



Original Article

Ahl al-Hadith Methodologies on Qur'anic Discourses in the Ninth Century: A Comparative Analysis of Ibn Hanbal and al-Bukhari

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ABSTRACT

The depth focus of *mufassirun* on linguistic sciences creates the pattern and nature of Qur'anic discourse in the ninth century. However, it was not only *mufassirun* who appeared to direct their focus on lexical explanation in their *tafsir*, the massive production of Qur'anic works that concentrate on literary analysis indicates clearly the nature and tenor of Qur'anic discourse within this period. This includes the works of ahl al-hadith of the early century. This study aims to (1) explore ahl al-hadith methodology in Quranic discourse, particularly of Ahmad ibn Hanbal and al-Bukhari, (2) extract their idiosyncratic approaches and (3) elucidate their personal style on certain issues regarding the Quran. The study is qualitative in nature in which the researcher employed both critical and analytical methods. The study in its finding asserts that Ahmad and al-Bukhari provide a different explanation of the Qur'anic verses from that of the *mufassirun* and sira's authors. For instance, in the interpretation of 94:1, Ahmad ibn Hanbal and al-Bukhari clearly demonstrates his arrival at a different interpretation and perspective.

Keywords: Ahl al-Hadith, tafsir, Qur'anic discourse, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, al-Bukhari

Introduction: Qur'anic Discourse in the Ninth Century

It is worthy of note that analysis of the Qur'anic *tafsir* of this century shows that the *mufassirun* tend to focus more on the lexical elaboration of the selected verses rather than establishing a historical value within the verses. What is apparent is that these scholars are elucidating the verses with emphasis specifically focusing upon the sciences of linguistics and stylistics rather than a straightforward historical reading. The plain linguistic elucidation of the verse could be regarded as conventions of the relative contemporary existing fashions in style and emphasis embraced by the scholar of *tafsir* at this particular period.

Moreover, the massive production of literary analysis of the Qur'an seems to be the fundamental setting of Qur'anic discourse in this century. Within this period, Muslim scholars apparently produced a considerable number of Qur'anic commentary works based on linguistic discourses. The titles of these works obviously indicate the nature of their content. These linguistic-centred commentaries can be found in the works of al-Farra's (d. 208/823) and al-Akhfash (d. 215/830) entitled *Ma'ani al-Qur'an* (The Meanings of al-Qur'an), Abu 'Ubayda Ma'mar ibn al-Muthanna's (d. 210/825) and his *Majaz al-Qur'an* (The Metaphor of the Qur'an),

'Abdullah ibn Yahya al-Yazidi (d. 237/849) and Ibn Qutayba in their work of *Gharib al-Qur'an* (The Ambiguous Qur'anic Words), Yahya Ibn Sallam (d. 280/893) and his *al-Tasarif: Tafsir al-Qur'an Mimma Ishtabahat Asma'uhu wa Tasarrufat Ma'anih* (Commentaries of the Quran on Its Ambiguous Names and Equivocal Meanings) and *Ma'ani al-Qur'an wa l'rabuhu* (The Meanings of the Qur'an and Its Grammar) of al-Zajjaj (ca. 230/844-311/923). The profuse works of Qur'anic discourse produced in this century clearly indicate that their major discussion mostly centred on a specifically linguistic discussion of the Qur'an. This, at the same time, imply that a historical analysis might not have been either a priority nor in the mainstream of Qur'anic discourse within this period.

Ahmad Ibn Hanbal and the Qur'anic Issue

There is no doubt that Ahmad b. Hanbal, Abu 'Abd Allah Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Hanbal b. Hilal al-Shaybani al-Marwazi was a prominent scholar of hadith, and also the founder of the Hanbali School of law. Renowned for his firm opposition to and, indeed, his clear rejection of the Mu'tazilite doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an, Ahmad gained a wider audience during his time after having been arrested, imprisoned and persecuted as the direct result of his firm opposition to Abbasid doctrinal policy. Even though the Qur'an is always regarded as a primary foundation of Islamic law, it is not necessarily a standard practice in Ahmad's legal thought. Well-grounded, and with a profound knowledge of the science of hadith, Melchert confirms that Ahmad's legal judgment was dominated by his particularly rigorous hadith perspective.¹ The influence of his master, the leader of the hadith movement, al-Shafi'i, could be considered as one of the factors which shaped Ahmad's hadithic judgment.² Moreover, this aspect of his judgement might be also an indication of his consistently robust stance as *ahl al-hadith*, scrutinising each aspect or element of discussion through the lens of hadith, which offers clear evidence of his implicit confrontation with the Mu'tazilite, the movement that campaign to rely primarily on the Qur'an and not the hadith.³

