

## Rhetoric and Qur'anic Exegesis in 7<sup>th</sup> Century Egypt: A Comparative Reading of Two Texts

Yamen Nouh<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Out of an experienced panoramic eye on the Islamic scholarship, a teacher of Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (d.794/1392) educated him on the classification of the sciences into three categories. The first one includes all the sciences that have matured and have been already exhausted, in which he places the sciences of prophetic traditions *ḥadīth* and jurisprudence *fiqh*. The second category includes the sciences that have matured as well but have not been yet exhausted, such as the sciences of jurisprudential principles *uṣūl al-fiqh* and grammar *nahw*. While the third category is saved for the sciences that have neither matured nor been exhausted, which are the sciences of Qur'anic exegesis *tafsīr* and the science of rhetoric *'ilm al-bayān*.<sup>2</sup> Al-Zarkashī's lesson highlights an interesting correlation between two different fields of knowledge that suffered from the same problems, either in the classical Islamic scholarship or in their projection in modern academia. These are the sciences of *tafsīr* and the Islamic study of rhetoric that is commonly referred to as *'ilm al-bayān* or *'ilm al-balāgha* in a wider, yet technically different, reference.

The differentiation of the study of rhetoric in classical Islamic scholarship seems to be a relatively late phenomenon. As its focus is to study and analyze the eloquence, clarity, and good style of the Arabic literary forms, such as poetry, prose, and, ultimately, the scripture of the *Qur'ān*, the subject matter of *'ilm al-bayān* is much older than itself. The early Arabic poets and public speakers supposedly owned an instinctive sense of eloquence that was expressed in their speech. Hence, the rhetorical devices were in their practice without intellectual enterprises to theorize or understand their mechanisms.<sup>3</sup> One of the early critical studies that differentiated the rhetorical functions was done by al-Jāḥiẓ (d.255/868) in *al-Bayān wa-l-tabīyīn*. Al-Jāḥiẓ generally analyzed the skills that are required in a speaker to be described as eloquent. He also reported early common definitions of eloquence *balāgha* that did not refer to any specific well-defined technical term by that time.<sup>4</sup> The rhetorician and one-day caliph 'Abdullāh ibn al-Mu'tazz (d.296/909) could be the first one to use the term *al-Badī'* to refer to a specific group of literary tools and mechanisms used in poetry and prose. He was not preceded in that attempt, according to his claim.<sup>5</sup>

The study of rhetoric reached a prominent turning point by the time of 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d.471/1078) who established the well-grounded foundations of the field of *balāgha* in his two main works: *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* and *Asrār al-Balāgha*. Though he did not introduce a strict theoretical definition of the concept of *balāgha*, al-Jurjānī carved the paramount methodology to understand and analyze the eloquence of a text through his comprehensive concept of structure, *naẓm*.<sup>6</sup> The course of theorization in the studies of *balāgha* reached its peak by the work of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sakkākī (d.626/1229), *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm*, in which he coined the most sophisticated theoretical classification of the fields of *balāgha*.

---

<sup>1</sup>Graduate student/Teaching assistant, department of Arabic and Islamic civilizations, The American university in Cairo.  
E: [yamen\\_nouh@aucegypt.edu](mailto:yamen_nouh@aucegypt.edu)

<sup>2</sup>Jalāl al-dīn al-Siyūṭī, *Sharḥ 'uqūd al-Jimān fī 'ilm al-Ma'āni wa-l-bayān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), p.3

<sup>3</sup>Ibn Abī al-Iṣḥāq al-Miṣrī, *Badī' al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Nahḍat Miṣr, 1957), p.12

<sup>4</sup>Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Al-Bayān wa-l-tabīyīn* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khāngī, 1998), p.92-96

<sup>5</sup>Abdullāh ibn al-Mu'tazz, *Kitāb al-Badī'* (Beirut: Dār al-Masīrah, 1982), p.58

<sup>6</sup>Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khāngī, 1989), p. 51.

He differentiated the study of *balāgha* into two well-differentiated fields: *'ilm al-Ma'āni* (semantics) and *'ilm al-bayān* (rhetoric) with specific interests for each of them. Later, his most prominent commentator, al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī (d.739/1338) in *Talkhīṣ al-Miftāḥ* added to this well-structured hierarchy *'ilm al-Badī'* that studies the rhetoric tools used to improve the style of a text.<sup>7</sup>

However, this degree of canonization and strict dissection of the fields of rhetoric was not well tolerated by the specialists of *balāgha*. They preferred more taste-oriented employment of these different fields, that they did not perceive as totally distinct. Al-Siyūṭī (d.911/1505) boasted in his autobiography in *Husn al-Muḥādara* that he learned 'the sciences of *ma'āni*, *bayān*, and *badī'* in the Arab's and rhetoricians' style, not in the style of the non-Arabs *'Ajam* and philosophers.<sup>8</sup> Al-Siyūṭī's statement simply illustrates the internal dichotomy within the circles of *balāgha* between the philosophical-oriented approach, that he alienizes by attaching to the philosophical tendency of the non-Arabic (mainly Persian) scholars, on one hand; and, on the other, the taste-oriented approach, that he attaches to the rhetorical talent of the Arabs.

