Abstract

Disjointed Letters at the beginning of some chapters of the Qur’ān have historically been one of mystery and of concern to the researchers and the commentators of the Qur’ān. One of the early Islamic mystics who has offered a new and idiosyncratic perspective and interpretation of the disjointed letters is Ibn Barrajān (d. 536/1141), the Andalusian mystic and exegete. The purpose of the present article is the study of Ibn Barrajān’s view of disjointed letters using a library based descriptive-analytic method. Referring to the verses of the Qur’ān, Ibn Barrajān understands the universal nature of the disjointed letters as a medium between the Clear Book (al-kitāb al-mubīn) and the Qur’ān. According to Ibn Barrajān, disjointed letters are foremost the revealed and detailed form of the letters and content of the Clear Book. Disjointed letters he continues have also been revealed and expanded in the form of Divine Names; whilst the exigencies of Divine Names are revealed, expanded and expressed in the form of the creatures in the world, as well as the verses of the Qur’ān. Ibn Barrajān believes that the disjointed letters refer to Divine Names and Attributes. Ibn Barrajān’s view of the disjointed letters in the Qur’ān is based on his perspective of the hierarchy of Divine Revelation and its descent. There are fundamental differences between Ibn Barrajān’s perspective on the subject to that of early Islamic scholars and Qur’ānic commentators (such as Abū Fākhti (d. 127/748), ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt (d. 525/1131), Avicenna (d. 428/1037) and Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640)) despite their superficial similarities.

Keywords: Ibn Barrajān; Disjointed Letters; Clear Book; Guarded Tablet

Introduction and Background

Disjointed Letters are a series of letters of Arabic Alphabet that appear at the beginning of some chapters of the Qur’ān. These letters come right after the “In the Name of God the Merciful the Compassionate” (Bism Allāh al-Rahmān al-Raḥīm) at the opening of 29 chapters of the Qur’ān. The total number of them is 78 letters and if we delete the repeated letters in them, we will have 14 letters (i.e. half of Arabic Alphabet). It is interesting to note that the letters of Arabic Alphabet are divided into nine classes based on their different features and Disjointed Letters constitute half of each of these nine classes (al-Zamakhsharī, 1987, vol. 1, pp. 29-31). These letters are also referred to as “Openings of the Suras” (Fawāṭiḥ al-Suwar) and “Beginnings of the Suras” (Awā’il al-Suwar). In English the following terms are
also used interchangeably to refer to these letters: “disconnected letters”, “abbreviated letters”, and “mysterious letters”. They are termed as “Disjointed Letters” because they are pronounced separately just like the alphabet letters, not as a word. For example, “a-l-m” is read as follows: “Alīf Lām Mīm”. The list of these letters according to the number of the letters consists of single letter: ș (Ṣād) (Q: 38:1), q (Qāf) (Q: 50:1), n (Nūn) (Q: 68:1); two letters: h-m (Ḥā Mīm) (Q: 40:1; Q: 41:1; Q: 43:1; Q: 44:1 Q: 45:1; Q: 46:1), t-h (Ṭā Há) (Q: 18:1), t-s (Ṭā Sīn) (Q: 27:1), y-s (Yā Sīn) (Q: 36:1); three letters: a-l-m (Alīf Lām Mīm) (Q: 2:1; Q: 3:1; Q: 29:1; Q: 30:1; Q: 31:1; Q: 32:1), a-l-r (Alīf Lām Rā) (Q: 10:1; Q: 11:1; Q: 12:1; Q: 14:1; Q: 15:1), t-s-m (Ṭā Sīn Mīm) (Q: 26:1; Q: 28:1); four letters: a-l-m-s (Alīf Lām Mīm Sād) (Q: 7:1), a-l-m-r (Alīf Lām Mīm Rā) (Q: 13:1); five letters: k-h-y-q (Kāf Hā Yā Qāf) (Q: 19:1), h-m-s-q (Ḥā Mīm Sīn Qāf) (Q: 42:1).

Interpretation and explanation of these letters are not provided by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and no tradition is quoted from his highness in which the disjointed letters are explained. Then, the nature of these letters has always been one of the key concerns of the exegetes and researchers and various perspectives are suggested of these letters. One perspective is that the nature of these disjointed letters is not clear. There are two general approaches among the followers of this perspective: some believe that the disjointed letters are secrets the knowledge of which belongs to God only and nobody knows them; some others contend that the disjointed letters are secrets shared by God and His prophet and nobody but the Prophet of Islam and Shia Imams knows their meaning. The followers of the second perspective seek to clarify and express the nature of the disjointed letters and they have offered numerous ideas regardless of the truth or falsity of which one can list them as follows: these letters indicate the beginning of a new chapter in the Qurʾān and the end of previous chapter; they are the name of the chapters that have them as their openings; these letters are the names for the Qurʾān; they are explicative letters for attributing the infidels; they are symbols for the People of Book that endorse the truthfulness of the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), because according to the Shia traditions, Israelite prophets had informed their nations of the beginning of the chapters of the Holy Book of the Last Prophet with disjointed letters; these letters are matters of divine oath; according to Abjad numerals, these letters can be used for estimation of the lifetime of Islam; these letters are symbols of the Divine Names and Attribute, prophet and angels, worldly and otherworldly creatures; the totality of the disjointed letters constitutes the Great Name (al-Iṣm al-ʿazam) of God; the beginning of the chapters of the Qurʾān with these letters reminds the people that the Qurʾān is compiled by these letters though no one can battle with it; disjointed letters in every chapter are related with their content; all these perspectives together reflect the intention of the revelation of these letters (Ṭayyib Ḥusaynī, 2009, pp. 18-40; al-Ṭabarī, 1992, vol. 1, pp. 67-74; al-Suyūṭī, 1984, vol. 1, pp. 22-23; al-Rāzī, 2000, vol. 2, pp. 249-258; al-Zamakhshārī, 1987, vol. 1, pp. 19-31). Contemporary Muslim exegetes and scholars have also discussed the disjointed letters and criticized and analyzed them from different points of view (al-Ṭabāṭābāʾī, 1971, vol. 18, pp. 6-16; Jawādī ʿĀmulī, 1999, vol. 2. p. 68; Tajarrī, 2019, pp. 245-261).

