



Scientific Authority of the Quran: Perspectives from Shiite and Sunni Exegetes

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The notion of the Quran's scientific authority has long been ingrained in Muslim thought, though not always explicitly articulated in Islamic scholarship. Throughout history, scholars within the Islamic tradition have engaged in extensive debates surrounding this concept. It is evident that Quranic exegetes, whether overtly or implicitly, grappled with the idea. In today's context, marked by technological and scientific advancements alongside increasing skepticism towards Islam, there exists a noticeable deficiency in both Muslim and non-Muslim knowledge structures—a neglect of engaging with the Quran for knowledge evaluation and alignment. There is a glaring absence of knowledge derived directly from the Quran. While Quranic exegetes acknowledge the Quran's scientific authority, questions persist about the extent of its applicability across all fields of knowledge and sciences. Some ponder whether the Quran encompasses all the intricacies of every discipline or if it primarily offers general guidance for humanity, without engaging in the specifics. As a result, diverse perspectives have emerged on the scientific authority of the Quran. This study employs both field and library research methods, consulting exegeses from Shiite and Sunni scholars to explore, elaborate upon, and evaluate their respective views on the nature of the Quran's scientific authority. Through this analysis, it aims to advocate for the most cogent position on the issue.

Keywords: scientific authority of the Quran, Quranic exegetes, Sunni and Shiite scholars, nature.

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Introduction

Contemporary scholars grapple with the question of the Quran's scientific authority across various fields of knowledge. Within Muslim scholarship, there is a prevailing belief that the Quran serves as the ultimate guide for all human knowledge. However, some scholars cast doubt on the Quran's authority over sciences and other branches of knowledge. Furthermore, debates abound regarding the scope and method of the Quran's scientific authority.

It is evident that the Quran transcends the realm of conventional human-authored texts, which typically contain formulated knowledge. Unlike ordinary books, the Quran's primary objective is not to delve into specific disciplines and sciences. Rather, as a manifestation of divine knowledge and wisdom, it serves as an overarching authority for humanity. Nevertheless, since the Quran does not explicitly present branches of knowledge in a formulated manner, the process of deducing and inferring such knowledge must be derived from its teachings and subsequently elaborated upon.

The Quran does not have an equal impact on various disciplines and sciences. Within each field of knowledge, the Quran assumes a distinct role, a subject extensively addressed by exegetes. While these scholars generally acknowledge the Quran's scientific authority, interpretations diverge. Some assert that the Quran serves as the ultimate authority or point of reference for all sciences and disciplines, encompassing detailed knowledge of each branch. Conversely, others argue that such comprehensive coverage is not the Quran's primary purpose, as its principal role is to provide guidance to humanity. Scholars have put forth varied definitions concerning the Quran's scientific authority. This study aims to scrutinize and evaluate the perspectives of both Shiite and Sunni exegetes regarding the nature of the Quran's scientific authority.



Necessity and Objectives of the Research

Muslims believe that the Quran encompasses all dimensions of life and serves as a criterion in all fields. However, while the Quran describes itself as containing everything, as a criterion of truth and falsity, and as eternal, in many communities, including Muslim societies, there is a gap between human sciences, particularly humanities, and the Quran. With the West's ongoing influence in the East, especially in Islamic sciences, expanding, it is imperative to consult the Quran to reconstruct human culture, prevent deviations, and embrace Islamic humanities. We should regard the Quran as the ultimate source of knowledge to achieve Quranic science and avoid unidimensional approaches, drawing insights from the Quran to foster a new Islamic civilization in the contemporary era. Thus, we should reconstruct Islamic humanities with a Quranic approach and align natural sciences with Quranic objectives.

Since ancient times, Quranic scholars have debated the Quran's authority in various branches of knowledge, yet they disagree on the nature of this authority. This research aims to analyze, critique, and comparatively study the perspectives of Shiite and Sunni exegetes regarding the scientific authority of the Quran. Such an endeavor will facilitate a deeper understanding of the Quran's role in guiding various sciences and disciplines.

