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A Definition of the Term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*,
(the Historical Present) in Light of Qur'ānic Exegesis

Abstract

This paper attempts to define the term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, as it is explained by the Qur'ān commentators, who can be considered as the primary source for understanding this term. The term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, is not a unique phenomenon of the Arabic language in general or of the Qur'ān in particular. *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, a term typically translated in the research literature as the *historical present*, is a universal phenomenon used especially in narratives. Before examining the use of the term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, in Qur'ānic exegesis, we first provide the Western definition of the term, *historical perfect* or, as it is also called, *historic imperfect*, *historical present tense* or *narrative present*.[1] As will be shown in the first part of the paper, the Western definition is almost identical to the definition of the term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, provided by the commentators on the Qur'ān. In both Western and Arabic sources these terms refer to verbs in the present tense used in order to provide a vivid effect and to evoke a past event recounted in a narrative. However, this traditional usage is criticized by Western scholars who propose, based on discourse-analysis, alternative explanations for the tense-switching between the simple past and the historical present. Alternative explanations for verbs in the imperfect which are considered to be cases of *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* are also mentioned by the commentators on the Qur'ān and are presented in the second part of this paper.

Keywords

ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya, Historical Present, Qur'ānic Exegesis, Effect of Vividness.

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[1] Brinton (1992: 221) mentions additional terms such as *the dramatic present* and *the narrative actual tense*.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The term, historical present, in Western definitions

The basic explanation of the term, historical present, is the use of the present tense to refer to a past situation, particularly in narratives. For example, the sentence, "*I'm sitting on the verandah when up comes Joe and says…*"includes verbs in the present which describe events actually performed in the past; thus, this should have been expressed as follows: "*I was sitting on the verandah when up came Joe and said…*" (Comrie 1985: 73). Another example presented by Wolfson (1979: 174), who analyzes the conversational historical present tense (CHP) which occurs in a specific type of narrative described by her as a *performed story*, is: "Well, we were getting dressed to go out one night and we were just leaving, just walking out the door and the baby was in bed, and all of a sudden the doorbell <u>rings</u> and Larry <u>says</u>, 'There's somebody here for you', and I <u>walk</u> in the living room and she's there with both kids." In this quotation describing a past event there is an alternation of tenses between the perfect (or verbs in the past simple) and the present (i.e., the historical present).
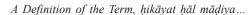
The term, the historical present*,* is usually mentioned when the researcher deals with the tense-switching in narratives trying to investigate the pragmatics of switching between the simple past, the historical present and other tense-aspect variations in the discourse.[2]

The phenomenon of the historical present is not new. In Greek, for example, the historical present has been seen in written narratives since ancient times. It is also found in the gospels of the New Testament (Thoma 2011: 2734) and of course can be found in the Old Testament (Waltke and O'Connor 1990: 501). The historical present is usually found in oral narrative discourse, although it tends to appear also in older written texts which are supposed to have been presented orally at some point or/and written down at a time before normalization rules were enforced on the written language (Thoma 2011: 2375). It is usually explained that the prominent function of the historical present in ancient literature is to provide an effect of immediacy and vividness, of visual testimony to a past event recounted in a story, an idea taken up and expanded upon by recent studies (Thoma 2011: 2734; Levey 2006: 130).

The effect of vividness is achieved as follows:

> The use of the Historical Present is a technique for reporting events that are vivid and exciting or for enhancing the dramatic effect of a story by making

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[2] Examples of such researchers are: Kiparski (1968); Wolfson (1979); Schiffrin (1981); Levey (2006) and Thoma (2011).

addressees feel as if they were present at the time of the experience, witnessing events as they occurred (Fleischman 1990: 75; Thoma 2011: 2376).[3]

It is agreed by scholars that the historical present gives the effect of vividness, yet the findings in their studies show that this explanation of the term is incorrect because in various cases in the narratives verbs in the present that are not considered to be the historical present indicate that the events are more dramatic and vivid than other verbs in the past. In other words, the historical present is not used only for vividness, or as Brinton (1992: 224) argues, vividness is an effect rather than a function, and therefore most of the scholars suggest various functions of the historical present in the discourse. One function concerns the use of the historical presen*t* (or the switch between perfect and historical perfect) as a text-structuring device. According to Wolfson (1979: 174,178), the tense-shifting from a verb in simple perfect into a verb in the historical present appears to mark episodic boundaries and helps organize narratives into chronological segments. Thus, according to Wolfson (1979: 172) it is the switching between the historical present and the past tenses that has an important function, while the historical present alone has no significance. The organization of the segments is necessary in the narrative, especially because the actions in the narratives occur one after another in a series. Thus, to separate the sequenced actions into events and to introduce a focus on a specific thing in the narrative or to permit the narrator to give his own interpretation, alternation between two verbs (usually in the perfect and the historical present) is used. The function of the historical present or, more precisely, the function of the switch between the historical present and other verbs might be seen and understood only when the whole discourse is examined and not only the sentence in which the switching occurs is examined (Wolfson 1979: 178). An example of such usage can be seen in the following paragraph quoted by Wolfson: "Oh, yes, we decided to go to this pizza place for lunch so we sailed – we left at eleven in the morning and we got there at three, okay? Four miles – it was against the wind all the way. – We get up to the place, we have our lunch, we get back in the boat, and I said to Bud, 'I think the wind died.' The wind died, it took us hours to get back. And we were shipping water because we had a hole in the boat. So by the time we got back, we had paddled three-quarters of the way back. No wind. Absolutely dead. The sail was absolutely hanging there

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[3] A similar definition is found by Wolfson (1979: 169): "The historical present has the function of making a narrative dramatic or vivid. The logic behind this interpretation is simple, and on the surface very reasonable: by describing past events in the present tense, the narrator relives these events, or causes his audience to relive them (or both). The point is that the use of the present tense somehow makes it seem that the events themselves are taking place at the moment of speaking, rather than at some time in the past."

and I was paddling." Wolfson (1979: 173) explains the switch between the past tense and the historical present as follows:

> What the present tense does is set off that part of the story which does not occur on the boat itself: i.e. the switch into the present tense signals the beginning of action on shore, and the shift back into past tense signals the beginning of activity back on the boat. As is frequently the case, a break in the story which is so signaled coincides with a major dramatic event.
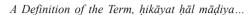
Fleischman (1990: 210) also argues that the tense-switching helps to organize and hence to understand the narratives' order but, unlike Wolfson, she suggests that the use of tense alternation is a means of slowing the pace, i.e., tense-switching may slow down the tempo of narration, particularly when new information which should be processed by the audience is introduced.[4]

Another function mentioned by various scholars, including Thoma (2006) and Fludernik (1991: 368), is linked to what is called *background information* and *foreground information*, while most of the researchers adopt the terms *complicating action*, *coda* and *evaluation*, taken from Labov's model of narratives. Thus, before explaining the use of the historical present in these three parts of the narrative, a brief account of Labov's model must be first provided.

After analyzing a corpus of hundreds of stories told in the course of everyday conversation by common people from various backgrounds, Labov noticed that the stories consist of six elements that have a certain function in the narrative:

1. Abstract: This is a short summary used by the narrator to reveal the point of the story by giving the reader/hearer some general terms about the topic of the story.
2. Orientation: This term refers to the information in the text that helps to identify the time, place, persons, and their activity or situations. The orientation has the function of orienting the reader/hearer to when and where the story takes place – information that the reader or hearer requires in order to follow the narrated events.
3. Complicating action: This term refers to the core of the story, which sets up a narrative, i.e., it is the set of events that compose the story or, more precisely, the plot. The temporally-ordered events that constitute the story might include information other than events; however, without these events a story would not have a plot and would simply be a description.
4. Evaluation: This is the storyteller's commentary on why the story should be told, which is the point of view or the primary message or purpose of

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[4] Fleischman (1990: 210–211) exemplifies this function by quoting some texts from Plato's 'Pot of Gold' in which verbs in the present tense speed up the pace of the narrative.

the story. The narrator indicates this by using various methods to insert evaluative comments.

