



The Hidden Essence In The Shell Of The Three Arts, By Algerian Scholar Abderrahmane Akhdari: A Descriptive Comparative Approach

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Abstract :

Abu Zeid Abderrahman Al-Akhdari, a prominent Algerian scholar in the 10th century AH, was known for his exceptional intelligence and diverse scientific interests in religion, language, literature, as well as his involvement in Sufism and traveling in pursuit of knowledge. I have chosen a prominent linguistic field in which this scholar excelled, namely the science of rhetoric in its various forms. Al-Akhdari authored a poetic work titled "Al-Jawhar Al-Maknun fi Saddaf Al-Thalathah Funun" (The Hidden Essence in the Shell of the Three Arts), consisting of 291 lines. The author himself provided an explanation of this text. Therefore, I will first introduce its scientific content, particularly its organization, and then proceed to explain and compare it with the most significant commentaries that have addressed it, as this is of utmost importance. However, this will not neglect the aspects emphasized by the Algerian scholar Al-Akhdari, highlighting the points of distinction and the additions contained in his famous poetic work. Thus, my aim is to combine the composition, explanation, and study of the text.

Keywords: system, explanations, essence, hidden, descriptive, comparative.

Introduction:

The organization of scientific fields is a vast and enriching field that has contributed to the enrichment of the Arab library in general and the Algerian library in particular, with a substantial number of valuable manuscripts. The presence of these manuscripts has opened wide doors for research activities and subsequent explanations. This becomes evident among our distinguished scholars who have embarked on this path in order to facilitate learning and various disciplines, as well as to manage their reception, study, and preservation by students of knowledge and learning. Consequently, we find an immense amount of systems and their various explanations, which prompts researchers to engage in studying, analyzing, and comparing them.

Among the prominent Algerian scholars in this field, we mention the eminent scholar Abderrahmane Al-Akhdari, who is undisputedly a great source of pride and honor due to the significant and important contributions he has made in this field, encompassing various subjects and specializations. His comprehensive and systematic thinking can be seen in his extensive works covering a wide range of disciplines, including Islamic sciences, rational

sciences, jurisprudence, linguistics, and mathematics. Some of his notable works include "Al-Siraj fi 'Ilm al-Falak" (The Lantern in the Science of Astronomy) in the field of astronomy, "Al-Durrah al-Bayda' fi Ahsan al-Funun wal-Ashya'" (The White Pearl in the Best Arts and Objects) which is an arjuzah (a poetic form) in mathematics, "Al-Salam al-Murunq" (The Shining Ladder) in the science of logic, "Mukhtasar Al-Akhdari" (The Concise Al-Akhdari) in Maliki jurisprudence, "Al-Durrah al-Bahiya fi Nazm al-Arujmiya" (The Radiant Pearl in the Science of Arabic Prosody) in the field of Arabic grammar, and "Al-Jawhar Al-Maknun fi Saddaf Al-Thalathah Funun" (The Hidden Essence in the Shell of the Three Arts) in the field of rhetoric, which is the focus of this study. But first, it is necessary to define this discipline before delving into its aforementioned impact.

1- Who was Abderrahman Al-Akhdari?

Despite the controversy surrounding the lineage of this scholar, it is established and more likely that he is (Sidi Abu Zaid Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad al-Saghir ibn Muhammad ibn 'Aamir al-Akhdari)ⁱ. There are also different accounts regarding his birth and death years, but it is more likely that he lived from 920 to 953 AH, indicating that al-Akhdari passed away at a young age, not exceeding thirty-three years of lifeⁱⁱ. From this, the peak of his genius becomes evident, as well as his exceptional distinction in an era characterized by decline, decay, and weakness in its circumstances and those existing within it.

Abdulrahman's upbringing was characterized by a devotion for learning, as he possessed upright character and a passionate love for knowledge. He dedicated his life to pursuing knowledge in various fields, with the support of those around him, which helped him achieve a prestigious scholarly position. His father played a significant role in providing him with care, education, refinement, and guidance. Abdulrahman's keenness, intelligence, and thirst for knowledge since a young age contributed to his diligence, resulting in him becoming a knowledgeable scholar who excelled in the sciences of revelation, reason, religion, and languageⁱⁱⁱ. Al-Akhdari was keen on teaching and writing. Students from different places used to come to his hometown, Batna, to benefit from his renowned reputation and excellence. He guided them in acquiring knowledge, whether it was through rational or transmitted sciences, until his passing.

