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## Analysis of Quranic Counter-discourse in Two Miniatures of Joseph in Prison and Jonah and the fish from Shah Tahmasebi' s Falnama\*

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### Abstract

Quranic discourse of miniature requires understanding the relationship between the text (Quran) and miniatures. Semiotics reveals the meaningful relationships of miniatures by discovering the relationship of signs with each other. Accordingly, the most important questions of the present research are: How did the counter-discourse or divine support mentioned in the Quran appear in the miniature of the two Prophets? And what pictorial relations reflect the Quranic discourse meaning?


**Aim:** This study is an attempt to show how the meaning is received in a pictorial narrative provided by miniature; because divine counter-discourse is analyzable in miniatures of Prophets.

**Methodology:** This study used discourse semiotics analysis as methodology and data were collected from available sources and two miniatures were selected from an English catalogue titled "Falnama" prepared by Masoumeh Farhad.

**Results:** The results of this study can be summarized as follows: 1. Discourse semiotics establishes a relationship between Quranic concepts and miniature. 2. Divine support from a Prophet is identified not only by presenting a miracle, but also divine support could appear in a dark prison or through swallowing by a whale.

In this semantics, the conflict between the dark and halo around the head of the Prophet, the contradiction between the plans, the action and connection of the angels' hands with Prophet Jonah, the rotating composition and etc. are involved in understanding the interfacing factor.

**Keywords:** *Quranic supporter-discourse, Story of Prophets, Persian Miniature, Falnama, semiotics.*

\*. The present paper is based on the thesis of the first writer of the thesis titled "Analysis of The Qur'anic Discourse of warning and Promising in Persian miniatures" (a selection from the Prophets' Falnama in the Safavid period), in 2017, directed by Dr. Mehdi Mohammadzadeh and Dr. Hassan Balkhari Ghehi and Mr. Consulting Dr. Lessani Fesharaki was arranged at the Islamic Art University of Tabriz.

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### Introduction and problem statement

Quranic discourse shows the ritual of dialogue. In the stories of Prophets, the ritual of dialogue is revealed through a miracle, which is a type of divine support, by the Prophet for his people. The present

article examines how the miniature is reflected by counter-discourse and whether the discourse of divine support is merely identified through miracles. There has been constantly the relationship between miniature and text in scientific, technical, didactic and lyrical versions. The holy Quran also in Prophets' stories is a narrative discourse text with guiding power. In the Quranic stories, there are three prominent factors of personality, event and dialogue (interaction between characters), accordingly, the miniatures of Joseph in the prison and Jonah and the fish from Shah Tahmasebi Falnama in Topkapi museum were selected to identify those miniatures with divine counter-discourse. In this analysis, factors such as positioning of the main characters and creating a composition of figures, miniature perspective, discourse coloring, point of view and the action orientation of elements and meanings created in both types of counterpoint and aligned relationships.

### **Theoretical framework- and literature review**

Louis Trolle Hjelmslev believes that the signs make sense in the text (Sojoodi, 2011: 193). In modern semiotics, unlike classical semiotics, signs find the chance to turn into new signs with aesthetic and unexpected functions from ordinary signs with common and repetitive function (Shoeyri & Vafae; 2009: 177).

Semiotics supposes that language is a collection of semantic structures. The main subject of this science is hidden ultra structure relationship which produces meanings. Semantics is a tool for analyzing discourse, that firstly identified text, then the relationship among the text levels are discussed and the meaning whole is made (Abbasi & Karimi Firoozjani, 2012: 168).

