Alshehab Journal, Vol. 12, N°.03 – (2026), pp 942 – 925
ISSN: 2477-9954, EISSN: 2602-5485
https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/PresentationRevue/391

Historicizing or Cosmologizing the Qur'an? A Comparative Reading of Two Contemporary Approaches, with an Application to Islamic Psychology

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Submission date: 22/08/2026	**Acceptance date:** 01/10/2026	**Publication date:** 15/11/2026

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Abstract:

This study compares two contemporary approaches to the Qur'an: the historical-critical approach of Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, which studies the Qur'anic corpus as a seventh-century document of Late Antiquity through philology, intertextuality and the critical use of Islamic and non-Islamic sources; and the cosmological-conceptual approach of Mohammad Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad, which reads the Qur'an synchronically as a unified, divinely authored text from which Qur'anic concepts for the human and social sciences can be derived. Each approach is assessed according to the same criteria: epistemological premises, methodological strengths and limitations. The study argues that the two readings answer different questions, so that their tension is better understood as complementary than as mutually exclusive. It then takes Islamic psychology as a test case, showing how nafs, qalb, rūḥ and ʿaql are re-theorized within Haj Hamad's framework and what this implies for the field.

Keywords: historical Qur'an; conceptual Qur'an; Amir-Moezzi; Haj Hamad; Islamic psychology.

1. Introduction

Academic researchers approach the Qur'anic text, as a sacred text within the field of religious studies, through a wide variety of lenses and methodologies. These epistemological approaches reflect their diverse understandings of its verses and teachings. This scholarly diversity is rooted in the dynamic nature of the approaches that permeate the field of Qur'anic studies, which treats Qur'anic discourse as a theme open to a wide range of doctrinal, exegetical, and legislative interpretations. The source of

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this divergence in the interpretation of the Qur'anic text lies in the fact that this text encompasses historical, theological, linguistic, anthropological, and other dimensions.

The present study examines the work of two academic researchers in the field of Qur'anic studies whose approaches stand at opposite ends of this spectrum: the French scholar of Iranian origin Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, director of studies at the École pratique des hautes études (Paris), and the Sudanese Islamic thinker Mohammad Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad. Together with Guillaume Dye, Amir-Moezzi directed the collective project *Le Coran des historiens*, which studies the Qur'an as "a historical, literary, linguistic and religious document of the seventh century",[1] situated within the religious world of Late Antiquity. Haj Hamad, by contrast, sought to work academically on the Qur'an in order to formulate purely Qur'anic concepts — that is, concepts drawn from the content of the Qur'an itself — capable of engaging, and in his view of reorienting, the concepts formulated by Western or Euro-American thought, on the grounds that the source of Qur'anic concepts is the divine will of the Creator, not the finite human thought of a creature bound by time, place, and the manner of his creation by God.[2] Although both scholars have contributed to the field of Qur'anic studies, each holds a distinct view of the Qur'an's significance, its stakes, the manner of its reception, its demonstration, and the assimilation of its meanings.

The study therefore addresses three questions. First, what are the epistemological premises and methodological procedures of each approach? Second, what are the respective contributions and limitations of each, assessed by the same criteria? Third, what follows from this comparison for a field such as Islamic psychology, whose foundational categories — nafs, qalb, rūḥ and ʿaql — are themselves Qur'anic terms? To answer these questions, the study adopts a descriptive-analytical and comparative method: it reconstructs each approach from its authors' own writings, compares them according to shared criteria (object of study, method, sources, and the type of knowledge produced), and then applies the comparison to Islamic psychology. The aim is not to adjudicate between faith and history, but to clarify what each approach can and cannot establish. The study proceeds in four steps: Section 2 presents Amir-Moezzi's historical-critical framework; Section 3 presents Haj Hamad's conceptual project and its application to Islamic psychology; Section 4 offers a comparative assessment; and the conclusion summarizes the findings.

[1] Amir-Moezzi & Dye (Eds.), *Le Coran des historiens*, vol. 1, p. 22.
[2] Haj Hamad, *Jadaliyyat al-Ghayb wa-al-Insān wa-al-Ṭabīʿa*.

2. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and the Historical-Critical Study of the Qur'an

2.1. General Presentation

Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi's primary mode of engaging with the Qur'anic text treats it, first and foremost, as a historical and philological corpus. In this respect, Amir-Moezzi affirms that the Qur'an has a temporal extension before and after its emergence, emphasizing its historical origins and the context of its stakes by connecting it to other sacred texts, such as the Old and New Testaments and other scriptures. This historical exploration rests on a methodological concept that runs through Qur'anic studies in Western scholarship: namely, the concept of intertextuality, which refers to "the explicit and implicit relations that a text or utterance has to prior, contemporary and potential future texts".[3] From this perspective, the Qur'anic text is read as part of a wider textual history that precedes it, accompanies its formation, and continues in its later reception.