Research Background

A. Specific Studies

The issue of the Quran's scientific authority, under this particular title, is relatively recent, hence no books or articles have been published under this exact heading. However, in recent years, there has been growing discourse on the topic, with several publications addressing it. One such example is Mohammad Ali Rezaee Esfehani's book, *The Quran's Scientific Authority*

(2024) in Persian, published by al-Mustafa University Press. Additionally, several articles have contributed to this discussion, including “*Jāvdānigī-ye Qur’ān wa istilzāmāt-i ān dar marja’iyyat-i ‘ilmī-ye Qur’ān*” [The Eternity of the Quran and its Implications for its Scientific Authority] (2022) published in *Pazhūhish-Kadih-ye Farhang wa ma’ārif-i Qur’ān* by Abbas Kowsari, “*Barrasī-ye dilālī-ye adillah-ye riwā’ī-ye marja’iyyat-i ‘ilmī-ye Qur’ān-i Karīm*” [An Examination of the Connotation of Hadith-Based Evidence for the Noble Quran’s Scientific Authority] (2022) by Mohammad Ezzati Bakhshayesh presented at the conference entitled ‘*Marja’iyyat-i ‘ilmī-ye Qur’ān,*’ held by ‘Pazhūhish-Kadih-ye Farhang wa ma’ārif,’ and “*Marja’iyyat-i ‘ilmī-ye Qur’ān az nigāh-i Allāmah Ṭabātabā’ī*” [The Quran’s Scientific Authority from the Perspective of Allameh Tabatabai] (2022) by Muhammad Faker Meibodi and Muhammad Husayn Rafiee presented at the aforementioned conference.

B. General Studies

While the topic of the Quran’s scientific authority has been a subject of discussion among exegetes since the early Islamic, it has typically been addressed sporadically within exegetical discussions. Therefore, for a comprehensive understanding of this issue, we should consult various exegeses of the Quran that involve allusions to its scientific authority.

So far, neither specific nor general discussions of the Quran’s scientific authority by Quranic scholars have thoroughly explored this concept from the viewpoints of Shiite and Sunni exegetes. Rather, they often touch upon the meaning of its authority without delving into the diverse perspectives of Sunni and Shiite exegetes. This research aims to examine both early and contemporary works of Quranic exegesis to delineate and expound upon their respective stances regarding the Quran’s scientific authority, elucidating various notions and definitions of such authority.



The Concept

It is essential to grasp the key terms used here: “authority” and “scientific,” which we will now delve into further.

A. The Notion of Authority/Reference

1. Literal Meaning of “*Marja ‘iyya*” (Authority/Reference)

The Arabic word “*marja*” or “*marji*” is a gerund form, signifying the point of reference or return. Translators of the Quran have rendered the term “*marji*” in the Quranic verse, “*thumma inna marji ‘ahum la-ilā al-jahīm*” [Then indeed their retreat will be toward hell] (Quran 37:68) as “return” or “retreat.” The term is derived from the root “r-j-‘,” denoting the action of going back or returning (Muṣṭafawī 2009, 4:67). Hence, the term “*marji*’,” used today in the sense of authority, literally denotes any point of reference.

2. Authority in Jurisprudential Terminology

In the terminology of Islamic jurisprudence or fiqh, authority (*marja ‘iyya*) refers to any qualified jurist whose jurisprudential rulings can be followed by non-mujtahid individuals. This process of following a qualified jurist for religious rulings is termed “imitation” (*taqlīd*), which entails obtaining one’s religious rulings from a qualified jurist (Khomeini 2005, 8, 9).

3. Authority in Quranic Terminology

Several Quranic verses illustrate various instances of “*ra-ja-‘a*.” For example, verse 8 of *Sūrat al-Munāfiqūn* alludes to the concept of returning to a previous place: “They say, ‘If we return (*raja ‘nā*) to al-Madinah, the more honored [for power] will surely expel therefrom the more humble” (Quran 63:8).

Moreover, a verbal form of “r-j-‘” was used in the Quran in the sense of returning to belief: “And We tested them with good [times] and bad that perhaps they would return (*yarji ‘ūn*) [to belief]” (Quran 7:168).



B. “Scientific” and “Knowledge”

The term “ilm” (knowledge) and its derivatives have been employed in various contexts across different Quranic verses, but its primary connotation is the perception of the reality of things (Rāghib al-İsfahānī 1991, entry “ilm”), encompassing empirical, intellectual, and transmitted knowledge. Various Quranic verses employing the cognates of “ilm” imply that it denotes any form of perception. For example, in the verse “And do not mix the truth with falsehood or conceal the truth while you know (*ta lamūn*) [it]”⁴ (Quran 2:42).

