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The Scattered Nature of the Text and its Divine Origin: A Necessary Connection or Not? (A Case Study of the Quran and the Testaments)

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Abstract

The Noble Quran and the Testaments share the common feature of being composed of various parts or chapters. These chapters are called "Surahs" in the Quran and "Books" in the Testaments. Unlike the Testaments, whose content mostly possesses a linear order similar to human books, with each book usually centered on a specific or general topic, the Surahs of the Quran—with the exception of the shorter Surahs and some collectively-revealed ones—typically lack a specific topic and order, appearing as if diverse and varied subjects are scattered throughout them (the "Scattered" nature of the Quran). Some believe the human-like order of the Testaments indicates their human origin, while the non-human order of the verses in the Quran's Surahs is a sign of its divine origin. However, according to this research, conducted using library resources and critical analysis method, neither the structure of the Testaments and their similarity to human books is proof of their non-divine origin, nor is the scattered structure of most long Quranic Surahs and their dissimilarity to the order found in most human books proof of its divine origin.

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Keywords: Quran, Testaments, Arrangement of Verses, Linear Order of the Bible, Coherence and Order of Verses, Scattering of Verses, Interrelation of Verses.

Introduction

Numerous signs have been presented for the divine origin of the Quran. The challenge of the Quran (*Tahaddī*) and the inability to produce its like, its unique eloquence and rhetoric, its singular rhythm and harmony, the illiteracy of its bringer, the absence of discrepancy and contradiction, reports of the unseen, scientific miracles, and others are some of these signs (Najjarzadegan, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 68-146). Some, like *Farid Wajdi*, believe that one of the signs of a divine book is the difference in the order and arrangement of its content compared to human books. The Surahs of the Quran, instead of each being about a single, sequential topic or story, often contain various verses on different subjects. For example, verses about the Resurrection are spread throughout the Quran's Surahs and are not all in one Surah. In his belief, if the Quran had presented its content with categorized topics like human books, it could not have been divine and celestial (Farid Wajdi, 1942 AD/1321 SH: 125-126; Hejazi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 14). Khorramshahi has also considered the scattered and non-sequential nature of the Quran's content as evidence of its miraculous nature (Khorramshahi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 79). This paper was formed to examine the validity of this belief and aims to answer this question:

- Is there a necessary connection between a book being divine and its content being scattered, or does no such connection exist, meaning

the content of a divine book can also have a linear order¹ like most human books?

The subject's relation to the Quran and the necessity of investigating its divine origin or lack thereof is sufficient for its importance. Although numerous works have been written on the order of the Quran, the interrelation of verses within Surahs, and the scattered nature of its content, etc., no research was found that examines and critiques the claim of the necessity for a divine book to differ from human books in presenting content in a linear order; therefore, this research is the first step in its subject.

1. Coherence of the Content in the Testaments

The Testaments are formed from the compilation of numerous books written by different individuals in different times and places. Each book consists of various chapters, and each chapter consists of numerous verses; although the division of each book into chapters and each chapter into verses is a later development. Stephen Langton divided the books into chapters in 1226 AD, and Robert Estienne numbered and versified those chapters in 1551 AD (Baghbani, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 42). A "Book"² in the Testaments is roughly equivalent to a "Surah" in the Quran, and the verses of each book are similar to the verses of each Surah. In the Quran, there is nothing equivalent to a "Chapter" in the Testaments, unless we loosely equate it with a "Unit of Revelation." The books of the Testaments are usually arranged sequentially

1. In linear narrative, we observe the presentation of content in a sequential, chained, and continuous manner. Each part is dependent on the previous one based on temporal or logical sequence, and characters and details progress continuously and systematically from beginning to end.

2. Although "Sefer" in Hebrew means "Book," in Persian terminology, it refers only to the Pentateuch.

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based on the historical chronology of their content (not their date of writing), from the beginning of creation to the end of the world, from ancient to recent. The Testaments are largely a historical book with details (Baghbani, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 71). The reader, while studying this book, does not feel that the speaker is God and has the sensation of reading a historical book (Asadi, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 38). Some have even speculated, due to this historical style, that its authors were also historians (Ashrafi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 75).¹

The first book of the Old Testament, Genesis, begins with the story of the beginning of creation, continues with the story of the creation of Adam and Eve, proceeds with the story of Prophet Noah, and finally ends with the story of Prophet Jacob and the death of Joseph in Egypt. The Book of Exodus begins with the story of Prophet Moses, continues by mentioning the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, their forced stay in the Sinai desert, and the revelation of the Torah, and concludes with the story of the worship of the calf. The Book of Leviticus is about the commandments God revealed to Prophet Moses on Mount Sinai. The Book of Numbers begins with the divine command to Prophets Moses and Aaron in the Sinai desert to census the Israelites, continues with the genealogy of the Israelites, and after stating commandments, the story of the Israelites' exodus from Sinai and entry into Kadesh and then Moab is mentioned, ending again with some commandments. Deuteronomy, the last of the five books, is about Prophet

¹. Whether the authors of the Old Testament books are individuals accepted by Jews and Christians, or an individual or individuals who were also historians, does not change anything in our discussion. What is important is that the content of the Old Testament books usually has a linear order and historical sequence alongside a specific or general subject.

