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Artistic Features in the Letters of Al-Hasan Al-Basri

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Abstract

This study seeks to unveil the art of letters in the Umayyad era and understand their methods and characteristics. Al-Hasan al-Basri was chosen as a model by studying his letters and clarifying their methods. The study concluded that al-Basri relied on religion and artistic imagery in his letters. These methods had an effective role in raising the semantic and artistic level. The study consisted of: an introduction, a preface, discussing the art of letters in the Umayyad era and its development according to the new circumstances in society, in addition to explaining the types of letters and what distinguishes each type. It consisted of four topics, the first of which dealt with the life of al-Hasan al-Basri, his knowledge, culture, and his preaching. The second topic dealt with the most important letters of al-Hasan al-Basri that he addressed to the Caliph Omar bin Abdulaziz and the Caliph Abdul-Malik bin Marwan. As for the third topic, it dealt with the discussion of the religious heritage in his letters in all its forms; the fourth topic focused on the artistic imagery in al-Basri's letters through the use of similes and metaphors. The conclusion includes the most important findings of the study, as well as a list of sources and references that were benefited from.

Keywords: *Umayyad Letters; Al-Hasan Al-Basri; Religious Heritage; Quotation; Artistic Imagery.*

Introduction

The art of letters evolved in the Umayyad era, as there were many writers of letters who greatly focused on them. As such, they used artistic methods that would elevate their letters. Al-Hasan al-Basri is considered one of the most important Umayyad letter writers because of his unique artistic and rhetoric styles which distinguished his letters from other letters of Umayyad writers.

This study was intended to shed light on the letters of al-Hasan al-Basri and the most important methods they included by employing religious heritage and artistic images in all their forms. The first topic was devoted to talking about al-Basri's life, knowledge, and preaching; the second topic focused on his most famous letters that he addressed to the Caliph Omar bin Abdulaziz and the Caliph Abdul-Malik bin Marwan. The third topic clarified the aspects of the religious heritage in its two parts: Qur'anic quotation and religious references. Lastly, the fourth topic focused on artistic images, including simile and metaphor, as well as the conclusion and the most important findings.

Perhaps what prompted the researcher to address this aspect was to clarify the methods in al-Basri's letters that distinguished them from other letters of Umayyad writers, and the aesthetic impact they produced that was reflected in his letters. The nature of the study required using

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the descriptive and analytical method. As for previous studies, none were found that dealt with al-Basri's letters from the same aspects that the researcher dealt with in this study. However, there are studies and research that touched on al-Hasan al-Basri's prose from other aspects; therefore, they did not discuss religious heritage and artistic images in detail. I noted some of them in the list of sources and references.

Preface

The art of prose writing developed due to the religious, social, and political changes in the Umayyad era, since "writing developed widely in the Umayyad era, as the Arabs knew the idea of the book and that it was pages collected together on a specific topic" (Al-Jubaili, al-Hussein, 2005, p. 472). Also, the need for religious, political, and social correspondence emerged at that time.

The development of the written prose arts extended in this era, as "another art of Umayyad prose became active, which is the art of letters, as letters were written and sent from everywhere, dealing with many Muslim affairs; many creative writers who excelled in eloquence and rhetoric participated in writing them... A large, valid portion of their letters was available to us... "(Abu Dhiab, 2006, p. 335). Therefore, the need to record the affairs of Muslims and other purposes was one of the most important motivations for interest in letters of all kinds; accordingly, this art attracted writers and people of eloquence and rhetoric, so they gave it their attention, added their methods to it, and excelled in producing the letters in the best way.

History and literature books are full of Umayyad letters of all kinds, and this indicates the large number of prose writers who directed their prose towards letters. Letters were a means to achieve social, political, and religious goals, and the latter occupied a special place in Umayyad society.

Religious letters were the most important because of the characteristics they possessed which raised their level. Looking at "religious and dialectical letters", we found that their authors, such as the articulate orators like al-Hasan al-Basri and others, were themselves masters of eloquence and rhetoric (Al-Jubaili, al-Hussein, 2005, p. 479). Al-Basri was famous for his preaching letters, as he wrote them more than other letters. The preaching letters are: "a type of writing that revolves around preaching and guidance, and al-Hasan al-Basri was famous for it in this era. The Caliph Omar bin Abdulaziz used to write to preachers in general, and al-Hasan al-Basri in particular, to send him their sermons." (Abu Zaid, 2012, p. 353).

