Measuring the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr:* From its Contentious Nature to the Formation of Sunnite Sufism

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Abstract

This article discusses the Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr *by al-Sulamī against the extant accusation of being Shi'ite. 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 ḥadiths, the nature of Sulamī's tafsir was relatively free from either Shi'ite elements or mystico-philosophical notions contradictory to the spirit of Sunnite orthodoxy. Al-Sulamī's tafsīr is to be classified ma'thūr, but it conceives spiritual significances (ḥaqā'iq) that might have been set beyond the common objectives of Qur'ānic tafsir in general. It is not a general tafsir for laymen, but an esoteric interpretation of the Qur'ānic verses for the elites of sufi readers.*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mendiskusikan Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr *karya al-Sulamī untuk menentang tuduhan terhadapnya sebagai seorang pengikut Shī'a. Penulis artikel ini membuktikan bahwa karya ini merupakan penafsiran Sunnī yang didasarkan dari sumber tradisi Sunnī dan juga merepresentasikan prinsip teologis Sunnī. Walaupun judulnya kontroversial dan merujuk kepada ḥadīth-ḥadīth ḍa'if, tafsir Sulamī bebas dari elemen Shī'a ataupun doktrin mistiko-filosofis yang bertentangan dengan spirit ortodoksi Sunnī. Tafsir al-Sulamī termasuk tafsir bi al-ma'thur namun ia mengandung pemaknaan spiritual (ḥaqā'iq) yang dapat dianggap keluar dari tujuan umum penafsiran al-Qur'ān secara umum. Tafsir ini bukan termasuk tafsir untuk masyarakat awam, akan tetapi penafsiran esoteris terhadap al-Qur'ān untuk kalangan elit dari para sufi.*

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

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Introduction

The *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* 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 tafsir, which was much more extensive than its predecessor, the *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Azīm* by Sahl al-Tustari (d. 289/896).[2] Tustari's *Tafsīr* had been diffused at the end of 3rd/9th century in Basra, whereas the *Ḥaqā'iq 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-Tustari's *Tafsīr*, the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* 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-Ḥaqā'iq*).[3]

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'ānic verses in his *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* can be compared to Ibn Jarir al-Ṭabari's method in his *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān.* Both *tafsīr*s employ the traditional style of interpretation based on transmitted exegetical materials (*al-tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*). Both al-Ṭabari and al-Sulami were also traditionists whose intellectual linkage meets indirectly in the revered figure of the Shāfi'ite jurist Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. 'Ali b. Ismā'il al-Qaffal al-Shāshi al-Marwazī (d. 365/976).[4] al-Ṭabari was al-Qaffal's teacher, whereas al-Sulami was al- Qaffal's disciple. The only slight difference between the two works is that unlike al-Ṭabari who provided full lists of transmission, for the most cases of interpretations al-Sulami 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-Sulami's *Ḥaqā'iq*

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[2] Sahl b. 'Abd Allāh b. Yūnus b. 'Isā b. 'Abd Allāh b. Rāfi' al-Tustari was born in Tustar in 200/816. He became a Sufi under the guidance of his maternal uncle Muḥammad b. Sawwār and Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣri (d. 246/861) (Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān,* Edited by Iḥsan 'Abbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣadir, 1868), ii, 150; I, 389).

[3] *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr: Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīz,* ed. Sayyid 'Imrān (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2001), I, 20.

[4] Al-Qaffal 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-Ṭabari, while among the Nishapuri traditionists who received his traditions afterwards were Abū 'Abd al-Raḥman al-Sulami (d. 412/1021) and al-Ḥakim al-Naysabūri. See his biography in Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān,* IV, 200-1, also al-Subki, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā,* Ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥi and 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥuluw (Cairo: Isā al-Bābi al-Ḥalabi, 1964), III, 200-227.

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-Ṭabari's tafsīr.[5]

On the basis of such a unique character, there is an extant presumption that the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* had been accused to have shared the nature of a Bāṭini *ta'wīl*, which consequently gives the *Ḥaqā'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-Suyūṭi, when he asserted that al-Sulami's tafsir was accused of being "untrustworthy".[7] In these two demeaning responses to the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, the accusation of al-Sulami's being a Qarmaṭi might have been based on his quotes from al-Ḥallāj.[8] Besides, there are also several objections posed by other scholars of non-Shafi'te madhhabs, who put their comments against the sincere intention of al-Sulami within the intensive project of enrooting Sufism to the Qur'ānic basis along with the formation of Sunnite orthodoxy. This piece will measure the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* to be a book of tafsir representing not a Shi'ite style of allegorical ta'wīl, 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

Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Mūsā b. Khālid b. Zāwiya b. Sa'id b. Qabīṣa b. Sirāq al-Azdi al-Sulami al-Naysābūri was born on 10th Jumādā al-Ākhira 325/927 in Nishapur.[9] He belonged to the clan of

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[5] Al-Khaṭib al-Baghdādi, *Tārikh Baghdād aw Madinat al-Salām* (Beyrut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabi, 1970), II, 248.

[6] Al-Dhahabī's said, "*wa lahu kitāb sammāhu "Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr" laytahu lam yuṣannifhu fa innahu taḥrif wa qarmaṭa fa dūnaka al-kitāb fa satarā al-'ajab.*" Al-Subki, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā,* IV, 147.

[7] He wrote, "*wa innamā awradtuhu fī hādha al-qismi lianna tafsirahu ghayru maḥmūd.*" Al-Suyūṭi, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirin,* ed. 'Ali Muḥammad 'Umar (Cairo: Maktaba Wahba, 1977), I, 98.

[8] See L. Gardet, "al-Ḥallādj" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* New Edition (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), ed. B. Lewis [et.al.], III, 99b. Extracts of Ḥallāj's accounts in the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* is specifically collected by Massignon, see Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1954), 359 – 412.

[9] This date is according to Abu Sa'id Muḥammad b 'Ali al-Khashshāb as quoted in al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā',* Ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūṭ (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-Risāla, 9th edition, 1993), XVII, 247; Dhahabi also quoted 'Abd al-Ghafir al-Farisi in his *Siyaq Naysabūr* mentioned that al-Sulami was born in 330 (al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā',* XVII, 250).

al-Azd[10] from the side of his father and to that of Sulaym from the side of his mother. His maternal grandfather Abū ʿAmr Ismāiʿil b. Nujayd al-Sulamī (d. 365/976), a proponent of the Malāmatiyya movement, played a very dominant role in directing Sulamī's basic and advance studies in traditional Islamic sciences (ʿilm al-ẓāhir).[11] According to al-Subkī,[12] al-Sulamī was linked through his maternal grandfather to a number of renowned authorities among Nishapuri traditionists.[13] Besides, Sulamī made his own extensive travels outside Nishapur to visit neighboring regions such as Marw, Iraq, and the Hijāz, where he collected ḥadīth from other respected figures of the 4th/10th century traditionists.[14]

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[10] The ancestral root of the clan of al-Azd is traced back to Azd Shanūʾa b. al-Ghawth b. Nabat b. Mālik b. Zayd b. Kahlān b. Sabaʾ (al-Suyūṭi, *Lubb al-Albāb fī Taḥrīr al-Ansāb,* eds. Muḥammad Aḥmad ʿAbd al-ʿAziz, and Ashraf Aḥmad ʿAbd al-ʿAziz (Beyrut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1991), I, 50).

