

The Perfective Indication of *kāna* in Clauses of the *kāna llāhu ‘alīman raḥīman* Type¹

Yehudit Dror

University of Haifa

تلخيص

بناءً على تفسير الباحثين الغربيين للفعل "كان" في جمل مثل "كان الله عليماً حكيمًا" فهو يدلّ على حدث يحصل بالزمن الحاضر أو على حدث ابتدأ بالماضي ولا يزال مستمرًا؛ هذا يعني أن الحدث في هذه الحالة لا زمن يحصره. جمل من هذا النوع تشير إلى قوّة الله، لذلك تشترك هذه الجمل بالاعتقاد بقوّة الله الأزليّة التي لا يحدّها زمانٌ أو مكانٌ. بعدما قمتُ بتحليل جملٍ من هذا النوع تبيّن أنّ الفعل "كان" في بعض الأحوال يدلّ على حدث حصل في الماضي، هذا لا يناقض دلالة الجملة على قوّة الله الأزليّة التي لا يحدّها زمانٌ أو مكانٌ. إنّ النتيجة المركزيّة لهذا التحليل هي أنّ الفعل "كان" يدلّ على أمرين: أولاً، يدلّ على حدث حصل في الماضي وغالب المفسّرين يوضحون ماهيّة الحدث؛ ثانياً، يدلّ على الأسباب التي أدت إلى حدوث هذا الحدث.

Abstract

According to traditional Arab and Western grammarians, *kāna* in clauses of the *kāna llāhu ‘alīman raḥīman* type expresses an action in the present or at no specific time, having started in the past and still continuing. Clauses of this type reveal various aspects of God's nature and share one notion: God is not limited by time or space and is eternal. My examination showed that in some cases *kāna* indeed has a perfective meaning, something that does not necessarily contradict God's infinity because *kāna* has two references: to a past action (mentioned in the verse or implied by Qur'ānic exegetes) and still to the circumstance that enabled this action's occurrence. For example, in Q 33:9 the implied past event is the triumph of the Muslims in the battle of the Trench. This happened because God saw (*kāna llāhu baṣīran*) the Muslims' effort before and during the battle, digging ditches and devising their military strategy.

Keywords

Clauses of the *kāna llāhu ‘alīman raḥīman* type; Perfective indication; Time boundaries; Circumstance and action

¹ I would like to thank the three IJAL anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions to improve this article.

1. Introduction

In monotheistic religions such as Islam, the idea of one God may well be considered a foundation for the entire idea of monotheism. Accordingly, a major concept treated in the Qur'ān, if not the most important, is God. However, the great descriptions of God and His nature in the Qur'ān are strictly functional. They intend to present God as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and of man, He who guides the people onto the right path and He who judges man, individually and collectively, and metes out merciful justice.² Thus, both man and nature operate independently of God because everything is related to Him; absent God's activity, nature's and man's activity becomes delinquent, purposeless, and self-wasting. The idea of God-oneness recurs throughout the Qur'ān to emphasize God's omnipotence. However, this emphasis also has a historical dimension – namely, the fight against polytheism or pagan Arabs, who invoked and worshiped many deities besides God.³ Time and again throughout the text, this asserts that there is no other God but He will repel all polytheistic notions or atheists who deny God's existence.

The Qur'ānic passages intent on emphasizing God's power are constructed differently, as, for example, in Q 59:22-24 the idea of this power is expressed in short nominal sentences. God as Creator is described as follows: *huwa llāhu l-ḥāliq l-bāri 'u l-muṣawwiru* “He is the God, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner.” An additional (syntactic) structure attributing omnipotence to God are clauses following the *kāna llāhu 'alīman ḥalīman* pattern (Q 33:51) “and Allāh is All-knowing forbearing”; these clauses are the focus of my discussion. Such clauses are called *al-fawāṣil* and they are explained by Zarkašī as the final clauses in the verse, which serve as a break or pause in speech to improve the delivery. These structures are called *fawāṣil* “separatives” because these final clauses in the verse separate themselves from what follows. Therefore, they are not labeled or considered *asğā'*, a form of rhymed prose.⁴

The *fawāṣil* exhibit five patterns: (1) the conjunctive particle *wa-* followed by the noun *Allāh*, a personal pronoun and an adjective, e.g., Q 2:247; (2) *wa-* preceding the noun *Allāh*, which is followed by a prepositional phrase and nominal predicate, e.g., Q 8:41; (3) *wa-* preceding the verb *kāna*, which is followed by the noun *Allāh* and a nominal predicate in accusative, e.g., Q 4:130; (4) *wa-* preceding the noun *Allāh*, which is followed/not followed by

² Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Chicago and London, 1980), p. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴ Zarkašī, *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo, 1957), I, pp. 53-54.

the negation particle ($\pm l\bar{a}$) and a verbal predicate, e.g., Q 3:86; (5) a verbal predicate followed by the nominal subject *Allāh*, e.g., Q 9:15.⁵

According to Bell, the pattern *wa-llāhu 'alīmun ḥakīmūn* “And God is All-knowing, wise” or *wa-kāna llāhu 'alīman ḥalīman* “And Allāh is All-knowing forbearing” essentially conclude a subject. They press home a truth by repetition and clinch the authority of what is laid down and they act as a type of refrain.⁶

My primary concern in the structure of *kāna llāhu 'alīman ḥalīman* is the usage of the verb *kāna* “was.” The traditional Arab grammarians distinguish two kinds of *kāna*: *kāna t-tāmma* “the incomplete *kāna*” and *kāna n-nāqiṣa* “the complete *kāna*.” The difference between the two types is that while *kāna t-tāmma* is regarded as a complete verb because it denotes both an action and time, *kāna n-nāqiṣa* does not denote an act but only time, and thus lacks one of the elements expressed in most verb forms. Additionally, *kāna t-tāmma* is an ordinary intransitive verb that takes a subject in the nominative, e.g., *kāna l-'amru* “this thing happened.” *kāna n-nāqiṣa*, however, is a verb that acts like a copula, taking a subject in the nominative (called *'ism kāna*) and a predicate in the accusative (called *ḥabar kāna*), e.g., *kāna r-raḡulu faqīran* “The man was poor.”⁷ Moreover, when *kāna n-nāqiṣa* is introduced in a nominal sentence it has a temporal indication; that is, the situation described in the sentence occurred in the past or will happen in the future. The treatment of the verb *kāna* as a time locator, which locates the situation in the past, present and future, is the core of this discussion since it raises the following problem: The central doctrine in the Qur'ān is that God is not limited by time or space, He is present at every point everywhere, and His infinite presence establishes the idea that He is eternal – He has always existed and will always exist, there was never a time He did not exist, nor will there be a time when He ceases to exist. How can we thus explain structures like *kāna llāhu 'alīman ḥalīman*, which locates God's description in the temporal boundaries of the past and consequently implies the finitude of His omnipotence? Arab grammarians, Qur'ān commentators and Western scholars seemingly have not remained indifferent to the usage of the verb *kāna* in Qur'ānic verses

⁵ Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (Berlin, 1981), pp. 161-163.