The First Topic

Al-Hasan Al-Basri

- His Life and Culture

He is the most important letter writer in the Umayyad era. "Al-Hasan al-Basri is Abu Saeed. He was born in the year 21 AH (642 AD) (Spano, 1982, p. 7). He was born in Medina and his father was of non-Arab origin. He was born in Medina in the year twenty-one AH to a non-Arab father called Yasar, as he was a captive of Maysan near Basra who was enslaved by an Ansari man, then he freed him." (Dhaif, d. t, p. 445). As for his mother (Khayrah), she was the mistress of Umm Salamah, the wife of the Prophet -Peace be upon him-. Al-Basri grew up in Wadi Al-Qura and then moved to Basra, where he resided until he died in the year 110 AH (728 AD) (Spano, 1982, p. 7). As for his political life, "his life began under the rule of Omar -

may God be pleased with him- and he lived through the events of strife, the killing of Othman, the Battle of the Camel, Ali's accession to the caliphate, and then his assassination..." (Spano, 1982, p. 8). Despite living during the events of strife between the followers of Ali and Muawiyah, the most important successive political events, and what the Islamic Caliphate witnessed in that era, al-Hasan "avoided participating in current events, as it was a doctrine he followed throughout his life to not participate in events and strifes" (Dhaif, d.t., p. 445). Therefore, he distanced himself from the events and chose a different path based on knowledge and asceticism.

Anyone who looks into al-Basri's life notices that he had a unique personality that was distinguished by eloquence and piety, as "when he was mentioned, he was described as an ascetic, humble, and knowledgeable person, and that he was the scholar of the nation and the eloquent and ascetic Imam, and that he was one of the masters and elders of the followers, known for his eloquence, piety, worship, and literature" (Spano, 1982, p. 7). In addition, he was particularly knowledgeable in language, literature, and prose arts.

Moreover, we see al-Basri being referred to by leading linguists at that time such as Abu Amr bin Al-Ala' when he said: "I have never seen a pastoral more eloquent than al-Hasan and al-Hajjaj" (Al-Jahiz, vol. 1, 1998, pp. 398-286). His Eloquence and superiority over many scholars and writers of his time was attested to him.

The Bedouins have an influential opinion in al-Basri, as some of them described him as "a knowledgeable Arab" (Al-Jahiz, vol. 1, 1998, p. 205). When the Bedouins attest to him on this, this is a valuable testimony, since the Bedouins were known for their eloquent and strong language. Among the later scholars were those who testify that: "He combined his eloquence with a precise linguistic sense" (Dhaif, d.t., p. 447).

-Al-Hasan Al-Basri as a Preacher

Al-Basri was known for his councils, which was attended by the various classes and religions, as "his council included Muslims, Christians and Jews, and it includes princes, leaders and the common people, as well as scholars and learners" (Spano, 1982, p. 11). In addition, learners and even people below that level attended as well, and this indicates the vast popularity that al-Basri enjoyed and made him a prominent figure who has a presence in society at the time.

What al-Basri excelled most in was preaching, and this was reflected in his prose and letters, since "his sermons combined the books of al-Bayan, al-Tabyen, Uyun al-Akhbar, and al-Eqd al-Fareed, as were his translations of various books and the books of Sufis, such as al-Lam' by al-Siraj and Hilyat al-Awliya by Abu Naim. Al-Ghazali mentioned him repeatedly in al-Ihya. In his sermons, he draws from the Holy Qur'an, in addition to the guidance of the Prophet -Peace be upon him- and his pious companions, especially Omar bin al-Khattab, for he narrates many of his sayings and sermons from him" (Al-Jahiz, vol. 1, 1998, p. 137). His name and prose appeared in major books, and he was mentioned by figures such as al-Khattab and al-Ghazali, which is a strong evidence of the position he occupied among the men of science and religion.

The basis of his preaching, to which he devoted himself, was to divert people's attention towards the afterlife. "In his preaching, he always rejects the world and its fleeting enjoyments, reminding of the Judgment Day and the harsh punishment that awaits the disobedient therein, urging piety and good deeds and following the example of the Prophet and his companions who rejected this world and sought the afterlife, so they were like the vine tree that its leaves were beautiful and its fruits were pleasant" (Dhaif, d.t., p. 447). All of this is due to the

asceticism and piety during his upbringing, and they became one of the traits of his personality. "Ihsan Abbas accurately portrayed his ascetic personality, showing how he distracted himself from the pleasures of life, how he delved deep into the experience of asceticism, and how he went on to continuously encourage it in his sermons." (Dhaif, d. t., 446).

