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Critical Study of Conventional and Scientific Exegesis of Qur'ānic Medical Theories (Study of Word Al-'Alaq)

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How to Cite:

Maryam Khansa and Dr. Sajila Kausar. 2024: "Critical Study of Conventional and Scientific Exegesis of Qur'ānic Medical Theories (Study of Word Al-'Alaq)". *Al-Mithāq (Research Journal of Islamic Theology)* 3 (01):129-136.

Article History:

Received:
19-05-2024

Accepted:
15-06-2024

Published:
30-06-2024

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Conflict of Interest:

Author(s) declared no conflict of interest

Abstract & Indexing



Publisher



HIRA INSTITUTE
of Social Sciences Research & Development

Critical Study of Conventional and Scientific Exegesis of Qur'ānic Medical Theories (Study of Word Al-'Alaq)

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Abstract:

Qur'ān is a book of guidance in all walks of life. Some Qur'ānic verses have scientific theories. In Arabic language its interpretation is correct but in other languages like English and Urdu there are many contradictions found same; in case of 'Alaq the scientific and conventional exegeses have different translation and interpretation. These contradictions are main hurdles for our young generation in comprehension from *Qur'ān*. So, this confliction addressing us and ask our religious scholars to correct our religious literature of exegeses. The word 'Alaq mean a substance cling with the uterus wall after zygotic stage, so we can say it a clinging substance. Its mean it is not a blood clot because a blood clot has no ability or power to produce a baby. The "Nutfah", the genetic material, contributed by the parents is not derived from blood. This is the result of fertilization of the mother's ovum by the father sperm. This grows to small microscope ball of cells that is embedded in mother's womb, and is known as 'Alaqah' but this is not blood.

Keywords: *Qur'ān, Exegeses, Al-'Alaq, Genetic Material, Clinging Substance.*

Introduction

The Glorious Qur'ān is the Book of Allah, who has promised to safeguard its purity from any violation. It is compulsory on each and every person who seeks the dignity of this world and the bliss of the Hereafter, to regulate his life according to it. We must implement its commandments and pay homage to the magnificence of the One Who revealed it. This is an easy task for those favoured with guidance from Allah, especially those blessed by having an understanding of Arabic, the language of divine revelation. But for those not acquainted with Arabic, their ignorance is a barrier between them and the source of guidance and illumination. For this reason, translating the message of Allah is not a task to be taken lightly or done superficially. According to the trend of scientific exegesis, some facts are clearly proved that there is contradiction in translation and interpretation of some verses of Holy Qur'ān. In this article we try our best to highlight this issue.

The Conventional or Classical Translation

The first revealed verse of Holy Qur'ān surah Al-'Alaq its second verse is the example in which the word 'Alaq mean clinging substance the mostly translated as congealed blood or blood clot.

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ¹.

The English Translation of this Verse

- 'Alaq (علق) is usually translated into English as a clinging substance or clot, and refers to an early stage in the development of the embryo in the womb.²
- He created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood)³.
- He created man from a hanging mass (clinging) like a leech (in the mother's womb)⁴
- He created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood).⁵
- Created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood.⁶
- Created man from a clot of blood.⁷
- A Qadiani Ahmadi translation: Created man from a clot of blood. And its Urdu translation by Mirza Tahir is:

اُس نے انسان کو ایک چمٹ جانے والے لو تھڑے سے پیدا کیا⁸

- Abul-A'alā Maudūdī in *Tafhīm al Qur'ān* Urdu translation:

جسے ہوئے خون کے ایک لو تھڑے سے انسان کی تخلیق کی⁹

In English exegesis he exegete as “after making mention generally of the creation of the universe, mention has been made of man in particular, saying how Allah made him a perfect starting his creation from an insignificant and humble state. 'Alaq is plural of 'Alaqah, which means congealed blood. This is the primary state of the embryo which appears a few days after conception. Then it assumes the form of a lump of flesh, then afterwards it gradually takes human shape.”

