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THE MEANING OF THE *MIḤRĀB*
– From the Perspective of Perennial Philosophy –

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Abstract

This paper presents research findings on the meaning of the *miḥrāb* from the metaphysical, cosmological, anthropological and psychological perspectives of the Muslim intellectual heritage. The aim is to broaden the scholarly approach to the *miḥrāb* as a key symbol of the Muslim heritage and thereby to facilitate a more holistic understanding of its meaning in the history of the world's art and architecture. This paper applies the findings of new research, the articulation of key questions concerning the *miḥrāb* in history, architecture and art, and philological and theological considerations of its place in Muslim heritage. These conclusions are then examined in light of the perennial philosophy typical of modern studies of traditional intellectuality, both specifically Muslim and in general. The structure of the study is hierarchical, from general anthropo-theological premises to specific kinds of symbolic forms. *Miḥrāb*s from the Bosnian tradition are considered as the initial pragmatic material and the final illustrative material for the conclusions drawn.

Key Words: Perennial philosophy, Muslim tradition, sacred art, mosque, *miḥrāb*

Foreword

The *miḥrāb* is the key symbol of Muslim material culture. Although primarily the heart of the mosque, it is present, visibly or im-

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plicitly, in every public and private space where Muslims do or can live. Its material articulation may take an almost infinite number of different forms, from very simple to extremely complex architectural and artistic structures and from the vaguest of hints to identifiable natural forms. The range of forms taken by the *miḥrāb* as a feature of Muslim culture has in the past generally been studied, analyzed and presented in terms of the history of architecture and art.

In studies of this broad phenomenological spectrum of *miḥrāb* forms, it is not uncommon to disregard the distinctive features that it has assimilated as a perennial component of Muslim culture, at various times and places, in clusters of similar but mutually contradictory cultural components. This situation has given rise to a paradox: the place and purpose of the *miḥrāb* is always the same, but extremely diverse architectural and artistic forms have been bestowed upon it. Thus, there is no clear answer to the question of how that single, unambiguous role, on the one hand, and the variety of forms, on the other, can fit into a unified cognitive or intellectual context.

The *miḥrāb* is the central feature of Muslim culture, in which we are perpetually striving towards a common center; that is to say, towards perfect humanity as each individual's principle and potential. Therefore, one may rightly ask what the *miḥrāb* means from the perspective of traditional Muslim teachings in their metaphysical, cosmological, anthropological and psychological expressions.

In the traditional Muslim doctrine, our entire debt to God (*dīn al-lāh*) is presented as being-in-Peace (*islām*), faith (*īmān*), doing-what-is-good (*iḥsān*) and the Hour (*sāʿa*). These three terms, *islām*, *īmān* and *iḥsān*, constitute our relationship with God; through them, we receive God's revelation of Himself through three of His names or attributes – the All-peaceful (*al-Salām*), the All-faithful (*al-Muʾmin*) and the possessor of the most beautiful names (*wa-li-llāhi l-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*), and they actualize themselves in the original, all-encompassing nature of our inner selves. In this relationship, God is the original giver (and, hence, creditor), while the world and we are recipients, and thus His debtors.

Because the world has no free will, it receives everything as a debt from God that constitutes its perfect nature, manifested as absolute submission or being completely at Peace. This being-in-peace is concentrated in human nature, but with the admixture of free will as a

condition of the possibility that God's free will may be manifested in the human self. Our relationship with God is thus one of faithful and All-faithful, of the realizer of the most beautiful names and He Who is their original and absolute possessor.

If we are to realize our original nature, the pledge we have received of the knowledge of all names and of fidelity, and thus find ourselves in perfection as our reason and purpose, then we are expected, by following the finest example prescribed for us, to ascend to the height of our original sublimity. This is designated by the *miḥrāb*, which symbolically links the visible world with its invisible principle, body with spirit, quantity with quality, multiplicity with the one.

As a result, the *miḥrāb* is the symbolic point of convergence of the diversity of existence and the synthesis of all our rational possibilities. It has been conceived, delineated and built for one person, which is to say for each of us in the plenitude of all our potential, for it is indivisible from the whole that is made up of all individuals. In other words, the *miḥrāb* represents the individual in the collectivity and the collectivity in the individual; synchrony in diachrony and diachrony in synchrony; transcendence in immanence and immanence in transcendence.

In the modern age, symbolic forms of traditional culture have been forcibly introduced into ideological teleology and thereby wrenched from their traditional ontology. Their different forms at various times and in different places, in diverse cultural and **civilizational** circumstances, become incomprehensible and are thus subjected to ideological deconstruction and destruction by the militant advocates of a fundamentalist attitude to traditional intellectuality. We lack a clearly articulated language to counter this, the clear meaning and unambiguous symbols of the *miḥrāb* as cohesive components of the Muslim intellectual tradition. This paper seeks to remedy this lack.

1. Anthropo-theological Premises

When we say "I am," we testify that we are alive, possessed of will and power, knowing, speaking, hearing and seeing, all in a finite manner; for at the same time, we are inevitably faced with being dead, without will, powerless, unknowing, unspeaking, unhearing and unseeing. Our being is received and, hence, contingent.

We sense in the depths of our saying "I am" that we derive from the absolute "**I Am**." The absolute is what bestows whatsoever includes the expression "I am." We are constantly on the boundary across which the absolute "**I Am**" manifests itself to us in the expression "I am." Our yearning to escape from contingency and finitude entails the testimony that there is no "I am" but "**I Am**." The former is the image or manifestation of the latter.

That latter **"I Am"** is absolute, and we are thus in a relationship with Him through life, will, power, knowledge, speech, listening and seeing. Nowhere and at no time can we attain plenitude by saying, "I am." The distinction between our "I" and the "**I**" of the Other is what separates us from the plenitude that is our greatest wish. Only plenitude can save us from the limitations of life, will, power, knowledge, speech, listening and seeing.

For this reason, we are constantly at war with limitations. Our goal is to cross the boundary that keeps us within the confines of contingency, and being in space and time is a struggle against contingency that cannot be won as long as the "I" and "**I**" are separated. The absolute "**I**" is Peace, Knowing, Loving and Beautiful, but in the contingent "I," these attributes of the absolute "**I**" are manifested without limitation. The absolute "**I**" is present in the principle of all time and space, but it can never be wholly encompassed by them.

Because the "**I**" manifests itself by Its own will in the world of contingency, It too needs to connect with the contingent "I." This is the relationship between the differentiated "**I**" and Itself. It descends into the contingent world so that the world may ascend to It. The ascent of the world from its uttermost contingency is the knowledge of the "**I**" as Peace, as the Known, the Beloved and the Beautiful. The relationship between "I" and "**I**" is love, or the yearning for absolute union.

Those who are perfectly in love with the Beloved see Him in all things, for the totality of the contingent world manifests Him as the All-Praised. The entire world proclaims the Praised (the literal meaning of the name Muḥammad), so that the perfect messenger is the recipient of that praise and which he then directs back towards God. As such, he is Praised and Praiser. The revelation, "God and His angels bless the Prophet. O believers, do you also bless him, and pray

him peace"[1] tells us that he is constantly in a place of war, in which, as a warrior, he strives to pass through the contingent world and the contingent self to the absolute.

The connection made when we bless him can always be severed. This connection is being-in-peace, knowledge and love and manifests in the relationship between the "I am" and the "**I Am.**" All too often, the connection is proffered in their place, however, and the illusion develops that life, will, power, knowledge, speech, listening and seeing are not merely contingent or received. Acceptance of the tenet that there is no "I am" but the "**I Am**" requires that every state of "I am" and all things in existence be understood as opportunities of self-abnegation in favor of union with the "**I Am.**" The totality of existence is thus a place of nullity, and the **I** is the annihilator of every illusion and all contingency. Thus, being in the nullity of the world forms part of a great war for redemption and return to the Abode of Peace.

The Praised is the finest example of being on the battlefield of existence. However close we may draw to the boundary beyond which is a higher level of our inner self, the Praised precedes us as our guide, as the well-known prayer suggests: "Call down blessing on him with that *ṣalāt* with which Thou didst call down blessing on him in the *miḥrāb* of Thy transcendent holiness and the Ipseity of Thine intimacy."[2]

Whatever our state, we are in the depths or the shadows. Ascending towards the heights or the light is contingent on our relationship with God. We carry trust within us, at the center of our inner self, as the treasury of all we need to realize that connection. To ascend is to overcome all obstacles; it is war with whatever stands in our way, both on the outer horizons and within ourselves. Our goal is Peace, but Peace manifests Itself to us in the shadows of existence.

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1 Q 33:56.

2 Arabic original see in Abū l-ʿAbbās Sayyid Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Tijānī, *al-Ṣalāt al-ghaybiyya fī l-ḥaqīqat al-Aḥmadiyya* (Marakesh: al-Zāwiyat al-Kubrā li-Sayyidī Muḥammad al-Kabīr al-Tijānī, 2009); our quotation of English translation is in Constance E. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions: A Study of Prayer-Manuals in Common Use* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1996), 157.

The position of those who discover in their hearts the pledge of fidelity as the land of faith[3] and the possibility of turning to God is described in the revelation of these words: "O believers, remember God oft, and give Him glory at the dawn and in the evening. It is He who blesses you, and His angels, to bring you forth from the shadows into the light. He is Ever-merciful to the believers. Their greeting, on the day when they shall meet Him, will be 'Peace!' And He has prepared for them a generous wage."[4]

In these verses, God is addressing the believers, which in principle means everyone. The pledge of trust or belief in God was offered to us, and we accepted it. It is as the All-faithful that He addresses us as the faithful, in our original attunement, calling upon us to remember and glorify Him in the twilight of dawn, in which light will triumph, and of dusk, when it will vanish into the night. This alternation between darkness and light, light and darkness, is a reminder of the One Who is made manifest by duality. We are oriented towards the One from the world of duality, as a place of war in which we are encouraged and guided by Peace. Becoming aware of being in the *miḥrāb* of the world is the condition of our connection with Peace as the original reality of the world and of our inner self.

To pray behind the Praised is to become part of the universal praise through which the people of this world are united with the principle of the next world. The totality of existence thus reveals itself as praise of God Who reveals Himself to Himself. The center of this revelation is the Messenger as the perfect image of the All-Praised. Al-Suyūṭī says of this:

> God Most High informed his worshippers of the rank which His Prophet holds with Him in the **heavenly host**, by praising Him in the presence of the **angels** of access, and by the *ṣalāt* of those angels for Him. Then he commanded *ṣalāt* and a greeting of peace from the people of the world below, so that the people of **both worlds**, above and below, might unite in His **praise.**[5]

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[3] See Q 95:3.

[4] Q 33:41-44.

[5] Arabic original see in Abū l-Faḍl Jalāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥirz al-manīʿ min al-qawl al-badīʿ fī l-ṣalāt ʿalā l-Ḥabīb al-shafīʿ* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿat al-ʿĀmira al-Sharqiyya, 1323 H.), 12; our quotation of English translation is in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 156.

God encompasses all things with His knowledge and mercy, which means both the lowest and the highest. Nothing can sink so far into the depths or the darkness as to be beyond His knowledge and mercy. Prayer begins by standing, or being, on the heights, and it reaches its limits in the depths, i.e., in prostration. God is with those who pray as they stand and as they prostrate themselves. The Praised is the perfect, most sublime presence of God with those who pray.

God's absolute nearness is in every part of the prayer. He is with us wherever we are;[6] He answers the call of the caller.[7] Prayer (*ṣalāt*) thus has various meanings. ʿAlī al-Makkī says:

> Opinions differ as to the significance of *ṣalāt*. It is said that from God its meaning is mercy and complaisance, and from angels and men petition and asking forgiveness. And it is said that God's *ṣalāt* is His mercy and the *ṣalāt* of the angels' prayer for blessing. And it is said that the *ṣalāt* of God is His mercy combined with magnifying and that of the angels is asking for forgiveness, and that of men, humbly beseeching and petition. And it is said that God's *ṣalāt* for His prophets is praise and magnifying while His *ṣalāt* for others is His mercy. Ibn al-ʿArabī said: *Ṣalāt* from God is mercy, and from human beings and others, angels and jinn, it is bowing and prostration and petition and praise, and from birds and owls it is praise. Each creature knows his own *ṣalāt* and *tasbīḥ*... and al-Ḥalīmī set forth the meaning of God's *ṣalāt* for His prophet as His magnifying of him."[8]

Earth and the heavens and all that lies between them, as well as all that lies beyond their bounds, glorify their Creator by praising Him, while through His creation He reveals Himself as the All-Praised. He glorifies Himself in praise through His creation. Glorifying in praise is the purpose of the creation of all things. The way in which the totality of existence does so as a whole and as each individual phenomenon was received by existence as a gift or debt from the Creator, Who expects us to repay the debt by glorifying Him in praise.

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6 See Q 57:4.

7 Q 2:186.

8 Arabic original see in ʿAlī al-Makkī ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad, *Fatḥ al-Karīm al-Khāliq fī ḥall alfāẓ al-Durr al-fāʾiq fī l-ṣalāt ʿalā ashraf al-khalāʾiq (Ṣ) li-l-Shaykh Muṣṭafā al-Bakrī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2010), 15; our quotation of English translation is in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 156-157.

We are the sum of all praise and thus the abundance or treasury of what God lays upon us as a debt, as He says in the Recitation [the literal meaning of the Arabic word *Qurʾān*]: "Surely We have given thee abundance; so pray unto thy Lord and sacrifice. Surely he that hates thee, he is the one cut off."[9] Our openness to Him is being praised, for there is nothing in existence that has not received its being from God as the All-Praised; thus, each of us is a praiser, for we repay our debt to God by praising Him. Praise is our connection as praiser and praised with God as the All-Praised. We cannot be open to acknowledging and repaying the debt to God without His help. This is why God says through the Praised, "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. When comes the help of God, and the opening, and thou seest men entering God's depth in throngs, then proclaim the praise of thy Lord, and seek His forgiveness; for He turns again unto men."[10]

God calls upon us to turn to Him in prayer, which includes glorifying Him by praising Him as our Lord. Furthermore, God confirms that He too turns towards us. Our human turning towards God is merely a sign, therefore, by which He glorifies Himself in praise. There is none equal to him,[11] nor any like him,[12] but by means of Himself and His creation, He teaches us the turning and the prayer in which are His glorification and praise. The perfect example of this glorification in praise is the Praised as His Messenger.

The Praised is the first of the people-of-peace and the perfect epitome of praise. God and the angels turn to him for blessing and pray for him. The way in which they turn to him and bless him is different from every other and cannot be compared to anything else, for God is not equal or like to anything. But God and the angels' turning in their prayer to the Messenger is the reason for our turning towards the Praised as the connection with God. In this turning as believers, as those who know God through the Praised as receiver and requiter of divine praise and who love Him as such, we connect with our supreme potential. God says of this, "Muḥammad is the Messenger of God, and those who are with him are hard against the concealers, merciful one to another. Thou seest them bowing, prostrating, seek-

9 Q 108:1-3.
10 Q 110:1-3.
11 See Q 112:4.
12 Q 42:11.

ing bounty from God and good pleasure. Their mark is on their faces, the trace of prostration."[13]

The connection with the Praised in prayer is the condition for the discovery of the world as a mosque. Indeed, the Praised is in every prayer, and glorification by praising God as the All-Praised is through him. When we pray, we wage war against everything that stands in the way of our realization through the testimony that there is no god but God and that the Praised is His servant and messenger. We thus enter into the mosque of existence with the intention of passing through the place of war, through the *miḥrāb*, into the Abode of Peace.

Turning towards God, indicated by the direction of the House (*qibla*), entering the place of war (*miḥrāb*), all the positions, movements and words of the prayer and, particularly, calling for blessings on the Messenger, have their own thanksgiving and blessings. As Constance E. Padwick concludes, "In his **calling** down of **blessing** on the **Prophet** the worshipper **believes** that he is, by the utterance of a few **words,** not only **entering** into communion with an activity of heaven but is setting in motion a correspondent heavenly activity."[14]

When we pray, we enter the mosque of existence, for there is nothing that does not bow down to God. Of our own will, we thus manifest ourselves as the will of God, and everything that is in the heavens, on earth and between them reveals that will. We submit to or connect with it through being-in-peace, thus becoming part of existence as descent (or receiving) and ascent (or giving). Our sacrifices, prayers, life and death belong to God, who has no equal. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī says of these acts of sacrifice and prayer, "It means that these acts of adoration, service and worship and attention do not come from us and we are not free to perform them. The truth is that 'blessings' and 'prayers' and 'greetings' belong to God, they are not ours, they are wholly His and belong to Him."[15]

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[13] Q 48:29.

[14] Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, xxv.

[15] Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī, *Discourses of Rūmī* (*Fīhi mā fīhi*) (trans. Arthur J. Arberry; London & New York: Routledge, 1995), 57.

2. The *Miḥrāb* as Symbolic Epitome

Physically and symbolically, the *miḥrāb* is the center or principal element of every mosque. It usually consists of a niche in the wall of the mosque facing towards the Kaʿba in Bekka. It is the place for the leader of the congregational prayer, and it may be large or small and of various designs and decorations. For most people who have received a modern education and have a modern view of things, this is all there is to say about the *miḥrāb*.

The form, purpose and meaning of the *miḥrāb* as a recess in the *miḥrāb* wall facing the Kaʿba in the Bekka valley cannot be understood without ontology, cosmology, anthropology and psychology as essential elements of the sacred teachings. They have always involved three things: testifying to the oneness of God as the principle of all things; testifying to the apostolate of the Messenger as the absolute through which descent from the One to multiplicity and re-ascent to Him are manifested; and testifying to return to the One by following in the Messenger's footsteps. The messenger, in this case, is the sum or supreme sign of all those messengers who swore to God in pre-existence that they would accept the Messenger as the supreme human potential.

Testifying to the return to God includes consenting to His judgment of everyone for every atom of good and every atom of evil we have committed. Testifying to the oneness of God, the apostolate of the Praised and return to Him is independent of both place and time. It is inseparable from human nature. The *miḥrāb* may therefore be seen as a sign of this perennial human orientation towards the supreme potential. Titus Burckhardt concludes, "The prayer niche, or *miḥrāb*, is indisputably a creation of sacred art, and has become in practice a regular element in the liturgy, though not an indispensable one."[16]

The meaning of the *miḥrāb* is inseparable from the perennial philosophy or sacred doctrine. Because it is a creation of sacred art in the full meaning of the term, anything said of it is incomplete if it does not take into account the principle that sacred art is inseparable from

[16] Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976), 86.

sacred teachings.[17] Though it is ordinarily represented as an integral part of the mosque, the various forms, purposes and meanings of the *miḥrāb* are present beyond the mosque – in houses, in public institutions, on graves and in paintings, in caves and on rocks,[18] or wherever we have transformed a place into a mosque or acknowledged it as such with our presence and by our decision and orientation.[19]

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[17] The noun *miḥrāb* (pl. *maḥārīb*) is widely regarded as deriving from the root *ḥ-r-b*, giving the verb *ḥariba*. The first form of the verb means "to be enraged," "to be furious;" the second form means "to provoke," "anger" or "annoy" (someone); the third form means "to fight," "to combat;" the sixth form means "to fight" (one another), "to be engaged in war." These meanings have prompted several scholars to search for the non-Arabic sources of the word, probably due to the inability to see a clear connection between those meanings and the sacred teachings to which the *miḥrāb* belongs. This quest has given rise to much speculation and many assumptions concerning the origin of the noun in other Semitic languages and in Persian. See: George C. Miles, "Miḥrāb and ʿAnaza: A Study in Early Islamic Iconography", in George C. Miles (ed.), *Archeologia Orientalia: In Memoriam Ernst Herzfeld* (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1952), 156-171; Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, "The Light of Heaven and Earth: From the Chahār-tāq to the Miḥrāb", *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 4 (1990), 95-131; Nuha N. N. Khoury, *The Miḥrāb Concept: Palatial Themes in Early Islamic Religious Architecture* (PhD dissertation; Harvard: Harvard University, 1992), 143-153.

[18] For more on the various forms, purposes and meanings of the *miḥrāb*, see Miles, "Miḥrāb and ʿAnaza", 52; Géza Fehérvári, "Tombstone or Miḥrāb: A Speculation", in Richard Ettinghausen (ed.), *Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972), 241-254; Alexandre Papadopoulo (ed.), *Le Mihrāb dans l'architecture et la religion musulmanes* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 88; Melikian-Chirvani, "The Light of Heaven and Earth"; Khoury, *The Miḥrāb Concept*; id., "The Miḥrāb Image: Commemorative Themes in Medieval Islamic Architecture", *Muqarnas* 9 (1992), 11-28; id., "The Dome of the Rock, the Kaʿba, and Ghumdan: Arab Myths and Umayyad Monuments", *Muqarnas* 10 (1993), 57-65; id., "The Miḥrāb: From Text to Form", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30/1 (1998), 1-27.

[19] The *miḥrāb* is present not only in the mosques, tekkes and homes of Bosnia, but also in nature, whether in existing forms or artificially indicated in valleys and caves, or on hillsides and peaks. As demonstrated by these remarks, the *miḥrāb* may be associated with the name of the summit of Mt. Horeb, as mentioned in the Torah. It is interesting that at one of the important old sites associated with ritual gatherings of Bosnian Muslims, thought to go deep into Bosnia's past, the top of the hill is known as Ratiš [*rat* = war]. See: Rusmir Djedović, "Dovište na Ratišu kod Srebrenika", in Salih Kulenović, Rusmir Djedović and Enes Mutapčić (eds.), *Srebrenik: historijsko-etnografske skice* (Srebrenik: Centar za kulturu i

Before defining the semantic field of the word *miḥrāb,* we must draw attention to some of the more significant meanings of the word *mosque*. Both denote a place – the first, a place of war (*ḥarb*), and the second a place of prostration (*sajda*, giving the Arabic word *masjid*, giving the English word mosque). The *miḥrāb* is part of the mosque, but in such a way as to comprise within itself everything encompassed by the mosque in which it is located. Prostration is the relationship between all things and God. There is nothing that does not prostrate itself before Him in its realization. The whole world can thus be said to be a place of prostration, a mosque.

The totality of the worlds – the heavens and earth and all that lies between them – is a mosque. When we want to transform this into a compressed form corresponding to our nature as the sum of all things, we commission or build a mosque in which every sign of masonry and decoration, every ritual and speech, should denote the mosque of all things, all horizons and the entire self. This means that the mosque represents both arcs – the arc of descent or of the manifestation of the One in multiplicity, and the arc of ascent or the return of all multiplicity to the One.

The purpose of the mosque, both as the totality of all things and as the image of their sum, is to enable us to see the truth of the creation of all things through the signs on the outer horizons. These signs constantly present themselves to us as the link to the Signified, but they also conceal Him. Parting the veils over the signs (which is to say over the inner self of the observer) or waging war against the concealer, illusion, is our way of finding ourselves or of returning to the original testimony of the oneness of God. The *miḥrāb* or place of war is thus the center of both the world and humanity. Through it, we pass through manifestation to the Manifested, through surrender to Peace, and through love to the Beloved.

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informisanje, 2007), 69-76. The *miḥrāb* and the *Muṣḥaf* are the two most important articles of Muslim culture, the one immovable, the other portable. Wherever there is no more Muslim presence, *miḥrāb*s and *Muṣḥaf*s have been destroyed. An anonymous Sarajevo poet wrote of the horrors of the devastation of Sarajevo in 1697 by Austrian troops led by Prince Eugene of Savoy: "Hundreds of thousands of *Muṣḥaf*s, countless books were burnt as were mosques; *miḥrāb*s were pulled down." Mehmed Handžić, "Sarajevo u turskoj pjesmi", in Esad Duraković (ed.), *Mehmed Handžić: Izabrana djela* (Sarajevo: Ogledalo, 1999), 482.

The *miḥrāb* symbolizes the ascent from one level of existence to another, drawing closer to the Real and distancing ourselves from illusion. Titus Burckhardt says, "Its very shape, with its vault corresponding to heaven and its piedroit to the earth, makes the niche a consistent image of the 'cave of the world.' The cave of the world is the 'place of appearance' (*maẓhar*) of the Divinity, whether it be a case of the outward world as a whole or the inner world, the sacred cave of the heart."[20]

As the perfect recipient and bestower of praise, as the man who is praised in relation to God as the All-Praised, the Messenger is a mercy to the worlds, a lamp that shines, and the finest example to all people. To bear witness to him means to follow him. We follow him because we love God, and the consequence of our following the Messenger is God's love of the follower. When we testify to the apostolate of the Praised, we are turned or oriented towards the Face of God. The world as a whole is a mosque, and turning to follow the Praised places us in the *miḥrāb* of the mosque of existence. The Praised is that *miḥrāb*, and, when it is built into the *miḥrāb* wall, the *miḥrāb* is the symbol of the presence of the Praised.

The act of worship by which we seek to confirm and resolve duality as the way unity is manifested can be performed anywhere. The entire world is thus a mosque or place of prostration. Passing from duality to unity is impossible without the act of worship or waging war. Entering the mosque, or the feat of annihilating all that appears to be god other than God, entails facing the outward center of the world as the sign of the uncreated center of humanity. The ritual of annihilating all illusions means resisting their constant entrance into the world and concealing That Which we remember.

Whenever we turn to the One, whenever we answer His call, we enter the *miḥrāb*. The finest example of entering and standing, bowing and prostrating, sitting and speaking, is the Praised, the lamp that shines from every *miḥrāb*. The light in that lamp is none other than God, for He sends down His Word through the Praised, as He says:

> God is the Light of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp (the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star) kindled from a Blessed Tree, and olive that is neither of the East nor of the West whose oil wellnigh would shine,

[20] Burckhardt, *Art of Islam*, 86.

even if no fire touched it, Light upon Light; (God guides to His Light whom He will.) (And God strikes similitudes for men, and God has knowledge of everything.)[21]

The light in the lamp or the perfect human heart needs no fire; it is the Spirit that God breathed into the human heart. His presence in the world is signified by the light that is inseparable from fire. Entering and being in the *miḥrāb* is an act of simultaneous acceptance and denial of that inseparability. The quest for the Light of the Praised as the supreme human potential entails passing through the fire of existence, separating his light from all things as the sign of its uncreated plenitude.

One could say that we humans, our immediate environment and the world as a whole are three forms of the mosque of existence. When we err, each of these three forms of the mosque of existence is out of joint; but when we repent, turning away from error and redeeming ourselves for what we have done, we purify ourselves and re-enter the mosque of our inner self, our place in the world and the whole of existence. The act of entering the mosque is a renewal of the whole world, its redemption from sin. The worshipper or guest of the mosque realizes this ascent from sin into order and peace in the *miḥrāb*, or place of war.

Thus, the *miḥrāb* is purpose, form and meaning in one. This is not an immutable state of unity; it changes from one individual and one generation to another. In the dictionary of Qurʾānic terms and semantic structures compiled by al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī in the 12th century, for example, the *miḥrāb* is the appropriate definition for a place of worship, the place where "war (*muḥāraba*) is waged against evil and profane desires."[22]

Nuha Khoury refers to this classic interpretation, observing,

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21 Q 24:35.

22 Abū l-Qāsim Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad ibn Mufaḍḍal al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qurʾān* (ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Kīlānī; Cairo: Sharikat Maktabat wa-Maṭbaʿat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Awlādihī, 1961), 160-161. Al-Iṣfahānī gives yet another meaning for the word *miḥrāb* as a place where the worshipper is "distanced" (*yakūnᵘ ḥāribᵃᵐ*) from worldly preoccupations. See: Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ismāʿīl Ibn Sīda, *al-Muḥkam wa-l-muḥīṭ al-aʿẓam fī l-lugha* (ed. ʿĀʾisha ʿAbd al-Raḥmān; Cairo: n.p., 1958).

> This pietistic interpretation relates *miḥrāb* to an action derived from the basic noun (*ḥarb*) and assumes a familial relationship between *ḥarb* (war) and *miḥrāb* (place of war). More recently, scholarship has attempted to understand *miḥrāb* through another presumed relative, *ḥarba* (spear). In this case, the evidence of the dictionary placement and word derivation is supplemented by that of historical reports mentioning the Prophet's use of a spear as a marking device during prayers at the *muṣallā* of Medina. *Miḥrāb* then becomes "the place of the spear" and, by analogy to the Prophet's actions, "the place of prayer" – one of the functional definitions for the Islamic niche *miḥrāb*.[23]

There is nothing unusual in calling the central place in the life of peace a "place of war." Many scholars have sought to associate this with the place, purpose and meaning the term has acquired over its long existence. The noun *miḥrāb* embraces place, purpose and meaning: an imperial throne, a refuge, a hermit's cell, a grave, humility, fire and light, a place of war, the place of the spear and so on. These terms are covered by the semantic field that corresponds to the sacred teachings, ritual and sacred art, to the virtues of which the Praised is the enduring principle.

We are perpetually in the duality of the self and the world, of the uttermost depths and the most sublime heights of existence. Knowing the boundary of this differentiation enables us to ascend from a lower to a higher level, but the difference between the manifestations of the One on either side of the boundary remains insurmountable. The resolution of this duality lies in the return, the evanescence of everything except the Face of God. Evanescence is, in fact, seeing the Face everywhere and in all things.

There is no state in which we are not diverted from reality towards illusion, from the higher to the lower, from remembrance to forgetting, and from testimony to denial. In each of these states, our soul is at war against Satan, the diverter, and strives to turn to the One. This is a war where the goal is Peace. Nothing we achieve in this world is worth anything in comparison with the stage through which we pass on our journey of ascent to the One. The Praised says of this, "Satan reaches everywhere in the human body as blood reaches in it."[24]

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[23] Khoury, "The Miḥrāb: From Text to Form", 4.

[24] Al-Bukhārī, "Adab", 21; "Iʿtikāf", 11.

To turn to God as Peace means to wage war against the diverter who is openly hostile towards us.[25] There is no discord in the creation of the heavens and earth.[26] The state of the self that dictates action based on ignorance obscures the world, and the order of the world is seen as disorder. Admitting ignorance and refraining from action based on what we do not know, along with loving what we know with certainty, is belief. Through belief, the discovery of order after chaos, resurrection after death, awakening from sleep, or remembering what we have forgotten takes place in the self.

The path to liberation from illusion is the discovery of order or being-in-peace as the relationship of all things to God as Peace. On this path, everything in existence nullifies itself to reveal at every instant that there is no reality but Reality. Within us, this is concentrated in free will, or the relationship of the faithful to the All-faithful through trust. The Praised says that for him, the whole world was made a mosque,[27] and he says of himself and his followers, "We have been made to excel (other) people in three (things): our rows have been made like the rows of the angels and the whole earth has been made

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[25] See Q 12:5.

[26] Q 67:3-4.

[27] See al-Bukhārī, "Ṣalāt", 56. The Bosnian *krstjani*, followers of the medieval Bosnian Church, also believed the whole world to be a place of prayer. They did not recognize separate buildings as exclusive places of prayer, as many contemporary records relate. In his will of January 5, 1466, Gost Radin writes, "... whoever kneels on the earth for my soul every feast day and on holy Sundays and holy Fridays and utters the Lord's Prayer, that the Lord God forgive us our trespasses and have mercy upon us on the Day of Judgment, for ever and ever." See: Franjo Šanjek, *Bosansko-humski krstjani u povijesnim vrelima (13.-15.st.)* (Zagreb: Barbat, 2003), 364. Holy Friday may be interpreted in a variety of ways, but it is impossible to exclude Friday as the common heritage of the Bosnian Christians and Muslims. In this regard, it is noteworthy that in the 15th and 16th centuries, the Spanish ecclesiastical authorities, seeking to eradicate from society anything and everything Muslim, required Christians to report anything they saw as "Muslim": "They must tell inquisitors about people who observed Friday as a holy day and who changed into clean clothing on this day, who ate meat on Fridays and other days prohibited by the Church, and who ceremonially slaughtered the animals they ate." Mary Elizabeth Perry, *The Handless Maiden: Moriscos and the Politics of Religion in Early Modern Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 52.

a mosque for us, and its dust has been made a purifier for us in case water is not available."[28]

The Praised is therefore a perpetual warrior (*muḥārib*).[29] His presence, confirmed by the testimony that there is no god but God and that the Praised is His messenger, makes every place into a mosque, a place of prostration, with a place of war (*miḥrāb*) at the center. Every *miḥrāb* denotes the constant presence of the Praised as our leader on the path toward realization of the human self. The moment the Praised is excluded as a constant presence in the *miḥrāb*, his place is taken by someone or something else and testimony to the oneness of God and the apostolate of the Praised is in disorder. Anyone who takes his place as the finest example is a diverter.

