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"A Very Egyptian Thinker". Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd (1943–2010) and His Approach to the Concept of Historicity (tā'rīkhiyya)

Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd (1943-2010), one of the most eminent contemporary Egyptian and Arab thinkers, has played a very important role in the contemporary critical rereading of Muslim thought and developing of hermeneutical approach to the Qur'ān and other Islamic sources. He published more than twenty important works written mostly in Arabic, but also in English, Italian, and German.

The article focuses on Abū Zayd's understanding of the concept of historicity which was presented especially in one of the chapters of the book *Al- Naṣṣ, al-sulṭa, al-ḥaqīqa. Al-Fikr al-dīnī bayna irādat al-maʿrifa wa-irādat al-haymana* ["Text, Authority, and the Truth. Religious Thought between Will of Knowledge and Will of Domination"; Dār al-Bayḍā'– Bayrūt 1995, Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī], published in 1995, in the peak of the so-called "Case of Abū Zayd". The first version of the aforementioned text was included in the book *Al-Tafkīr fī zaman al-takfīr: ḍidda al-jahl wa-al-zayf wa-al-khurāfa* ["Thinking in the Time of Accusations of Apostasy: Against the Ignorance, Lies and Prejudices"; 2nd edition, Al-Qāhira 1995, Maktabat Madbūlī].

The thinker treats historicity as a very important, however ambiguous, category. By using the notion of historicity, Abū Zayd distinguishes himself from the Islamist-oriented scholars who were not able to employ the historical contextualisation in researching Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. Abū Zayd localises roots of this intellectual and theological conflict in the classical period of Islam, when the Muʿtazilite doctrine of the "createdness" of the Qur'ān met the stiff resistance of the supporters of treating the holy book of Islam as the eternal and unchangeable. Abū Zayd's works are characterized by the centrist approach despite of his tendency of engaging in polemics with intellectual adversaries. His non-fanatical attitude seemed to have merits, letting him to stay away from the rifts of the radically anti-Western Islamic left or pure deconstructionism. In that regard, his position was based on an inventive, however non-revolutionary, rereading of the Islamic heritage (*turāth*) combined with trials to apply Western philosophical terminology (e.g. taken from hermeneutics and semiotics) to the Arab discourse/discourses.