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The Impact of Abdulqaher Al-Jurjani on the Emergence and Development of Ancient Arabic Rhetoric

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Abstract: This study is based on researching the Arabic heritage to read and study the rhetorical ideas in the mind of the grammatical intellectual and linguist 'Abdulqaher Al-Jurjani'. It explores what his unique mentality and overflowing ingenuity have produced in enriching Arabic studies and establishing the foundation and entity of ancient Arabic rhetoric. This was achieved through his indelible marks and works, which were and still are the compendium of literary and philosophical thinking and the spiritual nourishment of Arabic rhetoric. Furthermore, his works represent a primary source from which subsequent scholars have benefited.

Keywords: Emergence of rhetoric, development of rhetoric, rhetorical sciences, Al-Jurjani, Nazariyyat al-Nazm.

1. Introduction

It is well known that Arabs since ancient times, prior to Islam, were recognized for their mastery and innate disposition toward eloquent and rhetorical speech (Al-Jurjani, 1984; Dayf, 1965). This was their hallmark, and the embellishment of speech was their custom. They took pride in their condition, composed poetry, and considered it among their greatest glories (Dayf, 1965). Then, the miraculous Qur'an was revealed, eloquent in its wording and unmatched in its speech, challenging them to produce its like (Al-Suyuti, 1998). Consequently, understanding it became their foremost priority, and their love for it grew stronger. It represented a formidable challenge to their comprehension, prompting them to dedicate themselves to studying it, unearthing its precious treasures, and tasting its sweetness (Al-Jurjani, 1992). Their pathway to this understanding was solely through the 'Science of Rhetoric' (Ilm al-Balaghah), the secret of Arabic craftsmanship and its methodology for comprehending its mysteries and clarifying its sources (Al-Sakkaki, 1987; Dayf, 1965). The goal of rhetoric was to preserve the Qur'anic text, reveal its secrets, and explain its marvels. Thus, books and compilations were authored to build its structure,



expand its scope, define its parameters, and clarify its features (Al-Askari, 1986; Matlub, 1983). Thanks to its rules and foundations, it became a pathway to understanding the language, preserving its integrity, and developing it.

For this reason, rhetoric became the target for many minds and intellects thirsty for its inspiration and stewardship, as it requires a critical mind and a guiding wisdom (Abu Musa, 1987). Among these, we mention the rhetorical scholar with a brilliant rhetorical mind and a unique imprint, 'Abdulqaher Al-Jurjani'. He dedicated himself to researching, studying, and defining its pillars through his two foundational treatises: *Asrar al-Balaghah* (Secrets of Rhetoric) (Al-Jurjani, 1991) and *Dala'il al-I'jaz* (Proofs of Inimitability) (Al-Jurjani, 1992). Through these works, he was able to create a prominent turning point in its development and a starting point for research within it (Abu Musa, 1987; Dayf, 1965).

This research attempt arises to answer a set of questions, the most prominent of which are: What was rhetoric like before Al-Jurjani? How did it become after him? And to which rhetorical school does he belong? In this research, to answer these questions and others, we relied on the descriptive-analytical approach, as it is the most appropriate for studying and analyzing linguistic phenomena and rhetorical studies (Dayf, 1965; Matlub, 1983).

2. The Emergence of Ancient Arabic Rhetoric

The Arab nation before Islam was known for the eloquence of the tongue and the rhetoric of expression (Al-Askari, 1986; Dayf, 1965). They cared greatly about poetry and poets, and nothing else. The status of a poet in the pre-Islamic era (Jahiliyyah) was determined by the masterpieces and aesthetics of poetic creativity produced by his talent; tribes would rise or fall based on what their poets presented (Ibn Qutaybah, 1982). This continued until Islam came and challenged poetry and its composers. The Qur'an was revealed in an eloquent Arabic tongue, with profound meaning, miraculous in its expression (Al-Jurjani, 1992; Al-Suyuti, 1998).

Therefore, it was necessary to study it, discover the secret of its inimitability, and search for the charm and magnificence in its verses (Al-Baqillani, 1981). As Dayf (1965) emphasizes, this imperative later evolved into researching the secrets of Qur'anic inimitability, establishing rigorous scientific evidence for this inimitability, and directing scholarly intellects toward identifying the stylistic characteristics of diverse types of discourse (pp. 45–48). One of the core motives for codifying the principles of Arabic rhetoric was to construct an objective and accurate aesthetic scale by which the eloquence of speech is evaluated, and to protect writers and scholars from errors in composition, style, and expression (Al-Askari, 1986; Matlub, 1983).

