



# Astronomical Terminology and Its Movement: an Etymological Study. (Etymology, Meteor, Lightning, Comet, Meteorite

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## ABSTRACT

Rooting: It is the basis of the thing on which it is based, and its origin from which it sprouts. Where the statement of origin occupied the thought of linguists in the past, and the thought of it is due to the age of linguistic authorship, especially what was written in the body of the language. Permanent, from generalization to personalization to transition to advancement to decadence.

## Introduction

Language is a social phenomenon. It is a representation of aspects of life, and of an individual's feelings and ideas. There is also wide agreement among linguistic scholars that it is virtually impossible for any human group that is spread over a wide area to develop a uniform spoken language with no regional variation in pronunciation, meaning and approach, and variation in grammatical and syntactic patterns.

Change and evolution are the laws of life, through and through, and through all the domains of human life. They apply to words, too. Had they not done so since their birth, they would not have served their purpose, and no such phenomenon can be detected in history.

Thus, language bears within its vocabulary and customs the whole of the life conditions and characteristics of the people who speak it, and is, therefore, a national heritage and a mark of the culture of the people who use it. Consequently, every nation feels a deep responsibility for studying, developing and improving its own language, in order to appropriately and authentically express its identity, civilization, and its entire life, in all its dimensions.

The celestial bodies are the objects which exist in the heavens, as well as all that they contain (Umar, 2008, Vol. 1, p. 366). All galaxies and the celestial bodies which they contain follow a precise motion and precise timing, observing the absolute balance

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that the Most Merciful has decreed for His creation, both great and small.

The heavenly bodies pull the earth, just like the earth pulls the bodies placed on the earth. Thence, the gravitational pull among the heavenly bodies and between the heavenly bodies and the earth is perfectly balanced (Afia, 1994, p. 27). Thus the orbit of the heavenly bodies remains stable.

Among these known celestial bodies are the following:

### 1. The Meteor (Al-Shihāb)

According to Al-Mu'jam al-Lughawī al-Mu'āṣir (The Modern Arabic Dictionary), "Shihāb (pl. shuhub) is a celestial body composed of rock or iron and nickel that travels through space and burns up upon entering Earth's atmosphere, turning into ash. It is also known as the 'falling star' or 'piercing star'" (Umar, 2008, Vol. 2, p. 1240).

In fact, "shihāb" is a broken plural (jam' taksīr) of the Arabic word, derived from the triliteral Arabic root ش-ه-ب (sh-h-b), defined in classical Arabic lexicons as meaning "whiteness intermingled with blackness". Al-Rāzī states that "the letters shīn, hā', and bā' form a single root indicating whiteness within something dark" (Al-Rāzī, 1979, Vol. 3, p. 171).

Lexically, shihāb (with kasra on the shīn and fatha on the hā') means a flame or a streak of fire in accordance with Al-Farāhīdī, n.d., Vol. 3, p. 403; Al-Mursī, 2000, Vol. 4, p. 192; Al-Ḥanafī Al-Rāzī, 1999, p. 169; Umar, 2008, Vol. 2, p. 1240. The singular of shihāb is shihāb and the plural is shuhub. The verb shahiba (from the form ta'aba) means that whiteness has predominated over blackness (Al-Fayyūmī, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 324).

In original Arabic context, the word "shihāb" is defined as "a burning stick or piece of wood emitting bright light". (Al-Harawī, n.d., Vol. 6, p. 56; Aḥmad, n.d., p. 2405; Al-Ifriqī, 1414 AH, Vol. 1, p. 508; Al-Ḥusaynī, n.d., Vol. 3, p. 166) In extended meaning, it is also used for bright astronomical bodies, especially meteors and stars when used metaphorically.

As do other ancient authorities:

This al-shahab and al-shuhba mix whiteness and blackness; and some say that shuhba overpowers blackness with whiteness. One may say for: shahuba, shahaba shuhbatan, ishtahhabba (all meaning to become grayish-white or luminous amid darkness) (Al-Farāhīdī, n.d., Vol. 3, p. 403; Al-Ṭāliqānī, n.d., Vol. 3, p. 394; Al-Rāzī, 1979, Vol. 3, p. 62; Al-Mursī, 2000, Vol. 2, p. 154; Al-Ifriqī, 1414 AH, Vol. 1, p. 508).

After surveying customary Arabic dictionaries on the semantic usage of the term "shihāb", it is clear that until today the term has had three related meanings:

#### 1.1 A Blazing Flame of Fire

The word "shihāb" in classical Arabic denotes a bright luminous flame of fire (Al-Fārābī, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 159). Jāmi' al-'Ulūm (The Compendium of Sciences) discusses the phenomenon of these fiery flares appearing at night and provides the following description:

> [When] the smoke reaches the region of fire, preparing itself for a conflagration, it enkindles at the top and the fire rushes through it so as almost to seem the splendor of the flame to be extinguished by itself. However, if the smoke remains attached to the ground and the fire travels downwards along the smoke, it becomes a ḥarīq (conflagration) (Al-Ifriqī, 1414 AH, Vol. 1, p. 510; Umar, 2008, Vol. 2, p. 1240; Al-Aḥmad Nakrī, 2000, Vol. 2, p. 163).

