أَمّ

By the Book. Or not?
A linguistic journey through the Qur'an

by Mikael Sahlberg

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Abstract

This paper investigates how the usage of the particle ʾأَمْʾ in the Qurʾan differs from the descriptions given of it in sources on modern Arabic. To do this, it adopts a working definition of the particle based on these sources, and then examines the particle's occurrences throughout the book, placing them into two categories. Furthermore, older sources – or sources on the older language – are also presented, and an assessment is made as to which aspects of the particle's descriptions find support in Qurʾanic usage, and to what extent.

This information is then used to propose a revised Qurʾanic description of the particle that might be useful to those interested in understanding the central text of Islam, whether they be Arabic-speaking or not.

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Table of contents

1. Introduction & research question

'This makes no sense!' I thought. I was sitting at my kitchen table reading surah 13 of the Qur'an when it struck me that a certain word was not used as I had learned it ought to be. That word was the particle 'أَم', which appears twice in verse 16 of this surah. I had learned that the particle means 'either/or' and that it presents two exclusive options. Here, however, it appeared to mean something else, which piqued my curiosity. I have since learned that more than a few words, particles and constructions in the Qur'an don't correspond completely to the descriptions given by modern sources, such as grammars, lexicons and educational material.

While it is not surprising that the language should have changed with time, it can be worthwhile studying the phenomenon. After all, the Modern Standard Arabic that is taught today is largely based on the Classical Arabic for which the Qur'an is traditionally held as the highest literary standard, considered to be a language not merely of a certain people at a certain time, but the very word of God as relayed to Muhammad. It is not meant to change, but supposed to remain the same, steadfast as a rock, unmoved by the winds of change.

That the usage of certain words, particles and constructions differs between the Qur'an and the way they are taught today is therefore an issue of curiosity, and I hope that with simplicity, clarity and focus I may be contribute to the subject and inspire further inquiry. While there are numerous examples of these differing usages, the limited time and resources at my disposal necessitate that I narrow the scope. I have therefore chosen the word that first caught my attention, and my research question is the following:

How, and to what extent, does the usage of the particle أَم in the Qur'an differ from descriptions given by modern grammars and lexicons?

Without further ado, let us begin our linguistic journey through the Qur'an!

2. Theory

In order to investigate whether the use of the particle differs, a definition of its use must first be established, against which its occurrences may be compared before being placed into categories. The particle is, of course, mentioned in a great number of sources and the descriptions they give – though largely similar – often differ amongst themselves to some degree. For the basis of my working definition I have used four sources on modern Arabic, which I now present in alphabetical order.

2.1 The modern sources

A dictionary of modern written Arabic

In his highly regarded and authoritative work, Wehr (2012, p. 25) describes the particle briefly thus: 'or? (introducing the second member of an alternative question)'

Modern Arabic: structures, functions, and varieties

Holes (2004, p. 275) presents a somewhat differing description, writing: '*Am* is used in interrogatives only, whether direct or in reported speech. In contrast to *aw*, *am* normally presents possibilities that are actually, or presented as being, mutually exclusive.'

Modern written Arabic: a comprehensive grammar

Badawi et al. (2016, p. 338; 630; 765-766) mention the particle several times, saying it generally implies an exclusive choice, restricted to one of the alternatives. They contrast this with أَو, writing that أَم 'corresponds more closely to "either/or"'. They also write that أَم is mostly used used with interrogatives and rhetorical questions, and that alternative questions use أ or هَل, with mostly أَم before the second question.

A reference grammar of modern standard Arabic

In this grammar, Ryding (2008, p. 418) mentions the alternative/exclusive use of particle – translated as 'or' – twice, directly after presenting the particle أَو. She also mentions its usage with أ:

1. '[أَم] indicates an **exclusive option**; one or the other, but not both or all.'

2. 'أ with أَم . Sometimes the particle أ is used on the first element of the exclusive disjunction.'

As we can see, the modern grammars are largely in agreement concerning the meaning of the particle. Their descriptions are not identical, however. Two of them, Badawi et al. and Ryding, mention the particle's usage with أ. And two of them, Badawi et al. and Holes, also mention its interrogative use, but differ in their descriptions, the former writing that it is 'mostly used' with interrogatives, the latter that it is used 'in interrogatives only.'

In spite of these differences, they all agree that the particle means 'or' and is used in exclusive/alternative contexts, which leads me to adopt the following *working definition* for the particle, focusing on the exclusive/alternative aspect (henceforth referred to as the *either/or function*):

أَم*: A word used in 'either/or'-situations to present two mutually exclusive alternatives.*

Based on whether occurrences conform to this definition or deviate from it, they will be placed into either the *conforming category* or the *deviating category*, so named only for their relation to this working definition. It is not implied that occurrences in the deviating category are deviating in any larger or fundamental sense. When the word 'category' is used in this paper, it refers only to these two categories.

Because this paper examines modern descriptions and Qur'anic usage, I expect there might be significant differences between them, and many

occurrences may fall into the deviating category. These, too, I will analyze in order to bring clarity as to how the usage of the particle differs. To aid in this, I present some descriptions from 'older' sources, so termed because they are either older or focused on older language, i.e. the Qur'an itself.

2.2 The 'older' sources

Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage

Badawi & Haleem (2008, p. 43) describe the particle, which occurs 137 times in the Qur'an, as having two uses; the connected and the disconnected. The latter is more long-winded and warrants inclusion of examples.

1. Connected with what precedes it, presenting 'a choice between two propositions – "this or that"', and usually being preceded by a hamza.

2. Disconnected from that which precedes it, with meaning similar to بل, indicating dismissal or disapproval of a preceding proposition and turning to a following one, as in (32:2-3): *"this scripture, free from all doubt, has been sent down from the Lord of the Worlds, **yet they say**, 'He [Muhammad] has made it up'"*. (My emphasis) It can also be preceded by hamza or hal, and dismisses or disapproves of the proposition before it, as in (7:195): *"have they feet to walk with!?, [or] have they hands to strike with!?, [or] have they eyes to see with!? or have they ears to hear with!?"*

The particle here has two very different uses, one of which is more or less identical to that found in the modern sources, the other not mentioned by them at all. Also, though the authors do not mention the interrogative function at all, both uses contain reference to the particle أَ, also mentioned by Ryding.

Arabic-English Lexicon

Lane (1863, p. 88-89) presents a verbose description of the particle. Like Badawi & Haleem, he writes that the particle has both a connected and a disconnected use:

1. Connected with what precedes it, so that neither is independent of the other. It denotes interrogation, or is used in a case of interrogation, and meaning أَيّ. It corresponds to أَ, as though it is 'an interrogative after an interrogative'.

2. Disconnected from what precedes it, implying digression and signifying بل. It can be preceded by an enunciative or an interrogative other than أَ, or after an أَ which is not really intended as an interrogative but to denote disapproval.

This description mentions both أَ and interrogation, and is interesting, because the translation 'or' or any mention of 'either/or' use are non-existent. Rather, when discussing the connected use, Lane appears to view the exclusive 'either/or' function from a very different angle, nevertheless arriving at largely the same meaning. Instead of seeing the particle as meaning 'either/or', it is described as an 'interrogative after an interrogative'.

A dictionary and glossary of the Kor'an

Penrice (1873, p. 9) mentions the exclusive/alternative nature of the particle, and also the particle 'أَ': 'Or, a conjunction generally used in the second of two alternative propositions, the first of which is preceded by أَ, both may frequently be rendered *"whether"'*.

A grammar of the Arabic language

In a translation from Caspari's 19th century German-language work – Wright (1963, vol.1) mentions the particle thrice:

1. It follows the question particle أَ in alternative questions. (p. 282)
2. 'أَمُ , interrogative *an?*   أَ.....أَمُ […] utrum…… an?' (Latin, translation: either… or?) (p. 284)
3. 'أَمُ *or,* synonym of أَوْ in alternative questions.' (p. 292)

As we can see, these sources on the older language all include the 'either/or' function described by the modern grammars. Furthermore, they all mention the particle أَ, and Lane and Wright also mention the interrogative use.

In summary, all of the sources, whether concerning the modern or the classical language, in some way mention the particle's 'either/or' usage. This is the function that there is most agreement about, and most also mention the particle's interrogative usage, or its being used with أ. Only two sources; Badawi & Haleem and Lane, make any mention of a digressive or dismissive function.

2.3 The four characteristics

Having looked at all eight sources, I have extracted four different characteristics of the particle:

1. An 'either/or' function.
2. A 'dismissive/digressive' function.
3. Whether it is used interrogatively.
4. Whether it is used with أ.

