

The Methodology of Al-Kashf wa al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān

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Abstract

Abū Ishāq Tha‘labī Nayshābūrī is an outstanding Iranian exegete of the fourth and fifth centuries LH. Tha‘labī has been so skillful in various Islamic sciences such as Arabic linguistics (including morphology, syntax (grammatical inflection), vocabulary, and rhetoric), Ḥadīth, exegesis, and qur’ānic sciences that numerous students from many near and far places attended his classes. Tha‘labī’s commentary is a comprehensive and valuable exegesis of the Qur’ān that entails the utterances and viewpoints of many scholars from various scientific fields. Since Tha‘labī’s commentary is largely comprised of the narrations by the Companions and even Ahl al-Bayt (a), it can be considered a narrative commentary. Tha‘labī’s reality-centered and fair spirit has caused him to present narrations from Ahl al-Bayt (a) throughout his commentary. This has caused some biased critics to target him with their criticisms and reproaches. Tha‘labī’s outstanding scientific personality and position has made the exegetes of the ensuing centuries to use his commentary extensively in their works.

Keywords: Abū Ishāq Tha‘labī, Al-Kashf wa al-bayān, Ahl al-Bayt (a), Narrative interpretation.

Introduction

Abū Ishāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Tha‘labī, the remarkable exegete and scholar of the fourth and fifth centuries LH, lived in Nayshābūr. The training of excellent pupils such as Abū al-Ḥasan Wāḥidī Nayshābūrī (468 LH) is a clear reason for the scientific authority of Tha‘labī in his own time. In the introduction of his commentary, Tha‘labī, makes a value-based evaluation, criticism, and categorization of the commentaries written before him, and then enumerates the lack of a comprehensive, orderly, and trustable book about the qur’ānic science and the requests of some scholars as the reasons for the writing of his commentary. Tha‘labī’s commentary extensively involves the words and viewpoints of the scholars of various Islamic sciences that lived before him. The extensive use of interpretive narrations of the Companions and the Successors to the Companions has given this commentary a highly narrative appearance.

The reality-centered and fair spirit of Tha‘labī has caused him to use the interpretive viewpoints of the revelation and prophetic family in the interpretation of the Qur’ān. The interpretive narrations of Ahl al-Bayt (a) fill various pages of his commentary with regard to various fields such as vocabulary, recitation, cause of revelation, interpretation, and the esoteric interpretation of the qur’ānic verses.

One of the criticisms posed against Tha‘labī’s commentary is the presence of Isrā’īliyyāt in his commentary. The presentation of some narrations from some seemingly Muslim Jews and

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the explanation of some qur'ānic stories based on Isrā'īliyyāt are mentioned as the reasons of these critics.

In addition to what was said, Tha'labī's high scientific stance made many scholars and exegetes of the ensuing centuries to mention him and his commentary extensively in their works. In the following section, Tha'labī and his commentary will be introduced in more details.

Getting familiar with the author

Tha'labī as mentioned by scholars and biographers

Tha'labī's biography has been briefly mentioned in many past books (biographies, rijāl, and history). In order to get familiar with Tha'labī, some of the praises and criticisms issued by scholars about him will be presented.

Proponents' statements and viewpoints

Abū al-Ḥasan Wāhidī Nayshābūrī (468 LH), the outstanding exegete and grammarian, is a student of Tha'labī. Abūfāḍl 'Arūdī – Wāhidī's teacher of vocabulary – asks him to prepare himself to learn the Qur'ān after learning the poetic books. 'Arūdī orders Wāhidī to go to Tha'labī as a student. He mentions Tha'labī with titles such as “master” and “imām” and points out the travels made by many lovers of Qur'ān interpretation science to attend his classes. This way, he asks Wāhidī to go and attend Tha'labī's classes. Wāhidī has also referred to this and has mentioned Tha'labī with a highly positive attitude.

Abū al-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Ghāfir b. Ismā'īl Fārsī (529 LH), the author of the book *The history of Nayshābūr*¹ has called Tha'labī the teacher of the Qur'ān, exegete, orator, litterateur, trustworthy, and memorizer of the Qur'ān, and has mentioned his commentary very positively (Ṣarīfīnī, 1983, vol. 1: 109).

Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī (the first half of the sixth century LH) and Muntajab al-Dīn b. Bābawayh (585 LH) have praised him with the title “imām of the traditionists” (Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī, 1998, vol. 8: 381; Muntajab al-Dīn b. Bābawayh, 1988: 84).

Ibn Athīr Jazarī (630 LH)² refers to the fame of Tha'labī and calls his commentary as superior to all similar works (Ibn Athīr Jazarī, 1999, vol. 1: 163).³

Jamāl al-Dīn Qifṭī (646 LH), Ibn Khullakān (681 LH), and Yāqūt Ḥamawī (626 LH) have all mentioned his name very positively and have praised the expansiveness of his knowledge (Qifṭī, 1981, vol. 1: 119; Ibn Khullakān, n.d., vol. 1: 79; Yāqūt Ḥamawī, 1999, vol. 2: 198).

The outcome of all the praise put forth by the past scholars and historians about Tha'labī indicates that he has been the top figure in various scientific domains such as Qur'ān interpretation, qur'ānic sciences, Ḥadīth, and Arabic linguistics. The post-Tha'labī scholars' approach to his works and their use of them in their own writings is a clear proof for this claim.

1. This book is not available today and only a selection of it, compiled by Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. al-Azhar al-Ṣarīfīnī is accessible today.

2. 'Izz al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Abī al-Karam Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm b. 'Abd al-Wāhid al-Shaybānī, known as Ibn al-Athīr (630 LH), the author of the book *Asad al-ghāba fī ma'rifa al-ṣahāba*. It is noteworthy that his brother, Majd al-Dīn Abū al-Sa'ādāt Mubārak b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm b. 'Abd al-Wāhid al-Shaybānī (606 LH) has written the book *Al-Nihāya fī gharīb al-ḥadīth wa al-athar*, and some researchers have mistakenly taken the two as one person.

