



AN ANALYSIS OF THE METHODS RELATING TO THE COMMENTARY ON THE QUR'ANIC VERSES EMPLOYED IN "TAHSIL NAZAIR AL-QUR'AN"

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Abstract. This article analyzes the methods that al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi employed in commenting on Qur'anic words in his work "Tahsil nazair al-Qur'an," within the genre of "wujuh wa nazair" (the multiple aspects and analogues of Qur'anic vocabulary). Drawing on the studies of a number of scholars among them Abd al-Muhsin al-Husayni, Husni Zaydan, Paul Nwyia, Hind Shalabi, Salwa M. al-Awa, Khalid Zahri, and Süleyman Kaya the article shows that al-Tirmidhi's method differs from that of other authors who wrote in this genre: rather than treating a single word as bearing several unrelated meanings, he holds that all the "aspects" (wujuh) of a word return to a single basic meaning rooted in the word itself. The article also examines al-Tirmidhi's own analytical procedures and his distinction between tafsir and ta'wil.

Keywords: al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, Tahsil nazair al-Qur'an, wujuh wa nazair, Qur'anic exegesis, ta'wil, tafsir, polysemy, basic meaning, Sufism.

INTRODUCTION

A number of researchers have noted that the method al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi employed in composing "Tahsil nazair al-Qur'an" differs from that of other authors who wrote works on "wujuh wa nazair." Differing points are also discernible in their views. Some researchers drew their conclusions merely from the formal resemblance of the work to other works, while others expressed their opinions by relying on earlier studies.

MAIN PART

Among the researchers who studied "Tahsil nazair al-Qur'an" in the twentieth century, the Egyptian scholar Abd al-Muhsin al-Husayni notes that al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi

wrote it as a refutation of a book composed on “wujuh wa nazair” or, more precisely, with a critical view toward the method by which that book had been composed and he cites a passage from the book’s introduction. The book being refuted was written in the traditional manner characteristic of books on “wujuh wa nazair,” which is based on a single word occurring with different meanings in different places. According to al-Tirmidhi’s theory, these meanings return to the word itself. Al-Husayni emphasizes that the author of the refuted work is unknown, and he enumerates the names of all the “nazair” that appear in the work. Why precisely these words were chosen, and whether or not the refuted book was followed in this respect, cannot be known, says al-Husayni. In addition, al-Husayni was the first of the modern researchers to advance the hypothesis that the order of the words is probably based on the order in which they begin to occur in the Qur’an (al-Husayni, 1968:72-73).

Husni Zaydan, who prepared the modern edition of “Tahsil nazair al-Qur’an,” likewise notes briefly that it was written as a refutation of the books on “wujuh wa nazair,” and that in this the author relied on lexical analysis, proofs from the Qur’an and hadith, the words of the righteous predecessors, and reports about past communities. Zaydan says that “Tahsil nazair al-Qur’an” was written as a complement to another of al-Tirmidhi’s works, “al-Furuq wa man‘ al-taraduf,” since the idea of the two is one (Zaydan, 1969:14-15).

The French scholar Paul Nwyia compared al-Tirmidhi’s approach to “wujuh” figuratively to the rungs of a ladder: although the rungs are alike, their levels differ. The root word here is, as it were, a building with various parts, and each of its “aspects” (wajh), as a part of a building, has features that are progressively disclosed to a person as he goes deeper. Nwyia selected and analyzed the “nazair” in “Tahsil nazair al-Qur’an” al-huda, al-kufr, al-shirk, al-marad, al-mashy, al-su’, dhikr, khawf, al-salat, kataba, al-tahur, zann, al-hikma, al-zulm, al-ta’wil, al-istighfar, al-din, al-islam, al-iman, al-shahid, al-ruh, and wahy together with their “aspects” (Nwyia, 1970:120-156). Nwyia compares al-Tirmidhi mainly with Muqatil ibn Sulayman and, comparing the order of the words, concludes that the works are similar in method the reason being that all the earliest works of this type rely on the same order. He nonetheless points out the principal difference between the two methods: Muqatil enumerated the words successively without mentioning their semantic connection, whereas al-Tirmidhi, relying on his own

experience, strove to disclose their connection with one another. However, because Nwyia held firmly to the view that “Tahsil nazair al-Qur’an” was written precisely in imitation of Muqatil ibn Sulayman, he arrived at a number of erroneous conclusions. In particular, in his view, the reason al-Tirmidhi did not cite all the “wujuh wa nazair” enumerated by Muqatil is that not all the words suited his theory; therefore al-Tirmidhi selected from Muqatil only the words by which his theory could be proved (Nwyia, 1970:120-121). The incorrectness of this conclusion becomes clear when the two works are compared; it may be supposed that Nwyia, in reaching his conclusion, did not examine other works on “wujuh wa nazair.”

Hind Shalabi, who prepared the edition of Yahya ibn Salam’s “al-Tasarif,” also discusses “Tahsil nazair al-Qur’an” in the introduction she wrote for it, saying that she became acquainted with this work not directly but through the studies of P. Nwyia and A. al-Husayni. Even so, she concluded that al-Tirmidhi’s being a representative of Sufism strongly influenced the work, although she did not state in precisely what form the Sufi approach appeared. Shalabi also cites a passage from the work’s introduction and says that, in al-Tirmidhi’s view, the “aspects” (wujuh) consist of similar meanings closely connected to the original meaning (Yahya ibn Salam, 1979:22-23).

