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A Comparative Analysis of the Quranic Foundations of Imam Khamenei and Andrew Rippin

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The Quran is the eternal miracle of the Prophet Muhammad and contains the plan for the guidance and salvation of mankind. Many Orientalists, including Rippin, view this divine book and eternal miracle as a literary text and examine it with such an assumption. This research aims to comparatively analyze some of the Quranic foundations of Imam Khamenei and Andrew Rippin through a descriptive-analytical approach to highlight the authentic Quranic foundations compared with the views of Orientalists. Some of Rippin's Quranic foundations are as follows: The Quran is neither a Divine book nor an eternal miracle; the Quran does not present any exegetical method for its interpretation; the difference in readings is a justification for the Quran's miraculousness; the occasions of revelation are merely literary devices. In contrast, Imam Khamenei regards the Quran as a guiding book that is not limited to any specific time or place; he believes in the linguistic and semantic miraculousness and inimitability of Quranic verses and the wisdom behind their arrangement; he examines the difference in readings through appropriate means such as verifying the authenticity of narrators, the context of verses, and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad; he considers the occasions or context of revelation as appropriate devices for a better understanding of the verses. As long as Orientalists such as Rippin are not guided into the revelatory nature of the Quran, one should not expect them to have a correct understanding and a fair evaluation of the Quran and its verses.

Keywords: Imam Khamenei, Andrew Rippin, nature of the Quran, Orientalists, occasions of revelation, diversity of readings.

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Introduction

The Quran, as a miracle, is the book of divine guidance sent by Allah to the seal of prophets, Muhammad. Muslims consider this book as an eternal miracle that includes the plan for the felicity of mankind in both this world and the hereafter. Imam Khamenei, the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as a knowledgeable and wise scholar, an exegete, and a Quranic expert, has opened a window into the boundless teachings of this eternal miracle through his statements and books. By examining his speeches, one can find coherent intellectual foundations regarding the nature, position, doctrines, and application of the Quran in individual and social human life.

Andrew Rippin (1950–2016) was born on May 16, 1950, in London. After completing elementary and high school education, he entered the University of Toronto in 1968 and studied religious sciences at this university until 1974. In the same year, he went to McGill University to pursue his master's degree. In this university, Rippin turned to Islamic studies and turned his attention to the Quranic sciences. His main field of study and research is Quranic studies and interpretation (Rippin, 2023).

Some of Rippin's works are as follows: monographs including *The Qurʾan and Its Interpretive Tradition* as well as three special essays on the *Qurʾan*, *Tafsir,* and *Theology* for the Oxford Bibliographies series; edited collections including *The Blackwell Companion to the Qurʾan*; textbooks including *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*; and sourcebooks including *Classical Islam: A Sourcebook of Religious Literature* (El-Badawi 2017, 156).

Since the views of prominent Orientalists, such as Rippin, have a considerable influence on deviating from genuine Quranic thoughts or presenting an unrealistic image of the Quran and its profound teachings,

understanding and examining Rippin's ideas in comparison to Imam Khamenei's Quranic thoughts plays an important role in highlighting the fundamental deficiencies and mistakes of Rippin and some Orientalists who share his view. Through a comparative study of some Quranic intellectual foundations of Imam Khamenei and Andrew Rippin, this article attempts to highlight the root weaknesses and flaws of Rippin's intellectual foundations and present the authentic Quranic foundations based on Imam Khamenei's statements.

Background

One of the important theses written about Rippin is "*Naqd-i mabānī wa rawish-i muṭāliʿāti-ye* Andrew Rippin" [Critique of the Foundations and Methods of Rippin's Quranic Studies] (2012) by Parviz Azadi, which thoroughly critiques Rippin's Quranic foundations. In the article, "*Naqd-i mabānī muṭāliʿāti-ye* Andrew Rippin" [Critique of the Foundations and Methods of Rippin's Quranic Studies] (2020) by Parviz Azadi, in *Muṭāliāt Islāmī dar jahān-I muāṣir* [Islamic Studies in the Contemporary World], Issue 1, some of Rippin's foundations such as the influence of the Bible on the Quran, allegorical words in the Quran, occasions of revelation, different readings (*qirā'at*), and compilation of the Quran two centuries after the Prophet are addressed, and the writer explains Rippin's theories well with reference to his various works. In the article, "*Taḥlīl-i intiqādī-ye maqāli-ye 'Shutur yā Rismān' niwishti-ye Andrew Rippin*" [A Critical Analysis of Andrew Rippin's Article 'Camel or Rope'] (2020) by Sayyid Muhammad Hussayni Pour, in *Qur'ān pajūhī-ye khāwarshināsān* [The Quran from Orientalists' point of view], Issue 28, an attempt has been made to critically examine Rippin's claim while examining the term "*Jamal*" [camel], the background of its various readings, the authenticity of the famous reading and its conformity with the reading of the Prophet

