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TAFSIR IN THE NON-ARAB MUSLIM WORLD – II

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Dr. Hakan Çoruh* and Prof. Peter G. Riddell**

This is the second special issue of the *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* that focuses on the topic of Qur'ānic exegesis or *tafsīr al-Qur'ān* in the non-Arab world. *Tafsīr* (Qur'ānic exegesis) has been an important discipline throughout Islamic history, with various Muslim commentators interpreting the Qur'ān from the Eastern to Western regions of the Muslim world. A famous saying “the Qur'ān was revealed in Mecca, recited in Egypt, written in Istanbul and interpreted in Samarqand” indicates the diversity of contributions to Islamic scholarship. In the Islamic intellectual tradition, there were certain major regions of Islamic knowledge and culture, such as Hijāz, Bilād al-Shām, Iran and Khorasan, Transoxiana and India. Besides the Middle East, some other regions were also influential in the literature and scholarship of *tafsīr*, such as Istanbul, the libraries of which hold examples of most of the surviving *tafsīr* works and super-commentaries.

While the first special issue (Volume 6, Issue 4, 2021) mainly analysed Qur'ānic exegesis in Southeast Asia and Africa, this second issue extends its focus from Western Islamic lands to the Eastern parts (Ottoman to the Indian subcontinent), particularly Qur'ānic exegesis in Persian and its reception west of Iran, *tafsīr* in the Ottoman and Turkish Republic periods, Azerbaijani Qur'ān commentaries, and *tafsīr* in the Indian subcontinent.

Of the eight authors included in the papers, three are faculty members and researchers of state universities in Europe (Germany and the UK), one is a school member of a private Islamic institution in the USA, one is a faculty member of a state university in Australia, one is from a USA-based private Islamic institution, one is a faculty member of a state university in India, and finally one is a PhD candidate in a university of India. As can be seen, this issue of AJIS offers rich perspectives via authors from diverse backgrounds on a range of topics in the field of Qur'ānic exegesis. All authors provide significant scholarship about their topics and regions/figures of focus.

The first article by Dr. Majid Daneshgar and Dr. Sajjad Rizvi lays excellent foundations for the focus of this special issue. Considering Arabic and Persian are two key languages of Islamic civilisation, they focus on Qur'ānic exegesis in Persian and its reception west of Iran, arguing the formation of ‘Islamic classics’ and scholarly genres including *tafsīr* tends to

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ignore the role of Persian works and texts produced in a Persianate context. They successfully show how Persian is inscribed into the Arabic cosmopolis. Moreover, Daneshgar and Rizvi examine rare manuscripts to show how scholars read, copied and promoted Persian *tafsīr* in Arabophone contexts. Based on the discovery of historical evidence, the article highlights that Persian Qur'ānic exegeses produced in the classical period (1000–1300) were among the important materials in Islamic intellectual history along with other fields such as theology and Sufism (*taṣawwuf*). Furthermore, Daneshgar and Rizvi point out the contribution of Persian exegesis to a normative understanding of Islamic exegetical traditions at the heart of the *madrasa*. In addition, the authors maintain what is needed is more comprehensive understanding of Persianate Islamic intellectual cultures in East and West and their impact beyond the rational and ethical sciences. The article makes a significant case for the study of Persian exegesis, suggesting a more comprehensive and diachronic study of Persianate *tafsīr* from its origins to the modern period for a more nuanced understanding of Islamic intellectual traditions.

In the second article, Dr. Halim Calis turns our attention to Ottoman Qur'ānic exegesis, another significant field and region (along with the Persianate) for the Islamic intellectual tradition. He focuses on Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī's (1350–1431) Qur'ān commentary, the first prominent partial *tafsīr* in Ottoman history, as a case study. Fanārī's partial commentary on the opening chapter of the Qur'ān, titled “*‘Ayn al-a'yān: Tafsīr al-Fātiḥa*” (The Water Spring of the Notables: Interpretation of *Sūrah al-Fātiḥa*) is of particular significance to understand the early period of Ottoman Qur'ānic exegesis. Calis argues that Fanārī's main interest was Akbarī teaching, primarily seeking to justify Akbarī exegetical approaches in the *‘Ayn*'s prologue by using the terminology of classical Islamic scholarly tradition, including the Qur'ānic sciences. Also, Fanārī's embrace of the Akbarī school scriptural hermeneutics results in questioning the nature and authority of *tafsīr* and finally developing an exegetical theory that underlines the multilayering of Qur'ānic meanings, including their esoteric sense, and the openness of the Qur'ānic text to inexhaustible attempts at interpretation, not just interpretation based on traditional narrations. This article represents important scholarship for a range of reasons. First, it presents a lucid discussion of Akbarī philosophical concepts that ultimately derive from the complex thought of Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1240). Calis has managed to present these concepts in a way that is accessible and holds the reader's attention. Second, it presents some interesting debates found in classical literature that surround the nature of *tafsīr*. Third, the article unveils some relatively unknown and perhaps surprising influence that al-Fanārī had on later theologians, underscoring his importance is arguably underrated in Islamic studies.

