

**The Prophetic Biography
Between the Qur'anic Perspective and the Interpretive Perspective
– A Critical Analytical Study-
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Abstract

1. Research Hypothesis:

This study is based on a primary hypothesis asserting the existence of two distinct portrayals of the Prophetic Biography: the first is the Qur'anic portrayal, and the second is the interpretive portrayal.

2. Portrayals of the Study:

The research identifies two portrayals:

The Qur'anic Portrayal: This is a depiction provided by the Qur'an itself, even though the exegete may uncover it through contemplation and reflection. Thus, we term it the Qur'anic portrayal because the Qur'an is the guiding authority, with the exegete following its lead.

The Interpretive Portrayal: This is a depiction constructed by the exegete, even though it is derived from the Qur'an. We call this the interpretive portrayal because the exegete takes precedence, with the Qur'an serving as a point of reference.

3. Research Problem:

The Prophetic Biography is represented by two differing portrayals: one elevated and the other non-elevated. The



elevated portrayal aligns with the Prophet's character as praised in the Qur'an and harmonizes with the perfections attested by the Qur'an. This divergence presents a problem requiring resolution.

In my view, the solution involves three procedural steps:

- First, distinguishing between the two portrayals.
- Second, prioritizing the elevated portrayal over the non-elevated portrayal.
- Third, affirming the elevated portrayal and rejecting the non-elevated portrayal.

Introduction

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds, and peace and blessings be upon the Master of the Messengers, the Seal of the Prophets, the beloved of Allah, Muhammad ibn Abdullah—the distinguished Messenger, the noble Quraishite, the divinely supported Prophet, the victorious and guided leader, Abu al-Qasim. May blessings be upon him and his pure household, the chosen ones, and the most virtuous among Allah’s servants. Peace be upon them all.

There is a significant issue among exegetes concerning the approach to understanding and interpreting the Qur’an. Two primary trends can be observed in this regard. The first trend adheres to the Qur’an, submitting to its guidance and the worldview it presents. In other words, they accept the Qur’anic perspective, which offers an answer to questions posed from outside the Qur’an. Since this study focuses on the Prophetic Biography, the portrayal presented by this group is referred to as the Qur’anic portrayal. The second trend places the Qur’an in alignment with their own interpretations. In other words, they adhere to their own conclusions without considering the Qur’anic perspective. Consequently, they offer answers to external questions that often differ from the Qur’anic response. In the context of the Prophetic Biography, the portrayal presented by this group is termed the interpretive portrayal.

This delineation highlights the importance of the research, as it claims to present an original study—a novel contribution to the field. This study identifies and examines two distinct portrayals of the Prophetic Biography. The first is the Qur’anic portrayal, which, while presented by the exegetes, positions the Qur’an as the guiding authority (leader), with the exegete as the follower. The second is the interpretive portrayal, which is also presented by the exegetes, but here the exegete takes precedence as the guiding authority (leader), while the Qur’an is positioned as a secondary reference (follower).

Muhammad Husayn al-Tabataba'i (d. 1402 AH) pointed to this issue¹, stating:

They erred in this matter, for God Almighty did not invalidate the authority of reason in His Book. How could that be possible when the legitimacy of reason is established through the Quran itself? God did not grant authority to the interpretations and opinions of commentators, despite their differences, nor did He encourage sophistry by accepting contradictory or incompatible views. Instead, He called for reflection (tadabbur) on the verses of the Quran. Through this reflection, He eliminated any apparent contradictions, making the Quran a source of guidance, light, and clarification for all matters. How, then, can light rely on another light to illuminate it? How can guidance require guidance from something else? And how can the Quran, which clarifies everything, need clarification from external sources?²

Regarding the theologians (mutakallimun), their doctrinal affiliations often led them to interpret the Quran in ways that aligned with their respective sectarian views. They would accept verses that supported their positions and reinterpret or distort those that seemed to contradict their doctrines, according to what their particular school of thought deemed permissible. This adoption of specific doctrines and viewpoints may stem from differing intellectual approaches or other factors such as tradition and cultural biases.

There is a significant difference between a commentator asking, "What does the Quran say about this verse?" and asking, "What must we make the verse say?" The former approach requires setting aside preconceived ideas and relying solely on objective reasoning. The latter, however, imposes pre-existing theories onto the verse and builds interpretations upon those assumptions. Clearly, this method does not seek the true meaning of the verse but instead aligns the text with external ideologies.³

It is worth mentioning that this research is unprecedented and represents the foundation for a larger project aiming to investigate these two perspectives. In other words,

1 Tabatabai, Muhammad Husayn. *Al-Mizan fi Tafseer al-Mizan*. 2nd ed. Beirut: Al-Alami Foundation for Publications, 1394 AH. 1:6.

2 Tabatabai, 1:7.

3 Tabatabai, 1:7.

this study serves as the cornerstone for a broader book project.

For this study, we have relied on a wide range of sources and references, categorized into four main sections. The first section includes early sources—works authored by scholars whose deaths occurred between the beginning of the first Islamic century and the year 1270 AH. These sources are organized systematically as follows: fame, honorific titles, full trilateral names, and the year of death (in Hijri years).⁴

The second section comprises modern references, which derive their information from the early sources. These references include works by scholars who passed away after the year 1270 AH until today. It includes sources of the later scholars, the late later scholars, and the contemporaries whom we encountered and lived with. The sources in this section are arranged as follows: the full trilateral name, followed by the year of death (in Hijri). If the author is still alive, their name is followed by the description “(contemporary).” If the author holds a doctorate, their name is followed by the title “(Dr.).”⁵

The third section comprises theses and dissertations, divided into two categories: master’s theses and doctoral dissertations.

The fourth section comprises academic articles.

This study is structured into a summary, an introduction, and two chapters.

