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Research Paper

Critique of the "Literary Structures of the Qur'an" Entry in the Leiden Encyclopedia of Qur'an

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Abstract

The Encyclopedia of the Qur'an, published by Brill, is a product of contemporary research by Western Islamic scholars. According to its editor-in-chief, Jane McAuliffe, it aims to provide a scholarly examination of Qur'anic topics. The entry on Literary Structures, authored by Issa J. Boullata, explores the stylistic and rhetorical devices of the Qur'an and attempts to present a coherent image of the Qur'an. However, the article is open to criticism regarding its academic writing principles and content. This article therefore critically examines the entry using a descriptive-analytical approach. Despite all the positive points that the entry has made about the Qur'an, it introduces a concept called Transtextuality but then discusses other topics in its text, which diminishes the academic credibility of the author and the editor-in-chief of the encyclopedia as the responsible for the articles. This is one of the most important criticisms of this article.

Keywords: Literary Structures, Leiden Encyclopedia, The Coherence of the Surah, Issa J. Boullata, The Themes of the Qur'anic Surahs, Transtextuality.



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1. Introduction

The Qur'an contains various themes, and its structure and analysis are particularly important in Orientalist studies and research. One of the most important research works in this field is the Leiden Encyclopedia of the Qur'an, edited by Jane McAuliffe, Professor of Arabic and History at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, and a researcher in the fields of theology, comparative Abrahamic studies, and Islamic history, published by Brill in the Netherlands.

The articles in this encyclopedia, in five volumes and on various topics related to the Qur'an, have been written by Islamic scholars.

The majority of the content in this encyclopedia is based on the sources and opinions of Western Islamic scholars and, in some cases, Sunni Islamic sources. The authors have endeavored to examine Qur'anic topics using a scientific approach.

Of course, the aforementioned approach can be considered only one of the motivations for Qur'anic studies by Orientalists. Another motivation is to de-sanctify the Qur'an and pave the way for its criticism like other texts, as stated by Jane McAuliffe, the editor-in-chief of this encyclopedia:

Just as the ancient holy texts - such as the Bible - had been subjected to literary and historical criticism, so too did the Qur'an enter this realm. Most scholars of this period (the second half of the 19th century) regarded the Qur'an as a reliable source for reconstructing the life of Muhammad and the history of Islamic society and paid attention to it. Of course, much of this attention was focused on its controversial sections, such as those identifying the enemy, etc., to discredit the Qur'an as a divinely revealed text and to show its internal contradictions.

Ms. McAuliffe presents the purpose of publishing this work as providing rigorous and academic knowledge about the Qur'an. This knowledge stems from a collection of diverse perspectives and assumptions, and its distinctive feature is its claim to neutrality and unbiased knowledge. This claim itself paves the way for criticism of this work (See: McAuliffe, 2001, p. 18).

The Leiden Encyclopedia of the Qur'an is one of the most important reference works published by Orientalists in the field of

Qur'anic studies and is frequently consulted by non-Muslims seeking specialized information on Islamic issues. Given the recency of this work, it is expected that the latest views in this field are reflected in it. Therefore, it is essential to examine what is reflected in this encyclopedia as the teachings of Islam and the characteristics of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an has long been the subject of textual study by both early and modern Qur'anic scholars. Its literary structure has been examined using various terms, such as eloquence and rhetoric, the order of the Qur'an among early scholars, and structuralism and geometry of surahs among modern scholars. The textual and literary structure of this book has always been of interest to non-Muslim Qur'anic scholars as well, posing a challenge for them in their encounter with this text and its understanding. The Leiden Encyclopedia also examines the literary structures of the Qur'an in an entry in volume 3 entitled "Literary Structures of the Qur'an" by Issa J. Boullata (1929-2019). Given the importance of this encyclopedia, it is expected that the author has provided an academic article in a comprehensive review of this field; Therefore, in light of the lack of criticism of this entry by other researchers, this article, after a brief introduction to its author, seeks to review and critique it.

A. Introducing the author

Issa J. Boullata was born on February 25, 1929, in Jerusalem, Palestine. He completed his primary education in Palestine and then moved to England to pursue higher studies. Boullata earned his bachelor's degree in Arabic from the University of London, followed by a master's degree in Islamic Studies and a Ph.D. in Arabic Literature.

Academic Career

Boullata began his teaching career at the Hartford Seminary, where he taught Arabic language courses for seven years. In 1975, he joined McGill University in Montreal, Canada. At McGill, he taught courses in Arabic literature, modern Arab thought, and Islamic studies until his retirement in 2004. In 2009, he was conferred the title of Professor Emeritus by McGill University.

Contributions to Arabic Literature

Boullata made significant contributions to the field of Arabic literature. He was a renowned scholar, translator, and author. He authored numerous books on Arabic literature and poetry, including:

As Author

- ≠ Outlines of Romanticism in Modern Arabic Poetry (1960), new edition (2014)
- ≠ Badr Shakir al-Sayyab: His Life and Poetry (1971; 6th ed. 2007)
- ≠ Modern Arab Poets, 1950–1975 (1976) (an anthology in English translation)
- ≠ Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought (1990)
- ≠ A Window on Modernism: Studies in the Works of Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (2002)
- ≠ Homecoming to Jerusalem (1998)
- ≠ A Retired Gentleman and Other Stories (2007) (a short-story collection in English); republished as True Arab Love and Other Short Stories (2016); translated into French as Amours Arabes (2016)
- ≠ Rocks and a Wisp of Soil (2005), (essays in literary criticism)
- ≠ The Bells of Memory: A Palestinian Boyhood in Jerusalem (2014) (a memoir, covering years from 1929 to 1948); translated into French as Les Échos de la Mémoire: Une Enfance Palestinienne à Jérusalem (2014).