3. His book *Al-Lubāb fī tahdhīb al-ansāb* is a summary of Sam'ānī's *al-ansāb*.

Opponents' statements and viewpoints

The exploration of the available historical records demonstrates that Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taymiyya Ḥarrānī (728 LH) has been the first person to seriously criticize Tha'labī's commentary. Ibn Taymiyya's criticisms and sarcasms against this book can be summarized under two titles.

The presentation of weak, fictitious, and innovative narrations

Ibn Taymiyya has considered the majority of suchlike narrations to be "virtue narrations." Tha'labī has used virtue narrations in two parts of his commentary. The first part is the beginning of the qur'ānic chapters where he has referred to narrations on the virtue and divine reward of the recitation of every chapter (Ibn Taymiyya, 1986, vol. 7: 12, 90, & 310-312). Another occasion of the use of virtue narrations in Tha'labī's commentary is under some verses of the Qur'ān where he has sometimes used some narrations after interpreting the verse. In these cases, he has mentioned Imām 'Alī (a) and other members of the Prophet's (s) progeny as the superior examples of some qur'ānic patterns (ibid.: 190).¹

The inability to discern correct narrations from the incorrect ones

Ibn Taymiyya has repeatedly introduced Tha'labī as lacking the ability to discern the sound narrations from the unsound ones and the true sunna from the innovative narrations, and has suggested Tha'labī's unfamiliarity with Ḥadīth sciences as the reason for this (ibid.: 12, 34, 310). He maintains that the difference between the commentaries of Tha'labī and Baghawī is that the latter does not mention the fictitious and innovative traditions that exist in the former (id., 2001, vol. 7: 208).²

After Ibn Taymiyya, some scholars have criticized Tha'labī's commentary in their works. Ibn Kathīr Damishqī (774 LH) has referred to the existence of many strange things in Tha'labī's commentary. Ibn Tagharī Bardī (813-874 LH) quotes Ibn Jazarī: The only problem with Tha'labī's commentary is the existence of very weak narrations at the beginning of chapters (Ibn Tagharī Bardī, n.d., vol. 4: 283). While classifying the exegetes, Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī (911 LH) puts the name of Tha'labī and some other exegetes under the title "akhbārī," and introduces them as people whose only occupation has been story making and referring to the events of the previous people's lives, no matter if those stories have been true or false (Suyūṭī, 2001, vol. 2: 1236).

In the past few centuries, some Sunnī scholars have criticized Tha'labī's commentary. The majority of their criticisms are the repetitions of the statements and viewpoints of Ibn Taymiyya

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1. Ibn Taymiyya deems the story on Imām 'Alī's (a) charity-giving during his prayer as a fictitious narration and asserts that his opinion is one that is supported unanimously by the scholars. He also takes some other narrations that introduce the virtues of Imām 'Alī (a) as the cause of revelation of the verses "... and to every people a guide" (Qur'ān 13:7) and "ears (that should hear the tale and) retain its memory should bear its (lessons) in remembrance" (Qur'ān 69:12) as fictitious narrations of the Qur'ān commentaries. However, what is strange in his claims is that in several occasions, Ibn Taymiyya corroborates his stances by the consensus and unanimous agreement of the scholars, but in none of these cases he refers to the name of these scholars and the sources of their assertions. This makes clear the baselessness of his stances.
 2. It should be noted that Ibn Taymiyya provides a dual judgment about Baghawī's commentary. He sometimes takes this commentary as free from any weak, fictitious, or innovative narration, while at other times he introduces it as inclusive of suchlike narrations – just like Tha'labī's – and reproaches Baghawī. It is strange that 'Abd al-Razzāq Maḥdī, the researcher of Baghawī's commentary, in the introduction of his Ma'ālim al-tanzīl, repeatedly refers to Ibn Taymiyya's criticisms of Tha'labī's commentary, but does not even once refer to Ibn Taymiyya's countless criticisms of Baghawī's commentary (q.v. Baghawī, 1999, vol. 1: the introduction of the researcher).

about Tha‘labī and his commentary. Abū al-Ḥasanāt Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥayy (known as Laknawī Hindī) (1304 LH), ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, and Muḥammad b. Ja‘far Kattānī (1345 LH) are among the critics of Tha‘labī’s commentary in the past two centuries (Laknawī Hindī, 1993: 101-103; Abū Ghudda, 1993: 102-104, 109, 113-114; Kattānī, 1993: 78).

The foregoing lines entailed the criticisms made by some opponents and critics of Tha‘labī and his commentary. A careful examination of the viewpoints of the critics of Tha‘labī and his commentary shows that a great part of their criticisms and questions originate from religious biases. As noted earlier, the historical evidences indicate that Ibn Taymiyya is the first person who has seriously challenged Tha‘labī’s commentary. Ibn Taymiyya’s high status among some ensuing Sunnī scholars and researchers has caused them to repeat his claims about Tha‘labī and his commentary and has prevented them from treating this issue with fairness and precision. However, none of Tha‘labī’s contemporary scholars nor the historical, biographical, and exegetical book authors have criticized or sought to find faults with him or his commentary in such an extreme manner. On the contrary, they have all praised his high status and position and have honored his commentary.

Another important point that should be noted is that talking about the progeny of the Prophet (s), pointing out their high status, and using Shī‘a Imāms’ narrations in the Qur’ān interpretation are other reasons for the provocations against Tha‘labī and his commentary, especially when it is considered that Ibn Taymiyya and other critics after him have maintained part of the weak narrations of Tha‘labī’s commentary as those that mention Imām ‘Alī’s (a) virtues.

For example, in his discussion of the Wilāyat verse and the bestowment of the ring by Imām ‘Alī (a) as a charity, Ibn Taymiyya criticizes ‘Allāma Ḥillī and writes: “The consensus among the Ḥadīth scholars is that this story is made-up and fictitious, and with regard to what Tha‘labī has narrated from Abūdhār, the Ḥadīth scholars believe that Tha‘labī uses fictitious traditions in his commentary ... Tha‘labī is “ḥāṭib layl” (firewood collector at night, which is a metaphor of a person who talks nonsense). Baghwī – whose commentary is a summary of Tha‘labī’s commentary – has not used these fictitious traditions in his commentary (Ibn taymiyya, 1986, vol. 3: 3-4).