⁶ Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh, 1970), pp. 67-71.

⁷ Levin, “Sībawayhi's View on the Syntactical Structure of *kāna wa-'axawātuhā*.” In: *Arabic Linguistic Thought and Dialectology* (Jerusalem, 1998), p. 185. Cf. Levin, “*kāna wa-'axawātuhā*.” In: *Encyclopaedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics* (Leiden-Boston, 2008), II, pp. 548-549.

that refer to God’s unlimited time and space—His omnipotence. They offer some possible solutions to this temporality issue within the Qur’ānic discourse. The solutions are summarized in Wolfgang Reuschel’s (1968)⁸ short paper entitled *wa-kāna llāhu ‘alīman raḥīman* “and Allāh is All-knowing All-Compassionate”:

1. The first solution: Western scholars generally agree that the perfective *kāna* does not always indicate that the situation described in the sentence is set in the past tense, as in the case of *wa-kāna llāhu ‘alīman raḥīman*. *kāna* can indicate the present tense, as (for example) Wright explains:

The imperfect *yakūnu* has in this case the usual meaning of the imperfect: whilst the perfect *kāna* admits of four significations; viz. (a) of the *historical tense* or Greek aorist, in which case it has, according to the Arab grammarians, the sense of *šāra*, *to become*, (b) of the actual perfect, (c) of the actual imperfect, as if it were a shortening of *kāna yakūnu*, which also occasionally occurs; and (d) sometimes, especially in the *Ḳor’ān*, of the present, but only by giving a peculiar turn to its use as a perfect, as in *’inna llāha kāna ‘alaykum raqīban*, *verily God is a watcher over you* (Sūra iv.). The *kāna* in the perfect tense expresses the present in particular after the negative particle *mā*, and the interrogative particles, such as *’a* e.g., *mā kāna llāhu li-yuḍī’a ’īmānakum*, *God is incapable of letting—lit. is not (the one) to let—your belief perish (i.e., go unrewarded)*.⁹

2. The second solution: Reuschel refers to Sīrāfī, who distinguishes two types of *kāna*: *munqaṭi’* “discontinued,” “disjoined” and *ḡayr munqaṭi’* “continued not disjoined.” Reuschel

⁸ Reuschel, “*wa-kāna llāhu ‘alīman raḥīman*.” In: *Studia Orientalia* (Halle, 1968), pp. 147-153.

This article is a chapter from his habilitation thesis entitled “*Aspekt und Tempus in der Sprache des Korans*.” The work was written in 1968 and was published as a monograph in 1996.

⁹ See: Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* (Cambridge, 1971), part III, §131, p. 266.

Two additional scholars who are mentioned in this context by Reuschel are: Fleischer, *Kleinere Schriften: gesammelt, durchgesehen und vermehrt* (Osnabruck, 1968), I, p. 124; Gaudfroy-Demombynes, *Grammaire de l’arabe Classique* (Paris, 1952), p. 247.

Additional scholars who mention the durativity, iterativity and (general-)present indications of the perfect in Arabic are Bauer, *Tempora im Semitischen* (Berlin, 1910), p. 43; Reckendorf, *Arabische Syntax* (Heidelberg, 1921), p. 12; Aartun, *Zur Frage altarabischer Tempora* (Oslo, 1963), pp. 40-41; Kurylowicz, *Studies in Semitic Grammar and Metrics* (London, 1973), p. 82; Blau, “The use of Arabic stative verbs in the suffix-tense to mark the present.” In: *Studia Orientalia Memoriae D.H. Baneth* (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 185-186, 189.

says that it is not quite clear what is meant by these two types, and *munqaṭi* ‘ probably refers to an action that occurred on one occasion (einmal akzidentelles Sein) and occurred in the past, while *ḡayr munqaṭi* ‘ refers to a state or an action which is still being performed, an incomplete action, or an action which has no time limitation.¹⁰ Zarkašī also mentions that *kāna* may indicate ‘*inqiṭā* ‘ “discontinuance,” which is explained as *taḡaddud* “renewal”: the activity or the state of affairs is resumed after a pause or interruption. Alternatively, *kāna* may indicate not ‘*inqiṭā* ‘ but *dawām* “continuance,” “duration” and ‘*istimrār* “continuity.”¹¹

Indications of the durative aspect of *kāna* are also found in the Qur’ānic exegesis, as in:

yā-’ayyuhā llaḏīna ’āmanū lā ta ’kulū ’amwālakum baynakum bi-l-bāṭili ’illā ’an takūna tiḡāratan ’an tarāḏin minkum wa-lā taqtulū ’anfusakum ’inna llāha kāna bikum raḥīman (Q 4:29)

“O believers, consume not your goods between you in vanity, unless there be trading, by your agreeing together. And kill not one another. Surely God is compassionate to you.”

Ṭabarī explains this verse as follows:

*wa-’amma qawluhu ḡalla ṭanā’uhu (’inna llāha kāna bikum raḥīman) fa-’innahu ya’nī ’anna llāha tabāraka wa-ta’ālā lam yazal raḥīman bi-ḡalqihī wa-min raḥmatihī bikum kaffu ba’ḏikum ’an qatli ba’ḏin ’ayyuhā l-mu’minūna, bi-taḥrīmi dimā’i ba’ḏikum ’alā ba’ḏin ’illā bi-ḡaqqihā*¹²

As for the words of God, may His glory be praised (surely God is compassionate to you), it means that God, blessed and exalted be He, is still compassionate toward His creation (i.e., mankind), His compassion toward you [is expressed by] refraining from your killing one another, O believers, through the prohibition of shedding each others’ blood, unless there is a justification.

¹⁰ Reuschel, “wa-kāna llāhu ‘alīman raḥīman.” In: *Studia Orientalia* (Halle, 1968), pp. 147-148. Cf. Sāmarrā’ī, *Ma’āni an-naḥw* (Amman, 2000), I, p. 210.

¹¹ Zarkašī, *al-Burhān fī ’ulūm al-Qur’ān* (Cairo, 1957), IV, pp. 121-122. Cf. Sāmarrā’ī, *Ma’āni an-naḥw* (Amman, 2000), I, p. 211.

¹² Ṭabarī, *Ḡāmi’ al-bayān fī ta’wīl al-Qur’ān* (Beirut, 1992), IV, p. 38; Cf. Ṭabarsī, *Maḡma’ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (Tehran, 1959), III-IV, p. 37.

Additional verses in which *kāna* is replaced by the commentators with *lam yazal* are: Q 4:43; 4:56; 4:58; 4:85; 4:96; 4:99; 4:104; 4:126; 4:130; 4:127; 4:147; 4:152; 4:158; 4:165; 25:6; 48:7; 48:11; 48:14; 48:26.

Ṭabarī replaces the verb *kāna* with *lam yazal*, which is also one of the associates of *kāna* and according to 'Astrābādī¹³ is introduced to indicate '*istimrār* "duration," "continuation," i.e., the event is unbounded in time.

