

## The Intellectual Genealogy of *balāghah*: Historical Development and Its Role in Understanding the Qur'an

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### Abstract

This article examines the intellectual genealogy of *balāghah* and its role in shaping the interpretation of the Qur'an as a rhetorically organized and semantically layered discourse. The study addresses the problem that *balāghah* is often treated either as a chronological history of rhetorical terminology or as a technical background to Qur'anic stylistics, without sufficient attention to its function as a historically formed hermeneutical tradition. Using a qualitative textual research design, the article combines historical-genealogical analysis, philological-conceptual reading, and hermeneutical-rhetorical interpretation. The primary textual corpus consists of selected classical works by al-Jurjānī, al-Sakkākī, and al-Qazwīnī, while contemporary scholarship on Qur'anic linguistics, coherence, semantics, and digital Islamic knowledge provides the analytical context. The findings show that *balāghah* developed from early reflections on eloquence, Qur'anic inimitability, and the relation between wording and meaning into a systematic science of *ma'ānī*, *bayān*, and *badī*. Al-Jurjānī's theory of *naẓm* established a relational theory of meaning, al-Sakkākī transformed rhetorical concepts into a disciplinary architecture, and al-Qazwīnī contributed to their pedagogical consolidation. The study further demonstrates that *balāghah* functions as a Qur'anic hermeneutics by explaining word order, ellipsis, emphasis, figurative expression, coherence, and communicative force. Its theoretical contribution lies in repositioning *balāghah* as a bridge between classical Arabic rhetoric, contemporary Qur'anic Studies, and emerging digital approaches to Islamic knowledge.

**Keywords:** *balāghah*, *qur'anic hermeneutics*, *arabic rhetoric*, *naẓm*, *digital islamic knowledge*.

### Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji genealogi intelektual *balāghah* dan perannya dalam membentuk pemahaman terhadap Al-Qur'an sebagai wacana yang terstruktur secara retorik dan berlapis secara semantis. Studi ini berangkat dari masalah bahwa *balāghah* sering dipahami hanya sebagai sejarah kronologis istilah retorika atau sebagai latar teknis bagi stilistika Al-Qur'an, tanpa perhatian yang memadai terhadap fungsinya sebagai tradisi hermeneutis yang terbentuk secara historis. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian tekstual kualitatif, artikel ini memadukan analisis historis-genealogis, pembacaan filologis-konseptual, dan interpretasi hermeneutis-retorik. Korpus primer penelitian mencakup karya-karya klasik terpilih dari al-Jurjānī, al-Sakkākī, dan al-Qazwīnī, sedangkan kajian kontemporer tentang linguistik Al-Qur'an, koherensi teks, semantik, dan pengetahuan Islam digital digunakan sebagai konteks analitis. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *balāghah* berkembang dari refleksi awal tentang kefasihan, kemukjizatan Al-Qur'an, serta relasi antara lafaz dan makna menuju ilmu yang lebih sistematis melalui kerangka *ma'ānī*, *bayān*, dan *badī*. Teori *naẓm* al-Jurjānī menegaskan makna sebagai hasil relasi susunan bahasa; al-Sakkākī mengubah konsep-konsep retorik menjadi arsitektur disipliner; dan al-Qazwīnī berperan dalam menstabilkan serta mentransmisikan kategori tersebut secara pedagogis. Studi ini juga menunjukkan bahwa *balāghah* berfungsi sebagai hermeneutika Al-Qur'an karena mampu menjelaskan susunan kata, elipsis, penekanan, ungkapan figuratif, koherensi, dan daya komunikatif teks. Kontribusi teoretis artikel ini terletak pada reposisi *balāghah* sebagai jembatan antara retorika Arab klasik, Kajian Al-Qur'an kontemporer, dan pendekatan digital terhadap pengetahuan Islam.

**Kata kunci:** *balāghah*, *hermeneutika al-qur'an*, *retorika arab*, *naẓm*, *pengetahuan islam digital*.



## Introduction

The study of *balāghah* occupies a strategic position in contemporary Islamic Studies because it links the historical formation of Arabic linguistic thought with the enduring problem of how the Qur'an should be understood as divine discourse. In recent decades, Qur'anic Studies has expanded beyond conventional questions of textual transmission and exegetical history toward more refined investigations of discourse structure, semantic coherence, rhetorical force, and the relationship between language and revelation. This shift is visible in the growing interest in Qur'anic linguistics, textual relations, ring composition, semantic fields, and digital approaches to Islamic knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Within the field of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies, this development is not merely technical. It concerns a central intellectual question: how can the Qur'an be interpreted responsibly when its meanings are inseparable from the precision, density, and rhetorical organization of Arabic expression?

Historically, *balāghah* emerged from multiple intellectual sites: pre-Islamic poetic criticism, Qur'anic exegesis, theological reflection on *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, grammatical inquiry, and the literary culture of adab. Its development was not linear but genealogical, formed through debates over eloquence, figurative meaning, textual arrangement, and the relation between lafz and ma'nā. Early discussions of eloquence gradually became more systematic through figures such as al-Jāhīz, Ibn al-Mu'tazz, al-Rummānī, al-Khattābī, al-Bāqillānī, al-Jurjānī, al-Sakkākī, and al-Qazwīnī. By the post-classical period, *balāghah* had been organized into the familiar triad of *ma'ānī*, *bayān*, and *badī'*, yet this classification should not be understood only as a pedagogical simplification. It represents a long intellectual effort to explain how Arabic discourse communicates meaning with appropriateness, clarity, persuasion, and aesthetic force.<sup>2</sup>

The specific problem addressed in this article is that the genealogy of *balāghah* is often presented either as a chronological history of rhetorical terminology or as a technical background to Qur'anic stylistics. Such approaches are useful but insufficient. They tend to separate historical development from hermeneutical function, as though the formation of *balāghah* were merely a matter of disciplinary classification rather than a response to deeper interpretive demands. This creates a theoretical tension. On the one hand, *balāghah* is frequently invoked as indispensable for understanding the Qur'an; on the other hand, its internal historical formation and epistemological role in Qur'anic interpretation are rarely examined together. The result is a methodological limitation: modern Qur'anic analysis may employ concepts such as metaphor,

