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Emergence of the Discourse on the Imitability of the Qur'an

Numerous disciplines emerged for interpreting and assessing the Qur'an, establishing the dogma of its incomparable text. Over time, an interpretative community coalesced around this axiom, shaping and expanding the discourse on the Qur'an's inimitability. In parallel, a counter-discourse, termed in this paper as "the imitability of the Qur'an," evolved, illustrating its genesis and the methods of its interpretative community. This discourse encompasses two manifestations: linguistic and stylistic imitation of the Qur'an and a critical approach viewing the Qur'an as a text that imitates others, raising uncertainties about its motives, authorship, originality, and authenticity.

Key words: Qur'an, discourse of the inimitability of the Qur'an, discourse of the imitability of the Qur'an

Уобличавање дискурса имитативности Курана

У сврху тумачења и вредновања Курана развијено је мноштво дисциплина, у чијим је оквирима испољена догма о ненадмашивости његовог текста. Око тог се аксиома временом оформила интерпретативна заједница која је успоставила и надаље надограђивала „дискурс неимитативности Курана". Паралелно с тим, као противструја развијао се дискурс који смо у раду назначили као „имитативност Курана", појаснивши процес његовог уобличавања и методе на које се ослања његова интерпретативна

заједница. Овај дискурс може се односити на две врсте испољавања: прва, лингвостилистичко опонашање Курана, и друга, критички приступ *Курану* као тексту који и сам опонаша друге текстове, уз сумњу у његове мотиве, ауторство, оригиналност и аутентичност.

Кључне речи: Куран, дискурс неимитативности Курана, дискурс имитативности Курана

The Qur'an, originating in the 7th century, stands as a "solitary" written text,[1] devoid of supplementary documents and exhibiting challenging calligraphy from the current perspective.[2] This situation spurred diverse interpretations either endorsing or challenging the divine origin of the Text. For those who endorse it, *iʿǧāz* (inimitability) emerges as a pivotal concept, affirming the axiom of the Qur'an's superiority while preserving its authenticity.[3]

In contrast to the discourse of inimitability, a reverse process occurred simultaneously from within and later from abroad, treating the Qur'an as an act of plagiarizing literary and religious heritage. This paper refers to this as the *discourse of imitability of the Qur'an*, involving two manifestations: linguistic and stylistic imitation, and criticism of the Qur'an as a text imitating others, raising doubts about motives, authorship, originality, and authenticity. In both cases, the goal is to discredit the inimitability axiom, portraying the Qur'an as a mimesis of the Judeo-Christian tradition, whether rooted in historical context or even demonic activities. The dual action of attempting to surpass the Qur'an through imitation and proving its unoriginality and incorrect imitation of other sources could be termed in Arabic as *ḫiṭāb muḫākat wa taḥrīf al-Qurʾān*.

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[1] Qur'an manuscripts stand as the sole extant remnants from the 7th century. Practices of the Islamic community during Prophet Muhammad's time, encompassing Sunna and cultural heritage, particularly pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry, were purportedly not documented until a century and a half to two centuries post-Islamic emergence. Transmitters, entrusted with memorizing this material across generations, played a crucial role, utilizing *isnād* (chain of transmission) for Sunna, and *ruwāt* (reciters) for poetry.

[2] The earliest Qur'an manuscripts lack diacritical marks, essential for distinguishing similar basic forms of consonants in writing, like /b/ (ﺐ), /t/ (ﺖ), /ṯ/ (ﺚ), /n/ (ﻦ), and /y/ (ﻲ), with a shared basic form (ﻰ) which is only converted into a concrete voice by adding diacritics.

[3] For an insight into the intricacies and understanding of the concept of the inimitability of the Qur'an and the shaping of its discourse within the Islamic tradition, refer to Gharaibeh Simonović 2023.

1. THE CHALLENGE AND THE PRACTICAL RESPONSE

Linguistic and stylistic imitation emerges as a response to *the challenge* (al-taḥaddī) for humanity to create a text akin to the Qur'an, attempting to surpass the divine word. This challenge is iteratively presented in the Qur'an (2:23–24; 10:38; 11:13–14, 17:88; 52:33–34) and follows a consistent pattern:

> And if you are in doubt concerning that We have sent down on Our servant, then bring a sura like it, and call your witnesses, apart from God, if you are truthful. And if you do not – and you will not – then fear the Fire, whose fuel is men and stones, prepared for unbelievers.[4] (2:23–24)

This indirect rebuke of unbelievers commences by accusing the Prophet of belonging to categories like poets (21:5; 37:36; 52:30; 69:41), soothsayers (34:43; 52:29; 69:42), or mere narrators (6:25; 8:31; 16:24; 25:5; 68:15; 83:13). Furthermore, it alleges that the Qur'an is his verbal invention, inspired by the jinns.[5]

In addition to the Qur'an, those engaging with the challenge and mimicking its style are also referenced in tafsīr (exegesis). Notably, the *muḥaḍramūn*, residing in the Hijaz region during the pre-Islamic to Islamic transition, are highlighted. Foremost among them is Musaylima the Liar (Musaylima al-Kaḏḏāb), alias Maslama Ibn Ḥabīb, who asserted receiving revelations from an angel named Raḥmān. Maslama's statements, mimicking or parodying the Qur'an, represent a prevalent example of imitation in classical and modern literature.[6] Classified as *saǧʿ al-kuhhān* (rhymed and rhythmic prose of soothsayers), a frequently cited example is: "Yā ḍufdaʿ bint al-ḍufdaʿayni, naqqī kamā tunaqqīna lā al-māʾ tukaddirīna, wa lā al-shārib tamnaʿīna" ("O frog, of dual ancestry, purify, as purity's envoy, gracefully, with nimble leaps, stir not the tranquil flow, let none be denied the crystal waters' glow").

In his renowned *Tafsīr*, Ibn Kaṯīr (1300–1373) opposes Maslama's stance toward the Qur'an, citing a verse that alludes to him: "And who does

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[4] Translations of the verses in the text are given according to A. J. Arberry in *The Koran interpreted* (1955).

[5] In pre-Islamic times, it was believed that the eloquence and inspiration of prominent members of Arab tribes (poets and soothsayers) was due to demons who whispered amazing and poetic utterances to them.

[6] Cf. al-Bāqilānī 2009, 156–157 and al-Rāfiʿī 2003, 145–146.

greater evil than he who forges against God a lie or cries lies to His signs? Surely the sinners do not prosper" (10:17).[7] This, along with other verses (e.g., 6:93), serves as a response to the outset of the discourse on imitability, acknowledging the challenge's ostensible nature. In this challenge, there was only one *a priori* winner, with participants treated based on their blasphemous acts: they had the option to repent and convert to Islam or face hell in the afterlife (8:31–33). The term employed by believing theorists to encompass these figures and all those who, in diverse ways, contested the supremacy of the Qur'an was *muʿāraḍa*.

