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# QUR'ĀNIC HERMENEUTICS IN THE OTTOMAN CONTEXT: ABŪ AL-SU'ŪD'S *IRSHĀD AL-'AQL AL-SALĪM* AS AN EXAMPLE

Ghada Ghazal\*

**Abstract:** This article reexamines Abū al-Su'ūd al-'Imādī's *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm* as a milestone in the development of Qur'ānic hermeneutics during the Ottoman era. Departing from the conventional perspective that post-classical *tafsīr* (exegesis) replicated prior models, it contends that Abū al-Su'ūd formulated an interpretation where language, law, and theology were integrated into a cohesive hermeneutical framework. His commentary elucidates how *balāgha* (rhetoric) is not merely as a discipline of eloquence but also a medium for moral reasoning and legal authority. The article demonstrates that Abū al-Su'ūd reinvented *tafsīr* as an intellectual conduit between revelation and governance, integrating the Qur'ān into the moral and institutional framework of the Ottoman Empire through the lenses of linguistic coherence, legal reasoning, and rhetorical form. In response to previous works advocating for resurgence of interest in Ottoman exegesis, this research presents *Irshād* as a paradigm of interpretive innovation that reconciles the methodological distinctions between classical and contemporary Qur'ānic scholarship. It reestablishes the Ottoman exegetical effort as a vibrant domain of hermeneutical innovation, where the Qur'ān's aesthetic influence, moral significance, and legal reasoning intersect. The book reframes Abū al-Su'ūd not only as an Ottoman jurist but as a hermeneutical builder whose conception of Qur'ānic coherence persists in influencing modern discussions on authority, interpretation, and ethical responsibility.

**Keywords:** *Ottoman hermeneutics, i'jāz, 'ilm balāgha, legal-theological synthesis, coherence (nazm), moral responsibility, rhetorical theology, interpretive methodology*

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## INTRODUCTION

Ottoman Qur'ānic studies is still one of the least studied but most promising areas of Islamic hermeneutics.<sup>1</sup> For centuries, the Ottoman Empire nurtured an extensive intellectual legacy that connected the scholastic traditions of classical Islam with the nascent rational and institutional frameworks of the early modern era. Nevertheless, in Western academic discourse, the Ottoman contribution to *tafsīr* (exegesis) has been eclipsed by the emphasis on two other periods: the formative centuries of Islamic thinking and the modern reformist movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>2</sup> Andrew Hammond notes that this imbalance stems from the inclination in Western academia to identify intellectual originality in instances of origin or disruption, consequently neglecting the subtle yet significant continuities that influenced the Ottoman ages.<sup>3</sup> The exegetical tradition of the empire, shaped by the interaction of jurisprudence, rhetoric, and governance, embodies a dynamic amalgamation of language accuracy and moral reasoning that sustained the intellectual and ethical framework of a huge Muslim polity. The continuity of Ottoman exegetical practice was institutionally embedded within the *madrassa* system.<sup>4</sup> Within the *madrassa* curriculum, *tafsīr* was taught alongside *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *uṣūl al-fiqh* (the principles of Islamic jurisprudence), *kalām* (Islamic theology), and the linguistic sciences, reinforcing shared exegetical conventions across generations.<sup>5</sup>

The relative marginalisation of Ottoman *tafsīr* illustrates a disciplinary divide: Qur'ānic studies has predominantly focused on early Arabic sources, but Ottoman studies has historically emphasised political, judicial, and administrative history above intellectual and linguistic exploration. Between these two areas is a collection of writings that are mostly in Arabic but were influenced by the Ottomans' multilingual and multicultural society. This body of work relates to heavenly revelation and the reality of imperial government. The

<sup>1</sup> While significant regional cataloguing initiatives have been undertaken, a comprehensive, cross-regional inventory of Qur'ānic commentary manuscripts is still lacking, limiting efforts to produce an integrated and synthetic history of *tafsīr*. See Walid A. Saleh, "Qur'an Commentaries," in *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al. (HarperCollins, 2015), 1646. The union catalogue currently available is Āl al-Bayt Foundation, *al-Fihris al-Shāmil li-l-Turāth al-'Arabī al-Islāmī al-Makhtūṭ: 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, Makhtūṭāt al-Tafsīr wa-'Ulūmih* [The Comprehensive Index of the Arabic-Islamic Manuscript Heritage: Qur'ānic Sciences, Manuscripts of Tafsīr and its Disciplines] (Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt, 1988). This observation pertains to *tafsīr* historiography in general and is not intended to negate the substantial body of Ottoman-period *tafsīr* scholarship, including studies in Turkish on exegetical texts and related *hawāshī* (margin exegetical notes).

<sup>2</sup> Walid A. Saleh, "Preliminary Remarks on the Historiography of Tafsīr in Arabic: A History of the Book Approach," *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies* 12, no. 1–2 (2010).

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Hammond, *Late Ottoman Origins of Modern Islamic Thought: Turkish and Egyptian Thinkers on the Disruption of Islamic Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 2022). See also, Andrew Rippin, "Western Scholarship and the Qur'ān," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Walid A. Saleh, "The Last of the Nishapuri School of Tafsīr: Al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076) and his Significance in the History of Qur'ānic Exegesis," *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies* 24, no. 1 (2022); Susan Gunasti, "An Exegetical Tradition," *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies* 24, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>4</sup> See Madeline C. Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Postclassical Age (1600–1800)* (University of Minnesota Press, 1988); İhsan Fazlıoğlu, "What Happened in Iznik? The Shaping of Ottoman Intellectual Life and Dāwūd Qaysarī," *Nazariyat: Journal for the History of Islamic Philosophy and Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2017).

<sup>5</sup> Zilfi, *Politics of Piety*; Fazlıoğlu, "What Happened in Iznik?"

commentaries of this period were not mere reproductions of earlier works; rather, they represent engagement with the Qur'ān through the lenses of rhetoric (*balāgha*), legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and concerns with justice (*ʿadl*) and order (*nizām*) within an imperial context.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to being a period of decline, Ottoman exegesis exemplifies a disciplined inventiveness aimed at reconciling revelation with reason, continuity with reform, and language with legislation.

In this intellectual context, the current study reintegrates Ottoman *tafsīr* into the overarching history of Qur'ānic hermeneutics by examining Abū al-Suʿūd al-ʿImādī's (1490–1574) *Irshād al-ʿAql al-Salīm ilā Mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm* (Guiding the Sound Mind to the Prominent Features of the Qur'ān) as a quintessential example of exegetical synthesis. Recent scholarship increasingly contests the established perception of post-classical exegesis as a mere extension of preceding traditions. Walid Saleh has shown that the so-called “later” comments often broaden the scope of Qur'ānic interpretation through subtle rhetorical and philological innovation.<sup>7</sup> In his book *Ottoman Tafsir Legacy*, Mustafa Öztürk shows how Ottoman exegetes re-engaged classical authorities like al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī, putting their ideas on how to interpret texts into the intellectual, social, and spiritual life of the empire.<sup>8</sup> In the same spirit, Shuruq Naguib's study, “Guiding the Sound Mind,” illustrates how Abū al-Suʿūd al-ʿImādī's *Irshād al-ʿAql al-Salīm* redefined the instruments of *balāgha* as a means for moral and theological contemplation, transforming rhetorical analysis into a method of ethical reasoning.<sup>9</sup> Halil Şimşek's research reinforces this re-evaluation by depicting Ottoman *tafsīr* as a dynamic intellectual domain where language, law, and theology converged into a cohesive system of knowledge. He accurately describes the Ottoman commentary tradition as the “missing link” between medieval hermeneutics and the contemporary pursuit of coherence in his dissertation research.<sup>10</sup>

This work reexamines *Irshād al-ʿAql al-Salīm* by Shaykh al-Islām Abū al-Suʿūd, building on these findings. Abū al-Suʿūd's existence and research exemplify the Ottoman integration of intellectual fields. As a *mufasssīr* (exegete) and chief jurist under Sultans Süleyman I and Selim II, he lived in a time when understanding the Qur'ān was the same as understanding the law and how to run a country. This convergence took shape within institutional practice, reflecting an Ottoman scholarly order in which Qur'ānic interpretation was the intellectual foundation for legal judgment, administrative governance, and the articulation of imperial authority. His commentary stands at the convergence of these spheres: an exegetical work that reads the divine Word via the grammar of law, and a legal vision that gets its authority

<sup>6</sup> Zilfi, *Politics of Piety*.