The either/or function and the dismissive/digressive function are mutually exclusive; an occurrence can be either, but not both. Either of these two functions might, however, be used either interrogatively or non-interrogatively, and either with or without أ. Concerning whether an occurrence is used interrogatively or used with أ, it must be said that since أ is an interrogative particle (Badawi et al., 2016, p. 764), most occurrences containing it will likely be deemed interrogative. However, there may also be occurrences that do not contain it, and that are still deemed interrogative.

The categorization being based on the 'either/or' function, sorting the occurrences depending on whether they conform or deviate from the aforementioned working definition will establish whether the Qur'an usage differs from the descriptions of the modern sources. Let us look at a pair of examples of this function, presented in the following form:

surah:verse:word (number of the surah:number of the verse:the place number of the worse in the verse)

Arabic text with particle in red

English translation

Either/or function

2:140:16

قُلْ أَأَنْتُمْ أَعْلَمُ أَمِ اللَّهُ

Say, "Are you more knowing or is Allah?"

In this occurrence, containing two options and the particle أَ, there is a very clear either/or choice; either you are more knowing, or Allah is. Both cannot be true.

16:59:12

أَيُمْسِكُهُ عَلَىٰ هُونٍ أَمْ يَدُسُّهُ فِي التُّرَابِ أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ

Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide.

This verse, condemning the pre-islamic custom of burying female infants alive, also offers a strikingly clear either/or choice; the child can be kept or it can be buried, not both.

Examining the particle's occurrences throughout the Qur'an will also yield answers on the other three characteristics found in the sources, thereby answering *how, and to what extent,* the usage of the particle differs.*'*

Therefore, this paper investigates whether, and to what extent, the varying characteristics of description given by the sources find support in Qur'anic usage. To do this, definitions for how the other characteristics are to be judged must also be established. I therefore now present these characteristics, along with examples.

Dismissive/digressive function

This function is mentioned in only two of the sources; Badawi & Haleem and Lane, who offer similar – though not identical – descriptions. Incorporating part of both, I define it thus: *Disconnected from what precedes it, indicating dismissal or disapproval and turning to a new proposition* [according to Badawi & Haleem]*, or digression* [according to Lane]. Being mutually exclusive with the either/or function, this function can only appear in the deviating category. This does not imply that this function is deviant in any larger sense, rather, the category is named so merely because it contains occurrences that deviate from the either/or use or the particle.

13:16:24, 13:16;29

قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ **أَمْ** هَلْ تَسْتَوِي الظُّلُمَاتُ وَالنُّورُ **أَمْ** جَعَلُوا لِلَّهِ شُرَكَاءَ خَلَقُوا كَخَلْقِهِ فَتَشَابَهَ الْخَلْقُ عَلَيْهِمْ

Say, "Is the blind equivalent to the seeing? Or is darkness equivalent to light? Or have they attributed to Allah partners who created like His creation so that the creation [of each] seemed similar to them?"

In this verse, which was the original inspiration for this paper, the particle appears twice and does not present exclusive options. Rather, it presents a series of rhetorical questions, digressing from one to the next. Also, it is one of the rare times that the particle is preceded by هَلْ rather than أَ.

Interrogative use

As for whether an occurrence is interrogative, I go by the translation English Saheeh International – the default one used on quran.com; if it is translated as a question, I count it as an interrogative. This method has the advantage of being simple in execution and reliable in reproduction, but also carries the drawback that the results depend on the translation used.

56:64:3

أَأَنْتُمْ تَزْرَعُونَهُ **أَمْ** نَحْنُ الزَّارِعُونَ

Is it you who makes it grow, or are We the grower?

If the particle occurs several time in the same verse, which is translated as a question, both occurrences are counted as used interrogatively.

13:33:14, 13:33:21

أَمْ تُنَبِّئُونَهُ بِمَا لَا يَعْلَمُ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَمْ بِظَاهِرٍ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ

Or do you inform Him of that which He knows not upon the earth or of what is apparent of speech?

Use with أ

Determining whether an occurrence is used with أ is a bit trickier. Sometimes it is difficult to assess whether the preceding أ is related to the أَم, or simply happens to be there. That they occur in proximity does not necessarily mean they are related. For simplicity and reproducibility, I have decided count the first occurrence of أَم that is preceded by an أ as used with أ. This means that if an أ should be followed by multiple أَم's, only the first one أَم will be counted. Otherwise, a great number of أَم's could be counted as used with أ, even when the أ can occur more than 10 verses before and there are many أَم's in between.

7:195:5, 7:195:10, 7:195:15

أَلَهُمْ أَرْجُلٌ يَمْشُونَ بِهَا أَمْ لَهُمْ أَيْدٍ يَبْطِشُونَ بِهَا أَمْ لَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ
يُبْصِرُونَ بِهَا أَمْ لَهُمْ آذَانٌ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا

Do they have feet by which they walk? Or do they have hands by which they strike? Or do they have eyes by which they see? Or do they have ears by which they hear?

Here, the verse begins with أ and only the first 7:195:5 أَم is counted as occurring with أ. The following two in 7:195:10 and 7:195:15 are *not* counted as occurring with أ.

3. Method

3.1 A work in progress

The work on this paper has gone through several stages. After first conceiving the idea to investigate the particle's usage in the Qur'an, I started out with the hypothesis that most occurrences would conform to the two-option, either/or definition, with a relatively small minority of deviations which would then be subject to analysis. After going over the occurrences, however, it became clear that this hypothesis was far from correct. Instead, the opposite was true; most occurrences in the book deviated from the working definition, with the either/or occurrences in clear minority, and the occurrences also had other characteristics, namely being interrogative (or not) or being used with أَ (or not).

In response to this, I constructed a number of more specific categories such as 'several options presented, occurs together with أَ'. However, sorting the occurrences into more categories required more precise assessment, and I finally decided that the desired greater exactness of having more categories did not compensate for the increased risk that an occurrence might be placed into the wrong category.

I therefore returned to a narrower working definition of the particle and a simpler categorization, so that the occurrences could only be sorted into the categories *conforming* and *deviating*. Though having come back to where I started, the process of attempting to use several categories improved my understanding of the complexity of the task at hand and of the Qur'an itself.

3.2 Gathering and sorting of data

The gathering of raw material for this paper, namely the particle's occurrences in the Qur'an along with its English translation, has taken place using two online resources: an online Qur'an (https://quran.com), which has been the

source of the English translation, & The Qur'anic Arabic Corpus (http://corpus.quran.com/), which has been the main source of the Arabic text.

In the Corpus, it is possible to search for words in the Qur'an. The results appear in a list in order of where they occur in the book, with numbers defining the exact place, and the word in question marked with red. Using the Corpus I then went through the occurrences in order, from the first in سورة البقرة to the last in سورة النازعات. I gathered the place of occurrence and Arabic text, which I then paired with the English translation gathered from the online Qur'an. Sometimes, in order to provide the reader with more context, I added more of a verse than appeared in the search result in the Corpus.

The particle is sometimes written with sukūn 'أَمْ' and sometimes with the vowel kasra 'أَمِ' and I therefore searched for 'ام'without diacritics to ensure that both of these varieties would appear in the results. In a small number of occurrences the particle is written together with another word. These were more difficult to find as they did not appear in my search in the 'word for word' section of the Corpus that I first used. Instead, I used the 'Qur'an Dictionary' function of the corpus to search for them. I then gathered the place of occurrence and Arabic text and paired it with the English translation from the online Qur'an, as with all other occurrences. Having collected the occurrences, I then determined into which category the occurrences best fitted and placed them there. In doing this, I also took surrounding verses into account, looking for context that would aid me in the categorizing process.

With the the data collected and sorted into categories, I then looked at the other characteristics of description mentioned in the theory section; the dismissive/digressive function, whether it is used interrogatively and whether it is used with أَ.

4. Results

For a full list of occurrences, see Appendix.

