

Reporting the Direct Speeches of the Qur'anic Prophets: Rabb and Allāh as expressed by Hūd, Šāliḥ and Shu'ayb

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ABSTRACT:

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Prophetology is certainly a very relevant topic in the Qur'an. Therefore, after having expounded this topic in general terms, the main purpose of this article is to examine the direct speeches of the prophets. In particular, the focus is on two words, namely *Rabb* and *Allāh*, as expressed by the so-called pre-Islamic Arab prophets: Hūd, Šāliḥ and Shu'ayb. Hence, the emphasis is on the type of discourse and the subjects involved in the dialogic context. In the specific case of these three messengers, both *Rabb* and *Allāh* in their discourses are used primarily when speaking to their people. This highlights the antagonism between the "Lord of good" (God) and the "lord of evil" (the unbelieving people), reinforcing the idea of God as "Lord" (*Rabb*) and "the God" (*Allāh*).

KEYWORDS: Qur'anic text and language, Direct Speeches, Prophets, Hūd, Šāliḥ, Shu'ayb, *Rabb*, *Allāh*.

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1. Introduction

This article presents the results of a research focused mainly on the topic of Qur'anic prophethood, with special attention to the language used by the prophets¹. The study began first of all by examining Qur'anic prophetic narratives, in order to analyze and reconstruct the plot of each narrative, as well as to understand the overall message contained therein and the textuality through the prophetic speeches (Sherif 1985; Rippin 2016; Tottoli 2023). The sequence of the narratives was based on the order in which they are usually presented in the literary genre of the Stories of the prophets (*Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*), as well as in Biblical literature. In fact, far from the narrative style of the prophetic accounts found in the Bible, the Qur'an comprises a series of different passages in different *sūras* to tell the episodes of the prophets. However, these passages do not always follow the chronological order of revelations, since the particular organization of the Qur'an does not follow any sequential subject or pattern, being the revelations supposedly brought by God to Muhammad through Gabriel, as "the word of a noble Messenger" (Q. 81:19; Q. 17:106; 25:32), in different contexts, at different times, over a period of more than two decades (al-Ṭabarī 1987, 30: 166).

Regarding the language of the prophets in particular, the target was to propose a symmetrical reading between the incidents and the specific language (and words) used by the envoys themselves. Thus, by drawing a personal profile of each individual subject, an attempt has been made to reconsider an approach that claims to see all the Qur'anic prophets as serving the mission of Muhammad. In fact, several reference works clearly suggest that some episodes of Muhammad's biography can be seen in those of other prophets (Stern 1985; de Prémare 1989; Segovia 2015), as well as in traits of personality or words spoken. Through different Qur'anic passages dealing with messengers, Muhammad is told that the previous prophets were just like him. They had the same mission and had to endure the same trials. Therefore, God frequently encourages him by revealing: "If they cry lies to thee, so too before them the people of Noah cried lies, and 'Ād and Thamūd, and the people of Abraham, the people of Lot, and the men of Midian; to Moses also they cried lies" (Q. 22:42-44). This aspect is also corroborated by the stereotypical historical-prophetic framework of most of the stories: God sends the prophet to his people, so that they adhere to the monotheism he preaches; yet he meets opposition and the warning of a punishment is useless, as well as the signs the prophet brought. Thus, after God has been invoked, the unbelievers are punished and destroyed.² Hence, in other words the previous prophets can be seen as a sort of preparatio

prophetica of Muhammad.³

No less important, Muhammad, in the same way as Moses, experienced an intimate encounter with God (Q. 53:6-7), and an enlargement of his breast at the beginning of his prophetic mission (Q. 94:1)⁴. Moreover, some Qur'anic verses establish a special relationship between him and the prophet Noah, who is a kind of prototype of Muhammad. This aspect emerges prominently in several Qur'anic passages, when in their speeches recur the same words: 'I do not say to you, "I possess the treasures of God"; I know not the Unseen. And I say not to you, "I am an angel"; I only follow what is revealed to me. Say: 'Are the blind and the seeing man equal? Will you not reflect?' (Q. 6:50; see Q. 11:31). However, the only difference is that in the fact that when these words are spoken by Muhammad they are introduced by the typical divine order *qul* (say)⁵. Finally, Muhammad appears as a prophet who was given a Scripture like Abraham, Moses, and Jesus (Q. 3:48; 5:48; 20:133; 25:35; 53:36-37; 87:18-19).⁶

Given that one of the main research results was the building of a corpus that gathers all the words spoken by each prophet (except those of Muhammad)⁷, a final stage of the study considered the nature of its lexicon, as a specific segment of the Qur'an's lexicon, and the frequency with which each entry occurs⁸. Thus, a lexicometric analysis was very useful to start a specific in-depth investigation of the use of the terms *Rabb* and *Allāh* through the speeches of different prophets. This article, accordingly, focuses on the recurrence of these two words in the speech of Hūd, Šālīḥ and Shu'ayb, when found in a verbal exchange with other characters, emphasizing the subjects involved in the dialogical context. Obviously, starting from the data collected in the corpus of prophets' speeches, the analysis can be extended to all "speaking" prophets.⁹

2. Narratives and words of the prophets in the Qur'an

In the Qur'anic text there are several prophets who also belong to the Biblical tradition, especially the Old Testament: from the patriarchs and envoys to Jesus. In addition, there are also the so-called pre-Islamic Arab prophets, namely Hūd, Šālīḥ and Shu'ayb who otherwise seem to be absent from the Bible (Bell 1934, 330-340; al-Ṭarafī 2003, 113-124; Tottoli 2002; Wheeler 2002, 63-82, 146-156; Wheeler 2006, 24-57). Indeed, the commonality of prophetic characters found in the Bible and the Qur'an can be found in several Qur'anic passages, especially when it is God Himself, addressing the Prophet, who says: "So We relate to thee stories of what has gone before, and We have given thee a remembrance from Us" (Q. 20:99).