is proven. In the article, "*Naqd-i maqāli-ye ʿAbzārhāʾī barāye muṭāliʿi-ye ʿilmī-ye Qurʾānʾ* Andrew Rippin" [A Critique of Andrew Rippin's Article, 'Tools for the Scholarly Study of the Qur'an'] (2017) by Sayyid Kamal Keshik-nevis Razawi, in *Qurʾān pajūhī-ye khāwarshināsān* [The Quran from Orientalists' point of view], Issue 22, the author refers to some of the shortcomings of Rippin's article, such as not referring to the Quranic software, books on Quranic sciences, exegetical hadiths, and in general, insufficient research by Rippin.

What distinguishes this article from other research is its comparative approach, which attempts to examine some of Rippin's important Quranic foundations in comparison to the opinions of Imam Khamenei so that the authentic Quranic foundations can be made clear for seekers of truth. Some of these foundations are as follows:

1. The Nature of the Quran

1.1. Andrew Rippin

In his article "God," Rippin writes: "Assessing the 'poetic' (or 'mythical' or 'religious') nature of the Qurʾān commences with an understanding that the text of scripture is an expression, distilled at a particular historical point in time, of human religious experience located within the broad context of the Near East. The Qurʾān participates within this context but does not depict all of it. It presents arguments and positions from within the overall context but it does not provide the reader with the full vision of that religious ethos" (Rippin 2017, 237).

1.2. Imam Khamenei

Unlike Rippin, who considers the Quran as a reflection of certain customs

in the social context of the Near East during a specific period of history and criticizes it for not being able to fully portray these customs and norms (ibid), Imam Khamenei considers the Quran as a guiding book whose stories are full of lessons and messages that are not limited to a specific time, culture, or place. For example, Imam Khamenei about the story of Jonah states:

Look at the story of Jonah in the Quran, the great divine prophet [who] became angry with his people. As far as we are concerned, he did not act irrationally, he had been inviting them into guidance for years, but they persisted in disbelief and deviation. So, what else could he have done? He became angry and left [them]. But from a divine perspective, he should not have become angry: ﴿وَ ذَا النُّونِ إِذْ ذَهَبَ مُغاضِباً فَظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ نَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ فَنادى فِي الظُّلُماتِ أَنْ لا إِلهَ إِلاَّ أَنْتَ سُبْحانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ﴾ (الانبياء/۸۷): "And the Man of the Fish, when he left in a rage, thinking that We would not put him to hardship. Then he cried out in the darkness, 'There is no god except You!'" (Quran 21:87). God Almighty afflicted him with that strange incident, which if he had not recited this invocation, he would not have resorted to this supplication, ﴿لَلَبِثَ فِي بَطْنِهِ إِلى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ﴾ (الصافات/۱۴۴): "he would have surely remained in its belly till the day they will be resurrected" (Quran 37:144). He was apt to remain there until the Day of Judgment; see! As he is a prophet, his punishment is more severe than others. If we have a responsibility and do not act, Almighty God will deal with us. ﴿فَظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ نَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ﴾: "He thought that we would not put him to hardship," (Quran 21:87), but no, we deal harshly [with our prophets]. Allah deals harshly [with them]. If you are a poet, if you are a eulogist, if you are a speaker, if you are a preacher, the higher your knowledge and spiritual rank, the more is expected of you in the court of divine justice and in the presence of God. We must always keep this in mind;

we must also ask God for help. (Khamenei 2020, Statements in Meeting with Ahlulbayt Eulogists, 26/11/1398)

Analysis

Rippin's incorrect understanding of the nature of the Quran as an eternal miracle of the Prophet and a book of guidance and felicity for humanity has led him to consider the Quran as a book belonging to a specific geography and period of history that does not fully reflect the customs, mentality, and culture of the people of that time. Imam Khamenei, on the other hand, considers the Quran as a divine book including valuable messages which have to be extracted through contemplation and be applied in our lives today. For example, the story of Jonah reveals the proportionality of divine strictness and punishment with the spiritual rank of individuals. Such interpretations of the Quran are evidence of its eternal existence and vitality in human life because the teachings of the Quran are in line with human reason and nature, and it is logical and reasonable that each person should be held accountable according to his level of knowledge and understanding.