4.1 In total

My search for the particle has yielded 137 occurrences, confirming the number mentioned by Badawi & Haleem (2008, p. 43), with 122 أَم, 11 أَمَّن, 3 أَمَّا and 1 أَمَّاذَا. Of these 137 occurrences, 39 are conforming and 98 are deviating. 125 of 137 are used interrogatively and 62 of 137 are used with أ.
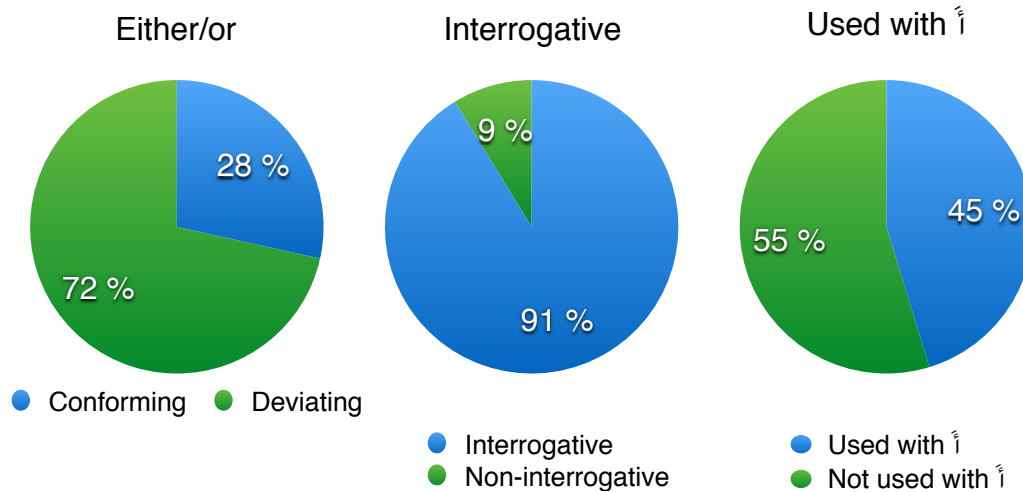
These results show that the usage of أَم in the Qur'an does indeed differ from the descriptions given by the modern sources, as expressed through my working definition, and thereby the first part of my research question has been answered. And with less than a third of occurrences conforming to the working definition, the Qur'anic usage of the particle not only differs, but differs to a great extent. Next follows a breakdown of the categories.

4.2 Conforming category

This category has 39 occurrences. Of these I find that 27 are used interrogatively, 12 are used non-interrogatively, and that all 39 are used with أَ.
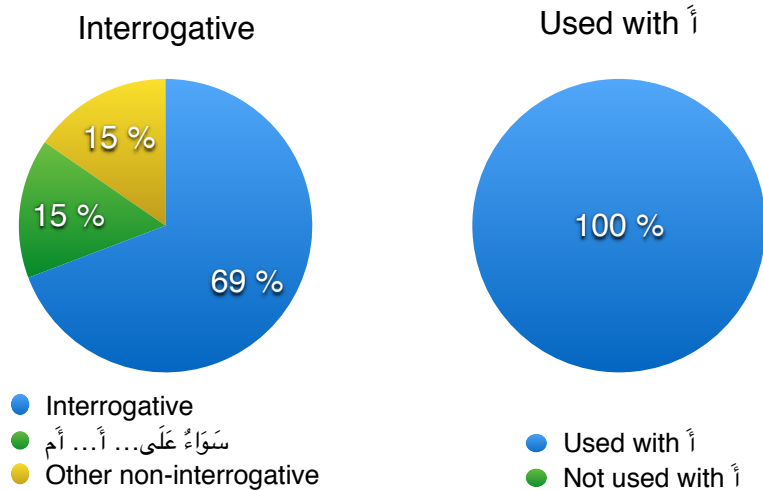
Interestingly, every single one of the conforming occurrences are used with أَ, meaning that in Qur'anic usage, أَ is an integral part of the either/or function. Furthermore, though most of the occurrences are used interrogatively, this category also contains the only 12 occurrences that have not been deemed interrogative. Instead they are statements giving exclusive choice between two propositions and translated as 'whether… or'. Half of them occur in the fixed formula 'سَوَاءٌ عَلَى... أَ ... أَم...', and the other half does not. Let us look at an example of each kind.

7:193:10

سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْكُمْ أَدَعَوْتُمُوهُمْ أَمْ أَنْتُمْ صَامِتُونَ

It is all the same for you whether you invite them or you are silent.

Though translated as 'whether… or', it is an example of the either/or use because it presents two opposite and exclusive alternatives; inviting or remaining silent. One may choose either, but the formula equates the results of the alternatives, saying it makes no difference which is chosen.

27:27:4

قَالَ سَنَنْظُرُ أَصَدَقْتَ **أَمْ** كُنْتَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ

[Solomon] said, "We will see whether you were truthful or were of the liars. /
…/

Again, two opposite and exclusive alternatives are presented, but unlike the
'…سَوَاءٌ عَلَى… أَ… أَمْ' formula, the results of the alternatives are not equated. In
fact, this occurrence might also have been translated as an interrogative,
without significantly altering the meaning: 'He said: "Were you truthful or of
the liars? We will see."' Although the word order is switched for a more
natural translation, the fact that the meaning of the verse is not significantly
impacted suggests that the whether/or statements and either/or interrogatives
are rather close in meaning.

Next, the deviating category.

27:27:4

قَالَ سَنَنْظُرُ أَصَدَقْتَ **أَمْ** كُنْتَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ

4.3 Deviating category

This category has 98 occurrences. Of these I find that 94 carry the dismissive/ digressive function and that the remaining 4 are of a deviating either/or function. All 98 are used interrogatively, and 23 of these 98 are used with أَ.
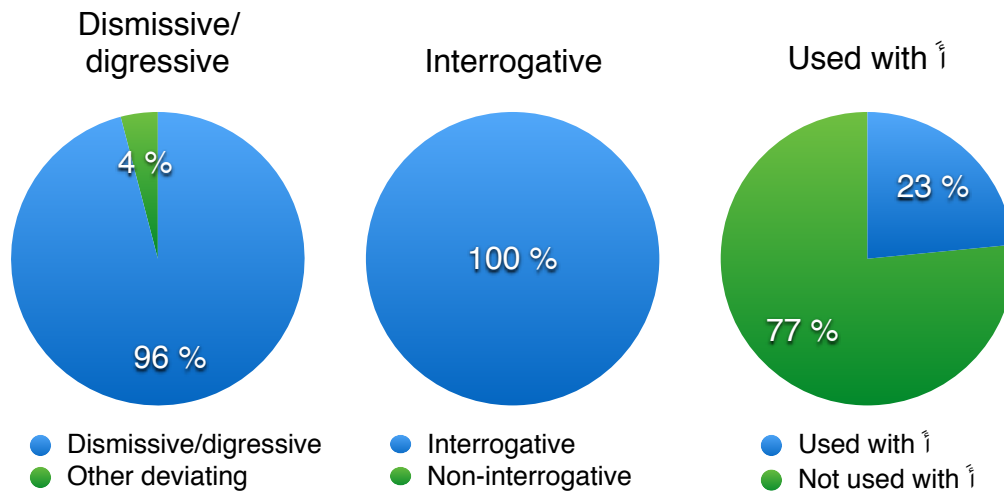
Unlike the conforming category, where 'used with أَ' was ubiquitous and the interrogative was not, every single one of the occurrences in the deviating category are interrogative, with less than a quarter being used with أَ. The vast majority are also deemed to have the dismissive/digressive function, with only four occurrences being of another function, namely the either/or function. As these four are the only occurrences of their kind, I present them here:

6:143:12, 6:143:14

قُلْ آلذَّكَرَيْنِ حَرَّمَ أَمِ الْأُنْثَيَيْنِ أَمَّا اشْتَمَلَتْ عَلَيْهِ أَرْحَامُ الْأُنْثَيَيْنِ

Say, "Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain?

6:144:10, 6:44:12

قُلْ آلذَّكَرَيْنِ حَرَّمَ أَمِ الْأُنْثَيَيْنِ أَمَّا اشْتَمَلَتْ عَلَيْهِ أَرْحَامُ الْأُنْثَيَيْنِ

Say, "Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain?

In these adjacent verses, questions are being asked about what is forbidden, offering an exclusive choice; it is either the two males or the two females. The

first أم in each of the two verses, therefore, initially appears to be conforming. However, a third alternative then follows, causing all four occurrences to be classified as deviating, because they do not strictly conform to the working definition that only two exclusive alternatives are to be presented. Perhaps it is because these cases are so few that some sources lean toward a binary either/or description of أم.

5. Discussion & A Revised Description

As can be gleaned from the examples given in this paper, أَم is used in a wide range of contexts; it appears after أ or without it, on its own or as one in a series, in interrogatives or equational statements using 'سَوَاءٌ عَلَى', and so on. In light of these differing uses and meanings, the differences found in the descriptions of the dictionaries and grammars are not strange – a perfectly exact description of the meaning and usage of the particle is hard to pin down. Nonetheless, the results of this paper give varying degrees of support to the different characteristics of description.

