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## A Critical Approach to Rudi Paret's Interpretive Approach to Qur'anic Stories

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### Abstract

Qur'anic stories are among the topics that interest Orientalists and have been analyzed differently. In some Orientalist works, attention has been paid to the whole story, and in others, some details have been focused on. German Orientalist, Rudi Paret, has presented a concise interpretation of Qur'anic stories in the book *The Qur'an Commentary and Concordance*. In this article, we will review his opinions in this field. The results of this article indicate that despite Paret's attention to the interpretation of verses with other verses and referring to the tradition of Islamic interpretation, relying on the information of the Bible and relying too much on the oriental tradition before him caused his misunderstanding of some stories. His focus is on some details in Qur'anic stories such as the meaning of the words Hettah and Raqem, which conflict with the Islamic interpretation tradition in most cases.

**Keywords:** Qur'an, Qur'anic Stories, Rudi Paret, Islamic Interpretation, The Qur'an Commentary and Concordance.

### 1- Introduction

Rudi Paret (1901-1983) is one of the most famous German orientalist who spent more than six decades in Qur'anic activities and research. Since 1951, he has been a professor of Islamic studies and Semitic studies at the University of Tübingen and retired in 1968. Along with people like Theodor Nöldecke, Heinrich Becker, and Josef Horowitz, Paret was considered one of the greatest German researchers of the second half of the 20th century. In the period after the end of World War II, Paret practically became the unique standard-bearer of the long-standing tradition of Qur'anic studies. Parth's long-standing connection with the Qur'an and Qur'anic interpretations, with the publication of a one-

volume translation of the Qur'an in 1962 and the publication of its supplementary volume in the form of *The Qur'an Commentary and Concordance*<sup>1</sup> in 1971, showed his mastery in Qur'anic interpretation. Of course, Paret's main fame is due to providing a complete published translation of the Holy Qur'an (Graham, 1384, pp. 79-91).

His book *The Qur'an Commentary and Concordance* is a lasting work in the field of interpretation and identification of similar Qur'anic texts. In this book, Paret not only explained each verse and presented its different translations but also pointed to other similar verses in the Qur'an. This initiative of

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<sup>1</sup> Der Koran Kommentar und Konkordanz



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the Paret has made this work become a very valuable tool, especially in terms of compatibility with other reliable sources for discovering languages and discovering similar verses in Arabic (Graham, 1384, pp. 79-91).

One of the subjects that Paret has addressed is the Qur'anic stories, which he has tried to explain by using various Islamic, covenantal, and historical sources. Taking advantage of the Orientalist tradition before him and many references to it, along with his personal opinions, he has left a collection of Orientalist reflections in the field of selected verses from Qur'anic stories in his book. The present article focuses on the mentioned work and examines and criticizes his views on Qur'anic stories. In the review of his opinions, in addition to the mentioned book, other books mentioned by Paret have also been reviewed and an attempt has been made to cite and criticize his views in this field.

## 2- Research background

Although Rudi Part is considered one of the great orientalists of the 20th century, since his works are in German, he has not received much success in the scientific circles of Iran. Farah Naranji and Mohammad Hossein Haddadi (1389, pp. 143-158) in an article titled "Criticism of Rudi Paret's German translation of the Qur'an" examine the strengths and weaknesses of the translation. This article considers Paret's main weakness to be his lack of familiarity with the principles of Islamic belief, which was reflected in his interpretations of the verses. Masoud Mansouri (1379, pp. 63-71) in the article titled "Reflection on some of the strengths and weaknesses of Rudi Paret's translation" mentioned some of the weak points of the translation while comparing it with Persian translations. Both works agree on Part's method of referring verse to verse, and it is considered one of the strong points of his translation.

Considering the mentioned background, it can be said that no article was found on the topic discussed in this article.

## 3- Rudi Part's opinions on Qur'anic stories

Rudy Paret has commented on various Qur'anic stories, among them, he has had special opinions on some Qur'anic stories, including the entry of the Children of Israel

into Jerusalem and the Promised Land and the story of Prophet Saleh, and miracles. He mentioned the story of the Companions of the Cave, the story of Moses and the fish, and the people of Thamud. In this article, focusing on these issues, we will criticize his opinions.

### 3-1- The story of the Children of Israel entering Jerusalem (Baqarah 58)

"And when We said, Enter this town, and eat thereof freely whenever you wish, and enter while prostrating at the gate, and say, "Relieve [us of the burden of our sins]", so that We may forgive your iniquities and We will soon enhance the virtuous" (Baqarah: 58)

A part of the verses of Surah Al-Baqarah (47 to 61) enumerates God's blessings to the Children of Israel and their excuses against these blessings. These verses refer to blessings such as the salvation of the Children of Israel from the tortures and oppression of the Pharaohs (49), the parting of the sea and the salvation of Moses and his companions (verse 50), the revelation of the Torah to guide the Children of Israel (53), the revelation of material blessings such as the shadow of a cloud, and delicious food in the desert (57). In this verse, some things are mentioned about the Children of Israel entering Jerusalem and praying for the forgiveness of their sins.

