



Translating Diverse–Analogous Patterns in the Quran

– Moses' Staff as a case study –

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General Introduction

At first glance, the title of this research paper might seem contradictory. However, it exhaustively focuses upon variations found within linguistic and semantic similarities in the Quran, and how could they be translated. To illustrate, an example will be extracted from the Quran to measure how could synonymy exist in the source text often slow down the process of translation instead of facilitating it. In light of that, this paper will be examining three Quranic lexical units namely *Thu'bān*, *Ḥayya*, and *Ġān*. All of these lexical units –in various Quranic contexts– refer to the staff of Moses. In the beginning, they may seem to have analogous meanings but with inquiry, several semantic divergences come to the fore.

To be sure, many identical cases could easily be detected in the Quran. For instance, *Al-Qalb* and *Al-Fu'ād* (القلب والفؤاد), *Al-Ġayt* and *Al-Maṭar* (الغيث والمطر), *Samīn* and *Ḥanīd* (سمين وحنيد), etc. This analogous vocabulary constantly confuse



professional translators especially when they fail to encompass all the nuances and implications of classical Arabic.

Since this research paper is oriented towards the analysis of diverse–analogous Quranic vocabulary, it is preferable to place it in its scholarly context.

As stated in historical documents, the story of Moses had taken place during the Pharaonic reign of Egypt. Moreover, according to historical traces and records exist in Egypt currently, the supreme ruler of Pharaohs used to wear a headdress like a crown in which a head of a snake (Cobra) is engraved. It is called **Uraeus**¹. One might ask, what exactly is the symbolic representation of the snake in the headdress? To answer this relevant question, it must be clear that Uraeus represented the power given to pharaohs by the god². Such power, according to logic, endowed ancient Egyptian rulers with great divinity and granted them sacred religious, social, and political status.

Indeed, it is noteworthy that the story of Moses' staff that is repeatedly mentioned in the Quran and closely attached to Thubān, Ḥayya, and Ġān, is also cited in many occasions in the Bible. According to this latter, the staff had turned to be a living Snake³ or Serpent⁴. This exact animal had tied the staff to some sort of divinity according to common beliefs prevailing in that era. Likewise, its Quranic contextual description relatively relates. That is because the contexts where the staff appears in the Quran do fall in the same semantic field that will be carefully explained next in accordance with four Arabic language dictionaries and



four books of Tafsīr (Quran Exegesis). Afterwards, the findings will be compared with four English and four French translations for the sake of assessment.

✚ **NOTE:** All titles of Quranic Surahs and verses exist in this research paper are extracted from the English translation of the Quran by Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

I- Thubān, Ḥayya, and Ġān in Arabic Language Dictionaries

Before light is thrown on the definitions provided for the three lexical units under study in four prominent Arabic language dictionaries as a first phase of investigation, here I display the Quranic verses that contain them.

- ❖ 107 – فَأَلْقَىٰ عَصَاهُ فَإِذَا هِيَ ثُعْبَانٌ مُّبِينٌ - الأعراف - 107
- ❖ Then (Moses) threw his **rod**, and behold! It was a **serpent**, plain (for all to see) (107:7)
- ❖ 32 – فَأَلْقَىٰ عَصَاهُ فَإِذَا هِيَ ثُعْبَانٌ مُّبِينٌ - الشعراء - 32
- ❖ So (Moses) threw his **rod**, and behold! It was a **serpent**, plain (for all to see) (26:32)
- ❖ 20 – فَأَلْقَاهَا فَإِذَا هِيَ حَيَّةٌ تَسْعَىٰ - طه - 20
- ❖ He threw **it**, and behold! It was a **snake**, active in motion (20:20)
- ❖ 10 – وَأَلْقَىٰ عَصَاكَ فَلَمَّا رَءَاهَا تَهْتَزُّ كَأَنَّهَا جَانٌ (...) النمل - 10
- ❖ “Now do thou throw thy **rod!**” But when he saw it moving (of its own accord) as if it had been a **snake** (...) (27:10)
- ❖ 31 – وَأَنَّ أَلْقَىٰ عَصَاكَ فَلَمَّا رَءَاهَا تَهْتَزُّ كَأَنَّهَا جَانٌ (...) القصص - 31



- ❖ “Now do thou throw thy rod!” But when he saw it moving (of its own accord) as if it had been a **snake** (...) (28:31)

Now, we check their precise meanings and investigate any probable variations in terms of their semantic references. Below, dictionaries are chronologically ordered.