Similar to Maslama, muhadrams like al-Naḍr Ibn al-Ḥāriṯ, ʿAbhala Ibn Kaʿb, Ṭulayḫa Ibn Ḫuwaylid al-Asadī, Saǧāḥ Bint al-Ḥāriṯ, and others who contested the inimitability of the Qur'an through imitation or parody faced anathematization.[8] In the centuries following the emergence of Islam, each of these blasphemous acts was also attributed to some classical writers, notably Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (724–759), Ibn Abī al-ʿAwǧāʾ (d. 772), Bashshār Ibn Burd (714–784), Abū al-ʿAtāhiyya (748–828), al-Nāshiʾ al-Akbar (?–906), al-Ḥallāǧ (858–922), al-Mutanabbī (915–965), and al-Maʿarrī (973–1057). Some are accompanied by a contradictory claim that their intention was not to respond to the challenge but to admire the Qur'an or at least to imitate or experiment with its style and show their literary superiority, exemplified by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, al-Mutanabbī and al-Maʿarrī.[9]

Regardless of whether muhadrams or subsequent respondents, their claimed imitative works remain absent in their authentic form.[10] Knowledge of them is solely derived or reconstructed from intermediaries who praised the Qur'an and disparaged those who responded. Portraying their denial of inimitability aimed to underscore the Prophet's mission's validity and serve as a cautionary message against future instances of such blasphemy.

A direct response to the challenge remains uncommon in contemporary times. As an illustration, Boullata references the website members.aol.com, where several suras imitating the Qur'an emerged in 1995 (2004, 23–

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[7] For the interpretation of this verse and further statements by Maslama, see Ibn Kaṯīr 1999, 254–256.

[8] To understand the unfavourable portrayal of respondents, see al-Rāfiʿī 2003, 145–148.

[9] See al-Bāqilānī 2009, 32, 155-156; al-Rāfiʿī 2003, 149–150, 153–154; Van Ess 2018 and Grigoryan 2003, 50–53.

[10] As an exception, al-Maʿarrī's *Kitāb al-Fuṣūl wa al-ġāyāt fī tamǧīd Allāh wa al-mawāʿiẓ* should be mentioned.

24). Following protests from Islamic believers, the content was removed, and the site's existence remains unverifiable. An instance of Qur'anic imitation that persists is the book *al-Furqān al-Ḥaqq* (*The True Furqan*),[11] translated from Arabic to English by the Palestinian evangelist A. Shurūsh (1933–2018). It is conjectured that Shurūsh is the author of *Furqan*, as the Arabic version surfaced no earlier than 1999, when it was released bilingually.

Furqan's intent, frequently emphasized, epitomizes Christian apologetics morphed into sacred expression, evident in the *basmala* preceding each chapter.[12] It urges Muslims to revere the "authentic sources" – the Gospels and *Furqan* – as the sole fortifications of monotheism. These scriptures represent themselves as the Muslims' guides to the Truth through Christianity, emphasizing belief in Jesus Christ's role in the Holy Trinity (*54:5–6*),[13] reiterated in many suras like a mantra. More specifically, *Furqan* is portrayed as a divine addition to the Gospels, tasked with rediscovering the Truth and combatting Qur'an's alleged fabrications and its "disease" (*4:2*; *16:7*; *17:15*). Armed with "the Arabic tongue clearly miraculous" and "eloquence so beaming and bright" (*4:1*; *11:4,18*), it attains absolute inimitability (*8:24*; *11: 9*).

On initial inspection, *Furqan* formally mirrors the Qur'an – it features suras and verses with sporadic saǧ. Some suras share names with those in the Qur'an, like al-Fātiḥa, al-Nisāʔ, al-Māʔida, etc. However, in terms of scope, *Furqan* falls significantly short of the Qur'an. Comprising 77 suras with a concise introduction and epilogue, it amounts to barely a quarter of the Qur'an's character count.

The resemblance to the Qur'an is evident in the *Furqan*'s style, freely incorporating many constructions from the Qur'an, albeit with modifications and frequent repetitions of both ideas and expressions. Furthermore, *Furqan* demonstrates a deliberate linguistic and stylistic imitation of the Qur'an, exemplified by naming its fifteenth sura "al-Iʕǧāz." Within this sura, the challenge is reiterated following the Qur'anic

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[11] While *al-Furqān* can be interpreted as synonymous with the Qur'an, its meanings extend beyond that, encompassing *distinctions between good and evil*, *the holy book*, *Torah*, and *divine revelation*.

[12] *Basmala* is the formula with which every sura in the Qur'an is introduced, except the ninth, and in *Furqan* it is modified in accordance with Christian doctrine and reads: Bismi al-Ābi al-Kalimati al-Rūḥi al-Ilāhi al-Wāḥidi al-Awḥadi (In the name of the Father, the Word, the Spirit, the one and only God).

[13] To distinguish between the suras and verses of the Qur'an and *Furqan*, the number of suras and verses from the latter are presented in italics.

pattern, with *Furqan* providing an answer to a longstanding debate about the source of inimitability. This answer is italicized in both the Arabic *Furqan* text and the English translation.

<table>
<tr><td align="center">*Furqan*, *15:13*</td><td align="center">Qur'an, 17:88</td></tr>
<tr><td align="right" dir="rtl">قُل لَّئِنِ اجْتَمَعَتِ الإِنسُ والجِنُّ على أَنْ يأتوا بآيةٍ مِنْ مِثلِهِ لا يأتونَ بَقَبْسٍ مِنْ نورِهِ أُو بنفحةٍ مِنْ مَحَبَّتِهِ ولو كانَ بعضُهُمْ لِبعضٍ ظَهِيرًا.</td><td align="right" dir="rtl">قُلْ لَّئِنِ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَىٰ أَن يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَٰذَا الْقُرْءَانِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا</td></tr>
<tr><td>Even if men of the world and spirits of the underworld were to put their energies together to produce a verse like unto it, they will not be able to produce *a glimmer of light or even a breath of its love.*[14]</td><td>Say: If men and jinn banded together to produce the like of this Koran, they would never produce its like, not though they backed one another.</td></tr>
</table>

Despite *Furqan*'s apparent effort to compete with the Qur'an, however, it declares that the form of the Qur'an is neither poetry nor prose, not even a "nuggets of pithy sayings", but "fabricated statements" that are recited, while being judged as redundant and incoherent gibberish (*38:1–2*).

