

The Concept Analysis of the Terms Shi‘r and Shā‘ir in the Noble Qur’ān

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Abstract

Attributing the accusation of being “shi‘r” (poetry) to the noble Qur’ān and the accusation of being a “shā‘ir” to the noble Prophet (s) were among the accusations made by the polytheists in order to reject the divinity of the Qur’ān and consequently to deny the prophetic mission of the Prophet (s). Although there have been suggested different viewpoints with regard to the intention of the polytheists with the words “shi‘r” and “shā‘ir” and the two viewpoints that favor analyzing “shi‘r” from the “structural” and “imaginative content” dimensions have more adherents among the exegetes, the examination of the culture and beliefs of the people of the revelation era and the analysis of the term “shi‘r” reveals that this accusation was issued by the polytheists due to their belief in “the inspiration of the poet by the jinni world” so as to introduce the Qur’ān as an inspiration of the jinni and to deny the prophetic mission of the noble Prophet (s). In addition to clarifying the origin and purpose of the polytheists’ attribution of this accusation, this study will make clearer the response given by the noble Qur’ān to this accusation.

Keywords

Inspiration, Analysis, Jinni, Exegetes’ viewpoint, Imaginative words, Semantics, Rhythm, Rhyme.

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Introduction

The Meccan polytheists in the early days of Islam constantly used different methods such as putting the Prophet (s) and the newly converted Muslims under pressure and bothering them in various ways to prevent the conversion of people to Islam and the Qur'ān. In order to attain their goals, the polytheists did not limit themselves to rejecting, ridiculing, or threatening, but rather, they attributed some accusations to the Prophet (s) to cast doubts on his prophet mission in the hearts of people. One of the accusations that they posed was attributing the accusation of being “shi'r” (poetry) to the noble Qur'ān and the accusation of being a “shā'ir” to the noble Prophet (s) in order to deny the divinity of the Qur'ān and consequently to refute the prophetic mission of the Prophet (s).

The precise analysis of the terms “shi'r” and “shā'ir” in the beliefs and words of the polytheists on the one hand will reveal the intellectual origin of the issuance of this accusation by the polytheists and their main goals of casting this doubt, and on the other hand, it will clarify the response given by the Qur'ān to this accusation.

Consequently, the analysis of the term “shi'r” and “shā'ir”, the consideration of the application of this term in the Qur'ān, and the examination and evaluation of the exegetes' viewpoint in its analysis are the main topics of this article. Accordingly, the precise analysis and understanding of the terms “shi'r” and “shā'ir” will be evaluated in two directions. First, the analysis of the terms “shi'r” and “shā'ir”, and then the examination of the application of these two terms in the Qur'ān will be undertaken.

The analysis of the terms “shi'r” and “shā'ir”

In the analysis of the terms “shi'r” and “shā'ir”, it is necessary to examine the literal and terminological meaning of these words as well as their meaning in the ancient Arab culture of the revelation era.

The literal meanings of “shi'r” and “shā'ir”

The term “shi'r” is derived from the root “sh.‘r” which has been used in various meanings. These meanings can be summarized as follows.

Understanding and comprehending something

One of the main and common meanings of this root, used as the verb forms “sha'ara” and “sha'ura” (Ibn Durayd, n.d., vol. 3: 1249), in the present tense verb form “yash'uru” (Ibn Sayyida, n.d., vol. 1: 362), and the gerund forms “shi'r”, “shi'ra”, and “shu'ūr” (Ibn Durayd, n.d., vol. 2: 726) is understanding and comprehending something. For example, when it is said that “sha'artu bikadhā” (Farāhīdī, 1989, vol. 1: 251; Azharī, n.d., vol. 1: 266)

or “ash'uru bih” (Azharī, n.d., vol. 1: 269), it means getting informed about something.

In the Qur'an, the root form “shi'r” in this meaning has only been used in the present tense, and most of its instances in the Qur'an occur in the negative manner, for example “lā yash'urūn” (Qur'an 2:12; 7:95; 16:26, 45), “mā yash'urūn” (Qur'an 2:9; 3:69; 6:26), “lā tash'urūn” (Qur'an 2:154; 39:55; 49:2), “lā yush'iranna bikum” (Qur'an 18:19), “mā yush'irikum” (6:109), “law tash'urūn” (Qur'an 26:113). It should be noted that the term “sha'ā'ir” which has been frequently used as an added noun to the glorious word “Allāh” (Qur'an 5:2; 22:32, 36; 2:158) is the plural form of “sha'ira” which means “a sign” (Farāhīdī, 1989, vol. 1: 251; Ibn Durayd, n.d., vol. 2: 726). Moreover, the word “mash'ar”, which has been used as a proper noun for the “mash'ar al- ḥarām” (Qur'an 2: 198), has been derived from this root, and in the light of the meaning of its locative noun form (maf'al), it means the position and location of holding the divine rites and Ḥajj rituals (Farāhīdī, 1989, vol. 1: 251). The literal meaning of the word “shi'ri” – which is used as the proper noun for a star – has been a noun or gerund with the meaning “something which is understood” (Muṣṭafawī, 1990, vol. 6: 77).

