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Religious Intertextuality in Ibn Al-Sayrafi's Al-Afdhaliyyat: Manifestations and Implications

Mohammad Naimat [1], Nusaiba Adel Almahameed [2*], Ali Mohammad Aldiabat [1], Lubna Mahmoud Matrook [3]

[1] Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Al-Hussein Bin Talal University, Ma'an, Jordan

[2] Department of English Language and Literature, Al-Hussein Bin Talal University, Ma'an, Jordan

[3] Center for Language and Cultural Communication, Al-Hussein Bin Talal University, Ma'an, Jordan

ABSTRACT

This study meticulously explores the manifestations of religious intertextuality within Al-Afdhaliyyat, a collection of correspondences authored by Abu Al-Qasim Ali Ibn Munjab Ibn Sulaiman, widely esteemed as Ibn Al-Sayrafi. As a distinguished literary figure of the Fatimid era in Egypt, Ibn Al-Sayrafi's oeuvre provides a fertile ground for investigating the intricate dynamics of intertextual interactions. Employing a descriptive-analytical methodology, this study systematically identifies and categorizes instances of intertextuality in these letters, with a particular emphasis on religious allusions and references. The primary objective is to conduct a comparative analysis between the literary components of Al-Afdhaliyyat and pertinent religious scriptures, thereby unveiling the complex interconnections underpinning these textual relationships. Findings reveal that Ibn Al-Sayrafi employs various forms of religious intertextuality, including direct quotations, indirect allusions, nuanced hints, and thematic absorptions, which enhance both the aesthetic and persuasive dimensions of his correspondence. These intertextual references serve to elevate the formal qualities of the prose, symbolically influence recipients by appealing to moral virtues, and reinforce doctrinal concepts integral to Fatimid theology. The study concludes that religious intertextuality in Al-Afdhaliyyat functions as a multifaceted tool that embellishes the text, persuades the recipient, and conveys complex doctrinal messages. This study contributes to academic discourse by applying contemporary literary theory to a relatively underexplored corpus, thereby enriching the understanding of Fatimid literary traditions and

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Nusaiba Adel Almahameed, Department of English Language and Literature, Al-Hussein Bin Talal University, Ma'an, Jordan;
Email: n.almahameed@yahoo.co.uk

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highlighting the pivotal role of intertextuality in literary analysis.

Keywords: Quranic Allusions; Religious Intertextuality; Al-Afdhaliyyat; Ibn Al-Sayrafi; Fatimid Literary Traditions

1. Introduction

Religious intertextuality intricately underpins the literary oeuvre of Abu Al-Qasim Ali Ibn Munjab Ibn Sulaiman, universally revered as Ibn Al-Sayrafi, a distinguished luminary of Egypt's Fatimid era. This examination delves into the nuanced interplay between religious texts and literary expression within Ibn Al-Sayrafi's seminal work, Al-Afdhaliyyat (The Preferences Letters)[Al-Afdaliyyat is presumed to have been composed during the 6th century AH, prior to his demise in 542 AH/1147 CE. As a collection of refined literary epistles, it is plausible that Al-Sayrafi meticulously authored and curated these letters over an extended period, reflecting his intellectual engagement and professional endeavors within the Fatimid Caliphate. Although the precise date of its composition remains undetermined, it is reasonable to surmise that the work emerged in the first half of the 6th century AH, likely aligning with Al-Sayrafi's active tenure as a court writer and historian. This period, characterized by his service to key figures in the Fatimid administration, provided a fertile context for the creation of such an intellectually rich and stylistically intricate corpus.]. As a compilation of erudite epistles, Al-Afdhaliyyat not only exemplifies Ibn Al-Sayrafi's sophisticated literary craftsmanship but also encapsulates his deep engagement with diverse intellectual domains, including religion, literature, criticism, and historiography. These epistles, meticulously composed as petitions for pardon addressed to Al-Afdal Ibn Badr Al-Jamali, transcend personal appeals, offering a fertile ground for dissecting the complex intertextual dynamics that underpin his correspondence.

Central to this investigation is the exploration of religious intertextuality, which functions as both a connective tissue and a reflective surface within Ibn Al-Sayrafi's literary endeavors. By intricately weaving references from the Holy Quran, Prophetic Hadiths, Arabic poetry, and pertinent narratives into his letters, Ibn Al-Sayrafi creates a layered and multifaceted narrative. This intertextual engagement manifests through direct quotations, subtle allusions, and suggestive references, each contributing to a rich discourse imbued with theological and ethical significance.

Positioned within the vibrant literary milieu of Fatimid Egypt, Ibn Al-Sayrafi's pivotal role is underscored by his ability to synthesize spiritual contemplation with literary refinement, positioning him as a critical interlocutor in the dialogue between tradition and innovation. Through Al-Afdhaliyyat, his work offers invaluable insights into the literary practices of Fatimid Egypt, revealing how intertextual references serve not merely as ornamental elements but as vehicles for complex intellectual and spiritual articulation.

Employing a descriptive-analytical methodology, the research meticulously maps the interconnections and textual relationships within Al-Afdhaliyyat, uncovering embedded meanings and the nuanced interplay between the primary text and its religious antecedents. The analysis highlights the strategic deployment of intertextual references, demonstrating how Ibn Al-Sayrafi navigates the intricate terrain of theological and ethical discourse through sophisticated literary strategies. The letters, while ostensibly personal pleas, are imbued with deliberate invocations of religious authority and moral imperatives, elevating the correspondence to a higher plane of intellectual and spiritual engagement.

Manifestations of religious intertextuality within Al-Afdhaliyyat are multifaceted, encompassing both direct quotations and indirect allusions that enhance the depth and resonance of the letters. This duality allows Ibn Al-Sayrafi to articulate complex ideas with precision and eloquence, facilitating a richer, more layered understanding of the underlying theological and ethical concepts. The intricate weaving of texts not only augments the aesthetic quality of the letters but also serves as a conduit for deeper intellectual exploration and spiritual reflection.

Significantly contributing to literary studies, the application of intertextuality, a cornerstone of contemporary literary theory, to a relatively understudied corpus, enhances comprehension of Ibn Al-Sayrafi's work and enriches the broader discourse on intertextuality in Arabic literature. Situating Al-Afdhaliyyat within the broader context of Fatimid literary traditions underscores the enduring impact of intertextual practices in shaping literary expression and highlights the sophisticated mechanisms through which Ibn Al-Sayrafi

negotiates his intellectual and spiritual environment.

Ultimately, this analysis illuminates the profound intertextual dynamics that underpin Ibn Al-Sayrafi's Al-Afdhaliyyat, revealing how religious texts are intricately interwoven into his literary correspondence to create a rich, multilayered narrative. The strategic use of intertextual references not only enriches the letters' aesthetic and intellectual appeal but also facilitates a deeper engagement with complex theological and ethical paradigms. By bridging the gap between contemporary literary theory and classical Arabic literature, the study offers a nuanced understanding of Fatimid literary traditions and highlights the enduring relevance of intertextuality in the evolution of literary expression.

2. Literature Review

Despite the strides made by earlier scholars in investigating Al-Afdhaliyyat, the phenomenon of religious intertextuality remains largely unexplored in Ibn Al-Sayrafi's oeuvre. Scholars have illuminated the literary and historical significance of these texts, yet the particular ways in which religious references, ranging from Qur'anic allusions to Hadith citations, shape Ibn Al-Sayrafi's letters have not been the primary focus of any systematic analysis.

