


A Conceptual Analysis of *Ṣulb* and *Tarā'ib* in the Qur'an: A Historical Linguistic and Modern Anatomical Approach

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article type: Research Article</p> <p>Article history: Received 01 November 2024 Received in revised from 27 November 2024 Accepted 05 December 2024 Published online 28 January 2025</p> <p>Keywords: Ṣulb, Tarā'ib, Sūrat al-Ṭāriq, Qur'anic exegesis, science and religion, historical linguistics, pelvic anatomy, hermeneutical methodology</p>	<p>Verse 7 of Sūrat al-Ṭāriq—(يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَيْنِ الصُّلْبِ وَالتَّرَائِبِ)—has long been regarded as one of the most challenging Qur'anic passages in the fields of exegesis and natural sciences due to the historical ambiguity of the terms ṣulb and tarā'ib. Traditional interpretations, which associate these terms with “back” and “chest,” have appeared to conflict with modern medical findings concerning the origin of seminal emission, and have thus been used as grounds for claims of scientific error in the Qur'an. Employing a descriptive-analytical method and an interdisciplinary approach, this article examines the etymology, lexical usage, and conceptual development of these terms in classical Arabic, and compares them with anatomical data. The analysis demonstrates that both traditional exegeses and many modernist attempts to reconcile the apparent conflict—whether through shifting the referent of the pronoun or adopting overly “scientific” interpretations—suffer from serious methodological shortcomings. In contrast, this study argues, based on principles of historical linguistics and human anatomy, that ṣulb refers to the sacrum and tarā'ib (with its semantic connotations of symmetry and spatial opposition) refers to the pubic bone. This interpretation not only resolves the historical ambiguity and exegetical disputes but also aligns the verse precisely with the anatomical location of seminal emission in modern medicine (the pelvic space between the sacrum and pubis), thereby eliminating the apparent contradiction. The study underscores the necessity of revisiting conventional exegeses and highlights the vital importance of adopting rigorous, interdisciplinary methodologies in interpreting Qur'anic verses related to natural phenomena.</p>
<p>Cite this article: Mollazadeh, R. & Shoaib, M. (2025). A Conceptual Analysis of Ṣulb and Tarā'ib in the Qur'an: A Historical Linguistic and Modern Anatomical Approach. <i>Journal of Contemporary Studies on Religion and Science</i>, 1(1), 66-91.</p>	
<p> Publisher: Research Institute of Science and Strategic Evolution</p>	

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Introduction

The Qur'an, as divine revelation and the unparalleled Word of God, lies at the core of the Islamic belief system. Its explicit claim of being free from error, contradiction, or inconsistency¹ renders the precise and methodical interpretation of its verses an indispensable necessity. This foundational feature makes any apparent conflict particularly when confronted with substantiated findings of the natural sciences a critical challenge in the fields of Qur'anic exegesis and theology, thereby intensifying the need for rigorous scholarly inquiry.

Among such cases, verse 7 of Sūrat al-Ṭāriq, (يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَيْنِ الصُّلْبِ وَالتَّرَائِبِ) (“emerging from between the *ṣulb* and the *tarā'ib*”), situated in the context of human creation and reference to “*mā' dāfiq*” (gushing fluid), has long been one of the most debated passages in the history of Qur'anic exegesis and philology. The semantic ambiguity of the key terms *ṣulb* and *tarā'ib* despite the extensive efforts of exegetes and lexicographers from the earliest centuries² up to the present has not been resolved. On the contrary, as 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī observes, it has resulted in a “remarkable divergence”³, reflecting both the depth and complexity of the issue and the need for a renewed and precise approach.

The root of this longstanding challenge lies in the apparent tension between widely circulated traditional interpretations largely grounded in primary lexical meanings or conditioned by the limited scientific knowledge of their time and the findings of modern biological sciences, particularly anatomy and reproductive physiology. Most exegetes and translators, citing certain lexical usages, have interpreted *ṣulb* as “back” (spinal column) and *tarā'ib* as “the bones of the chest” or “the upper part of a woman's body.” At first glance, this reading stands in sharp contrast with modern medical explanations regarding the formation and especially the initial emission of seminal fluid, which occurs within the pelvic cavity and its associated structures. This apparent contradiction has rendered the verse one of the most frequently cited passages by skeptics and critics as evidence for alleged scientific fallibility of the Qur'an, its dependence on the cultural-scientific context of seventh-century Arabia, and ultimately the human origin of revelation.

Conversely, Muslim scholars' attempts to resolve this tension have consistently faced significant methodological challenges. These efforts can be broadly categorized into several approaches: (1) acceptance of Qur'anic fallibility (which conflicts with the theological consensus of Muslims), (2) casting doubt on the certainty of scientific findings (a strategy untenable in cases firmly established by repeated empirical evidence), (3) advocating for

¹ Q 4:82; 41:42

² Muhammad ibn Jarir Tabari, *Jami'al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, ed. 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Muhsin al-Turki, vol. 24, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dar Hajr, 2001). P. 296

³ Muhammad Husayn al-Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, trans. Muhammad Baqir Musavi Hamadani, vol. 20 (Qom: Daftar Nashr-e Islami, 1995). P. 431

parallelism and separation of the domains of science and religion (a position inadequate in relation to verses that directly describe natural phenomena), and (4) offering alternative interpretations of the verse by appealing to linguistic and scientific resources. However, many of these attempts especially in the latter category have failed to provide a fundamental solution or to persuade the scholarly community and seekers of truth. This is due to their reliance on weak exegeses, unsubstantiated rationalizations, far-fetched allegorical interpretations, excessive “scientific exegesis” (*eisegesis*), or weakly transmitted reports lacking textual and chain-of-transmission credibility. At times, such efforts have even deepened the scope of doubt.

This study, while recognizing these challenges and the urgent need for a precise, documented, and methodical response, seeks to offer a novel and constructive interpretation of the verse by employing historical-linguistic analysis, a meticulous lexical-conceptual examination of *ṣulb* and *tarā'ib* within the framework of classical Arabic, and corroborating evidence from established modern anatomy. The primary aim of this research is not merely to propose a new meaning, but to demonstrate how a precise and authentic understanding of these terms grounded in the semantic capacities of Qur'anic Arabic and supported by valid intra-textual and extra-textual evidence can not only dissolve the apparent conflict with medical science but also lead to a deeper appreciation of the Qur'an's rhetorical precision and miraculous eloquence in describing natural phenomena. By critically evaluating earlier methodological approaches and presenting sound arguments, this article contends that verse 7 of Sūrat al-Ṭāriq should not be viewed as evidence of contradiction but rather as a striking testament to the Qur'an's remarkable harmony with scientific realities provided that its interpretation employs accurate tools and rigorous methodology.

1. Lexical and Conceptual Analysis of the Term *Ṣulb*

A precise and comprehensive understanding of verse 7 of Sūrat al-Ṭāriq hinges on a deep examination of its key terms, particularly *ṣulb* and *tarā'ib*. This section is devoted to the etymological, lexical, and conceptual analysis of the term *ṣulb*, in order to clarify its various semantic dimensions in classical Arabic and thereby prepare the ground for a more accurate anatomical correspondence.

An examination of authoritative Arabic lexicons shows that the root *ṣ-l-b* has generated numerous words and expressions, which despite their apparent diversity can largely be categorized into four distinct yet interconnected semantic domains.

The first domain is the central concept of “hardness and firmness.” This meaning is evident in terms such as *ṣalīb* (“a strong and steadfast person”), the expression *ṣulb al-‘aṣā* for a shepherd harsh with his camels, the phrase *al-ṣulb min al-arḍ* for hard and rocky land, and the word *ṣallab* for a whetstone (sharpening stone) ¹

¹ Muhammad Murtada al-Zabidi, *Taj al-‘Arus min Jawahir al-Qamus*, ed. ‘Ali Hilali, 2nd ed. (Kuwait: Turath al-‘Arabi, 1987). p. 200- 209.

