

A STUDY OF BINT AL-SHATP'S EXEGESIS

by

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**A Thesis Submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in Islamic Studies**

**Institute of Islamic Studies
McGill University
Montreal**

May, 1992

DEDICATION

**to my parents,
my wife and my children.**



'A'ishah 'Abd al-Rahman (Bint al-Shāṭi')

ABSTRACT

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Besides providing a biographical sketch of Bint al-Shāṭi', this thesis analyzes her intellectual growth and provides the necessary information about her works relating to Qur'ānic studies. The study also surveys al-Khulī's method of Qur'ānic exegesis and Bint al-Shāṭi's attempts to apply it to her own works. Our analysis focuses on her works on Qur'ānic studies such as al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, Maqāl fī al-Insān and al-I'jāz al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān wa Masā'il Ibn al-Azraq. The distinguishing features of her philological and thematic approach are discussed and the main results obtained by the practical application of this method are shown to bring refreshing insights into the meaning of the Qur'ān.

RÉSUMÉ

Auteur: Muḥammad Amīn.
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En plus de fournir une esquisse biographique de Bint al-Shāṭi', cette thèse analyse son évolution intellectuelle et fournit de l'information sur ses oeuvres traitant d'études qur'āniques. De même, cette étude brosse un tableau de la méthode d'exégèse qur'ānique utilisée par al-Khūli et les efforts développés par Bint al-Shāṭi' pour l'appliquer à son oeuvre. Notre analyse est centrée sur ses oeuvres d'études qur'āniques tels al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, Maqāl fī al-Insān et al-I'jāz al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān wa Masā'il Ibn al-Azraq. Les caractéristiques spécifiques de son approche philologique et thématique sont discutées, et les principaux résultats obtenus par l'application de cette méthode révèlent un apport renouvelé pour la pénétration du sens qur'ānique.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to the Faculty of Islamic Law (Sharī'ah), State Institute for Islamic Studies of Antasari, Banjarmasin, Indonesia for allowing me to take a two-year leave of absence to study at the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University. My academic pursuits here have exposed me to new insights into the study of Islam, and especially the study of the exegesis of the Qur'ān

I would like also to express my deep gratitude to my thesis supervisor Dr. Issa J. Boullata for his willingness to undertake the arduous task of guiding me in my research into Bint al-Shāṭi's ideas with respect to Qur'ānic exegesis. It was Dr. Boullata's stimulating graduate seminar that awakened in me an interest in pursuing a study on Qur'ānic exegesis. I am very grateful to him for his patience, acute observations and valuable criticism which have resulted in improvements in my thesis. Due to his encouragement and endless efforts, the final product of this thesis bears no resemblance to its earlier drafts.

Many people, whether directly or indirectly, have been very helpful in facilitating the completion of this thesis. The list is endless, but I would especially like to thank the staff of the Canadian Bureau for International Education, especially its Project Manager Cynthia Taha, as well as the staff of the McGill Indonesia

IAIN Development Project, particularly its Director Dr. Charles J. Adams, its former Director Dr. Donald P. Little, its Co-ordinator Dr. Rebecca B. Aiken, and Drs. Zaini Muchtarom, MA, of the Indonesian Ministry of religious Affairs. My appreciation also goes to the staff of Islamic Studies Library, especially Ms. Salwa Ferahian and Mr. Adam Gacek, Head Librarian, for their invaluable help in providing the necessary research materials. Finally, my thanks go to my colleagues and friends, especially Steve Millier, Floyd Mackay and Dr. Abdin Chande for reading and editing the first draft of this study, and to Roxanne Marcotte for translating the abstract of this thesis into French.

My everlasting gratitude goes to my parents, my wife, Dra. Rabiatal Aslamiah and my children for their encouragement and support during my period of study. This thesis is dedicated to them as an expression of my appreciation for their devotion, patience and infinite forbearance.

TABLE OF TRANSLITERATION

ا	a.	ب	= b.
ت	t.	ث	= th.
ج	j.	ح	= h.
خ	= kh.	د	= d.
ذ	= dh.	ر	= r.
ز	= z.	س	= s.
ش	= sh.	ص	= ṣ.
ض	= ḍ.	ط	= ṭ.
ظ	= ḏ.	ع	= ʿ.
غ	= gh.	ف	= f.
ق	= q.	ك	= k.
ل	= l.	م	= m.
ن	= n.	و	= w.
هـ	= h.	ء	= ʾ.
ي	= y.		

- long: اُوَ اِيْ اُ = ā, = ī, = ū.

- ta' marbūṭah: ة = ah, in idāfah = at

INTRODUCTION

Exegesis of the Qur'ān is one of the most important religious sciences for Muslims. Throughout the course of their history, Muslims have shown a keen interest in studying the Qur'ān and writing commentaries on it. Since Muslim commentators have tended to represent the dominant intellectual and socio-cultural trends of their times, the history of the exegesis of the Qur'ān has truly become a mirror of the intellectual history of Muslims.

In the history of exegesis, the philological approach is one of the methods applied in interpreting the Qur'ān. The development of philology and lexicography gave rise to certain developments in tafsīr, since the time of the Tābi'ūn. Some scholars had made philology and lexicography their field of study. The words and phrases in the Qur'ān and their structure became of particular importance to the understanding of the text. Old Arabian poetry and classical usage were brought into this study; they were cited to support the explanation of selected passages. Leading in this field was Abū 'Ubaydah (d. 824 A.D.), a philologist in Kūfah, who had taken as his field of studies everything that had to deal with the history and culture of the Arabs; he collected and put together cultural and linguistic items of the same or similar kind. He composed several philological works on the Qur'ān and

ḥadīth. His first work on the Qur'ān, Majāz al-Qur'ān,¹ is said to have been the first known work on tafsīr.² This work consists of brief notes on the meaning of selected words and phrases in the order of sūrahs. Among Abū 'Ubaydah's contemporaries who were also engaged in this aspect of tafsīr were Quṭrub (d. 821 A.D.), al-Farrā' (d. 822 A.D.), al-Kisā'ī (d. 805 A.D.), Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 786 A.D.), al-Mufaḍḍal al-Dabbī (d. 786 A.D.) and Khalaf al-Nahwī (d. 796 A.D.), each of whom wrote a work entitled Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān.³

It is said that it was al-Rāghib who first endeavoured to compile a Qur'ānic dictionary to explain the meaning of the words and their places of occurrence in the text of the Qur'ān. He also tried to shed light on the relationship between words by focusing on one entry in the various instances in which it is found therein. He focused therefore on the semantic aspect of the Qur'ān.

The later emergence of the scientific revolution of the 19th century in the West and its subsequent implantation

¹ Abū 'Ubaydah, Majāz al-Qur'ān: 'āradah bi-usūlih wa 'allaq 'alayh Muḥammad Fu'ād Sazgīn (Miṣr: Khanjī, 1954-1962), 2 vols.

² H.A.R. Gibb, "Abū 'Ubayda." The Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), vol. I, p. 158.

³ Ahmad Amīn, Duhā al-Islam (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'līf wa al-Tarjamah wa 'al-Nashr, 1952), vol. II, p. 146. Abū 'Ubaydah also wrote another work, Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān. Both of these works as well as that of al-Farrā' were printed in Cairo, 1954 and 1955 respectively.

in the East highlighted the beginning of the modern era. This revolution was not limited only to scientific disciplines in general, but extended to the domain of religion and scripture. Western scholars attempted to make a new and fresh interpretation of religion and scripture. They tried to establish a general principle of interpretation. One of the most important contributions of those who participated in this revolution was the belief that the authority of interpretation should not only be in the hands of men of religion, but might also be exercised by other scholars.

In the East, the movement for reform in religion was first championed by Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905 A.D.), who called on Muslims to put aside their tradition and rely on the authority of the Qur'ān. He tried to make a fresh interpretation of the Qur'ān with emphasis on the social aspect of its teachings. His ideas were spread by his students and others who had come in contact with him. Among those who championed the cause of reform and called for a fresh interpretation of the Qur'ān was Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1966 A.D.). He established a new approach to interpretation and wrote a book on this subject entitled Manāhiḡ Tajdīd fī al-Naḥw wa al-Balāghah wa al-Tafsīr wa al-Adab.⁴ Unfortunately, he did not leave any complete work on tafsīr, except for a few articles that originated

⁴ Cairo: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1961.

as Cairo radio broadcasts which were compiled in one book entitled Min Hady al-Qur'ān.⁵

It was Bint al-Shāṭi', of all his students, who was the first to implement his methodology through a literary study of the Qur'ān. She wrote several books relating to Qur'ānic studies. Some of them, such as al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm⁶ and Maqāl fī al-Insān,⁷ and al-I'jāz al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān,⁸ are studied in this thesis.

This thesis focuses on Bint al-Shāṭi''s exegesis of the Qur'ān. The first chapter outlines the life of Bint al-Shāṭi', showing the influences on her early life, her intellectual growth and her works. The major source for this chapter is her autobiography, 'Alā al-Jisr, Bayn al-Hayāh wa al-Mawt: Sīrah Dhātiyyah'.⁹ The second chapter traces the methodology of her exegesis. The final chapter examines Bint al-Shāṭi''s exegesis by focusing on those works of hers in which she implements this method. These are al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, Maqāl fī al-Insān and al-I'jāz al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān wa Masā'il

⁵ Published in three series, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1959-1961.

⁶ Published in 2 vols., Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1962-1969.

⁷ Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1969.

⁸ Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1971.

⁹ Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al 'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1986.

Ibn al-Azraq.¹⁰

The last section of the chapter consists of a conclusion which summarizes the distinguishing features of her works and the main results obtained by the practical application of her method.

¹⁰ Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1971.

Chapter One

Bint al-Shāṭi''s background, career and works

This chapter attempts to provide a sketch of certain significant events in Bint al-Shāṭi''s life. The main source for the writing of her biography¹ is her autobiographical work, 'Alā al-Jisr, Bayn al-Hayāh wa al-Mawt: Sirah Dhātiyyah'.² This chapter will discuss three major aspects of her life: the first one is describing her early life and her education; the second, her career as a literary author as well as a scholar who also devoted herself to the study of the holy Qur'ān; and finally, her works, especially those which relate to Qur'ānic studies.

A. Bint al-Shāṭi''s Background

Bint al-Shāṭi', whose real name is 'A'ishah 'Abd al-Rahmān, was born on November 6th, 1913 in Damietta,³ and raised in a religious environment and a conservative home.

Bint al-Shāṭi''s father, 'Abd al-Rahmān, who was also a

¹ For a biographical analysis, see C.Kooij, "Bint al-Shāṭi': A Suitable Case for Biography?" in Ibrahim A. El-Šheikh, C. Aart van de Koppel and Rudolph Peters, The Challenge of the Middle East (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, Institute for Modern Near Eastern Studies, 1982), pp. 67-72.

² Bint al-Shāṭi', 'Alā al-Jisr (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah li al-Kitāb, 1986).

³ Damietta is a harbour city in one of the northern Provinces in Egypt located along the eastern branch of the Nile about 15 km from the Mediterranean.

member of the Ṣufī brotherhoods, was a teacher at a theological school in Damietta and had a rather conservative outlook on religious matters. Accordingly, for him, a girl who has reached the age of adolescence should stay at home and continue her religious studies there.

Bint al-Shāṭi's father was in actual fact not originally from Damietta. He was from a small village called Shubrā Bakhūm, in Manūfiyyah. After completing his education at Azhar University in Cairo, he was appointed to be a teacher in the elementary school in Damietta.⁴ There, he met and married the grand-daughter (Bint al-Shāṭi's mother) of an Azhar-educated shaykh, al-Shaykh Ibrāhīm Damhūjī al-Kabīr.⁵

As a little girl, Bint al-Shāṭi' had almost no time to play with other girls of her age, for her father used to take her with him to his room in the house or to his office in Jāmi' al-Baḥr, which he called a seclusion/study corner, where this little girl often listened to the Qur'ān recited by her father and his friends. Listening to the Qur'ān repeatedly helped her to learn some verses of the Qur'ān by heart, especially the short sūrahs.⁶

⁴ See 'Alā al-Jisr, p.22.

⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

⁶ Ibid., p. 24.

In the summer of 1918 at the age of five, Bint al-Shāṭi' began to study writing and reading with Shaykh Mursī in Shubrā Bakhūm, her father's village.⁷ In the following seasons, fall and winter, her father taught her in Damietta Arabic grammar and Islamic beliefs and made her memorize what he taught her.⁸ In addition to her fall and winter classes, she also continued the summer session with Shaykh Mursī until she completed the task of memorizing the whole Qur'ān.⁹

In 1920, in response to her father's question as to why she did not look happy, Bint al-Shāṭi' first expressed her frank desire to go to formal school. But she received a very firm rejection from her father, who said, "There is no way for the daughters of Shaykhs to go to a vicious and character-spoiling [secular] school; rather they should study at their homes." Her father then asked her to read verses 32-34 of Sūrat al-Aḥzāb.¹⁰ Thus, her father considered that a non-Islamic teaching should be avoided.

Out of sympathy for her daughter's feelings after her husband had rejected her request, Bint al-Shāṭi''s mother complained to her grandfather, Shaykh Ibrāhīm Damhūjī about the matter. After having a discussion with Bint al-

⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

⁹ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

Shāṭi''s great-grandfather, her father eventually approved his daughter's decision to go to school, with certain conditions.¹¹

Having completed her education in elementary school, obtaining excellent marks, Bint al-Shāṭi' again asked for her great-grandfather's help in persuading her father to permit her to pursue her education to an advanced level. So her great-grandfather discussed the problem with Bint al-Shāṭi''s father, but unfortunately her father did not agree with him. Bint al-Shāṭi''s great-grandfather tried to meet Bint al-Shāṭi''s father's friends in Jāmi' al-Bahr asking for their help to persuade Bint al-Shāṭi''s father, but Bint al-Shāṭi''s father did not change his decision, even after having a quarrel with Bint al-Shāṭi''s great-grandfather. So Bint al-Shāṭi''s great-grandfather went out angrily and crossed the street without looking around. Suddenly a car passed and hit him and he broke his leg. When the school registration was open, Bint al-Shāṭi''s great-grandfather persisted in his endeavour to send her to school.¹²

After completing three years in junior high school, Bint al-Shāṭi' intended to continue her education at a teachers' school, but unfortunately no school existed in Damietta beyond junior school at that time, and besides,

¹¹ Ibid., p. 35.