In addition to the Qurʾānic commentaries, some independent studies are published in this regard which discuss and analyze different views of the disjointed letters. Welch in his article entitled “al-Kurʾān” in EI which has the secondary title “Mysterious Letters” provides some explanations of the disjointed letters as well as different scholarly views of them and at the end of the article, he presents useful sources for further readings and review of different views (Welch, 1986, vol. 5, pp. 412-414). In Encyclopaedia of Qurʾān, disjointed letters are referred to as “Mysterious Letters” and the views of Muslims exegetes and western scholars are explained in this regard (Massey, 2003, vol. 3, pp. 471-477). Martin Nguyen in his article studies the views of Muslim scholars and exegetes concerning disjointed letters and provides a historical analysis of the interpretation of the disjointed letters. He also mentions the views of non-Muslim researcher (Nguyen, 2012, pp. 1-28). The contemporary writer Sa’d ʿAbd al-Muttallib al-ʿAdl in his “Hieroglyph Interprets the Qurʾān” claims that the disjointed letters have their origin in the ancient Hieroglyph language and one can use the latter to understand the nature of the disjointed letters in the Qurʾān (al-ʿAdl, 2002). Independent works have also been authored concerning the disjointed letters including “Disjointed Letters in the Qurʾān” (al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa’)a fi al-Qurʾān by

Moreover, having studied and critically analyzed the view of al-Rāzī of Disjointed Letters, Lotfī concludes that in these letters lie the key notions and themes of the chapters. Thus, disjointed letters contain the meanings of the Qur’ānic notions (Lotfī, 2013, pp. 113-134). Studying the content of the chapters “Qalam”, “Qāf” and “Ṣūd”, Zarnegār concludes that the content of these chapters is closely related with the opening letters and “Ṣūd” refers to the honesty of prophets while “Qāf” is an indication of the Qur’ān and the Doomsday and “Nūn” symbolizes the prophecy of Prophet of Islam and his characteristics (Zarnegār, 2018, pp. 61-78). Avicenna’s view of the disjointed letters which is based on the philosophical approach and believes that each one of these disjointed letters are correspondent to a level of the Universe, is assayed and explained in an article (Ḥusaynī, 2015, pp. 5-24). Mullā Ṣadrā also prefers to choose the stance taken by Avicenna in this regard and he proceeds to explain it based on his own philosophical principles and Mullā Ṣadrā’s view is also studied in an independent article (Ḥusayndüst, 2004, pp. 58-63).

Mystics have approached the interpretation of the disjointed letters with a mystical approach as well as their own method and principles. As to the perspective of mystics concerning the disjointed letters, some independent studies are already conducted. In an article, the perspectives of ten mystic exegetes concerning the disjointed letters, their nature and the methods used by these exegetes to interpret these letters are studied and classified. According to this article, types of the ideas of mystics concerning the nature of disjointed letters are as follows: disjointed letters are among the allegorically expressed truths in Qur’ān; disjointed letters are the secrets of Qur’ān; disjointed letters are of rhetorical aspect; disjointed letters are matters of Divine Oath in view of their meanings; all or some of these disjointed letters are the names of the chapters of the Qur’ān; some of the disjointed letters are the names of Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him); disjointed letters express the Divine Names (Sheykh, 2016, pp. 89-106). Furthermore, Jahādī has independently assayed Meybūdī’s view of disjointed letters based on “Kashf al-Aṣrār” (Jahādī, 2014, pp. 161-184). In an article, the view of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt concerning the letters, disjointed letters and point has been expressed using his scattered words and it is concluded that according to ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, Qur’ān and the disjointed letters have their origin in point (Pārsāpūr, 2011, pp. 31-45).

Ibn Barrajān (d. 536/1141) better known as “Ghazālī of Andalus” is one of the great mystics who has presented a new and idiosyncratic perspective of the disjointed letters. His full name is Abū al-Ḥakam ‘Abd al-Salām Ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Abī al-Riǧāl Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Lakhmī al-Ifrīqī al-Ishbīlī. Ibn Abbār (d. 658/1260) the first writer of the biography of Ibn Barrajān, introduces him as an exegete familiar with the readings (Qirā‘āt), prophetic traditions and theology as well as the Sufis and principles of piety (Zuhd) and diligence in devotional services (Ibn Abbār, 2004, vol. 2, p. 292). Al-Dhahabi refers to him as the Mystic Leader (al-Shaykh al-Imam al-‘Arif al-Quḍwa) (al-Dhahabi, 1994, vol. 20, pp. 72). He was one of the leaders of “Murūdīn”, a group of Sufis in west Andalusia (Ibn Khāṭib, 2004, vol. 2, p. 225). The significant works of Ibn Barrajān that contain his views are as follows: sharḥ asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā, Tanbīh al-Aḥfām ilā Tadabbur al-Kitāb al-Ḥakīm wa al-Ta’arruf al-āyāt wa al-Naba’ al-‘Azīm and Ṣadāh al-Ḥikma bi Ahkām al-‘ibra.