This image is echoed in classical poetry such as Al-Tādli:

"Two shihābs from among us were kindled, then quenched, and indeed their radiance was a guiding light for night travelers." (Al-Tādli, 1991, Vol. 1, p. 449)

In his commentary on the Al-Ishārāt, al-Ṭūsī gives a scientific explanation of the shihāb:

> When that detached smoke penetrates and catches fire from below, in the fiery sphere, it will ignite from the top of the smoke to the bottom, producing this long streak of fire, and this flame is

a shihāb. But when the earthly particles within it (thanks to their extreme subtlety and refinement) have been turned completely into fire, it becomes invisible, and no flame would be seen as entering its proper celestial sphere, which is mistaken for its extinction. In fact, it still burns. But when the smoke is very heavy, the fire may last for several days, or even months. It can take on the form of a stream, a tail, a spear, or an animal with horns.

It is also reported that long after the time of Christ (peace be upon him), there came a turbulent fire (Wabārat al-sudūn) which appeared in the northern sky and continued for a whole year. For nine hours of each day, from noon to night, the earth would be in such deep darkness that nothing could be seen, and ash-like particles and charred fragments would fall from the sky (Al-Aḥmad Nakrī, 2000, Vol. 2, p. 163).

Furthermore, this Qur'anic verse was interpreted by the famous exegete Abū al-Su'ūd as:

"Except him (devil) that gains hearing by stealing, he is pursued by a clear flaming fire" (Qur'an 15:18)

He narrates that when they say that the devils are attempting to 'steal a hearing' this means they are trying to listen to the discussions in the heavens. Before the birth of Jesus (peace be upon him), the devils were struck out of three of the seven heavens and after the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) they are thrust out of all seven heavens. Of that shihāb, it is said: it is a blazing, incandescent flame... a luminous, burning streak sent to drive them away and safeguard the sanctity of the celestial domains (Mustafā, n.d., Vol. 5, p. 71).

## 1.2. A Burning Stick or Brand

The term "shihāb" originally meant "a piece of wood with fire on it". Al-Farāhīdī says, "Al-shihāb is a flame of fire" according to Al-Farāhīdī, n.d., Vol. 3, p. 403. This meaning is found in classical poetry. One poet writes:

Its ember glows like a detached shihāb of fire.

As though a spark at the valley's base, shining brightly."

(Al-Farāhīdī, n.d., Vol. 8, p. 38)

Abū al-Haytham elaborates:

The "Al-shihāb" means a stick or a burning wooden stick, and its definition is a luminous flame of fire (Al-Harawī, n.d., Vol. 6, p. 56; Al-Ifriqī, 1414 AH, Vol. 1, p. 508).

The same sense is expressed within the Qur'anic verse.

"Or shall I bring you a burning brand (shihāb qabas) so that you may warm yourselves?" (Qur'an 27:7)

Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH/923 CE) referenced Ibn al-Sikkīt's commentary: "Al-shihāb here means a stick or brand bearing fire" (Ṭanṭāwī, 1998, Vol. 17, p. 161). "and there follows him a shihāb" (Qur'an 15:18) has also received various interpretations.

- Al-Wāḥidī says it is "the fire with which devils are stoned". Some writers have said it does not kill, but burns, injures, and incapacitates without causing death (Al-Ḥanḍalī, n.d., Vol. 7, p. 2259).

Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī viewed it as "a luminous, blazing flame of fire" (Al-Zabīdī, n.d., Vol. 3, p. 165).

- The Mu'jam Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm (Dictionary of Qur'anic Terms) states: "Al-shihāb: a flaming streak seen descending through the sky," according to (Majma' al-Lughā al-'Arabiyya, 1989, p. 110).

Al-Ṭabarsī interprets it in its simplest form as "a piece of fire" (Al-Ṭabarī, 2000, p. 104).

This is often met with in classical Arabic poetry in numerous rhetorical imagistic phrases which correspond to or imply the word fire, etc.

Sa'āda ibn Juwayya says:

"A fragment of khaṭṭī wood, its edge concealed

Like a shihāb you raise, ablaze with light."

(Al-Mursī, 2000, Vol. 2, p. 273)

- Another poet writes:

"It blazes intensely, like the campfires of Sabī,

In that army there shall be a raging of fire." (Al-Rāzī, 1997, Vol. 32, p. 66)

### 1.3 The star

The term "**shihāb**" is also used to refer to a **star**, particularly a bright and luminous one. As stated in *Al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*. "*Al-najm* (the star) is a luminous, shining celestial body that travels through space; when it enters Earth's atmosphere, it ignites and turns to ash" (Mustafā, Al-Zayyāt, 'Abd al-Qādir, & Al-Najjār, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 497). It may also denote **the star itself**, or specifically a **radiant, brilliant star** (Al-Dīnawarī, 1397 AH, Vol. 1, p. 576), and at times refers to a **star falling from the sky** (Al-Ifriqī, 1414 AH, Vol. 1, p. 71).