Accordingly, Amir-Moezzi's research focuses on historically situating the Qur'an within the social, political, and cultural landscape of the Arabian Peninsula before the text's emergence in the seventh century, during its reception, and after the completion of its codification. This has led him to address and explore the textual variations and differences that run through the Qur'an from a diachronic outlook. As a result of this historical treatment, Amir-Moezzi's research also seeks to uncover the Qur'an's role in shaping early Islamic societies and to understand its significance within the broader historical narratives of what are known as the Abrahamic religions, namely Judaism and Christianity. His research is likewise concerned with the historical and anthropological reception of the Qur'anic text by the diverse groups and communities that engage with this corpus, whether Islamic or non-Islamic, so that the Qur'an appears as a sacred text that elicits different degrees of interest and representation from one society to another.

2.2. Methodological Premises of the Historical-Critical Approach

The methodological core of this approach is set out in the general introduction that Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye wrote for the first volume of *Le Coran des historiens*. The Qur'an is to be studied "as a text", in its "raw textuality", independently of the interpretive filters that later exegetical traditions — Muslim and non-Muslim — superimposed upon it, and on the basis of historical and philological research situated "outside the register of belief"; the Qur'an is thus considered as "a historical, literary, linguistic and religious document of the seventh century".[4] The authors make the

[3] Bazerman, *Intertextuality: How texts rely on other texts*, p. 86.
[4] Amir-Moezzi & Dye (Eds.), *Le Coran des historiens*, vol. 1, p. 22.

epistemological status of this choice explicit: the relationship between the historical and the confessional approaches is *asymmetrical*, since religious discourse "claims to speak of eternal and transcendent things with a transcendent and eternal authority", whereas historical discourse "speaks of temporal, human, earthly, local, contingent, circumscribed things; and it speaks of them in a fallible, revisable, partial voice".[5] The historian of religions therefore asks of the Qur'an the same questions that would be asked of any other text.

Four working principles follow from these premises. The first is a critical treatment of the Muslim sources (sīra, ḥadīth, asbāb al-nuzūl and exegesis), which were for the most part written down well after the events they report. Amir-Moezzi and Dye place their contributors on a continuum between "maximalist" positions, which accept the traditional account unless it is refuted, and "minimalist" positions, which accept it only when it is independently confirmed. The second is the systematic integration of non-Muslim sources contemporary with, or earlier than, the Qur'an, together with epigraphic, papyrological and codicological evidence. The third is philological competence in the "biblical languages" (Hebrew, Aramaic/Syriac, Greek, Ethiopic) and in the languages of pre-Islamic Arabia. The fourth is the thesis that the Qur'anic corpus perpetuates, in its own way, the living biblical traditions of Late Antiquity and does not constitute a rupture with the earlier monotheisms; on this view, "the rupture, if there was one, would have occurred later, with the Arab conquests and the birth of the Islamic empire".[6]

2.3. The History of the Text: Redaction, Canonization and the Shiʿi Sources

The most distinctive contribution of Amir-Moezzi lies in his use of early Shiʿi sources for the history of the Qur'anic text, which earlier Western scholarship had largely ignored. Together with Etan Kohlberg, he edited al-Sayyārī's *Kitāb al-Qirāʾāt*, a third/ninth-century Imāmī compilation of readings ascribed to the Imams, and he showed that, from the third/ninth century on, many followers of ʿAlī and his descendants regarded "the ʿUthmānic version of the Qur'an as falsified and censored",[7] a thesis found "massively in the sources of the original tradition until the beginning of the fourth/tenth century".[8] In his reading, the first centuries of Islam "were marked by two major and inextricably linked events": "the elaboration of scriptural sources—the Qur'an and the Hadith—and a chronic violence manifest mainly in the form of civil wars".[9]

[5] Amir-Moezzi & Dye (Eds.), *Le Coran des historiens*, vol. 1, p. 31.
[6] Amir-Moezzi & Dye (Eds.), *Le Coran des historiens*, vol. 1, p. 33.
[7] Amir-Moezzi, « Le shiʿisme et le Coran », p. 929; see also Amir-Moezzi, *The Silent Qur'an and the Speaking Qur'an*.
[8] Amir-Moezzi, « Le shiʿisme et le Coran », p. 932.
[9] Amir-Moezzi, *The Silent Qur'an and the Speaking Qur'an*, p. 1.