As Editor

- ≠ Critical Perspectives on Modern Arabic Literature (1980)
- ≠ Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Literature (1997, with Terri DeYoung)
- ≠ Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an (2000)
- ≠ The Miraculous Inimitability of the Holy Qur'an Throughout History (2006)

As Translator

- ≠ Embers and Ashes: Memoirs of an Arab Intellectual by Hisham Sharabi
- ≠ Flight Against Time a novel by Emily Nasrallah
- ≠ Fugitive Light a novel by Mohammed Berrada
- ≠ My Life an autobiography by Ahmad Amin
- ≠ Princesses' Street: Baghdad Memories an autobiography by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra

≠ The First Well: A Bethlehem Boyhood an autobiography by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (winner of the 1993 University of Arkansas Press Award for Translation from Arabic)

≠ The Game of Forgetting a novel by Mohammed Berrada

≠ The Square Moon short stories by Ghada Samman (winner of the 1997 University of Arkansas Press Award)

≠ The Unique Necklace: a compendium of Arabic classics (Garnet Publishing, UK, vols. 1, 2, 3; 2006, 2009, 2011) by 10th-century Andalusian writer Ibn Abd Rabbih

≠ The Caliph's Sister, a novel by Jurji Zaidan

≠ Three Treatises on the Ijaz of the Qur'an, Qur'anic & Literary Studies by al-Rummani, al-Khattabi, & `Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani.

≠ Numerous poems published in Salma Khadra Jayyusi's Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology (1987) and Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature (1992), and poems and prose pieces in *Banipal* and elsewhere.

As a Translator from English to Arabic

≠ Wallace Stevens by William York Tindall, 1962

≠ Edith Wharton by Louis Auchincloss, 1962

Boullata received numerous awards and recognition for his contributions to Arabic literature. He was a two-time winner of the Arkansas Arabic Translation Award. He also served as an editor for the London-based *Banipal* magazine, and his literary translations were featured in various issues of the magazine.

Later Years and Legacy

In 2006, Boullata assumed the role of advisor to the Metropolis Blue International Literary Festival in Montreal. With his support and guidance, an annual prize for an Arab writer, the "Metropolis Blue Arabic Literary Prize al-Majidi ibn Zuhr Arab", was established by the Abu Dhabi Department of Culture. Boullata passed away in 2019 at the age of 90.

Issa J. Boullata is remembered as a distinguished scholar, translator, and author who made significant contributions to the understanding and appreciation of Arabic literature. His works continue to inspire and

inform scholars and readers worldwide.

Boullata was a renowned Arabic-English translator. He received the Arkansas Arabic Translation Award twice for his outstanding translations.

≠ Translation Awards:
 ○ Arkansas Arabic Translation Award (Winner)

≠ Editorial Roles: Boullata served as an editor for the London-based *Banipal* magazine, where his literary translations were featured.

○ Banipal Magazine Editor

Additional Academic Roles

≠ Journal Editorship: Boullata held editorial positions for the *Journal of Islamic Studies* (1970–1980) and the *Arabica* journal (1977–1982).

○ *Journal of Islamic Studies* Editor
 ○ *Arabica* Journal Editor

Expertise in Modern Arabic Literature and Qur'anic Studies

Boullata was a leading scholar in the fields of modern Arabic literature and Qur'anic studies. His research and publications in these areas have made significant contributions to our understanding of these subjects.

≠ Modern Arabic Literature: Boullata conducted extensive research and published works on modern Arabic poetry and the novel.

○ Modern Arabic Poetry Specialist
 ○ Modern Arabic Novel Specialist

≠ Qur'anic Studies: Boullata's expertise in Qur'anic studies is evident in his works on classical Qur'anic interpretation and contemporary Arab thought.

○ Classical Qur'anic Interpretation Expert
 ○ Contemporary Arab Thought Expert

Editorial Contributions

Boullata's editorial skills were instrumental in shaping several important publications.

≠ Edited Books:
 ○ *Critical Perspectives in Modern Arabic Literature* (1980)
 ○ *Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Literature* (1997)
 ○ *The Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an* (2000)
 ○ *The Unrepeatable Miracle of the Holy Qur'an Throughout History* (2006)

≠ Translated Treatises: Boullata translated three treatises on Qur'anic verses from Arabic into English.

○ *Qur'anic Studies and Literary Studies* by al-Rumani (Translation)
 ○ *Al-Khattabi's The Methods of Interpretation* (Translation)
 ○ *Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani's The Wonders of Eloquence* (Translation)

Liden Encyclopedia of Qur'anic Studies

Boullata's expertise in Qur'anic studies led to his appointment by the Brill Encyclopedia of Qur'anic Studies to author an article on the literary structures of the Qur'an (The Islamic Studies Library Center site in European languages and the ewikifa.top site).

B. An Overview of the Article

The demands of scientific research necessitate a critical examination of a topic from two perspectives: understanding and critique. Therefore, to gain a thorough understanding of this entry, we will begin with an overview of the entry "Literary Structures of the Qur'an". This entry commences with a preliminary discussion of literary structures, stating that "stylistic, grammatical, and linguistic devices are employed to convey meaning. The Qur'an's message is expressed in diverse literary structures, which are generally considered the most brilliant examples of the Arabic language". Boullata asserts that Arabic grammar was formulated based on the language of the Qur'an. This entry aims to explore these structures and the effective methods by which they generate meaning in the Qur'an.

Issa J. Boullata further highlights the inimitable nature of the Qur'an from an Islamic perspective, emphasizing that its literary style is unparalleled. He asserts that the Qur'an's unique style is not merely an embellishment of the text but rather an integral component that profoundly impacts the reader. Any alteration, even minor, to the Qur'an's literary form can lead to a change in meaning.