Moses's farewell to the Israelites, the laws of the covenant, and entrusting the Torah to Joshua, ending with Moses's death in Moab. The sixth book, the Book of Joshua, begins by recounting the leadership of Joshua, the successor of Prophet Moses, and after describing the entry of the Israelites into the Promised Land (Canaan) and the division of the land among the Israelites, ends with Joshua's speech and his death. The next book concerns the Judges or leaders after Joshua, covering a 350-year period of Israelite history involving a repetitive cycle of the people's idolatry, repentance, and the appointment of a judge. The subsequent books, 1 and 2 Samuel are about the last and greatest judge, Prophet Samuel. With the end of the era of Judges, the time of the Kings, namely Prophets David and Solomon, begins, and the history of the Israelites continues in this chronological order until the end of the Old Testament, which is about Ezra and the rebuilding of the temple and ends with Malachi's prophecy of the coming of Prophet Elijah. Sometimes, in addition to the linear narration of content, we also see their categorization. For example, the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, accepted by Catholics and Orthodox Christians and which has additions and appendices compared to the Hebrew version accepted by Jews and Protestants, is divided into three sections: Historical Books, Books of Wisdom, Supplication, and Poetry, and Books of Prophecy (Asadi, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 38-39).

In the New Testament, as in the Old Testament, we mostly witness a linear and historical order of content. It begins with the narration of the birth of Jesus Christ, his emergence, and the conversion of the apostles. The four Gospels conclude with the story of the crucifixion of Jesus, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension to heaven. The fifth book, the Acts of the

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Apostles, deals with the account of the apostles and their preaching of Christianity, the conversion of Paul, etc. The remaining books consist of letters and epistles from Paul and the apostles to Christians in general or to specific churches in particular, and this Testament also concludes with the Book of Revelation, which prophesies the second coming of Jesus Christ at the end of the world.

Of course, not all books of the Testaments have a single topic, follow a chronological order, or possess a linear-historical progression. In some of them, such as the Book of Deuteronomy, the content is mentioned without historical order. The Psalms are neither categorized by topic nor do they have a chronological order; for example, the Psalms of David are mentioned before Psalm 90, attributed to Moses. In the Book of Proverbs of Solomon, although a single topic is sometimes followed, each proverb is not necessarily related to the one before or after it. In the New Testament, for instance, the order of content in the Gospel of Matthew is based on thematic importance, not chronological order (Michel, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 46). Similarly, some of the apostles' epistles also cover various topics, and their content is in response to the problems of churches in different cities or their questions; thus, there is not necessarily a unity within the content of one epistle, except for its connection to a specific church. Another issue is that the current order of the books of the Testaments does not necessarily correspond to their chronological order of writing. For example, Paul's epistles, although situated within this Testament, are its oldest parts, or the Gospel of Mark, although it is the second gospel, is believed by some to have been written earlier than the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Similarly, Paul's epistles are also ordered not based on chronological sequence but by

length, from longest to shortest (Sayyar, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 89-90, 96, and 744).¹

2. Disjointedness of the Quran's Content

The Quran, in contrast to the Testaments, generally lacks a linear order, both in terms of its Surahs and their content. Not only are the Surahs and their content not based on the historical chronology of their subjects, but they are not even in accordance with their own order of revelation; for this reason, Meccan Surahs are mostly at the end and Medinan Surahs are at the beginning. The only order observed among the Surahs is their arrangement mostly based on length, from longest to shortest—an order which is violated by the short Surah *al-Fātiḥah* at the beginning and by the non-observance of length for a few other Surahs (Suyūṭī, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 1, 223; Ṭāḥā Ḥussein, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 158), and consequently, there is no comprehensive criterion in this regard.

Another point is that not only do the names of the Surahs usually have no direct connection to their topics (Bell, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 97) and are based on the slightest pretext (Ma'refat, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 99), but with the exception of some short Meccan Surahs or collectively-revealed Surahs like *al-Fātiḥah*, *al-An'ām*, *al-Ṣaff*, *al-Mursalāt*, *al-Ḍuḥā*, *al-Bayyinah*, *al-Ādīyāt*, *al-Kawthar*, *al-Kāfirūn*, *al-Naṣr*, *al-Tabbat*, *al-Ikhlāṣ*, *al-Falaq*, and

1. Although the books of the Old and New Testaments usually cover different subjects, firstly, these different subjects are usually under a common theme, such as the story of the people of Israel at a specific point in history; secondly, for a text to be disjointed, the lack of one of the two things—a unified subject or linear order—is sufficient, and unlike the Old and New Testaments, whose contents mostly have a linear order, the Quran usually lacks this kind of order.

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al-Nās, which were revealed all at once (Suyūṭī, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 1, 145-146), or some long Surahs like Surah *Yūsuf*, the remaining Quranic Surahs—at least at a preliminary and simple glance, without complex and sometimes far-fetched analyses (Ayazi, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 160)—generally lack a specific topic. Sometimes, not only is the topic of each verse completely different from the topics of the verses before and after it, but even a direct and tangible connection between them is not seen. For example, Ṭāhā Hussein said about Surah *al-Baqarah*: "The topics of Surah *al-Baqarah* are very numerous and alien to each other." (Ṭāhā Hussein, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 187-188)

Ṭabāṭabā'ī, who accepted the theory of the unity of verses within Surahs and strives to identify a single purpose for each Surah before beginning its interpretation (Ayazi, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 145), said about Surah *al-Baqarah*: "Since this Surah was revealed gradually and in separate parts, it does not have a single purpose encompassing all its verses." (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 1, 43)

3. Orientalists' View on the Order of the Quran

Most Western Quranic scholars consider the Quran to be a fragmented text whose parts were placed together throughout history without any clear connection or reason. In their view, the face of the Quran is chaotic, and discerning its order is difficult, if not impossible (Tavakoli and Makvand, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 98), and it is hard to find signs of unity of speech in a long passage (Qaytouri, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 17). According to Richard Bell, "The scattered nature of the Quran's content is an authentic feature of its style; therefore, throughout a major part of a Surah, semantic consistency

and cohesion are rarely seen." In his conjecture, errors in rewriting and the misplacement of some pages during compilation are the cause of this! Arthur John Arberry believes: "The Quran is devoid of any kind of logical coherence, even coherence related to the order of revelation, and the reader of the Quran is bewildered and discouraged by the apparently disordered state of many Surahs." (Khorramshahi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 76-78; Khamegar, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 31-34)