There is no distinction regarding whether such perception is acquired through intellectual reasoning or deduction, revelation, sensory experience, or true dreams. Therefore, “knowledge” encompasses any type of understanding derived from the Quran, and “scientific” is anything that pertains to knowledge.

C. The Quran’s Scientific Authority

The Quran’s scientific authority signifies its trustworthiness and consequent authoritative status, establishing it as a valid point of reference or citation for any field of knowledge. This concept encompasses the Quran’s primacy, comprehensiveness, authenticity, and centrality, as well as its role as a criterion and source of knowledge (Yūsufī Muqaddam and Mūsawī ‘Ibādī 2023, 50).

In the subsequent discussion, we elucidate the perspectives of Sunni and Shiite exegetes concerning the nature of the Quran’s scientific authority.

4. ﴿وَلَا تَلْبِسُوا الْحَقَّ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتَكْتُمُوا الْحَقَّ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ﴾ (البقرة/ ٤٢)



The Nature of the Quran's Scientific Authority: Shiite Exegetes

1. The Quran's Role as a Source

In this context, the Quran serves as a scientific authority by being the foremost and paramount source. Quranic verses can be cited and referenced in matters pertaining to religious sciences, particularly Islamic jurisprudence, where jurisprudential rulings are derived and deduced from the Quran alongside three other sources (tradition, reason, and Muslim consensus).

In their interpretation of the Quranic verse, “And We have sent down to you the Book as clarification for all things and as guidance and mercy and good tidings for the Muslims”⁵ (Quran 16:89), scholars such as al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, al-Ṭabrisī, and Mullā Faḥ Allāh al-Kāshānī explain the phrase “clarification for all things” as elucidation of any issue. They argue that the universal modifier “all things” in this verse should be read as confined to matters of religion. Thus, according to their interpretation, the verse asserts that all religious matters are clarified in the Quran either explicitly or implicitly through references to sources of knowledge such as the words of the Prophet and his successors (Ṭūsī, n.d., 6:418; Ṭabrisī 1993, 6:586; Kāshānī 1924, 5:214). Consequently, all intricate religious matters are either directly addressed in the Quran or indirectly inferred through contemplation on the Quran and hadiths.

Similarly, other exegetes of the Quran also interpret the phrase “clarification of all things” to mean that the Quran elucidates all religious matters that may be difficult to comprehend, either directly or indirectly through hadiths (Fayḍ al-Kāshānī 1994, 3:150; Qummī al-Mashhadī 1999, 7:252; Jazāyirī 2009, 3:45; Shāh-‘Abdul‘azīmī 1984, 7:266; Nahāwandī 2007, 3:605; Faḍlullāh 1998, 13:279). According to these exegetes, the

5. ﴿وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ تِبْيَانًا لِّكُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً وَبُشْرَىٰ لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ﴾ (النحل/ ٨٩)

Quran's scientific authority implies that it serves as a primary source for learning about religious matters. Individuals are encouraged to turn to the Quran to ascertain their religious obligations.

Other exegetes suggest that “*tibyān*” (clarification) in this verse employs an exaggerative or hyperbolic form of the root word “b-y-n,” indicating that all matters, whether religious or non-religious, are addressed in the Quran. However, it is important to note that the Quran functions as a foundational guidebook or a general constitution, presenting many notions in broad outlines. Details are often elucidated and expanded upon through reasoning, deduction, and hadiths transmitted from the Prophet and Shiite Imams (Rāzī 1987, 12:81; Shawkānī 1993, 3:224; Marāghī, n.d., 14:128; Jawādī Āmulī 2019, 47:210, 213).