To illustrate this point, Boullata provides the example of the phrase "إِذْ نَعْبُدُكَ" (We worship You alone). He argues that the exclusive meaning of "only and solely worshipping You" cannot be fully conveyed through the grammatical structure "نَعْبُدُكَ" (we worship You) or similar constructions. This

demonstrates the crucial role of syntax in the Qur'an's literary structures, as it plays a pivotal role in determining the precise meaning of the Qur'anic text.

Boullata's analysis underscores the profound connection between the Qur'an's literary style and its inherent meaning. The Qur'an's inimitable style is not merely a stylistic flourish but rather an essential element that contributes to the Qur'an's profound impact on its readers. Any alteration to this style, even seemingly minor, can potentially alter the intended meaning of the Qur'anic message.

Issa J. Boullata further elaborates on the unique literary style of the Qur'an by examining verse 179 of Surah Al-Baqarah (Qur'an 2:179), which states: "And in retaliation, there is life for you". Muslim rhetoricians have compared this phrase to the Arabic proverb Killing is the remedy for killing, noting that while both expressions convey the idea that killing and capital punishment can ensure societal security, they are not precisely equivalent in terms of their literary style and impact.

Boullata's analysis highlights the significance of sound patterns in the Qur'an's literary structures. He argues that the Qur'an's euphonic arrangement not only ensures the text's auditory smoothness and ease of recitation but also contributes to the effective conveyance and emotional impact of its meaning.

In the introductory section of his entry on the literary structures of the Qur'an, Issa J. Boullata emphasizes the significance of the Qur'an's revelation in Arabic and the importance of understanding it within the context of Arabic grammar and linguistic conventions. He asserts that for Muslims, learning Arabic is of paramount importance as they believe that the Qur'an's true essence cannot be fully captured in translations.

Boullata, as a scholar of Arabic literature, draws attention to the inextricable link between language and culture. He writes: "Arabic, like all languages, possesses unique stylistic devices for conveying meaning, deeply rooted in its cultural background. The Qur'an's masterful employment of these devices sets it apart and is regarded as miraculous by believers. ... Therefore,

Muslims strive to preserve this profound connection between language, culture, and faith at the heart of their lives".

Boullata deals with these titles after mentioning the preliminaries.

1. The Text of the Qur'an during the Lifetime of the Prophet

In this section, Issa J. Boullata delves into the Islamic tradition that holds that the Qur'an was gradually revealed to the Prophet Muhammad over 23 years through oral recitation. He acknowledges with some qualification that the Prophet's literate companions would transcribe portions of the revelations onto various materials, including stones, wooden planks, shoulder blades, palm leaves, leather, and other surfaces.

Issa J. Boullata further elaborates on the compilation of the Qur'an, highlighting the gradual and dynamic nature of its revelation. He notes that verses addressing various topics were revealed over time in response to events unfolding during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime. The Prophet himself, Boullata emphasizes, instructed his companions on the appropriate placement of these verses within the growing oral text that would eventually become the Muslim holy book.

Boullata maintains that according to Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad himself determined the placement of all verses except for one: verse 176 of Surah An-Nisa'. This verse, he asserts, was the last to be revealed, shortly before the Prophet's passing. The companions, guided by the verse's meaning, context, and style, placed it in its current position within Surah An-Nisa'.

2. The Text of the Qur'an after the Death of the Prophet

Issa J. Boullata delves into the codification of the oral Qur'an, highlighting the process of compiling it into a written book. He asserts that the Qur'an was codified in 28 AH (649 CE) with 114 chapters (surahs) arranged in a single book. The companions, except Surah al-Fatihah, placed longer surahs at the beginning of the book and shorter surahs at the end.

Boullata acknowledges the revisionist theory proposed by John Wansbrough, which suggests that the Qur'an was compiled in its present form in the late second and early third

centuries CE. However, Boullata maintains the traditional view of early codification.

He emphasizes two crucial aspects of the codified Qur'an:

1. **Qur'an's Oral Nature:** The Qur'an's fundamental characteristic is its orality, reflecting its initial transmission through oral recitation.

2. **Extended Revelation Period:** The revelation of each surah, particularly the longer ones, spanned a considerable period.

Consequently, Boullata argues that the literary structures of the surahs, as cohesive units, merit attention and analysis. Early Qur'anic commentators, he notes, examined the verbal organization of phrases in terms of rhetorical devices under the concepts of "nazm" (order) or "tanاسب wa munasaba" (harmony and coherence).

Boullata attributes the conceptualization of the surah as a cohesive unit to the writings of Amin Ahsan Islahi and Sayyid Qutb. He proceeds to elaborate on this concept as a key term for understanding the codified text.

3. Surah as a Coherent Unit

In this section, Issa J. Boullata delves into the perspectives of Amin Ahsan Islahi and Sayyid Qutb on the structure and thematic coherence of surahs (chapters) in the Qur'an.

Islahi, a renowned Qur'anic scholar, proposed a unique framework for understanding the interconnectedness of surahs. He asserted that surahs are arranged in pairs based on thematic and semantic relationships. This pairing, he argued, reflects a deeper underlying unity within the Qur'anic text. Additionally, Islahi divided the Qur'an into seven groups of surahs, each group characterized by a unifying theme that binds the associated surahs together.

Sayyid Qutb also emphasizes the unity of each surah based on its semantic and thematic characteristics. However, he also pays attention to the phonological structures, imagery, style, and syntax of the surah to understand its mood and atmosphere. In his view, each surah has an axis, which is the main theme and focus of the surah. According to Qutb, a surah can have multiple themes or lines of development, and especially for long surahs, multiple lines of development can be envisioned, and the overall content of the

surah is fully related to them. On the other hand, he believes that each surah has a specific atmosphere that harmoniously organizes the themes and integrates the musical rhythm of the text with the themes. The atmosphere and musical rhythm help to effectively convey the meaning presented. He states in his book *Mashhad al-Qiyamah fi al-Qur'an wa al-Tasweer al-Fanni*: "The literary structures of the Qur'an can be effective in the linguistic and psychological beauty of the text".