In this verse, Paret expresses Wensink's theory and citing him, believes that Muhammad (PBUH) did not consider the time of "Kneeling" and "Prostrate" to be separate from each other. Therefore, in this verse, as well as verses 161 of Surah Al-A'raf and 154 of Surah Nisa, instead of "and enter while prostrating at the gate", it should have been said: "Enter the door kneeling" (Wensinck, 1908, p. 337; Speyer, 1961, p. 337) under the title "People's sin in entering the city", in his book, has discussed this verse and verses 161 well, and then compared this verse with verses 21-26 of Surah Ma'idah and verses 13 in the Torah and described them in detail (Paret, 1979, p. 19).

It is mentioned in the Torah that God told Moses to send people to the land of Canaan, which I want to give to the people of Israel, to investigate it. Then he sent one person from each tribe to represent the others and ordered them to see how the condition of the promised land was, who lived there, and whether their land was barren and fertile or dry and devoid

of water and grass. After forty days, they returned from their mission and reported the necessary reports to Moses and Aaron (Bible, Numbers, verse 13).

In the continuation of the text, Paret finds this issue incomprehensible and believes that it is not clear to everyone what the word "hettah" means here and why it is emphasized that the reason for its revelation is about the Israelites. Referring again to the book of Speyer, he states some words from the Torah as follows: "The next day, they got up early in the morning and went to the heights of the mountain and said that we are ready to go to the land that God has promised us because we want to sin. Let us confess (ḥāṭānū)" (Torah, Numbers, verse 14). Speyer also mentions that it seems that Muhammad (PBUH) made a mistake in understanding the word "Hettah" and made a mistake and narrated it wrongly. From Paret's point of view, Muhammad (PBUH) has suggested that the meaning of this word is closely related to the Jews who were forbidden to enter the Holy Land, which was confirmed by this description. Paret also suggests that the word "Ḥattah" in this verse means "wheat" because in Dt. 8.8 this word is referred to as *ereṣ ḥittā*. After that, although the Israelis used the word "Ḥaṭṭānū" (confessed), they were not honest in their work, but rather they thought about the fruits of that land and not about the works that God commanded (Paret, 1979, p. 20).

Also, Hirschfeld writes in his Qur'anic research that there is a verse in the Qur'an that has puzzled all the commentators and even still no satisfactory explanation has been provided for it, and he believes that the commentators are aware of the fact that a city in the mentioned verse is Jerusalem, then it says while you are worshiping God by mentioning the words, enter the gate and say "Hatta", then we may forgive your sins. These describe the Day of Repentance on which the high priest enters the holiest places in the temple. The word "Hettah" is also probably adapted from the method of confessing sins recorded in the Mishnah. Also, Hirschfeld says that the exegetical efforts of the Jews who have been rebuked in connection with this event are probably related to their devotional character because this method was related to a different text in the Book of Common Prayer. He then claims that Muhammad (PBUH) wherever

possible lost no opportunity to repeat these mocking reproaches (Hirschfeld, 1902, p. 107).

Paret also refers to Rivlin's article "Laws in the Qur'an" in which he stated several possibilities. He considered the phrase "enter while prostrating at the gate" in this verse to refer to a temple in Jerusalem, and in his opinion, the phrase "and we will soon enhance the virtuous" here and in verse 161 of Araf conveys the concept of full reward in the Hereafter (Paret, 1979, pp. 19-20).

### Review and Critique

In this verse, Paret referring to the opinions of other Orientalists and also the books of the Old Testament, considers this "village" to be the Promised Land that was promised to the Israelites, and according to verse 21 of Maedah, he considers the holy land to be Canaan. Then, regarding the word "Hettah" and the phrase "and we will soon enhance the virtuous", he also expressed his views, which are examined in the following order, and the opinions of Muslim commentators are also expressed in this regard.

#### A) Village

Some people consider the village to be the land of Jerusalem according to verse 21 of Surah Ma'idah. But Zamakhshari believes that this is not true because there was the address of Moses to the Children of Israel for the war with Amalek and before the incident in the land of Tiye, and it is not known whether this address was during the time of Moses (PBUH) or during the time of Joshua and later. It was one of the events of the Tiye land.

Some of the commentators believe that it meant Egypt, which they were assigned to enter after the return of the Children of Israel, and some said it was Jericho, which is a village near Jerusalem. But all of this is based on speculation and there is no conclusive evidence from the Qur'an and news to determine this village (Zamakhshari, 1407AH, Vol. 1, p. 143).

Also, Alousi in his Tafsir al-Ruh al-Ma'ani, considered "village" to mean a holy place or a place of worship, and he considered "hettah" to mean the destruction of sins. He also considered the way to reach God, being satisfied with God's destiny and submissively bowing before him. At the end of the verse, the meaning of "good people" is listed as the

worshippers (Alousi, 1415AH, Vol. 1, pp. 265-272).

