

Allegory

See INTERPRETATION; LANGUAGE OF THE QUR’ĀN; PARABLES OF THE QUR’ĀN; RHETORIC AND ELOQUENCE

‘ALAQA

‘Alaqa, literally “a thing that clings”, a derivative of the root ‘-l-q, mentioned six times in the Qur’ān as a stage during embryogenesis. It occurs once as the collective noun *‘alaqa* (Q 96:2) and five times in its singular form, *‘alaqa* (Q 22:5; 23:14 twice; 40:67; 75:38). The feminine passive participle of its second form, *mu‘allaqa*, not dealt with in this entry, occurs once in Q 4:129 where it refers to a wife unjustly treated by her husband, treatment that *leaves her, as it were, in suspense* (*ka’l-mu‘allaqa*; see MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE).

The collective plural of *‘alaqa*, *al-‘alaq*, is also the title of the ninety-sixth sura of the Qur’ān (also known as *Sūrat Iqra’* after its first word) where the word *‘alaq* appears in the second verse. According to the most common opinion (Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 65:1; Bukhārī, *Tafsīr*, *Sūrat al-‘Alaq*), the first five verses of this sura constitute the first revelation that came to the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, while he was in the Cave of Ḥirā’ (see CAVE), at the top of Jabal al-Nūr (the Mountain of Light) some ten kilometers northeast of Makka (see REVELATION).

Other meanings of ‘-l-q cognates include: to cling; to adhere; to love; to be suspended; to be attached; leech; anything hung or suspended; individual parts of a well’s pulley as well as the apparatus in its entirety (Farāhīdī, *‘Ayn*; Ibn Fāris, *Maqāyīs*; Fayrūzābādī, *Qāmūs*; Zabīdī, *Tāj*; Rāghib, *Mufradāt*). According to Ibn Fāris (d. 395/1004), the basic meaning of this root, common to all derivatives, is to attach or link one thing to another that is superior to it (*Maqāyīs*). According to Ibn Manẓūr (630-711/1233-1312), *‘alaq* is blood (*q.v.*) generically and specifically dark red blood that has not yet dried (*Lisān*).

Al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī (d. 502/ca. 1108) lists the following meanings of the root ‘-l-q, and clarifies which one is intended in the Qur’ānic description of the creation of human beings:

to be trapped in something, as it is said ‘the prey is caught in the net’ (*‘aliq al-ṣayd fī-l-ḥubāla*); coagulated or congealed blood (*al-dam al-jāmid*) from which is *al-‘alaqa*—congealed blood from which a child is created, as Allah Most High said: *He created human being from an aggregate of congealed blood* (Q 65:2); and He said: *And indeed We created man*

out of an extract of clay; then We made him into a drop of sperm (nutfā) in a safe depository; then We made this drop into congealed blood (‘alaqa), then We made this congealed blood into an embryonic lump (mudgha, lit. “a thing like chewed flesh”), then We made the embryonic lump into bones, then We clothed the bones with flesh, and then We made him into another kind of creation; so Most Blessed is Allah, the Best of all those who create (Q 23:12-14).

Mufradāt

In classical exegetical literature, all six Qur’ānic references to *‘alaqa* have been understood as referring to a form of blood that comes into existence as the second stage in embryogenesis. The early commentator Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) called *‘alaqa* “blood which forms from the transformation of water” (that is, of *nutfā*); al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) called it “a clot of blood” (*qīṭ‘at al-dam*); al-Rāzī (543-606/1148-1209) and al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286) both said it is “a clot of congealed blood” (*qīṭ‘at al-dam al-jāmid*); al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), referred to it as “congealed blood” (*al-dam al-jāmid*), further explaining it as “fresh blood (*al-dam al-‘abīl*), intense red in color”; Ibn Kathīr (700-774/1300-1373) similarly stated that it is red in color and is formed when the *nutfā* develops for forty days (see their *Tafsīrs*, sub Q 22:5). These exegetes contextualized stages of creation mentioned in Q 22:5 and Q 23:12-14 by referring to the creation of the first human being, Ādam (*q.v.*), upon him peace. Thus dust (*turāb*) in Q 22:5 and extract or essence of clay (*sulālatin min ṭīn*) in Q 23:12 are taken as specific to the creation of the first human being, whose progeny thereafter are created through the biological process in which the appearance of *‘alaqa*, glossed by them as congealed blood, is preceded by a drop of sperm mixed with an ovum, and followed by the formation of an embryonic lump (*mudgha*), which develops bones (*‘iẓām*) (*q.v.*) that are then covered with flesh (*lahm*) (cf. *Tafsīrs* of Ṭabarī, Qurṭubī, and Ibn Kathīr, sub Q 22:5 and Q 23:12-14).

