

## Rhetorical Coherence and Eco-Theological Meaning in Qur'anic Water Verses: A Disciplined Semitic Rhetorical Analysis

*Koherensi Retoris dan Makna Eco-Teologis dalam Ayat-Ayat Al-Qur'an tentang Air: Analisis Retorika Semit yang Terdisiplin*

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### Abstract

Too often, eco-theological readings of Qur'anic water verses outrun the text—because structural claims are made without a disciplined, transparent, and auditable method. This article examines whether Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA) can serve as an audit-able tool for reading Qur'anic water passages in a way that disciplines ecological inference. Focusing on Q 23:18–19 and Q 25:48–49, it asks how rhetorical segmentation and parallelism clarify the internal logic of the verses beyond atomistic citation. Using qualitative library-based research, the study applies Meynet's SRA procedure (segmenting the text, identifying correspondences, and mapping inter-unit relations) and then compares the resulting structure with thematic Qur'anic-ecological readings on water, balance (*mīzān*), and stewardship (*khalīfah*). The analysis shows that SRA makes visible a coherent argumentative sequence—sending down water, settling it, and directing its benefits—that frames water as an entrusted measure rather than a merely descriptive sign. It also constrains interpretive overreach by requiring each ecological claim to be traceable to a demonstrable textual relation, while still supporting an ethic of restraint and care. Overall, the article indicates that rhetorical-structural analysis can strengthen eco-tafsīr by providing a replicable pathway from textual structure to ethical inference.

**Keywords:** Semitic Rhetorical Analysis; Qur'anic coherence; eco-theology; Qur'anic Water Verse; rhetorical structure

### Abstrak:

Terlalu sering, pembacaan eco-teologis atas ayat-ayat air melampaui daya dukung teks—karena klaim strukturnya dibangun tanpa metode yang disiplin, transparan, dan dapat diaudit. Artikel ini menilai apakah *Semitic Rhetorical Analysis* (SRA) dapat berfungsi sebagai perangkat yang dapat diaudit untuk membaca ayat-ayat air sehingga inferensi ekologis lebih terdisiplin. Dengan fokus pada Q 23:18–19 dan Q 25:48–49, artikel ini menanyakan bagaimana segmentasi retorik dan paralelisme memperjelas logika internal ayat melampaui kutipan parsial-atomistik. Melalui penelitian kualitatif berbasis pustaka, studi ini menerapkan prosedur SRA ala Meynet (segmentasi teks, identifikasi korespondensi, dan pemetaan relasi antarsatuan), lalu membandingkan struktur yang dihasilkan dengan pembacaan tematik-eko Qur'ani tentang air, keseimbangan (*mīzān*), dan amanah *khalīfah*. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa SRA menampakkan rangkaian argumen yang koheren—pencurahan air, pengendapannya, dan pengarahannya—yang membingkai air sebagai “takaran amanah”, bukan sekadar tanda deskriptif. SRA juga membatasi *interpretive overreach* karena setiap klaim ekologis harus dapat



ditelusuri pada relasi tekstual yang dapat dibuktikan, sembari tetap menopang etika pengendalian dan pemeliharaan. Secara umum, artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa analisis retorik-struktural dapat memperkuat eco-tafsir melalui jalur replikatif dari struktur teks menuju inferensi etis.

**Kata Kunci:** Semitic Rhetorical Analysis; koherensi Al-Qur'an; ekoteologi; air dalam Al-Qur'an; struktur retorik

## Introduction

In recent decades, Michel Cuypers and Raymond Farrin have applied Roland Meynet's rhetorical analysis in biblical studies,<sup>1</sup> to the Qur'an.<sup>2</sup> This approach highlights non-linear, chiasmic structures in which semantic and rhetorical emphasis often lies at the structural center. It shows certain affinities with the identification of pivotal axes in Qur'anic sūrahs proposed by Quṭb and Iṣlāḥī. At the same time, it operates with a higher degree of structural rigor.<sup>3</sup> These studies establish structural analysis as a legitimate methodological framework.

Nicolai Sinai has raised sustained methodological objections to this strand of Qur'anic structural analysis. He argues that studies by Farrin and Cuypers often begin with an expectation of concentric symmetry and subsequently organize the text to confirm it. In his assessment, structural claims are not always sufficiently constrained by text-internal indicators such as verse demarcation, rhyme shifts, or thematic transitions. Symmetry, he cautions, can thus become formally persuasive without being semantically warranted.<sup>4</sup> This critique frames Cuypers's approach, commonly known as Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA)<sup>5</sup>, as a method whose claims must be justified through demonstrable meaning-production rather than structural symmetry alone.

Cuypers responds by rejecting the charge of deductivism, insisting that his method proceeds inductively through the cumulative evaluation of multiple

1 Roland Meynet, *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric*, trans. Leo Arnold (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).

2 Michel Cuypers, "Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 13, no. 1 (April 2011): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2011.0003>; Farrin Raymond, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text* (Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press, 2014); Michel Cuypers, *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'an*, trans. Patricia Kelly (Miami: Convivium Press, 2008); Michel Cuypers, *A Qur'anic Apocalypse: A Reading of the Thirty-Three Last Sūrahs of the Qur'an*, trans. Jerry Ryan, no. 1 (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2018).

3 Marianna Klar, "Structural Dividers in the Qur'an: Preliminary Remarks and Suggestions for Supplementary Reading," in *Structural Dividers in the Qur'an* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 4.

4 Nicolai Sinai, "Review Essay: 'Going Round in Circles': Michel Cuypers, The Composition of the Qur'an: Rhetorical Analysis, and Raymond Farrin, Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 19, no. 2 (June 2017): 108–14, 2, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2017.0285>.

5 Adnane Mokrani, "Semitic Rhetoric and the Qur'an: The Scholarship of Michel Cuypers," in *New Trends in Qur'anic Studies: Text, Context, and Interpretation*, by Mun'im Sirry (Atlanta, Georgia: Lockwood Press, 2019), 61–81.

compositional cues tested against semantic coherence.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, several recent studies suggest that a restrained application of SRA can illuminate Qur'anic coherence,<sup>7</sup> as illustrated by analyses of Sūrat Maryam by Cuypers and Zahniser, which argue for the integrity of its internal structural units.<sup>8</sup> However, Cuypers acknowledges the need for greater methodological transparency. He nonetheless defends a disciplined, Qur'an-sensitive adaptation of Meynet's rhetorical method as analytically productive.<sup>9</sup> This unresolved tension underscores the need for greater methodological transparency if SRA is to function as a reproducible and critically auditable mode of Qur'anic analysis.

