

Analytical study of a manuscript, Tafsir Ayat Mushkilah min Al-Kitab "Interpreting of equivocal Quranic signs (verses)"

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Abstract---This study introduces a significant manuscript in the field of Qur'anic studies, titled "Equivocal Qur'anic Verses" by Shaykh Al-Mukhtar Al-Kunti the Elder. The research is structured to highlight the manuscript's content, versions, and scholarly value. It begins with an introduction to the author, Shaykh Al-Mukhtar Al-Kunti, outlining his background and contributions to Islamic scholarship. The study then explores the purpose of the manuscript, provides an analysis of its various extant copies, and confirms its attribution to Al-Mukhtar Al-Kunti. Additionally, it examines the specific issues addressed within the manuscript, offering a detailed examination of Shaykh Al-Mukhtar's approach to elucidating equivocal (Almushkil) verses of the Qur'an. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the manuscript's context, significance, and the author's methodology in clarifying ambiguous Qur'anic verses.

Keywords---Manuscript, Equivocal, interpretation, Al-Mukhtar Al-Kunti.

Introduction

Cultural heritage plays a crucial role in reinforcing a nation's identity, linking its present to its past, and shaping its future. It fortifies the bonds among generations and contributes to the formation of their collective consciousness. In contemporary times, heritage has become a significant component of national income for countries that invest in it wisely.

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To fully realize these benefits, it is essential to introduce, highlight, and verify cultural heritage, particularly when it exists in written form. This endeavor is not only a tribute to the ancestors but also a responsibility towards future generations.

This research paper aims to introduce a manuscript that is pivotal in the study of the Qur'an, particularly concerning its equivocal (Almushkil) verses. This manuscript is noteworthy due to its association with the Kunta scholars, who are central to our cultural and intellectual history. The focus of this study is on Sheikh Al-Mukhtar ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr Al-Kunti Al-Kabir, the most prominent scholar among the Kunta scholars. Under his leadership, scholarly life thrived, and the Qadiriyya order gained prominence. His contributions span various fields, including Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), Sufism, and exegesis (Tafsir), leaving behind a rich intellectual legacy that merits further exploration.

Sheikh Al-Mukhtar ibn Ahmed Al-Kunti Al-Kabir (d. 1226 AH):

Al-Mukhtar Al-Kabir ibn Ahmed ibn Abi Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn Habib Allah ibn Al-Wafi .

His lineage is traced as Muhammad ibn Al-Mukhtar Al-Kunti¹ Al-Timbukti Al-Azawadi²:

- **Al-Timbukti:** This name refers to Timbuktu, a region located in northern Mali, established by the Tuareg of Meshren in the late fifth century AH. Before settling and developing the area, they migrated according to the seasons; moving in summer to the coast, specifically to the village of (Amzagh), and settling in Araouane in the fall, eventually choosing Timbuktu as a permanent settlement, which became a blessed and prosperous town³.
- **Al-Azawadi:** This name refers to Azawad, a vast land that stretches from Timbuktu in the northwest and ends at the Great Jawf in the depths of the desert. Azawad contains four villages: Araouane, Boujebeha, Al-Mamoun, and Al-Mabrouk⁴.

He was born in Katib Ogal in the year 1142 AH, and passed away in 1226 AH, according to the account of his son Muhammad, his successor, in his book *Al-Tara'id wal Tala'id fi Dhikr Karamat Al-Walid wal Walida*⁵.

He studied under prominent scholars in his environment, including:

- Ahmed ibn Abdullah ibn Al-Mukhtar.
- Ih Kallamarmi.
- Ali ibn Al-Najib.

Al-Mukhtar played a crucial role in the religious landscape by promoting the Qadiriyya Al-Mukhtariya order. He actively contributed to the reform movement by reviving the Sunnah and curbing the spread of Christianity in West Africa ⁶.