In response to Ibn Taymiyya, it can be said that firstly, Tha‘labī is not the only person who has narrated Imām ‘Alī’s (a) bestowment of the ring as charity by his own chain of transmission; other scholars such as Ḥākim Ḥaskānī (Ḥākim Ḥaskānī, 1991, vol. 1: 230) with his chain of transmission and Fakh Rāzī with the title “narrated from” Abūdhār and other Companions have narrated this event.

Secondly, which of the Ḥadīth transmission scholars has said that Tha‘labī talks nonsense?! On the contrary, there are many scholars who have praised him, as noted earlier in this article.

Thirdly, contrary to what Ibn Taymiyya claims, Baghwī has narrated Imām ‘Alī’s (a) bestowment of the ring in his commentary through Ibn ‘Abbās and Suddī. Although some content of Tha‘labī’s commentary requires examination and evaluation, the assessment and evaluation of a book should not merely regard its negative points and ignore its positive points.

The historical texts indicate that Tha‘labī has attended the classes of many masters and has learned from them. According to Tha‘labī himself in the introduction of his commentary, his masters have been nearly 300 notable figures of Qur’ān interpretation and Ḥadīth. Since a complete list of their names is not available, we can only rely on the examination of the chains of transmission available in the introduction of Tha‘labī’s commentary (Tha‘labī, 2001, vol. 1: 75-85)¹, the chains of transmission referred to by Baghwī in the introduction of his commentary (Baghwī, 1999, vol. 1: 47-48, & 53-54), and the reports of some historians

1. When presenting the chains of transmission and references to his predecessors’ commentaries and books, Tha‘labī refers to the hearings, readings, and licenses of his teachers, which can be used to extract and collect the names of his teachers and professors.

who have noted the names of some of his teachers to achieve a fairly complete list of the names of Tha‘labī’s teachers. After the collection and examination of the related chains of transmission and historical reports, the names of more than 50 teachers of Tha‘labī are achieved, including Abū Ṭāhir b. Khuzayma, Abū Muḥammad Wazzān, Abū Zakariyya Ḥarbī, Abū Bakr Jawzaqī, Abū al-Qāsīm Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb, and Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Sulmī (the author of the book *Ḥaqā’iq al-tafsīr ‘alā lisān ahl al-‘imāra*).

Among Tha‘labī’s pupils, the name of a scholar such as Wāḥidī Nayshābūrī (468 LH) – the famous exegete and the author of *Asbāb nuzūl al-āyāt* – can be seen. As one of the outstanding students of Tha‘labī, Wāḥidī has had an important role in familiarizing others with Tha‘labī’s commentary. He heard his teacher’s commentary and then licensed others (such as ‘Abd al-Ghāfir b. Ismā‘īl, the author of *The history of Nayshābūr*) to narrate it and other works of Tha‘labī (Ṣarīfīnī, 1983, vol. 1: 109). Other students of Tha‘labī include Abū Sā‘id Farrukhādī, Aḥmad b. Khalaf Shīrāzī, Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad Iṣfahānī, and ‘Abd al-Karīm b. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad.

Tha‘labī’s faith

The exploration of the biographical records shows that Tha‘labī has been a Shāfi‘ī. His name is seen in many books of “Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyya.” Ibn Ṣalāḥ Shahrzūrī (577-643 LH) has registered his name as one of the Shāfi‘ī jurisprudents (Ibn Ṣalāḥ Shahrzūrī, 1992, vol. 2: 560). Subkī has mentioned Tha‘labī in the fourth level of Shāfi‘iyya (Subkī, 1999, vol. 2: 380). Asnawī (772 LH) and Ibn Shubha Mamishqī (770-851 LH) both have named Tha‘labī as a Shāfi‘ī in their Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyya (Asnawī, 1987, vol. 1: 203; Ibn Shubha Mamishqī, 1987, vol. 1: 159). Ibn al-Ghazzī (1167 LH) also has called Tha‘labī a Shāfi‘ī jurisprudent (Ibn al-Ghazzī, 1991: 30). In his discussion of Tha‘labī’s commentary, Āqā Buzurg Tihirānī believes that Tha‘labī has been likely a Shī‘a, and says: “Even if Tha‘labī is not a Twelver Shī‘a, he certainly has no strictness and enmity toward the Shī‘a [denomination] and the Shī‘as.” He has taken the ample Shī‘a narrations and reports in Tha‘labī’s commentary as an evidence for his assertion (Āqā Buzurg Tihirānī, 1983, vol. 18: 66-67).

Another indication that helps us correctly know Tha‘labī’s jurisprudential faith comes from a precise examination of his interpretation of some verses related to jurisprudential ruling. For example, in his interpretation of the Qur’ān 4:43, Tha‘labī expresses the viewpoints and opinions of the jurisprudents of various denominations. Here, Tha‘labī mentions the ideas of Muḥammad b. Idrīs Shāfi‘ī in a more detailed and comprehensive manner. This might show his complete familiarity with the principles of Shāfi‘ī denomination (Tha‘labī, 2001: vol. 3: 155, vol. 4: 111, vol. 5: 162). Moreover, the historical reports indicate that Shāfi‘ī denomination has been prevalent in many parts of Khurāsān and Transoxiana in the fourth and fifth centuries LH (Dikhudā, 1999, vol. 9: 14022). Based on what we said, it is highly plausible that Tha‘labī has been a Shāfi‘ī follower.

Bibliography¹

Introduction of the commentary

Tha‘labī starts the introduction of his commentary with utterances about the magnificence of the Qur’ān. He then points out his attendance of various teachers’ classes in order to learn the Qur’ān as well as God’s grace to himself in this regard.