In Q 22:5, *‘alaqa* appears in an embryological sequence similar to Q 23:14, but the context here is resurrection, which the disbelievers doubt. *‘Alaqa* is mentioned in Q 75:38 in a similar manner, where

the purpose is to affirm resurrection (*ithbāt al-ma‘ād*) and refute those from among the ignorant, obstinate, and misguided who deny it; that is why it is said as an argument: *was he (man) not once a [mere] drop of fluid which gushed forth?* That is, man was a weak drop of sperm in a lowly fluid, which was dropped from the loins into the womb, then *he became congealed blood which [Allah] shaped and*

fashioned. That is, it became ‘*alaqa*, then a lump of flesh (*mudgha*); then it was given a shape and spirit—it was infused into it, and it became another kind of creation, with sound organs, man or woman, by the decree of Allah and [according to] its destiny; and that is why it is said, *And made of him a pair, the male and female*. [The next verse states:] *Is not He able of bringing the dead [back] to life?*—that is to say, is the One who began this perfect creation from this weak drop of sperm not capable of recreating as He began [creation]? Indeed, it is easier to re-create than to create for the first time.

Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 75:37-40

A similar ontogenetic sequence is repeated in Q 40:67 as a reminder of the Omnipotence, Grandeur, Oneness, Majesty, and Might of the Creator Who grants life and death and Who, *when He wills to bring a thing into existence, merely says “Be”*—and it is (Q 40:67-68).

Taken together, all references to ‘*alaqa* are thematically linked to two fundamental themes of the Qur’ān:

- I. Allah’s creative power, for He is the *Best of Creators* (*aḥsan al-khāliqīn*) (Q 23:14), Who brings human beings into existence from seemingly worthless fluids;
- II. human arrogance and heedlessness, arising from forgetting one’s lowly origins and expressed in rejecting the Creator’s guidance and denying the essential realities of life and the afterlife (see HEREAFTER; RESURRECTION).

In Sūrat al-‘Alaq, mention of ‘*alaqa* is preceded by the command to *Recite, in the name of thy Lord*, and followed by a verse stating that Allah *taught mankind by the pen*. Ibn Kathīr regarded these verses, constituting the first revelation, the first of the countless blessings of Allah Most High upon humanity, and “in this is a point for reflection: the beginning of human creation is merely from a drop of congealed blood, and then the Most High taught man what he knew not, honored him, and ennobled him with knowledge—a characteristic which distinguished the father of humanity, Ādam, upon him peace, from the angels (*q.v.*)” (*Tafsīr*, sub Q 96:4-5).

Classical commentators, then, understood ‘*alaqa* as congealed blood that appears in the process of human procreation within the context of Divine power, and as indicative of His Majesty and Might. Most English translations, however, render ‘*alaqa* as “blood clot”, whereas commentaries and books written in the light of modern scientific data recognize that there is no stage of embryogenesis in which blood clots appear. Thus Maurice

Bucaille (1920-1998), a French physician and author of several popular books on the Qur’ān and science (*q.v.*), warned that to translate ‘*alaqa* as ‘blood clot’ “is a mistake against which one should guard; man has never passed through the stage of being a ‘blood clot’... the original sense of [‘*alaqa* as] ‘something which clings’ corresponds exactly to today’s firmly established reality” (Bucaille, *The Bible, the Qur’an and Science* p. 224-225). Already in the nineteenth century, another medical doctor, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Iskandarānī (d. 1888 or 1889), who was one of the first Muslims to attempt a scientific explanation of certain verses of the Qur’ān, had tried to understand ‘*alaqa* in the light of scientific data of his time: he described the formation of ‘*alaqa* as the third stage in creation (after dust (*ṭurāb*) and *nufṭa*), which emerges through transformation of *nufṭa* into ‘*alaqa*, which is “a small speck, floating in a transparent fluid, which enters the womb at an undetermined time, and which scientists can see as clinging to the membrane” (*Kashf al-asrār* 1:38). He goes on to describe the development of ‘*alaqa* as it passes through stages of being “a small speck to that of becoming like a short line bulging in the middle, until it starts to resemble a circle” and is finally transformed into a *mudgha* (a lump of flesh)” (*Kashf al-asrār* 1:39).