5. Resolution: This is the final action of the story, answering the question: 'What finally happened?' Resolution is usually found in the final part of the complicating action.

6. Coda: This is the closure, which returns the narrative to the present time. It is one of the options used by the narrator to signal the end of the story (Labov 1972: 363–364, 366).

As for the connection between the historical present and the six elements of the narrative presented by Labov, Thoma (2006: 2375 Cf. Fludernik 1991: 368) indicates that according to various studies the historical present appears to function exactly like the simple past tense (perfective aspect) in narratives, in that it recounts past and completed events. In other words, the historical present can be found only in the complicating action, while the use of the historical present in the orientation, evaluation and the resolution sections is usually excluded. Schiffrin (1981: 51), who examines tense variations in oral narratives in English, found that the historical present is most distributed in the complicating action section explaining this fact as follows:

> The almost total restriction of the HP to complicating action clauses is not surprising. It is only here that the tense is freed from its main job of providing a reference time: events can be understood as having occurred prior to the moment of speaking, with or without the past tense form. In addition, narrative events are understood as having an event time because of their order in the discourse: they are temporally ordered, or limited to specific scenes or episodes, so that they can be understood to have occurred after previous events, and before upcoming events. In short, a specific understanding of the parameters of events within the temporal framework of the narrative is available throught the discourse. Because this understanding is provided only within the complicating action (the section which relays the experience), the HP-P variation is confined almost exclusively to the narrative and restricted clauses in this section of the narrative.

Fludernik (1991: 369) examines the tense usages in two levels of the plot in accordance with Labov's model of narratives. The *plotline*, which includes the following elements: the initial abstract and orientation sections; the *incipit* (the clause defining the onset of action by means of a temporal specifier such as *one day*, or *on Monday*,); the narrative clauses, which are temporally-ordered together with the background units within the complicating action span; and the sections entitled *resolution, final evaluation,* and *coda. Off-plotline*, are all parenthetical remarks. The off-plotline essentially includes two kinds of elements – embedded orientation and commentary. Fludernik (1991: 374) proposes to

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consider the switch into the present tense as a signal for a narrative "turn" of events in the plotline. The turn is important in terms of plot function because it marks not only what is commonly regarded as the peak or climax of an episode, but also the experientially-important and significant incidents in the narrative. The historical present, for example, might signal surprising turns of events, which are introduced by lexical markers such as *all of a sudden, and then*, as it can be seen in the following example: "Thus spoke she, when from the sea they suddenly do hear a strong and horrid noise" (Michael Drayton, Polyolbion XIX, v, 139).

To conclude this part, we might say that there is a traditional theory according to which the *historical present* vividly presents the events which took place in the past. However, this theory does not adequately coincide with the functions of the *historical present* introduced by various scholars. After examining and analyzing oral narratives, the scholars suggest that the historical present can be used to segment a story or to highlight or foreground events, particularly those found in the section of the complicating action of the narratives.

1.2. The term, *historical present*, in Western descriptions of Arabic

The term, historical present, designates the translation of the Arabic term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*. In this section, we present several scholars who discuss *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*. We commerce our review with Wright (1971: Vol. III, 30), who refers to this term in his discussion of the particle *ḥattā* "until", "until that", "that" and "in order that". In some cases, the verb after this particle may be in the present tense, although the event was performed in the past, as, for example: *sirtu 'ilā l-kūfati ḥattā 'adḫulahā*. This construction has four possible explanations:

1. *sirtu 'ilā l-kūfati ḥattā 'adḫulahā* "I journeyed to Kūfa that I might enter" (*ḥattā 'adḫulahā = kay 'adḫulahā*).
2. *sirtu 'ilā l-kūfati ḥattā 'adḫulahā* "I journeyed to Kūfa until I entered it". Wright mentions in this case the term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, i.e., *historical imperfect*.[5]
3. *sirtu 'ilā l-kūfati ḥattā 'adḫulahā* "I have journeyed to Kūfa until I am (now) entering it" (*ḥattā 'adḫulahā = ḥattā 'anā 'adḫulahā l-'āna*).
4. *sirtu 'ilā l-kūfati ḥattā 'adḫulahā* "I journeyed to Kūfa until I (actually) entered it" (*ḥattā 'adḫulahā = ḥattā daḫaltuhā*).

Thus, according to Wright, the term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya,* indicates a completed action in the past yet the difference between the second and the fourth explanations provided by Wright is not quite clear.

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[5] Like Wright, Fleischer (1968: Vol. I, 443) also compare *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* to the historical present (historisches Imperfectum).

The term (*ḥikāyat*) *ḥāl māḍiya* is also mentioned when Reckendorf (1921: 13) discusses the use of the imperfect tense to indicate the preterite tense, i.e., to denote events that took place or were completed in the past, saying: "Iterative und zuständlich (vergangener Zustand *ḥāl māḍiya*) ist es oft in Relativs. und Zustandss." "Iterative aspect and the indication of condition or state (condition or state that happened in the past *ḥāl māḍiya*) usually appear in relative clauses and in circumstantial clauses." Such constructions in some other cases are classified by Reckendorf as Präsent historik, i.e., the historical present. Reckendorf exemplifies the *ḥāl māḍiya* with the following clauses which include a verb in the imperfect denoting the repetition of an action (iterativity) or a state, which happened and were completed in the past: *fa-'amurru 'alā šammara* "and I am going to Šammar", *'innī la-'asīru 'iḏā bi-fatan* "I am going and suddenly [I saw] a young boy" and *qāla l-maliku 'innī 'arā sab'a baqaratin* "the king said: I see seven cows". The last example (Q 12:43) is also mentioned by Nöldeke (1963: 67)[6], who explains that dreams might be narrated by using verbs in the imperfect in order to create the feeling that the dream is vivid and that the narrator himself is involved in the story because the use of the present tense makes it seem that the events themselves are taking place at the moment of speaking, rather than at some time in the past. Nöldeke presents additional structures containing the historical present to express the vividness of the actions as, for example, *'innī la-'aqūduhumā 'iḏ raāhu bilālun ma'ī* "I led the two and then Bilāl saw him with me" and *wa-llāhi 'innā la-nataraḥḥalu 'ilā 'arḍi l-ḥabašati 'iḏ 'aqbala 'umaru* "truly, we were wandering to the land of Abyssinia and then (suddenly) 'Umar came". In these two examples the continued actions or states (*'aqūduhumā* and *nataraḥḥalu*) are interrupted by a verb in the perfect preceded by the particle *'iḏ*. In other cases, a verb in the perfect designating a completed action is followed by a verb in the imperfect, as in (for example): *fa-'aqbaltu fa-'aǧidu rasūla llāhi ṣallā llāhu 'alayhi wa-sallama qad ḥaraǧa wa-'aǧidu bilālan 'inda l-bābi qā'iman fa-qultu* "I came and I found that the Prophet, God bless him and grant him salvation, was already gone and I found Bilāl standing at the door and I said." (Nöldeke 1963: 68)

Aartun (1963: 94–95) does not mention specifically the term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*; however, based on Wright's and Reckendorf's books, he says that a verb in the imperfect (*yaqtul*) preceded by a verb in the perfect (*qatal*) functions as the *historical present*. Aartun also mentions Howell's explanation (1880: 10) of Q 35:9, saying:

> *wa-llāhu llaḏī 'arsala r-riyāḥa fa-tutīru saḥāban fa-suqnāhu* (and God is he that sent the winds; and they raise clouds; and we drove them) *fa-tutīru* is put into the *aor.* (d. h. *yaqtul*), contrary to what precedes and follows it, in order that

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[6] Nöldeke's examples are mentioned by Aartun (1963: 95–96) and Reuschel (1996: 263).

the state in which the raising of the clouds by the winds takes place may be imitated, and that those wondrous appearances indicative of the Supreme Power may be required to present themselves; and thus they do with a verb containing a sort of specialty and peculiarity in a state that is deemed extraordinary, or that impresses the person addressed […].

