

RECONFIGURING QUR'ANIC INTERTEXTUALITY: MUN'IM SIRRY'S CROSS-REFERENCES, MUNĀSABAH, AND TAFSĪR AL-QUR'ĀN BI AL-QUR'ĀN



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Abstract

This article examines Mun'im Sirry's concept of cross-references in *The Qur'an with Cross-References* within the broader framework of Qur'anic intertextuality. While cross-referencing has been presented as a contemporary approach to reading the Qur'an, its relationship to the classical concepts of *munāsabah* and *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān* (TQbQ) remains insufficiently explored. This study aims to analyze the conceptual foundations, methodological characteristics, and distinctive features of Sirry's approach in comparison with these two established exegetical traditions. Employing library research with a comparative descriptive design, the study applies qualitative content analysis to Sirry's *The Qur'an with Cross-References*, classical works on *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, and relevant contemporary scholarship. Sūrat al-Fātiḥah serves as the primary analytical sample because of its foundational position in the *muṣḥaf*. The findings demonstrate that the three approaches share the same premise of Qur'anic intertextuality but differ in their interpretive orientation. *Munāsabah* emphasizes textual coherence, TQbQ explains one verse through another, whereas Sirry's cross-references organize thematic connections through a practical system of marginal annotations. The analysis also shows that Sirry's selection of cross-references is interpretive rather than exhaustive, reflecting specific editorial criteria. This study concludes that Sirry's cross-references represent a contemporary reconfiguration of the classical TQbQ tradition, offering greater accessibility while remaining selective in coverage and methodological transparency.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji konsep cross-references yang diperkenalkan Mun'im Sirry dalam *The Qur'an with Cross-References* dalam kerangka intertekstualitas Al-Qur'an. Meskipun cross-references dipresentasikan sebagai pendekatan kontemporer dalam membaca Al-Qur'an, relasinya dengan konsep klasik *munāsabah* dan *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān* (TQbQ) masih belum banyak dikaji secara sistematis. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis landasan konseptual, karakteristik metodologis, serta kekhasan pendekatan Sirry melalui perbandingan dengan kedua tradisi tafsir tersebut. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kepustakaan dengan desain komparatif-deskriptif yang menerapkan analisis isi kualitatif terhadap *The Qur'an with Cross-References* karya Mun'im Sirry, literatur klasik *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, dan kajian-kajian kontemporer yang relevan. Sūrah al-Fātiḥah dipilih sebagai sampel analisis karena kedudukannya yang fundamental dalam *muṣḥaf*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketiga pendekatan berangkat dari premis yang sama mengenai intertekstualitas Al-Qur'an, tetapi berbeda dalam orientasi penafsirannya. *Munāsabah* menitikberatkan pada koherensi antarayat dan antarsurah, TQbQ menjelaskan suatu ayat dengan ayat lainnya, sedangkan cross-references Sirry menyusun keterkaitan tematik melalui sistem anotasi marginal yang lebih praktis. Analisis juga menunjukkan bahwa pemilihan rujukan silang oleh Sirry bersifat interpretatif dan tidak dimaksudkan mencakup seluruh kemungkinan hubungan antarayat. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa cross-references Sirry merupakan rekonfigurasi kontemporer terhadap tradisi klasik TQbQ yang menawarkan penyajian lebih mudah diakses, meskipun tetap bersifat selektif dalam cakupan dan transparansi metodologis.

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an exhibits an intertextual character in which its verses mutually elucidate one another. Within the tradition of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, this phenomenon has long been understood through two principal concepts: *munāsabah*, the science concerned with the interconnection of meaning between verses and between chapters (Saleh, 2024), and *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān* (hereafter abbreviated TQbQ), the interpretation of one verse by means of another verse that serves as its explanation (Hakim, 2017). Both approaches function as instruments for constructing a holistic, rather than fragmentary, reading of the Qur'an (Saeed, 2006).