In his 1987 article, Heritage and the Book of Al-Afdhaliyyat, Ibrahim Al-Samarrai set out to introduce Ibn Al-Sayrafi's text to modern readers. His goal centered on highlighting Al-Afdhaliyyat as a heritage work rather than delving deeply into its rhetorical dynamics or intertextual strategies. While his efforts rendered the book more accessible to contemporary audiences, they did not engage with the intricate religious references embedded in the letters [1]. Later, Moḥammad Mousa Alnaimat undertook two key studies, the Master's thesis Ibn Al-Ṣayrafi as a Writer (2006) [2], and the doctoral dissertation Artistic Epistles in Egypt During the Faṭimid Era (2014) [3], both placing Al-Afdhaliyyat in its broader historical and literary context. Although these works shed light on the letters' structural, stylistic, and cultural dimensions, they did not systematically explore the function or breadth of religious references woven throughout Ibn Al-Sayrafi's prose. Al- Alnaimat's analysis, therefore, provided essential groundwork but left a central aspect of the text—its religious intertextuality—largely untouched.

Another significant contribution to the scholarship came from Usama Salim Ḥamzah Al-Dhibḥawi's Master's thesis, Artistic Imagery in the Poetry of the Book Al-Afdhaliyyat by ʿAlī ibn Munjib, Known as Ibn Al-Ṣayrafi (d. 542 AH) (2014) [4]. In his thesis, the researcher focused on visual and figurative elements, investigating how artistic imagery operates within the text. Although this perspective advanced our understanding of Ibn Al-Sayrafi's use of poetic language and imagery, it likewise did not address the possible influence of Qur'anic or Prophetic intertexts that might enrich the interpretive dimensions of his work.

Collectively, these four key studies have clarified the historical placement, structural features, and artistic qualities of Al-Afdhaliyyat, yet they have not examined religious intertextuality in a focused manner. The subtle interplay of Qur'anic allusions, Hadith citations, and doctrinal motifs in Ibn Al-Sayrafi's prose remains a crucial gap. Such references, presumably integral to the rhetorical power and theological underpinnings of the text, warrant deeper investigation to elucidate both the aesthetic effects and the socio-political resonance of these intertexts.

By filling this gap, the present study seeks not only to advance our understanding of Ibn Al-Sayrafi's literary craft but also to illuminate broader Faṭimid-era cultural and intellectual practices. Consequently, it emerges as the first scholarly endeavor to address in depth the manifestations of religious intertextuality in the Al-Afdhaliyya.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology that blends qualitative textual analysis with a comparative intertextual approach to examine religious allusions in Ibn Al-Sayrafi's Al-Afdhaliyyat. The descriptive component involves identifying and classifying scriptural references—mainly Qur'anic verses, Hadith reports, and Fatimid theological texts—through systematic scrutiny of the letters. The analytical dimension then interprets how these references reflect the doctrinal, sociopolitical, and cultural realities of Fatimid Egypt. To ensure reliability, multiple manuscripts and critical editions of Al-Afdhaliyyat were collated, cross-verifying textual discrepancies to minimize errors. Secondary sources such as contemporary commentaries, theological treatises, and historical studies of the Fatimid period were also consulted to establish the religious context

that influenced Ibn Al-Sayrafi's writing.

Data collection proceeded through a careful, line-by-line reading of each letter in Al-Afdhaliyyat. Any segment suggesting an intertextual echo—be it an overt quotation, subtle paraphrase, or allusion—was annotated in a template that recorded the letter reference, possible source text, relevant passage, and initial observations on its rhetorical function. These passages were then compared against established Qur'anic indices, recognized Hadith collections, and Fatimid doctrinal works to confirm or refine the identification of sources. By capturing these details systematically, the study assembled a robust dataset of intertextual elements that offered clear evidence of scriptural borrowing or adaptation.

The process of analysis began by describing each identified reference in terms of its linguistic form, its immediate function in the letter—whether moral exhortation, doctrinal assertion, or a literary flourish—and its broader implications in the Fatimid milieu. Building on this descriptive groundwork, classical Arabic rhetorical theories and intertextual frameworks informed a deeper interpretation of how each reference strengthened the texts' persuasive, aesthetic, and doctrinal dimensions. Throughout this process, scholarly commentaries on Al-Afdhaliyyat and expert discussions helped address any uncertainties regarding source attribution, ensuring a high level of rigor. By merging descriptive and analytical perspectives, the study elucidates the interplay of scriptural elements within Ibn Al-Sayrafi's epistolary prose, highlighting the strategic ways in which religious intertextuality enriches both the literary and ideological dimensions of Fatimid discourse.

4. Theoretical Framework of Intertextuality

Intertextuality, a foundational concept in modern literary criticism, draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, which emphasizes the multiplicity of voices within any given text. Julia Kristeva formally introduced the term "intertextuality" in the late 1960s, proposing that no text exists in isolation but is shaped by ongoing intersections with myriad other texts. In fusing structuralist and post-structuralist ideas, Kristeva reveals how language functions as a dynamic realm of negotiation and transformation, continually reshaped by the interplay of different voices and contexts.

Gerard Genette builds on these ideas through his theory of "transtextuality," dividing textual relationships into five categories: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality, and architextuality. While Kristeva's broad intertextual perspective highlights the general permeability of texts and the continuous layering of multiple voices, Genette narrows "intertextuality" itself to explicit instances of quotation, allusion, or plagiarism. Transformations of one text ("the hypotext") into another ("the hypertext") are separately classified under "hypertextuality." Despite these terminological distinctions, both Kristeva and Genette agree that every new text arises from a tapestry of past writings and traditions [5].

A literary work acts as a nexus where various textual influences converge within the author's consciousness, resulting in overlapping artistic expressions [6]. This complex interaction is encapsulated by terms such as overlap, interconnection, and intertextuality, all signifying the same basic concept.

This insight, though named and theorized in the 20th century, has long been evident in literary history. Early forms of intertextuality manifested as quotation, inclusion, allusion, citation, metaphor, and comparison [7], concepts familiar to ancient critics who recognized how writers continually draw on prior works [8–10]. Originating from past influences and emerging within the present context of its creation, each text also anticipates future intertextual engagements [11]. This phenomenon, often referred to by ancient terms such as quotation, inclusion, allusion, citation, comparison, and metaphor, aligns with contemporary understandings of intertextuality [5].

Intertextuality unequivocally reflects the enduring influence of antecedent heritage and traditions, situating every literary work within the framework of its predecessors. The extant body of literature remains indelible and irremovable, thereby rendering the complete eradication of prior literary contributions an impossibility [10]. This phenomenon is deeply embedded within the encyclopedic culture and the repository of knowledge that creative individuals, whether poets or prose writers, seek and judiciously employ in their creative processes. Numerous scholars dedicated to the study of writing and literature acknowledge this cultural reservoir as a fundamental tool for writers. Ali bin Khalaf Al-Katib, for instance, treated writing as both art and craft, empha-

sizing that the writer's mastery depends on broad cultural and scholarly resources [12]. Similarly, Ibn Al-Sayrafi, in his discussions within Diwan Al-Insha, stresses the importance of memorizing religious, historical, and literary materials, particularly the Quran, the sayings of the Prophet (Hadith), and extensive poetic works, to enrich one's compositions [13]. Dhiy' Ad-Din Ibn Al-Athir reinforces this by requiring that a writer preserve the Quran, key prophetic traditions, and a large corpus of poetry to ensure rhetorical deftness and cultural resonance [14].

