

Lesson 6: The Science of the Signs of the Arabic Alphabets & Makki and Madani

[The Science of the Signs of Arabic Alphabets Putting 'dots' and articulation](#)

I do not know of any language other than Arabic that its correct reading and conversation requires that much of syntax. Sometimes a mistake in a Fatha sound () or Kasra () or Damma () would completely change the meaning of a sentence. Nonetheless, Arabic writing at the advent of Islam did not have any dots or any vowels. Muslims at the time of the Prophet (S), who were mainly Arabs, used to hear the Qur'an from the holy lips of the Prophet of Islam and hence in general they did not have much problem in correct recitation of the Qur'an.

With the expansion of Islam and the conversion of non-Arabs as well as Arabs who did not meet the Prophet (S) reading the text of the Qur'an was the only possible way for new Muslims to understand it. However because the Arabic writing then lacked any signs for sounds of vowels, a new phenomenon called different recitations emerged. For instance the term Tatloo [تتلوا](#) in the Ayah ["واتبعوا ما تتلوا الشياطين"](#) (2:102) ["على ملك سليمان"](#) if it is considered without the 'dots' could be possibly recited either Yatloo ([يتلوا](#)) or Natloo ([نتلوا](#)) or Nabloo ([نبلوا](#)). To remove this problem the science of making dots and sounds of vowels of the Qur'an was created.

[Putting dots on the words of the Qur'an](#)

Today the Arabic alphabets are divided into two types; the ones without dots and the ones with dots. Some of the Arabic alphabets if their dots are disregarded they look exactly the same such as ba (ب), ta (ت), tha (ث) or such as dal (د), thal (ذ). Obviously, reading the Arabic texts without any signs of 'dots' and vowels is extremely difficult.

The scientists of the sciences of the Qur'an disagree about the first person who created the symbols of

dots for Arabic alphabets. They have suggested four different people; Abul-Aswad Doeli, Yahya Bin Ya'mar, Nasr Bin Asim and Hasan Al Basri. The most famous one that most of the scholars have agreed upon was Abul-Aswad Doeli who was the companion of Imam Ali (A.S). According to historians he was an Iranian farmer from around Basra. He invented the science of Arabic syntax and created the symbol of dots for the Qur'an.

The Science of Symbol of Vowels

Putting vowels on the Arabic words are essential for correct reading. Today the level of the literacy of an Arabic student is examined by how accurately he can pronounce the words. As mentioned earlier Arabic language at the time of the Prophet (S) was free from dots as well as the symbols of vowels. Thus, recitation of the Qur'an for non-Arabs as well as those who were not well acquainted with the Arabic language was extremely difficult. After invention of the dots for the letters Abul-Aswad invented the signs of Fatha (َ), Kasrah (ِ) and Damma (ُ) for the correct pronunciation of the Qur'an. According to Qortobi the reason because of which Abul-Aswad created the signs for the Arabic alphabet was the following story:

"During the reign of Omar a Bedouin came to Medina seeking to hear the Qur'an. One of the Muslims recited Chapter 9 of the Qur'an to him during which instead of pronouncing Rasuloohoo (رَسُولُهُ) in Ayah 3 he pronounced it Rasulehee (رَسُولِهِ). This mistake completely changed the meaning of the Ayah. Because if it was pronounced correctly it means "Verily Allah is free from all obligations to the disbelievers and so is His Messenger." Whereas the way that the Muslim man recited it meant wrongly: 'Verily Allah is free from all obligations to the disbelievers and His Messenger!' The story of the wrong recitation of the Muslim man reached Omar. He called the Bedouin and informed him about the mistake. He then announced that none other than the learned Muslims shall recite the Qur'an for people. He later appointed Abul-Aswad to create the science of Syntax."

The science of recitations of the Qur'an

Another science of the Qur'an that has earned much attention by the Sunni scholars is the science of the different recitations of the Qur'an. Most of the Sunni scholars assert that the Qur'an is revealed with seven different accents. The Shi'a on the contrary believes that the Qur'an is the Word of Unique God and was pronounced by the Prophet (S) by only one accent; i.e. the accent of Quraysh which was the accent of the Prophet (S).

Zurara narrated in an authentic Hadith from Imam Baqir (A.S) "Surely the Qur'an is one, came down from the One but the different recitations comes from the narrators."

