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Principles and Rules of Quranic Exegesis in the Thought of Martyr Ayatullah Khamenei: A Methodological Analysis toward a Systematic Contemporary Exegetical Theory

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ABSTRACT

Throughout Islamic history, Quranic exegesis has been shaped by diverse epistemological foundations and methodological approaches, with each exegete offering a distinct framework for understanding divine revelation. Among contemporary exegetes, Martyr Ayatullah Khamenei has developed a coherent theory of Quranic exegesis that integrates the heritage of Shiʿi exegesis with innovative epistemological and methodological principles. This study examines the foundations, rules, and methodological structure of his exegetical thought through a descriptive–analytical analysis of his exegetical writings, Quranic discourses, speeches, and interpretive views. The findings indicate that his exegetical framework is grounded in the Quran's miraculous and its Inviolability, the inseparable relationship between the Quran and the *Ahl al-Bayt* (peace be upon them), the authority of authentic hadiths, and the legitimacy of reason. It further emphasizes the Quran's scientific and epistemic authority, the comprehensiveness of its guidance, its transformative role in the human sciences, and a socio-civilizational approach to revelation. His exegetical methodology incorporates contextual analysis (*siyāq*), application and extension (*jary wa taṭbīq*), deeper semantic interpretation (*baṭn*), dialogical engagement with the Quran (*istinṭāq al-Qur'ān*), linguistic analysis, and the integrated use of Quran-by-Quran, hadith-based, rational, and *ijtihādī* methods. The study concludes that these principles and rules form a coherent epistemological system that supports socio-political interpretation, interdisciplinary Quranic scholarship, and the development of Quran-based knowledge. Consequently, Ayatullah Khamenei's exegetical theory represents a significant contemporary paradigm capable of addressing individual, social, and civilizational challenges in the Muslim world.

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1. Introduction

The Holy Quran, as Islam's primary source of guidance and knowledge, has long been the focus of scholarly efforts to understand its meanings and uncover its semantic dimensions. These endeavors gave rise to the discipline of Quranic exegesis and the development of diverse exegetical schools and methodologies. Throughout Islamic history, exegetes have relied on various epistemic sources—including the Quran, the Sunnah, reason, linguistic sciences, and human knowledge—producing a rich legacy of exegetical literature and interpretive theories. However, contemporary intellectual, social, and civilizational developments have intensified the need to reassess Quranic interpretive methodologies and formulate paradigms capable of addressing modern challenges.

Among contemporary Quranic exegetes, Ayatullah al-ʿUẓmā Sayyid Ali Khamenei occupies a distinctive position. Alongside his scholarly, cultural, and socio-political responsibilities, he has devoted considerable attention to Quranic reflection, teaching, and interpretation. Since the 1960s, he has conducted Quranic exegesis sessions and, following the Islamic Revolution, further articulated his exegetical views through speeches, sermons, writings, and official messages. His exegetical works reveal a coherent epistemological framework in which foundational principles, interpretive methodologies, and exegetical orientations are systematically integrated.

The importance of examining Ayatullah Khamenei's exegetical thought stems from his combination of the Shiʿi exegetical heritage—particularly the School of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a)—with distinctive methodological innovations. These include emphasizing the Quran's epistemic authority, adopting a socio-civilizational approach to revelation, highlighting the Quran's transformative role in the human sciences, employing a comprehensive *ijtihādī* methodology, engaging the Quran as a responsive source for contemporary issues (*istinṭāq al-Qur'ān*), and integrating both individual and social dimensions of guidance. Such features have led a number of scholars to regard his Quranic thought as representing a coherent and emerging exegetical theory within contemporary Quranic studies.

Despite the growing scholarly interest in Ayatullah Khamenei's Quranic thought, most existing studies have focused on specific themes, such as political, social, educational, cultural, and civilizational dimensions of his exegesis. However, a comprehensive investigation of the principles and rules governing Quranic exegesis within his intellectual framework remains largely absent. Consequently, reconstructing the systematic structure of his exegetical foundations and exegetical rules is essential for a deeper understanding of the epistemological and methodological basis of his interpretive theory.

This study addresses the nature of the principles and rules of Quranic interpretation in Ayatullah Khamenei's thought and examines how they function within a coherent methodological system. It further explores the role of general and specific exegetical foundations, approaches to exegetical narrations, and the relationship between foundations, principles, and methods in shaping his exegetical framework. Accordingly, the primary objective is to identify, analyze, and reconstruct the system of exegetical principles and rules underlying his theory of Quranic exegesis.

Using a descriptive–analytical and library-based methodology, the study draws on Ayatullah Khamenei's exegetical writings, Quranic discourses, speeches, and related scholarly works. The collected data are analyzed within the broader context of Quranic hermeneutics and interpretive methodology. The findings are expected to clarify key dimensions of his interpretive theory while contributing to methodological studies in Quranic exegesis and demonstrating the Quran's epistemological potential for addressing contemporary issues.

The study's originality lies in its effort to reconstruct Ayatullah Khamenei's exegetical principles and rules within a unified theoretical framework rather than merely describing selected aspects of his Quranic thought. It also highlights the interrelationship between interpretive foundations, principles, methods, and outcomes. In addition, the systematic examination of criteria for evaluating exegetical narrations, the analysis of concepts such as *istinṭāq al-Qur'ān* (dialogical engagement with the Qur'an) and *baṭn*-oriented interpretation, and the assessment of his theory's capacity to generate Quran-based knowledge systems represent significant contributions of this research.

2. Literature Background

2.1. The Exegetical Background of Ayatullah Khamenei

Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei has been actively engaged in Quranic exegesis since the 1960s through teaching sessions, public lectures, Friday prayer sermons, and scholarly writings. Beginning in Mashhad and later continuing in Tehran, his interpretive activities have addressed theological, educational, social, and civilizational dimensions of the Quran, reflecting a sustained commitment to Quranic scholarship over several decades.