The either/or function, which was the one mentioned by every source, has between a quarter and a third of all occurrences in the Qur'an. Though far from being the majority use, it is not insignificant either. Rather, with 39 such occurrences, I consider this characteristic, and the sources that propose it, to find support in Qur'anic usage.

However, it is those characteristics of the particle that are mentioned by some – but not all – sources that find greatest support in Qur'anic usage. A vast majority of occurrences are interrogative, and almost half are used with أ. It is interesting that the characteristic of أَم that all sources agree is the one that finds least support in the Qur'an, occurring in less than a third of the cases, whereas the characteristics they disagree on – or do not mention – find significantly greater support.

It is not surprising that the older sources should present descriptions that are closer to Qur'anic usage. Rather, what is interesting is that it is the rarest Qur'anic usage that has survived until modernity and, so to speak, taken over.

This could be explained in two ways. It could be that the usage of the particle has changed over time, which is not unlikely given the vast period of time that has passed. Perhaps its usage was set to the 'either/or' function when MSA was standardized, which it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine.

It might also be that even in the classical language, the 'either/or' function was the most prominent one, and the other functions rather rare, but that the Qur'an still contains more of the latter. That a function which is generally rarer can still be more common in an isolated work is not illogical, because it depends on the work itself and what it wishes to express.

This suggests that – in spite of the Qur'an's status as the highest literary standard of the Arabic language – conclusions drawn from quantifying the usages found in it are not necessarily valid for other texts or for the language in general, but only for itself, and the same is true in reverse; general dictionaries, grammars and lexicons may encounter difficulty capturing the full meaning of the words of the Qur'an. The book stands on its own and requires a specific dictionary to be most easily understood.

Precisely this is the idea behind Qur'anic dictionaries, and these can fare better or worse; in spite of its promising title, Penrice's 1873 *A dictionary and glossary of the Kor-ân: with copious grammatical references and explanations of the text* does not give a satisfying description of the particle, completely leaving out any mention of a dismissive/digressive function. Fortunately, Badawi & Haleem's 2008 *Arabic-English dictionary of Qur'anic usage* does a better job, and is the work that offers the best description of the Qur'anic usage of أَم.

However, I believe even this description can be improved upon. For the either/or function, it only mentions two options, in spite of the rare cases where a third option may present, although this may be because they have judged those few cases differently than I have. Also, it does not even mention the word interrogative, in spite of the very prominent use of the particle in interrogatives.

Furthermore, it uses the words 'dismissal' and 'disapproval', rather than the word 'digression' used by Lane. In my opinion, 'digression' better describes

the dismissive/digressive function, as the particle does not always appear to dismiss (defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary (https://www.merriam-webster.com) as to 'reject serious consideration of', and by Oxford's dictionaries (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com) as 'Treat as unworthy of serious consideration.') the previous proposition, but rather merely to digress to the following one.

Lastly, it makes no mention that أَم can also occur in the forms أَمَّا, أَمَّن and أَمَّاذَا, which is useful information for the uninitiated reader of the Qur'an, and which should certainly be part of a complete Qur'anic description of the particle.

Based on my findings, I would therefore propose a revised Qur'anic description:

أَم: a particle occurring 137 times in the Qur'an, in 4 different forms: أَم (122 times), أَمَّن (أَم + مَن) 11 times), أَمَّا (أَم + مَا) 3 times, not to be confused with '…أَمَّا' (فَ') and أَمَّاذَا (أَم + مَاذَا), once). It is predominantly used in interrogatives and has two main functions, the first of which is more common: **I** *Digression, turning from a preceding proposition to a following one, sometimes indicating dismissal of the former. Often occurs verse-initially.* **II** *Presenting a second of two mutually exclusive or opposite options, as in 'either… or', or 'whether… or', though in rare cases it may also present a third exclusive option.* In either function it may be preceded by أ, though this is more common with the second function, where use with أ is ubiquitous.

This description covers every characteristic of the particle that was found in the sources. The functions are put in order of which is more common, which I find most logical and all different forms of the particle are present, together with how they are derived and how numerous they are. It is specific where there is certainty, as with the number of occurrences, and vaguer where there might be room for interpretation, offering some leeway instead of hard numbers that might be subject to change, while still presenting an accurate picture.

For example, while it is true that the precise number of occurrences that were deemed interrogative depends on the translation, with 125 of 137 occurrences having been deemed as such, a great deal would have to change for the phrase "predominantly used in interrogatives" to be incorrect. I would deem this unlikely. The weakest part of this description is probably *'though in rare cases it may also present a third exclusive option.'* as this is based on very few occurrences, and is therefore not very resilient; if these occurrences were deemed to be of the dismissive/digressive function instead, this part of the description would be incorrect.

It must be said, of course, that because I have conducted this work based on other sources and an English translation – instead of using my own exegesis and translation to derive everything directly from the Qur'an – my description is derivative rather than original. Nonetheless I believe it offers the most complete and accurate description of أَم's usage in the Qur'an.

6. Possible sources of error

In spite of my best efforts, this paper may not be perfect in either planning or execution. There are factors that reduce the reliability of my results and conclusions, which it behooves me to mention.

The grammatical sources

Firstly, the grammars and lexicons I have looked at. They are all in the English language and do not constitute an exhaustive list – there are many more sources in the world that could have been used. By choosing only English-language sources, however, any issue of translation has been bypassed, ensuring that the descriptions they give are accurately related in this paper. Also, any reader of this paper can look them up without knowledge of another language, which is another advantage, and with four modern sources, and four that concern the older language, I believe they have given me a sufficiently solid foundation on which to conduct this research.

The translation

Secondly, the English translation of the Qur'an I have used, the Saheeh International translation, which appears in a number of works. Because my assessment of whether an occurrence is interrogative or not has been based on this translation, the results in this regard are inevitably connected to it. There is a vast number of translations of the Qur'an, which differ to varying degrees, meaning that with another translation, my results may have been somewhat different in this regard. My assessment of the particle's interrogative use may therefore be lacking in conclusion validity.

Adding more translations might have helped against this, but this would not have been a perfect solution. With so many translations to choose from, I might have had to use rather a few in order to create a representative sample. And with every added translation the paper would have grown longer. The drawbacks of including more translations, I decided, outweighed the benefits.

The categorization

Thirdly, prudence requires me to mention that some occurrences may have been sorted into the wrong category or wrongly deemed to be used with أَ. However, I believe these cases to be relatively few, and that this source of error will not meaningfully impact the results and conclusions presented.

7. Concluding remarks

I would like to conclude this paper by thanking you – the reader – for the time and attention you have given it. I would also like to extend my gratitude to everyone who has helped me with the work, discussed the topic with me, encouraged me or simply shown interest. Special thanks are due to my supervisor Andreas Hallberg, and to Y.S., whose wily wit of words gave me my title. I have enjoyed this work, and hope that it has contributed something to our knowledge and understanding of the Qur'an.

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Appendix
Categorization of occurrences

The occurrences are presented in the following format:

surah:verse:word

Arabic text with أَم in red

English translation

Whether interrogative, whether with أ [*if* أ *is in another verse, its placement is*

also supplied] *whether dismissive/digressive* [*in deviating category only*]

Conforming category

2:6:7

سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَأَنْذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنْذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them - they will not believe.

Non-interrogative, used with أ

2:80:17

قُلْ أَتَّخَذْتُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَهْدًا فَلَنْ يُخْلِفَ اللَّهُ عَهْدَهُ أَمْ تَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

Say, "Have you taken a covenant with Allah? For Allah will never break His covenant. Or do you say about Allah that which you do not know?"

Interrogative, used with أ

2:140:16

قُلْ أَأَنْتُمْ أَعْلَمُ أَمِ اللَّهُ

Say, "Are you more knowing or is Allah?"

Interrogative, used with أ

7:193:10

سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْكُمْ أَدَعَوْتُمُوهُمْ أَمْ أَنْتُمْ صَامِتُونَ

It is all the same for you whether you invite them or you are silent.

Non-interrogative, used with أ

9:109:10

أَفَمَنْ أَسَّسَ بُنْيَانَهُ عَلَىٰ تَقْوَىٰ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانٍ خَيْرٌ أَمْ مَنْ أَسَّسَ بُنْيَانَهُ عَلَىٰ شَفَا جُرُفٍ

Then is one who laid the foundation of his building on righteousness [with fear] from Allah and [seeking] His approval better or one who laid the foundation of his building on the edge of a bank

Interrogative, used with أَ

10:35:20

قُلْ هَلْ مِنْ شُرَكَائِكُمْ مَنْ يَهْدِي إِلَى الْحَقِّ ۚ قُلِ اللَّهُ يَهْدِي لِلْحَقِّ ۗ أَفَمَنْ يَهْدِي إِلَى الْحَقِّ أَحَقُّ أَنْ يُتَّبَعَ أَمَّنْ لَا يَهِدِّي إِلَّا أَنْ يُهْدَىٰ ۖ فَمَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ

Say, "Are there of your 'partners' any who guides to the truth?" Say, " Allah guides to the truth. So is He who guides to the truth more worthy to be followed or he who guides not unless he is guided? Then what is [wrong] with you - how do you judge?"

