

A Comparative Study of Munāsabah and Semitic Rhetoric in Sūrah Al-Fajr

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Article Info

Article History:

Received: 18 May 2025

Revised: 21 July 2025

Accepted: 10 September 2025

Published: 30 September 2025

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Keywords

Abstract

The systematic arrangement of the Qur'an has raised pros and cons among Western academics regarding its coherence. This research examines the structure of Sūrah al-Fajr as a response to orientalist criticism, which argues that the structure of the verses is not connected. By using the theoretical framework of Munāsabah and Semitic Rhetoric, this research aims to confirm the relationship of the verses in Sūrah al-Fajr to show the accuracy of their arrangement, as well as to find the relationship between Munāsabah and Semitic Rhetoric in explaining the structure of the Sūrah. This library research uses a qualitative approach and descriptive-comparative methods in analyzing data. As a result, all the verses in Sūrah al-Fajr have been proven to be well structured and coherent based on Munāsabah and Semitic Rhetoric. Both can emphasize the structure of the Sūrah, although in different ways. Munāsabah emphasizes the linear connection of verses in a Sūrah, while Semitic Rhetoric explains the structure at each level of the text. In this way, Orientalist criticism regarding the composition of the Sūrah can be refuted.

The Qur'an, Munāsabah, Semitic Rhetoric, Al-Fajr

Abstrak

Sistematika susunan Al-Qur'an telah menimbulkan pro dan kontra antara akademi Barat mengenai koherensinya. Penelitian ini mengkaji struktur Sūrah al-Fajr sebagai respons atas kritik orientalis yang menilai susunan Versesnya tidak terhubung. Dengan menggunakan kerangka teori Ilmu Munāsabah dan Retorika Semit, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menegaskan hubungan Verses pada Sūrah al-Fajr sehingga menunjukkan ketepatan susunannya, serta menemukan keterkaitan antara Munāsabah dan Retorika Semit dalam menjelaskan struktur Sūrah. Penelitian kepustakaan ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode deskriptif-komparatif dalam menganalisis data. Hasilnya, seluruh Verses pada Sūrah al-Fajr telah terbukti tersusun dengan baik dan koheren berdasarkan Ilmu Munāsabah dan Retorika Semit. Keduanya mampu menegaskan struktur Sūrah meski dengan cara yang berbeda. Munāsabah menekankan keterkaitan Verses pada suatu Sūrah secara linier, sedangkan Retorika Semit menjelaskan struktur pada setiap tingkatan teks. Dengan begitu, kritik orientalis mengenai susunan Sūrah dapat terbantahkan.

Kata Kunci: Al-Qur'an, Munāsabah, Retorika Semit, Al-Fajr

INTRODUCTION

In the 20th century, Orientalists in the 20th century, Orientalists engaged in Qur'anic research from various perspectives (Asnawi, 2022), one of which concerned the arrangement of verses and the order of sūrahs. As Richard Bell observed, the systematic flow of the Qur'an's exposition appears disjointed and disconnected (Watt, 1970). For instance, he hypothesized that the beginning of Sūrah al-Fajr consists of verses 14-17, which describe humanity's attachment to worldly prosperity, followed by scenes of judgment in verses 22, 23, 25, and 26. He further argued

that other verses may have been inserted at a later, undetermined date, while verses 5–13 form a separate unit characterized by consistent rhyme. According to Bell, the series of affirmations at the beginning of the sūrah are not very comprehensible or well-structured and do not lead to any significant statement (Bell, 1939). Similarly, Blachere regarded it as the beginning of a verse with no connection to what precedes it (Cuypers, 2018). Thus, Orientalists generally considered this sūrah a composite text consisting of elements from different eras (Cuypers, 2018).

This view stands in clear contrast to Muslim scholars, who argue that the Qur'an is meticulously arranged and possesses its own systematic structure, referred to as *ilāhiyyah* (*tanqīf*), revealed through the commands and instructions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) via Jibrīl, rather than through human reasoning (*ijtihād*) (Al-Zarqānī, 1990). Abū Bakr al-Anbārī, as cited in al-Suyūṭī's *al-Itqān*, affirmed that "the arrangement of the sūrahs is the same as the arrangement of the verses and letters, all based on the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)" (Suyūṭī, 1974). This view is further reinforced by Sayyid Qutb in his work *Fi Zilāl al-Qur'an*, where he recounts that whenever a verse was revealed, the Prophet would summon his companions and instruct them, "Place this verse in such-and-such sūrah" (Quthb, 2003).

The interrelation of verses in Sūrah al-Fajr has been elaborated by Muslim scholars such as al-Biqā'ī in his tafsīr *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsīb al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*, Sa'īd Ḥawwā in his tafsīr *al-Asās fī al-Tafsīr*, and the modern exegete Ibn 'Āshūr in his tafsīr *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*. The study of these connections forms part of the discipline of *Munāsabah*, which examines the relationship between words within a verse as well as the relationship between one sūrah and another (Qaththān, 2000). Through this discipline, one can discern the underlying factors that account for the orderly arrangement of the Qur'an's components (al-Biqā'ī, 1990a).