In addition to the formal and stylistic analogies to the Qur'an, *Furqan* summarizes everything that was shaped within the discourse of imitability through a multitude of polemics and treatises of *muʿāraḍa*. In it, the answers to the questions of who compiled the Qur'an, from what motives and based on what sources, are given in rough form. The answer to the first two questions is given in *Furqan* through the actions of the Prophet Muhammad, who is sometimes portrayed as Satan's accomplice, sometimes as his alter ego. Due to his accumulated immorality, he is credited with having written the Qur'an with the help of Satan, without whom he "could not make a single move on his own" (*7:12*; *20:8*; *22:12*; *48:10*). However, Muhammad is never mentioned by name, but is referred to indirectly as the perverse messenger (*6:3*), the diabolical deceiver (*12:28*), the impostor (*17:15*), the epileptic (*22:6*), the adulterer

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[14] In *Furqan*'s English translation, the appending to the original text is obvious, and in many cases, it is a free interpretation. This is not the case in the specific example, but cf. e.g. Arabic text and English translation in *12:10*; *15:4*; *40:8*, and *59:8*.

and fornicator (*44:2*), the false prophet and messenger of Satan (*38:18*). Muslims are characterized in a similar way – as blasphemers, pagans, adulterers, robbers, murderers and ignorant (*53:3*), as followers of Satan (*31:4*), infected with his virus (*57:7*).

As for the sources, the Qur'an is presented in *Furqan* as a degrading plagiarism of the pre-existing monotheistic scriptures, mainly the Christian one (*55:1–2*). This form of recognizable appropriation is described as the cunning of Satan, which is why it is sometimes referred to as the Satanic verses (*40:12*) or the ethical code of the apostate (*56:14*). With the same aim, the Qur'an is also described as a copy full of "stinking remains full of all kinds of toxic materials" (*15:4*), which "unauthorizedly" gives itself the right to include false heretical proclamations in its ranks in "Their" name – in the name of the Torah and the Gospels (*38:11*; *42:10*; *45:7*).

In essence, *Furqan* appears as a linguistic and stylistic imitation of the Qur'an, concurrently asserting its dearth of originality, at the very end of the extensive structure of the discourse of imitability.

2. THE CHALLENGE AND THE THEORETICAL RESPONSE

The refutations of the Qur'an unfolded through both internal and external lenses. Specifically, from within, authors who lived among speakers of the Arabic language used this language to critique the Qur'an. From abroad, writers in non-Arabic languages also engaged in this discourse. In the second case, Western interpretive communities contributed to the discussion soon after the emergence of Islam, but particularly from the 12th century onward. These communities presented two distinct viewpoints: the theological (Judeo-Christian) and the scientific (Orientalist). Most often, it was the ideological (religious) point of view that led them to question the inimitability of the Qur'an, relying on arguments based on the Qur'an itself and Islamic tradition. However, starting from the 19th century, within the framework of Orientalism, new interdisciplinary methods were added to the previous mode of argumentation, primarily linguistic.

2.1. "*Muʿāraḍa* from within" – polemics in Arabic language

Non-Muslims in the Arab-Islamic empire participated in theological debates in various ways, according to their beliefs. Engaging with Muslim thinkers, primarily theologians, they collectively developed a specific branch of disputation known as *kelām*. This served "as a primary means of gaining ideological influence, vindicating one's own beliefs, and refuting

those of one's rivals" (Treiger 2016, 30).[15] These inner-discussion or inter-religious debates occurred using established disputation techniques, both among Muslims themselves, and between Muslims and other religious groups, including those labeled as "godless" (*mulḥīd* pl. *alḥād*). Regardless of the ideological standpoint of the participants, citing verses from the Qur'an became a common practice in their arguments.

Among *alḥād*, the term which sometimes overlaps with *zanādiqa* (sing. *zindīq*) or *dahriyyūn* (sing. *dahrīs*),[16] the Qur'an, according to Islamic tradition, served as a target for argumentation rather than merely a means. Its purpose was to demonstrate its inconsistencies and imitability. However, works with such focus, including the original treatises against them, have not been preserved. Instead, they are subject to reconstruction based on later selective (though not necessarily reliable) citations found in biased sources of *kalām* and philosophical works, often relying on "third- and fourth-hand material" (see Stroumsa 1999, 17, 40, 169). Additionally, some works present cosmologies closely related to theirs (see Crone 2016, 108).

Among the most frequently mentioned godless critics of the Quran, who not only refuted Islam but religiosity in general, were Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq (d. 861) and his disciple Ibn al-Rāwandī (815–911?), as well as Abū al-ʿAbbās Irānshahrī from the 9th century and Abu Bakr al-Rāzī (865–925), although to a lesser extent. For instance, classical works often discussed parts of Ibn al-Rāwandī's *Kitāb al-Zumurrud* (*Book of the Emerald*), where he engaged in a dialogue with al-Warrāq, using the method of *ilzām*.[17] In this work, Ibn al-Rāwandī "rejected the authority of any scriptural or revealed religion" (Stroumsa 1999, 73). Stroumsa reconstructed some of Ibn al-Rāwandī's attitudes from ths book, and the following passage summarizes their essence:

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[15] Such discussions were established in religious debates in the Middle East even before the emergence of Islam in the Syriac disputation literature, particularly within the context of the Christological schism during the 6th and 7th centuries in Syria (Treiger 2016, 30).

[16] The terms *alḥād*, *zanādiqa*, *dahriyyūn*, and also *barāhima* had similar usage in classical treatises. They generally referred to those who lost faith in any religion or at least rejected the Qur'an, the Prophet, or specific Muslim dogmas. Often, they were mentioned without names. See Stroumsa 1999, 5, 121-123, 162; Crone 2019, 105.

[17] *Ilzām* refers to counter-attacking by using the opponent's own arguments against them. In this specific case, al-Warraq persuaded Ibn al-Rawandī to reject prophetic religions, and Ibn al-Rawandī refused to see Manicheism as an exception (Stroumsa 1999, 72).