Under the term, the historical present*,* Aartun introduces various examples, such as: *qāla kun fa-yakūnu* (Q 3:59) "he said be! and he was", *fa-ḥaddaṯahu 'an Rustama* […] *ṯumma yaqūlu* "He told him about Rustam […] and he said".[7] In addition, Aartun mentions the structure constructed by the verb *kāna* followed by a verb in the imperfect, saying that it is a stylistic device with the same use as the historical present:

> Durch die lexikalische Bedeutung vom Verb *kāna* erhält das Arabische ein sprachliches Mittel, das in weit umfassenderer Weise, als es in anderen Sprachen üblich ist, den Gebrauch von historischen Präsentia ermöglicht. (Aartun 1963: 99)

It is inferred from the explanations presented above that the term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, refers to a verb in the imperfect usually linked to another verb in the perfect. The imperfect, like the perfect verb, expresses a completed, repeated or continued action performed in the past and Nöldeke is the only scholar who mentions the vivid effect of such a verb in the imperfect. Although the Western grammarians of Classical Arabic provide various examples of *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, it seems that their definition is not nearly as developed as it is in modern studies dealing with the historical present. Various questions regarding *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* remain without an answer, such as: What is the literary meaning of the term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*? Are there are additional constructions, other than those mentioned by Nöldeke, in which *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* is used? In which context can *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* be found?

Thus, there is no doubt that *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* needs further elucidation; however, the question depends on which sources we base our definition. Taking into account that the traditional Arab grammarians do not deal with issues of time and aspect in their descriptions, the primary source that can shed light on the term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, is the Qur'anic exegesis. Before providing an in-depth account of this term, however, we need to specify the exegesis mentioned in this paper, because Qur'anic exegesis does not necessarily mean that all commentators refer to *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, as, for example, this term is not to be found in Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), Qurṭubī (d. 71/1273), Ibn Kaṯīr (d. 774/1373) or a modern commentator such as Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966).

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[7] Aartun (1963: 96) presents additional examples taken from Nöldeke (1963: 68).

1.3. The Qur'ān commentators mentioned in the paper

Zamaḫšarī (d. 538/1144) *al-kaššāf*, Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1153) *maǧmaʿ l-bayān*, Rāzī (d. 606/1210) *mafātīḥ l-ġayb*, Nasafī (d. 710/1310) *madārik t-tanzīl wa-ḥaqāʾiq t-ta'wīl*, Abū Ḥayyān al-Ġarnāṭī (d. 754/1344) *al-baḥr l-muḥīṭ*, as-Samīn l-Ḥalabī (d. 756/1355) *ad-durr l-maṣūn fī ʿulūm l-kitāb l-maknūn*, Maḥallī (d. 864/1459) and Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) *tafsīr l-Ǧalālayni*, Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286) *'anwār t-tanzīl wa-'asrār t-ta'wīl*, Abū s-Suʿūd (d. 951/1431) *'iršād l-ʿaql s-salīm 'ilā mazāyā l-kitāb l-karīm*, Ibn ʿAǧība (d. 1224/1809) *al-baḥr l-madīd fī tafsīr l-Qur'ān*, Šawkānī (d. 1250/1834) *fatḥ l-qadīr*, Ālūsī (d. 1270/1856) *rūḥ l-maʿānī*, Aṭṭafayyiš (d. 1332/1914) *himyān z-zād 'ilā dār l-miʿād* and *taysīr t-tafsīr*, Ṭanṭāwī (d. 1431/1922) *al-waṣīṭ fī tafsīr l-Qur'ān l-karīm*, Riḍā (d. 1354/1935) *tafsīr l-manār*, Ḫalīlī (d. 1361/1942) *ǧawāhir t-tafsīr* and Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1401/1982) *al-mīzān fī tafsīr l-Qur'ān*.[8]

This diverse list includes classical, medieval, pre-modern and modern commentators, and the commentators are considered to be jurists, philologists, grammarians and philosophers. As for the classical commentators, they belong to the different Islamic schools, as (for example) Zamaḫšarī, a Muʿtazilite grammarian, exegete and man of letters. His commentary, *al-kaššāf,* was long considered a model of Muʿtazilite exegesis. His reputation for exegesis rests not so much on his Muʿtalism as on his qualities as a grammarian, philologist and master of rhetoric and literary criticism (Gilliot 2002: Vol. II, 115). Ṭabarsī's commentary includes variant readings as well as grammatical and philological explanations and offers moderate points of view on passages of particular importance for the Šīʿtes (Gilliot 2002: Vol. II, 118); and Nasafī is a Ḥanafite jurist and theologian who wrote a medium-sized commentary. His commentary might be considered a shortened version of Zamaḫšarī's and Bayḍāwī's commentaries (Gilliot 2002: Vol. II, 113). Bayḍāwī is a šāfiʿite jourist and theologian whose commentary depends a great deal upon Zamaḫšarī's work; in his commentary he introduces variant readings and issues of grammar that are not mentioned by Zamaḫšarī' (Gilliot 2002: Vol. II, 116).

Among the exegeses mentioned above there are commentators who refer more than others to grammatical issues, such as Abū Ḥayyān l-Ġarnāṭī, a philologist whose commentary is actually an encyclopedia of grammar and variant readings (Gilliot 2002: Vol. II, 110) and as-Samīn l-Ḥalabī, a grammarian and a specialist in Qur'ānic readings, who wrote the largest and less-known commentary on the Qur'ān, which contains many grammatical explanations (Gilliot 2002: Vol. II, 113).There is also a group of pre-modern commentators,

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[8] The exegesis of Aṭṭafayyiš, Ibn ʿĀdil and Ḫalīlī are not available in book format. Therefore, the electronic version of these exegeses which are found in the web site http://www.altafsir.com/ Tafasir, are used.

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who practice scientific exegesis (*tafsīr ‘ilmī*), such as: Ālūsī, Ṭanṭāwī and Ṭabāṭabā’ī (Wielandt 2002: Vol. II, 130).

In spite of the diversity of exegeses, the term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, can be found in them; nevertheless, the commentators do not leave this term without further explanation, as will be shown in the second part of the paper.

2. A Definition of the Term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, according to the Commentators on the Qur’ān

Examination of the various occurrences of the term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, in the exegeses reveals two main findings. First, it is mentioned in three syntactic structures:
1. When a verb in the imperfect designating a past action is used and hence can be replaced by a verb in the perfect, e.g., Q 2:87.
2. When a noun is followed by the adverb *l-yawma*, e.g., Q 16:63.
3. When an indefinite active participle is in the nominative case and is followed by a noun in the accusative, e.g., Q 18:18.

Second, usually *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* is not the only possible explanation for the use of a verb in the imperfect which designates a past event, as will be shown in Section 3.

2.1. ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya for evoking and vividly presenting an action performed in the past
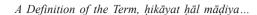
(1) *’a-fa-kullamā ǧā’akum rasūlun bi-mā lā tahwā ’anfusukumu stakbartum fa-farīqan kaḏḏabtum wa-farīqan **taqtulūna*** (Q 2:87)[9]
  "And whensoever there came to you a Messenger whom your souls did not desire, did you grow more arrogant? Some you disbelieved and some you killed."