Number	Composer	Dictionary	Explanation / Characteristics	Translation
1	Al-Khalīl B. Ahmad Al-Farāhīdī (d. 170 AH ⁵ / 786 CE ⁶)	<u>Al-‘Ain</u>	1- الثعبان: الحية الطويل الضخم ⁷ 2- الحية: لم يدرج أي تعريف. 3- الجان: حية بيضاء ⁸	1- Thu‘bān : the long giant Ḥayya. 2- Ḥayya : the word is not included in the dictionary. 3- Ġān : a white Ḥayya
2	Ibn Sidah (d. 458 AH / 1066 CE)	<u>Al-Muḥkam wa-l-Muḥīt al- A’zām</u>	1- الثعبان: الحية الضخم الطويل الذكر خاصة. وقيل كل حية ثعبان. (...). فإن قال قائل: كيف جاء (فإذا هي ثعبان مبین) وفي موضع آخر (تهتز كأنها جان) والجان: الصغير من الحيات فالجواب في ذلك أن خلقها خلق الثعبان العظيم واهتزازها وحركتها وخفتها كاهتزاز الجان وخفته ⁹	1- Thu‘bān : the big long male Ḥayya. It was said that every Ḥayya is a Thu‘bān . (...) if somebody asks “why” in certain contexts it (the staff of Moses) is described as Thu‘bān and other times as Ġān (the small Ḥayya)? The answer to that is the staff looked



			<p>2- الحَيَّةُ : الحنش المعروف. اشتقاقه من الحَيَاة في قول بعضهم¹⁰.</p> <p>3- الجَانُّ : ضرب من الحَيَّات أكحل العينين يضرب إلى الصُّفْرَةَ لَأ يُؤْذِي. وهو في بيوت الناس¹¹.</p>	<p>like Thu'bān in terms of form, but it moved as swift as a Ġān</p> <p>2- Ḥayya: the known snake. The word is derived from “life”, say some linguists.</p> <p>3- Ġān: a type of snake with black eyes and yellowish (slight yellow) skin. It is harmless. It could be found in people's houses.</p>
3	Murtaḍa Al-Zabīdī (d. 1205 AH /1790 CE)	<p><u>Tāj Al-‘Arūs</u> <u>Min Jawāhir</u> <u>Al-Qamūs</u></p>	<p>1- الثُّعْبَانُ : الحية الضخمة الطويلة تصيد الفأر (...) أو هو الذكر الأصفر الأشقر (...) سواء فيه الإناث والذكور. (...) وقيل: كل حَيَّةٌ تُعْبَانُ¹²</p> <p>2- الحية: معروفة. (...) يكون للذكر والأنثى (...) واشتقاقه من الحَيَاة في قول بعضهم¹³</p>	<p>1- Thu'bān: The giant long Ḥayya that catches mice (...) or the word could refer to the yellowish male (...) it is applicable to males and females. (...) it was said that every Ḥayya is <u>Thu'bān</u>.</p> <p>2- Ḥayya: known. (...) it refers to the male and the female. (...) The word is derived</p>



			<p>3- الجان: {كأنها جان}. قال الليث: (حية) بيضاء. (...). ضرب من الحيات (أكحل العين) يضرب إلى الصفرة (لا تؤذي)، وهي (كثيرة في الدور)¹⁴</p>	<p>from “life”, say some linguists. 3- Ġān: the word as in the Quranic verse refers to a white Ḥayya according to Al-Layth Ibn Sa’d. (...) a type of snake (with black eyes) that has yellowish (slight yellow) skin (it is harmless). It could usually be found in people’s houses.</p>
4	AL-Maany (online dictionary)	(The Official Website)	<p>1- الثعبان: (يطلق على الذكر والأنثى) حيوان من الزواحف من فصيلة الثعبانيات ممتد الجسم أملس، ويطلق على الحية العظيمة الضخمة¹⁵</p> <p>2- الحية: رتبة من الزواحف منها أنواع كثيرة كالثعبان والأفعى والصل وغيرها¹⁶</p> <p>3- الجان: الجن خلاف الإنس - الجان ضرب من الحيات، أكحل</p>	<p>1- Thu'bān: (the word refers to the male and the female). It is a type of reptiles (Ophidia) with long sleek body. The word refers to the giant Ḥayya. 2- Ḥayya: a class of reptiles that include many categories like <i>Thu'bān</i>, <i>'Afā</i>, <i>Ṣil</i> and others. 3- Ġān: <i>Jinn</i> (unlike humans) – Or, the</p>



			<p>العينين يضرب إلى الصفرة، لا يؤذي¹⁷</p>	<p>word could refer to a type of harmless snake with black eyes and yellowish (slight yellow) skin.</p>
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General Summary:

Based on the definitions provided in the dictionaries above, one can deduce that the word Ḥayya is more general if compared to Thu'bān and Ḡān in classical Arabic language. In addition, Al-Zabīdī in his book Tāj Al-'Arūs affirms that Ḥayya is a name that refers to both males and females. Furthermore, according to Ibn Sidah and Al-Zabīdī the word Ḥayya could be derived from “*Al-Ḥayāʾ*” which means “life”. On the other hand, Thu'bān is a name of a specific Ḥayya. It refers to the long and giant male specifically. In parallel, Ḡān refers to the small harmless category of snake though “Ḡān” probably has another different reference, which is *Jinn*¹⁸.

II- Thu'bān, Ḥayya, and Ḡān in Books of Tafsīr (Quran Exegesis)

In the following, this paper resorts to four books of Tafsīr in order to contextualize and designate the proper connotation(s) of the three lexical units within all Quranic verses where they appear. Like lexicographers just reviewed, the list of specialists in Tafsīr (Quran commentators) hereunder is chronologically classified.