"The *Zumurrud* attacks from various angles the doctrine of the unrivalled beauty of the Qurʾān *(iʿjāz)*. It suggests several natural explanations for the fact that the Arabs did not produce anything similar to the Qurʾān. It argues that this may be due to the fact that the people of Qurayš were more eloquent than members of other tribes, and that Muḥammad was a particularly gifted individual; or to the fact the Arabs were too busy fighting with Muḥammad, and had no time to invest in poetic competitions; or to the fact that the Arabs were uneducated people. The *Zumurrud* also argues that the Qurʾān is not really all that beautiful; […]. The Qurʾān is written in a faulty Arabic *(laḥn)* and its language can be corrected by human beings. The Qurʾān is full of contradictory and absurd sayings, and it cannot possibly be the speech of the Wise One. And, at any rate, while the language of the Qurʾān may seem to the Arabs to be proof that Muḥammad was a prophet, it cannot be expected to impress non-Arabs." (Stroumsa 1999, 81–82)

Ibn al-Rāwandī explored similar themes in his other writings. For instance, in *Kitāb al-Dāmiġ* (*Book of the Irrefutable Proof*), he specifically challenged the inimitability of the Qur'an (see Stroumsa 1999, 199–201). Likewise, al-Rāzī addressed prophetic miracles and the concept of *iʿǧāz* in his book *Kitāb Maḥārīq al-anbiyāʾ* (*Book on the Prophets' Fraudulent Tricks*), reaching the same points as Ibn al-Rāwandī did (see Stroumsa 1999, 103–105).[18]

Nevertheless, the majority of extant inter-religious debates in Arabic were conducted between Christians and Muslims, with both parties acting as "disputants and theologians" (Treiger 2016, 33). These debates primarily centered around topics such as the Trinity, divine attributes, Incarnation, and determinism. Among the earliest Christian debates written in Arabic and drawing upon the Qur'an in their arguments is the treatise *Fī taṯlīṯ Allāh al-Wāḥid* (*Treatise on the Triune Nature of God*), which emerged in the late 8th century. This work is described as "an apologetic stratagem that would find a continuous vein in Christian theology in Arabic" (Griffith 2016, 93). Additionally, some of the earliest Christian apologists who wrote in Arabic, following the style of the Arab mutakallimūn, include Theodore Abū Qurra (755–830) from Syria and Abū Rāʾiṭa al-Takrītī (d. 851) from Iraq (see Griffith 2019, 94–95).

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[18]   It should be mentioned here that Ibn al-Rāwandī and al-Rāzī were also portrayed as defenders of Islam in some classical Muslim sources, as well as in modern analyses. See Stroumsa 1999, 47, 50, 65, 107.

Christian apologetics did not necessarily involve an attack on the Qur'an; rather, they employed it in their defence, as it is the cases with the mentioned apologetic and the apologists. They even use "Qur'an's diction" in their style, which is also the result because "Arabic, the *lingua sacra* of Islam, had also become the *lingua franca* of the burgeoning Islamic commonwealth" (Griffith 1999, 214). Beyond defending Christian doctrines, some apologetics sought to challenge the idea that Islam alone holds the Truth and that the Qur'an is its exclusive source. In these polemics, Qur'anic citations served as inspiration for questioning its uniqueness and, at times, even mocking the Qur'anic text and Islamic tradition. A central topic in these debates cantered around the Qur'an's authorship. It was treated as a reproduction of the Bible, allegedly with the assistance of the monk Baḥīrā (who is also mentioned in Islamic tradition as recognizing signs of prophecy in Muhammad). According to this narrative, the Qur'an was subsequently distorted by Jews and later Muslim interpreters.[19]

However, one of the most remarkable debates in the Arabic language, which stands out for its sharpness, was the *Risālat ʿAbd al-Masīḥ ilā al-Hāshimī* (830). Its author is ʿAbd al-Masīḥ Ibn al-Kindī, who used the pseudonym of a Nestorian scholar at the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Maʾmūn (r. 813–833). The mentioned epistle represents his response in a debate with a certain Muslim named ʿAbd Allāh al-Hāshimī.[20] This part of the debate is briefly known as the Apology of al-Kindi and serves as one of the crucial starting points for the subsequent development of the discourse on the imitability, even though it was not the first of its kind.[21] It followed al-Hāshimī's epistle in which he urged al-Kindī to embrace Islam,

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[19] See "A Christian Bahira Legend", its Syriac and Arabic texts, introduced and translated into English by Gottheil (1898; 1899-1900; 1901 and 1903). This story is to be found also in Latin, Armenian and Hebrew versions; also see Hoyland 2019, 212–217, 371–374.

[20] There are different accounts of the identity of these polemicists and the year in which the debate took place. More on this in Muir 1887, 17–27, 32–37; Burman 1991, 198–199.

[21] *Risāla* belongs to a common literary genre, which Griffith refers to as "the Monk in the Emir's *Maǧlis*". Griffith also mentions other examples of this genre both before and after the appearance of the *Risāla* (see 1999, 221–222). The main characteristics of such popular disputes about religion is to take them "into the public space of Islam" and using the Qur'an as their base for argumentation, either in defence of the truthiness of Christianity or in critique of the falseness of Islam. Given that the *Risāla* was "unusually outspoken in its criticism of Islam" and is "unique in its clear similarity to the *al-Zumurrud*", Stroumsa raises an interesting question: Did the *Risāla*, if it is indeed from the latter period, come under the influence of Ibn al-Rawāndī's refutation in the mentioned book, or is it the other way around? (see 1999, 196)

as the full title of it states,[22] and al-Kindī's reply denies all the benefits and virtues of Islam that his interlocutor had previously emphasised and counters his invitation with a recommendation to convert to Christianity.[23]

In the first and last quarter of al-Kindī's epistle, which is six times longer than al-Hāshimī's, a detailed discussion on the oneness of God and the Holy Trinity in Christianity unfolds, referencing the Qur'an. The central portion critically examines Muhammad's life, the development of Islamic doctrine, and its distinctive features. Al-Kindī deems the actions of Muhammad, whom he refers to as the Master (al-Ṣāḥib), inconceivable for a prophet, particularly in relationships with women and opponents, highlighting perceived moral lapses in religious practice (*Risāla* 1885, 44–53). The narrative then delves into prophetic signs, which, according to al-Kindī, were not bestowed upon Muhammad. Dismissing certain stories of miraculous events in Muhammad's life as meaningless forgeries, this long section (*Risāla* 1885, 57–73) concludes by asserting that true prophecy is characterized by mercy, love, justice, and forgiveness – qualities deemed lacking in Muhammad's portrayal and actions.[24]

After "grounding" Muhammad's personality, al-Kindī challenges the Qur'an's inimitability, questioning both its authenticity and originality in terms of content, language, form, and style. He broaches this subject by citing challenge verses, deeming them unconvincing and misinterpreted axioms that liken the text's miraculous nature to the feats of Moses, Jesus, and preceding prophets (*Risāla* 1885, 75–76). Additionally, al-Kindī dismisses iʿǧāz as a deceptive ploy and a form of mockery, prompting him to elucidate the bitter yet "pleasant and healing" truth to al-Hāshimi (*Risāla* 1885, 76). To substantiate his stance, he meticulously narrates the intricate story of the Qur'an's compilation.

Al-Kindī traces the Qur'an's evolution through various stages (*Risāla* 1885, 76–84). He posits its foundation as the Gospel's text, transmitted to the Prophet by the excommunicated Nestorian monk Sergius. Following the Prophet's demise, al-Kindī attributes the initial editing to two Jewish doctors, imbuing the "evangelical" Qur'an with Old Testament elements.

