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Original Research Article

Investigating the Science of Letters Basis and Its Relationship with Calligraphy in the Traditionalists' Writings

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Abstract

The most important claim of the traditionalists about calligraphy is the semantic field or encryption. This essay's primary purpose is to investigate the cryptographic basis of calligraphy from the perspective of the traditionalists. The study is an attempt to examine what is the semantic field and encoding of calligraphy from the perspective of traditionalists,? Moreover, what does this basis have to do with tradition? This research assumes that the science of letters is the basis of calligraphy encryption from a traditionalist's perspective. The research method is descriptive and analytical, and the attempt is to look at the basis of cryptography in traditionalists' writings such as Seyed Hossein Nasr, Titus Burkhardt, and Shuan and Guenon. The first part discusses the basis of traditionalists' encryption and their claims about the calligraphy somatic according to their writings. The essay's second part studies the encryption of traditionalist's basis (the science of letters) in Islamic sources. The traditionalists consider the meaning of language letters in calligraphy, and calligraphic encoding is related to the language letters and Jafr (science of letters) and not necessarily the calligraphic aesthetic aspect. This encryption is more of a linguistic phenomenon (related to letters) than calligraphy. At the same time, the essay's second part shows that the science of letters basis is contradictory, and Islamic sources mostly reject the science of letters basis. As a result, traditionalists' encryption claims in the calligraphy need to be validated.

Keywords: *Symbolism, Science of letters, Calligraphy, Traditionalist.*

Introduction

Perhaps the traditionalism trend is the most critical aspect of the semantic interpretation of Islamic art. Unlike many currents that deny the Islamic nature of Islamic art or use the Arab art interpretation, the traditionalism current believes in the Islamic nature of this type of holy art (or traditional art in general). At the same time, traditionalists do not deny the formal aspect and believe that the form derives from the content. Even the form in art is sacred because of its encryption. Traditionalists such as Nasr and Martin Lings consider a metaphysical field for calligraphy

based on its cryptographic character.

Research Background

Regarding the research background, Nasr's writings about the calligraphy spiritual message and spirituality in art may illuminate some points about traditionalists' views (Nasr, 2002). René Guenon also raises issues about cryptography and the science of letters (Guenon, 2002). The traditionalists do not have independent writings about calligraphic cryptography and the science of letters' rules. However, the cryptographic aspects, the Sufism effects, and the connection with the science of letters are present

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in their writings. Other researchers, besides traditionalists, refer to the connection between the science of letters and calligraphy with similar presuppositions.

Anne-Marie Schimmel and Martin Lings considered Sufism the most crucial trend in forming calligraphy aesthetics. One point that proves the calligraphy connected with calligraphy and the calligraphy development through history is some fabulous calligraphers presence, including Marouf Baghdadi, in the calligraphy adventure, one of the oldest works in Nastaliq script recorded in his name (Bayani, 1984, 915).

Henry Carbon also believed that the shapes of the letters had formed the calligraphy aesthetics; He refers to this position in the history of Islamic philosophy. In this type of esoteric thinking, one should pay attention to the connection between the study of the mysteries of the human face and the calligraphy lines, which is considered a source for the phenomenology of allegorical figures (Corbin, 1994, 98). In this way of thinking, Fazlallah Horoufi became involved in the Iranian trend and started a new chapter in the work with letters (Haroufieh) (Qaragozlou, 2004, 207). Some historians believe that some sects' followers should have been more open to the evolution of form and calligraphy content. For example, the human face was called the letter and dot type of the human face, and on this basis, the calligraphers compared the letters to the human face (ibid., 124). The connection of some events in the life of the founder of Horufiyeh with the calligraphy development, including the emergence of the Nastaliq script in the second half of the 8th century, strengthens the possibility of the influence of this sect in these developments. In circles influenced by esoteric thought, especially in Tabriz, they reflected on calligraphy (Richard, 2004, 161).

The existence of Shiite Sufism and leaning towards Iranian nationalism has promoted the invention of a new calligraphy. From the evidence of this opinion, the position of Imam Ali, the leader of the mystics and Sufis of Shia, is in the calligraphy creation, which is evident in most of the calligraphers' treatises and statements of this era. As Ibn Muqalla says, he has received calligraphic education in his dreams (Sabzevari, 1993, 107). Historians explain that

many idea followers were killed or fled to India and other countries due to the strengthening and calligraphy rise in the 9th century and the rulers' actions. Due to the idea's strength, in the early 9th century, Persian writing with a particular script became popular even in India (Seraj Sirazi, 1997, 94).

