

Ships that sail and other Divine signs; an analysis and contextualization of Surah 31:29-31

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Abstract

Chapter 31 of the Qur'an, known as Surah Luqman, verse 31 states: 'Do not you see that the ships sail in the sea by the favour of Allah that He may show you of His signs'?. The addressee is alerted to a common phenomenon to which a theological explanation is then given. Additional to this immediate context, the expression, 'ships sail in the sea', may be framed in various ways.

Preceding verse 31 attention is drawn to another phenomenon (29-30), dawn and twilight, accompanied by a more elaborate explanation, calling the listener and reader to recognise the Oneness of God. Following verse 31, a storm at sea and shipwreck are described (32), after which is a strong comment on the response of those who survived in relation to their attitude to God, Who rescued them from disaster.

These three occurrences link to one another and to verses adjacent to them in various ways, depending (inter alia) on how the 34 verses of the Surah are divided.

The contextual scope may be further enlarged by juxtaposing the event of ships sailing as well as each of the other two occurrences with similar statements in the rest of the Qur'an. Parallels resembling the three phenomena are also to be found in the Old Testament, although the mentioning of a ship sailing as an amazing event features only once.

Immediate and wider contexts multiply the perspectives within which ships that sail may be viewed, but also bring to question the function of context in hermeneutics.

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1. Introduction

In this paper, attention will be given to the analysis and contextualisation of a Qur'anic verse directing attention to a common phenomenon which is typified as a 'sign' of Allah. The focus will be on Surah 31:31, featuring 'ships sailing', as

well as adjacent verses respectively referring to sunset (31:29-30) and the episode of shipwreck (31:32). Furthermore, their relationship to one another and to other verses in Surah Luqman will be examined. And within wider scope, parallels to the three themes in the rest of the Qur'an and in the Bible (Old Testament) will be surveyed. Ever-widening contours of context will thus be observed, leading finally to a reflection on the function of literary contextualisation in Qur'anic research.

2. Text and Classical commentary

Provided below is a transliterated version of the Qur'anic Arabic text and an English rendering^[1] of Surah 31:29-31 to which is added (as footnotes) commentaries quoted by Nasr (2015). They are Aj (Aḥmad ibn 'Ajībah, d. 1224/1809), IK (Ibn Kathīr, d. 774/1373), JJ (Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, d. 864/1459 and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, d. 911/1505), Q (Ai-Qurṭubī, d. 671/1272), Ṭ (Al-Ṭabarī, d. 310/923), Z (Al-Zamakhsharī, d. 538/1144) and Ṭb Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'i, d. 1401/1981).

Segmentation of verses has been guided by syntactic considerations. However, on a poetic level, in verse 29 parallel lines describing sunrise and sunset as well as Allah's subjecting of celestial bodies correspond in terms of end-rhyme, cf. *nahāri // laili* and *qamara // musamma[n]*. Furthermore, comments following Allah's subjecting of celestial bodies, and introduced by 'anna 'Allāha at the end of verse 29 and verse 30 have similar end-rhyme, i.e., *kabīrun, ḥaqqu, bāṭilu* and *kabīru*. In addition, lines drawing attention to, and commenting on, ships sailing in verse 31 also exhibit end-rhyme, cf. *baḥrī, 'Allāhī, 'āyāti-hī, la-'āyāti* and *ṣakūrī[n]*.

²⁹ 'a-lam tara / Do you not see

'anna 'Allāha / that Allah

yūliju 'al-laila fī 'al-nahāṭ / causes-to-enter the night into the day

wa-yūliju 'al-nahāra fī 'al-lail / and causes-to-enter the day into the night^[2]

wa-~~sak~~kara 'la- šamsa wa-'al-qamara / and has subjected the sun and the moon^[3]

kullu yajrī 'ilā 'ajali musammān / each runs for a term specified^[4]

wa-'anna 'Allāha / and that Allah

bi-mā ta'malūna*kabīrun* / with what you do [is] acquainted

³⁰ *dālika* bi-'anna 'Allāha / that^[5] [is] in that (i.e. because) Allah

huwa 'al-ḥaqqu / He [is] the Truth^[6]

wa-'anna / and that

mā yad'ūna min dūni-hi 'al-bāṭil / what they call other than Him is falsehood

wa-'anna 'Allāha / and that Allah

huwa 'al-'āliyu 'al-kabīr / He [is] the Most-high, the Grand

³¹ *'a-lam tara / Do not you see*

'anna / that

'al-fulqu tajrī fī 'al-baḥī / the ships sail in the sea

bi-ni'mati 'Allāh / by the favour of Allah

li-yurīya-kum min 'āyāti-hi / that He may show you of His signs

'inna fī dālika la-'āyāti / indeed in that surely [are] signs

li-kulli ṣabbārin ṣakūn / for everyone patient and grateful^[7]