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[22] *Risālat ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Ismāʿīl al-Hāshimī ilā ʿAbd al-Masīḥ Ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī yadʿūhu bihā ilā al-islām.*

[23] *Risālat ʿAbd al-Masīḥ ilā al-Hāshimī yaruddu bihā ʿalayhi wa yadʿūhu ilā al-naṣrāniyya.*

[24] Many of al-Kindī's assertions in this part of the epistle are comparable to the chapter on the Ishmaelites in *On Heresies* of John of Damascus (675–749), one of the first Christian apologetics written in Greek from the perspective of the inhabitants of the Arab-Islamic empire.

Subsequently, al-Kindī continues, diverse figures, each wielding some influence, contribute to the Qur'an's final iteration. He concludes his series with the sentence "that not a single argument was put forward without relying on the sources of an already accepted Islamic tradition", while he finds the proof for his assertions in the form and style of the Qur'an itself, which he presents as "a scattered heap of words, without order and composition, uncoordinated, even with a contradictory meaning" *(Risāla* 1885, 84). Al-Kindī deems presenting the Qur'an as a rival to Jesus and Moses' miracles an act of profound ignorance, a notion only conceivable to "a stupid fool with a dazed mind and a sick heart" (*Risāla* 1885, 84).

Alongside discrediting the Qur'an's authenticity and aesthetic merit, al-Kindī contests other facets of the discourse of inimitability. He refutes the notion that the Qur'an's miracle lies in its composition in the "chosen" Arabic language and introduces into the discussion one of the very complex issues related to the language of the Qur'an, namely the presence of foreign words in it. It is a perplexity that the supporters of inimitability tried to put forward as an argument for the linguistic magic of the Qur'an, while al-Kindī sees it as proof of its imperfection, as elucidated in the ensuing passage:

> "We have seen how your Master was forced to use a foreign language in his book, although he said, 'We have sent it down as an Arabic Koran; haply you will understand' [12:2]. And yet he addressed the native eloquent Arabs with foreign words such as *istabraq* [brocade], *sundus* [fine silk], *abārīq* [water bottles], *namāriq* [cushion] and the like, which are Persian in origin, or even *mishkāt* [lantern niche], which is an Ethiopian word. He used such words many times in his book, so we wonder if his Arabic language was weak so that he could only complete it by borrowing from other languages for such things." (*Risāla* 1885, 85–86)

Al-Kindī's treatise unequivocally dismisses the Qur'an's legitimacy as a standard for eloquence. He deems the challenge to surpass it as futile, highlighting the linguistic and metrical richness of the Arabic qasida in contrast to the Qur'an, which he characterizes as "a collection of broken saj' and confused speech with a lot of meaningless exaggerations" (*Risāla* 1885, 86–87). Al-Kindī contends that the Qur'an contributes neither linguistic nuance nor knowledge, suggesting its appeal lies primarily with the illiterate, ignorant, foreigners, and "fools" in urban settings (*Risāla*

1885, 87–88). As an Arab from the esteemed al-Kinda tribe, al-Kindī asserts his fluency in Arabic and his ability to comprehend the Qur'an (*Risāla* 1885, 88).

The remainder of al-Kindī's epistle critiques Islam, its doctrines, and recommended behaviours (*Risāla* 1885, 90–121). Such sections align with typical Christian apologetics, advocating for Christianity and Jesus Christ's defence, a common theme. This also implies the assertion that the Old and New Testaments are not forged scriptures, refuting Islamic claims, and cynically poses a rhetorical question: Which scriptures are forged – the biblical ones or the modified ones lacking miracles, pointedly referencing the Qur'an in the latter case (*Risāla* 1885, 138–140).

In the subsequent centuries, orthodox Muslim currents gained prominence, triggered by Mu'tazilite rationalism, born from the fusion of Greek philosophy and Islamic theology. Notably, the Ash'arites emerged, vehemently opposing blasphemous expressions, even deeming Mu'tazilites as heretical,[25] an outlook sustained by some contemporary Ash'arites.[26] This specifically pertains to the *ṣarfa* concept, where certain Mu'tazilites contended that the Qur'an is imitable, challenging its linguistic and stylistic uniqueness.

Nevertheless, *Aplogy of al-Kindi*'s manuscript "survived" the new circumstances, establishing itself as a textual paradigm in the discourse of imitability. Its arguments found initial application in Mozarab apologetics, notably in *Kitāb al-wāḍiḥ bil-ḥaqq* (*Book of Denuding*). This apologetic, crafted in Arabic between 1085 and 1132, features an unidentified author who professes conversion from Islam to Christianity.[27] In a manner reminiscent of al-Kindī, he employs sarcasm to critique Muhammad and the Qur'an.

Denuding outlines a developmental trajectory for the Qur'an, presenting a scheme akin to al-Kindī's (*Liber denudationis* 1994, 271, 277, 279). The author posits the Text's origin under the influence of the monk Baḥīrā, purportedly Muhammad's teacher, along with Persian Salmān

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[25] The emerging orthodox Muslim stance entailed elevating the Revelation as the cornerstone of theological contemplation, unequivocally rejecting external influences and metaphorical interpretations of the Qur'an.

[26] Al-Rāfiʿī, for instance, labels the Mu'tazilites as *muʿāraḍa*, dubbing them "fools" and "devils" (2003, 121, 126), expressing disapproval of their entire line of reasoning in their quest for arguments supporting the inimitability.

[27] *Denuding* exists only in a Latin translation, not in its original language. For additional details about the author, the period of composition, and the translation, see Burman 1994, 37, 46, 50–53, 62.

and Rabbi ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Salām. Subsequently, numerous versions emerged, eventually condensed into a "composed" one by the caliph Marwān Ibn al-Ḥakam's secretary at the end of the seventh century. The author then details various interventions believed to have been made to the Qur'an.

Denuding can be compared to the Apology in various other respects. This encompasses the defence of Jewish and Christian scriptures against allegations of forgery. Furthermore, the author contends that Muhammad is only mentioned in these scriptures when discussing false prophets, asserting his lack of prophetic legitimacy due to the absence of a sign, substituted by the sword (*Liber denudationis* 1994, 257, 261, 269).

The seventh chapter of *Denuding* delves into the alleged motive and method behind composing the Qur'an, claiming it was imposed on Muhammad to enable him to "commit adultery unhindered" (*Liber denudationis* 1994, 283). Muhammad, he continues, "the arrogant thief and dishonest plagiarist", thus joined a multitude of other known and unknown stories that were repeated so often that only "a quarter part of the Qur'an will remain" if, for example, one omits what was taken about Moses (*Liber denudationis* 1994, 293, 295).