¹² Ibid., pp. 41-42.

she had already reached the age of thirteen, which meant that it was time for her as a girl to stay at home, according to her father's religious opinion. Thus, it was very difficult for her to continue her studies. Nevertheless, with her mother's support, Bint al-Shāṭi' went to al-Manṣūrah to write the admission test for teachers' school, when her father was away on a ten-day journey.¹³

When Bint al-Shāṭi' did not receive any letter of acceptance from the teachers' school, while all of her friends who had taken the same test had received a letter of acceptance, she wrote to the school asking about her case. Then she received a very shocking letter informing her that her admission file had been withdrawn by her father. She was very upset and went on a hunger strike. All the family and her father's friends feared for her health. So they exaggerated the situation to her father and asked him to send the file back. Her father sent a letter (it later turned out to be not a letter but just a blank paper) to that school. Finally, she was very lucky because her mother got approval for Bint al-Shāṭi' to continue her studies from her husband's authoritative master, al-Shaykh Manṣūr Ubayy Haykal al-Sharqāwī.¹⁴

¹³ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 46-47.

Bint al-Shāṭi' studied in a teachers' school in Tanṭa only one year and soon after finishing the third year examination, she went home and stopped going to school, because her great-grandfather had died and her father again coerced her to remain at home with the family.¹⁵ Bint al-Shāṭi' and her mother felt that they had lost a very important person who had strongly encouraged and helped her to pursue her studies. Therefore, the only way for her to fulfill her strong desire to pursue further studies was to borrow the required books for the third year of the teachers' school from her friends and to prepare for the qualifying examination.¹⁶

After passing the qualifying examination in the teachers' school and achieving the first rank among 130 participants, she became a teacher in al-Manṣūrah. Besides teaching, Bint al-Shāṭi' spent much of her time reading various books in preparation for a certification test. Facing many problems in applying for the certification test, Bint al-Shāṭi' then returned to junior high school in the public school system where she was permitted to follow the qualifying test at all levels before university.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 67-68.

In 1932, Bint al-Shāṭi' completed her education in senior high school (public school) without attending classes and only one year after she had obtained her junior high school certificate. Two years later, in 1934, she received her baccalaureat certificate in literature. In 1939, she obtained her Licence (B.A.) degree in Arabic language and literature at Fuad I University of Cairo, and subsequently received her Master's degree in the same field of study in 1941. Finally, in 1950, she was awarded a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Arabic language and literature at the same university.¹⁸ Almost all levels of her education were completed while she continued to perform her main tasks of teaching and serving as a magazine and newspaper editor.

B. Bint al-Shāṭi''s Interest in Qur'ānic Exegesis

The holy Qur'ān has been very important in Bint al-Shāṭi''s life, because her childhood was spent in a Ṣufī environment, where one of the major rituals was reciting the Qur'ān. One night, at the age of eight or nine, Bint al-Shāṭi' experienced a very influential dream:

When I went to bed that night, I saw myself sitting in the study corner of my bedroom. All of a sudden, there was an angel, descending from heaven near my window. He gave me a green cover, and then flew back to heaven.

¹⁸ Issa J. Boullata, "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis: a study of Bint al-Shāṭi''s method," The Muslim World, 64 (1974), p. 103. In all three of her academic degrees (licentiate, master's and doctoral), she was awarded excellent grades.

When I opened the cover I found a copy of the eminent volume, mushaf sharīf (i.e. the Qur'ān), and never before had I cast an eye on such magnificence and brilliance.¹⁹

From that time onwards, she became very active in following her father's and his friends' activities in Jāmi' al-Baḥr in their Ṣufī session.

Bint al-Shāṭi' seems to have become interested in the exegesis of the Qur'ān ever since the first time she attended the course on Qur'ānic exegesis given at the University of Cairo by Professor Amīn al-Khūlī (later her husband) on November 6, 1936.²⁰ The first volume of her first work on Qur'ānic exegesis, entitled al-Taṭsir al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, was published in 1962. The second and final volume of the same work was published in 1969, and was followed by many other works in the field of Qur'ānic studies.

C. Bint al-Shāṭi''s Career

As a writer, Bint al-Shāṭi''s interest in writing began with her first contact with newspapers while still in junior high school, for she used to buy a newspaper on a regular basis for her great-grandfather and she would also help him to write articles by taking dictation from him. Sometimes she was also asked by him to improve the style

¹⁹ See 'Alā al-Jisr, p. 39.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 131.

of his articles. From that time onwards, she became keenly interested in journalism and writing. At the end of 1932 or in early 1933, Bint al-Shāṭi' tried to realize her interest in writing by sending her first poem to Majallat al-Nahḍah al-Nisā'iyyah, "Women's Awakening Magazine". After her poem was accepted and published, she attempted to have some articles published in the same magazine.²¹

From October 1933, she was entrusted with the responsibilities of both the editor-in-chief and the managing editor for Majallat al-Nahḍah al-Nisā'iyyah, and she was also given the honor of writing the editorial of that magazine on behalf of the publisher.²² This provided her an opportunity to explore her ability and talent in writing. Besides working on that magazine, Bint al-Shāṭi' also sent some short stories to daily newspapers and al-Hilāl journal.²³ Realizing that this journal and the daily newspapers where she used to send her short stories and articles would be widely distributed and might even reach her village, Bint al-Shāṭi' preferred to use a pseudonym Ibnat al-Shāṭi', later to be changed to Bint al-Shāṭi'²⁴ (which means daughter of the beach), in order not to be

²¹ Ibid., p. 78.

²² Ibid., p. 79.

²³ Ibid., p. 80.

²⁴ Tahir Tanāhī, "Bint al-Shāṭi'," al-Hilāl, 59 (August 1951), p. 26.

recognized by her father.²⁵

From 1935-1952, Bint al-Shāṭi' was very active in writing articles for the Egyptian newspaper, al-Ahrām, and she occupied a private office in that newspaper's headquarters in Cairo.

From 1936 on, having spent her childhood in the village or countryside and having witnessed with her own eyes the real living conditions of the peasants, Bint al-Shāṭi' was very much concerned about the social and economic well-being of the rural population. Therefore, Bint al-Shāṭi' began to write articles concerning pressing problems in the countryside and rural areas and urged the government and the big landowners to give serious attention to producers (by which she meant the peasants) as well as to their farms and cattle. In 1936, Bint al-Shāṭi' received a state prize for her article entitled Tarqiyat al-Rīf Ijtimā'īyyan, "Social improvement in the village".²⁶

Bint al-Shāṭi''s first work to be published in book form was al-Rīf al-Miṣrī in 1936. On the whole, she wrote more than sixty monograph publications on the interrelated fields of Islam, Arabic language, literature, social issues and women's emancipation, as well as several hundred articles. In 1950, Bint al-Shāṭi' was given the

²⁵ See 'Alā al-Jisr', p. 80.

²⁶ See Ṭanāhī, p. 28.

Award for Textual Studies by the Academy of the Arabic Language and in 1954 she also received a prize for a short story. In 1960, she became a member of the Higher Council of Arts and Letters in Egypt.

Bint al-Shāṭi' started her professional career as a teacher in an elementary religious school for girls in al-Manṣūrah in about the year 1929.²⁷ Later in 1932, she was transferred to a college for girls by the supervisor of teaching in the Ministry of Education in order to have an opportunity to use a laboratory for learning both English and French. At that college she worked as a clerk.²⁸ Two years later, in 1934, after she had gained her bachelor's degree, she was promoted to be a secretary at that college.²⁹

In 1939, Bint al-Shāṭi' became an assistant lecturer at the University of Cairo. Three years later, in 1942, she became an inspector of Arabic language and literature for the Ministry of Education, and in the same year she was entrusted with the post of literary critic for the al-Ahrām newspaper. From 1950-1957, she served as a lecturer in Arabic in 'Ayn Shams University. From 1957 to 1962, she became an assistant professor of Arabic literature in the same university, and in 1962 she became a professor of

²⁷ See 'Alā al-Jisr, p. 62.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 83.

Arabic literature at the University College for Women. By 1967, Bint al-Shāṭi' had been appointed as a full professor of Arabic language and literature at 'Ayn Shams University. Periodically she was invited to serve as visiting professor at Umm Durmān Islamic University in the Sudan and also as a professor of Qur'ānic studies at Qarawiyyīn University in Morocco.

As a scholar, Bint al-Shāṭi' often attended congresses and conferences. The following are some of the conferences that she attended:

- In 1936, at the age of 23, she was chosen to be a participant in the first conference on Agriculture in Cairo.
- In 1957, she participated in the first conference of Asian and African authors in Tashkent, U.S.S.R. and in the same year she also participated in a conference of Arab culture in Baghdād and The International Congress of Orientalists in Munich, West Germany.
- In 1960, she participated in a conference of Arab authors in Cairo, Kuwait and Baghdād; of African women in Ghana, West Africa; and a Seminar on Arabic Grammar in Cairo.
- In 1961, she participated in an International Seminar on contemporary Arabic literature in Rome.

- In 1962, she participated in a Seminar on family and emigration problems in Cairo.
- In 1963, she participated in a conference of Arab teachers in Algeria.
- In 1964, she attended The Twenty-sixth International Congress of Orientalists in India and gave a presentation at it.
- In 1965, she attended a conference of Arab authors in Baghdad and gave a presentation at it.
- In 1967, she attended the Nadwat 'Ulamā al-Islām in Baghdad and gave a presentation at it.
- In 1968, she attended al-Nadwah al-'Ilmiyyah li-'Usbū' al-Qur'ān at the Islamic University of Umm Durmān and gave a presentation at it.
- In 1969, she participated in a Symposium in honor of the great poet Iqbāl in Pakistan.

D. Bint al-Shāṭi's works

We have already noted that Bint al-Shāṭi' has more than sixty publications in book form to her name and several hundred articles on the interrelated fields of Islam, Arabic language, literature, social issues and women's emancipation. In this chapter we will mention only those of her books which relate to Qur'ānic

studies, while others will be included in the bibliography at the end of this thesis.

- Al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, in two volumes, discusses only fourteen short sūrahs of the Qur'ān taken from juz' 'Ammā, the last of the thirty parts of the Qur'ān. The first volume, which contains seven of those short sūrahs, was published in 1962, and was reprinted in 1966 and 1968. The second volume, which discusses the seven remaining short sūrahs of the Qur'ān, was published in 1969. Both were published by Dār al-Ma'ārif of Cairo, Egypt. These two volumes will be studied in the third chapter.
- Maqāl fī al-Insān, Dirāsah Qur'āniyyah. This book on man, which adopts a philological method regarding a central Islamic topic, was published by Dār al-Ma'ārif of Cairo, Egypt, in 1969. It discusses the concept of man in the Qur'ān and studies his attributes, such as man's grandeur, his greatness, his strength, his weakness and his responsibility towards the trustworthiness of God. In this book, Bint al-Shāṭi' studies how the Qur'ān describes man's creation from the first process to his final destiny. Another important aspect she studies is the concept of intellect in its relation to the concept of free will and predestination in the Qur'ān. This book will be discussed in the third chapter.

- Al-Qur'ān wa-al-Tafsīr al-'Asrī, Hādhā Balāgh li al-Nās. This work, which was written as a response to or refutation of Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd's al-Qur'ān, Muḥāwalah li Fahm 'Asrī li al-Qur'ān, was published by Dār al-Ma'ārif in 1970. In this book, Bint al-Shāṭi' criticizes Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd's so-called "modern exegesis" and his interpretation of the Qur'ān. At the same time, she also responds to Dr. 'Uthmān Amīn, a one-time professor of Islamic philosophy at the University of Cairo, who wrote a carefully phrased letter, which was published in Ṣabāḥ al-Khayr in February 1970, on Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd's exegesis stating, " In my opinion, the Qur'ān was not revealed for the specialists, but rather for all created beings, nazala li al-'alamīn. Ibn 'Abbās, he goes on to argue, the most competent authority of his time, did not have a formal religious schooling, nor special qualifications other than a sound nature." In her response, Bint al-Shāṭi' stated that understanding is different from interpreting, and it has been recognized by scholars that to interpret a certain field of discipline requires specialization in that discipline, and so not everybody is accepted to do interpretation unless qualified.³⁰

- Al-I'jāz al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān wa Masā'il Ibn al-Azraq. This book, which also includes the text of Ibn al-Azraq's Masā'il commonly known under the title :

³⁰ See al-Qur'ān wa al-Tafsīr al-'Asrī, pp. 67-68.

As'ilah wa Ajwibah, was published by Dār al-Ma'arif in 1971. In this book, Bint al-Shāṭi' discusses the position of genuine Arabs towards the rhetorical miracle of the Qur'ān in the time of revelation and makes a methodological attempt to understand their inability to imitate one sūrah of the Qur'ān or even one verse of it, despite the fact that the Qur'ān itself challenges people to do so. In this book, she also elaborates some of the points of her previous works; al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm and Maqāl fī al-Insān concerning particles, phrases and Qur'ānic styles of expression.

- Al-Qur'ān wa Qadāyā al-Insān. This book, which is a combination of Maqāl fī al-Insān and al-Qur'ān wa al-Tafsīr al-'Asrī, with some changes and additions, was published by Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, Beirut, in 1972.
- Al-Shakhsiyyah al-Islāmiyyah. This book, which was originally delivered as a lecture at the Arab University of Beirut, was published by Dār al-Aḥad, Beirut, in 1972. It discusses Islamic personality according to the Qur'ān and the sunnah of the Prophet. In this book, Bint al-Shāṭi' studies how the Qur'ān guides mankind especially Muslims to behave in society as individuals and as members of a community and what attitudes they should have as Muslims towards material and spiritual affairs. Another theme that is also discussed is the concept of jihād and worship in Islam.

Al-Shakhsiyyah al-Islāmiyyah, Dirāsah Qur'āniyyah. This book, which is an extension of her lecture published in 1972, was published by Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, Beirut, in 1973. It was reprinted in 1977.