Shoeyri in his book titled "Visual semiotics, theories and applications" regards the role of internal human dimension and emotions in semiotics important. Accordingly, the semiotic analyses of texts from the perspective of inner and outer look with characters<sup>1</sup> and corpse propre<sup>2</sup> related to the characters are

discussable. Greimas also in his book "Structural Semantics" emphasized that "The human world is a world which could only be described through meaningfulness". It is because, human, world and meaning are tied together (Shoeyri, 2009: 36). Therefore, the significance of discourse has always been based on sign systems and semiotics. Since the paintings of the prophets are story-oriented, the discourse narratology also plays an important role in receiving meaning from miniatures. Barthes, a French semiotician, believes that every reader in every era could give a new concept to the text. He has the same idea about painting (Kahnamoopoor, 2007: 131&132). He believes that text is sometimes narrative; so the result of text analysis is the appearance of the different structure such as narrative structures with the presence of characters and perceptual-sensory features. Greimas called meaning production course as passing from deep layers to the superficial layers (Ibid: 169). Therefore, intertextuality in text helps to understand the deep layer of meanings. In the study of a range of pictorial religious texts in the Islamic world, Renda identifies four groups for illustrated texts: 1. Hellieth 2. Dalayel Al-Kheirat 3. Qesas Al Anbia<sup>3</sup> 4. Falnama 5. include the life events of literary characters and the prophets of Gospel and Quran and Shia's Imams. Persian miniatures were illustrated in the 16th century in the Safavid and Othman eras (Renda, 2006: 149&151). This book contains rare miniatures about dream, horoscope and divination. One of these manuscripts is painted by Shah Tahmaseb Safavi's order including Quranic stories, planets and the signs of celestial bodies. Shah Tahmasebi<sup>4</sup> Falnama covers 73 miniatures probably belonged to the Tabriz or Qazvin school. Comparing Persian miniatures, Kerry Welch identified their painter as Aqamirak (Farhad, 2010: 44). The illustrated samples of this article are selected from Falnama.

In the field of Persian miniature, the number of books is not low, but most of the compilations have historically studied the Persian miniature schools. However, the contribution of the literature discussing

the content of semiotics and meaning reception from painting is indeed small. Of these, the Quran is the best reference for understanding the discourse of Prophets. such as the article of Prophets 'Stories narrated by picture from Hosseini (2005) Artistic Manifestations of Stories in Quran written by Motlaq et.al. (2016) and the book of Analysis of Literary and Artistic Elements of Quranic Stories by Parvini for familiarizing with the structure of Prophets' stories in Quran are useful references. The book titled Introduction to the Structural Analysis of the Narrative by Roland Barthes deals with formation and analysis of narrative. The writing collection of Shoeyri was helpful in understanding the discourse. Articles "A Study of the Function of Counter-discourse in Nima Youshij's letters" by Shoeyri, Rezayi, Mashhadi, Shoeyri & Nikbakht (2017) & "Role of counter -discourses in the discourse Analysis of al-Kahf Surah" by Davoudimoghadam, Shaeiri & Ghotbi (2017) dealt with counter-discourse analysis in stories of Prophets.

### Methodology

The present study is qualitative in nature employing semiotics as methodology and the samples are two miniatures which were purposefully selected from the illustrated version of Shah Tahmasebi's Falnama and intended discourse. The semantic system of research is of discourse type which has numerous dimensions and one of these dimensions is divine counter-discourse in two miniatures of the Prophets.

In this regard, the significance of Quranic discourse is revealed which has several dimensions and one of these dimensions is counter-discourse in two miniatures centered on the prophets. After analyzing the discourse dimensions of the Prophet story, the sign system of miniatures was identified according to the visual characteristics. Then the meaning of counter-discourse was received from miniatures by recognizing the relations among signs and the story elements of miniature. This study is underpinned by the discourse theories in French school and the

semantic square of Greimas.

