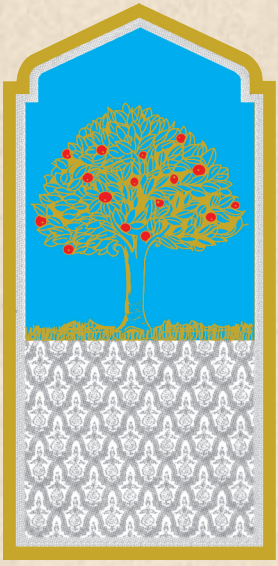

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Obituary

In Memoriam: Royal Laureate Professor Tan Sri Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas (1931–2026)

The passing of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas on 8 March 2026, in the month of Ramadan, marks the end of a singular intellectual career that shaped the contours of contemporary Islamic thought in profound and lasting ways. For more than half a century, he stood as one of the most original and uncompromising voices in the effort to articulate an Islamic intellectual tradition adequate to the challenges of modernity. His death will be felt deeply not only among his students and colleagues but also across a wider scholarly world that has long engaged, whether in agreement or in contention, with the terms he set.

Born in 1931 in Bogor into a family at once scholarly and aristocratic, al-Attas inherited a legacy that combined religious learning with public responsibility. His early military training, often noted but seldom examined, left a discernible imprint on his intellectual temperament: a preference for order, discipline, precision, and hierarchy that would later find systematic expression in his writings on knowledge and the self. His subsequent studies in Malaya, followed by productive stints at McGill University and School of Oriental and African Studies, exposed him to the full range of modern Western scholarship. Yet he remained throughout resistant to its

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uncritical adoption, insisting instead on the necessity of grounding inquiry in the conceptual and metaphysical resources of Islam.

At the center of al-Attas's intellectual project was a diagnosis, that is, that the crisis of the modern Muslim world was not primarily political or economic, but epistemological. What he described as a loss of *adab* was, in his view, a condition in which knowledge had been severed from its proper ends, producing confusion not only in thought but in ethical and spiritual life. His formulation of the *Islamization of Knowledge* must be read against this background, not as a slogan or programmatic agenda, as it was sometimes reduced to, but as a sustained attempt to recover the internal coherence of the Islamic intellectual tradition.

Al-Attas's scholarship spanned metaphysics, theology, philosophy, and the intellectual history of the Malay world, yet it was unified by a consistent set of concerns. His writings on the nature of the self, the meaning of happiness, and the purpose of education were not abstract exercises. They were interventions directed at a readership he believed had lost sight of the proper ordering of knowledge. In his studies of the Malay world, he advanced a forceful argument for the decisive role of Islam in shaping its intellectual and literary history. His readings of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī and Nur al-Dīn al-Ranīrī, in particular, challenged entrenched scholarly assumptions and reoriented discussion toward a more textually grounded understanding of the region's past.

His influence was not confined to writing. The founding of the *International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, widely known as

ISTAC, represented the most concrete realization of his intellectual vision. Conceived as a place for advanced study, it embodied his insistence that knowledge could not be separated from questions of spirituality and ethics. The structure of its curriculum, the selection of its faculty, the location of the institute, and even the design of its physical environment bore the mark of his conviction that learning required both rigor and a cultivated sensibility. Under his direction, it became a rare space in which serious scholarship was pursued without concession to passing academic fashions.

Al-Attas wrote with unusual precision and a deliberate concern for definition. His prose demands careful reading and reflection. He showed little interest in intellectual trends or public recognition, preferring the slower work of clarification and correction instead. Much in his work remains unfinished in the best sense. His reflections on language and conceptual change, especially in the modern usage of key Islamic terms, continue to pose questions that have yet to be adequately addressed. Likewise, his broader framework for the *Islamization of Knowledge* has been taken up only partially, and often without the philosophical depth he intended.

The idea of proper intellectual discipline, which runs throughout his work, offers a point of entry into current debates on education and the purpose of the university. His account of the self and his insistence on the inseparability of intellectual and moral formation remain directly relevant to ongoing discussions in the humanities and social sciences. His studies of the Malay world continue to open lines

of inquiry into the relationship between Islam and local intellectual traditions in Southeast Asia.

Al-Attas lived with a clarity of purpose that was evident to those who encountered him, whether in his writings or in person. His influence endures in the students he trained, the debates he initiated, and the institutional forms he helped to shape. What he leaves behind is not simply a body of work, but a set of intellectual demands that will continue to challenge and orient future scholarship. In the words of al-Attas, we hope that moving forward, *Al-Shajarah* continue to:

> "…contain scholarly works that conceptualize, clarify, and elaborate scientific and epistemological problems encountered by Muslims in the present age, as well as those that provide fresh and insightful Islamic response to the intellectual and cultural challenges of the modern world and of various schools of thought, religion, and ideology, and that its fruits will nurture our minds in our venture to formulate an Islamic philosophy of science. We hope also that there will be in it essays on the meaning and philosophy of Islamic art and architecture. The aims and objectives of ISTAC are not vain slogans; they rather reflect clearly our profound experience and grasp of the real problems confronting the contemporary Muslim world. So their solution also requires equal scientific and

> philosophical profundity. In this endeavour to realize our aims and objectives we beseech Allah Almighty to increase us in knowledge and hope that Al-Shajarah will be instrumental in disseminating beneficial knowledge."[1]

May his soul be granted peace, and may his legacy endure among those committed to the pursuit of knowledge.

Editorial Committee
Al-Shajarah
International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC-IIUM),
International Islamic University Malaysia,
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

[1] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, "Foreword," *Al-Shajarah: Journal of The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)*, no. 1 (1996): ii.

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The *Hukum Kanun Pahang*: A Forgotten Malay-Islamic Constitutional and Maritime Legacy

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Abstract

This study reconstructs Pahang's historical and intellectual identity as a sovereign Malay-Islamic civilization whose governance was founded upon law rather than conquest. At its centre stands the *Hukum Kanun Pahang* (*HKP*), compiled and codified during the reign of Sultan Abdul Ghaffar Muhyiddin Shah ibni Sultan Abdul Kadir Muhyiddin Shah (1592–1614), which is argued here to constitute the embryonic form of a Malay-Islamic constitution. Long before the emergence of Western constitutional theory, the Malay world had already articulated a written constitutional order grounded in *sharī'ah*, *'adat*, justice, and accountability to Allah. The *HKP* unified terrestrial and maritime

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sovereignty, extending law from palace to port, from river to sea, and codifying the duties of ruler and subject, judicial procedure, trade ethics, maritime order, taxation, and moral conduct. Far from representing primitive law, the *HKP* reflects proto-constitutional thought and the earliest living expression of Malay constitutionalism, principles that later found continuity in the *Undang-Undang Tubuh Kerajaan Pahang 1948 (UTKP 1948)*. Through socio-historical approach this study re-centres Pahang as a great maritime civilization, a key site of Islamic constitutional development in Southeast Asia and reclaims the *HKP* as one of the world's earliest comprehensive constitutional texts.

Keywords: *Hukum Kanun Pahang*; Malay-Islamic constitution; constitutional monarchy; Islamic governance; maritime law; Sultans.

Introduction

This study originated from an examination of the *UTKP 1948*[2] as the constitutional source underpinning *adat istiadat* (royal customs and tradition) in Pahang. It initially sought to situate these traditions within a legal framework that continues to guide ceremonial practice and governance. However, a close reading of the *Sejarah Melayu* and related sources raised a deeper question concerning their origins and legal foundations.

This inquiry led to the *Hukum Kanun Pahang (HKP)*. Although often treated as an ancient legal manuscript, the *HKP* reveals itself as a complete Malay-Islamic constitutional text that structured governance, religion, and social order in Pahang for centuries. Its relative neglect is partly due to its late rediscovery in 1993, when the

[2] *Undang-Undang Tubuh Kerajaan Pahang* also known as *Undang-Undang Tubuh Negeri Pahang 1948*.

manuscript was brought to Pekan and acquired by the Pahang State Museum.[3]

Unlike the fragmented manuscripts commonly designated as A[4], B[5], and C[6], the *HKP* preserved in Pahang is a complete legal codex dating to the early 17th century and consistent with royal manuscript production during the reign of Sultan Abdul Ghaffar Muhyiddin Shah ibni Sultan Abdul Kadir Muhyiddin Shah (1592-1614). Its completeness distinguishes it from later transcriptions of the *Hukum Kanun Melaka* (*HKM*) and *Undang-Undang Laut Melaka* (*UULM*), including the copy identified by Liaw Yock Fang in the Vatican Library dated 1656–1676.[7] In contrast, the *HKP* demonstrates continuity with the Melaka legal tradition, reflecting its transmission and refinement in Pahang following the fall of Melaka in 1511.

Compiled between 1592 and 1614, the *HKP* predates many constitutional developments commonly associated with Western history and indicates that written constitutional governance in the Malay world emerged independently within an Islamic legal framework. Its codification reflects a deliberate effort to preserve justice (*ʿadl*), order (*niẓām*), and *Hukum Allah* through written law, consistent with Islamic traditions of legal preservation.

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[3] Yaakub Isa (ed.), *Hukum Kanun Pahang: Manuskrip Agung Negeri* (Muzium Negeri Pahang, 2003).

[4] MS A RAS17, Royal Asiatic Society (RAS).

[5] MS B RAS20, Royal Asiatic Society (RAS).

[6] MS C Private Collection.

[7] Liaw Yock Fang, *Undang-undang Melaka dan Undang-undang Laut* (Yayasan Karyawan, 2016). Hereafter cited as *Undang-undang Melaka dan Undang-undang Laut*.; idem, *Undang-undang Melaka* (M. Nijhoff, 1976).

This study therefore repositions the *HKP* as a sovereign Malay-Islamic constitution and argues that constitutionalism in the Malay Archipelago, now known as Southeast Asia, developed indigenously within an Islamic and maritime civilizational context rather than through colonial influence. It further proposes that Pahang should be understood as a Malay-Islamic polity characterised by legal consciousness and maritime governance, with the *HKP* as its constitutional core.

Conceptually, the *HKP* articulates a model of sovereignty grounded in divine authority. While power is vested in the ruler, it is constrained by *sharī'ah* and established legal norms, rendering authority legitimate only insofar as it conforms to justice. This reflects the Islamic conception of governance as an *amānah* in which law functions as the primary restraint on power.[8]

The Significance of the Study

This study repositions the *HKP* within the broader history of constitutional thought in Southeast Asia. It challenges colonial and postcolonial portrayals of Malay polities as lacking structured governance by showing that legal order in the Malay world was grounded in law, moral accountability, and Islamic principles prior to colonial intervention.

[8] Abdul Halim el-Muhammady and Asma Hakimah Ab Halim, *Qanun Pahang: Zaman Pemerintahan Sultan Abdul Ghaffar Mahyuddin Shah (1592-1614M)* (Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2019), 26-29.

By examining the *HKP* as a coherent legal text, this study contributes to restoring balance in Malay legal historiography. It argues that constitutionalism in the Malay world was indigenous, emerging within an Islamic and maritime context, and thereby contests narratives that equate constitutional modernity exclusively with Western political development.

A key contribution lies in highlighting Pahang as a centre of legal and constitutional sophistication. Unlike other Malay polities whose legal traditions survive primarily in fragmented copies, Pahang preserves a complete and integrated manuscript that unites *sharīʿah*, *ʿadat*, and sovereignty within a single framework, offering rare insight into the structure of Malay-Islamic governance.

The study also contributes to Islamic legal history by demonstrating how *Shāfiʿī* jurisprudence was adapted within a Malay-Islamic Sultanate. Islamic law appears not as a static system but as a dynamic tradition integrated with local custom and governance, challenging rigid distinctions between religious and customary law.

From a constitutional perspective, the *HKP* provides an alternative genealogy of constitutionalism that developed independently of European models. Its regulation of authority, institutional governance, and moral accountability reflects core constitutional principles within a tawhidic framework, expanding the scope of comparative constitutional studies.

Its maritime dimension further enhances its significance. By extending legal authority across rivers, ports, and seas, the *HKP* articulates a form of maritime governance in which sovereignty, commerce, and morality are integrated, demonstrating that coherent legal frameworks existed in the Malay world prior to modern international maritime law.

Finally, this study has implications for contemporary constitutional interpretation in Pahang. By tracing continuity between the *HKP* and the *UTKP*, it situates modern governance within a longer legal tradition and affirms the enduring relevance of Malay-Islamic principles beyond ceremonial practice.

Historical and Maritime Background of Pahang

Understanding the background of Pahang requires situating it within the wider Malay maritime world, a civilizational sphere shaped by the sea long before European intervention. Early records refer to Pahang as *Pan-huang*, *Pahan*, and *Pa-hang*, reflecting its long-standing role as a coastal entrepôt linked to Indian Ocean, Selat Melaka and Laut Melayu trade networks. These references point to a maritime civilization structured by rivers, monsoons, and exchange networks rather than fixed territorial boundaries.[9]

Long before Western cartography defined the "South China Sea," the Malay world had conceptualised these waters as the *Laut Melayu*, a shared maritime domain linking Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula, Borneo and the wider archipelago. The sea was understood as a regulated space shaped by custom and authority, where navigation and trade operated within recognised norms.[10]

By the era of Srivijaya, Majapahit and Langkasuka, Pahang was already integrated into regional and international trade networks. Its interior supplied resources that moved through river systems to coastal ports, linking inland societies to maritime exchange. During the

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[9] William Linehan, "A History of Pahang." *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 14, no. 2 (125) (1936): 2.

[10] Leonard Y. Andaya, "A History of Trade in the Sea of Melayu." *Itinerario* 24, no. 1 (2000): 87–110.

15th century, under the Melaka Sultanate, Pahang functioned as both a vassal state and a trans-peninsular corridor, with Sungai Pahang serving as a key route between interior and maritime zones.[11]

The fall of Melaka in 1511 marked a political shift but did not disrupt existing networks. Its influence persisted in successor polities, particularly Pahang, which emerged as an independent maritime state. It maintained regional alliances and oriented itself toward the eastern maritime routes of the *Laut Melayu*, where trade and interaction continued beyond the contested Straits of Melaka.[12]

This maritime orientation shaped patterns of governance and exchange. Malay legal traditions, reflected in the *HKM* and *UULM*, had already regulated piracy, trade conduct, and port administration prior to European involvement.[13] These practices continued to inform regional systems of order linking land and sea.

Islam entered the Malay world primarily through maritime networks, carried by merchants and scholars. Legal and ethical norms were embedded in commercial practice, contracts, trade obligations, and trust, before becoming institutionalised within royal governance.[14]

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[11] Linehan, "A History of Pahang", 1-11.

[12] Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce* (Yale University Press, 1988), Vol. 2, p. 126.; A History of Pahang, 18-28.

[13] *Undang-undang Melaka dan Undang-undang Laut*, p. 61-71; Ahmad Jelani Halimi, *Legasi Kelautan Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Kaya Cipta, 2024), 170, 188-189.

[14] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Historical Fact and Fiction* (Johor: UTM Press, 2011), 1-9.

Maritime space was therefore not peripheral but integral to social and economic life. Trade operated within recognised ethical norms, while piracy was treated as a serious disruption to order. Ports functioned as centres of exchange and regulation, linking inland production to wider maritime networks.

Pahang's geography reinforced this system. River networks connected the interior to the coast, while islands such as Tioman served as key nodes in regional trade. Indigenous shipbuilding traditions, including the *perahu*, *lancaran*, *balok* and *jong*, reflect a high level of maritime knowledge adapted to local conditions.[15]

Unlike the western Malay Peninsula, Pahang experienced limited direct European control. Portuguese and Dutch influence concentrated on the Straits of Melaka, while British involvement developed through diplomacy. This relative autonomy enabled continuity in local systems of governance and trade. Maritime communities such as the *Orang Laut* and *Orang Dalaman* played an important role as navigators and guardians of sea routes, contributing to the maintenance of order across maritime space.[16]

From a broader Asian perspective, maritime exchange reflects long-standing patterns of interaction in which regional societies shaped trade, material culture, and systems of order. Pahang formed part of this interconnected world, where movement, exchange, and regulation were structured through established practices rather than external intervention.[17]

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[15] Linehan, "History of Pahang", 1-12.

[16] Barbara Watson Andaya, "Recreating a Vision: Daratan and Kepulauan in Historical Context." *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 153, no. 4 (1997): 483–508.

[17] Peter Borschberg (ed.), *Journal, Memorials and Letters of Cornelis Matelieff de*

The Islamic and Constitutional Foundations of the *Hukum Kanun Pahang*

The constitutional character of the *HKP* is inseparable from its Islamic foundations and the intellectual worldview within which it was conceived. Rather than a collection of administrative rules, the *HKP* reflects a coherent legal philosophy grounded in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Malay political ethics, and a tawhidic conception of sovereignty, in which governance is understood as an *amānah* exercised under *Hukum Allah* and moral accountability.[18]

Central to this framework is the principle that sovereignty ultimately belongs to Allah, while the ruler governs as His vicegerent (*khalīfah*). Authority is legitimised through adherence to divine law and the pursuit of justice (*'adl*), lineage, rather than coercion. The *HKP* gives written expression to this principle by situating the Sultan within a legal order that binds ruler and subject alike, anticipating the core idea of constitutional monarchy.[19]

The integration of *sharī'ah* is evident in the *HKP*'s reliance on *Shāfi'ī* jurisprudence, the dominant legal school in the Malay world by the 15th century. Its provisions on criminal law, contracts, evidence, and moral conduct reflect the adaptation of Islamic legal norms to local conditions, indicating that Islamic law functioned as a living tradition embedded within governance.[20]

Jonge: Security, Diplomacy and Commerce in 17th-century Southeast Asia (NUS Press, 2015), 176, 486, 522, 573, 577.

[18] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 121.

[19] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 2-3.

[20] Ahmad Farid Abd Jalal, Rahimin Affandi Abdul Rahim, Awang Azman Awang Pawi, "Manuskrip Hukum Kanun Pahang: Antara Kepentingan dan

At the same time, the *HKP* affirms the role of *'adat Melayu* as a recognised source of law, provided it does not contradict Islamic principles. This synthesis reflects a distinctive Malay-Islamic legal methodology that harmonises revelation with custom, producing a unified legal order that is neither purely religious nor purely customary.

The constitutional logic of the *HKP* is further evident in its regulation of governance. The Sultan is presented as a *raja 'adil*, bound by law and ethical obligation. The text defines the roles of officials such as *Bendahara*, *Temenggung*, *Shahbandar*, and *Hulubalang*, and procedures for adjudication and enforcement, indicating a structured system in which authority is distributed and regulated.[21]

This legal architecture challenges assumptions that Malay polities lacked constitutional order. The *HKP* shows that governance developed within its own intellectual and spiritual traditions, where law functioned as both a moral and political framework. In this respect, it may be compared to foundational texts such as the *Piagam Madina*, which similarly articulated governance through divine law and communal responsibility.

The constitutional nature of the *HKP* is reinforced by its terminology. The use of *hukum* and *kanun* reflects an understanding of law as both sacred and sovereign, *hukum* denotes divine and moral law, while *kanun* refers to enacted regulation under royal authority, together embodying the integration of revelation and legislation.[22]

Kritikan Sarjana Kolonial," *Jurnal Melayu Sedunia* Vol. 5, Issue 1, 93-94

[21] Abu Talib Ahmad, *Sejarah Negeri Pahang hingga 1945* (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2024), 125-126.

[22] El-Muhammady and Ab Halim, *Qanun Pahang*, 23-25.

Beyond its juridical content, the *HKP* functioned as a state-building instrument. By standardising legal norms across territory and maritime space, it unified diverse communities under a shared framework, strengthening political cohesion and administrative continuity.

These foundations are inseparable from a Tawhidic Epistemology in which law, governance, and morality are integrated expressions of divine unity. Justice is thus both legal and theological, and obedience to law is simultaneously obedience to Allah.[23]

In this light, the *HKP* emerges as a constitutional text in both form and substance. It structures authority, limits power and embeds moral accountability within governance. It must therefore be understood within a broader continuum of Malay-Islamic constitutionalism, extending from Melaka to later developments such as the *UTKP*.[24]

The Vision of a Constitutional Monarch

The emergence of the *HKP* is clearly attributable to the reign of Sultan Abdul Ghaffar Muhyiddin Shah (r. 1592–1614), whose political vision shaped a significant phase in the development of Malay legal tradition. As the 12th Sultan of Pahang and a descendant of the Melaka royal lineage, he inherited a body of legal knowledge rooted in earlier Malay-Islamic governance.[25]

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[23] Osman Bakar, "Islamic Science, Modern Science, and Post-Modernity: Towards a New Synthesis through a Tawhidic Epistemology", *Revelation and Science* Vol. 01, No. 03 (1433H/2011), 13-20.

[24] El-Muhammady and Ab Halim, *Qanun Pahang*, 20-30.

[25] El-Muhammady and Ab Halim, *Qanun Pahang,*20-30.

Under his reign, Pahang did not simply preserve inherited norms but undertook their systematic codification. The compilation of the *HKP* reflects a deliberate act of statecraft in which law was committed to writing to ensure continuity, authority, and clarity. At a time when many post-Melaka polities relied on oral transmission or fragmented records, this effort provided a stable legal reference for governance and adjudication.[26]

The scope of the *HKP* indicates the extent of this undertaking. It integrates *sharī'ah*, criminal, civil, administrative, commercial, and maritime regulations within a unified framework. Governance was structured through defined offices such as the *Bendahara*, *Temenggung*, *Shahbandar* and *Nakhoda* whose roles were articulated in relation to royal authority, indicating an organised system rather than a personalised form of rule.[27]

Sultan Abdul Ghaffar's approach to governance was informed by Islamic political principles. Authority was exercised within a framework of justice and accountability, consistent with the ideal of the *raja adil*. Legitimacy derived not from coercion alone but from adherence to law and moral responsibility, reflecting a conception of rule grounded in ethical restraint.[28]

This approach is particularly notable within the context of the early 17th century. While European powers were expanding influence through conquest and chartered authority, Pahang maintained

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[26] Amru Sazali, "The Manuscript of Hukum Kanun Pahang: Insights on Trade Laws and Economic Regulations in 17th-Century Malaya" *BITARA International Journal of Civilizational Studies and Human Sciences* 8(3): (2025), 106-116.

[27] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 106

[28] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 119.

stability through established legal and political structures. This contributed to continuity in governance despite wider regional disruptions following the fall of Melaka.[29]

The codification undertaken during this period also had wider implications. The legal structures associated with the *HKP*, influenced governance beyond Pahang, with parallels observed in neighbouring Malay polities such as Johor, Terengganu, and Riau.[30] This suggests that the *HKP* functioned as a point of reference within a broader regional legal tradition.

Sultan Abdul Ghaffar's role may therefore be understood as that of a codifier, who consolidated and systematised existing legal traditions within a written framework. His reign represents a stage in which legal knowledge was stabilised and transmitted in a form that guided governance across generations.

The *Hukum Kanun Pahang* as a Sovereign Malay-Islamic Constitution

While the *HKM* and *UULM* are recognised as foundational legal texts of the Malay world, the *HKP* represents a more developed articulation of governance in written form. It consolidates earlier legal traditions within a single framework that integrates authority, law, and administration.

The constitutional character of the *HKP* becomes evident when it is examined as a structured framework of governance rather than a compilation of laws. It regulated political authority, social relations, and legal obligations in a systematic manner, providing a

[29] Linehan, "History of Pahang", 29-37.

[30] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 158.

stable reference for governance beyond customary or ad hoc decision-making. In this respect, it fulfilled functions commonly associated with constitutional texts, organising authority and establishing recognised norms of rule.

Although enacted under royal authority, the *HKP* imposed legal and procedural constraints on governance. The Sultan operated within an established legal framework, and authority was exercised through defined norms rather than personal discretion. [31] This emphasis on regulated authority distinguishes it from models of absolutist rule.

The *HKP* further demonstrates this structure through its delineation of governance. It defines the roles and responsibilities of officials such as the *Bendahara*, *Temenggung*, *Shahbandar*, and the *Orang Besar*, forming an administrative system that mediated between ruler and society. These offices functioned as institutional components of governance, indicating an organised political order rather than a personalised system of rule.[32]

Judicial procedures and substantive law were also codified with a degree of consistency. Provisions on criminal offences, civil disputes, evidentiary standards, and punishments reflect an effort to ensure procedural regularity and legal predictability. Justice was governed by known rules, reinforcing the principle that authority operated within an established legal framework.[33]

The integration of *sharī'ah* and *'adat* further characterises the *HKP*'s legal structure. Customary practices were recognised alongside Islamic principles, provided they did not conflict with religious norms.

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[31] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 4.

[32] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 10.

[33] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 119, 131-132.

This produced a unified legal system that maintained social continuity while ensuring normative coherence.[34]

The scope of regulation extended to economic and social life. Provisions concerning taxation, trade conduct, and property reflect an understanding of economic activity as subject to legal oversight. Commercial behaviour was framed within recognised standards, indicating the role of governance in maintaining order within society.[35]

The *HKP* also extended its regulatory framework across both land and maritime domains. Offences such as fraud, piracy, and disorder were treated as violations of legal order, reflecting an understanding that authority applied across different spheres of activity within the polity.[36]

From a comparative perspective, the *HKP* exhibits features associated with early constitutional frameworks, including the organisation of authority, the regulation of governance, and the articulation of legal norms. Its terminology, particularly the use of *hukum* and *kanun*, reflects an awareness of law as both normative and enacted regulation under sovereign authority.[37]

The influence of the *HKP* extended beyond its immediate context. Its principles informed governance in Pahang over time and contributed to broader patterns within Malay legal tradition. Elements of its structure and legal reasoning can be observed in later developments, including the *UTKP*.

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[34] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 106-107.

[35] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 126, 116.

[36] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 107-114.

[37] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 107.

Viewed in this light, the *HKP* may be understood as a comprehensive legal framework that organised governance, regulated authority, and structured social order. Its provisions reflect a system concerned not only with authority, but also with the maintenance of legal and social stability.

The Maritime Dimension of the *Hukum Kanun Pahang*

The *HKP* occupies a distinctive position in Malay legal history as one of the earliest texts to integrate maritime governance within a comprehensive legal order. While earlier traditions, particularly the *UULM*, articulated norms of seafaring and trade, the *HKP* reflects a more developed framework in which maritime regulation is embedded within sovereignty. It indicates a legal consciousness that treated the sea as a central domain of governance and economic life rather than a peripheral frontier.[38]

Pahang's maritime orientation shaped both the scope and content of this framework. Situated along the eastern seaboard and connected to regional trade routes, it relied on networks linking the *Laut Melayu* with the wider Indian Ocean. Rivers, especially the Sungai Pahang, connected inland resources to coastal ports, forming a system that required consistent regulation. Authority extended across land, river, and sea within this interconnected environment.[39]

Within this context, maritime space was treated as a governed legal domain. Provisions addressing fraud, theft aboard ships, harbour

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[38] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 117.

[39] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 47-48.; Preethevan Ramu, Zuliskandar Ramli, Shamsuddin Ahmad, Mohamad Nazim Abdul Gaman, Asrul Effendi Kamaruzzaman and Muhammad Zaki Razani, "Sejarah Perkembangan Laluan Penarikan," *Jurnal Arkeologi Malaysia*, Vol. 33, No.1 (2020): 27-41.

security, and trade conduct reflect efforts to maintain order in maritime commerce, where dishonesty carried both legal and moral implications.[40]

The regulation of piracy further illustrates this framework. Piracy was treated as a disruption to both commercial stability and public order, reinforcing the distinction between recognised authority and unlawful coercion.[41]

Maritime governance was also institutionalised. The *Shahbandar* played a central role in overseeing ports, managing foreign merchants, collecting duties, and resolving disputes. This indicates that maritime authority operated through defined offices and procedures rather than informal enforcement.[42]

The *HKP* also reflects the influence of Islamic maritime practice. Through trade networks, legal principles governing contracts, partnership, and trust were incorporated into local systems, aligning commercial activity with recognised legal norms.[43]

Pahang's relative autonomy contributed to the stability of its maritime environment. While European powers concentrated on the Straits of Melaka, the eastern maritime routes under Pahang's influence developed a reputation for reliability. This stability was maintained through consistent regulation and established practices rather than coercive control.[44]

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[40] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 140.

[41] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 109-110.

[42] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 106.

[43] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 125.

[44] Linehan, "History of Pahang", 12-44.

Maritime communities such as the *Orang Laut* and *Orang Dalaman* supported this system by serving as navigators and guardians of river and sea routes, facilitating movement and contributing to the maintenance of order across maritime space.[45]

From a comparative perspective, the *HKP* reflects an early approach to maritime governance in which authority and regulation extended across multiple domains. Its provisions indicate an understanding that order in maritime activity depended on recognised rules, accountability, and the regulation of conduct.[46]

The maritime dimension of the *HKP* thus highlights the integration of economic activity, governance, and legal norms within a single framework, reflecting the broader organisation of authority within the polity.

Manuscript Tradition, Authenticity, and Rediscovery

The significance of the *HKP* is closely tied to the integrity, completeness, and provenance of its manuscript tradition. Unlike many Malay legal texts that survive only in derivative or partial copies, the *HKP* preserved in Pahang represents a rare, intact legal codex. This distinction is central to understanding the development of Malay-Islamic legal thought and the transmission of law in the early modern period.

The principal manuscript, designated as MS D[47], is kept at the Pahang State Museum. Written in *Bahasa Jawi* and illuminated with

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[45] Leonard Y. Andaya "Orang Asli and The Melayu in the History of The Malay Peninsula." *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 75, no. 1 (282) (2002): 24-25, 31.

[46] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 119.

[47] MS D Muzium Pahang.

gold, and Islamic and Malay motifs, it reflects the characteristics of early 17th-century royal manuscript production. The manuscript was written during the reign of Sultan Abdul Ghaffar Muhyiddin Shah, with palaeographic and stylistic evidence corroborating its placement within this period of compilation. Its integrity distinguishes it from other Pahang legal manuscripts, which survive only in partial or inconsistent forms.[48]

Earlier scholarship relied heavily on the *HKM* and *UULM*, particularly the copy identified by Liaw Yock Fang in the Vatican Library (1656–1676). While important for reconstructing Melaka legal traditions, these manuscripts represent later transcriptions removed from their original context.[49] By contrast, the HKP manuscript in Pahang provides a closer witness to the legal tradition in both chronological and political terms.

Additional manuscripts, commonly designated as A, B, and C, have contributed to scholarly ambiguity. These versions are fragmentary and divergent, reflecting processes of copying, adaptation, and editorial intervention rather than direct preservation. They therefore cannot be treated as equivalent to the Pahang manuscript when assessing the structure and content of the text.

Recent findings have further strengthened the importance of the *HKP*. A related manuscript, MS E, *Kitab Istilah Bagi Raja dan Wazir Bagi Negeri Pahang Darussalam* (also referred to as *Qanun Pahang*), shows substantial parallels with the *HKP* and is currently the subject of

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[48] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, xii-xii.

[49] *Undang-undang Melaka dan Undang-undang Laut*, p. 2-3.; idem, "Naskah Undang-Undang Melaka: Suatu Tinjauan: Suatu Tinjauan" *Sari* 25 (2007) 90-91.

comparative study.[50] The discovery of Manuscript F[51] on 5th March 2026, further provides additional evidence of continuity, indicating that the HKP remained in use as a governing legal reference into the 20th century.

The rediscovery of the *HKP* in 1993, marked a turning point in Malay legal historiography. Prior to this, it remained largely absent from academic discourse and overshadowed by Melaka legal texts. Its reappearance exposed gaps in prevailing narratives and suggests that earlier scholarship, including that of Liaw Yock Fang, and Abu Hassan Sham, might have been framed differently had the complete manuscript been available.

The preservation of a full legal codex allows for a more comprehensive analysis of governance, legal structure, and normative principles, revealing how different domains of law were integrated within a single framework. This supports the view that the *HKP* was conceived as a deliberate and organised legal project rather than an accumulation of disparate rules.

The manuscript tradition also reflects a broader intellectual culture, in which written law served to preserve authority and continuity. The composition of an illuminated royal manuscript indicates an intention to stabilise governance across generations and to anchor it in enduring legal principles.

The rediscovery and continued study of the *HKP* therefore represent, not merely the recovery of a historical artifact, but a renewed engagement with a legal tradition long marginalised in scholarship. Its preservation offers an opportunity to reassess the

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[50] *MSS 2583B.*; *Qanun Pahang: Zaman Pemerintahan Sultan Abdul Ghaffar*

[51] MS F is currently being restored and preserved in the National Archives of Malaysia.

development of legal thought in the Malay world and contributes to a broader understanding of regional intellectual history.

The *Hukum Kanun Pahang* and The *Undang-Undang Tubuh Kerajaan Pahang*

The legacy of the *HKP* continued, in transformed form, into the twentieth century and is most reflected in the *UTKP*. Although drafted within a colonial administrative context, the *UTKP* embodies principles that resonate with earlier patterns of governance, particularly in relation to sovereignty, Islam, *adat istiadat*, and the moral limits of political authority.[52]

The *UTKP* affirms the Sultan as the constitutional head of state while situating that authority within an Islamic framework. Islam is recognised as the religion of the state, and the Sultan as its protector. This reflects a conception of rulership in which authority is exercised as a trust (*amānah*) and remains tied to moral responsibility rather than unfettered power.[53]

Continuity is also evident in the recognition of *'adat*. The *UTKP* accords royal customs and traditions a formal place within governance, placing them under the authority of the Sultan and institutions such as the *Majlis Adat Istiadat Negeri Pahang and the Majlis Ugama Islam dan Adat Resam Melayu Pahang* (MUIP). This reflects the enduring role of *'adat* as a recognised component of governance within the Malay legal tradition.[54]

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[52] See Part I Chapter 1, Chapter 4 and Part II Chapter I, *Undang-Undang Tubuh Kerajaan Pahang*.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Part I Chapter 24, *Undang-Undang Tubuh Kerajaan Pahang*.

The organisation of governance in the *UTKP* similarly reflects earlier patterns. While expressed through modern administrative forms, it emphasises defined authority, institutional roles, and the regulation of power through law. This parallels the earlier articulation of offices such as the *Bendahara*, *Temenggung*, and *Shahbandar*, indicating continuity in the structuring of governance.

The relationship between law and morality further reinforces this continuity. Governance in the *UTKP* is framed within a moral context, emphasising responsibility for justice, religion, and social order. This reflects a longstanding conception of authority in which legal obligations are closely linked to ethical considerations.[55]

It is notable that the *HKP* was not directly referenced during the drafting of the *UTKP*, largely due to its obscurity prior to its rediscovery. This contributed to the view that constitutional development in Pahang derived primarily from colonial influence. However, the structural and conceptual parallels between the two indicate a deeper continuity. The *UTKP* may therefore be understood as a later articulation of principles already present within Malay-Islamic governance.

This perspective challenges interpretations that locate constitutional development in Tanah Melayu solely within colonial frameworks. Instead, it points to an established tradition in which authority, law, and custom were integrated within recognised systems of governance prior to external intervention.

The relationship between the *HKP* and the *UTKP* thus highlights the persistence of key principles across changing contexts. Despite differences in form, elements such as the centrality of Islam,

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[55] Part I Chapter 1, Chapter 4 and Part II Chapter I, *Undang-Undang Tubuh Kerajaan Pahang*.

the recognition of adat, and the regulation of authority through law continued to shape governance. The *HKP* may therefore be understood as part of a longer legal tradition that informs later constitutional developments in Pahang.

The *HKP* may be understood as a direct continuation of the *HKM* and the *UULM*, effectively representing "Melaka II" within the Malay-Islamic legal tradition. Preserved across at least six manuscripts (A–F), the *HKP* reflects both continuity and codification under Sultan Abdul Ghaffar Muhyiddin Shah. In contrast to the fragmentary nature of earlier copies, Manuscripts D, E, and F stand as complete and intact versions of the *HKP*, providing a comprehensive view of its structure, content, and legal framework.

Through dynastic marriages and political networks, this legal tradition extended beyond Pahang to other Malay Sultanates, including Brunei, Patani, Perak, and Aceh, and later evolved within the Pahang-Johor–Riau–Lingga Empire. [56] Evidence from Manuscript F (1884) further demonstrates its continued application until the promulgation of the *UTKP*. This unbroken trajectory, from Melaka to Pahang and into the modern constitutional era, establishes the HKP as a central pillar of a long-standing Malay-Islamic constitutional tradition, as old as Melaka itself, representing over five centuries of enduring legal and constitutional legacy.

Manuscript D, E and F belong to the Pahang Sultanate and are held in custodianship within the Pahang State Museum, representing a sovereign legal heritage of exceptional completeness and continuity. To date, no other Malay kingdom is known to possess

[56] Linehan "History of Pahang", 176-177.

a comparable corpus, rendering the *HKP* a singular and enduring treasure of Pahang's civilizational legacy.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the *HKP* stands as a significant constitutional text within the Malay world. It articulated governance, sovereignty, and justice in written form prior to colonial constitutional frameworks, reflecting a legal order grounded in Islamic jurisprudence, Malay political ethics, and a tawhidic worldview.

The *HKP* may be understood as a Malay-Islamic continuation of the *Piagam Madinah*, adapted to a sultanate and maritime context. It indicates that Islam in the Malay world was engaged as a framework of governance, not solely as ritual practice.

Placed within its historical setting, Pahang emerges as a maritime polity whose legal order extended across land, river, and sea. This reflects a form of governance in which authority, economic activity, and regulation were interconnected within established norms.

The *HKP* also shows that governance was exercised within defined legal and ethical limits. Authority was structured through recognised roles and responsibilities, and the ruler functioned within a framework that emphasised justice and accountability rather than arbitrary power.[57]

The role of Sultan Abdul Ghaffar Muhyiddin Shah was central to this development. His codification of law consolidated earlier traditions within a written framework, contributing to continuity in governance during a period of regional transition.[58]

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[57] Isa, *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, 32-36.

[58] Sazali, "The Manuscript of Hukum Kanun Pahang."

The preservation of the *HKP* manuscript provides important evidence for the study of Malay legal history. Its rediscovery, together with related manuscripts such as MS E and MS F, strengthens the case for continuity in legal practice and invites further scholarly reassessment.

The relationship between the *HKP* and the *UTKP* further highlights this continuity. Despite differences in form, and key elements, the role of Islam, the recognition of adat, and regulation of authority, persist across time, indicating the endurance of an established legal tradition.[59]

Taken together, these findings position the *HKP* as a significant document within the broader history of law and governance in the Malay Archipelago. It reflects an indigenous tradition in which law, authority, and social order were integrated within a coherent framework.

The *HKP* thus stands as a testament to a tradition of governance grounded in law and moral responsibility. Its continued study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intellectual and legal heritage of the Malay world and its place within wider historical narratives.

[59] Wan Ahmad Fauzi Hashim @ Wan Husain, "Analisis Hukum Kanun Pahang dari Aspek Ciri Perlembagaan Moden", *BITARA International Journal of Civilizational Studies and Human Sciences* 6(4) (2023): 220-233.

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Idris Al-Marbawī's Influence on Ḥadīth Pedagogy in the Malay Archipelago: A Textual and Contextual Analysis of *Baḥr Al-Mādhī*

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Abstract

This study examines the pedagogical influence of Shaykh Muḥammad Idrīs al-Marbawī through his seminal work *Baḥr al-Mādhī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī*, with particular attention to its role in shaping the teaching and transmission of *ḥadīth* in the Malay Archipelago. Employing a qualitative library-based approach, the study analyses selected sections of the text through close textual reading, focusing on its structure, translation strategies, and modes of commentary. The findings show that al-Marbawī developed a pedagogically oriented framework characterized by bilingual Arabic–Malay presentation, thematic organization, and simplified explanatory commentary. These features enabled the work to function not only as a reference text but also as a structured instructional medium in traditional learning environments such as *pondok*, *surau*, and *pesantren*. In addition, the study highlights how this approach facilitated greater accessibility for non-Arabic-speaking audiences and supported the integration of hadith learning with practical religious instruction. The

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study argues that *Baḥr al-Mādhī* contributed to a shift towards more accessible and contextually grounded forms of ḥadīth pedagogy in the region.