3. The Concept of Rhetoric (Al-Balaghah) Linguistically and Terminologically

3.1. Linguistically

Rhetoric (Al-Balaghah) is defined linguistically as arrival and reaching the desired end (al-wusul wa-al-intiha') (Ibn Manzur, 1990). In classical Arabic lexicography, it is stated: 'So-and-so reached (balagha) his goal,' if he arrived at it; and 'The caravan reached (balagha) the city,' if it entered or approached it (Ibn Manzur, 1990, Vol. 8, pp. 419–422). This root is substantiated in the Qur'anic verse: {When they have reached [balaghna] their appointed term} [Surat Al-Baqarah 2:231], indicating that they have approached or attained the stipulated limit (Al-Tabari, 2001). Thus, lexicographically, balaghah signifies successfully attaining or reaching the intended destination.

3.2. Terminologically

In his seminal work *Kitab al-Sina'atayn*, Abu Hilal Al-Askari (1986) defines rhetoric as follows: 'Rhetoric is everything by which the meaning reaches the heart of the listener, settling in it just as it is settled in your own soul, with an acceptable form and a beautiful presentation' (p. 15).

From a communicative perspective, rhetoric denotes the inherent qualitative capability that speech acquires when it fulfills all systemic conditions to reach the recipient in a way that achieves the ultimate communicative objectives—such as profound comprehension, rational persuasion, emotional resonance, and pragmatic effect (Al-Qazwini, 1985; Matlub, 1983). It empowers language to execute its assigned aesthetic and cognitive function optimally, enabling the speaker to deliver meaning fully, captivate the listener's faculties, and compel their active response to the intended purpose (Abu Musa, 1987; Al-Jurjani, 1992).

Classical scholars also encapsulated this definition aphoristically: 'Speech does not deserve the name of rhetoric until its meaning outpaces its wording, so that its wording does not reach your hearing faster than its meaning reaches your heart' (Al-Askari, 1986, p. 21; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, 1983). Terminologically, therefore, rhetoric is the realization of the intended meaning in the listener's consciousness through exquisite linguistic phrasing (Al-Sakkaki, 1987).

4. The Sciences of Arabic Rhetoric

According to classical rhetoricians and later systematizers, Arabic rhetoric is classified into three foundational sciences (Al-Qazwini, 1985; Al-Sakkaki, 1987; Sultan, 1986):

4.1. The Science of Eloquence (Ilm al-Bayan)

Linguistically, Al-Bayan denotes disclosure, clarification, manifestation, and explanation (al-kashf wa-al-idah) (Ibn Manzur, 1990, Vol. 13, pp. 68–72). Terminologically, it constitutes the science of principles and rules by which one learns how to convey a single core meaning through multiple diverse expressions

that vary in their degree of mental clarity and semantic explicitness (Al-Qazwini, 1985, pp. 122–125; Al-Taftazani, 1911). Its primary objective is to unlock the secrets of classical Arabic poetry and prose and understand the hierarchical levels of eloquence (Al-Jurjani, 1991).

According to most rhetoricians (Al-Qazwini, 1985; Al-Sakkaki, 1987; Matlub, 1983), the science of eloquence includes three main topics:

- **Simile (Al-Tashbih):** Establishing a shared characteristic between two or more entities using explicit or implicit comparative tools.
- **Tropes / Figurative Language (Al-Majaz):** The use of words in non-literal meanings, encompassing Metaphor (Al-Isti'arah).
- **Metonymy (Al-Kinayah):** An expression employed to indicate an implied meaning while allowing the literal meaning to remain valid.

4.2. The Science of Embellishment (Ilm al-Badi')

Linguistically, Al-Badi' denotes unprecedented invention and original creation without prior template (al-ikhtira' wa-al-ibda') (Ibn Manzur, 1990, Vol. 8, pp. 6–9). Terminologically, it is the discipline concerned with the systematic modes of embellishing discourse after fulfilling syntactic well-formedness and contextual conformity, thereby elevating stylistic elegance in conveying meaning (Al-Qazwini, 1985, pp. 280–285; Ibn al-Mu'tazz, 1935).

The science of embellishment is bifurcated into two major classes (Al-Qazwini, 1985; Sultan, 1986):

- **Semantic Embellishments (Al-Muhassanat al-Ma'nawiyah):** Devices focusing on enhancing the meaning, such as Antithesis (Al-Tibaq), Contrast (Al-Muqabalah), Double Entendre (Al-Tawriyah), Affirming praise with what resembles blame, Affirming blame with what resembles praise, and Allusion (Al-Talmih).
- **Lexical Embellishments (Al-Muhassanat al-Lafziyyah):** Devices focusing on enhancing acoustic and phonetic beauty, such as Paronomasia / Pun (Al-Jinas), Rhymed Prose (Al-Saj'), Balance (Al-Muwazanah), Antistrophe / Chiasmus (Radd al-'ajuz 'ala al-sadr), and Harmony of word and meaning (I'tilaf al-lafz wa-al-ma'na).