**Ibn Qutaybah** explicitly identifies *al-shihāb* with the star, citing the Qur'anic phrase "**shihāb thāqib**" (a piercing flame) as evidence—interpreting it to mean "**a luminous star**" (Al-Dīnawarī, 1397 AH, Vol. 1, p. 576). This celestial meaning appears vividly in classical poetry. One poet writes:

**"He plunged like a radiant comet (*kawkab durriyy*), detached  
Dashing downward, blending nearness with presence."** (Al-Qurashī, n.d., p. 35) Here, the poet likens his horse's swift gallop to a **falling shihāb**, emphasizing speed, brilliance, and dramatic descent.

Lexicographers further expand this usage. **Ibn Sīda** states: "*Al-shuhub* generally refer to the seven planets (*al-darārī*), whose singular is *shihāb*. These are: the Sun, the Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, and Venus" (Al-Mursī, 1996, Vol. 2, p. 382).

Similarly, **Ibn Manẓūr** notes: "*Al-shuhub* are the seven well-known stars called *al-darārī*" (Al-Ifriqī, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 510).

**Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī** adds: "*Shihāb*: a blazing, luminous planet/star" (Al-Andalusī, 1983, p. 182). The morphology of the word "**durriyy**" (radiant, pearl-like) is often linked to *shihāb* because it

derives from "**dar'a**" (to repel or ward off)—suggesting the star's light wards off darkness. It is also related to "**al-durra**" (the pearl), due to its brilliant whiteness.

Hence, "**al-kawkab al-durriyy**" means "**the piercing, luminous star**," likened to a pearl for its radiant clarity (Al-Fārābī, 1987, Vol. 3, p. 2189).

### 1.4 Shihāb of War

As Al-Murī notes: "*Shihāb al-ḥarb* (the shihāb of war) refers to one who charges forward in battle, likened to a star (*kawkab*) in its swift motion" (Al-Mursī, 2000, Vol. 4, p. 192). This poetic imagery appears in classical Arabic verse. The poet Laqīṭ ibn Yazīd al-'Ijlī writes:

**How can you still sleep in careless ease,**

**when war's blazing sign has already torn the heavens"?** (Dīwān Laqīṭ, n.d.)

### 1.5 A meteor of knowledge

It is also said of a person who is exceptionally skilled and accomplished in matters that "he is a shihāb of knowledge" (Mustafā, Al-Zayyāt, 'Abd al-Qādir, & Al-Najjār, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 497).

The poet says:

(Al-Ruqayyāt, n.d., p. 60)

Indeed, **Mus'ab** is a divine meteor—before whose face the darkness has vanished.

It has become evident that the term "**shihāb**" is an authentic Arabic word, as it appears in both the Qur'an and pre-Islamic (Jāhilī) poetry. Its core semantic meaning consistently revolves around **intense brightness and luminosity**.

## 2. The Thunderbolt

According to *Al-Mu'jam al-Lughawī al-Mu'āṣir* (The Modern Arabic Dictionary):

**"Al-Ṣā'iqah** (pl. *ṣawā'iq*) is a blazing fiery body that falls from the sky amid intense thunder, resulting from an electrical discharge between a charged cloud and the earth, or between two

charged clouds.” Example: “*The thunderbolt uprooted the trees*” (Umar, 2008, Vol. 2, p. 1297).

Upon close examination of the term “**al-ṣā’iqah**,” it becomes clear that it is an authentic Arabic word. Lexically, it is a verbal noun (*maṣḍar*) derived from the root ص-ع-ق (ṣ-‘-q), with the pattern *fā’ilah*, and its plural is **ṣawā’iq** (Al-Farāhīdī, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 129; Al-Fayyūmī, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 340).

The trilateral root **ṣād-‘ayn-qāf** fundamentally conveys the meaning of **a sudden, violent strike accompanied by a loud, shocking sound** (Al-Rāzī, 1979, Vol. 3, p. 285).

When consulting classical Arabic lexicons to uncover its semantic range, we find that the term “**al-ṣā’iqah**” has been used to denote several interconnected meanings, as follows:

## 2.1 Fire

*Al-Ṣā’iqah* is described as **a blazing fiery body that descends from the sky amid intense thunder** (Al-Iṣfahānī, 1412 AH, p. 485). It is also defined as **the combination of sound and fire**—a sudden, explosive phenomenon involving both thunderous noise and visible flame (Al-Barkatī, 1986, p. 172; Al-Qāhirī, 1990, p. 446).

## 2.2 Punishment / Death

Abū al-Baqā’ states: “**Every devastating punishment is called a ṣā’iqah.**” The term is also used for **any terrifying, fatal event—or one that overwhelms reason and consciousness** (Al-Ḥanafī, n.d., p. 854).

Al-Zabīdī reports that **Muqātil and Qatādah** interpreted *al-ṣā’iqah* in the verse “**A thunderbolt struck them**” as **death itself**. Similarly, Abū Ishāq, commenting on the Qur’anic verse:

“...and you said, ‘O Moses, we will never believe you until we see Allah plainly,’ so the thunderbolt (**ṣā’iqah**) seized you while you were looking on” (Qur’an 2:55),

explained that “*what struck them*” means **they died instantly**. This verse, he notes, refers to a

form of death followed by resurrection in this worldly life.

