Evidence of Historicity of the Qur'an as per Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and its refutes

Sayyed Muhammed Hussain Miri (Corresponding author)
Associate Professor , Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources University of Khuzestan , Iran
miri@asnrukh.ac.ir
Elham Pakarzadeh Dezfulinejad
Master's degree holder , Al-Zahra (pbuh) Islamic Seminary , Dezful , Iran,
e.pakarzadeh@gmail.com

شواهد تاريخية القرآن كما جاء في أعمال نصر حامد أبو زيد وردودها

د . سيد محمد حسين ميري (الكاتب المسؤول)
أستاذ مشارك ، جامعة علوم الزراعة والموارد الطبيعية في خوزستان ، إيران
إلهام باكرداده دزفولي نـجاد
حاملة شهادة الماجستير، حوزة الزهراء ﷻ العلمية ، دزفول ، إيران

Abstract:-

Historicity of the Qur'an refers to limiting it to a certain historical period, emphasizing that the meaning is influenced by the historical background, cultural realities, and conditions of the time of the text. This topic has long antecedence among scholars, some believing that religious discourse of Holy Scriptures is influenced by the worldview and original thoughts, thus, not related to the language and scientific beliefs of our time. Muslim thinkers interpret this concept differently. This is reflected in the works of intelligentsias like Abu Zayd, which influenced the academic discussions regarding scriptures as well as Muslims' practices. Arguing for Qur'an's historicity, Abu Zayd cites the changes and evolutions in the meanings of Qur'an, rendering it in the category of action. The main question of this descriptive-analytical research is: on what basis does Abu Zayd claim that Qur'an is limited to history, and what is the refute of his claim? This research tries to eliminate the doubt about Qur'an's historicity, taking it as a timeless entity. The research concludes that the Qur'an is not confined to history, for otherwise, it would contradict the very purpose of it's revelation–i.e., guidance of mankind at all times–which is accepted by the theorist.

Key words: Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Historicity of Qur'an, Impressibility of Qur'an, Denial of instantaneous descent of the Qur'an.

الملخص:

تشير تاريخيـة القـرآن إلى تحديـده بفتـرة تاريخية معينة، مع التأكيد على أن المعنى يتأثر بالخلفية التاريخية، والواقع الثقافي، وظروف زمن النص. وقد كانت هذه المسألة موضع نقاش طويل بين العلماء، حيث يعتقد البعض أن الخطـاب الـديني للكتـب المقدسـة يتـأثر بـالنظرة العالميـة والـتفكير الأصيل، وبالتـالي ليس مرتبطًا باللغة والمعتقدات العلمية لزماننا، يفسر المفكرون المسلمون هـذه الفكرة بطرق مختلفة. يظهر هذا في أعمال المفكرين مثل أبي زيـد، الـتي أثـرت في المناقشـات الأكاديميـة المتعلقة بالكتـب المقدسـة وكذلك ممارسـات المسلمين. ومن خلال التحدث عن تاريخية القـرآن، يستشــهد أبـو زيــد بـالتغيرات والتطورات في معاني القرآن، مما يجعله ينتمي إلى فئـة الفعـل، والسـؤال الرئيسـي في هـذا البحث الوصفي التحليلي هو: على أي أساس يدعي أبو زيد أن القرآن مقيد بالتاريخ، وما هو الرد على ادعائه؟ يحاول هذا البحث إزالة الشكوك حـول تاريخيـة القـرآن، معتبرًا إيـاه ككيان خالد. ويخلص البحث إلى أن القرآن ليس محصورًا في التاريخ، وإلا فإنه سيتناقض مع غرض نزوله – أي هداية البشر في جميع الأوقات – وهو ما يتفق عليه المنظرون.

الكلمـات المفتاحيـة: نصـر حامـد أبـو زيـد، تاريخيـة القـرآن، تـأثير القرآن، نفـي النـزول الفوري للقرآن.

Plain Language Summary

Nasr Hamid Abu Zeid's view on the historicity of the Qur'an and its proof requires that this issue be investigated in the Quranic sciences. This research, in fact, by studying the opinions of this contemporary thinker, identifies and examines the consequences and problems resulting from this theory, because history On the one hand, the validity of the Qur'an means to limit it in a historical period, and on the other hand, philosophical hermeneutics believes that the interpreter's understanding in various ways is the result of historical conditions, and the result of this belief is the acceptance of the historicity of understanding. Therefore, accepting the historicity of the Qur'an has consequences such as limiting the Qur'an to the age of revelation and the lack of coherence of the text, ignoring the phenomenon of revelation and unconventional readings from the understanding of the Qur'an, and the result of these consequences is ignoring the purpose of the revelation of the Qur'an. So this research aims to prevent these consequences by examining these beliefs and pathology and answering the doubts raised.

Introduction

The historicity of a thing tells the temporal nature of that thing and it digs into its period in history. It also alludes to the impermanence and conventionality of that thing, meaning it is the result of a situation specific to a certain time period and is suitable and applicable to that situation only. Either it won't be considered at all for any other place or time – for it won't have any relevance there – or in the case of being taken into consideration, it won't be competent, meaning it would have lost the usability of its time and would have become of different nature than its previous period. For example, weaponry from thousand years ago would today be considered as a historical phenomenon or imprint such that they are related to the past era and its specific usage which was defined in the past has lost its place during the current time. They are only good for preserving in the museum for the viewing of spectators and are replaced by other tools and means suitable for the time. Now the question is if every phenomenon which has an origin in time is necessarily a thing that is confined in history. For example, Qur'an is a book that has its time of origin and descent. But, the historical lookout at Qur'an and religious

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teachings are above and beyond its time of origin and thus it is beyond its historicity from this angle. And those who are proponents of the historicity of religion, the Qur'an or part of religious teachings have taken this same meaning of historicity, meaning they take them as the product of a historical situation or at least they consider that (time-bound) situation to have an impact in shaping up those teachings both in their qualitative and quantitative aspects. This leads to the belief of having a creation and expiration date for religion and some of the religious teachings. Therefore, here it has been attempted that the viewpoint of Abu Zayd about the historicity of the Qur'an is examined and refuted in this study.