More recently, popular works have extended the discourse on the Qur’ān and modern science to arguments for a scientific validation of the Qur’ān itself: “The word ‘*alaq*’ in Arabic means ‘something that clings, a leech-like substance’. The Qur’ān came down to us 1400 years ago, and the fact that God uses this word to describe the development of the embryo in the mother’s womb is one of its wonders. The fact that this knowledge, which could not have been discovered by the science of that period, was revealed centuries ago in the Qur’ān confirms once again that it is a revelation from God, the Lord of all the worlds” (Yahya, *The Miracle of the Human Creation* p. 93). The World Commission on Scientific Miracles of the Holy Qur’ān and Sunna, established in Jeddah in 1984, has held conferences in various parts of the world on the subject of human creation in the Qur’ān. One of its major publications is Keith Moore’s *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology with Islamic Additions*, an expanded version of his 1986 article, “Reference to Embryology in the Qur’an.” Moore translates ‘*alaqa* as “leech-like structure” and then states that “interpretation of the verses in the Qur’an referring to human development would not have been possible in the 7th century A.D., or even a hundred years ago. We

can interpret them now because the science of modern embryology affords us new understanding. Undoubtedly there are other verses in the Qur'an related to human development that will be understood in the future as our knowledge increases" (Moore, "Reference to Embryology in the Qur'an" p. 16).

Several rigorously authenticated Prophetic sayings mention these stages in the process of birth (*q.v.*) as being separated by a duration of forty days:

The components of creation of each one of you are collected in the womb of his mother for forty days; they then turn into '*alaqa* for an equal duration [of forty days]; then into a lump of flesh (*mudgha*) for a similar period [of forty days]. Then an angel is sent, who breathes its spirit into it and who is enjoined to inscribe four things: his provisions, his lifespan, (variant in Muslim includes: his works,) and whether he will be of the wretched (*shaqī*) or of the blessed (*sa'id*). And by Allah, save Whom there is no deity, one amongst you may act like the people deserving Paradise until between him and Paradise there remains but the distance of a cubit, when suddenly the writ of destiny overcomes him and he begins to act like the denizens of the Fire and thus enters it; and another one may act in the way of the denizens of Fire until there remains between him and the Fire only the distance of a cubit, when the writ overcomes him such that he begins to act like the people of Paradise, and enters it.

Bukhārī, Qadar, fī-l-qadar; Muslim, Qadar, kayfiyyat al-khalq al-ādami fī baṭn ummih wa-kitābat rizqih wa-ajalih wa-'amalih wa-shiqāwatih wa-sa'adatih; Tirmidhī, Abwāb al-qadar, mā jā'a anna al-a'māl bil-khawātīm; Alḥmad, Musnad 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd; Bayhaqī, *Sunan*, 'Adad, al-mar'a taḍla' saḡṭa

Thus the three Qur'ānic terms (*nutfā*, '*alaqa*, and *mudgha*) can be understood as stages in the process of birth, beginning with fertilization and ending with what resembles a lump of chewed flesh, each stage lasting forty days. Fertilization is a complex sequence of coordinated molecular events, which begins when a male gamete or sperm (spermatozoon) and a female gamete or oocyte (ovum) unite to form a single cell (zygote), usually in the ampulla of the uterine tube, and ends with the intermingling of maternal and paternal chromosomes at the metaphase of the first mitotic division of the zygote, within twenty-four hours (Moore, *The Developing Human* p. 34). During the first two weeks following fertilization (the *nutfā* phase), the most significant and discernible changes described in clinical embryology include:

- I. the repeated mitotic divisions of the zygote, resulting in a rapid increase in the number of cells called blastomeres;
- II. the formation of morula, which is the stage when there are 12 to 15 blastomeres;
- III. the entrance of morula into the uterus (about four days after fertilization) and the appearance of a fluid-filled space called the blastocyst cavity;
- IV. the implantation of the blastocyst to the endometrial epithelium, which commences around the seventh day after fertilization and is completed by the fourteenth (Moore, *The Developing Human* p. 34-62).