A vivid example comes from Abu Shamah al-Maqdisi, who recounts in his treatise the practices of an influential figure known as "the virtuous judge." This individual, celebrated for his eloquence in classical Arabic literature and specifically renowned within the Madhah of Bani Ayub, embodied a highly developed approach to writing. He explains how, during the era of Bani Abid, writing in Egypt was still emerging and that correspondence bureaus functioned under the authority of a single head clerk, sometimes with minimal oversight. The judge's father—himself a judge in Thughur Asqalan—sent his son to learn under the envoy Ibn Al-Khallaal at the Egyptian court during the reign of al-Hafiz. When asked, "What have you prepared for the art of writing in terms of tools?" the judge replied that he had memorized the Noble Quran and composed poetry, prompting Ibn Al-Khallaal to remark, "This is eloquence." The judge was subsequently guided through an in-depth study of poetic texts, notably dissecting and revisiting the poetry of al-Hamasah multiple times to internalize its rhetorical and stylistic strengths [15].

These accounts illustrate how literary prowess in classical Arabic tradition hinged on intertextual mastery. Works such as Al-Qalqashandi's writings delineate the theoretical and practical skills necessary for a writer in a pre-print world: theoretical knowledge entailed command of linguistic sciences, the Quran, Hadith, well-known sermons, poetical works, and historical chronicles; practical expertise required refined calligraphy, essential for producing texts before the invention of printing [16]. Drawing on this accumulated knowledge base allowed authors to weave multiple sources seamlessly into their own compositions.

Natalie Gross affirms that intertextuality flourishes through reading and memory [10]. When a writer actively reads and retains material, from canonical scripture to poetry and chronicles, those texts inevitably resurface in new works, shaped by fresh contexts. Consequently, intertextuality operates both as a creative skill and a methodological device for analyzing how a given work resonates with its predecessors. By examining explicit or implicit echoes, readers and critics can uncover a text's multilayered influences—whether they involve direct quotations, subtle allusions, or transformative rewritings.

Ultimately, intertextuality underscores that each text is not only a reflection of its creator's individual vision but also a culmination of inherited cultural and literary heritages. Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, Gérard Genette, Ali bin Khalaf Al-Katib, Ibn Al-Sayrafi, Dhiy' Ad-Din Ibn Al-Athir, Abu Shamah al-Maqdisi, the virtuous judge, and Al-Qalqashandi—together with figures like the father of the judge and the envoy Ibn Al-Khallaal—all exemplify how writers draw on, rework, and extend previous traditions. Their insights remind us that literature evolves through dialogue with the past, and the writer's craft lies in merging ancestral legacies with innovative perspectives, ensuring the perpetual renewal of literary expression.

4.1. Ibn Al-Sayrafi: Life and Literary Contributions

Abu Al-Qasim, Ali Ibn Munjab Ibn Sulaiman, widely recognized as Ibn Al-Sayrafi, stands as a distinguished figure in the literary and intellectual tradition of Fatimid Egypt. Born in 463 AH in Egypt [17], Ibn Al-Sayrafi lived for nearly ninety years, with conflicting accounts regarding the year of his death. While Ibn Muyassar (1980) and Al-Maqrizi (1970) place his passing in 542 AH [18–21]. His title, Taj Al-Ri'asa (Crown of Leadership) (Al-Suyuti, (849 AH.) [22], reflects his stature as a leading literary figure of his time. The influence of his grandfather, a scribe, appears to have been pivotal in steering him toward the field of official correspondence, a profession that he mastered with an exceptional skill [17]. The scarcity of biographical information about Ibn Al-Sayrafi highlights the broader marginalization of figures associated with the Fatimid dynasty. As Ali Bahjat argues, the omission of Fatimid-era figures by Sunni biographers—most notably al-Suyuti in Tarikh Al-Khulafa', where he deliberately excludes the Fatimid caliphs—underscores the sectarian tensions of the period. Such hostility likely extended to the Fatimid scribes, including Ibn Al-Sayrafi, who played instru-

mental roles in promoting the state's Shiite agenda [18].

Despite these challenges, Ibn Al-Sayrafi distinguished himself as a master of his craft. His early training in the Diwan al-Jaysh under Abu al-Ala Sa'id ibn Mufarrij laid the foundation for his expertise in epistolary composition [17, 18]. His subsequent tenure at the Diwan al-Kharaj further refined his skills, earning him the favor of al-Afdal ibn Amir al-Juyush, the vizier of Egypt [20]. This recognition led to his appointment in the prestigious Diwan al-Mukatabat, where he gained widespread acclaim for his eloquence and exceptional calligraphy. Ibn Sana' al-Mulk entrusted him with drafting official decrees and ceremonial documents, solidifying his reputation as one of the foremost scribes of the Fatimid era [18].

Ibn Al-Sayrafi's intellectual legacy is reflected in his extensive body of work, which spans literature, history, and poetry. Al-Hamawi's Mu'jam al-Udaba' lists several of his notable compositions, including Kitab al-Ishara fi Man Nala Rutbat al-Wizara, Kitab 'Umdat al-Muhadatha, and Kitab Rad al-Mazalim, among others. He also compiled poetry collections from luminaries such as Abu Al-'Ala al-Ma'arri and Ibn al-Sarraj. Al-Safadi notes that Ibn Al-Sayrafi's correspondences were compiled into four volumes, while Ibn Sa'id al-Andalusi attests to the preservation of his writings in multiple compilations.

4.2. Al-Afdhaliyyat

Building upon Ibn Al-Sayrafi's prolific contributions to Fatimid-era prose and his reputation as a skilled scribe and literary innovator, his Afḍhaliyyat letters emerge as a particularly noteworthy aspect of his oeuvre. These seven literary letters, addressed to King al-Afdal Shahanshah, Amir al-Juyush of Egypt (The Leader of the Egyptian Army), represent both a creative endeavor and a strategic attempt at reconciliation during a period of estrangement between the writer and the monarch. Comprising Risalat Al-'Afw (The Letter of Forgiveness), Risalat Radd al-Mazalim (The Letter on the Restitution of Wrongs), Risalat Lamḥ al-Malaḥ (The Letter on Noteworthy Delights), Risalat Mana'iḥ al-Qaraiḥ (The Letter of Creative Gifts), Risalat Munajat Shahri Ramadan (The Letter of Ramadan's Supplications), Risalat 'Aqa'il al-Fada'il (The Letter of Precious Virtues), and Risalat al-Tadalli 'ala al-Tasalli (The Letter on Consolation), Al-Afdhaliyyat underscore Ibn Al-Sayrafi's mastery of rhetorical and epistolary composition.

The epistles bear traces of the strained relationship between Ibn Al-Sayrafi and Al-Afdal ibn Badr al-Jamali, a tension that appears to have motivated their creation. This dynamic is evident in the tone and content of the letters. For instance, Risalat Al-Afw concludes with a plea for mercy, as Ibn Al-Sayrafi writes: "The servant concludes his epistle with this act of service to renew his plea and seek comprehensive mercy for the likes of him, for by God, his suffering has intensified and worsened, and he has reached the brink of despair" [23, 24]. Similarly, Risalat Radd al-Mazalim extols al-Afdal's justice in restoring rights, while subtly reflecting the writer's hope for personal relief (p. 39). In a final note appended to Risalat Lamḥ al-Malaḥ, it is recorded that upon presenting this epistle, Al-Afdal ibn Badr al-Jamali was appeased and reinstated Ibn Al-Sayrafi in the prestigious Diwan al-Insha' [23, 24].

These letters are remarkable not only for their rhetorical elegance but also for their intertextual richness, showcasing Ibn Al-Sayrafi's deep engagement with religious, literary, and historical traditions. Through their abundant references to Quranic verses, prophetic Hadiths, and classical poetry, Al-Afdhaliyyat illustrate the writer's skillful deployment of intertextuality as a means of persuasion and self-rehabilitation. This strategic interplay between textual heritage and literary innovation demonstrates Ibn Al-Sayrafi's ability to navigate the complex cultural and political landscape of Fatimid Egypt.