The second semantic domain is “intersection,” most prominently represented in the word *ṣalīb* meaning “a cross-shaped figure” (the Christian symbol), and the expression *ṣalībāni* for two intersecting wooden rods attached to a well bucket. Similarly, the name of a constellation with a cross-like shape and the branding tool for camels with a cross-shaped section also derive from this root with this meaning¹. The word *ṣulbūb* seems to have been used for “qamīsh” (a type of reed or stick) due to its occasionally intersecting structure.

The third category involves the concept of “crucifixion,” including *ṣalīb* as an execution device and the verbs derived from it. This category is not entirely independent, as it is linked both to the notion of “hardness” (severity of punishment) and to the “cross-shaped form” of the execution device².

The fourth, and most important semantic domain for the present discussion, is that associated with “lineage, descent, and reproduction.” The expression *‘arabī ṣalīb* referred to pure lineage, and most significantly, the word *ṣulb* (with *ḍamma* on the *ṣād*) was used to designate one of the vertebrae in the spinal column—precisely the term at the center of the exegetical ambiguity in the verse under study³.

Understanding this semantic network and the subtle relationships among derivatives of a single root is a principle recognized by major lexicographers such as Ibn Fāris, who in *Maqāyīs al-Lughah* emphasized categorizing words based on shared core meanings⁴. Such an etymological approach not only aids in deepening the understanding of common usages but also helps uncover neglected meanings or explain potential errors in interpretations and translations.

Focusing specifically on the word *ṣulb* (with *ḍamma* on the *ṣād*), the definitions provided by early and authoritative lexicographers—especially those closest in time to the Qur’an’s revelation—are of particular importance. Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, the author of the earliest comprehensive Arabic lexicon *al-‘Ayn* (d. 170 AH), defines *ṣulb* as follows: “*al-ṣulb: al-zahr, wa huwa ‘azm al-faqār al-muttaṣil fī wasaṭ al-zahr*”⁵; that is, *ṣulb* means the back, and it is the bone of the vertebrae connected together in the middle of the back. Likewise, Ibn Fāris (d. 395 AH) in *Maqāyīs al-Lughah* states: “...and thus the back was called *ṣulb* because of its strength”⁶

¹ Zabidi, *Taj al-‘Arus min Jawahir al-Qamus*, p. 204

² Ibid. p. 207

³ Ibid. p. 205

⁴ Ahmad Ibn Faris, *Mu ‘jam Maqayis al-Lughah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salam Muhammad Harun, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1979). P. 301

⁵ Khalil ibn Ahmad Farahidi, *Kitab al-‘Ayn*, ed. ‘Abd al-Hamid Hindawi, vol. 1, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2003). P. 405

⁶ Ahmad Ibn Faris, *Mu ‘jam Maqayis al-Lughah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salam Muhammad Harun, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1979). p.301

From careful attention to these definitions—particularly Farāhīdī's precise formulation, which carries special weight due to its antiquity and accuracy—one may extract the essential features of *ṣulb* in its original Arabic usage:

1. Being a bone (*'azm*): In its literal sense, *ṣulb* refers to a specific bony structure, not merely a general bodily region. This is confirmed by other lexicographers who likewise employ the word *'azm* in defining *ṣulb*.
2. A continuous vertebral structure (*faqār muttaṣil*): This bone consists of vertebrae arranged in continuous and connected form. The expression *fīhi faqār* (“having vertebrae”), used by other lexicographers, highlights this structural feature.
3. Located in the dorsal region (*zahr*): This bone is situated in the back, namely the dorsal area.
4. Firmness and strength (*quwwa*): In Arab cultural and linguistic usage, the word *ṣulb* connotes hardness, solidity, and resilience, as also noted by Ibn Fāris.

However, a comparison of lexical definitions and common usages shows that, alongside this precise and literal sense (a specific bone with the above features), the term *ṣulb* was also used metaphorically—by way of synecdoche, applying the part to denote the whole—to refer to the entire back (*zahr*). This semantic overlap, and the failure to distinguish clearly between literal and metaphorical usage, appears to be one of the main sources of exegetical confusion and disagreement in understanding verse 7 of Sūrat al-Ṭāriq. Many exegetes, likely due either to a lack of anatomical knowledge or insufficient attention to lexical precision, and favoring the broader and more common meaning, opted for the metaphorical sense of *ṣulb* (the back in general) rather than its literal, specific meaning (a particular bone). This choice has had significant consequences for interpreting *tarā'ib* and, ultimately, for understanding the entire verse—a matter that will be examined in detail in subsequent sections. Hence, distinguishing between these two semantic levels is a fundamental necessity for arriving at an accurate interpretation of the verse.

2. Anatomical Identification of *Ṣulb*: The Sacrum

After clarifying the lexical and conceptual features of *ṣulb* in classical Arabic, the next step toward understanding the verse precisely is to determine its anatomical referent in the human body. This identification not only helps to remove the ambiguity surrounding the meaning of *ṣulb* but also plays a key role in evaluating various interpretations and assessing the verse's compatibility with medical findings.

2-1. Anatomical Criteria of *Ṣulb*: A Bone with Fused Vertebrae in the Spinal Column

The previous lexical analysis showed that *ṣulb*, in its literal sense, refers to an *'azm* (bone) composed of *faqār muttaṣil* (connected vertebrae) and located in the *zahr* (back). With these criteria, the search for the anatomical referent of *ṣulb* directs us to the human vertebral column. The spine, the central axis of the skeletal system, consists of 33 vertebrae categorized into five

general regions: cervical (7 vertebrae), thoracic (12 vertebrae), lumbar (5 vertebrae), sacral (5 vertebrae), and coccygeal (4 vertebrae)¹

A critical and decisive point here is the process of vertebral fusion in certain regions. While the cervical, thoracic, and lumbar vertebrae remain separate throughout life and are divided by intervertebral discs, the vertebrae of the two terminal sections—the sacrum and coccyx—fuse after childhood to form single bony structures. Authoritative modern anatomical references explicitly confirm this. For the sacrum:

The sacrum is a large, triangular bone formed by the fusion of five vertebrae, constituting the posterosuperior wall of the pelvic cavity". For the coccyx: "*The coccyx is a small triangular bone, often asymmetrical, usually composed of four fused rudimentary vertebrae*"²

Accordingly, given the lexical definition of *ṣulb* as an *ʿaẓm* (bone) and the key feature of *faqār muttaṣil* (fused vertebrae), only two structures of the human spine fit this description: the sacrum and the coccyx. This initial narrowing is an important step toward accurately identifying the anatomical referent of *ṣulb*.

2-2. Distinguishing *Ṣulb* from the Coccyx and Its Complete Identification with the Sacrum

With these two possibilities (sacrum and coccyx), further lexical and anatomical evidence helps clarify the precise referent of *ṣulb*. The first and most decisive reason for distinction is the existence of an independent, specific name for the coccyx in Arabic. Early lexicographers referred to the coccyx as *ʿuṣ ʿuṣ* or *ʿajb al-dhanab*³. This distinct naming strongly indicates that the Arabs used a term other than *ṣulb* for this part of the spine, thus distinguishing the two.