Ibn Barrajān is indeed one of the earliest Islamic scholars that has dealt largely with the meaning and interpretation of Disjoined Letters in the Qur’ān. Yet much of his study and contribution on the subject has continued to be unnoticed, neglected, translated or referred to into modern times particularly by most contemporary religious scholars and academics.

Yousef Casewit is perhaps the only scholar that has to some extent dealt with Ibn Barrajān in his book (Casewit, 2017, pp. 230-234). In his book, Casewit gives extensive insight into Ibn Barrajān’s overall life, teachings and background as an Andalusian based mystic. The present article therefore aims to further research, study and focus particularly on Ibn Barrajān’s view of the disjointed letters in the Qur’ān.
Qur’ān based on his two commentaries of Tanbīh al-Afḥām and Ḥikma. Indeed, this aspect of Ibn Barrajān has not been dealt in detail and neglected by most scholars and in passing by Casewit. This research is undertaken using a library based descriptive-analytic method. Accordingly, first the works of Ibn Barrajān were collected, reviewed and studied, with discussions related to the disjointed letters gathered. Then, the collected data were assayed and classified. In this article, according to the collected data, Ibn Barrajān’s view of the disjointed letters are described and explained. Then, Ibn Barrajān’s view is compared with those views that seem to be similar to it.

Understanding the Meaning of Disjointed Letters

Ibn Barrajān denies the idea of ambiguity and indeterminateness of the meaning of the disjointed letters. He believes that the meaning of disjointed letters is clear and can be understood; but reaching the true meaning of them and their deep understanding are difficult (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 4, p. 224). He insists that as man cannot move the mountains with bare hands or touch the sky, he also cannot easily understand the meaning and implication of the disjointed letters (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 3, p. 510). He argues that the understanding of the disjointed letters is complicated and their interpretation can be handled merely by God and the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) only knew what God had taught him. The verse “so let your chest have no constriction because of it” (fa lā yakun fī ṣadrik haraj minh) (Q: 7:2), which addresses Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him), according to Ibn Barrajān, is very likely referring to the difficulty of the understanding of their deep meaning (kunh maʿrifatihā) by the Prophet (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 2, pp. 297-298). Perhaps this is why Ibn Barrajān usually uses the phrases “Allah knows that better than anyone else” (wa Allāh a’lam) and “He is more knowledgeable” (wa Huwa a’lam) when it comes to the discussion of the disjointed letters (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, p. 472; vol. 2, p. 492; vol. 4, pp. 224, 511; vol. 5, pp. 58-59, 364-365; Ibn Barrajān, 2016, pp. 126, 407, 598). Nevertheless, Ibn Barrajān is of the view that one can understand the meaning of the disjointed letters resorting to the Divine compassion and guidance as well as the power of faith and reason (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 3, p. 510). As to the method of understanding the meaning of these letters, he says: “They are understood by means of what comes with and after them” (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, p. 101). I continue to study Ibn Barrajān’s view of the general nature of the disjointed letters.

General Nature of Disjointed Letters

According to Ibn Barrajān, disjointed letters are the medium between the Clear Book (al-Kitāb al-Mubīn) and the Qur’ān. To put it otherwise, they are the mean and medium between the letters of these two books: “Verily a-ɺ-ɺ and a-ɺ-ɺ-ɺ and k-ɺ-ɺ-y- ɺ-s and ɺ-h and ɺ-s and ɺ-s-m and h-ɺ-m and ɺ-s-ɺ-q and y-ɺ-s and ɺ-q and ɺ-s and q and n are the medium (wāṣiṭa) between the letters of the Clear Book and the letters of the Qur’ān” (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 3, p. 510; also see: Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, p. 478; vol. 3, pp. 170, 221; vol. 4, p. 452). Among different views concerning the Disjointed Letters, he prefers this view and considers it to be the best perspective (al-ažhar; al-awjah) (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 3, pp. 510; vol. 5, p. 365).

Of course, in his works, sometimes instead of the Clear Book, the terms “Mother of the Book” (Umm al-Kitāb) and “Guarded Tablet” (al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz) are used. He believes that these three terms refer to the same meaning and reality (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, pp. 102, 475; vol. 5, pp. 58-59). Ibn Barrajān clearly argues that the Clear Book is the same Guarded Tablet or the Guarded Book (al-Kitāb al-Maḥfūz) or the Wise Book (al-Kitāb al-hakīm) (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 2, p. 492; vol. 3, pp. 78, 170-171; vol. 5, p. 119; Ibn Barrajān, 2016, pp. 335, 596). In the Clear Book, God’s knowledge of all creatures and events of the universe are inscribed (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 3, p. 78; Ibn Barrajān, 2016, pp. 335, 598). In other words, the Guarded Tablet is everything (kulla shay‘), because contains everything that comes into being (Ibn Barrajān, 2016, p. 351).