The first chapter is titled The Qur’anic Biography. It consists of two main topics: The General Level, and The Specific Level. This latter topic is divided into two subtopics: External Interaction and Internal Interaction

The second chapter is titled The Interpretative Biography. It also consists of two main topics:

Discourse in the Meccan Revelation and Discourse in the Medinan Revelation

The study concludes with a final section that includes the conclusion, findings, and a bibliography of sources and references.

Our final prayer is, “Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all worlds.”

4 Fattali, Sakina Aziz, and Jabar Kazem Al-Mulla. *Al-Dirasat al-Fiqhiyya fi Madrasat al-Hilla al-Tafseeriyya: Dirasah Ta’siliyyah*. 1st ed. (Hilla al-Musharrafah: Dar al-Sadiq al-Thaqafiyyah, 1444 AH), 33.

5 Fattali, Al-Mulla, 33-34.



Chapter One: The Qur'anic Biography

This chapter focuses on one dimension of the Qur'anic biography, namely, the ethical biography of the greatest Prophet, Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his family). To substantiate the central hypothesis underlying this study, it is essential to define the levels of the Qur'anic biography—specifically the ethical biography—and to support these theoretical levels with Qur'anic texts. These texts serve as the practical foundation for the theoretical framework, allowing us to present to the esteemed reader a comprehensive depiction of the Qur'anic biography. Through this depiction, the ethical dimensions of the biography of the greatest Prophet, Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his family), become fully evident.

From an operational perspective, the ethical biography can be divided into two levels: the general level and the specific level.

It is worth noting that the specific level encompasses various interactions of the noble Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) with the other, regardless of their identity.

We have chosen to begin with the general level, thoroughly examining it before proceeding to the specific level. This progression adheres to a scientific methodology by moving systematically from the general to the specific. Each level is treated in a dedicated section to ensure a focused and comprehensive analysis.

Section One: The General Level

This level refers to the ethical conduct of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) that manifested in his interactions with everyone he encountered, without exception or discrimination against any individual. Allah Almighty states:

“And indeed, you are of a great moral character.” (Al-Qalam: 4)

The key phrase here is “great moral character”. Allah, in His boundless glory, did not merely describe the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and

his family) as possessing good character; rather, He emphasized its greatness by describing it as “great”.

It is worth noting that Allah also uses the term “great” to describe His own favor, as in the verse:

“And Allah is the possessor of great bounty.” (Qur’an, Aal Imran: 174)

In other words, Allah glorified and elevated the moral character of His Prophet by describing it with the same term He uses for His divine favor—great. This conveys a profound indication that moral character, particularly when described as great, serves as a pathway to attaining perfection.⁶

Anyone whose character is praised by Allah Himself in this way in this world will undoubtedly achieve the highest levels of perfection in the hereafter. The Muslims tangibly witnessed the manifestations of this sublime character in the practical, real-world behavior of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his family). This general level is evident in his interactions with all individuals, embodying the great moral character praised by Allah.

Conclusion and Inference

Allah described Himself with the attribute of greatness, and He also described His Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) with the same attribute. He said about Himself:

“And Allah is the possessor of great bounty.” (Qur’an, Aal Imran: 174)

And He said about His Prophet:

“And indeed, you are of a great moral character.” (Qur’an, Al-Qalam: 4)

The key point here is the term “great”, which is used to describe both Allah and His Prophet. This indicates a level of perfection, and it is essential that we reject any interpretative understanding that contradicts this perfection. That is, any explanation of the Prophet’s character that deviates from the Qur’anic portrayal of his morality

⁶ Al-Mulla, Jabar Kazem. *Nazariyyat Hakimiyyat al-Khitab al-Qur’ani: Dirasah Tahliliyyah*. 1st ed. (Hilla al-Musharrafah: Dar al-Sadiq al-Thaqafiyyah, 1446 AH), 22.

as great must be rejected, as it does not align with the completeness and virtues that the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) embodies according to the Qur'an.

Thus, it is our responsibility today to seek the Qur'anic image of the Prophet and adhere to it. We should examine any interpretive image of the Prophet's character and measure it against the Qur'anic depiction. If it aligns with it, we accept it; if it contradicts it, we discard it without considering the interpreter's identity. The authority lies with the Qur'an, not with the opinion of the commentator, as the Qur'an holds supreme authority.

Section Two: The Specific Level

This level of behavior (ethics) refers to the interactions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) with different groups. We can classify this as a specific level, depending on the group in question. The Qur'an presents the Prophet's interactions with various types of "others," including the religious and non-religious, as well as those from different ethnic, familial, and companion backgrounds. To address the specifics under this level, each subgroup has been given a dedicated section.

The First Subsection: Dealing with the Non-Believers

The Qur'an reveals the Prophet's mercy and profound care for those who rejected faith, including idolaters, disbelievers, and the people of the Book (Jews and Christians). The Qur'an portrays how the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was almost consumed with grief for the disbelievers, wishing for their belief in the message of truth. This is illustrated in the following two verses:

"Perhaps you would kill yourself with grief, that they do not believe in this Faith."
(Al-Kahf: 6)

"Perhaps you would kill yourself with grief, that they do not believe." (Ash-Shu'ara: 3)

In both verses, the term "Perhaps you would kill yourself" refers to the immense sorrow and pain the Prophet felt for the rejection of the message by these people.

The first verse appears in Surah Al-Kahf (6), while the second appears in Surah Ash-Shu'ara (3).

