TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

V. Rozov

St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg, Russia
E–mail: v.rozov@spbu.ru

REVISION OF INTERNAL STRUCTURE AND ORDERING OF THE QUR'ĀNIC *SŪRA*S 105 *AL–FĪL* AND 106 *QURAYSH*: STRUCTURAL AND RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

Abstract. The article analyses two *sura*s of the Qur'an (Q. 105 and Q. 106) within the scope of the hypothesis that they initially constituted a textual unity. This assumption was presented by some reports of early Muslim traditions. Several modern researchers also mentioned the thematic coherence of these two *sura*s. Structural analysis of the rhyming endings in both *sura*s and distribution of their thematic units give new insights about supposed previous initial composition of the text. Rhetorical side of the revelation was also analysed according to the concept of emotional plots. These new arguments reinforce the idea that Q. 105 and Q. 106 were revealed as one distinctive piece of the Qur'anic text.

Keywords: Qur'an, Qur'anic chronology, rhyme, structural analysis, rhetoric, *sura al–Fil*, *sura Quraysh*

The certain details concerning the composition of the Qur'ānic codex is a debatable question, both within the modern researches and the Muslim tradition. Number of verses (*āya*s) in its chapters (*sūra*s), as well as the names and ordering of the latters — all of these have been a subject of intensive contemplations for the medieval Muslims of different communities and schools. This rises an enormously knotted and complicated question of the history and principles of the Qur'ānic composition, the process that included collection, fixation, redaction and consequent canonization of the texts. Without pretending to resolve all the disputable matters related to the chronology of Q. 105 (*al–Fīl*) and Q. 106 (*Quraysh*), the article would propose new arguments for a review of compositional structure of both the *sūra*s, supporting the idea about their initial revelation as one piece of the text.

These two *sūra*s have been the object of discussion since the earliest stages of Islamic thought dedicated to the formal and contextual analysis of the Qur'ān. For example, al–Ṣuyūṭī wrote in his *Tanāsuq al–durar fī tanāsub al–suwar* that these two *sūra*s were strongly connected because the final words of Q. 105 are continued with the initial words of the subsequent Q. 106. He stated that these two *sūra*s constituted the unity in the codex of Ubayy, being counted as one *sūra* [1]. Al-Ṣuyūṭī also mentioned this tradition in his *al–Itqān fī 'ulūm al–Qur'ān* appealing to the authority of al–Kirmānī [2]. Ibn al–Zubayr, who dedicated the book to the order of *sūra*s, stood at the same position, claiming that these two *sūra*s initially were one *sūra*. His evidence was almost the same: Q. 106 starts in the codex of Ubayy without basmala, the usual component that marks beginning of a *sūra*, so its first words could be perceived as the continuation of the last *āya*s of Q. 105. Moreover, he wrote that Ubayy b. Ka'b when he stood on the prayer, recited these two *sūra*s as the whole one [3].

Modern Islamic scholars tend to agree with these Muslim authorities or at least mention as a widely shared opinion that Q. 105 and Q. 106 are related to each other and united with their main idea — God's mercy upon the tribe of Quraysh. For example, Shaykh Muḥammad al–Ghazālī points that "some commentators view this *sūra* as complementary to, or a continuation of, *sūra al–Fīl* which precedes it" [4]. The same account is provided by Muḥammad al–Ṭāhir b. 'Āshūr in his *Tafsīr al–taḥrīr wa–l–tanwīr*. He also puts forward the ordering of the *sūra*s in the codex of Ubayy and absence of basmala as points supporting the idea of original unity of the two *sūra*s [5]. Muḥammad Sayyid Ṭanṭāwī claims that these

two *sūra*s are dedicated to the same subject that is God's benefactions towards Quray*sh*. The first *sūra* describes the highest help that was provided to the tribe in case of military danger (the expedition of Abraha) and their position as keepers of the Ka'aba shrine; and the subsequent one depicts the benefits of the Quray*sh* from their seasonal trade routes [6].

Some western scholars do not hesitate to support the idea about close relation between these two *sūra*s. For example U. Rubin, who dedicated one of his articles specifically to the re–examination of the Islamic traditional (e. g. based on *tafsīr*) treatise of Q. 106, mentions that

> it is significant that when the *sūra*s of the Qur'ān were arranged, *sūra* CVI was placed immediately after *sūra* al-Fīl, which deals with the defeat of Abraha.

Nevertheless, later he states that although the position of Q. 106 could give a clue to its original purport, it "seems to have originally been an independent" [7]. Worth mentioning that N. Sinai stated that these two *sūra*s have a common trait:

> *sūra*s such as Q. 105 and Q. 106 give the impression of belonging to a stage preliminary to (1) [the first group of *sūra*s, described by N. Sinai, that are relatively short, and dedicated mainly to the Last Judgment], where these latter's eschatological concerns had not yet surfaced [8].