By contrast, the sacrum fully embodies the lexical and conceptual characteristics of *ṣulb* as analyzed earlier:

- Firmness and strength: As the base of the spinal column and the posterior segment of the pelvic ring, the sacrum possesses great solidity and resistance. This corresponds perfectly with the notions of “hardness” and “strength” inherent in the root *ṣ-l-b* and highlighted in Ibn Fāris’s definition of *ṣulb*.
- Cross-like appearance and etymological relation: Another noteworthy point is the external shape of the sacrum, which resembles a cross. This visual similarity aligns intriguingly with the etymological link between *ṣulb* and *ṣalīb* (“cross-shaped”) in Arabic, both derived from the root *ṣ-l-b*. The resemblance is so pronounced that it has

¹ Henry Gray, *Gray’s Anatomy: The Anatomical Basis of Clinical Practice*, 39th ed. (New York: Elsevier Churchill Livingstone, 2005), p.735.

² Gray, *Gray’s Anatomy: The Anatomical Basis of Clinical Practice*, p.754

³ Ahmad Ibn Faris, *Muʿjam Maqayis al-Lughah*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salam Muhammad Harun, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1979). P. 47 & Khalil ibn Ahmad Farahidi, *Kitab al-ʿAyn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Hamid Hindawi, vol. 1, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2003). P. 173

influenced the scientific naming of the bone in other languages as well. For instance, in German, the sacrum is called *Kreuzbein*, from *Kreuz* (“cross”) and *Bein* (“bone”)¹. Likewise, the Persian term *khājī* (“sacrum”) derives from the Armenian word *khach*, meaning “cross”². This convergence in naming further supports the conceptual link between *ṣulb* and the cross-like form of the sacrum.

Considering the totality of this evidence—namely, the perfect alignment of the features “being a bone,” “having fused vertebrae,” “position in the dorsal region,” “firmness,” and “association with intersection/cross shape” with the sacrum, and, conversely, the existence of an independent name for the coccyx in Arabic—the logical conclusion is that the word *ṣulb*, in its precise lexical usage, refers to the sacrum. This accurate identification not only resolves the historical ambiguity but, as will be shown later, plays a foundational role in understanding the verse correctly and in aligning it with modern scientific findings. Neglecting this precise meaning and settling for the metaphorical sense of “back” may well be one of the principal causes of exegetical errors throughout history.

3. Lexical and Conceptual Analysis of the Term *Tarā'ib*

After the detailed examination of the word *ṣulb* and the identification of its anatomical referent, the next step is to conduct a comprehensive study of the term *tarā'ib*, which appears alongside *ṣulb* in Qur'ān 86:7 and constitutes the main focus of ambiguity and disagreement among exegetes. Correct understanding of this word requires etymological analysis, an exploration of its multiple meanings in Arabic lexicons, and a critique of common exegetical approaches.

3-1. Semantic Range of the Root *t-r-b* and the Place of *tarā'ib*

To gain a deeper understanding of the term *tarā'ib*, one must first consider the root *t-r-b* and its derivatives in Arabic. Lexical sources indicate that the words derived from this root can be classified into four primary semantic domains. The first three domains are closely related to the concept of “dust” or “earth”:

1. Soil and its derivatives, such as *turāb* (“dust”), *turbah* and *tarbā'* (“earth, soil”), and compounds like *turbat al-insān* (“grave”).³
2. Poverty and need, associated with being “earthbound” or destitute, as in *matrabah* (“poverty”) and *tarib* (“poor”).⁴
3. Submissiveness and smoothness, which may refer to the pliancy and evenness of soil or the tameness of an animal, as in *tarbūt* for a docile camel or level ground (Zabīdī, 1407 AH, vol. 2: 64). Ibn Fāris in *Maqāyīs al-lughah* likewise notes that these three semantic domains likely derive from the core meaning of *turāb* (“dust”) (Ibn Fāris, 1399 AH, vol. 1: 347).

¹ Amir Ashraf Aryanpour, *German–Persian University Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Tehran: Tutia, 2004).

² Mo 'in, Muhammad. *Mo 'in Persian Dictionary*. Vol. 1. 1st ed. Tehran: Behzad, 2003.

³ Zabīdī, *Taj al- 'Arus min Jawahir al-Qamus*, p. 62

⁴ Ibid. p. 63

The fourth category, however—of particular relevance here—denotes the distinct concept of symmetry, pairing, and correspondence. Words such as *tirb* (“peer, counterpart”), *mutārabah* (“facing one another”), *tirāb* (“the base of a sheep’s foreleg,” so named for the symmetry of its two limbs), and *taribah* (“fingertip,” due to the symmetry of the fingers on both hands) all fall within this semantic field.¹ The term under discussion, *tarā’ib* (plural of *tarībah*), also belongs to this fourth category and inherently contains the foundational notion of “symmetry.” Nevertheless, the precise and exclusive referent of this term in its various usages—especially in Qur’ān 86:7—has been a matter of dispute and wide-ranging disagreement among exegetes and lexicographers.

3-2 *Tarā’ib* in Lexicons and Exegesis: Ambiguity, Multiplicity of Meanings, and the Core Concept of Symmetry

Unlike the relatively clearer case of *ṣulb*, the term *tarā’ib* is associated in the lexical and exegetical tradition with a broad range of meanings, reflecting historical ambiguity and the absence of consensus on a single, definitive interpretation. Lexicographers have listed numerous meanings. For example, Ibn Sīda records interpretations such as *mawādi’ al-qilādah min al-ṣadr* (“the place on the chest where a necklace rests”), *izām al-ṣadr* (“the bones of the chest”), *mā bayna al-tarqwatayn* (“the area between the two collarbones”), and *arba’ adlā’ min kull jānb min al-ṣadr* (“four ribs on each side of the chest”). Ibn Fāris also refers the term to the “chest” (*ṣadr*), highlighting the alignment of bones in that region.²

This apparent multiplicity of meanings, which at first glance might suggest mere polysemy, upon closer inspection may actually reflect an underlying conceptual unity. In other words, *tarā’ib* likely refers to a more general concept, namely symmetry, and the various listed meanings represent specific anatomical instances of this symmetry in the human body. Human anatomy includes numerous paired or symmetrical structures with respect to the sagittal plane (the imaginary plane dividing the body into left and right halves): clavicles, arms, legs, eyes, ribs, and other paired elements. It appears that *tarā’ib* denoted this structural feature of symmetry as manifested in different anatomical locations.

3-3. Anatomical Referents of *Tarā’ib* Based on Symmetry and Critique of the Traditional Approach (Limiting the Term to the Chest)

By adopting symmetry as the core semantic feature of *tarā’ib*, one can identify the anatomical structures to which classical Arabs might have applied this word. These include:

1. Clavicles: two symmetrical bones in the upper chest region.
2. (Upper) ribs of the thoracic cage: especially the first to fourth pairs, which lie parallel to the clavicles and exhibit clear bilateral symmetry.
3. Maxillae (upper jawbones between the eyes): paired bones joined along the sagittal axis,

¹ Zabidi, *Taj al-‘Arus min Jawahir al-Qamus*, p. 62-65.

² Ibn Fāris, *Mu’jam Maqayis al-Lughah*, vo:1; p. 347

displaying symmetry.

4. Pubic bones: paired structures of the pelvis that meet along the sagittal plane, forming another prominent symmetrical feature of the body.

