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

Mohammad Anwar Syarifuddin

Abstract

This article discusses the Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr by al-Sulāmī 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 hadith, the nature of Sulāmī’s tafsīr was relatively free from either Shiʿite elements or mystico-philosophical notions contradictory to the spirit of Sunnite orthodoxy. Al-Sulāmī’s tafsīr is to be classified maʿthūr, 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 Qurʾān commentary, Sunnite Sufism, scripturally based Sufism.

1 Dosen Fakultas Ushuluddin-UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. E-mail: ma_syarifuddin@yahoo.com.
Introduction

The Ḥaqqāʾiq al-Tafsīr may have been one of the greatest achievements in the history of the development of mystical commentary on the Qurʾān. Not only because it comprises two huge volumes of tafsīr, which was much more extensive than its predecessor, the Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Azīz by Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 289/896). Tustarī’s Tafsīr had been diffused at the end of 3rd/9th century in Basra, whereas the Ḥaqqāʾiq al-Tafsīr 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-Tustarī’s Tafsīr, the Ḥaqqāʾiq al-Tafsīr includes almost all exegetical materials derived from Sahl al-Tustarī, along with all other sayings and accounts al-Sulāmī could gather from his Sufi precursors called by the epithet “the people of profound reality” (ahl al-Ḥaqqāʾiq).

Looking from the general nature of a traditional work of Qurʾānic exegesis, al-Sulāmī’s method of arranging those mystical traditions into a structure of interpretation of the Qurʾānic verses in his Ḥaqqāʾiq al-Tafsīr can be compared to Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī’s method in his Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ‘an Taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān. Both tafsīrs employ the traditional style of interpretation based on transmitted exegetical materials (al-tafsīr bi al-maṭḥūr). Both al-Ṭabarī and al-Sulāmī were also traditionists whose intellectual linkage meets indirectly in the revered figure of the Shāfiʿī jurist Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ‘Āli b. Ismāʿīl al-Qaffāl al-Shāhi al-Marwāzī (d. 365/976). Al-Ṭabarī was al-Qaffāl’s teacher, whereas al-Sulāmī was al-Qaffāl’s disciple. The only slight difference between 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 Ḥaqqāʾiq al-Tafsīr.

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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 Shāfiʿī school of Islamic law. He took traditions from Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, while among the Nishapuri traditionists who received his traditions afterwards were Abū ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulāmī (d. 412/1021) and al-Ḥākim al-Nayṣābūrī. See his biography in Ibn Khallikān, Wafayāt al-Aʿyān, IV, 200-1, also al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-Kubrā, Ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī and ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulūw (Cairo: Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalābi, 1964), III, 200-227.
al-Tafsīr, in which he confined his collection to provide only symbolic interpretations of the Qurʾān, compared to the vast varieties of exegetical genre within al-Ṭabari’s tafsīr.⁵

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

Sulami’s Being A Sufi Traditionist


⁶ Al-Dhahabi’s said, “wa lahu kitāb sammāhu “Ḥaqaʾiq al-Tafsīr” laytahu lam yusannifhu fa innahu taḥrīf wa qarmāta fa dūnaka al-kitāb fa satarā al-ʿajab.” Al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt al-Shafiʿyya al-Kubra>, IV, 147.
al-Azd\textsuperscript{10} from the side of his father and to that of Sulaym from the side of his mother. His maternal grandfather Abū ʿAmr ʿIsāʾī b. Nujayd al-Sulami (d. 365/976), a proponent of the Malāmatiyya movement, played a very dominant role in directing Sulamiʾs basic and advance studies in traditional Islamic sciences (\textit{ʿilm al-zāhiṭ}).\textsuperscript{11} According to al-Subki,\textsuperscript{12} al-Sulami was linked through his maternal grandfather to a number of renowned authorities among Nishapuri traditionists.\textsuperscript{13} Besides, Sulami made his own extensive travels outside Nishapur to visit neighboring regions such as Marw, Iraq, and the Hijāz, where he collected hadith from other respected figures of the 4\textsuperscript{th}/10\textsuperscript{th} century traditionists.\textsuperscript{14}


\textsuperscript{11} Al-Sulami in his introduction to the \textit{Huqāʾiq al-Tafṣīl} identified the “outward sciences” as the Islamic traditional sciences such as the varieties of Qurʾānic recitation (\textit{qiraʾa}), some sorts of Qurʾānic interpretation (\textit{tafṣīl}), and other dimensions of Qurʾānic sciences such as its unsolved questions (\textit{mushkila}), legal judgments (\textit{ahkām}), desinential inflection (\textit{iʿra}), linguistics (\textit{lughah}), general concepts and details (\textit{al-mujmal wa al-mufassal}), as well as abrogative and abrogated verses (\textit{al-nāṣikh wa al-mansūkh}).

\textsuperscript{12} Al-Subki, \textit{Tabāqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-Kubra}, IV, 144.

\textsuperscript{13} Among the renowned transmitters of hadith introduced by Ibn Nujayd himself to his grandson were Abū al-ʻAbbās al-Asamm (d. 346), ʻAbd Allāh b. ʻAbd Allāh b. Faqrī al-Umrī al-Balkhī, Muḥammad b. al-Muḥāmmal al-Māsarakhī, al-Ḥāfiz Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusaynī, and ʻAbd Allāh al-Maṣārahī. However, there is no information about Muḥammad al-Raṣī, except that he is an associate of Ibn Wārah (al-Dhahabi, \textit{Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubala}, XVII, 163), despite a number of accounts quoted from him by al-Sulami in his \textit{Tabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya},


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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-Baghdadī, who met al-Sulamī during the latter’s stay at Baghdad. Al-Khaṭīb asserted that al-Sulamī had been specifically interested in collecting mystical traditions (akhbār 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 Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyya al-Kubra, al-Subkī wrote that al-Sulamī had dedicated to the field of ḥadīth for forty years. Such a long period of traveling and teaching prophetic traditions had made al-Sulamī an expert of ḥadīth. Murād b. Yūsuf al-Dūsī in his Shams al-āṭāq fī dhikr al-ḥaḍīth min Manāqib al-Sulamī wa min manāqib Abī ʿAlī 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-Arba‘in fī al-Taṣawwuf, the Risāla al-Malāmatiya, 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 was able to compose almost a hundred works comprising a wide range of Islamic traditional sciences.

2. His Spiritual Masters: al-Ṣu’lūkī and al-Naṣrābādhī

Al-Sulamī’s attraction to Sufism came through the hands of Ibn Nujayd, who sent him to his colleague Abū Sahl Muḥammad b. Sulayman al-Ṣu’lūkī (d.