Composing a rhythmic and rhymed utterance

One of the other common meanings of the root “sh. 'r” is the rhythmic and rhymed utterance, which is used to make the verb forms “sha'ara”, “sha'ura” (Azharī, n.d., vol. 1: 268), the present tense verb form “yash'uru” (Jawharī, n.d., vol. 2: 699), and the gerund forms “sha'r” and “shi'r” (Azharī, n.d., vol. 1: 268). Accordingly, the sentence “sha'artu li-fulānin sha'ran (shi'ran)” is used when the rhythmic and rhymed utterance is composed for a person.

It should be noted that in the Qur'an, this meaning has never been used in the verb form; rather, it has only been used in the noun forms “shi'r” (Qur'an 36:69), “shā'ir” (Qur'an 69:41; 21:5; 52:30; 37:36), and “shu'arā” (Qur'an 26:224).

It is noteworthy that some philologists have related the origin of this meaning back to the previous meaning mentioned above, and asserting that shi'r as a rhythmic utterance is a kind of understanding something which is hidden from others, have taken shā'ir as an informed person who knows that hidden thing (Farāhīdī, 1989, vol. 1: 251; Ibn Fāris, 1984, vol. 3: 194; Jawharī, n.d., vol. 2: 699; Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1991: 456).

Hair and its growing

Another meaning of the root “sh. 'r” is the body hair, which is used in the two verb forms “sha'r” and “sha'ara” (Ibn Manzūr, 1993, vol. 4: 410), and the verb “sha'ara” is derived from it (Muṣṭafawī, 1990, vol. 6: 77). For

example, when it is said “rajul ash‘ar” or “imra‘at sha‘rā”, it means a man or woman who has a lot of hair (Ibn Durayd, n.d., vol. 2: 727), or when it is said “rajulun ash‘aru sha‘rānī”, it means a man who has long hair (Azharī, n.d., vol. 1: 268). Likewise, the sentence “sha‘ara al-ra’s wa al-jasad” means the hair of the head and body has grown a lot (Farāhīdī, 1989, vol. 1: 250), as the sentence “ash‘ir al-janīn fī baṭn al-umm” is used when the hair of the embryo is grown in the mother’s womb (Azharī, n.d., vol. 1: 269).

This meaning has been used in the Qur’ān only once in order to remind the blessing given to the human to use the wool, fluff, and hair of the animals (Qur’ān 16:80).

Clothes lining

One of the other important meanings of the root “sh.‘r” is the clothes lining, or in fact anything which is worn under the clothes and comes into contact with the skin (Farāhīdī, 1989, vol. 1: 250; Ibn Durayd, n.d., vol. 2: 727). Such a thing is called “shī‘ār”, and its plural form is “Shu‘ur” (Ibn Manzūr, 1993, vol. 4: 412).

Some philologists have related the origin of this meaning back to the previous meaning mentioned above, and have attributed its appellation to the fact that the lining or the underclothes comes into contact with the body hair (Farāhīdī, 1989, vol. 1: 250; Azharī, n.d., vol. 1: 267). On the contrary, some others have introduced this meaning as the origin of all other meanings and have related other meanings of this root to this meaning (Muṣṭafawī, 1990, vol. 6: 74). Still others have introduced two independent origins for the root “sh.‘r”: something that implies confirmation and something that implies knowledge or proper noun. As a result, they have related the clothes lining and hair to the first origin and the understanding of something and composing poetry to the second origin (Ibn Fāris, 1984, vol. 3: 193). At any rate, these meanings are not used in the qur’ānic verses.

Other meanings

In addition to the foregoing meanings, there are other meanings for this root that might be related to the abovementioned meanings in some cases. For instance, “mashā‘ir” which means senses (Jawharī, n.d., vol. 2: 699), “sha‘īr” which means malt (Ibn Durayd, n.d., vol. 2: 726; Jawharī, n.d., vol. 2: 698), “sha‘īra” which means a sword made of silver or steel (Ibn Durayd, n.d., vol. 2: 726), “shī‘ār” which is used in the wartime as a watchword (ibid: 727; Jawharī, n.d., vol. 2: 699), “sha‘rā” which means a kind of fly with green eyes (Ibn Durayd, n.d., vol. 2: 727), etc.

The terminological meaning of “shī‘r” and “shā‘ir”

“Shī‘r” has different terminological meanings in different sciences, in a way

that its definition for literature scholars and philosophers is essentially different. Shi'r in literary meaning is attributed to a piece of poetry and an utterance which has rhythm and rhyme ('Amīd, 1994, vol. 2: 1306). However, for the scholars of logic, shi'r is among the imagery issues and is one of the five figures of logic along with argumentation, rhetoric, dialectics, and fallacy, with imaginativeness as one of its main elements. In this meaning, issues such as rhythm and rhyme are secondary (Muḏaffar, 1988: 453). Khāja Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī has defined shi'r in logic as follows:

“Shi'r is a technique by which one can create imaginations that provoke the intended feelings and mental emotions ... Shi'r has been defined by the earlier scholars as “imaginative utterance”, but by the later ones as “A rhythmic, rhymed utterance with symmetric elements”, without being conditioned to imagination. However, it is better to consider all these issues as valid” (Khāja Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, 1987: 77).

As a result, it has been said that the logicians in the ancient Greece considered the imaginative issues as the single constituting element of shi'r and did not deem any valid role for rhythm and rhyme (Muḏaffar, 1988: 453). Similarly, Aristotle did not consider rhythm and rhyme as necessary for the poem (Ḥillī, 1944: 301). It has been quoted from him in this regard:

“People call the composers of a rhythmic utterance a “poet” only because of the rhythm of the utterance, not the topic and nature of the poet's job; similarly, if a person articulates a matter from medicine or natural philosophy in a rhythmic manner, people will call him a poet, too, while it is correct to call him a natural philosopher” (Aristotle, 1991: 114).