Keywords: *Baḥr al-Mādhī*; ḥadīth pedagogy; al-Marbawī; Malay Archipelago; Islamic education

Introduction

The study of *ḥadīth* in the contemporary Islamic world faces a dual challenge: preserving classical scholarship while ensuring its relevance across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. In Southeast Asia, particularly in the Malay Archipelago, this challenge has been addressed through processes of localisation in which scholars adapted Islamic knowledge to specific pedagogical settings. Among these figures, Shaykh Muḥammad Idrīs al-Marbawī emerges as a significant contributor to the contextualisation of *ḥadīth* education for Malay-speaking Muslim communities.[1] In this study, *ḥadīth* pedagogy is understood not merely as the transmission of textual knowledge, but as a dynamic educational process shaped by linguistic mediation and socio-cultural context.

Shaykh Muḥammad Idrīs al-Marbawī was a prominent twentieth-century scholar whose influence on *ḥadīth* studies and intellectual discourse continues to be recognised across Malaysia and Indonesia. His major work, *Baḥr al-Mādhī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī*, constitutes a substantial commentary on *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*,

[1] Latifah Abdul Majid, and Nurullah Kurt. "Bahr al-Mādhī: Significant Hadith Text Sciences for Malay Muslims as a Tool for Political Teaching during the Twentieth Century." *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2014): 423-432.

written in both Arabic and classical Malay.[2] In addition to *Baḥr al-Mādhī*, al-Marbawī contributed to *ḥadīth* scholarship through his translation and annotation of *Bulūgh al-Marām* by Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī. His method—characterised by explanatory notes and linguistic clarification—reflects a broader pedagogical orientation aimed at widening access to *ḥadīth* knowledge among Malay-speaking audiences. Beyond authorship, he was also actively engaged in teaching and *daʿwah* activities, which further facilitated the transmission of *ḥadīth* within local educational contexts.[3]

Existing scholarship has extensively documented the historical development of hadith studies in the Malay-Indonesian world, including the intellectual networks of Nusantara scholars and their contributions to the production of hadith literature. However, specific studies examining Baḥr al-Mādhī as a pedagogical model for the transmission and contextualization of hadith knowledge remain relatively limited.[4] This observation, however, should be qualified. Important contributions to the study of al-Marbawī's thought have already appeared, including discussions of *Baḥr al-Mādhī* within broader intellectual and hermeneutical frameworks, such as those

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[2] Latifah Abdul Majid, "The Bahr al-Mādhī of Shaykh Idris al-Marbawī and the Jawahir al-Bukhari of Tuan Haji Husayn: Significance of Hadith Texts for Malay Muslims as Tools for Religious, Political and Social Teaching during the Twentieth Century." (PhD diss., University of Wales, 2008).

[3] Najahudin, L. "Metodologi Syeikh Idris al-Marbawi dalam Terjemah *Bulugh al-Maram*." In *Proceedings of the Seminar Kebangsaan Tamadun Islam (NaSIC)*, 8-9 December 2009.

[4] Ahmad Levi Fachrul Avivy, "Jaringan Keilmuan Hadis dan Karya-Karya Hadis di Nusantara," *Journal Hadis* 8, no. 16 (2018): 63–82

presented in *Negotiating Meanings*.[5] These studies offer valuable insights into al-Marbawī's interpretive strategies and his engagement with Malay-Muslim intellectual traditions. Nevertheless, the present article differs in both focus and analytical orientation. Rather than examining *Baḥr al-Mādhī* primarily as a site of thematic interpretation or intellectual negotiation, this study foregrounds its function as a pedagogical model, with specific attention to how its structure, language strategy, and modes of commentary shaped the teaching and transmission of *ḥadīth* in educational contexts across the Malay Archipelago.

While some studies have examined its role in shaping religious discourse in the Malay world, systematic analysis of its function as an instructional text remains limited. This gap is particularly notable given that the structure and method of the work suggest a clear pedagogical orientation. Accordingly, this study seeks to analyse *Baḥr al-Mādhī* as a model of localised ḥadīth pedagogy, with particular attention to how it mediates between classical sources and the socio-religious realities of Malay Muslim communities.

More broadly, contemporary Islamic education continues to grapple with the challenge of balancing fidelity to classical sources with the need for contextual relevance.[6] In Southeast Asia, this involves not only linguistic translation but also the integration of local cultural frameworks into pedagogical practice.[7] Al-Marbawī's work offers a

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[5] Khairil Husaini bin Jamil, ed., *Negotiating Meanings: Studies on Islamic Thought and Textual Interpretation in the Malay World* (Islamic Book Trust, 2023).

[6] Yahia Baiza. "Are Contemporary Islamic Education and Their Pedagogical Approaches Fit for Purpose? A Critique and Way Forward." In *Supporting Modern Teaching in Islamic Schools*, (Routledge, 2022),17-30.

[7] Essam Ayyad. "Re-Evaluating Early Memorization of the Qur'ān in

compelling example of such integration; however, its broader pedagogical implications have yet to be fully theorised within current academic discourse.

Recent scholarship has explored the role of localised Islamic texts in shaping religious identity and intellectual traditions. For instance, Gallop and Fathurahman examine Acehnese manuscripts as part of regional Islamic scholarly heritage,[8] while Iswanto et al. analyse the transmission of Islamic knowledge in Bali through Malay and Javanese textual networks.[9] Although these studies underscore the importance of textual localisation, they primarily emphasise manuscript preservation and transmission rather than pedagogical function. Building on this body of work, the present study positions *Baḥr al-Mādhī* not only as a repository of classical *ḥadīth* knowledge but as an active pedagogical instrument that contributes to the formation of instructional models in the Malay Archipelago.

The intellectual and pedagogical relevance of *Baḥr al-Mādhī* becomes even more apparent in light of ongoing efforts to reform Islamic education in Southeast Asia.[10] Contemporary scholarship

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Medieval Muslim Cultures." *Religions* 13, no. 2 (2022): 179.

[8] Annabel The Gallop, and Oman Fathurahman. "Islamic Manuscripts from Aceh in the British Library." *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 13, no. 2 (2022): 151–224.

[9] Agus Iswanto, Moch Lukluil Maknun, Umi Masfiah, and Firdaus Wajdi. "The Linkage of Islamic Intellectual Traditions in Bali with Malay World: Kampung Saren Jawa Manuscripts." *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 14, no. 2 (2025): 203-229.

[10] Mesbahul Hoque, Muneer Abdul Rab, Mualimin Mochammad Sahid, and Yuslina Mohamed. "Phases in the Life of the Malaysian Scholar Shaykh Muhammad Idris al-Marbawi and His Contribution of Knowledge." *Journal*

highlights a growing emphasis on integrating traditional Islamic sciences with modern educational approaches.[11] In this regard, al-Marbawī's methodology—characterised by thematic organisation, accessible language, and practical orientation—aligns closely with such reformist trajectories. His work demonstrates how fidelity to classical sources can be maintained while simultaneously enhancing accessibility for students across *pesantren*, *madrasah*, and higher education institutions.

Despite its continued circulation in educational settings, *Baḥr al-Mādhī* has not received sustained analytical attention commensurate with its influence. Much of the existing literature remains confined to descriptive accounts of its linguistic features or its role in religious instruction, without fully engaging with its methodological innovations or broader intellectual significance. More recently, scholarship has begun to recognise Baḥr al-Mādhī as an important manifestation of the vernacularization of hadith scholarship in Southeast Asia, demonstrating how Islamic knowledge was articulated through Malay linguistic expressions and local intellectual sensibilities. This work illustrates the active role of scholars such as al-Marbawī in contextualizing prophetic traditions within the socio-cultural landscape of the Malay-Indonesian world.[12]

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of Hadith Studies (2018).

[11] Lukman Afandi and Monika @Munirah Abd Razzak. "The Progress of the Quranic Scientific Exegesis in South-East Asia." *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 19, no. 2 (2021): 228-256.

[12] Muhammad Asif, *Vernakularitas Tekstual dalam Pensyarahan Hadis di Nusantara Abad 20: Studi atas Kitab Baḥr al-Mādhī* (Tesis Magister, Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2020), 8–9

This study responds to that need by offering a focused analysis of *Baḥr al-Mādhī*, examining its structure, methodology, and pedagogical implications. It advances the argument that the work should not be understood merely as a commentary, but as a formative model of contextualised *ḥadīth* pedagogy. By situating *Baḥr al-Mādhī* within both its historical context and contemporary educational frameworks, this article highlights its continuing relevance for the development of localised Islamic scholarship.

While grounded in the established tradition of hadith commentary, al-Marbawī's Baḥr al-Mādhī reflects a pedagogically oriented approach that prioritised clarity, accessibility, and the effective transmission of prophetic teachings to Malay-speaking audiences. Through translation, explanation, and contextual elaboration, the work served not only as a scholarly commentary but also as a vehicle for religious education and intellectual formation within the Malay-Muslim community.[13]

A defining feature of *Baḥr al-Mādhī* is its bilingual format, which presents the original Arabic text alongside a classical Malay translation. This arrangement functions as a pedagogical tool rather than a mere linguistic aid. Al-Marbawī supplements the translation with concise Malay commentaries that clarify vocabulary, provide contextual background, and connect the narrations to jurisprudential discussions across the four Sunni legal schools. In doing so, the text facilitates engagement with *ḥadīth* as both a source of knowledge and a guide to ethical and legal practice.

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[13] Mohd Syukri Ab Razak and Roslan Shamsudin, "Pendekatan Penulisan Dakwah Al-Marbawi Berdasarkan Karya Syarah Hadith," *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development* 10, no. 71 (2025): 602–623, especially 613–614

The pedagogical value of Baḥr al-Mādhī is further reinforced by al-Marbawī's use of accessible Malay prose and a systematic explanatory method. Although deeply rooted in the classical hadith tradition, the work employs language that remains relatively easy to understand while presenting complex religious discussions in a structured and instructional manner. This combination of linguistic clarity and methodological organisation enabled Baḥr al-Mādhī to function not only as a reference work for scholars but also as an effective medium for the broader transmission of hadith knowledge among Malay-speaking Muslims.[14]

Al-Marbawī's treatment of hadith material reflects a pedagogically informed methodology that extends beyond literal translation. In rendering classical texts into Malay, he frequently supplemented the original wording with explanatory remarks, clarifications of technical terminology, and contextual notes designed to facilitate comprehension among local readers. This interpretive strategy enabled him to preserve the substance of the source text while simultaneously making its legal and ethical teachings more accessible to audiences with diverse levels of scholarly training.[15]

Beyond its pedagogical features, *Baḥr al-Mādhī* has also been examined for its broader intellectual and socio-political significance. Studies have shown that the work functioned as a medium for ethical

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[14] Hilmy Firdausy, Rifqi Muhammad Fatkhi, and Fuad Thohari, "Baḥr al-Madhī and the Establishment Momentum of Ḥadīth Studies in Nusantara in the 20th Century," *Ilmu Ushuluddin* 9, no. 1 (2022): 15–48

[15] Najahudin Lateh, "Metodologi Syeikh Idris al-Marbawi dalam Karya Terjemah *Bulugh al-Maram*: Analisa Kitab al-Taharah," paper presented at *Seminar Kebangsaan Ketamadunan Islam*, Hotel Casuarina, Ipoh, Perak, 8–9 December 2009

and political reflection in twentieth-century Malay society. Similarly, analyses of its treatment of jihad indicate that al-Marbawī framed the concept in ethical rather than militant terms, thereby shaping local understandings of religious responsibility within specific historical contexts.

The significance of *Baḥr al-Mādhī* extends well beyond its initial publication context. Widely regarded as one of the major contributions to Malay hadith scholarship, the work played an important role in shaping religious understanding and intellectual discourse among Malay Muslims throughout the twentieth century. Its enduring relevance reflects not only the breadth of themes addressed within the commentary but also al-Marbawī's ability to present prophetic teachings in a manner that resonated with the linguistic and cultural realities of the Malay world. Furthermore, the work contributed to the consolidation of a distinctive Malay tradition of hadith writing that combined fidelity to classical sources with sensitivity to local contexts.[16]

Nevertheless, the work is not without limitations. Its reliance on classical Malay expressions and traditional modes of exposition may pose challenges for contemporary readers who are unfamiliar with the linguistic and cultural conventions of earlier Malay Islamic literature.[17]

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[16] Mohd Solleh Ab Razak, Mohd Nor Adzhar Ibrahim, and Khairol Ikhwan @ Mohd Fithri Khoza, "Perkembangan Pengajian Ilmu Mukhtalif Al-Ḥadīth: Kajian Ketokohan Al-Marbawi (The Development of 'Ilm Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth: An Analytical Study of al-Marbawī's Scholarly Contributions)," *Journal of Hadith Studies* 10, no. 1 (2025): 42–60

[17] Fairuz Sakinata dan Sri Mawaddah, "Peran Bahasa Arab Melayu dalam Melestarikan Warisan Budaya dan Identitas di Aceh Besar," Bayt Al Hikmah: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pengembangan Masyarakat Islam 1, no. 1 (Juni 2025): 114–123

In addition, the increasing expectations of modern academic scholarship and contemporary learning environments highlight the need for updated interpretive tools, critical annotations, and pedagogical adaptations that can facilitate wider engagement with the text.[18] These considerations underscore the importance of continued scholarly efforts to bridge the gap between the historical context of *Baḥr al-Mādhī* and the intellectual needs of present-day readers.

Existing studies on *Baḥr al-Mādhī* may be broadly grouped into three areas: linguistic analysis, jurisprudential methodology, and socio-political impact. While each of these approaches provides valuable insights, they often remain analytically separate. This study seeks to bridge these strands by offering an integrated analysis that foregrounds pedagogy as a unifying framework, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the work's significance within the tradition of Southeast Asian Islamic scholarship.

Methodological Framework

This study employs a qualitative library-based approach with content analysis as its primary analytical method, focusing on Shaykh Muḥammad Idrīs al-Marbawī's *Baḥr al-Mādhī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī* as the central object of analysis.[19] Rather than treating the text as a purely descriptive source, this approach examines how its

[18] Widya Pratiwi dan Tasmin Tanggarreng, "Kritik Sanad Hadits terhadap Kajian Ilmu Hadits," *Global Research and Innovation Journal (GREAT)* 1, no. 2 (2025): 1969–1978.

[19] Wardani. "The Intellectual Genealogy of Indonesian-Malay Qur'an Interpreters: A Historical Tracking." *Global Journal al-Thaqafah* 12, no. 1 (2022): 98-110.

internal structure, translation strategies, and modes of commentary function pedagogically within specific intellectual and social contexts.

The analysis is guided by a historical-conceptual perspective inspired by Fazlur Rahman, which emphasises the interaction between normative Islamic sources and the contextual needs of particular communities.[20] In this study, this perspective is operationalised by examining how al-Marbawī selectively engages with classical *ḥadīth* material and reformulates it in response to the linguistic, legal, and pedagogical realities of the Malay Archipelago in the early twentieth century. This includes identifying patterns of selection, adaptation, and emphasis within the text, rather than assuming a neutral process of transmission.

The analysis focuses on selected sections that represent key thematic areas, particularly legal (*aḥkām*) and ethical discussions, as these sections most clearly demonstrate the work's pedagogical orientation. The selection is based on three criteria: (1) the presence of extended commentary beyond literal translation, (2) the inclusion of jurisprudential discussion across madhhab perspectives, and (3) the use of explanatory strategies aimed at non-specialist readers. This selective approach allows for a more focused and analytically coherent examination of al-Marbawī's methodological choices.

The analytical procedure involves close textual reading of the bilingual Arabic–Malay format, with attention to four interrelated dimensions: (1) textual structure, including the organisation of chapters, subchapters, and *ḥadīth* numbering; (2) translation and commentary techniques, such as the use of *ḥāshiyah*, lexical clarification, and contextual explanation; (3) legal orientation,

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[20] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

particularly the predominance of Shāfiʿī reasoning alongside references to other Sunni legal schools; and (4) pedagogical strategies, including the simplification of *isnād*, the use of analogies, and the adoption of a communicative explanatory style. These dimensions are derived inductively from the text and are consistent with recent studies that highlight the methodological and thematic features of *Baḥr al-Mādhī*.[21]

In contrast to classical ḥadīth studies, which prioritise isnād criticism and narrator evaluation, this study adopts a pedagogically oriented analytical lens. While the classical approach remains foundational, it offers limited insight into how ḥadīth knowledge is transmitted and internalised within non-Arabic-speaking educational contexts. Accordingly, this study situates *Baḥr al-Mādhī* within its instructional environment, examining how accessibility, language, and structure contribute to its function as a teaching text.[22]

To complement this perspective, the study incorporates an ethical-contextual approach informed by Khaled Abou El Fadl, which emphasises the importance of interpretive responsibility and contextual awareness in engaging with Islamic texts.[23] In practical terms, this framework is applied by assessing how al-Marbawī balances

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[21] Azid, Muhammad Adam Abd., Ibrahim Adham Mohd Rokhibi, Mohd Farhan Md Ariffin, Muhammad Ikhlas Rosele, and Mohammad Fahmi Abdul Hamid. "The Trajectory of the Jihad Discourse in Malay World: An Analysis on the Baḥr al-Mādhī by Muḥammad Idrīs al-Marbawī." *Al-Jamiʿah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 60, no. 1 (2022): 265-286.

[22] Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 3–7.

[23] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Reasoning with God: Reclaiming Shariʿah in the Modern Age* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

fidelity to classical sources with the need to address the moral, social, and educational concerns of his audience. This dual framework—historical-conceptual and ethical-contextual—allows for a more nuanced understanding of the text as both a scholarly and pedagogical project.

To ensure analytical validity, the findings are triangulated with existing scholarly literature on *Baḥr al-Mādhī*, including studies that examine its methodological features, intellectual contributions, and reception within the Malay world. This includes engaging with both positive evaluations and critical observations, such as the limited presentation of complete *isnād* chains and the challenges posed by the use of classical Malay for contemporary readers. By incorporating these perspectives, the study presents a balanced assessment of al-Marbawī's work and situates it within broader discussions of *ḥadīth* pedagogy and Islamic intellectual history in Southeast Asia.[24]

This study demonstrates that Shaykh Muḥammad Idrīs al-Marbawī occupies a transformative position in the development of *ḥadīth* studies in the Malay Archipelago. His contribution extends beyond textual transmission to a methodological reconstruction that repositions *ḥadīth* as a pedagogical instrument adapted to local linguistic and socio-cultural contexts. The findings are organized into four interrelated dimensions: (1) intellectual-historical role, (2) textual structure and methodology, (3) pedagogical orientation and

[24] Muhd Najib Abdul Kadir, Mohamad Zaid Mohd Zin, Ahamad Asmadi Sakat, Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor, Mohd Arip Kasmo, 1 Latifah Abdul Majid, Fadlan Mohd Othman, Jaffary Awang, Mazlan Ibrahim, "Methodology of Al-Marbawi in the Interpretation of Al Quran: A Study on *Tafsir Al-Marbawi Juzuk Alif Lam Mim*." Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences 5, no. 5 (2011): 446-45.

socio-religious function, and (4) critique, limitations, and contemporary relevance.

Intellectual and Historical Role in the Malay Ḥadīth Tradition

Al-Marbawī's intellectual legacy represents a pivotal shift in the localisation of *ḥadīth* scholarship in the Malay world. While earlier traditions largely preserved *ḥadīth* within Arabic textual frameworks, *Baḥr al-Mādhī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī* enabled broader access by rendering *ḥadīth* into classical Malay, thereby functioning as an epistemological bridge between classical Islamic scholarship and the lived realities of Malay-speaking Muslims.[25] Empirically, its influence is evident in its sustained use within Islamic educational institutions. In Malaysia, the text is utilised in *pondok* systems in Kelantan and Terengganu, while in Indonesia it appears in *pesantren*-based *ḥadīth* instruction, particularly in Aceh and parts of Java. In these contexts, *Baḥr al-Mādhī* functions not merely as a reference work but as a structured teaching text that shapes instructional practices.

In comparative terms, al-Marbawī's approach differs significantly from figures such as Muhammad Yasin al-Fadani, whose scholarship emphasises *isnād* transmission within transnational scholarly networks,[26] 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili, whose works integrate *ḥadīth* within broader exegetical and Sufi frameworks, and Maḥfūẓ al-

[25] Hussin, Haziyah, Latifah Abdul Majid, Nor Syamimi Mohd, Wan Nasyrudin Wan Abdullah, and Sabri Mohamad. "Pemikiran Tafsir Shaykh Mohamed Idris al-Marbawī dalam Manuskrip Quran Bergantung Makna Melayu." *Jurnal al-Turath,* (2016).

[26] Saleh Adri, "Pemikiran Hadis Syeikh Muhammad Yasin al-Fadani." *Al-Mu'tabar: Jurnal Ilmu Hadis* 1, no. 1 (2021): 86-101.

Tarmasī, whose contributions are likewise rooted in traditional scholarly transmission. [27] In contrast, al-Marbawī foregrounds pedagogical accessibility through linguistic adaptation, thematic structuring, and selective presentation. His contribution thus marks a shift from the logic of preservation toward that of transmission-oriented pedagogy, reshaping the dissemination of *ḥadīth* knowledge in non-Arab contexts. [28] This orientation reflects a deliberate methodological adjustment that mediates between classical textual authority and the communicative horizon of a Malay-speaking readership.

Through a selective engagement often described as *takhyīr al-maʿnā*, al-Marbawī departs from exhaustive transmission and instead foregrounds narrations with direct instructional relevance in their socio-religious setting. Accordingly, textual organisation serves a dual function: preserving authoritative content while ensuring its pedagogical intelligibility.

This adaptive tendency corresponds to a wider intellectual pattern in the region, where Islamic knowledge has long been rearticulated through local linguistic and cultural frameworks. As Wardani notes, scholars such as Shaykh ʿAbd al-Raʾūf al-Singkili illustrate this mode of mediation by embedding Arabic scholarly traditions within indigenous interpretive contexts. Within this continuum, al-Marbawī represents a further refinement, whereby

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[27] Ahmad Fauzan, "Syekh Mahfudz al-Tarmasi: Muhaddis Nusantara," *Tahdis: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu al-Hadis* 9, no. 2 (2018): 119-145.

[28] Ramli Abdul Wahid and A. Irwan Santeri Doll Kawaid, "The Role of Malaysian and Indonesian Ulama in Hadith Studies: Muhammad Idris al-Marbawi and T.M. Hasbi Ash Shiddieqy," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 3, no. 1 (2019): 104-19.

inherited discourses are reorganised in accordance with Malay linguistic expression and normative sensibilities, while remaining firmly grounded in the Sunni scholarly tradition.

Textual Structure and Methodology: From *Riwayah* to Pedagogical *Dirayah*

From a bibliographical perspective, *Baḥr al-Mādhī* comprises 22 volumes, containing approximately 2,781 ḥadīths and 8,282 legal and ethical discussions. It was first published in Egypt in 1933 (1352 AH) and later reissued in 1960 (1379 AH). While structurally modelled on *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, the work is not a literal reproduction but a selective and pedagogically oriented reorganization. A further indication of al-Marbawī's scholarly depth lies in his extensive engagement with authoritative classical sources. He frequently cites major jurists and scholars such as al-Shāfiʿī, al-Nawawī, Ibn al-ʿArabī, and al-Ghazālī, thereby situating his commentary within a well-established Sunni intellectual tradition. In the domain of ḥadīth scholarship, he draws upon prominent commentaries including *Tuḥfat al-Aḥwadhī*, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, and *ʿUmdat al-Qārī*, while in exegetical discussions he refers to foundational works such as *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, and al-Qurṭubī's *al-Jāmiʿ li Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*. This intertextual engagement not only reinforces the intellectual credibility of *Baḥr al-Mādhī* but also demonstrates how al-Marbawī mediated classical scholarship for a Malay-speaking audience without severing its epistemological roots.

A key methodological innovation lies in the simplification of isnād. In *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*, the ḥadīth on intention appears with a full chain of transmission:

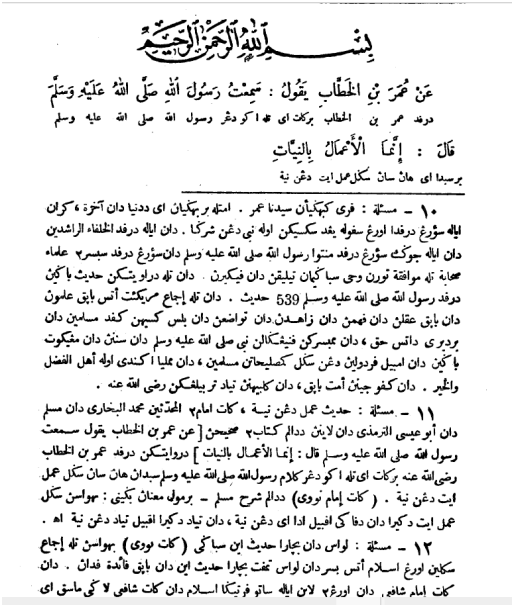
حَدَّثَنَا قُتَيْبَةُ، قَالَ: حَدَّثَنَا اللَّيْثُ، عَنْ يَحْيَى بْنِ سَعِيدٍ، عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ، عَنْ عَلْقَمَةَ بْنِ وَقَّاصٍ، عَنْ عُمَرَ بْنِ الْخَطَّابِ...

In *Baḥr al-Mādhī*, this is reduced to: From ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (raḍiyallāhu ʿanhu). This reduction reflects a deliberate shift from *isnād* criticism (*riwāyah*) to meaning-oriented interpretation (*dirāyah*), while still retaining ḥadīth classification categories such as *ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḥasan*, and *gharīb*. The pedagogical orientation is further evident in the commentary.

For example, the well-known *ḥadīth*:

إِنَّمَا الأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ

is explained through practical illustrations, such as intentions in trade, education, and daily work, thereby transforming the text into an ethical guide for everyday life.



بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

عَنْ عُمَرَ بْنِ الْخَطَّابِ يَقُوْلُ : سَمِعْتُ رَسُوْلَ اللهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ

درفد عمر بن الخطاب برکات ای تله اکو دغر رسول الله صلی الله علیه وسلم

قَالَ : إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ

برسبدا ای هاڽ سان سکل عمل ایت دغن نیة

١٠ ـ مسئلة : فری کبهکیأن سیدنا عمر . امتله بربهکیان ای ددنیا دان آخرة ، کران ایاله سؤرغ درفدا اورغ سفوله یغد سکسیکن اوله نبی دغن شرکا . دان ایاله درفد الخلفاء الراشدین دان ایاله جوکڽ سؤرغ درفد منتوا رسول الله صلی الله علیه وسلم دان سؤرغ درفد سبسر٢ علماء صحابة تله موافقة تورن وحی سباکیان تیلیقن دان فیکیرن . دان تله دراویتکن حدیث باکین درفد رسول الله صلی الله علیه وسلم 539 حدیث . دان تله إجماع مریکئت أتس بایق علمون دان بایق عقلن دان فهمن دان زاهدن دان تواضعن دان بلس کسیهن کفد مسلمین دان بردیری داتس حق ، دان ممبسرکن فنیڠکالن نبی صلی الله علیه وسلم دان سننڽ دان مڠیکوت باکین دان امبیل فردولین دغن سکل کصلیحاتن مسلمین ، دان ممليا اکندی اوله أهل الفضل والخیر . دان کفو جینڽ أمت بایق ، دان کابیهنڽ تیاد تربیلغکن رضی الله عنه .

١١ ـ مسئلة : حدیث عمل دغن نیة ، کات امام٢ المحدّثین محمد البخاری دان مسلم دان أبو عیسی الترمذی دان لاینڽ ددالم کتاب٢ صحیحن [عن عمر بن الخطاب یقول سمعت رسول الله صلی الله علیه وسلم قال : إنما الأعمال بالنیات] درواینکن درفد عمر بن الخطاب رضی الله عنه برکات ای تله اکو دغر کلام رسول الله صلی الله علیه وسلم سبدان هاڽ سان سکل عمل ایت دغن نیة . (کات إمام نووی) ددالم شرح مسلم ـ برمول معناڽ بکینی : بهواسن سکل عمل ایت دکیرا دان دفاکی افیبل ادا ای دغن نیة ، دان تیاد دکیرا اقبیل تیاد دغن نیة اه .

١٢ ـ مسئلة : لواس دان بچارا حدیث ابن سباکی (کات نووی) بهواسن تله إجماع سکلین اورغ اسلام أتس بسر دان لواس تمفت بچارا حدیث ابن دان بایق فائدة فدانڽ . دان کات إمام شافعی دان اورغ٢ لاین ایاله ساتو فرتیکا اسلام دان کات شافعی لاکی ماسق ای

Figure 1: The layout of the book's content

In jurisprudential terms, al-Marbawī adopts a comparative madhhab approach. In discussing whether physical contact invalidates *wuḍūʾ*, he presents both the Shāfiʿī and Ḥanafī positions before favouring the Shāfiʿī view, reflecting regional practice.[29] However, in several instances, the rationale for such *tarjīḥ* is not explicitly articulated, indicating a prioritization of pedagogical clarity over detailed legal argumentation.

Baḥr al-Mādhī has exerted a profound influence on Islamic education in the Malay world, particularly through its accessible

[29] Muhammad Mustaqim Mohd. Zarif, "The Bahr al-Madhi of Shaykh Muhammad Idris Al-Marbawi: A Preliminary Analysis," *Ulum Islamiyyah: Malaysian Journal of Islamic Sciences* 2 (2003): 61–80.

pedagogical design.[30] Its use of Jawi script alongside classical Malay enabled broader engagement among non-Arabic-speaking audiences in the early twentieth century. Structurally, the work is organized into major thematic sections (*abwāb* or *kitāb*), each further subdivided into specific legal and ethical topics, thereby facilitating systematic learning and ease of navigation. In addition, the inclusion of a glossary of *ḥadīth* terminology assists readers in understanding technical expressions, while the consistent numbering of *ḥadīths* enhances memorization, cross-referencing, and instructional use in classroom and informal study settings. These features collectively demonstrate al-Marbawī's deliberate effort to transform a classical commentary into a functional pedagogical tool.

مختصر صحيح الترمذي

وشرحه بلغة الجاوى الملايو . المسمى

بحر الماذى

تأليف

محمد إدريس عبد الرءوف المربوى الأزهرى

غفر الله له ولوالديه ولمشايخه والمسلمين آمين

الجزء الأول

يحتوى على كتاب الطهارة وما يتعلق بها

اين كتاب مڠاڠكن بچارا برسوچى دان بارڠيڠ تعلوقن

دكلوار كندى درفد « صحيح الترمذى »

حقوق الطبع محفوظة للمتزى طبعه ونشره :

شركة مكتبة ومطبعة مصطفى البابى الحلبى وأولاده بمصر

وباشر طبعه محمد أمين عمران

١٣٥٢ هـ / ١٩٣٣ م / رقم ٥٠٤

[ب]

فهرست باب٢ دالم جزء فرتام

باڬى كتاب بحر الماذى شرح باڬى مختصر صحيح الترمذى

٢ خطبة الكتاب

٨ حديث إنما الأعمال بالنيات : حديث بهواسان سكل عمل ايت دڠن نية

أبواب الطهارة — باب٢ حكم برجوچى

١٦ باب ما جاء لا تقبل صلاة بغير طهور : باب يڠتله دانڠ اى تياد دتريما سمبهيڠ دڠن تياد طهور

١٨ « ما جاء فى فضل الطهور : « يڠتله دانڠ اى فد كليهن برسوچى

٢١ « ما جاء أن مفتاح الصلاة الطهور : « يڠتله دانڠ اى بهواسن انق كونچى سمبهيڠ ايت طهور

٢٣ « ما يقول إذا دخل الخلاء : « يڠ دكات افيل ماسوق جبن

٢٤ « ما يقول إذا خرج من الخلاء : « يڠ دكات افيل كلوار درى جبن

٢٥ « النهى عن استقبال القبلة بغائط أو بول : « تكه درفد مغادف قبلة دڠن بيراق دان كنچيڠ

٢٧ « الرخصة فى ذلك : « مهاركن فد دمكين ايت

٢٩ « النهى عن البول قائما : « تكه كنچيڠ بردرى

٣١ « الرخصة فى ذلك : « مهاروسكن فد دمكين ايت

٣٢ « فى الاستنار عند الحاجة : « فد برليندوڠدرى وقتو قضاء حاجة

٣٣ « الاستنجاء باليمين : « استنجاء دڠن كاڽ

٣٤ « الاستنجاء بالحجارة : « استنجاء دڠن باتو

٣٧ « الاستنجاء بالحجرين : « استنجاء دڠن دوا باتو

٣٨ « كراهية ما يستنجى به : « تكهكن بارڠيڠ داستنجاء دڠندى

Figure 2: Cover and Table of Contents

[30] Nur Syahadah Mohamed and Mohd Akil Muhamed Ali. "Tahap Pengetahuan dan Persepsi Pelajar Terhadap Pengajian Hadith di Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin." *Islamiyyat* 38, no. 2 (2016): 155–163.

This pedagogical orientation is further reflected in al-Marbawī's effort to present ḥadīth teachings in a manner that is both intellectually grounded and socially relevant. Rather than limiting his commentary to textual exposition, he frequently connected prophetic traditions to practical religious concerns and everyday experiences within the Malay-Muslim community. Through explanatory discussion, contextual interpretation, and the clarification of legal and ethical implications, al-Marbawī transformed the study of ḥadīth from a purely scholarly exercise into an accessible medium of religious guidance. His methodology therefore demonstrates a conscious commitment to making classical Islamic knowledge meaningful and applicable to a broader audience while remaining firmly rooted in the authoritative tradition of ḥadīth scholarship.[31]

Pedagogical Orientation and Socio-Religious Function

The primary objective of *Baḥr al-Mādhī* is to disseminate Prophetic teachings to Malay-speaking audiences lacking proficiency in Arabic. As such, the work operates simultaneously as a scholarly contribution and a form of daʿwah. This intention is reflected in its opening with the *ḥadīth*:

إِنَّمَا الأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ

which establishes an ethical foundation for all subsequent discussions. In this regard, *Baḥr al-Mādhī* may be understood as a transformative pedagogical instrument that extends beyond the transmission of

[31] Faisal Ahmad Shah, "Syaikh Mohamed Idris al-Marbawi: Kontribusinya dalam Fiqh al-Hadīs," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman* 34, no. 1 (2010): 17–37.

religious knowledge to encompass ethical formation and civic awareness. Its localized yet textually grounded approach demonstrates how *ḥadīth* commentary can respond to contemporary educational needs without compromising fidelity to classical sources. The *ḥadīths* are systematically organised according to *fiqh* themes, and when a single *ḥadīth* appears across multiple contexts, al-Marbawī provides distinct commentaries tailored to each context—reflecting an adaptive pedagogical approach.

His writing style is equally distinctive, characterised by the use of direct address to the reader, such as "O my brother," the incorporation of Malay numerals, and concluding expressions such as:

الحمد لله على التمام

الحمد لله أولاً وآخراً

These stylistic features foster a sense of emotional proximity between the text and its readers, a quality rarely found in classical *ḥadīth* commentaries.

From a hermeneutical perspective, al-Marbawī demonstrates notable sensitivity in dealing with anthropomorphic *ḥadīths*. For example, in addressing anthropomorphic expressions such as:

يَدُ اللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ

In narrations referring to divine attributes—such as "the hand of God" or divine descent—he avoids literalism and instead employs *taʾwīl*, interpreting such expressions metaphorically in line with Sunni theological principles of *tanzīh* (divine transcendence). This approach

reflects an effort to preserve textual fidelity while addressing theological concerns within a modern pedagogical framework.

In cases of *mukhtalif al-ḥadīth* (apparently conflicting narrations), al-Marbawī employs classical reconciliation methods such as *al-jamʿ* (harmonisation) and *al-tarjīḥ* (preference). However, the analytical process is not always made explicit.[32] For instance, in discussions on the practice of *qunūt* in the dawn prayer, he endorses the Shāfiʿī position without systematically presenting the competing evidence. This suggests that his primary aim is instructional clarity rather than exhaustive legal debate. His mode of legal reasoning reflects a comparative orientation that draws upon multiple Sunni *madhāhib*, though often with a discernible inclination toward Shāfiʿī positions.[33] Such an approach exemplifies a form of methodological pluralism that resonates with the intellectual landscape of Southeast Asian Islam, where legal diversity is accommodated within a broadly shared normative structure.

Extending beyond its pedagogical orientation, the work also operates within a broader socio-political register. Through selective references to exemplary figures such as ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, al-Marbawī foregrounds themes of justice, governance, and ethical leadership, thereby situating *ḥadīth* within the domain of collective moral responsibility. In this regard, the text functions not merely as an instrument of individual piety, but as a medium through which ethical

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[32] Mohd Solleh Ab Razak, *Manhaj Mukhtalif al-Hadith oleh al-Marbawī dalam Bahr al-Mādhī li Sharh al-Mukhtasar Sahih al-Tirmidhi* (Master's thesis, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2022).

[33] Fadhilah, Is, "Analisis Metode Muhammad Idris al-Marbawī dalam Kitab *Mukhtasar Shahih al-Tirmizi wa Syarhuhu bi Lughah al-Jawi al-Malayu al-Musamma Bahr al-Madzi*." *Shahih: Jurnal Ilmu Kewahyuan* 4, no. 2 (2021): 40–59

principles are translated into lived social practices. This orientation is evident in the way al-Marbawī consistently connects Prophetic teachings to issues of communal conduct and responsible leadership, extending the relevance of *ḥadīth* beyond strictly devotional concerns.

More fundamentally, this approach reflects a conscious effort to recontextualise classical *ḥadīth* discourse within the socio-historical realities of the Malay world. Rather than reproducing inherited interpretations verbatim, al-Marbawī reformulates them in response to evolving political structures and patterns of social organisation. As observed by Majid and Kurt, such an interpretive orientation played a significant role in shaping a more reflective moral and political consciousness among Malay Muslims, particularly during periods of colonial and post-colonial transformation.[34]

Critique, Limitations, and Contemporary Relevance

Despite its significant contributions, *Baḥr al-Mādhī* is not without limitations. One major critique concerns its use of classical Malay, characterized by extended sentence structures and Arabic-Malay hybrid terminology, which may pose challenges for contemporary readers unfamiliar with older linguistic forms. As further noted by Zarif and Kosran, the linguistic style of early twentieth-century Malay scholarship may hinder accessibility, particularly for younger audiences.[35] This has led to increasing calls for retranslation and

[34] Abdul Majid, Latifah, and Nurullah Kurt. "Bahr al-Mādhī," 423–432.

[35] Siti Zahidah Kosran, and Latifah Abdul Majid, and Ahamad Asmadi Sakat. "Peranan Tulisan Jawi dalam Penulisan Hadith di Nusantara." *Al-Turath* 2, no. 2 (2017): 49–53.

linguistic modernization to ensure the continued relevance of the text in contemporary educational contexts.[36]

Additionally, the simplification of *isnād*—while pedagogically effective—limits the work's utility for advanced *ḥadīth* scholarship. The absence of complete transmission chains constrains critical analysis of authenticity and historical context. Although al-Marbawī consistently identifies the primary narrators and classifies *ḥadīths* using standard categories such as *ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḥasan*, and *gharīb*, the lack of full *isnād* documentation restricts deeper scholarly engagement, particularly in evaluating the transmission history of individual narrations.

Another limitation relates to the handling of *mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*. Although al-Marbawī employs recognized reconciliation methods such as *al-jamʿ* (harmonisation), *al-tarjīḥ* (preference), and *al-naskh* (abrogation), he does not consistently elaborate on the reasoning behind his preferences. This has led some scholars to view the work as more didactic than analytically rigorous, with a tendency to prioritize instructional clarity over methodological transparency.