As the finest example of a warrior against the diverter, the Praised is also marked out by his leadership of those who bear witness to him and follow him in turning to God. This is the war waged against everything that diverts us from this turning. When praying in front of his witnesses and followers, the Praised placed a spear (*ʿanaza, ḥarba*) before him in the ground,[30] thus revealing himself to be the finest example of being in the mosque and in the place of war and so ascent on the upright path. Those who love God follow the Praised in their belief that God loves them.

The Praised is the finest example of ascent and return to the original human condition. Adam lost that state and fell to the uttermost depths, where he was given doctrine, ritual and virtue as the prerequisites for redemption and return. The Messenger is the guide on that path. The two Houses, one in the Valley and the other on the Mount, are the signs of that return, of which the Messenger's companion Abū Dharr says,

> I asked the beloved Prophet Muḥammad which was the first mosque on Earth. "The Sacred House of Prayer [*al-Masjid al-Ḥarām*, the Kaʿba]" he said. "And then which?" I asked. "The Farthest House of Prayer [*al-Masjid al-Aqsā*]," he said. I further asked, "What was the time span between the two?" "Forty years," the Prophet replied. And

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28 Muslim, "Masājid", 3-4.

29 The noun *muḥārib* is derived from the third form of the verb *ḥariba* as an active participle.

30 See al-Bukhārī, "Ṣalāt", 92.

he added: "The earth is a mosque for you, so wherever you are at the time of prayer, pray there."[31]

As this account relates, Adam experienced being both at the most sublime height and in the utmost depths through a descent or fall that, through God's mercy, was also offered to him as the path of ascent, on condition that he acknowledged and bore witness to the Praised as the finest example. God shows us the ascent in the journey of the Praised from the Sacred or Inviolable Mosque to the Farthest Mosque.[32] There can be no ascent without being in the mosque of the world, in which the Praised is perpetually in the *miḥrāb*. Following him means ascending towards him or entering the *miḥrāb* that denotes him.

3. From Flux to Peace

Every mosque, and consequently every *miḥrāb*, is both like and unlike every other. Until the modern age, there was no copying of existing mosques (and hence of *miḥrāb*s) because every human self is unique and unrepeatable everywhere and at every moment. In modern times, it began to seem that each person was not the whole of humanity and that the whole of humanity was not each of us. In fact, every individual is ineradicable and unrepeatable. Each one of us is indeed the revelation of God, but in opposition to Him. No human knowledge is anything but a sign of God's omniscience. In our little knowledge, we are constantly in a state of forgetfulness and, hence, of opposition to God. The possibility of remembering presents itself to us as the remembrance of God.

The *miḥrāb* is for just one person and consequently is in the mosque merely as a sign that we are perpetually before God but with the ever-present possibility of turning away from Him. Neither of these possibilities is the repetition of some earlier state. It is made known that the Living God is constantly engaged in some affair. As a sign of the totality of existence, the *miḥrāb* is a niche that receives us by enfolding us before and behind, to the right and left, from above and below.

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[31] Al-Bukhārī, "Anbiyā'", 40.

[32] See Q 17:1.

Standing, we sense the niche of the *miḥrāb* as our interiority, which shows us differentiation into receiving and giving, into debt and claim, into masculine and feminine. To discover our whole self means to eliminate difference or differentiation, to unify ourselves, or to return to God as the revealer of the Word in our command to say, "He is God, One, God, the Everlasting Refuge, who has not begotten, and has not been begotten, and equal to Him is not any one."[33]

When revealing to the Praised that there is nothing that does not bow down before Him, God is indicating that the whole world is a place of prostration, mere flatlands. Our potential to perceive this and to prostrate ourselves as a testimony of what we see points to the world as a mosque. The horizontality of the world is thus offered to us as the start of the ascent. With our experience of the fall, we renew our awareness of the ascent or return. Wherever we may set off on the surface of the earth, the ultimate horizon eludes us. There is no house we can enter as the home we seek; whatever door we enter through, it cannot denote that which would wholly satisfy our love. A journey on the flatlands of the earth is thus merely a reminder of the ascending or upright path.

We are expected to wage war against everything that diverts us from the attraction of the Beloved. The invincible world manifests itself to us as the passage to the House of the Beloved. Our every state in the world of duality is thus cause for waging war, and every place is a place of war (*miḥrāb*). Wherever we turn, there is the face of the Beloved. He is closer to us than our jugular vein. His signs are all around us and also within us. All our earthly courses, on the seas and the rivers, the hills and the valleys, will therefore point to the Kaʿba as the sign of the heart, as the House towards which we travel, towards the plain from which the ascending path of return to the most sublime heights begins.

The Kaʿba is the sign of both the house and the grave as well as of the heart as the uncreated, uncreatable center of all things, in which horizontality and verticality are united. None of us lacks two absolute certainties – the first as our "now" and the second as our death. Our "now" is surrounded by pain and suffering of which death is the culmination, and both are created. But everything in existence has its opposite. "Now" is in a duality with Eternity, and death is in a duality

[33] Q 112:1-4.

with life. "Now" and death are thus merely signs of their opposites, eternity and life. We can therefore say that our orientation towards the grave and the house are merely signs of the path to bliss and eternity. Every meaning of the grave and the house and all the rituals performed in them are endeavors to overcome the obstacles as we pass through them.

We seek to pass from the mosque of the world through the *miḥrāb* to a state without war, to the House of Peace in which God speaks to our soul as to His guest: "O soul at peace, return unto thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing! Enter thou among My servants! Enter thou My Paradise!"[34] Wherever we are, we are at the center of all existence. The whole of the outward world – forward and back, right and left, up and down – extends from and of us. Our position on the surface of the earth means being reduced to horizontality. The labyrinth of our existence is this reduction to the surface of matter and time, where we are suspended between the possibility of ascending to a higher level or sinking still deeper into matter and time. The ascending path from the earth to the heavens and from matter to Spirit leads through the door of redemption, or the return to the fairest uprightness.

Everything we devise and build it there to guide our passage through the labyrinth of the world on the upward path that leads from the depths to our redemption. The čaršija (bazaar) is thus the sign of all human construction; in it, all the roads on the earth's surface are arranged to bear witness to the four quarters and the center from which all things come and to which they return. In this image, the city is the sum of all that is in our being situated between earth and heaven.

The center of the čaršija, the point of intersection of two roads making us aware of the four directions, is a reference to the human heart as the center of all things. We discover the heart so that we can testify within it to Light and Spirit. The čaršija thus becomes a sign of the contact between Spirit and matter, between Light and darkness, a gateway towards which we set off in our war against everything that is contrary to Peace, to the All-faithful, to the Beautiful.

The čaršija is thus the word for the center of a traditional town, literally denoting four sides. However they may be interpreted – as the

[34] Q 89:27-30.

four corners of the world, as the four sides of an invisible square, or as the four arms of a cross – they include the most important center. Before accepting Christianity, the Roman Empire was ruled by a tetrarchy of two emperors and their junior colleagues, each with one half of the empire, while the center belonged to each and to none. The center was empty, and the *polis* was created from that void.

With the recognition of Christ, the center of the Roman Empire came to belong to the Pantocrator, the Ruler of the World. No one could occupy it except Christ, the Word in whom God revealed Himself in the void and in the world. The pagan Roman rule of the tetrarchy was replaced by the Christian rule of five – Christopolis, in which the emperor and the patriarch were the representatives of Christ Pantocrator, and the patriarchs in Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Rome.

Standing before God is being in the *miḥrāb*. In standing, we confirm our differentiation between one side of the self facing the dark and one facing Peace. Perfect Peace is His Will. The very potential of the will of the self means opposition to the Will of the Self. To be in the *miḥrāb* is thus to testify that there is no self but the Self, no will but the Will. Standing and confirming it by bowing, prostrating, sitting and standing up means being-in-peace and opening up to the intimacy between Mary and the Christ, the Anointed, and Muḥammad with the Recitation. These four signs attest to the revelation of the One in the human heart.

The horizontal surface of the *miḥrāb* is a semicircle, with the other half formed by the worshippers. All four directions – right and left, forward and back – are thus united in a single point as the source and outflow of space as a whole. This point is the sign of our center of heart as the uncreated and uncreatable principle in which knowledge and being are one. The ritual prayer is a journey or return to that union. The center of the *miḥrāb* circle denotes the contact with the vertical axis or the steps on the upright path on which we stand erect or return from the depths to the most sublime heights.

The meaning of the *miḥrāb* is complex, but it cannot be isolated from its form and purpose. One may therefore speak of the multitude of semantic levels of the word *miḥrāb*, of which some of the most important levels will be discussed here.

God's oneness is revealed in the multitude of signs of the world and of humanity. Its revelation is as if the boundary between the visible and the unseen were opened to allow phenomena to descend into the world. The niche corresponds to the opening.

At the first level, the revelation of God in the multitude of signs is illumination, or the light of the Praised. God is Light, and illumination is His revelation or creation. The first revelation or creation is the Light of the Praised, who is thus the first of the people of peace, for there is no distance between him as the first recipient of the Light and the Light Itself. He is on the most sublime heights, and every descent to the uttermost depths will thus bear his seal, the testimony to God as bestower and the Messenger as recipient. Without that seal or stamp of original perfection, every one of us would be left without the possibility of regaining the return or the ultimate judgment with mercy.

Illumination is the relationship between God as Light and ourselves as recipients or illumined. As the first recipient of the Illumination, the Praised is a lamp that shines. There is nothing that God does not illumine by means of the Praised as a shining lamp. This is the point of the testimony that there is no light but the Light and that the Praised is the first to be illumined and thus the first bestower of received Light.

God's power governs both the descent and the ascent of all things. His Throne encompasses the heavens and the earth, and the first before the Throne when the sending-down begins is the Messenger, who is also the first in the return and the intercession before that same Throne.

God creates the Word by sending It down, and the Word returns from its differentiated manifestation to its original oneness. The tree is thus the symbol of a fine word, beginning as it does from a seed or fruit, in which it is concentrated in its supreme potential.

In line with these semantic levels, the *miḥrāb* is the sign of the oneness of God, of his Throne as the principle of all order in the worlds, of the apostolate of the Praised, of God as Light and the Praised as His Illumination, and of the Word sent down by God through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth into the heart of the Praised, who is the finest example. Following the Praised is thus inseparable from loving God and the expectation of God's love for us.

Entering the *miḥrāb* means testifying to the oneness of God, to the desired standing before His Throne, to the apostolate of the Praised as the finest example, and to the return to perfect creaturehood and oneness as its principle. We thereby turn from darkness to light, from death to life, seeking and discovering the reason and purpose of our being in the world.

We are between death and life at every moment. "Now" and death are absolute certainties in our inner self. Our "now" is bounded by the past and the future and, being so bounded, constitutes our consciousness. If "now" is certain, consciousness places us in a relationship with that certainty and thus with death. If the mercy and knowledge of the Living encompasses all things, it follows that He also encompasses death, but it never encompasses Him.

The differentiation of the manifestation of the One into hell and heaven and the placing of a clear boundary between them means the death of death. There is nothing worse than hell, so its encompassing by mercy and life is the same as its disappearance in them. The Praised says of this differentiation and of the death of death:

> On the Day of Resurrection Death will be brought forward in the shape of a black and white ram. Then a call maker will call, "O people of Paradise!" Thereupon they will stretch their necks and look carefully. The caller will say, "Do you know this?" They will say, "Yes, this is Death." By then all of them will have seen it. Then it will be announced again, "O people of Hell!" They will stretch their necks and look carefully. The caller will say, "Do you know this?" They will say, "Yes, this is Death." And by then all of them will have seen it. Then it (that ram) will be slaughtered and the caller will say, "O people of Paradise! Eternity for you and no death. O people of Hell! Eternity for you and no death."[35]

The same tradition relates that the Praised ended his account of the differentiation of the people by saying, "And warn them of the Day of distress when the case has been decided, while they are in a state of carelessness and they do not believe."[36]

The heaven-hell duality is in every inner self as the two tendencies in differentiation – downwards, towards multiplicity and death, or

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[35] Al-Bukhārī, "Tafsīr", 201.

[36] Q 19:39.

upwards, towards unity and life – that are never wholly distinct. The first is directed towards nullity; as such, it cannot be realized in plenitude, for death is merely the absence or obscuring of life. The second is towards the Living, to Whom all things return, when in the return to Him death brings about its own death. Death is dispersal into multiplicity, and life is concentration in the One; this is our human existence in the world of multiplicity, differentiation and comparison. Doctrine, ritual and virtue simultaneously acknowledge and transcend it. Through them, we orient ourselves on the scale of existence from depth to height, dark to light, hell to heaven.

Doctrine, ritual and virtue (or knowledge, the way and will) orient or turn the self towards its supreme potential, towards the Hidden One Who manifests Himself in human language through the prayer, "Thee only we serve; to Thee alone we pray for succor. Guide us in the upright path, the path of those whom Thou hast blessed, not of those against whom Thou art wrathful, nor of those who are astray."[37] One could say, therefore, that in doctrine, ritual and virtue, the world is both acknowledged and denied – acknowledged because the One manifests Himself in it, and denied because the revelation and the Revealed remain in some mysterious way both united and differentiated.

The world into which we come at birth, or even at conception, enters our consciousness by shifting the boundaries of the self in relation to the extent of differentiated signs in interiority and exteriority. The signs are more or less clear in this differentiation, but never so much as to escape from the shadows. Their lack of clarity increases or decreases in the incessant stream of consciousness. The endeavor to direct this stream towards clarity entails the question of the Ultimate manifested by the signs. The consequence of this is acknowledging the Ultimate as the Revealer of doctrine, ritual and virtue, through which the things of this world can be articulated and then connected with the principle they reveal.

It seems to us that the world has been created and made visible independently of our inner self, entirely exterior to us. But the whole world is summed up in our inner self. This is the sequence from the whole of multiplicity to the One, or union in the self. The revelation of the Book as the complete discourse on humanity and the world

[37] Q 1:5-7.

includes both directions – descent or concentration, and then differentiation into speech. Differentiation also includes summing the phonemes or letters into the Word or into sustainable clusters of meaning, as the beginning of the *ṣūra* "The Cow" suggests:

> *Alif Lām Mīm.* That is the Book, wherein is no doubt, a guidance to the consciousness who believe in the Unseen, and perform the prayer, and expend of that. We have provided them; who believe in what has been sent down to thee and what has been sent down before thee, and have faith in the Hereafter; those are upon guidance from their Lord, those are the ones who prosper.[38]

If seen as a verbal expression, this begins with three phonemes in the form of the names corresponding to their letters. Speech is thus connected to its distinct components. To understand the entirety manifested in multiplicity, we differentiate and connect. The book is the whole of the world sent down into human oneness. It cannot be embodied in listening and remembering, and in speaking and reading, without the human self, without its center in which the world is concentrated after being differentiated to be made manifest again. This manifestation in the world and the Book does not eliminate the unseen.

Not only does it not eliminate the unseen, it actually emphasizes it as the defining factor of humanity and its orientation or guidance towards the mutuality of the knowing and the Known, the loving and the Beloved, which is the relationship between the faithful and the All-faithful. None of these relationships eliminates doubt, though the purpose of this orientation is to weaken and eradicate it. The boundary between the participants in this separateness is constantly changing, but it can neither be removed nor accepted. The invisible remains ever-present. The relationship with the world and the Book requires the way and guidance as ritual or prayer in which the self is framed by two wills, its own or inner will and Divine or outward will. The incorporation of the self into that context may be confirmed only by virtue – by being of those who "expend of that wherewith We have provided them."

Acceptance of the Book and belief in the unseen requires ritual or the way as well as confirmation in virtue or in expending that which has been received. Do we have anything that has not been given to

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[38] Q 2:1-5.

us? The obvious answer is no, so expenditure includes the Book, consciousness, belief in the Unseen and prayer. Expenditure transforms the self-satisfied self into the humble, generous self. Its acceptance of what is given, which may seem to belong to it, does not in principle exclude the same givenness that is beyond its finitude in time and space. What is more, the visible world confirms the Unseen, but strictly and decisively.

4. Ritual as Symbol in Motion

Everything that is in the outer horizons or the inner self has the Absolute as its purpose. But the world and the self are perpetually detached from it. Their detachment does not mean that they are not constantly connected with it. God is simultaneously near and remote, similar and incomparable. The world and the self are oriented or directed towards the absolute. Acknowledging and transcending the boundaries has no purpose without knowledge of a higher world, beyond and after the visible world. Knowledge is always slight, but yet sufficient for testifying to the Signified and the bond of love with Him.

The passage from the Recitation quoted above begins with the three letters or phonemes and then refers to the Book. This demonstrates the mutuality of the minutest particles that can be arrived at by differentiation from the whole, which encompasses or concentrates all individualities. Being perpetually between the intangible or material values of the miniscule and the whole that encompasses all things, we can never have absolute knowledge. It is from that perfect knowledge that we are required, as conscious beings, to perform the ritual of prayer.

Through the ritual, we become part of an order that we cannot encompass with our knowledge. We pray at the prescribed times and in the proper manner, even if not always entirely sincerely or without doubts. We can never have full knowledge of what we are doing. It may thus seem to us that little knowledge is a reason to choose doubt and insincerity as the opposite of sincerity. In such a mindset, ritual and sincerity seem irreconcilable. When the quantitative world is seen as the only world, sincerity entails the rejection of a ritual that has been established without the agreement of its participants.

Doubt forms part of this assumption, but it is either disregarded or indirectly represented as sincerity. Every agreement between people introduces judgments on the basis of little knowledge. When we enter into such an agreement on the basis of little knowledge, we acknowledge our limitations and our potential to locate ourselves within them by trying to transcend them in our relationship to the Unseen, which is acknowledged as such. This means that the self is imbued with the conviction that the visible world derives from another world or from its higher meaning.

This kind of prayer cannot be reduced to mere supplication; it is a ritual that was ordained and prescribed as a way of inclusion in the world order. The place and the direction, the time and the duration, the movements and speech are ordained, as is the way we enter and leave it and the conditions for doing so. This is neither a response to an unexpected or wished-for manifestation nor the reflection of a certain state in the self. Sunrise, noon, the midway point to sunset, sunset and the onset of night are comparable in their constant, undeferrable repetition. There is both emergence and disappearance in all five. Earth and the heavens are reassembled in them after being separated, and in this way, their giving and receiving takes place as the way of confirming their one principle.

The ritual prayers are located in the cosmic entity so that the given order may arise and vanish. No achievement in that order can be secured. The repetition of the five daily prayers seems to be like the footprints of a traveler who is looking ahead, with his own footprints in the darkness or erased. The repetition of the prayers with intent, preparation, entry, performance and exit includes the renewal of the tension between ritual and sincerity.

One may become so accustomed to the repetition that the tension almost completely disappears. This does not mean that the inviolability and permanence of repetition eliminates the tension between the state in which we are and the aspiration to "embellishment" in which we serve God as though we saw Him. Habitude and ease in maintaining the rhythm of the prayer constitute only one of the states of the worshipper, explained by the Bosnian recommendation that if you pray all five prayers at the prescribed times for forty days, every day, you will continue for the rest of your life.

Becoming accustomed in this way, which is desirable, also has its dangers. As long as there is prayer, there is the *miḥrāb*. Prayer is not

an end in itself but is part of the journey to God. Whenever one senses delight in it, prayer should be turned against this, for God alone is the goal of the journey. Does not the Praised say that praying for show with some observer other than God in mind is the greatest danger in this world?[39]

The repetition of the prayer is a turning away from the past to the "now" as reality, a "now" that includes in itself both past and future. The differentiation into hell and heaven of which the Praised speaks manifests itself as past and present. Death is slaughtered on their boundary. The eternity of hell and heaven is a state without death, but the mercy of the Living and the life of the Merciful abolish this differentiation in the return of all things to Him. The eternities of hell and heaven are the image of the distinction between evil and good deeds, but it is not deeds that redeem us – God's eternity is redemptive.

Differentiating between hell and heaven, between evil and good or, as is said in the parable of the Messiah, the tares and the wheat,[40] is impossible in this world. The entire Enlightenment project of modernity was based on the opposite assumption. Overcoming doubt of the unseen, which is at the center of the traditional doctrine and the ritual that is inseparable from it, was set in a political context in modernity, in which the ultimate purpose of humanity is realization in society and history. As Eric Voegelin concludes, "Gnostic speculation overcame the uncertainty of faith by receding from transcendence and endowing man and his intra-mundane range of action with the meaning of eschatological fulfillment."[41]

If the purpose of war is perfect order in this world, death nullifies its point, and more – it mocks life and every attempt in life to deny or disregard death. Before every one of us is the perfect pair, the Praised and the Virgin, who are the manifestation of the One on this side of the place of war and on the other, beyond death. Contrary to them are association, concealment and hypocrisy.

After indicating the just outcome of the judgment of our deeds, the Praised warns us, as God's revelation says, of the day of distress,

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39 See Ibn Māja, "Zuhd", 21.

40 See Matt., 13:24-30.

41 Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 129.

when beginnings and ends will cease, when differentiation will be complete and no indifference or unbelief will remain without consequences. The reality of the Hour is revealed in this way. It cannot be escaped in any yesterday or tomorrow. Every order in time is broken down. The just outcome of all this is differentiation into the eternity of hell and the eternity of heaven, as God says in the Recitation:

> Surely the unbelievers, who have done evil, God would not forgive them, neither guide them on any road but the road to Gehenna, therein dwelling forever and ever; and that for God is an easy matter.[42]

> Say: "Is that better, or the Garden of Eternity, that is promised to the godfearing, and is their recompense and homecoming!" Therein they shall have what they will dwell forever; it is a promise binding upon thy Lord, and of Him to be required.[43]

The eternities of hell and heaven are states without death, but not without mercy. The possibility of calculation and quantification ceases in eternity. Absolute differentiation is the image of the just outcome or of judgment from full knowledge. The consequences of the consciousness that concealed the Signified with signs and of the consciousness that was oriented towards Him through the world are in this judgment. These are the two outcomes of waging war – hell as the result of waging war for the world and heaven as the result of waging war for the Living.

Neither eternity, whether in hell or heaven, restricts God or His mercy. These eternities give way to human finitude and hence to all calculation. This does not make them absolute; as manifestations, they too are worlds, are contingent. The eternity of hell, like that of heaven, is conditional; only God's eternity is unconditional. Were it not so, His will would be limited by some eternity other than His. Whatever the reshaping of the self from the insignificance of the embryo to death[44] and from death to standing before God, from this earth and this heaven to the next earth and the next heaven,[45] none of these states can escape either God's "now" or God's will. Every contingent eternity is subordinate to that "now" and that will.

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42 Q 4:168-169.

43 Q 25:15-16.

44 See Q 30:54.

45 Q 14:48.

Wretchedness is the state of the self that denies its debt to God, while happiness is the acknowledgement of the debt and the consequent realization of the right to redemption. Hell and heaven are the two signs of those human states, as God says:

> As for the wretched, they shall be in the Fire, wherein there shall be for them moaning and sighing, therein dwelling for ever, so long as the heavens and earth abide, save as thy Lord will; surely thy Lord accomplishes what He desires. And as for the happy, they shall be in Paradise, therein dwelling forever, as long as the heavens and earth abide, save as thy Lord will – for a gift unbroken.[46]

God's mercy that encompasses all things manifests itself in the eternity of heaven, which is thus less contingent than the eternity of hell. If hell is eternal, heaven is eternally eternal. Hell is extinguished in heaven, and people then gather in that eternal eternity, as is said through the Praised:

> God will admit into Paradise those deserving of Paradise, and He will admit whom He wishes out of His Mercy, and admit those condemned to Hell into the Fire. He would then say: See, he whom you find having as much faith in his heart as a grain of mustard, bring him out. They will then be brought out burned and turned to charcoal, and would be cast into the river of life, and they would sprout as does a seed in the silt carried away by flood. Have you not seen that it comes out yellow and intertwined?[47]

The passage from the fire to the garden, from suffering to bliss, from darkness to light, from wrath to mercy and from severity to clemency, does not mean the absolute eternity of heaven, for all things vanish except the Face of God.[48] They do not vanish in some indeterminate future, but here and now, for there is no reality but the Reality, no eternity but the Eternity. Nullity has no being, so the manifestation of the Face from one moment to the next (which is to say from one contingent eternity to the next) is always and eternally different.

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[46] Q 11:106-108.

[47] Al-Bukhārī, "Īmān", 14; Muslim, "Īmān", 304.

[48] See Q 28:88.

5. The *Miḥrāb*s of Bosnia

The series of images of Bosnian *miḥrāb*s presented in this text begins with one from the Čaršija Mosque in Jajce. The *muqarna* vault consists of fourteen rows, signifying the fourteen degrees of being or levels of existence relating to our earthly position – seven ascending and seven descending levels in the structure of the heavens and earth, corresponding to the seven degrees of ascent and descent in the human self. The concomitance of each of these levels is the House, or the image of the human heart.

The world was created with seven earthly and seven heavenly degrees.[49] Referring to the House in the sacred Bekka valley, the Praised says:

> This House (the Kaʿba) is one of fifteen, seven in the heavens up to the throne and seven up to the limits of the lowest earth. The highest situated one, which is near the throne, is the "visited House." Every one of these houses has a sacred territory like that of the Kaʿba. If any one of them fell down, the rest would fall down, one upon the other, to the limits of the lowest earth. And every house has its heavenly or earthly worshippers, like the Kaʿba.[50]

Accordingly, the *miḥrāb* is the sign of this human differentiation through all degrees of existence and is thus a sign of our potential to return, to ascend towards our original state or to sink even lower and further from our original vow to God. Every ascent means leaving the darkness for the sake of the Light, and every descent means sinking into deeper obscurity. When we are in the *miḥrāb*, which, principally speaking, we always are when praying, we face the Kaʿba as the sign of the center of all existence. The fourteen houses, one after another, denote the levels of the visible and the concealed, or the degrees that correspond to the upright path to the human heart. This is the path we ascend by means of our realization in the testimony that there is no self but the Self.

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[49] Q 65:12.

[50] Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, *Die Chroniken der Stadt Mekka* (Leipzig: Olms Verlag, 1858), 6, 1; our quotation of English translation is in Arent J. Wensinck, "The Ideas of the Western Semites Concerning the Navel of the Earth", in Arent J. Wensinck, *Studies of A. J. Wensinck: An Original Arno Press Anthology* (ed. Kees W. Bolle; New York: Arno Press, 1978), 51-52.

Every *miḥrāb*, regardless of its form, denotes the potential of the human self to ascend towards the Light by following the Praised as our finest example and a light-giving lamp. The ascent is a movement from a lower level to a higher level, made possible by the memory of the vertical axis or of the circumambulation around it. There is no light in existence without shadow; it is always dark by comparison with a higher level, as indicated by the alternation of day and night and the phases of the moon. At every degree, these alternations and phases are different states of the self and thus of the meaning of what can be seen in the outer horizons.

In the Čaršija Mosque in Stolac, the succession of months through the year, from winter to summer, from cold to heat and from darkness to light, are depicted in twelve images, one for each month. Nine of these are visible and three are in darkness, and one could speak of each as a state of the self in its ascent from the uttermost depths to the sublimest heights, from the grave to resurrection, from now to eternity.

The inscription referring to Zachariah and Mary and, in its widest meaning, to John and Jesus, is associated with this. The inscription is invariably in fine calligraphy, which means that we are facing the *miḥrāb* with our sacred listening and speech, our sacred writing and reading. The words of the inscription were first heard, then spoken, and then written down. They are the speech of God with which the breath, tongue and lips of the Praised were inspired. When he utters them, they come wholly from his heart, borne there by the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit.

In transmitting what he received, the Praised was thus one with the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, and may thus be called the Praised Spirit of Truth, the Praised Holy Spirit.[51] When these words are writ-

[51] The descent or revelation of the Word of God to the Praised is associated once with the Spirit of Truth (Arabic *al-rūḥ al-amīn*, Q 26:192-95) and once with the Holy Spirit (Arabic *rūḥ al-quds*, Q 16:102; Aramaic *rûhâ kadisha*, Hebrew *ruah ha-kodesh*). When the Praised transmits the Word, he is equated with the means of its revelation; if it were not so, the Word he speaks would not be God's. God is in it, and with it says that it is of Him and His, as the Praised testifies. Clearly, the translation given here of "Spirit of Truth" is not in line with the usual way it is translated. There are many semantic and etymological reasons justifying the proposed translation, reasons that can be derived from a comparative study of the terms in Arabic, Aramaic (*rûhâ dashrara*) and Hebrew (*ruah ha-emet*).

ten down by human hand, they continued to bear witness to their source in the pure heart of the perfect man whom God chose to be His Messenger. The words enable the human self to ascend the path of our descent.

The images of nineteen selected Bosnian *miḥrāb*s, given in the appendix, show them as they are now or, in the case of mosques destroyed in the 1991-1996 war against Bosnia, as they were before the destruction or before the inscriptions referring to Zachariah and Mary were erased. Destroyed mosques are marked with an asterisk. The inscriptions have been erased in the mosques of Konjic, Mostar, Ljubuški and Jablanica.

Because many of Bosnia's mosques have been destroyed or demolished more than once and some of them are of a much later date than the ones originally built on the sites, the dates given for their erection are those found on surviving inscriptions or in historical sources, where available, or dates based on tradition the author has been able to track down. As a result, the inscription of the Qurʾānic verse "Whenever Zachariah went in to her in the *Miḥrāb*,"[52] which can be seen in the illustrations, may date from the time the mosque was first built or from when it was renovated or rebuilt.

The selection of these nineteen *miḥrāb*s was based on research covering several hundred Bosnian mosques. Although there are more than 1.500 destroyed mosques in Bosnia today and almost as many surviving, renovated or entirely rebuilt, it is fair to say that the verse about Zachariah and Mary, and thus indirectly about John and Jesus, is to be found in every *miḥrāb*. The *miḥrāb*, as the universal symbol of the true faith or debt of rectitude (*al-dīn al-qayyim*), represents the quintessential testimony to the Unicity of God and the apostolate of the Praised through all the prophets and saints. It reminds us of our constant presence in the visible world of which the Unseen is the principle. Zachariah and Mary, John and Jesus were the last prophets before the Praised entered history; they are his witnesses and heralds.

This inscription in the *miḥrāb* indicates that God is neither in the heavens nor on earth, neither in the mosque nor in any other edifice; He is in the human heart, as He says: "My earth and My heaven embrace Me not, but the heart of My believing servant does embrace

[52] Q 3:37.

Me."[53] The Praised and Mary are perfect examples of believing servants. God speaks to us through the heart of the Praised, revealing to us the Recitation as His Word, just as He speaks to us through Mary's heart, revealing Jesus the Messiah to us as His Word.

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[53] In Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿat al-ʿĀmira al-Sharafiyya, 1908-1909), III, 12.

