

## The Foreign Vocabulary of the Glorious Qur'an

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### Abstract

*When talking about foreign vocabulary of the Glorious Qur'an, different arguments took place and affected the line of research on Qura'nic studies. Some scholars were against the idea that the Glorious Qur'an has foreign words. Other scholars argued against that, claiming that the existence of foreign words in the Glorious Qur'an would reflect the richness of Arabic and the excellence of the Qur'an. In the middle of these two points of view, lies the convincing argument that both points of view are not wrong: those who claim that there are foreign words in the Glorious Qur'an are right because the origins of these words are Persian, Syriac, Ethiopic, or Hebrew etc. and those who reject this claim are also right because these words were adopted into Arabic and were Arabicized so they became integrated in the Arabic language.*

**Keywords:** Language, Qur'an, Arabic, vocabulary in the Qur'an, Qur'anic language, foreign vocabulary, Arabicization.

When talking about foreign vocabulary of the Glorious Qur'an, different arguments took place and affected the line of research on Qura'nic studies. Some scholars such as Imam Al-Shafi'i and Ibn-Jarir were against the idea that the Glorious Qur'an has some foreign words. (As- Suyūfī & Abū-Sikkīn, 1980, p.57). Their proof is basically the Aya [verse]:

"ولو جعلناه قرآناً أَعْجَمِيّاً لَقَالُوا لَوْلَا فُصِّلَتْ آيَاتُهُ، أَعْجَمِيٌّ وَعَرَبِيٌّ" (41:44)

[And if We had sent this as a Qur'an in a foreign language (other than Arabic), they would have said: "Why are not its verses explained in detail (in our language)? What! (A Book) not in Arabic and (the messenger) an Arab?"] and some other Ayas [verses] such as "قرآناً عربياً" (12:2) [Arabic Qur'an] (12:2) and "عربيٌّ مُبِينٌ" (16:103) [this (the Qur'an) is a clear Arabic tongue] (11:2), (The Noble Qura'n (41:44), King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, 2006).

On the other hand, As-Suyuti and Ibn-Abbas (1980) argued against that, claiming that the existence of foreign words in the Glorious Qur'an would reflect the richness of Arabic and the excellence of the Qur'an to inform people of the new and best items such as *Istabraq* [brocade], and *misk* [musk], (p.58). So it does not limit people's knowledge by the simple civilization of the Arabs of the *Jahiliyya* [pre-Islamic paganism]. In the middle of these two points of view, lies one convincing argument.

Abu Obaid and As- Suyūfī (1980) states that both parties to the arguments are not wrong: those who claim that there are foreign words in the Glorious Qur'an are right because the origins of these words are Persian, Syriac, Ethiopic, or Hebrew etc. and those who reject this claim are also right because these words were adopted into Arabic and were Arabicized so they became integrated in the Arabic language, (p. 62-65). As- Suyūfī (1980) points out that :

قال أبو عبيد القاسم بن سلام: (والصواب عندي مذهب فيه تصديق القولين جميعاً، وذلك أن هذه الأحرف أصولها أعجمية، كما قال الفقهاء، لكنها وقعت للعرب فعربت بها بالسنتها وحولتها عن ألفاظ العجم إلى ألفاظها، فصارت عربية، ثم نزل القرآن وقد اختلطت هذه الحروف بكلام العرب، فمن قال إنها عربية فهو صادق ومن قال: إنها عجمية فصادق. وهذا الذي جزم به ابن جرير، ومال إلى هذا القول ابن الجوزي وآخرون (p.65).

Although the claim that no foreign words are there in the Qur'an seems fairly persuasive to the researchers, one should not deny the fact that there are in the Qur'an some foreign words but which cannot raise a doubt about the Qur'an being "قرآناً عربياً" (11:2) [Arabic Qur'an] (12:2) and "عربيٌّ مُبِينٌ" (16:103) [this (the Qur'an) is a clear Arabic tongue] (11:2).