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<sup>1</sup> Salwa M S El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur'an: Relevance, Coherence and Structure* (Routledge, 2005), [https://www.routledge.com/search?kw=Textual Relations in the Qur'an El-Awa; M Cuyper, The Composition of the Qur'an: Rhetorical Analysis, The Composition of the Qur'an: Rhetorical Analysis, 2015, https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85049160610&partnerID=40&md5=aa8750643913d2761fa34e5097f48c07](https://www.routledge.com/search?kw=Textual+Relations+in+the+Qur%27an+El-Awa;+M+Cuyper,+The+Composition+of+the+Qur%27an:+Rhetorical+Analysis,+The+Composition+of+the+Qur%27an:+Rhetorical+Analysis,+2015,+https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85049160610&partnerID=40&md5=aa8750643913d2761fa34e5097f48c07); Raymond Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text* (White Cloud Press, 2014), <https://search.worldcat.org/search?q=Structure+and+Qur'anic+Interpretation+Raymond+Farrin>; M Shah and M A Haleem, *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies, The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199698646.001.0001>; Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Qur'anic Semantics: Corpus and Lexical Behavior* (Routledge, 2023), [https://www.routledge.com/search?kw=Qur%27anic Semantics Corpus and Lexical Behavior Abdul-Raof](https://www.routledge.com/search?kw=Qur%27anic+Semantics+Corpus+and+Lexical+Behavior+Abdul-Raof).

<sup>2</sup> Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Arabic Rhetoric: A Pragmatic Analysis* (Routledge, 2006), [https://www.routledge.com/search?kw=Arabic Rhetoric A Pragmatic Analysis Abdul-Raof; Wolfhart P Heinrichs, "Balāgha," in \*Encyclopaedia of Islam\*, ed. P Bearman et al., 2nd ed. \(Brill, 2002\), \[https://referenceworks.brill.com/search?s.q=Balagha; Yūsuf ibn Abī Bakr Al-Sakkākī, \\*Miftāḥ Al-ʿulūm\\* \\(Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2000\\), \\[https://search.worldcat.org/search?q=Miftah+al-Ulum+al-Sakkaki+Dar+al-Kutub+al-Ilmiyah; Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Qazwīnī, \\\*Al-Īdāḥ Fī ʿulūm Al-Balāgha: Al-Maʿānī, Al-Bayān, Wa-Al-Badī'\\\*, ed. Ibrāhīm Shams al-Dīn \\\(Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2023\\\), \\\[https://www.al-ilmiah.com/search?search=الإيضاح في علوم البلاغة\\\]\\\(https://www.al-ilmiah.com/search?search=الإيضاح+في+علوم+البلاغه\\\).\\]\\(https://search.worldcat.org/search?q=Miftah+al-Ulum+al-Sakkaki+Dar+al-Kutub+al-Ilmiyah;+Jalāl+al-Dīn+Al-Qazwīnī,+Al-Īdāḥ+Fī+ʿulūm+Al-Balāgha:+Al-Maʿānī,+Al-Bayān,+Wa-Al-Badī%27,+ed.+Ibrāhīm+Shams+al-Dīn+\\(Dār+al-Kutub+al-ʿIlmiyyah,+2023\\),+https://www.al-ilmiah.com/search?search=الإيضاح+في+علوم+البلاغه\\)\]\(https://referenceworks.brill.com/search?s.q=Balagha;+Yūsuf+ibn+Abī+Bakr+Al-Sakkākī,+Miftāḥ+Al-ʿulūm+\(Dār+al-Kutub+al-ʿIlmiyyah,+2000\),+https://search.worldcat.org/search?q=Miftah+al-Ulum+al-Sakkaki+Dar+al-Kutub+al-Ilmiyah;+Jalāl+al-Dīn+Al-Qazwīnī,+Al-Īdāḥ+Fī+ʿulūm+Al-Balāgha:+Al-Maʿānī,+Al-Bayān,+Wa-Al-Badī%27,+ed.+Ibrāhīm+Shams+al-Dīn+\(Dār+al-Kutub+al-ʿIlmiyyah,+2023\),+https://www.al-ilmiah.com/search?search=الإيضاح+في+علوم+البلاغه\)](https://www.routledge.com/search?kw=Arabic+Rhetoric+A+Pragmatic+Analysis+Abdul-Raof;+Wolfhart+P+Heinrichs,+%27Balāgha,%27+in+Encyclopaedia+of+Islam,+ed.+P+Bearman+et+al.,+2nd+ed.+Brill,+2002,+https://referenceworks.brill.com/search?s.q=Balagha;+Yūsuf+ibn+Abī+Bakr+Al-Sakkākī,+Miftāḥ+Al-ʿulūm+(Dār+al-Kutub+al-ʿIlmiyyah,+2000),+https://search.worldcat.org/search?q=Miftah+al-Ulum+al-Sakkaki+Dar+al-Kutub+al-Ilmiyah;+Jalāl+al-Dīn+Al-Qazwīnī,+Al-Īdāḥ+Fī+ʿulūm+Al-Balāgha:+Al-Maʿānī,+Al-Bayān,+Wa-Al-Badī%27,+ed.+Ibrāhīm+Shams+al-Dīn+(Dār+al-Kutub+al-ʿIlmiyyah,+2023),+https://www.al-ilmiah.com/search?search=الإيضاح+في+علوم+البلاغه)

ellipsis, emphasis, coherence, and word order without fully reconstructing the intellectual genealogy that gave those concepts authority in the Islamic scholarly tradition.