He was also a prolific poet with a wide range of themes, and his fame spread far and wide. He corresponded with scholars of his time from various regions, including Murtada Al-Zabidi, the author of Taj Al-Aroos⁷. He authored numerous books in various fields such as grammar, Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), interpretation, hadith, and Sufism. His notable works include:

- Al-Kawkab Al-Waqad
- Al-Jur'ah Al-Safiyah wa Al-Nafhah Al-Kafiyah
- Tafsir Al-Basmala (interpreting the basmala).
- Bulugh Al-Wus' ala Al-Ayat Al-Tis' (Interpretation of nine verses that one of the men asked about): A large book, according to the sheikh himself in the book Noddar Al-Dhahab, dedicated to the parables of the Qur'an, and containing detailed information.⁸
- Hidayat Al-Tullab (Guidance for Students / disciples) .
- Alfyyah in Arabic .
- Al-Risalah fi 'Ilm Al-Tasrif
- Fath Al-Wadud Sharh Al-Maqsur wal Mamdud
- Zawal Al-Ilubs fi Tard Al-Shaytan Al-Khannas
- Kashf Al-Niqab an Asrar Fatihat Al-Kitab⁹ (interpreting the Al-Fatihah).
- Jadhwat Al-Anwar fi Al-Dhab 'an Manasib Awliya'

- Nafh Al-Tayyib fi Al-Salat 'ala Al-Habib (PBUH)
- Nuzhat Al-Rawi wa Bughiyat Al-Hawi .
- Tafsir Ayat Mushkilah min Al-Kitab, Interpreting of equivocal Quranic signs (verses).

He passed away, may Allah have mercy on him, on Wednesday, the fifth of Jumada Al-Awwal in the year 1226 AH, at the age of about 84 years. He was succeeded by his son Muhammad ibn Al-Mukhtar Al-Kunti.

I. What are the contents of the manuscript?

The content of the manuscript relates to the equivocal verses of the Qur'an. In the context of scholars of Interpreting and Qur'anic disciplines, "**equivocal**" refers to words or Qur'anic signs (verses) whose meanings are obscure and can only be understood through contemplation of the verse itself or by seeking its meaning from other verses or external sources¹⁰.

II. Reason for Writing the manuscript:

The author mentioned the reason for writing the book in his introduction, saying: "Some brothers in faith asked me to explain certain issues that were unclear to them and difficult for them to elucidate and master. Allah granted me and them the path of truth and the way of correctness, so I responded to their request. May Allah make it easy to clarify these issues in a manner more resplendent than crystal and clearer than the sun and the center of flames. Allah is the One who helps, and upon Him we rely."¹¹

III. Manuscript Copies:

We have located two copies of the manuscript, both indexed under the same title: Tafsir Ayat Mushkilah min Al-Kitab (Interpreting of equivocal Quranic signs (verses)). They are detailed as follows:

– First Copy:

This copy is held in the Khazana al-Rukb al-Nabawi, and is titled Tafsir Ayat Mushkilah min Al-Kitab by Al-Kunti Al-Mukhtar ibn Ahmed ibn Abi Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn Habib Allah ibn Al-Wafi (1142 AH - 1226 AH / 1730 CE - 1811 CE).

It is an incomplete copy:

➤ Beginning:

"...Sayyid of the time, his educator, and the commander and supporter of the army of truth... Praise be to Allah, the King, the Bestower, who chooses whom He wills among His servants for guidance in the Sunnah and the Book until what is difficult becomes easy and the obscurities are removed...

Some brothers in faith asked me to explain certain issues that were unclear to them and difficult to elucidate and master. Allah granted me and them the path of truth and the way of correctness, so I responded to their request. May Allah facilitate clarifying these issues in a manner more resplendent than crystal."¹²

➤ End of the manuscript:

"...the seventh: That Allah informed us that the one who drew near and descended was in the highest horizon, which is the horizon of the sky, not below it. Thus, he drew near to the earth and descended to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ). Allah's nearness and descent, according to the narration of Sharik, was above the Throne, not towards the earth. Then Allah refuted the claim about His Prophet (ﷺ) by saying: 'The sight "of the Prophet (ﷺ) did not swerve, nor did it transgress.' What is known to a viewer lacking respect in the presence of the king and the great ones is that he may turn his gaze to the right and left and exceed his sight beyond what is before him."¹³

- **Number of Folios** : 26 Folios (equivalent to 52 Pages).
- **Number of Lines**: 25 lines
- **Number of Words per Line**: Between 11 and 15 words
- **Script**: Moroccan in black and red ink, without mention of the scribe or the date of copying.

