The Qur’ā’a Adopted by the Authors of Tafsīr Al-Jalālayn and Its Significance in Understanding their Exegetical Notes
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Abstract

The Tafsīr al-Jalālayn, by virtue of its conciseness, is one of the most commonly taught books of Qur’ānic exegesis in Islamic institutions around the world. It features prominently in the curriculum of nearly all Islamic seminaries in South Africa, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Nigeria and other countries.

By virtue of its popularity the tafsīr has received a great deal of attention from scholars and publishers alike. As a result there are many editions of the work available today. In addition there are many scholars who have authored marginal notes on the commentary itself, both in Arabic (Ahmad al-Ṣawi and Sulaymān al-Jamal for instance) and Urdu (for example Muḥammad Naeem). In recent times the Tafsīr al-Jalālayn has also been translated into English. (The translations of Feras Hamza and Aisha Bewley are two examples.)

The style of commentary adopted by the authors of Jalālayn is to expand the Qur’ānic text by embedding explicatory remarks within the verses. It is on account of this that in nearly all available editions of the work the commentary of the authors is situated alongside the text of the Qur’ān. However the text of the Qur’ān generally used is that of the popular reading of Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān al-Asadī from Āṣîm ibn Abi al-Najūd, the reading found in most printed versions of the Qur’ān today. On account of this, it is not immediately evident how the

commentary of Jalālayn fits with the associated verse of the Qur’ān. Some contemporary writers have gone to great lengths of interpretation in their attempts to explain these apparent inconsistencies. The solution is a simpler one: the question of variant qirā’a (qur’ānic reading).

This article, by means of textual analysis of the commentary in comparison to the Qur’ānic text accompanied by external evidence, attempts to show that the authors of Jalālayn based their commentary on a reading other than that of Ḥafṣ from Āṣim, a fact that is often missed. It further attempts to demonstrate that Jalālayn was most probably based largely on the reading of Abū ‘Amr Zabbān ibn ‘Alā’ al-Baṣrī (d. 154/733) thus offering a solution to the problem of inconsistency between the commentary and the text in most instances.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Tafsīr

_Tafsīr al-Jalālayn_ was written by the two “Jalāls” - Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Maḥallī (d. 864/1459) and his student Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abū Bakr Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/ 1505) and is generally regarded as one of the most easily accessible works of Qur’ānic exegesis because of its simple style and one volume length.

Al-Maḥallī was an Egyptian scholar who excelled in the fields of jurisprudence, theology, grammar, rhetoric, and Qur’ānic exegesis. (Sakhāwī 7/39) He was known for his acute intelligence, piety and austerity. He taught jurisprudence in the Barqūqiyya\(^2\) and Mu’ayyadiyya\(^3\) schools of Islamic learning in Egypt. He

\(^2\) The Barqūqiyya School was established by Sultān al-Ẓāhir Abū Saīd Barqūq (d. 801/1396), the first of the Circassian Mamlūk rulers of Egypt and founder of the Burjī dynasty (784-922/1382-1517), in the year 788/1383. (Mubārak, 1886:6/4)
began writing the commentary of the Qur’ān halfway through the text beginning with Sūra al-Kahf and ending with Sūra al-Nās and Sūra al-Fātīha before passing away. The work was completed by his student, Al-Suyūṭī six years later and thus came to be known as “Tafsīr al-Jalālayn” (hereinafter ‘Jalālayn’) or “The Qur’ānic Exegesis of the Two Jalāls.” (Dhahabī 2000:237-240)

Al-Suyūṭī from Asyūṭ in Egypt, was among the most versatile and prolific Muslim scholars of his age. He wrote more than 300 books, covering various aspect of Islamic learning. He memorized the Qur’ān at the age of eight, and then went on to travel extensively in his quest for knowledge – to Damascus, the Hijāz, Yemen, India, Morocco, as well as in Egypt itself. Al-Suyūṭī devoted his life to learning, teaching and writing. He completed the commentary of the Qur’ān from Sūra al-Baqara to Sūra al-Isrā, by his own statement, in the year 870/1149 when he was only twenty years old and in just forty days (Al-Ṣāwī 1995:3:350).

1.2 Works on Jalālayn

By virtue of its eminence, there are many editions of Jalālayn available today. In addition the work has received much attention from both Arabic and Urdu scholars who have authored marginal notes on the commentary itself.