Therefore, the science of letter interpretation has effectively formed calligraphy aesthetics, and this effect is in Nastaliq. However, besides the formal influence of the science of letters on calligraphy, the traditionalists' encryptions are also related to the science of letters. Nevertheless, according to traditionalists, the question is, what is calligraphy's semantic field and encoding? Furthermore, what does this basis have to do with the Islamic tradition? The essay assumed that the traditionalists used the science of letters to impact calligraphy. To prove this hypothesis, one should refer to their essays and books.

- The coding in calligraphy from the traditionalist's perspectives

Nasr explains the mentioned concepts in two articles titled "The Spiritual Message of Calligraphy in Islam." Nasr states:

According to an old saying, Islamic calligraphy is the geometry of the spirit. Calligraphy, as the word of Allah's embodiment, helps Muslims to participate in this presence based on their spiritual talents so that their ultimate goal is to reach God and the purpose, which is the word of God's majesty. The calligraphy sacred art helps man pass the material veil of existence to access the blessing hidden in God's word and taste a drop from the spiritual world reality cup (Nasr, 2002, 72).

When traditionalists say calligraphy has a spiritual message or spirituality, it is not just the thoughts or the Quran's words. However, the images used in calligraphy or, to be more precise, the letters carry a spiritual message. In this context, Nasr cites Frithjof Schuons' words in the book Knowledge of Islam, which says that understanding the Qur'an verses, these noble and lofty expressions, is simple. These verses are not just sentences to convey thoughts, but in a way, they have life, they have power, and they are spells. Nasr considers calligraphy to have a

facet that reveals cosmic correspondences and even reveals itself through the symbolization of truths with a cosmic nature (Nasr, 2002, 43). For example, Nasr considers the letter meaning “Allah” as a unity sign. Nasr refers to the metaphysical field of calligraphy from the Qur’an’s point of view to Kamal al-Din Hossein Kashfi’s in the verse interpretation “N and Al-Qalam” that, according to him, the N is the symbol of light and Qalam (pen) is the calligraphy reed (ibid., 37).

Regarding Islamic calligraphy encoding, Nasr writes, “Through its special symbolism forms and formats, it shows the interrelationship and mutuality and transformation which is one of the creation characteristics itself, the world means continuous flow, becoming means, but this becoming is nothing but reflection and eternal and unchangeable forms hidden in the words or Islamic calligraphy wisdom to the extent that by embodying the text of the Qur’an... it can be said that the original unity vertical movements and the horizontal movement of the multiplicity in manifestation” (ibid.).

Nasr writes in the same article, “Because Quran verses are the power center or talisman, the words and letters that make it possible to visualize the Quran verses also play the talisman role, regardless of the numbers symbolism and their inner meaning. The calligraphic forms (5) letters can be considered to represent beings” (Nasr, 2002, 38).

In this phrase, even though Nasr does not deal with the science of letters, he talks about the science of letters in a footnote (5) regarding the esoteric sciences. He also presents the science of letters according to his interpretations regarding properties (A). According to Nasr, the dot is God’s presence symbol. In addition to the connection between calligraphy and the science of letters (Jafr) in Nasr’s writings, Guenon’s writings about cryptography in the science of letters also strengthen this hypothesis.

In this case, referring to Guenon’s writings regarding the science of letters is better. In this essay, he defines the science of letters’ intellectual foundations. When it comes to the science of letters and the inner meaning of letters, what they mean by symbolization in this field is a non-conventional symbolization. Even beyond this, traditionalists consider

letters to have magical properties. It is possible to predict and interfere with it. According to Guenon’s science of letters interpretation, language has three worlds:

1. The eternal order or the thing’s eternal knowledge
2. The intermediate level or the things creation quality
3. The names, knowledge, and letters and their connection with nature

The lowest stage is related to magic, the realm of the senses (Guenon, 2002, 17).

Guenon’s opinions about the science of letters and cryptography can be summarized as follows: a) Languages are divided into human and non-human types. Non-human languages can perform alphabetic operations. The holy books people’s languages can do the operations, and Arabic especially has such a feature, while non-human languages do not.

b) The reason for attributing acquiring knowledge characteristic in language is that objects are rooted in letters, and there is a relationship between letters and the object’s eternal knowledge. Ibn Arabi, in *Fotuh-at-e-Makijeh* book volume 2, considered the science of letters the first science and believes that these 28 letters are the angels’ names in the spirit world and the angel’s bodies are these letters (Ibn Arabi, 2002, 448; Ganun, 2002, 16-23).

c) With the science of letters, men can reach the essence of the thing, and most importantly, with the science of letters and non-human language, humans can extract ontological claims from the claims of cognitive language.