### Narrative-discourse system of the Quran

The stories about the divine prophets are remarkable conversations in Quran that historically or allegorically illustrate the reality of human life in the world. A part of the conversation also portrays the afterlife scenes. For instance: The conversation of God with humans, the conversation of God with angels, the dialogue of angels with humans, the conversation of humans with each other and with animals and conversations about monotheism, resurrection, prophecy, virtues and ethical vices, and the sequel of Adam's deeds and creation (Shaker & Akbari, 2013: 31&32). Discourse systems in narration are the ability of the parties for dialogue, which occurs at the beginning with action. An Action is what the actor performs with a determined and purposeful plan in dealing with the external world agents according to his logic and reasoning (Rezayi, et. al., 2017: 138). In the stories of the Prophets, the activist is God; the main actor is Prophet who carries the message of activist and factors such as characters in the story of the prophets. In the stories of the prophets in the Quran, the main idea of the story is related to the characters and his messages. The point of view in such stories is the unlimited first person, that is, God who dominates on the outside and inside of events. The central core of the narrative is an action that seeks to gain value in an interactive or constructive dialogue (Shoeyri, 2016: 19). The action actuator or Prophet with stimulus helper generally look for pivotal characters based on a determined plan who are away from the conscious or unconscious valued system. In this ethical system, sometimes the Prophet is also invited to a test on behalf of God, and due to the condition, he shows some characteristics which are analyzed in two miniatures through Counter-discourse.

### Counter-discourse

Pro (In Persian) پد in Dekhoda Dictionary means guardian, protector and supporter because Azarpad was the fire guardian as well as it is used in the meaning of anti, such as "antidote". In the first meaning, the

expression of counter-discourse is a situation in which two or more discourse are interacting or challenging each other and one discourse becomes a counter-discourse (Shoeyri, 2013: 269). In miniature of the Prophets, the discourse based on counter-discourse occurs when the Prophet has to present a sign from God in order to prove the legitimacy of his claims to the people and eliminate their suspicions. Surely, this sign must be something extraordinary and more than the human power of the Prophet, so that they who are in doubt will believe. Therefore, miracle or miracles come from God through the Prophet. In Arabic, the matter of inability means weakness and disability and is an extraordinary thing for confirming the claim of the prophet by the permission of God (Parcham, 2010: 24, 26 & 27). In this type of transcendental counter-discourse or miracle, which emphasizes on fulfilling the transcendental action in a ground space, it is accepted as the intermediary of communicating of the activist's message through a transcendental sign in its being and its perception by the audience, the Prophet, and heart belief occurs toward this activist. However, the present article has a different look at counter-discourse and analyzes the counter-discourse in other events in two miniatures.

### **Miniature of Joseph in prison**

The divine support of Joseph in the Quran is mentioned in many cases. One of these divine supports is shown by donating the science of dream interpretation to Joseph in verse 6 and in the middle of the story, verse 37. In verse 6 of Joseph Surah, the science of dream interpretation is donated by God to Yaqub or Joseph or both. This verse refers to "interpretation of the hadiths". The "interpretation" in the sentence " And he teaches you about the interpretation of the hadiths" is an incident that reveals its truth in the dream world to the dreamer in an appropriate form with documents and feelings; as the parents and brothers of Joseph prostrated and were embodied in the form of eleven stars, the moon and the sun, and they prostrated to him (Tabatabaee, 2007, Vol.11: 107).

Therefore, in the science of interpretation of hadith, it is meant that a dream, a story or an incident of events is appropriately illustrated and visualized to man, as in awakening, the speaker says the same story or incident for the listener to receive the original message; the science of dream interpretation (Tabatabaee, 2007, Vol.11: 108). Divine counter-discourse in verses 37 to 41 is illustrated by the interpretation of two prisoners' dreams by Joseph and then the interpretation of Egyptian king's dream by Joseph and his freedom from prison and gaining the position in the Egyptian kingdom.

### **Setting created in the miniature of Joseph in prison**

In this miniature, the setting is created by dividing the frame of miniature into two approximately equal plans or parts; the upper plan includes the realm of heaven and the middle plan in which Zoleikha and the Egyptian women are present and the lower plan portrays Joseph and three prisoners in a dark and black space. The frame in the form of triangle covers three main characters including Zoleikha, Joseph and prisoners. In fact, this triangular composition has revealed the relationship between two top and bottom plans of miniature and the orientation of Zoleikha's look and her surprised hands toward Joseph.