The author also dedicates the eighth chapter to refuting the axiom of the inimitability of the Qur'an, and already in the introductory word he comments on the mentioned verse about the unsurpassability of the Qur'an (17:88) as follows:

> "O most false and horrible-to-hear boasting! Even if he steals some things belonging to others which are good, he repeats them endlessly. But if he puts forth his own <ideas>, he either invokes God as the defender of his adulteries, or, in the fictions of <his> visions, he calls archangels as witnesses for his lies. And in <his> sayings, forgetful of knowledge of right and wrong, he very frequently contradicts himself. Even if we wanted to give an example, all good angels and men would not be able <to do this> because their <***> is not to assemble such great monstrosities of lies with so much impudence." (*Liber denudationis* 1994, 297)

In addition to questioning linguistic and stylistic peculiarities and the position of Arabic as the chosen language (*Liber denudationis*, 1994, 297, 299, 301), the Qur'an's content is assessed as contradictory. The author argues this by noting that more than forty interpreters have provided different explanations for the same sentence, and "not even two

have agreed in their explanation of one sentence" (*Liber denudationis* 1994, 247).[28] The Qur'an is further described with epithets like obscure, mangled, and senseless, attributed to the alleged concealment of "foolishness and lies" (*Liber denudationis* 1994, 279).

The simulation of a change of religion or an invitation to another faith, wherein a Christian purportedly responds to a Muslim with apologetics and vice versa, occurred repeatedly. At times, the first interlocutor's calls were only partially reproduced by the one responding from the perspective of the "rival." An instance is found in the Christian apologetic of Mozarabin Ḥafṣ Ibn al-Bar al-Qūṭī (d. 889), whose fragments from the *Kitāb al-masāʾil al-sabʿ wa al-ḥamsīn* are known solely through quotations and commentaries in *al-Iʿlām bi-mā fī dīn al-naṣāra min al-fasād wa al-awhām* by the Andalusian theologian and polyhistorian al-Qurṭubī (1214–1273).[29] Other Christian apologetics, including *Taṯlīṯ al-waḥdāniyya* by an unknown twelfth-century Mozarabic author and fragments of *Maṣḥaf al-ʿālam al-kāʾin* attributed to the Christian bishop Augustine, have been found in the same work by al-Qurṭubī.[30]

Referenced apologetics share common points of reference with the *Apology* and *Denuding*. They elaborate on the defence of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and Jesus Christ as the Son of God, while also critiquing Prophet Muhammad's (im)morality or denying his messiahship. Consequently, this leads to treating the Qur'an as an ordinary text compiled from Judeo-Christian scriptures. All apologetics also relied on the Qur'an and other branches of the Islamic tradition, such as hadith, tafsir, the Prophet's biography, and chronicles, as a methodological tool. This trend persisted even in more contemporary Arabic Christian apologetics, which occasionally adhered to established models of this writing tradition.[31]

2.2 "*Muʿāraḍa* from abroad" – polemics in non-Arabic languages

The expansion of Islam towards Byzantium in the east and the Iberian Peninsula in the west, along with the Crusades (1196–1270), naturally

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[28] The ninth chapter also addresses contradictions in the Qur'an, quoting specific verses and refuting their logic.

[29] More about al-Qūṭī's apologetic in the mentioned work of al-Qurṭubī, see Burman 1994, 14, 35–36.

[30] More about mentioned apologetics, see Burman 1994, 70–84. Interestingly, Jewish apologetics also engaged in this discourse, albeit to a lesser extent. For some examples, see Stroumsa 1999, 201–213.

[31] About more recent writings, see Bobzin 2004, 236–237.

sparked curiosity about the Qur'an and its content. The anticipated competition between Christian and Islamic missionaries likely resulted in mutual accusations of forgery, each side asserting its claim as the "true" version.

The earliest Christian apologetics depict Islam as a heretical doctrine, denouncing Muhammad as a false prophet who authored heretical scripture.[32] This perspective, evident in John of Damascus's 8th-century work, *On Heresy*, labels Muhammad a "false prophet" and an "adulterer", and the Qur'an as a collection of "absurd stories worthy of laughter", with many "foolish sayings" to which Muhammad gave titles (2018, 219, 221, 227, 229, 233). Byzantine authors further amplified discrediting descriptors, portraying Muhammad as epileptic, possessed by the devil, an Antichrist forerunner, and a madman. They also criticized the Qur'an as unreasonable, poorly compiled, replete with lies, forgeries, stories, contradictions, and composed in a language unbefitting a religious text or codex.[33]

However, the pivotal "event" in the discourse of imitability occurred in the mid-12th century with the emergence of the *Corpus Toletanum*, a collection of manuscripts on Islam translated from Arabic into Latin. This work was led by the Mozarab Petrus Venerabilis, who assembled several translators. Among them was Robertus Ketenensis, who was entrusted with the translation of the Qur'an and whose Latin translation was completed in 1143 under the title *Lex Mahumet pseudoprophete*. Robertus' interpretation served as Europe's standard Qur'an until the 18th century,[34] despite criticism from the 15th century for being a "loose, misleading paraphrase," deviating from the original text at will (Burman 1998, 705–706). Accompanying the version were numerous explanatory commentaries, often expressing negative sentiments toward the Qur'an. As Burman (1994, 85) quotes, the commentator occasionally explains that a verse is contradictory, while for others he concludes that the Prophet composed them in delirium, sometimes addressing the reader directly,

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[32] In his work, Hoyland (2019, 355–404) describes various known patterns of early apologetics following the emergence of Islam in Christian Arabic and other non-Arabic languages.

[33] About the epithets of Muhammad and Qur'an mentioned by various Byzantine authors, see Vrolijk 2017, 22; Hamilton 2001, 171; Bobzin 2004, 238.

[34] In 1210, another translation into Latin was published by Mark of Toledo, in a completely different manner – more literal than Robert's. For a comparison of the Latin translation of 1143 and 1210, see Burman 1998. For more on other translations of the Qur'an, see Bobzin 2006.

exemplified by the exclamation on the 179th verse of sura 2: "Notice how stupidly and how often he repeats this!".[35]

Within the Toledan corpus, "new life" was breathed into *Apology of al-Kindi* entitled *Epistula saraceni et rescriptum christiani*, and the *Book of Denuding* entitled *Liber denudationis* (known since the 17th century as *Contrarietas alfonica*). Some called the latter book *Liber Telif*, like the author of the apologetic *Liber de fine*, Ramon Lull (1232–1316), who adopted the formula of *Apology* in addition to *Denuding*.[36] Other Arabicized European Christians ("Neo-Mozarabs"),[37] such as Ramón Martí (d. 1285) in *Quadraplex reprobatio* and Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (1243–1320) in *Contra legem Saracenorum* and *Itinerary*, also drew on Christian apologetics, whether in Arabic or Latin.[38]