However, the rhetoricians' reticence towards the theoretical approach did not prevent the absolute dominance of the work of al-Sakkākī over the field of *balāgha* for a long time. This is shown by the plethora of commentaries and glosses that were written on his *Miftāḥ* and its *Talkhīṣ* in the following centuries.<sup>9</sup>

### **Balāgha and Tafsīr**

It seems that since the start of the rhetorical studies in Islamic scholarship, three different fields had the greatest influence on it, namely: Grammar, Theology, and Qur'anic exegesis. The early modern scholar Aḥmad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī (d.1952) argues that the early grammarians were the real founders of the field of rhetoric in the Arabo-Islamic culture. He believes that the theories of Sībāwayh (d.180/796) in his *Kitāb* represent the earliest perception of grammar as a comprehensive study of the structure of a text in the widest sense, in a way that exceeds the limited technical definition of the science of *naḥw* as the proper adjustment of the words' endings. This is not the common standpoint in the field, as he admits himself.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, though this argument could be slightly coercive in some respects, it reflects the great influence of the field of Grammar on the studies of *balāgha*. The bare fact that the books of *balāgha* demonstrate is that many of the rhetorical devices are structural, hence grammatical in nature. Even al-Jurjānī starts his introduction of *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* by saying 'this is a brief talk that demonstrates to the reader the general principles of Grammar, and everything that gives a structure *naẓm* its coherence.'<sup>11</sup> This statement by al-Jurjānī introduces the study of rhetoric as a branch of the study of Grammar in its widest sense. Based on that, al-Marāghī could have a valid point from a certain perspective.

Theology, as well, had an undeniable impact on the study of *balāgha*. 'Abd al-Laṭīf Ḥamza in his study of the pre-modern intellectual life in Egypt highlights the fact that most of the prominent names in the rhetorical studies from the second up to the eighth *hijrī* centuries were theologians, logicians, or philosophically oriented scholars in a way or another.<sup>12</sup> The theological debates regarding the concept of *I'jāz al-Qur'an* (the inimitability of the Qur'an) seem to be the main window of theologians on the study of *balāgha*. Though the concept of *I'jāz* was highly controversial within the circles of theology, the employment of *balāgha* in such context stamped it with its rational nature, especially in the later phases. The study of the Arabic literary forms became inseparable from the study of the inimitability of the Qur'an *i'jāz*.

Such intimate connection seems to have worked in both ways. The understanding of the *Qur'an* itself became inseparable from the background understanding of the nature of the classical Arabic styles of eloquence expressed in literary forms, that is the study of *balāgha*. Hence came the controversial connection between Qur'anic exegesis *tafsīr* and rhetoric *balāgha*.

<sup>7</sup>Aḥmad Maṭlūb, *Mu'jam al-Muṣṭalahāt al-balāghīyya wa taṭawurhā* (Beirut: Al-Dār al-'Arabiyya li-l-Mawsū'āt, 2006), p.406

<sup>8</sup>Jalāl al-Dīn al-Siyūṭī, *Husn al-Muḥādara fī Tārīkh Miṣr wa al-Qāhira* (Cairo: Dār Iḥiā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1967), p.338.

"ورزقت التبحر في سبعة علوم: التفسير، والحديث، والفقه، والنحو، والمعاني، والبيان، والبديع؛ على طريقة العرب والبلغاء، لا على طريقة العجم وأهل الفلسفة."

<sup>9</sup>Aḥmad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī, *Tārīkh 'ulūm al-Balāgha wa al-Ta'rif bi-rijālihā* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1950), p.33-38

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p.43.

<sup>11</sup>Al-Jurjānī, *Dalā'il*, p.3.

"هذا كلام وجيز يطالع به الناظر على أصول النحو جملة، وكل ما به يكون النظم دفعة، وينظر منه في مرآة تريبه الأشياء المتباعدة الأمكنة قد التقت له حتى رآها في مكان واحد"

<sup>12</sup>'Abd al-Laṭīf Ḥamza, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Fikriyya fī Miṣr fī al-'aṣrain al-Ayyūbī wa-l-Mamlūkī al-awwal* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, n.d.), p.246-248.

Jārullāh Alzamakhsharī (d.538/1143), who is universally considered the paramount employer of the science of rhetoric in the philological practice of *tafsīr*, announces that a Qur'anic exegete *mufasssīr* can never grasp the gist of the meanings of the *Qur'ān*, even if he is 'a better jurist than all his peers, or a superior theologian to the people of the world, or a more memorizing historian than the native man, or a more eloquent breacher than al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d.110/728), or a stronger grammarian than Sībawayh, or a linguist who chewed languages by his jaws' unless he spends a considerable time studying the two sciences that are specialized in the *Qur'ān*: '*ilm al-mā'ānī* (semantics) and '*ilm al-bayān* (rhetoric).<sup>13</sup>

However, al-Zamakhsharī's marked enthusiasm for the role of the rhetorical sciences in *tafsīr* cannot be taken as a matter of consensus. The prominent *shāfi'i* jurist Sirāj al-Dīn al-Balqīnī (d.805/1403) responded to al-Zamakhsharī on his claim and wondered 'how is it possible that two sciences, which are collectible in few pages and were invented after the time of the prophet's companions *ṣaḥāba* and followers *tabi'in*, outweighs (in *tafsīr*)? And why should people submit to terminologies coined by al-Jurjānī who was followed on them by al-Sakkākī with no apparent evidence? The science of *tafsīr* should be derived from the narrated reports *akhbār* (meaning mainly the prophetic traditions)<sup>14</sup>

Ḥajjī Khalīfa (d.1068/1657) who documented this debate, argues that al-Zamakhsharī and al-Balqīnī are not as opposed as it may seem. In his opinion, they were just speaking about two different points (*lam yatawārada 'alā maḥallin wāhid*). He believes that al-Zamakhsharī does not reject the priority of narrated traditions in *tafsīr*, but he only means that knowing the rhetorical sciences gives an added value.<sup>15</sup> Though such conflict resolution attempt by Ḥajjī Khalīfa may not be perfectly accurate in expressing al-Zamakhsharī's standpoint, it is beneficial to avoid the perception that the two schools of *tafsīr* are as dichotomized as it may be easily thought. The intersections between the philological school and the tradition-based school are more than to be easily dismissed. And this cautious remark does not negate the fact that an acute methodological tension was evident within the field of *tafsīr* between them. As Walid Saleh notices, such complicated competitiveness between the two schools ended up with a marked superiority of the tradition-based school.<sup>16</sup>

### Studies of *balāgha* and Egypt in the seventh century

This background demonstrates that by the seventh century, two main controversies were active and intersecting at the concept of *balāgha*: the theoretical approach versus the taste-oriented approach within the fields of literature and rhetoric from one side,<sup>17</sup> and, on the other side, the conflict between the tradition-based versus the rhetorical-based understanding of the Qur'an within the circles of *tafsīr*.