Despite this wider semantic potential, most exegetes and translators have traditionally confined the meaning of *tarā'ib* in Qur'ān 86:7 to the second option—that is, the ribs, or more generally, the chest of a woman. This restricted and selective approach is rooted in several factors, which may be critically assessed as follows:

- Neglect of the precise meaning of *ṣulb*: As discussed earlier, the failure to understand *ṣulb* correctly as the sacrum, and instead reducing it to the generic “back,” prevented exegetes from seeking an appropriate counterpart to it. If *ṣulb* were rightly identified as the sacrum (in the posterior-inferior part of the body), the search for *tarā'ib* as a symmetrical, corresponding structure would naturally lead beyond the chest.
- Unsystematic use of pre-Islamic poetry: A key reason for restricting *tarā'ib* to the female chest is reliance on certain jāhilī poets, such as Imru' al-Qays, who used the term *tarā'ib* in describing women's physical beauty, particularly their chests adorned with jewelry. This tendency, characteristic of the Ibn 'Abbās school of exegesis¹, is open to critique on several grounds:
- *Overgeneralization of literary usage*: The employment of a word in a specific poetic context (e.g., the depiction of feminine beauty) does not necessarily exhaust its semantic range, nor justify its wholesale application to a precise Qur'ānic context, where rhetorical precision is paramount.
- *Neglect of other poetic evidence*: Pre-Islamic poetry also attests to the use of *tarā'ib* with reference to men or in other senses—for instance, in al-Mutalammis al-Ḍab'ī's verse describing blood flowing from the *tarā'ib* of a wounded man²—evidence largely ignored in traditional exegesis.
- *Unwarranted restriction to women*: Even if *tarā'ib* sometimes denoted the female chest in poetry, there is no compelling reason to confine its Qur'ānic meaning to women, especially since the verse in question speaks of “the human being” (*insān*) in general.

Therefore, the traditional exegetical limitation of *tarā'ib* to “the chest” stems from overlooking the broader semantic potential of the word (grounded in the notion of symmetry) and from external literary and cultural influences. Such an approach not only perpetuates historical ambiguity regarding the term but also—as will be demonstrated in the next section—leads to an apparent conflict between the verse and medical findings. This study thus proposes that by

¹ Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut (Damascus: al-Risalah Publishers, 2008). P. 258

² Mutalammis al-Dubay'i, *Diwan al-Shi'r*, ed. Hasan Kamil al-Sayrafi (Cairo: League of Arab States, 1970). P. 195

returning to the core meaning of symmetry and considering *ṣulb* as the sacrum, one can arrive at a more precise identification of *tarā'ib* within the verse's context.

4. Anatomical Correlation of *Tarā'ib*: The Pubic Bone as the Counterpart of *Ṣulb*

Following the extensive lexical analysis of *tarā'ib* and the emphasis on its core meaning of “symmetry,” and taking into account the previous conclusion that *ṣulb* refers to the sacrum, we can now turn with greater precision to identifying the anatomical referent of *tarā'ib* within the context of Qur'ān 86:7. This identification requires close attention to internal textual evidence (especially the function of the preposition *bayna* “between”) and consistency with the anatomical features of pelvic structures.

4-1. The Key Significance of the Word *Bayna*: Spatial Opposition and Alignment of *Ṣulb* and *Tarā'ib*

One of the most important keys to understanding the spatial relationship between *ṣulb* and *tarā'ib* in this verse is the preposition *bayna* in the phrase *min bayni al-ṣulb wa-l-tarā'ib* (“from between the *ṣulb* and the *tarā'ib*”). The usage of this preposition in Arabic, and particularly in this context, strongly indicates that the “gushing fluid” (*mā' dāfiq*) emerges from a space situated between two definite and opposing structures. This expression does not merely refer to a vague or indeterminate region, but rather implies a specific spatial opposition and alignment between *ṣulb* and *tarā'ib*. In other words, these two terms point to two structures that flank the site of origin of the fluid, most likely along an anterior–posterior or superior–inferior axis. This understanding of *bayna* makes the search for the anatomical referent of *tarā'ib* more precise, directing us toward a structure that stands in anatomical opposition to the sacrum (the referent of *ṣulb*).

4-2. The Pubic Bone: A Symmetrical Structure, opposed to the Sacrum, and Corresponding to *Tarā'ib*

Once *ṣulb* is established as the sacrum, which constitutes the posterior and basal element of the pelvic ring, the task is to identify a structure in the anterior (frontal) position, directly opposed to it, and consistent with the notion of symmetry inherent in *tarā'ib*. The pubic bone (also known as the pubis or pubic symphysis), which forms the anterior and inferior part of the pelvic ring and lies precisely opposite the sacrum, fulfills all these conditions:

- Spatial opposition to the sacrum: The pubic bone and the sacrum are the two principals, opposing components of the bony pelvis, which together bound the pelvic cavity from front and back.
- Symmetry: The pubic bone consists of two symmetrical rami (left and right branches) that unite at the midline anteriorly at the *pubic symphysis*. This symmetrical structure corresponds perfectly to the central semantic feature of *tarā'ib*.
- Consistency with the origin of seminal emission: From an anatomical and physiological perspective, the area where the process of seminal emission begins (including the prostate

gland, ejaculatory ducts, and the proximal urethra) is located precisely within this pelvic space—between the sacrum (*ṣulb*) posteriorly and the pubic bone (*tarā'ib*) anteriorly.

Thus, the pubic bone, by virtue of its anatomical location (opposed to the sacrum), structural property (symmetry), and alignment with the physiological site of seminal discharge, represents a highly consistent and logical referent for *tarā'ib*.

4-3. Re-reading Supporting Lexical and Exegetical Evidence in Light of the Anatomical Correlation

This new anatomical identification also resonates with certain lexical and exegetical opinions that, though relatively marginal in the tradition, acquire fresh coherence when revisited through the lens of this correlation:

- The view of Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim al-Hilālī: One significant report ascribed to him interprets *tarā'ib* as referring to “the area between the legs” (*bayna al-rijlayn*)¹. This description matches precisely the anatomical location of the pubic bone and pubic region, which indeed lie between the two lower limbs.
- The view of Sa'īd b. Jubayr: Another interpretation, which gains new clarity if *ṣulb* is understood as the sacrum, is his statement that *tarā'ib* refers to “the ribs that are below the *ṣulb*” (*al-aḍlā' allatī asfal al-ṣulb*).² If *ṣulb* were taken in its common exegetical sense (the entire spine), this interpretation would be obscure and problematic. But if *ṣulb* designates the sacrum, then “the ribs below the *ṣulb*” may be understood figuratively as a reference to the superior and inferior rami of the pubic bone. These branches may be likened to small ribs (especially in comparison to the thoracic ribs) and are positioned inferiorly (*asfal*) and in direct opposition to the sacrum (*ṣulb*). This re-reading resolves the ambiguity and aligns with the proposed anatomical correlation.

Although these lexical and exegetical testimonies may have been sidelined in earlier scholarship—due to limited anatomical knowledge or the predominance of other interpretations—they can today, in light of modern anatomy, serve as important corroborating evidence for identifying *tarā'ib* with the pubic bone.

Taking all these analyses together—namely:

1. the clear indication of *bayna* as denoting spatial opposition and alignment between *ṣulb* and *tarā'ib*;
2. the full anatomical correspondence of the pubic bone (anterior, opposed to the sacrum) and its structural property of symmetry with the semantic and contextual requirements of *tarā'ib*;

¹ as cited 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Mawardi, *Al-Nukat wa al-'Uyun*, ed. Sayyid ibn 'Abd al-Maqsud ibn 'Abd al-Rahim, vol. 6 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1992). P. 247

² Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, ed. 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Muhsin al-Turki, vol. 24, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dar Hajr, 2001 CE).p. 296

3. the match with the precise anatomical site of seminal emission in modern medicine; and
4. the support offered by certain early exegetical statements (Ḍaḥḥāk and Sa‘īd b. Jubayr, when reinterpreted in this framework)—the main argument of this study is that *tarā’ib* in Qur’ān 86:7 specifically denotes the pubic bone.

This identification not only resolves the longstanding ambiguity and divergent interpretations surrounding the word but also provides the key to demonstrating the full coherence of the verse with modern scientific knowledge. It further paves the way for more accurate translation of these terms: “sacrum” for *ṣulb* and “pubic bone” for *tarā’ib*. Such an understanding avoids the interpretive pitfalls of restricting *tarā’ib* to the “chest” and opens a new horizon for appreciating the scientific miraculousness of the Qur’ān in this passage.