One of the factors that contributed to his intellectual maturity was his extensive travels. Like other scholars who dedicate their lives, efforts, and minds solely to knowledge, Al-Akhdari embarked on journeys to broaden his horizons. He traveled to Zitouna to interact with its scholars, enriching his knowledge and expanding his expertise. He then returned to Biskra and later went to Constantine. Afterward, he came back to his hometown, settling there as a teacher and educator, making his grandfather Muhammad ibn 'Aamir's corner a center for intellectual influence^{iv}. However, his death occurred in Constantine while he was spending the summer, as is customary among the people of the desert, in the hills. He passed away in the year 953 AH (1546 CE), specifically in Kjall. His body was then transported to his hometown, Batinus, in Biskra, where his mausoleum exists to this day. It remains a place of pilgrimage for scholars and travelers from all over the Maghreb^v.

Thus, it can be said that this man is a shining light among the scientific luminaries of Algeria, and a towering figure among its high ranks. He lived for the sake of knowledge, seeking it and imparting it, and he passed away leaving behind a precious legacy that is considered a valuable treasure. Alongside his prolific writings in various fields of knowledge, he was also a magnificent poet. Although the scientific aspect predominated in his output, he never ceased to compose poems, always planning to write another one as soon as he finished an ode. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, he occasionally composed poetry in which he supplicated to his Lord, praising Him and seeking forgiveness for his sins, and he also expressed his deep devotion to the greatest Prophet^{vi}. Indeed, Al-Akhḍari's poetry is more commendable than my sentences ascribe to him. Due to his preoccupation with writing in the scientific field, his poems were primarily focused on praising and extolling the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and seeking closeness to Allah through supplication^{vii}. This can be attributed to his religious orientation, his detachment from worldly matters, his conviction, and his deep attachment to the Book of Allah (the Quran) and his love for the noble Messenger. Therefore, we find his poetry to be delicate, sensitive, and profound in its ideas and meanings. He often leans towards the style of admonition and remembrance of the blessings of Allah and praising His Messenger.

The Hidden Essence of Rhetoric and its explanations:

Al-Jawhar al-Maknun is an arjuzah composed by Al-Akhḍari, consisting of 291 verses. It is a poetic compilation that summarizes the book "Al-Talkhis fi 'Ulum al-Balagha" by Jalal al-Din al-Qazwini. This is confirmed by Al-Akhḍari himself in verses 29 and of the arjuzah^{viii}.

I presented to him a beneficial arjuzah,

Polished, refined, and precise,

Gathering pearls from the treasures of summarization,

Exquisite gems of summarization.

This arjuzah, which the researcher Muhammad bin Abdulaziz Nasif diligently worked on, is contained in fifty-one pages. It includes the fully verified text based on the manuscript, along with an introduction and a table of contents. Abdullah began his arjuzah with praising and glorifying Allah, reminding of the miracle of the Quran and the power of Allah Almighty. Then, he sent blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and mentioned the title of the author in the introduction^{ix}. It was named "Al-Jawhar Al-Maknun" (The Hidden Essence) in the context of the three arts^x.

The book of Al-Akhḍari is divided into three sections, which are a logical division corresponding to the three branches of rhetoric: rhetoric (al-bayān), semantics (al-ma'ānī), and stylistics (al-badī'). Each of these sections is referred to as an art. For example, the first art is "The Art of Expression: Al-Bayān," the second art is "The Art of Meaning: Al-Ma'ānī," and the third art is "The Art of Eloquence: Al-Badī'." In each art, Al-Akhḍari discusses its components, elements, and lessons. In the first art, he addresses the concept of subject phrases (al-khabar) and then moves on to composition (al-inshā'). In the second art, he delves into various figurative expressions, starting with similes (al-tashbīh), literal meanings (al-ḥaqīqah) and figurative

meanings (al-majāz). He also includes metaphors (al-isti‘ārah) in this section. Then he discusses metonymy (al-kināyah).

As for the third art, it is divided into two well-known sections: the first section encompasses conceptual artistic embellishments (al-muḥṣānāt al-badī‘iyyah al-ma‘nawīyyah), and the second section includes verbal artistic embellishments (al-muḥṣānāt al-badī‘iyyah al-lafziyyah). He also touches upon certain issues within his discourse, such as quotation (al-iqtibās), plagiarism (al-sarqāt), and inclusion (al-tadammun). He did not leave his text without indicating its completion, as he mentions that he concluded his discourse regarding the craft of rhetoric with its three arts. He follows his words by sending blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The poet says in the conclusion of his text^{xi}:

And it is fitting for the speaker
To exhibit elegance in the beginning and the end,
With an easy and well-crafted opening,
And a flowing and skillful introduction.
Excellence lies in conciseness or brevity,
And in the clarity of the discourse's purpose.
One of the qualities of a good conclusion
Is its culmination with a powerful ending.
This is the completeness of the intended sentence,
From the praised craft of rhetoric.
Then, may Allah's blessings be forever
Upon the chosen Prophet, Muhammad,
And his noble family and companions,
As the yearning soul sings at dawn.
Prostrating humbly to the Almighty,
Seeking a means to reach the Merciful.