- Min Asrār al-'Arabiyyah fī al-Bayān al-Qur'anī. This book, which is the text of a lecture delivered at the Arab University of Beirut in 1972, was published by Dār al-Aḥad, Beirut, in 1972. In this book, Bint al-Shāṭi' tries to expound the mystery of the Arabic particles used as prepositions and the mysterious letters at the opening of some sūrah's, as well as words and expressions used in the Qur'ān. She believes that there is no single particle that is unnecessary, and yet some particles were called by some grammarians otiose letters. Each letter has its own function according to Bint al-Shāṭi'. She also discusses the problem of synonyms in the Qur'ān.

- The Subatomic World in the Qur'ān. This book, published by Diwan Press of London, England, in 1980, was written in response to an article about the Big Bang theory. According to Bint al-Shāṭi', the Big Bang theory is contained in the Qur'ān. The only difference is the terminology, while the essence is actually the same. She quotes some verses that refer to this matter.

- Kitābunā al-Akbar. This book was published by the Islamic University of Umm Durmān in 1967.

Bint al-Shāṭi' is still living and resides at 13 Aqam Street, Heliopolis, Egypt.

Chapter Two

Bint al-Shāṭi's Method

It has been mentioned that Bint al-Shāṭi' wrote only two volumes of Tafsīr on fourteen selected short sūrahs from Juz ' Amma, the last of the thirty parts of the Qur'ān, as well as topical Qur'ānic studies on a few other subjects. Although she wrote comparatively little on the Qur'ān, as far as I know she is the first Muslim woman who has ever written Qur'ānic exegesis in the Arab world or even in the Muslim world. In writing these works related to Qur'ānic studies, she sincerely admitted that she implemented the method of her husband,¹ Professor Amīn al-Khūlī (1895-1966).² So before we discuss how Bint al-Shāṭi' exercised that method, it is necessary to examine it as it is presented in his book, Manāhiḥ Tajdīd fī al-Naḥw wa al-Balāghah wa al-Tafsīr wa al-Adab, especially in the section on al-Tafsīr.³ The following section is a

¹ See Bint al-Shāṭi', al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1962), p. 10; Eadem, al-I'jāz al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa Masā'il Ibn al-Azraq (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1971), p. 11; Eadem, Min Asrār al-'Arabiyyah fī al-Bayān al-Qur'ānī (Beirut: Dār al-Aḥad, 1972), pp. 9-10.

² A sketch of Amīn al-Khūlī's life can be found in Anwar al-Jundī, al-Muhāfazah wa al-Tajdīd fī al-Naḥw al-'Arabī al-Mu'āṣir (Cairo: Matba'at al-Risālah, 1961), pp. 718-722; and Kāmil Sa'fān, Amīn al-Khūlī, (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1982).

³ Manāhiḥ Tajdīd (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1961). The section on Tafsīr also appears following the article al-Tafsīr in Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Islāmiyyah (Cairo:

summary of Amīn al-Khūlī's methodology in interpreting the Qur'ān.

A. Amīn al-Khūlī's Manāhiḥ Tajdīd

Amīn al-Khūlī, while a professor of Qur'ānic exegesis at Fuad I University in Cairo, tried to implement a new method for the interpretation of the Qur'ān based on a literary and philological approach. To realize his idea, he wrote a book entitled Manāhiḥ Tajdīd fī al-Nahw wa al-Balāghah wa al-Tafsīr wa al-Adab, especially in the section on al-Tafsīr. Unfortunately, he himself had no chance to implement this method in a form of exegesis, except a few articles delivered on the radio and published in one book entitled Min Hady al-Qur'ān. In his Manāhiḥ Tajdīd, he begins his discussion on Tafsīr by explaining its growth, gradual development and tendencies.⁴ Then he comes to the subject of method in the section entitled al-Tafsīr al-Yawm.

Concerning the goal of exegetical studies, Amīn al-Khūlī, although he is an admirer of 'Abduh, has a different point of view from Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh who held that its first goal was to discover the divine guidance.⁵ Amīn al-Khūlī held that the most important

Maṭba'at al-I'timād, 1933), vol. V, pp. 348-374.

⁴ See Manāhiḥ Tajdīd, pp. 271-301.

⁵ Ibid., p. 302.

goal, among others, was to judge the Qur'ān as the greatest book in the Arabic language, the one which has had the greatest literary influence, for it is the book that has eternalized the Arabic language and has become its source of pride.⁶

Al-Khūlī goes on to argue that the literary quality of the Qur'ān is recognized by all Arabs, no matter what their religions and tendencies, as long as they are conscious of their Arabness. This is also recognized by non-Arabs who have a historical relation to the Arabs and have accepted Islam as their religion. And even those who have not accepted Islam as their religion but have mixed and assimilated with Arabs and taken the Arabic language as their own, consider the Qur'ān as one of the literary principles of their life, because it occupies an important place in their literary studies.⁷

This literary study of the Qur'ān is something that should be done first in recognition of the greatness of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān is a sacred Arabic literary text, no matter whether the people acknowledge it or not. So this literary study of the Qur'ān is considered by Amīn al-Khūlī to be of primary importance. Without using this method of study, one cannot gain an exact understanding of

⁶ Ibid., p. 303.

⁷ Ibid.

the Qur'ān.⁸ Thus, any modern exegesis, according to Amin al-Khulī, should consist of a literary study, which has the right method as well as the correct goals and the necessary coordination.⁹

After setting forth the first goal of exegetical studies, Amīn al-Khulī draws attention to the importance of the Qur'ān's arrangement (tartīb al-Qur'ān) for interpreting the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān is not arranged in chronological order or according to a sequence of single topics or issues. Each sūrah covers different subjects and problems, which might also be found in many other sūrahs. Neither is the Qur'an compiled in any scientific order, such as in historical or theological books, nor even in the same order as other divine scriptures.¹⁰ Since the Qur'ān was arranged neither in chronological order nor in a sequence of unitary topics, a commentator who intends to write Qur'ān exegesis has to take into consideration all verses in which the Qur'ān talks about a subject, and not limit himself to a single sūrah or a single part of the Qur'ān, neglecting other sūrahs whose verses discuss the same topic.

Al-Khulī believes that one cannot reach a proper and

⁸ Ibid., p. 304.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 305.

correct understanding of one topic in the Qur'ān, if he just interprets it verse by verse or sūrah by sūrah. He requires a careful study by collecting all verses and sūrahs on the topic to be studied. In Qur'ān 2 : 30-39 we read about Adam; but this story cannot be understood correctly without being explained by what the Qur'ān says about Adam in 7: 10-33, 15: 28-42, or 18: 48. When the Qur'ān talks about believers and their characteristics in Sūrat al-Baqarah, this ought to be explained by Sūrat al-Mu'minūn.¹¹

Thus, the order of the Qur'ān is not based on the unity of any one topic; it ignores chronology and discusses subjects in different contexts and places. This obviously requires a topical interpretation by collecting certain verses carefully on one topic from different sūrahs, understanding the chronological order, and then examining these carefully in order to understand and to explain the subject.

This notion of interpretation actually has been recognized by some classical exegetes, namely, that "parts of the Qur'ān interpret other parts";¹² nevertheless attempts at systematically unifying the meaning of the Qur'ān for constructing a unitary understanding, as it has

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 305-306.

¹² See Bint al-Shāti', al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, vol. I, p. 10 : "al-Qur'ān yufassir ba'duhu ba'dā".

been suggested by Amīn al-Khūlī and exercised by Bint al-Shāṭi', have not been seriously undertaken on any large scale.

Concerning the traditional reports on the "occasions of revelation", al-Khūlī says that commentators are required to know the "occasions of revelation", but these are only taken into consideration when they are needed to shed light on the passages of the Qur'ān and provide a context for understanding the contextual circumstances associated with the revelation of the verse, for they are not its real cause. The important thing is the general sense of the passage and not the specificity of its occasion.

Some classical and medieval commentators on the Qur'an have treated the Qur'ān verse by verse; sometimes they gave cross references to other verses of the Qur'ān while commenting upon a verse. This has not been done systematically. Therefore, their Qur'ān exegesis does not yield an effective, cohesive and comprehensive view.¹³

Regarding the so-called tafsīr 'ilmi, "scientific exegesis", which seeks to draw all possible fields of human knowledge into the interpretation of the Qur'ān, Amīn al-Khūlī agrees with Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī¹⁴ (d. 1388

¹³ Fazlur Rahmān, "Interpreting the Qur'ān", Afkar Inquiry, 3 (1986), p. 45.

¹⁴ See his book al-Muwāfaqāt fī Usūl al-Ahkām (Cairo: Maktabat Muḥammad 'Alī Ṣabīḥ, 1969-1970), vol. II, pp. 48-56.

A.D.) in his opposition to that kind of Tafsīr. He quotes the arguments of scientific exegetes and their refutation by al-Shāṭibī.¹⁵ Then Amīn al-Khulī puts forward three arguments against the so-called "modern scientific exegesis" of the Qur'ān. Firstly, its lexicological aspect: he looks at the development of the Arabic words and their meanings, and finds that the words of the Qur'ān do not apply to the field of modern science. Secondly, its literary and rhetorical aspect: he asserts that the meaning of speech should be in conformity with the circumstances required. The Qur'ān addressed the Arab contemporaries of the Prophet Muḥammad, and consequently cannot contain anything that they would be unable to understand. Thirdly, its religious aspect: al-Khulī says that the Qur'ān contains the teaching of Islam. It brings a religious and ethical message. It is concerned with man's view of life, not with the problematic of cosmological views. Then he adds that it is unsound to argue that the Qur'ān, a static and unchanging collection of texts, should contain the ever-changing scientific truths. He concludes that it is better to avoid this kind of interpretation, for this unnatural interpretation causes the Qur'ān to deviate from its human and social purpose of improving the lives of Muslims and their spirits as a whole.¹⁶

¹⁵ See Manāhiḥ Tajdīd, p. 292.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 293-294.

The most important concept in his method of interpreting the Qur'ān is the literary interpretation, al-Manhaj al-Adabī fī al-Tafsīr. This method has two aspects:

- a. a contextual study of the Qur'ān.
- b. a textual study on the Qur'ān itself.

A contextual study of the Qur'ān has two dimensions. Firstly, a specific study of the background of the Qur'ān, such as: the coming down of the revelation; the compilation of the Qur'ān; the ways of reciting the Qur'ān, etc. These are all known as 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān', "Qur'ānic sciences". Besides knowing the Qur'ānic sciences, it is also important for commentators to be in touch with the literary works of the people at that time in order to be aware of their attitudes towards the Qur'ān and to understand the Qur'ān correctly. Secondly, a general study of both the physical and spiritual environments of the society in which the Qur'ān came into being, and to whom it was addressed.¹⁷

The spirit, the nature and the style of the Qur'ān is Arabic, "qur'ānan 'arabiyyan ghaira dhī 'iwaj".¹⁸ To understand its purpose, the commentators should study carefully the spirit, the nature, the sense and the style

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 307-308.

¹⁸ Qur'ān, 39: 28.

of Arabic. Therefore it is necessary for commentators of the Qur'ān to have a perfect knowledge of the physical and geographical environment of the Hijaz in Muḥammad's time, such as its lands and mountains, its weather and temperature, etc. This knowledge of the physical environment of the Arabian peninsula is one of the important elements for a correct understanding of the Qur'ān.¹⁹

Another object of study concerning the environment is to understand the history and the social structure of the Arab people at that time, such as the family or tribal system, the governmental system at any level and any kind of ideologies, fields of discipline and activities, etc. So everything that is connected with human life in the Arabian peninsula at that time is important as a means to understand the language of the Qur'ān.²⁰

Finally, al-Khulī summarizes the contextual study as generally dealing with one or the other of the following tasks:

- Identifying the text of the Qur'ān and explaining its chronological history or,
- Obtaining information regarding the situation in which

¹⁹ See Manāhiḥ Tajdīd, p. 310.

²⁰ Ibid.

and about which the Qur'ān was revealed.²¹

After explaining the contextual study of the Qur'an, al-Khulī comes to the second aspect of his method, a textual study on the Qur'ān itself. This study begins by examining the vocabulary of the Qur'ān. The commentators should understand the evolution of the meaning of all terms and phrases in the Qur'ān and the impact of its language.

Al-Khulī affirms that to have a proper understanding of the words, this task of interpretation should be applied even though the available sources are not sufficient. Firstly, a commentator should examine lexicographical entries for the word that he wants to interpret in order to have the most probable definition of the word, and to know whether that word is originally Arabic or foreign, then if it is a foreign word, he should know its original meaning and its circumstances.

Then, after having examined the word and obtained the most probable information, al-Khulī goes on to explain that the commentator should come back to the Qur'ān itself examining the same word used in other parts of the Qur'ān. This investigation should be applied to the whole text of the Qur'ān in different places and occasions in order to have a proper understanding of the word helped by

²¹ Ibid., p. 312.

etymological information.²²

The second step of the textual study of the Qur'ān itself is examining the grammatical arrangement of the words or morphemes in the verses of the Qur'ān. This study, al-Khulī asserts, requires philological sciences, such as grammar, rhetoric, etc. But these sciences are used only as a means to understand and to determine the meaning of sentences or idioms in their contexts, not as a standard for general application.²³

After completing the task of philological study of interpretation, according to al-Khulī, there are two aspects that should be considered by commentators of the Qur'ān. Firstly, the psychological aspect of the expression of the Qur'ān: he asserts that a psychological interpretation of the Qur'ān is based on a strong relation between the speech and the mind of human beings, because every science actually is a manifestation of the human mind. So a commentator should try to explain the psychological effect which the language of the Qur'ān has on its hearers or readers. Secondly, the sociological aspect: because the Qur'ān was revealed in order to give guidance to human beings and to improve their condition and give them a Shari'ah, a commentator should consider this aspect after doing a philological study of

²² Ibid., pp. 312-313.

²³ Ibid., p. 314.

interpretation, according to al-Khūlī.²⁴

To close the section on Tafsīr, al-Khūlī affirms that, however heavy and difficult these tasks are, they are actually the true way, because by applying this method no lie can ever be told.