Nevertheless, these limitations must be understood within the pedagogical objectives of the work. Rather than functioning as a specialized treatise in *ḥadīth* criticism, *Baḥr al-Mādhī* succeeds as an educational tool that bridges classical scholarship and the needs of broader Muslim audiences. Its methodological features—such as thematic organization, bilingual presentation, and contextual interpretation—represent deliberate adaptations to enhance accessibility and instructional effectiveness. Beyond the limitations outlined above, *Baḥr al-Mādhī* continues to exert a sustained intellectual

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[36] Abdul Mu 'iz Ahmad, and Taj Rijal Muhamad Romli. "Metode Terjemahan Teks Bab Solat dalam Kitab *Bahrul Mazi*." *International Journal of Humanities, Philosophy and Language* (2020).

influence on contemporary *ḥadīth* studies in the Malay world. Its methodological orientation—particularly its emphasis on contextualization, accessibility, and ethical engagement—resonates with current scholarly concerns surrounding religious literacy and the social function of Islamic knowledge.

More significantly, the work has contributed to the emergence of renewed scholarly interest in localized approaches to *ḥadīth* interpretation. As demonstrated in studies such as those by Azid, thematic discussions within *Baḥr al-Mādhī*—particularly on issues such as jihad—reflect a nuanced engagement with questions of identity formation and socio-political transformation in colonial contexts. This indicates that al-Marbawī's commentary is not merely exegetical, but also responsive to broader historical dynamics shaping Muslim societies. In addition, the methodological features introduced by al-Marbawī—including thematic structuring, bilingual exposition, and comparative legal reasoning—have informed subsequent developments in Malay *ḥadīth* literature. This influence is evident in later scholarly works, such as those of Mustafa Abdul Rahman and Abdul Hayei Abdul Sukor, who adopt similar strategies in presenting *ḥadīth* in accessible yet analytically grounded forms.[37]

Its enduring relevance is evident in its continued use in *pesantren*, *surau*, and *madrasah* curricula across Malaysia and Indonesia, as well as its influence on subsequent Malay-language *ḥadīth* writings.[38]

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[37] Nor Mohd Syamimi, Haziyah Hussin, and Wan Nasyrudin Wan Abdullah. "Scientific Exegesis in Malay Qur'anic Commentary." *Asian Social Science* 10, no. 10 (2014): 236.

[38] Shumsudin Yabi, Mesbahul Hoque, A. Irwan Santeri Doll Kawaid, Fadlan bin Mohd Othman, Norhasnira Ibrahim, Amiruddin Mohd Sobali, Muhammad Suhail Tsaqif, "Shaykh Muḥammad Idrīs al-Marbawī wa

Furthermore, these pedagogical and methodological features remain highly relevant to contemporary discussions on Islamic education, particularly in relation to the localization and democratization of religious knowledge.

Looking forward, the need for a critical edition and digital preservation is increasingly urgent. Variations across printed editions, inconsistencies in formatting, and limited accessibility present ongoing challenges for researchers and educators.[39] Digitization initiatives—particularly through open-access platforms and mobile applications—have the potential to significantly expand the reach and impact of the work, ensuring its continued relevance in modern Islamic education.

Looking ahead, *Baḥr al-Mādhī* continues to offer significant opportunities for further scholarly exploration. Recent studies have demonstrated that the work contains rich discussions on a range of social, legal, and ethical issues that remain relevant to contemporary Muslim societies. Beyond its value as a hadith commentary, the text provides important insights into the intellectual outlook of Malay Muslim scholarship and its engagement with changing social realities. Continued research on its thematic, methodological, and pedagogical dimensions will therefore contribute to a deeper understanding of the development of hadith studies in the Malay world.[40]

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kitābuhu" [Syekh Muhammad Idris al-Marbawī dan Kitabnya (Bahr al-Māzi)]" In *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Nabawi Heritage*, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, 2024.

[39] Syarif Hidayatulloh, Muhamad, and Muhammad Malik Nahar. "Digital Zakat as a Social Innovation: UTAUT and Maqasid Analysis for Strengthening the Islamic Financial System." *El-Hekam: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 10, no. 2 (2025): 186–204.

[40] Nur Saadah Hamisan @ Khair and Nor Aniza Mad Azeri, "Analisis

Conclusion

This study concludes that *Baḥr al-Mādhī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī* by Shaykh Muḥammad Idrīs al-Marbawī constitutes a significant milestone in the formation of localized *ḥadīth* pedagogy in the Malay Archipelago, as reflected in four interrelated key findings. First, al-Marbawī played a transformative intellectual-historical role by bridging the classical Arabic *ḥadīth* tradition with the socio-religious realities of Malay-speaking Muslim communities, thereby shifting the orientation of *ḥadīth* transmission from the mere preservation of *isnād* toward pedagogy cantered on comprehension and religious practice. Second, in terms of textual structure and methodology, *Baḥr al-Mādhī* demonstrates a pedagogically driven reorganization through its bilingual Arabic–Malay presentation, thematic arrangement based on *fiqh* and ethics, simplification of *isnād*, and integration of cross-madhhab references with a predominant Shāfiʿī inclination, marking a methodological transition from *riwāyah* to *dirāyah*. Third, the work exhibits a strong pedagogical orientation and socio-religious function, as evidenced by its communicative style, contextualization of *ḥadīths* through everyday examples, and emphasis on ethical values and social responsibility, enabling it to function not merely as a reference text but also as a means of moral formation and collective awareness within traditional institutions such as *pondok*, *surau*, and *pesantren*. Fourth, while *Baḥr al-Mādhī* has certain limitations—most notably its use of classical Malay and the absence of complete *isnād* presentation—these constraints are consistent with its pedagogical objectives and do not diminish its relevance within contemporary Islamic education, which

terhadap Hadis Berkaitan Wanita dalam Baḥr al-Mādhī: Meneliti Konsep Emansipasi Wanita," *HADIS* 13, no. 25 (2023): 18–27.

increasingly emphasizes accessibility, contextualization, and ethical engagement.

Overall, this study affirms that *Baḥr al-Mādhī* should be understood not simply as a traditional *ḥadīth* commentary, but as a coherent model of contextualized *ḥadīth* pedagogy that is both academically legitimate and highly significant for the development of *ḥadīth* studies and Islamic education in Southeast Asia, while also opening avenues for future research through critical editions, comparative regional studies, and digital integration within modern curricula.

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Inclusive Education as a Maqāṣidic Obligation: Addressing the Needs of Students with Learning Disabilities in Light of *Ḥifẓ Al-ʿAql*

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Abstract

Ensuring both inclusivity and equity remains a central challenge in education, particularly for a significant proportion of children worldwide with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia. Often erroneously perceived by their teachers as being "slow", these children frequently suffer from low self-esteem, withdrawal from academic and social engagement, and a heightened risk of psychological and emotional problems if they do not receive timely intervention. Highlighting the case of children with dyslexia, this conceptual and analytical essay focusses on the application of *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah* in the preservation of the '*aql* (intellect), which would entail the providing of a good and sound education to all members of society, leaving no child behind. It then proceeds with a

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discussion on the challenges these children face in school; the preparedness of teachers in addressing their educational needs in an inclusive education setting; and the importance that Islam places on the inclusion of students and individuals with physical and learning disabilities in the education system. The authors conclude the article by emphasising the fact that when viewed from the higher purposes and intent of the *maqṣid*, or objective, of the *sharīʿah*, addressing the needs of children with learning disabilities is a *darūriyyah* (necessity) and thus, an urgent obligation for us to fulfil.

Keywords: *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah*; preservation of *ʿaql*; *ḥifẓ al-ʿaql*; inclusive education; education for all; neurodiversity; learning disabilities; dyslexia

Introduction

Children with learning disabilities[1] such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia are often misunderstood and misjudged both in schools and in society. Despite the progress in inclusive education, misconceptions about their abilities remain widespread. These children—who

[1] The Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) defines "learning disabilities" (LD) as an umbrella term that covers a range of learning conditions where neurological differences affect how the brain processes information, impacting how individuals acquire, retain, understand, and use information, causing specific difficulties with specific skills such as reading (dyslexia), writing (dysgraphia) or math (dyscalculia); despite having average or above-average intelligence. It is important to note that the term, "learning disabilities" *does not* denote that an individual with the condition is incapable of learning. The term is used for legal purposes to ensure that these individuals are recognized under national disability legislation, enacted in various forms across countries, and are thus afforded corresponding rights and protections.

experience difficulties in reading, writing, and arithmetic respectively—are often erroneously perceived as being slow, lazy or less intelligent[2], when in reality, their struggles arise from specific neurodevelopmental differences that affect their brain's ability to receive, process, analyse, or retain information. [3] Such misinterpretations—and the reactions they receive as a result—can lead to their diminished self-esteem and reinforce a cycle of underachievement that could have been avoided if given the right support.

In addition to the misconceptions surrounding children with learning disabilities, there is also the concern about the kind of instruction we need to provide to help them succeed. Authoritative reports from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)—a leading U.S. advocacy and research organization dedicated to improving policies and practices for individuals with learning issues—have consistently underscored this concern. For instance, the NCLD's *State of Learning Disabilities Reports* (2014; 2017) reveal that approximately one in five children in the United States experience learning and attention difficulties.[4] The 2017 edition of the report, authored by

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[2] Suzanne LaGrande, "Unconscious Bias and Stigma around Dyslexia," 2025, accessed January 10, 2026, https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/unconscious-bias-stigma-around-dyslexia-dr-suzanne-lagrande-g3ovc?utm_

[3] Learning Disabilities Association of America, "What Are Learning Disabilities?" accessed January 10, 2026, https://ldaamerica.org/advocacy/lda-position-papers/what-are-learning-disabilities/

[4] Sheldon H. Horowitz, Jamie Rawe, and Mimi Corcoran Whittaker. *The State of Learning Disabilities: Understanding the 1 in 5*. New York: National Center

Horowitz, Rawe, and Whittaker, expands on the 2014 findings by providing updated national data and policy analysis, illustrating the persistence of these challenges. In the 2017 edition, the authors report that students with learning disabilities often do not receive timely nor effective intervention—and estimate that only 1 in 16—or about 6% of them—receive specialised instruction that would help to address their learning issues[5]. The Report also stresses that students with learning disabilities have a 31% greater chance of being bullied when compared to their peers; are twice as likely to be suspended; and three times more likely to drop out of school[6]. In addition, as reported by the Mental Health Foundation of the UK,[7] they are also 4.5 times *more likely* to have mental health issues than children without a learning disability. If their condition remains undiagnosed, and if we fail to address their learning issues, these children face a high risk of reading and academic failure, which frequently leads to frustration, psychological and emotional issues, and problems such as absenteeism, suspension, delinquency, and dropping out of school. In fact, the NCLD reports that many of these students consequently have problems with the law, often leading to their being incarcerated.[8]

For children with dyslexia, the extended time they require to read and process written material has often given rise to teachers'

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for Learning Disabilities, 2017.

[5] Horowitz, Rawe, and Whittaker, *The State of Learning Disabilities*.

[6] Horowitz, Rawe, and Whittaker, *The State of Learning Disabilities*.

[7] The Mental Health Foundation, UK. https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/mental-health-statistics/learning-disabilities-statistics

[8] Horowitz, Rawe, and Whittaker, *The State of Learning Disabilities*.

misconceptions about their cognitive abilities or motivation. Indeed, children with dyslexia are constantly being exposed to negative messages that "there is something wrong" with them and that they are "a failure or stupid".[9] They are also often ridiculed by other students when asked to read aloud in class.[10] Some dyslexic children in mainstream schools have even experienced criticism or humiliation by their own teachers, who perceive them as "lacking in ability".[11] The shame, confusion, and resentment that they feel may continue into their adult lives if they fail to be diagnosed and given intervention treatments. Some undiagnosed adults with dyslexia have sometimes been typecast as being mentally deficient, illiterate, or unable to learn, causing them to struggle to hold jobs, form relationships, and maintain good health.[12] Indeed, as stressed by Riddick,[13] the educational needs of children with dyslexia must be met by the time they are ten or twelve years of age or the negative consequences that are often associated with frustration and demoralisation, such as social withdrawal or aggression, will become apparent, and may lead to grave consequences such as social isolation, dropping out of school,

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[9] Micheal Hart. "Embracing Dyslexia – Crossing the Chasm and Saving Lives." Edited by C. Scherkenbach. *The Blue Dot*, no. 5 (2017): 10–13.

[10] Sally Shaywitz, and Bennett Shaywitz. "Dyslexia and Bullying." Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, 2016. https://dyslexia.yale.edu/articles_directors/dyslexia-and-bullying/.

[11] Riddick, Barbara. *Living with Dyslexia: The Social and Emotional Consequences of Specific Learning Difficulties/Disabilities*. (Routledge, 2010).

[12] Hart, "Embracing Dyslexia".

[13] Riddick, *Living with Dyslexia*.

and a greater likelihood of "becoming involved with the criminal justice system".[14]

In examining the emotional and psychological consequences of inadequate educational support for students with learning disabilities, this paper primarily draws on data from the National Center for Learning Disabilities, USA. These reports were selected because they synthesise authoritative, nationally representative datasets, including federal education statistics and large-scale national surveys, and provide updated analyses of educational outcomes and policy implications for students with learning disabilities in the USA. Comparable large-scale datasets of this nature remain limited in many other contexts, including Malaysia, Oman, and Bosnia. Nevertheless, empirical research indicates that challenges in implementing inclusive education persist, particularly in relation to teachers' preparedness, attitudes, and professional competence in supporting students with learning disabilities.

These patterns underscore the global urgency of providing early identification and instructional support for learners with learning disabilities, who often remain under-identified and misunderstood in mainstream classrooms. Given that these conditions are often not visually apparent, the children often do not receive the kind of instruction they need to succeed academically, limiting their access to quality education and their ability to participate in academic, social, and economic life. The academic, psychological, social, and economic repercussions of reading failure arising from not addressing the needs of students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities are enormous and profound. This is especially unfortunate given the fact that they

[14] Horowitz, Rawe, and Whittaker, *State of Learning Disabilities*.

have between average to high intelligence and can learn—if provided with the right support.

In response to these challenges, the discourse on inclusive education has increasingly been shaped by the neurodiversity [15] paradigm, which challenges deficit-based understandings of neurodivergent [16] learners and instead, recognises cognitive differences as natural variations of the human brain rather than conditions to be "fixed." This perspective is especially important in reframing how learners with dyslexia and other learning disabilities should be understood, as it shifts the focus away from perceived deficits toward differences in cognitive processing that require the appropriate forms of support. From this perspective—as well as those within inclusive approaches to teaching—learners with dyslexia and other learning disabilities are not lacking in ability but possess cognitive profiles that may remain unrecognised in mainstream classroom settings. This not only limits their access to effective learning but may

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[15] "Neurodiversity" is a concept that recognises neurological differences as natural variations of the human brain rather than deficits to be corrected, emphasising diversity in cognitive functioning as part of human variation. It is commonly used as an umbrella term encompassing conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dysgraphia, Tourette's Syndrome, among many others. See Judy Singer, "Why Can't You Be Normal for Once in Your Life?" in *Disability Discourse*, ed. Mairian Corker and Sally French (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999); and Nick Walker, "Neurodiversity: Some Basic Terms and Definitions," *Neuroqueer*, 2014, https://neuroqueer.com/neurodiversity-terms-and-definitions/

[16] While *neurodiversity* refers to the natural variation in human neurocognitive functioning, the term *neurodivergent* refers to individuals whose neurological development differs from what is typically expected.

also obscure their intellectual potential, thereby hindering the development and realisation of their intellectual capacities. In this regard, recognising and responding to such differences is a crucial issue that raises essential questions about the principles that ought to guide educational responsibility and the conditions necessary for the full development of human intellectual potential.

The cumulative impact of these challenges raises fundamental questions about the obligations of society to ensure that all learners are able to develop their intellectual potential. In light of the far-reaching consequences associated with the failure to support learners with dyslexia and other learning disabilities, there is a need for a principled framework through which the urgency and nature of this responsibility can be more fully understood. It is within this context that the *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* provides a valuable analytical lens for examining the provision of inclusive education, particularly in relation to the preservation of the intellect (*ḥifẓ al-ʿaql*).

The *Maqāṣid Al-Sharīʿah* as a Framework to Address the Educational Needs of Students with Learning Disabilities

Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah, to put it literally, are the objectives, purposes, or principles behind Islamic laws and the divine intents or the wisdom behind its rulings. Rooted in the Qurʾān and Prophetic traditions, they also represent the fundamental Islamic concepts such as human dignity, justice, and benevolence, among others, upon which Islamic law is built.[17] Aimed at providing benefits to the individual and the community, "its laws are designed to protect these benefits and to

[17] Auda, Jasser. "A Maqāṣidī Approach to Contemporary Application of the Sharīʿah." *Intellectual Discourse* 19, no. 2 (2011). https://journals.iium.edu.my/intdiscourse/index.php/id/article/view/231.

facilitate the improvement and perfection of the conditions of human life on earth.".[18] Hence, the *maqāṣid* are aimed at addressing the needs of the *ummah*—and humanity in general—in order that orderliness, facilitation, freedom, equality, and the preservation of *fitrah* may be maintained.[19] Addressing current and changing conditions, but still within the fabric of the *sharī'ah*, the *maqāṣid* also deal with and respond to global issues and concerns—such as environmental preservation and sustainability, accountability, and human rights, to name a few—and has evolved from "the wisdoms behind the rulings to practical plans for reform and renewal"[20]. Under the *maqāṣid*, the benefits are aimed at not only Muslim individuals and society, but also non-Muslims,[21] as Islamic law is aimed at "promoting people's benefit and welfare and protecting them from harm".[22]

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[18] Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Maqasid al-Shariah, Ijtihad and Civilisational Renewal* (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012), 1.

[19] Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn 'Āshūr, *Ibn Ashur: Treatise on Maqasid al-Shariah* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007) as cited in Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shari'ah: A Beginner's Guide*, Occasional Paper series no. 14 (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvkc67c6.

[20] Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), 2, https://iiit.org/wp-content/uploads/Maqasid-Al-Shariah-as-Philosophy-of-Islamic-Law-A-Systems-Approach.pdf (accessed 22 April 2025)

[21] Kamali, *Maqasid al-Shariah, Ijtihad and Civilisational Renewal*.

[22] Adis Duderija, *Maqasid al-Shari'a and Contemporary Reformist Muslim Thought: An Examination*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2.

Educating Learners with Learning Disabilities as a *Darūriyyah*

In light of the foregoing discussion on learners with learning disabilities, the question of how best to respond to their educational needs calls for a principled framework that addresses the broader objectives that ought to guide educational responsibility. Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, the *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* offers such a framework, providing a means through which human welfare may be understood in relation to the higher purposes and intents of the *sharīʿah*. Central to this framework is the preservation of the intellect (*ḥifẓ al-ʿaql*), which encompasses not only the protection of the mind from harm but also the cultivation, development, and realisation of human intellectual capacity. In this regard, the educational experiences of learners with learning disabilities raise important questions about the extent to which existing practices support—or hinder—the fulfilment of this fundamental objective.

Within the *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* framework, the preservation of the intellect (*ḥifẓ al-ʿaql*) is recognised as one of the essential necessities (*al-ḍarūriyyāt al-khams*) upon which both individual well-being and the proper functioning of society depend.[23] While classical jurists such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī often illustrated the preservation of the intellect through legal prohibitions such as that of intoxicants, this objective more broadly encompasses the safeguarding and development of human intellectual capacity.[24] In this regard,

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[23] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustasfā min ʿIlm al-Uṣūl*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1997); Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *The Reconciliation of the Fundamentals of Islamic Law (Al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharīʿah)*, trans. Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee (Garnet Publishing, 2015).

[24] Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustasfā min ʿIlm al-Uṣūl*; al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-*

education constitutes a *primary* means through which the intellect is developed and actualised. In *maqāṣid* terms, this reflects the principle that essential objectives are preserved not only through the prevention of harm but also through the provision of the means *necessary* for their realisation. When learners with learning disabilities are not provided with the appropriate form of instruction to help them succeed in learning, their ability to acquire knowledge and to participate meaningfully in intellectual, social, and economic life is significantly constrained. This does not merely constitute a failure in providing education to these learners, but an impairment of the very objective that the *sharīʿah* seeks to preserve.

This reasoning is further reinforced by the foundational principles of Islamic legal theory, particularly the removal of hardship (*raf' al-ḥaraj*), as reflected in the juristic maxim that hardship necessitates facilitation (*al-mashaqqah tajlib al-taysīr*).[25] For learners with learning disabilities, the absence of appropriate pedagogical support may give rise to prolonged educational hardship, which places disproportionate barriers to learning that hinder their intellectual development. From this perspective, the provision of appropriate support is not merely an act of accommodation but a *juristic necessity* aimed at removing hardship and enabling access to knowledge.[26]

Sharīʿah.

[25] On the principle of removing hardship and the juristic maxim *al-mashaqqah tajlib al-taysīr*, see Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2003); Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law*.

[26] Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Maqasid al-Shariʿah Made Simple* (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008); Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law*

Accordingly, the provision of education that meets the needs of these learners is not to be understood as merely being supplementary (*ḥājiyyah*), but rather, as a necessity or obligation (*ḍarūriyyah)*, given the central role of such provision in preserving and enabling the intellect. This classification is not merely a theoretical construction, but a principle that is firmly grounded in the central place accorded to knowledge and learning within the Islamic tradition, as discussed in the next section.

The Centrality of Knowledge in Islam

Knowledge (*ʿIlm*) is accorded a position of primary importance in Islam, as its pursuit is viewed as a divine command, a form of worship (*ibadah*), and a necessary means for understanding Allah and cultivating one's faith. This is evident in the Qur'ān, where those who are endowed with knowledge are described as engaging in contemplation (*tafakkur*) and understanding (*taʿaqqul*), leading to a deeper awareness and recognition of divine truth and reverence of Allah. In Surah al-Zumar (39:9), the Qur'ān states: "Are those who know equal to those who do not know? But only men of understanding will pay heed."[27] This is further affirmed in Surah Fāṭir (35:28), where Allah says: "Only those among His servants who have knowledge truly fear Allah."[28] In his interpretation of these two verses, Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur[29] explains that these distinctions reflect the elevation of human understanding through knowledge, whereby individuals develop

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[27] Qur'ān 39:9, *Surah al-Zumar*, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, https://quran.com/39/9 (accessed 22 July 2025)

[28] Qur'ān 35:28, *Surah Fāṭir*, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, https://quran.com/35/28 (accessed 22 July 2025)

[29] Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, commentary on Qur'ān 39:9 and 35:28

clarity of perception and sound judgment. He further interprets *khashyah* in Surah Fāṭir as evidence that true knowledge is not merely an intellectual acquisition, but a transformative state that leads to the recognition of Allah (*maʿrifatullāh*) and the attainment of spiritual refinement.

The centrality of knowledge in Islam is further reinforced through the teachings of the Prophet, which emphasise *both* its acquisition and dissemination as religious obligations. The hadith, "The search for knowledge is an obligation laid on every Muslim,"[30] establishes the pursuit of knowledge as a fundamental duty incumbent upon *all* believers. This is complemented by the Prophet's exhortation, "Convey from me, even if it is one verse,"[31] which underscores the responsibility to share knowledge, even if it is only a little. Similarly, the hadith, "May Allah beautify a man who hears a saying of mine, understands it, remembers it, and conveys it," [32] highlights the importance of understanding and internalising the beneficial knowledge we have received and conveying it for the benefit of others.

From the Qur'ān and hadith of the Prophet, we may understand that knowledge is not only to be sought but also to be actively disseminated in a manner that enables understanding; reinforcing the view that facilitating access to education constitutes a fundamental responsibility. This is particularly significant in the context of neurodiverse learners, including those with dyslexia, autism,

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[30] Sunan Ibn Mājah, "The Book of the Sunnah," hadith no. 224, https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:224 (accessed 10 March 2026).

[31] Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, "The Book of the Prophets," hadith no. 3461, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3461 (accessed 10 March 2026).

[32] Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī, "Chapters on Knowledge," hadith no. 2658, https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi:2658 (accessed 10 March 2026).

and ADHD, for whom differences in processing, attention, and expression may affect conventional modes of access and comprehension.

To realise the *maqāṣid* of developing and preserving the intellect (*ḥifẓ al-ʿaql*), the *sharīʿah* urges Muslims to promote the establishment of wholistic education and make it available to all members of society as this would enable an individual to think and read critically and discern good from bad, right from wrong, and truth from falsehood; leading them to be true servants of Allah as His Vicegerents on Earth. As articulated by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and further explicated by Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, education is "the recognition and acknowledgement, progressively instilled into man, of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition and acknowledgement of the proper place of Allah in the order of being and existence."[33] In al-Attas's philosophy, education is intimately connected to the concepts of *fitrah* (innate human nature), *adab* (right order and discipline), and *insān* (the holistic human being). Education, understood as *taʿdīb*, seeks to cultivate harmony between intellect, soul, and action in accordance with the divine order of reality.

Within this framework, learners with dyslexia and other learning disabilities may be understood as being the expressions of human *fitrah*, each endowed with inherent worth and potential. Consequently, the marginalisation of these learners can be seen as

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[33] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization [ISTAC], 1999), 14–15; see also Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (ISTAC, 1998), 79–80.

being a form of injustice (*ẓulm*), insofar as it denies them their rightful place within the educational order and undermines the ethical purpose of *ta'dīb*. Responding to the educational needs of these students thus becomes a moral responsibility—grounded in the Islamic understanding of education, justice, and human nature.

These perspectives reinforce the established position that education occupies a central place in Islam. However, recognising the importance of education does not, in itself, guarantee its effective realisation in practice. The extent to which learners are able to benefit from education depends, to a large extent, on the capacity of educators to understand and respond to their needs. This raises a critical question regarding the preparedness of teachers to fulfil this responsibility within the inclusive classroom context.

Teacher Preparedness to Meet the Needs of Learners with Learning Disabilities

To achieve the objective of meeting the educational needs of students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities, teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and preparedness are critical. However, research indicates that this remains a persistent concern in many countries.

Mather, White, and Youman, in their global overview of dyslexia-related services and educational opportunities, for instance, highlight that a common challenge across countries is the scarcity of teachers with specialised knowledge of dyslexia-specific instruction.[34] Similar findings were obtained in Folia and Malisiova's systematic review of 16 studies involving a total of 2,519 English as foreign

[34] Nancy Mather, Jennifer White, and Martha Youman, "Dyslexia Around the World: A Snapshot," *Learning Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 25, no. 1 (2020): 12-13 https://doi.org/10.18666/LDMJ-2020-V25-I1-9552

language (EFL) teachers across multiple countries on their perceptions and preparedness to teach students with dyslexia. The researchers found that the teachers had limited conceptual understanding of, and lack of formal training in dyslexia. They also reported having low confidence in tailoring instruction to their students' individual needs, causing them to receive insufficient classroom support.[35]

Beyond dyslexia-specific research, large-scale meta-analytic evidence further demonstrates that teacher preparedness is a central factor influencing the implementation and success of inclusive education. Dignath et al., in a meta-analysis of 102 studies across 40 countries published in 2022, found that teachers' beliefs about inclusive education are strongly shaped by factors such as professional training, self-efficacy, and prior experience in inclusive settings.[36] The researchers point out that although teachers may frequently express positive attitudes toward inclusion, this does not always translate into effective classroom practices if they do not have sufficient confidence and knowledge of pedagogy.[37] Systematic reviews of research by de Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert further substantiate the fact that teachers' acceptance of students with special educational needs is closely linked

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[35] Vasiliki Folia and Anastasia Malisiova, "Teachers' Perceptions and Preparedness for Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Students with Developmental Dyslexia: A Systematic Review," *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education* 15, no. 4 (2025): 64, https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe15040064

[36] Christina Dignath, Sara Rimm-Kaufman, Roel van Ewijk, and Mareike Kunter, "Teachers' Beliefs about Inclusive Education and Insights on What Contributes to Those Beliefs: A Meta-Analytical Study," *Educational Psychology Review* 34 (2022): 2609–2660, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-022-09695-0

[37] Dignath et al., "Teachers' Beliefs about Inclusive Education," 2615.

to their perceived competence, training, and access to professional support.[38]

Within the Malaysian context, Zalizan Mohd Jelas and Manisah Mohd Ali argue that the implementation of inclusive education in Malaysia is shaped by factors such as the interpretation of educational policy and its translation into practice in schools, availability of resources, class sizes, and school environments; highlighting that the success of inclusive education is not solely dependent on individual teachers, but also shaped by the broader systems and contexts within which they work.[39] Complementing this perspective, Amar Singh emphasises that mainstream teachers frequently lack specialised pedagogical knowledge and professional preparation to support students with special needs, and that their efforts are further constrained by insufficient institutional and professional support.[40] He emphasises that without sustained support, teachers are unlikely to be able to teach these students in a meaningful and sustainable manner. His analysis underscores the fact that teacher preparedness to teach special needs children must therefore be understood not only as individual competence but as a condition

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[38] Anke de Boer, Sip Jan Pijl, and Alexander Minnaert, "Regular Primary Schoolteachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 15, no. 3 (2011): 331–353, https://doi.org/10.1080/1360311090303008

[39] Zalizan Mohd Jelas and Manisah Mohd Ali, "Inclusive Education in Malaysia: Policy and Practice," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 18, no. 10 (2014): 991–1003, https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2012.693398.

[40] Amar-Singh HSS, *Education in Malaysia for Children with Special Needs: Progress, Critical Gaps, Efforts under Way and Policy* (Kuala Lumpur: National Early Childhood Intervention Council [NECIC], 2020).

shaped by policy frameworks and systemic constraints within the educational environment.

Empirical evidence further substantiates these analyses. Manisah Mohd Ali, Ramlee Mustapha, and Zalizan Mohd Jelas found that Malaysian teachers often report limited understanding of inclusive education practices, inadequate training in special education, and difficulties in adapting instructional strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners in mainstream classrooms.[41] Broader critical analyses highlight further challenges. In his critical review of special needs education provision in Malaysia published in 2021, Alshoura identifies issues such as inadequate teacher preparation, limited resources, and insufficient support services with regard to the teaching of students with special educational needs.[42] As a result, these limitations constrain teachers' capacity to carry out effective classroom practices to help these learners succeed in the inclusive classroom.

The Malaysian evidence parallels that of international research in showing that teachers' ability to cater to the needs of neurodivergent students in the inclusive classroom cannot be realised through teachers' dispositions alone, but requires policy commitment, *sustained* investment in teacher education, institutional support, and coherent implementation strategies.

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[41] Manisah Mohd Ali, Ramlee Mustapha, and Zalizan Mohd Jelas, "An Empirical Study on Teachers' Perceptions towards Inclusive Education in Malaysia," *International Journal of Special Education* 21, no. 3 (2006): 36–44, ERIC, EJ843603, https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ843603

[42] Hamza Alshoura. "Critical Review of Special Needs Education Provision in Malaysia: Discussing Significant Issues and Challenges Faced." *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education* 70, no. 5 (2021): 869–884. https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2021.1913718

This brings us to the following: Since most of a student's education is acquired through formal schooling, and given the critical role of teachers, schools, and educational institutions in this setting, the following questions arise: How can we best support students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities in actualising their full potential? How do we show sensitivity to their emotions and educational needs? Is it enough to set up separate educational institutions and programmes for them, or should we reconsider the way we teach, the pedagogy we use, and the way we handle them?

On this issue, there are many lessons that we can derive from the teachings of Islam, the practice of the Prophet, and our Islamic history, which will be presented in the next section.

Inclusion in Islam: Text, Prophetic Practice and Historical Institutions

Inclusion, in Islam, is a moral imperative, rooted in justice (*'adl*), mercy (*raḥmah*), and human dignity (*karāmah*). The core teachings of Islam require Muslims to treat people with disabilities kindly and fairly and include them as full and valued members of the community. This can be seen in how the Qur'ān has consistently emphasised the inherent dignity and equality of all human beings, regardless of physical ability, social status, or ethnic background. In Surah al-Isrā' (17:70), Allah declares, *"We have certainly honoured the children of Adam,"* affirming the divinely granted honour (*karāmah*) of every human being. Ibn Kathīr explains that this honour is reflected in capacities such as the intellect (*'aql*) and the ability to exercise sound judgment, which point to the distinctive status of human beings among Allah's creation. [43]

[43] Ismā'īl Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr (Abridged)*, trans. Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakfūrī et al., 10 vols. (Darussalam, 2000),

This Qur'ānic principle is repeated in *Surah al-Ḥujurāt* (49:13), where Allah says, "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you."[44] Ibn Kathīr explains that this verse affirms the shared origin of all human beings from Adam and Ḥawwā', establishing their fundamental equality in humanity. Hence, as Ibn Kathīr further clarifies, distinctions among people are not based on lineage, tribe, or ethnicity, but on *taqwā* (piety and moral consciousness), which alone determines honour in the sight of Allah.[45]

The Prophet Muḥammad (may peace be upon him) embodied these and other Qur'ānic principles in his dealings with people, including those with physical disabilities and learning challenges, indicating his unconditional acceptance of them and his respect for them; treating them with dignity and compassion, and providing us with lessons for education and community life. One famous example was that of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Umm Maktūm, a blind man who was very devoted to the Prophet and among the first to accept Islam. The Prophet treated ʿAbd Allāh ibn Umm Maktūm with great honour, entrusting him with leading the prayers in Madinah, and appointing him to lead Medina when he left the city for battle[46]. As far as the Prophet was concerned, ʿAbd Allāh's blindness did not impede his ability to carry out his duties. Hence, rather than marginalising him,

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commentary on Qur'ān 17:70.

[44] The Qur'ān 49:13, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

[45] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, commentary on Qur'ān 49:13.

[46] Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Aẓān*, ḥadīth no. 617; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, *Kitāb al-Masājid*, ḥadīth no. 412.

the Prophet recognized his abilities and gave him meaningful responsibility. Authentic reports also describe the Prophet as being exceptionally patient and gentle with those who struggled in understanding, communication, or learning, never humiliating or dismissing them but offering encouragement and guidance suited to their capacities. For example, Anas ibn Malik reported that he served the Prophet for ten years and never heard him say even, "Uff"— an expression of annoyance—illustrating his extraordinary patience and supportive demeanour.[47] This conduct, combined with Qur'ānic guidance to "invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction" (16:125), demonstrates the principle of teaching with patience and consideration for the learner's abilities.[48] These examples reflect not only the Prophet's compassion but also his wisdom, showing his sensitivity and attentiveness to their emotional and social needs as well as his recognition of the abilities of individuals beyond their impairments.

These are only a few examples of how the Prophet treated people with disabilities. These examples illustrate that the Prophet valued people for their faith and sincerity, recognizing their abilities rather than their limitations, and setting a timeless model of inclusivity for those with both physical and learning disabilities. These lessons

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[47] *At-Tirmidhī* 2015, hadith on the Prophet's exemplary patience, accessed February 11, 2026, https://www.prophetmuhammad.com/tirmidhi/chapters/27. This hadith, while not explicitly about students or learners, illustrates a general principle of compassionate and patient guidance, which can be applied to educational contexts where individuals struggle or need support.

[48] Qur'ān, Surah al-Naḥl (16):125.

underscore the fact that Islam views disability not as a barrier but as part of human diversity within Allah's creation.

Beyond the Prophet's time, early Muslim societies also carried out their responsibilities in caring for people with disabilities. Under the caliph al-Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, the first recorded Islamic hospital (or *bīmāristān*) was built in Damascus, aimed at treating the blind as well as those with mental and chronic illnesses—with stipends provided to patients to ensure their dignity and independence.[49] These *bīmāristāns* mushroomed across Muslim countries and provinces, set up and supported by the caliphs, the sultans, the governors, as well as the people who resided there.[50] Later, during the Ottoman period, schools and endowments (*awqāf*) were established to support blind Qur'ān reciters and others with impairments, reflecting a communal commitment to inclusion.

The Golden Age of Islamic civilisation also witnessed a significant number of deaf, blind, or physically disabled people playing important roles "as philologists, transmitters of the law, teachers, poets, and social commentators."[51] All this would not have been possible without the commitment of the rulers, the community, and the

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[49] Sharif Kaf Al-Ghazal, "Bīmāristāns in Islamic Medical History," *About Islam*, January 28, 2023, https://aboutislam.net/muslim-issues/science-muslim-issues/bimaristans-islamic-medical-history/.

[50] Amine Lahhab, "Bīmāristāns: When Medicine and Compassion Transformed History," *Neuro et Psycho*, March 25, 2025, https://www.neuroetpsycho.com/en/bimaristans-history-medicine-middle-ages/.

[51] Hurisa Guvercin, "People with Disabilities from an Islamic Perspective," *The Fountain*, 2008, https://fountainmagazine.com/all-issues/2008/issue-63-may-june-2008/people-with-disabilities-from-an-islamic-perspective/

individuals who were motivated by the desire to follow the Islamic exhortation of having love, respect, and compassion for people with disabilities; and showing kindness to them such that they are included and welcomed as valued and respected members of society.

These examples demonstrate that respect for and support of persons with disabilities is deeply embedded in the Qur'ān, the practice of the Prophet, and Islamic history. This reflects how Islamic civilization recognized the importance of inclusion, ensuring that both medical care and educational opportunities were accessible to individuals of all abilities.

Helping Learners with Learning Disabilities: From Islamic Principles to Classroom Practice

From the examples in the previous section, there are lessons to be learned for teaching students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities. First, the Qur'ān and Sunnah stress the *intrinsic dignity of every learner*. Second, the Prophet's actions highlight the need for *patience, empathy, and individualised support***,** such as giving extra time to those who struggle to understand and adapting instruction to students' strengths and areas in which they need extra help. Third, early Muslim institutions remind us that inclusion is not merely an expression of personal kindness but is also grounded in broader social and institutional arrangements that promote equitable access to learning opportunities. Within contemporary classrooms, these principles can inform teachers' efforts to recognise students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities as individuals with different strengths and needs, and to use teaching approaches that are responsive to how they are able to engage with knowledge. In this regard, teachers stand at the heart of this endeavour, translating these principles into practice through their engagement with learners.

The Role of Teachers in Meeting the Needs of Students with Learning Disabilities

Helping learners with dyslexia and other learning disabilities requires informed and responsive teaching practices. Teachers occupy a central role in shaping how learning difficulties are understood and addressed in school contexts. When teachers possess limited knowledge of learning disabilities, for example, learners may be misjudged as slow, unmotivated, or less capable. Conversely, teachers who are knowledgeable about learning disabilities can foster supportive learning environments that recognise learners' strengths while addressing their specific needs. This highlights the critical role that teachers play in determining the educational outcomes of these learners—a role that, within the Islamic tradition, carries profound intellectual and moral responsibility.

Such a role is underpinned by the view that teachers are pivotal in shaping the minds and intellect of their students. They not only impart knowledge or facilitate learning, but also cultivate their students' intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. In Islam, teachers hold a noble position because they are entrusted with guiding those under their care toward knowledge and wisdom. The Prophet said, *"The best of you are those who learn the Qur'ān and teach it,"*[52] a hadith narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* that highlights both the honour and responsibility of teaching. This hadith underscores the elevated status of teachers in Islam by linking excellence (*khayriyyah*) to both the acquisition and transmission of knowledge. While the hadith refers specifically to the teaching of the Qur'ān, it is widely understood to extend to the teaching of *all* beneficial knowledge (*'ilm nāfi'*).

[52] Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* [Book of the Virtues of the Qur'ān], Hadith no. 5027, available at https://sunnah.com/bukhari:5027.