His principal exegetical works include *From the Depths of Prayer* (2008), an interpretation of *Sūrat al-Ḥamd* and the concept of *tawḥīd*; *An Outline of Islamic Thought in the Qur'an* (1974), which presents the foundational principles of Islamic belief based on Quranic teachings; *A Discourse on Patience* (1975), focusing on the Quranic concept of *ṣabr*; and *The Spirit of Tawḥīd: The Negation of Servitude to Other than God* (1981), which elaborates the social and theological implications of Divine Unity. His later published exegetical works include *Bayān al-Qur'ān: Exegesis of Sūrat al-Mujādilah* (2017) and complete *tafsīrs* on *Sūrat al-Ḥamd*, *al-Baqarah*, *al-Ḥashr*, *al-Jumuʿah*, and *al-Tawbah* (2022). He also translated the first two volumes of Sayyid Qutb's *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* into Persian in 1975 (Qutb, 2019), contributing to the dissemination of contemporary Quranic thought. In addition, references exist to two unfinished Quranic projects—a Quranic Lexicon and a Persian Quranic Concordance (*Kashf al-Āyāt*)—which were initiated in the 1970s but never completed or formally published.

Collectively, this body of work demonstrates that Ayatullah Khamenei's engagement with the Quran extended beyond thematic exposition or rhetorical reflection. Rather, it constitutes a sustained exegetical enterprise founded upon identifiable epistemological assumptions and methodological principles. Accordingly, this exegetical legacy provides the primary basis for reconstructing the foundational principles (*mabānī*) and exegetical rules (*qawāʿid tafsīriyyah*) that shape his methodology of Quranic interpretation.

2.2. Background of Studies on the Exegetical Methodology of Imam Khamenei

Numerous academic studies have examined various dimensions of Ayatullah Khamenei's Quranic thought and exegetical approach. The most significant studies in this regard are summarized as follows:

Master's Thesis: *An Examination of the Exegetical Method of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei* (2015), authored by Zahra Khājivand, supervised by Mehdi Bakouei and advised by Mohammad Reza Taheri, Faculty of Quranic Sciences, Qum.

Master's Thesis: *The Methodology of the Quranic Thought of the Supreme Leader* (2011), authored by Amir Haidar (India), supervised by Mehdi Rostamnejad, advised by Mohammad Javad Eskandarloo, and examined by Mohammad Ali Rezaei Isfahani, Quran and Hadith Department, Imam Khomeini Educational Complex, Qum.

Master's Thesis: *The Quranic Foundations of the Supreme Leader's Message to Western Youth* (2016), authored by Sharifah (Afghanistan), supervised by Soheila Pirouz far and examined by Sayyid Mehdi Ahmadi Nik, Al-Mustafa International University – Khorasan Branch, Higher School of Fiqh and Quranic Studies for Women, Mashhad.

Master's Thesis: *The Etiquettes and Rulings of Quranic Recitation from the Perspective of the Supreme Leader* (2016), authored by Ismail Tayyib Ansamala (Malawi), supervised by Hassan Foroughi and examined by Sayyid Ali Mirdamad Najafabadi, Higher Institute of Quran and Hadith, Imam Khomeini Educational Complex, Qum.

Master's Thesis: *The Quranic and Prophetic Foundations of the Supreme Leader's Views on Soft War* (2018), authored by Mir Dilawar Husayn (India), supervised by Sayyid Isa Mostarahmi and examined by Mohammad Amini-Tehrani, Higher School of Tafsir, Imam Khomeini Educational Complex, Qum.

Master's Thesis: *The Quranic Foundations of Human Sciences with Emphasis on Imam Khamenei's Perspective* (2017), authored by Sayyid Hasan Hosseini (Thailand), supervised by Sayyid Isa Mostarahmi and examined by Mohammad Ali Rezaei Isfahani, Higher School of Tafsir, Imam Khomeini Educational Complex, Qum.

Doctoral Dissertation: *The Theory of Returning to the Quran with Emphasis on the Perspective of the Supreme Leader* (2020), authored

by Ali Akbar Farahi-Bakhshayesh, supervised by Mohammad Ali Rezaei Isfahani, advised by Abbas Elahi, and examined by Gholamreza Behrouzi Lak, Mohammad Hassan Zamani, and Mehdi Rostamnejad, Higher School of Tafsir, Imam Khomeini Educational Complex, Qum.

Doctoral Dissertation: *The Ijtihādī Method in Deriving Political-Theological Propositions from the Holy Quran: With Emphasis on the Perspective of Ayatollah Khamenei* (2021), authored by Sayyid Samad Mousavi, supervised by Mohsen Mohajernia, advised by Mohammad Ali Mirali-Bidakhvidi and Mohammad Hossein Malekzadeh, and examined by Mohammad Javad Norouzi, Gholamreza Behrouzi Lak, and Hayatollah Yousefi, Higher Institute of Islamic Humanities, School of Law and Political Science, Qum.

Doctoral Dissertation: *Moral Education in the Quranic Perspective of the Supreme Leader* (2018), authored by Mostafa Ahmadi-Far, supervised by Mohammad Ali Rezaei Isfahani, Razavi University of Islamic Sciences.

The Quran: The Book of Life, *Qadr-e Velayat Cultural Institute* (2003).

A Review of the Foundations, Methods, and Exegetical Rules of Grand Ayatollah Khamenei in the Exegesis of *Sūrat al-Tawbah* (2014), compiled by the Research Group of Islamic Revolution Publications, *Nasim-i Inqilāb Publications*.

Ethics and Spirituality in the Perspective of the Supreme Leader, collective authorship, *Qadr-i Wilāyat Cultural Institute* (2001).

