# THE HERMENEUTICAL THEORY OF NAṢR ḤĀMID ABŪ ZAYD:
## An Analytical Study of His Method of Interpreting the Qur'ān

by
YUSUF RAHMAN

A Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Institute of Islamic Studies
McGill University
Montreal, Canada

August, 2001
© Yusuf Rahman

0-612-78757-5

Canada

# ABSTRACT

Name        : Yusuf Rahman
Title         : The Hermeneutical Theory of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd:
                     An Analytical Study of His Method of Interpreting the Qur'ān
Department  : Institute of Islamic Studies
Degree      : Ph.D.

Through an examination of the writings of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd (b. 1943), this dissertation attempts to study his theory and method of interpretation. Not only are these analyzed within the socio-political and historical contexts that tended to inform the development of his thought, but also in the light of hermeneutics and of modern approaches to the Qur'ān.

Since his writings have led certain Egyptian Islamists to charge him with the crime of apostasy, the thesis also examines the main reasons for their objections. It argues that the crux of the problem lies not so much in the novelty of Abū Zayd's theories as it does in the theological opposition of the Islamists to the liberal Muslims.

# RÉSUMÉ

Nom           : Yusuf Rahman

Titre            : La théorie herméneutique de Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd:
                          Une étude analytique de sa méthode d'interprétation du Qur'ān

Département  : Institut des Études Islamiques

Diplôme      : Ph.D

Grâce à un examen des écrits de Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd (né en 1943), cette thèse tentera d'analyser sa théorie ainsi que ses méthodes d'interprétation. Non seulement elles seront analysées dans le cadre des contextes socio-politiques et historiques qui expliquent le développement de la pensée d'Abū Zayd, mais aussi selon une perspective herméneutique ainsi que par des approches modernes de l'interprétation du Qur'ān.

Alors que ses écrits ont conduit certains islamistes égyptiens à accuser l'auteur d'apostasie, cette thèse examinera les principales raisons de leurs objections. Il sera ainsi question que le coeur du problème réside non pas dans la nouveauté des théories d'Abū Zayd, mais plutôt dans l'opposition théologique des islamistes face aux musulmans libéraux.

# TABLE OF CONTENT

# NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

All Arabic words that occur in this dissertation are transliterated in accordance with the "Romanization Table," below on p. vi, while most technical terms are italicized. Those not italicized include certain terms of frequent occurrence, such as the Qur'ān, Islām, 'ulamā', imām, shaykh, and muftī.

Unless otherwise indicated, the translations of Qur'ānic verses are my own, while the numbering is in accordance with that of the standard Egyptian edition. In the case of the Qur'ānic verses and the Prophetic tradition, I have modified the transliteration in order to indicate how the letters are pronounced according to Qur'ānic *tajwīd*. For instance, in recitation, an *n* occurring immediately before an *m* is pronounced *m*, and is consequently transliterated as such.

# ROMANIZATION TABLE

Consonants:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ب = b | ذ = dh | ط = ṭ | ل = l |
| ت = t | ر = r | ظ = ẓ | م = m |
| ث = th | ز = z | ع = ' | ن = n |
| ج = j | س = s | غ = gh | ه = h |
| ح = ḥ | ش = sh | ف = f | و = w |
| خ = kh | ص = ṣ | ق = q | ء = ' |
| د = d | ض = ḍ | ك = k | ي = y |

Vowels and diphthongs:

Short          :          ٰا = a;          اِ = i;          اُ = u

Long           :          ـَا = ā;          ـِي = ī;          ـُو = ū

Diphthongs     :          ـَي = ay          ـَو = aw

Long with *tashdīd*   :          ـِيّ = iyya          ـُوّ = uwwa

In the case of *tā' marbūṭa* ( ة ) the *h* is omitted, unless it occurs within an *iḍāfa,* in which case it is written *at.*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation could not have been completed without the assistance of fellowships and awards from CIDA (the Canadian International Development Agency) administered by the Indonesia-Canada Islamic Higher Education Project, and the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University. This assistance has included: scholarships to undertake the M.A. and Ph.D. programs at the Institute of Islamic Studies; a travel grant for research in Leiden, the Netherlands, in June 1998; and travel grants to present papers at academic conferences in Binghamton, NY and Brockport, NY (Oct. 1996 and Nov. 1997) and in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia (Dec. 1996). For these, I would like to thank the successive Directors of the Indonesia-Canada Islamic Higher Education Project, Prof. Issa J. Boullata, Prof. H.M. Federspiel, and Ms. Wendy Allen, and the Director of the Institute of Islamic Studies, Prof. Dr. A.Ü. Turgay. In addition, I received a travel grant from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (McGill University) to pursue research in Cairo, Egypt in October 1999 and Alma Mater Student travel grants (McGill University) for conferences in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia (Dec. 1996), Orlando, Florida (Nov. 1998), Boston, Massachusetts (Nov, 1999) and Orlando, Florida (Nov. 2000), for which I would like to thank the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, Prof. Pierre Bélanger, and Canadian Middle East Studies Association (CANMES) travel awards to San Francisco (Nov. 1997), Washington, D.C. (Nov. 1999) and Orlando, Florida (Nov. 2000), for which I am indebted to the successive Presidents of CANMES, Prof. William L. Cleveland and Prof. Rex Brynen. In Indonesia, I would like to thank Dr. Azymardi Azra, Rector of the State

Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN) Jakarta, and Dr. Komaruddin Hidayat, Director of Islamic Higher Education at the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia, for granting me a leave of absence from my teaching responsibilities to pursue this study.

There are several people who have contributed to my intellectual development. Above all, I am indebted to Professor Issa J. Boullata, my supervisor. His readiness to read this dissertation in part and in whole, to discuss points of interest and to offer continuous encouragement and advice have made my Ph.D. research a very rewarding experience. Other professors at the Institute, especially Professors Sajida Alvi, Wael Hallaq, Hermann Landolt, Donald P. Little, Sheila McDonough (during the absence of Prof. Alvi), and Eric Ormsby have taught me much in the courses and seminars I took with them. My interest in Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's ideas in particular was aroused in a seminar on modern Qur'ānic exegesis offered by Prof. Boullata. Professors Maurice Boutin, Robert C. Culley and Joseph C. McLelland in the Faculty of Religious Studies were likewise kind enough to introduce me to the difficult field of hermeneutics.

I would like also to thank Prof. Abū Zayd himself, who generously responded to my queries through an interview and e-mail correspondence. I am grateful also to Dr. Navid Kermani who kept me informed of the recent works on Abū Zayd, especially his *Ein Leben mit dem Islam,* and to Ms. Annette Heilmann and Mr. Moch. Noor Ichwan who generously sent me copies of their M.A. theses on Abū Zayd. Let me also take this opportunity to thank the administrative staff of the Institute: Ann Yaxley and Dawn Richard; of the Indonesia Project, especially Susy Ricciardelli, Joanna Gacek and Lori Novak; and of the library of Islamic Studies, particularly Miss Salwa Ferahian, Wayne St. Thomas and Steve Millier, who assisted me a great deal in locating sources and in

acquiring them by inter-library loan. Steve, in addition, has made this study more readable through his diligent process of editing.

There are many others who have supported me socially and emotionally during my research and travel. Budi and Rosna of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia opened their home to me in 1996; Amiq, Solek, Hanafi, Zulkarnain and Jajang made my stay in Leiden in 1998 a pleasant and productive one; Masnur, Hakam, Yodi, Zuhairi, Arifin, Sulayman and Abd al-Hayyi al-Kettani welcomed me to Cairo in 1999, the latter showing particular generosity in giving me a copy of Muḥammad ʿAmāra's *al-Tafsīr al-Marksī fī al-Islām;* while Anwar, Usep Abd al-Matin, Dewi, Eka and Yuni made it possible for me to stay once again in Leiden in 1999. Writing my dissertation and juggling other events in my life put considerable pressure on me. I am truly fortunate that so many people supported me with advice and by being there for me. Only reasons of space prevent me from listing the names of the countless people who assisted me. I hope they understand how much their support was a factor in my success.

I would never have reached this stage were it not for the encouragement, support and prayers of my family in Indonesia, especially my sister Endang Astutiningsih and my brother-in-law Didin Syafruddin and their families here in Montreal. Last but not least, to my children Nurul Habibah and Faʾiz Amali Rahman and their mother, Siti Fathimah: Thank you very much for everything.

Yusuf Rahman
August, 2001

# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## A. Theoretical Clarification

The title of this dissertation is inspired by David E. Klemm's study of Paul Ricoeur (b. 1913) entitled *The Hermeneutical Theory of Paul Ricoeur: A Constructive Analysis.*[1] Taking this book as a model, the present dissertation modestly attempts to analyze systematically Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's (b. 1943) theory of hermeneutics,[2] to situate his theory within the tradition of literary interpretation of the Qur'ān in Egypt and modern approaches to the Qur'ān in general. In addition to Klemm's structure in his study of Ricoeur, my dissertation analyzes the responses of Egyptian Muslims, and especially the Islamists,[3] to his method of interpretation and ideas.

---

[1] London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1983.

[2] I use the term "hermeneutics" rather than "hermeneutic" since, following Richard E. Palmer, the latter "tends to sound like an adjective ..., and since the *s* suggests "rules" and "theory"." See Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), xiv.

[3] Although Abū Zayd does not differentiate between the radical and the moderate Islamists in his *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī* (Cairo: Sīnā li-al-Nashr, 1992), 14ff., in this study I am more interested in the latter and use the term Islamists to designate the moderate Islamists; they include "official Islam" as represented by al-Azhar, the Egyptian Muftī and the Islamist thinkers. See for further discussion on the distinction between the moderate and the radical Islamists in Ahmad S. Moussalli, *Moderate and Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Quest for Modernity, Legitimacy, and the Islamic State* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1999). The liberal Muslims, on the other hand, are those who propose intellectual openness. Shimon Shamir in his "Liberalism: From Monarchy to Postrevolution," has proposed some characteristics of liberal Muslims in Egypt: their intellectual inspiration came from the Islamic *turāth*, especially Ibn Rushd and the Mu'tazilites, and from the West; their thought and belief are based on the principle of reason, freedom and the spirit of humanism. See "Liberalism: From Monarchy to Postrevolution," in *Egypt from Monarchy to Republic: A Reassessment of Revolution and Change,* ed. Shimon Shamir (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995), 198-199.

*1*

Abū Zayd is an Egyptian Muslim scholar who used to teach Arabic and Islamic studies at the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, but was forced into exile in 1995 due to the radical Islamists threats against his life and livelihood. He now teaches in Leiden University, and in various other European institutions of learning. In his writings, Abū Zayd critically studies the Qur'ān and other Islamic *turāth* (heritage) utilizing modern theories, like hermeneutics, semiotics, modern linguistic theory and discourse analysis. One scholar describes him, together with Mohammed Arkoun (b. 1928), as "un des symboles de la lecture herméneutique."[4]

The word *hermeneutics* has its origins in the Greek verb *hermēneuein* and its corresponding noun *hermēneia,* which have three basic tendencies of meaning: to express/expression, to explain/explanation, and to translate/translation.[5] These three meanings may be classified under the English verb/noun "to interpret/interpretation." According to Richard E. Palmer, they all involve making something that is unfamiliar, foreign, distant, or obscure into something familiar, near and comprehensible through translation, explanation and expression.

In theological interpretation, the convention is to differentiate between hermeneutics and exegesis. The former is used to denote the rules, methods, or theory of interpretation while the latter is the actual commentary.[6] The Arabic terms which are in

---

[4] H'mida Ennaifer (Aḥmīda al-Nayfar), *Les commentaires coraniques contemporains. Analyse de leur méthodologie* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica (P.I.S.A.I.), 1998), 85.

[5] See Palmer, *Hermeneutics,* 13; Klemm, *The Hermeneutical Theory of Paul Ricoeur,* 18.

[6] See Palmer, *Hermeneutics,* 34. See also Jane D. McAuliffe, "Quranic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān,* ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 46-47.

various ways equivalent to the notions of exegesis and hermeneutics are many: *tafsīr*,

*sharḥ*, *tabyīn* and *ta'wīl* - all of which reflect different aspects of the exegetical

procedure.[7] The last word especially refers to the term hermeneutics. Here

"hermeneutical theory" may be understood as "theory of interpretation."

The first of Abū Zayd's works to incorporate Western hermeneutics theory

appeared in 1981. Published as an article entitled "al-Hirminyūṭīqā wa Mu'ḍilat Tafsīr

al-Naṣṣ"[8] it constituted a review of the history of Western hermeneutics from Friedrich

Schleiermacher (1768-1834) to Hans-Georg Gadamer (b. 1900) and Paul Ricoeur. His

interest in the subject had been stimulated by Gadamer's work *Truth and Method*[9] and

other works on hermeneutics which he had come across while a visiting student at the

University of Pennsylvania in 1978-1979.[10] Having realized from his graduate research

for "Qaḍiyyat al-Majāz fī al-Qur'ān 'inda al-Mu'tazila" (M.A. thesis, Cairo University,

1977)[11] and "Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān 'inda Muḥyī al-Dīn b. 'Arabī" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cairo

University, 1981)[12] that interpreters tended to allow their ideological beliefs to

influence their interpretation of the Qur'ān, Abū Zayd began from that point onwards to

concentrate on the concept of the text and the relation of the interpreter to it. His main

---

[7] See Jaroslav Stetkevych, "Arabic Hermeneutical Terminology: Paradox and the Production of Meaning," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 48 (1989): 81-96.

[8] Published in *Fuṣūl* 1, 3 (1981): 141-159, and reprinted in Abū Zayd, *Ishkāliyyāt al-Qirā'a wa Āliyyāt al-Ta'wīl* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1994), 13-49.

[9] Abū Zayd refers to this book which was published in 1975 by The Seaburg Press, New York. See Abū Zayd, *Ishkāliyyāt al- Qirā'a*, 37.

[10] See Abū Zayd's biography *Ein Leben mit dem Islam*, an interview by Navid Kermani, trans. from Arabic by Chérifa Magdi (Herder: Spektrum, 1999), 113ff.

[11] Published as *al-Ittijāh al-'Aqlī fī al-Tafsīr: Dirāsa fī Qaḍiyyat al-Majāz fī al-Qur'ān 'inda al-Mu'tazila* in Beirut: Dār al-Tanwīr li-al-Ṭibā'a wa al-Nashr, 1982. This study uses the fourth edition published in Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1998.

[12] Published as *Falsafat al-Ta'wīl: Dirāsa fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān 'inda Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī* in Beirut: Dār al-Tanwīr li-al-Ṭibā'a wa al-Nashr, 1983. This study uses the third edition published in Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1996.

purpose has been to define an "objective" understanding of Islam, an understanding which surpasses ideological biases present in the Arabo-Islamic context.[13] He has also translated Yuri Lotman's (b. 1922) works on semiotic theory and has applied the latter to Islamic texts in his *Anẓimat al-'Alāmāt fī al-Lugha wa al-Adab wa al-Thaqāfa: Madkhal ilā al-Simiyūṭīqā* (1986).[14] Thus from the early 1980s onwards, Abū Zayd's works have been pervaded by discussions on the nature of the text, problems of interpretation, and the relation between interpreter and text, as can be seen from the titles of his books *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* (1990); *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī* (1992), *Ishkāliyyāt al-Qirā'a wa Āliyyāt al-Ta'wīl* (1992),[15] *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa wa al-Ḥaqīqa: al-Fikr al-Dīnī bayna Irādat al-Ma'rifa wa Irādat al-Haymana* (1995),[16] and most recently *al-Khiṭāb wa al-Ta'wīl* (2000).[17]

Most of these works, however, are collection of articles published in various journals or papers presented in academic conferences. It is therefore necessary to study these articles in the order of their first publication and within their socio-political and historical context.[18] In addition, through a survey of his works I will attempt to trace the development of Abū Zayd's thought.

---

[13] See Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsa fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1998, fourth edition), 19. The first edition published in Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Amma li-al-Kitāb, 1990 and Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1990.

[14] Eds. Sīzā (Ceza) Qāsim and Abū Zayd (Cairo: Dār Ilyās al-'Aṣriyya, 1986).

[15] Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1992.

[16] Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1995.

[17] Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 2000.

[18] Ḥasan Ḥanafī studies Abū Zayd's books (up until 1993) in terms of their mere ideas without any consideration of their chronological order and socio-historical context. See Ḥanafī, "'Ulūm al-Ta'wīl bayna al-Khāṣṣa wa al-'Amma: Qirā'a fī A'māl Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd," *al-Ijtihād* 23 (1994): 9-95.

## B. The Development of Abū Zayd's Thought

Based on Abū Zayd's biography[19] and bibliography,[20] I propose, for the sake of analysis, to divide his life into four periods: (a) the formative period 1943-1972 and 1972-1985; (b) the foundational period 1985-1989; (c) the polemical period 1989-1993 and 1993-1995; and (d) the period of exile 1995-present. In the course of surveying these works I will not discuss each work one by one but rather try to find the salient features of these works during these periods.

### 1. The Formative Period

This period extends from his early life till 1985. The long span of this period is due to the fact that this was when Abū Zayd's intellect was initially formed, with inevitable consequences for his later work. We may divide this period into two phases: from his birth and upbringing in Ṭanṭā until 1972 in which year he finished his B.A. program in Arabic studies at the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Cairo University; and from 1972 to 1985, during which period he completed his M.A. and Ph.D. programs at this department in addition to serving as assistant lecturer and assistant professor in this same department. The year 1972 furthermore marked his shift of interest from Arabic studies to Islamic studies.

---

[19] See *Ein Leben mit dem Islam*. I also conducted an interview with Abū Zayd on October 5, 1999 in his office in Leiden University.

[20] See the chronological list of his works in the bibliography. It should be born in mind that, with many Arab publishing companies, there isn't the same delay in time between receiving the manuscript and printing it as there is with Western publishers.

## a. 1943-1972: From Ṭanṭa to Cairo

Abū Zayd was born on July 10, 1943 in Quḥāfa a village near Ṭanta, Egypt. Like the other children of his village, he began his schooling in a *kuttāb* where he learnt how to read and write, and memorized the Qur'ān. By the age of eight, he had memorized the whole of the Qur'ān.[21] From 1951 to 1957 he was enrolled in the elementary al-'Ubaydiyya School in Ṭanṭā. His father had planned to send him to al-Azhar University, but the illness from which he was suffering forced him to change his decision and he instead placed him in a school offering *al-ta'līm al-madanī al-'ādī* (civil education), where it would take less time to finish than in one offering *al-ta'līm al-dīnī* (religious education). Since Abū Zayd was the first male in the family, his father wanted him to be prepared to take on the responsibility of supporting the family financially after his death.[22]

Therefore, instead of continuing his education to secondary school, which would have enabled him to go to university, he took an applied arts technical program (*al-ta'līm al-fannī al-thānawī al-ṣinā'ī*). He obtained his diploma from Ṭanṭā Technical school – from the department of wireless communication (*qism al-lā-silkī*) -- in 1960, and began in February 1961 his job as a technician at the National Communication Organization.[23]

His dream to go to university, however, never left him. While still working as a technician, he studied part-time to obtain his secondary school degree, which he

---

[21] See "Ḥiwār," in *al-Khiṭāb wa al-Ta'wīl* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 2000), 216.
[22] His father died in 1957, some months after Abū Zayd finished his elementary schooling.
[23] See "Ḥiwār," in *al-Khiṭāb wa al-Ta'wīl*, 217.

received in 1968. Following this, he entered the Department of Arabic at Cairo University and obtained his B.A. with distinction (*mumtāz*) in 1972.

Some biographies of Abū Zayd mention his involvement with the Muslim Brotherhood in Ṭanṭā. As is known, this organization has many activities of a social, cultural or religious nature, such as helping the poor, assisting students with their schoolwork, commanding people to perform prayers, and holding different sport activities. These activities attract many young people, and it is likely that Abū Zayd's relations with the Brotherhood were much like those of other children in his village, except that one day, during a visit to Ṭanṭā by the leader of the Brotherhood, Ḥasan al-Ḥudaybī, Abū Zayd's stature and loud voice singled him out, and he was selected as cheering leader (*qā'id al-hutāf*), whereby his cheering call was to be repeated by people immediately after him.[24] The call was:

> *Allāhu akbar wa li 'llāhi 'l-ḥamd*
> *al-Islāmu dīnunā*
> *wa 'r-rasūlu imāmunā*
> *wa 'l-Qur'ānu dustūrunā*
> *wa 'l-mawtu fī sabīli 'llāhi aghlā amānīnā*
> *Allāhu akbar wa li 'llāhi 'l-ḥamd*[25]

> (Allāh is Great and praise be to Him
> Islam is our religion
> the Prophet is our leader
> the Qur'ān is our constitution
> death in the way of God is our most valuable wish
> Allah is Great and praise be to Him)

Despite his participation in this organization at this level, Abū Zayd was never an active member of any political party in Egypt.

---

[24] See "Ḥiwār," 219; *Ein Leben mit dem Islam*, 41.

[25] On the importance of this chant for the Muslim Brotherhood, see Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 193-194.

Since his childhood, Abū Zayd was interested in Arabic literature. He considered literature as "the first gate to the world of civilization and thought" (*al-bawwāba al-ūlā li-'ālam al-thaqāfa wa al-fikr*).[26] In Ṭanṭā, he used to write poetry and short stories and founded a literary group (*jamā'at al-adab*) where members read poetry and stories. When he obtained his job as technician, he also established a literary circle (*nādī al-adab*) with his friends to discuss Arabic literature. During the course of the debate between Luwīs 'Awaḍ and Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir on Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī, which was published in *al-Ahrām* and *al-Risāla*, respectively, Abū Zayd and his friends followed the arguments with much interest. At the same time he began reading books by 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, and others. His literary interest also led him to read the writings of Sayyid Quṭb on the literary interpretation of the Qur'ān, like *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān* and *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma*, as well as Muḥammad Quṭb's *Manhaj al-Fann al-Islāmī*. Abū Zayd did not know at the time that the literary approach to the Qur'ān was taught at the university, or at least not until he entered Cairo University himself.[27]

Abū Zayd's interest in Arabic literature was given concrete expression in three articles on Arabic literature published in *al-Adab*,[28] edited by Amīn al-Khūlī. He later enrolled at Cairo University in 1968 while still working as a technician at the National Communication Organization. His specific interests attracted him to the Department of Arabic Language and Literature. For him it was like a dream that came true, for not only

---

[26] See "Ḥiwār," 221.

[27] See "Ḥiwār," 223.

[28] "Ḥawla Adab al-'Ummāl wa al-Fallāḥīn," *al-Adab* 5 (Oct. 1964): 310-311; "Azmat al-Ughniya al-Miṣriyya," *al-Adab* 7 (1964): 406-408; "Aṣdā' Adabiyya: Miḥnat al-Thaqāfa fī al-Aqālīm." *al-Adab* 8 (Jan. 1965): 504-505. I could not consult these works.

would he be studying his favorite subject, but he would be doing so in a department that boasted such great teachers as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn.

## b. 1972-1985: Shift of Interest to Islamic Studies

On completing the B.A. program in 1972, Abū Zayd was offered by his department a position as assistant lecturer (*muʿīd*), which allowed him to leave his job as a technician. This appointment, according to Abū Zayd, meant a transformation from working in "wireless communication" (*fann lā-silkī*) – in which he had been involved for eleven years -- to working in the "academic profession" (*silk akādīmī*) since 1972.[29] The department, however, decided that the newly appointed assistant should, instead of Arabic literature and criticism, take Islamic studies, especially Qur'ānic studies, as his major field of research in both his M.A. and Ph.D. programs.[30] It seems that the department's decision was due to the vacancy in the chair of Qur'ānic studies at the department that had been left by Amīn al-Khūlī. The one who would replace al-Khūlī would have to combine literary skills with a deep knowledge of Islamic studies and Qur'ānic studies.

Abū Zayd, who preferred the study of Arabic literature and criticism to Islamic studies, was at first reluctant to accept the department's decision, since he realized that there were many cases where studies on Islamic issues were not received well.[31] Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalaf Allāh (d. 1998), for example, himself an assistant lecturer when he wrote his dissertation in 1947 on "al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," was expelled from his job and had his dissertation rejected by the examining committee

---

[29] See "Ḥiwār," 217.
[30] See Abu Zaid, "The Case of Abu Zaid," *Index on Censorship* 4 (1996): 31.

on the grounds that the ideas exposed in it contravened Islamic teachings.[32] But, since the department assured him of the need, Abū Zayd could not but accept the decision. And as we are all aware now, Abū Zayd later experienced a similar problem.[33]

Abū Zayd wrote his M.A. thesis on "Qaḍiyyat al-Majāz fī al-Qur'ān 'inda al-Mu'tazila" under the direction of Prof. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Ahwānī. Here, he examined the relation between the concept of literary criticism and Qur'ānic studies, the focus of which is the notion of metaphor (*majāz*). He found that the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites were in disagreement over the meaning of *majāz* in the Qur'ān and over the attribution of which verses are *muḥkamāt* (clear) and *mutashābihāt* (ambiguous). He also attempted to examine the relation between the word and its meaning, which led him to study modern linguistics. It was therefore necessary for him to read some books in English; but his English was at that time very poor. Fortunately, in 1975-1977 Abū Zayd was awarded a fellowship to study at the American University in Cairo where he learnt among other things, the English language.[34]

Having submitted his thesis on the theological interpretation of the Qur'ān, Abū Zayd shifted his focus to the study of *ṣūfī* interpretation and selected Ibn 'Arabī's *ta'wīl* as his research project. At that time, he heard that the Ford Foundation was offering a fellowship to study the theory of folklore and field research. Abū Zayd applied for the fellowship on the basis of his knowledge of the English language and his proposal that Sufism contains many elements of folklore.[35] He explained to the interviewer from the

---

[31] See, for example, the case of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *Fī al-Shi'r al-Jāhilī* in 1926.
[32] See Chapter Two *infra.*
[33] See Chapter Four *infra*
[34] See *Ein Leben mit dem Islam*, 103.
[35] See *Ein Leben mit dem Islam*, 112.

Ford Foundation his plan for writing a dissertation on Ibn ʿArabī. With this argument, Abū Zayd won the fellowship and traveled to the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, where he studied from 1978 to 1979.

Like a regular student of the folklore program in the university, Abū Zayd studied this topic and also took courses on linguistics, anthropology, and sociology. In addition, he came into contact for the first time with the discipline of hermeneutics. The latter was not among the requirements of the program, but since he was interested in the theory of interpretation, he started reading works on it.

On his return to Egypt, he wrote his first article on hermeneutics entitled "al-Hirminyūṭīqā wa Muʿdilat Tafsīr al-Naṣṣ,"[36] a review of the development of the theory from F. Schleirmacher and W. Dilthey to Gadamer, Ricoeur and E.D. Hirsch. With his improved knowledge of English, he also translated many articles[37] on literature and literary theory during this period. As for the dissertation itself, his "Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān ʿinda Muḥyī al-Dīn b. ʿArabī" was accepted, having been granted a Ph.D. degree with the rank of *al-sharaf al-ūlā* (Highest Honors) by the examining committee.

---

[36] Published in *Fuṣūl* 1, 3 (April 1981): 141-159. His main reference in this study is Palmer's *Hermeneutics*.

[37] Andrew Gibson, "Mulāḥazāt ʿan al-Qiṣṣa wa al-Fukāha," *Fuṣūl* 2, 2 (1982): 173-182; Eric D. Hirsch Jr., "Ittijāhān fī al-Taqyīm al-Adabī," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 2 (1982): 7-22; Boris Eichenbaum, "Uw Hinrī (=O'Henry) wa Naẓariyyāt al-Qiṣṣa al-Qaṣīra," *Fuṣūl* 3, 2 (1983): 82-108; and the works of Yuri M. Lotman, "Naẓariyyāt Ḥawla al-Dirāsa al-Simiyūṭīqiyya li-al-Thaqāfat," and "Muqaddima and Mushkilat al-Laqṭa," which were later published in *Anẓimat al-ʿAlāmāt fī al-Lugha wa al-Adab wa al-Thaqāfa: Madkhal ilā al-Sīmiyūṭīqā*, eds. Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd and Sīzā (Ceza) Qāsim (Cairo: Dār Ilyās al-ʿAṣriyya, 1986), 317-344 and 265-281, respectively.

## 2. The Foundational Period: 1985-1989

This period extends from 1985 to 1989 during which time Abū Zayd served as visiting professor at Osaka University of Foreign Studies in Japan. According to Abū Zayd, he was the second visiting professor from Egypt[38] to teach there since an agreement had been reached between Osaka and Cairo universities, after the opening of the Japanese Language Department in Cairo University, to exchange professors. Originally, he was assigned to teach for one year only, giving courses in Arabic language, modern Arab thought and special topics for M.A. students.[39] His visit, however, was extended for four years – a decision he never regretted, since during this period he was able to read and write extensively.

Many of his most important works were written in this period, the most significant of them being *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsa fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* and some parts of *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī.* He finished writing the former in 1987, but it was not published until 1990 due to poor communications with the publisher in Beirut.[40] This was the manuscript that earned him a promotion in 1987 to the rank of associate professor (*mushārik)* in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University.[41]

The book was inspired by his previous studies of Mu'tazilite and *ṣūfī* interpretation of the Qur'ān, which had made him realize that the Qur'ān had become "a battlefield" between theologians and *ṣūfīs* who attempted to interpret the Qur'ān on the

---

[38] The first one had been 'Abd al-Mun'im Talīima. See *Ein Leben mit dem Islam,* 135.
[39] Personal interview October 5, 1999.
[40] Personal interview.
[41] It is worth mentioning that in the "Abū Zayd Case," many reports are based on this unpublished manuscript rather than on the one published in 1990.

basis of their ideological and philosophical beliefs. While in his M.A. thesis he found

that the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites were in disagreement over the ambiguous and

clear verses, in *Falsafat al-Ta'wīl* he concluded that the life of the interpreter and the

socio-political context also tended to determine the interpretation of the Qur'ān. Here

should be noted the influence on Abū Zayd of hermeneuts who assert that the

presuppositions and preunderstanding of an interpreter determine his/her views and

conclusions.

In addition to this academic background, Abū Zayd, as an Egyptian citizen, also

realized that Islam was the locus of a battle between different ideologies, and that it was

manipulated to support a particular ideology. In the 1960s, for example, he would have

seen different works which discussed "Islam and Socialism."[42] In the 1970s the attention

would have shifted to *al-Islām wa al-Jihād* and *al-Islām wa al-Sahyūniyya.* On still other

occasions, Islam was interpreted as the religion of peace and the religion of co-

existence.[43] These were the contexts that prompted him to study objectively what Islam

is and what the Qur'ān is. He proposed that one has to study the concept of the text

itself before pursuing any effort of interpreting it.

For this reason, he chose to look first at Muslim scholars' opinions of the

traditional Qur'ānic sciences, as represented by al-Suyūṭī's *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*

and al-Zarkashī's *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān.* His reason for turning to these

---

[42] Like those of Maḥmūd Shalabī (*The Socialism of Muḥammad, The Socialism of 'Umar* or *The Socialism of 'Uthmān*). See Gabriel R. Warburg, "Islam and Politics in Egypt: 1952-80," *Middle Eastern Studies* 18, 2 (1982): 137. See also Shaykh Muḥammad Shaltūt's "Socialism and Islam," in *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives,* eds. John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 99-102.

traditional sources was because he believed that one cannot ignore these *turāth* books in the study of the Qur'ān, though at the same time one cannot accept them as they are, since they are the product of a specific culture and history which might not seem reasonable or suitable in the present time. In addition, he wanted to read these sources in the light of the modern methods available to him, like Roman Jakobson's theory of literary communication, F. Saussure's differentiation between *langue* and *parole,* and T. Izutsu's discussion of revelation.[44]

As a result, he felt more inclined to criticize many traditional opinions in the sciences of the Qur'ān and to suggest new ideas on the basis of the dialectical (*jadalī*) interaction between socio-cultural contexts and the text/Qur'ān. Commenting on Abū Zayd's *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* Aziz al-Azmeh states that his study was intended mostly "to clear the decks"[45] by revising the theory of *nāsikh wa mansūkh, makkī wa madanī,* and *asbāb al-nuzūl,* etc.

The main portions of *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī* were also written during his stay in Japan, in particular its first chapter on "al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī al-Mu'āṣir: Āliyyātuh wa Munṭalaqātuh al-Fikriyya," which was published in the journal *Qaḍāyā Fikriyya* 8 (1989): 45-78.[46] In this work Abū Zayd discusses the religious discourse as represented by the moderate (*al-mu'tadil*) and the radical (*al-mutaṭarrif*) Islamists. According to

---

[43] On the use of Islam to legitimize the policies of the government, see Michael Winter, "Islam in the State: Pragmatism and Growing Commitment," in *Egypt from Monarchy to Republic,* 44-58.

[44] See Chapter Three *infra.*

[45] Al-Azmeh, "The Muslim Canon from Late Antiquity to the Era of Modernism," in *Canonization and Decanonization: Papers Presented to the International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR), Held at Leiden 9-10 January 1997,* eds. A. van der Kooij and K. van der Toorn (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 223.

him, the difference between the two is a matter of degree only -- not of kind --, since

they share the same mechanisms of thought:

1. Unification of religious thought with religion and elimination of the distance between subject and object.
2. Interpretation of all phenomena by referring all of them to the first principle or the first cause, whether those phenomena are social or natural.
3. Dependence on the authority of the past or the *turāth*, and that is after converting the heritagial texts (*nuṣūṣ turāthiyya*), which are secondary texts, to the primary texts. [These secondary texts] enjoy an awful amount of sacredness, no less –in many cases-- than the primary texts.
4. Mental certainty and an absolute settled-kind of thinking which rejects any different thought, except if the difference is in particulars and details but not in principles or basis.
5. Abandonment and ignorance of the historical dimension, which manifests itself in crying over the wonderful past, whether it is the golden age of the Rightly-Guided Caliphate or the Turco-Ottoman caliphate.[47]

As a proof of their similarity, Abū Zayd refers, for example, to the concept of

*takfīr* (declaring another person to be an apostate). Both use this tool whenever they see

ideas and attitudes which, they claim, contradict Islam, but their ways of dealing with or

changing these ideas (*taghyīr al-munkar bi-al-yad*) are different.[48] The moderate

Islamists propose arguments in the light of traditional Islamic sources, ignoring their

historicity; the radical Islamists, on the other hand, employ direct action but in many

instances base themselves on the arguments put forward by the moderates.

If we read Abū Zayd's works carefully, his criticism of present-day religious

discourse can be seen to have begun with his book *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*. In its preface, he

---

[46] Reprinted in *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī*, 11-106. This article was translated into French by Nachwa al-Azhari and Edwige Lambert "Le Discours religieux contemporain. Mécanismes et fondements intellectuels." *Égypte/Monde arabe* 3, 3 (1990): 73-120.
[47] See Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī*, 14.
[48] Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī*, 15ff.

characterizes religious discourse as being "stagnant and backward thought" (*al-fikr al-*

*rajʿi al-tathbiti*),[49] which reads and interprets Islamic *turāth* according to an ideological

orientation.[50] It appears that Abū Zayd was at that time very concerned with this kind of

interpretation. One issue in particular that attracted his scorn was the demand to

implement Islamic *sharīʿa*, which, in his eyes, ignored entirely the historical context of

the *ḥudūd* (punishments) laws and the changing contexts of the constantly shifting

present.[51]

In the course of his discussion of religious discourse, Abū Zayd mentions in his

*Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* the 1986 scandal involving the various Islamic investment

companies,[52] in which the 'ulamā', while claiming to be the most authoritative

interpreters in Islamic issues, misled the Egyptian people by legitimizing the companies

although they charged 25% interest. Thus despite their ignorance of basic economic

matters, they used their influence to attract people to invest in these companies. Some

observers, including Abū Zayd himself, have suggested that Professor 'Abd al-Ṣabūr

Shāhīn's negative report on Abū Zayd's application for promotion to the rank of full

professor was influenced by the fact that Shāhīn had at one time been an adviser to the

companies.

Another work of Abū Zayd that was largely written in Japan was the part of his

work *al-Imām al-Shāfiʿi wa Taʾsis al-Idiyūlūjiyya al-Wasaṭiyya* entitled "al-Idiyūlūjiyya

---

[49] See *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 10.
[50] On this see Chapter Three, especially on *taʾwīl* and *talwīn*.
[51] See *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 14.
[52] *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 20-22, n. 1. On the issue of Islamic investment companies, see Sami Zubaida, "The Politics of the Islamic Investment Companies in Egypt," *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* 17, 2 (1990): 152-161.

al-Wasaṭiyya al-Talfīqiyya fī Fikr al-Shāfiʿī."[53] This later work (as a whole), together

with his "al-Ghazālī's Theory of Interpretation," that he published in *Journal of Osaka*

*University of Foreign Studies* 72 (1986): 1-25, have to be seen as his effort to re-

examine how Islamic *turāth* has influenced the present stagnancy and backwardness of

Islamic thought. He felt that there were three Muslim scholars who played decisive roles

in Arabo-Islamic thought: al-Ashʿarī in Islamic theology, al-Ghazālī in Islamic thought

and philosophy, and al-Shāfiʿī in Islamic jurisprudence.[54]

From this quick survey we can see that the bulk of his important works were

written during his stay in Japan and that they all related in some way to the question of

interpretation, whether as it is applied in contemporary religious discourse or how it was

used by outstanding figures of the past such as al-Shāfiʿī to reshape Islamic thinking.

## 3. The Polemical Period

His works in this period can be further subdivided into two phases: works

written between 1989 and 1993, and between 1993 and 1995.

## a. 1989-1993: His Critique of Religious Discourse

The majority of his works dating from 1989 to 1993 concentrate mainly on his

criticism of religious discourse, following the argument he presented in his *Naqd al-*

*Khiṭāb al-Dīnī.* This can be seen, for example, in his series of articles in *al-Yasār* under

the heading "al-Nuṣūṣ al-Dīniyya wa al-Wāqiʿ al-Tārīkhī,"[55] in addition to his other

---

[53] Published in *al-Ijtihād* 9 (1990): 57-91; reprinted in *al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī* (Cairo: Sīnā li-al-Nashr, 1992), 5-56.

[54] See *al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī*, 5.

[55] "al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī al-Muʿāṣir Yunāqiḍ Nafsahu Ḥīna Yarfuḍ al-Fahm al-ʿIlmī li-al-Nuṣūṣ," *al-Yasār* 2 (April 1990): 68-70; "al-Nuṣūṣ al-Dīniyya wa al-Wāqiʿ al-Tārīkhī: Tārīkhiyyat al-Dalāla

article in *Qaḍāyā wa Shahādāt* and a paper that he presented in a conference on the same subject.[56] The latter, entitled "Ihdār al-Siyāq fī Ta'wīlāt al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī," seems to summarize all his argument against religious discourse, that is their ignorance of the text's many levels of contexts – external and internal – in interpretation.

Besides his criticism of the Islamists, Abū Zayd also dealt with the liberal Muslims' interpretations, like that of Muhammad Shaḥrūr's *al-Qur'ān wa al-Kitāb*,[57] and Hasan Hanafī's *Min al-'Aqīda ilā al-Thawra*.[58] Efforts such as these, according to Abū Zayd, fall in the category of *talwīn* (biased reading) as well.[59]

In April 1992, Abū Zayd married Dr. Ibtihāl Yūnis, a professor of French and Comparative Literature at Cairo University; and one month later (May 9, 1992) he applied for promotion to the rank of full professor in Cairo University by submitting his published and unpublished works, only to be rejected on very tenuous grounds.[60]

## 2. 1993-1995: Polemics around the "Abū Zayd Case"

This is the period where most of Abū Zayd's time was spent in trying to defend and clarify his ideas through writings and interviews following the refusal of the Committee of Academic Tenure and Promotion to promote him to the rank of full

---

wa Harfiyyat al-Ta'wīl," *al-Yasār* 4 (June 1990): 56-58; "al-'Awda ilā 'Aṣr al-'Ubūdiyya wa Tasalluṭ al-Kahnūt," *al-Yasār* 7 (September 1990): 71-73; "al-Ijtihād al-Haqīqī ... wa al-Ijtihād al-Zā'if," *al-Yasār* 9 (Nov. 1990): 81-83.

[56] "al-Nuṣūṣ al-Dīniyya bayna al-Tārīkh wa al-Wāqi'," *Qaḍāyā wa Shahādāt* 2 (1990): 384-408; and "Ihdār al-Siyāq fī Ta'wīlāt al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī," a paper he presented in a conference which was later published in *al-Qāhira* 122 (Jan. 1993): 87-115.

[57] "Limādhā Ṭaghat al-Talfīqiyya 'alā Kathīr min Mashrū'āt Tajdīd al-Islām (Qirā'a Naqdiyya li-Kitāb Muhammad Shaḥrūr)," *al-Hilāl* 99, 10 (Oct. 1991): 18-27; "al-Manhaj al-Nafī fī Fahm al-Nuṣūṣ al-Dīniyya (Radd 'alā Shaḥrūr)," *al-Hilāl* 100, 3 (March 1992): 54-61. See Shaḥrūr's response in "Hawla al-Qirā'a al-Mu'āṣira li-al-Qur'ān," *al-Hilāl* 100, 1 (Jan. 1992): 128-134.

[58] Abū Zayd, "al-Turāth bayna al-Ta'wīl wa al-Talwīn: Qirā'a fī Mashrū' al-Yasār al-Islāmī," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 10 (1990).

[59] See Chapter Three on *ta'wīl* and *talwīn*.

professor on December 3, 1992 and the attempt of some plaintiffs to file suit against

him on May 17, 1993.

During this period, Abū Zayd wrote regularly for the journal *Adab wa Naqd* on

the topic of "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya." In his articles he responds and tries to correct the

many misrepresentation of his writings.[61] In addition to his own polemics, other scholars

also commented on the case. Their volume was such that the publishing house al-

Maḥrūsa li-al-Nashr wa al-Khadamāt al-Ṣaḥafiyya wa al-Maʿlūmāt in Cairo was able to

publish seven volumes of clippings on the case, which were published in magazines and

newspapers, under the title *al-Islāmiyyūn wa Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd*. Abū Zayd himself

published two books on the case: *al-Tafkīr fī Zaman al-Takfīr*[62] and *al-Qawl al-Mufīd fī*

*Qaḍiyyat Abū Zayd*.[63] The first book contains his response to the criticisms leveled

against him, while the latter is a collection of articles written by scholars in support of

him.

---

[60] See Chapter Four.

[61] "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya: Māta al-Rajul wa Badaʾat Muḥākamatuh," *Adab wa Naqd* 10, 98 (Oct. 1993): 63-68; "Ḍidda al-Kitābāt al-Mudhʿina," *Adab wa Naqd* 10, 100 (Dec. 1993): 84-88; "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya," *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 101 (Jan. 1994): 63-69; "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya: al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī: Bayna al-Bashariyya wa al-Qadāsa," *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 102 (Feb. 1994): 70-74; "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya: Mushkilāt al-Baḥth fī al-Turāth (Mutābaʿa)," *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 103 (March 1994): 47-56; "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya: al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī: Bayna al-Qadāsa wa al-Bashariyya (Mushkilāt al-Baḥth fī al-Turāth)," *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 104 (April 1994): 87-94; "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya: Mafhūm al-Tārīkhiyya al-Muftarā ʿAlayh." *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 105 (May 1994): 10-55; "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya: Mafhūm al-Tārīkhiyya al-Muftarā ʿAlayh (2) al-Qudra wa al-Fiʿl al-Ilāhiyyān," *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 106 (June 1994): 96-100; "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya: al-Lugha wa al-ʿĀlam wa Muʿḍilat ʿal-Qurʾānʾ wa ʿal-Tārīkhʾ," *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 107 (July 1994): 133-138; "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya: al-Lugha wa al-Thaqāfa wa al-Muntaj al-Thaqāfī," *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 109 (Sept. 1994): 57-66; "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya: Kalām Laysa Jadīdan Tamāman ʿan ʿal-Islāmʾ wa ʿal-Shiʿrʾ," *Adab wa al-Naqd* 12, 113 (Jan. 1995): 79-84; "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya: al-Difāʿ ʿan al-Shiʿr min Ajl Taʾsīs ʿIlm al-Bayān: Qirāʾa fī Muqaddimāt ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī," *Adab wa Naqd* 114 (Feb. 1995): 75-84.

[62] Cairo: Sīnā li-al-Nashr, 1995.

[63] Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1996.

Besides these polemical issues, Abū Zayd began in this period to discuss the issue of women in Islam.[64] This interest cannot be separated from his reading of the Islamists' interpretation of the issue. Referring to Muḥammad al-Ghazālī's *Qaḍāyā al-Mar'a bayna al-Taqālīd al-Rākida wa al-Wāfida* in his own article "al-Mar'a: al-Buʿd al-Mafqūd fī al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī al-Muʿāṣir,"[65] Abū Zayd finds that religious discourse, while arguing that its discussion of women issues is based on religious texts, ignores the fact that the notion of women in these texts is socially and culturally determined and that its insistence on the inequality between women and men is based on certain exceptional (*istithnā'iyya*) verses and not on fundamental (*asāsiyya*) ones.[66]

Many Islamists could not accept Abū Zayd's ideas and interpretation. As a consequence, while the plaintiffs' suit was dismissed in the First Instance Court, the Court of Appeals decreed on June 14, 1995 that Abū Zayd was an apostate and that consequently he had to be separated from his wife. Two week before that (May 31, 1995), the Cairo University Council had decided to promote Abū Zayd to full professorship after his second application for promotion. However, since Abū Zayd would have found it difficult to live, meet students, teach and do research with a cohort of bodyguards constantly around him, he and his wife decided to flee to Europe and he accepted the invitation of Leiden University in the Netherlands to be a visiting professor.

---

[64] See "al-Mar'a: al-Buʿd al-Mafqūd fī al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī al-Muʿāṣir," *al-Qāhira* 123 (Feb. 1993): 16-36; "Qānūn al-Aḥwāl al-Shakhṣiyya fī Tūnis bayna al-ʿAlmāniyya al-Muftaraḍa wa Judhūr al-Turāth al-Islāmī," in *Hājar: Kitāb al-Mar'a* 1 (1993): 263-80; "al-Mar'a fī al-Mujtamaʿ: Jirāḥ al-Lugha wa Jirāḥ al-Huwiyya," *Adab wa Naqd* 93 (May 1993): 53-66; "Qaḍiyyat al-Mar'a bayna Khiṭāb al-Nahḍa wa al-Khiṭāb al-Ṭā'ifī, *Mawāqif* 73-74 (1994): 39-53.
[65] Reprinted in *Dawā'ir al-Khawf: Qirā'a fī Khiṭāb al-Mar'a* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 1999).

### 4. The Period of Exile: 1995-Present

On July 26, 1995 Abū Zayd and his wife left for Europe and his new position at Leiden University. Finding himself in exile, his interests inevitably shifted in direction. According to Abū Zayd, in Egypt he had been planning to write the second part of *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* devoted to *sunna*, the interpretation of the text. Instead, however, he rearranged his research priorities to devote more time to modern religious thinking.

Having taught at Leiden University and having met with Muslim students from many different countries, Abū Zayd has developed an increasing interest in Islamic thought in languages other than Arabic, especially the Turkish, Pakistani, Indonesian, Balkan and Iranian traditions. In June 1998 he directed a conference on "Qur'anic Studies on the Eve of the 21st Century" inviting Qur'ānic scholars from several Western and Muslim countries.[67] He found that the trend in reform is now coming from outside the Arab world.

To be sure, there are still some of his writings that deal with his "case" and with the interpretation of the Qur'ān. These works, however, were intended for Western public consumption, since they do not differ much from his Arabic writings on the subject.[68] As a Muslim scholar living in the West, he has also been expected to respond

---

[66] Ibid., 123. See also Chapter Three.

[67] For the report of the conference, see Abū Zayd, "Qur'anic Studies on the Eve of the 21st Century," in *ISIM (International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World) Newsletter* 1/98, 46.

[68] On his case, see, for example, "The Case of Abu Zayd." *Index on Censorship* 4 (1996): 30-39; and "Inquisition Trial in Egypt," in *Human Rights in Islam (RIMO, Maastricht)* 15 (1998): 47-55. On his ideas, "Linguistic Exposition of God in the Qur'an," in "Fundamentalismus der Moderne Christen und Muslim im Dialog," in *Evangelische Akademie Loccum* 75/94 (1996): 97-100.; "The Textuality of the Koran," in *Islam and Europe in Past and Present* (Leiden: Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences, 1997), 43-52.

to the Western images of Islam and to present his ideas on such concepts as human

rights, democracy, Western domination and other issues of modernity.[69]

On Monday, November 27, 2000, Abū Zayd was awarded by Leiden University

the Cleveringa Professorship for 2000-2001 in "Law, Freedom and Responsibility,

especially Freedom of Religion and Conscience." In his welcome address, Prof. Dr. W.A.

Wagner, Rector of the University, explained that, like William Cleveringa who openly

resisted the dismissal of Jewish professors from Leiden University by the German

occupiers in 1940, Professor Abū Zayd had also spoken his convictions on the

fundamental issues of freedom of expression and freedom of conscience.[70]

In his inaugural lecture, entitled "The Qur'ān: God and Man in Communication,"

Abū Zayd basically reiterates his ideas presented in *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*. Although this

repetition indicates that his position remains the same, it also points to the fact that he

has not been producing works of the same caliber as *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*,[71] or even of the

caliber of other Muslim scholars living and teaching in Western universities, such as

Fazlur Rahman's and Mohammed Arkoun's studies.

## C. The State of the Field

Most studies of the thought of Abū Zayd have been devoted mostly to his

"case." We may divide these studies into those dealing with its legal, socio-political, or

---

[69] See, for example, "Islam, Muslims and Democracy," in *Religion und Politik* (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiffung, intere Studie) 151 (1998): 103-112; "The Concept of Human Rights, the Process of Modernization and the Politics of Western Domination," *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft/International Politics and Society* 4 (1998): 434-437; "The Modernisation of Islam or the Islamisation of Modernity," in *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East*, ed. Roel Meijer (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), 71-86.

[70] The Rector's welcome address as well as Abū Zayd's inaugural lecture are available at http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/forum/onderzoek/jan/2.html

historical perspectives. In the case of the first category, Kilian Bälz has discussed the legal reasonings of the courts in charging Abū Zayd with apostasy in the light of traditional Islamic law and legal precedent in Egypt.[72] In the course of his discussion, he does not deny the possibility that the "Abū Zayd Case" constitutes yet another step in the Islamists' effort to "Islamize" the Egyptian legal system through the implementation of Islamic law (*taṭbīq al-sharīʿa al-Islāmiyya*). Similarly, Baudouin Dupret in his "A propos de l'affaire Abū Zayd, universitaire poursuivi pour apostasie: Le procès: l'argumentation des tribunaux,"[73] examines whether the argument of *ḥisba*, on the basis of which the plaintiffs filed suit against Abū Zayd, had been abolished in 1955 together with the dissolution of the *Sharīʿa* courts (*maḥākim sharʿiyya*) in that year, and whether as a consequence the National courts (*maḥākim waṭaniyya*) were even justified in hearing the case. For further studies on the process of *ḥisba* and its application in Egyptian law, one can refer to the studies of Muḥammad Saʿīd al-ʿAshmāwī,[74] Muḥammad Salīm al-ʿAwwā,[75] Ahmad Seif al-Islam Hamad[76] and Jörn Thielmann.[77] In

---

[71] However, it is to be noted that Abū Zayd is still preparing a book in Arabic discussing the modern liberal understanding of Islam.

[72] See Bälz, "Eheauflösung aufgrund von Apostasie durch Popularklage: der Fall Abū Zayd," *Praxis des Internationalen Privat- und Verfahrensrechts* (1996): 353-356; and "Submitting Faith to Judicial Scrutiny through the Family Trial: The "Abū Zayd Case"," *Die Welt des Islams* 37, 2 (1997): 135-55.

[73] In *Monde arabe, Maghreb-Machrek* 151 (January-March 1996): 18-22. Dupret has also translated into French the rulings of both the First Instance Court and the Court of Appeals in "Jurisprudence Abū Zayd," *Égypte/Monde arabe* 34 (1998): 169-193.

[74] In "al-Ḥisba." *al-ʿArabī* 457 (Dec. 1996): 26-30.

[75] al-ʿAwwā, "Un arrêt devenu une 'affaire'," a translation of his article in *al-Shaʿb* (July 14, 1995) by Baudouin Dupret in *Égypte/Monde arabe* 29 (1997): 155-173; and idem, *al-Ḥaqq fī al-Taʿbīr* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1998).

[76] See Hamad, "Hisba: Is Egypt a Civil or Religious State?" In The Center for Human Rights Legal Aid's website (January 1996) at http://www.chrla.org/reports/hisba/hisbint.htm; and Karim el-Gawhary's interview with him in "Shariʿa or Civil Code? Egypt's Parallel Legal Systems: an Interview with Ahmad Sayf al-Islam," *Middle East Report* (November-December 1995): 25-27.

addition to these studies, George N. Sfeir's work may be considered particularly useful since he analyzes the legal argumentation in the light of the Egyptian constitutional laws that guarantee freedom of belief, freedom of expression and freedom of academic research.[78] Almost all these authors agree that the passing of Law 3 of 1996, which orders that only the public prosecutor has the right to initiate *ḥisba* proceedings, was enacted as a direct result of the "Abū Zayd Case."

In addition to legal studies, there are some scholars who view the case of Abū Zayd from the socio-political and historical perspectives. Dupret, following his legal study, joined his colleague Jean-Noël Ferrié to analyze the case in terms of the socio-political perspective. They see the Islamists' reaction to Abū Zayd as a sign of their will to be fully involved in the power structure that sets public norms.[79] We can also include here Salwa Ismail's "Religious 'Orthodoxy' as Public Morality: The State, Islamism and Cultural Politics in Egypt,"[80] although it is not specifically related to the case of Abū Zayd.

Included also in this category are the studies by Navid Kermani,[81] Rotraud Wielandt,[82] Ami Ayalon,[83] and Fauzi M. Najjar,[84] all of whom look at the case in terms

---

[77] Thielmann, "La jurisprudence égyptienne sur la requête en *hisba,*" *Égypte/Monde arabe* 34 (1998): 81-97.

[78] Sfeir, "Basic Freedoms in a Fractured Legal Culture: Egypt and the Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd," *Middle East Journal* 52, 3 (1998): 402-414.

[79] See Dupret and Ferrié, "Participer au pouvoir, c'est édicter la norme: sur l'affaire Abu Zayd (Égypte, 1992-1996)," *Revue française de science politique* 47, 6 (1997): 762-765; and idem, "For intérieur et ordre public, ou comment la problématique de l'Aufklärung peut permettre de décrire un débat égyptien," in *Droits et sociétés dans le monde arabe,* eds. Gilles Boëtsch, Baudouin Dupret et Jean-Noël Ferrié (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires d'Aix-Marseille, 1997), 193-215.

[80] Published in *Critique* (Spring 1999): 25-47.

[81] Kermani, "Die Affäre Abū Zayd: Eine Kritik am religiösen Diskurs und ihre Folgen," *Orient* 35, 1 (1994): 25-49.

of the constant historical battle between the Islamists and the liberal Muslims in Egypt. Among these studies, Wielandt has comprehensively summarized the reasons for the conflict in the case of Abū Zayd: from the personal conflict of Shāhīn with Abū Zayd over of the latter's criticism of the scandal of Islamic investment companies to the hidden conflict between Dār al-ʿUlūm College of Cairo University with the Arabic Department in the Faculty of Arts,[85] and the monopoly of the ʿulamāʾ over the interpretation of Islamic texts and Abū Zayd's lack of qualifications to write on and teach Islamic issues.

Finally, Mona Abaza and Annette Heilmann, in their respective articles,[86] show great concern over the Islamists' reaction to the effort of building civil society in Egypt. Heilmann in particular believes that the lack of tolerance on the part of Islamists for different opinions will impede mutual and peaceful dialogue. Almost entirely absent from these studies of the "Abū Zayd Case," however, is a discussion of the theological foundations upon which the Islamists ideologically base themselves, a stance that Abū Zayd set out to challenge. Why is it that, for example, Abū Zayd proposed the concept of the humanity of the text (*bashariyyat al-naṣṣ*) and criticized the Ashʿarites and al-

---

[82] Wielandt, "Wurzeln der Schwierigkeit innerislamischen Gesprächs über neue hermeneutische Zugänge zum Korantext," in *The Qur'an as Text,* ed. Stefan Wild (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 257-282.

[83] Ayalon, *Egypt's Quest for Cultural Orientation* (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1999).

[84] Najjar, "Islamic Fundamentalism and the Intellectuals: The Case of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 27, 2 (2000): 177-200.

[85] See also Ahyaf Sinno, "Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd fī Baʿḍ Āthārih," *al-Mashriq* (Jan-June, 1997): 117-134.

[86] See Heilmann, "Die Affäre Abu Zayd und der Begriff der ʿEthik der Toleranzʾ in der heutigen politischen Diskussion in Ägypten," in *Staat und Zivilgesellschaft in Ägypten,* ed. Ferhad Ibrahim (Münster; Hamburg: Lit, 1995), 145-168; idem, "Der politische und religiöse Diskurs in Ägypten am Beispiel der *Affäre Abū Zayd,*" (M.A. thesis, Berlin Free University, 1996); and

Ghazālī's interpretations in *Mafhūm al-Nass*, as well as al-Shāfiʿī's jurisprudence in *al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī?* It is for this reason that in Chapter Four, devoted to the "Abū Zayd Case," I include a discussion of the theological issues surrounding the dispute.

Studies which focus on Abū Zayd's ideas are not many, and where there are such studies, they are mostly based on a specific book of Abū Zayd. As far as I know, the first work that introduced Abū Zayd's ideas to the Western world was Stefan Wild's "Die andere Seite des Textes: Nasr Hāmid Abū Zaid und der Koran," published in *Die Welt des Islams* 33 (1993): 256-261. Following this, Navid Kermani wrote his M.A. thesis in 1994 on Abū Zayd's discussion of the notion of "revelation."[87] Both these studies are based mainly on *Mafhūm al-Nass*. Another German scholar who studied Abū Zayd's ideas at almost the same time as Kermani was Andreas Meier who refers to *Mahūm al-Nass* and *Naqd al-Khitāb al-Dīnī* in his treatment.[88] Not only does he summarize nicely Abū Zayd's concept of the religious text into five theses,[89] but he also proposes that Abū Zayd's idea of the human dimension of the Word of God as manifested in the Qur'ān and in Jesus can form the basis for a fruitful Muslim-Christian dialogue.

---

Abaza, "Civil Society and Islam in Egypt: The Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd," *Journal of Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies* 2, 2 (1995): 29-42.

[87] It has been published under the title *Offenbarung als Kommunikation: Das Konzept* wahy *in Nasr Hāmid Abū Zayds* Mafhūm an-nass (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996).

[88] Meier, "Gotteswort in Knechtsgestalt – ein islamischer Luther in Ägypten? N.H. Abu Zaids provokante Koranexegese als säkulare Reform des Islam," in *Begegnungen zwischen Christentum und Islam*, ed. Hans-Christoph Goßmann (Ammersbek bei Hamburg: Verl. An der Lottbek, 1994), 57-74. See also his *Der politische Auftrag des Islam: Programme und Kritik zwischen Fundamentalismus und Reformen; Originalstimmen aus der islamischen Welt* (Wuppertal: Hammer, 1994), 540-553.

[89] Ibid., 64.

North American scholars became interested in studying Abū Zayd only lately.[90]

Besides Sfeir's and Najjar's studies, there are very few others, though one outstanding example is the work of Charles Hirschkind, who, in his "Heresy or Hermeneutics: The Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd," (1996) discusses two concepts, i.e., the historicity of the religious texts and the role of reason which, according to him, underlie the political contestation between Abū Zayd and the Islamists.[91]

Despite these studies, Abū Zayd's theory of interpretation has still received less attention than his other ideas. Here I have to mention again works written by European scholars. The first is that of Hans Zirker who, in his "'Bedeutung zu schaffen ist ein gemeinsamer Akt zwischen Text und Leser' (Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd): Zur Hermeneutik heiliger Schriften," analyzes Abū Zayd's concept of *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* in the light of Western hermeneutics.[92] Similarly, H'mida Ennaifer in *Les commentaires coraniques contemporains,* reviews in general terms Abū Zayd's theory of interpretation. Finally, there is the M.A. thesis of Moch. Nur Ichwan, an Indonesian student of Abū Zayd in

---

[90] We should mention, however, Edward Said's article "The Other Arab Muslims," in *The New York Times Magazine* (Nov. 26, 1993); republished in *The Politics of Dispossession* (London: Vintage, 1995), which introduces Abū Zayd's ideas in passing.

[91] Hirschkind, "Heresy or Hermeneutics: The Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd," *Stanford Humanities Review* 5, 1 on "Contested Polities" (Feb. 8, 1996). Available at http://www.stanford.edu/group/SHR/5-1/text/hirschkind.html

[92] Zirker, "'Bedeutung zu schaffen ist ein gemeinsamer Akt zwischen Text und Leser' (Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd): Zur Hermeneutik heiliger Schriften," in *Wege der Theologie: an der Schwelle zum dritten Jahrtausend. Festschrift für Hans Waldenfels zur Vollendung des 65. Lebensjahres,* eds. Günter Riße, Heino Sonnemans, Burkhard Theß (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 1996), 587-599. Cf. Mohamed Yehia, "The Dialectic of Translation: The Case of Four Hermeneutical Terms," in *Proceedings of the Fifth International Symposium on Comparative Literature 15ᵗʰ-17ᵗʰ, December 1998 on "Translation,"* eds. M.M. Enani and Mohammed Abdel Aatty (Cairo: Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Cairo, 1999), 315-338, who sees that Abū Zayd has translated the hermeneutical concept into four Arabic terms: *naṣṣ, tafsīr, ta'wīl* and *qirā'a.*

Leiden University, entitled "A New Horizon in Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's Contribution to Critical Qur'anic Scholarship" (1999).

This dissertation is intended to fill this lacuna of research. In addition, it attempts to analyze Abū Zayd's ideas and theory of interpretation more comprehensively by studying his ideas in their socio-political context, and in the light of hermeneutics and the modern interpretation of the Qur'ān.

## D. Summary and Thesis

In the second chapter, I propose to study the tradition of the literary approach to the Qur'ān to which Abū Zayd's theory of interpretation belongs. Literary interpretation (*al-tafsīr al-adabī*) of the Qur'ān begins with the thesis that the Qur'ān is a literary text and that as such it can be analyzed like any other text. In order to show on what basis the Qur'ān might be considered as a literary text, I offer in the first part of the chapter a general discussion of what literature and literary interpretation are. The second part discusses the literary interpretation of the Qur'ān starting from Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1966) and his students and comparing them with Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966).

The third chapter deals exclusively with Abū Zayd's theory of interpretation. It starts by studying systematically his notion of revelation and his theory of interpretation. As an example of how his interpretation functions in practice, I look here at how it is applied to women's issues as reflected in the Qur'ān. Then in order to gauge the contribution and originality of his theory, this chapter also compares his approach with that of Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988) and Mohammed Arkoun (b. 1928).

Responses to Abū Zayd's ideas and theory of interpretation constitutes the fourth chapter of this dissertation. It starts with the description of his "case" at the university and in the court, and is followed by the discussion of the Islamists' criticism, represented mainly by Muḥammad 'Amāra's criticism of Abū Zayd as it is reflected in the former's book *al-Tafsīr al-Marksī li-al-Islām*. The chapter ends with some comments concerning the motifs and reasons that triggered the Islamists' reactions not only to Abū Zayd but also to other Muslim thinkers who have attempted to study the Qur'ān critically.

The dissertation comes to a close with a summary of Abū Zayd's method of interpretation and his contribution to the modern approach to the Qur'ān in general and Islamic thought in Egypt in particular.

The contribution of this dissertation in the light of other studies on Abū Zayd may be seen from each of its chapters. First, this dissertation goes beyond studying Abū Zayd's ideas in isolation from the socio-political and historical context in which they were written, and demonstrates to what extent he was reacting to the religious discourse surrounding him. It attempts to read his works chronologically by referring to his contexts which may have colored them. In addition, the first chapter attempts to analyze his intellectual development, which has to some extent been taken for granted until now.

The second contribution of this dissertation is in its analysis of Abū Zayd's theory of interpretation within the tradition of the literary interpretation of the Qur'ān in Egypt and that of modern Muslim scholars in general. It furthermore discusses systematically his theory of interpretation starting with the theory of the text. The most

important contribution in this regard is its attempt to study his theory of interpretation

using the general theory of interpretation in hermeneutics and Biblical interpretation.

Its discussion of the Islamists' responses to Abū Zayd's ideas, especially the

reasons and motifs behind these responses constitute another contribution. Many studies

on the "Abū Zayd Case" usually analyze it from the legal, socio-political and historical

perspectives. They do not search for the main reasons, which lies in the theological

belief as this dissertation argues, without which this case or any other cases for that

matter will not be understood.

Finally, it is hoped that this dissertation contributes to the critical study of

hermeneutics in Islam which is still in its infancy.[93] Contrary to the thesis of

Muḥammad 'Atā al-Sīd, who argues that the hermeneutical problem in Islam is

fundamentally different from that in Christianity and that certain principles developed

in Biblical interpretation cannot be employed to understand the Qur'ān because it

represents the *ipsissima verba* of Allāh revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad through an

agent, Gabriel,[94] this dissertation attempts to demonstrate that, despite its divine

source, the Qur'ān is also a work of literature that can be subjected to any approach. It is

on the basis of this presupposition that proponents of literary interpretation and

hermeneutics are increasingly turning their attention to the Qur'ān, and analyzing it in

new and exciting ways.

---

[93] See also Peter Heath, "Creative Hermeneutics: A Comparative Analysis of Three Islamic Approaches," *Arabica* 36 (1989): 173ff.
[94] al-Sīd, "The Hermeneutical Problem of the Qur'an in Islamic History," (Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1975)

# CHAPTER TWO

# LITERARY INTERPRETATION OF THE QUR'ĀN

## A. The Qur'ān as Literature

Before attempting to discuss the theory behind the literary approach to the Qur'ān, it would be useful to determine first whether in fact the Qur'ān may be regarded as literature. Even more to the point is the question: What is the "literariness" of the Qur'ān? Muslim scholars have in the past tried to demonstrate the literary qualities of the Qur'ān by appealing to the concept of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* (the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān), but, as Mustansir Mir has argued in his "The Qur'an as Literature," most of these writings are works of theology – wherein the superiority of the Qur'ān is asserted over other sacred or secular works -- rather than of literary criticism.[1] Mir proposes that any discussion of this issue should be based on the principles of literary criticism.[2]

In a lecture delivered in 1982 on "The Qur'an as Literature: Perils, Pitfalls and Prospects,"[3] Andrew Rippin also suggested that in order to approach the Qur'ān as literature, the basic assumption that the Qur'ān is the Word of God and is therefore "above" other works of literature has to be disregarded. "To take the Qur'ān as

---

[1] Mir, "The Qur'an as Literature." *Religion & Literature* 20, 1 (1988): 49. See also his "Irony in the Qur'ān: A Study of the Story of Joseph," in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān,* ed. Issa J. Boullata (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 173.

[2] Andrew Rippin would add that these principles are not simply those of Arab literary theory, but rather those of modern-day comparative literature. Rippin believes that the Arabic literary theory developed to prove the excellence of the Qur'ān. See his "The Qur'an as Literature: Perils, Pitfalls and Prospects," *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* 10, 1 (1983): 39.

[3] The lecture is delivered in the Faculty of Humanities, University of Calgary and published in 1983. See n. 2 *supra.*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

literature," Rippin states, "... is to take it on the same plane as all other literary productions."[4] There are of course many obstacles to studying the Qur'ān in this way. Rippin observes for instance that some Muslims perceive any critical approach to the Qur'ān to be an attack from outside.[5] Not only do some Muslims receive the critical studies by non-Muslims with suspicion, but also studies by liberal Muslims are distrusted. In most cases, those liberals are even excommunicated.

These conservative Muslims assert that as the Word of God (*kalām Allāh*), the Qur'ān should be approached using a "special" method that is "appropriate" to the text itself. This common assumption that believers hold of the Qur'ān makes it difficult to apply principles of literary theory to its analysis. Rudi Paret summarizes this view:

> Since Muslims believe the Qur'ān to have been verbally inspired by God
> and to have always existed in Heaven in its original, ideal form ..., the
> Qur'ān is not really a literary work at all, and cannot therefore be an
> object of study by literary historians.[6]

For literary scholars, however, the Qur'ān – like the Bible[7] -- is, as literature, liable to any approach. It does not require a special method of analysis simply because it is a divine text. Indeed, many of these literary critics are non-Muslims who would like to study the literary qualities of the Qur'ān. But there are also Muslim scholars with an interest in literary theory. Consequently, they do not worry about whether such critical approaches, which are products of modern Western civilization, will distort the

---

[4] Rippin "The Qur'an as Literature," 40.

[5] Rippin "The Qur'an as Literature," 41.

[6] Paret, "The Qur'ān – I," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period,* eds. A.F.L. Beeston, T.M. Johnstone, R.B. Serjeant and G.R. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 216.

[7] Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III have argued the case with the Bible in their *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), especially in "Introduction," 23-29.

Qur'ān. Many Muslims, on the other hand, do worry that these "foreign" and "non-Islamic" approaches will lead to misinterpretation of the Qur'ān.

Some of the Qur'ānic scholars even believe that the meaning of the Qur'ān should be that which was understood by Muḥammad and his contemporaries. These meanings, they claim, can be *discovered* through historical analysis of the works of previous *tafsīr*s and the Prophet's *sīra*. This position ignores the contention of literary scholars that the meaning of the text may lie in the author, the text, the context, or the reader, that the task of hermeneutics is not only to *discover* but also to *create* the meaning of the text. Given the many possibilities of locating the meaning of the text, the methods and approaches used to ascertain the analysis are consequently diverse.

In approaching the Qur'ān as literature, this chapter will examine the extent to which it exhibits a quality known as "literariness." But in order to do so, it will be necessary first of all to determine what constitutes literariness, i.e., what makes a work literature and what sets it apart from other non-literary works.

## 1. What is Literature?

What is literature?  Literary theorists themselves find it difficult to define literature.  Jonathan Culler, for example, argues in his *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, that nowadays the distinction between literary and non-literary works does not seem crucial. Both can be studied in similar ways. In addition, critics find that literariness, which is thought to be the chief quality of literary works, is to be found in non-literary works too.[8]  Terry Eagleton goes even further, saying that a piece of writing

---

[8] Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18.

can be or ceases to be literature depending on the particular ideology which promote it. "[L]iterature," Eagleton states, "cannot in fact be 'objectively' defined. It leaves the definition of literature up to how somebody decides to *read*, not to the nature of what is written."[9]

Aside from these arguments, other theorists have suggested definitions of literature that may be of use for our discussion. The debate among these scholars revolves around whether literariness lies in the text *ontologically* or *functionally*. The Russian Formalists, who argue for the former, have long suggested that the literariness of literature lies in its use of peculiar language which differs from ordinary language. This feature, which is usually referred to as the "foregrounding" of language,[10] makes literature strange and unfamiliar to the reader. The "estranging" or "defamiliarizing" element in the text then leads to a particular degree of attention from the reader. In the words of René Wellek and Austin Warren, the authors of the classical handbook of literary method and theory, *Theory of Literature*, "[p]oetic language organizes, tightens, the resources of everyday language, and sometimes does even violence to them, in an effort to force us into awareness and attention."[11]

Eagleton disagrees with this definition, arguing that the deviation from ordinary language and the resulting sense of estrangement do not "*always* and *everywhere*" make a text literature.[12] He takes as his example slang, which deviates from ordinary

---

[9] Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 8.
[10] Culler, *Literary Theory*, 28. On the discussion of Russian Formalism, see ibid., 123-124; Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 2-6.
[11] René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, Third Edition (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1956), 24.
[12] Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 5.

language but which cannot be considered as literature. Literariness, according to him, is a function that we apply to a text in considering it as literature.

While these particular theories are rather far apart in their views, they can be combined to yield a more comprehensive perspective on literature. David S. Miall and Don Kuiken have done just that in their recent article "What is Literariness? Three Components of Literary Reading."[13] Based on empirical study of students' responses to a particular poem, they argue that literariness consists in three components of response to a literary text: first, the presence of stylistic variations in the text; second, the occurrence of defamiliarization in the mind of the reader; and finally, the process of interpretation following defamiliarization. These three components, Miall and Kuiken further suggest, have to be present and must interact with each other. It is on the basis of this definition that I will attempt in the following to discuss the literariness of the Qur'ān.

## 2. The Literariness of the Qur'ān

The basic property of a literary text is its foregrounding of language, which the Qur'ān does possess in abundance — so much so that readers and hearers tend to believe that it is poetry. Although the question of whether the Qur'ān contains poetry or *saj'* (rhymed prose) is a problem that has not yet been settled, there are in fact quite a number of verses which are rhythmic and rhyming. J.J. Gluck and Devin J. Stewart, for example, have demonstrated respectively the existence of poetry and *saj'* in the

---

[13] David S. Miall and Don Kuiken, "What is Literariness? Three Components of Literary Reading," *Discourse Process* 28, 2 (1999): 122ff.

Qur'ān.[14] Besides these elements, the Qur'ān contains figures of speech, employs a variety of narrative techniques, and makes excellent use of words and phrases.

Whether reading or hearing these stylistic features in the Qur'ān, one is immediately struck by them. Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) calls this "estranging" process *siḥr al-Qur'ān* (the spell of the Qur'ān).[15] This process of defamiliarization has been documented in the Qur'ān and the *Sīra* of Muḥammad. Because of the beautiful language of the Qur'ān, many of Muḥammad's contemporaries called him *kāhin* (diviner), *shā'ir* (poet) or *majnūn* (one who is possessed by *jinn*), accusations which the Qur'ān categorically denies. Q. 69:40-43 for example states *innahū la-qawlu rasūlin karīm. wa mā huwa bi-qawli shā'irin qalīla 'm-mā tu'minūn. wa lā bi-qawli kāhinin qalīla 'm-mā tadhakkarūn. tanzīlu 'm-mi 'r-rabbi 'l-'ālamīn* "That it is indeed the speech of the noble messenger. It is not poet's speech – little is it that you believe. Nor diviner's speech – little is it that you remember. It is a revelation from the Lord of the Universe."

In the *Sīra* as well we come across stories about the reactions of Muḥammad's opponents upon hearing the Qur'ān. It was upon hearing the verses of the Qur'ān for example that 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644) entered Islam,[16] while al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra, though he turned away from Islam, acknowledged the beauty of the Qur'ān. Nevertheless he had to convince his peers among Muḥammad's enemies that the Qur'ān

---

[14] See Stewart, "*Saj'* in the Qur'ān: Prosody and Structure," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 21, 2 (1990): 101-139, and Gluck, "Is There Poetry in the Qur'ān?" *Semitics* 8 (1982): 43-89.

[15] Sayyid Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān* (Many editions. The first was published in 1945 by Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo. Unless noted otherwise, this study uses the 14th edition published by Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo in 1993), 11ff.

[16] Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 11-13, 25. See also Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, eds. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, and 'Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ Shalabī (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī,

is nothing but the magic from of old (*in hādhā illā siḥrun yu'thar*).[17] This last incident is reflected in the Qur'ānic verse (Q. 74:21-24) *thumma naẓar, thumma 'abasa wa basar, thumma adbara wa 'stakbar, fa-qāla in hādhā illā siḥrun yu'thar* "then he looked, then he frowned and showed displeasure, then he turned back and displayed arrogance. He said: This is nothing but magic from of old."

These two stories demonstrate that foregrounding of language evokes the feelings of those who understand the Arabic language regardless of their beliefs. Consequently, for our purposes Muslims and non-Muslims can appreciate equally the literary beauty of the Qur'ān. And it is for this reason that Mir suggests that, by considering the Qur'ān as literature, Muslim and non-Muslim scholars can work together to study from the perspective of literary criticism the literary aspect of the Qur'ān, a discipline which is still in its infancy.[18]

The third component of literariness consists in reader's (or hearer's) response and interpretation of the literary text as the result of being defamiliarized and estranged with this foregrounding of language. While the relation between foregrounding and defamiliarization is quite clear, the third component, according to Miall and Kuiken, depends on the individual's response to the literary text.[19] In the case of Qur'ānic studies, some scholars are interested in the aesthetic aspect of the Qur'ān, some in the rhetorical way of how the verse is structured to achieve its effect, some in the aural sound and other elements of literary structures.