In 2022, Mun'im Sirry, an Indonesian scholar teaching at the University of Notre Dame, published *The Qur'an with Cross-References* with the academic publisher De Gruyter. Sirry describes it as "the first book of its kind" to present the Qur'an with systematic cross-references in its margins for almost every verse (Sirry, 2022), while at the same time acknowledging that the idea is rooted in the classical principle of TQbQ and that his work constitutes "a manifestation of the cross-referentiality of the Qur'an." (Sirry, 2022). Walid A. Saleh, in his review in the *Bulletin of SOAS*, goes so far as to call it the only existing cross-referencing of the Qur'an to date (Saleh, 2024).

The emergence of the term *cross-references* raises a conceptual question that is central to this study: does the term designate a method substantively distinct from *munāsabah* and TQbQ, or does it merely rename approaches already familiar within the tradition? The question is significant because the conceptual clarity of a method determines its validity and its contribution to Qur'anic studies. Without a clear distinction, the introduction of a new term may generate confusion rather than advance the development of exegetical methodology.

Scholarship on the two classical concepts is already well developed. A number of studies have traced the history and sevenfold classification of *munāsabah* from Abu Bakr al-Naysaburi to al-Biqā'i (Ridho, 2004), examined al-Biqā'i's *Nazm al-Durar* in particular (Basid, 2016), and mapped the patterns of inter-chapter *munāsabah* in that same work (Saddad, 2020), while a comparative study of *Mafatih al-Ghaib*, *Nazm al-Durar*, and *al-Manar* has shown *munāsabah* to be a continually developing science (Shofiana, 2021). More recent research has applied *munāsabah* to specific passages such as QS al-Baqarah 237–240 (Firdausi, 2019), examined its earliest theorization in al-Zarkashi's *al-Burhan* (Elkarimah, 2022), underscored its urgency in contemporary exegesis (Salam, M. T., 2023), and demonstrated its persistence even in vernacular tafsir such as that of Mahmud Yunus (Marzuki, 2024), while Farnidah has documented its adaptation by al-Zuhayli in *Tafsir al-Munir* (Farnidah, 2022). From a different angle, Affani has problematized the very distinction between *munāsabah* and TQbQ (Affani, 2017).

Literature engaging Sirry's *cross-references* specifically, by contrast, remains scarce. The principal scholarly engagement to date is Saleh's review, which, while recognizing the work's significance, criticizes the absence of a transparent rationale for the selection of references (Saleh, 2024). Beyond this review, no study has yet placed *cross-references* in systematic comparison with the classical concepts it claims to extend, nor tested the method against the verses of an actual surah. It is precisely this gap that defines the contribution of the present study: instead of treating *munāsabah*, TQbQ, or Sirry's work in isolation, as previous research has tended to do, it sets the three concepts in direct comparison and applies that comparative framework to a concrete case.

Surah al-Fatihah is selected as that case for three reasons. First, it occupies a foundational position in the *mushaf* as its opening chapter (*umm al-Qur'an*), so that its verses are among the most frequently recited and most extensively interpreted in the entire tradition. Second, it is short enough—only seven verses—to permit an exhaustive, verse-by-verse mapping within the limits of a single article, yet theologically dense enough to test the reach of the method. Third, and decisively for a study of *cross-references*, Sirry provides references for five of its seven verses while leaving two (verses 3 and 5) without any, which makes al-Fatihah an ideal site for examining both how the method works and where it reaches its limits.

On this basis, the objectives of this research are threefold: (1) to describe the concept of *cross-references* in Mun'im Sirry's work; (2) to compare it with the concepts of *munāsabah* and TQbQ; and (3) to map the application of *cross-references* to the seven verses of al-Fatihah and to evaluate the consistency of the method.

This study employs a qualitative library-research design with a comparative-descriptive method, using content analysis (*analisis isi*) as its principal analytical technique. Content analysis is appropriate because the object of study is a textual artifact—Sirry's apparatus of marginal references—whose internal logic must be reconstructed from the text itself rather than from fieldwork or interview. The analysis therefore begins by describing what the text actually contains: which verses are cross-referenced, by means of which codes, and to which other verses, before it proceeds to interpret and to compare them.

