


The Methodological Divide in Comprehending the Prophecy of the Defeat and Victory of al-Rūm (Q.30:2-4): A Comparative Analysis of Historical Reading and Esoteric Interpretation

Reza Mollazadeh Yamchi ¹ 

Postdoctoral researcher in Quran and Hadith sciences, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran.

Mansoureh Arjomandi Fard 

Assistant Professor, Department of Jurisprudence and Fundamentals of Islamic Law, Payam Noor University, Tehran, Iran.

Mohammad Sadeq Hedayatzadeh 

Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Education, Farhangian University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

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ABSTRACT:

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The prophecy of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* (the Romans has been vanquished) (Q.30:2) in the opening verses of Surah al-Rūm has become a point of controversy within the Sunni and Shi'i exegetical tradition, due to its reference to a historical-unseen (*ghaybī*) event. By posing the question of what intellectual and methodological foundations underlie this exegetical conflict, this study conducts a comparative analysis of the two primary approaches to understanding these verses. The research hypothesis posits that this dichotomy is rooted not in minor details, but in a profound rupture in epistemological sources, textual function, and semantic horizons. Employing a qualitative content analysis method and examining classical exegetical sources, the article demonstrates that the first approach (historical-narrative), relying on the principles of contextualism and the primacy of the apparent meaning (*aṣālat al-ẓāhir*), understands the prophecy as a retrospective proof validating the veracity of the prophetic mission. Conversely, the second approach (esoteric-hermeneutic), based on the exclusive authority of “those firmly grounded in knowledge” (*al-rāsikhūn fi*

1. Corresponding Author. Email Address: reza.mollazadehyamchi@alumni.um.ac.ir

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al-‘ilm), interprets these verses as a prospective charter for eschatological glad tidings and the political guidance of the *Ummah*. The findings reveal that this duality is clearly traceable across epistemological foundations (the authority of history vs. the authority of the Imam's *naṣṣ*), textual function (a static proof vs. a dynamic charter), and semantic horizons (linear temporality vs. cyclical trans-historicism). Ultimately, this research redefines these verses as a methodological focal point for recognizing fundamental schisms within the exegetical tradition.

KEYWORDS: Qur’an, Methodology of Interpretation, Historical Exegesis, Esoteric Interpretation, *Ta’wīl*, Inimitability of the Qur’an, *I’jāz al-Qur’ān*.

1. Introduction

The Holy Qur’an has always been the central axis of understanding in Islamic civilization, and its news of the unseen is one of the prominent aspects consistently cited as evidence for the divine origin of revelation and the veracity of the prophethood of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH). The opening verses of Surah al-Rūm serve as a brilliant yet challenging example of such unseen news. These verses report a major military defeat of the Roman Empire by the Persian Empire and then decisively predict that within a period of a few years, the tide will turn and the Romans will emerge victorious:

غُلِبَتِ الرُّومُ * فِي آدْنَى الْأَرْضِ وَهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ غَلَبِهِمْ سَيَغْلِبُونَ * فِي بَضْعِ سِنِينَ لِلَّهِ الْأَمْرُ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَ مِنْ بَعْدُ وَ
يَوْمَئِذٍ يَفْرَحُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ (الروم/2-4)

*Byzantium has been vanquished * in a nearby territory, but following their defeat they will be victors * in a few years. All command belongs to Allah, before and after, and on that day the faithful will rejoice (Q. 30:2-4).*

This prophecy unfolded within the context of a real and tense historical event. During the period of the verses' revelation, the Sassanid Empire of Persia (followers of Zoroastrianism) and the Eastern Roman Empire (Christians, i.e., the People of the Book/*Ahl al-Kitāb*) were engaged in devastating wars. In this midst, the Persians defeated the Romans in a decisive battle in the nearest land to Mecca, namely, the border regions of the Levant (*Shām*), Palestine, and Jordan, and subsequently conquered Jerusalem. This defeat was perceived not merely as a minor retreat, but as the end of Roman power (Ibn Kathīr 1998, 3: 461).