Foreign words from other languages would reflect the historical and linguistic environment at that time. Arabic, Syriac, Hebrew and Aramaic are all Semitic languages and all had the same origin which entails that these languages have a number of words and expressions in common, though their connotations have been changed by time and locality. Turning back to Aya [verse]: "عَرَبِيٌّ مُبِينٌ" (16:103) [this (the Qur'an) is a clear Arabic tongue] (16:103), the Glorious Qur'an is still considered pure Arabic in spite of the fact that Arabic borrows, as all languages do, from previous dialects and languages. It is pure Arabic as a whole. The Qur'an is clear in its source, its laws and its commands. The fact that some of the words of the Qur'an are of a foreign-origin does not refute the purity of the Qur'anic Arabic, these words had already been adopted by the Arabs in their speech and literature. What was specific about the Arabs at the time of revelation was that they came into contact with other cultures due to trade and then had borrowed certain words. According to Al-Shafi'i, these foreign words in the Qur'an had been fully integrated into Arabic and were already a part of the language. They had already been naturalized into the Arabic language before the revelation of the Qur'an and they were already in use, (As- Suyūfī&Abū-Sikkīn, 1980, p.57).

To illustrate this point of view, the followings are some foreign words derived from different languages such as Ethiopic, Persian, Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Coptic, Indian, and other languages, (Jeffery ,2007, p. 12-28). Notice that the numbers indicated between brackets are verses and chapters where every word is mentioned, followed by the English translation as provided in Cowan's 1980 Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic or in the 2006 English translation of the Noble Qur'an of King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an.

- **Persian:**

- Barzakh برزخ interval (23:102; 55:20; 25:55), (Cowan, 1980, p.52).
- Firdous فردوس Paradise (18:107; 23:11), (Cowan, 1980, p. 704).
- Zanjabil زنجبيل ginger (76:17), (Cowan, 1980, p. 383).
- Sijjil سجيل baked clay (105:4), The Noble Qur'an (105:4) , King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, 2006) .
- Khandaq خندق trench [not mentioned the Nobel Qur'an but in the story of the Battle of the Trench], (Cowan, 1980, p. 263).

- **Syriac:**

- Dawud داود David (4:163; 5:78; 6:84), (List of people in both the Bible and the Quran, n.d.)
- Sulayman سليمان Solomon (2:102; 4:163; 6:84), (List of people in both the Bible and the Quran, n.d.)
- Isa عيسى Jesus (2:87; 2:136; 2:235), (List of people in both the Bible and the Quran, n.d.)
- Nuh نوح Noah (3:33; 3:44; 4:163), (List of people in both the Bible and the Quran, n.d.)

- **Hebrew:**

- Jahannam جهنم hell (2:206; 3:12; 3:162) , (Cowan, 1980, p. 144).
- Jibril جبريل Gabriel (2:97; 2:98; 66:4), (Cowan, 1980, p. 111).
- Shaytan شيطان Satan (2:36; 2:168; 2:208), (Cowan, 1980, p. 497).
- Sadaqah صدقة charity (2:196; 2:263; 4:114), (Cowan, 1980, p. 509).
- Surah سورة chapter (2:23; 9:64; 10:38), (Cowan, 1980, p. 441).
- Ma'idah مائدة "a dining" table ( 5:112; 5:114) , (Cowan, 1980, p. 933).
- Sakinah سكينة tranquility (2:248; 48:4; 48:18), (Cowan, 1980, p. 418).
- Tahara طهارة purity, (Cowan, 1980, p. 570), (not mentioned in the Nobel Qur'an but in Hadeeths books like Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim as in this Hadeeth in Sahih Muslim, Book 3, Hadeeth 2:

حَدَّثَنَا سَعِيدُ بْنُ مَنْصُورٍ، وَقَتَيْبَةُ بْنُ سَعِيدٍ، وَأَبُو كَامِلٍ الْجَحْدَرِيُّ - وَاللَّفْظُ لِسَعِيدٍ -  
 قَالُوا حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو عَوَانَةَ، عَنْ سِمَاكِ بْنِ حَرْبٍ، عَنْ مُصْعَبِ بْنِ سَعْدٍ، قَالَ دَخَلَ  
 عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ عُمَرَ عَلَى ابْنِ عَامِرٍ يَعُودُهُ وَهُوَ مَرِيضٌ فَقَالَ أَلَا تَدْعُو اللَّهَ لِي يَا ابْنَ  
 عُمَرَ . قَالَ إِنِّي سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ يَقُولُ " لَا تُقْبَلُ صَلَاةٌ بِغَيْرِ طَهْوَرٍ وَلَا  
 صَدَقَةٌ مِنْ غُلُولٍ " . وَكُنْتُ عَلَى الْبَصْرَةِ . (2 /3)