Drawing on this documentation and on recent critical scholarship, Amir-Moezzi advances a hypothesis that departs from the traditional account of a codification completed under the third caliph ʿUthmān (r. 23–35/644–656). "The official Qur'an, assigned a posteriori to the caliphate of ʿUthmān, was established later, probably during the caliphate of the Umayyad ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān", and "it bears all the characteristics of a protracted editorial task probably carried out by a team of scribes and qualified scholars"; parallel recensions, such as those attributed to ʿAlī, Ibn Masʿūd and Ubayy b. Kaʿb, "remained in circulation at least until the fourth/tenth century".[10] The early Shiʿi doctrine of the "silent Qur'an" (*qurʾān ṣāmit*) and the "speaking Qur'an" (*qurʾān nāṭiq*) — the Imam whose teaching restores the meaning of the Book — is, in his analysis, closely tied to this thesis of falsification, and explains why, "from its earliest texts, Shiʿism defines itself as a hermeneutical doctrine".[11] Amir-Moezzi also stresses the strong apocalyptic dimension of the oldest Qur'anic passages, which announce the imminence of the Hour, and he argues that the transformation of Muhammad's movement into an imperial religion was accompanied by the construction of "a new collective memory."[12]

2.4. The Historicity of the Qur'an and the Challenge to Traditional Frameworks

As a result, Amir-Moezzi's approach to Qur'anic studies differs from traditional interpretations that emphasize the Qur'an's sanctity and divine origin. He views the Qur'an as a text deeply rooted in a specific historical context,[13] reflecting the social and political milieu of the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century, as well as the periods before and after the Qur'anic text's emergence. Unlike scholars who prioritize theological interpretations, Amir-Moezzi's methodology requires a rigorous examination of the Qur'an's historical and material foundations. He examines the linguistic, cultural, social, and economic aspects of the Qur'anic text, aiming to uncover its significance within the broader historical narratives of early Islam. As a historian, he does not approach the text from the standpoint of belief in its divine origin; his method brackets this question rather than adjudicating it.

His work seeks to situate the Qur'an within the events, figures, and ideologies prevalent during the period of its emergence.[14] He analyzes the fine linguistic nuances, textual variations, and narrative structures of the Qur'an, shedding light on its development and transmission throughout history. By adopting a historical perspective,

[10] Amir-Moezzi, *The Silent Qur'an and the Speaking Qur'an*, p. 2.
[11] Amir-Moezzi, « Le shiʿisme et le Coran », p. 930.
[12] Amir-Moezzi, « Le shiʿisme et le Coran », p. 952.
[13] Amir-Moezzi & Dye (Eds.), *Le Coran des historiens*, vol. 1.
[14] Amir-Moezzi & Dye (Eds.), *Le Coran des historiens*, vol. 1.

Amir-Moezzi deliberately sets aside questions of religious sanctification and encourages critical scrutiny of the Qur'anic text; the editors of *Le Coran des historiens* present this distancing as both a scientific and a civic undertaking, for "it is thus that contextualization, relativization, critical distancing become possible"[15] in matters of faith.

Although he prioritizes historical analysis, Amir-Moezzi does not reduce religion to politics. A large part of his work is devoted to the spiritual and esoteric dimensions of early Shiʿism and to the devotional life that the Qur'an has inspired. At the same time, he highlights the profound impact of the political conflicts of the first centuries on the form that scripture and the collective memory of early Islam eventually took, so that, in his view, the history of the text cannot be separated from the history of power.[16] His approach thus integrates historical analysis with the political, social and religious stakes of the Qur'an, and invites scholars to engage critically with the text while leaving aside the question of its sacred status.

3. Mohammad Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad and Qur'anic Conceptualization

3.1. General Presentation

Mohammad Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad, for his part, approaches the Qur'an as a cosmic divine revelation with profound doctrinal, spiritual, and metaphysical dimensions. He affirms the centrality of the idea of the divine source of the Qur'anic text. This affirmation matters to him because it is precisely what allows the Muslim researcher to construct purely Qur'anic concepts, with which to confront the relativity of the concepts distinctive of the human and social sciences — concepts that nonetheless remain a source of inspiration and fascination for researchers in these fields. This confrontation is all the more necessary, in Haj Hamad's view, because Western scholars working in Islamic and, more specifically, Qur'anic studies typically rely, in their theoretical frameworks, established concepts, and interpretive practices, on notions borrowed from the human and social sciences in order to make sense of the Qur'anic text. Haj Hamad confronts these concepts, which he regards as relative given their human origin. In *Manhajiyyat al-Qurʾān al-Maʿrifiyya*, he argues that dialectical materialism, evolutionism, relativity and Freudianism, together with the studies built upon them, remain the superstructure of a Western civilization derived from the philosophy of the natural sciences, which lacks an alternative methodological and epistemic conception of the cosmos, whereas "the Great Qur'an alone possesses the

[15] Amir-Moezzi & Dye (Eds.), *Le Coran des historiens*, vol. 1, p. 28.
[16] Amir-Moezzi, *The Silent Qur'an and the Speaking Qur'an*.

alternative methodological and epistemic conception at a cosmic level".[17] He therefore focuses on Qur'anic concepts, which he considers the source of a revitalization of Qur'anic research in the Islamic sense of the term. In other words, while historical-critical scholarship approaches the Qur'an from outside its own bounds, focusing on the historicity of the Qur'anic text, Haj Hamad champions synchronic Qur'anic research aimed at investigating the semantic, rhetorical, and pragmatic content — through concepts and through the performative dimensions of dialogue and narrative — running through the Qur'anic text, focusing exclusively on the muṣḥaf in circulation throughout the Islamic world, the 1928 Cairo edition[18] being the version whose divine source is agreed upon across the Islamic world, from Jakarta to Tangier.