Article: "A Review of the Foundations, Method, and Interpretive Rules of Grand Ayatollah Khamenei in the Exegesis of *Sūrat al-Kawthar*," (2018) by Sayyid Mohammad Reza Alaeddin, Mohammad Javad Safa, and Najmeh al-Sadat Alaeddin, *Kawthar Quranic Quarterly*, no. 63.

Despite their scholarly value, these studies generally focus on particular themes or limited aspects of Ayatullah Khamenei's Quranic thought. Some are confined to specific subjects, such as ethics, education, soft war, or human sciences, while others examine individual Quranic sūras. Consequently, they provide important insights into certain

dimensions of his exegetical perspective but do not offer a comprehensive reconstruction of his overall exegetical theory.

A major gap in the existing literature is the absence of a systematic and integrated analysis of the foundational principles (*mabānī*), exegetical rules (*qawā'id tafsīriyyah*), methodological mechanisms, and epistemological assumptions underlying his approach to Quranic exegesis. Accordingly, the present study seeks to fill this gap by reconstructing the internal coherence of Ayatullah Khamenei's exegetical system and clarifying the relationship between its epistemological foundations, methodological principles, and exegetical outcomes within a unified theoretical framework.

3. Theoretical Framework and Conceptualization

3.1. The Concept of *Tafsīr* (Quranic Exegesis)

Tafsīr linguistically denotes clarification, explanation, and the unveiling of hidden meanings (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1996, 1:4 & 7; Rāghib Iṣfahānī 2001, 636; Suyūṭī 2000, 2:192; Ṭabarsī 1993, 1:13). In Quranic studies, it refers to the discipline concerned with uncovering the meanings of Quranic verses and explaining the Divine intent embedded within them. The term is generally used in three senses: the science of exegesis itself, the process of understanding divine intent, and the resulting exegetical works. This study adopts the second meaning, viewing *tafsīr* as the systematic process of deriving meaning from the Quran through authoritative sources, linguistic principles, rational norms, and contextual evidence (see Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2018, 2; Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2007, 3; Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2003, 18). This perspective forms the basis for examining Ayatollah Khamenei's approach to Quranic exegesis.

3.2. The Concept of Exegetical Foundations (*Mabānī Tafsīriyyah*)

Exegetical foundations are the epistemological assumptions and theoretical premises accepted by an exegete before engaging in interpretation. They constitute the intellectual infrastructure that shapes the overall direction of exegesis. Such foundations include belief in the Quran's miraculous nature and protection from distortion, the authority

of the Sunnah, the legitimacy of reason, the comprehensiveness of Quranic guidance, the epistemic authority of the Quran, the exegetical role of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (peace be upon them), and the qualifications of the exegete. Unlike exegetical rules, which guide practical interpretation, foundations function as underlying theoretical assumptions that influence both method and outcome (see Rūḥī Dihkurdī & Tajrī 2016, 103; Mīr Maḥmūdī & Mu'addab 2015, 201; Īmāndār & Muṣṭafavī Fard 2019, 118).

3.3. The Concept of Exegetical Rules (*Qawāʿid Tafsīriyyah*)

Exegetical rules are general methodological principles employed in deriving meanings from Quranic verses. Applicable across multiple interpretive contexts, they serve as the link between theoretical foundations and exegetical conclusions. Examples include contextual analysis (*siyāq*), adherence to literal meaning unless evidence dictates otherwise, application and extension (*jary wa taṭbīq*), dialogical engagement with the Quran (*istinṭāq al-Qur'ān*), *baṭn*-oriented interpretation, and principles for reconciling textual evidence. These rules ensure methodological rigor and protect interpretation from arbitrariness and subjectivism (ʿAmīd Zanjānī 1987, 123; Aḥmadī Nizhād 2013, 15).

3.4. The Concept of Exegetical Methodology

Exegetical methodology refers to the principal sources and evidentiary frameworks upon which an exegete relies in understanding the Quran. Major methodological approaches include Quran-by-Quran *tafsīr*, hadith-based, rational, scientific, and allusive methods. Methodology is closely related to both foundations and rules: epistemological assumptions determine methodological choices, while exegetical rules govern their practical application. Thus, methodology functions as the bridge between theoretical premises and the actual process of *tafsīr* (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2007, 3; ʿAmīd Zanjānī 1987, 117).

3.5. The Concept of Exegetical Theory

An exegetical theory is a coherent system of foundations, principles, methodologies, objectives, and outcomes that collectively provide an overarching framework for understanding the Quran. Rather than representing isolated views, it reflects an internally consistent structure in which its various elements are interconnected. Such a theory addresses fundamental questions concerning the proper understanding of the Quran, authoritative exegetical sources, governing methodological principles, and the epistemological and social implications of *tafsīr*. An exegetical theory exists when these components can be reconstructed as a unified epistemological system (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 19).

3.6. Ayatullah Khamenei's Position among Contemporary Exegetes

Martyr Ayatullah Khamenei is regarded as a leading contemporary exegete whose Quranic activities have extended from the 1960s to the present through teaching, sermons, speeches, writings, and official messages. Drawing upon the Shiʿi exegetical tradition, particularly the teachings of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a) and the influence of ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, he adopts a comprehensive and *ijtihādī* approach to Quranic exegesis. His thought is distinguished by integrating Quranic exegesis with contemporary social realities, emphasizing the Quran's epistemic authority, highlighting its transformative role in the human sciences, and employing *istinṭāq al-Qur'ān* to derive responses to contemporary intellectual and civilizational challenges. Consequently, he may be viewed as an influential contributor to an emerging paradigm in contemporary Quranic studies (see Bahjatpūr & ʿĀrifī 2024, 17-38; Aḥmadī Bīghash 2023, 56).

