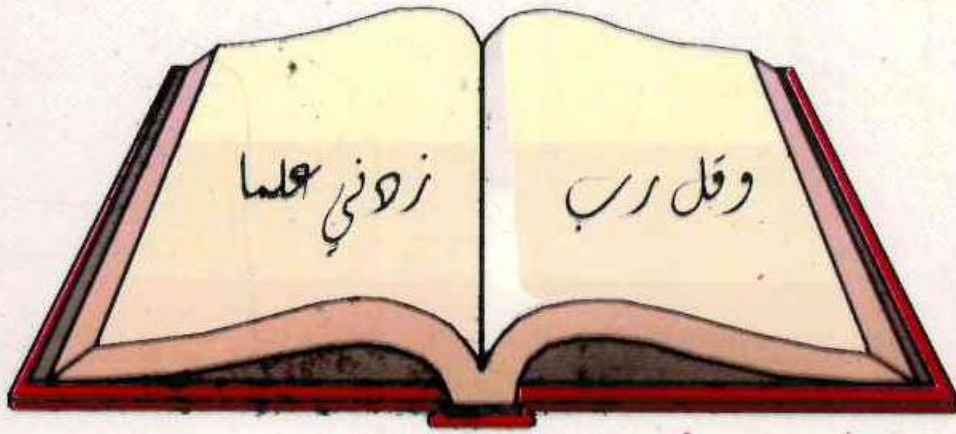


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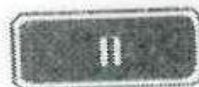
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TAFSĪR IN KANEM BORNO AND SOKOTO CALIPHATES

BY

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In the name of Allah The Beneficent The Merciful. May His peace and blessings be upon His last Messenger Muhammad (SAW), his household, companions and all those who follow the straight path up to the Day of Judgment.

Abstract

This paper highlights tafsīr in Kanem Borno and Sokoto Caliphates. The paper focuses on the two caliphates because they were the role model for the present Northern and some Western States of Nigeria and even beyond as far as the tafsīr of the Qur'ān and propagation of Islām are concerned. The paper shows the extent to which some indigenous Islāmic Scholars of the two caliphates contributed immensely in the field of tafsīr, hence, proved themselves as mufasssirūn and mutarjimūn of international repute.

Introduction

The paper begins by defining the term tafsīr. It also discusses distinction between tafsīr and ta'wīl and the divergent views of Muslim scholars on ta'wīl. The paper also highlights what tarjamah of the Qur'ān is all about, and the difference between tafsīr and tarjamah tafsiriyyah.

THE MEANINGS OF TAFSĪR

Literally, tafsīr means al-īdāh and al-tabyīn that is elucidation and explanation¹ as Allah says:

And no example do they bring to (oppose) you, but we reveal to you the truth and the better explanation (thereof).²

Technically, tafsīr could be defined as the science through which the Qur'ān can be understood. In other words, tafsīr means the science by the help of which Qur'ānic injunctions and causes of revelation can be understood.³ According to Badr al-Dīn Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah al-Zarkashī (745-794 AH), tafsīr is a branch of knowledge through which the book of Allah which was sent to Prophet Muhammad could be well comprehended through the deduction of its religious injunctions and legislations.⁴ According to some scholars, tafsīr is defined as a science which studies the Qur'ān on the basis of its instructions as ordained by Allah according to the capability of the humanbeing.⁵ According to al-Qādī (2002), tafsīr is the science by which the Qur'ān is understood, its meanings explained and its rulings derived.⁶

DISTINCTION BETWEEN TAFSĪR AND TA'WĪL

Ta'wīl is derived from al-awl which means al-rujū' that is to return, to revert, which implies going back to the original meaning of a word to see what its meanings and connotations are. Some scholars maintained that ta'wīl is derived from al-māl that is al-masīr meaning returning to one's destination. Other scholars stated that ta'wīl is derived from al-iyālah that is al-siyāsah, which means to make something look more stable.⁷ Technically, according to some salaf such as ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī (d.310 A.H) and Mujāhid ibn Jabr al-Makkī (d.140 A.H/722), ta'wīl has the same meaning as tafsīr as it could either be said "the tafsīr of the Qur'ān" or "the ta'wīl of the Qur'ān," both stand for one thing.⁸ Ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī, for instance, in his Jāmi' al-Bayān 'An Tā'wil Aya al-Qur'ān used the expression al-qaūl fī ta'wīl qauluhu ta'ālā kadhā to mean "the

interpretation of Allah's saying". He also often said in his tafsīr ikhtalafa ahl al- ta'wīl fī hadhihi al-āyah meaning that the mufassirūn differed in the interpretation of a particular verse. By the word ta'wīl in the two expressions quoted, Imām al-Tabarī referred it to mean tafsīr.⁹

According to Abū 'Ubaīdah Mu'ammār ibn al-Muthannā (d. 209/824), tafsīr and ta'wīl are synonymous.¹⁰ According to Husayn ibn Muhammad al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī (d.502/1108), tafsīr is more generalized than ta'wīl.¹¹ To him, tafsīr is applicable to interpreting the muhkamāt verses of the Qur'ān while ta'wīl is only applicable to interpreting the mutashābihāt verses, such as those talking about the throne of Allah (al-'arsh), His hand (yadullah), His speech (kalāmullah) and so on.¹² But al-Māturīdī (d.333 A.H) viewed tafsīr as the direct meaning of Allah's statements and ta'wīl as the different interpretations which are arrived at through exercising personal effort, ijtihād.¹³ According to Abū Tālib al-Tha'labī (d. 427 A.H/1036) tafsīr is the technical meaning of the verse such as the explanation of al-sirāt to mean al-tarīq (the path), while ta'wīl is the explanation of the hidden meaning of a verse.¹⁴ However, three mufassirūn: Abū al-Qāsim al-Nāṣabūrī (d. 728 A.H/1328), Imām al-Baghawī (d.510 A.H/1117) and al-Kawāshī defined tafsīr to mean the speech in relation to the causes of revelation and its qisas. They also defined ta'wīl as an effort to bring the most probable meaning of the verse.¹⁵ In other words, they viewed tafsīr to mean the direct meaning of the Qur'ān that explains the willful intention of Allah while ta'wīl is the exploration of the hidden meaning deducted from the text. Such deduction requires a thorough observation on the basis of its probable nature which at the same time does not go contrary to the Qur'ān and sunnah.¹⁶