1. Kurkīs ‘Awwād has reported that there exist two manuscripts of Tha‘labī’s commentary in one of the libraries of Baghdad (‘Awwād, 1999: vol. 4: 495, & 534)

Motivation for authoring the commentary

After mentioning various groups of exegetes and pointing out their different methods of interpretation, Tha‘labī reveals his motivation for authoring his commentary. According to Tha‘labī’s words in the introduction of the commentary, four factors can be mentioned as his motivations for authoring his commentary: 1) the lack of a comprehensive, well-ordered, and trustable book in the realm of the Qur’ān sciences, 2) people’s clear disinclination to the interpretation science, 3) the request of some scholars and notables, and 4) the personal urge to spread the knowledge so as to thank God’s grace in giving him that knowledge.

When talking about his motivations for the authoring the commentary, Tha‘labī refers to the features of his commentary, too. These include qualities such as comprehensiveness, perfection, freedom from unnecessary information, the succinctness of expression, comprehensibility, the fine processing of the text, and derivation from valid sources.

Discussion and resources of Tha‘labī’s commentary

After the presentation of motivations in the introduction of the commentary, Tha‘labī introduces his work in detail (Tha‘labī, 2001, vol. 1: 8). According to him, 14 different topics have been discussed in his commentary, including Qur’ānic stories, aspects, readings, Arabic linguistics, interpretation, virtues, and Islamic laws (ibid.: 77). Tha‘labī asserts that his commentary has no specific categorization and has not been divided into chapters.

In another part of the introduction, Tha‘labī notes the 29 commentaries that he has used more or less in his work. These include commentaries of scholars such as Ibn ‘Abbās, ‘Ikrama, Kalbī, Ḥasan Baṣrī, Muqātil b. Sulaymān, Muqātilb. Ḥayyān, and Abū Ḥamza Thumālī. Moreover, the names of books and commentaries written in his era and used by him in the composition of his work can also be seen. In addition to the commentaries of the Qur’ān, Tha‘labī has used the books “Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān,” “Gharīb al-Qur’ān,” and “Naẓm al-Qur’ān” in the explication of the verses. It should be noted Tha‘labī has sometimes used some books such as Mubarrad’s book (ibid.: 92) in his own book, but these are not named in the introduction.

Groups of exegetes from the viewpoint of Tha‘labī

In another part of the introduction, Tha‘labī refers to six groups of exegetes with different scientific backgrounds and interpretive approaches:

1. Innovators (such as Balkhī, Jubā’ī, Iṣfahānī, and Rummānī);
2. Those who have provided nice interpretations, but have mixed wrong statements of the innovators with the words of the antecedent righteous (such as Abū Bakr Qaffāl and Abū Ḥāmid Muqri’i);
3. Those who have limited themselves to narrations and have not paid attention to analysis and criticism (such as Abū Ya‘qūb Ḥanzalī and Abū Iṣḥāq Anmāṭī);
4. Those who have discarded chains of transmission – as the basis and cornerstone of narrations – and have used their mind as the means for documenting the narrations. From the viewpoint of Tha‘labī, these cannot be considered as scholar, because their books only reflect their own personal thoughts. Tha‘labī criticizes the authors of such commentaries using the statement “If there is no chain of transmission, anyone can say anything he wants”¹;

1. This statement is narrated only in the Sunnī narrative resources and is attributed to ‘Abdullāh b. Mubārak (Nayshābūrī, n.d., vol. 1: 12; Tirmidhī, 1983, vol. 5: 396; Rāmhurmuzī, 1984: 209; Ibn ‘Abd al-Birr Andulusī, 1967, vol. 1: 56; Khaṭīb Baghdādī, 1985: 433; Ibn Ṣalāḥ Shahrzūrī, 1992: 156)

5. Those who have skillfully stepped into this realm, but have stretched out their discussions too long. In these commentaries, the number of chains of transmission and narrations is excessively large. In addition, they present opponents' viewpoints and answer them in lengthy chunks. According to Tha'labī, suchlike commentaries does not attract those who aspire growth and guidance (including commentaries of scholars such as Ṭabarī and Abū Muḥammad 'Abdullāh Iṣfahānī);
6. Those who have limited themselves to the interpretation of the qur'ānic verses, have ignored the Islamic Law (and its rules), and have not presented and answered the posed doubts (for example, the commentaries of the Successors of the Companions and their successors such as Mujāhid, Muqātil, Kalbī, and Suddi) (ibid.: 74).

General structure and content of the commentary

Like many exegetes before him, Tha'labī has written his commentary based on the order of the qur'ānic chapters. The general method of Tha'labī in interpretation is to first refer to the narrations on the virtues of that chapter; he usually talks about the place, time, and sometimes the cause of the revelation of the chapter. In the interpretation of a verse or a group of verses, he first discusses the morphological discussions (including derivation, etymology, and meaning) and then uses the statements of Ahl al-Bayt (a), the Companions, the Successors of the Companions, the scholars of Arabic philology and linguistics, mystics, philosophers, poets, and exegetes to interpret the qur'ānic verses.

At the first glance, the reader finds the commentary full of various narrations and quotations. However, with a little concentration, it gets clear that after referring to the theories of the scholars of various fields, Tha'labī sets out to criticize and evaluate the interpretive narrations (ibid., vol. 2: 42-202, vol. 3: 15, vol. 6: 86, vol. 7: 107, vol. 8: 217).

In his account of the narrations and previous interpretive viewpoints, Tha'labī sometimes refers to the complete chain of transmission of those statements, at times presents the narrations in the form of a loose tradition, and at other times just gives the name of its articulator without mentioning its source and chain of transmission. In some other cases, he vaguely reports the narrations and quotations.

In some cases, Tha'labī evaluate the chains of transmission of the narrations (ibid., vol. 4: 62, vol. 7: 227), which shows Tha'labī's attention to the criticism of the chains of transmission of traditions.