### **B) Hettah**

From the point of view of the commentators, various aspects have been mentioned for the word "hettah":

According to some people, when God the Most High commanded the Israelites to enter Jerusalem with humility, he commanded them to say words that show their repentance, because repentance is a matter of the heart and inner self. The sinner must regret his actions with all his heart, so according to the verse, they were required to say "Hettah". Therefore, it is considered that those people entered Jerusalem humbly while asking for forgiveness with their tongues (Ibn Kathir, 1419AH, Vol. 1, p. 175; Fakhr Razi, 1420AH, Vol. 3, pp. 527-524). Tabarsi, quoting Ibn Abbas, says that they were commanded to say that this matter is right. Likewise, Ibn Kathir, according to the words of Ikrama, says that they were commanded to say "There is no god except Allah" and these words themselves shed their sin, and since all of these are the cause of shedding sin, it is called "Hatta" (Ibn Kathir, 1419AH, Vol. 1, 175; Tabarsi, 1372AH, Vol. 1, p. 188).

### **3-2- The people of Thamud and the miracle of Saleh**

"And to [the people of] Thamud [We sent] Saleh, their brother. He said, 'O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him. There has certainly come to you a manifest proof from your Lord. This she-camel of Allah is a sign for you. Let her alone to graze [freely] in Allah's land, and do not cause her any harm, for then you shall be seized by a painful punishment'" (Araf: 73).

The story of Saleh and Thamud is the story of Noah (verses 59-64) and Hud (verses 65-72), and then the story of Lot (verses 80-84) and Shuaib (verses 88-93) is the same. This is the final result of verses 94-102 of Surah Al-A'raf, the summary of which is severe. The stories of Saleh and Thamud are in the Qur'an in a structured way, in connection with other similar narrations. Apart from other short sources, they are mentioned in the following verses: 11-15 Shams, 9 Fajr, 43-45 Dhariyat, and 23-31 Qamar. In addition, verses 80-84 of Surah Hajar can also be considered in this

group.

Paret believes that the phrase "worship Allah! You have no other god besides Him" was mentioned about the divine messengers Noah (verse 59), Hud (verse 65), and Shoaib (verse 85) and these are the words that flowed on their tongues. Also, in line with it, they are mentioned in Surah Hud verses 26 -50 and verse 84. He goes on to state that in verse 23 of Surah Mominun, this phrase is repeated with the words of Noah and in verse 32 of the same surah with the words of one of the other messengers of God whose name is not mentioned and he is likely to be Hud. Other examples in which the word "camel" is sent by the righteous God are found in the following verses: 13 Shams and 27-29 Qamar. The term "Land of Allah" is also included in 3 other verses of the Qur'an.

According to his opinion, since it is said that God's earth is vast, it means that humans can live in it sufficiently (97 Nisa, 10 Zumar, 56 Ankabut). Perhaps "Land of Allah" has a similar meaning in the context of the text: After Thamud had made a request, a camel was sent to them as a sign of a miracle from God, which should not be denied to graze the vast land of God. The wording of 155 Surahs of the Shoara, 28 Surahs of Qamar, and 13 Surahs of Shams seems to indicate that a special control was planned for drinking camels in the form of rationing water springs. At the same time, a few rare signs have left much of Thamud's history in the dark. The evidence of the sources that Arab commentators and historians have provided for this issue is too doubtful to be used to fill the existing gaps. Julius Euting in his memoirs of a trip to the land of Arabs, talks about a giant container in the ruins of sandstone, which, according to the residents, the righteous camel was watered from. Of course, this assimilation was later formed with a legendary stream that the verse refers to. But perhaps the righteous camel is based on a legend based on which an attempt was made to explain the creation of a strange stone in the shape of a sleeping camel (Paret, 1979, pp. 164-165).

### **iew andRev Critique**

As mentioned earlier, Paret raises the possibility of Saleh's camel being a legend, which in contrast to Muslim commentators, consider it a divine miracle for Saleh before

the people of Thamud. According to Islamic commentators, the meaning of "Naqa" is the female camel that God brought out of the belly of the mountain as a miracle for the Salih's prophecy, and that is why it was called the "Naqa of God" that came out of a rocky mountain (Zamakhshari, 1407 AH, Vol. 2, p. 120; Tabasi, 1390 AH, Vol. 9, p. 158; Tabatabai, 1374, Vol. 8, p. 228; Tayeb, 1396, Vol. 5, p. 367).

Regarding the reason for naming the camel in this way, some have said that it was called the camel of God because God created it without any intermediary and made it a proof of monotheism and prophethood (Tabarsi, 1372AH, Vol. 9, p. 158), but the author of Tafsir al-Manar believes they have put God's name next to it for honoring and bowing. Jabai also said that this camel had no owner except God, and that is why it was called "God's camel" (Reza, 1414AH, Vol. 8, p. 501).