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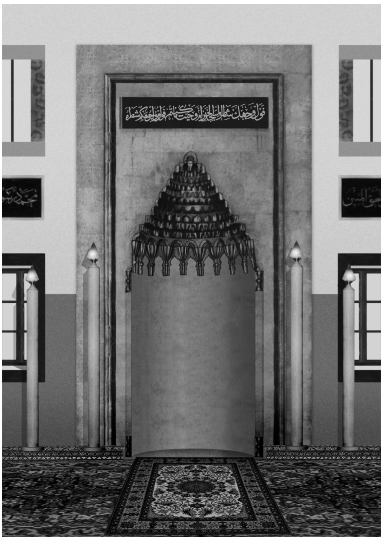
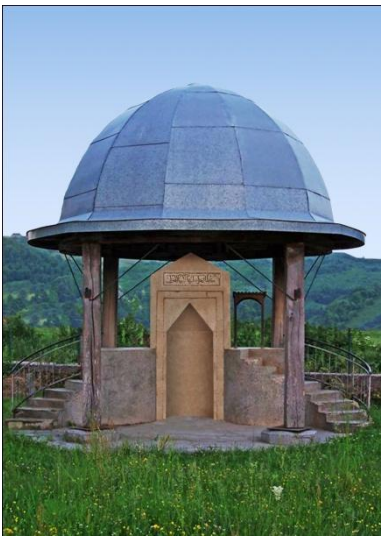
APPENDIX

(i) The Čaršija Mosque in Jajce, for which the dubious name of Esme-sultan Mosque has been advanced in recent years, along with a very unconvincing account of the Sultana's earring, dates from 1749. Her epitaph includes the words, "And have mercy upon our forebears, may they suffer no hardship in the world to come." The *miḥrāb* forms part of the harmonious composition of the mosque. Its fourteen rows of muqarnas decoration denote the seven heavens above our lowest earth and the seven earths below as signs of our potential to ascend to redemption or descend into ruin.



(ii) The Hajji Sinan Tekke in Sarajevo was built in the mid-17th century. It belongs to the Qādiriyya order. The *miḥrāb* in the semā-khāna has a spear and an axe at its outer edges, further defining the meaning of the *miḥrāb*. The inside walls of the semā-khāna are inscribed with the Qādiriyya *wird*, the liturgical words for the individual and the congregation, encircling the room and entering and emerging from the *miḥrāb*.

(c.1). The Fethija in Bihać was originally St Anthony's Church, built in 1400.[1] Its current name of Fethija may be associated with the nouns *al-Fattāḥ*, the "Opener," one of the ninety-nine beautiful names of God, and *al-Fātiḥa*, the feminine of "Opener," the name of the first ṣūra of the Qur'ān. The relationship between ourselves as open and God as the Opener is the opening, discovering or liberation of our original nature. This is the outcome of waging war, of being in the place of war with the world and the self, which we desire and for which we pray. Mosques in Jajce, Zvornik and Soko also bear this name. The number seven may be recognized in the design of the *miḥrāb* in this mosque, as in most others. The whole building is thus oriented towards the One and Peace. The verse about Mary and Zachariah is on a framed plaque above the *miḥrāb* muqarnas.



(c.2). Tradition has it that the Muṣalla in Kamengrad was built in 1463. A *muṣalla* is a place designated for congregational prayer. The present-day *miḥrāb*, with the verse about Mary and Zachariah, is the successor to several earlier ones that were destroyed.[2]

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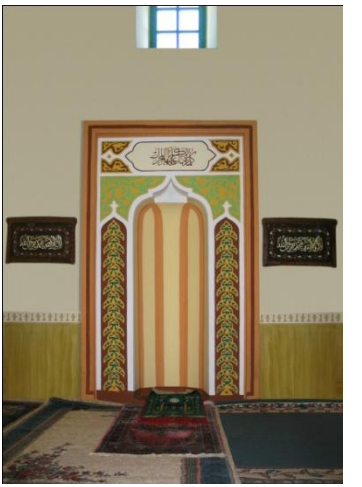
1 See: Mehmed Mujezinović, *Islamska epigrafika Bosne i Hercegovine* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1974-1982), III, 60.

2 *Ibid.*, III, 31.

(c.3). Milošnik is the name of one of the six surviving mosques in Livno, where there were once fourteen. Its present form preserves a very ancient structure, albeit with significant later repairs. The *miḥrāb* is of unusual and elaborate design. The latest wall paintings date from the latter half of the 19th century.[3]



(c.4). The Careva (Imperial) Mosque, is the only one of Blagaj's seven mosques to survive.[4] The original mosque, dating from the early 16th century, underwent major alterations in the late 19th century. The inscription about Mary and Zachariah is above the simple *miḥrāb* niche.

[3] *Ibid.*, III, 109-110.

[4] *Ibid.*, III, 316.

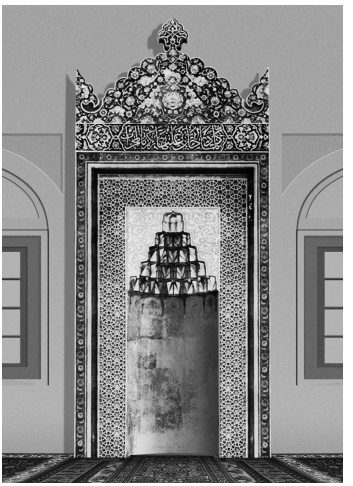
(c.5). The Atik is the oldest mosque in Bijeljina, built in the early 16th century on a site that had been adopted as a place of prayer well before. It has been demolished, rebuilt and refurbished on several occasions and in the 17th century was converted into a church.[5] During the latest reconstruction of the mosque, following its destruction in 1992, mediaeval tombstones (stećci) were discovered in the foundations, twenty-three of which bore epitaphs in Cyrillic.[6] The inscription with part of the Qurʾānic verse about the Virgin Mary and the Prophet Zachariah is above the *miḥrāb* niche.

(c.6). The Begova or Bey's Mosque is Sarajevo's central mosque, built in 1531 and endowed by Ghāzī Khusraw Bey.[7] Since then, it has had the symbolic meaning of the spiritual center of Bosnia. The whole of Baščaršija, with the madrasa, the other mosques, the bezistans, the caravanserais, and the shops forming a network of streets and courtyards, springs from and returns to the *miḥrāb* of the Begova. The stone *miḥrāb* has seven panels on which the Qur'anic passage on the Virgin Mary and the Prophet Zachariah are incised and gilded.

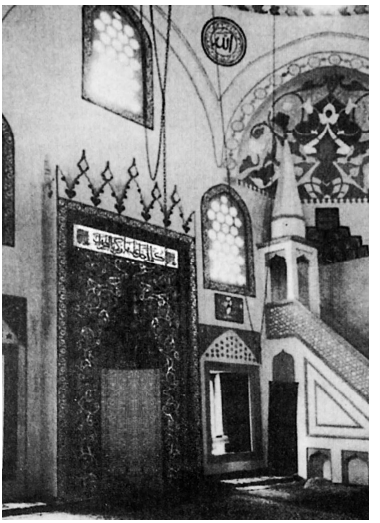
5 *Ibid.*, II, 156.

6 See: Mirko Babić, "Rezultati arheoloških istraživanja lokaliteta Atik džamije u Bijeljini", *Glasnik Udruženja muzejskih radnika* 2 (2004), 51.

7 See: Mujezinović, *Islamska epigrafika Bosne i Hercegovine*, I, 292-293.



(c.7). The Aladža is Foča's central mosque, built in 1550. The walls of the interior and portico bore painted decorations, hence the name Aladža, meaning "painted," "colorful" or "multi-colored." One of seventeen mosques in Foča, its beauty and symbolic meaning made it a crucially important element in the collective memory of the Bosnian people. The inscription over the door read, "This holy mosque and sublime masjid was built in the name of God Almighty by the benefactor Ḥasan, son of Yūsuf, in the hope of recompense from Almighty God and seeking His pleasure. A mysterious voice pronounced its chronogram: 'O All-sufficient (God), accept (this) fine (work)'." The travel chronicler Awliyā' Chalabī inscribed these words on the sofa walls of the mosque in 1664: "I have travelled much and visited many towns, but I have never seen such a place before."[8] The panel of stone below the crown of the *miḥrāb* was carved with the Qur'ānic passage on the Virgin and the Prophet Zachariah. The Alažda was damaged by fire and restored on several occasions before being razed to the ground in 1992, making it one of the great symbols of the suffering of the Bosnian Muslims over the centuries.



(c.8). The Čaršija Mosque, Čajniče's central mosque, was built in 1570.[9] Awliyā' Chalabī wrote of it in the chronicle of his travels: "It is a clean and spacious mosque in which the *miḥrāb*, *minbar* and *maḥfil* are works of art. When the bright rays of the sun shine through its windows of crystal, Najaf and Murano glass, it is brightly lit."[10] The passage about the Virgin and the Prophet Zachariah was carved below the *miḥrāb* crown. With the destruction of this and the town's other mosques in 1992, all ten mosques referred to by Awliyā' Chalabī were lost.[11]

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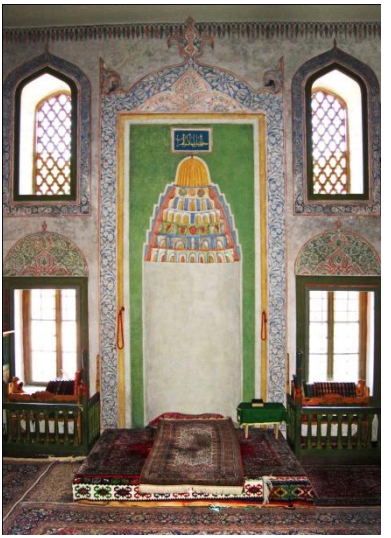
8 *Ibid.*, II, 37-38.

9 *Ibid.*, II, 66-67.

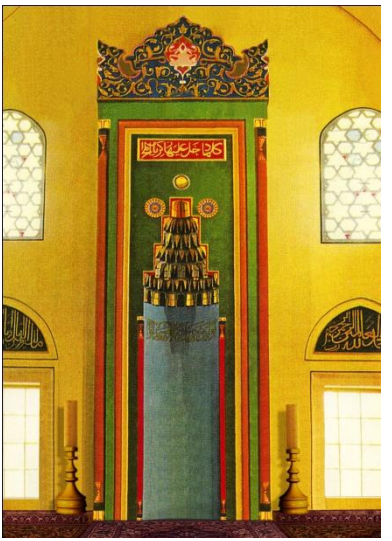
10 Evlija Čelebi [Awliyā' Chalabī], *Putopis: Odlomci o jugoslovenskim zemljama* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1973), 400.

11 *Ibid.*



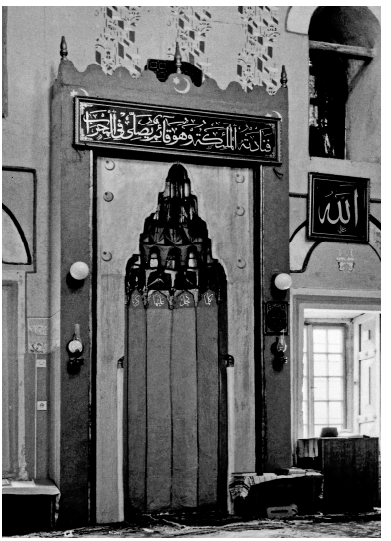
(c.9). In its present form, the Šarena Mosque is the successor to a number of earlier mosques, the first of which was built in the 16th century.[12] It is the best known of Travnik's sixteen mosques, gaining its name from the wall paintings on the inside and outside walls. The passage about Mary and Zachariah is above the *miḥrāb* niche.

(c.10). The Ferhadija is the most famous of Banja Luka's thirty-six mosques. It was completed in 1579; the inscription over the entrance door recording its construction reads, "This is a place built for the faithful in the name of God."[13] The Qur'ānic passage about the Virgin Mary and the Prophet Zachariah is below the *miḥrāb* crown. The Ferhadija was razed to the ground in 1992.



[12] See: Mujezinović, *Islamska epigrafika Bosne i Hercegovine*, II, 325, 414.

[13] *Ibid*., II, 191, 200.

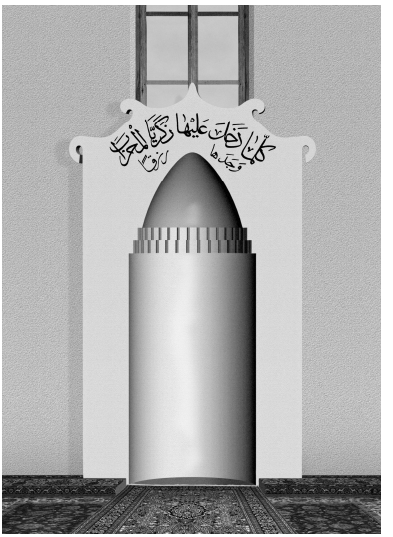


(c.11). The Tekke Mosque was built in 1579, one of several in Konjic. Its name refers to the Tekke with which it formed a single complex, though the Tekke is now long gone.[14] The passage about the Virgin and the Prophet Zachariah is carved in the *miḥrāb* in the panels below the muqarnas.

(c.12). Na Tepi is the local name for the mosque in Mostar built from 1612 to 1618 by Koski Mehmed Pasha. Its name is associated with the nearby Mala Tepa or lesser weighing station. The inscription over the mosque door includes the words, "The Holy Spirit said: 'House of the All-Merciful and a place of the good." It is one of Mostar's thirty-seven mosques.[15] The *miḥrāb* contains the Qur'ānic passage on the Virgin Mary and the Prophet Zachariah.

[14] *Ibid*., III, 422, 427.

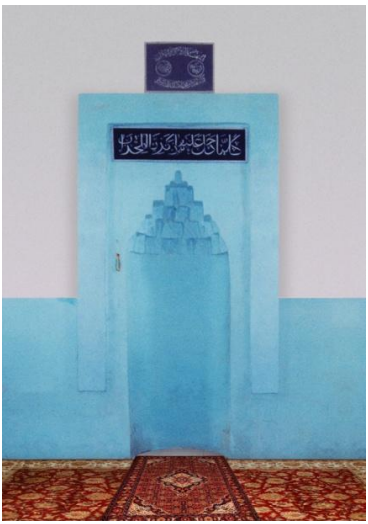
[15] *Ibid*., III, 144, 219-221.



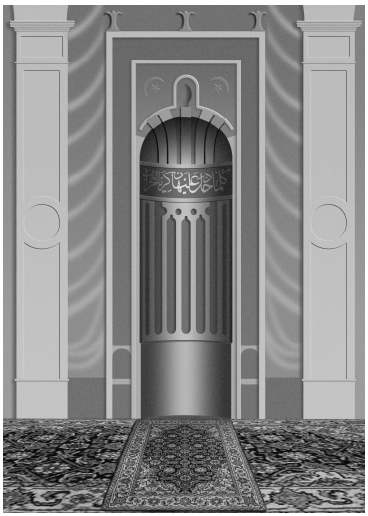
(c.13). Tradition has it that the Čaršija Mosque in Prijedor was built in 1700. The ḥadīth "My houses on My earth are mosques, and those who visit them maintain them" is carved on a stone plaque.[16] The passage about the Virgin Mary and the Prophet Zachariah was above the *miḥrāb* niche. This is another mosque that was destroyed in 1992.

(c.14). The Careva (Imperial) or Atik Mosque was built in 1719 in Kastel, the old walled town of Trebinje.[17] The Qurʾānic passage about the Virgin in the *miḥrāb* and the Prophet Zachariah coming to her was inscribed in the *miḥrāb* niche. This mosque, too, was razed to the ground in 1992.

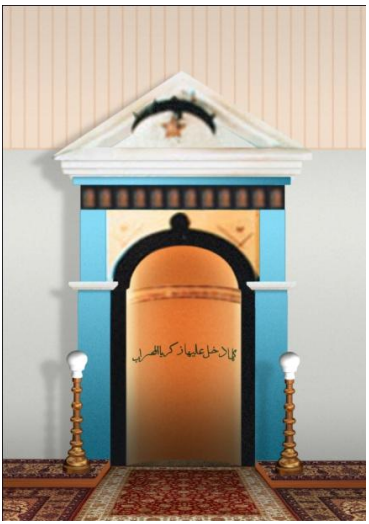
[16] *Ibid.*, III, 39.
[17] *Ibid.*, III, 358.



(c.15). The Old Mosque in Maoča has the Qurʾānic passage about the Virgin and Zachariah above the *miḥrāb* niche. Local tradition has it that the mosque was built in 1820.



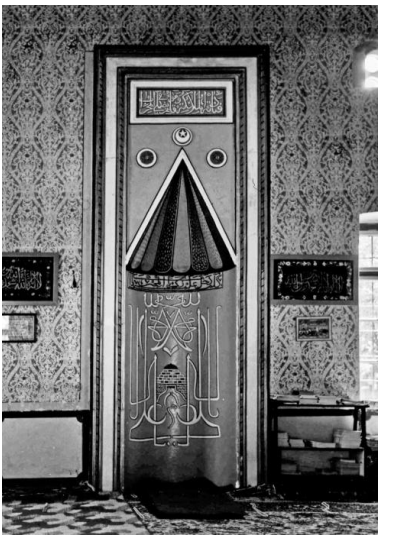
(c.16). The Azizija was built in 1863 after Muslims expelled from Serbia came to settle in Brezovo polje near Brčko.[18] The Qurʾānic passage about the Virgin in the *miḥrāb* and the Prophet Zachariah visiting her was inscribed in the *miḥrāb* niche. This mosque was also destroyed in 1992.



(c.17). The old Azizija Mosque in Bosanska Kostajnica was built after 1862, when Muslims fled there from Serbia.[19] The Qurʾānic citation *kullamā dakhala ʿalayhā Zakariyyā l-miḥrāb* … was inscribed in its *miḥrāb*.

[18] *Ibid.*, II, 164.
[19] *Ibid.*, III, 46.

(c.18). The mosque built in Pobrišće in 1870 was the fifth mosque in Ljubuški. The inscription about the Virgin and the Prophet Zachariah was above the *miḥrāb* niche.



(c.19). This mosque in Jablanica was built in Pobriježje in 1912 and named "U Pobriježju." Following the ancient tradition, part of the Qur'ānic verse on the Virgin Mary and the Prophet Zachariah was inscribed in the *miḥrāb*.

THE DIFFERENT STANCES OF AL-SHAHRASTĀNĪ

– A Study of the Sectarian Identity of Abū l-Fatḥ al-Shahrastānī in Relation to his Qurʾānic Commentary, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* –

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Abstract

Abū l-Fatḥ Muḥammad ibn Abū l-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) is a scholar best known in the academic and cultural Muslim world for his work, *al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*. He is considered to be a Sunnī scholar, particularly in relation to the theological views and conclusions that are given in his work, *Nihāyat al-iqdām/al-aqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām*, which are parallel to Ashʿarism. However, the contents of his Qurʾānic commentary, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār wa-maṣābīḥ al-abrār* recently edited by Muḥammad ʿAlī Ādharshab, have brought up questions about the general acceptance of the sectarian identity of al-Shahrastānī. What is remarkable is that al-Shahrastānī displays different stances in different works, which has led to various claims and views being made about his sectarian identity. This article, which is based on *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, aims to bring clarity to the question of which sect al-Shahrastānī was closest to, at least according to the aforementioned work.

Keywords: Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, secrets of the Qurʾān, Ismāʿīliyya, Bāṭınī interpretation.

Introduction

Abū l-Fatḥ al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) is well-known as a historian of religions and sects due to his work *al-Milal wa-l-niḥal. Nihāyat al-iqdām/al-aqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām*, another highly respected work which he compiled after *al-Milal*, established al-Shahrastānī as

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an expert in the field of *kalām*. Additionally, his work *Muṣāraʿat al-falāsifa* demonstrates that he has a remarkable repertoire in philosophy. Thus, one can conclude from this that al-Shahrastānī is a versatile Muslim scholar and intellectual. An aspect of this versatility is apparent in the field of Qurʾānic commentary (*tafsīr*). In other words, al-Shahrastānī is not only an exegete (*mufassir*), but also a historian of religions and sects, a philosopher and a theologian (*mutakallim*). However, to date, he has not been widely accepted as an exegete, as there has been no mention of his commentary in the classical literature.

In this article, al-Shahrastānī's understanding of the Qurʾān and his method of exegesis within the framework of his work, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār wa-maṣābīḥ al-abrār*, will be discussed; at the same time we will try to clarify the matter of which sect he belonged to. The reason that there is a need to discuss this matter is that there are various claims that al-Shahrastānī was an Ashʿarī Sunnī, a Bāṭinī-Ismāʿīlī or an Imāmī Shīʿī. Before citing each of these claims, it is important that we provide information about al-Shahrastānī's life and works.

The Life and Works of al-Shahrastānī

Abū l-Fatḥ Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm ibn Abī Bakr Aḥmad al-Shahrastānī was born in Shahrastān, which is on the border of the Karakum Desert of Turkmenistan, in the northwest of Khurāsān. It is uncertain when al-Shahrastānī, who was also known as *Tāj al-Dīn*, *Ḥujjat al-Ḥaqq* and *al-Afḍal*, was born. The biographical books (*ṭabaqāt*) give a date of birth of 467/1074, 469/1076 or 479/1086; the latter has been accepted as the most accurate date.[1]

There is no information about al-Shahrastānī's family, who lived during the time of the Seljuk dynasty (1040-1157) and no significant information about his childhood or youth. Nevertheless, it can be said that he received a good education, considering the contents of his works and the environment he flourished, which was an important center for knowledge. As far as it can be understood from the biographical books, al-Shahrastānī began his education in his hometown. As a young man, after studying instrumental/auxiliary sciences, such as Arabic language and literature, mathematics and logic, he

[1] For further information, see Muḥammad ibn Nāṣir ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Suḥaybānī, *Manhaj al-Shahrastānī fī kitābihī l-Milal wa-l-niḥal* (Riyāḍ: Dār al-Waṭan, n.d.), 32-41.

went to Nīshāpūr to study other sciences from scholars renowned in their fields. It was here that he participated in the lessons of teachers who had been the students of Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085). He studied *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* from Abū Naṣr ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 514/1120) and Abū l-Muẓaffar Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Khwāfī (d. 500/1106), who was a Shāfiʿī *faqīh* and the *qāḍī* of Ṭūs, as well as being a companion of al-Imām al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). He also received instruction in *ḥadīth* from Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Madīnī (d. 494/1101), and in Qurʾānic exegesis, *kalām* and metaphysical philosophy from Abū l-Qāsim Salmān (Sulaymān?) ibn Nāṣir ibn ʿImrān al-Anṣārī (d. 512/1118). Among these scholars, Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī, who was renowned as an ascetic and a Sufi, had the greatest influence on al-Shahrastānī. In his work *Nihāyat al-iqdām*, al-Shahrastānī states: "Many times we would consult our master and imām, Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī."[2]

We can understand that al-Shahrastānī completed his education while he was in Nīshāpūr and then traveled to Khwārazm to instruct and preach. He left for the Ḥejāz in 510/1116 to perform the pilgrimage and to pursue his scholarly studies. On his return from pilgrimage, he stopped in Baghdād and, with the help of his good friend, Asʿad ibn Muḥammad al-Mihanī (d. 527/1132), had the opportunity to teach at the Niẓāmiyya Madrasa. He also gave sermons and preached; in particular his sermons were very popular and well received. After staying in Baghdād for almost three years he probably went to Khurāsān in 514/1120. He started to serve Abū l-Qāsim Naṣīr al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Muẓaffar al-Marwazī (d. 530/1135), the vizier of the Seljuk sultan Sanjar (r. 512-548/1118-1153). During this time he was part of the close circle of Sultan Sanjar and became his confidant. Al-Shahrastānī, who stayed about ten years in Khurāsān, wrote his famous work *al-Milal* here and dedicated it to the vizier, al-Marwazī. However, in 526/1132, when Sultan Sanjar took up a stance that was in opposition to that of al-Marwazī, al-Shahrastānī replaced the dedication in the preface with a new one.[3] It is likely that after the afore-

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[2] Abū l-Fatḥ Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-iqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām* (ed. Alfred Guillaume; London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 38.

[3] Toby Mayer, "Translator's Introduction," in al-Shahrastānī, *Keys to the Arcana: Shahrastānī's Esoteric Commentary on the Qurʾan* (trans. Toby Mayer; New

mentioned vizier was dismissed in 526/1132, al-Shahrastānī, who had gone to Tirmidh, served under the Alid sydnic (*Naqīb al-ashrāf*) Abū l-Qāsim ʿAlī ibn Jaʿfar al-Mūsawī (d. 550/1155), who showed interest and respect towards scholars and philosophers; al-Shahrastānī presented a copy of both of his works, *al-Muṣāraʿa* and *al-Milal* to the latter.[4]

It is unknown how long al-Shahrastānī stayed in Tirmidh or when he returned to his fatherland, but the records of his death show that he lived his last years in Shahrastān. Two different dates are given for his death, but generally 548/1153 is accepted as the correct date. Although al-Shahrastānī is well-known in the scholarly world, only two of his students, Abū Saʿd al-Samʿānī (d. 562/1166) and Mujīr al-Dīn al-Baghdādī (d. 592/1196), made a name for themselves. The fact that al-Shahrastānī did not train a great many students, despite being renowned for his great knowledge, can be ascribed to the years he spent traveling and working with government dignitaries.

In keeping with his wide scope of scientific knowledge and his scholarly character, al-Shahrastānī produced quite a few works in various fields. Although his works are not many in number, his works, those on the history of religion and sects, *kalām* and philosophy are particularly important. The works which have reached us today can be listed as follows:

1. *Al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*: This work, which is considered to be al-Shahrastānī's masterpiece, was compiled in 521/1127-1128. According to some authors, such as Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *al-Milal* is the most valuable work in the field of Islamic heresiography.[5] Al-Shahrastānī's objective method of citing the opinions of Islamic sects in a descriptive way has made this work very valuable. The book, which has

York: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2009), 16.

4 In the introduction to al-Shahrastānī's *Muṣāraʿat al-falāsifa* the editor quotes a statement from Mullā Ṣadrā's (d. 1050/1641) *al-Asfār al-arbaʿa* that *al-Milal wa-l-niḥal* was written for *Naqīb al-ashrāf* Abū l-Qāsim Majd al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Jaʿfar al-Mūsawī. See Suhayr Muḥammad Mukhtār, "Muqaddima [Editor's Introduction]," in al-Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿat al-falāsifa* (Cairo: n.p., 1976), 26.

5 Abū Naṣr Tāj al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ibn ʿAlī al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-kubrā* (eds. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulw & Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī; Cairo: ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1964-1976), VI, 128.

been printed and translated into many languages, was translated into French at the encouragement of Ibrahim Madkour. The first volume was translated by Daniel Gimaret and Guy Monnot, with the second volume being translated by Jean Jolivet, again with Guy Monnot, under the title *Livre des religions et des sectes* (Paris & Leuven, 1986, 1993).

2. *Nihāyat al-iqdām/al-aqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām*: After *al-Milal*, al-Shahrastānī wrote this work on *kalām*. This work, which includes twenty fundamental subjects is based on the Ashʿarī creed, but criticizes it in some places as well as those of the Muʿtazila and some Shīʿī groups. The work was edited by Alfred Guillaume, with indexes (Oxford & London, 1934).

3. *Muṣāraʿat al-falāsifa*: This work was written in Tirmidh after *al-Milal* and dedicated to Naqīb al-ashrāf Abū l-Qāsim Majd al-Din ʿAlī ibn Jaʿfar al-Mūsawī. The book, also known as *al-Muṣāraʿa*, is a refutation of Ibn Sīnā's (d. 428/1037) views on metaphysical subjects. This work was subsequently refuted in a treatise entitled *Muṣāriʿ al-muṣāriʿ*, written by the Imāmī Shīʿī philosopher Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭusī (d. 672/1274), and edited by Suhayr Muḥammad Mukhtār (Cairo, 1976).

4. *Mafātīḥ al-asrār wa-maṣābīḥ al-abrār*: This book, which constitutes the main subject and source for this article, is al-Shahrastānī's Qurʾānic commentary. An introduction to Qurʾānic sciences is followed by the exegesis of the first two *sūra*s of the Qurʾān (*al-Fātiḥa* and *al-Baqara*); each verse is mostly interpreted in a classical Sunnī style and then esoteric interpretations are given under the subheading *Asrār* (secrets). This book, which is thought to have been written in 538-540/1143-1145, has been edited and published by Muḥammad ʿAlī Ādharshab in two volumes (Tehran, 2008), from the only known manuscript copy of 433 folios, which is housed at the Library of Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Millī in Tehran.[6] In addition, the introduction to the book, entitled *Mafātīḥ al-furqān*, and the interpretation of

[6] Ādharshab points out that the handwritten copy consists of 864 folios (see Muḥammad ʿAlī Ādharshab, "Muqaddimat al-Muṣaḥḥiḥ/Editor's Introduction," in al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār wa-maṣābīḥ al-abrār* (Tehran: Mīrāth-i Maktūb, 2008), I, 60. However, the copy itself and the library documents state that the number 864 does not correspond to the number of folios, but to the number of pages.

Sūrat al-Fātiḥa have been translated into English by Toby Mayer under the title *Keys to the Arcana: Shahrastānī's Esoteric Commentary on the Qurʾan*. This book, which includes the original Arabic text, was published in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London (Oxford & London, 2009).

5. *Risāla fī mawḍūʿ ʿilm wājib al-wujūd (Risāla ilā Muḥammad al-Īlāqī)*: This work, which was addressed to the physician and philosopher Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad al-Īlāqī (d. 536/1141) – a contemporary of the author – was published as a facsimile in Muḥammad Riḍā Jalālī Nāʾīnī's *Dū Maktūb*.

6. *Masʾala (Baḥth) fī ithbāt jawhar al-fard*: This work, which is concerned with the smallest indivisible particle of matter (*al-juzʾ alladhī lā yatajazzaʾ*), was published as an appendix to *Nihāyat al-iqdām* by Alfred Guillaume (Oxford & London, 1934).

7. *Majlis-i maktūb-i Shahrastānī-i munʿaqid dar Khwārazm*: This work in Persian was included at the end of *Sharḥ-i ḥāl wa-āthār-i Ḥujjat al-Ḥaqq Abū l-Fatḥ al-Shahrastānī* by Nāʾīnī (Tehran, 1946). It was translated into French by Diane Steigerwald under the title *Majlis: Discours sur l'ordre et la création* and published along with the original (Quebec: Saint-Nicolas, 1998). Steigerwald also wrote an article contending that in this book al-Shahrastānī uses the concept of "divine word" in accordance with Ismāʿīlī terminology.[7]

8. *Qiṣṣat sayyidinā Yūsuf ʿalayhi l-salām (Sharḥ/Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf)*: This work is an interpretation of Sūrat Yūsuf in the Qurʾān. According to the information given by Ādharshab, a manuscript copy of the work can be found at al-Azhar Library.[8] According to Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), al-Shahrastānī wrote this commentary according to the Bāṭinī-Ismāʿīlī perception (*alā madhhab al-Ismāʿīliyya*).[9]

Other works by al-Shahrastānī are listed in various sources, but it is not known whether these still exist today. Some of these can be listed as follows: (1) *al-Manāhij wa-l-āyāt (al-Manāhij wa-l-bayān)*,

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7 Diane Steigerwald, "The Divine Word (*Kalima*) in Shahrastānī's *Majlis*," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieues* XXV/3 (1996), 335-352.

8 Ādharshab, "Muqaddimat al-Muṣaḥḥiḥ," I, 23.

9 Abū l-ʿAbbās Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya, *Darʾ taʿāruḍ al-ʿaql wa-l-naql* (ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim; 2nd ed., Riyāḍ: Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmiyya, 1991), V, 173.