From the perspective of Régis Blachère, the style of the Quran is disjointed, fragmented, and full of tedious repetitions (Blachère, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 301). Frithjof Schuon believes that if viewed from the outside, the Quran is an anthology of more or less unrelated and incoherent sayings or stories (Schuon, 1983 AD/1362 SH: 52). According to Charles Joseph Adams, the Quran lacks logical structure, jumps from one topic to another without reason, and makes no effort to present material in a systematic way and gather all material related to a single topic in one place (Qaytouri, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 17). The Encyclopedia Britannica also states under the title Quran: "The reader of the Quran, upon observing the scattered nature of the content in its long Surahs and their thematic differences, feels that the verses of the Surahs have been gathered together without any calculated plan and randomly." (Abbas, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 73)

Although Orientalists agree that the constant change of topics in the verses is evidence of the Quran's incoherence, they disagree on the reason for the lack of semantic connection between the verses of the Surahs. According to Frithjof Schuon:

"It is as if the wretched and broken language of mortal man, under the dominion and pressure of the sublime celestial speech, has been shattered

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into thousands of pieces, or as if God, in order to express thousands of truths, had nothing but a handful of words at His disposal and was compelled to use allusions and implications brimming with meaning, shifts of attention, changes of tone and address, conciseness, brevity, and metaphorical expressions." (Schuon, 1983 AD/1362 SH: 53; Khorramshahi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 81)

Regarding the primary cause of these disorders, most point the finger of blame at the Companions, considering the disjointedness of the Quran's content to result from errors by the scribes of revelation and the collection and compilation of the Quran by the Companions after the Prophet of God (peace be upon him and his progeny) during the time of *Abū Bakr* and *Uthmān*; because, according to Orientalists, the ordering of verses and their arrangement into Surahs was done by the Companions, and their inability to perform this task correctly brought about the dispersion and confusion of the Noble Quran. Some, like John Wansbrough, also believe that the Quran is the product of narratives that came together over a long period; hence, they consider the form and structure of the Quran to be a matter of chance (Ma'refat, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 34; Feqhizadeh, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 145; Tavakoli and Makvand, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 100). The heavy emphasis on the disorder of the Quranic verses has led to the formation of the belief that the Quran has not remained immune from human tampering, and the agents of the Quran's collection, by changing their order, disrupted the coherence and connection of topics and turned it into a collection of various and unrelated materials (Khomeini, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 34).

Orientalists like Richard Bell have considered the disharmony of the verses as the cause for not correctly understanding Quranic concepts and

have proposed solutions such as the necessity of rearranging verses and organizing the Quran in a new style. In most cases, the rearrangement of verses was only within a Surah; for example, they believe that verses 48 to 50 of Surah *Yāsīn* should be placed after verse 28. But sometimes, applying this solution leads to moving one or several verses from one Surah to another. For instance, Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, and Goldziher believe that the introduction to verse 61 of Surah *al-Nūr* has been mistaken for verse 17 of Surah *al-Fath*! (Blachère, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 217)

Of course, not all Orientalists think this way. Some of them, like Angelika Neuwirth, emphasize the semantic connection between verses, opposing the fragmentation approach, and are determined to discover it. In this view, each Quranic Surah has a specific literary totality (Tavakoli and Makvand, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 107). Some also believe that despite the scattered nature of the Quran's content, "the variety and dispersion of topics in the Surahs reduces reader weariness and prevents disgust, and the literary unity of the Surahs and their rhythmic order compensates for the shortcoming of the lack of cohesion between verses." (Shahat, 1976: 5)

4. The Muslim Perspective on the Order of the Quran

Most Muslims, particularly the early scholars and prior to the Orientalists' doubts concerning the disjointedness of the Quran's content, not only did not and do not have a problem with the Quran's apparent disorder and do not oppose its non-linear arrangement, nor do they see it as a sign of incoherence (Qaytouri, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 18); rather, they have articulated various benefits for it.

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For instance, according to *Abul Qāsim Khu'ī*, the Quran is a book of guidance, revealed to lead humanity to felicity; it is not a book of jurisprudence, history, or ethics that would dedicate separate chapters to each topic and present its content in a categorized manner. Even from the Muslim perspective, the Quran's current structure more effectively serves its goal of guidance and impact. In this format, by studying a single surah, the reader can, in a short time and without difficulty, become acquainted with a wide range of this book's teachings and objectives. The dispersion of verses ensures that each surah covers various aspects instead of focusing on one specific topic. On one hand, the Origin and the Resurrection are recalled, and on the other, the history of past nations is examined so that lessons may be drawn from their experiences. Furthermore, while learning the rulings and commandments of the Quran in individual, social, material, and spiritual spheres, the reader also benefits from its ethical teachings. If the Quran were organized in systematic and orderly chapters, a reader could only become acquainted with all these subjects by reciting the entire Quran (Khu'ī, n.d.: 94-95).

From this viewpoint, the Quran is like a garden where the gardener, instead of planting different fruit trees in separate orchards, has planted them scattered throughout; thus, anyone walking in any part of this garden will find various fruits within reach (Shaltut, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 487). Similarly, the change of topics in the verses creates variety, thereby preventing fatigue for the reader of the Quran and encouraging more recitation. In the analogy above, if a person entering the garden only saw apple trees, they would gradually become weary; but if they constantly encountered different trees and colorful fruits, they would tire less quickly

and spend more and better time in the garden. Just as in nature—God's created book—great diversity is seen, and a soul-refreshing collection of various objects, colors, flavors, and phenomena are placed side by side (where everything is good in its place), the same principle governs the verses and Surahs of the Quran. If the Quran's diverse topics had been compiled in separate chapters and sections instead of its current structure, we would today be dealing with an unattractive 'compendium of rules' devoid of the beauty, vitality, simplicity, and grace present in the Quran's miraculous and current structure (Khorramshahi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 79). Therefore, the Quran is not a scientific book; it is a book for guiding humanity. Guiding humanity depends on knowing various matters, and this is not achieved one-dimensionally; hence, although God could have commanded the categorization of the Quran's verses, He willed that His servant, upon each visit to the Quran, would encounter various teachings, each playing a role in their guidance.

