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The arabicized turkish word in the Qur'an: A Study of “Ghassaq”

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Abstract

Arabicization is one of the linguistic issues that has been handled carefully by the linguists and scholars of Qur'anic studies. This scholarly attention is attributed to a discovery that the Qur'an contains a number of Arabicized words. However, the word *ghassaq* (غَسَّاق) is a Turkish originated word that appears in the Holy Qur'an. This word has been Arabicized by the Arabs before the Qur'an was revealed. In another word, *ghassaq* was used by the Arabs and treated as an Arabic word following the morphological process of the Arabic language. It was also mentioned in one of the Arabic pre-Islam poetry by *Ta'abbata Sharran*:

وله عاري الطنابيب مُمْتَدَّ نَوَاشِرُهُ .. مدلاج أدھمّ واهي الماء غَسَّاق

In Turkish, *ghassaq* refers to cold water or the smelly one. Other usage of this word could be seen in the Turkish lexicons. It has been related to the Turkish language according to Muslim scholars specialized in the terminology of the Qur'an. This paper is a linguistic study which intends to study the word *ghassaq* and to analyze its usage throughout the Qur'an in favor of other similar terms. It will also review the opinion of traditional and contemporary Muslim scholars on the origin of *ghassaq* and its usage in the Qur'an.

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1. Introduction

This article discusses a Qur'anic term “*ghassaq*” which repeated twice in the Qur'an, once in chapter 38:57 and once again in chapter 78:25. Both of the uses refer to the pretrial of hellfire on the day of Resurrection. It is known that the Qur'an contains many words from foreign languages like Persian, Roman, Ethiopian, Latin and others. For the word “*ghassaq*”, it is assumed that this is a Turkish originated word though it is not confirmed by the Qur'an itself. This paper explores the reality of this assumption and the reason why the Qur'an has chosen this particular word.

Most importantly this paper explores whether this word is really a Turkish word or not. It also scrutinizes the usage and purport of this word in Turkey at the time of Qur'anic revelation. This word, in the books of “foreignness of the Qur'an”, is identified by the scholars and exegetes as a non-Arabic foreign word.

Having been mentioned in the books of “foreignness of the Qur'an” the word “*ghassaq*” could be the best evidence for it to be a foreign word in the Qur'an. Many Muslim scholars like Ibn Abbas (687CE), Ibn Qutaybah (889CE), Makki bin Abi Talib (1045CE) and Ibn Hayyan al-Gharnati (1344CE) categorically identified this word as a foreign word.¹

A cursory look on the years of the abovementioned scholars and their dealings with this word may give an impression that this word is still upholds its foreignness in the Qur'an. This nature is perfectly compatible with the definition of “foreignness of the Qur'an”. According to scholars, “foreignness of the Qur'an” refers to certain terms of the Qur'an that remain equivocal to most of the people since the first era of Islam up to the present day.² The foreignness of this word is again affirmed by Sahih al-Bukhari which the second most authentic religious book in Islam. In this book, the word “*ghassaq*” is interpreted in the footnote.³ It can be argued that if the word was not a foreign one a further interpretation of its denotation would have required. Moreover, the interpreters of this book also added to a further elaboration of its meaning.⁴

2. Disagreements over the Genesis of the Word “*ghassaq*”

There are two different opinions could be traced about this word. One holds that it is Arabic and another argues that it is arabicized. The proponents of being this word Arabic disagree with those who say it is foreign or Turkish origin. Al-Jawaliqi, for example, refers to the root of this word which is “*ghasaq*”. According to him, as it has a root in Arabic, it should be logically considered as Arabic word.⁵ Al-Khaffazi, al-Alusi and Balashi supported this idea.⁶

However, some traditional Muslim scholars hold that this is an arabicized word and arabicized word refers to the Arab's usage of the foreign words for the meaning which is inconsistent with their original languages.⁷ Al-Suyuti says, *al-ghassaq*, in Turkish language, stands for stinking cold. Hamza Fathallah holds a similar view. Unlike, the Father Rafail did not affirm that it is really a Turkish word but he sees a probability of its being Turkish.⁸

Some scholars linked this word to the language “Tokhar”⁹ which was a borrowed language and attributed to a central Asian historical region Tokharistan during the period between third and nine century.¹⁰ Al-

¹ . Abdul Aziz Izz al-Din al-Sayyiruan, al-Mujam al-Jami li Gharib Mufradat al-Quran al-Karim: Ibn Abbas, Ibn Qutaybah, Makki bi Abi Talib, Abu Hayyan (Lebanon: Beirut, Dar al-Ilm li al-Malayin, 1986), 301.

² . Ibid, p.10.

³ . Fuad Abd al-Baqi, Mujam Gharib al-Quran (Dar Ihya al-Kutub al-Arabiyyah, 1950), p. 147.

⁴ . Muhammad bin Ismail al-Bukhari, Sahih al-Bukhari (Beirut: Dar ibn Kathir, 1987), p. 1188.

⁵ . Al-Khaffazi, Shifa al-Alil, p. 191.

⁶ . Al-Alusi, Ruh al-Maani, vol. 17, p. 373.

⁷ . Al-Suyuti, al-Muzhar, ed. Muhammad Zad al-Mawla, Dar al-Turath, vol.1, 268.

⁸ . Al-Yasui, Gharab al-Lugha al-Arabiyyah, p. 273.

⁹ . Ibn al-Athir, al-Lubab fi Tahdhib al-Ansab, p. 173.

¹⁰ . Tokharistan (Tukholo in Chinese sources) - region in the northern flow of Amu-Darya (Oxus) on the territory of modern Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. <http://www.sogdcoins.narod.ru/english/tokharistan/history.html>

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