According to Ibn Barrajān, disjointed letters are as such strong and short and present no details (ḥurūf muqāṭṭa’ā muḥkama mujmala ghayr mufasṣala fi anfusihā) (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 5, p. 60). He calls the disjointed letters “Strong Book” (kitāb muḥkam) and “Short Book (kitāb mujmal)” (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 3, p. 474; Ibn Barrajān, 2016, pp. 132, 494). Given the verse Q: 3:7, he asserts that the Strong matters in Qur’ān (muḥkamāt) also include the disjointed letters (Ibn Barrajān, 2016, p. 128). Strong in his view has two meanings: one in the sense of short (i.e. as contrary to the detailed (mufasṣal) and the other is the fixedness and unchangeability (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 3, pp. 474, 511). According to Ibn Barrajān, Qur’ānic verses and their content with different themes (e.g. Divine Names, Attributes, Activities, Ordinances, Orders, Prohibitions, Promises, Stories, Prescriptions and etc.) are the expansion of the disjointed letters (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, p. 472; vol. 3, p. 474; Ibn Barrajān, 2016, p. 335). Therefore, “disjointed letters have become strong, and then they are expanded and detailed in the form of the Qur’ān” (innahā ʿḥkimat thumma fuṣsilat ʿlā mā huwa al-Qurʾān al-ʿazīz) (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, p. 490).

Since disjointed letters are revealed from the Clear Book, Ibn Barrajān considers disjointed letters to be the signs (āyāt) of the Clear Book and its letters which refer to the content of Clear Book (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, pp. 98, 471, 475, 490; vol. 2, p. 298; vol. 3, pp. 78, 252; vol. 5, pp. 82, 364-365; Ibn Barrajān, 2016, pp. 596, 719). As an explanation of the verse 6 of the chapter al-Naml, he argues that God describes Qur’ān as “mubīn” [clear], because it clarifies and expresses what is in the Guarded Tablet (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 4, p. 225). It is interesting to note that according to Ibn Barrajān, disjointed letters not only are part of the strong matters, they are also considered to be part of the consimilar verses (mutashābihāt) (in the sense of similarity not in the sense of ambiguity) (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, p. 490).

The other point mentioned by Ibn Barrajān of the general nature of the disjointed letters is that these letters refer to the Divine Names and Attributes and contain and express the Divine Names and their exigencies (Ibn Barrajān, 2016, pp. 351, 407, 516). He insists that “Divine Names and Attributes are implicit in these letters” (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, p. 101). These letters inform us of the Divine Names and Attributes (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 3, pp. 171-172; Ibn Barrajān, 2016, p. 37) and Divine Names are detailing and elaboration of them (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, p. 489). On the other hand, he believes that whatever exists owes its existence to the Divine Names (Ibn Barrajān, 2016, p. 351) and the latter express all creatures (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 3, p. 170). The content of the Qur’ān is the result of the exigencies of Divine Names (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 4, p. 224; Ibn Barrajān, 2016, p. 132). Therefore, Disjointed Letters are an expression of whatever that has emerged from them; namely, all creatures in the world and Qur’ānic Verses (Ibn Barrajān, 2016, pp. 472, 517). Ibn Barrajān explains this point in the following sentences in a clear fashion: “Verily these Disjointed Letters are an expression of the Divine Names as revealed in human tongue by the Lord in the form of certain names; then, He revealed them from the Names and in the form of the exigencies (muqtaḍadiyyāt) of the Names in the beings in the world and what has become elaborated in the Qur’ān” (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 3, p. 510).

Thus, given the fact that disjointed letters are the source of all creatures and the Qur’ān, and the origin of the disjointed letters is the Clear Book that includes everything, Ibn Barrajān names the disjointed letters as the Comprehensive Letters (jāmī’a) and All-Embracing Letters (al-ḥurūf al-muḥīṭa)
which have the qualities of generality, comprehensiveness, totality and truthfulness (a’ammu ‘umūman wa ajma’u fā’idatan wa atammu wa坐落在 wuji’dan wa aḥaqqu ḥaqiqatan).

Then, as an overall review of Ibn Barrajān’s view of the general nature of disjointed letters, one can say that these letters are the revealed and detailed form of the letters and content of the Clear Book; the Disjointed Letters are also revealed and articulated in the form of the Divine Names; finally, the exigencies of Divine Names have been revealed and elaborated in the form of the creatures in the world and also the verses of the Qur’ān.

Reasons of Ibn Barrajān

Ibn Barrajān uses Qur’ānic verses to explain and demonstration his own perspective concerning the Disjointed Letters and believes that Qur’ānic verses have expressed this view in an explicit and implicit fashion (naṣṣan wa ta’rīḍan) (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 3, p. 5). The verses that he quotes and highlights in order to explain the disjointed letters in different chapters as follows:

- “ḥ-m; By the Clear Book; We have made it an Arabic Qur’ān in order that you understand; It is in the Mother of Book with Us, sublime and wise” (ḥā mīm; wa al-kitāb al-mubīn; innā ja’alnā Qur’ānan ‘arabiyyan la’allakum ta’qilūn; wa innahū fī umm al-kitāb ladaynā la’aliyyun ḥakīm) (Q: 43:1-4).

- “ḥ-m; The sending down of the Book is from Allāh, the Almighty, the Wise” (ḥā mīm; tanzīl al-kitāb min Allāh al-‘azīz al-ḥakīm) (Q: 45:1-2; Q: 46:1-2).