The primary source is Mun'im Sirry's *The Qur'an with Cross-References* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), together with the *User's Guide* prefaced to it. Secondary sources comprise two bodies of literature. The first consists of classical and contemporary treatises of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān* dealing with *munāsabah* and TQbQ. The second is a set of authoritative (*mu'tabar*) exegeses—*Tafsir al-Mishbah* of Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Azhar* of Hamka, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim* of Ibn Kathir, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* of Sayyid Qutb, and *al-Tafsir al-Munir* of al-Zuhayli—consulted to corroborate, and not to replace, the thematic relations that Sirry himself establishes.

The data are analyzed in three stages. The first is a descriptive mapping of Sirry's cross-reference system, covering its selection criteria, its notation, and its reading strategy. The second is a comparative analysis that situates *cross-references* against *munāsabah* and TQbQ along consistent axes of comparison. The third is an applied case study in which the comparative framework is tested on the seven verses of surah al-Fatihah, including a critical examination of the two verses that Sirry leaves without references.

Because Sirry's selection criteria govern the whole of the analysis, they are stated here at the outset and elaborated in the Results. Sirry includes or excludes a cross-reference on the basis of four criteria: (1) similarity in message; (2) topical relatedness between passages; (3) allusion to the same narratives, events, or characters; and (4) parallelism in phrasing. (Sirry, 2022) These four criteria, together with the content-analytical principle of reading only what the text itself presents, constitute the methodological lens through which al-Fatihah is examined below.

RESULTS

A Descriptive Profile of Sirry's *The Qur'an with Cross-References*

Before any comparison is undertaken, the work itself must be described so that the reader becomes acquainted with it. *The Qur'an with Cross-References* is a single-volume work issued

by the academic press De Gruyter in 2022. Its distinctive feature is that, for almost every verse, the margin carries a set of references to other verses related to it—an apparatus modeled on the cross-referencing long standard in printed editions of the Bible but, on the account of both Sirry and Saleh, not previously applied to the Qur'an in this systematic printed form. (Sirry, 2022)

Sirry sets out the way in which the apparatus is to be used in a *User's Guide*. There he defines a cross-reference as “a study tool used to direct the reader to related content that may define or explain the meaning of a verse,” (Sirry, 2022) and he stresses that the work “is ultimately an interpretive work” rather than a mechanical concordance. The references are arranged synchronically, following the order of the verses in the *mushaf*, and the reader is expected to move actively between a given verse and the passages to which it is linked rather than to receive a finished interpretation.

***Munāsabah*, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*, and Cross-References as Three Concepts**

Etymologically, *munāsabah* derives from the root *na-sa-ba*, denoting closeness, similarity, or relation. As cited across the works of *ʿulūm al-Qur'ān*, Manna' Khalil al-Qattan defines it as “the interconnection between one verse and another, or between one chapter and another.” (Ridho, 2004) The science addresses the secret behind the arrangement of verses and chapters in the *mushaf*, which is ordered not chronologically by the time of revelation but according to the sequence established by the Prophet ﷺ. The tradition began with Abu Bakr al-Naysaburi (d. 324 H) and culminated in the monumental *Nazm al-Durar fi Tanasub al-Ayat wa al-Suwar* of Burhan al-Din al-Biqā'i (d. 885/1480) (Saddad, 2020), who traced the relationship even between the first chapter (al-Fatihah) and the last (al-Nas), affirming that the Qur'an is a single, integrally organic whole (Shofiana, 2021). Within the discipline, *munāsabah* developed seven classifications, the principal orientation of which is the structural harmony of the *mushaf*.

In contrast to *munāsabah*, which emphasizes structural coherence, TQbQ is oriented toward the explanation of meaning, positing the Qur'an as the principal interpreter of itself on the basis of internal evidence (QS al-Nahl [16]: 89; QS al-Qiyamah [75]: 17–19) and the practice of the Prophet ﷺ. Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) issued the influential dictum that the best method of interpretation is to explain the Qur'an by the Qur'an, since what is stated briefly in one place is expanded in another (Sirry, 2022), a principle practiced by Ibn Kathir in *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Azim* and, in the modern era, by al-Shinqiti in *Adwa' al-Bayan* and Sadiqi Tehrani in *al-Furqan* (Sirry, 2022). Sirry explicitly acknowledges TQbQ as the conceptual foundation of his project, describing his work as “a manifestation of the cross-referentiality of the Qur'an.” (Saleh, 2024).