His method is summarized in a formula that recurs throughout his work: the researcher does not "bring the text down onto reality", as traditional exegesis did, but "raises reality up to the text" through the Qur'an's own epistemic methodology, which controls the meaning of the text; for this reason he resorts neither to *taʾwīl* nor to *tafsīr*, but to the methodology that, in his view, the Qur'an itself contains. The Qur'an is, in his words, "an objective equivalent, in consciousness, of cosmic existence and its movement", and the task of the researcher is the "combination of the two readings" (*al-jamʿ bayna al-qirāʾatayn*): a reading of the revealed text and a reading of the cosmos and of reality, each of which requires a methodological and epistemic awareness of the other.[19] This, according to Haj Hamad, is what the first revealed verse "Read in the name of your Lord!"[20] means: read through the Qur'anic conceptual network, not through the human conceptual network that represents, in the contemporary period, the idols manifested in the various human and social sciences. According to Deleuze and Guattari, philosophy is "the art of forming, inventing and fabricating concepts".[21] Transposed to Qur'anic studies, this definition helps to characterize Haj Hamad's ambition: concepts become linguistic formulations through which the Muslim researcher grounds his engagement with the text conceptually, so as to read human, historical, natural, psychological and social reality from the perspective of a Qur'anic conceptual network.

Building on this, Haj Hamad regards the Qur'an not as the source of one worldview among others, but as the source of the true and necessary worldview — one that is beyond doubt. As the Qur'an itself declares, "Falsehood cannot approach it from before

[17] Haj Hamad, *Manhajiyyat al-Qurʾān al-Maʿrifiyya*, p. 38.
[18] Albin, *Printing of the Qurʾān*, pp. 264–276.
[19] Haj Hamad, *Jadaliyyat al-Ghayb wa-al-Insān wa-al-Ṭabīʿa*, p. 11.
[20] Sūrat al-ʿAlaq (96), verse 1.
[21] Deleuze & Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie ?*, p. 8.

it or behind it".[22] Haj Hamad accordingly understands all Qur'anic themes — doctrinal, legislative, narrative, legal, and so on — in light of the Qur'anic text's absolute divine character. From a dialogical perspective, the concept of dialogism, widely used in the language sciences and in the philosophy of language, is helpful here: every utterance is "filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances, to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication."[23] Haj Hamad's theses, centred on the divinity of the Qur'anic text and on the necessity of conceptualizing its contents, are in this sense a response to historicizing theses that bracket or question that divinity. Within his "conceptual Qur'an", the metaphysical symbolism, the theological themes and the ethical principles of the text, along with the interpretation of its verses, are all regarded as reflections of divine wisdom and of the Creator's cosmic order.

3.2. Haj Hamad's Revitalization of the Qur'an: Problematizing Closed Answers and the Reader's Construction of New Meanings

Mohammad Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad offers a distinctive perspective on the Qur'an, emphasizing its transcendent significance as a cosmic worldview. Unlike scholars who focus primarily on the Qur'an's historical context, he centres his approach on the eternal divine essence of the Qur'an, which he does not regard as merely a historical artifact whose stakes belong to the past, but as a manifestation of divine will and guidance for the entire cosmos. The Qur'an conveys, for him, truths that remain relevant across time and place — a claim that, as he himself insists, must be demonstrated "objectively and from within the Qur'an"[24] rather than merely asserted — and its teachings function as the ultimate source of guidance for Muslims; it is inseparable from the essence of Islamic doctrine, of which the declaration of monotheism, "There is no god but God"[25], is the cornerstone.

By embracing the Qur'an as a cosmic worldview, Haj Hamad calls on believers to move beyond the limits of relative and historical interpretation, while simultaneously calling for deep engagement with the teachings of the Qur'an on the cognitive, behavioural, emotional, and spiritual levels. His perspective emphasizes the Qur'an's capacity for universal application across diverse cultures and civilizations. This universality, however, is not conceived as a theocratic imposition. In *al-Ḥākimiyya*, Haj Hamad argues, against Mawdūdī and Sayyid Quṭb, that "divine ḥākimiyya" does not mean the rule of a caliph or of a religious authority acting on God's behalf, but God's

[22] Sūrat Fuṣṣilat (41), verse 42.
[23] Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, p. 91.
[24] Haj Hamad, *al-Qurʾān wa-al-Mutaghayyirāt al-Ijtimāʿiyya wa-al-Tārīkhiyya*, p. 141.
[25] Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt (37), verse 35; Sūrat Muḥammad (47), verse 19.

direct rule over the Israelites in a past historical phase;[26] the present phase is one of "human ḥākimiyya", exercised through dialogue with humanity in light of the Qur'an's comprehensive methodology, under the law of "mercy and alleviation" rather than that of "burdens and shackles".[27] Laws themselves are, in his view, limits whose divine purpose is not punitive but the protection of human elevation (*taraqqī*), "the whole Qur'an being a comprehensive method for this elevation."[28] He also calls for an approach that goes beyond mere recitation or memorization of the Qur'anic verses, emphasizing the importance of critical analysis and constructive interpretation, so that the reader becomes an active builder of new meanings rather than the recipient of closed answers.