2. Confirmatory Authority

In this context, the Quran's scientific authority implies that the findings of any branch of knowledge must be brought into alignment with the Quran. If these findings are in harmony with Quranic teachings, confirmed by the Quran, or at the very least, not in contradiction with it, then they are accepted. Conversely, if they conflict with Quranic principles, they are rejected. This aligns with a hadith transmitted from the Prophet, which advises: “...What agrees with the Book of Allah, take it, and what disagrees with the Book of Allah, leave it”⁶ (‘Ayyāshī 1959, 2:115; Kulaynī 1986, 1:69; Ibn Bābawayh 1997, 367; Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī 1988, 27:110). Al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī and Marefat argue that the clause “what...” in this hadith suggests that this ruling is absolute and not subject to any qualifications or constraints. Therefore, any statement or piece of knowledge, whether it be from hadith or other sources, must be examined

6 . علي بن ابي ابراهيم عن ابيه عن التوفلي عن السكوني عن ابي عبد الله عليه السلام قال: قال رسول الله ﷺ: «إِنَّ عَلَى كُلِّ حَقٍّ حَقِيْقَةً وَعَلَى كُلِّ صَوَابٍ نُورًا فَمَا وَافَقَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا خَالَفَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ فَدَعُوهُ».



in light of the Quran. If it aligns with the Quran, it is to be accepted; if it contradicts the Quran, it is to be rejected (Iṣfahānī 1988, 45; Maʿrifat 2008, 1:226).

Malikī Miānajī asserts that the Quran serves as the ultimate reference in all religious matters, encompassing both fundamental principles and subsidiary aspects. Whenever disagreements arise, the Quran acts as the arbiter. In such disputes, whichever position aligns with the Quran or, at the very least, does not contradict its teachings should be followed. Conversely, any viewpoint that contradicts the Quran must be disregarded (Malikī Miānajī 1994, 4:233).

Al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī and al-Qummī al-Mashhadī reference the Quranic verse “And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger”⁷ (Quran 4:59) and a statement in Imam ‘Alī’s letter to Mālik al-Ashtar found in Nahj al-Balāghah, letter 53, to show that in situations of disagreement or confusion, individuals must turn to the Quran and the Prophetic tradition. Whatever concurs with the Quranic teachings should be embraced, while anything contrary to it should be rejected (Fayḍ al-Kāshānī 1994, 1:465; Qummī al-Mashhadī 1999, 3:448).

3. Practical Rule and Sovereignty

In this sense, the Quran’s scientific authority manifests in the application of Quranic teachings across various dimensions of life, ultimately resulting in the practical dominance and governance of the Quran in society.

Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Asadābādī proposed the theory of “return to the Quran” as a solution to the social, economic, and other challenges facing Muslim society. He delivered a sermon on this issue, which drew the attention of Muslims to the importance of adhering to the Quranic principles in addressing societal issues (Ṣāhibī 2021, 6:136). Later, his

7. ﴿فَإِنْ تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ﴾ (النساء/ ٥٩)

student Shaykh Muhammad Abduh authored a social and pedagogical exegesis of the Quran, which catalyzed significant transformations within Muslim society.

In a speech delivered on February 10, 1982, Imam Khomeini highlighted the victimization of Muslims and emphasized the significance of returning to the Quran. He lamented the abandonment of the Quran and its diminished influence in Muslim lives, stressing the necessity of its resurgence. Imam Khomeini asserted that the Quran should permeate every aspect of life and emphasized the importance of its recitation. He cautioned against a selective approach to the Quran, stating that it should be present in its entirety across all facets of human existence, warning against potential issues if only certain parts of it are upheld while others are neglected (Khomeini 2010, 16:39).

Imam Khamenei similarly advocated for the theory of returning to the Quran as a solution to societal problems, asserting that the primary issue facing Muslims is their estrangement from the Quran, and the remedy lies in returning to it. He emphasized the importance of implementing the Quran's teachings and utilizing it as a source of knowledge. According to him, it is through the Quran that the Islamic society gains insight into its duties, finds clarity amidst confusion, and emerges from darkness (Khamenei 2000).

This sense of the Quran's scientific authority was implemented on various judicial, political, military, economic, and other dimensions after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. This led to a remarkable transformation in the country and served as a model in the world, leading other countries to Quranic notions.

4. Explanatory Authority

The Quran indeed describes itself as the "clarification of all things" (Quran 16:89) and "a detailed explanation of all things" (Quran 12:111), indicating its ability to elucidate and expound upon its own contents. Thus,



when a Quranic verse appears too general and necessitates further elaboration or involves ambiguous terms or phrases, one can refer to other Quranic verses for clarification. By examining these additional verses, explanations or interpretations of the original verses can be deduced.

Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī advocates for the method of interpreting the Quran with the Quran, contending that since the Quran claims to clarify all things, it must necessarily clarify itself as well (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1970, 1:11). Therefore, Quranic verses that pose challenges in interpretation should be understood within the broader context of the Quran itself. By employing this approach, one can uncover the true meaning intended by the Quran in those ambiguous verses.

Other Quranic exegetes such as al-Balāghī (in *Ālā' al-raḥmān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*), al-Khaṭīb (in *al-Tafsīr al-Qur'ānī li-l-Qur'ān*), Muḥammad Mukhtār (in *Tafsīr aḍwā' al-bayān fī idāḥ al-Qur'ān bi-l-Qur'ān*), and ṣādiqī Tihrānī (in *al-Furqān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi-l-Qur'ān*) also cites Quranic verses to determine what is intended by a Quranic verse. Their exegetical style is also known as the interpretation of the Quran with the Quran.

5. The Quran's Capacity to Address All Human Needs

In this context, the Quran's scientific authority signifies its capability to address the needs of all humanity. Regardless of the period, emerging challenges and issues should be tackled by consulting the Quran to understand its stance on these matters. Ayatullah Ṣadr underscored the Quran's capacity to address human needs by asserting that any question posed can find an answer within its verses (Ṣadr, n.d., 9). Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlullāh advocates this understanding of the Quran's scientific authority in various sections of his Quranic exegesis. For instance, he addresses inquiries regarding the reward for hardships endured in God's path, providing an answer by referencing verse 142 of *Sūrah Āl-i 'Imrān*



(Fadlallah 1998, 6:288). In light of this perspective, when encountering new doubts, skepticisms, or theories, it is advisable to seek answers in the Quran, considering its stance on these matters with the assistance of hadiths transmitted from the Prophet and Imams.

6. Guiding the Sciences

In this sense, the Quran's scientific authority implies that the fundamental principles and objectives of sciences can be derived from Quranic verses. Consequently, sciences are influenced and guided by the Quran. As an example, in fields such as humanities and law, which encompass pedagogy and human rights, the foundations, objectives, and obstacles of education and human rights can be derived from Quranic verses. Subsequently, this understanding serves as a basis for generating new knowledge in these areas.

Imam Khamenei emphasizes that contemporary humanities, as they stand, often diverge from Quranic and Islamic principles. Western humanities, in particular, are rooted in a distinct worldview, often characterized by materialism. However, Imam Khamenei advocates for a reevaluation of the foundations of humanities, urging scholars to seek these foundations within the Quran. He underscores the importance of scrutinizing the Quran across various fields to uncover the fundamental principles upon which humanities should be based (Khamenei 2009). In accordance with this perspective, all pedagogical and legal sciences should find their roots in the Quran. Numerous questions within these disciplines ought to be addressed by referencing Quranic teachings, leading to affirmative or negative conclusions. It is imperative that such sciences are firmly grounded in the Quran, rejecting any frameworks or principles that are not derived from it.



7. The Quran as a Source of Sciences

In this context, the Quran's scientific authority entails the notion that the Quran serves as the primary origin and source of all sciences. Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī posits that many prevalent religious sciences trace their origins to the Prophet's mission and the revelation of the Quran, which led to the enactment of divine rulings. For example, during the early second Islamic century, when the ban on writing the Prophet's hadiths was lifted by 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, people became increasingly interested in the details of hadiths, jurisprudence, and Islamic beliefs. Consequently, disciplines such as the science of hadith, *rijāl* (assessment of the reliability of hadith transmitters), *dirāya* (understanding the content of hadiths), jurisprudence, and theology emerged. This indicates that the Quran served as the primary source for the development of these sciences, including Arabic morphology, syntax, rhetoric, and eloquence. Following the revelation of the Quran, discussions surrounding the principles of these sciences became necessary (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1971, 127, 128). According to this perspective, the primary origin of these sciences was indeed the revelation of the Quran. Without the Quran, these sciences would not have come into existence.

8. Authority in Healing Human Pains

In another sense, the Quran is regarded as a scientific authority because it serves as a source of healing for human pains when individuals refer to it and adhere to its teachings. Regarding the Quran's healing power, God states: "And We send down of the Quran that which is healing and mercy for the believers, but it does not increase the wrongdoers except in loss"⁸ (Quran 17:82).