---

1955), 342-346. For further discussion, see Issa J. Boullata, "Sayyid Quṭb's Literary Appreciation of the Qur'ān," in *Literary Structure of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, 357.
[17] Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 13-14, 25. See also Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, 270-271.
[18] Mir, "The Qur'an as Literature," 63.
[19] Miall and Kuiken, "What is Literariness?" 134.

## B. Literary Interpretation (*al-Tafsīr al-Adabī*) of the Qur'ān

Based on the above discussion of the literariness of the Qur'ān, in this section I will discuss the literary interpretation of the Qur'ān. But again what do we mean by literary interpretation. There are writings which claim to be using a literary approach but do not provide a definition of what they mean by a literary approach.[20] Others do not integrate Qur'ānic studies and literary criticism in their discussion. The pioneering work in that direction is *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān* (henceforth cited as *LSRMQ*) edited by Issa J. Boullata, which invites literary scholars and Qur'ānic scholars to analyze and appreciate the Qur'ān from a literary point of view.[21] But as is the case with many edited books, which gather a collection of articles, despite the editor's suggestion to the invited contributors to use recent literary theories in their analysis of the Qur'ān, some of the articles do not represent that plan. In addition, since the book is similar to *The Literary Guide to the Bible* edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode,[22] it is also victim to the same shortcoming -- indicated by the editors of *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* – "the volume offers no discernible or systematic literary method."[23] These weaknesses are not to belittle the many contributions of *LSRMQ* but to encourage further studies on the topic.

---

[20] This similar objection has been advanced by Ryken and Longman III in the case of literary commentary on the Bible in their book *Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, 9-10.

[21] See Boullata, "Introduction," in *LSRMQ*, xi.

[22] Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987.

[23] See Ryken and Longman, *Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, 10.

## 1. Literary Interpretation of the Qur'ān: Perils and Pitfalls

Literary interpretation has not attracted the attention of many Qur'ānic scholars, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. This may be because literary criticism – to borrow Mark Allan Powell's phrase[24] -- is still considered a "second language" by many of these scholars, who for the most part rely on philological and historical analysis. Before the appearance of *LSRMQ*, some non-Qur'ānic scholars who had been trained in the field of history of religions attempted, out of a sense of "dissatisfaction with existing approaches" in the field to apply literary theory to the Qur'ān.[25] But the number of such studies is still small compared to the corresponding work being done in Biblical interpretation.

The variety of literary theory, furthermore, makes the adaptation of this new approach to the study of the Qur'ān more difficult. Romanticism, New Criticism, Formalism, Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Reader-response criticism and Deconstruction are just some of the literary critical approaches available to Islamicists, who seem nevertheless to be largely unaware of them. M.H. Abrams's classification of the four types of literary criticism fortunately assists us in understanding the different schools of literary theory.[26] The first broad category of criticism, according to Abrams,

---

[24] Powell, *The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 3.

[25] See, for example, Richard C. Martin, "Structural Analysis and the Qur'an: Newer Approaches to the Study of Islamic Texts," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Thematic Issue 47, 4S (1979): 665-683; idem, "Understanding the Qur'ān in Text and Context," *History of Religions* 21 (1982): 361-384; Mohammed Arkoun, *Lectures du Coran* (Paris: Maisonneuve and Larose, 1982); Marcia K. Hermansen, "Pattern and Meaning in the Qur'ānic Adam Narratives," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 17, 1 (1988): 41-52; and other works mentioned in the latter article, especially p. 41 n. 1.

[26] Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: The Norton Library, 1958), 6-29.

is *mimetic,* which views a literary work as imitating the world and evaluating it in terms of the accuracy of its representation. The second and third categories of criticism are *pragmatic* and *expressive* types. *Pragmatic* theory is reader-centered criticism that evaluates a literary work in terms of its effects on its readers, while *expressive* theory is author-centered criticism which evaluates a work in terms of its expression of the views and thought of its writer. Abrams calls the fourth category of theories the *objective* types of criticism that view a work as a world in itself.

These four types of criticism represent four elements surrounding the work itself, i.e., the work, the universe, the writer, and the reader, which are illustrated by Abrams as follows:[27]
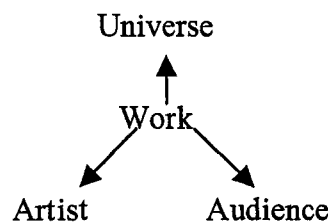
The history of literary criticism has recently seen a shift of focus from author-centered interpretation to reader-centered criticism. The latter argues that the role of the reader is not only to *re-produce* but also to *produce* the meaning of the text. David Jasper in his "Literary Readings of the Bible" nicely puts this theory as follows:

> Reader-response criticism focuses on the reader as the creator of, or at the very least, an important contributor to, the meaning of texts. Rather than seeing 'meaning' as a property inherent in texts, whether put there by an author or somehow existing intrinsically in the shape, structure and wording of the texts, reader-response criticism regards meaning as coming into being at the meeting point of text and reader -- or in a more extreme form, as being created by readers in the act of reading.[28]

---

[27] Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp,* 6.

[28] Jasper, "Literary Readings of the Bible," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation,* ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 18-19. This

Many Biblical scholars have applied this criticism to the Bible,[29] and some argue

that it is time for Qur'ānic scholars to do the same. Rippin has actually proposed in his

above-mentioned article that the future of Qur'ānic studies lies in "situating the Qur'ān

at the focal point of a reader-response study,"[30] but this proposal has not attracted many

Qur'ānic scholars yet.

Perhaps, the major difficulty in applying literary theory[31] is the resistance shown

by Muslims to this approach. Many consider it to be secular in nature and, as such, insist

that it cannot be applied to the divine text. It is true that the chief threat posed by

literary theory is its challenge to the authority of the text. The Qur'ān as the "sacred

text" or the Word of God becomes subject, like all other literature, to any critical

approach. Furthermore, different interpretive schools, whether feminist, Marxist,

Liberation theology critics – or "oppositional discourses" as Wolfgang Iser calls them[32]

---

quotation indicates that there are, at least, two types of reader-response theory: the conservative and the radical. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Reader in New Testament Interpretation," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation,* ed. Joel B. Green (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdamans Publishing Co. 1995), 301-328, especially 307ff.

[29] Besides Jasper and Vanhoozer, see, for example, Edgar V. McKnight, *The Bible and the Reader: An Introduction to Literary Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), especially Chapter XIII. Cf. Stanley E. Porter, "Why Hasn't Reader – Response Criticism Caught on in New Testament Studies?" *Journal of Literature & Theology* 4, 3 (1990): 278-292.

[30] Rippin, "The Qur'an as Literature," 46; idem, "Introduction" in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān,* ed. A. Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 3-4. See for instance Jane D. McAuliffe who reads Q. 3:7 in the light of reader-response theory in her "Text and Textuality: Q. 3:7 as a Point of Intersection," *LSRMQ,* 56-76. Compare this with A. Neuwirth who, instead of using reader-response theory, analyzes the Qur'ān in terms of communication process between speaker and listener (thus listener-response theory) in her, "Referentiality and Textuality in *Sūrat al-Hijr:* Some Observations on the Qur'ānic "Canonical Process" and the Emergence of a Community," *LSRMQ,* 143-172, especially, 145ff.

[31] Some objections in applying literary criticism to the Bible, which are summarized by Powell, may also be appropriated to the Qur'ān. See Powell, *The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism,* 16-17.

[32] Wolfgang Iser, *The Range of Interpretation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 4.

– will be tempted to attack the authority of the Qur'ān as has been done to the Bible.[33]

These oppositional critics challenge the ideology which, they believe, was implanted in the text by its author/s.[34] Feminist readings, for instance, will dispute its "patriarchal" ideology, while materialist and Liberation theology critics will argue against the economic and political oppressions promoted by the text.

The argument of these different schools, furthermore, imply that the meaning of the text is indeterminate. It is the reader who creates the meaning and lends the text whatever sense it possesses, depending on his/her interest. If the interests of the readers are different, it is inevitable that the text will mean different things to different readers. Consequently, there is no one determinate meaning that the reader is bound to discover in the text. This position, according to Muslim critics, confuses believers who, instead of a variety of relative meanings, would like to have some concrete and objective thing to hold on to.

Reader-response theory, therefore, allows for a variety of readings. To the question, "Which of these readings is correct?", literary scholars would say that there are no universal objective criteria to validate a reading. This conviction stems from the perception that objective interpretation is an expression of power. "Those in power," writes Terence J. Keegan in his "Biblical Criticism and the Challenge of Postmodernism," "whether political, economic, scholarly or religious, tend to justify

---

[33] In the case of Biblical interpretation see, for example, Jasper, "Literary Readings of the Bible," 28ff.; idem, "Literary Readings of the Bible: Trends in Modern Criticism," in *The Bible and Literature: A Reader,* eds. David Jasper and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 57ff.; and Terence J. Keegan, "Biblical Criticism and the Challenge of Postmodernism," *Biblical Interpretation* 3, 1 (1995): 1-14.

[34] Cf. Stephen Fowl, who challenges the claim that texts have ideologies, in his "Texts Don't Have Ideologies," *Biblical Interpretation* 3, 1 (1995): 15-34.

their power by appealing to objective analyses that support the structured world they dominate."[35] In the case of interpretation, therefore, the authority that sanctions a certain meaning and outlaws others lies in what Stanley Fish calls "interpretive communities,"[36] that is, a group of individuals who share similar interpretive strategies in reading. These interpretive strategies, however, apply only to certain interpretive communities and cannot be imposed on others.

Despite the many objections leveled against the literary approach, however, it can still be seen to offer many benefits for Qur'ānic interpretation. It challenges, for instance, the absolutists, who claim to know the true meaning and the true interpretation of the text.[37] In keeping with the concept of interpretive communities, it can at the same time help to refute the subjectivists who would have the texts mean only what fits their own interests. Werner G. Jeanrond in speaking about the crisis in Biblical interpretation, argues that hermeneutics (I would add, literary theory too) is not the cause of this crisis. He states:

> Hermeneutics, the study of proper means of text-interpretation, is not the cause of the current crisis in biblical studies, rather it may point indirectly to some ways out of this crisis. Of course, it is true to say that hermeneutics has destroyed the claims to any total objectivity in biblical interpretation, theology and any other discipline of human knowledge. But hermeneutics has equally invalidated the pretensions of any purely

---

[35] Keegan, "Biblical Criticism and the Challenge of Postmodernism," 1.

[36] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 14, 16, 317; David J.A. Clines, "Possibilities and Priorities of Biblical Interpretation in an International Perspective," *Biblical Interpretation* 1, 1 (1993): 79; David J.A. Clines, and J. Cheryl Exum, "The New Literary Criticism," in *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, eds. J. Cheryl Exum and David J.A. Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 19. In Qur'ānic studies, see McAuliffe, "Text and Textuality," 68-69.

[37] In his discussion of the marketplace of interpretation, Iser places this absolutist view as the first trend, i.e., "monopoly of interpretation." The second and third trends are "the conflict of interpretation," and "oppositional discourses." See Iser, *The Range of Interpretation,* especially Chapter One.

subjectivist approach to biblical texts, i.e. approaches based on nothing other than the conviction that one's preferred theory of what the biblical text ought to say or stand for is just fine. Thus, it has become obvious that neither objectivist nor subjectivist ideologies of reading have helped the critical reader any further in her or his attempt to understand the potential of meaning in biblical texts, or indeed any other written or oral texts.[38]

Contemporary literary theory furthermore encourages readers continuously to search for new meanings of the text. Literary theory and other new approaches to the Qur'ān can stimulate discussion of those areas that Mohammed Arkoun calls *l'impensable* and *l'impensé*.[39] They are "unthinkable" and "unthought of" only because of the limitations of the available methods, or because of the ideological constraints that prevent one from studying an issue critically.

Finally, with Mir, I argue that the Qur'ān is not exclusively a theological text; it is also literature. Even Sayyid Quṭb once argued that three quarters (*thalāthat arbāʿ*) of the Qur'ān consists of literature.[40] Although one can raise the objection that the literary approach is limited in what it can do with the Qur'ānic text, the same thing can be said of many other approaches.

## 2. Characteristics of the Literary Interpretation of the Qur'ān

One important feature of all literary approaches is the study of a text in its present form. In discussing the Qur'ān as literature, Mir, for example, argues in favor of

---

[38] Jeanrond, "After Hermeneutics: The Relationship between Theology and Biblical Studies," in *The Open Text: New Directions for Biblical Studies?* ed. Francis Watson (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1993), 85.

[39] See Arkoun, *Lectures du Coran,* xiiff. See also Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 81-82.

[40] Quṭb's comment to the third edition of *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī,* which is reprinted in the 14th edition, p. 254. See also idem, *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma fī al-Qur'ān* (Many editions. The first is

"taking the Qur'an in its finished form as a starting point for literary investigation."[41] Does this means that one need not bother with – as Stefan Wild calls it -- "the *pre-history* of the Qur'ānic text"?[42] Wild for his part argues that the questions of influences and the genesis of the Qur'ān are not of primary purpose for this approach.

In the case of Biblical interpretation, Jasper also states that instead of focusing on the *context* within which the Bible was written and had been understood, literary approaches are interested in the present *text* and its relation with the reader. "By focusing upon *text* rather than *context*," argues Jasper, "these literary readings of the Bible claim to overcome the hermeneutical problem of the 'two horizons', that is, the gap between the ancient text and the modern reader."[43] The latter, by looking at the literary qualities of the text, will find its power and meaning for the present context.

There is, however, a debate in Biblical interpretation about whether this synchronic approach neglects historical questions or *vice versa*. Ryken and Longman III, for example, argue in their *Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* that one of the pitfalls of the literary approach to the Bible is its refusal to concern itself with the question of history.[44] The "shift of paradigm" -- from historical to literary interpretation -- furthermore points to the agenda of the latter as being that of moving away from such historical concern. John Barton, on the other hand, argues that even the historical-

---

published in Cairo in 1947; the second by Dār al-Ma'ārif, in 1953; and the seventh in 1981. Unless noted otherwise, this study uses the second edition), 8.

[41] Mir, "The Qur'an as Literature," 53.

[42] Stefan Wild, "Preface," in *The Qur'an as Text*, ed. S. Wild (Leiden: Brill, 1996), viii.

[43] Jasper, "Literary Readings of the Bible," 27.

[44] Ryken and Longman III, *Complete Literary Guide*, 26

critical interpretation deals with literary issues of the text.[45] In an attempt to bridge this divide, Anthony C. Thiselton suggests that it is more constructive for Biblical interpretation to blend both approaches "draw[ing] on the strength of each approach while avoiding its distinctive weaknesses."[46] Similarly, Paul R. Noble in his "Synchronic and Diachronic Approaches to Biblical Interpretation"[47] argues that even though these approaches ask different questions of the text, they cannot ignore each other, because they are studying *the same text*. Noble further explains this mutual relation:

> The text was produced in a particular historical-cultural situation, knowledge of which is therefore indispensable for a sensitive synchronic reading; and conversely, historical reconstructions of what lies behind a text are dependent upon an accurate literary appreciation of the text's final form.[48]

In the case of literary interpretation of the Qur'ān -- as we will see below -- this debate does not seem to be pertinent, since the proponents of *al-tafsīr al-adabī* propose that both approaches be used in Qur'ānic interpretation.

A significant feature of literary interpretation lies in its focus on *how* the text communicates, before even addressing *what* it says.[49] Based on a linguistic model of oral language, literary theorists maintain that a text is a communication between addresser/s

---

[45] Barton, "Historical-Critical Approach," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, 14.

[46] Thiselton, "On Models and Methods: A Conversation with Robert Morgan," in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, eds. David J. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl, Stanley E. Porter (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 341, 343.

[47] Noble, "Synchronic and Diachronic Approaches to Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of Literature & Theology* 7, 2 (1993): 130-148.

[48] Noble, "Synchronic and Diachronic Approaches," 132.

[49] See Ryken, "The Bible as Literature: A Brief History," in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, 66; idem, "Literary Criticism of the Bible: Some Fallacies," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, eds. Kenneth R.R. Gros Louis, with James S. Ackerman and Thayer S. Warshaw (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1974), 27-28.

and addressee/s.[50] Literary studies, therefore, seek to examine the form and technique

underlying work or works in question. If we take the articles in *LSRMQ* as an example,

we find that interests range over a wide field, such as: the communication process in the

Qur'ān (A. Neuwirth and A. Johns);[51] how the *sūras* are constructed ("structural unity"

in A.M. Zahniser's and "formulaic feature" in A.T Welch's articles);[52] literary elements

in the Qur'ān ("irony" in Mir's, "ellipsis" in Y. Rahman's, *majāz* in Kamal Abu-Deeb's

contributions).[53] As a literary text which has affected Muslims, some contributors look

at how Muslim readers have responded to the literary beauty of the Qur'ān (N. Kermani,

M. Ayoub and Boullata).[54]And finally, since the Qur'ān was originally recited orally,

Michael Sells and Soraya Hajjaji-Jarrah examine the Qur'ānic voice, whose meaning has

had a great impact on its listeners.[55] These articles suggest that *how* the Qur'ān is

written is seen as an issue that takes precedence over *what* the Qur'ān says.

---

[50] Cf. Peter Dixon and Marisa Bortolussi, "Text Is Not Communication: A Challenge to a Common Assumption," *Discourse Processes* 31, 1 (2001): 1-25.

[51] Neuwirth, "Referentiality and Textuality in *Sūrat al-Hijr,*" 143-172; Johns, "Reflections on the Dynamics and Spirituality of *Sūrat al-Furqān,*"188-227.

[52] Zahniser, "Major Transitions and Thematic Borders in Two Long Sūras: *al-Baqara* and *al-Nisā',*"26-55; Welch, "Formulaic Features of the Punishment-Stories," 77-116.

[53] Mir, "Irony in the Qur'ān," 173-187; Rahman, "Ellipsis in the Qur'ān: A Study of Ibn Qutayba's *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān,*" 277-291; and Abu-Deeb, "Studies in the *Majāz* and Metaphorical Language of the Qur'ān: Abū 'Ubayda and al-Sharīf al-Radī," 310-353.

[54] Kermani, "The Aesthetic Reception of the Qur'ān as Reflected in Early Muslim History," 255-276; Ayoub, "Literary Exegesis of the Qur'ān: The Case of al-Sharīf al-Radī," 292-309; and Boullata, "Sayyid Qutb's Literary Appreciation of the Qur'ān," 354-371.

[55] Sells, "A Literary Approach to the Hymnic Sūras of the Qur'ān: Spirit, Gender, and Aural Intertextuality," 3-25; Hajjaji-Jarrah, "The Enchantment of Reading: Sound, Meaning, and Expression in *Sūrat al-'Ādiyāt,*" 228-251.

### *3. Literary Interpretation (al-Tafsīr al-Adabī) of the Qur'ān in Egypt*

In discussing the literary interpretation of the Qur'ān, this chapter focuses

mainly on specific *tafsīrs* written in Egypt. It will examine how they approach the

Qur'ān and whether they try to integrate Qur'ānic studies and literary theory.

### a. Amīn al-Khūlī (1895-1966)

The first modern Muslim scholar to employ a literary method in analyzing the

Qur'ān was Amīn al-Khūlī. He is even regarded by Katrin Speicher as this method's

spiritual father as well as the first to apply it (als ihr geistiger Vater und als der erste).[56]

Khūlī was in fact a literary critic who taught *'ilm al-bayān* and *tafsīr* at the Faculty of

Arts in Fu'ād I (then Cairo) University,[57] and edited a monthly journal on Arabic

literature called *al-Adab*[58] from 1956 until his death in 1966. Al-Khūlī broke new ground

in proposing a new approach to Qur'ānic studies based on a literary point of view.

In his book *Manāhij Tajdīd fī al-Naḥw wa al-Balāgha wa al-Tafsīr wa al-Adab*,

and especially in the section on *al-Tafsīr*,[59] al-Khūlī argues against Muḥammad 'Abduh

---

[56] See Katrin Speicher, "Einige Bemerkungen zu al-Ḫūlīs Entwurf eines *tafsīr adabī*," in *Encounters of Words and Texts: Intercultural Studies in Honor of Stefan Wild on the Occasion of His 60ʰ Birthday, March 2, 1997, Presented by His Pupils in Bonn*, eds. Lutz Edzard and Christian Szyska (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1997), 4. Speicher's dating of al-Khūlī's death should be corrected from 1967 to 1966. See Kāmil Sa'fān who writes that al-Khūlī died on Wednesday, the ninth of March 1966. Sa'fān, *Amīn al-Khūlī* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li al-Kitāb, 1982), 300. In his study of contemporary *tafsīrs'* methodology, H'mida Ennaifer (Aḥmīda al-Nayfar) places al-Khūlī as one of the pioneers in modern era to reform *tafsīr.* See Ennaifer, *Les commentaires coraniques contemporains: Analyse de leur méthodologie* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 1998), 74.

[57] Before teaching at Fu'ād I University from 1928 to 1953, he taught Arabic language and literature at *Madrasat al-Qaḍā' al-Shar'ī*, Cairo, from which he graduated in 1920. From 1923-1927 he was appointed as the leader of the Egyptian studies mission (*imām li-al-bi'tha al-dirāsiyya al-Miṣriyya*) to Rome and Berlin. See Ennaifer, *Les commentaires coraniques contemporains*, 75.

[58] Published by al-Umanā' (Madrasat al-Fann wa al-Ḥayāt), Cairo.

[59] al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd fī al-Naḥw wa al-Balāgha, wa al-Tafsīr wa al-Adab* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li-al-Kitāb, 1995), 203-243. The first edition was published in 1961 by

(1849-1905) who opined that the main purpose of interpreting the Qur'ān is to seek

guidance (*al-ihtidā'*) or to take benefit (*al-intifā'*) from its content.[60] 'Abduh's

contention was that

> Interpretation (*tafsīr*) ... is an understanding of the Book in terms of its
> [status as a] religion which guides people to wherever there is happiness
> in their worldly life and the hereafter. This is the highest aim of *tafsīr;*
> any studies behind it are secondary to it or a tool to attain it.

> (*Al-tafsīr ... huwa fahm al-kitāb min haythu huwa dīn yarshud al-nās ilā
> mā fīhi sa'ādatuhum fī hayātihim al-dunyā wa hayātihim al-ākhira,
> fa'inna hādhā huwa al-maqsid al-a'lā minhu, wa mā warā'a hādhā min al-
> mabāhith tābi' lahu aw wasīla li-tahsīlih*).[61]

'Abduh's suggestion was a response to the confusion engendered by the plethora

of different *tafsīr*s aiming to elicit different aspects of the Qur'ān, such as its structure,

its legal aspects, its theological views, and so on. This variety of goals in interpreting

the Qur'ān, 'Abduh argues, distracts the reader away from its true meaning (*ma'nāhu al-*

*haqīqī*)– the meaning intended by the speaker of the speech (*murād al-qā'il min al-*

*qawl*)[62]-- which is a guidance for human beings.

---

Dār al-Ma'rifa, Cairo. The section on "al-tafsīr" was previously published in *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Islāmiyya* (an Arabic translation of *EI'*), 5: 348-374, as a response to Carra de Vaux, the author of "tafsīr" in *EI'*, IV:1, 603-604. A section of al-Khūlī's "al-tafsīr" — that on "Scientific Interpretation" -- has been translated and introduced into French by J. Jomier and P. Caspar, "L'Exégèse scientifique du Coran d'après le Cheikh Amīn al-Khūlī," *MIDEO* 4 (1957): 269-280. Besides commenting on and criticizing Carra de Vaux's article on "tafsīr," al-Khūlī also comments on other articles, like "Usūl and Sharī'ah" by J. Schacht, "Tahrīf" by Fr. Buhl, etc. See the summary of these comments in Sa'fān, *Amīn al-Khūlī*, 165-183.

[60] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 229. According to Ennaifer, because of this "utilitarian" aim, 'Abduh does not engage with reforming the method of interpreting the Qur'ān; his effort is limited at guiding Muslims to conform with the teachings of the Qur'ān. See Ennaifer, *Les commentaires coraniques contemporains*, 36.

[61] See 'Abduh, "Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr," in *Tafsīr al-Manār* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Āmma li-al-Kitāb, 1972), 1:17. See also 'Abduh, *al-A'māl al-Kāmila li-al-Imām Muhammad 'Abduh*, collected, edited and presented by Muhammad 'Amāra (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, 1972), 4:9.

[62] 'Abduh, *al-A'māl al-Kāmila*, 4:15. See also al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 226. Cf. the printed "Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr" in *Tafsīr al-Manār* 1:22 which does not use the word *"al-qā'il"*

For al-Khūlī, however, the main purpose of interpretation is, before anything else, to assert that the Qur'ān is "the greatest Arabic book [with] the greatest literary influence" (*kitāb al-'arabiyya al-akbar wa atharuhā al-adabī al-a'zam*).[63] This fact, according to al-Khūlī, is admitted by anyone who knows Arabic, be they Christians, pagans, naturalists, atheists, or Muslims. As a literary text, it follows that it can be approached from a literary standpoint, and that anyone with literary ability and a knowledge of the language, regardless of their belief, can undertake such endeavor. Literary study of the Qur'ān, furthermore, does not primarily look at the text from any religious perspective (*dūna nazar ilā ayyi i'tibār dīnī*),[64] nor does it seek guidance from it. Only after the completion of such a literary study can a reader go on to draw other conclusions from the text appropriate to his or her needs, such as legal, theological or ethical lessons, and so on.

This literary study of the Qur'ān, according to al-Khūlī, consists of two steps: *dirāsat mā ḥawla al-Qur'ān* and *dirāsat mā fī al-Qur'ān*.[65] Here, it seems that al-Khūlī is in agreement with Wellek and Warren who propose *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* approaches to literature.[66] From these two aspects – external and internal -- we will see that al-Khūlī does not see the literary approach to the Qur'ān as being limited merely to the present text. The historical context in which the Qur'ān originated, developed and was read has to be taken into account in literary study according to him. Furthermore, since the

---

[63] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 229.

[64] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 230.

[65] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 233ff.

[66] Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 71ff. Cf. al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 258: *manhaj khārijī* and *manhaj dākhilī* in literary study.

Qur'ānic text itself is not arranged chronologically, knowledge of its chronological order is fundamental to its literary analysis.

The study of what is external to the Qur'ān, according to al-Khūlī, includes a study of the background of the text: the circumstances of its revelation, its compilation, its variant readings and its many other aspects, all of which are known as the sciences of the Qur'ān (*'ulūm al-Qur'ān*). Al-Khūlī shows a considerable awareness of the work in this field done by Western scholars,[67] especially T. Nöldeke's (1836-1930) important study *Geschichte des Qorāns*.[68] Yet in addition to these particular background studies of the Qur'ān (*dirāsa khāṣṣa qarība min al-Qur'ān*), the external study of the Qur'ān also includes general background study (*dirāsa 'āmma*), that is the study of the physical and spiritual environments (*al-bī'a al-māddiyya wa al-ma'nawiyya*) of the society of seventh-century Arabia in which the Qur'ān was revealed.[69] A knowledge of both the physical environment of Arabia (its land, mountains, sky, waters, and climate) and its intellectual milieu (its history, family structure, beliefs, and arts) is equally important to understanding the Qur'ān. Because of this fact, al-Khūli argues:

---

[67] Al-Khūlī spent four years (1923-1927) in Europe (Rome and Berlin), where he learnt Italian and German and read Orientalist works. See Anwar al-Jundī, *al-Muḥāfaẓa wa al-Tajdīd fī al-Nathr al-'Arabī al-Mu'āṣir fī Mi'at 'Ām 1840-1940* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Risāla, 1961), 722. He also worked with H.A.R. Gibb and other scholars in the Majma' al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya to compose a dictionary of the Qur'ān now published under the title *Mu'jam Alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma, 1970), 2 vols. See J.J.G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 61; Mohamad Nur Kholis Setiawan, "Literary Interpretation of the Qur'ān: A Study of Amīn al-Khūlī's Thought," in *al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 61 (1998): 91.

[68] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 234. Al-Khūlī mentions that there were an attempt to translate this work into Arabic, but due to "insignificant obstacles" (*'awā'iq tāfiha*), the project could not be published. See, *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 235. Based on al-Jundī's account, Speicher thinks that it was possible for al-Khūlī to read directly from the German edition. See Speicher, "al-Ḫūlīs Entwurf eines *tafsīr adabī*," 8, n. 20.

As long as we mention the Rock (*al-Ḥijr*), the Sandhills (*al-Aḥqāf*), the Ayka, Madyan, the residences of Thamūd and dwellings of 'Ād, but do not know these places except as anomalous indications, it is not proper to say that we have understood the description the Qur'ān gives of them and their people, or that we have grasped the intention of the Qur'ān in speaking about them and about their people, so that finally the moral lesson of this story will not be clear and the wisdom and guidance expected (from it) will not be useful and effective.

(*Wa mā dumnā nadhkur al-Ḥijr, wa al-Aḥqāf, wa al-Ayka, wa Madyan, wa mawāṭin Thamūd, wa manāzil 'Ād, wa naḥnu lā na'rif 'an hādhihi al-amākin illā tilka al-ishārāt al-shārida, famā yanbaghī an naqūl innanā fahimnā waṣf al-Qur'ān lahā wa li-ahlihā, aw innanā adraknā murād al-Qur'ān min al-ḥadīth 'anhā wa 'anhum, thumma lan takūn al-'ibra bi-hādha al-ḥadīth jaliyya wa lā al-ḥikma wa al-hidāya al-marjuwwa mufīda mu'aththira*)[70]

The second aspect of the literary method of interpretation, according to al-Khūlī, is the intrinsic study of the Qur'ān, that is to study the Qur'ānic text itself,[71] beginning with the meanings of its individual words and their etymology. In addition, their particular usage in the Qur'ān should also be closely observed so as to ascertain whether their meaning is different therein. After these preliminary investigations, one can deal with the text's composition (*murakkabāt*), which involves a knowledge of grammar and rhetoric (*'ilm al-balāgha*).

To all of the above al-Khūlī proposes in addition having recourse to psychology (*'ilm al-nafs*) and sociology (*'ilm al-ijtimā'*).[72] In his article on "Perceiving the Literary

---

[69] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 235. Al-Khūlī also applies this same point in the study of Arabic literature. See al-Jundī, *al-Muḥāfaẓa wa al-Tajdīd*, 720; and al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 88ff. and 169ff. in his study of Arabic literature and Egyptian literature, respectively.

[70] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 236.

[71] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 237-241.

[72] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 239-241. Cf. Setiawan, who does not include these two sciences as tools in al-Khūlī's literary approach. Setiawan, "Literary Interpretation of the Qur'ān," 93. Speicher includes *al-tafsīr al-nafsī* as the third element of the literary approach. Her discussion, however, depends mainly on al-Khūlī's "al-tafsīr" and does not refer to al-Khūlī's other articles in *Manāhij Tajdīd* or his other published works.

Text" (*fī tadhawwuq al-naṣṣ al-adabī*),[73] al-Khūlī states that by using a literary approach

he hopes to confirm the strong relationship between the literary text and *'ilm al-nafs.*

Since literature deals with expressions about beauty, it is very important to know the

mentality of both the one who expresses this beauty and the one affected by it. In the

case of *tafsīr*, an interpreter has to know about human mental situations (*ḥarakāt al-nafs*

*al-bashariyya*) in order to understand, for example, the reason why the Qur'ān was able

to persuade people to abandon their previous beliefs. How did the Qur'ān win this

battle, and what psychological approach did the Qur'ān use in this emotional pursuit?[74]

Commenting on different theories of the inimitability of the Qur'ān, al-Khūlī

asserts that these are based on individual opinion, which is contradicted by other

opinions. Most importantly, these theories are not based on literary study that analyzes

the spiritual aspect.[75] For al-Khūlī, the inimitability of the Qur'ān does not lie in its

expressions, its words or its structure, but rather in its effect on the human psyche.[76]

The repetition (*takrār*) in the Qur'ān, for example, has been the object of study by many

Muslim scholars, but in al-Khūlī's view it represents one of the strongest means of

persuasion available and the best method of firmly embedding ideas and beliefs in the

human mind (*al-takrār min aqwā ṭuruq al-iqnā' wa khayr wasā'iṭ tarkīz al-ra'y wa al-*

*'aqīda fī al-nafs al-bashariyya*).[77]

---

[73] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd,* 253.
[74] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd,* 239, 253.
[75] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd,* 152.
[76] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd,* 154.
[77] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd,* 159.

Closely connected with the psychology of the addressee of the Qur'ān, al-Khūlī

reminds an interpreter of the Qur'ān of the importance of sociology ('ilm al-ijtimā').[78]

Literary study of the Qur'ān has to benefit from sociology by understanding the

condition of the people and their development. It is by this science that he/she will

understand the Qur'ānic manner of reasoning and its method of guiding people and

reforming their lives.

It must be admitted that 'Abduh, several years before al-Khūlī, actually

mentioned some of these points in his "Introduction to al-tafsīr."[79] This is one of the

reasons why Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, the author of al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn,

considers 'Abduh the first scholar to introduce literary studies to the Qur'ān.[80] Kate

Zebiri, however, argues against characterizing 'Abduh's approach as literary. She

reasons that although 'Abduh has some similarities to al-Khūlī, 'Abduh did not follow

up on his own suggestion.[81] 'Abduh's tafsīr, according to Zebiri, lacks philological and

background analysis compared to al-Khūlī's. Furthermore, we may add, 'Abduh and al-

Khūlī start from different pre-understandings. The former begins with the belief that

tafsīr is aimed at guidance, while the latter begins from the assertion that the Qur'ān is a

literary text, and that hence tafsīr is a literary study of this literary text.

But, what most clearly distinguishes al-tafsīr al-adabī -- which al-Khūlī calls

"the tafsīr of the day" (al-tafsīr al-yawm) – from other "traditional" tafsīrs is its

---

[78] Al-Khūlī, Manāhij Tajdīd, 240-241.

[79] 'Abduh's list of conditions for conducting tafsīr are: 1) knowledge of the meaning of the words; 2) knowledge of the Qur'ān's styles (asālīb); 3) knowledge of human conditions ('ilm ahwāl al-bashar); 4) knowledge of the way people in the past were guided by the Qur'ān; 5) knowledge of the Sīra of the Prophet. See 'Abduh, "Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr," 19-21. See also Kate Zebiri, Mahmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 141.

proposal for thematic study (*dirāsa mawḍū'iyya*). Based on the assumption that study of the Qur'ān consists in studying the text in its unity, al-Khūlī suggests that this unity can only be seen through a thematic approach to the Qur'ān.[82] He reasons that since the Qur'ān often deals with the same subject in different places, an interpreter has to collect these related verses. In addition, he/she has to know their chronological order. Using this method, literary interpretation of the Qur'ān, according to al-Khūlī, can yield more thorough understanding of the Qur'ān.

In the works that make up his *Min Hady al-Qur'ān*,[83] which were originally broadcast on radio to the Egyptian public beginning in 1941, al-Khūlī put this approach into practice by discussing different topics, such as peace and Islam (*al-Salām ... wa al-Islām*), the Qur'ān and everyday life (*al-Qur'ān ... wa al-Ḥayāh*), leaders and messengers (*al-Qāda ...al-Rusul*), the Qur'ānic oath (*al-Qasam al-Qur'ānī*), Muḥammad's personality (*Shakhṣiyyat Muḥammad*), and so on.[84] Although these talks were intended for the general public, al-Khūlī insists that in discussing the topics he follows the literary approach, the same approach that he taught at the university level. Al-Khūlī sees at least three benefits resulting from this approach.[85] First, literary study aims at understanding the spiritual and social direction of the Qur'ān for human life (*annahā taqṣid ilā al-tadbīr al-nafsī wa al-ijtimā'ī fī al-Qur'ān li-al-ḥayāt al-insāniyya*). The second benefit of literary study is that it strives to determine the meanings of the

---

[80] Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1995, the 6th edition), 2:588ff.

[81] Zebiri, *Maḥmūd Shaltūt*, 141.

[82] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 231-233.

[83] The published works are *Min Hady al-Qur'ān: al-Qāda ...al-Rusul* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1959); *Min Hady al-Qur'ān: Fī Ramaḍān* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1961); *Min Hady al-Qur'ān: Fī Amwālihim ... Mithāliyya Lā Madhhabiyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Hanā li-al-Ṭibā'a, 1963).

Qur'ānic verses intended by their clear Arabic words, as they were understood by the Arabs at the time of revelation of the Qur'ān (*annahā ta'mīd ilā ma'ānī al-āyāt al-Qur'āniyya allatī tu'addīhā alfāzuhā al-'arabiyya al-mubīna, kamā kāna yafhamuhā ahl al-'arabiyya fī 'ahd nuzūl al-Qur'ān).* This approach, al-Khūlī argues, takes no notice of the meanings assigned to the words by the *Bāṭinīs,* the *Ṣūfīs* or many schools of *kalām,* but rather of their sense as this was understood by the prime authoritative speaker of the language, the Arabs (*mulūk al-kalām min al-'arab).*[86] Finally, literary study follows the thematic approach because of the fact that different parts of the Qur'ān interpret each other (*al-Qur'ān yufassir ba'ḍuhu ba'ḍan)* and that the arrangement of the Qur'ān supports this approach.

When we consider the second benefit of the literary approach, we see that the purpose of literary study for al-Khūlī is to understand the "original" meaning of the text as this was understood by those who received and heard the Qur'ān for the first time.[87] He is quick to acknowledge that a knowledge of the author's psychology can be of help in interpretation. In the case of the Qur'ān, however, this is impossible since the author, God, is beyond such analysis,[88] while in the case of other literature, al-Khūlī follows the standard literary approach of his time. "Our understanding of the writer," argues al-Khūlī, "is one of the many stages in understanding literature and a step that has to be undertaken" (*fahmunā li-al-adīb marḥala min marāḥil fahm al-adab wa khuṭwa lā budda*

---

[84] See al-Khūlī, *Min Hady al-Qur'ān: al-Qāda ...al-Rusul,* 7-8.

[85] Al-Khūlī, *Min Hady al-Qur'ān: al-Qāda ...al-Rusul,* 8-10.

[86] Al-Khūlī, *Min Hady al-Qur'ān: al-Qāda ...al-Rusul,* 9.

[87] Jansen compares this approach with the principle of *e mente auctoris.* See his, *Interpretation of the Koran,* 66.

[88] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd,* 257.

*minhā*).[89] In adopting this position, al-Khūlī showed how greatly influenced he was by the Romantic theory which understands the meaning of the text in terms of its "meaning" intended by the author.[90] This can be explained, according to Naṣr Abū Zayd, since Romanticism was the dominant literary theory at that time.[91] In addition, al-Khūlī's psychological interpretation which emphasizes the relationship between the author's personality and his/her work was an approach that he and his contemporaries taught in Cairo University.[92]

Having maintained the literary study of the Qur'ān, al-Khūlī goes further by insisting that, while the Qur'ān is a literary text, its literariness is not an aim in itself. It is a means to reform human life. In his *Min Hady al-Qur'ān*, al-Khūlī states:

> We wish here to pause at this unity of the Qur'ānic usage, and it is a literary pause in which we notice the horizons of the exquisite qualities of the fine speech, that this Qur'ān – the greatest Arabic book – has brought. But this pause is not meant to be one [showing] art for art's sake, rather art that is connected with the social purpose that is always intended by the Qur'ān and that is the one that we aim at first and foremost in these talks. And if someone says that art does not necessarily take virtue as a subject matter, or that art is for art alone, we [on the other hand] do not adopt this view here ... and we do not think the Qur'ān has adopted that either, because it considers its fine speech as a means to reform human life

---

[89] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd*, 257.

[90] See P. Ricoeur on Romantic hermeneutics in "The Task of Hermeneutics" and "What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding" published in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 43-62 and 145-164, respectively. For a discussion of Romanticism in the Arab world, see ʿĪsā Yūsuf Bullāṭah (Issa J. Boullata), *al-Rūmanṭīqiyya wa Maʿālimuhā fī al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī al-Ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1960).

[91] See Abū Zayd, "The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur'ān," unpublished paper presented at "Qur'ānic Studies on the Eve of 21st Century," in Leiden on June 10-12, 1998.

[92] See ʿIzz al-Dīn Ismāʿīl, *al-Tafsīr al-Nafsī li-al-Adab* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1963), 14, who mentions Muḥammad Khalaf Allāh Aḥmad, the author of *al-Wijha al-Nafsiyya fī Dirāsat al-Adab wa Naqdih,* Aḥmad Amīn and al-Khūlī. See also Pierre Cachia, "Psychology and Literary Criticism in Modern Egypt," in *Atti del Terzo Congresso di Studi Arabi e Islamici, Ravello 1966* (Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1967), 231-238.

(*Wa nurīd hunā li-naqif 'inda hādhihi al-waḥda li-al-istiʿmāl al-Qur'ānī, wa hiya waqfa adabiyya nushrif fīhā 'alā āfāq ṭarā'if al-fann al-qawlī alladhī dhahaba bih hādhā al-Qur'ān kitāb al-'arabiyya al-akbar, 'alā annahā laysat waqfa yurād minhā al-fann li-al-fann, bal huwa fannuhu al-murtabiṭ bi al-hadaf al-ijtimāʿī alladhī yarmī ilayhi al-Qur'ān dā'iman, wa alladhī nabtaghīhi awwala mā nabtaghī min hādhihi al-aḥādīth. Fa-idhā mā qāla qā'ilūn: inna al-fann lā yaltazim al-faḍīla mawḍūʿan lahu, wa inna al-fann yurjā li-al-fann waḥdahu, fa-innā lā na'khudh hunā bi-hādhā al-ittijāh ... wa lā naḥsab al-Qur'ān qad akhadha bih, li-annahu yajʿal fannahu al-qawlī wasīla li-iṣlāḥ al-ḥayāt al-bashariyya).*[93]

From this statement we see that al-Khūlī is of the opinion that literature has a message to convey. It is not merely art for the sake of art, but rather art that seeks to realize and reach an objective. This is known as "committed literature" (*al-adab al-multazim*).[94] As literature, the Qur'ān, for al-Khūlī, uses its artistic expression to reform the society.

Al-Khūlī's method influenced many scholars, among them Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalaf Allāh, Bint al-Shāṭi', Shukrī Muḥammad 'Ayyād, and finally Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd. These "interpretive communities" belong to what may be called "the school of al-Khūlī" in the literary approach to the Qur'ān.[95] An analysis of each of their styles will make this clear.

## b. Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalaf Allāh (1916-1998)

Khalaf Allāh – not to be confused with Muḥammad Khalaf Allāh Aḥmad – was the first of al-Khūlī's students to write a dissertation applying his master's theory to the

---

[93] Al-Khūlī, *Min Hady al-Qur'ān: al-Qāda ...al-Rusul,* 10-11.

[94] On *al-adab al-multazim,* see M.M. Badawi, "Commitment in Contemporary Arabic Literature," in *Critical Perspectives on Modern Arabic Literature,* ed. Issa J. Boullata (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, Inc., 1980), 23-44.

[95] One of al-Khūlī's students strongly criticizes al-Khūlī's ideas, especially his "regional approach" (*al-manhaj al-iqlīmī)* in the study of literature. See D. Semah, "al-Khūlī, Amīn (1895-

Qur'ān.[96] His work entitled "al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm"[97] was submitted

to the Faculty of Arts, Fu'ād I (now Cairo) University in 1947. But, instead of being

brought and defended before the Committee, it was decided that the dissertation was

not proper to be defended (*ghayru ṣāliḥa li-al-munāqasha*), even though, according to

Khalaf Allāh, the committee had never met, let alone coming to that decision.[98]

Since there have been many studies on Khalaf Allāh's case,[99] what interests us

more is first how he applied the literary approach to the Qur'ānic narratives; and second

how the Islamists responded to this method, since the case reappeared again almost

forty-five years later to Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd (b. 1943). Compared to the other

---

1966)," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, eds. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 2: 443.

[96] He wrote his M.A. thesis on *Jadal al-Qur'ān* in 1942 under al-Khūlī's direction too.

[97] This work has been printed four times. The first was published in 1951 by Maṭba'at al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, Cairo; the second was printed by the same publisher in 1957 with an addition of al-Khūlī's Foreword "Bayna Yaday al-Tārīkh," dh-l. The third printing was issued in 1965by Maktabat al-Anglū al-Miṣriyya together with al-Khūlī's introduction to the third printing. The last print was published by Sīnā li-al-Nashr and al-Intishār al-'Arabī (Cairo and Beirut) in 1999 which includes the comment of Khalīl 'Abd al-Karīm, 363-508. Unless it is noted otherwise, this study is based on the fourth printing.

[98] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, 19. See also al-Khūlī's "Bayna Yaday al-Tārīkh," in *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, (1957), ṭ. The members of the committee were Prof. Aḥmad Amīn, Prof. Aḥmad al-Shāyib and Prof. Amīn al-Khūlī. See also the explanation (*bayān*) of 'Abd al-Wahhāb 'Azzām, the Dean of the Faculty of Letters, concerning the decision of the Committee in *al-Risāla* 750 (Nov., 17, 1947): 1275-1276.

[99] See, among others, J. Jomier, "Quelques positions actuelles de l'exégèse coranique en Égypte révélées par une polémique récente (1947-1951)," *MIDEO (Mélanges Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales du Caire)* 1 (1954): 39-72; 'Abdelḥamīd Muḥammad Aḥmad, "Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen al-Azhar und der modernistischen bewegung in Ägypten von Muḥammad 'Abduh bis zur Gegenwart," (Ph.D. dissertation, Universität Hamburg, 1963), 55-64; Rotraud Wielandt, *Offenbarung und Geschichte im Denken moderner Muslime* (Wiesbaden: Frantz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1971), 134-152; Marc Chartier, "Muhammad Ahmad Khalaf Allāh et l' exégèse coranique," *IBLA (Revue de l'Institut des belles lettres arabes)* 137 (1976): 1-31; and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 46-53. In his unpublished paper "The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur'ān," Abū Zayd discusses Khalaf Allāh's thesis and controversy that surrounded the work.

proponents of literary study of the Qur'ān, it is against Khalaf Allāh and Abū Zayd that the Islamists raised their fierce voices.[100]

The one who condemned the dissertation severely was the group of the Azharite 'ulamā', called *Jabhat 'Ulamā' al-Azhar*. In their open letter to the Egyptian President, the Competent Authorities of the Egyptian Republic and Muslims in general, published in *Majallat al-Azhar*,[101] they consider Khalaf Allāh's dissertation to defame the Qur'ān by saying that the Qur'ānic narratives are not true, contradict each other, and are derived from the Old and New Testaments, Isrā'īliyyāt, Persian and Greek literatures. Furthermore, they claim that the writer has an opinion that the Qur'ān is the artist's speech who was influenced by emotion and imagination. In other words, they argue that the author asserts that the Qur'ān is not the speech of God but rather the speech of Muḥammad, the storyteller and artist.[102]

They demand, as a consequence: the submission of dissertation to the Egyptian Great Muftī for approval, since he is the most competent authority on religious issues; the suspension of al-Khūlī and Khalaf Allāh from their jobs in the university until their cases are decided; and the expulsion from Egyptian universities and schools of anyone

---

[100] Bint al-Shāṭi''s and Shukrī Muḥammad 'Ayyād's works were fairly reviewed by Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Fayūmī, the Azharite professor, in "Manhaj Madrasat al-Tafsīr al-Adabī," *Majallat al-Azhar* 72, 4 (Aug.1999): 550-553 and idem, "Madrasat al-Tafsīr al-Adabī," *Majallat al-Azhar* 72, 5 (Sept. 1999): 680-684. The author furthermore praises 'Ayyād for clarifying and correcting the view of his mentor, al-Khūlī, such as "the Qur'ān is the greatest Arabic art" (*fann al-'arabiyya al-akbar*), which, according to al-Fayūmī, is not appropriate to be said regarding the Qur'ān as it is not suitable to come from the mouth of the Shaykh. See "Madrasat al-Tafsīr al-Adabī," 684. It is worth noting that the author does not mention Khalaf Allāh among the proponents of this school.

[101] "Mudhakkira Marfū'a min Jabhat 'Ulamā' al-Azhar," *Majallat al-Azhar* 19 (Muḥarram 1367/1947): 86-91. See also *al-Risāla* 750 (Nov. 17, 1947): 1279.

[102] Jabhat 'Ulamā', "Mudhakkira," 86. It seems that their conclusion was based on Aḥmad Amīn's evaluation of the dissertation which was published in *al-Risāla* 744 (Oct. 6, 1947): 1105-1106.

deemed to be an apostate. If these demands are not met, they warn, "the Islamic judgment against the apostates is known" (*fa-ḥukm al-Islām 'alā al-murtaddīn ma'rūf*).[103]

As was the case with the promotion of Abū Zayd to the rank of full professorship, which rank he obtained only after submitting other works, Khalaf Allāh was finally awarded the Ph.D. degree for another dissertation entitled "Ṣāḥib al-Aghānī: Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī al-Rāwiya" that he submitted in 1952.[104] J. Jomier, Marc Chartier and others who studied Khalaf Allāh[105] do not mention the title of this second dissertation. The conclusion that "Ṣāḥib al-Aghānī" was Khalaf Allāh's substitute dissertation is based on al-Khūlī's "Foreword" to the published version of this thesis, which appeared in 1953, where he discusses "the case of *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*."[106] Later on, in the second printing of *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī* (1957), al-Khūlī refers the readers to the comment he made about "the case" in a *muqaddima* to the substitute dissertation of "al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī" (*fī muqaddimat al-risāla al-badīla 'an risālat al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*),[107] which is "Ṣāḥib al-Aghānī."

In his introduction to *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, Khalaf Allāh discusses both the reasons that attracted him to write on this topic; and the method that he follows. Among the

---

[103] Jabhat 'Ulamā', "Mudhakkira," 90. See also the *fatwā* of Azharite scholars, represented by al-Shaykh al-Sharbīnī, al-Shaykh 'Abd Allāh 'Āmir, al-Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azīz Khiṭāb and al-Shaykh Muḥammad Abū al-Najā, which decrees that the dissertation makes its author and his supervisor infidels. Consequently, both have to be punished according to the Egyptian rules and regulation, which are based on Islam, the religion of the country. See *al-Risāla* 752 (Dec. 1, 1947): 1335.

[104] The dissertation is published in 1953 by Maktabat Nahḍat Miṣr, Cairo.

[105] See note *supra*.

[106] See al-Khūlī, "Foreword," to *Ṣāḥib al-Aghānī*, hamzah. My conclusion has been later confirmed by Abū Zayd in his unpublished paper "The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur'ān."

[107] See al-Khūlī, "Foreword," to *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī* (1957), ḥ.

reasons that he mentions are his dissatisfaction with how the early *mufassirs* and the

Orientalists have approached the topic. Some of the former classify the narratives of the

Qur'ān among the *mutashābih* verses or interpret them to fit their theological and

philosophical views. They believe, however, that these narratives are historical facts

(*haqā'iq tārīkhiyya*).[108] The Orientalists, on the other hand, through their study of the

style of the Qur'ān and the latter's method in developing and constructing the narrative,

argue for the development of the author's personality (i.e., Muḥammad's) in the Qur'ān.

And when the Qur'ānic narratives contradict history, they would argue -- as the

dissenting Meccans argue in the Qur'ān – that someone provided Muḥammad with the

wrong information.[109]

Having studied the literary approach under al-Khūlī and read some views of

Western scholars on literature and its history, some of which have been translated into

Arabic,[110] Khalaf Allāh argues for the difference between literature and literary history

and between a historian of literature and an author of literature. According to Khalaf

Allāh, when a man of letters, a poet or a story-teller describes a historical event, he or

she does not necessarily include all the actual details in his/her work. The writer has the

freedom to select one event rather than another, to ignore historical elements like space

and time, and to describe the event based on the common historical knowledge (*al-*

---

[108] In his response to an objection written by "al-'Abbās" in *al-Risāla* 471 (Sept. 15, 1947): 1017, Khalaf Allāh asserts that there were two methods of interpretation of Qur'ānic narratives: the traditional (*salaf*) and the modernist (*khalaf*). The former insists that any past event related by the Qur'ān has taken place; the modernist, on the other hand, argues that these narratives used by the Qur'ān for *tamthīl*, to show the meaning behind the narratives. See Khalaf Allāh, "Ḥawla Jadal fī al-Jāmi'a," *al-Risāla* 743 (Sept. 19, 1947): 1068.

[109] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, 37. See Q. 25:4 and the Qur'ān's response 16:103.

[110] Khalaf Allāh mentions Gustave Lanson's book which has been translated by Muḥammad Mandūr, *Manhaj al-Baḥth fī Tārīkh al-Adab*. This translation is published in *al-Naqd al-Manhajī*

*mashhūr al-mutadāwal min al-ma'ārif al-tārīkhiyya)*, since the purpose of the description is not historical.[111] The historian, on the other hand, describes the event by including all historical facts related to that. Al-Khūlī, in his "Foreword" to *al-Fann al-Qasasī*, similarly differentiates between literary and historical exposition. Literary exposition is manifested in narrative and the art of literary speech (*fann al-qawl al-adabī)*, while historical exposition is intended to determine or identify past events and examine their exactitude. Because of this difference, Khalaf Allāh suggests that the Qur'ānic presentation of past events belongs to the former type of exposition, i.e., literary, and not the historical. His thesis is that the intention of the Qur'ānic narratives is not to deliver a history lesson, but rather an admonition and exhortation.[112]

In order to support this thesis, Khalaf Allāh sets forth the steps to which he abides in his study of the narratives in the Qur'ān, following neatly the thematic approach of al-Khūlī.[113] The first step involves collecting the texts (*jam' al-nuṣūs)* that deal with the narratives. The second step is arranging these texts chronologically, basing himself on the *Muṣhaf al-Malakī* (Royal Edition of the Qur'ān)[114] – the one known as the Egyptian edition. Even though he admits that this dating is not a very comprehensive one, it is not possible to ignore. He clearly does not rely on Nöldeke's dating in *Geschichte des Qorāns*. The chronological arrangement of the texts, according to Khalaf Allāh, provides the internal and external development (*taṭawwur dākhilī wa*

---

'inda al-'Arab wa Manhaj al-Baḥth fī al-Adab wa al-Lugha (Cairo: Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, n.d.), 397-426. See, Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qasasī*, 38.

[111] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qasasī*, 78.

[112] Khalaf Allāh, "Ḥawla Jadal fī al-Jāmi'a," 1067.

[113] Cf. Jansen's *Interpretation of the Koran*, 15-16, n. 54, that compares Khalaf Allāh's exegetical method to the "typological" exegesis of the Old Testament.

[114] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qasasī*, 44.

*khāṛijī)* of the narratives. If in secular texts the former represents the development of the author's feelings and thought and the latter the external development of literature in general and the text's relation with past and later literature,[115] in the case of Qur'ānic narratives, Khalaf Allāh believes, this view has to be adjusted, since Muḥammad is not the author of the Qur'ān. However, following the lead of the previous 'ulamā', who argued that the Qur'ān shows evidence of incremental legislation (*al-tadarruj fī al-tashrī'*), Khalaf Allāh asserts that the Qur'ānic narratives similarly developed during the span of more than twenty years in response to circumstances,[116] in other words, that the narratives in the Qur'ān were revealed to serve the cause of Islamic propagation (*al-da'wa al-Islāmiyya)*, to explain its principles and beliefs and to defend the Prophet and the Qur'ān. Therefore, Khalaf Allāh continues, the internal development of the narratives may be represented with the development of theme or thought in the light of this principle of *tadarruj*.

In assessing the external development (*taṭawwur khāṛijī)* of the narratives and their relation to previous and later texts, Khalaf Allāh refers to pre-Islamic texts and the tradition of the Prophet. However, he admits that he finds it difficult to identify the pre-Islamic narratives in particular.

The third step that he follows – after collecting and then arranging the texts chronologically – is to understand them literally (*al-fahm al-ḥarfī)* and literarily (*al-fahm al-adabī)*. The literal understanding consists in studying the meaning of the words and

---

[115] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, 44, 329.
[116] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, 330.

the overall style, while literary understanding seeks to identify the intellectual, emotional and artistic values in the texts (*qiyam 'aqliyya wa 'atifiyya wa fanniyya).*[117]

Having collected these materials, Khalaf Allāh finds that, when describing a past event, in many cases the Qur'ānic narratives:[118] 1) disregard specifying the exact time and place (*zamān wa makān)* of the event; 2) pay no heed to the names of the characters; 3) do not take into account the temporal and natural order of the event (*al-tartīb al-zamanī wa al-tabī'ī);* and 4) discount mentioning the exact number of the characters involved. In the case of the *ashāb al-Kahf* for example, the Qur'ān does not clearly specify their number or the length of their stay in the cave, but instead variously estimates their number as falling between three alternatives: "They were three and their dog was the fourth," "five and their dog was the sixth" or "seven and their dog was the eighth."[119] At the end of the verse, the Qur'ān merely adds "Say: "My Lord is best aware of their number"" (*qul rabbī a'lamu bi-'iddatihim).* Similarly, although Q. 18:25 mentions that the length of the stay in the cave lasted for three hundred years and an additional nine, the next verse begins with the same statement "Say: "Allāh is best aware of how long they stayed."

In addition to these phenomena, the Qur'ān sometimes ascribes the same event to different characters, such as Q. 26:34 which attributes a phrase to Pharaoh (*qāla li 'l-mala'i hawlahū inna hādhā la-sāhirun 'alīm),* whereas in Q. 7:109 it is referred to the chiefs of Pharaoh's people (*qāla 'l-mala'u min qawmi Fir'awna inna hādhā la-sāhirun*

---

[117] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qasasī,* 45. Lanson also suggests that the literal and literary meaning of the text to be identified in his *Manhaj al-Bahth* 410-411. See also Wielandt, *Offenbarung und Geschichte,* 137, n. 17.
[118] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qasasī,* 80ff.
[119] Q. 18:22.

*'alīm)*. Because of these factors, Khalaf Allāh believes that the Qur'ānic presentation of the narratives is not historical but rather literary, overall.

Khalaf Allāh defines artistic narrative (*qiṣṣa fanniyya*) as follows:

*al-'amal al-adabī alladhī yakūn natījata takhayyul al-qāṣṣ li-ḥawādith waqa'at min baṭal lā wujūd lahu aw li-baṭal lahu wujūd wa lākin al-aḥdāth allatī dārat ḥawlahu fī al-qiṣṣa lam taqa' aw waqa'at li-al-baṭal wa lākinnahā nuẓẓimat fī al-qiṣṣa 'alā asās fannī balāghī fa-quddima ba'ḍuhā wa ukkhira ākhar wa dhukira ba'ḍuhā wa ḥudhifa ākhar aw uḍīfa ilā al-wāqi' ba'ḍ lam yaqa' aw būligha fī al-taṣwīr ilā al-ḥadd alladhī yakhruj bi-al-shakhṣiyya al-tārīkhiyya 'an an takūna min al-ḥaqā'iq al-'ādiyya wa al-ma'lūfa wa yaj'aluhā min al-ashkhāṣ al-khayāliyyīn* [120]

(a literary work that is the result of a story-teller's imagination applied to events that happened to a hero who did not exist; or who existed but the event connected to him in the story did not occur; or did occur but was arranged in the story on a literary basis, such that some of it was put in the beginning and some more at the end, some of it mentioned and some of it left out, or there was added to the event something that did not occur, or there was exaggeration in the description to a degree that removed the historical personality from ordinary reality and transformed him/her into an imaginary person).

On page 182, Khalaf Allāh further explains that the intention of an artistic narrative is to engross the reader or hearer's emotion (*yasta'thir bi-'awāṭif al-qāri' aw al-sāmi'*).

Based on this definition, Khalaf Allāh studies the Qur'ānic narratives to see whether the definition applies to them. In view of the wide variety of Qur'ānic narratives, Khalaf Allāh differentiates between three types: historical narrative (*qiṣṣa tārīkhiyya*), parabolic narrative (*qiṣṣa tamthīliyya*), and legendary narrative (*qiṣṣa usṭūriyya*).[121]

The question in respect of historical narratives for Khalaf Allāh is not whether the event really happened or not, but rather, whether the Qur'ānic intention of the

---

[120] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, 152, 198.
[121] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, 152ff.

narration is to describe reality and history or to deliver exhortation (*'iẓa*) and admonition (*'ibra*).[122] Having studied these historical narratives, Khalaf Allāh concludes that this kind of narrative is literary-historical (*adabī tārīkhī*), which means that "the Qur'ān takes its narrative material from historical events but describes these literarily (*'ard adabī*) and conveys them compassionately (*sawq 'ātifī*), in order to explain their meanings, endorse their intentions and produce with them an effect whose impression on the soul is more tempting and rhetorical such that it captivates emotion and feeling" (*ya'khudh al-Qur'ān mawādd al-qiṣaṣ min aḥdāth al-tārīkh wa waqā'i'ih lākinnahu ya'riḍuhā 'ardan adabiyyan wa yasūquhā sawqan 'ātifiyyan yubayyin al-ma'ānī wa yu'ayyid al-aghrāḍ wa yu'aththir bihā al-ta'thīr alladhī yaj'al waq'ahā 'alā al-anfus waq'an istihwā'iyyan khiṭābiyyan yastathīr minhā al-'ātifa wa al-wijdān*).[123]

The second type of narrative is parabolic *(tamthīlī)*.[124] Contrary to the historical narratives, whose event or character is historical, parabolic narratives describe an event or character, which may or may not have existed, based on supposition (*fard*) and imagination (*khayāl*). Khalaf Allāh asserts that previous *mufassirs* have considered this kind of narrative as a parable *(tamthīl)* in their discussion. But some of them, because of their inability to understand parable, classify the narratives under the heading of unclear verses (*mutashābih*).[125] Other scholars, on the other hand, whom Khalaf Allāh describes as belonging to the category of later (*khalaf*) scholars, like al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144),

---

[122] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, 153.

[123] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, 155-156.

[124] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, 182ff.

[125] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, 183. Responding to the challenge of 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Badawī, an Azharite professor, to name past scholars who considered the narratives to fall into the category of *mutashābih*, Khalaf Allāh in his "Ḥawla Jadal fī al-Jāmi'a" mentions Muqātil, al-

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) and 'Abduh, understand that some narratives are of the

nature of a parable (tamthīl) in order to show the meanings behind them. 'Abduh, for

example, asserts in his Tafsīr al-Manār:

> Wa ammā tafsīr al-āyāt 'alā ṭarīqat al-khalaf fī al-tamthīl fa-yuqāl fīh
> inna al-Qur'ān kathīran mā yuṣawwir al-ma'ānī bi-al-ta'bīr 'anhā bi-
> ṣīghat al-su'āl wa al-jawāb aw bi-uslūb al-ḥikāya li-mā fī dhālika min al-
> bayān wa al-ta'thīr fa-huwa yad'ū bihā al-adhhān ilā mā warā'ahā min al-
> ma'ānī, ka-qawlih ta'ālā "yawma naqūlu li-jahannama hal imtala'ti wa
> taqūlu hal min mazīd." Fa-laysa al-murād anna Allāh ta'ala yastafhim
> minhā wa hiya tujāwibuh wa innamā tamthīl li-sa'atihā wa kawnihā lā
> taḍīq bi-al-mujrimīn mahmā kathurū ...[126]

(Concerning the interpretation of verses on parable according to the later
method, on the other hand, it is said that the Qur'ān often describes the
ideas with an expression using the structure of question and answer or the
style of the story since there are clearness and efficacy in them. It (the
Qur'ān) calls the minds with these (expressions) to the meanings behind
them, like His speech "On the day We shall say to the Hell: 'Are you
full?', and it shall respond: 'Is there more?'" (Q. 50:30). The meaning is
not that God asks her and she replies to Him but rather [it is] a parable of
its spaciousness and that it is not cramped with the evildoers whatever
their number...)

Anticipating the objections of some readers of his book, Khalaf Allāh makes it

clear that he does not assert that God needs imagination in expressing His intention in

the Qur'ān. The imagination, on the other hand, is for the benefit of human beings since

it is their custom to express their thoughts and feelings.[127]

Contrary to the belief of many Muslims, Khalaf Allāh insists that the Qur'ān

also contains usṭūra (pl. asāṭīr) "legends," the third type of narrative.[128] In his article on

"Ḥawla al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," Khalaf Allāh argues that usṭūra does

---

Ṭabarī, al-Ṭabarsī, al-Āmidī and al-Shawkānī. See Khalaf Allāh, "Ḥawla Jadal fī al-Jāmi'a," al-
Risāla 750 (Nov. 17, 1947): 1268-1269.

[126] See, Khalaf Allāh, al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī, 196. See the referred text in Tafsīr al-Manār (Cairo: al-
Hay'a al-'Amma li-al-Kitāb, 1972), 1:233.

[127] Khalaf Allāh, al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī, 188.

not mean "lie, falsehood, myths or delusions" (*kidhb, mayn, khurafāt, awhām*), but rather the stories written by the ancients (*asāṭīr al-awwalīn*).[129] Here, he refers to al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), al-Zamakhsharī and 'Abduh who define *asāṭīr* as "that which was written by the ancients" (*mā saṭarahu/katabahu al-awwalūn*).[130]

In order to discover whether the Qur'ān contains legends or not, Khalaf Allāh collects all verses which bear the terms *asāṭīr al-awwalīn*. He finds that these verses (Q. 6:25, 8:31-32, 16:24, 23:83-84, 25:5-6, 27:67-68, 46:17, 68:10-15, 83:10-13) are Meccan in origin and contain statements by unbelievers or those who did not believe in the Hereafter.[131] Furthermore, he finds in Q. 25:5-6 clear evidence of the existence of legends in the Qur'ān. The verses state *wa qālū asāṭīru 'l-awwalīna 'ktatabahā fa-hiya tumlā 'alayhi bukrata 'w-wa aṣīlan. Qul anzalahu 'l-ladhī ya'lamu 's-sirra fī 's-samāwāti wa 'l-arḍi innahū kāna ghafūra 'r-raḥīman* ("And they said: 'Tales of the ancients which he copied. They are dictated to him morning and evening.' Say: 'It was sent down by the One who knows the secret in the heavens and earth; He is indeed the Forgiving the Merciful'").

Unlike al-Rāzī who takes the last verse as a response to the unbelievers' statement and therefore denies the existence of the legends in the Qur'ān,[132] Khalaf Allāh argues that the discussion between the Qur'ān and the unbelievers does not center

---

[128] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, 198ff.

[129] Khalaf Allāh, "Ḥawla al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," *al-Risāla* 745 (Oct. 13, 1947): 1121. Cf. Majma' al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya which defines *al-asāṭīr: al-abāṭīl wa al-akādhīb wa al-aḥādīth lā niẓām lahā* in *Mu'jam Alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 1:38.

[130] See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1986), 5:109; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kahshāf 'an Ḥaqāiq al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1990), 3:88; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth, 1980), 24:51.

[131] Although Q. 8 is traditionally listed in Madīnan *sūras*, verses 30-36 are Meccan inserted in Madīnan *sūra*. Nöldeke, on the other hand, lists the whole Q. 8 as Madīnan.

on whether the Qur'ān contains legends or not but rather on whether these legends come from Muḥammad or from God. And the last verse clearly states in his eyes that the legend in question was sent down by God.[133]

Having demonstrated that the Qur'ān contains legends, Khalaf Allāh goes on to assert that these legendary narratives can be considered one aspect of the Qur'ān's *i'jāz*, since it sets a precedent for Arab literary life (*al-ḥayāh al-adabiyya al-'arabiyya*) by basing religious narratives on legends. Against the polytheists who happily accused the Qur'ān of being the repository of legends, Khalaf Allāh argues that they do not understand the meaning and intention of these legendary narratives in the Qur'ān. They were inserted in the Qur'ān, according to Khalaf Allāh, to show that they are not from Muḥammad but rather from God.[134] And against the Orientalists who also argue that because some of the Qur'ānic narratives are based on legends it had to have been of temporal origin, Khalaf Allāh argues that this does not invalidate the Qur'ān, since legend is one of the characteristics of all the world's literatures and great religions (*sabīl al-ādāb al-'ālamiyya wa al-adyān al-kubrā*). "We have to be pleased," Khalaf Allāh continues, "that the Qur'ān has introduced traditions, prescribed rules, and preceded others in these aspects (*sanna al-sunan wa qa''ada al-qawā'id wa sabaqa ghayrahu fī hādhihi al-mayādīn*).[135]

It is quite understandable how these ideas had raised objections from many Muslims. Compared to the view of Quṭb in the latter's discussion on "al-Qiṣṣa fī al-

---

[132] See al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 24:51.
[133] See Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, 205. See also idem, "al-Usṭūra wa al-I'jāz al-Qur'ānī," *al-Risāla* 748 (Nov. 3, 1947): 1207.
[134] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, 206
[135] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, 209.

Qur'ān" in *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*,[136] Khalaf Allāh's ideas are more radical. Like Khalaf Allāh, Quṭb also believes that the Qur'ān contains artistic narrative designed to produce an emotive effect (*ta'thīr wijdānī*) on the reader of or listener to the Qur'ān. But these narratives are not art *per se*, for since the Qur'ān, according to Quṭb, is before anything else a book of religious propagation (*kitāb da'wa dīniyya*),[137] these narratives are used as a means to disseminate religious objectives. Therefore, the religious and artistic goals are united in the Qur'ānic expression. The Qur'ān, Quṭb concludes, "creates artistic beauty as a means for emotive effect, so that it (the Qur'ān) can address the sense of religious emotion with the language of artistic beauty (*yaj'al al-jamāl al-fannī adātan maqṣūdatan li-al-ta'thīr al-wijdānī, fa-yukhāṭib ḥāssat al-wijdān al-dīniyya bi-lughat al-jamāl al-fanniyya*).[138]

Although Quṭb asserts that the Qur'ānic narratives do not serve a historical purpose but rather one of religious instruction, claiming that the former is not among the primary objections of the Qur'ān (*anna al-hadaf al-tārīkhī lam yakun min bayni ahdāf al-Qur'ān al-asāsiyya*),[139] he does not insist on the ahistorical nature of the narratives as boldly as Khalaf Allāh does. The latter makes a point of citing many historical facts that the Qur'ānic narratives pass over in utter silence.

While Khalaf Allāh calls the first type of narratives historical, Quṭb dubs it *qiṣaṣ ḥaqīqiyya* (actual, real stories).[140] Quṭb presents Q. 2:127 about the story of Ibrāhīm and Ismā'īl building the Ka'ba as an example of this type. The verse in question states *wa*

---

[136] See Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 143-215.
[137] Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 143.
[138] Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 143, 171.
[139] Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 162.

*idh yarfaʿu Ibrāhīmu 'l-qawāʿida mina 'l-bayti wa Ismāʿīlu rabbanā taqabbal minnā*

*innaka anta 's-samīʿu 'l-ʿalīm* (And when Ibrāhīm and Ismāʿīl raised the foundations of

the House [they prayed] "Our Lord, accept [this] from us. Surely You are the All-

Hearing, the Omniscent"). Commenting on this verse, Quṭb asserts that the transition of

the Qur'ānic style from describing the story of the building of the Kaʿba to the

invocation that follows it makes the story alive and present, as if we see the two of them

building and praying right before us.[141]

Khalaf Allāh does not list this verse among his examples of historical narratives,

but from his discussion of literary historical narrative we can assert that Khalaf Allāh

would not consider it as such since it does not give many historical details, such as time

and place, or the reason for building the House.[142] This historical narrative is rather

placed in the Qur'ān for a literary purpose: that of moving the minds and emotions

(*taḥrīk al-himam wa al-nufūs*)[143] of readers and listeners.

---

[140] Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 57-58. Cf. Quṭb, "al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," *al-Muqtaṭaf* 74, 2 (Feb. 1, 1939): 209, where he calls it *qaṣaṣ tārīkhī.*

[141] Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 57.

[142] It is worth mentioning that Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889-1973) had trouble with al-Azhar too when he stated in his book *Fī al-Shiʿr al-Jāhilī* that the mentioning of the names Ibrāhīm and Ismāʿīl in the Qur'ān and the Torah does not necessarily prove their historical existence (*wujūduhumā al-tārīkhī*). See Ḥusayn, *Fī al-Shiʿr al-Jāhilī* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1926), 26. Due to the many objections, this point was removed in his *Fī al-Adab al-Jāhilī* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1927). For the controversy around *Fī al-Shiʿr al-Jāhilī*, see Anwar al-Jundī, *al-Maʿārik al-Adabiyya fī al-Shiʿr wa al-Nathr wa al-Thaqāfa wa al-Lugha wa al-Qawmiyya al-ʿArabiyya* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Risāla, n.d.), 329-359; Aḥmad, "Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen al-Azhar und der modernistischen bewegung," 45-55.

[143] Khalaf Allāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, 161.

Another radical difference between Khalaf Allāh's discussion of Qur'ānic narratives with Quṭb is that while the latter takes the parabolic narratives into account in his survey,[144] he certainly rejects the possibility that these admit of legends.

Khalaf Allāh's discussion of the Qur'ānic narratives might well be compared with Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.[145] The latter concludes that, unlike historians who are bound to transmit the historical facts, the writers of the Bible (Alter discusses the Hebrew Bible specifically) "exercised a good deal of artistic freedom in articulating the tradition at their disposal," and therefore he classifies the narratives as "*historicized* prose fiction."[146] He further argues that this kind of analysis does not neglect the Bible's religious character, but rather

> focuses attention on it in a more nuanced way. The implicit theology of the Hebrew Bible dictates a complex moral and psychological realism in biblical narrative because God's purposes are always entrammeled in history, dependent on the acts of individual men and women for their continuing realization. To scrutinize biblical personages as fictional characters is to see them more sharply in the multifaceted, contradictory aspects of their human individuality, which is the biblical God's chosen medium for His experiment with Israel and history.[147]

Like the objections against Khalaf Allāh's analysis of the ahistorical nature of the Qur'ānic narratives, some scholars criticize Alter's classification of Biblical narratives as fiction. John Barton, for example, although he admits the positive aspects of the literary approach to the Bible, cannot accept the implication of fictivity in

---

[144] Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 52-56, 182. See also Quṭb, "al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," 209.

[145] New York: Basic Books, 1981.

[146] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 24.

[147] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 12.

Biblical narratives.[148] His main reason is that the modern conception of literature, which

is characterized as "a fictional, or non-affirmative, or non-pragmatic, or hypothetical

mode of discourse,"[149] cannot be applied to this ancient and divine text, the Bible.

Furthermore, the Biblical narratives, Barton argues, cannot be considered fictional, since

the narrator in those stories might be God.

So the objections raised against the use of literary criticism in Scripture studies

center around the incompatibility of method with text. For literary scholars this

criticism is not an issue since Scripture is a literary text. Whether their literary analysis

distorts the latter or not, they will argue that it doesn't, and they will assert instead that

the literary approach fully respects the literary characteristics of the Scripture.

Some readers of Khalaf Allāh's *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, however, believed that it

contradicted the Qur'ān, and therefore could not accept it. As a consequence, Khalaf

Allāh had to write another thesis. As for al-Khūlī, his supervisor -- who continued to

defend his student's thesis and the freedom of research in general --, the University

prohibited him from teaching and supervising the subject of Qur'ānic studies; he was

allowed only to teach Arabic grammar, rhetoric and literature.[150] This left his students

with a difficult choice: either to write on Arabic literature under al-Khūlī or to write on

Qur'ānic studies under the supervision of other scholars. Khalaf Allāh took the first

choice for his second dissertation.

---

[148] Barton, "Reading the Bible as Literature: Two Questions for Biblical Critics," *Journal of Literature & Theology* 1, 2 (1987): 151.

[149] Barton, "Reading the Bible as Literature," 149. The definition of literature is quoted from J.A. Burrow's *Medieval Writers and Their Work: Middle English Literature and Its Background 1100-1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

[150] See Abū Zayd's paper "The Dilemma of the Literary Interpretation of the Qur'ān."