Most of the Qur'anic prophetic accounts with a Biblical subtext (Reynolds 2010), despite being the most narrative section¹⁰, when compared to the Biblical versions, appear to be distinguished by an elliptical and formulaic style, in addition to narrative omissions and fragmentations¹¹. In fact, for instance, different narrative passages are integrated into sūras that are not characterized by stories, thus appearing as independent units¹². However, there are also specific passages composed wholly of stories or built around a core of stories¹³. On the contrary, other sūras contain narrative parts enclosed in a few concise verses¹⁴ or allusive passages¹⁵. Lastly, a given number of verses represent a mere list of envoys (Q. 3:84; 4:163; 6:84-86; 9:70; 22:42-45; 38:12-13; 50:12-14) and related episodes. While it is true that all prophetic characters are identified with the same mission, without any particular distinction in their function, it is equally true that not all of them have an evident narrative importance. Actually, some of them play an important role in extended passages (e.g. Abraham, Moses, and Noah) (Q. 2:124-136; 7:103-160), while others are only mentioned by name in brief verses or lists of prophets (e.g. Isaac and Jonah)¹⁶.

As regards the accounts of the prophets, as examples of "normative precedent" (Gwynne 2004, 32), even though some of them (e.g. those of Moses and Mary and Jesus) could be seen as reported in detail, all of them are not present in dedicated contexts, except for Joseph's story in sūra 12. Each story is mainly portrayed as an edifying narrative, a divine "sign" and a reminder for listeners (Bell & Watt 1970, 124-125; Schwarzbaum 1982; Norris 1983). The Qur'an itself gives evidence of this trait at the end of "the fairest of stories" (Q. 12:3), that is the account of Joseph: "In their stories is surely a lesson to men possessed of minds; it is not a tale forged, but a confirmation of what is before it, and a distinguishing of everything, and a guidance, and a mercy to a people who believe" (Q. 12:111; see Abdel Haleem 1990). Consequently, given that the Qur'an gives priority to the moral aspects before the details (Donner 1998, 76-85)¹⁷, all the characters, and related incidents, are for the most part depicted as moral paradigms. Likewise, specific narrative parts are repeated in different sūras, sometimes with a few variations or additions in the plot,¹⁸ as well as in several prophets' speeches regarding the same issue. It means that the storyline is not recounted episodically as in a "normal" writing style. This feature also has an impact on the language used to relate the diverse stories, without forgetting that "their divergences, then, point to a successively changing narrative pact, to a continuing education of the listeners and the development of a moral consensus that is reflected in the texts" (Neuwirth 1991, 261).

The Qur'an, specifically for the prophets, portrays their human traits, so that despite their divine mission, they cannot be considered divine (Q. 7:35;

12:109; 14:11; 16:43; 25:20)¹⁹. Such an aspect appears above all when reporting direct speech, which defines noteworthy peculiarities and differences of their human personality. According to Abdel Haleem (1999, 206), the use of the direct speech of the unbelievers in the Qur'an is important as it records exactly what they utter so that they may be judged by what they themselves have professed rather than by what anybody has reported (Q. 22:51-69; 26:16-31). Certainly, Dialogue is one of the media through which the Qur'an emphasizes their humanity (Mir 1992, 5). Also, dialogue lets readers get a remarkable insight into characters (Qutb 1963, 163-170), as both envoys and human beings. Yet, it is important to highlight that occasionally the words they speak, as "embedded speakers", are clearly put in their mouths by God, Who is identified as the "implied speaker" (Robinson 2003, 234-238). Hence, the prophets can be seen as mouthpieces of divine revelation. In fact, these words passed untouched through them before being referred to their own people. This obviously happens, for instance, when the singular imperative *qul* appears in the so-called "say-passages" (with more than three hundred occurrences), as a characteristic device of the Qur'anic rhetoric, explicitly when God orders his envoys what to say.²⁰ The singular imperative *qul* recurs in passages that Welch (1986, 422-423) categorized as "say-passages". They have two main parts, namely a statement (or a question) which designates the setting, and the say-statement which is sometimes followed by an answer, a comment (Q. 3:72-73; 6:148-151; 34:21-22), or a praise formula (Q. 2:110; 10:18, 68; 21:26). The setting statement usually reports something said or done by the opponents (e.g. Meccan pagans, Jews and Medinan "hypocrites", opportunistic converts to Islam). Finally, it concerns Muhammad's followers only very occasionally (Bobzin 2011, 570).

Besides, with an obvious conative function of the discourse, different prophets address their interlocutors through the use of the vocative particle *yā* (O), within different phrases, or by directly invoking God (Abdul-Raof 2018, 15-17, 257-259). The most common kinds of dialogues are those between a prophet and his nation, and those which occur between God and some of his prophets. Also, among the other more recurrent addressees there is the town/tribal assembly, or council of nobles (*al-mala'*)²¹ that, in addition to the prophets' peoples, represents the chief impediment to the achievement of the aim of several prophets, namely the conversion of all their people. Finally, several prophets are found in a sort of soliloquy/prayer, or one-sided dialogues, when relating and sharing desires, feelings or thoughts. This specific kind of dialogue also occurs in relation to God, for example, when in Q. 2:34-39, He addresses Satan and Adam and Eve (Mir 1992, 9-11; Mir 1986).