Interrogative, used with أَ

10:59:17

قُلْ آللَّهُ أَذِنَ لَكُمْ أَمْ عَلَى اللَّهِ تَفْتَرُونَ

Say, "Has Allah permitted you [to do so], or do you invent [something] about Allah ?"

Interrogative, used with أَ

12:39:6

أَأَرْبَابٌ مُتَفَرِّقُونَ خَيْرٌ أَمِ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ

are separate lords better or Allah, the One, the Prevailing?

Interrogative, used with أَ

14:21:29

سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْنَا أَجَزِعْنَا أَمْ صَبَرْنَا مَا لَنَا مِنْ مَحِيصٍ

It is all the same for us whether we show intolerance or are patient: there is for us no place of escape.

Non-interrogative, used with أَ

16:59:12

أَيُمْسِكُهُ عَلَىٰ هُونٍ أَمْ يَدُسُّهُ فِي التُّرَابِ

Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground?

Interrogative, used with أَ

<u>19:78:3</u>

أَطَّلَعَ الْغَيْبَ أَمِ اتَّخَذَ عِنْدَ الرَّحْمَٰنِ عَهْدًا

Has he looked into the unseen, or has he taken from the Most Merciful a promise?

Interrogative, used with أ

<u>20:86:17</u>

أَفَطَالَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْعَهْدُ أَمْ أَرَدْتُمْ أَنْ يَحِلَّ عَلَيْكُمْ غَضَبٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ

Then, was the time [of its fulfillment] too long for you, or did you wish that wrath from your Lord descend upon you /…/

Interrogative, used with أ

<u>21:55:4</u>

قَالُوا أَجِئْتَنَا بِالْحَقِّ أَمْ أَنْتَ مِنَ اللَّاعِبِينَ

They said, "Have you come to us with truth, or are you of those who jest?"

Interrogative, used with أ

<u>21:109:10</u>

وَإِنْ أَدْرِي أَقَرِيبٌ أَمْ بَعِيدٌ مَا تُوعَدُونَ

And I know not whether near or far is that which you are promised.

Non-interrogative, used with أ

<u>25:15:4</u>

قُلْ أَذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ أَمْ جَنَّةُ الْخُلْدِ الَّتِي وُعِدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ

Say, "Is that better or the Garden of Eternity which is promised to the righteous?

Interrogative, used with أ

<u>25:17:13</u>

أَأَنْتُمْ أَضْلَلْتُمْ عِبَادِي هَٰؤُلَاءِ أَمْ هُمْ ضَلُّوا السَّبِيلَ

Did you mislead these, My servants, or did they [themselves] stray from the way

Interrogative, used with أ

<u>25:44:1</u>

أَمْ تَحْسَبُ أَنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ أَوْ يَعْقِلُونَ

Or do you think that most of them hear or reason?

Interrogative, used with أ *(25:43)*

26:136:5

قَالُوا سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْنَا أَوَعَظْتَ **أَمْ** لَمْ تَكُنْ مِنَ الْوَاعِظِينَ

They said, "It is all the same to us whether you advise or are not of the advisors. /…/

Non-interrogative, used with أ

27:27:4

قَالَ سَنَنْظُرُ أَصَدَقْتَ **أَمْ** كُنْتَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ

[Solomon] said, "We will see whether you were truthful or were of the liars. / …/

Non-interrogative, used with أ

27:40:26

قَالَ هَٰذَا مِنْ فَضْلِ رَبِّي لِيَبْلُوَنِي أَأَشْكُرُ **أَمْ** أَكْفُرُ

This is from the favor of my Lord to test me whether I will be grateful or ungrateful.

Non-interrogative, used with أ

27:41:7

قَالَ نَكِّرُوا لَهَا عَرْشَهَا نَنْظُرْ أَتَهْتَدِي **أَمْ** تَكُونُ مِنَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَهْتَدُونَ

He said, "Disguise for her her throne; we will see whether she will be guided [to truth] or will be of those who is not guided."

Non-interrogative, used with أ

27:59:11

قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَسَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ عِبَادِهِ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَىٰ ۗ آللَّهُ خَيْرٌ **أَمَّا** يُشْرِكُونَ

Say, [O Muhammad], "Praise be to Allah, and peace upon His servants whom He has chosen. Is Allah better or what they associate with Him?"

Interrogative, used with أ

34:8:5

أَفْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا **أَمْ** بِهِ جِنَّةٌ

Has he invented about Allah a lie or is there in him madness?

Interrogative, used with أ

36:10:4

وَسَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَأَنْذَرْتَهُمْ **أَمْ** لَمْ تُنْذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

And it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them - they will not believe.

Non-interrogative, used with أ

37:11:5

فَاسْتَفْتِهِمْ أَهُمْ أَشَدُّ خَلْقًا أَمْ مَنْ خَلَقْنَا

Then inquire of them, [O Muhammad], "Are they a stronger [or more difficult] creation or those [others] We have created?"
Interrogative, used with أ

37:62:4

أَذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ نُزُلًا أَمْ شَجَرَةُ الزَّقُّومِ

Is Paradise a better accommodation or the tree of zaqqum?
Interrogative, used with أ

38:75:11

أَسْتَكْبَرْتَ أَمْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْعَالِينَ

Were you arrogant [then], or were you [already] among the haughty?"
Interrogative, used with أ

41:40:14

أَفَمَنْ يُلْقَىٰ فِي النَّارِ خَيْرٌ أَمْ مَنْ يَأْتِي آمِنًا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

So, is he who is cast into the Fire better or he who comes secure on the Day of Resurrection?
Interrogative, used with أ

43:58:4

وَقَالُوا أَآلِهَتُنَا خَيْرٌ أَمْ هُوَ

And they said, "Are our gods better, or is he?"
Interrogative, used with أ

44:37:3

أَهُمْ خَيْرٌ أَمْ قَوْمُ تُبَّعٍ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ

Are they better or the people of Tubba' and those before them?
Interrogative, used with أ

56:59:3

أَأَنْتُمْ تَخْلُقُونَهُ أَمْ نَحْنُ الْخَالِقُونَ

Is it you who creates it, or are We the Creator?
Interrogative, used with أ

56:64:3

أَأَنْتُمْ تَزْرَعُونَهُ أَمْ نَحْنُ الزَّارِعُونَ

Is it you who makes it grow, or are We the grower?
Interrogative, used with أ

<u>56:69:5</u>

أَأَنْتُمْ أَنْزَلْتُمُوهُ مِنَ الْمُزْنِ **أَمْ** نَحْنُ الْمُنْزِلُونَ

Is it you who brought it down from the clouds, or is it We who bring it down?

Interrogative, used with أ

<u>56:72:4</u>

أَأَنْتُمْ أَنْشَأْتُمْ شَجَرَتَهَا **أَمْ** نَحْنُ الْمُنْشِئُونَ

Is it you who produced its tree, or are We the producer?

Interrogative, used with أ

<u>63:6:5</u>

سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَسْتَغْفَرْتَ لَهُمْ **أَمْ** لَمْ تَسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ لَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ

It is all the same for them whether you ask forgiveness for them or do not ask forgiveness for them; never will Allah forgive them.

Non-interrogative, used with أ

<u>67:22:7</u>

أَفَمَن يَمْشِي مُكِبًّا عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ أَهْدَىٰ **أَمَّن** يَمْشِي سَوِيًّا عَلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ

Then is one who walks fallen on his face better guided or one who walks erect on a straight path?

Interrogative, used with أ

<u>72:10:9</u>

وَأَنَّا لَا نَدْرِي أَشَرٌّ أُرِيدَ بِمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ **أَمْ** أَرَادَ بِهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ رَشَدًا

And we do not know [therefore] whether evil is intended for those on earth or whether their Lord intends for them a right course.

Non-interrogative, used with أ

<u>72:25:7</u>

قُلْ إِنْ أَدْرِي أَقَرِيبٌ مَا تُوعَدُونَ **أَمْ** يَجْعَلُ لَهُ رَبِّي أَمَدًا

Say, "I do not know if what you are promised is near or if my Lord will grant for it a [long] period."

