

ZAMAKHSHAR AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TOWARD HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

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Zamakhshari is one of those scholars who have greatly influenced the Holy Scripture's interpretation and its knowledge. He came in a time when the Zahiri School influenced general masses, as well as the political authorities. Zamakhshari stressed on metaphorical meaning of the Quran as he belonged to Mu'tazillite School¹ and convinced majority of the scholars about his interpretation. He was a leading scholar in *tafsir*, *hadith*, syntax, linguistics and rhetoric,² and contributed to human knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Abu al-Qasim Muhammad bin Umar Jarullah Zamakhshari Khwarizmi was born in Rajab 27, 467 AH/ March 8, 1075 AD, at Zamakhshar, a town of Khwarizm.³ Al-Suyuti, however, mentions his date birth as 497 AH,⁴ which seems incorrect and probably print mistake. Zamakhshari is called as Jarullah (neighbor of Allah) because of his long stay in Baytullah, at Makkah.⁵

Mahmood Zamakhshari traveled to several places such as Bukharah, Marve, Gorgang, Samarkand, Baghdad and Makkah, to seek knowledge. He studied grammar with an Andalusian scholar, literature with Abu Mudar Mahmood ibn Jarir al-Dabbi and Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn al-Muzaffar.⁶ At Baghdad, he studied with Abu Mansoor Nasr ibn al-Haithi, Abu Sa'd al-Shaqqani and Abu al-Khattab ibn al-Batar⁷ or ibn Tabar⁸ and others. At Makkah he studied with ibn Wahhas.⁹ On his way to hajj, when Zamakhshari stayed at Baghdad, a famous 'Alwi scholar Abu al-Sa'adat ibn al-Shajari greeted him with the following verses:

When questioned, the riders informed me with pleasant
News about Ahmad ibn Da'ud,
Until we met, but by God, my ear did not hear
Better (news) than what I saw (meaning, he was greater
than what he had heard).¹⁰

When ibn Shajari finished, Zamakhshari thanked him. Then praising him he said:

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- ⁶⁹ Originally published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, January, 1999, pp.43-56
- ⁷⁰ Originally published in Stefan Wilde (ed.), *The Qur'ān as Text*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1996, pp.107-111
- ⁷¹ Ibn Warraq, *What The Koran Really Says*, p.739
- ⁷² Jeffery, Arthur, *The Moslem World*, vol.30 (1940), p.191
- ⁷³ Noldeke, Theodor, *Geschichte des Qorans*, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim, N.Y, 1981, pp.60-96
- ⁷⁴ Muir, William *Life of Mohamet*, Vol. I., Edinburg 1923, Introduction, p. iv
- ⁷⁵ About El Fadl, Khaled, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*, London, 2002, p. 23.

⁵² Ibid, p.88-89

⁵³ Ibid, p.82

⁵⁴ Quoted in Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, Routledge, N.Y,2008, p.29.

⁵⁵ Jeffery, Arthur, (ed) Introduction, *Kitab al-Masahif*, Egypt, 1936, p.5

⁵⁶ Ibn Warraq, *The Origins of the Koran*, p.10

⁵⁷ Ibn Warraq, Statement on the World Trade Center, retrieved on 24-03-2009 from

http://www.Centerforinquiry.net/isis/articles_and_books/state_ment_by_ibn_warraq_on_the_world_trade_center_atrocity/.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.13

⁵⁹ Ibid.,

⁶⁰ Jeffery, Arthur, *Materials For The History Of The Text Of The Qur'ān: The Old Codices*, E J Brill, Leiden, 1937.

⁶¹ Ibn Warraq, *The Origins of The Koran*, p. 122

⁶² Chaudary, Dr.Muhammad Akram, *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences: Orientalism on Variant Readings of the Qur'ān: The Case of Jeffery, Arthur*, vol. 12, summer 1995, No.2, Washington, Islamabad, p-172.

⁶³ Jeffery, Arthur, *Materials*, p.iii

⁶⁴ Chaudary, Dr.M.A, *Orientalism on Variant Readings*, p. 171.