The structure of Sūrah al-Fajr was also analyzed by Michel Cuypers (Cuypers, 2018), a Belgian Orientalist, through the method of Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA), a framework originally developed by Western scholars to study the structure of the Bible (Asnawī, 2018). Applying the principles of Semitic Rhetoric, Cuypers divided the verses into structural units and identified parallel, concentric, and mirror compositions in the Qur'an, similar to those found in other Semitic texts (Cuypers, 2011).

The urgency of this study lies in its attempt to respond to Richard Bell's criticism by explaining the structure of Sūrah al-Fajr through the perspectives of *Munāsabah* and Semitic Rhetoric. Without such an inquiry, Sūrah al-Fajr might continue to be regarded as poorly structured. Furthermore, this study seeks to identify the similarities and differences between *Munāsabah* and Semitic Rhetoric in elucidating the structure of the sūrah.

Previous studies on Sūrah al-Fajr include research on *al-naḥs al-muṭma'innah* (the tranquil soul) in the final three verses of the sūrah, namely verses 27–30 (Sanar, 2013), and a study of the phrase *Iram* (the capital of the 'Ād people) in verses 6–8 (Badriyah, 2020). Semitic Rhetorical Analysis has also been applied to other sūrahs of the Qur'an, including al-Qiyāmah (Asnawī, 2018), al-Mā'idah (Cuypers, 2016), al-Ḥijr (Muhammady et al., 2022), adz-Dzāriyyāt (Asnawī et al., 2023), al-Waqi'ah (Asnawī & Aisyah, 2023), al-'Alaq (Asnawī, 2021), al-Mulk (Asnawī, 2023b), al-Qalam (Zubaidi et al., 2023), as well as the final thirty-three sūrahs of the muṣḥaf (Cuypers, 2018). To

date, however, no research has specifically addressed a comparative study of *Munāsabah* and Semitic Rhetoric in relation to Sūrah al-Fajr.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method in the form of text analysis rather than numerical analysis (Moleong, 2018). It adopts a library research design, which relies on written sources such as manuscripts, books, journals, newspapers, and other documents (Rahmadi, 2011). The data are analyzed using descriptive-comparative techniques, a method that compares two objects (Abubakar, 2021). In this case, Sūrah al-Fajr serves as the primary object of analysis in comparing *Munāsabah* and Semitic Rhetoric.

According to Richard Bell, the opening of Sūrah al-Fajr is characterized by an irregular structure, with a series of oaths that appear unclear and difficult to interpret. Verses 5–13, for instance, are regarded as forming a distinct unit with a consistent rhyme pattern, while other verses are thought to have originated in different periods and were gradually compiled. As a result, the overall unity of the sūrah is considered uncertain (Bell, 1939, p. 654). This perspective highlights the divergence between Orientalist readings of the sūrah's structure and those of classical and contemporary Muslim exegetes. To evaluate Bell's claims, this study employs documentation techniques by collecting data from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include Michel Cuypers' *A Qur'anic Apocalypse: A Reading of the Thirty-Three Last Sūrahs of the Qur'ān*, which applies Semitic Rhetorical Analysis to Sūrah al-Fajr, as well as Sa'īd Ḥawwā's *al-Asās fī al-Tafsīr*, al-Biqā'ī's *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsuh al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*, and Ibn 'Āshūr's *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, which provide insights on *Munāsabah*. Secondary sources consist of books and journal articles relevant to the topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding *Munāsabah* and Semitic Rhetoric

Linguistically, *Munāsabah* means conformity, relationship, compatibility, relevance, and suitability (Zubaidi & Muslih, 2020). Several opinions exist regarding its etymological meaning. According to al-Suyūṭī and al-Zarkashī, *Munāsabah* refers to the harmonious relationship between verses or between sūrahs (al-Zarkashī, 1957; Suyūṭī, 1974). This differs from al-Baghawī, who equates *Munāsabah* with *ta'wīl* (Al-Baghawī, 1997).

Terminologically, *Munāsabah* is a discipline concerned with the wisdom behind the sequence of verses. It refers to human interpretive efforts in understanding the arrangement of verses within a sūrah or across sūrahs (Zubaidi & Muslih, 2020). According to Quraish Shihab, *Munāsabah* can be observed in several forms of harmony: the relationship between words within a verse, between the content of a verse and its closing (*fāṣilah*), between one verse and the next, between the opening and closing of a sūrah, between the closing of one sūrah and the opening of the next, and between the content of one sūrah and that of the following sūrah (Shihab, 1997). Understanding the concept of *Munāsabah* plays a crucial role in Qur'anic interpretation. Through it, the beauty and miraculous nature of the Qur'an become increasingly evident, demonstrating that every verse and sūrah forms an inseparable and coherent unity (Nurmansyah & Oktaviana, 2023).