In Q 2:87 we find an alternation between past and present tenses within the same verse, and the commentators raise the question, why a verb in the perfect is not used? As a first explanation for this alternation, they mention the term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya,* as can be seen in the following commentaries on Q 2:87:

a. *’ammā qawluhu ta‘ālā (farīqan kaḏḏabtum wa-farīqan taqtulūna) fa-li-qā’ilin ’an yaqūla: hallā qīla wa-farīqan qataltum? wa-ǧawābuhu min wiǧhayni:*

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*'aḥaduhumā: 'an yurāda l-ḥāl l-māḍiya li-'anna l-'amra faẓī'un fa-'urīda
stiḥḍāruhu fī n-nufūsi wa-taṣwīruhu fī l-qulūbi* (Rāzī 1993: Vol. III, 192)[10]
"As for the words of God sublime (some, you disbelieved and some you killed),
one should ask: why was *wa-farīqan qataltum* not said [i.e., why was a verb
in the perfect not used instead of the imperfect]? There are two points of view
[possibilities]: one of these[11] is that it is meant *l-ḥāl l-māḍiya* [*lit.* condition in
the past] because the act [of killing some of the prophets] is despicable and
it was meant to manifest this scene in the souls [of the people] and to evoke
it [the killing] in the hearts [of the people]."

b. *wa-t-taʿbīru ʿani l-qatli bi-ṣīġati l-muḍāriʿati d-dāllati ʿalā l-ḥuḍūri li-'aǧli
tabšīʿihi wa-tahwīli 'amrihi ʿinda s-sāmiʿīna, wa-ḏālika bi-taṣwīrihi bi-ṣūrati
l-'amri l-wāqiʿi ḥāla l-ḫiṭābi wa-'iḥḍārihi li-n-nufūsi bi-kulli mā fīhi bašāʿtun
wa-faẓāʿatun yaḥussu bihimā man šāhada rtikābahu.* (Ḫalīlī)[12]
"The statement [or talking] about the killing is [expressed] by using an imperfect
form indicating the presence [i.e., the action is being performed now] in order
to [express the feeling] of despicableness/ abomination of this action and
filling the listeners with horror. This is achieved by evoking this action by
using [a verb indicating] that this action happens at the moment of speech and
hence all the despicableness and the abomination which one feels when s/he
witnesses the performance of this action is transformed [*lit.* brought] to the
souls [of the people]."

c. […] *'inna l-mutakallima yaʿmidu bi-ḏālika l-fiʿli l-qabīḥi ka-qatli l-'anbiyā'i
wa-yuʿabbiru ʿanhu bi-l-fiʿli l-muḍāriʿi llaḏī yadullu bi-ḥasabi waḍʿihi ʿalā
l-fiʿli l-wāqiʿi fī l-ḥāli fa-ka-'annahu 'aḥḍara ṣūrata qatli l-'anbiyā'i 'amāma
s-sāmiʿi wa-ǧaʿalahu yanẓuru 'ilayhā bi-ʿaynihi fa-yakūnu 'inkāruhu lahā
'ablaġa wa-stifẓāʿuhu lahā 'aʿẓama* (Ṭanṭāwī 1992: Vol. I, 196)
"The speaker means, when he uses such a despicable verb, the killing of
the prophets, and he expresses this action by using a verb in the imperfect
which indicates according to its context [*lit.* position] what is happening now/
immediately, as though he evokes for the listener the scene of the killing of the
prophets [*lit.* brings the picture of killing the prophets in front of the listener]
and hence he makes him [i.e., the listener] look on this visualized scene with
his own eyes and [then] his condemnation of this action would be stronger and
his detestation of this action would be more intense."

The explanations presented above of using a verb in the imperfect designates
the fundamental definition or the basic principles of *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* –

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[10] Cf. Bayḍāwī (1996: Vol. I, 358); Abū Ḥayyān (1992: Vol. I, 483); as-Samīn l-Ḥalabī (1994:
Vol. III, 295); Ālūsī (1964: Vol. I, 436).

[11] The second explanation is mentioned later in Section 3.1.

[12] http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp

a definition which will be repeated whenever the term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* is mentioned. Thus, if one is asked to pinpoint the primary ideas of *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, one could use two expressions repeated in the various exegeses: *'istiḥḍāru ṣ-ṣūrati* "manifestation of the event/action/scene" and *taṣwīr l-wāqiʿi fī l-ḥāl* "visualization of the present at the moment [of speech]." The purpose of creating the feeling among the listeners as if they were attending a specific action or event is to arouse in them contempt for this action and to plant fear in their souls and to warn them against repeating this action.

Like Q 2:87, the following verse includes a similar structure in which the verb in the imperfect *yaqtulūna* should be in the perfect tense according to the commentators.

> (2) *kullamā ğā'ahum rasūlun bi-mā lā tahwā 'anfusuhum farīqan kaḏḏabū wa-farīqan **yaqtulūna*** (Q 5:70)
> "Whenever there came to them a Messenger whom their souls did not desire, a group of them they called liars, and others among them they killed."
>
> a. *wa-'innamā ğī'a bi-yaqtulūna mawḍiʿa qutilū ʿalā ḥikāyat l-ḥāl l-māḍiya stiḥḍāran lahā wa-stifẓāʿan li-l-qatli wa-tanbīhan ʿalā 'anna ḏālika min dīnihim maḍiyan wa-mustaqbalan* (Bayḍāwī 1996: Vol. II, 351)[13]
> "The verb in the imperfect *yaqtulūna* stands in a position [where actually] the verb in the perfect *qutilū* [should have been used] because of *ḥikāyat l-ḥāl l-māḍiya* [*lit*. describing a situation that had happened in the past] to manifest it [i.e., the picture of this scene in the listener's mind] and to cause abomination toward the killing and to warn of this action which happened and will happen to the believers [*lit*. their] religions."
>
> b. *wa-l-muḍāriʿu li-ḥikāyati l-ḥāli l-māḍiyati ka-'annahu ṣallā llāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallama yušāhidu qatlahum wa-hāḏā 'aqwā* (Aṭṭafayyiš)[14]
> "The verb in the imperfect is for *ḥikāyati l-ḥāli l-māḍiyati* [*lit*. describing a situation that had happened in the past] as though the Prophet, God bless and grant him salvation, witnesses the killing of the prophets and [this effect] is stronger."

The explanation of Aṭṭafayyiš clarifies the effect of using a verb in the imperfect when he adds the verb *yušāhidu*, i.e., in this case, the prophet (and also the listener) become witnesses or are involved in the described event.

As for the following verse, it is worth mentioning that in this and the following verses there is no tense-alternation between the perfect and the imperfect as shown in Q 2:87 and in Q 5:70. Additionally, only a few commentators refer

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[13] Cf. Nasafī (1996: Vol. I, 4240; Abū Ḥayyān (1992: Vol. IV, 326).
[14] *taysīr t-tafsīr* (http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp).

to the use of the verb in the imperfect in Q 2:91. However, as will be shown in the commentary of Riḍā, the term, *ḥikāyat l-ḥāl l-māḍiya,* is not specifically mentioned, but the explanation is the one of *ḥikāyat l-ḥāl l-māḍiya.*

> (3) *fa-li-ma **taqtulūna** 'anbiyā'a llāhi min qablu 'in kuntum mu'minīna* (Q 2:91)
> "Why then have you killed the Prophets of God in former times, if you were believers?"
>
> *wuḍi'a (taqtulūna) mawḍi'a l-māḍī (qataltum) li-mā sabaqa bayānuhu fī miṯli hāḏā t-ta'bīri min 'irādati stiḥḏāri ṣūrati hāḏā l-ğarami l-faẓī'i* (Riḍā 1954: Vol. I, 384)[15]
> "The verb in the imperfect *taqtulūna* occupies the position of the verb in the perfect *qataltum*, for the reason that was previously explained, while this form was used because of the intention to manifest this scene/action of committing this despicable crime."