5. Examining the Verse in Light of Medical Findings: Correlation, Clarification, and Resolution of Apparent Contradictions

Having undertaken a precise lexical study and identified the anatomical referents of *ṣulb* (the sacrum) and *tarā’ib* (the pubic bone), it is now time to examine verse 7 of Sūrat al-Ṭāriq in light of medical knowledge—both traditional and modern. This examination not only aids in evaluating the validity of competing interpretations but also demonstrates how a correct understanding of Qur’ānic terminology can resolve apparent contradictions and reveal the scientific precision of the Qur’ān.

A scientific evaluation of the exegeses of this verse requires familiarity with medical perspectives on the origin, maturation, and mode of discharge of semen (*mā’ dāfiq*). In this regard, there is a notable difference between the outlook of traditional medicine and the findings of modern medicine. Traditional medicine, largely influenced by the theories of ancient Greek physicians such as Hippocrates and Galen, and developed in the works of Islamic scholars like Avicenna, offered views that diverge significantly from today’s medical understanding. For example, Avicenna, in *al-Qānūn fī al-ṭibb* (The Canon of Medicine), quoting Hippocrates, held that much of the seminal substance originated in the brain, passed through vessels behind the ears, descended into the spinal cord, and was then directed via the kidneys toward the testes, where it accumulated¹. He also referred to the “seminal vessels” that carried the seed from the testes to the penis, and even suggested that ejaculation might in some cases result from pneumatic pressure within the penis². Although considered advanced for his era, these views differ greatly from our current knowledge of reproductive physiology.

By contrast, modern medicine—relying on advanced research tools and careful observation—provides a much more detailed account of semen production and discharge.

¹ Husayn ibn ‘Abd Allah Ibn Sina (Avicenna), *The Canon of Medicine (al-Qanun fi al-Tibb)*, trans. ‘Abd al-Rahman Sharafkandi, 9th ed. (Tehran: Soroush, 2008). Vol:5. P.221.

² Ibn Sina (Avicenna), *The Canon of Medicine (al-Qanun fi al-Tibb)*, Vol:5. P.222.

Modern findings establish that the primary site of sperm production is the seminiferous tubules within the testes. Each testis produces millions of sperm daily, which then mature and acquire motility in the epididymis. From there, sperm travel via the vas deferens to the prostate, where they mix with the secretions of the prostate gland and seminal vesicles (which supply nutrient-rich fluid vital for sperm survival and motility), forming semen. Ejaculation of the *mā' dāfiq* (gushing fluid) begins when nerve impulses from the spinal cord trigger coordinated contractions of the vas deferens, the prostate, and the pelvic floor muscles. These contractions propel semen into the ejaculatory ducts and then into the prostatic urethra, from where it is forcefully expelled

The key to understanding Qur'ān 86:7 lies in distinguishing between the site of production of the seminal components (sperm and glandular secretions) and the site of initiation of discharge and propulsion of semen. The verse explicitly states that a “gushing fluid” (*mā' dāfiq*) “emerges” (*yakhruj*) “from between the *ṣulb* and the *tarā'ib*.” The descriptor *dāfiq* (“gushing,” “forcefully expelled”) clearly refers to semen in the state of ejaculation, not to its earlier stages of formation within the testes or accessory glands. Thus, contrary to the common assumption of many exegetes—who often sought to match the verse with the site of semen *production* (whether based on traditional or modern medicine)—the verse, and especially the qualifier *dāfiq*, points instead to the locus where ejaculation begins and the semen is propelled outward. This distinction is crucial for resolving many misunderstandings and apparent contradictions. Significantly, as Fakhr al-Rāzī reports, even in his time certain critics and atheists claimed that this verse conflicted with medical knowledge (albeit incomplete)¹

This indicates that the challenge of properly understanding the verse—and the perception of contradiction—was not unique to the modern era of advanced medicine but has its roots in a failure to distinguish carefully between concepts and in superficial interpretations.

Now, with the precise identification of *ṣulb* as the sacrum and *tarā'ib* as the pubic bone, and with the verse understood as referring to the site of initiation of seminal discharge, a remarkable and exact correlation with modern medical findings emerges. Anatomy and physiology clearly show that the key structures involved in ejaculation—including the prostate gland, seminal vesicles, ejaculatory ducts, and the prostatic urethra (the site of semen accumulation and initiation of expulsion)—are located within the pelvic cavity, precisely between the sacrum (*ṣulb*) posteriorly and the pubic bone (*tarā'ib*) anteriorly. Accordingly, the Qur'ān's description of semen “emerging from between the *ṣulb* and the *tarā'ib*” is, when these terms are properly and anatomically understood, an accurate and flawless depiction of the initiation site of ejaculation. This reading not only avoids any conflict with the well-established findings of modern medicine but is fully consistent with them. Thus, the apparent contradiction—arising from traditional interpretations that equated *ṣulb* with the “back” and *tarā'ib* with the “chest”—

¹ Abu al-Futuh al-Razi, *Rawd al-Jinan wa Ruh al-Janan*, ed. Muhammad Ja'far Yahaqi and Muhammad Mahdi Nasih, vol. 20 (Tehran: Astan Quds Razavi, 1996). p. 131

is completely resolved, and the Qur'ān's remarkable precision in describing this physiological process is revealed.

6. Critique and Evaluation of Rival Interpretations: Methodological Challenges and the Need for Reassessment

The presentation of a lexical-anatomical interpretation of Qur'ān 86:7, as elaborated in the preceding sections, necessitates a careful critique of the rival exegetical approaches that have historically been advanced to explain this verse and, in particular, the terms *ṣulb* and *tarā'ib*. Such an evaluative inquiry not only exposes the weaknesses and shortcomings of those views but, inversely, highlights the validity and strength of the methodology and conclusions of the present study. A close analysis of earlier exegeses reveals a set of fundamental methodological errors, which will be examined and discussed in detail in the following section.

6-1. A Critical Reappraisal of Qur'anic Commentators' Views: From the Early Islamic Era to the Contemporary Period

A historical survey of the interpretations of verse 7 of *Sūrat al-Ṭāriq* reveals that this verse, from the earliest centuries of Islam, has been the subject of significant disagreement among exegetes, lexicographers, and even the Companions (*ṣaḥābah*) and Successors (*tābi'ūn*). As exegetical and theological debates grew more complex over time, these disagreements expanded, serving as evidence of the inherent semantic ambiguity of the verse's terminology for its earliest audience, and highlighting the challenges of attaining a precise understanding.

6-1-1. Views of First- and Second-Generation Exegetes (Companions and Successors): Two Primary Approaches and the Confusion over “*Tarā'ib*”

Among the exegetes of the early centuries, two principal approaches to the attribution of *ṣulb* and *tarā'ib* can be identified. The more widespread view, associated with figures such as Ibn 'Abbās, 'Ikrimah, Sa'īd b. Jubayr, al-Suddī, and one of the two opinions ascribed to Qatādah, held that *ṣulb* refers to the man, while *tarā'ib* refers to the woman (Ibn Kathīr, 1420 AH: 1984). In contrast, a less common approach—reported from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and another opinion of Qatādah—interpreted both terms as pertaining to the man¹.