– Second Copy:

This copy is held in the Khazana bayt El Oud . It has missing parts in the middle after page 10 when compared to the Rukb al-Nabawi copy, as well as missing parts at the end. Beginning (partially missing),

➤ **Beginning:**

"... upon it [the question] are the difficult parts that clarify its complexities and remove the ambiguity from its veil... A brother in faith asked me about the explanation of certain issues that he found difficult to understand and to reveal accurately. May God guide us and him to the path of truth and righteousness, so I responded to his request, hoping that God would make it easy for us to clarify these issues with an explanation that is clearer than crystal and gold..."¹⁴

➤ **End of the manuscript**

"... and they resisted with their small numbers against the armies, abandoning their fortresses, dwelling in caves and caverns, all in pursuit of the knowledge that led them to Your recognition and their love for You, which led them to taste the sweetness of My love. They became brothers in My grace, and in seeking My pleasure and support, became helpers. I replaced their fear with safety, gave them the lands of their enemies, and fortified them securely."¹⁵

- **Number of Folios:** 17 Folios, (equivalent to 34 Pages). sized 16 x 22 cm. 26 Folios
- **Number of Lines** per Page: Between 21 and 24 lines.
- **Number of Words per Line:** Between 9 and 12 words.
- **Script :** Maghrebi calligraphy style: Maghrebi script in black and red ink, without mentioning the scribe or the date of transcription. The manuscript includes a page in a different handwriting, where the missing part in the middle of the manuscript begins. There is also a page with significant tears before the page with the different handwriting."

IV. Attribution of the book to Al-Mukhtar Al-Kunti:

The attribution of the manuscript to Al-Mukhtar Al-Kunti is confirmed through the following evidence:

- The scribe explicitly attributed the book to Al-Mukhtar Al-Kunti in both copies.
- From the content of the manuscript itself, we can verify this attribution through the following points:
 - Firstly: The overlap of some quoted texts with his other works, especially when there is a verbatim quotation.
 - Secondly: Al-Mukhtar Al-Kunti referred in the manuscript to one of his own books, which is "Fath al-Wadud." where the manuscript states: "Whoever wishes to investigate this further should refer to our book 'Fath al-Wadud."

V. Issues addressed in the manuscript:

- **Issue One:** A question about Qur'anic sign (verse) number 19 from Surah Al-Baqarah. I found that the Qur'anic aphorism requires clarification in three sections:
 - The first section: Uncovering the metaphor.
 - The second section: Explaining the Qur'anic proverb itself.
 - The third section: Applying the Qur'anic proverb to those it was intended for, namely the disbelievers and hypocrites.
- **Issue Two:** A question about reconciling between two Qur'anic signs: verse 93 from Surah Al-Baqarah and verse 171 from Surah Al-A'raf, and interpreting Al-Suyuti's explanation when he mentioned that they did not refrain.
- **Issue Three:** A question about the attachment of negation and the nature of the two sentences. Can one replace the other? If not, what is the reason for the conjunction between them?
- **Issue Four:** A question about Jacob's statement to his sons regarding their coming from Egypt after Joseph had devised a plan to detain Benjamin. Jacob asked them why Joseph had detained Benjamin, and they replied that his son had stolen. Jacob said to them: "My son did not steal, nor would he steal, and he is not from a lineage of thieving men to be

influenced by them. But you are fabricating a story by accusing him of theft, which is not true."

- **Issue** **Five:**
A question about a Qur'anic word: *Ankatha*. Is it correct to consider it as adverbial (i.e., *حال*) related to spinning, given its singular and plural forms in the verse: **"And do not be like she who untwisted her spun thread after it was strong"** [16:92, An-Nahl].
- **Issue** **Six:**
A question about verse 49 from Surah An-Nur: Did they know the truth before the ruling occurred? And was their acceptance before or after the truth became apparent?
- **Issue** **Seven:**
A question about the statements to Moses in verses 15 and 16 from Surah Al-Qasas: Was the sin and forgiveness before the Prophethood?
- **Issue** **Eight:**
A question about the difference between the Qur'anic sign (verse): **"And draw in your hand to your side; it will come out white without disease - another sign"** [20:22, Tā-Hā], and the Qur'anic sign(verse): **"And draw in your arm close to you [as prevention]"** [28:32, Al-Qasas].
- **Issue Nine:**
A question about verses 63 to 66 from Surah Al-Waqi'ah and Al-Suyuti's interpretation of them.