B. Bint al-Shāṭi' 's attempts to implement al-Khūlī's method.

The first exegetical work by Bint al-Shāṭi' was her two-volume study entitled al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, "The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur'ān". This was followed by other works on Qur'ānic studies which were based on the topical approach.

In the introduction to these two volumes of her Tafsīr, Bint al-Shāṭi' complains that few Arab authors are interested in making Qur'ānic interpretation as a subject of pure literary studies. She also criticizes those commentators who simply interpret the Qur'ān by repeating the previous traditional exegesis, and most of which contains Isrā'īliyyāt (Jewish-Christian materials). In the same manner, Bint al-Shāṭi' is critical of grammarians and rhetoricians who unjustifiably impose grammatical and rhetorical rules as the criteria to judge the Qur'ānic verses. From this criticism then, she goes on to explain her procedures with respect to Qur'ānic exegesis. More

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 315-316.

specifically, the new method which she implements in her study is based on the philological approach founded by her husband. This attempt involves four procedures:

- to obtain a proper meaning of the words and the styles of expression, as far as possible, through a careful literary study.
- to gain a true understanding of the Qur'ānic text through the spirit of Arabic based on the styles of the Qur'ān itself. In other words, she considers the Qur'ān as the criterion in judging the differing opinions of the commentators.
- to base her study of the Qur'ān on the topical approach, which involves collecting verses on one topic from different sūrahs. This may be one reason why she chooses the fourteen sūrahs which conspicuously show topical unity.
- and to avoid reading any extraneous elements into the Qur'ān and to have the chronological order of revelation and the historical context of the verses taken into consideration.²⁵

²⁵ al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, vol. I, pp. 7-11; See also her book Muqaddimah fī al-Manhaj (Cairo: Ma'had al-Buhūth al-Dirāsāt al-'Arabiyyah, 1971), pp. 129-138; See Jansen, The Interpretation of the Qur'ān in Modern Egypt (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), pp. 68-70; and for a cohesive summary of her method, see Issa J. Boullata, "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis, A study of Bint al-Shāti's Method", The Muslim World, 64 (1974), pp. 103-115.

Her other books relating to Qur'ānic exegesis which adopted the topical approach have been listed above in the section on her works, such as Maqāl fī al-Insān, etc. Two of these works will also be examined in order to see how she implements the philological method of interpreting the Qur'ān.

In these two volumes of her Tafsīr, Bint al-Shāṭi' consistently starts each sūrah with an introduction about the places and the times of revelation, whether the sūrah was revealed in the Meccan or in the early Medinan period. This provides information on the chronology of revelations, which is very important for understanding the text itself. Each period has a certain characteristic style which gives a specific emphasis on the matter and helps to provide a proper understanding of the situational context.

Bint al-Shāṭi' sometimes provides a brief account of asbāb al-nuzūl, "the occasions of revelation", in her exegesis. However, she does not like to get much involved in the differences of opinion concerning these traditions. Consequently the term "occasion of revelation", as she understands it, refers to no more than the situation relating to a specific text of the Qur'ān. Indeed, she upholds the famous principle of the Muslim jurists that the decisive factor (in determining the meaning of the verse) is the universality of its

wording and not its specific cause.²⁶ Therefore she generally closes her discussions on the "occasions of revelation" by repeating or invoking this principle.

Afterwards, Bint al-Shāṭi' begins her exegesis by examining one verse at a time. In this process she interprets successively the text of the sūrah, verse by verse. She examines the constituent parts of a verse, especially what she considers to be the key words in that verse. With respect to the meaning of a word employed in the Qur'ān, she believes that one word gives only one meaning in one place, and no other word can possibly replace it.²⁷

Bint al-Shāṭi' further elaborates her opinion on this subject by examining the conclusions of certain linguists dealing with the problem of synonyms in her article entitled "The Problem of Synonyms in the Light of [the] Qur'ān",²⁸ presented at the Twenty-sixth International Congress of Orientalists in India. The central question in her article is whether there are synonyms in Arabic or not.

²⁶ The principle is anna al-'ibrah bi-'umūm al-lafz lā bi-khuṣūs al-sabab.

²⁷ al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, vol. I, p. 19.

²⁸ See Ai'sha Abdel Rahman (sic), "The Problem of Synonyms in the Light of [the] Qur'ān", Proceedings of the Twenty-sixth International Congress of Orientalists 1964, IV (1970), pp. 185-186.

There are two opposing sides on this issue. On the one hand, most linguists insist that such synonyms exist. Indeed, they seem proud of this fact, saying that Arabic is the richest language in this regard. They take the position that the Arabic language is so rich in synonyms that many words are used to convey the same meaning. One of them even proudly declares that he knows 200 words for "snake" and 500 words for "lion". On the other hand, some linguists reject the idea of synonyms and maintain that there is only one word for one thing. After a long and careful study on the Qur'ānic text, according to what she calls "a scientific method", by which one does not allow the interpretation of any word of the text without following the same word and its family throughout the whole text of the Qur'ān, she examines its context carefully wherever it appears in the Qur'ān. Bint al-Shāṭi' comes to the conclusion that the Qur'ān, representing the Arabic language in its highest purity and originality, does not support the view held by those who say that there are several words for one thing. Whenever one word is replaced by another, she concludes that it loses not only its effect, but also its beauty and essence. Thus she is in no doubt as to the fact that synonyms cannot be accepted in the high literary style of Arabic, as one word cannot exactly represent another.²⁹

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 185-186.

When examining the meaning of a word employed in the Qur'ān, Bint al-Shāṭi' usually begins her explanation from a linguistic standpoint. She attempts to find out the etymological meaning of a word from lexicography and then proceeds to determine whether it is used in the abstract sense or it has a concrete meaning, or denotes both of them. When she explains the words al-ḍalāl and al-hudā, for example, she says that al-ḍalāl, in its original meaning, means loss of direction or way or being confused, and al-hudā has the opposite meaning. In Arabic, the word al-hudā was originally used with the concrete meaning of a boulder in the water that can save someone from falling. Later on these two words took on an abstract meaning. Finally, they came to be used in a religious sphere relating to belief and unbelief.³⁰ This is the way Bint al-Shāṭi' examines the evolution of a word's meaning.

While explaining the meaning of the word, she also discusses the ways of reciting it, and notes whether there are differences among exegetes or reciters. When she discusses the entry wadda'a in 93:3, for instance, she notes that according to the majority of exegetes, this word is recited with doubling the consonant, d although others hold that the word is recited without doubling the consonant.³¹

³⁰ al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, vol. I, pp. 33-34.

After providing information concerning the meaning of the word of a text discussed, Bint al-Shāṭi' usually examines the word she studies from the entire Qur'ān to see how many times the entry appears there and to know whether the entry appears in more than one form. For instance, she explains that the entry n-sh-ṭ appears only in Sūrat al-Nāzi'āt (79:2),³² and the entry al-wad' never appears in the form of verb except in 93:3, and another form of al-wad', mustawda', appears only twice in the entire Qur'ān, in Sūrat al-An'ām and Sūrat Hūd.³³ This investigation is very important because it gives a clearer comprehension of the text according to the situational context. To find out how many times the entry of a Qur'ānic word along with its various forms appears in the Qur'ān is not difficult because we can easily classify and count the entry, using the concordance of the Qur'ān, such as al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li al-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm by Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī. This book was printed in 1945, and reprinted several times afterwards.

When the entry appears many times in the Qur'ān and has many different forms, Bint al-Shāṭi' examines the verses that contain that entry in order to understand

³¹ Ibid., vol. I. p. 23.

³² Ibid., vol. I, p. 93.

³³ Ibid., vol. I, p. 23.

how the Qur'ān employs that entry in a different context. She is then able to classify the verses in which the word gives a similar meaning in a different context. While discussing the word ghinā in 93:8,³⁴ for example, Bint al-Shāṭi' collects the verses that contain that entry and then classifies them according to their meaning. Based on her analysis of its occurrence in the Qur'ān, she uses her method to give the most possible meanings.

Unlike other commentators, Bint al-Shāṭi' always refutes the idea of imposing the rules of grammar on the Qur'ān. She argues that it is above those rules. She criticizes the grammar of exegetes who hold that the particle bi in Sūrat al-Qalam (68:2) is only an extraneous particle. After examining the style of the Qur'ān concerning that particle, she concludes that the particle bi which comes with a negative predicate of a nominal clause is not otiose, but is used to emphasize denial and rejection.³⁵ She quotes all the verses that refer to that matter.

One important point in her implementation of the literary method is that Bint al-Shāṭi' consistently refuses the idea of imposing the rules of grammar to

³⁴ Ibid., vol. I, pp. 38-49.

³⁵ Ibid., vol. II, p. 47, e.g., wa mā anā biḥallāmin li al-'abīd (Q. 50:29)

judge the Qur'ān where there appears to be a contradiction between the rules of grammar and the Qur'ān. She argues for a very precise examination of the Qur'ān itself. It is from this consideration that she insists that the Qur'ān, which is recognized as the highest literary book in Arabic, should be treated as the authoritative source. For example, while discussing the phrase a-ra'ayta (Q. 96:9), she criticizes Abū Ḥayyān saying that Abū Ḥayyān faults al-Zamakhsharī who often tries to impose the rules of grammar on the Qur'an although Abū Ḥayyān himself could not escape this criticism. He even states that the second object of a-ra'ayta is only an interrogative sentence and notes that: "This verse is an exception to this rule".³⁶

The most important thing about her implementation is that she consistently uses the Qur'ān as a criterion to judge any differences among exegetes. She always says: "There is no way for us to limit the meaning of . . . , but we prefer to generalize it as it is . . . ".³⁷ In many other places she also says that we should seek a decision from the text of the Qur'ān, she uses the term al-ihdikām to express this.

Another significant point of this method is that it leaves her independent and feeling free to disagree and

³⁶ Ibid., vol. II, p. 28.

³⁷ Ibid., vol. I, p. 28.

criticize the interpretations of other commentators. When Bint al-Shāṭi' quotes other interpretations, she does not mean only to repeat and follow those ideas. Rather she is free to disapprove them. For example, when Bint al-Shāṭi' discusses the words al-ākhirah and al-ūlā in 93:4, she disagrees with Muḥammad 'Abduh who interprets these two words as "the beginning and the end" and he adds his explanation that the second occurrence of revelation will make the religion perfect³⁸ It seems that 'Abduh wants to determine the meaning of the word al-ākhirah with "the end of revelation". After a careful study of the word al-ākhirah employed by the Qur'ān which appears 113 times, Bint al-Shāṭi' insists that the result of her investigation does not support the meaning held by 'Abduh and she finds that the word al-ākhirah indicates the afterlife.

Other books of Bint al-Shāṭi''s which show how she implements the method are Maqāl fī al-Insān and al-Shakṣiyyah al-Islāmiyyah. Both of them employ the topical approach to the study of the Qur'ān.

In her book Maqāl fī al-Insān, Bint al-Shāṭi' generally begins her discussion on each subject by quoting one or two verses of the Qur'ān that contain the subject as primary texts. She then discusses a few words

³⁸ Ibid., vol. I, p. 27.

of the text that concern the subject. In the process, she tries to find out the exact meaning of the term by investigating the verses of the Qur'ān that relate to the subject from the entire Qur'ān. For example, in the first chapter of this book she writes that: "Having examined the word in the places where the word baṣhar appears in the entire Qur'ān," ³⁹ Afterwards, she indicates the verses that contain the subject and gives an explanation to those verses. Sometimes she quotes the interpretations of other scholars, such as al-Zamakhsharī or al-Ṭabarī. However, she rarely quotes the traditions of the Prophet. At the end of each chapter she usually provides a conclusion. In this book, Bint al-Shāṭi' successfully proves that some parts of the Qur'ān interpret other parts.

In al-Shakhsīyyah al-Islāmiyyah, unlike her earlier book Maqāl fī al-Insān, Bint al-Shāṭi' begins her discussions on each chapter by giving an introduction that shows her general conclusion of the subject. This introduction is the result of her investigation from the Qur'ān and the sound traditions of the Prophet. Consequently, she indicates the verses and the traditions of the Prophet that relate to the subject under discussion. In this book, she does not specifically discuss a certain verse or part of the

³⁹ See Maqāl fī al-Insān, p. 15.

verse, nor does she quote interpretations from other exegetes as a reference. Bint al-Shāṭi' simply discusses the topic she chooses by referring to the Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet. In the first chapter, al-Islām wa al-Imān, for example, she opens her discussion by saying: "Hundreds of millions of us have Islam as their religion. The essential element of Islam is īmān, faith, which distinguishes the true Muslim from those who are Muslim in name only . . ." ⁴⁰ Then she starts discussing īmān by quoting the verses of the Qur'ān and the sound traditions of the Prophet that contain the subject and giving a brief explanation. Sometimes she simply connects the verses without any explanation. She does not draw any conclusion at the end of each chapter. Therefore, in this book she just presents her understanding of the subject based on the Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet.

⁴⁰ See al-Shakhṣiyyah al-Islāmiyyah, p. 23.

Chapter Three

Bint al-Shāṭi's Exegesis

This chapter will discuss Bint al-Shāṭi's exegesis by focusing on her works of Qur'ānic hermeneutics, especially her first work on this subject entitled al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm¹ and some others such as Maqāl fī al-Insān² (which takes a topical and philological approach), al-I'jāz al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa Masā'il Ibn al-Azraq³ and Min Asrār al-'Arabiyyah fi al-Bayān al-Qur'ānī.⁴ The first work, in two volumes, discusses fourteen short sūrahs⁵ which have topical unity. Here, I will try to bring out her unique contribution to exegesis, and will comment on those points where she has departed from classical or modern exegeses in her interpretive investigation of Qur'ānic material. In investigating her exegesis, I will refer to the classical

¹ Published in 2 vols., Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1962-1969.

² Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, 1972.

³ Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1971.

⁴ Beirut: Jāmi'at Bayrūt al-'Arabiyyah, 1972.