This assertion of Aristotle implies that even for the ancient Greek laymen – let alone the philosophers and logicians – rhythm and rhyme were the main principles in the realization of the poetic nature, as Avicenna attributes this stance to the Greek people (Muḏaffar, 1988: 453). Likewise, Arabs, Iranians, Turks, and other nations have deemed rhythm and rhyme as the basic principles of poetry and have considered them necessary for its realization.

At any rate, in the literary terminology and for the laymen, rhythm and rhyme form the basic nature of poetry, while the content of a poem has no effect on its nature. Similarly, philologists have taken only this meaning for poetry. Nonetheless, for philosophers and logicians, shi'r is a specific term whose nature is comprised of imaginative content.

Shā'ir in the ancient civilizations and for the Arabs of the revelation era

Although the language of poetry is not alien to people, it has basic differences with the ordinary and common language, because the poet needs a specific talent to compose a poem which is not possessed by every person. The wonderful effect of poetry on the human soul has set the grounds for the

formation of certain myths and beliefs about poets, in a way that many ancient people came to believe that poets' poems originated from another world and was inspired to them by some superior beings; in fact, they considered poets as the speakers of those superior beings. This thought can be found in the myths of the two great ancient civilizations, i.e. Rome and Iran, as well as other nations such as the Arabs of the Ignorance Days and the poets of Islamic era. This invisible power that inspired the poem was considered to be a certain deity, angel, or jinni who inspired that utterance to the poet and gave him the power of composition.

In the Greek and Roman beliefs and myths in which various goddesses and gods had a principal role in the humans' various affairs and there existed a specific deity for any matter and art, the artists and thinkers were deemed to be guided by some deities. As the symbol of the power of sun, moon, chanting, and art, Apollo was the god of music and art who was aided by nine other deities who were his children and each was in charge of a certain type of poetry – e.g. lyric, epic, romance, etc. These were considered to be the source of inspiration for poets and artists and were called *Muse* (q.v. Fāṭimī, 2009, vol. 1: 89-99; Guirand, 1997: 69:88).

Believing in these myths about poetry, Plato says:

“All great poets – composing either epic or lyric – do not compose poems because of their skill and art; rather, their composition of poems is due to the inspiration that penetrates their heart ... poets are unconscious when they compose their beautiful poems ... but when they get sober, they become unable to compose ... poets say and compose in the way they are inspired by the god of poetry” (Plato, 2011: 97-98).

Although there remains nothing from the poetry of ancient Iran, this belief can be seen in the works of Muslim Iranian poets, as great poets such as Rūdakī, Nāṣir Khusru, Nizāmī, etc. have overtly called inspiration and spiritual suggestion as “tābī‘a”, “jinni”, or “angel of poetry” (Āqā Ḥusaynī, 2003: 85-88; Bāqirī, 1999: 40).

Likewise, the pre-Islamic Arabs believed in the role of the jinni in many affairs of the humans, to the extent that they even sometimes attributed the murders to the jinni. A famous example is the murder of ‘Alqama b. Ṣafwān b. Umayya b. Muḥrab al-Kanānī, the maternal forefather of Marwān b. Ḥakam, where it is narrated that he fought with a jinni and killed it, and was killed by it (Mas‘ūdī, 1988, vol. 2: 140-141). In addition, the murder of Mardās b. Abī ‘Āmir al-Sulamī has been attributed to the jinni, too (ibid: 141). Mas‘ūdī says: “Gharīḍ the Singer was also murdered by the jinni because he did not obey their order to compose certain poetic verses (ibid).

The Arabs of the Ignorance Days deemed a special role for the jinni in

the poetry, too. They believed that when a jinni found a man who was self-centered, it descended on him, knocked him down, sat on his chest, and forced him to be his speaker in this world. This event was the ceremony of his entrance to the assembly of poets. That man was then known as a "Shā'ir" (poet) (1990: 216).

In a book by Muḥammad b. Abī al-Khaṭāb Qurashī in the second century LH called *Jamhara ash'ār al-'Arab*, there is a chapter on "The jinni speaking in the form of poem in Arabic" which today is usually called "shayāṭīn al-shu'arā." In this chapter, he narrates numerous tales about the jinni's speaking through the tongue of poets, asserts that every poet has had a jinni specific to himself, and mentions the name of the specific jinni of every famous poet of the Ignorance Days (whose name has been stipulated by the poet himself). For instance, in a story about the meeting between the father of "Ibn marwzī" and a jinni, he talks about "Habīd" as the companion and the inspiring jinni of "Abīd b. al-Abraṣ al-Asadī" and "Kumayt" as the inspiring jinni of "Mudrik b. Wāghim" (Qurashī, n.d.: 47-49). Moreover, in the story on the meeting of "Maz'ūn b. Maz'ūn" with "Mushal b. Sakrān b. Jundal" who was the companion jinni of "A'shā" – a famous Arab poet – it is narrated from this jinni that "Lāfīz b. Lāhiz" was the companion jinni of "Imra'i al-Qays", "Hādhir b. Māhir" was the jinni of "Nābigha Dhabyānī", and "Habīd" was the jinni of "Abīd b. Abra ṣ Asadī" (Ibid: 49-50).

