

Reconsidering the Historical-Cultural Anthropology of Clothing and Its Impact on the Interpretation of Related Quranic Verses

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Introduction

As an enduring and rational miracle, the Holy Quran possesses a verbal structure that, although situated within the temporal horizons of the period of revelation, retains a transhistorical capacity for meaning-making. This sacred text was revealed within history yet transcends it; understanding its universal teachings therefore requires movement through three interrelated layers of historical, cultural, and universal understanding. Many exegetes, however, have lacked access to the lifeworld of the Arabs at the time of revelation. As the cultural elements of that period have disappeared from present-day life, readers and exegetes may encounter semantic discontinuity and a sense of textual unfamiliarity. Among the most important of these elements are clothing and dress, which constituted not merely a biological necessity but also part of the semiotic and discursive system of desert societies. Adopting a cultural-anthropological approach, the present study closely reexamines the discourse of clothing and its various functions in the Quran. It aims to reduce exegetical disagreements and clarify how material elements are connected to transcendent truths in the divine word.

Materials and Methods



This study employs documentary-library research and a descriptive-analytical method. At the analytical level, it adopts a historical-cultural anthropological approach in order to study clothing within the lifeworld of the Arabs during the period of revelation. Cultural anthropology makes it possible to understand the material and symbolic elements of a society not in isolation, but in relation to its structures of meaning. Accordingly, the study first examines data concerning types of clothing, modes of dress, and their social and symbolic functions in the Arabian Peninsula. It then analyzes Quranic verses concerning clothing, including those that describe it as a blessing, refer to its ornamental and protective functions, or employ it metaphorically in relation to spouses and the 'garment of piety.' This method seeks to move beyond literal translation and reach the implicit and metaphorical layers of Quranic language. Within this framework, clothing is treated not merely as a lexical item, but as a cultural-religious concept that plays an important role in Quranic discourse construction. The approach thus establishes a coherent relationship among the text, the culture of the period of revelation, and the Quran's universal message.

Results and Findings

The Quran makes highly purposeful use of clothing to express a range of profound meanings. First, clothing is presented as a divine blessing with both concealing and ornamental functions: it protects human beings from nakedness and harm while also manifesting their beauty and dignity. This perspective elevates clothing from an everyday object to a sign of divine mercy and providence. Anthropological analysis further shows that clothing in Arab society took various forms, including tailored and wrapped garments. This distinction is especially important for understanding certain Quranic metaphors. The Quran describes spouses as garments for one another, and the metaphor signifies more than concealment; it evokes the closeness, intertwinement, security, tranquility, and intimacy established between them. Some studies suggest that the modern image of a tailored garment cannot convey the full semantic force of this metaphor. By contrast, the wrapped garment commonly worn at the time, because of its direct and two-sided contact with the body, offers a more precise image of the spouses' emotional and existential bond.

Another major finding concerns the 'garment of piety,' one of the Quran's most distinctive discursive innovations. Here clothing moves beyond the external level and becomes a symbol of inward and moral covering. The garment of piety protects a person from inner ugliness, moral lapses, transgression, and polytheism; it is thus an inward covering that also establishes norms of conduct. By connecting this concept with the story of Adam and Eve, the Quran shows that the collapse of piety is comparable to the loss of one's inward covering. True nakedness, in other words, is the nakedness of the soul and moral character, not merely that of the body. Clothing in the Quran is therefore more than an instrument of concealment: it mediates a movement from the sensible to the intelligible, from body to spirit, and from outward appearance to inward reality. The verses also demonstrate that the Quran speaks to its earliest audience in the language of a familiar culture while elevating that local language to a universal and enduring level. Consequently, clothing in the Quran simultaneously conveys aesthetic, ethical, social, and theological meanings.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that clothing in the Quran is a multilayered concept extending far beyond material covering. Drawing on the lived experience of its first audience, the Quran transforms this cultural element into a means of expressing human relationships with the self, with others, and with God. On the one hand, clothing symbolizes protection, adornment, and dignity; on the other, metaphors such as spouses as garments for one another and the 'garment of piety' express the deepest dimensions of emotional and moral connection. The study's principal conclusion is that interpretations of verses concerning clothing remain incomplete unless they take account of the cultural and anthropological context of the period of revelation. A historical-cultural approach is therefore not simply an auxiliary tool but an essential requirement for Quranic interpretation. By employing tangible and familiar concepts, the Quran articulates truths that transcend time and place, thereby moving from a text revealed in history toward a universal and enduring horizon. The study of clothing in the Quran thus shows that the language of

revelation is profoundly deliberate, symbolic, and attentive to human experience, and that it can establish a lasting bridge between the culture of the period of revelation and humanity's continuing spiritual needs.

Keywords:

Holy Quran; cultural anthropology; clothing; discourse construction.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with research ethics. The authors observed the ethical principles in conducting and publishing this scholarly research, and this is confirmed by all of them.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Funding statement

The authors declare that no funds, grants, or other support were received during the preparation of this manuscript.

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How to cite:

Mohammadian, Hossein & Dehghani, Farzad & Mousavifard, Seyed Abolfazl. (2026). Reconsidering the Historical-Cultural Anthropology of Clothing and Its Impact on the Interpretation of Related Quranic Verses. *Quran, Culture And Civilization*, 7 (3), 1–22. <http://doi.org/10.22034/jksl.2025.528417.1474>