## c. Shukrī Muḥammad ʻAyyād (1921- 1999)

Another student of al-Khūlī who was also affected by the University's decision was Shukrī Muḥammad ʻAyyād. He was a well-known literary critic in the Arab world. Many of his writings deal with Arabic criticism and literature. During his period of study at Cairo University he was very much influenced by al-Khūlī. ʻAyyād wrote under al-Khūlī's direction his M.A. thesis in 1947 on "Min Waṣf al-Qur'ān: Yawm al-Ḥisāb wa al-Dīn."[151] Because of his desire to remain under al-Khūlī's supervision he shifted his interest to Arabic literature and wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on "al-Tarjama al-ʻArabiyya al-Qadīma li-Kitāb al-Shiʻr al-Arisṭī wa Taʼthīruhā fī al-Balāgha al-ʻArabiyya" in 1953. It is his M.A. thesis, which has been published under the title *Dirāsāt Qur'āniyya: Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb*,[152] that concerns us here, for it is in this work that he applies al-Khūlī's literary approach to the Qur'ān.

It is worth noting that ʻAyyād's *Dirāsāt Qur'āniyya* was not published until 1980 – more than thirty years after its completion. The reasons for the delay may be due to any number of factors, but among these one has to include the reaction to "the school of literary interpretation," especially after the appearance of Khalaf Allāh's dissertation "al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī" in 1947. Later on, commenting on Khalaf Allāh's case and the people's response to al-Khūlī's literary approach, ʻAyyād says:

> The agitators -- enemies of reason – raised an outcry over this method ....
> [Finally however] people came to know that the conservatives' cry was
> not meant to serve religion. The call for literary study of the Qur'ān was
> nothing but a call to exert efforts to understand the Clear Book in a way
> not restricted by old exegesis, most of which – if not all – was connected
> with the myths of the ancient nations and the beliefs of the sects who

---

[151] See Jamāl Muqābala, *Shukrī ʻAyyād* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-ʻĀmma li-al-Kitāb, 1992), 219.

[152] Beirut: Dār al-Waḥda , 1980.

fought against one another. Rather, it (literary study) transcends that
approach by employing modern methods of linguistic and literary
analysis [and] by making use of contemporary knowledge in psychology
and sociology

(*Athāra al-mushāghibūn a'dā' al-'aql mā athārū min dajīj ḥawla hādhā al-
manhaj .... Fa-'arafa al-nās anna ṣiyāḥ al-jāmidīn lam yakun khidmatan
li-al-dīn, famā kānat al-da'wa ilā al-tafsīr al-adabī li-al-Qur'ān al-karīm
ghayr da'wa ilā badhl shay' min al-juhd fī fahm al-kitāb al-mubīn fahman
lā yaqif 'inda ḥudūd al-tafāsīr al-qadīma allatī irtabaṭat mu'ẓamuhā -- in
lam naqul kulluhā -- bi-asāṭīr al-umam al-ghābira wa 'aqā'id al-firaq al-
mutanāhira, bal yatajāwaz dhālik ilā istikhdām al-asālīb al-ḥadītha fī al-
baḥth al-lughawī wa al-adabī musta'īnan bi-ma'ārif al-'aṣr fī 'ilm al-nafs
wa 'ilm al-ijtimā').*[153]*

It was only in response to the suggestions of many of his colleagues, friends and

students, as well as his impression that cultural life in the Arab world requires

proponents of the literary approach to offer their contributions, that 'Ayyād finally

published his work without any changes to the content.

In an introduction to the work, where he discusses his method in analyzing the

Qur'ānic depiction of the Last Day, 'Ayyād quotes extensively from al-Khūlī's article

"al-tafsīr" published in *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Islāmiyya.*[154] Following al-Khūlī, 'Ayyād

asserts that literary study of the Qur'ān follows three steps, reflected in the chapter

division of 'Ayyād's own work: a study of the meaning of the words;[155] a study of its

style;[156] and a study of the individual and social goals of the Qur'ān (*dirāsat al-marāmī*

*al-insāniyya wa al-ijtimā'iyya min al-Qur'ān*).[157] This last step depends on that which

al-Khūlī puts under the heading of the physical and intellectual milieu surrounding the

Qur'ān.

---

[153] See, Muqābala, *Shukrī 'Ayyād,* 23.
[154] 'Ayyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb,* 6-9.
[155] 'Ayyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb,* 23-75.
[156] 'Ayyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb,* 77-96.

In the course of his discussion of the style of the Qur'ān, 'Ayyād argues against

Qutb's concept of *taṣwīr* in his book *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*.[158] According to Qutb, the

literary beauty of the Qur'ān lies in its mode of expression, which Qutb calls *taṣwīr*. In

his *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, Qutb explains this concept:

> *al-Taṣwīr huwa al-āda al-mufaḍḍala fī uslūb al-Qur'ān. Fa-huwa yu'abbir bi-al-ṣūra al-muḥassa al-mutakhayyala 'an al-ma'nā al-dhihnī, wa al-ḥāla al-nafsiyya, wa 'an al-ḥādith al-maḥsūs, wa al-mashhad al-manẓūr wa 'an al-namūdhaj al-insānī wa al-ṭabī'a al-bashariyya.*[159]

> (*Taṣwīr* is the preferred tool in the style of the Qur'ān. It expresses with the perceptible imaginative description the intellectual meaning, the psychological state, the perceptible event, the visible scene, the human type, and human nature).

In 'Ayyād's understanding, Qutb's concept of *taṣwīr*– which is sometimes called

*tajsīm/tashkhīṣ* (embodiment or personification) or *takhyīl* (imaginative

representation)[160] – places an emphasis on expression via perceptible description, that is,

a description which can be seen or heard. Although this kind of expression can convey a

thought to the mind of the reader or listener, *tajsīm al-ma'nā* (the embodiment or

personification of an idea) is neither the basis nor the quintessence of literary activity

(*aṣl al-'amal al-adabī wa lubābuh*).[161] 'Ayyād admits that human language often imitates

external perceptible reality, but warns that this language is not the exact description of

that reality; it is rather a reaction (*rudūd af'āl*) of it. Therefore the writer, when using

words to express his thought, depends on their emotional impact on the reader's mind

---

[157] 'Ayyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb*, 97-118.

[158] 'Ayyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb*, 80ff. Although Qutb has another book treating the Last Day in the Qur'ān, *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma fī al-Qur'ān*, 'Ayyād did not consult it, mainly because it was published in 1947 -- the same date that he submitted his M.A. thesis.

[159] Qutb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 36. See also Boullata's translation and extensive discussion of Qutb's concept in "Sayyid Qutb's Literary Appreciation of the Qur'ān," in *LSRMQ*, 356ff.

[160] Qutb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 71ff.

and not necessarily on that which influences it with perceptible description *(al-adīb ḥīna yastakhdim al-alfāz li-al-ta'bīr 'an ma'nāhu ya'tamid 'alā irtibāṭihā al-wijdāniyya fī dhihn al-sāmi', wa lā ya'tamid bi-al-ḍarūra 'alā mā tuthīruh min ṣuwar ḥissiyya).*[162] To prove his point, 'Ayyād takes the word death *(mawt).* When this word is heard, it does not necessarily suggest the image of a dead person *(mayyit)* in the mind of the listener; rather, it is its emotive power that comes to mind.

The style of the Qur'ān, consisting in devices such as *tashbīh* and *isti'āra,* according to 'Ayyād, are similarly not intended to transmit palpable pictures *(ṣuwar ḥissiyya),* but rather to show the hidden meaning behind the apparent ones.[163] He takes Q. 101:4-5, *yawma yakūnu 'n-nāsu ka 'l-farāshi 'l-mabthūth, wa takūnu 'l-jibālu ka 'l-'ihni 'l-manfūsh,* as an example. In Quṭb's analysis, 'Ayyād argues, this more tangible description of the Last Day is more effective than an attempt to use mere pure ideas *(ma'ānī mujarrada),* such as if the verse were to be replaced with *yawma yakūnu 'n-nāsu mutafarriqīn muntashirīn, wa takūnu 'l-jibālu wāhiyatan sāqiṭata 'l-quwwa* (On that day people shall become scattered and spread out and the mountains shall become weak and fall in strength).[164]

It is true that Quṭb differentiates in his *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī* between a description that transmits an idea in its pure mental form *(ṣūratihā al-dhihniyya al-tajrīdiyya)* and that in its personified form *(ṣūra tashkhīṣiyya).* Comparing these two ways of description, Quṭb writes:

---

[161] 'Ayyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb,* 81.
[162] 'Ayyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb,* 81.
[163] 'Ayyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb,* 82.
[164] 'Ayyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb,* 82.

The ideas of the first mode address the intellect and the consciousness, and arrive to them without their beautiful shade. In the second mode [on the other hand, the ideas] address the sensory perception and the emotion, and arrive to the soul through various ways: from the senses with imaginative description, from the sensory perception through the way of senses, and from the sentiment that is agitated by echoes and lights. The intellect becomes one way of their [ideas] many ways to the soul, and not their only single way

*(Inna al-ma'ānī fī al-ṭarīqa al-ūlā tukhāṭib al-dhihn wa al-wa'y, wa taṣil ilayhimā mujarradatan min ẓilālihā al-jamīla. Wa fī al-ṭarīqa al-thāniya tukhāṭib al-ḥiss wa al-wijdān, wa taṣil ilā al-nafs min manāfidh shattā: min al-ḥawāss bi al-takhyīl, wa min al-ḥiss 'an ṭarīq al-ḥawāss, wa min al-wijdān al-munfa'il bi al-aṣdā' wa al-aḍwā'. Wa yakūn al-dhihn manfadhan wāḥidan min manāfidhihā al-kathīra ilā al-nafs, lā manfadhahā al-mufrad al-waḥīd).*[165]

In *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma* – another of Quṭb's work that 'Ayyād did not consult -- the author consciously ignores Qur'ānic verses which refer to the Last Day in abstract terms *(mujarradan)* as well as other verses which do not describe it in personifying or moving depiction *(mashhad shākhiṣ aw mutaḥarrik)* among his category of scenes of the Last Day *(mashāhid al-Qiyāma).*[166] For him, only those verses that have graphic presentation, movement and rhythm *(ṣūra, ḥaraka, īqā')* are worthy of regard .[167]

As for Q. 101:4-5, Quṭb argues in his *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma* that the beauty of this verse is in depicting graphically the smallness of people due to their large amount like

---

[165] Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 242. Cf. *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma*, 8-9. The latter writes *min al-ḥawāss bi-al-tanāsuq wa al-īqā'* (harmony and rhythm) instead of *min al-ḥawāss bi-al-takhyīl*. Cf. idem, "al-Ma'ānī wa al-Ẓilāl," *al-Risāla* 581 (Aug. 21, 1944): 690, where Quṭb asserts that the expression that transmits abstract ideas belongs more to the nature of science, while the other belongs more to the nature of arts.

[166] Quṭb, *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma*, 10.

[167] Quṭb, *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma*, 10. Cf. Quṭb, *al-Naqd al-Adabī: Uṣūluh wa Manāhijuh* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1960, the third edition), 38, where Quṭb uses the criteria of "graphic presentations, traces and rhythms *(ṣuwar, ẓilāl wa īqā')*. In his *al-Naqd al-Adabī*, Quṭb also differentiates between the abstract form of the word and its personified form, and adds that compared to an ordinary writer who merely employs the abstract form of the word, "the skilled man of letters is the one who brings its [word] life to it and makes it diffuse a graphic picture

*al-farāsh al-mabthūth.*[168] For 'Ayyād, on the other hand, the strength of this verse does

not lie in graphic description (*taṣwīr*), but rather in its mode of associating the meaning

and senses of humanhood (*insiyya*) with those of *farāshiyya.*[169] While the term *nās* is

usually seen as referring to mere human beings, it also contains other meanings, like

transformation between strength and weakness; between knowledge and ignorance. The

term *farāsh* (moth), on the other hand, includes the sense of weakness, lightness,

disunion and diffusion. However, when these two terms are joined together, they

provide other meanings of *insāniyya* (humanhood), besides human, which may not for

some reason have been seen as yet.

And yet though he criticizes Quṭb's concept of *taṣwīr,* this does not mean that

'Ayyād denies the Qur'ānic style of depiction. What he is objecting to is Quṭb's

assertion that *taṣwīr* is the basis of Qur'ānic art (*asās al-fann al-Qur'ānī*).[170] This

assertion is rejected by 'Ayyād because it is based on two suppositions. First is the

belief that language is an imitation of a perceptible reality (*al-lugha muḥākāt li-al-wāqi'*

*al-maḥsūs*). If we refer to Abrams' classification of the four types of criticism,[171] this

criticism belongs to the *mimetic* types that view a literary work as an imitation of the

world. For 'Ayyād, on the other hand, language is a reaction or an expression of the

author's feeling; therefore, it falls under the *expressive* mode. If we study carefully

Quṭb's theory of art, however, we will find that he does not affirm the *mimetic* type but

rather asserts that language is an expression of feeling. In his book on literary criticism

---

and trace and draw a state and scene" (*al-adīb al-mawhūb huwa al-ladhī yarudd 'alayh ḥayātah*
*fa-yaj'aluh yashi'' ṣūratan wa ẓillan wa yarsum ḥālatan wa mashhadan*).

[168] Quṭb, *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma,* 66.
[169] 'Ayyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb,* 83.
[170] 'Ayyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb,* 95.

entitled *al-Naqd al-Adabī*, Quṭb defines literary work as *al-taʿbīr ʿan tajriba shuʿūriyya fī ṣūra mūḥiya* (an expression of feeling experience in an inspiring [verbal] form).[172]

The second supposition on which Quṭb's *taṣwīr* is based, according to 'Ayyād, is his claim that ordinary expression mostly uses pure ideas (*al-taʿbīr al-ʿādī yaghlub ʿalayh al-tajrīd*),[173] while the literati describe these ideas as consisting in graphic and moving presentation (*taṣwīr*). This is where 'Ayyād disagrees with Quṭb. For 'Ayyād, *taṣwīr* is only one facet of Qur'ānic style. Q. 50:19-29, for example, uses the stylistic devices of narrative (*qiṣṣa*) and dialogue (*ḥiwār*). 'Ayyād also considers *takhyīl* to be another type, though unlike Quṭb, who defines it as granting life to inanimate materials, natural phenomena and emotional states (*khalʿ al-ḥayāh ʿalā al-mawādd al-jāmida, al-ẓawāhir al-ṭabīʿiyya wa al-infiʿālāt al-wijdāniyya*),[174] or on another occasion as "personifying abstract ideas" (*tajsīm al-maʿnawiyyāt al-mujarrada*),[175] 'Ayyād understands *takhyīl* as meaning to establish a picture –either material or spiritual – in the mind of a listener, using a style that conveys to him that the described-thing is really taking place (*taqrīr al-waṣf – sawāʾan a kāna ḥissiyyan am maʿnawiyyan – fī dhihn al-sāmiʿ, bi-uslūb yuṣawwir lahu anna al-shayʾ al-mawṣūf wāqiʿ fiʿlan*). This concept, according to 'Ayyād, is known as bringing the imagination down to the level of reality (*tanzīl al-khayāl manzilat al-ḥaqīqa*).[176] Speaking to inanimate materials (*jamādāt*) or attributing speech or action to them, as in the phrase *idhā zulzilatiʾ l-arḍu zilzālahā* (Q. 99:1), is an example of this concept of *takhyīl*. Included in this category is the Qur'ānic

---

[171] Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 6-29.

[172] Quṭb, *al-Naqd al-Adabī*, 7.

[173] 'Ayyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb*, 95.

[174] Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 73.

[175] Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 72.

style of *tajrīd*, that is when a speaker abstracts from himself a part or aspect of his own person to whom he speaks *(an yujarrid al-mutakallim min nafsihi shakhṣan ākhar yukhāṭibuh)*. There are many verses in the Qur'ān that inform how the tongue, the hands, the feet, the eyes, the ears and the skin stand as witness *(shahida ʿalā)* or speak/are made to speak *(qāla/anṭaqa)* of someone's deed.[177]

Whether the Qur'ān employs the stylistic devices of narrative, dialogue, *taṣwīr* or *takhyīl* in describing the Last Day, they serve, according to ʿAyyād, the same purpose, i.e., to direct *(tawjīh)* the reader/listener to the idea of sudden, drastic transformation – in the lives of individual human beings, the life of a nation/community and the life of the world in its entirety *(fikrat al-inqilāb al-ʿanīf al-mufājiʾ, sawāʾan a kāna dhālika al-inqilāb fī ḥayāt al-fard, am fī ḥayāt al-umma, am fī ḥayāt al-dunyā bi-asrihā)* --[178] on the Last Day. Verses of Q. 81:1-14, for example, describe the situation of the sun, stars, mountains, seas and sky in the Last Day, while those in Q. 80:33-42 similarly portray the state of human beings with their families and friends. This device of directing attention is also aimed at producing a strong emotional effect *(al-taʾthīr al-wijdānī al-qawī)* in the mind of the reader or listener.

In keeping with al-Khūlī's method of linking literary study with a psychological approach, ʿAyyād investigates the Qur'ān's original purpose in describing the Last Day. This purpose, according to ʿAyyād, is in fact manifold and consists of individual purposes and social purposes *(marāmī insāniyya wa marāmī ijtimāʿiyya)*. Unlike the Orientalists – ʿAyyād mentions in particular Josef Horovitz in his *Das koranische*

---

[176] ʿAyyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb*, 95.
[177] See, for example, Q. 24:24, 36:65 and 41:20-21.
[178] ʿAyyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb*, 85-87.

*Paradies*[179] -- who refer the idea of the Last Day to the beginning of Muḥammad's sense of prophethood, 'Ayyād refers the meaning to the physical and intellectual milieu of seventh-century Arabia and what effect it must have had on the human soul.[180]

Psychologically, the description of the Last Day, like the coming of the Last Day (Q. 20:10, 54:1) or the reward and punishment promised to believers and unbelievers (Q. 4:40, 64:9), respectively, maintains in the mind of the reader/listener that the Last Day may come at any time, and that everybody will be rewarded in accordance with their deeds.

As for the social purposes/ideas, 'Ayyād sees them as reflecting the socio-economic circumstances of seventh-century Arabia, especially Mecca, the time and place of the Qur'ān's revelation. He observes that a certain wealthy tribe controlled the society of Mecca in that era. Islam then came to fight this societal structure, which was based on tribal allegiance and social hierarchy, and replaced this with a single religion, Islam, as its foundation. This idea, according to 'Ayyād, is also reflected in the Qur'ānic description of the Last Day. Thus Q. 34:37, for example, clearly states that descent and wealth cannot save one from punishment. Similarly verses of Q. 30:12-13 assert that not even one's partner can help one on the Last Day.

From this discussion we see that the object of interpreting the Qur'ān, according to 'Ayyād, is to understand the Qur'ānic text or the Qur'ānic description of the Last Day on the basis of the meanings that Qur'ānic words had in the minds of the Arabs living at the time of its revelation (*idrāk madlūlāt al-alfāẓ al-Qur'āniyya fī adhhān al-*

---

[179] 'Ayyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb,* 20, 102.
[180] 'Ayyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb,* 102.

*'arab waqta nuzūl al-Qur'ān).*[181] And this can be achieved by analyzing the physical and intellectual milieu of seventh-century Arabia, and their effect on the human mind. Although he admits that the personality of the author is usually the principle (*asās*) in literary study for understanding the meaning of a literary work, 'Ayyād suggests that referring the Qur'ānic ideas to the historical context and to the first recipients' understanding of the text would not deviate from that principle.[182] In literary theory and Biblical interpretation this meaning is known as "author's intention" and "canonical meaning," respectively.[183] The author's intention is related to the historical meaning of the text in its original context. Among the proponents of authorial intention in literary theory is without doubt E.D. Hirsch.[184] In Biblical interpretation, Raymond E. Brown refers to the meaning that was understood by those who first received the text as "canonical meaning."[185] There have been many objections leveled against this approach, as literary criticism has switched its attention away from the author. Unfortunately 'Ayyād could not benefit from this shift in his study of the Qur'ān.

## d. Bint al-Shāṭi' (1913-1998)[186]

Bint al-Shāṭi', whose actual name is 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān, also studied under al-Khūlī, who later became her husband. She was a prolific writer, even before she entered the university, and used the pseudonym Bint al-Shāṭi' in many of her writings.

---

[181] 'Ayyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb*, 119.

[182] 'Ayyād, *Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb*, 102.

[183] See the next chapter for further discussion.

[184] See especially his two books *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967) and *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

[185] See Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981), 32ff.

[186] P. Starkey's dating of Bint al-Shāṭi''s death in 1974 has to be corrected. See Starkey, "'Abd al-Raḥmān, 'Ā'isha [Bint al-Shāṭi'] (1912-74)," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 1:18.

Her dissertation in Cairo University did not focus on *tafsīr*, but rather took the form of an edition of the work of Abū al-ʻAlāʼ al-Maʻarrī (363-449) entitled *Risālat al-Ghufrān*, written under the supervision of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, scholar of al-Maʻarrī himself, and submitted in 1950.[187] Yet even though al-Khūlī did not supervise this dissertation, the decision to edit *Risālat al-Ghufrān*, admits Bint al-Shāṭiʼ, was motivated by the method of al-Khūlī which suggests that the task consists in "editing and respecting the texts, reading them reasonably and perceiving them thoroughly, based on the psychological understanding of the art/literature and of its authors" (*taḥqīq al-nuṣūṣ wa khidmatihā wa qirāʼatihā qirāʼatan mutafahhimatan wa idrākihā idrākan mutadhawwiqan qāʼiman ʻalā al-tafahhum al-nafsī li-al-fann wa aṣḥābih*).[188] Her edition of *Risālat al-Ghufrān* by the way won a prize from al-Majmaʻ al-Lughawī in 1950.

Besides her interest in Arabic literature and women's issues,[189] however, Bint al-Shāṭiʼ wrote extensively on Qurʼānic interpretation, the best known of her works in this field being *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī fī al-Qurʼān* (in two volumes)[190] and *al-Iʻjāz al-Bayānī li-al-Qurʼān*.[191] Having examined the materials for Arabic literature courses in many Arab universities, she was very surprised that the literary beauty of the Qurʼān was not recognized as part of the curriculum. The discussion of this aspect was reserved for courses on *tafsīr* or Islamic studies in general, and avoided entirely in courses on Arabic literature. For that reason, following in the footsteps of her professor al-Khūlī, she

---

[187] Bint al-Shāṭiʼ, *Risālat al-Ghufrān li-Abī al-ʻAlāʼ al-Maʻarrī 363-449* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʻārif, 1950).

[188] Bint al-Shāṭiʼ, *Risālat al-Ghufrān*, 11.

[189] For a list of her main publications, see I.J. Boullata, "Modern Qurʼān Exegesis: A Study of Bint al-Shāṭiʼs Method," *Muslim World* 64, 2 (1974): 103-104, n. 1.

[190] Cairo: Dār al-Maʻārif, 1962, vol. 1 and 1968, vol. 2.

[191] Cairo: Dār al-Maʻārif, 1987. This study uses the second edition published in 1999.

sought to study the Qur'ān as a literary text (*naṣṣ adabī*) and to apply a literary approach

to this task.

Bint al-Shāṭi' states that the principle of literary interpretation of the Qur'ān lies

in the thematic approach. In *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī*, she writes:

> *al-aṣl fī manhaj al-tafsīr al-adabī -- kamā talaqqaytuhu 'an shaykhī --*
> *huwa al-tanāwul al-mawḍūʿī alladhī yafrugh li-dirāsat al-mawḍūʿ al-*
> *wāḥid fīh, fa-yajmaʿ kulla mā fī al-Qur'ān 'anhu, wa yahtadī bi-ma'lūf*
> *istiʿmāluh li-al-alfāẓ wa al-asālīb, ba'da taḥdīd al-dalāla al-lughawiyya li-*
> *kull dhāka... wa huwa manhaj yakhtalif tamāman 'an al-ṭarīqa al-ma'rūfa*
> *fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān sūratan sūratan, ḥaythu yu'khadh al-lafẓ aw al-āya fīhi,*
> *muqtaṭaʿan min siyāqih al-'āmm fī al-Qur'ān kullih, mimmā lā sabīl*
> *ma'ahu ilā al-ihtidā' ilā al-dalāla al-qur'āniyya li-alfāẓih aw istijlā'*
> *ẓawāhirih al-uslūbiyya wa khaṣā'iṣih al-bayāniyya*[192]

(The principle in the method of *tafsīr adabī* – as I received it from my
teacher (Amīn al-Khūlī) – is thematic treatment[193] which is devoted to
the study of a single subject matter in it (the Qur'ān); hence, it brings
together all verses in the Qur'ān (which speak) about it, and understands
the words and the style in (their) common usage (of the Qur'ān) after
defining the linguistic meaning of each of them... It is a method which is
totally different from the known method in interpreting the Qur'ān
chapter by chapter, where the word or verse in it (the Qur'ān) is taken in
isolation from the general context of the overall Qur'ān. With this
(chapter-by-chapter method) there is no way to being guided to
understand the meaning of the Qur'ān's words, or to clarify its stylistic
phenomena and rhetorical characteristics).

In addition to neglecting the specific and general context of a given word, many

traditional *tafsīrs*, according to Bint al-Shāṭi', were influenced by sectarian concepts

reflecting the socio-political and historical concerns of the eras in which they were

written. These interpretations which include theological polemics and *isrā'īliyyāt*

materials, she continues, "are remote from the spirit of the original Arabic, distasteful to

---

[192] Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī*,1: 10. Cf. *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī*, 2:7, where she includes specific context (*siyāq khāṣṣ*) in addition to general context.

the eternal feeling of the Qur'ān and turning the text away from its literary nature"

(*ba'ida 'an rūḥ al-'arabiyya al-aṣīla, mujāfiya li-dhawq Qur'ānī al-khālid, mukhrija li-al-naṣṣ 'an ṭabī'atihi al-adabiyya).*[194] In order to avoid these mistakes, interpretation has to be based on the Qur'ānic text alone -- *al-Qur'ān yufassir ba'ḍuhu ba'ḍan* -- without having recourse to any source external to the text itself.

While many of the proponents of literary interpretation have applied this method to themes in the Qur'ān as a whole, Bint al-Shāṭi' uses it in her *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī* to focus on the short chapters of the Qur'ān, which she believes to have a thematic unity (*waḥdat al-mawḍū').* She also applied this method to the rhetorical inimitability of the Qur'ān in her *al-I'jāz al-Bayānī.* There have been several studies made of Bint al-Shāṭi''s Qur'ānic interpretation,[195] rendering any detailed discussion of her method here pointless. What is worth discussing, however, is whether she in fact applies the method of al-Khūlī to the Qur'ān, or does not.[196] In short, the question is: Does she or does she not integrate literary theory into Qur'ānic studies?

Like al-Khūlī, she believes that the purpose of interpreting the Qur'ān is to reach the intended meaning, i.e., the original meaning of the Qur'ān, which is why she opposes the role of a reader/interpreter's subjectivity in coloring the interpretation. To discover this original meaning, she proposes steps that can be inferred from the statements

---

[193] Although the term *mawḍū'ī* may be translated as either "objective" or "thematic", here it is translated as thematic, since it corresponds to the method that al-Khūlī proposes. Cf. Boullata, "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis," 104.

[194] Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī,*1: 9.

[195] See Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran,* 68-76; Boullata, "Modern Qur'ānic Exegesis;" and two M.A. theses written by Boullata's students at McGill University: Muḥammad Amīn, "A Study of Bint al-Shāṭi''s Exegesis," submitted in 1992; and Sahiron Syamsuddin, "An Examination of Bint al-Shāṭi''s Method of Interpreting the Qur'ān," submitted in 1998. See also other studies mentioned in the latter, nn. 9-15 of pp. 3-6.

quoted above and in her other works.[197] The first step in thematic treatment is to collect

all Qur'ānic verses related to the subject. The second step is to arrange all these verses

chronologically. In her *Muqaddima fī al-Manhaj*, Bint al-Shāṭi' bases this arrangement

on the criteria of place (*makān*) and time (*zamān*) of revelation. It seems that her

decisions as to whether a given verse was revealed in Mecca or Medina and whether it

was the first or the last verse revealed, depends mainly on al-Zarkashī's *al-Burhān fī*

*'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*[198] and al-Suyūṭī's *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*.[199]

The social and political circumstances of seventh-century Arabia, which are

often reported in the *asbāb al-nuzūl* materials, constitutes her next step. She warns,

however, that most of these materials are based on guesses (*wahm*), because of which

one verse may have two or three different *sababs*. Recognizing this difficulty, Bint al-

Shāṭi' insists that the *sabab* of revelation is not to be understood as its real cause; the

relation between *sabab* and revelation is not a cause-effect relation (*sababiyya/'illiyya*),

without which the verse would not have been revealed.[200] In addition, for her, the

important point concerning these "occasions of revelation" is in the generality of the

words and not in the specificity of the occasion (*al-'ibra bi-'umūm al-lafẓ lā bi-khuṣūṣ*

*al-sabab*).[201] As has been demonstrated by Boullata and others, Bint al-Shāṭi' treats

---

[196] Jansen assumes that Bint al-Shāṭi's works on Qur'ānic studies might be thought of as al-Khūlī's, had the latter had the chance to write *tafsīr*. See Jansen, *Interpretation of the Koran*, 68.
[197] Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī*,1:10, 2:7; idem, *Muqaddima fī al-Manhaj* (Cairo: Ma'had al-Buḥūth wa al-Dirāsa al-'Arabiyya, 1971), 132ff. See also Boullata, "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis," 104-105; Syamsuddin, "An Examination of Bint al-Shāṭi''s Method," 48-49; Amīn, "A Study of Bint al-Shāṭi''s Exegesis," 36.
[198] Ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Maṭba 'at 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1957), 4 vols.
[199] Ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 3rd ed. 1985), 4 vols.
[200] Bint al-Shāṭi', *Muqaddima fī al-Manhaj*, 133; *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī*, 1:14.
[201] Bint al-Shāṭi', *Muqaddima fī al-Manhaj*, 134; *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī*,1:14. See also, Boullata, "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis," 105.

these traditional materials only if they can assist in discovering the meanings of words.[202]

The fourth and fifth steps consist in studying the linguistic meaning of the words and their usage in the Qur'ān, respectively. Here Bint al-Shāṭi' admits that she has recourse to Arabic dictionaries and *tafsīr* literature. These works were exploited in order to understand the sense or feeling of Arabic (*ḥiss al-'arabiyya*) for words; how they are used in the Qur'ān; and whether the Qur'ān adds new meaning to them. As in her treatment of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* materials, she employs these classes of literature only to discover the original meanings of words. "We accept from them," Bint al-Shāṭi' writes in her *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī,* "that (opinion) which is acceptable textually and contextually, and then we mention other opinions which are rejected by the text" (*naqbal minhā mā yaḥtamiluh naṣṣan wa siyāqan, thumma yakūn īrāduna li-al-aqwāl al-ukhrā allatī lā yaqbaluhā al-naṣṣ*).[203]

Finally, this thematic study demands that one pay attention to the specific context (*siyāq khāṣṣ*) of the words in each Qur'ānic verse and *sūra,* as well as to their general context (*siyāq 'āmm*) in the Qur'ān as a whole.

And yet despite the elaborate structure and its author's obvious sincerity, Bint al-Shāṭi''s approach is best described as philological and rhetorical.[204] This can be seen, for example, in her analysis of synonyms (*tarāduf*) in the Qur'ān.[205] Basing herself on

---

[202] See, Boullata, "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis," 106; Jansen, *Interpretation of the Koran,* 71; Syamsuddin, "An Examination of Bint al-Shāṭi''s Method," 92-96.

[203] Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī,* 2:8.

[204] Jansen characterizes her work as having a philological viewpoint. See Jansen, *Interpretation of the Koran,* Chapter Four. 'Ayyād similarly considers Bint al-Shāṭi''s analysis to be more philological and rhetorical. See 'Ayyād's view in Muqābala, *Shukrī 'Ayyād,* 22.

[205] See Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-I'jāz al-Bayānī,* 210ff.

the maxim "[there is] no word in it (the Qur'ān) whose place can be taken by another word" (mā min lafẓ fīh yumkin an yaqūm ghayruh maqāmah),[206] she asserts that there are no true synonyms in the Qur'ān. To prove this thesis, she surveys all passages in the Qur'ān where words that are understood to have the same meaning occur. For example, in her study of the words qasam and ḥalf, which are said to be synonyms, Bint al-Shāṭi' finds that in the Qur'ān these words do not have the same meaning. Having studied the thirteen places where the word ḥalf occurs, she comes to the conclusion that, unlike qasam, this ḥalf connotes the oath that will be broken, and so is never attributed to God.[207]

Besides this philological approach, Bint al-Shāṭi' analyzes the rhetorical expression of the Qur'ān. Her discussion of the passive voice and passive forms of verbs definitely falls into this category. Having collected all the verses related to the description of the Last Day, Bint al-Shāṭi' finds that these verses are either referred to in the passive voice or in passive forms (muṭāwa'a) and in metonymic predication (isnād al-ḥadath bi al-majāz).[208] The reason for this, she argues, is to show the idea of spontaneity (tilqā'ī) and to convince the reader/listener that the world at that time is prepared for an important event – one that requires no order [to execute it] or agent [to

---

[206] See Bint al-Shāṭi', Muqaddima fī al-Manhaj, 136.

[207] See Bint al-Shāṭi', al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, 1:148-149; idem, "The Problem of Synonyms in the Light of Quran," in Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth International Congress of Orientalists (New Delhi: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1970), 4:186. See also Boullata, "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis," 109-110; Amīn, "A Study of Bint al-Shāṭi''s Exegesis," 86; Syamsuddin, "An Examination of Bint al-Shāṭi''s Method," 51, n. 190.

[208] Bint al-Shāṭi', al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, 1:69.

put it into execution] (*al-iqnā' al-nafsī bi-anna al-kawn kullah muhayya' yawma'idhin li-al-hadath al-khatīr, famā yuhtāj fīh ilā amr wa lā ilā fā'il).*[209]

Similarly, Mir, in his preliminary study of this topic in the Qur'ān,[210] sees the passive voice as signifying passivity and lack of power on the part of the subject. In the case of the Qur'ānic depiction of the Last Day, the phenomenon serves to convey "the total passivity and pliability of the creation in the hands of God."[211]

If I am to evaluate Bint al-Shāti''s method in the light of the present literary criticism, I would categorize hers as belonging to the type of text-centered criticism of literature. Even though she consulted *tafsīr*s and *asbāb al-nuzūl* literature in commenting on the Qur'ān, in the final analysis these are only supplementary. Her "close reading" of the text, however, and especially her insistence on interpreting the Qur'ānic verse on the basis of the other parts of the text are the core of her approach.

## e. Sayyid Qutb (1906 - 1966)

Besides al-Khūlī and his disciples, there have been other scholars who proposed a literary approach to the Qur'ān. Qutb, as we have seen above, was one of them. But, while some of the students of al-Khūlī ran into trouble with Islamists when applying this method to the Qur'ān, Qutb won their support and became one of their most influential ideologues.

---

[209] Bint al-Shāti', *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī,* 1:70.

[210] Mir, "Passives in the Qur'ān: Preliminary Notes," in *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of James A. Bellamy,* ed. Mustansir Mir in collaboration with Jarl E. Fossum (Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1993), 169-179.

[211] Mir, "Passives in the Qur'ān: Preliminary Notes," 174. The author does not mention Bint al-Shāti''s works, however.

It is worth mentioning that in discussing Quṭb's ideas, special attention has to be

paid to the edition dates of his books, because, as has been maintained by many

scholars,[212] Quṭb used to revise his books many times and consequently add or change

his ideas. In addition, the development of his thought has to be taken into consideration

too.

Like the followers of al-Khūlī, Quṭb argues that the literary beauty of the Qur'ān

has to be ascertained before other purposes of interpretation. In his *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī*

*al-Qur'ān,* the first edition of which was published in 1945,[213] Quṭb states that he wrote

this book neither to assert the religious sanctity of the Qur'ān nor to propagate Islamic

teachings, but rather:

> *li-najid ba'da dhālik kullih hādhā al-jamāl al-fannī al-khāliṣ, 'unṣuran*
> *mustaqillan bi-jawharih, khālidan fī al-Qur'ān bi-dhātih, yatamallāhu al-*
> *fann fī 'uzla 'an jamī' al-mulābasāt wa al-aghrāḍ. Wa inna hādhā al-jamāl*
> *la-yutamallā waḥdah fa-yughnī, wa yunẓar fī tasāwuqih ma'a al-aghrāḍ*
> *al-dīniyya fa-yartafi' fī al-taqdīr[214]*

---

[212] Many scholars of Quṭb usually refer to the changes between different editions of Quṭb's *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān.* See, for example, Adnan A. Musallam, "The Formative Stages of Sayyid Quṭb's Intellectual Career and His Emergence as an Islamic Dā'iyah, 1906-1952," (Ph.D. dissertation, the University of Michigan, 1983), 231; 'Abd Allāh 'Awaḍ al-Khabbāṣ, *Sayyid Quṭb al-Adīb al-Nāqid* (Jordan: Maktabat al-Manār, n.d. [1983?]), 313; Mhd. Syahnan, "A Study of Sayyid Quṭb's Qur'ān Exegesis in Earlier and Later Editions of His *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* With Special Reference to Selected Themes," (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1997). Different editions of his other books, however, show changes and additions too. See, for example, William E. Shepard who studies different edition of Quṭb's *al-'Adāla al-Ijtimā'iyya fī al-Islām* in *Sayyid Quṭb and Islamic Activism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), xviii-ff.; and Musallam, "The Formative Stages," 192. See also Kristiyān Tsīskā (Christian Szyska), "Ḥawla Mafhūm 'al-Adab al-Multazim' 'inda Udabā' al-Ḥarakāt al-Islāmiyya," in *al-Karmil (Abḥāth fī al-Lugha wa al-Adab)* 20 (1999): 36, n. 15.

[213] Unfortunately, I could not consult this first edition. This book was developed from his articles in *al-Muqtaṭaf* in 1939 and *al-Risāla* in 1944-1945 on the same subject. See Musallam, "The Formative Stages," 130-137; Boullata, "Sayyid Quṭb's Literary Appreciation," in *LSRMQ,* 355, 368, nn. 9-10; Sayyid Bashīr Aḥmad Kashmīrī, *'Abqarī al-Islām Sayyid Quṭb: al-Adīb al-'Imlāq wa al-Mujaddid al-Mulham fī Ḍaw' Āthārih wa Injāzātih al-Adabiyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Faḍīla, 1994), 280-281.

[214] Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī,* 24. In his article "al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm" published in *al-Muqtaṭaf* 94, 2 (Feb. 1, 1939): 206-207, Quṭb clearly states that he would like to treat the Qur'ān as a literary text *(kitāb adabī).* Commenting on the editor of *al-Muqtaṭaf* who

(in order that we may find after all these [discussions of the sanctity of the Qur'ān and goals of Islamic teachings] the pure artistic beauty, a distinct element in itself, eternal in the Qur'an, which is enjoyed by art in isolation of all interests and purposes. Indeed this beauty can be enjoyed in itself and is sufficient, (but when) it is seen in its connection with religious purposes (its) value increases).

Here we see that literary interpretation, according to Quṭb, involves studying the Qur'ān from an artistic perspective only (*al-wijha al-fanniyya al-baḥta*). According to Quṭb, the primary aim of art is to produce emotive influences, to spread artistic pleasure with this influence, to raise the hidden life with this experience, and to feed the imagination with depiction (*fa-waẓifat al-fann al-ūlā hiya ithārat al-infiʿālāt al-wijdāniyya, wa ishāʿat al-ladhdha al-fanniyya bi-hādhihi al-ithāra, wa ijāshat al-ḥayāt al-kāmina bi-hādhihi al-infiʿālāt, wa taghdhiyat al-khayāl bi-al-ṣuwar*).[215] And this artistic aim, continues Quṭb, is to be found in the Qur'ānic styles of expression, which he calls, *taṣwīr, takhyīl* and *tashkhīṣ*.

Commenting on Quṭb's claim that none before him has attempted to study the Qur'ān based on a literary approach,[216] Bint al-Shāṭi' wrote in *al-Ahrām* that this method was taught in Cairo University, a comment that Quṭb denied, challenging her to name the work advocating this approach.[217] In the third edition of *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, published in 1953, however, Quṭb admits that only later − after the first edition was published − did he learn that al-Khūlī had taught his students in the Faculty of Arts

---

suggested to him that the Old and New Testaments have been studied literarily in the West, Quṭb asserts that the Qur'ān with its unique style is more appropriate (*awlā*) for that literary approach.
[215] Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 242
[216] See, Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 9.

aspects of this approach (*nawāḥī min hādhā al-ittijāh*).[218] This note is curiously not found in the later editions that I have consulted.[219]

Quṭb relates in his *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī* the story of how he finally "found" the Qur'ān (*laqad wajadtu al-Qur'ān*), the Qur'ān that is pleasant and beautiful (*al-ladhīdh al-jamīl*).[220] Unlike the Qur'ān of plain aspect (*al-ṣūra al-sādhija*) surviving in his childhood imagination or the difficult and complicated Qur'ān (*'usr mu'aqqad*) that he read in Qur'ānic commentaries, the Qur'ān that he eventually discovered was attractive in its style of expression.

Having found this Qur'ān, and having at the same time found in himself the rebirth of the Qur'ān (*mawlid al-Qur'ān min jadīd*),[221] Quṭb set out to make known this discovery to the public through articles that he published in *al-Muqtaṭaf*[222] and *al-Risāla*,[223] which were finally republished in book form entitled *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-*

---

[217] Quṭb's counter-argument was published in his article "Mabāḥith 'an al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān," *al-Risāla* 620 (May 21, 1945): 529. See also al-Khabbāṣ, *Sayyid Quṭb*, 307; Kashmīrī, *'Abqarī al-Islām*, 298.

[218] See *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, the third edition, n.d. [1953?], 9, n. 1. Since I could not consult the second edition, I am not so sure if Quṭb wrote this note for that edition. The dating of the third edition in 1953 is based on Quṭb's own note in this edition where he says that the second edition of *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma* "appears in this year, 1953" (*taṣdur fī hādhā al-'ām, 1953*). See *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, the third edition, p. 113, n. 1.

[219] However, in his "postscript" to the third edition of *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, he gives some hints that some students of the Qur'ān and teachers in many schools (universities ?) apply this literary approach to the Qur'ān too. See the reprinted postscript in the 14th edition (1993), 254.

[220] See *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 8.

[221] Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 10.

[222] Quṭb, "al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," *al-Muqtaṭaf* 94, 2 (Feb. 1, 1939): 206-211; idem, "al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," *al-Muqtaṭaf* 94, 3 (March 1, 1939): 313-318.

[223] Quṭb, "al-Ma'ānī wa al-Zilāl," *al-Risāla* 581 (Aug. 21, 1944): 690-693; "Baqiyya fī al-Ma'ānī wa al-Zilāl," *al-Risāla* 583 (Sept. 4, 1944): 728-731; "al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān," *al-Risāla* 601 (Jan. 8, 1945): 43-45; "al-Tanāsuq al-Fannī fī Taṣwīr al-Qur'ān," *al-Risāla* 611 (March 19, 1945): 278-281.

*Qur'ān* in 1945. Excluded from the latter were Quṭb's discussions of *taṣwīr* in pre-Islamic poetry, Islamic poetry, the Old Testament and the poetry of Western poets.[224]

In 1947, Quṭb applied his theory of *taṣwīr* and expanded his discussion of Qur'ānic depiction of the Last Day in *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī* into a separate book, entitled *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma fī al-Qur'ān*.[225] Implementing his main theory of *taṣwīr*, which Quṭb asserts to be "the preferred tool in the style of the Qur'ān," he collects in this work 150 scenes (*mashāhid*) of the Day of Resurrection taken from 80 *sūras* (both Meccan and Madīnan), and arranges them chronologically.[226] Quṭb consciously uses the term *mashhad* (scene) because it is only those verses which have a personified and moving scene (*mashhad shākhiṣ aw mutaḥarrik*)[227] that he discusses, while other verses which describe the Last Day in abstract form he ignores.

As was the case with his first book, the aim in writing *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma* was also purely artistic (*hadafī hunā hadaf fannī khāliṣ maḥḍ*).[228] Because of this literary-oriented interest, he was criticized by Ḥasan al-Bannā (1906-1949), the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, for ignoring the religious aspect of the Qur'ān.[229] There were also other scholars who criticized Quṭb for applying secular ideas to the divine text, such as applying the criteria of poetry, like *taṣwīr* and *takhyīl*, to the Qur'ān, or

---

[224] These are discussed in "al-Ma'ānī wa al-Ẓilāl" and "Baqiyya fī al-Ma'ānī wa al-Ẓilāl", respectively. They are included in Quṭb's *al-Naqd al-Adabī*, 22-30.

[225] In the seventh edition of *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma*, Quṭb advises the reader to read his *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī* before proceeding to *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma*, since the former explains the theoretical framework of the Qur'ānic way of expression to which the latter book extensively refers. See Quṭb, *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma* (1981), 229. This advice, which constitutes his postscript (*kalima fī al-khitām*), does not exist in the second edition. I believe that this was added by Quṭb beginning with the third or fourth edition.

[226] Quṭb, *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma*, 10.

[227] Quṭb, *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma*, 10.

[228] Quṭb, *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma*, 12.

[229] See, Musallam, "Formative Stages," 138-139.

treating infallible prophets (*al-ma'ṣūm*) like ordinary people.[230] It is worth mentioning

that in his third edition of *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī* published in 1953, when arguing against

the objection of his use of the term "art" (*fann*) to the Qur'ān, Quṭb asserts that he does

not mean thereby that the Qur'ān is fictitious, invented or based on mere imagination

(*al-mulaffaq, al-mukhtara' aw al-qā'im 'alā mujarrad al-khayāl*), but that the term art

attributed to the Qur'ān means "beauty in presentation, order in execution and

efficiency in production" (*jamāl al-'arḍ, tansīq al-adā' wa barā'at al-ikhrāj*).[231]

Many scholars classify Quṭb's *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī* and *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma* as

falling within his "pre-Islamist" phase.[232] Christian Szyska notes that Quṭb's

understanding of art or literature changed with his publication of *al-'Adāla al-*

*Ijtimā'iyya fī al-Islām* in 1949.[233] This work on social justice in Islam has been

considered by many[234] as Quṭb's first Islamist book. However, if we compare the first

---

[230] See Najīb Maḥfūẓ's and 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Subkī's reviews of *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī* in *al-Risāla* 616 (April 23, 1945): 433 and *al-Risāla* 620 (May 21, 1945): 542, respectively. See also Quṭb's response in *al-Risāla* 620 (May 21, 1945): 527 and ibid., 621 (May 28, 1945): 569-570.

[231] See Quṭb's postscript to the third edition which is reprinted in the 14th edition of *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*, 255.

[232] Other scholars use the category of "Muslim secularist" like Shepard, *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism*, xvi, n. 13; "pre-Islamic" like Ronald Nettler, "A Modern Islamic Confession of Faith and Conception of Religion: Sayyid Quṭb's Introduction to the *Tafsīr, Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān,*" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21, 1 (1994): 102; "sécularisme neutre" like Olivier Carré in "*A L'Ombre du Coran*' Revisité: Les lendemains possibles de la pensée de Sayyid Quṭb et du 'Quṭbisme'," *Arabica* 48 (2001): 87. See also Boullata, "Sayyid Quṭb's Literary Appreciation," in *LSRMQ*, 354. Cf. Leonard Binder and John Calvert who argue that Quṭb's Islamism has started from his conception of the aesthetic appreciation of the Qur'ān; thus from his work of *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī*. See Binder, *Islamic Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 170-205; and Calvert, "Qur'anic Aesthetics in the Thought of Sayyid Quṭb," *Religious Studies and Theology* 15, 2-3 (Dec. 1996): 61-76. Musallam dates Quṭb's commitment to Islam in 1947, especially with the publication of the Islamic journal *al-Fikr al-Jadīd*. See Musallam, "Formative Stages," 187-191.

[233] Szyska, "Ḥawla Mafhūm 'al-Adab al-Multazim'," 36-37. She admits that she could not consult the first edition of this book but relies rather on the later edition, 1980. According to Shepard, *al-'Adāla al-Ijtimā'iyya* was written in 1948 but was published in 1949. It has been republished, with many changes, five times during Quṭb's life time.

[234] See, for example, Shepard, *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism*, x.

and later editions of *al-'Adāla al-Ijtimā'iyya*, we will find that at least until the third

edition, which was published in 1952, Qutb's understanding of art and its role in society

is almost the same as that expressed in other books like *al-Naqd al-Adabī*. In the latter,

Qutb asserts that literary writing is an expression of feeling experience in inspiring

verbal form (*al-ta'bīr 'an tajriba shu'ūriyya fī ṣūra mūḥiya*),[235] whose purpose is to

produce an emotional effect in other souls (*muthīra li-al-infi'āl al-wijdānī fī nufūs al-

ākharīn*).[236] In earlier editions[237] of *al-'Adāla al-Ijtimā'iyya*, the author also states that

literature has the strongest influence in creating the inward emotional idea of life and

adds that "therefore we must be careful to select what Western literature we present to

our youth, whether in Arabic or European languages."[238]

It was only with the later editions of *al-'Adāla al-Ijtimā'iyya* that Qutb applies

his radical Islamist ideology to the role of literature/art.[239] The above quoted statement

is replaced in the later edition with "therefore we need a literature that derives from the

Islamic conception and so it is perhaps well that we speak in some detail about the

program for Islamic literature." From this point on, Qutb discusses the Islamic

conception of literature. He argues that literature and other arts stem from "a specific

conception of life" (*taṣawwur mu'ayyan li-al-ḥayāh*), and that Islam is a particular

conception of life. Comparing literature written according to an Islamic conception with

---

[235] Qutb, *al-Naqd al-Adabī*, 7.

[236] Qutb, *al-Naqd al-Adabī*, 8.

[237] Editions 1-3, according to Shepard. See Shepard, *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism*, 335, no. 182.

[238] See Qutb, *al-'Adāla al-Ijtimā'iyya fī al-Islām* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1952, third edition), 255. The translation is Shepard's. See Shepard, *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism*, 335, no. 182. Cf. John B. Hardie's translation in Sayed Kotb, *Social Justice in Islam* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), 257.

that written otherwise, Quṭb states that literature in the former sense does not depict the moments of human weakness nor does it adorn them. It speaks rather to renew and raise individual and social life.[240]

*Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* is Quṭb's other work that deals specifically with the Qur'ān, besides *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī* and *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma*. The tone and the purpose of the former, however, are very different from the latter. Written originally for the periodical *al-Muslimūn* of Saʿīd Ramaḍān, a prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood, and during the phase when Quṭb was in constant contact with the Muslim Brotherhood, the main purpose of *Fī Ẓilāl* was not literary but rather religious: to revolutionize society, to condemn the society of *jāhiliyya* and to call for an Islamic one. This is apparent especially in the later editions of *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*.[241]

This does not mean that Quṭb ignores the literary aspect of the Qur'ān in his *tafsīr*. As has been noted by Boullata, Quṭb still addresses the topic of *taṣwīr*, often refers to his two books dealing with the artistic beauty of the Qur'ān, and even introduces a new literary concept, i.e., the coherent unity of the Qur'ānic *sūra* and of the Qur'ān as a whole.[242] As in the earlier books, in his introduction to the first edition of *Fī Ẓilāl*, Quṭb asserts that he tries to express the sense of artistic beauty of the Qur'ān.

---

[239] According to Shepard's study, in the fifth and later editions of *al-ʿAdāla al-Ijtimāʿiyya*, Quṭb adds more than twenty paragraphs to his discussion of art/literature. See Shepard, *Sayyid Quṭb and Islamic Activism*, 308-312.

[240] See Shepard, *Sayyid Quṭb and Islamic Activism*, 310-311, nos. 191-197. In *al-Naqd al-Adabī*, Quṭb also notes that, having been influenced by the Islamic conception, he does not agree with those who describe weaknesses in life. See Quṭb, *al-Naqd al-Adabī*, 30, n. 1. Since his aim in the latter book is to present the theory of literary criticism in general, he does not go into detail explaining the Islamic conception of literature.

[241] For the story of Quṭb's writing of *Fī Ẓilāl*, see al-Khabbāṣ, *Sayyid Quṭb*, 311-313; Kashmīrī, *ʿAbqarī al-Islām*, 313-315. See also Syahnan, "A Study of Sayyid Quṭb's Qur'ān Exegesis in Earlier and Later Editions of His *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*," especially Chapter Three.

[242] See Boullata, "Sayyid Quṭb's Literary Appreciation," 362ff.

Similarly, he insists that he does not want to deal too much with linguistic, theological and legal analysis that could "conceal the Qur'ān from my soul and my soul from the Qur'ān" (*taḥjub al-Qur'ān 'an rūḥī wa taḥjub rūḥī 'an al-Qur'ān*).[243]

In the later editions of *Fī Ẓilāl*, however, Quṭb introduces his *tafsīr* by presenting his Islamist "confession" – to use Ronald Nettler's term[244] – as the result of his experience of "living" in the shade of the Qur'ān.[245] In the introduction, where most authors usually discuss the method adopted in approaching a subject, Quṭb lays his religious thought and ideas of the Islamic society which is based on "God's method/system" (*manhaj Allāh*) as compared to the *jāhiliyya* society.

It is interesting to study the key terms Quṭb uses in this introduction, and on which he elaborates later in his whole commentary. But, before discussing these key terms, one cannot fail to see the transition of expression from "I have found the Qur'ān" (*laqad wajadtu al-Qur'ān*) in Quṭb's earlier book *Fī al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī* to "I have lived in the shade of the Qur'ān" (*'ishtu fī ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*) in his introduction to *Fī Ẓilāl*.[246] This change is to remind readers that the author has moved from an earlier stage to the next stage that he regards as the higher one, where he hears God speaking to him (*yataḥaddath ilayya*).[247] By presenting this new *maqām*, it is as if Quṭb would like to

---

[243] See Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1953), 1:6. Henceforth, this will be referred as *Fī Ẓilāl 1st edition*.

[244] See Nettler, "A Modern Islamic Confession of Faith," 104. Olivier Carré discusses Quṭb's theology as represented in *Fī Ẓilāl* in his "Eléments de la 'aqīda de Sayyid quṭb dans *Fī zilāl al-qur'ān*," *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000): 165-197.

[245] See Quṭb, "Muqaddima," of *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1988, the 15th edition), 1:11-18. Henceforth, this will be referred *Fī Ẓilāl 15th edition*. For a detailed study of the *muqaddima* of the later edition see Nettler, "A Modern Islamic Confession of Faith," 104-114.

[246] See Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl 15th edition*, 1:11. In *Fī Ẓilāl 1st edition*, 1:5-7, Quṭb relates how he finds in himself the hidden desire (*raghba khafiyya*) to live in the shade of the Qur'ān before he finally lived in it. He also hopes by writing this commentary that others will follow him.

[247] See Quṭb, "Muqaddima," of *Fī Ẓilāl 15th edition*, 1:11.

compare his experience with that of Prophet Muḥammad when the latter received the revelation.

Having lived and tasted the favor (*niʿma*) of living in the shade of the Qurʾān, Quṭb looks down from a high place (*ʿuluww*) on the *jāhiliyya* – an important key term for Quṭb – of the world. The ignorance of the *jāhiliyya*, according to Quṭb's decisive and conclusive conviction (*yaqīn jāzim ḥāsim*),[248] is due to people's turning away from God and from the Qurʾān's appeal to rule according to God's system (*al-iḥtikām ilā manhaj Allāh*).[249]

These are the strong messages that Quṭb introduces in his *tafsīr* and they are prevalent throughout it. In order to see the development of Quṭb's thought from his earlier books on Qurʾānic artistic beauty to his Qurʾānic commentary, I will discuss Quṭb's treatment of the narratives in the Qurʾān. Much as in his *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī* where Quṭb asserts that the Qurʾān – before anything else – is the book of religious propagation (*kitāb daʿwa dīniyya*), because of which the narratives are used in the Qurʾān to propagate the religious call and to strengthen it, such as to assert the revelation and the prophethood, the unity of God, the power of God or the consequence of good and bad deeds, in his commentary Quṭb also insists that the Qurʾān is the book of propagation. In the latter, however, Quṭb adds that the Qurʾān is also the book of a way of life (*manhaj al-ḥayāh*).[250] With this important term, Quṭb would like to insist that the narratives be used to promote the essence of faith conception (*ḥaqīqat al-tasawwur al-īmānī*) and to compare it with other foreign concepts (*tasawwurāt dakhīla*).

---

[248] See Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl 15ᵗʰ edition*, 1:15.
[249] See Quṭb, "Muqaddima," of *Fī Ẓilāl 15ᵗʰ edition*, 1:15.

In his discussion of the story of God's appointment of Adam as His *khalīfa* in the world,

Quṭb concludes:

> *Wa min hādhā al-ṭarf nastaṭī' an nudrik ahammiyat al-qaṣaṣ al-Qur'ānī fī*
> *tarkīz qawā'id al-taṣawwur al-Islāmī wa īḍāḥ al-qiyam allatī yartakiz*
> *'alayhā. Wa hiya al-qiyam allatī talīq bi-'ālam ṣādir 'an Allāh, muttajih*
> *ilā Allāh, ṣā'ir ilā Allāh fī nihāyat al-maṭāf. 'Aqd al-istikhlāf fīhi qā'im*
> *'alā talaqqī al-hudā min Allāh wa al-taqayyud bi-manhajih fī al-ḥayah.*
> *Wa mafraq al-ṭarīq fīhi an yasma' al-insān wa yuṭī' limā yatalaqqāhu min*
> *Allāh, aw an yasma' al-insān wa yuṭī' limā yumlīhi 'alayh al-shayṭān. Wa*
> *laysa hunāka ṭarīq thālith .. immā Allāh wa immā al-shayṭān, immā al-*
> *hudā wa immā al-ḍalāl, immā al-ḥaqq wa immā al-bāṭil, immā al-falāḥ wa*
> *immā al-khusrān .. Wa hādhihi al-ḥaqīqa hiya allatī yu'abbir 'anhā al-*
> *Qur'ān kulluh, bi-waṣfihā al-ḥaqīqa al-ūlā allatī taqūm 'alayhā sā'ir al-*
> *taṣawwurāt wa sā'ir al-awḍā' fī 'ālam al-insān.*[251]

(From this point we can understand the importance of the Qur'ānic narratives in setting up the principles of the Islamic conception and in clarifying the values on which [the Islamic conception] is based. They are the values that agree with the reality emanating from God, aiming to God and progressing to God at the end of the trip. The contract of appointing the *khalīfa* in the world is based on the acquisition of guidance from God and the acceptance of His system in life. The crossroad in it is for the people either to listen to and obey what they receive from God or to listen to and obey what Satan disposes them to. There is no the third road: either God or Satan; either guidance or misguidance; either truth or error; either success or loss .... This truth is the one that the whole Qur'ān expresses as the first truth on which are based all other conceptions and principles in man's world)

Furthermore, we can see the development of Quṭb's view of the literary character of the Qur'ān over the course of his career. In his early article on "al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," published in *al-Muqtaṭaf* (March 1, 1939), when discussing the four schools of literary criticism – Classicism, Romanticism, Positivism and Realism –, Quṭb believes that the literary structure of the Qur'ān falls in the category of Romanticism, adding that "it (the Qur'ān's Romantic style) surely existed

---

[250] See Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl 15th edition*, 1:55. In *Fī Ẓilāl 1st edition*, 1:28, the term *manhaj al-ḥayāh* is not mentioned.

earlier than the appearance of this school in Europe and in the East" (*wa in kāna huwa sābiqan li-ẓuhūr hādhā al-madhhab fī Awrubbā wa fī al-Sharq ṭab'an).*[252]

However, with the changing of historical, political and intellectual contexts during which *Fī Ẓilāl* was written, Quṭb developed an increasingly radical vision of the Qur'ān as literature. Historically, as we mentioned above, Quṭb wrote this *tafsīr* during his close involvement with the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, the large part of *Fī Ẓilāl* was written and rewritten when he was in jail. Adding to these is the fact that in the 1950s the concept of commitment (*iltizām*) in literature appeared in the discussion of literary criticism. As a result, not only do we see Quṭb's *tafsīr* political but also, and above all, his view of the Qur'ān as a political document.[253]

By holding the Qur'ān as a political document, Quṭb always tries to interpret his socio-political situations in relation to the Qur'ānic stories and sees that the sole solution of the present crisis is to return to the Qur'ān. James Barr calls this appeal to the Scripture the "theoretic model,"[254] since it believes that the Scripture has revealed the divine way (*manhaj ilāhī*) the society ought to live. It is no wonder then that in his interpretation of the Qur'ān, Quṭb correlates the story in the Qur'ān to the present situations.[255] Take, for example, his analysis of the pre-Islamic *jāhiliyya* which, according to him, also prevails in modern times. According to Quṭb, *jāhiliyya* means submitting to the sovereignty of human beings, which is not in accordance with the

---

[251] See Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl 15ᵗʰ edition,* 1:61. This statement is not found in the 1ˢᵗ edition.

[252] See Quṭb, "al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān," *al-Muqtaṭaf* 94, 3 (March 1, 1939): 318.

[253] I borrow the term from James Barr's "The Bible as a Political Document," in his *Explorations in Theology 7: The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (London: SCM Press, 1980), 91-110.

[254] See Barr, "The Bible as a Political Document," 94.

Islamic way (*al-manhaj al-Islāmī*). According to this definition, the term *jāhiliyya* does

not connote a historical period which has passed but one that continues to re-appear

whenever society deviates from the Islamic way, either in the past or in the future. In his

*Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*, Quṭb writes:

> *Wa al-jāhiliyya laysat fatra tārīkhiyya; innamā hiya ḥāla tūjad kullamā wujidat muqawwimātuhā fī waḍ' aw niẓām .. wa hiya fī ṣamīmihā al-rujū' bi al-ḥukm wa al-tashrī' ilā ahwā' al-bashar, lā ilā manhaj Allāh wa sharī'atih fī al-ḥayāh*[256]

> (And *jāhiliyya* is not a historical period; but rather a state that exists whenever its constituents exist in a situation or system .. The core of these [constituents] is the recourse in judgment and legislation to the whims of human beings, and not to the way of God and His legislation in life)

The "correspondence" between the two kinds of *jāhiliyya*, according to Quṭb,

consists in living on the basis of a human system; and, therefore, the only way out of

this situation is to return to God's system and His legislation.[257] I call this type of

interpretation, following Tim Gorringe's analysis in Biblical interpretation, "political

interpretation of the Qur'ān." The next chapter will discuss the basis of this kind of

interpretation and Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's criticism of Quṭb's interpretation. For now,

it may suffice to say that with Quṭb, especially in his later works, we see the stress on

the role of the reader/interpreter in giving and creating the meaning of the text.

---

[255] Clodovis Boff calls this method "correspondence of relationships" as quoted by Tim Gorringe in his "Political Readings of Scripture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, 74.

[256] Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl 15th edition*, 2:891.

[257] On Quṭb's discussion of *jāhiliyya*, see also Boullata, *Trends and Issues*, 58-62. See also Al Makin's thesis on "Modern Exegesis on Historical Narratives of the Qur'ān: The Case of 'Ād and Thamūd according to Sayyid Quṭb in his *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1999), which analyzes Quṭb's interpretation of 'Ād and Thamūd in their historical context and their significance in the contemporary situation.

# CHAPTER THREE

## Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's Hermeneutical Theory

Because of the many objections raised against the literary approach to the Qur'ān in Egypt, as we have discussed in the previous chapter, it was not applied much after the time of Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalaf Allāh. Many students under Amīn al-Khūlī's direction — either for fear of the consequences or due to a shift in interests — wrote instead on Arabic literature.[1] Khalaf Allāh, Bint al-Shāṭi' and Shukrī Muḥammad 'Ayyād wrote their dissertations on al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī's *al-Aghānī,* al-Ma'arrī's *Risālat al-Ghufrān* and the Arabic translation of Aristotle's book on poetics, respectively. And if literary interpretations of the Qur'ān were attempted, such as by Bint al-Shāṭi', they were more philological.[2]

However, in 1980s Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd revived al-Khūlī's tradition. Although he did not study directly under al-Khūlī, Abū Zayd has consistently asserted that he belongs to that tradition. In his works, he clearly states that he is applying a literary approach to the Qur'ān in response to al-Khūlī's call to study the Qur'ān as a literary text.[3] The purpose of this chapter is to analyze and systematize his approach. It will also

---

[1] Besides, al-Khūlī was prevented from teaching *tafsīr* and allowed only to teach Arabic literature.

[2] Khalaf Allāh has also written some works on the Qur'ān, such as *al-Qur'ān wa Mushkilāt Ḥayātinā al-Mu'āṣira* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anglū al-Miṣriyya, 1967), *al-Qur'ān wa al-Dawla* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, 1981), and *al-Usus al-Qur'āniyya li-al-Taqaddum* (Cairo: Kitāb al-Ahālī, 1984). However, he does not use literary approach in these works. Marc Chartier has indicated in his "Muhammad Ahmad Khalaf Allāh et l'exégèse coranique," *IBLA (Revue de l'Institut des belles lettres arabes)* 137 (1976): 1-31, especially p. 16ff., that they tend to be apologetic.

[3] See, for example, Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsa fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān,* 4th ed. (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1998), 10, 19.

examine his ideas in the light of present developments in Qur'ānic studies and

hermeneutics. Abū Zayd situates his project within the context of *al-turāth wa al-tajdīd*

(Islamic heritage and renewal) and attempts to re-read and re-interpret Islamic *turāth* by

employing new methods. To quote his own words:

> *wa idhā kunnā lā nastaṭī' an natajāhal hādhā al-turāth wa nusqiṭahu min*
> *ḥisābinā, fa-innanā bi-nafs al-qadar lā nastaṭī' an nataqabbalahu kamā*
> *huwa, bal 'alaynā an nu'īda ṣiyāghatahu fa-naṭraḥ 'anhu mā huwa ghayr*
> *mulā'im li-'aṣrinā wa nu'akkid fīhi al-jawānib al-ījābiyya wa nujaddidahā*
> *wa naṣūghahā bi-lughatin munāsibatin li-'aṣrinā.*[4]

(If we cannot ignore this heritage and deprive it of our consideration, at
the same time we cannot accept it as it is. But we have to seize again its
formulation: expelling from it that which is not fit for our own time,
confirming its positive aspects, renewing them, and reformulating them
in a language suitable for our time).

This project will be studied within the context of Western Qur'ānic studies and

the hermeneutical tradition, and within the context of modern Muslim scholarship.

## A. Abū Zayd's Presuppositions

In his article entitled "*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr" Norman Calder (1950-

1998) writes that "[t]he qualities which distinguish one *mufassir* from another lie less in

their conclusions as to what the quranic text means than in their development and

display of techniques which mark their participation in and mastery of a literary

discipline."[5] In other words, the methods employed by *mufassirs* may be considered

more important than the result. It is also often said that different conclusions in

---

[4] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 16. Andrew Rippin also sees that *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* "raises
methodological issues ... about the understanding of the Kur'ān within contemporary times."
See Rippin, "Tafsīr," *EI*² 10:87.

interpretation are mainly due to the variety of methods used by interpreters.[6] But, aside

from methods, the presuppositions adopted by interpreters are often far more influential

in producing varying results than disagreements over method. Scholars frequently differ

in their assessment of the same text. In the case of the Qur'ān, for example, the

Ash'arites assumed its eternity, while the Mu'tazilites were convinced of its

createdness. Among Western scholars of the Qur'ān, John Wansbrough operated on the

presupposition that the present Qur'ān was the product of editorial efforts some hundred

years after the prophet, while the traditional views suppose it to be the text left by

Muḥammad and published by the caliph 'Uthmān b. 'Affān (d. 656).[7]

---

[5] Calder, "*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: problems in the description of a genre, illustrated with reference to the story of Abraham," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān,* eds. G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 106.

[6] J. Wansbrough writes in his *Quranic Studies* "Results are, after all, as much conditioned by method as by material." See his *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 91. In a review of Josef van Ess's *Anfänge muslimischer Theologie,*" he also says "Method not merely conditions results, it may be selected to produce them." See *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43 (1980): 361. See also Issa J. Boullata's review of *Quranic Studies* in *Muslim World* 67 (1977): 307.

[7] Except J. Burton who argues that the final text of the Qur'ān was produced by Muḥammad himself. See his *The Collection of the Qur'ān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). For a summary of different theories of the collection of the Qur'ān, see A.T. Welch, "al-Ḳur'ān," *EI²* 5:404-406; Angelika Neuwirth, "Koran," in *Grundriß der arabischen Philologie,* ed. H. Gätje (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1987), 2: 101ff.; Claude Gilliot, "Coran: Les recherches contemporaines," in *Encyclopaedia Universalis,* ed. Jacques Bersani (Paris: Encyclopaedia Universalis, 1995), 6: 547ff. Wansbrough's thesis has led to many responses either to dismiss or to support his argument. I just would like to mention the recent ones: The special issue on "Islamic Origins Reconsidered: John Wansbrough and the Study of Islam," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9, 1 (1997), ed. Herbert Berg; Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), especially pp. 78-84; Jawid A. Mojaddedi, "Taking Islam Seriously: The Legacy of John Wansbrough," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 45, 1 (Spring 2000): 103-114; and Rippin, "Introduction. The Qur'ān: Formative Interpretation," in *The Qur'an: Formative Interpretation,* ed. A. Rippin (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgat Publishing Limited, 1999), xi-xxvii, especially xiv-xvii. See also the list of reviews of Wansbrough's works in Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam,* 101-102, nn. 90-93.

Presuppositions are involved in every aspect of the relationship of the interpreter to his text. Scholars commonly differentiate between presuppositions and prejudice; presupposition is the philosophical or theological starting point which an interpreter takes, while prejudice consists in personal factors which affect the judgment of the interpreter.[8] No one is more eloquent in his explanation of presupposition than the German theologian and hermeneut Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1967). In his influential work "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?" Bultmann declares that "*there cannot be any such thing as presuppositionless exegesis,*"[9] because every one is conditioned by his/her individuality, biases and interests. In his other article "The Problem of Hermeneutics," he argues that to demand that an interpreter silence his subjectivity and individuality is a false ideal because it will destroy the very condition of interpretation, which is a "life relation" between interpreter and subject.[10] Bultmann, however, distinguishes presuppositions from prejudices. Exegesis, according to him, must be without prejudices, in that the latter must not decide in advance what the results of exegesis should be, or manipulate the text to confirm a particular opinion.[11] Commenting on the danger of prejudice in interpretation, Bultmann warns: "Every

---

[8] Graham N. Stanton, "Presuppositions in New Testament Criticism," in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods,* ed. I. Howard Marshall (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1977), 61.

[9] Rudolf Bultmann, "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?" in idem *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann,* selected, translated and introduced by Schubert M. Ogden (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1966, 5th printing), 290. (italics in the original).

[10] Bultmann, "The Problem of Hermeneutics," in idem, *Essays Philosophical and Theological* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1955), 255. See also, p. 241, 242 and especially p. 252 where he defines presupposition to mean "*a previous living relationship to the subject,* which directly or indirectly finds expression in the text and which guides the direction of the enquiry." See also, "Exegesis Without Presuppositions?" 293, 294, 295.

[11] Bultmann, "Exegesis Without Presuppositions?" 289; and idem, "The Problem of Hermeneutics," 255.

exegesis that is guided by dogmatic prejudices does not hear what the text says, but only lets the latter say what it wants to hear."[12] Pre-understanding, on the other hand, is an open assumption which will hear the text speak and be criticized or corrected by it during the encounter with the text.[13]

With this view in mind, we will identify Abū Zayd's presuppositions in his interpretation of the Qur'ān. Agreeing with hermeneuts and semioticians -- he mentions Y. Lotman specifically -- Abū Zayd argues that the existence of a variety of methods and analytical-critical trends in the study of literary texts is due essentially to differing views in defining the nature of the text (*ikhtilāf fī taḥdīd māhiyyat al-naṣṣ*).[14] His proposal is that "the Qur'ān is a text like any other text." In his book *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, for example, he states that the Qur'ān is a linguistic text (*naṣṣ lughawī*),[15] related to (*yantamī*) a specific culture or context.

He acknowledges that treating the Qur'ān as a text is not his own idea, but was proposed previously by Amīn al-Khūlī who called the Qur'ān "the greatest Arabic book" (*kitāb al-'arabiyya al-akbar*).[16] Al-Khūlī, however, according to Abū Zayd, was unable to pursue the ramifications of this idea. The contentious nature of his claim led to the removal of al-Khūlī from his post of professor of *tafsīr* at Cairo University, as well as to the university's refusal to examine the thesis of al-Khūlī's pupil, Khalaf Allāh, as it was first submitted, because he had applied his mentor's idea.[17] No one knows better than

---

[12] Bultmann, "Exegesis Without Presuppositions?" 290.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 19.
[15] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 9, 10, 18, 19, 25 *et passim*.
[16] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 10, 19. See al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd fī al-Naḥw wa al-Balāgha wa al-Tafsīr wa al-Adab* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Amma li-al-Kitāb, 1995), 229, 230.
[17] See previous chapter.

Abū Zayd himself how much courage it requires to pursue such a course,[18] one which can sometimes cost a person his life. But for the sake of scientific awareness (*intāj wa'y 'ilmī*) of the *turāth* (Islamic heritage), Abū Zayd has been willing to run that risk. However, he does not claim to hold the absolute truth nor does he deny the possibility that his own ideology (what he calls *tashwīsh īdiyūlūjī*) might color his study. It is only through continuous awareness (*wa'y dā'im*) of the danger of such biases, he insists, coupled with the maximum effort to decrease their influence, that one can avoid falling into the abyss of ideological analysis (*mahāwī al-taḥlīlāt al-īdiyūlūjiyya).*[19]

Because he holds the view that the Qur'ān has to be considered a text like any other, Abū Zayd does not see the need to have a special or "sacred" hermeneutics to uncover the Qur'ān's meanings. On the contrary, he insists that as a text it can be interpreted by any modern critical approach. This view was bitterly condemned by many scholars, especially the Islamists, since in their view the Qur'ān is superior to all other texts, being unique and therefore to be studied differently.[20] This was not the first time, to be sure, that such criticism has been directed at a scholar who would apply "secular" critical methods to their Scriptures. Even in the fields of Old and New Testament

---

[18] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 17.

[19] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 23.

[20] This assumption is mainly based on the idea of *i'jāz* (the miraculous nature) of the Qur'ān. On *i'jāz,* see, for example, Issa J. Boullata, "The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur'ān: *i'jāz* and Related Topics," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān,* ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 139-157. Rippin observes that many Muslims perceive the use of critical methods in the study of the Qur'ān as an "attack from the outside." See Rippin, "The Qur'an as Literature: Perils, Pitfalls and Prospects," *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* 10, 1 (1983): 41. On argument against non-Muslims' interpretation of the Qur'ān, see Muhammad Abdur-Rauf, "Outsiders' Interpretations of Islam: a Muslim's Point of View," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies,* ed. Richard Martin (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 179-188. For further objections to the study of the Qur'ān, see now David Marshal, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers. A Qur'anic Study* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999), 1ff.

scholarship, there are still some scholars who insist that inasmuch as it is the Word of God, Scripture should not be the subject of human investigation or at least has to be approached by a special method. "It is bad hermeneutics," they argue, "if we do not interpret the Bible on its own terms, regardless of the question whether we are personally convinced of the Bible's divine status."[21]

Contrary to this "conservative" view which insists that Scripture should not be treated like any other writing, "liberal" thinkers argue that the fact that the text is believed to have a divine origin and an authoritative status for a particular group of adherents should have no influence at all on interpretation. There is no "sacred hermeneutics" nor is there privilege given to these texts because of their authority. On the contrary, they must be treated like any other text.[22] Charles M. Wood, for example, makes the following interesting comment on the liberal position on this issue:

> [T]he fact that scripture is authoritative for a community does not mean
> that it must be regarded as authoritative by its interpreters, or that it
> must be interpreted as an authoritative text. Interpreters within or outside
> the community whose scripture it is may for various reasons disregard its
> authority -- that is, disregard its character as scripture -- on the grounds
> that for their particular purposes its authoritative character is either
> irrelevant or inadmissible.[23]

---

[21] T.E. van Spanje, "Contextualisation: Hermeneutical Remarks," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 80, 1 (Spring 1998): 204. See also Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text. Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 22 who sees similar objections from some Protestants. She also finds some Catholics arguing that since the Bible is the Church's book, it is not subject to scholarly discussion and that only the hierarchical Magisterium are the authoritative interpreters of that Book.