Furāt al-Kūfī, Ḥaydar b. 'Alī al-Āmulī, Makārīm Shīrāzī, Ma'rifat, Malikī Miānajī, al-Qubaysī al-'Āmilī, and Ḥusaynī Tihirānī cite a hadith

8. ﴿وَنُزِّلَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ مَا هُوَ شِفَاءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَا يَزِيدُ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا خَسَارًا﴾ (الإسراء/ ٨٢)

from Imam ‘Alī, which advises: “Cure your illnesses with the Quran and seek help from the Quran for your suffering, as it contains a healing greater than the greatest illnesses, which is disbelief, hypocrisy, wrong, and misguidance”⁹ (Furāt al-Kūfī 1990, 283; Āmulī 1994, 1:342; Makārīm Shīrāzī 1992, 8:319, 12:239; Ma‘rifat 2008, 1:18; Malikī Miānājī 1994, 1:7; Qubaysī al-‘Āmilī, n.d., 5:141; Ḥusaynī Tihirānī 2006, 3:11).

Al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī also alludes to this notion, saying that he wrote books and essays, but in none of these sciences did he find a cure for his pain and water for his thirst. So, he feared and fled and repented towards God until He guided him through contemplation of the Quran and hadiths (Ḥusaynī 2022, 22).

Since all humans inherently seek infinite perfection and cannot be satisfied with any transient pleasure, constantly yearning for greater fulfillment, the most effective remedy for this perpetual longing is found in the Quran as the source of infinite divine knowledge. This existential longing is alleviated by harnessing the Quran’s boundless wisdom.

9. Satisfying the Intellectual Curiosity of Scholars

As time progresses and further research unfolds, the limitations of scientific inquiry become increasingly apparent. Any scientific conclusions must be approached with caution due to the potential for error. However, the Quran presents itself as an infallible source of knowledge, untouched by falsehood (Quran 41:42). By turning to this timeless wisdom, we can seek answers, satisfy our intellectual curiosity, and explore new avenues of discovery in science.

Certain scholars have hinted at the Quran’s scientific authority through references to a hadith attributed to Imam ‘Alī: “God has made the Quran a

9 . « فاستشفوا من أدوائكم واستعينوا به على لأوائكم فإنّ فيه شفاء من أكبر الداء وهو الكفر والنفاق والغى والضلال ».



means to quench the scholars' thirst and a spring for the hearts of jurists"¹⁰ (Nahj al-Balāgha, sermon 198; Kāshānī 1989, 1:2; Burūjirdī 1995, 2:15; Iṣfahānī 1988, 1; Ma'rifat 2008, 1:19; Khoei 2008, 21; Qubaysī al-Āmilī, n.d., 5:142). They elucidate that the Quran encapsulates the principles of all sciences, wisdom, sound advice, and all that humanity requires in both this world and the hereafter (Amīnī 1975, 7).

Those pursuing knowledge are inherently insatiable, constantly seeking greater perfection. Consequently, they seek a source of infinite knowledge, one that is universally beneficial and infallible. The Quran presents itself as the most comprehensive book until the Day of Resurrection. Scholars draw upon its infinite wisdom in accordance with their expertise, finding endless benefit therein.

10. Referential Authority

The assertions put forth by religious researchers are derived from Quranic verses and stem from deep reflection upon the Quran. These researchers maintain that without the Quran, their propositions would not have been formulated, as they are intricately linked to the insights gleaned from Quranic teachings.

Certain Quranic exegetes refer to a hadith from Imam al-Bāqir: "Whenever I told you something, ask me where in the Quran it comes from"¹¹ (Kulaynī 1986,1:60). This underscores the notion that all teachings from Shiite Imams find their basis in the Quran. Through this hadith, exegetes imply or directly assert that any propositions they wish to convey must be inferred from the Quran and the hadiths of *Ahl al-Bayt* (the Prophet's Household). These hadiths, they argue, are not separate from the

10 . «... جَعَلَهُ اللَّهُ رِيًّا لِعَطَشِ الْعُلَمَاءِ وَرَبِيعًا لِقُلُوبِ الْمُفْقَهَاءِ...» .

11 . علي بن إبراهيم عن أبيه عن محمد بن عيسى عن يونس عن حماد عن عبد الله بن سنان عن أبي الجارود قال قال أبو جعفر عليه السلام: «إِذَا حَدَّثْتُكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ فَاسْأَلُونِي مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ...» .