Al- Afḍhaliyyat hold significant value as a distinctive example of literary epistles from the Fatimid period. They serve as a window into the intellectual and stylistic practices of the time, reflecting the cultural and rhetorical sophistication of the Fatimid bureaucratic elite. Moreover, these texts offer valuable insights into the processes of literary composition and textual construction in a context rich with intertextual engagement. By analyzing these epistles, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic interplay between prose writing and the broader corpus of textual traditions, particularly religious texts, which constitutes the central focus of this research.

5. Manifestations of Religious Intertextuality in Al-Afdhaliyyat

Religious intertextuality is prominently evident in the epistles of Al-Afdhaliyyat, wherein Ibn Al-Sayrafi's deep-seated religious culture intricately shapes his prose compositions. His theological insights are substantiated, semantic expressions clarified, and correspondence enriched through the deliberate incorporation of the Qur'an and the Hadith across numerous passages. This integration not only reinforces his ideas and elucidates meanings but also embellishes his discourse with Qur'anic verses and meticulously organized rhetorical elements [25]. In defending the extensive use of religious references against critiques from contemporaries such as Ibn Surin, Ibn Al-Sayrafi asserts that such intertextuality elevates the eloquence of his writing, positing that discourse devoid of Qur'anic terminology deviates from eloquence, lacks intrinsic merit, and becomes cumbersome to comprehend [24].

Ibn Al-Sayrafi interweaves the Qur'an and occasionally the Hadith in multifaceted ways, ranging from direct literal quotations to allusive, suggestive, and evocative references that necessitate thoughtful reflection and recollection for comprehensive understanding. This intricate interplay creates a novel and more valuable textual fabric, enriching the linguistic texture, strengthening structural integrity, and imbuing the text with meanings that support central ideas and reinforcing argumentative coherence. The diverse forms and subtleties of intertextuality in Al-Afdhaliyyat encompass direct citations, as well as more nuanced allusions and evocative references that engage the reader on multiple cognitive levels. This multiplicity has driven scholars to undertake comprehensive studies of this literary characteristic, recognizing it as a defining attribute of Al-Afdhaliyyat that underscores its dynamic engagement with the broader corpus of textual heritage. The intricate relationship between Ibn Al-Sayrafi's prose and sacred texts not only enhances the literary quality of his epistles but also reflects the profound cultural and intellectual milieu of the Fatimid era, thereby offering invaluable insights into the interplay between literature and religious tradition.

Advancing this foundational understanding, the subsequent analysis delves into the two primary categories of Religious Intertextuality identified within Al-Afdhaliyyat: Direct Religious Intertextuality and Indirect Religious Intertextuality. By distinguishing between these forms, this study provides a nuanced framework for analyzing how Ibn Al-Sayrafi adeptly navigates and integrates religious texts. This bifurcation allows for a more detailed exploration of the mechanisms through which religious references operate within his epistles, thereby deepening our understanding of his rhetorical strategies and the broader literary and cultural implications of his work.

5.1. Direct Religious Intertextuality

In Ibn Al-Sayrafi's Al-Afdhaliyyat, direct religious intertextuality is employed as a strategic mechanism to deepen the semantic resonance of his prose and to firmly entrench these meanings within the recipient's consciousness. A clear example of this technique appears in the Letter of Forgiveness, which begins with praise to God and recognition of His all-encompassing mercy, His protection from harm, and His generous giving of blessings to people. Ibn Al-Sayrafi articulates:

Praise be to God, the Merciful, the Creator Himself, and indeed, He has magnified their sins, removed their harm when it struck them, and bestowed His blessings upon them while they were heedless. And He says in His Holy Book: 'It is He who accepts the repentance of His worshipers, and remits the sins, and knows what you do' [24, 26].

From the outset, the author meticulously integrates direct Qur'anic intertextuality into his discourse, utilizing terminology and syntactical structures that align with the referenced scripture, such as "Merciful", "magnified their sins", "removed their harm", and "bestowed His blessings". This invocation of the Qur'anic text serves a dual purpose, reinforcing the concept of "forgiveness" in the mind of the recipient, Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali, and eliciting a religious emotional response through the noble verse that underscores God's forgiveness and acceptance of the servant's repentance. In this manner, Ibn Al-Sayrafi adeptly brings the image of divine forgiveness into Al-Afḍal al-Jamali's psyche, thereby swiftly instilling the intended idea.

Moreover, Ibn Al-Sayrafi harmonizes the artistic objective of direct intertextuality by synchronizing prose pauses with Qur'anic pauses, achieving a rhythmic concordance between his phrase "and they were heedless" and the Qur'anic declaration "what you do". This rhythmic synchronization

not only enhances the aesthetic quality of the text but also reinforces the theological underpinnings of his message. Additionally, the author demonstrates a deliberate effort to showcase his literary prowess and rhetorical sophistication, striving to re-establish his esteemed position with Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali.

Continuing his rhetorical strategy, Ibn Al-Sayrafi endeavors to persuade Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali of the paramount value of forgiveness and his exalted status. In this iteration, he transcends mere emotional appeals, venturing into the realm of rational persuasion by presenting cogent arguments that engage the intellect. For instance, in advocating for the preference of forgiveness over charity, he articulates:

Forgiving those who give charity is an obligatory duty, instilling hope within them; for a charity giver does not exceed a deficient condition, compensating for its deficiencies and complementing its abundance. Moreover, forgiving sins may prevent the shedding of blood mandated by justice, thus the former embodies generosity and benevolence, while the latter revives something precious; 'and whoever saves it, it is as if he saved the whole of mankind' [24, 26].

Here, Ibn Al-Sayrafi establishes a comparative analysis between two virtuous actions; charity and forgiveness, arguing that the benefits derived from forgiveness are both greater and more comprehensive than those from charity. In this juxtaposition, he meticulously cites religious texts with precise terminology to culminate in a conclusion that profoundly impacts the listener, compelling them towards acceptance and conviction.

A notable characteristic of Ibn Al-Sayrafi's religious intertextual references is his method of preparing the cited text in a manner that anticipates its integration, subsequently weaving it seamlessly into his discourse while maintaining poetic rhythm and speech pauses. This is exemplified in the Letter of Consolation addressed to Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali upon the death of a relative, wherein he states:

Whoever indicates that God has secluded Himself with His uniqueness, and the witnesses of His decrees upon His will and His intent, and the proof of His oneness that whoever strives against it either out of ignorance or obstinacy, and therefore, in accordance with what He said in the verse: 'If there were in them gods other than Allah, they would have gone to ruin' [24].

Ibn Al-Sayrafi calls attention to God's absolute sovereignty by quoting the Qur'anic verse: "If there were in them gods other than Allah, they would have gone to ruin", and alluding to "His uniqueness, His will, His intent, and His oneness". This approach underscores the primacy of divine authority throughout the universe and highlights the mourners' vulnerability by contrast. In depicting death as an undeniable fact shaped by God's supreme power, Ibn Al-Sayrafi reinforces the central theological notion that all things ultimately lie under one divine governance.

Ibn Al-Sayrafi adroitly fuses Qur'anic narrative with direct Qur'anic quotations within a unified contextual framework. He seamlessly incorporates Qur'anic verses into his prose, presenting them as intrinsic components of the narrative. In the Letter of Forgiveness, for instance, he lauds the virtues and governance of Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali by proclaiming:

I have seen the honor of the world and the glory of eternity, and our authority is great, strong with support, and a vast kingdom that no one is worthy of... and my tongue is all reasonable with fear. He was eloquent, saying, and it was necessary, as He said in the Holy Qur'an: 'This is Our gift; so give generously, or withhold; without account' [24, 27, 28].

