



Criticism of the Theory of Historicity of the Quran by Focusing on the Quranic Thoughts of Imam Khamenei



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Abstract

Historicism means the limitation of the Quran and its teachings to the recent era and being influenced by the cultural conditions of that community. The limitation of religion and its teachings to the recent era, the ineffectiveness of religion for today's society, and the relativism of the understanding of the Quran are among the important results of this theory. The negative consequences of this theory make the necessity of its criticism clearer. In addition, knowing the foundations and thoughts of Imam Khamenei in comparison to this theory can be considered as a correct and reliable Quranic and Islamic basis. Therefore, in addition to criticizing the arguments of the historicists' view of the Quran, the present article is organized such that it also studies the views of Ayatollah Khamenei in this regard. This research shows that historical verses, occasions of revelation (asbāb al-nuzūl), and apparent contradictions of some verses with scientific findings are the main reasons for historicists' claims. The Holy Quran never accepted the superstitions and false cultures of its era. In addition, the relation of some verses with the occasions of revelation cannot be considered proof of the historicism of the Quran. This is because there are many verses in the Quran for which there are no occasions of revelation, hence it is also necessary to distinguish between the occasions of revelation and the context of revelation. The negation of the historicism of the Quran is quite clear in Imam Khamenei's Quranic thoughts. General guidance of the Quran, comprehensiveness of Quranic teaching, and the Prophet's lifestyle are the significant reasons for the negation of historicism in Imam Khamenei's speeches.

Keywords: Historicism of the Quran, Criticism of historicism, Quranic thoughts of Imam Khamenei, Imam Khamenei, Historicism.

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Introduction

Historicism means the confinement of the Quran and its teachings to the recent era and the impact of the cultural conditions of the community on the Quran. The limitation of religion and its teachings to the recent era, the ineffectiveness of religion for today's society, and the relativism of the understanding of the Quran are among the important results of this Theory. Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei is a prominent jurist and Quranic scholar of the present era. He always mentions the Quran as the book of life and guidance in all eras and emphasizes the spread of Quranic thinking and religious teachings in society. Therefore, the present article is organized so that, in addition to criticizing the arguments of the historicism view of the Quran, it also examines the view of Ayatollah Khamenei in this regard.

The destructive consequences of the theory of historicism of the Quran and the spread of this thought, especially among the thoughts of young people, make it necessary to recognize and criticize this point of view. In addition, knowing the foundations and thoughts of Imam Khamenei against this theory can be considered a correct and reliable Quranic and Islamic basis.

Some works have been written about the theory of the historicism of the Quran and its criticism, including the book "Historicism and Religion" by Mohammad Arab Salehi and the thesis "Criticism of the Historicism of the Quran" by Abazar Kafi Mousavi, and the article "Fundamentals: The theory of historicism of religious teachings and its criticism" by Huma Barati. But among these works, there is no work that, in addition to criticizing the arguments of the theory of historicism, compares this theory with the Quranic thoughts of Imam Khamenei and pays attention to the differences in their views and Basis.

The historicity of the Holy Quran

Two senses have been mentioned for the term historicism. The first term, which is less common, means trying to discover fixed, definite, and general laws from the text of history to predict future events. This sense was invented by Karl Popper and he admitted that no one but himself used it



(Crai, 1998, 3: 24; Amico, 1989, 20). But the second sense, which is the main and common meaning of historicism, means a historical attitude to phenomena and events related to humans. Generally, historicism means being influenced by time and place. According to this point of view, a historical phenomenon is limited to the conditions of its own time and place and it is either inapplicable to other times, places, and conditions or loses the main effectiveness of its era, such as the historical artifacts in a museum. The main origin of historicism goes back to the philosophical hermeneutics that some persons, such as Heidegger and Carl Page are among its proponents (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 278, 432-434; Carl Page, 1995, pp. 130, 47-50).

