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Negated Antithesis as Reflected in the Qurʾān and in Pre-Qurʾānic Arabic Poetry

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Abstract

This article presents a comparative analysis of the negated antithesis (*ṭibāq salb*) in pre-Islamic poetry and the Qurʾān using data generated by the Rhetorical Element Identifier (REI), a computational tool capable of automatically detecting this device across both corpora. Drawing on a dataset of 1908 pre-Islamic poems and the full Qurʾānic text, the study explores how shared rhetorical patterns reflect a broader stylistic continuum between the two earliest Arabic literary traditions. While the Qurʾān employs structures attested in the poetic corpus, it frequently reconfigures them—shifting antithetical elements from verse-final to mid-verse positions, creating new syntactic configurations, and deploying the device for didactic and theological aims. The analysis also identifies thirty-three shared verbal roots that appear in comparable grammatical settings across both corpora, underscoring a common semantic foundation. By isolating a single rhetorical feature, the study highlights how the Qurʾān both inherits and reshapes earlier poetic strategies, offering fresh insight into the evolution of early Arabic rhetoric.

Keywords: *ṭibāq salb*; negated antithesis; classical Arabic rhetoric; pre-Islamic poetry; Qurʾān

1. Introduction

This article offers a comparative examination of a specific rhetorical device known as the *negated antithesis* (*ṭibāq salb*), as it occurs in pre-Islamic poetry and in the Qurʾān. This device, defined below, is analysed through data generated by the Rhetorical Element Identifier (REI) (https://arabic-rhetoric.haifa.ac.il/welcome; accessed on 26 February 2026), a web-based tool developed by Hussein and colleagues (see Abd Alhadi et al. 2023).

The REI is an auxiliary tool designed to study the evolution of rhetorical elements in Arabic poetry from the pre-Islamic period to later eras. Arabic poems are manually entered exactly as they appear in their original *dīwāns* (poetry collections), allowing the systematic study of rhetorical development in classical Arabic poetry from its earliest stages. The system supports manual annotation of rhetorical elements and statistically processes the analysed data. It automatically presents the number and percentages of rhetorical elements in individual poems, poetic passages, and collections of poems, classified by poet, period, geographical region, and thematic content. In addition, it enables statistical comparisons of rhetorical elements across different texts, while its search engines allow users to locate specific words and phrases within the system's corpus.

The REI has also been developed as an independently processed, rule-based automatic framework for the identification of twenty rhetorical elements (Abd Alhadi et al. 2023), among them cases of negated antithesis. The results obtained from this preliminary automatic framework are highly promising, achieving overall F-measures of 0.897 and 0.78

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for negated antithesis. All automatically generated data for the present article were subsequently checked and corrected manually by the author.

The REI database comprises 1908 pre-Islamic poems (22,788 verses; 214,231 words), alongside the Qurʾānic corpus of 6200 verses (77,437 words).

The broader aim of this research is to explore the rhetorical texture of the two earliest and most formative Arabic textual traditions—the Qurʾān and pre-Islamic poetry—and to shed light on the intricate relationship between them. By tracing both shared and divergent rhetorical tendencies, this study seeks to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive understanding of how the stylistic fabric of early Arabic discourse evolved and how each corpus may illuminate the other's compositional logic. This investigation, however, represents only one step toward that larger objective. The broader aim can be fully realised only through a systematic, comparative study of the entire rhetorical fabric of both corpora.

To my knowledge, the rhetorical relationship between these two corpora has been directly explored in only one prior study, that conducted by Hussein (2023), which examined a particular category of simile. Earlier scholarship has addressed connections between the Qurʾānic text, pre-Islamic poetry, and biblical material.

The question of the interrelationship between the Qurʾānic text and co- and pre-Qurʾānic poetry is far from new. It can be traced back to mediaeval Muslim scholarship. Mediaeval authors addressed this relationship primarily through the doctrine of *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* (the inimitability of the Qurʾān), which emphasised the Qurʾān's absolute uniqueness and its superiority over all other forms of Arabic expression, particularly pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry (von Grunebaum, consulted online 2024). Within this framework, poetry was rarely treated as a parallel literary tradition. Nevertheless, some mediaeval scholars made limited use of poetic material, either to elucidate obscure Qurʾānic vocabulary (e.g., Abū Zayd al-Qurashī 1981, pp. 15–30, mid-4th/10th century) or to illustrate rhetorical figures and grammatical phenomena shared by poetry and the Qurʾān (ibid., pp. 12–15).

Modern scholarship has revisited this interrelationship only partially and often with similar methodological caution. While a number of influential studies have explored semantic, conceptual or thematic continuities, the rhetorical dimension of the relationship between the two corpora has received comparatively little sustained attention. Early on, Joseph Horovitz examined Qurʾānic vocabulary through the lens of pre-Islamic poetry and analysed poetic references to persons and tribes mentioned in the Qurʾān (Horovitz [1926] 2013). Izutsu traced the transformation of pre-Islamic ethical concepts into Qurʾānic moral discourse (Izutsu [1966] 2002), a line of inquiry later extended by Nadia Jamil's study of pre-Islamic Arabian ethics (Jamil 2017).

Bauer (2010) criticised Qurʾānic studies for insufficiently situating the Qurʾān within the broader literary culture of early Arabic poetry, calling for systematic investigation of lexicographical, grammatical, stylistic and even "negative intertextual" parallels—instances in which the Qurʾān deliberately distances itself from poetry in order to assert its prophetic authority. Tamer (2011) examined the concept of *dahr* ("time" or "fate") across poetry and the Qurʾān, while Sinai (2011, 2019) compared narratives and theological concepts—such as the Thamūd story and the conception of God—to reconstruct aspects of pre-Qurʾānic religious thought.

Other comparative studies have focused on specific narratives or motifs shared by the two corpora. El Masri (2013) reconstructed the history of the Maʾrib dam and associated migration traditions through poetry and **Q34**:15–21, while Stetkevych (2017) compared portrayals of Solomon in poetry and in **Q27** and **Q38**. Neuwirth (2014; 2016, [repr. in Alshaar 2017, pp. 61–92]; 2019) analysed Qurʾānic reworkings of poetic themes such as the *aṭlāl* (abandoned campsite) and the *ʿādhila* (the reproachful voice). El Masri (2015,

2016, 2017, 2020) likewise examined the *aṭlāl* motif and concepts such as *al-ākhira* ("the Last Day"), demonstrating how poetic imagery was resemanticised within a Qurʾānic theological framework. Finally, Loynes (2021) investigated the semantics of the roots *n-z-l* and *w-ḥ-y*, showing how *waḥy* shifted from a poetic notion of fleeting or indirect communication to the Qurʾānic concept of exclusive divine revelation.

Contemporary scholarship has shown considerably greater interest in another dimension of this interrelationship, namely, the connections between the Qurʾān and biblically based literature. The identification of biblical allusions and narrative parallels in the Qurʾān has prompted renewed interpretations of a number of suras, particularly those commonly associated with specific biographical or situational contexts in the life of the Prophet Muḥammad (see, for example, Neuwirth 2016; Sinai 2017). Owing to the close affinity between the religious content of the two corpora, biblical materials—far more extensively studied than the poetic tradition—have been comparatively easier to correlate with Qurʾānic passages.

One major concern that has long complicated the study of connections between these two early Arabic corpora is the authenticity of extant poems attributed to the pre-Islamic period (Neuwirth 2019, p. 420). While some poems are indisputably pre-Islamic, doubts persist as to whether others may be later compositions erroneously attributed to pre-Islamic poets. In research that seeks to determine interrelationships between poetry and the Qurʾān, chronology is therefore crucial: pre-Islamic poems could not have been influenced by the Qurʾānic text, whereas Islamic poetry is subject to such influence. This concern has become less pressing, however, as much modern scholarship increasingly tends to regard the corpus as generally authentic.

A computerised approach proposed by Hussein et al. examines the lexical, grammatical, topical and stylistic features of classical Arabic poetry in order to determine its period of composition. Their findings suggest that only a marginal number of poems attributed to the pre-Islamic era may in fact be post-Islamic contributions, with the remainder being genuinely pre-Islamic (Makhoul Sleiman et al. 2023). Further insights into the authenticity and historical context of certain pre-Islamic and early Islamic poems have also been provided by modern scholarship, in some cases removing all doubt (e.g., Jacobi 1985; Wagner 1987; Arazi 1997, 1999, 2004).

van Putten (2017) acknowledges that pre-Islamic poetry contains some authentic pre-Islamic elements; however, he argues that both this poetry and the Qurʾānic text likely underwent classicisation. The poetry was collected centuries after its composition, while Quranic reading traditions were canonized by Ibn Mujāhid in the fourth century AH/tenth century CE—both occurring in sociolinguistic contexts where Classical Arabic had become the dominant prestige variety. According to this view, certain linguistic features may have been adjusted to conform more closely to Classical Arabic norms. This observation invites methodological caution in studies that rely heavily on fine-grained grammatical or morphological comparison.

Even if some degree of linguistic regularisation did occur, such processes are unlikely to have affected higher-order features such as rhetorical organisation and semantic opposition in any systematic way. Classicisation typically targets surface-level morphological and phonological features rather than discourse structure or conceptual frameworks. Accordingly, while grammatical observations should be approached with due care, the rhetorical and semantic analyses undertaken in the present article remain on firm ground.

Although the rhetorical depth of the Qurʾān has long been recognised, our understanding of its mechanisms—especially when viewed against the background of pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetic expression—remains limited. Modern studies of Qurʾānic rhetoric have often been confined to its grammar or syntax. Scholars such as Abdel Haleem (1992, 2020)

and Hoffmann (2004, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2014, 2020) have emphasised the stylistic and rhetorical dimensions of Qurʾānic discourse, although without sustained comparative engagement with poetry. Stewart (1990, 2008) explored the function of *sajʿ* (rhymed prose), while Heinrichs' analyses of *majāz* ("trope") and his discussions of metaphor in *muḥdath* (ʿAbbāsid-era) poetry (Heinrichs 1977, 1984, 1986, 1991, 1994) remain foundational.

Building on these foundations, the present study adopts a dual focus: it examines the negated antithesis as a rhetorical phenomenon and uses it as a lens through which to reassess the broader stylistic continuum linking pre-Islamic poetry and Qurʾānic discourse. Rather than treating the two corpora as discrete or hierarchically related, it views them as participants in a shared rhetorical culture that was reconfigured through Revelation. By isolating a single rhetorical pattern and analysing its distribution, form, and function, this study seeks to illuminate how inherited poetic strategies were transformed—and sometimes transcended—within the Qurʾānic text.

2. *Ṭibāq al-salb*: Definition of the Term

The term *ṭibāq*—also referred to as *muṭābaqa* or *muṭābaq*—is a rhetorical device commonly translated as "antithesis." It is based on the use of words with opposite meanings within the same verse or sentence (Heinrichs 2012).

Two main types of *ṭibāq* are distinguished: *ṭibāq ījāb* ("non-negated antithesis") and *ṭibāq salb* ("negated antithesis") (Ibn Abī l-Iṣbaʿ 1963, p. 112; Abdul-Raof 2006, pp. 245–46). The former occurs when two different words appearing in the same verse have opposite meanings, such as "darkness" and "light."

The latter term *ṭibāq salb* was used by some mediaeval rhetoricians to describe the juxtaposition of two words (often verbs) that express opposite meanings through the use of a negative particle. The negative particle may precede each of the two words, in which case the words themselves must differ—for example, *lā yafūna wa-lā yaghdirūna* ("they neither act loyally nor betray"). This expression, taken from a classical Arabic verse, denounces a tribe for its disloyalty, yet also highlights its weakness—so feeble that even their betrayals cannot be carried out. Here, the two opposing meanings are conveyed through the repetition of the negative particle *lā* (Ibn Abī l-Iṣbaʿ 1963, p. 114).

Negated antithesis can also occur when the negative particle precedes only one of the two words, in this case derived from the same root—for instance, *lā aʿlam* and *aʿlam* ("I do not know, yet I know…") (Ibn Abī l-Iṣbaʿ 1963, pp. 114–15; Al-Subkī 2003, 2:228; Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq al-ʿUmarī 2018, p. 428). This expression, also drawn also from a classical verse, is spoken by a poet-lover who declares that he does not know how he fell in love, but he does know the depth of longing to which that love has brought him (Ibn Abī l-Iṣbaʿ 1963, p. 115).

In this article, my focus is primarily on this second form of *ṭibāq al-salb*.

3. Statistics

The REI has identified 206 instances of negated antithesis in the pre-Islamic poems and 269 in the Qurʾān. Given that the pre-Islamic poetic corpus in the REI comprises 22,788 verses whereas the Qurʾānic corpus contains approximately 6200 verses, this yields a frequency of the negated antithesis of about 0.9% per verse in poetry, compared with 4% in the Qurʾān. This statistical evidence indicates that, although use of this rhetorical device is quantitatively marginal in both corpora, it is a significantly more prominent feature of Qurʾānic discourse than of pre-Islamic poetry. In what follows, I examine the principal structural patterns that characterise the formation of negated antithesis in both corpora and highlight their points of convergence and divergence.

4. Internal Structure of the Negated-Antithesis Sentence

Several structural patterns recur in phrases that feature negated antitheses, some of which are common to both pre-Islamic poetry and the Qurʾānic text. In what follows, I analyse the structures shared by the two corpora. For the sake of brevity, I use the word *faʿala* to refer to the verb occurring in the negated-antithesis phrase. This term does not denote the specific *faʿala* pattern alone, but rather all verbal patterns employed in Arabic. In some cases, I use the word *fiʿl* to refer, often, to infinitives.

4.1. wa/fa-lā tafʿal Pattern

One such structural pattern appears when a negated-antithesis sentence begins with *wa-lā tafʿal* or *fa-lā tafʿal* ("and do not do") or, more rarely, with *lā tafʿal* ("do not do") on its own. This structure appears in four instances in pre-Islamic poetry, among them the following verse by ʿAbīd b. al-Abraṣ, who died around 554 CE[1] [(ʿAbīd b. al-Abraṣ and ʿĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl 1913), poem number xxx: verse number 26]:

ولا تَزْهَدَنْ في وَصْلِ أهْلِ قَرابَةٍ لِذُخْرٍ وفي صُرْمِ الأباعِدِ **فازْهَدِ**

Be not slow in admitting the claims of kinship in order that you may hoard wealth. However, when joining yourself to strangers, **be slow!**

In this example, the two components of the negated-antithesis sentence appear at opposite ends of the verse—one at the beginning and the other at the end.

