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Comparative Analysis of the Semantic Components of the Concepts of "Destruction and Annihilation" in the Holy Quran

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ABSTRACT

Employing a descriptive-analytical methodology, this study examines the Qur'anic concept of destruction and annihilation alongside a cluster of semantically related lexemes. The primary aim is to uncover the deeper semantic layers embedded within Qur'anic discourse and to illuminate the diverse dimensions of annihilation expressed through cognate Arabic terms. Within this framework, the lexemes *halāk*, *bakha'*, *bawār*, *tabīr*, *tadmīr*, *ta's*, *thubūr*, *damdam*, *tabb*, and *kabb* are systematically analyzed. The findings reveal that while *halāk* generally denotes annihilation without necessarily implying corporeal transformation, each of the other lexemes reflects a distinct nuance of destruction. For example, *bakha'* refers to death caused by grief, *bawār* to ruin resulting from corruption, *tabīr* to collapse, and *tadmīr* to both personal and material devastation. Likewise, *ta's* signifies downfall accompanied by immobility, *thubūr* denotes irreversible ruin, *damdam* refers to severe and recurrent punishment, *tabb* conveys profound loss, and *kabb* indicates violent casting down. The study concludes that, despite their semantic proximity, the subtle distinctions among these lexemes carry considerable exegetical and linguistic significance. Such nuances inform the precise usage of these terms in diverse Qur'anic contexts, thereby enhancing interpretive accuracy and contributing to a deeper understanding of Qur'anic language and divine intentionality.

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1. Introduction

In recent times, semantics has become a foundational method in the study of sacred texts, particularly the Qur'an. This research adopts semantic analysis to examine both the explicit and implicit meanings of Qur'anic vocabulary. Given the Qur'an's rich and complex semantic structure, its terms often appear in varied contexts with distinct connotations, necessitating an in-depth analysis. The study focuses on the concept of destruction and its associated terms—*halāk*, *bakha'*, *bawār*, *tabūr*, *tadmīr*, *ta's*, *thubūr*, *damdam*, *tabb*, and *kabb*—each used in different Qur'anic contexts with specific meanings. By analyzing these terms, the study aims to clarify the semantic relationships among them and offer a more precise understanding of the concept of *halāk*. This contributes significantly to Qur'anic interpretation and provides a basis for further research in religious semantics.

2. Research Background

Semantic investigations of the Qur'anic term *halāk* ("destruction"), particularly through componential and comparative approaches, have so far received limited scholarly attention. Nevertheless, several studies can be identified in which different aspects of this word have been examined.

For instance, Bahrami (2023) in his article "*A Semantic Study of the Derivatives of the Word Halak in the Qur'an*," analyzed various occurrences of this root in both nominal and verbal forms. The strength of his research lies in the breadth of linguistic data; however, a systematic comparison between the derivatives and their near-synonyms was not fully addressed.

Similarly, Rostaei and Mohammadzadeh (2021), in their study, "*The Linguistic Creation of the Qur'an in the Word al-Tahlukah and Its Relation to the Meaning of al-Infaq*," focused on verse 195 of *Sūrat al-Baqarah*. They demonstrated that the root *halak* carries a cognitive connotation of "destruction," interpreting the verse as a prohibition of withholding expenditure as a cause of ruin. This research is innovative in linking lexical semantics with cognitive analysis; nevertheless, its scope is confined to a single verse.

Qasemzadeh (2025), in his seminary thesis "*Conceptual Analysis of the Word Halak in the Qur'an*," examined both lexical and exegetical sources to analyze the meaning of *halak* alongside its semantic counterparts, such as *falāh*, *zafar*, *fawz*, and *baqā'*. His work clarifies the semantic and functional differences among these terms. While the study provides valuable insights into the semantic range of *halak*, its approach remains largely descriptive and does not engage in intertextual analysis or systematic comparative study.

In summary, a review of the existing scholarship shows that although previous studies have each illuminated certain aspects of the concept of "destruction," a comprehensive and independent analysis that examines *halak* within a comparative framework in relation to its synonyms has yet to be conducted. The present study aims to fill this gap by employing lexical and exegetical sources and adopting an analytical-comparative approach to uncover the semantic layers of *halak* and to delineate its distinctions from other synonymous terms.

3. Conceptual Framework

This section discusses the concepts of componential analysis and comparative analysis.

3-1. Componential Analysis

To attain a deeper understanding of word meanings, semanticists typically break down the concepts of each word into smaller elements, known as semantic components that constitute the conceptual structure of that word (Şafavī, 2000). These components represent a set of essential features that generate the overall meaning of a word and, by clarifying semantic relationships at the sentence level, help reveal conceptual connections (Palmer, 1967). Analyzing these components allows for the extraction of deeper semantic layers and is recognized as a central aim of semantic research. These elements may be inferred from the text or a specific context to achieve a more precise understanding of the intended concept (Palmer, 1967).