While there was relatively little disagreement among these early commentators concerning the meaning of *ṣulb* (generally taken as the man's back or spine), the term *tarā'ib* generated a remarkable level of confusion and multiplicity of opinions. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH), in his comprehensive commentary, extensively discussed these divergent views, classifying them into six major categories; yet, upon closer inspection, they can be further distinguished into roughly ten separate interpretations². These include a wide range of meanings for *tarā'ib*: the place on a woman's chest where a necklace rests (Ibn 'Abbās); the chest itself (Sa'īd b. Jubayr); the space between a woman's breasts (Ibn 'Abbās and 'Ikrimah); the area between the shoulders and chest

¹ Mawardi, *Al-Nukat wa al-'Uyun*. p. 246.

² Tabarī, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, p. 296.

(Mujāhid); beneath the collarbones (Mujāhid); above the breasts (Sufyān); the hands, feet, and eyes of a man (Ibn 'Abbās and al-Ḍaḥḥāk); beneath a man's throat (*nahr*) (Qatādah); ribs situated below the *ṣulb* (Sa'īd b. Jubayr); and even “the essence of the heart” (Ma'mar b. Abī Ḥabīb al-Madanī). Al-Māwardī likewise transmitted similar opinions, adding others such as “four ribs on each side of the chest” (citing Ibn Jubayr and al-Zajjāj), while also highlighting al-Ḍaḥḥāk's view that *tarā'ib* refers to the hands, feet, and eyes¹. The sheer diversity of these interpretations among the earliest exegetes serves as compelling evidence that no single, fixed, or readily understood meaning of *tarā'ib* was available in that period. Even those closest to the era of revelation found the term challenging to interpret.

6-1-2. Views of Later Exegetes: Continuity of Tradition and Reformist Efforts

Exegetes of subsequent centuries can generally be divided into two broad groups: “traditionalists” and “reformists.” Traditionalist exegetes—which include the majority of early and many later commentators—typically limited themselves to repeating or choosing from among the earlier opinions of the first and second generations. The most common position among them was the well-known view that *ṣulb* refers to the man's back, and *tarā'ib* to the bones of a woman's chest. This interpretation is echoed in the works of numerous prominent exegetes from different Islamic centuries and schools, including al-Ṭabarī, Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Qurṭubī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭūsī, and even 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī in *al-Mizān* (who notes its widespread acceptance)² Alternative interpretations—such as *ṣulb* and *tarā'ib* meaning the back and chest in general without specifying gender, or identifying them as the neck and chest of the woman, or attributing both terms to the man—also had some supporters among this group. Yet the common thread running through these interpretations is their lack of independent, in-depth philological analysis, with most exegetes relying on transmitted reports, adopting the dominant view, or selecting one of the earlier opinions without rigorous critical evaluation.

By contrast, with the advancement of science—particularly in medicine and anatomy—and the increasing recognition of the inconsistencies between traditional interpretations and modern scientific findings, some reform-minded exegetes, especially in the modern era, sought to resolve the apparent conflict by offering new interpretations. While these efforts were often motivated by a sincere desire to defend the integrity of the Qur'an, many unfortunately resorted to unconventional, methodologically weak, or linguistically imprecise approaches, producing a range of divergent, sometimes contradictory, and occasionally far-fetched readings. The breadth and fragmentation of these attempts, as readily observed in modern exegetical sources, underscore the absence of a consensual or convincing solution. Notable reformist approaches include:

¹ Mawardi, *Al-Nukat wa al-'Uyun*. p. 247.

² Tabarī, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, p. 296.

- **Shifting the referent of the pronoun:** Interpreting the pronoun in *yakhruj* (“emerges”) as referring not to the *mā’ dāfiq* (“gushing fluid”) but to the “human being” (mentioned in the previous verse). This possibility, first raised by Ibn ‘Atiyyah in the 6th/12th century¹, has been revived in modern times by exegetes such as Makkī (1431 AH: 591) and Āyatullāh Ja‘far Subḥānī².
- **Broad metaphorical and figurative interpretations:** Interpreting *ṣulb* and *tarā’ib* as representing the entirety of the man’s and woman’s bodies;³ as a metonym for male and female semen⁴; or even as abstract notions such as hardness and softness⁵, or a metaphor for both man and woman.⁶
- **Attempts to align with embryonic stages or other organs:** Interpreting the verse in reference to the position of the spine and chest during embryonic development⁷; aligning it with organs such as the spinal cord or bones between the legs⁸; or even associating it with bone marrow as the origin of sperm⁹; or with the male kidneys and female breasts.¹⁰
- **Interpreting it as the whole front and back of the human body:** A view advanced by ‘Allāmah Shahrānī¹¹ and echoed¹²

This diversity and multiplicity among reformist interpretations underscores the pressing need for a critical reassessment of exegetical foundations and methodologies.

¹ ‘Abd al-Haqq ibn ‘Atiyyah, *Al-Muharrar al-Wajiz fi Tafsir al-Kitab al-‘Aziz*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salam ‘Abd al-Shafi Muhammad, vol. 5, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2001). p. 456.

² Advanced Jurisprudence Class, 24/8/93

³ Muhammad Makki Nasiri, *Al-Taysir fi Ahadith al-Tafsir*, vol. 6 (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1985). P. 408

⁴ ‘Ali ibn Ahmad al-Wahidi, *Al-Wajiz fi Tafsir al-Kitab al-‘Aziz*, ed. Safwan ‘Adnan Dawudi, vol. 2 (Damascus/Beirut: Dar al-Qalam / al-Dar al-Shamiyyah, 1994). P. 1192.

⁵ Sayyid Mahmoud Taleqani, *A Ray of the Qur’an (Partovi az Qur’an)*, vol. 3, 4th ed. (Tehran: Sherkat-e Sahami-ye Enteshar, 1983 CE). P. 331

⁶ Tantawi Jawhari, *Al-Jawahir fi Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Karim* (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi wa Awladuh, 1932 CE). P. 331

⁷ Ahmad Mustafa al-Maraghi, *Tafsir al-Maraghi*, vol. 30, 1st ed. (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi wa Awladuh, 1946). P. 113

⁸ Sayyid Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi, *Min Huda al-Qur’an*, vol. 18, 1st ed. (Tehran: Dar Muhibbi al-Husayn, 1998). P. 139

⁹ Sayyid ‘Adel Nader‘Ali, *Mutali‘ al-Anwar*, vol. 5, 1st ed. (Qom: Javanān-e Mowaffaq, 2013). P. 634

¹⁰ Sultan Muhammad al-Junabadhi (Gunabadi), *Bayan al-Sa‘adah fi Maqamat al-‘Ibadah*, vol. 4, 2nd ed. (Beirut: al-Mu‘assasah al-‘Alami li-l-Matbu‘at, 1988). P. 247.

¹¹ Muhammad ibn Murtada al-Kashani, *Tafsir al-Mu‘in*, ed. Husayn Dargahi, 1st ed. (Qom: Library of Ayatollah al-‘Uzma Mar‘ashi Najafi, n.d.). p. 212.

¹² Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Shirazi (Mulla Sadra), *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Karim (Sadra)*, ed. Muhammad Khwajavi, vol. 7 (Qom: Bidar, 1991 CE). p. 380

6-2. Methodological Pitfalls in Earlier Interpretations

The interpretations of verse 7 of *Sūrat al-Ṭāriq*—whether traditional or reformist—are beset with a series of methodological flaws and errors that significantly undermine their credibility. Identifying and analyzing these shortcomings paves the way for a more precise and well-substantiated exegesis. The most notable issues include the following:

- **Unsystematic and selective use of pre-Islamic poetry:**

Citing pre-Islamic poetry as a tool for understanding Qur'ānic vocabulary is a recognized principle, but it must be applied in a systematic and comprehensive manner. With respect to the term *tarā'ib*, many exegetes relied selectively on poems that used the word to describe the beauty of a woman's chest (such as the verses of Imru' al-Qays), and generalized this meaning to the Qur'ān. However, other poetic evidence—for instance, the poetry of al-Mutalammis al-Ḍub'ī¹, where *tarā'ib* is used in reference to a man—was either ignored or downplayed. Such selectivity resulted in partial and at times misleading interpretations of the term.

