Measuring the Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr: From its Contentious Nature to the Formation of Sunnite Sufism

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Abstract

This article discusses the Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr by al-Sulami against the extant accusation of being Shiʿite. It is a certainly Sunnite commentary accumulated from their-own traditional sources as well as representing Sunnite theological principles. Despite its contentious title as well as the use of weak ḥadīths, the nature of Sulami’s tafsīr was relatively free from either Shiʿite elements or mystico-philosophical notions contradictory to the spirit of Sunnite orthodoxy. Al-Sulami’s tafsīr is to be classified maʾthūr, but it conceives spiritual significances (ḥaqāʾiq) that might have been set beyond the common objectives of Qurʾānic tafsīr in general. It is not a general tafsīr for laymen, but an esoteric interpretation of the Qurʾānic verses for the elites of sufi readers.

Abstrak

**Keywords:** Islamic spirituality, esoteric interpretation, Sufi Qur’ān commentary, Sunnite Sufism, scripturally based Sufism.

**Introduction**

The *Haqa’iq al-Tafṣīr* may have been one of the greatest achievements in the history of the development of mystical commentary on the Qur’ān. Not only because it comprises two huge volumes of tafsīr, which was much more extensive than its predecessor, the *Tafṣīr al-Qur’ān al-Azīm* by Sahl al-Tustari (d. 289/896). Tustari’s *Tafṣīr* had been diffused at the end of 3rd/9th century in Basra, whereas the *Haqa’iq al-Tafṣīr* were published two centuries later at the turn to 5th/11th century, but it specifically had incited wide-spread reactions among the Muslim scholarship. In a broader scope than al-Tustari’s *Tafṣīr*, the *Haqa’iq al-Tafṣīr* includes almost all exegetical materials derived from Sahl al-Tustari, along with all other sayings and accounts al-Sulami could gather from his Sufi precursors called by the epithet “the people of profound reality” (*ahl al-Haqa’iq*).

Looking from the general nature of a traditional work of Qur’anic exegesis, al-Sulami’s method of arranging those mystical traditions into a structure of interpretation of the Qur’anic verses in his *Haqa’iq al-Tafṣīr* can be compared to Ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarī’s method in his *Ja‘mi‘ al-Bayan ‘an Ta‘wil ‘ayl al-Qur’ān*. Both *tafṣīrs* employ the traditional style of interpretation based on transmitted exegetical materials (*al-tafṣīr bi al-ma‘thūr*). Both al-Ṭabarī and al-Sulami were also traditionists whose intellectual linkage meets indirectly in the revered figure of the Shāfi‘ite jurist Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ‘Alī. Al-Qaffāl shāhi al-Marwāzī (d. 365/976). al-Ṭabarī was al-Qaffāl’s teacher, whereas al-Sulami was al-Qaffāl’s disciple. The only slight difference between  

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4 Al-Qaffāl belonged to multi academic talent, as he renowned to be a jurist, traditionist, as well as linguist in the Shāfi‘i school of Islamic law. He took traditions from Ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarī, while among the Nishapuri traditionists who received his traditions afterwards were Abū ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulami (d. 412/1021) and al-Ḥākim al-Naysabūrī. See his biography in Ibn Khallikān, *Wafāyat al-A‘yān*, vol. iv, 200-1, also al-Ṣuḥḥi, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyya al-Kubrā*, Ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad al-Ṭanāhī and ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥuluw (Cairo: Isā al-Bābi al-Ḥalabi, 1964), vol. iii, 200-227.
the two works is that unlike al-Ṭabarī who provided full lists of transmission, for the most cases of interpretations al-Sulāmī simplified the lists of transmission by reducing them into certain principal authorities among the most prominent Sufi figures. In all, there is a unique nature of al-Sulāmī’s Ḥaqa’iq al-Tafsīr, in which he confined his collection to provide only symbolic interpretations of the Qur’ān, compared to the vast varieties of exegetical genre within al-Ṭabarī’s tafsīr.⁵

On the basis of such a unique character, there is an extant presumption that the Ḥaqa’iq al-Tafsīr had been accused to have shared the nature of a Bāṭini ta’wil, which consequently gives the Ḥaqa’iq its Shi’ite flavor. Such opinion is found in al-Dhahabī despite his doubt on the validity of such claim.⁶ Such harsh criticism also appears in al-Suyūṭī, when he asserted that al-Sulāmī’s tafsīr was accused of being “untrustworthy”.⁷ In these two demeaning responses to the Ḥaqa’iq al-Tafsīr, the accusation of al-Sulāmī’s being a Qarmāṭī might have been based on his quotes from al-Ḥallāj.⁸ Besides, there are also several objections posed by other scholars of non-Shafi’ite madhhabs, who put their comments against the sincere intention of al-Sulāmī within the intensive project of enrooting Sufism to the Qur’ānic basis along with the formation of Sunnite orthodoxy. This piece will measure the Ḥaqa’iq al-Tafsīr to be a book of tafsīr representing not a Shi’ite style of allegorical ta’wil, but a Sunnite traditional commentary accumulated from their own traditional sources as well as representing a Sunnite traditional perspective.

Sulāmī’s Being A Sufi Traditionist


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born on 10th Juma'a al-Akhira 325/927 in Nishapur.\(^9\) He belonged to the clan of al-Azd\(^10\) from the side of his father and to that of Sulaym from the side of his mother. His maternal grandfather Abü 'Amr Ismā'īl b. Nujayd al-Sulami (d. 365/976), a proponent of the Malāmātīyya movement, played a very dominant role in directing Sulami’s basic and advance studies in traditional Islamic sciences (‘ilm al-zāhir).\(^11\) According to al-Subkī,\(^12\) al-Sulami was linked through his maternal grandfather to a number of renowned authorities among Nishapuri traditionists.\(^13\) Besides, Sulami made his own extensive travels outside Nishapur to visit neighboring regions such as Marw, Iraq, and the Hijāz, where

\(^9\) This date is according to Abü Sa'id Muhammad b. 'Āli al-Khashshāb as quoted in al-Dhahabi, *Siyyar A'lām al-Nubalā*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-Risāla, 9th edition, 1993), vol. xvii, 247; Dhahabi also quoted 'Abd al-Ghafir al-Farisi in his *Siyyar Nāsabūr* mentioned that al-Sulami was born in 330 (al-Dhahabi, *Siyyar A'lām al-Nubalā*, vol. xvii, 250).


\(^11\) Al-Sulami in his introduction to the *Haqa'iq al-Tafsir* identified the “outward sciences” as the Islamic traditional sciences such as the varieties of Qur'ānic recitation (*qira'at*), some sorts of Qur'ānic interpretation (*tafāsir*), and other dimensions of Qur'ānic sciences such as its unsolved questions (*mushkila*t*), legal judgments (*ahkām*), desinential inflection (*i'ra*b*), linguistics (*lugha*), general concepts and details (*al-mujmal wa al-mufassal*), as well as abrogative and abrogated verses (*al-nasikh wa al-mansūkh*).

\(^12\) Al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shafi'iyya al-Kubra*, vol. iv, 144.

he collected hadith from other respected figures of the 4th/10th century traditionists.  

1. Being Traditionist within a Malāmati Background

Al-Sulamī’s bright career as a traditionist was echoed by one of his contemporaries al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, who met al-Sulamī listening to his hadith during the latter’s stay at Baghdad. Al-Khaṭīb asserted that al-Sulamī had been specifically interested in collecting mystical traditions (ākhlāq ṣūfīyya). Several works comprising a codex of mystical traditions (sunan ṣūfīyya), a work on Qur’anic exegesis, as well as hagiographic treatises were attributed to his name. In his Tābaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyya al-Kubra, al-Subkī wrote that al-Sulamī had dedicated to the field of hadith for forty years. Such a long period of traveling and teaching prophetic traditions had made al-Sulamī an expert of hadith. Murād b. Yūsuf al-Dūsī in his Shams al-āfāq fī dhikr al-ba‘d min Manāqib al-Sulamī wa min manāqib Abī ‘Alī al-Daqqāq also asserted that al-Sulamī had also involved in teaching activities of the “outward sciences” (al-‘ulūm al-zāhira) as well as issuing fatwas.  

There is no definite work showing al-Sulamī’s contribution to the field of fatwas, but scrutinizing certain treatises and Sufi manuals composed by al-Sulamī during his lifetime, such as Kitāb al-Sama’, Kitāb al-Arbā‘in fī al-Taṣawwuf, the Risāla al-Malāmatiyya, and the Kitāb al-Futuwwa will lead us to see that those works were composed in relation to the extent requests by his audiences. These types of works were intended to provide answers on specific problems posed to him, which may have resembled the question-answer type of the fatwa literature. In such particular treatises al-Sulamī explained specific issues based on his skillful analyses employing transmitted materials of the prophetic traditions. After all, we can say that by being a traditionist, al-Sulamī

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was able to compose almost a hundred works comprising a wide range of Islamic traditional sciences.\textsuperscript{18}

