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Religious Text and the Strategy of Reading in the Thought of Mohammed Arkoun

Abstract

Many thinkers and critics seek to draw upon contemporary philosophical and critical methodologies to read religious texts and subject them to these frameworks. Among such intellectuals is Mohammed Arkoun, who endeavoured to establish and apply what he termed "Applied Islamology," in contrast to the prevailing notion of "Classical Islamology." The purpose behind Arkoun's creation of this new conceptualisation was to break away from the classical notions that enveloped the Islamic mind, rendering it incapable of keeping pace with the spirit of modern humanist thought. Arkoun called for the formation of a renaissance capable of transcending the prohibitions that confined intellectual activity and the movements that excluded the questions accompanying the formative stage of Islam.

Keywords: *historical criticism, humanism, Qur'anic event, Sunnah, hermeneutical reason, displacement*

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Məhəmməd Arkounun düşüncəsində dini mətn və oxu strategiyası

Xülasə

Bir çox mütəfəkkir və tənqidçi dini mətnləri oxumaq və onları müasir fəlsəfi və tənqidi metodologiyalar çərçivəsində təhlil etmək məqsədilə çağdaş yanaşmalardan istifadə etməyə çalışır. Bu cür intellektuallar arasında Məhəmməd Arkoun xüsusi yer tutur. O, "Klassik İslamologiya" anlayışına qarşılıq olaraq "Tətbiqi İslamologiya" adlandırdığı yanaşmanı formalaşdırmağa və tətbiq etməyə cəhd göstərmişdir. Arkounun bu yeni konsepsiyanı irəli sürməkdə məqsədi İslam düşüncəsini əhatə edən və onu müasir humanist düşüncənin ruhu ilə ayaqlaşmaqdan aciz hala gətirən klassik təsəvvürlərdən uzaqlaşmaq idi. Arkoun intellektual fəaliyyəti məhdudlaşdıran qadağaları və İslamın formalaşma mərhələsi ilə bağlı sualları kənarda saxlayan yanaşmaları aşmağa qadir olan bir intibahın formalaşdırılmasına çağırış etmişdir.

Açar sözlər: tarixi tənqid, humanizm, Qurani hadisə, Sünnə, hermenevtik ağıl, yerdəyişmə

Introduction

Mohammed Arkoun makes no distinction within the Islamic tradition between religious texts, such as the Qur'an and Sunnah, for, in his view, all must be subjected to contemporary methodologies to arrive at a mode of thought capable of forming a sound foundation for any possible renaissance. This can be achieved through transgressing the prohibitions that have long encircled both intellect and movement, excluding the questions that emerged during the formative and foundational stage of Islam, only to be subsequently silenced and sealed away (Mohammed Arkoun, Islamic Thought, 1990, p. 31).

Research

Arkoun seeks to subject the Qur'an to the test of comparative historical criticism by treating it as a fertile text for open dialogues with all who have engaged with or contested it. He states, "The scientific study of the sacred does not mean diminishing or violating it; rather, it entails a better understanding of all its manifestations and transformations, and serves as a warning to certain groups or individuals against manipulating it for political or personal gain. I can say that the sacred we live by or with today is not the same as the sacred of the Arabs at the Kaaba before Islam, nor even the sacred that prevailed during the time of the Prophet."

The Concept of the Religious Text in the Thought of Mohammed Arkoun:

It is self-evident that the sacred changes and transforms with the evolution of beliefs and religions. The sacred of pagan Arabs is not the same as that of Muslim Arabs, just as the sacred of Christians is not that of Muslims. What must be emphasised, however, is that Islam, in its original texts, was not a sacred text manufactured by a group with political or material interests; instead, it was fundamentally a divine revelation emanating from God (Qasim Shuaib, 2007, p. 34).

From this perspective, Mohammed Arkoun employs the strategy of displacement, directing it toward Islamic convictions and certainties to reveal that such convictions were founded upon unstable grounds. This occurs within the framework of what Michel Foucault terms "intellectual archaeology," or an attempt to think the unthought. Displacement (*déplacement*), for Arkoun, signifies any transformation that affects traditional problematics or introduces a new approach to existing issues, an approach that may replace, annul, or dislodge previous ones (Mohammed Arkoun, The Qur'an: From Inherited Exegesis to the Analysis of Religious Discourse, 2005, p. 14).