With all this divergence of opinion among scholars, one can safely draw a conclusion that tafsīr is what is referred to as a derived report (al-riwāyah) while ta'wīl means exercising personal effort (ijtihād) in order to arrive at the meaning of a verse. This is because the exact meaning of

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tafsīr is to unveil (kashf) the meaning of the Qur'ān showing clearly what Allah means. This should never be based on personal opinion but rather in the context of the Qur'ān itself, the prophetic sayings and the sayings of the sahābah. On the other hand, ta'wīl is mostly based on exercising personal effort.¹⁷

DIVERGENT VIEWS OF MUSLIM SCHOLARS ON TA'WĪL

The issue of ta'wīl generated divergent views among Muslim scholars. These are: the view of Muslim scholars (the later jurists, theologians, traditionists and sufists), the view of the salaf and the view of the ash'arites.¹⁸

THE VIEW OF THE LATER MUSLIM SCHOLARS ON TA'WĪL

According to this group of scholars, ta'wīl means to return and to revert the statement from its preferable meaning (al-rājih) to the less preferable one (al-marjūh) in order to justify a certain thing. In this situation, a scholar intending to make ta'wīl must take two things into consideration.

¹⁹ These are:

- i. The scholar should explain the possibility of diverting the statement to the meaning he thought was the correct one.
- ii. He should explain the basis which necessitated the diversion of the statement from its preferable to its less preferable meaning. In the absence of these two conditions, the ta'wīl will be considered as invalid (ta'wīlan fāsīdan).²⁰

Al-Dhahabī (1976:18) quoted ibn al-Subkī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Muhallī in Jam'u al-Jawāmi' that :

Ta'wīl is to revert the surface meaning to the hidden (unsurface) one provided the unsurface meaning could still accommodate such diversion. If such diversion is done with genuine basis, the diversion is said to be a genuine ta'wīl.

However, if the diversion is done without basis, it is said to be an invalid ta'wīl.²¹

THE VIEW OF THE SALAF ON TA'WĪL

According to the salaf, ta'wīl has two meanings: The first meaning is to interpret and explain a statement whether it conforms or differs with its surface meaning or not. In this case, ta'wīl and tafsīr are synonymous. Among the salaf who held this view include Mujāhid ibn Jabr al-Makkī (d.722 AD) and Imām ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī (d.310 AH/922).²² In his Jāmi' al-Bayān 'An Ta'wil Āyā al-Qur'ān, al-Tabarī used the expression : "al-qawl fī ta'wīl qauluhu ta'ālā kadhā wa kadhā to mean the interpretation of Allah's saying. By the word ta'wīl here, al-Tabarī meant tafsīr.²³

The second meaning of ta'wīl according to the salaf is restricted to what appears on the surface in the Qur'ān, nothing more and nothing less. According to this view, Muslims are not allowed to try to investigate the so called "hidden" meaning of the Qur'ānic verses. Shaykh Ahmad ibn Taimiyyah (d.738 AH/1328) was among the proponents of this view.²⁴

THE VIEW OF THE ASH'ARITES ON TA'WĪL

The ash'arites are of the view that ta'wīl is allowed on the mutashābihāt (allegorical) verses of the Qur'ān. Such verses, however, include those talking about al-'arsh (the throne of Allah), kalāmullah (Allah's speech), wajh rabbik (the face of your Lord) and other numerous mutashābihāt verses of the Qur'ān. Shaykh 'Abdullah ibn Fūdī was among the proponents of this view.²⁵

LITERAL MEANING OF TARJAMAH

Literally, tarjamah has two meanings:

- i. To extract a statement from one language to another without explaining the original meaning as it is in the original language.

ii. To explain and interpret a statement from one language to another.²⁶

Based on this, tarjamah is divided into two types: tarjamah harfiyyah (direct or literal translation) and tarjamah-ma'nawiyyah aw tafsīriyyah (indirect or explanatory translation).²⁷

DIRECT OR LITERAL TRANSLATION OF THE QUR'ĀN (TARJAMAH HARFIYYAH LIL QUR'ĀN)

This means to extract a statement from one language to another, taking into cognizance the style and original meaning of the statement. Direct or literal translation of the Qur'ān (tarjamah harfiyyah lil Qur'āni) could either be translation with illustration (tarjamah harfiyyah bil mithli) or translation without illustration (tarjamah harfiyyah bi ghaīri mithli).²⁸ Tarjamah harfiyyah bil mithli, means to translate the glorious Qur'ān from Arabic into another language verbatim, taking into consideration the general style of the Qur'ānic expression.²⁹ In fact, this is not possible as far as the word of Allāh (the Qur'ān) is concerned.³⁰ Tarjamah harfiyyah bi ghaīri mithli, means to translate the Qur'ān and its style of expression verbatim, in accordance with the capacity of the translator (mutarjim) and also in accordance with what the mutarjim's language could accommodate.³¹ This will not also be possible as far as the Qur'ān is concerned.³²

It could be deduced that as far as the Qur'ān is concerned both tarjamah harfiyyah bil mithli and tarjamah harfiyyah bi ghaīri mithli are not possible.³³ It is far above human capability to imitate the unique kind of Qur'ānic expression.³⁴ Allah had already challenged human being and jinn that they will never bring even a verse similar to that of the Qur'ān (both in content and meaning). This, in essence, means that tarjamah harfiyyah is not the tafsīr of the Qur'ān.³⁵

INDIRECT OR EXPLANATORY TRANSLATION OF THE QUR'ĀN (TARJAMAH MA'NAWIYYAH AW TAFSĪRIYYAH)

This is the indirect explanation of the meaning of the Qur'ān from Arabic to another language. This is done in order to enable the audience to comprehend the divine message of the Qur'ān.³⁶

Suppose a scholar applies tarjamah harfiyyah (direct translation of the glorious Qur'ān) to explain verse 29 of sūrah al-Isrā':

And let not your hand be tied to your neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach so that you become blameworthy and in severe poverty.