Haj Hamad also encourages Muslim scholars to link Qur'anic concepts to contemporary disciplines such as the human and social sciences, insofar as the assimilation of the human and social sciences should take place in light of Qur'anic concepts rather than the reverse, so as to preserve the primacy of Qur'anic conceptualization as an absolute divine conceptualization, by comparison with conceptualization in the field of the human and social sciences, which is a relative human conceptualization bound by the limits of time and place. Through his call for an analytical-synthetic Qur'anic approach, he seeks to demonstrate the relevance of Qur'anic teachings in confronting contemporary challenges, and invites researchers to explore how Qur'anic principles can offer insight into ethics, sociology, psychology, political science, economics, and other fields.

3.3. The Cosmic Stakes of the "Conceptual" Qur'an in Haj Hamad's Thought

Haj Hamad's call for deep engagement with Qur'anic teachings reflects his commitment to fostering intellectual growth and spiritual development within Islamic society, on the condition that this takes place in light of the Qur'an. His approach accordingly requires that the stakes of modern and postmodern thought, in its diverse and dynamic fields of research, be read in relation to the transcendent stakes of the Qur'an.

Haj Hamad's call to treat the Qur'an as a cosmic essence thus differs in scope and purpose from Amir-Moezzi's commitment to the historical context of the text: where the historian asks how the text came to be, Haj Hamad asks what the text makes it possible to understand about the human being, society and the cosmos. He highlights the enduring importance of the Qur'an, which in his view brings to light truths that resonate across cosmic worlds — temporal, spatial, and spiritual-human — since, for him, there

[26] Haj Hamad, *al-Ḥākimiyya*, p. 45.
[27] Haj Hamad, *al-Ḥākimiyya*, p. 131.
[28] Haj Hamad, *al-Ḥākimiyya*, p. 113.

should be “no separation between the methods of the natural sciences and the methods of the human and social sciences”.[29] This holistic stance is consistent with his rejection of any opposition between the unseen and the material: in his own words, "it is not conceivable, in our understanding, to negate materiality by the unseen or to negate the unseen by materiality".[30]

3.4. Toward a Qur'anic Conceptualization of the Self: Haj Hamad and the Question of Islamic Psychology

Haj Hamad's insistence that engagement between the Qur'an and the human and social sciences must proceed from Qur'anic concepts rather than toward them finds a direct, if underexplored, application in the emerging field of Islamic psychology. This field, whose contemporary development is often traced to Malik Badri's (1979) *The Dilemma of Muslim Psychologists*, is animated by a strikingly similar diagnosis. Badri cautioned Muslim psychologists against the blind copying — "psychological Taqleed" — of Western, non-Islamic ideas and practices;[31] more recently, Rassool has described Muslim psychologists who remain in a "psycho-secular bubble" and have turned into "the Muslim Freud".[32] Haque and his colleagues similarly note that comparisons between Freud's id, ego and superego and the Qur'anic concepts related to the nafs have often ignored the incompatible presuppositions underlying the two views of human nature.[33] Where Badri's critique remains largely programmatic, warning against uncritical borrowing without specifying an alternative epistemic method, Haj Hamad's conceptual grid supplies a candidate for such a method: a demand that concepts describing human interiority be constructed from within the Qur'anic text's own semantic and pragmatic network, rather than retrofitted onto categories inherited from psychoanalysis, behaviourism, or humanistic psychology and subsequently dressed in Qur'anic vocabulary.

The need for such a method is visible in the current state of the field. Rassool, following Long, observes that approaches to Islamic psychology "have taken one of two forms: a critical revision of Western psychology—involving the exegesis of relevant passages from the Qur’an—or an elaboration of the classical Islamic legacy".[34] Models such as that of Keshavarzi and Haque organize the psyche around concepts such as "heart (qalb), spirit (ruh), intellect (aql), and ego (nafs)",[35] while others map these terms

[29] Haj Hamad, *Manhajiyyat al-Qurʾān al-Maʿrifiyya*, p. 112.
[30] Haj Hamad, *Jadaliyyat al-Ghayb wa-al-Insān wa-al-Ṭabīʿa*, p. 326.
[31] Badri, *The Dilemma of Muslim Psychologists*; see Rassool, *Islamic Psychology*, p. 11.
[32] Rassool, *Islamic Psychology*, p. 3.
[33] Haque, Khan, Keshavarzi & Rothman, *Integrating Islamic traditions in modern psychology*.
[34] Rassool, *Islamic Psychology*, p. 18.
[35] Haque, Khan, Keshavarzi & Rothman, *Integrating Islamic traditions in modern psychology*, p. 86.

onto modern constructs — for instance, Bakhtiar's "Quranic Psychology", which associates *al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinna* with ʿaql, "reason, intellect, spirit", *al-nafs al-ammāra* with "affect-behaviour", and the qalb with God-consciousness.[36] Rassool himself gives revelation priority over the other sources of knowledge, holding that "scientific evidence would be judged and evaluated according to the criteria of divine revelation";[37] yet the field still lacks an explicit procedure for reading the revealed text itself. It is at this point that Haj Hamad's framework can be tested, through four concrete examples.

