

THE QUR'AN AS A SOURCE OF HISTORY: A NEW APPROACH TO THE DATING OF THE QUR'ANIC PASSAGES*

Selim TÜRCAN¹

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Abstract: In this paper, we will introduce a method that we try to develop to detect the Qur'anic chronology in a way that is not speculative. For this we will use a method that matches the chronological knowledge we have and the expression patterns contained in the Qur'anic passages. In fact, it is argued that we can more accurately detect the chronology of expressions rather than the chronology data of passages on the basis of this method. Because the data concerning the history of Qur'anic passages are insufficient and controversial. We can be closer to the truth if we test the contradictions and alliances of the narrations and the evaluations at the level that the narrators and evaluators never planned, that is, at the level of expression. Then we can use the history of different expression patterns to determine the history of any passage that brings them together.

Keywords: *Qur'anic chronology, dating, expression patterns, method*

Tarihin Bir Kaynağı Olarak Kur'an: Kur'an'ın Ayetlerinin Tarihlenmesinde Yeni Bir Yaklaşım

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Özet: Bu çalışmada Kur'an kronolojisini spekülatif olmayan bir yolla tespit etmeyi amaçladığımız bir metot tanıtılacaktır. Bu kapsamda elimizdeki kronolojik veriler ve Kur'an pasajlarında yer alan ifade kalıplarından hareket eden bir yöntem önerilmektedir. Esasen bu metot temelinde pasajların kronolojisine yönelik veriler doğrudan kullanılmak yerine ifade kalıpları esas kabul edilerek değerlendirmeye alınacaktır. Zira Kur'an pasajlarının tarihlendirmesine yönelik veriler yetersiz ve tartışmalıdır. Eğer kronoloji listelerindeki rivayetleri ve değerlendirmeleri, daha önce düşünülmemiş bir şekilde, ifade kalıpları düzeyinde tahlil edersek, daha sağlıklı sonuçlar alınabileceğini düşünüyoruz. Böylece farklı ifade kalıplarının tarihini, bunları bünyesinde birleştirmiş olan herhangi bir pasajın tarihini belirlemede kullanabiliriz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Kur'an Kronolojisi, Tarihlendirme, İfade Kalıpları, Metot.*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to introduce a method that we have developed to determine the chronology of the Qur'anic surahs, passages and verses. This method which we name as "the use of Qur'anic expression patterns in illuminating the chronology of the Qur'an", have already been applied for two surahs before. We published them as essays before. One of the works is related to the chronology of the surah al-Muzzammil and the other is the Surah al-Fatiha (Türcan, 2010, pp.

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¹Prof. Dr., Hitit Üniversitesi, İlahiyat Fakültesi, Tefsir Anabilim Dalı, selimturcan@hitit.edu.tr, <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7618-3868>.

69-103; Türcan-Dinç, 2015, pp. 5-34). We can say that we have come a long way in developing the method. Here we will talk about the fundamentals of the method and introduce the basic elements and concepts of it. In doing so, we are considering using the datum of the work we have done for the Surah al-Fatiha as an example. Thus we hope to provide a concrete material for the *readers*.

Contemporary historians have discussed the period that the Qur'an was revealed in with different political and cultural motivations. When they talked about this matter, they noticed a very important point: The Qur'an is the most authentic historical source that has reached us in its period. This finding is not a subjective view defended only by the Muslim scholars. Non-Muslim researchers also accept this fact to a great extent except the ones highly skeptical. (Watt, 1970, p. 51; Paret, 1961, pp. 24-42). Therefore, the contemporary historians studying early Islam thought that it was necessary to support and test other historical materials with the Qur'an. However, there is a serious obstacle in practice of this approach. That is, the textual structure of the Qur'an does not reflect the chronology of events. As is known, the Qur'an was revealed in pieces in a period of 23 years and later it took the form of a book. We are aware of the fact that the chronological order of the verses was not taken into account during the compilation process. It is not regarded as a classification axis in textualization process. Even within the surahs, which are the main sections of the Qur'an, there are many passages revealed at different periods. This is a handicap for history researchers and means that the Qur'an does not provide any ready-made information as a source of history. The problem in chronological information given by a historical source can cause several serious mistakes. In addition, the chronology of the Qur'anic surahs and verses is significant for Islamic sciences such as classical tafsir and fiqh as well. In classical books we find many lists of independent chronology narratives as well as of chronological order of the surahs. Consequently, we can see that the chronology problem is an important field of study in Qur'anic studies in the classic and modern period.