Many scholars believe that Egypt during that turning point of the seventh century was the main theater for such intellectual tensions. Many of the main figures of rhetoric in the seventh/thirteenth century lived in Egypt for most of their lives or were strongly connected to it in some other way. The list of the prominent names of the field of *balāgha* during that period includes Diā' al-dīn ibn al-Athīr (d.637/1239), Zakī al-dīn ibn abī al-Iṣba' al-Miṣrī (d. 654/1256), 'Abd al-Raḥīm ibn Shaith (d.625/1228)<sup>18</sup> and Jamāl al-Dīn ibn al-Naqīb (d.698/1298).

Nothing can better reflect that intellectual moment in Egypt than the words of the Eighth-century Egyptian scholar Bahā' al-Dīn al-Subkī (d.773/1372). Al-Subkī is the writer of '*Arūs al-Afrāḥ* that is a commentary on al-Qazwīnī's most prominent summary of al-Sakkākī's *Miftāḥ; Talkhīs al-Miftāḥ*. In the introduction, al-Subkī reviews the literature in his specialty to identify the gap that he aims at bridging. He generally says that none of the earlier commentaries on the *Talkhīs* added any remarkable value to the field. He makes an intelligent and humble reflection on the field in which he compares the scholarship of *balāgha* in Egypt to the eastern territories of the Islamic world. He justifies the recession of the theoretical studies of *balāgha* in Egypt by the reason that 'the people of our lands (Egypt) are not in need for it, due to what God granted them of innate proper taste, upright understanding, minds that are more delicate than the breeze, softer than the water of life in the handsome face.

<sup>13</sup>Abū al-Qāsimjārullāh al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshaf anḥaqa'iq al-tanzīlwa'nyūn al-aqāwīlfiwujūh al-tā'wil*(Cairo: MaktabatMiṣr, 2010), p.17-18.

<sup>14</sup>ḤajjīKhalīfa, *Kash al-ḥunūn'anasāmi al-Kutubwa-l-funūn*, (Bagdad: Maktabat al-Muthannā, 1941), p.1475.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Walid Saleh, *Medieval Exegesis: the golden age of tafsīr*, in The Oxford handbook of Qur'anic studies, ed. Mustafa Shah, Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford university press, 2020), p.671-674.

<sup>17</sup>Ibn Abī al-Iṣba' al-Miṣrī, *Taḥrīr al-TaḥbīrifiṢinā'at al-Shi'rwa-l-Naṭhrwa bayan I'jāz al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Al-Majlis al-A'lā li-l-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 1963), p.62-63.

<sup>18</sup>Ḥamza, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Fikriyya*, p.249.

The Nile has given them that sweetness, pointed to them with his finger so that beauty appeared on them. They understand with their nature what scholars, as well as the illiterates, have invested in their lives. They see in the mirror of their shiny reflective hearts the hidden secrets behind the veils...that is the reason they directed their effort to the sciences that are an outcome or a subject matter of *'ilm al-bayān*, such as language, grammar, *fiqh*, *ḥadīth*, and *tafsīr*.<sup>19</sup>

The fascinatingly expressed analysis of al-Subkī perfectly puts our hands on the intellectual status in Egypt by that time. He gives us a list of the sciences that are in the limelight. As well, he defines the affiliation of the rhetoric school of Egypt within the general map of the field. This is better understood in contrast to the eastern school of rhetoric that is dominated, according to al-Subkī, by 'the people who are paramount in the rational sciences and logic,' and have invested their efforts in it until they reached the peak, 'when *The Key* (al-Sakkākī's *Miftāḥ*) has emerged of them, and it was as if the door has been closed on them.' Al-Subkī says that after al-Sakkākī's work, the development of the science has ceased, and no comparable work has been introduced to the field.<sup>20</sup> It is then, al-Subkī proceeds, when 'the science has decided to move...and rushed to Egypt...where he chanted for its people: I have landed in Egypt so my camels are not moving forward or backward' [a famous poetic line for al-Mutanabbī (d.354/965)].<sup>21</sup>

### A comparative reading

Within this context, the current paper will comparatively read the works of two of the main representatives of the study of *balāgha* in Egypt during that phase. The first one is Jamāl al-Dīn ibn al-Naqīb and his *Muqaddima*. This work is originally the introduction of his lost voluminous work of *tafsīr* known as *al-Tahrīr wa-l-taḥbīr*, and it is the only available work for him in print. The second scholar is Zakī al-Dīn ibn abī al-Iṣba' al-Miṣrī. Many of his works are relevant to the current comparison. His book *Baḍī' al-Qur'ān* is a study of the rhetorical styles and devices used in the scripture. It is excerpted from his comprehensive study of *balāgha* titled *Tahrīr al-Taḥbīr*.