<sup>7</sup> Walid A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition: The Qur'ān Commentary of al-Tha'labī* (d. 427/1035) (Brill, 2004), 15–19, 263–68. See also Saleh, “Preliminary Remarks on the Historiography of Tafsīr in Arabic,” 9–13.

<sup>8</sup> Mustafa Öztürk, *Ottoman Tafsir Legacy* (ISAR Publications, 2022).

<sup>9</sup> Shuruq Naguib, “Guiding the Sound Mind: Abū al-Suʿūd's Tafsīr and Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur'ān in the Post-Classical Period,” *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies* 17, no. 3 (2015).

<sup>10</sup> Halil Şimşek, “The Missing Link in the History of Qur'ānic Commentary: The Ottoman Period and the Qur'ānic Commentary of Ebüssuʿūd/Abū al-Suʿūd al-ʿImādī (d. 1574 CE), *Irshād al-ʿAql al-Salīm Ilā Mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm*” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2018).

from the texture of revelation. In the *muqaddimah* of his *tafsīr*, Abū al-Su‘ūd explicitly aligns his commentary with the rational and linguistic exegetical legacy of al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī, treating *al-Kashshāf* and *Anwār al-Tanzīl* as his primary interlocutors. Yet, rather than simply reproducing their methods, he re-configures them within a 16<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman horizon, where linguistic analysis serves the dual purpose of exegesis and governance.

The methodological foundation of *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm* is predicated on the belief that meaning emerges from the interrelation of syntax, rhetoric, and theological consistency. Abū al-Su‘ūd regards the Qur’ān as a meticulously structured speech, where its rhetorical unity (*naẓm*) elucidates the moral framework of Divine intention. His interpretation integrates transmitted authorities (*naqlī*) with rational and linguistic analysis (*‘aqlī*), situating inherited traditions of Qur’ānic exegesis alongside disciplined reasoning rather than in opposition to it. In this context, *balāgha* is not only an aesthetic discipline but also a hermeneutical tool through which Divine guidance is expressed in language. The Qur’ān’s eloquence, for Abū al-Su‘ūd, is inseparable from its normativity: its rhetorical perfection demands ethical response. Consequently, linguistic accuracy functions as a conduit for moral transformation, encapsulating a principle that guides his exegesis and jurisprudence. In this sense, *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm* articulates a hermeneutical vision in which revelation and reason emerge not as opposing forces but as complementary dimensions of Divine communication.

This study examines Abū al-Su‘ūd’s work via a historical-hermeneutical framework that emphasises the dialogical interplay among text, interpretation, and historical environment. It delineates how the Ottoman intellectual milieu, influenced by the *madrasa* curriculum, the institutional authority of the *‘ulamā’*, and the administrative pragmatism of the empire, fostered the conditions for the emergence of this synthesis. At the same time, it investigates how Abū al-Su‘ūd’s linguistic and rhetorical strategy transcended its immediate setting to define a universal paradigm of interpretive reasoning. This perspective aligns with contemporary advancements in Qur’ānic studies advocating for the interpretation of post-classical comments as historically contextualised hermeneutical endeavours rather than mere academic exercises.<sup>11</sup> This work closely analyses Abū al-Su‘ūd’s approach to syntax, semantic nuance, and contextual flow (*sibāq* and *siyāq*), illustrating how Ottoman exegetes attempted to achieve textual coherence as an intellectual and ethical endeavour. Their quest for meaning embodies a hermeneutical sensibility that aligns with contemporary theories of textual cohesion and reader involvement.

The significance of examining *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm* lies in its capacity to illuminate the Ottoman contribution to the evolving hermeneutical framework of Qur’ānic interpretation. The commentary’s amalgamation of rhetoric, jurisprudence, and theology illustrates the multifaceted character of Ottoman hermeneutics, where legal reasoning and language accuracy collectively convey theological understanding. This study posits that Abū al-Su‘ūd’s *tafsīr* epitomises the zenith of the post-classical exegetical tradition, where the Qur’ān is regarded not merely as revelation but also as a moral framework for society. By

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<sup>11</sup> See Saleh, “Historiography of Tafsīr”; Shuruq Naguib, “Guiding the Sound Mind.”

combining Divine eloquence with legal pragmatism, Abū al-Su‘ūd expresses a view of the Qur’ān as a linguistic miracle and moral framework for administration. His method illustrates that the potency of the Qur’ān resides not solely in its form or content, but in its ability to cultivate a just and logical framework for human existence.

Re-examining *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm* has implications that extend beyond Ottoman historiography. It invites reconsideration of how Qur’ānic coherence, interpretive authority, and moral agency interact within exegesis. Abū al-Su‘ūd’s integration of rhetorical analysis and legal reasoning demonstrates that attention to textual form is inseparable from the articulation of ethical and normative meaning. His *tafsīr* exemplifies an exegesis in which devotion and analysis, juridical responsibility and aesthetic sensitivity operate together rather than in tension. Viewed in this context, *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm* invites a reassessment of post-classical exegesis and underscores the Ottoman contribution to a Qur’ānic hermeneutics grounded in coherence and moral accountability. By restoring this work to contemporary scholarly discussion, the study contributes to ongoing debates about the relationship between revelation and reason, language and ethics, and interpretation and responsibility in Islamic thought.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Ottoman Empire, founded in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century and reached its height in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, stood as one of the world’s most powerful empires, extending from the Caucasus to the Balkans and North Africa.<sup>12</sup> The 16<sup>th</sup> century was a transformative period for the Ottoman Empire, during which Abū al-Su‘ūd emerged as a central figure in reconciling the empire’s legal framework with the principles of Islamic jurisprudence. As Shaykh al-Islām, his contributions were instrumental in achieving synthesis between the *qānūn* (secular administrative law) of the Ottoman Empire and *sharī‘a* (Islamic jurisprudence).<sup>13</sup> His interpretations facilitated seamless integration of Islamic principles into the framework of state governance, ensuring legal edicts were not only religiously legitimate but also administratively viable. This synthesis of religious and secular legal principles strengthened the authority of the Ottoman legal system and established a model for subsequent jurists seeking to navigate the complexities of religious law within an evolving state structure.

Abū al-Su‘ūd’s *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm* harmonises theological exegesis with juristic reasoning, reflecting his concurrent service as Shaykh al-Islām under Süleyman I (r. 1520–1566) and Selim II (r. 1566–1574). He interprets doctrinal questions through disciplined linguistic and rational analysis and approaches to *aḥkām* (legal rulings) verses within the Ḥanafī *uṣūl* (principles) framework. Administratively, he translates this hermeneutical method into institutional form by standardising the *fatwā* (p. *fatāwā* – legal opinion)

<sup>12</sup> Metin Heper, “The Ottoman Legacy and Turkish Politics,” *Journal of International Affairs* 54, no. 1 (2000): 63, accessed December 20, 2024, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24357689>.

<sup>13</sup> Colin Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd: The Islamic Legal Tradition* (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 63–69.

bureaucracy and aligning court procedure with Ḥanafī jurisprudential principles.<sup>14</sup> Abū al-Su‘ūd’s *tafsīr* not only elucidates linguistic and doctrinal dimensions but also functions as a juridical reference, informing legal deliberations and shaping the formulation of *fatāwā*.<sup>15</sup> His interpretation of Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:275,<sup>16</sup> which addresses the prohibition of usury, exemplifies his ability to contextualise Qur’ānic injunctions within ethical and economic frameworks, as illustrated in the excerpt below.