Ahmad's Methodology in *Tafsir*

In exploring the meaning of the Qur'an, Ahmad appears to use *ahl al-hadith's* methods of interpretation, in which he approaches the Qur'an by applying the method of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* (tradition-based exegesis) as a tool of guidance and interpretation. Furthermore, he admonishes Muslims to continue to employ authentic hadith as an explanatory device to excavate and reveal

¹ Melchert, Christopher, 'Ahmad Ibn Hanbal and the Qur'an', in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, Edinburgh University Press, 6(2), (2004), p.27.

² See, Ansari, Hassan, et all, 'Ahmad b. Hanbal', in *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and, Farhad Daftary. Brill Online. [accessed 15 December 2014]

³ Within this period, patronised by the Abbasid court, Mu'tazilite is perceived as promoting the campaign of prioritizing reliance on the Qur'an as an Islamic source, rather than a heavy dependence on hadith, as practised by *ahl al-hadith*. The unreliable status of certain hadith is likely to be the main offender. Some prominent Mu'tazilite scholars, such as Abu 'Ali Ibn Khallad and al-Jubba'i, were identified as rejecting the acceptance of certain types of hadith. See, Christopher Melchert, 'Traditionist-Jurisprudents and the Framing of Islamic Law', in *Islamic Law and Society*, Brill, (2001), pp.403-4; Muhammad al-'Abda, Tariq 'Abd al-'alim, *al-Mu'tazila Bayna al-Qadim wa al-Hadith*, (Birmingham: Dar Al;-Arqam, 1987), pp.81-90.; al-Duwayhi, 'Ali ibn Sa'd, *Ara' al-Mu'tazila al-Usuliyya Dirasa wa Taqwima*, (Riyad: Maktaba al-Rushd, 1995), pp.321-346.

Qur'anic 'gems' of wisdom in the interpretation of the word of God. In this regard, he was reported to have warned Muslims by saying that "Three books that have no basis: *al-maghazi* (stories of the battles), *al-malahim* (tales of eschatological nature) and *tafsir*."⁴ This guidance, according to al-Baghdadi and Ibn Taymiyya, implies that unreliable sources and unsound materials related to these three branches of Islamic discourse persist. His statement, at the same time, seems to be a reflection on the vigorous proliferation of fallacious sources of knowledge within this same period. By highlighting the *tafsir* as one of the branches of Islamic discourse which are mired in uncertain provenance, Ahmad shows implicitly how, within this period, false elements had begun to penetrate these sources of knowledge; and that Muslims need to be more vigilant in accepting any information related to *tafsir*.

Kitab al-Tafsir of Ahmad

Ibn al-Nadim reports that Ahmad produced a work known as *Kitab al-Tafsir*, a work that could provide us with an exemplar of Ahmad's approach to the interpretation of the Qur'an. Al-Baghdadi, on the authority of Ibn al-Munadi, narrates that Ahmad possessed a substantial knowledge of *tafsir*, in which, according to him, 120,000 exegetical hadith were at Ahmad's disposal.⁵ But since the work has not survived, later scholars have disputed the reliability of this account. Al-Dhahabi, for example, believes strongly that the work had not even existed. He expresses his doubts about this particular account by questioning how this enormous work, whose content was apparently several times larger than al-Tabari, and with Ahmad's huge numbers of pupils to preserve and disseminate it, the work could have been lost without trace.⁶ Even though al-Dhahabi's argument does appear to make good sense, other scholars express their belief in the existence of Ahmad's *tafsir*. Ibn al-Qayyim, al-Dhahabi's contemporary, for instance, offers a contrary opinion. In his *Bada'i al-Fawa'id*, Ibn al-Qayyim claims to have preserved an actual fragment of Ahmad's *tafsir*, narrated on the authority of al-Maruzi.⁷ Besides Ibn al-Qayyim, al-Zajjaj⁸ (311/923) and Ibn Qudama⁹ (620/1223) are other scholars to share a similar opinion of Ibn al-Qayyim, confirming the existence of Ahmad's *tafsir*.¹⁰ It therefore seems likely that Ahmad's commentaries did apparently exist, but have not survived in a complete

