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Thema *Bint al- Šāṭi's Approach to Tafsīr: A Journey From Hermeneutics to Humanity*

This talk studies the modern hermeneutic method of Bint al-Šāṭi' by examining her attitude toward the traditional genre of Qur'ān exegesis (*tafsīr*). Scholars like Jules Jansen, Issa Boullata, and Andrew Rippin assess this attitude in the light of an understanding of her method as an excavation of the original Qur'anic meaning beyond the obscurities of traditional interpretations rendered by a deficient method. This article presents a different reading of Bint al-Šāṭi'; firstly by showing that she does not seek to recover an 'original' meaning of the Qur'ān, and secondly by representing the complexity of her relation and response to traditional exegesis. Through textual analysis of her primary exegetical work *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li'l-Qur'ān*, the talk illustrates that while Bint al-Šāṭi' proposes to put aside traditional *tafsīr* because of its reliance to a large extent on extra-Qur'anic material, and applies instead a modern method of thematic and linguistic analysis of Qur'anic meaning, traditional *tafsīr* is never absent from her exegetical texts as it usually is in other modern approaches to the Qur'ān. This textual presence appears to serve both textual and transtextual functions beyond refuting the validity of past constructions of Qur'anic meaning in the *tafsīr* genre. By copiously citing and critically commenting on traditional readings, Bint al-Šāṭi' establishes her mastery of the detail of the genre and awareness of its failings, thus asserting her authority as extending from the past, while at the same time constructing the legitimacy of her proposition to break with or bypass that past. In this paper, I suggest that Bint al-Šāṭi's hermeneutic method and particularly its complex approach to the traditional genre of *tafsīr* must be considered in the light of her journey as a woman to construct an authoritative voice within a male-dominated traditional genre. Evidence that Bint al-Šāṭi's concern for the woman question underlies her hermeneutic approach is revealed through reading her earlier works

of *tafsīr* in the light of her autobiography and her later *tafsīr* treatises *Maqāl fi'l-Insān* and *al-Mafhūm al-Islāmī li-Taḥrīr al-Mar'ah* where she argues that the liberated woman is one who breaks away from the male customs which deprived Muslim women over the centuries of their humanity, a humanity she defines as fundamentally premised on the hermeneutic act of reading and interpreting in search for new horizons.

Dr. Shuruq Naguib lectures in Islamic Studies at Lancaster University. Previously, she studied and taught Islam at Manchester University. Her main research interest is in Qur'an hermeneutics. She has published on purity in Qur'anic exegesis; feminist hermeneutics of the Qur'an, and rhetorical interpretation in the post-classical period.