Affected by such thinking, some people consider letters a veil and believe one understands the letters’ meaning and can find the eternal order. Using mathematical operations on the letters can explore the letters’ meaning. Anne Marie Schimmel believes that the Sufis thought the letters between them and the direct perception of Hazrat Haqq (God) might have been a veil. The state and mind should be on a white page to reach that perception. Regarding the relationship between letters and meaning, Schimmel says that although the creation of a spiritual space for letters and numbers has a long history since the compilation began in the 4th century, letters acquired meaning under being letters. Because of this validity, the science of letters (or Jafr) was

created as an exciting subject in Sufism. The first Sufis that every letter ultimately leads to the worship of God, almost unlimited possibilities for interpreting letters and discovering new meanings in them were at the disposal of mystics and poets and later calligraphers, many of whom Some people influenced by such thinking consider the letters as a veil and believe that if we understand the meaning of the letters, we can understand the eternal order. These letters meaning in sentences appear by using mathematical operations on the letters. Anne-Marie Schimmel believes that the Sufis may have thought that the letters were between them and that the direct perception of the grace of the Holy Prophet was that to reach that state and mind, there must be a hijab because the page is white. Regarding the relationship between letters and meaning, Schimmel says that creating a spiritual space for letters and numbers has a long history since the space compilation began in the 4th century. Letters gained meaning due to their validity, and the science of letters (or Jafr) was created as one of the subjects of interest in Sufism. The first Sufis thought that every letter ultimately leads to God worship, providing almost unlimited possibilities for interpreting letters and discovering new meanings in them for later mystics, poets, and calligraphers, many of whom were in the mystic circle (Schimmel, 2007, 123-81). Mathematical operations include analysis and letter expansion by calculating Abjadcodes, discovered in the science of letters. Sometimes, they use it to treat diseases, interpret the Quran, and many other cases. In interpreting Qur'an, words are divided into letters, and the letters are interpreted according to their meaning. For example, Nasser Khosrow, based on Abjad's interpretation and calculation, calculated the demanding debt amount in the Surah Hadid 11th verse 119 dirham. Because by calculating based on Abjad, the word "Hasanan" equals 119 (Qubadiyani, 1977, 329-334). Many word interpretations or, in other words, meanings derived from letters exist even today. For example, the word (Tasavvof) or Sufism consists of "T" (Tobe) containing repentance mystic, "S" (Sedgh) containing truthfulness, "W" (Wara) containing abstemious, and "F" (Fana) containing sacrifice

for God. Do the same in many semantic inferences.

Another example is the words Muhammad and Allah, which consist of four letters in Arabic, showing their connection. In explaining the small world and the great world, they refer to the word human and extract the manifestation of God from it. This word consists of two "N," one at the beginning and the other at the end, which represents "Ana," and "Tashdid" (Doubling letter) in the middle represents the written form of Allah (Ibn Arabi, 2006, 49). Contrary to common assumption, many Sufists in the past were inclined towards the science of letters, and it was not just a matter of poetic description; they considered letters, including unseen secrets.

Discussion

The evaluation of the science of letters in the context of tradition can be categorized as follows:

• Lack of historical evidence

The science of letters history still needs to be clarified in the Islamic world and other traditions. Regarding the science of letters in Jewish practices and the Hebrew language, the reports are oral, and many researchers mainly believed that these commandments came from the Prophet Abraham (Guenon, 2020, 34-35). However, the science of letter rules was obtained in the 8th century A.D. and peaked in the 12th century. The case's verbal sources and their climactic nature over centuries raise doubts. Besides, no historical evidence exists for assigning Jafr to imams Menhaj, 2015).

• Historical linguistic problems

One of Guenon's claims was that the Arabic language's inhumanity made the science of letters possible. Regarding non-human languages, Guenon was one of Ibn Arabi's followers, and like him, he had a historical misconception. We have little doubt that Arabs make many words in the Arabic language and are, therefore, not non-human. For example, Arabs have invented and named many instruments with conventional human words. Besides, the Quran's first editions did not use Arabic letters. Strangeli script, or classical Syriac, was a scientific script with 22 letters (the same as the Hebrew alphabet). Therefore, Ibn Arabi's contradiction about the angels' numbers and their

equality with 28 Arabic letters also creates a problem. According to Ibn Arabi's reference to the world above, the angels' number is 28, and these 28 Arabic letters are used to call them. On the other hand, he considers both Syriac and Hebrew as non-human languages applied to the science of letters. Therefore, how can the angels' numbers be justified?