Previous scholarship may be grouped into three major tendencies. The first examines Arabic rhetoric as a linguistic and pragmatic discipline, emphasizing how rhetorical categories function in relation to context, intention, and communicative effect.<sup>3</sup> The second applies literary and discourse-based methods to Qur'anic interpretation, focusing on coherence, structure, thematic symmetry, and rhetorical composition.<sup>4</sup> The third situates the Qur'an within broader historical, philological, and late antique frameworks, showing how Qur'anic discourse can be studied through textual history, semantic fields, and interreligious context.<sup>5</sup> These studies have substantially advanced the field, but they have not fully explained how the historical development of *balāghah* itself became a hermeneutical infrastructure for Qur'anic understanding.

The research gap is therefore conceptual, methodological, and interpretive. Conceptually, existing studies have not sufficiently treated *balāghah* as an intellectual genealogy in which successive debates shaped a theory of meaning. Methodologically, scholarship often separates historical description from analytical application, leaving unclear how the development of rhetorical sciences informs Qur'anic interpretation today. Interpretively, the role of *balāghah* in mediating between classical exegesis, modern discourse analysis, and emerging digital Islamic knowledge remains underdeveloped. This gap has become more pressing because digital corpora and AI-based tools can retrieve patterns and generate explanations, but they still require human interpretive judgment grounded in linguistic, rhetorical, and hermeneutical competence.<sup>6</sup>

This article is guided by three research questions. First, how did *balāghah* develop historically as an intellectual tradition within Arabic-Islamic scholarship? Second, what conceptual transformations enabled *balāghah* to become a disciplined science of meaning, context, and rhetorical effect? Third, how does this genealogy contribute to the interpretation of Qur'anic discourse in contemporary Qur'anic Studies? Accordingly, the objectives of this study are to reconstruct the intellectual genealogy of *balāghah*, identify the key conceptual shifts that shaped its formation, and demonstrate its continuing relevance for understanding the Qur'an as a rhetorically organized and semantically layered text.

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<sup>3</sup> Abdul-Raof, *Arabic Rhetoric: A Pragmatic Analysis*; Hussein Abdul-Raof, *New Horizons in Qur'anic Linguistics: A Syntactic, Semantic and Stylistic Analysis* (Routledge, 2017), [https://www.routledge.com/search?kw=New Horizons in Qur'anic Linguistics Abdul-Raof](https://www.routledge.com/search?kw=New+Horizons+in+Qur%27anic+Linguistics+Abdul-Raof); H Abdul-Raof, *Text Linguistics of Qur'anic Discourse: An Analysis, Text Linguistics of Qur'anic Discourse: An Analysis*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315670942>.

<sup>4</sup> El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur'an: Relevance, Coherence and Structure*; Cuyper, *Compos. Qur'an Rhetor. Anal.*; Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*.

<sup>5</sup> Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an: Text and Commentary: Vol. 1. Early Meccan Surahs: Poetic Prophecy* (Oxford University Press, 2022), [https://academic.oup.com/search-results?q=The Qur'an Text and Commentary Volume 1 Early Meccan Surahs](https://academic.oup.com/search-results?q=The+Qur%27an+Text+and+Commentary+Volume+1+Early+Meccan+Surahs); Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an: Text and Commentary: Vol. 2.1. Early Middle Meccan Surahs: The New Elect* (Oxford University Press, 2024), [https://academic.oup.com/search-results?q=The Qur'an Text and Commentary Volume 2.1 Early Middle Meccan](https://academic.oup.com/search-results?q=The+Qur%27an+Text+and+Commentary+Volume+2.1+Early+Middle+Meccan); Nicolai Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an: A Critical Dictionary* (Princeton University Press, 2023), <https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691241319/key-terms-of-the-quran>; Shah and Haleem, *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*.

<sup>6</sup> Z Khalila et al., "Investigating Retrieval-Augmented Generation in Quranic Studies: A Study of 13 Open-Source Large Language Models" (arXiv, 2025), <https://arxiv.org/abs/2503.16581>; Mohamed Amine Mouhoub, "Islamic Large Language Models: From Knowledge Acquisition to Trustworthy and Hallucination-Resistant AI" (arXiv, 2026), <https://arxiv.org/abs/2606.16629>.

Theoretically, this study draws on historical genealogy, classical Arabic rhetorical theory, and Qur'anic hermeneutics. Historical genealogy allows the article to trace how rhetorical concepts emerged, changed, and acquired interpretive authority across time. Classical Arabic rhetorical theory provides the internal categories of analysis, especially *ma'ānī*, *bayān*, and *badī'*. Qur'anic hermeneutics situates these categories within the broader question of how revelation communicates meaning through linguistic form, context, and textual coherence. The novelty of this article lies in reading *balāghah* not simply as a technical science of eloquence, but as a historically formed hermeneutical tradition that shaped Muslim ways of understanding the Qur'an. By integrating intellectual history with Qur'anic interpretation, the study contributes to ongoing debates on Arabic rhetoric, Islamic epistemology, and the methodological future of Qur'anic Studies.

## Methodology

This study employs a qualitative textual research design using a historical-genealogical, philological, and hermeneutical-rhetorical approach. The design is appropriate because the article investigates the intellectual development of *balāghah* and its role in Qur'anic interpretation, rather than measuring empirical behaviour, institutional practice, or statistical patterns. Qualitative textual inquiry enables the study to examine how concepts, classifications, interpretive assumptions, and scholarly debates were formed across Arabic-Islamic intellectual history.<sup>7</sup> In this article, *balāghah* is treated not simply as a technical discipline of eloquence, but as a historically developed knowledge system that shaped Muslim ways of understanding Qur'anic discourse.

The study is historical-genealogical in the sense that it traces the formation, transformation, and transmission of rhetorical concepts across selected stages of Arabic-Islamic scholarship. Genealogy is used here not as a complete chronological inventory of all rhetorical writings, but as an analytical method for identifying how certain concepts acquired interpretive authority within the Islamic scholarly tradition. This approach allows the study to examine how discussions of eloquence, figurative meaning, textual arrangement, and *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* gradually developed into the more formal sciences of *ma'ānī*, *bayān*, and *badī'*.<sup>8</sup> The genealogical perspective is therefore useful for connecting the historical development of *balāghah* with its hermeneutical function in Qur'anic Studies.

