

A Metaphor Hidden in an Ancient Tradition (al-ddam al-ddam)

Mahmood Makvand

Associate professor. Department of Quranic and Hadith studies. Kharazmi University. Tehran. Iran. Email: mmakvand@khu.ac.ir

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Introduction

Throughout the early centuries of Islam, the study of prophetic traditions (ahādīth) and their linguistic structure have been one of the most fundamental avenues for understanding Islamic intellectual history. Among these reports, the expression “al-ddam al-ddam wa al-hadm al-hadm” has drawn attention due to its obscurity and multiplicity of interpretations in early Islamic, lexicographical, and sīra sources. While classical scholars sought to interpret the phrase within the confines of Arabic philology, they often failed to recognize its broader historical and semantic background. The present study aims to uncover the authentic conceptual meaning underlying this expression by employing a historical–comparative linguistic method. By tracing its cognates and parallels across other Semitic languages and texts—such as Syriac, Hebrew, and Aramaic—the research offers a new understanding of how this formula signifies unity and kinship rather than warfare or destruction. This approach sheds new light on early Islamic semantics and the conceptual language of religious texts.

Materials and Methods

This study adopts a descriptive–analytical and historical–comparative linguistic approach. The main sources include early Islamic literature—ḥadīth collections, sīra traditions, and classical Arabic lexicons—alongside Semitic philological corpora such as Peshitta (Syriac Bible), the Hebrew Bible, and Aramaic linguistic dictionaries. The research first surveys how early scholars like Ibn Hishām, Ibn Qutayba, and al-Azhari interpreted the phrase “al-ddam al-ddam wa al-hadm al-hadm” in purely Arabic contexts, identifying the limitations of their monolingual explanations. Next, the study performs a comparative etymological analysis of the key term hadm (هدم), tracing its roots and cognates—hadam in Aramaic and Syriac, and haddām in Hebrew—to reveal a shared semantic field meaning “part, limb, or member of the body.” This finding contradicts the dominant medieval interpretation that equated hadm merely with “destruction.” In the third step, the metaphorical structure of the phrase was reconstructed through the theory of conceptual metaphors to show how “body” as the source domain represents social and moral concepts such as unity, kinship, and mutual obligation in the target domain. In the fourth step, intertextual processes between Jewish, Christian, and Islamic sacred texts were

analyzed to reveal the continuity of a similar image of "one body" and "joined fragments." In all stages, the main goal has been to reconstruct the meaning based on historical data and to avoid purely lexical interpretations.

Results and Findings

The results of this study show that in the sphere of ancient Semitic languages, words with the same root as "hadma" were used in meanings such as "part, organ, piece, part of the body" and only in later periods did they acquire the meaning of "destruction". For example, in Syriac the word "hadma" (ܚܕܻܻ) means "body organ" and in some Hebrew texts forms of the same root are used to describe body parts or the dismemberment of sacrifices. Such uses in the Hebrew Bible (especially in Genesis and Daniel) as well as in the Syriac text of Peshitta and even in the epistles of Paul in the New Testament indicate a common pattern that sees the human body as an allegory of society and collective covenant. Based on these data, the reinterpretation of the phrase "al-ddam al-ddam wa al-hadm al-hadm" can be understood as "I and you are of the same blood and a part of the same body"; an expression that, in the form of an existential metaphor, instills an unbreakable bond and a deep covenant between the two parties. This meaning is in complete harmony with the historical context of the Aqabah homage and the phrase "ana minkum wa antum minnī." Metaphorical analysis of the tradition shows that this phrase is based on the conceptual metaphor "the other is a part of the body" and the more fundamental metaphor "the body is the container of the soul." This concept is linked to Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religious teachings, and similar examples are evident in the epistles of Paul (Ephesians 4:25) and in Islamic traditions such as "The believer is a brother to the believer, as one flesh." (al-mu'minu akhu al-mu'min kal-jasadi al-wāhid) On the other hand, metaphorical analysis shows that such formulas had a dual function in ancient Near Eastern cultures: on the one hand, they established a security pact and political alliance, and on the other hand, through the image of the body, they represented a kind of spiritual and moral unity. In addition, historical evidence shows that such expressions were also present in pre-Islamic alliance rituals and were established in the form of oaths of blood and flesh. As a result, the new interpretation based on comparative data not only reduces the ambiguity of the ancient lexical interpretations, but also establishes a link between Islamic texts and the broader context of Semitic culture, making it clear that the phrase in question is a remnant of a common thought pattern throughout the Semitic cultural sphere.

Conclusion

The historical-linguistic analysis of the narrative "al-ddam al-ddam wa al-hadm al-hadm" showed that the meaning and structure of this phrase are deeply connected to Semitic linguistic and cultural traditions and express a kind of blood and existential unity between allies. According to the results of the present study, this is not simply a political slogan or tribal oath, but rather a sign of a fundamental metaphor in Semitic cultures in which the human body represents society and the relationship between humans and others. Restoring the meaning of "Hadim" to the concept of "part and

organ", while removing the ambiguity of later interpretations, reveals the existential and cultural depth of this phrase and shows that in the Aqaba Homage and similar situations, the purpose of its use was to emphasize the identity and moral bond between the Homagers. In this way, utilizing the comparative etymology method and the theory of conceptual metaphors can be an efficient model for analyzing early Islamic texts and understanding deeper layers of meaning; layers that can only be identified through an interlanguage and intercultural perspective and can be used in Quranic, Hadith, and historical linguistics studies.

Keywords: Tradition, al-hadm al-hadm, al-ddam, Historical-comparative approach, Conceptual metaphor, Etymology.