The following example does not relate to Allāh but also includes the verb *kāna*:

*allaḏīna 'āmanū yuqātilūna fī sabīli llāhi wa-llaḏīna kaḡarū yuqātilūna fī sabīli
ṭ-ṭāḡūti fa-qātilū 'awliyā'a š-šayṭāni 'inna kayda š-šayṭāni kāna ḡa 'īfan (Q 4:76)*

The believers fight in the way of God, and the unbelievers fight in the idol's way. Fight you therefore against the supporters of Satan. Surely the cunning/artful plot of Satan is wicked.

According to Ṭabarsī and Rāzī, the verb *kāna* was introduced to indicate and emphasize that the weakness of Satan's cunning obtains in all situations and time periods – past, present and future.¹⁴ Thus, Q 4:76 is no different from the previous verses where *kāna* indicates continuity.

3. The third solution: Ibn Manẓūr argues that the verb *kāna* in the clause *kāna llāhu ḡaḡūran raḡīman* "God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate" is *zā'ida* "redundant" (lit. "appendix") and is used *li-ta'kīd* "for emphasis." For example, in the sentence *kāna Zaydun munṭaliḡan* "Zayd is going" (lit. "was going") is semantically equivalent to *Zaydun munṭaliḡun* – the verb *kāna* appended to the sentence has no effect on the meaning of the sentence.¹⁵ As for the terms *ta'kīd* or *tawkīd*, Reuschel explains them as meaning that *kāna* occupies the position of a

¹³ 'Astrābādī, *Šarḡ kāfiyat Ibn al-Hāḡib* (Beirut, 1998), II, p. 174; Cf. Zarkašī, *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo, 1957), vol. IV, pp. 123, 125 says that *kāna* and *mā zāla* are synonyms when they are used with adjectives describing God. Cf. Sāmarrā'ī, *Ma'āni an-naḡw* (Amman, 2000), I, p. 213.

¹⁴ Ṭabarsī, *ḡāmi' al-bayān fī ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* (Beirut, 1992), III-IV, p. 76; Cf. Rāzī, *Maḡātiḡ al-ḡayb* (Beirut, 2000), X, p. 147.

¹⁵ See: Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'arab* (Beirut, 1994), V, p. 453. Cf. 'Anbārī, *'Asrār al-'arabiyya* (Damascus, 1957), p. 136. He adds that *kāna z-zā'ida* is *ḡayr 'āmila* "does not function as a governor"; Ibn Ya'a'īš, *Šarḡ al-mufaššal* (Beirut: 1994), VII, 99. According to Ibn Ya'a'īš, adding *kāna z-zā'ida* to the sentence does not affect its meaning (*duḡūluḡā ka-ḡurūḡihā*), as in, for example, *'inna min 'aḡḡalihim kāna zaydun* "Surely the most distinguished among them is Zayd." The meaning of this sentence is the same as *'inna min 'aḡḡalihim zaydun*, while adding the verb *kāna* is a type of *ta'kīd*, because it means to say that he is the most distinguished now (*fī l-ḡāl*) and it is not meant to indicate that he was the most distinguished in the past. Furthermore, if *kāna* had functioned as *kāna n-nāḡiṣa*, i.e., indicating the past tense and requiring the predicate to be in the accusative, then the sentence should have been structured as *'inna zaydan kāna min 'aḡḡalihim* "Surely Zayd was the most distinguished among them."

copula in a nominal sentence that has a general/generic-present indication,¹⁶ which also exists in sentences without *kāna*, such as *wa-llāhu ‘alīmun raḥīmun*.

To conclude, Reuschel says that *kāna* in nominal clauses may indicate three tenses: (a) the perfect *kāna* indicates past tense, and therefore can be translated as “was”; (b) the imperfect *yakūnu* indicates future tense, and therefore can be translated as “will be”; (c) 0-form indicates present tense, while in our case the position of the 0-form is occupied by the verb *kāna* in the perfect.¹⁷ Examples are *wa-kāna ‘amru llāhi qadaran maqdūran* (Q 38:33) “And the Command of Allāh is a decree determined,” *wa-kāna ḍālika ‘alā llāhi yasīran* (Q 30:4) “And that is easy for Allāh,” and *kuntum ḥayra ‘ummatin ‘uḥriḡat li-n-nāsi* (Q 3:110) “You are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind.” In these, *kāna* is in the perfect, but according to Reuschel it indicates *generell-Präsens*, i.e., this term describes an action not limited in time and not relating to any specific time. This action started in the past and continues in the present, as well as in the future.¹⁸ Additionally, two primary reasons for using *kāna* are mentioned: first, structures with and without *kāna* are positioned at the end of the verse in order to maintain the rhyme in the Qur’ān. *kāna* is introduced to keep the assonance –*an*: its predicate must be in the accusative, ending in that vowel.¹⁹ Secondly, as has been noted, *kāna* is used for *tawkīd* “emphasizing,” so it serves purely as a stylistic device and has nothing to do with aspect and time.²⁰

¹⁶ See Reuschel “*wa-kāna llāhu ‘alīman raḥīman*.” In: *Studia Orientalia* (Halle, 1968), p. 148: “Es erfüllt hier die positionelle Funktion der Kopula und wird deshalb als *tawkīd* empfunden, weil es in einem (generell-)präsentischen Nominalsatz eine Stelle besetzt.”

¹⁷ Reuschel “*wa-kāna llāhu ‘alīman raḥīman*.” In: *Studia Orientalia* (Halle, 1968), p. 148

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 149. Cf. Reuschel, *Aspekt und Tempus in der Sprache des Korans* (Frankfurt, 1996), p. 94; Sāmarrā’ī, *Ma‘āni an-naḥw* (Amman, 2000), I, p. 214. Sāmarrā’ī mentions Q 3:110, indicating that there is disagreement among the Arab grammarians regarding the indication of *kāna* since it can be viewed as verb in the perfect or as a verb expressing continuance (*taḡaddud*).

¹⁹ Reuschel “*wa-kāna llāhu ‘alīman raḥīman*.” In: *Studia Orientalia* (Halle, 1968), p. 151. Cf. Bell, *Introduction to the Qur’ān* (Edinburgh, 1970), pp. 70-71. Kirmānī, *‘Asrār at-takrār fī l-Qur’ān*. (Cairo, 2008), 207.

²⁰ Reuschel “*wa-kāna llāhu ‘alīman raḥīman*.” In: *Studia Orientalia* (Halle, 1968), p. 94 says in his monograph that *kāna* is used for *tawkīd* in the structure *kāna llāhu ‘alīman raḥīman*, and therefore it can be understood as “and Allāh is **without any doubt** All-knowing All-compassionate.”