³² *wa-'idā ḡaṣīya-hum mawjun ka-'al- ṣulali / And when waves cover them like a canopies*

da'awū 'Allāha muḥliṣīna la-hu 'allaḍīna / they supplicate Allah, [as] who [are] faithful (/sincere) to him^[8]

fa-lammā najjā-hum 'illā 'l-barri / but when He rescued them [safely] to the land (/shore)

fa-min-hum muḥṭaṣilun/then some of them [stand] aloof ([are] indecisive)^[9]

wa-mā yajḥadu bi-'ayāti-nā /but not does he reject Our signs

'illā kulluḥkattārin kufūrīn / if not anyone [extremely] treacherous^[10], ungrateful

3. Discussion of ships (that) sail (31:31), night merging into day (31:29-31) and waves like canopies (31:32)

Surah 31:31 (ships sail)

Chapter 31 of the Qur'an, known as Surah Luqman, verse 31 states: 'Do not you (singular) see that the ships sail in the sea by the favour of Allah that He may show you (plural) of His signs'.

Ships sailing is a common sight when standing at the shore of an ocean. However, in this verse the addressee, the prophet Muhammad reports that he was alerted to this feature. The focus was not on the act of physical observing; the

presumed occasion of revelation was Mecca or Medina, respectively 186 and 384, km from the Red Sea. So, by means of the question, 'Do you not see?', attention was rather drawn, as in 30 other instances in the Qur'an, to the statement to be made.

Additionally, said communication consists of two parts: a certain scenario, followed by its interpretation for humanity. In the first, there is the mental picture of boats propelled by wind blowing in their sails; in the second, a theological observation for which agreement is asked.

Ships are manufactured by man, manned and steered by sailors; nevertheless, they sail 'by the favour of Allah *bi-ni'mati 'Allāhi*) that He may show you of His signs'.

The agency and objective expressed by the extended prepositional clause can also be rendered as 'by the grace of Allah to show you [people] some of His wonders (cf. Abdel Haleem). Ships that sail are presented as a manifestation of the kindness of Allah (God), in fact, a miracle intended to convince people of the reality of His existence and Allah's involvement in what may be regarded superficially as human achievements.

The revelation moves from this observation to an interrogative, rhetorical question that invites acceptance. from the one addressed. Added to this, there is an admonition and elucidation: 'Indeed in that are signs for everyone patient and grateful (*li-kulli ṣabbārin šakūrīn*).'

Similar reminders are also expressed elsewhere in the Qur'an following both a positive (14:5) and a negative statement (34:19). In Q. 31:31 perseverance or steadfastness (Abdel Haleem) and an appreciative attitude exacted are named specifically as being required to perceive events many regard as commonplace, as signs of Allah.

Surah 31:29-30 (night merging into day)

Using the semantic primitive 'movement' as a common denominator, 'ships sail' (*ajrī*; 31:31) is paralleled in the preceding verse by a portrayal of the motion of celestial bodies resulting in the rotation of day and night. Verse 29a states

Do you not see that Allah causes-to-enter (yūliju) the night into the day^[11] and causes-to-enter (yūliju) the day into the night?

As in verse 31, a rhetorical question that is common in the Qur'an is asked of the addressee, 'Do you not see?', expecting an affirmative answer. Attention is drawn to a daily event, namely the gradual occurrence of sunrise followed by sunset. Allah asks the question ('Do you not see') while He attributes Himself as the One who brings about the event. He is the grammatical subject of the verb ('causes-to-enter'; *yūliju*) in 31:29a; this is compared to 31:31 where it is stated the ships sail through Divine agency ('by the favour of Allah'), and not by His direct command

The merging of night into day and day into night in 31:29 is followed by an extended description and a theological description. In the extended description (29b) ‘sun’ is associated with sunrise and ‘moon’ with sunset:

*And has subjected the sun and the moon,
each runs (yajrī) for a term specified (‘ilā ‘ajali musamman)*

Allah’s attribute of Authority is accentuated, because it is demonstrated through the determining of the length of day and night – an act of which no other being is capable.