Similarly, analyzing and comparing the semantic components of a word with those of its synonyms not only enhances the semantic understanding of the word but also clarifies its precise function within a sentence. These subtle differences enable words to acquire distinct meanings and usages, depending on context and situational factors.

3-2. Comparative Analysis

As previously mentioned, researchers maintain that one of the foundational pillars of contemporary linguistics is the semantic analysis of vocabulary—a domain that now holds a prominent position in linguistic studies (Bāqirī, 1995). Numerous definitions and perspectives have been offered regarding the conceptual relationships among words and sentences, which are extensively discussed in the specialized literature of this field.

Modern semantics currently seeks to establish systematic and precise methodologies for a more accurate understanding of word and phrase meanings, with the study of semantic relationships among them playing a fundamental role. Researchers argue that to achieve a profound and accurate understanding of a word, it must first be analyzed within the network of internal linguistic relations, and then its concrete manifestations should be explored (Bāqirī, 1995). Accordingly, few semantic studies can achieve comprehensive and reliable results without considering the semantic interactions among words.

4. Comparative Analysis of Lexical Items

In semantics, destruction is considered a foundational concept encompassing a network of words and expressions that reflect aspects of a shared conceptual system. This study aims to explore the deeper semantic dimensions of these terms by examining, analyzing, and comparing a selection of words that share semantic components with *halākah*, particularly those found in the Noble Qur'an.

Within a conceptual mapping model, *halākah* is positioned at the center of a semantic structure, with related terms systematically arranged around it. This model facilitates the explanation of conceptual connections among these words and clarifies their usage within Qur'anic discourse.



Fig. 1. The Conceptual Mapping Model of the Term *halākah*

4-1. *Halāk* (Destruction)

The term *halāk* in its lexical sense denotes breaking apart and falling down, which is why the term *halak* is employed to describe the death of a human being (Ibn Fāris, 1983). Likewise, the term *tahlukah* signifies destruction and annihilation, and it is applied to any matter whose ultimate end leads to ruin and extinction (Farāhīdī, 1993; Ibn Manẓūr, 1992).

Halāk (destruction) differs from *i'dām* (execution) in its broader meaning, referring to the disruption of order and structural integrity or the loss of expected benefits, without necessarily implying complete annihilation (ʿAskarī, 1991). This sets it apart from related terms such as *thubūr* (eternal, irrevocable death), *tadmīr* (death along with the destruction of belongings such as offspring

and wealth), *bakh'* (death from overwhelming sorrow), and *tabbīr* (death following collapse). Unlike these, *halāk* may refer to destruction either at the level of utility and function or at the level of essential existence (Quran Culture and Education Center, 2019).

In the Noble Qur'an, derivatives of the root *h-l-k* (*halaka*) are employed extensively. For instance, in the verse, "*Wa anfiqū fī sabīlillāhī walā tulqū bi'aydīkum ilā at-tahlukati wa aḥsinū inna llāha yuḥibbu al-muḥsinīn*" [Spend in the way of Allah, and do not cast yourselves with your own hands into destruction, and be virtuous. Indeed, Allah loves the virtuous] (Qur'an 2:195). The term *tahlukah* [in the verse] is interpreted as referring to absolute and all-encompassing ruin, both worldly and otherworldly (Makārim Shīrāzī, 2000; Ṭayyib, 1990). Structural analysis of the term *tahlukah*, particularly the addition of extra letters, indicates an intensification and amplification of destruction inherent in its meaning (Ṭāliqānī 1983).

Moreover, since *halāk* may be applied to any phenomenon that results in decline or ruin, some Qur'anic exegetes have extended their semantic range to include notions such as extravagance and excessiveness (Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1989; Mughniyyah, 2003).

In the interpretation of the verse "*Wa idhā tawallā sa'ā fī al-arḍi liyuḥsidā fihā wa yuhlika al-ḥartha wa an-nasla wa-llāhu lā yuḥibbu al-fasād*" [If he were to wield authority, he would try to cause corruption in the land and to ruin the crop and the stock, and Allah does not like corruption] (Qur'an 2:205), the term *halāk* is emphasized as indicating the widespread destruction of life, encompassing both reproduction (*nasl*) and agriculture (*ḥartha*) (Ṣādiqī Tehrānī 1998, 32).

In this context, *halāk* may result from various causes such as killing or fire, and connotes the annihilation of all material entities (Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, 1992). Similarly, in the verse "*Wa idh qālat ummatun minhum lima ta'izūna qawman allāhu muhlikuhum aw mu'adhdhibuhum 'adhāban shadīdan qālū ma'dhiratan ilā rabbikum wa la'allahum yattaqūn*" [When a group of them said, 'Why do you advise a people whom Allah will destroy, or punish with a severe punishment?' They said, 'As an excuse before your Lord, and [with the hope] that they may be Godwary.'] (Qur'an 7:164), the term *muhlikuhum* refers to worldly destruction (Ṭabrisī, 1997).