His explanation could only portray that "to place one's hand tied to his neck" is prohibited. This, of course, is completely a deviation from what Allāh refers to in this verse.³⁷ However, if the verse is explained through tarjamah tafsīriyyah, the real meaning of the verse could rightly be conveyed that "Allāh prohibits squandering (tabdhīr) and stinginess and tightfistedness (taqtīr)."³⁸

On the whole, it could be suggested that tarjamah tafsīriyyah is allowed for the fact that it is much nearer to the tafsīr of the Qur'ān.³⁹

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TAFSĪR AND TARJAMAH TAFSĪRIYYAH

The difference between tafsīr and tarjamah tafsīriyyah could be seen from two angles.⁴⁰

- i. The difference between the two languages, i.e., Arabic and another language. Explanation of the Qur'ān is regarded to be tafsīr if conducted in the original language of the Qur'ān (Arabic).⁴¹ In sharp contrast with tarjamah tafsīriyyah, which is conducted in any other language beside Arabic,⁴² such as Kanembu (Kanuri), Fulfulde, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Nupe, Ibibio, Efik to mention a few.

- ii. As far as tafsir is concerned, both the mai jan baki, and the scholar interpreting the Qur'an are highly expected to be very proficient in Arabic.⁴³ They could easily realize whenever a mistake is made in the process of tafsir. However, in a situation whereby the mufassir did not notice the mistake in the tafsir text, his mai jan baki may easily draw his attention to it.⁴⁴ On the contrary, the mai jan baki to tarjamah tafsiriyyah, may not be aware of some of such mistakes. This is because he may not necessarily be proficient in Arabic language.⁴⁵ As such, he may think that the explanation rendered into the language of the audience is the correct version of the tafsir text he already read.⁴⁶

CONDITIONS LAID DOWN FOR TARJAMAH TAFSIRIYYAH

The following are the four conditions for tarjamah tafsiriyyah.⁴⁷

- i. It must be in conformity with the general rules and conditions governing a valid tafsir. For example, there should not be ta'wil unless when it is necessary to do so; and that such ta'wil must be supported with genuine hadith of the Prophet (SAW).
- ii. The mutarjim (translator) should never be inclined to a deviated ideology.
- iii. The mutarjim must be an expert in the two languages, that is Arabic language and another language.
- iv. The Qur'anic text should be written separately from its tafsir text, from where tarjamah tafsiriyyah should be conducted.⁴⁸ The wisdom behind separating the Qur'anic text from the tafsir text is, so that some people might not wrongly assume that the mutarjim is conducting tarjamah harfiyyah.⁴⁹

In conclusion, direct or literal translation of the Qur'an is not permissible as it will lead to the distortion of the actual message of the Qur'an. This is because some Arabic words cannot accept direct or literal translation; and the conditions necessary in translation (tarjamah

tafsīriyyah) are similar to those in tafsīr, but in addition the mutarjim must be fluent in the language of his translation.⁵⁰

Tarjamah tafsīriyyah of the Qur'ān is necessary since the Qur'ān which embodies the message of Islām is revealed in Arabic. Non-Arabs and even uneducated Arabs could only get the message through translation or interpretation. This is in consideration of the fact that the Qur'ān was revealed as a guidance to the whole of mankind irrespective of their Arabic background.⁵¹ It is noteworthy that even during the time of the Prophet (SAW) he permitted the translation of the Qur'ān.⁵² This is confirmed in the various letters which he sent to the then rulers of Byzantine Empire, Persia and Abyssinia.⁵³ Moreover, the sahābah of the Prophet (SAW) dispersed to various provinces especially during the conquest under the second Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb, they translated the Qur'ān to the converts.⁵⁴ The translation of the Qur'ān was necessitated by the conversion of non-Arabs to Islām since the first century under the hijrah.⁵⁵ The population of non-Arab Muslims today has out numbered the Arabs greatly. Due to the necessity of transmitting the Qur'ān to the Muslims, most of whom were non-Arabic speaking, translation of the Qur'ān (tarjamah tafsiriyyah) into any language was permissible according to the consensus of Muslim scholars.⁵⁶

Professors Murata and Chittick submitted that:

Translations however inspired they may be are only shadows of the original. They should always be read with a healthy dose of skepticism concerning the degree to which they reflect the original. The gulf between the original and the translation is an important reason why Muslims must recite the Qur'ān only in Arabic for the required daily prayers. A translation of the Qur'ān is not the Qur'ān; it is simply one person's interpretation of the Qur'ān. To a limited extent, however, translations can shed light on the meaning of the Qur'ān.⁵⁷

TAFSĪR IN KANEM BORNO AND SOKOTO CALIPHATES

Prior to the fall of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1903, there existed two mighty caliphates namely Kanem Borno and Sokoto Caliphates. Islām was well established in these two areas with the sharī'ah well entrenched in the lives and affairs of the inhabitants. Mahmūd (1988) states that in all the regions of the world colonized by the British no where was Islām being observed as thoroughly as was the case in these two caliphates, except perhaps in some parts of the Arab World.⁵⁸ It is against this background that this paper discusses tafsīr in Kanem Borno and Sokoto Caliphates.