Non-interrogative, used with أ

<u>79:27:4</u>

أَأَنْتُمْ أَشَدُّ خَلْقًا **أَمِ** السَّمَاءُ بَنَاهَا

Are you a more difficult creation or is the heaven? Allah constructed it.

Interrogative, used with أ

Deviating category

<u>2:108:1</u>

أَمْ تُرِيدُونَ أَنْ تَسْأَلُوا رَسُولَكُمْ كَمَا سُئِلَ مُوسَىٰ مِنْ قَبْلُ

Or do you intend to ask your Messenger as Moses was asked before?
Interrogative, used with أ (2:107), dismissive/digressive

<u>2:133:1</u>

أَمْ كُنْتُمْ شُهَدَاءَ إِذْ حَضَرَ يَعْقُوبَ الْمَوْتُ

Or were you witnesses when death approached Jacob
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

<u>2:140:1</u>

أَمْ تَقُولُونَ إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطَ كَانُوا هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَىٰ

Or do you say that Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the
Descendants were Jews or Christians?
Interrogative, used with أ (2:139), dismissive/digressive

<u>2:214:1</u>

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِكُمْ مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ

Or do you think that you will enter Paradise while such [trial] has not yet come
to you as came to those who passed on before you?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

<u>3:142:1</u>

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَعْلَمِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا مِنْكُمْ

Or do you think that you will enter Paradise while Allah has not yet made
evident those of you who fight in His cause and made evident those who are
steadfast?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

<u>4:53:1</u>

أَمْ لَهُمْ نَصِيبٌ مِنَ الْمُلْكِ فَإِذًا لَا يُؤْتُونَ النَّاسَ نَقِيرًا

Or have they a share of dominion? Then [if that were so], they would not give
the people [even as much as] the speck on a date seed.
Interrogative, used with أ (4:51), dismissive/digressive

<u>4:54:1</u>

أَمْ يَحْسُدُونَ النَّاسَ عَلَىٰ مَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ

Or do they envy people for what Allah has given them of His bounty?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

4:109:14

فَمَنْ يُجَادِلُ اللَّهَ عَنْهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ **أَمْ** مَنْ يَكُونُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَكِيلًا

but who will argue with Allah for them on the Day of Resurrection, or who will [then] be their representative?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

6:143:12

قُلْ آلذَّكَرَيْنِ حَرَّمَ **أَمِ** الْأُنْثَيَيْنِ

Say, "Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females
Interrogative, used with أ, not dismissive/digressive,

6:143:14

أَمَّا اشْتَمَلَتْ عَلَيْهِ أَرْحَامُ الْأُنْثَيَيْنِ

or that which the wombs of the two females contain?
Interrogative, not used with أ, not dismissive/digressive (rather introduces 3rd option)

6:144:10

قُلْ آلذَّكَرَيْنِ حَرَّمَ **أَمِ** الْأُنْثَيَيْنِ

Say, "Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females
Interrogative, used with أ, not dismissive/digressive

6:144:12

أَمَّا اشْتَمَلَتْ عَلَيْهِ أَرْحَامُ الْأُنْثَيَيْنِ

or that which the wombs of the two females contain?
Interrogative, not used with أ, not dismissive/digressive (rather introduces 3rd option)

6:144:17

أَمْ كُنْتُمْ شُهَدَاءَ إِذْ وَصَّاكُمُ اللَّهُ بِهَٰذَا

Or were you witnesses when Allah charged you with this?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

7:195:5

أَلَهُمْ أَرْجُلٌ يَمْشُونَ بِهَا **أَمْ** لَهُمْ أَيْدٍ يَبْطِشُونَ بِهَا

Do they have feet by which they walk? Or do they have hands by which they strike?
Interrogative, used with أ, dismissive/digressive

7:195:10

أَمْ لَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ يُبْصِرُونَ بِهَا

Or do they have eyes by which they see?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

7:195:15

أَمْ لَهُمْ آذَانٌ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا

Or do they have ears by which they hear?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

9:16:1

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تُتْرَكُوا وَلَمَّا يَعْلَمِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا مِنْكُمْ

Do you think that you will be left [as you are] while Allah has not yet made evident those among you who strive
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

10:31:7

قُلْ مَنْ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَمَّنْ يَمْلِكُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَمَنْ يُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَيُخْرِجُ الْمَيِّتَ مِنَ الْحَيِّ وَمَنْ يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ ۚ فَسَيَقُولُونَ اللَّـهُ ۚ فَقُلْ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ

Say, "Who provides for you from the heaven and the earth? Or who controls hearing and sight and who brings the living out of the dead and brings the dead out of the living and who arranges [every] matter?" They will say, " Allah," so say, "Then will you not fear Him?"
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

10:38:1

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ قُلْ فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِثْلِهِ

Or do they say [about the Prophet], "He invented it? Say, "Then bring forth a surah like it
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

11:13:1

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ قُلْ فَأْتُوا بِعَشْرِ سُوَرٍ مِثْلِهِ

Or do they say, "He invented it"? Say, "Then bring ten surahs like it
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

11:35:1

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ قُلْ إِنِ افْتَرَيْتُهُ فَعَلَيَّ إِجْرَامِي

Or do they say [about Prophet Muhammad], "He invented it"? Say, "If I have invented it, then upon me is [the consequence of] my crime;
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

13:16:24

قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ **أَمْ** هَلْ تَسْتَوِي الظُّلُمَاتُ وَالنُّورُ

Say, "Is the blind equivalent to the seeing? Or is darkness equivalent to light?
Interrogative, not used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

13:16:29

أَمْ جَعَلُوا لِلَّهِ شُرَكَاءَ خَلَقُوا كَخَلْقِهِ فَتَشَابَهَ الْخَلْقُ عَلَيْهِمْ

Or have they attributed to Allah partners who created like His creation so that
the creation [of each] seemed similar to them?"
Interrogative, not used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

13:33:14

أَمْ تُنَبِّئُونَهُ بِمَا لَا يَعْلَمُ فِي الْأَرْضِ

Or do you inform Him of that which He knows not upon the earth
Interrogative, not used with أَ (because preceded by imperative)

13:33:21

أَمْ بِظَاهِرٍ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ

or of what is apparent of speech?
Interrogative, not used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

17:69:1

أَمْ أَمِنْتُمْ أَنْ يُعِيدَكُمْ فِيهِ تَارَةً أُخْرَىٰ فَيُرْسِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ قَاصِفًا

Or do you feel secure that He will not send you back into the sea another time
and send upon you a hurricane
Interrogative, used with أَ (17:68), dismissive/digressive

18:9:1

أَمْ حَسِبْتَ أَنَّ أَصْحَابَ الْكَهْفِ وَالرَّقِيمِ كَانُوا مِنْ آيَاتِنَا عَجَبًا

Or have you thought that the companions of the cave and the inscription were,
among Our signs, a wonder?
Interrogative, not used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

21:21:1

أَمِ اتَّخَذُوا آلِهَةً مِنَ الْأَرْضِ هُمْ يُنْشِرُونَ

Or have men taken for themselves gods from the earth who resurrect [the
dead]?
Interrogative, not used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

21:24:1

أَمِ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ آلِهَةً قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ

Or have they taken gods besides Him? Say, [O Muhammad], "Produce your proof. /.../

Interrogative, not used with أ, *dismissive/digressive*

21:43:1

أَمْ لَهُمْ آلِهَةٌ تَمْنَعُهُمْ مِنْ دُونِنَا

Or do they have gods to defend them other than Us?

Interrogative, not used with أ, *dismissive/digressive*

23:68:4

أَفَلَمْ يَدَّبَّرُوا الْقَوْلَ أَمْ جَاءَهُمْ مَا لَمْ يَأْتِ آبَاءَهُمُ الْأَوَّلِينَ

Then have they not reflected over the Qur'an, or has there come to them that which had not come to their forefathers?

Interrogative, used with أ, *dismissive/digressive*

23:69:1

أَمْ لَمْ يَعْرِفُوا رَسُولَهُمْ فَهُمْ لَهُ مُنْكِرُونَ

Or did they not know their Messenger, so they are toward him disacknowledging?

Interrogative, not used with أ, *dismissive/digressive*

23:70:1

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ بَلْ جَاءَهُمْ بِالْحَقِّ

Or do they say, "In him is madness?" Rather, he brought them the truth

Interrogative, not used with أ, *dismissive/digressive*

23:72:1

أَمْ تَسْأَلُهُمْ خَرْجًا

Or do you, [O Muhammad], ask them for payment?