Conceptology

Historicity of Text

Scholars have put forward various definitions of historicity, all of which are about limiting any text or the understanding of a particular text to the binding of the specific period. Dilthey, the german historian, and philosopher (1833) says: "Historicity sees the meaning of everything only in the text which has been shaped up in the horizon of time. Thus, the meaning is attached with the history and it is viewed throughout the time." (Elahi Rad 2016, 78).

Rudolf Bultmann (1976) believes that the message and voice of holy books dwell in their existential attractions and these existential attractions are hidden inside the historical discourse in mythological form. This means Bultmann was of an opinion that the religious discourse of holy books is influenced by the worldview and thoughts of the time in which those religious texts have been written (Vaezi 2010, 174).

Roland Barthes (1980) also says this differently: "The texts float in the inner core of history and culture. They take upon new meanings according to geography, human conditions, and historical aspects all along this continuous journey of theirs while leaving behind their past meanings. Hence, any text must be interpreted and understood without getting in its way the historical origin of it and the imposed meaning by its author." (Vaezi 2010, 42).

Critique

Hamid Abu Zayd

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Based on the above three definitions: Firstly; historicity is associated with the text, whether it is conventional text or it is holy and heavenly. Thus, the text being holy doesn't affect its historicity.

Secondly; the time of release and occurrence of the text must be focused upon while navigating through its meaning.

Third; the factors of worldview and thought process of every age, geographical type, historical aspects, and even the mindset of the author are all effective in the understanding of that text.

Fourth; Consideration of these aspects - especially Barthes' view – would imply that the text treads on an evolutionary pathway while being alive at the same time. As if, it has been looked at as a living being. Thus, the text can be immortal but what makes it lively and immortal is the new understanding that the reader receives from the text. This new understanding is based on the time period of development of the text as well as its time of narration. The thinking which is dominant during the time of the text's development is impactful in the emergence of the text and in giving meaning to it. And now that the same thinking is not dominant, the meaning of the text at the time of its narration could be different than what it was during its development. Therefore, the understanding of that text by the predecessors cannot be taken as the criterion and yardstick of its correct understanding.

According to the aforementioned three definitions, it can be said that the historicity of the text is the impressibility of it from the historical context and the historical cultural conditions and facts of the era of the text's creation. With this presupposition of historicity, the interpreter's understanding of the text in terms of its meaning is limited to that same historical scope.

Historicity of the Qur'an in the view of Abu Zayd

In Abu Zayd's view, historicity means the actions which are occurred in time. Texts are also created in history, and all texts refer to language and its rules and take their validity from the culture from which they originate. The text of the Qur'an also has a speech that derives its expressive power primarily from the language, and what is meant by the expressive power of the Qur'an is a text addressed to people in a specific cultural context, not from the perspective of the

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speaker, who is Allah. Abu Zayd criticizes the written works of exposition and interpretation of the Qur'an, which mainly repeat and reiterate the words of the predecessors and become the cause of the stagnation of the text. To understand the text of the Qur'an, he puts forward a special linguistic system using the rational analysis methodology, which at its base considers the linguistic heritage as a system of signs in which the signifier and the signified are two sides of the same coin and are placed within that symptomatic system.

As per this view, the word implies a meaning - which can be understood from its appearance - then the listener reaches from that meaning to another meaning through reasoning, so historicity in Abu Zayd's view refers both to being historic in a specific period and also to the historicity of understanding. He considers this kind of historicity to be the result of the new reading of the Qur'an with the method of "linguistic analysis" in the system of signs, which it is meant that the Qur'an is separated from historical components and is viewed as a historical witness (Vaezi 2010, 12-13).

According to Abu Zayd, the efforts of the predecessors such as Zarakshi (794 AH) in al-Burhan and Uloom al-Qur'an and Suyuti (911 AH) in al-Itqan, was an effort to protect and retain the acquirements of Islamic civilization and its intellectual and cultural memory, which according to its cultural value, is shaped up based on a sort of religious notion of the text (Qur'an), which, for its part, is the result of recessive attitudes in Islamic Arabic culture. As per Abu Zayd, the least that defines this traditional notion is that it separates the text of the Qur'an from the context of its objective and historical flows, and as a result, separates the Qur'an from its true nature as a linguistic text and a cultural and historical yield, and it turns it into a sacred and spiritual (non-human) matter (Vaezi 2014, 385).

From his point of view, religious explication and enlightening discourse in the Islamic world have not been able to break the barrier and supremacy of traditional and typical religious discourse to establish a new cognitive horizon and thereby formulate the scientific and historical – and especially the religious – awareness. This is because the historical aspect of the Qur'an and its human and cultural characteristics have not been paid attention to. Therefore, to get out of this situation and to attain the scientific and historical awareness of religious texts, it is necessary that right in contrast to

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religious discourse and thinking - which considers Allah as the source and authority of religious texts and bestows sanctity and purity to the religious text by putting metaphysical clothing on it - we must rather take the historical, humanistic and cultural aspects of the text of religion as our initiating point and must focus on the historical, social and cultural reality that surrounds the perception of revelation (Asadi 2012, 189-190).

To put it more clearly in Abu Zayd's view, Quranic texts are a kind of cultural product in their nature and essence, which has been formed into the text of the reality of the culture and society of the time of its revelation for more than 23 years (Vaezi 2014, 386). He writes: "This text is not separated from its society. It is not detached from its culture, from its receiver; that is the Prophet of God. This is the basis of the book, ie, the issue of historicity and temporalness of the Qur'anic text and its close relationship with the culture attributed to it - after this, we would discuss the influence of the Qur'anic text on the culture. Of course, this text could not have an impact on the culture that comes after it unless it was formed through the culture of its time… From this point, we conclude that the Quran is a cultural product." (Abu Zayd 2020, 505-506).