The same structure is found in a verse by ʿAntara b. Shaddād (d. 600 CE), although in this instance, each of the two parts opens a separate hemistich (ʿAntara b. Shaddād 1992, 115:21):

لا تَسْقِني ماءَ الحَياةِ بِذِلَّةٍ **بَلْ فَاسْقِني** بِالعِزِّ كَأْسَ الحَنْظَلِ

Do not give me the water of life if it comes with humiliation.

Rather, give me the cup of colocynth when it is offered with honour

Two further examples of this structure in pre-Islamic poetry appear in the *dīwān* of al-Aʿshā Maymūn (d. after 3/625). In both, the two parts of the negated antithesis open and close the second hemistich (Al-Aʿshā Maymūn 1969, 17:20–21):

وَصَلِّ عَلَى حِينِ العَشِيَّاتِ وَالضُّحَى **وَلَا تَحْمَد** الشَّيْطَانَ وَاللهَ **فَاحْمَدَا**

وَذَا النُّصُبَ المَنْصُوبَ لَا تَنْسُكَنَّهُ **وَلَا تَعْبُدِ** الأَوْثَانَ وَاللهَ **فَاعْبُدا**

Pray at evening and morning.

And do not commend Satan; only God **should you commend**

Do not worship that erected statue.

Do not worship the idols; only God **should you worship**

An anecdote associates this poem by al-Aʿshā with Islam and the Prophet Muḥammad (Abū Zayd al-Qurashī 1981, pp. 80–81; Ibn Hishām 1955, 1:386–388; Ibn ʿAsākir 1995, 61:328–329; Pomerantz and Orfali 2019). Echoing several Qurʾānic themes, the poem is traditionally believed to have been composed for recitation upon al-Aʿshā's anticipated meeting with the Prophet, as a declaration of his intention to convert to Islam. According to the account, non-Muslim members of the Quraysh tribe—the Prophet Muḥammad's own tribe—feared that such a meeting would enhance Muḥammad's legitimacy and public standing. They therefore persuaded al-Aʿshā to postpone the encounter until the following year; the poet, however, died before fulfilling this intention.

Although al-Aʿshā lived for several years after the emergence of Islam and never formally converted, classical and modern scholars alike classify him as a pre-Islamic poet. Nonetheless, at least in terms of its content, this poem displays clear Qurʾānic resonances and may represent one of the earliest co-Qurʾānic poems influenced by the Qurʾānic text.

The *wa-lā tafʿal* structure in pre-Islamic poetry exhibits distinct structural characteristics. First, the second part of the negated-antithesis construction consistently follows the form *fa-fʿal* ("but do!" or "you should do!"). Second, this structure serves as an opening for the poetic verse or hemistich and, in some cases, functions as both the opening and closing of the same verse.

As for the Qurʾān, however, a distinction must be made between Meccan and Medinan suras with regard to this specific pattern. While they share certain similarities with, and differences from, pre-Islamic examples, the Meccan suras exhibit a closer structural resemblance to pre-Islamic poetry. This will become clearer in the following analysis of Qurʾānic examples. It should be noted that the historical classifications adopted here are based primarily on Nöldeke (1919, 2004).

It is important to note that the exact form *wa-lā tafʿal/fa-fʿal* attested in the poems does not appear in the Qurʾān. A similar, though not identical, pattern occurs in a sentence repeated in two different Medinan suras, where the conjunctions *wa-* and *fa-* are replaced. In these cases, the negated antithesis takes the form *fa-lā tafʿal/wa-fʿal*: فَلَا تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَاخْشَوْنِي ("And do not fear them; fear Me") [**Q2**:150; **Q3**:107]. Unlike pre-Islamic poetry, where the negated antithesis frequently opens or closes verses or hemistichs, this Qurʾānic example appears mid-verse. Moreover, the two components of the antithesis are placed directly adjacent to one another, rather than being separated by additional words, as is often the case in the poetic material.

In all other cases, the first part of the negated antithesis begins, as in the poems, with the phrase *wa-lā tafʿal*. In the Qurʾān, however—particularly in the Medinan suras—the second element takes a variety of forms. These Medinan verses share with the pre-Islamic poems another notable feature: the phrase *wa-lā tafʿal* opens the verse, while the second part is separated from it by intervening words or phrases. Examples include: *wa-lā tafʿal [….] wa-man yafʿal* [**Q2**:283; 24:33, both Medinan], *wa-lā tafʿal [….] ḥattā yafʿal* [**Q2**:191], *wa-lā tafʿal [….] ka-mā faʿalta* [**Q2**:286], and *wa-lā tafʿal [….] li-tafʿal* [**Q2**:188].

Additionally, some Medinan examples present the entire negated antithesis as a single unit that opens the verse, such as *wa-lā tafʿal mā faʿala* [**Q4**:22, Medinan]. In other instances, both parts of the negated antithesis are found in the middle of the verse, separated by additional phrases, as in *wa-lā tafʿal [….] fa-l-yafʿal* [**Q4**:6, Medinan]. Neither of these forms is found in pre-Islamic poetry.

Although the form *wa-lā tafʿal* [….] *fa-fʿal* is absent from the Meccan suras, the placement of these elements within the verse nonetheless mirrors their arrangement in certain pre-Islamic poems. Typically, the verse is divided into two main sentences—one opening and the other closing it—similar to a poetic verse comprising two hemistichs, with each part of the negated antithesis initiating one of these sentences. Unlike the poetry, however, these two sentences in the Qurʾān are not of equal length.

An example is the following [**Q6**:52; Meccan sura]:

وَلَا تَطْرُدِ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْغَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ مَا عَلَيْكَ مِنْ حِسَابِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ
وَمَا مِنْ حِسَابِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ **فَتَطْرُدَهُمْ** فَتَكُونَ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

Do not drive away those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking only to gain His favour. You are in no way accountable for their deeds, nor are

they accountable for yours. **If you drive them away**, you will be counted among the wrongdoers.[2]

This verse, taken from a Meccan sura, can be divided into two main sentences: the first ending with the phrase وَمَا مِنْ حِسَابِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ, and the shorter second sentence comprising the final four words. This separation is also reflected in the verse's translation. In this instance, the two parts of the negated antithesis each open one of the verse's two sentences, a feature also observed in the previously quoted verse by ʿAntara.

In **Q17**:31 (Meccan), the second part of the negated antithesis includes the phrase *inna qatlahum*, which, as in previous cases, opens a new sentence within the same verse. This verse can similarly be divided into two main sentences, separated here by a slash:

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ نَحْنُ نَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ/**إِنَّ قَتْلَهُمْ** كَانَ خِطْئًا كَبِيرًا

Do not kill your children for fear of poverty/We provide for them and for you. **Surely, killing them** is a heinous sin.

This structure is also evident in **Q10**:95 (Meccan):

وَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ/**فَتَكُونَ** مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

Nor be of those who reject the signs of Allah, **lest you be** among those who perish.

The only exception is found in **Q6**:108 (Meccan), where the second part of the antithesis appears mid-verse:

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ **فَيَسُبُّوا** اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ ذَٰلِكَ زَيَّنَّا لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ عَمَلَهُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ مَرْجِعُهُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

But do not revile those [beings] whom they invoke instead of God, **lest they revile** God out of spite and in ignorance. Thus have We made their deeds seem fair to every community. Yet, in time, they will return to their Sustainer, and He will make them understand all that they were doing.

It is noted that, unlike the Medinan examples, where most instances of the *fa*/*wa-lā taf*ʿ*al* pattern appear in a one sura only (**Q2**), in the Meccan part of the Qurʾan this structure is dispersed across multiple suras. In most instances, its placement mirrors that found in some pre-Islamic poems.

A key observation is that the exact pre-Islamic pattern rarely appears in its complete form in the Qurʾān. When certain features occur together in a single Qurʾānic verse, others tend to be modified. In some instances, the Qurʾānic wording adopts, with slight adjustments, a pattern similar to *wa-lā taf*ʿ*al*/*fa-f*ʿ*al*, though with different placement (as in the Medinan examples). In others, the positioning resembles pre-Islamic usage, while the second part of the negated-antithesis construction is altered (as in the Meccan examples).

*4.2. fa*ʿ*ala*/*lam yaf*ʿ*al Pattern*

The *fa*ʿ*ala*/*lam yaf*ʿ*al* pattern appears in three different positions in the poems. The first is the most familiar: one part of the negated antithesis opens the verse or hemistich and the other closes it. The others are the first part opening the verse, and the second appearing mid-verse; and the first part closing the first hemistich, and the second closing the second. The first two structures are also seen in the Qurʾān. The most frequent Qurʾānic structure, however, is both parts of the antithesis appearing mid-verse—a pattern unique to the Qurʾānic text.

I begin by comparing what is common to the two corpora. One example comes from a verse composed by Ṭufayl al-Ghanawī (d. 610 CE) (Ṭufayl al-Ghanawī 1997, 40:5):

فَأَبَّلَ وَاِسْتَرخَى بِهِ الشَّأنُ بَعدَما أَسافَ وَلَولا سَعيُنا **لَم يُؤَبِّلِ**

Then he came to possess many camels, and life became easy for him after his herds had perished.

Had we not helped him, **he would never have regained these camels**.

A Qurʾānic example [**Q69**:25; Meccan] reads:

وَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِشِمَالِهِ فَيَقُولُ يَا لَيْتَنِي **لَمْ أُوتَ كِتَابِيَهْ**

And as for those **who are given their record** in their left hand, they will cry, I wish **I had not been given my record**

The structure of this verse resembles that quoted in Ṭufayl al-Ghanawī's poem: the parts of the negated antithesis almost open and close the verse. The first part, however, is preceded by the conditional phrase *wa-ammā man* ("and as for those"), which prevents the first part of the antithesis functioning as the exact opening the verse. It is also worth noting that this Qurʾānic verse structurally aligns with the general form of poetic verses, as it can be divided into two main clauses of almost equal length: *wa-ammā man ūtiya kitābahu bi-shimālihi/fa-yaqūlu yā laytanī lam ūti kitābiyah*. In other words, the overall structure of the Qurʾānic verse and the placement of the negated antithesis within it bear clear similarities to the structure of pre-Islamic poetry.

The same pattern appears in a poem by ʿAntara b. Shaddād (ʿAntara b. Shaddād 1992, 64:21). In another poem by the same poet, the antithesis opens and closes not the entire verse but its second hemistich (ʿAntara b. Shaddād 1992, 130:64):

يا شاةَ ما قَنَصٍ لِمَن حَلَّت لَهُ **حَرُمَت** عَلَيَّ وَلَيتَها **لَم تَحرُمِ**

O Sweet gazelle! How fair a booty would you be!

Yet you were **forbidden to me**—would that you **were not forbidden**

In a poem by Khidāsh b. Zuhayr (date of death unknown), the antithesis opens and closes the first hemistich [Khidāsh b. Zuhayr, *Muntahā l-ṭalab* (Ibn Maymūn al-Baghdādī 1999, 464:40)]:

عَدَدْتُمْ عَطْفَتَيْنِ **ولَمْ تَعُدُّوا** وَقائِعَ قَدْ تَرَكْنَكُمُ حَصِيدا

You enumerated two minor attacks you made, but **you did not enumerate**

[our] battles that have brought you defeat

A similar structure is found in the Qurʾān in the verse **عَلَّمَ** الْإِنْسَانَ مَا **لَمْ يَعْلَمْ** [**Q96**:5; Meccan] ("He **taught** man what **he did not know**"). The verbs which open and close the verse are different derivations of the same root, but both convey the meaning of "knowing." This verse can thus be considered a negated antithesis.[3]

This Qurʾānic verse resembles another pre-Islamic verse—not in structure but in its lexicon and grammar. This latter, composed by Abū Qays Ṣayfī b. al-Aslat (d. 1/622) (Abū Qays Ṣayfī b. al-Aslat 1973, 19:1), reads:

رجموا بالغيب **كيما يعلموا** من عديد القوم **ما لايعلمُ**

They spoke conjecturally **in order to learn**

from the people what **he himself did not know**

Structurally, the verse corresponds to position no. 3, mentioned above. Both it and the Qurʾānic verse conclude with an almost identical phrase—*mā lam yaʿlam* vs *mā lā yaʿlamu*—which shares the same meaning, lexical elements, and grammatical structure. It is worth noting that this verse appears in the poet's *dīwān* as a standalone line. There is no information regarding the circumstances of its composition or whether it originally formed part of a since-lost poem. No historical conclusions can therefore be drawn about the time of its composition.

In the other two instances, one part of the negated antithesis appears mid-verse, while the other opens either the first or second hemistich. Examples are by Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā (d. 609 CE) (Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā 2004, 7:1:19; the first verse below) and al-Aʿshā Maymūn (Al-Aʿshā Maymūn 1969, 2:9; second verse below). Both are cited as follows:

فنَضرِبُهُ، **حتّى اطمَأنَّ** قَذالُهُ **ولم يَطْمَئِنَّ** قَلْبُهُ، وخَصائلُهْ

وَخانَ النَّعِيمُ أبَا مَالِكٍ وَأيُّ امْرِئٍ **لَمْ يَخُنْهُ** الزَّمَنْ

We struck him until the back of his head **fell**,

But his heart never **found rest**.

Pleasures have **betrayed** Abū Mālik.

Which man has **not been betrayed** by Time?

I could not maintain the original sequence of the negated antithesis in the translation, as it appears in the Arabic. In Zuhayr's verse, the verb *iṭmaʾanna* (*ifʿalla*) functions as a pun: in its first occurrence, it means "to fall down," and in the second, it means "to feel rest." Use of puns within the negated-antithesis phrase is unique to Zuhayr. It appears nowhere else in our corpus.

To conclude, in the *faʿala/lam yafʿal* pattern in pre-Islamic poetry, at least one of the two parts of the negated antithesis either begins and/or ends the verse or hemistich. As noted previously, this rhetorical element can serve both as an opener and/or a closure.