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16 Al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyya al-Kubrā, IV, 144.
18 The number of his works reach even more than a hundred according to an account of ʿAbd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisi as cited by al-Subkī. See al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyya al-Kubrā, IV, 144.
in order to receive the latter’s spiritual training. Al-Ṣu’lūkī was a moderate Sufi associated to the Junaydian line of the Baghdadi mystical tradition. He also belonged to a family with profound knowledge of the Shāfi‘ite School of Islamic law. With this strong scholarly background in both *fiqh* and ascetic experiences, al-Ṣu’lūkī was the most suitable teacher for al-Sulami considering his Malāmatiya background trained under the auspices of Ibn al-Nujayd. Al-Ṣu’lūkī’s fullname is Abu Sahl Muḥammad b. Sulayman b. Muḥammad b. Ḥārūn b. Bishr al-Hanāfī al-‘Ijī. He was born in the neighboring region of Isfahān in around 296/908. His *nisba* to al-Ḥanāfī refers to the Banū Ḥanīfā al-‘Ijī, not the Hanafite legal school. He passed away in Dhū al-Qa’dā 369/980.20 The *nisba* al-Ṣu’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 Isfahān, 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 Abu Ṭayyib Ahmad al-Ṣu’lūkī in 337/94921 resulted in a permanent stay in the city as he, then, decided to stop wandering and finally settled down in Nishapur.22

As a Sufi under the auspices of Ṣu’lūkī, al-Sulamī 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-Sulamī’s *Adāb al-Ṣuhbā*. Quoting an unpublished treatise *Shams al-Afāq fi Dhikr al-ba’di min manaqib al-Sulamī wa min manaqib Abī ‘Alī al-Daqqūq* by Murd b. Yūsuf al-Ḥanāfī al-Dūsī, Kister wrote:

> “Al-Sulamī took the spiritual path (*tariqa*) and Gnostic knowledge (*ma’rifā*) of the peaks of Sufism from Shaykh Abī 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 suiūtī. Then, he left him alone in a forty night seclusion (*al-khalwāt al-arba’īniyya*) until God opened his heart. Then, by his blessed hands Ṣu’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

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21 For his biography, see al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā‘*, XV, 391.
envisions by his inner sight and the strength of intuitive knowledge (fīrāṣa) that this al-Sulāmī 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-Sulāmī 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-Duṣā’s eclectic accounts on al-Sulāmī’s initiation that al-Sulāmī not only received the Sufi cloak from Abū Sahl al-Ṣū’lūkī, but he also received an investiture of the white garment of Junayd by the hands of Abū al-Qāsim al-Naṣrābādī (d. 367/978), one of Ṣū’lūkī’s colleagues.

Abū al-Qāsim Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. Muḥmūya al-Naṣrābādī was a native Nishapuri. Al-Ḥākīm al-Naysabūrī testified that al-Naṣrābādī was the tongue of the people of profound reality at his time, as he was also renowned for his sound spiritual states. He began his intellectual career as a traditionist. He learned hadīth from several traditionists in Nishapur. When he traveled for more than twenty years, he became a preacher (wā’īz) as well as listening to...
hadīth from several traditionists in Baghdad.\textsuperscript{28} During his stay in Baghdad he was attracted to engage in Sufism under the guidance of Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/946).\textsuperscript{29} In addition, he continued to study hadīth when he, then, traveled to Syria and Egypt.\textsuperscript{30} He returned to Nishapur in around 340/952.\textsuperscript{31} He spent his last days in Makka from 365/976\textsuperscript{32} up to his demise in Dhū al-Hijja 367/978.\textsuperscript{33}

It was through al-Nasrābādī’s teacher that al-Ṣulami 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-Nasrābādī’s account on the primary principles of scripturally based Sufism as he said, ”The main principles (\textit{usūl}) of ṭaṣawwuf 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 \textit{dhikr}, as well as to avoid taking exemptions (\textit{rukhas}) and excessive interpretations.”\textsuperscript{34} Besides, what is preserved by al-Nasrābādī from the main characteristic of Junaydian nature of mystical teaching is reported in al-Ṣulami’s \textit{Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya}, 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.”\textsuperscript{35} As both al-Ṣu'lu'ki and al-Nasrābādī took mystical counsels from al-Shiblī,\textsuperscript{36} it was

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\textsuperscript{29} Besides al-Shiblī, according to Ibn ‘Asākir, al-Nasrābādī was also took the spiritual guidance of Abū ‘Ali al-Rudbārī. See Ibn ‘Asākir, \textit{Tārīkh Madīna Dimashq}, vol. VII, 104.


\textsuperscript{31} Ibn ‘Asākir, \textit{Tārīkh Madīna Dimashq}, VII, 104.

\textsuperscript{32} This date is according to al-Dhahābī, \textit{Ṣiyār A’lām al-Nubalā‘}, XVI, 265. However, some other sources mentioned that it was the year 366/977. See al-Khāṭib, \textit{Tārīkh Baghdād aw Mādiḥat al-Salām}, VI, 169; Ibn ‘Asākir, \textit{Tārīkh Madīna Dimashq}, VII, 109.

\textsuperscript{33} Al-Dhahābī, \textit{Ṣiyār A’lām al-Nubalā‘}, XVI, 265.


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through these Sufi masters that the connection between al-Sulamī and the Baghdadi Sufi circle was strengthened.

Al-Nasrābādī’s relationship with al-Sulamī was firmly established, as both shared the same concern to collect prophetic traditions. It is also known that al-Nasrābādī was considered a reliable (thīqa) transmitter. Their shared concern for ḥadīth was shown, when both al-Sulamī and al-Nasrābādī were visiting Makka. According to the story, whenever they came across each other the latter would say, "Let’s listen to ḥadīths!” According to al-Sulamī, 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-Sulamī might have been able collect the mystical traditions for his Tārīkh and Tabaqāt al-Ṣūfīya. It was through the direct contact with al-Nasrābādī that al-Sulamī 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-Sulamī had undergone was genuinely connected to the Baghdadi sober type of Sufism.

3. Curing Sufism from its Degraded Condition

By considering various influences like the Malāmātī background coming from Ibn Nujayd, the blend between Shāfi’ī fiqh and sober Sufism taken from Abū Sahl al-Ṣu‘lūkī and Abū al-Qāsim al-Nasrābādī, we are quite certain to say that al-Sulamī 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-Sulamī the Baghdadi tradition was molded into a unique mystical school of Nishapur because the spirit of making a blend between Sufism and Shari‘a 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-

\[\text{Al-Sha’rānī, Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā. Cairo: np, 1897, vol. i, 122.}\]
Kalābādhī (d. 385/994) who remarked that his tendency to make a blend between Sufism and the Sharī‘a 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 magnumnimous collection of prophetic traditions. In his Kitāb Jawāmī‘ Adāb al-Ṣūfīyya, 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-Nafs wa Mudawwamātuhā, Kitāb al-Samā‘, 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 Shāfī‘ite School in Islamic law.