Although Muslims do not consider the Quran's current style to be incompatible with its divine origin and view it as an advantage and merit, they hold differing opinions on whether the verses within Surahs are truly as scattered and without order as the Orientalists claim (Ma'refat, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 11; Feqhizadeh, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 79-80).

Some, while accepting the disjointedness of content in most Quranic Surahs, consider it a necessary consequence of the Quran's gradual revelation. They believe that since the verses of each surah were revealed in different revelation units, they need not necessarily be thematically connected, and the coherence and connection of verses within each revelation unit suffice; because the circumstances of revelation for each unit

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differed from those before and after it. From this group's perspective, if the verses of a surah were revealed, for example, in five stages, there are five different types of connections between them. Even if a verse was revealed alone, it necessarily has no semantic connection to the verses before and after it (Khomeini, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 14). This group believes this very characteristic allows long Surahs to typically be divided into separate sections without affecting the surah's overall atmosphere. Of course, adherents of this view do not necessarily interpret the lack of thematic proportion and the variety of topics in the Surahs as an absolute lack of connection; because even if there is no thematic or spiritual link between these sections, there is usually a kind of shared language and common space—especially since all the Quran's verses seek to secure and realize a specific goal and purpose, such as human guidance and felicity, and this alone suffices for the coherence of the verses, the non-fragmentation of the Quran, and its having a connected form (Feghizadeh, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 146).

As *Khaṭṭābī* said, although promise and threat, warning and glad tidings are inherently opposites, because they all ultimately pertain to one goal, God has placed them together. He also considers the testing of servants another purpose for the dispersed revelation and arrangement of the Quran's verses (*Khaṭṭābī*, 2008: 53).

Another group of Muslims, indeed some contemporary exegetes, believe that despite the variety of topics and the dispersion of content in its Surahs, the Quran possesses an astonishing internal coherence and connection. "Its sentences are arranged alongside each other like precious pearls strung together with a specific harmony," and this feature gives the Quranic text a

unique beauty and freshness (Khu'ī, n.d., pp. 94-95). In this view, the Surahs are not collections of scattered verses placed together by chance; rather, there is an overarching unity in most Surahs that indicates the connectedness of their verses (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 1, 16)—a unity referred to as the "Thematic Unity" or "Contextual Unity" of each surah (Ma'refat, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 409). Of course, this unity cannot be grasped with a superficial look and requires the contemplation to which the Quran calls its readers (cf. Quran 38: 24).

Adherents of this view can be divided into two distinct categories. One group believes that although the verses were revealed in a seemingly chaotic and unsystematic manner, they were later arranged into the current Surahs under the guidance of the Prophet of God or through the ijtihad of the Companions. From this group's perspective, the dispersed revelation of the Quran based on various events not only does not mean a lack of proportion between the verses of the Surahs, but the verses of each surah, due to their divinely mandated order based on wisdom, possess a astonishing, even miraculous, order and style (Khamegar, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 14). However, another group believes in the natural order of each surah and the connected revelation of Surahs. In this view, the revelation of each surah began with the *Basmalah*, and the revelation of verses continued consecutively until the revelation of a new *Basmalah* indicated the end of the previous surah and the start of a new one (cf. Shariati and Sha'banpur, 2017 AD/1396 SH). From this group's perspective, the integral, logical, and literary unity of the verses in the Quran's Surahs—despite their revelation being the product of varied and diverse circumstances—is nothing short of a miracle (Ma'refat, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 34-35).

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A question that arises here is: if there is proportion and connection between the verses of the Quranic Surahs, 'Why do Orientalists see the Quran as fragmented and chaotic?' From the perspective of those who affirm the proportionality of verses, the perception of the Quran as chaotic stems from various reasons, including a failure to distinguish the oral system from the written one:

1) The Quran is an oral text revealed verbally; relying on contextual and textual clues, and was written down to be preserved. Muslims, having typically grown up in an Islamic environment from childhood, are subconsciously aware of many of these clues, and thus hardly notice the absence of these contextual indicators;

2) In the past, Orientalists mostly dealt with translations of the Quran, and translation is usually incapable of conveying the beauties of literary texts like the Quran; consequently, the disjointedness of the Quran's content becomes more apparent to the reader;

3) Western Quranic scholars have approached and evaluated the Quran using the criteria of the order and arrangement found in human books, even the Bible, and it is natural that they cannot accept the Quran's difference from such books and thus comment on determining the actual placement of verses;

4) Unfamiliarity with Arabic literature and matters such as conciseness (*Ījāz*), ellipsis, metonymy, etc., on one hand, and literal translations and atomistic interpretations on the other, are other factors that have led to perceiving the Quranic verses as disconnected—disconnections that Muslims, with their knowledge of Islamic history and the interpretive tradition, feel less acutely.

In addition to these points, the Quran has chosen an interwoven method for expressing sensitive matters that might have led to its distortion, and for this reason, it has expressed its intent within the framework of parenthetical clauses in various instances (Feqhizadeh, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 147, 148, 153, 154, 158; Shaker, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 156-159).