These verses highlight that the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) was so deeply concerned for the well-being of the disbelievers that he was almost driven to despair. The Qur'an here speaks to the Prophet's boundless compassion for those who refused to accept the message, even in the face of their idolatry and erroneous beliefs. The Qur'an mentions the claims made by the People of the Book⁷:

"And to warn those who say, 'Allah has taken a son.' They have no knowledge of it, nor did their forefathers. Grave is the word that comes out of their mouths; they speak nothing but a lie." (Al-Kahf 18:4-5)

This clearly refers to the Jews and Christians, as shown in other Qur'anic verses that mention their beliefs:

"The Jews say: 'Uzair is the son of Allah.'" (At-Tawbah: 30)

"The Christians say: 'The Messiah is the son of Allah.'" (At-Tawbah: 30)

"The Jews and Christians say: 'We are the children of Allah and His beloved ones.'" (Al-Ma'idah: 18)

Despite their erroneous beliefs, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) felt deep sorrow for their rejection of the truth and would nearly have harmed himself out of grief for their refusal to believe. This demonstrates the Prophet's immense care for the guidance of others, regardless of their religious affiliation.⁸

The Quranic depiction highlights the way Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) interacted with a distinct group of people referred to as the "non-religious other." This category includes disbelievers and polytheists, whether they were People of the Book or members of the Prophet's own community. The Prophet's interactions

7 Al-Hilli, Abu Mansur al-Hasan bin Yusuf bin al-Mutahhir. Nahj al-Haq wa Kashf al-Sidq, edited by al-Armawi; Ayn Allah al-Hasani. 4th ed. (Qom al-Musharrafah: Dar al-Hijrah, 1414 AH), 308.

8 Al-Hilli, Abu Mansur al-Hasan bin Yusuf bin al-Mutahhir. Nahj al-Haq wa Kashf al-Sidq, edited by al-Armawi; Ayn Allah al-Hasani. 4th ed. (Qom al-Musharrafah: Dar al-Hijrah, 1414 AH), 308.

with such individuals were rooted in the profound moral excellence that characterized him, enabling him to attain perfection in how he dealt with others, even those who opposed him.

If this was the Prophet's behavior toward the "other," one can only imagine the level of kindness and compassion he extended to his fellow Muslims. In addressing the non-religious, whether disbelievers or polytheists, the Prophet's responses consistently reflected his remarkable forbearance. For instance, whenever he was harmed by the disbelievers among his people, he prayed for their forgiveness rather than retribution, famously saying:

"O Allah, forgive my people, for they do not know."

This statement is widely recognized and appears in the traditions of both the Ahl al-Bayt school and the school of the Companions.

Furthermore, the Quran affirms the Prophet's deep concern for the disbelievers in the verse:

"Is the one to whom the evil of his deed has been made attractive so that he sees it as good [the same as one rightly guided]? For Allah sends astray whom He wills and guides whom He wills. So do not let your soul waste away in regrets over them. Indeed, Allah is Knowing of what they do" (Surah Fatir 35:8).

The phrase "do not let your soul waste away in regrets over them" illustrates the extent of the Prophet's sorrow over those who rejected his message. His profound empathy and moral excellence almost drove him to harm himself out of grief for the disbelievers.

If such was the Prophet's conduct toward those who opposed him, it underscores how much greater his care and concern were for his fellow believers. This exemplary behavior serves as a timeless model of compassion and forbearance in human interactions.

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they were People of the Book or members of the Prophet's own community.⁹ The Prophet's interactions with such individuals were rooted in the profound moral excellence that characterized him, enabling him to attain perfection in how he dealt with others, even those who opposed him.¹⁰

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9 Mulla, 22.

10 Mulla, 22.

11 Al-Hilli, 308.

12 Al-Majlisi, Muhammad Baqir. *Bihar al-Anwar al-Jami'a li-Durar Akhbar al-A'immah al-At-har*. 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Wafa, 1403 AH), 95/197.

13 Al-Nuri, Abu Zakariya Muhyi al-Din Yahya ibn Sharaf. *Riyad al-Salihin*. Edited by Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut. 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Risalah, 1419 AH), 188.

14 Al-Hilli, 308.

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The Second Aspect: Internal Interaction

The Quran states:

"Ask forgiveness for them, or do not ask forgiveness for them. Even if you ask forgiveness for them seventy times, Allah will never forgive them. That is because they disbelieved in Allah and His Messenger, and Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people" (Al-Tawbah 9:80).

The relevant part of this verse is: "Even if you ask forgiveness for them seventy times". It is reported that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) responded to this by saying:

"By Allah, I will ask for more than seventy times."

This statement reflects his hope that forgiveness might still be granted to disbelievers, even if it required exceeding the prescribed seventy times. The Prophet's words indicate his profound compassion and persistent hope for mercy, despite the explicit Quranic declaration of their unforgivable state if they persist in disbelief.

The authenticity of this statement has been discussed in exegetical works from the school of the Companions¹⁶, particularly those interpretations that adopt a traditionalist approach. Regardless of its authenticity, the underlying moral lesson aligns with the Prophet's supreme character and ethical perfection¹⁷. His consistent pursuit of mercy and forgiveness for others, even in challenging circumstances, exemplifies his unmatched moral greatness.

¹⁵ Al-Mulla, 22.

¹⁶ Al-Khazin, Abu al-Hasan Ala' al-Din Ali ibn Muhammad al-Shihi. *Lubab al-Ta'wil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* known as (Tafseer al-Khazin). Edited by Muhammad Ali Shahin. 1st ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah), 2/266.

¹⁷ Al-Suyuti, Abu al-Fadl Jalal al-Din Abdul Rahman ibn Abu Bakr. *Al-Durr al-Manthur fi al-Tafseer bil-Mathoor*. Edited by Dr. Abdullah Abdul Mohsen al-Turki. 1st ed. (Cairo: Hajr Center for Arabic and Islamic Studies), 3/264.