In another incident narrated by "Muṭraf Kanānī", "Lāfīz" and "Hādhir" have been introduced as the jinni of "Imra'i al-Qays" and Nābigha (Ibid: 50-51). Moreover, some poets have sometimes mentioned the name of the jinni that inspired the poems to him. An example is A'shā who introduces "Mushal" as the jinni who inspired him (Ibid: 63; Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1999, vol. 2: 663). Since the poem was generally attributed to the jinni accompanying the poet, sometimes the poets glorified themselves due to the accompaniment of that jinni or its attributes (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1999, vol. 2: 664). Similarly, some poems imply that the Arabs considered the poet's pieces of poetry to be received from the female jinni, as they were the source of emotions and art (Abū al-Faṭḥ Rāzī, 1987, vol. 1: 126).

The belief that poetry is the inspiration of the jinni to the poets was common among the poets even after the advent of Islam. For instance, it has been narrated about "Muḥammad b. Bakhtiyār Baghdādī" – a Tabi'a poet, commonly known as "Ablah" – that once he composed a poem for Ibn Dawāmī the Chamberlain. The Chamberlain asked him, "Have you composed this poem yourself?" Ablah said, "Yes." Suddenly he heard a voice from the invisible world that rejected the claim made by Ablah. The Chamberlain asked him to compose another poem. He composed another

poem, which was again claimed by the invisible voice. Ablah asked, “Who are you?” The voice said, “I am your devil [jinni] who teaches (inspires) you the poetry (‘Akarī, n.d., vol. 4: 266). Introducing the inspirational source of poems, Farazdaq (d. 110 LH) suggests: “There are two devils [jinni] for poetry, named “Hawbar” and “Hawjal”; the poems of anyone accompanied by “Hawbar” will be good, and the poems of anyone accompanied by “Hawjal” will be bad” (Qurashī, n.d.: 63).

These show that how conventional and acceptable has been the relationship between the jinni and shi‘ar in the eyes of the Arabs.

The examination of the use of “shi‘r” and “shā‘ir” in the Qur’ān

As it was noted in the foregoing terminology section, the root “sh.‘r” has been used in the Qur’ān in the verb form only to mean “understanding and comprehending something” and in the noun form only in the two meanings “a rhythmic, rhymed utterance” and “body hair”, and the other meanings of this root are not seen in the Qur’ān. The instances of the use of this root to mean “a rhythmic, rhymed utterance” are limited to the three words “shi‘r” (poem), “shā‘ir” (poet), and “shu‘arā” (poets), and occur in six verses in the Meccan chapters. Based on the chapter revelation order¹, these verses are as follows.

1. In the Yāsīn chapter (Qur’ān 36, which was the 41st chapter revealed), the Sublime God exonerates the Prophet (s) from “shi‘r” and rejects the notion that the noble Qur’ān is shi‘r: “And We have not taught him (Muhammad) poetry, nor is it meet for him. This is naught else than a Reminder and a Lecture making plain” (Qur’ān 36:69).
2. The Shu‘arā chapter (Qur’ān 26; which was the 47th chapter revealed), seemingly reproaches the poets and implicitly rejects the notion that the Qur’ān is a piece of poetry: “Shall I inform you upon whom the devils descend? They descend on every sinful, false one. They listen eagerly, but most of them are liars. As for poets, the erring follow them. Hast thou not seen how they stray in every valley, And how they say that which they do not? Save those who believe and do good works, and remember Allah much, and vindicate themselves after they have been wronged. Those who do wrong will come to know by what a (great) reverse they will be overturned!” (Qur’ān 26:221-227).
3. The Šaffāt chapter (Qur’ān 37, which was the 56th chapter revealed) both quotes and rejects the polytheists’ accusation of the Prophet (s) being a poet: “For when it was said unto them, ‘There is no Allah save

1. The chapter revelation order is based on a narration by ‘Aṭā’ Khurāsānī from Ibn ‘Abbās (q.v. Bahjatp ū r, 2014: 329-336).

Allah, they were scornful, and said: 'Shall we forsake our gods for a mad poet?' Nay, but he brought the Truth, and he confirmed those sent (before him)" (Qur'ān 37:35-37).

4. At the beginning of the Anbiyā' chapter (Qur'ān 21, which was the 73rd chapter revealed), the same accusation of the Prophet (s) by the polytheists has been mentioned: "'Nay,' they say, '(these are) medleys of dream! - Nay, He forged it! - Nay, He is (but) a poet! Let him then bring us a Sign like the ones that were sent to (Prophets) of old!'" (Qur'ān 21:5).
5. In the Tūr chapter (Qur'ān 52, which was the 76th chapter revealed), the same accusation made by the polytheists is noted: "Therefore proclaim thou the praises (of thy Lord): for by the Grace of thy Lord, thou art no (vulgar) soothsayer, nor art thou one possessed. Or do they say: 'A Poet! we await for him some calamity (hatched) by Time!' Say thou: 'Await ye! I too will wait along with you!'" (Qur'ān 52:29-31).
6. In the Hāqqa chapter (Qur'ān 69, which was the 77th chapter revealed), the accusation that the Qur'ān is the words of a poet is cleared off the Qur'ān and the Prophet (s): "So I do call to witness what ye see, and what ye see not, that this is verily the word of an honoured messenger; It is not the word of a poet: little it is ye believe! Nor is it the word of a soothsayer: little admonition it is ye receive. (This is) a Message sent down from the Lord of the Worlds" (Qur'ān 69:38-43).