4.3. The Science of Meanings (Ilm al-Ma'ani)

This science is defined as the study of configuring speech to conform precisely to the requirements of the communicative context (muqtada al-hal) (Al-Jurjani, 1992; Al-Qazwini, 1985; Al-Sakkaki, 1987). It guards against structural incongruities and semantic ambiguities, regulating the functional employment of brevity (ijaz), elaboration (itnab), separation (fasl), and conjunction (wasl) (Al-Qazwini, 1985). As Sultan (1986) concisely defines it: 'It is for the speaker to ensure that discourse strictly matches the situational demands of the addressees, coupled with absolute eloquence' (p. 34).

Its canonical topics include: Declarative Statements (Al-Khabar), Performative Statements (Al-Insha'), States of the Predicate (Ahwal al-Musnad), States of the Subject (Ahwal al-Musnad Ilayh), States of Verbal Complements (Ahwal Muta'allaqat al-Fi'l), Restriction (Al-Qasr), Separation and Connection (Al-Fasl wa-al-Wasl), and Brevity and Elaboration (Al-Ijaz wa-al-Itnab) (Al-Qazwini, 1985; Matlub, 1983).

5. Arabic Rhetoric Before Al-Jurjani

Prior to Abdulqaher Al-Jurjani, Arabic rhetorical knowledge remained dispersed, intuitive, and largely unsystematized (Dayf, 1965; Matlub, 1983). It consisted of fragmentary critical observations scattered across lexicographical and critical commentaries (Abu Musa, 1987). Al-Jurjani (1991) critically observed this early state in *Asrar al-Balaghah*, remarking that while foundational sciences typically advance from explicit axioms toward refined subtleties, the science of eloquence developed in reverse: its earliest texts were dominated by ambiguous symbols, hints, and intuitive metonymies accessible only to deep contemplatives (pp. 5–8).

Al-Jurjani (1991, 1992) further argued that earlier generations often transmitted archaic expressions rote without grasping their systematic communicative rationale or theoretical framework. Although modern historians suggest Al-Jurjani may have partially overstated this deficit to accentuate the necessity of his project, he nonetheless synthesized and formalized the valuable insights of predecessors such as Al-Jahiz, Ibn Qutaybah, Al-Amidi, and Al-Qadi Abd al-Jabbar (Abu Deeb, 1979; Dayf, 1965).

6. Al-Jurjani and the Transformation of Arabic Rhetoric

Abdulqaher Al-Jurjani is rightfully considered the true theoretical architect of ancient Arabic rhetoric (Abu Deeb, 1979; Abu Musa, 1987; Dayf, 1965). He established its epistemological foundations in his two monumental treatises: *Asrar al-Balaghah* (Al-Jurjani, 1991) and *Dala'il al-I'jaz* (Al-Jurjani, 1992). In these works, he fused abstract grammatical deduction with refined literary taste and psychological insight, ensuring that every theoretical assertion was substantiated by extensive textual analysis (Abu Musa, 1987).

Al-Jurjani addressed the enduring debate in classical criticism: does rhetorical excellence reside in the isolated word (al-lafz) or the abstract meaning (al-ma'na) (Dayf, 1965; Matlub, 1983)? He resolved this controversy decisively through his revolutionary Theory of Construction (Nazariyyat al-Nazm) (Al-Jurjani, 1992). Al-Jurjani demonstrated that isolated words possess no intrinsic rhetorical superiority when taken in isolation; rather, aesthetic value and communicative power emerge exclusively when words are syntactically arranged and dynamically coordinated in accordance with the rules of grammar (ma'ani al-nahw) to fulfill the speaker's communicative intent (Al-Jurjani, 1992, pp. 393–415). Consequently, Al-Jurjani earned the well-deserved title of 'The Father of Arabic Rhetoric' (Dayf, 1965, p. 162).

7. Al-Jurjani and the Tripartite System of Rhetoric

7.1. Al-Jurjani and the Science of Meanings (Ilm al-Ma'ani)

The Science of Meanings received its comprehensive theoretical crystallization in Al-Jurjani's *Dala'il al-l'jaz* (Al-Jurjani, 1992; Al-Qazwini, 1985). Although Al-Jurjani did not explicitly adopt the formal label *Ilm al-Ma'ani*, his formulation of *Nazariyyat al-Nazm* provided the holistic framework for all its subsequent categories: topicalization (*al-taqdim wa-al-ta'khir*), definiteness and indefiniteness (*al-ta'rif wa-al-tankir*), ellipsis (*al-hadhf*), and restriction (*al-qasr*) (Al-Jurjani, 1992; Al-Sakkaki, 1987; Dayf, 1965). Subsequent theorists, notably Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and Al-Sakkaki, extracted and codified these chapters directly from Al-Jurjani's foundational work (Al-Razi, 1986; Al-Sakkaki, 1987).