The first scholar to address the harmony of Qur’ānic verses was Abū Bakr al-Naysābūrī (d. 324 AH). When verses were recited in his presence, he would often remark, “Why is this verse placed next to that one? What is the wisdom behind positioning this sūrah after that sūrah?” (Suyūṭī, 1974). He was followed by Abū Ja’far ibn al-Zubayr, who authored *al-Burhān fī Munāsabah al-Suwar al-Qur’āniyyah*. Later exegetes such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, and Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Umar al-Biqā’ī advanced this discipline further, analyzing in depth the harmony of not only verses but even individual words in the Qur’an. Al-Biqā’ī’s tafsīr, *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsuh al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*, thus became an encyclopedic reference for the study of *Munāsabah* in Qur’ānic verses and sūrahs (Zubaidi & Muslih, 2020).

Similar to hermeneutics, which was originally developed to interpret the Bible (Huda et al., 2025), Semitic Rhetoric refers to a set of rhetorical principles identified by Western scholars in their study of biblical structure. Initially termed “Biblical Rhetoric,” it was later renamed “Semitic Rhetoric” because the same structural principles were also identified in other ancient texts written in Semitic languages, such as Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Pharaonic (ancient Egyptian) texts, as well as in Islamic ḥadīth literature (Asnawi, 2018a). Historically, Michel Cuypers was the first scholar to apply the principles of Semitic Rhetoric to analyzing the Qur’an (Asnawi et al., 2023). The application of these principles to textual analysis came to be known as Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA) (Asnawi & Idri, 2020).

The Relationship Between Verses in Sūrah Al-Fajr According to Munāsabah and Semitic Rhetoric

Surah Al-Fajr Verses 1-3

وَالْفَجْرِ ﴿١﴾ وَلَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ ﴿٢﴾ وَالشَّفْعِ وَالْوَتْرِ ﴿٣﴾

From the perspective of *Munāsabah* science, as explained by Sa’id Ḥawwā and al-Biqā’ī, verses 1-3 of Sūrah al-Fajr have the same connection and interpretation: the oaths all refer to the same context, “*Fajr*” denotes the dawn on the Day of Sacrifice; “the ten nights” refer to the first ten days of Dhū al-Ḥijjah; while “the even and the odd” signify the 9th and 10th days of Dhū al-Ḥijjah. Collectively, these verses describe events that occur during the month of Dhū al-Ḥijjah (al-Biqā’ī, 1990b; Ḥawwā, 1424a). According to al-Biqā’ī, the second verse stands in contrast to the first: if the first refers to dawn, the beginning of the day, the second refers to its opposite, night (al-Biqā’ī, 1990b).

Al-Rāzī explains that the connection among these oaths lies in their symbolism: dawn, which marks the end of night, resembles the resurrection of the dead from their graves (al-Rāzī, 1981). Sayyid Quthb interprets the oaths in relation to worship, describing how the souls of those who worship resonate between the serenity of the night and the radiance of dawn (Quthb, 2003). Ibn ‘Āshūr, meanwhile, highlights the contrast between “dawn” and “night.” Since dawn marks the end of night, the relationship between the two is one of opposition (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1984a).

Michel Cuypers, referring to al-Mawdūdī, emphasizes that these oaths must be understood in their broader context. Since the essence of the sūrah affirms God’s just judgment over good and evil, the oaths serve as affirmations of Divine wisdom that governs all things with order and measure. This includes the alternation of day and night, the distinction between even and odd

numbers, and the divergence of destinies between believers and unbelievers (Cuypers, 2018). Cuypers further argues that the key point is not to uncover what lies behind these terms but to recognize the interplay of oppositions. These oppositions, he explains, highlight the divergence of fate between believers, described in verses 27–30, and unbelievers, described in verses 21–26 (Cuypers, 2018).

Surah Al-Fajr Verse 4

وَاللَّيْلُ إِذَا يَسْرُ ﴿٤﴾ هَلْ فِي ذَلِكَ قَسَمٌ لِّذِي حِجْرٍ ﴿٥﴾

In verse 4, Sa'īd Ḥawwā, al-Biqā'ī, Ibn 'Āshūr, and Michel Cuypers share the same interpretation. Verse 4 is linked to verse 1 “By the dawn” and “By the night when it passes” which together signify that when night ends, dawn begins. This verse also serves as a reminder to employ reason, for the oaths in verses 1–3 already contain rational evidence of resurrection after death (al-Biqā'ī, 1990b). Verse 5, according to Ḥawwā, al-Biqā'ī, and Cuypers, is a rhetorical question addressed to people of reason (*dhū al-ḥijr*). Although this verse stands independently, it reflects on the oaths mentioned in the preceding verses (al-Biqā'ī, 1990b; Cuypers, 2018; Ḥawwā, 1424a; Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984a).