⁶⁵ Jeffery, Arthur, *Materials*, p.iii

⁶⁶ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, *Kitab Fadail ul-Qur'ān*

⁶⁷ Al-Tabari, Abu J'afar Muhammad bin Jarir (Translated & Abridged by J Cooper, W F Madelung and A Jones), *Ja'amie al-Bay'an an ta'wil ay al-Qur'ān*, 1987, Volume 1, Oxford University Press & Hakim Investment Holdings (M.E.) Limited, p. 16.

⁶⁸ Having gone through the literature written on this subject we have reached to the conclusion that it is the most suitable opinion in explaining the meaning of *Sab'a Ahruf* as far as all other opinions are concerned.

- ²⁹ Ibn Warraq - The Need for Qur'anic Criticism, Part Source: retrieved on 21-01-2009 from http://www.newsgroups.derkeiler.com/Archive/Soc/soc.culture.indian/2006-05/m_sg00321.html,
- ³⁰ Ibid.,
- ³¹ Ibid.,
- ³² Ibid.,
- ³³ Ibn Warraq, *The Origins of the Koran*, p.351-363
- ³⁴ Wansbrough, Johns, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford, 1977, p.43.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Ibid,p.44
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Ibid, p. 42,45
- ³⁹ Ibid, p.44
- ⁴⁰ Lester, Toby *What is the Koran?*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, January 1999, p.55 re-printed in Ibn Warraq, *What the Koran Really Says*, Prometheus Books, N.Y, 1998, pp. 111-112
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Ibid, p.112
- ⁴³ Ibid, p. 113
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Cambridge, 1980
- ⁴⁶ Ibn Warraq, *What the Koran Really Says*, p.121.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid, p.122
- ⁴⁸ Housman, A.E., *Selected Prose*, ed. John Carter, Cambridge, 1961, p.131.
- ⁴⁹ Klein, William W. William Wade; Craig Blomberg, Robert L Hubbard, Kermit Allen Eckleberger. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas 1993, p. 43
- ⁵⁰ R.A Torrey, *The Higher Criticism in New Theology*, New York, 1911, p.30
- ⁵¹ Bergstrasser, *Us'ul Naqd an-Nus'us wa Nashr al-Kutub*, Cairo, 1969, p.14.

- ⁸ We have tried at our level best but cannot find out his original name. Several e-mails have been sent to the Center for Inquiry USA but no received no reply in this concern.
- ⁹ Abu Isa Muhammad bin Harun bin Muhammad al-Warraq, a courageous free thinker of classical Islam.
- ¹⁰ Interview with Ibn Warraq, Qantara.de Op., Cit.
- ¹¹ *ibid*
- ¹² Der Spiegel interviews Ibn Warraq, *Spiegel Online*, Kultur, Dienstag, August 2007
- ¹³ Interview with Ibn Warraq, Qantara.de 19-07-2007 Translated from the German by Katy Derbyshire retrieved on 14.05.09 from [http://www.qantara.de/webcom/wcsearch.php?suchbereichid=62 &wc_search= articles+ of+ibn+ warraq & submit.x=31&submit.y=5](http://www.qantara.de/webcom/wcsearch.php?suchbereichid=62&wc_search=articles+of+ibn+warraq&submit.x=31&submit.y=5)
- ¹⁴ Ibn Warraq, Interview with Radio National Post, Religion Report, Sydney, Australia, on 10-10-2001.
- ¹⁵ *The spectator*, 3 October 2007.
- ¹⁶ The St. Petersburg Declaration, April 5, 2007
- ¹⁷ Prometheus Books, New York, 1998
- ¹⁸ Dutton, Yasin, Ibn Warraq's *The Origins of the Koran: A Critical Analysis*, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, May 2000 edition, *Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies*, 2000.
- ¹⁹ Ibn Warraq, *The Origins of the Koran*, p. 79, 235,259.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*.
- ²¹ Prometheus Books, New York, 2002
- ²² Al-Azami, Muhammad Mustafa, *Hoping to reform, revise Islam*, Impact International, Vol.30, March 2000.
- ²³ Ibn Warraq, *The Origins of the Koran*, p. 9
- ²⁴ Qantara.de.
- ²⁵ Ibn Warraq, *What the Koran Really Says*, p.90-91
- ²⁶ *Ibid*, p.92
- ²⁷ Qantara.de.
- ²⁸ Ibn Warraq, *Leaving Islam: Apostates Speak Out*, Prometheus Books, New York, 2003, p.149