As mentioned, in the majority of Qurʾānic examples, the parts of the antithesis either follow one another without separation or are separated mid-verse by a single particle of speech (for example, an interrogative particle). This structural feature is characteristic of the Qurʾān in both its Meccan and Medinan suras, and it is absent from the poems. An example that clarifies this structure [**Q36**:10; Meccan; a similar variation appears also in **Q2**:5; Medinan]:

وَسَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ **أَأَنْذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنْذِرْهُمْ** لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

It is the same **whether you warn them or not**—they will never believe.[4]

In some instances, the negated antithesis also appears in the middle of the verse, separated by one or more other words.[5]

Also unique to the Qurʾānic text are two additional negated-antithesis structures: one in which both parts open the verse [**Q18**:72, 75; both Meccan], and another in which both parts open the verse but are separated by a single intervening word [**Q4**:164; **Q13**:18; both Medinan].

4.3. faʿala/lā yafʿal Pattern

In the poems, the *faʿala/lā yafʿal* pattern mostly appears in conditional phrases. In all instances of negated antithesis, one of two structural configurations are seen: the antithesis either opens and closes the verse or hemistich, or one part of it serves as closure. The former is

evident in the following two examples, from ʿUrwa b. al-Ward (d. 594 CE) [ʿUrwa b. al-Ward, *Muntahā l-ṭalab* (Ibn Maymūn al-Baghdādī 1999, 144:1:10); the first quoted verse below], and Bishr b. Abī Khāzim (d. 598 CE) [Bishr b. Abī Khāzim, *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* (al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī 1918–1921, 96:8). The translation is from the same book, vol. 2, pp. 269–73. This is the second quoted verse]. The verses are in sequential order:

إذا ما فَاتَنِي لَمْ أَسْتَقِلْهُ حَيَاتِي وَالمُلَائِمُ **لا يَفُوتُ**

If [justice and favour] escape me, I shall never have the opportunity to recover them throughout my life, **nor shall I escape reproach**.

أَجَبْنَا بَنِي سَعْدِ بْنِ ضَبَّةَ إِذْ دَعَوْا وَلِلَّهِ مَوْلَى دَعْوَةٍ **لَا يُجِيبُهَا**

We answered the sons of Saʿd b. Ḍabbah when they called to us for help: blessed is the one whose call to God **never goes unanswered**!

The same structural opening-closing arrangement occurs in a third example by Ḥājiz b. ʿAwf al-Azdī (date of death unknown). Here, however, the antithesis opens and closes the second hemistich, not the entire verse [Ḥārith b. ʿAwf al-Azdī, *Muntahā l-ṭalab* (Ibn Maymūn al-Baghdādī 1999, 453:24)]:

وَرَدْتُ المَوْتَ بِالأَبْطَالِ فِيهِمْ **إِذَا خَامَ** الجَبَانُ **فَلا أَخِيمُ**

I went, together with the heroes, toward death.

If the coward **retreats, I do never retreat!**

The second structural configuration is seen in the following two examples, where the negated antithesis is in varying positions. In one case, it begins at the end of the first hemistich and concludes in the middle of the second; in the other, it ends both the first and second hemistichs. In both instances, it is evident that at least one part of the negated antithesis functions as a closure. The two verses are cited in sequence: the first is by al-Ḥārith b. Ḥilliza (d. 570 CE) [ʿĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl (ʿAbīd b. al-Abraṣ and ʿĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl 1913, 46:2)], and the second by ʿĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl (d. 11/632) (Al-Ḥārith b. Ḥilliza 1994, 4:1:12):

أَلَمْ تَعْلَمِي أَنِّي **إذا** الإِلْفُ **قَادَنِي** إلى الجَوْرِ **لا أَنْقَادُ** والإِلْفُ جائِرُ

فإذا طَبَخْتَ بِنَارِهِ **نَضَّجْتَهُ** وَإِذَا طَبَخْتُ بِغَيْرِهَا **لَمْ يَنْضَجِ**

Have you not realised that if the companion **leads me**

to injustice, I shall never be **led astray**? It is the companion who will be unjust

If you cook over his fire, the food will be **well prepared**;

but if you cook over another's, **it will never be done properly**

Three structural configurations of this pattern are attested in the Qurʾānic text, with the second part of the negated antithesis usually functioning as closure. Although none of these Qurʾānic examples open the verse outright, in some instances the first part may nonetheless be regarded—albeit loosely—as an opener. The distinction between Meccan and Medinan verses is not significant in this context, with examples of the first two configurations appearing in both (This does not apply to the third configuration, which is attested in only one verse).

In the first configuration, the second part of the antithesis functions as the verse's closure. Its first part almost opens the verse but is preceded by a few words that are part of the same sentence [**Q10**:54; Meccan]:

وَلَوْ أَنَّ لِكُلِّ نَفْسٍ **ظَلَمَتْ** مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ لَافْتَدَتْ بِهِ وَأَسَرُّوا النَّدَامَةَ لَمَّا رَأَوُا الْعَذَابَ وَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ بِالْقِسْطِ وَهُمْ **لَا يُظْلَمُونَ**

If every **wrongdoer** were to possess everything in the world, they would surely ransom themselves with it. They will hide 'their' remorse when they see the torment. And they will be judged in all fairness, **and none will be wronged**

Another example is a relatively short verse, comparable in length with a line of poetry. When divided into two symmetrical quantitative halves, the antithesis appears to open and close its second half [**Q8**:21; Medinan]:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ قَالُوا **سَمِعْنَا** وَهُمْ **لَا يَسْمَعُونَ**

Be not as those who say, "**We hear**," while **they hear not**

These two examples demonstrate the persistence of remnants of the poetic structure in the Qurʾān's use of the antithetical *faʿala/lā yafʿal* pattern. There are slight modifications in the first part of the antithesis, but the second part's function as a closure remains intact.

In the second configuration, the antithesis begins near the opening of the verse and concludes in the middle. In both cases, the first part is preceded by a brief introductory phrase. One example appears in [**Q2**:264; Medinan]:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ **آمَنُوا** لَا تُبْطِلُوا صَدَقَاتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ وَالْأَذَىٰ كَالَّذِي يُنْفِقُ مَالَهُ رِئَاءَ النَّاسِ **وَلَا يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ** الْآخِرِ فَمَثَلُهُ كَمَثَلِ صَفْوَانٍ عَلَيْهِ تُرَابٌ فَأَصَابَهُ وَابِلٌ فَتَرَكَهُ صَلْدًا لَا يَقْدِرُونَ عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ مِمَّا كَسَبُوا ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ

O **believers**! Do not waste your charity with reminders 'of your generosity' or hurtful words, like those who donate their wealth merely to show off **and do not believe** in Allah or the Last Day. Their example is that of a hard, barren rock covered with a thin layer of soil, struck by a strong rain—leaving it a bare stone. Such people cannot preserve any reward from their charity. Allah does not guide 'such' disbelieving people

Another is in [**Q40**:20; Meccan]:

وَاللَّهُ **يَقْضِي** بِالْحَقِّ وَالَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ **لَا يَقْضُونَ** بِشَيْءٍ إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

And Allah **judges** with the truth, while those idols invoked beside Him **cannot judge** at all. Indeed, Allah alone is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing

In the third configuration, both parts of the antithesis appear mid-verse—a structure entirely unattested in the examined poetic corpus. An example is in [**Q41**:44; Meccan]:

وَلَوْ جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا أَعْجَمِيًّا لَقَالُوا لَوْلَا فُصِّلَتْ آيَاتُهُ أَأَعْجَمِيٌّ وَعَرَبِيٌّ ۗ قُلْ هُوَ لِلَّذِينَ **آمَنُوا** هُدًى وَشِفَاءٌ وَالَّذِينَ **لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ** فِي آذَانِهِمْ وَقْرٌ وَهُوَ عَلَيْهِمْ عَمًى أُولَٰئِكَ يُنَادَوْنَ مِنْ مَكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ

Had We revealed it as a non-Arabic Qurʾān, they would have surely said, 'If only its verses were made clear 'in our language'. What! A non-Arabic revelation for an Arab audience?' Say, 'O Prophet, it is a guide and a healing for those **who believe**. As for those who **disbelieve**, there is deafness in their ears and blindness in their hearts'. It is as if they are called from a faraway place

4.4. a-faʿalta/am lam tafʿal Pattern

The *a-faʿalta/am lam tafʿal* pattern appears in three poetic verses as well as in a comparable number of Qurʾānic verses. In the poems, examples of negated antithesis either open or close the verse, whereas in the Qurʾān, they appear mid-verse.

The poetic examples are all from poets who lived either at the end of the pre-Islamic era or whose lifetimes extended into the early Islamic period. Two are by Abū l-Laḥḥām al-Taghlibī (no date of death is given; he is said to have lived until the end of the pre-Islamic era) and al-Aswad b. Yaʿfur al-Nahshalī (d. 600 CE) [Al-Aswad b. Yaʿfur al-Nahshalī, *Muntahā l-ṭalab* (Ibn Maymūn al-Baghdādī 1999, 53:1:1)]. In both cases, the antithetical sentence functions as both the opening and the closing of the first hemistich. A third example is ʿĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl (d. 11/632), whose negated antithesis closes the verse [ʿĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl (ʿAbīd b. al-Abraṣ and ʿĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl 1913, 29:1:1). The translations of the verses are taken from the same source, p. 116]. They are quoted in consecutive order:

أَيَئِسْتَ مِنْ أَسْماءَ **أَمْ لم تَيْأَسِ** وَصَرَمْتَ شَبْكَ حِبالِها المُتَلَبِّسِ

أَبَيَّنْتَ رَسمَ الدَّارِ **أَمْ لم تُبَيِّنِ** لِسَلْمى عَفَتْ بَيْنَ الكُلاب وتَيْمَنِ

لتسْأَلنّ أَسْمَاءُ وَهْيَ حَفِيَّةٌ نُصَحاءَهَا **أَطُرِدْتُ أَمْ لَمْ أُطْرَدِ**

Have you despaired of Asmāʾ—**or not despaired**?

And have you abandoned her cords, tangled and entwining [you]?

Have you recognised the traces of the dwelling—**or failed to recognise them**?

The ones of Salmā, [now] effaced, between al-Kulāb and Taymān?

Yea, let Asmāʾ ask—for she is kind and cares for our fortunes—let her ask

her counsellors **whether or not I was driven away**

In all three poetic examples, it is evident that this pattern serves as a closure. The third example closes the entire verse, while the first two close the first hemistich of their respective verses. By contrast, in the three Qurʾānic examples that share the same structural pattern as the poems, the antithesis occurs mid-verse. The earliest example appears in a Meccan sura, while the other two are Medinan [**Q2**:6; **Q63**:6]. Thus, this pattern is attested in the Qurʾān in both periods of revelation.

وَسَوَآءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ **أَأَنذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ** لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ [**Q36**:10; Meccan]

It is the same for them **whether you warn them or warn them not**; they will not believe

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ سَوَآءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ **أَأَنذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ** لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ [**Q2**:6; Medinan]

As for the disbelievers, **whether you warn them or you warn them not,** it is all one for them; they believe not

سَوَآءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ **أَسْتَغْفَرْتَ لَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تَسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ** لَن يَغْفِرَ ٱللَّهُ لَهُمْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِى ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلْفَٰسِقِينَ

[**Q63**:6; Medinan]

Whether **you ask forgiveness for them or ask not forgiveness for them**, Allah will not forgive them. Lo! Allah does not guide the wicked

4.5. if ʿal/wa-lā tafʿal Pattern

The *if ʿal/wa-lā tafʿal* pattern exhibits two principal structural configurations common to both corpora. In the first, the verse begins with the first part of the negated antithesis (*if ʿal* ["do!"]) followed by a clause or sentence, while the second part (*wa-lā tafʿal* ["and do not do!"]) appears mid-verse, introducing a second clause. Each corpus contains a single representative example of this structure.

The poetic verse is attributed to al-Mutalammis al-Ḍubaʿī (d. 569 CE) (Al-Ḥārith b. Ḥilliza 1994, 12:2):

كونُوا كَبَكْرٍ كَمَا قَدْ كانَ أَوَّلُكُمْ **ولا تَكُونُوا** كَعَبْدِ القَيْسِ إِذْ قَعَدُوا

Be like Bakr—as were your noble ancestors,

And do not be like ʿAbd al-Qays, who yielded in silence

The structurally parallel example in the Qurʾānic corpus appears in **Q7**:3 [Medinan]:

اتَّبِعُوا مَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ **وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا** مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ قَلِيلًا مَا تَذَكَّرُونَ

Follow what has been sent down unto you by your Sustainer, **and do not follow** masters other than Him." How seldom do you keep this in mind!

In this Qurʾānic verse, as in al-Mutalammis's line, the imperative (*ittabiʿū* ["follow"]) introduces the first clause, with the negative imperative (*wa-lā tattabiʿū* ["and do not follow!"]) introducing the second. This structural congruence between Qurʾānic and poetic expressions suggests a continuity in rhetorical practice across both religious and secular Arabic discourse.

In al-Mutalammis's verse, the two parts of the negated antithesis open each of the two hemistichs. In contrast, the Qurʾānic verse comprises three main sentences: the first two sentences are introduced by the two parts of the antithesis, with the verse's third sentence offering a general evaluative remark about the addressees—that is, the people to whom the Prophet delivers the Qurʾān and whom he addresses directly.

The second structural configuration contains the phrase *fa-fʿal* ["and do"]/*wa-lā tafʿal* ["and/but/so do not do"], with the two opposing imperatives appearing consecutively, without intervening words or clauses.

In the poetic corpus, this construction occurs in a verse by Ṭarafa b. al-ʿAbd (d. mid-6th century CE), nephew of al-Mutalammis (d. 564 CE) (Ṭarafa b. al-ʿAbd 2003, 25:1:1):

ونفسَكَ **فانْعَ ولا تَنْعَني** وداوِ الكُلومَ ولا تُبرِقِ

Your own death **announce, but mine do not announce**!

Heal your wounds, and do not threaten me!