[22] Charles M. Wood, "Hermeneutics and the Authority of Scripture," in *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation: Essays on the Occasion of the Sixty Fifth Birthday of Hans W. Frei*, ed. Garrett Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 4. The terms "conservative" and "liberal" are Wood's.

[23] Ibid., 6.

It seems clear that Abū Zayd goes along with this liberal view, and that he would also agree with Bultmann's assertion that "[t]he interpretation of biblical writings is not subject to conditions different from those applying to all other kinds of literature."[24] In his *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī*, Abū Zayd asserts his belief that religious texts are linguistic texts whose forms are the same as those of other texts in the culture (*anna al-nuṣūṣ al-dīniyya nuṣūṣ lughawiyya sha'nuhā sha'n ayyat nuṣūṣ ukhrā fī al-thaqāfa*).[25] Their divine origin, continues Abū Zayd, does not mean that they need a specific method suited to their specific divine nature, for if this were so it would imply that religious texts are beyond human understanding, except for those who have been granted a special power by God enabling them to understand them, and, as such, they are closed (*mustaghliqa*) for ordinary people.[26] Against those who object to the application of human understanding and method to divine texts, Abū Zayd argues that since the Author of the Qur'ānic text [God] may not be subjected to scientific research, His Speech/Word which operates in human language, is directed at human beings and is therefore linked closely to a specific context and culture, is certainly an appropriate field of study. And as such, it is subject to human understanding and method.[27]

Another consequence of assuming the Qur'ān to be a linguistic text, besides the effect of treating it as any other text, is that any qualified scholar, regardless of his/her religion, is equally capable of studying it. In an interview conducted by Navid Kermani, Abū Zayd states that the reason why he treats the Qur'ān as a text in the Arabic language is in order that Muslims, Christians and atheists alike can study the Qur'ān

---

[24] Bultmann, "The Problem of Hermeneutics," 256.

[25] Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī* (Cairo: Sīnā li-al-Nashr, 1992), 197.

[26] Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī*, 197.

because Arabic culture is united with it.[28] Abū Zayd does not attempt to clarify this reason further, but if we may follow the argument of Graham N. Stanton, the author of "Presuppositions in New Testament Criticism," who addresses a similar issue in New Testament studies, the argument appears to be more logical, and one with which, I think, Abū Zayd would agree. Stanton argues that since interpretation involves dialogue with the text, the interpreter's belief is not at issue. The most important aspect of interpretation, however, is "willingness and readiness to run the risk that the pre-understanding with which he comes to the text may well be refined or completely renewed. He must be prepared to be interpreted by the text. That is the necessary presupposition with which he must attempt to operate."[29]

A corollary of this argument is that dialogue between the scholars is possible regardless of their faith. David W. Atkinson, for example, argues in his "Religious Dialogue and Critical Possibilities" that the "openness" initiated in modern critical theory may liberate a student of religion from exclusivism and allow him to learn other possibilities from other traditions.[30] Reporting on the Conference on "Qur'anic Studies on the Eve of the 21st Century" held in Leiden on June 10-12, 1998, where Western and Muslim scholars were invited to present their thoughts on the current state of the discipline, Abū Zayd -- who had organized the conference -- concludes that: "[T]he old

---

[27] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 27.

[28] "Ich behandele den Koran als Text in arabischer Sprache, den der Muslim ebenso wie der Christ oder Atheist studieren sollte, weil sich in ihm die arabische Kultur vereinigt." Navid Kermani, "Die Affäre Abū Zayd: Eine Kritik am religiösen Diskurs und ihre Folgen," *Orient* 35, 1 (1994): 28-29. The complete interview has been published under the title "Die Befreiung des Korans: Ein Gespräch mit dem ägyptischen Literaturwissenschaftler Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid," in Abu Zaid, *Islam und Politik: Kritik des religiösen Diskurses,* trans. Chérifa Magdi (Frankfurt am Main: dipa-Verl., 1996), 191-213.

[29] Stanton, "Presuppositions in New Testament Criticism," 69.

clichés of orientalists versus Muslims seem very much to be a thing of the past,"[31]

observing that these scholars came together in dialogue without difficulty. Dialogue, he

states, can only be disrupted when one party claims to have the absolute truth and

rejects the other.

Besides assuming that the Qur'ān is a linguistic text, Abū Zayd presupposes that

it is also a cultural product (*muntaj thaqāfī*).[32] This understanding is based on the

argument that since the Qur'ān took shape (*tashakkal*) during a period of more than

twenty years in a specific context and culture, the latter obviously had a role in shaping

(*tashkīl*) the former.[33] He finds additional support for his view in the process of

revelation itself. He argues that when God revealed the Qur'ān to His messenger, He

chose a human language as the code for revelation. And given that a language cannot

exist in isolation from its culture since the latter is embodied (*tajassad*) in language, it is

therefore impossible to separate the text from its cultural context.[34]

At the same time, Abū Zayd argues in *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī* for the humanity

of the text (*bashariyyat al-naṣṣ*).[35] He does not, however, go so far as to say that the

Qur'ān is a "human product" as John B. Gabeel and co-authors, for example, argue in

the case of the Bible in their book *The Bible as Literature*.[36] Abū Zayd denies that the

Qur'ān is man-made, stating only that it uses human language in its expression. Here he

---

[30] Atkinson, "Religious Dialogue and Critical Possibilities," *Religious Studies and Theology* 12, 2-3 (Sept. 1992): 26-27.

[31] Abu Zayd, "Qur'anic Studies on the Eve of the 21st Century," in *ISIM Newsletter* 1/98, 46.

[32] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 24,

[33] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 26.

[34] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 24.

[35] Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī*, 197, 198, 206.

[36] John B. Gabeel, Charles B. Wheeler, and Anthony D. York, *The Bible as Literature: an Introduction*, fourth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), x.

seems to echo Toshihiko Izutsu's (1914-1993) words, which clearly must have

influenced Abū Zayd's understanding of the Qur'ān as a linguistic text:

> And Revelation means in Islam that God "spoke", that *He revealed Himself through language, and that not in some mysterious non-human language but in a clear, humanly understandable language.* This is the initial and the most decisive fact. Without this initial act on the part of God, there would have been no true religion on earth according to the Islamic understanding of the word religion.

> It is no wonder then, that Islam should have been from the very beginning extremely language conscious. Islam arose when God spoke. *The whole Islamic culture made its start with the historic fact that man was addressed by God in a language which he himself spoke.* This was not a simple matter of God's having "sent down" a sacred book. It meant primarily that God "spoke." And this is precisely what 'Revelation' means. Revelation is essentially a *linguistic concept.*[37]

To prove the humanity of the text, Abū Zayd makes a comparison between Jesus

and the Qur'ān.[38] Both, according to Abū Zayd, are identified as *kalām Allāh* in the

Qur'ān. Q. 4:171, for example, declares Jesus to be God's messenger and His Word

(*Rasūlu 'llāhi wa kalimatuhu*). Similarly Q. 3:45 conveys the good news to Maryam

about God's Word whose name is ʿĪsā (*Inna 'llāha yubashshiruki bi-kalimati 'm-minhu

'smuhu 'l-masīḥu ʿĪsā 'bnu Maryama*). As for the Qur'ān, Q. 9:6 clearly states that it is

---

[37] Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964), 152. (Italics is added)

[38] Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī,* 195-196. See also Stefan Wild, ""We have sent down to thee the book with the truth …": Spatial and temporal implications of the Qur'anic concepts of nuzūl, tanzīl, and 'inzāl," in *The Qur'an as Text,* ed. Stefan Wild (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 137. This kind of comparison has also been made by W.C. Smith in "Some Similarities and Differences between Christianity and Islam," in *The World of Islam: Studies in Honour of Phillip K. Hitti,* ed. J. Kritzeck and R. B. Winder (London: Macmillan, 1959), 47-59, especially 56-58. Josef van Ess has documented other scholars who have done the same comparison in his *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2.und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 1997), 4:604, n. 1. Cf. Rein Fernhout, "The Bible as God's Word: A Christological View," in *Holy Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam,* eds. Hendrik M. Vroom and Jerald D. Gort (Amsterdam-Atlanta: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1997), 57-68, where he argues that Jesus is the Word of God that becomes flesh and the Bible the Word of God which becomes scripture.

the speech of God: *wa in aḥadu 'm-mina 'l-mushrikīna 'stajāraka fa-'ajirhu ḥattā*

*yasma'a kalāma 'llāhi* "If anyone of the polytheists comes to you seeking your

protection, protect him so that he may hear God's speech (*kalām Allāh*). "

Furthermore, as the Speech of God, the Qur'ān was sent down to Muḥammad,

just as Jesus was "conveyed to Maryam" *alqāhā ilā Maryam* (Q. 4:171). In both cases,

Gabriel played the role of mediator coming in the form of a perfect man (*basharan*

*sawiyyan*) to Maryam (Q. 19:17), and in the form of a Bedouin (*a'rābī*) in the case of

Muḥammad.[39] Basing himself on these verses, Abū Zayd concludes that both Words of

God materialize (*tajassad*) into tangible form (*shakl malmūs*): into a created being in

the case of Jesus, and into a linguistic text using human language in the case of the

Qur'ān.[40] The humanity of the text in the case of the Qur'ān is due to its relation with

the language and culture of a particular historical period.[41]

In his interview with Kermani, Abū Zayd further notes this comparison:

> Jesus im Christentum: Ist er ein Gott oder ein Mensch? Das ist ein
> Problem in der christlichen Theologie. Jesus, das Fleisch und das Blut,
> der geboren wurde an einem bestimmten historischen Moment und
> getötet wurde an einem anderen historischen Moment, der in Nazareth
> lebte: Dieser Jesus ist ein Mensch. Dieser Jesus ist der, den wir kennen.
> Der Koran, den wir kennen, ist arabische Sprache. Die arabische Sprache
> ist eine geschichtliche Sprache. Der Koran wurde verkündigt an einem
> bestimmten historischen Moment.[42]

> (Jesus in Christianity: Is he a God or a human being? This is a problem in
> Christian theology. The flesh and blood Jesus, who was born at a certain
> historical time and died at another, lived in Nazareth -- this Jesus is a
> human being. This Jesus is the one we know. The Qur'ān, which we

---

[39] Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī*, 196.
[40] Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī*, 196. Sometimes he says the word of God is manifested (*tatajallā*) in the human language.
[41] Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī*, 198, 206.
[42] Kermani, "Die Affäre Abū Zayd," 31.

know, is Arabic. The Arabic language is a historical language. The Qur'ān was revealed at a certain historical time)

On another occasion, to prove the close relationship between the Arabic language and the Qur'ān, Abū Zayd refers to the distinction made by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) between *langue* and *parole*. This reference points again to Abū Zayd's debt to Izutsu, who discussed this issue in an article which Abū Zayd made use of.[43] The Qur'ān, according to Izutsu, represents the *parole* or speech-aspect of Saussurian terminology, while the Arabic language, used as a code-system for communication, is its *langue*-side.[44] While it is recognized that every community has its own *langue*, the Qur'ān clearly asserts that Arabic constitutes its own code *Innā ja'alnāhu qur'ānan 'arabiyyan la'allakum ta'qilūna* "We have made it an Arabic Qur'ān that you may understand" (Q. 43:3).[45]

The dependence of the Qur'ān on the language of the Arabs confirms for Abū Zayd that the Qur'ān is closely related to Arab culture and society. This relation is further shown in the fact that its verses reflect the historical period of Muḥammad, as represented, for example, in the *asbāb al-nuzūl*, the *Makkī* and *Madanī* verses, etc.[46]

---

[43] The article to which Abū Zayd refers is "Revelation as a Linguistic Concept in Islam," in *Studies in Medieval Thought, Journal of the Japanese Society of Medieval Philosophy* 5 (1962). The article is now reprinted in *God and Man in the Koran,* Chapter VII on "Communication between God and Man (II) – Linguistic Communication -," 151-197.

[44] See Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran,* 152ff. for the discussion of the *parole*-aspect of the Qur'ān, and 185ff. for the *langue*-side.

[45] See also Q. 12:2 *Innā anzalnāhu qur'ānan 'arabiyyan la'allakum ta'qilūna.*

[46] This issue will be discussed below. Abū Zayd seems to agree with the author of "al-Ḳur'ān" in *EI²* who also argues that the relation between the Qur'ān and Muḥammad is so close "that one cannot be fully understood without the other." See Welch, "al-Ḳur'ān," *EI²* 5:402. See also Welch's "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself. The Koranic Data," in *Islam's Understanding of Itself,* eds. R.G. Hovannisian and Speros Vryonis (Malibu, California: Undena Publications, 1983), 15-52. Wansbrough, however, would argue against this historical account. See the latter's argument in Rippin, "Literary Analysis of *Qur'ān, Tafsīr,* and *Sīra:* The Methodologies of John Wansbrough," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies,* 151-163. See

These are some of the reasons used by Abū Zayd to argue for the context's role in shaping the text. However, he asserts that the relation between text and context is dialectical (*jadaliyya*), in that, not only does context shape the text but the latter also shapes the context and becomes the producer of culture (*muntij li-al-thaqāfa*).[47] In this latter situation, the Qur'ān serves as subject (*fā'il*) and the culture as its object (*munfa'il*).[48] The role of the text in shaping the culture may be represented in the existence of a plethora of Islamic *turāth* works which were produced by continuously re-reading the text and re-interpreting its meaning.

## B. What is a Text?[49]

Having stated his assumption that the Qur'ān is a text, Abū Zayd goes on to define and explain the nature of Qur'ānic text in general. He suggests that before an attempt can be made at interpretation, "one must first define the nature of the text and examine the laws that govern the study of that text -- not every interpretation is permissible."[50]

In his writings, Abū Zayd reports that many Islamists criticized him for describing the Qur'ān as a text. He tells of the case of an al-Azhar University professor who protested against the use of the word 'text' in reference to the Qur'ān. The professor's argument was that:

---

also Rippin, " Muḥammad in the Qur'ān: Reading Scripture in the 21st Century," in *The Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of the Sources,* ed. Harald Motzki (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 298-309.

[47] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 24.

[48] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 178.

[49] It should be kept in mind that *naṣṣ,* which is usually translated as "text," means also in this discussion "literary text."

*lam na'rif fī tārīkh al-umma man sammā kalām Allāh bi-ghayr mā sammāhu Allāh min suwar wa āyāt, wa lam na'rif anna ahadan min al-'ulamā' tanāwal al-Qur'ān min haythu huwa nass, li-'anna hādhā mimmā yusta'ādhu bi 'llāh minhu, wa innamā tanāwaluhu fī kulli hāl min haythu huwa tanzīl min Allāh.*[51]

(We have not seen in the history of the [Islamic] community anyone describe the Qur'ān other than by the names that God himself used such as *suwar* ([Qur'ān] chapters) and *āyāt* (verses); similarly we do not know of any [Muslim] scholar who dealt with the Qur'ān as a text (*nass*), because this is what is prohibited by God. They instead dealt with it as *tanzīl* (revelation) from God).

Abū Zayd, however, argues that to refrain from treating the Qur'ān as a text or to disregard its textuality will lead to the fixation of its meaning. "When the meaning is frozen and fixed," Abū Zayd warns, "an authority emerges to claim itself as the only guardian power of Islam."[52] This authority then will manipulate the meaning of the Qur'ān to suit its own agenda and reject other possible interpretations.

## *1. The Semantic Meaning of Nass*

As with the English term "text," derived from the Latin word *textus* meaning texture, structure, construction (whose root verb *texo* means to weave or compose),[53] its Arabic counterpart, *nass* or *nassa* comes to mean to fix, lay down, compose, determine,

---

[50] Abū Zayd, "The Modernisation of Islam or the Islamisation of Modernity," *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East,* ed. Roel Meijer (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), 84.

[51] Quoted by Abu Zayd in *al-Nass, al-Sulta, al-Haqīqa: al-Fikr al-Dīnī bayna Irādat al-Ma'rifa wa Irādat al-Haymana* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1995), 153; idem, "The Textuality of the Koran," in *Islam and Europe in Past and Present* (Leiden: NIAS, 1997), 43; idem, "Divine Attributes in the Qur'an. Some Poetic Aspects," In *Islam and Modernity. Muslim Intellectuals Respond,* ed. John Cooper, Ronald L. Nettler and Mohamed Mahmoud (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 192.

[52] Abū Zayd, "Textuality," 43; idem, "Divine Attributes," 192.

[53] See Jorge J.E. Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality: The Logic and Epistemology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 7.

arrange, set up or provide.[54] Abū Zayd, however, observes that in the classical period the

term *naṣṣ* had a different meaning. In his research into the many usages of the term

found in *Lisān al-'Arab* of Ibn Manẓūr (1232-1311),[55] he concludes that the main idea of

*naṣṣ* is obviousness and clarity (*al-ẓuhūr wa al-inkishāf*).[56] Abū Zayd observes that in

Islamic *turāth* the meaning of *naṣṣa* has developed from the perceptible connotation

(*dalāla ḥissiyya*) into a semantic one (*dalāla ma'nawiyya*), and finally into a technical

term (*iṣṭilāḥ*); hence, from "to raise," or "to lift" as in *naṣṣat al-ẓabya jīdahā* (the female

gazelle raised her neck) or *minaṣṣa* (the raised platform) to *naṣṣa al-rajula* meaning to

ask someone about something, until finally coming to mean "to provide" or "to

specify."[57] This development of meaning, however, still points to the idea of

obviousness and clarity.

In the sciences of Qur'ān, as well as in *uṣūl al-fiqh*, according to Abū Zayd, the

word *naṣṣ* refers to the clear verses of the Qur'ān (*āyāt muḥkamāt*) that need no

explanation. As an illustration, he shows that al-Shāfiʿī (d. 820) in *al-Risāla* defines *al-*

*naṣṣ* as *al-mustaghnā fīhi bi al-tanzīl 'an al-ta'wīl* (the revelation which does not need

interpretation).[58] Similarly, al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144), in his interpretation of Q. 2:7 uses

---

[54] Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1979), fourth edition, 1135.

[55] See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir and Dār Beyrūt, 1956), 7 on "Ṣ": 97-99 (*naṣaṣa*).

[56] Abū Zayd, *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa*, 150.

[57] Abū Zayd, "Textuality," 44; idem, "Divine Attributes," 192; idem, *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa*, 150: (a) *al-dalāla al-ḥissiyya: rafa'a* (b) *al-intiqāl min al-ḥissī : naṣṣ al-umūr =shadīduhā* (c) *al-intiqāl ilā al-ma'nawī : naṣṣa al-rajula = sa'alahu 'an shay' ḥattā yastaqṣiya mā 'indahu* (d) *al-dukhūl ilā al-iṣṭilāḥī : tawqīf wa ta'yīn*.

[58] Abū Zayd, *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa*, 151. Abū Zayd refers to *al-Risāla*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Maktabat wa Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlādih, 1940), 14. I do not find on that page the term *naṣṣ* but rather *bayyin*. On page 21, however, in his discussion of *Kayfa al-Bayān*, al-Shāfiʿī describes *naṣṣ* as *bayyin*. See also Majid Khadduri's translation of *Risāla* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), 62 and 68, respectively.

the term *nassa* to refer to *al-muhkam al-wādih al-bayyin alladhī lā yahtāj al-ta'wīl* as an

opposite of *al-mutashābih.*[59] Abū Zayd further observes that, based on Q. 3:7 *Huwa*

*'lladhī anzala 'alayka 'l-kitāba minhu āyātu 'm-muhkamātun hunna ummu 'l-kitābi wa*

*ukharu mutashābihātun,*[60] verses of the Qur'ān are divided by early Muslim scholars of

the Qur'ānic sciences into four semantic levels. Those in the first category are called *al-*

*nass,* meaning the clearest verses. The second category is that of *al-zāhir,* which are less

clear since there are two possibilities for their meanings, of which the apparent meaning,

however, is the more appropriate. The third category is that of *al-mu'awwal*

(metaphorical) verses, i.e., verses whose hidden meaning is more appropriate than their

apparent. The fourth and the last level is *al-mujmal* (the general).[61]

With these observations, Abū Zayd is trying to show that the term *nass* was

widely used in the classical period to connote "clarity" and "obviousness." He is not

certain, however, when and how this term came to take on its modern sense, i.e., the

whole text.[62] He does note that, based on his study of Ibn Khaldūn's (1332-1406) *al-*

*Muqaddima,* Aristotle's book on logics was once called *al-Nass* "the Text,"[63] and that

---

[59] Abū Zayd, *al-Nass, al-Sulta, al-Haqīqa,* 154 (Instead of Q. 2:17, it should read Q. 2:7. See al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, n.d.), 50).

[60] Many scholars have studied Q. 3:7. See, for example, Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies,* 149ff.; Leah Kinberg, "*Muhkamāt* and *Mutashābihāt* (Koran 3/7): Implication of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis," *Arabica* 35 (1988):143-172; Michel Lagarde, "De l'ambiguïté (mutašābih) dans le Coran: tentatives d'explication des exégètes musulmans," *Quaderni di studi arabi* 3 (1985):45-62; and recently Jane D. McAuliffe, "Text and Textuality: Q. 3:7 as Point of Intersection, " in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān,* ed. Issa J. Boullata (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 56-76.

[61] Al-Suyūtī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān,* ed. Muhammad Abū al-Fadl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1985), 3:8. See, Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Nass,* 179; idem, "Textuality," 44.

[62] Abū Zayd, *al-Nass, al-Sulta, al-Haqīqa,* 157.

[63] Abū Zayd, *al-Nass, al-Sulta, al-Haqīqa,* 158. Cf. F. Rosenthal's translation of *al-Muqaddima* in Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1958), 3:139 where, instead of *al-Nass,* the word *al-Fass* is written, which is translated as "Text." See also M. Quatremère's reprinted edition of *Muqaddimatu Ibn Khaldūn* (Beirut:

Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) summarized that "Text" (*Talākhīṣ Ibn Rushd li-al-Naṣṣ*).[64] The

attribution of *Naṣṣ* to a book on logic, speculates Abū Zayd, may have been due either

to its clarity in comparison with Aristotle's other books (which yielded different

interpretations) or to its concentration on the general principles (*qawānīn kulliyya*)

which regulate the process of reasoning and analogy.[65] With this observation, Abū Zayd

would like to argue that the meaning of *naṣṣ* then has developed from its classical

connotation to its modern sense of "the whole book."

The distinction between the modern sense and the classical one of the term *naṣṣ*

is very important for Abū Zayd, because it is essential to his argument against the

Islamists' understanding of the maxim *la ijtihāda fīmā fīhi naṣṣ* "there is no *ijtihād*

where there is a *naṣṣ*." In his *Ma'ālim fī al-Ṭarīq*, Sayyid Quṭb writes:[66] *fa-'in kāna*

*hunāka naṣṣ fa-al-naṣṣ huwa al-ḥakam wa lā ijtihād ma'a al-naṣṣ. Wa in lam yakun*

*hunāka naṣṣ fa-hunā yajī' dawr al-ijtihād* (If there is *naṣṣ*, the *naṣṣ* is the rule and there

is no interpretation with *naṣṣ*. If there is no *naṣṣ*, then comes the role of interpretation).

Quṭb and other Islamists after him understand the term *naṣṣ* here to imply the whole

text of the Qur'ān, which consequently allows them to reject any interpretation of

Scripture but a literal one. Abū Zayd, on the other hand, understands this term to refer

---

Maktabat Lubnān, 1970), 3:110. However, *Tārīkh al-'Allāma Ibn Khaldūn* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Madrasa wa Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1961), 1:910 writes *al-Naṣṣ*.
[64] Abū Zayd, *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa*, 158. Cf. Quatremère's edition and *Tārīkh* where they read respectively *al-Faṣṣ* and *al-Qaṣṣ*. See *Muqaddimatu Ibn Khaldūn*, 3:217 and *Tārīkh*, 1:999.
[65] Abū Zayd, *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa*, 158.
[66] Quṭb, *Ma'ālim fī al-Ṭarīq* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1988), 105.

only to the *muḥkamāt*; the other verses falling outside this category may still need interpretation.[67]

Many scholars, however, would raise an objection to Abū Zayd's identification of a text as the whole book (*kitāb kāmil*), because they would argue that even a one-line written statement, such as "There is no change," might be considered as a text. Paul Ricoeur simply defines a text as "any discourse fixed by writing."[68] In other words, it is the fixation of speech into writing that makes a text. Jorge J.E. Gracia in his *A Theory of Textuality: The Logic and Epistemology* has tried to provide a comprehensive definition of text. "A text is," according to Gracia, "a group of entities, used as signs, which are selected, arranged, and intended by an author in a certain context to convey some specific meaning to an audience."[69] These definitions indicate that the concept of text does not have to comprehend the complete book.

## 2. The Qur'ān as Text

Why is the Qur'ān called a text by Abū Zayd? Or to put it another way: What is the textuality of the Qur'ān in his opinion? While there are many names used to designate the Qur'ān, Abū Zayd asserts that the terms *waḥy* "revelation" and *risāla* "message" are its central designations, especially in his effort to define text. Acknowledging his debt to linguist Roman Jakobson's (1896-1982) analysis of literary

---

[67] Abū Zayd, "Divine Attributes in the Qur'an," 193. See also ʿĀdil Ḍāhir's discussion of this formula in his "al-Lā Maʿqūl fī al-Ḥarakāt al-Islāmiyya al-Muʿāṣira," *Mawāqif* 67 (1992): 40-101, especially 80ff.

[68] Ricoeur, "What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding," in idem, *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences,* ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 145.

[69] Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality,* 4.

text, Abū Zayd sees a text as a form of communication or revelation act.[70] In every

communication act, Jakobson writes:

> [t]he ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADDRESSEE. To be
> operative the message requires a CONTEXT referred to ("referent" in
> another, somewhat ambiguous, nomenclature), seizable by the addressee,
> and either verbal or capable of being verbalized; a CODE fully or at least
> partially, common to the addresser and addressee (or in other words, to
> the encoder and decoder of the message); and, finally, a CONTACT, a
> physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and
> the addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication.[71]

Following Jakobson, Abū Zayd sees the Qur'ān as a form or an act of

communication, *waḥy*, comprised of six factors: a message (*risāla*), an addresser

(*mukhāṭib/mursil*), an addressee (*mukhāṭab/mustaqbil*), a contact ('*alāqat ittiṣāl*), a code

(*shifra/niẓām lughawī*) and a context (*wāqi' wa thaqāfa*).[72] From these elements, we may

venture to describe his notion of text as "a message sent by an addresser to an addressee

in a certain context through a contact using a special code," although Abū Zayd does

not put it this way. And in the case of the Qur'ān, it is a message sent by God to His

messenger through revelation in a certain context using the Arabic language.[73]

It seems, however, that in his discussion of *waḥy*, Abū Zayd does not bother to

differentiate between literary communication and day-to-day communication,[74] despite

the fact that the implications of this difference are very important, especially in the

---

[70] Abū Zayd clearly follows Jakobson's analysis. See *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 25. Cf. Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," *Style in Language*, ed. T. Sebeok (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1960), 350-377.

[71] Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," 353.

[72] See especially, Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 24, 25.

[73] Abū Zayd does mention that the Qur'ān is *risāla tumaththil 'alāqat ittiṣāl bayna mursil wa mustaqbil min khilāl shifra aw niẓām lughawī*. See, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 24.

activity of interpretation. For one thing, in literary communication the addresser and the addressee are not co-present but belong to different periods of time.[75] Where there is no dialogue or conversation in the form of question and answer between the writer and the reader, there is only one-way communication. In the words of Ricoeur, in a literary text "[t]he reader is absent from the act of writing; the writer is absent from the act of reading. The text thus produces a double eclipse of the reader and the writer. It thereby replaces the relation of dialogue, which directly connects the voice of one to the hearing of the other."[76] In the face-to-face communication, on the other hand, there is a possibility of checking and correcting the understanding from both parties in an act of communication (speaker and audience/I and you) through dialogue. Barbara A. Holdrege considers the relation between speaker and audience to be a personal one, since it involves face-to-face contact, while the relationship between the author and the reader is impersonal, in that the former has been replaced by the text he/she wrote.[77] In other words, in literary communication, the relationship is between the reader and the impersonal text.

Another distinction present between these two kinds of communication is the fact that in a literary text the context or the referent to which the addresser refers may be unknown to the reader.[78] In dialogic communication, on the other hand, both parties "are present not only to one another, but also to the situation, the surroundings and the

---

[74] Ricoeur has discussed the transformation of Jakobson's six factors of oral communication to written text. See his *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Texas: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 26-37.

[75] Cesare Segre, *Introduction to the Analysis of the Literary Text,* translated by John Meddemmen (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 4.

[76] Ricoeur, "What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding," 146-147.

circumstantial milieu of discourse."[79] It is therefore important to find the reference and the context, which the author sometimes inserted in the text during the process of interpretation.

Before the Qur'ān was canonized, it was communicated orally. Western scholars have intensively studied its oral aspect. William A. Graham, for example, argues in his works for the importance of the spoken form of the Qur'ān over its written aspect.[80] Others, like Arthur Jeffery,[81] Richard Bell,[82] Tilman Nagel[83] and Gregor Schoeler,[84] have studied the transformation from the oral aspect of the Qur'ān to the written *kitāb*. Abū Zayd is aware of the oral aspect of the Qur'ān,[85] but since, I would argue, his concern is with the interpretation of the Qur'ān and the dialectical relation between text and

---

[77] Barbara A. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 418-419.

[78] Segre, *Introduction,* 4; Ricoeur, "What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding," 147-148.

[79] Ricoeur, "What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding," 148.

[80] Graham, "Qur'ān as Spoken Word: An Islamic Contribution to the Understanding of Scripture," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies,* ed. Richard C. Martin (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1985), 23-40; idem, "Scripture as Spoken Word," in *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective,* ed. Miriam Levering (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 129-169; and idem, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), especially part 3. See also Holdrege, *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture.* These scholars admit their debt to Wilfred Cantwell Smith's works on the Qur'ān and other Scriptures. See, for example, the latter's book *What is Scripture: A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

[81] Jeffery, *The Qur'ān as Scripture* (New York: Russell F. Moore Company, 1952).

[82] W. Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1977), 30ff.

[83] Nagel, "Vom 'Qur'an' zur 'Schrift'-Bells Hypothese aus religionsgeschichtlicher Sicht," *Der Islam* 60 (1983): 143-165.

[84] Schoeler, "Schreiben und Veröffentlichen. Zu Verwendung und Funktion der Schrift in den ersten islamischen Jahrhunderten," *Der Islam* 69, 1 (1992): 1-43. See also its abridged version in English, "Writing and Publishing. On the Use and Function of Writing in the First Centuries of Islam," *Arabica* 44, 3 (1997): 423-435.

[85] See Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 52-55; idem, "Divine Attributes," 190-191; and his review of Graham's *Beyond the Written Word* in *Die Welt des Islams* 35, 1 (1995): 150-152.

context, he focuses mainly on the written text and discusses *waḥy*, the oral communication, in an attempt to prove the textuality of the Qur'ān.

## *3. Elements of Text*

It should be pointed out that the communication process in the Qur'ān is very complex. Many Western scholars of the Qur'ān have expressed doubts on God being the speaker of the revelation, since it is not clearly indicated in the Qur'ān. Besides, God is referred to in the Qur'ān not only as "I" but also as "He" and "We."[86] Similarly, Muḥammad is sometimes addressed as "you" or "he/him." As a believing Muslim, however, Abū Zayd holds an orthodox view on this issue as it will be shown in the discussion below.

### a. The Addresser

The sender of the message or its addresser is usually called the author. In the case of the Qur'ān, the author of its message is believed to be God. But in the process of *waḥy*, God did not send His message directly to the addressee (*mukhāṭab/mustaqbil*), Muḥammad, but used an intermediary, an angel. This understanding is based on the verse of the Qur'ān (Q. 42:51) *wa mā kāna li-basharin ay yukallimahu 'llāhu illā waḥyan aw mi 'w- warā'i ḥijābin aw yursila rasūlan fa-yūḥiya bi-idhnihī mā yashā'* "And it is not given to any man that God speaks to him, unless by revelation, or from behind a veil, or that He sends a messenger so that he reveals whatever He will by His leave."

---

[86] See the discussion on this in Welch, "al-Ḳur'ān," 402ff.; Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1996), 224ff. Cf. Rippin, "Muḥammad in the Qur'ān."

The communication between God and Muḥammad, according to Abū Zayd, is of the third type in this list, i.e., through an angel/messenger who is later identified as Gabriel.

Although the communication is achieved through a mediator, however, the Qur'ān expressly compels this mediator to reveal on the basis of God's permission *bi-'idhnihi mā yashā'*.[87] Furthermore, some scholars have argued on the basis of the *"qul-passages"* that the Qur'ān is the Word of God and Muḥammad acted only as the "mouthpiece."[88] Rein Fernhout in his *Canonical Texts* writes that "[t]he term 'say', used explicitly or implicitly converts the personal expression of Mohammed and the prayer of believers into the words of Allah himself."[89]

To illustrate the process of communication, Abū Zayd draws the following schema:[90]



---
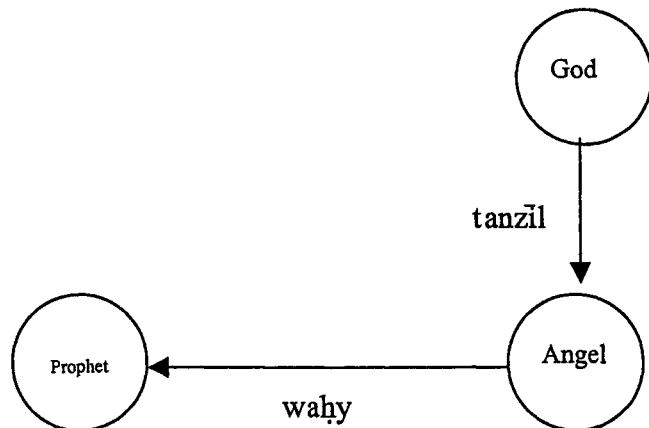
[87] See also Q. *2:97 nazzalahū 'alā qalbika bi-'idhni 'llāhi.* See Wild, "We Have Sent Down to Thee the Book," 146.

[88] See Welch, "al-Ḳur'ān," 422-423. Cf. Matthias Radscheit, "Word of God or Prophetic Speech? Reflections on the Quranic *Qul-*Statements," in *Encounters of Words and Texts. Intercultural Studies in Honor of Stefan Wild,* eds. Lutz Edzard and Christian Szyska (Hildsheim; Zurich; New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1997), 33-42.

[89] Fernhout, *Canonical Texts: Bearers of Absolute Authority. Bible, Koran, Veda, Tipiṭaka* (Amsterdam - Atlanta, GA: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1994), 23.

[90] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 41.

Kermani, however, redraws this to include a vertical line between God, angel and Prophet.[91]

God

tanzīl

Angel

waḥy

People        Prophet

i'lām/balāgh/indhār
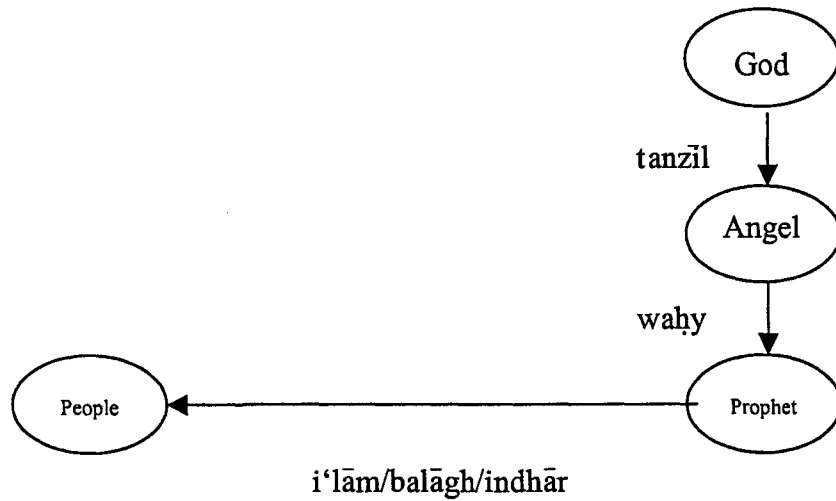
Following Kermani, I also would like to add that if we analyze carefully the terms used to indicate communication from God to angel and from angel to Muḥammad, the extension of the vertical line, between the angel and Muḥammad might be justified. Those terms are *tanzīl* and *waḥy*. Stefan Wild has discussed extensively the distinction between these two terms saying: "whereas *waḥy* may ocasionally also be used for interhuman communication, *tanzīl* and *'inzāl* are never used in this way but are reserved for divine communication with man."[92] Furthermore, Wild convincingly argues that *tanzīl* indicates the concept of sending from "above" to "below." That is why in Abū Zayd's original scheme we find a vertical line between God and angel indicating this process.

The relation between angel and human (Muḥammad), however, can also be drawn in vertical line. Besides the fact that they both are ontologically different beings

---

[91] Kermani, *Offenbarung als Kommunikation: Das Konzept* waḥy *in Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayds Mafhūm an-naṣṣ* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), 59, 80.

[92] Wild, "We Have Sent Down to Thee the Book," 138; Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran,* 153.

and communicate to each other through *waḥy*, which, according to Izutsu's analysis "occurs in an extraordinary situation, and ... is always accompanied by a sense of secrecy and mysteriousness,"[93] the Qur'ān also employs the term *tanzīl* or other forms of this word to indicate their communication. Q. 26:192-194, for example, has *wa innahū la-tanzīlu rabbi 'l-ʿālamīna nazala bihi 'r-ruḥu 'l-amīnu ʿalā qalbika* "And verily this is a revelation (*tanzīl*) of the Lord of the Universe, which the Faithful Spirit has brought down (*nazala bi*) upon your heart." Similarly Q. 16:102 states *qul nazzalahū rūḥu 'l-qudusi mi 'r-rabbika bi-'l-ḥaqqi li-yuthabbita 'lladhīna āmanū wa huda 'w-wa bushrā li-'l-muslimīna* "Say, the Holy Spirit has brought it down (*nazzala*) with truth from your Lord, to confirm those who believe and to be guidance and good tidings to those who have surrendered." To these verses indicating the *tanzīl* process from the angel to Muḥammad, we may add Izutsu's observation that the inspiration received by the poet was felt to be something "coming down" (*nuzūl*) from above.[94]

Concerning the belief in the pre-existence of the Qur'ān, which is based on the assumption that before the Qur'ān was sent down to Muḥammad, it was kept in "a preserved Tablet" *fī lawḥin maḥfūẓ* (Q. 85:22) and also on the tradition which narrates that the Qur'ān was written on the Tablet in Arabic script such that the size of each letter was as big as mountain Qāf,[95] is rejected by Abū Zayd. Taking the position that

---

[93] Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, 153, 158ff. See also Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 31, 32, 38, 40 etc. On p. 38, Abū Zayd writes that the communication between human and *jinn* or angel is surrounded by secrecy and obscurity; communication which cannot be understood by the third party *ittiṣāl maḥut bi al-sirriyya wa al-ghumūḍ, ittiṣāl lā yutāḥ li-ṭaraf thālith an yudrikahu.* The extraordinariness of the communication between angel and human lies firstly, in their ontological difference; and secondly in the special code-system between the two which is known only to both but not to the third party. Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 38. See also Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, 156.

[94] Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, 170-171.

[95] See, for example, al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:126.

the Qur'ān is a cultural product, Abū Zayd argues that the conception of its eternal pre-existence invalidates the dialectical relation (*ihdār li-jadaliyyat al-'alāqa*) between text and context.[96] Here, Abū Zayd seems to voice in a new way the idea of the Mu'tazilites concerning the Qur'ān.[97]

The Mu'tazilites, as is known, have argued against the Ash'arites over the nature of the Qur'ān.[98] The latter believed that the Qur'ān, as the Speech of God, is eternal (*qadīm*), since it belongs to the essential attributes (*ṣifāt dhātiyya*) of God, like His Knowledge, His Ability and His Will. They differentiated between God's inner speech (*kalām nafsī*) in heaven, which is eternal, and the revealed Qur'ān on earth (*kalām lafẓī*)

---

[96] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 42.

[97] Some scholars, like Jābir 'Aṣfūr, consider him to be Neo-Mu'tazilite. See 'Aṣfūr, "*Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* wa al-I'tizāl al-Mu'āṣir," in *Hawāmish 'alā Daftar al-Tanwīr* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1994), 35-60. See also Shukrī Muḥammad 'Ayyād, "Fahm al-Qur'ān," in idem, *al-Qafz 'alā al-Ashwāk: Taṭbīq al-Sharī'a wa Ṣiyāghat al-Ḥāḍir* (Cairo: Aṣdiqā' al-Kitāb, 1991), 37. In an interview conducted by Moch. Nur Ichwan, Abū Zayd admits the influence of the Mu'tazilites on his thinking. See Ichwan, "A New Horizon in Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's Contribution to Critical Qur'anic Scholarship," (M.A. thesis, Leiden University, 1999), 128-129.

[98] I will discuss the debate here in general, since even within one school there is a variety of opinions. What is important here is just to indicate the distinction between the two schools and how they relate to the thesis of Abū Zayd. For a more detailed discussion, see J.R.T.M. Peters, *God's Created Speech: A Study in the Speculative Theology of the Mu'tazilī Qādī l-Qudāt Abū l-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Jabbār bn Aḥmad al-Hamadānī* (Leiden: Brill, 1976); Josef van Ess, "Verbal Inspiration? Language and Revelation in Classical Islamic Theology," in *The Qur'an as Text*, ed. Stefan Wild (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 177-194; idem, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, 4:612ff. It is worth mentioning that Mohammed Arkoun was surprised and disturbed by van Ess's comment in his article "Verbal Inspiration" concerning his preference to discuss the "orthodox" view instead of the Mu'tazilites' ideas. The disturbing comment of van Ess is: "I do not want to put the Islamic view of history upside down. This would be something for the Muslims themselves to do," van Ess, "Verbal Inspiration?" 181. This argument, according to Arkoun is scientifically unacceptable, since "la vérité historique concerne les droits de l'esprit humain à pousser toujours plus loin les limites de la connaissance; la pensée islamique, comme toutes les autres traditions de pensée, ne peut que bénéficier d'une telle posture épistémologique." See Arkoun's review of *The Qur'an as Text* in *Arabica* 45, 3 (1998): 275; idem, *al-Fikr al-Uṣūlī wa Istiḥālat al-Ta'ṣīl Naḥwa Tārīkh Ākhar li-al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, trans. Hāshim Ṣāliḥ (London: Dār al-Sāqī, 1999), 33-35; and idem and Udo Steinbach, "Foreword," in *The Islamic World and the West: An Introduction to Political Cultures and International Relations*, ed. Kai Hafez, translated from the German by Mary Ann Kenny (Leiden: Brill, 2000), xi-xii.

which is an expression (*'ibāra)* of it. The Mu'tazilites, on the other hand, argued that

God's Speech belongs to God's factual attributes (*ṣifāt af'āl)*, and that any action

produced by these qualities is created.[99] Furthermore, they argued that the Qur'ān,

though it be the original speech of God, could not be eternal, since it differs in quality

from the essential attribute of God; the essential attribute is eternal while the Qur'ān,

produced by the factual attribute, is created.

The implication of the createdness of the Qur'ān for Abū Zayd is that it does not

belong to the metaphysical world and can thus be studied. The perception (*taṣawwur)* of

the pre-existence of the Qur'ān, on the other hand, carries with it two important

implications. First, it insists on the sacrality of the text and thus transforms it from a

linguistic text, which is subject to human understanding, to an imaginary text (*naṣṣ

taṣwīrī)*. Second, since the real Qur'ān is the one in the mind of God, any effort to

understand the text is rendered very difficult for it has to conform to the meaning which

is in the mind of God. [100]

## b. The Addressee/s

God sent the message via Gabriel to Muḥammad as the addressee (*al-mustaqbil,

al-mukhāṭab, al-mutalaqqī)*. But the communication in the Qur'ān does not stop with

Muḥammad. The latter was then required to convey the message to others through

*tablīgh* "transmission," as is implied in the verse *yā ayyuhā 'r-rasūlu balligh mā unzila

ilayka mi 'r-rabbika wa i 'l-lam taf'al famā ballaghta risālatahu,* "O messenger, convey

that which has been sent down to you, for if you don't you have not transmitted His

---

[99] Abū Zayd, *al-Ittijāh al-'Aqlī fī al-Tafsīr,* 4th edition (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1998), 181.

message" (Q. 5:67). That is the reason why revelation in Islam, according to Izutsu, is a four-person-relation concept (God→Gabriel→Muḥammad→Other People).[101] Abū Zayd asserts that Muḥammad, as the first addressee (*al-mutalaqqī al-awwal*), has to transmit the message to others. Only by virtue of transmitting the revelation is Muḥammad called *rasūl*, apostle; he remains nothing but a *nabī* as long as he does not execute it.[102] This distinction, however, does not seem to support his other distinction of the revelation of the Qur'ān between the "earlier" and the "later" verses. The Meccan verses, according to Abū Zayd, are those that were revealed during his prophecy, the Medinan during his apostleship.[103] The requirement to transmit the message, however, was in effect not only in the later phase, but during the Meccan period too.[104]

Muḥammad's role as a receiver and transmitter parallels that of Gabriel who was a receiver and transmitter of the message from God. The final end or goal of communication however is people. And since the final addressee is people, it follows that the code-system used to communicate this message should employ the code-system understood by these addressees. The variety of addressees in the communication is recorded in the Qur'ān; they are described as *yā ayyuhā 'n-nāsu, yā ayyuhā 'lladhīna āmanū* etc. An understanding of the variety of the addressees is useful during the process of interpretation.

---

[100] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 43.

[101] Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, 179.

[102] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 56. See also Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, 179.

[103] See discussion *infra*.

[104] For more discussion on the distinction between *nabī* and *rasūl*, see Willem A. Bijlefeld, "A Prophet and More Than a Prophet? Some Observations on the Qor'anic Use of the Term 'Prophet' and 'Apostle,'" *Muslim World* 59 (1969): 1-28; Welch, "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself," 42-45; W.M. Watt, *Muḥammad's Mecca: History in the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 75-80.

c and d. The Contact and the Code

According to the Qur'ān, there are only three types of verbal communication between God and human beings. These three types are clearly stated in Q. 42:51, where it says *wa mā kāna li-basharin ay yukallimahu 'llāhu illā waḥyan aw mi 'w warā'i ḥijābin aw yursila rasūlan fa-yūḥiya bi-idhnihī mā yashā'* "And it is not given to any man that God speaks to him, unless by revelation or from behind the veil or that He sends a messenger so that he reveals whatever He will by His leave." So the various manners of communication are numerous, and include *waḥy,* from behind the veil, and through a messenger. The first type is that of God's inspiration to Moses' mother in Q. 28:7 *wa awḥaynā ilā ummi Mūsā an arḍi'īhi* "We inspired the mother of Moses: "Suckle him (Moses);" or to the bee (*naḥl*) *wa awḥā rabbuka ilā 'n-naḥli ani 'ttakhidhī mina 'l-jibāli buyūtan* "And the Lord inspired the bee: "Take the mountains as shelter" (Q. 16:68), while the second type of communication is represented in God's dialogue with Moses. According to the Qur'ān, Moses is the only man to whom God speaks directly: *wa kallama 'llāhu Mūsā taklīman* (Q. 4:164).

Abū Zayd further notes some particular differences in both forms of communication. While the first uses a special code -- speech without sound or unnatural language (*bi-shifra ghayr ṣawtiyya, bi-lugha ghayr al-lugha al-ṭabī'iyya)* -- the second uses natural speech easily understood by Moses. In addition, the first kind of communication orders the addressee to act accordingly (imperative form), while the second comes in the form of dialogue, and is not so abrupt.[105]

---

[105] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 40-41.

As for the third kind of God's communication with humans, this consists in revelation through a mediating angel. The question is how communication occurs between these two ontologically different beings. To answer this, we might accept the conditions perceived by Jakobson, i.e., that in order for the addresser and addressee to be able to communicate, they first have to use a code understandable to both parties, and second, there must be a physical or psychological connection between the two. Early Muslim scholars have discussed this issue, especially in the context of the Qur'ānic sciences, under the heading *fī kayfiyyat inzālih* "On the manner of sending it down."[106] Commenting on the disagreement of Muslim scholars over the "why" and "how" lying behind its transmission, Wild notes: "This is, of course, what theology was often about: disagreeing on perfectly straightforward things, i.e., things which did not pose a problem to the primary audience of the Qur'ānic message."[107] But, that is exactly where the issue of interpretation comes in. The primary addressee/s did not have a problem since they understood the context and knew the referent, or if they did not understand they could go directly to Muḥammad for an answer. When the Qur'ān was fixed in writing and read by later readers, they had to search for this context in order to understand the text better.

Concerning the code-system used for communication, whether between God and angel or between angel and Muḥammad, there are at least two opinions in the Qur'ānic sciences.[108] The first is that Gabriel came down to Muḥammad with ideas (*ma'ānī*) and then Muḥammad expressed them in the Arabic language. The second opinion is that the

---

[106] See, for example, al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān,* 1:116ff.

[107] Wild, "We Have Sent Down To Thee The Book," 151.

[108] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān,* 1:126. See also Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 42-45.

angel brought the ideas and expressed them in Arabic. It further says that the "inhabitants in the sky" (*ahl al-samā'*) read it (the Qur'ān) in Arabic. As for the contact between angel and Muḥammad, early Muslim scholars opined that the communication came through transformation (*taḥawwul*) on both sides: either that Muḥammad was transformed from his human shape (*inkhala'a min al-ṣūra al-bashariyya*) to an angelic one (*malakiyya*), or that the angel took on a human form.[109] This is actually based on the Prophetic tradition where the Prophet responds to the question of al-Ḥārith b. Hishām concerning the manner of revelation: "Sometimes, it comes to me like the ringing of a bell. This is the most painful. When it leaves me I understood what he said (*wa 'aytu mā qāla*). At other times, the angel appears to me in the form of a man. He talks to me and I understand what he says (*fa-yukallimunī wa a'ī mā yaqūl*)."[110]

To explain this phenomenon, Abū Zayd refers extensively to Ibn Khaldūn who has discussed it in his *al-Muqaddima*. Ibn Khaldūn notes the stylistic distinction between the two transformations. The first case uses the perfect tense *wa qad wa'aytu mā qāla*, while the present tense *a'ī mā yaqūlu* appears in the second. This stylistic distinction, according to Ibn Khaldūn, discloses the manner of receiving a revelation. When Muḥammad received the revelation in the first manner, it seems that he lost consciousness. But as soon as that state was over, i.e., when he returned to his humanity, he realized (*wa'ā*) that the revelation had just come to him. On the other hand, the present tense is used in the second type of revelation, where the angel came to

---

[109] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:125. See also Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 46.

[110] *Aḥyānan ya'tīnī mithla ṣalṣalati 'l-jarasi wa huwa ashadduhu 'alayya fa-yufṣamu 'annī wa qad wa'aytu 'anhu mā qāla wa aḥyānan yatamaththalu liya 'l-malaku rajulan fa-yukallimunī fa-'a'ī mā yaqūlu.* See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 1:2. Other references, see *Concordance et indices de la*

him in the form of a human, to indicate that the angel spoke directly to Muḥammad and the latter understood what the former said.[111]

Another conclusion that might be drawn from this tradition is that the speech that was imparted to Muḥammad during his transformation into angelic form was a sign of speech *(ramz min al-kalām)* or a mysterious noise *(dawī)*, meaning that the communication was not linguistic communication *(ittiṣāl ghayr lughawī)*. During the transformation of the angel into human form, on the other hand, the communication used the linguistic system of the addressee.[112] This tradition finally suggests that not only did the communication between the angel and Muḥammad take on an auditory form *(sam ')*, but also a visual one *(ru'ya)*.

The transformation of Muḥammad to the level of angel, according to Abū Zayd, however, was not a literal physical transformation *(taḥawwul fīzīqī)*, but rather occurred through imagination *(khayāl)*. This is where Abū Zayd introduces the philosophers' and ṣūfīs' discussion of prophecy.[113] According to them, a prophet can grasp the revelation through his imaginative faculty *(fā'iliyyat al-khayāl)*. This faculty is greater in the prophet than in philosophers, mystics or ordinary people. Compared to philosophers and mystics, the prophet does not need training to increase the power of his imaginative faculty but has this granted to him by God. In ordinary people, by contrast, this faculty can only be performed in a limited time, especially during sleep.

---

*tradition musulmane,* eds. A.J. Wensinck, J.P. Mensing, J. Brugman (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), 7:261.

[111] See Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 48. See also Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran,* 176-177; Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah,* 1:200-201.

[112] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 47. See also, Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran,* 177.

[113] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 49. On prophecy, see for example, Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958), 30ff.

### e. The Message

The fifth factor in communication is the message, by which is meant utterance, *énoncé*. Early Muslim scholars have discussed "what it is that was sent down," whether the utterance was in letter and spirit (*lafẓ wa ma'nā*) or just the spirit which was then put into words by Muḥammad in Arabic. The Prophetic tradition discussed above at least suggests that Muḥammad received both of them. He received the spirit during his transformation into an angelic state, and both *lafẓ* and *ma'nā* during his encounter with the angel who transformed himself into a human being. In agreement with Ibn Khaldūn, Abū Zayd also concludes from the tradition that the message received by Muḥammad may be seen in fact as twofold: the message he received when he was a prophet (*nabī*) and the other during his role as messenger (*rasūl*).[114] This distinction, according to Abū Zayd, is supported by the opinions of Muslim Qur'ān scholars and also through the analysis of the historical background against which Muḥammad received the message. Al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) in his *Itqān* relates an opinion regarding the beginning of Muḥammad's mission, that the first Qur'ānic verse revealed in the phase of prophecy was *iqra' bi 'smi rabbika* (Q. 96), and the first verse of his apostleship *yā ayyuhā 'l-muddaththir* (Q. 74).[115] The difference between the two, continues Abū Zayd, results from the fact that during the first phase, Muḥammad's role was to warn people (*indhār*), to fight against the past traditions and to draw attention to the new belief, while in the second phase his mission was to build a new society.[116]

---

[114] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 46, 47. See also Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, 1:200.

[115] *Awwalu mā nazala li-al-nubuwwa: iqra' bi 'smi rabbika, wa awwalu mā nazala li- al-risāla: yā ayyuhā 'l-muddaththir.* See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:70. See also Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 48.

[116] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 77.

This division came later to be known as that between *Makkī* and *Madanī* verses. Abū Zayd, however, does not agree with earlier Qur'ānic scholars who simply saw a place (*makān*) as the criterion for distinguishing between the early and later verses, i.e., that *Makkī* verses were revealed in Mecca and *Madanī* ones in Medina. Instead he proposes a distinction based on the context and features of the text itself, i.e., its contents and structure. The context here means the two historical periods which are divided by Muḥammad's *hijra* (migration) to Medina. Therefore, Meccan verses are those revealed before his *hijra* and the Medinan those revealed after it, even if these verses were revealed in Mecca or Medina.[117] But, as Abū Zayd admits, since the historical evidence from the opinions of Companions and Followers is not sufficient to help us in distinguishing these of verses, this criterion has to be supported by other means, such as from the text itself.

The content and the structure of the text, according to Abū Zayd, might be useful as criteria in distinguishing between the Meccan and Medinan verses. Ibn Khaldūn, for example, notes the variations in the length of verses, and asserts that Medinan verses are longer than Meccan ones. According to Abū Zayd, this is due to the fact that during the period of prophecy the important thing was to warn and influence people. This could be achieved by using a condensed and rhythmic language (*murakkaz wa muwaqqaʻ*),[118] and did not need long verses. During the period of apostleship, on the other hand, the purpose was not only to influence but also to create and educate the new society. The readiness of the addressee to receive revelation was also a criterion for the relative length of the verses. Ibn Khaldūn asserts that in the earliest period Muḥammad

---

[117] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 77.

found it difficult to receive revelation, but when he had grown accustomed to this kind of experience -- first through repetition and finally through visions -- he was able to receive longer verses than the earlier ones.

Besides the length of the verses, Western scholars have discussed other criteria to distinguish the *Makkī* and *Madanī* verses and to determine the chronological order of the Qur'ān.[119] Theodor Nöldeke's distinction is the most widely known and is the one adopted by most non-Muslim scholars. Nöldeke, who follows Gustave Weil, does not think that the migration to Medina represents the dividing point where the style of the Qur'ān changes. He reasons that the change of style from the Meccan to the Medinan period developed gradually. Therefore, he divides the Meccan verses into three groups: the First, the Second and the Third Meccan verses, based on their internal style. There are nevertheless many scholars who still follow the traditional division between Meccan and Medinan verses.[120]

## f. The Context

The context is, according to Abū Zayd, the most important element of the text. Not only does this factor provide a window into the dialectical relationship between a text and the circumstances that gave rise to it, but it also serves as a referent for later readers during their interpretation of the text. Gracia has pointed out that the term "context" is composed of 'text' and the prefix 'con,' which literally means "with (the)

---

[118] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 80.

[119] See the review in Welch, "al-Kur'ān," 416ff.; Neuwirth, "Koran," 100; Helmut Gätje, *The Qur'ān and Its Exegesis*, Trans. A.T. Welch (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 28ff.; Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, 76ff.

[120] Wild, for example, thinks that Nöldeke's division is arbitrary and demonstrates trinitarian view of history. Wild, "We Have Sent Down to Thee the Book," 149.

text," indicating that which comes with and accompanies a text.[121] In the case of the

Qur'ān, this includes God, Gabriel, Muḥammad, the Arabs, and the spatial and historical

circumstances of the time.

As we saw in the case of the distinction between Meccan and Medinan verses,

the historical phases experienced by Muḥammad shaped the structure and even the

content of the Qur'ān. Much of this is revealed in the *asbāb al-nuzūl* literature,

considered by Abū Zayd as the most important source for uncovering the relation

between text and context.[122] This relation is of course made more complicated by the

fact that the Qur'ān was revealed not all at once but piecemeal (*munajjam*).

When discussing the *tanjīm* of the Qur'ān, previous scholars usually ascribed the

reasons for it to the personality of Muḥammad particularly his illiteracy (*ummī*), and

that the fact that sending down the Qur'ān piecemeal would strengthen Muḥammad's

heart *li-nuthabbita bihī fu'ādaka* (Q. 25:32). For Abū Zayd, the reason applies too to the

others to whom this scripture was addressed, even more perhaps than to Muḥammad,

since the latter was merely a transmitter whereas the final goal of communication was

the Arabic-speaking community of Hijaz.[123] In other words, the spreading of the

revelation over twenty years has to be seen in the context of the Arabs too who, like

Muḥammad, were still dependent on oral tradition and memorization.

Scholars of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān* usually, basing themselves on the Qur'ānic verses

"Verily, We sent it down on the Night of Power" (Q. 97:1) and "The month of

---

[121] Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, 27.

[122] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 97. On *asbāb al-nuzūl*, see Rippin, "The Exegetical Genre *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*: a Bibliographical and Terminological Survey," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48, 1 (1985): 1-15; and idem, "The Function of *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* in Qur'ānic Exegesis," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51 (1988): 1-20.

Ramaḍān wherein the Qur'ān was sent down to be guidance to the people" (Q. 2:185),

distinguish two processes in *tanzīl:* the first was the sending down of the whole text on

the Night of Power from the *Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ* to the lowest heaven (*al-samā' al-dunyā*),

while the second involved Gabriel's delivering it piece by piece to Muḥammad over a

period of more than twenty years.[124] This interpretation is rejected by Abū Zayd on the

grounds that the structure of the verse *anzalnāhu* "We sent it down," which takes the

past form, would contradict the claim of the pre-existence of the text in the Preserved

Tablet.[125] How could the Qur'ān, Abū Zayd asks, which is eternally recorded on the

Preserved Tablet use the past tense in declaring that it was sent down before its

existence on the *Lawḥ Maḥfūẓ?*[126]

The pre-existence of the Qur'ān, continues Abū Zayd, also contradicts the

doctrine of *naskh*.[127] The latter implies that "some verses were replaced by others," and

thus challenges the eternity and unchanging nature of the Qur'ān. However, unlike some

Muslim scholars who believe that *naskh* is applied to three categories: *naskh al-tilāwa*

---

[123] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 98-99.

[124] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 100-101.

[125] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 101-102. It should be noted that for Abū Zayd, *Lawḥ Maḥfūẓ*, as is the case with the words *kursī* and *'arsh* in the Qur'ān, has to be interpreted metaphorically. See *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa*, 69.

[126] The Ash'arites would interpret the verb *anzalnā* to indicate a future (*istiqbāl),* while the Mu'tazilites would interpret it as the starting of revelation (*ibtidā').* See also al-Jubbā'ī's interpretation of this verse in Daniel Gimaret, *Une lecture mu'tazilite du coran: Le Tafsīr d'Abū 'Alī al-Djubbā'ī (m. 303/915) partiellement reconstitué à partir de ses citateurs* (Louvain-Paris: Peeters, 1994), 97. "Cela veut dire que *chaque année,* lors de la nuit de la Détermination, Dieu a fait descendre jusqu'au ciel inférieur la partie du Coran qu'Il voulait, cette année-là, révéler au Prophète."

[127] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 102, 117ff. For the discussion of *naskh*, see David E. Powers, "The Exegetical Genre *nāsikh al-Qur'ān wa mansūkhuhu*," in Rippin, *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, 117-138. See also the discussion on the contradiction between *naskh* and the eternity of the Qur'ān in Daniel Brown, "The Triumph of Scripturalism: The Doctrine of Naskh and Its Modern Critics," in *The Shaping of an American Islamic*

*dūna al-ḥukm; naskh al-ḥukm dūna al-tilāwa;* and *naskh al-tilāwa wa al-ḥukm,* Abū

Zayd only considers the second type.[128] Abū Zayd sees the main goal of *naskh* as being

to introduce an element of contextuality into the law and therefore the reason why the

abrogated verses are still kept in the Qur'ān, he argues, is that its regulations can be

revived when the context commands it (*ḥukm al-mansūkh yumkin an yafriḍahu al-wāqiʿ*

*marratan ukhrā).*[129]

For Abū Zayd, the concepts of the occasions of revelation and of abrogation are

proof of the relation of the Qur'ān to its context. It does not mean, however, that the

meaning of the Qur'ān has to conform to that context, because, as we will see below,

Abū Zayd differentiates between the historical meaning of the Qur'ān and its

significance. The historical meaning is that represented by the historical context, while

its significance lies in its meaning for the present.

### 4. Some Features of Qur'ānic Textuality

Besides defining *naṣṣ,* Abū Zayd indicates some other textual features of the

Qur'ān. He states "If the textuality of the Qur'ān is to be asserted, it should be asserted

by the Qur'ān itself, as any text explicitly or implicitly exposes its own nature."[130] It

must be stated again that Abū Zayd's effort in textualizing the Qur'ān by defining it as

a form of "communication act" and in demonstrating its textual features is to insist on

---

*Discourse: A Memorial to Fazlur Rahman,* eds. Earle H. Waugh and Frederick M. Denny (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 55ff.

[128] For one thing, Abū Zayd does not accept *ilghāʾ* (oblivion) and *izāla* (omission) as the meaning of *naskh.*

[129] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 120.

[130] Abū Zayd, "Divine Attributes," 195.

its being subject to interpretation. In his *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* he pronounces that interpretation is the other side of text (*al-ta'wīl huwa al-wajh al-ākhar li-al-naṣṣ*).[131]

Some of the features of the textuality of the Qur'ān may be seen from, firstly, the process of revelation. Revelation is an act of communicating a message; and the Qur'ān, which is essentially a message, is also a text needing to be interpreted. The structure of the Qur'ān is another feature of its textuality. Abū Zayd notes that the structure of the Qur'ān is not the same as its chronological order (*tartīb al-nuzūl*). The present order, which is called *tartīb al-tilāwa* (the order of recitation), according to Abū Zayd, has an impact in "partially demolishing the historical and occasional context of every portion of revelation."[132] Another feature of its textuality is the Qur'ānic declaration that it includes clear verses (*muḥkamāt*) and ambiguous verses (*mutashābihāt*).

From these features, it can be understood that the Qur'ān as a text can be interpreted in a variety of ways. In *tafsīr* literature, we find that some exegetes have invariably discovered a correlation (*munāsaba*) between verses and *sūras* in the structure of the Qur'ān. Similarly, they disagree in identifying which verses are to be considered *muḥkamāt* and which ones *mutashābihāt*. It is in such features that we find the most interactivity between interpreter and text. At the same time, however, none of these findings can be considered final or fixed. It is simply the case that understanding the text may vary from one reader to another, from one place to another, and from one period to another.

---

[131] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 9, 219. See Wild, "Die andere Seite des Textes: Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zaid und der Koran," *Die Welt des Islams* 33 (1993): 256-261.

*5. Historicity of the Text*

By stating that the Qur'ān is an act of communication, it (as Cesare Segre has pointed out in his *Introduction to the Analysis of the Literary Text* in the case of literary communication) "automatically brings to the fore its links with the culture, and the perspective thereby established is a historical one. The codes employed by the addresser, and his motivations as well, derive from the cultural context within which he is inserted, while the addressee will have recourse to the codes at his disposition in order to interpret the text."[133]

Similarly, Andreas Meier, who studies Abū Zayd's *Mafhūm al-Nass*, deduces five theses that result from considering a text to be a linguistic text. He writes:

1. Religiöse Texte sind *sprachliche* Texte. Sie sind nach den gleichen Structuren und Regeln aufgebaut wie jeder andere sprachliche Text.
2. Religiöse Texte sind, als sprachliche Texte, *menschliche* Texte. Sie sind an die allgemeinen Bedingungen menschlichen Denkens und menschlicher Sprache und Kommunikation gebunden.
3. Religiöse Texte sind, als menschliche Texte, *Produkte* menschlicher *Kultur.* Sie verdanken sich in ihrer Entstehung einem bestimmten kulturellen Kontext, durch dessen spezifische Merkmale sie inhaltlich und formal geprägt werden.
4. Religiöse Texte sind, als Produkte menschlicher Kultur, *historische* Texte. Sie sind wie jedes andere Erzeugnis menschlicher Kultur den Bedingungen von Zeit und Raum unterworfen.
5. Religiöse Texte sind, als historische Texte, Gegenstand der Erforschung durch *historisch-kritische Wissenschaften* anhand der üblichen Methoden, wie sie auf alle anderen historischen Texte auch angewandt werden.[134]

---

[132] Abū Zayd, "The Qur'an: God and Man in Communication," Inaugural speech during the presentation of Clevering Professor 2000-2001 in Leiden University.

[133] Segre, *Introduction to the Analysis of the Literary Text,* translated by John Meddemmen (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 116.

[134] Andreas Meier, "Gotteswort in Knechtsgestalt – ein islamischer Luther in Ägypten? N.H. Abu Zaids provokante Koranexegese als säkulare Reform des Islam," in *Begegnungen zwischen Christentum und Islam,* ed. Hans-Christoph Goßmann (Ammersbek bei Hamburg: Verl. An der Lottbek, 1994), 64.

(1. Religious texts are *linguistic* texts. They are constructed according to the structures and rules as every other linguistic text.

(2. Religious texts, as linguistic texts, are *human* texts. They are associated with the general condition of human thought and human speech and communication.

(3. Religious texts, as human texts, are *products* of human *culture*. They owe their genesis to a certain cultural context, through whose specific characteristics they are substantially and formally shaped.

(4. Religious texts, as products of human culture, are *historical* texts. They are, like every other product of human culture, subjected to the conditions of time and space.

(5. Religious texts, as historical texts, are the subject of research through the historico-critical sciences using the standard methods, as these are applied also to all other historical texts.)

Abū Zayd defines historicity as "the occurrence in time" (*al-ḥudūth fī al-zamān*).[135] Following the Muʻtazilites, Abū Zayd argues that the Qurʼān is the speech of God and as such may be considered as one of God's attributes of action (*ṣifāt al-afʻāl*). Everything produced by these attributes is *muḥdath* (created), meaning it is created in separate moments (*laḥaẓāt*) of history. Concerning the Preserved Tablet (*Lawḥ Maḥfūẓ*), which is believed to contain the Qurʼān before it was sent down, is also considered by Abū Zayd as created. If it is eternal, how could be there many eternal beings besides God? Abū Zayd asks hypothetically.[136] The extended time frame of the piecemeal revelation (*tanjīm*), the occasions of revelation, and the concept of *naskh* contain some further proofs of the historicity of the Qurʼān.[137]

The belief in the historicity of the Qurʼān, for Abū Zayd, leads to the fundamental consequence that, since the prescriptions of the Qurʼān are very much linked to seventh-century Arabia, some of these prescriptions can no longer be applied

---

[135] Abū Zayd, *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa*, 71.
[136] Abū Zayd, *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa*, 72.

in the present context. The changing of the context, therefore, invites new interpretation. This re-interpretation has to be performed not only with regard to the text of the Qur'ān, but also to other elements in the *turāth* of Islam, since these too are conditioned by the socio-historical context.

## C. Abū Zayd's Method of Interpretation

For Meier, the concept of the text as an historical artifact requires that a scholar use "the historical-critical sciences [which] are the usual method (*historisch-kritisch Wissenschaften* anhand der üblichen Methoden)" in studying it.[138] This of course is valid on the whole but it must be qualified, since this method has been criticized by many scholars in recent years. Often applied in Qur'ānic studies as well as in Biblical interpretation, it is an approach that -- to use the criteria outlined by John Barton[139] -- examines the genesis, original meaning and historical reconstruction of the text, all of which questions are now considered *passé,* having been surpassed by the "new paradigm."[140] Robert Morgan, the author of *Biblical Interpretation,* for example, has criticized the historical-critical method on the grounds that "historical reconstruction of biblical persons, events, and traditions is an entirely legitimate activity, but possibly

---

[137] Wild, through his discussion of the terms *tanzīl, inzāl* and *nuzūl,* has demonstrated the temporality and historicality of the revelation. See Wild, "We Have Sent Down To Thee The Book," especially 146ff.

[138] Meier, "Gotteswort in Knechtsgestalt," 64.

[139] John Barton, "Historical-Critical Approach," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation,* ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9ff.

[140] Barton, "Historical-Critical Approach," 12. Barton and Robert Morgan even call this "new paradigm" a "breakthrough" in Biblical interpretation that is "characterized as a shift in the focus of interest from past persons, events, traditions, literary forms, and conventions, to the now available texts and their impact upon present-day readers and hearers." See Morgan and Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 221.

less fruitful for theology than the newly emerging literary approaches."[141] Wild also

observes "a definite and irrevocable shift of attention" in Qur'ānic studies.[142] What all

these scholars mean is that there has been a paradigm-shift in Biblical interpretation as

well as in Qur'ānic studies from a *diachronic* approach which examines the world *behind*

the text to a *synchronic* one which takes a text as it is now available in its final form and

evaluates its impact upon readers. In other words, the latter approach focuses on the

world both *within* and *in front of* the text, not the one that lies *behind* it.

Nevertheless, as has been quite convincingly argued by Barton, the historical-

critical approach focuses on more than just the diachronic aspect of the text – it also

takes in its synchronic side. Historical approaches, continues Barton, "are predominantly

*literary* in their interests ... to untangle the complex interrelationships within and

between complex texts."[143] To see how the text had influenced the early scholars as well

as how they received and interpreted the text is a historical study which produces a

history of interpretation. Finally, he proposes that the defining characteristic of Biblical

interpretation is its "critical" tendency to ask questions unrestrictedly about the

meaning of the text without fear of authority.[144]

Abū Zayd's approach might best be described as a critical study too. Not only is

he critical of the Islamic *turāth*, but also of other authorities – whether that of the

official discourse of Islam (*al-khiṭāb al-dīnī*) or that of the modernists. As he states:

---

[141] Morgan and Barton, *Biblical Interpretation*, 203.

[142] Wild, "Preface," of *The Qur'an as Text*, viii. See also Issa J. Boullata, "Introduction," in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, ed. Issa J. Boullata (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), x.

[143] Barton, "Historical-Critical Approach," 14.

[144] Barton, "Historical-Critical Approach," 18-19.

It is time now for a re-examination and transition to the period of liberation, not only from the authority of the texts, but also from every authority which hinders human journey in our world. We must undertake this (liberation) now and immediately before the flood sweeps us away.

(Ana awān al-murāja'a wa al-intiqāl ilā marḥalat al-taḥarrur, lā min sulṭat al-nuṣūṣ waḥdahā, bal min kull sulṭa ta'ūq masīrat al-insān fī 'ālaminā. 'Alaynā an naqūm bi-hādhā al-ān wa fawran qabla an yajrufanā al-ṭūfān)[145]

And this critical attitude is equipped by a variety of methods ranging from historical and textual interpretations to literary theory, such as hermeneutics, discourse analysis and semiotics.

## 1. The Meaning of the Text

There are at least three factors which are seen as determining the meaning of the text: the author, the text and the reader.[146] The author-centered interpretation (Romantic criticism) seeks to uncover the authorial intention, while the text-centered interpretation (New Criticism; Structuralism) asserts that the meaning can be found from the structure of the text. Finally, the reader-centered interpretation, usually known as reader-response theory, argues that it is the reader who creates and gives meaning to the text.[147]

In his discussion of the author of the Qur'ān, Abū Zayd has argued that God as well as the divine pre-existence of the Qur'ān are questions that lie beyond human

---

[145] See Abū Zayd, al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī wa Ta'sīs al-Īdiyūlūjiyya al-Wasaṭiyya (Cairo: Sīnā li-al-Nashr, 1992), 110.

[146] See Walter Vogels, Interpreting Scripture in the Third Millennium: Author-Reader-Text (Ottawa: Novalis, 1993), 10ff. For a discussion in literary criticism, see M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 3-29.

[147] For a general survey of reader-centered interpretation, see S.R. Suleiman, "Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism," in The Reader in the Text: Esseys on Audience and Interpretation, eds. S.R. Suleiman and I. Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981),

reason. It is therefore impossible, argues Abū Zayd, to search for the meaning of the text in the authorial intention. He does not go so far as to say that the author is dead; he merely argues that reason cannot conceive of the metaphysics of God. And yet Abū Zayd may not be aware of the consequences of this judgment for the interpretation of other historical texts, especially in view of his opinion that the Qur'ān is a text like any other text. On the surface he seems to echo the argument of Ricoeur concerning authorial intention. With his theory of text Ricoeur asserts that when speech is fixed in writing, the text becomes *autonomous* from its author and the latter's intention.[148] This is because, by contrast with oral communication where the interlocutor can query the speaker directly, in the case of a text, we -- as the reader -- cannot speak directly to the writer to ask his intention. Even if we happen to meet the author, Ricoeur argues "we experience a profound disruption of the peculiar relation that we have with the author in and through his work."[149] That is why Ricoeur used to consider the author as already dead, and instead that we read only his posthumous works, regardless of whether he is still alive or not.

Having stated that the meaning of the text cannot signify the authorial intention, Abū Zayd similarly argues that neither can it be left to the text to speak of its meaning. In his many writings he often quotes the statement of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661) *al-Qur'ān khaṭṭun masṭūrun bayna daffatayn lā yanṭuqu innamā yatakallamu bihi 'r-rijālu* "The Qur'ān is a script written between two covers; it does not speak, but people speak

---

3-45; and the many different approaches of this theory represented by the articles in that volume.

[148] Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," in idem, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 32.

through it."[150] In Biblical interpretation, Morgan equates texts with the dead men and

women who "have no rights, no aims, no interests. They can be used in whatever way

readers or interpreters choose. If interpreters choose to respect an author's intentions,

that is because it is in their interest to do so."[151] In other words, it is the reader who

gives meaning to the text.

Abū Zayd, however, does not agree with the view that the meaning of the text is

constructed by the reader alone. He says that in the process of interpretation, the text is

not a silent object that can be carried in any direction by any active reader. The relation

between the reader and the text is not the relation of *ikhḍā'* (forcing the text to submit

to the reader) on the part of the reader and *khuḍū'* (submission) on the part of the text.