Salwa M. al-Awa, among the scholars who have recently conducted research on “wujuh wa nazair,” also discusses al-Tirmidhi’s method and assesses it as having been written in opposition to the idea of “wujuh.” In her view, whereas much of the earlier work was “ma’tthur” (based on transmitted sources), al-Tirmidhi took the path of interpreting by “ra’y” (based on reason); “Tahsil nazair al-Qur’an” is a work that followed the intellectual path, denying that a single word has several meanings and maintaining that there is a clear connection among all of them. This is “ra’y,” which after al-Tirmidhi became the doctrine of the linguists, she says. Al-Awa acknowledges that the use of this method specifically on the subject of “wujuh wa nazair” was a distinctive revolution, not observed in any earlier author, and notes that, while the number of words explained in other works reached as many as five hundred, it is remarkable that al-Tirmidhi explained only eighty-one words in his method, and that this revolutionary method did not develop further (al-Awa, 1998:23-25).

According to the Moroccan scholar Khalid Zahri, in all of al-Tirmidhi’s works whatever field they belong to attention is directed to the ta’wil (interpretation) of

language; this disposition holds the place of a principal orientation in him. His interpretations rely not only on a lexical basis but also on a foundation of unveiling (kashf) and gnostic-Sufi insight, and al-Tirmidhi strove to ensure the balance of reason ('aql) and transmission (naql) in ta'wil (Zahri, 2009:26-29). Zahri objects to the views of H. Zaydan who studied and published "Tahsil nazair al-Qur'an" concerning the work's method. Zahri too considers that al-Tirmidhi gave a word-for-word refutation of Muqatil ibn Sulayman's work, and for this he compares certain passages in the two works and notes the resemblances (Zahri, 2013:102-106). As noted in the previous chapter, this conclusion of Zahri's is based on a superficial resemblance discernible only in the arrangement of the words.

The Turkish scholar Süleyman Kaya devoted a separate study to "Tahsil nazair al-Qur'an" and to al-Tirmidhi's methods and approaches in it (Kaya, 2016). In his study he carried out a comparative analysis of "Tahsil nazair al-Qur'an" and the classical sources on "wujuh wa nazair." According to the information Kaya provides, al-Tirmidhi's method continued in harmony with the method of Arabic linguistics but did not become established in the field of "wujuh wa nazair." Al-Tirmidhi followed the direction of semantic harmony rather than formal correspondence and made effective use of the rules of morphology and syntax in some terms; he also attached extremely great importance to the etymology of words. While the explanations of some words occupied a large extent, in others only the meaning the word denotes is given. In Kaya's view, al-Tirmidhi's method is directed toward disclosing the allusive (ishari) and inner (batini) meanings an approach that was to prepare the ground for a Sufi understanding of Qur'anic terms and the scholar prepared the ground for bringing the philological-analytical approach and the religious-mystical (allusive-inner) approach into mutual balance. Kaya notes that in al-Tirmidhi's interpretive approach the principal issue is determining the "basic meaning" (tamal ma'no) of words, a concept that emerges as the principal factor in a single word's varying across different meanings (Kaya, 2016:156-159).

Kaya also provides a number of other analytical details concerning al-Tirmidhi's methods and approaches. He likewise notes that some of the "aspects" (wujuh) in the examples al-Tirmidhi cites are not found in other works, which once again confirms that the work al-Tirmidhi refuted is not among the works on "wujuh wa nazair" known

today. As for the work's Sufi or allusive-inner meanings, however, they are discernible in very few places. The term "batin" (inner) that appears in "Tahsil nazair al-Qur'an" does not always necessarily indicate inwardness or allusiveness. For example, al-Tirmidhi, while stating that one of the meanings of ta'wil is tafsir, cites the definition:

لأنّ الفسر هو انكشاف الغطاء عن باطن القرآن

"Because 'fasr' exegesis is the uncovering of the veil from the inner (batin) of the Qur'an" (al-Tirmidhi, 1969:20). This definition may be understood to mean not the inner meaning of the Qur'an, but the becoming-clear of a place whose understanding was not clear. Even so, in some places of the work there are also partly Sufi concepts.

If the views presented above are summarized, the following brief conclusions become clear:

- the work is written in the style of a refutation (raddiya);
- another work was the cause of this work's appearance;
- the work's method had not been observed previously;
- the work's method was not continued in other works.

Although the researchers' views have common and differing aspects, from their sum a concise account of al-Tirmidhi's method is obtained. Among the conclusions presented above, the most apposite may be said to be that of A. al-Husayni.

In his work, al-Tirmidhi placed the principal emphasis on the impossibility that a particular word in the Arabic language should, without any cause, denote several meanings (Zahri, 2013:103). That is, he rejects homonymy. In his view, the fact that words, while having a single form, denote different meanings comes down to the existence, in the root of the word, of features that affirm precisely those meanings. By this method al-Tirmidhi advances a theory not encountered before him. To explain and substantiate his theory he employs a number of methods, the principal of which are the following:

- brief explanation;
- lexical explanation;
- analysis of the root and cognates;
- comparison;
- religious argumentation (proof through Qur'anic verses and hadiths);
- detailed explanation.

CONCLUSION

By means of these methods, eighty-one words occurring in the Qur'an are presented as "nazair" in "Tahsil nazair al-Qur'an" (71 nouns, 8 verbs, and 2 adjectives), and a total of 258 "aspects" (wujuh) that is, meanings of them are enumerated. When al-Tirmidhi explains the meaning of a word by means of a Qur'anic verse or a hadith, he calls the explanation the tafsir of the word; in places where a verse or hadith is not used, he employs the term ta'wil.

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