In conclusion, asceticism and love of preaching were reflected in al-Basri's personality in his letters. The value of these letters is not hidden, "because of their great importance in the religious field, as they were based on asceticism, preaching, and discussing some religious matters and issues that began to spread among people and attract their attention..." (Abu Dhiab, 2006, p. 336). As a result, they became a literary and religious reference.

Looking at the letters of al-Hasan al-Basri, we see the methods and characteristics that they carry are influenced by religion and the formation of artistic images, which played an important role in affirming meanings. The most important letters of al-Hasan al-Basri are his letters to the Caliph Omar bin Abdulaziz, and to Abdul-Malik bin Marwan...

The Second Topic

Letters of al-Hasan Al-Basri

-Al-Hasan Al-Basri's letter to Omar bin Abdulaziz

"As for what comes next, I know, O Commander of the Faithful, that the world is a place of Dhu'n², and it is not a place of permanent residence, but rather Adam descended to it from Heaven as a punishment, and those who do not know God's blessing might see it as a reward, and those who do not know God's punishment might see it as punishment; it is filled with struggles, and each time the struggle is different, as it insults who honored it, humiliates who loves it, and strikes who prefers it. Every now and then, it strikes and kills; it is like a poison, and the person who is unaware of it would consume it and die. Therefore, if you leave it, you will live a better life, and if you neglect it, you will be wealthy. O Commander of the Faithful, be like a person who treats his own wound, since he endures the pain of the medicine, fearing the length of the affliction, and he hides for some time, fearing that what he hates might prolong. The people of virtue were correct when they speak, humble when they walk, and their food was from good deeds, as they stayed away from what is forbidden. As such, their fear on land is like their fear at sea, and their supplication in good times is like their supplication in bad times. Had it not for the limited time they would live in this life, their souls would not have sustained the strength in their bodies, whether due to the fear of punishment or longing for reward, the Creator became great in their souls, so creatures became small in their eyes.

And know, O Commander of the Faithful, that contemplation calls for goodness and acting upon it, and that regretting evil calls for abandoning it... So beware of this wretched and deceitful world...

-Al-Hasan al-Basri's letter to Abdul-Malik bin Marwan regarding destiny:

"In the name of God, the most Gracious, the most Merciful

To Abdullah, Commander of the Faithful, from al-Hasan bin Abi al-Hasan al-Basri. May God's peace be upon you, O Commander of the Faithful. For I praise to you God, besides whom

² Dhu'n: Traveling.

there is no god; as for what comes next,

May God guide the Commander of the Faithful and make him one of the governors who work in obedience to God, follow His Prophet, and hasten to follow what He commands them. The Commander of the Faithful, may God guide him towards righteousness, has become among the many righteous people who have passed away, looked up to, overlooked, and emulated by their deeds. O Commander of the Faithful, we have known about our predecessors who acted upon God's command, spoke of His wisdom, and followed the Sunnah of His Prophet -Peace be upon him-; as such, they did not deny the truth, did not claim falsehood, did not address something to the Lord, the most Blessed and the most High, except what He addressed to Himself, and did not use as evidence except what God has used as evidence for His creation in His Book. God, the most Blessed and the most high, says, and His saying is the truth: (And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me. * I do not want from them any provision, nor do I want them to feed Me.) So God commanded them to worship Him in accordance with their creation, and He did not create them for a reason and then order them otherwise, because God Almighty said: (Because Allah is not ever unjust to [His] servants.) His prohibition against indecency, evil, and transgression was for (He admonishes you that you will be reminded), as the Book of God Almighty is a life for every death, a light for every darkness, and a source of knowledge for every ignorance. After the Book and the Prophet, God did not leave any argument for His servants, and God Almighty said: (Those who perished [through disbelief] would perish upon evidence and those who lived [in faith] would live upon evidence; and indeed, Allah is Hearing and Knowing). So the Commander of the Faithful thought about His Almighty's saying: (To whoever wills among you to proceed or stay behind * Every soul, for what it has earned, will be retained), and that is because God gave them the ability to proceed or stay behind, so He tested them to see how they would act, and to test their claims. If the matter was in the hands of the disbelievers, they would not have been able to proceed nor stay behind, and those who proceed would not have been rewarded for what they did.