Qur’ān 2:275 (Sūrat al-Baqarah) Arabic commentary excerpt (Abū al-Su‘ūd):<sup>17</sup>

لا يقومون يوم القيامة من قبورهم إلا قيامًا كقيام المصروع، وهو وارد على ما يزعمون أن الشيطان يخبط الإنسان ... فيصرع... فيكون نهوضهم وسقوطهم كالمصروعين، لا لاختلال عقولهم بل لأن الله تعالى أربى في بطونهم ما أكلوا من الربا فأتقلعهم فصاروا مذبذبين ينهضون ويسقطون – تلك سيماهم يُعرفون بها عند أهل الموقف... ذلك العقاب بسبب أنهم نظّموا الربا والبئع في سلك واحد لإفضائهما إلى الربح فاستحلوه استحلاله، وقالوا: يجوز بيع درهم بدرهمين كما يجوز بيع ما قيمته درهم بدرهمين... فإن أحد الدرهمين في الأول ضائع حتمًا، وفي الثاني مُنجبرٌ بمساس الحاجة إلى السلعة أو بتوقع رواجها

They will not rise from their graves on the Day of Resurrection except in a manner like the rising of one afflicted by seizure. This description corresponds to their claim that Satan strikes a person so that he collapses. Thus, their standing and falling will resemble that of those seized by epilepsy—not because of any impairment of their intellects, but because God will cause what they consumed of usury to swell within their bellies, weighing them down, so that they become disoriented, rising and falling repeatedly. This will be their distinguishing mark by which they are recognized among the people of the Gathering... That punishment is incurred because they placed usury and sale within a single category, on the grounds that both lead to profit, and thus deemed usury lawful by equating it with trade. They claimed that it is permissible to exchange one *dirham* for two just as it is permissible to sell a commodity worth one dirham for two. Yet this analogy is manifestly flawed, for in the former case one of the two *dirhams* is inevitably lost without compensation, whereas in the latter it is counterbalanced either by the buyer’s need for the commodity or by the expectation of its marketability.

Commenting on the opening phrase of Q. 2:275, “those who *are eating* usury” (الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ) (الرَّبَوَاتُ), Abū al-Su‘ūd draws attention to the Qur’ān’s deliberate use of the language of ‘*eating*.’ He interprets it as a moral indictment that presents usurious gain as a habitual form of acquisitive consumption rather than a legitimate form of exchange. He then links this ethical diagnosis to the verse’s eschatological imagery, reading the depiction of usurers rising *as one whom Satan has confounded through affliction* (كَمَا يَفُورُ الَّذِي يَخْبِطُهُ الشَّيْطَانُ مِنَ الْمَمِينِ) as a Divinely ordained sign manifested on the Day of Resurrection. This condition, he explains, does not indicate literal madness, but a punitive manifestation of moral disorder. Wealth

<sup>14</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 79–115; Uriel Heyd, *Studies in Old Ottoman Criminal Law* (Clarendon Press, 1973), 17–31.

<sup>15</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 62.

<sup>16</sup> Qur’ān 2:275: “But those who take usury will rise up on the Day of Resurrection like someone tormented by Satan’s touch. That is because they say, ‘Trade and usury are the same.’” Qur’ān translations in this article have been taken from M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an: A New Translation* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Abū al-Su‘ūd al-‘Imādī, *Irshād al-‘aql al-salīm ilā mazāyā al-Qur’ān al-karīm* [Guiding the Sound Mind to the Merits of the Noble Book], ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā (Maktabat al-Riyāḍ al-Ḥadītha, 1974), vol. 1, 266–67.

wrongfully acquired through usury is portrayed as weighing on their bodies, rendering them unsteady and visibly marked by disgrace. The imagery, he notes, draws on a commonly held belief that Satanic affliction results in collapse, which he invokes to intensify the moral gravity of the offense rather than to affirm its literal truth. From this moral and corporeal depiction, Abū al-Su‘ūd proceeds to expose the juristic fallacy underlying usurious practice, namely the claim that “trade is merely like usury” (إِنَّمَا الْبَيْعُ مِثْلُ الرِّبَا). He dismantles this analogy by distinguishing licit profit from illegitimate surplus. Usury, he argues, generates gain without equivalent compensation, whereas lawful trade grounds profit in real economic value, whether through the satisfaction of human need or the anticipated utility of the commodity. The severity of the punishment described in the verse thus follows from this false equivalence, which collapses the ethical distinction between lawful exchange and prohibited exploitation. By highlighting the moral and spiritual consequences of usury, he reinforces its prohibition while aligning his analysis with the *maqāṣid al-sharī‘a*, particularly the pursuit of justice and preservation of economic stability.<sup>18</sup>

This mode of interpretation does not remain confined to Qur’ānic exegesis, but extends into Abū al-Su‘ūd’s juristic engagement with questions of governance and public order. This interpretive synthesis between revelation and governance is further reflected in Abū al-Su‘ūd’s *fatwā* on land tenure and taxation, where he redefines the legal status of *mīrī* (state-owned) lands to harmonise Ottoman fiscal administration with Islamic legal principles.<sup>19</sup> Across exegetical and administrative contexts, Abū al-Su‘ūd demonstrates how hermeneutical reasoning is mobilised within concrete juridical cases to articulate norms of ethical governance. The implications of this framework extended beyond his time, influencing the Ottoman Land Code of 1858, which institutionalised state ownership while preserving usufruct rights within an Islamic juridical logic.<sup>20</sup>

By aligning the empire’s taxation policies with the dictates of *sharī‘a*, Abū al-Su‘ūd not only provided religious legitimacy for the Sultan’s fiscal reforms but also ensured that governance remained anchored within the principles of Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>21</sup> His legal interpretations resonated with the religious sensibilities of the Ottoman populace, reinforcing the image of the Sultan as a *sulṭān ‘ādil* (just ruler) and guardian of Islamic law.<sup>22</sup> In aligning juridical reasoning with imperial authority, Abū al-Su‘ūd helped construct a vision of governance that fused justice, piety, and legal order into a coherent Ottoman-Islamic ethos.<sup>23</sup> These rulings strengthened the Ottoman administration’s capacity to sustain social cohesion

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 159–65.

<sup>20</sup> The Ottoman Land Code (*Qānūn al-Arāḍī*, 1858) codified land tenure under the Tanzimat reforms, affirming state ownership of *mīrī* lands while granting conditional usufruct rights to cultivators. See Halil İnalçık, “The Ottoman Land Regime,” in *The Middle East and the Balkans under the Ottoman Empire: Essays on Economy and Society* (Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1993), 79–91; Huri İslamoğlu, *Property and Law in the Ottoman Empire: A Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3–12.

<sup>21</sup> Haim Gerber, *State, Society, and Law in Islam: Ottoman Law in Comparative Perspective* (State University of New York Press, 1994), 112–17.

<sup>22</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 169–72.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

by weaving religious authority into the fabric of state governance.<sup>24</sup> In doing so, Abū al-Su‘ūd’s juridical reasoning aligned legal practice with imperial objectives and the populace’s moral expectations of justice, consolidating the empire’s vision of a Divinely sanctioned order.<sup>25</sup>

This synthesis of jurisprudence and exegesis underscores *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm*’s enduring influence on *tafsīr* studies and Islamic legal thought.<sup>26</sup> Its significance is clearly seen in its integration into the educational and exegetical fabric of the Ottoman Empire. The work circulated widely in manuscript form and was assigned in Ottoman *madrasas*.<sup>27</sup> Through this widespread use, it helped shape the empire’s intellectual and spiritual orientation. Its prominence within the *madrasa* ecosystem—written for and read by the learned ‘*ulamā*’—is further attested by its extensive manuscript transmission and the presence of endowed copies in major institutions such as the Süleymaniye Madrasa.<sup>28</sup>

## BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ABŪ AL-SU‘ŪD

Abū al-Su‘ūd Muḥammad b. Muḥyi al-Dīn Muḥ. B. al-‘Imād Muṣṭafā al-‘Imādī (1490–1574), known as Khodja Çelebi (Hoca Çelebi), is a renowned Ottoman scholar, Qur’ānic commentator (*mufasssīr*, pl. *mufasssīrūn*), and jurist.<sup>29</sup> The Turkish pronunciation of his name is “Ebu’s-su‘ud,” which literally means “father of auspiciousness.”<sup>30</sup> His father, originally from İskilip (a town west of Amasya, in modern Turkey), was a respected scholar and *şūfī*.<sup>31</sup> Abū al-Su‘ūd began his career as a teacher in Ottoman *madrasas* (Islamic educational institutions), having a position at one of the prestigious “Eight Madrasas” established by Sultān Muḥammad II (known as al-Fatih).<sup>32</sup> In 1533, Abū al-Su‘ūd was appointed as a *qadi* (judge) in Bursa and later Istanbul, two major Ottoman centres of learning and governance.<sup>33</sup> In 1537, he was elevated to the position of *qadi ‘asker* (military judge) of Rumelia, one of the highest judicial offices in the empire.<sup>34</sup> In 1545, Sultān Süleyman I, known also as Sultān Süleyman the Magnificent, appointed Abū al-Su‘ūd as Shaykh al-Islām (Grand Muftī), the

<sup>24</sup> E. Attila Aytekin, “Agrarian Relations, Property and Law: An Analysis of the Land Code of 1858 in the Ottoman Empire,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 6 (2009): 947.

