

**Prophetic niche in the virtuous city: The concept of *ḥikmah* in early Islamic thought. By Hikmet Yaman. Leiden: Brill, 2011, pp. xii+316, ISBN: 978-90-04-18662-0.**

Reviewer: Abu-Bakr Imam Ali-Agan, Department of Religions, Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. Email: [aaliagan2003@yahoo.com](mailto:aaliagan2003@yahoo.com).

The contextual meaning of the Arabic word “*ḥikmah*” has been a subject of heated debate and scholastic polemics amongst the exegetes in particular and the Muslim scholars in general. Particularly, its application in the Qur’ān attracts the attention of both the Muslim and non-Muslim scholars as demonstrated by Hikmet Yaman. It is an important and comprehensive reference on the subject in English.

The book is divided into four parts containing twelve chapters. In chapter one, a graphic description of the key concept of *ḥikmah* is explained from the lexicographical point of view. Chapters two and three discuss the concept as used in terminological dictionaries as well as the contemporary Western scholars’ submission on the meaning of *ḥikmah*. Though the author’s effort in this elaborate discussion is commendable, one feels that the three chapters could have been condensed into one.

Yaman’s disagreement with most of the Western scholars he quoted in this chapter is not unexpected. Their thoughts, which differ from the concept of *ḥikmah* in early Islamic thought, is understandable. It is doubtful as an argument that the Western scholars’ submission on this Qur’ānic terminology will be adequately grasped and discussed in Western literature, though some objective comments by non-Muslim scholars on some aspects of Islamic philosophy is not totally ruled out.

It is worth noticing that the word *ḥikmah* is used in the Qur’ān both as a singular word and as a conjunction with *al-Kitāb* of which our author delved into the etymological source of the word. The author, in this regard, unearths a convincing definition of *ḥikmah* and examines its synonym in the Arabic language. He introduced and explained the meanings of *mana‘a*, *atqana* and *Qadā* as suggestive synonyms of *ḥikmah*. This laid a solid foundation for the author’s main argument that “giving a single word definition of the word *ḥikmah* in all the verses of the Qur’ān is misleading.”

In dealing with the lexicographical interpretation of the concept as demonstrated in the first part of the book, one expects the author to introduce alongside his definitions the following Arabic words *'adl*, *'ilm*, and *hilm* as part of the primary meanings of *hikmah*. Interestingly enough, the words attract the attention of the author in different contexts in p. 55 and p. 61.

The author maintains that the usage of *hikmah* in various verses is a pointer to the diverse position of the Muslim scholars and thinkers on its contextual application. Some suggestive meanings based on its usage in some specific Qur'ānic verses include prophethood, wisdom, understanding of the Qur'ān based on its abrogated verses and their replacement, the knowledge of its esoteric and exoteric meanings, the allegorical interpretations, the permissible and the forbidden, the parables, and understanding the *Sunnah* based on piety, are among the never ending interpretations that form the kernel of our author's discussion in the book under review.

What could be deduced in these numerous interpretations is that the conceptual meaning of *al-hikmah* is concise in both speech and action coupled with accurate placement of issues in their respective positions. This is in line with the author's statement that *hikmah* must be viewed together with other related mystical concepts as part of an overall approach to worldly life (p. 270).

The theme of the book is specifically covered in Parts II and III in which the author analyses the word *hikmah* in each Qur'ānic verse, contextualising it based on the exegetical discussion presented by early Muslim commentators. In doing this, the author classified the usage of the word as used in the glorious Qur'ān into the following sub-headings: *hikmah* as "much good"; *hikmah* as a method of calling to the way of the lord; a divine blessing to Abraham's progeny; authority: the case of David; gratitude: the case of Luqman; a criterion for Jesus; heavenly grace to the unlettered people: the case of Muhammad.

