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A Study of the Etymology of the Arabic Word "Istorah": A Historical and Comparative Outlook

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Abstract

This paper revisits the meaning of the Arabic word ʔustˤu:rah in the Qur'anic text, arguing that this word means a written-down narrative, regardless of accuracy of its content. ʔustˤu:rah may thus denote a true or false piece of writing. This encounters the orthodox viewpoint that ʔustˤu:rah, which appears nine times in the Qur'anic text in the plural as ʔasatˤi:r, means qisˤsˤah (tale), xura:fah (legend), and/or ħika:jah (fable). We contend that ʔustˤu:rah is associated with the form of the narrative rather than its informative value. This reasoning helps us resolve, among other things, the contradiction resulting from viewing ʔustˤu:rah as a synonym of fictitiousness-oriented words like qisˤsˤah, xura:fah and ħika:jah on the one hand and on the other, introducing mastˤu:r, an adjective derived from the same Arabic tri-consonantal root of ʔustˤu:rah (S-T-R), to praise the nature the Holy Qur'an itself, as evident in (ʔatˤ-tˤur: 2).

Keywords: Historical linguistics, Literary translation, ʔustˤu:rah narrative form, Holy Qur'an.

1. Introduction

The word *ʔustˤu:rah*, which appears nine times in the Holy Qur'an in the plural as *ʔasatˤi:r* (see appendix 1), is dated to the early beginning of the seventh century (602 A.D.) and is defined in *the Doha Historical Dictionary of Arabic*[1] as "the speech that is loaded with lie and exaggeration and is associated with reality in order to distract". This definition obviously associates *ʔustˤu:rah* with the act of lying and falsifying facts. Simultaneously, it associates the word with the different acts and forms of speech whether oral or written. Thus, *ʔustˤu:rah* is usually associated in modern Arabic with *qisˤsˤah*, *xura:fah*, and/or *ħika:jah*. According to *The Doha Historical Dictionary of Arabic*, *qisˤsˤah* is dated to 632 A.D. and is defined as "a piece of news and tale". *Xura:fah* is dated to 665 A.D. and is defined as "a pleasing weird speech that is usually made of lies". *Ħika:jah* is dated to 747 A.D. and is defined as "the reported tale". Obviously, these definitions emphasize the content-based nature of *ʔustˤu:rah*, *qisˤsˤah*, *xura:fah*, and *ħika:jah*, thus paying no attention to their form or layout.

The same approach is adopted in the several English translations of the Holy Qur'an. The word *ʔustˤu:rah* in the Qur'anic context is translated into English as 'tale', 'legend', and 'fable'. It is translated into 'tale' in *Sahih International*, 'legend' in *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, and 'fable' in *tafsi:r ʔal-dʒalalajn*. Regardless of why the first translator prefers 'legend' to 'tale' or 'fable', the second prefers 'tale' to the other two, and the latter uses 'fable', it is interesting that *the Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'tale' as "a fictitious or true narrative or story, especially one that is imaginatively recounted". Also, it defines 'legend' as "a traditional story sometimes popularly regarded as historical but not authenticated" and 'fable' as "a short story, typically with animals as characters, conveying a moral ... a false statement or belief". *The Oxford English Dictionary* uses the same approach of *the Doha Historical Dictionary of Arabic* in defining *qisˤsˤah* (tale), *xura:fah* (legend), and *ħika:jah* (fable) without paying any attention to form, which indirectly associates such words as well as *ʔustˤu:rah* with content's moral value, (in-)accuracy, and informative functionality. The many Arabic interpretations and English translations of the Holy Qur'an sacrifices the lexical meaning of *ʔustˤu:rah* at the benefit of the intuitive cultural referentiality of the word. They all view *ʔustˤu:rah* as a synonym of the supernatural and uncanny, which have nothing to do with the word's lexical meaning that seems related to the form, rather than content, of composition or writing.

While there seems to be no problem in viewing *ʔustˤu:rah* as a synonym of certain fictitiousness-oriented words like *qisˤsˤah*, *xura:fah*, and/or *ħika:jah*, it is hard to believe that *ʔustˤu:rah* is an act of lying while *mastˤu:r*, an adjective derived from the same Arabic tri-consonantal root of *ʔustˤu:rah* (S-T̲-R), is used to celebrate the nature of the Holy Qur'an, as in (At̲-T̲ur: 2). Thus, this paper revisits the meaning of the Arabic word *ʔustˤu:rah* in the Holy Qur'an attempting to define it in light of its lexical meaning as indicated in Arabic dictionaries like *al-Ain* by al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Faraheedi, *Lisa:n ʔal-ʕarab* by Ibn Manðˤoor, and *ʔal-Qamu:s ʔal-muħi:tˤ* by al-Fayrooz Abadi. We claim that *ʔustˤu:rah* has nothing to do with accuracy or inaccuracy. Rather, it refers to the form of writing, scripting, or documentation.