- “a-l-m; The sending down of the Book in which there is no doubt that is from the Lord of the Worlds” (alif lām mīm; tanzīl al-kitāb lā rayba fīh min rabbi al-‘ālamīn) (Q: 32:1-2).

- “ḥ-m; A sending down from the Merciful, the Compassionate, A Book whose signs have been detailed as an Arabic Qur’ān for a people having knowledge” (ḥā mīm; tanzīl min al-raḥmān al-raḥīm, kitāb fuṣṣilat āyātuh Qur’ānan ‘arabiyyan li qawm ya’alimūn) (Q: 41:1-3).

- “a-l-r; It is a Book the signs/verses of which have become secured and firm, and then it has been detailed by a Conscious All Wise” (alif lām rā; kitāb uḥkimat āyātuh thumma fuṣṣilat min ladun ḥakīm khabīr) (Q: 11:1).

- “t-s-m; Those are the signs/verses of the clear Book” (tā sīn mīm; tilka āyāt al-kitāb al-mubīn) (Q: 26:1-2).

- “t-s; Those are the signs/verses of the Qur’ān, and a Clear Book” (tā sīn; tilka āyāt al-Qur’ān wa kitāb mubīn) (Q: 27:1).

- “a-l-r; Those are the signs/verses of the Book, and a Clear Qur’ān” (alif lām rā; tilka āyāt al-kitāb wa Qur’ān mubīn) (Q: 15:1).

- “a-l-r; Those are the signs/verses of the Book.” (alif lām rā; tilka āyāt al-kitāb) (Q: 13:1).

- “a-l-m; Those are the signs/verses of the Wise Book,” (tīlka āyāt al-kitāb al-ḥakīm) (Q: 31:1-2).

- “a-l-r; Those are the signs/verses of the Clear Book” (alif lām rā; tilka āyāt al-kitāb al-mubīn) (Q: 12:1).

- “a-l-r; Those are the signs/verses of the Wise Book” (alif lām rā; tilka āyāt al-kitāb al-ḥakīm) (Q: 10:1).
Ibn Barrajān argues that the phrases “al-kitāb”, “al-kitāb al-mubīn” and “al-kitāb al-ḥakīm” in these verses refer to the reality of the Clear Book, the Guarded Tablet or the Mother of Book. In Q: 43:1-4, it is clearly expressed that the source of the Qur’ān that we have is the Clear Book and the Guarded Tablet. Ibn Barrajān refers to Q: 45:1-2, Q: 46:1-2, Q: 32:1-2 and Q: 41:1-3 to demonstrate that the Clear Book in the form of Disjointed Letters and verses of the Qur’ān have been sent down and revealed from the Lord. In Q: 11:1, it is argued that the Disjointed Letters are strong verses which are elaborated in the form of Qur’ānic verses: since in this verse the strong stands before the detailed (uḥkimat; fussilat), Ibn Barrajān contends that the strong is also in the sense of the short. Referring to Q: 41:1-3, he states that the Qur’ān is an elaboration of the Disjointed Letters. Ibn Barrajān concludes that the totality of these verses argue that the disjointed letters are the medium between the Clear Book and the Qur’ān. He also refers to the rest of the abovementioned verses and claims that the disjointed letters are part of the verses of Qur’ān and at the same time, some signs of the Clear Book or Guarded Tablet and reveal its content (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, p. 99; vol. 2, p. 492; vol. 3, pp. 5, 78; vol. 4, p. 201; vol. 5, p. 119; Ibn Barrajān 2016, pp. 128, 311, 499, 598).

Ibn Barrajān quotes Q: 32:1-2 as well as the opening verses of the Sura al-Baqara reading: “a-l-m; That is the Book, where there is no doubt” (alif lām mim; dhālika al-kitāb lā rayyah fih) (Q: 2:1-2), and emphasizes that “the Book” in this context refers to “the Clear Book”. Ibn Barrajān notes that what there is no doubt in it is the Clear Book and the Guarded Tablet; because some people cast doubts of the Qur’ān, but the Clear Book is clearly understandable and observable for those who see with the light of faith (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, p. 98; vol. 4, p. 367; Ibn Barrajān, 2016, p. 37).

In the abovementioned seven verses, the word “tilka” [that] is used to refer to the disjointed letters as the verses and signs of the Clear Book. According to Ibn Barrajān, “tilka” refers to the present distance and it denotes the Disjointed Letters (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 3, pp. 78, 252; Ibn Barrajān, 2016, p. 499). He explains why this word “tilka” is used to point to the distance in the following words: “In fact, nothing is far from God in view of its distance, rather this distance and closeness is measured according to the friendship and hatred (al-walāya and al-barā’a); whatever loves Him, then it is close to God while whatever keeps away from Him it will be far from it. … Sometimes someone is described as being far from the Lord even if this person is a Friend of God because he comes from someone but Him or is with someone but Him. Thus, when God asks in Qur’ān: “What is that in your right hand, Moses?” (wa mā tilka bi yamīnika yā mūsā?) (Q: 20:17), He is asking of something that is in the hand of Moses. Or when the Lord addresses the Prophet: “Those are two signs from your Lord” (fa dhāniqa burhānān min rabbika) (Q: 28:32), because He has given these to the prophet. Thus, plural demonstrative pronoun for distance is used for them though they are from the Exalted Lord. … As to these letters [disjointed letters] the demonstrative pronoun for distance [in singular form] is used, because they have been strongly detailed from the Guarded Tablet and are the medium between it and the letters of Qur’ān and … they have become disjointed from it.” (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 4, pp. 355-356). Therefore, Ibn Barrajān has reached this perspective reflecting on the verses of the Qur’ān.