[11] Al-Sulami in his introduction to the *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr* identified the "outward sciences" as the Islamic traditional sciences such as the varieties of Qurʾānic recitation (*qirāʾāt*), some sorts of Qurʾānic interpretation (*tafāsir*), and other dimensions of Qurʾānic sciences such as its unsolved questions (*mushkilāt*), legal judgments (*aḥkām*), desinential inflection (*iʿrāb*), linguistics (*lugha*), general concepts and details (*al-mujmal wa al-mufaṣṣal*), as well as abrogative and abrogated verses (*al-nāsikh wa al-mansūkh*). Al-Sulami, *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr*, I, 19.

[12] Al-Subki, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-Kubrā,* IV, 144.

[13] Among the renowned transmitters of ḥadīth introduced by Ibn Nujayd himself to his grandson were Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Aṣamm (d. 346), Aḥmad b. ʿAli b. Ḥasnūyah al-Muqriʾ, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbdūs (d. 346), and Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Saʿid al-Rāzi. Ṣafadi said that Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb b. Yūsuf b. Maʿqal b. Sinān b. Abu al-Abbās al-Umawi al-Naysabūri al-Aṣamm was a reliable transmitter of ḥadīth. He had spent his time for seventy six years being a traditionist as he died in 346/957 (al-Ṣafadi, *Das Biographische Lexikon des Ṣalāḥaddin al-Khalil ibn Aibak al-Ṣafadi Kitāb al-Wāfi bi al-Wafayāt,* Ed by H. Ritter, Iḥsān ʿAbbās, S. Dedering, M.Y. Najm, A. Amara and J. Sublet, Widad al-Qāḍi, Aiman Fuʾād Saiyid, B. Jonkisch and M. al-Hujairi (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1962-1988; Beirut: in kommission bei Klaus Schwarz Verlag Berlin, 2004), 1931, II, 171); whereas al-Dhahabi clarified that the other two transmitters were also reliable as he said that Aḥmad b. ʿAli b. Ḥasnūya al-Muqriʾ al-Naysaburi was considered reliable by his disciple al-Ḥakim al-Naysaburi (al-Dhahabi, *Mizān al-Iʿtidāl fī Naqd al-Rijāl*, ed. ʿAli Muḥammad al-Bajawi, Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1963, I, 121), as well as Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abdūs b. Salima al-Naysaburi al-Ṭarāʾifi was considered truthful (*ṣadūq*) by al-Ḥakim. See al-Dhahabi, *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ,* XV, 519-20. However, there is no information about Muḥammad al-Razi, except that he is an associate of Ibn Wārah (al-Dhahabi, *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, XVII, 163), despite a number of accounts quoted from him by al-Sulami in his *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya.*

[14] Among the teachers of ḥadīth whom he met within his travel were Abū Zahir ʿAbd Allāh b. Fāris al-ʿUmri al-Balkhi, Muḥammad b. al-Muḥammil al-Māsarakhsi, al-Ḥāfiẓ Abū ʿAli al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Naysaburi, Saʿid b. al-Qāsim al-Baradaʿi, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Rumayḥ al-Nasawi, Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ṣaffār, Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Ḥāfizh, Abū Isḥāq al-Ḥiri, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Kārizi, Abū Bakr al-Sibghi, Abū

1. Being Traditionist within a Malāmati Background

Al-Sulamī's bright career as a traditionist was echoed by one of his contemporaries al-Khaṭib al-Baghdadī, who met al-Sulamī listening to his ḥadīth during the latter's stay at Baghdad. Al-Khaṭib asserted that al-Sulamī had been specifically interested in collecting mystical traditions (*akhbār ṣūfiyya*). Several works comprising a codex of mystical traditions (*sunan ṣūfiyya*), a work on Qur'ānic exegesis, as well as hagiographic treatises were attributed to his name.[15] In his *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubra*, al-Subkī wrote that al-Sulamī had dedicated to the field of ḥadīth for forty years.[16] Such a long period of traveling and teaching prophetic traditions had made al-Sulamī an expert of ḥadīth. Murād b. Yūsuf al-Dūsi in his *Shams al-āfāq fī dhikr al- ba'ḍ 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-ẓāhira*) as well as issuing fatwas.[17]

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-Samā'*, *Kitāb al-Arba'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 was able to compose almost a hundred works comprising a wide range of Islamic traditional sciences.[18]

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. Sulaymān al-Ṣu'lūkī (d.

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al-Walīd Ḥisān, Yaḥyā b. Manṣūr al-Qāḍī, and Abū Bakr al-Qāḍi'i. See al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, XVII, 249-50; al-Ṣuyūti, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirin,* ed. 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umar (Cairo: Maktaba Wahba, 1977), I, 98.

[15] Al-Khaṭib, *Tārīkh Baghdād aw Madīnat al-Salām*, II, 248.

[16] Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubra,* IV, 144.

[17] Al-Sulamī, *Adāb al-Ṣuḥba wa Ḥusn al-'Ishra,* edited with an introduction by M.J. Kister (Jerusalem: The Israel Oriental Studies, 1954), 4.

[18] The number of his works reach even more than a hundred according to an account of 'Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisi as cited by al-Subki. See al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubra,* IV, 144.

369/980)[19] 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 Malāmatiyya backround trained under the auspices of Ibn al-Nujayd. Al-Ṣu'lūkī's fullname is Abū Sahl Muḥammad b. Sulayman b. Muḥammad b. Hārūn b. Bishr al-Hanafī al-'Ijlī. He was born in the neighboring region of Isfahān in around 296/908. His *nisba* to al-Ḥanafī refers to the Banū Ḥanīfa al-'Ijlī, not the Hanafite legal school. He passed away in Dhū al-Qa'da 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 Isfahan, he gave his cloak to a poor man. He clothed himself in a woman's robe [probably belongs to his wife as he posessed 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 Aḥmad al-Ṣu'lūkī in 337/949[21] 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-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-Sulamī's *Adāb al-Ṣuḥba.* Quoting an unpublished treatise *Shams al-Afāq fī Dhikr al-ba'ḍi min manāqib al-Sulamī wa min manāqib Abī 'Alī al-Daqqāq* by Murād b. Yūsuf al-Ḥanafī al-Dūsī, Kister wrote:

> "Al-Sulamī took the spiritual path (*ṭarīqa*) and Gnostic knowledge (*ma'rifa*) 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'īniyya*) until God opened his heart. Then, by his blessed hands Ṣu'lūkī clothed him with the garment of the sincere poor. Sulami continued to undergo his seclusion until God lets the master [i.e. al-Ṣu'lūkī] know as he

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[19] See his biography in al-Dhahabî, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, XVI, 235-240.