2. *His Spiritual Masters: al-Šu‘lūkī and al-Naṣrābādī*

Al-Sulami’s attraction to Sufism came through the hands of Ibn Nujayd, who sent him to his colleague Abū Sahl Mūḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Šu‘lūkī (d. 369/980)\textsuperscript{19} in order to receive the latter’s spiritual training. Al-Šu‘lūkī was a moderate Sūfī associated to the Junaydian line of the Baghdadi mystical tradition. He also belonged to a family with profound knowledge of the Shāfī’ite School of Islamic law. With this strong scholarly background in both fiqh and ascetic experiences, al-Šu‘lūkī was the most suitable teacher for al-Sulami considering his Malāmaṭiyya background trained under the auspices of Ibn al-Nujayd. Al-Šu‘lūkī’s full name is Abū Sahl Mūḥammad b. Sulaymān b. Mūḥammad b. Ḥarūn b. Bishr al-Ḥanāfī al-‘IJli. He was born in the neighboring region of Isfahan in around 296/908. His nisba to al-Ḥanāfī refers to the Banū Ḥanāfī al-‘IJli, not the Hanafite legal school. He passed away in Dhu al-Qa’dā 369/980.\textsuperscript{20} The nisba al-Šu‘lūkī, meaning a ‘desert wanderer’ attributed to him as he embraced Sufism, was probably opposed to his legist background of a rich family. On a cold winter day in Isfahan, he gave his cloak to a poor man. He clothed himself in a woman’s robe [probably belongs to his wife as he possessed no spare cloak] in order to attend his class in Islamic law. At last, his return to Nishapur for the funeral of his uncle Abū Ṭayyib Ahmad al-Šu‘lūkī in 337/949\textsuperscript{21} resulted in a permanent stay in the city as he, then, decided to stop wandering and finally settled down in Nishapur.\textsuperscript{22}

As a Sūfī under the auspices of Šu‘lūkī, al-Sulami underwent harsh spiritual trainings. The story of his initiatory ritual in Sufism up to receiving the degree of perfection, including the permission to raise disciples, is illustrated by M.J. Kister in his introductory section of the edition of al-Sulami’s *Adāb al-Šuhba*. Quoting an unpublished treatise *Shams al-Afāq fī Dhikr al-ba‘dī min manāqib al-Sulami wa min manāqib Abī ʿAlī al-Daqqāq* by Murād b. Yūsuf al-Ḥanāfī al-Dūsī, Kister wrote:

\textsuperscript{18} The number of his works reach even more than a hundred according to an account of ‘Abd al-Ghafr al-Fārisī as cited by al-Subkī. See al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfī‘īyya al-Kubrā*, vol. iv, 144.
\textsuperscript{19} See his biography in al-Dhahābī, *Siyar ʿlām al-Nubalā‘*, vol. xvi, 235-240.
\textsuperscript{20} Al-Dhahābī, *Siyar ʿlām al-Nubalā‘*, vol. xvi, 239.
\textsuperscript{21} For his biography, see al-Dhahābī, *Siyar ʿlām al-Nubalā‘*, vol. xv, 391.
“Al-Sulamī took the spiritual path (tariqa) and Gnostic knowledge (ma‘rifah) of the peaks of Sufism from Shaykh Abū Sahl al-Ṣu‘lūkī, who taught him divine recollection (dhikr) and took the pledge of allegiance to stand for being his child. He [i.e. al-Ṣu‘lūkī] then instructed him to join in his seclusion (khalwat), and to recite [certain] divine names which were suit to. Then, he left him alone in a forty night seclusion (al-khalwat al-arba‘iniyya) until God opened his heart. Then, by his blessed hands Su‘lūkī clothed him with the garment of the sincere poor. Sulamī continued to undergo his seclusion until God lets the master [i.e. al-Ṣu‘lūkī] know as he envisions by his inner sight and the strength of intuitive knowledge (fiqhah) that this al-Sulami was of the people whom God had opened his profound reality, and He had [also] made him reach the degree of perfection among the Sufis. Consequently, the master granted him permission to raise disciples. Then, for the continuing period al-Sulami began to raise disciples, as many people came to company and grow up with him, take benefits from him, and graduate under his auspices.”

Kister concluded from al-Dūsī’s eclectic accounts on al-Sulamī’s initiation that al-Sulamī not only received the Sufi cloak from Abū Sahl al-Ṣu‘lūkī, but he also received an investiture of the white garment of Junayd by the hands of Abū al-Qāsim al-Nasrābādī (d. 367/978), one of Su‘lūkī’s colleagues.

Abū al-Qāsim Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. Mūḥammad al-Nasrābādī was a native Nishapuri. Al-Hākim al-Naysabūrī testified that al-Nasrābādī was the tongue of the people of profound reality at his time, as he was also renowned for his sound spiritual states.

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learned ḥadīth from several traditionists in Nishapur. When he traveled for more than twenty years, he became a preacher (ważīz) as well as listening to ḥadīth from several traditionists in Baghdad. During his stay in Baghdad he was attracted to engage in Sufism under the guidance of Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/946). In addition, he continued to study ḥadīth when he, then, traveled to Syria and Egypt. He returned to Nishapur in around 340/952. He spent his last days in Makka from 365/976 up to his demise in Dhū al-Ḥijja 367/978. It was through al-Nasrābādhi’s teacher that al-Sulāmī was strongly linked to the Baghdadi Sufi circle, whose mystical genealogy reaches to the authority of al-Junayd. The Baghdadi mystical principles that seemed to have been inherited from Junayd are clearly shown in al-Nasrābādhi’s account on the primary principles of scripturally based Sufism as he said, “The main principles (ṣuḥūl) of taṣawwuf are persevering the Holy Scripture and prophetic traditions, leaving desires and innovations, augmenting the masters’ honor, looking upon the people’s impediments, habituating to perform continuous dhikr, as well as to avoid taking exemptions (rukhās) and excessive interpretations.” Besides, what is preserved by al-Nasrābādhi from the main characteristic of Junaydian


29 Besides al-Shiblī, according to Ibn ʿAsākir, al-Nasrābādhi was also took the spiritual guidance of Abū ʿAlī al-Rudbārī. See Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh Madīna Dimashq, vol. vii, 104.


32 This date is according to al-Dhahābī, Siyār Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ, vol. xvi, 265. However, some other sources mentioned that it was the year 366/977. See al-Khāṭīb, Tārīkh Baghdād aw Madīnat al-Salām, vol. vi, 169; Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh Madīna Dimashq, vol. vii, 109.

33 Al-Dhahābī, Siyār Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ, vol. xvi, 265.

nature of mystical teaching is reported in al-Sulami’s Ṭabaqāt al-Sūfīyya, in which al-Nasrābādī concluded, “Nobody will go astray on this path except by a wrong start, because the mistaken start affects to the [wrong] end.” As both al-Šu’ārūlūkī and al-Nasrābādī took mystical counsels from al-Shibli, it was through these Sufi masters that the connection between al-Sulami and the Baghdadi Sufi circle was strengthened.

Al-Nasrābādī’s relationship with al-Sulami was firmly established, as both shared the same concern to collect prophetic traditions. It is also known that al-Nasrābādī was considered a reliable (thiqa) transmitter. Their shared concern for hadith was shown, when both al-Sulami and al-Nasrābādī were visiting Makka. According to the story, whenever they came across each other the latter would say, “Let’s listen to hadiths!” According to al-Sulami, this was in 366/977, shortly before the death of Nasrābādī in 367/978. In view of such an intimate relation, and considering the important status of the master within the mystical circle of Baghdad, it was through him that al-Sulami might have been able collect the mystical traditions for his Tārīkh and Ṭabaqāt al-Sūfīyya. It was through the direct contact with al-Nasrābādī that al-Sulami learnt much about the historical background of the Sufi circle of Baghdad. This strong connection to the Baghdadi circle was not only significant for his collection of mystical sayings, most of which had been promulgated by the Sufi masters among the Baghdad circle; but this strong bond also explains that the spiritual path al-Sulami had undergone was genuinely connected to the Baghdad sober type of Sufism.

3. Curing Sufism from its Degraded Condition

By considering various influences like the Malamātī background coming from Ibn Nujayd, the blend between Shāfi’i fiqh and sober Sufism taken from Abū Sahl al-Šu’ārūlūkī and Abū al-Qasim al-Nasrābādī, we are quite certain to say that al-Sulami as a Sufi belonged to a moderate type of Sufism that we may call it “Sunnite Sufism”. The tendency to link Sufism with the Shari‘a might have become the new wave of orthodox scholasticism towards the formation of mystical theology, considering the degrading condition of the contemporaneous climate, including Islamic spirituality. In the hands of al-Sulami the Baghdadi tradition was molded into a unique mystical school of Nishapur because the

spirit of making a blend between Sufism and Shari'ah remained the focus within the traditionist background of the Nishapuri Sufis. In addition, an extent influence from the neighboring regions of the eastern provinces might have contributed to the spirit of establishing moderate Sufism to remain alive also, especially among the Hanafites in Transoxiana. We may note Abū Bakr al-Kalabadi (d. 385/994) who remarked that his tendency to make a blend between Sufism and the Shari'ah was due to the decay of Sufism.38

In order to cure Sufism from its degradation and to secure its good image, al-Sulami was connecting Sufism to orthodoxy through his magnanimous collection of prophetic traditions. In his Kitāb Jawāni‘ Adāb al-Šūfiyya, edited by E. Kolberg, for example, he tried to enroot Sufism in the traditions of the prophet Muhammad. He did this in several treatises like Uyūb al-Naṣf wa Mudāwanātuhā, Kitāb al-Sama‘; and al-Risāla al-Malāmatiyya. All treatises show his responses to the environment that was in favor of Sufism, but in which Sufism was facing degrading problems that demanded immediate responses. The responses took the shape of writing certain treatises to provide answers and clarifications. The task of al-Sulami’s works was to harmonize Sufism with orthodoxy as expressed by the traditionists (ahl al-sunna), a popular name for the adherents of the Shafi’ite School in Islamic law.

In conclusion, al-Sulami was being a Sufi traditionist as wished by al-Sari al-Saqati to his nephew al-Junayd, when he left al-Sari to quench the advanced spiritual guidance from al-Harith al-Muḥāsibī. At this occasion al-Sari prayed that his nephew will have become a Sufi traditionist (ṣāḥib al-ḥadīth ṣufī), not the extatic Sufi (ṣūfi ṣāḥib ḥadīth).39 In fact, this wish represents the nature of the sober type of Junaydian Sufism, upon which we may call “the Sunnite Sufism”. It was from the line of such a sober type of Sufism that al-Sulami inherited the spirit of the Baghdadi Sufi circle from either al-Sulu’ki or al-Nasrābādī.