2. Objectives of the Article

In this article I seek to manage the following lacunas that appeared in our reading the various explanations for *kāna*:

(a) The links between the verse and the succeeding *fawāšil* are not examined because the context is not considered.²¹ Zarkašī notes that the aspectual value of *kāna* can be determined only when the ways in which context contributes to meaning are considered and examined.²²

(b) Scholars generally assume that *kāna* is a stylistic device expressing *ta'kīd*; however, they ignore two important facts that might invalidate this assumption: first, the Arab grammarians maintain that *kāna z-zā'ida*, which is used for emphasis, cannot be regarded as governor (*'āmil*). It is redundant, and therefore can be omitted without affecting the structure's semantics and syntax. However, in the case of *kāna llāhu 'alīman raḥīman*, which consists of a subject and a nominal predicate, *kāna* causes the latter to be in the accusative. Secondly, the concept *ta'kīd* is not quite clear: one might wonder, particularly in light of a case such as *'inna llāha kāna 'afuwwan ḡafūran* (Q 4:43), why there is any need for a double emphasis – *kāna* and the particle *'inna*. According to Sībawayhi, the particle *'inna* is *tawkīd li-qawlihi zaydun muntaliqun. wa-'idā ḥaffafta fa-hiya ka-dālika tu'akkidu mā yatakallamu bihi wa-li-yaṭbuta l-kalāma*²³ “[The particle *'innā* is used for] emphasizing the [sentence] ‘Zayd is going.’ Even when you pronounce it without *tašdīd*], it also emphasizes what is being said and is used so the statement will stand firm”. Ibn Ya‘īš also mentions the *ta'kīd* function of *'inna*, yet he explains its essence by saying that a sentence such as *'inna zaydan muntaliqun* is a substitute for saying this sentence twice (*nāba manāba takrīri l-ḡumlati marratayni*). Thus, instead of saying *zaydun muntaliqun zaydun muntaliqun* “Zayd is going, Zayd is going” the speaker may shorten the speech by introducing *'inna*, and thereby maintaining the emphasis of the utterance.²⁴

²¹ For the types of relations between the *fawāšil* and the previous sentences, see: Dror, “Is each particle in the Qur’ān translatable? The case of *wāw al-isti'nāf* preceding the *fawāšil*,” *Babel: International Journal of Translation*, LXI/1 (2015), pp. 22-42.

²² Zarkašī, *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo, 1957), IV, p. 126. He cites this argument from the book of Maṣūf Ibn Fallāḥ al-Yamanī entitled *al-Kāfi*.

²³ Sībawayhi, *al-Kitāb* (Cairo, 1980), IV, p. 233.

²⁴ Ibn Ya‘īš, *Šarḥ al-mufaṣṣal* (Beirut, 1994), VII, p. 59.

(c) It was argued that *kāna* indicates habit and persistence; however, the tense most identified with these aspects is the imperfect. Habit is defined by Comrie as follows: “The feature that is common to all habitual actions, whether or not they are also iterative, is that they describe a situation which is characteristic of an extended period of time, so extended in fact that the situation referred to is viewed not as an incidental property of the moment but, precisely, as a characteristic feature of whole period.”²⁵ This raises the question of why a verb in the perfect is used in the Qur’ān, when the imperfective *yakūnu* could equally be used. Reuschel also refers to this issue, but the answer he provides is not sufficiently convincing. He explains laconically that *kāna* (not *yakūnu*) is typically used to indicate a connotatively and continuous state, as in the Qur’ānic verse *kuntum ḥayra ‘ummatin ‘uḥriḡat li-n-nāsi* (Q 3:110) “You are the best nation ever brought forth to men,”²⁶ where *kāna* indicates a continuous state.

Furthermore, it seems that these explanations have been made because clauses such as *kāna llāhu ‘alīman ḥalīman*, which have a perfective indication, do not agree with God’s being infinite. However, we would like to show next that in some clauses of the *kāna llāhu ‘alīman ḥalīman* type, *kāna* does have a perfective indication. In the textual approach which I take in this article, I look first at the text to understand what is being said. I also believe that a text must be examined in its context, because information about the background of the text is necessary to help construct the bigger picture. Thus, when the larger picture becomes clear, i.e., the event the whole discourse surrounds, we can identify that the clauses of *kāna llāhu ‘alīman ḥalīman* type are strongly connected to the described event which usually occurred in the past. To understand the context in which the studied clauses are introduced, I used the exegetical literature of the Qur’ān. It should be mentioned that I examined various exegeses, beginning with some early commentators such as Ṭabarī (d. 310H/923AD) *Ġāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl ‘āy al-Qur’ān*, Zaḡḡāḡ (d. 311H/923AD) *Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān al-karīm* and Naḥḥās (d. 338H/950AD) *Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān wa-‘i-rābuhu* and ending with modern commentators such as Ṭanṭāwī (d. 1431/1922) *al-Waṣīṭ fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-karīm* and Riḍā (d. 1354/1935) *Tafsīr al-manār*. As I saw, the commentators rarely refer to the studied structures, particularly the aspectual value of *kāna*, simply because they assume that the verb indicates habit and persistence—it is a verb with no time limitation.

²⁵ Comrie, *Aspect* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 28.

²⁶ See: Reuschel, *Aspekt und Tempus in der Sprache des Korans* (Frankfurt, 1996), p. 102. He translates Q 3:110 “Ihr seid die beste, (je) für die Menschen hervorgebrachte Gemeinde.

Strikingly, however, the few commentators that do provide an explanation confirm my assumption that in some cases (18 out of 88 examined) *kāna* does have time boundaries: it indicates an accomplished situation that happened in the past at a defined point in time, and thus it should be translated as “was” and not “is.”²⁷

3. The Perfective Indication of *kāna*

(1) *ḥurrimat ‘alaykum ‘ummahātukum wa-banātukum wa-‘aḥawātukum wa-‘ammātukum wa-ḥālātukum wa-banātu l-‘aḥi wa-banātu l-‘uḥti wa-‘ummahātukum llātī ‘arḍa ‘nakum wa-‘aḥawātukum mina r-raḍā ‘ati wa-‘ummahātu nisā ‘ikum wa-rabā ‘ibukum llātī fī ḥuḡūrikum min nisā ‘ikum llātī daḥaltum bihinna fa-‘in lam takūnū daḥaltum bihinna fa-lā ḡunāḥa ‘alaykum wa-ḥalā ‘ilu ‘abnā ‘ikum lladīna min ‘aṣṣalābikum wa-‘an taḡma ‘ū bayna l-‘uḥtayni ‘illā mā qad salafa ‘inna llāha kāna ḡafūran raḥīman (Q 4:23)*

Forbidden to you are your mothers and daughters, your sister, your aunts paternal and maternal, your brother's daughters, your sister's daughters, your foster-mothers and foster-sisters, your wives' mothers, your stepdaughters under your guardianship whom you raised up, born to women you have married and with whom you have consummated the relationship. However, if the relationship has not been consummated, the stepdaughters are not unlawful to you and you may marry them. (You are forbidden to marry) the spouses of your sons who are of your loins, and to take two sisters together in marriage, unless it be a thing of the past/except what happened prior to this commandment; God was²⁸All-forgiving, All-compassionate.