Interestingly, associating *ʔustˤu:rah* with the form rather than content of writing disagrees with the orthodox belief articulated by Mohammad al-Qurtubi, Jalaluldin al-Suyuti, Mohammad al-Tabari, and many others.[2] Al-Qurtubi, for instance, discusses *ʔustˤu:rah* as a narrative borrowed from foreign cultures.[3] Jawad argues that the word refers to a certain literary genre.[4] Al-Suyut̲i suggests that *ʔustˤu:rah* refers to magic.[5] Al-Bustani associates it with the act of lying.[6] Bashoor claims that the word refers to narratives about unreal events.[7] Ibn Kaθir contends that the word implies the absence of truth as it refers to man-wrought products.[8] Al-Tabari states that the word refers to a piece of news that says nothing serious or wise.[9] Hussein defines it as the creative documentation of people's communal memory, a process that aims at advertising humor and certain unreliable news.[10] Similarly, Qism al-Dirasat wa al-Buhooth defines *ʔustˤu:rah* in light of its scientific content, thus associating it with the divine and the magical.[11]

These viewpoints seem insightful, but they all define *ʔustˤu:rah* in terms of content, which is an unfounded approach that totally ignores the word's lexical denotation in favour of certain connotations. Accordingly, our paper provides an interpretation of *ʔustˤu:rah* in the Holy Qur'an based on the word's

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lexical denotation arguing that the word is all about form rather than content. Thus, the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of the meaning of *ʔustˁu:rah* as stated in Arabic dictionaries and Qur'an exegesis. Section 3 presents our theory regarding the meaning of *ʔustˁu:rah*. Section 4 concludes the research.

2. An Overview of *ʔustˁu:rah* in Arabic Dictionaries and Qur'an Exegesis

Obviously, interpreting and translating *ʔustˁu:rah* in the Holy Qur'an into *qisˁsˁah* (tale), *xura:fah* (legend), and/or *ħika:jah* (fable) mirrors the various definitions of the word by most authoritative Arabic lexicographers. In the oldest Arabic dictionary ever known, *al-Ain*, al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Faraheedi defines *ʔustˁu:rah* as speeches that have no order or logic as they do not stem from reality and totally rely on falsification. Similarly, Ibn Manðˁoor's eighteen-volume dictionary, *Lisa:n ʔal-ʕarab*, one of the most comprehensive and authoritative classical dictionaries of Arabic, refers *ʔustˁu:rah* back to the Arabic verb *saṯar*, and defines it as *ʔabaṯi:l* (lies) and speeches that are anonymous and have no value. He also reports that the verb *saṯar* means to compose and invent. Many other dictionaries and references of Arabic such as *muʕjam ʔal-Maʔa:ni ʔal-dʒa:meʕ*, *ʔal-Qamu:s ʔal-muħi:tˁ*, *ʔal-Muʕdʒam ʔal-Wasi:tˁ*, *ʔal-Muʕdʒam ʔal-ɣani*, and *ʔal-Muʕdʒam ʔal-Raʔid*, define *ʔustˁu:rah* as the speech that has no origin or reference at all. They all note that *ʔustˁu:rah* indicates a tale, fable, or legend about unusual events and entities, thus connecting the word *ʔustˁu:rah* with the acts of conjecturing and inventiveness without referring to any aspect or form of documentation or writing.