[20] Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, XVI, 239.

[21] For his biography, see al-Dhahabî, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, XV, 391.

[22] See Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 115-116.

envisions by his inner sight and the strength of intuitive knowledge (*firāsa*) that this al-Sulamī 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-Sulamī began to raise disciples, as many people came to company and grow up with him, take benefits from him, and graduate under his auspices."[23]

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-Ṣuʻlūkī, but he also received an investiture of the white garment of Junayd by the hands of Abū al-Qāsim al-Naṣrābādhī (d. 367/978), one of Ṣuʻlūkī's colleagues.[24]

Abū al-Qāsim Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. Mahmūya al-Naṣrābādhī was a native Nishapurī. Al-Ḥakim al-Naysabūrī testified that al-Naṣrābādhī was the tongue of the people of profound reality at his time, as he was also renowned for his sound spiritual states.[25] He began his intellectual career as a traditionist. He learned ḥadith from several traditionists in Nishapur.[26] When he traveled for more than twenty years, he became a preacher (*wāʻiẓ*)[27] as well as listening to

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[23] He wrote, "*akhadha (ay al-Sulamī) al-ṭarīqa wa maʻrifa aṭwār al-sulūk ʻan al-shaykh al-imām al-ʻārif billāh taʻāla…al-ustādh Abi Sahl al-Ṣuʻlūkī wa laqinahu al-dhikr wa akhadha ʻalayhi al-mubāyaʻa bi annahu waladuhu ḥissan wa maʻnan. Thumma amarahu bi idkhālihi li al-khalwa wa amarahu bi iqrā'i ismin bimā yunāsibuhu min al-asmā' thumma akhlāhu ʻindahu fī al-khalwa al-arbaʻiniyya ilā an fataḥa Allāhu ʻalayhi. Thumma albasahu khirqat al-fuqarā' al-ṣādiqin min yadihi al-mubāraka. Wa lam yazal bitilka al-khalwa ḥattā aṭlaʻa Allāhu al-shaykh wa raʼā biʻayn al-baṣira wa quwwati al-firāsa anna hādhā al-Sulamī mimman fataḥa Allāh taʻāla ʻalayhi ḥaqīqatahu wa ḥaṣala lahu al-kamāl min bayni al-rijāl falidhā aʻṭāhu al-ijāza bi tarbiyat al-muridin. Thumma akhadha baʻda dhālika bitarbiyat muridihi wa ṣaḥabahū khuluqun kathir wa intammū ilayhi wa intafaʻū bi ṣuḥbatihi wa takharrajū min taḥti tarbiyyatihi* (Al-Dūsī, *Shams al-Afāq*, fol. 62 as quoted in M.J. Kister's editorial notes for Sulami, *Adāb al-Ṣuḥba wa Ḥusn al-ʻIshra*, 4.

[24] See Böwering, "The Qur'ān Commentary of al-Sulamī," in W.B. Hallaq and D.P. Little (Eds.), *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles Adams* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 44.

[25] Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar Aʻlām al-Nubalā'*, XVII, 265.

[26] In Nishapur he heard ḥadith from Abū Bakr b. Khuzayma, Abū al-ʻAbbās al-Sarrāj, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Al-Azhar. Ibn ʻAsākir, *Tārikh Madina Dimashq wa Dhikr Faḍlihā wa tasmiyat man ḥallahā min al-amāthil aw ijtāz binawāḥihā min wāridihā wa ahlihā*, Ed. Muḥib al-Din Abū Saʻid ʻUmar b. Gharāma al-ʻAmrāwi (Beirut: Dār el-Fikr, 1995), VII, 103.

[27] Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar Aʻlām al-Nubalā'*, XVI, 265; Ibn ʻAsākir, *Tārikh Madina Dimashq*, VII, 103.

ḥadīth from several traditionists in Baghdad.[28] During his stay in Baghdad he was attracted to engage in Sufism under the guidance of Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/946).[29] In addition, he continued to study ḥadīth when he, then, traveled to Syria and Egypt.[30] He returned to Nishapur in around 340/952.[31] He spent his last days in Makka from 365/976[32] up to his demise in Dhū al-Ḥijja 367/978.[33]

It was through al-Naṣrābādhī's teacher that al-Sulamī 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-Naṣrābādhī's account on the primary principles of scripturally based Sufism as he said, "The main principles (uṣūl) 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 (rukhaṣ) and excessive interpretations."[34] Besides, what is preserved by al-Naṣrābādhī from the main characteristic of Junaydian nature of mystical teaching is reported in al-Sulamī's Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya, in which al-Naṣrābādhī concluded, "Nobody will go astray on this path except by a wrong start, because the mistaken start affects to the [wrong] end."[35] As both al-Ṣuʿlūkī and al-Naṣrābādhī took mystical counsels from al-Shiblī,[36] it was

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[28] Among them were ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Sharqī, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā b. Bilāl al-Naysabūrī, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Salām Makḥūl al-Bayrūtī. Al-Khaṭib, Tārīkh Baghdād aw Madīnat al-Salām, VI, 169.

[29] Besides al-Shiblī, according to Ibn ʿAsākir, al-Naṣrābādhī was also took the spiritual guidance of Abū ʿAlī al-Rudhbārī. See Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh Madīna Dimashq, vol. VII, 104.

[30] Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh Madīna Dimashq, VII, 103. He heard ḥadīth from Aḥmad b. ʿAmir in Damascus, Makḥūl al-Bayrūtī in Beirut; Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Wārith and Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭaḥāwī in Egypt.

[31] Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh Madīna Dimashq, VII, 104.

[32] This date is according to al-Dhahabī, Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ, XVI, 265. However, some other sources mentioned that it was the year 366/977. See al-Khaṭib, Tārīkh Baghdād aw Madīnat al-Salām, VI, 169; Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh Madīna Dimashq, VII, 109.

[33] Al-Dhahabī, Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ, XVI, 265.

[34] He wrote, "Qāla al-Naṣrābādhī: aṣl al-taṣawwuf mulāzamat al-kitāb wa al-sunna, wa tark al-ahwāʾ wa al-bidaʿ wa taʿẓim ḥurumāt al-mashāyīkh wa ruʾyat aʿdhār al-khalq, wa al-mudāwamat ʿalā al-awrād, wa tark irtikāb al-rukhaṣ wa al-taʾwīlāt. Al-Qushayrī, Risāla, 438; cf. al-Dhahabī, Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ, XVI, 265; XVII, 249.

[35] He said, "Qāla al-Naṣrābādhī: wa mā ḍalla aḥad fī hādhā al-ṭariq illa bifasād al-ibtidāʾ; fainna fasād al-ibtidāʾ yuʾthiru fī al-intihāʾ." Sulami, Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya, ed. J. Pedersen (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), 515.