The status of women in Muslim society had to be determined and regulations promulgated to instruct the people how to deal with women and to shape a society of equal justice. Therefore,

²⁷ Reuschel “wa-kāna llāhu ‘alīman raḥīman.” In: *Studia Orientalia* (Halle, 1968), p. 155 and (1996), p. 104 says that *kāna* appearing in the cases examined in his work are translated into German as “ist” (he is).

²⁸ *kāna* is translated as “is”; however, I decided to add my translation to show that this verb indicates the past and not the present or the future. I should note in this context that a survey of some Western translations (in various languages) of the Qur’ān shows that *kāna* in the studied verses is usually translated as “is”. Among the translations are: Arberry, *The Koran* (London, 1967); Bobzin, *Der Koran* (Munich, 2010); Rubin, *The Qur’an: Hebrew Translation* (Tel Aviv, 2015). Blachère, *Le Coran* (Paris, 1957) translates only three verses in the past (as: a été): Q 4:47; 4:113; 17:87.

in verses 1-24 of Sura 4 rules were prescribed for marriage, and the rights of wife and husband were apportioned fairly and equitably. However, how is the clause *'inna llāha kāna ḡafūran raḥīman*, which concludes verse 23, connected to this theme? Ṭabarī explains:

*(‘inna llāha kāna ḡafūran) li-ḍunūbi ‘ibādihi ‘idā tābū ‘ilayhi minhā (raḥīman) bihim fī-mā kallafahum mina l-farā‘idi wa-ḥaffafa ‘anhum wa-lam yuḥammilhum fawqa tāqatihim*²⁹

(God was All-forgiving) toward the sins [committed] by his servants, when they return³⁰/returned their sins (All-compassionate) toward them because of the laws which He imposed on them, and He eased them, and He did not burden them beyond their limits.

It is inferred from this explanation that even when God's laws were not kept fully, He always was forgiving toward the sinners, if they repeated their deeds. God was also All-compassionate when He gave the people these laws (described in verses 1-23) and God was considerate when he decided that the given laws would not be a burden on the people but easy to follow.³¹

(2) *wa-l-muḥṣanātu mina n-nisā‘i ‘illā mā malakat ‘aymānukum kitāba llāhi ‘alaykum wa-‘uḥilla lakum mā warā‘a ḍālikum ‘an tabtagū bi-‘amwālikum muḥṣinīna ḡayra musāfiḥīna fa-mā stamta‘tum bihi minhunna fa-‘ātūhunna ‘uḡūrahunna farīḍatan wa-lā ḡunāḥa ‘alaykum fī-mā tarāḍaytum bihī min ba‘di l-farīḍati **‘inna llāha kāna ‘alīman ḥakīman*** (Q 4:24)

And all married women (are forbidden unto you to marry) except those whom your right hand possesses. It is a written legislation of Allāh unto you; and lawful for you beyond all that, is that you may seek, using your wealth, in wedlock and not in license. Then as to those of whom you seek content (by temporary marriage), give them their

²⁹ Ṭabarī, *Ḡāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta‘wīl ‘āy al-Qur‘ān* (Beirut, 1992), III, p. 665. The same explanation is mentioned by him when he refers to Q 4:129 (III, p. 316) and 4:170 (III, p. 371).

³⁰ The verb following the particle *‘idā* is in the perfect, but it can indicate either past or future. See: Reckendorf, *Arabische Syntax* (Heidelberg, 1921), p. 463-464. I tend to interpret it as a past action in this context.

³¹ An additional example is Q 33:50, where the clause *kāna llāhu ḡafūran raḥīman* indicates that God showed his grace to Muḥammad when God allowed those wives who were not the Prophet’s relatives to marry him. In this way, God prevented Muḥammad from committing a sin/misdeed by marrying someone whom it was forbidden to marry. See Ṭabarī, *Ḡāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta‘wīl ‘āy al-Qur‘ān* (Beirut, 1992), X, p. 312.

bridal-due as a duty/obligation; and there is no blame on you in whatever you mutually agree after the duty. Verily Allāh was All-Knowing, All-Wise.

Many misunderstandings seem to persist about the right to marry a slave-girl. For this reason, various regulations on this issue were formulated, some of which are presented Q 4:24. Concluding this verse with the clause *'inna llāha kāna 'alīman ḥakīman* means that God was aware of this misunderstanding or, more precisely, he knew what was good and right for you in the matter of taking in marriage a woman who was captured or any other issues related to marriage, and accordingly he sent down this verse.³²

(3) *yā- 'ayyuhā llaḍīna 'āmanū lā ta 'kulū 'amwālakum baynakum bi-l-bāḥili 'illā 'an takūna tiḡāratan 'an tarāḍin minkum wa-lā taqtulū 'anfusakum 'inna llāha kāna bikum raḥīman* (Q 4:29)

O you who believe! In your transactions with one another, do not consume one another's property wastefully; let your commerce be conducted in good faith, with the agreement of all concerned. Do not kill one another for the sake of the things of this world, for God has always shown mercy for you.

Examination of the Qur'ānic exegesis shows that some of the commentators give *'inna llāha kāna bikum raḥīman* a perfective meaning. Zamaḥṣarī says that God was merciful/has shown mercy to you when He did not impose those laws (presented in verses 1-29) which would be difficult to obey.³³ Bayḍāwī³⁴ says that it means that God was merciful to you, the believers, when he commanded the Children of Israel to kill each other, while He forbids the Muslims from doing so.³⁵ However, in contrast to the previous commentators, Ṭabarī replaces the verb *kāna*

³² Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl 'āy al-Qur'ān* (Beirut, 1992), IV, p. 16-17.

A similar case is Q 4:35, where it is said that if you fear a breach between the couple, then appoint a judge from his people and a judge from her people if they both desire agreement. Verily, Allāh was All-Knowing that the two judges will be able to settle the things between the two sides, and All-Aware regarding the necessity of referring to two judges in the described situation. See Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl 'āy al-Qur'ān* (Beirut, 1992), IV, p. 80.

³³ Zamaḥṣarī, *al-Kaššāf* (Beirut, 1995), I, pp. 492-493.

³⁴ Bayḍāwī, *'Anwār at-tanzīl wa-'asrār at-ta'wīl* (Beirut, 1996), II, p. 177.

³⁵ An additional example is Q 17:66 *'innahū kāna bikum raḥīman* "Verily He was merciful to you." See: Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl 'āy al-Qur'ān* (Beirut, 1992), VIII, p. 112; Ṭabarsī, *Maḡma' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Tehran, 1959), V-VI, p. 427 and Ibn Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*

with *lam yazal* “still” (God still shows his mercy towards the people) indicating that this clause has no perfective meaning but rather a durative meaning.³⁶

(4) *yā- 'ayyuhā llaḏīna 'āmanū ḏkurū ni 'mata llāhi 'alaykum 'id ḡā 'atkum ḡunūdun fa- 'arsalnā 'alayhim rīḥan wa-ḡunūdan lam tarawhā wa-kāna llāhu bi-mā ta 'malūna baṣīran* (Q 33:9)

O believers, remember God's blessing upon you the day you were surrounded by the enemy, and We loosed against them a wind, (together with) hosts you did not see, and God saw the things you do.