⁵ The seven sūrahs of vol. I are Sūrat al-Duhā (93), Sūrat al-Sharh (94), Sūrat al-Zalzalah (99), Sūrat al-Nāzi'āt (79), Sūrat al-'Adiyāt (100), Sūrat al-Balad (90), Sūrat al-Takāthur (102), and of vol. II are Sūrat al-'Alaq (96), Sūrat al-Qalam (68), Sūrat al-'Asr (103), Sūrat al-Layl (92), Sūrat al-Fajr (89), Sūrat al-Humazah (104), and Sūrat al-Mā'ūn (107).

works, such as al-Zamakhsharī's Tafsīr al-Kashshāf⁶ and al-Rāzī's al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,⁷ as well as to modern ones such as 'Abduh's Tafsīr Juz 'Ammā⁸ and al-Marāghī's Tafsīr al-Marāghī.⁹ My discussion of Bint al-Shāṭi's exegesis will concentrate on those ideas and meanings which she discovered, emphasized and brought into focus for the first time. Some of these ideas and meanings, no doubt, are found in earlier commentaries, but in Bint al-Shāṭi's commentaries, they appear to have been treated with new insights and in refreshing ways.

A. Oaths in the Qur'ān

One of Bint al-Shāṭi's remarkable findings is the signification of the concept of oaths beginning with waw al-qasam and lā uqsimu.

Seven out of fourteen short sūrahs interpreted by Bint al-Shāṭi, in her al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, begin with oaths. Six of them begin with waw al-qasam and one begins with lā uqsimu.¹⁰

⁶ Mahmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf 'an Haqā'iq Ghāwāmid al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1947), 4 vols.

⁷ Muhammad Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1985), 16 vols.

⁸ Muhammad 'Abduh, Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm: Juz 'Ammā (Cairo: al-Matba'ah al-Amīriyyah, 1366 H.).

⁹ Ahmad Mustafā al-Marāghī, Tafsīr al-Marāghī (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1946), 30 vols.

¹⁰ Sūrahs which begin with waw al-qasam are Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā

Concerning the oaths of the Qur'ān which begin with waw al-qasam, Bint al-Shāṭi' rejects the idea that these, as most exegetes hold,¹¹ signify the glorification of the object of the oath. Bint al-Shāṭi' believes that the Qur'ānic oath is only one of several rhetorical devices utilized to draw attention to the matter at hand by using perceptible phenomena in order to introduce other matters that are imperceptible or abstract to the mind. Therefore, the choice of the object of a given oath in the Qur'ān corresponds to the situation. Bint al-Shāṭi' gives some illustrations from various sūrahs of such choices of the object, as where Allah swears by the morning (a perceptible phenomenon) as it shines forth and breathes away the darkness, by the night (another perceptible phenomenon) as it conceals, and by the day (still another perceptible phenomenon) as it appears in glory. She explains that the morning and the day represent guidance and truth on the one hand, and the night represents error and falsehood on the other, the Qur'ān using perceptible

(93), Sūrat al-Nāzi'āt (79), Sūrat al-'Adiyāt (100), Sūrat al-'Asr (103), Sūrat al-Layl (92) and Sūrat al-Fajr (89), while the sūrah which begins with lā uqsimu is Sūrat al-Balad (90).

¹¹ See Ibn Qayyīm al-Jawziyyah, al-Tibyān fī Aqsām al-Qur'ān (Cairo: Matba'at Hijāzī, 1933), p. 72; Sayyid Qutb, Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān (Beirut: al-Dār al-'Arabiyyah li' al-Tibā'ah wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', n.d.), vol. XXX, p. 172; Muhammad Jamāluddīn al-Qāsimī, Tafsīr al-Qāsimī al-musammā Mahāsin al-Ta'wīl (Cairo: Dār Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1960), vol. XVII, p. 61-67; Fakhr al-Dīn, vol. XXXI, p. 209; al-Marāghī, vol. XXX, p. 183.

concepts, light and darkness for imperceptible ones.¹²

In the first two verses of sūrah 93, for instance, Bint al-Shāṭi' affirms that Allah swears by perceptible things, that is, the brightness of the morning which people can see shining during the day, and the darkness of the night where they witness the light fading during the calm of the quiet night.¹³

'Abduh, like other exegetes, holds the view that the purpose of the oaths is to draw attention to the objects glorified. For instance, when interpreting sūrahs 91 and 93, 'Abduh points out that the oath referring to daytime is intended to glorify the power of light and to indicate the blessing it carries and to draw man's attention to the fact that light is one of God's great signs and splendid blessings.¹⁴

But, while explaining the oath referring to the night, 'Abduh, according to Bint al-Shāṭi''s critical evaluation¹⁵ seems to be in need of finding a way to glorify the night by explaining that God swears by the night because it is something that terrifies man and restrains him from movement and activity. The power that

¹² al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, vol. I, p. 15.

¹³ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁴ 'Abduh, pp. 93-94.

¹⁵ al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, vol. I, p. 15.

comes from fear, according to 'Abduh, is nebulous, like the divine majesty which surrounds man from all sides and which comes in imperceptible ways.¹⁶

With the exception of the idea of aggrandizement, Bint al-Shāṭi's understanding of the meaning of the oath of sūrah 93 is very close to that of Ibn Qayyim. Ibn Qayyim says that making the oath by the light of the day after the darkness of the night indicates the illumination and the light of revelation after the murkiness of delaying the revelation, and that the oath using dispelling of darkness by the light of the day signifies breaking the darkness of stupidity and idolatry. Those concepts represent the perceptible and abstract situations. Bint al-Shāṭi', however, notes that Ibn Qayyim seems to be confused over the sequence of the verses, while explaining that, in the first two verses of sūrah 93, the word duḥā (forenoon) precedes the word al-layl (night). Ibn Qayyim goes on to draw the reader's attention to the relationship between the object and the subject of the oath. The object of the oath is the light of forenoon that shows up after the darkness of night, while the subject of the oath is the illumination of the revelation which appears after it was held back from the Prophet.¹⁷

¹⁶ 'Abduh, pp. 93-94.

¹⁷ Ibn Qayyim, p. 73.

Bint al-Shāṭi' also notes that al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī do not explain the relationship between the object and the subject of the oath, but that they only explain the two sides of the oath independently and no further, while Abū Ḥayyān is preoccupied with grammatical matters.¹⁸

Another example is Sūrat al-ʿAdiyāt (100) which also begins with waw al-qasam. The oath in this sūrah presents a provocative picture intended to show the drastic suddenness of predatory incursion. This picture, which comes after waw al-qasam, draws attention to an event that was familiar to the Arabs of the Prophet's time. The event in question is the sudden attack in the very early morning which causes disorder and confusion. With this in mind, the Qur'ān conjures up another picture or image, an abstract one, that of the resurrection which will also appear suddenly without any warning.

In summarizing her interpretation of this sūrah, Bint al-Shāṭi' points out that this sūrah begins with a picture of an event which was familiar to the Arabs of the Prophet's time, such as a sudden attack at dawn and the consequences that follow such an event. Next, the Qur'ān brings another notion, an abstract one which has not happened yet and which ought to be believed as a real fact which people can perceive from the one described. It is

¹⁸ al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, vol. I, p. 18.

the resurrection scene. This great event, which comes unexpectedly, will cause people to be surprised and confused after a long time of denying Allah's blessings and of being deceived by their wishes and desires. Thus these two events are harmonious in the scene depicted, which brings together the view of the familiar fact of the incursion at dawn and the abstract scene of the Day of Resurrection. The subject of the oath comes between these two scenes, that is, verses 6 and 8.

It is also worth mentioning how Bint al-Shāṭi' explains the oath in Sūrat al-Layl (92). According to her, waw al-qasam in this sūrah calls attention to the clear contrast of perceptible matters between the night with its darkness and the day with its brightness to introduce another contrast, the opposite of abstract matters which dominate the remaining verses of this sūrah, such as the person who gives (in charity) and who fears (God) (verse 5) as opposed to the one who is a greedy miser and thinks himself to be self-sufficient (verse 8); and the person who testifies to the best (verse 6) as opposed to the one who gives the lie to the best (verse 9), etc.¹⁹

Having examined the oaths in the Qur'ān, Bint al-Shāṭi' is confident that waw al-qasam at the beginning of sūrahs signifies a departure from its original meaning and function of glorifying the object, to a rhetorical sense

¹⁹ Ibid., vol. II, pp. 102-114.

which draws attention to the sensory matters which are undisputed facts in order to introduce the unseen or abstract matters which may be disputable or questionable.

Regarding Bint al-Shāṭi's ideas concerning the oath beginning with waw al-qasam, Muḥammad Amīn Tawfiq, in his article, "Interpretation and lessons of Sūrat al-Duḥā," criticizes her for having taken for granted the perceptible matters present in this oath. He says:

In 13 out of 40 cases, the qasam occurs at the beginning of early Meccan sūrahs. Six of these initiating oaths deal with perceptible natural phenomena such as the night, the sun and the dawn. The remaining deal with less or non-perceptible matters, e.g. al-Sāffāt, al-Mursalāt, al-Nāzi'āt . . . This might exemplify to us how the above-mentioned idea of Bint al-Shāṭi's taken-for-granted perceptible matters of 'oath' cannot be accepted.²⁰

However, concerning the three sūrahs mentioned above, it seems to me that Bint al-Shāṭi' chooses the sensory rather than the abstract meaning. The word nāzi'āt, for instance, is interpreted by many exegetes to mean angels, while Bint al-Shāṭi' interprets it to mean horses.²¹

One of the two sūrahs of the Qur'ān beginning with the verb uqsimu preceded by the negative particle lā, lā uqsimu, is Sūrat al-Balad. This sūrah is studied by Bint al-Shāṭi' in her al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī.

²⁰ Muḥammad Amīn Tawfiq, "Interpretations and lessons of Sūrat al-Duḥā", Majallat al-Azhar 48 vi (1976) p. 16.

²¹ al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, vol. I, p. 91.

The majority of exegetes hold that the negative oath lā uqsimu has a positive meaning, uqsimu. These exegetes, however, do not provide further explanation as to the subtle difference between applying positive and negative oaths. Moreover, they do not notice the significant point of the change from a positive oath, uqsimu, to a negative one, lā uqsimu, which, according to Bint al-Shāṭi', gives a rhetorical tone to the phrase.

For his part 'Abduh, while remarking that lā uqsimu is a style of oath which is used to give emphasis to the predicate of a nominal clause,²² nevertheless goes on to speak about the idea of glorification. He explains that this kind of oath is used to glorify the object of the oath, as if someone says: "Indeed, I do not glorify it (any object) with the oath, because it is glory by itself".²³

Abū Ḥayyān offers a different interpretation on this subject. According to him, the negative particle in lā uqsimu is a real negative and does not serve to give emphasis to the oath.²⁴

'Abd Allāh Shāhatah, in his 'Ulūm al-Tafsīr summarizes

²² 'Abduh, p. 87.

²³ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁴ Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalūsī, Tafsīr al-Bahr al-Muḥīṭ (Riyād: Maktābat al-Nashr al-Ḥadīthah, n.d.), vol. VIII, p. 474.

the three different explanations or viewpoints among exegetes concerning the negative particle lā with the verb uqsimu. The first opinion is that the negative particle lā is a negation of an elliptical speech which is understood from the context. The second one is that the negative particle lā is considered otiose or additional. And the last opinion is that the negative particle is used to negate the oath, as if Allah is saying: "I do not swear to you by that day or by that soul, but I ask you a question without swearing, do you think that we do not collect your scattered bones after death ? Know ! that We are omnipotent and can do that". According to him, this explanation seems to negate the oath, although in actual fact its aim is to affirm, as if Allah says: "This matter is very clear so I do not need to swear by that." This expression, therefore, affirms the statement.²⁵

Bint al-Shāṭi' rejects the above interpretations. She argues that if lā is used to reply to or to negate the preceding statement, it requires a separation in recitation between lā and the verb uqsimu, lā, uqsimu (no, I swear), but all exegetes join lā and uqsimu in recitation, lā uqsimu. And if the negative particle lā is considered otiose, then it may be dropped or omitted without changing the meaning. Therefore, the negative particle lā does not serve to lend any emphasis to the

²⁵ 'Abd Allāh Shahatah, 'Ulūm al-Tafsīr, (Cairo: Maṭba'at Jāmi'at al-Qāhira, 1986) p. 130.

oath. Based on her investigation of the verb aqsama in the Qur'ān, Bint al-Shāṭi' finds that when Allah makes an oath using the verb uqsimu, the verb is always in the negative form, lā uqsimu.

Using a negative particle or construction for emphasis, according to Bint al-Shāṭi', is very familiar to users of the Arabic language. She illustrates this with the following example: lā ūṣika bi fulān, "Indeed, I do not (need to) recommend so and so to you." Accordingly, she disagrees with both 'Abduh, who stresses the sense of aggrandizement, and with Abū Ḥayyān who considers lā uqsimu, in this context, to signify a real negation.²⁶ Thus, according to her, it is impossible to consider the negative particle otiose.²⁷

B. Passive Voice and Passive Forms VII and VIII, and Metonymic Predication in the Qur'ān

These forms of expression constitute one of the themes upon which Bint al-Shāṭi' focuses in her exploration of the Qur'ān. It is clear that a major reason for the presence of the passive voice in the Qur'ānic text, in accordance with grammatical rules, is simply due to the fact that the agent of the verb is well-known. We shall elaborate on this point below.

²⁶ al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, vol. I, p. 147.

²⁷ Min Asrār al-'Arabiyyah fī al-Bayān al-Qur'ānī, p. 62.

In Qur'ānic discourse, according to Bint al-Shāṭi', the passive voice is used to emphasize the events by drawing attention away from the actual agent, while the metonymic predication is utilized for the purpose of spontaneity. The passive forms VII and VIII also focus attention on the event itself irrespective of the agent. Bint al-Shāṭi' elaborates upon this idea when she interprets Sūrat al-Zalzalah (99), especially in verses 1 and 2. In the verses 99:1 "When the earth is shaken to its (utmost) convulsion", 23:101 "When the trumpet is blown"; and 54:1, "And the moon is cleft asunder", for instance, attention is directed towards the events, not the agent itself. It is not important whether the actual executor is Allah, or one of His angels or the divine power. Bint al-Shāṭi' however does not support the assertion that because the agent is well-known, it is therefore omitted in this sūrah. She argues that there are many active verbs in the Qur'ān where the agent, Allah, is clearly mentioned. In fact, this agent will be clearly known and understood, even without its being mentioned, such as is the case with respect to the following verses: "Allah creates the heavens and the earth" (29:44), and "He creates man" (55:3). Therefore, the omission of the agent in this sūrah, and in others where the passive form is used, is not because it is known for a certainty, but because it signifies a rhetorical hidden intent. The purpose is to draw attention to the event itself.