Mus'ab b. Sa'd reported: 'Abdullah son of Umar

came to Ibn'Amir in order to inquire after his health as he was ailing. He said Ibn'Umar, why don't you pray to Allah for me? He said: I heard of Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) say: Neither the prayer is accepted without purification nor is charity accepted out of the ill-gotten (wealth), and thou were the (governor) of Basra. (Sahih Muslim,

Translated by: Abd-al-Hamid Siddiqui, 2000 ).

- Kanisah كنيسه / صومعة Church, Kinneset, monk's cell, hermitage (22:40), (mentioned in the Nobel Qur'an in the plural form صوامع), (Cowan, 1980, p. 525).
- **Christian Abyssinian (Ethiopic):**
- Mirhab محراب a prayer niche (3:37; 3:39; 19: 11), (Cowan, 1980, p. 166).
- Minbar منبر pulpit, (Cowan, 1980, p. 939). (not mentioned in the Nobel Qur'an but in Hadeeths books like Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim as in this Hadeeth in Sahih Muslim, Book 54, Hadeeth 1861:

وَعَنْ أَبِي زَيْدٍ عَمْرُو بْنِ أَحْطَبِ الْأَنْصَارِيِّ قَالَ: صَلَّى بِنَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ الْفَجْرَ، وَصَعِدَ الْمِنْبَرَ، فَخَطَبَنَا حَتَّى حَضَرَتِ الظُّهُرُ، فَنَزَلَ فَصَلَّى. ثُمَّ صَعِدَ الْمِنْبَرَ حَتَّى حَضَرَتِ الْعَصْرُ، ثُمَّ نَزَلَ فَصَلَّى، ثُمَّ صَعِدَ الْمِنْبَرَ حَتَّى غَرَبَتِ الشَّمْسُ، فَأَخْبَرْنَا مَا كَانَ وَمَا هُوَ كَائِنٌ، فَأَعْلَمْنَا أَحْفَظْنَا. رواه مُسْلِمٌ (1861/54)

Abu Zaid (viz. Amr b. Akhtab) reported: Allah's

Messenger (may peace be upon him) led us in the dawn prayer and then mounted the pulpit and addressed us until it was (time for the) noon prayer. He then came down the pulpit and observed prayer and then again mounted the pulpit and again addressed us until it was time for the 'Asr prayer. He then again came down and observed the prayer and again mounted the pulpit and addressed us until the sun was set and he informed (about) everything (pertaining to turmoil) that lay hidden in the past and what lies in (the womb) of) the future and the most learned amongst us is one who remembers them well. (Sahih Muslim, Translated by: Abd-al-Hamid

Siddiqui, 2000).

- Burhan برهان proof (2:111; 4:174; 12:24), (Cowan, 1980, p. 418).
- Hawariyoun الحواريون Jesus' disciples (3:52; 5:112; 61:14), (Cowan, 1980, p. 212).
- **Greek:**
- Kharaj الخراج Land Tax, wage. Recompense (23:72), (Cowan, 1980, p. 233).
- Dinar دينار dinar (monetary unit) (3:75), (Cowan, 1980, p. 306).