The historicity of the Quran means that the Quran is produced by historical conditions or at least historical conditions are effective in the quality and quantity of its teachings. In addition, the followers of this view believe that the Quran is fallible because it is the product of the Prophet's understanding and the prophet is not superhuman.

Among the contemporaries who believe in the historicity of the Quran, the following names can be mentioned: Nasr Hamed Abu Zaid, Amin al-Khouli, Hassan Hanafi (Egypt), Abed al-Jabari (Morocco), Muhammad Arkoun (Algeria), and Adel Zahir (Lebanon). In Iran, Mujtahid Shabistari, Abdul Karim Soroush, Mostafa Malekian, and Habibullah Peyman are contemporary believers in the theory of the historicism of the Quran.

In his works, Abu Zaid refers to the historicity of the Quran with Different phrases. He considers the Quran to be the product of interaction with historical reality (Abu Zaid, 2001, 145) and clarifies that the text of the Quran in its essence is a cultural and historical product (Ibid, pp. 505-506). He also says: "The Quran is a 7th-century text and we cannot expect a 7th-century text to conform to the principles and rules of the 20th century" (Abu Zaid, 2006).

It is clear that historicism leads to the negation of religion and any moral teachings. For example, Ernst Troeltsch believes that everything can be seen in the process of history and becoming. Politics, religion, ethics,

and faith are all canceled in the process of becoming and can only be understood as historical components (Edward, 1976, 3: 22-33). Wilhelm Dilthey also considers man to be the creator of concepts of the universe including religion, faith, and art (Clouser, 1996, 4).

Evidence of Historicism and Its Criticism

Several proofs have been mentioned for the historicity of the Holy Quran. Among these proofs, one can mention the claim of the historicity of certain verses of the Quran, the occasions of revelation (asbāb al-nuzūl), and contradictions between some verses and scientific findings.

1. Historicity of Certain Verses

Abu Zaid points to some historical examples that show the historicity of the teachings and verses of the Quran. Among these cases, one can refer to "jinn" "kursī," and "siḥr" (Abu Zaid 2004, pp. 211-212; 2001, pp. 79-80).

He also has a similar view about "revelation" and believes in the historicity of revelation. He explains the phenomenon of revelation as follows:

The phenomenon of revelation has a deep basis in Arab culture, and it is the possibility of human relationship with angels, demons, and jinn from other worlds. (Abu Zaid, 2001, 91)

Soroush also mentions the verses related to the seven heavens are examples of the historicity of the Quran (Soroush, 2007).

Analysis

In addition to being an old and weak argument, arguing that some verses are historical to prove the historicity of the Quran, this view shows the superficiality of the arguer about the collection of Quranic verses and religious teachings. This is because although the Holy Quran has used people's vernaculars in some verses to highlight its supreme goal to guide people, there is no indication or sign of accepting the superstitions of the Arab culture in the Quran, rather the Quran has directly confronted their false cultures, such as rejecting the belief in the divinity of demons and



making them partners with God in (Sūra al-An‘ām: 100) and other examples in the Holy Quran (The Quran 36: 158).

In addition, many verses in the Quran indicate that both the Prophet and the Quran were never influenced by the culture and conditions of their time. They indicate that the Quran has been but the intact Divine revelation. Therefore, it is not possible to influence its wording or meaning (The Quran 53: 3- 4; 16: 44; 27: 6; 26: 192-195; 46: 9).

The Holy Quran not only never accepted the superstitions and false cultures of its era, but it has also confronted them in many cases. However, how can one believe in the historicity of the Quran and its influence from the culture of its era?

2. Occasions of Revelation

Another piece of evidence to prove the historicity of the Quran pertains to the occasions of revelation. Since most of the verses of the Quran were revealed in the context of historical events, they are strongly influenced by the conditions of the same historical event. Abu Zaid says:

Occasions of revelation are one of the most important pieces of knowledge that show the interaction between the Quranic text and reality. The Quranic text is a response and a reaction to rejecting or accepting external reality. (Abu Zaid, 2001, 179)

Abu Zaid considers the Quran as a cultural and historical product (Ibid, pp. 68, 505-506) and emphasizes the influence exerted on the Quran by the culture of the revelation era (Abu Zaid, 2004, 113). He states that the Quranic text is the product of interaction with the living historical reality. (Ibid, 45).