3.7. The Concept of System-Building (*Niẓām-Sāzī*)

A system refers to an organized structure of institutions, mechanisms, and infrastructures established to realize specific goals based on a particular worldview. In Ayatollah Khamenei's intellectual framework, system-building (*niẓām-sāzī*) is a multidimensional process grounded in three interconnected pillars: the production of theoretical foundations

and intellectual frameworks, institution-building, and human resource development. This process is closely linked to advancement in the fields of governance and human sciences and serves as a central mechanism for translating intellectual and Quranic principles into social and civilizational realities (ʿAynīzādah & Mu'addab 2017, 155).

4. Ayatollah Khamenei's Exegetical Foundations

4.1. General Exegetical Foundations

4.1.1. The Miraculous Nature of the Quran (*Iʿjāz al-Qur'ān*)

A central foundation of Ayatullah Khamenei's exegetical thought is belief in the perpetual miraculous nature of the Quran. He maintains that the Quran's miracle is intrinsically linked to the finality and universality of Islam; therefore, its challenge (*taḥaddī*) remains valid and accessible to all generations (Shākir and Rustamnezhād 2015, 75). In his view, humanity's continued inability to produce a text comparable to the Quran demonstrates its enduring miraculous character. This principle reinforces the authority and epistemic reliability of the Quran and serves as a basis for confidence in its teachings (see Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 25).

4.1.2. The Inviolability of the Quran from Textual Distortion (*Taḥrīf*)

Ayatullah Khamenei firmly upholds the integrity of the Quranic text, considering the present Quran identical to that revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (s). He rejects all claims of omission or addition, relying on both the historical consensus of Muslims and the Quranic promise of divine preservation: *"Indeed We have sent down the Reminder, and indeed We will preserve it"*[1] *(Quran 15:9).* Confidence in the authenticity of the text is therefore regarded as an indispensable prerequisite for valid interpretation (Khamenei, 1992b).

4.1.3. The Inseparability of the Quran and the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a)

Drawing upon the teachings of the school of *Ahl al-Bayt* (a) and the *Ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn*, Ayatullah Khamenei views the Quran and the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a) as complementary and inseparable sources of guidance. He

1. ﴿إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَ إِنَّا لَهُ لَحافِظُون﴾ (الحجر/٩)

argues that a complete understanding of the Quran requires recourse to the interpretive teachings of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a), whom he regards as the authentic inheritors of prophetic knowledge. This principle establishes the authority of narrations transmitted from the Imams and provides a framework for evaluating competing interpretations (Khamenei, 2007).

4.1.4. The Authority of Exegetical Narrations

Another key foundation is the authority of authentic narrations from the Prophet and the Ahl al-Bayt in Quranic interpretation. Ayatollah Khamenei employs such narrations to explain Quranic concepts, occasions of revelation, terminology, and interpretive applications. However, he distinguishes between reliable and unreliable reports and does not accept narrations uncritically. Statements of the Companions and Successors are not considered independently authoritative unless linked to an infallible source, while reliable solitary reports are accepted provided, they do not contradict the Quran or established religious principles (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 26).

4.1.5. The Validity of Reason in Understanding the Quran

Although revelation remains the primary source of interpretation, Ayatollah Khamenei regards reason (*ʿaql*) as a legitimate instrument for understanding and evaluating religious knowledge. He rejects narrations that conflict with definitive rational judgment and maintains that genuine Qur'anic teachings cannot contradict sound reason. Thus, reason functions in a complementary relationship with the Qur'an and Sunnah, contributing to the verification and interpretation of religious texts (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 55).

4.1.6. The Comprehensiveness and Guidance-Oriented Nature of the Quran

Ayatollah Khamenei views the Quran as a comprehensive source of guidance addressing all aspects of human life. Its mission extends beyond individual spirituality and ritual practice to encompass social, cultural, political, educational, and civilizational dimensions. This conviction underlies his emphasis on the societal implications of Quranic teachings and his understanding of the Quran as a living, dynamic, and enduring guide capable of addressing the needs of human societies across different times and contexts (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 38).

4.2. Particular Exegetical Foundations

4.2.1. The Epistemic Authority of the Quran

A distinctive feature of Ayatullah Khamenei's interpretive thought is his affirmation of the Qur'an's epistemic authority (*marjaʿiyyah ʿilmiyyah al-Qur'ān*). He views the Qur'an not merely as a source of spiritual guidance but as a foundational reference for knowledge production and theory construction in the human and social sciences (Abedini, et al, 2024, 114; Khosh manesh, et al. 2023, 179). From this perspective, Quranic teachings provide fundamental principles and intellectual orientations capable of contributing to the development of Islamic sciences and contemporary intellectual paradigms. Consequently, Quranic interpretation extends beyond traditional theological concerns and assumes an active role in addressing modern intellectual and societal challenges (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 41).

4.2.2. The Transformative Role of the Quran in the Human Sciences

Ayatollah Khamenei argues that many contemporary human sciences are founded upon secular and materialistic assumptions that require reconstruction in light of revelation. He therefore assigns the Quran a transformative role in providing alternative epistemological foundations, normative goals, and intellectual orientations for the human sciences (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 43). In contrast to approaches that reduce human existence to material concerns, the Quranic worldview presents the human being as possessing both worldly and transcendent dimensions (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 12 & 23). Accordingly, the development of the human sciences should proceed within a theocentric framework that balances worldly well-being with eternal success and safeguards intellectual independence from ideological dependency (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 44).

4.2.3. Rejection of Restricting Quranic Interpretation to the Individual Sphere

Another important foundation of Ayatollah Khamenei's exegetical approach is the rejection of exclusively individualistic interpretations of the Quran. While acknowledging the importance of personal ethics and spirituality, he maintains that a substantial portion of the Quranic message addresses social, political, and civilizational concerns. Limiting interpretation to the individual level therefore overlooks a

significant dimension of the Quran's mission. His approach seeks to integrate personal moral development with collective social transformation (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 36).