In conclusion, al-Sulami was being a Sufi traditionist as wished by al-Sari al-Saqatī to his nephew al-Junayd, when he left al-Sari to quench the advanced spiritual guidance from al-Ḥarith al-Muhāsibī. At this occasion al-Sari prayed that his nephew will have become a Sufi traditionist (sāhib al-ḥadīth šūfī), not the extatic Sufi (ṣūfī sāhib 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-Ṣu‘lūkī or al-Nasrābādī.

The Contentious Ḥaqa‘īq al-Tafṣīr

Representing of the extended proponents of the Baghdadi Sufi circle in Nishapur, the Ḥaqa‘īq al-Tafṣīr was one of Sulami’s greatest achievements. However, it became quite controversial as there had so much criticism to this

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 (tahqīq) became embellishment (bīlya) and verification (tasdiq) only became ornament (zi‘na), 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-Kala‘badhi, Al-Ta’arruf li Madhhab Ahl al-Tasawwuf, first ed. A.J. Arberry (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1933), 4.

tafsir in the later period. To understand the contentious elements of this tafsir, we have to say that such might have been aroused by the use of the transmitted exegetical materials, in which al-Sulami incorporated the hadith in addition to mystical sayings of the previous Sufis among the tābi‘in 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 Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq to one of al-Sulami’s own teachers, Abū al-Qāsim al-Nasrābāḏī (d. 367/978). The aim of conducting a traditional style of exegetical writing represented by the Haqā‘iq al-Tafsir might have been what Kohlberg mentions as spreading the knowledge of Sufism to the general public.40 This aim is obvious in al-Sulami’s introductory remarks of the tafsir, as he decided to put aside the outward sciences of tafsir by providing the opinion (maqāla) of the masters of the knowledge of the profound reality (ahl al-haqīqa); 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 Shāfi‘ite adherents, was that he employed the traditional method of riwāya in providing specific commentaries on the Qur’ānic verses that only sustained symbolic interpretations. These symbolic interpretations should be classified under the method of ta’wil, which transpasses the boundaries of the approved formal interpretive accounts referred to by the term tafsir. 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 Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, to which these false attribution in turn would have been raising the problem of transmission in his traditional style of interpretation,41 as well as challenging his intellectual credibility.42

41 The fact that al-Sulami’s works, especially the Haqā‘iq al-Tafsir, lack indicating the definite source, as sometimes he simply narrates qīla, meaning ‘it is
On the ground that the *Haqa’iq al-Tafsīr* is responded by the later generations after al-Sulami’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-Sulami was also being related to the Bāṭinīyya? The answer of these two question will be highlighted by some findings that being composed by a Sufi traditionist like al-Sulami the *Haqa’iq 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 *Haqa’iq 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 *Haqa’iq 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-Sulami, 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-Sulami’s collection we may also conclude that the term *tafsīr*, employed in the title “*Haqa’iq 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 Naṣr al-Qushayri, who lived in Nishapur about two generations after al-Sulami, that the exegetical method of *tafsīr* was conducted by way of following (*ittibā‘*) and direct communication (*sama‘*).

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 mentioned’ with no reference to his sources contributed to discredit his ability as a *muhaddith*.


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 *istikhab*, 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 *tafsir*. However, unlike al-Ṭabarî who consistently provided the complete chains of transmission, al-Sulami often omitted the *isnad*, 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.

Nevertheless, it still remain confusing to classify the *Haqa‘iq al-Tafsir* under the methodological framework of *tafsir*, as we understood the term today to mean an objective interpretation of the Qur’anic verses. The reason to

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45 This interpretations refers to the mystical doctrine of Muḥammadan light promulgated by Sahl al-Tustarī in addition to Ja‘far al-Rāḥmān ʿUmāra (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1987), II, 343. However, unlike al-Tustarī who explained the doctrine in his own collection (see Tustarī, *Tafsir al-Qurān al-Aẓīm* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya al-Kubra, 1911), 68; see also pages 40-41). Al-Sulami quoted Sahl al-Tustarī as well as Ja‘far without details in his *Haqa‘iq al-Tafsir*, II, 45.

46 The supposedly Shi‘ite origin of the doctrine of Muhammadan light was indicated by Ibn ‘Arabi to have come from ‘Ali b. Abī Tālīb (see Ibn ʿArabi, *Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya il Ma‘rifāt Asrār al-Malakiyya* (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-ʿAmma li al-Kitāb, 1972), 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 process of creation was considered obsolete, compared to the Ashʿarite’s theory of creation of the world out of nothingness.
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-ḥaqiqā). 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 Ḥābib al-Naysabūrī (d. 406/1015),

47 it will be better to situate the diffusion of the *Haqāʾiq al-Tafsīr* under the degrading scholarly climate of Nishapur, in which contemporary ulama’ could not distinguish between the concepts of *tafsīr* and *taʾwīl*. Besides, it was also clear that Ibn Ḥābib’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.48 The era was marked politically by the extant but slowly diminishing influence of the

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 *taʾwīl*, 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-Burḥān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, II, 152.

Buyids on the central 'Abbāsid caliphate in Baghdad, contrary to the strengthening position of the Seljuks in Khurasan.\(^{49}\) 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 \(\textit{tafsīr}\) that had been initiated by al-Māturīdī (d. 944), which marked the end of the formative period of Islamic thought along with the maturing Sunni theology. Al-Māturīdī conceived \(\textit{tafsīr}\) to be “[Making] a scission (\(\textit{qaṭ}\)) that the intended meaning of a word (\(\textit{lafz}\)) 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 (\(\textit{tafsīr bi al-ra'y}\)), which is forbidden;” whereas \(\textit{ta'wil}\) was "to prefer (\(\textit{tarjiḥ}\)) one of the possible meanings carried by a Qur’anic verse, but without scission (\(\textit{qaṭ}\)) [on that meaning] nor [requiring] a testimony to God.”\(^{50}\)

Looking to the above definitions, as a matter of fact, the distinction between the term \(\textit{tafsīr}\) and \(\textit{ta'wil}\) was as yet unknown as there had been no certain objection to employ either the terms of \(\textit{tafsīr}\), \(\textit{ta'wil}\), or \(\textit{ma'na}\) for any sorts of exegetical methods during the formation of Islamic thought marked by the demise al-Māturīdī ca. 350 AH. Both \(\textit{tafsīr}\) and \(\textit{ta'wil}\) had previously denoted the activities of interpreting the Holy Writ. In this general sense, al-Farrā’ (d. 210/825) named his book \(\textit{Ma'ānī al-Qurān}\), while Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) named his mystical interpretation \(\textit{Tafsīr al-Qurān al-Azīm}\), and finally al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) named his compilation with the title \(\textit{Jaami' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wil ayy al-Qurān}\). 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 \(\textit{ta'wil}, \textit{tafsīr}, \textit{or ma'na}\) were similarly denote the same meaning of Qur’anic interpretation. Such an unscrupulous usage of various exegetical methods was clear in the opinion of Abū ‘Ubayd (d. 225/840), who had noted that both terms were synonymous.\(^{51}\) Al-Suyūṭī, who cited Abū ‘Ubayd’s opinion in his \(\textit{al-Itqān}\)

\(^{49}\) See Frye (1975), 228.