The same structure is found in two Meccan suras:

وَأَنَّ هَٰذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا **فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا** السُّبُلَ فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ذَٰلِكُمْ وَصَّاكُمْ بِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ [**Q6**:1:153]

Indeed, that is My Path—perfectly straight. **So follow it and do not follow** other ways, for they will lead you away from His Way. This is what He has commanded you, so that you may become mindful [of Allah]

ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاكَ عَلَىٰ شَرِيعَةٍ مِنَ الْأَمْرِ **فَاتَّبِعْهَا وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ** أَهْوَاءَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ [**Q45**:1:18]

> And now have We set you [O Muhammad] on a clear road of [Our] commandment; **so follow it**, **and follow not** the whims of those who know not

A closely related configuration appears in a Medinan sura, where the two parts of the antithesis are separated by an intervening clause—either short [**Q2**:231] or extended [**Q2**:187]. This same structure appears in a pre-Islamic poem attributed to ʿAdī b. Zayd (d. 600 CE), gnomic in tone and framed as personal advice. In both **Q2**:231 and ʿAdī's verse, the negated antithesis is introduced by a conditional phrase (ʿAdī b. Zayd al-ʿIbādī 1965, 23:36):

إذا كنتَ في قَوْمٍ **فَصَاحِبْ** خَيارَهُمْ **ولا تَصْحَبِ** ٱلأَرْدَى فتَرْدَى مَعَ الرَّدي

> **If you** are among a tribe, **befriend** their noble ones
>
> **And do not befriend** the one who may stumble—lest you fall with the fallen

وَإِذَا طَلَّقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَبَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ **فَأَمْسِكُوهُنَّ** بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ سَرِّحُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ **وَلَا تُمْسِكُوهُنَّ** ضِرَارًا لِتَعْتَدُوا وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَٰلِكَ فَقَدْ ظَلَمَ نَفْسَهُ [….] [**Q2**:2:231]

> So, **when you** divorce women and they are about to reach the end of their waiting period, then **retain them** in fairness or release them in fairness. But do not retain **them** against their will in order to harm [them]: for he who does so sins indeed against himself

This configuration is also seen in a verse by the *mukhaḍram* poet Kaʿb b. Mālik al-Anṣārī of Medina, a poet who embraced Islam and accompanied the Prophet Muḥammad after the migration to Medina. Kaʿb died in 50/670 (Kaʿb b. Mālik al-Anṣārī 1966, 31:8). His line is part of a poem describing the Battle of Dhū Qarad (near Medina), which took place around 6/627–628 CE. The timeline confirms that the verse in the Qurʾān, thought to have been revealed around 1/622 CE, definitely predates the poetic example.[6]

4.6. fʿl/wa-mā fiʿl + Preposition

The *fʿl/wa-mā fiʿl* + preposition construction is also one of the structural patterns shared by both corpora. The similarity is evident in the second part of the negated antithesis, which features the phrase *wa-mā fiʿl*, followed by either *bi-* or *min*. This phrase typically serves as the verse's closure. Of the two examples in the poetic corpus which exhibit this structure, one is attributed to ʿAbd Yagūth b. Waqqāṣ al-Ḥārithī—a Yemenite poet and tribal leader who died in 584 CE (Ṭarafa b. al-ʿAbd 2003, 25:1:1):

أَلَمْ تَعْلَما **أنَّ المَلامَةَ** نَفعُها قَليلٌ **وما لَومِي** أخِي مِن شِمالِيا

> Have you not both known **that reproach** brings little good,
>
> **And that reproaching** my brother is no trait of mine?

The other poem was composed by Kaʿb b. Saʿd al-Ghanawī (d. 612 CE) (Ṭarafa b. al-ʿAbd 2003, 25:1:1). Kaʿb was a pre-Islamic poet and, although he may have lived beyond the advent of Islam, no reliable source confirms his conversion. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad al-Waṣīfī, who has studied the poet's life, argues that even if Kaʿb died after the rise of Islam, his extant poetry displays no Islamic ideas or discernible Islamic influence (Kaʿb b. Saʿd al-Ghanawī 1998, pp. 14–18). It is difficult to assume that a pre-Islamic poet who lived into the Islamic period, yet remained intellectually unengaged with it, would nevertheless have been influenced by the Qurʾān in his literary production. There are therefore serious grounds for questioning whether the following verse should indeed be regarded as Qurʾānic in influence. The verse reads:

لقد أَنصَبَتْنِي أُمُّ قيس **تَلومُني** **وما لَوْمُ** مثلي باطلًا بِجَمِيلِ

Umm Qays has wearied me with her **reproach**;

To reproach [a man] like me unjustly is unseemly

There is only one example of this construction in the Qurʾān:

إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَئِهِ فَاتَّبَعُوا **أَمْرَ** فِرْعَوْنَ **وَمَا أَمْرُ** فِرْعَوْنَ بِرَشِيدٍ [**Q11**:9:97; Meccan]

To Pharaoh and his chiefs, yet they followed **the command** of Pharaoh, and Pharaoh's **command was not** well guided

The central question is whether this structure—found both in pre-Islamic poetry and in the Qurʾān—should be classified as a form of negated antithesis. Unlike the clearer examples examined earlier, the negation in the second part is more grammatical than contextual. I am nevertheless inclined to regard these instances as genuine expressions of negated antithesis.

In the poetic examples, the pattern is associated with the motif of reproach. The first part of the antithesis presents a statement of reproach, while the second part, introduced by a negation particle, implicitly negates the act of reproaching. In the first example, the poet-protagonist reflects on the futility of reproach, implying that although others may do so, he himself refrains from reproaching those close to him. In the second, it is Umm Qays who delivers the reproach, but the poet urges her to desist, suggesting that such behaviour is inappropriate. In the verse attributed to Kaʿb b. Saʿd, the negated antithesis follows the same structural placement seen in earlier patterns: it closes the first hemistich and opens the second.

The Qurʾānic example differs contextually as it concerns Pharaoh's followers choosing to obey him rather than Moses. Yet the structural pattern remains the same: the first part of the antithesis describes a particular action, while the second negates it—not by denying it occurred, but condemning it as morally wrong. The verse thus conveys the idea that although Pharaoh's followers made a certain choice, it was one they should not have made. In essence, it expresses the idea: "They should not have done what they did."

4.7. ḥattā yafʿal Pattern

In the *ḥattā yafʿal* pattern, the second part of the antithesis is introduced by the particle *ḥattā* ("until"). This construction is attested only rarely across the two corpora. In the poetry, there is an example in a verse by al-Shanfarā (d. 525 CE) (Al-Shanfarā 1996, 23:21):

صَلِيَتْ مِنِّي هُذَيْلٌ بِخِزْيٍ **لا يَمَلُّ** الشَّرَّ **حَتَّى يَمَلُّوا**

Hudhayl were burned by a noble man **who never wearies** of evil deeds **until they** [themselves] **grow weary**

A second example comes from Sinān b. Abī Ḥāritha, a pre-Islamic poet of uncertain date [Sinān b. Ḥāritha, *Aṣmaʿiyyāt* (Al-Aṣmaʿī 1993, 72:7)]:

وَلا أَجِيءُ بِسَوْءَاتٍ أُعَيَّرُهَا **حَتَّى يَجِيءَ** مِنَ القَبْرِ ابْنُ مَيَّادِ

I shall never come with disgraceful deeds for which I might be reproached, **until Ibn Mayyād comes** forth from the grave

A third example is in a verse by ʿAntara b. Shaddād (ʿAntara b. Shaddād 1992, 130:2):

أَعْيَاكَ رَسْمُ الدَّارِ **لَمْ يَتَكَلَّمْ** **حَتَّى تَكَلَّمَ** كَالأَصَمِّ الأَعْجَمِ

The traces of the dwelling have wearied you, for **they did not speak**—

until they spoke like one deaf and mute

This same pattern is found in the Qurʾān:

[….] إِنّ اللهَ **لا يُغَيِّرُ** ما بِقَوْمٍ **حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا** ما بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ [….] [**Q13**:11; Medinan]

[….] **God does not change** men's condition **unless they change** what is within themselves [….]

[….] وَالذين آمَنُوا **وَلَمْ يُهَاجِرُوا** ما لَكُمْ مِنْ وِلَايَتِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ **حَتَّى يُهاجِرُوا** [….] [**Q8**:72; Medinan]

[….] But as for those who have come to believe **without having migrated** [to your country]—you are in no way responsible for their protection **until they migrate** [….]

[….] **وَلا تُقاتِلوهُمْ** عِنْدَ المَسْجِدِ الحَرَامِ **حَتَّى يُقاتِلوكُم فيه** [….] [**Q2**:1:191; Medinan]

[….] And do not fight them within the precincts of the Sacred Mosque unless they fight against you there [….]

A key difference between the Qurʾānic and poetic examples is in the placement of the negated antithesis. In the Qurʾān, both parts are mid-sentence, whereas in the poetry the antithesis functions as an opening–closure device. In al-Shanfarā's verse, the two parts frame the second hemistich; with Sinān, the first part opens the first hemistich and the second opens the second; and in ʿAntara, each hemistich begins with one part of the antithesis. This suggests that in poetic usage the negated antithesis serves not only a semantic function—expressing two contradictory actions—but also a rhetorical one, projecting a forceful and emphatic style by occupying structurally prominent positions within the verse.

It may also be observed that both the poetic and Qurʾānic contexts share a thematic concern with transformation or resistance to transformation, of habits or actions, most often human. Furthermore, in both Sinān's verse and in Q2, the first part of the antithesis is introduced by the particle *wa-* (*wa-lā*).

4.8. fʿl/wa-mā fʿl Pattern

The *fʿl/wa-mā fʿl* pattern is one of the most common structures in both corpora, particularly in the Qurʾān. In the poetic corpus, the first part of the negated antithesis is consistently emphasised in various ways—either by opening with *innī/wa-innī* ("I am"/"and I am"), with *wa-qad/wa-la-qad* ("and I have [indeed] …"), or with an imperative introduced by *fa-* ("and hence, do!"). In every case, the negated antithesis occupies an opening–closure position. Its two parts may open each of the two hemistichs, open and close the second hemistich, open the first hemistich, or open the second hemistich:

وَإِنَّا مَنَعْنَا فِي بُعَاث نِسَاءَنَا **وَمَا مَنَعَتْ** مِلْ مُخْزِيَاتِ نِسَاءَهَا

We protected our women in Buʿāth,

But they did not protect their women from disgrace

[Qays b. al-Khāṭīm, *Muntahā l-ṭalab* (Ibn Maymūn al-Baghdādī 1999, 342:28)].

وَلَمْ أُدْبِرْ عَنِ الأَدْنَيْنِ **إِنِّي** **نَأَنِي** الأَكْرَمُونَ **وَمَا نَأَيْتُ**

I have never turned away from those near to me.

It was the noble who **withdrew from me, but I did not withdraw** [from them]

[ʿAmr b. Qiʿās al-Murādī, *Muntahā l-ṭalab* (Ibn Maymūn al-Baghdādī 1999, 444:18)].

خُلِقْتُ مِنَ الحَدِيدِ أَشَدَّ قَلْبًا **وَقَدْ بَلِيَ** الحَدِيدُ **وَمَا بَلِيتُ**

I was created with a heart stronger than iron.

Iron **has indeed perished, but I have not**

(ʿAntara b. Shaddād 1992, 5:24)

وَلَقَدْ غَدَوْتُ أَمَامَ رَايَةِ غَالِبٍ يَوْمَ الهِيَاجِ **وَمَا غَدَوْتُ** بِأَعْزَلِ

Indeed, I marched before Ghālib's banner on the morning of battle,

Yet never did I march there unarmed

(ʿAntara b. Shaddād 1992, 16:110)

وَمَا أَنْتَ مِنْ أَصْلٍ فَتَأْمُلُ نُصْرَةً **فَأَيْقِنْ وَمَا أَيْقَنْتَ** حَتَّى تَفَهَّمَا

You are of no true stock, and so you may never hope for support.

Be certain of this—for you have never been certain enough to understand [it]

[Bishr b. ʿUlayq, *Muntahā l-ṭalab* (Ibn Maymūn al-Baghdādī 1999, 486:30)]

Within the poetic corpus, there is a single example whose classification as negated antithesis remains uncertain. Although it contains both affirmative and negated elements, its structure is not typical. I include it here, however, because of its close resemblance to a Qurʾānic construction. The verse is attributed to Kaʿb b. Saʿd al-Ghanawī (d. 612 CE) [Kaʿb b. Saʿd al-Ghanawī, *Aṣmaʿiyyāt* (Al-Aṣmaʿī 1993, 19:1)]:

لَقَدْ أَنْصَبَتْنِي أُمُّ قَيْسٍ **تَلُومُنِي** **وَمَا لَوْمُ مِثْلِي بَاطِلًا بِجَمِيلِ**

Umm Qays has wearied me **with her reproach**;

To reproach a man like me without cause is not fair

The historical context of Kaʿb's poem is difficult to establish. As a poet, he died only about two years after the first Qurʾānic Revelation (610 CE). The poem addresses the reproach of a certain Umm Saʿd, who criticised the poet-protagonist for raiding and thereby endangering his life. This subject matter suggests a pre-Islamic setting, although this cannot be definitive. The Qurʾānic verse [**Q11**:97] is dated by Nöldeke (2004, pp. 135–36) to the third Meccan period—that is, to the suras revealed during the two years immediately preceding the Prophet's migration to Medina in 622 CE. On this basis, Kaʿb's poem appears to predate the Qurʾānic verse. The same structure recurs in another verse in the same sura [**Q11**:89].

In the poem, the key expression takes the form: "A has occurred, but A is not good." The negation in the phrase's second part is indirect. Unlike other examples, where the antithesis is expressed through an explicit prohibition ("do not do A"), here the negation is not directly articulated. Instead, the sentence implies that the action ought not to have taken place. In my view, this type of formulation should be regarded as a special case of the negated antithesis.