4.2.4. A Civilizational and Social Approach to the Quran

Ayatullah Khamenei views the Quran as a foundational text for social organization and civilizational development. He emphasizes its role in shaping the identity of the Muslim community, establishing justice, confronting oppression, promoting unity, and laying the foundations of a modern Islamic civilization (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 63). Within this framework, Quranic interpretation is directly connected to governance, social reform, and civilizational advancement. Consistent with this perspective, he argues that the prophetic method described in the Quran transcends individual preaching, monasticism, and spiritual isolation (Eynizadeh & Mu'addab 2017, 164).

Although personal moral cultivation remains important, comprehensive human reform requires the creation of just social systems and enabling institutional structures. This vision corresponds to the concept of *niẓām-sāzī* (system-building), whereby Quranic principles are translated into practical societal institutions. His interpretation of Sūrat al-Ḥashr, for example, highlights enduring historical laws governing the rise and decline of civilizations, the weakening of oppressive powers, and the eventual triumph of the monotheistic community, thereby providing strategic guidance for social and civilizational transformation (Mousavi Anijdan & Behjatpour 2023, 6).

4.2.5. The Quran as a Source of Knowledge Production

Ayatullah Khamenei further regards the Quran as a source for generating new bodies of knowledge. Through systematic and methodological engagement with the Quran, particularly via *istinṭāq al-Qur'ān* (dialogical interrogation of the Quran), he argues that new theories and intellectual frameworks can be developed across diverse fields of the human and social sciences. In this view, the Quran functions not only as a source of guidance but also as a dynamic reservoir for epistemological innovation, interdisciplinary research, and the construction of Quran-based knowledge systems (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 94).

5. Exegetical Rules from the Perspective of Ayatollah Khamenei

Exegetical rules constitute a central component of Ayatullah Khamenei's interpretive theory, serving as the practical mechanisms through which exegetical foundations are applied in understanding the Quran. While his approach is firmly rooted in the established principles of the Shiʿi exegetical tradition, it also incorporates several distinctive interpretive rules that collectively provide a coherent framework for deriving Quranic teachings relevant to contemporary intellectual and social challenges. According to Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī (2024), his methodology combines literary, linguistic, and Quranic-scientific principles with contextual analysis (*siyāq*), application and extension (*jary wa taṭbīq*), *baṭn*-oriented interpretation, *istinṭāq al-Qur'ān*, and the possibility of assigning multiple meanings to a single expression (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 46).

5.1. Literary Rules

Ayatullah Khamenei places significant emphasis on literary and linguistic principles in Quranic interpretation. He maintains that an accurate understanding of the Quran requires mastery of Arabic grammar, morphology, rhetoric, and stylistics. Consequently, his exegesis frequently incorporates lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical analysis. For example, in interpreting *"You [alone] do we worship" (Quran 1:5)* in *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*, he employs the rhetorical principle of preposing the object before the verb to demonstrate exclusivity (*ḥaṣr*) in worship. Such analyses illustrate that literary principles serve not only linguistic clarification but also the extraction of broader theological and ethical meanings (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 46).

5.2. Rules Derived from the Quranic Sciences

Another important category of interpretive rules derives from the traditional sciences of the Quran (*ʿulūm al-Qur'ān*). Ayatullah Khamenei frequently utilizes concepts such as Meccan and Medinan revelation, occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), abrogation (*naskh*), definitive and allegorical verses (*muḥkam* and *mutashābih*), and universal and particular expressions (*ʿāmm* and *khāṣṣ*). While he considers historical

context essential for understanding Quranic objectives, he does not restrict verses to their original circumstances. Rather, historical awareness functions as a means of uncovering the Quran's enduring and transhistorical guidance (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 47).

5.3. Linguistic Rules

A notable feature of Ayatullah Khamenei's interpretive theory is his emphasis on the communicative nature of Qur'anic language. He argues that although revelation originates from a transcendent source, it has been expressed through ordinary linguistic conventions to ensure human comprehension and guidance. Accordingly, Quranic interpretation should proceed according to rational principles of language and customary modes of communication. This perspective rejects the notion that Quranic language is inherently inaccessible or exclusively esoteric, affirming instead its intelligibility and guidance-oriented character (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 48).

5.4. The Principle of Contextual Analysis (*Qāʿidat al-Siyāq*)

Contextual analysis (*siyāq*) occupies a central place in Ayatullah Khamenei's exegetical methodology. He emphasizes the semantic relationship between verses and maintains that no verse should be interpreted independently of its surrounding textual context (Hedayati, 2025). His interpretations of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*, *al-Baqarah*, and *al-Tawbah* consistently demonstrate reliance on preceding and subsequent verses to clarify meaning. This approach preserves the coherence of the Quranic discourse, prevents fragmented interpretations, and complements the Quran-by-Quran method by promoting a holistic understanding of revelation (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 49).

5.5. The Principle of Application and Extension (*Jary wa Taṭbīq*)

The principle of application and extension (*jary wa taṭbīq*) plays a crucial role in Ayatullah Khamenei's social and civilizational interpretation of the Quran. According to this principle, Quranic narratives, concepts, and patterns are not confined to the historical context of revelation but remain applicable to analogous situations

across time (Ziaei, & Mousavizadeh, 2023, 76). Thus, figures such as hypocrites, enemies of religion, and agents of social corruption are viewed as recurring realities rather than purely historical phenomena (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 50).