The main objective of such comparative reading is to explore the dynamics of the study of *balāgha* in Egypt during that critical turning point, and, more importantly, to see how this course of development of the studies of *balāgha* impacted the field of Qur'anic exegesis *tafsīr*. The reading as well aims at knowing the impact of the two authors on the rhetorical field.

### The *Muqaddima* of ibn al-Naqīb

Ibn al-Naqīb is Jamāl al-Dīn al-Balkhī al-Maqdisī al-Ḥanafī. He was born in Jerusalem in 611/1214. Not much is known about his life except that he moved to Egypt to live most of his life. According to Shams al-dīn al-Dhababī (d.748/1348), he was a judge, exegete, and an ascetic. He left Egypt by the end of his life to die in Jerusalem in 698/1298. He was well known in Egypt for his asceticism and knowledge and spent most of his time in seclusion in al-Azhar mosque. He wrote a large work of *tafsīr* that did not survive except for short excerpts of it. The only available part of the work is its introductory chapter that was printed in 1909 by al-Khāngī publishing house in Cairo but mistakenly attributed to ibn al-Qaiyyim al-Jawziyya (d.751/1350). The editor Zakariyyā Sa'īd

<sup>19</sup>Bahā' al-Dīn al-Subkī, *'Arīs al-Afrāḥ fī sharḥ Talkhiṣ al-Miftāḥ* (Beirut: Al-Maktaba al-'Aṣriyya, 2003), p.20.

"أما أهل بلادنا فهم مستغنون عن ذلك بما طبعهم الله تعالى عليه من الذوق السليم، والفهم المستقيم، والأذهان التي هي أرق من النسيم، وألطف من ماء الحياة في المحيا الوسيم، أكسبهم النيل تلك الحلاوة، وأشار إليهم بإصبعه فظهرت عليهم هذه الطلاوة، فهم يدركون بطباعهم ما أفنت فيه العلماء فضلا عن الأعمار الأعمار، ويرون في مرآة قلوبهم الصقيلة ما احتجب من الأسرار خلف الأستار...فلذلك صرفوا همهم إلى العلوم التي هي نتيجة أو مادة لعلم البيان كاللغة والنحو والفقه والحديث وتفسير القرآن"

<sup>20</sup>Ibid. p.21.

"أما أهل بلاد المشرق الذين لهم اليد الطولى في العلوم، ولا سيما العلوم العقلية والمنطق، فاستوفوا همهم الشامخة في تحصيله، واستولوا بجدهم على جملة وتفصيله، ووردوا مناهل هذا العلم فصدروا من عندها بملء مسجلهم، وكيف لا وقد أجلبوا عليه بخيلهم ورجلهم، فلذلك عمروا منه كل دارس، وعبروا من حصونه المشيدة ما رقد عنه الحارس، وبلغوا عنان السماء في طلبه (ولو كان الدين بالثريا لناله رجال من فارس)، إلى أن خرج عنهم المفتاح فكان الباب أغلق دونهم، وظهر من مشكاة بلاد المغرب المصباح، فكاننا حيل بينه وبينهم وأدارت المنون على قطبهم الدوائر، فتعطلت بوفاته من علومه أفواه المحايير، ويطون الدفاتر، وانقطعت زهراتهم الطيبة عن المقطع، وتسلسل على العضد لسان من يعرف كيف تؤكل الكتف، فلم نظفر بعد هؤلاء الأئمة رحمهم الله تعالى من أهل تلك البلاد بمن مخض هذا العلم فألقى للطالب زبدته، ومخض النصح فنشر على أعطاف العاري بردته...بل ركبت بينهم في هذا الزمان ريحه، وخبث مصابيحها"

By the word '*al-Miṣbah*', I believe he is referring to the book '*al-Miṣbah fī al-Ma'ānī wa-l-bayān wa-l-baḍī'*' for Badr al-dīn ibn al-Nāẓem (d.686/1278)

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. p.22.

"فعد ذلك أزمع هذا العلم الترحل، وأذن بالتحول...وفزع إلى مصر فألقى بها عصا التسيار، وأشد من ناداهم من تلك الديار أقمت بأرض مصر فلا ورائي تخب بي الركاب ولا أممي)"

'Alī in 1994 succeeded to prove the book's attribution to ibn al-Naqīb and it was printed again by the same publishing house in 1995.

As explained, the *Muqaddima* of ibn Al-Naqīb was written in an age of regression of rhetoric studies. The field of rhetoric was still falling under the spell of al-Sakkākī and al-Qazwīnī, and the wider Egyptian intelligentsia was more interested in the fields of *fiqh*, *ḥadīth*, and *tafsīr* as we have been told earlier by al-Subkī. In this light, it is possible to understand the declared intention of Ibn al-Naqīb in writing his work. He said that he wrote it 'for reviving the science of *bayān* that has access to the uniqueness of the structure of the *Qur'an*, which traces have faded, and supporters have decreased, and the efforts have receded to learn its branches as well as its principles. None of the Islamic sciences has been abandoned as much as the science of rhetoric '*ilm al-Bayān* has been.'<sup>22</sup>

It seems that ibn al-Naqīb represents a revivalist pulse within the scholarship that was discontent with the devitalized status of the field of rhetoric. Ibn al-Naqīb elaborates on the importance of the science of rhetoric by saying that 'if they (the scholars) have spent time studying and using it, they would observe in the holy book's hidden aspects that would fill hearts with tenderness, and fine notions that would lead them to the objective.' The revivalist sound that ibn al-Naqīb represents seems to be annoyed by the unemployment of the rhetorical science in the field of *tafsīr*, due to the dominion of the tradition-based approach in *tafsīr*.