This event had a profound resonance in the social atmosphere of Mecca. The polytheists (*al-mushrikīn*) of Mecca, who were themselves unlettered (*ummī*) and lacked a divine scripture, rejoiced at the victory of their

counterparts, the Persians, viewing this incident as evidence of their own righteousness (al-Ṭabrisī 1993, 8: 480). They would say to the Muslims: Just as our unscriptured brothers (Persia) defeated your scripted brothers (Rome), we too shall overcome you. In contrast, the believers, due to their shared ideological affinity with the Romans as People of the Book, were saddened by their defeat but remained hopeful for their victory. Under such circumstances, where no logic or analysis could predict the return of power to the defeated Romans, the verses of Surah al-Rūm were revealed, decisively and unprecedentedly announcing the renewed victory of the Romans within a short timeframe, in *biḍ'ī sinīn* (between three and nine years). This news was a precise, time-bound prophecy, knowledge of which is beyond human reach; in this respect, acting as a miracle (*al-mu'jizah*), it proved the veracity of the prophetic mission.

However, consulting the extensive exegetical tradition reveals that this single prophecy, rather than leading to a shared understanding, has become the point of a profound methodological schism. On one hand, the majority of exegetes have understood the verses within the framework of a historical event; on the other hand, other exegetical currents, adopting a radically different approach, extract this prophecy from its historical context and apply it to the future political developments of the Islamic *Ummah* (Tabataba'i 1970, 16: 282).

The central problem of this research is not merely to report these two approaches, but to fundamentally investigate this methodological schism. By analyzing the exegetical content, this study seeks to answer the fundamental question: what foundations and principles in the methodology of comprehending the text have caused a seemingly clear unseen news to result in two completely contradictory approaches, the historical-narrative and the esoteric-hermeneutic?

The significance of this research extends beyond the study of a mere exegetical disagreement, serving as an opportunity to delineate the fundamental methodological schisms within the tradition of Qur'anic studies. To achieve this objective, through a systematic comparative analysis, this study substantively reveals the roots of this conflict across three fundamental levels: epistemological sources (the authority of history vs. the authority of the Imam's *naṣṣ*), textual function (the Qur'an as a retrospective proof vs. a prospective charter), and semantic horizons (linear temporality vs. esoteric trans-historicism). This innovative approach offers a deeper understanding of the dynamics and tensions governing the history of exegesis.

2. *Historical-Narrative Reading*

In opposition to the esoteric current, this exegetical approach is founded on the principle that understanding the prophecy of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* is impossible without relying on its historical context and objective evidence (al-Zamakhsharī 1987, 3: 466; al-Wāḥidī 2009, 18: 7). In this method, the text is perceived not as an esoteric decoding, but as an empirical and verifiable prophecy designed to establish the veracity of the prophetic mission.

2.1. *The Principle of Contextualism*

The historical-narrative reading of the prophecy of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* is fundamentally based on the premise that comprehending the verses is impossible without a complete understanding of the occasion of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) and the socio-geopolitical context of the revelation era (al-Ṭūsī 2002, 8: 227; Makarem Shirazi 2000, 16: 466). This context acts as a master key for accessing the meaning, and by establishing an objective historical event, it closes the door to any esoteric approach. This foundation manifests across three levels within the exegeses of this current:

First, it took shape in the context of a real and tense historical event. During the era of the verses' revelation, the Sassanid Empire of Persia (who were polytheists) and the Eastern Roman Empire (who were Christians and People of the Book) were engaged in devastating wars. According to the nearly unanimous reports of the exegetes, the Persians defeated the Romans in a decisive battle in the “nearest land” (*fi adnā al-arḍ*), and subsequently conquered Jerusalem (al-Fīrūzābādī n.d., 338; Muqātil ibn Sulaymān 2002, 3: 406; al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11). Exegetes have identified the location of this battle as the environs of *al-Shām* (al-Zajjāj 1988, 4: 175), Jordan and Palestine (Muqātil ibn Sulaymān 2002, 3: 406; al-Samarqandī 1996, 3: 3), *al-Jazīrah* (al-Ṣanʿānī 1991, 2: 84; al-Ṭabarānī 2008, 5: 115), and specifically *Adhriʿat* and *Buṣra* (al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11; al-Wāḥidī 2009, 18: 7).