- **Influence of obsolete and unscientific medicine:**

Some exegetes, particularly in the early and medieval periods, were influenced by Greek humoral medicine and prevailing premodern ideas of reproductive physiology (e.g., the belief that semen originated in the brain or from residues of the “fourth digestion”). They sought to interpret the verse through such outdated frameworks (as seen in parts of the commentaries of al-Qurṭubī, al-Kūrānī, and al-Biqā'ī). With the advancement of medical science, these interpretations have lost all validity.

- **Excessive “scientific exegesis” (eisegesis) and imposition of new findings onto the text:**

In modern times, some have been overly eager to extract scientific findings from the Qur'ān, forcing interpretations that align with recent discoveries in embryology, anatomy, or physiology—even if such readings require ignoring the verse's surface meaning, relying on far-fetched metaphors, or adopting unwarranted allegorical readings. A clear example is interpreting the verse as referring to early embryonic stages near the spinal column², or to bone marrow as the original source of semen³. This approach imposes meaning upon the text rather than deriving it from the text.

- **Neglect of the principle of *aṣālat al-zuhūr* (primacy of apparent meaning):**

The verse explicitly states that the *mā' dāfiq* (“gushing fluid”) *emerges (yakhruj)* from “between the *ṣulb* and the *tarā'ib*.” The descriptor *dāfiq* (gushing, thrusting) clearly

¹ Dubay'ī, *Diwan al-Shi'r*. p. 195

² Ahmad Mustafa al-Maraghi, *Tafsir al-Maraghi*, vol. 30, 1st ed. (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi wa Awladuh, 1946). P. 113

³ Nader'Ali, *Mutali' al-Anwar*, p. 634

refers to semen at the moment of ejaculation, not earlier stages of formation. Any interpretation that departs from this clear surface meaning in favor of abstract notions, far-fetched figurative readings, or irrelevant stages of reproductive development requires strong and decisive evidence—evidence largely absent in these interpretations.

- **Unrestrained use of metaphor and metonymy without clear indicators:** Figurative language and metonymy are common in Arabic and the Qur’ān, but their application requires explicit contextual clues (linguistic or semantic) and a logical, intelligible link between the literal and figurative meanings. Many interpretations of *tarā’ib* invoke figurative readings (e.g., the grave’s soil, the whole woman, the reproductive organs, or abstract concepts) without sufficient evidence, making them more akin to forced justifications than reasoned exegesis.
- **Unwarranted and irregular reassignment of pronoun reference:** Some exegetes attempted to redirect the pronoun in *yakhruj* (“emerges”) away from *mā’ dāfiq* toward “the human being” (mentioned in the preceding verse). This not only contravenes standard rules of Arabic syntax—which dictate that a pronoun ordinarily refers to the nearest suitable antecedent¹—but also faces serious semantic and anatomical problems. This solution, strongly rejected by earlier exegetes such as Ibn Juzzī, has also failed in modern times to convincingly address the issue. For example, the notion of a fetus “emerging from between the chest and the back” (under the traditional reading of *ṣulb* and *tarā’ib*) is anatomically untenable. Even if *ṣulb* and *tarā’ib* were reinterpreted as pelvic bones, the core problem of their precise meaning would remain unresolved.
- **Coining new meanings for words while neglecting their historical-linguistic context:** The Qur’ān is a historical text, and its vocabulary must be understood within the linguistic and cultural context of its revelation. Attempts to assign new meanings foreign to the historical Arabic usage—such as the suggestion in *Qāmūs al-Qur’ān* that *tarā’ib* did not originally mean the chest bones but was later applied to them by analogy with “dust”²—contradict sound hermeneutical and exegetical methodology.
- **Reliance on weak exegetical reports or those conflicting with established science:** The use of transmitted reports in Qur’ānic exegesis—especially concerning natural phenomena—requires extreme caution. Many exegetical reports, particularly those in later sources or associated with sectarian extremes (*ghulāt*), suffer from weak chains of transmission or contain content at odds with firmly established scientific knowledge. In the case of this verse, reports sometimes invoked to support certain interpretations (such

¹ al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fi ‘Ulum al-Qur’an*. P.401

² Sayyid ‘Ali Akbar Qureshi, *Qamus al-Qur’an*, vol. 1, 6th ed. (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 1992). 272.

as those cited in *al-Tamhīd*)¹ frequently exhibit these deficiencies. A critical evaluation of both chains and content, coupled with the principle of prioritizing certain scientific knowledge over solitary speculative reports (*khabar wāḥid ḡannī*) in cases of conflict, is essential.

- **Lack of or insufficient attention to relevant auxiliary sciences:**

Accurate interpretation of verses dealing with natural phenomena requires familiarity with and integration of various disciplines, including *rijāl* (narrator criticism), *dirāyah* (hadith methodology), philology, history of medicine, both traditional and modern medicine, anatomy, and physiology. The absence of such interdisciplinary expertise—or inadequate attention to it—has led even major exegetes into interpretive errors, resulting in inaccurate or insufficient explanations of this verse.

6-3. Critique of Alternative Approaches to the Apparent Conflict between Science and Religion

Alongside exegetical efforts, two broader approaches have been proposed to resolve the apparent conflict between verse 7 of *Sūrat al-Ṭāriq* and scientific findings. Both, however, suffer from serious shortcomings:

- **Questioning scientific findings and presuming scientific fallibility:**

This approach, often advanced by those lacking a precise understanding of the methodology of the empirical sciences—particularly the certainty of some medical facts (such as the anatomical site of ejaculation)—attempts to undermine well-established, repeatedly verified findings by appealing to the inherent provisionality of empirical knowledge. Such a stance is not only unscientific and fallacious, but it also risks undermining the credibility of transmitted religious proofs (*adilla naqliyya*) in other domains by applying the same skeptical logic². Moreover, the instrumental and inconsistent use of science (accepting it when it aligns with scripture and rejecting it when it does not) is incompatible with rational and religious principles.

- **Absolute separation of the domains of science and religion (the “parallelism” thesis):**

According to this view, conflict between science and religion is deemed impossible, since each pertains to an entirely separate domain³. Yet this position falters when confronted with verses that explicitly describe observable, empirical phenomena—such as the verse under discussion. Ignoring or evading close analysis of such verses does not

¹ Muhammad Baqir Behbudi, *Ma'rifat al-Hadith*, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Elmi va Farhangi, 2010). P. 75- 90

² ‘Abd Allah Jawadi Amuli, *The Status of Reason in the Structure of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Ahmad Wa‘ezi, 6th ed. (Qom: Isra, 2012). P. 118.

³ Baha’ al-Din Khurramshahi, *The Holy Qur’an*, 3rd ed. (Tehran: Jami/Nilufar, 1997).p. 634.

provide a convincing resolution to the issue of apparent conflict, but rather amounts to sidestepping the problem altogether.

6-4. Critical Assessment of Reliance on Exegetical Reports Concerning the Verse

The use of transmitted reports (*riwāyāt*) in interpreting verse 7 of *Sūrat al-Ṭāriq* and related verses on human creation is fraught with both textual and isnād (chain of transmission) challenges. Within Shī‘ī hadith sources, multiple such reports are found, but closer scrutiny reveals the following issues:

- **Weakness of chains of transmission:**

Many of these reports—including two key narrations from Ibn Bābawayh’s *‘Ilal al-Sharāyi*¹—are compromised by the presence of weak, unknown, or disputed narrators in their isnād (e.g., Muḥammad b. Mūsā b. al-Mutawakkil, ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Sa‘dābādī, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī, Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī, and Dāwūd b. Qāsim al-Ja‘farī). Based on rigorous principles of *‘ilm al-rijāl* and *dirāyah*, such reports lack sufficient credibility².