Remarkably, the *negative* lexical interpretation of *ʔustˁu:rah* echoes the most authentic Qur'anic interpretations of *ʔasatˁi:r ʔal-ʔawali:n*, which is viewed as the lies or hallucinations that are inscribed in the books and codex of the ancient pagans and former people. al-Tˁabari, for instance, suggests that *ʔustˁu:rah* means either *ʔifkohah* (jesting) and *'ʔudˁħu:ka* (joke) or what has been written by the ancient people. Al-Qurtubi proposes that *ʔustˁu:rah* means either *ʔuħdo:θah* (tale) and *ʔaħadi:θ* (speeches) or what has been inscribed by ancient people in books. Ibn Kaθeer views *ʔustˁu:rah* as what has been taken and quoted from the ancient people. Likewise, *tafsi:r ʔal-dʒalalajn* indicates that *ʔustˁu:rah* means "the lies of the ancients, similar to their jokes and strange tales" (*altafsir.com*). Obviously, the four distinguished references do not stress the literal etymology of *ʔustˁu:rah* and therefore fail to associate it with the process of writing down something. They marginalize the word's lexical or literal meaning and eventually define it as a false and inaccurate narrative.

The most eminent Qur'an scholars and interpreters, namely al-tˁabari, al-Qurtˁubi, Ibn Kaθir, and al-Suyuṯi as well as the most eminent Arabic lexicographers like al-Faraheedi, Ibn Manðˁoor, and al-Fayrooz Abadi define the word *ʔustˁu:rah* in the Holy Qur'an as a fictitious narrative that has nothing to do with either accurate historiography or the act of documentation and its formats. Whether Arabic lexicographers owe their understanding of *ʔustˁu:rah* to Qur'anic scholars or vice versa, defining *ʔustˁu:rah* lexically and interpreting it theologically do not consider all the lexical reverberations of the literal meaning of *saṯar*, which means to draw a line, put something in form of a line or row, and/or inscribe something on the line (almaany.com). Noticeably, the verb *saṯar* does not indicate inaccuracy or falsification; therefore, it

seems reasonable to question the negativity of the lexical and theological consensus about the meaning of *ʔustˤuːrah* in the Holy Qur'an, something we take up in the next section.

3. Discussion

To better understand the meaning of *ʔustˤuːrah* in the Holy Qur'an, it is necessary to point out that viewing *ʔustˤuːrah* as *qisˤsˤah* (tale), *xuraːfah* (legend), and/or *ħikaːjah* (fable) inspires translating *ʔustˤuːrah* into 'myth', which is often associated with fictitiousness and weirdness. Thus, to clearly understand *ʔustˤuːrah*, it is noteworthy that 'myth' is derived from "French *Mythe* (1818) and directly from Modern Latin *mythus*, from Greek *mythos* 'speech, thought, story, myth, anything delivered by word of mouth'" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). In *the Dictionary of English Folklore*, myths are "stories about divine beings, generally arranged in a coherent system; they are revered as true and sacred..." (254). For the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a 'myth' is derived from "modern Latin *mythus*, via late Latin from Greek *muthos*", and it means "a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events." These many authoritative references associate 'myth' with the supernatural, but none of them assert or suggest any valid relationship between 'myth' and fictitiousness. They all agree that the original Greek *mythos*, which means 'speech' or 'word', involves the *logos*, "the Word of God" (Coupe 9, 11), which suggests that doubting the accuracy of *mythos* inevitably implies doubting the accuracy of *logos*.[12]

Laurence Coupe warns us against "asserting belief in *logos* while forgetting its origin in *mythos*" (85). This is not to advocate any system of disbelief but to emphasize that promoting the *logos* at the cost of the *mythos* is absurd and invalid. In Coupe's words, "*mythos* precedes and informs *logos*. Without Homer there can be no Plato" (113). The validity of *mythos* is associated with and guaranteed by the validity of *logos*. This implies that '*mythos*' and '*logos*' are integrated with each other; nevertheless, "from 1840 the word [myth] has been modified to mean 'untrue story, rumor'" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). The semantic parallelism and inevitable interrelatedness of *logos* (Word of God) and *mythos* (Word of Man) is now obsolete. Accordingly, to think of 'myth' as a good English equivalent of *ʔustˤuːrah* in the Holy Qur'an is inappropriate and nonsensical.

Since 'myth' does not stand as a good modern English equivalent of *ʔustˤuːrah* in the Holy Qur'an, it is necessary to find an appropriate modern English word that does not necessarily connote falsity and inaccuracy. To meet this demand, 'history' seems as the most appropriate English equivalent of *ʔustˤuːrah*. What makes this suggestion reasonable, besides the sound resemblance between the Arabic /ʔustˤuːrah/ and the English /ˈhɪst(ə)ri/, is the fact that the word *history*, similar to *ʔustˤuːrah*, fuses together the sense of past time on the one hand and the act of documentation on the other. The *Online Etymology Dictionary* reports that 'history' is derived "from Old French *estoire*, *estorie* 'story; chronicle, history' (12c., Modern French *histoire*), from Latin *historia* 'narrative of past events, account, tale, story,' from Greek *historia* 'a learning or knowing by inquiry; an account of one's inquiries, history, record, narrative,' from *historein* 'inquire,' from *histor* 'wise man, judge, 'from PIE **wid-tor-*, from root **weid-* 'to see'" (etymonline.com). The word 'history' denotes the act of documenting the events of the past in the form of narrative, thus seems feasible to reflect certain connotations of *ʔustˤuːrah*. This finding becomes more