Second, this event had a profound resonance in the socio-ideological atmosphere of Mecca, causing the nascent community of Muslims and the polytheists to divide into two opposing fronts based on ideological solidarity (al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11; Sadeghi Tehrani 1985, 23: 113). The polytheists of Mecca, who considered the Persians as their brethren due to their shared lack of belief in a heavenly scripture, rejoiced at their victory, viewing this event as proof of their own righteousness (al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11; al-Wāḥidī 2009, 18: 7). They would taunt the Muslims thus: Just as our unscriptured

brothers (Persia) overcame your scripted brothers (Rome), we too shall overcome you (Muqātil ibn Sulaymān 2002, 3: 406; al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11; al-Zamakhsharī 1987, 3: 466). Conversely, the Muslims, due to their shared fundamental belief in divine scripture, felt a greater affinity with the Romans; they were saddened by their defeat and hopeful for their victory (al-Fīrūzābādī n.d., 338; Muqātil ibn Sulaymān 2002, 3: 406).

Third, in such a tense psychological atmosphere, the opening verses of Surah al-Rūm were revealed to simultaneously confirm the defeat and announce the definitive promise of the Romans' renewed victory, thereby establishing this historical context as the point of departure for understanding the text (al-Ṭūsī 2002, 8: 227; Makarem Shirazi 2000, 16: 466).

2.2. *The Linguistic Principle*

The second pillar of the comprehension methodology of this current is an uncompromising adherence to the primacy of the apparent meaning of the text (*aṣālat al-zāhir*) and the determination of meaning within the framework of the common understanding of the Arabic language at the time of revelation. This approach seeks the meaning of the prophecy not in hidden layers, but in the direct, comprehensible significations of the vocabulary and syntactic structures, thereby presenting an objective and verifiable interpretation. This principle manifests in three key areas within the exegeses:

First, in encountering the phrase *fī adnā al-arḍ*, the majority of exegetes of this current have construed it based on the lexical meaning of the “nearest land” and have sought to apply it to a real geographical location (al-Ṭūsī 2002, 8: 227; al-Naḥḥās 2001, 3:178; al-Biqā'ī 2006, 5: 582).

The second area is the exact determination of the timeframe *biḍ' sinīn*. Relying on linguistic knowledge, exegetes of this spectrum have defined *biḍ'* as a number between three and nine or ten years (Muqātil ibn Sulaymān 2002, 3: 406; al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11; al-Ālūsī 1995, 11: 19). The incident of Abū Bakr's (RA) wager, along with the Prophet's (PBUH) reminder that *biḍ'* is a number under ten years and that he should have exercised greater caution in determining the duration of the wager, serves as a crucial evidence of the importance of precise lexical signification for the correct understanding of this prophecy (al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11; al-Ṣan'ānī 1991, 2: 84; al-Bayḍāwī 1997, 4: 201).

Finally, the precise and technical syntactic discussions, which occupy a significant portion of the exegeses, bring this comprehension-based principle to its pinnacle. The disputes between grammarians such as al-

Farrā' and al-Zajjāj over whether *ghalabihim* is an original infinitive (*al-maṣḍar*) or a contracted form of *ghalabatihim* (al-Farrā' 1980, 2: 319; al-Zajjāj 1988, 4: 175) reflect the profound belief that the meaning of the text is confined within the rule-bound structures of language and is discoverable and provable through it. In sum, by relying on the objective tools of historical linguistics, this approach endeavors to block the path to any arbitrary interpretation and restrict the meaning of the prophecy to precisely what the original audience would have understood from the apparent words within its historical context.

2.3. The *i'jāz*-Centric Teleology

The two principles of contextualism and the primacy of the apparent meaning, employed in the historical-narrative reading, ultimately culminate in a distinct and powerful teleology: establishing the prophecy of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* as a definitive proof and an undeniable miracle to prove the veracity of the Prophet's mission and the divine origin of the Qur'an (al-Māturīdī 2005, 8:248). In this approach, this prediction is not merely news of the future, but it holds a theological and polemical function, utilized as an empirical and historical evidence against deniers (al-Zajjāj 1988, 4: 175; al-Wāhidī 2009, 18:7).

Al-Māturīdī articulates this aspect with greater subtlety; in his view, the difference between this miracle and other verses is that opponents could not inflict any reproach or flaw upon it, such as calling it "tales of the ancients" (*asāṭīr al-awwalīn*) or a "forged lie" (*ifk muftarā*). This is because it was news of a future event that was incomprehensible through either analogy (*qiyās*) or human knowledge, and its realization proved the revelatory nature of its source (al-Māturīdī 2005, 8:248).