This three-dimensional action indicates that the cause of Joseph's captivity in prison is Zoleikha; while Joseph depicted in prison, has a round halo showing the divine support and revelation (divine) mediation. His sit on a rug with sumptuous clothes and his flamboyant turban indicate the high status of Joseph (Fig.1).

According to the analysis of this miniature, the counter-discourse in the miniature is of the pro-suspension type in action (see Davoudimoghadam, Shaeiri & Ghotbi, 2017: 5). In this sense, the actor intentionally selects the prison to preserve his inner value and disconnection from God's value system. The existence of blackness & darkness and inferiority of prison and the presence of actors in such space is

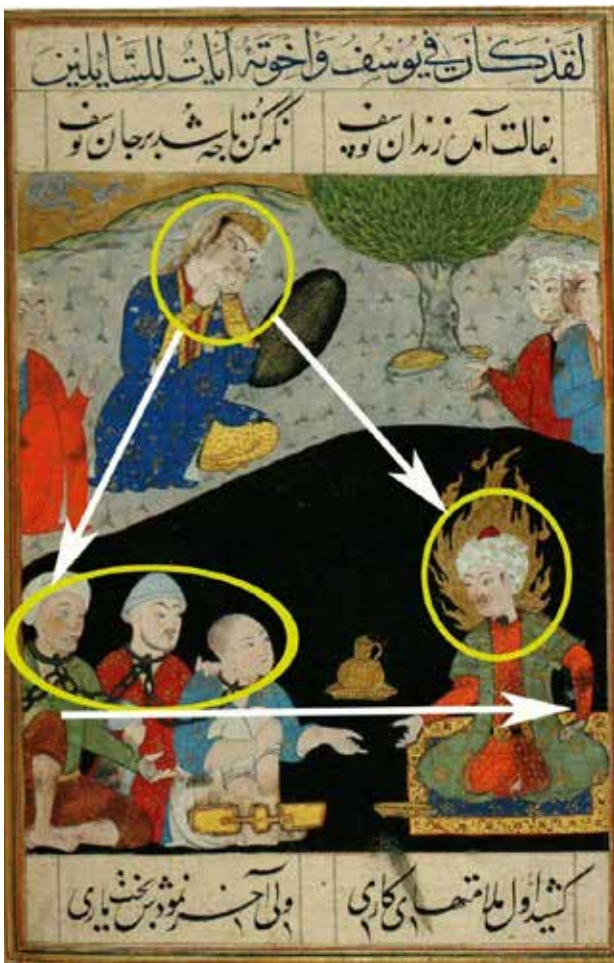


Fig.1. Miniature of Joseph in prison, from Safavid Falnama, Topkqapi museum, 49.5 \*36 cm. Watercolor and gold on paper, Source: Farhad, 2010.

a suspension; however, this suspension in the act of achieving a high status for the actor is indeed a type of divine support of the Prophet (Table1).

### Discourse coloring of Miniature

Zoleikha in the upper part of the picture is looking at Joseph in the bottom of plan. This low location of prison corresponds to the space and darkness of the prison. Joseph is highlighted in a dark space with a luminous halo around his head which shows that the main actor is the mediator of divine message and divine support is for him in every circumstance. There is a black stone next to Zoleikha which is in harmony with the black prison and captivity in the lower plan of the image.

In fact, the divine support is shown by displaying a dark corpse propre for Zoleikha, while she is

apparently free and is in a higher position. This is to reveal her contradiction with Joseph in a dark position. This discourse indicates that the prison can also serve as a counter-discourse or divine support from a Prophet to maintain his purity. Also, the science of dream interpretation, which is itself a divine support and occurs in the prison, is also another factor for emancipation of the Prophet (Fig. 2).

### Location of Figures in Miniatures

Location is created with the subject. Is it possible to locate without a subject? (Shoeyri, 2013: 245). Location in the miniature is received in the two section of low: Captivity and Upper: release.