In the second verse of sūrah 99, where Allah makes the earth, which in reality cannot do anything, the agent of the action: "And the earth throws up its burdens (from within)," the metonymic predication gives the impression of the terror engendered by the earth shaking by itself spontaneously. This expression, according to Bint al Shāṭi', also draws attention to the event regardless of its real agent and also indicates spontaneity. The eruption of the earth suggests that the earth wants to rid itself of its heavy burden or to lighten its load whenever it gets the opportunity to do so. Bint al-Shaṭi's understanding of the meaning of this verse is inspired by another passage in 84:3-4 which reads as follows: "When the earth is flattened out and casts forth what is within it, and becomes (clean) empty".²⁸

In examining the passive voice of the verb zalzala and the effective power which originates from ascribing the verbs ḥaddatha, akhraja, and zalzala to the agency of the earth, Bint al-Shāṭi' comes to the conclusion that the context does not accept the mediation of an angel in transmitting the inspiration from Allah to the earth (99:5) which is shaken with convulsions, throws up its burden from within and finally declares its tidings. Therefore, the context, according to her, lays stress on its effective power in describing the horror of an event

²⁸ al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, vol. I, pp. 71-72.

which surprises human beings to the point that they ask with astonishment what is happening to the earth. The next verse appears to serve as an answer: "Your Lord has inspired the earth" and the earth declares by itself spontaneously. Accordingly, the inspiration here is addressed directly to the earth, which corresponds with the ascription of declaration to the earth. Therefore, the use of the particle lām here gives a special sense, conveying and strengthening the transmissions.²⁹ Thus, all the universe is prepared for that great event whenever it will happen. All created things are within the purview of the great event, which will not require a command or a subject to initiate it. The earth will shake spontaneously and will be successively affected by other phenomena.

No other exegetes apart from Bint al-Shāṭi', as far as we are aware, have mentioned such an idea in their interpretation.

C. Rhymed verses in the Qur'ān

Another important subject that Bint al-Shāṭi' has emphasized on numerous occasions in her exegetical works is that of the fawāṣil al-āyāt (literally translated in English as "dividers of verses").

Some scholars have likened the fawāṣil of the Qur'ān to the qarīnah of saj' or the qāfiyah (rhyme) occurring in

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 78-79.

rajaz poetry. According to al-Zarkashī, for instance, "the fāṣilah of a Qur'ānic verse is in prose like the garīnah of a piece of saj', and in poetry like the qāfiyah of a line of verse."³⁰

All Muslim scholars agree that there are rhymes in the Qur'ān, although they differ on the question of whether the Qur'ān complies with the rhymed form of the text regardless of its meaning or whether it complies with the meaning regardless of rhyme. Bint al-Shāṭi' accepts the latter position. To support her position, she examines the rhymes in the Qur'ān and elaborates her argument in her exegetical works. Her refutation of the counter position is mainly undertaken with reference to al Farrā's Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān and Abū Ḥayyān's Tafsīr al-Baḥr al-Muḥīt.

In her interpretation of verse 3 of sūrah 93 concerning the omission of the pronoun ka as an object of galā, Bint al-Shāṭi' rejects the idea of a prosodical reason for that omission, which is the view held by al-Naysābūrī.³¹ Based on her careful study of Qur'ānic rhyme, she believes that there is no word in the Qur'ān which occurs anywhere merely for prosodical reason. This is how she sums up her

³⁰ al-Zarkashī, al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Ilmiyyah, 1988) vol. I, p. 83; al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 1988), vol. III, p. 290.

³¹ al-Naysābūrī, vol. XXX, p. 108; al-Rāzī also quotes this idea in his al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, vol. XXXI, p. 210.

view: "As for the reason of omission [of the pronoun ka] in keeping with the rhymes of division, we do not accept the view that Qur'ānic rhetoric is based on verbal considerations, but that it is actually in accordance with rhetorical meaning."³²

Besides the contextual sense, according to Bint al-Shāṭi', the omission of the pronoun ka, the object of the verb qalā, is required by spiritual sensibility, accuracy, and deep delicacy and sensitivity. It is also in keeping with the need to avoid applying Allah's address to the Prophet, as is implied in the expression qalā ka. In this instance, the verb qalā has the sense of expulsion and anger while the verb wadda'a gives the sense of unwilling separation accompanied by hope of return.³³

In his book Lughat al-Qur'ān, 'Abd al-Jalīl 'Abd al-Raḥīm points out that Bint al-Shāṭi''s argument is quite weak. According to him, maintaining the rhymes in verse 3 of sūrah 99 neither changes the original meaning of the verses nor does it split them apart. There is not much difference in meaning between mā qalā ka and mā qalā.³⁴

Bint al-Shāṭi' argues that if the rhyme of the text is the purpose of Qur'ānic rhetoric, the last text should

³² al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, vol. I, p. 24.

³³ Ibid., p. 25.

³⁴ Ammān: Maktabat al-Risālah al-Ḥadīthah, 1981, p.320.

keep the rhyme of the two previous verse endings, taqhar and tanhar. Why then should the last verse have ended with the word haddith, which does not fit the rhyming scheme, rather than the more appropriate khabbir? Jansen points out that Bint al-Shāṭi' 's argument is weak because, according to him, Qur'ānic vocabulary does not include the verb khabbara,³⁵ besides, khabbir does not rhyme very well with taqhar and tanhar.

In verse 2 of sūrah 102, Bint al-Shāṭi' points out that the use of al-maqābir, plural of maqbarah, "graveyard", and not al-qubūr, has an illustrative secret which most exegetes have missed. This is the relevance of the relationship between the word al-maqābir and al-takāthur. This affinity or fitness is not only in sound, but also in meaning. The word al-maqābir (a place where graves are located next to one another) indicates the place where the fierce struggle to collect or partake of the vanities of the world comes to an end. Therefore, the word al-maqābir cannot be replaced by al-qubūr because the latter has a different connotation. Most exegetes interpret it as being equivalent to al-qubūr.³⁶

In interpreting verse 4 of sūrah 89, Bint al-Shāṭi' rejects al-Farrā' 's explanation that the omission of the

³⁵ J.J. Jansen, The Interpretation of the Qur'an in Modern Egypt (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), p. 73.

³⁶ al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, vol. I, pp. 180-181.

weak letter yā' in the verb yasrī is intended to maintain the rhyme.³⁷

On examining the Qur'ānic occurrences of imperfect verbs ending with the weak letters yā' or waw, Bint al-Shāṭi' proves that the Qur'ān also omits the weak letters yā' or waw in the middle of a verse or in the course of Qur'ānic discourse. She lists verses such as 11:105, 17:11, and 79:16 as examples.³⁸

Bint al-Shāṭi' does not agree with Abū Ḥayyān's interpretation of verse 5 of sūrah 99. The latter holds that changing the particle of the verb awḥā from ilā into lām is intended to keep the rhyme at the end of the verse.³⁹

In her examination of the verb awḥā in Qur'ānic usage with a view to explaining the reason for the use of the transformational particle, Bint al-Shāṭi' observes that in sixty-seven occurrences the verb awḥā is accompanied by the particle ilā and only once by the particles fī and lām. The sixty-seven occurrences of the verb awḥā using the particle ilā are in the context of addressing living beings, while two others using the particles fī and lām are addressed to inanimate beings. The verb with the

³⁷ Baydāwī also cites such idea from Nāfi' and Abū 'Amr in his Anwār al-Tanzīl, vol. V, p. 184.

³⁸ al-I'jāz al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān, pp. 251-252.

³⁹ Abū Ḥayyān, vol. VIII, p. 501.

particle fī is addressed to heaven and the verb with the particle lām is addressed to earth. Bint al-Shāṭi' also rejects the interpretation that the object addressed (direct object) of the verb is omitted and that the verse means that Allah inspires His angel to serve as a medium to convey the revelation to the earth.

Bint al-Shāṭi' concludes her argument concerning fāṣilah by noting that the logic of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān is that there is no fāṣilah that does not indicate a special meaning. No fāṣilah, therefore, can be replaced by other words or particles. Thus, if we cannot understand its rhetorical secret, it is only because of our inability to see it. Maintaining this opinion, however, does not preclude, as she affirms, appreciating the harmonious Qur'ānic word structure and its brilliant rhythmical arrangement.

D. Particles and Mysterious letters

1. Particles (ḥurūf)

Bint al-Shāṭi' has been consistent in her refutation of the idea that there are extraneous words or particles in the Qur'ān, as is asserted by some exegetes. Al-Zamakhsharī and al-Naysābūrī, for instance, consider the phrase laka, "for you", in verse 1 of sūrah 94 as an insertion. According to her, those phrases or particles, that are considered by some exegetes as being extraneous

actually have a rhetorical function required by certain situations.⁴⁰

The discussion by exegetes of the grammatical role of the particle bi in the phrase bi-majnūn (68:2) occurring in the predicate of the negative particle mā, which is considered by most to be otiose, draws Bint al-Shāṭi's attention. As a rule, where the particle bi occurs in the predicate of the negative particle mā or the weak verb laysa, many exegetes and grammarians consider the particle to be an extraneous insertion, as is the case in verses 68:2, 41:46, 6:66, and 6:89. Therefore, the declensional position of the predicate remains the same (without the particle bi). By saying this, however, they do not mean that this particle serves no purpose. On the contrary, they consider it as being used for emphasis.

Based on her investigation of the predicates of the negative particle mā and the weak verb laysa in each occurrence in the Qur'ān, Bint al-Shāṭi' observes that only three out of twenty-three verses that have a clear single predicate of the weak verb laysa are not preceded by the particle bi. These are verses 4:94, 11:8, and 13:43. So are the predicates of the negative particle mā. They are preceded in most cases by the particle bi, when the predicate is clearly singular. Knowing that most predicates of the negative particle mā and the weak verb

⁴⁰ al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, vol. I, p. 52.

laysa are preceded by the particle bi, Bint al-Shāṭi' believes that it is difficult to regard the particle as being "extra". If the particle is assumed to be such, it might easily be dropped from the text. This, however, cannot happen with respect to the Qur'ān. Bint al-Shāṭi' concludes her investigation concerning the particle bi by noting the following. Firstly, when a sentence is negated by mā kāna, its predicate is not preceded by the particle bi. Secondly, when the predicate, negated by the negative particle mā or the weak verb laysa, is preceded by the particle bi, the construction gives the sense of emphasizing the negation in the sense of denial and rejection. But when the predicate is not preceded by the particle bi, it does not affirm the negation. It may give the sense of doubtfulness or the context may be not in need of affirming the negation. Finally, she states that when the predicate of the weak verb laysa is preceded by the particle bi in a negative interrogative sentence introduced by a-laysa, the form changes its function from interrogation to decisive affirmation.⁴¹

Another particle that draws Bint al-Shāṭi''s attention is the negative particle lā which is considered by some exegetes as an implied particle really existing in some verses of the Qur'ān, such as in verses 12:85, 4:186, and 2:184.

⁴¹ al-I'jāz al-Bayāni li al-Qur'ān, p. 176.

The interpretation of omitting the particle lā, in fact, follows the rule of grammar which says that the negative particle lā which occurs in the apodosis of an oath is regularly omitted when the negated verb is in the imperfect tense. Thus some exegetes interpret 12:85 to mean ta Allāhi lā tafta'u tadhkuru Yūsuf.

In the light of the above grammatical rule, Bint al-Shāṭi' argues that if the omission is steady, the context need not imply any assumption of omission, since the context reveals the intended meaning. Bint al-Shāṭi' observes that grammarians place or list the verb tafta'u in the same class as the continuing verb mā zāla. According to Bint al-Shāṭi' these verbs convey the sense of continuing action only when they are coupled with the negative particle lā. Therefore, when a verb is not attached to the negative particle lā, it conveys the opposite meaning, as is the case with the verb tafta'u in verse 12:85.⁴²

Another example of the omission of the particle lā, is the verb yuṭiqūnahu in verse 2:184, which is discussed at length by some exegetes. Some of them interpret the verb to mean lā yuṭiqūnahu, while others consider this verse to be abrogated by the next one.

Al-Ṭabarī, for example, enumerates several

⁴² Ibid., pp. 178-179.

interpretations, including that of abrogation mentioned above. On the other hand, he also cites a contrary view which says: "This verse is not abrogated, and there is no abrogation. It is a definite decree from the time it was revealed to the Day of Resurrection."⁴³ Abū Ḥayyān examines the idea of abrogation found in al-Kashshāf, and concludes that this view is that of the majority of exegetes.⁴⁴ Ibn Kathīr makes the following observation: "The conclusion is that the abrogation applies to the healthy non-traveller (al-ṣaḥīḥ al-muqīm), to whom fasting is obligatory, as Allah says, 'So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting'. And as for the very old man who is unable to fast he may break the fast without a make-up fast on another day, for he will not have a situation where he can do it."⁴⁵

There are some exegetes who do not accept the idea of abrogation and they have different explanations concerning this verse. Some of them say that there should be the omitted negative particle lā with the verb yutiqūnahū. They cite a narration from Ibn 'Abbās which says: "There can be no concession except for one who cannot fast", and

⁴³ Ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī, Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1987), vol. II, p. 82.

⁴⁴ Abū Ḥayyān, vol. II, p. 36.