Tha'labī's extensive knowledge about Arabic language and his full familiarity with various branches of Arabic linguistics is famous. This point – which was mentioned in the previous lines through the words of some past scholars – has made Tha'labī's commentary to have linguistic tinges. Therefore, his commentary can also be considered a “linguistic commentary.”¹ In the following lines, parts of Tha'labī's extensive efforts in various branches of Arabic linguistics will be presented.

Morphology and syntax (grammatical inflection)

1. Determining the type of the words (noun, verb, article) in the sentence (ibid., vol. 1: 150, & 218, vol. 2: 141, 161, & 182, vol. 5: 197, vol. 10: 33, 157, & 258);
2. Discussing the forms of the qur'ānic words (ibid., vol. 1: 162, & 180, vol. 3: 96, vol. 5: 339, vol. 7: 102, vol. 8: 70, vol. 9: 257, vol. 10: 229)

1. A commentary that includes linguistic and literary discussions of the Qur'ān such as grammatical inflections, vocabulary, and rhetoric. In a general classification, Ibn Khaldūn (808 LH) has divided commentaries into two types: narrative commentaries (which are based on narrations and traditions), and linguistic commentaries. Vocabulary commentaries are clear examples of linguistic commentaries (Qurbānī Zarrīn, 2004, vol. 4: 639).

3. Presenting the imperfective and the stem of the perfective verbs (ibid., vol. 3: 96)
4. Pointing out “i‘lāl” and “ibdāl” discussions in the qur’ānic words (ibid., vol. 2: 246, & 249, vol. 3: 41);
5. Presenting the various viewpoints of the Kufa and Basra grammarians about some disputed topics (ibid., vol. 1: 282, vol. 2: 242, & 273, vol. 3: 250, vol. 8: 101-102, vol. 9: 304, vol. 10: 124);
6. Referring to the discussion of the use of gerund instead of noun (ibid., vol. 1: 140, & 147, vol. 3: 134, vol. 5: 203-204, vol. 6: 171, & 274);
7. Determining the type of pronouns along with giving examples (ibid., vol. 1: 117);
8. Referring to the existence of ellipsis and taqdīr (restoring the full meaning of the text by holding certain words to be understood) in the Qur’ān and determining the deleted cases (ibid., vol. 1: 170, vol. 2: 35, vol. 3: 300, vol. 4: 205, vol. 5: 213, vol. 7: 68, vol. 8: 130, vol. 9: 93).

Vocabulary

Tha‘labī’s approach to “lughat” (vocabulary) discussion is about three issues:

1. Presenting the etymology of qur’ānic words: Allāh (ibid., vol. 1: 95-98); tathbītan (ibid., vol. 2: 264); shaghafahā (ibid., vol. 3: 37); ya‘ba’ (ibid., vol. 7: 153); ‘Utull (ibid., vol. 10: 12).
2. Expressing the meaning of qur’ānic words: ghaḍab (ibid., vol. 1: 123); taqwā (ibid., 142-144); tawakkala (ibid., vol. 2: 45-46); isrāf waqtār (ibid., vol. 5: 49); muhaymin (ibid., vol. 9: 287); ahqāb (ibid., vol. 10: 116).
3. Referring to the appellation of words and qur’ānic statements: sab‘ al-mathānī (ibid., vol. 1: 90); rabwa (ibid., vol. 2: 264), mā’ida (ibid., vol. 4: 112), al-āzafa (ibid., vol. 8: 270); al-ḥuṭama (ibid., vol. 10: 248).

The presentation of the etymology of the qur’ānic words and the various viewpoints in this regard are vastly seen in Tha‘labī’s commentary. The reference to the root (main letters) of the words such as “allāh,” “shayṭān,” “kāfir,” “fāsiq,” “la‘n,” “sūra,” and “i‘tikāf” reveals the author’s attention to the ishtiḳāq (derivation) discussion. Since there is a close relationship between the two discussions of “ishtiḳāq” and “the determination of the meaning of the single words of the Qur’ān,” Tha‘labī usually mentions the meaning of a word after determining its root. Moreover, when giving the meaning of synonymous words, he refers to the tinges of difference between their meanings. For instance, with regard to the differences in the meaning of the words “ḥamd” and “shukr,” he has extensively given the various scholars’ viewpoints (ibid., vol. 1: 108-109). Tha‘labī usually refers to the appellation of a word after determining its root and expressing its meaning. Using statements such as “The semanticists have said,” Tha‘labī sometimes uses the authors of “ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān” books to support his own stances.

Rhetoric

Some manifestations of rhetoric in Tha‘labī’s commentary can be seen in the determination of the instances of “irony” (ibid., vol. 1: 163, vol. 3: 135, vol. 10: 247), “trope” (ibid., vol. 5: 231, vol. 8: 293), “allusive proposition” (ibid., vol. 4: 267), and “simile” (ibid., vol. 2: 176, vol. 4: 293, vol. 9: 187).

Readings and accents

Like many other exegetes, Tha‘labī has addressed the topic of readings in his book. He sometimes refers to the reading style of a person and at other times expresses the multiple

aspects of the reading of a word along with references to those who have suggested them. In many cases he talks about the reading of a word by the people of a certain city or district (ibid., vol. 1: 154; vol. 2: 64; vol. 3: 70, vol. 4: 76, vol. 5: 341, vol. 6: 160). Sometimes he separately refers to the accents of different tribes in the pronunciation of a word (ibid., vol. 1: 150, vol. 2: 14, & 241, vol. 3: 29, 61, & 248, vol. 8, 140).

