Beyond Text and Context:

Modern Scientific Discoveries through Gadamerian Hermeneutics and the Hermeneutical Circle in Quranic Interpretation

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Abstract:

The claim that modern scientific discoveries serve as indisputable proof of the Quran's divine origin has long fueled debate. Others caution against literal interpretations of the Quran's scientific references, stressing the need for more nuanced approaches. This paper navigates this complex terrain by employing Gadamerian hermeneutics, fostering a deeper understanding of how this philosophical framework can guide a balanced interpretation that accounts for both the Quran's historical context and the dynamic nature of scientific knowledge.

Focusing on Surat Al-Hadeed ("Iron") and its pivotal verse 26 ("We have sent down iron..."), the paper delves into specific historical clashes between literal interpretations and scientific understandings. Through the lens of the hermeneutical circle, it demonstrates how such conflicts can be transcended by situating the verse within its specific historical context. This involves engaging with diverse scholarly interpretations, acknowledging the limitations of literal readings, and recognizing the inherent mutability of scientific interpretations themselves. Through this interweaving of historical context, interpretive diversity, and a critical awareness of scientific paradigms, the paper argues for a more nuanced and meaningful dialogue between the Quran and modern science.

This approach moves beyond simplistic interpretations that reduce the Quran to a scientific textbook or dismiss its relevance in today's world. Instead, it opens the door to a richer appreciation of the Quran's enduring message – one that transcends narrow interpretations and speaks to the fundamental questions of humanity, regardless of scientific advancements. Ultimately, the paper seeks to pave the way for a more productive and enriching conversation between the Quran and modern science, fostering mutual understanding and enriching our appreciation of both realms.

Keywords: *Quran, Science, Gadamerian Hermeneutics, Hermeneutical Circle, Surat Al-Hadeed, Iron, Interpretation, Context, Meaning-making, Dialogue*

ملخص:

إن الادعاء بأن الاكتشافات العلمية الحديثة اضحت دليلاً لا جدال فيه على الأصل الإلهي للقرآن قد أجج الجدل لفترة طويلة. ويحذر آخرون من التفسيرات الحرفية للإشارات العلمية فى القرآن، مشددين على الحاجة إلى مناهج أكثر دقة. تتنقل هذه الورقة في هذه الأرضية المعقدة باستخدام التأويل الهرمنيوطيقي، مما يعزز فهمًا أعمق لكيفية قدرة هذا الإطار الفلسفي على توجيه تفسير متوازن يأخذ بعين الاعتبار كل من السياق التاريخي للقرآن والطبيعة الديناميكية للمعرفة العلمية.

بالتركيز على سورة الحديد وآيتها المحورية ٢٦ ("إنزلنا حديدا...")، تتعمق الدراسة في صدامات تاريخية محددة بين التفسيرات الحرفية والفهم العلمي. من خلال عدسة الدائرة التأويلية ، يتضح كيف يمكن تجاوز مثل هذه الصراعات عن طريق وضع الآية في سياقها التاريخي المحدد. وهذا يتضمن الانخراط في تفسيرات العلماء المتنوعة، والإقرار بحدود القراءات الحرفية، والاعتراف بالطبيعة المتغيرة لتفسيرات العلوم نفسها. ومن خلال هذا التشابك بين السياق التاريخي وتنوع التفسيرات والوعي النقدي بالمكون العلمي ، تدعو الورقة إلى حوار أكثر دقة وذو مغزى بين القرآن والعلوم الحديثة.

يتجاوز هذا النهج التفسيرات التبسيطية التي تقلل من شأن القرآن أو تحتزله إلى مجرد كتاب علمي أو تقلل من صلته بالعالم اليوم. وبدلاً من ذلك، يفتح الباب أمام تقدير أكثر ثراءً للرسالة الخالدة للقرآن – رسالة تتجاوز التفسيرات الضيقة وتتحدث عن الأسئلة الأساسية للإنسانية، بغض النظر عن التقدم العلمي. في نهاية المطاف، تسعى الدراسة إلى تمهيد الطريق لحوار أكثر إنتاجية وإثراء بين القرآن والعلوم الحديثة، وتعزيز التفاهم المتبادل وإثراء تقديرنا لكلا المجالين.

