

Al-Hakim At-Tirmidhi And His Work Titled “Synonymous Words in The Qur’an”

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the personality of the scholar al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi and to certain aspects of his scientific legacy. In particular, alongside his research in the pure Islamic sciences, a place was also given in his scholarly activity to the field of linguistics (‘ulūm al-lughā). In works related to linguistics, such as “al-Furūq wa man’ at-tarādūf” (“Differences in Meaning and the Rejection of Synonymy”) and “Taḥṣīl nazā’ir al-Qur’ān” (“Homonymous Words in the Qur’an”), the author developed a distinct methodological approach in this field. According to the scholar, each word should have a fixed and unchanging meaning, and all its usages should ultimately return to a single, true meaning. The analysis shows that substantiating this central idea constitutes the core concept of the work “Taḥṣīl nazā’ir al-Qur’ān.”

Keywords: Jurisprudence, allama, manuscript, copy, Termiz, Qur’an, mysticism, kalam, qiyas, education.

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1. Introduction

One of our ancestors who made a major contribution to the development of Islamic civilization in the Middle Ages is Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Hasan ibn Bishr al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, one of the great scholars of Tirmidh.

Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi is remembered in history as a highly cultured scholar, a man of extensive knowledge, and the author of numerous works. It is known that he traveled to Khurasan and Iraq in pursuit of hadith studies, transmitted hadith in Nishapur, learned from many scholars, and received instruction from Sufi masters in accordance with divine guidance.

His scholarly activity was extremely broad in scope; he

wrote in the fields of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), engaged in intellectual debates with opponents of Ahl al-Sunnah, and addressed various other disciplines of his time. He also authored books and treatises in defense against opponents of Ahl al-Sunnah.

One invaluable source that has reached us, providing reliable information about his life and scholarly activity, is a treatise written in his own hand titled “The Beginning of the Work of al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi.” In this treatise, the author himself reports that he had delved very deeply into the fields of astronomy, mathematics, astrology, and geodesy, to the extent that he was even instructed not to pursue these disciplines excessively.

At the same time, it is clearly evident from many of his works that Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi was also active in fields

that were considered sciences of his time, such as medicine, anatomy, and other disciplines.

One distinctive feature of Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi's works is that they are often written in a question-and-answer format. A number of his works were written in the form of answers to questions posed by students to their teacher. The scholar also held distinctive views on various issues that differed from those of others. These characteristics enabled him to be counted among the few scholars who elevated Islamic sciences to their highest levels.

As a result of his productive scholarly activity, he left behind dozens of works, which are today preserved in manuscript collections around the world. The scholarly heritage of Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi consists of nearly one hundred works of varying size. Information about them is mentioned in various catalogs.

In particular, Fuad Sezgin reports about eighty works attributed to Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi .

In recent years, efforts have been launched in our country to study the scholarly heritage of the scholar and to make his works accessible to specialists and the wider reading public. However, the majority of works attributed to his pen still remain in manuscript form.

In the scholarly activity of Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, special attention is given to the human self—what the scholar himself refers to as the training and purification of the nafs (the soul or ego) . For this reason, he devoted himself to analyzing the deepest and most subtle aspects of human nature. It should be noted that in this field he developed his own method for correcting and educating the human self, and he applied this approach in a number of his works.

Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi approaches the interpretation of topics from the perspective of hikmah (wisdom). In doing so, he explains religious texts through elements such as the heart (qalb), breast (sadr), intellect (aql), soul (nafs), and spirit (ruh), thereby revealing their wisdom and hidden meanings. This approach can be found in all of his works.

The scholar examines in depth the meaning of the usage of a particular word and even analyzes it down to the letters that form it. He then explains the relationship between the word and its constituent letters and the meaning it conveys. Through this, he demonstrates that words and the names of the objects they denote did not

arise arbitrarily, but rather follow a logical coherence.

In order to convey his ideas to readers in an understandable way, and to show that these ideas are not detached from real life and can be practically applied, Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi extensively uses various examples, narratives, and conclusions based on his own experience.

In his scholarly creativity, the scholar does not neglect any branch of Islamic sciences. Whether it is fiqh, theology (kalam), Sufism (suluk), or Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir), his familiarity with all these fields is clearly reflected in his works.

Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi seeks to view all these sciences as closely interconnected and as forming a unified whole.

The intellectual capacity and outstanding abilities of Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi were highly valued by many scholars. Biographical scholars such as Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, Isfahani, Al-Hujwiri, Abdullah Ansari, Fariduddin Attar, and others mentioned Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi with great respect.

In particular, the great thinkers Abdurahman Jami, in his work *Nafahat al-Uns*, and Alisher Navoi, in his work *Nasa'im al-Mahabbat*, mention him among the greatest Sufi masters and classify him as belonging to the second generation of Sufis. In both the medieval period and later times, Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi was mentioned with deep respect by many scholars and men of learning. Numerous sources refer to the incomparable value of his spiritual and intellectual heritage.

Leaders of various Sufi orders, such as Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili, Ibrahim al-Dasuqi, and Ibn Ata Allah al-Iskandari, also benefited from and drew upon the scholarly and spiritual legacy of Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi.

In the scholarly activity of Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, the field of linguistics ('ulūm al-lughā) also occupied a special place, and he reached a high level in this discipline as well. His work in linguistics encompassed Qur'anic studies, literature, and fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence).