Manifestations of qur'ānic sciences in Tha'labī's commentary

Tha'labī talks about various qur'ānic sciences throughout his commentary based on the needs of every discussion. Points such as determining the qur'ānic chapters and verses as Meccan or Medinan (ibid., vol. 1: 90, & 135, vol. 3: 366, & 416, vol. 4: 131, & 324, vol. 5: 116, 156, & 304, vol. 8: 118), expressing the cause of revelation of some chapters and verses (ibid., vol. 3: 132, & 346, vol. 4: 55, vol. 5: 119, & 254), referring to the abrogation topic, its literal and terminological meaning, and reporting his precedent scholars' viewpoint about the role of the verses as abrogating or abrogated (ibid., vol. 1: 86, vol. 2: 201, vol. 3: 110, vol. 8: 226, vol. 9: 262, vol. 10: 317), referring to an example of the miraculousness of the Qur'ān (ibid., vol. 1: 238), talking about various issues accompanying the ending words of the verses¹ and using the linguistic context to interpret the qur'ānic verses (ibid., vol. 1: 160, vol. 2: 60, & 195, vol. 3: 364, vol. 6: 115, 222, & 269, vol. 7: 107, vol. 9: 39, & 103) are among the manifestations of Tha'labī's attention to various branches of qur'ānic sciences.

Mentioning the statements and viewpoints of mystics and philosophers

In his interpretation of the qur'ānic verses, Tha'labī sometimes refers to the statements and stances of mystics and philosophers (ibid., vol. 1: 140, & 152, vol. 2: 74, 106-107, & 162, vol. 3: 49, 125, & 190, vol. 9: 138-139, & 182, vol. 10: 94-95, & 201). There are also times when he separately mentions some notable figures of mysticism and Sufism such as Junayd, Shiblī, Dhūl-Nūn Miṣrī, Sarī Saqaṭī, and Abū 'Uthmān Khayrī.

Ahl al-Bayt (a) in Tha'labī's commentary

One of the outstanding features of Tha'labī's commentary is its extensive use of Ahl al-Bayt's (a) narrations in the interpretation of the Qur'ān. This adds to its value and richness on the one hand, and reveals his truth-seeker soul and conscious conscience.² In addition to 133 direct narrations he has quoted from the Prophet (s) of Allāh in his commentary, Tha'labī has presented 341 narrations from Ahl al-Bayt (a) on the following topics:

1. Expressing the meaning of the qur'ānic words (ibid., vol. 1: 99, vol. 10: 335);
2. Pointing out specific readings of the qur'ānic words and verses (ibid., vol. 4: 27, & 104; vol. 5: 264; vol. 9: 224);
3. Pointing out the revelation of some qur'ānic verses to honor Ahl al-Bayt (a): Tha'labī has referred to the revelation of a verse or some verses of the Qur'ān to honor Ahl al-Bayt (a)³ in 32 occasions in his commentary (ibid., vol. 2: 126, vol. 3: 85, vol. 4: 80, vol. 8: 42-44).

1. Tha'labī divides these ending words of the verses into "mutaqāriba" and "mutashākila" and has given examples for each type (Tha'labī, 2001, vol. 1: 105).

2. 'Ādil al-Ka'bī has collected the interpretive narrations of Ahl al-Bayt (a) and what have been narrated from them in Tha'labī's commentary. By categorizing and arranging them based on the qur'ānic chapter, he has written a book named *Ahl al-Bayt fī tafsīr al-Tha'labī (mā ruwiya 'anhum wa mā ruwiya fihim)*.

3. The verses revealed in the honor of Ahl al-Bayt (a) include Qur'ān 2:207, 273, 274; 3:61; 5:45, 67; 8:30, 41; 9:100, 119; 11:17; 19:96; 20:1; 22:19; 24:26; 25:54; 27:89; 33:33, 58; 42:23; 55:19, 20, 22; 58:12; 66:4; 69:12; 76: 5-9; 83:29; 93:5.

4. Interpreting the qur'ānic verses: another group of the narrations quoted in Tha'labī's commentary from Ahl al-Bayt (a) are about the Qur'ān interpretation. These involve the interpretation of "kabā'ir"¹ (ibid., vol. 3: 295), "Awliyā'ullāh"² (ibid., vol. 5: 137), and referring to the appellation of the jinni and the human as "al-thaqalān"³ (ibid., vol. 9: 186).
5. Pointing out the virtues of some chapters and verses of the Qur'ān: Tha'labī expresses the virtues of every qur'ānic chapter and verse under the respective chapter based on the famous narration from the Prophet of Allāh narrated by Ubayy b. Ka'b. In one occasion, he refers to a narration from Imām Muḥammad Bāqir (a) on the virtue of reading Āya al-Kursī (ibid., vol. 2: 229).
6. Mentioning some virtues of Imām 'Alī (a): in addition to the narrations that refer to the virtues of Imām 'Alī (a) in their causes of revelation, there are other narrations in Tha'labī's commentary that purely talk about the specific virtues of that Imām. Some of the main topics of this latter group of narrations include Imām 'Alī's (a) bravery in battles (ibid., vol. 8: 15), his pioneering position in having faith in God and his Prophet and declaring dislike to disbelief (ibid., vol. 5: 83, vol. 8: 126), his accompaniment and association with the Prophet of Allāh (s) and receiving knowledge and wisdom from the Prophet (s) (ibid., vol. 5: 84), the abundance of Imām 'Alī's (a) virtues (ibid., vol. 4: 81), his leading of the righteous (ibid., vol. 4: 80), his vicegerency of the Prophet of Allāh (s) (ibid., vol. 5: 8), and his self-sacrificing defense of the life and religion of the Prophet of Allāh (s) (ibid., vol. 2: 125, vol. 4: 349).

Another important point is that Tha'labī has mentioned Ahl al-Bayt (a) with their titles in some occasions. He praises Imām 'Alī (a) with the title "the Commander of the Faithful" (ibid., vol. 1: 135; vol. 5: 208, vol. 7: 59, vol. 10: 118). He also mentions Imām Sajjād (a) three times with the title "Zayn al-'Ābidīn" (ibid., vol. 1: 147, vol. 7: 135, vol. 8: 48). Moreover, when using the interpretive viewpoints of the fifth Imām of the Shī'a, he has mentioned him with the title "al-Bāqir" in 12 occasions (ibid., vol. 2: 229, vol. 3: 116, vol. 5: 61).