Interrogative, not used with أ, *dismissive/digressive*

24:50:4

أَفِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ أَمِ ارْتَابُوا

Is there disease in their hearts? Or have they doubted?

Interrogative, used with أ, *dismissive/digressive*

24:50:6

أَمْ يَخَافُونَ أَنْ يَحِيفَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ

Or do they fear that Allah will be unjust to them

Interrogative, not used with أ, *dismissive/digressive*

27:20:9

وَتَفَقَّدَ الطَّيْرَ فَقَالَ مَا لِيَ لَا أَرَى الْهُدْهُدَ **أَمْ** كَانَ مِنَ الْغَائِبِينَ

And he took attendance of the birds and said, "Why do I not see the hoopoe -
or is he among the absent?
Interrogative, not used with أً*, dismissive/digressive*

27:60:1

أَمَّنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَأَنزَلَ لَكُم مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَنبَتْنَا بِهِ
حَدَائِقَ ذَاتَ بَهْجَةٍ مَّا كَانَ لَكُمْ أَن تُنبِتُوا شَجَرَهَاۗ أَإِلَـٰهٌ مَّعَ اللَّهِۚ بَلْ
هُم قَوْمٌ يَعْدِلُونَ

More precisely], is He [not best] who created the heavens and the earth and]
sent down for you rain from the sky, causing to grow thereby gardens of joyful
beauty which you could not [otherwise] have grown the trees thereof? Is there
a deity with Allah ? [No], but they are a people who ascribe equals [to Him].
Interrogative, not used with أً*, dismissive/digressive*

27:61:1

أَمَّن جَعَلَ الْأَرْضَ قَرَارًا وَجَعَلَ خِلَالَهَا أَنْهَارًا وَجَعَلَ لَهَا رَوَاسِيَ
وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ حَاجِزًاۗ أَإِلَـٰهٌ مَّعَ اللَّهِۚ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

Is He [not best] who made the earth a stable ground and placed within it rivers
and made for it firmly set mountains and placed between the two seas a
barrier? Is there a deity with Allah ? [No], but most of them do not know.
Interrogative, not used with أً*, dismissive/digressive*

27:62:1

أَمَّن يُجِيبُ الْمُضْطَرَّ إِذَا دَعَاهُ وَيَكْشِفُ السُّوءَ وَيَجْعَلُكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ
الْأَرْضِۗ أَإِلَـٰهٌ مَّعَ اللَّهِۚ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَذَكَّرُونَ

Is He [not best] who responds to the desperate one when he calls upon Him
and removes evil and makes you inheritors of the earth? Is there a deity with
Allah ? Little do you remember.
Interrogative, not used with أً*, dismissive/digressive*

27:63:1

أَمَّن يَهْدِيكُمْ فِي ظُلُمَاتِ الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَمَن يُرْسِلُ الرِّيَاحَ بُشْرًا بَيْنَ
يَدَيْ رَحْمَتِهِۗ أَإِلَـٰهٌ مَّعَ اللَّهِۚ تَعَالَى اللَّهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

Is He [not best] who guides you through the darknesses of the land and sea and
who sends the winds as good tidings before His mercy? Is there a deity with
Allah ? High is Allah above whatever they associate with Him.
Interrogative, not used with أً*, dismissive/digressive*

27:64:1

أَمَّن يَبْدَأُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ وَمَن يَرْزُقُكُم مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ أَإِلَٰهٌ مَّعَ اللَّهِ ۚ قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

Is He [not best] who begins creation and then repeats it and who provides for you from the heaven and earth? Is there a deity with Allah ? Say, "Produce your proof, if you should be truthful.

Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

27:84:11

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوا قَالَ أَكَذَّبْتُم بِآيَاتِي وَلَمْ تُحِيطُوا بِهَا عِلْمًا أَمَّاذَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

Until, when they arrive [at the place of Judgement], He will say, "Did you deny My signs while you encompassed them not in knowledge, or what [was it that] you were doing?"

Interrogative, used with أ, dismissive/digressive

29:4:1

أَمْ حَسِبَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ أَنْ يَسْبِقُونَا

Or do those who do evil deeds think they can outrun Us?

Interrogative, used with أ (29:2), dismissive/digressive

30:35:1

أَمْ أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانًا فَهُوَ يَتَكَلَّمُ بِمَا كَانُوا بِهِ يُشْرِكُونَ

Or have We sent down to them an authority, and it speaks of what they were associating with Him?

Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

32:3:1

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ بَلْ هُوَ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ

Or do they say, "He invented it"? Rather, it is the truth from your Lord,

Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

35:40:14

أَرُونِي مَاذَا خَلَقُوا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ أَمْ لَهُمْ شِرْكٌ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ

Show me what they have created from the earth, or have they partnership [with Him] in the heavens?

Interrogative, not used with أ (because preceded by imperative), dismissive/ digressive

35:40:19

أَمْ آتَيْنَاهُمْ كِتَابًا فَهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَتٍ مِنْهُ

Or have We given them a book so they are [standing] on evidence therefrom?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

37:150:1

أَمْ خَلَقْنَا الْمَلَائِكَةَ إِنَاثًا وَهُمْ شَاهِدُونَ

Or did We create the angels as females while they were witnesses?"
Interrogative, used with أ (37:149), dismissive/digressive

37:156:1

أَمْ لَكُمْ سُلْطَانٌ مُبِينٌ

Or do you have a clear authority?
Interrogative, used with أ (37:155), dismissive/digressive

38:9:1

أَمْ عِنْدَهُمْ خَزَائِنُ رَحْمَةِ رَبِّكَ الْعَزِيزِ الْوَهَّابِ

Or do they have the depositories of the mercy of your Lord, the Exalted in Might, the Bestower?
Interrogative, used with أ (38:8), dismissive/digressive

38:10:1

أَمْ لَهُمْ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا

Or is theirs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and what is between them?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

38:28:1

أَمْ نَجْعَلُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ كَالْمُفْسِدِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ

Or should we treat those who believe and do righteous deeds like corrupters in the land?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

38:28:10

أَمْ نَجْعَلُ الْمُتَّقِينَ كَالْفُجَّارِ

Or should We treat those who fear Allah like the wicked?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

38:63:3

أَتَّخَذْنَاهُمْ سِخْرِيًّا أَمْ زَاغَتْ عَنْهُمُ الْأَبْصَارُ

Is it [because] we took them in ridicule, or has [our] vision turned away from them?"
Interrogative, used with أ, dismissive/digressive

39:9:1

أَمَّنْ هُوَ قَانِتٌ آنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ سَاجِدًا وَقَائِمًا يَحْذَرُ الْآخِرَةَ وَيَرْجُو رَحْمَةَ رَبِّهِ ۗ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ۗ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

Is one who is devoutly obedient during periods of the night, prostrating and standing [in prayer], fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord, [like one who does not]? Say, "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding.
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

39:43:1

أَمِ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ شُفَعَاءَ

Or have they taken other than Allah as intercessors?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

42:9:1

أَمِ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ

Or have they taken protectors [or allies] besides him?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

42:21:1

أَمْ لَهُمْ شُرَكَاءُ شَرَعُوا لَهُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا لَمْ يَأْذَنْ بِهِ اللَّهُ

Or have they other deities who have ordained for them a religion to which Allah has not consented?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

42:24:1

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا

Or do they say, "He has invented about Allah a lie"?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

43:16:1

أَمِ اتَّخَذَ مِمَّا يَخْلُقُ بَنَاتٍ وَأَصْفَاكُمْ بِالْبَنِينَ

Or has He taken, out of what He has created, daughters and chosen you for [having] sons?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

43:21:1

أَمْ آتَيْنَاهُمْ كِتَابًا مِنْ قَبْلِهِ فَهُمْ بِهِ مُسْتَمْسِكُونَ

Or have We given them a book before the Qur'an to which they are adhering?
Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

43:52:1

أَمْ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْ هَٰذَا الَّذِي هُوَ مَهِينٌ وَلَا يَكَادُ يُبِينُ

Or am I [not] better than this one who is insignificant and hardly makes himself clear?

Interrogative, used with أ (43:51), dismissive/digressive

43:79:1

أَمْ أَبْرَمُوا أَمْرًا فَإِنَّا مُبْرِمُونَ

Or have they devised [some] affair? But indeed, We are devising [a plan].

Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

43:80:1

أَمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّا لَا نَسْمَعُ سِرَّهُمْ وَنَجْوَاهُمْ

Or do they think that We hear not their secrets and their private conversations?

Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

45:21:1

أَمْ حَسِبَ الَّذِينَ اجْتَرَحُوا السَّيِّئَاتِ أَنْ نَجْعَلَهُمْ كَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ

Or do those who commit evils think We will make them like those who have believed and done righteous deeds

Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

46:4:13

أَرُونِي مَاذَا خَلَقُوا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ أَمْ لَهُمْ شِرْكٌ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ

Show me what they have created of the earth; or did they have partnership in [creation of] the heavens?

Interrogative, not used with أ (preceded by imperative, although أ does appear in 46:4:2), dismissive/digressive

46:8:1

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ قُلْ إِنِ افْتَرَيْتُهُ فَلَا تَمْلِكُونَ لِي مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا

Or do they say, "He has invented it?" Say, "If I have invented it, you will not possess for me [the power of protection] from Allah at all.

Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

47:24:4

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا

Then do they not reflect upon the Qur'an, or are there locks upon [their] hearts?

Interrogative, used with أ, dismissive/digressive

47:29:1

أَمْ حَسِبَ الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ أَنْ لَنْ يُخْرِجَ اللَّهُ أَضْغَانَهُمْ

Or do those in whose hearts is disease think that Allah would never expose their [feelings of] hatred?
Interrogative, not used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

52:15:3

أَفَسِحْرٌ هَٰذَا أَمْ أَنْتُمْ لَا تُبْصِرُونَ

Then is this magic, or do you not see?
Interrogative, used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

52:30:1

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ شَاعِرٌ نَتَرَبَّصُ بِهِ رَيْبَ الْمَنُونِ

Or do they say [of you], "A poet for whom we await a misfortune of time?"
Interrogative, not used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

52:32:1

أَمْ تَأْمُرُهُمْ أَحْلَامُهُمْ بِهَٰذَا أَمْ هُمْ قَوْمٌ طَاغُونَ

Or do their minds command them to [say] this, or are they a transgressing people?
Interrogative, not used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

52:32:5

أَمْ تَأْمُرُهُمْ أَحْلَامُهُمْ بِهَٰذَا أَمْ هُمْ قَوْمٌ طَاغُونَ

Or do their minds command them to [say] this, or are they a transgressing people?
Interrogative, not used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

52:33:1

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ تَقَوَّلَهُ بَلْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

Or do they say, "He has made it up"? Rather, they do not believe.
Interrogative, not used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

52:35:1

أَمْ خُلِقُوا مِنْ غَيْرِ شَيْءٍ أَمْ هُمُ الْخَالِقُونَ

Or were they created by nothing, or were they the creators [of themselves]?
Interrogative, not used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

52:35:6

أَمْ خُلِقُوا مِنْ غَيْرِ شَيْءٍ أَمْ هُمُ الْخَالِقُونَ

Or were they created by nothing, or were they the creators [of themselves]?
Interrogative, not used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

52:36:1

أَمْ خَلَقُوا السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بَلْ لَا يُوقِنُونَ

Or did they create the heavens and the earth? Rather, they are not certain.
Interrogative, not used with أ*, dismissive/digressive*

52:37:1

أَمْ عِنْدَهُمْ خَزَائِنُ رَبِّكَ أَمْ هُمُ الْمُصَيْطِرُونَ

Or have they the depositories [containing the provision] of your Lord? Or are they the controllers [of them]?
Interrogative, not used with أ*, dismissive/digressive*

52:37:5

أَمْ عِنْدَهُمْ خَزَائِنُ رَبِّكَ أَمْ هُمُ الْمُصَيْطِرُونَ

Or have they the depositories [containing the provision] of your Lord? Or are they the controllers [of them]?
Interrogative, not used with أ*, dismissive/digressive*

52:38:1

أَمْ لَهُمْ سُلَّمٌ يَسْتَمِعُونَ فِيهِ فَلْيَأْتِ مُسْتَمِعُهُمْ بِسُلْطَانٍ مُبِينٍ

Or have they a stairway [into the heaven] upon which they listen? Then let their listener produce a clear authority.
Interrogative, not used with أ*, dismissive/digressive*

52:39:1

أَمْ لَهُ الْبَنَاتُ وَلَكُمُ الْبَنُونَ

Or has He daughters while you have sons?
Interrogative, not used with أ*, dismissive/digressive*

52:40:1

أَمْ تَسْأَلُهُمْ أَجْرًا فَهُمْ مِنْ مَغْرَمٍ مُثْقَلُونَ

Or do you, [O Muhammad], ask of them a payment, so they are by debt burdened down?
Interrogative, not used with أ*, dismissive/digressive*

52:41:1

أَمْ عِنْدَهُمُ الْغَيْبُ فَهُمْ يَكْتُبُونَ

Or have they [knowledge of] the unseen, so they write [it] down?
Interrogative, not used with أ*, dismissive/digressive*

<u>52:42:1</u>

أَمْ يُرِيدُونَ كَيْدًا فَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا هُمُ الْمَكِيدُونَ

Or do they intend a plan? But those who disbelieve - they are the object of a plan.

Interrogative, not used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

<u>52:43:1</u>

أَمْ لَهُمْ إِلَٰهٌ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

Or have they a deity other than Allah ? Exalted is Allah above whatever they associate with Him.

Interrogative, not used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

<u>53:24:1</u>

أَمْ لِلْإِنْسَانِ مَا تَمَنَّىٰ

Or is there for man whatever he wishes?

Interrogative, not used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

<u>53:36:1</u>

أَمْ لَمْ يُنَبَّأْ بِمَا فِي صُحُفِ مُوسَىٰ

Or has he not been informed of what was in the scriptures of Moses

Interrogative, used with أَ (53:35), dismissive/digressive

<u>54:43:5</u>

أَكُفَّارُكُمْ خَيْرٌ مِنْ أُولَٰئِكُمْ أَمْ لَكُمْ بَرَاءَةٌ فِي الزُّبُرِ

Are your disbelievers better than those [former ones], or have you immunity in the scripture?

Interrogative, used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

<u>54:44:1</u>

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ نَحْنُ جَمِيعٌ مُنْتَصِرٌ

Or do they say, "We are an assembly supporting [each other]"?

Interrogative, not used with أَ, dismissive/digressive

<u>67:17:1</u>

أَمْ أَمِنْتُمْ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاءِ أَنْ يُرْسِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ حَاصِبًا

Or do you feel secure that He who [holds authority] in the heaven would not send against you a storm of stones?

Interrogative, used with أَ (67:16), dismissive/digressive

67:20:1

أَمَّنْ هَٰذَا الَّذِي هُوَ جُندٌ لَّكُمْ يَنصُرُكُم مِّن دُونِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ ۚ إِنِ الْكَافِرُونَ إِلَّا فِي غُرُورٍ

Or who is it that could be an army for you to aid you other than the Most Merciful? The disbelievers are not but in delusion.

Interrogative, used with أ (67:19), dismissive/digressive

67:21:1

أَمَّنْ هَٰذَا الَّذِي يَرْزُقُكُمْ إِنْ أَمْسَكَ رِزْقَهُ ۚ بَل لَّجُّوا فِي عُتُوٍّ وَنُفُورٍ

Or who is it that could provide for you if He withheld His provision? But they have persisted in insolence and aversion.

Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

68:37:1

أَمْ لَكُمْ كِتَابٌ فِيهِ تَدْرُسُونَ

Or do you have a scripture in which you learn

Interrogative, used with أ (68:35), dismissive/digressive

68:39:1

أَمْ لَكُمْ أَيْمَانٌ عَلَيْنَا بَالِغَةٌ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ۙ إِنَّ لَكُمْ لَمَا تَحْكُمُونَ

Or do you have oaths [binding] upon Us, extending until the Day of Resurrection, that indeed for you is whatever you judge?

Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

68:41:1

أَمْ لَهُمْ شُرَكَاءُ فَلْيَأْتُوا بِشُرَكَائِهِمْ إِنْ كَانُوا صَادِقِينَ

Or do they have partners? Then let them bring their partners, if they should be truthful.

Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

68:46:1

أَمْ تَسْأَلُهُمْ أَجْرًا فَهُم مِّن مَغْرَمٍ مُّثْقَلُونَ

Or do you ask of them a payment, so they are by debt burdened down?

Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive

68:47:1

أَمْ عِنْدَهُمُ الْغَيْبُ فَهُمْ يَكْتُبُونَ

Or have they [knowledge of] the unseen, so they write [it] down?

Interrogative, not used with أ, dismissive/digressive