The next article by Dr. Hakan Çoruh focuses on *tafsīr* production in modern Turkey with special emphasis on the Diyanet (the Turkish Presidency for Religious Affairs) Qur'ān commentary *Kur'an Yolu* (Path of the Qur'ān). After contextualising it through a brief overview of *tafsīr* production and culture in the Ottoman period (1299–1922) and in the period of the Republic of Turkey (since 1923), he analyses the Diyanet Qur'ān commentary (*Kur'an Yolu*) as official/institutional *tafsīr*, its major characteristics and methodology. Focus

is given to the commentary's *Introduction* (pp. 13-51), mainly investigating the major objectives and characteristics of this Turkish *tafsīr*, its approaches to the main objective of the Qur'ān and its contents, the notion of abrogation (*naskh*), and its methodological discussions for understanding the Qur'ān. Çoruh critically engages with existing studies in Turkish and English and argues, while the Qur'ān commentary *Kur'an Yolu* follows the classical mainstream Sunni framework and paradigm, it includes innovative perspectives, selections of alternative options along with critical engagement with the classical *tafsīr* and Islamic scholarship.

The article by Dr. Mykhaylo Yakubovych focuses on two vernacular Qur'ān commentaries by Azerbaijani scholars: *Kashf al-Ḥaqā'iq 'an Nukat al-Ayāt wa'l-Daqā'iq* (1904–1905) by Mīr Muḥammad Karīm al-Bākuwī and *al-Bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (1908) by Muḥammad Mawlā Zādah al-Shakawī. After contextualising both works, Yakubovych analyses the major characteristic features, sources and styles of these two commentaries on the Qur'ān written in the Azerbaijani language along with their receptions and legacy. He highlights the impact of these two early 20th century *tafsīr* on modern-day Azerbaijani Islamic education and scholarship has remained significant. Their influence can be recognised in everything from Qur'ānic studies courses in the current curricula of theological colleges to the most recent translations of the Qur'ān in Azerbaijan and beyond despite many dramatic changes brought about by Soviet policies between 1920 and 1991.

In the last three articles, the special issue pays specific attention to *tafsīr* scholarship in the Indian subcontinent.

In his article, Kamil Zia Uddin examines the Ḥanafī Indian subcontinent contribution to the field of *tafsīr*, focusing on Aḥmad b. Abū Sa'īd al-Junfūrī (d. 1717), more commonly known as Mullā Jīwan, and his juristic exegesis of the Qur'ān, titled *al-Tafsīrāt al-Ahmadiyyah fī bayān al-āyāt al-shar'īyyah* (Aḥmad's Exegeses in Explaining Legal Verses). This work is the first complete juristic exegesis written in the subcontinent. Mullā Jīwan is most known for his commentary on Abū al-Barakāt al-Nasafī's (d. 1311) text on the principles of jurisprudence, *al-Manār*, titled *Nūr al-anwār sharh al-manār*, and Jīwan's juristic exegesis has not received much scholarly attention. Throughout the article, Uddin presents the methodology, sources and characteristic features of Mullā Jīwan's juristic exegesis along with his analysis of examples from selected parts of the *tafsīr* in several fields of Islamic traditions such as theology, Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic legal theories. Accessible case studies presented in the article are helpful for readers to engage with Mullā Jīwan's style. The introduction, which provides an overview of the history of *tafsīr* in the subcontinent, will be of great benefit to readers of AJIS who may know little about the Muslim history of India. An article focusing on juristic exegesis of the Qur'ān as a type of *tafsīr* is of particular significance, which may increase scholarly interest in studying *tafsīr al-fuqahā'* (Exegesis of Muslim Jurists) literature.

The next article by Dr. M. Yaseen Gada focuses on Mawlānā Āzād's *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* and Mawlānā Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* and makes a comparative analysis of selected

Qur'ānic chapters in both works. The article examines chapters 9 (*Sūrah al-Tawbah*) and 18 (*Sūrah Al-Kahf*) of the Qur'ān, also exploring the exegetes' approach to Prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) and their stand on Islamic law (*fiqh*) while interpreting the Qur'ān. Gada argues that Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* bears many imprints and influences of *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, and Mawdūdī was highly influenced by Āzād. Moreover, while *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* particularly views the Qur'ān through a political prism, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* has little interest in such perspectives. Also, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* more often relies on *ḥadīth* literature and traditional *fiqh* sources as compared with *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*. The author emphasises Mawlānā Āzād's influence on Mawdūdī's exegesis while having different perspectives regarding Qur'ānic exegesis.

The final article by Owais Manzoor Dar focuses on Q. 4:59 with special reference to two modern South Asian Urdu *tafsīr*, Muhammad Shafī's (d. 1976) *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān* and Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdūdī's (d. 1979) *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*. Dar analyses the notion of *ulū al-amr* (those in authority) and 'obedience to political authority' in this context via some pre-modern exegetical discourses and compares them with Shafī's and Mawdūdī's *tafsīr*. The article also addresses some major issues, such as the extent to which *tafsīr* literature has been influenced by different theological traditions, political and sectarian interests. Dar concludes that the meaning of *ulū al-amr* (those in authority) transformed historically according to the social and political changes. Muhammad Shafī's connection with the Hanafī Deobandī tradition allows him to prove the necessary obedience to *ulū al-amr* when it refers to Muslim jurists. For Mawdūdī, Q. 4:59 is the basis of the entire religious, social and political structure of Islam and the first clause of an Islamic state. Thus, Mawdūdī's primary focus is on its political implications and this shows the political influence on his exegesis.

The seven articles in this issue of AJIS demonstrate the richness of resources in Qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsīr al-Qur'ān*) produced outside the Arabic-speaking world in Anatolia, the Persianate regions, the Caucasus and the Indian subcontinent.