A very interesting aspect that emerged in the language of the prophets is that of repetition. The recurrent repetitions could be justified by the fact that "Human beings must be constantly reminded that the coming of a prophet is not unprecedented. God has consistently sent prophets to inform them of the existence of their Creator and to remind them of their covenantal obligation to him" (Gwynne 2004, 32; El-Awa 2003). Actually, repetition stresses the value of the events, by providing a core message and its connected motifs, even though in different contexts. Hence, as well as the use of stereotypical phrases, repetition can be intentional, in order to draw attention to possible different nuances of a notion. It is a sort of "re-contexting" of the same truths rather than literal repetition. No less important, repetition, as well as specific stereotypical phrases, underlines and recalls a relevant Qur'anic detail. Cadence and rhythm require a generous amount of repetition. Such repetition aids fluency and serves as a mnemonic that assists oral recitation and memorization (Akhtar 2008, 148).

Finally, through the words spoken by the prophets, God exemplifies and outlines the framework of the argument that He wants to present to the recipients of the Scripture. Yet, not all of them are cited as speakers, and if they are, the amount of speech (or significant verbal exchange) of each prophet is obviously directly proportionate to the development of every single story. For instance, Adam, and especially Job, Jonah and Elijah, to whom little narrative development is provided, are therefore not very developed as characters. Indeed, they remain minor figures throughout both in terms of narrative and direct speech. On the contrary, quite different is the case of Ishmael, Aaron and David who, even though characterized only by a few utterances, appear clearly linked to stronger messengers in terms of individual narrative development, namely, Abraham, Moses and, although at a lower level, Solomon.

3. Rabb and Allāh in the Speech of the Prophets

The research on prophetic discourses in the Qur'an led to the structuring of a corpus in which all the words of the prophets have been organized according to their roots. The entries that appear with the greatest frequency are: RBB, 'LH, and QWM. Given the purpose of this article, the analysis presented here has focused mainly on the first two roots, from which Rabb and Allāh evidently derive. Specifically, in the following pages, these two words will be presented and investigated as they appear in linguistic exchanges of Hūd, Šālīḥ and Shu'ayb, during different types of speech (e.g. dialogue, soliloquy/prayer)²². The fact that God speaks of Himself in the third person mainly concerns the central issue of the Qur'an, namely the

Oneness of God (*tawhīd*) (Abdel Haleem 1999, 198): "So [Prophet] do not invoke any gods beside God, or you will incur punishment" (Q. 26:213). Furthermore, the following passages, in which God is referred to as *Allāh* or *Rabb*, also emphasize the same concept: "You who believe, eat the good things We have provided for you and be grateful to God, if it is Him that you worship" (Q. 2:172); "We will strike panic into the disbelievers' hearts because they attribute partners to God although He has sent no authority for this. Their shelter will be the Fire—how miserable is the home of the evildoers!" (Q. 3:151); "Truly We have opened up a path to clear triumph for you [Prophet], so that God may forgive you your past and future sins, complete His grace upon you, guide you to a straight path, and help you mightily" (Q. 48:1-3). No less important, it is interesting to note that the conjunction of *Allāh* and *Rabb*, *allāhumma rabbanā* (Q. 5:114) occurs only once in the whole of the Qur'an in the speech of Jesus.

Even though the noun *Rabb* is found during all the phases of Muhammad's mission, its use is far from uniform throughout the course of revelation. In fact, it appears more frequently in the first Meccan period, but gradually loses ground during the following periods and becomes quite rare during the Medinan revelations (Gaudefroy-Demombynes 1920-1930; Chelhod 1958; Jomier 2016). The reason is easily identifiable in the fact that the episodes of the prophets mainly represent a significant segment in the Meccan sūras. Besides, in Mecca the use of narrative as a tool to relate Muhammad's situation could reflect failure and powerlessness. On the contrary, the Medinan period illustrates only a small number of concise accounts or phrases (Q. 2:246-251; 5:20-26), frequently referring to punishment stories, thus, they constitute the rather meagre narrative clothing of the believer-unbeliever relationship in Medina (Marshall 1999, 161). The difference between the narrative materials of the two periods could be explained by considering the transformed religious condition, as well as the growing power and authority of Muhammad, since his attention turned to legal themes. Thus, messengers invoked as forerunners in the Meccan period of revelation were not as functional as in the Medinan period (Horovitz 1926, 25-27; Marshall 1999, 158-164).

However, although *Allāh* is the word with the highest frequency in the Qur'anic text (Watt 1953, 23-29; Jomier 2016; Mir 1987, 9; Badawi & Abdel Haleem 2008, 40), among the entries of the corpus of prophets' speeches, *Rabb* emerges as the most recurring name of God (Chelhod 1958; Mir 1987, 47; Badawi & Abdel Haleem 2008, 342), especially pronounced by Moses and Abraham (41 and 30 times respectively). As for *Allāh*, it occurs most often in the speeches of Noah and Moses (26 and 21 times respectively). Moreover, it can happen that in the same Qur'anic passage the

prophet pronounces both names; thus, there is a shift from *Rabb* to *Allāh* or vice versa.²³ On different occasions, it happens that the term *Rabb* occurs in the expression *Rabb al-‘ālamīn* (the Lord of all Being) (Noah: Q. 7:61; 26:109; Hūd: Q. 7:67; 26:127; Ṣāliḥ: Q. 26:145; Abraham: Q. 2:131; 26:77; 37:87; Lot: Q. 26:164; Shu‘ayb: Q. 26:180; Moses: Q. 7:104; 26:16; 43:46). Thus, in the Qur’anic text *Rabb* is used to refer to God’s dominion over the universe. However, there is at least one example where exegetes note its use for a human being, namely Potiphar (*al-‘azīz*, “the powerful”) in Q. 12:23