4-2. Bakh'

The term *bakh'* in the Arabic lexicon denotes "killing" and "humiliating" or "degrading." Hence, the Arabic expression *bakh'a nafsahu* ("he killed himself") is used to describe an act of suicide driven by intense anger or sorrow. Similarly, in the phrase *bakh'a al-arḍ*, the meaning is "to humiliate the inhabitants of the land," while *bakh'a lahu bi-ḥaqqihi* implies "to acknowledge the truth and submit to it" (Ibn Manzūr, 1992). The core meaning of *bakh'* is understood as "killing and subjugating," since in the context of defeat and humiliation, it is likened to the state of being slain. In the domain of animal slaughter, *bakh'* refers to the act of deeply cutting the throat until reaching the spinal cord (Ibn Fāris, 1983).

Some lexicographers, including al-Zamakhsharī, interpret *bakh'* as an exaggerated performance of an act carried out to its utmost limit. However, Ibn al-Athīr regards this interpretation as unique to al-Zamakhsharī and states that other lexicographers did not ascribe this meaning to *bakh'* (Ibn al-Athīr, 1988).

The Qur'anic term *bakh'* appears in verses such as "*Fala'allaka bākhi'un nafsaka 'alā āthārihim in lam yu'minū bihādihā al-ḥadīthi asaḥan*" (Qur'an 18:6) and "*La'allaka bākhi'un nafsaka allā yakūnū mu'minīn*" (Qur'an 26:3). Here, *bakh'* is interpreted as "to kill" or "to perish," indicating that the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny), overwhelmed by sorrow over the disbelievers' rejection of faith, was at the risk of losing his life (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996; Ṭūsī, n.d.).

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets *bakh'* as "cutting to the spinal cord," a vein in the back whose severing signifies the ultimate limit in slaughter (Zamakhsharī, 1986). In his interpretation of the phrase "*bākhi'un nafsaka 'alā āthārihim*," the Prophet (PBUH) is likened to one mourning the loss of his loved ones, gazing at their abandoned dwellings and overcome by grief to the point of death (Zamakhsharī, 1986). Some exegetes thus define *bakh'* as "dying from intense sorrow" (Ālūsī, 1996).

Al-Zamakhsharī identifies the core meaning of *bakh'* as "cutting the neck down to the final vein," from which the figurative meaning of extreme effort and emotional strain is derived. Ibn Fāris (1983), citing al-Ḍabbī, similarly reports that *bakh'* refers to "cutting until the spinal cord is reached." In contrast, Fakhr al-Rāzī (1992) contends that the essence of *bakh'* is not "killing" or "perishing" but "exerting the utmost effort to the point of death," rejecting the interpretation of physical killing as its primary meaning.

4-3. Bawār

The term *bawār* is derived from the root *b-w-r* which denotes destruction (*halākah*) (Farāhīdī, 1993). It is also used metaphorically to signify stagnation or recession, as an object that lacks circulation or demand is likened to something abandoned and perished (Fayyūmī, 1984; Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 1991). The term *būr* likewise denotes “destruction,” and the expression *qawmun būr* refers to perished or annihilated people. In this regard, *būr* has either been considered the plural of *bā’ir* or interpreted, like *bashar*, as carrying a general meaning (Farāhīdī, 1993).

In some sources, the word *bawr* is mentioned to mean “trial” or “test” (Jawharī, 1983). Some lexicographers consider the primary meaning of *būr* to be a combination of destruction and trial (Ibn Fāris, 1983), while others interpret it as intense loss approaching annihilation, distinguishing it from *halāk* (destruction) and *khusrān* (loss) on this basis (Muṣṭafawī, 1995). However, this interpretation lacks credible evidence or support from authoritative lexical sources, rendering its acceptance problematic from a documentation perspective.

In the Noble Qur’an, derivatives of the root *b-w-r* (*bawār*) appear in four different morphological forms: *Tabūr*, *yabūr*, *būran*, and *bawār*.