Other scholars stated that **any destructive punishment** may be termed *ṣā’iqah*, with variant forms in Arabic: *ṣā’iqah*, *ṣa’qah*, and *sāqī’ah*. It is also said that “**al-ṣā’iqah**” refers to the “**blast of divine punishment**” (Al-Zabīdī, n.d., Vol. 26, p. 21).

This meaning is echoed in poetry. A poet says:

**“I feared for you the decree of death...  
Yet I once felt safe from the thunderbolt (*al-ṣā’iqah*).”**  
(Al-‘Āmirī, 1414 AH, p. 144)

Thus, *al-ṣā’iqah* signifies **death, any annihilating punishment, or the catastrophic blast of divine retribution**—as seen in several Qur’anic verses:

- “**But if they turn away, say, ‘I have warned you of a thunderbolt (*ṣā’iqah*) like the thunderbolt that struck ‘Ād and Thamūd’**” (Qur’an 41:13) (Al-Fayrūzābādī, 2005, p. 1163).

- “**On the Day when the Trumpet is blown, and all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth will be terrified, except whom Allah wills. And all will come to Him humbled**” (Qur’an 39:68).

- “**And [recall] when you said, ‘O Moses, we will never believe you until we see Allah outright’—so the thunderbolt (*ṣā’iqah*) seized you while you were looking on**” (Qur’an 4:153) (Al-Iṣfahānī, 1412 AH, p. 485).

Ibn Qutaybah adds: “It is called *ṣā’iqah* because it kills upon impact. One says: ‘*ṣa’aqahum*’—meaning ‘He struck them dead’” (Al-Dīnawarī, n.d., p. 272).

## 2.3 Al-Ṣawt al-Shadīd (The Intense Sound):

*Al-Ṣa’q* refers to a sudden, overwhelming sound—specifically, the thunderclap (*al-ṣā’iqah*), which denotes the powerful crash of thunder. As al-Rāzī (1979, vol. 3, p. 285) explains, *al-ṣa’q* can also describe the state of being struck unconscious by an extremely loud noise one hears. Al-Zamakhsharī (n.d., vol. 2, p. 299) similarly notes

that *al-ṣāʾiqah* signifies the intense, crashing sound of thunder. Moreover, according to al-Mursī (1996, vol. 2, p. 472), *al-ṣāʾiqah* specifically refers to the continuous, unceasing roar of thunder.

Al-Azhari stated: “*Al-ṣāʾiqah* and *al-ṣaʿqah* refer to a thunderous cry or blast so intense that whoever hears it may faint or even die.” This is reflected in the verse of the Qurʾan: **“And the thunder glorifies His praise, and the angels [do so] out of awe of Him. He sends thunderbolts (*al-ṣawāʾiq*) and strikes therewith whomever He wills—yet they dispute about Allah, though He is Almighty, Omnipotent.”** (Qurʾan 13:13) Here, *al-ṣawāʾiq* signifies the thunderous sounds of thunder. (Al-Nawawī, n.d., p. 1196).

Al-Jurjānī said: “It is the intensely loud sound of thunder—so overwhelming that it is only natural for a person to faint or even die from it.” (Al-Barkatī, 1986, p. 172; Al-Qāhirī, 1990, p. 446)

The poetess, mourning her brother, said:

*“If indeed a naw’ from a cloud has struck him,  
Yet he once rose high in battle and triumphed.”*  
(Al-Tādli, 1991, vol. 1, p. 432)

The word *al-naw’* originally refers to a star setting (i.e., inclining toward the horizon), but here it metaphorically denotes the thunderbolt (*al-ṣāʾiqah*) that struck him. Her phrase “*fa-qad kāna yaʾlū fī al-liqāʾ*” (“he once rose high in battle”) means he surpassed others in courage and prowess during combat. In other words, she laments: “*Even if a thunderbolt from the sky has taken my brother, he was truly a brave and victorious warrior.*” (Al-Tādli, 1991, vol. 1, p. 432)

The term “**al-ṣāʾiqah**” (or its linguistic forms) appears in the Qurʾan in the following verses:

1. **Surah Al-Baqarah (2:19):**  
“*Or like a rainstorm from the sky—full of darkness, thunder, and lightning—wherein they put their fingers in their ears because of the thunderclaps, fearing death. And Allah encompasses the disbelievers.*”  
→ Here, *al-ṣawāʾiq* (thunderbolts/claps) evoke terror.

2. **Surah Al-Baqarah (2:55):**  
“*And recall when you said, ‘O Moses, we will not believe you until we see Allah plainly.’ So the thunderbolt struck you while you were watching.*”  
→ Divine punishment for demanding to see God directly.

3. **Surah An-Nisā’ (4:153):**  
“*The People of the Book ask you to send down upon them a scripture from heaven. Yet they had previously demanded something even greater from Moses, saying, ‘Show us Allah openly!’—so the thunderbolt seized them due to their wrongdoing...*”  
→ Reiteration of the same event as a warning.

4. **Surah Al-Aʿrāf (7:143):**  
“*And when Moses came to Our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, he said, ‘My Lord, show me [Yourself] so I may look at You.’ He said, ‘You will not see Me, but look at the mountain—if it remains in place, you will see Me.’ But when his Lord revealed Himself to the mountain, He leveled it, and Moses fell down struck unconscious (*ṣaʾiqan*). When he regained consciousness, he said, ‘Glory be to You! I repent to You, and I am the first of the believers.’”*  
→ *Ṣaʾiqan* here means “struck senseless” by divine manifestation.