Rather, the relation between the two is dialectical (*jadaliyya*).[152]

This dialectical relation between reader and text reminds us of the method

proposed by recent scholars of literary theory and philosophical hermeneutics.[153]

Wolfgang Iser, for example, in his *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in*

*Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, argues that the meaning of the text "is not given

by the text itself; [but] it arises from the meeting between the written text and the

---

[149] Ricoeur, "What is a Text?" 147.

[150] Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī*, 56, 74, 87; *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa*, 113. See also an interview with Muḥammad Ḥusayn in "D. Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd Yataḥaddath: Fahm al-Naṣṣ bi-al-Ḥayāh Lā Fahm al-Ḥayāh bi-al-Naṣṣ,"*Adab wa Naqd* 10 (May 1993): 71. Abū Zayd refers to *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī: Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, ed.Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1979), 5:66 "*wa hādhā 'l-qur'ānu innamā huwa khaṭṭun mastūrun bayna daffatayni, lā yanṭuqu, innamā yatakallamu bihi 'r-rijālu*". See also G.R. Hawting's translation in *The History of al-Ṭabarī. The First Civil War* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 17:103.

[151] Morgan and Barton, *Biblical Interpretation*, 7.

[152] Abū Zayd, *Falsafat al-Ta'wīl: Dirāsa fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān 'inda Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī*, 3rd edition (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1996) , 6.

individual mind of the reader with its own particular history of experience, its own consciousness, and its own outlook."[154] Ricoeur also speaks of the dialectic between the world of the text and the world of the reader.[155] The world of the text is the text's claims, the horizon which it opens to the reader and the possibilities that it displays. This world of the text then encounters another world, that is, the world of the reader and his horizon of expectations.

As for how this dialectical relation operates, however, the debate still rages. The main question is: How do they meet? How does the reader construct the meaning from the text? James L. Machor has summarized this debate in his article "The Object of Interpretation and Interpretive Change,"[156] where he observes at least three groups: those who argue that the text possesses intrinsic formal features from which readers build meaning; others who propose that the reader constructs meaning through filling the gaps or blanks in the text; and finally, a third group that asserts the immanent meaning of the word. Abū Zayd, I believe, would advocate the ideas of the first group in constructing meaning/significance from the original meaning.

---

[153] For an overview of this method, see Marcel Dumais, "Sens de l'écriture. Reéxamen à la lumière de l'herméneutique philosophique et des approaches littéraires récentes," *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999): 317ff.

[154] Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 284.

[155] See "World of Text, World of Reader," in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection & Imagination*, ed. Mario J. Valdes (Toronto: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 492ff.

[156] See James L. Machor, "The Object of Interpretation and Interpretive Change," *Modern Language Notes (MLN)* 113 (1998): 1126-1150, esp. 1128ff.

## 2. Ma'nā (Meaning) and Maghzā (Significance)

Unlike Ricoeur, who sees the text as emancipated, or to use his important term "distanciated," from the author, the original context and the first addressee,[157] (because of which the reader can "re-contextualize" the text), Abū Zayd still finds it an important prior step to know the historical meaning (*dalāla tārīkhiyya*) of the text. He is aware of the historical dimension of the text and thus its historical distance (*al-bu'd al-tārīkhī*) from the contemporary reader, but the latter cannot jump to contextualize the text without understanding the original meaning of it. It is through a diachronic approach, by studying how the first generation understood the text, that the historical meaning of the text will be revealed. But, this meaning is not the final one for Abū Zayd. It needs to be followed with another step, which is to find its significance (*maghzā*) in the present context, or if we may use the distinction made by Biblical scholar Krister Stendahl between "what it *meant*" in the past and "what it *means*" in the present context.[158]

Surprisingly, Abū Zayd's distinction between *ma'nā* and *maghzā* was adopted from E.D. Hirsch's distinction between 'meaning' and 'significance.'[159] It is "surprising" because Hirsch was the main proponent of authorial intention while Abū Zayd is himself

---

[157] See Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," in idem, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II,* Trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 83ff.

[158] Stendahl, "Method in the Study of Biblical Theology," in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship,* ed. J. Philip Hyatt (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), 196-209, esp. 199ff. See also Dumais, "Sens de l'écriture," 316, n. 16.

[159] See, for example, Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 229; *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī,* 116ff.; *Ishkāliyyāt al-Qirā'a wa Āliyyāt al-Ta'wīl* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1994), 6, 48, 152; *Dawā'ir al-Khawf: Qirā'a fī Khiṭāb al-Mar'a* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1999), 303; "The Textuality," 51; "Divine Attributes," 200. For Hirsch's distinction see, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), 8, 209-244; idem, *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 1-13 and 17-49. Kermani argues that Hirsch's distinction was originated from G. Frege's between 'Sinn' and

against it.[160] The latter has therefore had to make some adjustments to Hirsch's distinction. Let us see first how Hirsch distinguishes between the two. In his *Validity in Interpretation* Hirsch writes:

> *Meaning* is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance,* on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation or indeed anything imaginable"[161]

He further confirms that the author's meaning, which is represented in the text, is unchanging and reproducible;[162] its significance, on the other hand, changes.

While Abū Zayd accepts Hirsch's attribution of the stable nature of meaning and the changing character of significance, 'meaning' in Abū Zayd's hermeneutics is not that imposed by the author, but the historical meaning as understood by the first addressees of the text. It is the canonical meaning – to use Raymond E. Brown's classification of meaning – that Abū Zayd refers to. In his *The Critical Meaning of the Bible,* Brown distinguishes between literal meaning which *meant* to its author, canonical meaning which *meant* to those who first accepted it as Scripture, and contemporary meaning which *means* today.[163] As has been pointed by Kevin J.

---

'Bedeutung'. See Kermani, *Offenbarung als Komunikation,* 12, n. 51. Hirsch himself admits that he adopted it from Frege, see Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation,* 211.

[160] Scholars have criticized Hirsch's distinction of 'meaning' and 'significance.' See for the list of the critics in Paul R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 190, n. 9.

[161] Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation,* 8.

[162] Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation,* 216.

[163] Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981), 32ff. Noble calls the historical meaning "the text's intentional context," that is the meaning that relates to linguistic, social and cultural context when and where the author produces that text. See *Canonical Approach,* 197

Vanhoozer, Brown's third classification should not be considered as meaning but rather as significance.[164]

To support his distinction between historical meaning and significance, Abū Zayd examines the meaning of *ta'wīl* itself and analyzes the verses of the Qur'ān which contain that term.[165] He detects two different usages of the word.[166] The first he derives from the verb *āla al-shay'u -- ya'ūlu – awlan wa ma'ālan,* which has the sense of *raja'a* (to return).[167] On this basis *ta'wīl,* which is the verbal noun of the second form of *āla,* may be understood to mean, " to cause something or phenomenon to return to its original causes" (*irjā' al-shay' aw al-ẓāhira ... ilā 'ilalihā al-ūlā wa asbābihā al-aṣliyya).*[168] In *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* Abū Zayd says that *ta'wīl* means to uncover the hidden meaning (*al-dalāla al-khafiyya)* of an event, which means to reveal its real causes, to disclose its roots/origins.[169] It is in this sense that the prophet Yūsuf reveals the "origin" and the "source" of the food before it is served in the passage *qāla lā ya'tīkumā ṭa'āmun turzaqānihī illā nabba'tukumā bi-ta'wīlihī qabla an ya'tiyakumā* (Q. 12:37) "He said: the food which you are given shall not come unto you but I shall tell you its interpretation (source) before it comes unto you." Similarly, the interpretation of events

---

[164] Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 279, n. 293.

[165] Abū Zayd finds that the word *ta'wīl* is mentioned seventeen times in the Qur'ān, while *tafsīr* only once. This explains that *ta'wīl* was used more often than *tafsīr* in the past. See Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 226.

[166] See Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 229ff.; *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī,* 110ff.; *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa,* 167ff. Abū Zayd's discussion of the semantic meaning of *ta'wīl* is based on Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisān al-'Arab,* "a-w-l," 11:32-40. Cf. I. Poonawala, "Ta'wīl," *EI²,* 10:390-392.

[167] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab,* 11:32.

[168] Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī,* 110. This definition is taken from *Lisān al-'Arab* of Ibn Manẓūr.

[169] *Inna ma'nā al-ta'wīl al-kashf 'an al-dalāla al-khafiyya li-al-af'āl ...inna al-kashf 'an al-dalāla al-khafiyya al-bāṭina li-al-af'āl –aw ta'wīluhā - ma'nāhu al-kashf 'an asbābihā al-ḥaqīqiyya, wa*

or dreams (*ta'wīl al-aḥādīth* or *al-aḥlām*) comes to mean revealing their real cause, such as in Q. 12:6 *wa kadhālika yajtabīka rabbuka wa yuʻallimuka min ta'wīli 'l-aḥādīth* "Thus your Lord will prefer you and will teach you the interpretation of events."[170]

The second meaning of *ta'wīl* derives, according to Abū Zayd, from *āla al-shay'—awlan wa iyālan* which means to put something in order and to manage it (*aṣlaḥahu wa sāsahu*).[171] Here, *ta'wīl* means to arrive at a goal through the exercise of care, management and improvement (*al-wuṣūl ilā al-ghāya bi-al-riʻāya wa al-siyāsa wa al-iṣlāḥ*).[172] The term *ta'wīl* in the Qur'ān also used to mean *ʻāqiba*, the outcome, the end, the result. For example, Q. 17:35 *wa awfū 'l-kayla idhā kiltum wa zinū bi 'l-qisṭāsi 'l-mustaqīmi dhālika khayru 'w wa aḥsanu ta'wīlan* "Fill the measure when you measure, and weigh with right balance; that is good and better in the end" or Q. 4:59 *yā ayyuhā 'l-ladhīna āmanū aṭīʻū 'llāha wa aṭīʻū 'r-rasūla wa ūlī 'l-amri minkum ... dhālika khayru 'w- wa aḥsanu ta'wīlan* "O you who believe! Obey God and obey the messenger and those of you who are in authority ... that is better and more seemly in the end."

Based on his study of *ta'wīl,* Abū Zayd asserts that the process of contextual interpretation (*al-qirā'a al-siyāqiyya*) has to follow two steps: the first is to return (*rujūʻ*) to the meaning in its historical and cultural context (*tārīkhiyyāt al-dalāla);* and the second, to arrive to the significance (*maghzā*) of the meaning in the present

---

*al-kashf ʻan asbābihā al-ḥaqīqiyya bi-mathābat al-kashf ʻan al-uṣūl.* Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 229.

[170] Muhammad Asad in his *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), 337, n. 10 refers to al-Rāzī who points out that in this context the term *ḥadīth* (saying) is synonymous with *ḥadīth* (event).

[171] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʻArab,* 11:36.

[172] Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī,* 111; *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 230.

context.[173] The historical meaning is firm while its significance is changeable depending on the context. He further states that the *maghzā* has to be based on the historical meaning and is closely related to the latter.

## 3. Contextual Reading of the Qur'ān

As has been noted above, in order to discover the historical meaning of the text, a diachronic approach or a historico-critical study might be employed. In the discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, the genres of *asbāb al-nuzūl, nāsikh wa mansūkh,* and "early and later" verses (*makkī wa madanī*), are commonly used. But more than that, according to Abū Zayd, the text has to be studied in the socio-historical context (*al-siyāq al-tārīkhī al-ijtimāʿī*) of seventh-century Arabia, during which time the Qur'ān was sent down. Knowledge of this context is very important because it will reveal, for example, whether the laws or regulations in the text were originally prescribed by Islam or whether they were essentially pre-Islamic socio-religious customs later accepted and developed by Islam.[174]

In addition to the socio-historical context there are contexts to be considered when interpreting the Qur'ān. First is what Abū Zayd calls the "external context" (*siyāq khārijī*) of the text. While the socio-historical context may also be regarded as the external context, that is, in terms of the text's relation with the world surrounding it, the context of address (*siyāq al-takhāṭub*), or in the case of the Qur'ān the context of

---

[173] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ,* 230; *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī,* 115ff.; *Ishkāliyyāt al-Qirā'a,* 6. Compare with Fazlur Rahman's Double movement: 1. To move from the specific of the Qur'ān to the "eliciting and systemizing of its general principles, values and long-ranged objectives;" 2. - to take these general principles and formulate specific views which deal with contemporary situations. See *infra*.

[174] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf,* 202; *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa,* 100-101.

"sending down" (*siyāq al-tanzīl*), is what truly constitutes the external aspect of the text.[175] Parts of this context are the addresser of the text and its addressee. Included in the latter are the different addressees of the revelation, such as Muḥammad, the wives of the Prophet, women in general, the believers, the *Ahl al-Kitāb* or "People of the Book," etc. And since the process of *tanzīl* took more than twenty years to complete, the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), *nāsikh wa mansūkh* (abrogating and abrogated verses), and the concept of *makkī* and *madanī* verses may be considered as vital tools for understanding the external context of the text.

Besides this context however, there are internal contexts (*al-siyāq al-dākhilī*) as well, such as the text's chronological order (*tartīb al-nuzūl*). The present Qur'ān is not arranged chronologically, and while it is not known for certain why this is the case, nevertheless in the process of interpretation, a knowledge of this chronological order is useful. Abū Zayd observes that simply knowing that this is the case will help one understand, that the same word used in different places in the Qur'ān does not always have the same meaning, because the meaning of its word had to have developed over a period of twenty years. An historical reading of the text can uncover the development of this meaning within the text from the earlier verses to the later. Sequential reading (*qirā'a tatābu'iyya*), that is, a reading that follows the present order of the Qur'ān, on the other hand, will uncover the influential meaning of the whole text of the Qur'ān.[176] Modern methods of interpreting the Qur'ān, according to Abū Zayd, have to combine these two dimensions of reading.

---

[175] Abū Zayd, *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa*, 101.

The context of presentation (*siyāq sard*) and the linguistic structure (*al-tarkīb al-lughawī*) of the text are other levels of internal context that have to be looked at during interpretation. The former determines whether the text in question is describing the situation of previous generations or is instituting a new law; whether in the context of "incitement and intimidation" (*targhīb wa tarhīb*) or in the context of "promise and threat" (*wa'd wa wa'īd*).[177] The linguistic structure consists of the grammatical structure (*al-tarkīb al-naḥwī*) and literary styles, such as ellipsis (*ḥadhf*), repetition (*takrār*), etc. The analysis of this linguistic structure, according to Abū Zayd, is not only used to understand the meaning of that structure, but also to uncover the meaning of the unmentioned (*al-maskūt 'anhu*) in the text. What he means by the unmentioned is the meaning beyond the structure.[178]

While all these internal and external contexts, which are called by Gracia 'historical context,' might be used to recover the historical meaning of the text, a contextual reading has to proceed to a second step, that is, to see the significance of this meaning in its 'contemporary context.'[179] Significance involves the relevance or the importance of the text's meaning. It is here, I think, where the reader plays a greater role. It is true that the reader also has a part to fulfill in discovering the historical meaning of the text, but since this meaning is determinate and stable, his role ends after

---

[176] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf*, 203. Cf. Hassan Hanafi who has discussed the advantages and disadvantages of "longitudinal commentaries" of the Qur'ān. See Hanafi, "Method of Thematic Interpretation of the Qur'an," in *The Qur'an as Text*, 195-211, esp. 195-197.

[177] Abū Zayd, *Dawāir al-Khawf*, 204.

[178] Abū Zayd, *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa*, 108-109.

[179] Gracia differentiates between 'historical contexts' and 'contemporary contexts.' The historical is the circumstances that affect meaning of the text at the time of its production, while the contemporary is those circumstances of the contemporary readers. See Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, 30, 218. Gracia, however, does not see internal context as part of the context.

discovering it. Finding the significance of that meaning, on the other hand, varies from one reader to the other, from one socio-historical context to the other. This will produce an endless process of interpretation and a diversity of interpretations, since the significance of the text differs from one person to another, from one time to another, depending on the development of the meaning of the language, on the one hand, and the changes in the socio-political context on the other.[180]

One of the strongest objections made to this theory is the charge of relativism, since absolute truth is held to be an illusion. Abū Zayd, however, provides some general principles to facilitate valid interpretation. "The awareness of the difference between the original contextual 'meaning' which is almost fixed because of its historicity and the 'significance' which is changeable - in addition to the awareness of the necessity that the significance is to be firmly related and rationally connected to the meaning, will produce a more valid interpretation. It is only valid, however, as long as it does not violate the above mentioned methodological rules in order to jump to some 'desired' ideological conclusions."[181]

This principle, for Abū Zayd, can lead to objectivity in interpretation. But it is not an absolute objective, since it will stand in the way of other possible interpretations – a far from desirable situation in that, as he himself admits, he cannot claim to be privy to absolute truth. The kind of objectivity that he is proposing is contextual objectivity or cultural objectivity,[182] a quality that is objective for specific contexts but not for all contexts.

---

[180] Abū Zayd, "al-Manhaj al-Nafʿī fī Fahm al-Nuṣūṣ al-Dīniyya," *al-Hilāl* (March 1992), 56.
[181] Abū Zayd, "Divine Text," 200-201.
[182] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 240.

## 4. *Ta'wīl and Talwīn*

Basing himself on the distinction between *ma'nā* and *maghzā* and on the two-steps of interpretation, Abū Zayd criticizes the Islamists' and many modernists' understanding of the Qur'ān. The former, according to our author, either ignore the historical meaning of the text, or if they do understand it as it was understood by the earlier generation, they stick to it and do not contextualize it for any new situations encountered. The latter, on the other hand, arguing that historical meanings are passé, jump directly to the present context.

### a. The Islamists

In his book *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī*, Abū Zayd outlines the five mechanisms (*āliyya)* of the Islamists' method of thinking:

1. Unification of thought with religion and elimination of the distance between subject and object.
2. Interpretation of all phenomena by referring all of them to the first principle or the first cause, whether those phenomena are social or natural.
3. Dependence on the authority of the past or the *turāth*, and that is after converting the heritagial texts (*nuṣūṣ turāthiyya)*, which are secondary texts, to the primary texts. [These secondary texts] enjoy an awful amount of sacredness, no less –in many cases- than the primary texts.
4. Mental certainty and an absolute settled-kind of thinking which rejects any different thought, except if the difference is in particulars and details but not in principles or basis.
5. Abandonment and ignorance of the historical dimension, which manifests itself in crying over the wonderful past, whether it is the golden age of the Rightly-Guided Caliphate or the Turco-Ottoman caliphate.[183]

---

[183] Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī*, 14; "The Modernisation of Islam or the Islamisation of Modernity," 83. Cf. Edward Said's translation in *The Politics of Dispossession* (London: Vintage, 1995), 409-410.

*(1. al-tawḥīd bayna al-fikr wa al-dīn wa ilghā' al-masāfa bayna al-dhāt wa al-mawḍū'.*

*2. tafsīr al-ẓawāhir kullihā bi-raddihā jamī'an ilā mabda' aw 'illa ūlā tastawī fī dhālika al-ẓawāhir al-ijtimā'iyya aw al-ṭabī'iyya.*

*3. al-i'timād 'alā sulṭat al-salaf aw al-turāth, wa dhālika ba'da taḥwīl al-nuṣūṣ al-turāthiyya--wa hiya nuṣūṣ thānawiyya-- ilā nuṣūṣ awwaliyya tatamatta' bi-qadr hā'il min al-qadāsa lā taqill -- fī kathīr min al-aḥwāl -- 'an al-nuṣūṣ al-aṣliyya.*

*4. al-yaqīn al-dhihnī wa al-ḥasm al-fikrī al-qaṭ'ī wa rafḍ ayy khilāf fikrī - min thamma- illā idhā kāna fī al-furū' wa al-tafāṣīl dūna al-usus wa al-uṣūl.*

*5. ihdār al-bu'd al-tārīkhī wa tajāhuluh, wa yatajallā hādhā fī al-bukā' 'alā al-māḍī al-jamīl yastawī fī dhālik al-'aṣr al-dhahabī li-al-khilāfa al-rāshīda wa 'aṣr al-khilāfa al-turkiyya al-'uthmāniyya.)*

Although these mechanisms are inter-connected with each other, what concerns us the most here is the third and the fifth theses,[184] i.e., their dependence on the authority of the past and the *turāth*, and their ignorance of the historical dimension, considerations which bring them to believe that the past practices of seventh-century Arabia are to be applied in the present situation.

According to Abū Zayd, the main mistake of the Islamists is their claim that history moves and develops from the best to the worst. They believe that the period of seventh-century Arabia was the best ever and that the further it is from that period, the worse that era is. This belief is based on the Prophetic tradition *khayru ummatī qarnī thumma 'l-ladhīna yalūnahum thumma 'l-ladhīna yalūnahum* (The best of my community are [those living in] my period, and then those who will follow them, and then those who follow them).[185] Due to this claim they try to relate the meaning of the text (*ma'nā al-naṣṣ*) and its significance merely to the period of the golden age, ignoring

---

[184] Abū Zayd discusses these five devices of thought in *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī*, 14-58.

[185] For the reference of this *ḥadīth*, see *Concordance* 2:96. See also *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, by Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1978), 5:2.

later developments and socio-political change.[186] By limiting the meaning of the text as understood and interpreted by the earlier generations, they unconsciously, Abū Zayd argues, transform this interpretation into belief (*'aqīda*),[187] or to use the above theses: they identify religious thought (*al-fikr al-dīnī*) with religion (*dīn*), and transform these *turāth* interpretations into primary texts. What is more problematic about this process is that when the equation of interpretation with religion has been made, the former takes on the status of authority, which is exempt from criticism, and which can only be understood by the "men of religion" (*rijāl al-dīn*).

As an example of this kind of interpretation, Abū Zayd discusses the Islamists' central idea of *jāhiliyya* and *ḥākimiyya*. The pre-Islamic term *jahl* is identified by Abū Zayd as "obedience to the power of emotion and self-surrender to the power of sentiment without appealing to the composure of reason and the power of logics" (*al-khuḍū' li-saṭwat al-infi'āl wa al-istislām li-quwwat al-'āṭifa dūna al-iḥtikām ilā razānat al-'aql wa quwwat al-manṭiq*).[188] *Jahl* is behavior that is not based on reason or logic. Izutsu through a semantic analysis of this term in his *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, refers to this attitude as the "implacable, reckless temper of the pagan Arabs."[189] As the opposite of *jahl*, Abū Zayd does not juxtapose the term *'ilm*, as proposed by the Arab linguists, or *ḥilm*, as suggested by I. Goldziher and Izutsu, but rather an "appeal to the decision of reason and logic" (*al-iḥtikām ilā al-'aql wa al-manṭiq*).

---

[186] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 223.

[187] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 222.

[188] Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī*, 54.

[189] Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966), 28.

By confirming his thesis that texts initially address a specific historical context whose meaning can be known through the study of its structure and its language, and that this historical meaning is open to extended interpretation as long as this extension does not violate the original meaning, Abū Zayd argues that the term *jāhiliyya* points to the same meaning as *jahl.* After the coming of Islam, *jāhiliyya* came to connote a historical period before Islam, while continuing to have the meaning of a "state of *jahl,*" where people are controlled by emotion. This contrasts with the Islamic period in which people should operate on the basis of reason and logic.

Islamists, however, according to Abū Zayd, ignore this historical meaning and define *jāhiliyya* instead as "opposition to the reign of God" and thus to the *ḥākimiyyat Allāh.*[190] According to Sayyid Quṭb, the main theorist of the Islamists, *jāhiliyya,* means submitting to the sovereignty of human beings, which is not in accordance with Islamic method (*manhaj Islāmī*). According to this definition, the term *jāhiliyya* does not connote a historical period which has passed but one that continues to re-appear whenever society deviates from the Islamic method, either in the past or in the future.[191]

In his *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān,* Quṭb writes:

> *Wa al-jāhiliyya laysat fatra tārīkhiyya; innamā hiya ḥāla tūjad kullamā wujidat muqawwimātuhā fī waḍ' aw niẓām .. wa hiya fī ṣamīmihā al-rujū' bi al-ḥukm wa al-tashrī' ilā ahwā' al-bashar, lā ilā manhaj Allāh wa sharī'atih fī al-ḥayāh*[192]

---

[190] Sayyid Quṭb's definiton quoted by Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī,* 55. According to Shahrough Akhavi, *ḥākimiyyāt Allāh* (divine sovereignty) is an inaccurate translation of Mawdūdī's phrase *ḥukūmat- ilāhiyya* (divine government). Both of them are not identical. See Akhavi, "The Dialectic in Contemporary Egyptian Social Thought: The Scripturalist and Modernist Discourses of Sayyid Qutb and Hasan Hanafi." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29 (1997): 396, n. 7.

[191] On Quṭb's discussion of *jāhiliyya* and *ḥākimiyya,* see also Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 58-62.

[192] Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1988), 2:891.

(And *jāhiliyya* is not a historical period; but rather a state that exists whenever its constituents exist in a regulation or system .. The core of these [constituents] is the recourse in judgment and legislation to the whims of people, and not to the method of God and His legislation in life)

Similarly, their understanding of the *ḥākimiyya* of God, which is based on Q. 5:44,45,47, is contrary to the historical meaning of the latter texts. The Islamists translate the word *ḥukm* in those verses as 'to rule' or 'to govern,' so that Q. 5:44 *wa ma 'l- lam yaḥkum bimā anzala 'llāhu fa-ulā'ika humu 'l-kāfirūna* is translated as "Whoever does not *rule/govern* by what God has sent down, they are disbelievers." The historical meaning of that term, however, is "to judge," which is based on the *sabab al-nuzūl* of the verse where it is said that the verse was revealed in connection with the Jews' refusal to accept certain prescriptions of the Torah.[193]

In addition to this willful ignorance of the historical meaning of the text, the Islamists, according to Abū Zayd, do not believe in the historicity of the Qur'ānic prescriptions but argue that these prescriptions are eternally valid and have to be applied literally. Their maxim is "Wherever there is a text (*naṣṣ*) there is no room for interpretation." But, as has been argued by Abū Zayd, the term *naṣṣ* here should be understood as meaning the clear verses of the Qur'ān and not its entire text.[194] Furthermore, he argues, the prescriptions in the Qur'ān are conditioned by their

---

[193] See al-Wāḥidī al-Nīsābūrī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1982), 111-112. See also William E. Shepard, "Muhammad Sa'id al-'Ashmawi and the Application of the Shari'a in Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28 (1996): 39-58, esp. 44.
[194] See discussion *supra*.

historical context and therefore many of them are out of date or have to be reinterpreted

in the light of new contexts.[195]

## b. The Modernists

Not only does Abū Zayd criticize the Islamists' method of interpreting the text,

he also takes issue with the ideas of some modernists. He, for example, criticizes

Muḥammad Shaḥrūr's method of interpretation and considers his *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ān:*

*Qirā'a Mu'āṣira,*[196] as an example of *talwīn* (biased and tendentious reading), which

ignores the historical meaning of the text,[197] and suppresses the text for direct

pragmatic purposes (*aghrāḍ naf'iyya mubāshira*), i.e., to force the text to speak of

contemporary ideas.

Shaḥrūr differentiates in this same work between the concepts *al-Kitāb, al-*

*Qur'ān, al-Furqān* and *al-Dhikr.*[198] This distinction is founded on the distinction between

Muḥammad's function as Prophet and Messenger. The Book (*al-Kitāb*) in reality

contains two books: the book of prophecy (*nubuwwa*) which includes information and

news, which distinguishes between right and wrong, and the book of apostleship (*risāla*)

which comprises legal matters. Basing himself on Q. 3:7, Shaḥrūr contends that the

---

[195] See more on this in Michel Hoebink, "Thinking about Renewal in Islam: Towards a History of Islamic Ideas on Modernization and Secularization," *Arabica* 46, 1 (Jan. 1999): 29-62, especially 53ff.

[196] Shaḥrūr, *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ān: Qirā'a Mu'āṣira* (Cairo and Damascus: Sīnā li al-Nashr and al-Ahālī, 1992).

[197] Abū Zayd, "Limādhā Ṭaghat al-Talfīqiyya 'alā Kathīr min Mashrū'āt Tajdīd al-Islām?" *al-Hilāl* (Oct. 1991): 18-27; idem, "al-Manhaj al-Naf'ī fī Fahm al-Nuṣūṣ al-Dīniyya," *al-Hilāl* 100, 3 (March 1992): 54-60.

[198] Shaḥrūr, *al-Kitāb wa al- Qur'ān,* 37. See also Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunnī* usūl al-fiqh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 246ff.; Roxanne D. Marcotte, "Le réformisme islamique revisité: l'interprétation de Shaḥrūr (1938 -) et la condition féminine," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 28, 4 (1999) 437-

book of *risāla* includes clear verses, called in The Book *Umm al-Kitāb*, while that of

*nubuwwa* contains the *āyāt mutashābihāt*. The former are subject to *ijtihād* in socio-

economic contexts, except for those verses on ritual worship, ethics and *ḥudūd* (literally,

limits, i.e., punishments), while the latter is subject to interpretation *(ta'wīl)*. In addition

to the composition of clear and ambiguous verses, *al-Kitāb* also includes a third part,

which is not mentioned in Q. 3:7 but rather in Q. 10:37, i.e., the *tafṣīl al-kitāb* -- verses

which belong neither to the clear nor to the ambiguous verses but which aim to explain

the content of The Book.[199]

Out of this trio, *al-Qur'ān*, according to Shaḥrūr, falls into the second category,

*āyāt mutashābihāt*, i.e., those verses which Muḥammad received as a Prophet. Before

this part of *al-Kitāb* was sent down to Muḥammad, it pre-existed in the Preserved

Tablet *(al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ)* encoded in such a way as to be beyond human perception.

The process of revelation, Shaḥrūr asserts, consisted of two steps: *inzāl* and *tanzīl*. First,

it was sent down by God in one time in the Night of Power. This *inzāl* does not mean

that the Qur'ān was sent down from the *Lawḥ Maḥfūẓ* to the *Samā' al-dunyā;* rather, it

means that God moved this Qur'ān from the state of being unknown to that of being

known by making it *(ja'ala)* in the Arabic language (Q. 12:2; 43:3). After the process of

*inzāl*, the Qur'ān was then sent down progressively *(tanzīl)* by Gabriel to Muḥammad

over a period of about twenty-three years.[200]

It is interesting to note that the Night of Power, when the Qur'ān is supposed to

have been sent down *(inzāl)* and made Arabic, for Shaḥrūr, did not have a specific time

---

464; and Peter Clark, "The Shaḥrūr Phenomenon: a Liberal Islamic Voice from Syria," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7, 3 (Oct. 1996): 337-341.
[199] Shaḥrūr, *al-Kitāb wa al- Qur'ān*, 38.

frame, such as a specific night during the month of Ramaḍān. According to him, the

Qur'ānic verse *laylatu 'l-Qadri khayru 'm min alfi shahrin* should not be translated as

"The Night of Power is better than a thousand months"; rather, he understands *shahr* to

be equivalent to *shuhra,* "reputation" or *ishhār* "proclamation," and the term *alf* to mean

to "combine separate things." With this definition of the terms, Shaḥrūr asserts that the

above verse has to be understood as "the proclamation of the Qur'ān is better than all

other proclamations united together" (*ishhār al-Qur'ān khayr min kull al-ishhārāt al-*

*ukhrā mu'allafa kulluhā ba'ḍuhā min ba'ḍ).*[201]

Unlike the Qur'ān, which pre-existed in the *Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz* and had to follow

the process of *inzāl* and *tanzīl,* the other parts of The Book, i.e., *Umm al-Kitāb* and

*Tafṣīl al-Kitāb,* were not kept in the Tablet but were sent down to the Prophet directly

from God. In addition, while the Qur'ān strictly speaking does not have *asbāb al-nuzūl*

(since it would have been revealed whether requested or not (*su'ila am lam yus'al)),*[202]

the *Umm al-Kitāb,* consisting of verses concerning laws and regulations, has the *sabab*

of revelation.[203]

These are just some examples of Shaḥrūr's linguistic analysis of the terms in the

Qur'ān, which, according to Abū Zayd, ignore the historical meaning of these terms.[204]

His differentiation between *muḥkam* as belonging to messenger and *mutashābih* to

prophet, as well as his distinction between *al-Kitāb* and *al-Qur'ān,* ignore the contextual

---

[200] Shaḥrūr, *al-Kitāb wa al- Qur'ān,* 152-153.

[201] Shaḥrūr, *al-Kitāb wa al- Qur'ān,* 153.

[202] Shaḥrūr, *al-Kitāb wa al- Qur'ān,* 154.

[203] Shaḥrūr, *al-Kitāb wa al- Qur'ān,* 159.

[204] Wilfred Madelung also notes that Shaḥrūr's theory stands on "unsound philology." See Madelung's review of Hallaq's *A History of Legal Theories,* in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 8 (1998): 268.

meaning (*dalālat al-siyāq*) of the text, its occasions of revelation and the interpretations of early Muslim scholars, in order to advance his own reading of the text.

In the final analysis, both methods of interpretation – Qutb and Shahrūr –, argues Abū Zayd, are based on ideological biases, themselves founded on pre-judgment (*al-afkār wa al-ru'ā al-musbiqa*), which direct interpretation. In both cases, the text becomes the object (*maf'ūl bih*) and the ideology its subject (*fā'il*). And in both cases, they ignore the nature of the text and its levels of context.[205]

### 5. Abū Zayd, Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988) and Mohammed Arkoun (b. 1928)

In order to appreciate Abū Zayd's originality and his contribution to the modern approach in Qur'ānic interpretation, it is important to compare his method with those of other modern Muslim scholars. In the following, I will discuss Fazlur Rahman's and Mohammed Arkoun's approaches to the Qur'ān, which resemble Abū Zayd's insofar that they too have proposed the application of more modern interpretive methods to the Qur'ān. Perhaps the first Muslim scholar to use modern hermeneutics in this field, Rahman's ideas were likewise intensely opposed by traditional Muslims, and he had no choice but to leave his country and move to the West where the more liberal academic atmosphere allowed him greater freedom of speech.[206] However, this did not prevent him from objectively challenging and criticizing Western attitudes and values. Yet another similarity between these scholars – and perhaps the most important one – just as Abū

---

[205] Abū Zayd, *al-Nass, al-Sulta, al-Haqīqa*, 115.

[206] On responses to Rahman, see, for example, his "Some Islamic Issues in the Ayyūb Khān Era," in *Essays on Islamic Civilization Presented to Niyazi Berkes*, ed. Donald P. Little (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 284-302. See also Donald L. Berry, "The Thought of Fazlur Rahman as an Islamic Response to Modernity," (Ph.D. dissertation, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990), 55-59.

Zayd insists on defining revelation before interpreting the Qur'ān, Rahman and Arkoun too place an emphasis on understanding the meaning of revelation.[207]

The traditional position on this issue is reflected by Abdullah Saeed, who, in his "Rethinking 'Revelation' as a Precondition for Reinterpreting the Qur'an: A Qur'anic Perspective"[208] argues against a redefinition of the traditional concept of revelation (*waḥy*), stating that "a revision of the theory of Revelation in Islam is unwarranted; ... because ... a careful and literal reading of the linguistic evidence available, primarily in the Qur'an, does not support such a revision."[209] He further argues that if the purpose is to make the Qur'ān interpretable for the modern time, it is not the definition of revelation that has to be revised, but rather the method of interpretation.

I believe that Abū Zayd, Rahman and Arkoun would contest Saeed's thesis. Their determination to redefine *waḥy* and regard it in human and historical terms is meant to challenge the existing concept of the term that has dominated the Muslim world and to revive ones that have previously been banned and buried in Islamic history. In addition, contrary to Saeed's assumption, their attempt to revise the concept of revelation is based on their own understanding of the Qur'ān.

### a. Fazlur Rahman's Theory of Double Movement

Basing himself on Q. 26:194 *nazala bihi 'r-ruḥu 'l-amīnu 'alā qalbika li-takūna mina 'l-mundhirīn* (The Faithful Spirit has brought it (revelation/*tanzīl*) down upon

---

[207] Cf. Farid Esack, *Qur'ān, Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 63-73; and Richard C. Martin and Mark R. Woodward with Dwi S. Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 200-2006.

[208] In *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 1, 1 (1999): 93-114.

[209] Saeed, "Rethinking 'Revelation'," 95.

your heart that you may be among the warners), Rahman argues in his major work *Islam*

that the Qur'ān is both the Word of God and the word of Muḥammad.[210] It is this

statement that has led to many objections on the part of his fellow-countrymen in

Pakistan. Despite however the opposition he faced, Rahman retained this conviction till

the end of his life. Commenting on this attitude in later years, Rahman states:

> I defended the idea of the verbal revelation of the Qur'ān, which is the
> universal belief. However, it seemed to me that the standard orthodox
> accounts of revelation give a mechanical and externalistic picture of the
> relationship between Muḥammad and the Qur'ān—Gabriel coming and
> delivering God's messages to him almost like a postman delivering
> letters. The Qur'ān itself says that the Angel "comes down to the heart"
> of Muḥammad. I stated that the Qur'ān is *entirely* the Word of God
> insofar as it is infallible and absolutely free from falsehood, but, insofar
> as it comes to the Prophet's heart and then his tongue, it was entirely his
> word.[211]

In *Islam & Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition,* Rahman

asserts further that this concept of revelation constitutes the basis of his project of

Islamic intellectualism.[212] Unaware of the importance of this idea, Waheed Hussain

criticizes Rahman's proposal.[213] Differentiating between the concepts of social practice

and interpretive method in his analysis, Hussain questions how and why Rahman's idea

of the Qur'ān as "the divine word literally revealed to the Prophet Muhammad" could

become a practical interpretive method for interpreting the Qur'ān.[214] This question

might not have arisen if Hussain had understood Rahman's motive in speaking in these

---

[210] Rahman, *Islam,* 2nd edition (Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, 1979), 31, 33.

[211] Rahman, "Some Islamic Issues in the Ayyūb Khān Era," 299. See also Berry, "Dr. Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988): A Life in Review," in *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse,* 41.

[212] Rahman, *Islam & Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1-2.

[213] See Hussain, "Interpreting the Tradition: The Modernist Argument and the Sources of Islam," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 18, 1 (Winter 2001): 1-15.

terms, which was to challenge and refute the Ash'arite and the Ḥanbalite dogma, which claimed that the Qur'ān was not only the Word of God but also the "uncreated" and eternal Word of God – a concept that has long dominated Muslim thought. The latter view, according to Rahman, insists on the "otherness" of the Qur'ān and the "externality" of the Prophet in the process of revelation, neither of which solutions gives role to the Prophet Muḥammad. The Mu'tazilites, on the other hand, to whom Rahman's idea refers, maintained the Prophet's involvement in revelation.

The Prophet's implication in the revelatory process, argues Rahman, is attested to in the Qur'ān which states that the revelation was sent down to the heart of Muḥammad (Q. 26:194) and that Muḥammad's speech was a revelation (Q. 53:3-4). Further proof of Muḥammad's involvement might be seen from the fact that many of the Qur'ānic verses deal with the historical context of Muḥammad. "The Qur'ān," for Rahman, "is the divine response, through the Prophet's mind, to the moral-social situation of the Prophet's Arabia."[215]

It is on this concept of revelation that Rahman bases his theory of interpretation. Rahman approaches the Qur'ān through an attempt to understand it in its socio-historical setting. According to him, each of the Qur'ān's pronouncements on social, moral, political and economic matters, had a background "rooted in the flesh and blood of history."[216]

---

[214] Hussain, "Interpreting the Tradition," 10.

[215] Rahman, *Islam & Modernity,* 5. For more discussion on this, see Ebrahim Moosa's "Introduction" to Rahman's *Revival and Reform in Islam: a Study of Islamic Fundamentalism,* ed. Moosa (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 13.

[216] Rahman, "Islam: Legacy and Contemporary Challenge," in *Islam in the Contemporary World,* ed. Cyriac K. Pullapilly (Notre Dame: Cross Road Books, 1980), 409.

The purpose of this historical approach is to determine the worldview or *Weltanschauung* of the Qur'ān which, according to Rahman, is ethical in nature. By applying this method, it is possible to distinguish between *prescription* and *description* in the Qur'ān, between *Qur'ānic legal provisions* and their *objectives* or *ends*, and between *historical circumstances* and *essential Islamic principles*.

Rahman is however best known for his "double movement" approach to interpreting the Qur'ān. The first movement is to move from the present situation to the time in which the Qur'ān was revealed. This enables the interpreter to evaluate the verse in the context of its socio-historical background, allowing him or her to grasp the purpose and original intention of the verse. The second movement is an attempt to interpret the ramifications of the verse in the face of the present socio-cultural situation.[217]

The first of these two movements, according to Rahman, consists of two steps. To understand the meaning of a given verse, the interpreter should study the historical situation surrounding its revelation. This step implies the absolute necessity of knowing the social and religious life of Arabia on the eve of Islam as well as its customs and institutions. In the light of this socio-historical background, it is then possible in the second step to derive general moral-social objectives from specific texts.

After determining these objectives, the scholar is ready to move from the general view achieved in the first movement to apply these Qur'ānic principles to society in the context of contemporary socio-historical situations. This requires a careful study of the present situation in order to implement correctly Qur'ānic values.

---

[217] Ibid., 415; Rahman, *Islam & Modernity*, 6ff.

According to Ebrahim Moosa in his introduction to Rahman's posthumous book *Revival and Reform in Islam,* Rahman's theory of double movement is a condensation of E. Betti's (d. 1968) four canons that guide the exegete to reach and reproduce the original meaning of the text.[218] It is true that Rahman prefers Betti's "objectivity" theory to Gadamer's.[219] Like Betti, Rahman argues that an interpreter can reach objectively the original meaning of the Qur'ān. Unlike Betti, however, Rahman believes that this original meaning does not lie in the mind of the author but rather in the historical context to which the text/the Qur'ān responded.[220]

## b. Abū Zayd's Contextual Approach

In comparison with Rahman, Abū Zayd proposes an even more logical and systematic theory of revelation. First, he asserts his understanding of the humanity and historicity of revelation by referring to the Qur'ānic text and comparing the human manifestation of the Qur'ān with that of Jesus as maintained by the Qur'ān. Next, his critical study of the traditional Qur'ānic sciences provides him with more proofs of the spatial and temporal aspects of revelation. Abū Zayd's application of Jakobson's theory of literary communication, as well as that of Saussure's differentiation between *langue* and *parole,* to the concepts of *waḥy* as well as to Arabic language and the Qur'ān, discloses further the involvement of humanity and culture in forming the revelation.

---

[218] Moosa, "Introduction," 19.
[219] See Rahman, *Islam & Modernity,* 8ff. Cf. Earle H. Waugh, who mistakenly assumes that Rahman is closer to Gadamer whose position is that original meaning cannot be uncovered. See Waugh, "Beyond Scylla and Kharybdis: Fazlur Rahman and Islamic Identity," in *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse,* 21. Cf. Tamara Sonn, "Fazlur Rahman and Islamic Feminism," in *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse,* 126.
[220] Rahman, *Islam & Modernity,* 8.

In his inaugural lecture as Cleveringa Professor in Leiden University, Abū Zayd explores this issue further. He distinguishes between three aspects of the Qur'ān: its content, language, and structure. Although the content of the Qur'ān is from God, Abū Zayd argues, it is expressed in human language, and therefore it is correlated with cultural and historical contexts.

As for the structure of the Qur'ān, Abū Zayd sees the human dimension of revelation in the fact that the Qur'ān was revealed piecemeal (*munajjam*), as well as in the process of the canonization of the Qur'ān. Inasmuch as it was revealed portion by portion, the Qur'ān responded to the needs and demands of the community. Another aspect of the human involvement with the Qur'ān consists in the human effort to collect, arrange and canonize the content of the Qur'ān.

In terms of theory of interpretation, on the other hand, Abū Zayd's contextual approach to the Qur'ān seems to be close to the double movement theory of Rahman. Though it is not quite clear whether Abū Zayd was influenced by Rahman's works, he does after all allude to double movement in speaking of the double meaning of the term *ta'wīl* and its use in the Qur'ān. He also discusses more comprehensively the different kinds of contexts – external and internal – that assist one in understanding the meaning and significance of the Qur'ān.

## c. Arkoun's Strategies of Deconstruction

In the course of his discussion, Abū Zayd asserts that since the Qur'ān is a linguistic text (*naṣṣ lughawī*), the linguistic method is the only method (*al-manhaj al-waḥīd*) that may usefully be applied to the study of the Qur'ān, that it is "the only

possible method in terms of its appropriateness with the topic of the study and its

subject matter" (*innahu al-manhaj al-waḥīd al-mumkin min ḥaythu talā'umuh ma'a*

*mawḍū' al-dars wa māddatih*).[221] However, it can be argued that this reduces the text to

only one of its aspects, and closes the door to other perspectives which may yield

valuable insights. When one claims that a particular method is the most authoritative

one, one destroys the view of hermeneutics itself which admits different kinds of

methods. Mohammed Arkoun for one rejects single-minded approaches to the study of

the Qur'ān, and instead recommends a variety of approaches drawing from the

humanities and social sciences.[222]

Like Rahman and Abū Zayd, Arkoun starts his project by discussing the notion

of revelation. In his *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*,

Arkoun writes:

> The question of revelation is more delicate, especially if one wishes to
> get beyond and renew "orthodox" teachings piously repeated within each
> of the monotheistic traditions. It is not a matter of ignoring or
> overturning these teachings; the science of religions today seeks rather to
> understand the theological and historical genesis of them, their
> ideological and psychological functions, their semantic and
> anthropological limits and inadequacies.[223]

What Arkoun wishes to accomplish by this deconstruction is to understand the

reasons for the dominance of the orthodox view and its limitations, and to uncover other

conceptions that have been forgotten. Defending himself against the charge of using

---

[221] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 25, 27.

[222] For his program, see *Lectures du Coran* (Paris: Maisonneuve and Larose, 1982), especially "Bilan et perspectives des études coraniques," v-xxxiii. This article has been translated into Arabic "Ḥisāb Khitāmī li-al-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyya wa Āfāqihā," in Muḥammad Arkūn, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī: Qirā'a 'Ilmiyya* (Beirut: Markaz al-Inmā' al-Qawmī, 1987), 245-283.

[223] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, transl. and edited by Robert D. Lee (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994), 30,

Western ideas and methods in his studies, Arkoun maintains that the concept of a human and historical text with regard to the Qur'ān is to be found in the Islamic heritage itself. He refers to the Mu'tazilite concept of the createdness of the Qur'ān, stating that this concept implies that the Qur'ān is in need of human mediation (*wisāṭa bashariyya*).[224] By declaring that the Qur'ān is created, it asserts that the Qur'ān is manifested in human language, i.e., the Arabic language, and that human beings have the duty to understand and interpret it.

Arkoun differentiates between several levels of the Qur'ān.[225] The first is the Word of God that is related to the Heavenly Book, expressed in the Qur'ān as *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ*, "the Preserved Tablet" (Q. 85:22) and *Umm al-Kitāb* "Archetypal Book" (Q. 43:3). The second level is the Qur'ānic discourse which is the oral transmission of this Word to Muḥammad. This Qur'ān, which is also called by Arkoun "the prophetic discourse" (*al-khiṭāb al-nabawī*),[226] involves a discourse between three principal actors: God as the addresser, the Prophet as the first addressee, and men as the second addressee. The latter are those who accompanied the Prophet and heard the Qur'ān directly from him. This oral discourse was then transformed into a text (*muṣḥaf*), and finally elevated into the Official Closed Corpus. The transformation from oral discourse to written text, according to Arkoun, has three important implications: (1) radical changes to the linguistic and semiotic process in the Qur'ānic discourse; (2) the

---

[224] Arkūn, "al-Mumkin al-Tafkīr fīh/wa al-Mustaḥīl al-Tafkīr fīh fī al-Fikr al-Islāmī al-Mu'āṣir," an interview by Hāshim Ṣāliḥ in *Qaḍāyā fī Naqd al-'Aql al-Dīnī: Kayfa Nafham al-Islām al-Yawm* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī'a, 1998), 278-279.

[225] See Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation: From *Ahl al-Kitāb* to the Societies of the Book," *Die Welt des Islams* 28 (1998): 62-89.

[226] Arkūn, *al-Fikr al-Uṣūlī wa Istiḥālat al-Ta'ṣīl: Naḥwa Tārīkh Ākhar li-al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, trans. Hāshim Ṣāliḥ (London: Dār al-Sāqī, 1999), 30.

attribution of sacrality to the written text; and (3) the increasing role of written culture at the expense of oral culture.[227]

In the light of these three levels, Arkoun sees Ash'arite and Ḥanbalite theology as having assimilated the *muṣḥaf* with the transcendent Word of God, ignoring the successive processes of oral transmission and its transformation into a text. The Mu'tazilites, on the other hand, maintained the createdness of the Qur'ān in its oral transmission to the Prophet in the Arabic language and in its specific historical context.

Besides the above implications, the role of oral discourse in the formation of the text makes the Qur'ān available to everyone, and makes it possible to be interpreted. It follows, therefore, Arkoun argues, that during the interpretation of the Qur'ān, one has to consider these three levels of the Qur'ān, especially the shift from the oral discourse to the written. In the former, particular attention has to be paid to the role of metaphor and the semiotic structure of the Qur'ānic discourse. In addition, the interpreted corpuses, which derive from the Official Closed Corpus, have to be taken into consideration in the process of interpretation.

Arkoun admits that his approach, which he calls "anthropology of the past" (*antrūbūlūjiyyā li-al-māḍī*), following the French scholars Georges Duby, Alphonse Dupront and Jacques Le Goff, is still in a state of formation, and still at the level of theory.[228] However, this theoretical concept, which incorporates linguistic and

---

[227] Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation," 75.

[228] Arkūn, *al-Fikr al-Uṣūlī wa Istiḥālat al-Ta'ṣīl*, 43-44. See for example, Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, transl. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985).

anthropological analysis of the Qur'ān, according to Arkoun, has been successfully

implemented by Jacqueline Chabbi in her *Le Seigneur des tribus: l'Islam de Mahomet*.[229]

This approach begins with the archeological excavation (*al-ḥafr al-arkiyūlūjī*) of

the meaning of a word, its genesis and its genealogy through history from the past till

the present. It further analyzes this word as it is used in the Qur'ān, by relating it to the

socio-political context of seventh-century Arabia. Finally, the analysis of this word is

extended to any works of *turāth*, such as annals or chronicles, collections of Prophetic

traditions, biographies of the Prophet and his companions, compendia of *Isrā'īliyyāt*,

and Qur'ānic exegeses, which discuss the word in question.[230] Here we can see the

influence of the post-structuralist scholars, especially Michel Foucault (1926-1984). The

latter, in his *The Archeology of Knowledge* has suggested that an object of discourse

"exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations."[231] It is therefore

necessary, Foucault suggests, to analyze an object in its relation to other objects and to

define its difference.

Arkoun argues that the purpose of this archeological analysis is not to determine

the truthfulness or untruthfulness of a given account, but rather to deconstruct the social

*imaginaire* which has been formed and structured by the phenomenon of the *mushaf*. It

seems that it is on this basis that Arkoun's deconstruction theory lies; that is, to

consider the social *imaginaire* as the field of study. In his *Rethinking Islam Today*,

where he outlines the strategies of his theory, Arkoun states:

---

[229] Paris: Noêsis, 1997.
[230] See Arkūn, *al-Fikr al-Uṣūlī wa Istihālat al-Ta'ṣīl*, 52-55.
[231] See Foucoult, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 45. In *Rethinking Islam*, Arkoun refers to this as the theory of intertextuality.

There is no possibility to interpret the whole literature derived from those Scriptures without taking into account the representations of Salvation perpetuated in the behaviors and the thinking activity of all believers, so that all history produced in the Societies of the Book is legitimized and assimilated by the *imaginaire* of Salvation, not by any "rational" construction. The theological and juridical systems elaborated by so-called "reason" are also related to the *imaginaire* of Salvation.[232]

As a historian of religious thought, Arkoun finds that this kind of approach, which studies the religious literature as the result of the believers' *imaginaire*, is richer than the philological approach that searches for lexical and thematic influences. On a practical level, however, Arkoun has not yet applied this theory comprehensively to interpret Qur'ānic verses related to contemporary issues, such as the role of women, for instance.

## 6. Interpretation of Women's Status and Their Rights

In this last section I will look at Abū Zayd's application of his hermeneutics to the issue of women. This issue, according to Valerie J. Hoffman, is the most sensitive and critical of all the issues in Islamic law and the one most in need of re-interpretation in a modern context.[233] Abū Zayd himself has dedicated two books to this issue,[234] a clear indication of the importance he attaches to this topic. His discussion has to be seen

---

[232] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam Today* (Washington D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1987), 21.

[233] See Hoffman, "Qur'ānic Interpretation and Modesty Norms for Women," in *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse*, 89. See also Azizah al-Hibri, "A Study of Islamic Herstory: or How Did We Ever Get into This Mess?," in *Women's Studies International Forum* 5, 2 (1982): 207-219; republished in *Women and Islam*, ed. Azizah al-Hibri (Oxford, New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), 207-219, esp. 216ff.

[234] Abū Zayd, *al-Mar'a fī Khiṭāb al-Azma* (Cairo: Dār al-Nuṣūṣ, 1995); and *Dawā'ir al-Khawf* (1999). The first book, according to the author, was "for unknown reasons" not widely distributed and available; in fact it was the only book published by Dār al-Nuṣūṣ. For this reason the book was republished with additional articles in the second book. See Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf,* 12-13.

in the context of other discourses – and especially the discourse of 'crisis' (*khiṭāb al-azma*) as he calls it -- that seek to overcome the problems surrounding the Arabo-Islamic heritage. This is why in his studies he feels it necessary to relate, study and criticize these interpretations of the *turāth*.

There are many issues affecting women, but in this section I will concentrate on the issues of equality between men and women, polygamy, inheritance and *ḥijāb*. The selection of these topics is due to the controversial nature of the issues and the differing views of Muslim scholars, both past and present, in commenting on the Qur'ānic verses related to these subjects.[235] More importantly I hope to show how Abū Zayd's method of interpretation applies to women's issues,[236] and how it differs from the approaches taken by other modern Muslim scholars on these topics.[237]

## a. Abū Zayd's Interpretation

Abū Zayd first of all establishes a principle by which all issues affecting women must be seen and analyzed. This is the thesis that one goal (*maqṣad*) out of the many

---

[235] Many scholars have reviewed traditional as well as modern Muslim thinkers' views on these issues, see for example, Hoffman, "Qur'ānic Interpretation and Modesty Norms for Women," 89-121; idem, "Polemics on the Modesty and Segregation of Women in Contemporary Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987): 23-50; Sheila McDonough, "Modern Muslim Qur'an: Commentaries in Relation to Gender Roles and Distinctions," *Religious Studies and Theology* 7, 2-3 (May-Sept. 1987): 56-69; Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'ān, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), chapter ten; idem, "The *Ḥijāb*: How a Curtain Became an Institution and a Cultural Symbol," in *Humanism, Culture & Language in the Near East. Studies in Honor of Georg Krotkoff*, ed. Asma Afsaruddin and A.H. Mathias Zahniser (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 87-104; "Gender Issues and Contemporary Quran Interpretation," in *Islam, Gender, & Social Change*, eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 30-44.

[236] Stowasser notes that Abū Zayd's *al-Mar'a fī Khiṭāb al-Azma* is polemical in nature. See Stowasser, "Gender Issues and Contemporary Quran Interpretation," 42.

[237] I limit my discussion to Rahman's approach, since Arkoun has not yet dealt with this issue in detail. See *Rethinking Islam*, Chapter 13 on "women," 63.

intended by the Qur'ānic discourse is that of the equality between men and women (*al-musāwāt bayna al-rajul wa al-mar'a*).[238] Compared to the Torah, where Ḥawwā' (Eve) is pictured as the means by which Satan was able to seduce Ādam into eating from the forbidden tree, the Qur'ānic text clearly states that Ādam and Ḥawwā' were equally responsible and liable to punishment. It was the early *mufassirs*, argues Abū Zayd, who inserted these Torah stories and other *isrā'īliyyāt* into their interpretations of the Qur'ān.[239] The Qur'ānic text, moreover, asserts that both Ādam and Ḥawwā' were created from the same soul, *nafs wāhida* (Q. 4:1, 7:189), which again is contrary to the Torah which considers Ḥawwā' to be a part of Ādam, and it likewise states that they have equal religious duties, rewards and punishment (Q. 3:195, 4:124, 9:71-72, 16:97).

Abū Zayd does not refer directly to the Biblical story of the creation of Ḥawwā' (Eve) and the fall of Adam, but we can refer to Riffat Hassan, a Muslim feminist who discussed it a some years ago in her "Equal before Allah? Woman-Man Equality in the Islamic Tradition."[240] In that article she argues that, unlike Genesis 2:18-24, where it is clearly stated that woman was taken from man (implying that Adam was God's first creation), the Qur'ānic text speaks of "Adam and *zawj,*" (Q. 2:35, 7:19) which, according to Hassan, means that Adam was not the first human being and that "he" was not necessarily a male. She further argues that the story that woman was created from a man's rib entered into Islamic tradition through Ḥadīth literature in the early centuries

---

[238] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf*, 207.

[239] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf*, 207. In "Ḥawwā' bayna al-Dīn wa al-Usṭūra," he discusses al-Ṭabarī's account on "the fall of Adam and Ḥawwā'" from Paradise. See *Dawā'ir al-Khawf*, 17-24. On *Isrā'īliyyāt*, see Gordon D. Newby, "Tafsir Isra'iliyyat," in "Studies in Qur'an and Tafsir," ed. Alford T. Welch, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion: Thematic Issue* 47, 4 (December 1979): 685-697; Roberto Totolli, "Origin and Use of the Term *Isrā'īliyyāt* in Muslim Literature," *Arabica* 46 (1999): 193-210.

of Islam.[241] As for the "fall" of Adam and his subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), Hassan states that the Qur'ān does not regard woman as responsible for this, but assigns the sin to both the sexes, and therefore commands that both should fall (*ihbiṭā,* Q. 20:123, sometimes in the plural form *ihbiṭū,* Q. 2:36, 7:24).

The assumption that woman was created from Adam's rib and that the former was the cause of the fall is usually cited in support of female inferiority. Abū Zayd, however, rejects this argument saying that it is not based on the Qur'ān but rather on the mythical depictions (*taṣawwurāt usṭūriyya/khurāfiyya)* found in many early *tafsīr*s, especially the *Tafsīr* of Ṭabarī. And yet this does not mean, according to our author, that this and other early *tafsīr*s are of no use today. They contain after all the beliefs and thoughts of their time, and it is the task of the present generation to read and study rationally this *turāth* without sacralizing it and accepting it blindly as the truth.[242]

Having stated his thesis that gender equality is based on "fundamental" verses (*nuṣūṣ asāsiyya)* of the Qur'ān, Abū Zayd admits that there are some "exceptional" verses (*nuṣūṣ istithnā'iyya)* which *seem* to distinguish between men and women and legislate inequality. The latter, however, have to be interpreted in the light of the

---

[240] Riffat Hassan, "Equal before Allah? Woman-Man Equality in the Islamic Tradition," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (January-May 1987): 2-4.

[241] Ibid. See also her unpublished work "Is Islam a Help or Hindrance to Women's Development?"; and "Challenging the Stereotypes of Fundamentalism: An Islamic Feminist Perspective," *Muslim World* 91, 1&2 (Spring 2001): 55-69, especially 59-62. See also Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Y. Haddad, "Eve: Islamic Image of Woman," *Women's Studies International Forum* 5, 2 (1982): 135-144; republished in *Women and Islam;* M.J. Kister, "Legends in *Tafsīr* and *Ḥadīth* Literature: The Creation of Adam and Related Stories," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān,* 82-114, especially 110-114. Kister and Newby argue that these stories were transmitted by *quṣṣāṣ* in early Islam to *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* literature. See Kister, "Legends in *Tafsīr* and *Ḥadīth* Literature," 83; and Newby, "Tafsir Isra'iliyyāt," 689.

[242] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf,* 23.

---

fundamental verses.[243] In addition, they have to be understood against many levels of context before their significance can be discovered. Q. 16:58-59, for example, describes how the birth of a baby girl in the pre-Islamic period was considered evil and something to be ashamed of:

> *Wa idhā bushshira aḥaduhum bi 'l-unthā ẓalla wajhuhū muswadda 'w-wa huwa kaẓīmun. Yatawārā mina 'l-qawmi min sū'i mā bushshira bihī a yumsikuhu 'alā hūnin am yadussuhū fī 't-turābi*

> (If one of them receives the news of the birth of a female, his face becomes darkened, and he is filled with suppressed anger. He hides himself from the group because of the evil that was announced to him: whether he should keep it in shame or bury it in the dust).

These verses, Abū Zayd argues, have to be seen in the context of contest (*siyāq sijālī*),[244] that is, a context where the Qur'ān was intended to oppose and change a given situation. And this is clearly stated at the end of the verse in the words *alā sā'a mā yaḥkumūna* "Verily, evil is what they judge."

Similarly he finds other verses which tend to refer to females as inferior, such as the statement of Maryam's mother who had vowed (*nadhartu*) to dedicate what was in her belly to God, but on finding it to be female exclaimed that she delivered a female, implying that a female was unsuitable for her *nadhr*. God, however, contradicts this attitude and says *wa 'llāhu a'lamu bi-mā waḍa'at* "Allāh knows best what she delivered" (Q. 3:35-36).[245]

---

[243] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf*, 90-91. See also Stowasser, "Gender Issues and Contemporary Quran Interpretation," 42.

[244] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf*, 207-211.

[245] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf*, 211. Loren D. Lyberger has also argued that this story -- or theater as she calls it -- can be seen as a revolt against patriarchal claims to authority. See her "Gender and Prophetic Authority in the Qur'ānic Story of Maryam: A Literary Approach," *The Journal of Religion* 80, 2 (April 2000): 240-270, esp. 241-243.

It is in the context of description (*siyāq waṣf*) too, Abū Zayd argues, that the

*āyat al-qiwāma* (Q. 4:34) has to be understood.[246] There are those who argue that it is an

Islamic regulation that men should be managers of women, supporting their view by

quoting that part of the verse which states that God prefers men over women: *bi-mā*

*faḍḍala 'llāhu baʿḍahum ʿalā baʿḍin.* Abū Zayd, however, argues that this verse has to be

seen as describing an existing situation, and that the preference for men over women is

not a divine absolute decree (*qadr ilāhī muṭlaq*) but a statement of what must be altered

in order to conform to the original goal of the Qur'ānic discourse on women, which is to

promote equality.[247]

In addition to this argument, Abū Zayd offers another, asserting that the

linguistic meaning of *qiwāma* is to undertake socio-economic responsibilities (*al-qiyām*

*bi-taḥammul al-mas'ūliyya al-iqtiṣādiyya wa al-ijtimāʿiyya*), which can be assumed by

any party able to do so, whether man or woman, or taken on as a joint responsibility.

The Qur'ānic text therefore signifies that the only considerations in granting *qiwāma* or

"guardianship" should be the precedence (*afḍaliyya*) and ability (*qudra*) to give *infāq*

(expenditure), irrespective of gender.[248]

This contextual understanding of the *āyat al-qiwāma* has further repercussions

for the status of women in the Qur'ān, especially for the issue of inheritance. Since

*qiwāma* is based on whosoever is best able to give *infāq*, the portion of inheritance

ought to be interpreted accordingly. Abū Zayd observes that the *asbāb al-nuzūl* of Q.

4:7-11 relate to the practice of inheritance before Islam, according to which legacies

---

[246] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf*, 212.
[247] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf*, 214.
[248] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf*, 214.

were not given to women but only to males who were able to go into battle. Later, Islam was to give a "legal share" *naṣīb mafrūḍ* (Q. 4:7) to a woman from her father and husband and also the inheritance of *kalāla* from her brother and sister (Q. 4:12, 4:176). This alone was proof that Islam provided new rights for women.

Furthermore, Abū Zayd notes that, unlike the pre-Islamic custom where maleness functioned as a criterion of value (*mi'yār al-qīma*),[249] in Islamic inheritance the portion of the female is the basis (*aṣl*) for regulating the male's portion. Instead of asserting *li 'l-unthā niṣfu ḥaẓẓi 'dh-dhakar* "for the female half the male's portion," the text states *li 'dh-dhakari mithlu ḥaẓẓi 'l-unthayayni* "for the male the equivalent of the portion of two females" (Q. 4:11). This statement, for Abū Zayd, introduces an important significance (*maghzā hāmm*) in a socio-historical context where being a male used to be the sole criteria. The change of this criterion from male to female was designed to affirm the principle of equality with which the Qur'ānic chapter of *al-Nisā'* begins.[250]

The historical context of this verse, Abū Zayd argues, clearly shows the Qur'ānic goal of legislation (*tashrī'*), which was to control the male's share of an inheritance by setting an upper limit which must not exceed twice the female's share -- this after setting a minimum limit on the latter by stipulating that this may not be less than half the share of a male. Any interpretation which seeks to determine the share within these

---

[249] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf,* 232.
[250] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf,* 232.

two limits is an interpretation that affirms equality,[251] while any that insists on the letter of scripture is an affront to this principle.

It would also be wrong to assert on this basis that a woman's value is half of a man's. This error is repeated in the question of the value of woman as witnesses. Basing themselves on Q. 2:282, they argue that the witness of one man is comparable to the witness of two women in the judicial court. But that verse, argues Abū Zayd, does not eternally legislate a ratio of two (women) for one (man) in *shahāda;* rather, it describes specifically a case of financial transaction (*mu'āmala māliyya*) with which women at the time were not familiar. Now that the context has changed, and women participate in all aspects of work and life, their experience equals that of men and sometimes surpasses them in some aspects. It is therefore meaningless to assert that a woman's value as a witness is half that of a man.[252]

As for polygamy, Abū Zayd argues that both the context of revelation and the linguistic structure of the text clearly confirm that the command to practice polygamy was not intended as a permanent legal decree (*amr tashrī' dā'im*), but was appointed for a definite time (*mu'aqqat*). The Qur'ānic verse which allows polygamy (Q. 4:2-3) was revealed in Medina after the battle of Uḥud (625), in which conflict so many Muslim men had died. In order to deal with an unexpected situation *(mawqif ṭari'),*[253] which had

---

[251] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf,* 233-234. Although Shaḥrūr has a different thesis on *muḥkam* and *mutashābih,* he reaches the same result as Abū Zayd on this issue. On Shaḥrūr's analysis of inheritance, see Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories,* 249. In another article, Shaḥrūr asserts that the Qur'ānic verse *li 'dh-dhakari mithlu ḥaẓẓi 'l-unthayayni* is not talking about inheritance but on bequest (*waṣiyya*). He supports his argument by stating that the term *ḥaẓẓ* is used only in the case of bequest, while inheritance employs the term *naṣīb.* See Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf,* 234, n. 28.

[252] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf,* 235.

[253] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf,* 217.

resulted in there being a great many orphans, the Qur'ān allowed Muslims at that time to engage in polygamy.

An additional, indirect cause of the revelation of this verse was the fact that having more than one wife was a pre-Islamic custom which imposed no limit on the number of wives. Islam therefore attempts to limit this number to four but only under certain strict conditions. First it is permissible only in emergency situations and secondly the husband has to do justice to all his wives (Q. 4:3). Muḥammad 'Abduh, with whose views on polygamy Abū Zayd on the whole agrees, argues that in the final analysis the practice of polygamy is strictly forbidden (*muḥarram qaṭ 'ī*) because of the risk of failing to do justice. Here he follows 'Abduh who had based himself on another Qur'ānic verse, *wa lan tastaṭī'ū an ta'dilū bayna 'n-nisā'i wa law ḥaraṣtum* "You will not be able to do justice among [your] wives even if you desire [to do it]" (Q. 4:129).[254]

The other issues relating to women were those of *ḥijāb* and *'awra.* These issues depend mainly on the interpretation of Q. 24:30-31:

> *Qul li 'l-mu'minīna yaghuḍḍū min abṣārihim wa yaḥfaẓū furūjahum dhālika azkā lahum inna 'llāha khabīru 'm-bimā yaṣna'ūna*
> *Qul li 'l-mu'mināti yaghḍuḍna min abṣārihinna wa yaḥfaẓna furūjahunna wa lā yubdīna zīnatahunna illā mā ẓahara minhā wa 'l-yaḍribna bi-khumurihinna 'alā juyūbihinna wa lā yubdīna zīnatahunna illā li-bu'ūlatihinna aw ābā'ihinna ...*

> (Tell the believing men to avert their eyes and to preserve their chastity; that is purer for them. God knows what they are doing.
> And tell the believing women to avert their eyes and preserve their chastity and not to show their adornment except that which is apparent

---

[254] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf,* 220-221, n. 15. Abū Zayd's quotation of Q. 4:129 misses *tastaṭī'ū an.* 'Abduh's view on polygamy has been included by Helmut Gätje in his *The Qur'ān and Its Exegesis: Selected Texts with Classical and Modern Muslim Interpretations,* Trans. and edited by Alford T. Welch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), chapter 12, 248ff. (esp. 248-250)

and to draw their head shawls over their bosoms and not to show their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, ...)

Two concepts are particularly in need of elaboration: first the term *'awra,* and second *khimār.* What constitute the private parts of women has long been debated by scholars. Some argue that *'awra* refers to the whole body of a woman. Others differentiate between the apparent part (*zīna ẓāhira),* which is made visible to all by God, such as the head, feet and hands, and the hidden part, called *juyūb,* that is, the parts both between the breasts and armpits and between the pudenda and buttocks.[255] For Abū Zayd, however, *'awra* is not a fixed stable concept, but one that is clearly connected with cultural structures in their socio-historical context.[256] This implies that it is the custom or specific culture which defines the *'awra,* and that its definition for this specific custom may not be generalized for other cultures.

On the issue of *ḥijāb,* Abū Zayd states that it is not a matter that deserves heavy scrutiny either from those who propose to "imprison" women in a dress where only the eyes may be left showing, or from those who argue that women are not obligated to adopt a particular form of dress at all. This issue, argues Abū Zayd, has emerged as an important one only because of the various modern Islamic political movements, especially in Iran since the Revolution, where women are veiled from head to foot, representing an Islamic symbol refuting the Pahlavi's "Westoxicated" symbols.[257]

Thus, like the concept of *'awra,* argues Abū Zayd, the notion of *ḥijāb* is clearly connected to a custom ( *'āda).* What is considered as *'awra* in a particular society must

---

[255] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf,* 237.
[256] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf,* 237.

therefore be covered and veiled. The consequence of this interpretation is that the veiling of any part of a woman's body depends on custom ('*āda*), which may vary from one society to another. Similarly, the individual garment used to cover the woman's body may be modified in accordance with the customs and culture of the woman's societal background.

## b. Rahman's Interpretation

Having outlined his method of interpreting the Qur'ān, Rahman asserts that the basic élan of the Qur'ān is a moral value system with an emphasis on monotheism and social justice.[258] According to Rahman, Qur'ānic teachings on the subject of women are part of its effort to strengthen and ameliorate the condition of the weaker elements of society in pre-Islamic Arabia - orphans, slaves, the poor, women - people who had suffered abuse from the correspondingly stronger elements in the society.[259]

Rahman insists that the Qur'ān declares equality between men and women. He writes:

> On the question of the rights of women, the modernist contended that the Koran had not only improved their status, but had granted them virtually equal rights with men. Some even claimed that the Koran made women the equal of men in all essential respects, that certain inequalities that had existed in Islam were largely due to social custom - much of which was anti-Islamic - and that some of these inequalities were due to misperceptions of the purposes of the Koran by medieval Muslim lawyers. Modernists thus distinguished between the principles, values, or

---

[257] Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf,* 236. On the issue of the decree on women veiling imposed by the Iranian government, see Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Feminism in an Islamic Republic," in *Islam, Gender & Social Change,* 60-61.

[258] Rahman, *Islam,* 32.

[259] Rahman, "The Status of Women in Islam: A Modernist Interpretation," in *Separate Worlds: Studies of Purdah in South Asia,* eds. Hanna Papanek and Gail Minault (Columbia, Missouri: South Asia Books, 1982), 286; idem, "The Status of Women in the Qur'ān," in *Women and Revolution in Iran,* ed. Guity Nashat (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1983), 37.

objectives of the Koran, on the one hand, and some of its legal solutions, on the other.[260]

The inferior position of women in modern times, Rahman claims, results from social conditions rather than from the moral teachings of the Qur'ān. He asserts that the verse of the Qur'ān which reads "men are managers of women" is a *description* of the way things generally happened in Mecca in the sixth and seventh centuries rather than a *prescription* for the ordering of society. It is a description of functional superiority, not inherent superiority.[261] At that time and in that place, Rahman argues, men were the "primary socially operative factors and bread winners,"[262] charged with the responsibility of paying the household expenses. Due to their economic role in the society, men were entitled to a position as "managers over women." This title, however, is not inherent in the nature of the sexes but rather a socio-economic function, which may change with the changing of function. "There is nothing inherently unchangeable about these roles," Rahman affirms, "when justice so demands, change is Islamically imperative."[263]

In this interpretation as well as in other cases, Rahman does not follow the literal meaning of the Qur'ān but stresses the principles of socio-economic justice and egalitarianism which, according to Rahman, are reflected in each verses of the Qur'ān. "To insist on a *literal* implementation of the rules of the Qur'ān," he reasons, "(and)

---

[260] Rahman, "Roots of Islamic neo-Fundamentalism," in *Change and the Muslim World,* ed. Philip H. Stoddard, et al (Syracuse, NY, Syracuse University Press, 1981), 30.

[261] Tamara Sonn, "Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Methodology," *Muslim World* 81, 3-4 (1991): 212-230, especially 222.

[262] Rahman, "The Status of Women in Islam," 294; idem, "The Status of Women in the Qur'ān," 44.

[263] Ibid., 297.

shutting one's eyes to the social change that has occurred ... is tantamount to deliberately defeating its (the Qur'ān's) moral-social purposes and objectives."[264]

In evaluating the collections of *ḥadīth* used by traditionalists, Rahman is especially cautious, and rejects some of them because, according to him, they are mostly post-Prophetic *ḥadīths* projected back to the Prophet.[265] The *ḥadīths* which state that women are inherently inferior to men, for example, or those which require a woman to worship her husband are, for Rahman, unreliable, since they contradict the moral message of the Qur'ān.

Consequently, Rahman states that the Qur'ān advocates neither the veil nor the segregation of women, but merely insists on sexual modesty. He also insists that in the Prophet's time women did not veil their faces nor were the sexes segregated. As for Q. 33:33, which instructs women to stay at home, Rahman takes it to apply especially to the Prophet's wives who were the Mothers of the believers,[266] who had a special position and function beyond that of ordinary women. "O wives of the Prophet, you are not like any other women" (Q. 33:32).[267]

In his interpretation of the *ḥijāb* verses *wa lā yubdīna zīnatahunna illā mā ẓahara minhā*, Rahman explains that the adornments which are naturally exposed (*mā ẓahara minhā*) include the face and half of the forearm as well as cosmetics or jewelry including

---

[264] Rahman, *Islam & Modernity*, 19.

[265] Rahman has studied extensively this issue in his *Islamic Methodology in History* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1984), especially chapter two.

[266] Rahman, "The Status of Women in the Qur'ān," 41.

[267] Stowasser differentiates between Q. 33:53 and Q. 33:59-60. While the former is restricted to the Prophet's wives, the latter is concerned with individual female appearance when outside of the home and applies to all Muslim women. See Stowasser, "The *Ḥijāb*: How a Curtain Became an Institution and a Cultural Symbol," 93-94.

rings, bangles, rouge, and so on.[268] Similarly, for Rahman, the verses *wa 'l-yaḍribna bi-khumurihinna 'alā juyūbihinna* and *yudnīna 'alayhinna min jalābībihinna* clearly prove that women are not required to cover their faces.[269]

As we have seen, Abū Zayd's method of interpretation and the theory behind it resemble those of Rahman. Both began their projects by reviving the Mu'tazilite doctrine of "the created Qur'ān" through a redefinition of the concept of revelation. Their theories of interpretation, which are based on the historical dimension of the text, follow almost the same steps as well. Although Rahman took his hermeneutics from Betti and Abū Zayd from Hirsch, both came to the same conclusion: that there is a distinction between "historical values" and "moral values" or between "historical meaning" and "significance," and that it is possible to arrive objectively at the historical meaning. Despite this similarity, however, there is no evidence that the latter influenced Abū Zayd, who makes no reference whatsoever to Rahman in any of his works.