The primary textual corpus consists of selected classical works that represent decisive moments in the development and systematisation of Arabic rhetoric. The core sources include al-Jurjānī's *Dalā'il al-i'jāz* and *Asrār al-balāghah*, al-Sakkākī's *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm*, and al-Qazwīnī's *al-Idāḥ fī 'ulūm al-balāghah*.<sup>9</sup> These works are selected because they occupy central positions in the movement from theoretical reflection on Qur'anic eloquence and semantic arrangement to the post-classical codification of *balāghah* as a disciplined science. Al-Jurjānī is used to examine the theory of relational meaning and *nazm*; al-Sakkākī is used to analyse

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<sup>7</sup> Glenn A Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40; John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (Sage Publications, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Heinrichs, "Balāgha"; Abdul-Raof, *Arabic Rhetoric: A Pragmatic Analysis*; Philip Halldén, "What Is Arab Islamic Rhetoric? Rethinking the History of Muslim Oratory Art and Homiletics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37, no. 1 (2005): 19–38, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743805050021>.

<sup>9</sup> 'Abd al-Qāhir Al-Jurjānī, *Dalā'il al-I'jāz Fī Al-Qur'ān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākīr (Maktabat al-Khānjī, 2004), <https://search.worldcat.org/search?q=Dalail+al-Ijaz+al-Jurjani+Mahmud+Muhammad+Shakir>; 'Abd al-Qāhir Al-Jurjānī, *Asrār Al-Balāgha* (Dār al-Risālah, 2007), <https://search.worldcat.org/search?q=Asrar+al-Balagha+al-Jurjani+Dar+al-Risalah>; Al-Sakkākī, *Miftāḥ Al-'ulūm*; Al-Qazwīnī, *Al-Idāḥ Fī 'ulūm Al-Balāgha: Al-Ma'ānī, Al-Bayān, Wa-Al-Badī'*.

the architectural organisation of *ma'ānī*, *bayān*, and *badī'*; and al-Qazwīnī is used to observe the later pedagogical consolidation of rhetorical categories.

Secondary sources are selected according to four criteria. First, they must be directly relevant to Arabic rhetoric, Qur'anic linguistics, Islamic hermeneutics, or the history of *balāghah*. Second, they must contribute to understanding the relationship between rhetorical theory and Qur'anic interpretation. Third, they must be academically reliable, either published by recognised academic presses or appearing in peer-reviewed scholarly venues. Fourth, they must support the article's conceptual aim: reconstructing *balāghah* as an intellectual genealogy rather than treating it as a static list of rhetorical devices. Works by Abdul-Raof, El-Awa, Cuypers, Farrin, Shah and Abdel Haleem, Neuwirth, and Sinai are used to situate the discussion within contemporary debates on Qur'anic discourse, textual coherence, semantics, and interpretation.<sup>10</sup>

The analytical procedure is conducted in four stages. The first stage is historical mapping. At this stage, the study identifies the major conceptual phases in the development of *balāghah*: early reflection on eloquence and expression, theological debates on Qur'anic inimitability, semantic and syntactic theories of arrangement, and later disciplinary codification. This stage does not aim to produce an exhaustive historical survey, but to identify the intellectual transitions most relevant to Qur'anic interpretation. The analysis pays attention to how rhetorical terms shift from literary description to hermeneutical function.

The second stage is philological-conceptual reading. Key terms such as *balāghah*, *faṣāḥah*, *naẓm*, *ma'ānī*, *bayān*, *badī'*, *majāz*, *tashbīh*, *kināyah*, *ḥadhf*, and *taqdīm wa-ta'khīr* are examined in relation to their textual usage and conceptual role. This stage is necessary because the meaning of classical rhetorical terminology cannot be understood only through modern equivalents such as "rhetoric," "metaphor," or "style." Philological attention helps prevent anachronism and ensures that classical categories are interpreted within their own intellectual and linguistic context.<sup>11</sup>

The third stage is hermeneutical-rhetorical analysis. At this stage, the study examines how the historical development of *balāghah* contributes to the interpretation of Qur'anic discourse. The analysis focuses on rhetorical features that are repeatedly important in Qur'anic Studies, including word order, ellipsis, emphasis, figurative expression, semantic coherence, thematic arrangement, and communicative force. These features are analysed not as isolated stylistic ornaments, but as mechanisms through which Qur'anic meaning is structured and communicated. This procedure is consistent with contemporary studies that treat Qur'anic discourse as a coherent, layered, and rhetorically organised text.<sup>12</sup>

The fourth stage is comparative synthesis. The study compares the classical genealogy of *balāghah* with contemporary approaches in Qur'anic Studies, particularly discourse analysis, coherence theory, semantic field studies, and digital Islamic knowledge. This comparison is not intended to collapse classical and modern methods into one another. Rather, it identifies points of continuity, tension, and methodological complementarity. For instance, digital tools and

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<sup>10</sup> Cuypers, *Compos. Qur'an Rhetor. Anal.*; Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an: A Critical Dictionary*; Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*; Neuwirth, *The Qur'an: Text and Commentary: Vol. 1. Early Meccan Surahs: Poetic Prophecy*; Abdul-Raof, *Qur'anic Semantics: Corpus and Lexical Behavior*.

<sup>11</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 2004); Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, ed. Kathleen Blamey and John B Thompson (Northwestern University Press, 2006), <https://nupress.northwestern.edu/?s=From+Text+to+Action+Ricoeur>.

<sup>12</sup> El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur'an: Relevance, Coherence and Structure*; Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*; Abdul-Raof, *New Horizons in Qur'anic Linguistics: A Syntactic, Semantic and Stylistic Analysis*.

corpus-based approaches can identify lexical and structural patterns, but they still require hermeneutical judgement to determine rhetorical appropriateness and interpretive validity.<sup>13</sup> Classical *balāghah* is therefore analysed as a resource that can strengthen, not replace, modern methods of Qur'anic interpretation.