Abu Zaid considers the occasions of revelation as one of the reasons for the historicity of the Quran. Therefore, he considers the historical verses of the Quran invalid which merely function as historical evidence. He states that some verses, including the verses about of slavery and its laws, the women's laws, and the laws of relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, are merely historical verses (Abu Zaid 2004, pp. 286-309).



Soroush also points to the occasions of revelation in proving the historicity of the Quran. He considers the Quran to be a creation of the events of the revelation era, and by referring to the occasions of revelation of some verses, he says:

The Quran is based on the events of revelation. For example, the battle of Uhud or Hunain takes place, then its verses are revealed. They slander the Prophet's wife, then the verses of "ifk" are revealed. Abu Lahab and his wife harassed the Prophet, then the Sūra al-Masad was revealed. People had questions from the Prophet and the revelation answered them; ignorant Arab culture has certain requirements and related verses are revealed. (Soroush, 1999, pp. 20-23)

Mustafa Malekian is another proponent of the historicity of the Quran, who believes that the influence of the geographical features of the revelation area on the quality of religious teachings is probable (Malekian, 2006, pp. 401-402).

Analysis

The relation of some verses with the occasions of revelation cannot be considered any proof of the historicity of the Quran, for there are no occasions of revelation for many verses of the Quran. Contrary to Abu Zaid's claim, there are no occasions of revelation for this group of verses and they are directly articulated by God. Among these cases, we can refer to certain historical verses of the Quran that describe the history of the past nations or certain verses related to the resurrection, heaven, and hell. In addition to this, the existence of some important incidents and events during the era of revelation that took place without the revelation of even a single verse shows that the Quran had a specific purpose in describing events.

It is also necessary to distinguish between the occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and the context of revelation (*ẓarf al-nuzūl*). The occasions of revelation refer to the grounds for revelation, and commentators have also expressed the same meaning (Javādī Āmulī, 2010, 1: 235). Therefore, the occasions of revelation will not have any relation



with historicism. This is because the occasions of revelation only affect the time of revelation and the order of the verses, not the content. In addition, the Quran has not mentioned the characteristics and details of historical events, it has expressed the generalities and the main message of that event. This shows that the verses of the Quran are not limited to their occasions of revelation and have a universal message beyond such occasions. In a hadith quoted from Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir, this point is well illustrated: "If a verse that was revealed about a people were to die after the death of that people, nothing would remain of the Quran, but 'as long as the heavens and the earth remain,' the entire Quran shall remain" (‘Ayashī 2001, 1:10; Fayḍ Kāshānī 1994, 1:24; Bahrānī 1995, 1:49).

3. Contradictions of Some Verses with Scientific Findings

Contradictions of some verses with scientific findings is another piece of evidence to prove the historicity of the Quran. Some of these contradictions are mentioned below:

3. 1. Theory of the Seven Heavens

God refers to the seven heavens in many verses of the Holy Quran. In the Sura al-Ṭalāq, He says: "Allah is He Who created the seven heavens" (The Quran, 65:12). In this regard, it has been claimed that the theory of the seven heavens agrees with Ptolemy's cosmology, which was the common theory of the era of the revelation of the Quran. Today, the invalidity of Ptolemy's system has become clear to everyone, and the Quran has gone wrong in this regard.