In Q 3:59 *ḥikāyat l-ḥāl l-māḍiya* is mentioned only by the modern commentator, Aṭṭafayyiš, who explains the usage of the verb in the imperfect as follows:

> (4) *'inna maṯala 'īsā 'inda llāhi ka-maṯali 'ādama ḫalaqahu min turābin ṯumma qāla lahū kun fa-**yakūnu*** (Q 3:59)
> "Verily, the likeness of 'Īsā (Jesus) before God is the likeness of Adam. He created him from dust, then (He) said to him: "Be!" - and he was."
>
> *(fa-yakūnu) 'ay fa-huwa yakūnu wa-hāḏā ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya ka-'annahu staḥḍara llāhu ḏālika li-yušāhidahu sayyiduna muḥammadun ṣallā llāhu 'alayhi wa-sallama wa-lawlā ḏālika wa-la-qīla fa-kāna* (Aṭṭafayyiš)[16]
> "(And he was) meaning he will be, and [the verb in the perfect is a case of] *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, as though God wants to evoke this scene/action in order that our Lord Muḥammad God will bless him and give him salvation, will witness it, and if evocation had not been the intention then the verb would have been in the perfect."
>
> (5) *ṯumma **nunağğī** rusulanā wa-llaḏīna 'āmanū ka-ḏālika ḥaqqan 'alaynā nunği l-mu'minīna* (Q 10:103)
> "Then (in the end) we save our Messengers and those who believe! It is our duty, we will save the believers."

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[15] Cf. Aṭṭafayyiš (*himyān z-zād* http://www.altafsir.com). It should be mentioned that Ibn 'Ādil says that the verb *kaḏḏaba* is in the perfect tense, while *yaqtulūna* is in the imperfect tense because the despicableness/abomination of the killing is stronger than the despicableness of disbelieving. (see: *al-bāb fī 'ulūm l-kitāb* http://www.altafsir.com)

[16] *himyān z-zād* (http://www.altafsir.com).

In the case of Q 10:103, commentators such as Suyūṭī and Maḥallī (1994: 220), Nasafī (1996: Vol. II, 225) and as-Samīn l-Ḥalabī (1994: Vol. IV, 71) state that the verb in the imperfect *nunaǧǧī* can be replaced by the verb in imperfect *naǧaynā,* thus it can be considered as a case of *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya.* Furthermore, the verb *nunaǧǧī* should be connected to another verb which is deleted; thus according to the commentators Q 10:103 should be formulated as follows: *nuhliku l-ʾumama ṯumma nunaǧǧī rusulanā* "we killed the nations and then we saved our messengers", while the deleted verb *nuhliku* designates the so-called *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya.*

A further verse that attracts the attention of many commentators is Q 11:38:

(6) *wa-ṣnaʿi l-fulka bi-ʾaʿyuninā* […] *wa-**yaṣnaʿu** l-fulka* (Q 11:37–38)
"Make thou the Ark under our eyes […] So he made the Ark."

a. *ʾinnahu ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya ʾay fī ḏālika l-waqti kāna yaṣduqu ʿalayhi ʾannahu yaṣnaʿu l-fulka* (Rāzī 1993: Vol. IX, 232)
"This verb is *ḥikāyat l-ḥāl l-māḍiya*, so in this moment [e., at the moment of speech] he was fulfilling his mission to make the ark."

b. *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya li-stiḥḍāri ṣ-ṣūrati* (Šawkānī 1997: Vol. II, 693)[17]
"[The verb is in the imperfect because of] *ḥikāyat l-ḥāl l-māḍiya* in order to evoke the picture/scene of this action."

c. *wa-yaṣnaʿu ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya bi-ʾann nazala ḥāluhā* [the pronoun –*hā* refers to *ḥikāya*] *ka-ʾannahā ḥāḍiratun fī waqti nuzūli hāḏihi l-ʾāyati ʿalā sayyidinā muḥammadin ṣalla llāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallama ʾaw ǧaʿalahu ka-ʾannahu ḥāḍirun lahā wa-ʾanna zamānahu zamānuhā* (Aṭṭafayyiš)[18]
"The verb *yaṣnaʿu* is a case of *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* because this situation/action was revealed as if it were happening at the moment of revealing this verse to our lord Muḥammad, or he is present at this action as if he were attending [the performance of this action] and that his time is the time of the action [i.e., the moment of speech is also the moment in which the action is performed]."

d. *wa-ǧāʾa t-taʿbīru bi-l-fiʿli l-muḍāriʿi maʿa ʾanna ṣ-ṣanʿa kāna fī l-māḍī stiḥḍāran li-ṣūrati ṣ-ṣanʿi ḥattā la-ka-ʾanna nūḥan ʿalayhi s-salāmu yušāhadu l-ʾāna wa-huwa yaṣnaʿuhā* (Ṭanṭāwī 1992: Vol. VII, 202)
"The speech is expressed by using a verb in the imperfect, although the making of the Ark was in the past, to manifest/visualize the scene of making the ark [in the people's imagination] as if Noah, on him God's salvation, is seen now making the ark."

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[17] Cf. Abū s-Suʿūd (1999: Vol. III, 311); Ālūsī (1964: Vol. III, 547–58); Ibn ʿAǧība (2005: Vol. III, 213)

[18] *himyān z-zād* (http://www.altafsir.com).

Thus, by their explanations the commentators strengthen the fact that *ḥikāyat l-ḥāl l-māḍiya* has a dramatic effect by giving the audience or, in our case, the prophet Muḥammad, the feeling that when the story of Noah was revealed to him it is as though he were present at the time when the ark was being made by Noah, witnessing the process of its construction.

Q 16:63 is an exceptional case because no verb in the imperfect is registered in this verse and the term, *ḥikāyat l-ḥāl l-māḍiya,* refers to the nominal utterance *huwa waliyyuhumu l-yawma* or, more precisely, to the exact time indicated by the adverb *l-yawma,* as can be seen in the following exegeses:

(7) *ta-llāhi la-qad ’arsalnā ’ilā ’umamin min qablika fa-zayyana lahumu š-šayṭānu’a‘mālahum **fa-huwa waliyyuhumu l-yawma** wa-lahum ‘aḏābun ’alīmun* (Q 16:63)
"By God, We surely sent a Messenger to nations before you (O Muhammad), but Satan made their deeds attractive/fair-seeming. So he (Satan) is their *protector* (helper) today, and there yet awaits them a painful chastisement."

a. […] *’an yurāda l-ba‘ḍu llaḏī qad maḍā wa-huwa llaḏī waqa‘a fīhi t-tazyīnu mina š-šayṭāni li-l-’umami l-māḍiyati fa-yakūnu ‘alā ṭarīqi l-ḥikāyati li-l-ḥāli l-māḍiyati* (Šawkānī 1997: Vol. III, 240)
"The meaning indicated by this time/period [i.e., *l-yawma*] is one in the past, namely the time in which Satan made the action of the previous nations fair-seeming, and this meaning [is indicated] by *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*."

b. *l-yawma, ’ay yawma zayyana š-šayṭānu ’a‘mālahum fīhi wa-huwa wa-’inn kāna māḍiyan wa-yawma l-mu‘arrafu ma‘rūfun fī zamāni l-ḥāli ka-l-’āni lākinna ṣuwwira bi-ṣūrati l-ḥāli li-yastaḥḍira s-sāmi‘u tilka ṣ-ṣūrata l-‘aǧība wa-yata‘aǧǧabu minhā wa-summiya miṯla ḏālika ḥikāyat l-ḥāl l-māḍiya wa-huwa sti‘āratun mina l-ḥuḍūri l-ḥāriǧiyyi li-l-ḥuḍūri ḏ-ḏihniyyi* (Ālūsī 1964: Vol. IV, 397).
"*l-yawma* refers to that day in which Satan made their actions attractive/fair-seeming, and [although the context] is in the past, the definite adverb *l-yawma* is also used [*lit.* known] in the present time, as (for example) 'now' [i.e., *l-yawma* may indicate this moment/the moment of speech]. This action was described as if it were happening at the moment to visualize this inappropriate scene and thus the listener would wonder at this scene. Such a phenomenon is called *ḥikāyat l-ḥāl l-māḍiya*, which means borrowing from the [general] external reality framework to the [personally] mental reality framework."

c. *l-yawma huwa d-dunyā ’aw huwa ḥīnu t-tazyīni ḥikāyatan li-l-ḥāli l-māḍiyati ka-’annahā ḥāḍiratun* (Aṭṭafayyiš)[19]
"The adverb *l-yawma* refers to this world or it refers to the time/moment of making the deeds [of the unbelievers] attractive due to *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*."