In addition, the act of teaching is described as one that draws the prayers of the angels and all of creation. The Prophet said, "Indeed, Allah, His angels, the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth—even the ant in its hole and the fish—send blessings upon the one who teaches people goodness."[53]

These hadith are a powerful reminder of the honour accorded to those who impart knowledge and guide others towards knowledge, wisdom, and goodness. Teachers, as seen in Islam, are not merely transmitters of information but nurturers of faith, character, and intellect—entrusted with shaping future generations. Indeed, the virtues of teachers are deeply rooted in their role as *inheritors of the prophetic mission*,[54] for the Prophet himself was sent as a teacher to mankind, as affirmed by the Qurʾān: *"He is the one who raised among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves, reciting to them His verses, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and wisdom"* (Q. 62:2).[55] Classical scholars such as Ibn Kathīr understand this as a comprehensive process that encompasses both academic instruction and moral development. This understanding is closely linked to the Prophetic statement that

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[53] Muḥammad ibn ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*, book of knowledge (*Kītāb al-ʿIlm*), ḥadīth no. 2685. Classified as *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ*.

[54] Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, trans. Ahmad Hasan (Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1984), kitāb al-ʿilm, ḥadīth no. 3641; al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*, trans. Abu Khaliyl (Darussalam, 2007), ḥadīth no. 2682. The hadith states: "The scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets; the Prophets do not leave behind dinar or dirham, but they leave behind knowledge", indicating that their legacy is preserved through the transmission, teaching, and preservation of knowledge."

[55] Qurʾān 62:2 (Sūrah al-Jumuʿah).

"the scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets,"[56] as it is through teaching and the dissemination of knowledge that this mission continues. Hence, the verse and the *ḥadīth* suggest that those engaged in teaching are participating in a legacy that seeks to cultivate both the intellect and the character of learners.

When viewed through this lens, teachers carry both dignity and responsibility. For neurodiverse learners—such as those with dyslexia—this responsibility is especially meaningful as their ability to access and benefit from education is closely tied to how their brains are able to process information they receive and the extent to which teaching is adapted to their learning needs. By embodying patience, compassion, and creativity, teachers can ensure that these students are not left behind but are given the tools and encouragement to learn and develop their abilities. In carrying out their responsibility (*amānah)* of nurturing diverse learners with wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and compassion (*raḥmah*), today's teachers can extend this prophetic legacy by creating classrooms where neurodiverse students will be given the maximum opportunity to develop their unique strengths and succeed.

Teaching Approaches to Support Students with Learning Disabilities

The preservation of the intellect, for neurodiverse learners, requires that we enable their access to learning by using teaching approaches that are responsive to how they process, and engage with knowledge. This section highlights two of such approaches, designed to support students overcome their barriers to learning and achieve meaningful educational success. The first of these is *differentiated instruction*, which

[56] Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, ḥadīth no. 3641; al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*, ḥadīth no. 2682.

involves designing or adapting teaching and assessment to meet the varied readiness levels of students in inclusive classrooms. This approach moves beyond one-size-fits-all teaching by using flexible grouping and varied resources—and allowing learners with differences in cognitive and learning profiles to engage with the same content through varied instructional approaches so that they can participate in learning despite their different learning needs.

Differentiated instruction is especially important when teaching students with learning disabilities as empirical research has shown that this practice contributes to enhanced engagement and improved academic outcomes among students with dyslexia, autism spectrum conditions, and ADHD studying in inclusive classrooms.[57] To support teachers and educators in understanding not only *why* differentiation matters but also *how* to enact it in real teaching contexts, numerous teaching resources have been developed by educators, among which is Tomlinson's "The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners" and "How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms", which provide both the theoretical foundation and clear practical guidance on planning lessons, designing assessments, and tailoring instruction to

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[57] Anna Gheyssens et al., "Differentiated Instruction in Secondary Education: A Systematic Review of Research Evidence," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02366; Doolaard et al., "Supporting Primary School Teachers in Differentiating in the Regular Classroom," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 66 (2017): 107–116, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.04.002; Nargiza Goyibova et al., "Differentiation Approach in Education: Tailoring Instruction for Diverse Learner Needs," *MethodsX* 14 (2025): 103163, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mex.2025.103163

student needs,[58] hence helping to translate differentiated instruction from concept to classroom practice.

Another important and beneficial approach to teaching students with learning disabilities is the use of *multisensory teaching methods*, which involve engaging multiple senses—such as the visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and tactile—during instruction to strengthen comprehension, memory, and skill acquisition. Rather than relying solely on verbal explanation or written texts, multisensory instruction enables learners to process information through complementary sensory pathways, thereby reducing cognitive overload and supporting different learning profiles.[59]

Multisensory approaches are also supported by empirical evidence[60], including the results of a systematic review and meta-

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[58] Carol Ann Tomlinson, *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*, 2nd ed. (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 2014); Carol Ann Tomlinson, *How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms*, 3rd ed. (ASCD, 2017)

[59] See Judith R. Birsh, ed., *Multisensory Teaching of Basic Language Skills*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing, 2011), which includes chapters on multisensory instructional strategies—with examples of activities in teaching phonemic awareness, reading, comprehension and vocabulary, to name a few.

[60] M. U. A. Siddiqui and R. A. Othman, "The Use of Multisensory Approach in Teaching Children with Dyslexia," *Education* 4, no. 2 (2014): 9–14; Linnea C. Ehri et al., "Systematic Phonics Instruction Helps Students Learn to Read: Evidence from the National Reading Panel's Meta-Analysis," *Review of Educational Research* 71, no. 3 (2001): 393–447; Joseph K. Torgesen et al., "Longitudinal Studies of Phonological Processing and Reading," *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 34, no. 1 (2001): 33–44.

analysis of 53 studies conducted over a period of 40 years—between 1980 and 2020)—which consistently indicate that structured and multimodal reading interventions significantly improve literacy outcomes among students with learning difficulties, particularly in phonological awareness, decoding, and comprehension skills.[61]

Hence, there is a substantial body of empirical evidence that have demonstrated the positive impact of these two approaches on these students' reading achievement over time. However, while the two approaches offer meaningful ways of supporting such learners, it is important to recognise that their implementation may be shaped by practical constraints, including resource limitations, varying levels of teacher preparedness, and lack of institutional support. Nevertheless, these strategies remain valuable in helping to *reduce barriers* to learning and supporting their intellectual and educational development, allowing teachers to operationalise the values of compassion, accessibility, and responsiveness to individual differences in mainstream classrooms.

Conclusion

Islam places a great deal of emphasis on justice. Students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities will always be at a disadvantage if proper thought and care are not put into their education. The failure to provide teachers with the support and relevant training to help them carry out positive strategies to bridge educational, emotional, and social gaps will affect the quality of education we provide. We will have

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[61] Hall, C., R. L. Simpson, and J. A. R. Odegard. "Forty Years of Reading Intervention Research for Elementary Students with or at Risk for Dyslexia: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *Reading Research Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2023): 1–32. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.477

failed in protecting and preserving the sanctity of the *ʿaql* (intellect) if we continue to have situations in which adults with dyslexia suffer because of their illiteracy due to their not having received any intervention to address their reading disability. Therefore, the move towards adopting a stronger stance in preparing teachers with the essential and practical knowledge needed to succeed in inclusive classrooms must be expedited so that *all* children can benefit. It is crucial that teachers be supported through sustained professional development, including access to specialised training in teaching neurodiverse learners. However, such efforts must be understood as a *collective* educational responsibility, where supportive policies, the availability of trained personnel, and collaborative structures collectively enable inclusive practice. Ensuring that *all* learners are supported requires the committed and coordinated efforts of institutions, policymakers, teachers, and parents alike so that the principles of justice (*ʿadl*) and compassion and (*raḥmah*) in meeting the educational needs of learners can be realised.

The preservation of everything that matters to the human *ʿaql* (intellect) must be supported through the providing of wholistic education to enable the individual to acquire knowledge and to gain wisdom. The reality that the Qurʾān is, in the words of al-Attas, "the final authority that confirms the truth in our rational and empirical investigations" [62] may not be able to be fully understood and appreciated by those with learning disabilities such as dyslexia if remedial intervention is not provided to help them succeed in reading, and consequently, in learning and acquiring knowledge. However, grounded in Qurʾānic injunctions and the example of the Prophet, and guided by sound knowledge of effective practices in

[62] al-Attas, *The Concept of Education*, 7.

teaching students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties, teachers should be better able to nurture every learner in ways that honour both their intellect and their dignity.

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From *Takfīr* to *Takhṭi'ah*: Rethinking the Grammar of Monotheism in the Abrahamic Tradition

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Abstract

This article proposes a new theological framework for Muslim–Christian–Jewish dialogue rooted in humility, epistemic openness, and shared reverence for divine mystery. Beginning with the Qur'ānic affirmation of God's ineffability, it contrasts the distinct yet complementary theological "grammars" of the Abrahamic faiths: Islam's emphasis on divine attributes (*ṣifāt*), Christianity's on divine essence (*dhāt*), and Judaism's on divine action (*afʿāl*). The article argues that these divergent emphases reflect not contradiction but divine intentionality, each revealing partial dimensions of the unknowable God. Central to the paper is the recovery of the Qur'ānic principle of *taṣdīq* (confirmation) as a hermeneutical corrective to the polemical use of *naskh* (abrogation), positioning the Qur'ān as a confirmer rather than a canceller of prior revelations. Building on this, the author advances a shift from *takfīr* (excommunication) to *takhṭi'ah* (assuming error without exclusion) as a model for intra- and interfaith theological engagement. The article concludes by reframing Christian–Muslim relations as an intra-Abrahamic dialogue grounded in shared pursuit of divine truth, proposing a *maqāṣid*-based theology oriented not toward boundary defence but toward truth-seeking as a spiritual vocation.

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Introduction and Methodology

The relationship between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism has long been shaped by a tension between shared monotheistic commitments and deeply contested theological differences. Across centuries, this tension has often been mediated through polemic, apologetics, and boundary-making, where each tradition has sought to preserve doctrinal integrity while responding to the claims of the others. Yet beneath these contestations lies a more fundamental issue: the nature of divine knowledge itself and the extent to which any one tradition can claim to fully comprehend or exhaust the reality of God. In recent decades, the field of comparative theology has sought to move beyond purely defensive or descriptive approaches, instead advocating for a mode of engagement rooted in learning across traditions while remaining grounded in one's own confessional commitments.[1] It is within this broader intellectual and theological landscape that the present article situates itself.

Against this backdrop, the article narrows its focus to a central and pressing question: how can Muslims engage theological difference within the Abrahamic traditions without defaulting to *takfīr* (excommunication), while still maintaining meaningful doctrinal commitments? Put differently, is it possible to articulate a theological framework that recognises error without collapsing into exclusion, and difference without surrendering truth? The article proposes that such a framework is not only possible but already latent within the Qur'ān

[1] Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (Crossroad, 2008), 1–10.

and the Islamic intellectual tradition, particularly when read through the lenses of divine ineffability, *taṣdīq* (confirmation), and the interpretive ethic of *takhṭiʾah*. In doing so, it reframes interfaith theological disagreement as an intra-Abrahamic discourse structured by partial apprehensions of a shared divine reality, rather than as a zero-sum contest of mutually exclusive truth claims.

Methodologically, the article first situates itself within the discipline of comparative theology by adopting what may be described as a confessional yet dialogical approach. Unlike classical comparative religion, which often aims at neutral description, or polemical theology, which seeks refutation, comparative theology begins from within a particular tradition while remaining open to transformation through encounter with the other.[2] The article reflects this orientation by grounding its inquiry firmly within Qurʾānic theology, while simultaneously engaging Christian and Jewish thought as sources of genuine theological insight. This is evident in its initial move to foreground divine ineffability, not merely as a doctrinal claim, but as an epistemological condition that relativises all human attempts to fully grasp God. By beginning here, the article establishes a shared space across traditions, particularly resonant with apophatic strands in both Christian and Jewish theology, thereby creating the conditions for meaningful comparison without premature judgement.

The second methodological move develops a constructive comparative framework through the concept of distinct "theological grammars." Rather than comparing isolated doctrines, the article examines how each Abrahamic tradition approaches God through a different primary lens, attributes in Islam, essence in Christianity, and

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[2] Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 9–15.

actions in Judaism. This approach aligns with recent developments in comparative theology that emphasise deep learning across traditions by attending to their internal logics and categories, rather than translating them into one's own conceptual framework.[3] By doing so, the article aims to avoid reductionism and instead interprets theological differences as arising from divergent epistemological orientations. This allows for a more nuanced account of disagreement, where apparent contradictions may in fact reflect complementary, though partial, apprehensions of the divine. In this sense, the article positions itself within a strand of comparative theology that seeks not synthesis, but a disciplined attentiveness to difference as a site of theological enrichment.

Finally, the article advances a hermeneutical and normative methodology through its recovery of *taṣdīq* and its proposal of *takhṭiʾah* as an alternative to *takfīr*. Here, it combines textual analysis with constructive theology, re-reading the Qurʾānic relationship to prior scriptures as one of confirmation rather than abrogation, and extending this principle into a broader theological ethic. This move reflects what some scholars have described as a "theology of interreligious learning," where engagement with other traditions is not ancillary but integral to the pursuit of truth.[4] By drawing on intra-Muslim precedents of tolerated disagreement, the article situates its proposal within the Islamic tradition itself, thereby avoiding the charge of external imposition. At the same time, it contributes to comparative theology by offering a distinctly Islamic model for interfaith

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[3] James L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (Paulist Press, 1999), 114–120.

[4] David B. Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 175–182.

engagement, one that balances conviction with humility and reframes theological difference as an opportunity for deeper participation in a shared, though ultimately ungraspable, divine reality.

Divine Ineffability and Theological Awe

The theological foundation from which this paper begins is one not commonly emphasized in contemporary Muslim discourse: the utter unknowability and ineffability of God (Allah). The dominant mode of Muslim theology, especially in post-classical *kalām* traditions, has leaned toward careful articulation of divine attributes, sometimes leading to a presumption that God's nature, while not fully comprehensible, can at least be framed in systematically coherent terms.[5] However, the Qurʾān itself points toward a far more ineffable vision of God, one that stresses divine transcendence to the point of existential bewilderment. In Q. 20:110, the verse declares, "*He knows what is before them and what is behind them, but they do not encompass Him in knowledge*." This assertion is not merely epistemological; it is probably also existential. It destabilizes any attempt to domesticate the divine within the categories of human knowledge, whether theological, philosophical, or even mystical. The verse situates the human being in an asymmetrical relationship to the divine: God knows the totality of the human, but the human cannot reciprocate that knowledge. This epistemic limit is not a deficiency but an invitation into a posture of awe, humility, and contemplative surrender.

This emphasis on divine unknowability may invite a common objection: how can such an ineffable conception of God be reconciled with Qurʾānic verses that describe divine proximity, such as being

[5] Frank Griffel, *The Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy in Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 403-407.

"closer than the jugular vein" (Q. 50:16), or those that employ seemingly anthropomorphic language? Yet this tension is only apparent if such expressions are read in a strictly literal or corporeal sense. The Qur'ān's language of nearness gestures toward an existential and epistemic intimacy that does not compromise divine transcendence, while anthropomorphic descriptions function as analogical or pedagogical modes of address, enabling understanding without implying likeness in essence. Rather than resolving the mystery of the divine, these forms of expression preserve it, sustaining a productive tension in which God is at once intimately present and radically beyond full comprehension. It is precisely this tension, between nearness and incomparability, disclosure and concealment, that situates the human encounter with God not in conceptual mastery but in a state of reverent bewilderment, preparing the ground for a deeper reflection on how even the divine name itself evokes this experience.

The very name "Allah" encapsulates this dynamic of awe and unknowability. Classical Arabic lexicographers have noted that the term "Allah" derives from the root أَلِهَ (aliha) which carries connotations of being perplexed or bewildered (*waliha*). In Arabic lexicons, this root can be linked to a state of intense longing or bewilderment in the face of the divine.[6] In this view, "Allah" is not just a proper noun denoting a specific deity but a verbal and emotional invocation of the One who bewilders the heart and intellect due to the immensity of His majesty and beauty. This etymological insight is not peripheral to Islamic theology; rather, it centres the spiritual experience of God not in rational mastery but in *ḥayrah*; a state of

[6] Edward W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1 (Williams & Norgate, 1968), 82.

reverent astonishment.[7] This insight brings Islamic theology into profound resonance with apophatic traditions in Christianity and Judaism, as opposed to cataphatic traditions,[8] particularly those voices which insist that God is best spoken of in negation and silence rather than in positive assertions. Hence, revelation does not exhaust God; it gestures toward Him in ways that provoke worship and wonder rather than conceptual closure.

By recovering this neglected dimension of divine unknowability in Islam, one also recovers the deeply affective and spiritual grammar that underpins the Qurʾān's language about God. The God of the Qurʾān is not an object to be dissected but a subject who reveals Himself in signs that provoke *taʿajjub* (astonishment). Prophet Muhammad's own reported experience of revelation was marked by awe, physical trembling, and existential dislocation,[9] experiences that mirror the Gospel's depiction of the disciples' confusion and fear in the face of Jesus's divine authority (cf. Mark 4:41; 6:51). In both cases, divine disclosure is not about comfort but confrontation with the Real. This aesthetic and existential dimension of the divine has often been overshadowed in Muslim polemics against Christian theology. Yet it is precisely here, in the shared grammar of mystery, that Muslim and Christian readings can enter into productive and reverent engagement.

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[7] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1 (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1999), pp. 144–153.

[8] Adam Afterman, "The Mystical Theology of Kabbalah: From God to Godhead," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish Theology*, ed. Steven Kepnes (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 149–182.

[9] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Īmān, ḥadīth 2.

When engaging with non-Muslim scriptures, this orientation reframes the questions one brings to the text: rather than asking "Is this compatible with Islamic creed?" the more foundational question becomes, "What aspects of God's mystery are being unveiled here?" This does not imply uncritical acceptance of Christian or Jewish doctrines but does require an openness to spiritual resonance, a willingness to let the divine Other remain Other. Just as the Qur'ān calls its reader to reflect on the paradoxical signs in creation and history (Q. 51:20-21), so too does the Bible invites the reader into a sacred narrative that cannot be resolved without transformation.

Read alongside the insights of Catherine Cornille, particularly her emphasis on epistemological humility and the interconnection of religious traditions, this posture becomes not merely devotional but also methodological: it acknowledges the limits of one's own theological formulations while remaining open to the possibility that truth is encountered, though never exhausted, in the other.[10] In this light, *ḥayrah* is not only a spiritual state but an intellectual ethic, one that resists premature closure and sustains attentiveness to difference without collapsing it. If "Allah" is truly the One who bewilders, who unsettles the illusion of certainty, then reading the Bible as a Muslim becomes not an act of compromise but an extension of fidelity to the God who exceeds all names, means, and categories.

Theological Grammars of Monotheism

While the ambiguity of God's nature itself stands as a formidable starting point for theological complexity, an even deeper layer of ambiguity emerges from the disparate emphases that the three major monotheistic traditions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, have

[10] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 4.

historically placed when approaching the divine. These differing points of focus, God's *attributes* in Islamic theology, God's *essence* in Christian theology embodied in Jesus, and God's *actions* in Jewish theological history, reveal how each tradition forms its own epistemological framework for encountering the divine. This divergence means that theological discourses are often built upon distinct premises, leading to frequent misinterpretations when traditions engage one another. A Muslim theologian might approach divine mercy as one of God's *ṣifāt* (attributes), integrally related to God's will, while a Christian might seek to locate mercy within the triune *essence* or hypostatic union, and a Jewish thinker might consider how divine mercy is demonstrated historically in covenantal *acts*. These contrasting frameworks inherently create interpretative dissonance, as interlocutors are not merely speaking different languages, but inhabiting different metaphysical structures.

Muslim theologians have long been engaged in nuanced debates over the *ṣifāt Allāh*, God's attributes, and whether they are co-eternal with God or created.[11] The concern lies in preserving divine unity (*tawḥīd*) while affirming scriptural descriptions of God. The theological balancing act between anthropomorphism and negation becomes central here. Conversely, in Christian theology, especially from the patristic through scholastic periods, the primary concern shifted to the metaphysical structure of God's *ousia* (essence), especially as developed in Trinitarian and Christological doctrines. Debates between *homoousios* and *homoiousios* during the fourth century, for instance, reflect a commitment to understanding God's inner life, a question rarely foregrounded in Islamic *kalām*.[12] This theological

[11] Griffel, *The Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy in Islam*, 12-14.

[12] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (University

architecture inevitably renders God as a mystery primarily in terms of *being*, rather than *doing* or *manifesting*.

Judaism, as suggested here, often sidesteps ontological speculation in favour of a relational, covenantal model grounded in divine *actions*. The Hebrew Bible and rabbinic tradition focus intensively on what God *does*, acts of justice, mercy, wrath, and redemption, rather than what God *is*. The divine name YHWH is itself interpreted in rabbinic midrashim not as a metaphysical claim, but as a marker of divine constancy in action.[13] Thus, when Jewish thinkers discuss divine justice or compassion, they often refer to concrete historical interventions or ethical imperatives, not to metaphysical or essential realities. This makes the Jewish God both profoundly present and perpetually enigmatic, not because of ineffable essence, but due to unpredictable acts. The Hebrew Bible's statement that "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways"[14] reflects a theological humility rooted in God's otherness expressed through action.

When interreligious dialogue occurs, these distinctions are often either flattened or misunderstood. A Christian might misread a Muslim discussion of *raḥma* (mercy) as implying a changeable God if unaware of the distinction between *ṣifāt dhātīyya* (essential attributes) and *ṣifāt fiʿlīyya* (active attributes). Likewise, a Muslim might interpret Christian Trinitarian discourse as polytheistic if they are unacquainted with the conceptual difference between *hypostasis* and *essence*. Similarly, a Jewish thinker focused on divine justice through historical suffering

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of Chicago Press, 1971), 172–175.

[13] Jacob Neusner, *The Theology of the Halakhah* (Brill, 2001), 226–227.

[14] Isaiah 55:8 in *The Hebrew Bible*, trans. Jewish Publication Society (JPS, 1985).

might see Islamic or Christian metaphysics as overly abstract. These misreadings are not merely interpretative errors; they are born of divergent theological grammars. The result is often either a projection of one's categories onto the other, domestication, or a total lack of comprehension; alienation.

This multi-dimensionality of theological focus directly reflects the vastness of the divine, a reality all three traditions acknowledge, even as they articulate it differently. The Qur'ānic verse Q. 5:48 speaks precisely to this recognition of plurality and its divine sanction: *"To each of you We have assigned a law and a path. Had God willed, He could have made you one community, but He willed to test you in what He has given you. So vie with one another in virtue"* (Q. 5:48). This verse not only acknowledges theological and legal diversity but suggests that such diversity is divinely intended. The command to "vie in virtue" implies that epistemological humility and ethical excellence, rather than doctrinal uniformity, are the divine expectations. The verse thus functions as both a theological anthropology and an interreligious ethic: humans are inherently diverse in their access to divine knowledge and should live with and through that ambiguity.

Theologically, then, divine ambiguity is not merely a cognitive limit but a revealed reality. God may have chosen to disclose Himself through different modes, attributes, essence, and actions, across traditions, allowing each to access certain dimensions while remaining blind to others. This fragmentation is not a flaw in human knowledge but a feature of divine intentionality. The Qur'ānic verse, when read alongside the Trinitarian mystery in Christianity and the covenantal narrative in Judaism, points toward a plural epistemology of the divine. In this framework, God is not wholly known by any single tradition, but each tradition serves as a prism refracting a distinct colour of the divine spectrum. Thus, interfaith misunderstanding is not simply a

matter of theological error but a reflection of a deeper metaphysical truth: God exceeds the confines of any one interpretive tradition.

The persistence of theological misunderstanding, then, is perhaps not merely a historical or sociological phenomenon but also a doctrinal one. When Muslim theologians read Christian theology through the lens of *tawḥīd*, or when Jewish thinkers evaluate Islamic monotheism through the lens of covenant and action, the result is not necessarily an objective evaluation but a cross-pollination often marked by projection and distortion. This occurs because the categories themselves, essence, attributes, actions, are non-transferable without conceptual translation. Yet rather than signalling failure, this disjunction can be read as a testament to divine plenitude. If God is indeed "*closer than the jugular vein*" (Q. 50:16) and yet ungraspable, "*No vision can fully take Him in, but He takes in all vision*" (Q. 6:103), then the multiplicity of theological grammars is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be honoured. Through difference, the unknowable becomes more richly apprehended, not less.

Plural Paths to Knowing God

With this in mind, the theological encounter between the Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, ought to begin not with the aim of securing doctrinal superiority but with the mutual desire to know God more deeply. Within the framework of monotheism, it becomes increasingly evident that our traditions are not sealed compartments but part of a shared inquiry into divine reality. Given the earlier starting points, first, that monotheism entails accountability to the same ultimate source, and second, that revelation within each tradition is partial and interpretive; our third trajectory ought to be a humble, dialogical pursuit of God's self-disclosure. Such diversity is not a weakness of revelation but a testament to the ungraspable fullness of

the divine, which requires multiple lenses to glimpse even partially.

Christian theology has long wrestled with the paradox of God's immanence and transcendence, most vividly expressed in the Incarnation. In this, God's *dhāt*, His very essence, takes on flesh, offering believers a personal and historical encounter with the divine. As Karl Rahner (d. 1984) argues, the self-communication of God is not exhausted in mere propositions, but in "God giving Himself."[15] This encounter does not nullify other forms of divine self-communication but situates the Christian emphasis within a broader divine pedagogy. In Islam, by contrast, the emphasis on *ṣifāt*, attributes such as *al-Raḥmān* (the Merciful) and *al-Ḥakīm* (the Wise), provides a textured understanding of God's nature that discourages anthropomorphism while still affirming relationality. Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), for instance, devotes considerable attention to the attributes of God, noting that "understanding them is a pathway to divine closeness."[16] Thus, each tradition bears its own theological weight and vocabulary, but all aim at a fuller knowledge of the one God who transcends our conceptualizations.

Judaism offers yet another mode of divine disclosure by centring God's actions in history, His *afʿāl*. God's identity is unfolded through acts such as the Exodus, covenant formation, and prophetic intervention. Abraham Joshua Heschel (d. 1972) notes that the God of Israel is not a being detached from man but a God of "pathos," intimately involved in history.[17] Unlike the Christian emphasis on essence or the Islamic attention to attributes, Judaism emphasizes

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[15] Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (Crossroad, 1992), 141.

[16] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā fī Sharḥ Asmāʾ Allāh al-Ḥusnā*, trans. David Burrell (Islamic Texts Society, 2007), 31.

[17] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (Harper & Row, 1962), 48, 82.

divine activity as the locus of encounter and understanding. But these are not mutually exclusive modes. Each tradition, in focusing on essence, attributes, or acts, reflects a legitimate emphasis within a unified divine reality that defies reduction. Rather than resisting these different expressions, it is suggested that we see them as complementary perspectives on the same ineffable divine subject, none of which can claim exhaustive comprehension.

The fragmentation of our theological languages into exclusive truth-claims is more a function of human pride than divine necessity. When we dismiss another tradition's theological articulation as wholly "other," we risk mistaking our limited grasp of God for God's totality. As Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464) proposed in his *De Docta Ignorantia*, true knowledge of God begins with the acknowledgment of our ignorance, for every inquiry begins with wonder and ends in mystery.[18] To this end, interreligious encounter should not aim at the elimination of difference but at the cultivation of deeper listening. By engaging one another's understandings of God's essence, attributes, and actions, we are invited to grow in spiritual perception, rather than simply win theological arguments. The multiplicity of God's self-introduction across traditions challenges us to see divine mystery not as a problem to solve but as an invitation to awe.

The division into "religions" has often relied on binaries that categorize traditions in fixed and oppositional terms: monotheist/pagan, Abrahamic/non-Abrahamic, revealed/man-made. These binaries obscure more than they reveal. They reduce the divine narrative to a human taxonomy that neglects the fact that God is always greater than our systems of classification. As Shahab Ahmed

[18] Nicholas of Cusa, *De Docta Ignorantia* (1440), trans. Jasper Hopkins (Arthur J. Banning Press, 1990), 4.

(d. 2015) critiques, such binaries often lead to the "imposition of an artificial unity," and clarity, on what is in reality complex, lived, and interpenetrated.[19] A more fruitful theological methodology would resist the urge to flatten these complexities into binaries and instead recognize that theological boundaries are often porous. Divine revelation is not property but gift, and like all true gifts, it exceeds the possession of the recipient. To remain within our respective traditions is not to reject others' insights, but to affirm that our own theological frameworks are strengthened by cross-pollination with others who also seek the face of God.

To learn from one another, then, is not an act of theological compromise but of theological courage. It requires the humility to accept that another's articulation of God might disclose something we have overlooked or undervalued. When a Muslim contemplates God's mercy through the ninety-nine names of God (*asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*), a Christian might find renewed insight into the inexhaustibility of divine love. When a Jew recounts God's intervention in history as a covenant partner, a Muslim might find resonance with the Qur'ānic narrative of divine guidance. This cross-referential learning does not collapse difference; rather, it dignifies each tradition's unique orientation while acknowledging that they all direct us toward the same transcendent reality. As David Burrell affirms, the very intelligibility of our talk about God depends on our willingness to learn from how others speak of God, "If our differences show one tradition to be superior to another in certain respects, and others to be superior to one's own in other respects, then what have we to say except to learn from one another?"[20] This theological generosity is a discipline of love and an act of worship.

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[19] Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?* (Princeton University Press, 2016), 143.

[20] David B. Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, 180.

Ultimately, our shared inquiry into God ought to be rooted in mystery, not mastery. To speak of God is always to speak from the shadows of the cloud, not from the certainties of the spotlight. Whether God is encountered in essence, attributes, or actions, these are not mutually exclusive but mutually illuminating dimensions of a reality that eludes our grasp and draws us deeper. The mystery of divine self-revelation is not a deficiency but the space in which interreligious encounter becomes possible. In that space, we are not strangers competing for divine attention but companions walking together in pursuit of a God who, in His infinite mercy, has chosen to reveal Himself diversely yet truly. Our traditions are not walls, but windows, through which the light refracts in unique colours, yet all from the same source.

Taṣdīq as Qur'ānic Hermeneutics

The principle of *taṣdīq*, or confirmation, emerges as a foundational Qur'ānic principle in understanding the scripture's relationship with previous revelations, particularly the Bible. In at least thirteen verses, the Qur'ān repeatedly presents itself as a *muṣaddiq* (confirmer) of what preceded it.[21] For example, in Q. 3:3, the revelation of the Qur'ān is described as one that "confirms what was before it" (*muṣaddiqan limā bayna yadayhi*), highlighting a continuity rather than rupture with prior scriptures. Such a stance challenges the dominant classical hermeneutical approach that overemphasizes *naskh* (abrogation), often at the expense of the Qur'ān's own repeated declarations of continuity. This confirms that the Qur'ān's self-perception is not that of a

[21] Mohammed Gamal Abdelnour, "The Qur'ān and the Bible: Abrogation (naskh) or Confirmation (taṣdīq)?," *Religions* 14, no. 7 (2023): 856, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14070856.

superseding revelation but one that validates the core messages of earlier scriptures.

The emphasis on *taṣdīq* indicates that the Qurʾān assumes a certain epistemological trust in prior scriptures, particularly in their divine origin and ethical guidance. This is reflected in Q. 5:66, which states: *"If they had upheld the Torah and the Gospel and what was revealed to them from their Lord, they would have been nourished from above them and from beneath their feet…"* This verse underscores the enduring value and legitimacy of earlier revelations, suggesting that their proper observance remains spiritually and materially beneficial Traditional interpretations often overlook how such affirmations imply a hermeneutical engagement with previous texts, not their erasure.[22] The verse implies that the problem lies not in the scriptures themselves but in their misapplication or neglect. Thus, the Qurʾān invites its readers to engage with the Biblical tradition thoughtfully, acknowledging its original divine message while offering corrections or clarifications when necessary; never outright rejection.

This framework of *taṣdīq* necessitates a serious re-evaluation of the interpretive priority often given to *naskh*, which lacks a solid textual basis within the Qurʾān itself. The verse traditionally often cited in support of abrogation is Q. 2:106, yet even this verse is ambiguously worded and has been interpreted in vastly different ways.[23] Such readings depend more primarily on juridical and polemical developments in Islamic history than on the Qurʾānic text itself.[24] By contrast, *taṣdīq* is a consistently and repeatedly affirmed

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[22] Abdelnour, "The Qurʾān and the Bible," 856.

[23] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Naẓarāt fī al-Qurʾān* (Nahḍat Miṣr, 2005), 202.

[24] Abdelnour, "The Qurʾān and the Bible," 8.

Qur'ānic concept, making it a more solid foundation for intertextual theological understanding.

Additionally, the Qur'ān's acknowledgment of previous prophets and their scriptures as legitimate and divinely inspired cannot be reconciled with an outright abrogationist approach. Q. 2:136 explicitly instructs Muslims to affirm belief in "what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and what was given to Moses and Jesus." There is no suggestion here of annulment; rather, the verse calls for recognition and continuity. Hence, the Qur'ānic attitude is one of reverence towards previous revelations and that this reverence should guide how differences between the Qur'ān and the Bible are interpreted, not through negation, but through deeper contextual engagement. Such a hermeneutic resists the zero-sum logic of abrogation and fosters a theology of scriptural harmony grounded in divine intentionality.

Moreover, the marginalization of *taṣdīq* in favour of *naskh* has created a polemical distance between Islam and the People of the Book. While some classical commentators have leaned heavily on *naskh* to assert theological superiority, such moves ignore the Qur'ān's more nuanced and conciliatory tones. The emphasis on *taṣdīq* opens up space for recognizing the Bible not as a corrupted or outdated text but as a companion in conveying divine truth. For instance, Q. 10:94 advises Prophet Muhammad to consult those who read the earlier scripture if he is ever in doubt; a profound acknowledgment of the ongoing validity and relevance of earlier revelations. This dialogical posture aligns with the Qur'ān's broader theme of confirming and integrating the messages of past prophets rather than erasing them.

The marginalization of *taṣdīq* also has significant implications for Islamic theology and interreligious ethics. *Taṣdīq* affirms that the divine message has been historically dispersed across different

communities and texts, fostering a universalism that resists exclusivist theologies. When viewed through this lens, theological differences between the Qur'ān and the Bible become sites for interpretive negotiation rather than negation. Q. 12:111 describes the Qur'ān as a confirmer of previous scriptures and as a clarification (*tafṣīl*) of them, suggesting that differences may emerge from explanatory expansions rather than doctrinal oppositions. This invites scholars and believers alike to engage differences not with the presumption of contradiction but through a hermeneutics of deepening understanding within a shared divine discourse.

Finally, the Qur'ānic principle of *taṣdīq* restores the legitimacy of the Biblical message in Islamic thought and provides a theological anchor for constructive engagement with the Christian and Jewish traditions. The eclipse of this principle by the more juridically expedient notion of *naskh* has hindered both intra-Muslim and interfaith theological discourse. The restoration of *taṣdīq* as a central hermeneutical tool reorients Qur'ānic interpretation towards the acknowledgment of sacred continuity. Instead of presuming doctrinal rupture, the differences between the Qur'ān and the Bible ought to be read as dialectical developments within a single divine communicative act. In this light, *taṣdīq* not only blesses the Qur'ān's position *vis-à-vis* the Bible but also sanctifies the broader Abrahamic tradition as a whole, fostering a more inclusive and textually faithful Muslim theology.

From *Takfīr* to *Takhṭi'ah*

In light of these historical and theological tensions, it is critical to emphasize that the articulation of multiple starting points for Christian-Muslim dialogue should not be misread as a declaration of relativism or mutual correctness. Rather, such an approach is a call to

shift the mode of engagement from *takfīr*, the act of declaring someone a disbeliever, to *takhṭi'ah*, the recognition that one might hold an erroneous position without being excluded from the fold of monotheistic faith. The Muslim tradition provides ample precedent for this interpretive generosity. For example, the Ashʿarīs and the Atharīs have long held divergent conceptions of God's attributes. The Ashʿarīs regard the Atharī affirmation of divine attributes in literal terms as bordering on anthropomorphism, yet this theological critique has not, in normative Sunni discourse, led to the exclusion of Atharīs from the broader community of believers. The disagreement is acknowledged, contested, and even robustly debated, but it remains within the boundaries of *īmān* (faith).[25]

This precedent underscores an important epistemic humility that was, at times, absent in Islamic history but later recovered. Take, for instance, the case of the Muʿtazilīs' early polemics against Ashʿarī theology. The Muʿtazilīs, who emphasized God's unity (*tawḥīd*) to the extent of denying any real distinction between God's essence and His attributes, once accused the Ashʿarīs of exceeding even the Christians in dividing the divine. "You believe in twenty attributes," they would argue, "while the Christians believe in only three."[26] Such rhetorical flourishes were meant to underscore the gravity of theological error. Yet over time, the language of denunciation softened, and a more nuanced conversation emerged.

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[25] Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 115–120.

[26] W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh University Press, 1973), 246. See also Al-Ḥākim al-Jishumī, *Risālat Iblīs ilā Ikhwānihi al-Manāḥīs*, edited by Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (n.p, 1986), 130.

Al-Ghāzalī's *Fayṣal al-Tafrīqah bayna al-Islām wa-al-Ẓandaqah* (The Decisive Criterion for Distinguishing Between Islam and Heresy) is a reflection of this process of harmonization. Here, al-Ghazālī systematically complicates earlier tendencies toward rigid classification by distinguishing between different types of doctrinal deviation and the varying epistemic conditions under which they arise. He argues that many apparent theological errors stem not from wilful rejection of truth but from interpretive constraints, linguistic ambiguity, or the limits of rational inference when approaching divine realities. On this basis, he restricts the scope of blanket condemnation and introduces a more graduated understanding of belief, in which disagreement does not automatically entail exclusion from the faith community. What emerges is an epistemology that preserves doctrinal seriousness while simultaneously acknowledging the structural limits of human cognition in grasping metaphysical truths, thereby embedding restraint and discernment within theological judgment itself. This historical shift demonstrates the potential for growth in theological discourse, not by relinquishing critical engagement, but by adopting a posture of respect and forbearance that maintains a commitment to shared belief in God.

This capacity for internal theological pluralism serves as a model for Christian-Muslim engagement. If Muslims can argue passionately over the nature of divine attributes without consigning each other to hell, then surely similar disagreements with Christians over the nature of God can be approached in a spirit of *takhṭiʾah* rather than *takfīr*. Christians, too, might benefit from adopting such a paradigm in interfaith discussions. The Christian acknowledgment of mystery in the nature of God, most clearly articulated in doctrines like the Trinity, can be a bridge rather than a boundary. As Muslims assert the *tanzīh* (incomparability) of God, Christians affirm the ineffability of the divine nature. Both traditions, in their own ways, admit that God

ultimately transcends full human comprehension. This shared epistemic modesty provides the space to acknowledge difference without foreclosing dialogue.[27]

On the other hand, to frame Christian-Muslim theological differences as inherently excommunicative is to misunderstand the nature of doctrinal development in both traditions. Neither Christianity nor Islam has ever been monolithic, and both have experienced internal theological ferment that has, over time, reshaped communal boundaries. For example, the Christian debates over *homoousios* versus *homoiousios* in the early councils reflect just how contested the doctrine of God can be, even within a tradition that shares a common creedal core.[28] Similarly, Islam's own history of *Kalām* reveals a rich tapestry of disagreement that did not always result in mutual anathema. The shift from *takfīr* to *takhṭi'ah* in intra-Muslim debates was not merely a theological necessity; it was also a moral and social imperative, fostering the conditions for coexistence and intellectual vitality. This same imperative should guide contemporary Jewish-Christian-Muslim theological dialogue.

Moreover, the mutual recognition of God as a mystery invites us to reconsider the nature of theological truth claims themselves. If God is truly beyond the full grasp of human cognition, as both Qur'ānic and Biblical texts seem to attest, then our respective theological formulations are, at best, approximations grounded in revelation, reason, and tradition. The Qur'ān's affirmation that "there is nothing like unto Him" (Q. 42:11) parallels the Christian idea that

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[27] See David B. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

[28] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 1 (University of Chicago Press, 1971), 199–205.

