

# ALI 576: Historical Reliability of the Qur'an (P2)

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  1. The story of Haman and Firawn
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# Review of Previous Session

- Why study historical reliability?
- The past and history.
- Stories of the Qur'an: real or fictional?
- Arguments for stories of the Qur'an being real:
  - The beliefs and values are real.
  - The audience is universal.
  - The Qur'an presents itself as "haqq"

# The Point of Contact

- History is the construction and analysis of the past.
- Tafsir is our understanding and analysis of the Qur'an.
- The past occurs in the presence (mahdar) of Allah (S).
- The Qur'an is the articulation (madhar) of Allah (S).
- There can never be conflict between what is in the mahdar of Allah and what is the madhar of Allah (S).
- Hence the conflict is between history and our interpretation.
- Sometimes we have to revisit history and sometimes our interpretation.

# Revisiting History

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- Written history is recorded and transmitted by human beings.
- These human beings had ideological, cultural and political biases.
- Their account of history may be coloured by their biases.

Bias	Example
Ideological Bias	Revision of history regarding the Sahaba Scientific discovery commences in Europe
Political Bias	Rewriting history about Imam Ali (a) Columbus as the discoverer of America
Cultural Bias	Some narrations of tragedy of Karbala Jesus depicted as a white man

# The Story of Musa (a) and Firawn

- The story of the exodus is mentioned in the Bible and the Qur'an.
- The victory of Musa (a) is an important example of Divine practices.
- The actual occurrence of the exodus is questioned by historians.
- Why? Because there seem to be no account of the exodus in Egyptian records.
- Why do you think that such accounts are not mentioned in the Egyptian records?

# The Story of Musa and Firawn

No record of the exodus has been found in any Egyptian tablets, but that is not unusual; the new dynasty did not make a habit of recording its defeats. National Geographic.

So Canaanites went to Egypt for a variety of reasons. They were generally assimilated—after a generation or two they became Egyptians. There is almost no evidence that those people left. But there are one or two Egyptian documents that record the flight of a handful of people who had been brought to Egypt for one reason or other and who didn't want to stay there.

Carol Meyers, Archeologist and Professor of Religion at Duke.

# Revisiting our Interpretation

- Our interpretation of the apparent meaning of the verses of the Qur'an can change based on factual evidence.
  - E.g. heliocentric model of the solar system.
- Historical evidence that is factually established can also change our interpretation of the apparent meaning of the verses.
  - E.g. the flood of Nuh (a)



# The Story of Haman and Firawn

- The Qur'an mentions a minister of Firawn by the name of Haman.

And Pharaoh said, "O Haman! Build me a tower

so that I may reach the routes (40:36)

- Haman (or Haman the Agagite) is the antagonist in the biblical Book of Esther. According to this story, Haman was a fourth century B.C.E. Persian noble and vizier of the empire under Persian King Ahasuerus, traditionally identified as Artaxerxes II but thought by most modern scholars to be Xerxes I. (New World Encyclopedia).
- Modern historians even question the existence of any Haman in any ancient empire.

# The Story of Haman and Firawn

- Ayatullah Hadi Ma'rifat presents the following points:
  - Our interpretation of the Haman of the Qur'an as Haman in common knowledge of the Jewish people is wrong.
  - Arabic speaking people had a practice of Arabicizing names from other languages. E.g. ab-ram becomes Ibrahim, and moshe becomes musa.
  - Similarly he argues that haman is the Arabic version of Amun.
  - Amun (also Amon, Ammon, Amen) is the ancient Egyptian god of the sun and air. (Ancient History Encyclopedia).
  - Many important Egyptian figures had names related to Amun. E.g. the son of Ramses the II was called Amun-her-khepeshef (Amun is with his strong arm).

# Conclusion

- Sometimes revisiting the interpretation requires us to revisit the meaning of a statement and not just a word.
  - E.g. Uzayr as the son of God.
- Some of the words and the statements of the Qur'an have an apparent meaning and do not have a definitive meaning.
- These words and statements can be re-interpreted in light of factual historical evidence.
- We also have to carry out a careful study of history and historical records in light of the biases of those who recorded them.