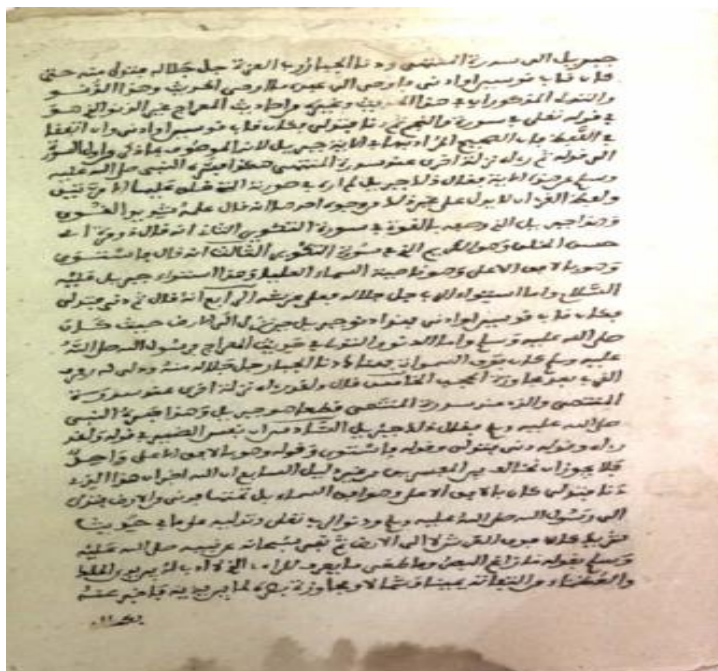
VI. Sheikh Al-Mukhtar Al-Kunti's Approach in Clarifying Equivocal (Mutashabih) Verses:

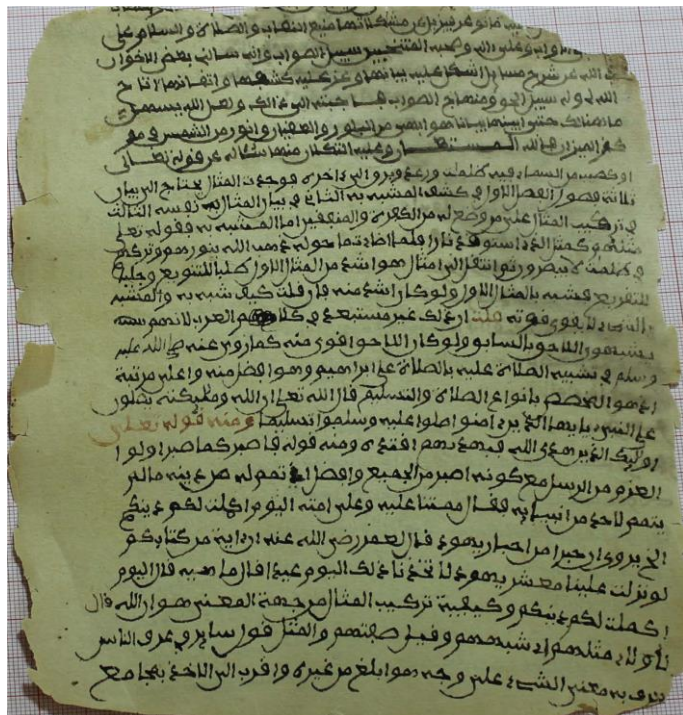
The author employed several principles and foundations to address equivocal (mutashabih) verses, varying according to the context of each instance. The main principles he relied on include:

- Citing the Qur'an and interpreting verses by using other similar verses.
- Referencing the Prophetic hadiths.
- Al-Mukhtar al-Kunti relied on Tafsir bi'l-Ma'thur (iexegesis based on transmitted reports) and other classical works of Quranic exegesis.
- Using the Occasion of Revelation (Asbab al-Nuzul) to clarify equivocal verses.
- In some instances, the author clarifies equivocal aspects through grammatical analysis, relying on works such as "Mughni al-Labib" by Ibn Hisham¹⁶, "Al-Kashshaf" by Al-Zamakhshari¹⁷, and "At-Tashil" by Ibn Malik.
- The author sometimes establishes a general principle and then clarifies equivocal verses based on it, such as the principle that "no repetition in the Qur'an is without an added benefit." The author states, "Indeed, Allah repeats the verse and reiterates the story, and this is not without additional benefit."
- Providing direct answers when the equivocation arises from the questioner's lack of Interpreting or missing information, rather than from the meaning of the verse itself or its conflict with another text, as noted in the seventh issue.
- Addressing equivocation using the principle of advancing and delaying (taqdim wa ta'khir), as he states: "... It is evident from this that the speech involves advancement and delay, and that each of the sentences is connected to the other like two related propositions"¹⁸...

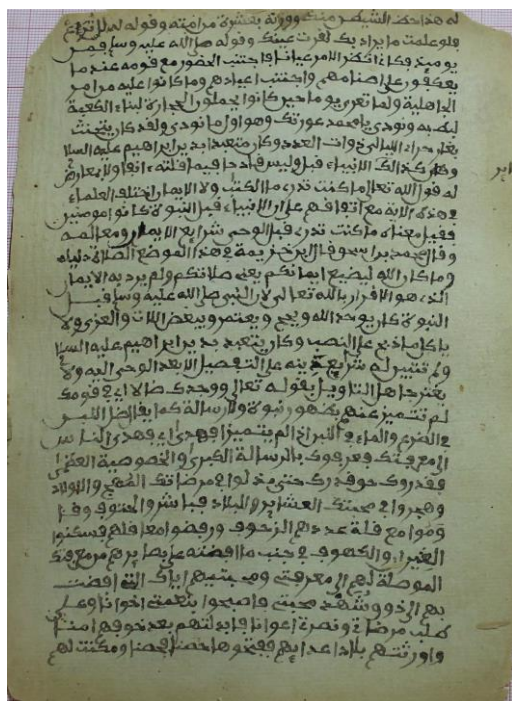


The last page of the manuscript of the Khazana al-Rukb al-Nabawi





The last page of the manuscript of the Khazana Bayt El Oud



بالله ما لا ينفعهم ولا يضرهم ولا اله الا الله تعالى
 في كل من زيادة واجبة هذه كرامة الاول فكذلك
 وفي الثاني من ترويه مرة من الانبياء والاول
 كيفية رفع الجبر وتنبئهم بالظلمة لا
 بعد من تنجس ولذا انصر عليه في كتاب
 وسمي به وانما فالوه بينهم وبين انفسهم
 واخبر ولقد كاد ان يكون نشر على انفسهم فقال الله تعالى
 ما اذ ذنوبكم او تقوه بحدسهم به الله في غير امر بشئ وهو
 هذه الامنة ويغضب من يشاء من سائر الامم فمنهم من قال وجه الشئ
 بقوله يا ايها الذين امنوا اجتنبوا كثيرا من الظن بعض الظن اثم
 وهو ما ثبت في القلب واستقر في النفس فمن بينك الرسول صلى الله عليه
 وسلم بينا ما هو اظهر من البيان في حاله على كل من الخط والنسيان
 وما حدثتكم به انفسهم ولقد عامر الله الملائكة وابليس بمثل
 صاعه ليم ينع اسرايل خيرا في الامم ان جاء على الارض خليفة قالوا اتبعوا
 فيهم بقميصه فيفاد يمسك الدماء ونحوه سبع حمدة ونحوه سرك
 فلما اظهرت فضيلة ادم على الجميع بالكلية والحكمة قال الله موينا
 لهم ومظهر الشرف ادم المرافل اظمر اني اعلم غيب السموات والارض
 واعلم

Conclusion

After examining the key issues of the manuscript, we can affirm that it is definitively attributed to Al-Mukhtar Al-Kunti. The book clearly reflects the author's profound cultural background and his era, and it contains significant scholarly material on equivocal Qur'anic verses. The author's approach to clarifying equivocal verses relied on the Qur'an itself, Prophetic Hadith, established principles of interpretation, and Arabic grammatical rules.

Additionally, this article aims to introduce the manuscript copies preserved in Algeria and to highlight the rich heritage they represent.

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