

CLASSICAL AND MODERNIST APPROACHES TO THE MIRACLES IN THE QUR'AN: A DIACHRONIC REVIEW

Ahmet Özdemir*

Abstract

In the last two centuries, an increasing number of Muslim scholars have adopted a modernist/decontextualisation approach to the interpretation of the Quran. This adoption is attributable to their worldviews or philosophical approaches that have changed over time. Instead of looking for primary and contextual meanings of words and miraculous events addressed in the Qur'an, they prefer to look at the connotative meanings, which are out of the context. This review argues that such decontextualized interpretations substantially contradict Quranic principles and contextual meanings of miracles. Muslim and non-Muslim, classical and modernist approaches to the Quranic miracles need to be reconsidered, so as to avoid or reduce misinterpretations. For this aim, the author has applied a diachronic (semantic) method of reviewing different approaches to definitions or conceptions of miracles in Arabic dictionaries, Islamic literature, classical standpoints, and modernist viewpoints.

Keywords: Quran, Tafsir, Miracle, Semantic, Diachronic Review

KUR'ÂN'DA GEÇEN MUCİZELERE KLASİK VE MODERNİST YAKLAŞIMLAR: ART-SÜREMLİ BİR İNCELEME

Öz

Son iki yüzyıl içinde, giderek artan sayıda Müslüman alim Kuran'ın yorumlanmasında modernist bir yaklaşım benimsemiştir. Bu benimseme, zaman içinde değişen dünya görüşlerine veya felsefi yaklaşımlara bağlanabilir. Bir çok alim, Kur'an'da geçen kavramların ve mucizevi olayların birincil ve bağlamsal anlamlarını aramak yerine, bağlam dışında kalan çağrışımsal anlamlara bakmayı tercih etmektedir. Bu makalede, söz konusu bağlam dışı yorumların, Kur'an'ın ilke ve prensiplere büyük ölçüde aykırı olduğu hususu ele alınmaktadır. Kur'an mucizelerinin Müslümanlara ait olsun olmasın, klasik ve modernist yaklaşımlar açısından yanlış yorumlarını önlemek veya azaltmak için art-süremlî bir yöntemle ele alınması ve yeniden gözden geçirilmesi önem arz etmektedir. Bu doğrultuda ilk dönem Arapça sözlükler ve temel İslami kaynaklar başta olmak üzere klasik ve modernist bakış açılarında mucize tanımları ve konusu art-süremlî/diachronic bir yöntemle ele alınmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kur'an, Tefsir, Mucize, Semantik, Art-Sürem Yöntem

Article Types/Makale Türü: Research Article/Araştırma Makalesi

Received/Makale Geliş Tarihi:14/06/2019, Accepted/Kabul Tarihi: 01/09/2019

Doi: 10.26791/sarkiat.578205

*Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Bitlis Eren Üniversitesi İslami İlimler Fakültesi, Temel İslam Bilimleri Tefsir Anabilim Dalı, aozdemir@beu.edu.tr

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3346-0527>

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, some of the Quranic principles, such as miracle, have been interpreted out of their contexts. Instead of looking for primary and contextual meanings of words and events addressed in the Quran, their connotative meanings out of the context have been used for the interpretation. This misinterpretation is attributable to two philosophical approaches, namely rationalist and empiricist. A mere rationalist approach towards interpretations of the Quran has been widely adopted by Muslim scholars, who are modernists or reformists following the Enlightenment Philosophy. This philosophical movement is based on a rational approach towards understanding religious texts. In other words, it essentially advocates truths that are solely based on human reason, not on divine revelations (Hazard, 1981, p. 110) and thus disregards basic religious principles. On the other hand, the empiricist philosophical approach leaves no room for empirically untestable metaphysical claims (divine revelations), which are against the natural laws (Armstrong, 1998, p. 352; Küçüker, 2001, p. 25). The two approaches thereby overshadow the fact that being untestable or against the natural law does not necessarily make a claim beyond reality or area of an investigation.