From the 13th century onward, numerous apologetics embraced the early discourse on imitability, with nuanced perspectives on the Prophet's development and the Qur'an's origins. Guillelmus Tripolitanus (d. 1273), for instance, proposed in *De statu Saracenorum* that the Qur'an was crafted 40 years post-Muhammad's demise by his companions who schemed to formulate the "Code of Muhammad" (Bobzin 2004, 241). Some authors delved into the Prophet's mental state, contending that the Qur'an resulted from Muhammad's morally questionable nature and epileptic episodes, often supplementing their claims with offensive illustrations.[39]

For an extended period, Western examination of the Qur'an and its translations primarily aimed to expose the adversary and its deceit rather than fostering comprehension. Thus, the learning of Arabic in Catholic realms, notably on the Iberian Peninsula and in Rome during the 16th and 17th centuries, signified efforts towards converting Muslims, managing schismatic Christians (especially in the Middle East), and "de-Islamizing"[40]

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[35] More about commentaries see Burman 1994, 84–87.

[36] For more, see Burman 1991, 200–201, 213.

[37] Mikel de Epalza uses the term "Neo-Mozarabs" to describe Northern Europeans who arrived at the Spanish frontier, acquired Arabic, and subsequently integrated into the Mozarabic community (Burman 1994, 9).

[38] In addition to the Liber *denudationis*, both authors adopt the method of relying on the Islamic tradition. For more about that, see Burman 1994, 46–49, 204–208, 216.

[39] See Vrolijk 2017, 22–24.

[40] The term "de-Islamizing" the Arabic language is frequently employed by García-Arenal and Mediano (2017, 136, 142, 150–152) to describe "how Moriscos and erudite Orientalism were intertwined, of the ambivalence towards the learning and use of Arabic that it produced and of the attempts made to resolve this ambivalence through efforts to 'de-Islamize' the Arabic language."

the Arabic language.[41] The latter objective sought to sever the language's association with the Qur'an by "Christianizing" it, as Girard (2017, 207, 209–210) have said, achieved by teaching Arabic through a lexical corpus derived from the Bible or the Bible itself translated into Arabic.

In the 17th century, the missionary's role became intricate, demanding not only proficiency in the Christianized Arabic language but also familiarity with the Arabic serving Islam, enabling arguments compelling enough to convince Muslims to convert to Catholic Christianity. Consequently, Christian missionaries engaged in translating the Qur'an into Latin or the Bible into Arabic, alongside producing grammars, works on Christian heresy, and apologetics that adhered to the established discourse, exemplified by figures like Filippo Guadagnoli (1596–1656) and Ludovico Marracci (1612–1700).[42]

After the colonization of the Arab territories in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a scientific, seemingly objective perspective was added to the theological and biased stance of the discourse of imitability to an unprecedented degree. These subdiscourses occasionally converged,[43] confirming Foucault's notion that the "novelty lies no longer in what is said, but in its reappearance" (1971, 14). The scientific interpretive community also continued to rethink the established discursive set, implying "the recognition of the same truths and the acceptance of a certain rule – more or less flexible – of conformity with validated discourse" (Foucault 1971, 19). Within this scientific approach to imitability, the discursive set of the preceding theological interpretative community persisted and evolved, now encompassing hypotheses concerning the author and sources of the Qur'an, with the addition of chronology as a subject of inquiry.

In terms of chronology, the authors endeavoured to ground the Qur'an historically and viewed the creation of its order as a reaction to the circumstances that accompanied Muhammad's "career". Thus, the Qur'an was at times regarded as a spiritual and conquering autobiography.

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[41] Cesari exemplifies these motifs in one of his studies (2013, 550–551), compiling eleven reasons by the Italian orientalist Giambattista Raimondi (1536–1614) that elucidate the necessity or utility of acquiring the Arabic language.

[42] For more on these authors, see Girard 2017, 195–196; Hamilton 2001, 219–220.

[43] This kind of symbiosis can be illustrated by the introductory remarks of the Scottish orientalist W. Muir (1819–1905) in the English translation of *Apology of al-Kindi*. Muir praised *Apology* as setting an unprecedented precedent, emphasizing in the first edition (1881) that the main aim of translating this work was to place it "in the hands of those who will use it in the interests of the Christian faith", and repeating this in the second edition (1887, 3, 5, 7).

Employing historical, linguistic, and stylistic indicators, these analyses frequently resulted in predetermined judgments about the Qur'an's structure: repetitive, content-lacking, riddled with errors, and featuring disjointed and confusing sequences.

Today, numerous studies within Western Orientalism explore the question of chronology, but the two key references are T. Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qorâns* (1860) and R. Bell's *The Qur'ān: translated, with a critical re-arrangement of the Surahs* (I–1937, II–1939). Nöldeke sought criteria to recognize the logical sequence of suras in the compilation of the Qur'an, while Bell delved deeper, searching for the place of each individual verse. Both authors derive the chronological framework from Islamic tradition. Consequently, some modern sceptics, including the Arabist under the pseudonym "Ibn Warraq," are inclined to consider such analyses unfounded. Absolute sceptics from the wing of historical revisionism[44] to which Ibn Warraq belongs, initially doubt the Islamic tradition, striving to prove it unreliable and dogmatic by employing rigorous historical and critical methodologies. Therefore, they regard chronology as a later, fabricated projection. This intertwining of chronology and authorship raises complex questions within the field of Western Orientalism.

For the believers, the divine origin of the Qur'an is an incontestable dogma, untouched by the hypotheses of the sceptics, and the search for an author would represent the negation of inimitability and in this sense belongs to the opposite discourse. The dogma of the inimitability and the thesis about the imitability of the Qur'an can be viewed comparatively through assumptions about the qualitative and quantitative redaction from the Revelation to its final version.

In the Islamic tradition, the difference between the original text in the consonantal version without diacritics (*scripta defectiva*), its codification at the time of Caliph Osman around the middle of the 7th century, and the final one, when the graphic systems of vocalization were developed in the scripts written in the Kufic style, is not emphasized. The concluding epoch extended from the latter part of the 7th century at its earliest inception, undergoing refinement over the subsequent two centuries. These versions are treated as identical in content, only technically refined according to

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[44] The revisionist school, or historical-critical school, of Islamic Studies emerged in the 1970s at SOAS, University of London, influenced by J. Wansbrough's works such as *Quranic Studies* (1977) and *The Sectarian Milieu* (1978). Additional key figures within the Revisionist School of Islamic Studies include A. Rippin, P. Crone, M. Cook, G. Lüling, Y. D. Nevo, and C. Luxenberg.

the original source, for which a chain of transmitters is used as authority to fix the unmarked in the *scripta defectiva*.