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[19] *himyān z-zād* (http://www.altafsir.com).

It is inferred from the above section that the adverb, *l-yawma*, can refer either to the future, i.e., Judgment Day (see Section 3.5) or to the past, i.e., the time when Satan misled the people by giving them the wrong impression that their deeds were good, while using this adverb in referring to a past action is considered a case of *ḥikāyat l-ḥāl l-māḍiya.*

The following case is Q 35:9:

(8) *wa-llāhu llaḏī 'arsala r-riyāḥa fa-***tuṯīru*** saḥāban fa-suqnāhu 'ilā baladin mayyitin fa-'aḥyaynā bihi l-'arḍa ba'da mawtihā* (Q 35:9)
"God is the one who sends the winds, that raise up clouds, and We drive them to a dead land, and revive with them the earth after its death."

(fa-tuṯīru saḥāban) li-ḥikāyati l-ḥāli l-māḍiyati stiḥḍāran li-tilka ṣ-ṣūrati l-badī'ati d-dāllati 'alā kamāli l-qudrati wa-l-ḥikmati (Ibn 'Aǧība 2005: Vol. VI, 105)[20]
"(Raising up clouds) is a case of *ḥikāyat l-ḥāli l-māḍiya* which is [used for] evocation of the wonderful scene which manifests the completeness of God's power and his wisdom."

(9) *wa-qāla l-maliku 'innī 'arā sab'a baqarātin simānin ya'kuluhunna sab'un 'iǧāfun* (Q 12:43) (see also 37:102)
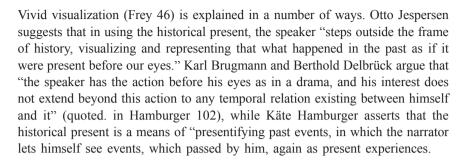"And the king said: I saw in a dream seven fat kine, and seven lean ones devouring them."

In the case of Q 12:43, the term, *ḥikāyat l-ḥāli l-māḍiya,* appears without any further explanation (see: Abū s-Su'ūd (1999: Vol. IV, 392), Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1966: Vol. XI 203) and Ālūsī 1964: Vol. IV, 26).

After examining the explanations provided by the commentators on the Qur'ān regarding the term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya,* one cannot ignore the similarity between the commentators' definition and the definition of the term, *historical present*, as is presented in Section One. In other words, Wright (1971: vol. II, 30) was correct when he translated *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* as the historical present/ historic imperfect. The primary function of both terms is to make something present, i.e., it creates a fictional or imaginary present by bringing the event before the listeners/readers. In this case, they all become eyewitnesses and the effect of this is to highlight the narrated event, an increase in vividness, excitement (Brinton 1992: 222) and according to the exegeses it also causes fear and deters one from repeating the despicable event. Two keywords found in the Qur'ān exegeses for defining *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* are: *'istiḥḍār* and *taṣwīr ṣ-ṣūrati*, and they both correspond to the term, visualization / evocation mentioned in the context of the historical present. Brinton (1992: 223) presents several explanations for this term:

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[20] Cf. Nasafī (1996: Vol. III, 486); Abū s-Su'ūd (1999: Vol. V, 274).

Vivid visualization (Frey 46) is explained in a number of ways. Otto Jespersen suggests that in using the historical present, the speaker "steps outside the frame of history, visualizing and representing that what happened in the past as if it were present before our eyes." Karl Brugmann and Berthold Delbrück argue that "the speaker has the action before his eyes as in a drama, and his interest does not extend beyond this action to any temporal relation existing between himself and it" (quoted. in Hamburger 102), while Käte Hamburger asserts that the historical present is a means of "presentifying past events, in which the narrator lets himself see events, which passed by him, again as present experiences.

The similarity between *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* and the historical present, as presented in the Western descriptions, indicates that *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* is not a unique feature of the Qur'ān but rather a universal phenomenon found both in ancient and modern sources. Additional findings regarding *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* arise from the exegeses concern the literal meaning of this term: *ḥikāya* means telling or reporting; *ḥāl* means event or situation; and the adjective *māḍiya* refers to the verbal noun *ḥikāya* and means in the past. Thus *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* can be translated as "telling/reporting an event/action which happened in the past" (as if it is happening now), and it is not necessarily connected to circumstantial clauses, as Reuschel (1996: 265) and Reckendorf (1921: 13) link *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* and circumstantial clauses.

In spite of the similarity between *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* and the historical present, one cannot ignore the fact that there are some differences between them. First, the Western scholars usually speak about tense-alternation or the switching either from the *historical present* to the past or *vice versa*. When we examine the occurrences of *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, we see that in only four cases out of nine (Q 2:87, Q 5:70, Q 12:43 and 35:9) does such an alternation exist. Furthermore, the Western scholars usually analyze the function of the *historical present* in narratives. As for the Qur'ān, not all passages where the term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, was mentioned by the commentators belong to the Qur'ānic narratives. The verses that are integral in a Qur'ānic narrative are: Q 2:87, Q 11:38 and Q 12:43.[21]

The last noteworthy finding is that, in contrast to the Western studies, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* is not necessarily mentioned only when a verb in the imperfect is involved. In their discussion of Q 16:63, some of the commentators mention this term when referring to the actual time that is indicated by the temporal adverb *l-yawma*. One possibility is that it refers to the future, i.e., Judgment Day, and the other possibility is that this adverb refers to the past, i.e., to the moment when Satan made the unbelievers' actions attractive, thus this adverb may be replaced by the following statement:

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[21] This argument is based on two sources: Gilliot's entry on narratives in the Qur'ān (2003) and my monograph entitled "Linguistic Features of the Qur'ānic Narrative" (forthcoming).

ta-llāhi la-qad 'arsalnā 'ilā 'umamin min qablika fa-zayyana lahumu š-šayṭānu'a'mālahum fa-huwa waliyyuhumu **waqta t-tazyīni** "By God, we surely sent a Messenger to nations before you (O Muhammad), but Satan decked out fair to them their deeds. So he (Satan) is their *protector* (helper) at the moment of making their deeds attractive."

Q 16:63 leads us to discuss in the following section another case where *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya,* is used with the active participle and not with a verb in the imperfect.

2.2. Explaining the case mark by using the term, ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya

(10) *wa-taḥsabuhum 'ayqāẓan wa-hum ruqūdun wa-nuqallibuhum ḏāta l-yamīni wa-ḏāta š-šimāli wa-kalbuhum* **bāsiṭun ḏirāʻayhi** *bi-l-waṣīdi* (Q 18:18)
"You would have thought them awake, as they lay sleeping, while we turned them now to the right, now to the left, and their dog stretching its paws on the threshold."

Šawkānī (1997: Vol. III, 381)[22] explains the expression *bāsiṭun ḏirāʻayhi* as follows:
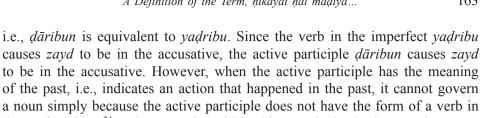
ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya li-'anna sma l-fāʻili lā yaʻmalu 'iḏā kāna bi-maʻnā l-maḍiyyi ka-mā takarrara fī 'ilmi n-naḥwi
"[The active participle is a case of] *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* because the active participle cannot govern [a noun] if it [i.e., the active participle] indicates the past as it was shown in the grammatical description."