[36] Al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-Kubrā, III, 170.

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

Al-Naṣrābādhī's relationship with al-Sulamī was firmly established, as both shared the same concern to collect prophetic traditions. It is also known that al- Naṣrābādhī was considered a reliable (*thiqa*) transmitter.[37] Their shared concern for ḥadīth was shown, when both al-Sulamī and al- Naṣrābādhī 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 Naṣrābādhī 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 *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*. It was through the direct contact with al- Naṣrābādhī 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 Malāmatī background coming from Ibn Nujayd, the blend between Shāfiʿī *fiqh* and sober Sufism taken from Abū Sahl al-Ṣuʿlūkī and Abū al-Qāsim al-Naṣrābādhī, 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 Shariʿa 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 Shariʿa 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 Ḥanafites in Transoxiana. We may note Abū Bakr al-

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[37] Al-Shaʿrānī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*. Cairo: np, 1897, vol. i, 122.

Kalābadhi (d. 385/994) who remarked that his tendency to make a blend between Sufism and the Shariʿa was due to the decay of Sufism.[38]

In order to cure Sufism from its degradation and to secure its good image, al-Sulamī was connecting Sufism to orthodoxy through his magnanimous collection of prophetic traditions. In his *Kitāb Jawāmiʿ Adāb al-Ṣūfiyya*, edited by E. Kolberg, for example, he tried to enroot Sufism in the traditions of the prophet Muḥammad. He did this in several treatises like *Uyūb al-Nafs wa Mudāwamātuhā*, *Kitāb al-Samāʿ*, 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-Sulamī's works was to harmonize Sufism with orthodoxy as expressed by the traditionists (*ahl al-sunna*), a popular name for the adherents of the Shāfiʿite School in Islamic law.

In conclusion, al-Sulamī was being a Sufi traditionist as wished by al-Sari al-Saqaṭī to his nephew al-Junayd, when he left al-Sari to quench the advanced spiritual guidance from al-Ḥarith al-Muḥāsibī. At this occasion al-Sari prayed that his nephew will have become a Sufi traditionist (*ṣāḥib al-ḥadith ṣūfī*), not the extatic Sufi (*ṣūfī 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-Sulamī inherited the spirit of the Baghdadi Sufi circle from either al-Ṣuʾlūkī or al-Naṣrābādhī.

The Contentious *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr*

Representing of the extended proponents of the Baghdadi Sufi circle in Nishapur, the *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr* was one of Sulami's greatest achievements. However, it became quite controversial as there had so much criticism to this

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[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 (*taḥqīq*) became embellishment (*ḥilya*) and verification (*taṣdīq*) only became ornament (*zina*), 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-Kalābadhī, *Al-Taʿarruf li Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf*, first ed. A.J. Arberry (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1933), 4.

[39] Al-Makkī wrote, "*Wa haddathūnā ʿan al-Junayd qāla idhā qumtu min ʿindi Sari al-Saqaṭī qāla lī idhan idhā fāraqtani man tujālis? faqultu al-Ḥarith al-Muḥāsibī, faqāla naʿam khudh min ʿilmihi wa adabihi wa daʿ ʿanka tashqīqahu lil kalām, wa raddahu ʿalā al-mutakallimīn, qāla falammā wallaytu samiʿtuhu yaqūlu jaʿalaka ṣāḥib ḥadith ṣūfiyyan, wa lā jaʿalaka ṣūfiyyan ṣāḥib ḥadith.*" Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-Qulūb* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Miṣriyya, 1932), II, 35.

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 ḥadith 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-Naṣrābādhi (d. 367/978). The aim of conducting a traditional style of exegetical writing represented by the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* 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 *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-ḥaqīqa*); 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'wīl,* 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 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]

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[40] Al-Sulami, *Jawāmi' Ādāb al-Ṣūfiyya wa 'Uyūb al-Nafs wa Mudāwamātuhā,* Edited with an introduction by E. Kohlberg, The Max Schloessinger Memorial Series no. 1 (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1976), 8.

[41] The fact that al-Sulami's works, especially the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr,* lack indicating the definite source, as sometimes he simply narrates *qila,* meaning 'it is

On the ground that the *Ḥaqā̄'iq 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 *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* should also represent a Qur'anic 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 *Ḥaqā'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 *Ḥaqā̄'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-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 *"Ḥaqā̄'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-Qushayrī, who lived in Nishapur about two generations after al-Sulamī, that the exegetical method of *tafsīr* was conducted by way of following (*ittibā'*) and direct communication (*samā'*).[43]

We may thus say that al-Sulamī 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

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mentioned' with no reference to his sources contributed to discredit his ability as a *muḥaddith*.

[42] See Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya fī Naqḍ Kalām al-Shī'a wa al-Qadariyya,* ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim (Cairo: Mu'assasa Qurṭuba, 1962), IV, 155.

[43] Al-Zarkashi, *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān,* Ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhim (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1957), II, 150; al-Suyūṭi, *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān,* ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhim (Cairo: Maktaba al-Mashhad al-Ḥusayni, 1967), IV, 168.

as a compiler. Thus, if the early Sufis produced a kind of *ta'wīl* within the framework of allegoric and symbolic interpretations, so this kind of *ta'wīl* was not al-Sulamī's own inference. Al-Sulamī did not perform *istinbāṭ*, 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'wīl*.[44] 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-Ṭabarī who consistently provided the complete chains of transmission, al-Sulamī often omitted the *isnād*, for which he was often criticized for such omissions.

The contentious nature of al-Sulamī'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[45] 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 Ash'ārite theological system.[46]

Nevertheless, it still remain confusing to classify the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* under the methodological framework of *tafsīr*, as we understood the term today to mean an objective interpretation of the Qur'ānic verses. The reason to

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[44] He wrote, "*istikhrāj al-ma'āni min al-nuṣūṣ bifarṭi al-dhihni wa quwwat al-qariḥa.*" See al-Jurjānī, *Al-Ta'rifāt,* Ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Umayra (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1987), 44.

[45] This interpretations refers to the mystical doctrine of Muḥammadan light promulgated by Sahl al-Tustarī, in addition to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq as mentioned by Sulami in *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr,* II, 343. However, unlike al-Tustarī who explained the doctrine in his own collection (see Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Aẓim* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya al-Kubrā, 1911), 68; see also pages 40-41). Al-Sulami quoted Sahl al-Tustari as well as Ja'far without details in his *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr,* II, 45.