The Basis of Ibn Barrajān’s Perspective

Ibn Barrajān’s perspective of the disjointed letters in the Qur’ān is based on his view of the hierarchy of the divine revelation and its sending down. According to Ibn Barrajān, the origin of this Qur’ān is the Mother of Book and Qur’ān is the detailing and extended version of the Mother of Book (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 4, pp. 201-202). Sometimes he uses “Clear Book” or “Guarded Tablet” instead of “Mother of Book”. Anyway, all three terms are referring to the same reality. Ibn Barrajān believes that Guarded Tablet contains the inscribed Divine Knowledge of the creatures; later the measures were written and finally the creatures got inscribed. Three inscriptions with three tablets contained by the Great Tablet written in three days (Ibn Barrajān, 2016, p. 351). He provides this explanation based on the prophetic traditions. He believes that the Mother of Book is the same book that the prophetic tradition “Inscribe My knowledge for My creatures” (uktub ‘elmī fi khalqī) has been expressed as to it (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, p. 97). He quotes a prophetic tradition in which the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) states:
“Verily the Lord first created the Pen and then the Guarded Tablet. Then addressed the Pen as follows: Write! It asked: What should I inscribe my Lord? He said: write My Knowledge of My creatures” (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, p. 483). He explains that in this inscription everything of beings and non-beings is written including the quality of the existence of a being, its time, the cause of its existence or inexistence (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, p. 483). He continues to note that in another prophetic tradition it is stated that the Lord ordered the Pen to write, it asked: what should I write, the Lord said: “Write the measure (maqādir) of everything that exist and whatever that will come to existence until the Doomsday”(Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, p. 484). According to Ibn Barrajān, the first inscription of which the Lord said: “Write My Knowledge of My creatures”, is strong and short that later becomes detailed in another inscription where the Lord states: “Write whatever comes to existence”. These two inscriptions become even further extended and detailed in a third inscription where it is noted: “write the measures” and its content included the themes like the measures of the creatures that are going to come to existence, the quality of their existence, cause and the goal of their existence (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 2, p. 484). As an explanation of the verse Q: 39:23, he states: “God has revealed the Qur’ān from the Clear Book that contains His Knowledge of His creatures, from the book the content of which is the measure and from the book the content of which is the existence of the creatures (kawn al-kā‘īnāt)”(Ibn Barrajān, 2016, p. 562).

Therefore, God extended the strong sentences and expressions in the form of strong and detailed sentences (tafsīlān ba‘da tafsīl) and the primordial, mother and original (umāt) inscriptions are all the detailed and extended version of whatever lie under them: by the same token, whatever comes under any detailing is the mother and origin of the expressions under it. To put it otherwise, every inscription is the detailed version when it is compared with the inscription above it, while it is considered to be what comes to be detailed when it is compared with the inscription below it. Here Ibn Barrajān again refers to the verses Q: 41:3 and Q: 11:1 and interprets becoming strong (uḥkimat) in terms of the being fixed and completed (athbatat wa akmalat) in undetailed form. This process is the detailing and expansion of the strong continues to the point where it is understandable for the man (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, p. 484; vol. 3, p. 7; vol. 5, p. 35).

According to Ibn Barrajān, in the process of revelation of Qur’ān, the Holy Book was revealed wholly in the Heavens on Qadr Night in Ramaḍān month and resided in the “House of Majesty” (bayt al-‘zza) wherefrom it was gradually sent down (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, pp. 102, 475). The disjointed letters were revealed from the Book sent down from the Mother of Book towards the House of Majesty and finally, Qur’ān is the ultimate result of the revelation and detailing of the disjointed letters. The Qur’ān has been revealed to the heart of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in Arabic along with these letters and meanings. It is indeed the same Qur’ān that is available to us in written form (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, pp. 102, 474-475; vol. 3, p. 5; vol. 5, p. 82; Ibn Barrajān, 2016, pp. 349, 501). Accordingly, the disjointed letters at the beginning of the chapters of Qur’ān are the medium between the Mother of Book and the content of Qur’ān. Moreover, they are signs for the Mother of Book.

As to the goal of the revelation of the disjointed letters and Qur’ān and detailing of Divine Knowledge, Ibn Barrajān explains that the Qur’ān was not understandable for us before the revelation and expansion due to its majesty and our reason had no path to its understanding (he believes that the word “sublime” (‘āli) (Q: 43:4) refers to the state of “being beyond people’s understanding” and the word “magnificent” (‘azīz) refers to lying beyond the access); then He revealed it for His servants so as to be readable and its understanding be possible and ready for them and they intellect on it (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, pp. 102, 475; vol. 5, p. 82; Ibn Barrajān 2016, pp. 569, 596, 598). According to Ibn Barrajān, the word “being revealed” (tanzīl) means “clarification, making easy, defining and making understandable” (tabyīn; taysīr; ta’rif; tāfīm) (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, p. 474; vol. 4, p. 367; vol. 5, p. 119). “God sent these letters down these letters [i.e. Disjointed Letters] from the heavens as the medium between the letters of the Clear Book and letters of the Qur’ān may it become clear and closer to people” (tibyānān wa taqrīban li al-ajhām) (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 3, p. 221). Therefore, as it is mentioned in Q: 27:2, Qur’ān is glad tidings for the believers who think and reflect on it and through it seek guidance and certainty (Ibn Barrajān, 2013, vol. 1, pp. 102-103; vol. 3, p. 511; vol. 4, p. 224).
Quality of Expansion of Disjointed Letters and Their Reference to Divine Names