Abdul Karim Soroush says:

The story of the Seven Heavens is even very much evident. Without exception, all previous commentators applied it readily and easily to Ptolemy's cosmological theories. (And why shouldn't they? All appearances indicate it) and it is only in the 19th and 20th centuries that new commentators of the Quran thought of a new interpretation of these verses and presented new and doubtful meanings. (Soroush, 2006)



Analysis

Several answers have been given in response to the above claim:

1. The Quran specifies the creation of the seven heavens, but nowhere does it mention Ptolemy's cosmology.

2. Based on the scientific findings, the invalidity of two issues has been clarified: 1. Ptolemy's theory 2. The commentators' interpretation of the verses of the Seven Heavens and their application of Ptolemy's system. It is possible to judge the error of the Quran in this regard when one either maintains that the Quran refers to the same theory as Ptolemy's cosmology or the human intellect rejects the existence of seven heavens. Therefore, the scientific contradiction of the Quran is not proven, and just the words of certain commentators of the above verse will be discredited.

3. According to Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī view about this verse, apparent meaning of the Quran is that the first heaven is the sky of the world, and of the other six heavens did not bring any other information except the principle of its existence (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1972, 10: 150).

3. 2. Creation of the Universe in Six Days

God has specified the creation of the world in six days in the verses of the Quran several times with the phrase “سِتَّةَ أَيَّامٍ” (*sittati ayyāmin*) such as in the *Sūra al-Furqān*. He asserts thus: “He, Who created the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them in six days, and then settled on the Throne” (The Quran, 25: 59). This appears against the scientists' claim because science says that it took billions of years for the earth and heaven to reach their current state.

Analysis

In response to this claim, it should be said that what science has reached (if it is correct and certain) does not contradict what is stated in the Quran. Because what is meant by “يوم” (*yawm*) cannot be restricted to the notion of the day and night, as used nowadays among us. This issue is clarified by paying attention to the multiple meanings of the word “يوم”. This word sometimes means the amount of time from sunrise to sunset, and



sometimes it is applied to any amount of time (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 2016, 894). Allama Ṭabāṭabā'ī considers the meaning of this word to be “a period of time”. In addition to the fact that the Quranic and hadith-based uses of this word also confirm this (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1972, 10: 150). “Yawm al-Qīyāmah” (يوم القيامة) is translated as a very long period, which in some hadiths has been interpreted as fifty thousand years. Other hadiths also refer to the same meaning. (Ibn Shu'ba, 1983: 207)

3. 3. Epilepsy, the Result of Satan's contact with Human

According to the Holy Quran, (*Sūra al-Baqarah*: 275): “Those who exact usury will not stand but like one deranged by the Devil's touch,” the usurers are likened to someone who has an epileptic seizure due to Satan's contact with him. In addition, this simile refers to the effect of Satan on the human body or soul; but scientific findings found other material causes for epilepsy that do not confirm the opinion of the Quran. Therefore, this verse is also considered to be in contradiction with scientific findings.

Analysis

In criticizing the above claim, the findings of experimental science can only prove other causes for epilepsy and insanity, but it cannot negate or prove the influence of Satan, for such phenomena cannot be tested empirically. In many cases of epilepsy or insanity, doctors are unable to find its cause(s) and are unable to treat it. In addition, there is no reason to negate the influence of Satan and jinn on the human body or soul, hence there is no obstacle.

Allama Ṭabāṭabā'ī maintains that ascribing insanity to the devil's touch does not necessarily mean that the devil functions directly. Rather, the devil also uses the same material and natural tools, such as disturbing the nerves or damaging the brain to fulfill his purposes (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1972, 2: 412).

The Historicity of the Quran from the Perspective of Imam Khamenei

Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei is considered a prominent jurist and Quranic scholar of the present era, as he was also a disciple of Allama

Ṭabāṭabā'ī. In 1968, he started teaching Quran exegesis in the Mashhad. Various topics on individual and social aspects of tafsir of the Quran can be found in his lectures. Most of his statements are based on Quranic verses, and he always emphasizes understanding and practicing Quranic teachings.