In another Hadith Fodhayl Ibn Yasar said to Imam Sadiq (a.s): People (the Sunnis) say: The Qur'an is revealed according to seven Letters (meaning seven recitations). Imam Sadiq (a.s): Said: "The enemies of God lied. Rather it was revealed in one Letter (recitation) from the One."

The Historical Stages of the Recitation of the Qur'an

We can divide the trend of the recitations of the Qur'an into seven stages:

1. Recitation of the Prophet (S) to the companions. This was the first stage of the recitation of the Qur'an in which the Prophet (S) was uttering the Qur'an to his companions as it was revealed to him.
2. Recitation of the companions to others: At this stage the companions recited the Qur'an to those who did not hear it from the Prophet (S). At this stage for the first time the problem of different recitations occurred. One of the main reasons for the occurrence of this problem was the fact that different Arab tribes had different accents and pronunciations. For instance, Al Mubarrad says: "the Arabs say: "Saeqa" and this is the accent of the people of Hijaz, whereas the tribe of Banu Tameem says: "Saqa".
3. Unification of the recitations at the time of Uthman: As mentioned in meeting three the problem of different recitations of the Qur'an was resolved by the unification of the recitations to the recitation of the Prophet (S) during the reign of Uthman under the auspicious guidance of Imam Ali (A.S).
4. Recitation of different cities such as Kufa, Basra, Damascus and Medina. Despite unification of recitations the problem of different recitations continued for the following reasons:
 - a. Lack of dots and the symbols for pronunciations in the then Arabic writing.
 - b. Lack of Alif (ا) for the words that the Alif would be pronounced in the middle of a word. For instance Yokhadioon (يخادعون) and Yakhdaoon (يخدعون) would be written the same. And therefore some of the reciters in the 2nd century did not tell any difference between the recitations of the two words.
 - c. Influencing personal opinions: Another reason for creation of different recitations was the fact that different reciters believed so much in the accent of their tribes and their own Arabic literacy and hence they preferred their opinion for the recitation of the Qur'an.
5. Recitation of the 'Seven Reciters': From the beginning of the 2nd Century among many reciters of the Qur'an seven became the most popular, they were Asim, Ibn Amer, Ibn Katheer, Abu Amr, Hamza, Naafe' and Kesaei. Among these reciters only Ibn Amer and Abu Amr were Arabs.
6. Compilation of different recitations of the Qur'an: From the middle of the 2nd Century the number of the reciters increased from seven to ten and from ten to fourteen to twenty and more.
7. Limitation of recitations to the recitation of the Seven Reciters: In the fourth century Ibn Mujahed wrote a book called Al-Saba' (The Seven) in which he limited the recitation of the Qur'an into the Seven Recitation according to the recitation of the Seven Reciters.

Therefore, the phenomenon of the Seven Recitations of the Qur'an is nothing other than the personal selection of Ibn Mujahed in order for him to stop multiplication of the recitations of the Qur'an and to limit

them to the first seven known reciters. Some of the Sunni scholars mistakenly have claimed that the recitations of the Seven Reciters are numerous narrated from the Prophet (S). We believe all these claims are fabricated and are spread by the followers of those reciters for the purpose of sanctifying their reciters. In Reality the Prophet (S) pronounced the Qur'an only with one accent which was his.

Question and Answer

The Sunni and the Shi'a have narrated that the Almighty God commanded the Prophet of Islam (S) to recite the Qur'an in Seven Letters or that the Qur'an was revealed in Seven Letters. The Sunnis based on this Ahadith have concluded that the Qur'an was in fact revealed in seven different accents.

Our response in short is that these narrations in the Shia books are not authentic and in the Sunni books needless to comment on them. Most possibly these narrations are fabricated to sanctify the Seven Reciters. Moreover, even if these narrations are authentic they do not necessarily mean the seven recitations of the Qur'an. For, they could mean – as explicitly mentioned in some of these narrations – seven main subjects discussed in the Qur'an or seven layers and degrees of interpretation of the Qur'an.

The Present Recitation of the Qur'an

One of the best proofs that only one of the seven recitations is narrated from the Prophet (S) is the fact that the Holy Qur'an throughout the centuries till this date has been always written in one recitation. The recitation of the Qur'an from the advent of Islam until today has been always according to only one of the Seven Reciters. The recitation of the rest never had any existence in other than the books of the sciences of the Qur'an or the interpretation of the Qur'an.