According to the statements mentioned above, Q. 105 and Q. 106 seem to be so closely related, both in terms of their topic and place in the Qur'ānic codex, that it would not be unlikely that they initially were one *sūra*. This opinion is supported by the early tradition based on authority of the codex of Ubayy b. Ka'b.

To shed an additional portion of light on this issue the query had to go beyond the limits of what the Islamic tradition says about these *sūra*s and the ideas prevail in their texts. In other words, not contextual or content–related but structural analysis is required. Internal structure of the *sūra*s could give a clue about their relation to each other as well as their place in the Qur'ān. In this article N. Sinai's approach towards structural analysis of *sūra*s in the light of their chronology [9] is combined with the method based on inquiry into rhyme and rhythmical patterns of *āya*s. The main assumption that lays behind the latter is that thorough analysis of rhyming endings and length of the lines could give a clue to the initial organization of the Qur'ānic text in this case as the poetical composition of the Qur'ān is structured by the rhyme endings of the *āya*s. A. Neuwirth, whose method is also widely adopted in this article, has demonstrated that a common rhyme pattern regularly unites semantically determined verse groups in Meccan *sūra*s as a remarkable unity [10]. The emotion analysis of *sūra*s, based on the concept of "emotional plots" elaborated in K. Bauer's illuminating article [11], could also be adopted for the purposes of this research.

Let us examine endings of verses in Q. 106. This early Meccan *sūra*, according to the common treatise, consists of four *āya*s; the last one is the longest [12]:

(1) *li–īlāfi quraysh*
(2) *īlāfi–him riḥlata al–shitā'i wa–l–ṣayf*
(3) *fa–l–ya'budū rabba al–bayt*
(4) *alladhī aṭ'ama–hum min jaw'in wa–āmana–hum min khawf*

(1) For the accustomed security of the Quray*sh* —
(2) Their accustomed security [in] the caravan of winter and summer —
(3) Let them worship the Lord of this House,
(4) Who has fed them, [saving them] from hunger and made them safe, [saving them] from fear.

D. J. Stewart his article dedicated to the *saj'* in the Qur'ān mentioned that this *sūra* has no rhyme [13]; however, this statement is to be revised. I. Krachkovsky in his notes and commentaries to the translation of the Qur'ān points that the rhyme of this *sūra* is a sort of assonance that breaks after the ending of the third *āya* (after the word *al–bayt*) [14]. This assonance is based on the presence of the component *–ay–* in their final words (in Arabic studies the term "diphthong" is traditionally applied for such a combination): *quraysh — ṣayf — bayt*. However, the final verse of the *sūra* stands out from the general row not only by the fact that the rhyme is interrupted on it, but also by its size, for it is noticeably longer than the rest of the verses. Two fragments can be distinguished in the *āya*, with characteristic syntactic parallelism is clearly visible in them: *alladhī aṭ'ama–hum min jaw'* and *wa–āmana–hum min khawf*, and each of them ends with a word containing the component *–aw–*, which also creates a rhyme. This allows, with a certain degree of caution, to assume that these two fragments could initially be considered as separate verses. These initial fragment were united, firstly, by the syntactic parallelism characteristic of the Meccan *sūra*s and, secondly, by a common rhyme in *–aw–*. Even if this statement is questioned, one cannot but agree that the final words of the verses of the *sūra* are united not only by the rhyme *–ay– / –aw–*, but also by the unity of the CawC / CayC model of their final words (where C stands for consonants). The alternation *–ay– / –aw–* seems to correlate with another alternation *–ī– / –ū–*, which was considered acceptable poetic liberty within the framework of the traditional Arab approach to rhyme. These two combinations rhyme regularly in the Qur'ān [15].

This assumption is supported by the semantic analysis of the *āya*s. The last fragment of the *sūra* (which is considered as consisting of two, not one, *āya*s) bears the idea of God's mercy upon the tribe of Quray*sh* while Q. 106:3 urges them to price God by their worship. It is an "invitation to worship with a hymnal justification," according to classification of A. Neuwirth [16]. This invitation consists of two parts — immediate appeal towards the tribe ("Let them worship the Lord of this House") in Q. 106:3 and listing of things for which the Quray*sh* should be grateful for the God. Those things are deliverance from hunger and rescuing from fear. The latter is understood by some commentators in connection with the previous *sūra*, "The Elephant", as mili-

tary danger from Ethiopian expedition [17]. This is Q. 106:4 in traditional structuring of *āya*s that in the light of the new approach could be treated as two separate verses ("Who has fed them, [saving them] from hunger // and made them safe, [saving them] from fear"). Thus, the formal composition of the *sūra* reflects meaning and ideas of its *āya*s. Moreover, in this case the length of *āya*s varying from two to four phonetic (and graphic) words seems to be more consistent and coherent to the characteristic features of the early Meccan *sūra*s. This feature, among other artistic devices, makes this chronological layer of the Qur'ānic text extremely intense in emotional effects. Supposed internal composition of Q. 106 appears to be as follows (here and elsewhere asterisk* is for supposed readings and re–compositions of the Qur'ānic passages):

