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With the Holy Qur'an

The infallible imams of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) paid excessive attention to the interpretation (tafsir) of the Holy Qur'an. Each one of them had a school of tafsir, and they were definitely the most aware of the contents of the Qur'an and all its sciences. The master of the pure progeny, Imam Ali (a.s.) was, among all the Prophet's companions, the most aware of the facts and minute details of the Qur'an, its muhkam (clear) verses and mutashabih (ambiguous) verses, and he knew when and where each verse was revealed.

As for Imam Abu Muhammad al-Hasan al-Askari (a.s.), he was one of the masters of interpreters. A special tafsir known as "tafsir Imam al-Askari" was transmitted from him. Here we mention in brief some holy verses that the imam had interpreted:

1. Abu Hashim al-Ja'fari said, 'Once, I was with Abu Muhammad (a.s.) and asked him about this saying of Allah: (*Then We gave the Book for an inheritance to those whom We chose from among Our servants; but of them is he who wrongs himself, and of them is he who takes a middle course, and of them is he who is foremost in deeds of goodness by Allah's permission*).1 He said, 'It has been revealed about the progeny of Muhammad (a.s.). One, who wrongs himself, is the one who does not acknowledge the imam, and one who takes a middle course is the one who acknowledges the imam, and one who is foremost in deeds of goodness by Allah's permission is the imam.'

My eyes shed tears and I thought to myself of what Allah had given to the progeny of Muhammad (a.s.). The imam looked at me and said, 'How great is that which your self told you about the great importance of the progeny of Muhammad! Thank Allah for He has made you love them! You shall be called with them on the Day of Resurrection when every human being shall be called with his imam. Be delighted Abu Hashim! You are in good state.'2

2. Muhammad bin Salih al-Armani asked Imam Abu Muhammad (a.s.) about this verse (*Allah effaces and establishes what He pleases, and with Him is the basis of the Book*)3 and he replied, 'Does Allah efface but what has been established, and does He establish but what has been not existent?...The Almighty is far above all things. He is Aware of all things before their existence, the Creator when there was no creation, the Reckoner.' Muhammad bin Salih said to the imam, 'I bear witness that you are the

authority of Allah and His guardian, and you are on the true path of Imam Ameerul Mu'minin.'4

3. Muhammad bin Salih al-Armani asked Imam Abu Muhammad (a.s.) about this saying of Allah (*Allah's is the command before and after*)5 and the imam said, 'The command is His before He issues it, and the command is His after He commands as He wills.' I said to myself, 'This is the saying of Allah (*Surely His is the creation and the command; blessed is Allah, the Lord of the worlds*).6' The imam looked at me, smiled, and then said, '(*His is the creation and the command; blessed is Allah, the Lord of the worlds*).'7

4. Abu Hashim said, 'I was with Abu Muhammad (a.s.) when ibn Salih al-Armani asked him about this verse, (*And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their backs, their descendants, and made them bear witness against their own souls: Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes, we bear witness*).8 Abu Muhammad (a.s.) said, 'The knowing was proved and they forgot that situation, but they will remember it, and without that no one would know who his creator and provider is.'

I was astonished with myself at the great favors Allah had endowed His guardian (Imam Abu Muhammad) with and the great task He had entrusted him with. Abu Muhammad turned to me and said, 'O Abu Hashim, the matter is greater and more astonishing than what you have been astonished at. What do you think about some people whom whoever acknowledges, acknowledges Allah, and whoever denies, denies Allah? There is no believer that does not believe in them and is not certain in knowing them.'9

5. Sufyan bin Muhammad as-Sayfi said, 'I wrote to Abu Muhammad (a.s.) asking him about the "waleejah" (friend or protector) mentioned in this saying of Allah, (*and take none for friends and protectors except Allah, His Messenger, and the believers*).10 I said with myself: 'Whom does he think the "believers" are here?'

His reply came to me saying, 'The "waleejah" are those who are proper for the "guardianship". Your self (*nafs*) spoke to you asking who were meant by the "believers" in this verse. They are the imams who believe in Allah, and namely we are those "believers".'

The Tafsir Ascribed To Him

The tafsir called Tafsir al-Askari was ascribed to Imam Abu Muhammad al-Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) but suspicions were aroused about it; some proved it was his and some others denied that. Here we should have a stop to ponder on it.

Those Who Depended On This Tafsir

Some of the great *'Ulama'* of the Twelver Shi'a depended on this tafsir and believed certainly it was Imam Abu Muhammad's tafsir. The following are the names of some of those *'Ulama'*:

1. Shaikh as-Saduq11

2. Shaikh at-Tabarsi[12]

3. Al-Muhaqqiq al-Kurki[13]

4. The Second Martyr[14]

5. Muhammad Taqiy al-Majlisi[15]

6. Ibn Shahrashub[16]

7. Al-Muhaqqiq Agha Buzurgh[17]

These great men did not suspect that this tafsir was falsely ascribed to Imam al-Askari and believed it was really his.