38 He wrote that the decay of Sufism was to be his main motivation to compose the book. It is true that he lived in environment favorable to Sufism, but one in which Sufism began to deteriorate as he said that at that time the profound reality (tahqiq) became embellishment (bilya) and verification (tasdiq) only became ornament (ziya), whereas claimants took their claims from someone unknown. Thus, up to his era, Sufism accordingly had lost its sense, only the name remained. See al-Kalabadi, Al-Ta‘arruf li Madhhab Ahl al-Tasawwuf, first ed. A.J. Arberry (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1933), 4.

The Contentious Haqāʾiq al-Tafṣīr

Representing of the extended proponents of the Baghdadi Sufi circle in Nishapur, the Haqāʾiq al-Tafṣīr was one of Sulami’s greatest achievements. However, it became quite controversial as there had so much criticism to this tafsīr in the later period. To understand the contentious elements of this tafsīr, we have to say that such might have been aroused by the use of the transmitted exegetical materials, in which al-Sulami incorporated the ḥadīth in addition to mystical sayings of the previous Sufis among the tābiʿin and the following generations to shape his mystical commentary. In the latter category, al-Sulami collected comments on notable Sufis and revered figures among his predecessors ranging from Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq to one of al-Sulami’s own teachers, Abū al-Qaṣīm al-Naṣrābāḏhū (d. 367/978). The aim of conducting a traditional style of exegetical writing represented by the Haqāʾiq al-Tafṣīr might have been what Kohlberg mentions as spreading the knowledge of Sufism to the general public. This aim is obvious in al-Sulami’s introductory remarks of the tafsīr, as he decided to put aside the outward sciences of tafsīr by providing the opinion (maqāla) of the masters of the knowledge of the profound reality (ahl al-haqqāq); hence, he collected their sayings and arranged those sayings in accordance to the order of the chapters and verses of the Holy Scripture. In addition, the way he composed the book by omitting most chains of transmission certainly incited controversy concerning his intellectual credit of being a reliable transmitter.

From his own huge collection of Sufi sayings al-Sulami was able to compose a compilation of mystical traditions for the commentary of the Qur’ān. The most probable factor that put this work under harsh criticism, even from his fellow Shāfiʿite adherents, was that he employed the traditional method of riwa'yā in providing specific commentaries on the Qur’ānic verses that only sustained symbolic interpretations. These symbolic interpretations should be classified under the method of taʾwīl, which transpasses the boundaries of the approved formal interpretive accounts referred to by the term tafsīr. Hence, both his aim to compose Qur’ānic commentary beyond the formally and normally literal meanings of the Qur’ānic verses and the contentious title of his book of Qur’ānic commentary has certainly caused many scholars to criticize him and his book later. Among the outspoken critics some also accused al-Sulami of having made false attributions to certain revered figures like Jaʿfar al-

Sādiq, to which these false attribution in turn would have been raising the problem of transmission in his traditional style of interpretation, as well as challenging his intellectual credibility.

On the ground that the Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr is responded by the later generations after al-Sulamī’s demise to be controversial work of tafsīr, the further questions are what reasons to explain behind such a controversy and does it truly bear Shi’ite flavor as al-Sulamī was also being related to the Bāṭiniyya? The answer of these two question will be highlighted by some findings that being composed by a Sufi traditionist like al-Sulamī the Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr should also represent a Qur’ānic commentary laid down under the sound principles of Sunnism.

1. A Confusing Context

The first point to explain on what reasons behind the contentious nature of the Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr is that the work was composed within a confusing context of what the Arabic term tafsīr denotes. By analyzing the introductory section of the Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr, we can clearly define the author’s intention on what kinds of exegetical materials he had been able to collect into his compendium. However, it remains unclear how he envisaged the place of his own collection within the existing types of tafsīr. It seems that al-Sulamī, who was very much aware of the scope of the extent genres of tafsīr, had already excluded his piece from the extant kinds of Qur’ānic interpretation and Qur’ānic studies. In addition, from the title given to al-Sulamī’s collection we may also conclude that the term tafsīr, employed in the title “Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr,” might have been applied to any sorts of collections comprising various kinds of exegetical traditions of Qur’ānic interpretation, including the esoteric approach. A supporting argument for attaching the term tafsīr to the collection of traditionally transmitted materials can be discerned in the view of Abū Nasr al-Qushayrī, who lived in Nishapur about two generations after al-Sulamī, that the exegetical method of tafsīr was conducted by way of following (ittibāʿ) and direct communication (samaʿ).

41 The fact that al-Sulamī’s works, especially the Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr, lack indicating the definite source, as sometimes he simply narrates qīla, meaning ‘it is mentioned’ with no reference to his sources contributed to discredit his ability as a muḥaddith.


We may thus say that al-Sulami was certainly a collector of exegetical traditions. He was able to quote a variety of exegetical approaches and related them to the names of early Sufis as the principal sources, not to his own name as a compiler. Thus, if the early Sufis produced a kind of ta’wil within the framework of allegoric and symbolic interpretations, so this kind of ta’wil was not al-Sulami’s own inference. Al-Sulami did not perform istinbaṭ, in the sense of “inferring a meaning from the texts by way of exerting one’s mind and using the strength of one’s innate disposition”, nor solely producing sorts of ta’wil. His task as an exegete is merely presenting varieties of opinion while instigating readers to choose the most preferable meaning on their own stances. Hence, he merely played his role as a conveyor of such mystical traditions. Consequently, by judging the title of the book and his method of compilation, we can say that exerting exegesis by way of presenting a collection of traditions was certainly included into the category of tafsīr. However, unlike al-Ṭabarî who consistently provided the complete chains of transmission, al-Sulami often omitted the isnaḍ, for which he was often criticized for such omissions.

The contentious nature of al-Sulami’s compilation should certainly be reduced to the fact that he unnoticeably play important role in selecting the mystical traditions by way of conducting censorship of any obsolete views among certain early Sufis’ opinions. The absence of a detailed exposition on the mystical doctrine of the emanative process of creation shows us that he conducted a certain form of censorship in the process of selecting the mystical traditions. This censorship was taken because the detailed elaboration of the doctrine of Muhammadan light incites a slightly Shi’ite flavor that does not suit both rational and traditional perspectives of the Ashʿarite theological system.

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45 This interpretations refers to the mystical doctrine of Muhammadan light promulgated by Sahl al-Tustari, in addition to Ja’far al-Sādiq as mentioned by Sulami in Haqā’iq al-Tafsīr, ii, 343. However, unlike al-Tustari who explained the doctrine in his own collection (see Tustarī, Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Azīm (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya al-Kubra, 1911), 68; see also pages 40-41). Al-Sulami quoted Sahl al-Tustari as well as Ja’far without details in his Haqā’iq al-Tafsīr, ii, 45.

46 The supposedly Shi’ite origin of the doctrine of Muhammadan light was indicated by Ibn ʿArabi to have come from ‘Ali b. Abī Tālib (see Ibn ʿArabi, Al-Futūḥāt al-Makhkīyya fī Maʿrifat Al-Sarār, 2 vols. (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya, 1972), vol. ii, 361). In Sulami, this view was received through Ja’far. By the growing tendency of enrooting Sufism in Sulami’s works, the doctrine of the emanative
Nevertheless, it still remain confusing to classify the Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr under the methodological framework of tafsīr, as we understood the term today to mean an objective interpretation of the Qurʾānic verses. The reason to exclude Sulami’s interpretation from the formal category of tafsīr is based on the primary consideration that the exegetical materials collected by al-Sulami were laying outside the common exegetical genres generally conducted by scholars of his time. This may be understood from al-Sulami’s own explication in his introductory section of the book that he only provided "comprehension" or "understanding" derived from a certain group of people he indicated with the epithet "the people of profound reality" (ahl al-haqiqa). According to al-Sulami, such a compilation had been neglected as there were scarcely any collections of Sufis’ sayings and opinions. Thus, he specifically excluded his collection from the so called a scholarly genre of "outward sciences" that commonly deserved the term tafsīr. In summary, he actually did not compose a general exegetical work commonly called by term tafsīr, but an esoteric one for a different class of readers, viz. very restricted spiritual elites, on the basis of the precaution that the contents would have been misunderstood by general populace.

2. The Borderline Category

On the basis of the above confusing context to determine the meaning of tafsīr as understood in the era of al-Sulami, we move on to proceed our second assumption that perhaps one would understand that the term tafsīr was put by al-Sulami into a borderline category which could be flexibly suited to any kinds of comprehension. However, the use of the term tafsīr for a book comprising esoteric exegesis became the object of various attacks from differing points of views promulgated by his critics, either among his contemporaries or more particularly among the critics of the following generations. Hence, as it was mentioned earlier by Ibn Ḥabīb al-Naysabūrī (d. 406/1015), 47 it will be better to situate the diffusion of the Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr under the degrading scholarly climate of Nishapur, in which contemporary ulama could not distinguish between the concepts of tafsīr and ta’wil. Besides, it was also clear that Ibn process of creation was considered obsolete, compared to the Ashʿarite’s theory of creation of the world out of nothingness.

47 His grievance to the degrading scholarly climate of Nishapur at the turn of the 5th/11th century was about the scholars’ ignorance of distinction between tafsīr and ta’wil, as well as the way to recite the Qurʾān properly and to know the meaning of its verses, release from hard work, deep thinking, as well as their hatred of being questioned. This statement is quoted by al-Zarkashi, Al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qurʾān, vol. ii, 152; as previously mentioned in chapter 1, note no. 53.
Habib’s statement implied to a century-long period of transition from the end of formative period of Islamic thought that brought the triumph of Sunnism. The era was marked politically by the extant but slowly diminishing influence of the Buyids on the central ‘Abbāsid caliphate in Baghdad, contrary to the strengthening position of the Seljuks in Khurasan. This political situation brought about the victory of traditionists within the development of Islamic scholasticism.