5. The Relationship between A Divine Book and A Scattered Nature

Some believe that the linear order of the phrases in the Testaments indicates their human origin, while the non-linear and scattered order of the verses in the Quran's Surahs indicates its divine origin. For example, according to the Egyptian author Muhammad Farid Wajdi (d. 1954), "It is not an issue to say that the Quran did not follow the conventions of human books; because if it had wanted to arrange topics orderly, chapter and section them, and place each topic in its own chapter and section, it would no longer be the Quran and a celestial book. It would become a book like one of the compositions of humans. The utmost difference this book would have had was a kind of divine superiority; whereas the status of God's speech is higher than to be compared with human books and for such arrangements to be expected from the Quran." (Farid Wajdi, 1942 AD/1321 SH: 125-126; Hejazi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 14; Ayazi, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 139-140)

According to this view, a necessary condition for a book's divine and celestial nature is that it should not resemble human books in matters such as the categorization and order of content; therefore, if we witness categorized content and linear order in a book, that book cannot be divine!

However, this claim is not complete; for when divine speech is presented in the form of human words – "And We did not send any messenger except

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in the language of his people" (Quran 14: 4) – and this is not incompatible with divine status, why would presenting these very words in the form of human books be incompatible with being divine?

In other words, just as the human nature of the language of revelation does not conflict with the Quran's divinity, a linear order does not conflict with the divinity of this celestial book. 'Do the short Surahs of the Quran, the collectively-revealed Surahs, or Surah Yusuf, for instance, all of which have a linear, human-like order and concern one or several specific topics, conflict with divine status?' According to Farid Wajdi's view, the fact that the story of Prophet Yusuf is told linearly only once, in one surah, conflicts with its divinity, and it absolutely must come scattered and separate across different Surahs—like the story of Prophet Moses in Surahs *al-Baqarah*, *al-A'rāf*, *Tāhā*, *al-Shu'arā'*, *al-Qaṣaṣ*, etc.—in order to be divine! A proposition which even he himself is not willing to accept.

Furthermore, we know of books which, in terms of the order of their content, are similar to the Quran but are not divine. For example, consider this statement:

"The present book is extraordinarily complex and unnecessarily difficult, its structure has become incomprehensible, and a frequently unintelligible thread of thoughts is visible in it. This book is intelligent and insightful, yet the presentation and organization of its material is accompanied by a strange ambiguity [...] The reader is constantly confused by material that more resembles a parenthetical clause and a digression from the topic [...] Obtaining an overview of the entire book or any of its chapters requires continuous reading and re-reading it. The reader gains the feeling that many separate sections in the book's chapters have probably been placed together

randomly [...] It is hard to believe that Oxford University Press bothered to—editor aside—even ask a reader to review the book's manuscript before publication." (Graham, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 222-223)

At first glance, one might think this is another of the Orientalists' opinions about the Quran; but it is not. It is, in fact, about a work by one of the critics of the Quran. The statement above is William Albert Graham's opinion about John Wansbrough's book "Quranic Studies," and Wansbrough himself is one of those who finds fault with the order of the Quranic verses. Through a literary analysis of the Quran, Wansbrough claimed that matters such as its dispersion indicate that this book took its current form over time, through various people, in the late second or early third century AH—a view which, of course, has numerous flaws both in its method and its application (Nilsaz, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 151).

Similarly, the "Divan of Hafez" is considered analogous to, and indeed influenced by, the Quran in its appearance of disjointedness and the lack of apparent order and cohesion between the verses of its Ghazals. The content of both books seems disordered and scattered at first glance, a characteristic that has been challenging since ancient times, leading some to deny their eloquence on this very pretext. Interestingly, some believe that the scribes of Hafez's Divan destroyed the order and sequence of its verses, and the disjointed appearance of the verses stems from this! (Khorramshahi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 82) Just as some Orientalists like Goldziher and Richard Bell consider the error of the Companions during the Quran's compilation to be the cause of the scattered nature of its verses! (Tavakoli and Makvand, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 99-100)

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Therefore, the method of presenting content in the Quran is neither always different from human books nor even unique to it. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the order of content in the original Torah was as piecemeal and scattered as the Quran, because it was revealed on tablets (*Alwāḥ*) and all at once (Exodus 24:12, 31:18, 32:15, etc.; Quran 7:145, 150, 154. Regarding the nature of the revealed Torah and Gospel, cf. Soleimani Ardestani, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 420-427).

Another point is that mere variety of topics and the lack of a logical order between the materials of a book cannot be an aspect of its *I'jāz*; because all books that present their content in a miscellany-like manner, without a direct connection between their materials, are like this. For example, one can point to the books of Psalms, Proverbs of Solomon, the Gospel of Matthew, and even the books of Leviticus and Numbers. Contrary to common perception, not all books of the Testaments have a single topic, and there are many books like Leviticus whose topic changes continuously, with no common denominator between those topics. Or in the Book of Numbers, besides historical material and the exposition of rulings, we also see various poems. Similarly, although the Bible has expressed its content in an orderly fashion in terms of historical chronology, in other respects it is no different from the Quran, and its content is not presented with categorization and chapter divisions. For instance, if someone wants to know this book's view on the role of works alongside faith in achieving human felicity, no specific section of this book is dedicated to this category, and they have no choice but to collect, categorize, and summarize the verses related to this topic from across the entire Bible. To facilitate this task, we see the composition of books like Bible concordances or verse finders, in which the phrases of the

Testaments are divided thematically. Interestingly, even this current Bible, each of whose books has its own specific author, origin, and history, is considered, despite its apparent multiplicity, to possess a kind of thematic unity and an integrated effect (Sayyar, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 1, 18).