[46] The supposedly Shi'ite origin of the doctrine of Muḥammadan light was indicated by Ibn 'Arabi to have come from 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (see Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyya fī Ma'rifat Asrār al-Malakiyya* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma 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 Ash'ārite's theory of creation of the world out of nothingness.

exclude Sulamī's interpretation from the formal category of *tafsīr* is based on the primary consideration that the exegetical materials collected by al-Sulamī were laying outside the common exegetical genres generally conducted by scholars of his time. This may be understood from al-Sulamī'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-ḥaqīqa*). According to al-Sulamī, 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-Sulamī, we move on to proceed our second assumption that perhaps one would understand that the term *tafsīr* was put by al-Sulamī into a borderline category which could be flexibly suited to any kinds of comprehension. However, the use of the term tafsir 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 *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* under the degrading scholarly climate of Nishapur, in which contemporary ulamā' could not distinguish between the concepts of *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*. Besides, it was also clear that Ibn Ḥabīb'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

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[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 *tafsir* and *ta'wil*, as well as the way to recite the Qur'ān 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-Qur'ān*, II, 152.

[48] The end of formative period of Islamic thought is marked by the demise of al-Ash'arī (d. 935) and al-Māturidī (d. 944). W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 1973), 316.

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 *tafsīr* that had been initiated by al-Māturidī (d. 944), which marked the end of the formative period of Islamic thought along with the maturing Sunnī theology. Al-Māturidī conceived *tafsīr* to be "[Making] a scission (*qaṭ'*) that the intended meaning of a word (*lafẓ*) 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'y*), which is forbidden;" whereas *ta'wīl* was "to prefer (*tarjīḥ*) one of the possible meanings carried by a Qur'ānic verse, but without scission (*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 *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* was as yet unknown as there had been no certain objection to employ either the terms of *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, or *ma'nā* for any sorts of exegetical methods during the formation of Islamic thought marked by the demise al-Māturidī ca. 350 AH. Both *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* had previously denoted the activities of interpreting the Holy Writ. In this general sense, al-Farrā' (d. 210/825) named his book *Ma'āni al-Qur'ān*, while Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) named his mystical interpretation *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Aẓīm*, and finally al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) named his compilation with the title *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*. All of them were classical exegetes, who lived before al-Māturidī. There had been no objection to name exegetical collections to any names during the classical period, hence the exchangeable terms of *ta'wīl*, *tafsīr*, or *ma'nā* 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 *al-Itqān*

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[49] See Frye (1975), 228.

[50] He wrote, "*Qāla al-Māturidī, al-tafsīr al-qaṭ' alā anna al-murād min al-lafẓ hādhā, wa al-shahādatu 'alā Allāh annahū 'anā bi al-lafẓi hādhā; fa in qāma dalīlun maqṭū' bihi fa ṣaḥīḥ, wa illa fa tafsīrun bi al-ra'yi wa huwa al-manhiyy 'anhu. Wa ta'wīl tarjīhu aḥadi al-muḥtamilāt bidūni al-qaṭ' wa al-shahāda 'ala Allāh.'*" Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān,* IV, 167.

[51] Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān,* 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 Abū 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.[52] However, the long span of more than a century from the introduction by al-Māturidī 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-Māturidī's opinion, which may really have introduced the extant technical differences between the terms *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* since the near end of the classical period. However, the remote area of Samarkand, where al-Māturidī spent most of his life, in addition to his unknown scholarly career as well as his ascetic life,[53] may have contributed to the persistent ignorance of this shifting concept.

The most important contribution initiated by al-Māturidī to the development of Qur'ānic interpretation is that he had outlined a clear demarcation between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*. It was certainly al-Māturidī's technical definition of the term *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 *tafsīr*. Its meaning from then on had become restricted to the interpretation of Qur'ānic 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."[54] The immediate impact of such a restriction to the concept of *tafsīr* was that the activity of interpreting the Qur'ānic verses is to be conducted within a more scriptural approach. In this approach, the *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 *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).[55] In fact,

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[52] See al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, II, 152.

[53] See W. Madelung (1986), "Al-Māturidī" in *EI*², vi, 846a.

[54] Abū Zayd, *Hākadhā Takallama Ibn 'Arabī* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li al-Kitāb, 2002), 139.

[55] See Ibn Taymiyya's answer to the query on the best way of interpretation (Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū Fatāwā*, edited by 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim with the assistance of his son Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān 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'wīl*.

A further impact of the formation of orthodoxy within the scholarly atmosphere of Muslim scholasticism, especially the Sunnī 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.[56] 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

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'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Riyaḍ: Wizārat al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya wa al-Awqāf wa al-Da'wā wa al-Irshād, 1995), III, 311); Ibn Kathīr's introductory section of his Tafsīr on the same hermeneutical problem (Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, edited by Sāmī b. Muḥammad Salāma (Riyaḍ: Dār Ṭayyiba, 1999), I, 7). Both exegetes shared the same principle of interpretation as they belonged to a master-disciple relationship despite their distinct affiliation in *madhhab*. For the hermeneutical theory promulgated by Ibn Kathīr in the light of his teacher's ideas, see McAuliffe, "Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabari and Ibn Kathīr," in A. Rippin, *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 46-62; see also McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 71-76.

[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'wīl* seems to be "the other face of a text" (*al-wajh al-ākhar li al-naṣṣ*) in the Islamic civilization of the Arabs. This consequently leads to consider *ta'wīl* reprehensible (*makrūh*) within the formal religious thought based on *tafsīr* (See Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsa fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (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 *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, Sulami's attempt to collect only mystical traditions for his exegesis of the Qur'ān (*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 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 *Ḥaqā'iq 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 *Ḥaqā'iq 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-Ḥallāj's execution, for example, was embellished on his connection with the politically rebellious movement of the Qarmaṭiyya. See Massignon, *The Passion of Ḥallāj. 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'lūki 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, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 312.

it was also applied in the general field of Qur'ānic 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 *Ḥaqāiq al-Tafsīr* became the target of criticism and controversies after Sulamī's demise.

The term *haqīqa* 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-Sulamī's *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*. 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-Qushayrī as Sulamī's junior contemporary in Nishapur defined *ḥaqīqa* as the concept of witnessing Lordship (*mushāhadat al-rubūbiyya*),[62] which is coupled with *shari'a* meaning the perseverance of worship (*iltizām al-'ubūdiyya*).[63] From such a distinction, the term *ḥaqīqa* 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 *shari'a*, which denotes reality that can undergo abrogation and changes like ordinances and commandments.[65] However, the distinction between *ḥaqīqa* and *shari'a* cannot be reduced to mere opposition, because one completes the other, as Gardet also underlined the

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[59] L. Gardet, "Hakīka," in *EI²*, III, 75a.

[60] Al-Ḥallāj said, "*Asmā' Allāh Ta'āla min ḥaythu al-idrāk ism, wa min ḥaythu al-Ḥaqq ḥaqīqa.*" Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, 309.

[61] Massignon, *The Passion of Ḥallāj*, III, 76-77; see also Massignon, *Essays on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism,* transl. Benjamin Clark (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 28.