The negation of the historicity of the Quran is quite clear in Imam Khamenei's Quranic thoughts and reflections. Some of his views are as follows:

1. The General Guidance of the Quran

Ayatollah Khamenei always mentions the Quran as the book of life and guidance in all eras. In this regard, he observes: “The guidance of the Quran is not limited to a limited area of human life; Quranic guidance is related to all the vast scope of human life.” (Khamenei’s statements at a meeting of the participants in the Qur'an competitions, 14/04/1390). He states: “From the point of view of Islam, the management of people's and society's affairs is based on the guidance of Quranic teachings and divine laws” (Khamenei’s statements at the presidential inauguration ceremony, 11/05/1380).

2. Comprehensiveness of Quranic Teachings

Ayatollah Khamenei considers the comprehensiveness of the teachings of the Quran as another reason for its non-historicism. Concerning the issues related to human life, Ayatollah Khamenei holds that there is no significant point unless the Quran has touched it upon (Khamenei’s Statements in the meeting of the youth of North Khorasan province, 23/07/1391).

He considers the Quran to be the guarantee of felicity both in this world and in the hereafter and believes that the Quran concerns various issues of life such as politics, economy, government, and so on (Khamenei’s statements at the gathering of familiarity with the Holy Qur'an, 25/01/1400).

Referring to the Quran's concern about the political and social challenges and its stand against oppressors, he considers this issue proof



of the necessity of the Quran's rule over society. He says in this regard:

The Quran itself does not step aside in any way when it comes to political-social challenges. And it does not refrain from confronting the Rebel (*tāghūt*) the arrogant, the wasteful, and the oppressors. It has always confronted them. The Quran's guidance is not particular to a limited domain in human life. Quranic guidance covers all the domains of human life. It is not the case that the Quran guides people in one field but leaves them alone in another essential field. No, the Quran deals with all aspects and corners of human life. (Khamenei's statements at the annual Ramadan Quranic meeting, 14/04/2021)

Also, He says:

How unaware are those who think that the Quran has nothing to do with matters of life, politics, economics, and government? Those who limit Islam to personal matters have not understood Islam and the Quran. The Quran does not dissociate itself from socio-political challenges and does not avoid confronting tyrants, arrogant powers, and oppressors. (Ibid.)

3. Prophet's Lifestyle

Ayatollah Khamenei considers the Prophet's lifestyle as a confirmation of the negation of the historicity of the Quran. He says:

If Islam and the Quran were not supposed to rule, then what was the Prophet's struggle for? ... The Prophet's fight was over political power and seizing power through the Quran. (Khamenei's statements at the meeting with the officials of the country, 04/06/1373)

4. The Quran's Rule: The Prerequisite for the Fulfillment of the Reappearance of Imam Mahdi

Ayatollah Khamenei considers the rule of the Quran as the prerequisite for the fulfillment of the reappearance and says in this regard:

True awaiting requires preparing the ground for the reappearance. Preparing the ground for the reappearance (of the Twelfth Infallible Imam al-Mahdī) means acting in accordance with Islamic rules. And



this is only possible with the rule of Islam and the Holy Quran. In a society that is awaiting, the rules and regulations should become closer to Islam on a daily basis in terms of both form and content. (Khamenei's Statements in the meeting with the people of Qom, 30/11/1370)

Conclusions

The results of the present research are as follows:

1. This article analyses the theory of historicity of the Holy Quran through focusing on the Quranic thoughts of Imam Khamenei.
2. The historicity of the Quran means that the Quran is formed by historical conditions or at least historical conditions that are effective in the quality and quantity of its teachings.
3. Historical verses, occasions of revelation (asbāb al-nuzūl), and contradictions of some verses with scientific findings are important historicism reasons.
4. The Holy Quran never accepted the superstitions and false cultures of its era.
5. The relation of some verses with the occasions of revelation cannot be considered proof of the historicity of the Quran because there are many verses in the Quran for which there are no occasions of revelation and it is also necessary to distinguish between the occasions of revelation and the context of revelation.
6. The negation of the historicity of the Quran is quite clear in Imam Khamenei's Quranic thoughts and words. General guidance of the Quran, comprehensiveness of Quranic teachings, and the Prophet's lifestyle are important reasons for the negation of historicism in his speeches.

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