(2) *Risāla ilā Muḥammad al-Sahlānī*, (3) *Risāla ilā l-Qāḍī ʿUmar ibn Sahlān fī l-radd ʿalā Ibn Sīnā* (ʿUmar ibn Sahlān al-Sāwī wrote a treatise on this book entitled *Jawāb ʿalā l-Shahrastānī*), (4) *Talkhīṣ al-aqsām li-madhāhib al-anām*, (5) *al-ʿUyūn wa-l-anhār*, (6) *al-Irshād ilā ʿaqāʾid al-ʿibād*, (7) *Risāla fī l-mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, (8) *Daqāʾiq al-awhām*, (9) *Qiṣṣat Mūsā wa-l-Khaḍr*, (10) *Tārīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*.[10]

al-Shahrastānī's Sectarian Identity

It is generally accepted that al-Shahrastānī was a Shāfiʿī in *fiqh* and an Ashʿarī in *kalām*. Many writers, such as Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 749/1349), Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), Abū l-Fidāʾ (d. 732/1331) and Ibn al-Wardī (d. 749/1349) mention al-Shahrastānī as an Ashʿarī;[11] it is also possible to come to the same conclusion through many statements found in works like *al-Milal* and *Nihāyat al-iqdām*.

Moreover, when some of the views and evaluations that are included in *al-Milal* under the titles *Ṣifātiyya*, *Ashʿariyya* and *Mushabbiha* are taken into account, we can come to the conclusion that al-

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[10] For information about al-Shahrastānī's life and personality see Abū l-Ḥasan Ẓahīr al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Zayd al-Bayhaqī, *Tatimmat Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* (*Tārīkh ḥukamāʾ al-Islām*) (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī, 1994), 119-120; Abū Saʿd ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Samʿānī, *al-Taḥbīr fī l-muʿjam al-kabīr* (ed. Munīra Nājī Sālim; Baghdād: Maṭbaʿat al-Irshād, 1975), II, 160-161; Abū ʿAbd Allāh Shihāb al-Dīn Yāqūt ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān* (ed. Farīd ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Jundī; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1990), III, 427-428; Abū l-ʿAbbās Shams al-Dīn Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-anbāʾ abnāʾ al-zamān* (ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās; Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968-1972), IV, 273-275; Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt* (ed. Sven Dedering; 2nd ed., Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974), III, 278-279; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, VI, 128-130; Abū l-Faḍl Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya* (ed. Ḥāfiẓ ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Khān; Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1987), I, 323-324; Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ* (eds. Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūt et al.; 3rd ed., Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1985), XX, 286-288; ʿAfīf al-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Asʿad ibn ʿAlī al-Yāfiʿī, *Mirʾāt al-jinān wa-ʿibrat al-yaqẓān fī maʿrifat mā yuʿtabar min ḥawādith al-zamān* (annotated by Khalīl al-Manṣūr; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), III, 221-222; Abū l-Faḍl Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Lisān al-mīzān* (Hyderabad: Maṭbaʿat Majlis Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-Niẓāmiyya, 1329), V, 263-264; Ādharshab, "Muqaddimat al-Muṣaḥḥiḥ," I, 15-64; Mayer, "Translator's Introduction," 3-25; al-Suḥaybānī, *Manhaj al-Shahrastānī*, 32-86.

[11] See al-Suḥaybānī, *Manhaj al-Shahrastānī*, 54.

Shahrastānī perceives the *Ṣifātiyya (Ahl al-ḥadīth)*, which according to the author was transformed into a Sunnī sect, Ashʿariyya, by Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, as the soundest belief system.[12] Even though there can be no dispute about al-Shahrastānī's *fiqh* sect, many divergent views about his theological inclinations have been put forth. Some of these claims were made while al-Shahrastānī was alive; as far as can be discerned from the sources, the claims are as follows:

1. *Al-Shahrastānī has heretical tendencies.* This claim was made by Abū Saʿd al-Samʿānī, known for his work, *al-Ansāb*, and Abū Muḥammad ibn Arslān al-Khwārazmī (d. 568/1172). However, it should be emphasized that al-Samʿānī only referred to claims of heresy about his teacher,[13] whereas al-Khwārazmī made an open accusation. Al-Khwārazmī makes the following claims:

> If al-Shahrastānī had not stumbled in the matter of creed and had not been inclined towards heresy, he could have been a leading figure (*imām*). Although he is a virtuous person and has an impeccable intellectual capability, his inclination towards unfounded ideas and views that have no rational or scriptural proof astonishes us. We seek refuge in Allah from divine abandonment (*khidhlān*), and from being deprived of the light of faith (*īmān*). Al-Shahrastānī finds himself in this predicament because he turned his face away from the light of the *sharīʿa* and delved into the darkness of philosophy. We have had conversations and discussions with al-Shahrastānī. Yet, he has always taken sides with the ideas and views of philosophers and supports these. I have been to his sermons several times and I have never heard him say "Allah said" or "the Prophet said", neither have I heard him provide an answer to legal (*fiqhī*) matters. Only Allah knows his true standing.[14]

Additionally, Ẓahīr al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī made the following statements in *Tatimmat Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*:

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[12] See al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa-l-niḥal* (eds. Amīr ʿAlī Mahnā & ʿAlī Ḥasan Fāʿūr; 3rd ed., Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1993), I, 106. According to al-Shahrastānī, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), Dāwūd al-Ẓāhirī (d. 270/884) and some other Salafī scholars followed the path of previous scholars of *Ahl al-ḥadīth* like Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795), Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767), and then had attained the path of safety. See al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, I, 118-119.

[13] Al-Samʿānī, *al-Taḥbīr*, II, 161.

[14] Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʾjam al-buldān*, III, 377.

Al-Shahrastānī has written a *tafsīr* but interpreted the verses sometimes according to the rules of *sharīʿa*, sometimes according to the rules of philosophy or other facts. Therefore, I said, "This type of interpretation is a deviation. An interpretation can only be made in the light of the narrations of the companions of the Prophet and the *tābiʿūn* (the second generation). There is no place for philosophy in the exegesis (*tafsīr*) and interpretation (*taʾwīl*) of the Qurʾān. Moreover, there is no one who has brought together religion and philosophy (*sharīʿa* and *ḥikma*) better than al-Imām al-Ghazālī," however, al-Shahrastānī was incensed by this.[15]

2. *Al-Shahrastānī is a person who is inclined to Bāṭiniyya-(Nizārī) Ismāʿīliyya*; he promotes this sect and consequently is at an extreme point in Shīʿism. This accusation is narrated by Abū Saʿd al-Samʿānī.[16] Although Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī said: "I do not know where al-Samʿānī got this information from," and stated that "the ideas expressed in al-Sharastānī's works entirely refute this accusation,"[17] Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, who spent thirty years of his life within the *Nizārī Ismāʿīlī* movement and then adopted the Imāmī Shīʿī creed, mentions al-Shahrastānī, in one of his pamphlets, as *dāʿī l-duʿāt*, which is an important status in the Bāṭinī-Ismāʿīlī hierarchy.[18]

The general claim and accusation, based on a number of al-Shahrastānī's views and interpretations expressed in some of his

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15 Al-Bayhaqī, *Tatimma*, 120.

16 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, XX, 287.

17 Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, VI, 130.

18 See Abū Jaʿfar Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī, *Majmūʿat rasāʾil* (Tehran: MS Library of Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Millī, no. 9480), fol. 3ª. Also see Mayer, "Translator's Introduction", 15; id., "Shahrastānī on the Arcana of the Qurʾan: A Preliminary Evaluation", *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* VII/2 (2005), 65. In the Ismāʿīlī mission hierarchy, the *imām* chooses the most apt and knowledgeable among the *dāʿī*s, and this *dāʿī* is known as *dāʿī l-duʿāt*. Inspection of the mission in all regions is given to the head *dāʿī*. Furthermore, the head *dāʿī* is like a bridge that enables communication between the *imām* and the *dāʿī*s. He also organizes meetings of philosophy (*ḥikma*) based on esoteric interpretation. This highest-ranking *dāʿī*, who is also known as the *dāʿī-yi akbar* and *bāb*, is responsible to the *ḥujja*, who represents a higher level. See Mustafa Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Aşırı Yorum: Tefsirde Bâtınilik ve Bâtını Te'vil Geleneği* [*The Qurʾān and Overinterpretation: Esotericism in the Qurʾānic Commentaries and Tradition of Esoteric Interpretation*] (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2003), 98-99.

works, that al-Shahrastānī was a Shīʿī, or the more particular claim that he was a Bāṭinī-Ismāʿīlī, have been discussed by Muḥammad Riḍā Jalālī Nāʾīnī and many other contemporary researchers, such as Muḥammad Taqī Dānish-pazhūh, Wilferd Madelung, Jean Jolivet and Guy Monnot. In this context, the impartial style of al-Shahrastānī (particularly in *al-Milal*), the fact that *Nihāyat al-iqdām* ends with a prayer from al-Imām Zayn al-ʿābidīn (d. 94/713), who is fourth in the Ithnā ʿAsharī Shīʿī chain,[19] the deep reverence shown for *Ahl al-bayt* and the imāms, as well as his occasional usage of sympathetic statements towards the Shīʿa have generally been interpreted as an inclination to Shīʿism.[20] In addition, interpretations of an esoteric nature in his commentary, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, the use of concepts such as *maẓhar*, *maṣdar*, *taḍādd*, *tarattub*, which are quite common in the works of Ismāʿīlī philosophers, and in particular his esoteric interpretations of many Qurʾānic terms, such as *ḥajj*, *ʿumra*, *bayt al-ḥarām*, with reference to *Ahl al-bayt* and the imāms, have been cited as indications of his inclination towards Bāṭinī-Ismāʿīlī thought. Furthermore, al-Shahrastānī's usage of some concepts, such as *kalima*, in line with Ismāʿīlī terminology has led to him being considered an Ismāʿīlī.[21]

3. *Al-Shahrastānī is one of the severest opponents of the Imāmī Shīʿism.* This view belongs to the Imāmī Shīʿī writer Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325). However, this view is a direct juxtaposition of what Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) writes in *Minhāj al-sunna*, a refutation of al-Ḥillī's *Minhāj al-karāma*:

> The truth is not as al-Ḥillī states. In fact, al-Shahrastānī is inclined to the views of Imāmī Shīʿism in many subjects. He has even sometimes restated the views of the Bāṭinī-Ismāʿīlī branch of the Shīʿa. For this

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19 Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-iqdām*, 504.

20 See Steigerwald, "The Divine Word (*Kalima*)," 337-339. In addition, see Wilferd Madelung, "Aspects of Ismāʿīlī Theology: The Prophetic Chain and God Beyond Being," in Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ed.), *Ismāʿīlī Contributions to Islamic Culture* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977), 59-60; id., "Shiism: Ismāʿīlīyah," *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. Mircea Eliade; London & New York: Macmillan, 1987), XIII, 255.

21 Steigerwald, "The Divine Word (*Kalima*)," 351-352. Also see al-Suḥaybānī, *Manhaj al-Shahrastānī*, 157-179. Toby Mayer, who describes al-Shahrastānī's system of thought as eclectic, believes that the dominant element is Ismāʿīlī belief. See Mayer, "Shahrastānī on the Arcana of the Qurʾan," 75-76.

reason some people have claimed that he belongs to the Ismāʿīliyya – although in reality he does not – and the same people use his views and conduct to produce evidence to support this claim. It is said that al-Shahrastānī is Shīʿī in one way and Ashʿarī in another, which is quite a common situation among those who specialize in *kalām* and the preachers. Hence, these groups use the supplications narrated from *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-sajjādiyya* of ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-ʿābidīn. However, most of these are prayers that have been fabricated and attributed to ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn. In short, al-Shahrastānī has adopted an attitude that is inclined towards Shīʿism either sincerely or to appease them. Thus, he wrote *al-Milal wa-l-niḥal* for someone who was one of the forerunners of Shīʿism and had influence in the government (here the author is referring to Naqīb al-ashrāf Abū l-Qāsim Majd al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Jaʿfar al-Mūsawī); al-Shahrastānī wrote this so that he would be included in the close circle of the aforementioned individual. Moreover, al-Shahrastānī wrote *al-Muṣāraʿa*, which was written to criticize Ibn Sīnā's views, because of his inclination towards Shīʿism and philosophy. Even if the person (ʿAlī ibn Jaʿfar al-Mūsawī) to whom these books were dedicated is not an Ismāʿīlī, he is at least a Shīʿī. Thus, al-Shahrastānī openly discloses his Shīʿism in this work.[22]

4. The claims and accusations that al-Shahrastānī's creed is faulty and/or that he is a Bāṭinī-Ismāʿīlī appear in two books, *al-Taḥbīr* by al-Samʿānī and *Tārīkh* by al-Khwārazmī whose entry on al-Shahrastānī was narrated in *Muʿjam al-buldān* by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī. In an environment where there was substantial rivalry, accusations were made to weaken the rival; in particular during the Seljuqī period, the way to denigrate someone was to claim that he was an Ismāʿīlī. Accusations of atheism in Baghdād or being an Ismāʿīlī in Marw or Nīshāpūr were two important tools for such incriminations. Both al-Khwārazmī and al-Samʿānī may have reflected this attitude in their writings. However, there may be some justification for those who accused al-Shahrastānī of such a stance, as his keenness for philosophy was seen by some as being far removed from the light of *sharīʿa*, and falling into the darkness of philosophy. Thus, what al-

[22] Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya* (ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim; Riyāḍ: Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmiyya, 1986), VI, 305-306.

Khwārazmī is criticizing is al-Shahrastānī's defense of philosophical ideas.[23]

5. According to Daniel Gimaret, al-Shahrastānī did not perceive the two sources of knowledge, that is, divine revelation and philosophy, as being alternatives to one another. It is true that he was interested in philosophy and believed in freethinking, but this approach does not necessarily make him an Ismāʿīlī. On the other hand, the way al-Shahrastānī demonstrates different stances in different subjects is something that is quite common amongst Muslim philosophers. A similar situation can be seen in al-Ghazālī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210). In truth, al-Shahrastānī was a distinctive Ashʿarī *mutakallim*, as well as a Shīʿī, a philosopher and a Sufi. As far as being an Ismāʿīlī is concerned, al-Shahrastānī might have been close to the Ismāʿīlī circles at one point, but this does not change the fact that he was a Sunnī.[24]

In this context, Muḥammad ʿAlī Ādharshab's evaluations on this subject may be useful. According to Ādharshab, al-Shahrastānī was actually a Sunnī, but because of his vast knowledge, as displayed in *al-Milal*, he always approached each sect as a scholar, searching for the truth. In addition, al-Shahrastānī understood that Islam had become flesh and blood in the person of ʿAlī and *Ahl al-bayt*, and perceived that *Ahl al-bayt* were the inheritors of the prophetic knowledge in creedal and legal issues. Essentially, it is not difficult for a Muslim from Ahl al-sunna to reach such a conclusion based on the authenticated sources. Al-Shahrastānī started to search for information on *Ahl al-bayt* from various sources and openly stated that he had consulted Imāmī Shīʿī sources, such as al-Kulaynī's (d. 329/941) *al-Kāfī* and the Qurʾānic commentary of al-ʿAyyāshī (d. 320/932?). It is also possible that he consulted Ismāʿīlī sources and took information that he thought referred to *Ahl al-bayt* from these sources. It is highly likely that Ismāʿīlī sources played an important role in forming the views and comments that were conveyed in his Qurʾānic com-

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[23] Ömer Faruk Harman, "Şehristânî [al-Shahrastānī]," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (*DİA*) [*Turkish Religious Foundation Encyclopedia of Islam*] (Istanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2010), XXXVIII, 467.

[24] Daniel Gimaret, "Introduction," in al-Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions et des sectes* (trans. Daniel Gimaret & G. Monnot; Paris & Leuven: UNESCO & Peeters, 1986), I, 9-10, 59-63, (quoted in Harman, "Şehristânî", XXXVIII, 467).

mentary, including the idea of the existence of secret knowledge that belonged to *Ahl al-bayt*.[25]

6. *Al-Shahrastānī was a person who fully embraced the Sunnī Ashʿarī creed.* Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, who is of this opinion, finds the accusation made by al-Samʿānī to be strange; he indicates that the works of al-Shahrastānī refute these claims.[26] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449) states that there is nothing in al-Shahrastānī's books that can be used to raise doubts about his thought in terms of sound Islamic creed.[27] Similarly, Muḥammad Ṭanjī states:

> Despite all the claims against him, al-Shahrastānī is in no doubt a full Sunnī in his creed and he follows Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī. He talks about al-Ashʿarī as his master (*ustādh*) on various occasions [in his work *Nihāyat al-iqdām*]. In controversial matters between Shīʿīs and Sunnīs, such as the matter of caliphate, the rank of the four caliphs both in succession and preference, the cursing of the companions by the Shīʿīs, their damnation, and even accusing them of blasphemy, al-Shahrastānī is in complete agreement with the views of Ahl al-sunna, and strongly refutes Shīʿī arguments. His theological views are all in conformity with the views of Ahl al-sunna.[28]

As can be seen, there are many various views and claims about al-Shahrastānī's sectarian identity. No doubt, all these claims and views require further investigation if we are to understand which one is true, or indeed, closer to the truth. We hope that the following section of this work, which is concerned with *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, its analysis and critique, will shed light on al-Shahrastānī's sectarian identity, allowing us to come to sound conclusions.

Does *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* Belong to al-Shahrastānī?

Before proceeding onto a content analysis of the commentary, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, about which we have briefly mentioned some characteristics, it is necessary to elaborate on the matter of the attribution

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25 Ādharshab, "Muqaddimat al-Muṣaḥḥiḥ," I, 33-34.

26 Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, VI, 130.

27 Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Lisān al-mīzān*, V, 462.

28 Muḥammad Ṭanjī, "Şehristânî [al-Shahrastānī]," *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (*İA*) [*Encyclopedia of Islam*] (Istanbul: MEB Yayınları, 1993), XI, 396; Ādharshab, "Muqaddimat al-Muṣaḥḥiḥ," I, 33.

of this work to al-Shahrastānī. Some statements in the author's introduction, particularly those that support the claims of alterations being made to the Qurʾān and the esoteric interpretations that are found under the title of *Asrār*, raise questions about whether this work belongs to al-Shahrastānī. In addition, the fact that there is no mention of a Qurʾānic commentary known as *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* being written by al-Shahrastānī in the *ṭabaqāt* or the history of *tafsīr* literature increases this suspicion. However, some researchers who have studied al-Shahrastānī's books believe that *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* is his work.

According to Ādharshab's evaluation and assessment, there is no mention of this commentary in the older sources that provide information about al-Shahrastānī's life and works, but his contemporary Ẓahīr al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī mentions that al-Shahrastānī wrote a *tafsīr*. In biographical books, al-Shahrastānī's only book in the area of *tafsīr* that is mentioned is *Tafsīr/Sharḥ sūrat Yūsuf*. The reason that *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* is not mentioned in the related sources is most probably because al-Shahrastānī wrote this piece in the latter part of his life, when he went into seclusion in his hometown. For this reason, writers such as al-Bayhaqī, al-Khwārazmī and al-Samʿānī, who lived during the same period, did not hear about this work, and consequently this work was not mentioned by any other writer who narrated information about al-Shahrastānī from the works of these three.[29]

According to another finding of Ādharshab, the first book that mentions al-Shahrastānī's *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* is *Biḥār al-anwār*, the work of an Imāmī Shīʿī author, Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1110/1698[?]). In the volume that is concerned with the issue of *imāma*, which includes some verses that are believed to have been revealed about and/or indicating the imāms, he quotes a remark of al-Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 117/735) to the effect that *ahl al-dhikr*, which are mentioned in Q 16:43 and Q 21:7, are the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt*, referring to al-Shahrastānī's commentary with the expression "*rawā l-Shahrastānī fī tafsīrihī l-musammā bi-*Mafātīḥ al-asrār."[30] Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Zanjānī (d. 1940), in his work *Tārīkh al-Qurʾān*, quotes al-Shahrastānī's work on subjects such as *al-aḥruf al-*

[29] Ādharshab, "Muqaddimat al-Muṣaḥḥiḥ," I, 33.

[30] Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* (2nd ed., Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Wafāʾ, 1983), XXIII, 172.

sabʿa (the seven modes), the claim that the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt* occupy a distinguished position in understanding the Qurʾān, and the order of the *sūra*s in several copies of the Qurʾān that belonged to certain companions of the Prophet.[31] According to our findings, while explaining Q 33:34 in his commentary, *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854) refers to al-Shahrastānī's interpretation of Q 2:129, when discussing the concept of wisdom (*ḥikma*) that corresponds to the Prophetic traditions (*sunna*), using the expression *ḥakāhu Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī fī awāʾil tafsīrihī* Mafātīḥ al-asrār.[32]

According to Ādharshab, who has no doubt that *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* belongs to al-Shahrastānī, this work is in harmony with al-Shahrastānī's other works in terms of style and content. Furthermore, the words and concepts, syntax, styles of expression and conclusions make it clear that the style used in this work is that of al-Shahrastānī.[33] After comparing several works, such as *al-Milal* and *Nihāyat al-iqdām*, and discovering a resemblance in expression and style, al-Suḥaybānī indicates that *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* was written by al-Shahrastānī and he gives examples from the latter and from *al-Milal* in support of this statement.[34]

In addition to the above, another indicator that confirms the thesis that *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* was written by al-Shahrastānī is the references made by the author to other of his works in the interpretation of some of the verses. For example, in the interpretation of Q 2:36, he refers to *al-Tārīkh* (he is probably referring to *Tārīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*) and *al-ʿUyūn wa-l-anhār* for a more detailed explanation about the misdeed that caused the expulsion of Adam from Paradise and the wisdom behind Satan's fall from grace. After providing information about Ṣābiʾīs in the interpretation of Q 2:62, he says: "This is the conviction of the Ṣābiʾīs, but the explanation of this belief is lengthy. For

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31 Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Zanjānī, *Tārīkh al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī li l-Maṭbūʿāt, 1969), 45, 54, 75, 85.

32 Abū l-Thanāʾ Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-maʿānī fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm wa-l-sabʿ al-mathānī* (ed. ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Bārī ʿAṭiyya; 2nd ed., Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2005), XI, 200.

33 Ādharshab, "Muqaddimat al-Muṣaḥḥiḥ," I, 35-36.

34 Al-Suḥaybānī, *Manhaj al-Shahrastānī*, 139-154.

further information on the subject, see *al-Milal*."[35] However, despite all this evidence that supports the supposition that the work belongs to al-Shahrastānī, it would be better not to arrive at a final conclusion, but to leave some room for doubt. This doubt must exist as this work was quoted for the first time by Imāmī Shīʿī Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī; that is, no scholar quoted this work that was supposedly by al-Shahrastānī until five hundred years after his death. Nevertheless, the information, opinions and evaluations that appear below are based on the premise that this work was written by al-Shahrastānī and the conclusions will be drawn accordingly.

Introduction of the Commentary

As pointed out in the section concerned with al-Shahrastānī's work, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* consists of a short foreword and an introduction entitled *Mafātīḥ al-furqān* (Keys to the Criterion) followed by the commentary on the first two chapters of the Qurʾān. As can be understood from the expressions in the foreword, al-Shahrastānī perceives the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt* as being absolute authorities on the Qurʾān and its interpretation. He describes the imāms in a way that is similar to the narrations of al-Kulaynī in *al-Ḥujja* section of his work *al-Kāfī*, and says: "They are the inheritors of the Qurʾān", "they are one of the two great trusts (*thaqalayn*)", and "they have the knowledge of both worlds and both existences". According to al-Shahrastānī, in the same way that the angels oversaw every aspect of the revelation (*tanzīl*) of the Qurʾān, the imāms, who are the true leaders of guidance, protect every aspect of its exegesis and interpretation. The protection of the revelation of *dhikr*/the Qurʾān, which is stated in Q 15:9 as: "Lo! We, even We, reveal the Reminder, and lo! We verily are its Guardian," is administered by guardian angels. The protection of the *dhikr* itself is administered by scholars (imāms of *Ahl al-bayt*) who are aware of the revelation; this is done not through predictions or presumptions, but with absolute knowledge about the revelation and interpretation, *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*, *nāsikh* and *mansūkh*, *ʿāmm* and *khāṣṣ*, *mujmal* and *mufaṣṣal*, *muṭlaq* and *muqayyad*, *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*, orders and prohibitions, *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*, and *ḥudūd* and *aḥkām*.

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[35] Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 291, 390.

Thus, according to al-Shahrastānī, the companions were in consensus that the knowledge of the Qurʾān belonged to *Ahl al-bayt*. A narration states that the companions came to ʿAlī and asked: "As a member of the household of the Prophet did you receive special knowledge other than the Qurʾān?" The statement, "other than the Qurʾān" shows that the companions were in agreement that the information about the revelation and interpretation of the Qurʾān belonged to *Ahl al-bayt*. In addition, even Ibn ʿAbbās was trained at ʿAlī's side; the former was accepted as an authority by all scholars of Qurʾānic interpretation, and the Prophet recited the following prayer for him: "O Allah, give him depth and insight in religion and teach him *taʾwīl* (interpretation)."[36]

Al-Shahrastānī explains how he was trained in the area of commentary as follows:

> In my youth I just listened to my teachers about the Qurʾānic commentary; in time I gained an understanding in this area and took notes about what I had learnt on the matter of commentary from my teacher Nāṣir al-Sunna Abū l-Qāsim Salmān ibn Nāṣir al-Anṣārī (may Allah be pleased with him). Later, my teacher allowed me to acquire the hidden knowledge and the sound fundamentals of the Qurʾān which came to us from *Ahl al-bayt* and their close friends.[37] [On the other hand] someone [a Divine Being?] called to me from the direction of a blessed tree on the right side of the valley of that blessed place and said, "O ye who believe! Be careful of your duty to Allah, and be with the truthful!" [Q 9:119]. Thereupon, just like the narration about Prophet Moses and his young friend who traveled a long distance and found the person they were looking for, which is related in the Qurʾān as: "So they found one of Our slaves, on whom We had bestowed mercy from Ourselves, and whom We had taught knowledge from Our own presence" [Q 18:65], I also set off in accordance with the way of those who fall in love, looking for the faithful servants. At last I found one of the virtuous servants of Allah. From this faithful

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[36] Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 4-5.

[37] The sentence that starts with "later my teacher", has been translated here in accordance with the grammatical discretion of both Muḥammad ʿAlī Ādharshab, the editor of *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, and Toby Mayer, who translated some sections (the introduction and the commentary of *al-Fātiḥa*) into English. However, this sentence has been mistranslated. In the following section the reason and motives behind this mistranslation and other errors in the translation will be explained.

servant I learnt the ways of explanation about the matters of creation and command (*khalq-amr*), the degrees of contrariety and hierarchy (*taḍādd-tarattub*), the two-dimensional matter of generality and particularity (*ʿumūm-khuṣūṣ*) and the two principles of the accomplished and inchoative (*mafrūgh-mustaʾnaf*). In this way, I was nourished and sated from one source, unlike those who are confused and immured in ignorance due to feeding from various sources. I drank my fill from the fountain of submission, in which there is a combination of *tathnīm;* at last I was proficient in the language of the Qurʾān, its composition and order, eloquence, fluency, articulateness and wonders.[38]

Based on these statements, some researchers have claimed that al-Shahrastānī's inclination to Shīʿism (*tashayyuʿ*) possibly comes from Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī's interest in *kalām* and philosophy.[39] Toby Mayer, who worked on *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, also claims that al-Shahrastānī's original contact with the Bāṭinī-Ismāʿīlī heritage was possibly made through this person.[40] According to this claim, Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī is a secret Ismāʿīlī; however, as recorded by Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, al-Anṣārī, who is renowned for his Sufi identity, was one of the prominent figures of Ashʿariyya.[41] According to the findings of Ayman Shihadeh, which we find to be very accurate, Toby Mayer's conclusion about Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī and al-Shahrastānī – that al-Shahrastānī honed his views and interpretive methods of *Ahl al-bayt* imāms with the Qurʾānic secrets that he learned from his teacher Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī, that the latter was actually a secret Ismāʿīlī master, and that al-Shahrastānī made his first acquaintance with Ismāʿīlī thought through this master – are all based on the incorrect structuring and misinterpretation of a statement in the Arabic text in the passage quoted above.

Toby Mayer, who has translated the introduction of *Mafātīḥ* and the commentary of *al-Fātiḥa* into English, and Muḥammad ʿAlī Ādharshab, the editor of *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, identified Abū l-Qāsim as the subject of the verb in the statement *thumma aṭlaʿanī muṭālaʿāt kalimāt sharīfa ʿan Ahl al-bayt wa-awliyāʾihim ʿalā asrār dafīna wa-*

[38] Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 5.

[39] Al-Suḥaybānī, *Manhaj al-Shahrastānī*, 66.

[40] Mayer, "Translator's Introduction," 6.

[41] Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, VII, 96-99.

uṣūl matīna fī ʿilm al-Qurʾān. Furthermore, a *min* was placed in a bracket before the word *muṭālaʿāt*. However, in Arabic, the subject of the verb *aṭlaʿa*, which is used with the preposition *ʿalā*, is not Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī, but the phrase *muṭālaʿāt*^{u} *kalimāt*^{in}. Thus, the aforementioned statement means: "Afterwards, my studies on the precious statements and views that were narrated from *Ahl al-bayt* and their friends have revealed to me the secrets and the sound basics of the Qurʾān." That Ādharshab and Mayer did not consider *muṭālaʿāt* to be the subject of the verb *aṭlaʿa* is possibly because of the incompatibility between the verb and the subject in terms of masculinity and femininity. However, using a masculine verb followed by a feminine subject was common in the Arabic texts of the Middle Ages.[42] In fact, three points are emphasized in the passage above: (1) in his youth, al-Shahrastānī listened to the commentary of the Qurʾān from his teachers and in particular recorded the commentaries of his teacher, Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī, (2) al-Shahrastānī came to understand the secrets of the Qurʾān through the study of the statements and views of *Ahl al-bayt* and their friends, and (3) someone (a Divine Being?) called upon al-Shahrastānī to be with the faithful servants. Upon this call he went searching, finally finding that faithful servant.[43]

According to Ayman Shihadeh, this mysterious faithful servant is either a contemporary of al-Shahrastānī or is symbolic, indicating a deep source of mystical knowledge.[44] However, according to Toby Mayer, this anonymous/nameless figure is someone other than Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī, a person who introduced al-Shahrastānī to the heritage of Ismāʿīlī thought – probably a disciple of al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ṣabbāḥ (d. 518/1124) or even the man himself.[45] Toby Mayer's views seem to be an assumption; nevertheless, we can easily state that al-Shahrastānī attained philosophical wisdom through a mysterious spiritual mentor, a private source of knowledge or through his ex-

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[42] To this argument of Ayman Shihadeh we could add the fact that the word *muṭālaʿāt* is *ghayr ʿāqil* (non-human) and there is a rule that allows the usage of a masculine verb when there is a first person pronoun (*yāʾ*) between such a subject and verb.

[43] Ayman Shihadeh, review of *Keys to the Arcana: Shahrastānī's Esoteric Commentary on the Qurʾan*, trans. by Toby Mayer, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* XXI/2 (2010), 195.

[44] Shihadeh, review of *Keys to the Arcana*, 195.

[45] Mayer, "Translator's Introduction," 7.

amination of the views and commentary of the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt*. Indeed, al-Shahrastānī first perceived linguistic specifications of the Qurʾān, such as composition, order, eloquence and articulateness in parallel to the knowledge that he had attained in religious sciences and philosophical wisdom. Later, he understood that the divine word was an endless ocean of meaning; again, in line with the fruit of his intellectual journey, al-Shahrastānī first related comments on subjects such as *qirāʾāt*, grammar, linguistics and semantics, and then laid out the deep and hidden meanings of each verse. However, he did not make up these meanings; on the contrary, al-Shahrastānī narrated what he had learned from the interpretations of prominent people, whom he describes as *abrār*.