Finally, concerning the use of these two references to God by the other prophets, certainly, it is fair to point out that their occurrence is influenced by the amount of speech, or significant verbal exchange, of each messenger, directly proportionate to the development of each individual narrative. For instance, Adam and Elijah, to whom little narrative development is provided, thus remaining minor figures throughout both in terms of narrative and direct speech, say *Rabb* once and twice respectively, with regard to *Allāh* only Elijah pronounces this name once (Q. 7:23; 37:126). It should be noted, therefore, that Moses, being also the prophet who speaks the most, is also the one who uses the term *Rabb* the most in his words.

In the translation of the Qur’anic passages taken from Arberry’s version, *Rabb* and *Allāh* are translated as “Lord” and “God”. Therefore, this translation will be used in the Qur’anic verses given in the following tables. Moreover, the verses have been listed according to the now-standard 1924 Cairo Edition.

3.1. *Rabb as mentioned by Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shu‘ayb*

From the analysis of the dialogical contexts it emerges that Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shu‘ayb use the word *Rabb*, in a Meccan context, especially when addressing their polytheist people: ‘Ād, Thamūd, and Midian.²⁴ Specifically, Hūd uses it 12 times when addressing the ‘Ād²⁵ (Q. 7:65; 11:59; 46:21), Ṣāliḥ 5 times when speaking to Thamūd²⁶ (Q. 7:73; 11:61; 26:141-2; 27:45), and Shu‘ayb 11 times when talking to Midian²⁷. Table 1 shows the occurrences in which Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shu‘ayb pronounce the name *Rabb* and the type of speech and the interlocutors to whom they address it.

Table 1. Occurrences of the name Rabb by Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shu‘ayb

| The prophet | Verses | Type of speech and interlocutors |
|-------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Hūd | (O) My people, there is no folly in me; but I am a Messenger from the Lord of all Being. | 7:67 |
| | I deliver to you the Messages of my Lord; I am your adviser sincere, faithful. | 7:68 |
| | What, do you wonder that a reminder from your Lord should come to you by the lips of a man from among you? | 7:69 |
| | Anger and wrath from your Lord have fallen upon you. | 7:71 |
| | I ask of you no wage for this; my wage falls only upon the Lord of all Being. | 26:127 |
| | And, O my people, ask forgiveness of your Lord, then repent to Him. | 11:52 |
| | Truly, I have put my trust in God, my Lord and your Lord; there is no creature that crawls, but He takes it by the forelock. Surely my Lord is on a straight path. | 11:56 (3) |
| | But if you turn your backs, I have delivered to you that I was sent with unto you, and my Lord will make a people other than you successors; you will not hurt Him anything. My Lord is Guardian over everything. | 11:57 (2) |
| | Destroying everything by the commandment of its Lord. | 46:25 |
| Ṣāliḥ | O my people, serve God! You have no god other than He; there has now come to you a clear sign from your Lord – this is the She camel of God, to be a sign for you. | 7:73 |
| | O my people, I have delivered to you the Message of my Lord, and advised you sincerely; but you do not love sincere advisers. | 7:79 |
| | I ask of you no wage for this; my wage falls only upon the Lord of all Being. | 26:145 |
| | O my people, serve God! You have no god other than He. It is He who produced you from the earth and has given you to live therein; so ask forgiveness of Him, then repent to Him; surely my Lord is nigh, and answers prayer. | 11:61 |
| | O my people, what think you? If I stand upon a clear sign from my Lord, and He has given me mercy from Him, who shall help me against God if I rebel against Him? | 11:63 |
| Shu‘ayb | O my people, serve God! You have no god other than He; there has now come to you a clear sign from your Lord. | 7:85 |
| | We should have forged against God a lie if we returned into your creed; after God delivered us from it. It is not for us to return into it, unless God our Lord so will. Our Lord embraces all things in His knowledge. In God we have put our trust. Our Lord, give true deliverance between us and our people; Thou art the best of deliverers. | 7:89 (3) |
| | O my people, I have delivered to you the Messages of my Lord, and advised you sincerely; how should I grieve for a people of unbelievers? | 7:93 |

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|--|---|--------------|--|
| | I ask of you no wage for this; my wage falls only upon the Lord of all Being. | 26:180 | |
| | My Lord knows very well what you are doing. | 26:188 | |
| | O my people , what think you? If I stand upon a clear sign from my Lord, and He has provided me with fair provision from Him | 11:88 | |
| | And ask forgiveness of your Lord, then repent to Him; surely my Lord is All-compassionate, All-loving | 11:90 (2) | |
| | O my people , is my tribe stronger against you than God? And Him – have you taken Him as something to be thrust behind you? My Lord encompasses the things you do. | 11:92 | |

3.2. *Allāh as mentioned by Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shu‘ayb*

Concerning the word *Allāh*, from the analysis of the different passages, it emerges that it recurs in the speeches of Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shu‘ayb, in a Meccan context, specifically when addressing their polytheist people. In particular, Hūd uses it 10 times when addressing the ‘Ād, Ṣāliḥ 15 times when speaking to Thamūd, and Shu‘ayb 13 times when talking to Midian. Table 2 shows the occurrences in which Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shu‘ayb pronounce the name *Allāh* and the type of speech and the interlocutors to whom they address it.