2. The Miraculousness of the Quran

2.1. Andrew Rippin

In the article, "A BAN IS UPON ANY TOWN," Rippin argues that using different readings of certain words in the Quran, along with complex grammatical explanations from interpreters, is under the pressures of the *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* (miraculousness of the Quran) doctrine (Rippin 1979, 53). According to him, "If the distinction between the 'J' and the 'E' strands of Genesis suggested, to some people, two literary texts being woven together, then, on the evidence of the Muslim tradition itself, the same

could be envisioned for the Quran: a weaving together of a text, involving duplications and abrupt breaks, just as in the Bible" (Rippin, 1992, 642).

2.2. Imam Khamenei

Imam Khamenei refers to two verses of the Quran in relation to its miraculousness:

﴿وَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ في رَيْبٍ مِمَّا نَزَّلْنا عَلى عَبْدِنا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِنْ مِثْلِهِ وَ ادْعُوا شُهَداءَ كُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صادِقينَ. فَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَ لَنْ تَفْعَلُوا فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتى وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَ الْحِجارَةُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْكافِرينَ﴾ (البقره/٢٣-٢٤)

"And if you are in doubt concerning what We have sent down to Our servant, then bring a surah like it, and invoke your helpers besides Allah, should you be truthful. And if you do not and you will not then beware the Fire whose fuel will be humans and stones, prepared for the faithless." (Quran 2: 23-24)

He then explains that the miracle during the time of Moses when magic was prevalent was appropriate for that time, and then during the time of Jesus when medical science was prevalent, it took on the form of healing incurable diseases and raising the dead. During the time of Prophet Muhammad, when eloquence was prevalent and their important art was speech, the miracle of the Quran, which was the pinnacle of eloquence, became evident (Khamenei 1992, Statements in the 25th session of the tafsir of *Sūra al-Baqarah*, 16/02/1371). He then says:

They have placed the miracle within the Quran itself. So when, as we mentioned, God says: ﴿فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِنْ مِثْلِهِ﴾: "bring a surah like it," (Quran 2:23), this is not unique to the early days of Islam. Even now, there is such a thing because they cannot do it now, while the experts

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in language acknowledge that the Quran is an extraordinary and prominent work; therefore: the miraculous nature of the Quran even after fourteen centuries remains perfectly intact. (ibid)

The Coherence and Wisdom of the Arrangement of Quranic Verses

Unlike some Orientalists like Rippin who consider the Quran as a handwritten script by Prophet Muhammad, one of the important foundations of the Muslim exegetes is the coherence and wisdom behind the arrangement of verses in the Quran based on Divine wisdom and revelation. Referring to the verse: ﴿إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَ إِنَّا لَهُ لَحافِظُونَ﴾ (الحجر/٩): "Indeed, We have sent down the Reminder, and indeed We will preserve it" (Quran 15:9), Ayatullah Maʿrifat believes that the arrangement and order of verses in the sūras of the Quran are considered to be a divine decree known as "tawqīfī," [meaning that they are fixed and cannot be changed] (Maʿrifat 2008, 1:278). He refers to reasons such as the challenge and miraculous aspects of the Quran, and the consensus among the Islamic community in all historical periods on the revelatory arrangement of the Quranic verses (ibid, 1: 279). Furthermore, he states that the order of the verses in each sūra is based on the order in which they were revealed, with rare exceptions where Prophet Muhammad, with God's permission, placed certain verses next to others due to their thematic relevance, even if they were revealed earlier (ibid, 1: 281). Therefore, not only are the words and meanings of the Quranic verses miraculous and divinely inspired, but even their arrangement within the sūras is also divinely inspired.