The concept of *cross-references* introduced by Sirry literally means mutual or reciprocal reference. Sirry concedes that the idea is not entirely new; what he regards as the novelty of his work lies not in the principle of the method but in its presentation—for the first time the Qur'an is printed with systematic cross-references in its margins, in the manner long established for the Bible. Saleh reinforces this claim by describing the work as “the only cross-referencing of the Qur'an existing to date, a step toward a historical-critical reading of the Qur'an.” (Saleh, 2024).

Sirry's Method: Selection Criteria, Notation, and Reading Strategy

As stated in the Method, Sirry establishes four criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of a reference: similarity in message, topical relatedness, allusion to the same narratives or characters, and parallelism in phrasing. He concedes that the process is to a degree subjective; nevertheless, he maintains that the selection is not arbitrary, since it is guided by earlier works of TQbQ.

Sirry employs two kinds of notation. The code *pp* (parallel passage) indicates that a cross-reference contains a verse stating nearly the same matter or describing the same event. The superscript letters a, b, c are used when the verse in question contains more than one topic, so that each topic receives its own reference (Sirry, 2022). Thus in *al-hamdu lillah rabb al-'alamin* (al-Fatihah, verse 2) the phrase *al-hamdu lillah* is given code a and *rabb al-'alamin* code b. The references are arranged synchronically, in the order of the *mushaf*.

Sirry further proposes a *four-fold reading strategy* to be performed by the active reader: to identify similarities and differences among the cross-references; to compare them with one another; to produce a meaningful synthesis; and to evaluate the chosen meaning in the light of other possible interpretations (Sirry, 2022). The strategy positions the reader as an active participant in the construction of meaning rather than a passive recipient of it.

The Cross-Reference Mapping of Surah al-Fatihah

Applying Sirry's apparatus to surah al-Fatihah yields the mapping presented below. The working principle is the one Sirry himself formulates in the *User's Guide*: each verse is understood through the verses to which it is cross-referenced, whether by the *pp* code or by a thematic reference, and the *mu'tabar* exegeses are consulted only insofar as they corroborate those relations. Of the seven verses, five carry cross-references and two (verses 3 and 5) do not.

Verse 1: *Bismi Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* – *pp* QS 27:30

Sirry cross-references the first verse with QS al-Naml (27): 30 by means of the *pp* code indicating a parallel passage of nearly identical wording (Sirry, 2022). QS al-Naml (27): 30 records the opening of Solomon's letter to the Queen of Sheba – “Indeed, it is from Solomon, and indeed it reads: *Bismillah al-rahman al-rahim*” – which is the only occurrence of the *basmalah* formula within the body of the Qur'an apart from its function as a chapter opener. The reference thus links the *basmalah* as the opening of revelation to the Prophet ﷺ with the *basmalah* as the opening of a prophet's official correspondence. Quraish Shihab corroborates this reading, observing that the *basmalah* was known before the Qur'an and was used by earlier prophets, Solomon ‘alaihissalam among them (Shihab, 2002).

Verse 2: *Al-ḥamdu lillāh rabb al-‘ālamīn* – *pp* 6:45; 37:182; 39:75 / a 6:1; 18:1; 27:93; 35:1 / b 26:23–24

The second verse carries the most complex cross-reference structure in al-Fatihah, since Sirry applies all three codes at once. (Saleh, 2024) The *pp* code links it to QS al-An'am (6): 45, QS al-Saffat (37): 182, and QS al-Zumar (39): 75 – three contexts in which the formula *al-hamdu lillah rabb al-'alamin* recurs: the closing of the destruction of a wrongdoing people, the closing of a chapter, and the praise of the angels around the Throne on the Day of Judgment. Code a links the phrase *al-hamdu lillah* to four further chapters that open with the *hamdalah* (QS 6:1; 18:1; 27:93; 35:1), so that verse 2 appears as a prototype of the recurring opening formula of the