Therefore, believing in the sacred real existence and metaphysical and predetermined existence of this text is an attempt to cover its cultural and historical aspects and to block the possibility of scientific understanding of this phenomenon. When Allah, the Almighty sent down the revelation to the Prophet (PBUH), he chose the dominant language system of the recipient of the revelation. Contrary to the view promoted by the contemporary (traditional) religious discourse, the choice of a language is not about choosing an empty container. Language is the most important tool of a nation in understanding the world and systematizing it. Based on this, it is never possible to comment about a language, in isolation from culture and social reality (Vaezi 2014, 386).

In the view of Abu Zayd, the Qur'an utilized the cultural elements of the era of revelation during its formation. He believes that these cultural elements reflected in the Qur'an were present in the superior culture of that time, which aimed to change the status quo, and the Qur'an did not use the elements of Bedouin or Arab culture. Of course, according to him, the Qur'an has reciprocally influenced the

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culture and transformed it. Abu Zayd believes that the Qur'an was influenced by the political and social conditions that the early audience of the Qur'an was facing, and on the other hand, the Qur'an left a slight change in the social realities of its time, but this change and transformation did not have much conflict with those realities (Goli 2011, 34).

Abu Zayd says: The divine source and origin of the revelatory text does not negate the veritableness and historicity of its content; therefore, the revelatory nature of the text does not conflict with human culture and the specific social and historical container to which the text belongs. Since the sender of the message and the divine origin cannot be researched in the case of the Qur'an, it is natural that the way for methodical entry into the research about the Qur'anic text passes through the "input of reality" or the "input of culture." And this truth is the thing out of which the life of the recipient of revelation and the individuals who are its early audience is formed, and the culture of which the language is its visualization surrounds it. In the research of the Quranic text, going to reality and culture means dealing with experimental and empirical issues. It is by analyzing such issues that one can achieve a scientific understanding of the phenomenon of the religious text (Abu Zayd 2020, 24).

Abu Zayd's emphasis on the historical dimension of religious texts and disapprobation of the traditional religious discourse for ignoring the historical dimension of revelation is based on a peculiar definition and understanding of the historical dimension; Because it is clear that the prevalent and traditional religious discourse is also aware of religious text having historical dimension, and for this reason, in the interpretation of the Qur'an and jurisprudence, they discuss the causes of revelation and historical events, which were the historical ground and foundation for the revelation of verses and surahs. Also, the discussion of abolisher and abolished and the change of rulings due to the change of circumstances and historical conditions (interference of time and place in ijtihad) is well-known in the traditional idea. Therefore, what Abu Zayd means by the historical dimension of religious texts is the historicity of concepts; This means that the content and meaning of the words and terminology of the revelation texts are historical due to the historical nature of the vocabulary and language used in the revelation, and it

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is mixed with the objective, linguistic and cultural realities of the era of revelation (Vaezi 2014, 387).

In some of Abu Zayd's explanations, there is a distorted and incorrect image regarding the belief in the divinity of the religious text and it being extra humane, for example, he writes: "Believing in the divinity of texts and insisting on their divine nature necessitates for us to believe that a person is unable to understand them with conventional methods, unless for some noble individuals who are blessed with the special divine providence and can understand it due to their special ability and capacity. Albeit, the mystics have said such a statement. In this way, religious texts are out of the scope of understanding of ordinary people…" (Asadi 2012, 197).

Proof of the historicity of the Qur'an from Abu Zayd's point of view

One of the most basic accepted principles for believers in the Quran is that the implications of the Quran are general. And since the historicity of the Qur'an violates this generality, Abu Zayd, in order to prove the historicity of the Qur'an, says the following in response to some people's opposition to the concept of historicity due to its contradictions with the generality of the Qur'an's implication: "We have all kinds of significations and one of them is the linguistic signification which has rules that do not govern other significations. By citing non-religious texts such as poems, Abu Zayd considers the Qur'an too as part of the historical heritage that needs a new reading. That too only in his own literary school of thought." (Raeesian and ZandaQatayi 2017, 15).

He considers the relationship between language and the world to be in the realm of mental and cultural horizons, concepts, and images and assumes that language is the modern system that expresses all cultural manifestations. The language of the cultural system is a signifier, and all texts take their validity from the culture from which they have emerged. In other words, culture is denotative of language. After stressing the linguistic signification, the theorist talks about the text of the Qur'an and says: "Undoubtedly, this text is vocal and is not merely a text that the language makes it speak, although it derives its power of expression primarily from the language. And the meaning of the power of expression is in the

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sense that the text is addressed to people in a specific cultural context." (Raeesian and ZandaQatayi 2017, 15).

By religious texts, Abu Zayd means only the text of the Qur'an and hadiths. He divides these texts into three categories in terms of their signification, which would be mentioned briefly.

Categorizations of religious texts in terms of signification

Obsolete texts and significations in the Qur'an

Abu Zayd says that the human society before Islam had special culture, beliefs, and negative values and had a special system which got reflected in the text of the Qur'an and the Sunnah in terms of linguistic and legislative reasons. But they have disappeared due to historical developments. Issues such as slavery, polygamy, possessing bondmaids, punishment for adultery, how to deal with infidels and the modality of collecting taxes from them, witchcraft, the effect of envy, jinn, demons, exorcisms, the effect of the evil eye and usury are amongst them.