God "dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Tim 6:16). Such scriptural declarations should humble our polemics and encourage us to approach each other not as adversaries but as fellow seekers after the Divine. This humility does not preclude disagreement, but it does call for a measured rhetoric that distinguishes between error and unbelief, between mistaken conceptions and the wholesale rejection of God.

Christianity as Intra-Abrahamic Dispute

John of Damascus's (d. 749) characterization of Islam as a Christian heresy, though polemical and somehow dismissive, paradoxically draws attention to Islam's theological proximity to Christianity. In his *Heresies in Epitome*, John describes Islam as the "heresy of the Ishmaelites," placing it not outside the Christian intellectual tradition but within its purview as a deviant interpretation rather than an entirely new faith.[29] While his framing was designed to delegitimize Islam, it also inadvertently acknowledged a shared theological grammar, monotheism, prophecy, scripture, eschatology, that distinguished Islam from paganism. The very fact that John felt compelled to engage Islam in theological terms, rather than purely as a foreign political threat, suggests that he saw it as operating within a recognizably Abrahamic framework. This shared framework, ironically, may offer a foundation for Muslims to reimagine their relationship with Christianity; not as with an alien faith but with an internally disputed interpretation of divine revelation.

This perspective invites a reversal of John's polemical move: not in the spirit of marginalizing Christianity, but rather of including it within a broader Islamic theological landscape. If John could frame

[29] John of Damascus, *Writings*, trans. Frederic H. Chase (Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 153.

Islam as a distorted Christian teaching, then Muslims might, without embracing polemics, frame Christianity as an Islamic variant at best or theological misstep, at worst, but all within a wider Abrahamic project. Crucially, this move need not equate to *takfīr* (excommunication), but to *takhṭi'ah*, a concept that permits theological error without denying the sincerity or the shared divine referent of the other. Classical Islamic theology made similar distinctions within its own tradition. As indicated earlier, Ash'arīs considered Mu'tazilīs to have erred seriously in their theological premises, especially on divine justice and human free will, but rarely did this amount to labelling them *kuffār* (disbelievers). [30] They were mistaken, not malicious; deviant, not damned.

This reconfiguration aligns deeply with the Qur'ānic portrayal of Judaism and Christianity. In Q. 6:156–157, these traditions are not presented as foreign religions but as part of the same divine conversation, merely recipients of earlier revelations. The term *ṭā'ifatayn*, meaning two parties or factions, is particularly telling. Rather than describing Jews and Christians as followers of fundamentally different religions, the Qur'ān characterizes them as internal components of a single revelatory lineage. Later in Q. 6:159, God condemns "those who divide their religion and become sects," a verse

[30] This generalisation should not obscure the fact that some Ash'arī theologians did, at certain historical moments and in polemical contexts, resort to more severe judgements against the Mu'tazila, including language that approaches or overlaps with *takfīr*; the point here refers to the broader tendency within Ash'arī *kalām* rather than a uniform or consistently applied position across all its representatives. See Camilla Adang, Hassan Ansari, Maribel Fierro, and Sabine Schmidtke (eds.), *Accusations of Unbelief in Islam: A Diachronic Perspective on Takfīr* (Brill, 2016).

frequently interpreted as a condemnation of intra-Muslim schism. Yet in context, it applies just as aptly, if not more so, to the partitioning of the Abrahamic tradition into mutually exclusive religions. This suggests that the Qur'ān itself resists the stark divisions later imposed between Muslims, Jews, and Christians, seeing them instead as inheritors of the same divine trust, fractured not by essence but by interpretation.

To read Christianity as a Muslim variant, at best, or a Muslim heresy, at worst, in this light is not to denigrate it, but to reabsorb it into the theological family. Such a reading softens the polemical edge often present in interreligious discourse and encourages Muslims to consider Christians as interlocutors within the house of Islam, not outsiders to it. The Qur'ān, while critical of certain Christian theological claims, nonetheless acknowledges the sincerity and even spiritual excellence of Christians, as in Q. 5:82: "*...and you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers those who say, 'We are Christians.'*" Such praise is irreconcilable with an exclusivist model of salvation or belonging. Indeed, the Qur'ān's willingness to praise Christians while simultaneously disputing their doctrines suggests a framework akin to *takhṭiʾah*, in which error and piety are not mutually exclusive.

This framing also resonates with early Islamic intertextuality, particularly in how the Qur'ān presents itself not as a radically new scripture but as a confirmation and correction of what came before (Q. 2:97; Q. 3:3). The Qur'ān's self-understanding as a *muṣaddiq* (a confirmer) rather than a *mubṭil* (a nullifier) of previous scriptures undercuts later tendencies toward exclusivist demarcation. This "corrective continuation" implies that Islam saw itself, at least initially, as part of a shared Abrahamic story. If Christianity erred, it did so within a narrative Muslims also claim. Framing Christian theology in this way rather than a betrayal reflects this nuance: it suggests shared

premises and diverging conclusions, not an essential rupture. In this light, heresy is less a badge of exclusion and more a marker of internal theological debate within a divinely guided trajectory, perhaps similar to how Sunnis would consider Muʿtazilīs heretics but not disbelievers?

The Qurʾān's self-description as *al-Furqān* (the criterion that distinguishes truth from falsehood) complicates, but does not negate, the emphasis on *muṣaddiq*. The key is that these are not competing self-understandings but complementary functions within the Qurʾānic discourse: confirmation operates at the level of continuity with prior revelation, while *furqān* operates at the level of discernment and adjudication within that continuity. In other words, the Qurʾān presents itself as both continuous with earlier Abrahamic revelation and as an authoritative measure for evaluating distortions, misunderstandings, or developments within that shared lineage. That is to say that divergence need not imply rupture, but it does entail judgment within a shared referential field. That is why later intra-Muslim distinctions, such as the Ashʿarī critique of Muʿtazilī theology, can be understood in analogous terms of *furqān-like* discernment without necessarily collapsing into exclusionary *takfīr*. The shared premise is continuity of revelation; the differentiating move is evaluative clarification within that continuity, not the abandonment of it.

Moreover, the internal diversity within Islam itself offers further support for this relational approach. Muslims have long coexisted with divergent theological schools, Māturīdīs, Ashʿarīs, Muʿtazilīs, and later even philosophical traditions influenced by Neoplatonism and Greek logic. Despite profound disagreements, these traditions often remained within the pale of Islam, demonstrating that the boundaries of theological correctness did not always align with those of communal belonging. This historical pluralism suggests that

Muslims are capable of accommodating a range of theological formulations without resorting to excommunication. Extending this same generosity to Christianity would be consistent with this intra-Islamic ethos. If we can hold that some Muslims are mistaken without being infidels, why not Christians, especially when their mistake is not a rejection of God but a different understanding of divine nature?

Ultimately, this shift in framing offers a theological alternative to the prevailing paradigm of interreligious alterity. Rather than viewing Christianity as an external competitor, Muslims might begin to see it as a disputing sibling within a shared Abrahamic household. This perspective, rooted both in Islamic theological traditions and the Qur'ān's inclusive vocabulary, allows for disagreement without division, error without exclusion. It challenges Muslims to view theological difference not as a threat to be purged, but as a tension to be navigated, just as they have done within their own schools of thought for centuries. Reimagining Christianity as a Muslim variant opens the door to a richer, more capacious understanding of religious otherness, one that remains faithful to Islamic orthodoxy while transcending its narrowest impulses.

I should hasten to say that Christian readers should not interpret this approach as an attempt to reduce Christianity to a mere offshoot or variant of Islam. The intent here is not to collapse theological distinctions or undermine the integrity of Christian faith, but to engage a Muslim audience that often perceives Christianity as wholly alien, even idolatrous. By reframing Christianity as a disputing sibling rather than a hostile outsider, the goal is to foster a more empathetic and theologically grounded Muslim understanding of Christian belief, not to appropriate or redefine it. This gesture of intra-Abrahamic recognition is necessarily asymmetrical, shaped by the

concerns and commitments of a Muslim readership, and should be understood in that context.

Neither Muslims nor Christians need adopt an absolutist stance in their theological claims, for the principle of *takhṭi'ah* calls not for wholesale rejection, but for humble discernment. This aligns with the notion of *provisional truth*, as I articulate in *The Higher Objectives of Islamic Theology* (2022), which urges believers to hold their theological understandings with conviction, yet without conflating human interpretations with eternal, divine truth.[31] It reflects the humility of Imam al-Shāfiʿī, who said, *"My opinion is correct though it may be wrong, and the opinion of others is wrong though it may be right."*[32] This posture affirms a sincere commitment to truth while recognizing the limitations of human reason in fully grasping it. Christianity, then, is not dismissed but critically engaged, as a serious and heartfelt interpretation of revelation. Such an approach preserves the integrity of Islamic theology while cultivating epistemic humility and dialogical generosity. It resists both relativism and sectarianism, inviting Muslims to see in Christian theology not an alien threat, but a familiar echo, close enough to contest, yet too near in spirit to condemn.

Theology Oriented Toward Truth

This view, while compelling in its intellectual ambition and ethical aspiration, is not an easy one to embrace, even for Muslims. It necessitates a reorientation of deeply embedded assumptions about the role and purpose of theology itself. Traditional *kalām* has long

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[31] Mohammed Gamal Abdelnour, *The Higher Objectives of Islamic Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 65-67.

[32] Yusef Waghid and Nuraan Davids, *Ethical Dimensions of Muslim Education* (Springer, 2016), 109.

functioned as an apologetic science; a means by which Islamic doctrines are protected and defended from perceived errors or external threats.[33] To move from this defensive posture to one that earnestly seeks the truth, even in the claims of religious others, is not merely a shift in method but in theological identity. For many, this appears as a concession, a softening of Islam's doctrinal resolve. Yet, such a perception is premised on a misreading of the Islamic tradition, where sincere inquiry and principled disagreement were not just tolerated but institutionalized within the legal schools (*madhāhib*).[34] This historical precedent suggests that theological pluralism, grounded in humility and pursuit of truth, is not alien to the Islamic spirit but an extension of its intellectual legacy.

Theological humility, however, demands more than ethical posture; it requires a new epistemological framework. In *The Higher Objectives of Islamic Theology*, I argue that the *maqāṣid* (higher objectives) of theology should be recast around the pursuit of truth rather than the preservation of it. This paradigm shift positions theology not as a fortress but as a bridge, a means of encountering the divine through sincere engagement with others' experiences of the sacred. This is not suggested as a form of relativism, nor is it one of syncretism. It is, instead, a recognition that truth is not monopolized by one tradition and that Islamic theology should have the courage to confront truth wherever it may reside. This approach mirrors the Qur'ānic ethos of inquiry and reflection (Q. 39:18), which praises those "*who listen to the word and follow the best of it*." Such an ethos ought to be extended to

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[33] Abdelnour, *The Higher Objectives of Islamic Theology,* 1-2.

[34] Mohammed Gamal Abdelnour, "Who Will Be Saved: The Right or the Upright?" *Religions* 15, no. 9 (2024): 1119.

interreligious theology, even when it complicates inherited dogmatic boundaries.

Reconfiguring *kalām* in this way exposes an important paradox: traditional Islamic theology, in its drive to defend Islam against external theologies, often ended up ossifying Islam internally. The fixation on orthodoxy turned theology into a matter of boundary policing rather than existential inquiry. This is not to deny the historical necessity of *kalām* in certain contexts, especially during formative periods when Islam confronted robust philosophical and theological challenges. However, the persistence of this posture into our contemporary, pluralistic context betrays a theological atrophy. By making defence its highest objective, *kalām* neglected the Qur'ānic imperative of *ta'āruf* (mutual recognition) and the existential vocation of the human being as a seeker of God. A theology that aspires to serve God should thus be reoriented toward truth, which often emerges at the limits of one's own religious tradition, and sometimes beyond it.

This reorientation also compels Muslims to reconsider their attitudes toward theological difference. While Muslims have long tolerated a spectrum of legal (*fiqhī*) opinions, indeed, even institutionalized them through schools of law, they have often been less generous with theological variance.[35] Yet this asymmetry is neither necessary nor consistent with Islamic intellectual history. The theological pluralism that I advocate in *The Higher Objectives* is modelled on the jurisprudential ethos of *ikhtilāf* (difference), which assumed the sincerity and validity of alternative reasoning, even when it arrived at divergent conclusions. This principle can and should apply to theological differences, both intra-Muslim and interfaith. Doing so requires a conceptual shift: from viewing theology as a

[35] Abdelnour, *The Higher Objectives of Islamic Theology*, 35.

zero-sum competition of truth claims to seeing it as a collaborative human endeavour to approximate the divine.

Theological tolerance, however, ought not to be confused with doctrinal indifference. On the contrary, it is precisely those who are most committed to truth who can afford to be generous with difference. If truth is not something we possess, but something we pursue (in accordance with Q. 1:6: "Guide us to the Straight Path"), then the other, particularly the religious other, is not a threat but a potential co-traveller. This perspective transforms Christian-Muslim engagement from an arena of apologetics into a space of mutual discovery. The pursuit of truth thus becomes dialogical rather than confrontational. This is an important departure from the classical polemical tradition, which tended to treat Christian doctrines as errors to be refuted rather than testimonies to be understood. By contrast, the *maqāṣid*-based paradigm invites Muslims to consider what elements of truth may be embedded in the doctrinal expressions of others, even if they do not cohere entirely with Islamic theology.

This vision is admittedly difficult because it forces Muslims to relinquish the comfort of exclusivist certainty without abandoning their theological convictions. The pursuit of truth as a higher objective challenges the hegemony of inherited categories and demands a critical openness that many fear may lead to doctrinal erosion. Yet this fear is based on a misunderstanding of how faith operates. Certainty in Islam (*yaqīn*) is not the absence of doubt but its transcendence through sincere struggle and reflection (Q. 2:260). In this light, engaging the theological claims of Christians, or any other faith community, is not a threat to Islamic belief but a means of deepening it. The Qur'ān itself affirms that among the People of the Book are "those who have faith in God and the Last Day... and they will have their reward with their Lord" (Q. 2:62). To take this verse seriously is to open

theological space for the recognition of truth beyond one's own religious borders.

Ultimately, the call to pursue truth rather than defend boundaries is a call to reimagine Islamic theology for our globalized, interreligious age. This does not entail abandoning the core tenets of Islam; it entails situating them within a larger epistemic horizon that honours both the particularity of revelation and the universality of truth. It is a difficult path, one that requires intellectual courage and spiritual humility. But it is also, I contend, the only path that allows Islamic theology to remain faithful to its deepest Qur'ānic impulses while engaging responsibly with the religious other. The *maqāṣid* approach I outline in *The Higher Objectives of Islamic Theology* provides the theoretical scaffolding for this transformation, offering a vision of theology that is at once faithful, critical, and open to truth, wherever it may be found.

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An Assessment of the Distinction Between *Ishārī Tafsīr* and *Taṣawwufī Tafsīr*

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Abstract

This study examines *ishārī tafsīr*, a contested concept in the *tafsīr* literature, with regard to its meaning and content. It analyzes the effects of the differing usages of the constituent term *ishārah* across various Islamic disciplines on the definition of *ishārī tafsīr*. The study has established that conflating these different usages under a single compound term has resulted in conceptual ambiguity regarding the scope and nature of *ishārī tafsīr*. To resolve this ambiguity, interpretations commonly classified as *ishārī tafsīr* are examined and differentiated according to their defining characteristics, and a terminological and definitional proposal is put forward. Foregrounding the juridical usage of *ishārah*, the study argues that interpretations deriving indirect meanings from the lexical or semantic indications of the Qur'ānic text, whose connection with the text can be established, should properly be designated as *ishārī tafsīr*. By contrast, Sufi explanations distinguished by their source of knowledge, content, terminology, and pedagogical orientation are more appropriately classified as *taṣawwufī tafsīr*. The study further notes that some Sufi interpretations that establish a clear link with the text may be treated as an intermediate category designated as "*taṣawwufī–ishārī tafsīr*." Methodologically, data gathered through a literature review were

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analyzed by means of content analysis; the topic was addressed primarily within a theoretical framework and supported by examples. It has been concluded that the proposed distinction will contribute to a more consistent and sound evaluation of Qur'ānic interpretations.
Keywords: *ishārī tafsīr*; *tasawwufī tafsīr*; Qur'anic exegesis; Sufism; *ishārah*

Introduction

In works on the history of Qur'anic exegesis, it is observed that interpretations produced from the period of revelation up to the present have been categorized in various ways. Alongside the overarching distinction between *dirāyah*-based *tafsīr*, which privileges rational reasoning, and *riwāyah*-based *tafsīr*, which is grounded in transmitted reports, exegetical works have also been classified by taking into account factors such as the exegetes' sectarian affiliations, ideological orientations, scholarly disciplines, and approaches to the Qur'anic verses. Accordingly, *tafsīrs* have been described using designations such as Muʿtazilī, Shīʿī, juristic, philosophical, mystical (*taṣawwufī*), linguistic, sociological, and scientific. One such designation is "*ishārī tafsīr*."

Ishārī tafsīr is one of the most extensively discussed issues in the discipline of Qur'anic exegesis. This phenomenon—variously referred to as *ishārī* interpretation, *ishārī ta'wīl*, *taṣawwufī tafsīr*, or Sufi *tafsīr*—lacks consensus both regarding its proper designation and the scope it is understood to denote. This ambiguity has led to divergent evaluations of the concept. In some cases, such interpretations have even been subsumed under the category of *bāṭinī* (esoteric) interpretation. In fact, *ishārī tafsīr* is clearly distinguished from such approaches in that it does not deny the outward meaning of the Qur'anic text. Another common misconception is the assumption that

ishārī tafsīr is exclusive to Sufi scholars and that all such interpretations are based on unveiling (*kashf*) or inspiration (*ilhām*). However, Sufi exegetical works are not composed solely of insights derived from unveiling; they also contain interpretations transmitted from earlier authorities, produced through rational inference, or obtained by means of analogical consideration. As a result, a wide range of opinions—both in favor of and opposed to *ishārī tafsīr*—has emerged. Among the factors underlying these divergent evaluations is the fact that the concept of *ishārah* within the compound term *ishārī tafsīr* has been employed in different ways across distinct disciplines—most notably rationally grounded jurisprudence (*fiqh*) on the one hand, and experientially grounded mysticism (*taṣawwuf*) on the other.

The use of the term *ishārah* with different meanings in both jurisprudence and Sufism (*taṣawwuf*), together with its varied usages within Sufi discourse itself, has directly shaped modern definitions of *ishārī tafsīr* and given rise to conceptual confusion. The present study addresses this issue and seeks to clarify the definition of *ishārī tafsīr* in order to reduce the ambiguity observed in scholarly discussions and assessments. By foregrounding the use of *ishārah* in jurisprudence, it will argue that *ishārī tafsīr* constitutes a method of inference (*istinbāṭ*) whereby meanings beyond the immediately apprehended sense of the Qur'anic text are derived from its lexical or logical indications. By contrast, the study will emphasize that the distinguishing character of Sufi interpretations—often subsumed under *ishārī tafsīr*—does not lie solely in the source of their knowledge (*kashf/ilhām*), but also in their embeddedness in Sufi culture, terminology, and pedagogical aims. For this reason, the designation "*taṣawwufī tafsīr*" will be proposed as a more precise term for such interpretations. This distinction is intended to differentiate between interpretations that have hitherto been

evaluated under a single label, thereby providing a sounder basis for more consistent assessment.

In this study, the explanations and definitions articulated around the concept of *ishārah* have synthesized together through a literature review and examined by means of content analysis. Views advanced on the same concept across different disciplines have been compared and the distinctions between them highlighted. As an interdisciplinary study centered on *tafsīr*, this article approaches the subject primarily within a theoretical framework, supported by illustrative examples.

A considerable number of theses, books, and articles have been written on *ishārī tafsīr*, addressing a wide range of issues such as its definition, characteristics, scope, criteria of acceptability, and scholarly value, as well as the positions of those who oppose it and the arguments they advance. Several of these works are referred to throughout the present study. However, no independent research has been found that articulates the distinction proposed here within the same conceptual framework. Although a limited number of studies employ the term *ishārī tafsīr* by foregrounding the juristic usage of the concept of *ishārah* and treat Sufi interpretations as a separate category, no study has been encountered that is specifically devoted to the conceptual ambiguity inherent in the definition of *ishārī tafsīr*, or that systematically examines these different types of interpretation under distinct headings based on their sources of knowledge, methods of inference, and conceptual content.

The article also engages with these previous distinctions and explicitly indicates the points at which the classification and terminology proposed here diverge from earlier approaches. At this point, the lexical meaning of the concept of *ishārah*—which lies at the

heart of the debates on *ishārī tafsīr*—and its usage across different scholarly disciplines will be examined.

The Lexical and Technical Meanings of the Term *Ishārah*

The word *ishārah*, a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) derived from the *if'āl* form of the Arabic root sh-w-r,[1] lexically means a sign (*ʿalāmah*), an allusion (*īmāʾ*), or a symbolic hint (*ramz*). It refers to pointing something out by means of the hand, fingers, head, eyes, or eyebrows,[2] as well as conveying a meaning through indirect, implicit, or allusive speech.[3] *Ishārah* has been regarded as an equivalent to speech in the comprehension of meaning; indeed, word (*lafẓ*) and sign are viewed as two partners, with the sign being accepted as the most eloquent assistant and interpreter of the word. It is further stated that *ishārah*, which consists of expressing extensive meaning with few words, often takes the place of the word and eliminates the need for it to be written down.[4]

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[1] Ebū ʿAbdirraḥmān al-Farāhīdī al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad, *Kitāb Al-ʿAyn*, ed. Hindāwī, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2003), 2:365; Ebū al-Qāsim Jārullāh Maḥmūd b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās Al-Balāghah*, ed. Muḥammad Bāsil ʿUyūn al-Sūd (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1998), 1:524-525.

[2] Ismāʿīl b. Ḥammād al-Jawharī, *Tāj Al-Lughah Wa-Ṣiḥāḥ al-ʿArabiyyah*, ed. Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Ghafūr ʿAṭṭār (Dār al-ʿIlm li-al-Malāyīn, 1990), 2:704-705; Ebū'l-Faḍl Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān Al-ʿArab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 4:436-437; Sayyid Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Ḥusaynī al-Zabīdī, *Tāj Al-ʿArūs Min Ǧawāhir al-Qāmūs*, ed. Commission (al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2001), 12:257-258.

[3] Süleyman Uludağ, "İşârî Tefsir [Allusive Exegesis]," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (TDV Publications, 2001), 23:23:424.

[4] Ebū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Al-Bayān Wa-al-Tabyīn*, ed.

Beyond its lexical meaning, the term *ishārah* has historically been employed as a technical term in various ways across different disciplines. In jurisprudence, for example, when enumerating the modes by which the wording of revealed texts signifies meanings, one of these modes is identified as *dalālat al-ishārah* (signification through implication). By this are meant meanings that are not immediately apparent from the outward sense of the wording (*lafẓ*) and grammatical form (*sīgha*) but are indirectly inferred from them through linguistic and logical considerations.[5] Al-Jurjānī likewise defines *ishārah* as "that which is established by the form itself, without the wording being directed toward it or uttered for its sake," thereby pointing to meanings derived from the arrangement and grammatical form of speech. He defines "the indication of the text" (*ishārat al-naṣṣ*) as "acting upon a meaning that the text was not directed toward, nor intended in a lexical sense, yet which is established by the composition (*naẓm*) of the wording," thus recording the technical usage of the term in

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ʿAbdüsselām Muḥammed (Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1998), 1:78; Ebū al-Baqāʾ Ayyūb b. Mūsā al-Ḥusaynī al-Kafawī, *Al-Kulliyyāt*, ed. by ʿAdnān Darwīsh, Muḥammad al-Miṣrī (Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 1998), 120.

[5] Ebū Bakr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ebī Sahl al-Sarakhsī, *Uṣūl Al-Sarakhsī* (Lujnat Iḥyāʾ al-Maʿārif al-Nuʿmāniyya, n.d.), 1:236; Imām al-Ghazālī, *El-Mustasfa: İslam Hukukunda Deliller ve Yorum Metodolojisi [al-Mustasfa: Methodology of Evidence and Interpretation in Islamic Law]*, trans. H. Yunus Apaydın (Rey Yayıncılık, 1994), 2:163-164; Ali Bardakoğlu, "Delâlet [Signification]," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (TDV Publications, 1994), 9:9:121; Nasi Aslan and Derviş Dokgöz, "Fıkıh Usulündeki 'İşaretin Delaleti' Ile İşârî Tefsirlerdeki 'Ayetin İşareti'Nin Karşılaştırılması [Comparison of 'Signification of the Sign' in Islamic Jurisprudence and 'Sign of the Verse' in Allusive Exegesis]," *Usûl: İslam Araştırmaları*, no. 36 (2021): 31–32.

jurisprudence.[6] As is evident, in *fiqh* the term is used to denote indirect meanings that are not directly derived from the apparent sense of the text but are reached by drawing on the indications of the wording. What is at stake here is a process of meaning derivation (*istinbāṭ*) in which the text serves as the point of departure and rational inference (*dirāyah*) is also at work.

Another discipline in which the term *ishārah* is employed in a technical sense is *taṣawwuf*. In the Sufi usage of the term *ishārah*, two points stand out: They use this term either to emphasize the subtlety (*laṭāfah*) of the truths bestowed upon them, or to characterize the language they employ when conveying such knowledge. In other words, they used this term to express the distinctive character of both how they received knowledge and how they conveyed it. Indeed, al-Kalābādhī (d. 380AH/990AD) observed that the contemplations (*mushāhadāt*) of the heart and the unveilings (*mukāshafāt*) of inner secrets cannot be fully expressed in words, and can only be known through spiritual states; he therefore called this state, which he regarded as peculiar to the Sufis, the "science of *ishārah*."[7] Likewise, al-Sarrāj (d. 378AH/988AD) defined *ishārah* as "that which, owing to the subtlety of its meaning, is not articulated by the speaker but is instead concealed."[8] Accordingly, a meaning is present, yet it cannot be directly expressed and is disclosed only through *ishārah* (allusion). Later

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[6] ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Muʃam Al-Taʿrīfāt* (Dār al-Fāḍila, 2011), 26.

[7] Ebū Bakr Muḥammad b. Isḥāq al-Bukhārī al-Kalābādhī, *Al-Taʿarruf Li-Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf* (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1434), 200. In another passage of his work, Kalābādhī is seen to have referred to *taṣawwuf* as *ʿulūm al-ishārah* al-Kalābādhī, 75.

[8] Ebū Naṣr al-Ṭūsī al-Sarrāj, *Al-Luma'* (Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1960), 414.

definitions that synthesize these early Sufi usages[9] describe *ishārah* as "communicating one's intention to another without the mediation of speech; a meaning that cannot be expressed in words and is so hidden that it can be grasped only through knowledge and intuition obtained by such means as inspiration and unveiling; and the implicit indication of one's intent regarding whether something ought or ought not to be done."[10] These formulations likewise reflect both aspects of the term *ishārah* as employed by the Sufis.

The use of *ishārah* in conjunction with *tafsīr* as a technical term is a development of the modern period. In the classical period, Sufis held that the meanings that arose (*wārid*) during their deep contemplation (*murāqabah*) of the Qur'ān could not be readily assimilated by everyone; to avoid leading people into misunderstanding, they therefore chose to communicate such knowledge through allusive language, symbols, and indications, and accordingly called these interpretations not *tafsīr* but *ishārah*. [11]

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[9] For further examples of the use of the term *ishārah* by Sufis in comparable senses, see al-Sarrāj, 37, 51, 115, 147, 168, 239, 294, 296; Ebū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Bayān Al-Farq Bayna al-Ṣadr Wa-al-Qalb Wa-al-Fu'ād Wa-al-Lubb* (Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, 2009), 33; Muhammed b. Ali b. Atıyye Ebû Tâlib el-Mekkî, *Kûtü'l-Kulûb Fî Mu'Âmeleti'l-Mahbûb ve Vasfî Tarîkı'l-Mürîd Ilâ Makâmi't-Tevhîd*, ed. Mahmûd İbrâhîm Muhammed er-Radvânî (Dâru't-Türâs, 2001), 1:358, 453..

[10] Süleyman Uludağ, *Tasavvuf Terimleri Sözlüğü [Dictionary of Sufi Terms]* (Marifet Yayınları, 1995), 282; Süleyman Uludağ, *İbn Arabî*, 3rd ed. (TDV Yayınları, 2015), 424.

[11] Süleyman Ateş, *İşârî Tefsîr Okulu [The School of Allusive Exegesis]* (Ankara University Faculty of Theology Publications, 1974), 19; İsmail Cerrahoğlu,

Scholars such as al-Zarkashī (d. 794AH/1392AD) and al-Suyūṭī (d. 911AH/1505AD) likewise reported that the Sufis' interpretations were not to be counted as *tafsīr*, but rather their statements concerning the Qur'ān consisted solely of the spiritual states they experienced during recitation and the meanings that were disclosed to them at those moments.[12]

The fact that Sufis designated their interpretations of the verses not as *tafsīr* but as *ishārah* has been interpreted to mean that they did not prioritize *ishārah* over *tafsīr*, nor did they regard it as its rival or

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Tefsir Tarihi [History of Exegesis] (Fecr Yayınları, 1996), 2:11; Fethi Ahmet Polat, "İşârî Tefsirin Kabul Şartları Çerçevesinde 'Fîhi Mâ Fîh'Te Yer Alan Kur'ân Yorumlarının Kritiği [Critique of Qur'anic Interpretations in 'Fihi Ma Fih' within the Framework of Acceptance Conditions of Allusive Exegesis]," *Mevlâna ve Mevlevîlik Sempozyumu* I (2007): 364; Mahmut Ay, "İşarî Tefsirde Yöntem Meselesi [The Problem of Method in Allusive Exegesis]," *İstanbul Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, no. 26 (2012): 62; Mehmet Zeki Süslü, "Tasavvufî Tefsir Metodu ve Bâtınî Te'vîl Geleneğiyle Mukayesesi [The Method of Sufi Exegesis and Its Comparison with the Tradition of Batini Interpretation]" (Ph.D. Thesis, Süleyman Demirel University, 2017), 15; Kadir Özköse, "Tasavvuf Kültüründe Bâtın ve Bâtınî/Ledünnî Bilgi Kavramlarının Referans Çerçevesi [The Reference Frame of the Concepts of Batin and Batini/Ledunni Knowledge in Sufi Culture]," 2018, 70.

[12] Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿAbdillāh al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān Fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 1983), 2:170-171; Jalāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān Fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, ed. Muṣṭafā Dīb al-Bughā (Dār al-Muṣṭafā, 2008), 2:1218-1221. Dihlawī, a scholar of Sufi inclination, also expressed similar views Walī Allāh Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Dihlawī, *Al-Fawz al-Kabīr Fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, trans. Muḥammad Anwar al-Badakhshānī (Bayt al-ʿIlm, 2006), 102.

alternative. In doing so, they also demonstrated that their interpretations were not produced according to the methodological rules of *tafsīr* and, consequently, did not claim to represent a definitive or objective meaning. Indeed, they did not employ the compound term "*ishārī tafsīr*"; rather, by presenting their interpretations through such expressions as "*ishārah*" or "*ishārī* meaning," they sought to indicate that these were not final, but rather that the verse in question alluded to these meanings and signified them indirectly.[13] These explanations hold true when *tafsīr* is employed as a technical term. However, in this article, when the expressions "*ishārī tafsīr*" or "Sufi *tafsīr*" are used, the term *tafsīr* will be employed in its lexical sense of explication, clarification, and exposition.

Ishārī Tafsīr

It is known that the first scholar to employ the compound term *ishārī tafsīr* in the modern period and to propose a definition of it was al-Zarqānī (d. 1367/1948). He defined *ishārī tafsīr* as "interpreting (*taʾwīl*) the Qurʾān, on account of a hidden indication perceived by those on the Sufi path (*sulūk*) and *taṣawwuf*, with a meaning beyond its apparent sense (*ẓāhir*), yet one that can be reconciled with that apparent sense."[14]

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[13] Ay, "İşarî Tefsirde Yöntem Meselesi," 63.

[14] Muḥammad ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil Al-ʿIrfān Fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, ed. Fawwāz Aḥmad Zumarlī (Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1990), 2:66. In the early modern period, prior to al-Zurqānī, al-Ālūsī articulated a similar definition under the designation of "*taʾwīl*." He defined *taʾwīl* as sacred indications and sublime knowledges that are unveiled to spiritual wayfarers from beneath the veils of expressions and that descend upon the hearts of the gnostics from the clouds of the unseen Ebū'l-Faḍl Shihābuddīn al-Sayyid Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ Al-Maʿānī Fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm Wa-al-Sabʿ al-Mathānī*, ed. ʿAlī ʿAbd

In the period following al-Zarqānī, it is observed that explanations presented under the heading of *ishārī tafsīr* continued within a similar framework. This type of *tafsīr* has been described as being based not on the Sufi's mere intellectual opinions, but on inspirations and indications that do not come to mind at first but arise in the heart according to the spiritual rank attained through ascetic practice (*riyāḍah*) and spiritual struggle (*mujāhadah*).[15] Although the emphasis placed in these definitions on Sufis and their modes of receiving knowledge is valuable for clarifying the definition, the similarity in name nonetheless gives rise to confusion, as the term evokes the *ishārah* of jurisprudence.

In this definition, the restriction of *ishārī tafsīr* to the people of *taṣawwuf*, together with the statement that it remains compatible with the outward sense, appears to be intended to underscore the legitimacy of Sufi interpretations. However, when one examines these interpretations, it becomes evident that in a significant number of cases a clear connection with the outward sense of the text cannot be established. For example, the interpretation of the expression "…*the*

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al-Bārī ʿAtiyya (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1994), 1:6; Ay, "İşarî Tefsirde Yöntem Meselesi," 61.

[15] Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa-al-Mufassirūn* (Maktabat Wahbah, n.d.), 2:261; Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith Fī ʿUlūm Al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿİlm li-al-Melāyīn, 1977), 296; Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Ṣābūnī, *Al-Tibyān Fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* (Tehran: Dār Iḥsān, 2003), 171; Cerrahoğlu, *Tefsir Tarihi*, 2:9; Ateş, *İşârî Tefsîr Okulu*, 19; Özköse, "Tasavvuf Kültüründe Bâtın ve Bâtınî/Ledünnî Bilgi Kavramlarının Referans Çerçevesi," 68; İsmail Çalışkan, "Tefsir ve Tasavvuf: Tasavvufi-İşârî Tefsir [Exegesis and Sufism: Sufi-Allusive Exegesis]," in *Sosyal Bilimlerde Disiplinlerarası Çalışmanın İmkânı: Tasavvuf Örneği* (Ankara University Publications, 2022), 87.

human devils…" in Q. 6:112 as referring to "the soul that commands evil (*al-nafs al-ammārah*)"[16] is a case in point. Likewise, interpreting the command of his Lord to Moses (as), who came to meet Him, "…*take off your sandals…*" (Q. 20:12), as meaning that the two sandals signify "nature (*tabʿ*) and the self (*nafs*)" which are to be abandoned,[17] or as symbolizing "this world and the Hereafter" meaning that "if you wish to enter Our presence, empty your heart of both the world and the Hereafter"[18] or even as meaning "abandon the two premises from which the proof is composed... you are now in the valley of gnosis (*maʿrifah*)"[19] may all be counted among interpretations whose link to the outward sense is tenuous. Similarly, the verse "*So look at the traces of God's mercy, how He revives the earth after its death*" (Q. 30:50), which occurs in a context enumerating the signs of God's power and mercy, is interpreted as "the hearts coming to life through remembrance (*dhikr*)"[20] a *taʾwīl* that is likewise disconnected from the context.

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[16] Aḥmad b. ʿUmar b. Muḥammad Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad ʿAlāʾ al-Dawlah Simnānī, *Al-Taʾwīlāt al-Najmiyya*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazīdī (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2009), 2:384; İsmāʿīl Ḥaqqī al-Bursevī, *Rūḥ Al-Bayān Fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2018), 3:93; 4:292.

[17] al-Bursevī, *Rūḥ Al-Bayān*, 1:215.

[18] Ebūʾl-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn ʿAjība, *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd Fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Majīd*, ed. Aḥmad ʿAbdullāh al-Qurashī Raslān (Cairo: al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li-al-Kitāb, 1999), 3:377, 379.

[19] al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ Al-Maʿānī*, 8:522.

[20] Ebū Muḥammad Sahl b. ʿAbdillāh al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr Al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaram li-al-Turāth, 2004), 219; Ebū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq Al-Tafsīr*, ed. Sayyid ʿImrān (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d.), 2:127-128. For similar interpretations, see also

In the same vein, the verse "*They ask you about wine and gambling; say: in them is great sin*" (Q. 2:219) is interpreted such that "wine" signifies the intellect's intoxication upon beholding the spiritual lights issuing from the eternal Presence, "gambling" denotes a person's being content with God alone and independent of all else, and "the sin in them" refers to the great difficulty of attaining such states[21]—this too belongs to the same category. Likewise, the term "*the menstruating woman*" in the verse prohibiting approaching menstruating women (Q. 2:222) is interpreted as "the soul immersed in the impurity of heedlessness and clad in the filth of love for the world."[22] This too is among those interpretations whose connection to the outward meaning of the text is difficult to establish. Doubtless, in the Sufi's inner world, these explanations have a connection with the verse. However, when the matter is approached from the standpoint of method and content, such interpretations must be subjected to a classification based on the connection they establish with the text.

Yunus Emre Gördük, known for his studies in the field of *ishārī tafsīr*, has recently defined *ishārī tafsīr* in his comprehensive work on the subject as follows: "It is the interpretation/exegesis of the Qur'ān, often by means of divine inspiration and a Lordly opening (*fatḥ rabbānī*), by

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Ebū al-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif Al-Ishārāt*, ed. Ibrāhīm Basyūnī (al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li-al-Kitāb, 2000), 3:124; al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ Al-Maʿānī*, 7:414.

21 Ibn ʿAjība, *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd*, 1:246-247.

22 Ibn ʿAjība, 1/253. For examples of Ibn ʿAjība's interpretations that are not consistent with the apparent (*ẓāhir*) meaning of the text, see also Mahmut Ay, "Ahmed b. Acîbe ve İşârî Tefsir Açısından 'El-Bahru'l-Medîd' [Ahmed b. Ajiba and 'al-Bahr al-Madid' in Terms of Allusive Exegesis]" (Ph.D. Thesis, Marmara University, 2010), 182–87.

verifying scholars (*muḥaqqiq ʿulamāʾ*), gnostics (*ʿārifūn*), and some people of spiritual wayfaring (*sulūk*), who have grasped the Qurʾān through deep reflection and contemplation, whereby they interpret the verses—on the condition that they do not, in general, contradict the outward sense of the Qurʾān—differently from their apparent meanings, owing to certain verbal, non-verbal, or spiritual indications."[23] In this definition, which claims to take into account all the points emphasized in the relevant sources, it is indeed possible to discern the traces of the explanations articulated around the concept of *ishārah* since the earliest periods, for the author offers a definition that encompasses both the usages in jurisprudence and Sufism. By stating that such interpretations may be produced by "verifying scholars, gnostics, and some people of spiritual wayfaring," he does not extend *ishārī tafsīr* to all Sufis, nor does he regard it as a form of interpretation exclusive to them alone.[24] Furthermore, by stating that it is carried out "often by means of divine inspiration and a Lordly opening," he both draws attention to the Sufi dimension of this kind of interpretation and, by means of the qualifier "often," prevents it from being reduced solely to inspiration and unveiling. By stating that it arises from "certain verbal, non-verbal, or spiritual indications," he also highlights both its juristic and Sufi dimensions. This is precisely the central issue we wish to focus on in this article: the broad scope of the concept of *ishārah*, its employment with different meanings across different disciplines, and the inclusion of each of these meanings—to varying degrees—in the definition of "*ishārī tafsīr*" constitute the basis

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[23] Yunus Emre Gördük, *İslam Geleneğinde İşârî Tefsir [Allusive Exegesis in Islamic Tradition]* (Istanbul: Kitâbi Yayınevi, 2023), 73.