In this passage, Ibn Al-Sayrafi masterfully evokes the Qur'anic account of Prophet Solomon (Sulaiman), peace be upon him, as the paradigmatic model of an ideal ruler, thereby drawing an analogy with Al-Afḍal ibn Badr al-Jamali's own leadership. This intertextual allusion not only reinforces the intended message but also vividly constructs the image of an exemplary sovereign in the recipient's mind. It is important to note that this rhetorical comparison employs a measure of hyperbole by juxtaposing the divinely ordained kingdom of a prophet with the temporal dominion of a human ruler—albeit one of exceptional esteem. Such a stylistic strategy is recurrent among writers, especially within discourses centered on themes of forgiveness and liberation from incarceration.

In the concluding section of the Letter of Forgiveness, Ibn Al-Sayrafi deploys a conspicuously direct instance of intertextuality, articulated in the following excerpt:

And for kings, the purpose of this letter is service, whose elevation to the exalted Maliki assemblies served to immortalize God's authority and establish its pillars, namely: "And Job, when he cried out to his: 'Great harm has afflicted me, and you are the Most Merciful of the merciful'. So We

answered him, lifted his suffering"[24, 29].

While this intertextual reference is overt, its interpretive significance transcends the surface meaning, imbuing the text with a rich and multifaceted depth. Ibn Al-Sayrafi engages in a hyperbolic rhetorical maneuver by aligning his own experience with that of the Prophet Jacob (Yaʿqub, peace be upon him), who, in the face of adversity, sought divine intervention. This association is further deepened through the invocation of the Prophet Ayub's (Job's) name, a term laden with connotations of return and contrition. In effect, Ibn Al-Sayrafi appears to be advocating for a reversion to his pre-incarceration state under the patronage of Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali, a return marked by profound remorse and penitence for any perceived ingratitude toward the divine bounty.

Moreover, the deliberate use of the term "cried out" operates on dual levels, connoting both the act of reporting and that of lamenting. This duality mirrors the writer's condition during his imprisonment, a state characterized by profound vulnerability and the cumulative impact of psychological, physical, and material afflictions, which inevitably compels one to cry out for assistance. In echoing the lament of the Prophet Jacob, who appealed directly to God, the sovereign arbiter of relief, the passage delineates a critical divergence: whereas Jacob's supplication was addressed solely to the Divine, Ibn Al-Sayrafi's entreaty is directed toward Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali, imploring him to extend mercy and pardon, albeit accompanied by lavish praise and an overtly hyperbolic encomium.

Thus, the intertextuality here is not merely ornamental but functions as a deliberate rhetorical stratagem grounded in contrast. Jacob's ordeal is portrayed as a divinely ordained test of faith, whereas Ibn Al-Sayrafi's own tribulations—and the subsequent transformation of his fortunes—are interpreted as the consequence of a fractured relationship with Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali. This rupture, in turn, precipitated a profound reversal in the trajectory of his life, underscoring the multifaceted interplay between divine ordination and human agency in the realms of suffering and redemption.

In his rhetorical practice, Ibn al-Ṣayrfī foregrounds the strategy of establishing parallels or correspondences to invoke direct religious intertexts. By introducing each citation with a phrase that underscores this parallelism, potentially venturing beyond conventional religious boundaries, he crafts a nuanced framework for comparing earthly figures to sacred archetypes. A salient illustration of this technique appears at the conclusion of his "The Letters of Pardon," where he states:

Hence, he confesses before his Lord and Master in the same manner as the first creature confessed before his Creator and Originator, saying: They said, Our Lord, we have done wrong to ourselves. Unless You forgive us, and have mercy on us, we will be among the losers' [24, 30]

By employing the key phrase "in the same manner", Ibn Al-Ṣayrfi effectively positions Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali in a divine role, while casting himself as Adam and Eve, who disobeyed the divine command and were consequently expelled from Paradise—though ultimately redeemed when they admitted their transgression. In so doing, the author simultaneously acknowledges the gravity of his own misdeed and seeks absolution from his patron, thereby invoking a sacred precedent for penitence and forgiveness.

On occasion, Ibn Al-Sayrafi deftly integrates both allusion and direct quotation in a single passage to construct a layered form of religious intertextuality. He seamlessly weaves Qur'anic phrasing into his own prose, making it appear as an intrinsic element of his text, and subsequently reinforces this with explicit citations from the Qur'an. A noteworthy instance surfaces in the "The Letter of Ramadan's Supplications" where he extols the sanctity of Ramadan. He writes:

You have ennobled it with what You revealed in its mention and description, for You declared in Your Book, beyond the reach of falsehood from before or behind, 'Ramadan is the month in which the Quran was revealed. Guidance for humanity, and clear proofs of guidance, and the Criterion' [24, 31].

By first embedding the phrase "falsehood cannot approach it from before it or behind it," the author alludes to the Qur'anic verse, "Falsehood cannot approach it, from before it or behind it. It is a revelation from One Wise and Praiseworthy"[32]. He then follows this indirect reference with a direct, quoted intertext. Although overt citation can be stylistically less subtle, the author strategically employs it to evoke a heightened sense of religious devotion, particularly significant given the letter's composition in observance of the sacred month of Ramadan.

Furthermore, another refined technique of direct intertextuality occurs when an author subtly weaves a Qur'anic excerpt into his prose without explicit markers, such as "God, the Exalted, says", thereby underscoring his stylistic elegance, linguistic finesse, and cohesive textual construction. One illustrative example appears in a letter by Ibn Al-Ṣayrfi, embedded within his treatise "Aqaʾil aA-Faḍaʾil", written as a counter to an epistle by Muḥammad Al-Qayrawānī and addressing inquiries about the widespread drought that afflicted Egypt. In this missive, he remarks, "So contemplate the gracious favors, how they precede all needs without the slightest fear of being missed; and observe the effect of God's mercy, how He revives the earth after its death [24]. The latter phrase directly cites the Qur'anic verse, 'So observe the effects of Allah's mercy—how He revives the earth after it was dead' [33]. Notably, Ibn Al-Ṣayrfi's rhetorical skill shines through in the seamless integration of this sacred text, making it seem organically suited to its context. Furthermore, the artful parallelism between "So contemplate the gracious favors" and the Qur'anic admonition to "observe the effects of Allah's mercy" [24] draws a connection between the acts of contemplation and observation, while likening divine favors to mercy. This elegant alignment amplifies the spiritual and aesthetic resonance of his writing.

Building on the preceding discussion of direct religious intertextuality, it is evident that this technique powerfully illustrates the author's rhetorical virtuosity, seamlessly melding sacred citations with his own prose to heighten both the force and cohesiveness of his message. Far from being a mere ornamental device, such an intertextual strategy not only elevates the stylistic caliber of the composition but also cultivates a deeper emotional rapport with readers. Having established the significance of direct intertextual references, the subsequent section turns to the realm of indirect religious intertextuality, a more subtle mode of allusion that, despite its subtlety, remains pivotal for enriching the work's interpretive complexity and layered significance.