NOTES & REFERENCES

¹ In shade of the spar between Islam and the West many individuals having Muslim family and background carry on criticizing Islam for their personal agenda of recognition, reputation, affluence and even the European nationality. Considering their literary activities as Native Orientalism, the term may be defined as “*any former Muslim living in West who inflates, advocates and precedes orientalist’s theories and works, is a Native Orientalist, and what he or she does is Native Orientalism*”. The definition may be considered as an initial attempt and not the final and ultimate. The academics and scholars are welcomed and requested to realize new realms and improvements in the definition ‘native orientalism’.

² Ibn Warraq, *What the Koran Really Says*, Prometheus Books, New York, 2002, p.111.

³ There are no sufficient details of his personal life mentioned in his books. His bio-data and personal details are mostly found in his interviews in magazines and world wide websites on Internet. It is endeavored at the level best to collect the related information from the print media, however, in some certain extents, the references of the internet websites are quoted due to non availability of printed sources.

⁴ Interview with Ibn Warraq, Qantara.de 19-07-2007 Translated from the German by Katy Derbyshire retrieved on 14.05.09 from

http://www.qantara.de/webcom/wcsearch.php?suchbereichid=62&wc_search=articles+of+ibn+warraq&submit.x=31&submit.y=5.

⁵ Smith , Lee, Losing his Religion, Daily Globe Correspondent, Bostan, 17-08-2003.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Prometheus Books, New York, 1995.

Conclusion

Ibn Warraq, denying all the living evidences, is creeping on the criticism of the Qur'ān by inflating various theories whereas in this era of enlightenment and conscience text and history of the Qur'ān are proved flawless. His entire work is a non serious scholarship that does not incite any glimpse of impartial, balanced and realistic meditation. He rejects the every light of Islam in a pure unethical approach based on pre-planned and presumed conclusions. It seems that he has been deployed to misrepresent Islam, regenerate old prejudice and fear against Islam and mould the public opinion in favour of long run of 'war against terrorism'.

He asserts that he was a Muslim by birth, educated in Islam and learnt the Qur'ān by heart. But his books reveal his ignorance of the basic sources of Islam and patchiness in Arabic language. He leaves aside all of his Islamic knowledge and accepts the Orientalists view point of Islam and its sources. He has edited two voluminous books on the criticism of the Qur'ān which are totally based on non-Muslim writings instead of Muslim scholars and thinkers. He comprehends Islam through the non-Muslim sources, presents Islam as Orientalists desire and consequently endeavors to impose his perception of Islam on entire *Ummah*. His scholarship is partial and biased, to criticize everything in Islam by rejecting Muslim sources.

A contemporary scholar remarks:

...Warraq is an intolerant pseudo-scholar. It (his work) is good propaganda, but not good scholarship.¹¹⁷⁵

The West should be cautious of these kinds of false friends who are adding fuel to hatred against the West among the Muslim communities. The West should also review the war on criticism against Islam as the Muslims have never criticized them to give up their beliefs.