Such revivalist pulse should be viewed within the bigger intellectual picture of that historical moment in Egypt. The general intellectual climate was directed by the post-*Fāṭimid* wave of reviving the *Sunni* sciences, that was led by the *Ayyūbid* and Mamluk reigns respectively. It was a part of the policy that aimed at expunging the impacts of the *Isma'ili* Shiite *Fāṭimids* on the social and intellectual life in Egypt, and establishing, or regaining, a well-grounded social foundation for the new *Sunni* political authorities.<sup>23</sup> Hence, the sciences of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* topped the scene. This climate must have empowered the tradition-based approach of *tafsīr* over the rhetoric-based one.

The same perception of the field of *balāgha* that ibn al-Naqīb expresses, is yet expressed by another scholar who died almost one hundred years later than ibn al-Naqīb. In *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'an*, Al-Zarkashī shares the same interest as ibn al-Naqīb, though his book covers a wider scope of the sciences of the *Qur'an*. In the chapter that he dedicates to 'the Quranic styles and eloquent arts', al-Zarkashī states that this topic is the main objective of writing his book, and it's the most important outcome of it.<sup>24</sup> He also condemns the recession in the interest in the field of *balāgha* in his age, that is a field 'of noble status, of few students, of weak demand, that has no clan to protect, and no astute scholars to investigate.'<sup>25</sup> Al-Zarkashī's remark reveals the limits of success that the revivalist move has achieved. It seems that the call of ibn al-Naqīb did not reach so far, especially in the field of *tafsīr*.

### Ibn al-Naqīb and his *tafsīr*

It seems that ibn al-Naqīb himself did not apply his approach in his *tafsīr*, *al-Tahrīr wa-l-Tahbīr*. Although the work is not currently available except for short pieces distributed in some manuscripts, comments of the pre-modern scholars who read the work are at hand. None of them mentioned anything specific related to using rhetorical sciences (*bayān* or *balāgha*) in interpreting the Quranic text in ibn al-Naqīb's *tafsīr*.

Al-Dhahabī, who was a contemporary and student of ibn al-Naqīb, mentioned that his *tafsīr* 'assimilated *istan'aba* the variant readings *qirā'āt*, occasions of revelation *asbāb al-Nuzūl*, Grammar *i'rāb*, sayings of the exegetes *aqwāl al-mufasssīrīn*, and sayings of the *ṣūfīs* and their truths *ḥaqā'iqahum*.'<sup>26</sup> He explicitly states a list of sciences the ibn al-Naqīb employs in his *tafsīr* but never mentions rhetoric *balāgha* or *bayān*.

Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī (d.745/1344) is another student of ibn al-Naqīb. He acknowledges in the introductory speech of his exegetical work, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, that he is indebted to the work of ibn al-Naqīb, *al-*

<sup>22</sup>Jamāl al-Dīn al-Balkhī al-Maqdisī al-Ḥanafī ibn al-Naqīb, *Muqaddimat tafsīr ibn al-Naqīb fī 'ilm al-bayān wa-l-ma'āni wa-l-badī' wa i'jāz al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khāngī, 1992), p.15.

"إحياء لعلم البيان المطلع على نكت نظم القرآن الذي قد عفت آثاره وقلت أنصاره وتقاعدت الهمم عن تحصيله، وضعفت العزائم عن معرفة فروعه، فضلا عن أصوله. فما علم من العلوم الإسلامية ربي بالهجر والنسيان ما ربي به علم البيان. ولو أداموا النظر فيه والتلميح لمعانيه لاطلعوا من الكتاب العزيز على خفايا تهش لها القلوب، ودقائق تسفر لهم عن وجوه المطلوب..."

<sup>23</sup>Ḥamza, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Fikriyya*, p.77.

<sup>24</sup>"وَهُوَ الْمَقْصُودُ الْأَعْظَمُ مِنْ هَذَا الْكِتَابِ وَهُوَ يَبْتُ الْقَصِيدَةَ وَأَوَّلُ الْجَرِيدَةِ وَغُرَّةُ الْكُتَيْبَةِ وَوَاسِطَةُ الْقِلَادَةِ وَدُرَّةُ النَّجِّ وَأَسَانُ الْحَدَقَةِ عَلَى أَنَّهُ قَدْ تَقَدَّمَتْ الْإِشَارَةُ لِلْكَثِيرِ مِنْ ذَلِكَ"

<sup>25</sup>Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'an* (Cairo: 'Issa al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī waShurakāh, 1957), vol 2, p.382.

<sup>26</sup>Shams al-dīn al-Dhahabī, *Mu'jam shuyūkh al-Dhahabī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1990), p.498.

*tahrir wa-l-tahbir*, by most of the quotations he reported. He praises ibn al-Naqib's *tafsir* for being the largest work of *tafsir* that he has learned about. It should have been in one hundred volumes according to abū Ḥayyān or ninety-nine according to al-Dhahabī. Nevertheless, abū Ḥayyān criticizes it for being too repetitive and unedited.<sup>27</sup>

The most characteristic feature of the *tafsir* of ibn al-Naqib is its aggregative nature. He mainly collected his material from earlier works of *tafsir*. Abū Ḥayyān's statements seem to emphasize the same nature, especially that he used the phrase 'that is collected by our teacher' (*min jam'i shaykbinā*) to refer to the book of ibn al-Naqib. The statement of al-Dhahabī implicitly confirms the same notion.