TAFSĪR IN KANEM – BORNO CALIPHATE

Islām was already fully established in Egypt and North Africa as far back as the seventh century. It was from these areas that the Islamization of the peoples of Africa south of the Sahara started. As early as the seventh century, Muslims from North Africa used the famous and well established trade routes as a means of the propagation of Islām.⁵⁹ Most historians are of the opinion that Islām reached Africa South of the Sahara through the trans-Saharan trade routes. J.D. Fage, for example, stated that the trans-Saharan trade route provided immediate means for the penetration of Islām into Kanem-Borno, while 'Abdullāh Smith asserted that the trans-Saharan trade routes provided a gateway through which Islām penetrated into Kanem-Borno throughout the period of the Sayfawa dynasty. This routes was not only coveyer of goods and articles of trade; but was also transmitter of culture and ideas and has been described as the ancient, shortest and easiest of all routes.⁶⁰ Historians such as Lavers believe that Islām made its first appearance in Kanem-Borno in the eleventh century.⁶¹ However, Mustafā (1987) has a contrary view, indicating that Islām came to Borno much earlier than eleventh century⁶².

Balogun held the view that there was Islāmic influence in Kanem-Borno prior to the reign of Mai Hume Jilmi ibn ‘Abduljalīl ibn Arki and that there were Muslim Mais like Mai Arki (the grandfather of Mai Hume Jilmi), Mai Kade ibn Arki and Mai ‘AbdulJalīl (Mai Hume’s father), prior to his reign.⁶³ Balogun stated further that there was not only the influence of Islām in Kanem-Borno prior to the eleventh century but also there were Muslims in greater numbers living there. In fact, it could only be said that the reign of Mai Hume Jilmi witnessed the establishment of an Islāmic ‘ummah headed by the most learned of them. During his reign and afterwards, the propagation and spread of Islām was undertaken by the fiat of the royal might with a high degree of concern. The reign of Mai Hume Jilmi was also characterized by a high level of intellectual pursuit by the ‘ulamā’.⁶⁴ According to Palmer (1928), the first country in the Sūdān which Islām entered was the land of Borno. It came through a scholar Muhammad ibn Mani who lived in Borno for five years in the time of king Bulu, six years in the time of king Arki, four years in the time of king Kadai Hawami, fourteen years in the time of king Hume.⁶⁵ Palmer stated further that:

King Bulu read with Muhammad ibn Mani from “Tabārah alladhī bi yadihil mulk” down to “min aljinnati wal nās”. Bulu gave his teacher fifty camels. King Arki read from “yāsīn” to “walnās” and gave him sixty camels. King Kade ibn Arju read from “K.H.‘A.S” to “walnās” and gave him seventy camels. ‘AbdulJalīl read from “A.L.M.S” (sūrah al-A‘rāf) onwards and gave him eighty camels. Mai Hume read secretly from sūrah al-Baqarah to “wal nās”. Then he read the Risālah twice and gave his teacher Mani one hundred camels, one hundred pieces of gold, one hundred pieces of silver and one hundred slaves, all because of the reading and instruction he derived from him.⁶⁶

It is noteworthy that the various gifts given to the scholar Muhammad ibn Mani by Mai Hume Jilmi for teaching him the Qur’ān

and fiqh are clear evidence to prove Mai Hume's concern for Islāmic education as well as for his great motivation to the Islāmic scholars. It is also very interesting to note that Mai Dunama Humani the son and successor of Mai Hume Jilmi built a mosque (madrasah) in Cairo for the education of the people of Kanem Borno. To demonstrate his willingness and desire, he settled his “slaves” to be taught there in Egypt. Mai Dunama Dibbalemi (1221-2159) built hostel in Cairo. Up to now, this hotel is in existence, and it is referred to as riwāq al-Barnāwī (Borno Students' Hotel).⁶⁷ Al-Maqrizi writing in 1364 submits that :

This madrasah was popular with the tukrūr and most years they sent money for its maintenance.⁶⁸

The tafsīr of the Qur'ān in Borno is generally referred to as tarjumo (from the Arabic term tarjamah) that is the translation of the Qur'ān from Arabic to the indigenous languages of Kanembu (Kanuri), Hausa, Mandara and Fulfulde.⁶⁹ As Islām entered Kanem-Borno, the study of the Qur'ān became necessary and indispensable tool for understanding the religion. As a result of this the tarjumo (translation of the Qur'ān) came into existence as a veritable branch of learning. In this field the contribution of the Sayfawa 'ulamā' was unique and remarkable. They were the first non-Arabs to have introduced the tarjamah of the Qur'ān (translating the Qur'ān into a language other than Arabic) as a method of tafsīr suitable to non-Arab speakers who did not understand the language of the Qur'ān.⁷⁰

Tarjamah (known in Kanuri as tarjumo) has three stages:

1. The allō (slate) stage: The allō stage is the introduction to tafsīr where the student normally writes some verses of the Qur'ān leaving some enough space between the lines to enable him to write his notes of explanation in vernacular in the Arabic script. Sometimes it is only the meaning of some difficult words that are rendered into the vernacular. At this stage, the student combines

the study of Arabic language with the tarjamah. Hence, the Qur'ān serves as the reading material for the student.⁷¹