Regarding the story of Saleh's camel, the common value of the Shia and Sunni interpretations is such that the majority of commentators believe that Saleh's camel, which came out of the mountain, was a very large and strong camel that was sufficient for all tasks and was exploited. On the other hand, the reports of Muslim commentators say that Saleh had made a covenant with his people to set aside one day for camels to be watered from the stream so that on that day only Saleh's camel would drink the water from the stream, and on other days the people would drink water from the stream. The camel used to give milk to the people and because it was very big, it gave so much milk that all their dishes were filled. But due to the displeasure of some people and the fact that Naqah was very big, other animals ran away from him, and this caused the infidels to try to kill Salih and the camel, and as a result, they suffered divine punishment (Ibn Ashur, 1420AH, Vol. 8, p. 169; Ibn Kathir, 1419AH, Vol. 3, p. 396; Reza, 1414AH, Vol. 8, p. 500; Zamakhshari, 1407A.H. Vol. 2, p. 120; Tabarsi, 1372 AH, Vol. 9, p. 158; Tabatabai, 1374, Vol. 8, p. 228; Tayeb, 1369, Vol. 5, 367)

### 3-3- Companions of the Cave (Surah Al-Kahf 9-26)

Paret relates verses 9 to 26 of Surah Kahf to the story of seven Christian followers who went out and hid in a cave during the time of

Daqianus, and fell into a deep sleep. According to him, the information in the Qur'an about this incident is clear and recognizable, but some of its concepts are difficult to understand. He considers one of the difficult points to be the word Al-Raqīm. According to him, it can be known as the name of the dog with which seven people slept in the cave. For the words "Al-Kahf" meaning cave and "Al-Raqeem" meaning cavemen, he refers the reader to Horovitz's Qur'anic studies and the vocabulary involved in the Qur'an by Arthur Jeffery. After that, it is possible that the word "Al-Raqeem" may be used in the sense and meaning of "Inscription" where there is a colored lead panel on which, according to Christian traditions, the names of the seven people sleeping in the cave are engraved (Paret, 1979, p. 310).

Regarding the word "Al-Hezbayn" mentioned in verse 12, Paret did not say exactly who or whom these two groups are referring to. Regarding the duration of their stay in the cave, different words have been said. Based on verse 19, it can be assumed that the discussion is about the seven people sleeping in the cave. (One of them said, "How long have you stayed [here]?" They said, "We have stayed a day or part of a day."), but in any case, the most correct opinion about the duration of their sleep is 309 years according to verse 25 of the same surah. In this way, it seems that until the time of Muhammad, there were discussions and conversations among people about the duration of their stay in the cave (Paret, 1979, p. 310).

Paret also refers to other verses that are related thematically. According to him, the first verse in the Qur'an that has a topic related to the topic of verse 19 of this surah is verse 259 of Surah Al-Baqarah, in which a story is told about falling into a deep sleep. In verses 112-115 of Surah Mominun and 45 of Yunus, there have been discussions about the fact that all these verses are somehow related to each other and generally refer to the dream of death between dying and resurrection (Purgatory). In verse 25 of the Surah, the actual duration of their stay in the cave is determined to be 309 years. Paret also believes that the first phrase of verse 20 can be translated according to verse 8 of Surah Tawbah as follows: "When they gained power over you means when they gained control over you." On the other hand,

he also gives the possibility that maybe in connection with the context of the text, the translation "when they found out about your existence" is more correct for this phrase (Paret, 1979, p. 311).

According to him, the opening words of verse 21 present the assumption that those who fell asleep in the cave were found after waking up, and this event should serve as a reminder for the contemporaries for the Day of Judgment, on which the dead are expected to be resurrected. But the truth is not known and it seems that the dispute that has been mentioned here has been decided whether those who woke up experienced it or their descendants. The phrase "Their Lord knows them best", which is not a quotation from the past, may mean that the place of construction of the building has not yet been established. But what will the words "foundation" and "mosque" mean in the rest of the text? Is it possible to finally not mention the building as an ordinary or non-holy building and establish only one place of worship (mosque) there? According to the text of verse 22, it can be understood that the people did not agree on the number of people sleeping in the cave until the time of Muhammad (PBUH). The strange issue is that it depends on whether the dog is counted in their count or not. Perhaps he is also considered a saint. In the following, as much as possible, one should also think about the Christian contemporaries of Muhammad (PBUH) as his interlocutors in the verse "and do not question about them any of them" (Paret, 1979, p. 311).

### Review and Critique

Allameh Tabataba'i in *Tafsir al-Mizan*, under verse 9 of Surah Al-Kahf, says about the meaning of the word "Raqeem" that this word is derived from the root "digit" which means both writing and line. So "Raqeem" actually means "Marqum", and in many cases, this word is used as an object, such as "Jarih" which means "wounded".