Imam Khamenei refers to this topic in his tafsir of the Quran. For example, he explains verse 60 of *Sūra Al-Tawbah*, which mentions that if there is a priority or delay in expressing two concepts or referring to two groups in the Quran, it is because of the superiority and emphasis that have existed in the first one, and this is due to the wise arrangement of the Quran

(Khamenei 2017, pp.16-17).

Analysis

There is a fundamental difference between Rippin's and Imam Khamenei's views on the miraculous nature of the Quran. Unlike Rippin, who considers the Quran as a sacred or literary text that Prophet Muhammad wrote during his lifetime, and considers its different readings as a justification for its miraculous aspect, Imam Khamenei believes that the Quran is an eternal miracle whose miraculousness and inimitability are still intact, as evidenced by Quranic verses that challenge and dare humanity to produce even a single sūra like it. Rippin's influence from the Bible and his approach towards the Quran have caused the miraculous aspect of the Quran to remain obscure to him, leading him to present matters such as differences in readings or evidence from the Bible as proof for his claims. However, if the Quran was truly a human creation, then after 14 centuries of progress and development, humans would have been able to produce something similar to it, which they are incapable of doing. Moreover, unlike Rippin who considers the Quran as a handwritten script, Imam Khamenei believes that the arrangement of the Quranic verses is based on divine wisdom and revelation.

3. Method of Interpreting the Quran

3.1. Andrew Rippin

Lack of an exegetical method in the Quran

Rippin introduces the Quran as a self-referenced book which provides little information to its readers about its interpretive strategies. He believes that the common method of studying the Quran among Orientalists is based on the Islamic community's internal framework, which is based on the

Prophet's biography and works well within the limits of its own presuppositions but getting outside the circle of interaction between the *Sīra* and the Quran seems impossible (Rippin 1991, pp. 153-154).

3.2. Imam Khamenei

3.2.1. Imam Khamenei's exegetical method

a) Ijtihādī (reason-based) method

From the presented materials, it can be inferred that Imam Khamenei's exegetical method is the ijtihādī method, which significantly relies on the Quran-by-Quran and hadith-oriented methods (Khamenei 2017, 1). The Ijtihādī method is to make intellectual efforts and use reasoning to understand the Quranic verses and achieve its objectives. In ijtihādī tafsir, emphasis is placed on intellect, opinion, and contemplation, while the hadith-oriented method places a greater emphasis on hadith (Maʿrifat 1997, 2: 349).

B) Quran-by-Quran method

The Quran-by-Quran method dates back to the early days of Islam and the Prophet's lifetime, and it was continued by the Infallibles. For example, when the Prophet was asked about "injustice" in verse ﴿وَ لَمْ يَلْبِسُوا إيمانَهُم بِظُلْمٍ﴾ (*Sūra al-Anʿām*/82): "they did not taint their faith with injustice," he responded by referring to verse ﴿إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظيمٌ﴾ (*Sūra Luqmān*/13): "Polytheism is indeed a great injustice" which shows that the meaning of "injustice" in the first verse is "polytheism" (Riḍā'ī-Iṣfahānī 2006, 51). Imam Khamenei's statements on tafsir indicate that one of his approved and used methods is the Quran-by-Quran method. For example, in interpreting the word "لمز" in verse:

﴿الَّذِينَ يَلْمِزُونَ الْمُطَّوِّعِينَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فِي الصَّدَقَاتِ وَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَجِدُونَ إِلاَّ جُهْدَهُمْ فَيَسْخَرُونَ مِنْهُمْ سَخِرَ اللَّهُ مِنْهُمْ وَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ﴾ (التوبه/۷۹)

"Those who blame the voluntary donors from among the faithful concerning the charities and as for those who do not find [anything] except [what] their means [permit], they ridicule them Allah shall put them to ridicule, and there is a painful punishment for them." (Quran 9: 79)

To explain the word "لمز" he refers to the verse: ﴿وَيْلٌ لِكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُمَزَةٍ﴾ (*Sūra al-Humaza*/1): "Woe to every scandal-monger and slanderer" and understands this word, which means "fault-finding," as being close in meaning to the word "همز" and he translates this verse as follows: "Woe to those who ridicule others; those who mock or find fault with others" (Khamenei 2017, 539).