Another traditionalist claim is about the dot coding function. A historical perspective needs to clarify this point. Many researchers think these points did not naturally exist in the Arabic script and appeared later.

• Cognitive error

It is always tricky to extract ontological facts from linguistic facts. This extraction means we take a reality in the world for granted based on linguistic similarities. For example, the words (Ensan=human) and (Onse=friendship) are similar in the Persian. If we conclude that humans get friends, for this reason, it is an apparent linguistic fallacy.

Ibn Arabi, one of the most influential people in the science of letters, reached conclusions with this type of fallacy that may not conflict with the text of the Qur'an, but it has nothing to do with the Quran verses. In the science of letters, there are many linguistic fallacies.

A person may have this ability because of the placement of the letters inside the Quran. Although these letters are the same 28 letters used by the Arabs, many Sufis of the Book of Companions agree that the letters of the Qur'an and not necessarily the letters set have this ability. Why should single letters have this capability? In this case, every letter should be like this, even in the Quran opponent's claims. In the science of letters, the abbreviated (Moqattat) of the Qur'an are considered luminous letters and a cryptography manifestation. However, Qur'an commentators often do not accept such an interpretation.

It is only an interpretation related to the science of letters, which, according to Allameh Tabatabai's research, has no narration. In volume 18 of Tafsir al-Mizan, Allamah Tabatabai has classified 11 other authentic sayings out of the 34 mentioned sayings about the abbreviated letters, of which only one is about Jafr's science (Tabatabaei, 1995, 5-7). Even if Jafr's knowledge is valid in interpretation,

it is noteworthy that it fundamentally differs from Jafr, who is infallible in imams'. Incidentally, among these 11 sayings, one is precisely on the opposite side of Sufism. Allameh Tabatabai mentioned in Tafsir No. 9 that bringing abbreviated letters emphasizes that these Qur'an letters are the same as Arab letters (Tabatabaei, 1995, 6). If these letters are similar, how can one defend the letter's mysterious ability in the Quran?

That is, in the Qur'an interpretation, Jafr's basis is not valid. What if we take such interpretations from the Qur'an regarding the letters? Even the interpretations they give about the relationship between the words Muhammad and prostration are only acceptable as poetic interpretations and cannot defend their metaphysical claims and mysterious features. However, there is a visual correspondence between any three-dimensional figure and letters on paper, and many claims have been mere arguments in history despite the beauty and such material poetic nature.

In calligraphy, we also saw that the calligraphers changed the letter shapes influenced by the science of letters. However, these sects influenced calligraphy events, and even the Sufis often differed from this. Nevertheless, Sufism's emphasis on the letter's intrinsic meaning must be validated. If we could only interpret the letters from a historical calligraphy view, some interpretations would be authentic. However, seeking epistemology from the script and spiritual messages in the letters is methodologically wrong. Calligraphy is formally aesthetically written. Therefore, the text's meaning is of secondary importance. The calligraphy letters are next in order. Now, if we emphasize that these letters have meaning in themselves, we have discredited calligraphy. Many calligraphic lines are unreadable with a combination of visual effect, decoration, and beauty, and many inscriptions are geometric repetitions of words such as Ali or Muhammad. What can this have to do with the spiritual message?

Conclusion

The article aimed to examine the traditionalists' view about encryption in calligraphy and determine the relationship between this basis (the science of letters) and the tradition.

Referring to the traditionalist essays, especially Nasr's essays, illuminates that the encryption basis is the science of letters or (Jafr) in the art of calligraphy. In the following part, the essays investigated the science of letters' references and examined their background and accuracy. According to the content mentioned above, traditionalists consider symbolization to be the result of the science of letters and use the metaphors of letters as the basis of this science in interpreting calligraphy letters. They consider symbolism to be the result of these interpretations. b) The science of letters has been involved to some extent in forming calligraphy.

c) The basis of the science of letters or Jafr is different, and many interpretations exist. d) According to researchers, the basis of the science of letters among the letters is inconsistent with the Islamic religion. Regarding Jafr among the prophets, the meaning of this science differs from what the letters have. There is a difference. As a result, generalizations about the connection between calligraphy and the science of letters need more attention. We see that it is incompatible with logic and reasoning when examining traditionalists' poetic interpretations of calligraphy and the science of letters with historical evidence. Also, scattered quotes and historical references to imams and Hazrat Ali add to the doubt and ambiguity of their views.

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