Whether or not it is classified as such, the resemblance between this structure and the Qurʾānic verses is unmistakable. For brevity, I cite only **Q11**:97:

إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَإِهِ **فَاتَّبَعُوا أَمْرَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَا أَمْرُ فِرْعَوْنَ بِرَشِيدٍ** [….]

to Pharaoh and his chiefs; **but they followed the command of Pharaoh, and the command of Pharaoh was not right**

In both examples, a personal name introduces the negative (or semi-negative) antithesis. The second part of the sentence follows the same grammatical structure: *wa-mā fiʿl* (genitive construction) + *bi-* + *ṣifa mushabbaha* (assimilate adjective):

wa-mā lawmu mithlī [….] bi-jamīl

wa-mā amru Firʿawan bi-rashīd

In terms of frequency, this pattern of negated antithesis appears far more often in the Qurʾān, with some twenty-six identifiable examples—approximately five times the number found in the poetic corpus, and more or less equally divided between the Meccan and Medinan suras.[7] This distribution suggests that the rhetorical strategy of presenting a statement within a specific context and then negating it aligns more naturally with the Qurʾānic mode of expression than with that of poetry. This difference can be readily explained: the didactic and admonitory character of the Qurʾān necessitates frequent juxtaposition of two opposing actions—one endorsed, the other rejected. Poetry, by contrast, is typically governed by such didactic aims.

In these examples, three principal compositional parallels with the poetic corpus can be observed. The first is when the negated antithesis is emphasised by opening with *innī* ("I am"). The second is when the two parts of the negated antithesis directly follow one another with no unrelated elements intervening. The third and most striking is when the second part of the negated antithesis is preceded by the negation particle *wa-mā* ("but not"), asin all the poetic examples and the majority of the Qurʾānic (with the exception of Q 8:17, one of whose two negated antitheses is negated by *fa-lam*).

The first compositional parallel is seen in the following examples:

قَالَ **إِنِّيٓ أُرِيدُ** أَنْ أُنْكِحَكَ إِحْدَى ابْنَتَيَّ هاتينِ على أن تَأْجُرَنِي ثَمانِي حِجَجٍ فَإِنْ أَتْمَمْتَ عَشْرًا فَمِنْ عِنْدِكَ **وَمَا أُرِيدُ** أَنْ أَشُقَّ عَلَيْكَ سَتَجِدُنِي إِن شاءَ اللهُ مِنَ الصَّالِحِين [**Q28**:27; Meccan]

> [The old man] proposed, '**I wish to** marry one of these two daughters of mine to you, provided you stay in my service for eight years. If you complete ten, it will be 'a favour' from you, **but I do not wish** to make things difficult for you. Allah willing, you will find me an agreeable man

وَقَوْلِهِمْ **إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا** الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ **وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ** وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَٰكِنْ شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِنْهُ مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا اتِّبَاعَ الظَّنِّ **وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ** يَقِينًا [**Q4**:157; Medinan]

> And for their boasting, **'We killed** the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of Allah.' **But they neither killed** nor crucified him—it was only made to appear so. Even those who dispute this 'crucifixion' are themselves in doubt. They have no knowledge whatsoever—nothing but conjecture. **They certainly did not kill him**

قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَ إِذْ أَوَيْنَا إِلَى الصَّخْرَةِ **فَإِنِّي نَسِيتُ** الْحُوتَ **وَمَا أَنْسَانِيهُ** إِلَّا الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ أَذْكُرَهُ وَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ عَجَبًا [**Q18**:63; Meccan]

> He replied, 'Do you remember when we rested by the rock? 'That is when' **I forgot** the fish. **None made me forget** to mention this except Satan. And the fish made its way into the sea miraculously

All these examples correspond to the first two poetic instances—those composed by Qays b. al-Khaṭīm and ʿAmr b. Qiʿās al-Murādī. The former was a poet from Medina who died two years before the Prophet Muḥammad migrated there and he never converted to Islam. The latter was a pre-Islamic poet of Yemenite origin, whose date of death is not

recorded. Most of the Qurʾānic verses cited above are Meccan, which suggests that this compositional structure entered the Qurʾānic style during the earliest stages of Revelation. In the Qurʾānic verses, as in the two poetic examples—particularly that of Qays b. al-Khaṭīm—the negated antithesis plays an introductory role, with the first part of the phrase introducing the verse. (In the Qurʾān, it is preceded by the root *q-w-l* "to say".)

It should be noted that the negated antithesis in the last Qurʾānic example [Q 18:63] is contested. Grammatically, it comprises two parts, one of which is negated. The sense of negation is not, however, fully realised because of the *istithnāʾ* (exception) construction that follows it.

The second compositional similarity appears in the following Qurʾānic verses:

قَالُوا أَوَلَمْ تَكُ تَأْتِيكُمْ رُسُلُكُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ قَالُوا بَلَى قَالوا **فادْعُوا وَما دُعَاءُ** الْكَافِرِينَ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ

[**Q40**:50; Meccan]

"[The keepers will] reply, 'Did your messengers not 'constantly' come to you with clear proofs?' They will say, 'Yes 'they did'.' The keepers will say, **'Then pray! Though the prayer of the disbelievers is nothing** but in vain"

وَاصْبِرْ وَمَا صَبْرُكَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا تَكُ فِي ضَيْقٍ مِمَّا يَمْكُرُونَ [**Q16**:127; Meccan]

"**Be patient—for your patience is only by** the help of Allah. Do not grieve over them and do not distress yourself because of their plotting"

[….] **وَعِدْهُمْ وَمَا يَعِدُهُمُ** الشَّيْطَانُ إِلَّا غُرُورًا [**Q17**:64; Meccan]

"**And promise them** [what you will]—yet **the promises of Satan are nothing** but deception"

[….] وكذلك جَعَلْنَا فِي كُلِّ قَرْيَةٍ أَكَابِرَ مُجْرِميهَا **لِيَمْكُرُوا فِيها وَمَا يَمْكُرُونَ** إِلَّا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ

[**Q6**:123; Meccan]

"[…] And thus We have placed in every town its leading sinners, so that they may scheme within it; yet they scheme only against themselves, though they do not realise it"

وَدَّتْ طائِفَةٌ مِنْ أَهْلِ الكِتَابِ **لَوْ يُضِلُّونَكُمْ وَمَا يُضِلُّونَ** إِلَّا أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرون [**Q3**:69; Medinan]

"Some of the People of the Book want **to mislead you**; **but they mislead none except themselves**, though they do not realize it"

وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكَ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَهَمَّتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْهُمْ **أَنْ يُضِلُّوكَ وَمَا يُضِلُّونَ** إِلَّا أَنْفُسَهُمْ [….] [**Q4**:113; Medinan]

"Allah's grace and mercy were not with you to save you from their mischief, a group of them was determined **to lead you astray**. **Yet they led astray none** but themselves [….]

[….] إِلَّا كَبَاسِطِ كَفَّيْهِ إِلَى الْمَاءِ **لِيَبْلُغَ فَاهُ وَمَا هُوَ بِبَالِغِهِ** [….] [**Q13**:14; Medinan]

"[….] but like one who stretches his open hands toward water, [hoping] **it will reach his mouth**, **yet it never does** [….]"

Through these examples, two main constructions can be distinguished: one characteristic of most Meccan suras (excepting **Q6**:123) and the other of the Medinan suras (including the Meccan sura **Q6**:123). In the first construction, the initial part of the negated antithesis begins with an imperative verb. This use of the imperative is also attested in one of the poetic examples in a verse by Bishr b. ʿUlayq al-Ṭāʾī, a pre-Islamic poet of unknown date, which includes the phrase *fa-ayqin wa-mā ayqanta*. The second construction, typical of the Medinan suras, begins with an imperfect verb. In the poetic corpus, by contrast, the first part of the negated antithesis most frequently begins with a perfect verb, as in the two phrases *innī naʾānī l-akramūna wa-mā naʾaytu* and *wa-qad baliya l-ḥadīd wa-mā balītu*. It should also be noted that in the Qurʾānic examples, both Meccan and Medinan, the negated antithesis in this construction is consistently followed by an *istithnāʾ* (exception) phrase.

The third compositional similarity, already evident in the examples discussed, may be summarised briefly. In all poetic examples and in most Qurʾānic, the second part of the negated antithesis is consistently introduced by the particle *wa-mā* followed by a verb or, more rarely, by an infinitive. In the poems, we encounter *wa-mā manaʿat*, *wa-mā naʾaytu*, *wa-mā balītu*, *wa-mā ghadawtu*, *wa-mā ayqantu*, and *wa-mā lawmu*. In the Qurʾān we find *wa-mā urīdu*, *wa-mā qatalūhu*, *wa-mā ansānīhu*, *wa-mā yaʿiduhum*, *wa-mā yamkurūna*, *wa-mā yuḍillūna*, *wa-mā huwa bi-bālighih* (an *ism fāʿil*, or active participle), *wa-mā duʿāʾu*, *wa-mā ṣabruka*, and *wa-mā amru*. This strong and recurring correspondence between the two corpora is unlikely to be coincidental. Such a compositional feature suggests that the later text may have assimilated this structure from the earlier, or that both drew on a now-lost shared source of literary expression.

In all the previous examples, the negated element appears as the second component of the negated antithesis. This is the most stable and recurrent pattern in both corpora. In a few instances, however, the order is reversed: the sentence opens with the negated action, followed by one that is non-negated. This structure is found in **Q**2:145, **Q**8:17 (two instances), **Q**11:101, **Q**16:118, and **Q**43:76, as well as in three pre-Islamic verses—those of Muhalhil b. Rabīʿa (n.d., 21:23, d. 525 CE), and ʿAntara b. Shaddād (1992, 73:8, 93:10). The following verse by ʿAntara b. Shaddād [73:8)] compared with **Q8**:17 [Medinan] illustrates this inversion. Both treat the theme of war.

ʿAntara's verse reads:

وَمَا قَصَّرْتُ حَتَّى كَلَّ مُهْرِي **وَقَصَّرَ** فِي السِّبَاقِ وَفِي اللَّحَاقِ

I did not fall short until my foal grew weary,

and fell behind both in the race and in the pursuit

The Qurʾānic verse reads:

فَلَمْ تَقْتُلُوهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللهَ قَتَلَهُمْ وَمَا رَمَيْتَ إِذْ رَمَيْتَ ولكنَّ اللهَ رَمَى [….]

It was not you who killed them, it was Allah Who killed them; nor was it you who threw [the handful of dust], but Allah Who threw it so that […]

4.9. a-lam tafʿal/[fa-]tafʿal

The *a-lam tafʿal/[fa-]tafʿal* is the last major common construction identified in the corpus. It appears in one verse by al-Nābigha l-Dhubyānī (d. 604 CE), in **Q**39:21 (Meccan) and **Q**24:43 (Medinan). All three open with the same formulaic phrase *a-lam tara anna llāha* ("Did you not see how Allah…").

The poetic verse reads (Al-Nābigha l-Dhubyānī 1996, 3:9):

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللهَ أعطاكَ سَوْرَةً **تَرَى** كُلَّ مُلْكٍ دُونَهَا يَتَذَبْذَبُ

Did you not see how Allah granted you power,

so that you see every other kingship beneath it tremble?

Q39:21 reads:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللهَ أنزلَ من السماءِ ماءً فَسَلَكَهُ يَنابِيعَ في الأرضِ ثُمَّ يُخْرِجُ بِهِ زَرْعًا مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ **فَتَرَاهُ** مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُ حُطامًا إِنّ في ذلك لَذِكْرَى لِأُولِي الألباب

Do you not see how Allah sends down water from the sky which penetrates the earth and emerges through springs? With it, He brings forth a variety of crops of different colours, then they wither **and you see them** turn yellow, and finally He crumbles them to dust. Surely, in this, there is a lesson for the people of understanding

Q24:43:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللهَ يُزْجِي سَحَابًا ثُمَّ يُؤَلِّفُ بَيْنَهُ ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُ رُكَامًا **فَتَرَى** الوَدْقَ يَخْرُجُ مِنْ خَلَلِهِ [....]

Do you not see that Allah makes the clouds move gently, then joins them together, then piles them up in masses, **then you see** the rain coming from within them? [....]

The three examples begin with the same rhetorical question, and the underlying negated antithesis is based on the contrast between "not seeing" and "seeing". The thematic context in both the poem and the Qurʾānic verses is similar: each focuses on divine power and sovereignty. Whereas the Qurʾānic examples glorify the power of God, the poetic verse praises a king whose authority and strength are portrayed as deriving from God.

It is worth noting that this same opening rhetorical question appears in other pre- and early Islamic poems (Pre-Islamic: Aws b. Ḥajar 1979, 28:1; Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā 2004, 23:14; Co-Qurʾānic: Ḥassān b. Thābit 2006, 236:3; Post-Qurʾānic: ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zabīr al-Asadī 1974, 24:1; Al-Akhṭal 1996, 257:1; Jarīr b. ʿAṭiyya l-Khaṭafā 1986, 21:7), as well as in several Qurʾānic suras—mostly Meccan (Meccan: **Q14**:19; **Q22**:18, 63, 65; **Q35**:27; Medinan: **Q24**:41; **Q58**:7)—though in these instances it is not part of a negated antithesis. It is therefore reasonable to assume that this formulaic phrase entered the Qurʾānic repertoire from pre-Qurʾānic poetic usage. It became particularly prominent in the chapters revealed during the early period or Revelation, gradually diminishing in frequency in the suras revealed after the migration to Medina, and later reappearing in certain post-Qurʾānic poetic compositions.

4.10. Comparative Summary of Negated-Antithesis Constructions

The Table 1 below presents a comparative synthesis of the structural configurations of negated antithesis in pre-Islamic poetry and the Qurʾān. By juxtaposing schematic form, placement and rhetorical function, it clarifies the extent to which the Qurʾān both inherits and reconfigures an established poetic device.

Table 1. Comparative Structural Configurations of Negated Antithesis in Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Qurʾān.