1. “yarjūna tijāratān lan tabūra” — “[They] expect a commerce that will never go bankrupt” (Qur’an 35:29)
2. “wa makru ūlā’ika huwa yabūru” — “and their plotting shall come to naught.” (Qur’an 35:10)
3. “wakānū qawman būran” — “And they were a ruined lot.” (Qur’an 25:18) “wakuntum qawman būran” — “And you were a ruined lot.” (Qur’an 48:12)
4. “wa aḥallū qawmahum dāra al-bawār” — “And they led their people to the House of Ruin” (Qur’an 14:28)

The Qur’anic exegetes have generally listed meanings such as destruction (*halāk*), corruption (*fasād*), and stagnation (*kasād*) for the term *bawār*. Shaykh Ṭūsī, in interpreting the verse “*wa kānū qawman būran*,” understands the term *būr* to mean corruption and cites the example “*bārat al-sil’ah*,” referring to a commodity that has lost its market value and cannot be sold as a linguistic parallel. Accordingly, he interprets *qawm būr* as a corrupt and destroyed people (Ṭūsī, n.d.). Al-Zamakhsharī (1986) also considers *būr*—whether as a singular or plural form—to mean destruction.

Some Qur’anic exegetes have proposed three possible meanings for *būr*: (1) destruction; (2) barrenness, in light of the expression *bawār al-arḍ*, meaning barren land; and (3) corruption (Māwardī, 1991). According to Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (1991, 152) and Ālūsī (1996), the core meaning of *bawār* is extreme stagnation and recession, which naturally leads to corruption and annihilation. Thus, the term *bawār* is sometimes used metaphorically to mean corruption and destruction.

In the interpretation of the expression “*makru ūlā’ika huwa yabūru*,” *bawār* is interpreted as corruption and stagnation, implying that the schemes and plots of the enemies were rendered ineffective, led nowhere, and ultimately ended with their death at the Battle of Badr (Zamakhsharī 1986).

Some Qur’anic exegetes have presented these meanings as distinct possibilities (Ṭūsī, n.d.), while others, such as Ṭabrisī (1997), have considered all these meanings collectively.

In clarifying the distinction between *bawār* and similar terms, two points are noteworthy:

1. Unlike related terms, *bawār* originally denotes intense stagnation and unprofitability, used to indicate destruction only insofar as stagnation leads to corruption and annihilation (Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 1991). In contrast, Fayyūmī (1984) defines *bawār* as destruction and views stagnation as a metaphor, as unused or unwanted items eventually perish.
2. Some interpret *bawār* as severe loss bordering on annihilation (Muṣṭafawī, 1995), though this lacks support from standard lexicons. Reconciling this with the interpretation of *bawār* as “trial” or “experience” is problematic. Ibn Fāris (1983), perhaps for this reason, presents the primary meaning of *būr* as encompassing both destruction and experience.

4-4. Tatbīr

The root *t-b-r* carries two meanings: (1) destruction, and (2) unrefined gold or unfinished silver (Ibn Fāris, 1983). *Tabara yatbiru* means to destroy; *tabār* is a verbal noun indicating annihilation (Fayyūmī, 1984). The phrase *tabbarahu tatbīran* means to crush and obliterate, as in Qur’an 7:139,

"*mutabbarun mā hum fīhi*," referring to the destruction caused by polytheism and misguidance (Jawharī, 1983).

Tatbīr appears in Qur'anic verses, "*wa-kullan tabbarnā tatbīrā*," (25:39) and "*wa-li-yutabbirū mā 'alaw tatbīrā*," (17:7) as well as in derived forms, including *mutabbar* (25:39; 17:7; 7:139) and *tabāran* (71:28). These usages all convey utter destruction.

The verse "*wa-kullan tabbarnā tatbīrā*" refers to destroyed nations such as Pharaoh, Noah, 'Ād, Thamūd, and aṣḥāb al-Rass (Bursawī, 2000; Ṭabarī, 1994, 1997; Ṭūsī, n.d.). Imam Ṣādiq (as) states that *tatbīr* means "*kassarnā taksīran*" — "we completely shattered them" (Qummī, 1988). In "*li-yutabbirū mā 'alaw tatbīrā*," it means that what they overpower, they ruin (Fayḍ Kāshānī, n.d.; Zamakhsharī, 1986). Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1996) interprets this as the destruction of people, burning of possessions, demolition of buildings, and devastation of cities.

On "*inna hā'ulā'ī mutabbarun mā hum fīhi*" (Qur'an 7:139), exegetes agree that it refers to the destruction of polytheists, their beliefs, and idols (Ālūsī, 1996). Moses (as) foretold this to the Children of Israel (Ṭabarī, 1994); some interpret this as the eradication of idolatry (Fayḍ Kāshānī, n.d.). In "*wa-lā tazīdī al-zālimīna illā tabāran*" (Qur'an 71:28), *tabār* means destruction; *tabr* refers to annihilation, and a shattered, ruined object is also called *tabr* (Ṭūsī, n.d.).