Of course, one should not think that the non-uniqueness of the Quran's arrangement of content means denying its order or its inimitability in this regard; because from the perspective of early scholars, order meant the correct delivery of speech by meticulously observing morphological, syntactic, and rhetorical principles, and placing words in their proper position, thus correctly conveying the intended meaning. However, after objections were raised concerning the lack of meaningful coherence in the Quran, a new approach to order based on the semantic unity of Surahs emerged (Alizadeh, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 31, 45-46).

For example, *Bāqillānī* (d. 403 AH) said about the order of the Quran:

"The order of the Quran is outside all conventional arrangements and the prevalent stylistic methods of speech of its time, and it is for this reason that it is considered a miracle. The Quran is not poetry, not rhymed prose without rhyme, not balanced, rhymed prose, not balanced, rhythmic prose without rhyme. The Quran is none of these, and in this respect, it is outside the custom of that time, and for this reason, it is considered a miracle." (*Bāqillānī*, 1987 AD/1408 AH: 53)

According to *Qāḍī 'Ayāḍ* (d. 544 AH), the second type of the Quran's inimitability is its wondrous order and amazing style, which is different from the styles of Arab speech and their common methods of poetry and prose, and has no parallel before or after it (*Qāḍī 'Ayāḍ*, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 1, 511).

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Therefore, not accepting the proportionality of verses within a surah does not necessarily mean denying the Quran's miraculous order; just as the *I'jāz* of the Quran is agreed upon, not its specific aspect.

Perhaps it will be said, "God has no need for the conventional categorizations of humans and utilizes a distinct method that had not occurred to the human mind until then." But firstly, can it not be said: God has no need, but humans, for understanding the material, need it to be presented in the form of conventional categorization? And secondly, some parts of the Quran conform to the usual human order. Just as some parts of the Testaments are also scattered like the Quran.

6. The Scattered Nature as a Consequence of Gradual Revelation

The Quran was revealed gradually, in interaction with its initial audience (Quran 17: 106, 25: 32). The process of forming the written Quran was such that after a portion of the Quran (a revelation unit) was revealed, the Prophet of God would ask one of the scribes of the Quran to write it down (Ramyar, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 257). The Surahs of the Quran can be categorized into two groups: those revealed all at once, termed collectively-revealed Surahs, and those revealed gradually, over several units. The verses of the first group are typically related to one or several specific topics. However, usually (Suyūṭī, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 1, 145), the Quranic Surahs were revealed gradually, sometimes verse by verse, and sometimes in sets of three, four, or five verses (Nekounam, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 266). The Quran was revealed in sets of ten verses in some instances, such as the incident of *Ifk* (the slander) and the first ten verses of Surah al-Mu'minun (Ramyar, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 201). Sometimes only a part of a verse was revealed.

For example, verses like the Verse of Purification (*Taṭhīr*) and the Verse of *Ikmāl al-Dīn* (perfection of religion), although they are only parts of verses, were revealed independently of their context, according to the testimony of both Shi'a and Sunni narrations and also the evidence of the context. Sometimes even just a few words of a verse were revealed. For instance, one can point to verse 95 of Surah *al-Nisā'* and the separate revelation of the phrase "Other than those who are disabled." (Wāḥidī, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 1, 179)

Whenever the Quranic revelation began with "In the name of God," it indicated the start of a new surah, and this surah would continue until the revelation of the next *Bismillah*, which signaled the end of the previous surah and the beginning of a new one (Ayyāshī, 1960 AD/1380 AH: 1, 19). Another point is that most Quranic verses do not have a specific cause of revelation and were revealed not in response to a question or an event; however, a portion of the Quranic verses do have causes of revelation (Zurqānī, 1989 AD/1368 SH: 1, 99). The important point is that when verses were revealed consecutively, whether they had a cause or not, they were typically written down consecutively in the Quran as well.¹

Claims such as scribal errors, mistakes in rewriting, or pages being misplaced during the compilation of the Quran are neither acceptable to Muslims from a doctrinal perspective (cf. Quran 15: 9) nor are they confirmed by historical evidence and indicators; they are merely conjectures, and of a pessimistic and simplistic kind at that. Especially

¹. However, at times, for specific considerations, the Prophet (peace be upon him) would instruct the scribes of the Quran to write verses in a place other than where they [chronologically] should have been written. It is for this reason that, for example, some Medinan verses are found within Meccan surahs (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 5, 167).

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since, firstly, a significant number of the Companions were memorizers of the Quran (cf. Muḥaysan, 1991 AD/1412 AH), and the alleged errors pertain to scribes, not memorizers. Moreover, the identical error of all the memorizers together in a specific case is highly improbable. Assuming some made a mistake, others would have pointed it out and the error would have been corrected. Secondly, although the transmission of the Quran from the very beginning was based on two methods—memorization and writing—the primary method was oral transmission and the memory of Muslims, not written transmission. Writing served more as a reminder for the memorizers of the Quran. Thirdly, the existence of ancient Quranic manuscripts like the Birmingham manuscript, which based on carbon-14 dating belongs to the first half of the first century AH and shows no difference from the current Quran, indicates that, contrary to the claims of some Orientalists like Wansbrough, the current text of the Quran was formed much earlier than their claimed timeframe.

More importantly, the Quran was not indifferent to the circumstances of its time, and for this very reason, it took shape gradually through interaction with the society and people of its era. Consequently, although the revealed verses were delivered at different times, the fact that they were placed consecutively from one *Bismillah* to the next means it is not strange at all to encounter various topics within a single surah, sometimes changing from one verse to the next. This is because the preceding verse, for instance, might have been revealed a month earlier on the occasion of an event, while the following verse was revealed a month later in response to a question.

In addition to the gradual revelation of the verses, the disjointedness of verses within a surah can also stem from addressing different topics within a

single revelation unit and digressing from one subject to another. In reality, it is not the case that each instance of revelation necessarily had a single topic; rather, in numerous cases, a single revelation addressed various topics that were needed by the community (Nekounam, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 212).