---

[268] Rahman, "The Status of Women in the Qur'ān," 40; idem, "The Status of Women in Islam," 291.
[269] Ibid.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Responses of Egyptian Islamists to Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's Ideas and Method of Interpretation

Confrontation between liberal and Islamist thinkers has been a marked feature of the Islamic landscape in the 20th century.[1] Both groups, with their respective methods of interpretation and proposed solutions, have been struggling to respond to the challenge of modernity. In most Muslim societies, however, modernist and liberal ideas are often condemned and declared heretical.[2] One case in point is that of Professor Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, a distinguished scholar of Islamic studies and Arabic literature at Cairo University, who has authored several books and numerous articles on Qur'ānic interpretation and other religious issues.[3] However, voices in certain Islamist quarters have charged that his theories and ideas are unorthodox and that they amount to heresy

---

[1] It is quite difficult to define liberal and Islamist thinkers categorically, and scholars have utilized different terms to denote these traditions. Charles Kurzman, for example, gives three types of interpretation of Islam: the customary Islam or traditionalist; the revivalist Islam or Islamist and the liberal Islam. See Kurzman (ed.), *Liberal Islam: a Source Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5ff. Salwa Ismail, while examining the Islamist movement in Egypt, distinguishes between radical Islamism and conservative Islamism. See Ismail, *Radical Islamism in Egypt: Discursive Struggle* (Montreal: Inter-University Consortium for Arab Studies, 1994); idem, "Confronting the Other: Identity, Culture, Politics, and Conservative Islamism in Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30 (1998): 199-225; and idem, "Religious 'Orthodoxy' as Public Morality: The State, Islamism and Cultural Politics in Egypt," *Critique* (Spring 1999): 25-47. In this study, Islamist thinkers, mostly refer to the conservative or moderate Islamists, which include the "official Islam" as represented by al-Azhar and the Egyptian Muftī, the "peripheral 'ulamā'," and Islamist lawyers. For "peripheral 'ulamā' ", see Malika Zeghal, "Religion and Politics in Egypt: The Ulema of al-Azhar, Radical Islam and the State (1952-94)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999): 371-399. Liberalists, on the other hand, are those who oppose the establishment and propose intellectual openness.
[2] See Kurzman's Introduction to *Liberal Islam*, "Liberal Islam and Its Islamic Context," *Liberal Islam*, 12ff.
[3] See bibliography *infra.*

and apostasy.[4]

To be sure, this is not the first time that modernist ideas have faced censure in Egypt. Previous thinkers, like Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalaf Allāh and others, have undergone similar attack. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's book *Fī al-Shi'r al-Jāhilī* published in 1926, was banned because of the alleged heretical ideas it contained. He was charged with questioning the Qur'ānic account that Ibrāhīm and Ismā'īl built the Ka'ba. Only after the removal of references to this and other ideas was the book allowed to be published under the new title *Fī al-Adab al-Jāhilī.*[5] Similarly, in 1947-1951 Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalaf Allāh's dissertation entitled "al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm" was rejected by the examining committee on the grounds that the ideas exposed in it contravened Islamic teachings.[6] In June 1992, moreover, a few months before the case of Abū Zayd, Dr. Faraj Fūda was assassinated by a member of the *Jamā'a Islāmiyya*, and two years later, another assassination attempt was made on the life of Nobel Prize laureate, author, Najīb Maḥfūẓ.

In this chapter I will discuss how Egyptian Muslim scholars responded to Abū Zayd's ideas and methods and why they replied in the manner that they did. It would be prudent, however, to outline the historical background to what is usually called the "Abū Zayd Case" (*Qaḍiyyat Abū Zayd*).[7]

---

[4] On apostasy, see Rudolph Peters and Gert J.J. de Vries, "Apostasy in Islam," *Die Welt des Islams* 17 (1976-1977): 1-25.

[5] See, for example, Pierre Cachia, *Taha Husayn: His Place in the Egyptian Literary Renaissance* (London: Luzac, 1956), 59-62; Mohammed Nowaihi, "Towards a Reappraisal of Classical Arabic Literature and History: Some Aspects of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's Use of Modern Western Criteria," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11 (1980): 189-207; Donald Malcolm Reid, *Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 121-2.

[6] See Chapter Two *supra*.

[7] Fauzi M. Najjar's article "Islamic Fundamentalism and the Intellectuals: The Case of Naṣr

## A. The "Abū Zayd Case"

### *1. Taqrīr 'Ilmī*

The affair began when on May 9, 1992, Abū Zayd applied to Cairo University for promotion *(tarqiya)* to full professorship *(ustādh)*. He submitted two of his books, *al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī wa Ta'sīs al-Īdiyūlūjiyya al-Wasatiyya*[8] and *Naqd al-Khitāb al-Dīnī*[9] along with eleven other academic papers,[10] to the Standing Committee of Academic Tenure and Promotion. This body consisted of 13 professors who then appointed three of its members -- Dr. Shawqī Dayf, Dr. 'Abd al-Sabūr Shāhīn and Dr. 'Awnī 'Abd al-Ra'ūf -- to deliver reports on Abū Zayd's works. A few days into the

---

Hamid Abū Zayd," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 27, 2 (2000): 177-200 was published after I finished writing this chapter and presented draft paper of it at Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Annual Meeting in Washington D.C. November 19-22, 1999.

[8] Cairo: Sīnā li-al-Nashr, 1992.

[9] Cairo: Sīnā li-al-Nashr, 1992.

[10] "al-Kashf 'an Aqni'at al-Irhāb: Bahthan 'an 'Almāniyya Jadīda." *Adab wa Naqd* 58 (June 1990): 40-50;

"Thaqāfat al-Tanmiya wa Tanmiyat al-Thaqāfa." *al-Qāhira* 110 & 111 (Dec. 1990 & Jan. 1991): 23-28;

"al-Turāth bayna al-Istikhdām al-Naf'ī wa al-Qirā'a al-'Ilmiyya." *Adab wa Naqd* 79 (March 1992): 51-70;

"Qirā'at al-Turāth fī Kitābāt Ahmad Sādiq Sa'd." Presented at a conference and in the press;

"Ihdār al-Siyāq fī Ta'wīlāt al-Khitāb al-Dīnī." Presented at a conference and in the press;

"Muhāwalat Qirā'at al-Maskūt 'Anhu fī Khitāb Ibn 'Arabī." *al-Hilāl* 100, 5 (May 1992): 24-33;

"Mafhūm al-Nass: al-Dalāla al-Lughawiyya." *Ibdā'* 4 (April 1991): 99-106;

"al-Ta'wīl fī Kitāb Sībawayh." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 8 (1988);

"The Perfect Man. A Textual Analysis." *Journal of Osaka University of Foreign Studies* 77 (1988): 111-33;

"Foreword" Inazo Nitobe. *al-Bushīdo Rūh al-Yābān.* Baghdād: Dā'irat al-Shu'ūn al-Thaqāfiyya al-'Amma, 1990;

"Markabat al-Majāz: Man Yaqūduhā? Wa Ilā Ayna?" *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 12 (1992): 50-74.

process, however, Dr. Ḍayf resigned his appointment, and another committee member,

Dr. Maḥmūd ʿAlī Makkī, was appointed in his place.[11]

In his report (*taqrīr*), Dr. Makkī, professor in the Arabic Department at Cairo

University and former supervisor of Abū Zayd's dissertation (following the death of the

latter's assigned supervisor, Dr. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Ahwānī), wrote:

> ... [I]n terms of the value (of these works), they represent mature thought
> (*fikr nāḍij*), ability for deep analysis, breadth of reading and commitment
> to the scientific method. And while we disagree with him over some of
> his views ... we see in this scholarly production (*al-intāj*), in general
> terms, a rational enlightened orientation (*ittijāh ʿaqlānī mustanīr*), and
> when he criticizes aspects of our past heritage (*turāth*) he does not offer
> any view except after deep and conscientious study and after wide
> reading on this heritage....
>
> (*wa ammā min nāḥiyat al-qīma fa-innahā tumaththil fikr nāḍij wa qudra
> ʿalā al-taḥlīl al-ʿamīq wa saʿat ittilāʿ wa iltizām bi-al-manhaj al-ʿilmī al-
> ṣārim, wa idhā kunnā qad ikhtalafnā maʿah fī baʿḍ wijhāt naẓarih ... fa-
> innanā narā fī hādhā al-intāj bi-shakl ʿām ittijāh ʿaqlānī mustanīr wa idhā
> kāna yantaqid jawānib min turāthinā al-qadīm fa-innahu lā yubdī raʾy illā
> baʿda dirāsa mustafīḍa wāʿiya wa baʿda ittilāʿ wāsiʿ ʿalā hādhā al-turāth
> ...*)[12]

Similarly, Dr. ʿAbd al-Raʾūf, professor in the Faculty of Linguistics, stated that

"[h]e (Abū Zayd) in each of his works reaches an idea and unveils it with complete

consciousness (*waʿy tāmm*), deep understanding and earnest scientific method (*fahm*

---

[11] See Ḥanafī al-Miḥlāwī's interview with ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr Shāhīn, "Azma fī Jāmiʿat al-Qāhira (2). Dr. ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr Shāhīn: Li-hādhihi al-Asbāb Rafaḍtu Tarqiyat Dr. Naṣr," *al-Akhbār* (April 7, 1993). Compare with Abū Zayd's account of Dr. Ḍayf's resignation. According to Abū Zayd, Ḍayf resigned on October 22, 1992 because his health condition could not help him to review the diverse aspects and many-sided fields of Abū Zayd's academic outcome (*anna al-intāj ghazīr wa mutaʿaddid al-jawānib wa mutashaʿʿib al-majālāt, wa anna murājaʿat hādha al-intāj taḥtāj ilā juhd lā tusʿifuh ʿalayh ẓurūfuh al-ṣiḥḥiyya*). See Abū Zayd, *al-Qawl al-Mufīd fī Qaḍiyyat Abū Zayd* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1995), 73.

[12] Makkī, "al-Intāj al-ʿIlmī li-al-Duktūr Naṣr Ḥāmid Rizq Abū Zayd al-Murashshaḥ li-Darajat Ustādh," *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 65.

*'amīq bi-jiddiyya 'ilmiyya).*"[13]

The third report, however, was unfavourable to Abū Zayd. Dr. Shāhīn, professor of Arabic literature in the Dār al-'Ulūm Faculty, for his part charged Abū Zayd with violating Islamic orthodoxy teaching on the Qur'ān, the Prophet Muḥammad, his companions, angels, and other points of Islamic doctrine.[14] He claimed, for example, that Abū Zayd calls on Muslims to liberate themselves from the texts of the Qur'ān and *Sunna* in his book *al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī.*[15] The offending passage in this book reads:

> It is time now for a re-examination and transition to the period of liberation, not only from the authority of the texts, but also from every authority which hinders human journey in our world. We must undertake this (liberation) now and immediately before the flood sweeps us away.

> (*Āna awān al-murāja'a wa al-intiqāl ilā marḥalat al-taḥarrur, lā min sulṭat al-nuṣūṣ waḥdahā, bal min kull sulṭa ta'ūq masīrat al-insān fī 'ālaminā. 'Alaynā an naqūm bi-hādhā al-ān wa fawran qabla an yajrufanā al-ṭūfān)*[16]

On the basis of this passage, Shāhīn claimed that Abū Zayd promotes abandonment of the Qur'ān and *Sunna* and dependence on reason alone.

In his evaluation of the second book, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī,*[17] Shāhīn concluded that not only does Abū Zayd strongly defend (*yudāfi' bi-ḥarāra*) Marxism and acquit it of the accusation of heresy, but that he also staunchly supports Salmān Rushdī and his

---

[13] *wa huwa fī kull hādhihi al-a'māl yatanāwal al-fikra allatī ya'riḍuhā bi-wa'y tāmm wa fahm 'amīq bi-jiddiyya 'ilmiyya.* See 'Abd al-Ra'ūf, "al-A'māl al-'Ilmiyya al-Mutaqaddim bi-hā Duktūr Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd li-al-Ḥuṣūl 'alā Darajat Ustādh bi-Qism al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya bi-Kulliyyat al-Ādāb Jāmi'at al-Qāhira," *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 71.

[14] Shāhīn, "Taqrīr 'an Intāj 'Ilmī," *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 72-78. See also, Shāhīn, *Qiṣṣat "Abū Zayd" wa Inḥisār al-'Almāniyya fī Jāmi'at al-Qāhira* (Cairo: Dār al-I'tiṣām, 1994), 19-33.

[15] Ibid., 73.

[16] See Abū Zayd, *al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī,* 110. In the preface to *Qiṣṣat "Abū Zayd" wa Inḥisār al-'Almāniyya,* Shāhīn describes Abū Zayd as a Marxist and a secularist writer who calls for emancipation from the texts of the Qur'ān and *Sunna,* and for dependence on reason.

[17] This book is now in its third edition, published both by Sīnā li 'l-Nashr and Maktabat

book *The Satanic Verses*, while severely criticizing al-Azhar.[18] At the end of his report,

Shāhīn concluded with the comment that some of Abū Zayd's works feature a "mixture

of thought, ideology, criticism, radicalism and controversy," and that they therefore

require reinvestigation (*i'ādat al-naẓar*) and purification (*tanqiya*).[19]

Although the two reports by Makkī and 'Abd al-Ra'ūf were favourable towards

Abū Zayd and urged his promotion to the rank of full professor, the Committee of

Academic Tenure and Promotion, after an interval of seven months, concurred with

Shāhīn's negative report and denied Abū Zayd's application for advancement on

December 3, 1992. Of the committee's thirteen members, seven voted to deny him the

promotion while six voted in favor of it.[20]

The report of the Academic Tenure Committee was, however, challenged in the

deliberations (*mulāḥaẓāt*) of the Arabic Department Council (*majlis qism al-lugha al-*

*'arabiyya*) and the Faculty of Arts Council (*majlis kulliyyat al-ādāb*) of Cairo

University, on the grounds that the Academic Tenure Committee had overstepped its

original task (*al-muhimma al-aṣliyya*), which was to examine only the scholarly works

---

Madbūlī, with a new preface from the author related to the "the case of Abū Zayd."

[18] Shāhīn, "Taqrīr 'an Intāj 'Ilmī," 73-74.

[19] Ibid., 78. In his evaluation of Abū Zayd's book *al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī*, Shāhīn condemned the writer for holding deviating views (*ārā' munḥarifa*) which it was not suitable to ascribe to the great Imām.

[20] Members of the Committee were Dr. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Haddāra, Dr. Aḥmad Haykal, Dr. Shawqī Ḍayf, Dr. Maḥmūd Fahmī Ḥijāzī, Dr. Kamāl Bashar, Dr. Nabīla Ibrāhīm, Dr. 'Abd al-Salām 'Abd al-'Azīz, Dr. Maḥmūd 'Alī Makkī, Dr. 'Abd al-Ṣabūr Shāhīn, Dr. 'Awnī 'Abd al-Ra'ūf, Dr. Ramaḍān 'Abd al-Tawwāb, Dr. Maḥmūd Dhihnī and Dr. Sayyid al-Nassāj. See *al-Ahrām* (April 21, 1993). According to Annette Heilmann based on her interview with Mustapha Kamil al-Sayyid, Egyptian sociologist, most of these members were graduated from Dār al-'Ulūm. See Annette Heilmann, "Der politische und religiöse Diskurs in Ägypten am Beispiel der *Affäre Abū Zayd*" (M.A. thesis, Berlin Free University, 1996), 48. See also idem, "Die Affäre Abu Zayd und der Begriff der 'Ethik der Toleranz' in der heutigen politischen Diskussion in Ägypten," in *Staat und Zivilgesellschaft in Ägypten*, ed. Ferhad Ibrahim (Münster; Hamburg: Lit, 1995), 147.

of a candidate and not his/her theological convictions (*jawānib i'tiqādiyya*).[21] The

academic report, according to these Councils, was thus transformed from a scholarly

evaluation into a theological inquisition, a process which cast doubt on the candidate's

beliefs and pronounced judgment on the depth of his religious faith.[22] In their *mulāhazāt*

the councils also criticized the report for its intolerance and its dismissal of different

opinions as theological deviations (*inhirāf i'tiqādī*).[23] Besides, the Council raised

procedural concerns regarding the report, since the Academic Tenure Committee had

spent seven months in drafting it, rather than the prescribed period of one to two months

at the maximum. In addition, although the report insisted that it reflected the views of

all members of the committee, it was not, in fact, signed by all the latter.[24] On the other

hand, the Council observed that Abū Zayd's works were "characterized by a wealth of

---

[21] The Arabic Department Council consisted of Dr. Yūsuf 'Abd al-Qādir Khulayf, Dr. Mahmūd 'Alī Makkī, Dr. Nabīla Ibrāhīm, Dr. Sayyid Hanafī Hasanayn, Dr. Mahmūd Fahmī Hijāzī, Dr. Ahmad 'Alī Mursī, Dr. Jābir 'Asfūr, Dr. Tāhā Wādī, Dr. Shawqī Riyād, Dr. 'Abd Allāh al-Tatāwī, Dr. Ahmad Shams al-Dīn al-Mihjājī, and Dr. Sulaymān al-'Attār. See Jābir 'Asfūr, "Mulāhazāt Asātidhat Aqsām al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya 'alā al-Taqrīr al-Khāss bi-Tarqiyat Nasr Hāmid Abū Zayd," *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 80.

[22] Ibid. See also the report of the Faculty of Arts Council which regarded some of the terms used by the Academic Tenure Committee as implying judgment on the candidate's religious beliefs, such as "*kalām ashbah bi-al-ilhād,*" "*hādhā ra'y kāfir wa mardūd,*" "*hādhā kufr sarīh,*" "*inna al-bāhith wada'a nafsah mirsād li-kull maqūlāt al-khitāb al-dīnī, hattā walaw kallafahu dhālik inkār al-badīhiyyāt aw inkār mā 'ulima min al-dīn bi-al-darūra.*" See "Taqrīr al-Lajna allatī Shakkalahā Majlis al-Kulliyya li-al-Nazar fī Mawdū' Tarqiyat al-Duktūr Nasr Hāmid Abū Zayd ilā Darajat Ustādh bi-Qism al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya wa Ādābihā," *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 95.

[23] Ibid., 93.

[24] Ibid., 79. Sayyid al-Nassāj was one of the members who did not sign the report. See Tāriq al-Nu'mān al-Qādī, "Musādarat al-'Aql wa Sinā'at al-Irhāb," *Adab wa Naqd* (May 1993): 29. Makkī, the writer of the positive report, although he signed the final report to support the democratic tradition based on majority voting in the Academic Tenure Committee, finally withdrew his signature, since some expressions bearing the accusation of heresy in the report were not replaced as promised. See 'Abla al-Ruwaynī's interview with Makkī, "Li-Hādhā Waqqa'tu ...wa li-Hādhā Tarāja'tu," *al-Akhbār* (April 14, 1993), reproduced in *al-Qawl al-Mufīd*, 240-246. According to Ahmad 'Abd al-Mu'tī Hijāzī, four members of the committee from the department of Arabic refused to agree with the form and the content (*shakl wa madmūn*) of the report. See, Hijāzī, "Lākin Jahilta fa-Qulta Inna Jamī'a Man Yahwā Khilāf

---

information, earnestness, diversity and scholarly originality" (*yattasim bi-al-ghazāra wa al-jidda wa al-tanawwu' wa al-asāla al-'ilmiyya*), and that he had benefited from adopting new methods and contemporary sciences as his analytical tools. For these reasons, the Council, after reviewing the report of the Academic Tenure Committee and Abū Zayd's works, came to the conclusion in its meeting of December 7, 1992 that Abū Zayd's academic record qualified him for promotion, both quantitatively and qualitatively (*kamman wa kayfan*), to the rank of full professor in the Arabic department.[25]

The Faculty of Arts Council, in its turn, formed on December 19, 1992 a committee, comprised of Dr. Muṣṭafā Suwayf, Dr. 'Abd al-'Azīz Ḥamūda, Dr. Ḥasan Ḥanafī and Dr. Jābir 'Aṣfūr, to pursue further the matter of Abū Zayd's promotion.[26] In its report, the Faculty Committee commented on the original Academic Tenure Committee report which described Abū Zayd's works as non-academic and confined to unscholarly journals of limited circulation.[27] The Faculty Committee, however, challenged this view, arguing that: all his works fell within the field of Arabic criticism and grammar, and Islamic Studies; they brought together the required scholarship qualities (*tajma' al-ṣifāt al-'ilmiyya al-maṭlūba*) to the subject; and were published in refereed journals (*majallāt 'ilmiyya muḥakkama*), or even republished in many editions

---

Hawāka Laysa bi-'Ālim," *al-Ahrām* (April 07, 1993), republished in *al-Qawl al-Mufīd*, 179-186, especially 185.

[25] Ibid.

[26] See, "Taqrīr al-Lajna allatī Shakkalahā Majlis al-Kulliyya," *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 94. Cf. Najjār, "The Case of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd," 179 who does not differentiate between the Arabic Department Council and the Faculty of Arts Council.

[27] See, Shāhīn, *Qiṣṣat "Abū Zayd" wa Inhisār al-'Almāniyya*, 20. The two articles, which, when submitted to the Academic Tenure Committee, were still in press, have been published since. They are "Qirā'at al-Turāth wa Turāth al-Qirā'a (fī Kitābāt Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd)," *Adab wa Naqd* 87 (Nov. 1992): 31-36; and "Ihdār al-Siyāq fī Ta'wīlāt al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī," *al-Qāhira* 122

in the Arab countries (besides having often been previously presented in academic conferences).[28]

It is important to note that even though the debate over Abū Zayd's promotion had taken place within the walls of the university and that the University Council had yet to deliver its verdict, some aspects of the case were already public consumption. Fahmī Huwaydī, the journalist and essayist, wrote on December 8, 1992 in a review for *al-Ahrām* of the Arabic edition of François Burgat's *L'Islamisme au Maghreb* to which Abū Zayd had contributed a preface,[29] that the latter "began to be very allergic toward Islam itself and very hostile to Islamist phenomenon" (*bada'a shadīd al-ḥasāsiyya izā'a al-Islām dhātih wa shadīd al-'adā' li-al-ẓāhira al-Islāmiyya*).[30] In another article dated January 26, 1993, Huwaydī wrote that Abū Zayd believed in the theory of the historicity of the Qur'ānic text which, in Huwaydī's eyes, contradicted religious dogma.[31] He also accused Abū Zayd of regarding Islam as a historical or nearly folkloric phenomenon (*i'tabara al-Islām tārīkhiyyan aw aqrabu ilā al-fūlklūr*). By this time, the decision of the Academic Tenure Committee had officially been made public, and being himself in disagreement with Abū Zayd's views, Huwaydī wrote in this article that he understood the reason why the Academic Tenure Committee refused the promotion of Abū Zayd.[32]

In his response sent to *al-Ahrām*, which, ignored by that newspaper, had to await publication until April 1993 when it appeared in *al-Qāhira* 125, Abū Zayd condemned

---

(Jan. 1993): 87-115.

[28] See, "Taqrīr al-Lajna allatī Shakkalahā Majlis al-Kulliyya," 95.

[29] See Abū Zayd's review "*al-Islām al-Siyāsī fī al-Maghrib* .. Naẓra Muḥāyida," *al-'Arabī* 406 (Sept. 1992): 198-202.

[30] Huwaydī, "Dars fī al-Tajarrud wa al-Inṣāf," *al-Ahrām* (Dec. 8, 1992); reprinted in *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 40.

[31] Huwaydī, "Qaḍiyya Mun'adima wa Muṣāraḥa Wājiba," *al-Ahrām* (Jan. 26, 1993); reprinted in

Huwaydī for bringing the story of his failed promotion to public, since, according to Abū Zayd, the decision of the Academic Tenure Committee was not final. The report awaited evaluation by, respectively, the Arabic Department Council, the Faculty of Arts Council and finally the University Council. Supplying the information regarding his application to the public, Abū Zayd feared, would influence the final decision,[33] especially since the accusation of Huwaydī, according to Abū Zayd, had raised some doubts as to his beliefs.

Huwaydī's understanding of Abū Zayd's theory of the historicity of the Qur'ān seems derived from his reading of the debates surrounding the latter's book *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, published in 1990.[34] This book has sparked fierce debate in Egypt. A professor at al-Azhar university,[35] Muḥammad Fāyid Haykal, for example, described the writer as "possessed" (*tamallakathu*) by materialist ideas from which he was not able to liberate himself.[36] This was, according to Haykal, clearly demonstrated in Abū Zayd's discussion of the dialectics between the text of the Qur'ān and culture, a dialectics in which the text takes on the shape of the culture (*yatashakkal bi-hā*), even as it shapes the culture (*yushakkiluhā*).[37] Another long review of the book was written by 'Abd al-Jalīl al-Shalabī and published over four days in the daily newspaper *al-Jumhūriyya*. Shalabī

---

*al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 47.

[32] Ibid., 48.

[33] Abū Zayd, "Min al-'Unf al-Mustatir ilā al-'Unf al-'Alānī," *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 49.

[34] *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsa fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. First published in Cairo by al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Amma, 1990. The edition used in this study is the fourth printing published in Beirut by al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1998.

[35] Malika Zeghal has indicated in her study of how al-Azhar has exercised its role since the 1980s to intervene and censure the intellectuals' productions. See Zeghal, *Gardiens de l'islam: les oulémas d'Al Azhar dans l'Égypte contemporaine* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1996), 313ff.

[36] Aḥmad Fāyid Haykal, "Dirāsat al-Naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī 'alā al-Ṭarīqa al-Yasāriyya: Naqd Kitāb *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*," *al-Azhar* 64, 3 (Sept. 1991): 271.

argued against the usage of many foreign terms, such as ideology and text in the work; for him the Arabic language does not need to borrow such expressions, just as Islamic thought can do without Russian or Western concepts. "Islamic life and Islamic thought," he continues, "developed, renewed and attempted to suit the currents of life and benefited from the civilization of the past, all of which were within an Islamic framework."[38]

Ironically, the work *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, which in its type-written draft submitted to an Academic Tenure Committee appointed to deliberate on Abū Zayd's promotion to the rank of assistant professor (*ustādh musāʿid*) in 1987, was accepted at the time.[39] Afterwards, however, some members of the Committee, such as Ramaḍān ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, accused the author of *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* of plagiarism and of being influenced by orientalists. There was also accusation of *takfīr* against the book, which Shāhīn claimed of defending before the Shaykh of al-Azhar.[40]

As for the appointment of Abū Zayd to the rank of full professor, the third council, i.e., the Council of Cairo University, headed by the president and vice-president of the university, namely Dr. Maʾmūn Salāma and Dr. Muḥammad al-Jawharī,

[37] Ibid., 275.

[38] ʿAbd al-Jalīl al-Shalabī. "'An *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*," *al-Jumhūriyya* 26, 27, 28, 29 May 1991; republished in *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 32-36. "*Anna fī lughatinā al-ʿarabiyya mā yughnīnā ʿan istiʿārat alfāẓ aw taʿbīrāt gharība ʿalayhā kamā anna fikranā al-Islāmī mā yughnī ʿan istiʿārat fikr rūsī aw gharbī ayyan kāna nawʿuh wa lā yaʿnī hādhā anna al-Islām yaḥūl dūna al-tajdīd aw yunkir al-tatawwur. Fa-al-ḥayāt al-Islāmiyya wa al-fikr al-Islāmī taṭawwar wa tajaddad wa ḥāwala an yulāʾim bayna nafsih wa bayna tayyārāt al-ḥayāt wa istafāda min ḥaḍārāt al-sābiqīn wa kull dhālik kāna fī iṭār islāmī.*"p. 36.

[39] See, Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī, "Fī Ṣamīm al-Masʾala," *al-Akhbār* (April 14, 1993), republished in *al-Qawl al-Mufīd*, 190-192, especially p. 191.

[40] See Abū Zayd, *al-Qawl al-Mufīd*, 46-56. Abū Zayd, however, does not believe in Shāhīn's claim, since if he was able to find so many *kufr* ideas in his *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī* and *al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī*, which discuss the religious discourse and al-Shāfiʿī's works, he should easily have found *kufr* ideas in his *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* which discusses the Qurʾān. See Abū Zayd, *al-Qawl al-*

respectively, had the final say in the matter. Yet in spite of the favorable reports from the other two members of the Academic Tenure Committee, as well as those of the Arabic Department and Faculty of Arts Councils, the University Council voted on March 18, 1993 to refuse Abū Zayd's promotion.[41]

As soon as the final decision was delivered, the news broke in the media. Some major Cairo newspapers, such as *al-Ahrām, al-Akhbār,* and *al-Ahālī* and the weekly *al-Muṣawwar* printed on the 31st of March 1993, the decision of the University Council together with comments from well-known intellectuals. Similarly, journals of *al-Qāhira, Adab wa Naqd* and *al-Mujtama' al-Madanī* brought out in April 1993 and May 1993 special issues devoted to the *qaḍiyyat Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd.*

In their comments, most intellectuals focused less on the question of whether Abū Zayd should or should not have been be promoted, and more on the decision of the University Council to approve the report of the Academic Tenure Committee, which was regarded by many as giving in to "intellectual-terrorism" (*al-irhāb al-fikrī*) which restricts the freedom of opinion and belief. Ghālī Shukrī, the editor of *al-Qāhira,* for example, wrote in an article entitled "Qaḍiyyat Naṣr Abū Zayd," published in *al-Ahrām* (March 31, 1993), that the decision of the committee resembled the legal judgments (*ḥaythiyyāt*) of *maḥākim al-taftīsh* (the courts of inquisition) in Medieval Europe which searched for the intentions and motivations of a scholar and labeled him/her as an

---

*Mufīd,* 46-51.
[41] The Center for Human Rights Legal Aid (CHRLA). "From Confiscation to Charges of Apostasy: The Implications of the Egyptian Court Decision Ordering the Divorce of Dr. Nasr Hamed Abu-Zeid from His Wife, Dr. Ibtihal Younis." *Dossier: Women Living Under Muslim Laws* 14/15 (1995): 34. This article, as well as other reports concerning "Abū Zayd Case" are available in the Center's homepage at http://www.chrla.org/zaydindx.htm

unbeliever (*takfīr*) when they were not satisfied.[42] In an article that appeared on the same day in *al-Akhbār*, its editor Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī questioned if there is a difference between those who level charges of heresy at thinkers or lecturers in the university and the extremists who use the weapon and accuse others of *kufr*.[43] Similarly, Farīda al-Naqqāsh, in her "al-Irhāb Yukaffir Ustādhan," published in *al-Ahālī* on the same day, compared the case of Abū Zayd with that of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn. She compared the reaction of Aḥmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid, president of the university in Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's day, in defending the latter against outside criticism, to that of Ma'mūn Salāma, the president of Cairo University in Abū Zayd's time, who approved a report generated from within the university, which accused one of its own members of *kufr*.[44]

Besides these and other comments available in the newspapers condemning the report, about fifty professors from the Faculty of Arts wrote a memo (*mudhakkira*) to the Ministry of Education and the President of the university, stating their objection to the decision of the University Council which, instead of defending the philosophy of the university and the right of its members to undertake *ijtihād*, approved a false accusation which was not supported by any real, material proof.[45] Similarly, the students of Cairo

---

[42] See Ghālī Shukrī, "Qaḍiyyat Naṣr Abū Zayd," *al-Ahrām* (March 31, 1993). This article has been collected in *al-Qawl al-Mufīd*, 169-173. See also Muḥammad Mūsā, "wa al-Dawla Ayḍan ...Tattahim al-Mufakkirīn bi-al-Ilḥād," *al-Yasār* 39 (May 1993): 28.

[43] Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī, "Mas'alat al-Duktūr Naṣr," *al-Akhbār* (March 31, 1993), republished in *al-Qawl al-Mufīd*, 164-166. See especially, pp. 165-166.

[44] Farīda al-Naqqāsh, "al-Irhāb Yukaffir Ustādhan," *al-Ahālī* (March 31, 1993), republished in *al-Qawl al-Mufīd*, 166-168. See especially, p. 168.

[45] The memo states: *Innanā na'tariḍ yā sayyidī 'alā mā intahā ilayhi majlis al-jāmi'a wa dūna munāqasha mawḍū'iyya li-taqrīr mashkūk fī miṣdāqiyyatih wa dāfi'ih, wa dūna an ya'khudh fī al-i'tibār taqrīr majālis 'ilmiyya jāmi'iyya lahā iḥtirāmuhā. Saddan li-dharā'i' ra'ā al-ba'ḍ annahā akthar ahammiyatan min al-ḥirṣ 'alā al-falsafa allatī qāmat al-jāmi'a 'alā asāsihā wa al-ḥifāẓ 'alā karāmat abnā'ihā wa ḥaqqihim fī al-ijtihād wa istijābatan li-ittihāmāt bāṭila lā yaqūm dalīl māddī ḥaqīqī 'alā ṣiḥḥatihā.* See Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī, "'Alā Hāmish al-Ḥiwār," *al-Akhbār* (April 7, 1993), republished in *al-Qawl al-Mufīd*, 176.

University collected 500 signatures on a petition from students in the Faculties of Economics, Political Science, Law, Arts, and Dār al-'Ulūm, and sent it to the President of Egypt himself, requesting that he re-examine the decision to refuse the promotion. They argued that this decision seriously endangered the practice of *ijtihād* and freedom of research.[46]

Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum of reaction, Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd, Jamāl Badawī and Tharwat Abāza defended the Academic Tenure Committee and its decision. Badawī, the editor of *al-Wafd* newspaper, replied to the comments made by Ghālī Shukrī in the same newspaper on April 8, 1993. Approving the concern shown by the university over the food for thought (*al-ghidhā' al-'aqlī*) served to its students, Badawī wrote that it is the right of the university to protect its students from ideas that are harmful to their religious beliefs and not to support any thought which defames religion under the cover of freedom of opinion.[47] Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd, formerly a Marxist but by then tending towards the Islamist camp, wrote an article entitled "Ma'a 'Abd al-Ṣabūr Shāhīn," published in *al-Ahrām* (April 10, 1993), in which he copied almost *verbatim* Shāhīn's report, approving it and calling those who supported Abū Zayd "the camp of old atheists" (*qabīlat al-shuyū'iyyīn al-qudāmā*).[48]

Tharwat Abāza, a deputy of the People's Council (*wakīl majlis al-sha'b*) and president of the Writers Union (*Ittiḥād al-kuttāb*) of Egypt, was one of those who

---

[46] See Qism al-Taḥqīqāt: Jarīdat al-Ahālī, "al-Irhāb Yuhaddid Akbar Qilā' al-Fikr fī Miṣr," *al-Ahālī* (April 07, 1993), republished in *al-Qawl al-Mufīd*, 112.

[47] See Badawī, "al-Irhāb fī al-Jāmi'a ... wa Qiṣṣat Abū Zayd," *al-Wafd* (April 08, 1993), republished in Shāhīn, *Qiṣṣat Abū Zayd wa Inḥiṣār al-'Almāniyya*, 93.

[48] See Maḥmūd, "Ma'a 'Abd al-Ṣabūr Shāhīn ...," *al-Ahrām* (April 10, 1993); republished in Shāhīn, *Qiṣṣat Abū Zayd wa Inḥiṣār al-'Almāniyya*, 87.

explicitly leveled the charge of heresy and apostasy against Abū Zayd.[49] He wrote in *al-Ahrām* that keeping Abū Zayd at the university would endanger religion (*ihdār li-al-dīn*) and the future of the students who learned from him.[50] In an interview with the editor of *ʿAqīdatī,* a newspaper whose main mission, as is reflected in its title, is to counter the secularists, Abāza described Abū Zayd not as a secularist but as an atheist and apostate; therefore, his dismissal (*ṭard*) from the university was compulsory.[51]

The decision of the University Council was surely welcome news to Shāhīn, author of the negative report in the Academic Tenure Committee, as well as the Friday preacher and imām (prayer leader) at his mosque ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ. In his Friday sermon for April 2, 1993, Shāhīn defended himself, his academic report and the Academic Tenure Committee against the smears of those who supported Abū Zayd. Responding to the allegation that the report employed poor language (*rakīk*), he told those present at the mosque that the members of the Academic Tenure Committee were experts (*asāṭīn*) in the Arabic language and Islamic thought, and therefore could not be criticized on that score. He furthermore declared that no more eloquent a writer existed than himself. Finally, in the same sermon he insisted that Abū Zayd would never be promoted to the rank of professor unless he submitted other academic records.[52]

In addition to the controversy surrounding the report and its content, there was also debate over the procedure involved in evaluating the promotion. Luṭfī al-Khūlī, Muslim socialist, for example, wanted to know not only why the members of the

---

[49] See Abāza, "Ḥadhār ..!," *al-Ahrām* (April 19, 1993); republished in Shāhīn, *Qiṣṣat Abū Zayd wa Inhiṣār al-ʿAlmāniyya,* 123-126, especially p. 125.

[50] Ghālī Shukrī, "Khiṭāb al-Takfīr al-Muʿāṣir," *al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī* (May 21, 1993).

[51] See Aḥmad Ṣubḥī Manṣūr, "Ṭāḥūnat al-Takfīr fī al-Ṣuḥuf al-Miṣriyya wa Ḥiwār maʿa Ṣadīq ʿAzīz," *al-Qāhira* (July 1993): 215.

Academic Tenure Committee accepted the one negative report instead of the two positive ones recommending promotion, but also the rationale of the members of the University Council in accepting the report of Shāhīn and neglecting the reports of the Department and of the Faculty of Arts Councils.[53]

Dr. Muḥammad Biltājī Ḥasan, at the time the Dean of the Dār al-'Ulūm Faculty and a member of the Cairo University Council, responded that the reports submitted by the Arabic Department and the Faculty of Arts Councils were not commensurate (*lā yukāfi'āni*) with the report of the Standing Committee of Academic Promotion and Tenure, since the latter was comprised of great scholars from all Egyptian universities.[54] As such, he argued, when a contradiction arises between the reports of Councils and that of the Academic Tenure Committee, the resolution (*qarār*) is based on the Committee's report, unless the Councils can uncover some contradiction in the Academic report itself.[55] Shāhīn also argued that the reports of the Department and Faculty Councils do not have the prerogative to evaluate the applicant's academic works.[56] The responsibility for evaluating these works, according to him, lies in the hands of the Academic Tenure Committee and the University Council.

Others, however, held a different view of the procedure. Ḥāzim Hāshim, *al-Wafd*'s journalist, argued that the usual procedure in the event of differences between the reports submitted by academic committee and departmental or faculty councils, is

---

[52] Mūsā, "wa al-Dawla Ayḍan ...Tattahim al-Mufakkirīn bi al-Ilḥād," 29.

[53] Luṭfī al-Khūlī, "Kitāb Sayyidinā aw Jāmi'at al-Qāhira," *al-Ahrām* (April 07, 1994); republished in Abū Zayd, *al-Qawl al-Mufīd,* 228-239. See especially p. 236.

[54] See "Taqrīr Dr. Muḥammad al-Biltājī fī "Qaḍiyyat" Abū Zayd Yakshif Akhṭā' Fiqhiyya wa Tārīkhiyya Khaṭira," in *al-Sha'b* (April 16, 1993); republished in Shāhīn, *Qiṣṣat Abū Zayd wa Inḥisār al-'Almāniyya,* 37. However, the content of Biltājī's report, was missing in Shāhīn's book.

that the University Council accepts the opinion of the Councils of the Department and the Faculty, as was the case with three other candidates for promotion within the Faculty of Arts of Cairo University. These candidates -- Muḥammad 'Uthmān, Aḥmad Ḥamdī Ibrāhīm, 'Afāf al-Manūfī -- were promoted to the rank of professor in spite of reports submitted by the Academic Tenure Committee rejecting their applications.[57]

In response to Shāhīn's claim that the reports of the Departmental Council and the Faculty Council had no bearing on the evaluation of Abū Zayd's academic record, al-Ghīṭānī argued that the opinions of the Academic Tenure Committee, the Departmental Council and Faculty Council, are all *istishārī* (consultative). The final decision on promotion, according to him, is the Council of University.[58]

The research department of the newspaper *al-Ahālī* discovered further data on the procedure used in the case of Abū Zayd. They found that his promotion, instead of being discussed in the regular periodic meeting (*al-jalsa al-dawriyya al-'ādiyya*) of the University Council leading up to the 31st of March 1993, was rather examined in an unscheduled emergency session (*jalsa ṭāri'a istithnā'iyya*) on March 18, 1993, when the main item on the agenda was the intention of the government of Sudan to take over the branch of Cairo University situated in Khartoum. The case of Abū Zayd was added to the agenda at the last minute. Because of this sudden change, some members of the University Council insisted on having more time to read the reports, but the President of

---

[55] Ibid.

[56] See his interview with al-Miḥlāwī in *al-Akhbār* (April 7, 1993).

[57] Ḥāzim Hāshim, "al-Maghḍūb 'Alayhim fī al-Jāmi'a," *al-Wafd* (April 6, 1993); republished in *al-Qawl al-Mufīd*, 99-102, especially p.100. Compare this with Abū Zayd's understanding of the procedure: If the report of the Faculty Council agrees with that of the Department Council, the University Council has to take the report of the Department even if it contradicts the Academic report. See *al-Ahrām* (June 19, 1995).

the University refused to read or discuss the reports.[59]

Abū Zayd himself has presented his own account of the case. In his interview with Annette Heilmann, Abū Zayd offered the opinion that the decision to accept the one negative evaluation instead of the other positive reports was largely motivated by the Council's fear of defending a person who had been accused of heresy. Another factor working against him, claimed Abū Zayd, was that the President of Cairo University himself, Dr. Ma'mūn Salāma, is believed to be an 'Islamist' sympathizer.[60] In his book *al-Qawl al-Mufīd fī Qadiyyat Abū Zayd,* a collection of articles related to the case, Abū Zayd expands on this account. In the month of February 1993, one month before the University Council's decision, Abū Zayd apparently had a meeting with the president of the university and his vice-president. At this meeting, these latter expressed their fear of the consequences for Abū Zayd if the university promoted him to the rank of full professor. In the words of the vice-president, Muḥammad al-Jawharī, "What advantage is it to you if you are promoted, and then one of them kills you...?"[61]

Similarly, on March 8, 1993, ten days before the final decision, Dr. Ḥasan Ḥanafī, who was appointed as intermediary (*wasīṭ*) between the president of the university and Abū Zayd, offered Abū Zayd three options to resolve the case. First, he could submit a written complaint (*shakwā*) to the president of the university regarding the accusation of heresy in the academic report, and ask him to resolve the problem through *taḥqīq* (verification). Second, given the refusal by Dār al-'Ulūm and its

---

[58] al-Ghīṭānī, "'Alā Hāmish al-Ḥiwār," *al-Akhbār* (April 7, 1993), republished in *al-Qawl al-Mufīd,* 175-178, especially p. 177.

[59] Qism al-Taḥqīqāt: Jarīdat al-Ahālī, "al-Irhāb Yuhaddid Akbar Qilā' al-Fikr fī Miṣr," *al-Ahālī* (April 07, 1993), republished in *al-Qawl al-Mufīd,* 107-112, especially, p. 108.

[60] See Heilmann, "Der politische und religiöse Diskurs in Ägypten," 89.

professors to countenance the promotion, he could accept "the refusal of promotion" (*'adam al-tarqiya*) with a promise from the president and the people in Dār al-'Ulūm that they would promote him on his second try. The third option was *al-rafḍ wa al-muqāwama* (refusal of the promotion and Abū Zayd's continued resistance to this refusal), and thus leaving the matter up to the public. If this last option was chosen, Abū Zayd had to understand its consequences.[62]

Abū Zayd rejected the first option, on the grounds that the Committee had accused him of heresy and that the "verification process" was simply another form of *mahākim al-taftīsh*, which he refused to countenance. As for the second option, Abū Zayd questioned the guaranty (*ḍamān*) of those promising to promote him in the second attempt. Was it absolutely guaranteed that he would be promoted? Abū Zayd told Ḥanafi that he could not trust the promises of the people of Dār al-'Ulūm, unless the president of the university were willing to write and sign an official letter stating his promise and the expected date of the promotion.[63] He further continued that he did not care what decision the university administration (*idārat al-jāmi'a*) came to since, he argued, the two reports of the Department and Faculty Councils had authoritatively promoted him. Since Abū Zayd did not choose the first or the second option, he was left with the third option: to leave the case to the public. As a result, the case was discussed publicly both in the media and in mosques.

---

[61] See Abū Zayd, *al-Qawl al-Mufīd,* 23-24.
[62] Ibid., 38-40. See also Khālid Sālim, "Wajhan li-Wajhin: Dr. Nasr Abū Zayd wa Dr. Khālid Sālim: 'al-Dirāsa al-Manhajiyya 'Allamatnī Iḥtirām al-Dhāt fī Aṣ'ab al-Ẓurūf'," in *al-'Arabī* 450 (May 1996): 70 which records the president's promise: *da' al-amr yamurr hādhihi al-marra li-'alla nastathīr mashā'ir asātidhat kulliyyat Dār al-'Ulūm, wa al-Islāmiyyūn fī al-jāmi'a yuhaddidūn bi-ish'ālihā nāran, wa laka minnī wa'd sharaf bi-tarqiyatika ba'da al-ṣayf.*
[63] Ibid., 40.

This chain of events suggests that the University Council decided to refuse the promotion of Abū Zayd due to the insistence of the elite of Dār al-'Ulūm and the fear of the consequences for Abū Zayd. But, as we shall see later, the refusal of the University to promote Abū Zayd, was tantamount to an agreement with the report, and hence constituted on an accusation of apostasy against Abū Zayd.

The opposition of Dār al-'Ulūm to the Arabic Department historically might be dated back to the time of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn. The Faculty of Dār al-'Ulūm used to criticize and charge professors of the Faculty of Arts of unbelief.[64] Ahyaf Sinno also sees that "the case of Abū Zayd" uncovers the hidden dispute (*al-khilāf al-kāmin*) between the Arabic Department and Dār al-'Ulūm at Cairo University.[65] Most of the reports used by the Islamist lawyers in the lawsuit against Abū Zayd, as will be seen below, were prepared by Dār al-'Ulūm professors.

Besides this opposition, in a broader context the affair indicates a battle between conservatives and liberalists. This conflict, according to Ami Ayalon, signifies "the historic struggle over Egypt's cultural identity."[66] The two traditions have clashed on numerous occasions, usually in intellectual debate,[67] but sometimes violently. Faraj Fūda, liberal thinker who criticized Islamic extremism, was assassinated in June 1992. In the trial of Fūda's assassin, Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, an Islamist thinker who in January 1992 sat against Fūda in a public debate, argued before the court that a

---

[64] Abū Zayd, *al-Qawl al-Mufīd*, 25.

[65] Sinno, "Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd fī Ba'ḍ Āthārih," *al-Mashriq* (Jan-June, 1997): 129.

[66] Ami Ayalon, *Egypt's Quest for Cultural Orientation* (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1999), 9.

[67] See, for example, Nancy E. Gallagher. "Islam v. Secularism in Cairo: An Account of the Dar al-Hikma Debate," *Middle Eastern Studies* 25, 2 (1989): 208-215; Bassam SA Haddad, "Islamic Liberals and Secularism," *The Arab Studies Journal* (Fall 1993): 26-31.

secularist must be punished by death, because he/she represented a danger to society.[68]

It is against this background that we have to read the Abū Zayd affair. His application

for promotion to the rank of professor was submitted one month before the murder of

Fūda and his case was brought to the court at almost the same time when Muḥammad

al-Ghazālī issued his *fatwā* in the trial of Fūda.

## 2. The Legal Case Against Abū Zayd

The case of Abū Zayd did not end with the rejection of the promotion. Some

Islamists in fact brought a legal action against him in the Giza Court of First Instance

(*Maḥkamat al-Jīza al-Ibtidā'iyya*) on May 17, 1993. The plaintiffs, who included

Muḥammad Ṣamīda 'Abd al-Ṣamad, 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 'Abd al-Salām al-Shāhid, Aḥmad

'Abd al-Fattāḥ Aḥmad, Hishām Muṣṭafā Ḥamza, Usāma al-Sayyid, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib

Muḥammad Aḥmad Ḥasan, and al-Mursī al-Mursī al-Mahdī, demanded the dissolution

of Abū Zayd's marriage to Ibtihāl Yūnis, claiming that the marriage of an apostate

(which they accused him of being), to a Muslim woman was void.[69] They based their

---

[68] Fauzi Najjar, "The Debate on Islam and Secularism in Egypt," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 18, 2 (1996): 1-21. On Fūda's ideas see Bassam SA Haddad, "The Assassination of Fuda," *The Arab Studies Journal* (Spring 1993): 16-19; Meir Hatina, "On the Margins of Consensus: The Call to Separate Religion and State in Modern Egypt," *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, 1 (Jan. 2000): 35-67, especially 55ff. On al-Ghazālī's testimony and its reactions, see Aḥmad al-Siyūfī, *Muḥākamat al-Murtaddīn* (Cairo: s.n., 1994).

[69] For a discussion of the ruling of the court, see Baudouin Dupret, "A propos de l'affaire Abū Zayd, universitaire poursuivi pour apostasie," *Monde arabe, Maghreb-Machrek* 151 (January-March 1996): 18-22; idem and Jean-Noël Ferrié, "Participer au pouvoir, c'est édicter la norme: sur l'affaire Abū Zayd (Égypte, 1992-1996)," *Revue française de science politique* 47, 6 (1997): 762-765; idem and Jean-Noël Ferrié, "For intérieur et ordre public, ou comment la problématique de l'Aufklärung peut permettre de décrire un débat égyptien," in *Droits et sociétés dans le monde arabe*, eds. Gilles Boëtsch, Baudouin Dupret et Jean-Noël Ferrié (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires d'Aix-Marseille, 1997), 193-215; Kilian Bälz, "Eheauflösung aufgrund von Apostasie durch Popularklage: der Fall Abū Zayd," *Praxis des Internationalen Privat- und Verfahrensrechts* (1996): 353-356; idem, "Submitting Faith to Judicial Scrutiny

accusation on the reports of Muḥammad Biltājī Ḥasan, dean of the Dār al-‘Ulūm faculty, Ismā‘īl Sālim ‘Abd al-‘Āl, assistant professor of comparative law in the same faculty, and Muṣṭafā Shak‘a, who studied Abū Zayd's works *al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī* and *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, respectively.

It would be worthwhile to present the contents of these reports in brief. In his report, Biltājī explained that he had detected two faults in Abū Zayd's *al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī*: bitter hostility (*‘adāwa shadīda*) towards the Qur'ān and *Sunna*, and a complex ignorance (*jahāla mutarākiba*) of the subject of Islamic law.[70] Biltājī observed Abū Zayd's "hostile attitude" to the Qur'ān in the latter's call for liberation from it which he took to be a sign of disbelief in the scriptural canon and its laws and regulations. Furthermore, Abū Zayd's accusation that the Companions and Imām al-Shāfi‘ī displayed fanaticism for the Quraysh dialect in the canonization of the Qur'ān was regarded by Biltājī as a debasement (*taḥqīr*) and attack (*hujūm*) against the Companions and the great Imām. On the other hand, Abū Zayd's argument that the classification of *ḥadīth* into *mutawātir, mashhūr* and *āḥād* was developed by al-Shāfi‘ī, continued Biltājī, was a sign of his ignorance of the subject.

Muṣṭafā Shak‘a, who was asked by the Shaykh of al-Azhar to review Abū Zayd's *al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī* and *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, wrote that from the first page of the former book, the author was dedicated (*mukarras*) to attacking every one of the sacred aspects of Islam (*al-muqaddasāt al-Islāmiyya*), to spreading prejudice against them (*taḥāmul ‘alayhā*) and to devaluing them in such a strong way as to resemble insanity (*al-nayl*

---

through the Family Trial: The "Abū Zayd Case"," *Die Welt des Islams* 37, 2 (1997): 135-55; and George N. Sfeir, "Basic Freedoms in a Fractured Legal Culture: Egypt and the Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd," *Middle East Journal* 52, 3 (1998): 402-14.

*minhā bi-ṭarīqa ḥādda tushbih al-junūn).* "This book," he continued, "is regarded as one

of the most fiercely biased books against Islam, the Qur'ān and *Sunna (yu'addu aḥadan*

*min ashadd al-kutub ḥamlatan 'alā al-Islām wa al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunna).*[71] As for the

second book, Shak'a commented that *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* proposes deviant views liable to

corrupt the beliefs of its readers and any potential students of Cairo University who

might want to study the book. These deviant views, according to Shak'a, include the

idea that the Prophet Muḥammad participated in producing *(intāj)* the Qur'ān, that

Islam does not have a fixed objective meaning *(mafhūm mawḍū'ī muḥaddad)*, that Islam

is an Arab religion *(dīn 'arabī)* and that the Qur'ānic sciences are a regressive heritage

*(turāth raj'ī)*, all leading to the decadence of Islam.[72] He also regarded Abū Zayd as

having falsely submitted the structure of the Qur'ān to modern secular method, while

arguing at the same time that the Qur'ān has no need of lending itself to any analytical

method.[73]

Ismā'īl Sālim, on the other hand, wrote a book entitled *Naqd Maṭā'in Naṣr Abū*

*Zayd fī al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunna wa al-Ṣaḥāba wa A'immat al-Muslimīn,*[74] in which he

discussed and refuted the views of Abū Zayd. Sālim classified his disapproval with Abū

Zayd's works into two aspects: form *(shakl)* and content *(mawḍū')*. The first aspect

includes his criticism of Abū Zayd for not having started his books with *basmala* and

*ḥamdala*, while arguing that anything which does not begin with a *ḥamdala* is effectively

---

[70] See "Taqrīr Dr. Muḥammad al-Biltājī fī "Qaḍiyyat" Abū Zayd," *al-Sha'b* (April 16, 1993).
[71] Shak'a, "Taqrīr 'an Kitāb: *al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī wa Ta'sīs al-Idiyūlūjiyya al-Wasaṭiyya,*" in *Qiṣṣat "Abū Zayd" wa Inḥisār al-'Almāniyya*, 60.
[72] Shak'a, "Taqrīr 'an Kitāb: *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsa fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān,*" in *Qiṣṣat Abū Zayd wa Inḥisār al-'Almāniyya*, 81.
[73] Ibid., 80.
[74] Cairo: al-Mukhtār al-Islāmī, 1993.

mute (*aqṭaʿ*). Similarly, he criticized Abū Zayd who, when mentioning the name of Muḥammad, did not follow it with the eulogy of *ṣallā 'llāhu ʿalayhi wa sallam* and very seldom called him a prophet (*al-nabī*) or a messenger (*rasūl*). He also found that Abū Zayd did not use the usual predicate *karīm* (noble) or *ʿaẓīm* (great) when mentioning the Qurʾān[75]

In terms of content, Sālim described the various views of Abū Zayd under such headings as: attacks against the Qurʾān;[76] attacks against the *Sunna*;[77] attacks against the Companions;[78] attacks against the *aʾimmat al-muslimīn*;[79] and an accumulation of mistakes (*akhṭāʾ mutarākima wa mutarākiba*).[80] In addition to the criticisms raised by Biltājī and Shakʿa, Sālim claimed that Abū Zayd sees the Qurʾān as an inappropriate tool for solving present and future problems, and as being incompatible with reason, which is why he calls upon Muslims not to seek legal judgment in the Qurʾān (*ʿadam al-iḥtikām ilā kitāb Allāh*). His attacks on *Sunna* include, among others, his view that the *Sunna* is not revelation (*waḥy*) but rather human interpretation; and his doubts regarding the *mutawātir ḥadīth*.

It should be noted that in his book Sālim demanded a ban on the distribution and teaching of Abū Zayd's works, his suspension from the teaching profession, and the application to Abū Zayd and others who attack Islamic beliefs of the legal punishment for apostasy (*ḥadd al-ridda*).[81]

---

[75] Ibid., 15-16.
[76] Ibid., 20-42.
[77] Ibid., 43-49.
[78] Ibid., 50-54.
[79] Ibid., 54-57.
[80] Ibid., 57-60.
[81] Ibid., 63. See also p. 13.

Based on this proposal and on the unfavorable reports, the plaintiffs brought Abū

Zayd to court. However, the court dismissed the action on January 28, 1994 on the

grounds that the plaintiffs were a third party having no direct personal interest in the

matter, since, according to the judge of the Giza Court of First Instance Muḥammad

'Awaḍ Allāh and his fellow jurists, Muḥammad Junaydī and Maḥmūd Ṣāliḥ, "the

constitution does not accept any claim or defence from those who do not have *maṣlaḥa*

*qā'ima* (real interest) decreed by the constitution."[82] And this interest is defined as the

protection of the right (*ḥaqq)* of the claimant or the defendant.

The plaintiffs were of course dissatisfied with the ruling of the First Instance

Court and appealed to a higher court, the Court of Appeals. This time, the court

accepted the complaint based on *al-ḥisba,* a doctrine which insists that it is the duty of

every Muslim to file a case against anyone breaking Islamic laws.[83] According to

Ahmad Seif al-Islam, one of Abū Zayd's defenders, al-Ṣamīda's allegation against Abū

Zayd was not accepted by the lower court, since it was viewed from the civil code where

the plaintiff has no right to file a case since he has no personal interest, whereas the

Court of Appeals viewed the case from the perspective of Personal Status Law, which

---

[82] See, *Adab wa Naqd,* "Haythiyyāt al-Ḥukm fī Qaḍiyyat Naṣr Abū Zayd: Lā Nufattish fī Ḍamā'ir al-'Ibād," *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 104 (April 1994): 79-86, especially, p. 85. The judgment of the First Instance Court has been translated by B. Dupret into French in his "Jurisprudence Abū Zayd," *Égypte/Monde arabe* 34 (1998):169-174. See also the website of the Legal Research and Resource Center for Human Rights (LRRC), Cairo, Egypt for excerpts from the verdict at http://www.geocities.com/~lrrc/Zaid/appeals.htm

[83] On *ḥisba,* see Cl. Cahen/M. Talbi, "Ḥisba," *EI*² 3: 485-489. Cf. R.P. Buckley, "The *Muḥtasib,"* *Arabica* 39 (March 1992): 59-117. See also the report prepared by Ahmad Seif al-Islam Hamad, "Hisba: Is Egypt a Civil or Religious State?" published by CHRLA January 1996 at http://www.chrla.org/reports/hisba/hisbint.htm. See furthermore Jörn Thielmann, "La jurisprudence égyptienne sur la requête en *hisba,"* *Égypte/Monde arabe* 34 (1998): 81-97.

accepted the allegation based on the *hisba*, whereby al-Ṣamīda could file suit on the basis of his identity as a Muslim who sees the rights of God violated.[84]

Consequently, on June 14, 1995, the Court of Appeals of Cairo (*Maḥkamat Istiʾnāf al-Qāhira*), presided over by judge Fārūq ʿAbd al-ʿAlīm Mursī and its members Nūr al-Dīn Yūsuf and Muḥammad ʿIzzat al-Shādhilī, reversed the ruling of the Court of First Instance and found Abū Zayd an apostate, ordering in consequence of this that he should be separated from his wife. This ruling was based on the same reports submitted to the Court of First Instance which maintained that Abū Zayd's writings express the views of an apostate. Some of the views which were seen as heretical by the court were:

1.      his rejection of the existence of some creatures mentioned in the Qurʾān, such as *al-ʿarsh*, angels, *jinn*, satans, etc.

2.      his ridicule (*sakhara*) of some verses of the Qurʾān, such as his description of the *shayāṭīn* as a hindering force (*quwwa muʿawwiqa*), with *siḥr* as their instrument

3.      his lying about the Qurʾān, such as his claim that Paradise (*janna*) and Hellfire (*nār*) are no more than *usṭūra* (myth);

4.      his debasement of the Qurʾān by considering it a human text (*naṣṣ insānī*) reflecting a human understanding (*fahm basharī*) of the revelation

5.      his rejection of the universality of the message of the Prophet to all humans

6.      his insistence that the laws of God stipulated in the Qurʾān need not be observed, since these, he argues, were conditioned by their historical context

7.      his rejection of the Qurʾān's insistence on the *ḥujjiyyat* of the *Sunna* and on the fact that it is part of the revelation.[85]

---

[84] See Karim el-Gawhary, "Shariʿa or Civil Code? Egypt's Parallel Legal Systems: an Interview with Ahmad Sayf al-Islam," *Middle East Report* (November-December 1995): 25-27, especially p. 26.

[85] See, *Adab wa Naqd*, "Ḥaythiyyāt Tafrīq Naṣr wa Ibtihāl: Ḥukm al-Ridda ... wa al-Ṭaʿn ʿalā

These views, in the judgment of the court, not only made him an apostate, definable as "one who turns away from Islam to unbelief," but also contradicted the Egyptian constitution which declares that Islam is the official religion of the country.

The ruling of the Court of Appeals was understandably welcomed by the Islamists. Yūsuf al-Badrī, an Islamist activist, demanded as a result that Cairo University terminate (*faṣl*) Abū Zayd's employment at the university since, he argued, it is not appropriate for an apostate to teach either Muslim or Christian students. He also petitioned to have Abū Zayd's works banned and burned.[86] The front line of al-Azhar scholars (*jabhat 'ulamā' al-Azhar*) also supported the ruling and stated that the decision "returns the truth to its proper place and revives the dream in the heart of every Muslim of the approaching application of Islamic *sharī'a*" (*yu'īd al-ḥaqq ilā niṣābih wa yuḥyī al-āmāl fī ṣudūr kull al-muslimīn bi-qurb taṭbīq al-sharī'a al-Islāmiyya*).[87] They further demanded that the university comply with the ruling and remove Abū Zayd from his teaching post at the university. Finally, since there was a *fatwā* legitimizing the assassination of Abū Zayd issued by the leader of the *al-Jihād* Organization, a certain Ayman al-Zawāhirī who resided in Switzerland,[88] the front line of al-Azhar scholars

---

al-Ḥukm," *Adab wa Naqd* 120 (August 1995): 11-28, especially p. 26. See also the translation of the ruling in Dupret, "Jurisprudence Abū Zayd," 175-193.

[86] *al-Ḥayāt* (June 17, 1995), 7

[87] See *al-Aḥrār* (June 19, 1995), "Jabhat 'Ulamā' al-Azhar Tushīd bi-Ḥukm al-Tafrīq ...wa Abū Zayd Yu'akkid Annahu Wahaba Ḥayātahu li-al-Islām!; and *al-Ḥayāt* (June 20, 1995), "Jabhat 'Ulamā' al-Azhar Tua'yyid Ḥukm al-Tafrīq bayna Abū Zayd wa Zawjatih." According to Zeghal, the 'Ulamā''s front was born for the first time in 1946 among conservative Azharite 'ulamā' to fight against secularism and secularist thinkers such as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Aḥmad Muḥammad Khalaf Allāh. See Malika Zeghal, "Religion and Politics in Egypt: The Ulema of al-Azhar, Radical Islam and the State (1952-94)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999): 390.

[88] See *al-Ḥayāt* (June 22, 1995). According to Muḥammad Ṣalāḥ, compared to *al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyya* which has assassinated Faraj Fūda and attempted to assassinate Najīb Maḥfūẓ, the *Jihād* organization has not assassinated thinkers or writers because of their religious beliefs. See

urged Abū Zayd to repent in order to avoid being killed (*li-kay ya'sim damah*).

Shāhīn too was quick to comment on the decision of the court. In his Friday sermon on June 16, 1995, two days after the ruling, he condemned Abū Zayd, orientalists and Marxists who, according to the preacher, controlled the media and insulted the Academic Tenure Committee, including the University Council. He observed, that these orientalists supported Abū Zayd and regarded the latter as the giant (*'imlāq*) and the thinker of the 20th century, greater than Imām al-Ghazālī and al-Shāfi'ī. Meanwhile, for Shāhīn, Abū Zayd was a victim (*dahiyya*) of the Marxists and therefore, was a failed, ruined individual (*rajul fāshil sāqit*).[89] He further asserted that the decision of the court was perfectly constitutional, since Islamic *sharī'a* is one of the source of the constitution and Islam the religion of the state.

It should be noted that on the 31st of May 1995 --two weeks before the ruling on the validity of Abū Zayd's marriage -- the Cairo University Council decided to promote Abū Zayd to full professorship after his second application for promotion was reviewed by the new Academic Tenure and Promotion Committee.[90] The evaluation read:

---

Salāḥ, "Rudūd Fi'l Wāsi'a 'alā Ihdār Jamā'at al-Jihād Dam Abū Zayd," *al-Ḥayāt* (June 23, 1995). On the comparison between radical Islamist groups, see Denis J. Sullivan and Sana Abed-Kotob, *Islam in Contemporary Egypt: Civil Society vs. the State* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), 77-86. See also David Zeidan, "Radical Islam in Egypt: A Comparison of Two Groups," *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA) Journal* 3, 3 (September 1999): 1-10.

[89] See, *al-Ahāli* June 21, 1995, "Min Fawq Minbar Masjid 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ: 'Abd al-Ṣabūr Shāhīn Yuṭliq Saylan min al-Shatā'im wa al-Tahdīdāt."

[90] See, "Taqrīr Jāmi'at al-Qāhira bi-Tarqiyat Abū Zayd li-Darajat Ustādh," *al-Jumhūriyya* (June 22, 1995). This time, Abū Zayd submitted in February 1995 nine works, i.e.:
- "al-Qur'ān: al-'Ālam bi-Waṣfih 'Alāma";
- *al-Tafkīr fī Zaman al-Takfīr Ḍidd al-Jahl wa al-Zayf wa al-Khurāfa;*
- "al-Ru'yā fī al-Naṣṣ al-Sardī al-'Arabī: Ḥāfiẓ Sardī am Wiḥda Dalāliyya";
- "Markabat I'jāz: Man Yaqūduhā? Ilā Ayna?";
- "al-Ta'wīl fī Kitāb al-Sībawayh";
- "al-Lugha al-Dīniyya wa al-Baḥth 'an Alsuniyya Jadīda";

After reviewing nine works of Dr. Abu Zayd -- each work with keenness -- and after examining all of them, we have reached the following conclusion: his prodigious academic efforts demonstrate that he is a researcher well-rooted in his academic field, well-read in our Islamic intellectual traditions, and with a knowledge of all its many branches -- Islamic principles, theology, jurisprudence, Sufism, Quranic studies, rhetoric and linguistics. He has not rested on the laurels of his in-depth knowledge of this field, but has taken a forthright, critical position. He does not attempt to make a critique until he has mastered the issues before him, investigating them by way of both traditional and modern methodologies. In sum, he is a free thinker, aspiring only to the truth. If there is something urgent about his style, it seems to derive from the urgency of the crisis which the contemporary Arab-Islamic World is witnessing and the necessity to identify honestly the ills of this world in order that an effective cure be found. Academic research should not be isolated from social problems, but should be allowed to participate in current debates and to suggest solutions to current dilemmas by allowing researchers to investigate and interpret as far as possible.[91]

This decision of the Academic Tenure Committee was also commented upon by Shāhīn in his previous Friday sermon. He tried to prove to the newly-established Academic Tenure Committee, of which he was not a member, that the ruling of the court left no doubt that Abū Zayd was an apostate and that he should not be promoted to the rank of professor.

Not all Islamists, however, were in agreement with the ruling on Abū Zayd's apostasy. Some Islamist thinkers, like Muḥammad 'Amāra and Muḥammad Salīm al-'Awwā, did not concur with the ruling. They argued that the case of Abū Zayd was not one of legality but one of thought (*qaḍiyya fikriyya*), whose domain was the entire

---

- *al-Mar'a fī Khiṭāb al-Azma;*
- "Mashrū' al-Nahḍa bayna al-Tawfīq wa al-Talfīq";
- "'Adasat al-Naqd al-Ḥadāthī".
The Academic Tenure Committee includes Dr. Maḥmūd Makkī, Dr. Muṣṭafā al-Ṣāwī of Alexandria University, Dr. Muṣṭafā Mandūr of Zaqāzīq. See *al-Ahrām* (June 19, 1995).
[91] Ibid., see also CHRLA, "From Confiscation to Charges of Apostasy," *Dossier* 14/15 (1995): 35.

discourse of thought *(al-ḥiwār al-fikrī)*.[92] 'Amāra also tended to be in agreement with the opinion of Muḥammad 'Abduh who says that "if a person expresses an opinion which contains apostasy in one hundred aspects and yet contains true belief in one aspect, it (the opinion) has to be taken to indicate the true belief *(annahu idhā ṣadara 'an insān ra'y yaḥtamil al-kufr bi-mi'at wajh wa yaḥtamil al-īmān bi-wajh wāḥid yajib ḥamluh ilā al-īmān)*.

Al-'Awwā, furthermore, argued that someone who has declared the *shahāda*, a testimony that there is no god but Allāh and Muḥammad is His messenger, is a Muslim, and no one has the right to accuse him of being an apostate. He further said that the primary condition for any ruling on apostasy is that *al-istitāba*, or a hearing designed to check or discuss the opinions of the accused, be held beforehand. In this case, al-'Awwā observed that Abū Zayd had never been required to defend himself before the court.[93]

These arguments of some Islamists angered al-Badrī. In his Friday sermon at al-Jam'iyya al-Shar'iyya mosque in the city of Nibrūh, taking as his subject of "I'rif 'Aduwwak" (Know Your Enemy), al-Badrī launched an attack against 'Amāra, al-'Awwā and the daily newspaper *al-Sha'b* which had published the article of al-'Awwā on the subject. He declared:

> If the attack against us and the defense for Naṣr come from the *Ahālī* newspaper, we will not pay attention, and if [the attack comes] from other newspapers we will say to them "yes" since they are Marxists.

---

[92] See, *al-Aḥrār* (June 17, 1995), "Qaḍiyyat Naṣr Abū Zayd Ṭaraḥat al-Su'āl: Hal Yajūz Takfīr Muslim Naṭaqa bi-al-Shahādatayn?!. See also, Akram al-Qaṣṣāṣ, "Aḥkām al-Naqd: al-'Aqīda Mas'ala Nafsiyya Lā Yajūz Baḥthuhā Ba'īdan 'an al-Ẓāhir," *al-'Arabī* (June 19, 1993). See below for more discussion on 'Amāra's argument. See also al-'Awwā, *al-Ḥaqq fī al-Ta'bīr* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1998), 11; and his article in *al-Sha'b* (July 14, 1995). This article has been translated into French by B. Dupret in "Un arrêt devenu une 'affaire'," *Égypte/Monde arabe* 29 (1997): 155-173.

[93] Ibid.

However, [the attack and the defense come from] the newspaper *al-Sha'b* which claims to be the defender of Islam and [from] those writers who consider themselves as the symbols of Islamic movement, [but] then defend the apostate heretic Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd who insults God and claims that *al-'arsh*, Paradise, Hell and Lawḥ Maḥfūẓ are myths and superstitions.

(*law kāna al-hujūm 'alaynā wa al-difā' 'an Naṣr ya'tī min jarīdat al-Ahālī lamā ihtamamnā wa law kāna min jarīda ukhrā la-qulnā la-hum na'am fa-hum shuyū'iyyūn wa lākin jarīdat al-Sha'b allatī taddā'ī al-difā' 'an al-Islām wa ulā'ika al-kuttāb alladhīna ya'tabirūna anfusahum rumūz al-tayyār al-Islāmī wa yudāfi'ūna ba'da dhālika kullih 'an al-mulḥid al-kāfir Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd alladhī yasubb Allāh wa yadda'ī anna al-'arsh wa al-janna wa al-nār wa al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ kullahā asāṭīr wa khurāfāt).* [94]

He concluded his sermon by pronouncing that Islam does not need people like al-'Awwā and 'Amāra to defend it.

From the modernist side, the response to the ruling was almost unanimous. The Counselor (*al-mustashār*) Muḥammad Sa'īd al-'Ashmāwī insisted that Egyptian law clearly does not accept any allegation based on *ḥisba* before any of its courts. He argued that the lawsuit on *ḥisba* was legitimate only in the Sharī'a courts (*lā'iḥat al-maḥākim al-shar'iyya*). But, since 1955, with the unification of the courts and the abolition of the Sharī'a court, the legal proceeding of *ḥisba* had been abolished, so that all cases had thenceforth to be based on direct interest. [95] In his response to the query of many Western journalists as to whether the Egyptian constitution allowed for charges of

---

[94] *al-Ahālī* (June 26, 1995), "Yūsuf al-Badrī fī Khuṭbat al-Jumu'a: Zawāj Ibtihāl min Naṣr Bāṭil wa al-Mudāfi'ūna 'anhum Mithla: al-'Awwā wa 'Amāra Shuyū'iyyūn wa Malāḥida."

[95] *al-Ahrām* (June 19, 1995). See also *al-Ahālī* (June 21, 1995), "Ihtimām 'Alamī bi-Ḥukm al-Isti'nāf: 16 Idhā'a wa Ṣaḥīfa Tas'al al-'Ashmāwī: Mā Hādhā?"; al-'Ashmāwī, "al-Ḥisba," *al-'Arabī* 457 (Dec. 1996): 30. See also al-'Ashmāwī's comment of the court's ruling in Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban (ed.), *Against Islamic Extremism: The Writings of Muhammad Sa'id al-'Ashmawy* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1998), 3. al-'Awwā, however, argued that lawsuit based on *ḥisba* was not abolished in 1955, but still used in 1966 and 1983 by the Court of Cassation in the case of marriage and curatorship of wealth (*wilāyat al-māl*), respectively. See, al-'Awwā, *al-Ḥaqq fī al-Ta'bīr*, 22.

apostasy to be laid, al-'Ashmāwī stated that no Muslim has the right to accuse another

of being an apostate as long as the latter has not announced clearly and unequivocally

that he repudiated Islam. He further declared that the court has no authority (*walāya*) to

investigate the personal beliefs of someone or his/her books as long as he/she does not

express publicly his apostate views.[96]

Khalīl 'Abd al-Karīm, one of Abū Zayd's defenders in the Court of Appeal,

wrote a report in an attempt to impeach the ruling.[97] His challenge revolved around

three points. First, he observed that the decision of the Court of Appeals was not a

ruling (*ḥukm*) but rather a *fatwā*. To prove his argument, he referred to Shihāb al-Dīn

al-Qarāfī's (d. 1285) opinion in the latter book *al-Iḥkām fī Tamyīz al-Fatāwā 'an al-*

*Aḥkām wa Taṣarrufāt al-Qāḍī wa al-Imām*[98] that the judge must base his ruling on

argument, while the muftī must rely on the *dalīl*s found in the Qur'ān, *Sunna* and *ijmā'*

(*yatba' al-ḥākim al-ḥijāj wa al-muftī yatba' al-adilla*).[99] The judge, 'Abd al-Karīm added,

gives a ruling based on the proofs submitted by the litigants, such as witnesses,

acknowledgment and an oath (*shahādat al-shuhūd, al-iqrārāt, al-yamīn*).[100] In the case of

---

[96] Ibid.

[97] 'Abd al-Karīm, "al-Radd 'alā Ḥaythiyyāt al-Ḥukm fī Qaḍiyyat al-Tafrīq bayna Naṣr wa Ibtihāl: Hādhihi Fatwā wa Laysa Ḥukman," *Adab wa Naqd* 120 (August 1995): 29-42. See also his book, *Kitābāt Dr. Naṣr Abū Zayd fī Mīzān Ṣaḥīḥ al-Islām* (Cairo: Dār Qaḍāyā Fikriyya li-al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 1996).

[98] Ed. Maḥmūd 'Arnūs. Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Anwār, 1938. On this book, see Sherman A. Jackson, "In Defense of Two-Tiered Orthodoxy: a Study of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī's *Kitāb al-Iḥkām fī Tamyīz al-Fatāwā 'an al-Aḥkām wa Taṣarrufāt al-Qāḍī wa al-Imām,*" (Ph.D. dissertation, the University of Pennsylvania, 1991).

[99] 'Abd al-Karīm, *Kitābāt Dr. Naṣr Abū Zayd,* 7. See al-Qarāfī, *al-Iḥkām fī Tamyīz,* 7, which states *"anna al-qaḍā' ya'tamid al-ḥijāj wa al-futyā ta'tamid al-adilla.*" See also the discussion of al-Qarāfī's differentiation between *fatwā* and *qaḍā'* in Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick, David S. Powers, "Muftis, Fatwas, and Islamic Legal Interpretation," in *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and Their Fatwas,* eds. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick, David S. Powers (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 18-20.