As is evident, the poet chronicles his precious arjuzah to the mid-10th century of the Islamic calendar, around 950. With this, the scholar Abd al-Rahman al-Akhḍari adhered to the majority of the thematic arrangement in his book of summarization. He demonstrates exceptional skill in organizing the content through poetic composition. He goes beyond mere quotation and explanation, making an effort to add further details and reorganize certain topics to facilitate understanding and clarification for his students^{xiii}.

It is also noticeable that he was keen on covering all the branches of the three arts of rhetoric, which includes their various aspects. This leads us to focus on a statement by Abu al-Qasim Saadullah, which is mentioned in the context of discussing Al-Akhḍari's essence. He says, "Al-Akhḍari composed the hidden gem in the sciences of expression and meaning, and then he explained it himself in a comprehensive manner that surpassed the summarized explanation of Jalal al-Din al-Qazwini. However, Al-Akhḍari passed away before completing and refining the explanation. This motivated several scholars to fill the gap, including Ahmad ibn al-Mubarak al-Qasantini in his work titled 'Mazhah al-Ayoun,' as well as Abdul Karim al-Fakoun.^{xiii}"

We see that Dr. Abu Al-Qasim Saadullah mentioned that the arrangement of Al-Akhḍarī's poem on the hidden essence was solely intended to complement rhetoric and semantics, knowing that the text, with its various investigations, includes the three fields. Moreover, the title of the poem itself refers to the number three, indicating the encompassing of the three areas of rhetoric, unless Abu Al-Qasim Saadullah intended something else that has been concealed from us. Due to the significant importance and great scholarly and educational value of this author, his manuscripts are spread across various libraries worldwide. They continue to attract the attention of researchers and even Orientalists. As a result, scholars and linguists have eagerly embarked on the task of studying and elucidating his works. The commentators of Al-Akhḍarī's hidden essence have devoted themselves to preserving the order of its chapters as organized by its author, Al-Akhḍarī. They began their commentaries from the introduction to the conclusion, covering the three arts, starting with semantics first, followed by of rhetoric second, and then literary embellishment third.

It is worth mentioning that when the poet himself did not provide an explanation for his poetic treatise, it added value to the text and enriched the field of rhetoric. It also opened up a wide range of possibilities for researchers to identify the differences between his commentary and that of others on this precious work. These differences do not indicate disagreement or conflict, but rather highlight points of distinction and dedication that each commentator tried to emphasize. For example, one of the commentators, Al-Ala Nourim, explains the chapters of the hidden essence starting with semantics as stated in the poem. However, he also focuses on including practical exercises after each element or topic he discusses. This approach is driven by his specific goal of targeting beginners and emerging learners in order to facilitate the study of rhetoric and make it simple and understandable. He expressed this intention by stating, "This is a new attempt in the field of rhetoric that I present to my beginner brothers, hoping that they will find in it some ease and simplicity.^{xiv}"

Indeed, this commentary serves a noble educational purpose, which is to facilitate and simplify the rhetorical material presented in the poetic treatise. It seems as though the commentator aimed to transform abstract knowledge into accessible knowledge for learners. As for the commentary of the poet himself, it is characterized by the following^{xv}:

- The commentator being the poet himself undoubtedly gives him a deeper understanding of his own poetic treatise, surpassing the understanding of others.
- He focuses on deciphering the structure of the poem and analyzing the elements that require grammatical analysis, showcasing his linguistic abilities and mastery.

- He enriches rhetoric with numerous new examples, particularly from Quranic sources, thereby expanding the scope of rhetorical knowledge.

Among those who provided explanations for the hidden essence, there is Muhammad bin Ali bin Musa Al-Thagri Al-Jaza'iri, who titled his commentary "Mowadah al-Sir al-Maknun 'ala al-Jawhar al-Maknun" (Explaining the Hidden Secret of the Hidden Essence). Al-Thagri clarified that he was convinced that Al-Akhḍarī's poem is one of the most beautiful works ever written in the field of rhetoric. He mentioned that he had read Al-Akhḍarī's commentary on it, but he was enthusiastic about undertaking a work that would clarify its mysteries and reveal the beauty of eloquence and the power of expression within it^{xvi}.