<sup>25</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 169–72.

<sup>26</sup> Öztürk, *Ottoman Tafsir Legacy*, 116–18.

<sup>27</sup> Öztürk, *Ottoman Tafsir Legacy*, 114–17; Şimşek, “The Missing Link.”

<sup>28</sup> Öztürk, *Ottoman Tafsir Legacy*, 117–18; Şimşek, “The Missing Link.”

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Schacht, “Abū al-Su‘ūd,” in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al., 2nd ed. (Brill, 1986), vol. 1, 152. Abū al-Su‘ūd hailed from a family with roots in Kurdistan and was born in the vicinity of Constantinople. See Elias John Wilkinson Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, ed. Edward Granville Browne (Luzac & Co., 1904), vol. III, 116; Kâtip Çelebi, *Kashf al-Zunūn ‘an Asāmī al-Kutub wa al-Funūn* [The Removal of Doubts from the Names of Books and Sciences], vol. 3 (Oriental Translation Fund, 1835), 56.

<sup>30</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, 116; Schacht, “Abū al-Su‘ūd.”

<sup>32</sup> Schacht, “Abū al-Su‘ūd.”

<sup>33</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> The Empire’s two highest-ranking judges were the Military Judges of Rumelia and Anatolia, both serving as members of the Imperial Council, which convened in the Sultān’s palace under the leadership of the Grand Vizier. Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 6.

supreme religious authority in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>35</sup> Abū al-Su‘ūd continued to hold this position for nearly three decades under the reign of Sulṭān Süleyman and his successor, Sultan Salīm II (1566–1574).<sup>36</sup> This position was marked by a close and genuine friendship with Sulṭān Süleyman, granting Abū al-Su‘ūd significant influence in shaping Ottoman legal, religious, and administrative policies. In that capacity, he supervised the issuance of *fatāwā* and coordinated the application of Ḥanafī *uṣūl* across the imperial courts.<sup>37</sup> Abū al-Su‘ūd successfully aligned the secular administrative law of the Ottoman Empire with the Islamic jurisprudence: this synthesis provided a unified legal framework that strengthened the legitimacy of the Ottoman state.<sup>38</sup>

During his lifetime, Abū al-Su‘ūd wrote five *tafsīrs*, three of which focus on individual chapters of the Qur’ān.<sup>39</sup> One is titled *Ma‘āqid al-Ṭarafā fī Awwal Tafsīr Sūrat al-Faṭḥ* (Refined Points in the Opening Section of al-Zamakhsharī’s Exegesis of Sūrat al-Faṭḥ). It is dedicated to the renowned commentary (Arabic: *sharḥ* -pl. *shurūḥ*, Turk. *şerh*) by al-Zamakhsharī.<sup>40</sup> While compiling his *tafsīr*, Abū al-Su‘ūd submitted the first part, completed through Surat Ṣād (Q. 38), to Sultan Süleyman, who was so pleased that he raised Abū al-Su‘ūd’s daily salary from 300 to 500 akçes (silver coins).<sup>41</sup> On completing the entire commentary in 1566, he was granted an additional 100 akçes per day and an honour robe.<sup>42</sup> The earliest printed edition of Abū al-Su‘ūd’s *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm* was published in Arabic at Būlāq Press in 1858.<sup>43</sup> Since then, Abū al-Su‘ūd’s *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm* has been printed many times in Cairo, Istanbul, and Beirut, culminating in the five-volume edition

<sup>35</sup> Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, 116.

<sup>36</sup> During his nearly 30-year tenure as the chief Ottoman mufti, Abū al-Su‘ūd faced controversies, including his notable support for cash *waqf*. See Michael M. Pixley, “Süleyman’s Şeyhülislam,” *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 6, no. 2 (1982): 12, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43384009>. In 1545, the Rumeli kazaskeri, Koca Çivizade, wrote a treatise condemning the creation of cash *waqf*. See Kâtip Çelebi, *Kashf al-Zunūn ‘an Asāmī al-Kutub wa-l-Funūn* [The Removal of Doubts from the Names of Books and Sciences], ed. Şerefettin Yaltkaya and Kilisli Rifat Bilge (Maṭba‘at al-Dawlah, 1941–43), vol. 2, 898–99.

<sup>37</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 14–18, 79–115.

<sup>38</sup> Pixley, “Süleyman’s Şeyhülislam,” 13.

<sup>39</sup> See Çelebi, *Kashf al-Zunūn*, vol. 1, 115 (s.v. *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm*), vol. 2, 1199 (s.v. *Ma‘āqid al-Ṭarafā*); Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 32–34.

<sup>40</sup> Çelebi, *Kashf al-Zunūn*, vol. 2, 1480–81.

<sup>41</sup> Çelebi, *Kashf al-Zunūn*, vol. 3, 249–50; Carl Brockelmann, *History of the Arabic Written Tradition, Supplement Volume 2*, trans. Joep Lameer, eds. Maribel Fierro et al. (Brill, 1996), 513. Akçe (plural *akçes*) was the principal silver coin and standard monetary unit of the Ottoman Empire, used to calculate salaries and state expenditures from the 14<sup>th</sup> century through much of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, official salaries, especially for judges, professors, and senior religious officials, were calculated in daily akçes; a rise in the number of akçes assigned to a scholar or official marked royal approval and an elevation in rank or prestige.

<sup>42</sup> Çelebi, *Kashf al-Zunūn*, vol. 3, 249–50; Brockelmann, *History of the Arabic Written Tradition*, 513.

<sup>43</sup> Abū al-Su‘ūd al-‘Imādī, *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm ilā Mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm* [Guiding the Sound Mind to the Merits of the Noble Book] (al-Maṭba‘ah al-Amīriyyah, 1858). Būlāq Press (al-Maṭba‘ah al-Amīriyyah bi-Būlāq), established in Cairo in 1820, was the first official Arabic printing house in the Ottoman domains and soon became a central institution in the preservation and dissemination of classical Islamic scholarship. Among its early Qur’ānic publications were al-Bayḍāwī’s *Anwār al-Tanzīl* (1832) and the *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (1842). In 1858, the press issued the first printed Arabic edition of Abū al-Su‘ūd’s *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm*, one of the earliest complete *tafsīrs* to appear in lithographic form and a milestone in the transition from manuscript scholarship to the modern culture of Qur’ānic print in Egypt. See Francis Robinson, “Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print,” *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1993).

edited by ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā.<sup>44</sup> Over 200 manuscript copies of *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm* are preserved in Istanbul’s major collections, particularly in the Süleymaniye, Köprülü, Ragıp Paşa, and Topkapı Palace libraries.<sup>45</sup>

Abū al-Su‘ūd also authored *Du‘ā-nāma*, known also as *Risāla fī al-Ad‘iya al-Ma‘thūra* (Treatise on the Transmitted Supplications), which is a volume divided into six chapters that discusses various aspects of Muslim ritual practices and is a handbook for proper behaviour.<sup>46</sup> Beyond his exegetical and juridical writings, Abū al-Su‘ūd composed poetry in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish,<sup>47</sup> however, his poetic work is difficult to evaluate due to the scarcity of surviving examples.<sup>48</sup>

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH IN *IRSHĀD AL-‘AQL AL-SALĪM*