The traditional problems in question are the certainties of the Muslim intellect, particularly in the doctrinal domain, such as the belief that the Qur'an is the Word of God, the binding authority of the Sunnah, and the universality of the Islamic message. These convictions are challenged by modern Western approaches to Jewish and Christian religious texts, which rely on contemporary knowledge and attempt to align with Western modernity and the applications of the human sciences in the West (Arkoun, Islamic Thought, p. 35).

The Strategy of Historical and Humanist Reading:

Mohammed Arkoun approaches the Qur'anic text, the foundational text of Arab-Islamic civilisation, on the basis of re-examining its sanctity and revealing its mechanisms through an inquiry into its linguistic nature, the history of its formation, and the stages of its development and stabilisation in its current form. Arkoun proposes epistemological and historical strategies to deconstruct the mechanisms of sacralisation. Humanising the text is grounded in an immanent philosophy that stands in opposition to the philosophy of transcendence and rupture, severing ties with any religious philosophy that defers human life to another world beyond the one in which human beings actually live.

Within this framework, three central concepts in Arkoun's thought reveal his strategy of embedding the text within its historical roots: *the communities of the written and oral text*s and *the Qur'anic event* (Mustafa Kihal, 2006, p. 159).

According to Mohammed Arkoun, these concepts reveal how the attributes of sanctification, transcendence, abstraction, and metaphysical remoteness are stripped away from many perceptions and meanings, situating them within immanent human processes. In this context, Arkoun distinguishes between two levels of divine speech: absolute speech and relative speech.

The first level represents the totality and finality of God's speech, while the second denotes the divine speech revealed to humanity through prophets and messengers. God's speech is inexhaustible, and humankind does not and cannot know it in its entirety. The successive revelations to Moses, Jesus, and finally to Muḥammad, peace be upon them, constitute only fragmented portions of that speech. The notion of the heavenly book serves merely as a symbolic expression of the belief that there exists a celestial book encompassing the totality of God's speech, which resides solely in the heavens. Whatever the case, the Qur'anic discourse represents an earthly manifestation of the divine Word (Mohammed Arkoun, Secularism and Religion: Islam, Christianity, and the West, 1996, p. 83).

This means that the Qur'an is a partial, earthly, and human manifestation conveyed through the Prophet Muḥammad, peace be upon him, because it was embodied in the human language of Arabic in the seventh century CE. It was directed toward human minds and revealed in connection with social and economic circumstances in the Arabian Peninsula. The Qur'an itself repeatedly emphasises the existence of an eternal, infinite divine speech preserved in the *Umm al-Kitāb* (the Mother of the Book) and of revelation sent down to earth as its manifested, visible, linguistically expressible, and readable portion, a segment of God's infinite speech, which is one of His divine attributes (Arkoun, The Qur'an: From Inherited Exegesis to the Analysis of Religious Discourse, p. 22).

Revelation addressed to humanity through the prophets constitutes part of this infinite divine speech. The origins of this distinction between two levels of divine speech can be traced to the Muʿtazilites, in their doctrine of the Qur'an's createdness. Since, according to their conception, speech is an attribute of divine action rather than an attribute of divine essence and since the attributes of action are contingent upon the existence of the world, this implies that God's speech is created and not eternal; thus, the Qur'an is also created.

The assertion that the Qur'an is created is not mere rhetoric; it entails the incorporation of the dimensions of culture and language into the formulation of the problem dimensions that are products of human activity and must therefore be taken into account in any intellectual endeavour. This signifies the recognition of reason's responsibility and its contribution to the act of appropriation (Arkoun, Secularism and Religion, p. 61). In other words, the Qur'an possesses both a transcendent, divine dimension and a natural, human dimension, marked by its historicity and relativity. Any reflection on revelation that fails to acknowledge the interplay between these two dimensions remains incomplete.

Religious texts are not detached from the cultural and linguistic environments within which they were formed. The divine origin of these texts in no way negates the fact that they are linguistic in nature and are entirely subject to the temporal and spatial dimensions of their historical and social contexts. That which exists beyond language and precedes it bears no direct relation to us as human beings, nor do we possess the epistemological or methodological tools necessary to subject it to study (Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, 1995, p. 119).