While some Western scholars consider the Qur'an devoid of any literary merit, others have recognized its literary qualities, albeit with varying degrees of appreciation.

≠ **Nöldeke** believed that the Arabs' refined linguistic taste almost entirely prevented them from imitating the oddities and weaknesses of the Qur'anic language.

≠ **Thomas Carlyle**, while praising Muhammad as a hero, found the Qur'an to be "a wearisome reading" and described it as "a tedious, confused, ill-conceived and dissonant jumble".

≠ **Reynold Nicholson** similarly stated that "to the European reader the Qur'an is obscure, tedious and unattractive, a medley of long stories and wearisome exhortations".

≠ **Montgomery Watt** also considered "discontinuity to be the true characteristic of the Qur'anic style".

Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, the first British Muslim to translate the Qur'an into English, titled his translation "The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an" with the subtitle "An Explanatory Translation". He described the Qur'an as "an inimitable symphony that moves the human to weep and ecstasy".

Another Qur'an translator, Arthur Arberry, titled his translation "The Koran Interpreted" and incorporated patterns and rhythmic groups of words to reflect aspects of the Qur'an's literary structures in Arabic. Regarding the Qur'an's chapters (surahs), Arberry stated: "Each surah must be considered a coherent unit in itself, and the Qur'an should be understood as a unified revelation, ultimately with internal coherence".

These contrasting views highlight the diversity of perspectives on the Qur'an's literary merit. While some critics find its style to be unappealing or even flawed, others acknowledge its unique and powerful qualities.

Boullata argues at the end of this discussion that in the German school of thought, it is possible to move from the study of microstructures to macrostructures. However, due to the multiplicity of theories about the **surahs** as a coherent unit, this topic still requires detailed linguistic discussions and investigations in new research. Similar studies have been conducted on other holy books and can contribute to a better understanding of the **surahs** and their literary structures, and ultimately the entire **Qur'an** as a holy book with a single message.

4. The Prose of the Qur'an

According to Boullata, the Qur'an is undoubtedly a text in the form of prose, and its prose style is unique and distinctive. As an expert in Arabic literature and poetry, Boullata observes that classical Arabic poetry is characterized by its conventional meter and repetitive rhymes, which contribute to its balance, harmony, and coherence. These features are evident in the long tradition of Arabic qasidas. In contrast, the prose of the Qur'an does not adhere to a regular meter or rhyming scheme. Unlike classical Arabic poetry, the Qur'an's rhyme is not governed by strict rules and does not follow a consistent pattern. Instead, it occasionally employs vowels or phrases as substitutes for rhyme. Consequently, the Qur'an is generally considered to be devoid of rhyme.

Boullata further elaborates on the reasons why Muslim scholars have refrained from classifying the Qur'an as *saj'a* (rhymed prose), citing the rhymed prose (*saj'a*) of pagan preachers, diviners, and priests, as well as the artificiality and pretentiousness of later *saj'a* writings. He asserts that the primary reason for deeming the term *saj'a* unsuitable for the Qur'an is that not all of the Qur'anic text conforms to the structure of *saj'a*.

Muslim scholars prefer to consider the Qur'anic text as a text divided into intervals or rhetorical segments, and each semantic-grammatical segment is called an "ayah" (verse), which usually ends with harmonious vowels and rhymes. These verses can be short or long. Boullata further provides examples of harmonious vowels and rhymes, such as the rhyme "اَ" for Surah Al-Ikhlās or "اَ" for verses 9 and 10 of Surah Ad-Duha, and other

examples to make these weights clear to the non-Muslim reader.

He ultimately concludes that the prose of the Qur'an is not entirely free and unrhymed, but rather a unique blend of the two, and harmonious vowels in verses of varying lengths distributed in short and long *surahs* play a significant role in shaping it.

5. Phonetics

Boullata emphasizes the significant role of sound in the impact of Qur'anic words, stating that despite extensive efforts, the best translators cannot replicate the same style in their translations. Even Arthur Arberry, despite his considerable efforts in this area and his creation of rhythmic groups in his translation, admits at the end that his translation is a weak reflection of the original Qur'anic text.

The sound of Arabic words in the Qur'an is an essential element of its literary structure in creating a rhetorical medium that effectively conveys meaning. This element is perceivable at the word level (*fasah al-mufrad*) and phrase level (*fasah al-murakkab*). In addition to the fact that the words are not harsh to the ear and are consistent with conventional Arabic morphology, the phrases also create a pleasant auditory experience and adhere to Arabic grammatical rules. This contributes to the impact of the expression. This is the same inimitable symphony that Pickthall described in the introduction to his translation of the Qur'an and which Muslim rhetoricians call "*nazm al-Qur'an*" (the order of the Qur'an). It is a blend of harmonious words and meanings by the rules of grammar, rhetoric, and phonology, and it is considered a miracle of the Qur'an by theologians.

6. Transtextuality

In a section titled "Transtextuality", Boullata addresses the topic of Qur'anic repetitions, arguing that transtextuality allows for various types of repetitions to emerge at the intratextual level of a single *surah* or the intratextual level of all *surahs*. Repetitions in any literary text, like music, play a fundamental role in the poetic impact. In the Qur'an, repetition appears in the form of recurring rhythms, rhymes, assonances, refrains, structural patterns, and various

expressions of a theme. In this section, he has tried to provide Qur'anic examples for each of these cases. He considers the purpose of repetitions to be the powerful transmission of the Qur'anic message, whose sublime language captivates both mind and heart.