[24] For the author's remarks in this regard, see also Gördük, *İslam Geleneğinde*, 74.

of the confusion. Therefore, a nomenclature and definition that distinguishes these usages from one another is indispensable.

At this point, we propose—as Gördük also notes, given that examples of *ishārī tafsīr* can be found even before the formative period of Sufism [25] —that, by foregrounding the use of the concept in jurisprudence, "*ishārī tafsīr*" be defined as "a mode of interpretation that brings out the various dimensions to which the verses point, by way of either their wording or their meaning, beyond the directly expressed sense of the Qur'anic text," and that the term be employed in a manner that encompasses all interpretations falling within this framework. In this approach, the connection with the verse may at times arise through a process of reflection that takes the verse as its starting point; at other times, it may emerge through the linking of a piece of knowledge that the Sufi has obtained by spiritual means with the verse. What is essential, however, is that the meaning thus reached can be connected to the verse. In this regard, it is of no consequence whether the interpreter belongs to the people of *taṣawwuf*, whether the interpretation has been obtained by spiritual means, or whether it contains elements of Sufi culture. Accordingly, the meanings articulated by the people of *taṣawwuf*—those they claim arise within them according to their spiritual ranks during their recitation or reflection upon the verses—should, if no connection with the text can be established, be designated not as "*ishārī*" but solely as "*taṣawwufī*." Nevertheless, some of these meanings can be connected to the text, and these may be designated as "*taṣawwufī-ishārī tafsīr*."

Within this framework we have set forth, interpretations that contain Sufi elements or are claimed to rest on unveiling but whose connection with the text cannot be established may be regarded as a

[25] Gördük, *İslam Geleneğinde,* 74.

separate category under the heading of "*taṣawwufī tafsīr*," while "*ishārī tafsīr*" constitutes a distinct category, and an intermediate category — the intersection of these two — may be spoken of as "*taṣawwufī-ishārī tafsīr*" (see Figure 1).

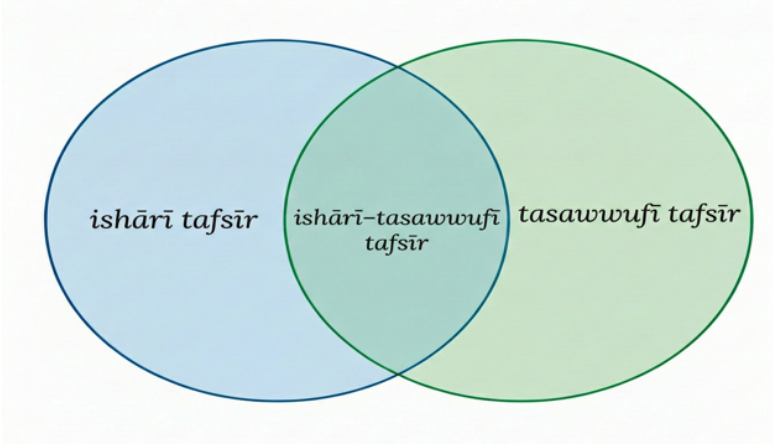

Figure 1: Venn diagram showing the relationship between *ishārī* and *taṣawwufī* tafsīr.

In making this classification, our aim is not to pass value judgments, but rather to draw attention to the qualitative differences among various types of interpretation and to name them as accurately as possible in accordance with their distinctive characteristics, thereby reducing the confusion that may arise in the minds of readers and providing a basis for sounder evaluations. Otherwise, when one speaks of *ishārī tafsīr*, it remains unclear whether what is meant is an interpretation arising from the indication of the text itself, or one issuing from the people of *taṣawwuf*—containing Sufi elements or resting on unveiling. Similarly, when we describe the interpretations of the people of *taṣawwuf* as "*ishārī*," it likewise remains unclear—owing to the different meanings they attach to the concept of *ishārah*—

whether this designation emphasizes the source of the interpretation or their distinctive mode of expression. Therefore, the use of accurate terminology holds an important place both in conveying what we mean and, ultimately, in being properly understood.

Now, let us show through examples that *ishārī tafsīr* is not an activity exclusive to Sufis, and that interpretations of this kind can be found in almost every *tafsīr* classified within the *dirāyah* category. For example, in *al-Kashshāf*, counted among the leading works of *dirāyah tafsīr*, the expression in Q. 46:15 which states that the period of pregnancy and weaning totals thirty months[26] has been taken to indicate that the minimum duration of pregnancy is six months. Such information does not appear in the wording itself. Al-Zamakhsharī arrives at this conclusion by citing the verse "*Mothers shall suckle their children for two complete years for those who wish to complete the nursing*" (Q. 2:233).[27] Likewise, al-Rāzī, one of the foremost figures of *dirāyah tafsīr*, derives from the continuation of the verse permitting those who fast to have sexual relations with their spouses during the nights of fasting—namely, "*...eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct from the black thread...*" (Q. 2:187)—the conclusion that the view holding that the fast of one who reaches dawn in a state of major ritual impurity (*junub*) is invalid is itself incorrect. This is because the verse permits eating,

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[26] The relevant part of the verse reads: ... وَحَمْلُهُۥ وَفِصَٰلُهُۥ ثَلَٰثُونَ شَهْرًا...

[27] Ebū al-Qāsim Jārullāh Maḥmūd b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqāʾiq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl Wa-ʿUyūn al-Aqāwīl Fī Wujūh al-Taʾwīl*, ed. ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd and ʿAlī Muḥammed Muʿavviḍ (Maktabat al-ʿUbaykān, 1998), 5:499. For similar interpretations, see also Ebū Manṣūr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah: Tafsīr al-Māturīdī*, ed. Majdī Bāsallūm (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2005), 9:245-246.

drinking, and sexual intercourse until the break of dawn. If a person is allowed to engage in sexual intercourse until dawn, then, when dawn arrives, he will inevitably be in a state of major ritual impurity.[28] As is evident, although the verse does not state this literally, the boundary drawn by the text makes it possible to deduce such a meaning. Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456AH/1064AD), known for the importance he attached to the outward sense of the Qur'ānic verses, may also be cited as a fine example of this matter: he derived from the phrase "…*do not even say 'uff' to them*…" in Q. 17:23, which addresses how one should treat one's parents, the ruling that striking or killing one's parents is forbidden. For no such wording appears in the verse itself. The verse commands kindness toward one's parents while forbidding the utterance of "uff," which is a lesser matter than striking or killing.[29] Therefore, if a lesser form of harm is prohibited, the more serious ones are all the more prohibited. The text does not say "do not strike them," but such a meaning is derived from the indication of the verse.

Interpretations in which the Sufis ground knowledge they claim to have acquired through unveiling or inspiration in the indications of the verses fall within the category we have designated as "*taṣawwufī-ishārī tafsīr*." For example, if we take into account Ibn al-

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[28] Ebū ʿAbdillāh Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 5:119. For similar interpretations, see also Ebū Bakr Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Rāzī al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq Qamḥāwī (Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1992), 1:288.

[29] Ebū Muḥammad ʿAlī b. Aḥmad b. Saʿīd Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Iḥkām Fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām*, ed. Aḥmed Muḥammad Shākir (Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, n.d.), 7:56-57. For similar interpretations, see also Muḥammad b. Yūsuf b. ʿAlī b. Yūsuf Abū Ḥayyān, *Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ Fi al-Tafsīr*, ed. Ṣidqī Muḥammad Jamīl (Dār al-Fikr, 2010), 7:37.

ʿArabī's statements that *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* was bestowed upon him through divine inspiration, [30] his explanations concerning the differences between the verses of *Sūrat al-Kahf* in which the expression "*in shā' Allāh*" occurs may be regarded as belonging to the category of *taṣawwufī-ishārī tafsīr*, insofar as they take into account the arrangement (*tartīb*) of the text. He states that in Sūrat al-Kahf, verses 23-24, God says:وَلَا تَقُولَنَّ لِشَاْيْءٍ إِنِّي فَاعِلٌ ذَٰلِكَ غَدًا "*Do not say of anything, 'I will do that tomorrow,' unless Allah wills,*" and that here the expression "*in shā' Allāh*" is deferred—by means of the exception particle — to a position after the action has been mentioned, which he describes as a Muḥammadan act. In contrast, in *Sūrat al-Kahf*, verse 69, it is reported that Moses (as) says: قَالَ سَتَجِدُنِيٓ إِن شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ صَابِرًا وَلَآ أَعْصِي لَكَ أَمْرًا "*You will find me, if Allah wills, patient, and I will not disobey you in any matter,*" and Ibn al-ʿArabī draws attention to the fact that here "*in shā' Allāh*" precedes the verb.

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[30] Ibn al-ʿArabī states, in the experiential account he relates at the beginning of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, that this work was bestowed upon him through divine inspiration. For the details of this experience, see .Muḥyiddīn Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, directed by Aḥmad Shamsuddīn (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1999), 1:79-80; Claude Addas, *İbn Arabi -Kibrit-i Ahmer'in Peşinde- [Quest for the Red Sulpher The Life of Ibn ʿArabī]*, trans. Atila Ataman (Gelenek Yayıncılık, 2004), 210–11; Michel Chodkiewicz, *Sahilsiz Bir Umman [An Ocean Without Shore]*, trans. Atila Ataman (İstanbul: Gelenek Yayıncılık, 2003), 50–52; Mahmud Erol Kılıç, "El-Fütûhâtü'l-Mekkiyye," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (TDV Publications, 1996), 13:13:251; M. Mustafa Çakmaklıoğlu, *İbn Arabî'de Ma'rifetin İfadesi [Expression of Gnosis in Ibn ʿArabī]* (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2007), 311–14; Hasan İslam Sak, *İbnü'l-Arabî'nin Kur'an İlimlerine Yaklaşımı -El-Fütûhatü'l-Mekkiyye Örneği- [Ibn al-ʿArabī's Approach to Qur'anic Sciences: The Case of al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya]* (İnsan Yayınları, 2023), 88–89.

He then explains Moses' inability to persevere by the fact that he placed "*in shā' Allāh*" before the act, whereas the action itself came afterwards. Had he, as in the Muḥammadan expression, mentioned the act first and then "*in shā' Allāh*," he would have persevered, he says. From this, he concludes that one must act in accordance with the wisdom of God's ordering of things—that what God has placed first must be placed first and what He has deferred must be deferred; otherwise, a hidden contention arises, giving rise to deprivation.[31] As is evident, Ibn al-ʿArabī conveys the meaning he has obtained by taking into account the context of the verses and drawing attention to the subtleties in the arrangement of the text, thereby expressing the textual indication (*ishārah*) of the knowledge he received through unveiling. Likewise, Ibn al-ʿArabī's statement concerning *Sūrat al-Shūrā*, verse 40, which speaks of retaliation—that in the verse "*The recompense of an evil is an evil like it,*" God names retaliation itself as "evil" and thereby encourages forgiveness[32]—may also be regarded as a *taṣawwufī-ishārī* interpretation, since it demonstrates that he takes into account the indication of the text in his interpretation.

At this point, an important subtlety pertaining to the subject should be noted. When we state that, for *ishārī tafsīr*, we will take as our point of departure the use of the concept of *ishārah* in the discipline of jurisprudence, we do not mean only those inferences that serve as examples of the category of *dalālat al-ishārah* (the indication of *ishārah*) among the modes of signification of the wording. Rather, we mean all interpretations that fall under the modes of signification beyond the indication of the explicit wording (*dalālat al-ʿibārah)*—namely, the indication of the text (*dalālat al-naṣṣ*), the indication of necessity (*dalālat*

[31] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, 3:394.

[32] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Al-Futūḥāt* 1:342.

al-iqtiḍā'), and the indication of *ishārah*[33]—that is, all interpretations whose connection to the text, beyond its outward sense, can be established by way of wording or meaning. At the same time, we should note that we are referring to a more comprehensive phenomenon, one that is not confined to verses dealing with legal rulings alone but foregrounds the dimension of meaning. In fact, in this form, the concept of *ishārī*, as employed in the discipline of Qur'ānic exegesis, is evaluated within a distinct framework, different from its usage in both jurisprudence and Sufism.

The Distinction between *Ishārī Tafsīr* and *Taṣawwufī Tafsīr*

In this section of our study, we aim to address certain classifications of *ishārī tafsīr*. Following al-Zarqānī's introduction of the compound term "*ishārī tafsīr*," many works written in the fields of Qur'ānic sciences and the history of *tafsīr* have attempted to formulate definitions and classifications. Here, we shall first focus on the classification of al-Dhahabī (d. 1397AH/1977AD). For this classification has significantly influenced studies conducted in the period after him. It can be observed that in many works dealing with *ishārī tafsīr*, explanations are made on the basis of this distinction.[34] Al-Dhahabī, who treats the

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[33] For the types of textual indication (*dalālāt al-alfāẓ*) in Islamic jurisprudence and detailed discussion thereof, see Ali Bakkal, "Örnekler Bağlamında Usûl-i Fıkıhta 'İşaretin Delâleti' Kavramının Kapsamı [The Scope of the Concept 'Signification of the Sign' in the Methodology of Islamic Law in the Context of Examples]," *Turkish Academic Research Review* 7, no. 1 (2022): 265–66.

[34] Ateş, *İşârî Tefsîr Okulu*, 19–20; Cerrahoğlu, *Tefsir Tarihi*, 2:9-11; Fahd b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Sulaymān al-Rūmī, *Ittijāhāt Al-Tafsīr Fi al-Qarn al-Rābiʿ ʿAshar* (Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1997), 1:366-368; Mannāʿ al-Qaṭṭān, *Mebāḥith*

issue under the heading "the *tafsīr* of the Sufis (*tafsīr al-ṣūfiyyah*)," grounds this classification in his distinction between "theoretical Sufism" (*al-taṣawwuf al-naẓarī*), which is based on investigation and inquiry, and "practical Sufism" (*al-taṣawwuf al-ʿamalī),* which is grounded in ascetic practice. According to this scheme, theoretical Sufism gives rise to theoretical Sufi *tafsīr*, whereas practical Sufism gives rise to *ishārī* Sufi *tafsīr*. In his view, theoretical Sufi *tafsīr* comprises the interpretations produced by Sufis who construct their understanding of *taṣawwuf* upon theoretical inquiry and philosophical doctrines, and who interpret the Qur'ān by prioritizing these theories and doctrines; such interpretations, he maintains, are unacceptable. *Ishārī Sufi tafsīr*, by contrast, is based on the spiritual discipline (*riyāḍah*) and unveiling of the Sufis who follow the path of spiritual wayfaring. Tracing the historical foundations of this mode of interpretation back not merely to the spread of the Sufis and their methods but even to the period of revelation, al-Dhahabī states that this form of interpretation is not a later innovation and regards such interpretations as legitimate.[35] In al-Dhahabī's classification, however, *ishārī tafsīr* is not

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Fī ʿUlūm Al-Qurʾān (Maktabat Wahbah, 2000), 346–48; Ahmet Çelik, *Tasavvufî Tefsir Âlûsî Örneği [Sufi Exegesis: The Case of Al-Alusi]* (Ekev Yayınevi, 2002), 33–35. In his study examining Ibn al-ʿArabī's Qur'ānic interpretations from the perspective of ishārī exegesis, Ağbal provides, in the footnotes on the relevant pages, a list of works both influenced by al-Dhahabī's classification and those that criticize it. See Davut Ağbal, *İbn Arabî'de İşârî Tefsir [Allusive Exegesis in Ibn ʿArabī]* (Litera Yayıncılık, 2017), 52–53.

[35] al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa-al-Mufassirūn*, 2:251-252, 256, 259, 261; Nihat Uzun, "Tefsir Disiplini Açısından Bâtınî ve İşârî Yorumun İlmî Değeri [The Scientific Value of Batini and Allusive Interpretation in Terms of the Discipline of Exegesis]," 2018, 53–54.

treated as an independent category but is restricted to the knowledge Sufis receive through inspiration, and is thus subsumed under Sufi *tafsīr*.[36] This yields a limited framework, since it reduces the concept to *taṣawwuf* and leaves out the wording-based extensions of meaning made on the basis of the indications of the text. Moreover, because al-Dhahabī bases his classification on the interpreter's Sufi state, he arrives at a definition that is not text-centered but subject-centered—one that is unverifiable by the reader. From this perspective, by distancing *ishārī tafsīr* from an epistemological foundation, al-Dhahabī's definition reduces it to personal spiritual experience, thereby making the objective evaluation of the concept difficult.

Al-Dhahabī fails to use consistent terminology even in naming this category that he calls *ishārī Sufi tafsīr*. Where he first makes this distinction, he employs the expression "*fayḍī Sufi* or *ishārī*"; in the heading under which he discusses the matter in detail, he refers to it as "Sufi or *ishārī tafsīr*"; and immediately beneath that heading, he uses the phrase "*fayḍī* or *ishārī tafsīr*." In the subsequent lines, he also refers to the same type under the designations "*Sufi ishārī tafsīr*" and simply "*ishārī tafsīr*."[37] These varying appellations indicate that even in al-Dhahabī's own mind, there was an ambiguity regarding the designation of this type of *tafsīr*. Moreover, al-Dhahabī's classification has been criticized for its lack of clarity in determining the position of Sufi *tafsīr* within the discipline of Qur'ānic exegesis. It has been argued that the core of this problem lies in the concept of *ishārah*; as al-Dhahabī uses it as well, the notion of *ishārah* neither encompasses the entirety of Sufi interpretation nor serves to distinguish what is Sufi from what is

[36] Gördük, *İslam Geleneğinde*, 147.

[37] al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa-al-Mufassirūn*, 2:251, 261.

non-Sufi.[38] We concur with this view. In addition, we consider his designation of this type of interpretation as "*ishārī*" to be problematic, since it evokes the term's usage in jurisprudence.

It is observed that a distinction between *ishārī tafsīr* and *taṣawwufī tafsīr* has been voiced in some recently written studies. For instance, *Subḥī Ṣāliḥ*—who defines *ishārī tafsīr* as "interpreting the verses beyond their outward sense while attempting to integrate their manifest and hidden meanings"—considers it closely related to the *tafsīr* of the Sufis; furthermore, he notes that *shaṭaḥāt* (ecstatic utterances) predominate in Sufi *tafsīr*, which entails an obscurity that those engaged in spiritual matters can transcend.[39] While this distinction is valuable, it contains ambiguity regarding the definition and scope of *taṣawwufī tafsīr*, as well as the points where this type of *tafsīr* converges with or diverges from *ishārī tafsīr*. Moreover, his evaluation of all Sufi interpretations as being of the same nature is inapt. For there exist Sufi interpretations that, despite bearing Sufi elements, establish an outwardly reasonable connection with the text and are not dominated by *shaṭaḥāt*.

Some studies on this subject have also noted that, although *ishārī tafsīr* encompassed a broad field in our classical sources, it was later reduced to Sufi *tafsīr*; and it has been stated that *ishārī tafsīr* constitutes a wider field of activity that includes *taṣawwufī tafsīr* within it.[40] We too find this observation regarding the reduction of *ishārī tafsīr*

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[38] Ağbal, *İbn Arabî'de İşârî Tefsir*, 54–55.

[39] Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith*, 295–96.

[40] Muhammed Çelik, "İşarî Tefsirin Sınırları ve Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır'da İşarî Tefsir [The Limits of Allusive Exegesis and Allusive Exegesis in Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır]," *Dicle Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 4, no. 2 (2002): 4; Gördük, *İslam Geleneğinde*, 151–52.

to *taṣawwufī tafsīr* to be valid and critique this reductionist approach. For this identification is also one of the primary causes of the conceptual confusion surrounding *ishārī tafsīr*. Nevertheless, we consider it more appropriate to view these two types as distinct sets. This is because *taṣawwufī tafsīr*—even if we set aside the Sufi identity of the *mufassir*—differs from *ishārī tafsīr* due to its distinctive terminology, aims, and epistemic foundations. In this respect, it would be inapt to evaluate the *tafsīr* of the Sufis entirely within the category of *ishārī tafsīr*.

Fahd b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Rūmī is another scholar who has drawn attention to the distinction between *ishārī tafsīr* and *taṣawwufī tafsīr*. In his work, citing a view he attributes to Sayyid Aḥmad Khalīl, al-Rūmī designates the *tafsīr* produced by the Sufis as "*ramzī tafsīr*" (symbolic exegesis), thereby distinguishing it from *ishārī tafsīr*. He further examines *ishārī tafsīr* under two categories: spiritual (*maʾnawī*) and lexical (*lafẓī*). In his view, spiritual *ishārī* refers to an interpretation that is connected to the indication of the general meaning of a verse or *sūrah* and points to another meaning concealed in a concise (*ijmālī*) manner. This form of *tafsīr*, which constitutes an understanding God grants to whomever He wills among His servants, is also not in contradiction with the text. As examples of this type, he cites Ibn ʿAbbās's inference from *Sūrat al-Naṣr* regarding the impending death of the Prophet (PBUH), and ʿUmar's reaction on the Day of the Greater Pilgrimage (*ḥajj al-akbar*) when the verse "*Today I have perfected your religion for you*" (Q 5:3) was revealed: whereas joy was expected, ʿUmar wept, saying, "We were advancing in our religion; but now that it has reached perfection, [know that] nothing that has reached perfection can do anything but diminish."[41] According to al-Rūmī, lexical *ishārī*,

[41] These examples have been cited in many works as instances of *ishārī tafsīr*. For some of them, see al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa-al-Mufassirūn*, 2:263-264;

on the other hand, is interpretation conducted by establishing a connection with a specific indication of the wording (*lafẓ*), through which another meaning implicit within the verse's general context is pointed out. As examples, he mentions ʿIzz b. ʿAbd al-Salām's deduction from the verse "*And his wife—[too]—a carrier of firewood (in the Hellfire)*" (Q 111:4) that the marriages of unbelievers are also legally valid, and the inference made by exegetes that the child is affiliated with the father rather than the mother—thereby placing the responsibility for maintenance upon the father—based on the verse regarding the sustenance and clothing of nursing women (Q 2:233). For al-Rūmī, "*lexical ishārī tafsīr*" is sounder than "spiritual *ishārī*" as it avoids muddying the meaning and does not contravene either the revealed text (*naṣṣ*) or its wording (*lafẓ*). He states that *ramzī tafsīr* is a method based on the Sufi's progress through ecstasy (*wajd*), spiritual taste (*dhawq*), and spiritual stations until reaching the station of gnosis (*maʿrifah*).[42]

Al-Rūmī's treatment of *ishārī tafsīr* within the framework of a lexical or spiritual connection to the text, together with his classification of the interpretations of the people of *taṣawwuf* as a separate category, is, in our view as well, apt. However, we consider his designation of the interpretations of the people of *taṣawwuf* as "*ramzī tafsīr*" (symbolic exegesis) to be inadequate in capturing their interpretations. For this designation primarily foregrounds their modes of expression while failing to sufficiently reflect the other features that distinguish their *tafsīr* from other types of interpretation. Yet the distinctive character of *taṣawwufī tafsīr* lies not merely in its recourse to forms of expression such as implication (*īmāʾ*), symbol (*ramz*),

Ateş, *İşârî Tefsîr Okulu*, 36–37; Ağbal, *İbn Arabî'de İşârî Tefsir*, 53.

[42] al-Rūmī, *Ittijāhāt Al-Tafsīr*, 1:407-409.

consideration (*i'tibār*), and indication (*ishārah*), but in its possession of its own terminology, training process, and source of knowledge. Moreover, expressing meanings derived from the verses through symbols (*rumūz*) is a mode of expression that any interpreter with a refined literary taste may employ; it is not an exclusive characteristic of the Sufis. Consequently, his designation does not suffice in distinguishing *taṣawwufī tafsīr* from other types of interpretation. On the other hand, it can be seen that, in al-Rūmī's classification, *ishārī tafsīr* and the interpretations of the people of *taṣawwuf* are treated as entirely independent and separate sets. Yet some interpretations made by Sufis also possess an *ishārī* character in that a connection with the text can be established. For this reason, excluding such interpretations altogether from the category of *ishārī tafsīr* is also inapt. As we have proposed in this article, those Sufi interpretations that maintain their connection with the text should be designated as "*taṣawwufī–ishārī tafsīr*," and a more permeable classification between these two domains should be adopted.

Conclusions

In this study, which has re-examined the meaning and scope of the compound term "*ishārī tafsīr*," it has been seen that a significant portion of the debates surrounding this concept stems from conflating the differing meanings of the concept of *ishārah* in the disciplines of jurisprudence and *taṣawwuf* under a single compound term. This has led to text-centered inferences and Sufi-specific interpretations being evaluated under the same heading, resulting in conceptual ambiguity.

The central thesis advanced throughout the article is that the distinguishing feature of *ishārī tafsīr* should not be sought in who provides the interpretation or through what epistemic means, but rather in whether the proposed meaning possesses a demonstrable

connection with the Qur'ānic text at the level of wording or meaning. Within this framework, *ishārī tafsīr* is evaluated as a method of inference that encompasses meanings extending beyond the direct expression of the Qur'ānic text —meanings derived from the text's indications and maintaining a clear link to it. From this perspective, it appears more appropriate to situate *ishārī tafsīr* within the framework of reason-based exegesis (*dirāyah tafsīr*).

By contrast, the inclusion of all interpretations voiced by the people of *taṣawwuf* concerning the verses within this category is methodologically problematic. For *taṣawwufī tafsīr* is distinguished from other types of interpretation not only by its reliance on unveiling or inspiration but also by its distinctive terminology, pedagogical objectives, and understanding of knowledge. Interpretations that lack a clear connection with the text and that primarily reflect the Sufi's inner experience and spiritual journey are therefore more coherently designated as *taṣawwufī tafsīr* rather than *ishārī tafsīr*.

On the other hand, it is also evident that certain Sufi interpretations—despite their *taṣawwufī* content—can be explicated through their relationship to the arrangement, verbal structure, or context of the text. Such explanations lie at the intersection of *taṣawwufī tafsīr* and *ishārī tafsīr* and should be designated as "*taṣawwufī–ishārī tafsīr*." This approach offers a more balanced classification by neither excluding the interpretations of the people of *taṣawwuf* wholesale from the domain of *ishārī tafsīr* nor reducing this domain to *taṣawwuf*.

In conclusion, the distinction proposed in this study aims to ground the concept of *ishārī tafsīr* on a more explicit, objective, and text-centered footing. Such a classification will both prevent the conflation of *ishārī tafsīr* and *taṣawwufī tafsīr* and contribute to the development of more consistent and auditable criteria for evaluating Qur'ānic interpretations. Given that accurate conceptualization is a

prerequisite for sound understanding, we are of the opinion that this distinction will bring greater clarity to the ongoing discussions in the *tafsīr* literature.

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Review Essay

Said Nursi's Perspective of Islamic Spirituality

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Abstract

This article re-examines the concepts of "religion" and "spirituality" within an Islamic framework by situating them in contemporary academic discussions and in selected writings of Said Nursi. While Islamic scholarship traditionally treats spirituality as an inner dimension of din, modern disciplinary approaches to religion have reshaped how these terms are analysed and compared. Drawing on recent scholarship in religious studies, anthropology, and Sufi thought, this study clarifies the terms and explores their interrelationship in light of Islamic metaphysics, Qur'ānic ethics, and the spiritual psychology found in Nursi's *Risale-i Nur*. The article argues that although religion

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and spirituality are sometimes treated as distinct domains in modern discourse, Islamic intellectual traditions view them as mutually constitutive, with spirituality functioning as the interior realization of the divine guidance articulated through revelation, law, and prophetic teachings. The study concludes that a comprehensive understanding of spirituality within Islam requires acknowledging its rootedness in the broader structures of din, its historical expressions, and its ongoing reinterpretation in modern Muslim thought.
Keywords: Islam; *Laṭāʾif*; Religion; Spirituality.

Introduction

The study of religion and spirituality has undergone significant conceptual expansion over the last several decades, particularly in religious studies, anthropology, Islamic intellectual history, and sociology. Modern theorists have demonstrated that the category of "religion", often presumed to be universal, is historically contingent. At the same time, the notion of "spirituality" has increasingly become associated with individualised practices of self-cultivation. These developments necessitate revisiting how Islamic thought conceptualises the interrelationship between *dīn* (religion) and *rūḥaniyyah/taṣawwuf* (spirituality). Islam presents a vision in which these terms are not separate or parallel domains but mutually constitutive aspects of a single moral, legal, and metaphysical system.

Talal Asad's critique of the category of "religion" has been particularly influential. In *Genealogies of Religion*, Asad argues that the modern definition of religion as a privatised, belief-centred system emerged from specific Christian and Enlightenment contexts and

cannot be uncritically applied to non-Western traditions.[1] Jonathan Z. Smith similarly emphasises that "religion" is not a native term of many cultures but a second-order, comparative construct developed by scholars.[2] These theoretical insights are crucial when studying Islam, because the Qur'ānic term *dīn* denotes a comprehensive orientation involving law, ethics, ritual practice, communal identity, and spiritual refinement—far broader than the modern Western construct of "religion."

Debates about "spirituality" have likewise expanded. Charles Taylor, in *A Secular Age*, describes the emergence of "the buffered self", which favours individualised spiritual seeking over communal religious authority.[3] Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas argue that modern spirituality reflects a "subjective turn" emphasising personal experience, inner authenticity, and self-realisation.[4] In contrast, Islamic traditions reject the dichotomy between spirituality and religion. Spirituality (*iḥsān*, *taṣawwuf*) is the inner dimension of *dīn*, manifested through prayer, remembrance (*dhikr*), moral refinement, and cultivation of character.

Classical Islamic scholarship provides a rich vocabulary for conceptualising this unity. Al-Ghazālī, in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, defines the spiritual path as an integrated process through which ethical practice,

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[1] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

[2] Jonathan Z. Smith "Religion, Religions, Religious", in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269–284.

[3] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 473–504.

[4] Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 1–19.

ritual observance, and inner purification converge.[5] Ibn al-Qayyim similarly argues that the heart attains proper spiritual illumination only through disciplined adherence to the *sharī'ah*.[6] The Qur'ān repeatedly links spirituality to righteous action and moral struggle (e.g., 91:7–10, 2:183), emphasising that inner states derive from embodied religious practice.

In modern Muslim contexts, the thought of Said Nursi offers a significant contribution to this discourse. Nursi's *Risale-i Nur* corpus conceptualises spirituality through the activation of subtle human faculties (*laṭā'if*), moral consciousness, and contemplation of divine signs. Serif Mardin's landmark study argues that Nursi articulated a spiritually resilient Islamic worldview during an era of intense secularisation in Turkey, presenting inwardness as ethical resistance rather than withdrawal.[7] Studies by Ahmet Karamustafa, Elisabeth Özdalga, and Mark Sedgwick further show that Islamic spirituality remains embodied in ritual practice, communal pedagogy, and scriptural hermeneutics.

Thus, an Islamic understanding of the relationship between religion and spirituality must be grounded in both classical doctrines and contemporary scholarship. The following sections examine the conceptual meanings of "religion" and "spirituality" and analyse their interrelationship within Islamic thought. By drawing on Qur'ānic exegesis, Sufi metaphysics, Nursi's writings, and modern academic

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[5] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazāli, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005), 13–15.

[6] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Madarij al-Salikin*, (Dar al-Hadith, 2003), 41–57.

[7] Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, (SUNY Press, 1989), 45–78.

theories, this study aims to clarify how Islam integrates outward practice and inward awareness into a unified moral-spiritual vision.

What is Religion?

The concept of "religion" has been the subject of extensive theoretical critique in modern scholarship, challenging the assumption that it designates a universal, timeless human category. Talal Asad's influential analysis in *Genealogies of Religion* argues that the modern definition of religion—typically understood as an inner, belief-centred domain—emerged from specific Christian and Enlightenment contexts.[8] It cannot, he argues, be uncritically applied to non-Western traditions without distorting their internal logic. Jonathan Z. Smith likewise insists that "religion" is not a native concept in most cultures but a second-order scholarly abstraction created to classify and compare traditions.[9] These insights are essential when approaching Islam, because the Qur'ānic and classical Arabic term *dīn* far exceeds the semantic scope of the English word "religion."

In Islamic intellectual tradition, *dīn* denotes a comprehensive moral, legal, spiritual, and social order revealed by God. Al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī defines *dīn* as "submission and obedience to a divine sovereign order," rooted in truth, justice, and ethical coherence.[10] Al-Ghazālī emphasises that *dīn* integrates ritual practice, doctrinal belief, moral refinement, and spiritual awareness, constituting a unified path of human flourishing. [11] Ibn Taymiyyah similarly argues that *dīn* combines inner faith (*īman*) with outward action (*'amal*), creating an

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[8] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion,* 27–54.

[9] Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," 269–284.

[10] Rāghib al-Isfāhanī, *Mufradat Alfaz al-m*, (Dar al-Qalam, 1992), 189.

[11] Al-Ghazāli, *Ihya'*, 13–17.

indivisible relationship between internal states and external embodiment.[12]

The Qur'ān uses *dīn* in multiple interrelated senses: divine judgment (1:4), divine law (3:19), moral accountability (51:6), and a total orientation of life toward God (30:30). This semantic richness underscores that *din* is not reducible to institutional practice alone but functions as an existential framework integrating belief, ethics, spirituality, and communal identity. Wilfred Cantwell Smith's argument that "religion" as a reified entity is foreign to many premodern cultures reinforces the idea that Islamic *dīn* is not a static institution, but a lived orientation expressed through personal faith and communal tradition.[13]

Modern scholars of Islamic law highlight the holistic epistemology embedded in *dīn*. Wael Hallaq explains that the *sharī'ah* historically operated not as a rigid code but as a moral-legal system animated by ethical intent, spiritual insight, and social responsibility.[14] This multidimensional understanding aligns with the classical integration of law, ethics, and spirituality found in the works of al-Ghazālī, al-Qushayrī, and Ibn al-Qayyim.

Said Nursi also presents religion as a comprehensive mode of knowing, being, and acting. In the *Risale-i Nur*, he describes *din* as a harmonious system that refines the intellect, enlightens the conscience, and activates the spiritual faculties (*laṭā'if*). Serif Mardin observes that Nursi's understanding of religion is not merely doctrinal but

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[12] Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmu' al-Fatawa*, (King Fahd Complex, 2004), 289–290.

[13] Willfred Cantwell Smith,*The Meaning and End of Religion* (Fortress Press, 1991), 15–37.

[14] Wael B. Hallaq, *Shari'a: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 103–140.

experiential and ethical, offering a model of religious life grounded in inner transformation and intellectual engagement.[15]

Thus, an academically robust definition of "religion" in the Islamic context cannot rely on modern Western categories. Rather, *dīn* must be understood as a holistic divine order encompassing belief, practice, ethics, spirituality, and communal life. This framework shapes the Muslim's entire orientation toward God and the world.

What is Spirituality?

The concept of "spirituality" has become increasingly prominent in contemporary academic discourse, although its definition varies significantly across disciplines. In modern Western scholarship, spirituality often refers to individualised, subjective, and experiential dimensions of meaning-making that may or may not be connected to institutional religion. However, within Islamic intellectual traditions—whether classical, post-classical, or modern—spirituality (*rūḥaniyyah*, *iḥsān*, *taṣawwuf*) is not conceived as an autonomous sphere independent of religion but as the essential internalisation, realisation, and experiential unfolding of *dīn*. To understand Islamic spirituality, it is necessary to situate it within Qur'ānic anthropology, Sufi metaphysics, ethical psychology, and the transmitted practices of the Prophet (PBUH).

Contemporary scholarship frequently defines spirituality as a personal search for the sacred, the cultivation of inner awareness, or an orientation toward meaning, transcendence, or self-actualisation. Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead identify the rise of "subjective-life spirituality," in which authenticity and personal freedom replace

[15] Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey*, 55–70.

doctrinal authority.[16] Robert Wuthnow similarly explains that spirituality in late modernity often prioritises inner experience over collective religious structures.[17] Although such definitions illuminate trends in Western societies, they are inadequate to describe Islamic spirituality because they rest on individualistic assumptions foreign to Islamic frameworks of selfhood, ethics, and metaphysics.

Islamic spirituality cannot be reduced to private experience, emotional states, or non-institutional forms of religiosity. Instead, it emerges through disciplined conformity to divine command, moral purification, and sustained engagement with revealed guidance. Talal Asad's analysis of embodied religious discipline helps explain this distinction. Asad argues that in traditions such as Islam, "the formation of a pious self is inseparable from practices of the body, speech, and intention".[18] Thus, spirituality in Islam is socially anchored, ethically structured, and conceptually embedded within a scriptural tradition.

Foundations of Islamic Spirituality

The Qur'ān repeatedly emphasises cultivating the inward self as the locus of moral and spiritual transformation. The human soul (*nafs*) is portrayed as a dynamic entity capable of growth or corruption. The Qur'ān identifies various states of the soul—*nafs al-ammarah* (the commanding soul inclined to evil; 12:53), *nafs al-lawwāmah* (the self-reproaching soul; 75:2), and *nafs al-mutma'innah* (the soul at peace;

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[16] Heelas and Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution*, 1–22.

[17] Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (University of California Press, 1998), 3–15.

[18] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, (Stanford University Press, 2003), 205–230.

89:27). These states reflect levels of spiritual development rather than separate entities.

The Qur'ānic emphasis on *taqwā* (God-consciousness) provides the ethical orientation of Islamic spirituality. Verses such as 2:183—"Fasting has been prescribed…so that you may attain *taqwā*"—demonstrate that ritual obligations cultivate inward awareness. Similarly, Qur'ān 91:7-10 describes the soul's dual potential and the necessity of purification (*tazkiyah*). These verses show that spirituality is inseparable from righteous action, worship, and moral struggle.

The prophetic hadith of Gabriel (Sahih Muslim, 1:1) defines religion as having three interrelated components: *Islam* (exterior practice), *īmān* (interior belief), and *iḥsān* (spiritual excellence). The definition of *iḥsān*—"to worship God as though you see Him, and if you do not see Him, to know that He sees you"—is the most authoritative articulation of Islamic spirituality. As al-Nawawi explains, *iḥsān* is the realisation of presence with God (*murāqabah*) and the refinement of intention.[19] This foundational hadith confirms that spirituality is integral to religion rather than an optional or separate domain.

Classical Muslim scholars developed elaborate systems to describe the stages, states, dynamics, and metaphysics of spirituality. Among the most influential were:

i. Al-Qushayrī (d. 1074) — His *Risalah* categorises spiritual states (*aḥwāl*) such as awe, intimacy, trust, fear, and love, and spiritual

[19] Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Sharh Sahih Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj*, Vol. (1) (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1991), 117–120.

stations (*maqāmāt*) like repentance, patience, gratitude, sincerity, and reliance.[20]

ii. Al-Hujwīrī (d. 1072) — In *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, he emphasises ethics, ascetic discipline, companionship, and the inner illumination of the heart.[21]

iii. Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) — His *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* synthesises law, theology, ethics, and Sufism; he describes spirituality as the purification of the heart from blameworthy traits and the acquisition of virtues.[22]

iv. Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240) — His metaphysical writings elaborate on spiritual ontologies, divine names, and the cosmology of the human spirit.[23]

These frameworks demonstrate that spirituality is not merely emotional piety but an intellectual, ethical, and metaphysical discipline grounded in regular practices—*dhikr*, fasting, prayer, generosity, contemplation of the Qur'ān, and moral vigilance.

Spiritual Psychology and the Subtle Faculties (*Laṭā'if*)

A significant dimension of Islamic spirituality concerns the development of the *laṭā'if*—subtle spiritual faculties that illuminate different dimensions of human receptivity. The Kubrawiyah and Naqshbandīyyah traditions, particularly through Najm al-Dīn Kubra

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[20] 'Abdul al-Karim al-Qusyharī, *Al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah*, (Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 2007), 35–95.

[21] 'Ali al-Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, (Sheikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1992), 83–130.

[22] al-Ghazāli, *Ihya',* 13–25.