1. Introduction

For centuries, the relationship between modern scientific discoveries and the Quran has captivated scholars and believers alike. Some view scientific advancements as undeniable proof of the Quran's divine origin, citing verses that seemingly anticipate future discoveries (e.g., Al-Hajj 30:25) (Aslan, 2019). Others, however, caution against literal interpretations of the Quran's scientific references, arguing that such readings fail to account for the historical context and evolving nature of scientific knowledge (Arkoun, 2011).

This paper navigates this intricate debate by employing the philosophical framework of Gadamerian hermeneutics. Central to this approach is the concept of the "hermeneutical circle," where our understanding of a text is constantly shaped by our own historical and cultural horizons, while simultaneously influencing our interpretation of that text (Gadamer, 1975).

By applying this lens to Surat Al-Hadeed ("Iron") and focusing specifically on verse 26 ("We have sent down iron...") (Qur'an 57:25), we delve into historical clashes between literal interpretations and scientific understandings. By engaging with diverse scholarly interpretations, acknowledging the limitations of literal readings, and recognizing the inherent mutability of scientific paradigms themselves, we demonstrate how the hermeneutical circle can foster a more nuanced and meaningful dialogue between the Quran and modern science.

One such scholar who has explored this relationship is Dr. Zagloul El-Naggar, a prominent Egyptian scientist and Quranic scholar. In his book "The Quran and Modern Science," El-Naggar argues that the Quran contains numerous scientific references that are consistent with modern scientific discoveries. For example, he interprets the verse "We have sent down iron..." as a reference to the process of iron formation in stars (El-Naggar, 2002).

El-Naggar's interpretation is significant because it demonstrates how the Quran can be understood as a text that speaks to both the religious and scientific dimensions of human experience. By engaging with El-Naggar's work and other scholarly interpretations, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the Quran's message and its relevance to the contemporary world.

This approach ultimately moves beyond the limitations of both proof and reductionism. It opens the door to a richer appreciation of the Quran's enduring message – one that speaks to the fundamental questions of humanity, regardless of scientific advancements. Importantly, it paves the way for a more productive and enriching conversation between the Quran and modern science, fostering mutual understanding and enriching our appreciation of both realms.

2. Review of Literature:

Previous Interpretations of Surat Al-Hadeed verse 26:

Several scholars have delved into Surat Al-Hadeed verse 26 ("We have sent down iron...") and its scientific aspects. Dr.

Zagloul El-Naggar, as previously mentioned, interprets it as referring to stellar iron formation (El-Naggar, 2002). Others offer contrasting interpretations. Maurice Bucaille, in "The Bible, the Quran, and Science," sees it as a premonition of modern steel production, while Maurice Bollag, in "The Quran and Modern Science," cautions against literal interpretations, emphasizing its figurative language (Bucaille, 1982; Bollag, 1991). These examples highlight the spectrum of interpretations, ranging from literal connections to scientific discoveries to a focus on the verse's broader message. However, some critiques point to potential problems with literal interpretations, including ignoring the historical context and scientific limitations of the verse's language (Arkoun, 2011).

Application of Gadamerian Hermeneutics in Quranic Exegesis:

Gadamerian hermeneutics has gained ground in Islamic scholarship, offering tools for nuanced interpretations. Authors like Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in "Islam and the Plight of Modern Man," and Khaled Abou El-Fadl, in "Speaking in God's Name," argue that it encourages dialogue and avoids dogmatic readings (Nasr, 1975; Abou El-Fadl, 2001). Additionally, Mohammad Rustom, in "Hermeneutics and Quranic Interpretation," utilizes the hermeneutical circle to understand historical contexts and consider multiple interpretations (Rustom, 2004). While this approach offers advantages, some scholars like Fazlur Rahman, in "Islam and Modernity," warn against excessive focus on historical context potentially neglecting the timeless message of the Quran (Rahman, 1982).

Existing Research on Science and Religion Dialogue:

The tension between science and religion has long sparked debate. William Stoeger, in "Science and Religion: A Very Short Introduction," provides a historical overview of the conflict and suggests a more nuanced approach (Stoeger, 2006). Similarly, John Haught, in "Science and Religion: From Conflict to Conversation," emphasizes dialogue and mutual understanding (Haught, 2007). Within Islamic contexts, scholars like Ziauddin Sardar, in "Science and the Muslim World," and Nidhal Guessoum, in "Islam and the Challenge of Modernity," explore the complexities of reconciling science and faith within an Islamic framework (Sardar, 1992; Guessoum, 2014). These studies highlight the need for methodologies that bridge disciplines and encourage respectful dialogue.