This *i'jāz*-centric teleology reaches its zenith in the frequently cited narrative of the wager (*mukhāṭarah*) made by Abū Bakr with polytheists such as Ubayy ibn Khalaf (al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21:11; al-Zamakhsharī 1987, 3:466; al-Bayḍāwī 1997, 4:201). This incident transforms the Qur'anic prophecy from a mere informative proposition into a public challenge and an objective test before the eyes of everyone. The insistence and absolute certainty of Abū Bakr in his response to the polytheists (Quṭb 2004, 5:2756), and his subsequent entry into the wager, indicates the conviction that existed within the hearts of believers regarding the fulfillment of the divine promise. The ultimate victory of the Romans at the appointed time served as a tangible and social seal of approval on this miracle, proving the Qur'an's claim in the realm of reality.

Furthermore, even the rejoicing of the believers (*yafraḥu al-mu'minūn*)

in this reading finds a function serving this very *i'jāz*-centric teleology. Their joy was not solely due to the victory of a group of the People of the Book over the polytheists, but was fundamentally the joy of the fulfillment of the divine promise and witnessing the veracity of the Prophet's news (al-Nahḥās 2001, 3:178; al-Māturīdī 2005, 8:248). This elation was an emotional reaction to the substantiation of a truth that the polytheists doubted. Therefore, within the framework of the evidentiary comprehension methodology, all exegetical elements, from the historical context and linguistic analysis to the wāg̃ narrative and the emotional reaction of believers, converge toward one ultimate goal: presenting the prophecy of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* as an empirical, historical, and undeniable proof designed to consolidate the faith of the believers and to persuade or establish the ultimate argument against the deniers.

3. Esoteric-Hermeneutic Reading

In stark contrast to the historical reading, which confines the meaning of the prophecy within the framework of an objective event and its linguistic context, another exegetical current emerges in the Shi'i narrative sources, founded on fundamentally different principles of comprehension. This current, by transcending the apparent and historical surface of the text, seeks to discover a deeper layer of meaning, which it refers to as *ta'wīl* (esoteric interpretation).

3.1. The Epistemological Foundation

The epistemological cornerstone of this approach is manifested in a key narration from Imam al-Bāqir (PBUH), who, in response to a question regarding the meaning of opening verses of Surah *al-Rūm*, states: *O Abū 'Ubaydah, this verse possesses a ta'wīl known to none save Allah and those firmly grounded in knowledge (al-rāsikhūn fī al-'ilm) from among the Ahl al-Bayt* (al-Qummī 1984, 2: 152; al-Ḥuwayzī 1995, 4: 169; al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335).

This proposition establishes a profound epistemological rupture with the preceding approach; firstly, because it explicitly declares that the text possesses an esoteric layer (*ta'wīl*) transcending its apparent layer (*tafsīr*). Secondly, it shifts the authority and legitimacy of comprehending this esoteric layer from the public domain (which relies on linguistic and historical knowledge) to an exclusive and specific domain, namely, divine knowledge and the wisdom of those firmly grounded in knowledge, explicitly identified as the Imams.

This methodological distinction becomes even more apparent when the narrator, citing the apparent discrepancy between *bid' sinīn* (a few years) and the timeline of Muslim conquests, challenges the narration, prompting the Imam to reiterate this distinction: *Did I not tell you that for this [verse], there is a ta'wīl and a tafsīr?* (al-Qummī 1984, 2: 152; al-Ḥuwayzī 1995, 4: 169). This emphasis indicates that in this paradigm, *tafsīr*, which deals with apparent and historical comprehension, is merely the preliminary and rudimentary level of meaning, whereas *ta'wīl*, serving as the discovery of the verse's true and ultimate meaning, is the exclusive prerogative of the infallible epistemological source.

3.2. The Mechanism of Ta'wīl

Once the epistemological foundation of the esoteric reading was established upon the authority of *ta'wīl*, the operational mechanism of this comprehension methodology becomes a process of decoding. During this process, the key words of the verses, acting as signifiers (*dāl*), are emptied of their historical-geographical signifieds (*madlūl*), and new signifieds of a political and eschatological nature replace them. This substitution transforms the prophecy from a prediction about foreign empires into a symbolic narrative regarding the destiny and internal conflicts of the Islamic *Ummah*.

