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A study of the term “Yam” in the Holy Qur’an from the perspective of the Semitic languages

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Abstract

The word "Yam" is one of the words in the holy Qur'an that God Almighty has mentioned 7 times in his heavenly book. This word is repeated in the surahs that refer to the story of Prophet Moses (peace be upon him). Linguists have known the word Yam from the roots of "y", "m" and "m". The meaning of this word is mentioned in the dictionaries as "deeper than the sea". But the commentators of the Holy Qur'an have interpreted the mentioned word as a synonym for the word "Bahr" (Arabic for Sea) or "Nile River" and as a result, looking at various interpretations the translators have also translated it as Darya (Persian for Sea). Looking at the science of etymology and semantics, the present research aims to examine the derivations of this word as well as the interpretations presented of these 7 blessed verses by finding the correct roots of this word in Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic with a descriptive-analytical and comparative method. It was found after the investigations that most of the interpretations of this word have interpreted it as "Sea" or "Nile River", but in fact this word does not come from the Arabic and is common in Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac/Aramaic languages; Yam was an imported word that the Hebrew language borrowed it from Aramaic and then entered Arabic from Hebrew, and this is exactly the reason why God Almighty uses this word in all the surahs that tell the story of the Israelites, Prophet Moses and Pharaoh; as a result, according to the context of the Qur'anic verses and religious and Islamic writings, the sea that was split by Prophet Moses was the Red Sea, and therefore the more precise meaning of the word "Yam" is also the Red Sea.

Keywords

Holy Qur'an, the Word "Yam (Sea)", Semitic Languages, Science of Etymology, Cognitive Linguistics.

Introduction

Referring and examining Arabic dictionaries such as Lisan al-Arab, Taj al-Arus, Al-Mu'jam al-Wasit, etc., it became clear that the difference that the lexicographers have made for this word and the word "Bahr" is in terms of depth, and in fact, they have considered "Yam" to be a sea that is deeper than the "Bahr", while some lexicographers, including the author of Lisan al-Arab, pointed out that this word was imported from another language and considered it Hebrew or Aramaic.

Materials and Methods

After finding the roots of this word in Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic languages, the present research, looking at the science of semantics, seeks to examine the derivations of this word with a descriptive-analytical and comparative method, and then, by searching in various interpretations, specifically mention the explanations provided in three Shiite interpretations and three Sunni interpretations as the exact statistical population.

Findings

The word "Yam" which appears 7 times in the Holy Qur'an; it is mentioned in Surahs AL-A'RAF (the heights) (verse 136), TA-HA (verses 39, 78 and 97), AL-QASAS (the stories) (verse 4) and 7) and ADH-DHARIYAT (the scatterers) (verse 40). But the point to think about is that if we look carefully in all these verses, we will find that "Yam" is repeated exactly in the verses that refer to the Israelites and the story of Prophet Moses (peace be upon him). In this way, after referring to and examining Arabic dictionaries such as Lisan al-Arab, Taj al-Arus, Al-Mu'jam al-Wasit, etc., it became clear that the difference that the lexicographers have made for this word and the word "Bahr" is in terms of depth, and in fact, they have considered "Yam" to be a sea that is deeper than the "Bahr", while some lexicographers, including the author of

Lisan al-Arab, pointed out that this word was imported from another language and considered it Hebrew or Aramaic. But the commentators of the Holy Qur'an have interpreted the mentioned word as a synonym for the word "Bahr" or "Nile River" and as a result, looking at various interpretations, the translators have also translated it as Sea. Because the word "Yam" is repeated in the surahs related to the Bani Isra'il (Children of Israel), it is possible that it is a loan-word from Hebrew or Syriac; therefore, by looking at several Hebrew and Aramaic dictionaries, it was found that this word means the sea in the two mentioned languages, and there is no mention of its depth.

Conclusion

After the various investigations, it was found that most of the commentators have interpreted this word as "deep sea" or "Nile River" by relying on popular Arabic dictionaries and lack of familiarity with Semitic languages, but in reality, this word does not come from the Arabic and is common in Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac/Aramaic languages; therefore, Yam was an imported word that the Hebrew language borrowed it from Aramaic and then entered Arabic from Hebrew. In fact, this is the reason why Almighty God uses this word in all the surahs that tell the story of the Bani Isra'il, Moses and Pharaoh, from the aesthetic aspect and to show the miracles of the Qur'an, which means that by using a word from the language of the Bani Isra'il, God Almighty shows his awareness and knowledge to the audience in a subtle way. As a result, according to the context of the Qur'anic verses and religious and Islamic writings and by examining the historical evidence left from the time of Prophet Moses and Pharaoh, the sea that was split by Prophet Moses was the Red Sea, and therefore, the Qur'an's commentators should have also referred to the Red Sea in the interpretation of the word "Yam".

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