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3 The Mu‘ayyadiyya School is attributed to al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh al-Maḥmūdī (d. 824/1421) who was originally one of the slaves of Sultān al-Zāhir Abū Saīd Barqūq but later assumed rule of Egypt in the year 815/1410) He established al-Jāmi‘ al-Mu‘ayyad in 818/1413. (Mubārak, 1886:1/43-44)

4 Also see Muṣṭafā ibn ‘Abdullah al-Rūmī (known as Ḥājjī Khalīfa), Kashf al-Ẓunūn fī Asāmī ʿl-Kutub wa l-Funūn. Beirut: Dar el-Fikr 1999. pp. 365-366. It is worthy of note that Ḥājjī Khalīfa attributes the part of the tafsīr from the beginning to Sūra al-Isrā’ to al-Maḥallī and the rest to al-Suyūṭī.
In recent times *Jalālayn* has been translated into English and other languages. The most significant of these is the translation of Feras Hamza, edited by Ghazi ibn Muhammad ibn Talal and published by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought and Fons Vitae Publishing as part of the “The Great Commentaries of the Holy Qurʾan Series.” Most of the English renderings in this article were adapted from this translation accessed online.

Another noteworthy translation is the one by Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley and edited by Abdalhaqq Bewley and Muhammad Isa Waley. Published by Dar al-Taqwa (London) it carries along with the English commentary the full text of the Qurʾān itself, but not that of the Arabic Tafsīr, which makes it difficult for those acquainted with both English and Arabic to compare the translation to the original.

1.3 Methodology Followed in this Essay

This paper will examine the commonly available printed editions and one manuscript edition of *Jalālayn* for examples of verses for which variant readings of the Qurʾānic text were pointed out by the authors. In doing so an attempt will be made to identify the reading of the Qurʾānic text that conforms most to the commentary of the authors of *Jalālayn*.

We have used five examples from the part of the commentary authored by al-Ṣuyūṭī and another three from the section by al-Maḥallī. These eight examples, it will be argued, indicate the conformity of the commentary with the reading of Abū ʿAmr al-Baṣrī.
Three examples have also been used wherein the author’s comments are at odds with the reading of al-Baṣrī, which leads to the conclusion that the author did not consistently adhere strictly to one particular reading for his exegetical remarks throughout the work.

1.4 A Note on Variant Readings of the Qur’ānic text

From the beginning of Islam there has always been consensus amongst scholars that the Qur’ān could be recited in various forms. These were known as the qirā‘āt or qur’ānic readings.

Frederik Leemhuis (2004:3/357) attributes the current selection of the qirā‘āt to a scholar known as Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936) who presented readings based on the ‘Uthmanic rasm from the places that were associated with the presentation of the first five copies of the Uthmānic codex: from Medina, Nāfī‘ ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān (d. 169/785); from Mecca, ‘Abdullāh ibn Kathīr (d. 120/738); from Kūfa, ‘Āṣim ibn Abī al-Najūd (d. 127/745), Ḥamza ibn Ḥabīb al-Zayyāt (d. 156/773) and ‘Alī ibn Ḥamza al-Kisā‘ī (d. 189/804); from Baṣra, ‘Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā’ (d. 154/770); and from Damascus, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Āmir (d. 118/736).

By the middle of the fourth century this system of seven canonical readings were widely accepted (Leemhuis 2004:3/358) and remain so up to this day.

1.5 Current Editions of Jalālayn

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5 According to Christopher Melchert in his article Ibn Mujāhid and the Establishment of Seven Qur'ānic Readings: “Aḥmad ibn Musā ibn al-‘Abbās ibn Mujāhid was born in 245/859-860 and died 324/936. He learnt Qur'an and hadith in Baghdad and seems to have travelled from it only to make the pilgrimage to Mecca.” (Melchert, 2000: 91/5)
The most common editions of Jalālayn today are those with the commentary of the authors of Jalālayn alongside the qirāʿā of Ḥafṣ ʿan Āṣim. This reading of the Qurʾānic text is the most commonly recited in the Muslim world today and is found in the vast majority of printed copies of the Qurʾān available today. (Brockett 1988) It is only in West and North Africa that the Warsh transmission is employed but printed copies of the Warsh transmission are rare in comparison to that of the Ḥafṣ.6

Despite the Jalālayn being printed with the Ḥafṣ transmission in most (if not all) available editions there are clear indications within the commentary itself that the author did not use this reading as the default, a detail that has slipped the attention of many an editor.

In the edition of Jalālayn abridged by the contemporary Syrian scholar, Muhammad ibn Luṭfī al-Ṣabbāgh, the editor stated in his introductory remarks about his work in producing the abridged version of the tafsīr:

حذفت كلامه على القراءات، وبنى التفسير على قراءة حفص، فالكلام على القراءات يكون في كتب القراءات أو كتب التفسير المطولة. والمؤلفان لم يستوعبا الكلام على القراءات في كل آية.