⁴ In Ibn Taymiyya's version, the phrase and wording arrangement of the statement is slightly different, but the meaning is similar. See, al-Baghdadi, al-Khatib, *al-Jami' li akhlaq al-Rawi wa Adab al-Sami'*, ed. Mahmud al-Tahhan, (Riyad, Maktaba al-Ma'arif) p.2/162; Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhaj al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, ed. Muhammad Salim, (Jami'ah al-Imam Muhammad ibn Sa'ud al-Islamiyya, 1986), p.7/435; Leaman, Oliver, 'Tafsir', in *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Oliver Leaman, (Oxon, 2006), p.632.

⁵ See, al-Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad*, ed. Bashshar Ma'ruf, (Bayrut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 2002), p.111/12; Ibn Abi Ya'la, *al-Tabaqat al-Hanabila*, ed. Muhammad al-Faqi, (Bayrut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, n.d.), p.1/8, p.183.

⁶ Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*, (al-Qahira: Dar al-Hadith, 2002), p.10/512.

⁷ See Ibn al-Qayyim, *Bada'i al-Fawa'id*, ed. 'Ali al-Imran, (Jedda: Ma'tbu'at al-Majma', n.d.), pp.3/1015-1040.

⁸ See, Al-Zajjaj, *Ma'ani al-Qur'an wa l'rabuh*, ed. 'Abd al-Jalil Shalabi, (Bayrut: 'Alam al-Kutub, 1988), p.4/8.

⁹ Ibn Qudama was a prominent scholar of Hanabilite, the adherent of Ahmad ibn Hanbal school of law. See, Ibn Qudama, *al-Mughni*, (Maktaba al-Qahira, 1968), p.9/540.

¹⁰ Apart from these two figures, there are several other scholars that agree with this opinion, such as Ibn Hajr and Ibn Taymiyya. See, Yasin, Hikmat Bashir, *Marwiyyat al-Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal fi al-Tafsir*, (al-Sa'udi: Maktaba al-Mu'ayyad, 1994), pp.8-16; al-Tayyar, Musa'id, *Anwa' al-Tasnif al-Muta'alliqa bi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, (Dar Ibn al-Jawzi), p.78.

form. The precise original form of the work is, therefore, unknown: it might be compiled in a specific one body of work; or the work might be scattered in various accounts or reports.

Idiosyncratic Approaches in Ahmad's *Tafsir*

Based on the reputed fragment of Ahmad's *tafsir* preserved in Ibn al-Qayyim's work, a few stylistic approaches utilised by Ahmad himself were discovered. For example, Ahmad, using an approach practised by other scholars of hadith, employs hadith to explain the meaning of ostensibly ambiguous word in the Qur'an. For example when he reads verse 3:113, a normal translation might render it as 'and from the evil of darkness when it settles.'¹¹ The word *ghasiq* here is translated as 'darkness'. In Ahmad's *tafsir*, he articulates the word *ghasiq* to connote 'moon' and supports his interpretation by using a hadith of the Prophet.¹² In certain places, Ahmad was also found to include his own personal experience as a part of his Qur'anic interpretation. For instance, when he elucidates verse 68:17 (which says: Verily We have tried them as We tried the People of the Garden), he casts a light on the meaning of the People of the Garden (*ashab al-janna*) by explaining that this (phrase) is an allusion to (the people of) the city of Darwan.¹³ He continues by saying that "I have passed through this city, it was near (the place of) 'Abd al-Razzaq (in which, he was from San'a), I saw it was (covered with) blankness and redness, an effect of being burned, and there is no trace of plantation or greenery."¹⁴ Furthermore, some of his interpretation seems obscure as it requires further explanation. For example when interpreting verse 21:99, he appears to render the word 'Gods' (*aliha*) as denoting Jesus and *al-Uzayr*.¹⁵ This connotation demands the immediate attention of Ibn al-Qayyim, who preserves the account originally, and of which he argues that the interpretation was in need of further clarification.¹⁶

The mastery of Ahmad in Qur'anic sciences and its *tafsir* indicate his proficiency and knowledge about the verses of the Quran. It is important for the researcher to know his Qur'anic background in order to explore his understanding regarding the Qur'anic issues.

