

Opinions and Selections of *Abu Hafs an-Nasafi* in the Science of *Qur'anic Qira'at* and Related Sciences in *Al-Taysir fi al-Tafsir*

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Abstract

Science of "*al-tafsir*" (*Qur'anic* interpretation) is among the most comprehensive branches of Islamic knowledge which draws upon a variety of fields of knowledge in order to bring forth the nuanced and cryptic meanings. This paper will study one of the early *Qur'anic* interpretations which is the interpretation of *Abu Hafs an-Nasafi* in *Al-Taysir fi al-Tafsir*. *Al-Taysir fi al-Tafsir* is considered to be one of the essential references in the subject of *Qur'anic* interpretation. Science of "*al-qira'at*" (the science of *Qur'anic* recitations) is adopted by *Abu Hafs an-Nasafi* to form the scientific foundation for *Al-Taysir fi al-Tafsir*. However, his viewpoints on the science of "*al-qira'at*" and the sciences associated with it are not systematically organized and randomly dispersed which complicates corroboration of assertions in his work related to the science of "*al-qira'at*". Hence, this study aims to extrapolate his interpretation by compiling his thoughts on a number of topics relevant to the science of *al-qira'at* and related studies as well as verifying with evidence from the science of "*al-qira'at*". This paper employed inductive and analytical techniques to collect, analyze, and present the necessary information. This paper found that *Abu Hafs an-Nasafi* presents his opinions on the subject in a variety of ways. His approaches include a brief introduction in one section of his interpretation and the extension of it in a separate section. For example, in the topic of "the Differences in *Qur'anic* Expressions and Their Similarities", it can be observed that the topic is divided into the fifth, ninth, and thirteenth sections. He would also express important viewpoints at the later sections such as his discussion of the requirement for accurate *qira'at*. It can also be observed that the topic is presented without weighting such as his opinion on *al-ahruf assabaah* (The Seven Letters), which he later adopts in his review. This paper helps contributing to facilitate researchers in related study by systematically compiling and emphasizing the interpretation.

Keywords: *Qira'at*, *Al-Tafsir*, *Abu Hafs An-Nasafi*, *Al-Taysir Fi Al-Tafsir*

Background of the Study

The Definition of “*Qur'anic qira'at*” (recitations)

The literary meanings of the words *qira'at* and Qur'an are identical. When the letters "ق" and "ر" as well as *Mu'tal* (irregular) are joined, the single noun “Qur'an” becomes the plural noun *qira'at*. Additionally, the sentence “قرأ الشيء قرآنًا” means that it is read and collected together, thus when you say “قرأت القرآن” you are saying, “I recite the complete Qur'an” (Ibn Fares, 1979 & Ibn Manzoor, 1414). The Qur'an is also known as having chapters and being gathered together. It combines verses and chapters with narratives, prohibitions, commands, glad tidings, and punishment (Al-Razi, 1995; Ibn al-Atheer, 1979). Othman bin Affan said: “Meaning, they recite the Noble Qur'an as told through Hassan bin Thabit (Mahna, 1994). The words *qara'a*, *yaqra'u*, *qira'atan*, and *Qur'anan* (قرأ يقرأ قرآنًا وقرآءةً) are where the word Qur'an is derived. *Qira'at* (Recitation) and the word Qur'an are synonymous terms. The miraculous words revealed to His Messenger (peace be upon him) by the Allah (s.w.t.) are thus referred to as the word's origin. This is based on the word's etymology and impact. Qur'an therefore means *maqrū* (decipherable) (Ismail, 1999). Allah (s.w.t.) says: “Move not your tongue concerning to make haste therewith. It is for Us to collect it and that it be recited, and when We have recited it to you, then follow its recitation, then it is for Us to make it clear (to you).” (Qur'an, ch.75/ v.16-19). This verse consists of: first, collection of the Qur'an in his heart (peace be upon him); second, its recitation; and third, its exegesis and interpretation of its meaning. Based on the above, Qur'an has two literal meanings: collection and recitation (Ismail, 2000). The Qur'an, which is written on *masahif* (scriptures and was revealed in pieces, is a collection of the words that the Allah (s.w.t.) revealed to His Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In this sense, it is stripped of its characteristics and its great purposes (Ismail, 1999; Rumi, 1999). On the other hand, *qira'at* or recitations technically refer to how to pronounce words found in the Qur'an with reference of each recite to its narrator (Al-Qadi, 2005). This definition shows that regardless of agreement or disagreement, all Qur'anic verses are included in recitations.