I omitted the author’s discussion on the readings (of the Qurʾānic text) and based the commentary on the reading of Ḥafṣ. This is because analyses of the readings are found in the books of Qurʾānic reading or in the more detailed books of Qurʾānic exegesis. The authors also did not fully treat the discussion on the readings in every verse7.

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7 I did not have access to the printed edition of this work but read the Introduction of the Editor online at http://www.odabasham.net/show.php?sid=26729. Accessed on 2 August 2009 11.34 pm.
This article attempts to show how the printing of the incorrect reading with this commentary can prove problematic. For this I have used some examples from Jalālayn where certain contemporary writers have inferred a wrong meaning from the author’s comments in an attempt to make it conform to the printed reading.

This article further attempts to show, by means of examples from the commentary itself as well external evidence, that the reading followed in Jalālayn is predominantly the Basran reading system of Abū ʿAmr.

2 Textual Analysis

2.1 Examples from the Section of Al-Suyūṭī (Sūrat al-Baqara to Sūrat al-Isrāʾ)

2.1.1 Example 1- Qurʾān 2:9

One of the earliest indications that the transmission of Ḥafṣ obviously does not fit the comments of Al-Suyūṭī is Q. 2:9 that contains the Arabic word يخذعون twice in the same verse.

(يخذعون الله والذين أمتؤوا) بإظهار خلاف ما أبتنوه من الكفر ليدفعوا عنهم أحكامه الدنيوية (وَمَا يَخْذَعُونَ إلَّا أَنفْسَهُمْ) لأن وبال خداعهم راجع إليهم فيفتضكون في الدنيا بإطلاع الله نبيه على ما أبتنوه ويعاقبون في الآخرة (وَمَا يَشْغَزُونَ) يعلمون أن خداعهم لأنفسهم، والمخادعة هنا من واحد (كعاقبت اللص) وذكر الله فيها تحسين وفي قراءة وما يخذعون.

(Al-Ṣāwī 1995:1:16)
They would deceive (yukhādiʿūn) God and the believers, by manifesting the opposite of the unbelief they hide, so that they can avoid His rulings in this world; and only themselves they deceive (yukhādiʿūn), for the evil consequences of their deception will rebound upon them, as they are disgraced in this world when God makes known to His Prophet what they are hiding, and they will be punished in the Hereafter; and they are not aware, and they do not know that they are actually deceiving themselves.

Mukhādaʿa [although a third verbal form, from khādaʿa] actually denotes a one-way action, such as [when one says] ‘āqabtu al-liṣṣa, ‘I punished the thief’ [using the third verbal form ‘āqaba]; the mention of ‘God’ in [this statement] is for [rhetorical] effect; a variant reading [for wa-mā yukhādiʿūna] has wa-mā yakhdaʿūna. (Hamza 2008)

In the first instance of the occurrence of the word all the modes of transmission are with the alif after the khāʾ i.e. (yukhādiʿūna).

In the second instance the readers Nāfīʿ, Ibn Kathīr and Abū ʿĀmr Baṣrī read with alif (yukhādiʿūna) whilst others recite without alif (yakhdaʿūna). (Ṣafāqīsī, 1999:30 and Bilfaqīḥ, 1994:3)

Al-Suyūṭī proceeds to elaborate on the word with the alif (yukhādiʿūna) which conforms to the reading of Abū ʿĀmr but not that of Ḥafṣ. He thereafter briefly makes reference at the end of the commentary of that verse to the reading without alif calling it a “variant reading.” (Al-Ṣāwī, 1995:1:16)

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8 The translation of this and other quoted passages from the Arabic work was adapted from the translation of Jalālayn by Feras Hamza, Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, Amman 2008, accessed online at http://www.altafsir.com/Al-Jalalayn.asp.
Nearly all printed editions (incorrectly) print the word in the second instance as *yakhdaʿūna* (without the *alif*.) The manuscript copy of Jalālayn that was examined, however correctly contained the word with an *alif* in both cases.

2.1.2 Example 2- Qurʾān 2:36

(Al-Ṣāwī 1995:1:33)

Then Satan, Iblīs, caused them to slip, **he caused them to be removed** (*fa-azallahumā*: a variant reading has *fa-azālahumā*: he caused them to be away from it) (Hamza 2008)

In this example al-Suyūṭī’s commentary indicates that he is reading *fa-azallahumā*, the second verbal form of the verb *zalla*, which means ‘to cause to be removed.’ This conforms to the reading of Abū ‘Amr.