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valid as one realizes that 'history' has always been related to 'story', which is a "shortening of Anglo-Norman French *estorie*" (*Oxford English Dictionary*) and "Latin *historia*", which means "connected account or narration of some happening" or a "narrative of important events or celebrated persons of the past" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). This suggests that the word 'story' does not necessarily connote fictitiousness and historical impreciseness but primarily the narrative documentation of the past.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Online Etymology Dictionary* indicate that the word 'story' used to denote the exact meaning and have the same connotations of 'history', as evident in nowadays French *histoire*. In modern French, *histoire* stands for both 'history' and 'story', which makes of 'story' a synonym of history rather than fiction. The *Online Etymology Dictionary* defines 'story' as a "'recital of true events" or a "narrative of fictitious events meant to entertain" in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In other words, the word 'story' has never been different from *history* until 1500s, but 'story' becomes a euphemism for 'a lie' in 1690s. Again, the words 'story' and 'history' have been identical before the sixteenth century, as they used to refer to the same process of chronological writing and/or documentation of the past. Until almost the end of the sixteenth century, 'story', similar to 'history', has always been related to the act or process of accurate recording of events rather than any form of lying or speculation. Thus, to think of *ʔustʕu:rah* in light of 'story' as well as 'history' is never invalid.

What supports the belief that *ʔustʕu:rah* in the Holy Qur'an may imply historical accuracy and can therefore be viewed as a form of history is the fact that Arabs did not know the word *tari:x*, the modern Arabic equivalent of 'history', until 642 A.D. (al-Fayrooz Abadi).[13] This explains why the Holy Qur'an does not use the word *tari:x* at all, which suggests that either Arabs before 642 A.D. did not think of historiography at all or that they used to use a different word from *tari:x* to refer to the act of historiography. Regarding the assumption that Arabs might have never cared about the accurate documentation of history and therefore did not have a word to describe it, one needs to know that "Assyrian annals", "South-Arabian inscriptions", and "Graeco-Roman" documents are pre-Islamic Arabic documents of history.[14] Arabic historiography has been widely known and practiced before Islam, which suggests that the non-existence of the word *tari:x* in Arabic is a lexical, rather than a cultural, issue. Whether or not this has anything to do with Arabs' illiteracy before Islam, it is hard to deny that reporting and documenting events have been part of the Arabic-Islamic civilization. This is evident in many Arabic books and references of history composed by Arabs before and after Islam, such as an-Nadr b. al-Harith (d.624), Makhrama b. Nawfai az-Zuhri (d.741-2), Ibn Ishaq (d.768), and Ibn Hisham (d.833).

The non-existence of the word *tari:x* in the Arabic lexicon before 642 A.D does not mean that Arabs did not know or care about the craft of historiography but that they might have used another word, such as *'anba'* and *'axbar*, which are synonymous words that denote 'news' or/and 'information', thus constituting the content of 'history', as stated in *Lisān al-ʕArab* and *al-Khamoos Al-Muhi:t*. Significantly, the Holy Qur'an uses *'anba'* in (Yusuf: 102) and *akhbar* in (The Convulsion: 4) to indicate *tari:x*, which is translated into 'history' and 'news' in *Sahih International* and other authoritative references (*quran.com*).