Reference to Allah’s omnipotence above (29b) is then juxtaposed with the accentuation of his omniscience in a theological addendum (29c). Thus, the addressee’s attention is driven immediately from the universe to the individual:

and that (wa-’anna) Allah with what you do [is] acquainted.

In the next verse (30) Allah is twice characterised by Divine epithets (29ci and 29ciii) emphasising his Uniqueness; this is then interrupted by a warning against taking others as gods (29cii)

*That [is] in that (bi-’anna; i.e., because) Allah He [is] the Truth
and that (wa-’anna) what they call other than Him is falsehood
and that (wa-’anna) Allah He [is] the Most-high, the Grand*

Surah 31:32 (waves like canopies)

Description and exposition of ‘ships sail’ in 31:31 is supplemented by a description of a storm at sea, described in vivid simile, and its consequences.

*And when (wa-’idā) waves cover them (ḡaṣiya-hum) like a canopies (ka-’al- ḡulali)

they supplicate Allah, [as people] who [are] faithful (/sincere) to him

but when he rescued them [safely] to the land (/shore)*

then some of them [stand] aloof (/ are indecisive; muqtaṣidun)

but not does he [i.e. a person] reject (/ deny; yajḥadu) our signs

except anyone [who is] treacherous (kattārin), ungrateful (kufūrin)

Verse 32 presupposes the subject to be the ships that sail mentioned in 31, but then describes an interrupted journey. The new situation is a storm at sea, leveraging the powerful visual metaphor of ‘waves [that] cover them like a canopies (ka-’al- ḡulālī)’. ‘Them’ refers to people aboard, but implies the ships are also engulfed by waves. The sailors call upon Allah in all sincerity. However, when the people concerned and possibly their ships manage to reach the shore safely, they do not acknowledge their survival as due to Divine intervention. As a matter of fact, they take “a middling course” (Nasr 2015).

This means they do not acknowledge their rescue and being due to Him. Rather, they adopt an attitude of indecisiveness, neither confirming nor denying the Truth; to adhere to it would require their submission in Islam. Commenting on their behaviour, a general statement is made. This indecision amounts to the rejection or denial of Divine signs, as being from Allah – these include the ships sailing, the remarkable and seamless transition of day into night and night into day, and the rescue from drowning, the direct answer to the plea of the lost – and this is conduct typical of those who are ‘treacherous, ungrateful’. We understand that this is unwanted and – since the human being is designed to worship Allah Alone – unexpected conduct. It is the opposite of ‘everyone patient and grateful’ (kullī ṣabbārin ṣakūrīn; 31:31); the latter being those who recognise the presence of Allah in everyday events.

Verse 32 (storm and survival) thus links to 31 (ships sail) in an antonymous way. Tranquillity (31) is juxtaposed with commotion (32), and in parallel to this, a religiously positive attitude (31) in submission to and worship of Allah, with an ungrateful, indecisive experience of the Creator belied by a lack of acknowledgement of His Authority in all affairs, and the requirement to express gratitude and awe in the proper way required by Islam.

4. Segmentation of Surah Luqman (Q. 31:1-34)

Surah 31 is titled Luqman, with reference to a wise person, introduced in 31:12, whose council to his son is cited in 31:13-19. Jeanne Malaik Bollen suggests a tripartite division of this Surah (1-11, 12-19 and 20-34) with subsections, each exacting belief in Allah alone, but in various ways.

Haleem ([2004] 2015) presents a comparative division as that of Bollen, expressed in terms of paragraphs in his translation.

Traditionally, according to indications in the Egyptian version of the Qur’anic text, Surah Luqman should be divided into parts 1-11, 12-19, 20-30 and 31-34.

The above three verses, Q. 31:29 (night merging into day) as well as Q. 31:31 (ships sailing) and Q. 31:32 (waves like canopies), lie within the same segment according to Bollen and Abdel Haleem namely Q. 31:29-32. In terms of the traditional division, Q. 31:29 is part of segment 20-30, and Q. 31:31 as well as 32 of segment 31-34.

