



Analytical Survey of the Book 'Atlas of the Qur'an' By Dr. Shauqi Abu-Khalil

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Abstract

The topic is one of the Modern Approaches to Tafseer Literature, basically categorized under Tafseeru'l-Ilmiy (Scientific Exegesis). The book of study itself (Atlas of the Qur'an) is an authentic collection of the Qur'anic Information about its historical places with their Maps, Tables and Pictures. The book is a unique publication which is coming to limelight for the first time, and its Subject has not been delved into by anyone before the Author (Abu-Khalil). As one of its kind, the book helps whoever studied al-Qur'an to know the precise location of the ancient Places, Nations, People and Landmarks mentioned in the Glorious Qur'an. Infact, the book remains an exploratory research work par excellence! To ascertain these facts, this paper foremostly gives an insight into the exact meaning, types and era of Tafseer Literature. The paper further examines the reasons why this excellent book is spectacularly a Modern Scientific Tafseer, making reference to the Biography of the Author, vis-à-vis the methodology adopted by him in compiling this unprecedented scientific publication on the geography of al-Qur'an. For the fact that knowledge keeps evolving according to the ages, the paper afterwards, concludes and makes some viable recommendations for whosoever that wanted to adopt a similar system of making Tafseer at this modern period of ours or, in the near future.

Keywords: Atlas, Exegesis, Tafseer, Classical, Modern, Geography and Science.

Introduction:

Studying the *Qur'an*, together with understanding of its intended meanings, and putting them all into practice, is a must for every reasonable *Muslim*. We must remember that reading *al-Qur'an* with proper etiquettes, utmost decorum and pondering over its intent meanings is a prerequisite for understanding the Glorious *Qur'an* itself, just as understanding its messages are a prerequisite of practicing all what is inside it. Obviously, we cannot contemplate the words of *al-Qur'an* unless we understand their meanings first, then to systematically investigate the reasons behind every revelation and explore its historical places as says Allah (SWT) in *Suuratu-Yuusuf* (Q12:2):

" إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ "

"Surely, We have revealed it as an Arabic Qur'an so that you may understand / comprehend its messages".

In *Suuratu-Saad* (Q38:29), He (SWT) further says:

" كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ "

"It is a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, so that they may ponder over its verses, and that those endowed with understanding / reasoning faculty may be mindful".

Likewise, in *Suratu-Muhammad* (Q47:24), He (SWT) says:

" أَفَلَا يَتَذَكَّرُونَ الْفُرْعَانِ أَمْ عَلَى قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا "

"Then, do they not reflect upon the Quran, or are there locks upon their hearts?"

Yet, all verses that reads: (أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ ... \ قُلْ سِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ ..)

\ ...) - (Have they not traveled through the earth...) / (Say, O Muhammad!: "Travel through the land and see how ...") as appeared in *Suratu'l-Hajj* (Q22:46), *Suratu Muhammad* (Q47:10), *Suratu Ghafir* (Q40:82), *Suratu'r-Ruum* (Q30:9), *Suratu Faatir* (Q35:44), *Suratu'l-Ankabuut* (Q29:20), *Suratu'l-An'aam* (Q6:11), and *Suratu'n-Naml* (Q27:69) among others, are also, indirectly encouraging us to explore and see the wonders of *Allah* by ourselves (such as the historical Places, Nations and Landmarks) exactly as mentioned in the *Qur'an*.

By-and-large, the book of study 'ATLAS OF THE QUR'AN'; which is a special work on Modern Scientific *Tafseer* has revealed those obscure places that we used to pass through inattentively (whenever we are reciting or interpreting the *Qur'an*) such as; the exact Site where *Nuuh*'s Ark settled, the Site of the Curved Sand-Hills (*al-Ahqaaf*), the Cave of those young faithful men (*As'habu'l-Kahf*), the places of every Prophet / Messenger, Sites of the Perished Nations, Sites of every battle fought by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as captured by the Glorious *Qur'an*. Exact Locations of *Tubba'i*, *Babylon*, *Intaakiyyah*, *Madyan*, *Jerusalem*, *Misrah*, *Makkah* and *Madinah* among others were all covered by this unique book 'Atlas of the Qur'an'.

Thus, the Atlas eliminates all the fantasies that we used to encounter whenever we are reciting or, interpreting the Glorious *Qur'an* and takes us to the particular areas, exact nations and specific landmarks where the events or incidents actually took place and/or occurred.