Abū al-Su‘ūd’s exegetical methodology is characterised by an approach that aims to resolve the Qur’ān’s apparent ambiguities by a meticulous analysis of language and context.<sup>49</sup> *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm* prioritises a rhetorical interpretative approach, where syntactic arrangement, sentence structure, and semantic accuracy function as the primary vehicle of meaning.<sup>50</sup> His interpretive approach draws on inherited exegetical traditions and Qur’ānic cross-referencing, together with careful linguistic and rational judgment. Within this process, transmitted precedent and analytical reasoning are brought into a mutually reinforcing dynamic. This synthesis illustrates his belief that the Qur’ān, although Divinely revealed, encourages human intelligence to engage in elucidating its semantic and moral profundity. Through the integration of grammatical precision and theological coherence, Abū al-Su‘ūd articulates an interpretive framework that honours the inherited tradition while affirming the scholar’s active role in the unfolding of meaning. *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm* exemplifies a multifaceted hermeneutical approach that uses lexical, morphological, syntactic, and rhetorical analysis, drawing on the comprehensive spectrum of Arabic linguistic sciences to

<sup>44</sup> Abū al-Su‘ūd al-‘Imādī, *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm ilā Mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm* [Guiding the Sound Mind to the Merits of the Noble Book], 5 vols., ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1999).

<sup>45</sup> Guy Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law: The Ḥanafī School in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 82.

<sup>46</sup> Çelebi, *Kashf al-Zunun*, vol. 1, 755.

<sup>47</sup> Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, vol. 3, 116.

<sup>48</sup> Two Persian couplets by Abū al-Su‘ūd are inscribed on the Dragoman Mosque in Istanbul, built by Sinan in 1541. Abū al-Su‘ūd’s poetry is briefly mentioned by early critics, including Elias John Wilkinson Gibb and Kafzade Faizi (d. 1620), who included seven of his couplets in his *Zubdat al-Ash‘ar* (A Compendium of the Finest Poems). Later, Riyadi Mehmet also refers to Abū al-Su‘ūd’s poetry in his *Riyad al-Shu‘ara*. Abū al-Su‘ūd’s poetry was unnoticed until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when Mehmet Tevfik cited several of his couplets in *Kafile-i Shucara*. Pixley, “Süleyman’s Şeyhülislam,” 12.

<sup>49</sup> Naguib, “Guiding the Sound Mind,” 5–10; Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law*.

<sup>50</sup> Naguib, “Guiding the Sound Mind,” 30–35.

clarify meaning.<sup>51</sup> His approach has argumentative and literary tendencies, demonstrating the commentator's mastery of philology and reasoning as interpretative tools.<sup>52</sup>

*Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm* exemplifies a post-classical exegetical approach that mediates between inherited rational-theological methods and Sunni traditionalist orthodoxy, privileging rhetorical analysis as a vehicle of meaning while tempering the overt disputational style of *kalām* (Islamic rational theology).<sup>53</sup> Judges and *muftis* (jurist who issues legal opinions (*fatāwā*)) used the commentary as a legal reference, which helped to solidify an Ottoman mix of Ḥanafī jurisprudence and imperial law.<sup>54</sup> Contemporary scholarship on post-classical Qur'ānic exegesis turns to Abū al-Su'ūd as a paradigmatic exegete whose interpretive method exemplifies balance between linguistic precision and theological depth.<sup>55</sup> His sensitivity to the sequential and contextual flow of verses (*sibāq/siyāq*) and his nuanced deployment of rhetorical-linguistic analysis underscore an exegetical commitment to coherence and meaning-making within the Qur'ānic discourse. As Shuruq Naguib demonstrates, Abū al-Su'ūd's *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm* interprets the "trust" (*amāna*) of Q. 33:72 not as an isolated concept but in relation to its preceding verses, resolving interpretive tensions through careful reading of the verse's analogical imagery (*tamthīl*) and its narrative sequence.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, Şimşek situates *Irshād* within the Ottoman intellectual milieu, showing how its rhetorical and institutional orientation became integral to the formation of a distinctly Ottoman exegetical tradition in which state-sponsored scholarship intersected with a refined theology of language and authority.<sup>57</sup>

Abū al-Su'ūd, through his meticulous study and profound engagement with the commentaries of al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf* and al-Bayḍāwī's *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, pursued a rigorous intellectual endeavour aimed at synthesising their exegetical insights into a coherent and systematic framework.<sup>58</sup> He sought to enrich this synthesis with authentic knowledge extracted from chosen authoritative texts, guaranteeing that his exegetical contributions were consistent with the grandeur and rhetorical magnificence of the Divine Word.<sup>59</sup> Abū al-Su'ūd's jurisprudential methodology has wider implications than just legal decisions. His interpretive approach exemplified a strategic fusion of pragmatism and doctrinal fidelity, ensuring the adaptability of Islamic law within the context of a vast and diverse imperial polity.<sup>60</sup> This amalgamation of legal tradition and governance illustrates that Ottoman legal

<sup>51</sup> Muhammad Sheikh and Khadije Rigi, "Method of Expression and Reasoning in the Commentary of Abu al-Sa'ūd (A Study in the First Part of the Qur'an)," *Kufa Journal of Arts* 1, no. 53 (2022): 402–28, <https://doi.org/10.36317/kaj/2022/v53.i1.10266>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Naguib, "Guiding the Sound Mind," 9–13.

<sup>54</sup> Imber, *Ebu's-su'ūd*, 14–18, 79–115; Şimşek, "The Missing Link," 51–64; Heyd, *Studies in Old Ottoman Criminal Law*, 17–31.

<sup>55</sup> Şimşek, "The Missing Link."

<sup>56</sup> Naguib, "Guiding the Sound Mind." Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, Qur'ān 33:72: "We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, but they refused to bear it and were afraid of it; man took it on—he was indeed unjust and ignorant—."

<sup>57</sup> Şimşek, "The Missing Link," 123–50.

<sup>58</sup> Abū al-Su'ūd, *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm*, vol. 1, 1999, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 1999, 4–5.

<sup>60</sup> Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law*, 145–52.

thought was not merely a continuation of prior Islamic jurisprudence but a conscious endeavour of reinterpretation and institutional modification, reinforcing the Sultanate's dual assertions of temporal power and religious legitimacy.<sup>61</sup>

## KEY CONTRIBUTIONS TO *TAFSĪR* STUDIES

Abū al-Su'ūd's *tafsīr* reflects a consistent adherence to Māturīdī theology, particularly in discussions of Divine attributes (*ṣifāt*) and predestination (*qaḍā' wa-qadar*).<sup>62</sup> His exegetical approach harmonises rational analysis with transmitted revelation, reflecting the overarching Ottoman Māturīdī paradigm that aimed to preserve Divine transcendence while ensuring human accountability.<sup>63</sup> *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm* engages a rhetorical tradition that has roots in al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī, and re-orientates it by prioritising stylistic, contextual and argumentative concerns rather than expansive *kalām* disputation.<sup>64</sup> He critically engages with the perspectives of earlier exegetes providing subtle critiques and reconciliations.<sup>65</sup> Drawing on the exegetical tradition of al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf* and al-Bayḍāwī's *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, Abū al-Su'ūd produced a commentary that illuminates the Qur'ān's eloquence and rhetorical depth.<sup>66</sup> He emphasises the miraculous qualities of the Qur'ān, examining its linguistic complexities and rhetorical techniques to affirm its Divine origin and aesthetic richness. In his introduction of *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm*, he asserts that "the Qur'ān combines divine guidance and miraculous eloquence, necessitating a profound balance of reason and revelation in its exegesis."<sup>67</sup> He works on exhibiting the indivisibility of eloquence and Divine guidance. For him, "the Qur'ān's miraculous nature lies not only in its content but also in its unparalleled linguistic beauty, which challenges the intellect and the soul."<sup>68</sup> His analysis of key verses, such as Sūrat al-Fātiḥa, highlights his sophisticated engagement with *'ilm al-balāghah* (Arabic rhetoric science) and his capacity to uncover the multilayered meanings inherent in the Qur'ānic text. For instance, his interpretation of the phrase "*Ihdinā al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*" (Guide us to the straight path) illustrates the dual nature of guidance, conceptualised as a spiritual state and an ongoing process necessitating human effort and Divine intervention.<sup>69</sup>

Abū al-Su'ūd's hermeneutical interpretation of the *taḥaddī* (challenge) verses highlights their function as *dalā'il* (epistemic proofs) of the Qur'ān's inimitability, framing them as a

<sup>61</sup> Imber, *Ebu's-su'ūd*, 165–72; İslamoğlu, *Property and Law in the Ottoman Empire*, 7–10; Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law*, 44–48.

