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THE CONCEPT OF “KHILAFAH” (STEWARDSHIP) AND THE CONCEPTUAL CONSTRUCTION OF CIVILIZATION IN THE QUR’ANIC TEXT

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the concept of khilafah (stewardship/successorship) and its relationship to the conceptual construction of civilization in the Qur’anic text, on the premise that khilafah constitutes a fundamental essence of human existence on earth and a justification for cultivating it and establishing civilization therein. The study seeks to elucidate the concept of civilization through a set of concepts and terms that interact within the Qur’anic text, foremost among them: the human being, the earth, religion, language, reason, ethics, knowledge, and water. It also examines the concept of khilafah through its linguistic meanings and Qur’anic usages, then investigates its conceptual and civilizational dimensions and the meanings associated with them, including responsibility, cultivation, monotheism, coexistence, intercultural exchange, and knowledge. The study concludes that although the term “civilization” does not occur in the Qur’anic text in its terminological form, the text provides an integrated conceptual system that establishes its foundations. Khilafah stands at the forefront of these concepts because it combines the material and developmental dimension



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with the ethical and spiritual dimension, making the human being an active agent in cultivating the earth and fulfilling his mission within the framework of monotheism, values, and ethics.

Keywords: khilafah; civilization; Qur'anic text; conceptual construction; human being; cultivation; monotheism; language; the Holy Qur'an.

INTRODUCTION:

Khilafah constitutes a fundamental essence upon which the idea of human existence on this earth is based, as reflected in the Qur'anic usages of the terms "khalifah," "khulafa'," and "khala'if." This essence grants the human being the capacity to cultivate the earth and, consequently, to establish what is conventionally termed "civilization."

Accordingly, the establishment of civilization as a comprehensive concept in its precise terminological sense could only begin after the human being assumed stewardship of this inhabited world. Yet this act of stewardship could only be realized under certain conditions within which "civilization" takes shape. These conditions belong to a single conceptual field and constitute part of the semantic domain that serves it, represented by a number of terms, including cultivation, religion, language, reason, the unseen, and ethics.

The Qur'anic text does not mention the term civilization explicitly; rather, it points to the principal concept upon which this notion is constructed, namely "khalifah." The latter reflects numerous conceptual perceptions that reinforce the mechanisms of civilization and belong to the terminology of the field to which it pertains, some of which have already been mentioned.

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the term "khalifah" in the Qur'anic text and the dimensions of the civilizational concept through the construction of an integrated conceptual system in which several major concepts interact, most importantly:

- a- Monotheism (religiosity).
- b- Language (intercultural exchange).
- c- Cultivation (construction).

The article is therefore based on two major elements:

- 1- The conceptual construction of the term civilization.
- 2- Khilafah and the importance of the conceptualization of the term civilization.

I. THE CONCEPTUAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE TERM "CIVILIZATION"

This section is not intended merely to trace the historical development of the term civilization or provide a descriptive account of it. Rather, it seeks to identify the major conceptual features that define the term. Despite the numerous definitions associated with it, which vary according to the views, ideas, and even inclinations of their proponents, the term "civilization" remains conceptually complex, open to multiple perspectives, and subject to continued study and reflection.

We therefore begin with the term itself in order to identify some of the major concepts that delimit it and clarify the foundations of its conceptual structure and general conception. We then attempt to infer some of the defining characteristics of the term from the general meanings of the Qur'anic text.

1. The Term "Civilization"

Numerous definitions have been proposed for the term civilization, as noted above. We present some of them here through a number of definitions that delimit its meaning. No particular chronological order is intended; rather, the definitions are presented according to their relevance to determining the term's conceptual significance:

a- Civilization is an acquisitive and constructive effort aimed at realizing the potentialities of nature—both material and human—in order to satisfy the basic needs perceived by the human being. (Zureiq, 1964, p. 79).

b- "Civilization denotes the quality or condition resulting from remarkable achievements accomplished by a particular society (and is therefore synonymous with civilizing development); it also denotes a set of particular achievements that emerged throughout history within one society or interconnected societies." (Zureiq, 1964, p. 49).

c- "Civilization is the material and spiritual fruit of human effort and endeavor to elevate life and improve the conditions of material and moral existence." (Al-Saeed & Khalil, 2008, p. 114).