(a) Nafs. In Haj Hamad's reading, the life-energy of the human being does not derive from the breathing of the divine rūḥ, as the inherited "mythical" tradition held, but from the nafs, which he defines, on the basis of Sūrat al-Shams,[38] as "a compound of cosmic interaction": the oaths on the sun and the moon, the day and the night, the heaven and the earth are followed by "and by the soul and Him who proportioned it".[39] Because the nafs is an interaction "between contrasting and opposed elements — sun and moon, day and night, heaven and earth", it has "the capacity to choose, since it is not single in its constitution".[40] Here Haj Hamad refers to the Qur'anic verse "and inspired it with its wickedness and its righteousness".[41] He also holds that "the Qur'an used only the word nafs in the two states of death and life",[42] as in the verse "God takes the souls (al-anfus) at the time of their death".[43] For Islamic psychology, this means that the nafs is neither a Qur'anic synonym of the Freudian ego nor merely the "lower self" to be suppressed: it is the embodied, cosmically constituted locus of life, moral polarity and choice. In *al-Ḥākimiyya*, Haj Hamad goes further: since Islam shifted the focus of religious law from the senses to the nafs, "the elevation of the ‘nafs’ is the foundation of human ḥākimiyya".[44] Moral agency is thus inscribed in the very structure of the psyche, and the nafs remains continuous with nature. Haj Hamad states explicitly that the Qur'an, like the philosophy of the natural sciences, holds that the human being — body and senses, but also nafs and ʿaql — is "a natural offspring of the cosmic field", so that the laws of the natural sciences may apply to human perception and to psychological and social behaviour; the two methodologies diverge only in their ends, the Qur'an leading to the concept of "creation" (*khalq*) and the philosophy of the natural sciences to that of

[36] Rassool, *Islamic Psychology*, p. 18.
[37] Rassool, *Islamic Psychology*, p. 10.
[38] Sūrat al-Shams (91), verses 1–8.
[39] Sūrat al-Shams (91), verse 7.
[40] Haj Hamad, *Jadaliyyat al-Ghayb wa-al-Insān wa-al-Ṭabīʿa*, p. 81.
[41] Sūrat al-Shams (91), verse 8.
[42] Haj Hamad, *Jadaliyyat al-Ghayb wa-al-Insān wa-al-Ṭabīʿa*, p. 82.
[43] Sūrat al-Zumar (39), verse 42.
[44] Haj Hamad, *al-Ḥākimiyya*, p. 113.

"reification" (*tashayyuʾ*).[45] This legitimizes the empirical study of the nafs, provided that its results are read within the Qur'anic conceptual framework.

(b) Rūḥ. Conversely, Haj Hamad separates rūḥ from the life of the human being: the rūḥ is "a channel of communication with revelation and with the Higher Assembly (al-malaʾ al-aʿlā)", belonging to the world of the divine command (ʿālam al-amr), which is why the knowledge granted about it is said to be "but little".[46] The verse that follows — "And if We willed, We could surely take away that which We revealed to you"[47] — shows, in his words, that God "links the rūḥ and revelation", for "the rūḥ has no relation to the life of the human being".[48] He reads Adam's "fall" in the same terms: Adam descended from the level of the properties of the rūḥ, which transcend the influences of nature (he neither hungered, nor thirsted, nor suffered heat)[49], to "the level of the properties of the nafs, which are affected by them".[50] For Islamic psychology, two implications follow. The rūḥ cannot be treated as a psychological variable to be measured; it marks the boundary of psychological knowledge. And the human condition is described as a tension between the nafs's susceptibility to natural influences and the possibility of a connection with the transcendent — a framework that may inform, for instance, the understanding of spiritual experience without reducing it to affect or cognition.

