

The Qur'an as the Ultimate Source of History

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There are primary and secondary sources of history. The Qur'an, which is very much history-oriented, can be categorized as neither. Rather, it is the ultimate historical source. This article explains why.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was the final messenger of Allah to mankind. His honorary and operative title was the Seal of the Prophets. The Qur'an, which was given to him, was likewise the final revealed guidance of Allah to people.

As such, the Qur'an looks as much to the present and the future, as to the past. While it aims to diagnose the present, providing answers for it and paving the way for the future, it also, in equal measure, amends and remedies the past.

This is so on account of the principle that one have to know his past in order to understand his present and to be able to build up his future.

The past is the foundation of the future. The present brings the two poles together and gives each one a life as well as a sense of purpose.

The Qur'an speaks not only about some of the critical episodes of mankind's history, but also about the history of life in general, and even about some aspects of the history of the universe.

It intends to provide man with a complete spiritual, together with intellectual, framework concerning existence as a whole. It knows that only such can give man a firm foothold to deal with the present and confidently look forward to the future.

What is special about the Qur'an is that its author is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and life in it. Allah vows in addition that He will preserve its integrity and authenticity until the end.

It follows that everything in the Qur'an is accurate, trustworthy, undisputable and normative.

Hence, a historical dimension is one of the many dimensions of the Qur'an as the permanent miracle. It was given to the unlettered Prophet (pbuh), who in no way could have been familiar beforehand with the Qur'an's content.

For example, in various contexts and with diverse degrees of attention, the Qur'an speaks about the creation of the universe and life, the creation of man, the commencement and earliest episodes of man's vicegerency mission on the earth, various Prophets and their holy missions, various nations and their civilizational successes and failures, etc.

The Qur'an also evidences and preserves some of the most significant chapters of Prophet Muhammad's mission, which was destined to forever change the course of human history and civilization.

The Qur'an does so turning frequently its attention to extraordinary facts and minutest details. It occasionally addresses the Prophet (pbuh) to the effect that he was not around to witness a historical occurrence, and that neither he nor his people had any knowledge about it, implying thereby that the divine revelation was the only source of the knowledge in question.

To the Qur'an, history is a compendium of infinite signs, lessons, admonitions and approvals. History is a book, so to speak, to be read and a "school" to be "attended". Islam's greatest enemies, it can be inferred, are myths, forgeries, legends and superstitions, i.e., untruths.

The case of the Ka'bah

The instance of the Ka'bah (*al-Masjid al-Haram* or the Holy Mosque) in Makkah serves as a perfect example of how serious Islam's treatment of history is.

The Ka'bah was first built by Prophet Adam and then rebuilt by Prophets Ibrahim and Isma'il. It was the first House of worship (House of God) appointed for mankind, "blessed and a guidance for the worlds" (Alu 'Imran, 96).

The structure and the metaphysical message it exemplified stood for the divine truth, the intent and story of existence, and for the human honourable destiny. It was a representation of micro- and macro-history.

However, prior to the Prophet's liberation (opening to Islam or *fath*) of Makkah, the Ka'bah was under the control of the polytheists of Makkah. As such, it was immersed in falsehood, darkness, fabrications and other sorts of spiritual and physical impurities.

It was filled and surrounded with 360 idols, symbolizing 360 wrong visions, ideas and interpretations relating to myriads of historical and current things and events.

Moreover, on the pillars and walls of the Ka'bah there were depictions of the Virgin Mary and the child Jesus (as Son of God) seated on his mother's lap, of Prophets Ibrahim and Isma'il holding divination arrows, and of angels as beautiful women.

These were extra confirmations that people either deliberately distorted, or simply misconstrued, history.

In the midst of both monotheistic and polytheistic tendencies, the Ka'bah's status and role were meant to be universal. Before the Prophet's purification of it, it testified that people's worldviews and life standards were faulty, and that their fundamental aspects of history were erroneously articulated.

There was virtually no hope for optimism, and no faith left to fall back on. People lived in the darkness and ignorance of the present time because of the historical ubiquitous darkness-es and ignorance-s. The former was the effect, the latter the cause.