Qur'an; Hamka likewise reads the *hamdalah* as an acknowledgment that all praise belongs to Allah in every context. (Hamka, 1989) Code b links the phrase *rabb al-'alamin* to QS al-Shu'ara' (26): 23–24, where Moses 'alaihi salam, answering Pharaoh's question "what is the Lord of the worlds?", defines Him as "the Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is between them." Ibn Kathir notes that Pharaoh had denied any lord besides himself, so that the reply of Moses functions as a confirmation of who the true *rabb al-'alamin* is. (Kathir, 1999) Sayyid Qutb, for his part, reads the *hamdalah* of al-Fatihah as the highest expression of *tawhid* (Qutb, 2003).

Verse 3: *Al-Rahmān al-Rahīm* – without cross-reference

Sirry provides no cross-reference for the third verse; the reasons for this silence are examined in the Discussion.

Verse 4: *Mālikī yawm al-dīn* – QS 82:17-19

Sirry cross-references the fourth verse with QS al-Infitar (82): 17–19, (Sirry, 2022) a thematic reference carrying neither a *pp* nor an *a/b* code. The three verses pose, and then answer, the question of what *yawm al-din* is: "(17) And what will make you know what the Day of Judgment is? (18) Again, what will make you know what the Day of Judgment is? (19) The Day when no soul will be of any avail to another, and the command on that Day will be entirely with Allah." The brief and abstract phrase of al-Fatihah is thereby explained by three descriptive verses. Quraish Shihab adds that *maliki yawm al-din* portrays the absolute sovereignty of Allah on the Day of Judgment (Shihab, 2002).

Verse 5: *Iyyāka na 'budu wa iyyāka nasta 'īn* – without cross-reference

As with verse 3, Sirry provides no cross-reference for the fifth verse; this case too is taken up in the Discussion.

Verse 6: *Ihdinā al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* – QS 2:142, 213; 4:68; 10:25

Sirry cross-references the sixth verse with four verses drawn from four different chapters, (Sirry, 2022) all of which declare that it is Allah who guides whomever He wills to a straight path (QS al-Baqarah [2]: 142 and 213; QS al-Nisa' [4]: 68; QS Yunus [10]: 25). The supplication of the servant in al-Fatihah—"guide us to the straight path"—thus receives its response in verses affirming that the One who guides is Allah Himself. Quraish Shihab reads *al-sirat al-mustaqim* as the straight path of religion that leads to Allah's good pleasure (Shihab, 2002).

Verse 7: *Ṣirāṭ al-ladhīna an 'amta 'alayhim...* – QS 4:69; 19:58

For the seventh and final verse, Sirry provides two cross-references, QS al-Nisa' (4): 69 and QS Maryam (19): 58 (Sirry, 2022), both of which identify those "upon whom favor has been bestowed." QS 4:69 enumerates four categories—the prophets (*al-nabiyyin*), the truthful (*al-siddiqin*), the martyrs (*al-shuhada'*), and the righteous (*al-salihin*)—while QS 19:58 adds a historical dimension, naming the prophets among the descendants of Adam, those carried with Noah, and the descendants of Abraham and Israel. The generic phrase of al-Fatihah is thus given a concrete referent from within the Qur'an itself. Such intra-Qur'anic referencing has a precedent in the practice of the Companions: Ibn Mas'ud *radhiyallahu 'anhu* interpreted the word *zulm* in QS al-An'am (6): 82 by reference to *zulm* in QS Luqman (31): 13, as recorded in the *sahih* tradition of al-Bukhari and Muslim (Sirry, 2022).

To present the complete picture, Table 2 summarizes Sirry's entire cross-reference mapping of surah al-Fatihah.