The most prominent example of this mechanism is the *ta'wīl* of the word *al-Rūm*. While in the historical reading, this word clearly denoted the Eastern Roman Empire, in a narration attributed to Imam al-Ṣādiq (PBUH), *Rūm* is esoterically interpreted as the Umayyads (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335). Another narration, by presenting an esoteric genealogy, justifies this substitution and traces the lineage and ancestry of the Umayyads back to Rome, explicitly stating that the *ta'wīl* of this verse concerns them (al-Ḥuwayzī 1995, 4: 169). Based on this, the cycle of defeat and victory is also completely redefined: the initial defeat signifies the domination of the Umayyads over the realm and governance, and the forthcoming victory is interpreted esoterically as the victory of the Abbasids over them (al-Ḥuwayzī 1995, 4: 169).¹

This decoding mechanism reaches its zenith in the exegesis of the rejoicing of the believers (*yafrāḥu al-mu'minūn*). This joy is no longer a reaction to a temporary victory in the past; rather, it is tied to an eschatological horizon. The narrations explicitly link this triumph and

1- This may be based on a reading in which the first occurrence of *ghalabah* is rendered in the active voice (*ghalabat al-Rūm*), while the second is read in the passive voice (*sayughlabūn*) (al-Zamakhsharī 1987, 3:467).

rejoicing to the time of the uprising of the *al-Qā'im* (PBUH) (the promised savior) (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335). This prospective horizon is so powerful that it encompasses even the deceased believers, where it is stated that they will rejoice in their graves with the uprising of the *al-Qā'im* (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335).

3.3. *The Emancipatory Teleology*

The complex and symbolic mechanism of *ta'wīl* ultimately leads to a teleology entirely distinct from the historical reading. If the goal of the first reading was to prove a retrospective miracle and establish the veracity of the prophetic mission against deniers, the goal of the esoteric-hermeneutic reading is to provide a prospective roadmap and an eschatological glad tidings for the community of believers. This reading transforms the verses from an isolated historical report into an identity-giving charter and a guide for action throughout history. The primary function of this prophecy is not to persuade opponents, but to sustain hope and give meaning to the internal struggles of the Islamic *Ummah*.

This emancipatory teleology reaches its zenith particularly in the *ta'wīl* of the phrase “*and on that day the faithful will rejoice*” (Q. 30:4). In this view, the joy of the believers is no longer related to the victory of a foreign empire in the seventh century CE, but is tied to the ultimate victory of the front of truth at the end of times. Narrations explicitly link this triumph and rejoicing to the time of the uprising of the *al-Qā'im* (the promised savior) (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335). This glad tidings possesses such a broad horizon that it even transcends the boundaries of worldly life and includes believers who have passed away; as stated in another narration, believers will rejoice in their graves with the uprising of the *al-Qā'im* (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335). This perspective transforms the Qur'anic promise from a short-term prediction into an enduring divine law and a source of solace and hope for all generations. Furthermore, in a mystical narration that esoterically interprets divine assistance as assistance for the lovers of Lady Fāṭimah (PBUH), this emancipatory aspect also acquires a spiritual and *wilāyī* dimension (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335). Additionally, some mystical exegeses have elevated this teleology to an inner, psychological level, considering the victory of Rome over Persia as a symbol of the victory of the “Rome of the heart” and spiritual faculties over the “Persia of the self” (*nafs*) and carnal desires, which in itself is a form of individual and spiritual emancipation (Ibn 'Arabī 2001, 2: 137; Ḥaqqī Bursawī n.d., 7: 4).

Therefore, in this paradigm, the prophecy of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* is no longer an archived event in history, but a living and dynamic text whose function is to provide political insight, bestow identity upon the community

of faith amidst turbulence, and above all, inject hope for ultimate victory and the realization of justice at the end of history.

4. Analyzing the Conflict

A comparative analysis of the two exegetical approaches outlined in the previous sections clearly demonstrates that the most fundamental point of conflict between these two readings lies not in the details, but in the epistemological source that each deems authoritative and valid for its interpretation.