• جس نے انسان کو خون کے لو تھڑے سے پیدا کیا۔¹⁰

• جس نے انسان کو خون کی پھٹکی سے بنایا۔¹¹

Sahih International translation:

- Created man from a clinging substance.¹²
- Created man from an embryo.¹³

Conventional Exegesis of 'Alaq

1. **Tafsīr Ibn e 'Abbās (R.A):** (Created man) i.e. the son of Adam (from a clot) and the Prophet (ﷺ) said: “what shall I read?” And Gabriel read to him the first four verses of this surah.¹⁴
2. **Tafsīr M'ārif ul Qur'ān:** (Created man from a clot of blood.) The previous verse referred to the creation of macrocosm, the large or entire universe in general. In this verse, the phrase is “khalāqa'l-insan” which refers to the creation of microcosm “the best, noblest or most honourable creation”, Man. If analysed carefully, we notice that man is the epitome of macrocosm or the large universe. He is a small-scale representation, analogue, or miniature of the large and complex universe. Another reason why man has been particularly mentioned is that the purpose of Prophet-hood, messenger-hood and revelation of the Qur'ān is the implementation of Divine ordinances, injunctions and laws and acting upon them: This is the essential peculiarity of mankind. The word 'alaq, being the plural of 'alaqatun, means 'congealed blood'. The creation of man has passed and passes through various phases. His primordial creation is from the four major elements, that is, earth, water, fire and air. His procreation is from an insignificant and humble state, the sperm which then transforms into congealed blood. This is the primary state of the embryo which happens after the

conception. Then it takes the shape of a lump of flesh and then the skeletal structure is created. 'Alaqaḥ is the middle phase in the whole process of creation. The specific mention of 'alaqaḥ covers the initial stage and the final stage of the process of creation.¹⁵

3. **Tafsīr Jalālain:** Created man (al-insan: the generic) from a blood-clot ('alaqa is the plural of 'alaqa, which is a small quantity of congealing blood).

Literal Meaning of 'Alaqa

Alaqa, literally “a thing that clings”, a derivative of the root ‘-l-q, mentioned six times in the Qur’ān as a stage during embryogenesis. It occurs once as the collective noun ‘alaq. He created man from a clinging substance. And five times in its singular form, ‘alaqa.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِن كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّنَ الْبُعْثِ فَإِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِّن تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِّن نُّطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِّن عَلَقَةٍ ثُمَّ مِّن مَّضْغَةٍ مُّخَلَّقَةٍ وَغَيْرِ مُخَلَّقَةٍ لِّنُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ وَنُقِرُّ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ مَا نَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ثُمَّ نُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِتَبْلُغُوا أَشُدَّكُمْ وَمِنْكُمْ مَّن يُتَوَفَّىٰ وَمِنْكُمْ مَّن يُرَدُّ إِلَىٰ أَرْذَلِ الْعُمُرِ لِكَيْلَا يَعْلَمَ مَن بَعْدَ عِلْمٍ شَيْنًا وَتَرَىٰ الْأَرْضَ هَامِدَةً فَإِذَا أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْهَا الْمَاءَ اهْتَزَّتْ وَرَبَتْ وَأَنْبَتَتْ مِن كُلِّ زَوْجٍ بَهِيجٍ¹⁶

O mankind! If you are in doubt about the Resurrection, then verily We have created you (i.e., Adam) from dust, then from a Nuṭfah (mix of mankind! If you are in doubt about the Resurrection, then verily We have created you (i.e., Adam) from dust, then from a Nuṭfah (mixed drops of male and female sexual discharge i.e., the offspring of Adam), then from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood) then from a little lump of flesh - some formed and some unformed (as in the case of miscarriage) - that We may make (it) clear to you (i.e., to show you Our Power and Ability to do what We will). And We cause whom We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed term, then We bring you out as infants, then (give you growth) that you may reach your age of full strength. And among you there is he who dies (young), and among you there is he who is brought back to the miserable old age, so that he knows nothing after having known. And you see the earth barren, but when We send down water (rain) on it, it is stirred (to life), and it swells and puts forth every lovely kind (of growth).ed drops of male and female sexual discharge i.e. the offspring of Adam), then from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood) then from a little lump of flesh - some formed and some unformed (as in the case of miscarriage) - that We may make (it) clear to you (i.e. to show you Our Power and Ability to do what We will). And We cause whom We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed term, then We bring you out as infants, then (give you growth) that you may reach your age of full strength. And among you there is he who dies (young), and among you there is he who is brought back to the miserable old age, so that he knows nothing after having known. And you see the earth barren, but when We send down water (rain) on it, it is stirred (to life), and it swells and puts forth every lovely kind (of growth).¹⁷