Burhān al-dīn al-Biqā'ī (d.885/1480) also cared to read the *tafsir* of ibn al-Naqib, but for totally different reasons. In his *tafsir*, *Naẓm al-Durar*, Al-Biqā'ī gave a long account on the authenticity and uniqueness of his comprehensive concept of 'Appropriateness' *tanāsub* compared to all the other works that touched on the same notion. When he was in the middle of writing his work, he was told that ibn al-Naqib's *tafsir* mentions the concept of *tanāsub*, so he scurried to the library of *al-Hākīm* mosque where a copy of it was available. Al-Biqā'ī was relieved when he found that ibn al-Naqib's work mentions only the appropriateness 'of the total verses, not its sentences, and of the stories, not its verses one by one.'<sup>28</sup>

This means that ibn al-Naqib was not utilizing the concept of *tanāsub* as a literary analytical concept that can be linked to a rhetorical method. It will be relatively coercive to believe that ibn al-Naqib's approach of *tanāsub* represents a structural perception of cohesiveness or can be linked to the rhetorical concept of *Naẓm*, as it is apparent that no one of the scholars who read the *tafsir* gave it any credit regarding the sciences of *bayān* and/or *balāgha*.

### Ibn abī al-Iṣba' and *Badi' al-Qur'an*

However, we cannot say the same in the case of ibn abī al-Iṣba'. In his work *al-khawāṭir al-Sawānīh fī Asrār al-Fawātiḥ*, Ibn Abī al-Iṣba' al-Miṣrī adopts a more comprehensive concept of coherence of the text of the *Qur'an*. He analyzes the opening words, not verses, of the Qur'anic chapters as a component of the eloquence *balāgha* and the inimitability *i'jāz* of the *Qur'an*. In this short work, he invites, as well, much of the theological, natural, astrological, and philosophical knowledge of his time to argue for the inimitability of these openings, besides its aspects of eloquence.<sup>29</sup> Zakī al-Dīn ibn abī al-Iṣba' al-Miṣrī was a prominent litterateur in his time. He was born in Egypt in 585/1198. During his life, he was singled out as *The poet of Cairo*.<sup>30</sup>

His other works include the book *Badi' al-Qur'an* that is excerpted from his earlier work *Tahrir al-Tahbir* which is an extensive study of the types of rhetoric in the Arabic literature, while *Badi' al-Qur'an* focuses only on the types that are evident in the *Qur'an*. In the *Badi'*, he counted one hundred and nine types of *balāgha* out of the one hundred and twenty-five reported in the *Tahrir*, leaving around twenty types that he believed are not used in the *Qur'an*.

For instance, ibn abī al-Iṣba' lists in *Badi' al-Qur'an* a rhetorical device that he calls 'the deluding' (*bāb al-tawḥīm*). This happens when the speaker imposes a false belief on the listener that he made a linguistic or grammatical mistake, while it is meant for a rhetorical reason. Under this type, he presents an example from the *Qur'an* that demonstrates the strong connection between rhetoric and *tafsir* from one side, and the dynamic relationship between rhetoric and grammar from another side. The example that he gives is the Qur'anic verse 2:11 that reads 'if they fight you, they will show you their backs [i.e., retreat]; then they will not be aided,'<sup>31</sup> (*wa 'in yuqātilūkum yuwallūkumu-l-adbāra thumma lā yunṣarūn*).

This verse includes a grammatical problem that caught the attention of ibn abī al-Iṣba'. Though the verbs *yuwallūkum* (turn to you), and *yunṣarūn* (be aided) are supposedly conjunct conditional clauses, they are not treated grammatically in the same way. The letter *nūn* is omitted from the first one as it is consonantal *majzūm* (i.e.,

<sup>27</sup> Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, *Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ fī al-tafsir* (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1999), p.22.

<sup>28</sup> Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-Durar fī tanāsub al-Āyāt wa-l-swar* (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, n.d.), p.10.

<sup>29</sup> Ibn Abī al-Iṣba' al-Miṣrī, *Al-khawāṭir al-Sawānīh fī Asrār al-Fawātiḥ* (Cairo, 1959), p.73.

<sup>30</sup> This title is usually contrasted to his contemporary Jamāl al-Dīn abū al-Ḥusayn al-Jazzār (d.672/1281) who is usually described as *The poet of al-Fuṣṭāṭ*. Cairo by that time refers to the political center while *al-Fuṣṭāṭ* refers to the old city that is the center of social life. This title given to ibn Abī al-Iṣba' is confusing as, according to the specialists, nothing found in his biography can relate him to any political activity or role. However, his title may refer to his status in the circles of the social elite. (Ibn Abī al-Iṣba', *Tahrir al-Tahbir*, p.5.)

<sup>31</sup> وَإِنْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ يُؤَلُّوكُمْ الْأَدْبَارَ ثُمَّ لَا يُنصَرُونَ " آل عمران - 111

*yuwallūukum* instead of *yuwallūnakum*), while the *nūn* is not omitted from the second clause (i.e., *yunṣarūn* while it should have been *yunṣarū*), which means it is not consonant. Grammarians, according to ibn abī al-Iṣbaʿ, tried to resolve this problem by assuming an omitted pronoun that is estimated to be *hum* (they) before *yunṣarūn*.

This moves the conjunction to be on the sentences' level (*'atf al-jumlab 'alā al-jumlab*) not on the words' level, and hence the unparallel conjunction between words is justified. For him, what the grammarians did is an unnecessary coercive interpretation. He believes that the grammatical solution does not answer the important question: why did the verse deviate from the straightforward grammatical rule to another different structure? What is the rhetorical benefit that comes out of that deviation?

For ibn abī al-Iṣbaʿ, If the last word *yunṣarūn* is treated grammatically as a parallel conditional clause to the first; *yuwallūukum*, it will mean that they (the enemies) will not be helped or supported *during* their fight with the Muslims. While changing its grammatical form in that way gives the meaning that they (the enemies) once fought the Muslims, they will *never* be helped or supported, neither during their fight with the Muslims nor in the future (*lā yunṣar[ūna] 'abadan*). And this is exactly what ibn abī al-Iṣbaʿ calls 'the deluding' *al-tawhim*.<sup>32</sup> The reader of the verse is 'deluded' to think that there is a grammatical mistake, while it is perfectly meant to add a specific rhetorical value.