To ensure methodological transparency, the study applies three strategies. First, source triangulation is used by reading classical rhetorical texts alongside modern scholarship on Qur'anic linguistics and Arabic rhetoric. Second, interpretive traceability is maintained by linking each major analytical claim to specific textual categories and scholarly discussions. Third, anachronism is controlled by distinguishing between classical concepts and modern analytical vocabulary. Terms such as "genealogy," "epistemology," and "hermeneutics" are used as contemporary analytical lenses, not as claims that classical authors used those terms in the same technical sense.

This methodological combination modifies conventional textual analysis by integrating historical genealogy, philological reading, and Qur'anic hermeneutics. The modification is justified because the research problem cannot be addressed through a purely historical, purely linguistic, or purely literary method. A historical method alone would describe development without explaining interpretive significance; a linguistic method alone would analyse rhetorical forms without reconstructing their intellectual formation; and a hermeneutical method alone might overlook the disciplinary history that gave *balāghah* its authority. By combining these approaches, the study can reconstruct the intellectual genealogy of *balāghah* and explain its continuing role in understanding the Qur'an.

## Results and Discussion

### From Eloquence to Discipline: The Early Formation of *Balāghah* in Arabic-Islamic Intellectual History

The principal finding of this subsection is that *balāghah* emerged not as a fully formed technical discipline, but as a gradual intellectual response to the need for explaining eloquence, meaning, and Qur'anic inimitability within Arabic-Islamic scholarship. Its early formation developed at the intersection of literary criticism, linguistic reflection, theological debate, and exegetical necessity. Before *balāghah* was formalised into the later triad of *ma'ānī*, *bayān*, and *badī*, Muslim scholars had already been concerned with the question of why certain expressions possess exceptional clarity, persuasive force, and semantic density. This concern was not merely aesthetic. It was closely connected to the authority of Arabic as the language of revelation and to the problem of how the Qur'an communicates meanings that exceed ordinary speech.<sup>14</sup>

The earliest formation of *balāghah* can be traced to the Arabic literary environment in which poetry, oratory, and refined prose served as the primary standards of eloquent expression. In this context, eloquence was initially evaluated through sensitivity to diction, rhythm, imagery, brevity, force, and suitability of expression. However, the rise of Qur'anic discourse transformed the function of rhetorical reflection. The Qur'an did not merely become another text to be judged by pre-Islamic aesthetic norms; rather, it reconfigured the standards through which Arabic eloquence itself was understood. The doctrine of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* intensified this transformation by requiring scholars to explain how the Qur'an's

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<sup>13</sup> Khalila et al., "Investigating Retrieval-Augmented Generation in Quranic Studies: A Study of 13 Open-Source Large Language Models"; Mouhoub, "Islamic Large Language Models: From Knowledge Acquisition to Trustworthy and Hallucination-Resistant AI."

<sup>14</sup> Heinrichs, "Balāgha"; Halldén, "What Is Arab Islamic Rhetoric? Rethinking the History of Muslim Oratory Art and Homiletics."

linguistic form, semantic arrangement, and communicative effect demonstrate its inimitability. Thus, rhetorical inquiry moved from appreciation of eloquent speech toward a more disciplined attempt to identify the principles that make discourse meaningful, forceful, and religiously authoritative.<sup>15</sup>

This early development also shows that *balāghah* was shaped by the relationship between *lafẓ* and *ma'nā*. The central issue was not whether wording or meaning was more important in isolation, but how both interact within an ordered expression. The emergence of this debate marks a crucial step in the intellectual genealogy of *balāghah*, because it shifted rhetorical attention from surface beauty to the internal structure of meaning. Later theorists such as al-Jurjānī would develop this insight into the theory of *nazm*, arguing that meaning is produced through the relational arrangement of words within syntactic and semantic structures.<sup>16</sup> Although al-Jurjānī belongs to a more mature phase of rhetorical theory, his work clarifies the direction already present in earlier debates: eloquence depends on the precise organisation of language, not on ornament alone.

The formation of *balāghah* was also inseparable from Qur'anic interpretation. Exegetes required tools to explain ellipsis, metaphor, emphasis, syntactic displacement, concision, expansion, and contextual appropriateness in Qur'anic discourse. These phenomena could not be adequately explained through grammar alone, because grammatical correctness does not necessarily account for rhetorical force. Nor could they be reduced to literary taste, because Qur'anic interpretation demanded disciplined justification. Early *balāghah* therefore developed as a mediating science between linguistic analysis and hermeneutical judgment. It supplied a way to ask why a particular Qur'anic expression appears in a specific form, why one construction is more appropriate than another, and how the arrangement of words contributes to theological, moral, or argumentative meaning.<sup>17</sup>

This finding supports previous scholarship that defines Arabic rhetoric as a historically layered discipline rather than a static set of figures of speech. Heinrichs shows that *balāghah* became a technical science through a long process of classification, refinement, and scholarly transmission. Halldén likewise argues that Arab-Islamic rhetoric should not be understood through the narrow lens of Greco-European rhetorical categories, because its formation was shaped by Arabic literary culture, Qur'anic discourse, and Islamic intellectual priorities. Abdul-Raof's pragmatic analysis further strengthens this view by demonstrating that Arabic rhetorical categories are deeply connected to context, intention, and communicative effect.<sup>18</sup> The present discussion extends these studies by emphasizing that the early formation of *balāghah* was not only historical but also epistemological: it created the conditions for judging how meaning becomes appropriate, persuasive, and interpretable.

The theoretical implication is that *balāghah* should be positioned within Islamic Studies as a developing science of meaning, not merely as a branch of literary embellishment. Methodologically, this requires scholars to reconstruct the intellectual conditions under which rhetorical concepts emerged before applying them to Qur'anic interpretation. The academic contribution of this subsection lies in showing that the early genealogy of *balāghah* provides the foundation for

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<sup>15</sup> Shah and Haleem, *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Jurjānī, *Dalā'il Al-I'jāz Fī Al-Qur'ān*; Al-Jurjānī, *Asrār Al-Balāgha*.