This methodological debate bears direct implications for Qur'anic eco-theological interpretation, particularly in readings of water. Islamic eco-theology frequently treats water as a symbol of divine order, balance, and stewardship.<sup>10</sup> Such

- 6 Michel Cuypers, "And Yet It Moves: Reflections on an Essay by Nicolai Sinai," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 22, no. 2 (2020): 86–104.
- 7 Aqdi Rofiq Asnawi, Husein Aziz, and Achmad Murtafi Haris, "Investigating Cohesiveness of QS. Al-Mā'idah: A Review on Michel Cuypers Implementation of Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA)," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 23, no. 1 (March 2022): 1, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2022.2301-03>.
- 8 Michel Cuypers and A.H. Mathias Zahniser, *The Composition of Sūrat Maryam: Rhetorical Analysis* (Taylor and Francis, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003517801>; A. H. Mathias Zahniser, "The Miraculous Birth Stories in the Interpretation of Sūrat Maryam (QS 19): An Exercise in a Discourse Grammar of the Qur'an," in *Structural Dividers in the Qur'an*, ed. Marianna Klar (Routledge, 2020), 92–139.
- 9 Cuypers, "And Yet It Moves," 100–101.
- 10 Seyyed Hossein Nasr locates nature, including water, is understood as an integral element of a living natural order, a sacred manifestation of divine life that reminds human beings that they belong to, rather than own, the created world. See: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion & the Order of Nature: The 1994 Cadbury Lectures at the University of Birmingham* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4–5; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "God Is Absolute Reality and All Creation His Tajalli (Theophany)," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2017), 3, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118465523.ch1>. From a Qur'anic ethical perspective, Özdemir similarly argues that environmental degradation reflects a violation of the divinely instituted balance (*mizān*), in which water functions as a central medium of life, mercy, and moral accountability rather than a neutral resource. See: İbrahim Özdemir, "Towards an Understanding of Environmental Ethics from a Qur'anic Perspective," in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, ed. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge, Mass: Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, 2003), 13–15. reassessed, and applied to such environmental problems as pollution and water scarcity. Sections on social justice and on issues of sustainability and development look at the history and roots of the current environmental crisis; at the broader context of women's rights of equal access to both natural and social resources; and at the interconnectedness of environmental protection and the alleviation of human poverty." "container-title": "Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust", "event-place": "Cambridge, Mass", "ISBN": "978-0-945454-40-3", "language": "English", "publisher": "Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School", "publisher-place": "Cambridge, Mass", "title": "Towards an Understanding of Environmental Ethics from a Qur'anic Perspective", "editor": [{"family": "Foltz", "given": "Richard C."}, {"family": "Denny", "given": "Frederick M."}], [{"family": "Baharuddin", "given": "Azizan"}], "author": [{"family": "Özdemir", "given": "İbrahim"}], "issued": [{"date-parts": [{"2003}]}], "locator": "13-15", "label": "page", "schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json" For more detail: Lisa A. Blankinship et al., "... And We Have Made from Water Every Living Thing": Water Conservation and the Holy Qur'an, *Environmental Conservation* 51, no. 2 (June 2024): 79, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S037689292300036X>; M. Nazirul Islam Sarker et al., "Ways of Water Management in Islam: Potential Insights for Future Water Governance,"

readings presuppose that ethical meaning in the Qur'an emerges through structured discourse rather than isolated motifs. As Reda argues, Qur'anic structural devices embed meaning and orient theological and ethical reflection within the text.<sup>11</sup> Where rhetorical coherence is weakly justified, ecological interpretations risk relying on selectively cited themes. Water passages therefore provide a strategic test case for assessing whether rhetorical analysis can demonstrate how textual structure mediates ethical meaning.

Against this background, this article addresses a primary methodological question: how can SRA be disciplined so that claims of Qur'anic structural coherence demonstrably contribute to meaning-production rather than merely identifying formal symmetry?

To operationalize this inquiry, the study poses a secondary question: how does the application of SRA to thematically connected Qur'anic water passages reveal both its interpretive potential and its methodological limits, and what implications does this have for a controlled form of eco-theological reflection?

This article contributes to ongoing debates on Qur'anic coherence and the application of SRA by proposing that rhetorical structure is analytically meaningful only insofar as it can be shown to account for the production of meaning. Structural claims are therefore evaluated in relation to their capacity to elucidate semantic progression, theological reasoning, and ethical orientation within the text. Coherence is not approached as a self-evident or universal property of Qur'anic discourse, but as an interpretive claim that requires explicit and methodologically transparent textual justification. In this sense, the study refines the use of SRA by situating it within clearer procedural constraints.

On this basis, the study advances two closely related theoretical contributions. First, it argues for a more procedurally disciplined application of SRA in order to enhance analytical accountability. Second, this study modestly extends the application of SRA beyond its conventional focus on intra-sūrah coherence. It explores the method's analytical relevance for a limited set of thematically linked passages drawn from different sūrahs. These ideas are operationalized through an analysis of two thematically related water passages, QS 23:18–19 and QS 25:48–49. These passages are examined as a controlled test case, rather than as an exhaustive treatment of Qur'anic water discourse.

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in *Indigenous and Local Water Knowl., Values and Practices* (Springer Nature, 2023), 47, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-9406-7\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-9406-7_4).2023

11 Nevin Reda, "Structure and Organization of the Qur'an," in *The Routledge Companion to the Qur'an*, 1st ed., ed. George Archer, Maria M. Dakake, and Daniel A. Madigan (New York: Routledge, 2021), 165–76, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315885360-18>.

## Procedurally Disciplined SRA and Corpus Selection

This article applies SRA following Cuypers through a procedurally disciplined and explicitly documented analytical framework.<sup>12</sup> Beyond employing SRA as an interpretive tool, the study advances a refined methodological articulation that emphasizes step-by-step procedure, transparency, and auditability. This refinement is developed in direct response to Sinai's methodological critique.<sup>13</sup>

Following Cuypers, the analysis adopts a synchronic approach, examining the Qur'anic text in its final canonical form as preserved in the *muṣḥaf*. No assumptions are made regarding chronology, redactional processes, or compositional history. The text is treated as a self-contained literary corpus, and meaning is approached as emerging from its internal organization rather than from external historical reconstruction.<sup>14</sup>

Table 1. A Procedurally Disciplined Framework for SRA

No.	Analytical Step	Procedure	Audit & Accountability Criteria (Responding to Sinai)
1	Corpus Delimitation and Hierarchical Segmentation	The Qur'anic text is analyzed in its final canonical form ( <i>muṣḥaf</i> ) using a synchronic perspective and hierarchically segmented from <i>member</i> to <i>book</i> . Boundaries are guided by rhyme, syntax, lexical repetition, shifts in address, and proportionality.	Text-based analysis avoids speculative assumptions; segmentation relies on explicit markers and proportional rules, ensuring reproducibility.

12 The formulation of the SRA procedure adopted in this article is grounded in Cuypers' major methodological and applied works, in which he systematically develops and implements SRA for the study of the Qur'anic text. These include *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'an* (2008), which offers a full-scale application of concentric and parallel structures; "Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text" (2011), which articulates the theoretical foundations of SRA; *The Composition of the Qur'an* (2015), which presents the most explicit methodological synthesis of his approach; and *A Qur'anic Apocalypse* (2018), which further refines the method through sustained structural analyses of shorter sūrahs.

13 Sinai, "Review Essay."

14 Michel Cuypers, *The Composition of the Qur'an* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 3–7; Cuypers, "Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text," 4–6; Cuypers, *The Banquet*, xv–xviii.