As previously mentioned, on the general nature of disjointed letters, Ibn Barrajān believes that these letters are expanded and detailed in the form of Divine Names and the creatures in this world as well as the verses of Qur‘ān are an expansion of the Divine Names and their exigencies. As to the particular nature, meaning and implication of disjointed letters, Ibn Barrajān struggles to explain the quality of the reference of the disjointed letters to the Divine Names and Attributes in some verses that begin with the disjointed letters (of course, he does not explain the meaning and implication of all disjointed letters in an independent way). Having reviewed his explanations concerning the relationship between the disjointed letters and Divine Names, one finds out that he makes use of two methods. Firstly, he traces every disjointed letter to the Divine Names that contain that letter at their beginning, middle or the end. Some examples of this class are as follows:


Secondly, Ibn Barrajān seeks to classify the Divine Names and Attributes related to a letter based on the features of the letters. This method is used in the explanation and expression of the meaning and implication of the letter \( f \). Ibn Barrajān argues that “\( f \) is a letter of transcendence (istiʿlāʾ) and intensity (shidda) and power (qawwra) and there is a dynamicity (laqlaqqa) in it”; accordingly, \( f \) refers to “ʿulūw” (Sublimity), “ʿazama” (Greatness), and “qadrāt” (Power) of God as well as the Names of “qāhir” (invincible), “qādir” (capable), “ʿalī” (magnificent), “qawwā” (powerful) and “zīz” (majestic) (Ibn Barrajān, 2016, pp. 418, 470, 472).

Comparison with Others

A review of different views offered of the general nature of the disjointed letters as well as the background of this issue shows that Ibn Barrajān’s perspective of the general nature of the disjointed letters is a new perspective and interpretation and it seems that only Ibn Barrajān has suggested such a perspective in this regard (although his explanation of the meaning of the disjointed letters in an independent way and in terms of the Divine names and Attributes, there is an approximate similarity
between his view and those offered of the mystical interpretation of Qur'ān and prophetic traditions) (Sheykh, 2016, pp. 89-106).

Nevertheless, when we turn to the ideas suggested by Sa‘īd Ibn ‘Alāqa better known as Abū Fākhti (d. 127/748), ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt (d. 525/1131), Avicenna (d. 428/1037) and Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) concerning the general nature of the disjointed letters, first we would find similarity between them and Ibn Barrajān on the general nature of the disjointed letters and their being a medium between the Clear Book and the Qur’ān. Then, we review the views of these people regarding the disjointed letters in order to reveal the difference between their views and that of Ibn Barrajān.

In al-Ṭabarī’s Exegesis, it is quoted that as to the disjointed letters, Abū Fākhti believed that “the Mother of Book are the openings of the chapters that the source of the Qur’ān as a whole; e.g. Sūra al-Baqara is derived from “a-l-m; that is the Book” and “a-l-m; Allah! There is no god except He” is the source of the Sūra ‘āli ‘emrān” (al-Ṭabarī, 1929, vol. 13, p. 117). Abū Fākhti’s perspective is similar to Ibn Barrajān’s view only in respect to its insistence on the idea that Qur’ān is an extended version of the Disjointed Letters. The difference lies in the fact that Ibn Barrajān emphasizes the mediatory role of the Disjointed Letters and argues that the disjointed letters are themselves originated in the Mother of Book and they are not the latter itself.

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt considers the disjointed letters to be “short expression” (bayān mujmal) of all secrets of the universe. He believes that with these letters, God has shared certain secrets with His Friends and the existing compactness is supposed to keep the strangers away from these truths. Of course, his view is not merely concerned with the disjointed letters and generally he believes that God has expressed the secrets through and in the form of the letters of the Qur’ān (‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, 1983, vol. 2, pp. 98, 143; ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, 1994, p. 175). He outlines the stages of understanding of the truth and secrets of the Qur’ān by the mystic as follows: seeing the connection between the letters of the words of Qur’ān, seeing the disconnection between the letters of Qur’ān, seeing all letters in the form of a point, and finally, seeing the truth in the point and disappearance of all points. His example is that people consider the Qur’ānic phrase “yuhibbuhum” to be connected; but if the veils are torn, instead of a connected phrase, they will see the letters: y, h, b, h, m; and finally instead of the letters, they will see the point. He considers the Qur’ānic phrase “We have detailed and explained the verses” (faṣṣalnā al-āyāt) (Q: 6:98) to be referring to these stages (‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, 1994, pp. 175-176; ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, 1983, vol. 2, pp. 98-99). As to the point, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt believes that “There is a station on the path of the Wayfarer that if he reaches to that station, he will know that Qur’ān as a whole exists in the point of the ba’ of Bismi Allāh or in the point of the mīm of Bismi Allāh and all creatures can be found in the point of the ba’ of Bismi Allāh” (‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, 1994, p. 172). According to ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, the Qur’ān has been revealed as shrouded in thousands of veils and the point of Bismi Allāh has not directly reached the heavens and the earth (‘Ayn al-Quḍāt 1994, p. 173; ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, 1983, vol. 2, p. 99). Then, the point of ba’ contains all creatures and Qur’ān is the expansion and revelation of the point, and therefore, upon our contemplation of the phrases and letters, we can reach the point and source of Qur’ān.