Contrary to this, debates on the authenticity of the original and "enriched" (modified) copies dominate Quranic studies. Varied hypotheses, ranging from an older pre-Islamic manuscript in a hybrid Syriac-Arabic language (Luxenberg 2007, 325) to a composition during Muhammad's life subsequently revised by later Muslim generations (Kahle 1949; Shoemaker 2022, 259–261), present divergent perspectives. A third broad group of authorities claims that the entire tradition of early Islam was retroactively fabricated a century or two after Muhammad's death (Wansbrough 2004, 44, 208), and for some, it is seen as a "fusion of barbarian force with Judaic value" that assumed an Islamic form in the 8th century (Crone & Cook 1977, 130).

Nevertheless, the prevailing assertions in the discourse of imitability often attribute authorship of the Qur'an to Muhammad. For example, the previously mentioned R. Bell highlights that his translation is grounded on the premise that the Qur'an existed "in written form when redactors started their work," whether it was personally penned by Muhammad, as his belief holds, or transcribed "by others at his dictation" (1937, vi). Moreover, in his commentary on chapters, where he sequentially reorganizes verses, Bell unambiguously regards Muhammad as the author and the verses as autobiographical expressions.[45]

Faith linked to the question of authorship also involves the inquiry into sources that inspire or are directly incorporated. Thus, the Qur'anic source implies the hypothesis of adopting pre-Qur'anic narratives and adapting them to historical context. Such investigations employ analogies in content or language.

Given the abundance of biblical parables transformed in the Qur'an, it is unsurprising that prevalent hypotheses center around the appropriation of elements from the Old and New Testaments. Establishing Islam as a mimesis of the Judeo-Christian tradition involves diverse methodological pathways. For instance, auxiliary material could represent Jewish perspectives and narratives (Geiger 1898), Syriac manuscripts (Mingana 1927; Nevo & Koren 2003, 339–344), Christian hymns (Lüling 2003, 11, 15–18), Qumran manuscripts (Bishop 1958), Coptic writings (Bishai 1971), and, generally, a synthesis of various Middle Eastern beliefs (Tisdall 1911). Conclusions from comparative analyses often lead to the assessment of

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[45] E. g., see Bell 1937, 2, 43–44, 66–67 etc.

the Qur'anic text's lack of originality, a definitive judgment expressed in the conclusion of the book *The Original Sources of the Qu'rān* (1905) by the British priest and philologist, W. St. Clair Tisdall (1859–1928):

> "Originating from many different sources and receiving into it certain elements of truth, it has assumed its form from the character and disposition of Muhammad; and thus the good in it serves only to recommend and preserve the evil which renders it a false and delusive faith, a curse to men and not a blessing — one that has turned into deserts many of the fairest regions of the earth, that has, even in our own days, deluged many a land with innocent blood, and has smitten with a moral, intellectual, and spiritual blight every nation of men which lies under its iron yoke and groans beneath its pitiless sway." (Tisdall 1911, 280)

In more recent instances, C. Luxenberg, an unidentified contemporary authority in the discourse of imitability, stands out. In *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran* (2000), Luxenberg utilizes a church technical term, *lectionarium*, still used in Western Christianity for audible scripture reading, fundamentally equating it with the Qur'an (2007, 71). Luxenberg's conclusion rests on research asserting that, during the Qur'an's emergence, the language of the Quraysh tribe and the Meccans, in general, was a hybrid of Aramaic and Arabic (2007, 327). This method – linguistic analogies – often underpins the determination of Qur'anic sources.

In addition to the previously mentioned works, various studies delve into the "strange" words in the Qur'an, whether they are uncommon or borrowed from languages such as Syriac, Hebrew, Ethiopian, Persian, or Greek. An authoritative study in this context is by A. Jeffery (1892–1959), an Australian professor of Semitic languages, titled *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān* (1937), with antecedents (Mingana 1927) and numerous successors (see Ibn Warraq 2002, 29–38). Jeffery compiles a registry of foreign words in the Qur'an, elucidating their origins, aiming to facilitate an understanding of the "influences which were working upon Muḥammad at various periods in his Mission," contributing to a more precise comprehension of "what he himself means by the terms he uses in the Qurʾān" (2007, 2).

Hence, the scholarly discourse on imitability positions the Qur'an as an ordinary text, often considered a historically unreliable document. While some Orientalist authorities seek its context in non-Arabic documents, most researchers, like medieval internal *muʿāraḍa*, rely on Islamic tradition

itself to cast doubt on the Qur'an's authenticity. This is particularly evident in exegesis, accompanied by similar epithets as the Qur'an – uncertainty, inconsistency, and demagogic subordination of means to ends, exemplified by Ibn Warraq (2002, 76–83).

CONCLUSION

Interwoven with verses that self-elevate as the sole untarnished, stylistically clear, and all-encompassing, the Qur'an implicitly challenges itself to surpass the existing (polytheistic and monotheistic) tradition on the Arabian Peninsula. Simultaneously, rhetorically, it guarantees failure and punishment for temptations related to its imitation. The claim of certain failure has been a subject of argumentation within the discourse of the inimitability of the Qur'an, shaped by Muslim theologians and philologists. Despite efforts to label any reaction as blasphemous, counteractions – both practical imitation and theoretical refutation challenging the authority of the Qur'an – have surfaced, giving rise to the discourse referred to in this paper as the imitability of the Qur'an.

In both discourses, inimitability and imitability, the prevailing standpoint remains consistent. Whether within Islamic tradition defending the non-imitativeness of the Qur'an or among anti-Islamic apologists challenging the Qur'an with itself, the resulting clash leads to an irreconcilable polemical interculturality. Nevertheless, attempts persist to establish a new culture in dialogue through the synthesis of their perspectives.

In recent decades, challenging the authenticity and originality of the Qur'an has given way to its understanding, incorporating the perspective of believers (Islamic) researchers. This strives for a convergence between the theological and critical, the believing and unbelieving.[46] Such dialogues often manifest in academic (Arabist) texts, notably post the rise of postcolonial theory in the 1980s, when criticism rooted in the discourse of Orientalism became, even if ostensibly, progressively unacceptable as an academic standpoint.

Nevertheless, the modern oral tradition – akin to what we might now label as "digital folklore" – disseminates the core of the discourse of imitability, converting hypotheses into widely accepted convictions. References to the Qur'an today extend beyond scholarly and theological texts to encompass continuous intercultural exchanges and various

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[46] E. g., see Arkoun 2001, 419–430.

mass communication channels. The multitude of sources and critics, even those without knowledge of the Arabic language, contribute to engaging with the Islamic heritage. Individual enthusiasts emerge as a viral interpretative community, reinforcing the discourse of imitability by introducing their interpretations to the public realm in a simplified, consumer-oriented form.

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