Notwithstanding the fact that the enlightenment movement was an objection against medieval Catholic-Christian scholastic thoughts (i.e., not against Islamic teachings), a considerable number of Muslim and non-Muslim Western scholars have followed this philosophy. Therefore, they primarily applied a rationalist approach to interpretations of Islamic texts and principles (Goldmann, 2009, p. 59). Applying the same rationalist approach to the two different religions is therefore likely to result in misleading interpretations of various religious principles, such as miracle. For example, Muslim scholars like Shibli Nomani, Syed Ahmad Khan, Syed Ameer Ali, Muhammad Abduh, Mohammad Asad, and Mustafa Islamoglu have stood up for invariable laws of nature and have attempted to rationalise Islamic miracles (Abū Zayd, 2009, pp. 20-30; Siddiqui, 1967, p. 290; İslamoğlu, 2008, I, p. 309, 584; 2011, p. 173; Turan, 2018, pp. 94-94). To the aim of this attempt, miracles have been deemed usual and natural events, but not unusual and unnatural events manifested by Allah to support prophecy of his messengers. Common examples of miracles, which have been postulated as natural events, are the “Virgin Mary’s birth of Jesus” (Q 19:20; Q 66:12), the “Elephant incident” (Q 105:1-5), and “Splitting the Red Sea” (Q 26:64) by Prophet Moses. Regarding miracle of the Virgin Mary, one common argument is that the birth of Jesus was in natural way, mainly because a woman cannot be pregnant spontaneously (İslamoğlu, 2008; Baş, 2008). Showing similar concrete reasons, Muhammad Abduh claimed the Elephant incident as variola virus and measles (Abduh, 1904, p. 157-158; Aydın, 2015, p. 106). According to him, the Ababil bird (common swift) in the incident was a microbe. In a similar way of rationalist interpretation, Muhammad Asad explained the miracle of splitting the Red Sea as a violent tide (Esed, 1999, p. 749). Concerning this miracle, a rather different stance has been taken by Islamoglu, who asserted that the prophet Moses was crossing a river not the Red Sea; right after the prophet and his followers had passed the river, a dam had broken down while Pharaoh and his soldiers crossing the river (İslamoğlu, 2012).

This review argues that these interpretations substantially contradict Quranic principles and contextual meanings of the miracles, mainly because the modernist Muslim scholars have decontextualized Islamic prophecy and miracle. The misinterpretations are likely to appear due to changes over time in Muslim scholars’ worldviews or their philosophical approaches towards understanding of Quran. To avoid or reduce the

misinterpretation, classical and modernist interpretations of the Quranic miracles need to be reconsidered. Therefore, the author has applied a diachronic (semantic) method¹ to review different approaches to understanding the Quran and miracles. Under four main sections, the review respectively presents definitions or conceptions of miracles in (a) classical Arabic dictionaries, (b) classical Islamic literature, (c) classical theistic standpoints, and (d) modernist viewpoints.

1. Meanings of Miracle in Classical Arabic Dictionaries

Classical Arabic dictionaries (i.e., Kitāb al-‘Ayn, Kitāb al-Jīm, Tahzīb al-Lughā, al-Sihāh Tāj al-Lughā we Sihāh al-‘Arabiyya, Asās al-Balaghā, Qamus al-Muhīt, Taj al-Arus, Maqāyīs al-Lughā, Lisan al-Arab) provides only lexical definition of the term miracle in the same or very similar meaning, unlike modern dictionaries (e.g., Aqrab al-Mawārīd), which provide conceptual or connotative meanings (Shertûnî, 1983). The Arabic word (معجزة) for miracle is derived from the transitive form *a’jaza* (أَعَجَزَ) of the intransitive verb “‘ajaza” (عَجَزَ). The original meaning of “‘ajaza” (عَجَزَ) is to be unable to do something, to get weak, or to be incapable of doing something. Another meaning of it is to get old, to be weak, or to be debilitated, especially for women. As in the infinitive form, “‘ajzun” (عَجَزْتُ) means weakness, debility, vulnerability, or impossibility and is the antonym of ability, capability, or capacity. Therefore, it is referred to as being left behind and deficiency in taking an action due to the inability, incapability, or helplessness. Most of the classical dictionaries use *the word* “*a’jaza*” (أَعَجَزَ) for corresponding phrasal verbs with this reference. For example, “*a’jazani fulanun*” (أَعَجَزَنِي فَلَانٌ) means “I remained incapable in terms of his demands and apprehension” or “he got ahead of me/left me behind/left me incapacitated”. Similarly, “*a’jaza fulanan*” (أَعَجَزَ فَلَانًا) means “I rendered someone incapable in terms of understanding me and reaching me” or “rendered him incapable”. Another phrasal verb, “*a’jaztu alrajul*” (أَعَجَزْتُ الرَّجُلَ) means “I outdid himself/rendered him incapable” (Javharî, 1990; Shaybanî, 1974; Azharî, Zebidî, 2004, pp. 15, 199; Ibn Manzûr, p. 236; Zamaksharî, 1998). In sum, there are three original meanings of the word *a’jaza* in the transitive form: (1) to get ahead of someone/something, to leave someone/something behind; (2) to render someone incapable/to pull someone down or to disable someone from being able to do something; and (3) to disable someone from reaching the same level of apprehension and demand/outdo someone (in apprehension). These original meanings indicate that acts of a subject are stimulated by an object, necessarily resulted from this stimulation.