The examination and analysis of the meaning of shā'ir in the Qur'ān

Interpreting the related verses, Muslim exegetes have provided different analyses on the polytheists' intention from accusing the Prophet (s) of being a shā'ir and the Qur'ān of being "shi'r" and the bases of this accusation, though it is possible to compromise some of these analyses, because each of them has addressed "shi'ir" only from one angle. These mono-dimensional analyses might not reject the other dimensions, but rather, they might complete each other. As a result, some exegetes have provided an analysis in one verse and another one in another verse which complete each other. Therefore, the multiplicity of analyses by one exegete in the interpretation of this verse should not be regarded as a paradox in their views. At any rate, the collection of these analyses which have addressed the various aspects of this word can be summarized in the following dimensions.

The first analysis: paying attention to the structural aspect of shi'r

In their analyses of the terms "shi'r" and "shā'ir" in the utterances of the polytheists, some exegetes of the Qur'ān have paid attention to the structural aspect of poem and have analyzed the accusation of the Qur'ān as being a

piece of poetry due to its rhythm and musical structure. That is to say, the Meccan polytheists accused the Qur'ān of being a piece of poetry in order to induce that despite the clear differences between the structure of the Qur'ān and the rhythmic, rhymed poems, the Qur'ān is similar to the poetry and is something of the same nature because it has a specific rhythm.

These exegetes have interpreted the polytheists' accusation of the Prophet (s) as being a "shā'ir" based on this very viewpoint and have noted that the polytheists intended to say that the Prophet (s) is an ordinary person who claims prophethood via composition of rhythmic utterances. In this analysis, the noble verses have been revealed to reject this accusation, i.e. through the rejection of the accusation of the Qur'ān as being "shī'ir", they aim at rejecting the accusation of the Prophet (s) as being a "shā'ir."

For example, interpreting Qur'ān 21:5, Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī puts forth this analysis and criticizes the polytheists' assertion and writes: "And what they [polytheists] said: 'Nay, He is (but) a poet!' is also misguided, because they did not even know poet [poetry], as poem is a rhythmic and rhymed utterance, while this [the Qur'ān] does not have rhythm or rhyme" (Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī, 1987, vol. 13: 208).

Similarly, in his interpretation of the Qur'ān 37:36, Muḥammad Ṣādiqī Tehrānī implicitly introduces the order of the qur'ānic chapters as the reason for the polytheists' accusation of the Prophet (s) as being a poet (Ṣādiqī Tehrānī). Likewise, Qurṭabī – in the interpretation of the Qur'ān 69:41 – suggests that the reason for the rejection of the accusation of the Prophet (s) as being a poet is the difference that exists between the Qur'ān and any type of poetry (Qurṭabī, 1986, vol. 19: 275).

Similarly, Ibn 'Aṭīyya Andalusī has taken the accusation of the Prophet (s) as being a "shā'ir" to be the words of the ordinary polytheists and has argued that the reason for its rejection is that the notables of Arab deemed evident the differences between the principles of the Qur'ān and poetry (Ibn 'Aṭīyya Andalusī, 2001, vol.4: 74). Abū Ḥayyān Andalusī, too, has considered the accusation of the Prophet (s) as being a "shā'ir" due to the faults in the innate disposition of the accusing person, because he has not differentiated the rhythmic poems which are based on famous principles from the totally different prose of the noble Qur'ān, and while this was evident for many polytheists, they favored this accusation in order to reject the Qur'ān (Abū Ḥayyān Andalusī, 1999, vol. 9: 574).

It is clear that Ibn 'Aṭīyya and Abū Ḥayyān have expressed this interpretation based on their observation of the structural aspect of "shī'ir."

Fakhr Rāzī, too, takes into account the great difference between the qur'ānic order and the poetic order, and in his interpretation of the noble

verse the Qur'ān 69:41 – which says: “It is not the word of a poet: little it is ye believe!” – writes: “To reject the accusation of the Prophet (s) as being a ‘shā'ir’, the Sublime God has said ‘little it is ye believe!’ ... that is to say, you do not intend to accept Islam and so, you refrain from reflection, and if you wanted to have faith, you would understand the falsity of your assertion ‘he is a poet’ because of the difference between this text and all other types of poetry” (Fakhr Rāzī, 1999, vol. 30: 634).

Moreover, the appearance of many commentaries (which have not proposed any specific analysis on the word “shā'ir”) indicates that they have taken “shi'r” in its common meaning as “a rhythmic, rhymed utterance” and have interpreted the accusation of “shi'r” and “shā'ir” in this meaning (Ṭabrisī, 1994, vol. 7: 62; Ṭūsī, n.d., vol. 10: 109; Zamakhsharī, 1987, vol. 4: 606; Baydāwī, 1997, vol. 5: 242; Ibn Kathīr, 1998, vol. 5: 291; Tha'labī Nayshābūrī, 2001, vol. 6: 270).