2. The ferno stage: This is a stage where text books on tafsīr are used. It has two stages: the use of the Qur'ān with tarjamah and the study of the Qur'ān with the Arabic translation (tafsīr) only. At the initial stage the student uses the text with the vernacular, and as he masters the meanings of the text in the most perfect manner he moves to the second stage of ferno, which is the study of the Qur'ānic text translated into Arabic only. When the student is able to read the text and its Arabic translation, and can translate it precisely into vernacular, he would then be considered to have possessed tarjuman. This means that he is not recognized as a mufassir yet but only a mutarjim (translator). His main work is to express the meaning of the mufassirūn's works into vernacular so that people could understand the message of the Qur'ān. It is the mastery of the translation skills by the student that leads him to acquire the skills necessary to possess mahūm (from the corrupted Arabic term mafhūm meaning understanding).⁷²
3. Mahūm is a stage where the student will be able to grasp the asbāb al-nuzūl of all the verses of the Qur'ān, plus the other requirements necessary to undertake the tafsīr, Arabic language, hadīth, fiqh etc. Thus, he is considered as having reached the highest level in Qur'ānic studies. At this stage, a student is supposed to have a thorough understanding of the Qur'ān including deducing some legal injunctions from the text. Once a mufassir reached this stage he would be regarded as a Shaykh.⁷³

In the seventeenth century there was evidence of the translation of the completed Qur'ān in Kanembu written by a scholar Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Masfarma. A copy of this Qur'ān was said to have been discovered by A.D.H Bivar in 1959 at Gwandu in the present Kebbi State, and two similar copies were found by him in Maiduguri.⁷⁴ These

copies are now available with some prominent Borno scholars such as Shaykh Abū Bakr al-Miskīn. However, two centuries earlier to the discovery of the Qur'ān written by ibn Masfarma, that is in the fifteenth century, the Kanuri tradition had it that Mai 'Alī Ghāji Dunama (1460–1500) the first Khalīfah of the Sayfawa dynasty who founded the city of Ngazargamo in 1467 and laid its intellectual foundation had written, in his own handwriting, the Qur'ān with its tarjumō and mahūm versions.⁷⁵

The tafsīr of Borno of Mai 'Alī Ghāji is a classic example of the salaf with emphasis and reliance upon the explanation or interpretation of a verse by another verse, accompanied by the detailed explanation given by the sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) and full of extensive quotations from the works of earlier mufassirūn like Jāmi' al-Bāyan Fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān of ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī (d.310 AH/922), Bahr al-'Ulūm of Abū al-Laīth al-Samarqandī (d.373 AH), Kashf Wa al-Bayān 'an Tafsīr al-Qur'ān of Ahmad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tha'labī al-Nisābūrī (d.383 AH/993), Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm of Isma'īl ibn Amr ibn Khathī al-Dimashqī (d.774 AH/1372) and Jāmi' Ahkām al-Qur'ān of Abū Abdullāh Muhammad ibn Abū Bakr ibn Farh al-Qurtubī (d.671 AH/1294).⁷⁶

The tafsīr in Arabic is accompanied by the notes of explanation written between the lines in vernacular in the Arabic script expressing either the meanings of the text or only the meanings of some difficult words in Kanembu. The use of the Arabic language and Kanembu simultaneously has, to a great extent, reduced the fear that the tarjamah as a means of tafsīr could not adequately give all the shades of meaning attached to some Arabic words and phrases. The reduction of this fear was, according to Mustafā, the greatest contribution of the Sayfawa 'ulamā' to the studies of tafsīr.⁷⁷

Apart from the Kanembu translation of the Qur'ān many other tafsīr books were translated to the people especially during the month of Ramadān. Few among such books include the famous tafsīr al-Jalālaīn, al-Durr al-Manthūr Fī Tafsīr Bi al-Ma'thūr of Imām al-Suyūtī Ma'ālim

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al-Tanzīl of Imām al-Baghawī, Madārik al-Tanzīl Wa Haqā'iq al-Ta'wīl of Imām al-Nasafī and Anwār al-Tanzil Wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl of Imām al-Baīdāwī.⁷⁸

The contribution of Goni Bukar Gana in the field of tafsīr in Kanem-Borno in the 1900's was very tremendous. He was said to be an authority in the recitation of the Qur'ān. He had travelled very widely in West Africa in the search for knowledge and had visited Timbuktu In the present Mali Republic and other cities of the Western Sudan. No sooner had he returned to Borno, he realised that the caliphate was in need of more mufassirūn. Hence, he devoted his time to the teaching of tafsīr. He travelled from one village to another conducting tafsīr.⁷⁹

TAFSĪR IN SOKOTO CALIPHATE

Kurawa (2000) suggested that the exact time during which Islām came to Kano cannot be ascertained. He further suggested that the first Muslim ruler of Kano was perhaps Bagauda (389-455 AH/999-1063). Thus, making Kano Islām one of the oldest in the Central Sudan. He went on to state that there were many Muslim rulers in Kano before the reign of 'Alī Yāji Dantsāmiyā (1349-1385) It could be assumed that Islām was revived and made the official religion of Kano kingdom during the reign of 'Alī Yāji by the Wangarawa scholars from Māli.⁸⁰

Kano was in fact the first area where Islām was introduced in the whole of Hausaland.⁸¹ This suggests that from Kano Islām spread to other parts of Hausaland including Sokoto, Katsina and Zaria. The remaining parts of Northern Nigeria might have come into contact with the Muslims of Kanem Borno through their trading, but they did not feel the impact of Islām until thirteenth to fourteenth century.⁸² There were some good scholars of tafsīr in Hausaland prior to the jihād of Shaykh 'Uthmān ibn Fūdī (1754-1817). One of them was Malam Hāshim from Zamfara who taught Shaykh 'Uthmān the tafsīr of the Qur'ān.⁸³ Shaykh 'Uthmān also studied tafsīr under his cousin Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn

al-Amīn. The Shaykh's brother 'Abdullāh ibn Fūdī (1766-1839), studied tafsīr under his brother 'Uthmān. Likewise Muhammad Bello (d. 1837) the son of Shaykh 'Uthmān also studied under his father such works as tafsīr al-Jalālāin and the tafsīr works of al-Baīdāwī, al-Khāzin, al-Baghawī, al-Nasafī and many other similar books.⁸⁴