So ponder, O Commander of the Faithful, with understanding, for God Almighty says: (So give good tidings to My servants * Who listen to speech and follow the best of it. Those are the ones Allah has guided, and those are people of understanding). Also, listen to the words of God Almighty, when He says: (And if only the People of the Scripture had believed and feared Allah, we would have removed from them their misdeeds admitted them to Gardens of Pleasure * And if only they had upheld [the law of] the Torah, the Gospel, and what has been revealed to them from their Lord [i.e., the Quran], they would have consumed [provision] from above them and from beneath their feet.) And He said: (And if only the people of the cities had believed and feared Allah, we would have opened [i.e., bestowed] upon them blessings from the heaven and the earth, but they denied [the message], so We seized them for what they were earning).

And know, O Commander of the Faithful, that God did not make matters inevitable for His servants, but said: If you do such-and-such, I will do such-and-such to you, and if I do such-and-such to you, I will do it. Rather, He gives them what they deserve based on their deeds, as he said: (increase for him double punishment in the Fire). But God has made clear to us who brought that upon them, and who led them astray, saying: (And they will say, "Our Lord, indeed we obeyed our masters and our dignitaries, and they led us astray from the [right] way.") The masters and the dignitaries are the ones who introduced disbelief to them and led them astray from the path after they had been on it, because God says: (Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful). Either he should be grateful for this. We have shown him the way and bestowed blessings upon him, or he should disbelieve. God says (And whoever is

grateful - his gratitude is only for [the benefit of] himself. And whoever is ungrateful - then indeed, my Lord is Free of need and Generous).

So say, O Commander of the Faithful, as God said: Pharaoh is the one who led his people astray. Do not contradict God in what He said, and do not make of God anything except what He approves for Himself, for He said: (Indeed, [incumbent] upon Us is guidance * And indeed, to Us belongs the Hereafter and the first [life].) Guidance is from God and misguidance is from the servants themselves.

Then think, O Commander of the Faithful, about the words of God Almighty: (And no one misguided us except the criminals), and His saying: (Allah will only bring it to you if He wills, and you will not cause [Him] failure.), meaning: You will not be saved from His torment if it comes to you, nor will you be abstained from it, and my advice will be of no use to you then if I wanted to advise you when torment befalls you. This is the Sunnah of God, as repentance is not accepted when witnessing torment. As for his saying: (If Allah should intend to put you in error. He is your Lord, and to Him you will be returned), meaning: a painful punishment. Moreover, among what they argue about is the words of God Almighty when He says: (Whoever Allah wills to guide, He opens their heart to Islam. But whoever He wills to leave astray, He makes their chest tight and constricted as if they were climbing up into the sky. This is how Allah dooms those who disbelieve.) They would say -out of their ignorance- that God Almighty singled out a people with open hearts without good deeds they performed, and others with narrow chests - meaning: hearts - without disbelief, immorality, or misguidance among them, and these have no way to the acts of obedience that God ordered them about, and they will remain in Hell for eternity; the truth is not - O Commander of the Faithful - as the ignorant and mistaken people believed. Our Lord is more Merciful, Just, and Generous to do that to His servants, since he says: (Allah does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity. It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned). If he is in a state where he is able to abide by all that He commanded and forbade, then this is the ruling regarding everyone who has attained obedience to his full extent, whether honorable or lowly; however, whoever abandons what God has commanded him to do of obedience and goes far in his disbelief and misguidance in this life, and despite that he is able to repent, then God will make his chest tight and distressed as if he was ascending to the sky as a punishment for his disbelief and misguidance in this life, as repentance is commanded and called upon.

And God, O Commander of the Faithful, mentioned openness and narrowness in His Book as a mercy from Him to His servants and as an encouragement to them in the deeds by which they are questioned in His wisdom, to open their hearts, and to encourage them against the deeds by which they necessitate in His wisdom the narrowness of the hearts; He did not mention that to them to cut off their hope or to give them despair of His mercy and grace, nor to cut them off from His pardon, forgiveness, and generosity.