2.1 Tafsīr Muqātil by Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān (D. 150 AH – 767 CE)

ثعبان / Thubān

Surah/Verse	Tafsīr (exegesis)	Reference(s)	Translation
<u>Al A'rāf</u> (The Heights) Verse – 107	فإذا هي ثعبان مبین، يعني حية بينة ¹⁹	حية بينة	A clear <u>Ḥayya</u> (to see)
<u>Al Shu'arā'</u> (The Poets) Verse 32	يعنى حية ذكر أصفر أشعر العنق عظيم ملاً الدار عظما ²⁰ (...)	حية ذكر أصفر أشعر العنق عظيم	A giant yellow male <u>Ḥayya</u> with a hairy neck

حية / Ḥayya

<u>Tā Hā</u> Verse 20	(تسعى... على بطنها ذكراً أشعر، له عرف ²¹)	ذكر أشعر، له عرف	A hairy male (<u>Ḥayya</u>) with a crest on the head
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جان / Ğān

<u>Al Naml</u> (The Ants – 10)	كأنها كانت حية ²²	كأنها حية	Like <u>Ḥayya</u>
<u>Al Qaṣaṣ</u> (The Narrations – 31)	كأنها حية (...) يعني شيطان ²³	1- حية 2- شيطان	1- Like <u>Ḥayya</u> 2- <u>Satan</u>

2.2 Tafsīr Al-Tabari by Al-Tabari (D. 310 AH – 923 CE)

ثعبان / Thubān

Surah/Verse	Tafsīr (exegesis)	Reference(s)	Translation
<u>Al A'rāf</u> (The Heights) Verse – 107	(...) تتبين لمن يراها أنها حية (...) تحوّلت حية عظيمة (...) الثعبان :الذكر من الحيات ²⁴	1- الحية العظيمة 2- الذكر من الحيات	1- The giant <u>Ḥayya</u> 2- The male <u>Ḥayya</u>



Al Shu'arā' (The Poets) Verse 32	الحية الذكر (...) يبين لفرعون والملا من قومه أنه ثعبان (...) مبين له خلق حية ²⁵	1- الحية الذكر 2- حية	1- The male <u>Ḥayya</u> 2- <u>Ḥayya</u>
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حياة / Ḥayya

Tā Hā Verse 20	فجعلها الله حية تسعى، وكانت قبل ذلك خشبة يابسة ²⁶	فجعلها الله حية تسعى، وكانت قبل ذلك خشبة يابسة	Allah has transformed it into a moving (crawling) <u>Ḥayya</u> (that turned alive) after it was a dry wooden staff
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جان / Ġān

Al Naml (The Ants) Verse 10	كأنها حية عظيمة، والجانّ جنس من الحيات معروف ²⁷	1- كأنها حية عظيمة 2- جنس من الحيات معروف	1- Like a giant <u>Ḥayya</u> 2- A known type of <u>Ḥayya</u>
Al Qaṣaṣ (The Narrations - 31)	واحد الجانّ، وهي: والجانّ نوع معروف من أنواع الحيات، وهي منها عظام ²⁸	نوع معروف من أنواع الحيات	A known type of <u>Ḥayya</u> (may include giant ones)

2.3 Mafāṭiḥ Al-Ghayb (At-Tafsīr Al-Kabīr) by Fakhr Ad-dīn Ar-rāzi

(D. 606 AH- 1209/1210 CE):

ثعبان / Thubān

Surah/Verse	Tafsīr (exegesis)	Reference(s)	Translation
Al A'rāf (The Heights) Verse – 107	والثعبان الحية الضخمة الذكر في قول جميع أهل اللغة ²⁹	الحية الضخمة الذكر	The giant male <u>Ḥayya</u>



<p>Al Shu'arā' (The Poets) Verse 32</p>	<p>والمراد أنه تبين للناظرين أنه ثعبان بحركاته وبسائر العلامات، (...) أما الحية فهي اسم الجنس ثم إنهما لكبرها صارت ثعبانا، وشبهها بالجان لخفتها وسرعتها (...) ويحتمل أنه شبهها بالشيطان³⁰</p>	<p>الحية الكبيرة السريعة كالجان (أو كالشيطان)</p>	<p>The huge <u>Ḥayya</u> that moves as swift as <u>Ġān</u> (the small fast snake) or as <u>Jinn</u> (Satan)</p>
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حية / Ḥayya

<p>Tā Hā Verse 20</p>	<p>(...) قلب العصا حية مزيدا في الكرامة (...) أما الحية فاسم جنس يقع على الذكر والأنثى والصغير والكبير، وأما الثعبان والجان فبينهما تناف لأن الثعبان العظيم من الحيات والجان الدقيق وفيه وجهان: أحدهما: أنها كانت وقت انقلابها حية صغيرة دقيقة ثم تورمت وتزايد جرمها حتى صارت ثعبانا فأريد بالجان أول حالها وبالثعبان مآلها. والثاني: أنها كانت في شخص الثعبان وسرعة حركة الجان، والدليل عليه قوله تعالى: { فلما رآها تهمتز كأنها جان (...) }³¹</p>	<p>1- حية وهو اسم جنس يقع على الذكر والأنثى والصغير والكبير 2- حية كانت في شخص الثعبان وسرعة حركة الجان</p>	<p>1- <u>Ḥayya</u> is a name of clade (Ophidia). It refers to the male, the female, the small, and the big. 2- In form, it looked like a <u>Ḥayya</u>. In motion, it moved as swift as <u>Ġān</u> (1-the fast small snake or 2- <i>Jinn</i>)</p>
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جان / Ġān