C) Hadith-oriented method

In the famous hadith of *Thaqalayn*, the Prophet says:

«انى تارک فيكم الثقلين كتاب اللّه و اهل بيتى و انهما لن يتفرقا حتى يردا على الحوض»

"I leave among you two precious things: the Book of Allah and my Household, and these two will never separate from each other until they reach me near the Fountain [of *Kawthar* on the Day of judgment]." (Qummī 1983, 2: 447)

Quran and Ahlul Bayt are two inseparable realities that must be adhered to for guidance. Therefore, the hadiths of the Infallible Imams play an important role in understanding the Quranic verses. Imam Khamenei's use of the hadiths of the Infallibles in interpreting certain verses indicates his

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attention to the hadiths for understanding the Quranic verses. For example, in interpreting verse:

﴿إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقاتُ لِلْفُقَراءِ وَ الْمَساكينِ وَ الْعامِلينَ عَلَيْها وَ الْمُؤَلَّفَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَ فِي الرِّقابِ وَ الْغارِمينَ وَ فى سَبيلِ اللَّهِ وَ ابْنِ السَّبيلِ فَريضَةً مِنَ اللَّهِ وَ اللَّهُ عَليمٌ حَكيمٌ﴾ (التوبه/۶۰)

"Charities are only for the poor and the needy, and those employed to collect them, and those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and for [the freedom of] the slaves and the debtors, and in the way of Allah, and for the traveler. [This is] an ordinance from Allah, and Allah is all-knowing, all-wise." (Quran 9:60)

Imam Khamenei refers to a hadith from Imam Sadiq, which says:

عَنْ أَبِى عَبْدِ اَللَّهِ 7قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اَللَّهِ ﷺ: «أيما مؤمن أو مسلم مات و ترك دينا و لم يكن في فساد و لا إسراف فعلى الإمام أن يقضيه؛ فإن لم يقضه فعليه إثم ذلك؛ إن الله تبارك و تعالى يقول: (إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقاتُ لِلْفُقَراءِ وَ الْمَساكِينِ وَ الْعامِلِينَ عَلَيْها وَ الْمُؤَلَّفَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَ فِي الرِّقابِ وَ الْغارِمِينَ) فهو من الغارمين و له سهم عند الإمام فإن حبسه فإثمه عليه» (كلينى، الكافى، ۱۴۰۷ ق: ج۱ ص۴۰۷)

"Whichever Momin or Muslim dies and leaves debts which do not happen to be regarding corruption or extravagance, so it is upon the Imam that he fulfills it. Therefore, if he does not fulfill it, the sin of that would be upon him. Allah Blessed and High is Saying: (Charities are only for the poor and the needy, and those employed to collect them, and those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and for [the freedom of] the slaves and the debtors) [Quran 9:60] So he is from the debtors, and for him would be a share with the Imam, and if he were to withhold it, so its sin would be upon him." (Kulaynī 1986, 1: 407)

Imam Khamenei, then, states:

> In this hadith, there are several points that need to be discussed and carefully considered. The expressions of hadiths, like the Quran, are accurate since they have come from the Imam. If we were careful in dealing with such expressions, many truths would have been clear to us by now. Unfortunately, due to the lack of attention to the words of the Imams, many of their meanings are not clear to us (Khamenei 2017, 390).

Then, Imam Khamenei interprets the verse based on the hadith and concludes that the Imam in the hadith is not referring to the twelve Infallible Imams due to the phrase, «فعليه إثم ذلك»: "the sin of that would be upon him"; rather, by Imam we mean the ruler of society, because sin contradicts the position of infallibility, and also to clarify the meaning of Imam which is also used for an unjust ruler, other hadiths are cited as examples. (ibid, pp. 391-392).

3.2.2. The exegetical approach of Imam Khamenei

The prominent exegetical approach of Imam Khamenei is the socio-political approach with a guidance-educational orientation (ibid, 4). Some of the social characteristics of this approach are as follows: 1. Attention to verses that address social issues; 2. Finding solutions to social problems in the Quran; 3. Attention to the educational and guiding teachings of the Quran; 4. Paying attention to intellect and definitive knowledge in interpreting the Quran; 5. Use of eloquent and simple expressions; 6. Efforts to respond to opponents' doubts, and so on. (Riḍā'ī-Iṣfahānī 2006, pp. 348-349).