5. **Surah Ar-Raʿd (13:13):**  
“*The thunder glorifies His praise, and the angels do so out of awe of Him. He sends thunderbolts (*al-ṣawāʾiq*) and strikes with them whomever He wills—yet they dispute about Allah, though He is Almighty, Omnipotent.*”  
→ Thunderbolts as instruments of divine power and judgment.

6. **Surah Az-Zumar (39:68):**  
“*And the Trumpet will be blown, so all in the heavens and all on earth will fall dead (*ṣaʾiqūn*)—except whom Allah wills. Then it will be blown again, and suddenly they will stand up, looking on.*”  
→ *Yuṣʾaqūn* refers to collapsing lifeless at the sound of the Trumpet on the Day of Judgment.

7. **Surah Fuṣṣilat (41:13):**  
“*But if they turn away, say, ‘I have warned you of a thunderbolt (*ṣāʾiqah*) like the thunderbolt that struck ʿĀd and Thamūd.’”*  
→ A metaphor for sudden, catastrophic divine punishment.

**8. Surah Adh-Dhāriyāt (51:44):**

*"So they defied the command of their Lord, and the thunderbolt struck them while they looked on."*

→ Refers to the destruction of the people of Thamūd.

**9. Surah At-Tūr (52:45):**

*"So leave them until they meet their Day, in which they will be struck senseless (yuṣ'aqūn)."*

→ Again, pointing to the overwhelming terror of the Day of Judgment.

Many exegetes (Qur'anic commentators) have stated that one of the meanings of *al-ṣā'iqah* is **death as a divine punishment**. As al-Balkhī (1423 AH, vol. 1, p. 105) and al-Ṣan'ānī (1419 AH, vol. 1, p. 271) explain, this is evident in verses such as:

**"...so the thunderbolt (*al-ṣā'iqah*) struck you..."**  
(Al-Baqarah 2:55),  
and **"...and Moses fell down struck unconscious (*ṣa'iqan*)..."** (Al-A'rāf 7:143).

where *ṣa'iqan* is interpreted by some as "dead" or "as if dead."

Similarly, in the verse:

**"And the Trumpet will be blown, so all who are in the heavens and all who are on earth will fall dead (*fa-ṣa'iqā man fī al-samāwāt wa man fī al-arḍ*)—except whom Allah wills..."** (Az-Zumar 39:68),

the term denotes immediate collapse or death upon hearing the blast.

Al-Ṭabarī (2000, vol. 2, p. 83; vol. 22, p. 437) adds another dimension: he identifies *al-ṣā'iqah* not only with death but also with **fire**. He states:

**"And the Trumpet was blown, so they fell dead (*fa-ṣa'iq*)—and *al-ṣā'iqah* is fire."**

He further explains that **the Arabs refer to any destructive, annihilating punishment as 'ṣā'iqah.'** As al-Iṣfahānī (1412 AH, p. 485) clarifies, what is described in these interpretations are **effects produced by the ṣā'iqah**, not its essence. In itself, *al-ṣā'iqah* is **a single phenomenon**: an

intensely loud sound descending from the sky. From this sound may result:

- fire,
- torment,
- or death.

Thus, while the *ṣā'iqah* is fundamentally a thunderous blast, its consequences—burning, punishment, or death—are manifestations of its overwhelming power.

From this, it becomes clear that the term "**al-ṣā'iqah**" is an **authentically Arabic lexical item**, rooted in both the Qur'an and pre-Islamic (Jāhilī) poetry. Across these sources, its semantic core consistently revolves around **destruction or annihilation**—for the *ṣā'iqah* kills through the sheer force of its sound, just as it consumes with the fire it carries.

**3. Al-Mudhannab (The Comet)**

According to Al-Mu'jam al-Lughawī al-Mu'āṣir (The Modern Arabic Dictionary): "Al-mudhannab (pl. mudhannabāt) is a celestial body with a long, luminous, gaseous tail that orbits the sun in an elliptical path and appears periodically, e.g. Halley's Comet appears once every 73 years" (Umar, 2008, Vol. 1, p. 823).

The term "al-mudhannab" is an Arabic word based on the verb dhannaba (ذَنَّبَ), meaning "to give something a tail" or "to append". It is in a passive participle (ism maf'ūl) form, literally meaning "that which has been given a tail". The word is pronounced with a ḍammah, Arabic accented vowel, on the first mīm and with a shaddah, a doubled nūn: al-mudhannab (Umar, 2008, Vol. 1, p. 823).

The root ذ-ن-ب (dh-n-b) has been recorded by classical lexicographers as having three main meanings:

1. The tail (of an animal or object),
2. The rear or end part of something.
3. Fate, portion, or lot (as in one's "tail" of destiny) (Al-Rāzī, 1979, Vol. 2, p. 361).