The use of *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* in this context seems to be problematic; to understand what is meant by the commentators we should first refer to the explanation of the traditional Arab grammarians regarding the regent (*ʻāmil*) of the active participle. Ibn 'Aqīl (1984: Vol. II, 121), for example, in his chapter entitled *'i'māl smi l-fāʻili* "the government of the active participle", explains that an active participle can govern (a noun) only when it indicates an action happening in the future or in the present as, for example, *hāḏā ḏāribun zaydan l-āna 'aw ġadan* "this is the one who hit [*lit.* he is the assailant of] Zayd now or tomorrow." The active participle in this case governs the noun *zayd* because the active participle has both the meaning and the form[23] of a verb in the imperfect,

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[22] Cf. Zamaḫšarī (1947: Vol. II, 709); Bayḍāwī (1996: Vol. III, 484); Nasafī (1996: Vol. III, 16); Abū Ḥayyān (1992: Vol. VII, 154); and Abū s-Suʻūd (1999: Vol. IV, 178).

[23] According to Ibn 'Aqīl, the active participle has the same vowels as the verb in the imperfect which are: *fatḥa*, *sukūn*, *kasra* and *ḍamma* →   ضَ ا رِ بٌ

يَ ضْ رِ بُ

i.e., *ḍāribun* is equivalent to *yaḍribu*. Since the verb in the imperfect *yaḍribu* causes *zayd* to be in the accusative, the active participle *ḍāribun* causes *zayd* to be in the accusative. However, when the active participle has the meaning of the past, i.e., indicates an action that happened in the past, it cannot govern a noun simply because the active participle does not have the form of a verb in the perfect form,[24] so it cannot be said in this case *hāḏā ḍāribun zaydan ’amsi* "this is the one who hit [*lit*. he is the assailant of] Zayd yesterday," but the active participle should appear in annexation *hāḏā ḍāribu zaydin ’amsi* "he is the one who hit Zayd yesterday [*lit*. he is the assailant of Zayd yesterday]." As for Q 18:18, Ibn ‘Aqīl mentions that according to Kisā’ī the active participle causes the noun *ḏirā‘ayhi* to be in the accusative case although the active participle, *bāsiṭun,* designates a past action.

If we go back to the discussion in Section 2.1, we see that the term *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* refers to verbs in the imperfect form, yet they were performed in the past. In light of this fundamental finding, it is expected that the active participle in Q 18:18, which is considered by the commentators as a case of *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, will also designate a past action. Instead, we see that *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* refers to the active participle form which designates an action that will be performed in the future, and thus we cannot avoid asking how this contradiction can be explained. A possible explanation is provided by Aṭṭafayyiš[25], who says that the active participle, *bāsiṭun* "stretching his paws", describes one situation of the dog among his other situations in which he found, such as a dog which is sleeping, rolling or perking up his ears. Thus, the noun, *ḏirā‘ayhi*, is governed by the active participle because it indicates a state in which the dog is usually found. However, it is argued that the dog died long before the verse was revealed, so the active participle designates a past action; however, as Aṭṭafayyiš explains: *’innamā ‘amila smu l-fā‘ilu ma‘a ’annahu li-l-māḍī tanzīlan li-l-ḥālati l-māḍiyati manzilata l-ḥālati l-ḥāḍirati taqrīran li-’amri ḏālika l-kalbi wa-baṣaṭihi ka-’annahu mušāhadun* "the active participle governs although it indicates the past because the action in the past has the status of an action happening in the present or at the moment of speech, as if the listeners can see the dog at the moment of speech." In other words, the active participle has the same effect of *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, which is to depict the action as if the listeners were witnessing it in the present.

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[24] As can be shown, the verb in the perfect does not have the same vowels as the active participle:

<div dir="rtl">

ضَ ا رِ بٌ

ضَ – رَ بَ

</div>

[25] *himyān z-zād* (http://www.altafsir.com).

3. Another Explanation for the Usage of Verbs in the Imperfect

Up to now we have seen that *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* has the function of making a specific action or event more dramatic and vivid. The past actions described in the present tense cause the listeners to see the events as if they were taking place at the moment of speaking. This definition is no different from the traditional definition of the term, historical present. However, as was shown in Section 1.1, the traditional definition is criticized by the Western scholars who analyze occurrences of the historical present in various narratives. The criticism is usually expressed by proposing alternative explanations for the function of the *historical present*, and the primary functions were also presented. As for the Qur'ān, it seems that explaining the occurrences of verbs in the imperfect as cases of *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* would not be sufficient for the reason which is well-articulated by Wolfson and is true regarding the Qur'ān (1979: 72):

> If CHP (conversational historical present) is used because the narrator wants to bring the story close to the listener, then how can we make sense of the fact that much of the important action is recounted in the past tense.

Wolfson analyzes the tense alternation in the so-called *performed story*, yet we must wonder why, for example, the phenomenon of *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* is not used in all Qur'ānic narratives, where important historical events are described by using verbs in the perfect form and not in the imperfect form. Furthermore, if verbs in the imperfect are used for evoking an event and describing it in a vivid way, how can one explain the fact that in the Qur'ānic description of Judgment Day verbs in the perfect form are used for creating the same effect as verbs in the imperfect[26] which are explained as *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*?

Trying to understand the real function of the imperfect verbs labeled by the commentators as *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, we tried to implement the proposed explanation of the Western scholars; however, functions such as segmentation of the events, highlighting the narrative peak or alternatively indicating a turn in the story are not relevant to the analyzed passages from the Qur'ān, especially due to the fact that cases of *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* do not necessarily appear in narratives and the use of the historical present is not as common in the Qur'ān as in classical or modern Western narratives. However, the one source which sheds light on the issue of *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* is the Qur'ān exegesis because, as will be shown in this section, together with the use of this term, the commentators propose an alternative explanation for the verbs in the imperfect, an explanation which has nothing to do with visualization and vividness.

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[26] See: Dror (2013).

3.1. The case of: farīqan kaḏḏabtum wa-farīqan taqtulūna (Q 2:87) and farīqan kaḏḏabū wa-farīqan yaqtulūna (Q 5:70)

a. Bayḍāwī (1996: Vol. I, 358)[27] explains that both verbs in the imperfect are used *murā'ātan li-l-fawāṣil* "out of attention to the final words of the verse". If we look at Q 2:70–92, we see that all verses end with the assonance *–ūna*, thus if a verb in the perfect (*qataltum*) had been used, the production of a unified rhyme would have been interrupted.

It should be mentioned in this context that using the present tense for the sake of rhyme is not a phenomenon restricted only to the Qur'ān. Visser (1966: 711, 720)[28] explains that the so-called *substitutive present*, i.e., the use of the present tense instead of the preterite for the sake of rhyme or metre, occurs in English poetry.

b. It is also possible that the verb, *taqtulūna*, indeed indicates a future action. The commentators explain that the children of Israel tried in the past to kill the prophet; therefore they all mention the following *ḥadīṯ*, which was uttered by the prophet Muḥammad after the attempt to kill him: *mā zālat 'aklatu ḥaybarun tu'āwidunī fa-hāḏā 'awānu nqitā'i 'abharī* "[the memory of] the feast in Ḥaybar returns to me from time to time and it is the moment when the blood flow in the main artery stopped."