<sup>17</sup> Abdul-Raof, *Arabic Rhetoric: A Pragmatic Analysis*; El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur'an: Relevance, Coherence and Structure*.

<sup>18</sup> Abdul-Raof, *Arabic Rhetoric: A Pragmatic Analysis*.

understanding its later role in Qur'anic hermeneutics. By tracing the movement from eloquence to discipline, this analysis demonstrates that *balāghah* became central to Islamic scholarship because it offered a systematic way to connect Arabic expression, interpretive precision, and the theological claim of Qur'anic inimitability.

### **The Genealogical Shift from *Nazm* to Systematic Rhetoric: Al-Jurjānī, al-Sakkākī, and al-Qazwīnī**

The principal finding of this subsection is that the historical development of *balāghah* moved from a relational theory of meaning in al-Jurjānī's concept of *nazm* toward a more systematic and pedagogically transferable rhetorical science through al-Sakkākī and al-Qazwīnī. This shift should not be understood as a simple replacement of one theory by another, but as a genealogical transformation in which earlier insights about the relation between wording, syntax, and meaning were reorganised into a more stable disciplinary structure. Al-Jurjānī, al-Sakkākī, and al-Qazwīnī therefore represent three connected moments in the intellectual history of *balāghah*: conceptual deepening, structural codification, and pedagogical consolidation.<sup>19</sup>

Al-Jurjānī's contribution lies in his insistence that meaning is not produced by isolated words, nor by rhetorical embellishment added after meaning has already been formed. In *Dalā'il al-I'jāz*, he argues that eloquence depends on the arrangement of linguistic relations, especially the syntactic and semantic ordering through which words acquire function within discourse.<sup>20</sup> This theory of *nazm* is crucial because it moves Arabic rhetorical thought away from a superficial evaluation of diction toward a more precise account of how meaning is generated through structure. In *Asrār al-balāghah*, al-Jurjānī further develops the analysis of figurative meaning, metaphor, and analogy, showing that non-literal expression operates through intelligible semantic relations rather than arbitrary ornamentation.<sup>21</sup> His work thus establishes a foundational principle for later *balāghah*: rhetorical force emerges from the organisation of meaning within language.

Al-Sakkākī transforms this relational insight into a more systematic architecture. In *Miftāh al-'Ulūm*, rhetorical knowledge is arranged into the disciplinary triad of *ma'ānī*, *bayān*, and *badī'*, each serving a distinct but interconnected function.<sup>22</sup> *Ma'ānī* addresses the contextual suitability of expression, including sentence arrangement, emphasis, omission, definiteness, indefiniteness, and the relation between utterance and circumstance. *Bayān* explains how meaning is disclosed through figurative relations such as metaphor, simile, metonymy, and indirect signification. *Badī'* examines the aesthetic and intensifying features of discourse that strengthen communicative effect. Al-Sakkākī's achievement is therefore not merely classificatory. He converts rhetorical reflection into a structured epistemic system capable of being taught, transmitted, and applied to textual interpretation.

Al-Qazwīnī's role in this genealogy is equally important, although different in character. Through *al-Īdāh fī 'ulūm al-balāghah*, he stabilises and clarifies the categories inherited from al-Sakkākī, making them more accessible for later scholarly and pedagogical use.<sup>23</sup> His contribution lies in the consolidation of

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<sup>19</sup> Al-Sakkākī, *Miftāh Al-'ulūm*.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Jurjānī, *Dalā'il al-I'jāz Fī Al-Qur'an*.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Jurjānī, *Asrār Al-Balāgha*.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Sakkākī, *Miftāh Al-'ulūm*.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Qazwīnī, *Al-Īdāh Fī 'ulūm Al-Balāgha: Al-Ma'ānī, Al-Bayān, Wa-Al-Badī'*.

*balāghah* as a teachable discipline within the post-classical madrasa environment. This stage is significant because intellectual traditions do not survive only through originality; they also require methods of transmission, simplification, and institutional repetition. Al-Qazwīnī's work allowed the conceptual architecture of *balāghah* to become part of a durable scholarly curriculum, ensuring that the categories of *ma'ānī*, *bayān*, and *badī* continued to shape Arabic literary education and Qur'anic interpretation.

This genealogical reading refines previous scholarship by showing that the movement from al-Jurjānī to al-Sakkākī and al-Qazwīnī is not merely chronological. Heinrichs notes the importance of *balāghah* as a formalised rhetorical science, while Abdul-Raof emphasizes its pragmatic and context-sensitive character. The present analysis extends these views by showing how formalisation itself emerged from earlier debates about relational meaning and Qur'anic eloquence. Al-Jurjānī provides the theoretical depth of arrangement; al-Sakkākī gives that insight a disciplinary structure; and al-Qazwīnī secures its pedagogical continuity. This sequence shows that *balāghah* developed through conceptual transformation, not through mechanical accumulation of terminology.

The implications for Qur'anic Studies are substantial. If Qur'anic meaning is shaped by arrangement, context, figurative relation, and communicative force, then the historical development of *balāghah* provides more than a background to tafsir; it supplies a methodological grammar for reading revelation as discourse. Al-Jurjānī's *naẓm* helps explain why the arrangement of Qur'anic language matters. Al-Sakkākī's classification offers analytical tools for distinguishing contextual appropriateness, figurative disclosure, and rhetorical intensification. Al-Qazwīnī's consolidation shows how these tools became available to later exegetical and educational traditions. The academic contribution of this subsection lies in demonstrating that the genealogy of *balāghah* is a history of interpretive reasoning. It reveals how Arabic-Islamic scholarship developed a disciplined theory of meaning capable of supporting more precise, historically grounded, and rhetorically sensitive engagement with the Qur'an.