An example of addressing social issues in Imam Khamenei's school of

tafsir is evident in the tafsir of (*Sūra al-Tawbah*/103) and the explanation of the phrase«تُطَهِّرُهُمْ» : "purify them," which refers to expressing the effects of paying Zakat (alms). Social issues in Islam have also been discussed and addressed. The mention of (فى سَبيلِ اللَّهِ): "in the way of Allah" in the verse shows that the Islamic economic school has considered both the individual and the community (Khamenei 2017, 5). Another example is the response to doubts about the command to kill polytheists in verse 5 of *Sūra al-Tawbah* which is explained that the reason is that they obstruct the path to humanity and human salvation (ibid, 7). An instance of extracting the divine traditions from the verses following verse 2 of *Sūra al-Tawbah* has been explained, which states: «وَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ مُخْزِى الْكافِرِينَ» : "and that Allah shall disgrace the faithless," is considered as a Divine tradition which means that God will humiliate those who conceal the truth (ibid, 9). Furthermore, special attention is paid to the Quran's educational goals, and Imam Khamenei states that "Quranic teachings usually entail intellectual growth, meaning that while teaching the truths, they empower the soul. This is the method of the Quran that, through reminding the truths with a particular expression, prepares the soul for accepting great responsibilities. The characteristic of proper teaching is that it also contributes to [spiritual] growth" (ibid, 260). From the sum of the presented materials, it can be concluded that Imam Khamenei's exegetical method is the ijtihādī method which, significantly, makes use of both Quran-by-Quran and hadith-oriented methods in addition to intellectual and juristic reasoning (ibid, 1). It extracts important messages with a social approach from Quranic verses.

Analysis

Rippin believes that the Quran does not introduce an exegetical method. Moreover, he appears to believe that the only way to interact with the Quran and comprehend its verses, according to the Muslims, is through interaction with the *Sīra* of the Prophet. However, Imam Khamenei has a

very dynamic and practical approach to tafsir, which is evident in his exegetical method. He not only uses Quran-by-Quran and hadith-oriented methods but also employs the ijtihādī (reason-based) method and extracts valuable teachings from Quranic verses with a social and political approach. In addition, through his method of tafsir, he responds to doubts and refers to some divine traditions. Therefore, Unlike Rippin, who has not been able to comprehend the dynamic exegetical methods derived from the Quran, such as the Quran-by-Quran method -which Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, by referring to verse 89 of *Sūra al-Naḥl*, ﴿وَ نَزَّلْنا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتابَ تِبْياناً لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ﴾: "We have sent down the Book to you as a clarification of all things," believes that it is impossible for the Quran to clarify everything but does not clarify itself (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1996, 1: 11)- Imam Khamenei skillfully uses valid methods such as the Quran-by-Quran, hadith-oriented, and ijtihādī methods with a social and political approach and extracts valuable teachings from the Quranic verses. In addition, he pays attention to the Prophet's tradition, and wherever necessary in tafsir, he uses it if it is credible, valid, and consistent with the Quranic verses.

4. Differences in Quranic Readings

4.1. Andrew Rippin

In the article "A ban is upon any town," Rippin mentions in the footnote two exegetical views about "*Yarjiʿūn*" in (*Sūra al-Anbīyā'*/95) by referring to certain Sunnite Exegeses: 1. Bayḍāwī (4:64); Al-Shawkānī (3:412): it refers to the unbelievers' physical return at the apocalypse; 2. Sufyān al-Thūrī (163); Zamakhsharī (3:134-135): it refers to their non-repentance and non-Muslim status from which they do not return (Rippin 1979, 43). He writes: "As will be seen, most of the variant readings on this verse represent what would appear to be conscious attempts to come to grips with an obscure passage by alternative grammatical constructions and

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lexical variations; it seems unlikely that all the variants represent equally probable original readings" (ibid, 44). He also says: "The use of variants to solve the problems of this verse was not limited to *annahum*/*innahum*; indeed, a mass of variants has come down to us for the word *ḥarām*" (ibid, 48).