The Companions of the Cave and the Companions of the Grave were a single group that was called both the Companions of the Cave and the Companions of the Funeral. Because of this, they were called the Companions of the Cave because they lived in the cave, and they were called the Companions of the Grave because their story and history

were found in an inscribed stone in that area. In his book *al-Tafsir al-Hadith*, Darwazeh chose the same meaning for the word *al-Raqeem*. Tabarsi, in *Majmael al-Bayan*, in the interpretation of this verse, considered the meaning of the cave to be the same cave where those people took refuge. And about the meaning of *Raqeem*, he has mentioned all kinds of differences that have been encountered in the meaning of this word from the words of Numan bin Bashir: *Raqeem* is the name of the valley where the cave was located or the name of a mountain in the area where the mentioned cave is located, or it is the name of the village from which the companions of the cave has been left, or *Raqeem* is the name of a book in which news was recorded and God did not inform about its contents (Tabarsi, 1372AH, Vol. 15, p. 16).

In *al-Kashaf* of Zamakhshari, it is also stated that *Kahf* is the name of a large cave in the heart of the mountain. It is also mentioned that *Raqeem* was the name of a dog that came to the cave with them, and this is the same quote that Paret also mentioned in his book.

Regarding the term "*Hezbin*", which Rudi Paret considers these two groups to be indeterminate, Allameh Tabataba'i in *Al-Mizan* considers the meaning of "two parties" to be two factions of the Companions of the Cave who disagreed with each other (Tabataba'i, 1374AH, Vol. 13, p. 345). Fakhr Razi also mentioned this meaning in his commentary (Fakhr Razi, 1420AH, Vol. 21, p. 430). Tabarsi also considered the meaning of "two parties" to be two sects of people who disagreed about the sleep of the companions of the cave, the disbelievers were wrong, and the believers were correct, and God himself woke up the companions of the cave to find the truth. (Tabarsi, 1372AH, Vol. 15, p. 17).

In *Tafsir al-Mizan*, it is understood that the phrase "Build a building over them" means building a foundation on them. As stated in *Majmaal al-Bayan*, the meaning is that a wall should be built so that the companions of the cave behind it would hide from the eyes of the people, and no one would know about them. Allameh continued that this part of the verses of the story of the Companions of the Cave refers to the completeness of the story. They passed, so it didn't take long for the fame of this man to spread in the city, the people all gathered and rushed towards the cave and

surrounded the companions of the cave and asked about their condition and news, and after the sign of God and his proof was obtained, the Lord of all took their souls, so after waking up, they did not live for more than a few hours, they were only alive enough to clear people's doubts about the resurrection. After that, they all died and people said to build a building over their cave. But the idolaters did not stop denying even though they saw God's sign and said, "Build a wall over them so that people do not have contact with them, because nothing was revealed to us from their command, and we did not find certainty that their Lord is more knowledgeable than them." The monotheists said that their command was revealed, and we are satisfied with this sign and we believe, and we will build a mosque on top of their cave where God can be worshiped and the name of the people of the cave will live on until that mosque exists so that they will know God's promise is the truth, and the meaning of God's promise as it is used in the context is the matter of resurrection and resurrection (Tabatabai, 1374 AH, Vol. 13, p. 368).

### **3-4- The story of the good news of Isaac to Abraham's wife (71-73 Hud)**

And her mother laughed, and she preached to us with Isaac, and from Isaac Jacob (71) She said, "Woe to you, O child, and I am an old man, and this is the husband of the sheikh." (72) They said, "Are you not surprised by the command of God, the mercy of God and His blessings upon you, O people of the house?" He is blessed and glorious (73).

Abraham (PBUH) is one of the prophets whose many stories have been narrated in the Qur'an. One of these stories is the good news given to him and his wife for the birth of a child named Ishaq (PBUH) and a grandson named Yaqub (PBUH). Verses 71-73 of Surah Hud and several other verses of the Qur'an in other surahs have mentioned this story.

Paret finds it interesting that Abraham's wife laughed before the news of Isaac's birth, while Isaac's birth and then Jacob's birth was announced after his laughter. According to Tabari, there were seven reasons for the laughter of Abraham's wife, but none of these reasons are convincing, even the reason he preferred, that the laughter of Abraham's wife was due to ignorance of the punishment of

Lot's people. It should be said that finally the phrase "His wife, standing by, laughed" goes back to the Genesis of the Torah, where it is described that Sarah's loud laughter was because she could not believe that she could have a child at an old age, so she wondered if I could really give birth to a child while I am old and worn out. There was a call that this was not a problem for God and that she would have a son in nine months. Sarah denied it out of fear and said I did not laugh, but the angel replied that you did laugh (Genesis 12-15, 18). But it seems that in this verse, the entire history of its literature has been reduced to introductory material. The expression of laughter has been preserved, but the motive of laughter has been neglected, because according to the text, the phrase "laughed" cannot be completely related to the phrase "We gave her the good news of [the birth of] Isaac, and Jacob, after Isaac". Perhaps the text can be explained as follows: At first, Abraham's wife only heard the good news of the children to her husband, which was promised to her (according to verse 69 of Ankabut) and therefore she laughed and later in particular, the news of Isaac and Jacob reached him (Hud verse 71). Of course, such interpretations are artificial. The phrase "We gave her the good news of [the birth of] Isaac, and of Jacob, after Isaac" must, first of all, be understood as that Jacob, like Isaac, is announced as a son to Abraham and his wife with an interval of time. This issue can be compared with the following verses: 49 Maryam, 72 Anbia, 27 Ankabut, 84 Anam (Paret, 1979, 239-240).