Divine speech becomes accessible to us only when it is situated within a human language, beginning from the moment the Prophet Muḥammad, peace be upon him, uttered the revelation. The transcendent manifests itself solely through history, and the sacred appears only through the world. Revelation, as the speech of God, can be read and understood only through a specific language. Islamic revelation was articulated in Arabic, in accordance with the linguistic conventions and discursive structures of the Arabs of that time; it is, therefore, an Arabic discourse. Moreover, its contextual circumstances, as well as the occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), always refer to concrete events and practices situated in time and space. From this emerges the humanistic and temporal character of revelation (Ali Harb, 1995, p. 95).

For Mohammed Arkoun, humanising revelation entails subjecting religious texts to scientific and historical analysis. What concerns Arkoun is not divine speech in its absolute form but rather the Qur'anic discourse revealed through a vertical movement, embodied first in an oral human language and later in written form. In this sense, Arkoun adopts a worldly, immanent understanding of revelation, aiming to strip the phenomenon of revelation and prophetic discourse of the mechanisms of sanctification and transcendence by exposing these very mechanisms. To study revelation scientifically is to approach it as a linguistic and social construct. What has been spoken, known, interpreted, and lived within the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic contexts must be examined as a linguistic and social structure underpinned by shared historical solidarities (Arkoun, The Qur'an: From Inherited Exegesis to the Analysis of Religious Discourse).

To achieve what Arkoun terms a *methodological and epistemological displacement* of religious thought and revelation from traditional theological grounds to the horizons of free inquiry into meaning, he proposes a distinction between two concepts: the *communities of the Mother of the Book* and the *term "Mother of the Book" itself.* The latter, a theological term, is replaced by Arkoun with

a more anthropological notion: "the community of the Mother of the Book" or "the ordinary book." He aims to demonstrate that the theological concept of the Book corresponds to a material object, something tangible, handled, and circulated, which, as history shows, is often appropriated by the political authority embodied in the state apparatus (Mohammed Arkoun, *Where Is Islamic Thought?*).

All religions, according to Arkoun, are compelled to use the book in its material and ordinary sense to disseminate their threefold theories of revelation. Without revelation in the form of a material book inscribed in a particular human language, it would neither have been transmitted through the centuries nor spread widely. However, theology developed within sectarian frameworks, and as a result, sanctification shifted from the *Umm al-Kitāb* to the material book itself, which was mediated through hermeneutical reasons (Arkoun, Islam, Europe, the West, 2001, p. 21).

This entails restoring the Book to its historical and cultural contingency, stripping away the layers of obfuscation and mythological visions surrounding the phenomenon of the Book, and shifting from the transcendent to the human sphere while removing the sanctifying aura from political authority (Arkoun, Islam, Europe, the West, 2001, p. 58). To distinguish between the book in its common understanding and the "sacred book," Mohammed Arkoun provides an example of how the Gospels were compiled. This formation reveals a functional differentiation between the book in its ordinary sense and the book in its sacred sense.

It is well known that the Gospels were written in Greek rather than in Aramaic, the language of Jesus, because Greek possessed greater cultural power and wider circulation. Aramaic, by contrast, was merely a modest dialect among the Semitic languages, with far less cultural capital in terms of its literary corpus than Greek. This choice illustrates how a sacred text emerges within and is shaped by historical, linguistic, and cultural conditions rather than existing in a purely transcendent realm (Arkoun, Islam, Europe, the West, 2001, p. 58).

This constitutes compelling evidence of the profound impact produced by the ordinary book: by relinquishing the original form of the message, Christian theologians sought to disseminate Christianity more effectively (Arkoun, The Qur'an: From Inherited Exegesis to the Analysis of Religious Discourse, p. 81).

Communities of the Book and the Qur'anic Event:

Mohammed Arkoun interprets the relationship between the *Umm al-Kitāb* (the Mother of the Book) and the ordinary book through an anthropological and cultural lens by invoking the notion of the conflict between oral and written reason. Written reason is the force that imposes its propositions, definitions, classifications, and system of truths upon society through the practical solidarity of four powers, ultimately resulting in its domination over the entire social sphere. These four powers are the state, writing, and culture (Arkoun, Where Is Islamic Thought?, p. 59).