The term “miracle” in the form of doer/subject means to disable someone (from apprehending the event), pulling someone down, or outdo someone. For example, Verse-22 in the Al-Ankabût chapter of the Quran provides evidence for such meanings of the term: وَمَا أَنْتُمْ بِمُعْجِزِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ "And you will not cause failure [to Allah] upon the earth or in the heaven" (The Holy Qur'an-English meanings, 2004). As for referring to this meaning as “the miracle of prophet(s)”, it implies that prophets incapacitated their opponents when challenged them (Fîrûzâbâdî, 2008, p. 516).

¹ Synchronic and diachronic approaches are of semantic analysis. A synchronic approach considers a language at a moment in time without taking its history into account. By contrast, a diachronic approach takes history into account in explaining the development and evolution of a language (Giacalone Ramat, Mauri, & Molinelli, 2013, p. 17).

Thus, when taking into account the root meanings of the word of ‘ajaza, three respective points can be addressed: (1) scholarship (understanding, conception, or apprehension), (2) willpower (desire, search, or reaching), and (3) power (strength, capability, or ability). People, who were the object of the event (miracle), were striving to outdo or outperform the prophet (the performer of miracles) by utilizing their own knowledge, willpower, and capability. However, their endeavours fell short of showing the prevailing willpower and knowledge against God, and thus, demonstrated their incapability against miracles.

2. Miracle in the Classical Islamic Literature

In the Quran, the word miracle is not conceptually used; it refers to a number of events (i.e., instead of being a concept, miracle is a supernatural event). Instead of the very word miracle, there is the corresponding concept “*ayah*” (verse) (See the Quran, 7:106-108; 11:96; 28:36; 54:2) that refers to events those prophets performed miraculously by God willing. Lay people could not create similar events, which attested to the prophecy of miracle performers and verified that prophets were saying the truth. Therefore, miracle can be conceptualised as the equivalent of “*ayah*”, which means explicit evidence rendering people opposeless and incapable (Dāmeghānī 2010, pp. 55-57; Akkuş 2016).

This conceptualization (*aya*), but with various operationalizations, can be found in the Islamic classical literature. The first use of miracle as an *Ilm-al-Kalam* term (the science of discourse or dialectical science) in the classical literature is unknown, but it can be traced back to the 10th century. For instance, *Ilm al-Kalam* scholars following Ash`ari (e.g., Kādī Abduljabbār; Bāqillānī, Jurjānī, Taftazanī, Samarqāndī), Māturidī’ (e.g., Nasafī), and Salafī (Ibn Taymiyya) schools of thoughts indirectly used the term miracle in a similar way, but with various explanations as briefly presented below:

- Māturidī, defined miracle as “Godly events manifested merely by prophets; similar ones cannot be created by learning (the acquisition, transference, and application of knowledge and skills)” (Māturīdī 1979, p. 289).
- Kādī Abduljabbār remarked that supernatural events created by God in order to verify trustworthiness of those who claimed to be a prophet, thereby showing incapability or inability of human beings to create similar or the same events (Abduljabbār 1962, p. 199). He also deemed miracle to be events that happen against the natural laws and are impossible to be performed by other than prophets. Such events verify rightness/trustworthiness of those whom God granted with prophecy (Abduljabbār 1962, p. 199).
- Nasafī drew attention to extraordinary events (taking place in this world) that God created to challenge people to create the same or similar ones (Nasafī (h.508/1115, 1990, p. I, 469-475).
- Bāqillānī considered miracle as an essential feature of prophecy in addition to other prophetic characteristics, as it is required from those who professed to be a messenger of God (i.e., having revelations from God or bringing revealed words of God to people). Miracles are Godly (extraordinary) events solely performed by prophets (i.e., other than prophets cannot perform such events) when challenged by opponents (Bāqillānī, 1958, pp. 37-46).

- Semerqandī defined miracle as “a supernatural event that verifies prophecy and challenges opponents of prophets to be able to create the same or similar one”. Semerkandī hereby postulated miracle to be an evidential value of prophecy (Kaplan, 2016, pp. 744-746).
- Jurjanī categorically postulated miracle to be the essence of prophecy. Miracles are extraordinary or supernatural events happened by God’s will as incontestable evidence to verify prophecy and be performed only by prophets (Jurjanī, 2015, p. 104).
- Taftazanī strongly emphasised that the trueness of prophecy of prophets is based on miracles, which are of God’s deeds, creating extraordinary events. God supports his prophets by allowing them performing explicit miracles, which enables submission of societies to God (al-Taftazanī, 1998, p. 11).
- Ibn Taymiyya recognized miracle as the essential attribute of prophecy and has an essential value of it. Miracles are paramount signs of God, which are incompatible with the natural laws, not comprehensible scientifically, not explorable objects, and not describable by cause and effect relationships. People exposed to a miracle are called for having the due faith in God’s signs, called miracles and only performed by prophets (Ibn Taymiyya, 1983, pp. 40-42).