§	Pattern	Pre-Islamic Poetry	Qurʾān	Notes
Section 4.1	**wa-/fa-lā tafʿal → (contrast)**	4 cases. Often framing: opens verse/hemistich and the counterpart appears at the other edge (or opens each hemistich). Second element tends toward fa-fʿal ("but do!").	Exact wa-lā tafʿal/fa-fʿal absent. Near-match in Medinan: fa-lā tafʿal/wa-fʿal (**Q2**:150; **Q3**:107), typically mid-verse and adjacent. Elsewhere: wa-lā tafʿal opens verse but second element varies (wa-man yafʿal/ḥattā yafʿal/etc.). In Meccan, placement often mimics two-sentence/"two-hemistich" feel (e.g., **Q6**:52; **Q17**:31; **Q10**:95), though the second element is structurally altered.	Qurʾān reworks a poetic-looking opening into new internal syntax: either keeps the *placement* (Meccan) but changes the *second element*, or keeps the *pattern* but changes *ordering/adjacency* (Medinan).
Section 4.2	**faʿala/lam yafʿal**	3 placements: (i) open–close of verse/hemistich (most "poetic"); (ii) opener + mid-verse; (iii) end of first hemistich + end of second.	Shares (i) and (ii), but most frequent Qurʾānic form is both parts mid-verse (often adjacent, or separated by a small particle), a pattern not found in poems (e.g., **Q36**:10; cf. also **Q2**:5). Also Qurʾānic-only: both parts can open (**Q18**:72, 75), or open separated by one word (**Q4**:164; Q13:18).	Poetry uses antithesis as an edge device (rhetorical framing). Qurʾān often turns it into a mid-verse argumentative hinge.
Section 4.3	**faʿala/lā yafʿal**	Mostly in conditional contexts. Two configurations: (i) open–close; or (ii) one element serves as closure.	3 configurations, with the second part often closing. Some verses preserve "poetic remnants" (closure effect), but the Qurʾān also allows configurations not in poems (including both parts mid-verse: **Q41**:44).	Compared with the poetry, the Qurʾān expands the pattern's syntactic freedom, while often preserving a closing punch.
Section 4.4	**a-faʿalta/am lam tafʿal**	3 examples. In poems the construction tends to open and/or close (often closing a hemistich; in one case closing the whole line).	Comparable number (**Q36**:10; **Q2**:6; **Q63**:6): in the Qurʾān the antithesis is characteristically mid-verse.	Same interrogative antithesis exists in both corpora, but the Qurʾān de-poeticises placement (moves it inward).
Section 4.5	**ifʿal/wa-lā tafʿal**	Two main configurations: (i) ifʿal introduces first hemistich/clause; wa-lā tafʿal introduces second; (ii) fa-fʿal/wa-lā tafʿal as a compact unit mid-verse.	Both configurations exist: (i) close parallel (e.g., **Q7**:3). (ii) Meccan examples with compact consecutive imperatives (**Q6**:153; **Q45**:18). Also Medinan variants with an intervening clause (notably in **Q2**).	This is one of the clearest "continuity" cases: the Qurʾān preserves the imperative-counterimperative logic, then elaborates it with longer didactic expansions.
Section 4.6	**(X)/wa-mā (X) + prep (bi-/min)**	Rare:2 poetic examples, typically closing with wa-mā + x+ genitive + bi-/min + adjective.	1 Qurʾānic example (**Q11**:97), structurally very close (wa-mā … bi-adjective).	A striking shared *formula*; the debate is whether it is "full" negated antithesis or semi-negation ("X happened, but X is not *right/fit*").
Section 4.7	**… ḥattā yafʿal**	3 poetic examples; placement tends to be structurally prominent (framing hemistichs or opening each hemistich).	The Qurʾān attests it (**Q13**:11; **Q8**:72; **Q2**:191), but typically mid-sentence, not as an edge-framing device.	Same semantic logic (threshold/transformation), but the poetry uses it for emphatic framing, the Qurʾān for legal-ethical delimitation within prose-like syntax.
Section 4.8	**(X)/wa-mā (X)**	Very common. In the poems, first element often emphasised (innī/wa-qad/wa-la-qad/fa-imperative), and the whole device strongly favours edge positions (opening/closing hemistichs).	~26 Qurʾānic examples, roughly balanced Meccan/Medinan. Qurʾān often pairs it with istithnāʾ ("… illā …"), and uses both imperative-led (often Meccan) and imperfect-led (often Medinan) variants. Also includes inversion cases (negated first).	This is a major quantitative result: the Qurʾān adopts a shared mechanism but uses it far more, fitting its didactic/admonitory mode.
Section 4.9	**a-lam tafʿal/[fa-]tafʿal** ("Did you not do…")	1 poetic example (al-Nābigha), opening with the same rhetorical question; underlying contrast is "not seeing/seeing".	2 Qurʾānic examples highlighted (**Q39**:21; **Q24**:43), same opening formula and similar theme (divine power), though the Qurʾān uses it more widely, beyond strict antithesis.	A strong case for a shared formulaic entry point into demonstrations of power/sovereignty, with Qurʾān expanding its range.

The following section moves beyond these shared structural patterns to examine two additional aspects that further reveal the rhetorical kinship between the two corpora. One

is the repetition of words within negated-antithesis sentences, and the other is the shared vocabulary that underlies its formulation in both the Qurʾān and in pre-Islamic poetry.

5. Word and Phrase Repetitions

Beyond the common constructions described, negated-antithesis sentences in the two corpora sometimes repeat words that constitute the actual antithesis. Usually, the key word or a derivative of it, is repeated three times, as in the following two examples:

وَدَاعٍ دَعَا هَلْ **مَنْ يُجِيبُ** إِلَى النَّدى **فَلَمْ يَسْتَجِبْهُ** عِنْدَ ذاكَ **مُجِيبُ**

(Kaʿb b. Saʿd al-Ghanawī, *Muntahā l-ṭalab* (Ibn Maymūn al-Baghdādī 1999, 350:24))

A caller called out: "Is there anyone **who will respond** to a call for generosity?"

Yet no responder, at that time, **responded** to his call

And [**Q2**:32; Medinan]:

قالُوا سُبْحانَكَ **لا عِلْمَ** لَنَا **إِلّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا** إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ **العَلِيمُ** الحَكِيم

They said, 'Glory be to You! **We have no knowledge except what You have caused us to know**. Truly, You are the **All-Knowing**, the All-Wise

In both these, the antithesis revolves around two opposing poles: "responding" versus "not responding," and "knowing" versus "not knowing." In each verse, the two corresponding roots are repeated three times. This occurs in both corpora, although it is more frequent in the Qurʾānic text than in the poems.[8] Aside from this shared triple repetition (with rare cases of four or five repetitions),[9] no further significant structural similarities were observed between the two.

Repetition of entire phrases within the negated-antithesis sentence is also found in both corpora, although without additional structural similarities. One example is a previously quoted verse [ʿĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl (ʿAbīd b. al-Abraṣ and ʿĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl 1913, 46:2)]:

أَلَمْ تَعْلَمِي أَنِّي **إِذا الإِلْفُ قَادَنِي** **إِلَى الجَوْرِ لا أَنْقَادُ وَالإِلْفُ جَائِرُ**

Have you not realised **that if the companion leads me**

to injustice, I shall never be **led astray**? **It is the companion who will be unjust**

And another is [**Q4**:164; Medinan]:

وَرُسُلًا قَدْ قَصَصْنَاهُمْ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَرُسُلًا لَمْ نَقْصُصْهُمْ عَلَيْكَ وَكَلَّمَ اللَّهُ مُوسَى تَكْلِيمًا

There are messengers whose stories We have told you already and others We have not. And to Moses, Allah spoke directly

This stylistic feature, common to both corpora, occurs more frequently in the Qurʾān than in the poetry, and far more often in the Meccan suras than in the Medinan.[10] Hence, the repetition of complete or extended phrases within the negated-antithesis sentence appears to be a shared device in early Qurʾānic verses and in pre-Islamic poetry. In later Qurʾānic chapters, however, this practice is largely replaced by repetition of single words rather than entire phrases.

A final observation in this area concerns use of reversed word order in the negated-antithesis sentence. This is mostly characteristic of the poetic corpus, although it also appears twice in the Qurʾānic text. Here are the Qurʾānic examples, followed by one from the poetry:[11]

[**Q6**:136; Meccan]

[....] **فَمَا كَانَ لِشُرَكَائِهِمْ فَلَا يَصِلُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَمَا كَانَ لِلَّهِ فَهُوَ يَصِلُ إِلَىٰ شُرَكَائِهِمْ** سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ

Yet the portion of their associate-gods is not shared with Allah, while Allah's portion is shared with their associate-gods. How unjustly they judge

[**Q3**:86; Medinan]

كَيْفَ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ قَوْمًا كَفَرُوا بَعْدَ إِيمَانِهِمْ وَشَهِدُوا أَنَّ الرَّسُولَ حَقٌّ وَجَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ **وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ** الظَّالِمِينَ

How will Allah guide a people who chose to disbelieve after they had believed, acknowledged the Messenger to be true, and received clear proofs? People who do wrong **will never be guided by Allah**

A verse from [ʿAbīd b. al-Abraṣ (ʿAbīd b. al-Abraṣ and ʿĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl 1913, 7:14)] represents use of this structure in the poetic corpus:

وَلَقَدْ أَبَحْنَا مَا حَمَيْـ تَ وَلا مُبِيحَ لِما حَمَيْنَا

We allowed what you have protected,

But what we protect is never allowed

The structure of the second Qurʾānic example is closer to that found in most of the poems, as the two parts of the negated-antithesis sentence serve to open and close the verse.

To conclude, the recurrence of key roots (such as *j-w-b* or *ʿ-l-m*) within negated-antithesis sentences demonstrates that both pre-Islamic poetry and the Qurʾān employ morphological recursion to intensify contrast. In these instances, the affirmative and negative poles are derived from the same root, and they generate internal semantic tension and produce rhythmic and rhetorical emphasis through repeated forms—often threefold. This phenomenon of what may be termed intra-root antithesis is distinct from other stylistic devices shared by the two corpora, such as the repetition of entire phrases within the antithetical structure or the inversion of repeated elements. In the latter cases, the emphasis arises not from multiple reiterations of a single root, but from syntactic mirroring or reversed word order, which likewise heighten contrast and balance. While all these techniques appear in both corpora, the Qurʾān employs them—except for antithetical inversion—more systematically and with greater frequency integrating them into a broader argumentative and theological framework, thereby increasing the rhetorical density and expressive range of the construction beyond its predominantly performative function in poetry.

6. Shared Vocabulary

The final topic in this comparative analysis concerns the use of shared vocabulary within the negated-antithesis sentence in the two corpora. There are thirty-three roots common to the two texts: *ʾty*, *ʾmr*, *blgh*, ***jwb***, *jwr*, *ḥrm*, *ḥml*, *khlq*, *khwn*, *drk*, *dhkr*, ***rʾy***, *rjw*, *sʾl*, *sqy*, *smʿ*, ***ẓlm***, *ʿbd*, *ʿdw*, *ʿṣm*, *ʿlm*, *ʿmr*, *ghrr*, ***qtl***, ***qwl***, *qwm*, ***kwn***, *lwm*, *msk*, *njw*, *nyl*, *wṣl*, and *wʿd*. Some observations:

The root *ʾty* ("to bring") appears in both corpora in conjunction with the root *qwl*. A speech (*qawl*) is narrated, and its content establishes the duality of "bringing" versus "not bringing." In the Qurʾān, this construction occurs primarily in Meccan suras [**Q12**:37; **20**:133; **69**:25] and only once in a Medinan sura [**Q5**:20]. An example is in [**Q12**:37]:

قَالَ **لَا يَأْتِيكُمَا** طَعَامٌ تُرْزَقَانِهِ إِلَّا نَبَّأْتُكُمَا بِتَأْوِيلِهِ قَبْلَ **أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمَا**

He said: The food which **is brought to you** [daily] **shall not be brought to** you, but I shall tell you its interpretation before it reaches you

Only one example is identified in the poetic corpus (Imruʾ al-Qays 2000, 72:19):

فَأَقُول: تأتيكَ الفِصالُ **وَلا تأتِيكَ إلّا** ليلةَ الخِمْسِ

I then said: The camels' young **shall be brought to you, yet they shall not be brought to you until** the fifth day of their watering

This verse by Imruʾ al-Qays is a humorous condemnation of the husband of his mistress, and it is presented as a dialogue with her. When she praises her husband for his generosity—filling large bowls with meat to feed others, mainly poor children—Imruʾ al-Qays responds mockingly that he provides only a small quantity of food, symbolised by his reference young rather than mature camels, and that he does so only once a week. The Qurʾānic context also concerns food, but it does so in praise of the Prophet Joseph. Here, in a dialogue between Joseph and two fellow prisoners, they speak of the food they see in their dreams. Joseph replies that every kind of food they see in their dreams has meaning which he can interpret.

The root *ʾmr* ("to order") in seen in three examples, one in the poetic corpus and two in the Qurʾān. One Qurʾānic instance is the previously quoted verse **Q11**:97 [Meccan]; the other is **Q3**:80 [Medinan]:

إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَئِهِ فَاتَّبَعُوا **أَمْرَ** فِرْعَوْنَ **وَمَا أَمْرُ** فِرْعَوْنَ بِرَشِيد

To Pharaoh and his chiefs, yet they followed **the command** of Pharaoh, and Pharaoh's **command was not** well guided

The poetic example comes in a verse by al-Mutalammis al-Ḍubaʿī (d. 569 CE) (Al-Mutalammis al-Ḍubaʿī 1970, 7:6):

أَمَرْتُهُمْ أَمْرِي بِمُنْعَرَجِ اللِّوَى **ولا أَمْرَ** للمَعْصِيِّ إِلَّا مُضَيَّعُ

I gave them my orders at the Munʿaraj al-Liwā,

but no command is preserved for one who is disobeyed

In both examples, the second part of the negated-antithesis sentence shares similar grammatical structure, combining *wa-mā*/*wa-lā* with the word *amr*. The contexts are likewise comparable. In the poem, the poet's tribe refuses to obey his command, while in the Qurʾānic verse, Pharaoh's people reject the authority of Moses. Both groups are consequently defeated.

Apart from its negated-antithesis construction, the opening hemistich of al-Mutalammis's verse appears to have influenced the later poet Durayd b. al-Ṣimma, who was killed in 8/630 battling the Muslims [Durayd b. al-Ṣimma, *al-Aṣmaʿiyyāt* (Al-Aṣmaʿī 1993, 28:6)]. Durayd describes how his tribe likewise refused to heed his command in a pre-Islamic battle, resulting in the death of his brother.