2	Identification of Rhetorical Relationships	Rhetorical correspondences (parallelism, antithesis, mirror relations, repetition, inclusion) are identified between units across hierarchical levels.	Correspondences must be linguistically grounded, exclusive, and specific; general thematic similarity is insufficient.
3	Structural Reconstruction	Based on validated relationships, multiple structural hypotheses are tested (parallel, mirror, or concentric). No structure is presupposed. If a concentric structure is confirmed, the center is determined according to Lund's Laws, emphasizing proportional symmetry, balanced correspondence, and functional prominence.	Addresses the charge of deductive imposition; alternative structures are explicitly considered. Prevents overdetermination of concentric centers; multiple centers invalidate the concentric hypothesis.
4	Structure-Based Interpretation	Interpretation proceeds inductively from the established structure. Meaning is derived from the functional position of units within the overall organization. Alternative readings are acknowledged.	Avoids circular reasoning; interpretation does not dictate structure retroactively.
5	Visualization	Results are presented through diagrams and tables documenting segmentation, correspondences, and structure.	Ensures transparency, replicability, and independent verification of the analysis.

Methodologically, the study formulates a five-step analytical procedure designed to ensure procedural discipline and analytical accountability. The procedure begins with corpus delimitation and hierarchical segmentation of the text. In Semitic rhetoric, segmentation is conducted progressively from the smallest to the largest analytical units, namely *member*, *segment*, *piece*, *part*, *passage*, *sequence*, *section*, and, where relevant, *book*.

The *member* (or *stich*, from the Greek) constitutes the most basic rhetorical unit and typically corresponds to a syntagmatic structure. A *segment* is composed of one to three *members*, but never more. A *piece* is formed by one to three *segments*, likewise not exceeding this limit, while a *part* consists of one to three *pieces*, following

the same compositional constraint. The same hierarchical principle applies to the four higher analytical levels each of which is constructed from one or more units of the immediately preceding level, without a fixed numerical limitation.<sup>15</sup>

Boundaries between units are identified on the basis of observable linguistic and literary markers, including rhyme, syntactic structure, lexical repetition, shifts in address, and thematic coherence. To mitigate the risk of arbitrary division highlighted by Sinai,<sup>16</sup> segmentation decisions are documented explicitly and constrained by proportional and quantitative considerations at each hierarchical level.

Following segmentation, the analysis proceeds to the systematic identification of rhetorical relationships among units. According to Cuypers, these symmetries may be total, when all or most elements of the text correspond, but they are more often partial, signaled by compositional indicators.<sup>17</sup> Each proposed correspondence is evaluated against clearly defined criteria: it must be grounded in explicit linguistic or semantic evidence, demonstrate exclusivity, and remain resistant to generalization across unrelated units. This evaluative discipline is intended to address concerns regarding subjectivity and overextension in earlier applications of SRA.

Based on the validated rhetorical relationships, the overall structure of the passage is reconstructed. At this step, the analysis tests three structural hypotheses: parallel, mirror, and concentric (ring) composition.<sup>18</sup> No structural form is presupposed, and concentric organization is treated strictly as a hypothesis to be demonstrated rather than an expected outcome. Alternative structural readings are explicitly considered in order to avoid deductive imposition of predefined rhetorical models.

15 Cuypers, "Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text," 4–5.

16 Sinai, "Review Essay," 110–16.

17 Such indicators include *outer terms* at the boundaries of units (traditional inclusions), *initial, central, and final terms* within symmetrical units, and *median terms* linking the end of one unit to the beginning of the next (the so-called "link-word" in biblical scholarship). Relationships between these terms can involve identity, broad synonymy, antithesis, homophony, or paronymy (near-homonymy), the latter occurring frequently in the Qur'an. See Cuypers, "Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text," 4.

18 Parallel construction occurs when corresponding textual units reappear in the same sequential order (ABC//A'B'C'). Mirror composition is characterized by an inverted arrangement of units without an explicit central element (ABC/C'B'A'). Ring, or concentric composition, involves the symmetrical organization of textual units around a central axis (ABC/x/C'B'A'), which in some cases may be reduced to a minimal configuration (A/x/A'). See: Cuypers, "Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text," 4.

Only when a concentric structure proves stable across multiple hierarchical levels does the analysis proceed to the identification of a structural center. This step is conditional and follows criteria derived from Lund's Laws,<sup>19</sup> including proportional symmetry, balanced correspondence between peripheral units, and the functional prominence of the central element. The proposed center must be unique and irreducible; the presence of multiple plausible centers is treated as grounds for rejecting the concentric hypothesis. This conditional application aims to prevent overinterpretation and structural inflation.

Interpretation is conducted only after the structural configuration has been established through the preceding analytical steps. Semantic analysis proceeds inductively from the documented structure, examining how meaning is generated by the functional relationships between units within the overall organization. This sequencing ensures that interpretation does not retroactively determine structural findings, thereby avoiding circular reasoning and reinforcing methodological transparency.

Finally, the results of the analysis are presented through structured tables or schematic diagrams that document each analytical step. This visual and procedural documentation enables readers to trace the analytical process step by step, assess alternative interpretations, and replicate the analysis independently.

The present study selects QS 23:18–19 and QS 25:48–49 as prototype passages, rather than statistically representative samples. Notably, the term *mā'* (water) occurs explicitly only in QS 23:18 and QS 25:48. However, the analysis includes the immediately following verse in each case (QS 23:19 and QS 25:49) to capture the broader discursive context and ensure a coherent unit for corpus delimitation under the SRA framework.

The selection is grounded in a prior mapping of sixty-three verses that explicitly mention *mā'* (water) across diverse thematic contexts. A multi-label thematic framework is applied, allowing verses to perform multiple discursive functions, while each verse is assigned to its dominant function for analytical clarity. This mapping is

19 In the identification of concentric structures, SRA incorporates Lund's Laws, a set of structural principles formulated by Nils W. Lund for the analysis of symmetrical compositions. The first law states that the center functions as the structural turning point and may consist of one or several lines. The second law observes that a shift in the line of thought frequently occurs at the center, often through the introduction of an antithetical idea, after which the initial thematic trajectory resumes. The third law notes that identical or closely related ideas may appear both at the center and at the extremes of the structure, while remaining absent elsewhere. The fourth law identifies a structural correspondence whereby elements located at the center of one system reappear at the extremes of a parallel system, indicating deliberate compositional matching. The fifth law points to a tendency for certain lexical or thematic elements to gravitate toward specific structural positions, such as divine names or quotations occupying focal or central locations. See: Cuypers, *A Qur'anic Apocalypse*, xx.



intended to situate the case studies within the broader corpus and to limit selective reading, not to claim exhaustiveness.

The inclusion criteria are limited to verses that explicitly contain the lexical item *mā'* and treat water as a material element within Qur'anic discourse. Verses in which water appears only implicitly, through metaphor, pronouns, or synonymous terms, are excluded to maintain lexical and analytical consistency.