[100] 'Abd al-Karīm, "al-Radd 'alā Ḥaythiyyāt al-Ḥukm, 29.

Abū Zayd, however, according to 'Abd al-Karīm, the judge did not rely on the proofs provided by the defendant. He further asserted that it is the duty of a muftī not the judge to decide on cases of apostasy, since "a judicial decision aims to settle the quarrel between people in worldly affairs and not in other-worldly matters" (*al-qaḍā' huwa al-faṣl fī khuṣūmāt al-nās bi-sha'n al-maṣāliḥ al-dunyawiyya lā al-maṣāliḥ al-ukhrawiyya*).[101] Further proof that the decision resembled a *fatwā* and not a *qaḍā'* was the last statement in the court decision: "*wa al-maḥkama tuhīb bi-al-musta'naf ḍiddahu an yatūb ilā Allāh ta'ālā wa an ya'ūd ilā al-Islām al-ḥaqq*" (the court calls upon the one against whom the appeal has been made to repent to God and to return to the true religion of Islam). This statement, which was written in accordance with the formula "it is better for you to do or worse for you to do" (*al-aḥsan la-ka an taf'al aw yukrah la-ka an taf'al*), 'Abd al-Karīm argued, again referring to al-Qarāfī, should be seen as a *fatwā*.[102]

The second argument brought by 'Abd al-Karīm against the ruling was that it was not based on legal proofs. 'Abd al-Karīm contended that the court of Appeals had ruled that the decision was in contradiction with the *Sharī'a* and Islamic jurisdiction only because it did not listen to the testimony of the defendant, nor did it even hear from witnesses.[103] In an interview with the journalist of *al-Ahālī* Miṣbāḥ Quṭb, 'Abd al-Karīm rejected the claims of the plaintiffs who ascribed the works of Abū Zayd as his

---

[101] Ibid., 30; idem, *Kitābāt Dr. Abū Zayd*, 8. See Jackson, "In Defense of Two-Tiered Orthodoxy," 181ff.; Masud, Messick, Powers, "Muftis, Fatwas, and Islamic Legal Interpretation," 19.

[102] See al-Qarāfī, *al-Iḥkām fī Tamyīz*, 12.

[103] Ibid., 35.

*iqrār,* and the opinions of scholars as witnesses.[104] *Iqrār* is defined by 'Abd al-Karīm by

referring to 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Ḥaṣkafī's (d. 1677) *al-Durr al-Mukhtār* as *ikhbār bi-ḥaqq*

*'alayhi li-al-ghayr* (notification about him with truth for others),[105] and requires the

presence of the one who testifies in the court.[106] *Shahāda,* on the other hand, has to be

based on seeing and hearing the event (*al-shahāda takūn 'alā waqā'i' ra'āhā aw*

*sami'ahā),* and not on opinions and thoughts. Based on these definitions, the works of

Abū Zayd and the opinions of the scholars, in 'Abd al-Karīm's view, could neither be

considered as the *iqrār* nor the *shuhūd* respectively, and, therefore, the ruling was not

based on legal proofs.

Finally, 'Abd al-Karīm argued that the ruling contradicted Ḥanafī *fiqh,* as well as

that of all the *madhāhib,* which insists that the ruling of apostasy has to be agreed upon

by all Egyptian Muslim scholars.[107] In addition, 'Abd al-Karīm argued that according to

Abū Ḥanīfa, a Muslim becomes a heretic only by *iqrār* (confession) and *taṣdīq*

(acknowledgment). He referred to the latter statement which reads "*lā yakhruj aḥad min*

*al-īmān illā min al-bāb alladhī dakhala fīh, wa al-dukhūl bi-al-iqrār wa al-taṣdīq wa*

*humā qā'imān"* (no one departs from Islam unless through the door where he came in,

and the entrance [is] by way of confession and confirmation and both of them have to be

present).[108] In his study of the writings of Abū Zayd, however, 'Abd al-Karīm could not

find any clear expression of apostasy. They were simply *ijtihādāt* (interpretations) which

---

[104] See, *al-Ahālī* (July 12, 1995), "Khalīl 'Abd al-Karīm Muḥāmī Naṣr Abū Zayd Yataḥaddath: Fatwā al-Takfīr Lā Taṣdur Illā bi-Ijmā' al-Mujtahidīn." See also, 'Abd al-Karīm, *Kitābāt Dr. Abū Zayd,* 12-13.

[105] Cf. Brij Mōhān Dayāl's translation of *al-Durr al-Mukhtār* in *The Durrul Mukhtar* (Lucknow: C.M. Dayal, 1913), 327.

[106] 'Abd al-Karīm, *Kitābāt Dr. Abū Zayd,* 12.

[107] 'Abd al-Karīm, "al-Radd 'alā Ḥaythiyyāt al-Ḥukm," 37. See also *al-Ahālī,* (July 12, 1995).

could be right or wrong.

Muḥammad Nūr Farḥat, who likewise studied the court's ruling, also found that the ruling was not based on the clear expression of apostasy on the part of the sentenced (*al-maḥkūm 'alayh*) nor had he ever been given a chance at *istitāba* to discuss his opinion before the ruling.[109] He stated moreover that the court had been forced to abandon ruling against the behavior (*sulūk*) and the appearance (*al-ẓāhir*) of the accused, to ruling against his state of mind (*ḍamīr*) and the inner aspect (*bāṭin*) of his thought. The evaluation which had been applied by the judge in the court, Farḥat argued, was not in accordance with the rules of law (*qawā'id al-qānūn*) regulating behavior, but rather on the basis of right or wrong (*al-ḥaqq wa al-bāṭil*) in ruling on beliefs. This latter, according to Farḥat, is what is known as *qaḍā' al-taftīsh* (the court system of inquisition).[110] Similarly, he argued that the meaning of apostasy, its conditions and rulings, are the product of 'ulamā' scholarship, since they are not mentioned in either the Qur'ān or the *Sunna*. As a product, it is conditioned by its socio-cultural context. For example, previous scholars had defined apostasy as a rejection of that which is known necessarily from the religion (*inkār mā huwa ma'lūm min al-dīn bi-al-ḍarūra*). This understanding, however, according to Farḥat, is very broad, for its definition and content may vary from time to time.

In the meantime, Abū Zayd, who had never been summoned by the Court to sit before the judge to discuss his opinions or to declare his beliefs, sent a statement (*bayān*) to every newspaper after the ruling of the court was handed down. In his

---

[108] Ibid. See also idem, *Kitābāt Dr. Abū Zayd,* 16.

[109] Muḥammad Nūr Farḥat. "Dirāsa Qānūniyya Muhimma: Qirā'a fī Ḥaythiyyāt al-Takfīr," *al-Muṣawwar* 3690 (June 30, 1995): 60-63.

statement he insists that he is a Muslim researcher who has devoted his life to defending Islam and who dedicated his academic ability to uncover its glorious aims and its exalted human meanings (*li-annanī bāḥith muslim wahaba ḥayātahu li-al-difā' 'an al-Islām wa karrasa ṭāqatahu al-'ilmiyya li-al-kashf 'an ghāyātih al-nabīla wa ma'ānīh al-insāniyya al-sāmiya).*[111] He further asserts that he is the victim of the extremists (*mutaṭarrifīn)* who consider themselves to be gods controlling the lives of the people. Therefore, he continues, since he is proud of his belief in God and His messenger, and proud of the value of his *ijtihād,* he will not give up his views to pay heed to a handful of extremists (*lan atanāzal 'anhā inṣiyā'an li-ḥafnat min al-mutaṭarrifīn).*

On another occasion, he wrote an article entitled "Hal Anā Kāfir?" in *Rūz al-Yūsuf* of June 26, 1995, to explain to readers that he had been a Muslim since his childhood, had memorized the Qur'ān by the age of eight, and had never refuted what is known necessarily of religion (*mā huwa ma'lūm min al-dīn bi al-ḍarūra),* such as the belief that God is one, Muḥammad is His messenger, prayers, fasting, *zakāt* and *ḥajj.* These, according to Abū Zayd, are the five pillars of Islam, the refusal of which can lead someone to turn away from Islam and become an apostate.[112] However, Abū Zayd reminds his readers that there are different understandings of these pillars due to different interpretations and *ijtihādāt.* He gives an illustration of monotheism which, as conveyed by Islamic history, contains different concepts about the essence of God and His attributes. Similarly, in the case of the understanding of legal verses in the Qur'ān,

---

[110] Ibid., 60.

[111] See, for example, in a*l-Akhbār* (June 19, 1995); *al-'Arabī* (June 19, 1995); *al-Jumhūriyya* (June 22, 1995). The Islamists, however, regard this statement as Abū Zayd's official expression of repentance.

[112] Abū Zayd, "Hal Anā Kāfir?," *Rūz al-Yūsuf* (June 26, 1995).

many interpretations could be found of one legal verse, such as the well-known interpretation of Caliph 'Umar on certain legal verses of the Qur'ān. At the end of his article, Abū Zayd challenges those who would accuse him of heresy to debate with him on his ideas in order that he may explain what is still unclear and to give others the chance to criticize what is wrong with his ideas, either on television or in a public forum.

In addition to Abū Zayd's public statement and articles published in the mass-media explaining his stance, there were also interviews conducted with him inquiring into the truth of the accusation. The journal *al-'Arabī*, for example, ran a long interview with Abū Zayd where the latter responded to all items of the accusation. In this interview Abū Zayd confirmed that what constitutes the *ma'lūm min al-dīn bi-al-darūra* in Islam is the five pillars of Islam, while the others are subject to differences (*mahall ikhtilāf*). He further clarified the big difference between an apostate (*kāfir*) and a disobedient (*'āṣī*). The one who refuses these pillars, according to Abū Zayd, is an apostate, while the one who does not respect one or another pillar of Islam is not apostate but rather an *'āṣī*. [113] Abū Zayd declared that he did not reject these pillars nor had he ever neglected to perform them.

As for the accusation that he demonstrated grave enmity toward the Qur'ān and *Sunna*, Abū Zayd explained that this accusation derived from the last statement in his book *al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī* which reads: *Ana awān al-murāja'a wa al-intiqāl ilā marhalat al-taharrur, lā min sultat al-nuṣūṣ wahdahā, bal min kull sulta ta'ūq masīrat al-insān fī*

---

[113] *al-'Arabī,* "Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd 'alā Ṭarīq Ṭāhā Ḥusayn," an interview run by Fathī 'Āmir and Nūr al-Hudā Zakī, *al-'Arabī* (June 26, 1995).

*'ālaminā. 'Alaynā an naqūm bi-hādhā al-ān wa fawran qabla an yajrufanā al-ṭūfān.*[114]

This statement, however, comes after Abū Zayd's analysis of Shāfiʿī's texts, which according to him have been transformed in the history of Islamic thought into an authority *(sulṭa)* in themselves, and thus cannot be contradicted or criticized, in spite of the fact that they are nothing more than man-made texts. Thus, he argued, he did not call for liberation from the Qur'ān and *Sunna,* but rather from the authority of texts such as Shāfiʿī's. Such texts, in his view, are merely historical interpretations that must be studied and analyzed in their socio-cultural context. Even then, Abū Zayd asserted that he did not call upon people to ignore the *ijtihādāt* of previous scholars, but to remove the authority which has been invested in these interpretations *(bi-nazʿ al-sulṭa 'an hādhihi al-ijtihādāt).* In the understanding of religious texts as well, Abū Zayd reminded his readers that literal understanding of the text and reading being taken *(nazʿ)* out of context transform the religious text into *sulṭa.*

Against the accusation that he refused revelation and considered the Qur'ān as a man-made text, Abū Zayd affirmed his belief in the Qur'ān as God's speech and in its divine source. The message of revelation, Abū Zayd explained, is sent from God for the benefit of humankind, and the fact that it was sent in the Arabic language was God's choice. In view of this, Abū Zayd saw revelation, whose source is divine, as having been manifested *(tatajallā)* in human language. Therefore he found two sides to revelation: *al-tanzīl,* which is the Qur'ān, and second *al-ta'wīl* which means that the

---

[114] See Abū Zayd, *al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī,* 110. In the preface to *Qiṣṣat Abū Zayd wa Inḥisār al-'Almāniyya,* Shāhīn describes Abū Zayd as a Marxist and secularist writer who calls for emancipation from the texts of the Qur'ān and *Sunna,* and for dependence on reason.

Qur'ān needs the *ta'wīl* or human understanding.[115] This does not mean, Abū Zayd argued, that he denied that the Qur'ān came from God. He maintained, on the contrary, that the Qur'ān is from God, but after its deliverance by the Prophet Muḥammad, it became human property in terms of understanding it (*ṣāra milkan lanā bi-al-fahm*). This other aspect of the Qur'ān, i.e., *ta'wīl,* which renders the Qur'ān compatible with every period and place, by the renewal of understanding and interpretation according to the new context, contrasts sharply with the literal approach to the meaning of the Qur'ān. According to Abū Zayd, the latter amounts to a rejection of the compatibility of the Qur'ān, since an insistence on its literal meaning means preserving the understanding of the first generation, when in fact the situation of each generation is always different. On the issue of the human text (*naṣṣ basharī*), Abū Zayd denied having said any such thing and challenged anyone to prove from his writings that he used this phrase or that he ever denied the divine source of the Qur'ān.

On the subject of the angels, *al-'Arsh* and jinn, Abū Zayd declared in the first place that he did not reject these things or deny their existence in the Qur'ān, but rather understood these as figurative images (*ṣūra majāziyya*), which, like the Mu'tazilites, he consequently interpreted metaphorically. On the issue of inheritance, furthermore, Abū Zayd attempted to uncover the ethics/philosophy behind the Qur'ānic verse regarding inheritance and tried to interpret it by considering its context. The *maqāṣid al-sharī'a* (legal aims) with respect to the position of women, in his opinion, are that Islam honors

---

[115] On this issue, see the discussion of Stefan Wild, "Die andere Seite des Textes: Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zaid und der Koran," *Die Welt des Islams* 33 (1993): 256-261; Andreas Meier, "Gotteswort in Knechtsgestalt – ein islamischer Luther in Ägypten? N.H. Abu Zaids provokante Koranexegese als säkulare Reform des Islam," in *Begegnungen zwischen Christentum und Islam,* ed. Hans-Christoph Goßmann (Ammersbek bei Hamburg: Verl. An der Lottbek, 1994), 57-74,

and respects *(takrīm wa iḥtirām)* women. In the pre-Islamic period, women did not enjoy any kind of respect. If a woman's husband died, all that his family would give her was a robe *(ridā')*, and she would not be permitted to marry again, whereas in the case of a husband whose wife died, he was allowed to marry any number of times. Then Islam came and established equality between men and women, for example, by limiting the number of wives, and giving a widow a share of the inheritance *(mīrāth)*, something that had not been the case before. And now, when the context has changed and the society is also different, where women work as hard as men, giving a half share of the inheritance to a woman is no way to respect and honor her. Therefore, Abū Zayd proposed interpreting the verse contextually.

Having explained his position at every opportunity granted him, but never in a mosque nor on television (since he himself does not own one), Abū Zayd demanded the suspension of the execution of the ruling, and filed an impeachment *(ṭa'n)* against the ruling.[116] Those named in the impeachment were Ṣamīda 'Abd al-Ṣamad (the plaintiff), Shaykh of al-Azhar Jād al-Ḥaqq 'Alī Jād al-Ḥaqq, the Egyptian Muftī Muḥammad Sayyid Ṭanṭāwī, and the Ministry of Justice and Internal Affairs. He argued that the ruling on the separation was *bāṭil muṭlaq* (absolutely void) and contradictory to both law *(qānūn)* and the Islamic *sharī'a*, since the ruling and the suit came from someone who had no right to proceed because he had no connection to the case. In addition, the ruling was beyond the authority of the court, for investigations into the *ḍamīr* (conscience) of a person were not part of its domain. Furthermore, Abū Zayd argued, the

especially 63ff.
[116] *al-Ḥayāt* (July 05, 1995), "Naṣr Abū Zayd Yaṭlub Waqf Tanfīdh al-Ḥukm bi-Tafrīqih 'an Zawjatih."

ruling had no basis in the *shar'* and *qānūn* because of the fact that it pronounced someone a heretic who still witnessed that Allāh was God and Muḥammad His messenger. Finally, the ruling, could be seen to be based on a rash and biased reading (*qirā'a mubtasira wa mughriḍa*) of his works, without even discussing them with the author. On the basis of these challenges (*ṭu'ūn*), Abū Zayd brought his case to the highest court, which is the Court of Cassation.

In the meantime, letters of solidarity were pouring in to Abū Zayd and his wife. They came not only from Egypt, but also from other Arab and even Western countries. Abū Zayd received many invitations to leave Egypt and work either in North America or Europe. Initially he insisted that he would not leave Egypt and would fight in the courts until the end, but since his movements were so limited and he felt as though he were imprisoned (*masjūn*) due to the security that constantly surrounded him wherever he went, he and his wife eventually fled to Europe in July 1995; at present Abū Zayd teaches at Leiden University in the Netherlands.

But, even though Abū Zayd explained his beliefs and countered all accusations against him, on August 5, 1996 the Egyptian Court of Cassation (*Maḥkamat al-Naqḍ al-Miṣriyya*), the highest Egyptian civil court, confirmed the decision of the Egyptian Court of Appeals, which ruled that Abū Zayd was an apostate and should be separated from his wife.

The Court of Cassation, presided over by *al-Mustashār* Muḥammad Miṣbāḥ Sharābīḥ, argued that the charge of apostasy was established on the basis of an acknowledgment (*iqrār*) and a legal testimony (*bayyina sharī'iyya*). An acknowledgment, in the court judgment, was Abū Zayd's *iqrār* that he is the author of

the works which contain a testimony of explicit unbelief (*kufr ṣarīḥ*). The Court of Cassation further claimed that Abū Zayd argued in his studies that Islam had no objective meaning (*mafhūm mawḍūʿī*), from the time of the Prophet up to the present day. His approach, the court argued, was intended to strip Islam of any value or significance. He had characterized Islam as an Arab religion in order to deny its international character and he had claimed that Qurʾānic studies are a backward heritage and he opposed the application of the *Sharīʿa*. Furthermore, the Court found Abū Zayd guilty of declaring that the provisions of Islamic law would hamper civilization and progress. These views, in the judgment of the court, amounted to explicit unbelief (*kufr ṣarīḥ*).[117]

Muḥammad Sayyid Ṭanṭāwī, the Shaykh of al-Azhar who replaced Jād al-Ḥaqq ʿAlī Jād al-Ḥaqq, insisted in the days following this decision that the ruling delivered by the Court of Cassation was final and had to be executed. According to the Shaykh, the Court had argued that whoever ridicules (*yastahziʾ*) Islam is not a Muslim, even though he may have pronounced the *shahāda*. Ṭanṭāwī further clarified that Abū Zayd's ideas could not be classified as *ijtihād*, since there is no *ijtihād* for religious matters which have been fixed (*thabata min al-dīn bi-al-ḍarūra*).[118]

The content of the ruling itself took no notice of the impeachment (*ṣaḥīfat al-ṭuʿūn*), which had been prepared by ʿAbd al-Karīm, in which the latter had argued that the works of Abū Zayd could not be considered as his testimony and that the judicial

---

[117] Aḥmad Nabīl, "Fī Ḥaythiyyāt Maḥkamat al-Naqḍ bi-Taʾyīd Ḥukm al-Tafrīq," *al-Ahrām* (August 09, 1996). See also the translation of the ruling in English by M.S. Berger in "Jurisprudence Abū Zayd," 193-201; and the website of the Legal Research and Resource Center for Human Rights (LRRC), Cairo, Egypt at http://www.geocities.com/~lrrc/Zaid/cassation.htm .

[118] *al-Ḥayāt* (August 22, 1996), "Shaykh al-Azhar li-*al-Ḥayāt*: al-Ḥukm ʿalā Abū Zayd Mulzim."

court had no authority to rule on questions of apostasy. It only came to be known later that 'Abd al-Karīm's argument was never placed before the Court of Cassation by the other defendants of Abū Zayd.[119] The latter preferred to argue against the procedure of the suit, i.e., that the lawsuit could not be brought by someone who did not have direct interest in the case, rather than against the content (*mawḍū'*) of the ruling.

## B. Responses of Egyptian Islamists

One issue that surfaces over and over again in the charge of apostasy leveled against Abū Zayd is the issue of Marxism. Shāhīn, in his famous report, claimed that Abū Zayd passionately supports (*yudāfi' bi-ḥarāra*) Marxism and acquits it of the charge of heresy.[120] He even commented in the report that "... maybe he [Abū Zayd] will worship and salute Marx as the leader of the devout" (*wa la'allahu yuṣallī wa yusallim 'alā Mārks imām al-muttaqīn*).[121] This comment, according to the Arabic Department Council, was rephrased by the Academic Tenure Committee to read "maybe he imagines that Marx is a believer with spiritual tendencies" (*la'allahu yataṣawwar anna Mārks mu'min rūḥī al-naz'a*).

On another occasion, Shāhīn asserted that Abū Zayd's intellect has been fired by (*shuḥina*) two sources of knowledge: Marxism and the thought of Ibn 'Arabī."[122] It is not quite clear, however, what he meant by Marxism except for his understanding that this ideology propagates views against Islam (*mu'ādiya li-al-Islām*), among which he counts Abū Zayd's call to liberate Islam from the Qur'ān and *Sunna;* and his accusation

---

[119] 'Abd al-Karīm, *Kitābāt Dr. Abū Zayd,* 3.
[120] Shāhīn, *Qiṣṣat Abū Zayd wa Inḥiṣār al-'Almāniyya,* 15, 23.
[121] See, *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 83.

of fanaticism (*'asabiyya*) against the Companions and Imām al-Shafiʿī. This and other views which advocate Marxism and show enmity to Islam, according to Shāhīn, can easily be found published in leftist journals, such as *al-Qāhira*, *Ibdāʿ*, *Adab wa Naqd*, *al-Yasār* and propagated by printing companies, such as Dār Sīna, Dār al-Thaqāfa al-Jadīda, etc.[123] It is important to note that most of Abū Zayd's writings are published in these journals, which are implicitly regarded as pro-Marxist. In the end, Shāhīn maintained, Marxist ideas, like those of Abū Zayd, cause their authors to retreat from Islam (*irtidād 'an al-Islām*), i.e., to apostatize.[124]

Haykal, in reviewing Abū Zayd's *Mafhūm al-Nass*, also described the writer as "possessed" (*tamallakathu*) by materialist ideas.[125] He found these materialist ideas in Abū Zayd's discussion of the dialectics between the text of the Qur'ān and culture, a dialectics in which the culture shapes the text, and the text, in its turn, shapes the culture (*yushakkiluhā*).[126] 'Umar 'Abd Allāh Kāmil arrived at a similar conclusion to Haykal's, adding that the dialectical method and other Western analytical methods are not to be permitted (*lā yajūz*) in the study of religious texts. The permissible method, according to Kāmil, is to understand these texts according to the methods recognized in the principles of comprehension, found in *usūl al-fiqh*, the original Arab science.[127]

The accusation that Abū Zayd was a Marxist was more pronounced in the writings of the Islamist theorist, Muḥammad 'Amāra, whose articles on Abū Zayd

---

[122] Fayṣal Darrāj, "Radm al-Jāmiʿ wa al-Jāmiʿa Maʿan!," *al-Ādāb* 7/8 (July-August 1995): 6.

[123] Shāhīn, *Qiṣṣat Abū Zayd wa Inḥisār al-ʿAlmāniyya*, 12.

[124] "al-Ḥukm Nidāʾ li-al-Mujtamaʿ bi-anna mā Yaqūluh al-Mārksiyyūn ʿalā Ṭarīq al-Ridda," *al-Liwāʾ al-Islāmī* (June 22, 1995).

[125] Haykal, "Dirāsat al-Naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī," 271.

[126] Ibid., 275.

[127] 'Umar 'Abd Allāh Kāmil, *Ḥiwār maʿa ʿAlī Ḥarb, Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd wa Muḥammad*

appeared in the daily newspaper *al-Sha'b* and were later published in a work entitled *al-Tafsīr al-Mārksī li-al-Islām.*[128] This book, as 'Amāra described it, is "an objective scholarly study" (*dirāsa 'ilmiyya mawḍū'iyya*)[129] of Abū Zayd's ideas and methods. At the very beginning of his book, 'Amāra tells of how he came to know Abū Zayd: On one occasion long before "the Abū Zayd affair" had achieved notoriety, Dr. Maḥmūd Amīn al-'Ālim, who was regarded by 'Amāra as a well-known Marxist figurehead (*al-quṭb al-Mārksī al-ma'rūf*) and as a Marxist theorist (*munaẓẓir li-al-Mārksiyya*),[130] informed 'Amāra that "Dr. Abū Zayd .. excels in analyzing the text" (*al-Duktūr Abū Zayd .. aḥsanu man yuḥallil al-naṣṣ*). Since this statement came from a Marxist theorist, 'Amāra assumed that Abū Zayd was in agreement with all of al-'Ālim's convictions in thought (*mawqi' fikrī*) and in his ideological orientation (*ittijāh īdiyūlūjī*).[131] What was more damning in 'Amāra's eyes was the fact that Abū Zayd's writings were published in leftist Marxist journals (*al-dawriyyāt al-Mārksiyya al-yasāriyya*), such as *Qaḍāyā Fikriyya*, *Adab wa Naqd*, *al-Yasār* and *al-Ahālī* in Egypt, and *al-Ṭarīq* in Beirut etc.[132]

In his evaluation of Abū Zayd's works, 'Amāra concluded that all of his writings were exercises in applying Marxist methods to the study of Islam. To emphasize this point, 'Amāra referred to the philosophy of the materialist school of thought, which asserts that "matter is self sufficient, it does not need a creator to create it" (*anna al-*

---

*Arkūn* (Cairo: International Press, 1995), 48.

[128] Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1996. His articles are Dr. Naṣr Abū Zayd wa al-Tafsīr al-Mārksī li-al-Islām," *al-Sha'b* (Oct. 27, 1995); "al-Ru'ya al-Māddiyya li-al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," *al-Sha'b* (Jan. 16, 1996) and (Jan. 26, 1996); and "Tārīkhiyyat Ma'ānī wa Aḥkām al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," *al-Sha'b* (Feb. 9, 1996) and (Feb. 16, 1996).

[129] Ibid., 6.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid., 7.
[132] Ibid.

*mādda mustakfiya bi-nafsihā mustaghniya 'an khāliq yūjiduhā).*[133] He pointed to the theory of superstructure (*al-binā' al-fawqī*) and infrastructure (*al-binā' al-taḥtī*), which maintains that matter and context - economic, social and physical – are the source of all thought. Infrastructure creates, colors and determines the superstructure, which is thought. In its turn, the superstructure influences the context, the infra-structure. Therefore, the theory dictates continuous dialectic (*jadal mustamirr*) between context and thought.[134]

'Amāra gave examples of how Abū Zayd applied this Marxist materialistic interpretation to the principles of Islam (*thawābit al-Islām*), the Qur'ān, prophethood, revelation and the *sharī'a*. He showed that dialectical materialism was used by Abū Zayd in his *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* in the following ways: to uphold the context as the producer of the text;[135] to describe culture as subject (*fā'il*) and the text as object (*munfa'il*) during the formation period of the text (*marḥalat tashakkul al-naṣṣ*);[136] and to define the text as a cultural product (*muntaj thaqāfī*).[137] These ideas, in 'Amāra's view, are contradictory to both the many verses of the Qur'ān which affirm that the Qur'ān is revelation (*tanzīl*) from God, and the Islamic principle of the pre-existence of the Qur'ān. 'Amāra furthermore concluded that Abū Zayd saw prophethood and revelation as the product of reality (*nitāj al-wāqi'*), and claimed that the Islamic *sharī'a* in its development shaped itself according to the progress of reality (*ṣāghat nafsahā ma'a*

---

[133] Ibid. Quoted from Murād Wahba, *al-Mu'jam al-Falsafī* (Cairo: 1971) "Māddī-Madhhab."
[134] Ibid., 35.
[135] See Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 109.
[136] Ibid., 200.
[137] Ibid., 28.

*ḥarakat al-wāqiʻ fī taṭawwurih).*[138] Finally, he indicated that Abū Zayd's belief in the

historicity of religious texts denies their original, fixed and eternal meanings (*yanfī ʻan*

*dalālātihā al-aṣliyya ayya thabāt aw istimrāriyya aw khulūd).*[139]

These unbelieving views, in ʻAmāra's eyes, were the result of the Marxist

materialist method employed by Abū Zayd in his study of Islam. Although ʻAmāra did

not agree with the charge of apostasy and heresy leveled at Abū Zayd by some Islamists

since -- as ʻAmāra argued, the affair involving Abū Zayd was not a "legal matter"

(*qaḍiyya qānūniyya)* but rather "a matter of thought" (*qaḍiyya fikriyya)* whose scope

was scholarly dialogue --[140] he explicitly condemned Abū Zayd's method and views as

incompatible with Islam:

> Abū Zayd has every right to use the materialistic and Marxist method in
> analyzing Islam. We believe too, however, that this materialistic position
> in reading religion [Islam] cannot be compatible with the belief of this
> observer and also with his religion of Islam
>
> (*bi-anna li-al-Duktūr Naṣr al-ḥaqq kull al-ḥaqq fī an yatabannā al-minhāj*
> *al-māddī al-mārksī fī taḥlīl al-Islām .. lākinnanā nuʼmin ayḍan bi-anna*
> *hādhā al-mawqif al-māddī fī al-naẓar li-al-dīn, lā yumkin an yakūn*
> *muttasiqan maʻa īmān ṣāḥibih bi-al-dīn wa lā maʻa intimāʼih ilā dīn al-*
> *Islām)*[141]

Al-ʻĀlim responded to the claims of ʻAmāra by criticizing his mechanical

conclusion that to be a Marxist inevitably meant that one was an atheist and an

apostate. He showed that there are scholars who benefit from Marxist methodology

without themselves being Marxists, or even approving of the ideology.[142] He argued

---

[138] ʻAmāra, *al-Tafsīr al-Mārksī,* 59.

[139] ʻAmāra, *al-Tafsīr al-Mārksī,* 61.

[140] Ibid., 9.

[141] Ibid., 34.

[142] al-ʻĀlim, "Raddan ʻalā *al-Tafsīr al-Mārksī li-al-Islām:* Muḥammad ʻAmāra bayna Fiqh al-Takfir wa Fiqh al-Ijtihād bi-al-Raʼy," *al-Ahālī* (Oct. 30, 1996), 11.

further that the relation between superstructure and infrastructure, between context and thought, is not discussed merely in the Marxist materialist theory. This approach, according to al-'Ālim, is a general academic method (manhaj 'ilmī 'āmm) which has been developed and utilized in the studies of human sciences.[143]

In addition to his comments on 'Amāra's misunderstanding of Marxist method, al-'Ālim criticized him for taking some of Abū Zayd's statements out of context in order to construct a different or contradictory understanding of what the latter wrote. 'Amāra's claim that Abū Zayd saw context as having a role in shaping the Qur'ān, which amounted to a denial of the divine source of the Qur'ān, according to al-'Ālim, was but one of 'Amāra's methods of distorting (yalwī) the truth of Abū Zayd's statements.

In trying to characterize 'Amara's approach to his works, Abū Zayd described it as qirā'a mutarabbiṣa (biased reading).[144] In his public debate with 'Amāra, which was broadcast on Qaṭar television on the 31st of December 1996, Abū Zayd argued that in his works he never rejected the divine origin of the Qur'ān. His research and study of the Qur'ān, on the other hand, was concerned with its aspect of human language, for this divine source manifests itself (tajallā) in the Arabic language, which is human language.[145] In order to prove that this kind of approach has been practiced in Islamic history, Abū Zayd cited the case of the Ash'arites who delineated two aspects of God's speech: the eternal speech of God and, in terms of its language, the imitation (muḥākāt)

---

[143] Ibid. See also Maḥmūd Ismā'īl, "al-Tafsīr al-Mārksī li-al-Islām: 'Arḍ wa Naqd," Adab wa Naqd 142 (June 1997): 14.

[144] See Muḥammad 'Awaḍ, Fī al-Jawla al-Ūlā amāma Dr. Muḥammad 'Amāra: Naṣr Abū Zayd Yasquṭ fī Qaṭar (Cairo: Bayt al-Ḥikma li-al-I'lām wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 1997), 37.

[145] Ibid.

of this eternal speech. Therefore, according to Abū Zayd, to consider the Qur'ān, with reference to its language, as part of the culture and to place the Qur'ān in its historical context, was not a rejection of the divine source of the Qur'ān.[146] Similarly, the idea of the dialectic between text and context, according to Abū Zayd, could be explained by the fact that the Qur'ān was not revealed all at once but verse by verse (*munajjaman*), in consideration of the circumstances and condition of society. Furthermore, the legal regulations in the Qur'ān developed (*tatawwar*) during the period of the revelation of the Qur'ān. This and other disciplines forming part of the sciences of the Qur'ān, such as *asbāb al-nuzūl, al-Makkī wa al-Madanī, nāsikh wa mansūkh,* enlighten the relationship between text and context.[147]

In an e-mail dated November 18, 1999, Abū Zayd told me that 'Amāra's [and other Islamists'] purpose was to condemn his works as heretical "by invoking Marxism which is automatically associated with atheism in the eyes of the public."[148] Indeed the next scenario, as seen from the testimony of Muḥammad al-Ghazālī in the case of Faraj Fūda's assassination, is punishment by death.[149]

He acknowledges that he has employed a historical materialist method, as well as other modern analytical methods, such as semiotics and hermeneutics, in his analysis. The Islamists, however, want him and other Muslim scholars to apply only an Islamic methodology (*al-manhaj al-Islāmī*) and to perform *ijtihād* from within Islam (*dākhil al-Islām*), not from outside of it. This suggestion is questioned by Abū Zayd:

---

[146] Ibid., 39.

[147] Ibid., 40.

[148] Internet e-mail, Thursday, November 18, 1999.

[149] Najīb Maḥfūẓ, who was stabbed in the neck by the radical Islamist on October 14, 1994, was also regarded as Marxist. See Fauzi M. Najjar, "Islamic Fundamentalism and the Intellectuals:

> Is there any specific Islamic methodology to understand and interpret Islam other than quoting the Qur'ān, the prophetic tradition and repeating what has been said by our ancestors?[150]

Islamic methodology, from the Islamists' point of view, according to Abū Zayd, amounts to nothing more than "preaching," whereas what Abū Zayd proposes and defends in his works is the right to exercise *ijtihād,* the right of diversity, and the right to be wrong (*ḥaqq al-ijtihād, ḥaqq al-ikhtilāf, ḥaqq al-khaṭa'*).

## C. Comments

In evaluating the responses of the Islamists to Abū Zayd's ideas and method of interpretation, many observers have pointed to the constant historical conflict between Islamists and liberal Muslims in Egypt in their attempts to influence and form its culture.[151] They do not, however, clearly define the crux of this conflict.[152]

Following the argument of the authors of *Defenders of Reason in Islam,*[153] I find the Islamists' objections to Abū Zayd's ideas represent the traditionalists' *theological* opposition to the rational one. Contrary to the thesis of many political scientists that "fundamentalism" is a modern phenomenon that reacts to modernism,[154] Richard C. Martin, Mark R. Woodward and Dwi S. Atmaja argue that the conflict between

the Case of Naguib Mahfouz," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 25, 1 (1998): 142-143.

[150] Ibid.

[151] See, for example, Navid Kermani, "Die Affäre Abū Zayd: Eine Kritik am religiösen Diskurs und ihre Folgen," *Orient* 35, 1 (1994): 25-49; R. Wielandt, "Wurzeln der Schwierigkeit innerislamischen Gesprächs über neue hermeneutische Zugänge zum Korantext," in *The Qur'an as Text,* ed. Stefan Wild (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 257-282; Ami Ayalon, *Egypt's Quest for Cultural Orientation* (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1999); Fauzi M. Najjar, "Islamic Fundamentalism and the Intellectuals: The Case of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 27, 2 (2000): 177-200.

[152] Except the authors of *Defenders of Reason in Islam.* See *infra.*

[153] Richard C. Martin and Mark R. Woodward with Dwi S. Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Muʿtazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 7ff.

[154] They mention in particular Bruce B. Lawrence's *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist*

Martin, Mark R. Woodward and Dwi S. Atmaja argue that the conflict between Islamists and liberal Muslims has been raging since the early centuries of Islam. Basing themselves on two texts – the *Kitāb al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa* of al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d.1024) and the *Kaum Mu'tazilah dan Pandangan Rasionalnya* of Indonesian scholar Harun Nasution (d. 1998) – they assert that:

> [t]hese texts can be seen as expressions of a form of theological "rationalism" that throughout history has defined itself doctrinally in opposition to several theological stances, especially what we have called theological "traditionalism."[155]

Furthermore, they state that just as Mu'tazilite ideas have influenced many liberal Muslims, the influence of Ḥanbalite and Ash'arite traditionalism is evident in the statements of most Islamists.

The views of the Mu'tazilites are manifest in Abū Zayd too. He himself admits this influence in his thought, which has led some scholars to describe him as a neo-Mu'tazilī.[156] Abū Zayd first became interested in Mu'tazilī thought when he wrote his thesis on "Qaḍiyyat al-Majāz fī al-Qur'ān," for which task he investigated in great depth the works of leading representatives of this school, especially 'Abd al-Jabbār's *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawḥīd wa al-'Adl*.[157] *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* constitutes another of Abū Zayd's works which clearly reflects these Mu'tazilite ideas, the most important of which is the idea of the createdness of the Qur'ān (*khalq al-Qur'ān*).

---

[155] Martin, Woodward and Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam*, 221.

[156] See Jābir 'Aṣfūr, "*Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* wa al-I'tizāl al-Mu'āṣir," in *Hawāmish 'alā Daftar al-Tanwīr* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1994), 35-60; and Shukrī Muḥammad 'Ayyād, "Fahm al-Qur'ān," in idem, *al-Qafz 'alā al-Ashwāk: Taṭbīq al-Sharī'a wa Ṣiyāghat al-Ḥāḍir* (Cairo: Aṣdiqā' al-Kitāb, 1991), 37.

[157] See his *al-Ittijāh al-'Aqlī fī al-Tafsīr: Dirāsa fī Qaḍiyyat al-Majāz 'inda al-Mu'tazila* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1998)..

Contrary to the traditional belief which holds that the Qur'ān is the "uncreated" and eternal Word of God, constituting in fact one of His essential attributes, like His Knowledge, His Ability and His Will, the Mu'tazilites believed that the Qur'ān was created.[158] They argued that God's Speech belongs to God's factual attributes (ṣifāt afʿāl), and that any action produced by these qualities is created.[159] Furthermore, they argued that the Qur'ān, though it be the original Speech of God, cannot be eternal, since it differs in quality from the essential attribute of God; the essential attribute is eternal while the Qur'ān, produced by the factual attribute, is created.

Belief in one or the other -- the eternity or createdness of the Qur'ān – has important implications for whoever supports one of them. Referring to J.R.T.M. Peters' *God's Created Speech,* Abū Zayd asserts that belief in the eternity of the Qur'ān implies belief in God's absolute predestination, that God predetermined every event in the world.[160] Another implication of these concepts, particularly in relation to the role of reason and revelation in interpretation, is that the traditionalists have taken revelation as their starting point and do not allow any source other than the Qur'ānic verses and Prophetic traditions to figure in their theory of interpretation. The rationalists, on the other hand, have taken reason as their starting point, so that whenever they are unable to

---

[158] In his many discussion of this issue, Abū Zayd usually refers to J.R. T.M. Peters' *God's Created Speech: A Study in the Speculative Theology of the Mu'tazilī Qādī l-Quḍāt Abū l-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Jabbār bn Aḥmad al-Hamaḏānī* (Leiden: Brill, 1976) and Josef van Ess' "Verbal Inspiration? Language and Revelation in Classical Islamic Theology," in *The Qur'an as Text,* ed. Stefan Wild ( Leiden: Brill, 1996), 177-194.

[159] Abū Zayd, *al-Ittijāh al-'Aqlī fī al-Tafsīr,* 181.

[160] Abū Zayd, "The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur'ān," (unpublished paper), referring to Peters, *God's Created Speech,* 3.

find the basis of interpretation in the Qur'ān they refer to reason and extra-Qur'ānic sources.[161]

The socio-political and historical context in which Abū Zayd lives, however, is dominated by the traditional theological belief which has controlled Islamic thought since the ninth century.[162] Because of this dogma, not only do the Islamists oppose interpretation which uses modern methods, but they also reject any critical study of the Qur'ān. They still consider the subject of Qur'ānic studies to fall within the field of *muḥarramāt* -- or, to use Mohammed Arkoun's terms, "the unthinkable" in Islamic thought.[163] Commenting on the negative reactions that Abū Zayd has encountered from the Islamists, Arkoun asserts that these reactions constitute a clear proof of the massive proportion of "the unthinkable" and "the unthought of" in contemporary Islamic thought.[164]

It is on this basis that the literary study of the Qur'ān, which asserts that the Scripture is like any other literary text regardless of its divine and sacral nature, is condemned, and labeled heretical. To quote the view of Noel Weeks in the context of Christianity:

> Whenever people ... claim that Scripture is a work of man not distinguishable in origin from other human literary productions they do

---

[161] Martin, Woodward and Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam*, 16.

[162] See, for example, caliph al-Qādir's creed (*al-I'tiqād al-Qādirī*), which countered the decree of caliph al-Ma'mūn through *Miḥna* (inquisition), stating that: "He who says the Qur'ān is created is an infidel, whose blood may legitimately be shed." See George Makdisi, *Ibn 'Aqīl: Religion and Culture in Classical Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 8.

[163] On this concept, see Arkoun, *Lectures du Coran* (Paris: Maisonneuve and Larose, 1982), xiv. See also its Arabic translation in "Ḥisāb Khitāmī li-al-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyya wa Āfāqihā," in Muḥammad Arkūn, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī: Qirā'a 'Ilmiyya* (Beirut: Markaz al-Inmā' al-Qawmī, 1987), 255. For further discussion see Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 81-84.

[164] See Arkūn, *al-Fikr al-Uṣūlī wa Istiḥālat al-Ta'ṣīl: Naḥwa Tārīkh Ākhar li-al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, trans. into Arabic by Hāshim Ṣāliḥ (London: Dār al-Sāqī, 1999), 64.

not merely influence our understanding of Scripture, but ultimately change the whole shape of our religion.[165]

Despite the insistence of Abū Zayd and the proponents of this approach that it does not and will not damage the Qur'ān, the Islamists find it difficult to accept that argument. In the end, though, their failure to propose any new approaches to the Qur'ān is due to the lack of a theological foundation to support them. This was what Abū Zayd in Egypt, Fazlur Rahman in Pakistan, Harun Nasution in Indonesia,[166] and many other liberal Muslims[167] attempted to introduce and establish.

Finally, in order to understand the reasons why the Islamists label such efforts heretic, we may refer to Norman Calder's study of Islamic orthodoxy. In his "The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy,"[168] Calder suggests five criteria to define religious orthodoxy, i.e., its reliance on scripture, community, reason, gnosis, and charisma.[169] Sunni Muslims, Calder asserts, define orthodoxy in terms of their reliance on the previous community more than on scripture. He states:

> [T]he intellectual tradition of Islam is one which makes it a requirement that each succeeding generation look at and take into consideration the work of the preceding generations. It is not a religion which, from generation to generation, goes back to the original words of scripture and revelation. When a scholar makes this attempt to go back to the original sources and to look at them with an unprejudiced eye (if there is such a thing), people are not sure about this and ... he is liable to rejection.[170]

---

[165] Quoted by Abdullah Saeed in his "Rethinking 'Revelation' as a Precondition for Reinterpreting the Qur'an: A Qur'anic Perspective," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 1, 1 (1999): 95.
[166] See his *Islam Rasional: Gagasan dan Pemikiran* (Bandung: Mizan, 1995); and Martin and Woodward with Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam,* Part Two.
[167] See also Farid Esack, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Problems and Prospects," *Muslim World* 83, 2 (April, 1993): 118-141.
[168] In *Intellectual Traditions in Islam,* ed. Farhad Daftary (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 66-86.
[169] Ibid., 71.
[170] Ibid., 77.

Like many cases of liberal Muslims who depend on reason and express Mu'tazilite views,[171] Abū Zayd is labeled heretic since he criticizes the traditions of the community and tries to go back directly to the Qur'ān. As such, he is considered to deviate from Islamic orthodoxy.

---

[171] Calder finds that the line between Sunnism and the Mu'tazila is not clear, since there are many Mu'tazilite works that were accepted by Sunni Muslims, like al-Zamakhsharī's *tafsīr.* Ibid., 81.

# CONCLUSION

## A. General Conclusion

We have seen in this study how the literary interpretation of the Qur'ān begins with the thesis that the Qur'ān is a literary text, and that as such it can be analyzed like any other literary text without necessarily looking at it from a religious perspective. Unlike previous Muslim scholars who studied the literary beauty of the Qur'ān from a theological perspective in order to assert its superiority over all other texts, literary or sacred, the modern proponents of the literary approach study the Qur'ān in the light of Western literary theory and criticism.

In the course of their interpretations of the Qur'ān, not only do literary theorists adopt a synchronic approach to the text but they apply a diachronic one as well. Influenced to a great extent by the Romantic style of hermeneutics which searches for the meaning in the mind of the author, many proponents of the literary approach to the Qur'ān attempt to find its meaning in the historical context of Arabia of the seventh century. This is done by analyzing the external background of the Qur'ān, like the *asbāb al-nuzūl*, the question of the Meccan or Madīnan origin of individual verses, or the book's internal structure.

Abū Zayd, who has read and been influenced by some works of Western hermeneuts, especially those of E.D. Hirsch Jr., proposes to differentiate between meaning *(ma'nā)* and significance *(maghzā)*. According to Abū Zayd, an interpretation does not end with finding the text's historical meaning, which is fixed, but to see its significance, which is always changing, in the contemporary context. To support his

*248*

distinction between historical meaning and significance, Abū Zayd examines the

meaning of *ta'wīl* itself and analyzes the verses of the Qur'ān which contain that term.

Based on his textual study of the latter, Abū Zayd finds that the process of

interpretation, which he calls "contextual interpretation" (*al-qirā'a al-siyāqiyya*), has to

follow two steps: the first is to return (*rujū'*) to the meaning in its historical and cultural

context (*tārīkhiyyāt al-dalāla)*; and the second, to arrive at its significance (*maghzā*) in

the present context.

Abū Zayd argues that with this contextual interpretation one can reach

objectively the historical meaning of the text. Its significance, on the other hand, is

relative and subject to different interpreters and contexts. This significance, however,

Abū Zayd warns, has to be firmly related to the historical meaning.

It is for this reason that Abū Zayd criticizes some Islamists' and modernist

Muslims' interpretation of the Qur'ān. Both, according to Abū Zayd, either ignore the

historical meaning and the historicity of the text, or discount it because it is of the past

and of no use for the present. In both cases, they read *into* the Qur'ān, which Abū Zayd

classifies as "biased reading" (*talwīn)*, instead of reading *before* or *in front of* the text.

In our comparison with the approaches to the Qur'ān of other contemporary

Muslims, we found that Abū Zayd's theory of interpretation is similar to the double

movement theory of Fazlur Rahman. We could not detect, however, any trace of direct

influence by the latter on Abū Zayd. Moreover, Abū Zayd's argument was enhanced by

his willingness to draw not only on the Qur'ānic verses but also on other traditional

sources in an effort to support his contextual theory of reading the Qur'ān.

Abū Zayd has benefited in particular from modern and postmodern theories of interpretation, but his theory falls within the category of modernism rather than postmodernism. As Terence J. Kegan puts it, "[w]hat distinguishes postmodernism from modernism in both scientific and humanistic disciplines is the acceptance of the impossibility of arriving at objective certitude."[1] Abū Zayd insists that, with his theory, one can reach an objective understanding of the text as long as he or she follows the two steps faithfully. Mohammed Arkoun, on the other hand, has been influenced more by postmodernism in that he sees objective interpretation as being the result of the political, economic or religious power that justifies and legitimates a certain interpretation rather than another. His challenge to modern objectivism is further supported by his application of deconstruction. Besides challenging the notion of objective interpretation, this theory criticizes the hierarchical oppositions between inside and outside, speech and writing, and true and false. Arkoun proposes a theory of deconstruction to explain why certain dogmas prevail while others disappear from view.

Abū Zayd, Rahman, Arkoun, and other proponents of the literary approach to the Qur'ān have encountered negative responses from the Islamists despite their different strategies. The thesis argues that these responses are the result of the Islamists' *theological* opposition to rational theology, and the supposed lack of theological foundations to support this new approach.

---

[1] See Keegan, "Biblical Criticism and the Challenge of Postmodernism," *Biblical Interpretation* 3, 1 (March 1995): 1.

## B. Abū Zayd's Contributions

Abū Zayd has contributed greatly to the field of Islamic studies, especially Qur'ānic studies. His major contribution is his systematical analysis of the concept of *waḥy* (revelation). He demonstrates the human, cultural and historical dimensions of revelation by first asserting that the revelation was directed to a human being (Muḥammad) using a human language (Arabic language). He supports his argument for the essential human aspect of the text from the Qur'ān itself by way of comparison between the Word of God in Christianity and in Islam. While the Word of God which was conveyed to Maryam (Q. 4:171) materialized in Jesus, that which was revealed to Muḥammad was manifested in a linguistic text using human language.

Since the revelation uses a human language, which is Arabic, it is, Abū Zayd continues, closely related to its culture and context. This relation is further shown from the fact that the Qur'ān, which was revealed piecemeal (*munajjaman*), was meant to respond to the historical context of Arabia.

Contrary to some scholars who argue that it is pointless to re-evaluate the concept of revelation, Abū Zayd has contributed to the re-introduction of the rational theology of Islam, based on the "createdness of the Qur'ān," which has been long buried or forgotten by many Muslims. The negative reactions that he has received prove that it requires courage on his part and on that of liberal Muslim scholars to challenge the status quo.

A third aspect of Abū Zayd's contribution lies in his methodology of interpretation. He is well versed in the traditional Islamic sources and Western methodologies, and has implemented these modern methodologies in his studies. His

theory insists that historical research has to be linked with the reality of the

contemporary situation. In comparison with other studies of the Qur'ān, which mostly

utilize philological and historical approaches, Abū Zayd has contributed his share by

suggesting the use of modern linguistic theories. It is worth quoting the comments of

Mohammed Arkoun here:

> *Yumkin al-qawl bi-'anna Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd huwa awwalu bāḥith*
> *muslim yaktub mubāsharatan bi-al-'arabiyya wa yudarris fī jāmi'at al-*
> *Qāhira wa yatajarra' 'alā intihāk al-muḥarramāt al-'adīda allatī tamna'*
> *taṭbīq muktasabāt al-alsuniyyāt al-ḥadītha al-akthar ījābiyyatan 'alā al-*
> *Qur'ān*[2]

(It is possible to say that Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd is the first Muslim
thinker who writes directly in Arabic, teaches in Cairo University, and
ventures to desacralize the various taboos that prevent the
implementation of modern linguistic findings, which have more positive
contribution, to the Qur'ān)

Likewise, it is worth mentioning that Western Qur'ānic scholars have

appreciated Abū Zayd's contribution by appointing him a member of the Advisory

Board for the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* since 1994.

---

[2] Arkūn, *al-Fikr al-Uṣūlī wa Istiḥālat al-Ta'ṣīl: Naḥwa Tārīkh Ākhar li-al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, transl. into Arabic by Hāshim Ṣāliḥ (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 1999), 63.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography contains four categories of sources. The first consists of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's works. They are divided into his books and articles. Included in this category are his translations of some English works and his own works which have been translated into Western as well as Eastern languages. The second category consists of studies on Abū Zayd's ideas and "case". Since this thesis studies the hermeneutics of Abū Zayd, the third category incorporates works on the theory of interpretation in literary criticism and Biblical studies. The final category encompasses works on Qur'ānic interpretation and other subjects related to the topic.

In classifying entries, no account is taken of the Arabic letter *'ayn* and the Arabic definite article *al-*.

## A. Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's Works

### 1. Abū Zayd's Books (in chronological order)

Abū Zayd, Naṣr Ḥāmid. *al-Ittijāh al-'Aqlī fī al-Tafsīr: Dirāsa fī Qaḍiyyat al-Majāz fī al-Qur'ān 'inda al-Mu'tazila.* Many editions. The 1st edition was published in Beirut: Dār al-Tanwīr, 1982; the 2nd in 1983; the 3rd in 1993; the 4th in Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1998.

----------. *Falsafat al-Ta'wīl: Dirāsa fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān 'inda Muḥyī al-Dīn b. 'Arabī.* Many editions. The 1st edition was published in Beirut: Dār al-Tanwīr, 1983; the 2nd in 1993; the 3rd in Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1996; the 4th in 1998.

---------- and Sīzā (Ceza) Qāsim (eds.) *Anẓimat al-'Alāmāt fī al-Lugha wa al-Adab wa al-Thaqāfa: Madkhal ilā al-Sīmiyūṭīqā.* Cairo: Dār Ilyās al-'Aṣriyya, 1986.

----------. *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsa fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān.* Many editions. The 1st edition was published in Cairo by al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma in 1990 and Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1990; the 2nd edition Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1994; the 3rd in 1996; the 4th in 1998.

----------. *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī.* Many editions. The 1st edition Cairo: Sīnā li-al-Nashr, 1992; the 2nd edition in 1994; the 3rd edition Cairo: Sīnā li-al-Nashr and Maktabat Madbūlī, 1995; the 4th in 1998. Trans. into German by Chérifa Magdi. *Islam und Politik: Kritik des religiösen Diskurses.* Frankfurt am Main: dipa-Verl., 1996; Trans. into French by Mohamed Chairet, *Critique du discours religieux.* Paris: Sinbad, 1999. It is also published under the title *al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī: Ru'ya Naqdiyya. Naḥwa Intāj Wa'y 'Ilmī bi-Dalālat al-Nuṣūṣ al-Dīniyya.* Beirut: Dār al-Muntakhab al-'Arabī, 1992.

----------. *al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī wa Ta'sīs al-Īdiyūlūjiyya al-Wasaṭiyya.* Many editions. The 1st edition Cairo: Sīnā li-al-Nashr, 1992; the 2nd Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1996;

the 3<sup>rd</sup> in 1998. Trans. into Bahasa Indonesia by Khoiron Nahdliyyin. *Imam Syafi'i: Moderatisme-Eklektisisme-Arabisme.* Jogyakarta: LKIS, 1997.

----------. *Ishkāliyyāt al-Qirā'a wa Āliyyāt al-Ta'wīl.* The 2<sup>nd</sup> Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1992; the 4<sup>th</sup> in 1994; the 5<sup>th</sup> in 1999.

----------. "Foreword." In *al-Khilāfa wa Sulṭat al-Umma.* Cairo: Dār al-Nahr, 1995, 7-60.

----------. *al-Mar'a fī Khiṭāb al-Azma.* Cairo: Dār al-Nuṣūṣ, 1995.

----------. *al-Tafkīr fī Zaman al-Takfīr: Ḍidd al-Jahl wa al-Zayf wa al-Khurāfa.* The 1<sup>st</sup> edition Cairo: Sīnā li-al-Nashr, 1995; the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition in 1998.

----------. *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa: al-Fikr al-Dīnī bayna Irādat al-Ma'rifa wa Irādat al-Haymana.* The 1<sup>st</sup> edition Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1995; the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition in 1997.

----------. (ed.). *al-Qawl al-Mufīd fī Qaḍiyyat Abū Zayd.* Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1996.

----------. (Nasr Hamid Aboe Zaid). *Vernieuwing in het islamitisch denken.* Trans. from Arabic into Dutch by Fred Leemhuis and Rob Leemhuis. Amsterdam: Bulaaq, 1996.

----------. *Dawā'ir al-Khawf: Qirā'a fī Khiṭāb al-Mar'a.* Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1999.

----------. (Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid). *Ein Leben mit dem Islam.* An interview by Navid Kermani. Trans. from Arabic by Chérifa Magdi. Herder: Spektrum, 1999.

----------. *al-Khiṭāb wa al-Ta'wīl.* Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 2000.

## 2. Abū Zayd's Articles (Chronological)

### 1960s-1970s

Abū Zayd, Naṣr Ḥāmid. "Ḥawla Adab al-'Ummāl wa al-Fallāḥīn." *al-Adab* 5 (Oct. 1964): 310-311.

----------. "Azmat al-Ughniya al-Miṣriyya." *al-Adab* 7 (1964): 406-408.

----------. "Aṣdā' Adabiyya: Miḥnat al-Thaqāfa fī al-Aqālīm." *al-Adab* 8 (Jan. 1965): 504-505.

----------. "Ibn Khaldūn bayna al-Naẓariyya wa al-Taṭbīq." *al-Kātib* 195 (1977).

### 1980s

----------. "al-Thābit wa al-Mutaḥawwil fī Ru'yā Adūnīs li-al-Turāth." *Fuṣūl* 1, 1 (Oct. 1980): 241-249. Reprinted in *Ishkāliyyāt,* 227-251.

----------. "al-Hirminyūṭīqā wa Mu'dilat Tafsīr al-Naṣṣ." *Fuṣūl* 1, 3 (April 1981): 141-159. Reprinted in *Ishkāliyyāt,* 13-49.

----------. "al-Dhākira al-Mafqūda wa al-Baḥth 'an al-Naṣṣ." *Fuṣūl* 4, 1 (Dec. 1983): 199-205. Reprinted in *Ishkāliyyāt,* 253-269.

----------. "al-Asās al-Kalāmī li-Mabḥath al-Majāz fī al-Balāgha al-'Arabiyya." In *Dirāsāt fī al-Fann wa al-Falsafa wa al-Fikr al-Qawmī fī Sharaf al-Maghfūr Lah 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Ahwānī.* Cairo: Dār al-Qāhira li-al-Nashr, 1983. Reprinted in *Ishkāliyyāt,* 121-147.

----------. "Mafhūm al-Naẓm 'inda 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī: Qirā'a fī Ḍaw' al-Uslūbiyya." *Fuṣūl* 5, 1 (Dec. 1984): 11-24. Reprinted in *Ishkāliyyāt,* 149-183.

----------. "al-'Alāmāt fī al-Turāth: Dirāsa Istikshāfiyya." In *Anẓimat al-'Alāmāt. Madkhal ilā al-Simiyūṭīqā,* 73-132. Reprinted in *Ishkāliyyāt,* 51-118.

----------. "al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya Sīra Sha'biyya." *Journal of Osaka University of Foreign Studies* 71 (1986), 1-24. Reprinted in *al-Funūn al-Sha'biyya* 32-33 (Dec. 1991): 17-36.

----------. (Nasr Abu-Zaid). "al-Ghazali's Theory of Interpretation." *Journal of Osaka University of Foreign Studies* 72 (1986): 1-25.

----------. "al-Fawāzir: Waẓīfatuhā wa Banā'uhā al-Lughawī." *al-Funūn al-Sha'biyya* 18 (Jan.-March 1987): 60-66.

----------. (Nasr Abu-Zaid). "The Perfect Man: a Textual Analysis." *Journal of Osaka University of Foreign Studies* 77 (1988): 111-133.

----------. "al-Ta'wīl fī Kitāb Sībawayh." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 8 (1988). Reprinted in *Ishkāliyyāt,* 185-223.

----------. "al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī al-Mu'āṣir: Aliyyātuh wa Munṭalaqātuh al-Fikriyya." *Qaḍāyā Fikriyya* 8 (1989): 45-78. Reprinted in *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī,* 11-106. Translated into French by Nachwa al-Azhari and Edwige Lambert "Le Discours religieux contemporain. Mécanismes et fondements intellectuels." *Égypte/Monde arabe* 3, 3 (1990): 73-120.

### 1990

----------. "Foreword." In Inazo Nitobe's *al-Būshīdo Rūḥ al-Yābān.* Baghdad: Dā'irat al-Shu'ūn al-Thaqāfiyya al-'Āmma, 1990.

----------. "al-Turāth bayna al-Ta'wīl wa al-Talwīn: Qirā'a fī Mashrū' al-Yasār al-Islāmī." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 10 (1990). Reprinted in *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī,* 107-182.

----------. "al-Nuṣūṣ al-Dīniyya bayna al-Tārīkh wa al-Wāqi'." *Qaḍāyā wa Shahādāt* 2 (1990): 384-408. Reprinted in *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī* as "Qirā'āt al-Nuṣūṣ al-Dīniyya. Dirāsa Istikshāfiyya li-Anmāṭ al-Dalāla," 183-224.

----------. "al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī al-Mu'āṣir Yunāqiḍ Nafsahu Ḥīna Yarfuḍ al-Fahm al-'Ilmī li-al-Nuṣūṣ." *al-Yasār* 2 (April 1990): 68-70.

----------. "al-Kashf 'an Aqni'at al-Irhāb: Baḥthan 'an 'Almāniyya Jadīda." *Adab wa Naqd* 58 (June 1990): 40-50.

----------. "al-Nuṣūṣ al-Dīniyya wa al-Wāqi' al-Tārīkhī: Tārīkhiyyat al-Dalāla wa Ḥarfiyyat al-Ta'wīl." *al-Yasār* 4 (June 1990): 56-58.

----------. "Azmat al-Niẓām al-'Arabī bayna Ghiyāb al-'Aql wa Sulṭat al-Dīn." *al-Ahālī* (Sept. 5 and 12, 1990)

----------. "al-'Awda ilā 'Aṣr al-'Ubūdiyya wa Tasalluṭ al-Kahnūt." *al-Yasār* 7 (September 1990): 71-73.

----------. "al-Ijtihād al-Ḥaqīqī ... wa al-Ijtihād al-Zā'if." *al-Yasār* 9 (Nov. 1990): 81-83.

----------. "al-Idiyūlūjiyya al-Wasaṭiyya al-Talfīqiyya fī Fikr al-Shāfi'ī." *al-Ijtihād* 9 (1990): 57-91; Reprinted in *al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī,* 5-56.

### 1991

----------. "Thaqāfat al-Tanmiya wa Tanmiyat al-Thaqāfa." *al-Qāhira* 110&111 (Dec. 1990&Jan. 1991): 23-28.

----------. "al-Mahdī al-Muntaẓar wa al-'Aql al-Ma'zūm." *al-Yasār* 14 (April 1991): 32-34.

----------. "Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ (1): al-Dalāla al-Lughawiyya." *Ibdā'* 4 (April 1991): 99-106; Reprinted in *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa,* 149-159.

----------. "Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ (2): al-Ta'wīl: Mafhūm al-Thaqāfa li-al-Nuṣūṣ." *Ibdā'* 5 (May 1991): 121-130; Reprinted in *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa,* 159-171.

----------. "Kitāb 'Ḥaṣād al-Sinīn' wa Amthilat al-Tanwīr al-Makbūta." *al-'Arabi* 395 (Oct. 1991): 108-113; Reprinted in *al-Khiṭāb wa al-Ta'wīl,* 67-82.

----------. "Limādhā Ṭaghat ·al-Talfiqiyya 'alā Kathīr min Mashrū'āt Tajdīd al-Islām (Qirā'a Naqdiyya li-Kitāb Muḥammad Shaḥrūr)." *al-Hilāl* 99, 10 (Oct. 1991): 18-27.

----------. "I'ṭā' al-'Aysh li-Khubbāzih aw 'Awdat Maḥākim al-Taftīsh." *Adab wa Naqd* 75 (Nov. 1991): 28-31.

## 1992

----------. "al-Manhaj al-Nafʿī fī Fahm al-Nuṣūṣ al-Dīniyya (Radd 'alā Shaḥrūr)." *al-Hilāl* 100, 3 (March 1992): 54-61.

----------. "al-Turāth bayna al-Istikhdām al-Nafʿī wa al-Qirā'a al-'Ilmiyya: Sulṭat al-Naṣṣ fī Muwājahāt al-'Aql." *Adab wa Naqd* 79 (March 1992): 51-70; Reprinted in *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa,* 13-26 and 35-48.

----------. "Markabat al-Majāz: Man Yaqūduhā? Wa Ilā Ayna?" *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 12 (1992): 50-74; Reprinted in *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa* as "Ishkāliyyat 'al-Majāz': al-Nizā' Ḥawla al-Ḥaqīqa," 173-212.

----------. "Muḥāwalat Qirā'at al-Maskūt 'Anh fī Khiṭāb Ibn 'Arabī." *al-Hilāl* 100, 5 (May 1992): 24-33.

----------. "Review of François Burgat's *L'Islamisme au Maghreb (al-Islām al-Siyāsī fī al-Maghrib)* .. Naẓra Muḥāyida." *al-'Arabi* 406 (Sept. 1992): 198-202.

----------. "Mashrū' al-Nahḍa bayna al-Tawfīq wa al-Talfīq." *al-Qāhira* 119 (Oct. 1992): 18-31.

----------. "Azmat al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī." *Rāyat al-Istiqlāl* 19 (Oct. 1992): 57-59.

----------. "Qirā'at al-Turāth wa Turāth al-Qirā'a (fī Kitābāt Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd)." *Adab wa Naqd* 9, 87 (Nov. 1992): 31-46.

## 1993

----------. "Ihdār al-Siyāq fī Ta'wilāt al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī." *al-Qāhira* 122 (Jan. 1993): 87-115.

----------. "al-Mar'a: al-Bu'd al-Mafqūd fī al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī al-Mu'āṣir." *al-Qāhira* 123 (Feb. 1993): 16-36; Reprinted in *Hājar: Kitāb al-Mar'a* 1 (1993): 51-84; Reprinted in *Dawā'ir al-Khawf,* 75-125.

----------. "Qānūn al-Aḥwāl al-Shakhṣiyya fī Tūnis bayna al-'Almāniyya al-Muftaraḍa wa Judhūr al-Turāth al-Islāmī." In *Hājar: Kitāb al-Mar'a* 1 (1993): 263-80; Reprinted in *Dawā'ir al-Khawf,* 279-309.

----------. "Qirā'at al-Turāth wa 'Adasat al-Naqd al-Ḥadāthī." *Fuṣūl* 12, 1 (1993).

----------. "Khiṭāb al-Islām al-Siyāsī wa al-'Unf al-Mustatir." *al-Ahrām* (Jan. 24, 1992); Reprinted in *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 42-48.

----------. "Min al-'Unf al-Mustatir ilā al-'Unf al-'Alānī." *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 49.

----------. "Ibn Rushd: al-Ta'wīl wa al-Ta'addudiyya." *al-'Arabī* 414 (May 1993): 110-16.

----------. "al-Mar'a fi al-Mujtama': Jirāḥ al-Lugha wa Jirāḥ al-Huwiyya." *Adab wa Naqd* 93 (May 1993): 53-66; Reprinted in *Dawā'ir al-Khawf* as "Anthrūbūlūjiyyat al-Lugha wa Injirāḥ al-Huwiyya," 27-51.

----------. "Ḍawābiṭ al-Baḥth al-'Ilmī wa Amānat Ḥurriyyat al-Ra'y." *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī* 15, 12 (June 1993): 42-45.

----------. "Review of Kitāb *Tajdīd al-Nahḍa bi-Iktishāf al-Dhāt wa Naqduhā* li-Muḥammad Jābir al-Anṣārī." *al-'Arabī* 415 (June 1993): 94-99.

----------. "al-Islām bayna al-Fahm al-'Ilmī wa al-Istikhdām al-Nafʿī." *al-Qawmī* (August 4, 1993).

----------. "Ataḥaddāka yā Duktūr ... wa Sāhamaka Allāh. Lam Tuḥsin Qirā'at Kalāmī ... wa Taddaʿī 'alayya bi-al-Bāṭil. Abū Zayd Yarudd 'alā al-Badrāwī." *al-Akhbār* (August 25, 1993).

----------. "Al-Lā-Ma'qūl - Kayfa Yaṣīr Ma'qūlan fi Ḥayātinā?" *al-Ahālī* (Sept. 9, 1993).

----------. "Zakkī Najīb Maḥmūd: Ghurbat al-Rūḥ Bayna Ahlihā." *al-Muṣawwar* (Sept. 24, 1993): 44-46.

----------. "Mashrūʿ 'al-Iṣlāḥ al-Dīnī': Thawābituh wa Mutaghayyirātuh." *Adab wa Naqd* 10, 97 (Sept. 1993): 99-100.

----------. "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya: Māta al-Rajul wa Bada'at Muḥākamatuh." *Adab wa Naqd* 10, 98 (Oct. 1993): 63-68; Reprinted in *al-Khiṭāb wa al-Ta'wīl,* 83-88.

----------. "al-Ahzāb wa al-Ḥurriyyāt wa al-Ḥiwār." *al-Ahālī* (Oct. 6, 1993).

----------. "al-Ma'qūl wa al-Lā Ma'qūl fi al-Ḥayāh al-Siyāsiyya al-Miṣriyya." *al-Ahālī* (Oct. 6, 1993).

----------. "al-Muthaqqif al-'Arabī wa al-Sulṭa." *al-Ḥayāh* (Oct. 6 and 17, 1993).

----------. "Abū Zayd wa 'al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī'." In *Qaḍāyā Fikriyya* 13/14 (Oct. 1993) on *al-Uṣūliyyāt al-Islāmiyya fi 'Aṣrinā al-Rāhin.* Ed. Maḥmūd Amīn al-'Ālim: 387-406.

----------. "Ḍidda al-Kitābāt al-Mudh'ina." *Adab wa Naqd* 10, 100 (Dec. 1993): 84-88.

----------. "al-Rijāl wa al-Ḥaqq wa mā Baynahumā. Ta'līqāt Sarī'a 'alā mā Ḥadath." *al-Ahālī* (Dec. 1, 1993).

## 1994

----------. "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya." *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 101 (Jan. 1994): 63-69.

----------. "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya: al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī: Bayna al-Bashariyya wa al-Qadāsa." *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 102 (Feb. 1994): 70-74.

----------. "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya: Mushkilāt al-Baḥth fi al-Turāth (Mutāba'a)." *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 103 (March 1994): 47-56.

----------. "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya: al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī: Bayna al-Qadāsa wa al-Bashariyya (Mushkilāt al-Baḥth fi al-Turāth)." *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 104 (April 1994): 87-94.

----------. "Khiṭāb al-Ḥurriyya: Mafhūm al-Tārīkhiyya al-Muftarā 'Alayh." *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 105 (May 1994): 10-55; Reprinted in *al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa* as "al-Tārīkhiyya: al-Mafhūm al-Multabis," 67-70.

----------. "Qaḍiyyat al-Mar'a bayna Khiṭāb al-Nahḍa wa al-Khiṭāb al-Ṭā'ifi. *Mawāqif* 73-74 (1994): 39-53; Reprinted in *Dawā'ir al-Khawf,* 55-73; "The Sectarian and

the Renaissance Discourse." Translated and introduced by Mona Mikhail. *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 19 (1999): 203-222.

----------. "al-Istiqtāb al-Fikrī bayna 'al-Islām al-'Asrī' wa 'Aslimat al-'Asr' fi Misr." *al-Tarīq* 53, 3 (May 1994): 8-12.

----------. "al-Maqāsid al-Kulliyya li-al-Sharī'a: Qirā'a Jadīda." *al-'Arabī* 426 (May 1994): 112-116; Reprinted in *al-Khitāb wa al-Ta'wīl*, 201-208.

----------. "Khitāb al-Hurriyya: Mafhūm al-Tārīkhiyya al-Muftarā 'Alayh (2) al-Qudra wa al-Fi'l al-Ilāhiyyān." *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 106 (June 1994): 96-100; Reprinted in *al-Nass, al-Sulta, al-Haqīqa*, 70-74.

----------. "Khitāb al-Hurriyya: al-Lugha wa al-'Ālam wa Mu'dilat 'al-Qur'ān' wa 'al-Tārīkh'." *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 107 (July 1994): 133-138; Reprinted in *al-Nass, al-Sulta, al-Haqīqa*, 75-80.

----------. "Isyān al-Dīn am 'Isyān al-Dawla." *al-Nāqid* 73 (July 1994): 9-15.

----------. "al-Urthūdhuksiyya al-Mu'ammama." *al-Nāqid* 74 (August 1994): 26-34; Reprinted in *al-Khitāb wa al-Ta'wīl* as "al-Lugha al-Dīniyya wa al-Bahth 'an Alsuniyya Jadīda: Qirā'a fi Fikr Muhammad Arkūn," 106-125.

----------. "Ta'qīb: Na'am li-Tahrīr Madāmīn al-Mustlahāt." *al-'Arabī* 37, 429 (Aug. 1994): 160-163.

----------. "Khitāb al-Hurriyya: al-Lugha wa al-Thaqāfa wa al-Muntaj al-Thaqāfī." *Adab wa Naqd* 11, 109 (Sept. 1994): 57-66; Reprinted in *al-Nass, al-Sulta, al-Haqīqa*, 80-89.

----------. "Wajhan li-Wajhin: Mahmūd Amīn al-'Ālim wa Dr. Nasr Abū Zayd." *al-'Arabī* 37, 430 (Sept. 1994): 74-80.

----------. "al-Ru'ya fi al-Nass al-Sardī al-'Arabī." *al-Fusūl* 13, 3 (Dec. 1994): 105-128.

### 1995

----------. "Khitāb al-Hurriyya: Kalām Laysa Jadīdan Tamāman 'an 'al-Islām' wa 'al-Shi'r'." *Adab wa al-Naqd* 12, 113 (Jan. 1995): 79-84.

----------. "Khitāb al-Hurriyya: al-Difā' 'an al-Shi'r min Ajl Ta'sīs 'Ilm al-Bayān: Qirā'a fi Muqaddimāt 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī." *Adab wa Naqd* 114 (Feb. 1995): 75-84.

----------. "al-Bu'd al-Mafqūd fi al-Dirāsāt al-Dīniyya (Review of W. Graham's *Beyond the Written Word*)." *al-'Arabī* 436 (March 1995).

----------. (Nasr H. Abou-Zaid). "Review of William A. Graham's *Beyond the Written Word*." *Die Welt des Islams* 35, 1 (1995): 150-152.

----------. "al-Tanwīr al-Islāmī Judhūruh wa Āfāquh min al-Mu'tazila wa Ibn Rushd ilā Muhammad 'Abduh." *al-Qāhira* (May 1995): 29-45.

----------. "Hal Anā Kāfir?" *Rūz al-Yūsuf* (June 26, 1995).

----------. "Foreword." *al-Khilāfa wa Sultat al-Umma.* Cairo: Dār al-Nahr, 1995, 7-60; Reprinted in *al-Khitāb wa al-Ta'wīl* as "Ishkāliyyat al-Khilāfa bayna al-Tārīkh wa al-Lāhūt," 137-171.

----------. "Foreword." *al-Shi'r al-Sūfī bayna Mafhūmay al-Infisāl wa al-Tawhīd.* Cairo: Misr al-'Arabiyya li-al-Nasr wa al-Tawzī', 1995, 5-10.

### 1996

----------. "Mashrū' al-Islāh al-Dīnī bayna al-Tahaddī al-Awrubbī wa al-Takhalluf al-Dākhilī." *Adab wa Naqd* 133 (Sept. 1996): 10-22.

----------. (Nasr Abu Zaid) "The Case of Abu Zayd." *Index on Censorship* 4 (1996): 30-39.

----------. "Linguistic Exposition of God in the Qur'an." In "Fundamentalismus der Moderne, Christen und Muslim im Dialog." In *Evangelische Akademie Loccum* 75/94 (1996): 97-100. Available at http://www.geocities.com/~lrc/Zaid/exposition.html

----------. "Khiṭāb Ibn Rushd bayna Ḥaqq al-Maʿrifa wa Dughūṭ al-Khiṭāb al-Naqīd." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 16 (1996): 6-35; Reprinted in *al-Khiṭāb wa al-Taʾwīl* as "Markaziyyat al-Ghazālī wa Hāmishiyyat Ibn Rushd: Khiṭāb al-Tanwīr bayna Ḥaqq al-Maʿrifa wa Dughūṭ al-Khiṭāb al-Naqīd," 19-66.

## 1997

----------. (Nasr Abu Zaid). "The Textuality of the Koran." In *Islam and Europe in Past and Present.* Leiden: Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences, 1997, 43-52.