In interpreting the Qurʾān, al-Shahrastānī sought refuge in Allah from doing exegesis based on his personal opinion, independent of narration and *isnād*;[46] this is something he emphasized many times. Nevertheless, he made very sophisticated comments, particularly under the subheading *Asrār*. According to the author, these comments are not the product of his personal thought, but, presumably, are the manifestations of the wisdom he attained through his master and/or through a deep source of knowledge. At the same time, these comments are the product of the spiritual power that emanated from this wisdom and the fruit of that which had been revealed to him (*futūḥāt*).

It is due to this wisdom that al-Shahrastānī referred to his commentary as *Mafātīḥ al-asrār wa-maṣābīḥ al-abrār*. As Ādharshab has pointed out, the *mafātīḥ* (the keys) in this title is that which enables one to attain secret and deep meanings; the use of this word indicates basic concepts and theories, such as *khalq-amr*, *taḍādd-tarattub*, *mafrūgh-mustaʾnaf*, which are derived from a private and secret source of knowledge, whereas *abrār* corresponds to *Ahl al-bayt*. Indeed, according to the narrations from Shīʿī exegetes, Q 76:5, which starts with *inna l-abrār* and the following verses (5-22) were revealed when ʿAlī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (may Allah be pleased with them) gave their own food to poor, orphaned or enslaved people.[47] When this point is taken into consideration, the

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[46] Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 5-6.

[47] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (ed. Aḥmad Ḥabīb Qaṣr al-ʿĀmilī; Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.), X, 211; Abū ʿAlī al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*

meaning of the word *abrār* in the phrase *maṣābīḥ al-abrār* can be better understood.[48]

As far as the introduction of the commentary, which is entitled *Mafātīḥ al-furqān*, is concerned, there are twelve titles and subjects that are discussed in the following order: (1) the first and last revealed verses and the period of the revelation of the Qurʾān, (2) the matter of compilation of the Qurʾān, (3) the differences between narrators on the order of revelation of the chapters of the Qurʾān, (4) *Qirāʾa*s, (5) matters that are recommended and matters that are disliked for people who read the Qurʾān (6) the number of chapters, verses, words and letters in the Qurʾān, (7) prominent exegetes from among the companions and other generations, and noteworthy works in the area of Qurʾānic commentary, (8) the meaning of *tafsīr* and *taʾwīl*, (9) *ʿumūm-khuṣūṣ*, *muḥkam-mutashābih* and *nāsikh-mansūkh*, (10) divine rules that are *mafrūgh* and those that are *mustaʾnaf* according to the principles of *khalq* and *amr* and principles of *taḍādd* and *tarattub*, (11) the miracle of the Qurʾān in terms of composition, articulateness, eloquence, guidance (*hidāya*), etc., (12) prerequisites for commentating on the Qurʾān.

Very interesting and thought-provoking information, views and assessments are included under these twelve titles. For example, in the section that is concerned with the compilation of the Qurʾān, al-Shahrastānī first recounts the process of compiling and copying the Qurʾān respectively by Abū Bakr and ʿUthmān, referring to the narrations from *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/869). However, he later cites a narration which says: "Some people of knowledge said that there had been many verses in the Qurʾān about the virtue of *Ahl al-bayt*, but they removed them." Following this, al-Shahrastānī recounts nearly all the problematic narrations about the process of compilation of the Qurʾān; for example, he relates that some verses were only found with a companion called Khuzayma ibn Thābit and that private copies of the Qurʾān which were with some companions, such as Ibn

(Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), X, 168; ʿAbd ʿAlī ibn Jumʿa al-Ḥuwayzī, *Tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* (ed. ʿAlī ʿĀshūr; Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabī, 2001), VIII, 66; Fayḍ Mullā Muḥsin Muḥammad ibn Murtaḍā al-Kāshānī, *Tafsīr al-ṣāfī* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī li l-Maṭbūʿāt, 2008), III, 497; also see Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1988), XIX, 85.

[48] Ādharshab, "Muqaddimat al-Muṣaḥḥiḥ," I, 38-39.

Masʿūd or Ubayy ibn Kaʿb, had a different order and content from the copy of ʿUthmān. He goes on to relate how there were some grammatical mistakes (*laḥn*) in ʿUthmān's copy and that in the beginning some chapters were much longer than they were in this copy. The author also tells us how some verses, such as the verse about stoning to death (*rajm*), were excluded; however, in the end al-Shahrastānī tells us that there was a consensus that the ʿUthmān's copy was the standard Qurʾān.[49]

Yet, according to al-Shahrastānī, there is no value in this consensus, as the ʿUthmān's copy was crippled by many linguistic mistakes, as mentioned in the aforementioned narrations. This means that the Qurʾān had been altered and distorted. At this point, al-Shahrastānī states that he is shocked and disappointed with that when the Qurʾān was being compiled and copied, ʿAlī and the copy of the Qurʾān which he had were ignored, although ʿAlī was a native Arab who was much closer to the Prophet and superior to everyone in the copy committee in his understanding of the Qurʾān and writing skills. However, Allah protected the Qurʾān through *Ahl al-bayt*, and thus the text of the Qurʾān has reached us today protected from all kinds of distortions, alterations, deficiencies or additions.[50]

It is thought-provoking that these views were expressed by al-Shahrastānī, who was renowned as a Sunnī. His statement that the ʿUthmān's copy is rife with many grammatical mistakes and missing verses, followed up by his claim that "the text of the Qurʾān we have today has been protected from all kinds of alteration and distortion," – attributing this protection to *Ahl al-bayt*, although not expressing how this could be – creates a problem. However, it is very hard to explain that the views that are put forward on this subject by al-Shahrastānī are parallel to some Shīʿī groups that are even more extreme than the Ismāʿīlīs. For, as is known, the Ismāʿīlī sect has an orthodox understanding about the soundness of the text of the Qurʾān, although they delve deep in esoteric interpretations. On the other hand, in the works of ḥadīth scholars, such as al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902) and al-Kulaynī, who both belonged to the Akhbārī (Ahl al-ḥadīth) school of Imāmiyya and exegetes like Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 307/919) and Abū Naṣr al-ʿAyyāshī, there are

[49] Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 9-12.

[50] Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 13-15.

various narrations from the two imāms, Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq about how the verses concerning *Ahl al-bayt* and their virtues, as well as ʿAlī and his sainthood (*walāya*), have been removed or altered.[51]

Taking into consideration that the narrations of distortion which were narrated by al-Shahrastānī without citation of any sources have been attributed to al-Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq in Shīʿī Imāmī sources, who he is referring to as "some people of knowledge" becomes clear. However, these narrations, which have been recounted by Akhbārī Imāmī scholars without criticism, have been recognized by Uṣūlī Imāmī scholars, such as al-Sheikh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044) or Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), as being unsound, particularly in terms of *sanad/thubūt*, as they are *khabar wāḥid* (single narration) and narrated by extremist Shīʿī groups.[52]

In light of all this information, it is possible to say that al-Shahrastānī considers the narrations about the Qurʾān and its distortion that were mentioned by Akhbārī scholars as being sound, and thus he adopted an approach that is refuted by most of the Imāmī scholars. This is supported by the fact that in the introduction of his commentary he first refers to al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī* and that the superior features he attributes to *Ahl al-bayt* exactly correlate with those mentioned in *al-Ḥujja* section of this book. Likewise, al-Shahrastānī's view about the differences in the revelation order of the chapters of the Qurʾān confirms the same result; this is because, according to al-Shahrastānī, the true revelation order from God as it was revealed, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, is only known by a few select scholars. Although not precisely noted by al-Shahrastānī, these are the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt*. Indeed, the following narration[53] by al-Kulaynī, taken from al-Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir, indicates the same

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51 For example, see Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī li l-Maṭbūʿāt, 1991), I, 22-23; Abū l-Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Masʿūd al-ʿAyyāshī, *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī li l-Maṭbūʿāt, 1991), I, 192-193.

52 For extensive information and an evaluation on the subject, see Öztürk, *Tefsirde Ehl-i Sünnet & Şia Polemikleri* [*Sunnī & Shīʿī Debates in Qurʾānic Exegesis*] (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2009), 173-191.

53 Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī fī ʿilm al-dīn* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1365 HS), I, 228.

thing: "Whoever says that the entire Qurʾān was compiled as it was (revealed from Allah Almighty) is a liar. Because, those who have compiled and protected the Qurʾān as it was revealed from Allah Almighty are only ʿAlī and the imāms who came after him."

Other information in this context that is given by al-Shahrastānī needs to be examined. In particular, the lists he provides about the order of revelation and compilation of chapters of the Qurʾān are significant. According to the statement of the author, while it is not likely that these lists can be found elsewhere, they are narrated from trustworthy narrators and respected books. The first of the five lists concerned with the revelation order of the Qurʾān is narrated by the narrators of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/167), while the second is from ʿAlī through Muqātil, the third is from Ibn ʿAbbās, the fourth is from Ibn Wāqid[54] and the fifth is from al-Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. As for the lists regarding the compilation order of the Qurʾān, the first is that of ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, the second is the copy of Ibn Masʿūd, the third is the copy belonging to Ubayy ibn Kaʿb. The fourth one is based on a narration by Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Khālid al-Barqī (d. 274/887 or 280/893), who was a famous Shīʿī ḥadīth scholar of the early period of the Imāmiyya and a companion of al-Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799), and al-Imām Riḍā (d. 203/818), while the final one is based on a report by al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 292/905).[55]

On the subject of readings (*qirāʾāt*) of the Qurʾān, al-Shahrastānī displays, as it were, a different stance. Strictly speaking, the attitude adopted by al-Shahrastānī on the subject is completely orthodox; this is because, according to him, all of the seven or ten *qirāʾa*s that are renowned and accepted in the circles of Ahl al-sunna are based on Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) through sound narrations. Thus, there is no permission for individual preference in *qirāʾāt*. None of the famous imāms of *qirāʾa*, such as Ibn ʿĀmir (d. 118/736), ʿĀṣim ibn

[54] This person is most probably Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn ibn Wāqid al-Qurashī al-Marwazī. According to the records of al-Dāwūdī (d. 945/1539), Ibn Wāqid, who died in 157/774 or 159/776, took lessons from scholars like ʿAbd Allāh ibn Burayda and ʿIkrima. Many scholars of ḥadīth, except for al-Bukhārī, narrated from Ibn Wāqid, who wrote a commentary and two other works, *Wujūh al-Qurʾān* and *al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*. See Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d.), I, 163-164.

[55] Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 16-30.

Bahdala (d. 127/745), Abū ʿAmr (d. 154/771) or al-Nāfiʿ (d. 169/785) produced *qirāʾāt* according to their own preferences. Similarly, no one from among the companions or their descendants produced any *qirāʾa*, nor interpreted the Qurʾān, in line with their personal opinion. This is because the Prophet strictly forbade doing exegesis by personal opinion. On the other hand, the narrations that the Qurʾān was revealed in seven modes are sound.[56]

All these views correspond exactly with the generally accepted views of Ahl al-sunna. Furthermore, al-Shahrastānī is of the same opinion as Abū ʿAmr al-Dānī (d. 444/1054), Abū Shāma al-Maqdisī (d. 665/1267) and Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429) about *qirāʾāt* and the seven modes, even though this style of thought is absolutely contrary to the general Shīʿī views. The narrations about the revelation of the Qurʾān in seven modes are not approved of in the Imāmī Shīʿī tradition, and the opinion that these different *qirāʾa*s are *mutawātir* (mass narrated report) is not accepted.[57]

On the matter of commentating on the Qurʾān according to one's personal opinion, al-Shahrastānī seems to accept a parallel view to that of Ahl al-ḥadīth. However, Ahl al-ḥadīth mentioned here is not that which is known as *Ahl al-sunna al-khāṣṣa*, but rather is the Akhbāriyya, the equivalent of this school in the Imāmī Shīʿī tradition. We are able to arrive at this conclusion because, after reporting the narration about the impermissibility of creating commentary according to one's personal opinion, al-Shahrastānī refers to another narration that is narrated in the *tamrīḍ* mode (by the expression "*qīla* [it is said]"). This is attributed to al-Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq,[58] who is of the opinion that the interpretation of the Qurʾān according to one's personal opinion is not permissible. Al-Shahrastānī points out how difficult it is for a person to do exegesis of the Qurʾān, except, he adds, "for one group". In his own words, this group is none other than the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt*, the spiritual pillars of the world, people who have inherited one of the great trusts, the inheritors of the prophets and people who are the most prominent in both worlds, as well as

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56 Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 17, 37.

57 Öztürk, *Tefsirde Ehl-i Sünnet & Şia Polemikleri*, 229-272.

58 Al-ʿAyyāshī, *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, I, 17-29.

being close and favorite subjects of Allah, the trustees of His secrets and mines of wisdom.[59]

It should be stated here that the Ismāʿīliyya has a similar understanding about personal interpretation not being permissible for religion in general and the Qurʾān in particular, but it is ironic that while the same sect defends such an approach, they are also unparalleled in their production of esoteric interpretations. This seems also to be the case with al-Shahrastānī, which is as paradoxical as it is ironic. Although on the one hand, al-Shahrastānī says that it is not possible to do exegesis according to one's personal opinion, on the other hand he tries to justify the esoteric interpretations he produced founded on personal opinion according to enlightenment from the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt*. As researchers like Toby Mayer have pointed out, this explanation reminds the doctrine of *taʿlīm*[60] (learning religious truths under the mentorship of innocent imāms) of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs, however, it is not sufficient, at least for us, to solve the paradox in question.

Interestingly, al-Shahrastānī recommends a practice of religiosity that goes beyond the orthodox approach of a *faqīh* and is more specific to that of the ascetics and pious people on the subject of recommended and disliked actions for readers of the Qurʾān, and says:[61] "A person who is *junub* or menstruating cannot read the Qurʾān. Thus, the person who reads the Qurʾān should be clean and have ablution. Even if there is no harm in reciting the Qurʾān without the lesser ablution (*wuḍūʾ*), as a sign of respect to the Qurʾān, one should read it with the lesser ablution and turn in the direction of the Kaʿba, reading in a most somber voice, in a state of utmost calm and readiness of heart." In the introduction he repeats common views on the section about exegesis and interpretation of the Qurʾān; similarly, he does not say anything that contradicts the conventional view on subjects, such as the miraculousness of the Qurʾān or the matter of *muḥkam-mutashābih*. However, he rejects the conventional understanding of *naskh* and puts forth interesting opinions on this subject; in addition

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59 Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 37.

60 Mayer, "Shahrastānī on the Arcana of the Qurʾan," 75-76. For further information on the *taʿlīm* doctrine of Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs see Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Aşırı Yorum*, 283-296.

61 Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 40.

to this, he makes compelling statements in matters of *ʿumūm* (generality) and *khuṣūṣ* (particularity).

According to al-Shahrastānī, the subject of *ʿumūm* and *khuṣūṣ* has dimensions that differ from the content in the methodology of Islamic law (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). Many scholars, however, have failed to determine indicators of specific words and concepts in the Qurʾān that refer to certain person/people (*tashkhīṣ al-makhṣūṣāt*). Al-Shahrastānī says: "There is no *ʿāmm* (general) wording in the Qurʾān that is not specified and there is no specification that is not personalized" (*mā min lafẓ*^{in} *ʿāmm*^{in} *fī l-Qurʾān illā wa-qad dakhalahū l-takhṣīṣ wa-mā min takhṣīṣ*^{in} *illā wa-qad qāranahū l-tashkhīṣ*); he then goes on to give the following examples in support of this thesis:

> The word *al-nās* as a general term does not include children or insane people, but only the *mukallaf* (religiously responsible person). From this aspect, *al-nās* is an *ʿāmm* (general) term that has not been specified. This term can also be personalized in reference to a specific group. For example, in the verse: "Then hasten onward from the place whence the multitude hasteneth onward" (Q 2:199), the order "*afīḍū*/hasten onward" applies to specific persons (the *mukallaf*), while the word *al-nās* in the statement "*min ḥaythu afāḍa l-nās*" indicates more specific people, rather than the *mukallaf* in question. (Although not explicitly stated by al-Shahrastānī, these people are none other than the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt*.)
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> In other verses, the word *al-nās* is used to refer to a specific person among the imāms. For example, in the verse: "Or are they jealous of mankind…" the term *al-nās* refers to the Prophet, as is stated in some commentaries. This is the personalization of a *khāṣṣ* (specific) term.[62]

Both these views and his remarks that are in keeping with them have been accepted by some researchers as the greatest indication of al-Shahrastānī's inclination to esoteric interpretation.[63] We find this evaluation and assessment valid up to a point, as this kind of interpretation can be found in the commentaries of Shīʿī Imāmī exegetes, such as al-Qummī, al-ʿAyyāshī and Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, as well as in extreme Shīʿī sects, such as Kaysāniyya, Mughīriyya, Manṣūriyya,

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62 Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 50.

63 See al-Suḥaybānī, *Manhaj al-Shahrastānī*, 172-179.

Khaṭṭābiyya and Ismāʿīliyya.[64] Therefore, when examining his interpretations, it can be said that al-Shahrastānī displays an approach that is Shīʿī in general, while being Ismāʿīlī-Bāṭinī in particular.

Sources and Characteristics of the Commentary

The sources used in al-Shahrastānī's commentary can be divided into two categories, as the commentary consists of two dimensions. This double dimension is based on the division between *tanzīl* and *taʾwīl*, and between *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*. Indeed, the principle of *taḍādd-tarattub*, which al-Shahrastānī sees as one of the keys to the secrets of the Qurʾān, represents this double dimension. According to this, everything that has either a concrete or abstract quality has two poles and dimensions; for example, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, night and day, long and short, or black and white. As a matter of fact, everything in the Qurʾān is mentioned as having two sides, for example, belief and non-belief, believer and non-believer, and sin and good deeds. This double dimension is true for the Qurʾān itself, which has aspects of both *tanzīl* and *taʾwīl*. Again, the Qurʾān also has a *ẓāhirī* and a *bāṭinī* facet. Al-Shahrastānī, who frequently states narrations of *ẓāhir-bāṭin* about the Qurʾān, also frequently mentions the distinction of *tanzīl-taʾwīl* in the interpretation of many verses; according to him, *tanzīl* corresponds to the wording (*lafẓ*) of the Qurʾān, while *taʾwīl* corresponds to the deeper meaning. Again, according to this distinction, *tanzīl* is the subject of the science of Qurʾānic commentary that is concerned with the *ẓāhirī* dimension, which includes language, grammar, eloquence, linguistics, semantics, readings, and legal rulings. *Taʾwīl* is concerned with the deeper meanings and exploring the secrets of the Qurʾān.

Based on this categorical distinction, al-Shahrastānī first explains a verse from a *ẓāhirī* dimension and then goes onto the *bāṭinī* dimension, using different sources in accordance with the two different styles of explanation. He gives the sources he uses for the *ẓāhirī* dimensions. Among the sources of linguistics to which al-Shahrastānī refers are names like al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad (d. 175/791), Sībawayh (d. 180/796), al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. 215/830), al-Aṣmaʿī (d. 216/831), Abū ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Aʿrābī (d. 231/846), Thaʿlab (d. 291/904), al-Azharī (d. 370/980) and al-Jawharī (d. 400/1009). He also gives the

[64] See Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Aşırı Yorum*, 164-192, 418-431.

opinions of exegetes, such as al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822), al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī (d. 322/934) and al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī (d. 365/976). Al-Shahrastānī also narrates from scholars among the companions and the *tābiʿūn*, as well as the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt* in the interpretation of many verses, but he records the narrations without *sanad* (chain of narrators). He attributes a special importance to the opinions of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī among the sources of Qurʾānic interpretation that are mentioned, especially for the correlation between verses.

According to the statement of the author himself, the main source of the views and interpretations that comprise the distinctive section of *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, that is, *Asrār*, are the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt*. It is more likely that al-Shahrastānī, who bases his esoteric interpretations on the latter, took these interpretations from sources that are claimed to have belonged to al-Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and which are respected in the Bāṭinī-Ismāʿīlī tradition; these include *Khawāṣṣ al-Qurʾān*, *Miṣbāḥ al-sharīʿa wa-miftāḥ al-ḥaqīqa*, *Asrār al-waḥy*, *al-Khāfiya fī ʿilm al-ḥurūf* and *Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-tadbīr*, which were reported from Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar al-Juʿfī (d. 128/745[?]). In fact, the narrations he reports from al-Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq in the twelfth chapter of the introduction confirm this. According to one of the statements in these narrations, al-Imām Jaʿfar responds to a person called Sudayr al-Ṣayrafī, who asks if the claims that the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt* had qualities, such as receiving revelation, were true or not, saying: "Do not honor those who talk nonsense about us. We are the proofs of Allah and His agents over human beings. Whatever we say is *ḥalāl* or *ḥarām* comes from the book of Allah."[65]

According to another narration, a person named al-Fayḍ ibn al-Mukhtār complained and said: "Each one of your supporters says something different. What is this for God's sake?! I go to their circle in Kūfa and fall into almost total doubt, and then I go to Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar al-Juʿfī, I find what he says to be acceptable." Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq replied: "Yes, people close to us have made up many lies about us. It is to such extent that I narrate a ḥadīth to one of them and when that person leaves my side, he interprets it inappropriately." According to another narration, there was a claim in a letter written to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq that some of his supporters interpreted the orders and prohibi-

[65] Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 65.

tions in the Qurʾān only in the esoteric style. They said: "a certain person was intended for prayer, while another person was intended for fasting, another for *zakāt*, another for *ḥajj*; all of these people refer to the imāms. Whoever learns about these people will have prayed, fasted, given *zakāt* and performed *ḥajj*." They also understood that the prohibitions stood for certain people. al-Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq strongly denied all such interpretations.[66]

It is significant that all these narrations come from Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, because some people close to him attributed him with some miraculous features, even while he was still alive. It was claimed that he was interested in secret sciences, such as *jifr* and talismans, and even many works about these sciences were attributed to him.[67] Furthermore, all the sects in the history of Islamic thought which have esoteric tendencies, most importantly the *Ghulāt* (extreme Shīʿī sects) and the Ismāʿīlīs, have all shown great interest in Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and the works that have been attributed to him. When this point is taken into consideration, it can be said that al-Shahrastānī also used sources that were attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq in the interpretations he included under the title of *Asrār*; however, he tried to explain that although he has narrated these statements he does not adopt a stance that disregards the external (*ẓāhirī*) meaning, and thus he is not to be included among the extreme followers of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq.

As a result, it seems that the reason for including the aforementioned statements in the introduction is to indicate that a great number of the esoteric interpretations which have been attributed to the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt* are based on the authority of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and that these interpretations differ from the esotericism of those who ignore the *ẓāhir*. Another indicator that demonstrates which sources are used when narrating the esoteric interpretations of al-Shahrastānī is that most of the narrations of commentary from the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt* in Shīʿī literature come from al-Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir and al-Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. The narrations from al-Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir about the interpretations of Qurʾānic verses were recorded in the commentary of Abū l-Jārūd Ziyād ibn Mundhir (d. 150/767); this

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66 Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 65-66.

67 See Mehmet Atalan, *Şiîliğin Farklılaşma Sürecinde Ca'fer es-Sâdık'ın Yeri* [*The Place of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq in the Evolution Process of Shīʿa*] (Ankara: Araştırma Yayınları, 2005), 117-149.

commentary has in part reached us today through *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, which has been attributed to al-Qummī.[68] However, the content of the narrations from Muḥammad al-Bāqir do not correspond with the esoteric interpretations that al-Shahrastānī gives under the title *Asrār*; thus increasing the possibility that the aforementioned interpretations could have been quoted from works that are attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq.[69]

Features of Method and Contents of the Commentary

Mafātīḥ al-asrār is a very interesting commentary in terms of method and content. It is interesting in method because it is a commentary of *dirāya* (based on *raʾy*) by a scholar who claims that the interpretation by *raʾy* is forbidden. To state this paradox more clearly, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* is a commentary that is based on traditions and narrations according to the author, but in truth, the facet of *raʾy* outweighs the former. This seems to present a significant paradox. While al-Shahrastānī seeks refuge in Allah from interpreting the Qurʾān according to his own *raʾy*, he also mentions that he was the recipient of a prayer to receive knowledge for the sake of the prominent servants of Allah, saying: "I found the strength to reach the words of prophecy within myself (*hidāya*) and was familiar with the language of prophethood; in this way, I reached the secrets of the words of the glorious Qurʾān." However, in the end he adds: "without interpreting the Qurʾān according to my own *raʾy*."[70]

According to these statements, the interpretations given by al-Shahrastānī under the title of *Asrār* do not belong to him. In the seventh section of the introduction, he says that the true owners of the opinions stated under the section *Asrār* belong to those who are known as *ahl al-Qurʾān*, *aṣḥāb al-asrār*: "Those upon whom Allah

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[68] See Öztürk, "Şii-İmami Tefsir Kültürünün Genel Karakteristikleri [Characteristics of Imāmī Shīʿī Tafsīr Literature]," *Tarihten Günümüze Kur'an'a Yaklaşımlar* [*Approaches to the Qurʾān from the Beginning to the Present Day*] (eds. Bilal Gökkır et al.; Istanbul: İlim Yayma Vakfı, 2010), 250.

[69] The esoteric interpretations of al-Shahrastānī and the works attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq need to be compared if this is to be brought to the surface; however, this would require a separate study.

[70] Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 85-86.

guided to the right path" and "those who have been given knowledge of the secrets of the Qurʾān."[71]

Al-Shahrastānī is not content merely with narrations; he also records his own views and opinions about the secrets of the Qurʾān; however, he does not consider this to be his own *raʾy*. This is because, as we have indicated above, through his mysterious sage and/or his source of wisdom and through his contemplations of the statements of the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt* he earned a spiritual aptitude that helped him to discover the deep layers of meaning of the Qurʾān. Al-Shahrastānī believes that his understanding and commentary of the Qurʾān is correct because of this spiritual aptitude. On the other hand, the Qadariyya/Muʿtazila, Jabriyya, Mushabbiha and other sects did commentaries on the *mutashābih* verses according to their personal opinions, particularly those concerned with matters like divine attributes, preordination and fate. In this way they misinterpreted the Qurʾān and came to incorrect conclusions. In the same way, in the same subjects the Ashʿarīs also misinterpreted the Qurʾān.[72]

It is very interesting how al-Shahrastānī marginalizes Ashʿariyya[73] and describes all these sects as being confused and bewildered in terms of their understanding and interpretation of the Qurʾān. He goes on to explain that the main reason for this is their inability to acquire knowledge from the true source and gate of knowledge, that is, ʿAlī and his sons (the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt*). After discussing this matter, al-Shahrastānī reports various narrations about the virtues of ʿAlī and his absolute authority in understanding the Qurʾān, and then provides a number of narrations from Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq.[74]

Al-Shahrastānī then goes on to examine the matter of the keys that open the gate to the secrets of the Qurʾān; these keys are acquired through the guidance and wisdom that come from the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt* and are expressed with concepts and theories that al-Shahrastānī calls *ʿumūm-khuṣūṣ*, *taḍādd-tarattub*, *mafrūgh-mustaʾnaf* and *khalq-amr*. For example, according to the explanation

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71 Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 64-65.

72 Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 45.

73 For mention of the Ashʿariyya with other groups, such as the Muʿtazila, Qadariyya, Mushabbiha, Karrāmiyya and Falāsifa, see *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 147-148, 423, 549-550; II, 867.

74 Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 65-66.

of the author about *ʿumūm-khuṣūṣ*, there is no general concept in the Qurʾān that has not been assigned a specific expression, and there is no specification that does not fall under personalization. According to this, the attributes of those who are praised or criticized in the Qurʾān can be ascribed to certain people who lived during the period of Qurʾānic revelation, as well as to other people who lived after this period through personalization. In order to explain this, it would be helpful to cite the explanation of the author about the Israelites worshipping the calf, which is related in Q 2:54.

In the commentary of the aforementioned verse, al-Shahrastānī starts with the statement: "Those who take heed of the stories in the Qurʾān said …" and briefly records the following:

> Each parable of the Qurʾān has an equivalent in the Muslim community. A discord (*fitna*) similar to that which existed among the Israelites who were worshipping the calf after Prophet Moses went up Mount Sinai has fallen upon the Muslim community. In other words, the Muslim community has become slaves of the ostensible caliphates in a way that is similar to the Israelites who worshipped the calf. These caliphs are the Umayyads, whom the Prophet described as, "in my dream I saw some men trampling over my pulpit like donkeys." Indeed, some of the Umayyads seized the right of the caliphate from *Ahl al-bayt*, friends and allies of Allah, and some slaughtered them. As Allah ordered the Israelites to kill one another because of their worship of the calf, He brought down his wrath against those who worshipped the calf in this community, meaning those who martyred Ḥusayn and became the vanguards of hell, that is, the followers of Yazīd. This happened to such an extent that seventy thousand followers of Yazīd – may Allah increase their torment in Hell – were killed in a short period of time.[75]

In essence, this comment is strictly in keeping with the Imāmī concept of *tawallī-tabarrī*; to love the Prophet and those who have descended from his lineage and not to love those who do not love the Prophet or his lineage. The Imāmiyya believes that every Muslim must be lovingly devoted to *Ahl al-bayt*, because in Q 42:23 – according to the Shīʿī interpretation – Allah commands Muslims to love *Ahl al-bayt*. Also, Prophet Muḥammad declared that feeling affection for *Ahl al-bayt* is a sign of faith and also pointed out that loving *Ahl al-*

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[75] Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 355-356.

bayt is the equivalent of loving Allah and His Messenger. For this reason, loving *Ahl al-bayt* is equal to loving Allah and His Messenger, and is thus compulsory. A person who denies this truth is the same as someone who denies the obligation of *ṣalāt* (prayer) or *zakāt*, or even the prophethood.[76]

From the commentary of Q 2:165-167, which are concerned with how some people take (for worship) others than Allah and love them with a love that should be for Allah alone, it is possible to perceive the concept of *ʿumūm-khuṣūṣ* and the personalization of specific words which al-Shahrastānī utilizes as one of the keys for discovering the secrets of the Qurʾān; this is done in an attempt to establish a foundation for the *tawallī-tabarrī* concept of the Imāmiyya. In the commentary of these verses, al-Shahrastānī uses an expression that we can summarize here as: "According to these verses, to love Allah is to love one of His friends, while to attribute partners to Him is either to build idols and worship them or to adhere to the views of some people who are considered absolute authorities." Then al-Shahrastānī records some Prophetic traditions, for example: "Whoever loves my *Ahl al-bayt* loves me, and whoever loves me loves Allah," "On the Day of Judgment all forms of relations and lineage will be severed and will not be of any benefit, except my relation and lineage," "I am leaving you two great trusts. One is the book of Allah and the other is my *Ahl al-bayt*. If you faithfully hold on to these with you will never go astray."[77]

It is possible to make a connection with the Imāmiyya through the concepts of *mafrūgh-mustaʾnaf*, which al-Shahrastānī perceives as another important key to the secrets of the Qurʾān. The following explains the basic content of these concepts: There are two different worlds and two different divine edicts in the plane of existence. *Mafrūgh* signifies the completed world that has reached the point of perfection; the divine edict concerned with this world is final. No change in the *mafrūgh* world is possible. The *mustaʾnaf* world and edict have not yet reached perfection and so have not been finalized. For this reason, divine edicts about the *mustaʾnaf* world are open-ended. If this distinction is not taken into consideration, if the entire

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[76] Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Mūsawī al-Zanjānī, *ʿAqāʾid al-Imāmiyya al-Ithnā ʿAshariyya* (5th ed., Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Wafāʾ, 1982), III, 180.