Table 2. Corpus Map of Qur'anic Water Verses (63 Verses)

No.	Thematic Cluster	Qur'anic Verses
1	Creation & Origin of Life	QS 21:30; QS 24:45; QS 25:54
2	Divine Regulation & Measure	<b>QS 23:18–19</b> ; QS 13:17; QS 39:21
3	Ecological Revival & Sustenance	<b>QS 25:48–49</b> ; QS 16:65; QS 22:63; QS 35:27; QS 50:9–11
4	Human Provision & Dependence	QS 2:22; QS 6:99; QS 14:32; QS 16:10; QS 16:11; QS 80:24–32
5	Potable Water & Gratitude	QS 56:68–70; QS 77:27
6	Water as Divine Blessing	QS 7:57; QS 25:48; QS 43:11
7	Ritual Purification	QS 4:43; QS 5:6; QS 8:11
8	Cosmological Processes	QS 15:22; QS 30:24; QS 30:48; QS 31:10
9	Settlement & Storage of Water	QS 23:18; QS 67:30
10	Prophetic–Historical (Flood)	QS 11:43–44; QS 23:27; QS 54:11–12; QS 69:11
11	Water as Judgment	QS 7:133; QS 25:40
12	Parables & Rhetorical Imagery	QS 10:24; QS 18:45; QS 24:39
13	Eschatological Reward (Paradise)	QS 47:15; QS 55:50; QS 55:66; QS 76:5–6
14	Eschatological Punishment (Hell)	QS 14:16; QS 18:29; QS 22:19–21; QS 37:67
15	Springs & Flowing Waters	QS 2:60; QS 7:160; QS 36:34
16	Seas & Barriers	QS 25:53; QS 35:12; QS 55:19–20
17	Rain as Mercy	QS 42:28; QS 46:24
18	Scarcity & Withholding	QS 23:18; QS 67:30

Within this mapped corpus, many water-related verses foreground a single dominant dimension. For example, QS 16:10 emphasizes drinking and irrigation,<sup>20</sup> QS 56:68–70, which highlights human dependence on fresh water,<sup>21</sup> and QS 21:30, which presents water as the origin of life.<sup>22</sup> These verses, however, tend to foreground a single dominant dimension. By contrast, QS 23:18–19 and QS 25:48–49 depict water within an ecological chain of relations, encompassing divine descent, measured regulation, terrestrial settlement, and life-sustaining outcomes for humans, animals, and vegetation.<sup>23</sup> This relational configuration qualifies them as suitable prototypes for eco-theological analysis.

From a theological perspective, these passages explicitly frame water within divine governance and intentional order. The phrase *bi qadar* (in due measure) in 23:18 affirms measure and balance, while *fā askannāhu fī al-ard* (water is “settled” into the earth) indicates deliberate placement by God.<sup>24</sup> In QS 25:48–49, water is described as *ṭabūr* and is explicitly linked to the purpose of giving life.<sup>25</sup> Other water verses do not always express this normative dimension with similar clarity. For instance, QS 30:48 is largely cosmological in description,<sup>26</sup> whereas QS 80:24–32 is predominantly human-centred.<sup>27</sup> The selected passages therefore provide a more explicit theological basis for conceptualizing water as a divinely entrusted resource, rather than as a neutral or merely utilitarian element.

Beyond their theological clarity, these passages also exhibit a rhetorical coherence that makes them methodologically suitable for SRA. Each forms a coherent and self-contained pericope with a clear semantic progression. The sequence moves from divine action to natural process and then to the purpose of life. This structure aligns closely with the core principles of SRA, which locate meaning in

20 M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation*, Oxford World's Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 166.

21 Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation*, 357.

22 Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation*, 204.

23 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: Dār al-Ṭayyibah, 1999), 5:470; Al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ Al-Ma'ānī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1994), 10:34.

24 Sayyid Quṭb, *Fi Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 32nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2003), 4:2461.

25 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār Ihya' al-Turāth al-'Arabīy, 1420), 24:466; Ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa al-Tanwīr* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisīyyah li al-Nashr, 2008), 19:47–48.

26 Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation*, 260.

27 Annisa Nur Hanifah, Belqes Al Sowaidi, and Andri Nirwana An, “Reinterpretation of the Words Falyanzur and Tha'am in Qs 'Abasa Verse 24 to Build Public Nutrition Awareness,” *QiST: Journal of Quran and Tafseer Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 2025): 109–24, <https://doi.org/10.23917/qist.v4i1.7321>; Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation*, 409.

textual relations and rhetorical direction rather than isolated lexical items.<sup>28</sup> Many other water verses, such as QS 16:10 or QS 56:68–70, are dispersed and fragmentary. As such, they are less optimal for detailed structural analysis.

This study also acknowledges its limitations. It does not claim that these passages are fully representative of all Qur'anic water discourse. Nor does it attempt an exhaustive structural analysis of the entire corpus. Instead, it adopts a qualitative, prototype-based design. Analytical depth is prioritized over breadth. Other water-related verses are engaged secondarily to contextualize and corroborate the findings, while the core analysis remains focused on passages that most clearly exhibit the rhetorical features under investigation.

The case study strategy adopted in this research follows an established methodological practice in Qur'anic rhetorical studies and Islamic eco-theology. In his work on Semitic rhetoric in the Qur'an, Cuypers does not pursue an exhaustive analysis of the entire text. Instead, he focuses on a limited set of structurally coherent sūrah's and pericopes. These include QS 101, selected passages of QS 5:15–19 and 65–71, QS 1, and QS 12:35–42. Despite this selective corpus, Cuypers advances broader conclusions regarding the rhetorical organization and *naẓm* of the Qur'an.<sup>29</sup> His work demonstrates that analytical depth applied to representative units can yield insights transferable across the Qur'anic discourse, without requiring comprehensive textual coverage.

A similar methodological orientation is evident in contemporary eco-theological studies of the Qur'an. Eser's analysis of environmental anachronism focuses exclusively on Qur'an QS 2:205 and QS 30:41, yet advances broader claims about the misuse of environmental interpretations in Qur'anic exegesis.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, the study *Quranic Messages on Environmental Sustainability* by Muhamad, Syihab, and Achour discusses the concept of *'imārah* primarily through Qur'an QS 11:16 and QS 30:19,<sup>31</sup> despite the existence of multiple other verses related to human cultivation and construction of the earth. In both cases, limited textual selection functions as an example and argumentative core, not as an exhaustive survey.

28 Cuypers, "Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text"; Asnawi, Aziz, and Haris, "Investigating Cohesiveness of QS. Al-Mā'idah"; Mokrani, "Semitic Rhetoric and the Qur'an: The Scholarship of Michel Cuypers."

29 Cuypers, "Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text."

30 K. Eser, "An Example of Anachronism: Relating Verse 205 of Sūrah al-Baqara and Verse 41 of Surah al-Rūm to Environmental Problems," *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 65, no. 1 (2024): 149–90, <https://doi.org/10.33227/auifd.1352314>.

31 A. Muhamad, A.H. Syihab, and M. Achour, "Quranic Messages on Environmental Sustainability: An Expository Study of Its Relevance," *AlBayan* 17, no. 1 (2019): 38–59, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-12340069>.

By applying a procedurally structured SRA framework and selecting prototype passages from a mapped corpus, this methodology aims to support analytical transparency, reproducibility, and interpretive rigor. The approach provides insights into the relational and theological configuration of water in the Qur'an, while situating these observations within the broader textual corpus.

### Parallel Composition and Divine Control in QS 23:18–19

The analysis begins with corpus delimitation and hierarchical segmentation. QS 23:18–19 is examined exclusively in its final canonical muṣḥaf form. No chronological, redactional, or source-critical assumptions are introduced. The two verses are delimited as a single analytical unit on the basis of observable textual continuity. This continuity is indicated by thematic coherence centered on water, by sustained divine agency as subject, and by explicit referential linkage through *mā'* and the pronoun *bihi*. The absence of a strong syntactic or rhetorical break further supports treating the verses as one unit. This delimitation is stated explicitly to ensure that subsequent structural claims are grounded solely in the observable text and remain open to independent verification.

