



The Composition of the Qur'an: Structure, Style & Meaning

A conference co-organized by the Orient-Institut Beirut (OIB)
& the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies (IDEO: EU funded "Anawati Chair"),

Location: IDEO (Cairo), March 19th–20th, 2027

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Conference Theme

Questions concerning the composition of the Qur'an, its structure, style, and organisation, have occupied Muslim scholars for centuries and remain central to contemporary Qur'anic studies. Yet composition is not merely a question of literary form. It also concerns how the Qur'an generates meaning, organises argument, guides interpretation, establishes authority, and shapes relationships between revelation, recitation, and community.

Approaches to these questions have been remarkably diverse. Muslim scholarly traditions developed sophisticated reflections on textual organisation through *tafsīr*, *balāḡa*, theories of *naẓm* and *munāṣabāt*, and the sciences of the Qur'an (*ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*). Contemporary scholarship has expanded these discussions through literary, rhetorical, philological, historical-critical, manuscript, and comparative approaches, while also exploring the Qur'an's engagement with the wider intellectual and religious cultures of Late Antiquity.

Rather than asking only how the Qur'an is composed, this conference asks what composition accomplishes. How does compositional form shape meaning? How have different scholarly traditions understood these relationships? What new perspectives emerge when literary, philological, historical, theological, and exegetical approaches are brought into conversation?

The conference welcomes contributions that revisit established assumptions, develop new methodological perspectives, or explore how composition functions as a dynamic process of meaning-making within the Qur'an and across its interpretive traditions.

Possible questions include:

- How can textual coherence in the Qur'an be understood?
- What kinds of compositional structures emerge within individual *sūras* or across the Qur'an as a whole?
- How do repetition, variation, formulaic language, rhythm, and sound contribute to meaning?
- How has the Islamic intellectual tradition theorised textual form, rhetoric, coherence, and style?
- What can philological, manuscript, and codicological evidence contribute to our understanding of the Qur'an's composition?
- How do different models of the Qur'an's formation shape literary interpretation?

- What role do self-referentiality, scriptural dialogue, and intertextuality play in the Qur'an's discourse?
- How do recitational, performative, and liturgical contexts shape perceptions of textual organisation and coherence?

Possible Themes

Theme 1 – Literary Structure, Rhetoric, and Compositional Analysis

This theme welcomes studies exploring rhetorical structure, thematic progression, compositional symmetry, coherence, repetition, narrative organisation, and other formal dimensions of the Qur'anic text. It also encourages critical reflection on the assumptions, possibilities, and limits of different approaches to structural analysis and on the relationship between compositional form and meaning.

Theme 2 – Textual Formation and Historical Context

How do literary readings relate to different accounts of the Qur'an's formation and transmission? This theme explores the relationship between synchronic and diachronic approaches while encouraging dialogue between literary criticism, philology, manuscript studies, oral performance, historical criticism, and material textuality. We also welcome contributions examining the Qur'an within the broader intellectual and religious cultures of Late Antiquity and considering how these perspectives intersect with literary, philological, theological, and exegetical approaches. Rather than assuming a rigid opposition between these methodologies, the panel seeks to explore the questions that emerge at their points of convergence.

Theme 3 – Self-Referentiality and Interpretation

How have different interpretive communities understood the relationship between the Qur'an's compositional form and its meaning? This theme explores self-referentiality, internal Qur'anic hermeneutics, scriptural conversation, and the interpretive significance of textual form. It welcomes studies of Muslim exegetical, rhetorical, and theological traditions alongside contemporary literary, philological, historical, and comparative approaches, with particular attention to the conceptual frameworks through which composition, structure, and style have themselves been understood and theorised.

Submission Guidelines

If you are interested in presenting a paper, please send **your title and an abstract of 300–500 words** in PDF format to Quran2027-IDEO-OIB@ideo-cairo.org by **September 30th, 2026**. Please also include a short CV (maximum one page) detailing your institutional affiliation and recent publications. Participants commit to presenting **original research** and **submitting a paper to *MIDEO***. *Notification of acceptance*: November 30th, 2026. *Submission of full articles for publication*: September 30th, 2027.

Publication & Peer Review

Selected papers will be published in the *MIDEO 45* (2029). Please note that inclusion in the conference does not guarantee publication. Conversely, researchers who are unable to attend the conference are still encouraged to submit their manuscripts for consideration in this thematic issue. All manuscripts (maximum 60,000 characters including spaces) will undergo a double-blind peer review process according to the journal's editorial standards ([see the guidelines here](#)).

Practical Information

Languages: The primary language of the conference is English.

Travel & Accommodation: Our funding is limited. Please let us know if you require financial assistance regarding your airfare. **Accommodation, local transportation and meals will be provided by the conference organizers.**