> (1) *li–īlāfi quraysh*
> (2) *īlāfi–him riḥlata al–shitā'i wa–l–ṣayf*
> (3) *fa–l–ya'budū rabba al–bayt*
> (4) *alladhī aṭ'ama–hum min jaw'*
> (5) *wa–āmana–hum min khawf**

> (1) For the accustomed security of the Quraysh —
> (2) Their accustomed security [in] the caravan of winter and summer —
> (3) Let them worship the Lord of this House,
> (4) Who has fed them, [saving them] from hunger
> (5) And made them safe, [saving them] from fear*.

N. Sinai, who offered the method of studying the chronology of the Qur'ān based on analysis of *āya*s' length and similarity of the groups, formed by the common rhyme in *āya*s and their studies, mentioned

that Q. 105 and Q. 106 "do show some remarkable signs of discontinuity with other early Meccan *sūra*s" [18]. Being focused on the local Meccan issues, they do not describe the Meccans as pagans or "unbelievers", "the two texts under discussion chronologically precede all other Qur'ānic recitations" [19]. Thus, these two *sūra*s could be viewed aside from other Meccan *sūra*s and that makes assumed thematic and stylistic divergences (actual or assumed) of this part of the Qur'ān more plausible.

If we try to examine both *sūra*s, Q. 105 and Q. 106, one could see that they are closely related on the level of meaning. For this purpose, the method of the meaning clusters by A. Neuwirth is applied. A meaning cluster is a small group of *āya*s that bears one distinct idea. A. Neuwirth proposed that Q. 105 has three meaning clusters. The first *āya* draws the attention to the "companions of the elephant" (*aṣḥāb al–fīl*); the three subsequent Q. 105:2—4 describe the punishment from the God and Q. 105:5 tells about the disastrous outcome of the divine punishment. Thus the structure of this *sūra* looks as a combination of clusters with different number of *āya*s (1 + 3 + 1). As for Q. 106, it has, according to A. Neuwirth, two clusters: the first two *āya*s (1—2) are the address towards the tribe of Quraysh, and the last two (3—4) contain the invitation to worship that sounds like a hymn [20]. When we apply A. Neuwirth's method to the analysis of internal composition of the two *sūra*s given as a whole (with the supposed re–combination of the division on *āya*s in the latter), we would see that the meaning clusters of the *sūra*s would differ from the structure, proposed by her (1 + 3 + 1 and 2 + 2). The new composition of the *soar*s would rather look like as follows:

Table 1

Number of *Āya*s	*Āya*s	Thematic Clusters
	*Āya*s of the *Sūra al–Fīl* (105)	
1	1	directing attention to Abraha's army
3	2—4	their punishment by Allāh (rhetorical question)
1	5	results of the punishment
	*Āya*s of the *Sūra Quraysh* (106)	
2	1—2	address to the Quraysh
1	3	urging them to praise the God
2	4—5*	naming the God's mercies upon them

Proposed meaning clusters of Q. 105 and Q. 106 given as a textual unity.

As one could see, in this division *āya*s of the *sūra*s are divided in alternating clusters of one and two or three *āya*s. This internal rhythm of interchanging short and longer clusters builds the internal dramaturgy and unity of the text. These clusters are united with the common story, told in them. It is focused, as was mentioned above, on the relations between the tribe of Quraysh and the God, who protected them against enemies and favored them with benefits. The rhyme of the verses changes when the narration is switched from the previous mercy of the God towards the tribe of Quraysh to the exhortation urging them to praise Him. If we follow this assumption, the reconstructed text that later constituted these two *sūra*s appeared to be as follows:

> (1) *a–lam tarā kayfa fa'ala rabbu–ka bi–aṣḥābi al–fīl*
> (2) *a–lam yaj'al kayda–hum fī taḍlīl*
> (3) *wa–arsala 'alay–him ṭayran abābīl*
> (4) *tarmī–him bi hijārin min sijjīl*
> (5) *fa ja'ala–hum ka–'asfin ma'kul*
> (6) *li–īlāfi quraysh*
> (7) *īlāfi–him riḥlata al–shitā'i wa–l–ṣayf*
> (8) *fa–l–ya'budū rabba al–bayt*
> (9) *alladhī aṭ'ama–hum min jaw'*
> (10) *wa–āmana–hum min khawf**

> (1) Have you not considered, [O Muḥammad], how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?
> (2) Did He not make their plan into misguidance?