Use of the root *rʾy* ("to see") is notably similar in the two corpora. Structurally, the rhetorical question *a-lam tara anna Allāha* ("Have you not seen that God…?") is repeated in both the Qurʾānic and poetic examples discussed above. Semantically, the concept of "seeing" also appears in a verse by al-Aʿshā Maymūn in the poem mentioned earlier, intended to be recited in the presence of the Prophet Muḥammad, as well as in **Q7**:143 [Meccan].

The verse by al-Aʿshā reads (Al-Aʿshā Maymūn 1969, 17:14):

نَبِيٌّ يَرَى ما لا تَرَوْنَ وَذِكْرُهُ أغارَ لَعَمْرِي فِي البِلادِ وَأَنْجَدَا

A prophet who sees what you do not see—

his fame, I swear, has spread through the lowlands and the highlands

This poem may have been influenced by Qurʾānic composition, perhaps intentionally to display the poet's familiarity with and acceptance of the Qurʾān. It depicts the Prophet possessing knowledge inaccessible to others, granted him through his contact with the divine. The same idea, expressed through a similar negated-antithesis structure, appears in a poem by Ḥassān b. Thābit (d. 54/674), a companion of the Prophet (Ḥassān b. Thābit 2006, 290:6).

The Qurʾānic verse conveys a comparable concept of prophetic knowledge, here in reference to Moses:

وَلَمَّا جَاءَ مُوسَى لِمِيقَاتِنَا وَكَلَّمَهُ رَبُّهُ قَالَ رَبِّ **أَرِنِي** أَنْظُرْ إِلَيْكَ قَالَ **لَن تَرَانِي** وَلَٰكِنِ انظُرْ إِلَى الْجَبَلِ فَإِنِ

اسْتَقَرَّ مَكَانَهُ فَسَوْفَ **تَرَانِي** [….]

When Moses came at the appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, he asked, 'My Lord! Reveal Yourself to me **so I may see You**.' Allah answered, **'You cannot see Me**! But look at the mountain. If it remains firm in its place, only then will you **see Me** [….]

In this verse, Moses is portrayed as possessing the potential to perceive the divine and thereby grasp His essence—an ability denied to ordinary people.

The root *smʿ* ("to hear") appears in a single pre-Islamic poem (by al-Aʿshā Maymūn (Al-Aʿshā Maymūn 1969, 28:29)) and in several Qurʾānic verses, one of which is **Q35**:14 [Meccan]. Al-Aʿshā describes a man, attacked by a lion, who cries out twice to his comrades. His first cry is heard, but his second—barely audible as he dies—is not:

فَأَسْمَعَ أُولَى الدَّعْوَتَيْنِ صِحَابَهُ وَكَانَ التِي **لَا يَسْمَعُونَ لَهَا** قَدِ

He made his first cry heard by his comrades,

but [the second] was not heard—it was the cry [of a dying man]

In this verse, the cry for help is ultimately futile as the second call goes unheard. In the Qurʾānic verse, the same combination of the roots *dʿw* ("to call") and *smʿ* ("to hear") appears, though in a different yet thematically related context. While the poetic verse portrays the caller's death, the Qurʾānic verse refers to the death—or powerlessness—of those called to help. In both cases, the call is a plea for rescue, either from physical death or from punishment in the hereafter:

إِنْ تَدْعُوهُمْ لَا يَسْمَعُوا دُعَاءَكُمْ وَلَوْ سَمِعُوا مَا اسْتَجَابُوا لَكُمْ [….]

"**If you call upon them, they cannot hear your calls. And if they were to hear**, they could not respond to you [….]"

The root *ẓlm* ("to wrong") is widely used in negated-antithesis constructions in the Qurʾān, but appears only once in pre-Islamic poetry. It is used by Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā (Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā 2004, 1:54):

وَمَنْ لَا يَذُدْ عَنْ حَوْضِهِ بِسِلَاحِهِ يُهَدَّمْ وَمَنْ **لَا يَظْلِمِ النَّاسَ يُظْلَمِ**

The one who does not defend his watering place with his weapon,

It will be destroyed; and **the one who does not wrong people will himself be wronged**

In both examples, the negated part of the sentence appears first in the negated antithesis: **Meccan suras: Q7**:160; **Q10**:44; **Q11**:101; **Q16**:33, 118; **Q29**:40; **Q30**:9; **Q43**:76; **Medinan suras: Q2**:57; **Q3**:117; **Q9**:70. Only in one instance (**Q10**:54, Meccan) does the negation appear as the second part of the sentence.

In all the Qurʾānic examples, as in Zuhayr's verse, the central theme is human injustice. In the Qurʾān, people are portrayed as wronging themselves through their misdeeds and thereby deserving divine punishment—not because God has wronged them, but because they have wronged themselves. In Zuhayr's verse, however, the message takes the opposite form: people are urged to wrong others, because if they do not, they will themselves be wronged. As in Zuhayr's verse, one Qurʾānic example (**Q10**:44) also explicitly combines *al-nās* ("the people") with *ẓlm* ("to wrong").

إِنَّ اللهَ **لا يَظْلِمُ النَّاسَ شَيْئًا وَلَكِنَّ النَّاسَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ** [**Q10**:44]

Indeed, Allah **does not wrong people** in the least, **but it is people who wrong themselves.**

The root *ʿbd* ("to worship") appears in the poem by al-Aʿshā Maymūn, previously mentioned, where the poet urges people to worship not idols but the divine (Al-Aʿshā Maymūn 1969, 17:20):

وَلا تَعْبُدِ الأَوْثَانَ واللهَ فَاعْبُدَا

Do not worship idols, but worship God

The same notion is conveyed in two Qurʾānic verses, both employing the negated-antithesis structure. The first is **Q10**:104 [Meccan]:

[….] **فَلَا أَعْبُدُ الَّذِينَ تَعْبُدُونَ** مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ **وَلَٰكِنْ أَعْبُدُ اللَّهَ** [….]

[….] **but never will I worship those that you worship** besides Allah**. I worship Allah [….].**

The second is **Q109**:2 [Meccan]:

لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ

I do not worship that which you worship

Al-Aʿshā's verse and the Qurʾānic examples share not only a common root and syntactic structure but also a unified theological message: the rejection of idolatry and exclusive devotion to the one true God.

The root *ʿlm* ("to know"/"to teach") is widely used in the Qurʾān but appears less frequently in pre-Islamic poetry. Here are two sets of examples. In the first, the negated-antithesis sentence combines the forms *ʿallama* ("to teach") and *ʿalima* ("to know"), as in the following verse by al-Mutalammis al-Ḍubaʿī (Al-Mutalammis al-Ḍubaʿī 1970, 1:8):

لِذِي الحِلْمِ قَبْلَ اليَوْمِ مَا تُقْرَعُ العَصَا **وَمَا عُلِّمَ الإِنْسانُ إِلّا لِيَعْلَمَا**

Before this day, the stick was not struck for the wise man;

Man was taught only in order that he might know

This comes from a poem in which al-Mutalammis praises himself and his tribe in comparison with others. The first hemistich is explained through an anecdote: when a wise Arab grew old and his mind began to falter, he instructed his daughter to alert him by striking a stick whenever she heard him make a mistake in speech (Al-Mutalammis al-Ḍubaʿī 1970, pp. 26–28). Al-Mutalammis thus acknowledges that only the truly wise seek counsel—and counts himself among them.

This combination also appears in the Qurʾān, in **Q96**:5 and **Q6**:91 [both Meccan]:

عَلَّمَ الإنسانَ **ما لَمْ يَعْلَمْ**

He taught man what he did not know

[….] **وَعُلِّمْتُمْ ما لَمْ تَعْلَمُوا** [….]

[….] **You have been taught what you did not know** [….]

And in **Q2**:32 [Medinan]:

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ **لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا** إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ

They replied, 'Glory be to You! **We have no knowledge except what You have taught us.** You are truly the All-Knowing, All-Wise

The order of the two parts of the negated antithesis differs between the poetic and Medinan Qurʾānic examples on one hand, and the two Meccan verses on the other. In the former, the negated part opens the line, whereas in the Meccan examples it appears at its end. Nevertheless, the general context in all four instances is comparable: the transmission of wisdom in the poem and of divine knowledge in the Qurʾān. In both **Q96** and al-Mutalammis's poem, *al-insān* ("human beings") are addressed.

In the second set of examples, the negated-antithesis phrase features the combination of *ʿalima/yaʿlam* and *lam/lā yaʿlam* ("to know" and "not to know"). It appears in two verses: one by ʿAntara b. Shaddād in his famous *Muʿallaqa* (ʿAntara b. Shaddād 1992, 130:80):

إِنِّي عَدانِي أَنْ أَزورَكِ فَاعْلَمي **ما قَدْ عَلِمْتِ وَبَعْضُ ما لَمْ تَعْلَم**

I was prevented from visiting you—know this!

Because of **what you already know, and of what you do not yet know**

Here, ʿAntara addresses his beloved at the poem's end, explaining to her matters she partly knows and partly does not. The poem presents two main ideas that the poet clarifies for his beloved. The first is why he cannot visit her (the conflict between him and her kinsfolk), which she likely already knows. The second is about his noble qualities, of which she is not fully aware. The image, therefore, is that of the poet-lover possessing knowledge in contrast with his beloved who either does not know or knows only in part.

A similar combination of *yaʿlam* and *lā yaʿlam* (and their derivatives) appears in several Qurʾānic verses. In these, the contrast is typically between divine and human knowledge: God knows, whereas humankind does not. Such verses highlight the perfection and completeness of divine knowledge relative to the limited and imperfect understanding of humankind. Numerous examples include the expression إِنَّ اللَّهَ **يَعْلَمُ** وَأَنْتُمْ **لَا تَعْلَمُونَ** ("Indeed, Allah knows, but you do not know") [Meccan verses: **Q16**:74; Medinan verses: **Q2**:216, 232; **3**:66; **24**:19].

In other verses, it is the perfect knowledge of the prophets—derived from God's own knowledge—that is praised and contrasted with the limited understanding of human beings. The phrase **وَأَعْلَمُ** مِنَ اللهِ **ما لا تَعْلَمُون** ("**for I know** from Allah **something that you do not know"**) [**Q7**:62; **12**:86; Meccan] appears in this context.

The second poetic example is the previously cited verse by Abū Qays Ṣayfī b. al-Aslat:

رجموا **بالغيب كيما يعلموا** من عديد القوم **ما لا يعلمُ**

They spoke conjecturally **in order to learn**

from the people what **he himself did not know**

This verse stands alone, not preserved within a longer poem, and its precise context therefore remains uncertain. The concept expressed, which is centred on the *ghayb* (the

unseen or the realm of the unknown), also appears in the Qurʾānic verse [**Q11**:31; Meccan]. Here, the Prophet Noah acknowledges his ignorance of the unseen compared with the divine, who possesses complete and perfect knowledge:

وَلَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ عِنْدِي خَزَائِنُ اللَّهِ **وَلَا أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ** وَلَا أَقُولُ إِنِّي مَلَكٌ وَلَا أَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ تَزْدَرِي أَعْيُنُكُمْ لَنْ يُؤْتِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ خَيْرًا **اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ** بِمَا فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ إِنِّي إِذًا لَمِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

> I do not say to you that I possess Allah's treasuries or **know the unseen**, nor do I claim to be an angel, nor do I assert that Allah will never grant goodness to those you look down on. **Allah knows** best what is [hidden] within them. [If I did,] then I would truly be among the wrongdoers

In sum, the shared vocabulary underlying negated-antithesis constructions in pre-Islamic poetry and the Qurʾān indicates a common rhetorical and conceptual reservoir rather than isolated lexical coincidence. The recurrence of thirty-three shared roots—many of them clustered around themes of authority (*ʾmr*), perception (*rʾy*, *smʿ*), knowledge (*ʿlm*), justice (*ẓlm*), worship (*ʿbd*), speech (*qwl*) and response (*jwb*)—shows that the device operates within similar semantic fields in both corpora. Yet while the poetic examples typically situate these oppositions within tribal, ethical or personal contexts, Qurʾānic usage redirects them toward the theological, prophetic and eschatological. The structural pattern remains recognisably the same, but its ideological horizon expands: what in poetry serves to assert honour, authority or experiential wisdom becomes in the Qurʾān a vehicle for articulating divine sovereignty, moral accountability and the limits of human knowledge. The shared roots thus testify not only to linguistic continuity, but also to a process of rhetorical reorientation, whereby an established poetic device is integrated into—and reshaped by—a new religious discourse.

7. Summary and Conclusions

The comparative examination of negated-antithesis structures in pre-Islamic poetry and the Qurʾānic text reveals a complex interplay of continuity, possible indirect adaptation, and innovation across the two corpora. While many of the Qurʾānic constructions reflect patterns already well established in poetic tradition, they rarely replicate them verbatim. A central finding of this analysis is, therefore, not merely the existence of shared structures, but the ways in which the Qurʾān transforms earlier patterns—sometimes subtly, sometimes fundamentally—to suit an emerging scriptural discourse.

Across the different patterns examined, one of the most consistent observations is structural displacement. In many Qurʾānic examples, features that in poetry typically appear at the opening or closing of the verse or hemistich are shifted to mid-verse. This is evident, for example, in the *faʿala/lam yafʿal* pattern. While pre-Islamic poets regularly used this construction to frame a verse—opening or concluding it with the antithesis—the Qurʾānic text commonly places both parts of the structure in close succession, often mid-verse, sometimes separated by no more than a single particle. Such tight syntactic coupling may reflect the Qurʾān's preference for compact, rapidly unfolding argumentation. Conversely, the Qurʾān occasionally generates new structural possibilities unattested in the poetic corpus, such as instances where both halves of the antithesis open the verse, either adjacently or separated by a single intervening word. These unique Qurʾānic formations point to a scriptural reconfiguration of the poetic inheritance, rearranging inherited rhetorical components into novel syntactic environments.

