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The Movement of Meaning and the Mechanisms of Interpretation: A Reading of Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad's Epistemological Methodology of the Qur'an

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***Abstract*—**When reading transcends the boundaries of comprehension and moves towards reconfiguration, Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad emerges as a contemporary scholar and pioneer who engages in the deconstruction and reconstruction of meanings through a modern intellectual approach that goes beyond the contemporary philosophies imposed upon the Qur'anic text in an attempt to penetrate its depths. He establishes his own epistemological philosophy and a distinctive methodology for reading the Qur'an, including such concepts as the objective counterpart of the universe, the Islamization of knowledge, and transcending the doctrines of burdens and shackles. These concepts constitute new foundations and building blocks for understanding the Qur'anic text.
In this research paper, we place under critical scrutiny a number of issues that constitute the core of his intellectual project, as presented in his book The Second Islamic Universalism, in order to address the following research question: Are his efforts suitable for establishing a new epistemological methodology for understanding the Qur'an?

***Keywords*—**Meaning, Qur'anic Methodology, Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad, Islamization of Knowledge, Interpretation.

Preamble

The call for new readings of the Qur'anic text or for developing a contemporary understanding of it necessarily presupposes the existence of a genuine need for such approaches, since these calls are not merely forms of intellectual luxury. The question, therefore, is: Why do we need these readings? Do we need them to critique the culture of stagnation and the primitivism of thought, in the words of Bensalem Himmich? Is it to escape the bubble of metaphysics and mythologisation, as Arkoun puts it? Is it to construct a distinctive interpretative model based on the approach of Abdelwahab Elmessiri? Or is it to search for the reasons behind the stagnation of the Arab-Islamic mind in comparison with its Western counterpart, between those who attribute its causes to external factors, such as Al-Jabri, and those who locate them within the Arab-Islamic intellectual structure itself, such as George Tarabishi?

These thinkers have enriched philosophical scholarship with an enormous body of interpretative contributions and intellectual debates. At times, they diagnose and dissect existing problems, while at others, they attempt to propose certain solutions. Nevertheless, their efforts are, on the whole, more critical than foundational. They lack alternative methodological conceptions capable, at their core, of establishing comprehensive and robust epistemological systems that could serve as philosophical models capable of transforming our understanding of existence without contradicting the outcomes of either civilisational reason or traditional intellectual heritage. In other words, this involves "displacing the structures of imitation and unquestioning adherence and reconsidering the nation's inherited intellectual legacy on the basis of civilisational epistemological assimilation."1

These thinkers share a common project of renewing religious thought through the generation of new meanings or the transformation of inherited concepts relating to the Qur'anic text, whether they are right or wrong, which is

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another matter altogether. Nevertheless, their writings remain attempts to understand or reassess the Arab-Islamic mind. They recognised that the Qur'an possesses a distinctive status and central role in shaping that mind, and that we cannot become part of the global intellectual framework, with all its philosophical outputs, because the Qur'an was not part of the intellectual formation of European civilisation, which has become the dominant civilisation, exporting its principles and philosophies. These were formed through a cumulative dialectical process extending from Greek thought to liberal thought.

Against this background, and in light of this divergence, Haj Hamad's idea of establishing a new methodology derived from the Holy Qur'an began to take shape. This methodology seeks to frame knowledge in its entirety and is referred to as the Islamization of Knowledge, whereby all scientific fields converge under the epistemological framework of Islam, which serves as their organising principle in terms of interpretation, explanation, and ultimate purpose.

1. The Islamization of Knowledge and Its Applications

1.1. What Is Meant by the Islamization of Knowledge?

Before clarifying the meaning of the Islamization of Knowledge, we shall provide a brief overview of the epistemological problem that paved the way for its emergence and the historical and intellectual necessity underlying its development.

At its core, philosophical inquiry seeks to provide an explanation of existence in its various forms and manifestations. All philosophical theories, from Aristotelianism to deconstructionism, represent attempts to understand existence and being in terms of matter, humanity, and the unseen. However, these theories have not succeeded in bringing together all three dimensions. Rather, they have affirmed one or two of them while excluding the remaining dimension or dimensions. This eventually led to pure materialism, which established the framework of modern knowledge around matter and its determinisms, to the detriment of humanity and the unseen.

In light of these outcomes, the question emerged concerning the possibility of adopting a new path and methodology capable of bringing together the three dimensions without contradiction or exclusion. Haj Hamad summarised this approach as follows: "The dialectics of the unseen without theology, the dialectics of humanity without absurd existentialism, and the dialectics of nature without materialism." 2

From the foregoing, we understand that a separation was created by pure materialism, despite its dominance in the achievements of scientific civilisation. Built upon positivist philosophy in its various epistemological manifestations, this separation gave rise to an intellectual orientation seeking to "liberate the philosophy of the natural sciences from materialist references, liberate humanity from absurd existentialism, and liberate the unseen from theology and superstition, so that the universal philosophy may be placed on a sound footing" within the framework of the Islamization of Knowledge.

It therefore means: "Severing the connection between human scientific and civilisational achievements and the various positivist philosophical references." We might understand from this definition that the problem is merely methodological. However, it is far deeper than that, since knowledge itself has become the problem. Indeed, it has lost its genuine purpose because of its flawed conception. Although it claims to represent and express truth, it produces nothing but confusion, disorder, and scepticism. Methodologically, it elevates doubt and conjecture to the status of scientific principles, considering doubt a valid and important epistemological instrument in the pursuit of truth. How, then, can knowledge itself be regarded as suspect and non-neutral? Is this not a contradiction?