Table 2. Occurrences of the name Allāh by Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shu‘ayb

| The prophet | Verses | Type of speech and interlocutors |
|-------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Hūd | O my people , serve God! You have no god other than He; will you not be godfearing? | 7:65 |
| | Remember God's bounties; haply you will prosper. | 7:69 |
| | What, do you dispute with me regarding names you have named, you and your fathers, touching which God has sent down never authority? | 7:71 |
| | So fear you God, and obey you me. | 26:126 |
| | So fear you God, and obey you me; | 26:131 |
| | O my people , serve God! You have no god other than He; you are but forgers. | 11:50 |
| | I call God to witness; and witness you, that I am quit of that you associate | 11:54 |
| | Truly, I have put my trust in God, my Lord and your Lord | 11:56 |
| | saying, Serve none but God! Truly I fear for you the chastisement of a dreadful day | 46:21 |
| | Knowledge is only with God, and I deliver to you the Message with which I was sent; but I see you are an ignorant people. | 46:23 |

| | | | |
|---------|---|----------|--------------------------|
| Ṣāliḥ | The She-camel of God; let her drink! | 91:13 | Dialogue with his people |
| | O my people , serve God! You have no god other than He; there has now come to you a clear sign from your Lord – this is the She-camel of God, to be a sign for you. Leave her | 7:73 (2) | |
| | Remember God's bounties, and do not mischief in the earth, working corruption. | 7:74 | |
| | So fear you God, and obey you me. | 26:144 | |
| | So fear you God, and obey you me; | 26:150 | |
| | Serve you God! | 27:45 | |
| | O my people , why do you seek to hasten evil before good? Why do you not ask forgiveness of God? Haply so you will find mercy | 27:46 | |
| | Your augury is with God; nay, but you are a people being proved. | 27:47 | |
| Shu'ayb | O my people , serve God! You have no god other than He; there has now come to you a clear sign from your Lord. | 7:85 | Dialogue with his people |
| | And do not sit in every path, threatening and barring from God's way those who believe in Him, desiring to make it crooked. | 7:86 | |
| | And if there is a party of you who believe in the Message I have been sent with, and a party who believe not, be patient till God shall judge between us; He is the best of judges. | 7:87 | |
| | We should have forged against God a lie if we returned into your creed; after God delivered us from it. It is not for us to return into it, unless God our Lord so will. Our Lord embraces all things in His knowledge. In God we have put our trust. Our Lord, give true deliverance between us and our people; Thou art the best of deliverers. | 7:89 (4) | |
| | So fear you God, and obey you me. | 26:179 | |
| | O my people , serve God! You have no god other than He. | 11:84 | |
| | God's remainder is better for you, if you are believers. And I am not a guardian over you. | 11:86 | |
| | My succour is only with God; in Him I have put my trust, and to Him I turn, penitent. | 11:88 | |
| | O my people , is my tribe stronger against you than God? | 11:92 | |
| | O my people , serve God, and look you for the Last Day; and do not mischief in the land, working corruption. | 29:36 | |

4. Discussion

On a first reading, the corpus of prophets' speeches obviously underlines both the main linguistic and textual, as well as contextual, characteristics of each prophet. In fact, it confirms that the speeches of some prophets present a strong connection with their episodes, in the sense that several stories— notwithstanding the common mission of each envoy—are characterized by

one or more peculiar elements that function as identifying the prophet himself. It means that the reader/listener of the Qur'an is immediately able to identify the envoy also thanks to some exclusive words used by him. Certainly, this "subject-object identification" of language is found in a number of interesting cases. With regard to the prophetic speeches that were the subject of this article, for instance, the term *nāqah* (she-camel), "as a clear sign" (Q. 7:73; 11:64; 26:155; 54:27-9; 91:11-5), always refers to Ṣāliḥ²⁸. On the other hand, there are also some words recurring in different stories, such as *fulk* (ark), the most peculiar symbol of Noah's narrative in connection with the flood (Q. 7:64; 10:73; 11:37, 38; 23:28; 26:119; 36:41), which also appears in the account of Jonah (Q. 37:140). But, along with this term, the word *safīnah* recurs with the same meaning as *fulk* during an episode of Moses' narrative, as well as for Noah's vessel (Q. 18:71, 79; 29:15). In all these cases the context itself, where the words occurs, "subjectivates" the words used/spoken.

Also, the context, also intended as a textual linguistic context in which the words occur, can also have another type of influence on the words. In fact, the utterances may start/end with stereotypical words, phrases or sentences on the lips of the different prophets, to proclaim, for instance, the omnipotence of God and confirm the prophetic mission, such as "so fear you God, and obey you me" (Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, Shu'ayb, Jesus) (Q. 26:108, 110, 126, 131, 144, 150, 163, 179; 43:63)²⁹. In this case the purpose to accomplish is not the "subjectivation" of the prophet's words, but the achievement of specific literary features. These recurring phrases could have, of course, a more systematic collection and description, in order to survey their origin, by adopting an intertextual approach³⁰.

With an obvious conative function of discourse, in the Qur'anic text different prophets address their interlocutors through the use of the vocative particle *yā* (O), within different phrases, or by directly invoking God. Specifically, in the above verses, the three prophets use the vocative particle to address their own people exclusively, *yā qawmī* (O my people)³¹.