If we go back to the previous customary Arabic dictionaries and look for the full meaning of the word, we see that "al-mudhannab" has several related meanings:

### 3.1 A Star with a Tail

The term "al-najm al-mudhannab" (the tailed star) refers to a star with long tail and bright light that becomes manifest in the sky every now and then (Umar, 2008, Vol. 1, p. 823). In classical times, it was sometimes taken as a good omen and especially if it appeared in the western horizon, and it was even sometimes seen as a portent (tatayyur).

This state of isolation and prominence was, in fact, felt by Al-Aḥnaf, who said that he felt just like a lone star.

"I have become on earth like...

the tailed star (najm al-dhanab) in the horizon." (Dīwān Ibn al-Aḥnaf, n.d., p. 75)

Here the mudhannab is the bright cloud, and also the solitary one, with two faces in one.

In Arabic, the star was known as "al-kawkab dhū al-dhu'ābah" (the star with a plume or tuft). A prominent scholar Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī even dedicated a monograph to the star, titled "Al-Kawkab Dhū al-Dhu'ābah" ("The Star with the Plume") (Abī Uṣaybi'ah, n.d., pp. 291; 'Abd al-Ra'ūf, 2020, p. 45).

The words "al-dhanab" (الذنب) and "al-dhu'ābah" (الذوابة) have the same lexicographic meaning as a long trailing appendage, a tail, tuft of hair or plume, or a glowing train of gas and dust. They are thus synonyms, derived as superlative adjectival forms that describe a comet's characteristic appearance as a radiating trail of light that appears behind it as it moves across the sky.

### 3.2 A Type of Insect (and Other Creatures with Tails)

#### 1. Al-Mudhannabāt: The Tailed Ones

The Arabic term al-mudhannabāt (Umar, 2008, Vol. 1, p. 823) entomologically includes a broader

sense of "having a tail", and applies to a group of wingless insects, which project from the rear of the rest of the body.

#### 2. The Dabb (Desert Monitor Lizard):

According to al-Azharī, the lizard is called al-ḍabb and when he strikes the tail at a predatory animal, whether a man (muḥtarish) or a snake, he is said to have mudhannab (= ḍabb mudhannab). The verb dhannaba (ذَنَّبَ) means the same when done by the animal. Thus, one may describe it as "aḍ-ḍabb al-adhnab"-a lizard with a long tail (Al-Harawī, n.d., Vol. 14, p. 316).

It is also said that in the summer heat, the head of the ḍabb sometimes remains inside its burrow while only its tail is shown at the burrow's entrance in order to be in a position to defend itself (Al-Mursī, 2000, Vol. 10, p. 81).

#### 3. Butterflies and Moths:

Other butterflies and moths show a similar behavior. They spread or flutter their wings to show off to a mate or compete with rivals. They are said to be mudhannabah. The word adhānib (أَذْنَاب) here refers to the wingtips that are sometimes tailed (Al-Mursī 2000, Vol. 10:81).

In all these examples, the word "al-dhanab" (الذنب, tail, back) is used, and a winged insect or a scorpion with a tail or a lizard with a tail, etc. are called "mudhannab" (مُذَنَّاب). This fits the grammatical root ذ-ن-ب (dh-n-b) discussed by Al-Rāzī as meaning "the posterior part of animals" (Al-Rāzī, 1979, Vol. 2, p. 361), connecting the celestial and terrestrial meanings.

#### 3.3. Watercourses (Majāri al-Mā')

The term **al-mudhannab** (plural: *mudhānib*) refers to **channels or courses through which water flows**—specifically, the paths that carry water **from elevated, thickly vegetated areas down to gardens or meadows (*al-riyāḍ*)**, or conversely, **from gardens toward valleys**. It also denotes a **small stream or gully in a low-lying area** where water runs. In some contexts, *al-mudhannab* is synonymous with a **small streamlet or rivulet (*jadal*)**.



Abū Ḥanīfah al-Dīnawarī explains that it resembles **a channel that drains excess water from a meadow (*rawdāh*) to other places**, dispersing the water across its course. Moreover, the very ground **over which water flows** is itself called *mudhannab* (Al-Harawī, n.d., vol. 14, p. 317; Al-Ḥusaynī, n.d., vol. 2, p. 441).

This meaning is poetically illustrated by an Andalusian poet:

**"I set out at dawn while birds still nestled in their roosts, and the dew's water flowed along every *mudhannab*."** (Al-Andalusī, n.d., p. 29; Al-Taymī, n.d., p. 33)

All these usages are semantically close, describing natural or gentle water channels. The related term **al-mudhannabah** also refers to a **ladle or dipper**—so named because it has a "tail" (*dhanab*) or a handle resembling one (Al-Mursī, 2000, vol. 10, p. 81).

**The Connection to the Verse on Smoke (Qur'an 44:10):** In interpreting the verse:

**"So watch for the day when the sky brings forth a visible smoke"** (Ad-Dukhān 44:10),

Ibn Jurayj reported:

"Ibn Abī Mulaikah showed me—or I heard him say—'One day I entered upon Ibn 'Abbās, who said to me: "I did not sleep last night until morning." I asked, "Why?" He replied: "They said, 'The comet with a tail (*al-kawkab dhū al-dhanab*) has appeared,' so I thought the smoke [foretold in the Qur'an] had already come. By Allah, I didn't sleep until dawn." Another version of the narration adds:

"...so I feared the Dajjāl (Antichrist) had already appeared."