Al-Bukhari and His Qur'anic Approaches

Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad b. Isma'il b. Ibrahim b. al-Mughira b. Bardizba al-Ju'fi al-Bukhari (d. 256/870) was a prominent Sunni traditionist. Although celebrated as an expert in the science of hadith, scholars have also recognised him as a legalist, in which he presents his juridical

¹¹ Based on the translation of Sahih International, Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, Shakir and Muhsin Khan.

¹² The hadith was presented in dialogue form in which the Prophet is said to have held Aisha's hand and pointed to the moon, saying: 'Seek refuge with Allah from the evil of the overspread moon.'" See, Ahmad, *Musnad*, p.40/379.; al-Nasa'i, *Sunan al-Nasa'i al-Kubra*, ed. al-Arna'ut, (Bayrut: Mu'assasa al-Risala, 2001), p.9/122.

¹³ This interpretation seems to be taken from the interpretation of Sa'id ibn Jubayr, one of the famous *Tabi'in*. According to Sa'id, this was a city of Yemen situated six miles from San'a. See, al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan*, ed. Ahmad Shakir, (Muassasa al-Risala, 2000), p.23/545.

¹⁴ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Bada'i' al-Fawa'id*, p.1018.

¹⁵ The verse 21:99 says: If these had been gods, they would not have got there.

¹⁶ According to Ibn al-Qayyim, if this interpretation is truly Ahmad's words, it presumably refers to 'the devils' (*al-shayatin*) that have been worshipped by the Christian and Jews, in which, they (the Christian and Jews) think that the devils (probably the idols) are (the resemblance) of Jesus and *al-Uzayr*. See, Ibn al-Qayyim, *Bada'i' al-Fawa'id*, p.1024.

theory and personal opinion in the headings or titles of chapter in his *al-Sahih*.¹⁷ His implicit critique of Abu Hanifa's legalistic thought, presented in the work, implies his critical jurisprudence stance.¹⁸ In this subsection, this study will explore in more depth the Qur'anic background of al-Bukhari in order to discover their unique approaches especially his Qur'anic perspectives on certain issues.

Al-Bukhari's Methodology in *Tafsir* Concerning Legal Issue

What is of most relevance to this study is his exegetical views on the Qur'anic verses, in which he shows a remarkable approach. A thorough grounding in the Qur'an is consistently at the very foundation of his views. For example, in his discussion about *al-liḥān* (one types of dissolution of marriage in Islam),¹⁹ he opens the subject by adducing verse 31:6, which is clearly regarded as the origin and legal foundation of this issue. He then goes further, discussing the legal status of deaf-mutes (*al-akhras*) in performing *al-liḥān*, using his writing. In this case, al-Bukhari approves the validity of performing *al-liḥān* by using notes, the opinion of which is obviously contradict the Kufa's judiciary, especially the Hanafite scholars.²⁰ To justify his argument against his opponents, al-Bukhari legitimises his point by presenting 19:29 of the Qur'an, which recounts the story of Maryam when she used 'signs' (body language) to defend herself from being accused of having an unlawful affair. This is one of examples which demonstrate al-Bukhari's profound exploration of the Qur'an. In his analysis, Lucas also recognises al-Bukhari's solid foundation of Qur'anic thought. He concludes that in legal principles, al-Bukhari upholds the Qur'an as his premier reference.²¹

Al-Bukhari's Methodology in *Tafsir* Regarding Creedal Issue

Apart from exploring legal discourses by employing a specifically Qur'anic perspective, al-Bukhari also demonstrates his Qur'anic-based approach towards discussions regarding creedal issues in his *al-Sahih*. Refuting the doctrine of Qadarite in the issue of predestination (*al-qadr*)

