WHERE IS THE MIRACULOUS NATURE OF THE QUR’AN (‘IJAZ AL-QUR’AN) FOUND? ABUL QASIM IBN ‘UMAR AL-ZAMAKHSHARI’S PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The current paper is dedicated to answer the following research question: where is ‘ijaz Al-Qur’an situated according to Abu al-Qasim Mahmud b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsari al-Mu’tazili. He insisted that ‘ijaz Al-Qur’an is originated in it’s composition (nadzam) and its content or news brought by the Qur’an on the unseen matters (akhbar ‘anil ghuyub). This notion can be found in his master piece of Qur’anic exegesis, al-Kashshaf ‘an Haqa’iq Ghawamid al-Tanzil wa ‘Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuh al-Ta’wil where he analyzed the Qur’anic verses using linguistics approaches and its branches which include the science of rhetoric (ilmul-bayan and ilmul ma’ani).After studying his tafsir, the writer found that Zamakhshari used the science of rethorics in digging the meaning of the Qur’an (Balaghah). It covers bayan, badi’, and ma’ani. In addition, Zamakhshari went into detail that nadham or the composition of Qur’anic verses which contains of words is the source of the inimitability and considered to be very unique. In this context, Zamakhshari insisted that the beauty of Qur’anic composition, the elegance of its style and the marvel of its diction could not be appreciated, nor its inimitability, be established unless reference is made to the principles of Ma’ani and Bayan, the two disciplines of Arabic rhetoric. He was convinced that a fuller comprehension of the ‘ijaz al-Qur’an and a deeper and more thorough understanding of the bases on which the Qur’anic challenge rested demanded the employment to the principles of Arabic rhetoric as the most effective and sophisticated tool of interpretation of the Qur’anic verses. His expertise was acknowledged by many scholars from one generation to another generation. Ibn Khallikan once stated that al-Khashshaf is the best tafsir that used language and literaty approaches. In addition, Ibn Khaldun recommended his students to study al-khashshaf carefully, however, he also reminded them due to Mu’tazilte influence on his tafsir.

Key Words: I’jaz al-Qur’an, Nadzam, Balaghah.

1. Introduction

ZAMAKHSHARI'S theory of *I’jaz al-Qur’an* can be extracted from his multivolume *al-Khashshaf*, where he uses a rhetorical interpretation to show that the inimitability of the Qur’an rests on its composition (*nadzam*). This essay will examine specific passages of *al-Khashshaf* to show that Zamakhshari uses this work to implement his theory of rhetorical interpretation. A discussion of Zamakhshari’s personal background as well as a consideration of the Muslim scholars who have discussed his works enables us to understand his perspective on where the miraculous nature of the Qur’an is situated.

2. Al-Zamakhshari: His Life and Works in Brief

Abu al-Qasim Mahmud b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhshari was born in 467/1075 in the province of Khawarazm, only seven years after the death of al-Tusi, a prominent Shi'i exegete. He spent the first eighteen years of his life as a subject of the great Saljuq Sultan Malik Shah I. He traveled a great deal, studying under scholars in Bukhara, Samarqand, Baghdad and Mecca. It is said that his strongest intellectual influence was Mamud b. Jarir al-Dabbi al-Isbahani later known as Abu Mudar (d. 507/1113). He was credited with introducing Zamakhshari to Mu’tazili teachings and the people of Khawarazm, where his proselytism was far-reaching. Zamakhshari had a close personal relationship with his teacher who not only imparted knowledge to his student, but also supported him financially. Because Zamaksahari was well versed in knowledge, some scholars called him “unique in his time” (*wahid ‘asrihi*).
Zamakhshari’s own adoption of the Mu’tazilite doctrine was open and outspoken. He frequently called himself “Abu Qasim al-Mu’tazili;” once he answered a call by saying that “Abu al-Qasim al-Mu’tazizi is at the gate.” Proud of being Mu’tazili, he states explicitly that al-Kashshaf was written in order to provide a much-needed comprehensive Mu’tazili commentary to the Qur’an. This exegete is said to have begun his tafsir with the phrase: “al-hamdu li-llahi al-ladhi khalaqa al-Qur’an.” He was later persuaded to temper the tone of “khalaqa” to “ja’ala,” some scholars say “anzala” however, he didn’t want to change it; any copy of his tafsir which uses these two proposed words, has clearly been edited by subsequent scholars.

It is said that by the time Zamakhshari reached Baghdad, the golden days under vizier Nidham al-Mulk had already ended. The Saljuq empire was feeling the strain of internecine rivalry. Yet the intellectual legacy of the previous era remained, continuing to attract students such as Zamakhshari to Baghdad’s madaris (study center). While in Baghdad Zamakhshari received licenses (ijazat) from some of that generation’s leading scholars in Hadith and literary studies. After getting a licence in Hadith from Baghdad, he moved to Mecca, where he settled for a while and to which he returned from subsequent travels. His tenure in that city was long enough to win him the nickname of “God’s neighbor (Jar Allah).” Although born a Persian, his mastery of Arabic was extraordinary. He taught in Arabic and, more than that, he refused to speak any language other than Arabic to his students. He acknowledged the superiority of the Arabic language. His book on Arabic grammar, al-Mufassal became renowned for its bright and comprehensive exposition of grammatical principles.

In 538/1144, at the age of seventy-one, al-Zamakhshari died in Jurjaniyah, a town about twenty miles north of Zamakhshari. History justifies that Zamakhshari’s tafsir is among the most noted and most quoted of Qur’an commentaries. Ibn Khallikan wrote: “Nothing like it had been

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9 Yusuf Biqa’i, Sharh Maqamat, 6.
14 McAuliffe, Qur’anic Christians, 50.
written before.” The noted fourteenth-century Muslim historian Ibn Khaldun (also known as the author of al-Muqaddima) suggested that his student make use of this tafsir for varied linguistic information. However, he also reminded them to be careful when reading it: as Zamakhshari was a Mu’tazillite by faith and action, he consequently used the verses of the Qur’an to argue in favor of the doctrines of the Mu’tazila.

It was during his second visit to Mecca that he wrote his commentary on the Qur’an entitled al-Kashshaf an Haqa’iq Ghawamid al-Tanzil wa ‘Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujul al-Ta’wil. This work was completed during a two-year stay in Mecca around 1134. It is mentioned clearly in the introduction of his tafsir that he had expected to spend more than thirty years on the task; he attributed the swift completion of the work to the miraculous power of the Ka’bah and the blessed influence that emanates from it.

3. Comments on al-Zamakhshari’s Methods in interpreting the Qur’an

According to Andrew Rappin, the work is a phrase by phrase philosophical and philological commentary on the entire text of the Qur’an, written in a concise, careful, and somewhat difficult style. Zamakhshari first presented what he considered to be the obvious meaning of a verse and then noted other possible interpretations on the basis of grammar and textual variant readings, while always paying full attention to the notion of the rhetorical beauty (‘Ijaz) of the Qur’an. More than that, Ibn Khaldun remarks that Zamakhshari’s commentary of the Qur’an is based wholly upon the discipline of the science of rhetoric (‘Ilm al-Balaghah). This science is needed most importantly to Qur’an commentators. Most classical commentators before Zamakhshari disregarded it. When he wrote his Qur’an commentary, he investigated each verses of the Qur’an according to the rules of this discipline. This indicates, in part, its inimitability. It gives his commentary greater distinction than that possessed by any other commentator. However, he tried to confirm the articles of faith of the Mu’tazila innovators by deriving them from the Qur’an by means of different aspects of rhetoric (balaghah). Therefore, many orthodox Muslims have read his commentary with caution, despite his abundant knowledge of rhetoric.

Al-Khashshaf is known as the only complete extant Mu’tazilite commentary on the Qur’an. It is also the first and by far the most successful effort to apply the principles of Arabic rhetorics to Qur’anic exegesis with a view to laying bare the bases of I’jaz, the inimitability of the Qur’an. 23 Zamakhshari believed that the beauty of Qur’anic composition, the elegance of its style and the marvel of its diction could not be appreciated, nor its I’jaz, its inimitability, be established unless reference is made to the principles of Ma’ani and Bayan, the two disciplines of Arabic rhetorics. 24 He was convinced that a fuller comprehension of the I’jaz al-Qur’an and a deeper and more thorough understanding of the bases on which the Qur’anic challenge rested demanded the employment to the principles of Arabic rhetoric as the most effective and sophisticated tool of interpretation of the Qur’anic verses. For the first time in the history of the Qur’anic exegesis, he produced an explication of the entire Qur’an on the groundwork of rhetorical principles, exposing thereby the roots of the inimitability of the Qur’an and establishing its I’jaz on literary grounds. While doing so he made an important contribution to the evolution and development of Arabic rhetorics as well, by elucidating its principles in the framework of the interpretation of the Qur’anic verses. He also enriched Arabic rhetorics by enunciating a number of rhetorical principles, hitherto unknown, and by adding numerous original rhetorical forms to those already existing. 25

Fazlur Rahman has commented that Tafsir al-Kashshaf fully reflects the achievements of its author, a versatile genius who had mastered the literary and religious science of his times. 26 The orthodox trend of tafsir bi al-ma’tthur also received Zamakhshari’s full attention. However, it is ironic that his approach towards the traditional exegetical reports (riwaya) was that of an uncritical and passive acceptance, while, on the other hand, he was a Mu’tazilite by faith and action. To understand Zamakhshari’s commentary demand a knowledge of Arabic grammar; without this his remarks are sometimes difficult to follow. 27 Commenting on this matter, McAuliffe states that: “on the basis of grammar, Zamakhshari examined the stylistic peculiarities of the Qur’an minutely and gave reasons for the apparent irregularities in the text. Deviations of word order and morphology are exhaustively explained. Unusual significances are justified, frequently by recourse to the corpus of classical poetry. Such syntactical and lexical idiosyncrasies are then lauded as marks of the Qur’an’s rhetorical preeminence. What begins as philological analysis becomes, in Zamakhshari’s hands, a paean to the doctrine of the Qur’an’s inimitability (I’jaz). 28

28 McAuliffie, Qur’anic Christians, 53-54.
Sawi al-Juwayni mentions that ‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani’s theory of rhetoric (balaghah) has flourished since the appearance of Zamakhshari’s Kashshaf. In accord with this statement, al-Hafiz ‘Abd al-Rahim agrees that Zamakhshari used and developed al-Jurjani’s theory of rhetoric. He adds that Zamakhshari’s Kashshaf is not only a tafsir devoted to analyzing the Qur’anic verses grammatically as such, but also treats it from the rhetorical point of view which indicates the beauty of the Qur’anic composition. Shawqi Dayf also remarks that Zamakhshari’s theory of rhetoric is parallel to ‘Abd al-Qahir’s. In the last part of his article, Issa J. Boullata underlines that al-Jurjani’s theory of nadham was organized by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209) in Nihayat al-I’jaz fi Dirayat al-I’jaz and put to practical purposes by al-Zamakhshari in his Kashshaf. More than that, Boullata says “that there is no book on Qur’an exegesis that has better used the growing science of rhetoric in understanding the sacred text and shedding light on its I’jaz and its inimitable beauty and expressiveness than al-Kashshaf of Zamakhshari.” The evidence that ‘Abd al-Rahim, Sawi al-Juwayni, Shawqi Dayf and Issa Boullata are right can be found in the text of Kashshaf. This exegete consistently implements grammatical rules as well as rhetorical theory to explain the Qur’anic verses. Soraya Hajjaji-Jarrah also states that Zamakhshari’s exegesis presents a combination of the philological, religious and dogmatic modes of thinking of his time. She found Zamakhshari explores how the Qur’anic discourse utilizes the Arabic language’s greatest possible penetrating power. This effort is intended to prove the literary superiority and inimitability of the Qur’anic discourse. The following passages are examples of Zamakhshari’s treatment of the Qur’anic verses based on grammatical analysis and rhetorical theory.

29 Al-Jurjani is the author of Dala'il al-l'jaz where he rejects the idea of sarfa (turning away), as he did in al-Risalah al-Shafi’iyah. For his complete biography as well as his works, see Ahmad Ahmad Badawi, ‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani wa Juhuduhu fi al-Balaghah al-'Arabiyyah (Cairo: Mu’assasah al-Misriyyah al-Ammah, n.d.) 5-29 his life, 30-77 his complete works.

30 al-Juwayni, Manhaj al-Zamakhshari, 216.


Before discussing examples from al-Kashshaf, it is necessary to underline the fact that Zamakhshari considered the miraculous nature of the Qur’an to rest upon two aspects: its nadham (composition) and it’s ikhbar ‘an al-ghuyub (information about unseen matters). He supported his ideas by citing the Qur’anic verses: “Fa’lamu annama unzila bi ‘ilmillahi.” (know that it (the Qur’an) was revealed by God’s knowledge). Zamakhshari understands God knowledge (‘ilm Allah) as nadham and information about unseen matters. So it is understood that nobody can produce nadham similar to the Qur’an and its ikhbar ‘an al-ghuyub except God alone.

4. I’jaz al-Qur’an according to al-Zamakhshari
The following section will discuss examples of Zamakhshari’s methods in explaining I’jaz al-Qur’an in turn. Zamakhshari’s explanation of I’jaz can be divided into three aspect: The science of meaning or Semantic (‘ilm al-Ma’ani), the science of syntax and style (‘ilm al-Bayan), and the science of rhetorical figure (‘ilm al-Badi’). First of all, it is important to note that Zamakhshari deals with information about the unseen (ikhbar ‘an al-ghuyub) is a miracle (mu’jiza). Zamakhshari cites Qur’anic verses. First he quotes Qur’an 2:24: “And if you are not sure of what We have revealed to Our servant, then produce one sure like it.” “If you can not do (that) and you will never be able to do (it) then protect yourselves from hell-fire.” It can be understood that God’s challenge to produce such a sura is followed by a warning of hell-fire, which is unseen matter. Other verses that give information about the unseen matters include surat al-Baqarah (2): 94-95 which explains about the hereafter and the mystery of death. In addition, Zamakhshari argues that information about what has happened and what will happen is also considered a miracle; this can be found in surat al-Rum (30): 1-3, which reads, “Alif Lam Mim, The Roman Empire has been defeated, in a land close by, but they, (even) after (this) defeat of theirs, will soon be victorious.

37 The same opinion is also expressed by ‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani who states that the miraculous nature of the Qur’an rests upon its balaghah, and the essence of balaghah is its nazm. See Ahmad Badawi, “Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, 79.
38 “Innahu kitabun mu’jizun min jihatayni, min jihati I’jazi nazmihi wa min jihati ma fihi min al-ikhbari bi al-ghuyub.” See Mustafa al-Sawi al-Juwayni, Manhaj al-Zamakhshari, 217.
39 Qur’an, 11:14.
41 M. Khalafallah explains that ‘Ilm al-Badi’ is the branch of rhetorical science which dealt with the beautification of literary style. See his article on ‘Badi’, in The Encyclopedia of Islam, 1960, 1: 857-58.
42 This is the author’s own translation of surat al-Baqarah (2): 23.
43 Qur’an, 2: 24, the author’s translation.
The essence of Zamakhshari’s theory of l’jaz can be explained by using to text or al-Kashshaf which analyses most of Qur’anic verses based on this discipline. He highlights the fact that composition is the essence of the miraculous nature of the Qur’an (al-nadhamu huwa ummu l’jaz al-Qur’an) and the regulation dealing with the nadham should be known by the mufassir.\(^{45}\)

In implementing ‘Ilm al-Ma’ani, Zamakhshari analyses some Qur’anic verses base on this discipline; he believes that the use of demonstrative pronouns “dhalika” to honor something (li al-ta’zim); as in, dhalika al-kitabu\(^{46}\) while “hodhihi” is intended to lessen the importance of something (li al-ta’qir); for example, wa ma hadhihi al-hayat ud dunya illa lahwun wa la’ib\(^{47}\) is to lessen the importance of worldly matters. Zamakhshari raised the question “why do the Qur’anic verses use the demonstrative pronoun “dhalika” to refer to something that is very close. For example dhalika l-kitabu and not hadha l-kitabu. It is to praise al-Kitab. But, why does the Qur’an use dhalika to refer to something masculine. This is because many meanings are included in the word al-Kitab, so it is better to use the general term to challenge the human mind.\(^{48}\) Here we find that Zamakhshari is very concerned with the aspect of the language used by the Qur’an , which becomes an important aspect of his rhetorical exegesis. To Zamakhshari, the structure of the verses has also a secret meaning, such as the use of nominal sentence which comes after a verbal one is meant to strengthen the meaning of the whole message. For example, in “wakh-shaw yauman la yaziz walidun ’an waladihi, wala mawludun huwa jazin ’an walidihi shay’an,” the seneteece “wala mawludun huwa jazin ’an walidihi shay’an” is intended to strengthen the verbal sentence that comes before it, that is “wohshay yauman la yaziz walidun ’an waladihi.” Based on this analysis, the rhetorical meaning should be: if the parents can not give jaza’\(^{49}\) to their children, how can the children give jaza’ to their parents in the life after life.\(^{50}\) The significance of this analysis is that everybody is responsible to God for their own actions in the hereafter.

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\(^{46}\) Qur’an, 2: 2.

\(^{47}\) Compare between the following Qur’anic verses:

6:32 “wama ihayat al-dunya illa la’ib wa lahw...”

29:64 “wama hadhihi l-hayat al-dunya illa lahw wa la’ib ...”

47:36 “innama ihayat al-dunya la’ib wa lahw...”

\(^{48}\) A. detailed explanation about dhalika al-Kitab can be read in Zamakhshari’s Kashshaf, vol I, 32-37.

\(^{49}\) Jaza’ is a kind of reward in the hereafter. This idea arose when the parents of believers are going to hell because they are unbelievers, and their children ask God to save the parents for the sake of their believing children. Some scholars called it shafa’ah.

\(^{50}\) Mustafa al-Sawi, Manhaj al-Zamakhshari, 220-221.
Another example of his discourse on ‘Ilm al-Ma’ani can be found in his interpretation of the Qur’anic verses: “wa zannu annahum ma n’atuhum husunuhum (and they thought that their fortresses would defend them)”. In an oridnary sentence we can say wazannu anna husunahum tamna’uhum, but, Zamakhshari argues, the Qur’anic verse is better because its real intent is to express the idea that the Jews of Banu Nadir were overly trusting in their power (dalilun ’ala farati wathqaqhim bihasanatiha) to protect themselves from God’s torture. The pronoun (damir) “hum” here is the subject (ism) of anna and indicates their trust in themselves. This meaning can not be found in the second statement (wa zannu anna husunahum tamna’uhum).

It is interesting to see how Zamakhshari explains the dual expression (tathniyah) in the Qur’an. He argues that this style can be used to produce a deeper and stronger understanding of the intended meaning (ablaqh wa akad fi taqdir al-ma’na al-murad), for example “bal yadahu mabsutatan.” The preceding verse reads yadu-Ilahi maghlihulah in the singular from, intending to show that God is very generous and at the same time reject the idea of miserliness (bukhi). In other words, we can say that God gives all with his two hands.

When he reaches the Qur’anic verse: afara ‘aytum ma tad’una min duni-Ilahi in aradaniyallahu bidurрин hal hunna kashifat durrihi, Zamakhshari analyses it from the point of view of the form of the word ‘kashifat.’ It is in the feminine form (ta’nith); according to Zamakhshari ta’nith is a sign of weakness and softness. This expression is intended to show the unbelievers that their female goddesses (al-lata, al’uza and manat) were weak beings who could not protect them from danger.

To summarize Zamakhshari implementation of ‘Ilm al-Ma’ani in the interpretation of the Qur’an, there is one final example, uslub al-l’jaz (simple style). When Zamakhshari read the Qur’anic verse: huda li-immuttaqin, he posed a question, “why not huda li-ddallin?.” “Then he himself answered his own question by arguing that may be guided. That’s why the Qur’an uses huda li-immuttaqin as a shortened form of the long phrase huda li-ssa’irin ila al-huda ba’da al-dalal.

Having examined Zamakhshari’s rhetorical exegesis on ‘Ilm al-Ma’ani, the next step is to analyze the ways in which he implements ‘Ilm al-Bayan in his rhetorical exegesis. He analyses some verses of the Qur’an based on the principles of ‘Ilm al-Bayan, such as his treatment of the Qur’anic verse: ula’ika al-ladhina-shhtarawwu ddalalata bi al-huda fama rabihat tijaratuhum woma kanu muhtadin. Zamakhshari treats this verse according to majaz. But he expands its meaning and goes beyond it by implementing the idea of ‘aqidah and does not only discuss it from the aspect of its rhetoric. He questions, why the lost (al-khusran) is related to the trade (al-tijarah) and then answers his own question by arguing that according to the theory of isnad al-majazi, the verb should be related to something real, such as the relationship between trade and the subject of trade (an yusnada al-fi’lu ila shay’in yaltabisu bi-lladhi huwa fi al-haqiqah lahu kama talabbasat al-tijarah bi al-mushtarin).

51 Qur’an, 59: 2.

52 Mustafa al-Sawi, Manhaj al-Zamakhshari, 221.

53 Mustafa al-Sawi, Ibid, 221-222.

54 Zamakhshari, al-Kashshaf, vol. I, 35. See also footnote on the same page.

55 Appropriate discussion on the theory of majaz can be read in Ahmad Badawi, ‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, 236-246.
Therefore the intention behind the mention of the words: “al-ribh” and al-“tijarah” is to describe the real trade (mubaya ‘ah ‘ala al-haqiqah).

The next example of Zamakhshari’s analysis on ‘Ilm al-Bayan is uslub al-kinayah wa l-ta’rid fi al-Qur’an. Zamakhshari distinguishes between kinayah wa al-ta’rid. Al-Kinayah is to mention something indirectly through the use of metaphor (an tadhkura al-shay’a bighayri lafzhi al-maudu’). For example tawil al-nijad wa al-hama’il is said li tuli al-Qamah or kathir al-ramad to attribute the generous people. While al-Ta’rid denotes the thing that is not mentioned, as in statements that approach the subject in a roundabout manner; for example: ji’tuka li’usal lima ‘alayka wa li’anzura ila wajhika al-karim, for this purpose it is enough to say: wa hasbuka bi-ttaslimi minni taqadiyan. This style is also called al-talwih.

The last example of his rhetorical exegesis deal with ‘Ilm al-badi. For example, take the style al-jinas in the verse: waji’tuka min saba’in binaba’in yaqin. This is saying that ‘min saba’in binaba’in’ is a kind of jinas. This is a sort of mahasin al-kalam which dealt with lafz by maintaining sihhat al-ma’na. Another example is ya asafi ‘ala yusuf. Another example is uslub al-laff. Zamakhshari takes ayat al-tashri’ as an example: wali-tukmilu al-‘iddata wali-tukabbiru ‘ala ma hadakum wala’al-lakum tashkurun. Litukmilu is to maintain the number, litukabbiru is to show the way they celebrate as the time of breaking the fast, and la’alakum tashkurun is to show that God’s command of fasting is something reasonable, that the believers should thank Him for. Another example is wamin rohamatih ja’ala lakumul-layla wa-nahara litaskunu fihi walitabtaghu min fadlihi wala’allakum tashkurun. From the last example, we can infer that some aspect of the Qur’an’s beauty rests upon its style, such as the comparable element between night (layl) and day (nahar) which has three aims; to stay or to take a rest at night, to seek God’s sustenance in the day, and to command people to thank God for His blessing and for making their life harmonious.

Conclusion
In conclusion, Zamakhshari believed that the miraculous nature of the Qur’an rested upon its nadham and its information about the unseen. He successfully implemented the theory of rhetoric in his tafsir, al-Kashshaf. Scholars consider it to be a rhetorical interpretation of the Qur’an, and this is what distinguishes Zamakhshari from other exegetes.
References