The Third Topic

Religious Heritage in Al-Basri's Letters

-Citing the Holy Quran

Religion is an important resource in the art of letters, as writers drew what supports their ideas from it. The Holy Qur'an has taken their interest in a remarkable way throughout the ages,

despite the succession of time, as "it is the text that remains in the Arab memory" (Bennis, 1979, p. 285). Looking at al-Hasan al-Basri's letters, we notice the writer's tendency to include the Quranic verses.

Al-Basri's upbringing, learning the Qur'an, as well as his extensive religious culture and his love for Islamic sciences were among the motives that made him cite verses of the Qur'an in much of his prose because of the strength he found in It, since "the Holy Qur'an represents the source of Islamic literature and represents its replenishment and nourishment, its source and its strength" (Al-Nahwi, 1994, p. 28).

The religious tendency appears in al-Basri's letters by relying on several pillars, including: citing the Holy Qur'anic verses, and recalling the situations of the Prophet and the Companions - peace be upon them-, as they are the best role models in life matters. In addition, he resorted to some religious references with the aim of persuading and influencing the addressee and the listener.

Among the directions that al-Basri was keen on in his letters was to explain the reason for God's creation -the Almighty- of mankind and the jinn.

And that by quoting the Almighty saying: (And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me. * I do not want from them any provision, nor do I want them to feed Me.) (Al-Dhaariyat, 56-57). The first and most prominent purpose of creating the jinn and mankind is to worship the Almighty Creator alone, adding that the Almighty is not in need of them and they cannot give Him livelihood or benefit.

The Qur'an is the ideal foundation that establishes human life and illuminates their path in this life. On this basis, al-Basri relied on the Islamic religion -in all its forms- as it contains guidance, success, and religious and worldly happiness. Religion "prescribes life for people and establishes it on a sound path that achieves happiness for them in both worlds: the first and the hereafter" (Dhaif, d.t., p. 31).

Al-Hasan al-Basri was able to link his thoughts and visions to the Holy Qur'anic verses, along with the realistic issues that he lived through at that time, which served the intended meanings. There is no doubt that the Islamic religion gave literature -in all its types and forms- a strength and elegance that nothing else can give it, as "Islam came and gave all of these meanings their freshness, strength, richness, blessing and goodness" (Al-Nahwi, 1994, p. 32), in a suggestive and influential expression.

Al-Hasan al-Basri recalls the words of God Almighty: (He admonishes you that you will be reminded) (An-Nahl, 90), addressing the mind as a kind of reminder. Man needs preaching from time to time, and al-Basri considers himself a means of reminding about the religious rulings, as he spares no effort whenever he is given the opportunity; the quotation often comes literally, and this has a sanctity that convinces the listener and increases the credibility of the meaning.

The quotation from the Holy Qur'an was the common quotation in most sermons, as well as religious and preaching letters (see, al-Hofy, d.t., p. 354). As such, the status of the Qur'an is great and its sacred and profound effect in the hearts of human beings is a great impact.

Anyone who examines al-Hasan's letters sees a variety of forms of citing Qur'anic verses: "His citation of Qur'anic verses is many, sometimes he brings them in multiples of his speech, and sometimes he recites the verse and then follows it with his sermon, etc." (Dhaif, d.t., p. 448);

for example, citing the words of the Almighty: (To whoever wills among you to proceed or stay behind * Every soul, for what it has earned, will be retained) (Al-Muddaththir, 38-39), it is followed by clarification and confirmation of the content of the verse, as God tested man to see what he would do and offer.

Whoever looks at the biography of al-Hasan al-Basri will see that the latter was not only a pious and devout man, but that he was eloquent, rhetorical, and knowledgeable of the language, and this led to letters of great strength and eloquence. "Ibn al-Atheer, talking about writing, identifies its most important pillars. He sees that a certain book should use some of the meanings of the Holy Qur'an and the life of the Prophet, as they are sources of eloquence and rhetoric" (Ibn al-Atheer, vol. 1, 1959, p. 96). The strength of the letters is not complete unless they include the meanings of the Qur'an and religious references. In his letter to Abdul-Malik bin Marwan, al-Hasan al-Basri relied on the Qur'an for most of it. For each situation, he chose the appropriate Qur'anic verse from the Almighty's saying: (Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful) (Al-Insan, 3). The Qur'an is "the creator of heritage, and its source" (Sharad, 1987, p. 4), and even if time passes, it is alive within the souls no matter how many years have passed. Therefore, the need for it remains in all fields, as it is preserved by God's protection.