2.1.3 Example 3 - Qurʾān 2:83

(Al-Ṣāwī 1995:1:56)

And speak well, **good** words, to men, commanding good and forbidding evil, being truthful with regard to the status of Muhammad (s), and being kind to them [sc. orphans and the needy] (a variant reading [for ḥasanan] has ḥusnan, the verbal noun, used as a hyperbolic description) (Hamza, 2008)

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Again al-Suyūṭī’s comments are based on the reading of the adjective ḥasanan (good) instead of the verbal noun ḥusnan (to be good) and is consistent with the reading Abū ‘Amr (Bilfaqīḥ, 1994:12). The print editions incorrectly have ḥusnan before the commentary.

2.1.4 Example 4 - Qur’ān 2:106

And whatever verse (mā is the conditional particle), that has been revealed containing a judgement, We abrogate, either together with its recital or not [that is only its judgement, but its recital continues]; there is a variant reading, nunsikh, meaning ‘[Whatever verse] We command you or Gabriel to abrogate’, or postpone, so that We do not reveal the judgement contained in it, and We withhold its recital or retain it in the Preserved Tablet; a variant reading [of nansaḥā] is nunṣīḥā, from ‘to forget’: so ‘[Whatever verse We abrogate] or We make you forget, that is, We erase from your heart’ (Hamza, 2008)

In this example the reading of nansaḥā is adopted by Al-Suyūṭī. This is clearly evident from his interpreting the word to mean "postpone" and his regarding as variant the reading of nunṣīḥā, meaning ‘cause to forget’ from the verbal noun nisyān “to forget”. The reading of nansaḥā (postpone) is transmitted by only two of the famous readers viz. ibn Kathīr and Abū ‘Amr (Bilfaqīḥ 1994:12). This tells us that Al-Suyūṭī was complying with either one of these readings.
2.1.5 Example 5 - Qurʾān 2:283

Another example where Abū ʿAmr and ibn Kathīr are the only ones that transmit the same reading is Q. 2:283:

(Al-Ṣāwī, 1995:1:179)

And you do not find a writer, then a pledge (ruhun or rihān, plural of rahn) in hand, as a guarantee for you. (Hamza, 2008)

The above five examples show that the commentary of al-Suyūṭī does not correspond to the reading of Ḥafṣ. Despite this nearly all of the printed editions of Jalālayn available today merely print the Qurʾānic text according to the reading of Ḥafṣ from ʿĀṣim alongside the commentary. Unless the reader is an expert in the science of qirāʿa or diligently makes reference to books on the science he is continuously troubled with the task of figuring out the reading of the text that the commentary elaborates on. In my study of the tafsīr and during my years of teaching the same, the problem described was one that presented itself often.

Furthermore when we study the examples of variant readings brought to our attention by al-Suyūṭī in Jalālayn, it is noticed that in nearly all instances the reading of Abū ʿAmr conforms to the author’s comments. This leads to the conclusion that the author was most probably adhering to this reading.

However in order to conclusively prove this we need to find an example where the transmission of Abū ʿAmr differs from all other transmissions together with clear indication from the author’s comments that this is the reading being commented upon.

Despite an extensive an exhausting search for such an example in the section of al-Suyūṭī I was unable to find any clear example of that kind. To the contrary, I
discovered instances wherein the comments of al-Suyūṭī pointed to the exact opposite conclusion.

Consider for instance Q. 2:219:

وَٰيَسْتَلَلْنَكُمْ مَا ذَلِكَ (فَلْتُنفَهُنَّ) أي ما قدره (فَلْ) أنفقوا (العفو) أي الفاضل عن الحاجة ولا تنفقوا ما تحتاجون إليه وتضيعوا أنفسكم وفي قراءة بالرفع بتقدير هو

(Al-Ṣāwī, 1995:1:134)

And they will ask you what, that is to say, how much, they should expend. Say, expend, ‘Comfortably’ (al-‘afwa [in the accusative] is also read in the nominative, al-‘afwu, implying a preceding huwa), that is, the surplus of your need, and do not expend what you need, ruining yourselves. (Hamza, 2008)

In this example Abū ‘Amr is alone in reading the word al-‘afwu in the nominative case (Bilfaqīh, 1994:34 and Muḥaysin, 2003:33) yet al-Suyūṭī treats this as a variant reading. This indicates that the reading of Abū ‘Amr is not being adopted.

Similarly Q. 2:149 presents a problem in that Abū ‘Amr is alone in reading (Bilfaqīh, 1994:23) ya‘malun with the letter yā‘ instead of tā‘ but the author of Jalālayn treats the tā‘ first.