Although the current order of verses within the Surahs is, according to the well-known view, divine and not based on the scholarly effort of the Companions, given that some verses in each surah have specific causes of revelation, and these causes are different from each other—and more importantly, were unplanned human events and questions—one cannot claim that the current order of verses in non-collectively revealed Surahs is necessarily based on a divine wisdom¹ (Jawaheri, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 105-106). Imagine ten verses were revealed without a specific cause, then a question was raised, and three verses were revealed in response to this question, followed again by six verses revealed without a cause, but then five verses were revealed concerning an event. Therefore, one might argue that by removing the verses with specific causes, the order of the verses without causes could possess wisdom, but the combined set of verses with and without causes cannot necessarily be based on a single wisdom. Hence, insisting on the thematic unity of every surah or determining a specific

1. *Tawqīf* means that the current order of the verses was established by the command of the Prophet of God, and it is not the case that the Companions arranged the verses in this manner after his passing.

Possessing Divine Wisdom means that God revealed these verses consecutively for a specific purpose.

However, *Tawqīf* (being divinely ordained) and possessing divine wisdom are not necessarily concomitant. This is because the purpose behind the revelation of the verses was, in numerous instances, the questions and events that occasioned their revelation (i.e., their *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*). Since these occasions of revelation occurred in this specific sequence, the content consequently adopted this order.

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purpose for all the verses of all Surahs has, in not a few cases, led to forced and far-fetched interpretations (Ayazi, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 160). The disagreement among proponents of this theory is also noteworthy. For example, *Sayyid Quṭb* considered the main theme of Surah *Hūd* to be giving comfort to the Prophet, *Biqā'ī* considered it to be establishing rulings and providing details, *Ṭabāṭabā'ī* considered it to be monotheism, Bazargan considered it to be the fate of sinful nations, and Said Hawwa considered it to be worship!¹ (Qamarzadeh and Teymouri, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 68)

The important point is that neither the connection and cohesion of all the verses of a surah revealed gradually, from beginning to end, signifies its divinity, nor does the lack of connection between the verses of a surah signify its non-divinity. This is because the content of a book does not necessarily have to be categorized, and even if categorized, the items within each category do not necessarily have to be connected to each other. What matters is the connection of all of them to the main objective the author had for writing that book or chapter. Just as a criterion is necessary for the content not to be scattered, that criterion does not necessarily have to be the topic; it could be the chronological order of revelation and the consecutive revelation of verses. For example, the books in a library do not necessarily have to be categorized by topic for the library to be organized; they could be arranged based on criteria such as date of authorship, author, language, etc. The Quran is like a diary: although its entries occur consecutively in time and all relate to a single person, the content regarding the events is usually

1. Given that if the Quran had an order, such a multitude of diverse interpretations and contemplations would not have emerged, some believe that perhaps one of the wisdoms behind the Quran's apparent lack of coherence is precisely this.

not interconnected, and each page pertains to a good or bad event and different people who are either present from start to finish or come today or leave tomorrow. Has anyone ever seen someone categorize the content of their diary? The only conceivable categorization in such notebooks is chronological, for instance, recording each year in a separate notebook. In such a case, the mere fact that all the various and numerous entries in the notebook belong to one year is sufficient for them to be placed together.¹

The verses of the Quranic Surahs, according to the view about each surah beginning and ending with the *Bismillah*, belong precisely to a specific time period. Just as all diaries belong to a single person, they all connect with each other. Similarly, the Surahs of the Quran, because they all belong to Islam and its specific guidance, are connected and thus coherent in this manner.

Another analogy is different styles of painting.² The Torah and the Gospel are usually like the style of Realism,³ but the Quran bears more resemblance to Cubism,⁴ Abstract art,⁵ or even Suprematism.¹ The Realist

1. In an analogy, the compared object is not similar to the object it is compared to in all respects; rather, the similarity is intended only in the specific aspect of comparison—in this case, the lack of topical categorization and classification.

2. In an analogy, one must pay attention to the *point of similarity*. The intention is not that the compared object is similar to the object of comparison in all aspects and dimensions.

3. The Realism style focuses on the precise and truthful depiction of the surrounding world. Realist paintings are rendered in such a way that they appear inseparable from reality, much like an image seen in a photograph. According to the worldview of this style, reality must be depicted exactly as it is seen.

4. In the Cubism style, various and differing perspectives of diverse subjects are brought together within a single image, resulting in works that appear fragmented. According to the belief and worldview of this style, a single, one-sided perspective is insufficient.

5. In the Abstract style, the artist uses colors, lines, and shapes to express emotions or concepts, instead of depicting things that are clear and identifiable. What you see may be entirely dependent on your own perception. Works in this style are admired for their own sake, not for their narrative quality or for depicting something else. The worldview of Abstract art is that art need not necessarily be a representation of observable reality.

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style is more easily understood but does not engage the mind deeply, whereas modern styles have more appeal and compel one to contemplate.² Another point is that in a style like Cubism or Suprematism, although the components are usually understandable individually, the whole formed from these components is often not comprehensible and is simply beautiful! Of course, the painter usually provides an interpretation of the whole, which others would not understand unless the painter explains it themselves.

Another point that must not be forgotten is that the Quran, unlike the Old Testament (Tanakh), which is the history of the Children of Israel aimed at showing their chosen status, and also unlike the New Testament, which is the history of Jesus Christ and his apostles aimed at identifying him as the promised Messiah of Israel, was never intended to narrate history or the stories of the prophets "Per se," such that it would need to tell them all at once and in one place. Rather, the Quran's goal was to guide its audience, and sometimes, to achieve or facilitate this goal, it engaged in purposeful and selective storytelling, mentioning a story appropriately and only to the extent necessary (Sadr, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 77). Similarly, since this goal sometimes depended on stating a religious commandment, an Islamic belief, or a noble human character trait, it mentioned rulings, beliefs, and ethics; otherwise, the Quran is not even a book of rulings, beliefs, and ethics.