This principle enables the Quran to function as a living guide for contemporary societies and supports the extraction of broader divine laws (*sunan ilāhiyyah*) governing history and society. Within Ayatollah Khamenei's framework, these divine traditions are universal, enduring, and truth-based laws that regulate social development and civilizational change. Recognition of such principles—such as divine assistance, trials, and the effectiveness of sustained effort—enables societies to align themselves with the divine order and thereby advance toward social progress and civilizational success (Razavi and Johari, 2022, 156–171).

5.6. The Principle of Deriving Deeper Semantic Layers (*Baṭn*) from Quranic Verses

A distinctive aspect of Ayatullah Khamenei's exegetical methodology is his emphasis on the deeper semantic dimensions (*buṭūn*) of the Quran. Consistent with the Shiʿi exegetical tradition, he maintains that Quranic verses possess multiple layers of meaning extending beyond their apparent wording. However, *baṭn*-oriented interpretation does not negate the outward meaning (*ẓāhir*); rather, it uncovers additional meanings that remain connected to and derived from the apparent sense of the text.

Through this approach, Ayatullah Khamenei frequently derives broader social, civilizational, and epistemological insights from Quranic verses, demonstrating his conviction that the Quran contains expansive and enduring semantic capacities. This principle enables the Quran to address issues beyond its immediate historical context while remaining grounded in valid interpretive standards. Consequently, *baṭn*-oriented interpretation represents one of the distinctive features of his contemporary interpretive framework (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 50).

5.7. The Principle of Dialogical Interrogation of the Quran (*Istinṭāq al-Qur'ān*)

Among the most innovative elements of Ayatullah Khamenei's interpretive theory is the principle of *istinṭāq al-Qur'ān* ("making the Quran speak"). This principle refers to the systematic engagement with Quranic verses in order to derive guidance and solutions for new and emerging issues (Ziaei, & Mousavizadeh, 2023, 75). According to Ayatullah Khamenei, under the *tafsīr* of verse 6 of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* said, the Quran is not a silent historical text but a living source capable of responding to contemporary intellectual, social, and civilizational challenges. He argues that sincere engagement with the Quran enables believers to discover guidance relevant to changing historical circumstances. This perspective has significantly contributed to the development of thematic exegesis (*tafsīr mawḍūʿī*) and the extraction of Quranic theories concerning contemporary issues. Through *istinṭāq*, the Quran becomes an active source for knowledge production and problem-solving in modern contexts (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 51).

A practical illustration of this principle appears in his interpretation of Qur'an 57:25, where he understands *kitāb* (Book) as representing intellectual and normative foundations, *mīzān* (balance) as the institutional realization of justice, and *ḥadīd* (iron) as the political and executive power required to protect and implement justice (ʿAynīzādah & Mu'addab 2017, pp. 166-167). Together, these concepts form the pillars of a Qur'anically grounded model of governance and system-building.

Within this framework, Quranic knowledge production follows a systematic process involving the identification of contemporary problems, conceptual clarification, engagement with existing scholarship, comprehensive analysis of relevant verses, hypothesis construction, theory development, and evaluation of theoretical coherence in light of the Quran and authentic Sunnah (Mansouri et al., 2025, pp. 115-120). This methodology transforms the Quran into a dynamic source of civilizational and intellectual development.

5.8. The Principle of Employing a Word in Multiple Meanings

Another notable feature of Ayatullah Khamenei's interpretive methodology is his acceptance of the possibility that a single Quranic expression may simultaneously convey multiple valid meanings. Although this issue remains debated among scholars of legal theory, he frequently employs this principle to reconcile different interpretive possibilities and to preserve the semantic richness of the Quranic text.

In several exegetical discussions, including his interpretation of *Sūrat al-Tawbah*, Ayatullah Khamenei argues that a verse need not always be restricted to a single meaning when multiple interpretations are compatible with the linguistic and contextual framework of the text. Accordingly, diverse meanings may coexist as intended dimensions of the verse. This principle expands the interpretive potential of the Qur'an, reduces unnecessary conflicts among competing interpretations, and reflects his belief in the comprehensiveness and depth of Quranic language. By recognizing the possibility of multiple simultaneous meanings, his methodology preserves the richness of revelation while allowing for broader and more inclusive understandings of Quranic guidance (Ziaei, & Mousavizadeh, 2023, 68; Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 51).

6. Foundations of Critiquing Exegetical Narrations in the Thought of Ayatollah Khamenei

Exegetical narrations occupy an important position in Shiʿi Quranic exegesis; however, Ayatollah Khamenei does not regard them as immune from scholarly scrutiny. Consistent with the *ijtihād*-oriented Shiʿi tradition, he maintains that the validity of exegetical narrations depends upon critical evaluation according to established epistemological and methodological criteria. His approach seeks to safeguard Quranic exegesis from unreliable reports, fabricated traditions, and *Isrāʾīliyyāt* by subjecting narrations to both textual and rational assessment. The principal foundations of his narration criticism are as follows (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 28).

6.1. Evaluating Narrations in Light of the Quran

The primary criterion for assessing exegetical narrations is their conformity with the Quran. Ayatollah Khamenei regards the Quran as the most authoritative and definitive source of religious knowledge and therefore the ultimate standard for validating transmitted reports. Any narration that conflicts with the clear teachings, definitive meanings, or established principles of the Quran cannot be accepted as a valid interpretive source (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 28).

Rooted in the teachings of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a), this principle treats the Quran as the decisive criterion (*mīzān*) for distinguishing authentic from unauthentic narrations (Kulaynī 1986, 1:69). Consequently, the evaluation of exegetical reports begins with examining their consistency with Quranic teachings and objectives (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 28).

6.2. Evaluating Narrations through Reason

Reason (*ʿaql*) occupies a significant position in Ayatullah Khamenei's epistemological framework and serves as a complementary criterion for assessing narrations. He maintains that genuine revelation and sound reason cannot contradict one another because both originate from God. Therefore, narrations that imply logical contradictions, rational impossibilities, or conflict with self-evident rational principles cannot legitimately be attributed to the Prophet or the Imams (Khamenei, n.d; Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 29).