\(^{50}\) He wrote, “\(Qala al-Māturīdī, al-tafsīr al-qat’ alā anna al-nurād min al-latţe ādāhā, wa al-shahādatu ‘alā Allah annahu ‘ana bi al-latţi ādāhā; fā in qāma dālīlun maqtū’ bihi fā sāhīh, wa illa fā tafsīrun bi al-ra’yi wa huwa al-mañhityy ‘anhu. Wa ta’wil tarjiḥu ähladi al-muhtamal fi biṭānī al-qat’ wa al-shahāda ‘alā Allah.’” Al-Suyūṭī, \(\textit{Al-Itqān fi ‘Ulium al-Qurān}, IV, 167.\)

\(^{51}\) Al-Suyūṭī, \(\textit{Al-Itqān fi ‘Ulium al-Qurān}, IV, 167.\)
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 explicated in more details.\footnote{See al-Zarkashi, \textit{Al-Burhān fi 'Ulūm al-Qurān}, II, 152.} However, the long span of more than a century from the introduction by al-Māturīdī and its application in the era of al-Sulamī is also too long to ignore in the development of Qur’ānic hermeneutics. Al-Suyūṭī himself mentioned al-Māturīdī’s opinion, which may really have introduced the extant technical differences between the terms \textit{tafsīr} and \textit{ta’wīl} since the near end of the classical period. However, the remote area of Samarkand, where al-Māturīdī spent most of his life, in addition to his unknown scholarly career as well as his ascetic life,\footnote{See W. Madelung (1986), “Al-Māturīdī” in \textit{EI} 2, vi, 846a.} may have contributed to the persistent ignorance of this shifting concept.

The most important contribution initiated by al-Māturīdī to the development of Qur’ānic interpretation is that he had outlined a clear demarcation between \textit{tafsīr} and \textit{ta’wīl}. It was certainly al-Māturīdī’s technical definition of the term \textit{tafsīr}, viz. to be the scission (qaṭ) of the intended meaning of a word (lafẓ), which was indeed very important contribution in narrowing down the technical definition of the term \textit{tafsīr}. Its meaning from then on had become restricted to the interpretation of Qur’ānic verses applying the method of ‘\textit{ībārā} which means, according to Abū Zayd, “to limit the meaning, making the meaning locked (mughlaqa) and reaches its end.”\footnote{Abū Zayd, \textit{Hākadhā Takāliṣama Ibn ‘Arabi} (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma li al-Kitāb, 2002), 139.} The immediate impact of such a restriction to the concept of \textit{tafsīr} was that the activity of interpreting the Qur’ānic verses is to be conducted within a more scriptural approach. In this approach, the \textit{tafsīr} for a verse takes its proof by linking the verse to a sequential search starting with parallel Qur’ānic passages, and then continuing with the Hadith. If there were no Qur’ānic parallels, nor anything to be traced in the other scriptural sources, the interpretation is to be taken by way of \textit{ijtiḥād}. 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).\footnote{See Ibn Taymiyya’s answer to the query on the best way of interpretation (Ibn Taymiyya, \textit{Majmū‘ Fatāwā}, edited by ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim with the assistance of his son Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān and introduced by ‘Abd Allāh b.}
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’wil*.

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’wil* 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 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


56 The distinction between *tafsīr* and *ta’wil* 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-a>khar li al-nas }s}) in the Islamic civilization of the Arabs. This consequently leads to consider *ta’wil* reprehensible (*makru>h*) within the formal religious thought based on *tafsīr* (See Abū Zayd, *Maʃḥūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāṣa fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’a>n* (Cairo: Al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Amma li al-Kitāb, 1993, 247).
had been involved in certain political movements, such political participation would have been the reason to brand them as heretics.\(^{57}\)

Probing deeper the *Haqāʾiq al-Tafsīr*, Sulamī’s attempt to collect only mystical traditions for his exegesis of the Qurʾān (*tafsīr*) may have been considered unusual in the eyes of tradition, since they were commonly limited the term *tafsīr* only to sorts of rigid and literal approaches of interpretation. Al-Sulamī tried to blend Sufism with the Shari’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 *Haqāʾiq al-Tafsīr* cannot be classified as strictly displaying a traditionist style of interpretation.\(^{58}\)

### 3. Discerning the Meanings of Ḥaqīqa

The need to trace the meaning of *ḥaqīqa* within the atmosphere of scholarly thinking of the 5th/11th century Islam is necessary in order to investigate the most probable reason why al-Sulamī named his work *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr*, and how readers responded to such controversies in later periods. The only immediate information revealed from the introductory sections of al-Sulamī’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 mashāyikh ahl al-ḥaqīqa. These Sufi masters were representing a group of people whom God had bestowed them the understanding of divine discourses. As the term *ḥaqīqa* 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-Sulamī. 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

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\(^{57}\) The case of al-Hallāj’s execution, for example, was embellished on his connection with the politically rebellious movement of the Qarmatīya. See Massignon, *The Passion of Hallāj. Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, transl. from the French with a biographical foreword by Herbert Mason (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), I, 200-201; III, 193-1944.

\(^{58}\) Al-Sulamī’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-ʿAsh‘arī, who might have given a further influence in the field of speculative theology. See Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 312.
it was also applied in the general field of Qur’anic exegesis from a linguistic approach (as for example we may compare ُحاَقِيقَ to مَاجْزَ). It might be on the basis of such a linguistic approach that the حَقَّيَّةُ الْتَفْسِيرُ became the target of criticism and controversies after Sulami’s demise.