According to the latter, a line of demarcation is drawn; with the description of sunrise on the one side, and ships sailing and shipwreck on the other. There is merit in the partition according to the traditional division in terms of which sunrise (31:29-30) is the last verse of the section (31:20-30), emphasising the role of Allah as Lord of the creation. However, as argued above, ships sailing may be convincingly linked to the previous theme (sunrise) and the following theme (storm at sea).

5. Qur'anic parallels

Topics mentioned in 31:29, 31 and 32 are also alluded to in various other verses in the Qur'an.

Q. 31:29 (night merging into day) is duplicated in Q. 35:13, and paralleled by Q. 39:5,

*'He [Allah] created the heavens and the earth in truth. He wraps (/ rolls up) **the night** over the day and wraps **the day** over the night and he has subjected the sun and the moon each running [its course] for a specific term.'*

The contents of **Q. 31:31 (ships sailing)** are repeated in various ways in other verses.

Closely related with regards to verses underlining Allah's agency are:

*Q. 22:65 (cf. Q.35:13), 'Do you not see that Allah has subjected to you whatever is on the earth and **the ships** (wa-al-fulka) which run (tajri) through the sea by his command?'*

*Q. 17:66, 'It is your Lord who drives (yuzji) **the ship** for you through the sea that you may seek His bounty. Indeed, He is ever for you, Merciful.'*

While sailing, ships depicted as possessions or signs of Allah create a more formidable impression of His Authority and Ownership over His dominion:

Q. 55:24

And to Him belong the **ships** (*al-jawāri < jawārin, pl. of jāriya*) [with sails] elevated (*al-munša'ātu, IV participle passive*) in the sea like mountains.

Q. 42:32

And of His signs are the **ships** (*al-jawāri*) in the sea like mountains (*ka-al-'alāmi, pl. of 'alam: signpost*)

Some verses allude to ships as vehicles to transport products, which are the 'bounty of Allah'^[12]:

Q. 45:12, 'It is Allah who subjected (*ṣakkara*) to you the sea so that **ships** may sail upon it by His command and that you may seek of his bounty (*min faḍli-hi*); and perhaps you will be grateful.'

Q. 16:14, 'And you see the **ships** (*al-fulka*) ploughing through it (*mawākira* [pl. of *mākir*] *fī-hi*) and He subjected it that you may seek of its bounty; and perhaps you will be grateful.'

Ships sailing are also associated with other material blessings ascribed to Allah:

Q. 30:46, 'And of his signs is that He sends (*an tursila*) the winds as bringers of good tidings (*nubašširātin*) and to let you taste his mercy [i.e. the rain] and so the **ships** may sail (*li-tarjyal al-fulku*) at his command and so you may seek (*wa-li-tabtaḡū*) of his bounty (*min faḍli-hi*), and perhaps (*la-'alla-kum*) you will be grateful (*taškurūna*).'

Q. 14:32, '[It is] Allah who created the heavens and the earth and sent down rain from the sky and produced thereby (*wa-akraja bi-hi*) some fruits as provision for you and subjected for you the **ships** (*al-fulka*) to sail (*li-tajriya*) through the sea by His command and subjected for you the rivers (*al-anhāra*).'

Q. 16:14, 'And it is He who subjected the sea for you to eat from its tender meat and to extract from its ornaments which you wear. And you see the **ships** ploughing (*mawākira* [participle pl. of *mākir*]) through it, and [He subjected them] that you may seek of his bounty and perhaps you will be grateful.'

Verses corresponding to **Q. 31:32 (waves like canopies)** are:

Q. 29:65, 'And when they board (*akibū*) a **ship**, they supplicate Allah, sincere to Him in religion. But when He

delivers them to the land, at once they associate others with Allah (yušrikūna).'