The term "The Household" is also found in verse 73 and verse 33 of Surah Al-Ahzab: "Indeed Allah desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification". Before this, he advised the Prophet's women, or all Muslim women to abandon the customs and rituals of the infidels and seek a life pleasing to God. Perhaps the meaning of the household is not limited to the relatives of Abraham's family but to all the people of the household. As in verse 33 of Surah Al-Ahzab about the Prophet, the meaning of Ahl al-Bayt is the people of God's house, i.e. the Kaaba. In other words, the pure followers of believers in God should be considered in the rituals of the Kaaba, because in the Qur'an, the meaning of "the Household" is always the Kaaba. In any

case, it must be accepted that in this verse, he is referring to a story based on which he proposed the house of Kaaba in the concept of a place of pure monotheism (Paret, 1979, 240).

### Review and Critique

Muslim commentators differ on what was the cause of Sarah's "laughter" and have given several reasons to answer it. Some commentators have said that Abraham's wife was standing there during his conversation with the guests and was horrified by the fact that the guests did not eat, but as soon as it became clear to her that the guests were the angels of God Almighty who had come to her house and no danger has come to this family, she was happy and laughed, and when the angels saw her smiling, they announced her to Isaac and then to Jacob (Fakhr Razi, 1420AH, Vol. 18, p. 25).

Others have said that her laughter was due to the negligence of Lot's people, who did not know that they would be destroyed in a few days. Or they said: The wife of Abraham (PBUH) suggested to him that he should send for Lot to come to you and not be among his people, otherwise he will also perish. When the angels saw his concern, they said: "We are responsible for the destruction of Lot's people, not him." Therefore, Sarah was happy and laughed, because she understood that her suggestion was not unreasonable (Ibn Ashur, 1420AH, Vol. 11, p. 298; Tabarsi, 1372AH, Vol. 3, p. 188). Some have said that her laughter was due to her surprise that the guests did not eat, even though she had served them, or they said that her laughter was due to the good news that was given to her (Alousi, 1415AH, Vol. 12, p. 97; Darwazeh, 1421AH, Vol. 3, p. 529). In summarizing the matter, it should be said that Isaac is the name of the son that Abraham's wife bore from him, and Jacob is the name of Isaac's son, and according to this, the purpose of the angels was to let him know that his descendants will remain, that God Almighty gave him Isaac and gives Isaac Jacob. Regarding the word "laughter", it should be said that this word means menstruation. As soon as she had menstruated, God gave her good news to Ishaq, and this menstruating was a sign that made Abraham's wife (PBUH) believe and accept the good news sooner, and it was a miracle that prepared her heart to acknowledge the truth and

correctness of gospel. By mentioning this, the Qur'an wants to convey this news and make it clear that she was so disappointed in getting pregnant that she did not even imagine that she would menstruate again in her old age. The meaning of the verse is that Abraham (PBUH) was busy talking with the guests while his wife was standing and watching what was going on between Abraham and the guests and never imagined anything else and didn't think about anything else, at the same time she suddenly got her period and immediately the angels gave her the good news of having a child. This theory was expressed by Alousi and Tabatabai in their commentary (Alousi, 1415AH, Vol. 12, p. 99; Tabatabai, 1374AH, Vol. 10, p. 483).

Regarding the meaning of "The household" (Ahl al-Bayt), Islamic commentators have said that it means that they made Sarah realize that God has sent down His mercy and blessings on this household (Ibn Ashur, 1420AH, Vol. 11, p. 298; Tabatabai, 1374AH, Vol. 10, p. 486). Of course, some commentators have also considered that it means the family of Abraham (PBUH) and that they have included Sarah as part of his family because Sarah was the daughter of Abraham's cousin, and otherwise there is no proof in this verse that a man's wife is from his family (Alousi, 1415AH, Vol. 6, p. 299; Tabarsi, 1372AH, Vol. 12, p. 94).