On the other hand, although in the Quran, slavery, having a maidservant, etc. was not eliminated completely; we should pay attention to the general orientation of Islam, which aims to eradicate these cases. And resorting to the literal meanings of the texts sometimes not only contradicts the interest of the people but it can be said that it harms the national and ethnic existence as well (Asadi Nasab 2012, 185).

Texts and significations interpreted in a figurative sense

From Abu Zayd's point of view, some Quranic words had their specific meanings in the language of descend, and people used to act according to their actual meaning, but now we have to find a figurative meaning for them; because it is not possible to act based on their literal meaning. For instance, Abu Zayd gave the word 'Slave' as an example and said: "In the era of the advent of Islam, the relationship between people was based on servitude and slavery. In religious texts, it was emphasized that humans are servants of Allah only and worship is exclusive to Allah; so, the concept of servitude, which is slavery, existed in that era, but in the following eras, this concept got a different meaning, which is figurative compared to the first meaning. Currently, slavery does not exist in its old form (its

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literal meaning), but it exists in its new form; That is, without dominating over someone's body and soul, it leads him to exploitation." For example, worshiping Allah is not in its literal sense, but in its figurative sense; It means attachment, belongingness, love, bonding, and affection, and this is something that is hidden from religious discourse; Because the religious discourse insists on its literal meaning; Thus the insistence of the religious discourse on the exclusivity of the relationship between man and Allah in the aspect of servitude, in its literal and historical sense, is an insistence that conflicts with the truth of Islam (Asadi Nasab 2012, 185).

Extendable texts and significations in the Qur'an

Abu Zayd argues like this about such types of texts, that is, the way in which texts from the Qur'an can be accepted for the current era with semantic development is based on the separation between the meaning of the text, its content, and its core, which is established with the inner context of the texts and also by using their historical and social context. The meaning is that same implication of the text that comes from the signification of the word in the era of revelation and during the creation and formation of the texts, but the content, although it is related to the meaning, is a contemporary issue and depends on the time and place and the specific social conditions of each era.

The content that Abu Zayd explains is the horizon of current reality, which the present situation directs its movement, therefore, the content is versatile, dynamic, relative, and fluid, and it is the time that determines its situation. For example, at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an, girls were completely deprived of inheritance, and the Qur'an legislated a special ruling in their favor at that time, and more than that was not possible because the fanatical patriarchal relations were dominants. Therefore, inheritance rules should be in harmony with the cultural and social context of that time and should not conflict with the aforementioned context in the process of legislation (Abu Zayd 2004, 308).

It is the case in which one should reach the unsaid of the text according to the content of the text; That is, by meticulosity in the text, we must understand what was the goal of the Shariah (the legislator) and where it wants to get to, that due to the prevailing atmosphere, it did not state all its claims; Therefore, the meaning of

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many rulings related to women cannot be discovered without paying attention to her status in Arab society before Islam, in that society women had no value and the criteria of people's worth was economic efficiency and warrior spirit. The hidden issue regarding the category of inheritance also reaches the limit of overthrowing the fanatical system (Abu Zayd 2004, 308).

Abu Zayd, in his book, "The concept of the text", considers the Qur'an to be a cultural product that itself can create culture, and this is an obvious fact that does not need to be proven. But it needs continuous emphasis. For this reason, he mentions two stages in the history of the text of the Qur'an. One is the stage of its formation and completion, and the second is the stage where it turns out to be the creator of culture, i.e., it becomes a dominant text with which all other texts are compared and gains their legitimacy from it (Raeesian and ZandaQatayi 2017, 16).

Abu Zayd believes that nothing in the Qur'an has a clear meaning by itself. Therefore, all concepts and propositions of the Quran are always in need of interpretation. Thus, religious texts, especially the Qur'an, have turned into human texts, and Islamic culture is fundamentally based on the Arabic language and culture because of its text centricity (Aby Zayd 2020, 531). He says in this regard: "Texts became humanly since they were descended from the sacred world and embodied in the field of history and language and addressed to mankind." (Abu Zayd 2020, 396).

Quiddity of the revelation and evidentiary of the historicity of the Qur'an from Abu Zayd's point of view

In Abu Zayd's view, the Qur'an is a historical text and "a historical action and a phenomenon that has occurred in history and is bound by the level of intelligence and awareness of its audience and the nature of the social and cultural situation in which it was substantiated." Based on this, Abu Zayd considers the idea of a transhistorical and antecedent existence of the Qur'an in the divinely preserved tablet to be incorrect.

Now, we will discuss the most important evidence and documents of Abu Zayd to prove the historicity of the Qur'an in the sense of the creation of the Qur'an in the historical situation of the era of revelation, those are as follows:

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The occurrence of change and transformation in the Qur'an

If the text is transhistorical, eternal and everlasting, no change will occur in it; however, the Meccan or Madani nature of the Qur'anic verses, the abrogation of some verses, and the causes of the revelation of the verses indicate the occurrence of changes and transformations in the Qur'an due to its interaction with the culture of the era of revelation. Therefore, it is not possible to consider the Qur'an as eternal and everlasting, but it should be considered a historical text (Goli 2011, 54-55).

As a result, what comes out from the analysis of Quranic knowledge is that the Quran is a text; a historical text, and a language that was formed in "reality" and after its formation, itself shaped "reality" (Abu Zayd 2000, 7-8).

From the category of the Qur'an, being an action

If the divine word belongs to the category of "action", then like other divine actions in the realm of the universe, it is created and originated; therefore, the Holy Quran, which is one of the instances of the divine word, should be considered historical like other creations (Abu Zayd 2009, 340).

Need of having an addressee for the realization of the speech

For Qur'an to be the word of Allah, there requires having creatures who are listeners for those words from Allah, the sublime; because speech is realized and meaningful if there is a speaker and a listener. Therefore, the speech of Allah, the Almighty in the Qur'an should be considered at the time of the existence of creatures. Hence, it can be said that the Qur'an is a historical phenomenon (Abu Zayd 1979, 8).