4.1. The Opposition in Epistemological Sources

The historical-narrative reading derives its validity from objective, public, and verifiable data in two primary domains: history and language. The legitimacy of this approach hinges on referencing historical reports concerning the occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) as well as relying on the well-known and common rules of the Arabic language during the era of revelation. Exegetes of this current, through frequent references to the events of the Perso-Roman war and the social reactions in Mecca (al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11; al-Wāḥidī 2009, 18: 7), alongside precise lexical and syntactic discussions (al-Farrā' 1980, 2: 319; al-Zajjāj 1988, 4: 175), strive to present an interpretation based on external and public evidence accessible to any researcher proficient in these sciences. In this approach, authority arises from the heart of historical data and reports.

Conversely, the esoteric-hermeneutic reading defines its epistemological source and criterion of authority in a completely different locus. This reading derives its validity neither from public historical reports nor from common linguistic rules, but rather from the explicit text (*naṣṣ*) issued by the infallible Imam as the sole competent authority for discovering the esoteric meaning of the Qur'an. The key proposition of Imam al-Bāqir, stating that these verses possess a *ta'wīl* known to none but Allah and “*those firmly grounded in knowledge*” (*al-rāsikhūn fī al-'ilm*, interpreted as the Imams), clearly demonstrates this epistemological rupture (al-Qummī 1984, 2: 152; al-Ḥuwayzī 1995, 4: 169). In this view, the apparent understanding, which is accessible to the public, is insufficient and does not pave the way toward the true and ultimate meaning of the text. Therefore, the primary root of the conflict between the two currents lies in this fundamental opposition: the authority of public and acquired knowledge based on history and language versus the authority of specific and divinely endowed knowledge based on the *naṣṣ* and the Imam.

4.2. Duality in Textual Functionality

This fundamental distinction in epistemological sources directly leads to a profound duality in the textual functionality of the sacred text between these two exegetical currents. The historical-narrative reading views the primary function of the prophecy of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* as fulfilling the role of a retrospective proof. In this approach, the verse is an empirical and historical evidence that, upon its realization within the context of history, namely, the victory of the Romans within the specified timeframe, has accomplished its primary and ultimate function. The goal was to prove the veracity of the Prophet's mission and the divine nature of the Qur'an to everyone, especially the denying polytheists (al-Zajjāj 1988, 4: 175; al-Wāḥidī 2009, 18: 7; al-Māturīdī 2005, 8: 248). Following the fulfillment of this promise, this prophecy is recorded in the history of Islam as a closed case and a document of pride, its primary function, i.e., proving the truth, having been completely fulfilled.

In contrast, the esoteric-hermeneutic reading posits an entirely different function for these verses, understanding them as a prospective charter. In this approach, the function of the verse does not end with the realization of a past event; rather, it continues throughout history, remaining perpetually meaningful and guiding for the community of believers. By interpreting the verses esoterically (*ta'wīl*) as referring to the internal conflicts of the Islamic *Ummah* and its ultimate destiny, which culminates in the uprising of the *al-Qā'im* (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335), this prophecy transforms from a mere proof for verification into a roadmap for steadfastness and an endless source of hope. Its function is not to persuade opponents at a specific historical juncture, but to sustain identity, impart meaning to sufferings, and offer an eschatological glad tiding to a community continuously facing challenges on the path to realizing its ideals. Thus, while the first reading views the verse as a realized and static historical proof, the second reading perceives it as a dynamic text and a charter for the future, whose function is perpetually in a state of becoming and realization.

4.3. Divergence in Semantic Horizons

The climax and deepest layer of this conflict manifest in the fundamental divergence of the semantic horizon, specifically in how each of the two currents perceives the categories of time and history. The historical-narrative reading situates the Qur'anic prophecy within the framework of an event-driven, historical-linear temporality. In this approach, history is a direct, non-repetitive path, and the meaning of the verse is tied to a specific, unique, and elapsed event. Accordingly, the key phrase *wa yawma 'idhin*

(and on that day) points to a specific point in time in the past; upon its arrival, the primary function of the prophecy, namely, proving the truth of the divine promise, has reached its perfection. Exegetes of this current have specifically applied this day to one of the events in early Islamic history, such as the day of Rome's final victory over Persia, or more precisely, to the day when the news of this victory coincided with a great triumph for the Muslims, namely the day of Badr (al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11; al-Ṭabarānī 2008, 5: 115) or the day of al-Ḥudaybiyyah (al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11). In any case, that day is a historical event that occurred and concluded in the past. Thus, the text in this reading possesses a retrospective function, transforming into a historical document for proving inimitability (*al-i'jāz*).