The Definition of “*al-ahruf as-sab'ah*” (the seven letters)

Sab'ah is the Arabic word for seven, which is a number between six and eight. The term *harf* is singular, whereas *ahruf* is its plural (az-Zurqâny, n.d.). The term *harf* has a wide variety of meanings, several of which are included in the dictionary, such as “the corner of anything”, “the limit of something”, “the peak of something”, and also *ahruf* which is referred to the Arabic alphabets. However, the meaning of *ahruf* in the Hadith: “أنزل هذا القرآن على سبعة أحرف”, actually means that the Qur'an was revealed in seven different Arabic dialects. Therefore, “*ala sab'ti ahurf*” does not suggest that there are seven distinct versions of one letter. The right interpretation, however, is that the seven languages are distributed throughout the Qur'an (AL-Fairuzabady, 2005). Al-Zurqani, however, indicated in his book, *Manahil al-'irfan fi 'ulum al-Qur'an* that the definition of the word *ahruf* that is most appropriate is *al-wajh* (type/form) in al-Qamus (az-Zurqany, n.d.). The Qur'an was revealed to make it simple for readers to read it using seven different dialects and types; they are unrestricted to use whichever letter they like (az-Zurqany, n.d.). The meaning of *al-ahruf al-sab'ah* is subject to a variety of interpretations. The words of the hadith that are meant to clarify the meaning of *al-ahruf al-sab'ah* is obscure, or *mujmal* which has led to discussions and disagreements. Muslim intellectuals and orientalisks have been inspired to research and analyze the nature of *al-ahruf al-sab'ah* by the *qira'at* presence in the history of the Qur'an (Fathurrozi & Fahimah, 2020). One of these perspectives claims that the hadith in question is obscure and

whose meaning is uncertain since *harf* might refer to words, meanings, directions, and Arabic alphabets. According to the second interpretation, *sab'ah* refers to ease rather than a precise number and instead indicates numerous. In accordance with another opinion, the seven *qira'at* that make up *al-ahruf as-sab'ah* are the only words in the Qur'an that may be interpreted in seven different ways. According to Ibn al-Jazari (Al-Suyuṭī, 1974), who also stated that he had tracked the *qira'at*, *sahihah*, *shathah* and *munkarah*, and found that *al-ahruf as-sab'ah* has returned to distinctions in seven forms, including

- difference in pronunciation without changing the meaning or writing difference in meaning and the writing
- difference in writing without changing the meaning
- changing in meaning and writing
- difference in *taqdim wa ta'khir*
- difference in addition and subtraction and many other opinions

Imam Abu Hafis an-Nasafi did not declare his view on this matter, which may have misled the researcher and the reader. However, extrapolation will reveal that he adopts one of the interpretations of "*al-ahruf as-sab'ah*" as will be shown later in this study.

Definition of *al-Nasikh wal-Mansukh* (abrogator and abrogated)

The Arabic word *nasakha*, from which the terms *al-nasikh* and *al-mansukh* are derived, literally means to abolish, to replace, to abrogate, to cancel, to invalidate, to remove, and to withdraw. As a result, the term *al-nasikh* refers to removal, elimination, abrogation, cancellation, or invalidation. However, the phrase actually refers to a *hukm* (ruling) being lifted by a another *hukm* (al-Shatibi, 1983). On the other hand, *al-mansukh* technically refers to the chapter of the Qur'anic revelation that has been abrogated while lexically referring to "the abrogated" (*Manna' al-Qattan*, 1983). For instance, it has been contended that the verse addressing the law of inheritance nullifies the *hukm* regarding bequest *wasiyyah* (Islamic will) by parents and relative (Ibid). Some legal scholars and exegetes contend that verse 2:106 of the Qur'an supports this phenomenon of abrogation. Therefore, it is encouraged that certain transitory legal rulings in the Qur'an be replaced or nullified by certain other universal and permanent rulings, which have been enacted by the same God – the Lawgiver, particularly during the proclamation of those rulings. Essentially, the revelation of the Qur'an happened gradually. *Imam Abu Hafis an-Nasafi* had a viewpoint on the issue of abrogation, but he did not elaborate on it unless in a later section of his interpretation. I will thus present his viewpoint and go into further detail on it in the next section of this research.