The effectiveness and impressibility of revelation from reality

Among the important and influential elements in Abu Zayd's view of the Quranic revelation is that, according to him, there is a mutual relationship of impacting and being impacted between the Qur'an and the external reality. The most important evidence that Abu Zayd brings forth to prove his claim is as follows: Impressibility of the

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Qur'an from 1. From the culture of the era of revelation, 2. Different conditions of the era of revelation (Goli 2011, 56).

Impressibility of the Qur'an from the culture of the era of a revelation

According to Abu Zayd, the Qur'an, at the time of its formation, was influenced by and benefited from the cultural elements of its era of descent. Thus: "The text of the Qur'an is a cultural product at its essence and substance. That is, this text has been formed in this reality and this culture for more than twenty years, where this point is undoubted and well-accepted. Believing in a metaphysical and prior existence of the Qur'an is an attempt to cover up this definite reality and, as a result, eliminate the possibility of scientific perception of the phenomenon of the Qur'anic text." (Abu Zayd 2000, 68-69).

Another point is that Abu Zayd believes that these cultural elements which are reflected in the Qur'an were present in the superior culture of that time, which aimed to change the status quo, and the Qur'an did not use the elements of Bedouin or Arab culture. (Abu Zayd 1979, 8). Though, according to him, the Qur'an too has reciprocally influenced the culture and transformed it (Wasfi 2008, 42).

Impressibility of the Qur'an from the different circumstances of its era of revelation

In the view of Abu Zayd, while Qur'an was influencing, it was impressible too. That is, the Qur'an was influenced by the political and social conditions that the early audience of the Qur'an was facing (Goli 2011, 57), and on the other hand, the Qur'an left a slight change in the social realities of its time, but this change and transformation did not have much conflict with those realities (Abu Zayd 2004, 308).

An instantaneous and timeless descent of the Qur'an is impossible

Another point from the common core elements of Abu Zayd's views is about the nature of the Qur'anic revelation through which he reaches the historicity of the Qur'an. It is the denial of the instantaneous revelation of the Qur'an. He rejected the idea of the Qur'an being descended at once in full, from some outer space. The most important pieces of evidence that he has stated to deny the instantaneous descent of the Qur'an, are as follows:

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The idea of instantaneous descent of the Qur'an in full conflicts with the first verse of the chapter of Al-Qadr; because the past tense of "اَنزَلنَا (we sent down)" in the verse «إِنَّا اَنزَلنَاهُ فى لَيلِه القَدر» (Al-Qadr/1) indicates the beginning of the revelation of the Qur'an in the past. Therefore, based on this verse, only a part of the verses of the Qur'an were gradually revealed to the Prophet on the night of Qadr, and not the whole Quran was revealed to him instantaneously.

Another reason is that the concept of the instantaneous revelation of the Qur'an is incompatible with the issue of abrogation of rulings and with the clear significations of some verses of the Qur'an (Abu Zayd 2004, 308); because it is not possible that a ruling to be issued at some time and then be canceled at the same time.

Critiquing the view of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd

Every text considers and oversees the sociocultural realities of its time. Also, the influence of the cultural realities of the time of the origination of the text over its subject matter is possible both through the language and through the impressibility of the author in terms of beliefs and orientations from the sociocultural situations of his time. These are moderate and acceptable views. And the Qur'an, which was revealed in Arabic and whose purpose is to guide mankind and show the divine path, cannot be disconnected from cultural issues and realities. Rather, the Qur'an has endorsed the correct aspects of this culture, modified some, and rejected others. But on the other hand, this should also be noted that the essence of the Qur'an is for the guidance of mankind in all times and places. Therefore, it cannot be considered confined and exclusive to the society of a particular era, which can be understood from the concept of the historicity of the Qur'an. Abu Zaid, on the other hand, is caught up between two paths, to consider the Qur'an as historical and also that text as amenable to interpretation. Thus, Abu Zayd has taken two extreme paths in this regard. One extreme is for reaching the subject matter of the Qur'an and for having the relevance of the teachings of the Qur'an for today's life, there would need interpretation and presentation of new readings from the Qur'an. This too, if done without fulfilling the requisites and observing proper standards, may lead to inappropriate and arbitrary interpretations, and can be resulted in having fake and fable readings from the Qur'an. Also, another extreme path is since it limits the Qur'an in the enclosure of

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time, the result of which are the consequences that will be discussed later. Now, the most important issues from Abu Zayd's point of view will be briefly discussed, although what is mentioned here would cover only a part of his controversial discussions.

The text isn't dependent on reality only

The basis of Abu Zayd's view on religious texts is the belief that these texts are "cultural products" and despite having a divine origin, they have a human aspect and are influenced by the historical and social realities of the era of revelation. Therefore, they are subjected to historical scientific reading and it is not possible to extend the historical and original meanings of these texts to all eras. Rather, the real meaning of these texts is limited in the enclosure of the cultural and historical situation of the era of descent, and to extend them to other ages, we need figurative interpretation and understanding of the meaning and essence of these texts. The very first inadequacy of this analysis comes from the use of the compound term "cultural product". At least two interpretations of this word, extreme and moderate, can be presented and what Abu Zayd implied by using this term is closer to its extreme interpretation. All the viewpoints that do not consider the union between words and meaning to be intrinsic affirm the involvement of the human element in creating this union, whether through the convention and specifying designation or through the prevailing usage and self-specifying designation. They open a channel for factoring in the sociocultural norms in the category of language. Here the necessities for new words, human relations, economic and cultural relations, and other natural factors are all effective over the lexical richness, richness, and scarcity of metaphors and similes, applicability of language, positive and negative connotations of words, and other linguistic issues. And the changes created over the centuries in the realm of such human and social relations naturally affect the objective reality of a language, and it can be said that the texts created in a language during the historical process of the transformation of that language are indirectly influenced by the prevailing culture and social norms of that society. According to this moderate interpretation, the text does not have a direct link with culture and social developments, but this connection is established through language. It is such that those cultural and social elements that have not been able to influence the language,

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will inevitably find a place to appear in the text; Because every writer and speaker will benefit from language as a means of conveying their message and meaning, and language with limitations and requirements will be exposed in the given texts (Vaezi 2010, 51-52).