Al-Basri derived from the Qur'an what enhances the meaning and elevates it in a way that goes hand in hand with its significance and supports it without exaggeration or forcing of meaning; this what makes the Qur'an suitable for all times, intersecting with life issues, for "Arab writers continue to draw from its abundance and drink from its abundant spring what strengthens their tongues, and guarantees them good speech without exaggeration, falsification, or forcing words that are irrelevant" (Dhaif, d.t., p. 34). Here lies al-Basri's ingenuity, as we see a great ability to include the context of the Qur'anic verses that suit the context in his letters.

When al-Basri cites the Almighty's saying: (Indeed, [incumbent] upon Us is guidance * And indeed, to Us belongs the Hereafter and the first [life]) (Al-Layl, 12-13), he derives noble meanings to be consistent with his letter, and in his reconciliation between these meanings and the noble verses, it is an indication of his ability to employ the Qur'an, which is inevitable to be understood and to comprehend its methods and meanings; so, the text would be elevated and acquire a high value, and this is what we see in the letters of al-Hasan al-Basri.

Al-Basri cites provisions from the Holy Qur'an that represent the justice and mercy of the Creator toward His servants, as He does not burden them beyond their capacity, and He rewards them with what they have earned, and that is in the Almighty's saying: (Allah does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity. It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned) (Al-Baqarah, 286). Such quotations would give strength to the context, thus influencing the recipient and listener and attracting him to the intended meaning.

Qur'anic quotations enhance prose and add semantic value, in addition to being an adornment. All of this elevates the level of letters, attracting the listener and convincing the recipient. The Qur'an was and still "literature meets with the faith that God Almighty planted in the instinct of man, but rather it is one of the fruits of this faith, and a whiff of its breath, and a beating of its heartbeats, where the talent is available" (Al-Nahwi, 1994, p. 26).

- Religious References in the Letters of Al-Hasan Al-Basri

Prose writers -in the forms of sermons and letters- sought to refer to the religious heritage, and

al-Hasan al-Basri's letters are full of various forms that reflect his influence by religion. The matter was not limited to quoting Qur'anic verses, but we also see many religious references in his letters. In his letter to Omar bin Abdulaziz, he said: (but rather Adam descended to it from Heaven as a punishment), which is a reference to the descent of Adam and his wife from Paradise. Al-Basri intended to refer to this situation, and did not resort to literal quotation, but the reference is clear, and he aims to indicate that this world is not a place of rest, so Adam was in Heaven and descended to earth, as it is only a passage to the afterlife.

In his letter to Abdul-Malik bin Marwan, he begins by saying: (For I praise to you God, besides whom there is no god); the religious tendency of al-Hasan al-Basri appears here by beginning his letter with praise and monotheism. This is not strange, as he was raised in a religious environment, in addition to his closeness to the House of Prophethood, and his memorization of the Book of Allah...

Al-Basri's letters show a clear influence by religion through the strong religious tendency we see in his letters, and this was common in prose in general. When he says in his letter: (He tested them to see how they would act), he draws inspiration from the Holy Qur'an, God's law in this world, when a person is tested by his actions and God treats him with either reward or punishment, al-Basri intends to refer to this Sunnah to remind the listener to follow God's commands and work towards the Hereafter.

In another place, he seems to be influenced by the Qur'an in his saying: (And disbelief, immorality, and disobedience burden him), it is derived from Surat Al-Hujurat that God has endeared faith to the hearts of Muslims and made disbelief, immorality, and disobedience hateful to them. Al-Basri's citing of such references is successful because he expresses the intended meaning precisely without ambiguity.

When he said: (...God will make his chest tight and distressed as if he was ascending to the sky as a punishment for his disbelief and misguidance), this phrase clearly refers to that group that God deprives of the blessing of faith, so its people become distressed, as if their souls are ascending to the sky, as mentioned in the verse. When al-Basri recalls such images, it is considered a tangible depiction that brings the meaning closer and deepens the understanding of the meaning.

Looking at al-Basri's letters, we find that they are predominantly religious in nature. The reader is prepared to read a religious preaching, and there is no doubt that religion gives such arts strength and elevates them, for "every belief gives literature strength and adds dignity to it." But the doctrine of Islam is the only doctrine that pushes literature to its true and faithful status, and elevates it to a sublime and ascending height..." (Al-Nahwi, 1994, p. 39). As a result, al-Basri's citation of religious references gave his letters a spiritual atmosphere overflowing with faith and credibility.