While *tari:x* seems to be the most appropriate Arabic synonym of *ʔustʕu:rah*, it is noteworthy that the defining context of the nine occurrences of *ʔustʕu:rah* in the Holy Qur'an does neither prove nor refute any sense of *tari:x* (history or historiography). The word *ʔustʕu:rah* appears in the Holy Qur'an nine

times in the plural form as *ʔasatˤiːr* and is always modified by *ʔal-ʔawaliːn*, which is viewed by all authoritative Arabic dictionaries and Qur'anic interpretations as an adjective that refers to ancient people. The mutual relationship between the Noun and its modifiers within the same phrase suggests that the Noun *ʔasatˤiːr* in the Holy Qur'an should always involve the temporal sense implied by *ʔal-ʔawaliːn* but does not necessarily connote historiography. Thus, the Arabic verb *saṯar* and the singular noun *ʔustˤuːrah* as well as its plural *ʔasatˤiːr* necessarily connote neither spuriousness nor historiography. Rather, their possible connotations in the Holy Qur'an should always maintain the word's root-based meaning, reject associating the word with falsity and inaccuracy, and reflect the sense of the past time implied by the contextual phrase *ʔasatˤiːr ʔal-ʔawaliːn*.

4. Conclusion

Defining *ʔustˤuːrah* in the Holy Qur'an in light of its contextual phrase *ʔasatˤiːr ʔal-ʔawaliːn* does not mean that the word always implies a fact or historical truth and therefore should always be viewed as a reference to accurate historiography. Rather, we believe that the phrase *ʔasatˤiːr ʔal-ʔawaliːn* has nothing to do with either accuracy or inaccuracy. It refers to something like a narrative that is directly related to old nations and former people, which can be folktales, theological stories, or/and historical narrations. Thus, it is infeasible to restrict the meaning of *ʔustˤuːrah*, as used in the Holy Qur'an, to the fictitious and the supernatural at the cost of the word's root-based sense, which implies the act of drawing a line or writing down something in form of a line. The word *ʔustˤuːrah*, due to its lexical definition that is to write on the line or to draw a line, refers to the shape or form of documenting.[15]

Accordingly, to associate *ʔustˤuːrah* with the act of lying appears in later stages of the historical development of the word where the act of scripting/writing starts to be denoted by the verb *yaktub*, which is used in the Holy Qur'an to imply the process of writing true incidents as evidenced in so many Qur'anic verses, such as (Al-Baqarah/the Heifer: 178, 180, 183, 187, 216, 246, 282, 285). In all these verses, the verb *katab*, the past form of *yaktub*, and its cognates are always associated with God's "decree", which is taken by Qur'an scholars and readers as the most authoritative and accurate judgment. For instance, verse 178 of Al-Baqara explains some acts related to Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting, and uses the phrase "what Allah *katab*" to indicate God's decree and its sense of obligation as well as accuracy rather than form. The verb *katab* in this verse is not interpreted or translated as the act of writing down but as God's decree. This means that the semantic sense of the verb *yaktub* in modern Arabic is possibly the result of narrowing down the semantic sense of *yastor*, which is now associated with writing down fictitious or inaccurate content or narratives. This apparently needs further investigation, something we leave open for further research.

دراسة معنى كلمة "اسطورة" من منظور تاريخي مقارن

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الملخص

تقدم هذه الدراسة معنى مفردة "اسطورة" في النص القرآني من منظور جديد، وتناقش فكرة أن هذه المفردة تشير الى النص المكتوب بغض النظر عن دقة المحتوى. وهذا يدل على أن مفردة "اسطورة" قد تشير إلى نص صحيح أو غير صحيح في آن واحد، الأمر الذي يتناقض مع الاعتقاد السائد بأن مفردة "اسطورة" التي تظهر في النص القرآني تسع مرات بصيغة الجمع "أساطير" تعني قصصاً، خرافة، أوحكاية. نناقش هنا فكرة أن "اسطورة" مرتبطة بشكل السرد وليس بقيمته الخبرية. وعليه، فمثل هذا الطرح قد يساعد في حل التناقض الناتج عن الفهم التقليدي لمفهوم "أسطورة" كقصة أو خرافة أو حكاية مقارنة بالفهم التقليدي لمفردة "مسطور" المشتقة من الجذر الثلاثي لأسطورة التي يتغنى بها بطبيعة القرآن الكريم - كما الحال في سورة الطور.

الكلمات المفتاحية: لغويات تاريخيّة، ترجمة أُدبيّة، أسطورة، الشكل السردي، القرآن الكريم.

Endnotes

[1] This reference is the only available dictionary of Arabic that focuses on the etymology of Arabic words. It consults with several authentic references of Arabic language and literature, thus providing a holistic description and definition of every single entry. https://www.dohadictionary.org/ (accessed 5 August 2020).