- **Contradiction with established scientific knowledge (matn criticism):**

More significant than isnād weakness is the content of these reports, which in many instances stands in stark conflict with well-established findings in modern biological sciences (anatomy, physiology, embryology, and genetics). For example, one narration identifies the spinal cord as the origin of the *mā’ dāfiq* (“gushing fluid”)³, while another attributes a child’s resemblance to either parent to the agitation or tranquility of the heart and blood vessels during intercourse⁴. Such claims are scientifically untenable. According to hadith criticism principles, contradiction with certain scientific knowledge and sound reason nullifies the credibility of a report, even if its chain were hypothetically reliable, and precludes its attribution to an infallible Imam (peace be upon them).

Accordingly, reliance on such reports for interpreting verse 7 of *Sūrat al-Ṭāriq* and for resolving its apparent conflict with science is not only unhelpful, but may also prove detrimental: by presenting incorrect or unscientific claims in the name of religion, it risks diminishing the sanctity of the Imams (peace be upon them) and generating further doubts.

This critical review of earlier interpretations and alternative approaches demonstrates that most are beset with significant methodological deficiencies. This underscores the necessity of developing a fresh exegesis—one grounded in precise philological analysis, aligned with the

¹ Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar al-Baydawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta’wil*, ed. Muhammad Subhi ibn Hasan Hallaq and Mahmud Ahmad al-Atrash, vol. 3, 1st ed. (Damascus/Beirut: Dar al-Rashid / Mu’assasat al-Iman, 2001). P. 262.

² Muhammad Baqir Behbudi, *Ma’ani al-Qur’an*, 3rd ed. (Tehran: Sara, 2001). p. 251

³ Muhammad ibn ‘Ali Ibn Babawayh, *‘Ilal al-Sharāyi*, ed. Sayyid Muhammad Sadiq Bahr al-‘Ulum, vol. 1 (Najaf: al-Maktabah al-Haydariyyah, 1965). P. 562.

⁴ Ali Ibn Babawayh, *‘Ilal al-Sharāyi* p. 97

principles of historical linguistics, and consistent with reliable scientific findings. It is precisely such an approach that this article has endeavored, to the extent possible, to pursue.

Conclusion

The present study, primarily aimed at investigating the conceptual meanings of the terms şulb and tarā'ib in verse 7 of *Sūrat al-Ṭāriq* and examining their relation to medical knowledge, has yielded a set of interrelated and insightful findings. These results open new horizons for understanding this challenging verse and similar passages. They not only help to resolve longstanding debates over the meaning and implications of the verse but also highlight the importance of rigorous, interdisciplinary methodological approaches in Qur'anic exegesis, particularly concerning verses that address natural phenomena.

The foremost and foundational finding of this research is the accurate identification of the authentic meanings of şulb and tarā'ib within the linguistic framework of Classical Arabic at the time of revelation, based on both internal textual and external contextual evidence. Contrary to the common assumption among many commentators, translators, and lexicographers who have generally interpreted these terms as referring respectively to the back (spine) and the chest bones (especially in women) a comprehensive etymological, lexical, and conceptual analysis, combined with precise anatomical correlation, demonstrates that şulb specifically denotes the *sacrum* (a solid bone with fused vertebrae in the posterior pelvic region), while tarā'ib, derived from the semantic notion of symmetry and spatial opposition to şulb in the verse, refers to the *pubic bone*, a symmetrical structure in the anterior pelvis. This semantic clarification, grounded in linguistic reasoning and anatomical evidence, provides a key to the correct understanding of the verse and resolves long-standing exegetical ambiguities and disputes surrounding it.

The second major outcome of this research is the demonstration that, once the key terms are correctly understood, verse 7 of *Sūrat al-Ṭāriq* is fully compatible with established modern medical knowledge. When şulb is recognized as the sacrum and tarā'ib as the pubic bone and considering the verse's clear reference to the site of "emission and gushing" (*mā' dāfiq*) of semen it becomes evident that the Qur'anic description corresponds precisely to the anatomical region of the pelvic cavity, located between the sacrum posteriorly and the pubic bone anteriorly, where the principal structures responsible for ejaculation (e.g., the prostate and ejaculatory ducts) reside. Consequently, the alleged conflict between this verse and modern science does not stem from the Qur'an itself but from misreadings and interpretations shaped by the limited anatomical knowledge of earlier scholars, as well as methodological errors among exegetes and translators, which collectively produced the illusion of incompatibility.

A third significant implication of this study lies in its potential to reassess and refute certain theories and claims concerning this verse, and more broadly, the relationship between science and religion. By demonstrating the verse's consistency with scientific knowledge through the correct interpretation of its terminology, this verse can no longer serve as evidence of a conflict between science and the Qur'an, nor as support for hypotheses such as the human authorship of

revelation, the historical influence of contemporary scientific misconceptions on the Qur'an, or the notion of prophetic dreams. On the contrary, this verse—whose description is remarkably precise and anticipatory relative to the scientific understanding of its time—can be viewed as evidence of the Qur'an's linguistic and scientific inimitability (*i'jāz*). Furthermore, weak or scientifically untenable exegetical reports that were once employed to justify erroneous interpretations or to reconcile apparent discrepancies (e.g., certain narrations attributed to 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī and other early sources) lose their interpretive and evidentiary value once the correct scientific understanding of the verse is established. This underscores the need for rigorous textual and *isnād*-based scrutiny in exegetical analysis.

The fourth major finding underscores the necessity of adhering to sound methodological principles in Qur'anic exegesis, particularly when dealing with verses related to natural or scientific phenomena. The study demonstrates that:

- Lexical or exegetical consensus is not always definitive. Lexicography and tafsīr are inductive and interpretive disciplines; the prevalence of an opinion or apparent consensus does not guarantee its correctness. Occasionally, a less common or novel interpretation—if supported by strong linguistic or contextual evidence (e.g., al-Ḍahḥāk's interpretation of *tarā'ib* or a symmetry-based analysis)—may in fact be closer to the original meaning.
- Avoiding extreme scientific exegesis (*eisegesis*) is essential. The Qur'an is a guide to truth, not a compendium of empirical science. Efforts to extract modern scientific details from it, or to forcibly align its verses with scientific theories, risk producing subjective interpretations and distorting the spiritual integrity of the text. Concepts such as “Qur'anic medicine” or “Qur'anic nutrition,” when understood as attempts to derive empirical knowledge directly from revelation, lack a solid methodological foundation.
- Exegetical precision and intellectual caution are imperative. Commentators should refrain from weak justifications, uncritical recourse to metaphorical interpretation, and reliance on speculative scientific or linguistic claims. When definitive conclusions cannot be reached, acknowledging the limits of human understanding is preferable to proposing conjectural interpretations.
- Interdisciplinary expertise is indispensable. Deep comprehension of verses concerning natural or scientific realities requires not only linguistic and theological acumen but also knowledge of anatomy, physiology, medical history, historical linguistics, and the principles of *ḥadīth* criticism. Without such breadth of expertise, the risk of interpretive error increases substantially.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that applying a precise lexical and anatomical methodology—while avoiding common interpretive pitfalls and maintaining a scientifically informed yet textually faithful approach—can yield a deeper, more coherent, and more scientifically consistent understanding of the Qur'anic message. Such an approach not only

resolves long-standing exegetical challenges and answers historical objections but also enriches appreciation of the Qur'an's miraculous eloquence and enduring guidance. It is hoped that this research represents a modest step toward a more accurate comprehension of the Divine Word and a clearer revelation of its profound wisdom.

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