Since the accurate title of the miniature is Joseph in the black hole. However, given the pro-action-suspension content, the event is happening at the down part.

In fact, the pro-divine place in the miniature is the place of captivity and freedom together (Table.2).

### Tension-oriented discourse system to counter (tension-oriented supporter-discourse): Miniature of Jonah and the whale

Jonah and his people are mentioned in Qalam, Safaat and Anbia. In the Quran, in the story of Jonah, the plot<sup>5</sup> is more about Jonah' character. "Now wait for the command of your Lord and do not act like the owner of the fish (Jonah) when he called God with the utmost grief (Qalam/ 48), and if there was no mercy from God, he would come out with condemnation (from the abdomen of Fish (49) he was thrown out while he was faulty, however, his Lord chose him and made him from the righteous people (Qalam / 50). A part of miniature from Falnama has also dedicated to the destiny of Jonah when he was swallowed by the big Fish by divine permission and then he was released from the belly of Fish by the command of God and God selected him to continue the mission. Setting created in the miniature of Jonah and the Fish This miniature from Falnama with a unique composition has displayed what is happening between the Fish and Jonah in one hand . To this

Table1. Narrative discourse elements of Joseph in prison. Source: authors, 2018.

Narrative discourse elements of Joseph in prison					
Character				Story plot	interaction
activist	actor	inhibitor	Mediator for suspended supporter-discourse	Captivity of Joseph's corpse propre: down plan, darkness, blackness, prisoners	Zoleikha, upper plan for look element toward Joseph
God (invisible presence)	Joseph (presence)	Zoleikha (presence)	Prisoners ( presence)	pro-transcendental Fulfillment which was in Joseph ( dream interpretation science) corpse propre: prisoners	Joseph's side for hands gestures toward prisoners
In miniature for the light halo around the Prophet's head( disconnected corpse propre)	Dark Halo around the prisoners (connected corpse propre)	For the look action to Joseph Black stone (disconnected corpse propre)	Chain to neck and legs Hands action toward Joseph (connected corpse propre)		Prisoners' look with hand status toward Joseph
Disconnected or connected to the corpse propre to the character in miniature					

purpose a saving angel<sup>6</sup> is drawn in the center of the picture with a rotary composition and in a semi-circular form. Fish, sea and pumpkin shrubs which were silver became dark over time by oxidation in the air. Tensional space was of counter-discourse type due to the presence of Prophet, naked in the mouth of Fish. As mentioned before, the action is an act which is performed based on intention and awareness; and plan-orientation and purposefulness are of the action-oriented discourse features which are the most important characteristic of the Prophet's

invitation. Tension discourse establishes the power of instant connection of the subject with the world and is beyond the subject's discretion and it is unexpected (Rezayi, et. al., 2017: 138). Accordingly, anger characteristic of the Prophet Jonah caused to create a tensional space by the whale. In Jonah's miniature, the high emotional intensive caused by darkness and loneliness inside the Fish belly caused Jonah's repentance and then pro-to become process occurs. Tensional space contains two intensive and extensive ranges which the broader the extensive, the more obscure the meaning; however, the meaning is



Fig. 2. Discourse coloring of Joseph in prison, from the Safavid Fālnama, Topkapi museum, 36\*49.5 cm, watercolor and gold on the paper. Source: Farhad, 2010: 252.

revealed by decreasing the extensive and increasing the intensive (emotional-sensual, perceptual); (Shoeyri, 2013: 80).

In fact, it shows the test of the Prophet after the emergence of anger and, more importantly, a tensional space of regret and seek forgiveness from the Lord and request of him for help in loneliness and darkness within the fish.<sup>7</sup> In the composition of miniature, it is specifically the corpse propre of the tensional space and its attachment to Prophet Jonah and, on the other hand, the divine angel, and the attachment of the hands of Jonah to the arms of the angel who is dedicated to the divine protection and support of the Prophet due to his repentance, with a circular composition is displayed that within this circular space of the corpse propre of pumpkin tree, according to Quran depicts the pro-divine space of Prophet Jonah after his salvation from the belly of the fish, and is the messenger of divine mercy for him (Fig. 3)<sup>8</sup>.