Q 33:9, as well as Q 33:10, discusses one of the most important events in the history of Islam, the Battle of al-'Aḥzāb (the confederates), also known as the Battle of the Trench (*ḡazwat al-ḥandaq*). This war in fact changed the balance of forces between Islam and infidels to the benefit of the Muslims. The Jews, the pagans and the hypocrites resolved to occupy Medina in a surprise attack. Muḥammad and the Muslims decided to dig a ditch around Medina to defend it against the enemy. According to Q 33:9, Allāh helped the Muslims by blowing winds and sending down hidden powers which under Allāh's command operated in human affairs and of which men were entirely unaware. Thus, Q 33:9 refers to an actual historical event, while according to the Qur'ānic commentators a cause-and-effect relationship existed between the verse and its final clause. *wa-kāna llāhu bi-mā ta 'malūna baṣīran* means that God saw what you did before and during the war: you dug ditches, you planned your military strategy, your recourse to God, your hoping to receive his mercy. God saw all actions; therefore this battle ended with the triumph of the Muslims.³⁷

(5) *wa-ḏkurna mā yutlā fī buyūtikunna min 'āyāti llāhi wa-l-ḥikmati 'inna llāha kāna laṭīfan ḥabīran* (Q 33:34)

And remember that which is recited in your houses of the signs of God and the wisdom. God was All-subtle, All-aware.

Both Ṭabarī and Ibn Kaṭīr explain this verse:

al- 'azīm (Cairo, 2000), p. 776, according to these commentators, the clause refers to a past event when God made the ship sail through the sea in order that they could easily move from one place to another. That is how God showed His mercy to the people.

³⁶ Ṭabarī, *Ḓāmi' al-bayān 'an ta 'wīl 'āy al-Qur 'ān* (Beirut, 1992), V, p. 45.

³⁷ 'Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma 'ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur 'ān al- 'azīm wa-s-sab ' al-maṭānī* (Cairo, 1964-1969), VII, p. 13.

*wa-qawluhu: ('inna llāha kāna laṭīfan ḥabīran) yaqūlu ta'ālā dīkruhu: 'inna llāha kāna dā lutfin bikunna 'id ḡa'alakunna fī l-buyūti llatī tutlā fihā 'āyātuhu wa-l-ḥikmatu, ḥabīran bikunna 'idā ḥtārakunna li-rasūlihi 'azwāḡan*³⁸

And in His words (God was All-subtle, All-aware) God exalted his memory, saying: God was kindness to you when He put you in houses where the signs of God [the Qur'ānic verses] are recited. All-aware regarding you, since He chose you to be the spouses of his messenger.

It can be inferred from this explanation that *kāna* indicates that the given circumstance, namely God's being All-subtle and All-aware, concerned a specific event at a specific moment in the past: God made the chosen women the Prophet's wives and by virtue of their close and constant social association and attachment to the Prophet they knew and experienced many things. Living with the prophet inevitably encompassed his wisdom, and hearing his sayings and his reciting the verses of the Qur'ān.

(6) *'inna llāha yumsiku s-samāwāti wa-l-'arḍa 'an tazūlā wa-la-'in zālatā 'in 'amsakahumā min 'aḥadin min ba'dihī 'innahu kāna ḥalīman ḡafūran* (Q 35:41)

God holds the heavens and the earth, lest they cease to function. And if ever they do cease to function, none would hold them after Him. Surely He was Forbearing, Forgiving.

Q 35:41 is part of a discourse meant to warn and reprove the non-believers for their antagonistic attitude to God. Verses 38-39 relate that God is aware of every secret thing in the heavens and on earth: He even knows the hidden secrets of the heart. He it is who has made you vicegerents on the earth. As for the non-believers, they gain nothing except more loss. Verse 40 starts by asking: Have you ever seen those associates of yours whom you invoke instead of God? Did these idols do something significant like the creation of the earth? The fact is that Allāh alone could do it, and He alone sustains the heavens and the earth from falling into oblivion.

The clause *'innahū kāna ḥalīman ḡafūran* can be understood only when the context (verses 38-41) is taken into account. Despite the disbelief of the non-believers, which only increased Allāh's anger, He was always forgiving when they turned to Him repentantly or asked His forgiveness.

³⁸ Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl 'āy al-Qur'ān* (Beirut, 1992), X, p. 299 Cf. Ibn Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm* (Cairo, 2000), p. 1089.

The perfective indication is also inferred from Ṭabarī's exegesis, as he keeps *kāna* in the perfect and does not replace it with *lam yazal*:

*wa-qawluhu ('innahu kāna ḥalīman ḡafūran) yaqūlu ta'ālā dīkruhu: 'inna llāha kāna ḥalīman 'amman 'ašraka wa-kafara bihi min ḥalqihī fī tarkihī ta'ḡīla 'aḡābihi lahu, ḡafūran li-dunūbihī man tāba minhum wa-'anāba 'ilā l-'īmāni bihi wa-l-'amali bi-mā yurḡīhi*³⁹

In his words (surely he was Forbearing, Forgiving) God exalted his memory saying: Surely God was forbearing to those who associated idols with God and disbelieved in Him, when He [decided not to] expedite the punishment [of these people], and [God was] forgiving [i.e., He forgave] the deeds of those who abandoned them and turned repentantly to believing in God and doing whatsoever pleased God.

(7) *wa-maḡānima kaṭīratan ya'ḥudūnahā wa-kāna llāhu 'azīzan ḥakīman* (Q 48:19)

And many spoils that they will take/capture. And God was All-mighty, All-wise.

The perfective indication of the clause *wa-kāna llāhu 'azīzan ḥakīman* can be clarified only after a close examination of its historical background, which is given by Ṭabarī. Verse 18 states that God was satisfied with the believers pledging allegiance to their Prophet at Ḥudaybiyya, and He was aware that their pledge was insincere. As a result, God showed His might and His discretion as He rewarded the believers: He sent down serenity upon them, He rewarded them with a triumph at the Battle of Ḥaybar and the abundant spoils that they would capture.⁴⁰ In light of this explanation, the final clause might be understood as: Allāh was powerful when he took revenge on his enemies and guided his believers in His will.

The following example is also mentioned by Reuschel (1996), although he classifies it together with additional examples in another group because the noun Allāh is a part of a noun phrase, where the noun Allāh is in genitive case functioning as *nomen regens* (e.g., *'amru llāhi*), or following a preposition (e.g., *'alā llāhi*). Despite this difference, Reuschel claims that these structures, similar to the previous ones, function as general timeless statements.⁴¹

³⁹ Ṭabarī, *Ḡāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl 'āy al-Qur'ān* (Beirut, 1992), X, p. 421.

