

For Sale to the Highest Bidder: A Precious Shi'i Manuscript from the Early Eleventh Century

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Keywords

al-Sharīf al-Raḍī – Talkhīṣ al-bayān ‘an majāzāt al-Qur’ān – al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā – manuscripts of Iraq – Faḍl Allāh al-Rāwandī – ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā al-Raba‘ī al-Naḥwī

The prominent Twelver Shi'i scholar and poet, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn "al-Sharīf al-Raḍī" (d. 406 /1015), author of a monumental, partly preserved Qur'ān commentary in ten volumes, *Ḥaqā'iq al-ta'wīl fī mutashābih al-tanzīl*, and compiler of the renowned anthology of homilies, speeches and letters attributed to Imām 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), *Nahj al-balāgha*, also composed a comprehensive, and largely unprecedented book on the metaphors in the Qur'ān, entitled *Talkhīṣ al-bayān ‘an majāzāt al-Qur’ān*.¹ A remarkable manuscript containing volume 2 of the work (henceforth "Lot 68") is currently offered for sale by the UK auctioneer Dreweatts. The description in the Dreweatts web-based catalogue² reads as follows:

162 leaves (plus one contemporary and 3 later endleaves), complete in alternating quires of 8 and 12 leaves with a bifolium at the end to complete the text, the second volume of the text only, single column of 11-12 lines in

- 1 For his poetry, see, e.g., Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, "Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī and the Poetics of Alid Legitimacy: Elegy for al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī on 'Ashūrā", 319 A.H.," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 38 (2007), pp. 293-323 (with further references). Studies on his *Nahj al-balāgha* are legion. For al-Sharīf al-Raḍī's *Ḥaqā'iq* and his *Talkhīṣ al-bayān*, see the contributions of Mahmoud M. Ayoub and Kamal Abu-Deeb to *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, ed. Issa J. Boullata, New York, NY: Routledge, 2000; Tehseen Thaver, "Ambiguity, Hermeneutics, and the Formation of Shi'i Identity in al-Sharīf al-Raḍī's (d. 1015 CE) Qur'an Commentary," PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2013. For al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, see also *Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition*, vol. 9, pp. 341-343 (Moktar Djebli).
- 2 See <https://bid.dreweatts.com/m/lot-details/index/catalog/962/lot/16021?url=%2Fm%2Fmy-items%2Fall> [consulted November 28, 2019].

sepia naskh hand of the author al-Sharīf al-Rādī himself, title on recto of first leaf, colophon at end of text in same hand, ...

The auctioneer's conclusion that the codex constitutes an autograph is compelling. The volume ends with an authorial colophon (fig. 6) in which al-Sharīf al-Rādī relates the dates of the commencement of the composition (Thursday, 20 Sha'bān 401[/29 March 1011])³ and its completion (Sunday, 13 Shawwāl 401[/17 May 1011]). That the codex has both a title page and a final colophon confirms its completeness. At the same time, since the auctioneer's website includes only a few sample pages, it cannot be established precisely where in the work volume 2 begins.

Confirmation that the codex dates back to the late tenth or first half of the eleventh century CE—but not that it is a holograph—is also provided by

a C14 test (by C14 Science for Art Cultural Heritage of Martillac, France and New York, their report reference 0415-OA-98R-4 carried out in 2015, with them extracting the sample of paper from the book themselves: strip of paper from blank lower edge of fol. 10), as well as a report on the antiquity of the paper [...] The C14 analysis establishes a date of 986-1048 AD with a probability of 79.1%, and the paper stock is characteristically Persian and of the twelfth century or before (the extreme rarity of comparative eleventh-century manuscripts from this region forcing the dating parameters to be set as twelfth-century or before).⁴

Additional confirmation that the codex constitutes a holograph is provided on the titlepage (fig. 1), which was written down by one al-Ḥasan b. Ḥāmid al-Warrāq,⁵ the equivalent of a publisher's impressum. He remarks that the work is in the hand of the author.⁶ Moreover, the titlepage also contains a

3 The auctioneer's website erroneously mentions 13 Sha'bān 401 AH, but the Arabic reads: *wa-kāna ibtidā' taṣnīf hādihā l-kitāb fī yawm al-khamīs li-'aṣhar layālīn tabqā min Sha'bān sanat ihdā wa-arba' mī'atⁱⁿ*, i.e., "The commencement of the composition of this book dates to Thursday, with ten nights of Sha'bān remaining, in the year 401".