It should be noted that there is no contradiction in the presence of green tree on the upper part of the frame from the perspective of Quran, we placed him in a land without vegetation, but we set up for him a

pumpkin shrub. Because a part of miniature spacing is analysable with cultural discourse of persian miniature tradition in the Safavid era and Tabriz or Qazvin miniature school which both miniatures belong to that school. In aesthetic of this miniature school, trees such as plantains in miniature space is one of the aesthetic factors of this painting school (Azhand, 2015: 93-98-147).

Transferring the meaning of counter - discourse from the texts (the Quran) to miniatures

The relationship between the meaning production and discourse analysis of samples is created by the interfacing factors called “mediating role of discourse” (Shoeyri, 2013:14). This mediating role produces meanings with the features such as counterpoint, interaction, alignment, collusion, quarrel, division and composition. In two miniatures, the most important factor in the meaning-making is alignment. The meaning is established (spoken word (in sensory-perceptual conditions and its relationship with visual samples. In fact, in terms of revealing meaning on the basis of the discourse context of images, a pre-determined and absolute meaning is not contemplated, but the "becoming" meaning in the sense-perceptual relationship in interaction and challenge between the spoken word and the image (samples) is formed, receives meaning (Ibid: 14,76).

### Alignment

In the miniature of Jonah in prison, the alignment factor with Joseph or Zoleikha's code gives meaning to the miniature; because the cause of Joseph captivity in the prison is 1. Request of Zoleikha and 2. Purity and piety of Joseph. Therefore, the desire for alignment with Joseph was analyzed according to Greimas semantic square. Greimas believes that the opposing categories in the narrative make fundamental meanings. In fact, the meaning is produced by placing the world in opposite meanings. The Semantic square of Greimas deals with moving among the mentioned counterpoints in the narrative analyzing the deep structures (Ahmadpanah & Jabbari, 2014: 78) (Fig.4). In the miniature of Joseph in prison, considering

Table 2. The same location of captivity and release in both plans of the miniature to the two main characters, Joseph &. Source: authors, 2018.

Captivity-emancipation location( lower plan)	Captivity-emancipation location( upper plan)
Freedom from impurity; Joseph- prison captivity	Zoleikha- emancipation (upper plan)- inner captivity to Joseph



Fig.3. Spacing of Jonah and the Fish miniature, from Safavid falnama, Toopkapi museum,Source: Farhad, 2010.

and identifying with the main character, Joseph, and placing himself in a dark prison, emotional intensive of staying away from the free humans, absence of family and relatives could attract every human to align with a beautiful, free and rich character to release from prison. However, as in the miniature, the interaction and alignment of Joseph with the prisoners in order to interpret their dreams are displayed, Joseph's patience and purity are manifested by the drawing the down plan, closed and black space of prison, and with the presence of Zoleikha's character, the meaning of counter-discourse for the safety of Joseph being pure even in prison is understandable. Since the audience knows the rest of story, he knows that this prison is not permanent (Fig.5).

Also, in the miniature of Jonah, being released from the dark space and divine support is reflected by the positions of Jonah's hands and angel's hands . As can be seen they are connected to each other so that the angle with Jonah is the mediator of their salvation. In fact, the divine support of Jonah in the sea by catching his arms and emancipation from dark and loneliness is disclosed in this way.

### Finding and Discussion

Semiotic study helps in better understanding of some Quranic concepts and especially the stories of the prophets which have discourse space. Findings show that the characteristics of the main actor (the Prophet) are the cause of remoteness or proximity to a unique



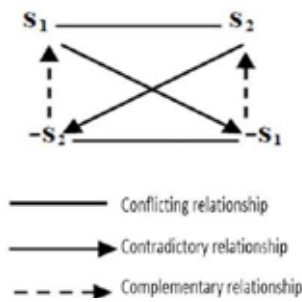


Fig. 4. Grimas semantics square. Source: Ahmadpanah & Jabbari, 2014.