The term ُحاَقِيقَ 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-Hallaj’s concept of divine names as quoted in al-Sulami’s َتَباَقَآتُ الْشَّعْرَیَّةَ. Al-Hallaj said, "Divine names are [merely] a name from [the point of view of] comprehension (ِیِدْرَأَکَ), whereas from the point of view of God the Real (َحاَقَّ) they are a reality (ِحاَقَّى)".\(^{60}\) From this stance, al-Hallaj concluded that everything real has an essential reality. Thus, the term ُحاَقِيقَ should be differentiated from َحاَقَّ as like the abstract and the concrete: "reality" and "real", Deity and God.\(^{61}\)

Furthermore, from the stance of Islamic mysticism ُحاَقِيقَ can be differentiated from the term ُشَهَرَىَ. Al-Qushayri as Sulami’s junior contemporary in Nishapur defined ُحاَقِيقَ as the concept of witnessing Lordship (مُشْهَادَةُ الْرَّبِّيَّةَ),\(^{62}\) which is coupled with ُشَهَرَىَ meaning the perseverance of worship (ِیِلْتَزْمَ الْعُبْدَیَّةَ).\(^{63}\) From such a distinction, the term ُحاَقِيقَ leads to the meaning "a profound reality which remains immutable from the time of Adam to the end of the world."\(^{64}\) Such a mystical concept, according to Gardet, is juxtaposed to ُشَهَرَىَ, which denotes reality that can undergo abrogation and changes like ordinances and commandments.\(^{65}\) However, the distinction between ُحاَقِيقَ and ُشَهَرَىَ cannot be reduced to mere opposition, because one completes the other, as Gardet also underlined the


\(^{60}\) Al-Hallaj said, “أَسْمَاءُ اللَّهِ تَأْلَى مِنْ حَیْثُ الْیِدْرَآکَ إِسْمُ، وَمِنْ حَیْثُ الْحَآقَّ الْحَآقِیَّ.” Al-Sulami, َتَباَقَآتُ الْشَّعْرَیَّةَ, 309.


\(^{62}\) Al-Qushayri related the concept of ُمُشْهَادَةُ to the term ُمُعْدَنَأُ literally means "adhere to religion". Accordingly, there are three hierarchic levels of manifestation: (1) ُمُشْهَادَةُ bi ُحاَقَّ, to witness something with the argument of unity (2) ُمُشْهَادَةُ لِیِلَ ُحاَقَّ, to see God in something, and (3) ُمُشْهَادَةُ ُحاَقَّ, to see God in concealment with no description. See Qushayri, أَرْبَعَ رَأْيَ فِي الْتَأْشِیَّة, ed. Qasim al-Samarrai (Baghdad: al-Majma’ al-I’raqui, 1969), 54.

\(^{63}\) Al-Qushayri said, “الشَّهَرَاءُ امْرُنَ بِیِلْتَزْمُ الْعُبْدَیَّةَ، وَا ُحاَقِیقَ ُمُشْهَادَةُ الْرَّبِّیَّةَ.” Al-Qushayri, عَرْبَةُ الرِّضَا فِی ْیَلْمِ الْتَأْشِیَّة, 82.

\(^{64}\) L. Gardet, "Hakika" in El, III, 76b.

\(^{65}\) L. Gardet, "Hakika" in El, III, 76b.
relation between baṭīn and zāhīr. Thus, both concepts must be understood in a mutual correlation. This was also noted by al-Qushayrī who stated there must a reciprocal relation between the two concepts, in which ḥaqqīqa is to be strengthened by shari‘a, while at the same time shari‘a should be endorsed by ḥaqqīqa in order to achieve perfection.\(^{66}\)

Similarly, a philosophical basis for such a parallel relation between ḥaqqīqa 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 5\(^{th}\)/11\(^{th}\) century may have been compared to some related concepts within the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037). This seems to be indicated by al-Jurjānī’s explanation of the philosophical meaning of the term in his al-Ta‘rīfāt. Al-Jurjānī defined the term ḥaqqīqa al-shay‘ to mean “the quiddity of a thing: the thing as it is in itself.” Consequently, ḥaqqīqa is not the thing existing, but the essence of the thing in as much as it exists, or the real nature in absolute intelligibility. In close relation to the preceding meaning, the term al-hakika al-aqīliyya means, according to al-Jurjānī, “the exact conception of a thing.”\(^{67}\)

Consequently, it can be concluded that ḥaqqīqa 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 Ḥaqqīqa al-Tafsīr, 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 ulamā’ of the time. Al-Sulami’s collection of mystical traditions was certainly esoteric, claiming to present the essence or profound reality of the Qur’ānic 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 comprehension resulting from mystical experiences in the form of mukāshafāt.\(^{68}\)

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\(^{66}\) Al-Qushayrī continued to say, “wa kullu shari‘atin ghayru mu’ayyadatin bi al-haqqīqa fa amruha ghayru maqbuł, wa kullu haqqīqatin ghayru muqayyadatin bi al-shari‘a fa amruha ghayru mahsūl.” Al-Qushayrī, Risāla, 82.


\(^{68}\) According to al-Qushayrī, mukāshafāt is higher than mushāhada. In this sense, the term mukāshafā bi al-ilm is defined to be “reaching clarification of truth in understanding” (taḥqiq al-isāba fi al-fahm). Besides, according to al-Qushayrī the Sufis could also attain a degree of unveiling in a mystical state (mukāshafā bi al-ḥal) and the unveiling in an unexpected concurrence (mukāshafā bi al-wajih). See al-Qushayrī, Kitāb Tartib al-Sulūk fi Tariq Allāh li al-Imām Abī al-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin al-
Thus, the act of unveiling what is hidden, which is perceived to be the general principle of *tafsir* 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 a *tafsir*, but based on such profound mystical experiences had certainly classified under a specifically distinct perspective within the filed of Qur’anic interpretation. The term *tafsir* employed by al-Sulami as read in the title of his collection does not differ from the general books of *tafsir* only on a representation of the compiler’s traditional approach by way of collecting mystical traditions from the previously sufi figures elaborating their Qur’anic comprehension. Thus, the *Haqiqa al-Tafsir* is called a *tafsir* in a sense that its main sources of interpretation are transmitted materials of sayings and opinions of the previous Sufis, viz. *riwaya*. However, in addition to its traditional style of *tafsir* bil-riwaya, the extant esoteric understanding poses some slight glances out of the boundary of “the sciences of the outward” (*al-'ulûm al-žâhira*), in which the main objective of the *Haqiqa al-Tafsir* was to provide another kind of *tafsir* out of its common category, viz. to bear the traditions of “the People of Reality (ahl al-haçiqa). Thus, the title of the book, indicated that this was not a *tafsir* of the usual type, but a specific collection esoteric materials far beyond what had been generally suggested with the term *tafsir* in its formal sense.