Review of related works:

Series of studies from various perspectives and areas of interest have already been conducted by different writers, scholars and researchers on Science of *al-Qur'an* at various times and locations such as the works of: Ibn-Katheer, 1937, 1983 & 1996; Ibn Atiyyah, 1974; Ibn Sa'adiy, 1976; al-Baghawiy, 1989; Fazlu'l-Kareem, 1980; Haykal, 1933; Abdul-Haq, 1989; Ahmad, 1994; Khalid, 2004; Yunus, 2005; Qadhi-Yasir, 2000; Bilal-Philips, 1999; Yusuf, 2010; ar-Raziy, 1962; at-Tabariy, 1983; al-Baydawi, 2006; al-Mawdudiy, 1982; Zakir, 2007; Maurice, 1980; and Muneer, 2013 among others. This write-up was mainly conducted to review the work of Dr. Shauqi Abu-Khalil and that of other early Muslim scholars similar to the subject-matter. To expose their Scientific *Tafseer* works to the general populace and to improve their submissions on it from the *Shari'ah* point of view. Thus, there is no any other research work previously done on the subject-matter with clear Islamic approach like this book of study.

Discussions on the concept of Tafseer:

The Word *Tafseer* is literally derived from the root *FASSARA* (Interpreted), which means; to provide explanation, interpretation and commentary (*Ta'weel*) to the Qur'anic Injunctions (most especially, on issues dealing with Linguistics, Ambiguities, Theology, Jurisprudence and reasons behind every revelation), for clear understanding of the entire Mankind. Thus, *Tafseer* is a unique science that made all the allegorical *Aayaat* of *al-Qur'an* and its hidden meanings to become clearer (Babamole, 2009).

Historically, *Tafseer* wasn't a literature per se during the era of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and the *Sahaabah* (companions). The activities of this Formal Documentation of Tafseer Literature however, started towards the end of the Umayyad dynasty to the beginning of the Abbasid period due to some cogent reasons, issues and factors (Abdul-Haq, 1989). It kept on developing right from that classical period up till this Modern age of ours in a dimensional way, with new perspectives and interpretations (non-stop!)

Types of Tafseer:

Majorly, according to Ladan (n.d), there are two (2) types / categories of Tafseer namely:-

- i. *Tafseer Bi'l-Ma'thuur* (Received Tafseer): From Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) directly to the *Sahaabah* (rta). This type of Tafseer is otherwise called: *Tafseeru'l-Qur'an Bi'r-Riwaayah.*
- ii. *Tafseer Bi'r-Ra'y* (Tafseer by Opinion): Which is done through personal reflection / independent rational thinking. This second category of *Tafseer* however, is also called: *Tafseeru'l-Qur'an Bi'd-Diraayah.*

Era of Tafseer:

- i. **Classical Era of Tafseer:** This was the era when the traditional Exegetes (*al-Mufassiruun*) from amongst the *Sahaabah* (rta), only interprets the Qur'an with the comments that they received from Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). This also prevailed throughout the periods of the *Taabi'uun* and the

Taabi'u't-Taabi'uun... With this, the ancient exegetes then (*al-Mufassiruun*), left no stone unturned, on all matters of Tafseer. Many great works were also produced during the said era (Abdul-Haq, 1989; Ahmad, 1994; & Fazlu'l-Kareem, 1980).

- ii. **Modern Era of Tafseer:** It started before the end of the Umayyad dynasty, to the beginning of the Abbaasid period, and kept on developing in scope, system and characteristic up till today. This is regarded as the period of Formal Documentation and Intellectual activities (Abdul-Haq, 1989; Ahmad, 1994; & Fazlu'l-Kareem, 1980).

However, *Tafseer* at this modern period, takes many dimensional approaches, facets and features among which is this topic of discussion (*Atlas of the Qur'an*). It is purely and per-excellence, one of the modern Scientific systems of Qur'anic interpretations (*Tafseeru'l-Ilmiy*) because, the author simplified the task by taking us round to all these historical sites, areas and locations mentioned in *al-Qur'an*. Meanwhile, recently, many other unique works on modern system of *Tafseer* were produced and are in circulation everywhere in this century, as we speak (Khalid, 2004).

Atlas of the Qur'an as a Modern Scientific Tafseer:

This book 'Atlas of the Qur'an by Dr. Shauqi Abu-Khalil' is categorized as one of the most essential traits with unprecedented characteristics on Scientific Tafseer at this modern age of ours (*Tafseeru'l-Ilmiy*) that many people are not even talking about at all. It again, remains one of the qualities or, miraculous expositions of *al-Qur'an* through a Scientific approach, done with a stylishly perfect expressions; of which no any other publication of its kind can claim its uniqueness. The book is an authentic collection of the Qur'anic Geography with Maps, Tables, Photographs and other meaningful Illustrations. Thus, it is purely based on the Qur'anic Science of Geographical Locations.