In short, linguistic issues also held a distinct position in his writings. In his linguistic works such as "al-Furūq wa man' al-tarāduf" ("Differences in Meanings and the Rejection of Synonymy") and "Taḥṣīl nazā'ir al-Qur'ān" ("The Collection of Qur'anic Parallels"), the author developed a distinctive methodological approach in this field.

These works complement each other, and their main idea is the rejection of the concept of synonymy among Arabic words. This means clarifying that each word possesses a distinct meaning within the framework of its relation to other words. This idea is clearly demonstrated in “al-Furūq wa man‘ al-tarāduf”. According to the scholar, every word, regardless of the context and position in which it is used, has a specific and fixed meaning that does not change. This means that even if the form and various usages of a word change, its essential root and reality remain one and the same. This lexical characteristic of words is clearly reflected in the style of his book “Taḥṣīl Nazā‘ir al-Qur’ān” (“Qur’anic Parallels”), which we are currently translating and studying.

The style of Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi is distinguished by the simplicity and broad semantic range of the words he uses. In some passages, it can be observed that the sentences become quite extended due to the detailed explanation of the issues being addressed. This is because the scholar, in order to achieve his intended purpose, employed various methods, such as citing Qur’anic verses and hadiths as evidence to support the topic.

In addition, he also attempted to analyze these issues from a linguistic perspective. Most importantly, none of these methods created confusion or difficulty in understanding the subject. This is due to the scholar’s comprehensive knowledge and high level of intellectual and scholarly culture.

Throughout his life, Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi attached great importance to the complete study of the Holy Qur’an and undertook journeys in pursuit of hadith knowledge. In this pursuit, the scholar made great efforts to fully master the Arabic language. As a result of these studies, he developed a distinctive method that gives a deeper sense of enjoyment in understanding the meanings of the Qur’an.

The essence of this method lies in a strict rejection and criticism of the idea of synonymy among words. Explaining this view, the scholar says: “If one word were a synonym of another, this would lead to disagreements in understanding them. For example, one person may know a certain word expressing a meaning, while another person knows a different word expressing the same meaning. In this way, disagreement would arise between the two.”

On this basis, he also criticizes those who support the use of synonyms, arguing: “The use of synonymous words expands the possibilities of expressing intended meanings, facilitates creativity in poetry and prose, and allows one of two equally meaningful words to be used in expressing an idea.”

Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi developed an inductive method and, in order to support his objections, demonstrated the subtle differences between words and expressions that are considered synonymous. He wrote a work dedicated to this theory entitled “Kitāb al-Furūq” (“The Book of Differences”), in which he attempted to clarify names, words, their evidences, and their realities.

According to the scholar, every word must have a fixed and unchanging meaning. Although a word may have different forms and various usages, there must still be a stable underlying factor linking them, and all meanings must ultimately return to a single true essence. This main idea forms the foundation of the work “Taḥṣīl Nazā‘ir al-Qur’ān” (“Qur’anic Parallels”).

It is possible that the scholar had other works devoted to this subject as well. One of the authors of such works states that words have multiple forms and may carry different meanings in different contexts—for example, the word “dhikr” may in one context mean prayer, in another narration, preaching, honor, or the Qur’an itself—thus arguing that “dhikr” carries different meanings in different contexts.

Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi disagrees with this view and emphasizes that all meanings of the word “dhikr,” despite their outwardly different forms, are ultimately rooted in a single essence, and that their various usages derive from that original core.

Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi selected eighty-one words from the Qur’an and applied his theory to them. For this purpose, he developed a linguistic analytical method based on providing Qur’anic evidence for each of his principles. According to this method, the derivation of a word and its original meaning are first explained, after which it is shown that, although the word may be used in different senses in the Qur’an, it ultimately derives from a single root essence.

For this analysis, he makes use of narrations found in hadith literature, statements of reliable early Islamic figures, and reports transmitted from ancient peoples, all of which are employed to help the reader form a clear conceptual understanding.

The known manuscript copies of “Taḥṣīl Naẓā’ir al-Qur’ān” are not numerous. Like most of the scholar’s works, the manuscripts of this book are primarily preserved in foreign manuscript collections. The known copies are listed in the “Catalogue of Manuscripts of the Works of Scholars from Tirmidh.” One manuscript of the book was copied by Muhammad ibn Hibatullah ibn Abu Jarrad in 1196 and is preserved in Egypt at the Alexandria Library under the shelfmark 3585/II. Another manuscript copy of the work is preserved in Egypt at the Alexandria Municipal Library under the shelfmark 3575j/I. This manuscript was also copied by Muhammad ibn Hibatullah ibn Abu Jarrad. However, it contains numerous errors.

A photographic copy of this manuscript is preserved in Cairo at the Library of the Egyptian Publishing House under the shelfmark 32842j. A newly copied manuscript of the work, transcribed in modern times from the ancient manuscript preserved in Alexandria, is also held in the Library of the Egyptian Publishing House under the shelfmark 19516B. A photographic copy of “Taḥṣīl Naẓā’ir al-Qur’ān” (“Qur’anic Parallels”), transcribed in 1936 by the calligrapher Mahmud Hamdi, is preserved under shelfmark 1/II at the Center for Islamic Studies of the Islamic University of Tashkent.

The scholarly annotated Uzbek translation of the work “Synonymous Words in the Qur’an” (“Taḥṣīl Naẓā’ir al-Qur’ān”) by Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi was prepared at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan and was published in Uzbek for the first time.

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