Al-Naysābūrī (1990, vol. 4, p. 506) notes that this report is **authentic according to the criteria of al-Bukhārī and Muslim**, though neither included it in their canonical collections. However, he points out a divergence: **this view conflicts with the position of 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd**, who held

that **the sign of the Dajjāl had already occurred** (i.e., was not future).

### 1. Al-Nayzak (The Meteorite)

According to Al-Mu'jam al-Lughawī al-Mu'āṣir (The Modern Arabic Dictionary): *Nayzak* (pl. *nayāzik*) is a celestial body that travels through space; when it enters Earth's atmosphere, it burns up and appears as a piercing, falling meteor-like streak" (Umar, 2008, Vol. 3, p. 2195).

Upon examining the word "*nayzak*," it becomes clear that it is not of native Arabic origin, but rather a loanword that has been Arabized (*mu'arrab*). As Al-Azdī notes, "*Nayzak* is an Arabized form of *nayza*, and *nayzaq* is another variant of the same word. It also appears in Aramaic.

Some scholars trace its origin to Middle Persian (Pahlavi), where *nayzak* referred to a short spear" (Al-Azdī, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 459; Riḍā'ī, n.d., p. 51). Despite its foreign roots, classical Arabic speakers adopted and used it in their eloquent speech (Al-Azdī, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 459).

Shihāb al-Dīn al-Khafājī (d. 97 AH) explains: It is a short Persian spear, Arabized from *nayza*. The eloquent Arabs used it, and scholars later applied the term metaphorically to describe a luminous streak resembling a spear—considered one of the types of *shuhub* (meteors)—and the Arabs fully integrated it into their language" (Al-Ḥanafī, 1952, p. 260). Thus, while originally denoting a weapon, the term evolved in Arabic to describe a celestial phenomenon due to visual resemblance: a bright, fast-moving object streaking across the sky like a thrown spear.

Below are the historical meanings of "*al-nayzak*" in classical Arabic:

#### 4.1 A Celestial Body

In its astronomical sense, "*al-nayzak*" refers to a celestial object that travels through space and, upon entering Earth's atmosphere, burns up due to friction, appearing as a luminous, piercing, falling streak—resembling a meteor or shooting star (Umar, 2008, Vol. 3, p. 2195; Mustafā, Al-Zayyāt, 'Abd al-Qādir, & Al-Najjār, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 915).

This usage reflects the metaphorical extension of the word from its original meaning (“a short spear”) to describe a fast-moving, bright object darting across the sky—visually akin to a spear hurled from the heavens. The imagery emphasizes speed, brilliance, and sudden descent, aligning with classical Arabic poetic and descriptive traditions that liken celestial phenomena to weapons or fiery projectiles.

## 4.2 The Short Spear

Lexically, the root ن-ز-ك (n-z-k) signifies stabbing or piercing, and from this root comes the word “al-nayzak”, which originally denotes a short spear used for thrusting (Al-Rāzī, 1979, Vol. 5, p. 416; Al-Farāhīdī, n.d., p. 309; Mustafā et al., n.d., Vol. 2, p. 915). The verb “nazakahū” (نَزَّكَهُ), conjugated on the pattern of *daraba* (to strike), means “he pierced him with a nayzak”—i.e., stabbed him with this short spear (Al-Rāzī, 1979, Vol. 5, p. 416; Al-Farāhīdī, n.d., p. 309).

This martial meaning appears in classical Islamic texts:

- In a well-known ḥadīth, it is stated: “Indeed, Jesus (peace be upon him) will kill the Dajjāl (the Antichrist) with a *nayzak*.” Here, the *nayzak* is understood as a divine weapon—a short, piercing spear—symbolizing decisive judgment.
- Another narration reports that Ibn ‘Awn, upon hearing the name of Shahr ibn Ḥawshab, remarked: “Indeed, they *nazzakūhu* (نَزَّكَوْهُ).” This does not refer to physical stabbing, but rather to verbal piercing—meaning “they criticized him harshly” or “they disparaged and condemned him,” as if metaphorically “stabbing” his reputation (Al-Jazarī, 1979, Vol. 5, p. 42).

Thus, while “al-nayzak” originally referred to a physical weapon—a short, thrusting spear—its semantic range expanded to include both literal combat and figurative acts of sharp criticism, reflecting the Arabic linguistic tendency to extend concrete terms into expressive metaphors.

## 4.3 The Meaning of “Al-Nazk” as Censure or Fault-Finding

Lexicographers and commentators affirm that the verb “nazakahu” (نَزَّكَهُ) means “to censure him,” “to find fault with him,” or “to disparage him.” This definition is cited by:

- Al-Rāzī (1979, vol. 5, p. 416),
- Al-Farāhīdī (n.d., p. 309),
- And Mustafā, al-Ziyāt, ‘Abd al-Qādir, and al-Najjār (n.d., vol. 2, p. 915).