Among the subjects which Shaykh 'Uthmān taught, tafsīr had a prominent place. He used to address the common people in the night and meet the students in the afternoon. His public lectures focused on verses of the Qur'ān which he explained to his audience. When preaching, he supported his explanation with relevant extracts from the Qur'ān which he translated into the language of the people Fulfulde and Hausa.⁸⁵ His lectures to the students on the other hand were formal and scholarly. He taught them taūhīd tafsīr, hadīth and fiqh. His contemporary scholars admitted his superiority in knowledge and attended his lectures on tafsīr.⁸⁶ Shaykh 'Uthmān did not write any book about tafsīr, and instead devoted himself to teaching and preaching. His aim was to train some people to work with him.⁸⁷

The scholar who gave the field of Qur'ānic studies due attention and major contributions to it was Shaykh 'Abdullāh ibn Fūdī.⁸⁸ He received most of his education under his brother Shaykh 'Uthmān. In his book 'Īdā' al-Nusūkh Man Akhadhtu 'Anhu Min al-Shuyūkh, Shaykh 'Abdullāh mentioned the subjects he studied under his brother Shaykh 'Uthmān. Pertaining to tafsīr Shaykh 'Abdullāh submitted that:

I learnt from him (Shaykh 'Uthmān) the tafsīr of the Qur'ān from the beginning to the end many times more than I can remember.⁸⁹

Shaykh 'Abdullāh devoted much of his time to studying the Qur'ān as a consequence of which he produced his Diyā' al-Ta'wīl Fī Ma'ān al-Tanzīl and other valuable works. In fact, the credit of changing the attitude of fear of innovation (bid'ah) by students and scholars towards the study of the Qur'ān in Hausaland goes to Shaykh 'Abdullāh. He

produced six books, three on tafsīr and the remaining three on the sciences of the Qur'ān. Al-Miftāh Li al-Tafsīr (written in 1794) Sulālat al-Miftāh (written in 1795) and al-Farā'id al-Jalīlah (written in 1796) are his books on Qur'ānic sciences. His tafsīr books are Na'il al-Su'l Min Tafsīr al-Rasūl (written in 1796), Diyā' al-Ta'wīl Fī Ma'ān al-Tanzīl (written in 1816) and Kifāyah Du'afā' al-Sūdān Fī Bayān Tafsīr al-Qur'ān (written in 1822).⁹⁰

In Diyā' al-Ta'wīl, Shaykh 'Abdullah consulted a number of significant works on tafsīr. Among these sources were Tafsīr al-Jalālāin, Anwār al-Tanzīl Wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl of al-Baīdāwī, Lubāb al-Ta'wīl Fī Ma'ān al-Tanzīl of al-Khāzin, Ghāyah al-Amānī of al-Kurānī, Ahkām al-Qur'ān of ibn 'Arabī, al-Jawāhir al-Ihsān Fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān of al-Tha'labī and al-Jāmi' al-Muharrar al-Wajīz Fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-'Azīz of ibn 'Atiyyah. Beside these, Shaykh 'Abdullah consulted Mafātih al-Ghaīb of al-Rāzī, Madārik al-Tanzīl Wa Haqā'iq al-Ta'wīl of al-Nasafī, Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl Wa Haqā'iq al-Ta'wīl of al-Nasafī, Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl of al-Baghawī and many other tafsīr books.⁹¹

Shaykh 'Abdullāh tried to make Diyā' al-Ta'wīl a standard tafsīr which could provide guidance for the people in solving their problems. He treated almost all those important issues which he considered very useful to his community.⁹² For example, while interpreting sūrah al-Baqarah: 185

... So whoever of you is present (at his home) should fast the month and whoever is ill or on a journey, the same number (should be made up) from other days. Allah intends for you ease and He does not want to make things difficult for you...

Here, Shaykh 'Abdullāh opined that if the farm produce of a farmer became ripe for harvest in the month of Ramadān and it was certain that it would perish if it was not quickly harvested, the farmer was at liberty to break his fast if he so wishes, harvest his farm produce, and then compensate the missing days of Ramadān later. Failing this, Shaykh

'Abdullāh warned the farmer would be guilty of willful destruction of natural resources, which is a grave sin in Islām. He reasoned further that sight should not be lost of the fact that the farm produce was not wholly owned by the farmer. The poor had a lawful share in it. Therefore, if part of the farm produce or all of it perished that would inadvertently affect the share realisable for zakāt which was not the farmer's right but that of the poor. However, it may be difficult if not an impossible in such a situation, to offer the poor any compensation, while in the case of fast, compensation of the equal number of days to be missed under excuse or necessity is possible.⁹³

In fact, Shaykh 'Abdullah produced Diyā' al-Ta'wīl on the persistent demand of students who were desperately looking for a book of tafsīr that could help them in understanding the Qur'ān. They indicated their wish to have a book that was based on the exposition of the most acceptable views, pronouncement of the i'rāb where it was required, and an indication of the well known qirā'āt with particular emphasis on the qirā'ah of Warsh. He also elucidated in Diyā' al-Ta'wīl some legal rulings with special reference to the Mālikī school of law. He illustrated some points on rhetoric (balāghah). However, when Shaykh 'Abdullāh produced Diyā' al-Ta'wīl many students considered it too advanced for them. As such, he abridged it and wrote Kifāyah Du'afā' al-Sūdān in 1822 as a separate book of tafsīr for the less advanced students, hence, the title, Kifāyah Du'afā' i.e, (something) sufficient for the weak.⁹⁴

In Diyā' al-Ta'wīl, Shaykh 'Abdullāh sparingly interpreted some verses of the Qur'ān with the Qur'ān. For instance, he interpreted sūrah Qasas: 88 with sūrah al-Rahmān :26-27. He also applied ta'wīl in his tafsīr. For example, he interpreted the word wajhuhu as in sūrah Qasas :88 to mean dhātuhu. Shaykh 'Abdullāh also applied his personal ijtihād (ra'y) while interpreting some verses such as sūrah al-Baqarah: 185 as submitted earlier.⁹⁵