By setting aside any dubious schismatic approach, the degrading scholarly climate illustrated by Ibn Ḥabīb al-Naysabūrī might have been referring to the narrowing concept of tafsīr that had been initiated by al-Māturīdī (d. 944), which marked the end of the formative period of Islamic thought along with the maturing Sunnī theology. Al-Māturīdī conceived tafsīr to be “[Making] a scission (qat’) that the intended meaning of a word (laţţ) is such and such with a testimony before God that He entitled the word with such [a meaning]; if there is a definite proof, the meaning is valid; but if not, it will be an analytical interpretation (tafsīr bi al-ra’ī), which is forbidden;” whereas ta’wil was “to prefer (tarjiḥ) one of the possible meanings carried by a Qur’ānic verse, but without scission (qat’) [on that meaning] nor [requiring] a testimony to God.”

Looking to the above definitions, as a matter of fact, the distinction between the term tafsīr and ta’wil was as yet unknown as there had been no certain objection to employ either the terms of tafsīr, ta’wil, or ma’na for any sorts of exegetical methods during the formation of Islamic thought marked by the demise al-Māturīdī ca. 350 AH. Both tafsīr and ta’wil had previously denoted the activities of interpreting the Holy Writ. In this general sense, al-Farra’ (d. 210/825) named his book Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān, while Sahl al-Tustari (d. 283/896) named his mystical interpretation Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Azīm, and finally al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) named his compilation with the title Jāmi‘ al-Bayan ‘an Ta’wil āy al-Qur’ān. All of them were classical exegetes, who lived before al-Māturīdī. There had been no objection to name exegetical collections to any names during the classical period, hence the exchangeable terms of

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48 The end of formative period of Islamic thought is marked by the demise of al-Ash’arī (d. 935) and al-Māturīdī (d. 944). W. Montgomery Watt, The Formative Period of Islamic Thought (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 1973), 316.
49 See Frye (1975), 228.
ta'wil, tafsir, or ma'na were similarly denote the same meaning of Qur’anic interpretation. Such an unscrupulous usage of various exegetical methods was clear in the opinion of Abu ‘Ubayd (d. 225/840), who had noted that both terms were synonymous.  

Al-Suyūṭī, who cited Abu ‘Ubayd’s opinion in his al-Itqān continued to explain that some people (qawm) began to disagree with such a simple generalization in about one and a half centuries after the death of Abu Ubayd. At that moment the problem reached the ears of Abu al-Qāsim Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb al-Naysabūrī (d. 406/1015) who asserted that the distinction between the two terms was in need of being explicatd in more details.  

However, the long span of more than a century from the introduction by al-Māturīḏī and its application in the era of al-Sulāmī is also too long to ignore in the development of Qur’anic hermeneutics. Al-Suyūṭī himself mentioned al-Māturīḏī’s opinion, which may really have introduced the extant technical differences between the terms tafsir and ta’wil since the near end of the classical period. However, the remote area of Samarkand, where al-Māturīḏī spent most of his life, in addition to his unknown scholarly career as well as his ascetic life, may have contributed to the persistent ignorance of this shifting concept.  

The most important contribution initiated by al-Māturīḏī to the development of Qur’anic interpretation is that he had outlined a clear demarcation between tafsir and ta’wil. It was certainly al-Māturīḏī’s technical definition of the term tafsir, viz. to be the scission (qat) of the intended meaning of a word (lafẓ), which was indeed very important contribution in narrowing down the technical definition of the term tafsir. Its meaning from then on had become restricted to the interpretation of Qur’anic verses applying the method of ‘ibāra which means, according to Abū Zayd, “to limit the meaning, making the meaning locked (mughlaqa) and reaches its end.”  

The immediate impact of such a restriction to the concept of tafsir was that the activity of interpreting the Qur’anic verses is to be conducted within a more scriptural approach. In this approach, the tafsir for a verse takes its proof by linking the verse to a sequential search starting with parallel Qur’anic passages, and then continuing with the Hadith. If there were no Qur’anic parallels, nor anything to be traced in the other scriptural sources, the interpretation is to be

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taken by way of *ijtihād*. A detailed elaboration of such a hierarchic procedure can be found in the work of a medieval traditionist like Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and also in writings of his disciple Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373). In fact, this hierarchic procedure laid down the principles of exegesis in the later development of Sunnism. It was through such an emendation that the narrowing sense of the term *tafsīr* would be standard within the scholarly milieu of the Sunnite in the formation of Islamic orthodoxy.

Consequently, analytical interpretation by way of exercising *ijtihād* might have been permitted as long as the explication of the meaning of a verse could not be found within the Qur’ānic parallel or its explanation in Prophetic traditions. Moreover, any other kinds of interpretation will be posited outside the boundary of the term *tafsīr*. To mention some examples of these kinds are exegetical methods conducted by extreme jurists, theologians, philosophers, and the Sufis. All of kinds of interpretations would only be classified under the category of *ta’wīl*.

A further impact of the formation of orthodoxy within the scholarly atmosphere of Muslim scholasticism, especially the Sunni religious group, was the distinction between the approved method of *tafsīr* that belonged to the group of traditionists, i.e. the orthodox followers who often named themselves as “the People of Tradition”, “ahl al-sunna”, or “ahl al-ḥadīth”; and the condemned method of *ta’wīl* that was attributed to the heterodox group, the “ahl al-bida’”, among whom the Sufis were also included, as well as the proponents of the condemned religious schools. Political struggle may also

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56 The distinction between *tafsīr* and *ta’wīl* was often developed as the difference between a literal and an allegorical interpretation, or a single and a multiple derivation of meanings. From sociological perspective, *ta’wil* seems to be “the other face of a text” (*al-wajh al-akhir li al-naṣṣ*) in the Islamic civilization of the Arabs. This consequently leads to consider *ta’wil* reprehensible (*makruh*) within the formal religious thought based
have contributed significantly to this growing dichotomy between the approved group of intellectuals and the condemned ones. In fact, Sufis had actually been the object of condemnation since they were positioned into a marginal community, who used to remain aloof of the political sphere. And even if they had been involved in certain political movements, such political participation would have been the reason to brand them as heretics.\footnote{The case of al-Hallaj’s execution, for example, was embellished on his connection with the politically rebellious movement of the Qarmatiiyya. See Massignon, \textit{The Passion of Hallaj. Mystic and Martyr of Islam}, transl. from the French with a biographical foreword by Herbert Mason (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), vol. i, 200-1; vol. iii, 193-4.}

Probing deeper the \textit{Haqa’iq al-Tafsir}, Sulami’s attempt to collect only mystical traditions for his exegesis of the Qur’an (\textit{tafsir}) may have been considered unusual in the eyes of tradition, since they were commonly limited the term \textit{tafsir} only to sorts of rigid and literal approaches of interpretation. Al-Sulami tried to blend Sufism with the Sharī‘a that marks his works full of speculative ideas amidst the proofs of traditional sources. Such was not quite welcomed by traditionists who objected to the speculative ideas poured into their seemingly puritan line of thought. This would also underline the compound of the \textit{Haqa’iq al-Tafsir} cannot be classified as strictly displaying a traditionist style of interpretation.\footnote{Al-Sulami’s academic career showed a blended taste. His master in fiqh was Abū Sahl al-Ṣu’lūkī, who gave also a taste of mystical touch of Islamic law, in addition that al-Ṣu’lūkī was also a direct disciple of Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ash’ari, who might have given a further influence in the field of speculative theology. See Watt, \textit{The Formative Period of Islamic Thought}, 312.}

3. Discerning the Meanings of \textit{Haqa’iq}

The need to trace the meaning of \textit{haqa’iq} within the atmosphere of scholarly thinking of the 5th/11th century Islam is necessary in order to investigate the most probable reason why al-Sulami named his work \textit{Haqa’iq al-Tafsir}, and how readers responded to such controversies in later periods. The only immediate information revealed from the introductory sections of al-Sulami’s mystical compendium is that the author had intended the book to be a collection of accounts and sayings of the Sufi masters renowned the epithet \textit{masha’yikh ahl al-haqa’iq}. These Sufi masters were representing a group of people whom God had bestowed them the understanding of divine discourses. As the term \textit{haqa’iq} applied to an esoteric interpretation the investigation is to

trace the meaning of the term ḥaqīqa within the field of Islamic mysticism, and even within philosophical discourses of the surrounding milieu as well as scholarly culture developed at the time of the life of al-Sulami. Consequently, the term ḥaqīqa had closely related to philosophical thinking as the term al-Ḥaqq was commonly used by both philosophers and Sufis to denote God. Besides, we may also relate the term ḥaqīqa to a completely different concept as it was also applied in the general field of Qur’anic exegesis from a linguistic approach (as for example we may compare ḥaqīqa to majāz). It might be on the basis of such a linguistic approach that the Ḥaqīq al-Tafsīr became the target of criticism and controversies after Sulami’s demise.

The term ḥaqīqa within the mystical perspective suggests a sense of "profound reality to which only experience of union with God opens the way".\(^{59}\) Then, the closest explanation of this mystical sense, according to Louis Gardet, can be found in al-Ḥallāj’s concept of divine names as quoted in al-Sulami’s Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya. Al-Ḥallāj said, "Divine names are [merely] a name from [the point of view of] comprehension (idrāk), whereas from the point of view of God the Real (al-Ḥaqq) they are a reality (ḥaqīqa)".\(^{60}\) From this stance, al-Ḥallāj concluded that everything real has an essential reality. Thus, the term ḥaqīqa should be differentiated from Ḥaqq as like the abstract and the concrete: "reality" and "real", Deity and God.\(^{61}\)

Furthermore, from the stance of Islamic mysticism ḥaqīqa can be differentiated from the term shari'a. Al-Qushayri as Sulami’s junior contemporary in Nishapur defined ḥaqīqa as the concept of witnessing Lordship (mushāhada al-rubūbiyya), which is coupled with shari'a meaning the perseverance of worship (iltizām al-'ubūdiyya).\(^{62}\) From such a distinction, the term ḥaqīqa leads to the meaning "a profound reality which remains immutable

\(^{59}\) L. Gardet, “Hakika,” in EI, iii, 75a.