[62] Al-Qushayrī related the concept of *mushāhada* to the term *mudānāh* literally means "adhere to religion". Accordingly, there are three hierarchic levels of manifestation: (1) *mushāhada bi al-ḥaqq*, to witness something with the argument of unity (2) *mushāhada li al-ḥaqq*, to see God in something, and (3) *mushāhada al-ḥaqq*, to see God in concealment with no description. See Qushayrī, *Arba' Rasā'il fi al-Taṣawwuf*, ed. Qāsim al-Sāmarrā'ī (Baghdad: al-Majma' al-'Ilmi al-'Irāqī, 1969), 54.

[63] Al-Qushayrī said, "*al-Shari'a amrun bi (i)ltizām al-'ubūdiyya, wa al-ḥaqīqa mushāhadat al-rubūbiyya.*" Al-Qushayrī, *Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya fī 'Ilm al-Taṣawwuf*, 82.

[64] L. Gardet, "Hakika" in *EI²*, III, 76b.

[65] L. Gardet, "Hakika" in *EI²*, III, 76b.

relation between *bāṭin* and *ẓāhir*. 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 *ḥaqīqa* is to be strengthened by *sharī‘a*, while at the same time *sharī‘a* should be endorsed by *ḥaqīqa* in order to achieve perfection.[66]

Similarly, a philosophical basis for such a parallel relation between *ḥaqīqa* and *sharī‘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 Sīna (d. 428/1037). This seems to be indicated by al-Jurjānī's explanation of the philosophical meaning of the term in his *al-Ta‘rifāt*. Al-Jurjānī defined the term *ḥaqīqa al-shay’* to mean "the quiddity of a thing: the thing as it is in itself." Consequently, *ḥaqīqa* 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-‘aqliyya* means, according to al-Jurjānī, "the exact conception of a thing."[67] Consequently, it can be concluded that *ḥaqīqa* 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-Sulamī's compendium, the *Ḥaqīqa 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-Sulamī'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 sharī‘atin ghayru mu’ayyadatin bi al-ḥaqīqa fa amruhā ghayru maqbūl, wa kullu ḥaqīqatin ghayru muqayyadatin bi al-sharī‘a fa amruhā ghayru maḥsūl.*" Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 82.

[67] Al-Jurjāni, *Al-Ta‘rifāt*, Ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Ūmayra. Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1987., 123.

[68] According to al-Qushayrī, *mukāshafāt* is higher than *mushāhada*. In this sense, the term *mukāshafa bi al-ilm* is defined to be "reaching clarification of truth in understanding" (*taḥqīq al-iṣāba fī al-fahm*). Besides, according to al-Qushayrī the Sufis could also attain a degree of unveiling in a mystical state (*mukāshafa bi al-ḥāl*) and the unveiling in an unexpected concurrence (*mukāshafa bi al-wajd*). See al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb Tartīb al-Sulūk fī Ṭarīq 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 *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 a *tafsīr*, but based on such profound mystical experiences had certainly classified under a specifically distinct perspective within the filed of Qur'ānic interpretation. The term *tafsīr* employed by al-Sulamī 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 *Ḥaqīqa al-Tafsīr* 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 bil-riwāya*, the extant esoteric understanding poses some slight glances out of the boundary of "the sciences of the outward" (*al-ʿulūm al-ẓāhira*), in which the main objective of the *Ḥaqīqa al-Tafsīr* was to provide another kind of *tafsīr* out of its common category, viz. to bear the traditions of "the People of Reality (*ahl al-ḥaqīqa*). 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.[69]

We may assume that al-Sulamī was aware of taking the risk in naming his collection with the phrase "*Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*" as both terms *tafsīr* and *ḥaqīqa* had received different technical senses within various branches of Islamic traditional sciences. Had we perceived the term *ḥaqīqa* within the field of interpretation of the Qur'ān (*ilm al-tafsīr*) as well as Rhetoric, the term *ḥaqīqa* was perceived to mean "basic, divine, and definite meaning" which lays in a juxtaposed position to the so called allegoric meaning (*majāz*).[70] This might be the point of controversy addressed by later critics to al-Sulamī's *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*. Since the field of *ʿilm al-tafsīr* is the common approach to measure the validity of Qur'ānic intepetation within the Sunnite academic atmosphere.

Qushayrī (d. 465). Transl. and ed. by Qāsim al-Sāmarrā'i. In al-Sāmarrā'i. *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-Māturidī can be read in al-Suyūṭi, *Al-Itqān fī ʿUlūm 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*.

[70] In this sense, Ibn Taymiyya composed a treatise titled *al-ḥaqīqa wa al-majāz* (ms. coll. Rashid Rida, Cairo) see L. Gardet, "Ḥakīka," in *EI²*, III, 75a.

Then, it will not be surprising that so much criticism was addressed to blame al-Sulamī's *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr*. 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 Malāmatiyya movement. In conclusion, the term *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr* might not properly titled for such an esoteric commentary on the Qur'ān under the perspective of *ilm al-tafsīr*, but Qur'ānic interpretation beyond its formally existing exoteric meanings.

4. The Principles of Interpretation

Al-Sulamī'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 Ṭālib, 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."[71] 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 (*bāṭin*). Al-Sulamī 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 (*aḥruf*), for every verse there are the outward (*ẓahr*) and the inward (*baṭn*); whereas every letter (*ḥarf*) has a limit (*ḥadd*) and a point of ascent (*maṭlaʿ*)."[72]

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[71] 'Alī said, "*lā, wa allādhī falaqa al-ḥabbata, wa baraʾa al-nasama illā an yuʿṭiya Allāh ʿabdan fahma kitābihi*". This account was conveyed through Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Quraysh, al-Ḥasan b. Sufyān al-Fasawī, Abū Mūsa al-Anṣārī, 'Abbās al-Qurashī, from Sufyān, from Muṭarrif, from al-Shaʿbī, from Abū Juḥayfa who posed the question to 'Alī (Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr*, I, 20).

[72] The prophet said, "*Innā al-Qur'ān unzila ʿalā sabʿati aḥruf, likulli āyatin minhu ẓahr wa baṭn wa likulli ḥarfin ḥadd wa maṭlaʿ*." The ḥadīth was conveyed through the following authorities: 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Ziyād al-Daqqāq, from Muḥammad b. Isḥāq, from Isḥāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥanḍalī, from Jarir, from Wāṣil b. Ḥibān, from Ibn Abī al-Ḥudhail, from Abū al-Aḥwaṣ, from 'Abd Allāh b Masʿūd, from the Prophet (Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr*, I, 21; al-Ṭabarānī, *Al-Muʿjam al-Awsaṭ*, ed. Maḥmal-Ṭaḥḥān (Riyadh: Maktaba al-Maʿārif, 1985), I, 230-232).