The mere presence of Christianity, Judaism, polytheism, and the primitive forms of hedonism and agnosticism, was a proof of such spiritual, moral and intellectual conundrums humanity had to put up with. The lack of their historicity was as debilitating as the lack of their ideological assurance.

Thus, while he was ordering that those misrepresentations be obliterated, and the truth about history and Heaven restored, the Prophet (pbuh) said about Prophet Ibrahim and Isma'il: "By Allah, neither Ibrahim nor Isma'il practiced divination by arrows."

He additionally said about Ibrahim, the father of Prophets: "Accursed be the Makkans! They have made our ancestor an idolater and a diviner. What does Ibrahim have to do with divination arrows? He was neither a Jew nor a Christian nor yet an associationist, but a *hanif*, and a Muslim."

The Prophet (pbuh) similarly denied that angels had any bodily forms as depicted in the pictures of the Ka'bah walls, and that they were either male or female.

While cleansing the Ka'bah and restoring it to its original purpose and character, the Prophet (pbuh) recited these Allah's words: "Truth has (now) arrived, and falsehood perished, for falsehood is (by its nature) bound to perish" (al-Isra', 81).

It was only after the past had been rectified - both theoretically and practically - that the present was able to be duly served and the future planned.

History and the biggest problems people face today

Those who decline to follow the message of Islam decline the prospect of knowing and following the historical truths as well. Their most consequential theories and assumptions are based - as the Qur'an verifies - on sheer conjectures and what their own souls desire, which however avail nothing against the truth (al-Najm, 28).

Ignorance about history begets confusion about the present and uncertainty about the future. That spells a perfect storm for creating and then perpetuating some of the biggest predicaments of man.

For instance, the painful scourges of modern times, such as racism, endless conflicts, nationalism, environmental destruction, and spiritual and moral decadence, are mainly due to the engrained ignorance of the history - as well as the truth - of mankind, religion, life and the earth as the home.

Racism, ceaseless and fluid forms of colonialism and conflicts are rampant because some people think they have been created superior to others, and that they should rule over them either by a divine or an acquired right.

Religious degeneracy is prevalent because the Prophets have been rejected and their teachings deformed, resulting in good being bartered for evil, and honesty for deceit.

This is obviously an upshot of certain people's misreading and outright distortions of history. The Qur'an, as an instance, brings the Jews and Christians to task over their tampering with and altering of Holy Scriptures and of the terms of their ancient covenants with Allah, "changing and displacing words from their right places."

Darwinism, as especially Western modernity's state creed, is also a big culprit. Its main ideas that man evolved from apes (with Stephen Hawking saying that man is nothing more than an advanced breed of monkeys); that natural selection processes govern not only plants and animals, but also individuals, groups and societies; that only the fittest and strongest will

survive, while the rest will grow weaker and will eventually go extinct – caused irreparable damage to human civilization.

The fault of Darwinism was two-fold. It negated and blurred the true history, while, at the same time, helping inscribe a fraudulent one.

Darwinism promoted imperialism, racism, bigotry and narrow-mindedness. It cemented the principle that might is – and makes - right. That is to say, the powerful ones can do whatever they want unchallenged, even if what they do, in fact, is unjustified.

Such people believed that by virtue of being powerful (fittest), they have been mandated (selected) by the laws and forces of life (and history) to do what they do.

Moreover, the bio-capacity of the earth is abused to the point that mankind is steadily approaching an environmental crisis of global proportions. The culprit, unsurprisingly, is a being – man – which is still in the dark about its origins, significance, purpose and destiny (history), and which not only turned its back on spirituality and morality, but as well declared a war against them.

In actual fact, as long as man does not show respect to himself and his authentic past, he will never be able to show genuine respect to anything else in the present as well as in the future. All the fancy talk about sustainability and conservation is only a cover-up. It is but a sign of panic rooted in embarrassing ignorance.

The chickens are coming home to roost. All of a sudden, the fact that man's whole existence is in jeopardy started to emerge. It is finally dawning upon man that for the sake of his venal, greedy and muddled ends he will not be able to devour *ad infinitum* the capacities of the natural world.

There is very little that is sincere in the sustainable development discourses. It is all about that confused and avaricious being that is trying to save his own skin.