In a more precise analysis, destruction and annihilation are classified into two categories: (1) punishments of the Hereafter, and (2) material and spiritual afflictions in this world that begin gradually (Muṣṭafawī, 1995). Some, based on a narration from Imam Bāqir (as), have stated that *tabār* means loss and damage, although, in common exegetical works, this word is generally interpreted as destruction (Sharīf Lāhījī, 1994). In comparing *tatbīr* with similar terms, it is important to note that *tatbīr* specifically denotes destruction that occurs through the act of breaking apart, whereas other related terms indicate destruction in a general sense, without the particular condition of being shattered (Muṣṭafawī, 1995).

4-5. Tadmīr

The term *dammār* derives from the root *damār*, meaning destruction or annihilation (Fayyūmī, 1984). Lexical sources also associate *dammār* with "entering someone's space without permission" (Fīrūzābādī, 1991), and *mudammīr* refers to a skilled hunter (Zamakhsharī, n.d.).

Some consider the primary meaning to be "*to enter suddenly into a house or place*, including invasions and dangerous acts leading to destruction (Ibn Fāris, 1983; Muṣṭafawī, 1995). Others argue that the core meaning is the destruction of a person along with possessions and dependents, such as wealth and children (Majma' al-Lughā al-'Arabiyya, 1984).

In the verse, "*Wa idhā aradnā an nuhlika qaryatan amarnā mutrafīhā fafasaqū fīhā faḥaqqā 'alayhā al-qawlu fadammarnāhā tadmīrā*" [And when We desire to destroy a town, We command its affluent ones [to obey Allah]. But they commit transgression in it, and so the word becomes due against it, and We destroy it utterly] (Qur'an 17: 16), the term *tadmīr*—based on the context of the beginning of the verse ("*an nuhlika*"—"to destroy") and the consequential particle *fa'*—signifies annihilation and obliteration.

The Qur'anic exegetes have clarified that *tadmīr* denotes complete destruction, including the demolition of traces, buildings, and cities (Abū Ḥayyān Gharnaṭī, 1991; Ālūsī, 1996). It is also employed to mean destruction by an extraordinary and miraculous means (Tha'labī, 2001; Ṭūsī, n.d.). The use of the verbal noun *tadmīran* following the verb *dammarnā* serves to intensify and emphasize the severity of divine punishment (Qurtubī, 1992).

The same meaning is observed in the verse, "*Faqlnā idhābā ilā al-qawmī alladhīna kadhdhabū bi-āyātīnā fadammarnāhum tadmīrā*" [Then We said, 'Let the two of you go to the people who have denied Our signs.' Then We destroyed them utterly] (Qur'an 25:36), which refers to the annihilation of Pharaoh's people.

In the interpretation of the verse "*Dammara-llāhu 'alayhim*" [Allah destroyed them] (Qur'an 47:10), the term *dammār* is understood to mean total destruction, and the expression '*alayhim*' indicates the obliteration of a person's possessions and dependents. In other words, God eradicated all their wealth, children, and belongings (Zamakhsharī, 1986).

Compared to similar terms that convey the notion of destruction, *tadmīr* conveys annihilation along with the obliteration of a person's effects and belongings, distinguished by "complete eradication,

including destruction of possessions and attributes.” Alternatively, some scholars propose the root meaning as “sudden and unauthorized entry,” encompassing assault and resulting devastation (Muṣṭafawī, 1995).

4-6. Ta‘*s*

The root *ta‘*s** in the Arabic lexicon signifies falling to the ground in such a way that the individual is unable to rise afterward (Fayyūmī, 1984; Ibn Manzūr, 1992). This term is also used in the sense of destruction or perishing (Jawharī, 1998). The semantic connection between falling and destruction in this term lies in the fact that such a fall often results in annihilation. In the verse "*Wa alladhīna kafarū fata‘*san* lahum wa aḍalla a‘*mālahum*" [As for the faithless, their lot will be to fall [into ruin], and He will render their works fruitless] (Qur’an 47:8), the term *ta‘*s** [in the verse] is interpreted as a fall accompanied by an inability to rise. Its antonym is *la‘*ā**, which denotes rescue and rising up (Kāshānī, 2002; Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1991).*

Some Qur’anic exegetes, noting the contrast with the following verse that promises firmness to the believers "*O you who have faith! If you help Allah, He will help you and make your feet steady*" (Qur’an: 7), interpret *ta‘*s** as slipping, falling, and collapsing, the consequence of which is ruin and destruction (Ibn Kathīr, 1988; Makārim Shīrāzī, 1995; Muṣṭafawī, 1995).

The term *ta‘*san** has been interpreted as a fall from the ranks of the believers (Ṭūsī, n.d.), being slain in this world and cast into Hellfire (Zamakhsharī, 1986), a curse upon disbelievers, analogous to "*Perish man! How ungrateful is he!*" (Qur’an 80:17), or as a metaphor for their futile, failed efforts, symbolized by falling face down denoting ultimate weakness and incapacity (Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, 1996).