So far as the case of variant manuscripts of the Qur'ān is concerned Ibn Warraq has dedicated the first and the last parts of his book "*What The Koran Really Says*" for allegations on the manuscripts of the Qur'ān. Both these articles are inter-related as Toby Lester inflates and reiterates Puin's views more sensationally. "*What is the Koran?*"⁶⁹ by Toby Lester in the part first, under the heading Introduction, and another article "*Observations on Early Qur'ān Manuscripts in Sana'a*" written by Gerd-R. Puin⁷⁰ in the last part under heading: Manuscripts. If Puin's found discrepancies in Sana'a fragments are analyzed, keeping in mind above discussion of variant readings, it becomes clear that these statements carry no weight of evidence, clearly far-fetched and totally untenable. It seems that the main theme runs behind his allegations is to resume the work of his ancestors to prepare a revised version of the Qur'ān. Puin determines to complete the mission by his findings:

The plan of Bergstrasser, Jeffery, and later Pretzl to prepare a critical edition of the Qur'ān was not realized, and the collection of variant derived from real old codices failed to survive the bombs of World War II. Many more old manuscripts are accessible now, which would justify a new approach, not no such undertaking is in sight.⁷¹

It is the matter of amusement that Puin wants to resume the work of Jeffery to prepare a variant version whereas Jeffery himself acknowledges this fact dejectedly, lamenting that "practically all the early codices and fragments that have so far been carefully examined, show the same type of text, such variants as occur being almost always explainable as scribal errors"⁷² Bergstrasser also reached a similar conclusion.⁷³ Now one can ask: where does Puin stand?

William Muir acknowledges the truth:

"There is probably no other book in the world which has remained twelve centuries (now fourteen) with so pure a text".⁷⁴

(*tafsir*) linguistics (*lughab*) literature (*adab*) and reading style (*qira'ats*).⁶² His main source was the Kitab al-Masahif of Ibn Abi Dawud (d. 316 A.H). However a large number of variant reading entries listed in his Materials lack proper and authentic chains of transmission, a fact which he himself realizes.⁶³ Moreover, while listing variant readings in his Materials Jeffery never mentions his source.⁶⁴ He himself acknowledges that in Ibn Abi Dawud's Kitab al-Masahif, his very first and basic source, the *isnad* is weak and that the Orthodoxy may not accept it.⁶⁵

It seems quite relevant here to depict the status of seven ahruf and the need of multiple (variant) readings for reciting the Qur'ān along with conditions of authentic readings. According to an authentic *Hadith*, the Holy Prophet (*peace be upon him*) has said:

ان هذا القرآن أنزل على سبعة احرف فاقرأ ما تيسر منه.⁶⁶

The Qur'ān has been revealed covering seven versions. So recite it in a way that is easy for you from out of these.

Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud reports:

The Messenger of God said: "The Qur'ān was sent down in seven ahruf. Each of these ahruf has an outward aspect (*zahir*: ظاهر) and an inward aspect (*batin*: باطن); each of the ahruf has a border, and each border has a lookout."⁶⁷

In view of above quoted authentic *Hadiths* it is, thus, clear that the Qur'ān was revealed in seven letters but to explain and describe these seven letters is not an easy task. The discussion of the seven ahruf is a very significant, extensive and one of the most complicated discussions on the sciences of the Qur'ān. This is an established fact that the term *Sab'a Ahruf* (سبعة احرف) does not mean Seven Qira'at (Seven Readings) rather it refers to seven types.⁶⁸ However, the best explanation and interpretation of the Seven Dialects of the Qur'ān is that it means "Variant Recital".

cannot be relied upon to construct a reliable, scientific history. Second, we seem to assume that the Companions of the Prophet heard and understood him perfectly.⁵⁹

The major theme runs through Ibn Warraq's voluminous works on the Qur'ān, "*The Origins of the Koran*" and "*What the Koran Really Says*" is to put a question mark on the authenticity of the Qur'ān. not only Ibn Warraq but many others, since a long time, have never been intended to believe the Qur'ān as word of Allah, as Muslims believe. They find Bible with a history of corruption, tempering and alteration in consequence of implying the principles of textual criticism. Being religiously biased and prejudiced or with objectives of political empowerment and for acquisitive interests not for academic research, they apply the principles of higher criticism to Islam's sacred book but originated nothing sensible to realize their contentment. So they have endeavored at their level best and even spent their lives to rummage around microscopically for each and every, weak and slight clue to negate the fair collection and transmission of the Qur'ān in the early history of Islam. But after a long run of centuries they could not make heads or tails of it.