In consequence, until the last two centuries, the Islamic classical literature refers to miracle as extraordinary events that God create to verify prophecy and other than prophets are incapable of performing the same or similar one (Shertunī, 1983, p. II, 748). Because miracles have been considered to be God’s signs verifying prophecy, it has been usually a matter of prophecy in the classical literature. In all the classical definitions, miracle has evidential value not only for prophecy but also for God’s lordship.

3. Miracle from all the Classical Theistic Standpoints

The belief in the creation of the universe by one God is the first principle of classical theistic standpoint (Çevik, 2012, p. 4). The theistic conception of God is based on the understanding that God is perfect (Bayam, 2015, p. 325). Theism was developed in the first century as the postulation of that God is real, conscious, and willed; and humans consciously believe in God’s existence. The next principle is to believe in that God is omnipotent, omniscient, all-seeing, all-hearing, all-ordaining, judicious, merciful, blesser, and bestower. The last principle is to postulate that God reveals his words through prophets and adduces evidence for his existence by the creation of miracles (Topaloğlu, 2011, pp. 332-334).

According to classical theism, God sometimes intervenes in the physical structure and function of the world (natural law) in order to set aright things that do not go right (e.g., unfairness), prevents major disasters from happening, or creates events or objects those never happen spontaneously. The intervention of God in the world is a belief alleviating people’s concern, because it implies that people and the world are not left alone or under unwilled powers. The belief in the intervention also makes prayers to God plausible (i.e., making meaningful to pray God for alleviating or halting difficulties and hazards when face).

The abovementioned classical theistic approach is applicable to extraordinary events mentioned in the Quran as well as in the Bible. Miracles have an important place in

Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. In all the respective religious texts, miracles refer to extraordinary events as witnessing the agentic intervention of God; miracles are essential to verify the conception of God's divinity as actively willed at any moment (Kılıç, 2000, pp. 134-136). Saint Thomas Aquinas (d.1274) argued that for an event to be considered miracle, it should happen extraordinarily, be created beyond the capability of human being (Tarakçı, 1986, p. 37). Aquinas postulated that only God is able to create miracles (supernatural events) and a miraculous event is inconsistent with the nature of objects of that event. However, when the event and object relationship is taken into account as a whole, it is consistent with the divine order. For instance, the Israelites' (tribes of Israel) pass-through the parted sea is inconsistent with the nature of the sea but consistent with the divine order (Kılıç, 2000, pp. 135-141). According to 14th Benedict (d.1675), God grants some angels or people a special power to perform miracles. This conception, elaborated in his book "De Miraculis", moulded the Roman Catholic Church's view of miracle.

Dating back to Isaac Newton's (d.1643-1727) scientific revolution, a widely held view is that God created the nature and enacted the natural law once for all, so that natural events, which he plans, can occur per se, without his further intervention. God, however, intervenes in paramount social events such as sending Jesus Christ and the religion of Christianity. The Catholic traditional belief is that miracles continue to happen throughout the history. In contrast, the Protestant traditional belief is that miracles discontinue happening after the first two century of the Christianity, while acknowledging the trueness of miraculous events mentioned in the holy book (Russell, 2016, p. 55).

As to the Islamic traditional belief, there are a good number of miraculous events mentioned in the Quran. Examples are the Israelites' pass-through the parted sea (Q 7:138), the transformation of Moses's staff into a snake (Q 7:117), Abraham falling into the fire-pit that did not burn him (Q 21:69), Jesus speaking when he was a baby in the cradle (Q 19:22-33), taking Muhamad from a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque (in Mecca) to the Al-Aqsa, in Jerusalem, (Q 17:1). People who did not believe in Muhammad asked him to show some miracles as evidence for his prophecy and said: "thou have a house [made] of gold, or thou ascend to heaven - but nay, we would not [even] believe in thy ascension unless thou bring down to us [from heaven] a writing which we [ourselves] could read!" (Q 17:93). As a response to this request, God enjoined Muhammad: "Say thou, [O Prophet:] Limitless in His glory is my Sustainer! Am I, then, aught but a mortal man, an apostle?" (Q 17:93). According to Quranic verses, the non-believers wanted "an angel to be sent to them (Q 6:8), "the prophet ought to be richer than them", "have larger fruit gardens than their own gardens" (Q 17:89-93). Regarding the first request, God enjoined Muhammed: "Say, if there were angels walking about on earth, feeling at home, we would have sent them an angel from heaven as a messenger" (Q 17:93). As to the next request, Muhammed had never claimed that he possessed treasures, but only said he is a messenger (Q 17:94). In fact, if God had willed, he could enable Muhammed to do all of these deeds (Q 11:12).