Muhammad Naquib al-Attas provides what we consider an appropriate answer: "Knowledge is not something neutral; in reality, it may be imbued with a particular spirit and content disguised in the guise of knowledge. Consequently, in its general form, it is not necessarily genuine or authentic knowledge, but rather an interpretation and an understanding of facts through the prism of Western civilisation and in accordance with its comprehensive vision of existence and its intellectual conception of truth."3

Without delving too deeply into theoretical complexities, we may offer the following example: the theory of evolution, or Darwinism. It is no secret to any academic researcher, regardless of their field of specialisation, that this theory has become dominant as a starting point for explaining phenomena and as an ultimate guiding framework, whereby transcendent purposefulness is eliminated in favour of chance, mutation, or other explanations.

There can be no knowledge without criteria, a problem that philosophers refer to as the "problem of the criterion". It can be summarised in two principles:

1. An individual cannot identify which cases qualify as knowledge unless they already know what the criteria of knowledge are.
2. An individual cannot know what the criteria of knowledge are unless they have first identified the cases that qualify as knowledge.

The two preceding principles constitute the epistemological paradox and, consequently, the problem of knowledge. This is precisely what we mean by the concept of "suspect knowledge."

The issue, therefore, is much more profound than simply adding the adjective "Islamic" to knowledge or engaging in verbal and terminological manipulation by directly imposing Qur'anic verses and reformulating them to achieve civilisational compatibility and scientific progress. Rather, it involves a profound transformation of epistemological foundations, scientific principles, and patterns of interpreting existential phenomena in their entirety rather than in isolated aspects.

Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad defines it as follows: "The Islamization of Knowledge means the Islamization of applied science and scientific principles as well, through understanding the correspondence between the laws of the natural sciences and the laws of existence, upon which religious values themselves are constructed. Thus, the philosophical references underlying scientific theories are Islamized in such a way as to eliminate their positivist dimension and reformulate them within their universal dimension, which incorporates divine purposefulness into existence and movement."4

We shall attempt to formulate the concept by explaining what the Islamization of Knowledge is not, in order to clarify the picture further. The Islamization of Knowledge does not mean assimilating Western civilisation, nor does it mean adding an Islamic character to scientific findings through comparisons between religious texts and interpretations intended to make them correspond to certain natural scientific theories, as occurs in research on scientific miracles and similar studies. This is because science, in its simplest definition, is a deferred error: if we interpret a religious text today to make it correspond to a scientific law, that interpretation may be proven wrong after some time, placing us in a compounded linguistic and religious dilemma.

Nor does it mean searching for practical equivalents between heritage and modernity, such as claiming that the Islamic principle of consultation corresponds to democratic practices embodied in parliaments and representative councils, or the attempts of the Islamic Left to impose certain socialist concepts onto the principles of justice in Islam, and so forth.

Rather, it constitutes an entirely alternative model that confronts and challenges epistemological systems and methodologies at the very heart of the global materialist civilisational predicament. An example of this is one of the laws of physics: "We cannot say that heat causes bodies to expand and, at the same time, claim that bodies expand by themselves." This provides a simple illustration of the epistemological dilemma involved in explaining existence. Haj Hamad believes that this philosophical problem requires the intervention of an alternative model, namely the Islamization of Knowledge, which organises the [purposefulness of creation and the purposefulness of becoming].

Haj Hamad believes that the Holy Qur'an is "(the only text that possesses an alternative methodological and epistemological conception at the universal level)." He considers this a necessity rather than an optional choice for the human intellect, comparable to Marxist materialism or Fukuyama's liberal conception of the End of History, or Huntington's theory of the Clash of Civilisations. This is because "(God prepared the Qur'an to confront this crisis at the stage when humanity enters its third intellectual phase, following the decline of the revivalist and binary-oppositional intellectual systems)."5

Consequently, the Qur'an encompasses all epistemological and existential problems, whether psychological, social, political, or historical. However, does the Islamization of Knowledge take place through accumulated understandings and interpretations developed over time, or does it require a new reading?

Haj Hamad answers that there should be no epistemological rupture with heritage. In his view, what connects us to the intellectual heritage is the immutable principles of Islam, upon which all Muslim scholars and philosophers have agreed, despite their differences in conceptualising and understanding these principles. For instance, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd did not disagree over the fundamental principles of Islam, despite their differences in understanding and interpreting them. The same applies to us in relation to them and to other

scholars: we acknowledge and do not break with the fundamental principles of Islam, namely, the testimony that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, the performance of prayer, the giving of alms, fasting during Ramadan, and pilgrimage.

However, our disagreement with them lies in the fact that we employ different methodologies and perspectives from theirs, within intellectual and formative characteristics that are distinct from their own.

Nevertheless, what is required is to "(reread the Qur'an as a universal reference)." Here, we may ask: How can the Qur'an be reread as a universal reference?

2. Practical Models of the Movement of Meaning and the Language of the Unseen

Haj Hamad argues that the meanings of the Qur'an flow in accordance with an ongoing process that is constantly advancing towards the future, thereby demonstrating its enduring capacity to encompass changing circumstances and accommodate their social and historical laws within a universal formulation of contemporary and future scientific epistemological methodologies.

2.1. The Alternative Historical Model in the New Reading of the Qur'an

Haj Hamad maintains that the task of the historical researcher goes beyond collecting documents, facts, and successive events and compiling historical phenomena. Rather, the researcher's task should be "(within the framework of the Islamization of Knowledge, the application of the methodology of dual teleology to the fields of historical research)." 6

Dual teleology refers to [the purposefulness of creation and the purposefulness of becoming]. This means deriving a deeper understanding of the complexity underlying the movement of history.

Haj Hamad has illustrated his conception of history through numerous examples, which he reread in accordance with his proposed methodology. These include the Israeli phenomenon and the decline of Islamic civilisation, the story of Gog and Magog with Dhul-Qarnayn, and the story of Abraham (peace be upon him) and its underlying purpose. We shall limit ourselves to the latter as an applied model.