⁴⁵ Al-Ḥāfiz Abū al-Fidā' Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1987), vol. I, p. 405.

cite another narration from 'Aṭā' concerning the concession for breaking the fast and paying the ransom. 'Aṭā' said: "He [a person who may break his fasting] is an old man who cannot fast except with hardship. As for someone who is able to do it, he should fast, and there is no excuse for him not to do so".⁴⁶ After enumerating some interpretations, Abū Ḥayyān comments as follows: "To imply the negative particle lā as really existing is wrong, for it is ambiguous. Don't you see that what is immediately understood from the text is the positive imperfect verb? It is not allowed to estimate the omission of the negative particle lā save in the oath. Verses [of poetry] that indicate this case are in the section on oath, and the reason for omission is mentioned in grammar".⁴⁷

Bint al-Shāṭi' rejects the idea that the omission of lā is intended. She argues that this is a legal verse and it is not allowed for us to consider legislation as being negative or even to imply the negative particle lā as existing in the verse that is expressed by the Qur'ān in a positive or an affirmative way.⁴⁸

According to Bint al-Shāṭi', those who hold the idea of omitting the negative particle lā understand the verb yutīqūnahu as being synonymous to yastaṭī'ūnahu when, in

⁴⁶ Abū Ḥayyān, vol. II, p. 36.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ al-I'jāz al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān, 179.

fact, the latter conveys a slightly different meaning. As for the word istiṭā'ah, Bint al-Shāṭi' explains that it conveys the sense of obedience, convenience and ability, while the word tāqah gives the sense of reaching the limit of one's abilities. When the Arab says, hal tuṭīq ḥadhā? "Could you endure this?", he will not quote this expression, except if he believes this to be unbearable.⁴⁹

After examining the occurrences of the word tāqah in the Qur'ān, Bint al-Shāṭi' finds that this word is mentioned only three times therein, in verses 2:184, 249 and 286. From these verses, Bint al-Shāṭi' concludes that if the hardship of fasting is beyond one's capacity, this condition renders fasting non-obligatory, for Allah would not place on a person a burden greater than he can bear. The decree of paying ransom, according to Bint al-Shāṭi', is intended neither for those who can do it easily (endure fasting) nor for those who are incapable of bearing the burden. The option of paying the ransom is given only to those who can do so with hardship, meaning those whose fasting exhausts the limit of their ability to do so and they cannot do it on another day, such as very old people or sick people with unexpected cure. Therefore, this verse is not an ambiguous one.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ibid., 183.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 184.

Another case concerning the negative particle is that where it cancels the effect of the negative particle lā that exists elsewhere in the text, such as in verse 44 of sūrah 9, lā yasta'dhinuka. The verse clearly negates the idea of the believers' asking permission to take part in jihād, "striving militarily". Some exegetes see the verse as negating their asking permission to be exempted from jihād. Therefore, in their interpretation, they consider the act of asking permission to apply to those who want to be absent from the fight.

Al-Ṭabarī declares that "as for someone who believes in Allah, acknowledges His oneness, the Resurrection, the hereafter, and reward and punishment, he does not need to ask permission to stay away from the war or from fighting against the enemy of Allah with his soul and wealth".⁵¹ He cites the narration from Ibn 'Abbās who says: "Therefore this verse is a rebuke against hypocrites when they ask permission to abandon jihād without any excuse. They do not go until they ask him [the Prophet] for permission".⁵²

According to Bint al-Shāṭi', interpreting this verse to mean negating the asking of permission to abandon jihād destroys the objective of the expression. This verse should be understood from its plain text, that is a negation of asking permission to fight, not a negation of

⁵¹ al-Ṭabarī, vol. X, p. 100.

⁵² Ibid.

asking permission to be absent. Therefore, believers do not need to ask permission to fulfill the duty of jihād, just as they do not need to ask permission to perform prayer, to pay alms, to fast or to go on the pilgrimage.⁵³

Another idea concerning the particles used by the Qur'ān that Bint al-Shāṭi' takes into account is the idea that a given particle can be replaced by another. According to her it is impossible to say that one particle used in the Qur'ān can be substituted for another.

Regarding the particle 'an' in the phrase 'an ṣalātihim' in verse 4 of sūrah 107, for instance, some exegetes say that this phrase can be a substitute of the phrase li ṣalātihim.

Influenced by this idea, al-Ṭabarī, after enumerating different interpretations, concludes in his Tafsīr that the more adequate opinion, according to him, is that they forget and neglect their prayers, or skip prayers or neglect to say them at their proper times, due to being busy with other matters.⁵⁴ A similar opinion appears in al-Zamakhsharī's al-Kashshāf. Al-Zamakhsharī says that the phrase means that people do not perform prayer the way the Prophet did, or if they do, they do it without concentration.⁵⁵

⁵³ al-I'jāz al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān, p. 185.

⁵⁴ al-Ṭabarī, vol. XXX, pp. 201-202.

Bint al-Shaṭi' does not accept the explanation with respect to forgetfulness when performing prayers or with respect to neglect of prayers. She affirms that we should interpret this phrase separately from the next one as both are connected by the syndetic relative clause, al-ladhīna. Therefore, as Bint al-Shāṭi' insists, forgetfulness about prayer in this context is not forgetfulness in prayer or in the sense of skipping it, or even neglecting it. It is actually forgetfulness about the real purpose or wisdom behind the prayer ritual. Therefore, the reference is to prayer which is nothing more than outward show and pretence at worship on the part of one who poses as a religious and faithful person for the purpose of gaining profit and getting rid of his or her problems. This type of prayer does not have the effect of restraining these people from deceiving others. Such prayer neither brings them into a state of submission and humbleness nor does it purify their hearts.⁵⁶

2. Mysterious letters

The abbreviated or mysterious letters called hurūf muqatta'ah (disjointed letters) or fawātiḥ al-suwar (sūrah openings) have been the subject of a number of conjectures by Qur'ānic commentators ancient as well as modern. In more recent times Muslim and also non-Muslim scholars have

⁵⁵ al-Zamakhsharī, vol. IV, p. 805.

⁵⁶ al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, vol. II, pp. 191-193.

attempted to unveil the mystery of these letter symbols. For Muslim commentators, however, this exercise usually ends up with the invocation of the formula wa allāh a'lam : "But God knows best",⁵⁷

Bint al-Shāṭi' enumerates many different interpretations with respect to the mysterious letters which occur in 29 sūrahs as sūrah openings. Of these interpretations, she accepts that of Ibn Kathīr who holds the opinion that in each sūrah of the Qur'ān beginning with these letters there should be some verses that uphold the glory and miraculous nature of the Qur'ān. This view, however, is not accepted by a number of exegetes. They point out that there are three sūrahs which do not mention the Qur'ān at the beginning of the sūrah, i.e. suraḥs 19, 29, and 30. Bint al-Shāṭi' responds to this criticism by pointing out that al-Zamakhsharī, Rashīd Riḍā' and al-Zarkashī seem to have missed the general point of Ibn Kathīr's statement which does not require that the word Qur'ān or Kitāb appear at the beginning of the sūrah. All that Ibn Kathīr had insisted on was that the relevant verses in these sūrahs should make mention of the glory and miraculous or wondrous nature of the Qur'ān. Bint al-Shāṭi' examines these three sūrahs and shows that there are some verses in them which uphold the glory or wondrous nature of the Qur'ān, such as verses 14, 41, 51, 54, 56

⁵⁷ Hāshim Amīr 'Alī, "The Mysterious Letters of the Qur'ān", Islamic Culture, 36 i (1962) p. iii.

and the last two verses (97 and 98) of Sūrat Maryam (19).⁵⁸

In Sūrat al-Qalam (68), for example, Bint al-Shāṭi' points out that al-Ṭabarī enumerates eight interpretations concerning the letter n as a sūrah opening without, however, indicating his preference. According to his interpretations the mysterious letter n stands for anyone of the following: a whale; the last letter of the word al-rahmān; an inkwell; a light pen; an oath sworn by the Lord; the name of this sūrah; and a letter of the alphabet.⁵⁹ Al-Rāzī, on the other hand, presents only five of the eight interpretations in his tafsīr.⁶⁰ Other exegetes equate mysterious sūrah openings with numerical values⁶¹ or with the passages of the Qur'ān that have ambiguous meanings.

For her part, Bint al-Shāṭi' explains that the letter n mentioned here is intended to inform people of the Prophet's time that the Qur'ān contains the letters that they are familiar with, the purpose being to confirm their inability to produce such a Qur'ān. Next, she attempts to relate this sūrah to the previous one, Sūrat al-'Alaq

⁵⁸ al-I'jāz al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān, pp. 143-145.

⁵⁹ al-Ṭabarī, vol. XXIX, pp. 9-11.

⁶⁰ al-Rāzī, vol. XXX, p. 77.

⁶¹ See Ibn Hishām, al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1987), vol. II, pp. 187-188.

(96). The latter sūrah draws attention to the greatest sign of Allah, that of His creation of man from a blood clot, and His teaching him with the pen that which he knew not. Sūrat al-Qalam (68) begins with the letter q so as to draw attention to the mysterious letters which highlight the importance of reading and knowledge which are dependant on these letters of the alphabet.⁶²

It should be noted, however, that all interpretations (including those of Bint al-Shāṭi') of these mysterious letter-symbols are not entirely satisfactory as they are all based on arbitrary conjectures. These letters shall forever remain a mystery.

E. Meanings

In her exegetical work, Bint al-Shāṭi' offers many interesting and refreshing new insights into the meanings of the Qur'ānic words. In this part we shall dwell on some of these insights.

1. Al-Insān (man), al-nās (people), and al-ins (mankind)

Concerning the term insān in verse 2 of sūrah 103, Bint al-Shāṭi' shows that the words al-insān, al-nās, and al-ins, which are derived from the same root, a-n-s, have each a subtle difference in meaning. None can be substituted for the other in the context of the Qur'ān.

⁶² al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, vol. II, p. 43.

According to her investigation, in the eighteen places where the word al-ins is used, the word always appears in conjunction with the word jinn. Accordingly, the word al-ins connotes the sense of friendliness, as opposed to wildness and belligerency. From her investigation of sixty-five verses which contain the word al-insān, Bint al-Shāṭi' concludes that the notion of insān in the Qur'ān is applied in the context of competency to bear, among other things, the responsibility for duties or tasks, trials with respect to good and evil, and the capacity to resist temptations, such as deception and oppression. Therefore, it is only with respect to the word al-insān, and not al-ins, that the meaning of 'ilm, "knowledge", bayan, "explanatory", and jadāl, "debate" is specified. This means that the objective of al-insāniyyah, "humanity", according to her, is with respect to its advancement (mankind having risen from the status of lowly human state) to the quality of being able to bear the trust and responsibility as spiritual beings.⁶³

Al-Rāghib accepts the above view concerning the meaning of the word insān and its derivations. He considers the word or the concept insān as being intimately connected with the sense of community through which man becomes sociable within a group. It is by living in a community that man becomes civilized.⁶⁴ Apparently Bint al-Shāṭi'

⁶³ al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, vol. II, pp. 83-84.

has taken this idea from al-Rāghib. In any case, she proceeds to examine the entry of a-n-s in the Qur'ān to see how the Qur'ān employs the word in various places, and she supports her interpretation with Qur'ānic verses. Therefore, her finding is based on sound proof.

In her book, Maqāl fī al-Insān, Bint al-Shaṭi' argues that the concept of insān in the Qur'ān is different in sense from the related concept of bashar. The concept of bashar, according to her, connotes physical characteristics, involving animal functions such as eating or walking on the streets. All the descendants of Adam share these characteristics. The word bashar, which is a collective noun, occurs in thirty-five places in the Qur'ān. In twenty-five of these cases, it is used to indicate the humanity of messengers and prophets, while the concept of insān, which appears sixty-five times, does not refer merely to the human species in a physical sense. Rather, the word insān has a more specific meaning; it refers to the sense of man's development spiritually to the point of assuming caliphal duties in the world, and of bearing responsibility and human trust by virtue of his being endowed with knowledge and intellect. This means that man has to face good and evil in the world and is equipped to deal with life's trials and deceptions. By facing life's challenges man becomes conscious of his

⁶⁴ al-Rāghib, p. 28.

strengths and limitations which make him contented with his lot in life and his privileged position in terms of realizing the highest level of development on the spiritual plane.⁶⁵

2. Bayān (eloquence) and nuṭq (utterance)

In interpreting verse 4 of Sūrat al-Raḥmān (55), Bint al-Shāṭi' has first to examine the Qur'ān concerning the occurrence of the word bayān. It is on the basis of this examination that she declares that the word bayān has a distinctive meaning which refers only to mankind. This is unlike the word nuṭq which is used by logicians to refer to the distinctive nature of man. The word nuṭq in the Qur'ān is also used with reference to animals (27:16) while the word bayān is applied only to mankind.⁶⁶

3. Amānah (trust)

With respect to verse 72 of Sūrat al-Aḥzāb (33), Bint al-Shāṭi' states that the word amānah "trust", which is used in the singular form and is defined with a definite article, has a specific meaning in that verse. She disagrees with some exegetes who generalize the meaning of amānah to mean amānah of all types. According to her, this is the only verse where the word amānah takes both the singular form and the definite article. When the Qur'ān

⁶⁵ Maqāl fī al-Insān, pp. 11-19.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-48.

uses the word amānah in a general sense, it always uses it in the plural form, such as the case in verses 23:8, 70:32, 8:27, etc. She also disagrees with al-Rāghib who interprets the word amānah in the sense of 'aql, "intellect", whereas the two words are not synonymous in meaning. Similarly, it is not correct to interpret the word amānah as meaning religious obligations, for the Qur'ān asks the believers to fulfill simultaneously their religious duties and amānah (22:1-9). To bring this concept into bold relief, Bint al-Shāṭi' proceeds to examine the entry h-m-l, "carry, bear", in Qur'ānic usage. She concludes that the offer of amānah to heaven, the earth and the mountains, and their fear or refusal to bear this amānah, is in fact, a metaphorical use of the word in order to emphasize the hardship or heavy burden involved. Therefore, the point of their weakness to bear amānah relates to power and not to a physical dimension, solidity. Thus amānah, according to her, is a trial in terms of responsibility with respect to duties and freedom of will.⁶⁷

4. Raqabah (neck)

As for the word raqabah as used in the Qur'ān, Bint al-Shāṭi' states that this word, when it is used in the singular form, indicates man's responsibility as an individual whether in terms of his human trust, or in

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 51-60.