Dr. Shauqi Abu-Khalil's Biography:

Dr. Shauqi Abu-Khalil (1941-2010) was a Syria-based Palestinian author and researcher who wrote many works, most famous of which is this: *ATLAS*. Shauqi Abu-Khalil was born in the city of Beisan in 1941. He completed his University Studies at the Faculty of Arts, Department of History at Damascus University in 1965 then, went to Azerbaijan to obtain his Ph.D in History from the Academic of Sciences (As retrieved from: Wikipedia.org).

After his return, he worked as a Secondary School Teacher in many Schools in Syria, held many administrative positions and then rose to become a Professor of Islamic Civilization at the Faculty of Islamic Preaching (Damascus Branch). He also taught History at both the College of Islamic Call and the College of Shari'ah at same Damascus University from 1986 - 1997. At the same time then, he was appointed as Secretary General of the University of Islamic and Arabic Sciences, Damascus from 1992 - 1997. He was later made Editor-in-Chief at Daru'l-Fikr since 1991 until the date of his death; which was the publishing house from which he released most of his recent books (wikipedia, 2016).

His Methodology:

The idea to produce this *ATLAS* first came to the mind of Abu-Khalil in the year 1990 when he saw a dot in the Map of Arabia pointing at the "Grave of Prophet *Huud*", located in *Taryam, Hadramawt*. When he saw this and many other amazing events of *al-Qur'an*, he asked himself: Does every Muslim exactly knows where *Huud* and other Messengers / Prophets of *Allah* lived and died? The idea continued to grow in his mind until it became matured by seeing many other Atlases produced on various topics then, he knew precisely what steps that he needed to take in order to produce this Atlas of al-Qur'an (Abu-Khalil, 2003).

He began the Project of which no book of its nature has ever been produced before in Islamic World. Though, number of historians have already written different books about the places and peoples that are

mentioned in the Glorious Qur'an, such as the works of *Zamakhshariy* and *Mu'allimiy* among others but, none has ever made any effort to present the exact Pictures and Maps of those historical areas. He embarked on the in-depth reading of al-Qur'an, looking for verses that mentioned places, peoples, nations, landmarks, events and important persons. Thereafter, he came up with the ideology / methodology of this tremendous endeavor but, faced with a lot of obstacles before he could finally reach this marvelous conclusion (Abu-Khalil, 2003).

He moved on to declare that this research work 'Atlas of the Qur'an' is not mainly about the Stories of the Prophets, past events and spectacular places that are mentioned in the Glorious Qur'an nor, is it a *Tafseer* Literature per-se but, this book is only an Atlas or, a collection of Maps, Charts, Pictures and Illustrations - all of which have to do with the places, peoples, landmarks and important persons that are mentioned in the Glorious Qur'an, just to assist the readers, researchers and the *Mufassiruun* in understanding the intended meanings of some Qur'anic information further. Abu-Khalil in that same book, added tables and list of illustrations that mentioned how many times each of the subject-matters is being mentioned in *al-Qur'an*. He also included those Qur'anic verses that are related to every picture and map in the book. He mentioned the names that every city, ocean and place are known nowadays with, vis-à-vis their exact locations / areas today (Abu-Khalil, 2003). A spectacular research work that nobody has ever preceded him in producing before!

Number of verses where Persons, Nations and Landmarks are mentioned together with their Maps and Pictures:

According to this book: 'Atlas of the Qur'an', Prophet Adam was mentioned in the *Qur'an* 25-times, Prophet Idris was mentioned 2-times, Prophet Nuuh was mentioned 43-times, Huud 7-times, Saalih 9-times, Ibraheem 69-times, Ishaq and Isma'eel 17-times, Luut 17-times, Ya'qub 16-times, Yusuf 27-

times, Shu'aib 11-times, Musa 136-times, Haaruun 20-times, Ilyas 2-times, al-Yasaa'u 2-times, Da'uud 16-times, Ayyuub 4-times, Dhul-Kifl 2-times, Yuunus 4-times, Zakariyyaa' 7-times, Yahya 5-times, Isaa by name 25-times (by title "*ALMASEEH*" 11-times, and by the name; *Ibn-Maryam* 23-times), Luqman 2-times ... (Abu-Khalil, 2003).