Furthermore, in Diyā' al-Ta'wīl, Shaykh 'Abdullāh used the term ta'wīl different from tafsīr. For instance, in volume I of Diyā', he submitted that, the fact that Allah says in sūrah Yūsuf: 2 "Verily! We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'ān in order that you may understand", this, according to Shaykh 'Abdullāh suggests the need for ta'wīl (ijtihād) when the need arises; and he restricted ta'wīl to the mutashābihāt verses of the Qur'ān.⁹⁶

1. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

2. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

3. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

4. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

5. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

6. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

7. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

8. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

9. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

10. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

11. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

12. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

13. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

14. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

15. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

16. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

17. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

18. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

19. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

20. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

21. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

22. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

23. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

24. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

25. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

26. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

27. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

28. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

29. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

30. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

31. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

32. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

33. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

34. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

35. Al-Furqān, vol. 1, p. 472-473.

CONCLUSION

The paper defined tafsīr in its various perspectives. These include: distinction between tafsīr and ta'wīl, and the divergent views of Muslim scholars on ta'wīl. The paper also submitted the meaning of tarjamah of the Qur'ān, its classification, the distinction between tafsīr and tarjamah tafsiriyyah, conditions laid down for tarjamah tafsiriyyah and the need for tarjamah tafsiriyyah in the contemporary period.

We have also seen the contribution of the Sayfawa 'ulamā' and Mais to the studies of tafsīr. The contribution of the Sayfawa 'ulamā' in this field was unique and very remarkable. They were the first non-Arabs to have introduced the tarjamah of the Qur'ān as a method of tafsīr suitable to non-Arab speakers who did not understand the language of the Qur'ān. We have also discussed that the tafsīr of Borno of Mai 'Alī Ghāji is a classic example of the salaf with emphasis and reliance upon the explanation of a verse by another verse, accompanied by the detailed explanation given by the sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) and full of extensive quotations from the works of earlier mufasssirūn. The paper also discussed the contribution of Shaykh 'Abdullāh ibn Fūdī in the field of tafsīr. He produced three books on the science of tafsīr and another three on tafsīr with Diyā' al-Tawīl and Kifāyah Du'afā al-Sūdān as the most known of all the six books.

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3. Al-Zārkashī, M.A., (1957), Al-Burhān Fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, vol.1, 'Isā al-Bābī al-Halabī, Cairo, p . 13.
4. Ibid, p.13
5. Ibid, p.13
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8. Al-Dhahabī, op-cit, vol.1, p.15
9. Ibid, pp. 15-16
10. Ibid, pp. 15-16
11. Al-Dhahabī, op-cit, vol.1, p.19
12. Ibid, p. 19
13. Ibid, p. 19
14. Ibid, p. 20 and al-Qādī, op-cit
15. Al-Dhahabī, op-cit, vol.1, p.20
16. Ibid, p.21 and Yūnus, op-cit p.13
17. Ibid, p.21 and ibid, 13
18. Ibid, pp.21-22 and ibn Fūdī, op-cit, p.157
19. Ibid, al-Dhahabī, p.18
20. Ibid, p.18
21. Ibid, p.18
22. Ibid, p.18
23. Ibid, p.17 and Al-Zurqānī, M.A; (1942), Manāhil al-'Irfān, vol. I, Cairo, pp.472-473.
24. Ibid, p.17, ibid, pp.472-473 and al-Qādī, op-cit
25. Ibn Fūdī, op-cit, vol.4, p.163
26. Al-Dhahabī, op-cit, vol.1, p. 24
27. Ibid, al-Dhahabī, p.25
28. Ibid, p.26
29. Ibid p.27
30. Ibid, p.24
31. Ibid, p.24
32. Ibid, p.30
33. Ibid, p.26
34. Ibid, p.26
35. Ibid, p.26

36. Ibid, p.24 and p.27
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38. Ibid, p.27
39. Ibid, pp.27 - 28
40. Ibid, p.28
41. Ibid, p.28
42. Ibid, p.28
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51. Ibid, p.138
52. Ibid, p.138
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60. Ibid, p.16
61. Ibid, p. 16
62. Ibid, p. 31, The conquest of Mediterranean littoral from Egypt to Morocco by Muslims at the beginning of seventh to eleventh century established Islāmic education in North Africa and Maghrib. Eventually, this lead to the emergence of three eminent centres of Islāmic education. These are :Qayrawān mosque (in Algeria), in 670; Zaytuna mosque (in Tunusa) in 750; and al-Azhar mosque (in Egypt) in 970. The Qayarawān and Zaytuna mosques were initially established to teach non Arabs how to read and recite the Qur'ān with some emphasis on theology (taūhīd) and jurisprudence (fiqh). These two mosques later became the specialized centres for Qur'ānic studies and they greatly influenced West African Qur'ānic scholarship. However, al-Azhar was initially established by the Fātimids as a propaganda centre for shi'ism. With the coming of the Ayubids into power in 1171

al-Azhar was converted as a sunnī centre where madhāhib al-arba'h (the four sunnī schools of fiqh) were taught, and the traces of shi'ism eliminated. Kanem Borno was linked to the Mediterranean littoral and beyond by the shortest and widely traveled trans-Saharan trade route. This route linked Kanem Borno intellectually to the mosques of Qayrawān and Zaytuna as early as their establishments. Kanem Borno was also linked to Egypt and beyond by the savanah route. This also linked Kanem-Borno intellectually to the mosque of al-Azhar in Cairo. (see ibid, pp.1-2 and pp.373-375).