We find the lists of Meccan-Medinan surahs in the books written in tafsir and some historical sources. These lists give the chronological order of the surahs (Al-Yakūbī, 1992, pp. 33, 34, 43; Al-Shahristānī, 2008, pp. 19-23). The criterion of the lists is not given. But there is a settled claim that this science is based on the reports. Moreover, basing the lists on the early companions of the Prophet and some later Muslim scholars may give us the feeling that we are faced with the datum based on the witnessings of the revelation period. But we cannot assume that these lists were entirely created by testimony. It is possible that there are evaluations based on Qur'anic content in these materials. The lists may contain some non-report materials; but they might, in fact, be evaluations perceived as if reports coming from the revelation period. Besides these lists, there are also narrations about singular surahs, passages and verses. These narrations are found in the related sections of the Usul-al-Tafsir books (Al-Zarkashī, 2011, pp. 139, 140; Al-Suyūṭī, 2007, p.53).

On the other hand, it is also necessary to mention the lists of modern Western and eastern researchers. These are studies provided from the lists of tafsir sources and individual chronology datum and especially the use of *sīrah* sources with a critical approach. As Nöldeke does, they usually subject the surahs to a chronological order and, at most, classify the Meccan surahs into periods (Nöldeke, 1961, p. XI, XII). Besides, there are such scholars as Mawlana Muhammad Ali who tried to divide the Medinan surahs into periods. In addition, Muhammad Ali tried to clarify the dating of the Meccan and Medinan periods by dividing them into certain

years (Ali, 2008, pp. 29, 30). There are those who make datings in the level of passages like Hirschfeld (Hirschfeld, 1902, pp. 139-142) as well as more detailed and mathematical calculations such as performed by Mehdi Bâzergân. (Bâzergân, 1385 H, p.147 ff.). It is evident that Bazergan took the Western criticisms into account to a great extent. However, these lists include subjectivity and speculations and even ideological preferences. Although they contain many justified evaluations, these are not enough to achieve stability in this field. They are, in fact, in controversy in some significant matters even if they seem to agree in a very general frame. What's more, these evaluations have not emerged as a search of method that will at least isolate the issue from subjectivity. Even those who want to reach a top level with interesting calculations such as Bâzergan seem to be unable to skip this level of personal evaluation. Here, then, the following conclusion can be reached: Although the Qur'an is a source of history, it has not yet been fully established as a convenient source of history. Can a method be developed that will enable us to identify the Qur'anic chronology and overcome subjective evaluations?

To answer this question, we need to determine the basic principles that will shape our approach. Before establishing a method, it is best to clarify what you need and what the main goal is. Thus, the approach will reveal our way and we can concrete our method. What we need firstly in dating the Qur'anic passages is to abstain from subjective evaluations and anticipations that are effective on us. Up to now, thematic analyzes, traditional chronological datum, information from political sources have not been able to provide a level of objectivity that can finish the disputes. In fact, they can even be the source of the conflicts. We must determine the truth without prejudice. Therefore, the method we choose should have a concrete objective support point that enables it. What could be this point of support?

We offer to take Qur'anic text itself into account in order to get rid of all these sorts of disadvantages. For the Qur'anic text is both a concrete object and the most reliable and compromised historical source. Let's deal this point a little further. We believe that taking the structure of the Qur'anic language as a starting point is the best way. What I mean is that there are chronological traces in the structure of the text. We know that the Qur'an was revealed over various events in 23 years. Moreover, the Qur'an built the Muslim community by managing the political and cultural life of them. The Qur'an has the most important role in the struggle of the Muslims against their enemies. This is an adventure that extends from an initial weakness point to the highest success. So, in a changing and transforming strategy within 23 years, it is possible to see the concrete traces reflected in the language of the Qur'an. If we can follow the traces properly, we can achieve some illuminative results about the chronological order. We can ask a question to make the matter a little more concrete: What are these traces? How can they be recognized? What is the difference between thematic analysis to identify the Qur'anic chronology and between our suggestion?