The present and the ever recitation of the Qur'an is the recitation that is narrated to us from Hafs from his teacher Asem (one of the Seven Reciters) from his master Imam Ali (a.s) from the Prophet (S) from Gabriel from Allah. Hafs was one of the companions of Imam Sadiq (A.S). Asem; his teacher, was one of the companions of Imam Ali (A.S) and he was originally from Iran and was one of the eminent Shi'a scholars from Kufa.

Note

Although the correct and the authentic pronunciation of the Qur'an is only one, there are many narrations from the Imams of Ahlul Bayt that non Arabs or Arabs who are unable to pronounce the Qur'an correctly should not be despaired from the recitation of the Qur'an for the Merciful God will elevate their recitation with the real accent of the Qur'an. Imam Sadiq (A.S) from his pure ancestors, from the Prophet (S): "Surely a non-Arab person from my Ummah recites the Qur'an with his non Arabic accent but the angels take it up in accordance with the pure Arabic accent."

The Science of Makki & Madani

The Scholars of the Sciences of the Qur'an have suggested various classifications for the Ayaat of the Qur'an. The Prophet of Islam (S) lived the first 13 years of his mission in Makka and the last 10 years in Madina. Therefore, one of the famous classifications is division of the Qur'an into Makki and Madani.

Definition

Scholars have suggested three different meanings for the Makki and the Madani. The first meaning is based on the place of revelation. Any Ayah or Surah of the Qur'an that is revealed in Makka whether prior to the migration of the Prophet (S) or after the conquering of Makki would be classified as Makki. Similarly, any Ayah or Surah revealed in Madina would be Madani.

The second meaning is based on the time of revelation. Any Ayah or Surah that was revealed to the Prophet (S) prior to his migration to Madina would be Makki and the ones after his migration were called Madani even if they were revealed to him whilst he was temporarily in Makka.

The third meaning for Makki and Madani is based on the addressees of the Qur'an. If the addressees are the infidels the Surah would be Makki even if it was revealed in Madina whereas if the addressees were the believers or the People of the Book then the Surah would be classified as Madani.

Most of the scholars have accepted the second meaning for the definition of Makki and Madani. To them any Ayah or Surah that is revealed prior to his migration to Madina is Makki and the ones after his migration are Madani. Thus, Ayah 3 of Surah al-Ma'edah (Ch.5) is Madani although it was revealed in Hajjatul-Weda' (Farewell Hajj) in Arafah-Makka, and so is Ayah 58 of Surah Nisa' (Ch.4) although it was revealed in Ka'ba when Makka was conquered.

Problems of this classification

Some of the Surahs of the Qur'an are indisputably revealed completely in Makka (prior to migration) and some in Madina (after migration). The division of these Surahs into Makki and Madani is obvious.

The Problem occurs when one part of a Surah is revealed in Makka and the other part in Madina. Should they be called Makki or Madani or something else? Scholars have not given any third name and hence they have named the Surahs based on two criteria: 1) We consider most of the Ayaat of the Surah in naming them Makki or Madani, 2) We consider the first Ayaat of every Surah. Therefore, if most of the Ayaat or the first Ayaat of a Surah were revealed, for instance, in Makka then it is Makki. For example, Surah Hajj (Ch.22) is Madani although the Ayaat 52-55 of it are revealed in Makka (prior to migration). Similarly, Surah al-Shoura (Ch.42) is Makki although the Ayaat from 23-26 are revealed in Madina. Surah al-Najm (53) is Makki but its 32nd Ayah is revealed in Madina. Surah al-Ahqaaf is Makki but its 10th Ayah is revealed in Madina and the like. In all the above examples the majority of the Ayaat

of a Surah are considered in naming them Makki or Madani.

On the other hand, Surah al-Nahl (Ch. 16) is Makki although from Ayah 41 to the end of the Surah (more than 2/3rd of the Surah) was revealed in Madina. For, the first Ayaat of it were revealed in Makka.

However, Surah al-Ankaboot (Ch.29) is considered Makki although the first 11 Ayah of it were revealed in Madina!

Methods of Identification

There is no Prophetic narration to identify whether an Ayah or a Surah is Makki or Madani. The scholars of the Qur'an have identified the Makki and the Madani Surahs mainly by relying on the testimonies of the companions of the Prophet (S) or the companions of the companions. Moreover, they have suggested some signs by which the Ayaat of Makki are to be distinguished from the Madani.