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِّن تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِّن نُّطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِّن عَلَقَةٍ ثُمَّ يُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِتَبْلُغُوا أَشُدَّكُمْ ثُمَّ لِتَكُونُوا شُيُوخًا وَمِنْكُمْ مَّن يُتَوَفَّىٰ مِن قَبْلٍ وَلِتَبْلُغُوا أَجَلًا مُّسَمًّى وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ¹⁸

He it is Who created you from dust, then from a sperm-drop, then from a clot; then He brings you out as an infant, then causes you to grow into full maturity, and then causes you to grow further so that you may reach old age, while some of you He recalls earlier.

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِنْ طِينٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُطْفَةً فِي قَرَارٍ مَكِينٍ ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً¹⁹

We created man from an extract of clay. Then We made him as a drop in a place of settlement, firmly fixed. Then we made the drop into an *al-'alqah* (leech, suspended thing, and blood clot), then We made the *al-'alqah* into a *mudghah* (chewed substance).

Literally, the Arabic word *al-'alqah* has three meanings:

1. Leech
2. Suspended Thing
3. Blood Clot.

In Arabic as mentioned below:

مِنْ عَلَقٍ جَمْعُ عَلَقَةٍ وَهِيَ النُّطْفَةُ فِي الطُّورِ الثَّانِي «قِطْعَةٌ مِنَ الدَّمِ الْغَلِيظِ»

Blood clot chemically changed from semen.

أَلَمْ يَكُنْ نُطْفَةً مِنْ مَائِي يُمْنَى ثُمَّ كَانَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقَ فَسَوَى²⁰

Alam yaku nutfatan min manayyin yumna (أَلَمْ يَكُنْ نُطْفَةً مِنْ مَائِي)	Transliteration
Was he not a drop of sperm emitted (in lowly form)?	Yusuf Ali
Was he not a small seed in the seminal elements?	Shakir
Was he not a drop of fluid which gushed forth?	Pickthal
Was he not a Nutfah (mixed male and female sexual discharge) of semen emitted (poured forth)?	Mohsin Khan
Had he not been a sperm from semen emitted?	Sahih

Scientific Exegesis

1. **Leech:** In comparing a leech to an embryo in the *alqaqah* stage, we find similarity between the two²¹ as we can see in figure 1. Also, the embryo at this stage obtains nourishment from the blood of the mother, similar to the leech, which feeds on the blood of others.²²

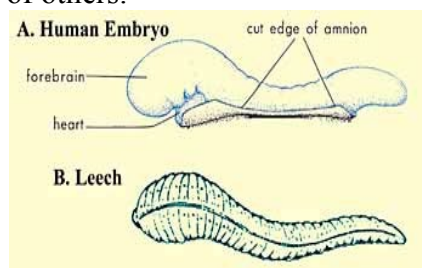


Figure 1: Drawings illustrating the similarities in appearance between a leech and a human embryo at the *alqaqah* stage. (Leech drawing from Human Development as Described in the Qur'an and Sunnah, Moore and others, p. 37, modified from Integrated Principles of Zoology, Hickman and others.²³

2. **Suspended Thing:** The second meaning of the word *alqaqah* is "suspended thing." This is what we can see in figures 2 and 3, the suspension of the embryo, during the *alqaqah* stage, in the womb of the mother.

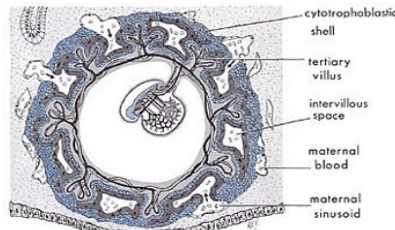


Figure 2: We can see in this diagram the suspension of an embryo during the *alaqah* stage in the womb (uterus) of the mother.²⁴

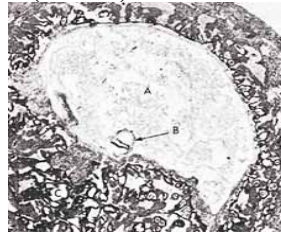


Figure 3: In this photomicrograph, we can see the suspension of an embryo (marked B) during the *alaqah* stage (about 15 days old) in the womb of the mother. The actual size of the embryo is about 0.6 mm. (The Developing Human, Moore, 3rd ed., p. 66, from Histology, Leeson and Leeson.)