Of course, it seems that he does not refer to the superficial point. For sometimes he speaks of the point of a word or the point of a letter that does not apparently have a point. For example, the point of “lā”, point of “huwa”, point of “h”, “d” and “y” (‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, 1994, pp. 36, 248, 338). Therefore, by point, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt refers to genuine unity through which the wayfarer can understand the point of unity that is the source of all them through the diversity of verses, words and letters in Qur’ān. Of course, point will also disappear at last.

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt shares the same view with Ibn Barrajān when he considers the disjointed letters to be “the short” while he introduces the verses of the Qur’ān as their detailed expression. However, there is a difference here between the two as ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt contrary to Ibn Barrajān attributes this quality to all letters of Qur’ān. Moreover, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt does not say that Qur’ān is an expansion and detailing of the disjointed letters, rather he considers Qur’ān to be an expansion and revelation of the point. Furthermore,
according to ‘‘Ayn al-Qu’dât, in the Qur’ân there is a short expression (which has been expressed in the letters and can be understood by special people) and an extended expression (which are addressing the public through the expressed phrases and words).

In the treatise “al-Nayrûzîyya fî Mu’ânî al-ḥurûf al-Hiā’îyya”, Avicenna uses his own philosophical method as well as the theory of Abjad letters to argue that the disjointed letters both separately and collectively refer to the different stages of existence and beings. Avicenna’s theory is new and unprecedented. The first chapter of this treatise gives an outline of the order of beings and the feature of each one of them, the second chapter is concerning the quality of the reference of each one of these letters to the creatures, and the third chapter discusses the goal and conclusion of the premises expressed in previous chapters. Avicenna compares the Abjad letters with the ontological hierarchy of beings and believes that the disjointed letters in Qur’ân refer to different levels of creatures. Accordingly, alif refers to God and the next letters in turn refer to the rest of the creatures and stages of existence. Avicenna’s interpretation of the disjointed letters is based on the Abjad letters and numeral equivalent of the letters. He believes that each one of the creatures in the hierarchy of existence is correspondent to a number and each letter is correspondent to a creature and a level of existence (Avicenna, n.d., pp. 134-141). Mullâ Şadrâ has also accepted Avicenna’s view in this regard and explains it based on the principles of his own Transcendent Philosophy (Mullâ Şadrâ, 1987, vol. 1, pp. 215-216).

The perspective adopted by Avicenna and Mullâ Şadrâ is totally different from Ibn Barrajân’s perspective of the general nature of the disjointed letters and the meaning of each of them. Ibn Barrajân, contrary to these two philosophers, does not use the Abjad letters and their numeral equivalents in explanation of the disjointed letters. The disjointed letters themselves are one level of the levels of Divine Revelation and manifestation of the Divine Knowledge, not that each one of them refers to a level of the levels of existence.

Therefore, Ibn Barrajân’s perspective of Disjointed Letters as compared to the perspectives of others in this regard, despite the existing superficial similarities, is totally different and his view is still considered to be a new perspective.

Conclusion

Ibn Barrajân presents a new perspective and interpretation concerning the general nature of the disjointed letters. He is against the idea that disjointed letters are ambiguous. According to Ibn Barrajân, the meaning of disjointed letters is clear and one can reach the meaning of these letters relying on the divine guidance, faith, reason and also the study of the verses in which these disjointed letters are used. By reflection on the verses of Qur’ân, Ibn Barrajân has reached this perspective and interpretation and he refers to the Qur’ânic verses in order to explain and demonstrate his own view of the disjointed letters. As to the general nature of the disjointed letters, he argues that they are the medium between the Clear Book and the Qur’ân. By Clear Book, he refers to the Mother of Book and the Guarded Book. According to Ibn Barrajân, disjointed letters are the revealed and expanded version of the letters and content of the Clear Book; the disjointed letters have also been expanded and detailed in the form of the Divine Names; finally, exigencies of the Divine Names are revealed and detailed and expressed in the form of the creatures in the world and also the verses of the Qur’ân. Ibn Barrajân calls disjointed letters “strong and short” and believes that they are extended and detailed and also refer to the content of the Clear Book and bespeak of them. Also he describes disjointed letters as the Comprehensive and All Embracing Letters in view of their being the source of all creatures and the Qur’ân as well as the fact that these letters have their origin in the Clear Book.

To explain the particular nature, meaning and implication of the disjointed letters and the quality of the reference of these letters to the Divine Names and Attributes, Ibn Barrajân takes advantage of two methods: firstly, he argues that every one of the disjointed letters refer to those Divine Names that have
this specific letter at their beginning, middle and end; secondly, he explains the Divine Names and Attributes related to a determinate letter based on the features of the letters. Ibn Barrajān’s view of the disjointed letters is based on his view of the hierarchy of the divine revelation and its descent. Although Ibn Barrajān’s perspective and interpretation of the disjointed letters has some similarities with the viewpoints of Abū Fākhitī, ‘Ayn al-Qūdāt, Avicenna, and Mullā Ṣadrā, there are still certain fundamental differences and we can still argue that Ibn Barrajān’s perspective and interpretation is special and new.

References


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