Accordingly, all the classical theistic standpoints emphasize two functions of a miracle. First, it has an evidential value of verifying divine revelation. Prophets perform miracles to persuade people that divine revelations are from God. Second, it gives people an opinion about the existence of God, his divine omnipotence, and about the nature of his will. For example, God saved the prophet Abraham from fire or God parted the red sea

to save the Moses and the Israelites. Such miracles not only verify prophecy but also testify God's divine-will instructing prophets.

4. Modernist² Approaches to the Concept of Miracle

Religions or religious traditions put a great emphasis on miracle. In religious scriptures, miracle is thought to be a divine power that intervenes in the universe and allows for extraordinary events to happen, so as to highlight a fact, to support people, to help good people in adverse situations. In general, miracle is defined as an extraordinary event or situation that bewilders people (Gündüz, 1998, p. 269). Miracle is also defined as a sign or as evidence that makes aware of the difference between human and creator. In this sense, theologically, miracle is not a sign forcing for verification but a sign for the invitation to believe in God (Kılıç, 2000, p. 137).

However, dating from the 17th century, changes in attitudes towards miracle are observable. In particular, in line with Protestant-Christianity, several philosophers and scientists explicitly consider miracles to be tales, exaggerated stories, or superstitions. From the 17th century onwards, Aristotle's understanding of the world has been replaced with an understanding that motions of objects are determined by the "natural laws", which explain the sequence of events. Occurrence of an event that violates or contradicts the natural laws has been considered supernatural. Therefore, David Hume defined miracles as a violation of the natural laws. He argued that events, which are called miracles, are contradictory to the natural laws that are based on irrefutable evidence (i.e., indicates that no event can be miracle) (Hume, 2014). Similar argument was put forward by Renan who stated that only very naive people believe in seeing miracles.

In a similar vein, Swinburne argued that God made miracles as a violation or suspension of the natural laws, which also impossible. Swinburne maintained that even if events happen as claimed to be miracles, they are under suspicion, mainly because they can be ascribed to natural reasons, such as ascribing the partition of the red sea to levanter (Swinburne, 2009, p. 113). Muslim scholars like Muhammad Abduh, Fazlur Rahman, and Mehmet Aydın have put forward similar arguments for rationalization of miracles, although following up with the conventional perspective. Mehmet Aydın remarked that miracles occur in a "hectic period" when religions manifest themselves along with socio-psychological fluctuations, that is, transition from an old to a new belief system and religious society (Aydın, 2000, p. 75). Muhammad Abduh rationalised such conceptions by arguing that miracles are based on laws that are as certain as the natural laws, but transcendent to the human mind. Abduh stated that: "God may create certain laws for entities that take place naturally. We do not know these laws, but we can see their effects particularly on those people whom God has granted". In other words, miracle is not an implausible event, because there is no evidence for that deviation in the natural laws cannot happen. An example of such a deviation is observable in patients who abstain from eating foods that could kill a healthy person; they continue eating no food notwithstanding that this eating behaviour exacerbates their poor health and its consequences. If one claims that such behaviours are results of another law of

² Modernist approach refers to rationalisation of miraculous events by disregarding primary and contextual meanings of words that describe miracles. Instead, connotative meanings, which are out of the context, are taken into account. Modernists are those who consciously or unconsciously reject Islamic miracles as they are for the sake of objectivity and rationality, on the basis of modern references such as enlightenment philosophy and positivism.

nature, the following response will be given: whoever has made the natural law is the same creator of this universe at the same time. As such, to make certain laws for extraordinary events is not impossible for the creator. Given that believers have faith in omnipotence and self-agency of the creator, there is nothing preventing them from believing in that the creator with his permanent knowledge and free-will is able to form possibility or determine causes of possibility. Because miracles are evidence verifying prophecy, they are shown only when people do not trust a prophet's invitation to religion and argue against it. Prophets have recourse to miracles to prove that they disclose religious teachings in the name of God; because only God allows them to perform miracles, thereby verifying their prophecy. No doubt God does not lie nor does verify liars. Thus, believers must understand that God allows prophets to perform miracles, verifying their prophecies (Abduh, 1986, p. 132-133).

A different modernist stance was taken by Fazlur Rahman. He postulated that miracles are not only supernatural events but also natural events. According to Fazlur Rahman, the perfectness of miracles serves as evidence for the existence of God, because only the perfect one is able to create a perfect event. The perfect miracle created by God is the nature itself. Due to the perfect design and systematic work of nature (Q 34:9; Q 50:6; Q 51:47; Q 13:2). Unlike the classical/non-modernist approach, he considered every natural event to be miracle, even natural disasters (i.e., floods and earthquakes) are miraculous signs of God's existence (Rahman, 2000, p. 47). If people are not convinced with miraculousness of the perfect design, that is, with the natural-miraculous signs of the universe, God is also capable of halting, terminating, or reorienting causes underlying natural events (i.e., showing supernatural events). Because a group of people cannot understand that nature is not by itself but a sign of its creator, they expect to see God's miracles to be supernatural events (i.e., an interception of or intervention in natural events) (Rahman, 2000, p. 53).