Table 2. Recapitulation of *Cross-References* of Surah al-Fatihah

Verse	Phrase	Code	Cross-Reference
1	<i>Bismi Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm</i>	pp	QS 27:30
2	<i>Al-ḥamdu lillāh rabb al-‘ālamīn</i>	pp / a / b	QS 6:45; 37:182; 39:75 (pp); QS 6:1; 18:1; 27:93; 35:1 (a); QS 26:23–24 (b)
3	<i>Al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm</i>		(no reference)
4	<i>Māliki yawm al-dīn</i>		QS 82:17–19
5	<i>Iyyāka na ‘budu wa iyyāka nasta ‘īn</i>		(no reference)
6	<i>Ihdinā al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm</i>		QS 2:142, 213; 4:68; 10:25
7	<i>Ṣirāṭ al-ladhīna an ‘amta ‘alayhim...</i>		QS 4:69; 19:58

Source: Compiled from Sirry, *The Qur'an with Cross-References*, page 39.

DISCUSSION

Comparing the Three Concepts

The three concepts share a single fundamental premise: that the Qur'an possesses an internal interconnection enabling it to interpret itself, and that this interconnection can serve as a methodological instrument for a holistic understanding. They diverge, however, along four axes. In orientation, *munāsabah* aims at the structural coherence of the *mushaf*, TQbQ at the explanation of one verse by another, and *cross-references* at the systematic mapping of thematic linkages. In scope, *munāsabah* comprises seven detailed classifications, TQbQ concentrates on verse-to-verse clarification of meaning, and *cross-references* cover inter-verse relations selected by Sirry's four criteria. In presentation, *munāsabah* and TQbQ are elaborated in extensive narrative exegeses, whereas *cross-references* are compressed into a marginal notation – Sirry's most significant innovation, the transformation of exegetical narrative into an accessible *study tool*. And in their methodological basis, *munāsabah* rests on the *ijtihād* of the exegetes, TQbQ on transmitted reports (*riwayah*) and the views of the Companions, and *cross-references* on a compilation guided by four criteria. These distinctions are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of *Munāsabah*, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*, and *Cross-References*

Aspect	<i>Munāsabah</i>	<i>Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān</i>	Cross-References (Sirry)
Definition	Science of the harmony of verse and chapter arrangement	Interpretation of a Qur'anic verse by another Qur'anic verse	A study tool directing the reader to other verses related in meaning
Principal figures	al-Naysaburi, al-Razi, al-Suyuti, al-Biqā'i	Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn al-Qayyim, Ibn Kathir, al-Shinqiti	Mun'im Sirry (2022)

Orientation	Structural coherence of the mushaf	Explanation of one verse by another	Systematic mapping of thematic linkages
Scope	7 types (inter-chapter, inter-verse, words, fawatih, etc.)	Verse-to-verse relations for clarification of meaning	Inter-verse relations based on 4 selection criteria
Presentation	Narrative exegesis	Narrative exegesis	Marginal notation (pp, a, b, c)
Nature	Exegetical	Exegetical	Referential / study tool
Accessibility	Requires the ability to read Arabic exegesis	Idem	Accessible to lay readers

Source: Compiled from the literature on 'ulūm al-Qur'ān, Sirry (2022), and Ridho (2004).

A Three-Concept Reading of al-Fatihah

The mapping presented in the Results can now be re-examined through all three lenses rather than through *cross-references* alone, so that the comparison is applied evenly and not allowed to privilege Sirry's apparatus by default. For the verses that Sirry does reference, the three concepts prove complementary rather than competing. At verse 1, for instance, *munāsabah* would ask how the *basmalah* coheres with the structure of the surah and of the *mushaf*; TQbQ would explain the *basmalah* of al-Fatihah by the *basmalah* of QS al-Naml; and *cross-references* merely records the redactional parallel “pp QS 27:30” and leaves the synthesis to the reader. At verse 2 the same division of labor appears in sharper form: *munāsabah* accounts for the internal sequence of *hamdalah*, *rabb al-'alamin*, and the attributes that follow; TQbQ supplies the definition of *rabb al-'alamin* from the reply of Moses 'alaihihsalam in QS al-Shu'ara'; and *cross-references* maps both relations at once through its layered codes. The three are therefore best read as describing the same intertextual reality from different vantage points—structure, meaning, and map—rather than as rival methods, and the verse-by-verse analysis that follows keeps all three in view.