*Q. 10:22-23:²² It is He who enables you to travel [/sets you in motion / steers you] (ʔusayyiru-kum) on land and sea until when you are in **ships** and they sail (wa-jaraina) with them by a good wind and they rejoice (wa-fariḥū) therein, there comes (jā'at-hā) a storm wind (rīḥun 'āšifun) and the waves (al-mawju) come upon them everywhere and they assume (wa-ẓannū) that they are surrounded (literally: it is surrounded by them) [i.e. doomed] (uḥiṭa [ḥ-w-ṭ pf passive] bi-hum) supplicating (da 'ū) Allah sincere to Him in religion (mukliṣīna), 'If You should save us (anjaita-nā) from this, we will surely be among the thankful (nin šākirīna)'.²³ But when He saves them, at once (idā hum) they commit injustice (yabgūna [b-g-y]) upon the earth without right (bi- ġairi al-ḥaqqi). O mankind your injustice is only against yourselves, [being merely] the enjoyment of earthly life. Then to us is your return, and We will inform you of what you used to do.'*

6. Biblical parallels

Themes expressed by Q. 31:29, 31 and 32 have counterparts in Biblical literature

Q. 31:29 (night merging into day) is paralleled by Biblical verses referring to light and darkness or day and night.

Isaiah 45:7¹³:

*I [the Lord] form (yōṣēr) the **light** and create (ū-bōrē') the **darkness** (ḥōšek),*

I bring (ōśeh) prosperity (šālōm) and create (ū-bōrē') disaster (rā');

I, the Lord, do (ōśeh) all these things.

*Cf. Psalm 74:16, 'The **day** is Yours (or: for you; lě-kā), and Yours also the **night**;*

You established (hakīnōtā) the sun and the moon.'

Other Biblical verses associated with Q. 31:29 (night merging into day) combine day and night or sun and moon with the mentioning of waves:

Amos 5:8^[14]:

He who made the Pleiades and Orion,

who turns (wě-hōpēk) blackness (šalmūt) into **dawn** (or: morning; la-bōqer)

and darkens (heḥšîk) day into **night**,

who calls (ha-qōrē') for the **waters** of the sea

and pours them (wa-yišpēk-ēm) over the face of the land—

the Lord is his name.

Jeremiah 31:35^[15]:

This is what the Lord says,

he who appoints (nōtēn) the **sun**

to shine (ā-ōr) by day,

statutes of (ḥuqqōt) the **moon** and the stars

to shine by night,

who stirs (rōga') up the sea

so that its **waves** (gallāw) roar (yehēmū)—

the Lord Almighty is his name.

Q. 31:31 (ships sailing) as wonderful event is matched by a single Biblical verse:

Proverbs 30:18-19^[16]:

There are three things that are too amazing (ḥiplē'ū) for me;

four that I do not understand:

the (derek) way of an eagle in the sky,

the way of a snake on a rock,

*the way of a **ship** (' ōniyyāh) on the high sea (in the heart of the sea; bē-leb yām),*
and the way of a man with a maiden bē-'almāh)

Contrary to the Qur'an, ships as trading vessels are at times associated with the arrogance of man which would be 'brought low':

Isaiah 2:12, 15-18:

The Lord Almighty has a day in store

for all the proud and lofty ...

for every lofty tower

and every fortified wall;

*for every trading **ship***

*and every stately **vessel**^[17] (šēkiyyāh).*

The arrogance of man will be brought low

and the pride of men humbled;

the Lord alone will be exulted in that day,

and the idols will totally disappear.

Q. 31:32 The simile **waves like canopies** has corresponding Biblical equivalents. In one instance the storm is described

Jonah 1:4^[18]:

*Then the Lord sent (hēṭīl, ṭ-w-l Hiph.) a great **wind** (rūaḥ gēdōlāh) on the sea, and there was (wa-yēhī) such a violent **storm** (sa'ar gādōl) that the **ship** threatened (ḥiššēbū, ḥ-š-b Pi.; be close to) to break up (lē-hiššābēr, š-b-r Niph infinite construct).*

In another example threatening shipwreck, supplications to God and reaching the harbour in safety has as an epilogue the exhortation to the sailors to thank and exult God for their rescue.

Psalm 107:23-32^[19]

*Others went out on the sea in **ships**;*

they were merchants on the mighty waters.

They saw (rā'ū) the works of the Lord,

his wonderful deeds in the deep.

For he spoke and stirred (wa-ya'amēd) up a tempest (rūaḥ sē'ārāh)

*that lifted high the **waves**.*

They mounted (ya'ālū) up to the heavens and

went down (yērēdū) to the depths (tēhōmōt);

in their peril (bē-rā'āh) their courage (napš-ām) melted away (/wavered; titmōgāg).