\(^{60}\) Al-Ḥallāj said, “Asma’ Allāh Ta’āla min ḥaythu al-idrāk ism, wa min ḥaythu al-Ḥaqq ḥaqīqa.” Al-Sulami, Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya, 309.


\(^{62}\) Al-Qushayri related the concept of mushāhada to the term mudānah literally means "adhere to religion". Accordingly, there are three hierarchic levels of manifestation: (1) mushāhada bi al-Ḥaq, to witness something with the argument of unity (2) mushāhada li al-Ḥaq, to see God in something, and (3) mushāhada al-Ḥaq, to see God in concealment with no description. See Qushayri, Arba’ Rasa’il fi al-Ṭaṣawwuf, ed. Qasim al-Sāmarrāʾi (Baghdad: al-Majma’ al-‘Ilmi’ al-‘Iraqi, 1969), 54.

\(^{63}\) Al-Qushayri said, ‘al-Shari’a amrun bi (i)iltizām al-‘ubūdiyya, wa al-ḥaqīqa mushāhada al-rubūbiyya.” Al-Qushayri, Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya fi ‘Ilm al-Ṭaṣawwuf, 82.
from the time of Adam to the end of the world.” Such a mystical concept, according to Gardet, is juxtaposed to shari‘a, which denotes reality that can undergo abrogation and changes like ordinances and commandments. However, the distinction between ḥaqiqa and shari‘a cannot be reduced to mere opposition, because one completes the other, as Gardet also underlined the relation between bātîn and zâhir. Thus, both concepts must be understood in a mutual correlation. This was also noted by al-Qushayri who stated there must a reciprocal relation between the two concepts, in which ḥaqiqa is to be strengthened by shari‘a, while at the same time shari‘a should be endorsed by ḥaqiqa in order to achieve perfection.

Similarly, a philosophical basis for such a parallel relation between ḥaqiqa and shari‘a might have been inferred from Platonic philosophical concept of the world of ideas. The closest reference for such Platonic concept within the development of mystical thinking of the post classical Sufis of the 5th/11th century may have been compared to some related concepts within the philosophy of Ibn Sînā (d. 428/1037). This seems to be indicated by al-Jurjânî’s explanation of the philosophical meaning of the term in his al-Ta’rîfî. Al-Jurjânî defined the term ḥaqiqa al-shay‘ to mean "the quiddity of a thing: the thing as it is in itself." Consequently, ḥaqiqa is not the thing existing, but the essence of the thing as much as it exists, or the real nature in absolute intelligibility. In close relation to the preceding meaning, the term al-hakika al-aqîliyya means, according to al-Jurjânî, “the exact conception of a thing.” Consequently, it can be concluded that ḥaqiqa suggests the meaning of both reality and intelligibility within Platonic dichotomy between a thing and its image.

If we apply the preceding mystical and philosophical analyses to the title of al-Sulami’s compendium, the Ḥaqiqa al-Tafsi‘, we may read the conclusion that the collection of sayings and accounts of the Sufi masters was not an interpretation of the type commonly perceived by the ulama‘ of the time. Al-Sulami’s collection of mystical traditions was certainly esoteric, claiming to present the essence or profound reality of the Qur’anic verses rather than their formal understanding in the exoteric senses. His collection of mystical traditions referring to a number of Sufi individuals was generally esoteric

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64 L. Gardet, "Hakika" in EI², iii, 76b.
65 L. Gardet, "Hakika" in EI², iii, 76b.
66 Al-Qushayri continued to say, “wa kullu shari‘at in ghayru mu’ayyadatin bi al-ḥaqiqa fa amruhā ghayru maqbu‘l, wa kullu ḥaqiqatin ghayru muqayyadatin bi al-shari‘a fa amruhā ghayru maḥṣul.” Al-Qushayri, Risâla, 82.
67 Al-Jurjânî (1987), 123.
comprehension resulting from mystical experiences in the form of *mukāṣhabāt*. Thus, the act of unveiling what is hidden, which is perceived to be the general principle of *tafsīr* denoted either by the Arabic verbal root of *s-f-r* or its inverse form *f-s-r*, but in this case a mystical interpretation is based on the Sufis’ unveiling of their mystical experience.

In the end, a book called *tafsīr*, but based on such profound mystical experiences had certainly classified under a specifically distinct perspective within the field of Qur’ānic interpretation. The term *tafsīr* employed by al-Sulāmī as read in the title of his collection does not differ from the general books of *tafsīr* only on a representation of the compiler’s traditional approach by way of collecting mystical traditions from the previously sufi figures elaborating their Qur’ānic comprehension. Thus, the Ḥāqiqa al-Taṣfīr is called a *tafsīr* in a sense that its main sources of interpretation are transmitted materials of sayings and opinions of the previous Sufis, viz. *riwāya*. However, in addition to its traditional style of *tafsīr bi-riwāya*, the extant esoteric understanding poses some slight glances out of the boundary of “the sciences of the outward” (*al-‘ulūm al-zāhirā*), in which the main objective of the Ḥāqiqa al-Taṣfīr was to provide another kind of *tafsīr* out of its common category, viz. to bear the traditions of “the People of Reality (*ahl al-hāqiqa*)”. Thus, the title of the book, indicated that this was not a *tafsīr* of the usual type, but a specific collection esoteric materials far beyond what had been generally suggested with the term *tafsīr* in its formal sense.

We may assume that al-Sulāmī was aware of taking the risk in naming his collection with the phrase “Ḥāqiqa al-Taṣfīr” as both terms *tafsīr* and *hāqiqa* had received different technical senses within various branches of Islamic traditional sciences. Had we perceived the term *hāqiqa* within the field of interpretation of the Qur’ān (*ilm al-taṣfīr*) as well as Rhetoric, the term *hāqiqa* was perceived to mean “basic, divine, and definite meaning” which lays...

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68 According to al-Qushayrī, *mukāṣhabāt* is higher than *mushahada*. In this sense, the term *mukāṣhabāt bi al-ilm* is defined to be “reaching clarification of truth in understanding” (*taḥqīq al-‘isāba fi al-fāhm*). Besides, according to al-Qushayrī the Sufis could also attain a degree of unveiling in a mystical state (*mukāṣhabāt bi al-ḥaṣb*) and the unveiling in an unexpected concurrence (*mukāṣhabāt bi al-wajdh*). See al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb Tartīb al-Sulūk fī Tariq Allāh li al-Imām Abī al-Qāsim Abī al-Karīm b. Hawāzin al-Qushayrī* (d. 465). Transl. and ed. by Qāsim al-Sāmarrā’ī. In al-Sāmarrā’ī. *Theme of Ascension in Mystical Writings: a Study of the Theme in Islamic and non-Islamic Writings* (Baghdad: National Printing and Publishing Co., 1968), 54.

69 The quotation of the definition *tafsīr* promulgated by al-Māturīdī can be read in al-Suyūtī, *Al-Itqān li ‘Ulam al-Qur’ān*, vol. iv, 167, which might have become the starting point of its narrowing sense held by the Sunnite representing the majority of the Muslim *umma*.
in a juxtaposed position to the so called allegoric meaning (majāz). This might be the point of controversy addressed by later critics to al-Sulami’s ḥaqa’iq al-Taḥsīr. Since the field of ‘ilm al-taḥsīr is the common approach to measure the validity of Qur’ānic interpretation within the Sunnite academic atmosphere. Then, it will not be surprising that so much criticism was addressed to blame al-Sulami’s ḥaqa’iq al-Taḥsīr. The controversies were also fueled by a lack of clear understanding that the book was written skillfully by a Sufi exegete as well as Sunnite traditionist who had been educated under the influence of the Malāmatiya movement. In conclusion, the term ḥaqa’iq al-Taḥsīr might not properly titled for such an esoteric commentary on the Qur’ān under the perspective of ilm al-taḥsīr, but Qur’ānic interpretation beyond its formally existing exoteric meanings.

4. The Principles of Interpretation

Al-Sulami’s clear outline of his method of mystical interpretation is based on solid bases of arguments within Islamic traditional thinking. The most fundamental query that he tried to answer was whether the Prophet had received revelations in other forms than the Qur’ān. He answered by quoting an account originated from ‘Alī b. Abī Tālib, who had been asked a similar question. ‘Alī said, "No, by God who splits seeds and creates the living creatures, [this will happen] only if God will grant mankind the understanding of His Book." This ḥadīth clearly mentions the possibility that God is granting the understanding of the Qur’ān through some kinds of inspiration. On the basis of such a traditional account on the possibility of receiving "inspired divine-knowledge", we may classify this kind of knowledge as the inner understanding (bātīn). Al-Sulami also mentioned another tradition to frame the possibility of bearing fourfold meanings of Qur’ānic verses quoted from Ibn Masʿūd. According to this tradition, the Prophet had said, “The Qur’ān was revealed on seven letters (ahāruf), for every verse there are the outward (zahr) and the inward (bātīn); whereas every letter (ḥarf) has a limit (ḥadd) and a point of ascent (maṭla’).”

70 In this sense, Ibn Taymiyya composed a treatise titled al-ḥaqiqa wa al-majāz (ms. coll. Rashid Rida, Cairo) see L. Gardet, “Hakika,” in EI², iii, 75a.