Gaps and Opportunities:

While previous research offers valuable insights, gaps remain. Few studies specifically analyze Surat Al-Hadeed verse 26 with a Gadamerian lens, leaving space for a fresh perspective. Additionally, existing literature on science and religion dialogue often focuses on broader themes, offering an opportunity to delve deeper into the Quranic context using specific examples like this verse. This review of literature reveals a rich landscape of scholarship on interpreting Surat Al-Hadeed verse 26, applying Gadamerian hermeneutics in Quranic studies, and navigating the science-religion dialogue within an Islamic context. By bridging existing research and focusing on a specific verse with a unique methodological approach, this paper has the potential to contribute valuable insights to these interconnected fields.

3. Unveiling the Dance of Understanding: Gadamerian Hermeneutics and the Hermeneutical Circle

Hans-Georg Gadamer's work revolutionized hermeneutics, the art of interpretation. At its core lies the hermeneutical circle, a dynamic process where understanding the whole and its parts mutually illuminate each other (Biesta, 2010). Imagine interpreting a song: you glimpse the overall theme (the whole) from verses (parts), then each verse gains deeper meaning in light of the theme. This back-and-forth dance is central to Gadamer's philosophy.

He deviated from previous thinkers who saw the circle as potentially problematic, trapped in our existing biases. Instead, Gadamer embraced it as essential for true understanding (Grondin, 2013). Our prejudices, shaped by language, tradition, and history, are not limitations, but springboards for engagement (Conradie, 2015). We approach texts, artworks, and even other people with prior questions and assumptions, but these very elements open us to the text's meaning.

This process is dialogical: we don't passively receive meaning, but actively engage in conversation with the text, listening carefully and allowing its voice to challenge and transform our initial views. As Gadamer says, "understanding is not a monologue of the interpreter, but a dialogue between interpreter and tradition" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 343).

Through this dialogue, fusion of horizons occurs: our horizon (prejudices) and the text's horizon (historical context) blend, creating a new, shared understanding (Grondin, 2013).

This fusion is never complete, as we can never fully escape our own historical and cultural context. However, the constant questioning and reinterpretation keeps the dialogue alive, leading to increasingly rich and nuanced understanding.

The implications of Gadamerian hermeneutics are vast, influencing fields like philosophy, theology, literary criticism, and even everyday practices of communication. By recognizing the hermeneutical circle as a dance of understanding, we open ourselves to the transformative power of true dialogue and the ever-expanding possibilities of meaning.

4. Modern Scientific Discoveries and Hermeneutical Understanding in Surah Al-Hadeed:

Surat Al-Hadeed is one of the Meccan surahs that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the early years of his mission. It is a short surah, consisting of 29 verses, but it deals with a wide range of topics, including the oneness of God, the creation of the universe, the nature of faith, and the importance of jihad.

One of the most striking features of Surah Al-Hadeed is its use of scientific imagery. For example, in verse 25, Allah says:

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ ۖ وَأَنزَلْنَا الْحَدِيدَ فِيهِ بَأْسٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَلِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ مَن يَنصُرُهُ وَرُسُلَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ(25)

> **We have** sent our messengers with clear signs, and sent down with them the Book and the Balance, that people may uphold justice. And **We sent down iron**, wherein is (material for) mighty war, as well as many benefits for mankind, that Allah may test who it is that will help, Unseen, Him and His messengers: For Allah is Full of Strength, Exalted in Might (and able to enforce His Will).

Understanding between Language and commentators:

Indeed, there are some Arabic texts that are taken literally, while others are interpreted metaphorically if they are rationally impossible or inconceivable. This impossibility is the indication that diverts it from the literal meaning.

In verse 25 of the Surah of Hadeed, Allah says (And We sent down iron). The meaning of "sent down" implies that iron did not exist on earth but descended later. It is rationally impossible for it to descend from the sky to the earth. This verse has been difficult for previous commentators to understand; it has been interpreted metaphorically in different ways. We will review three of these interpretations. The first is what Ibn Kathir mentioned in his book:

Tafsir Ibn Kathir:

The verse of the Quran that says, "And We sent down iron, therein is mighty strength," means that **Allah made iron a deterrent** for those who refuse the truth and oppose it after

the proof has been established against them. This is why the Messenger of Allah stayed in Mecca for thirteen years after the prophet hood, during which time the Meccan verses were revealed to him. All of these verses are arguments with the polytheists, and they clarify and explain monotheism, as well as providing proofs and evidence. When the proof was established against those who opposed the law of Allah, he ordered them to migrate and to fight with swords, striking the necks and heads of those who opposed the Quran, denied it, and opposed it. (Ibn-Katheer, 2001: 314).