To further illustrate his point, Boullata provides examples of Qur'anic repetitions. He identifies two exceptional examples of refrains in Surah Ar-Rahman and Surah Al-Mursalat.

≠ **Surah Ar-Rahman:** The verse "Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?" is repeated 31 times in this surah, addressing both jinn (spirits) and humans. This repeated verse emphasizes the vastness of God's blessings, leaving no room for denial and continuously reinforcing the message.

≠ **Surah Al-Mursalat:** The phrase "Woe to the deniers!" is repeated ten times in this surah. It alludes to the Day of Judgment when all material possessions will vanish, and all creatures will gather before their Lord for judgment. Woe to those who deny these revelations! The repetition of this verse serves as a warning to those who will deny God's truth on the Day of Judgment. They will be silenced and denied any excuses. These threats underscore the severity of the punishment and the bliss of the rewards.

≠ Boullata further highlights that Qur'anic repetitions encompass various forms that contribute to the Qur'an's unique style and impart a distinctive tone. One notable example is the phrase "Hu al-Aziz al-Hakim" (He is the Mighty, the Wise) or its alternative form "Allah Aziz Hakim", which appears at the end of many verses. This repetition occurs frequently both within individual surahs (chapters) and across the entire Qur'an, establishing a distinct pattern.

Another form of repetition in the Qur'an involves retelling a story from different perspectives. The eloquence of thematic and verbal repetition in these narratives plays a powerful role in conveying their intended message and effectively instilling meaning.

7. Imagery and Figurative Language

Boullata emphasizes that the Qur'an employs a remarkable range of figurative language and original metaphors to enhance the impact of its message, stimulate the imagination, and engage the reader's emotions. As in other

languages, Arabic words can be used figuratively so often that they become accepted as their primary or literal meanings. For instance, the word "foot" initially refers to a body part but can also be used to describe the leg of a table. Similarly, in Arabic, the word "shari'ah" (meaning "path to water" but also used metaphorically for religious law) appears in Qur'an 18:18, and the word "fatrah" (meaning "slackness" but also used metaphorically for some time between two events) appears in Qur'an 5:19. These words have acquired metaphorical meanings that are almost indistinguishable from their literal ones.

Boullata provides further examples of figurative language in the Qur'an, including "hand of God", "eye of God", and others found in various verses. He explains their metaphorical usage, such as describing God's throne as a symbol of His power and majesty. Similarly, the Qur'an depicts the afterlife as a realm of physical pleasures in Paradise and physical pain in Hell, corresponding with the rewards and punishments of one's earthly deeds.

Boullata acknowledges that similar details about the afterlife exist in Jewish and Christian traditions, but he asserts that the Qur'an's imagery is unparalleled. This is evident in the vivid descriptions of Paradise and Hell, often presented in contrasting pairs within Meccan suras (chapters). Sayyid Qutb, in his work "Ma'alim al-Qur'an fi Tadabbur al-Rahmani", analyzes 150 scenes from 80 Qur'anic suras, 63 of which are Meccan and 17 are Medinan.

In this section, Boullata provides examples of the Qur'an's vivid imagery across various themes. He concludes by emphasizing that the Qur'an employs a diverse range of literary techniques to convey its message. From a linguistic perspective, he suggests that continuous study of both the larger and smaller units of the Qur'anic text will lead to a deeper understanding of the internal coherence of its literary structures and a harmonious appreciation of their interrelationships.

C. Criticism of the Article

Critiquing a research paper can be approached from at least two perspectives:

a. Academic and Scientific Writing Principles: This involves evaluating the

paper's adherence to established guidelines for academic writing, such as proper citation, grammar, and structure.

b. Research Findings: This entails assessing the validity, reliability, and significance of the paper's research findings, considering the research methodology, data analysis, and conclusions drawn.

This article will be examined from these two perspectives in the following sections.

a. Criticizing the article in terms of writing based on scientific principles

Despite claims of impartiality and academic rigor Jane McAuliffe, the Editor-in-Chief, considers the encyclopedic nature of the article, which aims to provide a comprehensive overview of a topic for a specialized readership, as well as to show the significance of the Leiden Encyclopedia of the Qur'an among the non-Muslim scholarly community. There are several areas where the article can be improved to better align with the Editor-in-Chief's vision and enhance its value for the target audience.

1. In academic writing, it is crucial for authors to maintain impartiality and ensure that diverse viewpoints are represented fairly and accurately. While Boullata has a background in university teaching and academic article writing, he has, in some instances, chosen to present the opinions of Muslim scholars without citing their names. Instead, he employs generic terms like "Muslim rhetoricians" or "Muslim theologians" and refers to other entries in the same encyclopedia rather than providing primary sources for these views.

This approach falls short of academic rigor for several reasons:

≠ **Diversity of Perspectives:** Among Muslim rhetoricians, theologians, and other scholars, there exists a wide range of schools of thought and diverse opinions. Attributing a single view or concept to an entire group is not an academically sound practice.

≠ **Importance of Primary Sources:** Relying solely on secondary sources, such as other encyclopedia entries, can introduce bias and inaccuracies. Consulting primary sources, such as the original works of the scholars being cited, is essential for ensuring the authenticity and accuracy of the information

presented.

≠ **Transparency and Attribution:** In academic writing, when selecting a particular view to support an argument, it is imperative to identify the proponents of that view and cite their sources. Boullata's failure to do so for Muslim scholars raises concerns about his research methodology and potential biases.

≠ **Contrasting Approach with Orientalist Sources:** It is noteworthy that Boullata exhibits meticulousness when citing the opinions of Orientalist scholars. He consistently provides their names and references to relevant primary sources, adhering to academic standards. This contrast highlights the uneven treatment of Muslim and Orientalist scholars in Boullata's writing.