Thus, it can be said that the middle stage—denoted by the term '*alaqa* in the Qur'ān and the Prophetic traditions—is not a fixed and unchanging entity; rather, it is the entire sequence of changes in the developing human between day 41 and day 80 after fertilization. This duration does not correspond to any named stages in modern embryology, which takes the end of the eighth week (56th day) as the completion of the "embryonic period" during which all major organs and systems of the body form from the three germ layers, and the beginning of the ninth week as the commencement of the "fetal period" which ends at birth and which has no formal staging system (Moore, *The Developing Human* p. 104, 110). Regardless of this dissonance, according to the modern understanding, the period covered by the stage of '*alaqa* (41st to 80th days) involves the following successive stages:

- regional differentiation of the upper limbs as elbows and large hand plates developing around day 42;
- spontaneous movements of the embryo such as twitching of the trunk and limbs (42-48 days after fertilization);
- development of all regions of the limbs, separation of the lengthened digits, and the first appearance of purposeful limb movements (49-56 days);
- rapid body growth, visibly separated eyes, fused eyelids, low-set ears, appearance of primary ossification centers in the skeleton, especially in the skull and long bones, and the near-completion of the process by which the upper limbs grow to their final relative lengths (80th day).

In the light of current knowledge, and keeping in view the primary meaning of the word ("something that clings"), it seems best to understand '*alaqa* not as a fixed entity such as a clot of blood but rather as a stage in embryogenesis between *nutfā* and *mudgha*.

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See also: BIRTH; BLOOD; BODY; BONES; THE QUR'ĀN AND SCIENCE; REVELATION; RESURRECTION.

MUZAFFAR IQBAL

Allah, Most High

See first entry in this volume

ALLIANCE AND TREATY

The article comprises the following sections: i. Definitions; ii. Importance of Upholding Agreements; iii. Prophetic Treaties with Non-Muslims; iv. Establishing Written Contracts; v. Bibliography.

Definitions

General terms for alliances, treaties and contracts

The Qur'ānic terms that denote an alliance, treaty, and contract are *mīthāq* (occurring 25 times), *ʿaqd* (pl. *ʿuqūd* used once for contracts in Q 5:1; derived word *ʿuqda* used twice specifically for marriage contracts), *ḥilf* (various forms of its verb appearing twelve times as to swear or take an oath, and the noun *ḥallāf*, oath-taker, appearing once in Q 68:10), *yamīn* (while none of its 24 occurrences in the singular form refer to oaths, promises, bonds, or treaties, many of its 41 occurrences in the plural, *aymān*, do), *wa'd* (occurring 15 times), *ahd* (31 times), and *dhimma* (twice).

The word *mīthāq* is derived from the root *w-th-q*, which originally has the meaning of "bond" (Q 5:7) and its corollary, "confidence" (Q 12:66; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, *sub w-th-q*). In its Qur'ānic usage, it often refers to Allah's covenant with humanity to believe and worship Him alone, and to follow His Messengers (Q 2:63; 7:172-173; 33:7-8) (for further discussion of *mīthāq*, see COVENANT).

The word *ʿaqd* is derived from the root *ʿ-q-d*, which means to tie a knot (*ʿuqda*, as in Q 20:27, *loosen the knot from my tongue*; pl. *ʿuqad*, as in Q 113:4, *who blow on knots*) or "bond", and by extension to enter into a binding agreement (Q 5:1). Allah refers to the marriage contract as the "tie of marriage" (*ʿuqdat al-nikāḥ*) (Q 2:235 and 237; see more on marriage below). When the word *ʿaqd* is used along with other words for promise, such as *ahd* or *yamīn*, it implies the "strong bond" created through the treaty (Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, *sub ʿ-q-d*; see Q 4:33 and 5:89).

Al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854) states that the pre-Islamic Arabs (see JĀHILIYYA) often instituted treaties through symbolic acts, which later came to refer to the treaties themselves. For instance, two persons or tribes would sometimes become allied through the taking of bilateral compacts that made each an ally (*ḥalīf*, pl. *aḥlāf*) of the other. Later, the word *ḥilf* came to be used for allegiances regardless of the ritual involved. Oaths might also be instituted through other symbolic acts, for instance, placing one's right hand (*yamīn*) on another's, such that the word *yamīn* (pl. *aymān*) also came to be used for oaths and covenants: *those with whom you have made solemn covenants* (*ʿaqadat aymanukum*) (Q 4:33). The time and place in which oaths