4.2. Imam Khamenei

In contrast to Rippin's approach, Imam Khamenei not only examines the authenticity and accuracy of hadiths and their transmitters but also uses the Prophet's *Sīra* and other Quranic verses when faced with non-famous readings. For example, in analyzing a non-famous reading of verse 73 of *Sūra al-Tawbah*, (*jāhid al-kuffār bi al-munāfiqīn*) which is mentioned in the book *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* (Ṭabrisī 1993, 5:77), meaning "fighting against disbelievers by hypocrites," he states that this reading is not well-known or frequently-narrated (*mutiwātir*) and has no strong evidence except for a few weak and hurried (*mursal*) hadiths. If someone wants to recite this sūra in prayer, he has no right to read "*bi al-munāfiqīn*" but should use the common and well-known reading. The definitive and authentic hadith of the tafsir of *Nūr al-Thaqalayn* (written by ʿArūsī Huwayzī 1994, 2: 242) has quoted the well-known reading from four reliable persons (*thiqa*) (Ali ibn Ibrahim, his father, Ibn Abi ʿUmayr, and Abu Basir) which is the frequently-reported reading. Therefore, the narration of any unknown reading from the Infallibles is invalid and rejected. Imam Khamenei then refers to the history of Prophet Muhammad to prove the authenticity of the well-known reading (*jāhid al-kuffār wa al-munāfiqīn*): "Wage jihad against the faithless and the hypocrites," and states that at no point during the Prophet's life did he use the hypocrites to fight against the faithless. In addition, he cites Quranic verses and refers to the verse, "Had they [hypocrites] gone forth with you, they would have only added to your troubles" (Quran 9:47), explaining that since the hypocrites and the

faithless were united in their goals, it was not wise to use the hypocrites against the faithless, and there is no historical record of Prophet Muhammad using the hypocrites for war against the faithless. (Khamenei 2017, pp. 520-521).

Analysis

Rippin considers the various readings of certain words as evidence of Quranic manipulation or the absence of the original reading. In fact, Rippin uses differences in readings as a means of raising doubt about Quranic verses. Imam Khamenei uses scientific and logical means to examine different readings, such as verifying the accuracy of the hadiths related to a particular reading and examining the Prophet's *Sīra* relevant to the verse(s) under consideration to verify the correctness of a specific reading. In addition, he finds evidence from other verses to prove the accuracy of the well-known reading. The main reason behind their different approaches to various readings in certain Quranic verses is the fundamental difference between Imam Khamenei, who believes that the Quran is divine revelation, and Rippin, who regards the Quran as a literary, historical, or religious text. Moreover, Imam Khamenei's familiarity, as a scholar and Quranic expert, with the social context of the sūras, the Prophet's life and *Sīra*, and the science of the transmitters (ʿilm al-rijāl) has enabled him to easily find the correct reading, unlike Rippin, who due to his lack of familiarity with scientific means of validation and Islamic teachings is unable to recognise the correct reading.

5. Occasions of Revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*)

5.1. Andrew Rippin

In his article entitled "The Exegetical Genre '*Asbāb al-Nuzūl*': A

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Bibliographical and Terminological Survey," Rippin considers the occasions of revelation as a genre of exegetical literature that emerged late and says: "the technical term *sabab* in reference to the 'cause' or 'occasion' of revelation would appear to emerge somewhat after the time of the establishment of the genre" (Rippin 1985, 12). In his article "Literary analysis of the Quran, Tafsir and Sira: the methodologies of John Wansbrough," Rippin asserts that it is never possible to reach the essence of Islamic materials and sources because the sources available to us are based on the thoughts and beliefs of people in the third century and cannot be indicative of the events and ideas of early (Rippin 1985, 157).

5.2. Imam Khamenei

Imam Khamenei and other scholars pay attention to the context of revelation, the authenticity of the occasions of revelation, their alignment with the verse, and the extent of their impact on understanding the verses. For example, in interpreting verse 43 of *Sūra al-Tawbah*, especially the phrase (عَفَا اللّهُ عَنْكَ) : "May Allah excuse you," based on the social, political, and cultural context of the revelation of the verse, Imam Khamenei selects one of the possibilities and theories proposed and rejects others (Khamenei 2014, 41). He also expresses that most of the occasions of revelation are not reliable. One of the bases for rejecting them is the weakness of the chain of transmission and the unreliability of the narrators. As mentioned in verse 79 of *Sūra al-Tawbah*, referring to an occasion of revelation, he believes that narrations are not reliable because they have weaknesses and come from people who may not be reliable (ibid, 43). He only pays attention to reliable occasions of revelation that are documented and consistent with the content of the verse and other Quranic foundations. For example, in many cases, such as the first verses of *Sūra al-Tawbah*, he has discussed the authentic occasion of revelation and benefited from its content in analyzing the verse. In contrast, he has rejected one of the

occasions of revelation transmitted from Sunni sources regarding Abū Ṭalib's faith, as mentioned in verse 114 of *Sūra al-Tawbah* (ibid, 43).