terms of his effort to establish freedom, or, more precisely, in terms of his struggles to purify himself from sin. On the other hand, when the word is used in the plural form the responsibility to fulfill the human trust rests with society and its rulers.⁶⁸

On the topic of "human freedom", Bint al-Shāṭi' concludes from her investigation of relevant Qur'ānic texts that Islam offers two ways to eradicate slavery. The first method, is that of closing the door to new enslavement. The main source of slavery is war which creates war captives. The subject of war captives is treated in the Qur'ān in verse 47:4 which offers two ways to solve this problem; first, it calls for their unconditional release, and second, it encourages their being ransomed. There is no third alternative concerning the war captives. The second method of eradicating slavery is that of freeing the existing slaves. Since the early Meccan phase of Islamic propagation, Islam has encouraged believers to tread the steep path (Q 90: 11-13), even though it is toilsome. Instituting freedom and human rights exemplified by the freeing of a slave at one's own initiative as an act of penance without being motivated to do so, is the first step in this path (fakk raqabah). There are other verses which encourage believers to free those who are less fortunate than

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 71.

themselves from bondage or slavery by, for instance, ransoming them as an act of charity, as an act of atonement for a sin and as an act of human goodness and mercy by committing the deed of freedom in writing (mukātabah) by the masters (Q. 24:33).⁶⁹

5. Jadal (debate)

On the subject of intellectual freedom, Bint al-Shāṭi' disagrees with those who believe that to debate in religious matters is to display evidence of unbelief or hypocrisy. According to her, the Prophet Ibrāhīm had questioned Allah about Lūṭ's people and had asked Him to extend His mercy to them. The Qur'ān tells us that Allah had not been angry with Ibrāhīm, but had forgiven him and had asked him to turn away from them. Bint al-Shāṭi' observes that the entry j-d-l appears twenty-five times in the third form of the verb and five times in the form of a verbal noun. She indicates that the word is commonly used in the context of religious issues. Given this situation, it is natural, according to her, that debates and differences of opinion should arise with respect to understanding the meaning(s) the Qur'ān intends to convey. The ability to think, reflect and disagree on issues is what, after all, distinguishes man from other creatures. From this point of view, according to her, Islam is a natural religion given that its scripture, the Qur'ān,

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 68-73.

does not reject argumentation and disputation as long as these remain in friendly terms and within the bounds of the Qur'ānic world view.⁷⁰

6. Irādah (will)

Bint al-Shāṭi' examines the word irādah which relates to the concept of freedom of will. She concludes that in all the 140 occurrences of the word in the Qur'ān the word appears in the māḍī or mudārī' tenses of the verb and never in the imperative mood. Therefore, the word irādah in Qur'ānic usage, according to her, gives the sense that the focus of irādah is the occurrence of action itself, and not mere imagination or description. In the Qur'ān, 50 out of 140 instances of the word irādah are attributed to Allah, and the remainder to His creatures. This leads Bint al-Shāṭi' to conclude that there is a difference between the irādah of man and the irādah of Allah. The irādah of God is a determination or a destiny, while the irādah of human beings consists of certain motivational steps from desire, choice, and finally a firm decision which leads to action. Thus, Bint al-Shāṭi' believes that the human will requires freedom tempered with divine just rule which obliges man to bear responsibility for whatever he chooses.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 94-96.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 101-117.

7. Na'im (bliss)

A significant aspect of her interpretation of verse 8 of sūrah 102 especially with respect to the meaning of the word na'im, is that Bint al-Shāṭi' has a unique understanding of the word na'im, which none of the exegetes seems to have been aware of. No exegete, for instance, has remarked on the distinction between the words na'im and ni'mah (blessing) or ni'am (plural). Based on her examination of the entry n-'a-m, she declares that the Qur'ān always links the word na'im with al-ākhirah or na'im al-ākhirah, "the grace of the hereafter" and never uses it in conjunction with the word al-dunya. The word ni'mah or ni'am (plural), on the other hand, is used to indicate the guidance and blessing of this world. This confirms her belief that the question in the last verse of sūrah 102 relates to na'im al-ākhirah. In other words, the verse suggests that people will be asked about the true grace which had eluded them in their neglect of spiritual matters and their preoccupation primarily with material things, not all of which are harmful. The reward of paradise is a manifestation of the true grace from Allah to believers. Therefore, the warning in this question, according to Bint al-Shāṭi', is perfectly harmonized with the threats mentioned in the whole sūrah. These verses are intimately connected with this question and reveals coherence to this divinely-inspired

arrangement.⁷²

F. Synonyms

It is very interesting to note that Bint al-Shāṭi' in her investigation of the words aqsama and halafa, which are generally considered to be synonyms by most exegetes, finds that the word halafa does not convey the same meaning as the word aqsama in Qur'ānic application. All the thirteen instances of the word halafa which she examines occur in the Qur'ān in the sense of making an oath which will be broken. Moreover, the word halafa is never attributed to Allah.⁷³

As for the word lahw (amusement), Bint al-Shāṭi' rejects the idea held by some exegetes that lahw is a synonym of la'ib (play). Since the Qur'ān often connects the words lahw and la'ib with the conjunction waw, she believes that the two words do not function as synonyms. Her investigation of the word lahw in the Qur'ān shows that the causes of lahw can be la'ib just as they can be a person (80:10), children and wealth (63:9), commerce and trade (24:37), and hopes (15:3).

She disagrees with Rāzī who considers the word al-takāthur (mutual rivalry) to be a synonym of al-tafākhur

⁷² al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, vol. I, pp. 191-197.

⁷³ Ibid., vol. I, pp. 148-149.

(boasting).⁷⁴ She points out that al-takāthur and al-tafākhur are placed in the same verse and joined with the conjunction waw in 57:20, which, according to her method, does not denote synonymity.

Bint al-Shāṭi' examines Masā'il Nāfi' Ibn al-Azraq, a collection of 189 words from the Qur'ān (Ibn 'Abbās gives a brief definition of each which he supports with pre-Islamic poetry) to see whether the word given by Ibn 'Abbās is a synonym of Qur'ānic words in question or just an approximative explanation. She provides an extensive commentary on these words by comparing how the Qur'ān uses them in various occurrences in order to identify their meanings. Sometimes she also refers to the classical lexicographers, exegetes and philologists for clarification, although in the end she consistently upholds Qur'ānic meaning for final judgment. In her commentary on Masā'il Nāfi' Ibn al-Azraq, sometimes Bint al-Shāṭi' disagrees with Ibn 'Abbās's explanation, such as his definition or identification of the word kabad with istiḡāmah.⁷⁵ Bint al-Shāṭi''s examination of Masā'il Nāfi' Ibn al-Azraq yields more evidence with respect to what linguists usually call synonyms which she does not consider as ever occurring in the Qur'ān. Therefore, she believes that a Qur'ānic word cannot be substituted for

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ al-I'jāz al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān, pp. 282-283.

another.⁷⁶ Boullata, in his article "Poetry Citation as Interpretive Illustration in Qur'ān Exegesis: Masā'il Nāfi' Ibn al-Azraq," observes that Bint al-Shāṭi's "commentary on the masā'il is an outstanding scholarly effort in philology, and it offers refreshing insights into Qur'ān exegesis in modern times."⁷⁷

G. Scientific Interpretation

In interpreting verse 2 of sūrah 96, particularly the word 'alag, Bint al-Shāṭi' is strongly critical of the so-called modernists who try to interpret this word according to understandings derived from the field of embryology and, in particular, physiological and biological explanations. She argues that the Qur'ān was revealed to an illiterate Prophet and an illiterate community which did not know and had not studied embryology and could not imagine that the Qur'ān would present to them something that they could not fathom. For the early Muslims the word 'alag was understood by them as simply referring to any material that clings, for instance, blood. They had no need to study embryology or to consult any references in a medical library in order to comprehend the meaning of the verse which says "He who creates man from 'alag, 'blood clot'." Bint al-Shāṭi' supports her argument with many

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.508.

⁷⁷ Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams, ed. by Wael B. Hallaq and Donald P. Little (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), p. 32.

verses of the Qur'ān relating to the creation of man. She argues that there is no single verse in the Qur'ān which calls attention to the study of biology or anatomy just for the purpose of understanding the creation of man. All the verses concerning the creation of man, she asserts, are intended to convey the sense of the omnipotence of Allah Who creates man from a blood clot or mingled fluids which become a new creature, that is man, who is to be the subject of reward and punishment.⁷⁸

As for the subject of the creation of man, she again repeats her objection to scientific interpretations. She argues that the verses on creation are only intended to serve the purpose of admonition and to draw attention to the process and progress of the embryo which can be understood easily by observation. Scientific insights are not needed to get at the lessons contained in those verses. She argues that the method of the sciences in the field of, for instance, anatomy and biology, does not have as its concern the treatment of spiritual issues pertaining to belief. Rather, the purpose of Qur'ānic teaching is to provide spiritual guidance and to warn against the consequences of a life devoid of moral responsibility.⁷⁹ She, therefore, completely disagrees with the pseudo-modernist interpretations of people such

⁷⁸ al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī, vol. II, p. 18-20.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

as Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd.⁸⁰

Concerning this kind of interpretation, al-Khūlī elaborates his refutation and his argument in his book Manāhiḥ Tajdīd whose ideas have been summarized in chapter two of this thesis.⁸¹

⁸⁰ See her refutation of his book in her Al-Qur'ān wa al-Tafsīr al-'Asrī: Hādhā Balāgh li al-Nās.

⁸¹ Manāhiḥ Tajdīd, p. 292; Chapter II of this thesis, p. 28.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to present and to analyze Bint al-Shāṭi's views with respect to her exegetical study of the Qur'ān. We have shown that her method of analysis (rooted in a number of assumptions which together establish the basic foundations of her interpretive quest) is both innovative and creative. The main interpretive principle that she adheres to is firmly rooted in the belief that the Qur'ān is the best interpreter of itself. This is the basis of her method of analysis.

Her approach seeks to explain the meaning of the Qur'ānic verses based on what might be called Qur'ānic contextualization. To determine the meaning of a particular verse in a sūrah, she focuses on the central idea/phrase or word as it appears here as well as elsewhere in the Qur'ān as the key to unlocking the meaning of that verse.

Bint al-Shāṭi' examines at length various interpretations offered by some of the most celebrated exegetes such as al-Zamakhsharī, Abū Ḥayyān, al-Ṭabarī and al-Naysābūrī, and modern ones such as Muḥammad 'Abduh. She offers a critical appraisal of their views before reaching her own conclusions.

She differs from the other exegetes in the fact that

she is bound to a principle of interpretation which she applies rather rigorously. A few examples will suffice. While many exegetes interpret the word ghinā in verse 8 of sūrah 93 to mean wealth, Bint al-Shāṭi' shows that the word is used in the spiritual sense of protecting or insulating the Prophet from committing bad deeds while at the same time meeting his needs as the various occurrences of the word in the Qur'ān indicate. Similarly, whereas many exegetes have interpreted the word na'im to mean the blessing of this world, she again shows that on the basis of contextualization the word actually conveys the meaning of na'im al-ākhirah, "the blessing of the hereafter". Bint al-Shāṭi' does not accept the practice of some exegetes who subject the Qur'ān to the rules elaborated by later grammarians, rhetoricians and literary critics for she would "adjudicate the Qur'ān in matters of grammar, rhetoric and style".⁸² She also does not hesitate to reject certain stories or narrations (which the exegetes use to interpret the Qur'ān) if she believes that they violate the spirit of the Qur'ān, or to dismiss interpretations that she considers artificial and contrived. Her exegetical approach rejects privileging certain narrations over the criteria of interpreting the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān itself.

⁸² Issa J. Boullata, "Modern Qur'ānic Exegesis, A Study of Bint al-Shāṭi's Method", The Muslim World, 64 (1974), p. 107.

A closer scrutiny of Bint al-Shāṭi's interpretive approach reveals that her views are grounded in Islamic modernism. Although she received her earliest education from traditional Islamic schools (including studying informally with her father and with a religious Shaykh), she did later attend secular schools where she was exposed to modern ideas. What was pivotal to her intellectual development was her joining Cairo University. It was under the influence of a Cairo University scholar, Prof. Amīn al-Khulī, later to become her husband, that she was introduced to the radical modernist-inspired approach to the interpretation of the Qur'ān. Al-Khulī has left a lasting impression on her.

With respect to her method Issa J. Boullata writes that "While there is no doubt that some of her views may be controversial, it is perfectly clear that her exegetical method is a courageous and refreshing attempt in this field in modern times."⁸³

It is worth noting that Bint al-Shāṭi' is very consistent in holding the principles of this method, which include avoiding any extraneous elements and rejecting the idea of forcing grammatical rules on the Qur'ān. This attempt can be clearly seen from our discussion in Chapter III, where we have seen that she independently criticizes both classical and modern commentators and discovers some

⁸³ Ibid., p. 113.

interesting points on which she differs from them in their classical or modern exegeses.

Her most interesting finding is what certain linguists call synonyms which do not appear in the Qur'an with the same meaning, even for the words of the same derivations. Another important point of her exegesis is that the passive form of the verb and the metonymic predication (isnād majāzī) that are applied to describe the events of the Last Day are strictly for the purpose of emphasizing the events which will be spontaneous regardless of the real doer. Another important point of her findings is with respect to Qur'ānic oaths, especially *waw al qasam* which, according to her, are used as rhetorical devices applied to other than a particular oath's original meaning. In other words, the purpose of using this rhetorical device is to draw attention to perceptible objects which are indisputable as a way of introducing a discussion on abstract phenomena connected with the unseen.

Thus Bint al-Shāṭi's exegesis, according to us, is an excellent example and guide for someone attempting to interpret the Qur'ān using this method. In conclusion, it should be noted that Bint al-Shāṭi's abiding contribution to scholarship has been her formidable challenge to the received scholarship on Qur'ānic exegesis by Muslim scholars both ancient and modern. At the same time she has

offered new insights into a subject on which much remains to be said/written. The fact that she is a female Muslim Qur'ānic scholar whose specialty is literary Arabic, is even more interesting and an encouraging development in a field where women's contributions and intellectual endeavors in Quranic hermeneutics need to be exposed and examined.

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