His Opinions on Certain Key of *Qira'at* Aspects

His Viewpoint on the Conditions of "*Qira'ah Sahihah*" (Correct *Qira'ah*)

It is well known that the *Qira'ah Sahihah* in which the word Qur'an is true, and it is acceptable to worship *Allah* with it, is the *qira'ah* that the Islamic realm accepted, agreed to and pledged to the Quranic reading performance specialists with care and attention because it applied the requirements outlined by the people of *tahqiq* (scholars who drafted the *qira'at* rules). These stipulations were written by *Imam Ibn Al-Jazari* in the form of a poem to make them easier for *qira'at* students to memorize. He said

”فَكُلُّ مَا وَاَفَقَ وَجْهَ نَحْوِ ... وَكَانَ لِلرَّسْمِ اِحْتِمَالًا يَحْوِي

وَصَحَّ إِسْنَادًا هُوَ الْقُرْآنُ ... فَهَذِهِ الثَّلَاثَةُ الْأَرْكَانُ
وَحَيْثُمَا يَخْتَلُّ رُكْنٌ أَثْبِتْ ... شُدُودَهُ لَوْ أَنَّهٗ فِي السَّبْعَةِ

(Ibn Al-Jazari, 1998, p. 32).

The meaning of these poem lines is “Three major factors must be met for correct recitation:

- Each *qira'ah* (recitation) must comply with the one Arabic grammar at lees
- Each *qira'ah* must comply with one of the possibilities of “Uthman Quranic drawing” (The font draw of the Quran distributed by Uthman to the Islamic countries).
- Each *qira'ah* have to be *mutawatirah* (continuity of the chain of that narrator's *qira'ah* until it reaches the Prophet, peace be upon him)” (Rizq, 1990).

Abu Hafs an-Nasafi explained the criteria he used to determine the correct *qira'ah* when he came to the verse: ﴿وَتَنْظُنُونَ بِاللَّهِ الظُّنُونًا﴾ [33: 10], He stated his opinion for picking the correct *qira'ah* after referring the *qira'at* to their reciters saying: “And in these three words: ﴿الظُّنُونًا﴾, ﴿الرُّسُولًا﴾, ﴿السَّبِيلًا﴾ it is recited with the letter (*Alif*), and it is the most accurate recite, since it fits to the Qur'anic drawings, matches the verse endings, and it is correct and used in Arabic language and pronunciation” (*Abu Hafs*, 2019). We notice that *Abu Hafs* conditions are completely consistent with what *Imam ibn Al-Jazari* concluded in “*ṭayyibat al-nashr*” after about 230 years in many ways

It can be seen that *Abu Hafs's* statement: “it fits to the Qur'anic drawings and matches the verse headings” is the same as *Imam ibn Al-Jazari's* opinion: “Each *qira'ah* must comply with one of the possibilities of Uthman Quranic drawing. As you can see that his statement: “and it is accurate and used in Arabic language and pronunciation” is similar to *Imam ibn Al-Jazari's*: “Each *qira'ah* must conform with the one Arabic grammar at lees”. As for the requirement of *twator*, it is fulfilled, well-known, in the recitation of the *imam* who affirm the letter *Alif* in that verse. This demonstrates that the people of *tahqiq*, such as *Imam ibn Al-Jazari* (D. 844 AH), did not invent the requirements for correct reading from themselves, but rather had a model in the scholars who walked on their methodology, such as *Imam Abu Hafs an-Nasafi* (D. 537 AH).

His Viewpoint on “*al-ahruf as-sab'ah*” (the Seven Letters)

As previously stated, *Imam Abu Hafs* does not declare his opinion on many subjects, instead leaving it to the reader to determine it from his interpretation. I extrapolated the *qira'at* in this interpretation, and we found that he adopts the opinion that says: “the seven letters are seven Arab languages, and in them the difference of the Qur'anic recitations occurred, and all of them were recited by the Prophet (peace be upon him)”. Hence, it can be observed that *Imam Abu Hafs* in many places stating – after he mentions and refers the *qira'at* – that: “it is the language of such-and-such of Arabian tribes” in order for him to connect this close association in the reader's mind. Some examples of this method:

When interpreting the verse ﴿أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ﴾ [1:6], *Imam Abu Hafs* mentioned three recitations in the word “الصِّرَاطَ”, then he referred each of them to their reciters. Then he identified the Arabic dialects that match to these readings; thus, he states that the letter “ص” (*sad*) was spoken by the Quraysh tribe, and the “س” (*sin*) is the Bani Qays' dialect, and the “ز” (*Zay*) is the Banu Adhra's (*Abu Hafs*, 2019). It can be found that *Imam Abu Hafs* points out

that these recitations are nothing more than dialects and languages in which the *Qur'an* was revealed to the Prophet in order to make it easier for different Arab tribes with different dialects to read and understand the *Qur'an*.

Another example in the verse: ﴿وَالشَّفْعِ وَالْوَتْرِ﴾ [89 3], *Imam Abu Hafs* mentioned the recitation with “*Kasrah*” in (وَالْوَتْرِ) and ascribed it to the reciters “*Hamza* and *al-Kisa'i*” and he added that the recitation with “*Fathah*” in (وَالْوَتْرِ) is for the remainder of the reciters. Then he stated that these two recitations are in fact two Arab languages, the language of the *Hijazi* tribes is with “*Fathah*” while the language of the *Tamim* tribe is “*Kasrah*”. (*Abu Hafs*, 2019). We find him here as well, keen to connect the *qira'ah* to the dialect that agreed with it, to emphasize their close-fitting relationship.

His Thoughts on Topics Related to the *Qira'at*

His Opinion in “*Targeeh*” (preferring some *al-qira'at al-mutawatirah* over others)

In scholars' interpretations, it can be found that some of them give preference between the “*al-qira'at al-mutawatirah*” in various levels, so some of them preclude weighting absolutely and do not go into it, and some of them give weight between them, so they support one recite and criticize the others, and the situation may reach a point where some of them reject it, while the majority prefer between the *qira'at* rhetorically. *Imam Abu Hafs an-Nasafi* states that the readings cannot be rejected, but rather are preferred in terms of rhetoric, and he says: “The Companions differed about (فرهين) and (فارهين), (حمئة) and (حامئة), and (نخرة) and (ناخرة), and none of the Companions argued with his companion because of this difference, but they preferred between these *qira'at* in terms of increasing the meaning, so let us consider which of them is more informative in the meaning, Then, from a rhetorical sense, we may compare and choose among these various *qira'at*” (*Al-Nasafi*, 2019). *Imam Abu Hafs an-Nasafi* explains to us his approach to weighting, because weighting for him is nothing more than a rhetorical comparison, and he was satisfied with this amount of weighting in the rest of the interpretation, and he did not delve into the matter more than that.

His opinions on subjects that were affected by various *Qira'at*

His perspective on “*al-Nasikh wal-Mansukh*” (abrogator and abrogated)

According to *Imam Abu Hafs an-Nasafi*, the following are the varieties of abrogators in the *Qur'an*: “The abrogation may occur to a hard ruling in favor of an easier ruling, such as removing the rule of – the woman's waiting period is a full year after the death of her husband, and replacing it with the rule of the woman's waiting period is four months. It may be an abrogation of the ruling by its like, such as (heading when pray towards Jerusalem) by (heading towards the Kaaba), and it may be abrogated by a more difficult rule on the body than the first rule. (As in avoiding the fight) by (Obligation to fight)” (*An-Nasafi*, 2019). Then he described and showed the *qira'at* in the word (نَسَخَ) and the word (نَسِيَهَا) that impacted these three perspectives on the meaning of abrogation:

a. The effect of the recitations in the word (نَسَخَ) on the meaning of abrogation

He stated that the meaning of the recitation (نَسَخَ) with “*Fathah*” on the letter (ن) and the letter (س) – in which the most reciters had recite, comes in many different meanings including: “We do not remove a verse's judgment from the *Qur'an* while keeping it's recitation remains” (*Abu Hafs an-Nasafi*, 2019). He also quoted Ibn Mujahid: “(نَسَخَ) means: we do not remove the judgment on a verse and its recitation” (*Abu Hafs an-Nasafi*, 2019). Then he

stated that the meaning of the recitation (نُسِيْحٌ) with “*Dhommah*” on the letter (ن) and “*Kasrah*” on the letter (س) – in which the reciter Ibn Zaqwan is: “we don’t command you to clarify the abrogation in the verse” (*An-Nasafi*, 2019).