We may assume that al-Sulami was aware of taking the risk in naming his collection with the phrase “*Haqiqa al-Tafsir*” as both terms *tafsir* and *haqiqa* had received different technical senses within various branches of Islamic traditional sciences. Had we perceived the term *haqiqa* within the field of interpretation of the Qur’ân (*ilm al-tafsir*) as well as Rhetoric, the term *haqiqa* was perceived to mean “basic, divine, and definite meaning” which lays in a juxtaposed position to the so called allegoric meaning (*majaž*). This might be the point of controversy addressed by later critics to al-Sulami’s *Haqiqa al-Tafsir*. Since the field of *ilm al-tafsir* is the common approach to measure the validity of Qur’anic interpretation within the Sunnite academic atmosphere.


69 The quotation of the definition *tafsir* promulgated by al-Maturidi can be read in al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqa’n fi ‘Ulûm al-Qur’ân*, 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.

70 In this sense, Ibn Taymiyya composed a treatise titled *al-haçiqa wa al-majâz* (ms. coll. Rashid Rida, Cairo) see L. Gardet, “Haçiqa,” in *EF*, III, 75a.
Then, it will not be surprising that so much criticism was addressed to blame al-Sulami’s *Haqā’iq al-Tafṣīr*. 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 Malāmatīyya movement. In conclusion, the term *Haqā’iq al-Tafṣīr* might not properly titled for such an esoteric commentary on the Qur’ān under the perspective of *ilm al-tafṣīr*, 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 ‘Ālī b. Abī Tālib, who had been asked a similar question. ‘Ālī 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 hadith 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 (*baṭṭin*). Al-Sulami also mentioned another tradition to frame the possibility of bearing fourfold meanings of Qur’ānic verses quoted from Ibn Mas’ūd. According to this tradition, the Prophet had said, "The Qur’ān was revealed on seven letters (*ahrūf*), for every verse there are the outward (*zahr*) and the inward (*baṭṭin*); whereas every letter (*ḥârīf*) has a limit (*ḥadd*) and a point of ascent (*maṭla*)."  

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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 latâ ‘ifi wadâ ‘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’ani); 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 (haqiqa’at haqa’iq). 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 ‘ibaara. As indicated earlier, such an understanding could not be easily attached to the exegetical method denoted by the term tafsir, since al-Maturidi 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 (’awaamm). 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-Shadiq, such an alternate understanding resulted by way of ta’wil may include higher levels of discernment by the method of ishara, as it is juxtaposed to the method of ‘ibaara. The method of ishara comprises two layers of understanding classified as subtleties (latâ ‘ifi) and profound realities (haqa’iq), which will be subsequently achieved only by the specialists (khawass) among

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73 Al-Sulami, Haqa’iq al-Taafsir, I, 19.
74 Al-Sulami, Haqa’iq al-Taafsir, I, 19.
the saints (awliyā’) and those who were privileged with a higher degree of prophecy (nubuwā).

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 ‘Ālī b. Abī Ṭalīb. Al-Sulāmī also quoted ‘Ālī’s account saying, ”Every verse of the Qur’ān has a fourfold meaning: the outward (ẓāhir), the inward (bātin), the limit (ḥadd), and the point of ascent (maṭla’).” ‘Ālī further explained, ”[firstly] the outward is the recitation (tīlāwā), [secondly] the inward is the comprehension (fāhm), and [thirdly] the limit is the explanation (‘ibāra), symbolic expression (iṣhāra), as well as the legal rules of lawfulness (al-ḥālāh) and prohibition (al-ḥarām), and [fourthly] the elevating point (maṭla’) as the final intention (murād) for his servant.” ‘Ālī further stated, ”[God] creates [within] the Qur’ān [sorts of] explanation (‘ibāra), symbolic expression (iṣhāra), subtleties (lātā’īf) and profound reality (ḥaqqā’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 (istīslām).

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

For his collection of exclusively mystical sayings al-Sulāmī had put aside any categorical interpretations employing the method of ‘ibāra. He may have left out the “outward sciences” (al-‘ulūm al-ẓāhirā), 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 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.

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75 The report was taken from Ja’far without any sufficient information about its chains of transmitters. Al-Sulāmī only mentioned the method of transmission with the phrase ḥukkiyā ‘aṭ Jafar b Muḥammad meaning "reported" or "given an account" from Ja’far (Al-Sulāmī, Ḥaqqā’iq al-Tafṣīr, I, 22).
77 This expression was later found in al-Dhahabi’s critique to the Shaykh. See al-Subkī, Ṭabaqat al-Shāfī‘yya al-Kubrā, IV, 147.
78 Al-Sulāmī, Ḥaqqā’iq al-Tafṣīr, I, 19.
the level of ḥaqa’iq, 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’iq al-Taḥfīẓ 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 Ḥabib (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 taḥfīz 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 (sūra), 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” (müḥāna).

The earliest criticism of the Ḥaqa’iq al-Taḥfīẓ may have connected with the growing awareness of the distinction between the term taḥfīz and ta’wil, expressed by Ibn Ḥabib al-Naysaburi, which was mentioned before. Almost a generation after the death of both Ibn Ḥabib and al-Sulami, a critical remark on the Ḥaqa’iq al-Taḥfīẓ 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-Rahmān al-Sulami composed the Ḥaqa’iq al-Taḥfīẓ; had he firmly believed [the book] to be a taḥfīz, 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’ānic verses. The critic seems to imply that al-Sulami could be mistaken


only in case that he classify his Ḥaqā’iq a-Tafsīr as an objective interpretation intended by the term tafsīr, 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 Bāṭinī ta’wil. In fact, the difference between Sufis and the Bāṭinīs was barely known to laymen. Al-Wāḥidī’s statement may contribute theological issues before it was theoretically clarified by al-Ghazālī in his Fāḍā’ih al-Bāṭinīyya (the Iquminies of the Bāṭinīyya), which sociologically refers to various sects of the Shi’ites from time to time.

The difference between the Sufis and the Bāṭinīyya was consisted primarily by the former’s attestation of the applicability of the ẓāhir meaning despite their advance steps to uncover spiritual significances of the Qur’ānic verses. It was on the ground of accepting the ẓāhir that the Sufis were safe from being accused of heresy as it is warned by al-Wāḥidī. On the contrary, the Bāṭinī only believed in the inward meaning of the Qur’ānic verses, on the basis of which their main goal was to obliterate the shari‘a, specifically in the eyes of their opponents. Such a distinction certainly splits the Sufis from the Bāṭinī, 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 Ḥaqā’iq a-Tafsīr, al-Wāḥidī must have been quite certain that Sulami did not believe the Sufi sayings to be the only meaning of the Qur’ānic verses.