An extreme interpretation of the influence of culture and social relations on texts – by which the religious texts are meant here - is that basically, any text is a reflection of the cultural norms and beliefs that govern the historical era in which the text was created and the author of the text would necessarily conform and comply in his work with those beliefs and norms. In such a way that the text will not be anything but an emerged matter and a cultural product out of his era. Referring to Abu Zayd's works, it appears that he is inclined towards this extreme approach. For example, he says this at a place: "Therefore, it is the "reality" which is the main thing and it cannot be ignored that the text emerged from the reality and it is created from the language and culture-specific concepts. And through the change in reality, – due to human activities - the signification of the text (also) changes. Therefore, the reality is the first and last of every text." (Vaezi 2010, 51-52).

It can be seen that in this extreme interpretation, the role of culture and society in the semantic relations of the text, the focus and pivot of meaning shifts from the author and the text to the cultural and historical facts of the era of the text, and the meaning of the text becomes a function of the variable of cultural and social changes. And according to Abu Zayd, it is the sociocultural reality that forms the beginning and end of every text. Another issue with this interpretation is that the scope and limits of the influence of historical and cultural elements are not standardized. For example, Abu Zayd selectively considers the inclusion of elements such as witchcraft, magic, usury, slavery, jinn, and Satan in the Qur'an as a reflection of the cultural elements and realities of the time of revelation, while other elements also existed in the realm of the beliefs of the people of that time. Why are they not considered for this? For example, the words (Allah, Lord, worship, and servitude) were among the beliefs of the people of the time of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) (Vaezi 2014, 396).

The Qur'an reveals the fact that the people of Hijaz and the polytheist of the time of the Prophet (PBUH) believed in Allah as the creator of the heavens and the earth, «وَ لَئِن سَاَلتَهُم مَّن خَلَق السمواتِ و الارضَ

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«لَيَقُولُنَّ اللّهُ»(Luqman 25). Their problem was polytheism in Lordship, so they believed in the principle of Lordship and that the affairs of the world, including human affairs, other creatures and visible phenomena, all lives are under the guardianship and lordship of the divine existence. They were afflicted with the plurality of lords and polytheism in Lordship and they did not believe in the exclusiveness of the Lordship of the Almighty Allah. Despite this, is it now correct to claim that the inclusion of matters such as Allah as the creator and the concept of lordship and mastery in the Qur'an is due to the reflection from the culture of the era of revelation? (Vaezi 2014, 396).

The impact of the Quran on reality

The previous point explored that the text with all its characteristics is not affected by reality only. And now we want to say that the text also affects reality, and that is why we say that the idea of the impressibility of the Qur'an from the culture of the era of descent is rejected. Because the confrontation of Islam with the culture, customs, and traditions of the Arabs at the time of descent, was not passive, but an active encounter. Such that, the Qur'an acted in two ways in dealing with the culture of its time. Qur'an approved those elements in the culture of the time of descent that was in conformity with reason and justice (such as various methods of buying, selling, renting, etc.) or those that were remnants from the teachings of the previous prophets and there was no need for abolishing them (such as Hajj, prayer, fasting), although it specified certain limitations and boundaries for them. However, it stood against and invalidated those beliefs, customs, and traditions of Arab culture (such as burying the girls alive, depriving women of inheritance, usury, etc.) that were contrary to reason and justice and hindered the personal and social development of humans. Therefore, it can be said that the Qur'an is not only not affected by the culture of the time, but it was the culture of the time that was positively influenced by the wise teachings of the Qur'an (Goli 2011, 57).

Of course, it is accepted if what Abu Zayd meant, by saying the formation of the Qur'an is based on the culture of the time, is that the Qur'an used the vocabulary and rules of the Arabic language from the descent era to make an impact on the culture of that time. However, if he means that the Qur'an has used false ideas, beliefs, and superstitious myths of the culture of its time to influence society,

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then his theory is rejected. Because the outcomes of asserting that the false elements of contemporary culture are reflected in the Qur'an is that the guidance of the Qur'an is mixed with misguidance, and the only easy access to the divine laws available to mankind - which is essential for comprehensive felicity – turns to be fallible. And since it is in contrast to the intention of the All-Wise Allah for descending of the revelation to guide mankind and it contradicts His wisdom, such a thing cannot be issued by him (Goli 2011, 57).

The entailment of the historicity of the Qur'an, the admittance of falsehood in the Qur'an

Consideration of the revelation being humanistic and historical, per Abu Zayd's theory, has clear theological constraints and both rationale and narration prove its inaccuracy. The most important of these constraints is entailment to the admittance of falsehood and injustice in the Qur'an. While, in the verse لايَأَتيهِ البَاطِلُ مِن بَين يَدَيهِ و لامِن خَلفِه تنزيلٌ مِن حكيمٍ حميدٍ» (Fussilat /42), Allah clearly absolves the Holy Qur'an of any falsehood. Moreover, as per rational judgment, it is against Allah's wisdom to issue lies and falsehood (Vaezi 2014, 397).

On the other hand, we observe that the Holy Quran provides guidance for all at every level of existence. Quran is an endless sea that satiates the thirsty souls with any capacity and this is the secret of it being always fresh like an ebullient spring. Therefore, such teachings, which make up the majority of the verses of the Qur'an, can never be the result of the culture of the time or be influenced by it, such that they can be considered a cultural product (Arab Salehi 2008, 193).