72 The prophet said, “Inna al-Qur‘ān unzila ‘alā sab‘ati ahāruf, likulli āyatin minhu zahr wa bātīn wa likulli ḥarfin ḥadd wa maṭla‘”. The ḥadīth was conveyed through the
The above two traditional accounts were crucially fundamental to justify what al-Sulami collected amidst the traditions of “the people of the profound reality” (ahl al-haqa’iq). In al-Sulami’s view, these people were the chosen specialists. They were a group of people who received understanding of divine discourse (ahl al-fahm likhitabihi), as they were bestowed knowledge of the subtleties of Divine entrusted custody (al-'alimuna bi latatifi wadai’ihi). Al-Sulami classified two occasions by which ahl al-haqa’iq receive divine knowledge: firstly, that God displayed (fataha) to them parts of the subtleties concerning divine secrets and [esoteric] meanings (ma’aani); or secondly, that God may also make to appear (sanaha) to them parts of the wonder of his Book. However, nobody could speak about the [complete] essence of His profound reality (haqiqat haqa’iqihi). Each of them could only tell about a small portion of it as it is appropriated for them to understand. Thus, the discernment revealed to the Sufis, according to al-Sulami, was unable to cover the entire understanding.

Such an elusive understanding exclusively belonging to the ahl al-haqa’iq fell outside the boundary of the commonly known concept of comprehension called by the term ‘ibara. As indicated earlier, such an understanding could not be easily attached to the exegetical method denoted by the term tafsir, since al-Mâturîdî promulgated a narrowing sense of the term tafsir and placed it in a juxtaposed position with the term ta’wil, to include all kinds of exegetical methods not covered by the term tafsir. Hence, tafsir is attached to an objective interpretation in order to gain a standard and formally intended meaning as desired by God, the speaker of Qur’anic discourse, in which it is commonly provided for all the hierarchically accepted categories of thinking within Islamic community. Tafsir is generally aimed at providing explanations of the Qur’anic verses in the most obvious and easiest way of comprehension needed by general reader (‘awam). In an alternate position, ta’wil is a surrogate or substitute exegetical method provided for people who daringly desire higher levels of understanding. Following the fourfold division of the Qur’an promulgated by Ja’far al-Ṣâdiq, such an alternate understanding resulted by way of ta’wil may include higher levels of discernment by the method of ishâra, as it is juxtaposed following authorities: ‘Abbâs b. Muhâammad b. ‘Ali b. Muhâammad b. Ziyâd al-Daqqâq, from Muhâammad b. Ishâq, from Ishâq b. Ibrâhîm al-Handâlî, from Jarîr, from Wâsîl b. Hîbân, from Ibn Abî al-Ḥudhâlî, from Abû al-Ahwaṣ, from ‘Abbâs Allâh b Mas’ud, from the Prophet (Al-Sulami, Haqa’iq al-Tafsîr, i, 21; al-Ţabarâni, Al-Mu’jam al-Awsaf, ed. Mahmal-Ţahîn (Riyadh: Maktaba al-Ma’ârif, 1985), vol. i, 230-2).  

73 Al-Sulami, Haqa’iq al-Tafsîr, i, 19.  
74 Al-Sulami, Haqa’iq al-Tafsîr, i, 19.
to the method of ‘iba‘ra. The method of ishāra comprises two layers of understanding classified as subtleties (laţī‘if) and profound realities (haqa‘iq), which will be subsequently achieved only by the specialists (khawāṣṣ) among the saints (awliyā‘) and those who were privileged with a higher degree of prophecy (nubuwwa).

Tracing further on the origin of Ja‘far’s fourfold division of the Qur‘ān, we may reach a genealogical linkage of traditional transmission originating in ‘Alī b. Abī Ta‘līb. Al-Sulami also quoted ‘Alī’s account saying, "Every verse of the Qur‘ān has a fourfold meaning: the outward (zāhir), the inward (bātīn), the limit (ḥadd), and the point of ascent (maṭla‘)." ‘Alī further explained, "[firstly] the outward is the recitation (tīlā‘a), [secondly] the inward is the comprehension (fāhm), and [thirdly] the limit is the explanation (‘iba‘ra), symbolic expression (ishāra), as well as the legal rules of lawfulness (al-ḥalāl) and prohibition (al-ḥarām), and [fourthly] the elevating point (maṭla‘) as the final intention (mura‘d) for his servant." ‘Alī further stated, "[God] creates [within] the Qur‘ān [sorts of] explanation (‘iba‘ra), symbolic expression (ishāra), subtleties (laţī‘if) and profound reality (haqa‘iq). Explanation is for hearing (sam‘), symbolic expression is for intellect (‘aql), subtleties are for vision (mushāhada) [of divinity], and profound reality is for submission (istemāl)."

This ideas, shared with the traditional Shi‘ite interpretation, may have caused the accusation of al-Sulami’s being associated with the Qarmati or Bātini organization.76

For his collection of exclusively mystical sayings al-Sulami had put aside any categorical interpretations employing the method of ‘iba‘ra. He may have left out the “outward sciences” (al-‘ulu‘m al-zāhir),77 because collections of the prophetic traditions of this type of interpretation had already been the concern of many other traditionists amongst his precursors and many of his contemporaries as well. The elusive content of his collection certainly was far

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75 The report was taken from Ja‘far without any sufficient information about its chains of transmitters. Al-Sulami only mentioned the method of transmission with the phrase ḥukiya ‘an Ja‘far b Muḥammad meaning "reported" or "given an account" from Ja‘far (Al-Sulami, Haqa‘iq al-Tafsīr, i, 22).
77 This expression was later found in al-Dhahabi’s critique to the Shaykh. See al-Subki, Ṭabaqat al-Shāfi‘iyya al-Kubra, vol. iv, 147.
78 Al-Sulami, Ḥaqa‘iq al-Tafsīr, i, 19.
removed from the need of the larger Muslim community. It was certainly a unique *tafsīr* for a very limited circle of readers. It comprises only traditions of Qur’ānic comprehension on the basis of the deepest level of understanding, i.e. the level of ḥaqa‘iqt, the highest level of spiritual significances that come from the peak of mystical experiences.

5. Scholarly Critique: From Apology to Accusations of Heresy

The most probable absence of an immediate reaction to the Ḥaqa‘iqt al-Tafṣīr during al-Sulami’s life time seems to be in line with the degrading socio-religious climate at the turn of the 5th/11th century, as described by Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 421/1015) by his own statement as quoted in al-Zarkashi, "It is outstanding in our time that when some ulama’ are being questioned about the distinction between *tafsīr* and *ta’wil*, they will not succeed in doing so. They do not recite [the Qur’ān] well, and do not know the meaning of a chapter (*surah*), or [even] a verse of the Qur’ān…."\(^79\) Besides, the period also shows a rupture towards a new development of Qur’ānic interpretation. The line between traditionalist and rationalist thinkers began to be drawn at that time, and too between orthodox and heterodox factions within Muslim scholasticism, as this happened through various cases of “inquisition” (*mihna*).

The earliest criticism of the Ḥaqa‘iqt al-Tafṣīr may have connected with the growing awareness of the distinction between the term *tafsīr* and *ta’wil*, expressed by Ibn Ḥabīb al-Naysaburi, which was mentioned before. Almost a generation after the death of both Ibn Ḥabīb and al-Sulami, a critical remark on the Ḥaqa‘iqt al-Tafṣīr was addressed by a native Nishapuri among their junior contemporaries, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076). As an adherent of the Shāfi‘ite school of law and a Qur’ānic commentator as well as a traditionalist, al-Wāḥidī warned people to beware of what had been written by al-Sulami as he stated, “Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulami composed the Ḥaqa‘iqt al-Tafṣīr; had he firmly believed [the book] to be a *tafsīr*, he would have been committed heresy.”\(^80\) By this conditional sentence, the statement should not be classified to be a harsh accusation of heresy to al-Sulami himself, but rather a warning for


everybody not to consider esoteric commentary as an objective interpretation of the Qur'anic verses. The critic seems to imply that al-Sulami could be mistaken only in case that he classify his Ḥaqa'iq a-Tafsir as an objective interpretation intended by the term tafsir, as such might lead to an act of heresy.

Such a warning had been growing from awareness of the dangerous impact of publicly diffusing the mystical interpretation. This also probably led the Sufis to be accused of committing Ba'tini ta'wil. In fact, the difference between Sufis and the Ba'tinis was barely known to laymen. Al-Wahidi’s statement may contribute theological issues before it was theoretically clarified by al-Ghazali in his Faḍa’ih al-Ba’tiniyya (the Ignominies of the Ba’tiniyya), which sociologically refers to various sects of the Shi‘ites from time to time.82

The difference between the Sufis and the Ba’tiniyya was consisted primarily by the former’s attestation of the applicability of the zahir meaning despite their advance steps to uncover spiritual significances of the Qur’anic verses. It was on the ground of accepting the zahir that the Sufis were safe from being accused of heresy as it is warned by al-Wahidi. On the contrary, the Ba’tini only believed in the inward meaning of the Qur’anic verses, on the basis of which their main goal was to obliterate the shari’a, specifically in the eyes of their opponents.83 Such a distinction certainly splits the Sufis from the Ba’tini, hence the Sufi like al-Sulami might still be considered “Sunnite”. Even though al-Sulami did not touch upon this contentious issue in the introductory section of the Ḥaqa’iq a-Tafsir, al-Wahidi must have been quite certain that Sulami did not believe the Sufi sayings to be the only meaning of the Qur’anic verses.