The chronological traces reflected in the text of the Qur'an might be forms of speech that point to a chronological development in the Qur'anic discourse structure. I draw your attention that this is something different from the thematic elements of the Qur'an. In fact we are talking about the literal structure which has a close interest to the themes in the Qur'an, but more concrete and followable. Of course, we talk about the characteristic patterns of the Qur'anic language, not every word of it. It will be understood better when given examples. It is appropriate for us to define it as "expression pattern". At this point we need to clarify what the expression pattern is. The expression pattern is a composition of words which, we think, is repeated in various places of the Qur'an, consisting of at least two words and giving a sense that

it has its own characteristics. Not all the expression patterns are useful to our method. If an expression pattern appears in every period of the 23-year revelation period according to our current chronology. The political and social struggle of the Qur'anic revelation reflected to its expressions. The expression patterns entered and exited to the Qur'an at different intervals throughout the 23 years of its history. Some of these expression patterns have also gained continuity. It is possible to analyze these expression patterns throughout the Qur'anic text and to follow them by way of chronological datum. This follow-up can ensure that we are able to identify what is consistent within the chronological data regardless of subjective preferences and news. Here the following critique question can be asked: All very well but, what we are looking for is the chronology in which the expression patterns have taken their shape, isn't it? So, isn't it a tautology to explain an unknown with another unknown connected to it? That is, the confusion in the chronology narratives will naturally create confusion in the Qur'anic expression patterns. At this point, it will be enlightening to explain the basis on which the method is settled. We will not use the present chronology narratives as directly informative datum. We will take all the chronology narratives and evaluations into account. We will take the certain datum, reconciled evaluations and reviews that are close to each other as a starting point. Let's try to concrete the analysis.

Let us now consider that we are talking about the chronology of a Qur'anic passage. How will we detect the chronological period of this passage using these expression patterns? First of all, we determine the expression patterns in that Qur'anic passage. The expression patterns in the language of the Qur'an came to the agenda within 23 years; they were used and then might be abandoned. Here we are actually talking about the diachronic transformation of the concepts within a language. But we are dealing with this matter in terms of expression patterns rather than the conceptual plane. In other words, we will rather follow the Qur'anic language in terms of style. We can say that different patterns are active at different time intervals. Then, the chronology of a passage must be the interval in which the chronologies of the expression patterns it contains coincide. So we can assume that the given passage has some expression patterns that are exactly effective in that interval of Qur'anic language. That is, there are expression patterns coming up or being off the agenda during the revelation process. Then, let's imagine that we take a photo at any point about these expression patterns. Here the Qur'anic passages show which patterns are on the agenda at that moment like photographs actually taken. Therefore, when we witness that passage, the expression patterns in it are still alive. So, how will we detect the date of the expression?

We deal the expression patterns of the passage one by one. We identify the other verses or passages that these patterns are in. We take the chronology datum and assessments related to the passages into account. At the end, we determine the widest chronological time interval for each expression pattern beginning from the first one. This chronological time interval is restricted with the two views that make it the earliest and latest dating for the use in the Quran. At this stage, a wide time interval is determined for the first pattern. If the two views at the beginning and at the end of the group are too far away from the group, they can be removed and identified in a narrow but more speculative second stage. This process is performed for the expression patterns of the passage respectively and the notes are taken. We are finally at the stage of determining the dating interval of our passage. So we take the dating intervals determined for all expression patterns into account. We designate the dating interval in which all of these expression patterns are in effect in the Qur'anic language as a coincidence stage. The narrow dating interval we have obtained is the dating interval of the Qur'anic passages.

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APPENDIX: THE EXPRESSION PATTERNS OF SURAH AL-FATIHA AND ITS PROBABLE CHRONOLOGICAL PERIOD

Considering the language of al-Fatiha in the context of the aforementioned evaluations, the coincidence of the expression patterns of the surah shows that its probable chronology extends about a 14-15 year-period from the 5th year of the revelation to the 8th year of Hijra. *This period begins with the patterns of al-rahman ar-rahim and al-maghdhûbi 'alayhim. It ends with the pattern of ar-rahmân.*