4 <https://bid.dreweatts.com/m/lot-details/index/catalog/962/lot/16021?url=%2Fm%2Fmy-items%2Fall> [consulted November 28, 2019].

5 He was most likely Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥasan b. Ḥāmid b. 'Alī b. Marwān al-Baghdādī al-Warrāq, an important scholar and authority among the Ḥanbalīs, who died in 403/1012-13. On him, see Arij al-Jābirī, "al-Ḥasan b. Ḥāmid", *al-Multaqā al-fiqhī* (website), 10 July 2010, <http://www.feqhweb.com/vb/t6257.html> (with further references). I thank Hassan Ansari for this identification.

6 The titlepage reads as follows: *al-juz' al-thānī min kitāb | Talkhīṣ al-bayān 'an majāzāt al-Qur'ān | taṣnīf sayyidīnā al-sharīf al-ajall al-Rādī | Dhī l-Ḥasabayn Abī l-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. al-tāhir al-awḥad | dhī l-manāqib Abī Aḥmad al-Ḥusayn b. Mūsā al-Mūsawī aṭāla | Allāh*



FIGURE 1

statement by the renowned grammarian and *adīb* Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā b. al-Faraj b. Šālīḥ al-Raba‘ī al-Zuhayrī al-Naḥwī (b. 328/939, d. 420/1029), obviously an admirer of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī.⁷

The manuscript's provenance remains unclear. The codex has several documentary statements, a reader note (signed by al-Ḥājjī Aḥmad b. al-Shaykh Yūsuf al-Ḥimmašī and dating to 688/1289, final page; fig. 6), an ownership statement signed by Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Takrūrī al-Muqaddasī (?) and dated 737/1336-37 (final page), and a purchase note dated 751/1350-51 and signed by Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abī Bakr al-Ḥanafī al-Ḥillī (titlepage). The names of the reader and the two owners indicate that the codex circulated among Sunnis during the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. No details are provided about the book's fate beyond the fourteenth century CE or, especially, about its last owner and its journey to the United Kingdom.⁸

baqā’ahu wa-adāma nu’amā’ahu wa-kabata ḥasadatahu wa-aḍā’ahu | wa-huwa bi-khaṭṭihi al-sharīf wa-kataba l-’unwān al-Ḥasan b. Ḥāmid al-Warrāq.

7 The note reads: *naẓara fihi ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā al-Raba‘ī al-Naḥwī | mutabarrikan bi-khaṭṭ muṣannifihi ayyadahu llāh ta’ālā*. For al-Raba‘ī, see also the editor's introduction to Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā al-Raba‘ī al-Naḥwī, *Kitāb al-‘Arūḍ*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Badrān, Beirut / Berlin: Orient-Institut der DMG / Das Arabische Buch, 2000.

8 The grim description of the fate of libraries and academic life in Baghdad after the Mongol conquest in 1258 that is given in the auctioneer's description no longer reflects the state of art in scholarship. See, e.g., Linda Komaroff (ed.), *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, Leiden: Brill, 2006.

Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī's *Talkhīṣ al-bayān* is preserved in only a few witnesses. For the libraries of Iran, the *Union Catalogue of Iran Manuscripts* lists two copies:⁹ This first is Ms. Tehran, Dānishgāh 5470, fols 303-400, transcribed by Muḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ḥāfiẓ Rahqī and dated 29 Rajab 567¹⁰ [27 March 1172].¹¹ The scribe relates in a margin note at the end of the codex that a few years later, in Jumādā 11 564 [March 1169] he collated his copy with a copy of the work transcribed by Faḍl Allāh b. 'Alī b. 'Ubayd Allāh b. 'Alī al-Ḥasanī al-Rāwandī al-Kāshānī (alive in 571 /1176-77). Faḍl Allāh was also the prominent transmitter of *Nahj al-balāgha* as well as *K. al-Amālī* by the older brother of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (b. 355/967, d. 436 /1044), and his (indirect) involvement in the 567 AH copy is significant.¹²

The second witness mentioned in the *Union Catalogue*, "Ms. Tehran, Dānishgāh, Mishkāṭ 1034", belonged to the library of the prominent Iranian scholar and politician al-Sayyid Muḥammad Mishkāṭ (b. 1902, d. 1989),¹³ who in 1953 published a facsimile of this codex.¹⁴ The publication is rounded up with introductions by Ḥusayn 'Alī Maḥfūẓ (dated 10 Rabī' 1 1371 [9 December

9 Muṣṭafā Dirāyatī, *Fihristigān: Nuskha-hā-yi khaṭṭī-yi Īrān (Fankhā)*, 35 vols, Tehran: Sāzmān-i Asnād wa Kitābkhāna-yi Millī-yi Jumhūrī-yi Islāmī-yi Īrān, 1390/2011, vol. 9, p. 149.

10 According to Muḥsin Ṣādiqī, "Nuskha-ay tāzih yāb az *Talkhīṣ al-bayān fī majāzāt al-Qur'ān*," *Bayyanāt* 54 (1386 [2007]), p. 197 the date is 29 Ramaḍān 547 AH.

11 Cf., however, Muṣṭafā Dirāyatī, *Fihristwāra-yi dastnawisht-hā-yi Īrān (Dinā)*, 12 vols, Tehran: Kitābkhāna, Mūzih wa Markaz-i Asnād-i Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Islāmī, 1389/2010, vol. 3, p. 294 no. 68250 where it is stated that the manuscript belongs to the 'Alī 'Ulūmī Collection in Yazd (shelfmark 56/3). A significant part of this private collection has been sold to the Central Library of Tehran University, evidently including the 567 AH copy of *Talkhīṣ al-bayān*. See Geoffrey Roper, *World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts*, vol. 1, London: Al-Furqan Heritage Foundation, 1992, p. 546. The 'Alī 'Umūmī collection contained two other works in the realm of Qur'ānic sciences that had been transcribed by the same scribe, Muḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ḥāfiẓ Rahqī, namely *al-Wujūh wa-l-naẓā'ir* by Ḥasan b. 'Abd Allāh Ibn Hilāl al-'Askarī (d. 395/1004-5 ?), dated Shawwāl 542 [February-March 1148], and *Nukat al-ma'ānī wa-l-a'rāb wa-'ilal al-qirā'āt* by 'Alī b. Ḥusayn Bāqūlī (d. 543/1148 ?), dated end of Rabī' 1 547 [July 1152]. See Dirāyatī, *Fihristwāra*, vol. 8, p. 665 no. 227054, vol. 10, p. 1003 no. 295063.

12 See Hassan Ansari and Sabine Schmidtke, *Imāmī Thought in Transition: An Archaeological Inquiry into Texts and Their Transmission*, Cordoba: UCOPress, 2020, index (s.v. "Faḍl Allāh al-Rāwandī").