Hierarchical segmentation proceeds strictly from the smallest observable units. The analysis begins with members, defined as syntactically complete clauses. Six members are first identified. M1 is *wa anzalnā mina al-samā' i mā'an bi-qadar* ("We sent water down from the sky in due measure"). M2 is *fa-askannāhu fī al-arḍ* ("and We lodged it in the earth"). M3 is *wa innā 'alā dhabābin bihi la-qādirūn* ("and indeed We have the power to take it away"). M4 is *fa-ansha'nā lakum bihi jannātin min nakhīlin wa a'nāb* ("with it We produced for you gardens of date palms and vines"). M5 is *wa-lakum fīhā fawākihu kathīratun* ("and for you therein are many fruits"). M6 is *wa-minhā ta'kulūn* ("and from them you eat").

The members are subsequently grouped into four segments based on syntactic connections and semantic dependencies: Segment A comprises M1, Segment B comprises M2, Segment A' comprises M3, and Segment B' comprises M4–M6. The variation in the number of members per segment reflects the constraints of SRA, which permits each segment to contain one to three members.<sup>32</sup> Segment B' aggregates three members due to their shared thematic coherence. Segments A and B collectively form Piece 1, while segments A' and B' form Piece 2, with the grouping guided by verse boundaries and thematic development. It is not feasible to consolidate all four segments (A–B–A'–B') into a single piece because, under SRA

32 Cuypers, "Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text," 4–5.

principles, a piece can only encompass one to three segments.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, these two pieces jointly constitute a single part, corresponding to QS 23:18–19, defined inductively through continuous discourse and unified semantic focus.

At the second step of SRA, rhetorical relationships are identified inductively, beginning at the level of members and only then extending to segments. At the member level, M1 corresponds to M3 through antithetical semantic relation. The contrast between measured bestowal (*bi-qadar*) and unrestricted power (*la-qādirūn*) establishes an outer framing pair. At the same level, M2 corresponds to M4–M6 through causal continuity, marked lexically by the shared instrumental *bibi* (“with it”).

On this basis, these member-level relations scale upward to the segment level. Segment A (M1) corresponds to Segment A' (M3) as outer terms forming an antithetical inclusion. Segment B (M2) corresponds to Segment B' (M4–M6) as a cause–effect pair within a partial symmetry. The segmental relations thus emerge directly from the documented member-level correspondences.

At the third step of SRA, the overall structure of QS 23:18–19 is reconstructed inductively from the validated rhetorical correspondences. Three structural hypotheses are tested in this part level: parallel, mirror, and concentric composition. A concentric hypothesis is rejected because no stable central unit emerges and the correspondences do not converge toward a unique midpoint. A mirror structure is likewise excluded, since the sequence does not exhibit reversed ordering.

The parallel hypothesis, by contrast, accounts consistently for the observed relations. Segment A corresponds to Segment A' as outer framing terms expressing divine control, while Segment B corresponds to Segment B' as an inner pair linked by causal continuity. The sequence A–B // A'–B' thus reflects a balanced parallel composition. This part's structure is derived from explicit member and segment level evidence, and does not rely on a predefined rhetorical model. Since QS 23:18–19 exhibits a parallel composition in part level, no structural center is identified.

However, Segment B' (M4–M6) shows a concentric composition. M5 serves as the structural center. It mediates a thematic shift from the introduction of divine provision (M4) to its human consumption (M6). This creates symmetrical emphasis in line with Lund's Laws. The recurrence of key thematic elements at both the center and extremes highlights deliberate rhetorical mirroring, typical of Qur'anic short-unit structures.

At the fourth step of SRA, interpretation proceeds strictly from the established parallel structure. Meaning is derived from the functional roles of the segments within the composition. The outer parallel pair, Segment A (*bi-qadar*) and Segment

33 Cuypers, “Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text,” 4–5.



A' (*la-qādirūn*), articulates the scope of divine control, from measured bestowal to potential withdrawal. The inner parallel pair, Segment B and Segment B', explicates the operational sequence of this control, from the lodging of water in the earth to the generation of sustenance for human benefit. The parallel alignment constrains interpretation. Divine generosity and divine power are presented as coextensive, not contradictory. The passage thus frames water as a contingent gift, productive yet revocable. This meaning emerges from structure, not from thematic presupposition.

This structural reading converges with broader Qur'anic and exegetical interpretations. The motif of measured descent (*bi-qadar*) aligns with parallel formulations in QS 13:17 and QS 43:11, where water is likewise framed as proportioned and purposeful.<sup>34</sup> Classical commentators, including Ibn Kathīr, interpret this measure as an expression of divine wisdom that sustains life without excess.<sup>35</sup> Segment A' reinforces this logic by foregrounding contingency. Al-Rāzī reads the power of withdrawal (*la-qādirūn*) as an implicit warning against complacency.<sup>36</sup> The inner parallel further strengthens this convergence. Sayyid Qutb interprets the lodging of water in the earth as a hidden yet decisive stage in the divinely ordered cycle. The emergence of gardens and fruits confirms this causal sequence.<sup>37</sup> Across these readings, the same ethical trajectory appears. Balance precedes benefit. Preservation enables productivity. Responsibility follows provision. The SRA-based interpretation thus does not generate a novel meaning *ex nihilo*. It clarifies, systematizes, and structurally grounds insights already present in the exegetical tradition.

At the fifth step of SRA, the analytical results are documented in a transparent and verifiable format. The following table presents the SRA mapping of these verses, using the translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem in his work *The Qur'an: A New Translation*.<sup>38</sup>

34 Although all three verses employ the term *bi-qadar*, QS 13:17 and QS 43:11 differ from QS 23:18 in rhetorical function. QS al-Ra'd 13:17 uses the measured descent of water within the imagery of valleys (*awdiya*) to illustrate proportional flow, while QS al-Zukhruf 43:11 invokes the same notion to allude to human resurrection. By contrast, QS 23:18 embeds *bi-qadar* within an ecological sequence that foregrounds regulation, preservation, and sustained life on earth.

35 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-Azīm*, 5:470.

36 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabīy, 1420), 23:269.

37 Qutb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, 4:2461.

38 Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation*, 215.

Table 3: The Semitic rhetoric structure of QS 23:18–19

1 <sup>st</sup> Step: Corpus Delimitation and Hierarchical Segmentation				2 <sup>nd</sup> Step: Identification of Rhetorical Relationships
Piece	Segment	Member	Verse	Symmetrical Relations
1	A	M1	QS 23:18: <i>wa anzalnā mina al-samā'i mā'an bi-qadar</i> (We sent water down from the sky in due measure)	Segment A introduces the thematic key of measured divine control through <i>bi-qadar</i> , functioning as the opening member of the <b>outer frame</b> .
	B	M2	<i>fa-askannāhu fī al-arḍ</i> (and lodged it in the earth)	Segment B operates as the <b>cause-term</b> within the <b>partial</b> symmetry, establishing the <b>causal</b> basis of the correspondence with Segment B'.