Consequently, the concept of the "communities of the Mother of the Book" encompasses two essential dimensions of tradition. The first is the historicity of all cultural processes and scholarly practices through which the sacred text is integrated into the social body. The second is the sociology of reception, which refers to how the social and cultural attributes of tradition are received and transmitted within society (Arkoun, *The Qur'an: From Inherited Exegesis to the Analysis of Religious Discourse*, p. 82).

Mohammed Arkoun ultimately delineates the stages of what he terms the system of production of the communities of the sacred book and the ordinary book, which he summarises in four key phases:

- **Inaugural events:** Torah, Gospels, and Qur'an, earthly history and history of salvation.
- **Witnesses to revelation:** the apostles or the *ṣaḥābah* (Companions), who ensured the faithful transmission of revelation; the *tābiʿūn* (Successors); the interpretive community; the imaginative generation of the living tradition; the living collective memory.
- **Written codifications** and the oral transmission of living tradition.
- **Interpretive readings** and the struggle of interpretations (Arkoun, The Qur'an: From Inherited Exegesis to the Analysis of Religious Discourse, p. 91).

The term *"Qur'an"* refers exclusively to the oral message that the Prophet conveyed to the community. What was compiled after his death in a specific arrangement and recorded between two

covers differs from the original oral proclamation. Even the Companions themselves were not initially in agreement regarding the legitimacy of this compilation, which had neither been carried out nor commanded by the Prophet (Mustafa Kihal, p. 168). As with other religions, Islam in its beginnings consisted of an oral discourse, which was memorised and transmitted verbatim by the Companions, who acted as witnesses conveying what they had heard and seen. This marks the transition from an oral state to a written textual state.

In his analysis of the problematic history of the Qur'anic text, that is, the *muṣḥaf*, Mohammed Arkoun seeks to move beyond the traditional narrative of Islamic heritage. He casts doubt on the process by which the Qur'anic message transitioned from an oral discourse to an official written codex, arguing that this transformation involved extensive processes of deletion, selection, and linguistic manipulation. Not all oral discourse was transcribed; some elements were lost along the way, as specific manuscripts, such as the codex of Ibn Masʿūd, were destroyed. This process unfolded under heated conditions of political struggle over power and legitimacy (Arkoun, *Secularism and Religion*, p. 46).

According to Arkoun, this claim is corroborated by modern linguistics, which highlights the crucial distinction between oral and written texts. As he explains, certain elements are inevitably lost or altered during the shift from an oral to a written stage (Mohammed Arkoun, Fundamentalist Thought and the Impossibility of Foundation, 1996, p. 53).

According to Mohammed Arkoun, the implication of this is that the *muṣḥaf* we possess today is not the Qur'an, as it was initially revealed; it has undergone modification in accordance with the requirements and constraints of the writing system. Intellectual liberation, he argues, is impossible without a historical perspective on this transformation. He frames the problem of this transition in terms of identifying the epistemological status of meaning produced at the linguistic and historical level of oral discourse and distinguishing it from that of written discourse. This distinction is well understood by linguists, particularly when they refer to the general context in which oral speech was first uttered (Mohammed Arkoun, Issues in the Critique of Religious Reason, 2000, p. 188).

By "circumstances of discourse," Arkoun refers to the totality of conditions, circumstances, and contexts in which the Prophet Muḥammad, peace be upon him, performed the speech act directed at both his believing followers and his opponents. Unlike the Prophet's contemporaries, all subsequent believers did not experience the specific circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) that the Prophet did. Although the Companions lived through these events, later generations sought to reconstruct them, and their partial documentation did not occur until at least two or three generations after the events themselves. It is therefore unsurprising that these accounts were subject to considerable fabrication and distortion (Abdelmajid Charfi, p. 188).

This logic of analysis has led some scholars to distinguish between three levels: the **Qur'an**, the **muṣḥaf**, and the **kitāb**. To conflate these levels, Arkoun maintains that it is an ideological act. The **Qur'an** represents the oral message; the **muṣḥaf** represents the written text compiled after the Prophet's death, subject to complex historical and political circumstances; and the **kitāb** is a foundational juristic concept that has come to be used synonymously with both the Qur'an and the muṣḥaf, despite its distinct meaning within the Qur'anic text itself (Nader Hammami, 2006, p. 53).