They reeled (yāḥōggū) and staggered like drunken men;

they were at their wits' end (/ their wisdom [ḥokmāt-ām] was confused [titballā']).

Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble (ḥa- ṣar lā-hem),

and he brought them out of their distress.

He stilled the storm to whisper (i-dēmāmāh);

the waves of the sea were hushed (wa-yehēšū).

They were glad when it grew calm,

and he guided (wa-yanḥēm) them to their desired haven.

Let them give thanks (yōdēū) to the Lord for his unfailing love (ḥasd-ō))

and his wonderful deeds for men.

Let them exult in the assembly of people (qēhal 'ām)

and praise him (*wě-niplě'ōtāw*) in the council of elders.

7. Context^[20]

Mentioning a ship or ships (*al-fulqu* is a collective noun) sailing in the sea (31:31) evokes different mental pictures. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (9th edition, 2015), the English verb 'sail' refers to a boat or ship [i.e., a large boat] travelling on water, using sails or an engine. Arguing from the perspective that the Qur'an expresses timeless truths, the exact image of the hearer or reader would not matter. Emphasis is on the seemingly automatic movement (*tajrī*) of the sailing object. However, if the reader/hearer visualises the maritime situation of early 7th century Arabia, the maritime recollections would be that of sailing boats that pass by. An everyday event observable for those close to the sea is now theologically contextualised in the Qur'an as elucidated above. The addressee is Prophet Muhammad, and through him believers individually and collectively.

This has a corresponding structure with 31:29-30, where daybreak and sunset are presented as being regulated by Allah, being Master of the universe, but also the One Who is Knowledgeable of the behaviour, thoughts, and heart of each individual person.

Thematically the regulated movement (*yajrī*, 31:29) of sun and moon corresponds with the image of ships sailing (*tajrī*, 31:31). However, the harmony between the motion of celestial bodies and human means of transport by sea, is disrupted by the portrayal of the towering waves, the storm and pending shipwreck, dampened again by the lack of thankfulness of the survivors to their Lord, as depicted by their attitude of dismissive indecision in 31:32.

Within each of the themes, merging of night into day (seen in isolation according to traditional segmentation of Surah 31), ships sailing and shipwreck, the focus is on Allah, the event and the people concerned – in that order.

Events are signs that affirm the Oneness and Greatness of Allah, demonstrating his involvement in nature, and in everyday events often ascribed to men, such as the sailing of ships, and His authorship of the miraculous. The people concerned may be ideally believers but may include those 'who call other than Him' (Q. 31:30) – that is, those who worship others besides Allah, or who take gods instead of Him – and the hypocrites who supplicate to Allah in need, while otherwise standing aloof or even rejecting His Signs (31:32).

The present reader or hearer of the Qur'anic verses, in turn, becomes part of the context depending on the way he or she experiences the contents of 31:29-32. The contents can, for example, be understood as a personal Divine directive^[21], or as informative of the source (Qur'an) informing Islamic theology.

Related to the latter, informative reading of the subject matter, are Qur'anic parallels pertaining specifically to ships sailing. Perspectives elucidated are the awe with which ships are viewed (55:24 and 42:32), and their functioning as vessels transporting merchandise (45:12 and 16:14) associated with Divine provision (30:46, 14:32 and 16:14). Together

the different portrayals create a distinctive tenor and simultaneously emphasise the importance of ships as specific examples of significance within theological reasoning.

Biblical parallels also present light and darkness as Divinely regulated (Isaiah 31:29). A storm at sea and its desirable outcome are vividly described (Psalm 107:23-32). However, Biblical images also vary from the Qur'anic presentations. Changing of night into day is juxtaposed with the roaring waves of the sea (Jeremiah 31:35), both ascribed to God. Sailing ships as a wondrous event is mentioned, but only in a single instance (Proverbs 30:18-9). Furthermore, trading ships are presented as symbols of human arrogance and thus a legitimate target of Divine retribution (Isaiah 2:12 and 15-18). Ships thus fulfil diverse functions within Biblical argumentation. The themes of sunrise, ships sailing and shipwreck depicted in the Bible also link in ways that vary with those meanings found in similar images and events in the Qur'an.

Contours provided by literary context added or applied to text, furnish an ever-widening circle that both broadens and deepens stereotypical understanding, but also perpetually invites further investigation. This may include examining the way literary contextualisation relates to theological settings in life suggested by *asbāb al-nuzul* (occasions of revelation).