(3) And He sent against them birds in flocks,

(4) Striking them with stones of hard clay,

(5) And He made them like eaten straw

(6) For the accustomed security of the Quraysh —

(7) Their accustomed security [in] the caravan of winter and summer —

(8) Let them worship the Lord of this House,

(9) Who has fed them, [saving them] from hunger

(10) And made them safe, [saving them] from fear*.

When it comes the rhetoric side of this text, the search for its emotional plot is extremely illustrative in terms of its unity and suggestive power. Emotional plot is the specific series of expressions that transform mental state of the listener. It is some kind of the arc of feelings produced by different types of address in the Qur'ān, for example promise–and–threat passages, exhortations, and stories [21]. The most interesting for us is so–called promise–and–threat kind of emotional plot. K. Bauer described the promise–and–threat plot using the case of three *sūra*s — Q. 12 (*Yūsuf*), Q. 103 (*al–ʿAṣr*) and Q. 91 (*al–Shams*). She described their main ideas in this way:

> The first invites sympathy with a recognizable character undergoing human suffering, the second puts the listener on guard with threats and promises about their own potential fate, and the third puts the believers' triumph into historical perspective, casting it as an eternal fight between good and evil [22].

If we look at the text of Q. 105 and Q. 106 from the point of emotional analysis, we will make an interesting observation. The first part of the text tells the story of the defeat that befell their enemies by the God's will, depicting the frightful scene of His wrath. And the second part is dedicated to the God's generosity for the Qurashites and their hope on the mercy of the Al-mighty. One may notice that the two parts of the emotional plot are inverted: the promise of successful trade expeditions follows the remainder of the God's anger towards "companions of the elephant" (*aṣḥāb al–fīl*). The threat and the promise passages are reversed; however, this is not something unusual for the Qur'ānic narratives. For example, Q. 98: 1—5 are the threat to the "disbelievers from the People of the Book and the polytheists" and Q. 98: 6—8 contain the promise of "Gardens of Eternity" for those who obey the God. So, the text of interest, i. e. Q. 105 and Q. 106 could be characterized as inverted promise–and–threat plot that tells the story of the first listeners of the Qur'ān themselves i. e. the tribe of Quraysh. The rhyme of the *āya*s changes with the transmission from the sermon on the God's mercy to the threat passage. The coherence of the texts on the level of its emotional plot is an additional reason to contemplate about these two *sūra*s as a unity.

The structural analysis of rhyme and thematic groups of the *āya*s gives additional clues to the idea, approved by the number of Muslim traditional scholars, that two *sūra*s — Q. 105 and Q. 106 initially constituted one text. This assumption opens way to the division of the text in thematic groups of interchangeable length that provides internal rhythm of the narration that moves to the sermon. The emotional analysis of the two *sūra*s reinforces the idea about initial unity of these two *sūra*s. Moreover, the pattern of rhyming words in Q. 105 could provide its alternative division in verses that explains its poetic and rhetoric features better than the traditional count of the *āya*s. This finding may contribute studies in the history of the codification of the Qur'ānic text by re–evaluating the testimonies about alternative codices of the Qur'ān. It also could be helpful in comparative analysis of emotional structure of the Qur'ānic narratives and sermons as well as in an investigation of suggestive techniques of sacred texts.

N o t e s

1. Frolov, 2014: 218.

2. al–Ṣuyūṭī, 2006: 843.

3. Ibn Zubayr, 1990: 377.

4. al–Ghazālī, 2000: 756.

5. Ibn ʿĀshūr, 1984: 553.

6. Ṭanṭāwī, 1991: 2202.

7. Rubin, 1984: 177.

8. Sinai, 2010: 413.

9. *Ibid*.

10. Neuwirth, 2007.

11. Bauer, 2017.

12. Translation of the Qur'ān is given according the Ṣaḥīḥ International translation.

13. Stewart, 1990: 108.

14. Krachkovsky, 1990: 653.

15. Stewart, 2004: 478.

16. Neuwirth, 2007: 234.

17. Frolov, 2014: 231.

18. Sinai, 2010: 427.

19. *Ibid.*: 428.

20. Neuwrith, 2007: 234.

21. Bauer, 2017: 17.

22. *Ibid.*: 18.

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