The Sanadof This Tafsir

The sanad[18] of this tafsir was mentioned in the beginning of the book (Tafsir al-Askari) as the following:

Muhammad bin Ali bin Muhammad bin Ja'far bin Daqqaq said,

"The two jurisprudent sheikhs Abul Hasan Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Ali bin al-Hasan bin Shathan and Abu Muhammad Ja'far bin Muhammad bin Ali al-Qummi told me from Abul Hasan Muhammad bin al-Qassim al-Astrabadi the interpreter and preacher that Abu Ya'qub Yusuf bin Muhammad bin Ziyad and Abul Hasan Ali bin Muhammad bin Sayyar, who were from the Twelver Shi'a, said, 'Our parents were Twelver Shi'a. The Zaydites were prevailing in Astrabad. We were under the rule of al-Hasan bin Zayd al-Alawi called as ad-Da'iy ilal-Haqq.[19]

He was the imam of the Zaydites. He often listened to them (the Zaydites) and killed people according to their slanders. We feared for ourselves, and so we resorted with our families to Imam Abu Muhammad al-Hasan bin Ali bin Muhammad the father of al-Qa'im (Imam al-Mahdi) (peace be on him).

We asked permission to visit the imam. When he saw us, he said, 'Welcome to the two comers to us, and resorters to our protection. Allah has accepted your efforts, calmed your fear, and relieved you from your enemies. Go (back) and feel safe about yourselves and properties!' We were astonished at his saying, though we did not doubt the truthfulness of his speech. We said, 'O Imam, what do you order us to do on our way until we get to the country that we had got out of? How shall we enter that country which we had fled from, and the ruler searched for us and his threatening against us was severe?'

He (peace be on him) said, 'Leave your these two sons with me and I will teach them the knowledge that Allah will honor them with. As for you, do not pay attention to the slanderers nor to the threat of the ruler, because Allah the Almighty will end it with happiness and bring them to your intercession with him whom you had run away from...'

Abu Ya'qub and Abul Hasan said, 'They (their fathers) obeyed what they were ordered of and left, but they left us there. We often visited him (the imam) and he met us with the kindness of fathers and close relatives. One day, he said to us, 'If the news of the satisfaction of your fathers and the disgrace of their enemies by Allah comes to you and my promise to them comes true, I shall thank Allah by teaching you the interpretation of the Qur'an and some traditions of Muhammad's progeny (a.s.) so that Allah will exalt you.'

We became delighted at that and said, 'O son of the messenger of Allah, then we shall learn all sciences and meanings of the Qur'an.'

He said, 'No! (Imam) as-Sadiq taught some of his companions what I want to teach you.'

They became delighted and said, 'O son of the messenger of Allah, you have had all knowledge of the Qur'an.'

He said, 'I have had much good, and have been granted great virtue, but nevertheless it is less than the least part of the Qur'an's knowledge. Allah the Almighty says, (*Say: Though the sea became ink for the Words of my Lord, verily the sea would be used up before the words of my Lord were exhausted, even though We brought the like thereof to help*),20 and (*And if all the trees in the earth were pens, and the sea, with seven more seas to help it,* (*were ink*)*, the words of Allah could not be exhausted*).21 This is the knowledge and meanings of the Qur'an and the wonders it has. What amount do you think I have taken from all this Qur'an?'

We said, 'But even this amount that you have taken, Allah has preferred you by it to all those who do not possess the like of your knowledge, and do not understand like your understanding.'

We did not leave him until a messenger came to us from our fathers with a letter saying that al-Hasan bin Zayd al-Alawi killed some man and confiscated his properties after the slander of those Zaydites. Then letters came to him from different countries and villages written by the Zaydites scolding and blaming him and saying that the killed man was the best one of the Zaydites in the Earth and that those few Zaydites who had petitioned against him did so just because of his virtue and wealth. Al-Hasan bin Zayd thanked those people and ordered to cut the noses and ears of those Zaydites (who had petitioned), and some of them were mutilated and others ran away. Al-Hasan bin Zayd felt very sorry and he repented, and paid great monies as charity after he gave back the properties of the killed man to his heirs, and gave them much more than the specified blood money. He asked them to pardon him and they said to him, 'As for the blood money, we exempt you from it, but as for the blood, it is not ours but it is the killed man's blood and Allah is the Judge.' Al-Hasan bin Zayd vowed for the sake of Allah that he would not interfere with the beliefs of people.

It was mentioned in the letter of our fathers that al-Hasan bin Zayd sent to us one of his trusted men with his letter that was sealed with his seal assuring that we would be safe and that our properties would be given back to us, and that he would recompense the harms and losses we had met. We shall go

back to our country according to his promise.

Imam Abu Muhammad (a.s.) said, 'Allah's promise is true.'

On the tenth day, a letter came to us from our fathers saying that al-Hasan bin Zayd had carried out all his promises and permitted us to keep to the great-blessed imam whose promise was true. When the imam knew that, he said, 'This is the time to carry out my promise of teaching you the interpretation of the Qur'an. I have prepared something everyday for you to write down. Keep to me and be mindful of the good luck of happiness that Allah has given you.'