To know deeper on who is Al-Wahidi we can clearly say that he belonged to a group of high-ranking intellectuals in Nishapur, as this closeness to the Shafi’ite faction had already appeared in his very carefully selected sentence in his critique. Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Ali b. Ḥamād b. Muḥammad b. ‘Ali al-Wahidi al-Naysaburi was born in Nishapur and died there in 468/1076. His family was

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81 The term Bātiniyya is defined by Hodgson to be the Isma’ili in medieval times referring to their stress to the batin, the inward meaning behind the literal wording of the sacred texts. In a less specific, the term is also applied to anyone rejecting the literal meaning in favor of its batin. It was in the last sense that certain Muslim philosopher and Sufis were being accused of the batinis, even though some might have defended themselves from the charge of being a bātini on the ground that they remain acknowledge the zahir alongside the batin. (See M. Hodgson 1960, “Bātiniyya, in EI, i, 1098b-1100a).


83 See the Ḥanafi theological stance elaborated by Sa’d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī commenting the Aqā’id al-Nasā’īyya in al-Suyūṭī, Al-Ītqān fī Ulūm al-Qur’ān, iv, 195.
among the great merchants of Nishapur. His grandfather, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Māṭuwiyyī (d. 428/1035) was the founder of the Māṭuwiyyī madrasa in Nishapur. His father was a successful merchant who always provided strong support to his son to pursue his advanced studies. As a result, al-Wāḥidī became an intellectual who had been learning from various great teachers of his age. In Qur’ānic exegesis, Wāḥidī was linked with the renowned Abū Ishāq al-Tha‘alībī (d. 427/1034).

As a result of various scholarly achievements, al-Wāḥidī was famous for his works, not only about Qur’ānic exegesis and the occasions of Qur’ānic revelation (asbāb al-nuzūl), but he also had become a renowned Arabic philologist and rhetorician. He composed several tafsīrs: al-Bāṣīṭ, al-Wāṣīṭ, and al-Wājīz. Looking into al-Wāḥidī’s scholarly character by observing his al-Tafṣīr al-Wājīz, we may conclude that he was typically traditional in his method of interpretation. Thus, it was on the ground that he was a traditional exegete that the statement was addressed to al-Sulāmī as his senior mentor of the Shāfī‘īte fellow in the same native city of Nishapur.

After the demise of al-Wāḥidī as of the confreres of the Shāfī‘ī School of Islamic Law, there would have been much criticism of the Haqīq al-Tafṣīr by al-Sulāmī, which is unanimously expressed by almost all legal schools within the Sunni community. Despite the fact that al-Wāḥidī’s critique was barely known as he himself did not mention it in his own work, but it only read through circulated opinion among the 7th/13th century traditionists. Among the

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84 Bulliet, The Patricians of Nishapur, 254.
86 Abū Muḥammad b Ibrāhīm Abī Ishāq al-Tha‘alībī was a commentator to the Qur’ān, besides he was also known to be the author of prophetic chronicles and a master in the science of the Qur’ān, Arabic and prophetic traditions, see al-Suyūṭī, Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirīn, vol. i, 28.
88 As it is clear by the title al-Wājīz, al-Wāḥidī provided meanings of the Qur’ānic verses in a brief explanation, based only on a single authority of Ibn ʿAbbās that he aimed at giving simple commentary for the sake of the common people who are interested in the science of the Qur’ān, including its commentary. (al-Wāḥidī, Kitāb al-Wājīz, vol. i, 2)
medieval Shafi’ites, Ibn al-Šalāḥ (d.643/1245) quite comprehensively discussed the statute of *Haqā’iq al-Tafsīr* by al-Sulami in his *Fatāwā*. When asked about his legal opinion on the mystical interpretation to the Qurʾān, Ibn al-Šalāḥ began his answer with a quotation of al-Wāhiḍi’s statement, even though Ibn al-Šalāḥ himself seemed to have been doubtful that such a reliable figure like Abū ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulami had been accused of committing heresy by his junior colleague. In fact, the fatwā was issued for answering a query from an anonymous questioner who was not satisfied with an answer from an anonymous Muftī he had consulted before. The unnamed Muftī who had been asked before was described as seemingly giving a compliment to the mystical commentary. He said that the mystical interpretation like that of al-Junayd cannot be included under the framework of *tafsīr*, but under that of "meanings" (*ma‘ān*) that the Sufis are able to gain through the activity of recitation (*tilāwā*). Such an answer might not have satisfied the questioner as he then finally addressing similar question to Ibn al-Šalāḥ to seek a second legal opinion as a final answer that he would not have to oppose anymore.

What we might derive from the fatwā that classifies the mystical interpretation to be out of the framework of *tafsīr* would rather be a clear apology that the revered Sufi figure like al-Sulami would not have included his collection of mystically inspired utterances gained by the previous Sufis as the solely intended meanings for certain Qurʾānic verses. Such might have probably been allegoric and symbolic “meaning”, which were spiritually found by the Sufis during their recitation to the Qurʾān, or from their activities of attentive hearing (*sama‘a*). Ibn al-Šalāḥ’s acknowledged that such mystical interpretations, to some extent at least, might come to a true sense (*madīl*) for the specialists, but such deep understanding might also lead to confusion among the laymen. Moreover, such interpretations might also be included into a genre of Qurʾānic eisegesis that was vehemently condemned like that of the

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89 Abū ‘Amr Taqi al-Dīn Uthmān b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān, b. Muṣā b. Abi Nasr al-Shahrāzūrī al-Shāfi’ī was born in 577/1182 in Sharkhān, Iraq. He was a famous trained scholar in the field of Ḥadīth and Fiqh. He began to learn *fiqh* from his father, who later took him to Mosul in order to learn more on the *fiqh* of the madhhab al-Shāfi’ī. He traveled to Khurasan to master the science of Ḥadīth, then, moved to Syria, staying at Jerusalem giving lectures at the Sahāliyya School, which was established by Salah al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī. He, then, moved to Damascus and dedicated most of his teachings to the Rāwāḥiyya School. He was appointed to teach Ḥadīth, when the Ḍār al-Ḥadīth was established in Damascus by al-Malik al-ʿAshraf b. al-Malik al-ʿAdil b. Ayyūb. He died on 25th Rabi‘ al-akhir 643/1245 in Damascus. (J. Robson 1971, “Ībn al-Ṣalāḥ,” in *EI*, iii, 927a).

Bāṭinīyya, as this would be the case if one believed such allegorical interpretations to be the solely intended meanings of the Qur’ānic verses. In short, this apology implied in Ibn al-Ṣalāh’s legal opinion about the mystical interpretation conducted by the Sufis represents a definitely moderate opinion, compared to the other critics among middle age generations of the Shāfī’ī scholars, as we will mention them below.

However, before delving into the criticism from later generations of Shāfī’ī scholars, it is worth considering to see the hardest reaction from other parts, even though they may have been addressed their accusation only to the Bāṭinīyya among the Shi’ites. In this group was the Ḥanafī theologians Abu al-Ḥāṣṣ ‘Umar b Muḥammad al-Nasāfī (d. 537/1142) as he criticized esoteric interpretation in general to be a sort of conversion of obvious meanings of Qur’ānic verses, leading to an accusation of heresy of the type committed by the “people of the esoteric (ahl al-baṭīn).”91 This seemingly harsh theological argument received a more elaborated explanation in a milder tone in the work of Sa’d al-Dīn al-Taftazānī (d. 722/1390) who said that the primary target of such an accusation of heresy was directed only to the framework of ta‘wil promulgated by the Bāṭinīyya among the Shi’ites because they did not accept literal (ẓāhir) interpretations.92 By this late clarification, the Ḥanafī theologians refrained from rejecting a mystical claim concerning esoteric meanings or spiritual significances within the interpretation to the Qur’ānic verses as long as those meanings do not deviate from the desired objective expressed within its outward sense (ẓāhir). However, this milder view would certainly not obliterate the general Ḥanafite rejection of the so called "inspirational interpretation" as the basis of their opposition to the Bāṭinī ta‘wil. According to them, this kind of esoteric interpretation was based on their wrong theological stance as well as against their rationally epistemic framework. The fact that the mystical commentary was rejected was basically because it stemmed from kashf (unveiling) or mukāshafā (disclosure),93 or ilḥām (inspiration) in a more general term. Both, accordingly, could not be classified as valid sources of knowledge (asbāb al-‘ilm). Giving a commentary on the Aqā’id by al-Nasāfī, al-Taftazānī

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93 The term means “lifting and tearing the veil”, which usually unidentified as the veil that comes between man and the extra phenomenal world. According to al-Jurjānī in his Ta’rifāt, kashf technically means, “to make appear in a complete and actual realization the mysterious senses and the realities which are behind the veil.” Experience of kashf could be resulted in the state of mukāshafā meaning “unveiling in the sense of “illumination” or epiphany, which is opposed to the term satr, and istītār (closure). See L. Gardet, “Kashf”, EI 2, iv, 696b.
argued, “The inspiration explained by way of throwing a meaning into [one’s] heart through the method of illuminative reception (fayd) is not one of the roots of knowledge on the validity of something according to the people of the Truth, until there is a counter argument against the restriction of the roots into three,” as Abū al-Ḥāfs al-Nasafi principally asserted that the roots of human knowledge are three: the senses, trustworthy reports, and reason.