<sup>62</sup> Naguib, "Guiding the Sound Mind," 26–30.

<sup>63</sup> Yahya Haidar, "The Debates between Ash'arism and Māturīdism in Ottoman Religious Scholarship: A Historical and Bibliographical Study" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2014), 212–18. This work discusses how Abū al-Su'ūd's hermeneutic articulates a mature Ottoman expression of Māturīdī thought.

<sup>64</sup> Naguib, "Guiding the Sound Mind."

<sup>65</sup> S. A. Ma'sūmī, "Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and his Critics," *Islamic Studies* 6 (1967).

<sup>66</sup> Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur* [History of Arabic Literature], 2nd ed. (Brill, 1945–49) vol. 2, 579–80.

<sup>67</sup> Abū al-Su'ūd, *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm*, vol. 1, 1999, 15.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

rhetorical and theological challenge to humanity.<sup>70</sup> His *tafsīr* contextualises this challenge within the broader framework of classical Arabic *balāgha*, linguistic precision, and theological interpretation. By doing this, Abū al-Su‘ūd critically examines the methods of al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī, refining their perspectives to foreground Divine intentionality as the organising principle of Qur’ānic meaning.<sup>71</sup> Unlike al-Zamakhsharī, who reads the *taḥaddī* verses primarily through a linguistic and rhetorical lens, and al-Bayḍāwī, who incorporates Ash‘arī theological issues while adhering to the *Kashshāf* tradition, Abū al-Su‘ūd formulates a more cohesive hermeneutic.<sup>72</sup> His methodology harmonises rhetorical analysis with legal and theological interpretation, contextualising meaning within the language structure and normative objectives of the Qur’ān.<sup>73</sup> Abū al-Su‘ūd’s interpretation of *i‘jāz* transcends its phonetic and structural aspects to examine its cognitive and spiritual significance, especially its impact on human consciousness and moral reform.<sup>74</sup>

His interpretation of the *taḥaddī* verses (e.g., Q. 11:13) exemplifies a distinctive exegetical approach that integrates stylistic accuracy with legal reasoning, contextualising the rhetorical excellence of the Qur’ān within the realm of legal and ethical discourse.<sup>75</sup> The passage below from *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm* illustrates how this method is enacted in practice. Through a layered analysis of linguistic form, rhetorical sequencing, and the logic of the challenge, Abū al-Su‘ūd frames the Qur’ānic *taḥaddī* not as a purely aesthetic claim, but as one that carries juridical and ethical force.

Qur’ān 11:13 (Sūrat Hūd) Arabic commentary excerpt (Abū al-Su‘ūd):<sup>76</sup>

﴿أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ﴾ إضرابٌ به، أم ”المنقطعة عن ذكر ترك اعتدادهم بما يوحى وتهاونهم به، وعدم اقتناعهم بما فيه من المعجزات الظاهرة الدالة على كونه من عند الله عز وجل وعلى حقيقتة نبوته ﷺ – وشروع في ذكر ارتكابهم ما هو أشد منه وأعظم. (وما فيها من معنى الهمزة للتوبيخ والإنكار والتعجب). والضمير المستكن في افتراه للنبي ﷺ، والبارز لما يوحى – أي بل أيقولون افتراه (وليس من عند الله)؟ ﴿قُلْ﴾ (لهم:) إن كان الأمر كما تقولون. ﴿فأثروا﴾ (أنتم) ﴿بِعَشْرِ سُورٍ مِّثْلِهِ﴾ (في البلاغة وحسن النظم) – وهو نعت لسور، أي أمثاله – (وتوحيده إما باعتبار مماثلة كل واحدة منها [أي: كل سورة]، أو لأن المطابقة ليست بشرط حتى يُوصف المثنى بالمفرد، كما في قوله تعالى أَنُؤْمِنُ لِبَشَرَيْنِ مِثْلِنَا [المؤمنون 23:47]؛ أو للإيماء إلى أن وجه الشبه ومدار المماثلة في الجميع شيء واحد، هو البلاغة المؤدية إلى مرتبة الإعجاز، فكان الجميع واحداً). ﴿مُفْتَرِيَاتٍ﴾ – صفة أخرى لسور أجرت عن وصفها بالمماثلة لما يوحى، لأنها الصفة المقصودة بالتكليف؛ إذ بها يظهر عجزهم وقعودهم عن المعارضة. (وأما وصف الافتراء فلا يتعلق به غرض يدور عليه شيء في مقام التحدي، وإنما ذكر على نهج المساهلة وإرخاء العنان؛ ولأنه لو عكس الترتيب لربما تُؤهم أن المراد هو المماثلة في الافتراء). والمعنى: فأثروا بعشر سور مماثلة له في البلاغة (مختلفات من عند أنفسكم)، إن صح أي اختلافه من عندي؛ فإنكم أقدر على ذلك مني، لأنكم عرب فصحاء بلغاء قد مارستم مبادئ ذلك من الخطب والأشعار، وحفظتم

<sup>70</sup> Abū al-Su‘ūd, *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm*, vol. 1, 102–104.

<sup>71</sup> Şimşek, “The Missing Link,” 128–30.

<sup>72</sup> Naguib, “Guiding the Sound Mind,” 10–13. Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa-Asrār al-Ta’wīl* [The Lights of Revelation and the Secrets of Interpretation] (al-Maṭba‘ah al-Amīriyyah, 1832), vol. 1, 46–48; Maḥmūd ibn ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ‘an Ḥaqā’iq al-Tanzīl wa-‘Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta’wīl* [The Unveiler of the Realities of Revelation and the Choice Interpretations of its Exegesis] (al-Maṭba‘ah al-Amīriyyah, n.d.), vol. 1, 55–58.

<sup>73</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 164–67.

<sup>74</sup> Öztürk, *Ottoman Tafsir Legacy*, 130.

<sup>75</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-Su‘ūd*, 68–70. Qur’ān 11:13: “If they say, ‘He has invented it himself,’ say, ‘Then produce ten invented suras like it, and call in whoever you can beside God if you are truthful.’”

<sup>76</sup> Abū al-Su‘ūd al-‘Imādī, *Irshād al-‘aql al-salīm ilā mazāyā al-Qur’ān al-karīm* [Guiding the Sound Mind to the Merits of the Noble Book], ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā (Maktabat al-Riyāḍ al-Ḥadītha, 1974), vol. 4, 190–91.

الوقائع والأيام، وزاولتم أساليب النظم والنثر. (وَادْعُوا) (لِلإِسْتِظْهَارِ فِي الْمَعَارِضَةِ) (مَنْ اسْتَطَعْتُمْ) (دَعَاءَهُ وَالِاسْتِعَانَةَ بِهِ) مِنْ آلِهَتِكُمُ الَّتِي تَزْعُمُونَ أَنَّهَا مِمْدَةٌ لَكُمْ فِي كُلِّ مَا تَأْتُونَ وَمَا تَنْذِرُونَ، وَالْكَهْنَةَ وَمَدَارِكُمْ الَّذِينَ تَلْجَأُونَ إِلَى آرَائِهِمْ فِي الْمَلَمَّاتِ لِيُسْعِدُوَكُمْ فِيهَا، (مَنْ دُونَ اللَّهِ) – مَتَعَلِّقٌ بِادْعَاؤِ أَيِّ مَتَجَاوِزِينَ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى. (إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ) – فِي أَنِّي افْتَرَيْتُهُ – فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ يَسْتَلْزِمُ إِمْكَانَ الْإِثْبَانِ بِمِثْلِهِ، وَهُوَ أَيْضًا يَسْتَلْزِمُ قُدْرَتَكُمْ عَلَيْهِ. وَالْجَوَابُ مَحذُوفٌ (بَدَلًا عَلَيْهِ الْمَذْكُورُ

Or do they say, ‘He has fabricated it?’ (أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ)

The particle ‘am’ (أَمْ) here is the disconnected ‘am,’ marking a transition away from their disregard for what is revealed, their trivialization of it, and their lack of conviction regarding the manifest signs it contains, which indicate that it is from God, exalted and glorified be He, and that it confirms the truth of his prophethood ﷺ. It then initiates mention of an even graver and more serious offense. The particle also carries the interrogative sense of reproach, repudiation, and astonishment.