¹⁷ There are works dedicated to analyse al-Bukhari views in legal discussion. For example, Lucas, Scott, 'The Legal Principles of Muhammad B. Isma'īl al-Bukhari and Their Relationship to Classical Salafi Islam', *Islamic Law and Society*, Brill, (2006); al-Mazru'ī Muna, *Fiqh al-Bukhari fi Kitab al-Sala min Jami'ihi al-Sahih Dirasa Muqarana*, (unpublished thesis, Umm al-Qura University, 2002); al-Iskandari, Ibn al-Munir, *al-Mutawari 'Ala Tarajum Abwab al-Bukhari*, (Kuwayt, 1987); Ibn Jama'a, *Munasabat Tarajum al-Bukhari*, (al-Hind, 1984).

¹⁸ According to Ibn Hajr, his term 'some people say' (qala ba'd nas) most of the time usually refers to and argues the Hanafite school of thought. See Ibn Hajr, *Fath al-Bari fi Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*, (Bayrut, 1379), 13/187; al-'Aini, *'Umdah al-Qari*, (Bayrut, n.d) p.14/41, p.20/291.

¹⁹ Li'an is to accuse one's wife of committing illegal sexual intercourse with another man by saying, for instance, "I saw her committing adultery", and in denial of the paternity of the baby with which she is pregnant. See, Ahmad, Yusuf al-Hajj, *The Book of Nikah: Encyclopaedia of Islamic Law*, (Darussalam, 2014), p.39.

²⁰ In this quarrel, al-'Aini proposes that al-Bukhari aims to rebut the opinion of the scholars of Kufa, while al-Kirmani goes deeper by suggesting that the argument is focusing on a group of Hanafites. See, Al-'Aini, Abu Muhammad Mahmud ibn Ahmad, *'Umdah al-Qari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*, p.20/291.

²¹ Lucas, Scott. C, 'The Legal Principles of Muhammad B. Isma'īl al-Bukhari and Their Relationship to Classical Salafi Islam', *Islamic Law and Society*, Brill, (2006), p.299.

and humans' free will (*af'al al-'ibad*),²² al-Bukhari reinforces his doctrinal conceptions by presenting 25:2 of the Qur'an, implying that God had already determined each of human acts with precise determination.²³ According to Ibn Hajr, in this argument, al-Bukhari seems to signify that anyone who claims that he is creating his own actions is actually intervening in divine autonomy, and playing God's role; and by that action, he could be regarded as polytheist.²⁴ In another instance, al-Bukhari creates one specific chapter to rebut the creeds of the Kharijites, the group that proclaims that everyone who commits grave sins would be punished eternally in hell.²⁵ In the chapter of 'Sins are from ignorance and a sinner is not a disbeliever unless he worships others along with Allah', al-Bukhari consults 4:48 as his solid foundation, in which the verse clearly connotes that Allah will forgive every sin except *al-shirk* (polytheism). The plain meaning of the verse was employed by al-Bukhari to show the false premise promoted by the Kharijites. Based on al-'Aini's articulation, the heading of the chapter was designed not only to refute certain group of Kharijites, but also reproach *al-Rafida*, *al-Ibadiyya* and other groups that held the same belief.²⁶

Al-Bukhari's Methodology in *Tafsir* Regarding Historical Event

Not only applying his Qur'anic knowledge in the discussion related to legal and creedal issues, al-Bukhari also outlined the historical account by using similar technique in his *al-Sahih*. In the Book of Prophets (*Kitab ahadith al-anbiya'*), Ibn Hajr describes how al-Bukhari consistently introduced chapters in his book by specific reference to Qur'anic verses (indeed, if there existed one which could be identified as a reference).²⁷ Khatari however, questions al-Bukhari's terms of reference in the story of David, for according to him, al-Bukhari's interpretation is prone to be influenced by *al-isra'iliyyat*, (the narrative that usually originated from Jewish traditions or Biblical material).²⁸ In the chapter of The Statement of Allah Taa'la: "and remember Our slave David, endued with power", al-Bukhari cites 38:23, in part to exemplify the Qur'anic illustration of David's attributes. To articulate this verse, he interprets