The above two traditional accounts were crucially fundamental to justify what al-Sulamī collected amidst the traditions of "the people of the profound reality" (*ahl al-ḥaqā'iq*). In al-Sulamī's view, these people were the chosen specialists. They were a group of people who received understanding of divine discourse (*ahl al-fahm likhiṭābihi*), as they were bestowed knowledge of the subtleties of Divine entrusted custody (*al-'ālimūna bi laṭā'ifi wadā'i'ihi*).[73] Al-Sulamī classified two occassions by which *ahl al-ḥaqā'iq* receive divine knowledge: firstly, that God displayed (*fataḥa*) to them parts of the subtleties concerning divine secrets and [esoteric] meanings (*ma'ānī*); or secondly, that God may also make to appear (*sanaḥa*) to them parts of the wonder of his Book. However, nobody could speak about the [complete] essence of His profound reality (*ḥaqīqat ḥaqā'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-Sulamī, was unable to cover the entire understanding.[74]

Such an elusive understanding exclusively belonging to the *ahl al-ḥaqīqa* fell outside the boundary of the commonly known concept of comprehension called by the term *'ibāra*. As indicated earlier, such an understanding could not be easily attached to the exegetical method denoted by the term *tafsīr*, since al-Māturīdī promulgated a narrowing sense of the term *tafsīr* and placed it in a juxtaposed position with the term *ta'wīl*, to include all kinds of exegetical methods not covered by the term *tafsīr*. Hence, *tafsīr* is attached to an objective interpretation in order to gain a standard and formally intended meaning as desired by God, the speaker of Qur'ānic discourse, in which it is commonly provided for all the hierarchically accepted categories of thinking within Islamic community. *Tafsīr* is generally aimed at providing explanations of the Qur'ānic verses in the most obvious and easiest way of comprehension needed by general reader (*'awāmm*). In an alternate position, *ta'wīl* is a surrogate or subtitute 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-Ṣādiq, such an alternate understanding resulted by way of *ta'wīl* may include higher levels of discernment by the method of *ishāra*, as it is juxtaposed to the method of '*ibāra*. The method of *ishāra* comprises two layers of understanding classified as subtleties (*laṭā'if*) and profound realities (*ḥaqā'iq*), which will be subsequently achieved only by the specialists (*khawāṣṣ*) among

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[73] Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, I, 19.
[74] Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, I, 19.

the saints (*awliyā'*) and those who were privileged with a higher degree of prophecy (*nubuwwa*).[75]

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 Ṭalib. Al-Sulamī also quoted 'Alī's account saying, "Every verse of the Qur'ān has a fourfold meaning: the outward (*ẓāhir*), the inward (*bāṭin*), the limit (*ḥadd*), and the point of ascent (*maṭla'*)." 'Alī further explained, " [firstly] the outward is the recitation (*tilāwa*), [secondly] the inward is the comprehension (*fahm*), and [thirdly] the limit is the explanation (*'ibāra*), 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 (*murād*) for his servant." 'Alī further stated, "[God] creates [within] the Qur'ān [sorts of] explanation (*'ibāra*), symbolic expression (*ishāra*), subtleties *(laṭā'if)* and profound reality (*ḥaqā'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 (*istislām*)."[76] This ideas, shared with the traditional Shi'ite interpretation, may have caused the accusation of al-Sulamī's being associated with the Qarmatī or Bāṭinī organization.[77]

For his collection of exclusively mystical sayings al-Sulamī had put aside any categorical interpretations employing the method of *'ibāra*. He may have left out the "outward sciences" (*al-'ulūm al-ẓāhira*),[78] 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-Sulamī 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-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, I, 22).

[76] He asserted, "*mā min āyatin illa wa lahā arba'atu ma'ānin: ẓāhir wa bāṭin wa ḥadd wa maṭla' qāla: 'al-ẓāhir al-tilāwa wa al-bāṭin al-fahm wa al-ḥadd huwa 'ibāra wa ishāra wa aḥkām al-ḥalāl wa al-ḥarām wa al-maṭla' murāduhu min al-'abd bihā wa ja'ala al-Qur'ān 'ibārat wa ishāratan wa laṭā'if wa ḥaqā'iq fa al-'ibārat li al-sam'i, wa l-ishārat li al-'aqli wa al-laṭā'if lil mushāhada, wa al-ḥaqā'iq li al-istislām.* Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, I, 22-23.

[77] This expression was later found in al-Dhahabī's critique to the Shaykh. See al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā*, IV, 147.

[78] Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, I, 19.

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the level of *ḥaqāʾiq,* 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 *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr* during al-Sulamī'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-Zarkashī, "It is outstanding in our time that when some ulama' are being questioned about the distinction between *tafsīr* and *taʾwīl*, they will not succeed in doing so. They do not recite [the Qur'ān] well, and do not know the meaning of a chapter (*sura*), 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" (*miḥna*).

The earliest criticism of the *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr* may have connected with the growing awareness of the distinction between the term *tafsīr* and *taʾwīl*, expressed by Ibn Ḥabīb al-Naysabūrī, which was mentioned before. Almost a generation after the death of both Ibn Ḥabīb and al-Sulamī, a critical remark on the *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr* was addressed by a native Nishapuri among their junior contemporaries, Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076). As an adherent of the Shāfiʿite school of law and a Qur'ānic commentator as well as a traditionist, al-Wāḥidī warned poeple to beware of what had been written by al-Sulamī as he stated, "Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī composed the *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr*; 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-Sulamī 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-Sulamī could be mistaken

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[79] Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī ʿUlūm al-Qur'ān*, II, 152. He wrote, "*qāla al-Imām Abū al-Qāsim Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb al-Naysābūri: wa qad nabagha fī zamānina mufassirūn law su'ilū an al-farq bayna al-tafsīr wa taʾwīl mā ihtadū ilayh, lā yuḥsinūna al-Qur'ān tilāwa, wa lā yaʿrifūna maʿnā al-sūra aw al-āya,...*"

[80] Al-Wāḥidi asserted, "*Ṣannafa Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulami Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr, fa in kāna qad iʿtaqada anna dhālika tafsīran fa qad kafara.*" Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-Kubrā*, V, 241; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Fatāwā Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ fī al-Tafsīr wa al-Ḥadīth wa al-Uṣūl wa al-ʿAqāʾid* (Cairo: Idārat al-Ṭibāʿa al-Muniriyya, 1929), 19; al-Suyūti, *Al-Itqān fī ʿUlūm al-Qur'ān*, IV, 194-195.

only in case that he classify his *Ḥaqā'iq a-Tafsīr* as an objetive 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 Bāṭini *ta'wīl*.[81] In fact, the difference between Sufis and the Bāṭinis was barely known to laymen. Al-Wāḥidi's statement may contribute theological issues before it was theoretically clarified by al-Ghazāli in his *Faḍā'iḥ al-Bāṭiniyya* (the Ignominies of the Bāṭiniyya), which sociologically refers to various sects of the Shi'ites from time to time.[82]

The difference between the Sufis and the Bāṭiniyya 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'anic 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-Wāḥidi. On the contrary, the Bāṭini only believed in the inward meaning of the Qur'ānic verses, on the basis of which their main goal was to obliterate the *sharī'a*, specifically in the eyes of their opponents.[83] Such a distinction certainly splits the Sufis from the Bāṭini, 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 al-Tafsīr*, al-Wāḥidi 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-Wāḥidi 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. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Ali al-Wāḥidi al-Naysaburi was born in Nishapur and died there in 468/1076. His family was among the great merchants of Nishapur. His grandfather, Abū al-Ḥasan 'Ali al-Mātuwiyi (d. 428/1035) was the founder of the Mātuwiyi *madrasa* in

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[81] The term Bāṭiniyya is defined by Hodgson to be the Ismā'ilis 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 philosopher and Sufis were being accused of the *bāṭini*s, 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 *EI²*, I, 1098b-1100a).