In addition to this, religion is fixed, immutable, and eternal, as well as integral and unchanging in terms of its source of origination. The source of religion is Allah's immutable truth, and its subjects are human nature and the soul. Therefore, the basis of the teachings of the Qur'an and religion is addressing human nature in line with this innate nature and it is for guidance and perfection. The passage of time and change of place and circumstances do not make it obsolete, just as the divine nature is not a matter of history. Because the audience of the modality of verses is human nature and not those ignorant Arab people (Arab Salehi 2008, 193).

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One of the consequences of the phenomenon of the historicity of the Qur'an is the denial of the instantaneous revelation of the Qur'an and asserting of its gradual revelation over the course of 18 years. Therefore, Abu Zayd does not accept the instantaneous revelation of the Qur'an on the night of Qadr. He says that the distinction between the full-length revelation of the Qur'an and its revelation in parts is merely a mental formulation that has taken on a scientific appearance. It is nothing but the reiteration of the words of the scholars of the Qur'anic sciences about the descent of the Qur'an into the sky first and then its gradual descent onto the heart of the Prophet (PBUH). In reality, no Qur'anic text has been revealed instantaneously at once and in complete form from a place outside the earth, which could assumably be some sacred place accounting for the destinies and other details. Because this is not only in conflict with the first verse of Surah Qadr, but also incompatible with the issue of abrogation and nullification of rulings and with the clear significations of some verses of the Qur'an (Abu Zayd 2015, 186-187).

While famous Shia and Sunni scholars have accepted the instantaneous revelation of the Holy Qur'an to the heart of the Prophet (PBUH) in the month of Ramadan and on the Night of Qadr (Raeesian and ZandaQatayi 2017, 18-19).

Without a doubt, it is intellectually proven that every existence in material ecstasy has higher levels of existence in the example universe and in the realm of intelligence that are referred to as the corresponding worlds of existence. And to claim that the Qur'an is entirely a product of events and sociocultural realities of the era of descent and has no independent prior identity is a clear contradiction to rationale and narration (Vaezi 2014, 298).

Implicativeness and interpretability of the text, contrary to its historicity

Since Abu Zayd's main goal is the historical scientific study of religious texts, he wants us to believe by accepting the humanistic and historical nature of the religious text that the real meaning of the religious text is directed to the sociocultural realities of the descent era. Therefore, it will have a historical character and will be enclosed by the cultural and linguistic reality of its era. Therefore, now that we

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live in different cultural and social realities from the era in which the religious text originated, it is necessary to adjust the religious text to the sociocultural realities of our era. And instead of sufficing with the original historical meaning of the text, we should look for the substance (core) of the text and reach its purport by figurative interpretation of the signifiers of the text.

Here is what Abu Zayd believes about such religious texts which are extensible:

a) This methodology by which the texts from the Qur'an can be applied for the present era using semantic development is based on the separation between the meaning of the text, its content, and its core substance, which is established with the inner context of the texts and also by using their historical and social context. Here, the meaning is that same implication of the text that comes from the signification of the word in the era of descent and when the texts were formed, but the content, although it is related to the meaning, is a contemporary issue and depends on the time and place and the specific social conditions of each era. There are also two interrelated processes to understand contemporary content or fatwa on new topics (Asadi Nasab 2012, 193-194).

b) Finding out the reason behind a ruling, which is the criterion of that ruling as per jurists, is a rudimentary process and does not apply to other rulings. And it is not extended to texts other than those same texts corresponding to the rulings. In fact, it is the same old ruling that originated from the texts, centered on the same reason that is inapplicable in the current era. The process of discovering the purports behind the revelation is actually an extension of that same process of finding the cause that was then limited to the matters of saving life, wealth, honor, and religion only (Asadi Nasab 2012, 303).

c) The content that Abu Zayd explains is the horizon of current reality, which the present situation directs its movement, therefore, the content is versatile, dynamic, relative, and fluid, and it is the time that determines its situation. As per Abu Zayd, one should reach the unsaid of the text according to the content of the text; That is, by meticulosity in the text, we must

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understand what was the goal of the Shariah (the legislator) and where it wants to get to, that due to the prevailing atmosphere, it did not state all its claims; Therefore, the meaning of many rulings cannot be discovered without paying attention to the situation of Arab society before Islam (Asadi Nasab 2012, 303).

This statement of the theoretician extends the applicability of the text to other times, as opposed to the concept of stagnancy of the text in the past and in the situation and time that led to its emergence; An extension and development that is in harmony with the cultural characteristics after the origination of the text, even if that may be contrary to the meaning that can be perceived from the text and its outer appearance.

What must be said, in response to the above, is that the method for understanding religious texts through the perception of the message and religious literacy and then casting them through new mold and words alongside the supremacy of dominant values of the age over them, would mean the invention of a completely new religion with its branches and principles in every era (Asadi Nasab 2012, 195).

According to Abu Zayd, the implication or the core substance is not about meaning or the proportionality of meaning in relation to some external factor. Rather, reaching the implication is the goal of the interpretation of the text. The commentator and interpreter of the text are responsible for two tasks; one is to discover the meaning, which is nothing but finding the original and historical meaning of the text, and the other is to get to its implication, which is the ultimate goal of interpretation of the text. But the problem with what Abu Zayd meant by implication is that it leads to a kind of fluid and relativistic interpretation of the text; Because Firstly; it permits the reader to extend the meaning of the text and unhooks the text from its historical signification and from being confined to the enclosure of the cultural and linguistic realities of the era of the descent and creation of the text; Secondly, it allows the reader to re-interpret those extendible and interpretable linguistic signifiers based on the sociocultural reality of his era and achieve a (contemporary reading) of the text. He terms this as the implication of the text, which in this case, would be transforming, variable, and fluid according to the

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reader and his cultural and historical ties and also according to linguistic expansions. This description of what is considered the implication and the ultimate goal of interpretation cannot be attributed to Allah and the owner of the religious text by any measure or indicator. In the semantic encounter with the text, at least in the religious and creedal environment, the goal is to infer the intended meaning and objective of the speaker from religious discourse and text. And yet, according to his description, the implication is nothing but the interpretative adaptation of the text to the cultural realities of the age and time of diverse and numerous readers in the context of historical transformations. And Abu Zayd's insistence on the necessity of correspondence between the implication and the meaning and not having a fundamental gap in the discoverer's inference of implication with the original and historical meaning does not solve this problem of attribution (to Allah) (Vaezi 2014, 400).