Among other Sunnite factions, the Hanbalite Ibn Taymiyya was the most outspoken critic of the Ḥaqaʿiq al-Tafsīr. Representing a traditionist position he asserted, "Abū ʿAbd al-Ḥāfīẓ al-Sulami mentioned in his Ḥaqaʿiq al-Tafsīr on the authority of Jaʿfar b. Muhammad and the likes several accounts of which experts know that he certainly lied about Jaʿfar b. Muhammad.96 In a general evaluation, Ibn Taymiyya concluded the Ḥaqaʿiq al-Tafsīr by al-Sulami to have comprised three sorts of traditions: first, weak traditions (nuquʿ daʿiʿa) like the ones he had conveyed from Jaʿfar; second, valid quotations, but wrongly mentioned by the transmitters; third, valid quotations from good quality of authoritative sources.97 Some accounts found in al-Sulami’s Ḥaqaʿiq al-Tafsīr would have been classified by Ibn Taymiyya under the category of "wrong hermeneutical procedures" in the form of a "mistaken method of argumentation, but without invalidating the meanings" (al-khatāʾ fi al-dalīl, la fi al-maddīl).98 Such methodological faults had been also conducted by other groups of scholars among jurists, theologians, and preachers (waʿiz), besides the Sufis.99 Within his own principles of Qurʾānic interpretation Ibn Taymiyya explained further


that what had been conducted by the Sufis was to be classified under the category of “significances” (ishārāt). As long as this significance comes from a valid analogy, it would be accepted.\(^9^9\) Within Sufism, such ishārāt are to have been applied outside their legal contexts. Sufis usually employ such evidences as some kinds of supporting argument aimed at "arousing desires and inspiring awe" (al-targhib wa al-tarhib) as well as for exhortation of excellent activities (fādā’il al-a’māl).\(^10^0\) Such an application is actually highly acceptable as long as it is not in opposition to a formal interpretation of the Qurʾān and the Sunna.

In various opinions issued after the diffusion of the Ḥaqaʾiq al-Taṣfīr and other mystical commentaries on the Qurʾān, we observe the tendency to marginalize the mystical interpretation. Such was clear from the Ḥanafī criticism that the theological consequences of refracting certain Qurʾānic verses from their obvious meaning could lead to an accusation of heresy, due to the Ḥanafītes rejection to include the inspirational meaning to be sorts of valid argument. In Ibn Taymiyya’s valuation of al-Sulāmi’s Ḥaqaʾiq al-Taṣfīr, the credentials of the mystical interpretation of the Qurʾān could only reach the degree of a wrong hermeneutical procedure. After all, only the Shāfi’ites seemed to hold a moderate appreciation of the symbolic interpretation conducted by the Sufis, though it is still also marginal, categorizing the mystical interpretation to be out of the framework of ṭaṣfīr. Had it been admitted to the framework of ṭaṣfīr, such an appraisal would certainly have been rejected by some late hard-liner Shāfi’ite traditionists like al-Dhahabi (d. 748/1348) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), who both were in fact the pupils as well as inheritors of the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya. The approach of later traditionists led to a growing antipathy against Sufism. Such a tendency was very visible in al-Dhahabi’s opinion about the Ḥaqaʾiq al-Taṣfīr as recorded in Ţabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyah Kubra by Taj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 769/1368) saying, "A book named Ḥaqaʾiq al-Taṣfīr belongs him (i.e. al-Sulāmi); I wish that he had never composed it, because it is perversion and Qarmati [influence] in it; so, beware of the book, [because] you will [certainly] see how odd it is.”\(^10^1\) This
anti-Sufi tendency had also been inherited by al-Suyūṭī who classified al-Sulamī under the category of a heretic. The reason for such a classification, according to al-Suyūṭī, was because his *tafsīr* was as if condemned (ghayru *mahmūd*). It is clear from al-Dhahabi’s criticism that concerning the use of his traditional sources, al-Sulamī had to be classified as an unreliable commentator. In addition, a rebellious nature was also attributed to al-Sulamī by connecting him with the Qarmatīyya movement, which is something exaggerated like in the case of al-Ḥallāj.

Despite such harsher criticism, however, al-Sulamī continued to receive respect for his capability as a traditional scholar among the early medieval Shāfi’ites. This appraisal is quite clear in al-Subkī, who followed al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, defending al-Sulamī’s reliability in the field of hādīth. Al-Khaṭīb asserted that the rank (*qadr*) of Abū ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī among his native contemporaries was honorable (*jālīl*) as he was also a praiseworthy (mahmūd) traditionist. Al-Subkī followed al-Khaṭīb’s opinion as he argued that Abū ‘Abd al-Rahmān was right to have been reliable so far. At the end of his biographic account of al-Sulamī, al-Subkī concluded by saying that anyone who had been given an honorable rank should not necessarily be accused of being a Qarmāṭī. Much criticism directed against the *Ḥaqa’iq al-taḥṣīl* was because al-Sulamī had confined himself in his compilation to mention only some sorts of allegoric interpretation (*ta’wīla*), while it was inconceivable for the Sufis that their words were in contradiction to the formal interpretation.

**Concluding Remarks**

What outweighed crucial role of al-Sulamī in composing the *Ḥaqa’iq al-Taḥṣīl* was that the political instability and the demeaning cultural atmosphere of Nishapur at the turn of the 5th/11th century. This demeaning condition led to schismatic rivalries that cause people to ignore what Ibn Ḥabīb al-Naysabūrī wrote, “wa innama awra’dthu ʾī ḥādha al-qism li ʾinaa taḥṣīruh ghamru *mahmūd*.”

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103 The accusation of al-Sulamī’s being a Qarmāṭī as appears in al-Dhahabi (al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāhīyya al-Kubrā*, vol. iv, 147) was of the reason he was associated with al-Ḥallāj (cf. L. Gardet, “al-Ḥallāj” in *EI* 2, vol. iii, 99b). In fact, al-Sulamī quoted many traditions originated from al-Ḥallāj in his *Ḥaqa’iq al-Taḥṣīl* as specifically collected by Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*, 359 – 412.


called "the distinction between the concept of tafsir and ta’wil" as it had been propagated almost a half century earlier by al-Māturīdī. He had conceived tafsir to be somewhat a sort of objective interpretation to the Qur’ān in comparison to the subjective nature of analytical interpretation resulted from the exegetical method of ta’wil. It was the contentious nature of the Ḥaqqā’iq al-Tafsir that the labeling such a collection of mystical tradition was unwillingly applied by later traditionists to name an exegetical work comprises a collection of mystical traditions. This further leads to a confusing context that might have also been resulted from the borderline category by the use of the term tafsir employed by al-Sulami as a Sufi in his traditional way of interpretation on such mystical understanding.

Al-Sulami concerned for exclusively collecting mystical sayings as his source of interpretation. Hence, if we use the framework of Ja’far’s division of the fourfold hierarchic layers of meanings: ‘ibāra, ishāra, latā‘if, and ḥaqqā’iq, al-Sulami had certainly collected some sorts of extreme categorical interpretations: he employs the method of ‘ibāra, which is basic, to provide ḥaqqā’iq that was positioned to be the subtlest level of significance and known to be privileged only for the highest rank of prophecy (nubuwwa). It was such an extremity that might have incited controversy and objection to al-Sulami’s tafsir in the following generations.

After all, the controversial nature of the Ḥaqqā’iq al-Tafsir may also have been aroused from the extant criticism that the compendium was claimed to have comprised Shi’ite flavor that resembles the character of a Bāṭini ta’wil. After conducting a scrutinized observation to the compendium, we can visibly say that al-Sulami play his role as an exeget, not merely a compiler of the mystical compendium. He had applied censorship to some obsolete views in order to suit the Sunnite traditional principles. In this case, the most obvious thing he had censored is the omission of detailed explanation on the Shi’ite doctrine of Muhammadan light, which becomes the basis of emanative process of cosmogony as it appears in some accounts originated in either Ja’far al-Ṣādiq or Sahl al-Tustari. Despite still collecting sayings of those two respected figures among Sufis on some of their ethical prescriptions, al-Sulami seemed to consider the doctrine of emanative process of cosmogony to have been obsolete. Besides, it might have been old and derivative of pre-Islamic sources in comparison to the widely spread mainstream Qur’ānic doctrine of instantaneous creation out of nothing. He referred to the Baghdadi Sufi tradition of Ibn ‘Atā’ in interpreting QS 2:284, "To God belongs all that is in heavens and what is on earth." Commenting the verse, Ibn ‘Atā’ said, "To God belong two cosmic
realms (kawnānī), of which He is the Innovator (al-mubdi’i) out of nothing (min ghayri shay‘); whoever is occupied with them, is occupied with nothing out of everything.”\textsuperscript{107} In this clearly traditional stance, al-Sulami was quite consistent as he brought in Ibn ‘Aṭā’ī’s traditional view related to the meaning of Divine Attribute of al-Bādī’, which is accordingly meant to be the Innovator (mubdi’) of things out of nothingness (min ghayri shay‘).\textsuperscript{108}

In short, despite the contentious nature of its style of interpretation the Ḥaqa’īq al-Tafsīr by al-Sulami was relatively free from any kinds of either Shi’ite elements nor mystical and philosophical notions contradictory to the spirit of the Qur’ān like that of the mystical doctrine of Muhammadan light. What certainly conveyed by al-Sulami was a scripturally based Sufism that he certainly plays significant role in the formation of Sunnism. Besides, what had been conceived to be “spiritual significances” of the Qur’ānic verses was not aimed at determining the sole intention of the objective meanings of the Qur’ān, but to disclose a complementarily spiritual demand outside its legal context. Sufis usually employ such interpretation for "arousing desires and inspiring awe" (al-targhib wa al-tarhib) as well as for exhortation of excellent activities (fadā’il al-a’māl), upon which the use of weak traditions might not be considered problematic at all. \textit{Walla hu a’lam.}

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\textsuperscript{107} He said, “\textit{Qāla Ibn ‘Aṭā‘}: lillāhī al-kawnānī huwa mubdi‘uhuma min ghayri shay‘in); ūman istaghalah bihihi ishtaghalah bi là shay‘in) ‘an kulli shay‘in.” Al-Sulami, \textit{Ḥaqa’īq al-Tafsīr}, i, 84.

\textsuperscript{108} Al-Sulami, \textit{Ḥaqa’īq al-Tafsīr}, ii, 322.


Measuring the Ḥaqa’iq al-Taṣīr: From its Contentious Nature to the Formation of Sunnite Sufism