By underlining the lexicographic characteristics of several prophets' speeches, as well as a symmetrical reading of the stories, between incidents and specific language used, an attempt was also made to point out an individual profile of some prophets, by getting an insight into characters. Indeed, speakers are usually distinguished from each other by the substance of their speech rather than by linguistic peculiarities; so the Qur'an gives few visual details, because it focuses the reader/listener's attention primarily to the content of the speech (Mir 1992, 18). This approach, inspired by the method demonstrated in the works of Mir (1991; 1992; 2000; 2006; 2008), has highlighted interesting personal characteristics of the prophets: feeling

of lack of control, distress, impatience, steadfastness, tenderness, humor, sarcasm, etc. All of these traits confirm, in line with the concept of Islamic prophethood, the humanity of God's envoys and their continuous dependence on Him, throughout all the phases of their mission, without losing their personal traits. Hence, each prophet remains God's servant.

In particular, taking into consideration the specific focus of this article, it emerges that Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shu'ayb, notwithstanding their warning and signs brought during the mission to their people, they meet opposition by rejecting the monotheistic message. In fact, the unbelievers, in line with the previous sinful people, did not believe a word of what he said and accused them (Q. 7:66; 26:123, 139; 54:18). Especially Hūd, like the prophet Muhammad, not being sent with a particular sign to his people, is reproached for not having demonstrated a miracle (Q. 7:69; 11:53-55; 46:22). However, even when they are shown a divine sign like she-camel in the story of Ṣāliḥ, in total contempt the opponents among the people killed her. Despite all this, prophets continue to trust in God while enduring difficulties (Q. 37:115; Q. 21:69-70, 76). As a consequence, the disbelieving peoples are punished and destroyed in a variety of explicit or unspecific ways.

5. Conclusion

Assuming that God guides His messengers' actions, He also often "guides their tongue". As for the recurrence of the words *Rabb* and *Allāh* in the speech of the so-called pre-Islamic Arab prophets, the analysis indicates that both *Rabb* and *Allāh* in their speeches occurs especially when they dialogue with their people. This could strengthen the opposition between the Lord of good, i.e. God, and the lord of evil, i.e. the unbelieving people. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that the envoys use both terms with a "legal purpose", intending to present God as both Lord (*Rabb*) and the God (*Allāh*).

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Notes

1. In this article the terms “prophet”, “messenger” and “envoy” are used as synonyms, meaning chosen and divinely inspired people. Specifically, the “Prophet” designates Muhammad (PBUH).

2. While in Medinan passages there are only a few short references to past divine punishments (Q. 3:10-11; 9:70; 22:42-49; 47:10; 64:5-6), punishment stories mainly occur in the middle and late Meccan periods, the first phase of the prophetic mission (Q. 6:6; 7:64-65, 78, 83-84, 91-92, 94, 165; 20:128; 25:39; 29:40; 36:31; 38:12-15; 43: 55-56; 50:12-14). Particular attention on this issue has to be given to sūras 7, 11, 26, 27, 37, 54. They form a very considerable section of the Qur'anic text. According to Horowitz (1926, 10-32) the progress of these punishment stories represents Muhammad's growing knowledge of the Biblical stories. Abraham's account, despite not being a punishment story as it does not have any reference to annihilation, sometimes appears in the stories of the punishment of Lot's people (Q. 11: 69-83). Finally, Jonah represents the only messenger whose people escaped castigation, thanks to their repentance (Q. 37:139-148; 10:98) (Bell & Watt 1970, 127-135; Marshall 1999; Jomier 1997; Juynboll 1986, 186; Fadel 1986, 294-298; Raven 1997, 451-461).

3. This feature seems to be particularly evident in the narrative of Abraham (Nöldeke & Schwally 1909-1938, 1: 19-20; Gilliot 1993, 278-279; Hurgronje 1951). In addition, Rezvan (1997, 41) says, “In speaking of the Biblical prophets, Muhammad more than once fashioned his narrative on the contemporary situation in Mekka and Yathrib.”

4. However, Muhammad's status appears higher than that of Moses, since the former during his heavenly journey spoke to God without even trembling, while the second fainted at the manifestation of the divine attributes in the Burning Bush (Bell 1979, 176; Schimmel 1985, 62-63).

5. Al-Zarkashī (1988, 2, 373) takes the singular imperative *qul* as an honorific address.

6. Abraham and Moses specifically received the *al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā* (the former scrolls), a part of a set of antique or earlier scrolls (Q. 20:133; 87:18).

7. In this research the Qur'anic events of Muhammad's story have intentionally not been systematically related, considering all the peculiarities of the Qur'an as a revealed text and the precise role of the previous prophets in the life of Muhammad and his mission. Hence, the Qur'anic words spoken by Muhammad have deliberately not been reported, considering his identification as the ‘implied privileged addressee’. In fact, Muhammad is generally addressed by the ‘implied speaker’ (God), by using the second person singular, though his name does not appear, unlike the other characters whose identity, when addressed as ‘you’, is always clear. There are, however, several verses where the second person singular is not used with Muhammad, but with humankind (Q. 7:24; 29:8; 82:6-8; 84:6. See Robinson 2003, 240-243).

8. In the Qur'an there are words that recur once (hapax legomenon). Thus, also in the corpus of prophets' speeches they were detected, such as *rijs* (punishment) (Q. 7:71), a term pronounced only by Hūd (Toorawa 2011).

9. During the research, the prophets were identified as “speaking” or “not speaking”, depending on the fact that the words spoken by them are quoted in the Qur'anic text.