A New Reading of the Story of Abraham (Peace Be Upon Him)

Haj Hamad's interpretation of the Abrahamic story proceeds from the perspective of dual teleology. He states: "(The Abrahamic inquiry began in the realm of divine will and culminated in the great philosophy of sacrifice as an expression of gratitude to God for the cosmic place)."7

Haj Hamad presents a renewal-oriented interpretation of the dream of Abraham and his son Ishmael (peace be upon them). He rejects the traditional accounts concerning the dream of slaughter and redemption and the nature of the sacrificial offering, considering them to have been derived from the distorted Jewish heritage.

In this regard, he interprets the Almighty's words:

"...He said, 'O my son, indeed I have seen in a dream that I [must] sacrifice you, so see what you think.' He said, 'O my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah wills, among the patient.' ... And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice." [Al-Saffat: 101–107].

According to Haj Hamad, these verses contain new facts that differ from the interpretations traditionally inherited.

First:

Discovering the relationship between God and the universe through a sound intellectual conception, by means of Abraham's journey towards certainty. Haj Hamad explains: "(He possessed the cornerstone of this understanding when, through his sound rational reflection in the realm of divine will, he arrived at the discovery of this relationship)."8

This becomes evident in the Almighty's words:

"When the night covered him, he saw a star. He said, 'This is my lord.' But when it set, he said, 'I like not those that disappear.' ... Indeed, I have turned my face towards He who created the heavens and the earth, inclining towards truth, and I am not among those who associate others with Allah." [Al-An'am: 76–79].

Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad considers Abraham (peace be upon him) to be the founder of the integration of the two readings [the purposefulness of creation and the purposefulness of becoming]. Abraham's guidance, therefore, represents "(a rejection of animism and a rejection of materialism. This signifies the beginning of Islam, whereby, following the establishment of the rational concept of God–the universe, the relationship between God and the universe is established)."9

Consequently, a new methodology is established for approaching the existential relationship between God, humanity, and the universe. Abraham (peace be upon him) translated this relationship through a sound reading connecting observable phenomena with the realm of divine will.

Haj Hamad's perspective converges with that of many scholars who advocate new readings of the Qur'anic text. Muhammad Shahrur, for example, proposes a similar reading, stating: "(Abraham's method was an inductive and inferential approach that proceeded in the search for God from the senses to thought and from doubt to faith)."10

Youssef Seddik also adopts the same orientation, stating: "Only the Qur'anic version of Abraham's life makes him a reader of the starry sky; he begins his journey towards a new representation of the divine."11

The philosophical abstraction of Abraham's thinking leads, according to Haj Hamad, to the conclusion that he was the actual founder of the essence of Islam, which is represented by "(establishing the formula of the relationship between the unseen and reality, whereby the integration of the two readings became possible after the establishment of Islam)."12

His evidence is the Almighty's words:

"And strive for Allah with the striving due to Him. He has chosen you and has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty. [It is] the religion of your father, Abraham. Allah named you 'Muslims' before [in former scriptures] and in this [revelation], so that the Messenger may be a witness over you and you may be witnesses over the people. So establish prayer, give zakah, and hold firmly to Allah. He is your protector, and excellent is the protector, and excellent is the helper." [Al-Hajj: 78].

The first dimension of the Abrahamic experience, therefore, lies in the methodological transition from fragmented revivalist thought to an intellect capable of understanding the nature of the unseen and reality.

Second:

The new reading of the story of Abraham (peace be upon him), according to a historical perspective that transcends the mere recording of events, leads to what Haj Hamad calls the "philosophy of place and sacrifice." By this, he means "(Abraham's establishment of the concept of the relationship between God and the universe in accordance with spatial conceptions within the realm of divine will)."13

He derives this epistemological foundation from the Almighty's words:

"And [mention] when Abraham said to his father, Azar, 'Do you take idols as deities? Indeed, I see you and your people to be in manifest error' (74) ... Say, 'I do not ask you for this [message] any payment. It is not but a reminder to the worlds' (90)." [Al-An'am: 74–90].

The preceding verses illustrate Abraham's journey in searching for God, which Haj Hamad divides as follows:

- Abraham's initial rejection of the concept of the implicit embodiment of divinity.
- The search for the concept of a deity residing in the star, the moon, and the sun in their state of perfection.
- The rejection of their divinity because they set. This rejection did not arise from their disappearance or concealment, since Abraham had understood the cycle of disappearance and appearance from his childhood.
- Abraham's rejection was based on his understanding of the concept of "deficiency of form." This is because a setting she-camel is a camel whose physical constitution is incomplete, just as a setting newborn is one born with an incomplete constitution. The setting of the sun indicates its eclipse, while the setting of the moon indicates its lunar eclipse. This is what Abraham observed in them: a deficiency of form that contradicts the concept of perfection. He had directed his search for divinity towards them in their state of perfection, whereas whatever is deficient is destined to disappear and perish and cannot, in this sense, possess divinity.
- Abraham was searching for the perfect deity, one who possesses all attributes: a deity who knows, hears, sees, speaks, and instils a sense of security in a particular place. Haj Hamad considers these to be the characteristics of Abraham's conception of divinity, which were absent from mute and speechless idols and from natural phenomena characterised by incomplete forms.
- Haj Hamad derives the concept of the philosophy of place from the deficiency and limitations of the phenomena that were worshipped and from the inability of fire to burn Abraham, whereby fire acted contrary to its natural burning properties.