Balata's approach in his article "Structures Littéraires" reflects the influence of positive thought, which often discourages scholars from directly engaging with Islamic sources. While Balata, unlike some positivists, does not deny the prophethood of Muhammad, his methodological approach aligns with positivist principles in its disregard for Islamic sources. He even cites Western works and encyclopedia entries for his discussions of Islamic tradition (see: Jamal, 2010, p. 37).

One instance where Boullata fails to consult primary sources or adequately consider diverse viewpoints within Islamic scholarship, leading to an incomplete and inaccurate representation of Islamic tradition, is his assertion regarding the final verse revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Boullata claims that, according to Islamic tradition, Muhammad (PBUH) determined the placement of all verses except for 176 of Surah An-Nisa. He maintains that this verse was the last to be revealed, shortly before the Prophet's death, and that the Companions placed it in Surah An-Nisa based on its meaning, context, and style.

However, this assertion contradicts the existence of diverse opinions within Islamic tradition regarding the final verses revealed to the Prophet (PBUH). Narrations exist that identify 281 of Surah Al-Baqarah, 176 of Surah An-Nisa, part of 3 of Surah Al-Ma'idah, the last three verses of Surah At-Tawbah, or Surah An-Nasr as the final verses revealed.

Contrary to Boullata's claim, the majority of narrations within Islamic tradition point to

281 of Surah Al-Baqarah as the last verse, which the Prophet (PBUH) placed between the verses on usury and debt in Surah Al-Baqarah a few days before his passing. (Wahidi Nishapuri, 1992, pp. 16-18; Ya'qubi, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 43; Muqatil, 2002, Vol. 1, p. 228)

Notably, none of the narrations concerning the final revealed verse mention the Companions placing it in the Qur'an. Therefore, Boullata's assertion represents an opinion that deviates from Islamic tradition and is susceptible to criticism.

2. Beyond the previously discussed issues, Boullata's article exhibits additional shortcomings that further undermine its academic rigor and credibility:

In several instances, Boullata makes sweeping generalizations about the opinions of "Muslim rhetoricians" or "Muslim theologians" without providing any specific citations or references. This practice violates fundamental principles of academic writing, as it fails to identify the sources of information and allows readers to verify the accuracy of the claims.

In the discussion comparing the Qur'anic verse "And for you there is life in the law of retaliation" (Qur'an 2:179) with the pre-Islamic Arabic proverb "blood for blood", Boullata asserts that "Muslim rhetoricians have compared this verse with the pre-Islamic Arabic proverb". However, he fails to provide any names or references to specific works of rhetoric or theology that support this claim.

3-Throughout the discussion of the proverb comparison, Boullata presents the comparison without providing any context or background information about the historical development of Arabic rhetoric or the role of proverbs in pre-Islamic and Islamic societies. This lack of context diminishes the value of the comparison and makes it difficult for readers to fully understand its significance.

Throughout this article, the reader is introduced to the views of only two Muslim scholars and Qur'anic exegetes: Ameen Ahsan Islahi and Sayyid Qutb. Considering the vast array of topics and issues that can be explored within the realm of Qur'anic literary structures, it would have been more appropriate for the author to draw upon the perspectives of Muslim experts in each respective area. Instead of using generic titles, the author could

have named these experts and cited their works. Furthermore, the exclusive mention of these two individuals suggests a degree of academic bias in the author's selection of viewpoints, which undermines the objectivity and credibility of the writing. This bias is further amplified in a statement about Sayyid Qutb, where the author writes: "Regardless of these debates, the Qur'an possesses an abundance of literary and stylistic devices and innovations in its structures, to the extent that it has prompted the modern literary critic and astute exegete Sayyid Qutb to assert that what he terms 'artistic imagery' is, in fact, a distinguishing feature of the Qur'anic style". Boullata's bias reaches its peak in this sentence with the phrase "astute exegete". In academic articles, the opinions and claims of individuals should be examined and presented, while praising individuals independently of their views and claims detracts from the credibility of an academic article at the encyclopedia level.

b. Content Criticism of the Article

The previous section summarized the content of the encyclopedia entry on Qur'anic literary structures. It appears that several claims made in this entry, particularly those related to the views of Muslims, warrant further examination and discussion. This section of the article delves into these claims, which are as follows:

1. The development of Arabic grammar based on the language of the Qur'an.
2. The possibility of the Qur'an's compilation during the Prophet's lifetime according to Islamic tradition (the view of traditional Muslims).
3. The compilation of the oral Qur'an around the year 28 AH by the Companions.
4. The discussion of various types of Qur'anic repetition under the title of "taratīmul-Qur'ān".

1. Writing an Arabic grammar based on the Arabic language of the Qur'an:

In the introductory section of the encyclopedia entry on Qur'anic literary structures, Boullata asserts that Arabic grammar, encompassing both morphological and syntactical rules, was not fully developed until the second century AH (8th century CE) following the advent of Islam. He suggests that the rules of Arabic

grammar were derived from and extracted from the language of the Qur'an.

This claim, however, is not entirely accurate and overlooks the rich linguistic heritage of the Arabic language before the emergence of Islam. While it is true that the Qur'an played a significant role in standardizing and unifying the Arabic language, the development of Arabic grammar was a gradual process that spanned centuries, influenced by various factors, including pre-Islamic dialects, the Qur'an, and the works of linguists.

To counter Boullata's claim, it is important to recognize the contributions of early Arabic grammarians, particularly those of the Basra school, in codifying the rules of Arabic grammar. Among these grammarians, Ibn al-Sībawayh (d. 767 CE) stands out as a pivotal figure. His magnum opus, *al-Kitāb*, is considered a foundational work in Arabic grammar and has been extensively studied and commented upon by subsequent scholars. (see: Baqeri Mahyari, Views of Arabic Grammarians on Persian Sibawayeh, p. 221).