²² Qadarite was known as a movement that promoted the idea of human free will and disputed the concept of divine predestination. According to Van Ess, Becker and McDonald, the genesis of this debate has something to do with the influence of Christianity. Wensinck however, contends that the issue might be raised internally, and emerged as consequence of the debate between Kharijite and Murji'ite. The idea initiated by Qadarite was to form subsequently a basis of thought for t Muṣṭafā tazilite. See, Wensinck, A.J., *The Muslim Creed*, (New York, 1965), p.51-71, Frolov, Dmitry, 'Freedom and Predestination', in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, (Leiden, 2002), pp.267-271; Ahmed, Ziauddin, 'A Survey of the Development of Theology in Islam', *Islamic Studies*, Islamabad, (1972), pp.93-111; Van Ess, 'Kadariyya', in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Brill Online, [accessed 13 October 2014].

²³ Al-Bukhari, *al-Sahih*, 9/152.

²⁴ While giving his commentary on the *Kitab of al-Qadr* (one of the books in *al-Sahih*), he explains the creed of Qadarite and suggests that al-Bukhari narrates a hadith related to al-Qadr to show his disagreement with their standpoint. In his work entitled *Khalq Af'al al-'Ibad* (the Creation of Human's act), al-Bukhari mentioned in detail his viewpoint in this heated debate. See, Ibn Hajr, *Fath al-Bari*, p.11/490, p.13/495; al-Bukhari, *Khalq Af'al al-'Ibad*, (Bayrut, 1990), pp.25-46.

²⁵ Al-Ash'ari, *Maqalat Islamiyyin*, ed. 'Abd al-Hamid, (Bayrut, 1990), p.204.

²⁶ Al-'Aini, *'Umda al-Qari*, p.1/203.

²⁷ Ibn Hajr, *Fath al-Bari*, p.15/204.

²⁸ Tottoli adds that, this term was sometimes employed by western scholar implying resources related to Biblical elements as well. See, Tottoli, Roberto, 'Origin and Use of the Term Isra'iliyyat in Muslim Literature', *Arabica*, (1999), pp.193-210.

the word *na'ija* denoting 'the women' (*al-mar'a*, which is probably an allusion to the story of David and Bathsheba).²⁹ It is at this point in his explanation that Khatari argues al-Bukhari's definition of the word, insisting the word *na'ija* means 'ewe', and not 'lady'. As a result, Khatari interprets this as a direct influence of *al-isra'iliyyat*.³⁰ Khatari's assertion should be considered as *argumentum ex silentio*, since there is no clear indication that the author intended to connect the story with the narrative of *al-isra'iliyyat*. Presumably, al-Bukhari was merely offering various connotations of the word as he mentions the two words together, 'lady' and 'ewe'. On the other hand, this could also represent an indication of the popularity of this story at that particular time, since the Abbasid period was known as a time in which syncretism was pervasive through encounters between Muslims and other communities.

Discussion: Comparative Analysis

Ahmad and Al-Bukhari's View on the Createdness of the Quran

On the issue of 'the createdness of the Qur'an', al-Bukhari offers a unique point of view. Supporting his master, Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855), al-Bukhari is reported to declare that 'reciting the Qur'an is an element of createdness'.³¹ This statement presumably proclaimed by al-Bukhari as an explanatory assertion intended to provide an alternative source of thought or reasoning for Muslims. Instead of accepting the doctrine of the Mu'tazilites (the group that champions the concept of the creation of the Qur'an), al-Bukhari appears to suggest that the element of creation is only applied to humans, not to the words of God, namely the Qur'an. The statement did, however, receive a negative response from the Muslim community, including some prominent scholars such as Abu Hatim al-Razi (d. 277/890), Abu Zur'a al-Razi (d. 264/877-878) and Al-Dhuhli (d. 252/866).³² At the crux of the disagreement regarding the meaning of apparently ambiguous terms of '*lafz al-Qur'an*' (word of the Qur'an), in which al-Bukhari was reported to have uttered '*lafzi bi al-Qur'an makhluq*' (my recitation of the Qur'an is created), where he is actually referring to the human action of reading the Qur'an, he was immediately at risk.³³ The consequence was swift and dramatic: he was imprisoned and expelled from the city.³⁴

²⁹ Tottoli provides a cross-check of the similarity between Qur'anic passage and biblical narrative. See Tottoli, Roberto, *Biblical Prophets In The Qur'an And Muslim Literature*, (Oxon, 200), p.60.; Newby, Gordon D., *The Making of The Last Prophet*, (University of South Carolina Press, 1989), pp.159-160; Hasson, Isaac, 'David', in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, ed. J. McAuliffe, Brill, pp. 495-497.

³⁰ Khatari, Sayyid Ahmad, *Manhaj al-Imam al-Bukhari fi al-Tafsir Min Khilal Kitabih al-Sahih*, (unpublished thesis, Umm al-Qura University, 1994), p.644.

³¹ This statement indicates he is being consistent on the idea of the creation of human act (*khalq af'al al-lbad*.) See Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*, pp.12/454-462. Melchert, Christopher, 'al-Bukhari', in *Encyclopedia Islam THREE*, Brill Online, [accessed 31 November 2014].; Robson, J. 'al-Bukhari', in *Encyclopedia Islam*, Second Edition, Brill Online. [accessed 31 November 2014].

³² According to the report of Ibn Abi Hatim, his father, Abu Hatim and Abu Zur'a, withdrew from accepting hadith delivered by al-Bukhari since they heard of al-Bukhari's opinion on this. Al-Dhahabi and al-Subki related that it is due to the jealousy of some scholars of Naisabur (Nishapur), where in some accounts it is specifically said that it was Muhammad ibn Yahya al-Dhuhli, al-Bukhari's reputation that was rejected. See, Ibn Abi Hatim, *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil*, (al-Hind, 1952), p.7/191; al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*, p.12/462; al-Subki, *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyya al-Kubra*, ed. Mahmud al-Tanahi, (n.p.,1413), p.2/230.

³³ In his *Tabaqat*, al-Subki articulates in details the meaning of *al-lafz*, between the words of the Qur'an and reciting the Qur'an. See, al-Subki, *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyya al-Kubra*, pp.2/228-231.

³⁴ Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*, p.12/463; Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhari and Muslim*, p.270.

Ahmad and Al-Bukhari's Perspective on Verse 94:1 of the Quran

Even with a different and specific context of development, an analysis of this two prominent representatives of hadith literature has provided us with a picture of a somewhat unique approaches on Qur'anic discourse. Ahmad and al-Bukhari provide a different explanation of the Qur'anic verses from that of the *sira's* authors. For instance, in the interpretation of 94:1, al-Bukhari clearly demonstrates his arrival at a different interpretation and perspective. While al-Tirmidhi equates verse 94:1 with the event of the 'opening' or 'expansion' of Muhammad's breast, al-Bukhari concludes that the verse should be read metaphorically, not literally. The account concerns how Allah 'expands' Muhammad's breast metaphorically, in order to achieve the spiritual condition necessary to accept the Islamic revelation. The same occurs in the reading of Ahmad in exploring the meaning of 26:219, in which he offers understandings and interpretations that clearly have no bearing on any of the incidents of the Prophet's early life. This, indeed, lends support to our hypothesis that the connection made by the authors of *sira* is not actually a widely-accepted (nor indeed, popular) line of discourse of this period. It was initiated by some scholars of the ninth century, and it expanded gradually in the specific context.

Conclusion

In exploring the meaning of the Qur'an, Ahmad and al-Bukhari appears to use ahl al-hadith's methods of interpretation, in which they approach the Qur'an by applying the method of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* (tradition-based exegesis) as a tool of guidance and interpretation. Both scholars are also demonstrate their Qur'anic-based approach towards discussions regarding doctrinal, legal and historical issues in their works. The mastery of Ahmad and al-Bukhari in Qur'anic sciences and its *tafsir* indicate their proficiency and knowledge about the verses of the Quran. Thus, it is important for the researcher to extend a further study his Qur'anic background in order to explore his understanding regarding the Qur'anic discourse.

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