The entire philosophy becomes evident in "(God's response to Abraham in accordance with Abraham's own approach, by transforming the phenomena into fragments, just as idols are broken into pieces, and then restoring them to their perfection and bringing them back to life. Then, four birds were cut into pieces, thereby rendering their forms incomplete. Their pieces were subsequently distributed among four locations,

as stated in the Almighty's words:

'And [mention] when Abraham said, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead." 14[Allah] said, "Have you not believed?"15 He said, "Yes, but [I ask] only that my heart may be satisfied." [Allah] said, "Take four birds and commit them to yourself. Then [after slaughtering them] put on each mountain a portion of them; then call them—they will come [flying] to you in haste. And know that Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise." (260)' [Al-Baqarah: 260].16

The birds' parts were distributed across four regions. They came to him from the four locations, from the four passes, and from the different corners of the earth, returning alive with their parts reassembled."17

The philosophy of place in Abraham's story is then completed through the raising of the foundations of the Sacred House and the proclamation of pilgrimage among the people, after which the story proceeds directly to the subject of sacrifice.

Haj Hamad believes that the relationship between place (pilgrimage) and sacrifice represents an expression of gratitude for spatial existence and the livestock it contains. This is because "(the universe offers its sacrifice to humanity through livestock, and humanity must offer its sacrifice to God, namely, the human being himself. Just as livestock constitute a sacrifice of existence for humanity, the human being constitutes a sacrifice of existence for God. However, God makes the human sacrifice one of absolute servitude, as stated in the Almighty's words:

'And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me (56). I do not want from them any provision, nor do I want them to feed Me (57).' [Al-Dhariyat: 56–57]."18

Based on the philosophy of place and sacrifice, Haj Hamad offers a new interpretation of Abraham's dream and the issue of slaughter. He considers the dream, as a symbol, to refer to meanings in reality. Deciphering its symbols therefore requires taking into account both the general and specific contexts of the dreamer. Even if people's dreams are identical, their interpretations differ because of variations in their personal circumstances and psychological structures.

For this reason, Haj Hamad states: "(The interpretation of the Abrahamic vision should have been directed towards a sacrifice structurally corresponding to the place, namely, camels. However, Abraham and his son wanted to fulfil the vision exactly as it appeared in its original form. God therefore prevented him from doing so by calling upon him, simultaneously reproaching and thanking him)."19

2.1.1. A New Interpretation of Abraham's Vision

Haj Hamad summarises his interpretation of Abraham's vision in five fundamental points. His reading begins with a Qur'anic premise: God prohibits human sacrifice, which was a ritual practice in ancient pagan civilisations. Therefore, God could not have commanded His prophet to offer his son as a sacrifice.

In support of this position, he cites the Almighty's words:

"And likewise, to many of the polytheists their partners have made attractive the killing of their children in order to bring about their destruction and to confuse them regarding their religion. And if Allah had willed, they would not have done so. So leave them and that which they invent." [Al-An'am: 137].20

Accordingly, the interpretation is as follows:

1. The vision is not revelation, including the visions of prophets, since the condition for revelation is wakefulness rather than sleep. Prophethood is a divine commission, and its communication cannot be symbolic.

2. It was Ishmael, rather than Abraham, who saw in his father's vision something that he understood to be a divine command. The Almighty says:

"And when he reached with him [the age of] exertion, he said, 'O my son, indeed I have seen in a dream that I [must] sacrifice you, so see what you think.' He said, 'O my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah wills, among the patient.'" [Al-Saffat: 102].21

Abraham did not tell him that he had been commanded to do so. Had his vision constituted a divine command, the meaning of the verse in Surah Al-An'am prohibiting sacrificial offerings would have been invalidated.

3. Ishmael was not a child deprived of the ability to exercise his own will. Rather, he was a rational adult, since he had reached the age of exertion and was participating with his father in the responsibilities of life. He was also consulted on the matter. This interpretation therefore rejects the dual tragic dimension of the trial, namely, the demand for human sacrifice and the fact that the person to be sacrificed would have been a child.

4. The wording of the call addressed to Abraham raises a linguistic question. The call was not expressed in the conventional form, such as "And We called him: O Abraham" or "We called Abraham." Instead, it appears in the

form "And We called him—'O Abraham'." The particle an is not redundant, since there are no redundant elements in the Qur'an.

The language of the Qur'an, in which every letter has been examined as though it occupied its own position among the stars, indicates that the expression "O Abraham" serves to draw attention to the fact that Abraham had subjected himself to a trial in a place where no such trial was intended. He did so out of obedience to God, based on what he had seen in his vision. God therefore rewarded him for his obedience and then redirected the vision towards its true meaning by providing its actual significance in reality through the presentation of the ransom, namely, the great sacrifice. This, according to Haj Hamad, is the true interpretation of Abraham's vision, rather than the slaughter of his son.

5. Haj Hamad argues that the great sacrifice was not a ram, nor was it brought from Paradise. Abraham used to honour his guests by slaughtering a roasted calf; how, then, could God have ransomed Abraham's son with a ram?

Haj Hamad concludes that the sacrificial animal was a camel, because the required offering had to correspond structurally to the configuration of the cosmic place. He states that "(the performance of this ritual must take place through a living creature among livestock whose structural characteristics correspond to the cosmic structure itself: a spread-out earth, an elevated sky, and towering mountains. This correspondence applies only to camels)."22

He supports this interpretation with the Almighty's words:

"Then do they not look at the camels—how they are created (17), and at the sky—how it is raised (18), and at the mountains—how they are erected (19), and at the earth—how it is spread out (20)?" [Al-Ghashiyah: 17–20].

Thus, the slaughter represents an important indication of the sacrificial offering, and the fact that the slaughtered animal should be a camel signifies gratitude for the place, since offspring are among the distinctive characteristics of spatial existence.