The Verses without References: A Content-Analytical Reading of Verses 3 and 5

The two verses that Sirry leaves unreferenced require closer scrutiny, since it would be too simplistic to treat their mere absence as evidence either of the method's transparency or of its failure. A content-analytical reading—one that attends to what Sirry's own criteria permit—yields a more careful account. Verse 3, *al-rahman al-rahim*, is redactionally a repetition of the two divine names already present in the *basmalah* of verse 1, which Sirry has cross-referenced to QS al-Naml (27): 30. On the principle, stated in the *User's Guide*, that references are included only where a relation of meaning obtains and are not multiplied for mere verbal repetition, the omission at verse 3 is consistent with his own stated method. Verse 5, *iyyaka na'budu wa iyyaka nasta'in*, presents a different case: its construction in the first-person plural (*na'budu*, *nasta'in*) is formally distinctive and has no close redactional parallel, so that it satisfies none of the four criteria in the strict, substantive sense that Sirry requires.

This reading is strengthened by comparison with the *munāsabah* tradition, which proceeds on a different premise and therefore reaches different results. Where Sirry's criteria are redactional and thematic, al-Biqā'i's *munāsabah* is structural: in *Nazm al-Durar* he connects

every verse to its neighbors as part of a single organic design, so that verses 3 and 5 are by no means left in isolation but are read as integral links between the praise of verses 1–2 and the petition of verses 6–7. The contrast is instructive. The absence of a cross-reference in Sirry does not imply that these verses “have no echo in the Qur'an” – a possibility against which Saleh rightly warns (Saleh, 2024) – but reflects a methodological choice: *cross-references* records substantive inter-verse parallels and falls silent where it finds none, whereas *munāsabah* is committed in principle to articulating a relation for every verse. Read in this way, the silence at verses 3 and 5 is neither a simple virtue nor a simple defect of transparency, but a direct consequence of the kind of intertextuality that Sirry's method is designed to capture.

The Selectivity of the References: A Closer Look at Verse 4

Verse 4 illustrates a further feature of the method that a balanced analysis must address: its selectivity. Sirry assigns *maliki yawm al-din* a single cross-reference, QS al-Infitar (82): 17–19, although the verse contains at least two elements that are richly attested elsewhere in the Qur'an. The element *malik* (sovereign, owner) recurs in such forms as *malik al-nas* (QS al-Nas [114]: 2) and *malik al-mulk* (QS Al 'Imran [3]: 26); the element *yawm al-din* belongs to a large semantic field of terms for the Day of Judgment that includes *yawm al-qiyamah*, *al-sa'ah*, and *yawm al-hisab*, among many others. On a purely lexical or thematic criterion, therefore, verse 4 could have generated a far more extensive set of references than the one Sirry provides.

That it did not is explicable, once again, by the criteria stated in the *User's Guide*. Sirry's first and dominant criterion is similarity in *message*, not similarity in *word*, and he explicitly disavows word-by-word linkage made without regard to meaning. On this criterion QS al-Infitar (82): 17–19 is the strongest single reference, because it does not merely repeat the term *yawm al-din* but defines the Day it names – “the Day when no soul will be of any avail to another” – and so explains verse 4 in the manner that TQbQ requires. The lexical parallels *malik al-nas* and *malik al-mulk*, by contrast, share a word with verse 4 without explaining its sense in context, and the synonyms for the Day of Judgment, however numerous, would add breadth without adding definition. The single reference at verse 4 is thus not an oversight but an application of the method's governing principle; what the reviewer's observation usefully exposes is the interpretive and selective character of *cross-references*, which a fuller *munāsabah*-based or concordance-based treatment – such as that of Rudi Paret – would handle quite differently. This selectivity is the double-edged feature taken up in the implications below.

Methodological Implications

On the basis of the foregoing, several implications follow. First, in point of principle, *cross-references* does not constitute a radical epistemological breakthrough. Sirry himself acknowledges that his work stands on the shoulders of the TQbQ tradition; what is new is not the concept but its presentation – for the first time the Qur'an is printed with systematic marginal cross-references in the manner long established for the Bible (Saleh, 2024). The work is in this respect consistent with the trend toward historical-critical reading within Western academic Qur'anic studies mapped by Stefanidis (Stefanidis, 2008).