The implicit pronoun in *iftarāhu* refers to the Prophet ﷺ, while the explicit pronoun refers to what is revealed, meaning: *Do they say that he has fabricated it and that it is not from God?*

“Say”—that is, say to them: if the matter is as you claim, “then produce”—you yourselves—“ten *sūrahs* like it”, that is, like it in eloquence and excellence of composition. This is an adjectival qualifier of *sūrahs*, meaning *sūrahs* comparable to it. The use of the singular *mithlihi* may be understood in several ways: either with reference to the likeness of each individual *sūrah*; or because exact correspondence is not required for describing a dual or plural with the singular, as in His saying, “*Are we to believe in two mortals like us?*” (Q 23:47); or as an indication that the point of resemblance and the axis of comparison in all of them is one and the same, namely eloquence that reaches the level of inimitability, such that all are as though one.

“Fabricated” is a further description of the *sūrahs*, delayed until after the description of resemblance to what is revealed because this latter attribute is the one intended by the challenge. Through it, their inability and incapacity to produce anything comparable becomes manifest. As for the description of fabrication, no decisive purpose hinges upon it in the context of the challenge. Rather, it is mentioned by way of concession and rhetorical latitude. Had the order been reversed, it might have been imagined that the intended resemblance lay in fabrication itself.

The meaning is therefore: produce ten *sūrahs* comparable to it in eloquence, invented by yourselves, if it is true that I have fabricated it on my own. For you are more capable of that than I, since you are eloquent Arabs, skilled in rhetoric, experienced in oratory and poetry, well versed in accounts of events and battles, and practiced in the techniques of both verse and prose composition.

“And call”—for reinforcement in mounting the challenge—“whomever you can call upon”, that is, whom you are able to summon and seek assistance from among your deities whom you claim aid you in all that you undertake or abandon, as well as your soothsayers and advisors to whom you turn in times of crisis in hopes that they will bring you success therein, “*apart from God*”, meaning in exclusion of God the Exalted.

“*If you are truthful*”, that is, in your claim that I fabricated it, for such a claim necessarily entails the possibility of producing something like it, and likewise entails your ability to do

so. The response to this conditional clause is omitted, as its implication is sufficiently indicated by what has already been stated.

The excerpt highlights how Abū al-Su‘ūd reads the *tahaddī* through the internal ordering of Qur’ānic discourse, allowing rhetorical form, legal reasoning, and ethical implication to remain closely interwoven. By tracing the challenge through particles, syntactic sequencing, and standards of compositional excellence, he presents inimitability as a claim addressed to rational discernment and moral responsibility, rather than as a purely aesthetic assertion.

*Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm* also played an important role in the development of Ottoman legal theory by informing the codification of laws and guiding judicial decision-making.<sup>77</sup> The opinions expressed in *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm* were often employed in *fatāwā* and scholarly treatises, facilitating the alignment of Islamic law with the administrative and legal frameworks of the Ottoman state.<sup>78</sup> Abū al-Su‘ūd’s legal opinions were authoritative references, guiding scholars and administrators in their judicial deliberations.<sup>79</sup> One key example is Abū al-Su‘ūd’s interpretation of Q. 4:6, which pertains to the guardianship and financial responsibility over orphans.<sup>80</sup> Abū al-Su‘ūd’s commentary reinforces the Ottoman legal requirement that guardians be held under strict oversight to safeguard the property of orphaned children, aligning Qur’ānic injunctions with administrative regulation.<sup>81</sup> His views on this issue were incorporated into the *Kanunname* (legal codes) of Sultan Süleyman, which formalised state control over inheritance and guardianship laws.<sup>82</sup> Abū al-Su‘ūd’s *fatāwā* were also instrumental in shaping Ottoman land legislation. In one legal opinion, he was asked whether land designated as *mīrī* (state-owned) property could be privately sold or inherited.<sup>83</sup> His ruling—grounded in Qur’ān 2:188, “Do not consume one another’s wealth unjustly”—reinforces the legal principle that state-owned land remains the property of the state and could not be subjected to unrestricted private sale or inheritance.<sup>84</sup> This ruling became foundational to Ottoman land law, ensuring that state-owned lands remained regulated within the centralised juridical and fiscal framework of the empire.<sup>85</sup> Through such interpretations, Abū al-Su‘ūd’s legal reasoning set a precedent for integrating Islamic

<sup>77</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 165–72; Şimşek, “The Missing Link,” 135–38; Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law*, 44–48.

<sup>78</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 165–70; Şimşek, “The Missing Link,” 135–37; Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law*, 47–49.

<sup>79</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 112–15.

<sup>80</sup> Qur’ān 4:6: “Test the orphans until they reach a marriageable age; then if you judge them to be mature enough, hand over their property to them. Do not consume it wastefully or in haste before they grow up. If the guardian is well off, he should abstain, and if he is poor, let him use what is fair. When you hand over their property to them, call witnesses in; God is enough to take account.”

<sup>81</sup> Abū al-Su‘ūd, *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm*, on Q. 4:6; Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 167–69; Şimşek, “The Missing Link,” 136–37.

<sup>82</sup> Gerber, *State, Society, and Law in Islam*, 56–59.

<sup>83</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 159–65; İslamoğlu, *Property and Law in the Ottoman Empire*, 7–9.

<sup>84</sup> Qur’ān 2:188; Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 159–65; İslamoğlu, *Property and Law in the Ottoman Empire*, 7–9.

<sup>85</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 165–67; İslamoğlu, *Property and Law in the Ottoman Empire*, 7–10; Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law*, 44–48.

jurisprudence into state policy, consolidating the dominance of Ḥanafī legal principles within the Ottoman imperial framework.<sup>86</sup>

### IMPACT AND LEGACY: ABŪ AL-SU‘ŪD’S *IRSHĀD AL-‘AQL AL-SALĪM*

Abū al-Su‘ūd’s enduring legacy lies in his ability to articulate the Qur’ān’s normative force within the socio-intellectual context of his era. He models an exegetical method whose analytic rigour and historical sensitivity remain useful for contemporary scholarship.<sup>87</sup> His exegetical approach demonstrates an engagement that adapts the Qur’ān’s timeless message to the social and intellectual concerns of his era, a responsibility that remains as crucial today as it was in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>88</sup> *Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm*’s influence transcends its immediate historical context, leaving a profound and enduring impact on subsequent Islamic scholarship. In his doctoral dissertation, “The Missing Link in the History of Qur’ānic Commentary,” Halil Simsek positions Abū al-Su‘ūd’s commentary as a pivotal link in the evolution of Qur’ānic exegesis, bridging classical interpretations with Ottoman scholarly tradition. Simsek argues that the work “provides exceptional research tools for us to evaluate and assess other exegetical works,” thereby emphasising its methodological rigour and comprehensive scope.<sup>89</sup>

*Irshād al-‘Aql al-Salīm* consolidates the Ḥanafī–Māturīdī synthesis and crystallises a rational–rhetorical approach to exegesis whose influence endured for centuries.<sup>90</sup> By integrating linguistic precision with juristic reasoning and theological moderation, Abū al-Su‘ūd articulates an interpretive framework that extended from the Ottoman heartlands to Mughal scholarly circles and into the broader intellectual milieu of the Arab–Persian world.<sup>91</sup> Among Ottoman commentators, Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī al-Burūsawī (1652–1725) engages Abū al-Su‘ūd’s analyses of syntax and rhetoric in *Rūḥ al-Bayān* (The Spirit of Elucidation), often extending his semantic observations into mystical and juridical registers.<sup>92</sup> Also, Mehmed Ṭāhir al-Bursevī (d. 1865–1922) absorbed Abū al-Su‘ūd’s hermeneutical balance, integrating it into the scholastic–spiritual discourse of 18<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman scholarship.<sup>93</sup> In the Mughal intellectual milieu, Abū al-Su‘ūd’s exegetical legacy remained evident among scholars devoted to the linguistic precision and structural unity of the Qur’ān. In *al-Fawz al-Kabīr fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* (The Great Victory in the Principles of Qur’ānic Exegesis), Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (1703–1762) exhibits a similar sensitivity to Qur’ānic coherence and interpretive

<sup>86</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 165–72; Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law*, 47–50; Şimşek, “The Missing Link,” 135–38.