Haj Hamad's interpretation appears logical and coherent from a philosophical perspective, as he strips historical events and Qur'anic narratives of their purely informative function, seeking instead to establish an epistemological methodology that embodies the functional dimension of the realms of the unseen and the witnessed. This is particularly significant given that the animals legally permissible for Islamic sacrifice include sheep, cattle, and camels, which does not contradict his position.

However, what is particularly noteworthy is his attempt to establish the foundations of humanity's initial awareness of its relationship with place and with God. Abraham's guidance towards God began with place (the surrounding and observable natural phenomena), the self (structural characteristics), and purpose (absolute servitude and its manifestations).

Accordingly, the principles of the epistemological methodology for reading history become clear and can be summarised as follows:

Place + Self + Objectives

The preceding equation transcends materialist philosophy, dialectical historical materialism, and the socio-psychological approach, moving towards the integration of phenomenon, consciousness, and functional dimension.

Clarification:

The reader might assume that Haj Hamad excludes the vast body of traditional exegesis and jurisprudential efforts, discarding them entirely in order to establish an alternative based on his new methodology. Quite the contrary: he believes that the proposed methodology would not have taken shape without those earlier readings, which regulated, corrected, refined, and clarified the texts and distinguished the Islamic perspective from the Israelite one.

He states: "(What they accomplished has fundamental value for us, despite the differences between our methodologies and intellectual characteristics and theirs, as well as the differences in our cultures, knowledge, and sciences. They eliminated an enormous amount of accumulated material that had been introduced through the principles they established in Islamic jurisprudence. They restricted the sources of religious authority to the Qur'an, the Sunnah, consensus, and analogy, and they established the conditions for independent legal reasoning, thereby regulating its foundations to a considerable extent. They thus protected religion from distortions which, had they reached us without their efforts to contain them, would have become dark clouds. The saying of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) therefore applies to those righteous imams: 'This

knowledge shall be carried by the trustworthy people of every succeeding generation, who will remove from it the distortions of the extremists and the false claims of the falsifiers.')"23

The foregoing constitutes an applied model of the Islamization of history within the methodology of Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad.

2.2. The Psychological Model

Before addressing the alternative psychological model, we shall clarify a term that frequently recurs in Haj Hamad's work, as it constitutes the key to understanding the mechanisms of the psychological reading of existence through the Qur'anic epistemological methodology. This term is the Method of Structural Correspondence.

3. The Method of Structural Correspondence

Structural correspondence constitutes the backbone of Haj Hamad's project for rereading the Qur'an. He considers the Qur'an to be the objective counterpart of the universe. Although this formulation may appear simple, its practical application is extremely complex, requiring profound insight and considerable intellectual depth to uncover certain correspondences within the Qur'anic text.

This was evident in the historical model of the story of Abraham (peace be upon him), where he established a correspondence between the structural composition of camels and the structure of the universe: [their humps correspond to mountains, their feet to the earth, and their heads to the sky].

He presents another model of correspondence derived from Surah Al-Tariq. The Almighty says:

"By the sky and the night comer ... So allow the disbelievers time. Leave them awhile." [Al-Tariq: 1–17].

Here, the correspondence is established between natural law and the moral law that governs marriage among human beings. This corresponds to the relationship between the sky, characterised by its returning rain, and the earth, characterised by its splitting open.

God establishes a correspondence between the laws of the cosmic natural world, namely, the sky that returns water through rainfall and the earth that receives it into its womb in preparation for purposeful growth, producing every beautiful pair of plants, and the process whereby fluid is emitted from the man's loins and mixes with the reproductive fluid originating from the woman's pelvic region, resulting in the birth of a male or female child. Each constitutes a beautiful pair governed by the moral law of marital union.

The concept of structural correspondence is the key to understanding Haj Hamad's psychological model, because it enables him to use Surah Al-Shams, with all its correspondences, to derive the foundations of the human psyche.

The concept of the psyche raises a problem at the level of understanding because, according to Haj Hamad, it is more complex than the material product. He states: "(The very structure of the psyche is formed through a complex natural cosmic dialectic resulting from two constant forces)." These two forces are reflected in Surahs Al-Ghashiyah and Al-Tariq, that is, in the relationship between life and consciousness.

The Almighty's words:

"By the sun and its brightness (1) ... And He does not fear the consequence thereof (15)." [Surah Al-Shams].

These verses represent a structural correspondence between a series of cosmic phenomena, culminating in the human psyche and its characteristics. Haj Hamad divides these correspondences as follows:

- The sun — The moon
- Day — Night
- Sky — Earth
- The psyche

He argues that there is a direct relationship between natural cosmic phenomena and the human psyche. Through this interaction, "(something emerges that transcends perceptible matter within natural phenomena, namely, the 'psyche', which has puzzled scholars. The psyche is the product of cosmic dialectical activation. It is a third composite entity and, therefore—and this is the most significant epistemological principle—it possesses the capacity for choice. This is because it is structured on the basis of cosmic division and its dialectical interaction. Consequently, it is capable of inclining either towards wickedness or towards piety. The freedom of choice possessed by the psyche does not contradict God's will and cosmic sovereignty, because the structure of the psyche derives from the interactions resulting from division)."24

Perhaps the preceding interpretation of the nature of the psyche, in its relationship with existential opposites and as a consequence of its direct interaction with cosmic dynamics, is unprecedented. It removes the psyche as a scientific subject from the materialist behavioural school and transcendent Gnostic thought, making it an existential centre and a product of all cosmic interactions.

This interpretation goes even further by seeking to demonstrate the nature of the free psyche and its responsibility for its choices, not because of its capacity to develop itself, but because of its very nature and characteristics as a product of cosmic divisions and correspondences.