63. Ibid, p. 39
64. Ibid, pp. 32-33, The establishment of Islām as a state religion began in 1086 during the reign of Mai Hume Jilmi. (see ibid, p.374)
65. Ibid, p. 42
66. Palmer, H. R., (1928) "Kano Chronicle" in Sudanese Memoirs Being mainly translation of a number of Arabic Manuscripts relating to the Central and Western Sudan, three volumes in one, Negro Universities press, Newyork, p. 14.
67. Mustafā, op-cit, p.44.
68. Ibid, p.45.
69. Ibid, p.14.
70. Dahiru, op-cit, p.137.
71. Mustafā, op. cit, pp. 173-174.
72. Ibid, pp. 174-175.
73. Ibid, pp. 175-176.
74. Dahiru, op. cit, pp. 141-142.
75. Ibid, p. 140 and Mustafā, op-cit, p.177.
76. Ibid, Mustafā, pp. 178-179.
77. Ibid, p.140.
78. Mustafā, op-cit, p.179.
79. Dahiru, op-cit, p.14.
80. Kurawa, I.A., (2000), Sharī'ah and the Press in Nigeria :Islām Verses Chirstian Civilisation, Kurawa Holding Limited, pp. 215-217.
Suggesting about the advent of the Wangarawa in Hausaland in the thirtieth to fourteenth centuries, M.S. Usman (1987) submitted that:
The main reason for the arrival of the Wangarawa in Hausaland in the thirtieth to fourteenth centuries was to Islamise the government circles in Kano, Katsina and other ancient cities of Hausaland, but not to be regarded as giving an acceptable history of the first arrival of Islām in Hausaland.
(see "Sūfism and Anti Sūfism in Nigeria" unpublished MA thesis submitted to the Department of Islāmīc Studies, Bayero University, Kano, 1987, p.27).
81. Palmer, op-cit, p.94 and p.104.
82. Ibid, p. 104.

83. 'Abdulhamīd, A.A.,1980), 'Abdullāh ibn Fūdī as an Exegetist,' unpublished Ph.D thesis submitted to the Department of Islāmīc Studies, Bayero University, Kano, p. 25.
84. *Ibid*, p. 25. Shaykh 'Uthmān ibn Muhammad ibn 'Uthmān ibn Sālih popularly called Shaykh 'Uthmān ibn Fūdī was born in Gobir at a place called Maratta in the land of Galmi on Sunday 15th December 1754. He belonged to the Fulānī tribe which migrated from Fūtatoro in Senegal. He studied the Qur'ān, hadīth, fiqh, lughah, taūhīd, sīrah and other elementary Islāmīc disciplines from his father Muhammad al-Fūdī (meaning Muhammad the learned). After studying the Qur'ān with his father, Shaykh 'Uthmān moved to other teachers. They include his paternal and maternal uncle 'Uthmān Biddūri, Muhammad Sambo (also his relation) and Shaykh Jibrīl ibn 'Umar al-Agdasī. His stay with the latter had dominant influence in his life.
- Shaykh 'Uthmān started teaching and preaching in 1774 while he was twenty years. This gained him an ever increasing followers. Such popularity was perceived by the kings of Gobir as a threat to the power. He was forbidden to preach; he was harassed, and his life was threatened. To escape the hostility of the kings of Gobir the Jamā'ah (as Shaykh followers were known) had made a hijrah from Degel to Qudu (Gudu).
- In an attempt to protect the status quo, the king of Gobir attacked the jamā'ah in June 1804. The king forces were defeated and the resulted high morale enabled the jamā'ah to persist with their jihād until they sacked Alkālāwā the capital of Gobir in 1808. With the fall of Alkālāwā many Hausa states became under Shaykh 'Uthmān. Efforts were geared towards islāmising the administration of Hausaland. Hence, establishment of the Sökoto caliphate. Shaykh 'Uthmān died in 1817 at the age of sixty three. (For more detail on Shaykh 'Uthmān ibn Fūdī and Sokoto Caliphate, see Last, M.(1967), The Sokoto Caliphate, Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd, London; and Malumfāshī, U.F (1973), 'The Life of Shaykh 'Uthmān Dan Fodio And Sultān Muhammad Bello Being An Edition; Translation And Analysis of Raūd al-Jinān Fī Dhikr Ba'd Karāmāt Shaykh 'Uthmān And al-Kashf Wa al-Bayān 'an Ba'd Ahwāl Muhammad Bello' by Gidādo ibn Laīma, thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts, Department of Islāmīc Studies, Abdullāhi Bayero College, Ahmadu Bello University, Kano).
85. *Ibid*, p. 26.
86. Usman, Y. B.,(ed. 1979), Studies in the History of the Sokoto Caliphate – The Sokoto Seminar Papers, published by the Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, p. 182.
87. *Ibid*, p. 183.
88. *Ibid*, p. 183.
89. *Ibid*, p. 183 and fieldnotes, interview with Malam Alu Tābōbī (80) Sarkin Malamai na Sarkin Gwandu, Gwandu town, Kebbi State on 28th February 2002. He is the

most elderly and prominent mufasssir in Gwandu. He is an authority on the history of Gwandu and Sokoto caliphate.

90. Usman, op. cit., p. 183.
91. 'Abdulhamid, op. cit., p. 24.
92. Ibid., pp. 24-25.
93. Ibid., p. 24 and 'Abdullah, S.U., (1984), On the Search For a Viable Political Culture: Reflections On the Political Thought of Shaykh 'Abdullāh Dan Fodio, NNN Commercial Printing Department, Kaduna, pp.11-12 and Ibn Fūdī, A., (1961), Diyā' al-Ta'wil Fī Ma'ān al-Tanzīl, Istiqāmah Publisher, Cairo, Vol. 1, p. 70
94. Ibid., Ibn Fūdī, pp.4-5
95. Ibid., vol.3, p.198.
96. Ibid., vol.4, p.163.