Hikmet Yaman has made concerted efforts to explain the occurrence of the word as used contextually in the Qur'ānic verses under various captions. Some of his arguments, however, can easily be challenged. The case of Luqman in verse 31:13 refers to divine wisdom and religious understanding. The fact that the phrase "Give thanks to Allah" is mentioned after *hikmah*, does not, in our view, point to thankfulness

as the central theme of the discussion in this respect. Similarly, the word as used in verse 2:269 does not necessarily portray “much good”. *Ḥikmah* here is qualified as abundant good, and not as the contextual meaning. Many scholars, as the author admits, have explained its usage here as knowledge and the understanding of the Qur’ān and the *Sunnah* and one’s ability to speak and act in the correct way.

In Part III, the author boldly touches on the sensitive *Sufi* literatures as he explores the occurrence of *ḥikmah* in early *Sufi* compendiums. Much attention is devoted to this section which gives the impression that the motivational factor for the research is *Sufism*. Though *Sufism* itself is a subject of controversy, the author’s preference and deep involvement in the *Sufi* order is well portrayed in this section based on intellectual objectivity and academic trust which leaves no room for polemical discourse.

For this reviewer, however, any attempt to discuss the concept of *ḥikmah* in early Islamic thought is incomplete without adequate reference to the writings and the activities of *Sunni* Muslim scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah and Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. Al-Qaḥṭānī’s one-sided arguments on the contributions of the duo to *ḥikmah* and its methodology, as presented in his *al-Ḥikmat fī al-Da‘wah ilā Allāh Ta‘ālā* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1997) could form the basis of an intense academic discourse on the subject.

The book ends with an appraisal of *ḥikmah* in the Islamic philosophical circle. The views of al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, and Ibn Sīnā are elaborately discussed. In doing so, the author examines the connective link between moral philosophy and the concept of *ḥikmah* as mentioned in the Muslim authoritative references.

Overall, the language used in this book is lucid and the book itself is well-referenced. The Arabic transliterations are carefully done though the elongated sign on the second “a” in the writing of “Allah” may be contestable. The universal adaptation without the elongated sign remains the standard form of writing.

Hikmet Yaman deserves commendation for this educative compendium, which is a significant contribution to the better understanding of *ḥikmah* as a concept in Islamic studies of which teachers, researchers, and students of Islamic moral philosophy will

definitely find useful as an indispensable companion for continued reference. However, the multiple title of the work needs re-consideration. While the “*Prophetic Niche in the Virtuous City*” is a very catchy title, its correlation with “*the Concept of Hikmah in Early Islamic Thought*” is clumsy. One would expect that the book will be based on the application of *hikmah* in the *Ḥadīth* or *Sunnah*, which the niche or lamp of the Prophet (S.A.W.) represents. Unfortunately this was not given due attention to.

---

**The Qur’anic worldview: A springboard for cultural reform. By AbdulHamid AbuSulayman. London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2011, pp. xv+179, ISBN: 978-1-56564-365-9.**

Reviewer: Abdulazeez Balogun Shittu, Department of Philosophy and Religions, University of Abuja, Nigeria. Email: [abshittu@yahoo.com](mailto:abshittu@yahoo.com).

Misconstruing the actual connotation of the Qur’ānic worldview and how it can be harnessed to rejuvenate the lost glory of the Muslim society has led many writers and readers alike to misplaced priorities. The attempt made by AbdulHamid Abusulayman in this book stands out as a masterpiece. Rigorous research, wealth of experience and interaction with the Islamic and other cultures afforded him the opportunity to distinguish cultural practices from the practical implementation of Qur’ānic injunctions and Sunnatic authorisation.

Unlike other books that overburden their readers with many definitions and instead of convincing them end up confusing them, chapter one (the Qur’anic Worldview and Human Culture) restricts its elucidation of what the Qur’ānic worldview is all about to those values embedded in the primary sources of Islam. One may think that since many Muslims have committed the *surahs* and verses of the Qur’ān to memory, observing and implementing the Qur’ānic worldview becomes easier. The book reminds us that it is easier said than done, as the human instinct always inclines towards what pleases the soul, which at times, may not be in conformity with the dictates of the Qur’ān. In the same vein, there is customarily a wide gulf between people’s heritage