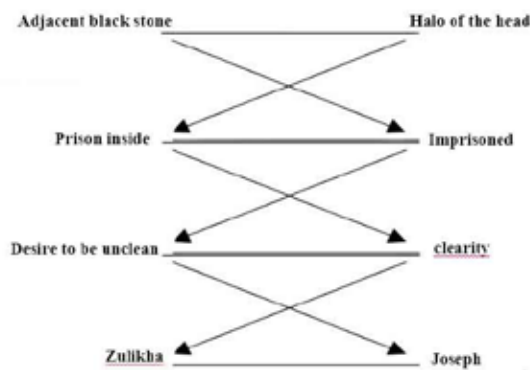


Fig. 5. Created contradictions in the miniature based on Greimas semantic square. Source: authors, 2018.

meaning and conveying that meaning to the audience. For this reason, identification with the characters such as the Prophet results in the reception of deeper meanings.

### Conclusion

The present study shows that discourse dimensions of stories through analyzing the deeper layers of Prophets' miniatures with regard to the main characters, events and the way the characters interact with each other. The power of sign in every miniature was different and it was dependent on the event and the power in conveying meaning was not the same. For example, the whale is a powerful sign in the Prophet Jonah's story, these powerful codes independently convey the poor meanings, but through the mediator agent between the form and the content, such as the angel, the sea, the black stone adjacent to Zoleikha, the black prison, they can convey the fluid and dynamic meanings to the audience. Analysis of the color shows the black stone adjacent to Zoleikha stands for the

desire of Zoleikha's alignment with a pure character through an impure action and Greimas contradiction square analyses this contradiction.

By analyzing two miniatures, it became clear that divine counter-discourse can appear in the form of action-suspension, tensional in both miniatures and due to the scene of the story which the miniature belongs to it, these dimensions of divine counter-discourse were manifested. The authors of this article believe that human weakness in understanding the dynamic meanings of the Quran stories, especially prophets can be compensated by visual arts, and in particular the analytic and efficient analysis of Iranian paintings. Then, by identifying the characteristics shown by the story characters in different positions and characters align or contradict them, it will be more tangible. The counter-discourse analysis in the two miniatures revealed that divine support of God can be revealed by characteristics of the prophet in different events. Disagreement with Zoleikha who prevents Joseph character from the faith, the divine suspension- action counter-discourse in the dark prison was revealed, and repent and request of help from God by Jonah after his anger turned the whale into a salvation angel and pro-tension for Jonah.

### Endnotes

1. Illustrated version of Qesas al-Anbiya contains miniatures of different parts of the evangelical and Quranic Prophets' lives (Renda, 2006:149-151).
2. Falnama miniatures are taken from the text of Imam Jafar Sadeq's falnama (manuscript, 1058 A.H, available in the national content consortium. <http://icnc.ir/>).
3. Character: or actors are human factors which identified by their actions in an event and exhibit different characteristics. For example, two prisoners in Joseph's miniature are identified as the captive characters.
4. Corpse propre: it is different from the physical object. Corpse propre is placed between two levels of form and content facilitating the movement between form and content not to convert the meaning-maker actions into physical actions. Feeling and perceiving the subject are place on the corpse propre (Shoeyri, 2013, p.270).
5. Plot: plot is an element that acts as the mental thinking structure of the story. It adjusts the dependence between the story events rationally. In this regard, plot is an organized collection of events which are linked to the cause and effect relationship and are arranged in a map.
6. And when Zolnon (Jonah) left his people angrily and supposed that we would not be hard at him, in that darkness called: "(Allah) there is no god except you! Your glory! I was a wicked man". (Anbia, 87).
7. We answered his prayers and rescued him from grief and we will save such believers (Anbia, 88).
8. We put him in a dry land without vegetation while he was ill (145) and planted a pumpkin shrub for him (Safaat, 146).

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