Second, in point of methodology, *cross-references* exhibits a transparency unequal to that of classical *munāsabah*. Sirry offers no systematic account of why particular references are chosen and others omitted (Saleh, 2024), and where the classical exegetes explained each relation in extended narrative, he cites verse numbers without explanation; as Saleh observes, a compiler

who “refuses to tell us which works he has consulted” leaves the reader in methodological uncertainty (Saleh, 2024). This contrasts with the transparency of works such as Islahi's *Tadabbur-i Qur'an*, studied by Mustansir Mir, in which each coherence relation is given an exegetical justification (Mir, 1986).

Third, in point of scope, the references are not universal. The work itself claims to provide references for “almost every verse,” an implicit admission that many verses – as Saleh notes of numerous pages and of many chapters toward the end of the Qur'an – are left without them (Saleh, 2024). Yet Angelika Neuwirth's close reading of the early Meccan chapters shows that even the short surahs at the end of the *mushaf* are rich in thematic linkage (Neuwirth, 2014), so that the gaps reflect the limits of Sirry's compilation rather than of the text.

Fourth, Sirry's project runs parallel to those of Salwa El-Awa and of Mustansir Mir, both of whom seek to inaugurate readings of the Qur'an that emphasize textual coherence (Mir, 1986), as well as to the earlier concordance work of Rudi Paret. Fifth and finally, *cross-references* may be regarded as a technical development of *munāsabah* and TQbQ toward a referential format accessible to the lay reader – a democratization of Qur'anic knowledge consistent with the spirit of contemporary hermeneutics as elaborated by Syamsuddin (Syamsuddin, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The *cross-references* advanced by Mun'im Sirry are, in essence, a contemporary development of the classical principle of *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān* rather than an entirely new method. Sirry himself acknowledges this root and positions his work as “a manifestation of the cross-referentiality of the Qur'an”; the novelty lies not in the principle but in the presentation, namely a systematic marginal format accessible to the lay reader that had not previously been realized in printed editions of the Qur'an. The three concepts nevertheless remain clearly distinct: *munāsabah* is oriented toward the structural coherence of the *mushaf* through its seven classifications, TQbQ toward the explanation of one verse by another, and *cross-references* toward a systematic mapping governed by four selection criteria and a notation of *pp* and *a/b/c*. The mapping of al-Fatihah shows the method working well where explicit substantive relations exist (verses 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7) and falling silent at verses 3 and 5 – a silence that a content-analytical reading attributes to the demands of Sirry's own criteria, and that comparison with *munāsabah* shows to be a feature of the method rather than a mere lapse. Read accordingly, *cross-references* is best understood as a complementary instrument rather than a substitute for classical *munāsabah* and TQbQ: *munāsabah* supplies the framework of structural coherence, TQbQ the depth of meaning, and *cross-references* an accessible systematic map. Further research might extend the same analysis to more complex chapters – al-Baqarah or Yusuf, for instance – in order to test the consistency of the method on a larger scale. *Wallahu a'lam bish-shawab*

Declarations

Author Contribution Statement

Afni Azzahra served as the principal author, responsible for study conceptualization, data collection, analysis of Sirry's primary text, drafting of the manuscript, and final approval. Ida Kurnia Shofa contributed to the methodological design, comparative analysis of *munāsabah* and TQbQ, and critical revision of the manuscript. Khoirun Nidhom contributed to the

literature review of contemporary works, validation of the cross-reference mapping of surah al-Fatihah, and final revision. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement

The data analyzed in this study are derived entirely from publicly available scholarly publications cited in the references. No additional dataset was generated. Supporting materials are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Interests Statement

The authors declare no competing interests, financial or non-financial, that could be perceived to influence the study design, data interpretation, or manuscript preparation.

AI Use Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Claude (Anthropic) solely for language editing (grammar, clarity, and readability) of the English translation. The authors reviewed, revised, and verified the final text and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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