The first thing he dictated to us was traditions about the preference of the Qur'an and of its people, and then he dictated to us the tafsir. We wrote down throughout the period of our staying with him. It was seven years, and every day we wrote down as much as we could...'

Defects

This tafsir was criticized in that it had some defects:

Firstly, it was accused of being weak in its credibility. From the chain of narrators, there was Muhammad bin al-Qassim al-Mufassir al-Astrabadi who was weak. Ibn al-Ghadha'iri said, 'Muhammad bin al-Qassim al-Mufassir al-Astrabadi was weak and a liar. Abu Ja'far bin Babwayh narrated from him. A tafsir was transmitted from him that he had narrated from two unknown men, one called Yusuf bin Muhammad bin Ziyad and the other was Ali bin Muhammad bin Yasar, from their father from Abul Hasan the Third (Imam al-Hadi) (a.s.), and the tafsir was written down by Sahl ad-Dibaji from his father.'[22]

What was mentioned by al-Ghadha'iri can be refuted in some ways: first, he mentioned that this tafsir was narrated by Yusuf bin Muhammad bin Ziyad and Ali bin Muhammad bin Yasar from their father. This is a mistake because they did not narrate it from their father, but they narrated it without an intermediary from Imam Abu Muhammad (a.s.). Second, Ibn al-Ghadha'iri ascribed this tafsir to Abul Hasan the Third (a.s.) whereas it was ascribed to Imam Abu Muhammad al-Askari (a.s.). Third, He said that this tafsir was authored by Sahl ad-Dibaji from his father. This is very odd because Sahl was not mentioned among the chain of narrators of this tafsir. Anyhow, what al-Ghadha'iry mentioned in weakening this man cannot be depended on.

Sayyid al-Khu'i said, 'No one of the past scholars mentioned the reliability of Muhammad bin al-Qassim. Even Sheikh as-Saduq, who mentioned many traditions from him without an intermediary, did not mention that he was weak... The right thing is that this man was an unknown, whose reliability nor weakness was proven,[23] and therefore one cannot depend on his narrations.

In addition, al-Mufassir al-Astrabadi narrated this tafsir from Yusuf bin Muhammad bin Ziyad and Ali bin Muhammad bin Yasar who both were unknown and unreliable in their narrations from Imam Abu Muhammad (a.s.), as Sayyid al-Khu'i says.[24]

Second, this tafsir is weak and full of defects which means that it is not true to ascribe it to Imam al-Askari (a.s.), and whoever looks into it thinks with no doubt that it was falsely ascribed to the imam, Sayyid al-Khu'i says.

Third, Imam Abu Muhammad (a.s.) was surrounded by a large number of intelligence officers, security forces, and policemen of the Abbasid government that prevented the Shi'a from associating with him, so how could these two persons frequent him for seven years without being prevented from visiting him?

Fourth, the care of the imam for these two men and his asking their fathers to leave them with him to teach them the knowledge that Allah would honor them with, as mentioned in the beginning of the book, though they were unknown, would be doubted somehow. Would it not be better for the imam to favor the great *'Ulama'* and jurisprudents of his Shi'a with this honor?

Anyhow, it is certain that this tafsir was not Imam Abu Muhammad's but it was fabricated and ascribed to him. In addition to the defects it has, it is not eloquent in many of its chapters, and of course, this does not fit the imam who had been endowed with wisdom and eloquence, and he was the most eloquent man in his time. So how could this tafsir, which had no feature of eloquence, be ascribed to this great imam? Besides that, it has some traditions that have excessiveness, as I think, and this was too far from the imam's (a.s.) character.

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1. Qur'an, 35:32.
2. Ath-Thaqib fil-Manaqib by al-Jirjani, p.241-242.
3. Qur'an, 13:39.
4. Ath-Thaqib fil-Manaqib by al-Jirjani, p.242, Kashf al-Ghummah, vol.3 p.209.
5. Qur'an, 30:4.
6. Qur'an, 7:54.
7. Kashf al-Ghummah, vol.3 p.210.
8. Qur'an, 7:172.
9. Kashf al-Ghummah, vol.3 p.210.
10. Qur'an, 9:16.
11. Man La Yahdhuruhu al-Faqih.
12. Al-Ihtijaj.
13. He permitted this tafsir for Safiyuddeen.
14. Al-Munyah.
15. Sharh al-Mashyakhah.
16. Al-Manaqib.
17. Ath-Tharee'ah, vol.4 p.285.
18. Sanad is the chain of authorities or narrators as an essential part of the transmission of a tradition.
19. Ibn an-Nadeem said in al-Fihrist p.274 that al-Hasan bin Zayd ruled in Tabaristan in 250AH and died in 270AH.
20. Qur'an, 18:109.
21. Qur'an, 31:27.
22. Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith, vol.17 p.173.
23. Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith, vol.17, p.174.
24. Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith, vol.12 p.159.

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