### 3-5- The Story of Moses and the Fish (Kahf: 60-64)

"When Moses said to his lad, I will go on [journeying] until I have reached the confluence of the two seas, or have spent a long time [traveling]. So, when they reached the confluence between them, they forgot their fish, which found its way into the sea, sneaking away. So, when they had passed on, he said to his lad, bring us our meal. We have certainly encountered much fatigue on this journey of ours. He said, did you see?! When we took shelter at the rock, indeed I forgot about the fish—and none but Satan made me forget to mention it! —and it made its way into the sea in an amazing manner! He said, 'That is what we were after! So, they returned, retracing their footsteps.'"(Kahf: 60-64)

Paret has understood that verses 60 to 82 of this surah are based on a legend whose first part (up to verse 64) refers to the story of



Alexander and his journey in search of the water of life, and the second part (verses 65 to 82), corresponds to Arne Thompson<sup>2</sup>. He believes that verse 64 forms the end of the first part and at the same time moves the story to the second part. On the other hand, it is strange that the hero of the first part is called Moses and not Alexander, although in the next part of the same surah, in verses 83 to 98, Alexander plays the main role. Also, in verses 60 to 82, some ambiguities can be read in Noldecke's article about Alexander's novel and some other articles such as "The Story of Alexander in Arabic" by Mark Lidzbaski, "The Legend of Ascent and Alexander's Novel" by E. Fried Linder, and "Islamic and Jewish View of the Myth of Divine Justice" cited by Haim Schwartzbaum (Paret, 1979, p. 316).

In verse 60, the use of the word "fatā" (son) refers to Moses' companion, which corresponds to the cook in Alexander's story. The destination of the trip is the place where two seas or large waters meet, which is called the "Bahrin Complex". Two seas or big waters are also mentioned in other verses of the Qur'an, one of which consists of fresh water and the other of salt water. God mixed these two seas (ma'raj) or in other words, he joined them together but at the same time placed a barrier between them so that they were different from each other (Furqan: 53, Namal: 61, Rahman: 19 and 20). It is important to understand that when the freshwater meets the salt water, they mix, but there is still such a separation between the two large bodies of water, salt water and fresh water, that each has its taste. As in both mentioned verses (Furqan: 53 and Fatir: 12) the great water is not only identified with the name 'Azb (Sweet) but also with the name "Euphrates" (which is the same as the name of the Euphrates River), it may be possible to imagine that the Prophet had in mind the area of the Euphrates River with his thoughts about both big waters (ibid).

If someone thinks that in this verse where the two great seas meet (Al-Bahrin Complex) should be proven geographically, the first step is to think only about its mouth area in the Persian Gulf. On the other hand, Friedlaender considered that place to be the Strait of Gibraltar. But Hartman's theory is somewhat more acceptable, which considers the Tigris as

the source of that place. To explain Friedlaender's theory, it seems necessary to talk about the conditions, which he mentioned in verse 63 about the throne of stones. This could be an interpretation of the Syrian version of Alexander's legend, where it says:

"The terrible seas that cover the world will not allow you to pass, for there are eleven clear seas in which passenger ships pass. But on the other side, there are boulders ten miles long, which behind them lies the stinking sea of Okanos, which contains all living things." (Friedlaender, 1913, p. 52). But if one accepts Friedlaender's opinion that the discovery of the water of life according to the Syrian version of the legend took place in a region of Gibraltar, it does not mean that the Prophet was thinking far west by retelling this story.

The fish mentioned in verses 61 to 64 corresponds to the revolted and dead fish mentioned in Alexander's legend. That dead fish is brought back to life in contact with the water of life and thus a recognizable source of life. The fish comes back to life upon contact with water and disappears from the cook's hands. He forgets to inform Alexander. In the Qur'anic version, the fish survives and swims anyway (Kahf: 61-63). What is expected in this case can be concluded from the statement of Moses: "Do this with wisdom" (Verse 64). In the following, it is said that the boy (fata) forgot the fish (verse 63). It fits the legend that the cook does not report the missing fish. In any case, some things are unclear in the Qur'anic version. Now in verse 61, it is said that both people (Moses and the boy) have forgotten the fish, and at the end of the story (verse 64), it seems as if the whole purpose of the journey has ended with the disappearance of the fish. However, in the legend, Alexander is very disappointed that he did not find the water of life and did not achieve the goal of his journey. The phrase "Sarba" at the end of verse 61 is probably understood as the adverbial infinitive "Sarba" (to flow) and therefore, it means something that swims from there to far away. The commentators wrongly identified this word from the word "mirage" (water piping, channel) which is taken from Persian and derived all imaginary possibilities from it. Friedlaender translates as follows: "There they forgot the fish that went to the sea through the underground channel". On the other hand, Bell corrects the sentence as follows: "And he

<sup>2</sup> It is a catalog of [folktale](#) types used in [folklore studies](#).

makes his way freely towards the sea". It is noteworthy that Muhammad, in his retelling, considers the son's forgetfulness (Fatā) to be caused by the influence of Satan (Paret, 1979, 318).

### Review and Critique

Regarding the story of Moses and his companion who traveled to Al-Bahrin, there are many narrations, and the opinions of Muslim commentators are almost different from each other.