Ibn al-Sībawayh, based in Basra, Iraq, was a student of the renowned linguist al-Farāhidi (d. 750 CE). His *al-Kitāb* encompasses a comprehensive treatment of Arabic grammar, including morphology, phonology, phonetics, and vocabulary. Notably, Ibn al-Sībawayh drew upon various sources in formulating his grammatical rules, including pre-Islamic poetry and texts from the pre-Islamic era. (see: Ibn al-Sibwayh, *Al-Kitab*, p. 199-488).

This reliance on diverse sources demonstrates that the development of Arabic grammar was not solely dependent on the Qur'an. Instead, it reflects a broader linguistic tradition that predates Islam and encompasses a rich tapestry of influences.

2. The possible expression of the writing of the Qur'an during the lifetime of the Prophet according to Islamic tradition (the opinion of traditional Muslims)

In the section titled "The Qur'anic Text during the Prophet's Lifetime", Boullata asserts that "according to Islamic tradition, the Qur'an was gradually revealed over 23 years, and Muhammad received and memorized the oral

Qur'an, and possibly some of its verses were written by his literate Companions on stone tablets, shoulder blades, etc". The source for Boullata's claim is Frederick Leemhuis's entry on "Qur'an Manuscripts" in the first volume of this encyclopedia.

Leemhuis divides Qur'anic manuscripts into two categories: pre-Uthmanic and Uthmanic. He claims that pre-Uthmanic manuscripts have perished, implying that he believes such manuscripts existed but were later lost. The assertion that some verses of the oral Qur'an, not the entire Qur'an, were possibly written on parchment or other materials, does not align with the cited source.

Moreover, the opening phrase of the text, "according to Islamic tradition", indicates that Boullata intended to present Muslim views on Qur'anic compilation during the Prophet's lifetime. In this case, he should have consulted Islamic sources and Muslim opinions on the matter. This failure to do so reflects a departure from academic writing principles, which, as discussed earlier, are evident in the overall positivist approach adopted by Orientalists throughout the article.

In contrast to Boullata's assertion, Muslim scholars specializing in Qur'anic compilation, based on historical accounts from that era, maintain that literate Companions were appointed by the Prophet Muhammad to write down the Qur'an during his lifetime. The Prophet had designated specific scribes of revelation at various points in time, and even the placement of verses within the written text was done at his command. Some Companions also possessed their own personal Qur'ans, as Leemhuis correctly points out. According to Islamic tradition, these personal Qur'ans were destroyed during the unification of Qur'ans under Uthman's rule. (See: Tabari, 1996, Vol. 3, p. 173; Baladhuri, 1978, p. 459; Ibn Sa'd, 1990, Vol. 2, p. 268; Kulayni, 1972, Vol. 1, p. 64; Ibn Abi Shaybah, 1409, Vol. 4, p. 226; Bayhaqi, 2003, p. 27)

According to Muslim scholarship, in addition to the official Qur'an scribes, each Qur'an learner and recipient of revelation would also write down a portion of the verses they had learned and keep them in their homes (See: Tabari, 1996, Vol. 3, p. 173; Ya'qubi,

1987, Vol. 2, p. 53; Ibn Kathir, 1989, Vol. 5, pp. 295-309; Ibn Athir, 1965, Vol. 2, p.176).

3. Compilation of the oral Qur'an around the year 28 Hijri by the Companions

In the section titled "The Qur'anic Text during the Prophet's Lifetime", Boullata makes a sweeping claim without citing any sources. He asserts that after the Prophet's passing, the Companions compiled the oral Qur'an into its current form, comprising 114 chapters arranged in order of length, from longest to shortest. He contends that no codified book existed before this compilation.

Boullata's assertion that the Qur'an was not compiled into a book during the Prophet's lifetime while lacking explicit source attribution, appears to align with the views of some non-Muslim Qur'an scholars, such as John Wansbrough. These scholars maintain that the Qur'an's compilation into a book occurred in the second half of the first century AH (8th century CE) (See: Jamal, 2010, p. 38).

However, Boullata's claim faces significant challenges when examined in light of:

1. **Historical Reports:** Islamic historical accounts, including Ibn al-Nadim's "al-Fihrist" (Ibn al-Nadim's ,1997, pp. 43-45) and Ya'qubi's "Tarikh" (Ya'qubi, 1987, Vol. 2, pp. 92-93), Report on the entry of Qur'anic manuscripts by Limhous (McAuliffe, Vol. 1, pp. 347-351), document the existence of complete Qur'ans before Uthman's compilation.

2. **Leemhuis's Entry on Qur'anic Manuscripts:** Frederick Leemhuis's entry on "Qur'an Manuscripts" in the first volume of this encyclopedia (McAuliffe, pp. 347-351) acknowledges the existence of pre-Uthmanic Qur'ans, albeit with variations in their arrangement.

3. **Counterarguments from Muslim Scholars:** Muslim scholars specializing in Qur'anic compilation have presented strong arguments against the notion of a delayed compilation. They emphasize the Prophet's active involvement in preserving and compiling the Qur'an during his lifetime.

In both sections titled "The Qur'anic Text during the Prophet's Lifetime" and "After His Passing", Boullata employs phrases like "possibly" and "writing of some verses" in an attempt to soften the idea of Qur'anic

compilation during the Prophet's lifetime. This approach aims to undermine the established belief among Muslims that the Qur'an was compiled at the Prophet's command during his lifetime, a cornerstone of their understanding of the Qur'an's sanctity and infallibility. Boullata seeks to emphasize the oral transmission of the Qur'an and, consequently, its susceptibility to errors due to individual and collective memory limitations, extending this oral transmission period up to the year 28 AH. Throughout the article, he repeatedly refers to the "oral Qur'an" in support of this argument.