Al Naml (The Ants) Verse 10	الجان الحية الصغيرة، سميت جانا، لأنها تستتر عن الناس ³²	الحية الصغيرة، التي تستتر عن الناس	The small snake that hides away from people
Al Qaṣaṣ (The Narrations - 31)	(...) صريح في أنه تعالى شبهها بالجان ولم يقل إنه في نفسه جان، فلا يكون هذا مناقضا لكونه ثعبانا بل شبهها بالجان من حيث الاهتزاز والحركة لا من حيث المقدار (...) ³³	كالجان من حيث الاهتزاز والحركة	(like) Ġān (1-the fast small snake or 2- <i>Jinn</i>) in terms of movement

2.4 Tafsīr Ibn Kathir by Ibn Kathir (D. 774 AH – 1373 CE)

ثعبان / Thu'bān

Surah/Verse	Tafsīr (exegesis)	Reference(s)	Translation
Al A'rāf (The Heights) Verse – 107	الحية الذكر (...) والثعبان: الذكر من الحيات ³⁴	الحية الذكر	The male Ḥayya
Al Shu'arā' (The Poets) Verse 32	(ثعبان) ظاهر واضح في غاية الجلاء والوضوح والعظمة ³⁵	ثعبان عظيم	The giant Thu'bān (the male Ḥayya as explained above)

حية / Ḥayya

Tā Hā Verse 20	(...) صارت في الحال حية عظيمة، ثعباناً طويلاً يتحرك حركة سريعة، فإذا هي تتهتز كأنها جان، وهو أسرع الحيات حركة، ولكنه صغير، فهذه في غاية الكبر، وفي غاية سرعة الحركة، {تَسْعَى {أي: تمشي وتضطرب (...) ولم تكن قبل ذلك حية	1- حية عظيمة 2- ثعبان طويل يتحرك حركة سريعة 3- (عصا/حية) تتهتز كالجان وهو أسرع الحيات حركة ولم تكن قبل ذلك حية	1- The giant Ḥayya 2- The long Thu'bān that moves (crawls) very fast 3- It moves like Ġān , which is a
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	(...) ثم حانت نظرة فإذا بأعظم ثعبان نظر إليه الناظرون ³⁶		small snake but the fastest. Before, It was not Ḥayya (alive)
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جان / Ğān

Al Naml (The Ants) Verse 10	(...) انقلبت في الحال حَيَّةً عظيمة هائلة في غاية الكبر، وسرعة الحركة مع ذلك (...) والجان: ضرب من الحيات، أسرعه حركة، وأكثره اضطراباً ³⁷	حية عظيمة لكنها كالجان في سرعة الحركة	A giant <u>Ḥayya</u> that moves like <u>Ğān</u> which is a small snake but the fastest
Al Qaṣaṣ (The Narrations - 31)	{ كَانَتْهَا جَانٌ } أي : في حركتها السريعة مع عظم خَلْقِ قَوَائِمِهَا ³⁸	كأنها جان في الحركة السريعة	like <u>Ğān</u> (1-the fast small snake or 2- <i>Jinn</i>) in terms of movement

General Summary:

After explaining the three lexical units within their Quranic contexts in which they appear, we notice a quite agreement among Quran commentators concerning their references despite variations. On this basis, we can confirm that all of them have referred Thu'bān to the giant male Ḥayya but with slight variations concerning its description. For instance, having a hairy neck, it is yellow in color (check Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān), and it is as swift as Ğān (the small fast snake or as Jinn (Satan)) (check Ar-rāzi).



As for **Ḥayya**, we can notice constant variations too in terms of the descriptions provided in reference books by Quran commentators consulted. For example, Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān stresses that Ḥayya is a hairy male (snake) with a crest on its head. Al-Tabari emphasizes that it came to life and after it had been but a dry wooden staff. Ar-rāzi says that Ḥayya is a name of clade (or class) since it could refer to the male, the female, the big, and the small. However, the staff looked like Ḥayya in form, but in motion, it moved as swift as Ḡān (1-the fast small snake or 2- *Jinn*). Alongside, Ibn Kathir adds that it is a giant long Thu'bān that moves very swiftly after it turned to be *alive*.

With respect to **Ḡān**, Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān contextualizes the lexical unit as Ḥayya or *Satan* with regard to its motion, whereas Al-Tabari adds that it is giant and known. Conversely, Ar-rāzi states that it is a small snake that hides away from people but it is very fast. Probably like *Jinn* in terms of speed of motion. On the other hand, Ibn Kathir affirms that the reference is to a giant Ḥayya. However, it is similar to **Ḡān** (1-the fast small snake or 2- *Jinn*) in terms of its movement.