Haj Hamad attempted to establish a connection between cosmic phenomena and the human psyche through an in-depth reading of Surah Al-Shams, thereby introducing a new epistemological dimension that reveals the power of Almighty God in shaping a universe whose components are interconnected. The result is a call for " (reformulating a new science of psychology to study the cosmic sources involved in the formation of the psyche and its behavioural determinants)."25

Commentary

A Critical Assessment

It may be understood from Haj Hamad's argument that he is influenced by two theories in the philosophy of knowledge and that he has introduced nothing fundamentally new at the level of epistemological references, since his ideas could be interpreted in terms of Hegelian dialectics and the "butterfly effect."26

Haj Hamad's interpretation differs from Hegel's dialectics in that it transcends consciousness. In Hegel's philosophy, opposing interactions concern consciousness and thought, whereas, in Haj Hamad's approach, they constitute a cosmic dialectic between nature and humanity under God's absolute and all-encompassing sovereignty.

It also differs from the "butterfly effect" theory because it moves beyond the cause-and-effect relationship—which appears chaotic, confusing, and non-linear (systemic) in many of its manifestations, prompting attempts to identify the first cause, which is invariably explained in terms of chance—and towards reading the universe through the key provided by the Qur'an. God has described the natural universe and the creatures within it as a Book, through which human beings read God's signs. The Almighty says:

"There is no creature on earth or bird that flies with its wings except that they are communities like you. We have not neglected anything in the Book. Then unto their Lord they will be gathered." [Al-An'am: 38].

According to our understanding, which may be mistaken, Haj Hamad's epistemological alternative represents an escape from the epistemological predicament of the butterfly effect by providing a key to reading the universe. This is achieved by expanding the scope of research and investigation into the search for the initial cause, starting instead from the key granted by God, namely, the Holy Qur'an. The Qur'an represents "(the counterpart to all the methodological and epistemological dimensions of the universe ... because it provides different forms of consciousness and knowledge according to the qualitative differences in the development of the human intellect and its epistemological systems. Consequently, the human intellect does not become absolutely captive to one developmental stage at the expense of another. This enables the Qur'an to fulfil its universal mission across changing times and places and in accordance with every methodology. It thus continues to Islamize knowledge throughout the ages, rather than exclusively in our present era)."27

This is because Haj Hamad believes that the Qur'anic purpose in addressing the human psyche is "(to bring it into ethical conformity with the principles and laws of cosmic existence, namely, the laws of truth disseminated throughout creation)."28

The preceding theoretical discussion is extremely difficult to put into practice, as Haj Hamad himself acknowledges when he states: "(The task is not as easy as I proclaim it to be)." Nevertheless, its logic and supporting evidence derive from the Qur'an itself. Our philosopher begins with the Almighty's words:

"Rather, it is a glorious Qur'an (21), [inscribed] in a Preserved Tablet (22)." [Al-Buruj: 21–22].

And:

"Then I swear by the positions of the stars (75), and indeed, it is an oath—if you could know—[most] great (76)." [Al-Waqi'ah: 75–80].

Accordingly, the Qur'an is:

- Glorious: it does not become obsolete as time and place change.

- Noble: in the sense that its bestowal is continually renewed.
- Concealed: capable of revealing new meanings and insights.

The overall structure of the Holy Qur'an corresponds, in its organisation, to "(the positions of the stars that regulate cosmic movement and mutually influence one another. The positions of its letters have been precisely arranged, transforming it into a systematically organised [universe-book], characterised by a living, comprehensive organic unity extending from its opening chapter to its two concluding protective chapters, from which knowledge of the concealed is derived through divine generosity)."29

The two preceding models, historical and psychological, represent practical examples of Haj Hamad's concept of the Islamization of Knowledge. They also propose an epistemological alternative to the foundations of the disciplines of history and psychology. His broader objective is to develop this Qur'an-derived approach so that it encompasses all fields of knowledge, considering the Qur'an the objective counterpart of the universe.

However, the problem of the unseen and its relationship with humanity and nature remains difficult to understand without an applied example based on his new perspective. He therefore attempts to explain this dialectical relationship by analysing the experience of Moses (peace be upon him), in order to establish some of its underlying principles.

4. The Dialectic of the Unseen, Humanity, and Nature: The Mosaic Experience

It may be difficult to conceive of establishing a relationship between the unseen and nature within collective consciousness in a manner characterised by objective harmony that the human intellect can comprehend, given that this intellect has been conditioned by materialism and reification. This is because "(the dialectic of nature negates the dialectic of the unseen, reverting to a comprehensive scientific methodology that believes in its material means of investigation)."

Within the framework of the Islamization of Knowledge, however, the unseen constitutes both a principle and an answer at the same time. Haj Hamad begins with the Almighty's words:

"Alif, Lam, Meem (1). This is the Book about which there is no doubt, a guidance for those conscious of Allah (2), who believe in the unseen, establish prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them (3)." [Al-Baqarah: 1–3].

In this verse, prayer represents the connecting link between the first level [belief in the unseen] and the subsequent level [matter and nature]. Thus, the Holy Qur'an establishes an epistemological model that contradicts all positivist epistemological models. This model is based on the integration of the unseen and humanity [represented in the verse by the one who establishes prayer], together with matter, namely, [nature and provision].

The theoretical understanding of the integration of these three dimensions is followed by difficulties at the level of practical application. Haj Hamad attempts to explain this through the example of the Mosaic experience [Moses, peace be upon him]. He argues that God "(chose Moses for a specific experience through which He revealed the actual manifestation of the unseen in the movement of reality)."30

He refers here to the story of the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) with the righteous servant [Al-Khidr], which he considers a central model for the Sufi experiences between spiritual masters and their disciples. The story begins with the Almighty's words:

"And [mention] when Moses said to his young companion, 'I will not cease [travelling] until I reach the junction of the two seas or continue for a long period' (60) ... [Al-Khidr] said, 'Indeed, with me you will never be able to have patience' (67)." [Al-Kahf: 60–82].