Fazlur Rahman further maintained that supernatural events, which people always expect to see, do not have to happen anymore, mainly because when people of Mecca requested from the prophet Muhammad to show miracles as did the preceding prophets, he told their requests could not be granted. The Quranic verses show that God responded to the requests of non-believers by reminding how their predecessors reacted to miracles. Their predecessors were shown miracles they wanted to see (i.e., seeing that the way nature works or natural causes of events are temporarily stopped or terminated). Nevertheless, they did not believe in prophets (See the Quran 3:183-184; Q 6:7). In the same or similar way, even if Muhammad had shown thousands of miracles to Meccan pagans and Jews, it would have been useless. Fazlur Rahman presumed that hearts of non-believers become hardened like stones, so that even supernatural-miraculous events remain insufficient to convince them to believe in God. Therefore, in the time of the prophet Muhammad, supernatural events/miracles did not have to happen anymore, yet miracles are always possible to take place. The Quran's inimitable language (style of writing and expression) is the prophet's greatest miracle (Rahman, 2000, p. 50, 52, 73). This implies that miracles vary according to prophets.

Although supernatural miracles are mentioned in the Quran, Fazlur Rahman rationalised them, particularly the elephant event happened 55 years before the birth of the prophet Muhammad and Muhammad's ascent to heaven. For the first event, he ascribed the destruction of Abrahah (a Christian ruler of Yemen) and his army, mentioned in the surah of Elephant, to the smallpox epidemic (Rahman, 2000, p. 47). As to the second

event, he presumed that the prophet Muhammad's ascent to heaven happened spiritually (Rahman, 2000, p. 73).

With regard to the claim for the first event, some commentators (Ibn Hishām, 1955, 1: 54; Taberī, 1964, 30: 298, 303; Ibn Kesīr, 2000, 461), in the earlier period as narrated by Ikrima, advocated the idea that the stained fever (hasbe) and smallpox ensued from stones hurled by flying creatures in the event of elephant. As to the next claim that the prophet Muhammad spiritually ascended to heaven not somatically, Islamic scholars (Kurtubī, X, 208; Mustafa Sabri Efendi, IV, 199) argued that it is problematic in terms of the hadith technique. Although these two viewpoints are of the Islamic classical literature before Fazlur Rahman, they are not of the modernist perspective. By contrast, Fazlur Rahman's viewpoints are based on the modernist approach under the influence of positivism, one of the strong philosophical movements of the period. This is because Fazlur Rahman explained Islamic miracles through the concept of "Ayah" which literally means evidence/signs, in the Qur'an. According to him, the term Ayah means signs of God and therefore every signs can be explained within the frame of reason, although, the Qur'an describe miracles as to scare people for the purpose of warning only (Q, 17/59).

However, these modernist/rationalist interpretations are inconclusive because of two reasons. First, if supernatural miracles are signs verifying prophecy and the existence of God (Rahman, 2000), then they should be applicable to the prophecy of Muhammed, as well. People of Makkah, in the prophet time, have the right to believe in God through seeing supernatural miracles. Why should God deprive these people of this right? Second, Fazlur Rahman's agreement with the necessity of showing supernatural events to disbelievers in the time before the prophet Muhammed is inconsistent with his disagreement with the need for showing supernatural miracles in the time of the prophet Muhammed.

Conclusion

This present diachronic (semantic) review of classical and modernist interpretations of miracles in the Quran has expounded on reasons for semantic changes and theological standpoints underlying the interpretations. The review has found that interpretations of miracles have begun to change along with changes in scholars' worldviews of metaphysical topics. Many modern non-Muslim scholars have deemed miracles to be myths (i.e., rejecting metaphysical events or claims). As a response to this conception, some Muslim scholars have proposed a modern interpretation of miracles in the Quran.

In the classical literature before the 19th century, followers of Islam did not lay due emphasis on miracles. In this period, commentaries of the Quran were based on an approach to miracles as the way discussed in the Quran, such as how many miracles God granted and to which prophet, which events are miracles, and what historical influences miracles exerted on the place they happened. Miracles are supernatural but real events that God allows prophets to show. Miracles are hereby verifications of prophecies and therefore discussed in classical Islamic literature under the heading of prophecy. In the Christian world in the middle age, too, miracles are used as valid and reliable evidence.