From here, Arkoun draws a fundamental distinction between **the Qur'an and Islam**, between **the Qur'anic event (*Le Fait Coranique*)** and **the Islamic event (*Le Fait Islamique*)**, or between **the Qur'anic phenomenon** and **the Islamic phenomenon**. He noted that the first to use the term "Qur'anic phenomenon" was Malek Bennabi in the past century, albeit within a reverential and sacralising framework (Arkoun, Issues in the Critique of Religious Reason, p. 12).

Mohammed Arkoun understands the **Qur'anic event** as a **linguistic, cultural, and religious occurrence** that divided the Arab space into two distinct domains: the realm of "wild thought" and the realm of "learned thought." This division marks the difference between pre-Qur'anic jāhilī society and the politically organised society that emerged after the Qur'an, culminating in the establishment of the Islamic state by the Prophet Muḥammad, peace be upon him, in 622 CE (Arkoun, Issues in the Critique of Religious Reason, p. 187).

Arkoun aims to demonstrate the relationship between the Qur'anic event and the Islamic event and to underscore that the two do not coincide. The Qur'anic event signifies the **historical emergence of a new phenomenon** circumscribed in both time and space. It cannot be reduced merely to the textual corpus transmitted to us since its formation; instead, it requires a new analytical strategy. The Islamic event, however, does not derive wholly from the Qur'anic event, contrary to the assumption of the general Muslim public and the claims of reverential tradition. Traditional heritage, Arkoun argues, is not concerned with historical criticism but with the consolidation of a normative model (Arkoun, Islam, Europe, the West: Stakes of Meaning and Wills of Domination, p. 12).

This distinction between the Qur'anic event and the Islamic event seeks to reveal the **historicity of all transformations and processes** that unfolded under the influence of the Islamic event. The Qur'an, he maintains, does not transcend history, and the Islamic event is itself a historical phenomenon produced by ideological strategies. Therefore, "Arkoun calls for moving beyond negative historicity to positive historicity" (Sebaï Lakhdar, 2015) Arkoun proposed examining Islam at three distinct levels:

➢ **First Islam**: the *religion of power*;
➢ **Second Islam**: the *religion of forms*;
➢ **Third Islam**: the *religion of the individual*.

The relationship between these levels can be grasped by differentiating and disentangling the shared lived experience, distributing it between transcendence and immanence, between mystical and ritual desire, between independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) and imitation (*taqlīd*), and between openness and withdrawal (Mohammed Arkoun, "From the Concept of Islam to How Islam Is Today, 1988, p. 47).

The Prophetic Text and Its Rereading:

The Prophetic text, or the Sunnah, occupied the **second position in Islamic legislation** after the Qur'anic text. It continues to serve as a **practical point of reference** for Muslims across sectarian and doctrinal lines. This prominent status of the Prophetic text is also acknowledged within modernist discourse, in which Mohammed Arkoun regards the hadith corpus, alongside the Qur'anic text, as a **living heritage** (Arkoun, Islamic Thought: A Scientific Reading, p. 21).

This elevated status accords with the Prophetic text that has led Muslims to devote significant efforts to the **collection, preservation, and transmission of hadith**, giving rise to a set of scholarly disciplines collectively known as the *sciences of hadith*. From this standpoint, modernist discourse engages critically with the Sunnah, seeking to **destabilise established convictions, challenging its binding authority**, and **asserting its historicity**. For Arkoun, modernity itself entails the establishment of a **radical rupture with heritage**, whether this heritage is general, as in the ancient traditions of all nations, or written and sacred, as in the case of the Islamic tradition (Arkoun, Islamic Thought: A Scientific Reading, p. 22).

In his effort to **displace prevailing convictions regarding Prophetic texts**, Mohammed Arkoun addresses several key issues. The first concerns the very **term "Sunnah"**, followed by his perspective on the **Prophetic Biography (sīrah)**. With respect to the concept of *ḥadīth*, Arkoun distinguishes between its common usage among Muslim scholars, jurists, theologians, and traditionists, which, he argues, did not fully crystallise until the time of Umar ibn Abdelaziz (Arkoun, Islamic Thought: A Scientific Reading, p. 22).