The Fourth Topic

The Artistic Imagery in al-Basri's Letters

Since ancient times, Arabic literature has been characterized by beauty and high artistry, and this is attributed to the fact that it is speech in which there is artistic depiction, which made it rise above ordinary speech. Writers were interested in the artistic image and focused heavily on it, until they promoted Arabic literature and it surpassed all other literatures. Therefore, the artistic image became a necessary basis in literature, as "the literary image is a major foundation of literature and its artistic and stylistic components, because of the variety of imaginative

images and the power of influence it contains” (Mashreqi, 2022, p. 44). Elegant literature calls for the use of images, which in turn depends on imagination and the realization of thought and emotion, as "the artistic image is a brilliant child of a creative force that is imagination" (Al-Rubai, 2009, p. 15). Imagination is the basic pillar of the artistic image, and this opinion is shared by many scholars in the modern era, as Izz al-Deen Ismail sees it as "a mental composition that belongs in its essence to the world of the idea more than its relation with the world of reality" (Ismail, 1984, p. 58).

The most important thing that writers and authors rely on in their literature is simile and metaphor. The relationship between simile and metaphor is close, and they are strongly linked. This is what prompted Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani to say: (Know that metaphor always relies on simile) (Al-Jurjani, d.t., p. 63)

Anyone who observes al-Hasan al-Basri’s prose, and his letters in particular, finds many artistic images in them, and this is due to his eloquence and rhetoric, which was reflected in his letters. There were many forms of artistic images in his letters, including simile and metaphor.

- Simile in Al-Basri's Letters

The simile method has been common among writers from ancient times to the present day. Simile is one of the simplest forms of artistic images. The view on the concept of simile varied, and it was known to the ancients as: “A method of Arabic rhetoric that makes the deepest meaning clearer, and brings the farthest of them closer” (Al-Qayrawani, vol. 1, 1964, p. 489). Perhaps this concept is directed to the mind, as it addresses the imagination by linking things and creating a relationship between them...

The simile is based on two or more parties linked by a common characteristic, and this is what Ahmed Matloob expressed as: “linking two or more things in one or more attributes” (Matloob, vol. 2, d.t., p. 170). The simile is not valid unless there are two sides of the simile.

In his letter to Omar bin Abdulaziz, describing the world, he says: it is like a poison, and the person who is unaware of it would consume it and die; here, he likens the world to poison that a person would consume, ignorant of what he is consuming, and it becomes his end. What al-Basri means here is that the worldly life may deceive a person and overwhelm him, so he ends up empty-handed, or defeated. Such a simile reflects a high aesthetic and artistry that is not limited to one literary genre, but rather includes literature in all its forms. Since “simile is one of the indispensable virtues of poetry” (Al-Rubai, 2009, p. 49), as such, simile has beauty and adornment that elevates the literary work and its artistic level.

Al-Hasan continues, addressing Omar bin Abdulaziz, saying: So be in it, O Commander of the Faithful, like a person who treats his own wound. He asks him to be in this world as one who heals his wound, an indication of self-perseverance and patience.

Through the simile sentences that al-Basri included in his letters, beauty and splendor are achieved, since the simile is able to achieve easy and clear beauty by highlighting two symmetrical borders, each of which works in a direction in which it meets the other; they are not completely united, but rather harmonize quietly and without clash (see Al-Rubai, 2009, p. 50). Here lies al-Basri’s ingenuity which is represented in his usage of simile images that combine both sides with a common whole. These images would help him express his visions and meanings, so the listener would receive them, so they attract and convince him.

Also, he says in his letter about the righteous people (their fear on land is like their fear at sea),

where he indicated that the condition of this group is the same in all circumstances, since they fears God in distress and prosperity, as well as (their supplication in good times is like their supplication in bad times) depicts their condition in supplication, as they pray to God in the event of good and bad times. Hence, the similes contribute to the formation of the artistic image and meanings remarkably.

Metaphor

Metaphor is one of the most important artistic means that was popular among ancient and modern writers, until it became one of the components of literature. Scholars paid attention to this method, one of them is al-Jurjani, who believes that in the metaphor: “you see inanimate objects alive and speaking, and a foreigner as an eloquent person, and mute bodies would speak, and hidden meanings clearly apparent” (Al-Jurjani, d.t., p. 33). So, metaphor has a strong influence in stimulating minds with its ability to personify inanimate objects, thus giving lifeless things life and vitality.