III- Translations

3.1 English Translations

Lexical Unit	Translator and Equivalent					
----- -	Arthur Arberry	John	King Complex The Printing Of	Fahd For	Muhammad A. S. Abdel Haleem	Abdullah Yusuf Ali



		The Holy Qur'ân		
Thu'bân	Serpent ³⁹ (7 :107)	Serpent ⁴¹ (7:107)	Snake ⁴³ (7:107)	Serpent ⁴⁵ (7:107)
	Serpent ⁴⁰ (26 :32)	Serpent ⁴² (26 :32)	Snake ⁴⁴ (26 :32)	Serpent ⁴⁶ (26 :32)
Ḥayya	Serpent ⁴⁷ (20:20)	Snake ⁴⁸ (20:20)	Snake ⁴⁹ (20:20)	Snake ⁵⁰ (20:20)
(like) Ġān	(like) Serpent ⁵¹ (27:10)	(as if it were) Snake ⁵³ (27:10)	(Like) Snake ⁵⁵ (27:10)	(as if it had been) Snake ⁵⁷ (27:10)
	(like) Serpent ⁵² (28:31)	(as if it were) Snake ⁵⁴ (28:31)	(Like) Snake ⁵⁶ (28:31)	(as if it had been) Snake ⁵⁸ (28:31)

3.2 French Translations

Le mot	Traducteur/Traductrice et Equivalents			
-----	Régis Blachère	Denise Masson	André Chouraqui	Jacques Berque
Thu'bân	Dragon ⁵⁹ (7 :107)	Dragon ⁶¹ (7 :107)	Dragon ⁶³ (7 :107)	Serpent ⁶⁵ (7:107)
	Dragon ⁶⁰ (26:32)	Dragon ⁶² (26:32)	Serpent ⁶⁴ (26:32)	Serpent ⁶⁶ (26:32)
Ḥayya	Serpent ⁶⁷ (20:20)	Serpent ⁶⁸ (20:20)	Serpent ⁶⁹ (20:20)	Vipère ⁷⁰ (20:20)



Ġān	(comme des) Djinns ⁷¹ (27:10) -----	(comme des) Djinns ⁷³ (27:10) -----	(tel des) Djinns ⁷⁵ (27:10) -----	(comme un) Aspic ⁷⁷ (27:10) -----
	(comme des) Djinns ⁷² (28:31)	(comme des) Djinns ⁷⁴ (28:31)	(comme un) Djinn ⁷⁶ (28:31)	(comme un) Serpent ⁷⁸ (28:31)

VI- Comparisons and General Conclusion

4.1 Comparisons

4.1.1 English Translations:

Vividly, all English translators have used either “Serpent” or “Snake” to refer to the three Quranic lexical units under investigation, *Thuḃān*, *Ḥayya*, and *Ġān*. To elucidate the two “equivalents” provided in the English translations, we will look them up in English language dictionaries to check the “presumed” compatibility. Therefore, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary: a serpent means “a- (archaic) a noxious creature that creeps, hisses, or stings. b- Snake. It can also mean, Devil”⁷⁹. A snake, on the other hand, refers to “any of numerous limbless scaled reptiles (suborder Serpentes synonym Ophidia) with a long tapering body and with salivary glands often modified to produce venom which is injected through grooved or tubular fangs”⁸⁰

Britannica, the online encyclopedia, defines the serpent as “a usually large snake”⁸¹, whilst the snake is “an animal that has a long, thin body and no arms or legs”⁸².



In Oxford, the online dictionary, a serpent is “a large snake; a dragon or other mythical snake-like reptile. The word is recorded from Middle English, and comes via Old French from Latin serpent- ‘creeping’. In proverbial and allusive reference, a serpent is taken as the type of cunning, treachery, and malignancy. The figure of a serpent with its tail in its mouth is a symbol of eternity. In the Bible, the Serpent is a special designation of Satan, as in Genesis 3:1 (...)”⁸³. Whereas a snake is “a reptile with a very long thin body and no legs. There are many types of snakes, some of which are poisonous”⁸⁴

4.1.2 French Translations:

As for the French translators, we notice variations concerning the equivalents provided for the three Quranic lexical units under scrutiny. In fact, to compensate the meaning of Thu'bān translators have used the French words “dragon” and “serpent”. “Serpent” and “vipère” to compensate Ḥayya. Lastly, “djinn”, “serpent”, and “aspic” to convey the semantic connotation of Ġān.

To explain the French “equivalents” proposed, we –likewise– will look them up in prominent credible French language dictionaries (Larousse and Le Robert) to check their definitions with the intention to assess their compatibility with the source text.

On this ground and according to Larousse:

“Dragon” is “*Animal légendaire représenté généralement sous un aspect effrayant, avec des griffes, des ailes et une queue de serpent*”⁸⁵ (Translation:



Legendary animal usually represented in a frightening form, with claws, wings, and a serpent's tail). Almost the same definition is provided in Le Robert⁸⁶.

Larousse states that a “Serpent” is “*Reptile sans pattes, au corps allongé, se déplaçant par ondulations latérales du corps. (Les serpents constituent le sous-ordre des ophidiens, de l'ordre des squamates)*”⁸⁷ (Translation: "a legless reptile with an elongated body, and it moves by lateral undulations of the body. (Serpents belong to the suborder of ophidians, within the order of Squamata)). Le Robert adds that there is a symbolic/religious representation of this animal since it represents the evil spirit in the Bible – Genesis, “*l'esprit du mal, dans la Bible (Genèse)*”⁸⁸

“Vipère” according to Larousse is “*Serpent venimeux soléno-glyphe, vivipare (vipéridé) des régions chaudes et tempérées froides de l'Ancien Monde.*”⁸⁹ (Translation: "Venomous, viviparous solenoglyphous snake (viperid) found in warm and cool regions of the Old World”). Le Robert adds that it has two venomous fangs or hooks and lives in bushy areas⁹⁰.