Footnotes

[1] English renderings are based on translations printed in Şaḥeeḥ International. 1997. *The Qur'an, Arabic text with corresponding English meanings*. Riyadh: Abdulqasim Publishing House

[2] The passing of the night into the day and the day into the night can refer to the daily exchange of light and darkness (Aj), to seasonal variations in the length of day and night (IK, JJ) or both.

[3] That God has made the sun and the moon subservient refers to God's control over celestial bodies (IK)

[4] That each runs for a term appointed refers to their termination at the end of the world (IK, JJ).

[5] 'That' refers to all that is mentioned in the previous verse (Aj, Q, Ṭ, Z), or it can be understood to begin an emphatic statement meaning 'Witness that God, He is Truth' (Aj).

[6] God is the only reality that is necessary, while all other realities are contingent (Ṭb).

[7] Patient and thankful describe those who are steadfast in the face of affliction and thankful when in a state of ease (IK).

[8] Devoting religion entirely to Allah refers to the singularity of their devotion in the face of afflictions (Ṭ).

[9] Taking a middle course here refers to wavering away from the sincerity they had declared when they feared for their lives (Z).

[10] Treacherous or perfidious (*kattārin*) refers to one who betrays or stabs in the back or who breaks every promise made (IK). Such people deny that their good fortune is a blessing from God and do not give thanks for it (IK).

[11] Al-Hilali and Khan (1993:637) explains the occurrence as ‘the decrease in the hours of the night ... added in the hours of the day’.

[12] Rudi Paret (1962:416) explains the seeking of ‘bounty’ (translated as ‘Gunst’, i.e., favour) as being able to sail on the sea in order to accomplish their objective of eventually making profit (‘Erwerb’).

[13] The verse is part of consolation pertaining to exiles. According to Jörg Jeremias (2017:272) light and darkness may be indicative of fortune and misfortune, but in the view of Second Isaiah, all human experiences are ultimately determined by God.

[14] According to Hans Walter Wolff (1977:240-1), Amos 5:8 was possibly part of a hymn recited by people in the vicinity of Bethel but has been imbedded with a prophesy foretelling destruction of stronghold and city (verse 9) due to the prevalence of injustice (verse 7).

[15] Part of the oracle of hope. William L. Holladay (1989:199) states that the passage (Jer. 31:35-7) ‘agues from the permanence of the cosmos to the permanence of the covenant’. Verse 36 for example declares, ‘Only if these [cosmic] decrees (*ḥuqqōt*) vanish from my sight ... will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation’.

[16] In wisdom and contextual references, these verses are most similar to the genre of Surah Luqman. In the case of Proverbs 30:18-19 the reader is alerted to four features, three of them pertaining to nature in general and the fourth to human nature. Cf. William McKane 1970:657.

[17] An alternative and more literal rendering of the Hebrew text (Isaiah 2:16) would be, ‘upon all precious (/ envied) ships (pl. of *šēkiyyāh*). The noun *šēkiyyāh* is evocative of the Egyptian word *šk.tj* with a similar meaning. Cf. Hans Wildberger 1972:94). According to L.A. Snijders (1969:55) the term ‘precious’ (*ḥemdāh*) is a vague expression but alludes to the valuable cargo imported from afar (e.g., gold, cf. 1 Kings 9:28).

[18] The language used in describing the scene mentioned in Jonah 1:14 and following events reveals how little Israel was familiar with the sea and nautical context. Cf. Theodore H. Robinson 1964:121.

[19] Fourth group of thanksgiving statements; previous groups are verses 4-9, 10-16 and 17-22. Cf. Hans-Joachim Kraus 1972: 738-9

[20] Literary contexts of the chosen Qur’anic verses will be discussed. Anthony C. Thiselton (1980:17) rightly opines that meaning ‘depends upon context’. Context, on the other hand, involves the ‘two horizons’ of past and present, featuring a 7th century text as well as its interpretation in terms of modern-day hermeneutics.

[21] Anthony C. Thiselton (1992:299) refers to the ‘hermeneutics of self-involvement’ reading a given text as directive influencing behaviour. The propositional content may thus be said to have ‘illocutionary force’ (1992:42).

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