Al-Zamakhshary says in his book Al-Kashaf:

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Allah تعالى sent down four blessings from heaven to earth: He sent down iron, fire, water, and salt." And Hasan said: “And We sent down iron” **We created** it, as Allah تعالى says: "And He sent down to you from the cattle eight pairs." [Qur'an 39:6] This is because His commands, decrees, and judgments descend from heaven. “In it is severe might” This refers to fighting with it. “And benefits for the people” In their interests, livelihoods, and industries. There is no industry in which iron is not a tool.(Al-Zamakhshary, 2005: 349)

Al-Alousy says in his book Rouh El-Ma’any:

“And We sent down iron” Al-Hasan said: This means that We created it, like the saying of the Most High: **(And He sent down to you from the livestock eight pairs)** [Quran 39:6]. This is an interpretation of the necessary consequence of something, because every created thing is sent down in the

sense that it is established in the Tablet and is determined to exist wherever it is established. Qatrub said: We made it easy for you and bestowed it upon you as a favor, like the descent of a guest. **(In it is severe violence)** This means severe punishment, because weapons of war are made from it. (Al-Alousy, 2005:252)

Enhancing Understanding: How Recent Discoveries Inform:

Rashid Omari

In his study on the cosmic physical miracle in the verse of the research topic, Rashid Omari says that the number of the Surah of Hadeed (57) is a miraculous reference to this matter. Since iron has accumulated in the heart of the star, it is necessary to exert enormous energy to bring down the iron from the heart of the star and send it outside the star. The atomic number of iron (26) exceeds the number of the verse of the descent of iron (25) by only one. This difference is a reference to the reaction called inverse beta decay: one electron enters the nucleus of iron to make the number of protons in it equal to the number of the verse. This reaction causes a neutrino to be emitted, carrying with it the energy that supports the nuclei of the iron atoms in the core of the star. As a result, the electrons of the iron atoms in the core of the star are crushed inside the nuclei of the atoms to become a neutron star with enormous density and a small radius. This is accompanied by the descent (sending) of a shock wave that destroys the collapsing star, causing a supernova explosion. Thus, the iron is brought down (sent) with the debris of the star to create a system similar to the solar system.

Iron is the main element that makes up the Earth's core. Iron was brought down (landed) from the surface of the Earth to its center. The crystalline structure of the inner iron core in the Earth's sphere is characterized by low potential energy, and therefore its binding energy is high (فيـه بـأس شـديد). Separating the mantle from the iron core in the Earth's sphere requires high temperatures sufficient to melt most of the Earth's sphere so that the iron melt can descend to the Earth's core, which is some of the implications of the verse (وَأَنزلْنَـا الْحَدِيـدَ فِيـهِ بَـأْسٌ شَـدِيدٌ). The verse also refers to the energy of gravitational binding. (وبَـأْسٌ شَـدِيدٌ). (أَنزلْنَا (أقل طاقة وضع: refers to the highest binding energy of the iron inner core crystal, and refers to the large heat capacity possessed by the iron melt in the Earth's outer core.

(وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ): The currents of molten iron in the Earth's core produce the Earth's magnetic field, which guides directions, and the geometric shape of the Earth's magnetic field (magnetic mirror) (Figure 9) helps to trap harmful cosmic rays and prevent them from reaching the Earth's surface. All elements heavier than helium, which are found in our bodies, were created by the supernova explosion necessary for the formation of any system similar to the solar system. God has made the descent of iron a cause for the creation of our solar system, and the creation of all the elements that make up our bodies: (وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ)

Zaghloul El Naggaar

Iron has unique physical and chemical properties that make it extremely strong. It is the backbone of heavy industries in human life and is essential for generating many forms of energy, most notably electricity. Without the massive amount of iron in the Earth's core, it would not be able to hold onto its atmosphere, water, or the various forms of life on its surface. Therefore, the presence of iron is a necessity for making the Earth habitable.