5.2. Indirect Religious Intertextuality

Indirect religious intertextuality constitutes a significant aspect of Ibn Al-Sayrafi's work. His letters, particularly those focused on virtues, are rich in religious references from the Quran, Prophetic Hadiths, and the biographies of the caliphs. This is done to reinforce a set of ideas and values, such as forgiveness, justice, wisdom, and honor. Additionally, there are references to general Fatimid discourse and doctrine, as Fatimid writers, including Ibn Al-Sayrafi, aimed to disseminate Fatimid ideas and advocate for their Ismaili creed in various letters. For example, in praising Ali ibn Abi Talib, he states:

May Allah bless our master Muhammad, His Prophet, who honored him with the noble Quran [...] and bless his brother and cousin, the Commander of the Faithful, Ali ibn Abi Talib. From the outset, Ali responded to the call of faith with earnest resolve, pardoned those who opposed him even at moments of indisputable power, and, motivated by his innate benevolence, refrained from harming the wounded. May these blessings also encompass their immaculate household, sanctified of every impurity, in a continuous flow that endures through every morning and evening into perpetuity [24].

At the commencement of "The Forgiveness Letters", the author integrates nuanced religious allusions that encapsulate Fatimid doctrinal principles, consistently accentuated throughout their correspondence. A salient example is the exposition of the Imamic succession emanating from Ali Ibn Abi Talib within the lineage established subsequent to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. The author subtly invokes this paradigm through the reference to 'prayers' (salawat), a term that not only pertains to Prophet Muhammad but also implicitly encompasses Ali Ibn Abi Talib and the succeeding Imams. This rhetorical maneuver underscores the Fatimid conviction in the hereditary Imamate lineage, thereby reinforcing the intrinsic connection between their Imams and the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

To further entrench this theological assertion, the writer cites the Qur'anic verse: "And remember your Lord within yourself, humbly and fearfully, and quietly, in the morning and the evening, and do not be of the neglectful" [34], thereby establishing a layer of indirect intertextuality. This citation serves to affirm the Fatimid belief that the Imamate, following Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, perpetuates through the Fatimid Imamic lineage until the eschatological event wherein Allah inherits the earth and its inhabitants. As articulated by the author, the Fatimid Imams are posited as the legitimate inheritors of the Messenger, peace be upon him, and are consequently deemed the most deserving of leadership within

the Muslim ummah. This sophisticated interplay of scriptural reference and doctrinal assertion meticulously affirms the Fatimid assertion of their rightful spiritual and temporal authority.

Additionally, the writer employs subtle indirect allusions, utilizing expressions such as "my brother" to encapsulate the principle of fraternity intrinsic to their doctrinal framework. This particular allusion harkens back to the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) pronouncement of brotherhood with Ali ibn Abi Talib:

By the One who sent me with the truth, I did not delay you except for myself. You hold the same position with me as Aaron held with Moses, except that there will be no prophet after me. You are my brother, my minister, and my successor[35].

Through this citation, Ibn Al-Sayrafi marshals evidentiary support for Ali ibn Abi Talib's legitimate succession to the leadership of the Muslim community. This strategic invocation underscores the theological and spiritual legitimacy of Ali's Imamate within the Fatimid tradition.

Subsequently, Ibn Al-Sayrafi navigates through additional indicative allusions by referencing biographical accounts that delineate Ali's exemplary virtues across three distinct instances. The initial indicative allusion is encapsulated in the assertion: "Ali responded to the call of faith with earnest resolve", which signifies Ali's proactive engagement and swift commitment to the nascent faith. This highlights Ali's prompt acceptance of Prophet Muhammad's call, being the first among the youth to embrace Islam without equivocation or deliberation[36, 37].

The discourse progresses to a second indicative allusion embodying the ethos of forgiveness and the renunciation of personal triumph:

[He] pardoned those who opposed him even at moments of indisputable power This allusion references a pivotal episode during the Battle of Uhud, wherein Ali pardoned a defeated polytheist adversary despite possessing the capacity for retribution, thereby exemplifying magnanimity and restraint[36].

The third indicative allusion pertains to the manifestation of mercy and the mitigation of harm inflicted upon one's own constituents: "motivated by his innate benevolence, refrained from harming the wounded". This statement alludes to Ali's conduct in the aftermath of the Battle of Nahrawan against the Kharijites, where he directed his soldiers to refrain from pursuing or harming the vanquished and their wounded[35], thereby demonstrating profound mercy and compassion.

Through these subtle allusions, Ibn Al-Sayrafi endeavors to elucidate and exalt the virtues of forgiveness and mercy, thus accentuating Ali's distinguished character and his exemplary status as a model leader within the Fatimid ideological paradigm.

Within the spectrum of indirect indicative allusions, the theme of forgiveness emerges prominently, as Ibn Al-Sayrafi advocates for voluntary acts of worship and charity surpassing the merit of voluntary prayers. He articulates:

For this reason, the Lord has honored the acts of charity and prayers, and He has preferred the one who gives charity over the one who performs prayers. This is because the one who prays does not exceed the reward of what he has done, while the one who gives charity has benefited others, and he has undoubtedly benefited as well[24].

This assertion is skillfully buttressed by an indirect allusion to the Prophet's esteemed declaration:

The most beloved of people to God are those who are most beneficial to people, and the most beloved deeds to God, the Almighty, are those that bring joy to a Muslim's heart, or relieve him of distress, or settle his debt, or ward off his hunger[37].

Through this intertextual layering, Ibn al-Ṣayrafi not only substantiates his rational argument with the weight of transmitted religious texts but also vividly conveys the psychological turmoil of his incarceration—marked by hardship, isolation, and loss—while still clinging to the hope of imminent relief. In a parallel discourse, he posits that "one who pardons is preferred over one who gives charity; it is an obligatory duty and favoring him is a determined matter and a sticky right"[24]. Here, his language is resolute, employing unequivocal expressions to secure the listener's attention and support, particularly that of his patron, Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali

Furthermore, by interweaving a well-timed intertextual reference within his meticulously crafted rhymed prose, specifically, the evocative phrase "sticky right", which recalls the Qur'anic verse "We created them from sticky clay"[38]. Ibn Al-Ṣayrafi constructs a compelling analogy. This analogy is intended to dispel any residual doubts about his argument,

cementing the notion that forgiveness not only precedes charity in value but also serves as a more potent safeguard against harm. In this manner, his argument attains the same undeniable certainty as the established fact of humanity's creation from sticky clay, thereby reinforcing both the ethical and practical imperatives of forgiveness within his ideological framework.

Additionally, Ibn Al-Ṣayrafi strategically employs indirect religious intertextuality to convey to, Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali the importance of contrition and acknowledgment of error. This approach surfaces in his self-reflective remark:

We do not know of any wrongdoing on his part that would amount to spurning your benevolence and kindness, nor any departure from sincerity and servitude to God the Exalted. Rather, he believes that no servant suffers misfortune unless it arises from a past transgression that remains recorded—though forgotten by the offender[19].

Initially, the writer professes puzzlement at the hardship he faces, being unaware of any specific misdeed severe enough to warrant his imprisonment. He also denies ever rejecting the favor or generosity of Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali, thereby invoking the Quranic principle, "And when your Lord proclaimed: 'If you give thanks, I will grant you increase; but if you are ungrateful My punishment is severe'"[39].Yet, he does not dwell on protesting his plight. Instead, he refocuses on imploring, Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali's mercy, repeatedly calling himself "the servant," fully recognizing that voicing indignation will not expedite the pardon he seeks. Emphasizing that the adversity he endures must stem from his own failings, he cites God's words, "and whatever bad happens to you is from your own self"[40].