If this was his interaction with disbelievers,¹⁸ it is clear that his dealings with his fellow Muslims would be characterized by even greater empathy, care, and kindness. His behavior remains a model of unparalleled moral conduct, both in external and internal interactions.¹⁹

The Quran records the words of Prophet Joseph as he addressed his brothers, saying: “There is no blame upon you today. May Allah forgive you, and He is the Most Merciful of the merciful” (Yusuf 12:92).²⁰

This noble conduct was similarly reflected in the actions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Household) during the conquest of Mecca in 8 AH. When the people of Quraysh, acknowledging his power, said to him, “You have the power to punish; show mercy,” he responded with humility and forgiveness:

“I say as my brother Joseph said: ‘There is no blame upon you today. May Allah forgive you, and He is the Most Merciful of the merciful.’”

Just as Joseph forgave his brothers who had wronged him, Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Family) pardoned his people despite the immense harm they had caused him. This reflects the Quranic principle mentioned in:

“Those who suppress anger and forgive people. And Allah loves the doers of good” (Aal-Imran 3:134).

The key terms here, “suppressing anger,” “forgiving people,” and “doing good,” emphasize actionable virtues. The verse’s use of active participles (“suppressing,” “forgiving,” and “doing good”) underscores that these qualities are not merely abstract ideals but require deliberate action.

Moreover, the statement “And Allah loves the doers of good” signifies divine approval for those who embody these attributes, particularly the capacity to forgive and pardon others. This is reinforced by another divine command:

¹⁸ Al-Hilli, 308.

¹⁹ Al-Mulla, 22.

²⁰ Al-Azraqi, Abu al-Walid Muhammad ibn Abdullah al-Ghassani al-Makki. *Akhbar Makkah wa Ma Ja’a Fiha Min al-Athar*. Edited by Rushdi al-Salih Mulhas. 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus), 2/121.

"Let them pardon and overlook" (An-Nur 24:22).

These verses collectively highlight the importance of forgiveness and mercy, central to the ethical teachings of the Quran and the Prophetic tradition. They call believers to actively embody these virtues, assuring them of divine love and favor for doing so.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Household), exemplified every attribute beloved to Allah Almighty. A remarkable instance of this is evident during the conquest of Mecca in 8 AH. The Prophet addressed the people of Quraysh, asking:

"What do you think I will do with you?"

They replied:

"Good. You are a noble brother, the son of a noble brother."

In response, the Prophet declared:

"Go, for you are free."²¹

This incident has been documented by commentators on Sahih al-Bukhari.²²

Such virtuous qualities were also a hallmark of the Prophet's family, the Ahlul Bayt (peace be upon them). A well-known narration recounts an incident involving Imam Sajad (peace be upon him). A servant of the Imam was pouring water for him when the jug slipped and struck the Imam's face, causing an injury.²³ The servant, fearing retribution, immediately recited the verse:

"Those who suppress anger" (Aal-Imran 3:134).

The Imam responded, "I have suppressed my anger."

She continued:

"And pardon people."

He replied, "May Allah pardon you."

21 Ibn Hisham, Abu Muhammad Jamal al-Din Abdul Malik ibn Hisham. *Al-Sira al-Nabawiyya* known as (*Sirat Ibn Hisham*). Edited by al-Saqqa, and translated by Mustafa Ibrahim al-Abiyari and Abdul Hafeez Shalabi. 2nd ed. (Cairo, Egypt: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi & Sons Printing House), 2/412.

22 Al-Asqalani, Ibn Hajar Ahmad ibn Ali. *Fath al-Bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*. Edited by Muhib al-Din al-Khatib, translated by Muhammad Fuad Abdul-Baqi. 1st ed. (Cairo, Egypt: Al-Maktaba al-Salafiya), 8/18.

23 Al-Razi, Abu Abdullah Zayn al-Din Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr. *Mukhtar al-Sihah*, entry: "Shajaja." 1st ed. (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Fikr).

Finally, she added:

“And Allah loves the doers of good.”

Moved by her words, the Imam said, “Go, for you are free.”²⁴

This incident reflects the profound moral and spiritual ethos of the Ahlul Bayt (peace be upon them), characterized by self-restraint, forgiveness, and benevolence. The narration is recorded in sources such as Amali²⁵, Tarikh²⁶, and Manaqib²⁷, as compiled by al-Majlisi.

The Quran states: “So by mercy from Allah, [O Muhammad], you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them” (Al-E-Imran: 159). The mercy exhibited by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Household) is a continuation of Allah’s encompassing mercy, as described in another verse: “My mercy encompasses all things” (Al-A’raf: 156).

The people did not abandon the Prophet because he was never harsh or unkind. This is implied by the use of the Arabic particle “if” in the verse, which indicates a condition that is impossible to occur. The verse suggests that harshness is entirely absent from the Prophet’s character, as its absence is what ensured that people remained close to him.

It is evident from the above discussion that the ethical conduct of the noble Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his Household) made him an exemplary role model. The Quran states: “There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent example for anyone whose faith is in Allah and the Last Day and [who] remembers Allah often” (Al-Ahzab: 21).

²⁴ Al-Majlisi, 46/68.

²⁵ Al-Saduq, Abu Ja’far Shaykh al-Muhaddithin Muhammad ibn Ali. Amali al-Saduq, ed. by: Islamic Studies Department. 1st ed. (Qum al-Musharrafah, Iran: al-Ba’itha Foundation), 201.

²⁶ Al-Mufid, Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Akbari al-Baghdadi. Al-Irshad fi Ma’rifat Hujaj Allah ‘ala al-Ibad, ed. by: al-Bayt (peace be upon them) Foundation for Heritage Research. 2nd ed. (Dar al-Mufid), 274.

²⁷ Ibn Shahrawayh, Abu Abdullah al-Hafiz Muhammad ibn Ali. Manaqib Ahl al-Bayt, known as (Manaqib Ibn Shahrawayh), ed. by: A Committee of Professors from Najaf al-Ashraf. (Najaf al-Ashraf: Al-Haydariyah Press), 3:296.