(c) Qalb and fuʾād. In Haj Hamad's reading, the heart is not primarily an organ of feeling opposed to reason. When he discusses the forms of faith that the Qur'an demands, he links them to "hearing, sight and hearts" (*al-samʿ wa-al-abṣār wa-al-afʾida*), that is, to a capacity of consciousness that exceeds the material senses, in contrast with the demand for material, sensory miracles; our relation to God is thus established "according to the components of a triadic perception (of the unseen), and not through material, sensory vision".[51] Read through this lens, qalb and fuʾād designate a cognitive-spiritual faculty of recognition and assent, not merely an emotional centre. This differs from both the modern opposition between cognition and emotion and the classical position of al-Ghazālī, for whom nafs, rūḥ, qalb and ʿaql, in their subtle sense, refer to one and the same spiritual reality, while each term also keeps its own primary meaning (the physical heart, the vital spirit, the seat of anger and desire, and knowledge).[52] Haj Hamad's

[45] Haj Hamad, *Manhajiyyat al-Qurʾān al-Maʿrifiyya*, p. 112.
[46] Sūrat al-Isrāʾ (17), verse 85.
[47] Sūrat al-Isrāʾ (17), verse 86.
[48] Haj Hamad, *Jadaliyyat al-Ghayb wa-al-Insān wa-al-Ṭabīʿa*, p. 82.
[49] Sūrat Ṭā Hā (20), verses 118–119.
[50] Haj Hamad, *Jadaliyyat al-Ghayb wa-al-Insān wa-al-Ṭabīʿa*, p. 83.
[51] Haj Hamad, *Jadaliyyat al-Ghayb wa-al-Insān wa-al-Ṭabīʿa*, p. 267.
[52] al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, vol. 3.

synchronic reading, by contrast, differentiates the terms according to their distribution in the Qur'anic text itself.

(d) ʿAql. Finally, ʿaql is not presented by Haj Hamad as a self-sufficient faculty, but as a capacity exercised in the combination of the two readings, the reading of revelation and the reading of reality; opposing the unseen and the material is, in his words, the result of a "confusion in the human mind".[53] Understanding the divine will within the unity of time and space, he writes, gives the human mind "synthetic and exploratory capacities" and moves it towards the philosophical question "why?".[54] He also connects the cognitive distinction of the human being to the breathing of the rūḥ into Adam and to the "names" that Adam was taught,[55] which distinguished him from the destructive behaviour that the angels had feared.[56] These names, he argues, were not proper names designating things, which the angels already knew, but "predicate names" (*ism al-maḥmūl*) expressing a state or a proposition.[57] For Islamic psychology, ʿaql therefore appears as an integrative and conceptual capacity — the capacity to name, relate and synthesize — rather than as a narrow, computational notion of cognition.

Read through Haj Hamad's grid, the constitutive terms of Islamic psychology thus cease to function as Arabic glosses for pre-existing psychological categories (id, ego, self-actualization, cognition) and instead recover their status as properly Qur'anic concepts, whose meaning is generated synchronically within the muṣḥaf's own discourse rather than borrowed from, and subordinated to, the relative conceptual apparatus of the human and social sciences. Applied consistently, this would mean that Islamic psychology's engagement with the Qur'an should not stop at citing scriptural proof-texts to support psychological constructs formulated elsewhere, but should instead build its constructs from the Qur'anic conceptual network itself. These examples, however, also reveal the limits of the framework. Several of Haj Hamad's interpretations — such as the separation of rūḥ from life, or his reading of Adam's origin — depart from mainstream exegesis and remain interpretive proposals that require scholarly discussion. The linguist Masʿūd Ṣaḥrāwī, while acknowledging the precision of some of his lexical distinctions — such as that between rūḥ and nafs — argues that Haj Hamad "often forces the linguistic method and violates the linguistic system of the Qur'anic text".[58] Moreover, his concepts are not yet operationalized for empirical research or clinical practice. A historical-philological approach of the kind practiced by Amir-Moezzi could

[53] Haj Hamad, *Jadaliyyat al-Ghayb wa-al-Insān wa-al-Ṭabīʿa*, p. 326.
[54] Haj Hamad, *Jadaliyyat al-Ghayb wa-al-Insān wa-al-Ṭabīʿa*, p. 224.
[55] Sūrat al-Baqara (2), verse 31.
[56] Sūrat al-Baqara (2), verse 30.
[57] Haj Hamad, *Jadaliyyat al-Ghayb wa-al-Insān wa-al-Ṭabīʿa*, p. 85.
[58] Ṣaḥrāwī, *Dalālāt al-Alfāẓ fī al-Qurʾān min Manẓūr Siyāqī*, p. 11.

usefully complement this work, for example by tracing how the meanings of nafs, rūḥ, qalb and ʿaql shifted from Qur'anic usage to later philosophical and Sufi usage, thus preventing later meanings from being projected onto the text. The task of building an Islamic psychology from the Qur'anic conceptual network therefore remains, for the most part, still to be undertaken.

4. Comparative Assessment: Contributions, Strengths and Limitations

The two approaches can now be assessed according to the same criteria. Table 1 summarizes the comparison.