It is noticeable that Al-Thagri did not create his own categorization for his commentary but rather followed the organization of the poet himself, relying on the unity of the verse, section, and chapter. Abu Al-Qasim Saadullah adds that Al-Thagri's commentary was widely circulated among scholars, as evidenced by the numerous copies of it. In his commentary, Al-Thagri fulfilled his promise by showcasing the arts of rhetoric and addressing its topics with detail and simplification. As a result, the commentary became quite extensive in size. Additionally, Al-Thagri provided a comprehensive introduction to Al-Akhḍarī's work^{xvii}.

There is another commentary by the scholar Ahmad bin Muhammad Al-Abbasi Al-Samlali, who relied entirely on the summary by Saad Al-Din Al-Tiftazani in his explanation of this poetic treatise. He mostly transmits Al-Tiftazani's words without much modification, occasionally providing simple explanations. Therefore, he does not usually follow the wording of the poem with commentary and remarks like most commentators. Instead, he quotes a verse or a set of verses from the poem and immediately turns to what is mentioned in the summary by Saad Al-Din Al-Tiftazani regarding the mentioned verse or verses. Al-Abbasi extracts what he deems necessary, then moves on to another verse or set of verses, continuing in this manner until he completes his commentary on the treatise. However, this does not mean that the summary by Al-Tiftazani is the sole reference for this commentator's explanation of the hidden essence. At times, he goes beyond it and refers to other sources, using them as references or citing them^{xviii}. And thus, the focus of the latter on merely direct transmission from the summary of Al-Tiftazani and others made the commentator a summarizer rather than providing detailed explanations, as he would address a group of verses and explain them as a whole.

As for "Hilyat al-Lubb al-Masun 'ala al-Jawhar al-Maknun" by Ahmad al-Damanhourī, one of the scholars who focused on this poetic treatise, he provided another commentary on it. However, he also maintained the arrangement of the book's chapters and elements as they appeared in the original text without any changes. The difference between him and the previous commentators may lie in his strict adherence to the content of the text without any additions or expansions. The commentator worked on the explanation by addressing each verse individually, from the opening verse to the final verse in the conclusion, without adding new evidence, applications, or illustrative examples that are not present in the treatise. He contented himself with what the poet had presented.

However, in his commentary on the most significant verses, he was keen on explaining each word individually. For example, in his explanation of the verse by Abdul Rahman Al-Akhḍarī that says^{xix}:

"Alhamdu lillahi al-Badi'u al-Hadi

Ila bayani Muhi'i al-Rashad"

"Praise be to Allah, the Creator, the Guide

To an explanation of the dazzling guidance."

he would provide a separate explanation for each word.

Al-Damanhourī says, "I say: Alhamd (praise) linguistically means praising someone with beautiful attributes through speech. In technical terminology, it signifies magnifying the bestower due to His blessings. The meaning of gratitude, linguistically, is similar to praise, but in technical terminology, it replaces the term "Al-Hamid" (the praiser) with "Al-Shakir" (the grateful). Technically, it refers to the servant diverting all that Allah has blessed him with towards what he was created for. The phrase "Alhamd" is beneficial for him, even if it were a predicate, as reporting praise is itself praise.^{xx}"

From this, we can observe the difference between Al-Damanhourī and the previous commentator, Al-Abbasi Al-Samlali. Al-Damanhourī exhibits a great emphasis on details and precise explanations, word by word, verse by verse, in order to fully comprehend and analyze the text.

Undoubtedly, the presentation of this number of commentaries on Abdul Rahman Al-Akhḍarī's treatise, known as "Al-Jawhar Al-Maknun fi Sadaf Al-Thalathah Funun," reveals a range of differences among them. Although they are distinct points, they are worth mentioning. Some of these differences include:

- Al-Akhḍarī himself, the author of the treatise, incorporated Arabic grammar (nahu) into his rhetorical text whenever he deemed it necessary and essential. This enriched his explanation, as he was meticulous in providing detailed explanations to achieve the intended benefit for learners and students of knowledge.

- The format and content of the treatise did not allow for sufficient inclusion of examples and evidence. Therefore, Al-Akhḍarī found in his commentary the opportunity to provide a wider scope and utilize appropriate examples and particularly those from the Quranic verses.

- Alal Nourim's commentary was instructional and functional, catering to beginner learners. Hence, he included various exercises and applications to deepen understanding and solidify knowledge.
- Al-Thaghri, on the other hand, was keen on exhaustively covering the details and addressing obscure sub-points in his explanations. He was also known as the author of the poetic treatise itself, Abdul Rahman Al-Akhḍarī.