The author then exalts Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali's stature to such an extent that any lapse against him is construed as a grave offense, following the pattern of a humbled petitioner who magnifies his failings. Suggesting that Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali may have noted transgressions too subtle to register in the writer's own mind, Ibn Al-Ṣayrafi alludes to the verse, "Allah has kept count of it, but they have forgotten it"[41]. It is noted that the references to the first two verses represent a form of "absorptive intertextuality," seamlessly blending scriptural concepts into the narrative. By contrast, the third verse shifts the attribution of "recording" from the divine realm to Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali, thus demonstrating how Ibn Al-Ṣayrafi deftly redeploys Quranic language to amplify his plea. Through this layered intertextuality, he imbues his appeal with theological resonance while underscoring the centrality of remorse and humility in securing clemency.

In his concluding remarks from the so-called "Pardon Letter", the author offers a pointed illustration of intertextuality that intertwines personal lament with a plea for clemency. He observes that "the servant has ended his letter by renewing his complaint about his plight and requesting universal mercy for those in similar circumstances; indeed, by God, his affliction has become severe and increased, and he has nearly reached the brink of ruin"[24].By aligning his appeal with the Quranic verse, "Whenever adversity touches the human being, he prays to Us"[42], Ibn Al-Sayrafi implicitly positions Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali as a channel of divine compassion, hoping thereby to secure deliverance from his dire situation.

In his encomium, the author esteems Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali above other monarchs, emphasizing his commitment to justice and his unique capacity to reconcile hostile parties. Such praise is reinforced through multiple subtle intertextual allusions drawn from the Quran and the Prophetic hadith. Notably, the letter "On Restoring Rights" recounts that "various nations gathered in his courtyard, and the kings of both Arabs and non-Arabs came before him, migrating to his threshold with eager anticipation, taking refuge beneath his protection, and severing all other ties." Two kings—those of Ghana and Farghana—are cited as illustrative examples, having arrived from geographically and linguistically distant realms. Yet through al-Afdal's discernment, each was freed from grudges harbored over time, leading the author to invoke, "So reflect, O people of insight," highlighting al-Afdal's extraordinary power and exalted status as a divine gift for which he offers continuous thanks[24].

One dimension of al-Afdal's eminence lies in how feuding kings from disparate cultures and regions instinctively turn to him for arbitration. The phrase "And they migrated toward his gate with hopeful hearts, their necks outstretched" evokes the Quranic depiction of those who "Their necks outstretched, their heads upraised"[43], thereby underscoring both the urgency and the confidence with which disputants seek his wisdom. In a further intertextual layer, the assertion that "They sought his shade, taking refuge and severing all

else"[24], alludes to the Prophetic hadith on those who will be shaded by God on a day when no other shade exists, one of whom is the just ruler. This narrative device accentuates Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali's reputation for justice and underscores his distinction among both Arab and non-Arab sovereigns. Indeed, his wisdom proves decisive in reconciling two erstwhile hostile monarchs, one ruling over Ghana in Africa and the other over Farghana in Central Asia, despite their striking differences in location, culture, and language.

Such peacemaking gestures, the text implies, manifest an unspoken form of divine grace that animates al-Afdal's capacity to bridge seemingly insurmountable rifts. By referencing the command 'Therefore, take a lesson, O you who have insight'[44], the writer succinctly ties this lofty moral achievement to sacred precedent. Simultaneously, he hints that his own predicament—one so dire that it led to imprisonment—may soon meet the same redemptive outcome. The virtue, sagacity, and fairness that enabled al-Afdal to transform the fortunes of the kings of Ghana and Farghana might likewise secure the writer's release. In this way, the encomium transcends mere praise, operating as a deftly woven personal appeal and an affirmation of hope for deliverance.

In his epistolary writings, Ibn Al-Sayrafi deliberately employs subtle intertextual references to articulate and reinforce the themes central to his discourse. A revealing example occurs in "On Restoring Rights", where he extols the distinctive capacity of the Andalusian poet Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn 'Ammar—who occupied two vizierial posts—to evoke sympathy from monarchs. He characterizes Ibn 'Ammar as "among the renowned luminaries, outstanding in addressing kings and adept at entreating them for mercy, a sun impervious to decline"[24]. This concise yet evocative formulation underscores Ibn 'Ammar's literary prominence and his special talent for petitioning. By alluding to the Qur'anic command, "Perform the prayer at the decline of the sun"[45], Ibn Al-Sayrafi imbues his praise with a potent intertextual element. Through this artful reference, he aligns Ibn 'Ammar with the venerable precedent of entreaty and apology, drawing upon the poet's enduring success in supplicating al-Mu'tamid ibn 'Abbad, the King of Seville. He thereby conjures an image of a poet so masterful in his pleas that he could, metaphorically, command the sun's reappearance were he to implore it.

Ibn Al-Sayrafi further illustrates his thesis in another section of "On Restoring Rights", where he explores the literary constructs and similes perfected by poets. In comparing the Andalusian Abu Bakr ibn 'Ammar with 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Khafaji, he cites two lines in which Ibn 'Ammar describes a town he has conquered and set ablaze. The writer deems these lines, "I widowed it by the sword and dressed it in mourning by fire", among the most refined rhetorical compositions and inventive similes, comparing them to a similar passage by 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad, despite the two poets' inhabiting roughly the same era yet living in distant regions, "one on the nearer bank, the other on the further bank"[24]. By highlighting their geographic separation, Ibn Al-Sayrafi refutes any notion of plagiarism, asserting that such striking parallels in language and imagery must originate from shared creative insight rather than direct borrowing. To underscore the remoteness between the two poets, he cites the Qur'anic verse, "Recall when you were on the nearer bank, and they were on the further bank"[46], thus adopting a scriptural precedent of spatial distance to emphasize the improbability of direct influence. Just as the believers in Medina and the idolaters at the far reaches of Mecca converged on the battlefield of Badr despite being separated by considerable distance, so too did these poets converge in their creative expressions, forging a striking affinity in style and metaphor that transcends mere imitation. The parallel thus dispels any suggestion that one poet simply appropriated the other's work, leaving readers instead with a vivid illustration of how profound creativity can blossom independently across disparate realms.

In certain instances, the author engages in an overtly expansive use of indirect religious intertextuality, at times pushing the boundaries of orthodox decorum. A notable illustration appears in a letter known as "Lamḥ Al-Milaḥ", wherein he extols the service of Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali with an enthusiasm that verges on religious hyperbole:

Since service to his exalted station constitutes a form of worship and an avenue of obedience, devoting oneself to it is akin to fulfilling the compulsory pilgrimage incumbent upon those with the capacity and means; consequently, every subject must undertake it in accordance with his ability, committing himself with heart, hand, and tongue[24].

From the tone of this excerpt, it appears that the writer has all but relinquished hope in divine mercy, channeling his desperation into an excessive veneration of al-Afdal al-

Jamali. He effectively elevates proximity to the ruler to the level of a devotional act ordinarily reserved for worship of the Divine. Further intensifying this exaltation, the author draws a pointed analogy between service to Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali and the obligatory Hajj: just as physical and financial capacity forms the prerequisite for the pilgrimage, so does it determine one's readiness to serve, Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali. He grounds this analogy in an implicit Qur'anic intertext, referencing the verse, "Pilgrimage to the House is a duty to Allah for all who can make the journey"[47].

His rhetoric does not end there. He contends that rendering service to Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali is as essential a duty as the enjoinment of good and the forbiddance of evil—a position he justifies by evoking the well-known Prophetic tradition: "Whoever among you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; if he is unable, then with his tongue; if he is still unable, then with his heart, and that is the weakest of faith"[48]. In the writer's formulation, the moral fiber and collective welfare of the community hinge upon allegiance to this Fatimid ruler no less than upon the imperative to eradicate wrongdoing. Such framing not only underscores the central place of al-Afdal ibn Badr al-Jamali but also demonstrates the degree to which the author resorts to hyperbole—a stylistic approach frequently observed among Fatimid-era authors. This text thus exemplifies a conspicuous rhetorical pattern wherein political loyalty and spiritual devotion become inextricably, and, to some readers, controversially, intertwined.