10. Generally, the proportion of all the Qur'anic narratives is very large: 1453 verses, or about a quarter of their total number, approximately 6000. While 1700 relate eschatological themes (al-Suyūṭī 1967, 1: 232; Sherif 1985, 46; Platti 2002, 174). They consist of stories about prophets (25 of them fall into this category) (al-Suyūṭī 1967, 3:67), sages, historical, mythical, historico-mythical or stereotyped figures of ancient times (Tottoli 2006, 467-480; Gilliot 1986, 517). In particular, some modern Arabic works discuss the general style and form of Qur'anic narratives. See, e.g., Abbas (1987) who arranges all of the narratives in chronological order, and Hasan (1982) who explores many literary devices, such as interrogative style (*uslūb al-istifhām*) and predicative style (*uslūb al-asnādī*).

11. Elliptical versions of several stories are found, e.g., in Q. 21:74-91. This pericope indeed reports the stories of Lot, David and Solomon, Job, Jonah, Zechariah, Maryam.

12. Q. 14:35-41 (Abraham), Q. 38:71-85 (Adam), Q. 40:23-56 (Moses), Q. 89:6-12 ('Ād, Thamūd and Pharaoh) (Neuwirth 1981; Mir 1988; Abdel Haleem 1993; El-Awa 2006).

13. Q. 7 contains Noah (Q. 7:59-64), Hūd (Q. 7:65-72), Šāliḥ (Q. 7:73-79), Lot (Q. 7:80-84), Shu'ayb (Q. 7:85-93) and Moses (Q. 7:103-157); Q. 54 reports five stories: Noah (Q. 54:9-17), Hūd (Q. 54:18-22), Šāliḥ (Q. 54:23-32), Lot (Q. 54:33-40) and Pharaoh (Q. 54:41-42). Q. 20 has two stories about Moses (Q. 20:9-99) and Adam (Q. 20:115-128); while Q. 26:10-189 narrates seven stories: Moses (Q. 26:10-68), Abraham (Q. 26:69-104), Noah (Q. 26:105-122), Hūd (Q. 26:123-140), Šāliḥ (Q. 26:141-159), Lot (Q. 26:160-175) and Shu'ayb (Q. 26:176-189). See Gilliot, 1986, 518-522.

14. Q. 69:4-12 (Thamūd, 'Ād, Pharaoh, al-mu'tafikāt (the Cities Overthrown), and Noah) and Q. 17 (Q. 17:61-65 (Adam), Q. 17:101-104 Moses and Pharaoh).

15. Q. 85:1-7 (the Men of the Pit), Q. 85:17-20 (Pharaoh and Thamūd); Q. 53:50-54 ('Ād, Thamūd, Noah, and "the Subverted City").

16. For instance, Isaac seems to remain a minor character. Indeed, if compared with other prophets, he is not given much space in the narrative, except his presence in idiomatic expressions and formulaic lists in which he appears with his father Abraham and other messengers, often with a clear chronological disregard, if compared with Biblical episodes (Q. 2:136, 140; 3:84; 4:163). Furthermore, these lists appear as a sort of litany of remembrance about ancient prophets and God's inspiration, messages and guidance. The order can be Abraham, Ismael, Isaac and Jacob, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Q. 3:84; 6:84; 12:38; 38:45), or, following Jewish tradition, Ishmael and Isaac, Abraham and Isaac, Isaac and Jacob (Q. 12:6; 14:39; 19:49; 21:72; 29:27). Isaac occurs alone only in Q. 37:112.

17. The lack of specific narrative features could suggest a certain knowledge to the first listeners of the Qur'an in regard to Biblical traditions, through Jewish and Christian interpretations, in some circles where Muhammad shared his revelations (Reeves 2003; Reynolds 2010).

18. See, e.g., the story of Šāliḥ reported in Q. 27:45-53 that varies almost completely from the one given by the Qur'an in other sūras. See Q. 7:73-79; 11:61-68; 26:141-159; 27:45-53; 54:23-31; 91:11-15.

19. On the human nature of the envoys, see also Q. 23: 33-34; 25:7.

20. The verb *qāla*, "to say" in the imperative form appears as the most divine frequent order understood to be referred primarily to Muhammad. Nonetheless, it is worth underlining that there are six passages where words which were clearly spoken by Muhammad do not follow the command *qul* (Q. 6:104, 114; 11:2-3; 27:91-92; 42:10; 51:50-51) (Robinson 2003, 9, 20, 235). Moreover, as a usual narrative pattern in the Qur'an, direct speech is mainly introduced by the verb *qāla*, in addition to *talā*, "to recite", and *nabba 'a*, "to inform", predominantly in the imperative form (Q. 5:27; 10:71; 12:36; 15:51; 26:69).

21. This specific addressee emerges in the narrative of Noah, and mainly in that of Moses and the Pharaoh in which the major clash between a prophet, as a representative of heavenly power, materializes against a representative of evil earthly. In other words, the major clash between *al-mala' al-a'lā* (High Council), and an earthly court is realized (Q. 7:104-106; 10:75; 11:38; 17:102; 20:50-61, 63-70; 26: 26-54; 37:8; 38:69).

22. Though the investigation concentrated mainly on the prophets' use of the names Rabb and *Allāh*, it is easy to imagine that these are not the only expressions the envoys use to refer to God; see, e.g., *al-'Alīm* (the All-knowing) (Abraham and Ishmael: Q. 2:127; Ishmael: Q. 2:128; Joseph: Q. 12:100); *'Allām al-ghuyūb* (Thou knowest the things unseen) (Jesus: Q. 5:116); *Ghaḥūr* (All-forgiving) (Noah: Q. 11:41; Jacob: Q. 12:98; Joseph: Q. 12:53); *al-Raḥīm* (All-compassionate) (Abraham: Q. 2:128; Ishmael: Q. 2:129; Jacob: Q. 12:98; Solomon: Q. 27:30) (Gimaret 1988; Böwering 1991).