Clearly, those problems will refuse to go away. People do not have what it takes to properly diagnose - much less cure - them. As consequences, they will persist as long as the historical causes that produced and sustain them remain alive.

Equally true is the verity that if man knew his existential history, and if he held on to it, things will be different. Such knowledge of history is a precondition for effectively tackling any menace that may rear its ugly head and trouble humanity.

Things will be definitely different, furthermore, if man knew and subscribed to the truths that he was created by the Creator with a noble purpose and that he was fully accountable to Him; that the earth was created for man to be Allah's vicegerent on it; that everything in the heavens and the earth has been subjected to man and his noble mission; that the natural world has been created as a realm of Allah's faithful servants, boons and blessings to man, enlightening signs, and as part of a universal equilibrium and harmony; that Allah deliberately created people different in every way, and made them nations and tribes so that they could know and learn from each other ("Indeed, the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct" (al-Hujurat, 13)); and that Allah continuously sent His Prophets so as to make sure that mankind stayed the course and did not deviate into the abyss of ignorance and falsehood, etc.

All these factors are not merely historical, but also ontological, facts. Apart from being history themselves, they likewise signify a determining factor in human history-making procedures. They are the foundation that dictate the legitimacy and strength of each and every historical unfolding and its generated civilizational legacy.

The people whose identities and thought are the products of “wrong” and “problematic” histories are headed for creating more “wrong” and “problematic” histories. They fashion the present and the future in their own historical image, creating a snowball effect.

It is for a reason people say the winners write history. However, “winners” here means bullies, intimidators and exploiters, too. The losers are vilified and the inferior and weak ones suppressed. They are constantly being proselytized, democratized, civilized, acculturated, enlightened, liberated, and rendered ever more “progressive”.

In those cases, history is a socio-cultural construct and the truth is its nemesis. Hence, Napoleon is reported to have said that history is but a fable agreed upon.

The role of the Qur’an in the science of history

All this shows that to Muslims, studying the Qur’an as the ultimate source of history is paramount. There is no substitute for the matter.

The Qur’an is the first and final source of history, in the sense that all primary and secondary sources derive their sense of correctness from it. They also articulate history along the lines of the general guidance and ethical framework of the Qur’an, and finally return to it with outcomes for validation and approval.

It must be stressed that in studying history, plain historical facts are only one dimension of the task. Correspondingly important are the subjects of historians’ overall integrity (ethics) and the integrity of adopted methods, perceptions, interpretations and applications.

One cannot say enough about the importance of the holistic approach to knowledge in general, and to the science of history in particular. That is why the Qur’an abounds with direct and indirect references to the orb of what later came to be known as the sciences of history and historiography.

Everything that is anti-history the Qur’an denounces in emphatic terms. It condemns lies, fabrications, manipulations, misinterpretations, negligence, vested interests, blind faith and credulous following, and unfounded beliefs and their acceptance.

These verses stand for an epitome of the Qur’anic outlook: “O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information (*naba*’: news or report), investigate (ascertain the truth), lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful” (al-Hujurat, 6).

“O you who have believed, when you go forth (to fight) in the cause of Allah, investigate carefully; and do not say to one who gives you (a greeting of) peace ‘You are not a believer’, aspiring for the goods of worldly life” (al-Nisa’, 94).

“(Prophet) Sulayman (Solomon) said (to the hoopoe who had brought him some extraordinary news): ‘We will see whether you were truthful or were of the liars’” (al-Naml, 27).

It was this spirit of the Qur'an, and nothing else, that produced Ibn Khaldun, the father of sociology, historiography, the philosophy of history, economics and demography (social sciences).

It also produced the sciences of *Hadith* (*'ulum al-hadith*) at the heart of which stand the principles of meticulous evaluation of the *matn* (text) of *hadiths* and of the narrators of *hadiths* (*'ilm al-rijal*: biographical evaluation, or the knowledge of men).

The sciences of *Hadith* grew hand in hand with the development of the sciences of Islamic history and historiography. They behaved like twins.

Lastly, Islam is the religion of the truth, so to it, nothing but the truth - earthly and heavenly, spiritual and worldly - is ever acceptable.