For instance, any Surah that its addressees are 'O you mankind' is Makki and if the addressees are 'O you who believe' is Madani. However, Surah al-Nisa' (Ch. 4) is Madani yet it starts with "O you mankind". Similarly, Surah al-Hajj (Ch 22) is Madani, yet its Ayah 77 is addressed to the believers.

Another way to identify whether the Surah is Makki or Madani is by the length of the Surah and its Ayaat. In general, the Makki Surahs are short and so are their Ayaat, whereas the Madani are long.

Nonetheless, Surah al-An'am (Ch.6) with 165 Ayah is Makki and the length of its Ayaat is also similar to the Madani Ayaat. On the other hand, Surah al-Nasr (110) is Madani but it is a very short Surah.

The main subjects of the Makki Surahs are dealing with the principles of Islam such as monotheism, the Day of Judgment, and the Prophecy of the Prophets, whereas most of the jurisprudential rules of Islam are mentioned in the Madani Surahs. For instance, no Ayah with regards to Jihad was revealed in Makka. The following charts clearly indicate the trend of the subjects of the Qur'an during the years of Prophetic mission.

Chart 1: Percentage of the subjects of the Qur'an

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<u>1) Knowing God, Revelation, Quran</u>	<u>30%</u>	<u>1920 Ayaat</u>
<u>2) The Hereafter</u>	<u>25/8%</u>	<u>1640 Ayaat</u>
<u>3) Mission of the Previous Prophets</u>	<u>23/5%</u>	<u>1500 Ayaat</u>
<u>4) Islamic Ummah & People of the Book</u>	<u>11/7%</u>	<u>736 Ayaat</u>
<u>5) Statutes (Fiqh & Ethics)</u>	<u>7%</u>	<u>456 Ayaat</u>
<u>6) Jihad</u>	<u>4%</u>	<u>260 Ayaat</u>
<u>7) Creation, Man, Jinn & Satan</u>	<u>3%</u>	<u>190 Ayaat</u>
<u>8) Family of the Prophet (P)</u>	<u>.35%</u>	<u>22 Ayaat</u>
TOTAL	105/35%	6724 Ayaat

The total percentage is more than 100% and the number of Ayaat are more than the actual numbers as some of the Ayaat include more than one subject.

Source: M Bazargan, Evolution Du Coran, p.165

Chart 2: Trend of the subjects during the 23 years of revelation

Subject	Percentage of the revealed Ayaat in the years of Mission																				
	1+2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13+1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10-11
Occurrence of the Resurrection Day	18	10	7																		
Heaven & Hell	16	28	18																		
Resurrection and the Hereafter	34	38	26																		
Previous Nations	7.5	10	13																		
Struggles with Infidels of Qoraysh	3.5	7.5	8																		
Description of the Prophets	1.5	3	7																		
Monotheism & Prophecy	22	23	23.5																		
Jihad	0	.1	.2	.3	.4	.5	1.5	3	3	4.5	6.5	8.5	12	18	13	12	10.5	9.5	9.5	8	5
Admonition of the Hereafter	10.5	9.5	9																		
Man, Jinn & Satan	2	2	3																		
People of the Books	-	-	-																		
Islamic Ummah	.3	1	2																		
Statutes	7	6	3	2.5	2	2.5	3	3	3	3.5	4	5	6	7.5	8.5	10	13	17	30	65	45

Image:

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6) Jihad	4%	260 Ayaat
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Subject	Percentage of the revealed Ayaat in the years of Mission																				
	1+2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13-1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10-11
Occurrence of the Resurrection Day	18	10	7																		
Heaven & Hell	16	25	15																		
Resurrection and the Hereafter	34	25	25																		
Previous Nations	7/5	10	13																		
Struggles with Infidels of Qoraysh	3/5	7/5	8																		
Description of the Prophet	1/5	3	7																		
Monotheism & Prophecy	22	23	23/5																		
Jihad	0	.1	.2	.3	.4	.5	1/5	3	3	4/5	6/5	8/5	12	15	13	12	10/5	9/5	9/5	8	5
Admission of the Hereafter	10/5	9/5	9																		
Man, Jinn & Satan	2	2	3																		
People of the Books	-	-	-																		
Islamic Ummah	.3	1	2																		
Statutes	7	5	3																		

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