Another pivotal step in consolidating the notion of Sunnah, in Arkoun's view, was the intellectual effort of Al-Shafi'i, through which the Sunnah came to be recognised as the **second source of Islamic legislation**. This development, he maintains, **elevated the Prophetic text to the rank of the foundational sources of religion**, imbuing it with a **sacred status** (Arkoun, Islamic Thought: A Scientific Reading, p. 23). By implication, Arkoun does not consider the Sunnah a sacred text in itself; rather, **sacrality was conferred upon it** through historical processes, a view that resonates with other proponents of modernist thought.

Arkoun asserts that *ḥadīth* became **interwoven with the cultural legacies of competing social groups**, shaping the collective perceptions of religious authority. He clearly states:

"In reality, the Prophetic hadiths are originally both a collective and individual production. They reflect certain slow-moving linguistic and psychological processes, all of which contributed to the formation of the general Islamic spirit and the Islamic mentality in the anthropological sense, for they provide us with information about the reciprocal interactions between the teachings of the Qur'anic text then in a state of gradual closure and the customary and cultural realities prevailing within the various milieus in which the Qur'anic phenomenon spread." (Mohammed Arkoun, Fundamentalist Thought and the Impossibility of Foundation, p. 201)

Mohammed Arkoun pushes his analysis of the **Prophetic Biography (sīrah)** to the point of arguing that it reproduces or generates what in the field of semiotics is known as **manipulation**: a process involving persuasion, competence, use, and recognition or validation, ultimately making possible the interpretive act through manipulation of the **narrative structure** at its earliest, most primitive stage (Mohammed Arkoun, The Historicity of Islamic Thought, p. 83).

According to Arkoun, the **mythical dimension** of the Prophet's biography has become more dominant than the historical dimension because of popular beliefs, exaggerations, and the accumulation of legendary elements. To read the sīrah within the framework of new epistemological perspectives, he proposes three analytical orientations:

➢ **The psychological, social, and cultural origins of the Islamic imagination**, its functions, and modes of production are exemplified by movements such as the Abbasid Revolution, the Ikhwan movement, and the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

➢ **The narrative technique is a mechanism for producing meaning** that nourishes the collective imagination, weaving a narrative fabric of events to shape worldviews, reinforcing certain beliefs, elevating particular values, or neutralising the past to integrate it into a new order.

➢ **The historical and cultural conditions govern the transformation of collective imagination**, specifically the transition from myth or legend to history and subsequently to the present stage of Islamic societies and Islamic thought (Arkoun, Islamic Thought: A Scientific Reading, p. 76.).

A renewed reading of the Prophetic discourse, Arkoun maintains, requires **deconstructing the structure and functions of imagination**, as well as analysing **narrative art and its role in producing meaning** that feeds collective imagination and strengthens belief systems and value hierarchies. Thus, Arkoun treats the Qur'anic text in the same critical manner that Western scholars have applied to their own sacred texts. His critique, therefore, is directed not only at the exegetical tradition but also at the **Qur'anic text itself** (Mustafa Kihal, p. 268).

Conclusion

The intellectual project of Mohammed Arkoun stands out as one of the most prominent Arab intellectual endeavors to question religious reason and to reopen the fil of sacred texts in light of modern methodologies in linguistics, anthropology, and comparative history. His reading of the religious text was not an attempt to dismantle the sacred or strip it of its divine dimension; instead, it was an effort to **recover the human and historical meaning of the text** as a **linguistic and cultural phenomenon** formed within specific social and historical conditions.

Arkoun grounded his approach in a **multidimensional epistemological strategy**, built upon the concepts of *displacement*, *humanisation*, and *intellectual archaeology*, aiming to **deconstruct the theological structures** that surround the text and prevent it from becoming an object of critical thought. He calls for **moving the text from the closed realm of sacrality to the open sphere of free scientific understanding**, where its history, formation, and modes of reception within the collective Islamic consciousness can be critically examined.

The actual value of Arkoun's project lies not only in its conclusions Rather, in establishing a new concept of humanity by deconstructing the text in accordance with its current issues, his project was: "an attempt to establish a project of humanity in a different way, a concept that has always been misused and misapplied." (El-Arabi Miloud, 2016) but also in its **methodological audacity**, which reawakened within Islamic thought the capacity for questioning, critique, and rethinking. His **reading**

strategy thus represents a call to establish a **new hermeneutical reason** capable of engaging with the religious text as a discourse open to history, humanity, and meaning, not as a closed document confined to a single, authoritarian mode of interpretation.

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