Where is the Bahrain Assembly? Some have said that the end of the Roman Sea (Mediterranean) is from the eastern region, and the end of the Persian Gulf is from the western region. Therefore, what is meant by Majma Al-Bahrain is that part of the earth that is located at the eastern end of the Mediterranean and, according to another belief, at the western end of the Persian Gulf, and in a way it is called the meeting place of the two seas (Tabatabai, 1374AH, Vol. 13, p. 471). Tabarsi believes that the meeting place of the Persian Sea and the Roman Sea is called Majma al-Bahrin (Ibn Kathir, 1419AH, Vol. 5, p. 157; Tabarsi, 1372AH, Vol. 15, p. 94). But Ibn Ashur considered it to be a place in the land of Palestine (Ibn Ashur, 1420AH, Vol. 15, p. 101)

Darwazeh also mentions different narrations about the location of Majma Al-Bahrin in his commentary including that it refers to the place where Moses (PBUH) met Khizr, and some have considered it to be a village where the wall of the house of two orphans, which had collapsed, was located, and Khizr and Moses (PBUH) repaired it (Darwazeh, 1421 AH, Vol. 5, p. 88).

But as for who forgets the fish, the majority of Shia interpretations believe that the young man with Moses, who was a person named Joshua, forgets the fish. Muslim commentators say that it appears from the appearance of the text of the verses that they placed the fish on a rock by the sea. Then the fish fell into the sea or the wave of the sea pulled it towards itself and sank into the depths of the sea and disappeared. The narrations also confirm this meaning, because it is mentioned in them that the case of the disappearance of the fish was a sign of the meeting with Khizr, not its coming back to life. Of course, there are many quotes in this context; Allameh in al-Mizan says that

the mentioned fish was a salted or roasted fish and they took it with them so that it would be in the way of their food, not that it was a live fish, but this same roasted fish in the house they landed on has come to life and thrown itself into the sea, and the young man with Moses also saw it come to life and swim in the sea.

### Conclusion

Rudi Paret is one of the Orientalists who has a special mastery in the field of Islamic interpretation. His points of excellence in his interpretation studies are referring verses to other verses and considering common themes throughout the Qur'an. His main weakness is relying too much on the Old Testament and New Testament sources and Orientalists before him, which has caused him to interpret the Qur'anic verses in the previous Orientalist interpretation tradition.

Paret considers the word "Hatta" to be vague and uncertain in terms of the entry of the Israelites into Jerusalem. From Parth's point of view, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has given the possibility that the meaning of this word is closely related to the Jews who were forbidden to enter the Holy Land, which was confirmed by this description. Paret also suggests that the word "Hettah" in this verse means "wheat" because in Dt. 8.8 this word is referred to as *ereṣ hittā*. After that, although the Israelis used the word "*ḥātānū*" (confessed), they were not honest in their work, but rather they thought about the fruits of that land and not about the works that God had commanded.

He also commented on Hirschfeld's narrates describing the Day of Repentance on which the high priest enters the holiest places in the temple. The word "Hattah" is probably derived from the way of confessing sins recorded in the Mishnah.

His quoted opinions are not confirmed by the Bible and cannot be historically confirmed. Hirschfeld's assumption in adapting the word and topic from the Mishna is also not correct and is based on the assumption that the Qur'an used Jewish sources, which is a false assumption.

From the point of view of Paret and Orientalists, what is certain is that they have considered this case as a legendary story and they believe that the Qur'an and Islamic chronicles have not been able to properly

prove the truth of this story. The only issue that Paret mentions at the end of his statement is milking camels, for which he did not mention any witnesses or documents, but this is even though Islamic books have mentioned milking camels, not milking them!

Paret considers some of the concepts in the story of Companions of the Cave to be difficult to understand, and the word Raqem is part of this category of concepts. In one sense, Raghim is the name of the dog who slept in the cave with seven others, or it means the men of the cave. Horowitz is a related word that probably means an inscription in which there is a colored lead board on which, according to Christian traditions, the names of the seven people who slept in the cave are recorded. The last meaning that Paret mentions is close to the opinion that Allameh and Darwazeh also said about the name of the Companions of the Dead. According to these commentators, they are called the Companions of the Dead because their history was found in a stone inscription in that area.

Regarding the story of Isaac's tidings to Abraham's wife, Paret suggests that when the angels gave Abraham the good news of having a child at that age, Sarah heard their words and laughed at those words. Relying on the Torah data has led the Paret to this conclusion. Although Muslim commentators also disagree about the reason for his laughter, considering the context of the verses, it can be resolved that the initial fear and anxiety towards the guests caused her happiness and laughter.

In the story of Moses and the Fish, Islamic interpretations have different points of view and each of them has told this story differently. It can be said that most of the Islamic sources called the young man who accompanied Moses (PBUH) as Joshua, which Paret, matching it with the time of Alexander, referred to him as a cook. Regarding the location of the Al-Bahreen Assembly, there was no consensus among Muslim commentators, and each of them had expressed different opinions, but none of them had expressed the location of the Al-Bahreen Assembly on the Tigris and Euphrates. This is even though Paret had listed it as the imagination of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). However, regarding the revival of the fish when it reached the Al-Bahreen Assembly, the opinions of Islamic commentators and Orientalists are almost the same, and both of

them believe in the revival of the fish.

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