This assassination attempt was prevented by God but *taqtulūna* implies that the children of Israel never stopped, are not stopping in the present and will not stop in the future from trying to kill the prophet (Bayḍāwī 1996: Vol. I, 358).[29]

c. Ṭabarsī (1959: Vol. III, 227) claims that some components were deleted from this verse, and the underlying structure of Q 5:70 should be as follows: *farīqan kaḏḏabū lam yaqtulūhu wa-farīqan kaḏḏabu yaqtulūna* "a group (of prophets) you disbelieved and you did not kill them and a group (of prophets) you disbelieved and you killed." According to Ṭabarsī, *yaqtulūna* is the adjective of the noun *farīq* and therefore one need not wonder how or why a verb in the perfect is connected to a verb in the imperfect.

d. Rāzī (1993: Vol. VI, 59) argues that the verb, *kaḏḏabū.* is in the perfect form because this verb indicates their attitude toward Mūsā. The verb, *yaqtulūhu*, however, is in the imperfect form because it indicates the attitude toward Zakariyyā, Yaḥyā and 'Īsā and the time of these prophets is closer (to the audience) than the time of Mūsā, as if they were living in the present time.

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[27] Q 2:87: Cf. Nasafī (1996: Vol. I, 107); Abū Ḥayyān (1996: Vol. II, 351); Ālūsī (1964: Vol. I, 26); as-Samīn l-Ḥalabī (1994 Vol. I, 295).
Q 5:70 See: Ṭabarsī (1959: Vol. III, 227); Bayḍāwī (1996: Vol. II, 351); Maḥallī and Suyūṭī (1994: 119).

[28] Visser is also mentioned by Brinton (1992: 221).

[29] Cf. Nasafī (1996: Vol. I, 107); Abū Ḥayyān (1992: Vol. I, 483); as-Samīn l-Ḥalabī (194: Vol. I, 295) and Ḥalīlī (http://www.altafsir.com).

3.2. The case of: kun fa-yakūnu (Q 3:59)

A possible explanation presented by Aṭṭafayyiš[30] is that God first created Adam, with the intention that first He created his body – his flesh, blood and bones – and only then did he bring him to life – an action which is indicated by the imperative verb, *kun*. The verb, *fa-yakūnu*, is the result of bringing life to Adam, therefore *fa-yakūnu* can be translated as "Be! And he is (existing)" and not as it is usually translated "Be! And he was."According to as-Samīn l-Ḥalabī (1994: Vol. II, 119), *fa-yakūnu* is in the imperfect, indicating both the present and the future, while the meaning is: *fa-yakūnu ka-mā ya'muru llāhu* "and he is/will be as God commanded".

3.3. The case of: wa-yaṣnaʻu l-fulka (Q 11:38)

The commentators propose the possibility of the deletion of verbs of beginning, which in Arabic are called *'afʻāl l-'inšā'*. Thus, according to Rāzī (1993: Vol. IX, 232) the elided verb is *'aqbala* "he began to", and the statement should be *wa-'aqbala yaṣnaʻu l-fulka* "he began to make the ark". According to Šawkānī (1997: Vol. II, 693)[31] the underlying structure should be *wa-ṭafiqa yaṣnaʻu l-fulka, 'aw wa-'aḫaḏa yaṣnaʻu l-fulka* "he began to make the ark."

3.4. The case of:'innī 'arā sabʻa baqarātin simānin (Q 12:43) (see also 37:102)

Both Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1966: Vol. XI, 203) and Ālūsī (1964: Vol. VII, 165) mention that the verb *'arā* indicates that the action of seeing the kine in his dream (in Q 37:102) is repeated while Aṭṭafayyiš[32] says that the king saw it three times.

3.5. The case of: fa-huwa waliyyuhumu l-yawma (Q 16:63)

Although Q 16:63 does not include any verb in the imperfect, the commentators considered the adverb, *l-yawma*, to be *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya* because it may indicate a time in the past when Satan used to make the unbelievers' actions attractive. However, when we read further we see that the commentators propose that *l-yawma* might also be considered a case of *ḥikāyat ḥāl 'ātiya* "telling a coming action", which means that Satan made their deeds attractive; therefore, he (Satan) should be their protector (helper) today, i.e., in the coming future on Judgment Day, when they will be punished by entering Hell (Zamaḫšarī 1947: Vol. II, 614).[33]

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[30] *himyān z-zād* (http://www.altafsir.com).

[31] Cf. Abū s-Suʻūd (1999: Vol. III, 311).

[32] *himyān z-zād* Q 37: 102 (http://www.altafsir.com.

[33] Cf. Maḥallī and Suyūṭī (1994: 273); Ibn ʻAḡība (2005: Vol. IV, 36); Ṭanṭāwī (1992: Vol. VIII, 180).

3.6. The case of: wa-llāhu lladī ’arsala r-riyāḥa fa-tuṯīru saḥāban (Q 35:9)

Abu s-Su‘ūd (1999: Vol. V, 274), Ibn ‘Aǧība (2005: Vol. VI, 105) and Ālūsī[34] explain the appearance of a verb in the imperfect while the verbs that precede it and follow it are in the perfect form, saying: *li-d-dalālati ‘alā stimrāri l-’iṯārati* "[the verb in the imperfect is used for] indicating the continuity of the raising up the clouds." These words might be clarified by Aṭṭafayyiš’[35] commentary on this verse:

> *li-yubayyina bi-ḏāika ’annahu yuḥdiṯu r-riyāḥa bi-ḥayṯu tuṯīru s-saḥābi fī l-ḥāli la-tutraku ’iṯāratuhu wa-lā tata’aḫḫaru ‘an ’iṯāratihi wa-’inna quwwata l-’iṯārati mawǧūdatun*
>
> [The verb in the imperfect is used] to clarify by this usage that the wind can be created by raising up the clouds immediately, while [the ability of the wind to] raise up the clouds never stops and never has been delayed because the ability/strength of raising up the clouds always exists [in the wind].

These commentaries indicate that the verb, *tuṯīru*, describes one feature of the wind, therefore this verb indicates an action that will never be completed.

Conclusions

If we take into account that Qur’ānic exegeses are the primary source for understanding *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, it can be well argued that the Arabic term is no different from the Western term, the historical present. Both Arabic and Western sources assume that these terms designate a verb in the imperfect, demonstrating that a action completed in the past makes the past more vivid. By using such verbs, the past events are visualized and are made more dramatic by moving them out of their original time in the past and presenting them as if they were happening at the moment of speaking, right in front of the audience's eyes. However, after examining the verbs in the present tense within the exegeses, we see that alongside the term, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, there are three possible explanations for using the present tense. First, it is used for the sake of the rhyme. This is the case of the verb, *yaqtulūna*, and, by using this verb, the assonance –*ūn* is maintained. Second, there is an omitted element which should precede the verb. This is the case of the verb *yaṣna‘u*, where a verb of beginning such as *ṭafiqa* (*yaṣna‘u*) is omitted, or in the case of the statement *wa-farīqan yaqtulūna* the underlying structure should be *farīqan kaḏḏabū lam taqtulūhu wa-farīqan kaḏḏabu taqtulūna*. Third, the commentators mention

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[34] *himyān z-zād* (http://www.altafsir.com).

[35] *himyān z-zād* (http://www.altafsir.com).

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various verbal aspects other than the historical present. Thus, the verbs *'arā* and *taqtulūna* are iterative actions, *tuṯīru* indicates a general truth regarding the wind, i.e., it always raises the clouds up, an iterative action which will never be completed, *yakūnu* indicates the state of Adam after God has brought him to life, and the adverb, *l-yawma*, actually means Judgment Day, which will occur in the future. It might also be argued that the actions mentioned in this section are not completed at the moment of speaking.

Finally, *ḥikāyat ḥāl māḍiya*, does not necessarily refer only to verbs. Among the cases discussed by the commentators, the adverb, *l-yawma*, is included and so is the case of the active participle *bāṣiṭ* (*ḏirāʿayhi*). Some of the commentators explain that the active participle indicates a past action and nevertheless it still governs the noun, *ḏirāʿayhi*, although an active participle cannot govern a noun when it has the meaning of a past action. Others argue that the active participle, like a verb in the imperfect tense, has the effect of visualization and dramatization as if the action were happening at the moment of speaking.

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