d- "Civilization is the interaction of a material group with a tangible machine that is invented, a structure that is erected, a tangible system of government that is practiced, and a religion with certain human rituals, within a particular natural environment. The production of this group thus becomes an echo of the potentialities of the natural environment and a measure of the extent to which people strive to benefit from these potentialities. Civilization includes the crafts practiced by

people, the types of dwellings they construct, the systems of government to which they submit, the laws with which they interact, the family system, literary production, artistic production, and so forth." (Razqana et al., n.d., p. 9).

e- "Civilizations correspond to and coincide with the largest social units. Within the scope of a continent or subcontinent, they are capable of encompassing several ethnic groups, each of which, within the whole, expresses in its language its local shared ideological form and, in its material life, its shared mode of practice." (Breton, 1993, p. 33).

f- "It is the intellectual production of the human being, whether material or literary. Everything the human being undertakes as an activity, whether material or literary, is civilization. Civilization is an inherent attribute of the human being and an inevitable result of reaching a certain degree of power, just as reason and speech are inherent attributes of humanity."

g- "The totality of the life lived by one people or several peoples, including systems of government, means of earning a livelihood, social relations, theoretical and practical knowledge, rules of conduct, and other components through which that life is manifested." (Zureiq, 1964, p. 14).

These are some of the definitions that delimit the term and vary from one another. Nevertheless, the general framework remains what characterizes the concept. On the basis of these and other definitions, the major features of the term can be inferred through the following conceptual markers:

Key terms contributing to the conceptual delimitation:

Human being — soil — time

Idea — earth — history

Government — place — temporality

Communication — interaction — dialogue

System — influence — effect

Productivity — innovation

Cooperation — stability — mobility

Adaptation — cooperation — particularity

Precedence — superiority — creativity

2. The Conceptual Dimension of the Term through the Qur'anic Context

This section establishes the term "civilization" not merely as a lexical word in the linguistic dictionary, nor simply as a terminological entry, but rather by examining the construction of its conceptual system through the Qur'anic text. This is not because the Qur'an formally defines or delimits the term, but because the conceptualization is inferred from the civilizational dimensions manifested in Qur'anic usage.

Through the Qur'anic text, it is possible to identify the foundations that delimit the concept. Qur'anic indications thus provide a starting point for this conceptual determination and generate a conceptual image of the term that does not privilege one dimension over another. Instead, they establish a civilizational system whose foundation is religion, whose domain is the earth, and whose active agent is the human being.

Accordingly, the conceptual construction of civilization in the Holy Qur'an is founded upon a number of intercultural contexts that constitute a systematic and textual reading originating in the Qur'an. Among these are:

- a- The Qur'an is, in essence, a book of religion and worship that calls for monotheism; there can be no civilization without religion or even an idea, because religion regulates laws and human relations.
- b- The human being, angels, and Satan, and the preparation of place.
- c- The symbolism of the earth in the Qur'an and the outcome of stewardship over it.
- d- The dialogical and ethical exchange between God Almighty and the angels concerning the human being's stewardship of the earth.
- e- The importance of the human being in the Holy Qur'an, for the Qur'anic text is fundamentally concerned with human formation.
- f- The earth: a geographical space, but also the material foundation for the construction of civilization.
- g- The genuine integration of reason and the unseen, particularly since the latter disciplines and guides the former.
- h- The ethical dimension of Islam, which came to complete and perfect the noblest moral qualities, and the importance of this dimension for the establishment and continuity of civilization.
- i- The duality of reading and writing and its relationship to civilizational construction.
- j- The pen and the emphasis on its civilizational significance.
- k- Language and its epistemic role in constructing the vessel of thought and knowledge.

- l- Security and reassurance.
- m- Administration and economic stability.
- n- Relations among societies.
- o- Intercultural exchange among peoples and tribes.
- p- The traces of past nations.

II. KHILAFAH AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE TERM "CIVILIZATION"

From the foregoing, the importance of the term civilization becomes clear, as does the importance of the conceptual markers associated with it through the universal laws and explanations found in the Qur'anic text. Each of these concepts has clear foundations and significance for civilizational construction in general. However, attention turns to "khilafah" for several reasons that can be discerned from the Qur'anic text, whose verses are precise and whose sacredness is miraculous. Some of these can be summarized as follows:

- a- Khilafah is the first stage and justification for human existence.
- b- The importance of khilafah begins with God Almighty's dialogue with the angels, through informing them and their subsequent questioning, as well as Satan's refusal to prostrate and what followed from it.
- c- The earth constitutes the spatial and developmental setting for khilafah.
- d- The human being is the active element on earth and in realizing khilafah.