This sense is poetically expressed by the poet:

**“O who will comfort a heart forever trembling,  
As though pierced through by the breasts of *al-nayāzik*?”** (Basaj, 1995, p. 270)

Here, *al-nayāzik* (the plural of *nāzik*) metaphorically evokes those who wound the heart through harsh criticism or reproach—suggesting emotional pain inflicted by fault-finders. Further support comes from a ḥadīth of Abū al-Dardā’, in which he describes the *abdāl* (substitute saints or righteous individuals): “**They are neither *nuzāk* (fault-finders), nor self-admiring, nor pretenders of asceticism.**”—As explained by Al-Jazarī (1979, vol. 5, p. 42): “**Al-nuzāk**” refers to **those who habitually censure others**. It is said: “*Nazaqt al-rajul*” (I criticized/faulted the man) when one **finds blame or defect in him**.

The term “**al-nayzak**” (النَّيْزَك)—commonly rendered in English as “**meteor**” or “**meteorite**”—appears in certain Qur’anic commentaries with specific cosmological and linguistic interpretations, beyond its earlier meaning related to fault-finding (*nazk*). This usage is particularly tied to the exegesis of the following verses:

**“By the sky and the night-comer (*al-tāriq*)! And what will make you know what the night-comer is? It is the piercing star (*al-najm al-thāqib*).”**

— Surah Al-Ṭāriq (86:1–3)

## Interpretation of *Al-Najm al-Thāqib* as Meteors (Al-Nayāzik)

Many exegetes interpret “*al-najm al-thāqib*” as referring to **meteors or shooting stars (al-nayāzik or al-shuhub)**. The verb “*thāqab*” (ثاقب) implies **piercing, penetrating, or boring through**, and scholars have offered the following understanding:

- It is plausible that “*thāqib*” describes how the meteor **pierces or penetrates the Earth’s atmosphere** as it descends (Ḥawwā, n.d., vol. 8, p. 4687; vol. 11, p. 6468).
- **Al-nayāzik** are defined as **rocky fragments detached from the remnants of a shattered celestial body (e.g., a disintegrated planet or asteroid)**, which are then drawn by Earth’s gravity.
- When these fragments enter the Earth’s atmosphere and burn up due to friction—producing luminous streaks—they are called **shuhub (shooting stars)**. If they reach the ground, they become **meteorites**.
- According to Al-Zuḥaylī (1418 AH, vol. 8, p. 290) and ‘Āfiyah (1994, p. 49), these meteors are **parts of stars or planets**, and it is by means of them that Allah “hurls” (*yarū*, يرمي) **against devils**, as mentioned elsewhere in the Qur’an (e.g., Surah Al-Mulk 67:5).

This interpretation aligns with both classical Arabic cosmology and modern scientific understanding, where meteors are seen as cosmic debris interacting with Earth’s atmospheric sphere.

Indeed, the term “*al-nayzak*” (النيزك)—now commonly used in modern Arabic to denote a **meteorite**—has undergone a fascinating semantic evolution, reflecting both linguistic adaptation and scientific development.

## Scientific Classification of Meteorites

As noted from your source (<https://alkaoun.com>), scientists classify recovered meteorites into **three main types** based on composition:

1. **Iron Meteorites (Siderites):** Composed primarily of an **iron-nickel alloy**, these are dense and metallic.
2. **Stony Meteorites (Aerolites):** Made almost entirely of **silicate minerals**, especially **olivine** and **pyroxene**, and are typically heavier than terrestrial rocks of similar size.
3. **Stony-Iron Meteorites (Siderolites):** A hybrid type containing **both iron-nickel metal and silicate minerals**.

These extraterrestrial fragments can strike Earth at speeds up to **70 km/s**. The larger the meteorite, the more catastrophic its impact—capable of forming craters, triggering seismic events, or even causing mass extinctions. To date, scientists have identified approximately **2,500 distinct meteorites** of varying sizes and compositions.

Remarkably, some meteorites contain **microscopic diamond crystals**, formed under extreme pressure in space—evidence of violent cosmic processes long before they reached Earth.

## Linguistic Clarification: Meteor vs. Meteoroid vs. Meteor Shower

- **Meteorite (النيزك):** A solid fragment that **survives atmospheric entry and reaches the Earth’s surface**.
- **Meteor (الشهاب):** The luminous streak produced when a meteoroid **burns up in the atmosphere** due to friction—commonly called a “shooting star.” It **does not reach the ground** (Muslim, 2005, p. 165).

## Etymological Insight: Is “Nayzak” an Arabized Foreign Word?

Your observation is astute: “*al-nayzak*” appears to be an **Arabized (mu‘arrab) term of non-Arabic origin**. Historical linguistic evidence suggests its **earliest meaning in pre-Islamic Arabic was “a short spear” or “javelin”—a weapon that pierces or penetrates**, aligning with the root concept of “*kharq*” (خرق), i.e., **piercing, perforating, or breaking through**.

This core semantic idea—**swift, forceful penetration**—bridges the ancient and modern usages:

- In **Jāhili poetry and early Arabic**, *nayzak* described a **thrusting spear**.
- In **modern scientific Arabic**, it denotes a **celestial projectile that pierces the sky and strikes the Earth**.

Thus, although the word may have foreign phonetic origins (possibly from Persian or another Semitic language), it was **fully integrated into classical Arabic** and used by the Arabs of old—not as a borrowed technical term, but as part of their native lexicon describing piercing objects.

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