Undoubtedly, following this example is a path toward achieving the highest degrees of perfection in this world. Those who attain this in worldly life are assuredly destined to achieve it in the hereafter without any doubt. It is worth emphasizing that what has been discussed above represents a Quranic perspective on the Prophet's life and character.

Section Two: The Interpretive Methodology

After affirming that the principles of exegesis are among the essential tools for interpreting the Quran, and acknowledging that occasions of revelation are one such principle, this section examines the reliability of these interpretive tools by referencing the Quranic discourse itself. Through this approach, we evaluate the understanding derived by exegetes based on these tools, particularly focusing on the role of occasions of revelation, as it is the central theme of our study.

In other words, the Quranic discourse inherently possesses the authority to critique interpretive tools. It governs them, not the other way around. These tools serve as means to comprehend the Quran, but they are not infallible and may lead to either accurate or flawed interpretations. This study seeks to identify erroneous understandings by relying on the Quranic discourse as the ultimate arbiter. It is this discourse that accepts or rejects specific interpretations based on their alignment—or lack thereof—with its principles.

Rejection of a particular interpretation often stems from the misuse of interpretive tools, such as the occasion of revelation, when they fail to harmonize with the Quranic discourse. This discrepancy arises because the Quranic text, with regard to its Meccan and Medinan revelations, asserts its authority over these tools. It integrates the Meccan into the Medinan context and vice versa, demonstrating a cohesive and unified discourse.

While we acknowledge the oral nature of the Quranic discourse during its revelation (Meccan or Medinan), we assert that it constitutes a single, cohesive message. Upon being documented into written form, this discourse became one Quran, not

two distinct texts—a Meccan Quran and a Medinan Quran—as some Orientalists mistakenly claim, a view subsequently adopted by certain modernist thinkers.

The Quranic Discourse: Unity and Diversity

The diversity of the Quranic discourse in its Meccan and Medinan revelations manifests at multiple levels: the form of the discourse, its patterns, and its themes. This diversity reflects the richness of the Quranic message while preserving its unity.

Even if we acknowledge this diversity—which is a well-established fact—whether in form, patterns, or themes, it is essential to emphasize that the Quranic discourse, whether revealed in Mecca or Medina, remains fundamentally one unified discourse in terms of its overarching challenge. This challenge serves to demonstrate the miraculous nature of the Quran, which in turn establishes its divine origin. By affirming this, any claims that the Quran is a human construct are definitively refuted. What applies to the Meccan discourse similarly applies to the Medinan discourse in this regard.

Since the Quranic discourse is categorized by its Meccan or Medinan contexts of revelation,²⁸ it can be utilized as a criterion to assess the validity of interpretations and claims about its meaning. This perspective, however, has often been overlooked. The nature of the Quranic revelation endows the discourse with an inherent potency, enabling it to evaluate and validate the interpretations, exegeses, or understandings derived from it, based on the tools of exegesis employed.

This notion, which we term the “authority of the Quranic discourse”, asserts that the Quranic discourse governs not only the interpretive tools but also the understanding of the exegetes themselves. In both its Meccan and Medinan revelations, the Quranic discourse remains the ultimate reference point for determining the accuracy and validity of interpretations.

It is important to note that the failure to pay attention to the Qur’anic discourse has led the “interpretive mind” into a dilemma, which we can refer to as the “dilemma

²⁸ Al-Mansouri, Wasim Abbas. *The Diversity of Qur’anic Discourse*, MA thesis, supervised by Prof. Dr. Jabar Kazim al-Mulla (University of Babylon / Babel: Submitted to the Council of the College of Islamic Sciences), 1446 AH.

of the interpretive mind.” This is because it has followed the tools of interpretation, which have directed it away from the true reality and contrary to the revealed Qur’anic message, as the Qur’anic discourse rejects such misinterpretations.

In other words, the “dilemma of the interpretive mind” constitutes an “intellectual crisis” and, at times, a “moral downfall”²⁹ because it undermines the sacred, particularly the character of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Household). This occurs when an interpretive image is presented that contradicts the Qur’anic portrayal, as the interpreter clings to an opinion that aligns with personal inclinations or with their prior intellectual or doctrinal background, or with the school of thought they adhere to within this interpretive framework. In this way, the interpreter disregards the Qur’anic image, which is derived from the totality of the content found in the Qur’anic message—both Meccan and Medinan revelations—and turns it upside down.* The prevailing interpretive image reflects the choices of many interpreters.

Supporting this argument is the statement of one interpreter in his commentary on the verse from Surah Abasa (80:1-2): “He frowned and turned away when the blind man came to him.” Many interpreters and traditionalists claim that this verse refers to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Household). They explain that the Prophet was with a group of the nobility of his tribe and that when Ibn Umm Maktum, a blind man, approached him, the Prophet turned away, fearing that his attention to the blind man might displease the leaders of the tribe, leading to the blaming of God to His Prophet. This interpretation, however, presents a picture that contradicts the Qur’anic portrayal of the Prophet.³⁰

29 Al-Nasser, Ghaleb. *Narrative, History, and Society: The Semantic Features and Qualitative Characteristics of Qur’anic Narrative and Historical Discourse and Its Impact on the Formation of the Cultural Content of Islamic Society*, 1st ed. (Karbala al-Muqaddasa: Department of Religious Affairs), p. 33.

30 Al-Tusi, Abu Ja’far Sheikh al-Ta’ifa Muhammad ibn al-Hasan; *Al-Tibyan fi Tafseer al-Qur’an*, ed. by Islamic Publishing Foundation, 1st ed. (Qom, Iran: Islamic Publishing Foundation), 10/267.

*The shield: It is a plate made of wood or metal, which the warrior would carry on his arm for protection against swords and similar weapons.