13 In 1950 Mishkāṭ donated his entire library of 1,320 manuscripts to the Central Library of Tehran University. See Roper, *World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts*, vol. 1, pp. 522, 526. A handlist of the Mishkāṭ collection is provided in Muḥammad Shīrwānī, *Fihristwāra-yi nuskha-hā-yi khaṭṭī-yi majmū'a-yi Mishkāṭ: ihdā' bih Kitābkhāna-yi Markazī wa Markaz-i Asnād*, Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tīhrān, Kitābkhāna-yi Markazī wa Markaz-i Asnād, 1356/1976. See also the entry for *Talkhīṣ al-bayān* at <http://aghabozorg.ir/showbookdetail.aspx?bookid=45229> [consulted November 28, 2019] for a brief description of "Ms. Tehran, Dānishgāh, Mishkāṭ 1034".

14 Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Talkhīṣ al-bayān fī majāzāt al-Qur'ān*, Tehran: Muḥammad al-Mishkāṭ, 1953.

1951]) and Muḥammad Mishkāt (dated Ramaḍān 1372[May-June 1953]), as well as various indices to facilitate its usage. The Mishkāt codex is defective both at the beginning and at the end, as well as within the text (leaves 24 and 25 are missing), and its identity could be established at the time only on the basis of regular cross-references to the author's exegetical work, *Ḥaḡāʾiq al-taʾwīl*, and through brief references to the work provided in later books. Mishkāt further explains in his introduction that he had tried in vain to find another witness of the work to fill the lacunae in the Mishkāt codex. In 1955, the Egyptian scholar Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Ḥasan published a critical edition of the Mishkāt codex.¹⁵

Around the same time, another witness of the book was discovered by al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mūsawī al-Jazāʾirī in Najaf. Unlike the Mishkāt codex, the Najaf codex contains the work in its entirety, and the book was published on the basis of this second witness by Makkī al-Sayyid Jāsim.¹⁶ Another edition of the *Talkhīṣ al-bayān* was prepared by ʿAlī Maḥmūd Muqallad who consulted both the Mishkāt codex and the Najaf codex.¹⁷

More recently, another copy of the work has surfaced in Egypt, among the holdings of the library founded by the renowned Sufi shaykh Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī (b. 1219, d. 1286) in Alexandria.¹⁸ The manuscript (88 leaves with 21 lines to a page) is defective in the beginning and was transcribed in 509/1115.

Comparing “Lot 68” with the Mishkāt codex, there are evident differences as regards the *mise-en-page* of the text (17 lines per page in the Mishkāt codex, 11-12 lines in “Lot 68”; 205 by 145 mm. [textblock 105 by 171 mm.] in the Mishkāt codex, 218 by 118 mm. [text-block 170 by 75 mm.] in “Lot 68”). Moreover, although the Mishkāt codex is incompletely preserved, it covers most of volumes 1 and 2 of the book.¹⁹ The auctioneer's website provides only some sample pages of “Lot 68”, but the codicological division of the work into volumes seems

15 Cairo: Dār Ihyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1955.

16 Baghdad: al-Maktaba al-ʿIlmiyya, 1955 (repeatedly republished). The editor provides a detailed description of the manuscript in his three-page introduction but does not include facsimiles from the codex.

17 Beirut: Manshūrāt Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1986 (repeatedly republished).

18 The shelfmark is indicated as “169 *tafsīr*”. See Ṣādiqī, “Nuskha-ay tāziḥ,” pp. 196-200. For the library and its holdings, see also Amīr Jād, “al-Khalifa – Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī,” *Sofy* (website), 19 January 2008, <http://sofy.4umer.com/t125-topic>. For Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī, see Nathan Hofer, *The Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt, 1173-1325*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015, pp. 105-128 and passim.