The distinct feature of *ta‘*s** compared to similar destruction terms is that annihilation (*halākah*) is an inseparable part of its meaning, whether in this world, the Hereafter, or spiritual realms. Interpretations of the verse "*fa-ta‘*san* lahum*" include being slain in life, falling into Hell, or losing spiritual rank among believers.

4-7. Thubūr

The term *thabar* in Arabic lexicography encompasses various meanings, including confinement, prevention, vigilance, ease, and destruction (Fīrūzābādī, 1991). The phrase *tabbara Allāhu ta‘*ālā* al-kāfir* means "God destroyed the disbeliever" (Fayyūmī, 1984). The supplication "*a‘*ūdhu bika min da‘*wat* al-thabūr*" (I seek refuge in You from the invocation of *thubūr*) refers to seeking protection from destruction and annihilation (Ibn al-Athīr, 1988).*

The word *thubūr* is defined in lexical sources as "woe" or "destruction" (Ibn Durayd, 2005). Some scholars interpret it as "eternal annihilation," implying no possibility of revival or return thereafter. Consequently, the inhabitants of Hell express their longing for death through the term *thubūr*, as mentioned in the Qur’an: "*Lā tad‘*ū* al-yawma thubūran wāḥidan wad‘*ū* thubūran kathīrā*" [They will be told: ‘Do not pray for a single annihilation today, but pray for many annihilations!’] (Qur’an 25:14) (Mūsawī, 1989; Zamakhsharī, n.d.).

The term *thubūr* appears in three Qur’anic verses, and its derivative *mathbūran* occurs in one. In verses such as "*Wa idhā ulqū minhā makānan ḍayyiḡan muḡarranīn da‘*aw* hunālika thubūran*" [And when they are cast into a narrow place in it, bound together [in chains], they will pray for [their own] annihilation] (Qur’an 25:13), the Qur’anic exegetes such as Zamakhsharī, Ṭabarī, Fakhr al-Rāzī, Abū Ḥayyān, Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, Ālūsī, and Fayḍ Kāshānī interpret *thubūr* as "destruction."

Zamakhsharī (1986) states in his commentary that the *thubūr* denotes death and annihilation and that the inhabitants of Hell, in their agony, cry out "*wā-thubūrāh*" (woe and ruin!), pleading for death. However, they are commanded not to call for death once but repeatedly, as diverse forms of punishment descend upon them, each compelling them anew to seek annihilation.

Some other Qur’anic exegetes have interpreted the term *thubūr* as signifying withdrawal from obedience and expression of regret and remorse. For instance, the phrase "*mā tabarraka ‘an hādhā al-amr*" means to fall short or hold back from undertaking an action. In the context of the verse, it is argued that the inhabitants of Hell express their sorrow and remorse for having neglected obedience to God, through cries akin to "*Oh my regret!*" and "*Oh my remorse!*" (Ṭabarī, 1994; Ṭūsī n.d.).

Sheikh al-Ṭūsī, in his commentary on the verse "*fa-sawfa yad‘*ū* thubūrā*" [he will pray for annihilation] (Qur’an 84:11), explicitly states that the core meaning of *thubūr* is "destruction." The

derivative term *mathbūr* is also used in this sense, while its application in other contexts is due to its metaphorical alignment with the original sense. For instance, a type of soil that inhibits the growth of date palm trees is called *mathbarah*, as it causes the tree's roots to wither and perish (Ṭūsī, n.d.).

In contrast with similar terms, *thubūr* denotes permanent destruction; that is, a form of ruin from which there is no return. For this reason, the inhabitants of Hell express their desperate wish for annihilation using this very word. The Qur'an states: "*da'aw hunālika thubūran*" [they will pray for [their own] annihilation] (Qur'an 25:13) (Zamakhsharī, n.d.).

4-8. Damdam

The root *damm* refers to the gradual covering or spreading of a substance by rubbing or coloring. Any substance repeatedly applied to a surface is called *damdam*. The term *damdama* also means destruction (Ibn Fāris, 1983). *Damm* inherently implies repetition, e.g., *damdamtu 'alayhi* means something is repeatedly surrounded (Muṣṭafawī, 1995).

Some scholars hold that its primary meaning is gradual, repeated envelopment, while punishment and destruction meanings arise contextually, especially when combined with the preposition *'alā* (Muṣṭafawī, 1995).

In the verse, "*Fakadhhabūhu fa'aqarūhā fadamdama 'alayhim rabbuhum bidhanbihim fasawwāhā*" [But they impugned him and hamstrung her. So, their Lord took them unawares by night because of their sin, and levelled it] (Qur'an 91:14), the Qur'anic exegetes have offered multiple interpretations for the verb "*damdama*." The first interpretation is destruction (*halākah*), indicating that the people of Thamūd rejected their prophet, slaughtered the divine she-camel, and consequently, God sent upon them an all-encompassing and annihilating punishment (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1991; Sabzawārī, 1998; Ṭabarsī, 1991). The pronoun in "*fasawwāhā*" is understood to refer back to the action of *damdama*, indicating that God subjected the entire community to destruction without exception (Ṭabarsī, 1991).