Imam Khamenei is aware that the occasion of revelation should not completely restrict the interpretation of the verse. Therefore, he sometimes does not mention the occasion of revelation in the first stage to avoid limiting the meaning of the verse. As mentioned in verse 64 of *Sūra al-Tawbah*, he refrains from mentioning the occasion of revelation because it may force the exegete to interpret the verse in a way that contradicts the occasion of revelation (ibid, 45). Moreover, he sometimes rejects an occasion of revelation because it does not match the meaning of the verse. For example, after stating that the occasion of revelation of verse 63 of *Sūra al-Tawbah* does not match its meaning, he states that even if we have no narration or hadith for the occasion of revelation of this verse, the verse itself indicates its occasion of revelation. Therefore, the discrepancy between the occasion of revelation and the verse leads to invalidation and rejection of the occasion of revelation (ibid, 47).

Analysis

Contrary to Rippin who considers the occasion of revelation as a genre of exegetical literature that emerged late, Imam Khamenei examines the context or occasions of revelation after verifying their credibility by examining the reliability of narrators and comparing them with the content of the verse. If they are compatible and beneficial to better understand the verses, he uses them. In addition, he does not limit the meaning of the verse to the occasion of revelation. Therefore, from Imam Khamenei's point of view, the occasion of revelation is not considered an exegetical genre, rather its effectiveness depends on the authenticity of its chain of transmission, its compatibility with the content of the verse, and its impact on a better understanding of the verse.

Conclusion

The results of this study are as follows:

1. The fundamental difference between Imam Khamenei and Rippin regarding the nature of the Quran is that Rippin considers the Quran as a non-revelatory book reflecting the customs and traditions of a certain period of Islamic geography, whereas Imam Khamenei considers the Quran as the eternal miracle of the Prophet and a guiding book, whose eternal teachings are alive and dynamic forever, and not limited to a particular time or place.

2. Contrary to Rippin who considers variant readings of certain Quranic verses as an attempt by Muslims to justify the miraculous nature of the Quran, Imam Khamenei, based on the Quranic verses and the challenge presented by the Quran, regards the Quran as a Divine revelation and an eternal miracle that is not only miraculous in terms of wording and meaning, but also in the wise arrangement of its verses.

3. Unlike Rippin who thinks that the Quran does not offer an exegetical method and that the only way to interpret the Quran is through the Prophet's *Sīra* (or tradition) and history, Imam Khamenei employs a dynamic method based on Islamic teachings and reason by using Quranic verses and hadiths with a social and political approach in his tafsir. He extracts and presents the eternal teachings of the Quran in accordance with the needs of society and with the aim of guiding people toward salvation.

4. Contrary to Rippin who regards various readings of certain Quranic verses as deficiencies or weaknesses that some scholars try to justify or correct, Imam Khamenei as a scholar and jurist accurately explains the correct reading by such means as examining the authenticity of narrators,

using other Quranic verses, and referring to the Prophet's tradition.

5. Unlike Rippin who considers the occasions of revelation as a kind of exegetical genre that emerged at a later time, Imam Khamenei considers the occasions of revelation as means for a better understanding of some Quranic verses if they are reliable and effective for interpretation, and the meaning of the verse should not be limited to them.

6. Rippin's incorrect Quranic foundations are rooted in his lack of proper understanding of the nature of the Quran as an eternal miracle of the Prophet. For this reason, he can never attain the true meanings and truths of the Quran and considers the Quran limited to a particular time and place where its main meaning is only understandable in that context. In contrast, Imam Khamenei, due to his belief in the revelatory nature of the Quran and his mastery of the principles of tafsir as a scholar and Quran expert, has a deep understanding of the elevated teachings of the Quran and conveys them well. As long as orientalists such as Rippin are not guided to the Divine aspect of the Quran, we should not expect them to evaluate and understand the Quran and its verses correctly and fairly.

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