Haj Hamad gives the story of Moses and the righteous servant a new epistemological dimension by approaching it outside the framework of miraculous interpretation, that is, independently of inspiration and the divinely bestowed knowledge attributed to Al-Khidr.

He considers these events to be a re-enactment of Moses' own story, enabling him to understand the tangible lesson of the unseen, namely, the presence of divine providence and wisdom, which transcend the duality of cause and effect. The three experiences "(were nothing more than stages in Moses' own life, reenacted in living reality so that Moses might recognise God's presence throughout the course of his personal life and arrive at a profound understanding of God's immediate sovereignty)."31

The following table summarises the correspondences between the stages of Moses' life and the three events involving Al-Khidr:

Experiences	The story of Moses (peace be upon him) with Al-Khidr	The corresponding stage in Moses' life
First experience	The ship incident: "As for the ship, it belonged to poor people working at sea. So I intended to damage it, for there was ahead of them a king who seized every ship by force." [Al-Kahf: 79].	The first experience in Moses' life: His being placed in the river while Pharaoh was behind him, having ordered the killing of every Israelite male child: "...Put him into the chest and cast it into the river, and the river will throw it onto the bank; there an enemy of Mine and an enemy of his will take him. And I bestowed upon you love from Me so that you would be brought up under My watchful care." [Ta-Ha: 37–39].
Second experience	The killing of the boy: "And they proceeded until they met a boy, and he killed him. [Moses] said, 'Have you killed a pure soul...'" [Al-Kahf: 74].	Moses striking a man, which resulted in his death: "...So Moses struck him and [unintentionally] killed him. [Moses] said, 'This is from the work of Satan. Indeed, he is a manifest, misleading enemy.'" [Al-Qasas: 15].
Third experience	Building the wall without payment: "So they set out, until when they came to the people of a town, they asked its people for food, but they refused to offer them hospitality..." [Al-Kahf: 77].	Moses watering the flocks for the two daughters of Shu'ayb (peace be upon him) without receiving payment: "...So he watered [their flocks] for them; then he went back to the shade and said, 'My Lord, indeed I am, for whatever good You would send down to me, in need.'" [Al-Qasas: 23–24].

Haj Hamad proposes a new interpretation of the story of Moses (peace be upon him), linking the unseen with humanity through the embodiment of divine will in the movement of matter. In doing so, he seeks to construct a model that integrates the unseen, humanity, and nature, in contrast to positivist philosophy, which eliminates the first dimension and attempts to establish harmony and coherence solely between humanity and matter.

Haj Hamad maintains that the three preceding experiences are based on a philosophy that can be summarised in the following points:

1. The action is ordinary and natural [damaging, killing, and building], but its consequences are not necessarily determined by conditional causality, as is the case under positivist laws.

2. Human beings find it difficult to perceive situations as they truly are, even though Moses had experienced and lived through these very situations. Nevertheless, he had not yet grasped the reality of God's absolute will.

3. God exercises absolute sovereignty over cosmic movement, including its phenomena, forms, dynamics, and timing. This is illustrated by the lesson given to Moses concerning his haste to meet God and the subsequent occurrence of the trial of the calf. As Haj Hamad explains, "(A human being, like Moses, hastens God's decree in matters, whether good or evil, and consequently overlooks the divine determination of the temporal factor without understanding its wisdom)."32

4. God intended Moses to establish a connection between the unseen and reality, enabling him, through their unity, to understand his existential experience and comprehend the nature of his life's course.

5. The absolute rejection of the chaotic conception of chance: The Mosaic experience demonstrates an understanding of the element of timing in cosmic movement, which is regulated by both time and place.

6. The collapse of the principle of absurdity in the relationship between opposing natural and human phenomena: These phenomena do not occur by chance; rather, some emerge from others in a direction governed by the wisdom of divine determination in time.

5. Conclusion

The issues discussed in this research paper represent some of the fundamental entry points into Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad's intellectual project. We have selected them in an attempt to clarify the central idea that he advocates throughout his writings, namely, the integration of the two readings [reading through God and reading through the Pen], that is, the empirical reading and the reading of the unseen.

Some may wonder where this methodology stands in relation to the traditional and modern interpretations of the Qur'an. Does it exclude traditional approaches?

The answer is no. We believe, as Haj Hamad himself maintains, that this methodology is not exclusionary. Indeed, it cannot succeed without the accumulated interpretative and epistemological heritage of earlier generations. Nevertheless, it differs in its analytical approach, which he summarises as follows: "(We resort to the unifying principle, whereas they resorted to dealing with multiplicity)."

The differences in approaches to the Qur'anic text reflect differences in understanding and receiving what is universal; they do not concern religious legislation or acts of worship. Haj Hamad's project seeks to derive a philosophical methodology and an epistemological system from the Qur'an that are compatible with all fields of knowledge and universal phenomena. In other words, it seeks to transcend a limited historical mentality confined to a particular period.

We do not find him rereading the pillars of prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and zakat, nor does he discuss the rulings governing inheritance, prescribed punishments, and other such matters. Rather, his objective is to move beyond partial readings, that is, the practice of understanding individual Qur'anic verses in isolation, as though

each verse in the Qur'an could be considered independently of the comprehensive nature of the Book as a whole.

Haj Hamad believes that the methodology and epistemological system are embedded in the Qur'an and that we must extract them in order to understand ourselves, existence, and the unseen. This is because Islam represents the Second Universalism, following the end of the First Islamic Universalism with the return of the Children of Israel to Palestine. This signifies the end of the religious law of burdens and shackles and the beginning of the law of mercy and alleviation.