Quran; rather, they are interpretations and derivations thereof (Fayḍ al-Kāshānī 1994, 1:56; Ḥuwayzī 1994, 1:443; Baḥrānī 1994, 1:30; 2:23, 172, 371; Qummī al-Mashhadī 1999, 3:329, 527, 7:254; Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1970, 3:87, 6:155, 450; Ma'rifat 2008, 1:220; Mūsawī al-Sabziwārī 1988, 9:268).

11. Pattern-Like Authority

Various fields of study can draw inspiration from the Quran. Take for example *Sūrah Yūsuf*, which offers a rich model for pedagogy, economy, and governance. The Quran itself states: “We will recount to you the best of narratives in what We have revealed to you of this Quran, and indeed prior to it you were among those who are unaware [of it]”¹² (Quran 12:3). Thus, in *Sūrah Yūsuf*, God informs Prophet Muḥammad that He recounts to him the best of narratives. Evidently, since the Quran primarily aims to guide humanity towards worldly and afterlife felicity, it elaborates on what leads to human happiness. Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, in his interpretation of this verse, posits that this surah is the “best of narratives” because it delineates Prophet Joseph’s sincerity, his commitment to monotheism, and God’s lordship over His obedient servants, guiding them from the depths of slavery and prison to the heights of governance (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1970, 11:76). Other Shiite exegetes suggest that this verse is not limited to Surah Yusuf but encompasses all Quranic verses, depicting them as the best of narratives. This is because the verse states “...in what We have revealed to you of this Quran.” Consequently, it becomes apparent that the entire Quran, not just Surah Yusuf, represents the best narratives, providing patterns and models for life (Makārim Shīrāzī 1992, 9:301; Ḥuwayzī 1994, 2:309).

The two perspectives can be reconciled by recognizing that while the narratives throughout the entire Quran are indeed beneficial, those within Surah Yusuf hold a superlative status—that is, they are the best.

12. ﴿ نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ أَحْسَنَ الْقَصَصِ بِمَا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ وَإِنْ كُنْتَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ لَمِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ ﴾ (يوسف / 3)



This distinction lies in the superlative form of “aḥsan” (the best). Hence, the Quran amalgamates exceptionally eloquent language with profoundly meaningful content, making it the epitome of narrative excellence. Its teachings offer exemplary models for all humanity. Consequently, one aspect of the Quran’s scientific authority lies in its provision of guidance and models. Those who seek direction should consider the Quran as their ultimate model and authority.

12. The Quran as a Source of Knowledge

The Quran’s scientific authority as a source of knowledge implies that human understanding is not solely derived from sensory perception, reason, and empirical observation, but can also be obtained from Quranic teachings - divine revelations beyond the realm of the senses. For instance, cosmologists can contemplate the Quranic verse “Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and whatever creatures He has scattered in them, and He is able to gather them whenever He wishes”¹³ (Quran 42:29) to infer that there exist living beings throughout the universe. This inference stems from the interpretation of the term “*dābba*” (creatures), which encompasses both sentient and non-sentient living beings (Azharī 2000, 14:55; Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 1991, 306; Ibn al-Manzūr 1993, 1:369). In their interpretation of this verse, Quranic exegetes infer that there exist both small and large creatures in the skies that scientists have yet to discover, suggesting that the Quran has alluded to the existence of living beings in the skies (Faḍlullāh 1998, 20:182; Makārīm Shīrāzī 1992, 20:436; Mudarrisī 1998, 12:358; Ṭabāṭabā’ī 1970, 18:58). Hence, despite the significant advancements in science in the present age, scientists have not yet discovered living creatures in the skies. However, by turning to the Quran as a source of revelation, they can draw upon this Quranic teaching, along with similar teachings, to find motivation for extensive research and exploration of uncharted territories.

13 . «وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ جَمْعِهِمْ إِذَا يَشَاءُ قَدِيرٌ» (الشورى / ٢٩)



13. Source of Arbitration

In disputes among Muslims, the primary source of arbitration to resolve conflicts is the Quran. By referencing the Quran, its commands and prohibitions become evident. One objective of the Quran's revelation is described as facilitating the Prophet's arbitration and adjudication based on Quranic directives: "Indeed We have sent down to you the Book with the truth, so that you may judge between the people by what Allah has shown you"¹⁴ (Quran 4:105).