[2] See Mohammad al-Qurtubi, *tafsi:r Al-Qurtubi*, Beirut: Dar Ehia al-Tourath al-Arabi for Printing Publishing & Distribution, 1952. Ali Jawad, *Al-Mufasal fi Tari:x al-arab qabl al-Islam*, Beirut: Dar al-Malayin, 1970. Jalaluldin al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fi Uloom Al-Qur'an*, Beirut: Dar Al-Jil, 1973. Butros al-Bustani. *Muhit al-Muhit*. Beirut: Lebanon Library, 1977. Wadi Bashoor. *Al-Myhtologia al-Suryiah: Asati:r Aram*, Beirut: Dar Fikr for Research and Publication, 1981. Hafiz Ibn Kaθi:r, *tafsi:r Ibn Kaθi:r*. 7th edition, Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1985. Mohammad al-Tabari. *tafsi:r Al-Tabari*, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1997. Fadhila Hussein, *Fikr Al-'Istorah wa Kitabat Al-Tari:x*, Amman: Yazori, 2009. Qism al-Dirasat wa al-Buhooth, *Al-'Istorah: Tawthi:q Hadhari*, Damascus: Kiwan, 2009.

[3] Al-Qurtubi, *tafsi:r Al-Qurtubi*, p. 382.

[4] Jawad, *al-Mufasal fi Tari:x al-Arab,* p. 7.

[5] Al-Suyuti, *al-Itqan*, p. 355.

[6] Al-Bustani, *Muhit Al-Muhit*, p.410.

[7] Bashoor, *Al-Myhtologia al-Suryiah*, p. 26.

[8] Ibn Kaθi:r, *tafsi:r Ibn Kaθi:r*, pp. 309-310.

[9] Al-Tabari, *tafsi:r Al-Tabari*, p. 94-95.

[10] Hussein, *Fikr Al-'Istorah*, pp. 51-87,

[11] *Al-'Istorah: Tawthi:q Hadhari*, p. 26.

[12] Coupe, *Myth*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009.

[13] See Coupe, *Myth*, p. 257.

[14] Francesco Gabrieli and M.S. Khan, "Arabic Historiography", *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer 1979), pp. 81-95.

[15] The resemblance between *ʔustˤu:rah* on the one hand and the Greek word *historia* and English 'history' on the other is noted by some linguists and researchers as mentioned in Wadi Bashoor, *Al-Myhtologia Al-Suryiah: Asati:r Aram*, Beirut: Dar Fikr for Research and Publication, 1981, (p.9-11), Qism Al-Dirasat wa Al-Buhooth. *Al-'Istorah Tawthi:q Hadhari*, Damascus: Kiwan, 2009, p.21-23, and Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* 2ed, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968, p.42. They all believe that although *ʔustˤu:rah* is similar to *historia* and 'history' at the sound level, the Arabic word connotes implausibility while the other two refers to different forms of narration and documentation. While this viewpoint is noteworthy, we totally reject it in our paper because *ʔustˤu:rah*, as we contend, has nothing to do with content and should not accordingly be judged in terms of plausibility or accuracy.

[16] The English translation of Qur'an verses is quoted from Rashad Khalifa. https://www.masjidtucson.org /quran/frames/ (accessed 22 July 2020)

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Appendix: the nine occurrences of *ʔasatˁiːr ʔal-ʔawaliːn* in the Holy Qur'an

[6:25] *Some of them listen to you, but we place veils on their hearts to prevent them from understanding, and deafness in their ears. Thus, no matter what kind of proof they see, they cannot believe. Thus, when they come to argue with you, the disbelievers say, "These are **tales from the past**."*

[8:31] *When our revelations are recited to them, they say, "We have heard. If we wanted to, we could have said the same things. These are no more than **tales from the past!**"*

[16:24] *When they are asked, "What do you think of these revelations from your Lord," they say, "**Tales from the past**."*

[23:83] *"Such promises were given to us and to our parents in the past. These are no more than **tales from the past.**"*

[25:5] *They also said, "**Tales from the past** that he wrote down; they were dictated to him day and night."*

[27:68] *"We have been given the same promise in the past. These are nothing but **tales from the past**."*

[46:17] *Then there is the one who says to his parents, "Woe to you; are you telling me that (after death) I will come back to life? How come those who died before us never come back?" The parents would cry for GOD's help and say, "Woe to you; please believe! GOD's promise is the truth." He would say, "**Tales from the past!**"*

[68:15] *When our revelations are recited to him, he says, "**Tales from the past!**"*

[83:13] *When our revelations are recited to him, he says, "**Tales from the past!**"*