The evaluation and criticism of this analysis

Since most of the Meccan people in the noble Qur'ān revelation era were familiar with poetry and its structure very well, it would be strange to think that they had difficulty differentiating the structure and order of the noble Qur'ān and the poetry structure and deemed their structures the same. The reason is that poetry was based on certain rhythms which were different from the rhythm of the qur'ānic verses, and this would not go unnoticed by Arabs who were familiar with poetry.

On the other hand, due to the very vivid difference between the structure of the Qur'ān and the rhythms of the Arabs' poems, the polytheists could not introduce the rhythm and structure of the Qur'ān as similar to the rhythms of the Arabic poems and use it as a pretext to cast a doubt on the prophetic mission of the Prophet (s), because such a claim would be unacceptable for the people of Mecca (who had enough knowledge about poetry, its limits, and its qualities).

Therefore, such an analysis about “shi'r” and “shā'ir” cannot be suggested based on a superficial viewpoint without taking into account the culture and atmosphere of the Mecca about poetry. Rather, in order to deeply and precisely analyze this term, it would be necessary to pay attention to the atmosphere of this city and the prevalent culture of its people.

The second analysis: paying attention to the imaginative and unreal content of the poem

Understanding and paying attention to the great difference between the structure and principle of “shi'r” and the structure of the Qur'ān, another group of exegetes have provided another analysis against or as an addition to

the previous analysis. These exegetes have taken the imaginative and unreal content of poetry as what was intended by the polytheists, and assert that they cast this doubt because they deemed the content and knowledge within the Qur'ān as unreal. Therefore, as one of the basic characteristics of poetry is the imaginativeness and unreality of its content, the Meccan polytheists took this quality to be true about the Qur'ān, too. Then, they used it not only to reject the qur'ānic knowledge, but also to reject the possibility of the prophethood of the Prophet (s).

In his interpretation of the noble verse “‘Nay,’ they say, ‘(these are) medleys of dream! - Nay, He forged it! - Nay, He is (but) a poet!’” (Qur'ān 21:5) and to express the development path of these accusations, ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī says: “This verse shows the gradual increase in polytheists’ accusations and rejections. That is to say, they first say that he [Prophet (s)] has had bad dreams which he has mistaken for prophethood and divine book which is easier than magic, and then they say ‘He has falsely attributed it to God’. Here, [it is clear that] they have moved farther in their claims, because a bad dream indicates that the person has mistaken something for something else, but false attribution is deliberate. Moreover, when they say ‘Nay, He is (but) a poet!’, they take their accusation to a yet higher level, because a false attributer does so based on reflection, but a poet expresses what he has imagined and what his emotions have decorated for him with no reflection. A poet might praise a vice despite its badness or reproach a beauty despite its goodness. He might even reject the essential requirements, insist upon a wrong, confirm an untruth, or deny the truth” (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1996, vol. 14: 252).

This assertion of ‘Allāma is in fact a detailed explication of Sayyid ‘Abdullāh Shubbar’s analysis of this verse (Shubbar, vol. 4: 186), although Sayyid ‘Abdullāh Shubbar has considered both imaginativeness and rhythmic nature of shi‘r (poetry) to be effective in the analysis of this term (ibid., 1991: 490). Similarly, Fayḍ Kāshānī talks about the two elements of rhythm and imaginativeness in the analysis of “shi‘r” and “shā‘ir” (Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1994, vol. 5: 81). Sharīf Lāhījī has interpreted the term “shā‘ir” as unreal imaginations (Sharīf Lāhījī, 1995, vol. 3: 596) and *Tafsīr nimūna* has taken it as poetic imaginations (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1996, vol. 13: 357). Ālūsī, a Sunnī exegetes, has interpreted shi‘r as the unreal, imaginary meanings (Ālūsī, 1994, vol. 9: 10).

Some other exegetes have made a similar analysis, have expanded the meaning of shā‘ir, and have written in this regard: “This is not the utterance of a poet, because it is not similar to the compositions of poets, not in rhythm, not in eloquence, and not in rhetoric, because its eloquence and its high literary quality is different from the eloquence and literary potency of poets so greatly

that [we might say] no one knows [that level of eloquence] but God ... and [they are not similar] in meaning, because the poet just pays attention to the appearance and overrides the meaning ... and the biggest difference between the divine prophets and poets is that the latter rely on their feelings, while the divine prophetic mission is based on the vast knowledge of God ... therefore, we might say that the term 'shā'ir' is not exclusive to one who orders verses and odes, though such a person is one of its manifest instances; rather, this word involves anyone who follows the human culture – either thoughts or feelings – such as philosophers, but not those who follow the divine knowledge” (Mudarrisī, 1998, vol. 16: 315-316).

The evaluation and criticism of this analysis

This analysis – which relies on the common meaning of shi'r and shā'ir in logic, regards only the content of poetry, and takes the imaginativeness of the poetic content as the common point between the noble Qur'ān and the poetic works in the eyes of the polytheists – is not acceptable, because although there exist two logical and literary terms for “shi'r”, the common meaning of “shi'r” in logic (in which, as mentioned in the section on literal meaning, the imaginative content constitutes the nature of poem, while rhythm and rhyme are secondary and have no role in the nature of poem) is only common among philosophers and logicians, not among the ordinary people in general and the Meccan people of the revelation era in particular (Muzaffar, 1988: 453; Aristotle, 1991: 114). As a result, none of the authors of terminological glossaries have referred to the existence of such a term among the Arabs, and all of them have introduced a rhythmic and rhymed utterance as “shi'r” without taking into account the content aspect.