Table 1. Comparison of the two approaches

Criterion	Amir-Moezzi: historical-critical approach	Haj Hamad: cosmological-conceptual approach
Object	The Qur'anic corpus as a seventh-century document of Late Antiquity, together with its redaction, canonization and reception	The received muṣḥaf as a unified text and as the "objective equivalent" of the cosmos
Perspective	Diachronic: the text in time	Synchronic: the text as a semantic and pragmatic system
Sources and tools	Muslim and non-Muslim sources, philology, epigraphy, codicology, early Shiʿi literature	The Qur'anic text itself, read through its own "epistemic methodology" and the combination of the two readings
Main contribution	Integrates the Qur'an into the history of religions; brings early Shiʿi sources into the history of the text	Grounds the human and social sciences in Qur'anic concepts; offers a reading method usable in other disciplines
Main limitations	Hypotheses (e.g. late canonization) remain debated; dependence on the dating of sources; the believer's experience of the text is bracketed	Interpretations sometimes depart from mainstream exegesis; limited engagement with historical and empirical evidence; concepts not yet operationalized

Source: Author's elaboration.

In terms of epistemological contribution, Amir-Moezzi's approach offers what the historian can offer: a contextual knowledge of the Qur'an, integrating it into the history of the religions of Late Antiquity and opening the history of the text to sources — notably the early Shiʿi corpus — that had long been marginal. Its methodological strengths are its explicit rules of evidence, its comparative breadth and the revisable character of its conclusions. Its limitations follow from the same choices. Several of its

hypotheses, such as the late fixing of the official corpus, remain debated; the collective volume he co-edited itself acknowledges, concerning the radiocarbon dating of the lower text of the Ṣanʿāʾ palimpsest, that "if these figures were reliable, they would support the traditional version", even though it also stresses the uncertainties of such dating.[59] Moreover, by deliberately bracketing the question of revelation, the historical-critical method does not address the meaning that the text has for the communities that live by it, which is precisely the domain that matters to disciplines such as Islamic psychology.

Haj Hamad's approach, in turn, offers a hermeneutic and epistemological contribution: it treats the Qur'an as a coherent semantic system and proposes a method for deriving concepts from it, which gives Muslim researchers in the human and social sciences a way out of the alternative between imitation and apologetics. Its strengths are its systematic ambition, its attention to the internal relations of Qur'anic vocabulary and its explicit refusal to oppose the unseen and the material. Its limitations are also clear. Some of its readings depart from established exegesis without always discussing the alternative interpretations; Ṣaḥrāwī observes, for instance, that the principle of the "combination of the two readings", derived from the repetition of the imperative "Read" in Sūrat al-ʿAlaq, has no demonstrated linguistic foundation;[60] its engagement with historical and philological evidence is limited; and its claim to universality rests on a premise of faith that cannot itself be established by the method. The two approaches thus do not answer the same question: the first asks how the text came to be, the second what the text makes it possible to understand. Seen in this way, their tension is better described as a division of epistemic labour than as a contest that one of them must win.

5. Conclusion: From the Contextual Qur'an to the "Conceptual" and "Universal" Qur'an

The comparison between the conceptions of Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Mohammad Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad shows the dynamic tension between a historicizing understanding of the Qur'an and a reading that seeks in the text a timeless conceptual structure. Amir-Moezzi's historical-critical approach situates the Qur'an in the religious world of Late Antiquity, subjects the Islamic and non-Islamic sources to critical examination, and brings early Shiʿi literature into the history of the text; its results are significant but, by the method's own standards, revisable and in several respects debated. Haj Hamad's cosmological-conceptual approach reads the received muṣḥaf as a unified text and as the source of a Qur'anic conceptual network through

[59] Dye, « Le corpus coranique : questions autour de sa canonisation », p. 862.
[60] Ṣaḥrāwī, *Dalālāt al-Alfāẓ fī al-Qurʾān min Manẓūr Siyāqī*, p. 9.

which human, social and natural reality can be read; it opens a fruitful path for the Islamization — or, more precisely, the Qur'anic grounding — of the human sciences, while relying on interpretive choices and premises of faith that remain open to discussion.

The main findings of the study can be summarized as follows. First, the two approaches differ less in their conclusions than in the questions they ask and the evidence they admit, which is why they cannot simply refute each other. Second, each has its own strengths and limits, and each can correct the blind spots of the other: historical philology can protect a conceptual reading from projecting later meanings onto the text, while a conceptual reading can draw attention to the meaning that the text has for those who live by it. Third, the case of Islamic psychology shows the practical stakes of this debate: Haj Hamad's distinctions between nafs and rūḥ, his understanding of the qalb as a faculty of assent and of ʿaql as a synthetic capacity, offer concrete starting points for a Qur'anically grounded psychology, but they remain to be discussed exegetically and operationalized empirically.

Accordingly, the study recommends (1) further comparative research on the semantic history of the psychological vocabulary of the Qur'an, combining synchronic and diachronic methods; (2) the development of research instruments that translate Qur'anic concepts such as nafs and qalb into testable constructs without reducing them to existing Western categories; and (3) continued dialogue between historical-critical and conceptual scholarship on the Qur'an, conducted with mutual respect for their different premises.

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