To know deeper on who is Al-Wāḥidī 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. Abu al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Cairo: al-Dār al-Qawmiyya, 1964), 11-17.

81 The term Bāṭinīyya is defined by Hodgson to be the Ismā‘ilīs in medieval times referring to their stress to the bāṭin, 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 bāṭin. It was in the last sense that certain Muslim philosophers and Sufis were being accused of the bāṭinis, even though some might have defended themselves from the charge of being a bāṭini on the ground that they remain acknowledge the ẓāhir alongside the bāṭin. (See M. Hodgson 1960, “Bāṭiniyya, in EI, I, 1098b-1100a).

82 See Al-Ghazālī, Fāḍā’ih al-Bāṭiniyya, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, 11-17.

83 See the Hanafi theological stance elaborated by Sa’d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī commenting the Aqā’id al-Nasafiyya in al-Suyūṭī, Al-Itqa’n fi ‘Ulu’m al-Qur’ān, IV, 195.
Nishapur. His father was a successful merchant who always provided strong support to his son to pursue his advanced studies. As a result, al-Wāhīdī became an intellectual who had been learning from various great teachers of his age. In Qur’anic exegesis, Wāhīdī was linked with the renowned Abū Ishāq al-Tha‘ālibī (d. 427/1034).

As a result of various scholarly achievements, al-Wāhīdī was famous for his works, not only about Qur’anic exegesis and the occasions of Qur’anic revelation (asbāb al-nuzūḥ), but he also had become a renowned Arabic philologist and rhetorician. He composed several tafsirs: al-Basīṭ, al-Wasiṭ, and al-Wajiż. Looking into al-Wāhīdī’s scholarly character by observing his al-Tafsir al-Wajiż, 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-Sulami as his senior mentor of the Shafi’ite fellow in the same native city of Nishapur.

After the demise of al-Wāhīdī as of the confreres of the Shafi’i School of Islamic Law, there would have been much criticism of the Haqiq al-Tafsir by al-Sulami, which is unanimously expressed by almost all legal schools within the Sunni community. Despite the fact that al-Wāhīdī’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 medieval Shafi’ites, Ibn al-Salah (d.643/1245) quite comprehensively

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84 Bulliet, The Patricians of Nishapur, 254.
87 As it is clear by the title al-Wajiż, al-Wāhīdī provided meanings of the Qur’ānic verses in a brief explanation, based only on a single authority of Ibn ‘Abbās 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-Wāhīdī, Kitaḥ al-Wajiż, I, 2)
88 Abū ‘Amr Taqī al-Ḍīn Uthmān b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān, b. Mūsā b. Abī Naṣr al-Shahrūzī 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
discussed the statute of Ḥaqāʾiq al-Taḥsīr by al-Sulami in his Fatāwā.90 When asked about his legal opinion on the mystical interpretation to the Qurʾān, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ began his answer with a quotation of al-Wāḥidī’s statement, even though Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ himself seemed to have been doubtful that such a reliable figure like Abū ʿAbd 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 anonimous 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 taḥṣīr; but under that of “meanings” (maʿān) that the Sufis are able to gain through the activity of recitation (tīlāwā). Such an answer might not have satisfied the questioner as he then finally addressing similar question to Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ 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 taḥṣīr 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 (samaʿ). Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s acknowledged that such mystical interpretations, to some extent at least, might come to a true sense (madlūḥ) 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 Bāṭinīyya, as this would be the case if one believed such allegorical interpretations to be the solely intended meanings of the Qurʾānic verses. In short, this apology implied in Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s legal opinion about the mystical interpretation conducted by the Sufis represents a definitely moderate opinion,

traveled to Khurasan to master the science of Ḥadīth, then, moved to Syria, staying at Jerusalem giving lectures at the Ṣalāḥiyya School, which was established by Salah al-Din al-Ayyūbī. He, then, moved to Damascus and dedicated most of his teachings to the Rawḥiyya School. He was appointed to teach Ḥadīth, when the Dār al-Ḥadīth was established in Damascus by al-Malik al-Ashrāf b. al-Malik al-ʿĀdil b. Ayyūb. He died on 25th Rabiʿ al-akhir 643/1245 in Damascus. (J. Robson 1971, “Ībn al-Ṣalāḥ,” in EI, III, 927a).

compared to the other critics among middle age generations of the Shafi’i scholars, as we will mention them below.

However, before delving into the criticism from later generations of Shafi’i 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 Batiiniyya among the Shi’ites. In this group was the Hanafi theologians Abu al-Haʃṣ ‘Umar b Muhammad al-Nasafi (d. 537/1142) as he criticized esoteric interpretation in general to be a sort of conversion of obvious meanings of Qur’anic verses, leading to an accusation of heresy of the type committed by the “people of the esoteric (ahl al-batîn).”91 This seemingly harsh theological argument received a more elaborated explanation in a milder tone in the work of Sa’d al-Din al-Taftazani (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 Batiiniyya among the Shi’ites because they did not accept literal (zâhir) interpretations.92 By this late clarification, the Hanafi theologians refrained from rejecting a mystical claim concerning esoteric meanings or spiritual significances within the interpretation to the Qur’anic verses as long as those meanings do not deviate from the desired objective expressed within its outward sense (zâhir). However, this milder view would certainly not obliterate the general Hanafite rejection of the so called “inspirational interpretation” as the basis of their opposition to the Bâtiîîī 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 mukâshafa (disclosure),93 or ilhâm (inspiration) in a more general term. Both, accordingly, could not be classified as valid sources of knowledge (asbâb al-‘ilm). Giving a commentary on the Aqa’id by al-Nasafi, al-Taftazani 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

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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-Jurjani in his Ta’rifat, kashf technicly 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 mukâshafa meaning “unveiling in the sense of “illumination” or epiphany, which is opposed to the term satr, and istitâr (closure). See L. Gardet, “Kashf”, EF, IV, 696b.
three”, as Abū al-Ḥafs al-Nasaḥi 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 Ḥaqaʿiṭ al-Taḥṣīr. Representing a traditionist position he asserted, “Abū ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Sulami mentioned in his Ḥaqaʿiṭ al-Taḥṣīr on the authority of Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad and the likes several accounts of which experts know that he certainly lied about Jaʿfar b Muḥammad.” In a general evaluation, Ibn Taymiyya concluded the Ḥaqaʿiṭ al-Taḥṣīr by al-Sulami to have comprised three sorts of traditions: first, weak traditions (nuqūl daʿīfā) 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. Some accounts found in al-Sulami’s Ḥaqaʿiṭ al-Taḥṣīr 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-khatāʿ fi al-dālīl, lā fi al-maddūlī). Such methodological faults had been also conducted by other groups of scholars among jurists, theologians, and preachers (waʿīz), besides the Sufis. Within his own principles of Qurʿānic 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