The ideas advocated by Haj Hamad constitute the building blocks and foundations of a project that remains incomplete, despite its philosophical depth and its vision that transcends procedural readings. The project seeks to establish a different form of consciousness and understanding of the Qur'anic text. This situation can be attributed to several reasons, including the following:

1. The difficulty of understanding the intended meaning of his project: It requires extensive knowledge of history, psychology, and sociology, as well as specialised training in linguistics and Qur'anic sciences and a degree of familiarity with the accumulated body of knowledge developed over fourteen centuries.

2. The strength of the deeply rooted principles of Islamic jurisprudence in the Arab-Islamic intellect: By this, we do not intend to exclude or diminish the importance of this intellectual tradition. On the contrary, Haj Hamad's project attempts to challenge the exclusion of new and evolving readings through interpretative guardianship, which regulates independent reasoning and confines it to certain issues.

3. The deviation of certain new interpretative approaches that employ Western methodologies procedurally without understanding their foundations and philosophical implications: Examples include applying structuralism without considering its positivist materialist foundations and applying hermeneutics without distinguishing between the nature of Christian sacred texts and Islamic sacred texts, among other examples.

4. The Islamization of Knowledge requires a comprehensive interdisciplinary project involving scholars from different fields of knowledge. These scholars must fully comprehend the central idea and subsequently establish an epistemological network whose central concern and objective are, simultaneously, harmony between the unseen, humanity, and nature. This remains premature at the present stage, which is characterised by intellectual imitation and emulation of the West, or imitation and emulation of traditional heritage.

5. The negative reputation of the project itself, resulting from certain practical conclusions that have affected some established principles of Islamic jurisprudence, such as the veil, polygamy, and drinking alcohol, among other matters. We, in turn, reject these positions because the philosophy of legislation and the restriction of its application to a particular group or a bygone historical period contradict the essence of the project. Universality necessarily requires a spatial and temporal extension encompassing humanity as a whole rather than being confined to a particular historical group.

6. The fundamental reason behind the incompleteness of Haj Hamad's project lies in the reluctance of intellectual elites to engage with it, either because of its complexity or because of its perceived risks, particularly its political implications concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict in terms of the historical, philosophical, and religious struggle between the First Universalism [the Children of Israel] and the Second Universalism [Muslims].

Finally, we recommend that intellectual elites engage with Haj Hamad's project in order to evaluate and critically assess it. It is a project presented across a series of books arranged according to a systematic intellectual progression, reflecting three epistemological stages: revision, assimilation, and transcendence.

[1] Muhammad Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad, (2013), The Qur’anic Epistemological Methodology, Dar Al-Saqi, Beirut, 1st ed., p. 35.

[2] Ibid., p. 39.

[3] Ibid., p. 39.

[4] Ibid., p. 41.

[5] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, (2000), Philosophical Interventions in Islam and Secularism, translated by Muhammad al-Tahir al-Misawi, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, Amman, Jordan, 1st ed., p. 155.

[6] Ibid., p. 155.

[7] Duncan Pritchard, (2013), What Is This Thing Called Knowledge?, translated by Mustafa Nasser, National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, The World of Knowledge Series, Kuwait, September, p. 46.

[8] The Qur’anic Epistemological Methodology, p. 41.

[9] The Qur’anic Epistemological Methodology, p. 47.

[10] Ibid., p. 55.

[11] Ibid., p. 61. Animistic Mentality and Opposing Dualism: By the animistic conception of the universe, Haj Hamad means a view that begins by deifying natural phenomena, followed by their existence and movement, which, in the early stages of this animistic mentality, appear to be independent of one another and to possess autonomous life. Thus, natural phenomena are associated with multiple deities: the sun is a god, the moon is a god, and rain is a god. Opposing dualism, meanwhile, refers to the combination of the animistic conception and the materialist conception, which views the same natural phenomena as belonging to a single structure, ultimately leading to the idea of the unity of material existence.

[12] Muhammad Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad, (2011), The Qur’an and Social and Historical Changes, Dar Al-Saqi, Beirut, 1st ed., p. 26.

[13] The Qur’an and Social and Historical Changes, p. 50.

[14] Ibid., p. 65.

[15] The Qur’anic Epistemological Methodology, p. 120.

[16] Ibid., p. 155.

[17] Ibid., p. 160.

[18] Ibid., p. 160.

[19] Muhammad Shahrour, (2014), Qur’anic Narratives: A Contemporary Reading – Part Two: From Noah to Joseph, Dar Al-Saqi, Beirut, 2nd ed., p. 100.

[20] Youssef Seddik, (2015), We Have Never Read the Qur’an, Med Ali Édition, Sfax, Tunisia, 1st ed., p. 150.

[21] The Qur’anic Epistemological Methodology, p. 161.

[22] Ibid., p. 161.

[23] Ibid., pp. 161–162.

[24] The Qur’anic Epistemological Methodology, p. 162.

[25] Ibid., p. 165.

[26] Ibid., p. 156.

[27] Ibid., p. 157.

[28] Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad, (2012), The Second Islamic Universality: The Dialectic of the Unseen, Humanity, and Nature, Dar Al-Saqi, Beirut, 3rd ed., p. 90.

[29] Ibid., p. 91.

[30] The Second Islamic Universality, p. 95.

[31] The Qur’anic Epistemological Methodology, p. 80.

[32] Ibid., p. 81.

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1. Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad, (2012), The Second Islamic Universality: The Dialectic of the Unseen, Humanity, and Nature, Dar Al-Saqi, Beirut, 3rd ed.
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