It is worth noting that this interpretive image has ignored the true Qur'anic image, which presents an accurate and ethical portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Household). Instead, it has replaced the Qur'anic portrayal with unreliable reports of "reasons for revelation,"³¹ which are based on unauthenticated narrations.³² These narrations were used to attach the qualities of "frowning" and "turning away" to the Prophet, while insisting on these qualities being specific to him and rejecting the possibility that they could apply to others within the Muslim community.

The interpreters from the school of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) criticized the interpretive image that represented the choice of many scholars. One of them stated, "This is invalid."³³ It is important to note that the term "invalid" has been borrowed from the science of *usul al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence) into the field of exegesis, as "validity" and "invalidity" are terms commonly used by *usul al-fiqh* scholars.³⁴

As for Sheikh al-Tusi's statement that the interpretive image represents the choice of many interpreters, this is a curious matter. This is because they have chosen an image that tarnishes the character of the Prophet and damages his sacred status, even though, in contrast to this negative image, there exists a Qur'anic depiction that honors and sanctifies the Prophet, safeguarding his sacred dignity.

The Qur'anic discourse that we encounter presents an image that does not falter at any point. It is a consistent Qur'anic vision, shaped by the entirety of the Qur'anic revelation, both Meccan and Medinan.

If we reflect on the "revelation" of the Qur'anic discourse, as mentioned earlier, we will find that it is Meccan in its origin. Since the narrator of the reasons for revelation

31 Shahrour, Muhammad; *The Qur'anic Stories: A Contemporary Reading*, 1st ed. (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Saqi), 177.

32 Shahrour, Muhammad; 177.

33 Al-Tusi; 10/267.

34 Mulla, Jabar Kazem; "The Methodologies of Usul Research among the Theologians and Hanafis" - Master's Thesis, (University of Kufa - Najaf Al-Ashraf: Unpublished / Submitted to the Faculty of Jurisprudence), / 124.

should be a witness to the event, and testimony is only valid if the witness was present, this requires two things: the first is that the “witness” here must be from Mecca, not from Medina or elsewhere. The second is that the “witness” must have been present at the event. In other words, if the narrator is from Medina, their testimony is rejected in terms of the Qur’anic discourse, because the revelation is Meccan. How can someone from Medina testify about a Meccan revelation? How can someone who was not present be a witness?

According to the principle of the supremacy of the Qur’anic discourse, the narration of Malik ibn Anas, attributed to Abu Hamza al-Ansari al-Khazraji al-Najari Al-Madani³⁵, is invalid in suggesting that the verse refers to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This is because Malik is from Medina. In other words, this issue can be addressed by referring to the supremacy of the Qur’anic discourse itself, without needing to rely on the chain of narration.

If we examine the nature of the Qur’anic discourse mentioned earlier, we find that it follows the pattern of addressing the absent, as shown in the verse “He frowned,” where the address is directed at an unspecified individual, and “and turned away,” which also directs the speech to the absent. This means the discourse is ambiguous. Whenever the speech is ambiguous, extensive discussion arises about its interpretation, since the explanation varies according to different foundations, principles, and interpretive rules.

To insist that the Qur’anic discourse pertains specifically to the Prophet, and to ignore other opinions that suggest it could apply to someone else, is striking. This is particularly noteworthy considering the existence of alternative interpretations that propose it refers to others.

If we turn to the Qur’anic discourse itself — which is Meccan in its revelation — we find that it rejects this interpretation, as the discourse includes two negative attributes: the first is frowning, and the second is turning away. The Qur’anic discourse re-

35 Al-Dhahabi, Abu Abdullah Shams al-Din Muhammad bin Ahmad; *Biographies of the Noble Figures*, ed. by: Muhammad Na’im al-Arqousi, Shu’ayb al-Arna’ut, 9th ed. (Beirut, Lebanon: Al-Risalah Foundation), 3/396.

fuses to suggest that the intended individual is Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Household), because it contradicts both the Meccan Qur’anic message directed at the Prophet and the Medinan Qur’anic message directed at him as well.

To verify this matter, we must examine the Qur’anic discourse addressed to the Prophet in detail to uncover the falsehood of this interpretive narrative. Given that the Qur’anic discourse has two distinct stages — the Meccan and Medinan revelations — we have dedicated a separate section for each of them.

First Section: The Discourse in the Meccan Revelation

In the Meccan revelation, the Prophet’s character is described as “great,” as stated in the chapter Al-Qalam. The Qur’an declares: “Indeed, you are of great moral character” (Al-Qalam 68:4). Throughout the Meccan Qur’anic discourse directed at the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Household), the mode of address consistently employs the direct pronoun of the addressee. It is not reported that God ever addressed His Prophet using the pronoun of the absent.³⁶

This pattern of direct address is a hallmark of the Meccan revelation.³⁷ Supporting this observation, the Qur’anic discourse in other Meccan chapters—such as Taha, Ya-Sin, Al-Muddathir, and Al-Muzzammil³⁸—provides examples:

“Taha. We have not sent down to you the Qur’an that you be distressed” (Taha 20:1-2).

“Ya-Sin. By the wise Qur’an, indeed you are among the messengers” (Ya-Sin 36:1-3).

“O you who covers himself [with a garment], arise and warn” (Al-Muddathir 74:1-2).

“O you who wraps himself [in clothing], arise [to pray] the night, except for a little” (Al-Muzzammil 73:1-2).

36 Al-Miqdad, Muhammad al-Risafi; *Defending the Prophet*, ed. by: Department of Religious Activities, 1st ed. (Karbala al-Muqaddasa: Religious Affairs Department - Al-Husayniyah Sacred Shrine), 128.

37 Al-Bahrani, Ibn al-Mutawajh Jamal al-Din Ahmad ibn Abdullah al-Jaziri; *The Abrogating and Abrogated Verses*, ed. by: Majid al-Balad al-Qadeem al-Awainati, 1st ed. (Itrat), 132–119.