[23] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*, (SUNY Press, 1989), 45–90.

and later Ahmad Sirhindī, emphasised these faculties as centers of spiritual perception.[24] The *laṭā'if* typically include *Qalb* (the spiritual heart), *Rūḥ* (spirit), *Sirr* (inner secret), *Khafī* (hidden consciousness) and *Akhfa* (most profound hidden awareness).

Said Nursi adapts this tradition, describing *laṭā'if* as spiritual capacities—conscience (*wijdān*), intellect, emotions, spiritual intuition—that allow humans to recognise divine signs. For Nursi, spirituality requires activating these faculties through ethical discipline, prayer, and reflective engagement with revelation.[25] Serif Mardin notes that Nursi's spiritual psychology functions as a modern translation of classical Sufi ideas into rational, Qur'ānic language suitable for a secularising era.[26]

Islamic spirituality is inseparable from ritual actions. Prayer (*ṣalāh*) cultivates humility and presence; fasting disciplines desire and awakens compassion; almsgiving purifies the heart of miserliness; pilgrimage symbolises spiritual journey; and Qur'ānic recitation shapes the believer's consciousness. William Chittick explains that rituals mold the inner self by engraving divine meanings onto the heart through repetition, rhythm, and intention.[27] Unlike modern secular spirituality, Islamic spirituality grows through submission rather than autonomy.

Islamic spirituality is closely tied to ethics. Al-Ghazalī lists virtues such as sincerity, patience, trust, and gratitude as essential for spiritual

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[24] Najm al-Dīn Kubra, *Fawa'ih al-Jamal*, (Manshurat-i Bidar, 2002), 57–80.

[25] Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Collection*, (Sözler Publications, various editions), 110–135.

[26] Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey,* 83–119.

[27] William C. Chittick, *Faith and Practice of Islam*, (SUNY Press, 1992), 6–12.

ascent.[28] Ibn al-Qayyim argues that all spiritual paths converge on purification of intention and moral discipline.[29] Islamic spirituality is therefore ethical rather than purely mystical.

Modern research on Sufism in Turkey—by Karamustafa, Özdalga, and Sedgwick[30]—shows that spirituality continues to evolve through Community-based learning (*sohbet*), Ethical service (*hizmet*), Informal *dhikr* circles, Qur'ānic study groups and Nursi-inspired movements

These expressions show that spirituality remains embedded in social, educational, and ethical structures, contradicting Western assumptions that spirituality is individualistic or anti-institutional.

Religion	**Spirituality**
The founder of the religion is Allah. Religion is the law set by Allah. Religion is a declaration, a manifesto, describing both the One who made this beautiful universe and the universe itself.	Spirituality is a degree of spiritual attainment that emerges in a person when he fulfills the de facto gratitude by acting under Allah's orders and prohibitions with his material organs, intangible feelings, and *Letaif* (subtle faculties).
Religion includes the basic tenets of Islam, which never changed in the course of human history.	Spirituality is variable. It can weaken or strengthen a person over time.

[28] Ghazali, *Ihya'*, 115–150.

[29] Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Madarij al-Salikin bayna Manazil Iyyaka Na'budu wa-Iyyaka Nasta'in*, (Dar al-'Asimah, 2003), 67–91.

[30] Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period.* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

Religion is broader than spirituality and it encompasses spirituality.	Spirituality is a dimension of religion.
Allah teaches the principles of religion to the prophets, and the prophets convey them to people. True religion cannot be of human origin.	Spirituality is the high states, blessings, tastes, and happiness that a person feels in his conscience and soul. It is strengthened by the application of religious principles.
Religion is effective in functioning the entire universe, including man (from outside to inside).	Spirituality is within man. It is affected by the order, arrangement, and functioning of the universe (from inside to outside).
Religion is the very life of life, its light, and its basis. There is no life without religion.	There is life without spirituality.
Religion is the light of happiness, sublimity of feeling, and salvation of conscience. The revival of religion is the revival of the nation. No nation can continue in existence without religion.	Spirituality is nourished and strengthened by religion. There is no spirituality without religion.

Table 1. Comparison of Religion and Spirituality

The Relationship between Religion and Spirituality

The relationship between religion and spirituality has been conceptualised in diverse ways in the academic literature, often shaped by the historical and cultural contexts in which these categories emerged. In contemporary discourse, particularly in Western scholarship, some writers distinguish sharply between religion—seen

as institutional, doctrinal, and collective—and spirituality—understood as personal, experiential, and individualistic. However, such dichotomies are foreign to the Islamic worldview, where *dīn* (religion) and *iḥsān/rūḥaniyyah* (spirituality) are distinct yet inseparable aspects of a unified system. Unlike the dualistic separation prevalent in modern Western thought, Islamic intellectual traditions maintain that spirituality is the inner, experiential dimension of religion. Understanding this relationship requires examining classical Islamic sources, Sufi metaphysical frameworks, modern theoretical debates, and the contributions of thinkers such as Said Nursi.

Contemporary scholarship often identifies four key models describing the relationship between religion and spirituality: (1) the two are entirely separate; (2) they are identical; (3) spirituality is broader than religion; (4) spirituality is a dimension of religion.[31] The first model sees institutional religion as rigid and impersonal, while viewing spirituality as fluid and inward; the second collapses both into a single category; the third elevates spirituality as a superior, more inclusive realm; and the fourth views spirituality as the heart of religion.

For Islamic thought, the fourth model—spirituality as a dimension of religion—offers the closest approximation. Talal Asad's insights into embodied religious traditions suggest that Islamic religiosity is cultivated through practices, rituals, and ethical formations that shape specific dispositions.[32] This means that religious

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[31] Brian J. Zinnbauer, Kenneth I. Pargament, Brenda Cole, Marks. Rye, Eric M. Butter, Timothy G. Belavich, Kathleen M. Hipp, Allie B. Scott, Jill L. Kadar, "Religiousness and Spirituality: Unfuzzying the Fuzzy," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 36(4)* 1997): 549–564.

[32] Asad, *Formations of the Secular,* 205–230.

practice (*'amal*) and spiritual experience (*ḥāl*) are mutually reinforcing, not mutually exclusive.

Qur'ānic and Prophetic Foundations for Integrated Spirituality

Islamic spirituality is rooted in the Qur'ānic view that human beings must cultivate inner awareness while also fulfilling outward obligations. The Qur'ān states, "He has succeeded who purifies the soul, and he has failed who corrupts it" (91:9–10). This verse establishes *tazkiyah* (purification) as a spiritual imperative. However, the Qur'ān also repeatedly commands ritual obligations—prayer, fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage—not merely as formal duties but as means to nurture inner states such as humility, gratitude, and God-consciousness (2:183).

Returning to the Prophetic *ḥadīth* of Gabriel further clarifies the relationship between outer and inner aspects. Islam is presented as threefold: *Islam* (actions), *īman* (belief), and *iḥsān* (spiritual excellence). The definition of *iḥsān*—"to worship God as if you see Him"[33]—locates spirituality at the heart of religious life. Al-Nawawī comments that *iḥsān* is the perfection of worship through inward presence and sincerity.[34] Thus, in this foundational text, spirituality is not a separate path but the culmination of religion.

Across centuries, Muslim scholars affirmed the inseparability of spirituality and religious practice. For al-Ghazālī, religious rituals without inward sincerity are devoid of transformative value, just as spirituality detached from *sharī'ah* is directionless and prone to error.[35]

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[33] Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Imān [Book of Faith], hadith no. 4. https://sunnah.com/muslim:8e .

[34] al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim,* 117–120.

[35] al-Ghazāli, *Iḥya'*, 25–32.

Ibn al-Qayyim develops a similar view in *Madarij al-Sālikīn*, arguing that spiritual refinement arises from ethical conduct, disciplined worship, and moral vigilance.[36] The Sufi tradition, primarily through al-Qushayrī and al-Hujwīrī, describes spiritual states (*aḥwāl*) and stations (*maqāmāt*) as accessible only through rigorous conformity to divine commands.

These perspectives reveal a consistent principle: the structure of *dīn* provides the necessary discipline and equilibrium through which the spiritual heart (*qalb*) becomes receptive to divine illumination. Rituals shape inward disposition; inward purification enhances the beauty of action.

Islamic spirituality operates through a dynamic relationship between outward performance and inward states. Prayer disciplines the body and trains the heart to cultivate presence (*khushūʿ*). Fasting restrains the ego and heightens empathy. Charity softens the heart and breaks attachment to wealth. *Dhikr* (remembrance) orients the mind toward divine presence and purifies the spirit from heedlessness (*ghaflah*). As William Chittick notes, outward forms are "the vessels that carry the lights of meaning into the heart".[37]

This synergy is also reflected in Sufi metaphysics. Ibn al-ʻArabī argues that actions without inner awareness lack spiritual potency, while awareness without action is incomplete.[38] This holistic anthropology refutes modern claims that spirituality can thrive outside of normative religious structures.

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[36] al-Jawziyyah, *Madarij al-Salikin*, 76–110.

[37] Chittick, *Faith and Practice of Islam*, 7–14.

[38] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 92–104.

The Role of Spiritual Faculties (*Laṭā'if*) in Connecting Religion and Spirituality

Many Sufi traditions teach that spirituality involves the activation of subtle spiritual faculties (*laṭā'if*) such as the heart (*qalb*), spirit (*rūḥ*), and inner secret (*sirr*). Najm al-Dīn Kubra describes these capacities as loci of divine illumination awakened through continuous worship and ethical discipline.[39] The purification of these faculties requires ritual acts, Qur'ānic recitation, and continual remembrance—emphasising again that spirituality depends on religious commitment.

Said Nursi offers a modern reinterpretation of these ideas. He presents *laṭā'if* as diverse spiritual capacities—conscience, heart, intellect, and emotional intuition—unlocked through prayer, ethical struggle, and contemplation.[40] Serif Mardin notes that Nursi uses this framework to reconcile rational faith with spiritual experience in a secular context.[41] Thus, Nursi illustrates how spirituality animates religion while remaining anchored in it.

Social Dimensions of Spirituality and Religion

Contrary to Western constructions of spirituality as individualistic, Islamic spirituality is socially embedded. Sufi communities rely on collective practices—*dhikr* gatherings, companionship (*ṣuḥbah*), shared learning, and ethical service (*khidmah*). Ahmet Karamustafa's work shows that early Sufi networks cultivated spirituality through communal bonds.[42] Elisabeth Özdalga and Mark Sedgwick document similar patterns in Ottoman and modern Turkish Sufism,

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[39] Kubra, *Fawa'ih al-Jamal*, 64–85.

[40] Nursi, *Risale-i Nur*, 112–136.

[41] Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern*, 83–119.

[42] Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 44-71.

where spirituality remains tied to ritual, community, and shared hermeneutics of the Qur'ān.

This communal dimension reflects the principle that spirituality flourishes through shared practice rather than solitary exploration—a stark contrast to modern individualist conceptions.

In sum, the Islamic paradigm presents a distinct model: *spirituality is a dimension of religion but cannot exist independently of it***.** Religion provides the structure: law, ethics, rituals, and belief, while spirituality provides the meaning: sincerity, presence, purification, and experiential knowledge.

Without spirituality, religion degrades into formalism devoid of moral depth. Without religion, spirituality becomes subjective, unanchored, and prone to deviation. This holistic integration is evident in both classical Sufism and modern thinkers such as Nursi. Thus, the Islamic worldview rejects both the modern split between religion and spirituality and the reduction of spirituality to emotion. Instead, it offers a unified, comprehensive vision grounded in divine revelation and embodied practice.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the Islamic understanding of the relationship between religion and spirituality differs fundamentally from the dichotomous models dominant in contemporary Western scholarship. Whereas modern theoretical frameworks often separate religion from institutional practice and spirituality from individual practice, Islamic thought—grounded in the Qur'ān, Prophetic teachings, and classical Sufi scholarship—presents *din* as a holistic system in which outward practice and inward refinement are integrated. Qur'ānic exhortations to purify the soul (91:7–10) and

cultivate *taqwa* through ritual obligations (2:183) demonstrate that spirituality emerges through religious action rather than apart from it.

Classical scholars such as al-Ghazalī, al-Qushayrī, and Ibn al-Qayyim emphasised that spiritual realisation cannot occur without adherence to *shari'ah*, moral discipline, and ethical transformation. These insights are reinforced by modern thinkers like Said Nursi, who conceptualises spirituality as the activation of inner faculties (*laṭā'if*) through prayer, contemplation, and moral striving. Studies of Turkish Sufism show that this integration continues in contemporary Muslim contexts, where spirituality remains rooted in communal practice, ethical service, and Qur'ānic hermeneutics.

Therefore, the Islamic paradigm reveals a "distinction without separation": religion provides the structure—belief, law, ethics, and ritual—while spirituality provides the experiential depth and inner transformation. Together, they form a unified orientation toward God, affirming that authentic spirituality in Islam cannot be detached from the religious framework that sustains and guides it.

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Manuscript Studies

Introduction and Analytical Study of Paintings from a Previously Understudied 12th Century A.H. *Khamsa* Manuscript from the Library of Marashi in Qom[1]

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Abstract

The *Iskandarnāma*, the fifth *Masnavi* of the Nezami's *Khamsa*, recounts the legendary and historical episodes of Iskandar the Great. This study examines an understudied manuscript of the Nezami's *Iskandarnāma* preserved in the Marashi Library of Qom. The manuscript dates to 1115 A.H. (1703 AD). The aim of this research is to introduce this Iskandarnama manuscript and analyze its paintings. In this regard, the following questions are answered: Which of the Iranian painting schools are the images of this *Iskandarnāma* most associated with, and what are the specific formal features of this manuscript? By examining the images in a descriptive-analytical manner, we conclude that this *Iskandarnāma* is probably a manuscript commissioned by a court or prince in the late Safavid period. From the uniformity of their images

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and lines, we can conclude that all the paintings were executed by a single painter and scribe. Its paintings and illuminations reflect the continuity of the artistic style of Herat and Isfahan school of that period. The writings are in *Nastaliq* script and were executed quickly. The illustrations are unsigned and the scenes of the story are faithful to the text. All elements such as plants, clothes, landscapes and animals are carefully designed.

Keywords: Persian painting; Book decoration; Manuscript; *Iskandarnama*; Marashi library

Introduction and Methodology

Painting and literature have had an inseparable and long-standing link in the history of Iran. In different periods, artists have always illustrated literary (book) works that were often full of wisdom. Also, these manuscripts are a valuable treasure of the events and developments of society throughout the history of Iranian art. The illustration of Nezami's *Khamsa* (*Khamsah-negari*) is one of the long-standing traditions of Persian book art and is considered, after the *Shahnama*, among the most frequently illustrated and widely circulated literary manuscripts in Iran.[2] In this context, several of the most significant illustrated manuscripts of the *Khamsa* of Nezami may be highlighted, including the Jalayirid Khamsa (788/790 AH)[3], regarded as the earliest known illustrated copy; the *Baysunghurī Khamsa* (Herat school); and the *Jamālī Khamsa* (869 AH, Baghdad school, preserved in the India Office Library); the *Ṭahmāspī Khamsa* (946–950 AH, Tabriz school, preserved in the British Museum, London), widely considered one of the most exquisite manuscripts of the first half of the 10th century AH. The

[2] Basil Gray, *Persian Painting*. (Skira, 1977), 14.

[3] Sheila R. Canby, *Persian Painting* (British Museum Press, 1993), 42.

study of Nezami's *Khamsa* in different schools is useful in the process of better identifying the evolution of Iranian painting.

Hakim Nezami Ganjavi, Jamal al-Din Abu Muhammad Ilyas Yusuf ibn Zaki Mu'ayyad, alias Nezami (ca. 537–608 AH/1141–1209 AD), was one of the foremost masters of Persian eloquence and among the greatest poets of the sixth century AH.[4] He was born in the city of Ganja. Nezami's most celebrated achievement is his *Khamsa*, which secured his enduring fame in Persian literary and cultural history. The fifth poem of the *Khamsa* is the *Iskandarnāma*, which Nezami has divided into two parts: the *Sharafnama* and the *Iqbalnama*. For twenty-three centuries, Iskandar has been the subject of history books and Iranian stories. He was one of the rare conquerors of history and the one who was able to become king before reaching the age of thirty and created one of the largest empires of the ancient world. Over time, retellings of Iskandar's life accumulated legendary elements that gradually overshadowed the historical figure, leading to his portrayal as a largely imaginary and mythic hero in later traditions.

The aims of the present study are to introduce and analyze the previously understudied manuscript of Nezami, which belongs to the library of Marashi in Qom (with the number 25009), which was written in 1115 AH, and the range of plant, animal, and human motifs and architectural elements have been evaluated. It is necessary to study the manuscript and illustrated manuscript of the *Iskandarnāma* of Marashi's library, which has not yet been introduced and studied, in order to understand Iranian painting at that time.

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[4] Julie Scott Meisami, "Nizami Ganjavi," in Encyclopaedia Iranica, online ed., accessed April 22, 2026, https://iranicaonline.org/articles/nezami-ganjavi.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

In the tradition of Persian manuscript culture, painting, calligraphy, and layout function together as a coherent visual system shaped by literary content, artistic conventions, and cultural context. In addition to formal analysis, this study draws on iconographic and narrative approaches. The illustrated passages in the manuscript are examined with respect to their narrative function within the text.

Furthermore, a comparative perspective informs the methodology. Selected paintings from the Marashi Library manuscript (MS 25009) are compared with works from the Isfahan and Herat schools. This comparison does not seek to assign the manuscript rigidly to a specific workshop; rather, it aims to situate its imagery within broader pictorial traditions and to identify both shared conventions and distinctive features. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of continuity and variation in late Safavid manuscript painting.

Firstly, codicological aspects such as layout, illumination (*tezhib*), and pagination are considered. The manuscript is therefore approached not merely as a historical artefact, but as a visual narrative shaped by artistic choices and cultural expectations. The present study is qualitative in nature. Given its historical orientation, data and images were collected through library resources, documentary sources, and direct observation. The author had direct access to photographs of the folios. The study employs a descriptive–analytical method. Its aim is to introduce and visually analyze a 12th-century AH manuscript of the *Iskandarnāma* from the Safavid period, preserved in the Marashi Library in Qom.

The Herat School: The Pinnacle of Persian Miniature Painting

The Herat School is recognized as the definitive expression of the Iranian aesthetic, representing a transition from foreign stylistic influences toward a purely local artistic language.[5] Scholarly consensus generally divides its development into two distinct phases:

a. *The Early Timurid Synthesis*

The first period, flourishing under the patronage of Shah Rukh and his son Baysunghur, introduced an unprecedented level of refinement. This era is characterized by a sophisticated palette dominated by gold and lapis lazuli, seen in masterpieces such as the *Baysunghur Shahnama.*[6] During this stage, painters began to move away from the rigidities of earlier styles, favoring fluid human movements and a harmonious balance between figure and landscape.[7] This "softness" in expression set the stage for what would become the classical Persian style.

b. *The Era of Kamal al-Din Behzad*

The second period is synonymous with the brilliance of Kamal al-Din Behzad, arguably the most influential painter in Islamic history. Under Behzad's leadership, the Herat School achieved "ultimate perfection" by integrating intense naturalism with complex spatial compositions.[8] Behzad's work emphasized individual psychology and the variety of

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5 Canby, *Persian Painting*, 52–56.

6 Gray, *Persian Painting*, 44–48.

7 Canby, *Persian Painting*, 57–60.

8 Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250-1800* (Yale University Press, 1994), 62-70.

human experience, moving Persian art toward a peak of technical mastery.

The legacy of the Herat School served as the foundational bedrock for subsequent dynasties. As the Safavid era began, the Tabriz School emerged not in isolation, but as a sophisticated synthesis of three primary traditions: the Herat School (noted for its refinement), the Shiraz School (Turkman period), and the local Turkman styles of Tabriz.[9] This amalgamation allowed the Safavids to inherit a matured artistic language, which they then adapted to their own imperial and religious narratives.

The Evolution of Safavid Book Arts and Patronage

a. *From the Early Safavid Rulers to Shah Abbas I*

The Safavid era (1501–1736 AD) marks a transformative period in Persian visual identity, characterized by the synthesis of regional styles into a unified imperial aesthetic. Following the coronation of Shah Ismail I in Tabriz, the Safavid court became a melting pot of artistic traditions. By capturing Herat in 1510 AD, Ismail I effectively inherited the refined Timurid workshops, blending the lyrical delicacy of the Herat school with the expressive, high-energy dynamism of the Turkman Tabriz tradition. This cultural fusion reached its zenith under Shah Tahmasp I, whose patronage facilitated the production of the most celebrated manuscripts in Islamic history, notably the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) and the *Khamsa* of Nizami.[10]

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[9] Yaqub Azhand, *The Tabriz School of Painting* (Farhangestan-e Honar, 2005), 101.

[10] Oleg Grabar. *Mostly Miniatures: An Introduction to Persian Painting*. (Princeton University Press, 2000), 66-74.

The trajectory of Safavid painting was deeply influenced by the shifting nature of royal favor. While the early reign of Shah Tahmasp I represented a "Golden Age" of manuscript production, his later drift toward religious orthodoxy led to a decline in courtly commissions. This shift forced a migration of talent; artists sought new horizons either in the provincial courts of Khorasan or by traveling to the Mughal Empire in India, where they fundamentally shaped the development of Mughal painting. Furthermore, as the capital moved from Tabriz to Qazvin, the focus of book decoration evolved. The rigid structure of royal workshops gave way to a more commercialized market, giving rise to independent lacquer paintings and single-page illustrations that catered to a broader class of elite collectors.

Shah Abbas I (1588-1629 AD/1039-996 AH) restored Iran to its former glory after organizing the western regions of Iran and the Ottoman and Uzbek invasions. A sign of Iran's success and stability during this period was the new capital, Isfahan, which was built with gardens, magnificent palaces, vast bazaars, and various public buildings. Although the painting of this period continued previous traditions, new changes gradually emerged, including the abundance of single-sheet paintings. Reza Abbasi is the most prominent painter of this period.

b. *The Last Safavid Rulers*

In the later Safavid period, political instability and administrative decline significantly affected artistic production. As central authority weakened, court patronage diminished, and the organized manuscript workshop system gradually disintegrated. Painting during this period reflects both continuity and transformation. On the one hand, it retained elements of the established Safavid visual vocabulary,

particularly the stylistic legacy of the Reza Abbasi school. On the other hand, increasing contact with European artistic models introduced new visual elements, including naturalistic portraiture and landscape representation. Although manuscript illustration continued, it showed limited formal innovation compared to earlier periods. A growing number of artists shifted away from royal and elite patronage toward producing individual portraits and genre scenes, often catering to foreign travelers and new market demands. This transition reflects a broader shift from court-centered production to a more diversified and semi-commercial artistic economy in the late Safavid period.[11]

Codicological Description and Ornamentation

a. Introduction to the *Iskandarnāma* of the Library of Marashi in Qom, an illustrated manuscript from the 12th century AH

Figure 1. Cover, back cover, and spine in red timaj leather, Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

[11] Canby, *Persian Painting*, 102-116.

Iskandarnāma (*Sharafnama*, *Iqbalnama*) of Nezami's *Khamsa* (serial number 25009) is a manuscript consisting of 321 leaves, in each page of which eleven lines in two columns are written in *Nastaliq* script on pea-colored paper with black ink. The headings are in white and in *Nastaliq* script as well, with inscriptions on a background of gold color, Islamic decorations, white flowers, and *Shangarf* (vermillion) (Figure 4). Around the inscriptions, there are *Zangar* (verdigris) color tabulations with dimensions of 6.5 cm in the desired dimension (depending on the number of words in the title of the story), which are placed between the two columns, with a distance of half a centimeter between each column. The black and gold lines of the table are 8 × 16 cm in size, and a black border of the same dimensions is visible all around the table on the entire page.

This manuscript is very exquisite and valuable; it has nine color paintings, as well as some very valuable inscriptions with a *Lajvard* (ultramarine blue) background and gold wash with colorful flowers and leaves, and borders decorated with pure gold decorated in the form of flowers and leaves. At the beginning of each of the sonnets, there is a short studded inscription. The leaves are three-lined, and the lasso is gilded. The possession of the manuscript with the oval seal of "Hossein ibn Ali 1256" and the oval seal of "Ja'far ibn Ali 1246" is mentioned in the final leaf. The beginning of the manuscript has a golden header and pages in *Shangarf*, black, and gold. The dimensions of this manuscript are 23×14.5 cm, and its thickness is 3.5 cm. Its cover is a multiplicative *timaj* (fine polished leather, glazed leather used for manuscript binding) with *Lachak* (Corner motif), *Toranj* (Medallion/Central medallion motif), and *Sargolboteh* (Floral crest

motif, Top floral cluster), (inflection: red timaj) (Figure 1).[12] Over time, this *Iskandarnāma* has suffered from scratches, abrasions, and leather wear on the cover, and its leaves have become wrinkled. Apparently, its first and last pages have been exposed to a lot of water and moisture, the effect of which can be seen in this manuscript (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Two-column Nastaliq script in Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

Figure 3. Damage to the leaves of Nezami's *Iskandarnāma* manuscript, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

[12] Seyyed Mahmoud Mousavi, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Marashi Najafi Library, vol. 25* (Marashi Library Publications, 2022), 144.

b. Calligrapher

The text of the poems of the *Iskandarnāma* of the Marashi Library is written in Persian and *Nastaliq* script and in black, and the title pages are also written in *Nastaliq* script and in white. (Figure 2).

Nastaliq has been developing steadily since the Timurid era, alongside various forms of calligraphy.[13] During the reign of Shah Ismail, manuscripts were written in *Nastaliq* script that were in line with the manuscripts of the Herat school of the Timurid era. During the reign of Shah Tahmasp I, *Nastaliq* script gained special importance and prestige and became increasingly regular. *Nastaliq* then gained such importance that calligraphers of the Safavid era wrote manuscripts in it.[14]

In manuscripts, the name of the scribe is usually with the date and name of the founder mentioned next to of the book, but in this manuscript, the name of the scribe or scribes is not specifically mentioned at the beginning or end. The only trace of the attribution of the manuscript to the owner of the manuscript is found in the book *List of Manuscripts of the Library of Marashi* in Qom. In this book, an oval seal with the names (Jafar ibn Ali) and (Hossein ibn Ali) is mentioned on the first and last pages.[15]

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[13] Fariba Pat, Seyed Ahmad Reza Khazri, and Mehrangiz Mazaheri, "Khoshnevisi dar Aghaz-e Asr-e Safavi: Tahavvolat, Karkardha, Hamiyan va Honarvaran," *Pazhuheshnameh-ye Tarikh va Tamaddon-e Eslami* 44, no. 1 (Spring–Summer 2011), 36.

[14] Soucek, Priscilla, "Calligraphy In The Safavid Period 1501-1576", In John Thompson And Sheila R. Canby, *Hunt For Paradise: Court Arts Of Safavid Iran* 1501-1576, (Skira, 2003), 50-51.

[15] Mousavi, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts*, 144.

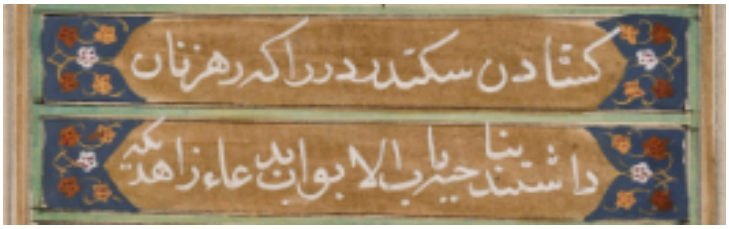

Figure 4. An example of a story title box in Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

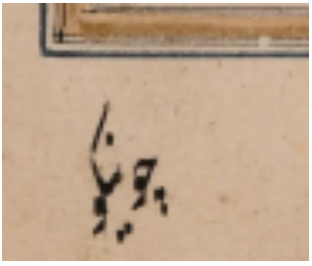

Figure 5. A sample of numbering by the Rekabeh method in Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

Figure 6. An example of annotation that was later written by the owners in Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

c. Page layout and tabulation

The relationship between the arrangement of the written elements and the picture frame, as well as the relationship between the shape of the picture frame and the subject and composition of the picture in the *Iskandarnāma* manuscript of the great library of Marashi in Qom, always follows special proportions. The dimensions of the paper plate are 14.5×23 cm, the dimensions of the table are 8×16 ×16 cm, and each column is 27×4 cm. The distance between the columns is half a centimeter, and each column consists of 23 rows, and in the pages with headings, the number of rows is proportionately reduced. It is 4.5 cm from the right and 4 cm from the left to the edge of the paper. In the drawing table, six lines were used in dark blue color and gold for the middle, and for the columns, two lines were used. The arrangement and width of the columns follow the division of the page that is set for writing the poems, which are mostly rectangular and square in shape. The numbering of this manuscript uses the method of *Rekabeh* (Figure 5), in such a way that in the bottom left corner of the pages, the first word of the next page is written. On some pages, there are notes in black (different from the color of the poems), which explain the details of the story related to the page and the previous and next pages or in some cases give the meaning of a word or give a sentence about the interpretation of the poem. These notes seem to have a different handwriting from the original text of the manuscript and the ink color is not the same as the original text and it seems that someone who was apparently the previous owner of the book added notes to the page that seemed necessary while reading and reviewing this copy and wrote this near the edge of the paper (Figure 6).

d. Beginning and Ending

The opening page of the *Iskandarnāma* manuscript is the background color, pea. The headline of gilded, with the colors of gold, *Lajvard*, *Shangarf*, *Zangari*, and *Arghavani* (purple/crimson), occupies half of the page. There is the title of *Bismillah al-Rahmān al-Rahīm*, which is written in Nastaliq script in the inscription. The text begins with praise and adoration of God and continues until several pages later. Plant motifs: *Islimi*, *Khataei* (the collective set of floral motifs—flowers, leaves, and buds), *Atlasi* (a glossy, delicate floral motif resembling small blossoms, found in Iranian book illumination and textile decoration), and three-petaled and five-petaled flowers can be seen on the background of the gilded. The gilding of the header of the opening plate is crown-shaped. The gold-colored crown is located in the lower half. The entire illumination is depicted with geometric and floral motifs and in the colors of *Lajvard*, gold water, and *Shangarf* (Figure 7). Also, the first two pages of the illumination motifs in the *kamand* (thin, continuous often gold line used to frame and decorate the margins in Persian manuscripts) of the pages are worked with gold color, and the verses are filled with gold color around the first two pages.

From the third page onwards, the writing of the poems continues, and each story is distinguished from the other stories with a golden title in a frame with the desired dimensions × 6.5 (depending on the title of the story) and in the middle of the columns. The frame is *zangar*, and on both sides of the frame, small slime forms are worked. The five-petaled *Atlasi* have the same proportions. On the golden background, there are five-petaled flowers, *Khataei*, and two modes of Shah Abbasi (a stylized form of the *Khataei* flower that became widespread in the Safavid period, whose shape was inspired by lotus and tulip blossoms) and *Atlasi* flowers, and the *Sharafeh* (crenellation ornament) are executed in *Lajvard* color. At the end of the book,

Iskandarnāma refers to the year 1115, which is determined to be the year 1115 (1703 AD and 1704 AD) (Figure 8).

This date corresponds precisely to the years of the reign of Shah Sultan Hossein Safavi in Isfahan. During the reign of Shah Sultan Hossein began in 1105 AH and ended in 1135 AH (1694–1722 AD), although the splendor of the royal workshops of previous centuries had diminished, the tradition of painting and book art continued in Isfahan. In the late Safavid period, "single-page and mural replaced the large courtly illustrated manuscripts," and a tendency toward European influences, especially in shading and naturalism, is evident in the works of artists such as Mohammad Zaman and his students. This trend continued in the early 12th century AH, and painters such as Mohammad Ali ibn Mohammad Zaman were active in the Isfahan artistic scene, although there is no longer any evidence of the commissioning of the Shahnamas or the magnificent Khamsas of Shah Tahmasp's era. At the same time, in the field of architecture, despite the political weakness of the government, important projects were carried out, such as the construction of the Soltani School (Chaharbagh School) in Isfahan in 1116–1126 AH, (1704–1714 AD), which is considered one of the last outstanding examples of Safavid architecture and tile decoration.[16] This evidence shows that although the political authority of the Safavids was declining during the reign of Shah Sultan Hossein, artistic life continued in more limited forms. But it still continued to be dynamic.

[16] Blair and Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam*, 217.

Figure 7. The opening page of Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

Figure 8. The final page of Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

At the beginning of this manuscript, the director of the Marashi Library of Qom, as the owner, wrote a note, we checked and found that some items in it were written incorrectly, some of which are mentioned. At the beginning of that note, it is written that there are eight paintings, but in fact there are nine paintings, in which the ninth painting was drawn with a greater distance than the other paintings.

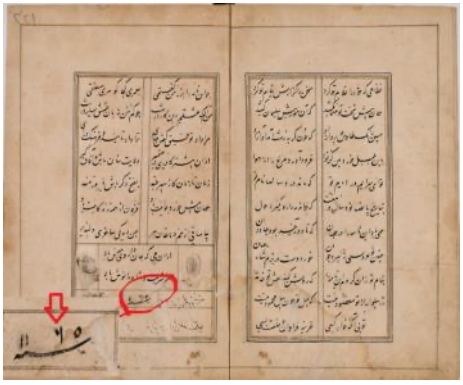

Figure 9.a. The ending's year from Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

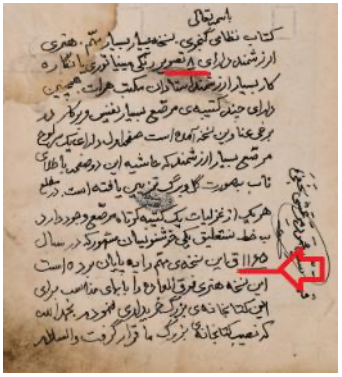

Figure 9.b. The note written by the director of the Marashi Library on the first page from Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

At the end of this manuscript is the word "سنه" (*sanah*), which means year. This word has a dot in Persian, and the year is written above this word as 1115. Because the scribe wrote the dot next to the number one, the library employee mistakenly read the number 1115 as 1165 and wrote it down on the first page of this manuscript (Figure 9.a and Figure 9.b).

e. Stylistic Analysis of the Paintings

Although Iranian society was in turmoil and chaos during the late Safavid period, the production of such a valuable manuscript occurred at this time. The correspondence between the manuscript's date of transcription (1115 AH) and the reign of Shah Sultan Hossein Safavi (1106–1135 AH) indicates that this manuscript was produced during his rule. Given that during that period certain paintings adhered to the prevailing artistic style of the time, the paintings in this manuscript show that the artists continued the visual conventions of Safavid and Herat schools' painting to a significant extent into their contemporary period. The depiction of garden environments and open spaces in nature in this manuscript—especially in scenes such as the "Noshabeh" painting—shows a strong affinity with the Safavid garden-city pattern, and the female figures are among the visual characteristics of the Isfahan school of painting. These features are clearly evident in the single-page *muraqqa'* (an Islamic art album of mounted calligraphy and paintings) produced in Isfahan in the late Safavid period (11th and 12th centuries AH) as well as in the murals of Chehelsotun and Ali Qapu palaces. Among the features that the Marashi's *Iskandarnāma* manuscript shares with them is the similarity in the design and decoration of the female figures (Figure 10.a and Figure 10.b).

Figure. 10.a Detail of the painting "Noshabeh," from Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

Figure. 10.b Detail of the painting Chehel soton place, central hall, Isfahan (Source: Authors).

On the other hand, the battle scenes—characterized by dynamic compositions, dense arrangement of figures, and spiral organization of pictorial space—are in close harmony with the pictorial traditions of the Herat school of painting (the works of Kamal al-Din Behzad and his students). Such features are clearly visible in the Timurid illustrated manuscripts, including manuscripts associated with the Herat Royal Library from the second half of the ninth century AH. Given these points, it can be concluded that the composition, processing, and postures of the figures in the *Iskandarnāma* manuscript have their roots in the Timurid Herat school, and that the creation of space (especially in the decoration and design of garden and nature spaces) and the representation of the form, postures, and decorations of the faces are characteristics of the Isfahan school of painting.

Also, considering the use of gold paint—melted gold—in the coloring of the manuscript and the delicate finishes and the display of precise details, this manuscript was probably illustrated in the artistic environment of the capital Isfahan and by painters who were supported by the Shah or by princes at the royal court.

In Iranian book arts history, manuscripts are generally divided into two principal categories: provincial (or local) manuscripts and courtly manuscripts. Provincial manuscripts were often produced without illustrations or with only a small number of painted scenes; they typically lack illumination, marginal ornamentation, and ruled borders. In such copies, the quality of calligraphy and painting was lower, and they were executed within a shorter period of time. By contrast, courtly manuscripts were produced under the patronage of kings or princes and through the collaboration of highly skilled artists, and their creation often extended over long periods, sometimes lasting several years. For example, the *Haft Awrang of Sultan Ibrahim Mirza*, now housed in the Freer Gallery, reportedly took ten years to complete.[17] Due to their financial means, kings and princes were able to attract and commission the finest artists of their time.

Given its sumptuous ornamentation, meticulous finishes, carefully rendered figures, multiplicity of characters, and the wide range of pictorial elements, the Marashi's *Iskandarnāma* was most likely produced at court or commissioned by the court. This point gains further weight considering that in the late Safavid period, the art of manuscript production had largely given way to single-page paintings.

The visual program of the Marashi's *Iskandarnāma* includes nine paintings and seven inlaid inscriptions, which are listed in

[17] Marianna Shreve Simpson, "The Haft Awrang of Sultan Ibrahim Mirza," in *Persian Manuscripts*, 6.

Table 1. A general examination of the paintings shows that the painter's degree of fidelity to the text is appropriate and, despite the diversity of subjects, they have common features in visual elements such as composition, type of decoration, color, texture and space-making. All are drawn with good quality and detail. In the paintings, there is no protrusion from the frame and the painter is faithful to the frame of the image, but at the same time, the painter has devoted the entire space of the frame to the painting and the painter's pen has not been drawn on the lines of the table. In most paintings, the space is divided into two parts. The main story and human figures are in the foreground, and the rest of the background space is dedicated to plant and animal motifs, architectural elements, or natural space. The placement of the horizon line at the top of the paintings has given the painter more freedom to describe the story.

First painting Victory of Iskandar over the Zangian army (p.70)	**Second painting** Iskandar's forgiveness and sending gifts to the King (p.74)

Third painting

Iskandar's deliberation on the wrath of Darius, and his basing and relying on his own victory and triumph (p.77).

Fourth painting

Writing a letter to Iskandar (p.99)[18]

Fifth painting

Iskandar's Encounter with Dara and Victory (p.110)

Sixth painting

The killing of Dara (p.117)

[18] The numbering of the pages was done by Marashi Library in pencil. We write the page number in parentheses.

Seventh painting: Iskandar's Convenant with the Elders of Iran (p.118)

Eight painting: The story of King Barda's Nushabeh (p.122)

Ninth painting
(p.280)

The First Inlaid Inscription
(p.134)

The Second Inlaid Inscription
(p.134)

The Third Inlaid Inscription
(p.145)

The Fourth Inlaid Inscription (p.165)	**The Fifth Inlaid Inscription** (p.165)
The Sixth Inlaid Inscription (p.179)	**The Seventh Inlaid Inscription** (p.190)

Table 1: Various visual program of the Marashi's *Iskandarnāma*

Elements of composition considered in paintings

Composition is the most important element in a visual structure. The meaning of a visual expression depends to some extent on the type of composition in it. In addition, the composition of a painting plays a very important role in attracting the viewer's attention. Each of the elements in the paintings, in turn, plays a decisive role in the overall structure of the painting. In such paintings, the eye does not remain fixed on a specific point, and there is a rhythmic rotation throughout the spiral composition, in which the elements of the painting are arranged to guide the viewer's gaze toward the intended focal point of the image—the main subject—following the golden spiral. Also, the viewer is led to a unique experience of light and color that is not found

in other paintings. One of the specific examples of this type of combination is in traditional Iranian painting.