Isrā'īliyyāt in Tha'labī's commentary

One of the criticisms against Tha'labī's commentary is the inclusion of Isrā'īliyyāt. The main reasons in this regard can be classified into three groups: 1) the presentation of some narrations from seemingly Muslim Jews, 2) Tha'labī's personality and position, and 3) the detailed presentation of some historical stories and events.

Tha'labī has included some statements in his commentary from some seemingly Muslim Jews residing in the Islamic lands. These people include 'Abdullāh b. Sallām (42 cases), Wahab b. Munabbah (58 cases), Ka'b al- Aḥbār (31 cases), Tamīm Dārī (four cases), and Ibn Jurayj (108 cases).

With regard to the origin of the introduction of Isrā'īliyyāt in Tha'labī's commentary, some critics believe that Tha'labī's position as an orator and lecturer has made him interested in the stories and historical reports. This group of critics have taken the authoring of the book Al-'Arā'is as the main proof for their stance, talk about Tha'labī's little familiarity with Ḥadīth science and his unfamiliarity with "'ilal al-Ḥadīth" science, and point out some example of Isrā'īliyyāt in his commentary (Dhahabī, n.d.: 104-108).

Another group of critics have taken the explication of some stories and historical events taken from the resources of the People of the Book and putting them into the commentary as the signs of the inclusion of Isrā'īliyyāt in Tha'labī's commentary. These critics do not stop at this level of criticism and consider Tha'labī's commentary to include fictitious narrations in

1. Qur'ān 4:31
 2. Qur'ān 10:62
 3. Qur'ān 55:31

the two domains of the chapter and verse virtues and the causes of revelation, and refer to some related examples in the commentary (Abū Shubha, 1992: 126, 307, 312).

The effects of Tha‘labī’s commentary on the ensuing works

Based on the existing reports and evidences, the role of Tha‘labī’s commentary on the ensuing scholars and exegetes has been in three ways, namely paying attention to hearing, reading, learning, and memorizing (keeping in mind) Tha‘labī’s commentary, writing works using Tha‘labī’s commentary, and quoting the interpretive reports in it.

It was noted that Wāḥidī Nayshābūrī (468 LH), the outstanding exegete and grammarian, attended Tha‘labī’s interpretation sessions and read the interpretation of his teacher in his presence (Ḥamawī, 1999, vol. 4: 492-497). ‘Abd al-Ghāfir b. Ismā‘īl Fārsī (529 LH) also has reported Wāḥidī’s hearing of Tha‘labī’s commentary (Ṣarīfīnī, 1983, vol. 1: 109). Moreover, Abū Sa‘īd Farrukhẓādī, another student of Tha‘labī and Qāḍiyān Ṭūs, heard his commentary completely during his travel to Nayshābūr (Sam‘ānī, 1975, vol. 1: 604). According to the report of Qāḍī b. Shahba Damishqī, Zāḥir al-Dīn Khārazmī (503 LH) memorized Tha‘labī’s commentary completely and narrated the statements of the exegetes in it to others without any mistake (Ibn Shahba Damishqī, 1987, vol. 2: 19-20). Abū Muḥammad Ṭūsī (549 LH) was engaged in narrating Tha‘labī’s commentary in Nayshābūr and many knowledge lovers repeatedly read this book in his presence (Sam‘ānī, 1975, vol. 1: 604). In another occasion, Sam‘ānī (562 LH) talks about his travel with his friend Abū al-Ḥasan Fur Ghulīẓī to the Nawghān of Ṭūs to hear Tha‘labī’s commentary (id., 1988, vol. 4: 368-369). With the aim of writing a book comprised of the commentaries of Tha‘labī and Zamakhsharī, Ibn Athīr Jazarī (606 LH) wrote the book *Al-Inṣāf fī al-jam‘ bayn al-kashf wa al-kashshāf* (Ibn Khullakān, n.d., vol. 4: 141; Ibn Shahba Damishqī, 1987, vol. 2: 61; Dhahbī, 1993, vol. 43: 227; id., 1996, vol. 21: 490). Baghawī (433-516 LH) has reproduced a large part of Tha‘labī’s interpretive viewpoints in his own commentary, in a way that Ibn Taymiyya introduces his commentary as a summary of Tha‘labī’s commentary¹ (Ibn Taymiyya, 1986, vol. 6: 90, & 310). In the introduction of *Ma‘ālim al-tanzīl*, Baghawī has not clearly called his commentary a summary of Tha‘labī’s commentary, but when he talks about the resources he has used in his commentary, he notes that the majority of the interpretive narrations of his commentary has been obtained from reading Tha‘labī’s qur’ānic legacy he has received through his teacher Abū Sā‘īd Shurayḥī Khārazmī (Baghawī, 1999, vol. 1: 47). Moreover, in another part of the introduction, Baghawī refers to the paths through which he has achieved the chains of transmission of previous commentaries, in some of which the name of Abū Ishāq Tha‘labī can be seen (ibid.: 47-48, 53-54).

When mentioning his path to the chains of transmission of Wahab b. Munubbah’s *Al-Mubtadā*, Ibn Shahrāshūb (588 LH) cites Tha‘labī and says that he has used Tha‘labī’s *Nuzha al-qulūb* through his grandfather – Shahrāshūb – and Quṭayfī (Ibn Shahrāshūb, 1957, vol. 1: 9, & 11). Moreover, Ibn Shahrāshūb has presented narrations from Tha‘labī’s commentary in his own book (ibid., vol. 1: 163, 346, & 392, vol. 2: 289, & 300, vol. 3: 31, & 117). Likewise, Ibn Baṭrīq has presented some narrations from Tha‘labī’s commentary on the virtues of Imām ‘Alī (a) in two of his books (Ibn Baṭrīq, 1987-8, 42, 88, 185, 350-352, 399-400, 450-454; id., 1996: 58, 87-88, 179-180, 240-241). Sayyid b. Ṭāwūs (664 LH) has presented narrations from Tha‘labī’s different books in many of his own books (Ibn Ṭāwūs, 1994, vol. 2: 284, 251, & 376; id., 1979: 14-15, 39-40, 45-47, 69, 112-113, 460, 490). Similarly, ‘Allāma Ḥillī (726 LH) has referred to Tha‘labī in his book *Minhāj al-kirāma fī al-imāma*. Similar to Ibn Shahrāshūb, Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (111 LH) has mentioned Tha‘labī in his chain of