23. For an exploration of pre-Qur'anic Arab notions of Allāh, see Sinai 2019; Cole 2025, 50.

24. The eras of 'Ād and Thamūd were between those of Noah and Abraham, and the era of Midian was between those of Lot and Moses. Such sequences evident in Qur'anic sūras generally follow the presentation of biblical history (Stewart 2024, 56). Furthermore, several Meccan sūras open and/or close with polemical discussions on different positions of conflict, corroborating as declared by Izutsu (2002, 75) that from the semantical point of view, the Qur'anic Weltanschauung is [...] a system built on the principle of conceptual opposition. As a frequent aspect of the Qur'anic discourse, it is principally seen in a dual conflict (this world and the next, heaven and hell, good and evil, belief and unbelief, and so on), in which the addressees are persistently tested to opt between alternatives, especially between faith and scepticism (Zebiri 2006). Accordingly, parables, metaphors, imageries and figurative language and

other figures of speech, which produce both dramatic descriptions and complexity of meaning, are recurrently employed (Mir 2008; Stewart 2021).

25. In the Qur'an the 'Ād are mentioned twenty-four times in eighteen sūras. It is reported that they were called to faith in a place named al-Aḥqāf (Q. 46:21), which is also the title of sūra 46; whereas a different verse connects them with the city of Iram, mentioned only once in Q. 89:6-7. In several other passages the 'Ād are briefly mentioned with Noah, the Thamūd, the people of Ṣāliḥ, and others (Q. 9:70; 14:9; 22:42; 29:38; 38:12; 40:31; 50:13). Moreover, the Qur'an reports that they lived after the people of Noah in a fortress, and were very tall in stature, proud of their strength, but also ignorant and materialist (Q. 7:69; 26:128-30; 41:15; 46:23; 89:6-8) (Buhl 1986; Tottoli 2001; al-Ṭarāfī 2003, 120-124; Wheeler 2002, 63-73).

26. The Qur'an refers to the Thamūd twenty-six times in twenty-one sūras and describes them as a goddess wealthy tribe who lived in the Ḥijr area (Q. 15:80), located in north-western Arabia, in castles among gardens and fountains, as God's bounties (Q. 7:74). They carved their houses out of the surrounding mountain cliffs (Q. 7:74; 26:149), the remains of which were declared in the Qur'an still visible (Q. 29:38). In other verses the Thamūd are briefly mentioned with Noah, the 'Ād, the people of Ḥūd, and others (Q. 9:70; 14:9; 22:42; 29:38; 38:12; 40:31; 50:13) (Rippin 1995; Tottoli 2004; Id. 2002, 45-50; Shahid 2000; Firestone 2006; Serjeant 1954; van den Branden 1966). On Thamūd and Ṣāliḥ in Islamic tradition, see al-Ṭarāfī 2003, 113-116; Wheeler 2002, 74-82; Brinner 1986, 114-123.

27. The people of Midian, or the people of the Thicket (*aṣḥāb al-aykah*), refer to the same group of people. Qur'anic references to them are found in Q. 7:85; 11:84, 95; 15:78; 26:176; 29:36; 38:13; 50:14. The location of Midian is mentioned in Q. 9:70; 20:40, 22:44; 28:22-3, 45. In the Qur'an, Midian is also related to the Biblical Midian and to the story of Moses and Jethro, his father-in-law, mentioned in the Bible (Q. 20:40; 28:22-3, 45; Ex 3:1; 4:18; 18:1-12). In the Bible Midian is also associated with one of Abraham's sons through Keturah in Gen 25:2. Shu'ayb himself should be recognized as Jethro, or be seen as his uncle (Jeffery 1938, 260; Beeston 1968; Brinner 1986, 274-277; Buhl and Bosworth 1986; Tottoli 2002, 45-50; Wheeler 2002, 147-150; Firestone 2003).

28. There are, of course, other examples as well. As for the word '*aṣā* (staff), always denotes Moses' staff (Q. 2:60; 7:107, 115, 160; 20:18; 26:32, 45, 63; 27:10; 28:31), besides, it is used in Q. 20:66 and 26:44 in a plural form, '*iṣiyyah*, with reference to the Pharaoh's sorcerers), whereas in Q. 34:14 *minsā'ah* identifies that of Solomon. Another example is found in the word "sea," that is regularly designated by two different words. When it is related to the successful crossing of the Israelites the term is *baḥr*, "fresh water" (see Q. 2:50; 7:138; 10:90; 26:63; 44:24); yet, when it is in association with the fatal crossing of the Pharaoh and his troops the term is *yamm*, "mortal fire" (Q. 7:136; 20:78; 28:40; 51:40). Moreover, in Q. 20:39 and 28:7 it is also used in relation to the episode when Moses' mother left him in the river, with a clear negative meaning.

29. The phrase is sometimes followed by the verse, "I ask of you no wage for this; my wage falls only upon the Lord of all Being" (Q. 26:109, 127, 145, 164, 179-180).

30. For a contemporary approaches to the identification of Qur'anic literary structures, see Klar 2021.

31. In the Qur'an some other prophets utter this expression: Noah (Q. 7:59, 61; 10:71; 11:28, 29, 30; 23:23; 71:2), Moses (Q. 2:54; 5:20, 21; 10:84; 20:86; 61:5), Abraham (Q. 6:78), Lot (Q. 11:78) and Aaron (Q. 20:90).