2	A'	M3	<i>wa innā 'alā dhabābin bihi la-qādirūn</i> (We have the power to take it all away if We so wish)	Segment A and A' function as <b>outer terms</b> that frame the unit, forming an <b>antithetical</b> inclusion. The <b>lexical echo</b> between <i>bi-qadar</i> and <i>la-qādirūn</i> reinforces their correspondence: God's precise provision of water stands in deliberate contrast to His power to withdraw it.
	B'	M4	QS 23:19: <i>fa-ansha'nā lakum bihi jannātin min nakhīlin wa a'nāb</i> (with it We produced for you gardens of date palms and vines)	The relationship between Segment B and B' is one of <b>causal synonymy</b> , a form of semantic correspondence within partial symmetry. Segment B functions as the <b>cause-term</b> , while Segment B' serves as the <b>effect-term</b> .
		M5	<i>wa-lakum fihā fawākihu kathīratun</i> (with many fruits there)	
		M6	<i>wa-minhā ta'kulūn</i> (for you to eat)	
	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Step: Structural Reconstruction</b>			<b>4<sup>th</sup> Step: Structure-Based Interpretation</b>

Parallel Composition				Meaning is derived from the functional roles of each segment within the structure. The outer parallel pair defines the scope of divine control, while the inner pair explains its operation, from water's placement in the earth to its benefit for humanity. This parallel alignment constrains interpretation, presenting divine generosity and power as complementary rather than opposed, and framing water as a contingent, revocable gift. The meaning thus arises from structure, not from prior thematic assumptions.
A	<i>wa anzalnā mina al-samā'i mā'an <b>bi-qadar</b></i>			
B		<i><b>fa-askannāhu</b> fī al-arḍ</i>		
A'	<i>wa innā 'alā dhabābin bihi <b>la-qādirūn</b></i>			
B'		<i>A</i>	<i><b>fa-ansha'nā</b> lakum bihi jannātin min nakhīlin wa a'nāb</i>	
	X	wa-lakum fīhā fawākihu kathīratun		
	A'	wa-minhā ta'kulūn		

This analysis shows that a strictly procedural application of SRA can establish rhetorical coherence in QS 23:18–19 without presupposing concentric structure. The findings demonstrate that parallel composition governs the passage, refining the use of SRA for short Qur'anic units. More broadly, the study clarifies how structure can discipline interpretation, strengthening methodological accountability.

### Concentric Structure and Life-Giving Water in QS 25:48–49

The analysis begins with corpus delimitation and hierarchical segmentation. QS 25:48–49 is examined exclusively in its final canonical muṣḥaf form. No chronological, redactional, or source-critical assumptions are introduced. The two

verses are delimited as a single analytical unit on the basis of observable textual continuity. This continuity is indicated by thematic coherence centered on divine provision and water, by sustained divine agency as subject, and by explicit referential linkage through the wind (*rīyāḥa*) and water (*mā'*). The absence of a strong syntactic or rhetorical break further supports treating the verses as one unit. This delimitation is stated explicitly to ensure that subsequent structural claims are grounded solely in the observable text and remain open to independent verification.

Hierarchical segmentation proceeds strictly from the smallest observable units. The analysis begins with members, defined as syntactically complete clauses. Five members are first identified. M1 is *wa huwa alladhī arsala al-rīyāḥa* ("And He is the One who sends the winds"). M2 is *bushran bayna yaday raḥmatihī* ("As heralds before His mercy"). M3 is *wa anzalnā mina al-samā'i mā'an ṭahūran* ("And We sent down from the sky pure water"). M4 is *li nuḥyi bihi baldan maytan* ("So that We may revive a dead land with it"). M5 is *wa nusqiyahu mimma khalaqnā an'āman wa anāsiyya kathīran* ("And to give drink to many of the cattle and human beings We have created").

Since one segment will not allowed consist of more than three members in SRA,<sup>39</sup> these five members are then grouped into two segments based on syntactic linkage and semantic dependency. Segment A contains M1–M3, describing divine actions and provision from above. Segment B contains M4–M5, articulating the functional outcomes of this provision on earth. The segmentation is guided by observable grammatical markers, verbal sequencing, and functional transitions, without reliance on thematic generalization. Together, the two segments constitute a single piece, QS 25:48–49, defined inductively by continuous discourse and shared semantic focus.

Following hierarchical segmentation, rhetorical relationships among members are systematically examined. The analysis identifies semantic and functional correspondences that are linguistically grounded and structurally significant. M1 functions as the initiating member, with verb *arsala* (sends) anchoring the divine action that drives the intended purpose expressed in M5 and prepares the progression toward M3. Thus, M1 serves as the marker of prior action, realized before M3.

M5 functions as the purpose-member. Its key term, *nusqiyahu* (we give drink), expresses the goal of M1's initiating action and embodies the outcome of M3, which was preceded and signaled by M1. The recipients, *an'āman wa anāsiyya kathīran* (the cattle and human beings), are the objects of this purposeful action. The correspondence between M1 and M5 constitutes a teleological semantic relationship. It demonstrates

39 Cuypers, "Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text," 4–5.



partial symmetry within the passage. All actions are ultimately related to M3.

M2 serves as the preparatory member, with the term *bushran* (As heralds) signaling the process leading to the realized outcome in M4, while simultaneously clarifying and qualifying M1. The expression *li nuḥyī bihi* (We may revive) in M4 indicates the fulfillment of the divine plan, and *baldan maytan* (dead land) specifies the object of this action. The relationship between M2 and M4 forms a progressive semantic correspondence, moving from indication to realization.

M3 occupies the central, or turning-point, position. The term *mā'an ṭahūran* (pure water) introduces the key theological concept of life-giving water. M3 functions as the thematic and semantic pivot. M1 and M2 converge upon it, while M4 and M5 derive their outcomes from it. Collectively, these correspondences establish a symmetrical and progressive structure, demonstrating how initiating, preparatory, resultive, turning-point, and purpose terms are rhetorically integrated.

The next step in SRA is to reconstruct the overall rhetorical structure of the text based on validated relationships. QS 25:48–49 is analyzed at the piece level, defined as a continuous discourse with shared semantic focus. The analysis tests three structural hypotheses: mirror, concentric (ring), and parallel. Mirror composition is not detected, as the sequence progresses linearly from divine action to terrestrial outcomes. Concentric analysis reveals a stronger pattern, forming a ring composition (AB/x/BA). M3 (*mā'an ṭahūran*) serves as the central pivot, connecting divine action with earthly outcomes, while M1–M2 and M4–M5 maintain balanced correspondence on either side.

Application of Lund's Laws confirms M3 as the structural center, marking a thematic turning point and focal position for divine and life-giving elements. Teleological relations (M1–M5) and progressive correspondences (M2–M4) further support rhetorical integration. Parallel composition can be considered an alternative, in which Segment A precedes Segment B, though it is less robust than the concentric (ring) composition. This approach demonstrates SRA's methodological objectivity, recognizing multiple structural possibilities while privileging evidence-supported interpretations.

The next step in SRA is interpretation, conducted after the structural configuration is established. QS 25:48–49 is analyzed at the piece level. M1–M2 describe the initiation and preparatory role of divine action. M3 serves as the central pivot, highlighting the life-giving function of water. M4–M5 present realized outcomes for earth, humans and animals.<sup>40</sup> The ring composition (AB/x/BA) shows

<sup>40</sup> Other Qur'anic verses concerning water, such as QS 7:57 and QS 35:9, similarly emphasize the regulated nature of natural processes, illustrating how winds and rainfall cooperate to revive and sustain life on earth.

balanced correspondences, with teleological and progressive links connecting M1–M2 to M3, which enables M4–M5.

Semantic meaning emerges inductively from this structure, integrating cause, divine intention, and benefits to creation. Natural processes, such as wind and rain, function as instruments of divine mercy. This interpretation follows the documented composition, ensuring methodological transparency and avoiding retroactive imposition of meaning.