Ibn 'Āsyūr interprets this verse as a statement that poses a question situated between an oath and its response, or the evidence supporting that response. The interrogative particle “*hal*” (whether in this context functions affirmatively, since its root usage indicates affirmation, equivalent to “*قد*”). The pronoun within the oath refers back to the very oath itself, while the repetition of the word *qasam* (oath) serves to reinforce its emphasis, making it a strong and convincing declaration for those to whom it is addressed. Thus, if a person possesses sound reason, they will be able to reflect upon it with their intellect (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984a).

Surah Al-Fajr Verses 6-11

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ ﴿٦﴾ إِرَمَ ذَاتِ الْعِمَادِ ﴿٧﴾ الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُهَا فِي الْبِلَادِ ﴿٨﴾ وَثَمُودَ الَّذِينَ جَابُوا الصَّخِرَ بِالْوَادِ ﴿٩﴾ وَفِرْعَوْنَ ذِي الْأَوْتَارِ ﴿١٠﴾ الَّذِينَ طَعَوْا فِي الْبِلَادِ ﴿١١﴾

Verses 6-11, according to the interpretations of Sa'īd Ḥawwā, al-Biqā'ī, Ibn 'Āshūr, and Michel Cuypers, share a common understanding: these verses refer to the tribes of 'Ād, Thamūd, and Pharaoh, who were renowned for their power and greatness but were destroyed by Allah SWT because of their arrogance (al-Biqā'ī, 1990b; Cuypers, 2018; Ḥawwā, 1424a). Al-Biqā'ī further emphasizes that the opening of Sūrah al-Fajr contains not only warnings expressed through oaths and admonitions directed at people of understanding, but also warnings conveyed by recounting the fate of past nations, as seen in verses 6–14. Accordingly, these verses remain connected to verses 1–5, since both passages convey admonitions (al-Biqā'ī, 1990b).

Surah Al-Fajr Verses 12-14

فَاكْتُرُوا فِيهَا الْفَسَادَ ﴿١٢﴾ فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ ﴿١٣﴾ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَبَاسِرٌ ﴿١٤﴾

In verses 12–14, Sa'īd Ḥawwā, al-Biqā'ī, Ibn 'Āshūr, and Michel Cuypers present a similar interpretation. Verses 6–11 serve as the basis for the punishment described in verses 12–13, which

recount the consequences faced by the peoples of ‘Ād, Thamūd, and Pharaoh—nations that acted unjustly in the lands they ruled, committing tyranny and spreading corruption (al-Biqā‘ī, 1990b; Cuypers, 2018; Ḥawwā, 1424a; Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1984a). Verse 14 then explains Allah’s reason for punishing oppressors and taking retribution against those who spread corruption, affirming that He is the All-Observant, overseeing every action (al-Biqā‘ī, 1990b). This verse also clarifies that nothing escapes His punishment: He is all-powerful and all-knowing, exercising complete oversight. Thus, it is evident that Allah does not wrong any of His servants in recompense for their deeds. (al-Biqā‘ī, 1990b; Cuypers, 2018; Ḥawwā, 1424a; Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1984a).

Surah Al-Fajr Verses 15-16

فَأَمَّا الْإِنْسَانُ إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَأَكْرَمَهُ وَنَعَّمَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَكْرَمَنِ ﴿١٥﴾ وَأَمَّا إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهْنَنِ ﴿١٦﴾

In verses 15–20, Sa‘īd Ḥawwā, al-Biqā‘ī, Ibn ‘Āshūr, and Michel Cuypers each offer distinct interpretations. Sa‘īd Ḥawwā adopts the view of al-Nasafī, who links verses 15–16 with verse 14. Since verse 14 affirms that Allah watches over all the actions of His servants, those who are constantly under His watch should strive for the hereafter rather than focus solely on fleeting worldly pleasures. Yet, verses 15–16 describe the opposite tendency in human behavior (Ḥawwā, 1424a).

Beyond this misunderstanding of Allah’s actions in verses 15–16, humans also commit errors highlighted in verses 17–20: neglecting orphans, failing to encourage the feeding of the poor, mixing lawful and unlawful wealth, and excessively loving riches. Such behaviors reflect a failure to fulfill their duties as servants who are continually observed by Allah (Ḥawwā, 1424a).