<sup>87</sup> Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ūd*, 88.

<sup>88</sup> Naguib, “Guiding the Sound Mind,” 30–33.

<sup>89</sup> Şimşek, “The Missing Link,” 140–42.

<sup>90</sup> Naguib, “Guiding the Sound Mind,” 8–10; Öztürk, *Ottoman Tafsir Legacy*, 112–15.

<sup>91</sup> Şimşek, “The Missing Link,” 125–28.

<sup>92</sup> Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī al-Burūsawī, *Rūḥ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* [The Spirit of Elucidation in Qur’ānic Exegesis], vol. 1 (Maṭba‘at al-‘Āmirah, 1870), 25.

<sup>93</sup> Öztürk, *Ottoman Tafsir Legacy*, 178.

discipline, indicating awareness of the Ottoman exegete's linguistic-legal methodology.<sup>94</sup> Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī (1802–1854) engaged extensively with Abū al-Su'ūd in his encyclopaedic *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm wa-al-Sab' al-Mathānī* (The Spirit of Meanings in the Exegesis of the Noble Qur'ān and the Seven Oft-Repeated Verses). He assimilates and critically evaluates Abū al-Su'ūd's interpretations, thereby consolidating *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm* as a principal reference for subsequent exegetical synthesis.<sup>95</sup>

In the later Arab–Persian intellectual tradition, Abū al-Su'ūd's rationalist perspective significantly influenced following exegetical discourse. Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1903–1981), in his *al-Mīzān fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān* (The Balance in the Interpretation of the Qur'ān), demonstrates rigorous attentiveness to linguistic precision and syntactic structure.<sup>96</sup> His methodology, reminiscent of Abū al-Su'ūd's hermeneutical perspective, reinterprets linguistic and theological accuracy through the framework of Shī'ī philosophy. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935), in *Tafṣīr al-Manār* (The Manār Commentary on the Qur'ān), proposes a reformist hermeneutic that continues to engage with Abū al-Su'ūd's exegetical tradition.<sup>97</sup> By revisiting the rationalist principles embedded in *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm*, Riḍā situates his modernist project not as a rupture but as a renewal of the classical interpretive tradition.

Contemporary research acknowledges Abū al-Su'ūd's lasting methodological impact. In *Ottoman Tafṣīr Legacy*, Mustafa Öztürk underscores the systematic clarity and rhetorical discipline that distinguish *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm*, tracing its formative impact on later exegetes, jurists, and theologians across the Ottoman and post-Ottoman periods.<sup>98</sup> Recent studies have further situated Abū al-Su'ūd's *tafṣīr* within its imperial and institutional context, revealing how his exegetical method is not merely literary but deeply enmeshed in the ideological and administrative culture of the Ottoman Empire. Şimşek situates *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm* within a state-sanctioned exegetical tradition, arguing that Abū al-Su'ūd's commentary articulates the line of exegetical inheritance through which the Ottomans understood themselves as the rightful heirs to earlier scholarly authority.<sup>99</sup>

The enduring influence of Abū al-Su'ūd's interpretive framework across Ottoman, Indo-Mughal, Arab, and Persian scholarly circles attests to the wide and lasting resonance of his hermeneutics. His synthesis of linguistic precision, rhetorical elegance, and juridical reasoning marks a defining culmination of the classical exegetical tradition. It harmonises scholastic rigour with spiritual insight and continues to inspire the intellectual imagination of

<sup>94</sup> *Al-Fawz al-Kabīr* is not a *tafṣīr* of the Qur'ān, but a theoretical and methodological treatise on Qur'ānic interpretation. Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī, *al-Fawz al-Kabīr fī Uṣūl al-Tafṣīr* [The Great Victory in the Principles of Qur'ānic Exegesis] (Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1999), 91.

<sup>95</sup> Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm wa-l-Sab' al-Mathānī* [The Spirit of Meanings in the Exegesis of the Noble Qur'ān and the Seven Oft-Repeated Verses], vol. 3 (al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, 1928), 212.

<sup>96</sup> Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān* [The Balance in the Interpretation of the Qur'ān] (Mu'assasat al-'Alamī li'l-Maṭbū'āt, 1973–1983).

<sup>97</sup> Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān al-Ḥakīm al-shahīr bi-Tafṣīr al-Manār* [The Interpretation of the Wise Qur'ān, Commonly Known as the Manār Commentary] (al-Manār Press, 1898–1935).

<sup>98</sup> Öztürk, *Ottoman Tafṣīr Legacy*.

<sup>99</sup> Şimşek, “The Missing Link,” 13.

Qur'ānic interpretation. Through this synthesis, Abū al-Su'ūd emerges as a formative architect of a hermeneutical legacy mediating between the classical and early modern worlds. His *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm* stands as a testament not only to the depth of the *tafsīr* tradition, but also to the Qur'ān's discursive richness. This richness lies in the Qur'ān's capacity to sustain renewed interpretive engagement across shifting historical and intellectual contexts, through forms of interpretation shaped by exegetical discipline.

## CONCLUSION

Abū al-Su'ūd stands among the most distinguished Ottoman scholars whose work combines exegesis, devotion, and jurisprudence. His *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm* exemplifies the intellectual sophistication of 16<sup>th</sup> century Islamic scholarship and its ability to integrate the disciplines of language, theology, and law into a cohesive interpretive framework. Through a synthesis of linguistic precision, rhetorical insight, theological reflection, and juridical reasoning, Abū al-Su'ūd produced a commentary that remains a cornerstone in the study of Qur'ānic inimitability (*i'jāz*). His work reveals that the Qur'ān's eloquence functions not merely as a sign of Divine authorship but an intellectual and spiritual invitation that engages human reason in the pursuit of moral consciousness and ethical responsibility.

Abū al-Su'ūd's methodology is based on the idea that revelation must be comprehended and lived through the balance of reason and law. By linking interpretation with the moral and institutional order of the Ottoman state, he converted *tafsīr* into a discipline that fostered the soul while structuring governance. His interpretation of the Qur'ān illustrates that linguistic and rhetorical coherence serve as tools for ethical development, so transforming exegesis into a practice of moral cultivation and civic responsibility. In this manner, *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm* embodies a hermeneutical vision that mediates between the transcendence of Divine revelation and the lived realities of human community.

The findings of this study highlight the enduring significance of Abū al-Su'ūd's interpretive synthesis within the broader trajectory of Qur'ānic scholarship. Positioned within the exegetical tradition extending from al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī, Abū al-Su'ūd's method denotes not copying but a creative rebuilding of rhetorical analysis anchored in the ethical and legal logic of revelation. His integration of *balāgha* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* foreshadows modern discourse on textual coherence, moral authority, and the development of ethical subjectivity. Read within the context of Ottoman governance, his hermeneutics reveal how theological reflection could be a foundation for moral order, bringing language, law, and justice into an integrated vision of the good.

In the broader context of Islamic intellectual history, *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm* should be regarded as more than merely a commentary. It is a systematic hermeneutical framework that integrates theology, law, and rhetoric in validating the harmony between Divine revelation and human reason. The ramifications of this synthesis extend beyond the Ottoman setting, necessitating a re-evaluation of the Qur'ān's capacity to foster moral consistency and social justice amid the intricate multiplicity of modernity. By synthesising revelation, logical

inquiry, and aesthetic eloquence, Abū al-Su‘ūd developed a hermeneutical framework that continues to influence academic re-evaluations of post-classical *tafsīr* and its implications for the ethical dimensions of contemporary thought.

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