b. The effect of the recitations in the word (نُسِيْحًا) on the meaning of abrogation

Abu Hafis stated that the recitation (نُسِيْحًا) with “*Dhommah*” on the letter (ن) and “*Kasrah*” under the letter (س) – in which the most reciters had recite means: “we make the verse vanishes from people's hearts and minds”. Then, he defended for this recitation and the meaning he choose by directing it using Qatada's hadith: “The verse was abrogating the verse. And Allah, the Highest, may make His Prophet forget as much as He will of these verses”. *Imam ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-San‘ani* (d. 211 AH) narrated a similar hadith in his interpretation (*Al-San‘ani*, 1997). He also quoted *Abu Umamah's* hadith about the man who forget a verse he used to recite. Hence, he woke up in the middle of the night to read it, but he couldn't. Another man tried to read it, but neither could he. When the morning arrived, and they reported that to the Prophet (peace be upon him), he said, “this verse was abrogated yesterday”. *Imam At-Ṭahawi* narrated this hadith in his book *Mushkil al-Athar* (*At-Ṭahawi*, 1993). The main problem here is that *Abu Hafis* did not define his point of view or the strongest opinion he sees in this case after mentioning various perspectives on the topic of abrogation - which was impacted by the varied *qira'at*. However, after extrapolating his interpretation, it can be found that *Abu Hafis* believes that the abrogation accurses to the verses that mentions rulings, rather than in the verses where the Islamic creeds, news, and tails are mentioned. I will give two examples from the places where I extrapolated in this regard below:

According to *Abu Hafis*, many interpreters believed that the verse

﴿أَسْتَغْفِرُ لَهُمْ أَوْ لَا تَسْتَغْفِرُ لَهُمْ إِنْ تَسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ سَبْعِينَ مَرَّةً فَلَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ﴾ [9: 80]

which contains the Prophet's ruling of requesting forgiveness for hypocrites was abrogated by the verse

﴿سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَسْتَغْفَرْتَ لَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تَسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ لَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ﴾ [6:63].

However, *Abu Hafis* denied the abrogation here for a variety of reasons, including the fact that this verse includes a warning for hypocrites, as well as Muslims' belief that God Almighty does not break a promise, hence the passage contains a creed, and creed cannot be abrogated. (*An-Nasafi*, 2019). *Abu Hafis* mentioned that God directed this speech in the verse: (وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُضَيِّعَ إِيمَانَكُمْ) [2:143] which was revealed after abrogating the rule of “Heading towards Al-Aqsa Mosque during prayer” by “heading towards the Kaaba” – to those who say that the abrogate rulings leads to a difference and conflict in religion. Then, he said: What Muslims must believe is “the obligation of prayer”, and that cannot be abrogated or changed because it is one of the beliefs in Islamic creed, as for the direction of prayer to one direction and not another, it is nothing but a ruling and it could be abrogated and replaced (*An-Nasafi*, 2019).

Conclusion

After exploring the interpretation of *Imam Abu Hafis an-Nasafi* and tracking the viewpoints that he says in the many aspects of *Qira'at*, the researcher came to numerous conclusions in this research, the most important of which are

1. *Imam Abu Hafis an-Nasafi* provides his opinions on a variety of subjects in *qira'at* science in a various way. He may expound on the subject and he may divide it into multiple parts

in his interpretation, and sometimes he postpones certain essential topics to a later part of his interpretation.

2. Imam *Abu Hafs an-Nasafi* had numerous perspectives on *Qur'anic Qira'at*, but his dispersing for them in his interpretation made them difficult to know and grasp.
3. Imam *Abu Hafs an-Nasafi* agrees with past scholars on many *qira'at* topics, such as his views on the requirements of correct recitations and his opinion on the seven letters.
4. Imam *Abu Hafs an-Nasafi* was moderated in his opinions about the *qira'at* and the topics that were affected by them, such as his opinion on the weighting between the *al- qira'at al-mutawatirah*, as he is weighted between them from only a rhetorical standpoint, and his opinion about the abrogator and the abrogated, as he asserts that it only occurs to rulings, not to Islamic creeds and the stories of previous nations.

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