According to al-Biqā‘ī, verses 15 and 16 depict human tendencies when tested with prosperity or adversity. Humans have been entrusted with reason, which should be used to contemplate the oaths in verses 1–3 and the affirmations in verses 4–14. Verses 17–20 then detail the transgressions that result in the humiliation described in verse 16. Abundant provision in verse 15 is not always a mark of honor, nor is limited provision in verse 16 necessarily a mark of humiliation. Rather, disgrace befalls them because they disobey Allah’s commands: they fail to use their wealth to honor orphans, they do not promote the feeding of the poor, they unlawfully mix wealth, and they excessively love riches thereby usurping the rights of others (al-Biqā‘ī, 1990b).

Ibn ‘Āshūr explains that verses 6–11 recount the pleasures enjoyed by earlier nations who, despite their prosperity, ignored the messengers and neglected their duty to seek Allah’s pleasure. Arrogant and boastful in their strength, they faced divine punishment, as described in verses 12–13. The experiences of those past nations (vv. 6–14) mirror the situation of the Meccan polytheists at the time of revelation. Verses 15–16 thus highlight the error of the Meccans in assuming that worldly pleasures signified divine approval. Their rejection of the afterlife ultimately led them to deny the warnings conveyed to them (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1984a).

Surah Al-Fajr Verses 17-20

كَأَلَّا بَنًا لَا تَكَرِّمُونَ الْيَتِيمَ ﴿١٧﴾ وَلَا تَحْضُونَ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمَسْكِينِ ﴿١٨﴾ وَتَأْكُلُونَ التُّرَاثَ أَكْلًا لَمًّا ﴿١٩﴾ وَتُحِبُّونَ الْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا ﴿٢٠﴾

In verses 17–20, Ibn ‘Āshūr interprets the word *kallā* (By no means) as a rejection of the assumption expressed in verses 15–16 namely, the belief that Allah tests humans by granting blessings or restricting provision as a sign of honoring or humiliating them (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1984a). The term "*hal*" (but) functions as a transitional rejection. The connection between the misunderstanding in verses 15–16 and the correction offered in verses 17–20 lies in their perception of divine generosity: they assumed that God honored them, yet they themselves failed to honor His servants, particularly by refusing to share their wealth and by neglecting orphans (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1984a).

Michel Cuypers, meanwhile, argues that verses 15–20 are linked to verses 6–13, which recount examples from the past (vv. 6–11) and God’s punishment (v. 13). This pattern is then extended to humankind in general, who, in their present condition, misinterpret divine treatment (vv. 15–16) while neglecting those in need—such as orphans and the poor (vv. 17–18) and succumbing to greed (vv. 19–20). Verses 17–20 also demonstrate rhetorical cohesion: verses 17 and 18 employ negative verbs (not honoring) (not encouraging), both associated with the final terms "*yatīm*" (orphans) and "*miskīn*" (the poor), which share a rhyming pattern (*-im*, *-in*). Similarly, verses 19 and 20 contain parallel grammatical constructions with synonymous meanings, each using positive verbs ending in the same rhyme (*-lamma*, *-jamma*) (verse 20) (Cuypers, 2018).

Verses 21–30

كَلَّا إِذَا دُكَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَكًّا دَكًّا ﴿٢١﴾ وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا ﴿٢٢﴾ وَجِئَ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِجَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ وَأَنَّى لَهُ
الذِّكْرُ ﴿٢٣﴾ يَقُولُ يَلَيَّتَنِي قَدَمْتُ لِحَيَاتِي ﴿٢٤﴾ فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يُعَذِّبُ عَذَابُهُ أَحَدًا ﴿٢٥﴾ وَلَا يُؤْنِقُ وُثْقَهُ أَحَدًا ﴿٢٦﴾ يَأْتِيهَا النَّفْسُ
الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ﴿٢٧﴾ أَرْجَعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ رَاضِيَةً مُّرْضِيَةً ﴿٢٨﴾ فَأَدْخِلِي فِي عَبْدِي ﴿٢٩﴾ وَأَدْخِلِي جَنَّتِي ﴿٣٠﴾

In the final section, verses 21–30, Sa‘īd Ḥawwā and al-Biqā‘ī share a similar interpretation concerning the connection between these verses. Verse 21 serves as the link between the preceding section (vv. 17–20) and the following verses (vv. 21–30), determining the fate of humankind based on their deeds described in verses 6–20. It introduces what awaits them in the eternal realm: the torment of the disbelievers in verses 21–26, and the reward of honor for the believers in verses 27–30 (al-Biqā‘ī, 1990b).

Sa‘īd Ḥawwā further explains that this final section is connected to verses 17–20, as verse 21 delivers a stern warning and verse 22 refers to the coming of something momentous Allah SWT and the angels. Verses 22–26 describe the severe punishment awaiting disbelievers: on the Day of Judgment, no one can punish as Allah punishes, nor bind as He binds. In contrast, verses 27–30 describe those who earn Allah’s pleasure and are admitted among His righteous servants in Paradise. These are the believers with tranquil souls free from doubt, firm in faith in the Qur’an, the unseen, revelation, and the Last Day. Such a tranquil soul is a pious one, and this section confirms the promised success for the righteous: Paradise (Ḥawwā, 1424a).