The book further brought the STORIES and the LOCATIONS of: The People of *Iram (Dhaatu'l-Imaad)*, the Dwellers of *Rass*, the People of *Tubba'i*, *Ya'juj* and *Ma'juj* (Gog & Magog), *Haruut* and *Maaruut*, the Dwellers of the Town, people of the Cave (*As'habu'l-Kahf*), the *Sabians*, the *Magians (Magus)*, people of the Ditch (*As'habu'l-Ukhuud*), people of the Garden, owners of the Elephant (*As'habu'l-Feel*), the nearest city (*Adna'l-Ard*), the Mother of all Towns (*Makkah*), the Jinns of *Nasiba'in* (Island), the Night Journey and Ascension to Heavens (*al-Israa'i wa'l-Mi'raaj*), the *Hijrah* (Migration) from *Makkah* to *Madinah*, sites of all the Battles/Wars fought in Islam by the Prophet (pbuh) and his companions, some important event places in *Makkah*, *Madinah* and in the history of *Islam*. He did all these, buttressing his points with the maps, tables and pictures of where those incidents really occurred. The book today, better described the exact geographical locations of all these aforementioned places, nations and landmarks in *al-Qur'an*.

Moreover, in the book, cities like: *Antaakiyyah* (Antioch), *Misrah* (Cairo/Egypt), Babylon, Jordan, Sabia, Persia, Azerbaijan, Saba'i, Shaam, Ruum (Rome), Syria, Iraq, Constantinople, Jordan, Palestine among other historical places, were all captured with clear maps and pictures. Also, many incidents such as: *Sailu'l-Arimi* (Flood released from the Dam) and so on were discussed in this Atlas, with full illustrations and landmarks.

What a unique, spectacular and scientific work on geography of *al-Qur'an* is this by a distinguished author! May Allah keep on blessing the soul of Dr. Shauqi Abu-Khalil for compiling this incredible book:

'Atlas of the Qur'an!'

Conclusion:

To make this 'Atlas of the Qur'an' a more comprehensive write-up with better understanding for all, Abu-Khalil went on in the book, to include the full descriptions, illustrations and maps of all the places, nations and landmarks that are explicitly or implicitly mentioned in the Qur'an. And those that do not require any Map or Picture (such as; people and other living / non-living creatures), he supported his facts with their detailed descriptions.

For example, in this book again, the exact descriptions and illustrations of the *Ribbiyyun* (Religious learned men), *Bahrayn* (the two seas), *as-Saddayn* (the two mountains), *Taa'ifatayni* (the two sects), 'Ayna'l-Qitri (A fount of Molten Brass) and so on, were completely covered. Great people (like: *Khidir*, *Imra'atu-Fir'awn*, *Dhu'l-Qarnayn*, and etcetera), as well as the bad people (like: *Saamiriyyu*, *Abu-Lahab*, *Qaaruun*, *Fir'awn*, among others), were also captured and discussed in this wonderful compendium.

By-and-large, in this unique book, Abu-Khalil once more, cited the exact places or, locations of the Perished Nations (Destroyed Cities) as stated in the *Qur'an* (i.e; Q59: 2, Q34: 18, Q25: 40, Q4: 75, Q16: 112, Q47: 13 and Q22: 45, etcetera), for easy comprehension, assimilation and understanding of all students of knowledge, vis-a-vis the enlightenment of every scholar, reader and researcher on the notion. Thus, the exact geographical locations of every event as mentioned in the Qur'an were cited (with clear maps and pictures) in this book, including what those areas were called during that time, and what are they called today for general accessibility of everybody.

Recommendation:

In the course of this research and throughout the period of intense study of this marvelous book, a lot of discoveries occurred which makes this study to hereby, recommends the book for all the students, teachers and researchers of Islamic Studies, due to lots of reasons among which are the followings:

- 1- That, the book opens our minds to many new discoveries about the Science and wonders of *al-Qur'an*.
- 2- That, the book was first of its kinds on the geography of *al-Qur'an*. It takes us to those specific areas, exact places and particular nations where these incidents or events actually took place, happened and occurred; as recorded in *al-Qur'an*.
- 3- That, the book serves as a template for every contemporary Exegete (*al-Mufasssiruun*), who may want to interpret, write or, produce a similar work on Scientific *Tafseer*.
- 4- The study finally recommended that; as a modern researcher, you can dwell your own *Tafseer* research towards the Political policies of *al-Qur'an* or, the Mathematical aspects of *al-Qur'an* or, the Arts discourse of *al-Qur'an* or, the Astronomy of *al-Qur'an* or, the Biology of *al-Qur'an* or, the Chemistry of *al-Qur'an* or, the Philosophy of *al-Qur'an* or, the Economy and Financial activities of *al-Qur'an* or, on any other related field of Scientific *Tafseer*.

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