38 Al-Mulla, Abeer Jabar Kazem; *The Interpretive Views of Ibn al-Mutawajh al-Bahrani, A Critical Study*, Master’s Thesis, supervised by Professor Dr. Hikmat Obeid al-Khafaji (University of Babylon - Babel: Presented to the Council of the Faculty of Islamic Sciences), 71-66.

“There has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves. Grievous to him is what you suffer; [he is] concerned over you and to the believers is kind and merciful” (At-Tawbah 9:128).

“And do not send away those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, seeking His countenance” (Al-An’am 6:52).

Given this consistent mode of address, how can the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Household) be depicted as turning his face away from a blind man, as interpreted in the chapter ‘Abasa? The Qur’an, in Al-An’am 6:52, clearly directs him not to dismiss those seeking their Lord.

Clinging to this interpretive portrayal creates an impression of inconsistency within the Qur’an itself, which is impossible. As stated in the Qur’an: “Then do they not reflect upon the Qur’an? If it had been from [any] other than Allah, they would have found within it much contradiction” (An-Nisa 4:82).

From the above discussion, it becomes evident that the Qur’anic discourse directed at the Prophet (peace be upon him) in the Meccan revelation exalts his status, distancing him from attributes such as frowning or turning away. How could the Qur’an attribute such actions to him when it explicitly describes him as possessing “exalted character”?³⁹

For anyone familiar with the Prophet’s noble character and the unparalleled virtues bestowed upon him by God—as conveyed in the Qur’anic depiction—accepting the interpretive narrative that tarnishes his esteemed status seems inconceivable. These interpretations contradict the very essence of his character as presented in the Qur’an and unjustly diminish his noble station.

39 Al-Tusi; 10-267.

Section Two: Qur'anic Discourse in the Medinan Revelation

Examining the Qur'anic discourse in the Medinan revelation also demonstrates a rejection of the notion that certain verses imply a reprimand of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his Household). This is because the Medinan Qur'an consistently praises the Prophet, describing him as a "beautiful example" in Surah Al-Ahzab, a Medinan revelation. The verse states:

"Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah, you have a beautiful example." (33:21)

In the Medinan Qur'anic discourse directed at the Prophet, the mode of address is consistently in the second person, directly engaging him. The use of the third-person mode to address the Prophet is virtually absent in Medinan revelation as well.⁴⁰ This is supported by several instances, such as:

In Surah Al-Ahzab, it is stated:

"O Prophet, indeed We have sent you as a witness, a bringer of good tidings, and a warner." (33:45)

In Surah Al-Ma'idah, the verse declares:

"O Messenger, convey what has been revealed to you from your Lord." (5:67)

This pattern of direct address counters the claims made by certain Orientalists and their followers, who argue that the Qur'an is of human authorship and was written by the Prophet himself. If such claims were true, it raises a paradox: how could the Prophet address himself in this manner? Such a narrative is inconsistent with the linguistic and stylistic norms of the Qur'an, which unequivocally point to its divine origin.

What has been said about 'frowning' in Surah Abasa can also be applied to 'orphanhood' in Surah Ad-Duha. The interpretive perspective commonly understands 'orphanhood' as referring to the loss of a father, which is a plausible explanation. However, the Qur'anic perspective conveys 'orphanhood' as a state of uniqueness or singularity, a meaning that aligns with the Qur'anic depiction of the Prophet in the highest ranks of moral and spiritual perfection. This notion of uniqueness fits harmoniously with the overarching Qur'anic image. Therefore, it cannot be dismissed

⁴⁰ Al-Bahrani; 119-132.

as a far-fetched interpretation or subordinated to the more conventional meaning of “fatherless.” In fact, the moral and ethical excellence evidenced in the Prophet’s biography serves, in my view, as a compelling indicator that the so-called “distant” meaning is, in reality, the closer and more accurate one—closer even than the commonly accepted interpretive perspective.

The earliest scholar to identify this Qur’anic nuance, according to our research, is At-Tabarsi, Abu Ali Al-Fadl ibn Al-Hasan (d. 548 AH). He highlighted this understanding in his commentary, correcting the earlier interpretation of At-Tusi, Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn Al-Hasan (d. 460 AH), a prominent figure in tafsir. This refutes the claim that At-Tabarsi’s *Majma’ al-Bayan* merely adopted At-Tusi’s commentary (*Tafsir at-Tibyan*) without adding any critical contributions. It should be noted that it was customary among earlier scholars to build on the works of their predecessors, and this was not considered a flaw at the time.

To support this argument, let us examine At-Tabarsi’s interpretation of the sixth verse of Surah Ad-Duha, where Allah says:

“Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter?” (Ad-Duha 93:6).

In his commentary, At-Tabarsi writes:

“An alternative meaning is: Did He not find you unique, with none like you in your honor and virtue, and thus He sheltered you by drawing you close to Himself and choosing you for His message? This interpretation is supported by the Arabic expression ‘a solitary pearl’ (*durratun yatimah*), which describes something unmatched.”⁴¹

It is worth noting that the Qur’anic understanding of “orphanhood” (as individuality or uniqueness) was also adopted by a contemporary scholar from Hilla, ‘Alim Subayyṭ an-Nili (d. 1421 AH). However, it is important to clarify that he was not the originator of this interpretation, as some researchers suggest. In fact, this interpretation was already established by At-Tabarsi, who appears to have preceded an-Nili in this regard. For instance, an-Nili statement, “He found you unique among all beings,

41 Al-Tabarsi, Abu Ali Amin al-Islam al-Fadl bin al-Hasan; *Majma’ al-Bayan fi Tafseer al-Quran*, edited by: Hashim al-Rasouli al-Mahlati, 1st ed. (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Ihya’ al-Turath al-Arabi), 10/383.

unmatched by anyone, and so He sheltered you by making others seek refuge in you, and you in them, thereby actualizing this uniqueness in its outward form,” is clearly derived from At-Tabarsi’s earlier commentary.⁴²

This notion presents an unconventional and remarkable perspective: the Prophet’s selection for prophethood and apostleship was primarily due to his own unique nature. Consequently, those who possess a share of this singularity were drawn to him. For this reason, the verb “sheltered” does not explicitly take a direct object in the verse. Contrary to traditional interpretations that supply “you” as the implied object, one might just as reasonably propose the meaning to be “He sheltered them with you”, making “them” the implied object instead.