“Djinn”, cites Larousse “*Dans les croyances musulmanes, génie ou démon, généralement hostile à l'homme. (Les djinns jouent un grand rôle dans le folklore.)*”⁹¹ (Translation : "In Islamic beliefs, a genie or demon, typically hostile to humans. (Djinns play a significant role in the (Muslim) folklore). Le Robert does not provide any further details⁹²

Larousse defines “Aspic” as “*Vipère de France et d'Italie, au museau retroussé et à la tête triangulaire*”⁹³ (Translation: "A viper found in France and Italy, with an



upturned snout and a triangular head”). Le Robert states that *Aspic* could be considered a synonym of *viper*. (*Vipère*⁹⁴)

General Summary:

As we have thoroughly examined the three lexical units (in dictionaries and books of *Tafsīr*) that represent the core of this paper, along with their English and French equivalents provided by translators, we could now deduce that the word “Snake” would represent a general equivalent that would compensate *Ḥayya*. However, it practically does not comply with the connotative references of the French words “*Vipère*” and “*Aspic*” that could be considered as subcategories of snakes. “*Serpent*”, though, would perfectly fit into Quranic contexts where the reference is to a huge/giant type of snakes regardless of its sex (i.e. being a male or a female)! “Though the word *serpent* is often interchangeably used with the word *snake*, it is most of the time used to indicate a large snake that threatens the humans”⁹⁵. As for the French word “*Djinn(s)*” (*Jinn*) suggested as an equivalent for the Quranic lexical unit “*Ĝān*” in many French translations (27:10/28:31), we have to take note first that the context where *Ĝān* appears in the Quran is slight different from the contexts where *Thu'bān* and *Ḥayya* are mentioned. That is because its context is describing Moses’ staff that moved “as” *Ĝān* through simile (the small fast snake – or *Jinn*. Check definitions provided for it in dictionaries and its contextualized references in books of *Tafsīr*). As a result, we could deduce that such an equivalent does not contradict the source text.



To sum up, we can now safely declare that “Serpent” would represent a fair equivalent to “Thu’bān” since they definitely share many characteristics like being a “lager” snake, a “dragon-like” snake, or probably a “devil-like” snake (check Ar-rāzi, Oxford the online dictionary, and Le Robert consulted earlier). “Snake” would represent a general equivalent with no specifics (Ḥayya). Lastly, the French equivalent “Djinn(s)” (Jinn) suggested to compensate the Quranic lexical unit Ğān would be justifiably acceptable.

In light of the aforementioned data and findings, we have arrived at the subsequent objective assessment concerning the translations:

English Translations:

- Arthur John Arberry has not made any effort to clarify variations exist among the various Quranic contexts where lexical units Thu’bān, Ḥayya, and Ğān are mentioned. The translator uses “Serpent” as a sole “equivalent/counterpart” in all contexts, which could eventually be considered as an inadequate translation, or at least a translation of a low quality.
- King Fahd Complex For The Printing Of The Holy Qur’ān provides a quite adequate translation since it has rendered Thu’bān to “serpent” whereas it has used “snake” to compensate both Ḥayya, and Ğān. (Reasonably acceptable translation).
- Muhammad A. S. Abdel Haleem uses the word “snake” in all Quranic contexts referring to Thu’bān, Ḥayya, and Ğān. (A translation of a low quality).



- Abdullah Yusuf Ali suggests a similar translation to King Fahd Complex as he chooses “serpent” to be an equivalent to Thu'bān, and “snake” to compensate both Ḥayya, and Ğān. (Reasonably acceptable).

French Translations:

- Régis Blachère uses “Dragon” to compensate the lexical unit Thu'bān. In fact, such an equivalent gives a metaphorical meaning to a clear-cut Quranic verse by inserting a “mythical” creature instead of using a simple word like “Serpent” instead. As for Ḥayya, the translator uses “Serpent” now, and for Ğān he uses “Djinn(s)” preserving the same simile. In these two latter contexts, the translator has been successful whilst the former context is questionable. (Partly acceptable translation).
- Denise Masson offers exactly the same translation as Régis Blachère. (Partly acceptable translation).
- André Chouraqui, factually, is not consistent in his translation concerning the equivalents he suggests for Thu'bān. In the Quranic verse (7:107), he uses “Dragon”, whereas in the Quranic verse (26:32), he uses the French word “Serpent”. Consequently, such inconsistency evidently undermines the quality of his translation. With regard to Ḥayya and Ğān, Chouraqui provides exactly the same translation as his counterparts, Régis Blachère and Denise Masson (“Serpent” for Ḥayya, and “Djinn(s)” for Ğān preserving the same simile). (Slightly acceptable translation).