Although in the early periods of Islam, there are some rationalist-like statements about the prophet Muhammad's ascending to heaven as well as the elephant event, these

statements are different from those made by modernists. This difference is mainly because of that the non-modernist statements address the nature of the miracles as it is, whereas modernists attempt to rationalize miracles on the basis of their connotative meanings. Starting from the 19th century, a considerable number of Muslim and Non-Muslim scholars have proposed the modernist interpretations by referring to connotative instead of primary/contextual meanings of words used for explaining miracles. This reference is based on a mere rationalist approach to interpretations of miracles. This approach essentially advocates interpretations of divine revelations that are based on human reason. It thereby leaves out divine revelations that are untestable or against the natural law.

In contrast, this review has argued that rationalization of miraculous events or disregarding unfathomable aspects of them is based on no tenable religious reason, mainly because the Quran explicitly refers to miracles (e.g., Q 3:49; Q 7:73-133; Q 20:22; Q 21:69-87) as unusual and unnatural events were solely manifested by Allah. The rationalisation of miracles requires to explain the relationship between Allah's order/omnipotence and physical laws of nature. The scholars have fallen short of explaining this relationship and rationalizing: Why Allah's order (i.e., the creation of miracles) "has to be" according to physical laws of nature? To clarify this question is central to understanding whether (a) miracles in the Quran are natural or supernatural and if (b) physical laws of nature are invariable orders of Allah. Accepting the latter case truth, Allah's omnipotence appears self-contradictory (i.e., Allah is restricted by his own order). In other words, the two orders of Allah (i.e., the creation of supernatural miracles and the invariable natural laws) would contradict with each other, which in turn cast doubt on Allah's omnipotence to give the order.

References

- Abduh, M. (1904). *Tefsîru cuz'î Amme*. Kahire.
- Abduh, M. (1986). *Tevhid Risalesi* (S. Hizmetli, Çev.). Ankara: Fecr Yayınevi.
- Abduljabbâr, K. (1962). *al-Mughnî fî ebvâb at-tavhîd ve al-'adl*, (C. I-XX). Kahire.
- Abû Zayd, N. Hâmid. (2009). *Reformation of Islamic Thought: A Critical Historical Analysis*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Akkuş, S. (2016). Kur'an'da Ayet Kavramı. *Usûl İslam Araştırmaları*, 14(14), 7-24.
- Armstrong, Karen. (1998). *Tanrı'nın Tarihi* (O. özel, H. Koyukan, & K. Emiroğlu, Ed.). Ankara: Ayraç.
- Aydın, H. (2015). İslâm İnançları Açısından Mucize, Kerâmet, Sihir ve İstidrac Kavramları Üzerine Bir İnceleme. *Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 17(32), 106-137.
- Aydın, M. (2000). *Din Fenomeni*. Konya: Din Bilimleri Yayınları.
- Bâqillânî, E. B. M. b. T. (1958). *al-Bayân 'an al-farq bayna al-mu`cizât wa al-karamah ve al-hiyel ve al-kehâne ve as-sihr ve an-nârinçât* (R. J. Mccarthy, Ed.). Beyrut.
- Baş, E. (2008). Mustafa İslamoğlu'nun Hayat Kitabı Kur'an Adlı Eserinde Rasyonel Yorum. *Usûl İslam Araştırmaları*, 10(28), 78-106.