Ibn ‘Āshūr, meanwhile, interprets verses 21–26 in relation to verses 15–20, explaining that arrogant humans misinterpreted the trials they faced and disregarded the warnings of the Messengers. They persisted in ignorance despite clear admonitions, and when they finally realized their negligence, it was too late to benefit from it (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1984a). He also stresses that the

sūrah closes with glad tidings for believers who remember the Qur'an and follow its guidance. According to the original muṣḥaf's arrangement, verses 27–30 are revealed together with verses 21–26, indicating that the words in verses 27–30 are addressed in the Hereafter directly to the tranquil souls of the believers (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984a).

Michel Cuypers observes several rhetorical connections. In verses 21–23a, verses 21 and 22 end with parallel phrases "*dakkan dakkan*" (one after another) and "*ṣaffan ṣaffan*" (in rows) while verses 22 and 23 share the root "*ja'a*" (came) and "*ji'a*" (will come). He identifies three consecutive eschatological moments: (1) the destruction of the earth, (2) the coming of Allah SWT with His angels, and (3) the presentation of Hell. Verses 23b and 23c are linked through the root "*dh-k-r*" (will remember) (v. 23b) and "(warning)" (v. 23c). Verse 24 also parallels verse 23b through the use of similar verbal forms, (will remember) (23b) and (will say) (24). Similarly, verses 25 and 26 mirror each other structurally with synonymous meanings: "*yu'adhbhibu 'adhabahu*" (none can punish as He punishes) and "*yūthiqu wathāqahu*" (none can bind as He binds) (Cuypers, 2018).

Finally, in verses 27–30, verses 27 and 28 contain paired terms "*muṭma'innah*" (tranquil) and "*marḍiyyah*" (pleasing) while verses 29 and 30 begin with the identical imperative "*udkhibuli*" (enter). These verses address the tranquil souls of believers, inviting them to return to their Lord and enter Paradise (Cuypers, 2018).

In general, Sa'id Ḥawwā, al-Biqā'ī, and Ibn 'Āshūr demonstrate similarities in their interpretation of the structural unity of Sūrah al-Fajr. Their differences lie in how they group the verses and which exegetical sources they reference. Ḥawwā divides the sūrah into three sections: verses 1–14, verses 15–20, and verses 21–30 (Ḥawwā, 1424a). Michel Cuypers follows a similar tripartite division in *A Qur'anic Apocalypse*, namely verses 1–14, 15–20, and 21–30 (Cuypers, 2018). In contrast, al-Biqā'ī divides the sūrah into four groups: 1–8, 9–16, 17–22, and 23–30, while Ibn 'Āshūr divides it into six: 1–4, 5, 6–14, 15–20, 21–26, and 27–30 (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984a).

Differences are also evident in their references. Ḥawwā often relies on Ibn Kathīr and al-Nasafī, since he composed his tafsīr while in prison with limited access to other works (Ḥawwā, 1424b). Al-Biqā'ī draws heavily on hadith and exegetes who specialized in *Munāsabah*, such as Ibn 'Abbās (RA) (al-Biqā'ī, 1990a), and Imam Badr al-Dīn bin Abdullah al-Zarkashī (al-Biqā'ī, 1990a). Ibn 'Āshūr, however, generally avoids depending on earlier tafsīrs (e.g., *al-Kashshāf*, *al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz*, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*), except when his own analysis required supplementation. He would then enhance and refine earlier insights without dismissing them, acknowledging that many of his thoughts had been anticipated or surpassed by earlier scholars (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984b).

Cuypers, although an orientalist, applies Semitic Rhetoric to demonstrate that Sūrah al-Fajr forms a passage with three parts, each containing 2–3 pieces, composed of smaller segments with 1–3 members, arranged in a concentric symmetrical pattern (ABCB'A'). The oaths at the beginning of the sūrah (vv. 1–5, A) mirror the call to the tranquil soul at the end (vv. 27–30, A'), with verses 15–16 (C) forming the central pivot (Cuypers, 2018). Although his method is rooted in Semitic rhetoric, Cuypers often engages with Muslim exegetes such as Ḥawwā, Mawdūdī, Sayyid Qutb, and al-Rāzī (Cuypers, 2018), while also incorporating insights from fellow orientalists such as Blachère and W. Montgomery Watt (Cuypers, 2018).