➤ Jacques Berque, indeed, expands the circle of references (equivalents) he offers. Though Berque is persistent when translating Thu'bān as “Serpent” adequately, he subsequently starts to oscillate between different subcategories of snakes (Vipère, Aspic) in other contexts. This inconsistency assuredly has led to a higher risk of confusion for the readers of the target text. (A translation of low quality)

4.2 General Conclusion

As this research paper reaches this last phase, I can safely admit that it has endeavored to provide a general overview of the translation challenges of Quranic analogies and their implications. To achieve that, I have investigated the broader impact of translating similar Quranic vocabulary, but still diverse. We have come to witness how the translations (English and French) –in truth– fluctuate between different equivalents/counterparts. In other words, we have detected translators who got confused as they have started giving names of various subcategories of snakes (Vipère and Aspic as it is the case of Jacques Berque for instance) in various Quranic contexts assuming they compensate the meanings of Thu'bān, Hayya, and Ĝān. These latter lexical units, I suggest, could simply be managed as “a giant serpent (for Thu'bān) that turned alive (crawling like a snake) (for Hayya), and moved as a swift as Jinn (for Ĝān)”, respectively.



Notes de fin:

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/animal/cobra-snake> accessed on 22/10/2023

² <https://egyptian-history.com/blogs/egyptian-symbols/uraeus-wadjet> accessed on 22/10/2023

³ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus%207&version=ISV> accessed on 21/10/2023

⁴ The Holy Bible. Book of Exodus. Chapter 4. Verse 3. P. 70. Translated from Latin vulgate – diligently compared with Hebrew, Greek and other editions in divers languages – Douay-rheims version – 1609, 1582.

⁵ AH : Anno Hegirae (Hijri year)

⁶ CE: Current Era

⁷ <http://arabiclexicon.hawramani.com/?p=350&book=5#4b554c> accessed on 07/10/2023

⁸ <http://arabiclexicon.hawramani.com/?p=10575&book=5#56fdaa> accessed on 07/10/2023

⁹ <http://arabiclexicon.hawramani.com/?p=6635&book=10#0f30ee> accessed on 06/10/2023

¹⁰ <http://arabiclexicon.hawramani.com/?p=10350&book=10#87cf1e> accessed on 29/09/2023

¹¹ <http://arabiclexicon.hawramani.com/?p=10575&book=10#476f3d> accessed on 26/09/2023

¹² <http://arabiclexicon.hawramani.com/?p=6635&book=27#77b21c> accessed on 24/09/2023

¹³

<http://arabiclexicon.hawramani.com/search/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A9?cat=27> accessed on 26/09/2023

¹⁴ <http://arabiclexicon.hawramani.com/?p=3599&book=27#fcc7cb> accessed on 24/09/2023

¹⁵ <https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/%D8%AB%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86/> accessed on 24/09/2023

¹⁶ <https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A9/> accessed on 24/09/2023

¹⁷ <https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86/> accessed on 24/09/2023

¹⁸ According to Britannica, Jinni, plural Jinn, also called Genie, Arabic Jinnī, in Arabic mythology, a spirit inhabiting the earth but unseen by humans, capable of assuming various forms and exercising extraordinary powers (...). <https://www.britannica.com/topic/jinni> accessed on 09/10/2023

¹⁹ <https://quran-tafsir.net/moqatel/sura7-aya107.html> accessed on 24/09/2023

²⁰ <https://quran-tafsir.net/moqatel/sura26-aya32.html> accessed on 24/09/2023

²¹ <https://quran-tafsir.net/moqatel/sura20-aya20.html> accessed on 24/09/2023

²² <https://quran-tafsir.net/moqatel/sura27-aya10.html> accessed on 24/09/2023

²³ <https://quran-tafsir.net/moqatel/sura28-aya31.html> accessed on 24/09/2023

²⁴ <https://quran-tafsir.net/tabary/sura7-aya107.html> accessed on 24/09/2023



- ²⁵ <https://quran-tafsir.net/tabary/sura26-aya32.html> accessed on 24/09/2023
- ²⁶ <https://quran-tafsir.net/tabary/sura20-aya20.html> accessed on 24/09/2023
- ²⁷ <https://quran-tafsir.net/tabary/sura27-aya10.html> accessed on 24/09/2023
- ²⁸ <https://quran-tafsir.net/tabary/sura28-aya31.html> accessed on 24/09/2023
- ²⁹ <https://quran-tafsir.net/alrazy/sura7-aya107.html> accessed on 24/09/2023
- ³⁰ <https://quran-tafsir.net/alrazy/sura26-aya32.html> accessed on 24/09/2023
- ³¹ <https://quran-tafsir.net/alrazy/sura20-aya20.html> accessed on 25/09/2023
- ³² <https://quran-tafsir.net/alrazy/sura27-aya10.html> accessed on 24/09/2023
- ³³ <https://quran-tafsir.net/alrazy/sura28-aya31.html> accessed on 25/09/2023
- ³⁴ <https://quran-tafsir.net/katheer/sura7-aya107.html> accessed on 27/09/2023
- ³⁵ <https://quran-tafsir.net/katheer/sura26-aya32.html> accessed on 27/09/2023
- ³⁶ <https://quran-tafsir.net/katheer/sura20-aya20.html> accessed on 27/09/2023
- ³⁷ <https://quran-tafsir.net/katheer/sura27-aya10.html> accessed on 07/10/2023
- ³⁸ <https://quran-tafsir.net/katheer/sura28-aya31.html> accessed on 13/10/2023
- ³⁹ Arberry, Arthur. J. (1955) *The Koran Interpreted*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. New York: The Macmillan Company. P 164.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid. P 368.
- ⁴¹ K. F. C. P. H. Q. (2003) *The Noble Qur'ân - English translation of the meanings and commentary*. Madinah Munawwarah, KSA: King Fahd Complex For The Printing Of The Holy Qur'ân. P 215.
- ⁴² Ibid. P 491.
- ⁴³ Haleem, Abdel. M. A. S. (2004) *The Qur'an - a New Translation*. New York: Oxford University Press. P 101.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid. P 233.
- ⁴⁵ Ali, Abdullah, Y. (2004) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ân*. Maryland, USA: Amana Publications. P 375.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid. P 912.
- ⁴⁷ Arberry, Arthur. J. (1955) *The Koran Interpreted*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. New York: The Macmillan Company. P 313.
- ⁴⁸ K. F. C. P. H. Q. (2003) *The Noble Qur'ân - English translation of the meanings and commentary*. Madinah Munawwarah, KSA: King Fahd Complex For The Printing Of The Holy Qur'ân. P 415.
- ⁴⁹ Haleem, Abdel. M. A. S. (2004) *The Qur'an - a New Translation*. New York: Oxford University Press. P 197.
- ⁵⁰ Ali, Abdullah, Y. (2004) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ân*. Maryland, USA: Amana Publications. P 768.