Exegetical readings support this structural interpretation. Al-Najjār notes that the wind–rain sequence is divinely regulated, preparing the earth for renewal.<sup>41</sup> Al-Rāzī and Ibn ‘Āshūr highlight M3’s dual role as purifying and ecologically generative. M4–M5 reflect realized benefits for humans and animals.<sup>42</sup> Across these readings, the passage presents a coherent sequence. The SRA-based interpretation clarifies how the concentric structure encodes both functional and ethical relations, integrating divine intention with ecological and moral considerations without overextending exegetical claims.

In the fifth step of SRA, the findings are recorded in a clear and verifiable manner. The table below illustrates the SRA’s implementation of these verses.

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Although both verses describe water, their primary purpose is to remind humans that these phenomena serve as divine signs and to draw attention to the reality of resurrection.

41 Zaghlūl al-Najjār, *Tafsīr Al-Āyāt al-Kawniyyah Fī al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, 1st ed. (Cairo: Maktabatu al-Syurūq al-Dauliyyah, 2007), 2:333.

42 al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb*, 24:466; Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa al-Tanwīr*, 19:47–48.

Table 4: The Semitic rhetoric structure of QS 25:48–49

1 <sup>st</sup> Step: Corpus Delimitation and Hierarchical Segmentation			2 <sup>nd</sup> Step: Identification of Rhetorical Relationships
Segment	Member	Verse	Symmetrical Relations
A	M1	QS 25:48: wa huwa alladhī arsala al-rīyāḥa (He is the One who sends the winds)	The initiating term in a teleological relationship, introducing the action (M3) in that drives the intended purpose expressed in M4 and M5.
	M2	bushran bayna yaday raḥmatihī (as heralds before His mercy)	M2 serves as the preparatory member, with bushran signaling the process leading to M4, while clarifying M1.
	M3	wa anzalnā mina al-samā'i mā'an ṭahūran (And We sent down from the sky pure water)	It serves as the rhetorical turning point, introducing the key theological idea and providing the thematic source echoed in the outer members. M3 introduces the life-giving water that unites M1–M2 and enables the outcomes in M4–M5.
B	M4	QS 25:49: li nuḥyi bihi baldan maytan (so that We may revive a dead land with it)	It serves as the resultive member that completing the progressive correspondence from indication in M2 to realization and linking the M3 to the other purpose in M5.
	M5	wa nusqiyahu mim mā khalaqnā an'āman wa anāsiyya kathīran (and to give drink to many of the cattle and human beings We have created) <sup>43</sup>	It functions as the purpose member, realizing the goal of M1's initiating action, deriving from the central pivot M3, and completing the progressive outcome that follows M4.
3 <sup>rd</sup> Step: Structural Reconstruction			4 <sup>th</sup> Step: Structure-Based Interpretation

43 Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation*, 229.

Concentric (ring) composition					<p>M1–M2 initiate and prepare divine action, M3 serves as the central pivot introducing life-giving water, and M4–M5 present its realized outcomes for earth, humans and animals. This arrangement shows that divine action is purposeful, natural processes function as instruments of mercy, and water mediates life, with semantic and functional links embedded within the passage itself.</p>
A	M1	wa huwa alladhī arsala al-rīyāḥa			
B		M2	<i>bushran bayna yaday raḥmatihī</i>		
X		M3	wa anzalnā mina al-samā’i mā’an ṭahūran		
B’		M4	li nuḥyī bihi baldan maytan		
A’	M5	wa nusqīyahu mim mā khalaqnā an’āman wa anāsiyya kathīran			

This application of SRA to QS 25:48–49 highlights a coherent sequence from initiation through a central pivot to realized outcomes. Meaning appears to emerge from the functional and semantic links among members, without imposing interpretive assumptions. The analysis suggests that examining structural patterns can support a systematic and transparent approach to interpretation in short Qur'anic passages.

### Responsibility in Qur'anic Composition: From Structure to Eco-Theological Inference

Global environmental ethics is structured by the tension between anthropocentrism and biocentrism. Anthropocentric models justify nature through human utility, whereas biocentric and ecocentric approaches emphasize intrinsic value beyond human interests.<sup>44</sup> Stewardship frameworks occupy an intermediate position by affirming human agency while restricting exploitation through responsibility and accountability.<sup>45</sup> These debates suggest that ethical orientation may not fully address the issue. A key concern lies in how responsibility is grounded in the text. This article therefore focuses on the Qur'anic textual construction of responsibility, rather than on ethical positioning alone.

<sup>44</sup> Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 2011), 44–49.

<sup>45</sup> Robin Attfield, *Environmental Ethics: An Overview for the Twenty-First Century*, 2. ed., fully rev. and expanded (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 177–81.

Religion-and-ecology scholarship has shown that religious traditions can shape environmental ethics through moral imagination and symbolic authority.<sup>46</sup> Islamic eco-theology has advanced this claim by foregrounding Qur'anic concepts such as *khilāfah*,<sup>47</sup> *amānah*,<sup>48</sup> and *mizān* (balance).<sup>49</sup> These studies establish a normative

46 John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Ecology and Religion* (Washington: Island Press, 2014), 35,86.the natural world has been integral to the world's religions. John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker contend that today's growing environmental challenges make the relationship ever more vital. This primer explores the history of religious traditions and the environment, illustrating how religious teachings and practices both promoted and at times subverted sustainability. Subsequent chapters examine the emergence of religious ecology, as views of nature changed in religious traditions and the ecological sciences. Yet the authors argue that religion and ecology are not the province of institutions or disciplines alone. They describe four fundamental aspects of religious life: orienting, grounding, nurturing, and transforming. Readers then see how these phenomena are experienced in a Native American religion, Orthodox Christianity, Confucianism, and Hinduism. Ultimately, Grim and Tucker argue that the engagement of religious communities is necessary if humanity is to sustain itself and the planet. Students of environmental ethics, theology and ecology, world religions, and environmental studies will receive a solid grounding in the burgeoning field of religious ecology.", "event-place": "Washington", "ISBN": "978-1-59726-708-3", "language": "English", "number-of-pages": "280", "publisher": "Island Press", "publisher-place": "Washington", "source": "Amazon", "title": "Ecology and Religion", "author": [{"family": "Grim", "given": "John"}, {"family": "Tucker", "given": "Mary Evelyn"}], "issued": {"date-parts": [{"2014"}]}, "locator": "35,86", "label": "page", "schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"}]

47 Fazlun M. Khalid, "Islam and The Environment," in *Encyclopedia of Global Environmental Change*, ed. Robert Edward Munn and Peter Timmerman, Social and Economic Dimensions of Global Environmental Change (Chichester: J. Wiley & sons, 2002), 5:7; Nasr, *Religion & the Order of Nature*, 219, 255–56.