Variant Readings and Manuscripts

Ibn Warraq has exaggerated the allegations instigated by the orientalist regarding variant readings and variant manuscripts of the Qur'ān in his work "*The Origins of the Koran*" and "*What The Koran Really Says*" that suit his hard bark on the sacred book of Islam. Keeping in view the importance of Arthur Jeffery's hypothesis of variant readings of the Qur'ān Ibn Warraq has selected his well-known work "*Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān*"⁶⁰ and other articles under the topic "The Collection and the Variants of the Qur'ān" in his edited work "*The Origins of the Koran*". To establish that "the Qur'ān is Muhammad's book, the impression of his personality is on it from the first word to the last,"⁶¹ Jeffery collected about six thousand variant readings from books dealing with commentary

1. How did the Koran come to us?—That is the compilation and the transmission of the Koran.
2. When was it written, and who wrote it?
3. What are the sources of the Koran? Where were the stories, legends, and principles that abound in the Koran acquired?
4. What is the Koran? Since there never was a *textus receptus ne varietur* of the Koran, we need to decide its authenticity.⁵⁶

He rejects the divine origin of the Qur'ān in his statement :

..... it is surely totally irrational to continue to believe that the Qur'ān is the word of God when the slightest amount of rational thought will reveal that the Qur'ān contains words and passages addressed to God (e.g. VI.104; VI.114; XVII.1; XXVII.91; LXXXI.15-29; lxxxiv.16-19; etc.); or that it is full of historical errors and inconsistencies.⁵⁷

After describing the project of collection of the Qur'ān under the custody of Abu Bakr and Uthman (may Allah be pleased with them) he finds no relief to his agony against the integrity of the text of the Holy Book:

There are no compelling reasons for accepting the 'Uthmanic story and not the Abu Bakr one; after all they *are all gleaned from the same sources*, which are all exceedingly late, tendentious in the extreme, and all later fabrications, as we shall see later".⁵⁸

According to his pre-assumed objectives, he rejects every tradition or evidence of the recording or written preservation of the Qur'ān:

Similarly the Companions of the Prophet are said to have memorized many of his utterances. Could their memories never have failed? Oral traditions have a tendency to change over time, and they

In fact Ibn Warraq reproduces Wansbrough's theory of 'revisionism' to strengthen his polemical agenda as Fred M Donner remarks:

.... the pseudonymous religious polemicist Ibn Warraq who seems to champion Wansborough's ideas in pursuit of his own personal religious agenda.⁵⁴

Donner is absolutely right; Ibn Warraq's hue and cry reveals his individual interests rather than any literary advancement as he himself is fully aware of the massive work of orientalists on the Qur'anic criticism.

Major Cannons towards the Qur'ān

Ibn Warraq, with a very loathsome tongue, is carrying on criticism of the Qur'ān at international forums, facilitated by the West, to pursue his polemical agenda.

Textual Authenticity of the Qur'ān

There are numerous gateways for an assault on the Qur'anic text, one of which is to question its recording and compilation as Arthur Jeffery remarks: "The Western scholars do not consent that the arrangement of the text of the Qur'ān which is in our hands now is the work of the Prophet".⁵⁵ It is in this spirit that Orientalists allege that Quran was not indeed recorded during the Prophet's (peace be upon him) lifetime. Collection and compilation of the Qur'ān has been a basic subject for almost all the renowned orientalists as far as the study of the Qur'ān is concerned. Well-known to the fact that integrity and authenticity of the text of the Qur'ān rests upon its recording and collection, orientalists endeavored at their best to critically investigate the early history of the compilation and collection of the Qur'ān.

In his book, "*The Origins of the Koran*" Ibn Warraq has included his introduction as a prelude, therein; he discusses the collection of the Qur'ān quite objectively. He has the opinion that through a critical investigation of the Qur'ān it is hoped to find out the answers of the following questions: