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Quranic Exegesis of Al-Bahr Al-Muhit: Narration of Hadith and *Isra'i Liyyat*

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Abstract

This research focuses on the narration of hadith and *isrā'iliyyat* in Imam Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalūsī' masterpiece exegesis book, al-Baḥr al-Muḥiṭ. As a multidisciplinary figure, Abū Ḥayyān uses his expertise to elaborate on every verse of the Quran in the book, not to mention the Prophet Muhammad PBUH's hadith narration and the *isrā'iliyyat*. Most hadiths cited in this book are from the authentic hadith book narrated by Imam al-Bukhārī and Muslim, as well as the work of other hadith scholars. However, this book contains few unauthentic hadith until Abū Ḥayyān is criticized for his lack of hadith expertise. The narration of *isrā'iliyyat* demonstrates Abū Ḥayyān's prudence, so much so that this book is recognized as a preserved exegesis book and only mentions a few narrations of *isrā'iliyyat*. However, it has been found that this book also narrates fabricated *isrā'iliyyat*.

Keywords: Quranic Exegesis, Al-Baḥr al-Muḥiṭ, Hadith Narration, *Isra'iliyyat*, Abu Hayyan

Introduction

The book of al-Baḥr al-Muḥiṭ is a well-known exegesis book that Muslims consult in order to comprehend the interpretation of Quranic verses. This book was written using the *tafsīlī* method in the year of 1311 or 710 Hijri when the author was 57 years old (Sulaiman, 2010). It is categorized by scholars as *tafsīr bi al-ra'y al-mamdūh*, and its contents are guaranteed to be free of fabricated narrations and deviant beliefs. Abū Ḥayyān has learnt from many teachers and it was stated that the total of his teachers were 450 teachers, therefore it showed that Abū Ḥayyān seek knowledge very wide and in many filed of studies (Mohd Saad et al., 2012). However, Muslims must still be cautious, as this exegesis book still contains few fabricated narrations and *isrā'iliyyat* (Abū Syahbah, 1988).

In addition to understanding the author's method for narrating hadith and *isrā'iliyyat*, Muslims must also avoid arguing and being influenced by unreliable sources (Abidin & Noor, 2017). For example, the narrations of *isrā'iliyyat* sometimes mixed up between authentic and fabricated. Ibn Khaldun (2004) had mentioned about the history of *isrā'iliyyat* infiltration in the Islamic books and it brings harm to the Muslim who have least understanding about the knowledge.

Even though there were few unauthentic hadith and fabricated *isrā'iliyyat* in the exegesis book written by Abū Ḥayyān, the book was still well preserved and not deviated from the true teachings of Allah (Abū Syahbah, 1988). Therefore, this article wants to explore the methodology used by Abū Ḥayyān to complete his exegesis book, to find out the parts of unauthentic hadith and fabricated *isrā'iliyyat* from the Abū Ḥayyān' works and to investigate the stand of Abū Ḥayyān towards Prophet Muhammad's narration.

Perspective Towards the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH

The writing of Abū Ḥayyān in his book is very firm and is based on the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. If there is an authentic hadith found in interpreting certain verses of the Quran, he will continue to stand to the interpretation without prolonging the debate on the hadith.

There are many examples that show that he is committed to the hadith exegesis of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, which were

- a. Allah verily says in Chapter al-Fatihah, verse 7 (1:7)

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ۝۷

Translation

the Path of those You have blessed—not those You are displeased with, or those who are astray.

— Dr. Mustafa Khattab, the Clear Quran

Abū Ḥayyān cited from Ibn Mas'ūd, Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid, al-Suddī and Ibn Zayd that (لَمَغْضُوبٍ أ) (الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ) was addressed to the Jews, while (الضَّالِّينَ) was addressed to the Christians. This interpretation is narrated by 'Ādī bin Hātim and narrated by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. Thus, Abū Ḥayyān asserts: When a hadith is authentic from the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, it is an obligation to agree with it (Abū Ḥayyān, 1993; Abū Ḥayyān, n.d.).

- b. Allah verily says in Chapter al-Baqarah, verse 79 (2:79):

فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ الْكِتَابَ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ ثُمَّ يَقُولُونَ هَذَا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ لَيْسَ شَيْءٌ بِهِ تَمِيمًا قَلِيلًا ۝ فَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا كَتَبَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا يَكْسِبُونَ ۝۷۹

Translation

So woe to those who distort the Scripture with their own hands then say, "This is from Allah"—seeking a fleeting gain! So woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for what they have earned.

— Dr. Mustafa Khattab, the Clear Quran

Abū Ḥayyān asserts: If the interpretation of وَيْلٌ is authentic from the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, then it is an obligation to agree with it (Abū Ḥayyān, 1993; Abū Ḥayyān, n.d.).

- c. Allah verily says in Chapter al-Baqarah, verse 143 (2:143)

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا ۝ وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَتَّبِعُ الرَّسُولَ مِمَّنْ يَنْقَلِبُ عَلَى عَقْبَيْهِ ۝ وَإِنْ كَانَتْ لَكَبِيرَةً إِلَّا عَلَى الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ ۝ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُضَيِّعَ إِيمَانَكُمْ ۝ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرَءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ ۝۱۴۳

Translation

And so We have made you 'believers' an upright community so that you may be witnesses over humanity and that the Messenger may be a witness over you. We assigned your former direction of prayer only to distinguish those who would remain faithful to the Messenger from those who would lose faith. It was certainly a difficult test except for those 'rightly' guided by Allah. And Allah would never discount your 'previous acts of' faith. Surely Allah is Ever Gracious and Most Merciful to humanity.

— Dr. Mustafa Khattab, the Clear Quran

The interpretation of the meaning of وَسَطًا here is (عدولا) which is fair, it is cited from the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. Abū Ḥayyān (1993; n.d.) explained: If the interpretation is authentic from the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, then it is an obligation to interpret وَسَطًا according to the debate.

This approach clearly shows that Abū Ḥayyān is a person who prioritizes the authentic interpretation of Nabawī. He even rejected all other interpretations made by other exegetes.

References Books of Hadith

The prevalence of Abū Ḥayyān when citing a hadith is when he will be referring the hadiths to the main books in the science of hadith. Most of them are books cited by two major figures of authentic hadith, al-Bukhārī and Muslim, or one of them. There are also hadiths cited from other major books and the names are mentioned by him, for example:

- a. Citation from al-Bukhārī dan Muslim, Allah verily says in Chapter al-Baqarah, verse 58 (2:58)

وَأَدْخُلُوا الْبَابَ سُجَّدًا وَقُولُوا حِطَّةً نَّغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ۗ وَسَارِعُوا إِلَىٰ أَلْمُحْسِنِينَ ٥٨

Translation

And 'remember' when We said, "Enter this city and eat freely from wherever you please; enter the gate with humility, saying, 'Absolve us.' We will forgive your sins and multiply the reward for the good-doers."

— Dr. Mustafa Khattab, the Clear Quran

Abū Ḥayyān when interpreting (وَأَدْخُلُوا الْبَابَ سُجَّدًا) mentioned several opinions, then he asserted that it is stated in the book of al-Bukhārī in the chapter of *Hadith al-Khudir ma' Mūsā 'alayhimā al-salām* (al-Bukhārī, 1978) and Muslim in the book of al-Tafsīr (Muslim, n.d.), the interpretation of the verse is "they have all entered the gate by crawling". Hence, other interpretations of this verse cannot be used, and it is an obligation to follow the interpretation of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH (Abū Ḥayyān, 1993; Abū Ḥayyān, n.d.).

- b. Citation from the main books of hadith, Allah verily says in Chapter āli 'Imrān, verse 200 (3:200):

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَصْبِرُوا وَصَابِرُوا وَرَابِطُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ٢٠٠

Translation

O believers! Patiently endure, persevere, stand on guard, and be mindful of Allah, so you may be successful.

— Dr. Mustafa Khattab, the Clear Quran

Abū Ḥayyān stated that the interpretation of the above Quranic verse is based on hadith from several main book of hadith (Abū Ḥayyān, 1993; Abū Ḥayyān, n.d.), namely:

Narrated in the book of al-Bukhārī, the Prophet Muhammad PBUH said: The preparation on the day of *jihad fi sabilillah* (striving in the name of Allah) is better than the world and its whole contents (al-Bukhārī, 1978).

While in the book of Muslim (n.d.), the Prophet Muhammad PBUH said: Preparation on the day and night of *jihad fi sabilillah* (striving in the name of Allah) is better than fasting for a month and worshipping at night. After death, the practice will continue to be beneficial, and will be spared from various slanders.

Sunan Abū Dāud (Abū Dāud, n.d.) in chapter *fī faḍl al-ribāt*: The Prophet Muhammad PBUH said: Everyone who dies has perfect his deeds, except *al-murābiṭ* (i.e. the one who prepares for *jihad fi sabilillah* (striving in the name of Allah)), his practice will continue to benefit until the Day of Judgment and Resurrection and be spared from various slanders of the grave.

Fabricated Hadith

There is a hadith mentioned in the book of al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ which is:

A Jew came to see the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and said: O Muhammad, tell me about the names of the stars seen by the Prophet Yusuf. The Prophet Muhammad kept quiet, Jibrīl came down and told the names to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. The Prophet Muhammad called the Jews and said: Would you believe if I had told them? The Jew replied: Yes. The Prophet Muhammad said: Juryān, al-Ṭāriq, al-Dhayyāl, Dhū al-Katifāyn, Qābis, Wathāb, 'Amūdān, al-Falīq, al-Miṣbaḥ, al-Fargh, al-Diyā and al-Nūr. The Jew said: By Allah, those are the names (Abū Ḥayyān, 1993).

This story is a fabricated story which is stated to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, and it was stated by Syahbah (1988) in his book, *al-Isrā'īliyyat wa al-Maudhū'īyyat fī Kutub al-Tafsīr* that this story is unauthentic, the Prophet Yusuf saw the star in appearance not by name. After that comes the name that indicates the dream.

Although this fabricated hadith is found in the book written by Abū Ḥayyān, the unauthentic narrations found in the entire book are very few and are still preserved as mentioned by Syaykh Abū Syahbah himself 1988.

Criticism Towards Abū Ḥayyān

Criticism of Abū Ḥayyān was made by an expert on hadith and Quranic knowledge from Egypt, Syaykh Abū Syahbah. Syaykh Abū Syahbah (1988) states that Abū Ḥayyān does not criticize the narrations and conducts analysis of *al-ta'dīl* and *al-tajrīh*, because in his opinion, Abū Ḥayyān is not a scholar and critic of hadith that can distinguish the status of hadith.

This view is rather absurd because Abū Ḥayyān took a stand not to prolong the debate of other fields of knowledge in his book. He also screened the hadith which has been reviewed and criticized in the book of hadith before including it in his book. This method is a tradition in his field by referring to the results of the hadith debate in the book of hadith without having to re-discuss it in the book of exegesis (Abū Ḥayyān, 1993).

The fact that Abū Ḥayyān is not a scholar of hadith is also rejected based on the many book of hadith written by him himself. This is stated by Imam al-Dhahabī (1988) in *Mu'jam al-mukhtaṣṣ bi al-muhaddithīn*: it was written to me his narration (Abū Ḥayyān), he did a good job in the knowledge of hadith and received many requests for it.

Narration of *isrā'iliyyat* in al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ

Isrā'iliyyat is the plural of *isrā'iliyyah*, which is the relational adjective (*an-Nisbah*) and genitive construction (*al-Iḍāfah*) to the word *Isrā'īl*. *Isrā'īl* makes reference to Prophet Ya'qūb bin Ishāq bin Ibrahīm ('*Alaihis Salām*), the progenitor of the twelve Jewish tribes. Thus, Jews are referred to as Banū Isrā'īl – the Children of Isrā'īl (Siddiqa, 2021; Wan Razali, Mohd Noor & Awang, 2016).

The categories of *isrā'iliyyat* tales are categorized into three sections: *saḥīḥ*, *mawdu'* and *maskut 'anhu*. The *saḥīḥ* stories of *isrā'iliyyat* are stories that have been discovered to correspond with Allah's revelation in the Quran and hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Conversely, the stories of *mawdu'* are having contradiction with the Quran and hadith. The stories that are silenced (*maskut 'anhu*) are those whose veracity cannot be determined with certainty (Abu Syahbah, 1971).

The book of al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ is an exegetical book that does not narrate the stories or of *isrā'iliyyat* but if there is a narration, then it is to explain the authenticity of the *isrā'iliyyat*. Abū Ḥayyān (1993) explained in his book's introduction: Likewise, they mention something that is unauthentic in *asbāb nuzūl*, hadith on *faḍā'il*, unreasonable tales and history of *isrā'iliyyat*. It is not worth mentioning this in the science of exegesis.

In writing the *isrā'iliyyat* narration, the method used by Abū Ḥayyān was using the weak *sighah* (term) which was (روي) or (قيل) to show the weakness of that narration (Syukri, 2006).

Among the *isrā'iliyyat* stories found in al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ and commented by Abū Ḥayyān on the fabrication are as follows

a. Calf Worshipping

Allah verily says in Chaper al-Baqarah verse 51 (2:51):

وَإِذْ وَاعِدْنَا مُوسَىٰ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً نَّمُ اتَّخِذْنُمُ الْعِجْلَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَأَنْتُمْ ظَالِمُونَ ٥١

Translation:

And 'remember' when We appointed forty nights for Moses, then you worshipped the calf in his absence, acting wrongfully.

— Dr. Mustafa Khattab, the Clear Quran

Abū Ḥayyān (1993) explained that exegetes cite many different stories about the reason for calf worshipping and its worship approaches from Ibn Abbās, al-Suddi and others. Hence, he stressed: A lot of rumors accompany this matter, only Allah knows its authenticity. This story has never been supported by its authenticity, whether through the Quran or authentic hadith, therefore we leave this citation based on our traditions in this book.

b. Attempted Seduction Towards Prophet Yusuf

Allah verily says in Chapter Yusuf verse 24 (12:24)

وَلَقَدْ هَمَّتْ بِهِنَّ وَهَمَّ بِهَا لَوْلَا أَنْ رَأَىٰ بُرْهَانَ رَبِّهِ كَذَلِكَ لِنَصْرِفَ عَنْهُ السُّوءَ وَالْفَحْشَاءَ إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُخْلَصِينَ ٢٤

Translation

She advanced towards him, and he would have done likewise, had he not seen a sign from his Lord. This is how We kept evil and indecency away from him, for he was truly one of Our chosen servants.

— Dr. Mustafa Khattab, the Clear Quran

Abū Ḥayyān (1993) explained this verse: Some of them associated to the Prophet Yusuf something that was not suitable for him, that is, with the attitude of the wicked. My choice is that the Prophet Yusuf was not tempted by the woman, but he was denied seeing the sign (a sign from Allah).

c. The tale of Allah's house (Allah's *Bayt*)

Allah verily says in Chapter al-Baqarah verse 127 (2:127)

وَأِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ١٢٧

Translation

And 'remember' when Abraham raised the foundation of the House with Ishmael, 'both praying,' "Our Lord! Accept 'this' from us. You are indeed the All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

— Dr. Mustafa Khattab, the Clear Quran

Some exegetes mention the characteristics of the house of Allah, which is perpetually, the story that happened to it, the material of the manufacture of the door, the frequencies of Prophet Adam performing the pilgrimage, the material that Prophet Ibrahim used to build it, the assistant who helped Prophet Ibrahim build it and many others (Abū Ḥayyān, 1993).

Abū Ḥayyān explained that this happened because of the habit of exegetes to cite everything they come across. In other way, they should seek references from the authentic sources, the Quran and hadith.

Fabricated *Isrā'īliyyat* Narration

There is evidence that the book of al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ also narrated fabricated *isrā'īliyyat* narrations, for example in a story in the Quranic verse in Chapter al-Fajr, verse 7 (89:7):

إِزْمَ ذَاتِ الْعِمَادِ ۝

Translation:

'the people' of Iram—with 'their' great stature

— Dr. Mustafa Khattab, the Clear Quran

Abū Ḥayyān cites from exegetes that *zāt al-'Imād* is a city built by Shaddād bin 'Ād upon hearing about heaven, but with an untrue visualize, it is impossible to build a real heaven in this world. Allah Almighty sent a decree upon the city and its inhabitants before they could enter the city and all of them were destroyed at once. He stated that this story is found in the books al-Taḥrīr and al-Kashshāf (Abū Ḥayyān, 1993).

However, this story is an unauthentic story because Ibn Kathīr (1999) stated in his book, "All of this (the story and false depiction of the 'Ād) is part of the superstition and *isrā'īliyyat* designed by the *zindiq* people to confuse the thoughts of the ignorant so that they believe the matter.

Nevertheless, the book of al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ is citing very few the narration of fabricated *isrā'īliyyat*. This is in line with the statement of Syaykh Abū Syahbah (1988) in his book that

the exegesis of Abū Ḥayyān is among the preserved exegesis and only cite few of the narration of *isrā'iliyyat* and unauthentic source.

Conclusion

Abū Ḥayyān wrote the book of *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* with reference based on the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and if there is an authentic hadith that he found in interpreting certain verses of the Quran, then he continues to use the interpretation without prolonging the debate. Based on the examples shown, he is very committed to the interpretation from the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. Although there is a criticism that he is not an expert in the field of hadith because he does not show the analysis of the status of hadith in the book of exegesis, the criticism does not affect his credibility as a figure as it is customary for him not to incorporate knowledge in other fields in this book.

Abū Ḥayyān was found to be less narrated the *isrā'iliyyat*. If it occurs, it is an explanation for the status of the *isrā'iliyyat*. He is of the opinion that narrating something that is unauthentic should not happen in the science of exegesis, but if he uses the narration of *isrā'iliyyat*, he will use the weak *sighah* (term); (روي) or (قيل) to show the weakness of the narration.

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