This approach appears to align with the editor-in-chief's vision, as stated in the introduction, to open up the Qur'an to criticism, similar to other holy books, as one of the objectives of this encyclopedia.

4. Dealing with the types of repetitions in the Qur'an in a title called transtextuality

The relationship between a text and other texts is a significant area of study that has been explored by scholars in the fields of structuralism and post-structuralism, including Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Michael Riffaterre, Gérard Genette, and others.

Julia Kristeva was the first to introduce the term "intertextuality" (intertextualité) in the 1960s to refer to any type of connection between different texts. Subsequently, Gérard Genette, expanding on Kristeva's scope of study, coined the new term "transtextuality" (transtextualité) to encompass any type of relationship between a text and other texts within or outside itself. He further divided transtextuality into five categories, of which intertextuality is one (Namvar Motlaq, 2008, p. 83). These five categories are:

1. **Intertextuality (Intertextualité):** This refers to the explicit or implicit presence of one text within another. This can manifest in various forms, such as quotations, allusions, parodies, and pastiches.

2. **Paratextuality (Paratextualité):** This category encompasses the elements that surround a text and contribute to its meaning, such as titles, subtitles, epigraphs, prefaces, introductions, and afterwords.

3. **Architextuality (Architextualité):** This refers to the generic and typological features that a text shares with other texts, such as genre, style, and form.

4. **Metatextuality (Metatextualité):** This involves a text commenting on or referring to itself or other texts. This can include self-references, literary criticism, and commentaries.

5. **Hypertextuality (Hypertextualité):** This category emerged with the advent of digital media and refers to the nonlinear and interconnected nature of hypertext, where links and connections between texts are embedded within the text itself. Hypertextuality, like intertextuality, examines the relationship between two literary or artistic texts. However, unlike intertextuality, which focuses on the coexistence of texts, hypertextuality emphasizes the influence of one text upon another. In other words, hypertextuality delves into the impact of one text on another, rather than their mere presence together. While it is true that presence often implies influence, and influence often implies presence, hypertextuality focuses on a broader and deeper level of influence. To clarify, while intertextuality often examines the presence of a portion of one text within another, hypertextuality explores the overall impact and inspiration one text has on another (Namvar Motlaq, 2008, pp. 87-95).

Among the five categories of transtextuality, intertextuality and hypertextuality focus on the relationship between two independent texts. The remaining categories of transtextuality, namely paratextuality, architextuality, and metatextuality, examine the relationship between a text and its associated paratexts, generic features, and self-referential elements, respectively.

As briefly discussed earlier, analyzing the repetition of a phrase and its variants within a text does not fall under any of the transtextual categories. Therefore, examining and categorizing Qur'anic repetitions under the umbrella of transtextuality represents a significant error on the part of the author of this encyclopedia entry and the editor-in-chief of the series, who bears responsibility for the content.

This error, regardless of the correctness or incorrectness of Boullata's analysis of repetitions, severely undermines the credibility of this entry and the author's scholarly reputation. It also casts doubt on the accuracy

of other information presented in the entry, particularly for a specialized reader. Furthermore, the lack of or inadequate references to the entry on Qur'anic manuscripts further indicates the author's carelessness in writing the article.

In this section, Boullata attributes the repetitions in the Qur'an to its powerful message, which he believes captivates both the mind and the heart through its sublime language. Despite the criticisms raised earlier, Boullata's overall descriptions of how literary structures are employed in the Qur'an throughout the article serve to encourage non-Muslim readers to engage with this holy book. His approach presents a cohesive, purposeful, and guiding image of the Qur'an for non-Muslim audiences.

D. Conclusion

As discussed earlier, the encyclopedia entry under consideration faces two categories of criticism, stemming from both academic writing and content-related issues. These issues have been addressed in detail, and a summary is provided below:

1. **Neglect of Islamic Sources:** The article fails to consult a diverse range of Islamic sources when presenting the views of Islamic scholars. This oversight limits the scope of the discussion and potentially misrepresents the breadth of perspectives within Islamic scholarship.

2. **Author Bias:** The author tends to favor specific viewpoints and individuals, such as those of Sayyid Qutb. This bias compromises the article's objectivity and raises concerns about the selection of sources.

The article under examination exhibits several significant content issues that raise concerns about its academic validity and its suitability for inclusion in an encyclopedia. These issues can be summarized as follows:

1. **Misrepresentation of Orientalist Views:** The author presents the opinions of Orientalists as if they represent the consensus among Muslim scholars on the topic of the oral Qur'an and its compilation during the Prophet's lifetime. This misrepresentation overlooks the diversity of views within Islamic scholarship and potentially perpetuates Orientalist stereotypes.

2. **Irrelevant Discussion of**

Transtextuality: Under the heading of "transtextuality", the author delves into an analysis of Qur'anic repetitions, which is entirely unrelated to the concept of transtextuality. This digression demonstrates a lack of understanding of transtextuality's theoretical framework and its inappropriate application in this context.

3. Oversimplified Interpretation of Qur'anic Repetitions: The author attributes the Qur'an's repetitions solely to the conveyance of a powerful message. This oversimplification overlooks the multifaceted nature of Qur'anic repetitions, which serve various literary, linguistic, and theological purposes.

Impact on the Article's Credibility

These content issues severely undermine the credibility of the encyclopedia entry. The author's reliance on outdated and inaccurate information, coupled with their misinterpretations of transtextuality and Qur'anic repetitions, raises serious doubts about their expertise in the field. The article's overall presentation falls far short of the standards expected for an academic publication.

While the article may present a positive image of the Qur'an and encourage non-Muslim readers to explore its message, it does so at the expense of academic rigor and accuracy. Muslim readers, particularly those with specialized knowledge of Islamic studies, are likely to find the article's shortcomings glaring and its claims unsubstantiated.

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