One of the surprising things in Abu Zayd's thought is the emphasis on the non-existence of such things as magic, demons, envy, amulets, etc. in the Holy Quran. (Vaezi 2014, 401). In critiquing Abu Zayd's theory, it can be said that first of all, empirical science is not capable of proving or negating transcendental things, so it would not be logical to deny everything that modern empirical science is not able to prove, by considering them as superstition and illusionary (Arab Salehi 2008, 251).

This view of Abu Zayd lacks logical justification and is unjustified in two ways; First of all, he does not provide any reasoning that these things are unreal. And if, due to the prevalence of empiricism and the acceptance of positivism, someone considers experiment and feeling as the only basis for accepting the existence of beings and facts then not only these things but any non-material existence starting from Allah and angels to heaven and hell and life after death and everything unseen should be denied and rejected. Moreover, senses and experiments, and scientific findings based on them are not the only things, and they cannot negate and deny transcendental existences and objective relationships. This is why the discovery of empirical relationships between material phenomena cannot deny the influence of non-material factors, such as the answer to prayer, miracles, and divine will over the events of the material world (Vaezi 2014, 401).

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It can be seen from Abu Zayd's thoughts that from his point of view: One. The Prophet (PBUH) is the result of Arab upbringing, culture, and history; so, he is not an ideal truth or something beyond history; Two. Being a human necessitates fallibility, and infallibility is associated with being above and beyond human beings; Three. Since the Prophet's understanding is not beyond the culture and history of the previous Arab society and is influenced by it; so, the Prophet's understanding is relative and variable.

As we can see, these views are not evidentiary and are not substantiated by rationale and narrative justification. In other words, this type of remark, instead of being originated out of reasoning, is driven by the factor; That is, the observance of a fact or some facts caused Abu Zayd to reach this conclusion, while the apparent fact is not always the discoverer of the truth. In other words, because he observed the impact of human culture and the circumstances of the time, he generalized it to all humans (Arab Salehi 2008, 130).

Qur'an, which is the word of Allah, the All-Wise, has followed the rules of the language and culture of its initial audiences to deliver its contents to them. The Prophet (PBUH) is also one of the audiences. Therefore, even disregarding the prophet's infallibility in receiving revelation, it can still be said that he, knowing the linguistic rules of his culture, could be well aware of the meanings of the Qur'an - which were intended by Allah. Also, the prophet's infallibility in receiving revelation does not conflict with him being a human; because to qualify as a human being, doesn't necessarily require a person to make mistakes, including a mistake in perception (Goli 2011, 61).

Some contemporary authors say in this regard: "Consolidation of humanness is not in erring and forgetfulness, but even if avoiding mistakes and forgetfulness is beyond the limits of human control, it does not prevent the Almighty Allah from blessing the prophets and some other saints with this gift of infallibility. And just as granting the position of prophethood to some people and giving them the authority that others are incapable of attaining, does not mean stripping them of their title of human being, granting them infallibility from mistakes and forgetfulness too does not mean the same." (Yousefiyan and Sharifi 2009, 36-37).

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Conclusion:-

Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd is one of the contemporary Egyptian thinkers whose views and ideas about the historicity of the Qur'an have created a turning point in present-day Qur'anic discussions. He believes that the Qur'an, during its formation, absorbed the cultural elements of the era of its descent and these cultural elements are reflected in the Qur'an. In his belief, the Qur'an has reciprocally influenced the culture and transformed it. Of course, the Qur'an too, like other divine books, was revealed and written in the language of the people of that era and used their common words, similes, and allusions. But this does not mean accepting the superstitions and anti-scientific matters of that people and nation. In addition, the Qur'an has acted selectively regarding the culture existing in the contemporary Arab era of the time of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), that is, it has approved the positive issues and has not accepted the negative elements of that culture. Abu Zayd's emphasis on the historical dimension of religious texts and blaming the traditional religious discourse for ignoring and neglecting the historical dimension of revelation is based on a specific definition and understanding of the historical dimension; Because it is clear that the mainstream traditional religious discourse is also aware of the historical dimension of the religious text. And for this reason, in the interpretation of the Qur'an and jurisprudence, they discuss the reasons for the revelation and historical events - which were the historical context for the revelation of the verses and chapters of the Qur'an. In response to Abu Zayd's thoughts, it should be said that the Qur'an was not revealed in a vacuum, and it was not revealed without paying attention to the knowledge of words and vocabulary, and without a thorough understanding of the subject matter. The city of Mecca had been the meeting point of world-traveling merchants and various tribes whose people had different beliefs and cultures. And for this reason, many phrases in the Qur'an are embroiled with the local and regional dialects of Hejaz, whether from Persian, Abyssinian, Roman, or Syriac; because the position of the Qur'an requires it to be such and it has addressed such congregations. But there exists an insurmountable difference between consideration of the culture of the descent era and making an impact on it, with that of stagnation in the culture of the descent era and taking its unilateral and all-encompassing influence. And that creates an issue with Abu

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Zayd's argument that how can such a book carry a message and guidance for all people in every culture?

Conflict of interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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