In other words, if the intention in this analysis is to suggest that the in the issuance of their accusation, polytheists did not take into account the structure and order of the Qur'ān and called the Qur'ān “shi'r” and Prophet (s) a “shā'ir” only based on the qur'ānic content, we might say that the analysis is not acceptable because it is only conceivable based on the logical meaning of this term (which has not been proved to be common during the revelation era). Likewise, if the intention is to assert that the polytheists issued this accusation with regard to both the structure and the content of the Qur'ān (i.e. they also believed that both the structure of the noble Qur'ān and its content were similar to the structure and content of the poetry), again the analysis is based on the logical meaning of shi'r which considers a role for content in “shi'r”. The reason is that in literary meaning, content has no role in the nature of “shī'r”; rather, any rhythmic, rhymed utterance is called “shi'r”, even if it has non-imaginative content such as argumentation, dialectics, etc.

The third analysis: paying attention to the effectiveness of poetry on people

In their analysis of this term, another group of exegetes have taken into account the role of utterance order in the word “shi‘r” along with its effectiveness on people. That is to say, when the polytheists heard the Qur’ānic text (an orderly utterance with a great deal of effect on people), they called it “shi‘r” and called Prophet (s) a “shā‘ir” so as to induce that the Qur’ān – which they deemed was the words of the Prophet (s) – is the same as the words of the poets which influences the hearts in order to reject the prophetic mission of Prophet (s). Makārim Shīrāzī (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1996, vol. 19: 46), Sayyid Muḥammad Taqī Mudarrisī (Mudarrisī, 1998, vol. 7: 277), and Muḥammad Ṣādiqī Tihirānī (Ṣādiqī Tihirānī, 1987, vol. 19: 244; id., 1998: 322) have referred to this analysis in their commentaries.

The examination and criticism of this analysis

What has been expressed in this analysis is not an independent analysis of the word “shi‘r”, because this analysis does not certainly intend to attribute the nature of poetry to any utterance effective on the heart and leave out any role for structure in the nature of poetry, because such an issue has been established neither in literal meaning nor in the terminological one. Rather, as the scrutiny of the words of the providers of this analysis shows, the intention is to say that the Qur’ān – due to its special order and structure which has been imagined as similar to the order of poetry – is effective on people, just like the words of poets. In other words, from the viewpoint of this analysis, the poetry-like order of the noble Qur’ān which had a great influence on the people’s heart caused the polytheists to call the noble Qur’ān “shi‘r”. That is to say, in this analysis, the two elements of the structure of the noble Qur’ān and its effectiveness on the hearts together have been introduced as the bases of this accusation. This way, the criticisms against the first analysis (i.e. the essential difference between the order of the Qur’ān and the order of the poets’ poems even in the eyes of the polytheists) is true for this analysis, too.

The fourth analysis: paying attention to the inspiration of the poet by the jinni

As mentioned in the introduction of the culture of the Ignorance Days and the Arabs of the revelation era, the Arabs living during the Ignorance Days believed that the composition of poetry is out of the power of the ordinary humans, and it is the jinni that have such ability and inspire poems to the poets. Since this was the common belief of the Meccan people in the Qur’ān revelation era, some exegetes have come to recognize and understand this

belief of the polytheists and have considered this aspect of the foregoing accusation in their analyses of the words “shi'r” and “shā'ir”.

Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥujjat Balāghī has noted this point and has written in the interpretation of the Qur'an 21:5: “Some said: ‘He – that is, Muḥammad – is a poet and like any poet who has a specific jinni who inspires to him, Muḥammad has also have a specific jinni who inspires the Qur'an to him’” (Balāghī, 2008, vol. 4: 187).

In his interpretation of the Qur'an 69:41-42, Sayyid Quṭb takes the roots of the accusation of being a “shā'ir” and “Kihānat” (fortune telling) the same and writes: “One of the accusations made by the polytheists against the Qur'an and the Prophet of Allāh (s) is their assertion that ‘he is a poet’ or ‘he is a fortune teller.’ In this accusation, the polytheists were affected by a superficial shubha (doubt) which originated from the point that this utterance (i.e. the noble Qur'an) is naturally superior to the human words, as well their belief that the poet had a jinni who gave him those superior utterances, just like the fortune teller who was deemed as being connected to a jinni. Therefore, the jinni are the ones that help them with the metaphysical knowledge! This doubt is rejected with a little reflection in the nature of the Qur'an, the prophetic mission, the nature of poetry, and the nature of fortune telling” (Sayyid Quṭb, 1991, vol. 6: 3686).

The evaluation of this analysis

The fourth interpretive analysis which expresses that the polytheists took the source of the inspiration of the “shi'r” on “shā'ir” the same as the source of the inspiration of the Qur'an to the Prophet (s) – or at least tried to cast this doubt among people – is closer to reality. The reason is that although the reality of this belief of the polytheists about the source of the inspiration of “shi'r” on “shā'ir” or at least its generality is questionable, the injection of such a stance in the hearts of the polytheists and the Meccan people could open the way for this doubt to move into their minds in order to cast doubts on the prophetic mission of the Prophet (s) among people.