----------. "al-Islām wa al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya wa al-Marʾa: Dawāʾir al-Khawf ʿinda Fāṭima al-Mirnīsī (al-Khawf min al-Taḥdīth wa al-Ḥadātha." *Nūr* 12 (1997); Reprinted in *Dawāʾir al-Khawf,* 243-277.

## 1998

----------. "The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur'ān." Unpublished paper presented at "Qur'anic Studies on the Eve of the 21st Century," June 10-12, 1998 in Leiden University.

----------. (Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd). "Qur'anic Studies on the Eve of the 21st Century." In *ISIM (International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World) Newsletter* 1/98, 46.

----------. (Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid). "Divine Attributes in the Qur'an: Some Poetic Aspects." In *Islam and Modernity: Muslim Intellectuals Respond.* Eds. John Cooper, Ronald L. Nettler and Mohamed Mahmoud. London: I.B. Tauris, 1998, 190-211.

----------. "Inquisition Trial in Egypt." In *Human Rights in Islam (RIMO, Maastricht)* 15 (1998): 47-55.

----------. (Nasr Abu-Zaid). "Review of Michael Lecker's *Muslim, Jews and Pagans: Studies on Early Islamic Medina.*" *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 55, 1/2 (Jan.-April 1998): 275-278.

----------. "Islam, Muslims and Democracy." In *Religion und Politik* (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, intere Studie) 151 (1998): 103-112.

----------. "Literature and Heresy, Literature and Justice: The Critical Potential of Enlightened Religion." In "Literatur, Menschenrechte in islamischen Gesellschaften und Staaten." In *Evangelische Akademie Loccum* 22/96 (1998): 18-32.

----------. (Nasr Abu-Zayd). "The Concept of Human Rights, the Process of Modernization and the Politics of Western Domination." *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft/International Politics and Society* 4 (1998): 434-437. (Also available online at http://www.fes.de/ipg4_98/debabuzayd.html

----------. "Ishkāliyyāt al-Turāth: al-Taʾwīl al-ʿIlmī wa al-Qirāʾa al-Nafʿiyya." *Suṭūr* 23 (Oct. 1998): 12-16.

## 1999

----------. (Nasr Hamid Abu Zeid) "The Modernisation of Islam or the Islamisation of Modernity." In *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East.* Ed. Roel Meijer. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999, 71-86.

----------. "Qaḍiyyat al-Mar'a bayna Sanadān al-Ḥadātha wa Maṭraqat al-Taqālīd: Dirāsa fī Tārīkh al-Nuṣūṣ." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 19 (1999): 29-65; Reprinted in *Dawā'ir al-Khawf* as "Ḥuqūq al-Mar'a fī al-Islām: Dirāsa fī Tārīkh al-Nuṣūṣ," 177-242.

----------. (Nasr Hamed Abu-Zeid). "The Sectarian and the Renaissance Discourse." Translated and introduced by Mona Mikhail. *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 19 (1999): 203-222.

----------. (Naṣr Abū-Zaid). "Islamic Cosmology and Qur'anic Exegesis." In *Religion im Wandel der Kosmologien.* Ed. Dieter Zeller. Frankfurt am Main; Berlin; Bern; New York; Paris; Wien: Lang, 1999, 217-230.

----------. (Naṣr Abū-Zayd). "Review of C.A.O. van Nieuwenhuijze's *Paradise Lost: Reflections on the Struggle for Authenticity in the Middle East.*" *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 56, 3/4 (May-August 1999): 510-514.

----------. (Naṣr Abū-Zayd). "Review of Jabal Muhammad Buaben's *Image of the Prophet Muhammad in the West: A Study of Muir, Margoliouth and Watt.*" *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 56, 3/4 (May-August 1999): 518-521.

## 2000

----------. (Nasr Abu-Zayd). "Review of M.A. Choudhury's *Reforming the Muslim World.*" *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 57, 1/2 (Jan. – April 2000): 221-224.

----------. (N. Abu Zayd). "Review of Abdullah Saeed's *Islamic Banking and Interest: A Study of the Prohibition of Riba and Its Contemporary Interpretation.*" *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 57 5/6 (Sept. – Dec. 2000): 736-739.

----------. "The Qur'an: God and Man in Communication." Inaugural lecture as Cleveringa Professor 2000-2001 in Law, Freedom and Responsibility, especially Freedom of Religion and Conscience (Nov. 27, 2000). The text is available at: http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/forum/onderzoek/jan/2.html

## 2001

----------. "Enlightenment in Islamic Thought." Paper presented at Karl Rahner Akademie, Köln (Jan. 27, 2001). Available at http://www.kath.de/akademie/rahner/vortrag/enlight.html

## 3. Abū Zayd's Translations

Andrew Gibson. "Mulāḥaẓāt 'an al-Qiṣṣa wa al-Fukāha." *Fuṣūl* 2, 2 (1982): 173-182.

Eric D. Hirsch Jr. "Ittijāhān fī al-Taqyīm al-Adabī." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 2 (1982): 7-22.

Boris Eichenbaum. "Uw Hinrī (=O'Henry) wa Naẓariyyāt al-Qiṣṣa al-Qaṣīra." *Fuṣūl* 3, 2 (1983): 82-108.

Jurij M. Lotman. "Naẓariyyāt Ḥawla al-Dirāsa al-Simiyūṭiqiyya li-al-Thaqāfat." In *Anẓimat al-'Alāmāt,* 317-344.

Jurij M. Lotman. "Muqaddima" and "Mushkilat al-Laqṭa." In *Anẓimat al-'Alāmāt,* 265-281.

Inazo Nitobe. *al-Būshīdo Rūḥ al-Yābān.* Baghdad: Dā'irat al-Shu'ūn al-Thaqāfiyya al-'Āmma, 1990.

## 4. Interviews with Abū Zayd (in alphabetical order)

Amer, Fathi. "The Reform of Islamic Thought Comes from Abroad." *al-'Arabī* (Nov. 7, 14 and 21, 1999). Available at The Legal Research and Resource Center for Human Rights (LRRC), Cairo, Egypt website.

Bakr, Ayman and Elliott Colla. "Silencing is at the Heart of My Case." In *Middle East Report* (Nov.-Dec. 1993): 27-31.

Fawzī, Maḥmūd. *Naṣr Abū Zayd bayna al-Kufr wa al-Īmān!* Cairo: Dār al-Rā'id li-al-Nashr, 1995.

Heilmann, Annette. "Interview mit Dr. Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd in der Kairo-Universität am 14.12.1993." In "Der politische und religiöse Diskurs in Ägypten am Beispiel der *Affäre Abū Zayd.*" M.A. thesis, Berlin Free University, 1996, 85-92.

----------. "Interview mit Dr. Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd in Berlin am 10.11.1995." In ibid., 93-95.

Ḥusayn, Muḥammad. "Dr. Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd Yataḥaddath: 'Fahm al-Naṣṣ bi-al-Ḥayāh Lā Fahm al-Ḥayāh bi-al-Naṣṣ'." In *Adab wa Naqd* 10, 93 (May 1993): 70-75.

Ichwan, Moch. Nur. "Interview with Nasr Abu Zayd (June 2, 1999)." In "A New Horizon in Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's Contribution to Critical Qur'anic Scholarship." M.A. thesis, Leiden University, 1999, 121-129.

Kermani, Navid. "Die Befreiung des Korans. Ein Gespräch mit dem ägyptischen Literaturwissenschaftler Nasr Hamed Abu Zaid." In *Islam und Politik: Kritik des religiösen Diskurses,* 191-213.

----------. *Ein Leben mit dem Islam.* Trans. from Arabic by Chérifa Magdi. Herder: Spektrum, 1999.

Publisher of *al-Khiṭāb wa al-Ta'wīl.* "Ḥiwār: 'Anā Rajul min Ghimār al-Mawālī'." In *al-Khiṭāb wa al-Ta'wīl,* 209-266.

Rahman, Yusuf. "Interview with Abū Zayd (Oct. 5, 1999)." Unpublished transcript.

----------. "E-mail correspondence with Abū Zayd on M. 'Amāra's criticism." (Nov. 18, 1999).

----------. "E-mail correspondence with Abū Zayd on his C.V. and recent works." (Jan. 29, 2001).

----------. "E-mail correspondence with Abū Zayd on *Tafsīr Adabī.*" (May 21, 2001).

Sālim, Khālid. "Wajhan li-Wajhin: Dr. Naṣr Abū Zayd wa Dr. Khālid Sālim. 'al-Dirāsa al-Manhajiyya 'Allamatnī Iḥtirām al-Dhāt fī Aṣ'ab al-Ẓurūf'." In *al-'Arabī* 450 (May 1996): 66-75.

# B. Studies on Abū Zayd

## 1. Studies on His Ideas & Method of Interpretation (in alphabetical order)

'Abd Allāh, Muḥammad Hāshim. "al-Shāfi'ī Mu'assisan li-Īdiyūlūjiyā al-Taṭarruf!!: Qirā'a Naqdiyya li-Kitāb *al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī wa Ta'sīs al-Īdiyūlūjiyā al-Wasaṭiyya* li-Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd." *Adab wa Naqd* 10, 93 (May 1993): 31-40.

'Abd al-Wahhāb, Maḥmūd. "'An Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd wa *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī.*" *al-Thaqāfa al-Jadīda* 71 (Aug. 1994): 20-23.

Abū 'Awf, 'Abd al-Raḥmān. "Manhaj Naṣr Abū Zayd fī *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī:* Laqāḥ al-Khiṣb." *Adab wa Naqd* 10, 93 (May 1993): 47-51.

'Amāra, Muḥammad. "Dr. Naṣr Abū Zayd wa al-Tafsīr al-Mārksī li-al-Islām." *al-Sha'b* (Oct. 27, 1995).

----------. "al-Ru'ya al-Māddiyya li-al-Qur'ān al-Karīm." *al-Sha'b* (Jan. 16, 1996) and (Jan. 26, 1996).

----------. "Tārīkhiyyat Ma'ānī wa Aḥkām al-Qur'ān al-Karīm." *al-Sha'b* (Feb. 9, 1996) and (Feb. 16, 1996).

----------. *al-Tafsīr al-Mārksī li-al-Islām.* Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1996.

al-'Ālim, Maḥmūd Amīn. "Manhaj Naṣr Abū Zayd fī Naqd al-Fikr al-Dīnī." In idem. *Mawāqif Naqdiyya min al-Turāth.* Cairo: Dār Qaḍāyā Fikriyya, 1997, 59-69.

'Aṣfūr, Jābir. "*Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* wa al-I'tizāl al-Mu'aṣir." In idem. *Hawāmish 'alā Daftar al-Tanwīr.* Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1994, 35-60.

'Ayyād, Shukrī Muḥammad. "Fahm al-Qur'ān." In idem. *al-Qafz 'alā al-Ashwāk: Taṭbīq al-Sharī'a wa Siyāghat al-Ḥāḍir.* Cairo: Aṣdiqā' al-Kitāb, 1991, 29-39.

Bakr, Ayman. "*Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī:* Lā Yanṭuq wa Innamā Yatakallam bih al-Rijāl." *Adab wa Naqd* 10, 93 (May 1993): 41-46.

Greifenklau, Hugo von (HvG). "Review of *Ein Leben mit dem Islam.*" *Fikr wa Fann* 71 (2000): 77.

Ḥanafī, Ḥasan. "Qirā'at *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* li-Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd." *Fuṣūl* 9, 3-4 (1991): 226-237.

----------. "'Ulūm al-Ta'wīl bayna al-Khāṣṣa wa al-'Āmma: Qirā'a fī A'māl Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd." *al-Ijtihād* 23 (1994): 9-95.

Ḥaydaz, Ibrāhīm. "al-Insānī fī al-Ilāhī (Review of *al-Ittijāh al-'Aqlī fī al-Tafsīr*)." *al-Nāqid* (Dec. 1993): 62-64.

Haykal, Aḥmad Fāyd. "Dirāsat al-Naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī 'alā al-Ṭarīqa al-Yasāriyya: Naqd Kitāb *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ.*" *al-Azhar* 64, 3 (Sept. 1991): 271-275.

*al-Hilāl.* "Review of *al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī.*" *al-Hilāl* 100, 6 (June 1992): 135-136.

Hirschkind, Charles. "Heresy or Hermeneutics: The Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd." *Stanford Humanities Review* 5, 1 on "Contested Polities" (Feb. 8, 1996). Available at http://www.stanford.edu/group/SHR/5-1/text/hirschkind.html

Ichwan, Moch. Nur. "A New Horizon in Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's Contribution to Critical Qur'anic Scholarship." M.A. thesis, Leiden University, 1999.

Kāmil, Fu'ād. "Review of *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ.*" *al-'Arabī* 412 (March 1993): 198-204.

Kāmil, 'Umar 'Abd Allāh. *Ḥiwār ma'a 'Alī Ḥarb, Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd wa*

*Muḥammad Arkūn*. Cairo: International Press, 1995.

Kermani, Navid. *Offenbarung als Kommunikation: Das Konzept* waḥy *in Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayds* Mafhūm an-naṣṣ. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996.

----------. "Review of *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ.*" *Orient* 36, 2 (1995): 344-346.

Meier, Andreas. "Gotteswort in Knechtsgestalt – ein islamischer Luther in Ägypten? N.H. Abu Zaids provokante Koranexegese als säkulare Reform des Islam." In *Begegnungen zwischen Christentum und Islam*. Ed. Hans-Christoph Goßmann. Ammersbek bei Hamburg: Verl. An der Lottbek, 1994, 57-74.

----------. *Der politische Auftrag des Islam: Programme und Kritik zwischen Fundamentalismus und Reformen; Originalstimmen aus der islamischen Welt.* Wuppertal: Hammer, 1994, 540-553.

al-Shalabī, 'Abd al-Jalīl. "'An *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ.*" *al-Jumhūriyya* (May 26, 27, 28, 29, 1991). Republished in *al-Qāhira* (April 1993): 32-36.

Sinno, Ahyaf. "Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd fī Ba'd Athārih." *al-Mashriq* (Jan-June, 1997): 117-134.

Tamer, Georges. "Review of *Ein Leben mit dem Islam.*" *Die Welt des Islams* 41, 1 (2001): 112-113.

Wild, Stefan. "Die andere Seite des Textes: Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zaid und der Koran." *Die Welt des Islams* 33 (1993): 256-261.

Yehia, Mohamed. "The Dialectic of Translation: The Case of Four Hermeneutical Terms." In *Proceedings of the Fifth International Symposium on Comparative Literature 15ᵗʰ-17ᵗʰ, December 1998 on "Translation."* Eds. M.M. Enani and Mohammed Abdel Aatty. Cairo: Department of English language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Cairo, 1999, 315-338.

Zirker, Hans. "'Bedeutung zu schaffen ist ein gemeinsamer Akt zwischen Text und Leser' (Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd): Zur Hermeneutik heiliger Schriften." In *Wege der Theologie: an der Schwelle zum dritten Jahrtausend. Festschrift für Hans Waldenfels zur Vollendung des 65. Lebensjahres.* Eds. Günter Riße, Heino Sonnemans, Burkhard Theß. Paderborn: Bonifatius, 1996, 587-599.

## 2. Studies on His "Case"

Abaza, Mona. "Civil Society and Islam in Egypt: The Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd." *Journal of Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies* 2, 2 (1995): 29-42.

Abāza, Tharwat. "Ḥadhār ..!," *al-Ahrām* (April 19, 1993). Republished in *Qiṣṣat "Abū Zayd" wa Inḥisār al-'Almāniyya*, 123-126.

'Abd al-Karīm, Khalīl. *Kitābāt Dr. Naṣr Abū Zayd fī Mīzān Ṣaḥīḥ al-Islām.* Cairo: Dār Qaḍāyā Fikriyya li-al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 1996.

----------. "al-Radd 'alā Ḥaythiyyāt al-Ḥukm fī Qaḍiyyat al-Tafrīq bayna Naṣr wa Ibtihāl: Hādhihi Fatwā wa Laysa Ḥukman." *Adab wa Naqd* 120 (August 1995): 29-42.

'Abd al-Ra'ūf, 'Awnī. "al-A'māl al-'Ilmiyya al-Mutaqaddim bi-hā Duktūr Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd li-al-Ḥuṣūl 'alā Darajat Ustādh bi-Qism al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya bi-Kulliyyat al-Ādāb Jāmi'at al-Qāhira." *Al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 66-71.

'Aṣfūr, Jābir. "Mulāḥaẓāt Asātidhat Aqsām al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya 'alā al-Taqrīr al-Khāṣṣ bi-Tarqiyat Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd." *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 79-93.

al-'Awwā, Muḥammad Salīm. "Un arrêt devenu une 'affaire'." Translation of his article in *al-Sha'b* (July 14, 1995) by Baudouin Dupret. *Égypte/Monde arabe* 29 (1997): 155-173.

----------. *al-Ḥaqq fī al-Ta'bīr.* Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1998.

Ayalon, Ami. *Egypt's Quest for Cultural Orientation.* Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1999.

'Azzām, 'Abd al-Wahhāb. "Bayān." *al-Risāla* 750 (Nov. 17, 1947): 1275-1276.

Badawī, Jamāl. "al-Irhāb fī al-Jāmi'a ... wa Qiṣṣat Abū Zayd." *al-Wafd* (April 08, 1993). Republished in 'Abd al-Ṣabūr Shāhīn, *Qiṣṣat "Abū Zayd" wa Inḥisār al-'Almāniyya,* 89-97.

Bälz, Kilian. "Eheauflösung aufgrund von Apostasie durch Popularklage: der Fall Abū Zayd." *Praxis des Internationalen Privat- und Verfahrensrechts* (1996): 353-356.

----------. "Submitting Faith to Judicial Scrutiny through the Family Trial: The "Abū Zayd Case"." *Die Welt des Islams* 37, 2 (1997): 135-55.

Berger, M.S. "Court of Cassation." Translation of the ruling of the Court of Cassation in Abū Zayd's affair. In "Jurisprudence Abū Zayd." *Égypte/Monde arabe* 34 (1998): 193-201.

Biltājī, Muḥammad. "Taqrīr Dr. Muḥammad al-Biltājī fī "Qaḍiyyat" Abū Zayd." *al-Sha'b* (April 16, 1993).

The Center for Human Rights Legal Aid (CHRLA). "From Confiscation to Charges of Apostasy: The Implications of the Egyptian Court Decision Ordering the Divorce of Dr. Nasr Hamed Abu-Zeid from His Wife, Dr. Ibtihal Younis." *Dossier: Women Living Under Muslim Laws* 14/15 (1995): 333-44.

Darrāj, Fayṣal. "Radm al-Jāmi' wa al-Jāmi'a Ma'an!" *al-Ādāb* 7/8 (July-August 1995): 3-9.

Dupret, Baudouin. "Un arrêt devenu une 'affaire'." Translation of Muḥammad Salīm al-'Awwā's article in *al-Sha'b* (July 14, 1995). *Égypte/Monde arabe* 29 (1997): 155-173.

----------. "Jurisprudence Abū Zayd." Translation of the rulings of both the First Instance Court and the Court of Appeals in Abū Zayd's case. *Égypte/Monde arabe* 34 (1998): 169-193.

----------. "A propos de l'affaire Abū Zayd, universitaire poursuivi pour apostasie." *Monde arabe, Maghreb-Machrek* 151 (January-March 1996): 18-22.

---------- and Jean-Noël Ferrié. "For intérieur et ordre public, ou comment la problématique de l'Aufklärung peut permettre de décrire un débat égyptien." In *Droits et sociétés dans le monde arabe.* Eds. Gilles Boëtsch, Baudouin Dupret et Jean-Noël Ferrié. Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires d'Aix-Marseille, 1997, 193-215.

---------- and Jean-Noël Ferrié. "Participer au pouvoir, c'est édicter la norme: sur l'affaire Abu Zayd (Égypte, 1992-1996)." *Revue française de science politique* 47, 6 (1997): 762-765.

Farḥāt, Muḥammad Nūr. "Dirāsa Qānūniyya Muhimma: Qirā'a fī Ḥaythiyyāt al-Takfīr." *al-Muṣawwar* 3690 (June 30, 1995): 60-63.

al-Ghīṭānī, Jamāl. "'Alā Hāmish al-Ḥiwār." *al-Akhbār* (April 7, 1993). Republished in *al-Qawl al-Mufīd,* 175-178.

----------. "Fī Ṣamīm al-Mas'ala." *al-Akhbār* (April 14, 1993). Republished in *al-Qawl al-*

*Mufid,* 190-192.

----------. "Mas'alat al-Duktūr Naṣr." *al-Akhbār* (March 31, 1993). Republished in *al-Qawl al-Mufid,* 164-166.

Hāshim, Ḥāzim. "al-Maghḍūb 'Alayhim fī al-Jāmi'a." *al-Wafd* (April 6, 1993). Republished in *al-Qawl al-Mufid,* 99-102

Heilmann, Annette. "Die Affäre Abu Zayd und der Begriff der 'Ethik der Toleranz' in der heutigen politischen Diskussion in Ägypten." In *Staat und Zivilgesellschaft in Ägypten.* Ed. Ferhad Ibrahim. Münster; Hamburg: Lit, 1995, 145-168.

----------. "Der politische und religiöse Diskurs in Ägypten am Beispiel der *Affäre Abū Zayd.*" M.A. thesis, Berlin Free University, 1996.

Ḥijāzī, Ahmad 'Abd al-Mu'ṭī. "Lākin Jahilta Faqulta Inna Jamī'a Man Yahwā Khilāf Hawāka Laysa bi-'Ālim." *al-Ahrām* (April 7, 1993). Republished in *al-Qawl al-Mufid,* 179-186.

Huwaydī, Fahmī. "Dars fī al-Tajarrud wa al-Inṣāf." *al-Ahrām* (Dec. 8, 1992). Reprinted in *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 37-41.

----------. "Qaḍiyya Mun'adima wa Muṣāraḥa Wājiba." *al-Ahrām* (Jan. 26, 1993). Reprinted in *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 47-48.

Kermani, Navid. "Die Affäre Abū Zayd: Eine Kritik am religiösen Diskurs und ihre Folgen." *Orient* 35, 1 (1994): 25-49.

Mahmūd, Muṣṭafā. "Ma'a 'Abd al-Ṣabūr Shāhīn ...," *al-Ahrām* April 10, 1993. Republished in *Qiṣṣat "Abū Zayd" wa Inḥiṣār al-'Almāniyya,* 85-88.

Majlis Kulliyyat al-Ādāb Jāmi'at al-Qāhira. "Taqrīr al-Lajna allatī Shakkalahā Majlis al-Kulliyya li-al-Naẓar fī Mawḍū' Tarqiyat al-Duktūr Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd ilā Darajat Ustādh bi-Qism al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya wa Ādābihā." *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 94-96.

Makkī, Mahmūd 'Alī. "al-Intāj al-'Ilmī li-al-Duktūr Naṣr Ḥāmid Rizq Abū Zayd al-Murashshaḥ li-Darajat Ustādh." *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 50-65.

----------. "Li-Hādhā Waqqa'tu ...wa li-Hādhā Tarāja'tu." *al-Akhbār* (April 14, 1993). Reproduced in *al-Qawl al-Mufid,* 240-246.

Manṣūr, Ahmad Ṣubḥī. "Ṭāḥūnat al-Takfīr fī al-Ṣuḥuf al-Miṣriyya wa Ḥiwār ma'a Ṣadīq 'Azīz." *al-Qāhira* (July 1993): 214-225.

al-Miḥlāwī, Ḥanafī. "Azma fī Jāmi'at al-Qāhira (2). Dr. 'Abd al-Ṣabūr Shāhīn: Li-hādhihi al-Asbāb Rafaḍtu Tarqiyat Dr. Naṣr." *al-Akhbār* (April 7, 1993).

Mūsā, Muḥammad. "Wa al-Dawla Ayḍan ...Tattahim al-Mufakkirīn bi-al-Ilḥād." *al-Yasār* 39 (May 1993): 26-29.

Nabīl, Ahmad. "Fī Haythiyyāt Maḥkamat al-Naqd bi-Ta'yīd Ḥukm al-Tafrīq." *al-Ahrām* (August 09, 1996).

Najjar, Fauzi M. "Islamic Fundamentalism and the Intellectuals: The Case of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 27, 2 (2000): 177-200.

al-Naqqāsh, Farīda. "al-Irhāb Yukaffir Ustādhan." *al-Ahālī* (March 31, 1993). Republished in *al-Qawl al-Mufid,* 166-168.

al-Qāḍī, Ṭāriq al-Nu'mān. "Muṣādarat al-'Aql wa Ṣinā'at al-Irhāb." *Adab wa Naqd* 10, 93 (May 1993): 27-30.

al-Qaṣṣāṣ, Akram. "Aḥkām al-Naqd: al-'Aqīda Mas'ala Nafsiyya Lā Yajūz Baḥthuhā Ba'īdan 'an al-Ẓāhir." *al-'Arabī* (June 19, 1993).

Qism Taḥqīqāt: Jarīdat *al-Ahālī.* "al-Irhāb Yuhaddid Akbar Qilāʿ al-Fikr fī Miṣr." *al-Ahālī* (April 07, 1993). Republished in *al-Qawl al-Mufīd,* 107-112.

al-Ruwaynī, ʿAbla. "Li-Hādhā Waqqaʿtu …wa li-Hādhā Tarājaʿtu." Interview with Maḥmūd ʿAlī Makkī. *al-Akhbār* (April 14, 1993). Reproduced in *al-Qawl al-Mufīd,* 240-246.

Ṣalāḥ, Muḥammad. "Rudūd Fiʿl Wāsiʿa ʿalā Ihdār Jamāʿat al-Jihād Dam Abū Zayd." *al-Ḥayāt* (June 23, 1995).

Sālim, Ismāʿīl. *Naqd Matāʿin Naṣr Abū Zayd fī al-Qurʾān wa al-Sunna wa al-Ṣaḥāba wa Aʾimmat al-Muslimīn.* Cairo: al-Mukhtār al-Islāmī, 1993.

Sfeir, George N. "Basic Freedoms in a Fractured Legal Culture: Egypt and the Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd." *Middle East Journal* 52, 3 (1998): 402-414.

Shāhīn, ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr (ed.). *Qiṣṣat "Abū Zayd" wa Inḥisār al-ʿAlmāniyya fī Jāmiʿat al-Qāhira.* Cairo: Dār al-Iʿtiṣām, 1994.

----------. "Taqrīr ʿan Intāj ʿIlmī." *al-Qāhira* 125 (April 1993): 72-78.

Shakʿa, Muṣṭafā. "Taqrīr ʿan Kitāb: *al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī wa Taʾsīs al-Īdiyūlūjiyya al-Wasaṭiyya.*" In *Qiṣṣat "Abū Zayd" wa Inḥisār al-ʿAlmāniyya,* 60.

----------."Taqrīr ʿan Kitāb: *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ-Dirāsa fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān.*" In *Qiṣṣat "Abū Zayd" wa Inḥisār al-ʿAlmāniyya,* 81.

Shukrī, Ghālī. "Khiṭāb al-Takfīr al-Muʿāṣir." *al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī* (May 21, 1993).

----------. "Qaḍiyyat Naṣr Abū Zayd." *al-Ahrām* (March 31, 1993). Republished in *al-Qawl al-Mufīd fī Qaḍiyyat Abū Zayd,* 169-173.

Wielandt, Rotraud. "Wurzeln der Schwierigkeit innerislamischen Gesprächs über neue hermeneutische Zugänge zum Korantext." In *The Qurʾan as Text,* 257-282.

## C. Works on Theory of Interpretation

### 1. Literary Theory and Criticism

Abrams, M.H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953; New York: The Norton Library, 1958.

Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Dixon, Peter and Marisa Bortolussi. "Text Is Not Communication: A Challenge to a Common Assumption." *Discourse Processes* 31, 1 (2001): 1-25.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archeology of Knowledge.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.

Gracia, Jorge J.E. *A Theory of Textuality: The Logic and Epistemology.* Albany: SUNY Press, 1995.

Iser, Wolfgang. *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.

----------. *The Range of Interpretation.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Jakobson, Roman. "Linguistics and Poetics." *Style in Language.* Ed. T. Sebeok.

Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1960, 350-377.

Lanson, Gustave. Translated into Arabic by Muḥammad Mandūr. *Manhaj al-Baḥth fī Tārīkh al-Adab*. In *al-Naqd al-Manhajī ʻinda al-ʻArab wa Manhaj al-Baḥth fī al-Adab wa al-Lugha*. Cairo: Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, n.d., 397-426.

Machor, James L. "The Object of Interpretation and Interpretive Change." *MLN (Modern Language Notes)* 113 (1998): 1126-1150.

Miall, David S. and Don Kuiken. "What is Literariness? Three Components of Literary Reading." *Discourse Process* 28, 2 (1999): 121-138.

Palmer, Richard E. *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer.* Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969.

Ricoeur, Paul. "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation." In idem. *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II.* Trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1991, 75-88.

----------. *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning.* Fort Worth, Texas: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976.

----------. "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics." In *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II,* 25-52.

----------. "What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding." In idem. *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences.* Ed. John B. Thompson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 145-164.

----------. "World of Text, World of Reader." In *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection & Imagination.* Ed. Mario J. Valdes. Toronto: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, 491-497.

Segre, Cesare. *Introduction to the Analysis of the Literary Text.* Translated by John Meddemmen. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988.

Suleiman, S.R. "Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism." In *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation.* Eds. S.R. Suleiman and I. Crosman. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, 3-45.

Wellek, René and Austin Warren. *Theory of Literature.* Third Edition. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1956.

## *2. Biblical Interpretation*

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative.* New York: Basic Books, 1981.

---------- and Frank Kermode (eds.) *The Literary Guide to the Bible.* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987.

Barr, J. "The Bible as a Political Document." In idem. *Explorations in Theology 7: The Scope and Authority of the Bible.* London: SCM Press, 1980, 91-110.

Barton, John (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

----------. "Historical-Critical Approach." In *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation,* 9-20.

----------. "Reading the Bible as Literature: Two Questions for Biblical Critics." *Journal of Literature & Theology* 1, 2 (1987): 135-153

Brown, Raymond E. *The Critical Meaning of the Bible.* London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981.

Bultmann, Rudolf. "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?" In idem. *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann.* Selected, translated and introduced by Schubert M. Ogden. 5th printing. Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1966, 289-296.

----------. "The Problem of Hermeneutics." In idem. *Essays Philosophical and Theological.* London: SCM Press Ltd, 1955, 234-261.

Clines, David J.A. "Possibilities and Priorities of Biblical Interpretation in an International Perspective." *Biblical Interpretation* 1, 1 (1993): 67-87.

---------- and J. Cheryl Exum. "The New Literary Criticism." In *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible.* Eds. J. Cheryl Exum and David J. Clines. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, 11-25.

Dumais, Marcel. "Sens de l'écriture. Reéxamen à la lumière de l'herméneutique philosophique et des approaches littéraires récentes." *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999): 310-331.

Fowl, Stephen. "Texts Don't Have Ideologies." *Biblical Interpretation* 3, 1 (1995): 15-34.

Gabeel, John B., Charles B. Wheeler, and Anthony D. York. *The Bible as Literature: an Introduction.* Fourth Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Gorringe, Tim. "Political Readings of Scripture." In *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation,* 67-80.

Holdrege, Barbara A. *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.

Jasper, David. "Literary Readings of the Bible." In *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation,* 21-34.

----------. "Literary Readings of the Bible: Trends in Modern Criticism." In *The Bible and Literature: A Reader.* Eds. David Jasper and Stephen Prickett. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, 44-64.

Jeanrond, Werner G. "After Hermeneutics: The Relationship between Theology and Biblical Studies." In *The Open Text: New Directions for Biblical Studies?* Ed. Francis Watson. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1993, 85-102.

Keegan, Terence J. "Biblical Criticism and the Challenge of Postmodernism." *Biblical Interpretation* 3, 1 (1995): 1-14.

McKnight, Edgar V. *The Bible and the Reader: An Introduction to Literary Criticism.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

Morgan, Robert and John Barton. *Biblical Interpretation.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Noble, Paul R. *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs.* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995.

----------. "Synchronic and Diachronic Approaches to Biblical Interpretation." *Journal of Literature & Theology* 7, 2 (1993): 130-148.

Porter, Stanley E. "Why Hasn't Reader – Response Criticism Caught on in New Testament Studies." *Journal of Literature & Theology* 4, 3 (1990): 278-292.

Powell, Mark Allan. *The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography.* New York: Greenwood Press, 1992.

Ryken, Leland. "The Bible as Literature: A Brief History." In *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible,* 49-68.

----------. "Literary Criticism of the Bible: Some Fallacies." In *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives.* Eds. Kenneth R.R. Gros Louis, with James S. Ackerman, and Thayer S. Warshaw. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1974, 24-40.

---------- and Tremper Longman III (eds.). "Introduction." In *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993, 15-39.

Schneiders, Sandra M. *The Revelatory Text. Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture.* New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991.

Spanje, T.E. van. "Contextualisation: Hermeneutical Remarks." *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 80, 1 (Spring 1998), 197-217

Stanton, Graham N. "Presuppositions in New Testament Criticism." In *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods.* Ed. I. Howard Marshall. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1977, 60-71.

Thiselton, Anthony C. *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992.

----------. "On Models and Methods: A Conversation with Robert Morgan." In *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield.* Eds. David J. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl, Stanley E. Porter. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990, 337-356.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *Is There Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998.

----------. "The Reader in New Testament Interpretation." In *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation.* Ed. Joel B. Green. Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdamans Publishing Co. 1995, 301-328.

Vogels, Walter. *Interpreting Scripture in the Third Millennium: Author-Reader-Text.* Ottawa: Novalis, 1993.

Wood, Charles M. "Hermeneutics and the Authority of Scripture." In *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation: Essays on the Occasion of the Sixty Fifth Birthday of Hans W. Frei.* Ed. Garrett Green. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987, 3-20.

## D. General Works

### *1. Qur'ānic Studies*

'Abd al-Raḥmān, 'Ā'isha. *See* Bint al-Shāṭi'.

'Abduh, Muḥammad. "Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr." In *Tafsīr al-Manār.* Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Amma li-al-Kitāb, 1972, 1:17-26.

'Abduh, Muḥammad. *Tafsīr al-Manār.* Cairo: al-Hay'a al-'Amma li-al-Kitāb, 1972.

Abu-Deeb, Kamal. "Studies in the *Majāz* and Metaphorical Language of the Qur'ān: Abū 'Ubayda and al-Sharīf al-Raḍī." In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān.* Ed. Issa J. Boullata. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000, 310-353.

Amīn, Muḥammad. "A Study of Bint al-Shāṭi''s Exegesis." M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1992.

Arkoun, Mohammed. *Lectures du Coran.* Paris: Maisonneuve and Larose, 1982.

----------. (Muḥammad Arkūn). "Ḥisāb Khitāmī li-al-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyya wa Afāqihā." In Muḥammad Arkūn. *al-Fikr al-Islāmī: Qirā'a 'Ilmiyya.* Translated into Arabic by Hāshim Ṣāliḥ. Beirut: Markaz al-Inmā' al-Qawmī, 1987, 245-283.

----------. "The Notion of Revelation: From *Ahl al-Kitāb* to the Societies of the Book." *Die Welt des Islams* 28 (1998): 62-89.

Ayoub, Mahmoud M. "Literary Exegesis of the Qur'ān: The Case of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī." In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān,* 292-309.

'Ayyad, Shukrī Muḥammad. *Dirāsāt Qur'āniyya: Yawm al-Dīn wa al-Ḥisāb.* Beirut: Dār al-Waḥda, 1980.

Asad, Muḥammad. *The Message of the Qur'an.* Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980.

Bint al-Shāṭi'. ('Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān). *al-I'jāz al-Bayānī li-al- Qur'ān.* Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1987. The second printing published in 1999.

----------. *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li-al-Qur'ān al-Karīm.* Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1962. Vol. 1; Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1968. Vol. 2.

----------. "The Problem of Synonyms in the Light of Quran." In *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth International Congress of Orientalists.* New Delhi: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1970. 4: 185-186.

Boullata, Issa J. "Introduction." In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān,* ix-xii.

----------. (ed.). *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān.* Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000.

----------. "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis: A Study of Bint al-Shāṭi's Method." *Muslim World* 64, 2 (1974): 103-113.

----------. "Review of John Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies.*" *Muslim World* 67 (1977): 307.

----------. "The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur'ān: *i'jāz* and Related Topics." In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān,* 139-157.

----------. "Sayyid Quṭb's Literary Appreciation of the Qur'ān." In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān,* 354-371.

Burton, John. *The Collection of the Qur'ān.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Calder, Norman. "*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: problems in the description of a genre, illustrated with reference to the story of Abraham." In *Approaches to the Qur'ān.* Eds. G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef. London and New York: Routledge, 1993, 101-140.

Calvert, John. "Qur'anic Aesthetics in the Thought of Sayyid Quṭb." *Religious Studies and Theology* 15, 2-3 (Dec. 1996): 61-76.

Carré, Olivier. "Eléments de la 'aqīda de Sayyid quṭb [*sic]* dans *Fī zilāl al-qur'ān.*" *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000): 165-197.

----------. "'*A l'Ombre du Coran*' Revisité: Les lendemains possibles de la pensée de Sayyid Quṭb et du 'Quṭbisme'." *Arabica* 48 (2001): 81-111.

Chartier, Marc. "Muhammad Ahmad Khalaf Allāh et l'exégèse coranique." *IBLA (Revue de l'Institut des belles lettres arabes)* 137 (1976): 1-31.

al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn. *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1995. 3 vols.

Esack, Farid. "Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Problems and Prospects." *Muslim World* 83, 2 (April, 1993): 118-141.

----------. *Qur'ān, Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*. Oxford: Oneworld, 1998.

Gätje, Helmut. *The Qur'ān and Its Exegesis: Selected Texts with Classical and Modern Muslim Interpretations*. Trans. and edited by Alford T. Welch. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

Gilliot, Claude. "Coran: Les recherches contemporaines." In *Encyclopaedia Universalis*. Ed. Jacques Bersani. Paris: Encyclopaedia Universalis, 1995, 6: 547-548.

Gimaret, Daniel. *Une lecture mu'tazilite du coran: Le Tafsīr d'Abū 'Alī al-Djubbā'ī (m. 303/915) partiellement reconstitué à partir de ses citateurs*. Louvain-Paris: Peeters, 1994.

Gluck, J.J. "Is There Poetry in the Qur'ān?" *Semitics* 8 (1982): 43-89.

Graham, William A. "Qur'ān as Spoken Word: An Islamic Contribution to the Understanding of Scripture." In *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*. Ed. Richard C. Martin. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1985, 23-40.

Hajjaji-Jarrah, Soraya M. "The Enchantment of Reading: Sound, Meaning, and Expression in *Sūrat al-'Ādiyāt*." In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, 228-251.

Hanafi, Hassan. "Method of Thematic Interpretation of the Qur'an." In *The Qur'an as Text*, 195-211.

Hermansen, Marcia K. "Pattern and Meaning in the Qur'ānic Adam Narratives." *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 17, 1 (1988): 41-52.

Hoffman, Valerie J. "Qur'ānic Interpretation and Modesty Norms for Women." In *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse*, 89-121.

Izutsu, Toshihiko. *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*. Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966.

----------. *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung*. Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964.

Jansen, J.J.G. *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt*. Leiden: Brill, 1974.

Jeffery, Arthur. *The Qur'ān as Scripture*. New York: Russell F. Moore Company, 1952.

Johns, Anthony H. "Reflections on the Dynamics and Spirituality of *Sūrat al-Furqān*." In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, 188-227.

Jomier, Jacques. "Quelques positions actuelles de l'exégèse coranique en Égypte révélées par une polémique récente (1947-1951)." *MIDEO (Mélanges Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales du Caire)* 1 (1954): 39-72.

Kermani, Navid. "The Aesthetic Reception of the Qur'ān as Reflected in Early Muslim History." In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, 255-276.

Khalaf Allāh, Muḥammad Aḥmad. *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*. Many editions. First printing was published in 1951 by Maṭba'at al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, Cairo. The second printed by the same publisher in 1957 with an addition of al-Khūlī's Foreword: "Bayna Yaday al-Tārīkh," dh-l. The third printing was issued in 1965by Maktabat al-Anglū al-Miṣriyya together with al-Khūlī's introduction to the third printing. The last print was published by Sīnā li-al-Nashr and al-

Intishār al-'Arabī (Cairo and Beirut) in 1999 which includes the comment of Khalīl 'Abd al-Karīm, 363-508.

----------. "Ḥawla al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm." *al-Risāla* 745 (Oct. 13, 1947): 1121-1123.

----------. *al-Qur'ān wa al-Dawla.* Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, 1981.

----------. *al-Qur'ān wa Mushkilāt Ḥayātinā al-Mu'āṣira.* Cairo: Maktabat al-Anglū al-Miṣriyya, 1967.

----------. *al-Usus al-Qur'āniyya li-al-Taqaddum.* Cairo: Kitāb al-Ahālī, 1984.

----------. "al-Usṭūra wa al-I'jāz al-Qur'ānī." *al-Risāla* 748 (Nov. 3, 1947): 1205-1208.

al-Khūlī, Amīn. "L'Exégèse scientifique du Coran d'après le Cheikh Amīn al-Khūlī." Trans. and introduced to French by P. Caspar and J. Jomier. *MIDEO* 4 (1957): 269-280.

----------. *Manāhij Tajdīd fī al-Naḥw, wa al-Balāgha, wa al-Tafsīr wa al-Adab.* Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Amma li-al-Kitāb, 1995. The first edition was published in 1961 by Dār al-Ma'rifa, Cairo.

----------. *Min Hady al-Qur'ān: Fī Amwālihim ... Mithāliyya Lā Madhhabiyya.* Cairo: Dār al-Hanā li-al-Ṭibā'a, 1963.

----------. *Min Hady al-Qur'ān: Fī Ramaḍān.* Cairo: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1961.

----------. *Min Hady al-Qur'ān: al-Qāda ... al-Rusul.* Cairo: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1959.

----------. "al-Tafsīr" (al-Khūlī's critical commentary on Carra de Vaux's article on "Tafsīr"). In *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Islāmiyya* (an Arabic translation of *EI'.* Trans. into Arabic by Muḥammad Thābit al-Fandī, Aḥmad al-Shantanāwī, Ibrāhīm Zakī Khūrshīd and 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Yūnus. Tehran: Budharjumihrī, 1966, 14 vols. Reprint of Cairo edition, 1933). 5: 348-374.

Kinberg, Leah. "*Muḥkamāt* and *Mutashābihāt* (Koran 3/7): Implication of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis." *Arabica* 35 (1988): 143-172.

Kister, M.J. "Legends in *Tafsīr* and *Ḥadīth* Literature: The Creation of Ādam and Related Stories." In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān,* 82-114.

Lagarde, Michel. "De l'ambiguïté (mutašābih) dans le Coran: tentatives d'explication des exégètes musulmans." *Quaderni di studi arabi* 3 (1985): 45-62.

Lyberger, Loren D. "Gender and Prophetic Authority in the Qur'ānic Story of Maryam: A Literary Approach." *The Journal of Religion* 80, 2 (April 2000): 240-270.

Marshal, David. *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers. A Qur'anic Study.* Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999.

Martin, Richard C. "Structural Analysis and the Qur'an: Newer Approaches to the Study of Islamic Texts." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion.* Thematic Issue 47, 4S (1979): 665-683.

----------. "Understanding the Qur'ān in Text and Context." *History of Religions* 21 (1981/1982): 361-384.

McAuliffe, Jane D. *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

----------. "Quranic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr." In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān,* 46-62.

----------. "Text and Textuality: Q. 3:7 as a Point of Intersection." In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, 56-76.

McDonough, Sheila. "Modern Muslim Qur'an: Commentaries in Relation to Gender Roles and Distinctions." *Religious Studies and Theology* 7, 2-3 (May-Sept. 1987): 56-69.

Mir, Mustansir. "Irony in the Qur'ān: A Study of the Story of Joseph." In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, 173-187.

----------. "Passives in the Qur'ān: Preliminary Notes." In *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of James A. Bellamy*. Ed. Mustansir Mir in collaboration with Jarl E. Fossum. Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1993, 169-179.

----------. "The Qur'an as Literature." *Religion & Literature* 20, 1 (1988): 49-64.

Nagel, Tilman. "Vom 'Qur'an' zur 'Schrift'-Bells Hypothese aus religionsgeschichtlicher Sicht." *Der Islam* 60 (1983): 143-165.

al-Nayfar, Aḥmīda. (H'mida Ennaifer). *Les commentaires coraniques contemporains: Analyse de leur méthodologie.* Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 1998.

Nettler, Ronald. "A Modern Islamic Confession of Faith and Conception of Religion: Sayyid Quṭb's Introduction to the *Tafsīr, Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān.*" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21, 1 (1994): 102-114.

Neuwirth, Angelika. "Koran." In *Grundriß der arabischen Philologie*. Ed. H. Gätje. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1987, 2: 96-135.

----------. "Referentiality and Textuality in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr:* Some Observations on the Qur'ānic "Canonical Process" and the Emergence of a Community." In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, 143-172.

Newby, Gordon D. "Tafsir Isra'iliyyat." In "Studies in Qur'an and Tafsir." Ed. Alford T. Welch. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion. Thematic Issue* 47, 4 (December 1979): 685-697.

Nöldeke, Theodor and Friedrich Schwally. *Geschichte des Qorāns.* Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1970.

Paret, Rudi. "The Qur'ān – I." In *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period.* Eds. A.F.L. Beeston, T.M. Johnstone, R.B. Serjeant and G.R. Smith Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 186-227.

Poonawala, I. "Tafsir." *EI²* 10: 390-392.

Powers, David E. "The Exegetical Genre *nāsikh al-Qur'ān wa mansūkhuhu.*" In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, 117-138.

Quṭb, Sayyid. *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān.* Many editions. The 1st edition Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1953; the 15th edition, Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1988.

----------. "Mabāḥith 'an al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān." *al-Risāla* 620 (May 21, 1945): 527-529.

----------. *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma fī al-Qur'ān.* Many editions. The first was published in 1947; the second was published by Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo, n.d. [1953?]; the 7th edition in 1981.

----------. "al-Tanāsuq al-Fannī fī Taṣwīr al-Qur'ān." *al-Risāla* 611 (March 19, 1945): 278-281.

----------. "al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm." *al-Muqtaṭaf* 94, 2 (Feb. 1, 1939): 206-211.

----------. "al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm." *al-Muqtaṭaf* 94, 3 (March 1, 1939): 313-318.

----------. "al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān." *al-Risāla* 601 (Jan. 8, 1945): 43-45.

----------. *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān.* Many editions. The first was published in 1945 by Dār al-Maʿārif, Cairo; the third n.d. [1953?] together with his postscript on the third edition; the 14ᵗʰ edition published by Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo in 1993.

Radscheit, Matthias. "Word of God or Prophetic Speech? Reflections on the Quranic *Qul*-Statements." In *Encounters of Words and Texts. Intercultural Studies in Honor of Stefan Wild.* Eds. Lutz Edzard and Christian Szyska. Hildsheim; Zurich; New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1997, 33-42.

Rahman, Yusuf. "Ellipsis in the Qur'ān: A Study of Ibn Qutayba's *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān.*" In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān,* 277-291.

al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn. *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr.* Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth, 1980. 32 vols.

Rippin, Andrew (ed.). *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

----------. "The Exegetical Genre *Asbāb al-Nuzūl:* a Bibliographical and Terminological Survey." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48, 1 (1985): 1-15.

----------. "The Function of *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* in Qur'ānic Exegesis." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51 (1988): 1-20.

----------. "Introduction." In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān,* 1-9.

----------. "Introduction. The Qur'ān: Formative Interpretation." In *The Qur'an: Formative Interpretation.* Ed. A. Rippin. Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgat Publishing Limited, 1999, xi-xxvii.

----------. "Literary Analysis of *Qur'ān, Tafsīr,* and *Sīra:* The Methodologies of John Wansbrough." In *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies,* 151-163.

----------. "Muḥammad in the Qur'ān: Reading Scripture in the 21ˢᵗ Century." In *The Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of the Sources.* Ed. Harald Motzki. Leiden: Brill, 2000, 298-309

----------. "The Qur'an as Literature: Perils, Pitfalls and Prospects." *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* 10, 1 (1983): 38-47.

----------. "*Quranic Studies,* Part IV: Some Methodological Notes." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9, 1, (1997): 39-46.

----------. "Tafsīr." *EI²* 10: 83-88.

Robinson, Neal. *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text.* London: SCM Press Ltd., 1996.

Saeed, Abdullah. "Rethinking 'Revelation' as a Precondition for Reinterpreting the Qur'an: A Qur'anic Perspective." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 1, 1 (1999): 93-114.

Sells, Michael. "A Literary Approach to the Hymnic Sūras of the Qur'ān: Spirit, Gender, and Aural Intertextuality." In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān,* 3-25

Setiawan, Mohamad Nur Kholis. "Literary Interpretation of the Qur'ān: A Study of

Amīn al-Khūlī's Thought." *al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 61 (1998): 89-105.

Shahrūr, Muḥammad. "Ḥawla al-Qirā'a al-Mu'āṣira li-al-Qur'ān." *al-Hilāl* 100, 1 (Jan. 1992): 128-134.

----------. *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ān: Qirā'a Mu'āṣira.* Cairo: Sīnā li-al-Nashr and al-Ahālī, 1992.

Speicher, Katrin. "Einige Bemerkungen zu al-Ḫūlīs Entwurf eines *tafsīr adabī.*" In *Encounters of Words and Texts: Intercultural Studies in Honor of Stefan Wild on the Occasion of His 60th Birthday, March 2, 1997, Presented by His Pupils in Bonn.* Eds. Lutz Edzard and Christian Szyska. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1997, 3-21.

Stewart, Devin J. "*Saj'* in the Qur'ān: Prosody and Structure." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 21, 2 (1990): 101-139.

Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. "Gender Issues and Contemporary Quran Interpretation." In *Islam, Gender, & Social Change.* Eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 30-44.

----------. *Women in the Qur'ān, Traditions, and Interpretation.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn. *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān.* Ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm. Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 3rd ed. 1985, 4 vols.

Syahnan, Mhd. "A Study of Sayyid Quṭb's Qur'ān Exegesis in Earlier and Later Editions of His *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* With Special Reference to Selected Themes." M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1997.

Syamsuddin, Sahiron. "An Examination of Bint al-Shāṭi''s Method of Interpreting the Qur'ān." M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1998.

Vaux, Carra de. "Tafsīr." *EI* IV,1: 603-604.

al-Wāḥidī al-Nīsābūrī. *Asbāb al-Nuzūl.* Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1982.

Wansbrough, John. *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Watt, W. Montgomery. *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1977.

Welch, Alford T. "Formulaic Features of the Punishment-Stories." In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, 77-116.

----------. "al-Kur'ān." *EI*² 5: 400-429.

----------. "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself. The Koranic Data." In *Islam's Understanding of Itself.* Eds. R.G. Hovannisian and Speros Vryonis. Malibu, California: Undena Publications, 1983, 15-52.

Wild, Stefan (ed.). *The Qur'an as Text.* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996.

----------. "Preface." In *The Qur'an as Text,* vii-xi.

----------. ""We have sent down to thee the book with the truth ...": Spatial and temporal implications of the Qur'anic concepts of nuzūl, tanzīl, and 'inzāl." In *The Qur'an as Text,* 137-153.

Zahniser, A.H. Mathias. "Major Transitions and Thematic Borders in Two Long Sūras: al-Baqara and *al-Nisā'.*" In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān,* 26-55.

al-Zamakhsharī. *al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqāiq al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl.* Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1990. 4 vols.; al-Zamakhsharī. *al-Kashshāf.* Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, n.d.

al-Zarkashī. *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān.* Ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm. Cairo: Maṭba'at 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1957. 4 vols.

## 2. Other Subjects

'Abduh, Muḥammad. *al-A'māl al-Kāmila li-al-Imām Muḥammad 'Abduh.* Collected, edited and presented by Muḥammad 'Amāra. Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, 6 vols.

Abdur-Rauf, Muhammad. "Outsiders' Interpretations of Islam: a Muslim's Point of View." In *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies.* Ed. Richard Martin. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985, 179-188.

Adams, Charles. "Reflections on the Work of John Wansbrough." In "The special issue on "Islamic Origins Reconsidered: John Wansbrough and the Study of Islam." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9, 1, (1997): 75-90.

Ahmad, 'Abdelhamīd Muḥammad "Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen al-Azhar und der modernistischen bewegung in Ägypten von Muḥammad 'Abduh bis zur Gegenwart." Ph.D. dissertation, Universität Hamburg, 1963.

Akhavi, Shahrough. "The Dialectic in Contemporary Egyptian Social Thought: The Scripturalist and Modernist Discourses of Sayyid Qutb and Hasan Hanafi." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29 (1997): 377-401.

al-'Ālim, Maḥmūd Amīn. "Raddan 'alā *al-Tafsīr al-Mārksī li-al-Islām:* Muḥammad 'Amāra bayna Fiqh al-Takfir wa Fiqh al-Ijtihād bi-al-Ra'y." *al-Ahālī* (Oct. 30, 1996), 11.

Arkoun, Mohammed. (Arkūn, Muḥammad). *al-Fikr al-Uṣūlī wa Istiḥālat al-Ta'ṣīl: Naḥwa Tārīkh Ākhar li-al-Fikr al-Islāmī.* Trans. Hāshim Ṣāliḥ. London: Dār al-Sāqī, 1999.

----------. "al-Mumkin al-Tafkīr fih/wa al-Mustahil al-Tafkīr fih fī al-Fikr al-Islāmī al-Mu'āṣir." An interview by Hāshim Ṣāliḥ. In *Qaḍāyā fī Naqd al-'Aql al-Dīnī: Kayfa Nafham al-Islām al-Yawm.* Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī'a, 1998, 274-297.

----------. *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers.* Transl. and edited by Robert D. Lee. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994.

----------. *Rethinking Islam Today.* Washington D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1987.

----------. "Review of *The Qur'an as Text.*" *Arabica* 45, 3 (1998): 274-275.

---------- and Udo Steinbach. "Foreword." In *The Islamic World and the West: An Introduction to Political Cultures and International Relations.* Ed. Kai Hafez. Translated from the German by Mary Ann Kenny. Leiden: Brill, 2000, xi-xvi.

al-'Ashmāwī, Muḥammad Sa'īd. *Against Islamic Extremism: The Writings of Muhammad Sa'id al-'Ashmawy.* Ed. Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban. Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1998.

----------. "al-Ḥisba." *al-'Arabī* 457 (Dec. 1996): 26-30.

Atkinson, David W. "Religious Dialogue and Critical Possibilities." *Religious Studies and Theology* 12, 2-3 (Sept. 1992): 13-29.

'Awaḍ, Muḥammad. *Fī al-Jawla al-Ūlā amāma Dr. Muḥammad 'Amāra: Naṣr Abū Zayd Yasquṭ fī Qaṭar.* Cairo: Bayt al-Ḥikma li-al-I'lām wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 1997.

al-Azmeh, Aziz. "The Muslim Canon from Late Antiquity to the Era of Modernism." In *Canonization and Decanonization: Papers Presented to the International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR), Held at Leiden 9-10 January 1997.* Eds. A. van der Kooij and K. van der Toorn. Leiden: Brill, 1998, 191-228.

Badawi, M.M. "Commitment in Contemporary Arabic Literature." In *Critical Perspectives on Modern Arabic Literature.* Ed. Issa J. Boullata. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, Inc., 1980, 23-44.

Berg, Herbert. "The Implications of, and Opposition to, the Methods and Theories of John Wansbrough." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9, 1, (1997): 3-22.

---------- (ed.). "The Special Issue on "Islamic Origins Reconsidered: John Wansbrough and the Study of Islam." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9, 1, (1997).

----------. *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period.* Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000.

Berry, Donald L. "Dr. Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988): A Life in Review." In *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse.* 37-45.

----------. "The Thought of Fazlur Rahman as an Islamic Response to Modernity." Ph.D. dissertation, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990.

Bijlefeld, Willem A. "A Prophet and More Than a Prophet? Some Observations on the Qor'anic Use of the Term 'Prophet' and 'Apostle." *Muslim World* 59 (1969): 1-28.

Binder, Leonard. *Islamic Liberalism.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Bint al-Shāṭi'. *Risālat al-Ghufrān li-Abī al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī 363-449.* Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1950.

Boullata, Issa J. (ed.) *Critical Perspectives on Modern Arabic Literature.* Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, Inc., 1980.

----------. (Bullāṭah, 'Isā Yūsuf). *Al-Rūmanṭīqiyya wa Ma'ālimuhā fī al-Shi'r al-'Arabī al-Ḥadīth.* Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1960.

----------. *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

Brown, Daniel. "The Triumph of Scripturalism: The Doctrine of Naskh and Its Modern Critics." In *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse,* 49-66.

Buckley, R.P. "The *Muḥtasib.*" *Arabica* 39 (March 1992): 59-117.

al-Bukhārī. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari.* Transl. by Muhammad Muhsin Khan. Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1978.

Cachia, Pierre. "Psychology and Literary Criticism in Modern Egypt." In *Atti del Terzo Congresso di Studi Arabi e Islamici, Ravello 1966.* Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1967, 231-238.

----------. *Taha Husayn: His Place in the Egyptian Literary Renaissance.* London: Luzac, 1956.

Cahen, Cl./M. Talbi. "Ḥisba." *EI²* 3: 485-489.

Calder, Norman. "History and Nostalgia: Reflections on John Wansbrough's *The Sectarian Milieu.*" *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9, 1, (1997): 47-73.

----------. "The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy." In *Intellectual Traditions in Islam.* Ed. Farhad Daftary. London: I.B. Tauris, 2000, 66-86.

Chabbi, Jacqueline. *Le seigneur des tribus: l'islam de Mahomet.* Paris: Noêsis, 1997.

Clark, Peter. "The Shaḥrūr Phenomenon: a Liberal Islamic Voice from Syria." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7, 3 (Oct. 1996): 337-341.

Ḍāhir, 'Ādil. "al-Lā Ma'qūl fī al-Ḥarakāt al-Islāmiyya al-Mu'āṣira." *Mawāqif* 67 (1992): 40-101.

Ess, Josef van. *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2.und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam.* Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 1997. 6 vols.

----------. "Verbal Inspiration? Language and Revelation in Classical Islamic Theology." In *The Qur'an as Text,* 177-194.

Fernhout, Rein. "The Bible as God's Word: A Christological View." In *Holy Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.* Eds. Hendrik M. Vroom and Jerald D. Gort. Amsterdam-Atlanta: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1997, 57-68.

----------. *Canonical Texts: Bearers of Absolute Authority. Bible, Koran, Veda, Tipiṭaka.* Amsterdam - Atlanta, GA: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1994.

Gallagher. Nancy E. "Islam v. Secularism in Cairo: An Account of the Dar al-Hikma Debate." *Middle Eastern Studies* 25, 2 (1989): 208-215.

el-Gawhary, Karim. "Shari'a or Civil Code? Egypt's Parallel Legal Systems: an Interview with Ahmad Sayf al-Islam. *Middle East Report* (November-December 1995): 25-27.

Graham, William A. *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

----------. "Scripture as Spoken Word." In *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective.* Ed. Miriam Levering. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989, 129-169.

Haddad, Bassam SA. "The Assassination of Fuda." *The Arab Studies Journal* (Spring 1993): 16-19.

----------. "Islamic Liberals and Secularism." *The Arab Studies Journal* (Fall 1993): 26-31.

Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982.

Hallaq, Wael B. *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunnī uṣūl al-fiqh.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Hamad, Ahmad Seif al-Islam. "Hisba: Is Egypt a Civil or Religious State?" In The Center for Human Rights Legal Aid's website (January 1996) at http://www.chrla.org/reports/hisba/hisbint.htm

al-Ḥaskafī, Muḥammad 'Alā' al-Dīn. *The Durrul Mukhtar.* Transl. by Brij Mōhān Dayāl. Lucknow: C.M. Dayal, 1913.

Hassan, Riffat. "Equal before Allah? Woman-Man Equality in the Islamic Tradition." *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (January-May 1987): 2-4.

----------. "Challenging the Stereotypes of Fundamentalism: An Islamic Feminist

Perspective." *Muslim World* 91, 1&2 (Spring 2001): 55-69.

----------. "Is Islam a Help or Hindrance to Women's Development?" Unpublished paper.

Hatina, Meir. "On the Margins of Consensus: The Call to Separate Religion and State in Modern Egypt." *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, 1 (Jan. 2000): 35-67.

Hawting, G.R. "John Wansbrough, Islam, and Monotheism." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9, 1, (1997): 23-38.

Heath, Peter. "Creative Hermeneutics: A Comparative Analysis of Three Islamic Approaches." *Arabica* 36 (1989): 173-210.

al-Hibri, Azizah. "A Study of Islamic Herstory: or How Did We Ever Get into This Mess?" In *Women's Studies International Forum* 5, 2 (1982): 207-219. Republished in *Women and Islam*. Ed. Azizah al-Hibri. Oxford, New York: Pergamon Press, 1982, 207-219.

Hoebink, Michel. "Thinking about Renewal in Islam: Towards a History of Islamic Ideas on Modernization and Secularization." *Arabica* 46, 1 (Jan. 1999): 29-62.

Hoffman-Ladd, Valerie J. "Polemics on the Modesty and Segregation of Women in Contemporary Egypt." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987): 23-50.

Husayn, Ṭāhā. *Fī al-Adab al-Jāhilī*. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1927.

----------. *Fī al-Shiʿr al-Jāhilī*. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1926.

Hussain, Waheed. "Interpreting the Tradition: The Modernist Argument and the Sources of Islam." *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 18, 1 (Winter 2001): 1-15.

Ibn Khaldūn. *Muqaddimatu Ibn Khaldūn*. Ed. M. Quatremère. Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 1970. 3 vols.; Ibn Khaldūn. *Tārīkh al-ʿAllāma Ibn Khaldūn*. Beirut: Maktabat al-Madrasa wa Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1961. 7 vols.; Ibn Khaldūn. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Trans. F. Rosenthal. New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1958. 3 vols.

Ibn Manẓūr. *Lisān al-ʿArab*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir and Dār Beyrūt, 1956. 15 vols.

Ismāʿīl, ʿIzz al-Dīn. *al-Tafsīr al-Nafsī li-al-Adab*. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1963.

Ismāʿīl, Maḥmūd. "*al-Tafsīr al-Mārksī li-al-Islām:* ʿArḍ wa Naqd." *Adab wa Naqd* 142 (June 1997): 9-22.

Ismail, Salwa. "Confronting the Other: Identity, Culture, Politics, and Conservative Islamism in Egypt." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30 (1998): 199-225.

----------. *Radical Islamism in Egypt: Discursive Struggle*. Montreal: Inter-University Consortium for Arab Studies, 1994.

----------. "Religious 'Orthodoxy' as Public Morality: The State, Islamism and Cultural Politics in Egypt." *Critique* (Spring 1999): 25-47.

Jabhat ʿUlamāʾ al-Azhar. "Mudhakkira Marfūʿa min Jabhat ʿUlamāʾ al-Azhar." *Majallat al-Azhar* 19 (Muḥarram 1367/1947): 86-91.

Jackson, Sherman A. "In Defense of Two-Tiered Orthodoxy: a Study of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī's *Kitāb al-Iḥkām fī Tamyīz al-Fatāwā ʿan al-Aḥkām wa Taṣarrufāt al-Qāḍī wa al-Imām.*" Ph.D dissertation, the University of Pennsylvania, 1991.

al-Jundī, Anwar. *al-Maʿārik al-Adabiyya fī al-Shiʿr wa al-Nathr wa al-Thaqāfa wa al-Lugha wa al-Qawmiyya al-ʿArabiyya*. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Risāla, n.d.

----------. *al-Muḥāfaẓa wa al-Tajdīd fī al-Nathr al-'Arabī al-Mu'āṣir fī Mi'at 'Ām 1840-1940.* Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Risāla, 1961.

Kashmīrī, Sayyid Bashīr Aḥmad. *'Abqarī al-Islām Sayyid Quṭb: al-Adīb al-'Imlāq wa al-Mujaddid al-Mulham fī Ḍaw' Athārih wa Injāzātih al-Adabiyya.* Cairo: Dār al-Faḍila, 1994.

al-Khabbāṣ, 'Abd Allāh 'Awaḍ. *Sayyid Quṭb al-Adīb al-Nāqid.* Jordan: Maktabat al-Manār, n.d. [1983?].

Khalaf Allāh, Muḥammad Aḥmad. "Ḥawla Jadal fī al-Jāmi'a." *al-Risāla* 743 (Sept. 19, 1947): 1067-1069.

----------. "Ḥawla Jadal fī al-Jāmi'a." *al-Risāla* 750 (Nov. 17, 1947): 1268-1270.

----------. *Ṣāḥib al-Aghānī: Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī al-Rāwiya.* Cairo: Maktabat Nahḍat Miṣr, 1953.

al-Khūlī, Amīn. "Foreword." In Khalaf Allāh's *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī,* 1957. h – l.

----------. "Foreword." In Khalaf Allāh's *Ṣāḥib al-Aghānī.* a – z.

al-Khūlī, Luṭfi. "Kitāb Sayyidinā aw Jāmi'at al-Qāhira?!" *al-Ahrām* (April 07, 1994). Republished in Abū Zayd, *al-Qawl al-Mufīd fī Qaḍiyyat Abū Zayd,* 228-239.

Kurzman, Charles (ed.). *Liberal Islam: a Source Book.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Lawrence, Bruce B. *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age.* San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989.

Le Goff, Jacques. *The Medieval Imagination.* Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988.

Madelung, Wilfred. "Review of Wael Hallaq's *A History of Legal Theories.*" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 8 (1998):267-268.

Majma' al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya. *Mu'jam Alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm.* Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Amma, 1970. 2nd edition. 2 vols.

Makdisi, George. *Ibn 'Aqil: Religion and Culture in Classical Islam.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997.

Marcotte, Roxanne D. "Le réformisme islamique revisité: l'interprétation de Shaḥrūr (1938 -) et la condition féminine." *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 28, 4 (1999): 437-464.

Martin, Richard C. (ed.). *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies.* Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1985.

---------- and Mark R. Woodward with Dwi S. Atmaja. *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol.* Oxford: Oneworld, 1997.

Masud, Muhammad Khalid, Brinkley Messick, David S. Powers. "Muftis, Fatwas, and Islamic Legal Interpretation." In *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and Their Fatwas.* Eds. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick, David S. Powers. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996, 3-32.

Mitchell, Richard P. *The Society of the Muslim Brothers.* London: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Mojaddedi, Jawid A. "Taking Islam Seriously: The Legacy of John Wansbrough." *Journal of Semitic Studies* 45, 1 (Spring 2000): 103-114.

Moosa, Ebrahim. "Introduction." In Fazlur Rahman. *Revival and Reform in Islam: a Study of Islamic Fundamentalism.* Ed. Ebrahim Moosa. Oxford: Oneworld, 2000, 1-29.

Moussalli, Ahmad S. *Moderate and Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Quest for Modernity, Legitimacy, and the Islamic State.* Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1999.

Muqābala, Jamāl. *Shukrī 'Ayyād.* Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li-al-Kitāb, 1992.

Musallam, Adnan A. "The Formative Stages of Sayyid Qutb's Intellectual Career and His Emergence as an Islamic Dā'iyah, 1906-1952." Ph.D. dissertation, the University of Michigan, 1983.

Najjar, Fauzi. "The Debate on Islam and Secularism in Egypt." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 18, 2 (1996): 1-21.

----------. "Islamic Fundamentalism and the Intellectuals: the Case of Naguib Mahfouz." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 25, 1 (1998): 139-168.

Najmabadi, Afsaneh. "Feminism in an Islamic Republic." In *Islam, Gender, & Social Change.* Eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad & John L. Esposito. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 59-84.

Nasution, Harun. *Islam Rasional: Gagasan dan Pemikiran.* Bandung: Mizan, 1995.

Nowaihi, Mohammed. "Towards a Reappraisal of Classical Arabic Literature and History: Some Aspects of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's Use of Modern Western Criteria." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11 (1980): 189-207.

Peters, J.R.T.M. *God's Created Speech: A Study in the Speculative Theology of the Mu'tazilī Qādī 1-Quḍāt Abū 1-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Jabbār bn Aḥmad al-Hamaḏānī.* Leiden: Brill, 1976.

al-Qarāfī, Shihāb al-Dīn. *al-Iḥkām fī Tamyīz al-Fatāwā 'an al-Aḥkām wa Taṣarrufāt al-Qāḍī wa al-Imām.* Ed. Maḥmūd 'Arnūs. Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Anwār, 1938.

Quṭb, Sayyid. *al-'Adāla al-Ijtimā'iyya fī al-Islām.* Many editions. The 3rd edition, Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1952; Sayed Kotb's *Social Justice in Islam.* Translated by John B. Hardie. New York: Octagon Books, 1970; *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism. A Translation and Critical Analysis of Social Justice in Islam.* Translated by William E. Shepard. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996.

----------. "Baqiyya fī al-Ma'ānī wa al-Ẓilāl." *al-Risāla* 583 (Sept. 4, 1944): 728-731.

----------. *Ma'ālim fī al-Ṭarīq.* Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1988.

----------. "al-Ma'ānī wa al-Ẓilāl." *al-Risāla* 581 (Aug. 21, 1944): 690-693.

----------. *al-Naqd al-Adabī: Uṣūluh wa Manāhijuh.* 3rd edition. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1960.

Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam.* 2nd edition. Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, 1979.

----------. *Islam & Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984.

----------. "Islam: Legacy and Contemporary Challenge." In *Islam in the Contemporary World.* Ed. Cyriac K. Pullapilly. Notre Dame: Cross Road Books, 1980, 402-415.

----------. *Islamic Methodology in History.* Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1984.

----------. *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy.* London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958.

----------. *Revival and Reform in Islam: a Study of Islamic Fundamentalism.* Edited with an Introduction by Ebrahim Moosa. Oxford: Oneworld, 2000.

----------. "Roots of Islamic Neo-Fundamentalism." In *Change and the Muslim World.*

Eds. Philip H. Stoddard, et al. Syracuse, NY, Syracuse University Press, 1981.

----------. "Some Islamic Issues in the Ayyūb Khān Era." In *Essays on Islamic Civilization Presented to Niyazi Berkes.* Ed. Donald P. Little. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976, 284-302.

----------. "The Status of Women in Islam: A Modernist Interpretation." In *Separate Worlds: Studies of Purdah in South Asia.* Eds. Hanna Papanek and Gail Minault. Columbia, Missouri: South Asia Books, 1982.

----------. "The Status of Women in the Qur'ān." In *Women and Revolution in Iran.* Ed. Guity Nashat. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983.

Reid, Donald Malcolm. *Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Sa'fān, Kāmil. *Amīn al-Khūlī.* Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li-al-Kitāb, 1982.

Said, Edward. *The Politics of Dispossession.* London: Vintage, 1995.

Schoeler, Gregor. "Schreiben und Veröffentlichen. Zu Verwendung und Funktion der Schrift in den ersten islamischen Jahrhunderten." *Der Islam* 69, 1 (1992): 1-43.

----------. "Writing and Publishing. On the Use and Function of Writing in the First Centuries of Islam." *Arabica* 44, 3 (1997): 423-435.

Semah, D. "al-Khūlī, Amīn (1895-1966)." In *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature.* Eds. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey. London and New York: Routledge, 1998. 2 vols. 2: 443.

al-Shāfiʻī. *al-Risāla.* Ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir. Cairo: Maktabat wa Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlādih, 1940; al-Shāfiʻī. *Islamic Jurisprudence Shāfiʻī's Risala.* Translation with Introduction, Notes and Appendices by Majid Khadduri. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1961.

Shaltut, Muhammad. "Socialism and Islam." In *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives.* Eds. John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982, 99-102.

Shamir, Shimon. "Liberalism: From Monarchy to Postrevolution." In *Egypt from Monarchy to Republic: A Reassessment of Revolution and Change.* Ed. Shimon Shamir. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995, 195-212.

Shepard, William E. "Muhammad Sa'id al-'Ashmawi and the Application of the Shari'a in Egypt." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28 (1996): 39-58.

----------. *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism. A Translation and Critical Analysis of Social Justice in Islam.* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996.

al-Sīd, Muhammad 'Atā. "The Hermeneutical Problem of the Qur'an in Islamic History." Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1975.

al-Siyūfī, Aḥmad. *Muḥākamat al-Murtaddīn.* Cairo: s.n., 1994.

Smith, Jane I. and Yvonne Y. Haddad. "Eve: Islamic Image of Woman." *Women's Studies International Forum* 5, 2 (1982): 135-144. Republished in *Women and Islam.* Ed. Azizah al-Hibri. Oxford, New York: Pergamon Press, 1982, 135-144.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. "Some Similarities and Differences between Christianity and Islam." In *The World of Islam: Studies in Honour of Phillip K. Hitti.* Eds. J. Kritzeck and R. B. Winder. London: Macmillan, 1959, 47-59.

----------. *What is Scripture: A Comparative Approach.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

Sonn, Tamara. "Fazlur Rahman and Islamic Feminism." In *The Shaping of an American*

*Islamic Discourse,* 123-145.

----------. "Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Methodology." *Muslim World* 81, 3-4 (1991): 212-230.

Starkey, P. "'Abd al-Raḥmān, 'Ā'isha [Bint al-Shāṭi'] (1912-74)." In *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature.* Eds. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey. London and New York: Routledge, 1998. 2 vols. 1: 18

Stetkevych, Jaroslav. "Arabic Hermeneutical Terminology: Paradox and the Production of Meaning." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 48 (1989): 81-96.

Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. "The *Ḥijāb*: How a Curtain Became an Institution and a Cultural Symbol." In *Humanism, Culture & Language in the Near East. Studies in Honor of Georg Krotkoff.* Eds. Asma Afsaruddin and A.H. Mathias Zahniser. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1997, 87-104.

Sullivan, Denis J. and Sana Abed-Kotob. *Islam in Contemporary Egypt: Civil Society vs. the State.* Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999.

Szyska, Christian. (Tsīskā, Kristiyān). "Ḥawla Mafhūm 'al-Adab al-Multazim' 'inda Udabā' al-Ḥarakāt al-Islāmiyya." in *al-Karmil (Abḥāth fī al-Lugha wa al-Adab)* 20 (1999): 33-62.

al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Jarīr. *The History of al-Ṭabarī. The First Civil War.* Translated and annotated by G.R. Hawting. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996. Vol. 17.

----------. *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī: Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk.* Ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1979. 11 vols.

Thielmann, Jörn. "La jurisprudence égyptienne sur la requête en *hisba.*" *Égypte/Monde arabe* 34 (1998): 81-97.

Totolli, Roberto. "Origin and Use of the Term *Isrā'īliyyāt* in Muslim Literature." *Arabica* 46 (1999): 193-210.

Wansbrough, John. "Review of Josef van Ess's *Anfänge muslimischer Theologie.*" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43 (1980): 361-363.

Warburg, Gabriel R. "Islam and Politics in Egypt: 1952-80." *Middle Eastern Studies* 18, 2 (1982): 131-157.

Waugh, Earle H. "Beyond Scylla and Kharybdis: Fazlur Rahman and Islamic Identity." In *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse,* 15-36.

----------. and Frederick M. Denny (eds.). *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse: A Memorial to Fazlur Rahman.* Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998,

Wehr, Hans. *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic.* Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1979. Fourth edition.

Wielandt, Rotraud. *Offenbarung und Geschichte im Denken moderner Muslime.* Wiesbaden: Frantz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1971.

Winter, Michael. "Islam in the State: Pragmatism and Growing Commitment." in *Egypt from Monarchy to Republic,* 44-58.

Zebiri, Kate. *Maḥmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

Zeghal, Malika. *Gardiens de l'islam: les oulémas d'Al Azhar dans l'Égypte contemporaine.* Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1996.

----------. "Religion and Politics in Egypt: The Ulema of al-Azhar, Radical Islam and the State (1952-94)." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999): 371-

399.

Zeidan, David. "Radical Islam in Egypt: A Comparison of Two Groups." *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA) Journal* 3, 3 (September 1999): 1-10.

Zubaida, Sami. "The Politics of the Islamic Investment Companies in Egypt." *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* 17, 2 (1990): 152-161.