The second interpretation implies all-encompassing and overwhelming punishment; *damdama* implies complete covering, e.g., "*damdama 'alayhim al-qabr*" ("the grave enclosed them"). "*Damdama 'alayhim rabbuhum*" signifies God's punishment completely enveloped and annihilated the people (Ālūsī, 1996; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996). *Damdama* implies repeated and layered envelopment (Abū Ḥayyān Gharnāṭī, 1991; Ṭūsī, n.d.).

Third interpretation is concerned with anger and wrath (Tha'ālibī, 1995), while the fourth one highlights a sudden punishment striking people during sleep or nighttime heedlessness (Qummī, 1988). The fifth interpretation is complete and thorough destruction eradicating every trace of existence (Shawkānī, n.d.). All interpretations converge on the total destruction of the people of Thamūd. Distinctive feature of *damdama* is gradual, repeated envelopment of punishment before final destruction.

4-9. Tabb

The term "*tabb*" in the Arabic lexicon denotes loss and destruction. The expression "*tabban li-fulānin*" means "*may God cause him to suffer loss and perish*" (Ibn Manẓūr, 1992; Jawharī, 1983), and the phrase "*tabbat yadāhu*" signifies loss and ruin, which metaphorically implies destruction (Fayyūmī, 1984). Overall, in Arabic lexicons, the term "*tabb*" is defined both as an independent term indicating loss and destruction (Fīrūzābādī, 1991), and sometimes, as a composite expression encompassing both meanings (Ibn Manẓūr, 1992). Some scholars have combined these two and asserted that "*tabb*" refers to a loss that ultimately leads to destruction (Muṣṭafawī, 1995).

Various interpretations have been proposed in the exegetical literature regarding the meaning of the word "*tabb*." The first is destruction (*halākah*); based on this, the verse "*Tabbat yadā Abī Lahabin wa tabb*" [Perish the hands of Abu Lahab, and perish he!] (Qur'an 111:1) is understood to mean the destruction of both Abū Lahab and his hands. This statement is considered a divine response to Abū Lahab's insult, either when he attempted to hurl a stone at the Prophet (Zamakhsharī, 1986), or a response to his harsh words upon hearing the Prophet's call, when he said, "*May you perish! Is this what you've summoned us to?*" (Abū al-Futūḥ al-Rāzī, 1992).

The second interpretation is loss leading to destruction; that is, *tabb* signifies loss which ultimately results in ruin (Fayḍ Kāshānī, n.d.; Ṭūsī, n.d.). The third view understands *tabb* as continuous and

persistent loss; thus, “*tabbat yadā Abī Lahab*” signifies Abū Lahab’s perpetual loss, and the verse “*mā zādūhum ghayra tatbīb*” (Qur’an 11:101) implies that nothing was added to them but continual loss (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1991). The fourth interpretation is that *tabb* connotes severance and cutting off, which leads to destruction. The fifth is despair, and the sixth is complete deprivation from all forms of goodness (Ālūsī, 1996).

In sum, all of these meanings are closely related (Abū Ḥayyān Gharnāṭī, 1991), as *tabb* and loss imply the nullification of actions and failure to attain one’s objective. A person’s loss, in this sense, signifies being deprived of eternal felicity, which itself constitutes perpetual destruction (Ṭabātabā’ī, 1996). Accordingly, the verse “*Mā zādūhum ghayra tatbīb*” [and they did not increase them in anything but ruin] (Qur’an 11:101) has been interpreted to mean loss and ruin (Marāghī, n.d.; Ṭabrisī, 1997), as has the verse “*Wa mā kaydu Fir‘awna illā fī tabāb*” [Pharaoh’s stratagems only led him into ruin] (Qur’an 40:37) (Burūsawī, 2000; Zuḥaylī, 1971).

Some Qur’anic exegetes have interpreted *tabb* exclusively as destruction (*halākah*) (Ṭūsī, n.d.), while others have taken it solely to mean loss (Fayḍ Kāshānī, n.d.). However, as previously noted, loss ultimately leads to destruction. What distinguishes *tabb* from similar expressions is its connotation of loss culminating in ruin, setting it apart from other terms.

4-10. Kabb

The term *Kabb* refers to the sudden fall of something or being thrown onto a surface (Ḥimyarī, 1999). Accordingly, the derivative *kabbakaba* originally stems from *kabbaba*, where the insertion of the letter *kāf* between two *bā*’s is due to the avoidance of the repetition of identical consonants—similar to the formation of *zahḥaha* from *zahḥa* (Ḥaqī Bursawī, n.d.). This term conveys the meaning of tumbling into a pit and repeatedly falling until settling at its bottom (Azharī, 2000). Additionally, *ikbāb* signifies turning one’s attention toward or showing an inclination toward something (Ṭurayḥī, 1996).