Again Q. 2:281 presents a problem in that Abū ‘Amr reads the verb tarji‘un in the active form (Bilfaqīh, 1994:47) rather than the passive turja‘ūn but the author of Jalālayn treats the passive form first.

A clear example is the verse Q.2:165:
If he, [if you] O Muhammad (s), were to see those who did evil, by taking to themselves compeers, ... (according to one reading, the person listening [to the verse] governs the verb *yara*‘, *he sees*, and constitutes the subject [of the clause]; according to another [reading], it is the *evildoers* [who constitute the subject of the clause and govern the verb *yara*‘]; and so it [yara‘] has the sense of *ya‘lam*, ‘he knows’; the particle *an*, ‘that’, and what comes after it have taken the place of the objects in both cases; (Hamza, 2008)

The only readings that have *tarā* as al-Suyūṭī takes it are those of Nāfi‘, ibn ‘Āmir and Ya‘qūb (Bilfaqīh, 1994:25). It therefore presents a problem for the premise that al-Suyūṭī adopted the reading of Abū ‘Amr.

Another possibility is that al-Suyūṭī in his section of the commentary was not adhering to any one particular reading but what was merely passing on the Qur’ānic commentary as was transmitted down from the earlier generations. These commentaries were not necessarily based on any one specific reading of the Qur’ān.

We can find evidence for this if we study the same verse (Q.2:165) in al-Suyūṭī’s other commentary on the Qur’ān, *al-Durr al-manthur fī l-tafsīr al-ma’thūr*:

وأخِرَجَ أبِنُ جرِير عن الزبير في قوله (وَلِى تَرَى الْذِّينَ ظَلَمَوا) قال: وَلَوْ تَرَى الْذِّينَ ظَلَمَوا أنفسهم، فاتخِذُوا مِن دونِي أَنْتَادًا يَحْبُونَهُم كَحَبُّكَمْ إِيَّاهُمْ حِينَ يَعَابِنُونَ عَذَابَيْنِ يومَ القيامةِ الَّذِي أَعْدَدُتْ لَهُمْ، لَعَلَّمُتْ أَنَّ القُوَّةَ كُلَّهَا إِلَيْهِ دُونَ الأَنْدَادَ، وَالَّذِيَةَ لَا تَغْنَي عَنْهُمْ هَنَاكَ شَيْئًا وَلَا تَدْفَعُ عَنْهُمْ عَذَابًا. (al-Suyūṭī, 1993: 2: 402)
Ibn Jarīr records from Zubayr with respect to the verse in question: If you see O Muhammad those who wronged themselves by having taken others besides me as gods, and having loved them like how you love me, when they will see my torment which I have prepared for them on the Day of Resurrection, then you will know that all power belongs to me not those other gods. Those gods will not be of any benefit to them and will not be able to save them from the punishment at that time.

2.2 Examples From the Section of al-Maḥallī (Sūra al-Kahf\ to Sūra al-Fātiḥa)

In the section of the commentary authored by al-Maḥallī we find a similar trend. In most instances the reading adopted conforms to that of Abū ʿAmr. Below two examples of this are discussed.

In the commentary of Q.18:47 we read:

(وَ ذِكرُ ِ يَوْمَ نُسَبِّرُ الْجَبَالَ ُ يَذْهَبْ بِهَا عَن وَجْهِ الْأَرْضِ فَتْصِيرُ هَيَاهَا منْبِئًا) . وَفِي قِرَاءَةِ البَالِنُونَ وَكَسَرَ الْيَبَيِّ وَنَصِبَ الجِبَالَ. (وُتَّرَى الْأَرْضُ بَارَزَةً) ظَاهِرَةً لِسَلِبُهَا شَيْءًا مِنْ جِبَلٍ وَلَا غَيْرِهِ (وُحْشُرُ نَاهُمْ) الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْكَافِرِينَ (فَلْتُعَابِرُ) نَتَرْكُ. (مُنْهُمْ أُحْدَأً) (Al-Ṣawī, 1995:4:21-22)

And, mention, the day when the mountains shall be set in motion — they shall be removed from the face of the earth and become ‘[as] scattered dust’ [Q. 56:6] (a variant reading [for tusayyaru l-jibālu] has nusayyiru l-jibāla, ‘We shall set the mountains in motion’) and you will see the earth exposed, manifest [in full view], with no mountain or anything else on top of it. And We shall gather them, believers and disbelievers, such that We will not leave out anyone of them. (Hamza, 2008)

Again most of the available editions of Jalālayn have the reading of nusayyiru whilst the commentary is clearly on the reading of the passive tusayyaru which is the reading of Ibn Kathīr, Abū ʿAmr and Ibn ʿĀmir (Bilhaqī, 1994:299).
In Q. 18:55 the same pattern is evident:

And nothing prevented people, that is, the disbelievers of Mecca, from believing (an yu’mīnū is [after al-nāṣa, ‘people’] constitutes the second direct object clause) when the guidance, the Qur’ān, came to them, and from asking forgiveness of their Lord, without that there should come upon them the precedent of the ancients (sunnatu l-awwalīn constitutes the subject of the verb) that is to say, Our precedent of dealing with them, which is the destruction decreed for them, or that the chastisement should come upon them before their very eyes, in front of them and for them to see — which was their being killed on the day of Badr (a variant reading [for qibalān] has qubulān, which [in the accusative] is the plural of qabīlīn, meaning, ‘of various kinds’). (Hamza, 2008)

Most editions contain the reading qubulān whereas the author clearly adopts the reading qibalān mentioning qubulān as a variant reading. The reading of the author conforms to that of Nāfī’, Ibn Kathīr, Abū ‘Amr, Ibn ʿĀmir and Yaʿqūb (Bilfaqīḥ, 1994:300).

However, of significant note in the section of al-Maḥālī is Q. 20:63 wherein al-Maḥālī clearly mentions Abū ‘Amr by name:

They said, to each other, ‘these two men (hādhān, this [form] concords with the forms used by those [grammarians] who use the alif [ending] for all three cases of the dual person; Abū ‘Amr has [the variant reading] hādhayn). (Hamza, 2008)
The significance of being aware of the reading of the author becomes clear from the confusion evident in the printed editions of Jalālayn as well as the translation of Feras Hamza in this particular instance.

Most printed editions print ḥādhān first and then ḥādhayn as a variant reading. However this is then immediately followed by the author's comments regarding the grammar of ḥādhān forcing Feras Hamza in his translation to bring the comments on grammar before the mention of the variant reading.

However if the reading of ḥādhayn was printed first, as is the reading of Abū ‘Amr, then the comments of the grammar of ḥādhān would have appropriately been placed alongside it.

This example would provide almost conclusive evidence that the author was adopting the reading of Abū ‘Amr were it not for other examples in which his commentary clearly differs from the transmitted reading of ‘Abū ‘Amr.

3 Significance of Identifying the Qirā‘a in Understanding the Commentary or in Translating the Jalālayn

To know the reading adopted by Jalālayn is obviously of vital importance should one intend to study or try to explain the commentary. Without being cognizant of this the attempt to explain the author's comments can be quite mystifying.

Consider for example the author of Jalālayn’s comments on Q. 2:259:

(وانظر إلى العظام) من حمارك (كَيْفَ تُشَرِّعَهَا) نحيبها بضم النون وقريء بفتحها من (أَنْشَرَ) و (نَشَرَ) لغتان، وفي قراءة (تُشَرِّعَهَا) بضم النون والزاي أي نَحْرِكَهَا

(Al-Ṣāwī, 1995:1:164)
And look at the bones, of the ass, how We shall raise them back to life (nunshiruhā), or nanshuruhā, derived from the two expressions, anshara and nashara; a variant reading has nunshizuhā, meaning ‘How We shall move it and make it stand’ (Hamza, 2008)

The reading of the author is clearly nunshiruhā and therefore he explains the meaning of the word as: “how We shall raise them back to life.”

However, this has not considered in the translation of Jalālayn by Feras Hamza who gives the translation as follows (emphasis mine):

And look at the bones, of the ass, how We shall set them up, how We shall raise them back to life (nunshiruhā, or nanshuruhā, derived from the two expressions, anshara and nashara; a variant reading has nunshizuhā, meaning ‘How We shall move it and make it stand’ (Hamza 2008)

The words “how We shall set them up” is a translation of the reading nunshizuhā which is not the reading of the author but is the reading found printed in almost all available copies of Jalālayn. This is then followed with the explanation “how We shall raise them back to life” which clearly does not fit the reading of nunshizuhā but that of nunshiruhā.

A similar oversight is found in the translation of Aisha Bewley, who also incorrectly records the variant readings. Her translation reads as follows:

Look at the bones of your donkey – how We raise them up (read as nunshizuhā, nanshizuhā and nunshiruhā) and clothe them in flesh (Bewley 2007:100).