Also, the golden ratio is in these paintings—the dividing line which segmentize it into two parts, so that the ratio of the length of the larger segment to the length of the entire segment of the line is equal to the length of the smaller segment to the larger segment. In the past, this ratio was known as dividing the line in proportion to the middle and sides (or consensual division); therefore, in order to create the first frame that has the desired visual characteristics, the index square becomes the basis of the work (Table 2).

Painting 1	**Iskandar's victory over the Zangian army (the battle between the Romans and the Zangians)**
	In *Iskandarnāma*, during Iskandar's conquests of distant lands, he arrives at a land whose inhabitants are called "Zangians". The Zangians are often described as strong, warrior people, with peculiar characteristics —tallness, great physical strength, and sometimes animal characteristics. These descriptions are mostly based on popular imaginations and legends of the time. The battle with the Zangians is often described as a difficult battle in which Iskandar and his troops face serious resistance. In these battles, Iskandar uses his intelligence, resourcefulness, and courage to defeat the Zangians. Of course, in some stories, it ends badly: after victory, Iskandar usually makes

	a peace treaty with the Zangians or makes them obey him. Sometimes the story ends with Iskandar showing his generosity and chivalry in the face of the defeated Zangians.
Characteristics of the Herat School	The use of very bright colors, and complementary colors, the use of less red colors and the use of brown colors, *Lajvard* and *Arghavani* colors, and soft pink, the influence of white and black colors, the clever depiction of carpet decoration and architectural elements, and even the sky.
Characteristics of the Safavid Isfahan School	Subjects such as: daily life, shepherds, dervishes and doctors and pilgrims. Turban around the hat with its tip protruding. Handsome young men in beautiful clothes in the background, big buildings are seen in smaller sizes. The faces are triangular, round and oval face shapes, with almond-shaped eyes and elongated eyebrows, small, plump lips, sharp noses and full cheeks.
Graphic contents	Courage and Victory in the Wake of Iskandar's Epic.
Composition	Spiral.
Figures	The figures, with an elongated body and a turban on their heads, wore a long shirt, a robe or *abā*, except that its sleeves were longer and the hands were hidden. A shawl or belt was worn over the

	abā. The *abā* was a long, loose tunic that was usually made of cotton or wool and had two holes on either side for the hands to come out. Trousers: The trousers were loose at the top and tight at the ankles, reaching to the ankles. Shoes: in the Safavid period, men's footwear often resembled women's in overall form, and it was typically made of leather and occasionally of finely processed thin leather (*timaj*).[19]
Color scheme of images	Dominant colors, gold and use brown and red family; Golden sky to show day and azure blue to show night; Empty spaces are filled with patterns and soft colors are used. Use of gold and silver and other vibrant colors.
Influences from other schools	Herat style, Herat school (Behzad), especially the mastery of the court style, and Isfahan school of painting.
Conclusion	In this painting, the dynamic composition, delicate portraiture, rich color palette, and meticulous and elaborate decorations lead us to conclude that the artist's recreation was an attempt to continue the Herat school of painting. Also, considering the past glory of art and

[19] Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Safarnameh-ye Tavernier*, trans. Abutorab Ghafari (Ketabkhaneh-ye Sana'i Publications, 1974), 626.

	painting in the Safavid era and the political turmoil during the time of Shah Sultan Hossein Safavi, it seems that the efforts of artists and the court during the reign of Shah Sultan Hossein to promote and preserve art were significant (for example, the Chaharbagh School). Therefore, the production of such a luxurious manuscript at this time and in the city of Isfahan is likely.

Table 2. Characteristics of Safavid Miniature (Herat School).

Figural Representation and Iconography

In the illustrations of this version, the faces are closely similar to each other and are often depicted with the same type of makeup. The eyes are almond-shaped, the eyebrows are drawn, and the lips and mouth are small, along with a narrow nose. The younger people are without beards and mustaches. The color used in the clothing has a variety of colors and patterns. The human figures are well placed in relation to the surrounding space and a variety of behavioral expressions are used for them. The figure of Iskandar is often located in the center of the image. In some illustrations, a kind of shapelessness is evident in the figures, the ratio of the head to the body or the neck and arms and legs show disproportion. The number of figures in each illustration is limited and the illustrator has avoided depicting unnecessary and unrelated people.

The men mainly wear white turbans with a small colored hat in the center, which in the case of the king, this clothing becomes a crown. Most of the people in the paintings wear a single-colored robe and *Arkhaluq*[20] with delicate and varied decorations, and in battle

[20] *Arkhaluq* is a Turkic term formed from the combination of arkha, meaning

scenes, a helmet is worn on the head. All the men's shoes are black. The clothes of the first character in the story are decorated with more patterns and decorations, and sometimes with jewelry. If the king is sitting on a throne, wooden decorations and delicate decorative patterns are visible on the throne (Figure 11).

Our examination of the paintings in this manuscript shows that the image of the woman only appears in two paintings: The story of King Barda, whose name is *Nushabeh* (Figure 12) and "Iskandar's forgiveness and sending gifts to the King" (Figure 11). In both of them, the women's faces are seen with great elegance, long and colorful robes with delicate decorations on the clothes and white scarves on the heads, with strands of hair hanging on both sides of the face.

Figure 11. Iskandar's act of generosity and the sending of gifts to the king, from Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

"back" and liq, a suffix indicating relation or attribution; thus, the word literally means "related to the back" or "backed"; outer garment fitted at the waist and worn over other clothing. See Yadollah Gholami Mayani, "Arkhaluq" in *Daneshnameh-ye Iran*, ed. Kazem Mousavi Bojnordi (Markaz-e Dayerat al-Maaref-e Bozorg-e Eslami, 2019), 1:1634.

Figure 12. Portrait of the woman, Nushabeh King of Bardae, from Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

Natural and Architectural Elements

The vegetation in *Iskandarnāma* is a dense vegetation, and a great variety of leaves, flowers, and greenery are spread over the hills and the ground. There are also greenery and flowers around the rocks on the ground (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Vegetation in Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

The presence of the tree is in the form of a single green tree or a dry tree and plantain tree in a green space, or spring trees with flowers and blossoms with a light shade and noticeable patterns that are drawn in the frame (Figure 14).

Figure 14. The tree patterns in Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

Figure 15. Cloud and Sky in Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

Figure 16. The Mountain in Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

The motif of mountains in the paintings, with curved lines, separates the space of the earth and the sky from each other. The painter has tried to show a light shadow on the tops of peaks or hills with careful processing, using a darker color than the background and distinct curved lines (Figure 15).

The use of a golden sky to signify daytime and a deep azure sky with white clouds for nocturnal scenes provides a symbolic

temporal framework for the narrative[21] (Figure 16). A mountainous landscapes whose craggy cliffs with gnarled tree and golden sky with Chinese-inspired clouds is typical of the Isfahan school.[22]

There is a hill motif in all the paintings except for the depiction of Iskandar's Seventh War with the Russians, where the mountains are painted with more exaggeration and longer curves. This seems to emphasize the atmosphere of war.

Animal motifs, like other elements in the Iskandar manuscript, are depicted with slight exaggeration: the horse (Figure 17), elephant (Figure 18), fox (Figure 19), pheasant, patridge (Figure 20) and dragon (Figure 22). The color of the horse in all the paintings is white, brown or black. In the battle scenes, the horses do not have the same form or equipment; their heads are drawn smaller in proportion to their bodies, and they are adorned with various decorations, saddles, and accessories. The subtle and delicate shading throughout their bodies is clearly visible. In some examples, the head appears noticeably smaller than the body (Figure 25). The other animals are also illustrated with great beauty and delicacy, showing precise use of light and shadow (*Pardaz*). Their colors are very close to natural tones, and their facial expressions are painted with careful attention to detail.

Architectural structures or interior spaces in the *Iskandarnāma* appear only in a single painting titled "Iskandar's Victory over the Zang Romy". In this painting, the surrounding space is depicted with flat colors, brick decorations on the walls, and mosaic designs on the

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[21] Adel T. Adamova, Persian Manuscripts, Paintings and Drawings: From the 15th to the 19th Century (Slavia, 1996).

[22] Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, *Cosmophilia: Islamic Art from the David Collection*, (McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2006), 64.

courtyard floor, without any perceptible visual depth. Three windows with metal railings and a decorative tiled on the wall are visible.

The remaining eight paintings are painting in gardens and natural landscapes. In these natural paintings, motifs of trees, foliage, sky, flowers, plants, and animals define and fill the entire pictorial space.

Figure 17. The Horse in Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

Figure 18. Vegetation in Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

Figure 19. The Fox in Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

Figure 20. Pheasant with partridge in Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

Figure 21. Decorations of saddles and horse leaves in Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

Figure 22. The Dragon in Nezami's *Iskandarnāma*, Marashi Library, Qom (Source: Authors).

Conclusion

In this study, a 12th-century AH manuscript of Nezami's *Iskandarnāma* is introduced and its visual elements and components are examined. The introduction and analysis of this manuscript, which has remained largely understudied until now, constitute an effort to deepen our understanding of this chapter in the history of Iranian painting. No information is currently available regarding the scribe or the painter of the manuscript. The manuscript of the *Iskandarnāma*, now housed in the Marashi Library in Qom, displays sumptuous ornamentation, meticulous finishing, careful rendering of figures, a multiplicity of characters, and a diverse range of pictorial elements. These features suggest that it was likely a courtly commission; considering the date of its production, it may be attributed to the court of Shah Sultan Hossein of the Safavid dynasty. The titles are in *Nastaliq* script and in white on a gold background, and the text of the manuscript is in black and executed quickly. In this manuscript, nine unsigned paintings are illustrated and the connection between the text and the images is seen. There are also seven inscriptions with exquisite decorations. Most of the arrangement of elements, especially human figures, have a spiral or helix composition and consist of two levels of foreground and background, which are decorated with the background of the paintings.

The main figure of the story is located in the center of the image, and the climax of the story occurs in the foreground and with the presence of the main characters. The blue sky with white clouds represents the night and the golden sky represents the day. The motifs of flowers, plants, trees and nature are clearly visible in the background space. The landscapes and architectural elements and plant and animal elements are luxurious, and there are impressive decorative

motifs and designs on the clothes of the people, the saddles and bridles of the horses, and the expanse of the land and the surrounding nature. Brown, red, rust (green), azure (blue), white and black are other colors of the paintings. The painting was paint in thick watercolor, and in some parts, the painter has used the pea-colored paper, for the background color. From the uniformity of their images and lines, it can be concluded that all the paintings were executed by a single painter and scribe. The human figures are close to the paintings of the second half of the 12th century AH Isfahan in terms of decorations on clothes and coverings and the design of the faces, but the golden color and warm colors and decorations of the background space, dynamic composition, delicate portraiture, rich color palette and detailed and elaborate decorations lead us to the conclusion that the artist's recreation was an attempt to continue the Herat school of painting.

Also, considering the past glory of art and painting in the Safavid era and the political turmoil during the time of Shah Sultan Hossein Safavi, it seems that the efforts of artists and the court during the reign of Shah Sultan Hossein to promote and maintain this art were significant (for example, the Chaharbagh School was built at this time). Therefore, the production of such a luxurious manuscript at this time and in the city of Isfahan is likely.

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Book Reviews

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1970. xvii + 556 pages. Appendix, bibliography. Hardback.

This review revisits *The Mysticism of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī*, one of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's most substantial and enduring works. Among his many writings, this book stands out for its methodological rigour, conceptual precision, and sustained engagement with the Malay intellectual tradition. The work is more than a study of a single Malay mystical poet. It constitutes a major contribution to the understanding of the Malay intellectual tradition by demonstrating that Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī was a serious Ṣūfī thinker whose writings reflect a coherent metaphysical system. Through careful textual, semantic, and philosophical analysis, al-Attas shows that Ḥamzah's thought is firmly rooted in the wider tradition of Islamic mysticism. In doing so, the book also advances a broader claim regarding the Malay language.

It argues that Malay had long possessed the capacity to articulate complex spiritual and philosophical ideas, challenging the assumption that it functioned merely as a medium of popular or didactic religious expression. The study may therefore be read not only as an account of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī, but also as part of a wider effort to clarify the intellectual depth and coherence of Malay-Islamic scholarship.

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Bibliographical Background of The Book

First published in Kuala Lumpur by the University of Malaya Press in 1970, *The Mysticism of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī* is an extensive work of over 500 pages. Completed in 1965 and submitted to the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in 1966, it was accepted as a doctoral thesis and later published largely in its original form, with minor additions to the footnotes and bibliography.

The book is addressed primarily to students of Islamic philosophical mysticism (taṣawwuf) and Malay Ṣūfī literature. Its subject, Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī, is presented not merely as a literary figure but as a major Ṣūfī thinker whose ideas had often been insufficiently understood or misrepresented. Al-Attas describes the study as the first comprehensive attempt to expound and analyse Ḥamzah's mystical teachings based on his prose works and poetry, while situating him within the wider tradition of classical Ṣūfism.

The study combines several interrelated aims. It reconstructs Ḥamzah's teachings, examines criticisms directed at him by Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, analyses key concepts within his thought, and provides edited texts with English translations. In this respect, the work is at once a contribution to Islamic intellectual history, semantic analysis, and Malay textual scholarship. The book also reflects a strong scholarly milieu. Al-Attas acknowledges the guidance of Martin Lings (Shaykh Abū Bakr Sirāj al-Dīn), as well as the contributions of scholars such as A. J. Arberry and others who assisted in philological and textual research. These acknowledgements situate the work within a

broader international academic context and help explain its methodological depth.

Beyond its immediate subject, the book contributes to the modern revaluation of the Malay intellectual tradition. It may thus be read not only as a specialised study of a sixteenth-century Ṣūfī thinker, but also as part of a broader effort to restore the intellectual significance of Islam in the Malay world.

Organisation of The Book

The Mysticism of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī is divided into two main parts, reflecting both its interpretive and documentary aims.

Part I presents a detailed account of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī's mystical ideas and teachings. It opens with a study of Ḥamzah himself, followed by an examination of the criticisms directed at him by Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī. The central chapter analyses Ḥamzah's metaphysical system, addressing themes such as divine unity, creation, the fixed essences (al-aʿyānu'l-thābitah), the spirit (al-rūḥ) and soul (al-nafs), the divine names and attributes, and the relationship between fanā' and maʿrifah. Subsequent chapters adopt a more focused conceptual approach, including a semantic study of the concept of divine will (irādah) through the Malay term *hendak*, as well as an analysis of key terms within Ḥamzah's mystical vocabulary. Together, these chapters reconstruct the internal coherence of his thought with methodological precision.

Part II serves a complementary function by providing primary materials. It includes annotated romanised editions of Ḥamzah's

three prose works—*Asrāru'l-ʿĀrifīn*, *Sharābu'l-ʿĀshiqīn*, and *Al-Muntahī*—alongside English translations. This section demonstrates that the book is not only interpretive but also a critical contribution to the preservation and transmission of Malay Ṣūfī texts.

The appendices further enhance the work's scholarly value, containing additional source materials, a facsimile of *Al-Muntahī*, and an index of key semantic vocabulary. The book concludes with a comprehensive bibliography.

Overall, its structure reflects an integrated method that combines historical and conceptual analysis with textual editing and documentation, contributing to its lasting significance in the study of Malay intellectual history.

Main Argument and Scholarly Contribution

The central argument of *The Mysticism of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī* is al-Attas's reconstruction of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī as a major metaphysical thinker of the Malay world. At the time of writing, Ḥamzah was often treated either as a literary figure or as a controversial mystic known primarily through later criticisms, particularly those of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī. Al-Attas moves beyond such views by returning directly to Ḥamzah's own writings and analysing them as expressions of a coherent intellectual system.

He argues that Ḥamzah was not merely a mystical poet but a serious Ṣūfī thinker whose works articulate a structured metaphysical vision. Through close attention to ontology, cosmology, psychology, and language, al-Attas reconstructs the internal coherence of

Ḥamzah's thought. This restores Ḥamzah not only to literary history but also to the broader tradition of Islamic intellectual scholarship.

An important contribution appears in the opening chapter, where al-Attas addresses longstanding questions concerning Ḥamzah's life, including his place and date of birth and the period in which he flourished. Earlier scholars had proposed differing conclusions based on limited historical evidence. Al-Attas re-examines these issues through a critical reading of Ḥamzah's own texts, arguing that he lived during the reign of Sulṭān 'Alā' al-Dīn Ri'āyat Shāh of Aceh (1588–1604) and likely died before 1607. While not definitive, this analysis demonstrates the necessity of combining textual scrutiny with historical reasoning.

The book's contribution extends beyond the reconstruction of Ḥamzah. By establishing him as a systematic thinker, al-Attas advances a broader claim about the intellectual capacity of the Malay language. He argues that Malay is capable of expressing complex Ṣūfī and philosophical ideas with precision and coherence, challenging the view that it functioned primarily as a medium of popular religious instruction. In this respect, the study is significant not only for its interpretation of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī but also for its implications for the status of Malay as a language of intellectual and metaphysical discourse.

Author's Method and Approach

One of the major strengths of *The Mysticism of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī* lies in its method. Al-Attas adopts a twofold approach combining textual

commentary with linguistic and semantic analysis. While the commentary method allows comparison with earlier Ṣūfī writings, he recognises its limitations, particularly the risk of subjective interpretation. To address this, he incorporates a systematic analysis of key terms within Ḥamzah's writings. This semantic approach is among the book's most original contributions. Al-Attas treats concepts not as isolated terms but as elements within a structured network of meaning. By examining the relationships between key terms, he reconstructs the conceptual framework underlying Ḥamzah's mystical system. This allows the study to move beyond descriptive commentary toward a more rigorous understanding of intellectual structure.

The significance of this method extends beyond the immediate subject. It reflects a broader commitment to methodological precision, objectivity, and conceptual clarity. By combining philological analysis with philosophical interpretation, al-Attas offers a model for the study of Malay intellectual texts that integrates language, thought, and worldview. A further aspect of his approach is the concern with textual authenticity. Al-Attas establishes the reliability of Ḥamzah's writings through multiple considerations, including their citation by contemporaries, their linguistic and conceptual coherence, and their internal consistency. This attention to textual foundations strengthens the overall argument by ensuring that interpretation rests on carefully evaluated sources.

Overall, the method employed in the book demonstrates a disciplined attempt to recover a coherent system of thought from

within its linguistic and textual context, contributing to its enduring scholarly value.

Contribution to the Study of Malay Scholarship

Al-Attas's contribution to the study of early Malay scholarship is evident in the way he situates Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī within an established Ṣūfī intellectual tradition. He shows that Ḥamzah was not merely drawing from earlier sources but had mastered and rearticulated complex metaphysical doctrines derived from figures such as Ibn 'Arabī and other classical Ṣūfī thinkers. By expressing these ideas in Malay, Ḥamzah made sophisticated metaphysical teachings accessible beyond the Arabic and Persian intellectual milieu. This argument challenges the view that Ḥamzah's mysticism was marginal or heterodox. Instead, al-Attas presents him as an integral participant in a recognised intellectual lineage, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of Malay Ṣūfī scholarship within the wider Islamic tradition.

Al-Attas also highlights the intellectual and social context in which Ḥamzah wrote. He describes a milieu shaped by both the spread of Ṣūfī vocabulary and the tensions arising from misunderstanding and contestation. In this setting, Ḥamzah's writings can be seen as responses to both the misuse of Ṣūfism and the suspicion directed toward it by religious authorities. In this respect, the book contributes not only to the study of an individual thinker but also to a broader understanding of the development of Malay scholarship, where intellectual discourse, textual transmission, and social context are closely interconnected.

Scholarly Reception and Subsequent Significance

The significance of *The Mysticism of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī* is reflected in its scholarly reception and enduring influence. Although early reviews were limited, the work was noted in academic venues such as the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* and *Archipel*. More importantly, it has continued to serve as a principal reference in subsequent studies of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī and Malay-Islamic thought. Later scholarship confirms its lasting impact. Researchers consistently engage with al-Attas's work when discussing Ḥamzah, indicating its central role in shaping modern understanding of the subject. It has contributed not only to the interpretation of Ḥamzah's ideas but also to his recognition within broader academic discourse.

At the same time, the study has not exhausted the field. Its significance lies partly in opening new avenues for research, particularly given the limited number of extant texts attributed to Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī. The survival of only a small corpus—preserved in scattered manuscripts—suggests the possibility of further discoveries and continued scholarly inquiry. In this respect, al-Attas's work remains foundational while also encouraging future research on Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī and the wider Malay intellectual tradition.

Conclusion

More than half a century after its publication, *The Mysticism of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī* remains a landmark in the study of Malay intellectual history. Its significance lies not only in being among the earliest comprehensive studies of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī, but also in the methodological rigour with

which al-Attas approaches his subject. By reconstructing Ḥamzah as a systematic Ṣūfī thinker and examining the conceptual structure of his ideas, the work establishes a foundation for subsequent scholarship. The book is also notable for integrating interpretive analysis with textual editing, providing both a coherent account of Ḥamzah's thought and access to primary materials. This combination has contributed to its continued relevance in the study of Malay-Islamic intellectual traditions.

More broadly, the study underscores the capacity of the Malay language to convey complex metaphysical and philosophical ideas, reinforcing its status as a medium of intellectual discourse. For these reasons, the work continues to hold an important place in the field and remains a valuable resource for future research.

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Adis Duderija, *Islam and Constructive Interreligious Engagement*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2026, vi + 280 pp. Bibliography, index. Hardback. ISBN: 978-1-6669-7277-1

This book offers a systematic attempt to evaluate contemporary Muslim approaches to interreligious engagement through the framework of comparative theology, drawing primarily on Catherine Cornille's concepts of comparative theological learning and the conditions for dialogue. By examining a range of Muslim thinkers, the author seeks to assess the extent to which their theological orientations enable meaningful engagement with religious others.

The study's strength lies in its comparative ambition. By placing diverse figures such as Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, Mahmoud Ayoub, Mona Siddiqui, Imtiyaz Yusuf, and Muna Tatari within a single analytical framework, it offers a structured account of Muslim responses to religious pluralism. However, this methodological approach raises important concerns.

In Cornille's original formulation, comparative theology is epistemological, focusing on interpretive dispositions such as openness and willingness to learn, while doctrinal difference serves as a condition for learning rather than an obstacle. In Duderija's application, however, this framework shifts toward an ontological register, where doctrines are implicitly treated as facilitating or hindering dialogue. As a result, theological positions are evaluated not only in terms of dialogical disposition but also their perceived structural compatibility with dialogue.

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This shift narrows the scope of legitimate interreligious engagement by overlooking the role of interpretation and privileging a single model of comparative theology over alternative approaches, such as philosophical dialogue or context-driven praxis. This tension becomes particularly evident in the author's evaluation of key Muslim thinkers.

Although Duderija discusses a wide range of Muslim thinkers, this review focuses on three—Ismail al-Faruqi, Imtiyaz Yusuf, and Muna Tatari—because they appear to occupy an implicit hierarchy within his framework: al-Faruqi is positioned lowest, Yusuf in the middle, and Tatari as the most adequate. This selection is not exhaustive but serves to illuminate the evaluative logic underlying the book.

Al-Faruqi is presented as insufficiently dialogical, largely because his tawḥīd-centered framework is interpreted as normatively evaluating other traditions rather than learning from them. However, this assessment appears reductive when examined in light of the structure of his argumentation, which is grounded in sustained engagement with Western philosophical debates, particularly on the objectivity of moral value.

In his doctoral work, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi critically engages philosophers such as C. I. Lewis and Immanuel Kant, especially their attempts to ground moral value in experience or rational autonomy. He argues that such approaches render the good probabilistic or subjective, and therefore insufficient as a basis for ethical obligation. In response, al-Faruqi reconstructs an account of value that preserves

objectivity while engaging these frameworks on their own terms, reflecting a mode of critical dialogue oriented toward trans-religious philosophical concerns.[1]

This dialogical pattern extends beyond philosophy into theological engagement. In his interaction with Reinhold Niebuhr, al-Faruqi does not evaluate Christianity from an external standpoint. Instead, he draws on the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ to highlight tensions between moral ideals and Western socio-political practice. By employing internal categories of Christian thought, his critique becomes a form of reflective, internal-theological engagement rather than doctrinal imposition.[2]

Seen in this light, al-Faruqi's method operates at the intersection of philosophical and internal-theological dialogue. While it does not conform to the expectations of comparative theology as interpreted by Duderija, it nonetheless represents a structured form of interreligious engagement. To interpret it as lacking "learning" therefore depends on a restricted definition of dialogue.

Imtiyaz Yusuf is acknowledged as dialogical but criticized for lacking theological depth, particularly for not addressing doctrinal issues within Islamic orthodoxy. This critique, however, presupposes that dialogue must begin at the level of doctrine. Yusuf's work instead offers an alternative model, in which engagement with Muslim–

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[1] Ismail Raji al-Faruqi. *On Justifying the Good: Metaphysics and Epistemology of Value*. PhD diss., Indiana University, 1952.

[2] Ismail Raji al-Faruqi. "On the Significance of Niebuhr's Ideas of Society." *Canadian Journal of Theology* 7 (1961): 100–107.

Buddhist relations emerge from concrete social realities—conflict, coexistence, and ethical collaboration—and only subsequently moves toward theological reflection.

This "context–[inter]text[uality]–context" approach reflects a praxis-oriented mode of dialogue in which theology is responsive rather than primary. Rather than indicating a lack of depth, it reconfigures the locus of dialogue by privileging ethical engagement as its entry point. Even doctrines often seen as obstacles, such as *al-walā' wa-l-barā'*, in this framework can be read in terms of ethical commitment (Sīla-Adhiṭṭhāna) and communal formation (Sangha), revealing parallels with Buddhist notions of detachment (Viveka). By prioritizing doctrinal critique, Duderija risks overlooking this context-driven form of interreligious learning.

Muna Tatari is presented as the most successful embodiment of comparative theology, particularly through her sustained engagement with Christian theology and her emphasis on reciprocal learning across traditions. Her work reflects a clear alignment with Cornille's model, as she not only studies but also incorporates insights from Christian thought into her own theological reflection.

However, her elevated status reveals an inconsistency. While Duderija emphasizes the importance of critically addressing problematic doctrines, Tatari does not engage these doctrines explicitly, yet this is not treated as a limitation. This suggests that methodological conformity to comparative theology ultimately outweighs other evaluative criteria, shaping a hierarchy based on proximity to a particular model of engagement.

The preceding discussion suggests that the main limitation of Duderija's analysis lies in a shift from an epistemological to an ontological understanding of interreligious dialogue. While Cornille locates the conditions of dialogue in interpretive dispositions such as openness and willingness to learn, Duderija extends this framework to evaluate doctrines themselves, implicitly treating them as structural obstacles. This move risks reifying doctrines and overlooking the role of interpretation. A more consistent application of Cornille's approach would recognize that the dialogical potential of any concept depends on how it is interpreted, rather than on its intrinsic content.

The interpretive nature of doctrine can be illustrated through concrete examples. In Jesus and Jihad: Reclaiming the Prophetic Heart of Christianity and Islam, Robert F. Shedinger reinterprets jihad, not as violence, but as a moral and social struggle grounded in early Islamic sources. He further employs jihad as a hermeneutical lens to re-examine the mission of Jesus Christ, particularly in terms of prophetic resistance to injustice.[3] Rather than collapsing doctrinal differences, this approach creates a comparative space in which both traditions illuminate one another. What is significant here is not only the reinterpretation of a contested concept, but the methodological shift it entails: a notion often seen as an obstacle becomes, through interpretive engagement, a productive site of theological reflection.

[3] Robert F. Shedinger. *Jesus and Jihad: Reclaiming the Prophetic Heart of Christianity and Islam*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015.

A further implication of this critique is the need to recognize multiple valid forms of interreligious engagement. While the book privileges comparative theology as the primary model, the cases examined here suggest a broader spectrum: al-Faruqi represents philosophical dialogue grounded in shared intellectual problems, Yusuf exemplifies contextual and praxis-oriented dialogue emerging from social realities, and Tatari embodies comparative theological engagement focused on reciprocal doctrinal learning. These approaches are not inherently hierarchical but respond to different contexts, questions, and aims. Treating one model as normative therefore risks marginalizing other legitimate forms of engagement.

It is precisely at this point that the main limitation of Duderija's study becomes apparent. By privileging comparative theology as the standard against which all other approaches are measured, the analysis narrows the scope of what counts as meaningful dialogue. This is further reinforced by the tendency to treat certain doctrines as inherently problematic, thereby shifting the focus from interpretive practice to theological content.

While the book makes a valuable contribution by highlighting the importance of openness, learning, and reciprocity, a more expansive approach would retain the epistemological insights of Cornille while recognizing the plurality of dialogical methods across philosophical, contextual, and theological domains. Such an approach would provide a more balanced account of Muslim engagements with religious diversity and better reflect the complexity of interreligious dialogue in contemporary contexts.

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Halim Rane and Ibrahim Zein, *Covenants with Allāh: Keystone of Islam*. New York: Routledge, 2026. xv + 240 pp. References, index. Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-032-79766-3.

The book pursues two primary objectives: (1) a historical survey of the application of the concept of covenant in Islamic history, and (2) a theorisation of covenants in Islam, whether in the form of a theory or a paradigm. As such, this review adopts these two objectives as its criteria for analysis.

To attain these objectives, the book employs an inductive textual survey of Islam's primary sources—namely, the Qur'ān and the Sunnah—by mapping the semantic relations between key terms within selected verses and narrations. This survey reveals a logical unfolding, both structurally and empirically. Structurally, it begins with God as the source of the covenant, followed by man as its second party and Satan as an adversarial third. Empirically, it traces the applications and misapplications of the covenant from the time of Adam to the advent of Prophet Muḥammad, and subsequently into modern Islamic history across various levels—from the individual to the international. This methodological framework informs the overall arrangement of the book's chapters.

Such an approach is not uncommon in Islamic studies; introductory works on fields such as *maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah*, *tafsīr*, and *taṣawwuf* often adopt similar methods. The book's distinction, therefore, lies less in methodological innovation than in its structural organisation.

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Chapter One, "Allāh, Earth, and Afterlife," outlines the basic scaffolding of the covenant paradigm by identifying three domains in which the covenant operates: God, earthly life, and the hereafter. God is the source of the covenant; earthly life constitutes the arena of its fulfilment; and the hereafter serves as the site of reckoning. This corresponds to the primordial covenant (*mīthāq alastu*) between man and God. The discussion largely reiterates themes familiar from the classical tradition.

One noteworthy point concerns the role of the *asmā' al-ḥusnā* in shaping the believer's moral orientation: they not only convey knowledge of the divine will but also inform the kind of being one ought to become. This idea—commonly associated with the notion of *takhalluq bi-akhlāq Allāh* in the Ṣūfī tradition—is not explicitly developed in relation to the covenant. Its omission represents a missed opportunity, as such a connection would have allowed the covenant paradigm to be articulated not only in moral but also in spiritual terms.

Chapter Two, "Adam, Satan, and Humanity," explores the first particularised application of the primordial covenant in the account of Adam and his wife, alongside its initial breach by Satan. From this episode, the book derives an extended network of rights and responsibilities governing human relations, beginning with the most fundamental: the covenantal bond between male and female in marriage, described as a *mīthāqan ghalīẓan*.[1]

[1] In its most elaborate and sophisticated covenantal form in Islam, see Hammūdah ʿAbd al ʿĀṭī, *The Family Structure in Islam* (Indianapolis: American

From this foundational relationship, the discussion expands to encompass broader forms of covenant governing human interaction at multiple levels—communal, societal, national, and international. In all such contexts, man remains bound by the covenant with God, guided by prophetic revelation and entrusted with the role of *khalīfah*. At the same time, the persistent presence of Satan underscores the possibility of deviation. The emphasis on human capacity for choice—obedience, disobedience, repentance, and reform—highlights the existential significance of the covenant.

Chapter Three, "Abraham, Israelites, and Arabs," and Chapter Four, "Messengers, Believers, and Disbelievers," trace the historical unfolding of covenants through the lives of the Prophets and their respective communities. Chapter Three focuses on Abraham and subsequent Prophets among his descendants—particularly those sent to the Israelites and the Arabs—while Chapter Four centres on Prophet Muḥammad. Together, these chapters establish two principal claims: first, that the prophetic mission originates in the covenant made with Abraham as the "leader of humankind" and extends to all subsequent Prophets and their followers; and second, that the fulfilment of this covenant in its earthly phase culminates in the emergence of Islam as a revealed religion.

Although these discussions make no explicit reference to earlier contemporary works on covenant theory—such as al-Attas's *Covenants Fulfilled* or Ismail Faruqi's "A Comparison of the Islamic and

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Trust Publications, 1977).

Christian Approaches to Hebrew Scripture"[2]—the influence of both is nevertheless discernible. From Faruqi, the book adopts the notion of the covenantal honour of the Israelites and the Arabs as grounded not in lineage but in fidelity to the Abrahamic covenant. From al-Attas, it draws the idea that the fulfilment of the covenant finds its culmination in Islam. A notable contribution, however, lies in the book's more detailed treatment of covenantal implications in areas such as Jewish claims to sacred lands and Christian intra- and interreligious conduct.

By this stage, the book has established a near-comprehensive account of the covenant paradigm, emphasising that its ethical prescriptions and legal provisions are contained within the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, while its exemplary realisation is embodied in the Prophetic community of al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah. (A more theoretically refined articulation of this relationship may be found in al-Attas's *Islām and Secularism*).[3]

Chapters Five to Seven extend this framework through an extensive historical survey of Muslim societies, documenting instances in which covenants were formed, upheld, or violated across a wide range of political and social contexts over fourteen centuries. While the breadth of this material is considerable, its analytical function remains consistent with the broader pattern of the work: historical cases are

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[2] Ismail Faruqi, "A Comparison of the Islamic and Christian Approaches to Hebrew Scripture" in *Ismāʿīl Fārūqī: Selected Essays* (London; Washington: IIIT, 2018), 36–55.

[3] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islām and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), 53–54.

presented primarily as illustrations of the covenantal framework rather than as sources from which new theoretical insights are derived.

Chapter Eight, "A Theory of Covenants in Islam," is perhaps the most significant, as it represents the book's attempt to fulfil its second objective. Two key terms— "paradigm" and "theory"—are employed in a largely Kuhnian sense. A paradigm is defined as a broad framework that informs perception and interpretation, while a theory is understood as a set of interrelated propositions intended to explain a phenomenon within such a framework. Within this schema, the covenant is identified as the core theory of the Islamic paradigm.

At the outset, the book appears to recognise the requirements of theory-building. However, its treatment of these requirements lacks conceptual precision. A central difficulty lies in its failure to distinguish clearly between the covenant as a concept and as a phenomenon. In its textual analyses of the Qur'ān, the covenant is treated descriptively as a conceptual structure; yet in its engagement with historical material, it is treated normatively as a standard by which phenomena are evaluated.

This shift produces a methodological inconsistency. Rather than deriving a theory inductively from historical phenomena, the analysis proceeds by applying a pre-existing conceptual framework to assess those phenomena. The theory thus precedes and governs the analysis, functioning less as an explanatory construct than as an underlying paradigm. In this sense, what is presented as a theory operates instead as a normative framework.

The implications of this are most evident in the treatment of "testability." A theory, properly speaking, must be open to verification or falsification through engagement with empirical reality. Here, however, historical cases are assessed in terms of their conformity to the covenantal framework: alignment is taken as confirmation, while deviation is attributed to failure on the part of the phenomena rather than to any inadequacy in the theory. The theory itself remains unaffected, thereby undermining its claim to explanatory status.

The difficulty, therefore, lies not merely in execution but in conceptualisation. The covenant, as articulated in the Qurʾān, functions primarily as a normative concept rather than as a descriptive theory. Its discourse is moral and evaluative rather than explanatory in the scientific sense. The absence of a clear distinction between concept and phenomenon consequently weakens the book's claim to have developed a theory in the strict sense.

This conceptual ambiguity is further reflected in the interchangeable use of terms such as "covenant paradigm," "covenantal Islamic paradigm," and "Islamic paradigm," which raises questions of definitional precision and coherence. While these formulations may be related, their lack of explicit differentiation obscures the conceptual structure the book seeks to establish.

Nevertheless, the work succeeds in demonstrating the centrality of the covenant within the Islamic paradigm. Indeed, the evidence presented suggests that the covenant is not merely a component within that paradigm but is constitutive of it. Without it, the paradigm itself would be rendered unintelligible. In this respect,

the book's emphasis on the essentially covenantal nature of Islam is well founded.

This account, however, would have been further strengthened by engagement with al-Attas's analysis of the "existential indebtedness" (*dāna* or *dayn*) of man to God as a fundamental dimension of religion (*dīn*), whereby the covenant may be understood as the means through which this primordial debt is acknowledged and repaid.[4]

Despite its claim that the covenant represents an understudied field, the evidence suggests otherwise. The concept has long been embedded within the Islamic intellectual tradition, particularly in Qur'ānic exegesis, even if not always articulated in explicitly paradigmatic terms. As Recep Şentürk has shown, for example, covenantal principles underlie broader political concepts such as the "circle of justice" (*dā'irat al-'adl*), even where they are not explicitly foregrounded.[5]

The claim of novelty is further weakened by the book's limited engagement with the *tafsīr* tradition. Aside from Ibn Kathīr, there is little indication that other major exegetical works have been substantially utilised. A more sustained engagement with this tradition might have yielded a more nuanced assessment of

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[4] al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*. 139.

[5] Recep Senturk, "Ibn Khaldūn and Kınalızāde's Concept of Dā'irat al-Siyāsah: A Rethinking of Modern Politics from A Civilisational Perspective," *TAFHIM: IKIM Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World*, 17(1): 1–21. https://doi.org/10.56389/tafhim.vol17no1.1

the concept's historical development and avoided overstating its novelty.

To conclude, the book succeeds admirably in achieving its first objective, offering a wide-ranging and detailed survey of the role of covenant in Islamic history. Its second objective, however—the development of a coherent theory—remains only partially realised. The work is best understood as a preliminary contribution to a more rigorous theoretical formulation.

Nevertheless, its significance should not be understated. In the sense described by Ibn Ḥazm, the book performs the important scholarly function of *jamʿ*—the gathering and organisation of dispersed materials. Its principal contribution lies in bringing together a wide range of discussions on covenant across the Islamic tradition and presenting them within a unified structure. In this respect, its value is considerable, even if its theoretical ambitions exceed what is ultimately achieved.

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TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

	Ar	Pr	OT	UR		Ar	Pr	OT	UR		Ar	Pr	OT	UR
ء	ʾ	ʾ	ʾ	ʾ	ز	z	z	z	z	گ	–	g	g	g
ب	b	b	b	b	ڑ	–	–	–	ṛ	ل	l	l	l	l
پ	–	p	p	p	ژ	–	zh	j	zh	م	m	m	m	m
ت	t	t	t	t	س	s	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n	n
ٹ	–	–	–	ṭ	ش	sh	sh	ş	sh	ہ	h	h	h[1]	h[1]
ث	th	th	th	th	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ṣ	ṣ	و	w	v/u	v	v/u
ج	j	j	c	j	ض	ḍ	ẓ	ż	ż	ی	y	y	y	y
چ	–	ch	çh	ch	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ۃ	-ah			-a[2]
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al[3]			
خ	kh	kh	kh	kh	ع	ʿ	ʿ	ʿ	ʿ					
د	d	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğ	gh					
ڈ	–	–	–	d	ف	f	f	f	f					
ذ	dh	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	k	q					
ر	r	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ	k					

[1] – when not final
[2] – at in construct state
[3] – (article) al - or 1-

VOWELS

		Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	Ā	–
	و	ū	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	iyy (final form ī)	iy (final form ī)	iyy (final form ī)
	و	uww (final form ū) uvv (for Persian)	uv	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	au	ev
	ى	ai or ay	ay	ey
Short	ـَ	a	a	a or e
	ـُ	u	u	u or ü o or ö
	ـِ	i	i	i

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. جھ jh گھ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

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