- 3. Blood Clot:** The third meaning of the word *alaqah* is “blood clot.” We find that the external appearance of the embryo and its sacs during the *alaqah* stage is similar to that of a blood clot. This is due to the presence of relatively large amounts of blood present in the embryo during this stage²⁵ See figure 4. Also, during this stage, the blood in the embryo does not circulate until the end of the third week.²⁶ Thus, the embryo at this stage is like a clot of blood.

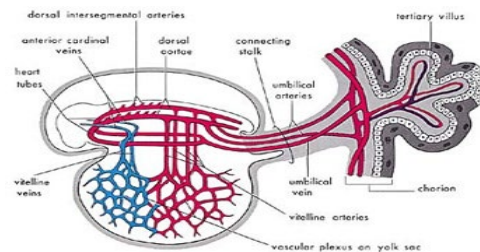


Figure 4: Diagram of the primitive cardiovascular system in an embryo during the *alaqah* stage. The external appearance of the embryo and its sacs is similar to that of a blood clot, due to the presence of relatively large amounts of blood present in the embryo.²⁷ (So the three meanings of the word *alaqah* correspond accurately to the descriptions of the embryo at the *alaqah* stage.

If we translate *alaq* as a clinging substance than its scientific interpretation would be;

‘Alaq a Clinging Substance

The “Alaq” Clinging to the Uterus.



If we continue to examine the facts announced to us in the Qur'ān, about the formation of human beings, we again encounter some very important scientific truth. When the sperm of the male unites with the ovum of the female, the essence of the baby to be born is formed. This single cell, known as a "zygote" in biology, will instantly begin reproducing by dividing, and eventually become a "piece of flesh," called an embryo. This, of course, can only be seen by human beings with the aid of a microscope.

The embryo, however, does not spend its developmental period in a void. It clings to the uterus, with something like roots that is firmly fixed to the earth by its tendrils. Through this bond, the embryo can obtain the substances essential to its development from the mother's body. Here, an important miracle of the Qur'ān is revealed. While referring to the embryo developing in the mother's womb.

The meaning of the word "alaq" in Arabic is "a thing that clings to some place." The word is literally used to describe leeches that cling to a body to suck blood. Certainly, the use of such a specific word for the embryo developing in the mother's womb proves once again that the Qur'ān is the Word of Allah, the Lord of all the Worlds.²⁸

So, the 'alaq mean Blood clot, clinging substance, Suspended things and Leech. But Professor Muhammad Aata in his book "The Mystery of 'ALAQ" writes the meaning of word 'alaq previously understood as blood or leech like clot is wrong but has deeper spiritual meanings. He argued that, no doubt a blood clot is sticky, but the clotting of the blood has no relationship to the fatal development. The "nuṭfah", the genetic material, contributed by the parents is not derived from blood. This is the result of fertilization of the mother's ovum by the father sperm. This grows to small microscope ball of cells that is embedded in mother's womb, and is known as 'Alaqah' but this is not blood. 'Alaqah of course sticks to the walls of the womb for nine months. But the stick area develops into placenta which does not grow to a baby. To summarize this debate of meaning of alaq he writes it may be appropriate to translate either "out of his love" and its second meaning "Beloved Human Conjugate suspended divinely for life".²⁹

Professor Abdul Haleem mentions that "alaq can also mean anything that clings: a clot of blood, a leech, even a lump of mud. All these meanings involve the basic idea of clinging or sticking.³⁰ The term 'alaqah also occurs in several languages related to Arabic. In Hebrew there is עֲלֻקָּה alûqāh (or alukah), the generic name for any blood-sucking worm or leech³¹ In Aramaic and Syriac there are words with apparently similar meanings.³²

Concluding Note

The word 'alaq mean a substance cling with the uterus wall after zygotic stage, so we can say it a clinging substance. Its mean it is not a blood clot because a blood clot has no ability or power to produce a baby. The "nuṭfah", the genetic material, contributed by the parents is not derived from blood. This is the result of fertilization of the mother's ovum by the father sperm. This grows to small microscope ball of cells that is embedded in mother's womb, and is known as 'Alaqah' but this is not blood.

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