It should be noted that in this analysis, the structural aspect of the Qur'an is not ignored; rather, since the quality of the order of the Qur'an was out of the human ability and “shi'r” for the Arabs was considered something as out of the reach of ordinary people, the source of the inspiration of the Qur'an to the Prophet (s) and the inspiration of “shi'r” to the poets were attributed to a world beyond that of the humans, although the polytheists tried to cast the doubt that these two had the same source and both originated from the world of the jinni.

The Sublime God's defense of the Qur'ān and the Prophet (s)

Although there is no word in the Qur'ān on the confirmation or rejection of the inspiration of poetry by the devils onto the humans, the huge capability of the jinni to undertake extraordinary deeds have been implicitly suggested (Qur'ān 27:39) and the inspiration of the devils to the humans has also been mentioned (Qur'ān 6:121). Relying on the Qur'ān, we might deem imaginable the possibility of the inspiration of some poets by the jinni. However, when it comes to affirmation, the devils inspirations are viewed by the Qur'ān to be mostly lies: "Shall I inform you upon whom the devils descend? They descend on every sinful, false one. They listen eagerly, but most of them are liars" (Qur'ān 26:223-221).

However, to oppose these common beliefs in Mecca and in order to discard the polytheists' accusation of the Prophet (s) as being a "shā'ir" and the other accusations on the role of the jinni in the revelation of the Qur'ān, God repeatedly rejects the accusation of the Prophet (s) as being a "shā'ir". On the one hand, in many Meccan verses of the Qur'ān, He states that the Qur'ān has been revealed by Him in order to cast out the suspicion that the Qur'ān is made by the jinni. An example is the verse "The revelation of the Scripture is from Allah, the Mighty, the Wise" (Qur'ān 45:2; 46:2). On the other hand, in order to reject the suspicion about the mediation of the devils in the delivery of the Qur'ān from the Highest Plenum and to emphasize the protection of the Qur'ān against any modification by the jinni, God suggests the attribution of the Qur'ān to Him as tied to the consideration of the deliverers of the Qur'ān as trustworthy and pure: "And lo! It is a revelation of the Lord of the Worlds, Which the True Spirit hath brought down" (Qur'ān 26:192-193) and "Which none toucheth save the purified, a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds" (Qur'ān 56:79-80). In this regard, He sometimes states the mediation of the trustworthy and noble Gabriel in order to reject the mediation of the devils in the revelation of the Qur'ān onto the Prophet (s): "That it is indeed the speech of an illustrious messenger. It is not poet's speech - little is it that ye believe!" (Qur'ān 69:40-41) and "That this is in truth the word of an honoured messenger, Mighty, established in the presence of the Lord of the Throne, (One) to be obeyed, and trustworthy; And your comrade is not mad. Surely he beheld Him on the clear horizon. And he is not avid of the Unseen. Nor is this the utterance of a devil worthy to be stoned" (Qur'ān 81:19-25). God then moves further and states that it is impossible for the jinni and the devils to listen to and attain the divine messages (including the Qur'ān): "The devils did not bring it down. It is not meet for them, nor is it in their power, Lo! verily they are banished from the hearing" (Qur'ān 26:210-212) and "And We have guarded

it from every outcast devil, Save him who stealeth the hearing, and them doth a clear flame pursue” (Qur’ān 15:17-18). This way, He guarantees the protection of the Qur’ān from being robbed by the devils: “Lo! We, even We, reveal the Reminder, and lo! We verily are its Guardian” (Qur’ān 15:9).

Conclusion

1. “Shi‘r” has two different terminological meanings for the logicians and the literature scholars. That is to say, the basic principle of “shi‘r” for the logicians is the imaginativeness of the utterance content, even if it is articulated without rhythm and rhyme, while for the literature scholars, the rhythm and rhyme comprise the basic principles and conditions of “shi‘r”, in a way that they do not consider any role for content in the nature of poetry.
2. Since the logical meaning for “shi‘r” has been common among the philosophers and logicians rather than the ordinary people and the Arabs of the revelation era – as the philologists have made no reference to the logical use of this term among the people of the revelation era – it is not correct to take the words “shi‘r” and “shā‘ir” in the noble Qur’ān in the logical meaning of this term.
3. The Arabs of the revelation era considered the poets’ ability to compose poems as deriving from the inspirations of the jinni; that is, every poet was known as so due to the accompaniment of a specific jinni with him and the reception of poems from it, because they deemed poetry as something out of the human capability and attributed such things to the jinni.
4. The exegetes of the Qur’ān have provided various analyses with regard to the roots of the accusation of the Qur’ān as being “shi‘r” and the Prophet (s) as being a “shā‘ir” and have looked at this accusation from various directions, including the consideration of the structural aspect of poetry, the imaginative content of the poetry, and the effectiveness of poetry. However, the comprehensive analysis which delineates the origin of the accusation is the belief in the inspiration of the poet by the jinni. That is to say, the opponents of the Prophet (s) in the revelation era claimed that the Prophet (s) received the Qur’ān from the jinni as the poets received their poems from the jinni.
5. In order to defy the accusation of the Qur’ān as being “shi‘r” and the Prophet (s) as being a “shā‘ir”, God on the one hand introduces the Qur’ān as being revealed by Himself and the deliverers of the revelation as trustworthy and pure, and on the other hand rejects the competency of the devils and the jinni to mediate the revelation of the

Qur'ān. Casting off the devils' and jinni's possibility of attaining the divine knowledge, God guarantees the protection of the Qur'ān against their access.

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