7.2. Al-Jurjani and the Science of Eloquence (Ilm al-Bayan)

In *Asrar al-Balaghah*, Al-Jurjani (1991) transformed the scattered insights on figurative language into a coherent semantic-cognitive theory. He explored the aesthetic mechanisms of Simile (*Tashbih*), Metaphor (*Isti'arah*), and Analogy (*Tamthil*), while establishing the epistemological boundary between Linguistic Trope (*Majaz Lughawi*) and Rational/Cognitive Trope (*Majaz 'Aqli*) (Al-Jurjani, 1991, pp. 180–225). His semantic conceptualization remains the foundational bedrock of *Ilm al-Bayan* to this day (Abu Deeb, 1979; Dayf, 1965).

7.3. Al-Jurjani and the Science of Embellishment (Ilm al-Badi')

Unlike *Ma'ani* and *Bayan*, the Science of Embellishment received selective treatment from Al-Jurjani, confined primarily to *Paronomasia* (*Jinas*) and *Rhymed Prose* (*Saj'*) (Al-Jurjani, 1991, 1992). Al-Jurjani subordinated rhetorical embellishments to his overarching theory of *Nazm*, arguing that stylistic figures are aesthetically acceptable only when they emerge organically from the inner requirements of meaning rather than through artificial, forced ornamentation (Al-Jurjani, 1992, pp. 58–64; Matlub, 1983).

8. Al-Jurjani and the Flourishing of Rhetorical Research

All major scholars succeeding Al-Jurjani acknowledged that ancient Arabic rhetoric reached its intellectual peak through his contributions (Abu Musa, 1987; Al-Qazwini, 1985; Dayf, 1965). He synthesized disparate concepts into an integrated discipline, elevating rhetoric to an autonomous science capable of demonstrating the grammatical-literary inimitability of the Qur'an (Al-Jurjani, 1992; Al-Suyuti, 1998).

9. Al-Jurjani's Rhetorical School: The Literary-Scholastic Paradigm

Scholars examining Al-Jurjani's methodology in *Asrar al-Balaghah* and *Dala'il al-l'jaz* observe a unique synthesis of two dominant traditions (Abu Musa, 1987; Dayf, 1965; Matlub, 1983):

- **The Literary-Aesthetic School (Al-Madrasah al-Adabiyyah):** Evident in his profound sensitivity to poetic nuances, psychological reception, and aesthetic resonance (Al-Jurjani, 1991).
- **The Scholastic-Theological School (Al-Madrasah al-Kalamiyyah):** Manifest in his rigorous logical deductions and dialectical defense of Qur'anic inimitability influenced by his Ash'arite background (Al-Jurjani, 1992; Dayf, 1965).

Consequently, Al-Jurjani established an independent, hybrid paradigm that contemporary historians characterize as the 'Literary-Scholastic School' (Al-Madrasah al-Adabiyyah al-Kalamiyyah) (Abu Musa, 1987, pp. 210–215; Dayf, 1965).

10. Rhetoric After Al-Jurjani

Following Al-Jurjani, rhetoric entered an era of extensive codification and formalization (Dayf, 1965; Matlub, 1983). Al-Zamakhshari (1987) applied Al-Jurjani's principles comprehensively in his celebrated Qur'anic commentary Al-Kashshaf. Subsequently, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (1986) summarized Al-Jurjani's works in Nihayat al-Ijaz fi Dirayat al-I'jaz, which Siraj al-Din al-Sakkaki (1987) formalized into the third section of Miftah al-Ulum. Finally, Al-Khatib al-Qazwini (1985) condensed this framework in Talkhis al-Miftah and Al-Idah, cementing the tripartite division (Ma'ani, Bayan, Badi') that dominated later centuries (Dayf, 1965).

11. Conclusion

Abdulqaher Al-Jurjani stands as the defining figure in the history of Arabic rhetoric and critical theory (Abu Deeb, 1979; Abu Musa, 1987; Dayf, 1965). Through his masterworks Asrar al-Balaghah and Dala'il al-I'jaz, he established Nazariyyat al-Nazm, demonstrating that eloquence is an organic attribute of syntactic composition and semantic harmony (Al-Jurjani, 1991, 1992). His legacy remains the enduring foundation from which all subsequent rhetorical and stylistic inquiries draw their inspiration and authority.

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