### Between ibn al-Naqīb and ibn abī al-Iṣbaʿ

Avigail Noy in her dissertation on *'ilm al-Bayān* believes that both ibn al-Naqīb and ibn abī al-Iṣbaʿ appeared historically in a moment when they can build over an already established scholarly framework.<sup>33</sup> This conclusion can be correct only if we momentarily ignore the internal tensions of the school of *balāgha*, as well as the declining status of the field within the scholarship community. However, comparing ibn abī al-Iṣbaʿ to ibn al-Naqīb reveals that there is a noticeable gap in skill and experience between them.

Though ibn al-Naqīb's *oeuvre* is supposedly more involved in *tafsīr*, as he already wrote a voluminous exegetical work, ibn abī al-Iṣbaʿ seems to be more skilled in dealing with complex exegetical problems. We have seen in the previous example how he was able to find his way through rhetoric, grammar, and *tafsīr* to explore fine aspects of the text. We can see ibn abī al-Iṣbaʿ' s superior capability in another example of *tafsīr* that now intersects theology with linguistics and grammar. This comes under the rhetorical device that he calls 'the theological doctrine' (*bāb al-madbbah al-kalāmī*).<sup>34</sup>

According to him, this type includes the cases of argumentation in which the *Qur'an* adopts the approach of theologians in deducing conclusions based on logical premises. He exemplifies this by verses 6:80 to 83. These verses illustrate an argumentative debate between the prophet Abraham and his people, starting with 'and his people argued with him...' up to the verse that reads 'this was the argument We gave Abraham against his people...' In this discussion, ibn abī al-Iṣbaʿ combines the tools of theology and rhetoric to discover the eloquence of the verse.

In contrast to that, ibn al-Naqīb's long discussion of the topic of 'metaphor' *majāz* barely touches on theological connotations, despite the theological sensitivity of the topic.<sup>37</sup> However, he presents an elaborate discussion on the linguistic aspects of it. As well, as Avigail Noy remarks, ibn al-Naqīb generally shows strength in 'metadata' collection.<sup>38</sup> This aspect is expressed in his branched classifications of the topic and in the *Muqaddima*' s general arrangement of the material that heavily employs lexicology and branched categorizations.

It may be beneficial to mention the remark of the early twentieth-century traditionist and editor Aḥmad Shāker (d.1958) who witnessed the first publication of ibn al-Naqīb's *Muqaddima*. Shāker was not convinced that the book is written by ibn al-Qaiyyim al-Jawziyya and criticized the publisher for insisting on attributing it to him. For Shāker, it was obvious that the writer of this book, who was still unknown by that time, is an 'inexperienced scholar' who overestimates himself and cannot be ibn al-Qaiyyim.<sup>39</sup> It is also noteworthy that Shāker criticized ibn

<sup>32</sup>Ibn abī al-Iṣbaʿ, *Badī*, p.132.

<sup>33</sup>Noy, Avigail, *The emergence of 'ilm al-Bayān: Classical Arabic Literary Theory in the Arabic East in the 7th/13th Century* (Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, 2016), p.190.

<sup>34</sup>Ibn abī al-Iṣbaʿ, *Badī*, p.37.

<sup>35</sup> "وَحَاجَّهُ قَوْمُهُ قَالَ أَتُحِبُّونِي فِي اللَّهِ وَقَدْ هَدَانِي وَلَا أَخَافُ مَا تُشْرِكُونَ بِهِ إِلَّا أَنْ يُشَاءَ رَبِّي شَيْئًا وَسِعَ رَبِّي كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا أَفَلَا تَتَذَكَّرُونَ" الأنعام- 80

<sup>36</sup> "وَتِلْكَ حُجَّتُنَا آتَيْنَاهَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ عَلَى قَوْمِهِ لَرَفَعِ دَرَجَتٍ مَن نَّشَاءُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ حَكِيمٌ عَلِيمٌ" الأنعام - 83

<sup>37</sup>Ibn al-Naqīb, *Muqaddimat*, pp. 21-45.

<sup>38</sup>Noy, *The emergence*, p. 352.

<sup>39</sup>Abū al-Ashbāl, *Al-Kutub al-Ma'zummatu 'ilāghairimuṣannifihā* (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1916), vol.19, issue. 1, p.121. Aḥmad Shāker signed this article in *al-Manār* by his common nickname *kunīya*; Abū al-Ashbāl.

al-Naqīb's standpoint on the inimitability of the *Qur'an*. Ibn al-Naqīb reported a long list of standpoints on *i'jāz al-Qur'an* as well as the opposing refutation of each standpoint, except for one standpoint that he did not refute.

This must have led Shāker to believe that this standpoint is ibn al-Naqīb's chosen opinion *ikhtiār*.<sup>40</sup> This notion assumes that the inimitability of the *Qur'an* lies only in its preservation of change over a long period. Such a standpoint is eccentric to the mainstream of rhetoricians. More importantly, it does not build over or extend from any extensive rhetorical knowledge. In contrast to that, it is clear from the previous examples of ibn abī al-Iṣḥāq's work that his concept of *i'jāz* is more comprehensive and technically relevant.