[77] Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, II, 707-708. Also, see *ibid*., I, 436.

world is accepted as being *mafrūgh* and all divine edicts are deemed absolute and unchangeable, the idea of *jabr* (predestination) becomes inevitable while the opposite is accepted, then it is inevitable that *tafwīḍ* (complete freedom) will be adopted. Both of these approaches are incorrect; the correct way is to hold a path between these two, a path that finds its expression in the distinction between *mafrūgh* and *mustaʾnaf*.[78]

Al-Shahrastānī thinks that matters such as predestination (*qadar*), human actions, divine will and the freedom of the human being, as well as *hidāya* and *ḍalāla*, which are among the most debated subjects of Islamic *kalām*, can only be solved with this distinction; for instance Q 2:26 states that Allah has led most people astray by using similitudes of a gnat and such-like creatures, but at the end of the same verse it is stated that only those who have deviated have been led astray. Both of these divine statements are surely true; but the first one is a *mafrūgh* decree, and the second one is a *mustaʾnaf* decree. There is a dialectic relationship between these two decrees that reminds us of the relationship between the chicken and the egg. Furthermore, when it is understood that the *mafrūgh*, which is the final decree, occurs because of the *mustaʾnaf* and that the *mustaʾnaf* decree is derived from *mafrūgh*, it becomes clear that the idea of predestination and the denial of fate are both incorrect. About being led astray we can state the following: Allah led people astray, thus they went astray from the true path; however, at the same time, these people already went astray from the true path, thus Allah led them astray. This means that deviation (*fisq*) occurs with Allah's leading people astray and Allah leads people astray because they have willingly gone astray from the true path.[79]

This approach to divine edict and human actions reminds one of the idea that Ahl al-sunna is a middle way between the Jabriyya and Muʿtazila and even evokes the *kasb* theory of the Ashʿariyya, but strongly resembles the *badā* theory of the Imāmiyya. According to the *mafrūgh-mustaʾnaf* distinction that is mentioned above, Allah has two edicts, for the world of creation in general, and for human actions in particular. The first one is of a nature that is permanent and unchangeable (*makhtūm*). The second one comes under *mustaʾnaf*

[78] Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 54-55, 456.

[79] Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 229.

and can change.[80] For us, this understanding substantially overlaps with the *badā* theory of the Imāmiyya. According to a narration that has been attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, which is concerned with the *badā* theory that is connected to the subject of *imāma* and has caused great dispute among Imāmī Shīʿī scholars, it is said that with Allah all actions are divided into two: that is, *al-umūr al-makhtūma* and *al-umūr al-mawqūfa*. *Al-umūr al-makhtūma* is concerned with things that are final and closed to change, while *al-umūr al-mawqūfa* is concerned with things that are open to change in keeping with divine will and intention.[81] Moreover, as stated by some Shīʿī scholars, *badā* has been described as a secret knowledge that belongs to the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt*.[82] This description is closely related to the idea presented in a series of narrations in the basic Shīʿī ḥadīth and tafsīr sources that Allah has two kinds of knowledge. The first one is *al-ʿilm al-maknūn* and/or *al-ʿilm al-makhzūn*, which is only for Allah. *Badā* actualizes within this knowledge that is described as *umm al-kitāb* in the Qurʾān. The second type of divine knowledge is that which is known to the angels, Prophets and their trustees/saints, *al-ʿilm al-makhtūm*; it is closed to *badā*, namely, is closed to change.[83] In a narration reported by al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, it is said that the imāms are able to perceive when *badā* occurs in the knowledge that is unique to Allah.[84]

Parallel to this division, Shīʿī scholars claim that there are two tablets of fate/predestination with Allah. The first one is *al-lawḥ al-mahfūẓ*. That which is written on this tablet is absolute and permanent. The second tablet is called *lawḥ al-maḥw wa-l-ithbāt*. As expressed by the contemporary Shīʿī exegete al-Khūʾī (d. 1992), *badā* actualizes within the suspended (*mawqūf*) divine edict that has been recorded on this tablet. In this sense, saying that *badā* is permissible does not imply attributing ignorance to Allah. Again, such an idea of

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80 Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 507, 767; II, 653.

81 Al-ʿAyyāshī, *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, II, 232.

82 Muḥammad Ḥusayn Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ, *Aṣl al-Shīʿa wa-uṣūluhā* (Qum: Muʾassasat al-Imām ʿAlī, 1415), 313.

83 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, I, 147; al-ʿAyyāshī, *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, II, 232-233.

84 Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt* (Qum: Manshūrāt-i Maktaba-i Āyat Allāh Marʿashī, 1404), 394.

badā does not impair Allah's greatness or sublimity.[85] In truth, through *badā*, Allah discloses secrets that are recorded on the tablets of *al-maḥw wa-l-ithbāt*. Allah can inform some of the angels or Prophets who are close to Him about this secret. The angels notify the Messengers about it and the Prophets inform their *umma*. However, after a while, a situation that contradicts this information arises. This is absolutely normal because Allah has erased everything that was connected to the first instance and has instead made something else in the outer world. All of this knowledge exists in the eternal knowledge of Allah. This is what is being described in Q 13:39, "Allah doth blot out or confirm what He pleaseth: with Him is the Mother of the Book."[86]

In *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, in addition to many basic views and interpretations about *imāma*, *waṣāya*, *imām*, *waṣī*, etc., which correspond with the views of the Imāmiyya, al-Shahrastānī uses the *bāṭinī* and *ḥurūfī* interpretations, such as *al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭaʿa*, the number of seven, *mann* and *salwā* (manna and quail), the staff of Prophet Moses and the twelve springs that emitted from a rock,[87] all of which are used to a large extent in the books of Ismāʿīlī philosophers and Sufis with a bāṭinī inclination, including Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) and ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 736/1335). He also uses various concepts, such as *al-ʿaql al-kullī*, *al-nafs al-kullī*, *lawḥ*, pen, *abdāl*, *awtād*. These are all characteristics that document al-Shahrastānī's usage of *bāṭinī* and philosophical sources in the most general terms.

General Review and Conclusion

The Qurʾānic commentary, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, which has been attributed to al-Shahrastānī, has the characteristics of works that were written within the frame of Shīʿī thought. However, the information about the external explanations of verses provided under titles such as *naẓm*, *nuzūl*, *tafsīr*, *lugha* and *maʿānī*, are mostly descriptive and correspond exactly with the classical commentaries of *dirāya* in the

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85 Abū l-Qāsim ibn ʿAlī Akbar al-Khūʾī, *al-Bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (Qum: Muʾassasat Iḥyāʾ Āthār al-Imām al-Khūʾī, n.d.), 390.

86 Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ, *Aṣl al-Shīʿa*, 314.

87 See al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, I, 119-125, 375, 383, 446-448; II, 655, 800, 822.

Sunnī tradition as far as terms of expression and content are concerned. This correspondence is not the primary feature, but rather a secondary one, due to the unique and original stance of *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* not being the section on the explanation of external meaning, but rather the section of interpretation related to the secrets (*asrār*). Moreover, most of the commentaries in the *Asrār* section, which can be found under the commentary of almost every verse, have an esoteric nature. On the other hand, it is possible to describe *Mafātīḥ al-asrār,* in its most general terms, as an eclectic commentary; the verses are first explained according to their external meaning and then according to the more esoteric aspects, with the two explanations being presented under separate titles (except in a few places); this acts as a clear indication of the work's eclectic structure. The various commentaries can sometimes be described as philosophical or mystical, in a way that is sometimes very close to Gnosticism, or as having a political or sectarian content; each commentary, differentiated under subtitles as *sirr ākhar* (another secret), can be evaluated as characteristics that are particular to the eclectic structure.

Although the commentaries concerning the secrets of the Qurʾān are esoteric in style, this esotericism is not one that disregards the external meaning of the Qurʾān. Again, this esotericism cannot be identified with the Ismāʿīlī esotericism, although there is a shared usage of certain terms and concepts. It seems that al-Shahrastānī's esoteric interpretations are expansions of the concepts of *bāṭin* and *taʾwīl* of the Imāmiyya, especially the early period Akhbārī scholars, such as al-Kulaynī, al-ʿAyyāshī and al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī; all of the above frequently repeated the narration: "The Qurʾān has an external and an esoteric dimension" in their works, although what they are alluding to here is not clearly disclosed. This is because in the Akhbārī-Salafī school of the Imāmiyya there is a frequent emphasis on the double dimension of the Qurʾān, utilizing the concepts of *ẓāhir-bāṭin* and *tanzīl-taʾwīl*; however, suitable elucidation to allow us to comprehend the deep meaning that has been attributed to the concepts of *bāṭin* and *taʾwīl* is not provided. In the commentary it is emphasized that the only authority in the exegesis and interpretation of the Qurʾān is the imāms. Furthermore, esoteric interpretations have rarely been reported from the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt* in the Imāmī Shīʿī sources. To put it more accurately, the Imāmī Shīʿī literature gives clear and comprehensible reports from the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt*. In addition, because doing exegesis of the Qurʾān based on personal

opinions was forbidden in the Akhbārī school of the Imāmiyya, the scholars of this school refrained from *taʾwīl*. Al-Shahrastānī took his place alongside the Akhbāriyya in the matter of doing exegesis of the Qurʾān with personal opinions, but also stated that being acquainted with the imāms' views and interpretations regarding the Qurʾān brought him a wisdom and spiritual power, thus enabled him to produce personal interpretations. Thus, al-Shahrastānī combined the traditionalist/scripturalist line of the Imāmiyya with Shīʿī wisdom and insight, or he gave an esoteric coloring to the Imāmiyya's externalist approach in Qurʾānic exegesis with interpretations based on philosophical insight. In this way, al-Shahrastānī continuously referred to the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt*, most frequently referring to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq; more accurately, he used various works that were attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, and also well-respected in the Ismāʿīlī tradition.

Al-Shahrastānī's esoteric and *ḥurūfī* interpretations in some verses (especially those concerned with *al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭaʿa* and the number of seven), his attribution of some Qurʾānic concepts to certain people, assigning symbolic meanings to them, and the utilization of concepts such as *khalq-amr*, *taḍādd-tarattub*, and the divine word in parallel with the Ismāʿīlī terminology should not be taken as an indication that he was a Bāṭinī-Ismāʿīlī. Rather, he only used Ismāʿīlī terms as an instrument to introduce a philosophical depth to the thought of the Akhbārī school of the Imāmiyya, as the identity put forth by al-Shahrastānī in *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* is an Akhbārī Imāmī Shīʿī identity rather than a Bāṭinī-Ismāʿīlī one. Indeed, the fact that he does not mention the Uṣūlī school of the Imāmiyya, one that was mostly formed and developed under the effect of the Muʿtazila and which not only gave importance to personal opinion in Qurʾānic exegesis, but also implemented it, and even he frequently criticizes the Muʿtazila, which the Uṣūlīs saw as a reference frame in theology, indicates the same association. In addition, his alienation of the Jabriyya, Murjiʾa, Karrāmiyya and even the Ashʿariyya, and his accusations that they misunderstood and misinterpreted verses that are concerned with divine attributes, fate and predestination, and human actions, is an important evidence about the identity that is being put forth, particularly in *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, is far removed from the Sunnī identity.

In light of all this information, we can say that the opinion which is closest to the truth about al-Shahrastānī's sectarian identity is that put

forward by Ibn Taymiyya, who stated that al-Shahrastānī adopted the views of the Imāmiyya in many subjects, while sometimes putting forth opinions that were in line with Ismāʿīlī views. At this point, it can be said that al-Shahrastānī's Ashʿarī identity emerges, particularly in *Nihāyat al-iqdām*, and thus he displays different stances in different works. However, this can be seen to be a characteristic of his search for the truth rather than a hypocritical, sycophantic or opportunistic stance. Moreover, a similar situation can be found in the life of al-Imām al-Ghazālī. Indeed, al-Ghazālī comes across as a Sunnī methodologist and a *faqīh* in some of his works, while in others as the fiercest enemy of the Bāṭinī school and esotericism, a stern opponent of philosophers, a Sunnī Sufi, and at other times as having *bāṭinī* tendencies.

In conclusion, the fact that al-Shahrastānī takes up different stances in different works reminds us of the search for truth that al-Ghazālī describes in *al-Munqidh*. It is significant that both Ẓahīr al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī and Ibn Taymiyya found a similarity between al-Shahrastānī and al-Ghazālī, and that both mentioned[88] these names in the same context. While al-Ghazālī concluded his journey in search of the truth with a rich Sunnī Sufi wisdom, al-Shahrastānī, as can be seen from *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, which he wrote during his last years, completed the same journey by reaching philosophical insight within the Imāmī Shīʿī matrix. In fact, al-Shahrastānī displayed his inclination towards Shīʿism by dedicating *al-Milal* and *al-Muṣāraʿa* to Naqīb al-ashrāf ʿAlī ibn Jaʿfar al-Mūsawī, and he then reinforced his Shīʿī inclination in his Qurʾānic commentary. Nevertheless, al-Shahrastānī put forth opinions that were parallel to the views of Ahl al-sunna when necessary, for example, in matters such as *qirāʾa*s and the seven modes. Thus, we can see that he was not bound by one sect; on the contrary, he was a free scholar who defended the opinion he deemed to be correct without giving importance to which sect it belonged to. However, it is necessary to emphasize that the identity reflected in *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* points strongly to an inclination to *tashayyuʿ* (Shīʿism).

At this point, we can say that al-Shahrastānī tried to establish an interesting paradigm in *Mafātīḥ al-asrār*, one that is reminiscent of the process of Ahl al-ḥadīth line in the Sunnī tradition that evolved first

[88] Al-Bayhaqī, *Tatimma*, 120; Ibn Taymiyya, *Darʾ taʿāruḍ*, V, 173.

into Ashʿarism and eventually led to the penetration of the Ashʿarī Sunnī belief into Sufism. More clearly, the paradigm that al-Shahrastānī attempts to establish in *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* can be described as one that adds depth to the *Akhbārī/ẓāhirī* understanding of the Imāmiyya on the basis of philosophical insight. In doing this, he refers to the imāms of *Ahl al-bayt*, while also employing the terminology of Bāṭinī-Ismāʿīlī philosophy. A similar version of this paradigm which al-Shahrastānī tried to structure on his own, in the body of a single work, has formed over time in the Sunnī tradition with the contributions of various scholars. In the early period, Ahl al-ḥadīth (*Ahl al-sunna al-khāṣṣa)*, which was represented by names such as al-Awzāʾī (d. 157/774), Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/777), Layth ibn Saʿd (d. 175/791), Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795), al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), Ishāq ibn Rāḥawayh (d. 238/853), Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) and Abū Saʿīd al-Dārimī (d. 280/894), evolved into Sunnī Islamic theology with al-Imām al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/936), who stated in his work *al-Ibāna* that the leading figures of Ahl al-ḥadīth specifically followed the path of al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal in theological matters.[89] After this evolution, Sufis, such as Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), al-Kalābādhī (d. 385/995) and al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) wrote works that blended the Sunnī approach and Sufism; this process culminated in its ultimate aspect with al-Imām al-Ghazālī's work *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn.*[90]

After this discussion, it is necessary to once again state that it does not seem possible to arrive at a definite conclusion that al-Shahrastānī was a Bāṭinī-Ismāʿīlī. However, some researchers, such as Toby Mayer, associate al-Shahrastānī's emphasis of the teacher-student relationship with the *taʿlīm* doctrine, a doctrine that holds a very important place in the Nizārī-Ismāʿīlī tradition, and associate the concepts of *taḍādd-tarattub* with the hierarchical structure of Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* organization.[91] Despite this, such similarities are not enough to prove that al-Shahrastānī was a Bāṭinī-Ismāʿīlī. In a similar vein, al-Shahrastānī's open references to Sunnī exegetes under the titles of

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89 Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ismāʿīl al-Ashʿarī, *al-Ibāna ʿan uṣūl al-diyāna* (Medina: al-Jāmiʿat al-Islāmiyya, 1975), 8.

90 For the stages and the main purpose of this project, see Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī, *Takwīn al-ʿaql al-ʿArabī* (4th ed., Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 1991), 276-281.

91 Mayer, "Shahrastānī on the Arcana of the Qurʾan," 75-76.

naẓm, *tafsīr*, *nuzūl*, *maʿānī*, etc., do not prove that he is a Sunnī scholar. However, al-Shahrastānī's open references to the Imāmī Shīʿī sources, such as al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī* and al-ʿAyyāshī's *Tafsīr*, as well as his emphasis on the impermissibility of doing exegesis of the Qurʾān by personal opinion, his perception of *Ahl al-bayt*, the nature of the compilation of the Qurʾān and its distortion, *tawallī-tabarrī*, *imāma* and many other subjects all exhibit a deep affection and inclination to the Imāmī Shīʿī tradition, while not demonstrating an allegiance. This deep affection and inclination is either fundamental and sincere, as stated by Ibn Taymiyya,[92] or was donned to gain sympathy from Shīʿī circles.

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[92] Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna*, VI, 305-306.

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DISCUSSION OF CAUSALITY BASED ON THE CONCEPTIONS OF NATURE OF IBN RUSHD AND AL-GHAZĀLĪ

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Abstract

In this short analysis, we will compare Ibn Rushd's justification of the causality principle to the suspicions and objections of al-Ghazālī. Nevertheless, our analysis of the issue will center on al-Ghazālī's and Ibn Rushd's conceptions of nature. Therefore, our article aims at illuminating two points: first, there is a fundamental difference between the conceptions of *nature* and *generation* of the two philosophers; second, this structural difference constitutes the real cause of disagreement over the causality principle.

Keywords: Ibn Rushd, al-Ghazālī, causality, nature, determinism, generation.

When studying the history of philosophy, one will find serious objections to causality even as early as antiquity. Aristotle's conflict with the Sophists, who ignore absolute knowledge and even being itself, is one example. In the Islamic world as well, certain Muslim theologians, especially Ashʿarīs, were inclined towards the refusal of causality in nature, as evident in their genuine style. This is why we see that Ibn Rushd, as he identifies his position with Aristotle's, tends to place *kalām* scholars in the same position as the Sophists.

As a strict follower of Aristotle, Ibn Rushd is actually uncomfortable with Ashʿarī *kalām* to a large extent and is prone to include Ashʿarīs in the same category as the Sophists due to certain similarities. It is not an exaggeration to say that one of the major reasons for

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this discomfort arises from their denial of causality. In order to better understand the situation, however, and as an appropriate introduction to the issue, we should revisit the basics to begin our essay with an elaboration of Ibn Rushd's classification of fundamental types of knowledge. Ibn Rushd follows Aristotle exactly and identifies three categories of methodical knowledge in virtue of their approach to being, i.e. philosophy/wisdom (*ḥikma*) based on demonstrative proof (*burhān*); dialectic, and sophistry:

> The true philosophy distinguishes from dialectic philosophy in terms of type of knowledge, since true philosophy approaches the being through demonstrational thought, whereas the dialectic deals with it through widely accepted (*mashhūr*) view. As for Sophism, it differentiates with respect to objective in life; as the objective of Sophist is to be deemed as a philosopher even though he is not, just to attain a prestigious status or other worldly benefits. On the other hand, the aim of philosopher is just to know the truth.[1]

Sophistry evidently manifests the ambition to acquire pecuniary advantages or to satisfy individual lust because the sophist does not aim to reach the truth. The dialectic is merely a phase that should be surpassed in the later process of learning, because the real objective is, no doubt, to acquire *burhānī* knowledge. However, not many achieve this goal because many seekers of knowledge can not go beyond the dialectical phase as a consequence of using the wrong methodology:

> This [situation] occurs with many of the young people who learn the science called *kalām* at the beginning of their education. Because this science aims at making certain views believed to be true superior, these young people are obsessed by the desire to support those [*kalamic*] arguments through a sophistic approach, which might include ignoring first principles, or even by means of dialectic, rhetoric, or poetic thought. As a result, such views become spontaneously known for persons who grow up listening to them, including the denial of natures and forces, the abolition of obligations in human nature, and making all of them possible (*mumkin*), the ignorance of

[1] Abū l-Walīd Ibn Rushd al-Ḥafīd Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr Mā baʿd al-ṭabīʿa* (henceforth *Tafsīr*) (ed. Maurice Bouyges; Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1991), I, 329.

sensible efficient causes, and the denial of the reasonable necessity between cause and effect.[2]

Therefore, Ibn Rushd establishes a fundamental analogy between *kalām* scholars, who do not refrain from using dialectical, rhetorical, or even sophistical inferences that are not based on exact knowledge in order to support their own theological views and the Sophists. Moreover, according to Ibn Rushd, most *kalām* scholars are unable to overcome views, such as the denial of causality even at the end of their learning process. The reason for this failure is that their mental ability is insufficient or, in other words, their nature is not predisposed:

> Most people, due to their nature, are not capable of overcoming dialectical views in order to reach demonstrative thought. When they accept the reasonable (*maʾqūlāt*), they admit it only on the condition of being widely accepted. Later on, when the opposite of the reasonable is widely accepted, they deny much of the reasonable. This is very similar to the situation of persons who have been associated with a kind of *kalām* called *ʿilm al-Ashʿariyya* in our present time, as they have denied the impossibility of a being's coming into existence from nothing (*min lā-shayʾ*), i.e. from non-existence (*al-ʿadam*), even though it is a judgment (*qaḍiyya*) commonly agreed by the Ancients, I mean including especially the impossibility of magnitude (*ʿiẓam*) emerging from non-magnitude (*min lā-ʿiẓam*). Even more, you see that many people dealing with philosophy deny its primariness and that they refute the propriety of forms of species to their substances (*ikhtiṣāṣ al-ṣuwar al-nawʿiyya bi-mawāddihā*). Moreover, we see that Ibn Sīnā, despite his renowned status in philosophy, says "it is possible that man can come into existence from clay just like mice"! If he actually believes this and does not affirm such an argument in order to agree with his contemporaries, he should be influenced by his concern with *ʿilm al-Ashʿariyya*.[3]

This long quotation of the remarks of Ibn Rushd on this issue is due to understand more clearly his evaluation of the denial of causality. As a matter of fact, because of Ashʿarīs' manner of approach, the problem of causality in the eyes of Ibn Rushd extends beyond a mere

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[2] Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, I, 44.

[3] Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, I, 46-47.

ontological and epistemological subject and becomes an important theme in the field of philosophy of religion.

We can now address the problem of the *denial of causality in nature* that is considered to be dialectic or even sophistry by Ibn Rushd; of course in the context of conceptions of nature, as our title suggests. The most clear and systematic text for this purpose can be found in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*). Therefore we will largely follow this text, and we will try to address the question at a different level by analyzing other works by Ibn Rushd as the need arises.

First, we would like to put two essential findings about the discussion on causality in al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*:

1. Al-Ghazālī put his objections to causality at the first rank of physics. The order of the book shows us that causality is the most important theme in physics.

2. Information provided by al-Ghazālī regarding physics and objections by Ibn Rushd against it are important data that reveal the difference between the conceptions of nature of the two philosophers. For this reason, the discussion of causality by these great thinkers should be read in a way that enables us to determine the conception of nature of each.

According to al-Ghazālī, the physical sciences are classified into eight fundamental sciences and seven branches (*farʿ*). There is no problem with the fundamental sciences; however, the sciences designated as branches by al-Ghazālī actually do not arise from Aristotle's philosophy. Nevertheless, we should say that al-Ghazālī is not the first to put this classification, and thus he bears no responsibility, because he directly borrowed it from Ibn Sīnā as it was.[4] Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the silence of al-Ghazālī with respect to Avicennian classification, as is also seen from his words in the discussion, implies his agreement. Importantly, he clearly expresses that

[4] Abū ʿAlī Ḥusayn ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā, *Risāla fī aqsām al-ʿulūm al-aqliyya*, in *Rasāʾil fī l-ḥikma wa-l-ṭabīʿiyyāt* (Istanbul: Maṭbaʿat al-Jawāʾib, 1298 H.), 75.

there is no religious need for opposition to these sciences, except in four instances.[5]

Ibn Rushd proposes remarkable criticisms of the classification of "natural sciences", a classification that is directly adopted and related by al-Ghazālī. Al-Ghazālī includes medicine among the natural sciences, whereas according to Ibn Rushd medicine is not one of the natural sciences; it is a practical art taking its principles from the natural sciences.[6] The disagreement between Ibn Rushd and al-Ghazālī is quite clear, too, with respect to all other sciences which the latter considers among the natural ones. According to Ibn Rushd, astrology (*ʿilm aḥkām al-nujūm*) and knowledge of discernment (*ʿilm al-firāsa*) are not natural sciences but are kinds of fortune-telling and soothsaying. The interpretation of dreams is not a science at all. Talismanic arts are superstitious, and sorcery has nothing to do with science; chemistry (alchemy) is probably not a science, let alone a natural one.[7]

This classification of science clearly exposes the difference between the conceptions of nature of al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd. The nature, according to al-Ghazālī, is not only the subject of medicine and astronomy, but also of astrology, knowledge of discernment, the interpretation of dreams, talismanic art, magic and alchemy; whereas, aside from considering these as tools to examine the nature, Ibn Rushd does not even accept them as sciences.

We should add that, objections by al-Ghazālī against causality are not an investigation of truth or an epistemic problem, but only a defense of faith. Al-Ghazālī attacks the causality principle in order to demonstrate the possibility of extraordinary events, namely miracles as proofs of prophethood. Accordingly, al-Ghazālī attempts to rationalize miracles saying the following:

> The contention over the first [theory] is necessary, inasmuch as [on its refutation] rests the affirmation of miracles that disrupt [the] habitual

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5 Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahāfut al-falāsifa*; henceforth *Tahāfut)* (A parallel English-Arabic text translated, introduced and annotated by Michael E. Marmura; 2nd ed., Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), 163.

6 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (ed. Sulaymān Dunyā; Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, n.d.), II, 768.

7 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, II, 767-768; cf. al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 161-163.

> [course of nature], such as the changing of the staff into a serpent, revival of the dead, the splitting of the moon. Whoever renders the habitual courses [of nature] a necessary constant makes all these [miracles] impossible. [The philosophers] have thus interpreted what is said in the Qurʾān about the revivification of the dead metaphorically, saying that what is meant by it is the cessation of the death of ignorance through the life of knowledge.[8]

Ibn Rushd objects to this attitude, which completely corresponds to his abovementioned classification. He says:

> Of religious principles it must be said that they are divine things which surpass human understanding, but must be acknowledged although their causes are unknown.[9]

This analysis constitutes the basis of Ibn Rushd's theory related to philosophy of religion.

Therefore, we clearly see that the apologetic view of al-Ghazālī is associated with his conception of nature, and this is also the case for Ibn Rushd. When al-Ghazālī includes miracles within the rational domain by reducing the relationship between cause and effect to "possibility"; Ibn Rushd, contrarily, insists on the necessity of the cause-effect relationship and removes miracles from the rational domain. Evidently, this disagreement has significant consequences not only in terms of ontology and epistemology, but also with respect to philosophy of religion.

In order to better understand these consequences, we should look more closely at the discussion. Al-Ghazālī develops his position on causality using three arguments. His first assertion is that there is not a necessary relationship between cause and effect. For demonstration, he begins by denying the existence of the genuine necessary natures of objects. We may address the burning of cotton, for instance, when in contact with fire.

> The first position is for the opponent to claim that the agent of the burning is the fire alone, it being an agent by nature [and] not by

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8 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 163; cf. Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, II, 770.

9 Ibn Rushd, *Averroes' Tahafut al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)* (henceforth *Averroes' Tahafut*) (trans.with introduction and notes Simon van den Bergh; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 322; for Arabic text see *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, II, 791-792.

> choice, hence, incapable of refraining from [acting according to] what is in its nature after contacting a substratum receptive of it. And this is one of the things we deny. On the contrary, we say: The one who enacts the burning by creating blackness in the cotton, [causing] separation in its parts, and making it cinder or ashes is God, either through the mediation of His angels or without mediation. As for fire, which is inanimate, it has no action. For what proof is there that it is the agent? The have no proof other than observing the occurrence of the burning at the [juncture of] contact with the fire. Observation, however, [only] shows the occurrence [of burning] at [the time of the contact with the fire] but does not show the occurrence [of burning] by [the fire] and [the fact] that there is no other cause for it. For there is no disagreement [with the philosophers] that the infusion of spirit and of the apprehending and motive powers into the animal sperm is not engendered by the natures confined in heat, cold, moistness, and dryness; that the father does not produce his son by placing the sperm in the womb; and that he does not produce his life, sight, hearing, and the rest of the powers in him. It is known that these [come to] exist with [the placing of the sperm], but no one says that they [come to] exist by it. Rather, they exist from direction of the First, either directly or through the mediation of the angels entrusted with temporal things. This is what the philosophers who uphold the existence of the creator uphold in a conclusive manner, [our] discourse being [at this point in agreement] with them.[10]

There are three key points in this reasoning:

1. *The cause and effect relationship as observed in nature is not necessary.*

Ibn Rushd completely refuses such an assertion:

> To deny the existence of efficient causes which are observed in sensible things is sophistry, and he who defends this doctrine either denies with his tongue what is present in his mind or is carried away by a sophistical doubt which occurs to him concerning this question.[11]

What Ibn Rushd means by "denying with his tongue what is present in his mind" is better understood through Aristotle's criticism of the Sophists: "In case one believes that it is the same to fall and not to

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[10] Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 167; cf. Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, II, 778-779.

[11] Ibn Rushd, *Averroes' Tahafut*, 318; cf. *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, II, 781.

fall into a well, he would not avoid the well or cliff on his way due to fear of falling!".[12] Similarly, those who assert the contingency of the relationship between cause and effect always refrain from touching the fire; therefore they, similar to the Sophists, claim with their tongues the opposite of what they have in their hearts.

We already examined the clear conviction and proofs of Ibn Rushd regarding the necessity of the cause-effect relationship. In this regard, it is quite normal that he describes the assertion al-Ghazālī supported, which means the denial of the order in nature and knowledge of existence, as sophistry; this is because the denial of the necessity of the cause-effect relationship will also mean ignoring the hierarchy of being, in other words, the capacity to know the truth and, thus, being:

> Now intelligence is nothing but the perception of things with their causes, and in this it distinguishes itself from all the other faculties of apprehension, and he who denies causes must deny the intellect. Logic implies the existence of causes and effects, and knowledge of these effects can only be rendered perfect through knowledge of their causes. Denial of cause implies the denial of knowledge, and denial of knowledge implies that nothing in this world can be really known, and that what is supposed to be known is nothing but opinion, that neither proof nor definition exist.[13]

Averroes adds a strong dialectical comment to these remarks:

> Those who admit that there exists, besides necessary knowledge, knowledge which is not necessary, forms a judgment on slight evidence and imagines it to be necessary, whereas it is not necessary.[14]

In fact, criticism of al-Ghazālī in this mode, namely, of the lack of any proof other than perceiving of cotton's being in contact with fire and following this the burning of cotton, includes a significant point that should not be overlooked. Yet, *substance* is not perceived by the senses either; it is comprehended through the intellect. The cause of this comprehension is its phenomenal entirety within sensible qualities. Otherwise, we could talk about neither knowledge nor intellect. This conclusion is also evident in Ibn Rushd's statement that "intelli-

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12 Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, I, 398.

13 Ibn Rushd, *Averroes' Tahafut*, 319; cf. *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, II, 785.

14 Ibn Rushd, *Averroes' Tahafut*, 319-320; cf. *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, II, 785-786.

gence is nothing but the perception of things with their causes, and in this it distinguishes itself from all the other faculties of apprehension, and he who denies causes must deny the intellect."

Thus the objection asserted by al-Ghazālī is invalidated because, just as the qualities within the phenomenal entirety belonging to an object impose the insensible essence of the object on intellect, another phenomenal entirety, namely, the fact that the cotton burns whenever it is brought into contact with fire, imposes on intellect that one is the cause of the other. To deny the necessity of the cause-effect relationship only because it cannot be perceived requires also the denial of substance for the same reason. This will mean the same as affirming the disorder of existing things.

Sure enough, one can question here whether the fact that fire always burns cotton proves that it will burn it again hereafter, in short, whether a phenomenon necessarily occurs for the 1001st time just in the same way it occurred repeatedly for a thousand times. We think that Ibn Rushd would answer it as follows: The 1001st phenomenon is as necessary as a thing's being that thing, namely, as necessary as present Socrates' being the same Socrates tomorrow.