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10 It is interesting to note that the same reading is adopted by al-Zamakhsharī in his Tafsīr al-Kashshāf. (al-Zamakhsharī 1:391)
If we study the same extract in the Urdu explanation on *Jalālayn* the following explanation is given:

And look at the bones (of your ass), how we clothe it, raise it to life, with a *ḍamma* on the *nūn* and also read with a *fatḥa* on the *nūn* derived from *anshaza* and *nashaza*. In another reading it is with a *ḍamma* and a *zāʾ* with the meaning of “moving it and raising it.” (Naeem, 1:299)

Again it is clear that the explanation proceeds on the assumption that the reading is *nunshizuhā* and the words of the author “with a *ḍamma* and *fatḥa* on the *nūn*” is incorrectly interpreted to mean *anshaza* and *nashaza* with a *zāʾ* instead of *rāʾ*. This error is reflected in the Arabic text of *Jalālayn* of this edition as well as in the Urdu translation.

Another example is in the commentary of Q. 2:106:

(أَوْ نَسَاَهَا ) نَؤُخَرُهَا فَلَانْزِلَ حُكْمُهَا وَنَرْفَعُ تَلَوْتُهَا أوْ نَؤُخُرُهَا فِи الْلُوحِ
المحفوظ وفي قراءة بلا همز من النسائين: أي نُنسِكُها، أي نَمَحُها من قلْبِكَ

(Al-Shawi, 1995:1:69)

Or postpone, so that We do not reveal the judgement contained in it, and We withhold its recital or retain it in the Preserved Tablet; a variant reading [of nansa’hā] is nunshihā, from ‘to forget’: so ‘[Whatever verse We abrogate] or We make you forget, that is, We erase from your heart.’ (Hamza, 2008)

If we consider the explanatory translation of this extract given in the Urdu *Kamālayn*:

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11 It appears like this in the Urdu print. The correct words however are *anshara* and *nashara* with the letter *rāʾ* instead of *zāʾ*. 
Or we cause the verse to be forgotten, such that its judgement is not removed but its recitation is prohibited, or we postpone it from the Preserved Tablet altogether. In another reading it is nunsī without a hamza derived from nisyān (to forget) i.e. we abolish it and erase it from your heart. (Naeem, 1:113)

The author of Kamālayn translates the word as found in the printed editions of Jalālayn i.e. nunsī which means “we cause to be forgotten” not realizing that the author of Jalālayn was reading the word as nansa‘ which means “we postpone”

Likewise consider the translation of Aisha Bewley:

_Or cause it to be forgotten_, meaning that We hold it back and do not send down its decrees and remove its recitation, or keep it in the Preserved Tablet (Bewley 2007:38).

The words “meaning that We hold it back” clearly do not correspond to the words _“Or cause it to be forgotten”_ but rather to the reading “we postpone” as correctly translated by Hamza.

Another example is Q. 25:48

And He it is Who sends forth the winds (al-riyāha; a variant has al-rīha, ‘the wind’) dispersing before His mercy (nushuran, ‘dispersing’), scattered before the [coming of the] rain (a variant reading has nushran, the singular of which is nashūr, similar [in pattern] to rasūl, ‘messenger’ [plural rusul]; another reading has nashran, as a verbal noun; and a third variant has bushran, in other words, [the winds function as]
mubashshirāt, ‘bearers of good tidings’, the singular of which is bashīr) (Hamza, 2008)

In Kamālayn the following commentary is given:

And it is He who sends forth the winds before his rain of mercy that cause rejoicement (by bringing hope of rain). Al-Riyāḥ in another reading is al-Riḥ. Bushran in one reading is with a bāʾ and a ḍamma on the shīn. In another reading the shīn has a sukūn. In yet another reading the shīn is with sukūn and the nūn has a fatha i.e. nashran. (Naeem, 4:318)

If we compare the comments of Naeem with the original Arabic and with the translation of Hamza above the disparity is striking.

From the above examples the relevance of identifying the reading of the author of Jalālayn becomes apparent. Without this Jalālayn cannot be printed correctly – nor understood easily.

4 Other Evidence for Identifying the Qirāʿāt of Jalālayn

If we study the history and spread of Qurʾānic readings we find that even though the reading of Ḥafṣ is the most common today, this was not always the case. For a number of years the reading of Abū ʿAmr was in fact common throughout the Islamic world.

The great scholar of Qurʾānic recitation, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Jazarī (d. 833/1412), writes:

فالقراءة عليها الناس اليوم بالشام والحجاز واليمن ومصر هي قراءة أبي عمرو فلا تجد أحدا يلقن القرآن إلا على حرفه خاصة في الفرش وقد يخطئون في الأصول
The reading that is common amongst the masses today in the Levant, the Ḥijāz, Yemen and Egypt is the reading of Abū ‘Amr. You will not find anyone teaching the Qur’ān except according to his mode of recitation. This is true especially for the specific differences in individual words, even though they may err in the standard differences (al-Jazarī, 2009: 181)\textsuperscript{12}.