48 Soumaya Pernilla Ouis, "Islamic Ecotheology Based on the Qur'an," *Islamic Studies* 37, no. 2 (1998): 158.

49 Richard C. Foltz, "Islam," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (Oxford University Press, 2006), 207–19, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195178722.003.0009>; Özdemir, "Towards an Understanding of Environmental Ethics from a Qur'anic Perspective," 13–14. it would seem that the adoption of a caring and non-exploitative ethic toward the environment by Muslims would presuppose the existence in Islamic tradition of principles which accord value to the natural world. This essay shows that such principles are indeed to be found in Islam and discusses some of the ways that contemporary Muslims throughout the world are seeking to apply these principles in response to the global environmental crisis. It also points out some of the cultural and political obstacles facing those who would implement Islamic guidelines for preserving the environment. In addition, the article examines sources of Islamic environmentalism, the two-edged sword of development and economic growth, and Islamic environmental ethics.", "container-title": "The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology", "ISBN": "978-0-19-517872-2", "note": "DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195178722.003.0009", "page": "207-219", "publisher": "Oxford University Press", "source": "Silverchair", "title": "Islam", "URL": "https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195178722.003.0009", "author": [{"family": "Foltz", "given": "Richard C."}], "editor": [{"family": "Gottlieb", "given": "Roger S."}], "accessed": {"date-parts": [{"2026", 1, 2}]}, "issued": {"date-parts": [{"2006", 11, 16}]}, {"id": "4145", "uris": ["http://zotero.org/users/8614130/items/VZRDDJ4A"], "itemData": {"id": "4145", "type": "chapter", "abstract": "Islam is the religion of over one billion people and is practiced in virtually every country on earth. The articulation of an Islamic environmental ethic in contemporary terms is all the more urgent because Western-style conservation efforts do not fit all cultural and philosophical traditions. This volume outlines the Islamic view of the cosmic order and reviews the ways an Islamic world view can be interpreted, reassessed, and applied to such environmental problems as pollution and water scarcity. Sections on social justice and on issues of sustainability and development look at the history and roots of the current environmental crisis; at the broader context of women's rights of equal access to both natural and social resources; and at the interconnectedness of environmental protection and the alleviation of human poverty."}, "container-title": "Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust", "event-place": "Cambridge, Mass", "ISBN": "978-0-945454-40-3", "language": "English", "publisher": "Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School", "publisher-place": "Cambridge, Mass", "title": "Towards an Understanding of Environmental Ethics from a Qur'anic Perspective", "editor": [{"family": "Foltz", "given": "Richard C."}, {"family": "Denny", "given": "Frederick M."}],



ecological orientation but rarely show how ethical meaning is constrained by Qur'anic textual structure. This article addresses this limitation by examining how ecological ethics emerge from Qur'anic composition rather than being inferred thematically.

Accordingly, this study applies SRA to selected Qur'anic ecological passages. It does not propose a new environmental ethic. Instead, it reconstructs how stewardship-oriented meaning emerges from composition. Analyses of QS 23:18–19 and QS 25:48–49 demonstrate that divine generosity and divine power are structurally coextensive. Water is framed as a measured, productive, yet revocable gift. Ethical implications follow this structure. Balance precedes benefit. Preservation enables productivity. Responsibility follows provision. Islamic eco-theology is thus grounded in rhetoric rather than thematic assertion.

### Implications of Qur'anic Rhetorical Structure in Shaping Ecological Awareness

The analysis of QS 23:18–19 and QS 25:48–49 suggests that ecological meaning in Qur'anic water passages emerges less from symbolic attribution than from rhetorically organized discourse. This finding bears directly on Islamic eco-theological interpretation, particularly when ethical readings assume structural grounding without demonstrating how textual form mediates meaning. Scholarship on Qur'anic composition has shown that rhetorical and structural devices function not merely as stylistic features, but as mechanisms that guide perception, hierarchy of values, and theological reflection within the text.<sup>50</sup> By situating ecological significance within compositional coherence, this observation is relevant to Qur'anic ecological interpretation by suggesting a discursive context in which ecological awareness may be textually implied, prior to explicit ethical formulation.<sup>51</sup>

The selected water passages serve as a limited test case. They allow assessment of whether ecological awareness can plausibly be linked to discourse organization rather than retrospectively inferred from ethical generalization. Without advancing

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"family": "Baharuddin", "given": "Azizan"}], "author": [{"family": "Özdemir", "given": "İbrahim"}], "issued": {"date-parts": [{"2003"}]}, "locator": "13-14"}, "schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"}]

50 As demonstrated in the structural analyses of specific Qur'anic sūrahs by Cuypers, Robinson, Reda, and Zahniser. See: Nevin Reda, "The Poetics of Sūrat Āl 'Imrān's Narrative Structure (Q 3)," in *Structural Dividers in the Qur'an*, ed. Marianna Klar (London: Routledge, 2020); Cuypers, *The Composition of the Qur'an*; Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*; Zahniser, "The Miraculous Birth Stories in the Interpretation of Sūrat Maryam (Q 19)."

51 This implication resonates with Qur'anic ecological interpretation frameworks that treat environmental meaning as an interpretive orientation emerging from the text's discourse on creation and natural order. Ecological awareness, in this view, is inferred at the level of interpretation prior to explicit ethical formulation, rather than imposed as a normative agenda. See: Abdul Mustaqim, *Tafsir Ekologi: Relasi Eko-Teologis Tuhan, Manusia, Dan Alam* (Mojokerto: Damai Banawa Semesta, 2024), 66–72.

a normative ecological agenda, this study offers a modest contribution. It indicates how rhetorical structure may function as an intermediary analytical layer through which sensitivity to balance, dependency, and restraint is textually suggested, in line with critical standards in contemporary Qur'anic studies.

## Conclusion

This article has examined the analytical value of SRA for Qur'anic eco-theological interpretation through a procedurally disciplined framework. It has argued that rhetorical structure contributes to interpretation only when structural claims are demonstrably constrained by textual evidence and transparent analytical steps. By applying this framework to QS 23:18–19 and QS 25:48–49, the study tested SRA not as a symmetry-seeking technique but as a method of meaning production.

The findings show that different rhetorical configurations emerge across passages. QS 23:18–19 is governed by parallel composition, while QS 25:48–49 exhibits a concentric structure with a clearly identifiable pivot. These results indicate that SRA does not inherently privilege ring composition. Rather, structure must be established inductively from validated relationships within the text. In both passages, water is rhetorically framed as a measured, productive, yet revocable divine gift. This framing integrates divine generosity, control, and contingency within a single discursive movement.

Within the broader field of global eco-theology, this study shifts the discussion from ethical assertion to textual mediation. It suggests that ecological awareness in the Qur'an may be structurally implied through rhetorical organization rather than derived from externally imposed ethical frameworks.

Methodologically, the study refines the application of SRA by emphasizing procedural discipline, auditability, and resistance to overinterpretation. Substantively, it shows that ecological significance in Qur'anic water verses can be grounded in rhetorical organization rather than inferred thematically. The analysis remains limited to prototype passages and does not claim representativeness. Future research may extend this framework to other ecological themes and test its applicability across larger Qur'anic units to further assess its explanatory scope.

## Acknowledgements

## Authors' Contribution

All four authors contributed to the study's conceptualization, analysis, and writing. The first author designed the research and conducted the primary

SRA analysis. The second author developed the eco-theological interpretive framework. The third author reviewed relevant literature and contextualized the study academically. The fourth author assisted with data organization, structural mapping, and manuscript integration. All authors collaborated in discussions to ensure analytical rigor, coherence, and clarity.

### Data availability statement

All data underlying the results are available as part of the article and no additional source data are required.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest that could potentially influence the research outcomes or compromise its integrity.

### Funding

This work was supported by a research grant from the Directorate General of Research and Development, Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology of Indonesia, in 2025.

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