A similar pattern emerges in the *faʿala/lā yafʿal* construction. Pre-Islamic poetic usage overwhelmingly places the antithesis at the verse's borders—opening and closing or, at the minimum, concluding the line. In the Qurʾān, however, there are three distinct structural

configurations, none of which directly open the verse. The Qurʾānic examples cluster mid-verse, sometimes following brief introductory phrases and sometimes appearing entirely in the verse's central region—an arrangement unattested in the poems. The Qurʾān's relocation of this structure from the metrical frame to the syntactic interior signifies a shift from poetic ornamentation toward argumentative sequencing, with the antithesis functioning as a hinge within a discursive progression rather than a framing device.

The *a-faʿalta/am lam tafʿal* pattern reinforces this observation. Whereas the poetic instances—mostly from poets at the cusp of Islam—use the antithesis to open or close a verse, the Qurʾān embeds all its examples mid-verse. In these cases, the Qurʾānic discourse absorbs the poetic form but assigns it a distinct rhetorical function suited to exegetical or admonitory purposes. This structural reorientation also indicates a temporal transition: poets closest to the Islamic period appear more willing to exploit this pattern, and the Qurʾān continues this usage while adapting it to the syntax of revelation.

In the *ifʿal/wa-lā tafʿal* pattern, the two corpora show both striking parallels and clear divergences. Matching examples—one in poetry, one in the Qurʾān—share an almost identical configuration: the affirmative imperative introduces a clause, followed by the negative imperative, which introduces a second. Yet even here, Qurʾānic discourse expands the pattern. In the Qurʾān, the paired imperatives form only part of a more elaborate three-sentence structure, in which a final evaluative remark generalises the message beyond the immediate antithesis. This demonstrates the Qurʾān's tendency to use inherited structures while embedding them within an extended rhetorical framework. Other variants—such as the consecutive *fa-fʿal/wa-lā tafʿal* construction or versions separated by intervening clauses—likewise appear in both corpora, with the Qurʾānic examples showing greater syntactic flexibility.

The *fʿl/wa-mā fiʿl* pattern, one of the clearest structural bridges between the two corpora, displays the most extensive overlap. Both poetic and Qurʾānic texts employ the characteristic *wa-mā fiʿl + bi-/min* construction, with the negated clause typically functioning as closure. In the poems, the pattern is strongly associated with reproach and personal admonition; in the Qurʾān, the same structure functions as a tool for moral, doctrinal, and theological instruction. Its markedly higher frequency in the Qurʾānic text—approximately five times the poetic count—reflects the didactic pressures of revelation, where presenting and immediately negating a proposition serves not merely a stylistic role but also one that is central and argumentative. This pattern further reveals two compositional tendencies in the Qurʾān: a Meccan usage, in which the antithesis begins with an imperative, and a Medinan usage beginning with an imperfect verb. Both contrast with poetry, which predominantly opens with perfect verbs. Yet despite these differences, the repeated introduction of the second clause by *wa-mā* constitutes a strong structural link between the two corpora—unlikely to be coincidental and indicative of a shared rhetorical heritage.

The *ḥattā yafʿal* form is another window into the distinct rhetorical strategies at play. In all poetic examples, the antithesis frames the hemistich, generating a forceful ring-like effect. The Qurʾān, by contrast, consistently positions both parts mid-sentence. The poetic structure lends itself to emphatic, performative delivery, while the Qurʾānic adaptation embeds the pattern within narrative or argumentative flow. Nevertheless, a shared thematic concern persists: in both poetry and revelation, the construction frequently expresses resistance to change or the persistence of human disposition, indicating that both corpora use this structure to articulate tensions between constancy and transformation.

Repetition, too, plays an important role. Both corpora occasionally repeat the key verb or root three times, though this is seen more frequently in the Qurʾān. Repetition of complete phrases also appears in both, especially in Meccan suras, though less so in Medinan material. The Qurʾān further exhibits a small number of reversed word-order constructions—common

in poetry, rare in scripture—demonstrating that while it preserves certain poetic features, it typically reconfigures them to serve its prose-rhythmic style.

A further aspect of this study concerns the shared vocabulary that appears within negated-antithesis constructions across both corpora. The thirty-three common roots identified—including *ʾty*, *ʾmr*, *rʾy*, *smʿ*, *ẓlm*, *ʿbd*, and *ʿlm*—indicate that the Qurʾān and pre-Islamic poetry draw on a broadly overlapping lexical reservoir. In many cases, the two corpora use these roots in strikingly similar grammatical and rhetorical settings. The pairing of *ʾty* ("to bring") with *qwl*, for example, creates a parallel "bringing/not bringing" dynamic in both Joseph's speech in the Qurʾān and Imruʾ al-Qays's humorous description of generosity. Similarly, the root *ʾmr* ("to command") appears in comparable negated-antithesis structures that depict the rejection of rightful authority, whether it is al-Mutalammis's tribe ignoring his orders or Pharaoh's people refusing Moses. Shared patterns are also seen in the use of perception verbs such as *rʾy* and *smʿ*, which in both corpora highlight the limits of human insight or the futility of calling on those unable to respond.

These lexical convergences are equally evident in ethically and theologically charged roots. The root *ẓlm* ("to wrong") frames discussions of human injustice in both the Qurʾān and the poetry, although with opposite moral emphases, and *ʿbd* ("to worship") anchors parallel rejections of idolatry in al-Aʿshā and in several Meccan verses. The root *ʿlm* ("to know") likewise appears in both corpora to contrast knowledge with ignorance—human wisdom in poetry and divine knowledge in the Qurʾān. Taken together, these examples demonstrate that the Qurʾān's rhetorical reshaping of earlier antithetical structures relies not only on inherited syntactic patterns but also on a shared semantic foundation. The overlap in vocabulary underscores the Qurʾān's engagement with familiar linguistic materials, even as it reconfigures them to serve new doctrinal and rhetorical purposes.

Taken together, these findings illuminate a notable field of interaction between pre-Islamic poetic style and Qurʾānic rhetoric. The Qurʾān does not simply inherit the antithetical structures of earlier poetry; it reshapes them, redistributes them syntactically, and amplifies their rhetorical purpose. What emerges is a layered picture in which continuity and innovation coexist: the Qurʾān's rhetorical system is unmistakably grounded in earlier Arabic expression, yet it deploys familiar structures for new ends, transforming inherited patterns into instruments for theological argument, moral exhortation, and narrative insight. This study thus demonstrates not only the Qurʾān's engagement with the broader Arabic literary continuum but also its decisive role in expanding and redefining the possibilities of Arabic rhetorical composition.

These findings also invite reflection on the internal development of negated antithesis within the Qurʾānic corpus itself, particularly the distinction between Meccan and Medinan suras. Although the present study does not aim to offer a comprehensive diachronic account of Qurʾānic rhetoric, the distribution and structural behaviour of negated antithesis across different periods of revelation nevertheless reveal meaningful tendencies that merit explicit acknowledgement.

In the Meccan suras, negated antithesis frequently appears in configurations that preserve features characteristic of pre-Islamic poetic discourse. These include the tendency for the two antithetical components to initiate distinct syntactic units within the same verse, often corresponding to a bipartite structure reminiscent of poetic hemistichs. In several early Meccan examples (e.g., **Q6**:52; **Q17**:31; and **Q10**:95), the two parts of the negated antithesis open successive clauses that frame the verse's internal architecture, a pattern closely aligned with poetic usage. Even when the Qurʾānic text modifies the precise form of the poetic construction, its placement and rhythmic segmentation suggest a continued sensitivity to inherited verse-based organisation.

By contrast, Medinan usage exhibits a marked tendency toward syntactic consolidation and discursive integration. Negated antithesis in Medinan suras—most prominently but not exclusively in **Q2**—frequently occurs mid-verse, with the two components positioned in close proximity and embedded within extended legal, ethical or communal argumentation. In these instances, the antithesis no longer functions as a framing or emphatic device but rather as a hinge within a complex propositional sequence. This shift should not be understood as merely a consequence of sura length or thematic density. Rather, it reflects a broader rhetorical transformation associated with the Qurʾān's evolving communicative aims, as it moves from the compact, exhortatory style of the Meccan proclamations toward the elaborated normative discourse of the Medinan period.

The comparison between Medinan suras and Meccan suras is therefore best understood not as a quantitative juxtaposition of chapters of unequal length but as a qualitative assessment of rhetorical behaviour at the level of individual constructions. Viewed from this perspective, the contrast between Meccan dispersion and Medinan concentration of negated antithesis acquires clear analytical significance. The Meccan material displays a wider distribution of the pattern across multiple suras, often preserving configurations closer to poetic segmentation, whereas the Medinan material tends toward clustering, syntactic consolidation and formal diversification within fewer textual units. This shift reflects not merely differences in scale but a broader reorientation in Qurʾānic discourse, as inherited rhetorical forms are progressively integrated into sustained argumentative and normative contexts.

These observations align with broader insights in Qurʾānic studies that view the Qurʾān not as a rhetorically static text but as a corpus whose discourse strategies develop in tandem with changing historical, social, and communicative contexts (e.g., Nöldeke 1919; Sinai 2010). Within this framework, negated antithesis emerges as a device that is not merely inherited from pre-Islamic poetic usage but progressively refunctionalised within the Qurʾān itself. Its evolution—from a structure that often mirrors poetic segmentation in the Meccan period to one embedded within sustained argumentative prose in the Medinan period—illustrates how the Qurʾān simultaneously preserves and transcends earlier Arabic rhetorical conventions.

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Notes

1 Some classical anecdotes describe the longevity of ʿAbīd and accordingly place his death in later decades; however, these reports have been questioned as fictional by Weipert (2007). Moreover, ʿAbīd's poetry contains no references to Islam.

2 The translations of the Qurʾānic verses are taken from https://www.alim.org/quran/ (accessed on 8 February 2026), with occasional amendments made by the author.

3 The combination of *ʿalima* and *lam taʿlam* ("to know" and "what you did not know"), which appears in the Arabic verse by Abū Qays Ṣayfī b. al-Aslat, also appears in the Qurʾān in **Q48**:27 [Medinian].

4 Other examples are found in the following Meccan suras: **Q6**:93; **Q12**:9:96; **Q20**:96; **Q27**:22; and in the following Medinian suras: **Q2**: 33; **Q4**:11–12; **Q5**:20; **Q7**:8:87; **Q48**:2:27; **Q58**:8; **Q63**:6.

5 Meccan suras: **Q11**:36; **Q39**:42; Medinian suras: **Q62**:5; **Q4**:90; **Q49**:14.

6 For the date of the Battle of Dhū Qarad, see (Ibn al-Athīr 1425 AH [2004], 12:841). For the dating of the Revelation of **Q2**, see (Nöldeke 2004, p. 155). For a discussion of the interrelationship between Kaʿb's poetry and the Qurʾān, see (Imhof 2010, pp. 389–403).

[7] The examples that appear in the Qurʾān are as follows: **Meccan *sūras*: Q6**:123; **11**:40, 97; **16**:127; **17**:31, 64; **18**:63; **28**:19, 27; **35**:44; **40**:21, 50; **43**:46. **Medinian *sūras*: Q2**:9, 26, 135, 143 (two occurrences), 213; **3**:67, 69; **4**:113 (two occurrences), 120, 157; **13**:14 (the attribution of this last verse to Medina is doubtful).

[8] In the poetry, this appears in: (Al-Aʿshā Maymūn 1969, 14:15; Imruʾ al-Qays 2000, 1:7; 4:19; *Khidāsh b. Zuhayr, Muntahā l-ṭalab* Ibn Maymūn al-Baghdādī 1999, 464:6; Al-Mutalammis al-Ḍubaʿī 1970, 7:6; Muhalhil b. Rabīʿa n.d., 24:10). In the Qurʾān, the Meccan *sūras*: **Q6**:50,59,150; **7**:143, 187; **12**:68; **16**:70,92; **17**:23,33; **28**:56; **31**:33; **35**:5,11,44; **39**:42; **40**:21; **55**:33 Nöldeke (2004, p. 96) questions the authenticity of the attribution of this specific verse to *sūra* 55. The Medinian *sūras*: **Q2**:143, 213, 286; **3**:67, 157; **4**:97,141,157; **5**:27, 41, 95, 115; **8**:72; **9**:78; **24**:33; **33**:53; **49**:14; **57**:8; **58**:9; **59**:12; **62**:5.

[9] In the poems: Bishr b. Abī Khāzim al-Asadī, *Muntahā l-ṭalab* (Ibn Maymūn al-Baghdādī, *Muntahā l-ṭalab*, 96:11). In the Qurʾān: Meccan *sūras*: **Q6**:19; **11**:89; **28**:19; The Medinian *sūras*: **Q2**:145, 246.

[10] In the poems: ʿAbīd b. al-Abraṣ (ʿAbīd b. al-Abraṣ and ʿĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl 1913, i:16); (ʿAntara b. Shaddād 1992, 45:2; Kaʿb b. Mālik al-Anṣārī 1966, 34:5); Qays b. al-Khāṭīm, Muntahā l-ṭalab (Ibn Maymūn al-Baghdādī 1999, 342:18); al-Samawʾal b. ʿĀdiyāʾ, Muntahā l-ṭalab (Ibn Maymūn al-Baghdādī 1999, 433:16); (Ṭarafa b. al-ʿAbd 2003, 8:38).In the Qurʾān, the Meccan *sūras*: **Q6**:81; **7**:87,99,146; **10**:35, 40,44; **11**:9:97; **13**:18; **16**:17; **25**:14; **29**:40; **40**:78; **41**:44; **69**:25;The Medinian *sūras*: **Q2**:188; **3**:75; **5**:116.

[11] The others are found in: ʿAbīd b. ʿAbd al-ʿUzzā (Ibn Maymūn al-Baghdādī 1999, 450:36); (Al-Aʿshā Maymūn 1969, 13:72; 81:4); Bishr b. Abī Khāzim al-Asadī (Ibn Maymūn al-Baghdādī 1999, 100:8); al-Find al-Zimmānī (Ibn Maymūn al-Baghdādī 1999, 477:56); Mālik b. Ḥarīm al-Hamdānī, *Aṣmaʿiyyāt* (Al-Aṣmaʿī 1993, 15:17); (Ṣayfī b. al-Aslat 1973, 17:12).

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