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valid analogy, it would be accepted.\textsuperscript{99} Within Sufism, such išārāt 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 (fada’il al-a’māl).\textsuperscript{100} 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 Ḥaqa’iq al-Tafṣīr 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-Sulami’s Ḥaqa’iq al-Tafṣīr, 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 tafsīr. Had it been admitted to the framework of tafsīr, 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 Ḥaqa’iq al-Tafṣīr as recorded in Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya Kubra by Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 769/1368) saying, "A book named Ḥaqa’iq al-Tafṣīr belongs him (i.e. al-Sulami); I wish that he had never composed it, because it is perversion and Qarmatī [influence] in it; so, beware of the book, [because] you will [certainly] see how odd it is.”\textsuperscript{101} This anti-Sufī tendency had also been inherited by al-Suyūṭī who classified al-Sulami under the category of a heretic. The reason for such a classification, according

\textsuperscript{99} Fa inna al-Shaykh Abā ʿAbd al-Rahmān dhakara fi Ḥaqa’iq al-tafsīr min al-ishārāt...fa in kānat al-ishāratu i’tibāriyyatan min jinsi al-qiyās al-ṣāḥib kānat ḥaṣanatan maqbulatan. Ibn Taymiyya, Majmūʿ Fatawā, VI, 376-377.

\textsuperscript{100} Fatilka al-ishārāt hiya min báb al-i’tibār wa al-qiyās, wa iḥāqā mu lā yaysa bi maṣūṣin bi al-maṣūṣ mithlu al-i’tibār wa al-qiyās alladhi yasta’milu al-fuqahā’ fi al-aḥkām, lākinna ḥadīḥa yusta’malū fi al-targhib wa al-tarhib wa fada’il al-a’ma’il... Ibn Taymiyya, Majmūʿ Fatawā, VI, 377.

\textsuperscript{101} Al-Dhahabi said, “wa lāhu kitāb samma hu “Ḥaqa’iq al-Tafsīr” laytahu lān yuqnnīnu fā innahu taḥrīf wa qarmaṭa fā dūnaka al-kitāb fā satarā al-‘ajab.” Al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya al-Kubra, IV, 147.
to al-Suyūṭī, was because his *tafsīr* was as if condemned (*ghayru maḥmūd*).\footnote{He wrote, "wa innamā awradtuhu lī hādha al-qismi lianna tafsīrahu ghayru maḥmūd." Al-Suyūṭī, *Tābaqāt al-Mufassirīn*, I, 98.} It is clear from al-Dhahabī’s criticism that concerning the use of his traditional sources, al-Sulami had to be classified as an unreliable commentator. In addition, a rebellious nature was also attributed to al-Sulami by connecting him with the Qarmāṭiyya movement, which is something exaggerated like in the case of al-Ḥallāj.\footnote{The accusation of al-Sulami’s being a Qarmāṭī as appears in al-Dhahabī (al-Subki, *Tābaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya al-Kubrā*, IV, 147) was of the reason he was associated with al-Ḥallāj (cf. L. Gardet, “al-Ḥallāj” in *EI* 2, III, 99b). In fact, al-Sulami quoted many traditions originated from al-Ḥallāj in his *Ḥaqa‘īq al-Tafsīr* as specifically collected by Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*, 359 – 412.}

Despite such harsher criticism, however, al-Sulami continued to receive respect for his capability as a traditional scholar among the early medieval Shāfi‘ītes. This appraisal is quite clear in al-Subki, who followed al-Khaṭīb al-Bağhdādī, defending al-Sulami’s reliability in the field of ḥadīth. Al-Khaṭīb asserted that the rank (*qadr*) of Abu ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulami among his native contemporaries was honorable (*jālīḥ*) as he was also a praiseworthy (*maḥmūd*) traditionist.\footnote{Al-Khaṭīb al-Bağhdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdaḍ wa Madīnāt al-Salām*, vol. ii, 348; al-Subki, *Tābaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya al-Kubrā*, IV, 145.} Al-Subki followed al-Khaṭīb’s opinion as he argued that Abu ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was right to have been reliable so far.\footnote{Al-Subki, *Tābaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya al-Kubrā*, IV, 145.} At the end of his biographic account of al-Sulami, al-Subki 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‘īq al-Tafsīr* was because al-Sulami had confined himself in his compilation to mention only some sorts of allegoric interpretation (*ta‘wīl*), while it was inconceivable for the Sufis that their words were in contradiction to the formal interpretation.\footnote{Al-Subki, *Tābaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya al-Kubrā*, IV, 147.}

**Concluding Remarks**

What outweighed crucial role of al-Sulami in composing the *Ḥaqa‘īq al-Tafsīr* was that the political instability and the demeaning cultural atmosphere of Nishapur at the turn of the 5\textsuperscript{th}/11\textsuperscript{th} century. This demeaning condition led to schismatic rivalries that cause people to ignore what Ibn Ḥabīb al-Naysabūrī called "the distinction between the concept of *tafsīr* and *ta‘wīl*" as it had been propagated almost a half century earlier by al-Māturīdī. He had conceived *tafsīr*...
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 Ḥaqa’iq al-Tafṣīr 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: ‘iba‘ra, ishāra, latā‘if, and ḥaqa‘iq, al-Sulami had certainly collected some sorts of extreme categorical interpretations: He employs the method of iba‘ra, which is basic, to provide ḥaqa‘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-Sulamis’ tafsir in the following generations.

After all, the controversial nature of the Ḥaqa‘iq al-Tafṣīr 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 Bātini 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 emanatif 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 ‘Aṭa‘ in interpreting QS 2:284, "To God belongs all that is in heavens and what is on earth." Commenting the verse, Ibn ‘Aṭa‘ said, "To God belong two cosmic realms (kawnān), of which He is the Innovator (al-mubdi’) out of nothing (min ghayri shay’); whoever is occupied with them, is occupied with nothing out of..."
In this clearly traditional stance, al-Sulami was quite consistent as he brought in Ibn ‘Ata’s traditional view related to the meaning of Divine Attribute of *al-Bādi’*, which is accordingly meant to be the Innovator (*mubdi’*) of things out of nothingness (*min ghayri shay’*).

In short, despite the contentious nature of its style of interpretation the *Haqā’iq 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. *Wallāhu a’lam.*

**Bibliography**


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