Ibn Al-Ṣayrafi's mastery of indirect intertextuality surfaces most prominently in his epistolary exchanges, particularly where he offers literary compositions in response to, or in rivalry with, the writings of his contemporaries. Through these endeavors, he aims to exhibit his literary prowess, eclipse his peers, and reaffirm both his aesthetic distinction and his erstwhile stature. A notable example unfolds in an epistle he presents within a letter to "Maḥal A"l-Milḥ", in which he counters a text by Muḥammad ibn Sharaf al-Qayrawani. Here, he recounts the story of a pilgrim beset by intense heat while traveling. Seeking relief, the pilgrim descends into a well to drink, only to have it struck by lightning; miraculously, he survives. Later, however, a hailstorm befalls him, and a single, fatal hailstone ends his life.

In rendering the scorching heat, Ibn Al-Ṣayrafi likens the day to a veritable inferno bereft of shade or breeze, suggesting the flames of Hell itself: "He encountered a day of blazing heat and searing fire, such that he lost any cool shade and comfortable rest, as though he had borrowed the very flames and scorching winds of Hell"[24]. The writer describes the heat of the day as something nearly infernal, devoid of shade or fresh air, as though it were a taste of Hell's torment. This description resonates with the Qur'anic verse portraying the agony of the damned, 'The Fire lashes their faces, and therein they grimace'[49], thereby creating a subtle yet potent intertextual reference. As the pilgrim hastens to quench his thirst, Ibn Al-Ṣayrafi portrays a thunderbolt narrowly sparing the man, an image that alludes to the Qur'anic notion of Divine mercy versus destruction: 'Or He could wreck them, because of what they have earned. And yet He pardons much'[50]. The pilgrim's salvation thus parallels the experience of sailors whose ships are sustained on tumultuous seas purely through God's benevolence. Emboldened by his survival, the pilgrim grows overconfident and disregards the quiet mercy of his Lord. Ibn Al-Ṣayrafi dramatizes the abrupt reversal of fortunes with the gathering of a cloud that veils the day, banishing its suffocating heat. In a thunderous moment, hailstones descend from the heavens, culminating in the pilgrim's demise. The phrase "erasing … that scorching heat and its traces" echoes the Qur'anic declaration: 'We have made the night and the day two wonders. We erased the wonder of the night, and made the wonder of the day revealing, that you may seek bounty from your Lord'[51], signifying a total inversion of circumstances decreed by God. What was once a searing, sun-scorched environment becomes a hailstorm that delivers sudden death. This dramatic shift underscores the precariousness of human certitude in the face of Divine will: the very events that spared the pilgrim initially now hasten his end, illustrating that mortal plans falter before the sweeping omnipotence of destiny.

In weaving these intertextual threads throughout his narrative, Ibn Al-Ṣayrafi elevates a seemingly simple tale of travel misfortunes to a profound reflection on the interplay between human presumption and divine ordinance. His skillful allusions to Qur'anic imagery heighten the dramatic tension and underscore the moral lesson that safety and ruin lie ultimately in God's hands, a potent reminder that what appears assured may, in a single turn of fate, be irrevocably undone.

In his epistles, Ibn Al-Ṣayrafi frequently underscores

the principle that a writer is obliged to devote his fullest intellectual energies and rhetorical skill to cultivating eloquent, refined prose, particularly in the service of Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali. In "Mana'iḥ Al-Qara'iḥ", he elucidates how those endowed with clear thought and sound innate disposition must harness their cognitive faculties to uncover subtle meanings and highlight their worth through "the flashing brilliance" of excellence. By discerning the locus of virtue in their compositions and recognizing the role of such works as a means (Al-wasila) to attaining exalted ranks, authors reveal their latent strengths and place the product of their reflection at the disposal of the higher assembly, offering what captivates the ear and delights the mind.

Ibn Al-Ṣayrafi further insists that writers with unblemished pens must craft their words so as to enthrall, Al-Afdhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali. To reinforce this directive, he deploys indirect intertextuality, citing phrases such as the means (Al-wasila) and virtue (Al-faḍila)" and "a noble station," which closely echo the Prophetic invocation calling upon God to confer upon Muḥammad (peace be upon him) "the means (Al-wasila) and virtue (Al-faḍila)" and raise him to "the praiseworthy station" promised him. By alluding to this ḥadith, Ibn Al-Ṣayrafi invokes the Prophet's own desire to be granted the means (wasila) and virtue (faḍila) by God—an aspiration the Prophet commended his followers to reaffirm whenever they heard the call to prayer:

Whoever says upon hearing the call to prayer: 'O God, Lord of this perfect call and the prayer that is to be established, grant Muḥammad the means (al-wasila) and virtue (al-faḍila), and resurrect him to the praiseworthy station (al-maqam al-maḥmud) You have promised him,' my intercession will be assured for him on the Day of Resurrection[52].

Drawing upon this familiar ritual utterance, Ibn Al-Ṣayrafi subtly encourages Al-Afḍhal ibn Badr Al-Jamali to view himself in parallel to the Prophet's station: as the Prophet's intercession is secured for those who beseech God to bestow upon him Al-wasila, so might Al-Afḍal ibn Badr al-Jamali extend his own "intercession" or favor to those who devote themselves to producing the choicest and most resonant discourse. By fashioning this analogy, Ibn al-Ṣayrafi not only highlights the honor of serving so distinguished a patron but also implies that the bestowal of approval or patronage requires the writer's diligent pursuit of virtuous, carefully selected language. This reciprocal framework—elevated patronage in exchange for supreme eloquence—encapsulates the essence of Ibn Al-Ṣayrafi's message: that literary excellence, buttressed by purity of thought and lucidity of style, is a critical means of achieving favor and recognition within the refined circles of his day.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, Ibn Al-Sayrafi's Al-Afdhaliyyat stands as a masterful fusion of literary finesse and theological depth. By weaving an intricate tapestry of explicit quotations and subtle allusions drawn from religious sources, he displayed his formidable erudition while simultaneously serving multiple purposes. These intertextual references lent the text aesthetic distinction, influencing its tonal and rhythmic quality, and aided in shaping the moral and emotional undertones of his letters. They also anchored Ibn Al-Sayrafi's doctrinal allegiances and underscored the virtues of compassion, justice, and clemency in the consciousness of his patron. Through this deft orchestration of scriptural resonances, he secured not only an elevated level of stylistic elegance but also persuasive leverage in his plea for pardon.

Building on these insights, further research might illuminate how Ibn Al-Sayrafi's intertextual strategies align with the broader literary conventions of his day or how other authors in similar Islamic contexts employed analogous methods. Close attention to the manuscript tradition, including scribal notations and marginalia, could shed additional light on how his readers received and interpreted his scriptural echoes. Equally important is an interdisciplinary investigation—one that integrates literary analysis, historical sociology, and theological inquiry—to trace the development of religious discourse and the interplay between authorship, patronage, and authority in Fatimid-era prose. Finally, understanding the subsequent reception and influence of Al-Afdhaliyyat would reveal how later writers and intellectuals absorbed, adapted, or critiqued Ibn Al-Sayrafi's literary and doctrinal strategies, offering a fuller picture of his enduring legacy in the broader tradition of Islamic prose. It is also recommended that similar studies be conducted on other medieval Arabic texts to uncover the broader patterns of intertextuality, authorial intent, and reception across different regions and periods, thereby enriching our understanding of the dynamics of classical Arabic literary culture.

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Information about data used in the study is available.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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