The foreign elements of this vocabulary are three kinds (Jeffery, 2007, p. 10). Firstly, words which are entirely non-Arabic (such as zanjabī:l زنجبيل [Ginger], Firdous فردوس [Paradise], Istabraq إستبرق [brocade] etc.) have no Arabic roots because their sources are foreign. Secondly, Semitic words whose trilateral roots are found in Arabic but are used in the Glorious Qur'an in another language's sense such as fater فاطر which means the creator in the Qur'an while its root /fatarā/ means to break in Arabic. Thirdly, other words are commonly used in the Arabic language but the Qur'an has used them semantically in another language's sense. For instance, the word nu:ر نور, meaning light, is a common Arabic word but is used in the Qur'an to mean religion under the influence of the Syriac language use as in the Aya (verse):

"يُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ، وَيَأْبَى اللَّهُ إِلَّا أَنْ يُتِمَّ نُورَهُ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ" (9:32)

[They (the disbelievers) want to extinguish Allah's Light (with which Muhammad PBUH has been sent – Islamic Monotheism) with their mouths, but Allah will not allow except that His Light should be perfected even though the Kafirun (disbelievers) hate (it).] (The Noble Qur'an (9:32), King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, 2006).

Moreover, the presence of some foreign vocabulary which describes articles of luxury, precious items, and generally speaking, civilization shows the limitless images of the Qur'anic discourse. For instance, the words *sundus* سندس [sarcenet], *istabraq* إستبرق [brocade], *suradiq* سُرادق [pavilions], *misk* مسك [musk], *yaqu:t* ياقوت [sapphire], *marjan* مرجان [corals], *abari:q* أباريق [pitchers], *namariq* نامارق [cushions], *akwab* أكواب [drinking glasses], *bata' inuha* بطانتها [lining of a cushion], and *zanjabī:l* زنجبيل [Ginger] all indicate luxury and civilized life which should not be available at that time when Arabs generally led a hard life in deserts where they naturally do not have words belonging to the higher stages of civilization to which the Glorious Qur'an refers (Jeffery, 2007, p. 11).

As a conclusion, the foreign vocabulary which has become Arabicized even in pre-Islamic era suggests that there should have been changes in the language (Stetkevych, 1970, p. 95).

Thus, these foreign words had already been integrated into the Arabic language and were accepted as part of pure literary Arabic. In general, words of foreign origins, when adopted by the literate of a language, become part of that language.

Table 1: Foreign vocabulary of the Glorious Qur'an

Letter أ	أباريق، أبا، ابلي، اخلد، إنجيل، أرائك، أزر، استبرق، أسفار، إصري، أكواب، اليم، أسباط، أبابيل، إبليس، أن، أواه، أواب، أوبي، ابراهيم، اسماعيل، اسرائيل
Letter ب	بطانتها، بعير، برزخ، بيع، برهان
Letter ت	تنبيراً، تابوت، من تحتها، تنور
Letter ج	جبريل، الجبت، جهنم، جناح
Letter ح	حصب، حطة، حوبا، حواريون، حرام
Letter خ	الخراج، خندق
Letter د	درست، دينار، دُرِّي، داوود
Letter ر	راعنا، ربانيون، ربيون، الرس، رمزا، رهوا، الروم، الرقيم
Letter ز	زنجبيل
Letter س	سُجْدًا، السجل، سجّيل، سجين، سراق، سُرَى، سَفَرَة، سقر، سكر، سلسبيل، سنا، سندس، سنين، سينا، سكينه، سليمان، سرياً
Letter ش	شطر، شيطان
Letter ص	الصراط، صرهن، صدقة
Letter ط	طه، طاغوت، طفقاً، طوبى، طور، طوى، طهارة
Letter ع	عَبَدْتُ، عدن، عمران، عيسى
Letter غ	غساق، غيض
Letter ف	الفرديوس، فوم
Letter ق	قراطيس، قسط، قسطاس، قس، قطناً، قفل، قمل، قنطار، قسورة
Letter ك	كافور، كفر، كفلين، كورث، كنز
Letter ل	لينة
Letter م	مُتْكَأ، مجوس، مرجان، مرقوم، مزجاة، مسك، مشكاة، مقاليد، ملكوت، مناص، منسأته، منفطر، المهل، مائدة، محراب، منبر
Letter ن	ناشئة، نوح، نمارق
Letter هـ	هُدْنَا، هُونًا، هيت لك
Letter و	وزر، وراءهم (أمامهم)، وردة
Letter ي	ياقوت، يحور، يس، يصهر، يم، اليهود

(As- Suyūṭī & Abū-Sikkīn, 1980, p.65-158)

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