In addition, Ibn Rushd highlights a far more dangerous consequence of denying efficient causes and directs the abovementioned dialectical objection at his opponent: "He who denies this can no longer acknowledge that every act must have an agent".[15] Therefore, it is impossible for someone who denies the cause-effect relationship to prove that there is an agent for each act; in this case, it will be equally impossible to think of God as a cause beyond the sensible cause. Therefore, *kalām* scholars abolish the belief for the sake of which they deny the principles of being.

2. *Things do not have any necessary nature at all.*

No doubt, this claim is also unacceptable for Ibn Rushd. Because, when al-Ghazālī's criticism of causality based on the denial of necessary nature, Ibn Rushd's defense of it is grounded in the approval of necessary nature. At this point, we can understand the categorical similarity between Ibn Rushd's criticisms of Ashʿarīs and Aristotle's comments about Sophists.

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[15] Ibn Rushd, *Averroes' Tahafut*, 318; cf. *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, II, 781.

Just as Sophists cannot conceive the essence behind the changing qualities, Ashʿarīs denied the necessity of the cause-effect relationship, and consequently the necessary nature of things in order to prove the possibility of miracles through reason. As a result, *kalām* scholars, at least in the eyes of Ibn Rushd, have sunk into relativism just like the Sophists. Yet, to deny the cause-effect relationship will equally mean to deny the thing that is cause or the effect; that makes one thing what it is, namely, the essential cause. In consequence, no definite or constant thing will remain in universe:

> And further, what do the theologians say about the essential causes, the understanding of which alone can make a thing understood? For it is self-evident that things have essences and attributes which determine the special functions of each thing and through which the essences and names of things are differentiated. If a thing had not its specific nature, it would not have a special name nor a definition, and all things would be one – indeed, not even one.[16]

According to Ibn Rushd, the mistake of the Ashʿarīs here arises from their lack of ability to go beyond the effort to justify their prejudgments, as opposed to trying to comprehend nature independent of any kind of prejudgment. They have, in order to glorify God, asserted God as the only agent in the universe and tried to prove this assertion by means of sophistic proofs:

> As for men of our day, they have imposed one immediate agent for all acts of beings, and that is almighty God. Therefore, according to them, no one among all beings should have a peculiar act with which God has stamped. If beings have no peculiar acts, it means, then, that they do not have peculiar essences because acts differentiate only according to the differentiation of essences. Once essences are abolished, so are names and definitions. Consequently all beings become a single thing. This view is seriously strange to human nature. The motive to lead them to such a thought is their closing the doors of thinking. They invite to thinking, but deny its principles. They are dragged to all of these conclusions because they suppose that only such this manner will lead us to a right faith in *sharīʿa*. All these, however, are nothing but their ignorance of *sharīʿa* or their obstinacy outwardly, not inwardly.[17]

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[16] Ibn Rushd, *Averroes' Tahafut*, 318; cf. *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, II, 782-783.

[17] Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, II, 1135-1136.

3. *The formal substance, which provides the nature peculiar to each thing, is given by an agent separate from the matter, that is God or through the intermediation of angels, not by things of the same kind.*

Two previous articles criticized the necessity of the cause-effect relationship between things in nature. On the other hand, the continuous change in generation should be explained, and this requires a causal relationship. At this point, al-Ghazālī explains *generation* by claiming that there is *no agent other than God*. Therefore, al-Ghazālī indicates that there is nothing necessary apart from God's will and His creation.

We would like to illuminate a significant point before discussing that issue. It seems that al-Ghazālī's only references in philosophical sciences are to al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. Al-Ghazālī probably never analyzed the works of Aristotle. This can be demonstrated by two proofs:

1. The philosophers al-Ghazālī refers to as "who believe in God" are Socrates, Plato, and his disciple Aristotle. According to al-Ghazālī, Aristotle criticized Socrates, Plato, and all other philosophers of metaphysics, and became distant from them. Aristotle developed the science of logic into a method, completed the philosophical sciences more than ever, and made them clear.[18] However, it is Plato who affirms that the efficient cause cannot be physical, whereas Aristotle argues that the non-physical cannot influence the physical. Moreover, the longest chapters of his *Metaphysics* consist of a criticism of Plato's view in question. As we will soon examine in detail, it is al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā who identify Aristotle as the source of this view. In this case, because al-Ghazālī says, "This is among the points definitely accepted by philosophers who believe in God," it can be inferred that he has never read Aristotle.

2. Al-Ghazālī explicitly states that al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā are the most perfect commentators on Aristotle, and he considers the works of others in this matter unworthy of reading:

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[18] Al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance from Error and Attachment to The Lord of Might and Majesty* [*al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*], in W. Montgomery Watt (trans.), *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953), 32; for the Arabic text see al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (eds. Jamīl Ṣalībā and Kāmil ʿAyyād; 7th ed., Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1967), 77.

> None of the Islamic philosophers has accomplished anything comparable to the achievements of the two men named. The translations of others are marked by disorder and confusion, which so perplex the understanding of the student that he fails to comprehend; and if a thing is not comprehended how can it be either refuted or accepted?"[19]

These phrases reveal that al-Ghazālī's only sources concerning Aristotle are al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā.

After clarifying this problem, we can now address the concept of *formal substance* that constitutes, in our opinion, the key point of causality in the philosophy of Ibn Rushd.

After denying the necessity of a causal relationship in nature, and even claiming the nonexistence of such a relationship, al-Ghazālī ignored the idea that each existent possesses a necessary and constant nature. The insistence of *kalām* in this issue seems to be closely related to their conceptions of God and fate (*qadar*). Hereafter, al-Ghazālī attempts to explain *generation* by means of a concept, which, as we will see, he adopts from al-Fārābī and especially Ibn Sīnā.

According to al-Ghazālī, *generation* has occurred by immediate act of God or by means of His angels. In justifying this, he tries to prove that the formal substance, which is the cause of coming into existence, is given to matter by an agent separate from it. According to al-Ghazālī, philosophers who believe in God have accepted that the forms emanate to the matter from the angels, which they call the principles of being, and that species and genera come into existence in this way: "For this reason, wheat has never sprouted from barley, and apples never from the seed of pears".[20]

However, later on al-Ghazālī begins to adduce proofs in order to demonstrate that the agent of this emanation is separate from the matter and in order to ignore that the beings in nature cause each other. For example, according to al-Ghazālī, worms reproduce from soil, not from each other, similarly, mice, snakes, and scorpions can reproduce from the soil, as well as from each other. Therefore, the formal substance, which ensures the formation of species and genera

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[19] Al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance*, 32; also see ibid., *al-Munqidh*, 78.

[20] Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 173; cf. Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, II, 801.

and is the cause of any coming into existence, is separated from the matter; as a result, the formal substance is given to matter by an agent that is separate from the matter. Al-Ghazālī thinks that the philosophers agree with him. He says: "Our statement in [answering your question] is the same as your statement in [answering ours]. It is, however, more fitting for both you and us to relate this to God, either directly or through the mediation of the angels."[21]

As we have seen, the main problem al-Ghazālī emphasizes is the denial of the cause-effect relationship between physical objects; in this way, it will be revealed that the cause of generation is an immaterial being; thus, the possibility of miracles will be justified. Besides, al-Ghazālī does not refrain from bringing evidence from practices such as magic, talismanic art, and astrology in order to strengthen his analysis. For example, talisman practitioners can dispel scorpions, snakes, and bedbugs from a certain place through charms they apply in accordance with the positions of celestial bodies. Therefore, "whoever studies [inductively] the wonders of the sciences", such as talismanic practice, soothsaying, sorcery and fortunetelling, "will not deem remote from the power of God, in any manner whatsoever, what has been related of the miracles of the prophets."[22]

Al-Ghazālī thinks that he attains his goal through this argumentation. Nevertheless, Ibn Rushd thinks very differently in accordance with his philosophy and offers some important criticisms.

1. According to Ibn Rushd, the assertion that the formal substance is separate from the matter and given to the matter by an agent separate from matter, such as God or angels, is a Platonist view; as for Aristotle, he thinks the opposite and claims that formal substance is immanent to the material being. In fact, this point is one of the sharpest distinctions between Plato and Aristotle, and it is discussed in several chapters of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

However, it seems that Muslim philosophers are seriously on the wrong track here, especially because of apocryphal *Theologia*. In this context, Ibn Rushd's achievement in revealing the true Aristotle is remarkable:

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21 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 172; cf. Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, II, 800.

22 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 174; cf. Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, II, 802.

> The community [Mashshāʾīs] could not comprehend Aristotle's justification of this problem and could not have a grasp of its true meaning. It is not only Ibn Sīnā but also Abū Naṣr [al-Fārābī] who surprises us! The latter's work *Kitāb fī l-falsafatayn* [Book on the Two Philosophies; i.e. philosophies of Platon and Aristotle] reveals that he had a suspicion in this regard. The community [Mashshāʾīs] inclined towards the Platonist view, because it is very close to the conviction of theologians of our religion concerning this issue that "the agent of everything is one and beings cannot cause each other." That is, they thought that if beings cause each other, it would require the infinite regression in the series of efficient causes, consequently they asserted that there must be an agent which is not a body (*jism*).[23]

2. According to Ibn Rushd, the explanation of formal substance is the most important issue in philosophy. Even more, he states that because of this *Tahāfut* is not the appropriate place to explain this problem and that those who want to learn its true solution should follow the right way.[24] By this, he no doubt means an analysis of the works of Aristotle.

This is why we will bypass the discussion in *Tahāfut* and examine Ibn Rushd's philosophical explanations to that end.

Ibn Rushd strictly follows Aristotle on this theme; so he purified the philosophy of Aristotle from syncretic confusions traced to the Hellenistic period, and that this achievement raised Ibn Rushd to the position of an original thinker.

According to Ibn Rushd, at this point, the essence of what Aristotle said is that, even if there are separate forms here, they are not sufficient to bring into existence. Generation occurs only through things that are the same in terms of form but distinct with respect to number".[25] Here, we discover that Ibn Rushd turns towards explaining generation in nature through formal substance that is never separate from the matter and exists immanently within individuals.

Naturally, according to Ibn Rushd, that which is separate from the matter cannot act on the material. In this regard,

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[23] Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, II, 886.

[24] Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, II, 788.

[25] Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, II, 881.

> necessarily, just as how each material thing should generate from the material, the immaterial thing should definitely generate from the immaterial.[26]

The exact opposite of this view was Platonism, which explained generation with forms separate from matter, namely, ideas. According to Ibn Rushd, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā used Platonist analysis, distorting Aristotle, in order to reconcile these two opposite views, as well as they were unable to comprehend Aristotle's arguments.

3. Proofs of the separation between formal substance and matter by al-Ghazālī, who introduces them as his own invention, are nothing but a repetition of those asserted by Plato:

> This discourse of Aristotle comprises suspicions that are hard [to resolve], as well as strong difficulties. That is, even if we assume that a thing which is potential (*bi-l-quwwa*) becomes actual (*bi-l-fiʿl*) only via something in the same species and genus, because we see that many animals and plants breed without fertilization from something of the same kind in form, one can think that there should be certain [separate] substances and forms that give the forms of animals and plants to the animals and plants being generated. This is the most important argument in favor of Plato and against Aristotle.[27]

Yet, all comings into existence in nature consist of natural things, and they generate from matter. The same is true for products of crafts. However, in the first case the agent is nature itself, whereas in the second case the craftsman. Therefore, "similarly, what forms the 'formed thing (*al-mutakawwin*)' possessing a form and nature is a nature and form, as in 'man' in natural things and 'house' in crafts.[28] Nevertheless, generation does not merely consist of natural things and products of arts; there are also what are generated by chance, because the matter sometimes has a spontaneous movement in itself.

The condition of objects formed by nature is similar to that of objects which are products of crafts:

> Things brought into existence by nature are similar to objects which are artistic productions; the sperm (or seed [*zarʿ*]) acts on what is formed through a potentiality similar to the art in itself. In other

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[26] Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, II, 886.

[27] Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, II, 881.

[28] Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, II, 840.

> words, this is the essence of the formed. Just as how the form of the artefact is preexisted in the mind of the artisan, so the form of the formed is potentially present in sperm.[29]

Hereby, the entity that is created from the sperm itself and the thing that is formed by the sperm share the same name. That is, man emerges from man. "But," states Averroes,

> ... we said that they are like a begotten species and its father because there is not an offspring absolutely and in all aspects identical to the father; just as when a male human can breed from a male human, so a female human can also come into existence through a male human.[30]

The reason for this is a slight deficiency with respect to the form transmitted by the sperm. Furthermore, there are more extreme deficiencies of form in nature; for example, a mule is the offspring of a horse and a donkey, but it cannot generate from each other due to the deficiency of the potential form in its sperm.[31]

Consequently, we can touch upon al-Ghazālī's most important proof of the separation of formal substance and matter, which analyzes the parthenogenetic animals such as worms, mice, and snakes. As indicated above, according to Ibn Rushd apart from things generated by nature or by art, there are things generated by chance due to the spontaneous movement in their matter. That is the reason of self-generation of certain creatures in nature.

> Anything that comes into being from not its synonym but itself is generated in a manner like the generation of things whose matter (or sperm) has a potentiality from which a synonym is generated … The creatures that are not generated from their own genera and that are not born [that come into existence themselves] do not bear in their matter the potentiality to produce their synonyms. Likewise, this kind of living thing comes into existence in a manner different from the occurrence of accidents, as well as from generation through the aggregation of accidents or generation through sperm or seed.[32]

It is clear that Averroes refuses to explain the generations in nature by means of certain supernatural agents. But what are we to say

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[29] Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, II, 879.

[30] Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, II, 880.

[31] Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, II, 880.

[32] Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, II, 880.

about the fact that Platonists defend themselves by asserting abiogenesis against the Aristotelian criticisms of the theory of ideas? Given that Aristotle also admits abiogenesis, does not the generation of a living thing from inorganic matter – and also without sperm – indicate the influence of a substance separate from the matter?

Ibn Rushd, as a strict follower of Aristotle, refuses to associate abiogeneration with the influence of active intellect separate from the matter and thus definitely separates the realms of physical and non-physical beings – at least in terms of efficient causality. This attitude clearly diverges from the interpretation of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, who consider the non-physical active intellect to be the efficient cause of not only knowledge but also of generation. Therefore, it is not surprising that Ibn Sīnā classifies practices that seek ways of acting on material objects by means of immaterial causes, including talismanic art, magic, fortunetelling, etc., among the natural sciences. It is historically wrong for al-Ghazālī, who addresses the Avicennian thought, to incline toward a total refusal as if Aristotle were of the same opinion with Ibn Sīnā. For Ibn Rushd, the self-generation of certain creatures is a phenomenon that has nothing to do with practices like talismanic art or magic; it is about deficiency and disorder with respect to formal substance. Besides, certain anomalies in nature do not show that the efficient cause of generation is a power separate from the matter. On the contrary, scientific proof points out that the agent of what is physical is again a physical thing.

This opinion may certainly appear to be a type of materialism at first glance. Nonetheless, Aristotle and Ibn Rushd definitely accept the existence of a realm of non-physical things. Moreover, this realm is more perfect than the realm of physical things. All the same, another point to be emphasized is that the causal relationship between the physical and the non-physical is established not by efficient cause, but with respect to final cause. Therefore, even though the non-material does not act on the material, it possesses a superior directive position in virtue of its being a final cause. Here lies the strength of the solution brought by the Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd to the problem.

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Jews as a Chosen People: Tradition and Transformation
by S. Leyla Gürkan

Reuven Firestone

Mutezile'nin Felsefe Eleştirisi: Harezmli Mutezilî İbnü'l-Melâhimî'nin Felsefeye Reddiyesi [*Muʿtazila's Critique of Philosophy: Muʿtazilī Theologian Ibn al-Malāḥimī of Khwārazm's Refutation of Philosophy*]
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Muhammet Tarakçı

The Jews as a Chosen People: Tradition and Transformation, by S. Leyla Gürkan, (Routledge Jewish Studies Series), (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), xiv + 246 pp., ISBN: 978-0-415-46607-3, £75 (hardback)

The notion of chosenness, that God has chosen one religious community from among all the peoples of the world, is a cornerstone of monotheistic religions and has become a point of contention and polemic between them. All monotheisms include this notion in one form or another, but Judaism seems to contain the earliest expression and has openly struggled with its meaning in the face of a long history in which the Jewish people have seemed to be anything but chosen. Destruction, dispersion, exile, and the demolition of the most sacred religious shrine of the Jerusalem Temple all would seem to demonstrate that the Jews have lost any possible status as chosen people. And yet the notion has survived among Jews, who have tried to make sense of the meaning of chosenness for thousands of years.

Professor Leyla Gürkan's meticulous scholarly account follows that intellectual and spiritual journey through the ages from its appearance in the earliest layers of the Hebrew Bible to its most recent expressions among Jews in the United States and the State of Israel. This is an important book, and for a number of reasons. It is the first longitudinal study of this core creedal concept from biblical to modern times, and it is one of the first truly scholarly studies of Judaism conducted by a modern Muslim scholar of religion. It is also an excellent case study of a religious notion as it evolves in relation to the evolution of human history from ancient to contemporary expressions. The very attempt to treat such a complex, sensitive and variegated subject as divine election and its resulting sense of chosenness in such as fashion is a bold act, but with rare exception, the author succeeds in carrying it out.

The work is divided into three sections that correspond to three periods: ancient, modern and post-Holocaust. Each period is defined by a dominant theme, which reflects a response to a dominant challenge. In the ancient period the theme is holiness and it is developed in late antiquity as a response to the emergence of Christianity. During the transition to modernity and the emancipation of Jews in the West it is mission, and after the Holocaust the theme is survival. These thematic developments reflect trends in Jewish responses to

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the historical, intellectual and socio-political influences that they experienced. Specific inclinations are noted, from an early stage of Jewish separation from other peoples in the pre-modern period to an attempt to find a way to integrate into modern society after emancipation, to the current situation in which the major thrust of thinking is articulated in terms of both physical survival after the Holocaust and spiritual survival in a post-modern world. While the last period is defined as post-Holocaust because of its overwhelming influence upon contemporary Jewish thought, the actual period during which the specter of the Holocaust actually holds sway is triggered by the Six Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of 1973.

The author is really interested in modern and contemporary Jewish thought, and this is where she concentrates her efforts. The first section on ancient Judaism establishes the paradigm for the notion of chosenness, and is half as long as each of the latter two sections. The medieval world is virtually untreated aside from passing references to Saadia, Judah HaLevy, Maimonides and Gersonides. The strength of the book lies in the second and third sections treating the last two to three hundred years.

The book is extremely dense and nearly encyclopedic in both breadth and depth. It is not for undergraduates or anyone who is not already familiar with Judaism, Jewish history and Jewish religious literatures, as it does not define many concepts or explain trends, developments, and changes that Jews and Judaism have undergone over the millennia. On the other hand, it is very stimulating for the advanced student, and will be extremely challenging for most knowledgeable Jewish readers.

More needs to be said about the latter. Jews have subjected themselves to the harshest self-criticism, certainly since the beginning of the nineteenth century and arguably for centuries prior as well. It is part of the Jewish "culture of *machaloqet*," a methodology of debate or dispute wherein two parties take different positions and argue them *leshem shamayim*, literally "for the sake of heaven." This means that by debating all possible angles to an argument or legal interpretation of divine law or the meaning of scripture, Jews believe that they come closest to making sense of the ultimately inscrutable mind (or meaning or intent) of God. So Jews are quite accustomed to hearing very heated arguments and critiques of their positions over issues such as chosenness rendered by their fellows, and this culture of de-

bate and dispute has spilled over into modern and secular Jewish cultural expressions as well. It is at the core of the (secular) academic Jewish critiques of Judaism as found published in countless monographs and scholarly articles. But Jews are also accustomed to hearing slanderous critiques leveled against them by non-Jews, so we tend to have a particular sensitivity to outside critique. Because one of the topics around which defamatory accusations of Judaism were constructed was exactly the topic of chosenness, this phenomenology of critique and hyper-sensitivity always lurks behind such a study. Professor Gürkan's critical scholarship has no agenda and no prejudgment. Her approach in this regard differs, for example, from that of the Egyptian encylopaedist, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Muḥammad al-Masīrī in his eight volume *Encyclopedia on Jews, Judaism and Zionism* published in Cairo by Dār al-Shurūq in 1999 (for his treatment of chosenness, see Vol. 5, pp. 72-77).

One drawback of the book, which also explains the need to assume prior knowledge of Judaism in the reader, is its attempt to cover the entire range of thinking on such a large and complex topic in a single volume of less than 200 expository pages. It attempts to be so comprehensive in its effort to capture such a broad range of thinking on the notion of chosenness that it simply cannot treat the subtleties of the various positions thoroughly enough to avoid some question as to whether it reflects them adequately, particularly since the complex Jewish expressions often reflect deep internal arguments about profound subtleties of religious meaning.

Professor Gürkan's analysis of chosenness in Zionism is a particularly interesting case. The initial discussion on p. 93 is excellent, but the resumption of the discussion toward the end of the book loses the fine balance of the previous analyses. Her usual scholarly objectivity seems to falter when treating expressions in the radical Zionist camp post 1973. Her exposition and analysis of the radicals was not inaccurate, but she failed to treat the counter-positions in the Orthodox community, thereby suggesting that there are none. She cites the most radical critics such as Israel Shahak, whose agenda was to shock and "wake up" the Israeli Jewish community to the destructive direction he believed that Zionism and Jewish religious radicalism had taken, and which he condemned in the harshest terms. I found her resonating so personally with the critique of Shahak, for example, that it seemed as if she could not remove herself from the discussion,

thereby appearing as if she is inserting her own strong opinions into the discourse. As soon as this occurs it is no longer an analytically discursive critique but rather becomes a subjective political or religious critique.

This section is the only part of a long and careful study that I found questionable or problematic, though the English is somewhat awkward and could have used better editing by the publishers. With these caveats, I highly recommend this important study. Professor Gürkan demonstrates knowledge of Jewish primary sources in original languages and deep control of secondary sources written by Jews and non-Jews alike. Her study is indeed encyclopedic in its scope while focusing successfully on a narrow but extremely complex topic. One of Gürkan's great strengths is the success with which she establishes a paradigm for analysis of a religious phenomenon as expressed in its classic formulations and then observes how it evolves in response to societal and social-political developments in history. Professor Gürkan provides an intellectual journey through the history of Judaism through the vehicle of the notion of divine election, observing how religion responds to the dynamics of history through development and change in religious thought.

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***Mutezile'nin Felsefe Eleştirisi: Harezmli Mutezilî İbnü'l-Melâhimî'nin Felsefeye Reddiyesi* [*Muʿtazila's Critique of Philosophy: Muʿtazilī Theologian Ibn al-Malāḥimī of Khwārazm's Refutation of Philosophy*],** by Orhan Şener Koloğlu, (Bursa: Emin Yayınları, 2010), x + 397 pp., ISBN: 978-9944-404-68-6

Although the relationship between *kalām* and philosophy (or between religion and philosophy) remains one of the most popular subjects in Islamic studies, much of the discussion appears to be confined exclusively to al-Ghazālī's refutation and Ibn Rushd's defense of philosophy in *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* and *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut,* respectively. Needless to say, this discussion should be enriched by introducing new figures, works, and centuries. Ibn al-Malāḥimī's (d. 536/1141) *Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn fī l-radd ʿalā l-falāsifa* (*Gift for the Theologians in Refutation of the Philosophers*), edited by Hassan Ansari and Wilferd Madelung in 2008 (Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy & Institute of Islamic Studies Free University of Berlin) can be seen as an important contribution to this enrichment. What makes Ibn al-Malāḥimī particularly significant is his affiliation to the Muʿtazila as a member of the school of al-Ḥusayniyya, founded by Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, in Khwārazm. For, although the critique of philosophy done by Sunnī and *salafī* theologians is relatively well known in the literature, we still lack adequate detailed examination of the Muʿtazilī theologians' approach to philosophy.

Koloğlu's book is the first comprehensive study of Ibn al-Malāḥimī's work. The author first examines Ibn al-Malāḥimī's life and works by focusing on his position in the Muʿtazilī tradition. He then analyzes the *Tuḥfa* on the basis of its three chapters: *ilāhiyyāt*, *sharʿiyyāt*, and *samʿiyyāt*. He also identifies Ibn al-Malāḥimī's direct and indirect sources, including both Muʿtazilī and philosophical ones. According to Koloğlu, the importance of Ibn al-Malāḥimī's book revolves around three points: (a) *Tuḥfa* was completed during the approximate period 532/1137 to 536/1141, that is, less than fifty years after al-Ghazālī's *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, and it is the second book written to critique the philosophers in Islamic civilization; (b) it is the only refutation of philosophy written from a Muʿtazilī point of view; (c) it is the most comprehensive and systematic refutation of philosophy. As Koloğlu indicates, Ibn al-Malāḥimī has a very severe

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and exclusive approach to philosophy. He sees philosophy as a foreign discipline, alien to Islam and to the Islamic community. His aim is to demonstrate how Muslim philosophers, like al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, have attempted to present Islam on the basis of the ancient philosophers' doctrines, thereby depriving it of its true foundation and the message of the prophets. He is very worried that many scholars of *fiqh* were engaged in philosophical sciences to reach a deeper understanding of the religious law and jurisprudence. Further, he stresses that the Islamic community may share the fate of Christians, whose religion was distorted by adopting Greek philosophy. Thus, the primary difference between Ibn al-Malāḥimī's and al-Ghazālī's refutations of philosophy is that although the latter has a selective approach to philosophy, the former presents an outright rejection of philosophy in its entirety and considers it impossible to find a common ground between religion and the philosophical doctrines that he criticizes. Moreover, Ibn al-Malāḥimī is reluctant to mention al-Ghazālī in *Tuḥfa*. The fundamental reason behind this reluctance is that he did not consider al-Ghazālī's approach in *Tahāfut* to be a proper and correct way of refuting philosophy. Interestingly enough, when he narrates the doctrines of philosophers, he usually relies on al-Ghazālī's *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* and extensively paraphrases it, whereas he often quotes and criticizes passages from al-Ghazālī's esoteric interpretations in *al-Maḍnūn bi-hī alā ghayr ahlihī* on eschatological concepts like resurrection, balance, reckoning, intercession, and the path over hell.

Koloğlu emphasizes that Ibn al-Malāḥimī condemns philosophers on two points: (a) that their doctrines lead to compulsion (*jabr*); (b) that they have esoteric teachings. Because Ibn al-Malāḥimī, as a Muʿtazilī theologian, understandably defends human free will and frees God from any responsibility for evil, he sees the deterministic character of Muslim philosophers' teachings as dangerous. One can observe this criticism throughout the chapters on *ilāhiyyāt* and *sharʿiyyāt*, which specifically deal with temporal creation of the world, God's attributes, the problem of evil, the nature of human responsibility, prophecy, and miracles. As for the second point, he focuses on al-Ghazālī's thoughts in his *al-Maḍnūn*, as mentioned above, and rejects the doctrines of the philosophers on the hereafter (*samʿiyyāt*), on the grounds that they are based on an over-interpretation of exterior meanings of Qurʾānic verses.

Though the Muʿtazila is known as the representative of rationalism in Islam, Ibn al-Malāḥimī's merciless attitude toward philosophy raises some questions about this judgment, and this suspicion increases owing to Ibn al-Malāḥimī's adherence to the school of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī in the Muʿtazilī tradition, who is known by, and often attacked for, his interest in philosophical sciences. Although Koloğlu does not scrutinize Ibn al-Malāḥimī's relationship with the Ḥusayniyya school, he states that the rationalistic characteristic of the Muʿtazila does not mean that they share the same doctrines with philosophers. Rationalism of the Muʿtazila, he believes, is intended to understand and justify the truth brought down by the prophet, not to establish a new truth as philosophers do.

Koloğlu's well-researched book is a welcome addition to *kalām* studies in Turkey, where the interest in the history of *kalām* is increasing steadily. Koloğlu's work not only examines Ibn al-Malāḥimī's specific criticisms of philosophical teachings, but also provides detailed information on Muʿtazilī doctrines and is a useful source for students of the Muʿtazila. The increasing scholarly attention paid over the past two decades to the central position of Ibn Sīnā in Islamic philosophy in particular, and to Islamic intellectual history in general, has convincingly demonstrated the existence of a strong relationship between philosophy and *kalām*. In this context, Koloğlu's study is indispensable for students of the history both of Islamic philosophy and of *kalām*.

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The Historic Hammams of Bursa, by Elif Şehitoğlu, (translated by Georgina Özer; Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Publications, n.d.), 164 pp., ISBN: 978-975-333-222-4, 24.00 TL

This book provides detailed information about the history of "Hammam Culture" in Bursa, the first capital of Ottoman State. In fact, the city maintained its importance even after Istanbul had been conquered and designated the new capital. It has always been known as a green city, famous for its natural hot springs and hammams, including public hammams that have survived from the Ottoman period. The book originally published in Turkish as "Bursa Hamamları" (2008) has been translated into English by Georgina Özer.

The author, Elif Şehitoğlu, is an outstanding architect, who graduated from the Faculty of Architecture, Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey in 1995. Since graduating, she has been involved in many significant projects in Turkey, especially the restoration of historic places in Bursa. Her 2000 MA thesis, entitled "Bursa Hamamlarının Yapısal, Çevresel, İşlevsel Sorunları ve Çözüm Önerileri [The Structural, Environmental, Functional Problems of the Hammams of Bursa]", submitted to the Department of Restoration, Mimar Sinan University, Istanbul provides the basis of this book. In the preface, the author mentions several influential studies on the subject, the most important of which is Kâmil Kepecioğlu's work *Bursa Hamamları* (*The Hammams of Bursa*) published in 1935.

In the introduction, Şehitoğlu emphasizes that the "Turkish Bath" or hammam, which fascinated European travellers to Anatolia from the 16th and 17th centuries on and inspired many writers and artists, was fundamentally a borrowed form of the ancient Roman and Byzantine cult of collective bathing. The Ottomans further developed the hammam by introducing the idea of full ablution (*ghusl*), one of the ritual acts of Islam. Thus, it evolved beyond a place for perfoming a ritual and became an indispensable social custom.

In the first chapter entitled "The Tradition of Bathing from Ancient Times and Hammams", Şehitoğlu summarizes the historical evolution of the hammam concept and points out the cultural differences in ways of satisfying the need to cleanse the body. In this context, she pays special attention to the fact that the Roman baths were the first examples of the modern hammam. After dealing with how the me-

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dieval Muslim world embraced and adapted the Roman and subsequent Byzantine hammams as a social institution, the book explores hammams during the Ottoman period and the emergence of the "Turkish Hammam." Alongside technical and architectural details, the anecdotes concerning the place of hammams in Ottoman culture, especially those related to women makes the book gripping and pleasant to read.

After a brief history of the city of Bursa, the second chapter addresses the building, development, and architectural features of hammams in the city from the Roman period on. It draws attention to the rich abundance of hot and cold springs in the region as well as the geographic conditions that led to the success of hammams. These features also contributed to the development and variation of hammam culture. The book illustrates this development by narrating accounts from legends and books of travels. It then examines each of the Ottoman hammams in the city by placing them into four main groups: hammams in mosque complexes, marketplace hammams, neighborhood hammams, and spas. For each hammam, it sheds lights on details such as location, architect, construction date, architectural features, major repairs, and the current condition. It also offers a great number of photographs and drawings. At the end of the chapter, it touches on defunct hammams, which now exist only in historical registers.

In the final chapter, Şehitoğlu reflects on the dilapidation of the hammams of Bursa. On one hand, she speaks of changing hammam culture. On the other, she complains about the lack of historical awareness. Lastly, she offers proposals for the survival of historic hammams and hammam culture.

The book ends with a brief glossary for readers who may not have a firm grasp on the subject. Readers who are interested in hammam culture or the "Turkish hammam" will not only find detailed information but also the chance for an intellectual journey into the hammams of Bursa, the capital of the Ottoman state for more than a hundred years.