### ***Balāghah* as Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Meaning, Context, and Rhetorical Coherence**

The main argument of this subsection is that *balāghah* functions as a Qur'anic hermeneutics because it provides a disciplined way to explain how meaning is generated through linguistic structure, contextual appropriateness, and rhetorical coherence. In the intellectual genealogy of Arabic rhetoric, *balāghah* did not remain a theory of eloquence in the narrow aesthetic sense; it gradually became an interpretive instrument for understanding the Qur'an as a discourse whose meanings are shaped by arrangement, emphasis, omission, figurative relation, and communicative force. This finding is significant because many difficulties in Qur'anic interpretation cannot be resolved by lexical translation alone. A word may be known, yet its function within a verse, its placement in relation to surrounding expressions, and its rhetorical effect may still require deeper analysis. For this reason, *balāghah* offers a hermeneutical bridge between linguistic form and theological meaning.<sup>24</sup>

The category of *ma'ānī* is especially important for explaining how Qur'anic meaning depends on the relation between expression and context. In Qur'anic discourse, word order, ellipsis, emphasis, definiteness, indefiniteness, brevity, and expansion are not arbitrary stylistic choices. They shape how the reader receives the force of command, warning, consolation, argument, or divine address. A

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<sup>24</sup> Abdul-Raof, *New Horizons in Qur'anic Linguistics: A Syntactic, Semantic and Stylistic Analysis*.

rhetorical reading therefore asks why a particular construction appears in one form and not another, and how that form responds to the communicative situation of the passage. This supports Abdul-Raof's argument that Qur'anic interpretation must treat syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse texture as interdependent dimensions of meaning rather than as separate analytical layers.<sup>25</sup> In this respect, *ma'ānī* strengthens Qur'anic hermeneutics by preventing interpretation from becoming either purely grammatical or overly impressionistic.

The role of *bayān* is equally central because Qur'anic discourse frequently communicates through figurative and relational forms of meaning. Metaphor, simile, metonymy, indirect reference, and semantic transfer are not decorative additions to the Qur'anic message; they are part of the text's mode of disclosure. Through *bayān*, the interpreter is able to examine how meaning moves from literal expression to deeper conceptual, moral, and theological resonance. This is particularly relevant in passages where images of light, darkness, life, death, guidance, blindness, trade, or covenant function beyond ordinary denotation. A *bayān*-oriented reading allows these expressions to be interpreted with semantic discipline rather than reduced to either literalism or uncontrolled symbolism. Such an approach is consistent with broader studies of Qur'anic rhetoric that emphasize the text's layered semantic structure and its resistance to flat paraphrase.

The contribution of *badī* should also be reconsidered within Qur'anic hermeneutics. Although it is often associated with embellishment, its function in Qur'anic discourse is more substantial. Parallelism, antithesis, phonetic harmony, semantic contrast, repetition, and rhythmic intensification contribute to the persuasive and affective power of the text. These features do not merely beautify expression; they organize reception, reinforce memory, sharpen contrast, and guide the reader's attention. The rhetorical force of Qur'anic discourse therefore lies not only in what is stated, but also in how expression is patterned and intensified. This point refines the view that *badī* is secondary to meaning, because in Qur'anic discourse aesthetic configuration often participates directly in the construction of meaning.

This analysis also engages critically with contemporary studies on Qur'anic coherence. El-Awa, Cuyper and Farrin have shown that Qur'anic passages often display textual relations, structural symmetry, and thematic coherence.<sup>26</sup> Their works challenge fragmentary readings that isolate verses from their discursive environments. However, the genealogy of *balāghah* expands this discussion by showing that coherence is not only a modern literary concern but also a problem already anticipated by classical Arabic rhetorical theory. *Ma'ānī*, *bayān*, and *badī* provide conceptual tools for examining coherence at the micro-level of expression, the meso-level of passage structure, and the broader level of surah organization. Thus, classical rhetoric and modern coherence studies can be read as complementary rather than competing approaches.

The theoretical implication of this finding is that *balāghah* should be positioned as a hermeneutical science within Qur'anic Studies, not merely as a historical branch of Arabic literary criticism. Methodologically, it offers interpreters a framework for moving from lexical meaning to discursive meaning, from isolated wording to contextual force, and from stylistic observation to interpretive justification. Its academic contribution lies in showing that the historical development of *balāghah* produced a sophisticated theory of Qur'anic

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<sup>25</sup> Abdul-Raof, *Text Linguistics of Qur'anic Discourse: An Analysis*.

<sup>26</sup> Cuyper, *Compos. Qur'an Rhetor. Anal.*; El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur'an: Relevance, Coherence and Structure*; Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*.

readability: one that joins language, context, rhetoric, and meaning into a coherent interpretive practice. In this sense, *balāghah* remains indispensable for any Qur'anic analysis that seeks to be linguistically precise, historically grounded, and hermeneutically accountable.

### **The Contemporary Relevance of *Balāghah*: Classical Rhetoric, Qur'anic Studies, and Digital Islamic Knowledge**

The principal finding of this subsection is that the contemporary relevance of *balāghah* lies in its capacity to provide hermeneutical discipline for Qur'anic Studies at a time when the field is increasingly shaped by linguistic analysis, semantic studies, digital corpora, and artificial intelligence. Modern Qur'anic scholarship has benefited from historical-critical inquiry, discourse analysis, coherence studies, and computational tools, yet these approaches still require a theory of interpretation capable of judging contextual appropriateness, rhetorical force, and semantic validity. In this respect, the intellectual genealogy of *balāghah* is not a closed classical inheritance, but a living methodological resource for reading the Qur'an as a linguistically precise, contextually embedded, and rhetorically structured discourse.<sup>27</sup>

The relevance of *balāghah* becomes clearer when viewed against the current expansion of Qur'anic Studies. Contemporary scholarship no longer treats the Qur'an merely as a sequence of isolated verses or doctrinal statements, but as a text whose meanings are shaped by composition, address, semantic fields, intertextual resonance, and rhetorical organization. Neuwirth's work situates the Qur'an within late antique discursive environments while still emphasizing its distinctive literary and communicative form. Sinai's study of Qur'anic key terms likewise demonstrates that interpretation requires sensitivity to semantic development, conceptual networks, and contextual nuance rather than simple word-equivalence.<sup>28</sup> These approaches converge with the classical concerns of *balāghah*, especially its attention to how expression, arrangement, and context produce meaning.