This approach allows reason to function not only as a means of understanding religious texts but also as a tool for critically evaluating and refining the transmitted exegetical tradition. Narrations inconsistent with divine wisdom, justice, or established rational principles are therefore subject to rejection or reinterpretation (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 29).

6.3. Assessing Narrations in Relation to Other Authentic Narrations

Another important criterion is the comparative evaluation of narrations within the broader corpus of authenticated ḥadīth literature. Ayatullah Khamenei emphasizes that no narration should be examined in

isolation; rather, it must be compared with other reliable reports transmitted from the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a) to determine consistency or contradiction among them (Ibid).

Where apparent conflicts arise, established principles of ḥadīth criticism—such as reconciliation (*jamʿ ʿurfī*), preference (*tarjīḥ*), and reference to the Quran—must be employed. This method prevents selective reliance on individual reports and promotes a more integrated understanding of Quranic teachings (see Ḥurr Amili 1988, 18:76; Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 29).

6.4. *Isnād* Criticism and the Examination of Transmission Chains

Ayatullah Khamenei also considers *isnād* criticism an essential component of narration evaluation. The attribution of a report to the Prophet or the Imams requires verification of its chain of transmission, and the mere presence of a narration in exegetical literature does not establish its authenticity (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 28). Accordingly, attention is given to the reliability of transmitters, continuity of transmission chains, credibility of sources, and biographical assessment through *rijāl* studies. Nevertheless, his methodology does not rely exclusively on isnād analysis. Alongside chain criticism, he places considerable emphasis on content analysis (*matn criticism*), evaluating narrations in light of Quranic teachings, rational principles, and supporting contextual evidence. Through this integrated approach, the authenticity and interpretive value of narrations are determined by both their transmission and their substantive coherence with the broader framework of Islamic teachings (Khamenei, n.d; Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī, 2024, 28).

6.5. Evaluating Narrations in Light of the Status of the Infallibles (a)

A significant criterion in Ayatullah Khamenei's critique of exegetical narrations is their consistency with the theological status of the Prophets and Imams. He maintains that some narrations attribute actions, characteristics, or forms of conduct to the Infallibles that are incompatible with their divinely granted knowledge, wisdom, and infallibility (*ʿiṣmah*). Such reports therefore cannot be accepted uncritically as reliable sources for Qur'anic interpretation (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 29).

Accordingly, any narration that undermines the intellectual, ethical, or spiritual stature of the Infallibles requires careful reassessment. This principle is particularly important in identifying and rejecting certain *Isrāʾīliyyāt* traditions and other reports that entered the exegetical heritage and portray prophets or Imams in ways inconsistent with their recognized theological rank (Khamenei, n.d).

6.6. Evaluating Narrations in Light of Human Dignity and the Spirit of Islam

Ayatullah Khamenei also evaluates narrations according to their compatibility with the overarching values and objectives of Islam. In his view, the Quran is fundamentally grounded in principles such as justice, human dignity, moral responsibility, freedom, and spiritual development. Consequently, narrations that conflict with these foundational values cannot serve as valid bases for religious understanding (Khamenei, 2007; Riḍāʾī Iṣfahānī 2024, 29).

This criterion is especially relevant in assessing weak or fabricated reports that present degrading, irrational, or unjust portrayals of human beings. Within this framework, broader Quranic principles and the higher objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*) function as important standards for determining the validity and interpretive relevance of narrations (Riḍāʾī Iṣfahānī, 2024, 29).

6.7. Historical Evaluation of Exegetical Narrations

The final major criterion in Ayatollah Khamenei's methodology is the historical evaluation of narrations. He recognizes that political, social, and cultural developments throughout Islamic history have influenced the transmission, interpretation, and, in some cases, fabrication of certain reports. Therefore, narrations must be examined within their historical context to avoid inaccurate conclusions (Riḍāʾī Iṣfahānī, 2024, 30).

This approach considers factors such as the period of transmission, political circumstances, possible motives for fabrication, the influence of intellectual and sectarian trends, and patterns of transmission across different sources. Historical analysis is particularly valuable for identifying *Isrāʾīliyyāt* materials and narrations shaped by the political

environments of the Umayyad and Abbasid eras. As a result, it contributes to the purification and refinement of the exegetical tradition (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 30).

In summary, Ayatollah Khamenei's framework for critiquing exegetical narrations is founded upon seven interrelated criteria: (1) conformity with the Qur'an, (2) consistency with sound reason, (3) comparison with other authenticated narrations, (4) examination of transmission chains (*isnād*), (5) compatibility with the status of the Infallibles, (6) conformity with human dignity and the spirit of Islam, and (7) historical analysis. Together, these criteria reflect a systematic, rational, and ijtihād-based methodology that seeks to ensure the authenticity and reliability of the transmitted exegetical heritage while safeguarding Quranic interpretation from distortion and methodological error.

7. A Systemic Analysis of the Principles and Rules of Interpretation in Ayatollah Khamenei's Exegetical Theory

An examination of Ayatullah Khamenei's Quranic works and methodological discussions indicates that his interpretive thought constitutes a coherent and integrated exegetical theory rather than a collection of isolated views. This theory is structured around a systematic relationship between foundational assumptions, interpretive principles, and methodological approaches, ultimately facilitating the production of social, civilizational, and Quran-based knowledge. Its internal coherence demonstrates a comprehensive epistemological framework capable of addressing both traditional and contemporary challenges (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 24).