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An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries: Volume 1: On the Nature of the Divine, edited by Feras Hamza and Sajjad Rizvi with Farhana Mayer, (New York: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008), xviii + 670 pp., ISBN: 978-0197200001, 95 $ (hardback).

This book provides a new window onto the vast intellectual and hermeneutic diversity of the Islamic learned tradition and its value cannot be overestimated. The object is to present in English translation the exegesis of the Qur'ān from a wide variety of Muslim authors (twenty in all) over the 12-13 centuries of the history of *tafsīr*. (The considerable and deft translation work is camouflaged by the official bibliographic information from the title page where the translators are listed as "editors". This is much too modest.) Most of these works are in Arabic, one is in Persian. It is envisaged as the first of several similar volumes under the general title *Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries*. For the present volume, the topic has been narrowed – if such is the correct term – to the general problem of the Nature of the Divine. The editors and translators have had to deal with innumerable methodological problems besetting their wish to present in English an apt and accurate reflection of the exegetical tradition in Islam. Their solution is a good one. Because of the large amount of duplication and repetition in the genre, both within discrete works and between authors and commentaries from generation to generation, it is simply not feasible to attempt a complete translation of the exegesis of every pertinent verse within this general problematic. Indeed, the first impossible problem would be to "disqualify" a verse because of lack of pertinence: each verse and each word of the Qur'ān implies and invokes all the others. So, the editors have chosen six of the most frequently quoted and beloved *āya*s of the Qur'ān, devoted a chapter to each, and presented, in chronological order, translations from the chosen scholars. The verses are: Q 2:115 on God's omnipresence; Q 2:255, the celebrated Throne Verse; Q 6:12, on God's self-imposed obligation to be merciful; Q 24:35, the Light Verse; Q 54:49, God has created all things according to a specific measure; Q 112:1-4, the sūra of Sincerity or Oneness. Such a selection bespeaks deep familiarity with the Qur'ān and mastery of the Islamic exegetical tradition. It is no easy task to choose a mere six from the over 6.000 verses. But these remarkable *āya*s have provided the history of tafsīr with much

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inspiration. And such inspiration is presented in fluid and readable translation from the following authors: Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Balkhī (d. 150/767); Furāt ibn Furāt al-Kūfī (*fl.* late third/ninth century); Abū l-Naḍr al-ʿAyyāshī (*fl.* late third/ninth century); Hūd Muḥakkam al-Hawwārī (*fl.* fourth/tenth century); ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (*fl.* fourth/tenth century); Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923); Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/934-5); Jaʿfar ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. before 346/957); Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (*fl.* sixth/twelfth century); Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144); al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī/Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1154); Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209); ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 736/1336); Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī (d. 745/1344); ʿAllāma ʿAbd Allāh al-Sharafī (d. 1062/1651); Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī Burūsawī/Bursawī (d. 1137/1725); al-Sayyid Maḥmūd ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854); Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1323/1905) & Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1354/1935); Sayyid Abū l-Aʿlā al-Mawdūdī (d. 1399/1979); Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍl Allāh (b. 1935-2010).

Given the vast number of exegetes that the tradition has produced, there will always be room to discuss the criteria and methods for the choices made in such a context. It seems to me that the editors have chosen wisely and where one might have added, say, a representative group from the late medieval/early modern periods in order to sample the exegetical culture of the Islamicate proto-states of the Ottoman, Ṣafawid and Mughal empires, it is obvious that in a book such as this, one has to draw the line somewhere. One might query the overly sanguine use of the category "Sufi", as if it represented a distinct "communion" within the world of Islam on the order of Sunnī and Shīʿī Islam. And despite the very best efforts of the authors to remain aloof from sectarian and partisan bias, it nonetheless appears to creep in, as for example, when Sunnī Islam seems to be considered the measure by which all other interpretations are compared. Thus in speaking of the fascinating *taʾwīl* of Jaʿfar ibn Manṣūr, we read:

> For him, theology and sacred history are intimately linked: the unfolding of human history reveals the divine plan and realities to the initiated, often through the subversion of the master narrative that is linked to the developing notion of a normative Sunnī conception of the early Muslim community. The elaborate schema whereby he links the past experience of the prophets in the Qurʾān to the difficulties

faced by the *daʿwa* express the hermeneutics of *taʾwīl* as a process of interpretation embedded in an account of counter-history." [p. 31]

From this are we meant to understand that "normative" Sunnī Islam does not see a connection between human history and "the divine plan"? Does Sunnī Islam not see in the great community of prophets and their travails and triumphs lessons for here and now? And finally, is Sunnī Islam, especially in the mid-tenth century when Jaʿfar was writing, the triumphant standard-bearer of the Qurʾānic revelation? But such questions arising from the book at hand are part of its payload. They deserved to be continuously asked. The editors demonstrate that they have always been asked within the exegetical tradition of greater Islam. The tradition emerges here as a meta-*majlis* in which Muslims of all times and places have felt free and encouraged to discuss their differences and similarities in a shared language, with shared moral and ethical presuppositions and a shared imaginaire. Tafsīr emerges as what Illich referred to as a "tool of conviviality" and one of the chief emblems of the Islamicate civilizational project.

In addition to the six chapters constructed around the six verses listed above, the book contains much else of great value. The *Introduction*, pp. 1-19, is a densely annotated presentation of the methodological orientation of the volume; *The Commentators and their Commentaries,* pp. 20-65 is an equally learned presentation of the *dramatis personae:* the exegetes themselves. Pages 577-601 contain a *Prosopographical Appendix*, a truly invaluable "directory" of dozens of the most important names in the overall exegetic tradition: ḥadīth scholars, mainly, but also important figures from Islamic history. Here brief entries provide dates, proper spellings of names and general information. Students and scholars will be very grateful for the effort put into this feature. This is no less true for the excellent extensive *Bibliography* (pp. 603-654) and the *Indexes:* Subject (pp. 647-666) & Qurʾānic Citations (pp. 667-670).

This book will appeal to teachers because it comes much closer than any previous effort to display the richness of the tradition in English translation. This is achieved through the judicious choice of topic and the very representatives of the tradition. Names not normally admitted to the "tafsīr club" are here given ample space, demonstrating that not all that goes by the name of Qurʾān commentary is found in works with the word "tafsīr" in their title. The

form and contents of this fine book, then, says that a deeper study of this remarkable hermeneutical tradition will reveal that not everything named *tafsīr* will tell us all we need to know about the way Muslims may understand the Qurʾān.

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***İbn Hazm: Uluslararası Katılımlı İbn Hazm Sempozyumu – Bildiri ve Müzakere Metinleri – [Ibn Ḥazm: Proceedings of International Symposium on Ibn Ḥazm]*,** edited by Süleyman Sayar & Muhammet Tarakçı, (Istanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 2010), 878 pp., ISBN: 9786055623456

The first international symposium on Ibn Ḥazm ever convened, to the best of our knowledge, was held in Spain in 1963 with twenty-five participants. The second such symposium was hosted by the Faculty of Theology, Uludağ University and the Muftiship of Bursa on 26-28 October 2007, in Bursa, Turkey. At the latter symposium, which comprised five sessions, twenty-eight papers and eighteen discourses were presented. The proceedings were published in book form after a delay of three years. Three of the contributions were in English, one was in Arabic, and others were in Turkish. The contributions that were not written in Turkish were published in their original language with a Turkish translation. The work is the fruit of a meticulous editorship and promises to become a significant reference work on Ibn Ḥazm. The proceedings are introduced under the headings of philosophy, kalām, fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), the history of religions, and other fields.

The work begins with an article by Mehmet Özdemir, who presents an account of the environment in Spain at the time of Ibn Ḥazm (pp. 29-58).

Under the heading of philosophy, Muḥammad Abū Layla treats the scientific personality of Ibn Ḥazm as a thinker and critic (pp. 59-80, in English), whereas Hidayet Peker exclusively stresses his classification of sciences, and he further indicates that Ibn Ḥazm, like other medieval Muslim philosophers, classifies intellectual sciences under religious ones. However, he argues that it is useless and deficient to concentrate solely on religious sciences while setting the intellectual ones aside (pp. 103-111). İbrahim Çapak handles the comprehension of logic by Ibn Ḥazm within the scope of his views regarding concept, definition, proposition and types of proposition and syllogism (*burhān*). He states that Ibn Ḥazm recognized the idea of syllogism, which Aristotle explained as "to reach the unknown through the known", by naming it *burhān*, and that he distinguished it from analogy, which means to attain a consequence through the similarity be-

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tween two things (pp. 113-134). Ibn Ḥazm's views on morals are analyzed by Enver Uysal with considerations of issues like the moral aspect of philosophy, the determinative elements of morals and fundamental virtues (pp. 135-153), whereas Aliye Çınar treats the subjects of phases and symptoms of love, separation and morals, within the scope of his *Tawq al-ḥamāmā* (pp. 155-177).

Under the second heading, a section of the proceedings that is dedicated to the science of "Kalām", Murat Serdar examines Ibn Ḥazm's understanding of divinity and points out that for Ibn Ḥazm, it is impossible to talk about attributes of God because any attribute is an accident present only in composite beings, but it may be possible only to mention His names. Names of God are restricted only to the Qurʾān and the ones identified in prophetic traditions (*sunna*); God cannot be called by names other than these, even though they bear the same meanings (pp. 197-228). As for Ibn Ḥazm's comments on Prophethood, Ulvi Murat Kılavuz informs us that according to Ibn Ḥazm, just as in al-Ashʿarī, women can be *nabī* (prophet) but not *rasūl* (messenger), and accordingly, he considers Sarah, Mary and Āsiya as *nabī*s. Moreover, Ibn Ḥazm differs from many Muslim philosophers in that he asserts that miracles or extraordinary situations are peculiar to prophets (pp. 229-244). In another article under the same title, Orhan Ş. Koloğlu treats Ibn Ḥazm's refusal of atomism, dubs him one of the rare Muslim philosophers to refuse atomist thought and provides a place for the arguments that Ibn Ḥazm developed in opposition to that thought (pp. 245-270). Mehmet Dalkılıç discusses the method of Ibn Ḥazm, a Muslim heresiographer apart from all of his other qualities, in regard to the classification of Islamic sects (pp. 271-316). Ibn Ḥazm's critical approach toward the Ashʿariyya that was strong and influential in his day, as well as his criticisms in terms of faith-profanity, the names and qualities of God, prophethood, miracle and magic, are analyzed by Cağfer Karadaş, who argues that the criticisms of Ibn Ḥazm directed against the Ashʿariyya go beyond critical limits (pp. 317-330).

Under the heading of *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), the Ẓāhirī school, the first topic that springs to mind when one mentions Ibn Ḥazm, is examined by Muharrem Kılıç, who proceeds to explain the historical development of Ẓāhirī thought prior to Ibn Ḥazm, its systematization by Ibn Ḥazm, and its loss of importance and departure from the stage of history (pp. 345-366). Vecdi Akyüz summarizes Ibn Ḥazm's thoughts on *fiqh* (pp. 367-376), whereas Bilal Aybakan treats

his approach to *ijmāʿ* (consensus of Muslim scholars) and assumes that, according to Ibn Ḥazm, to apply *ijmāʿ* was restricted to the period of *ṣaḥāba* (Companions of the Prophet), and it is out of the question regarding an issue that is not explained in the Qurʾān and *sunna* (pp. 377-394). H. Yunus Apaydın points out differences between Ibn Ḥazm and other Muslim jurists regarding the views of the former on *ijtihād* (independent reasoning), and he discusses the conditions and methods of *ijtihād* according to Ibn Ḥazm's thought (pp. 395-403). Oğuzhan Tan analyzes how Ibn Ḥazm explains the concept of *dalīl* (proof) in *fiqh* principles, as well as his criticisms on syllogism and his comparisons between syllogism and proof (pp. 405-422). Zekeriya Güler evaluates Ibn Ḥazm's criticisms of Ḥanafī scholars of *fiqh* within the scope of *khabar al-wāḥid*, *mursal ḥadīth*s, *rijāl* (the science of narrators), the words of *ṣaḥāba* and syllogism, etc. (pp. 423-442).

Ibn Ḥazm is a scholar who should also be assessed in terms of the history of religions. The fourth heading was dedicated to this issue. This section of the proceedings begins with a paper by Süleyman Sayar on Ibn Ḥazm as a historian of religions. According to Sayar, Ibn Ḥazm is a historian of religions whose approach is largely theological. He chose to use a critical method rather than a descriptive one, and he used reason and sacred texts together in his criticisms. When he dealt with religions, he was interested in their fundamental thoughts instead of their history. He was the most important figure in biblical criticism during the early period (pp. 467-489). Nurshīf ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Rifʿat introduces Ibn Ḥazm's criticisms of rabbinical writings (pp. 491-526; Turkish translation: pp. 527-561); Muḥammad Abū Layla presents his biblical criticism (pp. 563-598; Turkish translation: pp. 599-633); Ali Erbaş covers Magus and the Ṣabians according to Ibn Ḥazm (pp. 635-640); Bülent Şenay introduces Ibn Ḥazm's treatment of Indian religions and *Barāhima* (pp. 641-650); and finally, Tahir Aşirov relates Ibn Ḥazm's view of the Epistles of the New Testament (pp. 651-662).

The final session considers the place of Ibn Ḥazm in the "other sciences." The first contribution, by M. Emin Maşalı, treats Ibn Ḥazm's view of the Qurʾān and the method of interpretation (pp. 677-696), whereas his view and method of *ḥadīth* are analyzed by Abdullah Karahan (pp. 697-716). Karahan states that Ibn Ḥazm accepted *sunna* (prophetic tradition) as a product of revelation exactly like the Qurʾān and attributed a conjunctive quality to the two. He defended the view

that not only the consecutive *ḥadīth*s (*mutawātir*) but also the single-narrator *ḥadīth*s (*āḥād*) were included in this context. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ʿUways treats Ibn Ḥazm as a historian in his Arabic article (pp. 717-748; Turkish translation: pp. 749-773). According to ʿUways, there is no historian other than Ibn Ḥazm who is not content with narrating historical events, who reveals his opinions about those who are right or wrong, and who uses historical criticism so extensively. In his analysis of the literary character of Ibn Ḥazm, including his philosophy of language, his conception of rhetoric and his poetic approach, Mehmet Yalar gives some examples from his poems (pp. 777-794). İsmail Güler concentrates particularly on the linguistic theory of Ibn Ḥazm. Beginning with the verse "*And Allah taught Adam the names – all of them*" (Q 2:31), he touches on the question of the origin of language. He states that Ibn Ḥazm defended the position that language is taught to man by God, and he therefore rejects the assumption that it emerged as a result of a convention. According to Ibn Ḥazm, there is no definite answer to the question "Which language did the first man speak?" The first man may have spoken one of the modern languages, but his language could also be extinct. To the question "Which is the language superior to all others?" Ibn Ḥazm responds that prophets speaking their own language were sent to every nation, and therefore, no language is superior to the others. Accordingly, for Ibn Ḥazm, it is impossible to assume that the language of Heaven is Arabic (pp. 795-801).

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CONFERENCE REPORTS

International Symposium on Khojazāda, 22-24 October 2010, organized by the Faculty of Theology, Uludağ University & Bursa Metropolitan Municipality, Bursa-Turkey

L. W. C. van Lit

IV International Congress on Islamic Feminism, 21-24 October 2010, organized by Junta Islámica Catalana (JIC) [Catalan Islamic Council], Madrid-Spain

Tuba Işık-Yiğit

International Symposium on Khojazāda, 22-24 October 2010, organized by the Faculty of Theology, Uludağ University & Bursa Metropolitan Municipality, Bursa-Turkey

After a successful symposium on Mullā Fanārī in 2009, the Theology Faculty of Uludağ University and the Bursa Metropolitan Municipality organized a symposium on the Ottoman intellectual Khojazāda (d. 893/1488) from 22 to 24 October 2010.

The first day was opened by Prof. M. Kara and Prof. A. Arslan. Kara discussed the Sufi environment of Khojazāda's days. Arslan (well known for his study of Kamāl Pāshā Zāda's commentary on Khojazāda's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*) introduced the general philosophical environment of Khojazāda, emphasizing the inclusion of an increasing number of philosophical arguments within the *kalām* discourse.

The first session was mainly concerned with Khojazāda's life. The first presentation was by Prof. A. K. Cihan and concerned the general scientific environment during the time of Khojazāda (in particular, under the patronage of Sultan Mehmed II). In the Ottoman environment, the Ḥanafī school was dominant in Religious Law and al-Jurjānī and al-Taftāzānī shaped and influenced to a large extent the agenda of the philosophical and theological investigations. Especially under the rule of Mehmed II, who conquered Constantinople in 1453, intellectual circles experienced an upsurge. As a simple example of this upsurge, Cihan showed that in *al-Shaqāʾiq al-Nuʿmāniyya* (a bio-bibliographical dictionary of Ottoman intellectuals), 89 scholars are recorded during the reign of Mehmed II, whereas only 40 are recorded during the reign of the previous sultan, Murad II. Cihan also discussed the different intellectual centers such as Edirne, Bursa, and Istanbul.

Subsequently, the life of Khojazāda was discussed into detail in presentations by Prof. M. Hızlı and Prof. S. Köse. Bearing the full name Muṣliḥ al-Dīn Muṣṭafā b. Yūsuf b. Ṣāliḥ al-Būrsawī, Khojazāda was raised by a father who was a rich businessman. His birth date is not explicitly recorded, although Köse argued for a birth year of 838/1434. Living his whole life in the Ottoman Empire, Khojazāda became a well-known scholar in his own days and remained well known as the various glosses on his books testify. After he had studied for some time, he entered the service of Ibn Qāḍī Ayāthlūgh. In

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the Aghrās Madrasa, he studied Arabic, the principles of law and religion, and the linguistic sciences of meanings and metaphors with Ibn Qāḍī Ayāthlūgh. Then, Khojazāda entered the service of Khiḍr Bek Ibn Jalāl. Khojazāda held positions as a *mudarris* (multiple times in Bursa and Istanbul and once in Iznik; he also served as a private teacher of the sultan) and a qāḍī (in Kestel, Edirne, Istanbul, and Iznik and for the army), and he held strong connections throughout his life with all three Sultans under whom he served. He died in Bursa in 893/1488.

Khojazāda was also buried in Bursa, and his grave was the subject of the talk by Dr. H. Gülgen. Contextualizing the gravestone within the Ottoman environment, Gülgen showed how Khojazāda's gravestone is a fine example of a 'Bursa-style' gravestone. The elaborate writings and decorations are unique for its time and could indicate that the gravestone was made based on a specific request, according to Gülgen.

The second session of the first day discussed Khojazāda's philosophical and theological writings. Prof. A. Shihadeh began the session with a discussion of some of Khojazāda's glosses on al-Jurjānī's *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*. After some remarks on the use of commentaries (sing. *sharḥ*) and glosses (sing. *ḥāshiya*) in the time of Khojazāda, Shihadeh examined some problems regarding the nature of *kalām* as a discipline and of theological knowledge and enquiry. He argued that Khojazāda is generally more critical of the later Ashʿarīs (e.g., Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Abharī, and al-Jurjānī) than he is of the earlier, classical Ashʿarīs (e.g., al-Ashʿarī, al-Bāqillānī, and al-Juwaynī). As for the core theological doctrine of Ashʿarism (e.g., the omnipotence of God), Khojazāda appears to favor the positions of earlier schools over the position of later schools, which were often contradictory.

The second presentation was given by Prof. C. Karadaş. A technical-philosophical discussion on causality was delivered. It mainly focused on the concept of secondary causality and its role within the Peripatetic philosophical framework. The presentation then problematized this scheme from within a religious outlook and surveyed al-Ghazālī's synthesis, which predominantly draws from the idea of God's custom (*ʿāda*).

A similar technical-philosophical discussion was undertaken by L. W. C. van Lit. In his presentation, he discussed Khojazāda's and ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's chapters on God's knowledge from their studies on al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. While surveying their arguments, van

Lit pointed out that Khojazāda's text in particular reveals a great degree of reliance on earlier texts, such as the previously mentioned al-Jurjānī's *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*. Though ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn does not explicitly use many citations, his text relies on almost exactly the same texts as Khojazāda's text does. Overall, Khojazāda seems to favor Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī's solution (particulars are known by their unique bundle of universals), while ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn seems to emphasize Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's idea of knowledge as a relation.

Although a fourth paper – on Khojazāda's exposition of the Liar Paradox – was announced, it was not presented. The third session suffered from similar issues. A paper on '*Tahāfut*s in terms of Eternity of Creation' was not presented; another one on 'the eternal speech of God' was read on behalf of the author. The session began with a stimulating presentation by Dr. Ö. Türker. He tried to assess the success of the *Tahāfut*-studies of Khojazāda and ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī by explicating the philosophy-theology relation in the Islamic tradition. Türker invoked the technical term of 'disputation' (*jadal*) to establish a twofold discourse for theologians (*mutakallimūn*). On the one hand, there is the discourse between Islamic and non-Islamic intellectuals, and on the other hand, there is the discourse between intellectuals of different Islamic denominations. His claim is that, before al-Ghazālī, 'the philosophers' (*al-falāsifa*) were considered non-Islamic intellectuals by Muslim theologians, whereas after al-Ghazālī, 'the philosophers' were accepted as intellectuals of a different Islamic denomination, inducing a far greater commitment to philosophy (in the Peripatetic sense of the word) by the theologians. As such, Türker claims, the revivification of the *Tahāfut* discussion could not establish itself as an enduring tradition because the *Tahāfut* discussion betrays a commitment to the first type of discourse. The second paper was presented on behalf of Dr. A. Belhaj. He edited and discussed a treatise of Khojazāda entitled 'Epistle on the Eternal Speech of God' (*Risāla fī anna kalām Allāh qadīm*).

On Saturday, sessions four and five were undertaken. The fourth session was opened by Prof. Y. Michot. He contributed a paper on the division of the sciences, as it is given by Khojazāda in his introduction to his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. By and large, Khojazāda's division resembles Ibn Sīnā's division of the sciences. Michot's historical analysis also brought to light the solution to the obscure "*ālāt juzʾiyya*," which is faithfully reproduced in every edition of Ibn Sīnā's treatise, even though it is unclear what exactly 'particular instruments'

is supposed to mean. Using Ibn al-Akfānī's division of the sciences, Michot proposes to emendate it to "*ālāt ḥarbiyya*" (war instruments).

The two other presentations of this session were given by Dr. T. Yücedoğru and V. Kaya, and both dealt with philosophical discussions concerning cosmology. Yücedoğru highlighted the differences between Khojazāda's view (close to the mainstream *kalām* view) and alternatives such as Sufi and philosophical views. Kaya's paper focused on one issue of cosmology, namely whether or not the universe is eternal. Primarily using Khojazāda's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, he showed that Khojazāda argues for a strict creation of the universe. The presentation also offered a good sample of the style of the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, of which the fierce criticism on al-Ghazālī is most noteworthy.

The fifth and final session was devoted to Khojazāda's scientific writings. Prof. İ. Fazlıoğlu opened with a fascinating paper on a treatise concerning the question of whether the universe has a center. This question was raised by Sultan Mehmed II and was addressed by fifteen respondents, of which Khojazāda was one. To answer the question, Khojazāda transformed the cosmological problem into a mathematical problem.

The second speaker, Dr. A. Akbar Ziaee, discussed Khojazāda's treatise on rainbows. He referred to the cultural significance of the rainbow and to the scientific ventures to explain the phenomenon in the most satisfying way. Conceptually, Khojazāda's treatise is in line with those of previous scientists within the Islamic world, such as Ibn Sīnā, according to Akbar Ziaee.

The final speaker was K. Şenel. She offered an in-depth discussion of celestial bodies (Ar. sing. *falak*) using Khojazāda's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. By discussing aspects such as soul (*nafs*) and will (*irāda*) in connection to celestial bodies, she both raised classical issues in natural philosophy and metaphysics and showed how Khojazāda's critique on "the philosophers" questions the tenability of theorems.

In all, this symposium proved to be thought provoking. In itself a great contribution to a better understanding of the intellectual history of the Ottoman Empire, this symposium will hopefully lead to more attention being paid to Khojazāda and the intellectual history of the Ottoman Empire in the years to come.

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IV International Congress on Islamic Feminism, 21-24 October 2010, organized by Junta Islámica Catalana (JIC) [Catalan Islamic Council], Madrid-Spain

The Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), the Women's Institute (Ministry of Equality), the Madrid Autonomous Community, Casa Árabe, and Fundación Pluralismo y Convivencia Casa Asia hosted, in cooperation with Junta Islámica Catalana (JIC) and with the collaboration of the United States Embassy in Spain and the Iranian Embassy in Spain, the fourth congress on "Islamic Feminism" from October 21 to 24. The organizers placed the emphasis of the proceedings on the analysis of the present status of the movement and future perspectives. They sought to understand the reasons for opposing Islamic feminism – on the part of both non-Muslims and Muslims – and to seek ways to appropriately counteract such trends. The congress attempted to explore the potential of Islamic Feminism to change the experiences of Muslim women in the different contexts in which they face discrimination.

Focusing on these issues, the participants offered a number of different analytical solutions. Some participants, such as Omaima Abou Bakr (Egypt), critiqued the hegemonic discourse of scholars, the main approaches of which in Islam are hermeneutics (*tafsīr*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*), methods pursued at institutions such as al-Azhar University and elsewhere.

The core idea, for Abou Bakr, is to free the reading of Islamic texts from mostly male-dominated interpretation or simply dominant cultural traditions so as to enable gender-neutral and equitable interpretations of the Qurʾān.

Other participants, such as Houria Bouteldja (France) and Zahira Kamal (Palestine) are better categorized as activists and have a more significant practical relevance. They reported on the status and situation of Muslim women in their respective regional contexts of action and showed how the tools of Islamic feminism can be used in women's rights discourse to address issues such as raising the age of marriage in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Laure Rodríguez Quiroga (Spain) described the problems that Spain's approximately 1.5 million Muslims, whether Spanish-born or otherwise, experience as minorities in a Western European country

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and the stereotypical perceptions of Muslims due to media coverage and the excessive focus on rather statistically insignificant phenomena, such as the *burqa*. Arzu Merali (England) highlighted differences in the development of Eurocentric feminism and the existing feminism movements in decolonized developing countries.

In another panel, Durre S. Ahmed (Pakistan) highlighted the relationship between masculinity and spirituality in Islam from a psychoanalytic point of view, closely following the concepts of Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud.

Later there was a reading of a paper by Fariba Alasvand (Iran), as she could not attend because of visa problems. She presented the doctrine of the Iranian theological center of Qum, according to which gender roles are fixed. She addressed the incompatibility of Islam and feminism but said that in the Islamic understanding of human nature, there is no essential gender difference, except in the context of the family organization, in which different roles are assigned. However, Ziba Mir Hosseini, who is also from Iran but lives in England, argued that the combination of the Islamic legal tradition and feminism enables a new dialogue, pointing out that in Iran, secular and religious feminists now work together more closely than ever before as they pursue the same goals.

Mir Hosseini, and later the theologian Juan José Tamayo-Acosta (Spain), referred to the importance of the approach of liberation theology, which is equally important for Islam as it is for Christianity. She even took the view that the concepts of Islam and feminism overlap, pointing out links between liberation theology and Islamic feminism. However, she also said political engagement is necessary to highlight grievances.

Another panel focused on the relation between Qurʾānic hermeneutics and women's rights as human rights, as well as the importance of interreligious feminist hermeneutics for Islamic feminism. The disparity between the self-descriptions of the female speakers, who introduced themselves sometimes explicitly as either Muslim feminists or Islamic feminists, led on several occasions to requests by other participants for more precise definitions.

Margot Badran, who was unfortunately unable to participate in this conference, could have certainly contributed here. Instead, Mir Hosseini found herself asked to make a statement. For her, there existed no actual difference between Islamic and Muslim feminism in

objectives, but only in strategy, which is why they also saw no great need to anchor or manifest this conceptual distinction in their discourse.

Another focus of the conference was Sufi perspectives on the topic of gender and Islam. Here, Saʿdiyya Shaikh presented a very sophisticated account of the spiritual dimension in relation to gender and the "greater Jihad" with reference to Ibn al-ʿArabī. At this point, Maryam Faye (EEUU), Sheikha of the Muṣṭafawiyya Sufi Order, had the opportunity to present her specific vision and approach.

"We miss diversity!" said many of the participating women and I. There was not much progress observable in the discourse of the event. The state of "Islamic feminism" is still the same as it was 10 years ago, and it is still not clear whether it is now actually a social project or "only" a scholar's in-house discussion. The heterogeneity among Muslims and within Islam is certainly relevant to why the Islamic feminism movement has not advanced as much as some of its representatives would like.

In that regard, one can agree with Omaima Abou Bakr: the diffusion of the discourse has now led to a point at which it is not clear what is actually meant by the term "Islamic feminism."

For many, this term has always been misleading, perhaps because this ambition is seen as genuinely rooted in Islam or because it suggests too strongly an association with the West and thus the feminism of the Christian and Jewish traditions. Perhaps this term is actually only appropriate for self-description. It certainly cannot describe a closed or objective-based project.

The term is only useful if the global network of Muslim women and women's activists is being promoted. Committed *Muslima*s have long known this. Whether a generic term that is also still in dispute is necessary remains to be seen. Presumably, sociologists and politicians need such a term so that they can talk about something "special."

Women and committed *Muslima*s participating in the discourse are thereby exposed to the danger of becoming unable to conduct internal dialogue and constructive debate because of the problem of naming and defining an identifier. Thus, they further separate instead of moving toward each other.

The conference did not determine precisely who belongs in the

category of Islamic feminism and who does not. Can a *Muslima* count as a feminist who advocates women's rights as human rights but at the same time holds the opinion that the woman's role is at the side of the man and so deriving from this in an essentialist manner her primary duties as a mother and wife? A discussion of such basic questions did not take place, not even when a young *Muslima* urged participants not to define the obligation to wear the headscarf from the perspective of a Western feminist conception of freedom.

It remains to be seen whether a unified understanding of feminism will take root in Islam or whether, instead, different feminisms will appear. As an internal scholarly discourse, as understood by Abou Bakr, Islamic feminism certainly exists. However, whether it reaches and appeals in this respect to the entire community of Muslims is questionable. Theologically, it is obviously having an effect. From a sociological point of view and considering the different conditions in individual countries in terms of the economic, cultural and social contexts, there are many other factors and "feminist" mechanisms at play than those that are singled out as "Islamic feminism."

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Buckley, J. Jacobsen and Albrile, Ezio, "Mandaean Religion", (trans. from Italian by Paul Ellis), *Encyclopedia of Religion: Second Edition*, (editor in chief: Lindsay Jones; USA: Thomson Gale, 2005), VIII, 5634-5640.

Book

Kātib Chalabī, Ḥājī Khalīfa Muṣṭafā ibn ʿAbd Allāh, *Kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī l-kutub wa-l-funūn*, 2 vols., (eds. M. Şerefeddin Yaltkaya and Kilisli Rifat Bilge; Istanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1941-1943).

Michot, Yahya M., *Ibn Sīnā: Lettre au Vizir Abū Saʿd: Editio princeps d'après le manuscrit de Bursa, traduction de l'arabe, introduction, notes et lexique* (Beirut: al-Burāq, 2000).

Book Chapter

Janssens, Jules, "The Reception of Avicenna's *Physics* in the Latin Middle Ages" in I. Vrolijk and J. P. Hogendijk (eds.), *O ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture in honour of Remke Kruk* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2007), 55-64.

Online Citation

Rudolph, Kurt, "Mandaeans: ii. The Mandaean Religion", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online Edition, 20 January 2010, available at www.iranica.com/articles/mandaeans-2-religion

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Text and references must follow the format outlined in The Chicago Manual of Style, 15th edition.

Arabic words should be transliterated according the style used by the Library of Congress.

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