Metaphor was important to the ancients, as Ibn Rashiq describes it: (Metaphor is the best rhetoric and the first sign of elegance, and there is nothing more beautiful in the ornaments of poetry than it) (Al-Qayrawani, vol. 1, 1981, p. 268). It is an ornament that adorns literature and gives it elegance and beauty. It is “an important means of clarifying and confirming meaning, a manifestation of imagination, and one of its magical powers that reveals itself to us in creating balance, or reconciling contradictory or conflicting qualities” (Abu al-Adous, 1997, p. 313). Metaphor has magic that attracts the listener and stimulates his imagination.

The writer forms several types of metaphor. It may take the form of: embodiment, or personification, and sometimes in the form of communicating with the senses. The metaphor in the letters of al-Hasan al-Basri was represented in images derived from the lived reality. For instance, in his letter addressing Omar bin Abdulaziz, he says: (So beware of this wretched and deceitful world), he depicted the world in the form of an object that lets down whoever it faces, and strikes him to the point of defeat; here is a personification in the form of a living being as an indication of the futility of this world and that the afterlife is better and more lasting.

In another place, al-Basri says: (as the Book of God Almighty is a life for every death), he depicts the Holy Qur'an as life at death, as if it were a reason for reviving the dead; there is elegance capable of influencing the human soul in this picture.

At other times, he depicts the Holy Qur'an as the light that illuminates the darkness of the road, which is an indication that it is the source of guidance and goodness to man. Such images contain high energy which greatly attracts the recipient.

In his letter to Omar bin Abdulaziz, he says: (as they stayed away from what is forbidden), where he depicted the Muslims who followed God's commands as people with their eyes closed from what harms them and from everything that is forbidden. Such an image embodies the idea in a sensual, imaginable way, and this image would bring the meaning closer to the mind of the recipient.

In another place in his letter to Abdul-Malik bin Marwan, al-Basri says: (that God Almighty singled out a people with open hearts without good deeds they performed, and others with narrow chests...); here, he depicts peace of mind for the believer as a spacious place, and the worry of the disbeliever as a narrow place, and here is an embodiment of the abstract in a sensual form.

In another place in the same letter, he says: (and hasten to follow what He commands them), he depicts the true believers as people competing in running to reach a specific goal, where he resorted to this embodiment which indicate the believers' eagerness to follow God's commands to gain His satisfaction; al-Basri uses such images for the believers to give an example to them.

In his letter to Abdul-Malik bin Marwan, he says: (.. to cut off their hope or to give them despair of His mercy and grace), where hope and despair of His mercy were depicted as the rope could be cut. Thus, artistic images appear to have an impact on the recipient by stimulating his senses, sharpening his imagination, and captivating himself with what he reads.

The purity of expression of the artistic imagery -including its simile, embodiment, and personification- has a great impact on the soul, and the image becomes weak, far from imagination and lacking in beauty without it. If the speech is devoid of images and is based on the truth, it becomes far from eloquence and devoid of rhetoric (see Asfour, 1983, p. 324). Sensory perceptions are the basis for the formation of the artistic image, which in turn is the basis of the literary work.

Conclusion

Al-Hasan al-Basri was one of the most important Imams and preachers in the Umayyad era. He was a scholar of the Qur'an and religious sciences, as well as a combination of piety, eloquence, and rhetoric in his personality.

Al-Basri is considered one of the most important prose writers in the Umayyad era. He was famous for his sermons and letters in which he called for asceticism and contemplation of the afterlife. Among his most important letters that deserved analysis are his two letters to the Caliph Omar bin Abdulaziz, and to Abdul-Malik bin Marwan.

Al-Hasan al-Basri's letters are characterized by methods that advanced and elevated their artistic level. He recalled religious heritage at times and resorted to artistic imagery at other times.

Qur'anic quotations were common in al-Basri's letters, as they supported the presented meanings. These quotations added strength and holiness to the letter, in addition to the religious references, and all of this would influence the recipient and convince him of the writer's visions.

Moreover, al-Basri used many artistic images, including similes and metaphors which were full of embodiment and personification, in his letters. These artistic images would bring the meanings closer, attract the listener to the content of the letter, and sharpen his imagination.

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