7.1. The Internal Structure of the Exegetical Theory

Ayatullah Khamenei's interpretive theory may be understood through three interconnected levels. The first level consists of exegetical foundations, including belief in the Quran's miraculous nature and preservation, the authority of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a), the validity of reason, the comprehensiveness of Quranic guidance, and the Quran's scientific and epistemic authority. These foundations provide the epistemological basis for interpretation (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 26).

The second level comprises interpretive principles and rules, such as contextual analysis (*siyāq*), application and extension (*jary wa taṭbīq*), *baṭn*-oriented interpretation, *istinṭāq al-Qur'ān*, and literary and linguistic principles. These serve as practical mechanisms that connect theoretical assumptions with the process of deriving meaning from the Quran (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 49).

The third level involves interpretive methodologies, including Quran-by-Quran interpretation, narrational and rational exegesis, scientific interpretation, and the comprehensive *ijtihād*-based method. The interaction among these three levels produces a multidimensional framework that addresses not only the apparent meanings of the Quran but also its broader epistemological, social, and civilizational implications (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 52).

7.2. The Relationship between Foundations, Principles, and Methods

A defining characteristic of Ayatullah Khamenei's theory is the systematic relationship between its components. Foundational assumptions generate interpretive principles, while those principles guide the application of specific methodologies. For instance, belief in the comprehensiveness and guidance-oriented nature of the Qur'an gives rise to the principle of *istinṭāq*, which is then operationalized through thematic and ijtihād-based exegesis (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 70).

Similarly, belief in the Quran's scientific authority supports the use of *baṭn*-oriented interpretation and *jary wa taṭbīq*, since a text capable of addressing all ages cannot be confined solely to its original historical context. Likewise, the principle of the inseparability of the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt underpins both the narrational method and the critical evaluation of narrations. These interconnections reveal an integrated epistemological system rather than a collection of independent interpretive tools.

7.3. The Position of *Istinṭāq* and *Baṭn*-Oriented Interpretation

Among the various interpretive principles employed by Ayatollah Khamenei, *istinṭāq al-Qur'ān* and *baṭn*-oriented interpretation occupy a particularly central place. *Istinṭāq* reflects an active and problem-

oriented engagement with the Quran aimed at deriving guidance for contemporary issues. It is founded on the assumption that the Quran is a living text capable of responding to changing historical and social conditions (Khamenei, 2021; Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 92).

Baṭn-oriented interpretation complements this principle by emphasizing the existence of deeper layers of meaning beyond the apparent text. Together, these principles move Quranic interpretation beyond a purely literal approach and enable the extraction of theories, concepts, and solutions relevant to modern challenges. As such, they constitute two of the most innovative and influential elements of Ayatollah Khamenei's interpretive framework (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 50).

7.4. The Capacity for Quranic Knowledge Production

A major implication of Ayatollah Khamenei's exegetical theory is its potential to generate Quran-based knowledge and contribute to the development of Islamic human sciences. Within this framework, the Quran is regarded not only as a source of spiritual guidance and legal rulings but also as a foundational reference for theory construction and knowledge production (Khamenei, 2013; Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 97).

Through principles such as *istinṭāq*, *jary wa taṭbīq*, and *baṭn*-oriented interpretation, Qur'anic paradigms can be derived in areas such as politics, economics, culture, education, social justice, and governance. Consequently, the theory provides a methodological basis for interdisciplinary studies and the formulation of knowledge systems grounded in a tawḥīd-centered worldview.

7.5. Epistemological and Civilizational Implications of the Exegetical Theory

Ayatullah Khamenei's exegetical theory carries significant epistemological and civilizational implications. Epistemologically, it expands Quranic studies beyond traditional textual analysis toward theory generation and the resolution of contemporary intellectual problems. The Quran is thus viewed not merely as an object of study but as a dynamic source of knowledge and intellectual renewal (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 98).

At the civilizational level, the theory redefines the relationship between the Quran, society, and history by placing concepts such as justice, resistance, unity, independence, progress, and Islamic civilization-building at the center of interpretation. As a result, Quranic exegesis becomes directly connected to social reform and civilizational development (Khamenei, 2010; Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī 2024, 99).

In this framework, the Quran is understood as a guide for constructing individuals, societies, and civilizations. The ultimate outcome is the transformation of the Quran from a text primarily studied for its meanings into an active source of knowledge production, guidance, and civilization-building. Accordingly, Ayatullah Khamenei's exegetical theory may be regarded as an emerging paradigm in contemporary Quranic studies—one that remains rooted in the principles of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a) school while simultaneously addressing the intellectual and civilizational needs of the modern world.

Conclusion

This study examined the epistemological foundations, interpretive principles, and methodological rules of Quranic exegesis in the thought of Martyr Ayatullah Sayyid Ali Khamenei and found that his exegetical theory represents a coherent hermeneutical framework rooted in the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a) tradition and adapted to contemporary Quranic studies. Its foundations include the perpetual miraculous nature and preservation of the Quran, the inseparability of the Quran and the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a), the authority of authentic narrations, the validity of reason, and the comprehensiveness of Quranic guidance.

Methodologically, his approach integrates contextual analysis (*siyāq*), application and extension (*jarī wa taṭbīq*), semantic depth (*baṭn*), Qur'anic interrogation (*istinṭāq al-Qurʾān*), and the combined use of linguistic, rational, narrational, and ijtihād-based methods. A defining feature of this framework is its view of the Quran as an epistemic and civilizational source capable of knowledge production and the reconstruction of the human sciences.

The study also shows that Ayatullah Sayyid Ali Khamenei adopts a critical evaluative method toward exegetical narrations, assessing them

through Quranic conformity, rational scrutiny, authenticated traditions, isnād criticism, ethical consistency, and historical context. Overall, his exegetical theory may be characterized as Quran-centered, rational, *ijtihād*-based, and problem-oriented, making it a significant contemporary contribution to the *Ahl al-Bayt* school of *tafsīr*.

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