## Conclusion

In the seventh/thirteenth century, Egypt was the main intellectual center that embraced the tensions of the pre-modern Islamic scholarship, especially in the fields of *tafsīr* and linguistics. The field of *tafsīr* during that time was polarized between what can be generally described as the tradition-based approach and the rhetoric-based approach, with apparent hegemony of the first one and a marked decline in the employment of rhetorical sciences in understanding the *Qur'an*. Within the circles of *balāgha*, a revivalist current of rhetoricians emerged and was busy trying to regain the status of rhetoric in the process of *tafsīr* and was discontent with the dominance of the tradition-based approach in the field of exegesis.

Both ibn al-Naqīb and ibn abī al-Iṣḥāq represent that revivalist voice of rhetoric. However, comparing their works shows variations and differences in their contribution to the dialectics of the field. In general, the discussions of ibn abī al-Iṣḥāq are deeper, more elaborate, and more experienced. Ibn abī al-Iṣḥāq, as well, shows more expertise in dealing with complex problems of *tafsīr* than ibn al-Naqīb in his *Muqaddima*. Ibn al-Naqīb's strength lies mainly in his lexicological and aggregative skills. This is apparent in his introduction and could be concluded regarding his *tafsīr* as well.

The current study of the science of *balāgha* sketches the interconnections between the pre-modern Islamic scholarship. Fields of *tafsīr*, theology, *ḥadīth*, linguistics, and Grammar are inseparable in their practice and have dynamic mutual influences.

## References

### Primary sources

- 'Abdullāh ibn al-Mu'tazz (d.296/909), *Kitāb al-Badī'* (Beirut: Dār al-Masīrah, 1982).
- 'Abd al-Qāhīr al-Jurjānī (d.471/1078), *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khāngī, 1989).
- Abū al-Qāsimjārullāh al-Zamakhsharī (d.538/1143), *Al-Kashshaf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl wa'uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta'wīl* (Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, 2010), vol.1.
- Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī (d.745/1344), *Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, ed. Ṣedqī Muḥammad Jamīl (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1999), vol.1.
- 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāhīz (d.255/868), *Al-Bayān wa-l-tabiyyīn*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khāngī, 1998), vol.1.
- Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (d.794/1392), *Al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'an* (Cairo: 'Issa al-Bābī al-ḤalabīwaShurakāh, 1957), vol.2.
- Bahā' al-Dīn al-Subkī (d.773/1372), *'Arūs al-Afrāḥ fī sharḥ Talkhīṣ al-Miftāḥ* (Beirut: Al-Maktaba al-'Aṣriyya, 2003).
- Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī (d.885/1480), *Nazm al-Durar fī tanāsūb al-Āyātwa-l-swar* (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, n.d.), vol.1.
- Ḥājī Khalīfa (d.1068/1657), *Kash al-zunūn 'an asāmī al-Kutubwa-l-funūn*, (Bagdad: Maktabat al-Muthannā, 1941), vol.2.
- Ibn Abī al-Iṣḥāq al-Miṣrī (d. 654/1256), *Badī' al-Qur'an* (Cairo: NahḍatMiṣr, 1957).
- Ibn Abī al-Iṣḥāq al-Miṣrī (d. 654/1256), *Taḥrīr al-Taḥbīr fī Ṣinā'at al-Shī'r wa-l-Naṭh wa bayan I'jāz al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Al-Majlis al-'Alī li-l-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 1963).
- Ibn Abī al-Iṣḥāq al-Miṣrī (d. 654/1256), *Al-ḥawāṭir al-Sawānīh fī Asrār al-Fawāṭīh* (Cairo, 1959).
- Jalāl al-Dīn al-Siyūṭī (d.911/1505), *Sharḥ 'uqūd al-Jimān fī 'ilm al-Ma'ānīwa-l-bayān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.).
- Jalāl al-Dīn al-Siyūṭī (d.911/1505), *Husn al-Muḥādara fī Tārikh Miṣr wa al-Qahira* (Cairo: Dār Iḥiā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1967), vol.1.

<sup>40</sup>Shāker did not explain the reasons for his conclusion, but this reason is what can be understood from the *Muqaddima*'s text.



- Jamāl al-Dīn al-Balkhī al-Maqdisī al-Ḥanafī ibn al-Naqīb (d.698/1298), *Muqaddimat tafsīr ibn al-Naqīb fī 'ilm al-bayān wa-l-mā'ānī wa-l-badī wa i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, ed.Zakaria Sa'īd'Alī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khāngī, 1992).
- Shams al-dīn al-Dhahabī (d.748/1348), *Mu'jam shuyūkh al-Dhababī*, ed. Rawḥiyya 'abd al-Raḥmān al-Siyūfī, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1990).

### Secondary sources

- 'Abd al-Laṭīf Ḥamza, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Fikriyya fī Miṣr fī al-'aṣraiyn al-Ayyūbīwa-l-Mamlūkī al-anwal* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, n.d.).
- Aḥmad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī, *Tārikh 'ulūm al-Balāgha wa al-Ta'rif bi-rijālīhā* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1950).
- Aḥmad Maṭlūb, *Mu'jam al-Muṣṭalahāt al-balāghīyya wa taṭawuruhā* (Beirut: Al-Dār al-'Arabiyya li-l-Mawsū'āt, 2006).
- Abū al-Ashbāl, *Al-Kutub al-Ma'zūwatu 'ilā ghairi muṣannifihā* (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1916), vol.19, issue. 1, pp.120-122.
- Noy, Avigail, *The emergence of 'Ilm al-Bayān: Classical Arabic Literary Theory in the Arabic East in the 7th/13th Century* (Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, 2016).
- Walid Saleh, *Medieval Exegesis: the golden age of tafsīr*, in 'The Oxford handbook of Qur'anic studies, ed. Mustafa Shah, Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford university press, 2020), pp.666-681.