19 The beginning of the text in the Mishkāt codex corresponds to ed. Muqallad, p. 28:13, indicating that only one folio is missing here. The end of the text in the Mishkāt codex corresponds to ed. Muqallad, p. 378:4. In Muqallad's edition, there are some nine pages of additional text before the end of the book.

to differ in the two manuscripts. There is nothing in the *Mishkāt* codex that would indicate a codicological division into volumes corresponding to what is attested in “Lot 68”. The text found on one of the double pages of “Lot 68” that is available on the auctioneer’s website (fig. 2) corresponds to pp. 169:7-170:2 of the *Mishkāt* codex (figs 6, 7) (= ed. Muqallad, pp. 267:5-268:4). However, a second double page of “Lot 68” on the auctioneer’s website (fig. 3) differs significantly from the version included in the *Mishkāt* codex: it corresponds to pp. 195:5-14 and 196:13-197:2, but the intervening section, pp. 195:14-196:13, of the *Mishkāt* codex has no equivalent in “Lot 68”. The same longer version of this passage is included in Muqallad’s edition.²⁰

The concluding section of the Najaf codex comprises al-Sharīf al-Raḍī’s authorial colophon, which agrees verbatim with the wording found at the end of “Lot 68”. It is followed by the scribe’s colophon in which the latter identifies himself as Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Mūsawī and relates that he was commissioned to transcribe the book for *al-makhdūm al-awḥad al-ḥājj* Āqā Sayyid ‘Abd al-Ṣamad, and that he completed the work on Tuesday, 8 Rajab



FIGURE 2

20 *Talkhiṣ al-bayān*, ed. Muqallad, pp. 303:6-304:12, with pp. 303:14-304:7 having no equivalent in “Lot 68”. Muqallad remains silent as to whether the Najaf codex includes this digression or not.



FIGURE 3



FIGURE 4



FIGURE 5



FIGURE 6

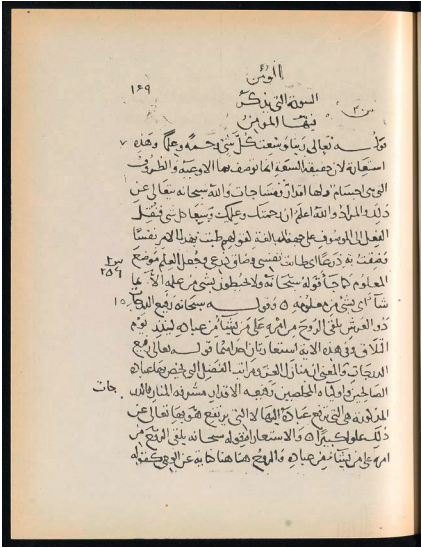


FIGURE 7

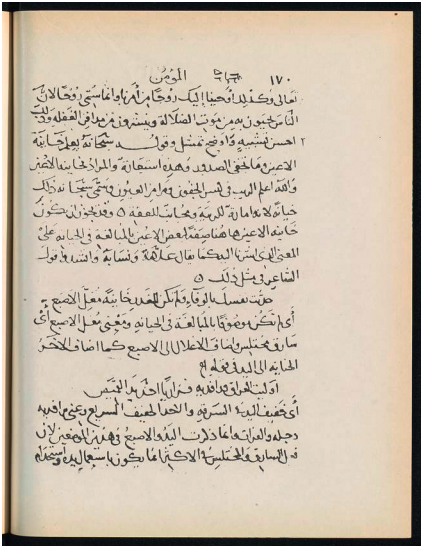


FIGURE 8

1287[/4 October 1870].²¹ This suggests that the Najaf codex may possibly be a direct copy of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī's holograph, volume 2 of which is preserved as "Lot 68". If this is indeed the case, "Lot 68" was in Iraq during the second half of the 19th century, most likely in Najaf, and at the time perhaps still united with volume 1 of the book. There is therefore a slim chance that volume 1 of the holograph has also survived though its current whereabouts are unknown.

Be that as it may, "Lot 68" is of utmost significance for any further study of the work and its transmission, including a new critical edition of the book. It is to be hoped that whoever purchases "Lot 68" will make it available to scholars for research.

21 Several copies of other books transcribed by Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Mūsawī have come down to us. See Dirāyatī, *Fihristwāra*, vol. 12, p. 681 (s.v. "Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Mūsawī").