Conversely, the esoteric-hermeneutic reading completely transforms the semantic horizon of the verse by presenting a model of esoteric-cyclical trans-historicism. In this view, history is not a line of isolated events, but the stage for the repetition of a fundamental pattern: the continuous confrontation between the fronts of truth and falsehood. Apparent events gain significance not in and of themselves, but as symbols of this continuous, esoteric truth. In this approach, *yawma'idhin* no longer refers to a day in the past; rather, it is projected into the future and an eschatological horizon where the ultimate meaning of history is revealed. The narrations of this current explicitly link the ultimate joy of the believers to the time of the uprising of the *al-Qā'im* (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335). This glad tidings possesses such a broad horizon that it even transcends the boundaries of worldly life and includes believers who have passed away; as stated in another narration, believers will rejoice in their graves with the uprising of the *al-Qā'im* (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335). This perspective transforms the Qur'anic promise from a short-term prediction into an enduring divine law and a source of solace and hope for all generations. Therefore, the divergence of the two viewpoints reaches its zenith at this juncture: the first reading, by historicizing the text, confines the meaning to the past; whereas the second reading, by trans-historicizing it, yields a dynamic, continuous, and prospective meaning that remains perpetually inspiring and guiding for the community of believers.

5. Conclusion

By moving beyond mere description, this research demonstrated that the exegetical conflict surrounding the prophecy of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* is rooted in a profound schism in the foundations of comprehending the text. Rather than being an isolated event, these verses have acted as the focal point for the crystallization of two intellectual approaches within the Islamic exegetical tradition. The results of this comparative analysis clearly reveal

three focal points of this opposition:

First, the opposition in epistemological sources: The historical-narrative reading derives its validity from objective and verifiable data in the two domains of history and language. This approach presents an interpretation based on external and public evidence, extracting authority from the heart of historical reports and linguistic rules. Conversely, the esoteric-hermeneutic reading defines its epistemological source not in the public domain, but in the explicit text (*naṣṣ*) of the infallible Imam as the sole competent authority for discovering the esoteric meaning. This fundamental rupture demonstrates that these two currents disagree over the question: From where should the Qur'an be understood?

Second, the duality in textual functionality: This difference in the epistemological foundation leads to a duality in the function and purpose of the sacred text. On one hand, the historical-narrative reading views the prophecy as a retrospective proof whose aim is to establish the veracity of the prophetic mission through a historical event in the past. Upon the fulfillment of this promise, the verse transforms into a historical document and a closed case. On the other hand, the esoteric-hermeneutic reading understands the verses as a prospective charter whose function does not conclude with the realization of a past event, but remains perpetually meaningful and guiding for the community of believers. By esoterically interpreting the verses as the internal conflicts of the *Ummah* and its destiny, the prophecy transforms from a mere proof for verification into a roadmap for steadfastness and an endless source of hope.

Third, the divergence in semantic horizons: The deepest layer of this opposition manifests in the differing perceptions of the two currents regarding the categories of time and history. The first reading situates the verse within the framework of a historical-linear temporality and ties its meaning to a specific, unique, and elapsed event. In this view, "that day" (*wa yawma'idhin*) points to a historical point in the past that occurred and concluded with the victory of the Romans or its coincidence with events such as Badr or al-Ḥudaybiyyah. In contrast, the second reading, by presenting a model of esoteric-cyclical trans-historicism, completely transforms the semantic horizon of the verse. In this view, history is not a line of isolated events, but the stage for the repetition of the confrontation between truth and falsehood. *Yawma'idhin* no longer refers to the past; rather, it is projected into the future and an eschatological horizon where the ultimate meaning of history is revealed at that moment, namely during the uprising of the *al-Qā'im*.

Therefore, this research demonstrates that the apparent conflict in the exegesis of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* actually signifies a schism in the methodology

of Qur'anic comprehension: a schism between a positivist, history-oriented approach versus a symbolic, future-oriented approach. This schism is not a flaw, but a dynamic mechanism that transforms the Qur'an from a mere historical document into a living and perpetually guiding text for the community of faith throughout the passage of history.

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