In this section, we examine the Qur'anic meaning of khilafah through exegetical texts, as well as its general dimensions and their importance for the conceptual construction of civilization.

1. Qur'anic Meanings of Khilafah

This can be elucidated in the Qur'anic text through the lexical item "khalifah." Before addressing this issue, however, several preliminary elements must be considered:

- a- The linguistic etymology of the word "khilafah":

The term derives from the word "khalifah," from the root "kh-l-f." Linguistic dictionaries enable us to identify a range of meanings associated with this root.

- b- Qur'anic usage:

This section concerns the occurrence of the Qur'anic lexical item and its derivatives in the Qur'anic text through their contexts in the noble verses. A word has no full value without investigating its

Qur'anic usages, and this serves several purposes, including:

- determining the intended meaning;
- identifying the possible derivations.

The Qur'anic usage of the lexical item occurs through numerous verbal and nominal derivations, including: khalafa, khalaftumuni, and yukhlifunani.

c- Qur'anic meanings:

By this section, we mean the meanings attributed by Qur'anic exegetes to these usages.

2. The Conceptual Dimension of Khilafah and the Construction of Civilization

After examining the terms civilization and khilafah in terms of their linguistic foundations and Qur'anic usages, and after clarifying their exegetical meanings, we return to the major meanings of khilafah that can be projected onto the conceptual construction of civilization.

Accordingly, discussion of the concept of khilafah and its civilizational conceptual implications, or vice versa, through the Qur'anic text, provides guidance toward numerous meanings, including:

- The geographical dimension represented by the earth, which demonstrates the creative power of God Almighty.
- The earth was not merely a planet; rather, God prepared it for human life and its cultivation, demonstrating His power to subject creation to human benefit.
- The divine and heavenly acknowledgment of human stewardship and cultivation of the earth, expressed through the dialogue with the angels, constitutes an honor and responsibility assigned to the human being.
- The human being and his pivotal role in this stewardship, through his cosmic mission of worship and monotheism.
- Language as a civilizational necessity: no civilization can exist without religion, and religion is transmitted and communicated through language.
- The cultural dimension of coexistence among those who inhabit and cultivate the earth for the purpose of fulfilling stewardship over it.
- The scientific dimension through "Read," "the Book," and "the Pen," and their foundational role in civilizational awakening.
- The succession of nations in stewardship and the replacement of one nation by another as a condition of construction and cultivation.

- Water, which belongs to the sphere of divine provisioning and subjugation: there can be no civilization without land, and no land without water. Moreover, the emergence of civilizations is closely associated with water (sea, river, well, etc.).

We may therefore conclude that the construction of the concept of civilization in the Qur'anic text begins with the reality of khilafah and is constructed through a set of terms, including: earth, water, human being, language, and religion.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Qur'anic text constitutes a rich source for elucidating the conceptual dimensions of the term civilization, even though the term does not occur in its direct terminological form. The Qur'an nevertheless establishes a system of interconnected concepts that, taken together, constitute an integrated vision of civilization. The study has shown that khilafah occupies a central position within this system, as it represents the starting point of human existence and the justification for cultivating the earth. It is not limited to the developmental and material dimension but extends to religious, ethical, scientific, and cultural dimensions. According to the Qur'anic conception, the human being is not merely an element within the environment; rather, he is the principal active agent in cultivating the earth and is responsible for fulfilling the requirements of khilafah within the framework of monotheism, worship, and ethical values.

It has also become clear that the construction of civilization from the Qur'anic perspective rests upon a set of integrated components, most notably the earth, the human being, religion, language, knowledge, reason, ethics, and water. These concepts interact with one another to form the foundation upon which civilization is established and through which it continues. Language emerges as a tool for communication and the transmission of knowledge, while knowledge, reading, writing, and the pen constitute important foundations for civilizational construction. Religion and ethics, in turn, guide this construction and ensure its continuity.

Accordingly, khilafah in the Qur'anic text is not merely developmental stewardship; rather, it is fundamentally ethical and responsibility-based. It combines the cultivation and reform of the earth with human responsibility for actions, relationships, and practices. Hence, the concept of civilization in the Holy Qur'an rests on an integration of the material dimension with the spiritual and ethical dimensions, making civilization a comprehensive human project whose aim is to achieve development and cultivation under the values of monotheism, knowledge, and ethics.

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