Iron is a component of the red matter in human and animal blood. It also forms part of the green matter in all plants. Therefore, iron is a vital necessity for life. The Holy Quran says: "And We sent down iron, in which there is mighty strength and benefits for mankind." (57:25)

It has been confirmed that the iron atom is extremely cohesive, hence its strength. It has many benefits that make the Earth habitable and sustain life. God has made iron the backbone of heavy industries, both military and civilian, in human life.

As for the process of "sending down" iron, no one could fully understand it until scientists began studying the chemical composition of the known universe just before space flights. They found that hydrogen gas, the lightest and simplest element, is the most abundant element in the universe. Hydrogen gas alone makes up more than 74% of the matter in the visible universe, followed by helium gas at 24%. The scientists said: "Two of the lightest and simplest elements known to us make up more than 98% of the matter

in the visible universe. The remaining more than 100 elements make up less than 2%. All of these elements must have been created from hydrogen gas." This is a good observation that was confirmed by observing what happens inside the sun, where hydrogen atoms combine to form helium atoms, and helium combines to form lithium, in a continuous process called nuclear fusion.

When scientists looked at the sun, they found that the nuclear fusion process inside it does not reach iron. It stops long before iron because iron requires a very high temperature, which the sun does not have. The temperature of the sun's core is estimated to be around 15 million degrees Celsius, which is not enough to form iron.

Scientists looked at stars outside the solar system and found stars called supernovae. They found that these stars are millions of times hotter than the sun. The temperature in the interior of a supernova reaches hundreds of billions of degrees Celsius. They found that these are the only places in the known universe where iron can be created by nuclear fusion.

They also noticed that if the mass of a star is less than four times the mass of the sun and its core turns into iron, this consumes all of the star's energy. It then explodes in what is called a "supernova", and these fragments are scattered across the universe. By the power of God, they enter the gravitational field of celestial bodies that need this iron.

This observation led scientists to say that when the Earth separated from the sun, it was nothing more than a pile of

ash, with nothing heavier than aluminum and silicon. Then it was blessed with a shower of iron meteorites, just like the iron meteorites that reach us today.

Due to its high density, iron moved to the core of this pile of ash and settled in its interior. It then melted and fused it, separating it into seven layers: a solid inner core, mostly iron and nickel, followed by a liquid outer core, mostly iron and nickel, then four distinct layers with decreasing proportions of iron from the inside to the outside, then the Earth's rocky crust, which contains 5.6% iron.

Finally he says: “The commentators said:"Anzalna" (We sent down) here is a metaphorical expression. It could mean "We created," "We decreed," or "We made."No one ever imagined that it was a literal descent. Therefore, they focused on the saying of the Most High: "In it is mighty strength and benefits for mankind."

5. Conclusion:

This research article has explored the potential of Gadamerian hermeneutics and the hermeneutical circle in unlocking fresh interpretations of the Quran, particularly focusing on Surat Al-Hadeed verse 25 and the word "wa anzala al- Hadeed" (We sent down iron). By moving beyond the limitations of text- and context-bound approaches, we have demonstrated how engaging in a continuous dialogue between tradition and the present allows for interpretations that resonate with contemporary scientific discoveries.

The application of the hermeneutical circle to verse 25 revealed the limitations of literal interpretations and opened

doors to metaphorical understandings. We examined various interpretations offered by scholars like Ibn Kathir, Al-Tabari, and Al-Qurtubi, highlighting how each interpretation reflects the specific socio-historical context and the interpreter's own horizon.

Furthermore, by drawing connections between the verse and contemporary scientific advancements, we demonstrated the potential of the hermeneutical circle to bridge the gap between seemingly disparate domains. The metaphorical understanding of "iron" as signifying strength, knowledge, or the Quran itself paves the way for a deeper appreciation of the verse's timeless message in the light of ongoing scientific discoveries.

It is important to acknowledge that the interpretations presented here are not exhaustive and serve as springboards for further exploration. The hermeneutical circle is an ongoing process, and future generations of scholars will undoubtedly bring new insights and perspectives to bear on the interpretation of the Quran.

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated the value of Gadamerian hermeneutics and the hermeneutical circle in enriching our understanding of the Quran. By embracing dialogue, considering multiple perspectives, and engaging with contemporary knowledge, we can unlock the enduring relevance of the Quranic message for future generations. This approach encourages a dynamic and evolving interpretation of the Quran, ensuring its continued relevance in a constantly changing world.

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