1. For example, q.v. Baghawī, n.d., vol. 1: 188, & 198-199, vol. 2: 10, vol. 3: 57, vol. 4: 19

transmission leading to Wahab b. Munabbah's *Al-Mubtadā*. Moreover, the name of Tha'labī's *Nuzha al-qulūb* has been noted in the reference list of *Bihār al-anwār* (Majlisī, 1983, vol. 1: 63-66). Majlisī has presented some narrations from Tha'labī's commentary in different parts of *Bihār al-anwār* (ibid., vol. 21: 116, vol. 22: 514, vol. 23: 115, vol. 24: 42, vol. 26: 228).

A significant number of Shī'a and Sunnī scholars have used Tha'labī's commentary in writing their own commentaries, including Ṭabrisī, (548 LH) (Ṭabrisī, 1997, vol. 1: 510; id., 1994, vol. 1: 75, 423, vol. 2: 14, vol. 3: 382, vol. 8: 156, vol. 10: 39), Ibn 'Ṭiyya Andulusī (546 LH) (Ibn 'Ṭiyya Andulusī, 1992, vol. 3: 508, vol. 4: 201, 211-212, & 217, vol. 5: 11, 35, & 85), Qurṭabī (671 LH) (Qurṭabī, 1985, vol. 1: 116, 295, & 451, vol. 3: 260, vol. 4: 136, vol. 9: 20, vol. 18: 70, & 75), Abū Ḥayyān Andulusī (745 LH) (Abū Ḥayyān Andulusī, 2001, vol. 1: 368, & 406, vol. 2: 31, vol. 3: 179, vol. 4: 463, vol. 5: 264, vol. 8: 59, & 149), Ibn Kathīr Damishqī (774 LH) (Ibn Kathīr Damishqī, 1991, vol. 1: 404, vol. 2: 483, vol. 4: 28, & 299), and Sayyid Hāshim Baḥrānī (1107 LH) (Baḥrānī, 1995, vol. 1: 62, 117, & 672, vol. 2: 245, 292, & 315, vol. 3: 94, 225, & 233, vol. 4: 77, vol. 5: 115, 234, & 257). Moreover, Tha'labī's commentary has been the main source of Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (654 LH) in the authoring of *Baḥr al-Ḥaqā'iq wa al-Ma'ānī fī tafsīr sab' al-mathānī* (Ḥafīziyān Bābulī, 2004: 110).

Other works of Tha'labī

Wāḥidī Nayshābūrī has referred to the reading of more than 500 pieces of the writings of his teacher in his presence (Ḥamawī, 1999, vol. 4: 497). Many past scholars have named Tha'labī's works in their own written works. Overall, Tha'labī's works noted in suchlike books are as follows:

1. *Al-'Arā'is fī al-majālis wa yawāqūt al-tījān fī qiṣaṣ al-Qur'ān* (Kohlberg, 1993: 191-192; Majlisī, 1983, vol. 55: 238; Āqā Buzurg Tihirānī, 1983, vol. 15: 242-243)¹;
2. *Rabī' al-mudhakkirīn* (Ibn Shahrāshūb, 1957, vol. 2: 300, vol. 3: 5, & 9; Ibn Jabr, 1997: 452, 629; Suyūfī, n.d.: 17; Majlisī, 1983, vol. 11: 36);
3. *Nuzha al-qulūb* (Ibn Shahrāshūb, 1957, vol. 1: 11, & 20, vol. 3: 320; Majlisī, 1983, vol. 1: 66, vol. 46: 262);
4. *Qatlay al-Qur'ān* (Jurj ā n ī, 1987: 561)²;
5. *Al-Kāmil fī 'ilm al-Qur'ān* (Ḥamawī, 1999, vol. 4: 497).

Conclusion

Abū Ishāq Tha'labī is one of the outstanding scholars and exegetes of the Qur'ān in the fifth century LH. Tha'labī's commentary is a complete representation of its author's scientific status and expansive knowledge. Tha'labī's commentary is considered a narrative interpretation due to its extensive use of narrations. However, the attention paid by the author to various issues such as derivation and other vocabulary discussions, morphology, syntax, and rhetoric, along with jurisprudential, historical, and even mystic discussions in the commentary causes us to call his work as an encyclopedia of the sciences of the early centuries of Islam. One of the outstanding features of his commentary is the extensive use of interpretive narrations of Ahl al-Bayt (a). Tha'labī has used the interpretive narrations of Ahl al-Bayt (a) to interpret the Qur'ānic verses more than any other Sunnī exegete before him. This reveals his truth-seeker soul and fairness. The existence of some historical tales and statements of some Jews residing in Islamic lands in Tha'labī's commentary have caused

1. According to Āqā Buzurg Tihirānī, this book has been mentioned with different names, including 'Arā'is al-majālis, al-'Arā'is fī al-majālis, al-'Arā'is wa al-tījān, and 'Arā'is al-tījān.
2. Muḥammad b. Naṣrullāh b. 'Alī, the scribe of the book *History of Jurjān* has heard Tha'labī's *Qatlay al-Qur'ān* from Ḥafīz 'Abd al-Ghanī in 596 LH.

criticisms by some ensuing critics (starting from Ibn Taymiyya) who contend that Tha‘labī’s commentary is full of Isrā’īliyyāt. Although this weakness is not at the level claimed by Ibn Taymiyya and Dhahabī, some historical reports mentioned in this commentary needs to be examined for their sources. Nonetheless, the appearance of a rich and fairly complete commentary of the Qur’ān in the fifth century LH in Nayshābūr is a compelling sign of the widespread prevalence of Islamic sciences in Iran at that time.

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