Therefore, the phrase *mukabban ‘alā wajhih* refers to someone whose head is cast down, unable to see forward, left, or right (Qurashī, 1992). *Kawākib* specifically denotes stars appearing in the sky and is not used for other celestial objects (Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 1991). *Kabb* is interpreted as gathering and accumulation; *kubāb* refers to the accumulation of sand dunes (Muṣṭafawī, 1995).

The Qur’anic exegetes have offered various interpretations for the verse: “*Wa man jā’a bis-sayyi’ati fakubbat wujūhuhum fī an-nār, hal tujzawna illā mā kuntum ta‘malūn?*” [But whoever brings vice—they shall be cast on their faces into the Fire [and told:] ‘Shall you not be requited for what you used to do?’] (Qur’an 27:90). The first interpretation is falling headlong into the Fire (Sabzawārī, 1998). Some scholars hold that *kabb* means to throw something onto the ground; therefore, the phrase “*wujūhuhum*” [their faces] is used for emphasis (Makārim Shīrāzī, 2000).

Others believe the fall into the Fire occurs in an inverted state (Sabzawārī, 1985). Some Qur’anic exegetes accept both meanings; that is, being thrown into the Fire both upside-down and reversed (Ālūsī, 1996). Moreover, this expression implies humiliation, degradation (Shaykh ‘Alwān, 1999), and rebuke (Sayyid Quṭb, 2004).

The term *kubbū* in the verse “*Fakubkibū fīhā hum wa al-ghāwūn*” [Then they will be cast into it on their faces—they and the perverse] (Qur’an 26:94) is interpreted as being cast down, ultimately leading to destruction. The Qur’anic exegetes have described various modes of this act, such as being thrown into the Fire (Sabzawārī, 1998) or falling headfirst into Hell (Ṭayyib, 1990).

Some believe that *kubbikibū* is simply an intensified form of *kubbū* (Ṭūsī, n.d.). Ibn ‘Abbās considered it a reference to being gathered in one place; Mujāhid described it as falling into a pit; Muqātil interpreted it as plunging into Hell; Zajjāj viewed it as one group being cast upon another; and Qutaybah explained it as being thrown headfirst (Pānīpatī, 1991).

The preferred interpretation is that individuals are repeatedly cast down from higher to lower levels of Hell until they reach its deepest part (Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1997, 1989). Alternatively, they are first gathered in Hell and, then, thrown into its lowest part, similar to a stone hurled into a gorge, bouncing down to the bottom (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1995).

5. Conclusion

By examining the words related to the concept of “destruction,” each of which expresses a specific aspect of destruction in the Arabic language, one can discover the deep semantic layers and subtleties

of this language. Although these words share a general semantic domain, each is distinguished by certain restrictions and conditions.

In a general classification, these words can be classified based on the quality of occurrence of that destruction. For example, words such as “tatbeer” (destruction by crushing) and “tadmeer” (destruction with property and children or sudden onslaught) emphasize the physical and mechanical manner of destruction. Similarly, “kabb” specifically refers to destruction resulting from falling or being thrown onto a surface. In contrast, words such as “bakh” (death due to intense anger and grief) and “ta’s” (falling to the ground and being unable to get up, leading to destruction) focus on the cause and the mental or physical state occurring before the destruction.

There are also significant differences in terms of severity and final outcome. The word “thubur” implies permanent and irreversible destruction, after which there is no life; it conveys the ultimate cruelty and torment. “Damdam” also describes a destruction that occurs after encompassing and repeated torment, emphasizing the gradual and continuous nature of the torment before final destruction. In this regard, “tabaab” refers to a loss that gradually leads to spiritual or worldly destruction.

“Halak,” as a relatively more general key word, focuses on the destruction of the structure of something and the complete loss of its benefits. This feature distinguishes it from other words that have more specific restrictions. Similarly, although “bawar” is translated as destruction, its original meaning is downside and stagnancy, which is used as a metaphor for destruction, emphasizing the economic and value aspects of destruction.

Consequently, it can be said that each of these words, like a piece of a puzzle, illuminates a specific aspect of the broad concept of “destruction.” These subtle differences, which sometimes relate to the cause (anger, grief), sometimes to the method (breaking, falling), sometimes to the quality (repeated, permanent), and sometimes to the lateral consequences (destruction of property, previous loss) of destruction, demonstrate the unparalleled richness of the Arabic language in the precise expression of concepts and allow the translator or interpreter to paint a more complete picture of torment and destruction by choosing a more precise word.

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