- Bayam, E. G. (2015). Açık Teizmin Geleneksel Tanrı Tasavvuru Ve Süreç Teizmi ile İlişkisi. *S B A R D*, (25), 253-269.
- Jurjānī, S. Sh. (2015). *Sherh al-Mevākīf: Mevākīf Şerhi* (Ö. Türker, Ed.). İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler.
- Çevik, M. (2012). David Hume'da Mucize ve Nedensellik. *Beytu'l-Hikme Dergisi*, 2(2), 3-16.
- Dāmegānī, H. b. M. (2010). *al-Vucuh ve an-Nazāir* (A. A. Arabī, Ed.). Beyrut.
- al-Javharī, I. bin H. (1990). *as-Sihāh, Tāc al-Lughatī ve Sihāh al-Arabiyye* (C. 1–6). Beyrut: Dāru'l-ilm.
- al-Ḳurtubī (ö. 671), E. A. M. b. A. b. E. B. (2006). *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'ān* (C. 1–22). Beyrut: Müessesetü'r-Risale.
- Esed, M. (1999). *Kur'an mesajı: Meal-Tefsir* (C. 1–3; C. Koytak, Çev.). İstanbul: İşaret Yayınları.
- Shaybanī (ö.206/821), İ. b. M. (1974). *Kitab al-Jīm*. Kahire: Vizaretü'l-Evkaf.
- at-Taberī, M. b. C. (1964). *Tārīḫ ar-rusul ve al-muluk* (C. 1–15). Leiden.
- at-Taftazanī, S. (1998). *Sherh al-Maḳāsīd*. Beyrut: Âlemü'l-Kütüb.
- Azharī, (ö. 370), M. b. A. (trs.). *Tehzīb al-Lugha, as-Sihah*. Kahire: Matābiu sübüli'l-Arab.
- ez-Zebidī (ö.1205/197), M. M. b. M. b. M. (2004). *Tācū'l-arūs min cevāhiri'l-Kāmūs* (C. 1–60). Tunus.
- Firuzābādī, (ö. 816/1414), E. T. M. M. bin Y. (2008). *Ḳamus al-Muhīt*. Kahire: Dāru'l-Hadīs.
- Giacalone Ramat, A., Mauri, C., & Molinelli, P. (Ed.). (2013). *Synchrony and diachrony: A dynamic interface*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Goldmann, L. (2009). *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*. New York: Routledge.
- Gündüz, Ş. (1998). *Din ve İnanç Sözlüğü*. Ankara: Vadi Yayınları.
- Hazard, P. (1981). *Batı Düşüncesinde Büyük Değişme* (E. Güngör, Ed.). İstanbul: Yüksel Matbaası.
- Hume, D. (2014). *İnsanın Anlama Yetisi Üzerine Bir Soruşturma* (M. Özgen, Ed.). Bursa: Biblos Kitabevi.
- Ibn Hishām, A. (1955). *as-Sīreh an-nebeviyye* (C. 1–4). Kahire.
- Ibn Kesīr (ö. 774), E.-F. İ. b. ad-Dımeşkī. (2000). *Tefsīr al-Kur'ān al-Azīm* (C. 1–15). Kahire: Müessesetu Kurtuba.
- Ibn Manzūr, Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad ibn Mukarram. (1883). *Lisān al-'Arab*. Kahire: Dārü'l-Meârif.
- Ibn Taymiyya, T. E.-A. A. (1983). *Kitab al Tevhid ar-Rububiyye* (A. b. M. b. K. el-Asimī, Ed.). Kahire.
- İslamoğlu, M. (2008). *Hayat Kitabı Kur'an, Gerekçeli Meal-Tefsir*. İstanbul: Düşün Yayıncılık.

- İslamoğlu, M. (2011). *Kur'an Surelerinin Kimliği* (3. Baskı). İstanbul: Akabe Vakfı Yayınları.
- İslamoğlu, M. (2012). *Nüzûl Sırasına Göre Hayat Kitabı Kur'ân*. İstanbul: Düşün Yayıncılık.
- Kaplan, İ. (2016). Nübüvvet Anlayışı. *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 5(4), 739-765.
- Kılıç, R. (2000). *Modern Batı Düşüncesinde Vahiy*. Ankara: Ankara Üniv. İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları.
- Küçüker, M. U. (2001). *Aydınlanma Felsefesinde Dîn Anlayışı* ((Unpublished Master Thesis)). Marmara, İstanbul.
- Maturidî (ö. 333/944), E. M. (1979). *Kitâb at-tevhîd* (F. Huleyf, Ed.). İskenderiye: Daru'l-Jamiat al-Mısriyye.
- Nesefî (h.508/1115, E.-M. (1990). *Tabsirah al-adille fî al-keîâm* (C. 1-II; C. Salame, Ed.). Dımaşk.
- Rahman, F. (2000). *Ana Konularıyla Kur'an*. Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları.
- Russell, B. (2016). *Din İle Bilim*. İstanbul: Yapı Kredi.
- Sabri Efendi, M. (1992). *Mevkîf al-'akl ve al-'ilm ve al-'alem min rabb al'lemîn ve 'ibadîh al-murselîn*. Beyrut: Dâru ihyâi't-turasi'l-Arabî.
- Shertunî, S. al-Hurî al-Lubnânî. (1983). *Eqreb al-Mewârîd*. Qum.
- Siddiqui, M. (1967). Religious Thought of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. *Islamic Studies*, VI (3), 289-308.
- Swinburne, R. (2009). *Mucize Kavramı* (A. Işık, Ed.). İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık.
- Taberî (ö. 310/923), E. C. M. b. C. (2001). *Jâmi' al-Beyân an Tavîl al-Qurân* (C. 1-26). Kahire: Mektebetü İbn Teymiyye.
- Tarakçı, M. (1986). *St. Thomas Aquinas*. Ankara: Fecr Yayınevi.
- The Holy Qur'an-English meanings*. § Saheeh International (2004).
- Topaloğlu, A. (2011). Teizm. *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi (DİA)* (C. 40). Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı.
- Turan, M. (2018). Mustafa İslamoğlu'nun Kur'an Surelerinin Kimliği İsimli Eserindeki Bazı Farklı Yorumların Kritiği. *Şırnak Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 9 (19), 79-116.
- Zamakhsherî, E.-K. C. M. (1998). *Esâs al-Belâgha* (M. B. Uyunussud, Ed.). Beyrut: Daru'l-Kitubi'l-İlmiyye.