Likewise, in an interview with \textit{al-Sharq News}, the famous contemporary Somali Qur’ān reciter, now based in Qatar, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rashīd al-Ṣūfī mentioned:

The majority of Qur’ānic exegetes used the reading of Abū ‘Amr such as \textit{Tafsīr al-Jalālayn}. I have in my possession a copy of the \textit{muṣḥaf} in the beginning of which is recorded: “This \textit{muṣḥaf} has been written according to the reading of Abū ‘Amr al-Baṣrī since the people of Egypt know nothing besides it and only read according to it.”\textsuperscript{13}

Even though al-Ṣūfī has explicitly stated that \textit{Tafsīr al-Jalālayn} is based on the reading of Abū ‘Amr this is not conclusive as shown above.

A similar sweeping assumption is made in the \textit{Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān}.

At first, most readings appear to have been favored by the regions in which they originated. It is conceivable that some readings predate the reader with whom they were associated by Ibn Mujāhid (Dutton, Early \textit{muṣḥaf}). About the subsequent history in some regions a little bit more is known. In the Maghrib, Ḥamza’s reading was supplanted by Nāfī’\textquotesingle}s, which also became the favored reading in al-Andalus.


\textsuperscript{13} Al-Sharq Newspaper Accessed online: http://www.al-sharq.com/PrintPage.aspx?xf=2008,March,article_20080330_1146&id=local&sid=localnews 19 Feb. 09, 11.00 pm
Nowadays, the most widespread reading in west and north Africa, except Egypt, is Warsh ʿan Nāfiʿ. In Libya and in parts of Tunisia and Algeria Qālūn ʿan Nāfiʿ also has some following. In Egypt, the reading of Warsh ʿan Nāfiʿ was equally well spread until about the tenth/sixteenth century, but the reading of Abū ʿAmr was also not unknown. The commentary known as al-Jalālayn, for instance, follows this reading. The reading of Abū ʿAmr is said to have been dominant in the Ḥijāz, Syria and the Yemen from the fifth/eleventh century, when it superseded Ibn ʿĀmir’s. (Leemhuis, 2004:4/360)

Harmut Bobzin (1995: 15/33-44) in his article, Notes on the importance of variant readings and grammar in the Tafsir al-Galalayn, writes:

Şuyūṭī (here) does not follow the qirāʾa of Ḥafṣ ʿan Āṣim, the nowadays generally accepted textus receptus, but that of Nafīʿ, Ibn Kathīr, Abū ʿAmr and Ibn ʿĀmir. In other words Şuyūṭī (here) votes against the Kūfan reading traditions. Generally speaking, throughout the text Şuyūṭī does not follow only one of the seven canonical reading traditions, but makes use of ikhtiyār between the different traditions. However, he does not mention in any case the name of the reader (or: the readers) whose reading he adopts. (Bobzin, 1995:15/33-44)

A few lines thereafter Bobzin remarks:

If one tries to characterize, with regard to the different reading traditions, the “mixed” text Şuyūṭī is following, it becomes clear that he agrees in most cases with the Basrian reader Abū ʿAmr and the Meccan reader Ibn Kathīr. If he does not agree either with Abū ʿAmr or with Ibn Kathīr, he adopts in most cases the reading of Ḥamza and Al-Kisāʿī, and this is somewhat surprising, because, on the whole, he votes in most cases against these two Kufan readers. It seems therefore very difficult to detect the principles underlying Şuyūṭī’s ikhtiyār - provided that he used something like that. (Bobzin, 1995:15/33-44)
5 Concluding Remarks

The importance of identifying the Qur’ānic reading of the author for the proper understanding of his tafsīr (Qur’ānic exegesis) is evident from the substance of this essay. There is a need for a fresh edition of Jalālayn to be printed with the author’s adopted reading in each instance alongside his commentary. This task will no doubt be a painstaking and lengthy one. However with the assistance of existing editions of the Jalalayn, that have the correct reading in most instances, the task may be accomplished sooner than later. It is my hope that this will be done for the benefit of readers and students alike.

6 Bibliography


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14 For instance Ḥāshiya al-Ṣāwī ‘alā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr 1977 (which I found in the library of Madrasa Asia Islamia in Azaadville, South Africa) and the same Ḥāshiya al-Ṣāwī ‘alā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn. Cairo: Maṭba’a al-Āmira al-Sharqiyya 1318/1897 (a copy of the first volume of which was accessed online: http://ia301509.us.archive.org/3/items/hachiya_sawi_01/hachiya_sawi_01.pdf 12 September 2009, 7.00 am)


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