Husayn Faḍlullāh references the Quran's pivotal role in arbitration and dispute settlement, suggesting that it contains rulings to resolve disputes, legislate truth, and exert influence over existence, thereby serving as the ultimate arbiter (Faḍlullāh 1998, 20:151). Other Shiite exegetes similarly allude to the Quran's scientific authority, interpreting the mentioned verse as an obligation for the Prophet to arbitrate between people according to Quranic teachings (Dakhīl 2001, 125; Ṭayyib 1990, 4:192; Nahāwandī 2007, 2:282; Shāh-'Abdul'azīmī 1984, 2:561; Mughniya 2004, 120; Shawkānī 1993, 1:589; Kāshānī 1989, 1:250; Jazāyirī 2009, 1:502; Ishkawārī 1995, 1:544; Fayḍ al-Kāshānī 1994, 1:496; Kāshānī 1923, 2:145; Ṭabrisī 1993, 1:286). Hence, the Quran stands as the primary source of arbitration to resolve disputes among people. Judges and Islamic rulers are obligated to consult the Quran in order to render legitimate adjudications and settle disputes effectively.

The Nature of the Quran's Scientific Authority: Sunni Exegetes

Literary Authority

A fundamental aspect of the Quran's scientific authority lies in its literary excellence, as elucidated in literary exegeses of the Quran. This implies that the Quran serves as the ultimate authority for Arabic grammar and

14 . «إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِتَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِمَا أَرَاكَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَكُنْ لِلْخَائِبِينَ حَصِيمًا» (النساء/ ١٠٥)



linguistic rules, with the correctness or incorrectness of Arabic sentences measured against its standards. Prior to the formalization of Arabic syntax and grammar, the Quran stood as a masterpiece and pinnacle of Arabic eloquence. No Arabic text has ever matched the Quran in its linguistic beauty and precision. Following the Quran's revelation, through the guidance of Imam 'Alī and the efforts of his student Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī, the foundations of Arabic literary rules were laid (Şadr 1996, 40). Subsequently, eminent figures in Arabic literature such as Sībawayh (d. 796 CE) and Ibn Hishām (d. 808 CE) contributed to the development of Arabic literature. Thus, the Quran serves as the cornerstone of Arabic literature and the standard by which the eloquence and correctness of Arabic sentences are evaluated. The same principle applies to other languages as well, where the accuracy or inaccuracy of their texts is determined based on their earliest and most authentic sources. Additionally, these early texts serve as the bedrock for the development of their literature and grammar.

Despite this widely accepted principle, al-Zamakhsharī holds the belief that Quranic recitations should be judged based on the rules and grammar of the Arabic language. According to him, even if a recitation of the Quran occasionally contradicts Arabic grammar rules, it must be deemed invalid. This stance stems from the notion that Quranic recitations hold religious significance, and any deviation from Arabic rules renders them unacceptable (Zamakhsharī 1986, 2:70). However, Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī and al-Ālūsī strongly criticized al-Zamakhsharī for this viewpoint, accusing him of rejecting recitations that have been frequently transmitted from the Prophet. They argue that all seven recitations of the Quran are accepted among Muslims, and instances of seemingly non-grammatical recitations can also be found elsewhere in Arabic literature (Abū Ḥayyān 1999, 4:658; Ālūsī 1998, 4:276).



A study of the history of the compilation of the Quran alongside the evolution of Arabic literature and its rules underscores that the primary reference point for Muslims and the Arabic language is the Quran and its seven recitations. The accuracy or inaccuracy of Arabic literature should be assessed in light of the Quran, rather than vice versa. This is because Arabic literature is fundamentally influenced by Quranic literature, thus the correctness of Arabic sentences must be gauged against the standards set by the Quran.

Conclusion

According to Quranic exegetes, there is a consensus regarding the scientific authority of the Quran. In some instances, exegetes present multiple aspects of the Quran's scientific authority, including its role as a source of arbitration, dispute resolution, and clarification of various matters. This is because the authority of the Quran in resolving disputes also implies its authority as an arbiter. Individuals who seek guidance from the Quran to settle disputes rely on it not only for understanding Quranic rulings but also for resolving conflicts based on these rulings. Consequently, these two concepts often align in specific cases.



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