⁴⁰ Ṭabarī, *Ḡāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl 'āy al-Qur'ān* (Beirut, 1992), XI, p. 350

⁴¹ Reuschel, *Aspekt und Tempus in der Sprache des Korans* (Frankfurt, 1996), p. 106.

(8) *fa-lammā qaḍā zaydun minhā waṭaran zawwaġnākahā li-kay lā yakūna ‘alā l-mu’minīna ḥaraġun fī ‘azwāġi ‘ad‘iyā’ihim ‘idā qaḍaw minhunna waṭaran wa-kāna ‘amru llāhi maf’ūlan* (Q 33:37)

But when Zayd had accomplished his concern with her (i.e., divorced her), we joined her in marriage to you, so that there should not be a difficulty for the believers in respect of the wives of their adopted sons when they have accomplished their concerns with them (i.e., have divorced them), and the command of Allah shall be performed.

The context refers to the story of Zaynab and Zayd, who was the adopted son of the prophet. After their divorce, the prophet married Zaynab.

According to Ṭabarī and Zamaḥṣarī, the expression *‘amru llāhi* means *qaḍā’*, therefore the final clause can be interpreted as God's decision to marry Zaynab and the prophet Muḥammad, whereupon the marriage indeed was sanctified.⁴²

(9) *wa-law-lā faḍlu llāhi ‘alayka wa-raḥmatuhu la-hammat ṭā’ifatun minhum ‘an yuḍillūka wa-mā yuḍillūna ‘illā ‘anfusahum wa-mā yaḍurrūnaka min šay’in wa-‘anzala llāhu ‘alayka l-kitāba wa-l-ḥikmata wa-‘allamaka mā lam takun ta’lamu wa-kāna faḍlu llāhi ‘alayka ‘aẓīman* (Q 4:113)

Had it not been for God's abundant Grace and Mercy, some of the traitors would have exercised their cunning and tried to mislead you into making a wrong judgment. But they mislead none but themselves, and they cause you no loss whatsoever. God has sent down to you the Book and the wisdom and has taught you what you did not know, and could not have known, before. He taught you how to show the old customs as null and void, and how you should discard them for something better; the simple principle of oath and evidence. And God's infinite Mercy was ever great.

Ṭabarsī refers to the word *faḍl*, saying that it means that God's mercy to you, Muḥammad, from the moment you were born until you were sent as a messenger, was ever great, in particular when he made you the seal (i.e., the last) of the Prophets.⁴³

⁴² Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl ‘āy al-Qur’ān* (Beirut, 1992), X, p. 304. Cf. Zamaḥṣarī, *al-Kaššāf* (Beirut, 1995), III, p. 527.

⁴³ Ṭabarsī, *Maġma‘ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (Tehran, 1959), III-IV, p. 109.

The temporal limitation mentioned by Ṭabarsī strengthens the argument that the clause *wa-kāna faḍlu llāhi ‘alayka ‘aẓīman* has a perfective meaning and no persistence of this situation is involved here. Furthermore, verse 113 could be explained as follows: there is an address to the Prophet in which Allāh's grace toward him is described: God prevented the non-believers from leading Muḥammad astray and he revealed the Book and wisdom to him and taught him what you did not know. The verse *wa-kāna faḍlu llāhi ‘alayka ‘aẓīman* concludes this section by asserting that in retrospect God indeed was merciful to Muḥammad.

(10) *‘illā raḥmatan min rabbika ‘inna faḍlahu kāna ‘alayka kabīran* (Q 17:87)

(Whatever you have received) is nothing but grace from your Lord: for his bounty is to you (indeed) great.

Q 17:87 is not much different from Q 4:113 because both verses refer to God's grace, which he showed toward the prophet Muḥammad. In his commentary on Q 17:87, Rāzī repeatedly uses the verb *kāna* when explaining the meaning of the clause *‘inna faḍlahū kāna ‘alayka kabīran*. According to him, there are two possible meanings of this clause: first, that God's bounty to Muḥammad was great because God gave him the knowledge and the Qur'ān; second, God's bounty to Muḥammad was great because he made him the lord/master of Adam's children and God sealed through him the chain of Prophets and gave him a place of honor in Islam.⁴⁴

As for the connection between the verses and the clause *‘inna faḍlahū kāna ‘alayka kabīran*, it is known that the Prophet had been instructed to adhere firmly to his position discounting the opposition and difficulties he encountered; he should never think of making a compromise with unbelief. However, Q 17:86 states that if God so wished, he could take back from him all that he had revealed to him: then Muḥammad would find no one to help him regain what he had lost. The *fāṣila* which concludes the section referring to Muḥammad comes as a reminder and a warning: everything Muḥammad has received is by the favor of his Lord. Indeed His favor to you (until now) has been very great.

(11) *‘aṣiḥḥatan ‘alaykum fa-‘idā ḡā’a l-ḥawfu ra’aytahum yanẓurūna ‘ilayka tadūru ‘a ‘yunuhum ka-llaḍī yuḡṣā ‘alayhi mina l-mawti fa-‘idā ḍahaba l-ḥawfu salaḡūkum bi-‘alsinatin ḥidādin ‘aṣiḥḥatan ‘alā l-ḥayri ‘ulā’ika lam yu’minū fa-‘aḥbaṭa llāhu ‘a ‘mālahum **wa-kāna ḍālika ‘alā llāhi yasīran*** (Q 33:19)

⁴⁴ Rāzī, *Maḡātib al-ḡayb* (Beirut, 2000), XXI, p. 45.

Being niggardly toward you. And when fear came, you saw them looking at you, their eyes revolving like one being overcome by death. But when fear has departed, they lash you with sharp tongues, being niggardly to possess [any] good. Those have never believed, so Allāh has rendered their deeds worthless, and that was easy for Allāh.

The clause *wa-kāna dālika 'alā llāhi yasīran* is syntactically and semantically related to the previous sentence. According to Ṭabarī, the demonstrative pronoun *dālika* refers to *'ihbāṭu llāhi 'a'mālahum* “rendering their deeds.” Since the verb *'ahbaṭa* is in the perfect, indicating a complete action, it might be argued that the final clause (“doing this was easy for him”) also has a perfective indication.

Finally, the discussion of the aspectual indications of *kāna* would be incomplete without reference to ambiguous cases, where two interpretations of the verb *kāna* are plausible and the intended meaning cannot be definitively determined because the context in this case could not operate in settling the ambiguity, as the following example shows:

(12) *'in tubdū ḥayran 'aw tuḥfūhu 'aw ta'fū 'an sū'in fa-'inna llāha kāna 'afuwwan qadīran* (Q 4:149)

If you keep doing good—whether openly or secretly—or pardon the evil, surely God is/was All-Pardoning and All-powerful.