- ⁵¹ Arberry, Arthur. J. (1955) The Koran Interpreted. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. New York: The Macmillan Company. P 377.
- ⁵² Ibid. P 389.
- ⁵³ K. F. C. P. H. Q. (2003) The Noble Qur'ân – English translation of the meanings and commentary. Madinah Munawwarah, KSA: King Fahd Complex For The Printing Of The Holy Qur'ân. P 506.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid. P 521.
- ⁵⁵ Haleem, Abdel. M. A. S. (2004) The Qur'an – a New Translation. New York: Oxford University Press. P 239.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid. P 247.
- ⁵⁷ Ali, Abdullah, Y. (2004) The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ân. Maryland, USA: Amana Publications. P 939.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid. P 970.
- ⁵⁹ Blachère, Régis. Le Coran, G. –P. Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 1966, page 188.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid. P 395.
- ⁶¹ Masson, Denise. Le Coran, Bibliothèque de la pléiade, Gallimard, 1967, page 195.
- ⁶² Ibid. P 452.
- ⁶³ Chouraqui, André. Le Coran – L'Appel, Robert Laffont, 1990, page 221.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid. P 521.
- ⁶⁵ Berque, Jacques. Le Coran : essai de traduction, éditions Albin Michel, 2002, page 175.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid. P 391.
- ⁶⁷ Blachère, Régis. Le Coran, G. –P. Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 1966, page 338.
- ⁶⁸ Masson, Denise. Le Coran, Bibliothèque de la pléiade, Gallimard, 1967, page 383.
- ⁶⁹ Chouraqui, André. Le Coran – L'Appel, Robert Laffont, 1990, page 434.
- ⁷⁰ Berque, Jacques. Le Coran : essai de traduction, éditions Albin Michel, 2002, page 330.
- ⁷¹ Blachère, Régis. Le Coran, G. –P. Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 1966, page 405.
- ⁷² Ibid. P 415.
- ⁷³ Masson, Denise. Le Coran, Bibliothèque de la pléiade, Gallimard, 1967, page 464.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid. P 479.
- ⁷⁵ Chouraqui, André. Le Coran – L'Appel, Robert Laffont, 1990, page 536.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid. P 557.
- ⁷⁷ Berque, Jacques. Le Coran : essai de traduction, éditions Albin Michel, 2002, page 403.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid. P 415.
- ⁷⁹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/serpent> accessed on 07/10/2023
- ⁸⁰ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/snake> accessed on 14/10/2023
- ⁸¹ <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/serpent> accessed on 13/10/2023
- ⁸² <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/snake> accessed on 13/10/2023



- ⁸³ <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100456223> accessed on 14/10/2023
- ⁸⁴ https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/snake_1 accessed on 14/10/2023
- ⁸⁵ <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/dragon/26711> accessed on 14/10/2023
- ⁸⁶ <https://dictionnaire.lerobert.com/definition/dragon> accessed on 15/10/2023
- ⁸⁷ <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/serpent/72329> accessed on 14/10/2023
- ⁸⁸ <https://dictionnaire.lerobert.com/definition/serpent> accessed on 15/10/2023
- ⁸⁹ <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/vip%C3%A8re/82096> accessed on 14/10/2023
- ⁹⁰ <https://dictionnaire.lerobert.com/definition/vipere> accessed on 15/10/2023
- ⁹¹ <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/djinn/26227> accessed on 14/10/2023
- ⁹² <https://dictionnaire.lerobert.com/definition/djinn> accessed on 15/10/2023
- ⁹³ <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/aspic/5740> accessed on 14/10/2023
- ⁹⁴ <https://dictionnaire.lerobert.com/definition/aspic> accessed on 15/10/2023
- ⁹⁵ <https://alldifferences.com/serpent-vs-snake/> accessed on 14/10/2023