1. This style is based on the use of simple geometric forms, such as squares, circles, and lines. The primary goal of Suprematism is to focus on the purity of emotion and art, independent of real-world imagery. The worldview of Suprematism is founded on the principle that art should transcend physical reality and engage with pure and simple human emotions.

2. Perhaps one of the wisdoms behind the non-sequential nature of the Quranic verses is to encourage contemplation upon them—a matter on which the Quran itself emphatically insists.

Perhaps the reason why the verses of each revelation unit were not presented as independent Surahs—so that it would be clear today with which verse each revelation of Gabriel began and ended, similar to the Psalms where each Psalm is independent of the others—is precisely this. Considering this point, one can no longer say that the Quran is incoherent because all verses related to a single topic are not gathered in one surah; for the main topic of all Quranic verses is guidance. One could even say that since the divine purpose behind verses that seem thematically similar is different, we simply do not have similar verses whose scattering would lead to the Quran's incoherence. This is like the verse "So which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?" (*Fa bi Ayyi Ālā'i Rabbikumā Tukaththibān*) which, although repeated thirty-one times in Surah *al-Raḥmān*, cannot be considered repetitive because each time it is connected to a specific blessing. The constant change of topic also ceases to be problematic because, although the topic changes constantly, a single purpose is sufficient to prevent it from being considered merely scattered.

The benefits cited for the scattered nature of the Quran's content are usually correct, but they are not necessarily proof of its divinity, as this feature is commonly observed in miscellanies as well. However, the claim that the Quran's scattered nature results from the inability of human speech to convey divine meanings is, firstly, usually presented as evidence for the similarity of the allegorical verses, specifically on certain topics like the Origin and the Resurrection (Ma'refat, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 247; As'adi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 134, 136), not as an explanation for why the verses within Quranic Surahs are scattered. Secondly, this reasoning is neither acceptable, neither in our discussion nor even in the discussion of *Mutashābih* verses;

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for is the problem with the capacity of the agent or the capacity of the recipient? Was God incapable of expressing His sublime matters in a human-like order, or is human order incapable of receiving God's sublime matters? The capacity of the agent is not in question. Regarding the capacity of the recipient, it must be said: Why is this capacity usually present in the short Surahs but not in the long ones? Are the meanings of the short Surahs or even long Surahs like that of Prophet Yusuf, not sublime?

Another inference can be drawn from this discussion: "If the Quran, as claimed by some Orientalists, were fabricated by the Prophet himself, and he wanted to create a book for his followers like the books of the People of the Scripture, thus distinguishing his religion from theirs after the Jews opposed him, then naturally this book should have been like the books of the Jews and Christians." The very fact that the Quran's style contradicts that of the Testaments is strong evidence that it is not of human origin or borrowed. Of course, one could counter-argue: "Firstly, the Prophet was unlettered, and secondly, he was in an environment where the books of other religions were not accessible, and he had only heard some of their stories orally; therefore, he was simply unaware of their order and structure to be able to author a book like them." In response to this doubt, it can be said: "Assuming this claim is true; the Prophet became aware of this difference between the Quran and their books at some point." It is narrated from *Ibn 'Abbās* that a group of Jews came to the Prophet and said: "How can we follow you when the book you have brought does not have coherence like the coherence of the Torah? We too can bring something like it: "Indeed, we do not see this [book] you have brought as coherent like the coherence of the Torah. So reveal to us a book we recognize, otherwise we will bring you something

like what you bring." (Ṭabarī, 1992 AD/1412 AH: 15, 106-107; Enayah: 260)

In response to this claim, God revealed verse 88 of Surah *al-Isrā'*, saying: "Say, "If mankind and the jinn gathered together to produce the like of this Quran, they could not produce the like of it, even if they assisted one another."

Given that no difference appeared in the Quran before and after this meeting, it becomes clear that the Quran's style was not a result of ignorance but was intentional and deliberate. As careful attention to the phrase above shows, the Jews were not denying any form of coherence in the Quran; rather, they did not see in it coherence "Like the coherence of the Torah."

Conclusion

Orientalists have approached the Quran using the criteria of order and arrangement found in human books, such as the Bible. Consequently, they have perceived it as fragmented and chaotic, claiming this is the product of the Quran's compilation by the Companions after the Prophet. Muslims, however, while believing in the divinely-mandated nature of the verse order within Surahs, not only do not consider the scattered nature of the Quran's content a flaw but also cite advantages for it, such as enabling familiarity with a vast body of teachings in a short time and providing variety, thereby reducing reader fatigue.

Regardless of whether the verses of each surah have a single topic or purpose or not, firstly, the current order of verses in the Quran's Surahs merely indicates its gradual revelation, its formation through interaction with its audience, and its addressing of various topics within a single

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revelation unit. Secondly, some books of the Testaments also possess a kind of scattered in their content, similar to the Quranic Surahs even though they differ in quantity and quality.

Therefore, a scattered nature is not necessarily an indicator of divine origin, nor does a linear order and the absence of a scattered nature conflict with being divine.¹

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1. Some believe that "the fact that an unlettered (*ummi*) and untutored individual could arrange such a vast amount of material without [a conventional, linear] order, and for the final product to be, in its totality, coherent and free of contradiction, is undoubtedly one of the aspects of the Quran's *I'jāz* and a sign of its divine origin." It is recommended that, for the continuation of this research, the foundational principles and evidence supporting this theory be examined.

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