Table 1: Similarities and Differences in Munāsabah and Semitic Rhetoric

Similarities	Differences	Verse
<p>Saʿīd Ḥawwā and al-Biqāʿī share the same view and interpretation: the oaths mentioned—"By the dawn" (v. 1), "And by the ten nights" (v. 2), and "By the even and the odd" (v. 3)—all refer to the same context, namely the events of the month of Dhū al-Ḥijjah</p> <p>Saʿīd Ḥawwā, al-Biqāʿī, and Michel Cuypers share the same interpretation of verse 4, which is connected to verse 1: "By the night when it departs" and "By the dawn." This indicates that when the night ends, dawn arrives.</p> <p>They also agree in their interpretation of verse 5: "Is there in that an oath [sufficient] for a person of understanding?" This verse is a rhetorical question addressed to people of understanding (<i>dhū al-hijr</i>). Although it stands alone, it reflects upon the oaths mentioned in the preceding verses.</p>	<p>Michel Cuypers, drawing on al-Mawdūdī, states that these oaths must be understood in their broader context. He further emphasizes that the most important point to note is that these oaths are expressed in terms of opposition or contrast.</p> <p>-</p>	<p>Verses 1-3</p> <p>وَالْفَجْرِ ﴿١﴾ وَلَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ ﴿٢﴾ وَالشَّفْعِ وَالْوَتْرِ ﴿٣﴾</p> <p>Verses 4-5</p> <p>وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَسْرِ ﴿٤﴾ هَلْ فِي ذَلِكَ قَسَمٌ لِّذِي حِجْرٍ ﴿٥﴾</p> <p>Verses 6-11</p> <p>أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ ﴿٦﴾ إِرَمَ ذَاتِ الْعِمَادِ ﴿٧﴾ الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُهَا فِي الْبِلَادِ ﴿٨﴾ وَثَمُودَ الَّذِينَ جَابُوا الصَّخْرَ بِالْوَادِ ﴿٩﴾ وَفِرْعَوْنَ ذِي الْأَوْتَادِ ﴿١٠﴾ الَّذِينَ طَعَوْا فِي الْبِلَادِ ﴿١١﴾</p>
<p>Saʿīd Ḥawwā, al-Biqāʿī, and Michel Cuypers generally share the same interpretation of verses 6–11, which describe the tribes of ʿĀd, Thamūd, and Pharaoh peoples renowned for their power and greatness but ultimately destroyed by Allah SWT because of their arrogance.</p>	<p>However, differences emerge in the interpretation of certain key terms. For example, regarding the word "Iram," al-Biqāʿī interprets it as referring to the inhabitants and their pillars, Michel Cuypers citing W. Montgomery Watt understands it as a tribe, while Saʿīd Ḥawwā interprets it as a city or region. As for the word "awtad" (pegs), both Saʿīd Ḥawwā and al-Biqāʿī interpret it as Pharaoh and his army. In contrast, Cuypers presents several exegetical views but ultimately favors Sayyid Quthb's interpretation</p>	

that “*awtād*” refers to the pyramids, which resemble firmly planted pillars.

Sa‘īd Ḥawwā, al-Biqā‘ī, and Michel Cuypers share the same interpretation of these passages. Verses 12–13 describe the consequences of the crimes committed by the peoples of ‘Ād, Thamūd, and Pharaoh mentioned in the preceding verses. Verse 14 further emphasizes that nothing escapes Allah’s punishment, for He is all-powerful and fully aware of everything with complete oversight.

Verses 12-14

فَاكْثُرُوا فِيهَا الْفَسَادَ ﴿١٢﴾
فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ
﴿١٣﴾ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَبَالْمُرْصَادِ
﴿١٤﴾

Sa‘īd Ḥawwā, al-Biqā‘ī, and Michel Cuypers each offer distinct interpretations of these two verses. Sa‘īd Ḥawwā explains that they concern humanity’s misunderstanding of Allah’s actions. Al-Biqā‘ī argues that the verses highlight the inherent condition of human beings, who, despite being endowed with reason, are created with a disposition toward forgetfulness, self-centeredness, and self-satisfaction. Meanwhile, Michel Cuypers interprets these verses as depicting human inconsistency when confronted with destiny.

Verses 15-16

فَأَمَّا الْإِنْسَانُ إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَأَكْرَمَهُ
وَنَعَّمَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَكْرَمَنِ ﴿١٥﴾
وَأَمَّا إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ
فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهَانَنِ ﴿١٦﴾

In verses 17–20, Sa‘īd Ḥawwā, al-Biqā‘ī, and Michel Cuypers each present distinct interpretations. Sa‘īd Ḥawwā explains that, in addition to humanity’s misunderstanding of Allah in verses 15–16, people also commit transgressions in verses 17–20, such as failing to honor orphans, neglecting to encourage the feeding of the poor, mixing lawful and unlawful wealth, and loving

Verses 17-20

كَأَلَّا بَلَ لَا تُكْرِمُونَ الْيَتِيمَ ﴿١٧﴾
وَلَا تَحْضُونَ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمَسْكِينِ
﴿١٨﴾ وَتَأْكُلُونَ الثَّرَاثَ أَكْلًا لَّمًّا
﴿١٩﴾ وَتُحِبُّونَ الْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا
﴿٢٠﴾

wealth excessively. Al-Biqā'ī interprets this section as addressing humanity's excessive attachment to worldly possessions. Meanwhile, Michel Cuypers highlights the rhetorical structure of these verses: in verses 17–18, the negative verbs correspond with parallel endings *yatim* (orphan) and *miskin* (poor), which rhyme in *-im* and *-in* while verses 19–20 feature highly similar grammatical constructions and synonymous meanings through two positive verbs, both ending with the same rhyme, *-lamma* (verse 19) and *-jamma* (verse 20).