- Al-Damanhourī's commentary did not introduce anything new from outside the treatise. However, he focused on precise explanations by considering the linguistic and technical meanings of each word in the verse, and then delving into the complete intended meaning conveyed by the poet in that verse.
- The agreed-upon point is that all commentators of "Al-Jawhar Al-Maknun" adhered to the same arrangement and organization of the poetic treatise itself.
- Poetic treatises are a creative and intellectual activity that opens the door for further investigation, followed by commentary. They stimulate another activity: interpretation, which comes after the treatise itself.
- Multiple commentaries on the same poetic treatise encourage study, comparison, and highlighting the points of distinction that emerge among them.
- -The distinction lies in the value that a commentary can bring to a poetic treatise. This can be achieved through the additions and enrichments made by the commentator, or through the method they employ in their explanation.
- -Based on that, it can be said that the commentator Ahmad ibn Muhammad Al-Abbasi Al-Samlali had less precision and presence in his commentary on "Al-Jawhar Al-Maknun."

At the end of this study on "Al-Jawhar Al-Maknun fi Sadaf Al-Thalathah Funun" by Abdul Rahman Al-Akhḍarī, the value of the heritage contained in our Arabic, Algerian, and even global writings becomes evident. This manuscript heritage, from which much has emerged and awaits attention and examination, can produce a complete range of investigations, explanations, additions, and scholarly efforts needed by our esteemed scholars who have dedicated their lives to the pursuit of various fields of knowledge to their students and future generations. On one hand, even the manuscripts that have been studied require pauses and studies to ensure the preservation of our ancestral treasure, safeguarded and protected, so that it is not preempted by Westerners and orientalist, as we are more deserving of it.

Endnotes

ⁱ . Bouziane Al-Deraji: Abdul Rahman Al-Akhḍarī, the eminent Sufi scholar of his time. Dar Al-Bilad, 2nd edition, Algeria, 2009, p.10.

ⁱⁱ Same reference, p.14.

Hamdadou bin Omar: The heritage of Sheikh Abdul Rahman Al-Akhḍarī. 47563 ⁱⁱⁱ
<https://www.asip.cerist.dz/en/article/>

^{iv} Same reference.

^v See, Bouziane Al-Deraji: Abdul Rahman Al-Akhḍarī, the Eminent Sufi scholar of his time, p.47.

^{vi} Abdul Halim Said: Abdul Rahman Al-Akhḍarī as a poet. Voices of the North magazine, October 5, 2015.

<https://www.aswat.achamal.com/ar/>

^{vii} Same reference.

^{viii} Bouziane Al-Deraji: Abdul Rahman Al-Akhḍarī, the eminent Sufi scholar of his time, p.239.

^{ix} Abdul Rahman bin Sughair Al-Akhḍarī: Al-Jawhar Al-Maknun fi Sadaf Al-Thalathah Funun, edited by Mohammed bin Abdul Aziz Nasif, Al-Basa'ir Research Center, p.230.

^x Same source, p.22.

^{xi} Same source, p.48.

^{xii} Bouziane Al-Deraji: Abdul Rahman Al-Akhḍarī, the Eminent Sufi scholar of his time, pp.240-241.

^{xiii} . Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah: History of Cultural Algeria, Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami, 1st edition, Beirut, 1988, Vol. 2, p.167.

^{xiv} Alal Nourim: Jadid Al-Thalathah Al-Funun fi Sharh Al-Jawhar Al-Maknun, Oulad Ya'qoub, Qal'at Sraghna, 2005, Vol. 1, from the introduction.

^{xv} Mohammed bin Abdul Aziz bin Omar Nasif: Commentary on The Hidden Essence in the Shell of the Three Arts by Abdul Rahman Al-Akhḍarī: A Study and Investigation, Ph.D. thesis, Islamic University, Madinah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1429-1430 AH, p.2.

^{xvi} Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah: History of Cultural Algeria, pp.167-168.

^{xvii} Same reference, p.169.

^{xviii} Ahmed bin Mohammad Al-Abbasi Al-Samalali: Al-Jawhar Al-Maknun fi Al-Thalathah Funun, edited by Yazeed Al-Radi.

^{xix} . Abdul Rahman Al-Akhḍarī: Al-Jawhar Al-Maknun fi Sadaf Al-Thalathah Funun, p.21.

^{xx} Ahmed Al-Damnhouri: Hilyat Al-Lub Al-Masoon 'ala Al-Jawhar Al-Maknun, 1994, p.5.