From the preceding discussion, it becomes clear that “orphanhood” in the Qur’anic image refers to uniqueness, whereas the interpretive image equates it with the loss of a father, as in the case of the Prophet before his birth. Similar Qur’anic versus interpretive disparities can be observed in other terms, such as “the illiterate”. According to the Qur’anic image, this term implies the lack of practice in reading and writing, not the lack of knowledge or understanding of these skills. In contrast, the interpretive tradition defines “the illiterate” as someone who neither reads nor writes, as conveyed by many exegetes: “One of the meanings of the illiterate is that he neither writes nor reads.”⁴³

This interpretive perspective, however, conflicts with the Qur’anic context. Allah says: “It is He who has sent among the illiterate a messenger from themselves, reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom, although they were previously in clear error” (Surah Al-Jumu’ah: 2). Allah also says:

“And you were not reciting before it any scripture, nor were you inscribing it with

42 Al-Tabarsi, Abu Ali Amin al-Islam al-Fadl bin al-Hasan; *Majma’ al-Bayan fi Tafseer al-Quran*, edited by: Hashim al-Rasouli al-Mahlati, 1st ed. (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Ihya’ al-Turath al-Arabi), 10/383.

43 Al-Nayli, Alam Sabeet; *The Unified Language: Refuting the Arbitrary Principle and Establishing the Intentionality Principle in General Linguistics*, 1st ed. (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Mahajja al-Bayda), 1/426.



your right hand. Otherwise, the falsifiers would have had reason to doubt” (Surah Al-‘Ankabut: 48).

Thus, the Qur’anic image of “illiterate” aligns with the Prophet’s profound moral and intellectual capacity, emphasizing his lack of practice in writing rather than a lack of capability or knowledge.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has proven the central hypothesis with which we began. Two distinct images of the Prophetic Biography emerged: the first image is the Qur'anic image, and the second is the interpretive image. The Qur'anic image is definitive, authentic, and grounded in reality, while the interpretive image is based on assumptions, differing from truth and reality.

The Qur'anic image of the Prophetic Biography is a derived image, drawn from the entirety of the Qur'anic discourse in both the Meccan and Medinan revelations. This image is realized through reflection and contemplation. On the other hand, the interpretive image is one provided by interpreters, who understand it through the Qur'an itself.

In the interpretive image, the authority belongs to the interpreter; hence, the image is named after them. In contrast, the authority in the Qur'anic image belongs to the Qur'an itself, making it named after the Qur'an. It is important to note that the Qur'anic image holds supremacy over the interpretive image.

God Almighty describes Himself as possessing greatness, and He attributes this same quality to His Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), saying about Himself: "And Allah is full of great bounty" (Qur'an 4:96), and about the Prophet: "And indeed, you are of a great moral character" (Qur'an 68:4). What kind of biography is this? What kind of greatness is this? What kind of character is this? Yes, it is Muhammad, and it is enough that God Himself praises his character and describes him with greatness. After the testimony of God Almighty in the Qur'an, can we accept a testimony from an interpreter that contradicts or differs from this divine testimony?

According to the Qur'anic image, the verse regarding 'Abasa (the Prophet's turning away) was not revealed about the Prophet. However, according to the interpretive image, it was. Similarly, orphanhood in the Qur'anic image signifies singularity, whereas, in the interpretive image, it refers to the death of the father (Abdullah ibn Abd al-Muttalib), with the Prophet (peace be upon him) still in his mother's womb. Additionally, the term unlettered in the Qur'anic image refers to the lack of practice in reading and writing, not the lack of knowledge of them. Conversely, the interpretive

image defines unlettered as a lack of knowledge of reading and writing. Notice the difference between the two images: the Qur'anic image is purified because it aligns with the Prophet's morals and the values he embodied, which the Qur'an celebrates. On the other hand, the interpretive image is often non-purified because it does not align with the Prophet's morals nor the values he upheld.

Since the Qur'anic discourse – with regard to its revelation – is sometimes Meccan and sometimes Medinan, it is possible to use this distinction as a standard for accepting or rejecting certain interpretations. This aspect has not been sufficiently addressed, even though the revelation provides the Qur'anic discourse with significant energy.

The Qur'anic image of the Prophetic Biography only records the realistic actions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) as he practiced them in his life. Simultaneously, it categorically rejects – with certainty – unrealistic actions that the Prophet (peace be upon him) never performed, but which were attributed to him based on the interpretive biography provided by interpreters. The Prophet (peace be upon him) is innocent of these actions, just as the wolf is innocent of the blood of Joseph. In my view, these attributions stem from the problematic assumption made by interpreters about the justice of the companions, which led them to attribute certain actions to the Prophet in order to absolve some companions. What helped them in this was the fact that sometimes the Qur'anic text appears in a general form, and they failed to realize that such a general text cannot necessarily be applied to the Prophet. Based on the Qur'anic biography – which is the entirety of the Qur'anic discourse – and according to the theory of the supremacy of the discourse, we can conclusively affirm that the Qur'anic discourse concerning, for instance, 'Abasa cannot be referring to the Prophet, but rather to someone else. It is worth noting that the addressee here remains un-specific in the Qur'an, and the clarification comes from the authentic Hadith, whether it originates from the Prophet himself or from the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them). However, we have refrained from addressing the latter as our study is focused on the Qur'an, not narrative traditions.

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