Rāzī mentions three possible explanations of the clause *fa-'inna llāha kāna 'afuwwan qadīran*: first, *kāna* indicates continuity, so the clause means that God has forgiven and will forgive those who do good or those who disbelieved and asked God's forgiveness; second, *kāna* indicates a past situation, where the clause should be understood as “God has forgiven and he had the power/the ability to bring recompense to those who were forgiven”; third, *kāna* is used for emphasis and the clause means God is the most forgiving—He can forgive you more than your friend could.⁴⁵

(13) *wa-qul li-'ibādī yaqūlū llatī hiya 'aḥsanu 'inna š-šayṭāna yanzaḡu baynahum 'inna š-šayṭāna kāna li-l-'insāni 'aduwwan mubīnan* (Q 17:53)

And say to my servants, that their words are more kind. For surely Satan provokes strife between them, and Satan was/is ever a manifest foe of man.

The final clause in Q 17:53 does not refer to Allāh but to the devil; however, it also includes the verb *kāna*. According to Ṭabarī and Ṭabarsī, the final clause refers to a past event in

⁴⁵ Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ḡayb* (Beirut, 2000), XI, p. 73.

which the Satan was a manifest foe to 'Ādam and to his descendants throughout history. Satan's hostility to 'Ādam was manifested when he seduced him until 'Ādam was forced to leave paradise.⁴⁶ Šawkānī, however, identifies a causal connection between the final clause and what precedes it; therefore these clauses should be understood as indicating that it is Satan who provokes strife among the people because he is patently an enemy to mankind.⁴⁷

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Zarkašī noted that the verb *kāna* might indicate that the action or situation occurred in the past; alternatively, it may indicate persistence; the context or the discourse of the verses containing *kāna* helps to determine its interpretation. Scholars generally disregard this context, and they analyze *kāna* entirely by distinguishing two types of the verb: *munqaṭi* “discontinues” and *gayr munqaṭi* “continues.” This article shows that limiting the analysis to the observation that *kāna* indicates *generelles-Präsens* can be misleading because that term indicates an indefinite duration of an action in progress or a situation with no set limits. The Qur'ānic exegetes point out that *kāna* also indicates perfect tense, which concerns the endpoint of the actions and their result. Still, the argument that perfective is taken to describe an event that has reached an end is problematic: if we look at a clause such as *kāna llāhu 'alīman raḥīman* we fail to identify the event. Based on the Qur'ānic exegesis, I argue that such a clause is not merely descriptive in nature; instead, there is a diffusion of circumstance and event/action, the two ending simultaneously. The term *circumstance* applies to a situation which allowed the performance of the action in the past. To clarify this argument, I start with Q 4:23 *'inna llāha kāna ḡafūran raḥīman* (see example 1) and Q 4:24 *'inna llāha kāna 'alīman ḥakīman* (see example 2). The event to which these two verses refer establishes the regulations of marriage. The circumstance under which these events could be executed is the point at which God was All-forgiving and All-compassionate, All-knowing and All-wise. Understanding that He should comfort the people, since there are various issues relating to marriage that might lead to misunderstanding, God has set forth Islamic laws concerning types of marriage, types of divorce and the rights of married women.

⁴⁶ Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl 'āy al-Qur'ān* (Beirut, 1992), VIII, p. 93. Cf. Ṭabarsī, *Maḡma' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Tehran, 1959), VI, p. 321.

⁴⁷ Šawkānī, *Fath al-qadīr* (Mansoura, 1964), III, p. 327.

According to Baydāwī, the event referred to in Q 4:29 (example 3), *'inna llāha kāna bikum raḥīman*, is God commanding the Children of Israel to kill each other, while He forbids the Muslims to do likewise. This command was given or could have been given under the circumstance that at that point in time God showed his mercy to the Muslims, otherwise they would have killed each other. Q 4:29 also exemplifies the difficulties in determining the indication of *kāna*. While Rāzī gives it a perfective meaning, Ṭabarī replaces it with *lam yazal* – indicating the opposite. These differences among the commentators are exhibited in other cases, such as Q 4:99, where Zaḡḡāḡ mentions the dual indication of *kāna*: perfective or durative.⁴⁸

The hypothesis regarding the perfective indication of *kāna* receives convincing support from Zarkašī's explanation in his reference to Q 4:170:

*(wa-kāna llāhu 'alīman ḥakīman) wa-ma'nāhu l-inqitā'u fī-mā waqa'a 'alayhi l-'ilmu wa-l-ḥikmatu lā nafsū l-'ilmi wa-l-ḥikmatī*⁴⁹

(Verily Allāh was All-Knowing, All-Wise) means the discontinuance of [the action/situation] which knowledge and wisdom have an impact on [and it does not mean the cessation of] knowledge and wisdom itself.

In other words, God can observe past, present and future, which allows Him to know all and to act accordingly. According to Zarkašī, it is the acting—a consequence of God's ability to know absolutely everything and His wisdom—that is complete, not God's Omniscience, namely His ability to have full knowledge and all-wisdom. Zarkašī's comments indicate that he was also aware of the difficulty in interpreting *kāna* as a perfective verb because it might stand as opposed to the infinite nature of God; that is, God is not limited by time or space and we should refer to Him with terms like *omniscience*, *omnipotence*, *omnipresence*. Therefore, his explanation stresses not that the idea of God's omnipotence and his infinite power is limited in time, but the actions that precede clauses such *wa-kāna llāhu 'alīman ḥakīman* are thus limited.

As for examples 8-11, where structures such as *wa-kāna 'amru llāhi maf'ūlan* are presented, the contextual approach taken in this paper noted that such structures not only have a perfective indication, they have pragmatic factors as well, namely the aspectual choice is governed by an external consideration. Muslims are to be inspired or urged to face the enemy bravely; to beware of their mistaken religious conceptions, their immorality and their evil acts; to

⁴⁸ Zaḡḡāḡ, *ma'ānī al-Qur'ān al-karīm* (Beirut, 1988), II, 95.

⁴⁹ Zarkašī, *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo, 1957), IV, p. 126.

be convinced that their achievements in the future will rest only on God's power and omniscience. To that end, some evidence of past events attesting that God is indeed All-mighty and All-powerful is to be presented, whereby the idea of God All-mighty becomes concrete and less abstract. In Q 4:113 (example 9), *wa-kāna faḍlu llāhi ‘alayka ‘aẓīman* it becomes clear from the beginning of this verse that the Muslims are warned to be on their guard against the hypocrites and the unbelievers and the people of the Book. To encourage them to keep their faith, some evidence from the past is adduced, showing that God's infinite Mercy was always great.

Another example is *wa-kāna ḍālika ‘alā llāhi yasīran* (Q 33:19) (example 11). Allāh has notified the Muslims that among them is a group who create hindrances (against the war effort). They encourage the people to fight alongside them, but when danger threatens they are afraid. However, when the war ends (and the warriors return victorious), they receive them warmly, and try to impress them with a glib tongue that they too have contributed to the victory—because they want to share in the booty. To warn and to prevent such behavior it is said that Allāh made all their works fruitless, which was an easy thing for Him.

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