At the same time, the rise of digital Islamic knowledge introduces both methodological opportunity and interpretive risk. Digital corpora can identify lexical frequency, syntactic recurrence, semantic proximity, and intertextual patterns with a speed that traditional reading cannot match. Retrieval-augmented generation and large language models can also assist users in locating relevant Qur'anic materials and related scholarly discussions. However, such tools do not automatically guarantee interpretive reliability. Khalila show that open-source language models applied to Qur'anic Studies still require source-grounding, evaluation, and domain-specific control,<sup>29</sup> while Mouhoub stresses that trustworthy Islamic language models must address hallucination, authority, and knowledge validation.<sup>30</sup> These findings indicate that digital capacity must be complemented by interpretive criteria, not mistaken for interpretation itself.

This is where *balāghah* offers a critical contribution. The classical sciences of *ma'ānī*, *bayān*, and *badī* train the interpreter to ask questions that computational

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<sup>27</sup> Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*; Neuwirth, *The Qur'an: Text and Commentary: Vol. 1. Early Meccan Surahs: Poetic Prophecy*; K V Lewis, "Power, Youth, and Temporality: Capitalising on the Symbolic in Resourcing Social Entrepreneurship," *Social Enterprise Journal* 20, no. 5 (2024): 701–18, <https://doi.org/10.1108/SEJ-08-2023-0097>.

<sup>28</sup> Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an: A Critical Dictionary*.

<sup>29</sup> Khalila et al., "Investigating Retrieval-Augmented Generation in Quranic Studies: A Study of 13 Open-Source Large Language Models."

<sup>30</sup> Mouhoub, "Islamic Large Language Models: From Knowledge Acquisition to Trustworthy and Hallucination-Resistant AI."

systems cannot fully resolve whether an expression is appropriate to its context, whether a figurative relation is semantically justified, whether an ellipsis is rhetorically motivated, and whether stylistic intensification strengthens the intended meaning. A digital model may detect that a word appears repeatedly across different surahs, but *balāghah* helps explain why the word functions differently in distinct rhetorical environments. It may map formal patterns, but *balāghah* evaluates how those patterns shape argument, warning, consolation, command, or theological emphasis. Thus, classical rhetoric functions as a hermeneutical filter for contemporary data-driven analysis.

This finding refines existing scholarship by showing that the value of *balāghah* is not limited to historical reconstruction or literary appreciation. Abdul-Raof's work on Qur'anic semantics demonstrates that Qur'anic meaning must be studied through lexical behavior, syntactic function, discourse texture, and contextual usage.<sup>31</sup> The present analysis extends that insight by arguing that *balāghah* supplies the classical epistemic framework through which these linguistic phenomena can be evaluated hermeneutically. It also complements modern Qur'anic studies by showing that philological precision and digital analysis remain incomplete unless they are integrated with rhetorical judgment.

The theoretical implication is that Qur'anic Studies should not abandon classical rhetorical reasoning in favor of purely computational or historical models. Rather, it should integrate *balāghah* into contemporary methodology as a theory of meaning that connects language, context, discourse, and interpretive responsibility. The academic contribution of this subsection is to position the genealogy of *balāghah* as a bridge between classical Islamic scholarship and modern knowledge systems. Such a bridge allows Qur'anic interpretation to remain empirically attentive to textual data while also preserving the rhetorical, semantic, and hermeneutical depth required for responsible engagement with revelation.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that *balāghah* should be understood not merely as a technical discipline of eloquence, but as an intellectual genealogy through which Arabic-Islamic scholarship developed a disciplined theory of Qur'anic meaning. The analysis answers the first research objective by showing that *balāghah* emerged historically from the interaction of Arabic literary criticism, linguistic reflection, theological debates on *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, and exegetical needs. Its development was not linear or accidental but shaped by successive attempts to explain how Arabic expression produces clarity, persuasion, semantic depth, and interpretive authority.

In response to the second objective, the study demonstrates that the major conceptual transformation in the history of *balāghah* lies in the shift from general reflection on eloquence to a more systematic science of meaning. Al-Jurjānī's theory of *nazm* established that meaning arises through the relational arrangement of words, syntax, and semantic structure. Al-Sakkākī then reorganized this insight into the disciplinary framework of *ma'ānī*, *bayān*, and *badī'*, while al-Qazwīnī contributed to the stabilization and pedagogical transmission of these categories. This genealogy shows that *balāghah* developed as a form of interpretive reasoning, not simply as a catalogue of rhetorical devices.

In relation to the third objective, the study affirms that *balāghah* remains central to understanding the Qur'an because it provides tools for analyzing word

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<sup>31</sup> Abdul-Raof, *Qur'anic Semantics: Corpus and Lexical Behavior*.

order, ellipsis, emphasis, figurative expression, coherence, and communicative force. It enables Qur'anic interpretation to move beyond lexical meaning toward a more comprehensive reading of discourse, context, and rhetorical effect. The study also shows that this classical framework remains relevant in the contemporary context of Qur'anic linguistics, digital corpora, and artificial intelligence, where textual data still require hermeneutical judgment.

The theoretical contribution of this article lies in repositioning *balāghah* as a historically formed hermeneutical science rather than a decorative branch of Arabic rhetoric. Its academic significance rests on connecting intellectual history with Qur'anic interpretation, thereby showing how classical rhetorical theory can inform contemporary debates on meaning, coherence, and interpretive validity. Future research may apply this genealogical framework to selected Qur'anic surahs, compare different stages of rhetorical thought more extensively, or develop a digital-humanities model that integrates corpus analysis with the classical categories of *ma'ānī*, *bayān*, and *badī'*.

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