In verses 21–30, Sa'īd Ḥawwā and al-Biqā'ī share the same interpretation regarding the connection between these verses. Verse 21 serves as a transition, linking the events of the previous verses with what follows. It determines the fate of humankind based on their deeds in verses 6–20 and what awaits them in the eternal realm: the torment of the disbelievers described in verses 21–26, and the honor granted to the believers in verses 27–30.

Michel Cuypers highlights the structural connections within this passage. In verses 21–23a, verses 21 and 22 end with parallel expressions "*dakkan dakkan*" (one after another) and "*saffan saffan*" (in rows) while verses 22 and 23 are linked through the opening words "*ja'a*" (came) and "*ji'a*" (will come). He further explains that these verses outline three successive eschatological moments: (1) the destruction of the earth, (2) the coming of Allah and His angels, and (3) the bringing forth of Hell. Verses 23b and 23c are connected through the root "*dhkr*" (will remember) in 23b and (warning) in 23c, while verse 24 continues the link with the same grammatical structure, pairing (will remember) (23b) with (will say) (24).

Similarly, verses 25 and 26 correspond through their parallel construction and synonymous expressions: "*yu'adhdhibu 'adhabahu*" (able to

Verses 21-30

كَأَلَّا إِذَا دُكَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَكًّا
دَكًّا ﴿٢١﴾ وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ
صَفًّا صَفًّا ﴿٢٢﴾ وَجِئَ يَوْمَئِذٍ
بِجَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ وَأَنَّى لَهُ
الذِّكْرَى ﴿٢٣﴾ يَقُولُ يَلَيِّنَنِي قَدَّمْتُ
لِحَيَاتِي ﴿٢٤﴾ فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يُعَذِّبُ
عَذَابَهُ أَحَدٌ ﴿٢٥﴾ وَلَا يُؤْتِقُ وَثْقَهُ
أَحَدٌ ﴿٢٦﴾ يَأْتِيهَا النَّفْسُ
الْمُطْمَئِنِّةُ ﴿٢٧﴾ ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ
رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً ﴿٢٨﴾ فَادْخُلِي فِي
عِبْدِي ﴿٢٩﴾ وَادْخُلِي
جَنَّتِي ﴿٣٠﴾

punish as He punishes) and "*yūthiqu wathāqahu*" (able to bind as He binds). Finally, verses 27–30 focus on the reward of the believers: verses 27 and 28 feature related terms, "*mutma'innah*" (tranquil) and "*marḍiyyah*" (pleasing), while verses 29 and 30 share the same opening command, "*udkhibuli*" (enter). These verses are addressed to the serene souls of believers, inviting them to return to their Lord and enter Paradise.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it is evident that the application of Semitic Rhetorical Analysis to Sūrah al-Fajr reveals a passage composed of three main parts, each containing two to three sections, with segments of one to three members arranged in a concentric structure (ABCB'A'). This analysis demonstrates a meaningful relationship similar to that found in the science of Munāsabah, namely the link between a verse and those preceding or following it. At the same time, Semitic Rhetorical Analysis highlights another dimension: meaning derived from the structural arrangement of the text once it has been divided into its rhetorical units.

The principles of Semitic Rhetoric therefore differ from those of Munāsabah in several ways. Semitic Rhetoric emphasizes text division, hierarchical levels, and rhetorical structures elements not explicitly addressed in Munāsabah. Yet, the rationale for connecting verses in both approaches can overlap, depending on the perspective of the analyst. For example, concentric or mirror structures in Semitic Rhetoric resemble the Munāsabah approach of linking the opening and closing of a Sūrah, or the beginning and end of a verse, as discussed in '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*'.

Consequently, the interconnection of Qur'ānic verses is not confined to linear sequencing within the *mushaf*, but also extends to textual structures that operate at multiple levels: concentric, parallel, and mirror. This challenges Richard Bell's claim that parts of Sūrah al-Fajr lack coherence. On the contrary, as affirmed by classical exegetes and Michel Cuypers, every verse in the Sūrah is deliberately arranged, structurally connected, and symmetrically balanced, forming a coherent and unified whole.

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