[82] See Al-Ghazāli, *Faḍā'iḥ al-Bāṭiniyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawi (Cairo: al-Dār al-Qawmiyya, 1964), 11-17.

[83] See the Ḥanafi theological stance elaborated by Sa'd al-Din al-Taftāzāni commenting the *Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya* in al-Suyūṭi, *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, IV, 195.

Nishapur.[84] 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.[85] In Qurʾānic exegesis, Wāḥidī was linked with the renowned Abū Isḥāq al-Thaʿālibī (d. 427/1034).[86]

As a result of various scholarly achievements, al-Wāḥidī was famous for his works, not only about Qurʾānic exegesis and the occasions of Qurʾānic revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), but he also had become a renowned Arabic philologist and rhetorician. He composed several *tafsir*s: *al-Basiṭ, al-Wasiṭ,* and *al-Wajīz*.[87] Looking into al-Wāḥidī's scholarly character by observing his *al-Tafsīr al-Wajīz*, we may conclude that he was typically traditional in his method of interpretation.[88] Thus, it was on the ground that he was a traditional exegete that the statement was addressed to al-Sulamī as his senior mentor of the Shāfiʿite fellow in the same native city of Nishapur.

After the demise of al-Wāḥidī as of the confreres of the Shāfiʿī School of Islamic Law, there would have been much criticism of the *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr* by al-Sulamī, which is unanimously expressed by almost all legal schools within the Sunnī 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 medieval Shāfiʿites, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d.643/1245)[89] quite comprehensively

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[84] Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur,* 254.

[85] He took Arabic from Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Quhunduzī, linguistics from Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad b Muḥammad b Yūsuf al-ʿArūdī, and Ḥadīth from several traditionist: Abū Ṭāhir al-Zayyādī, Abū Bakr Ahmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥīrī, and Abū Ibrāhīm ʿIsmāʿil b. Ibrāhīm al-Wāʿiz, Abd al-Raḥmān b. Hamdān al-Nasrūnī, and Ahmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Najjār (al-Subkī (1964), V, 240-241.

[86] Aḥmad b Muḥammad b Ibrāhīm Abū Isḥāq al-Thaʿālibī was a commentator to the Qurʾān, besides he was also known to be the author of prophetic chronicles and a master in the science of the Qurʾān, Arabic and prophetic traditions, see al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirīn,* I, 28.

[87] Al-Wāḥidī, *Kitāb al-Wajīz fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAzīz,* in the margin of al-Nawāwī al-Jāwī's *Marāḥ Labīd* (Surabaya: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya Andūnisiyya, ca. 2006), 2 vols.

[88] As it is clear by the title al-*Wajīz*, al-Wāḥidī provided meanings of the Qurʾānic 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 Qurʾān, including its commentary. (al-Wāḥidī, *Kitāb al-Wajīz,* I, 2)

[89] Abū ʿAmr Taqī al-Dīn Uthmān b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, b. Mūsā b. Abī Naṣr al-Shahrazūrī al-Shāfiʿī 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-Shāfiʿī. He

discussed the statute of *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* by al-Sulamī in his *Fatāwā*.[90] When asked about his legal opinion on the mystical interpretation to the Qur'ān, 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 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī 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 Mufti 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 (*tilāwa*). 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 *tafsīr* would rather be a clear apology that the revered Sufi figure like al-Sulamī would not have included his collection of mystically inspired utterances gained by the previous Sufis as the solely intended meanings for certain Qur'ānic verses. Such might have probably been allegoric and symbolic "meaning", which were spiritually found by the Sufis during their recitation to the Qur'ān, or from their activities of attentive hearing (*samaā'*). Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's acknowledged that such mystical interpretations, to some extent at least, might come to a true sense (*madlūl*) 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 Qur'ānic eisegesis that was vehemently condemned like that of the Bāṭiniyya, 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-Ṣalāḥ's legal opinion about the mystical interpretation conducted by the Sufis represents a definitely moderate opinion,

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traveled to Khurasān 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-Ayyūbi. He, then, moved to Damascus and dedicated most of his teachings to the Rawāḥiyya School. He was appointed to teach Ḥadīth, when the *Dār al-Ḥadīth* was established in Damascus by al-Malik al-Ashraf b. al-Malik al-'Adil b. Ayyūb. He died on 25th Rabi' al-akhīr 643/1245 in Damascus. (J. Robson 1971, "Ïbn al-Ṣalāḥ," in *EI²*, III, 927a).

[90] See Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Fatāwā Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ fī al-Tafsīr wa al-Ḥadīth wa al-Uṣūl wa al-'Aqā'id* (Cairo: Idārat al-Ṭibā'a al-Muniriyya, 1929), 19.

compared to the other critics among middle age generations of the Shāfi'ī scholars, as we will mention them below.

However, before delving into the criticism from later generations of Shāfi'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 Bāṭiniyya among the Shi'ites. In this group was the Ḥanafī theologians Abu al-Ḥafṣ 'Umar b Muḥammad al-Nasafī (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-bāṭin*).[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'wīl promulgated by the Bāṭiniyya 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'wīl*. 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 *mukāshafa* (disclosure),[93] or *ilhām* (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-Nasafī, al-Taftazānī argued, "The inspiration explained by way of throwing a meaning into [one's] heart through the method of illuminative reception (*fayḍ*) 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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[91] Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān,* IV, 195.

[92] See al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān,* IV, 195.

[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'rīfāt, 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 *mukāshafa* meaning "unveiling in the sense of "illumination" or epiphany, which is opposed to the term *satr*, and *istitār* (closure). See L. Gardet, "Kashf", *EI²,* IV, 696b.

three",[94] as Abū al-Ḥafs al-Nasafī principally asserted that the roots of human knowledge are three: the senses, trustworthy reports, and reason.[95]

Among other Sunnite factions, the Hanbalite Ibn Taymiyya was the most outspoken critic of the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*. Representing a traditionist position he asserted, "Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī mentioned in his *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* on the authority of Ja'far b. Muḥammad and the likes several accounts of which experts know that he certainly lied about Ja'far b Muḥammad."[96] In a general evaluation, Ibn Taymiyya concluded the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* by al-Sulamī to have comprised three sorts of traditions: <u>first</u>, weak traditions (*nuqūl ḍa'ifa*) like the ones he had conveyed from Ja'far; <u>second</u>, valid quotations, but wrongly mentioned by the transmitters; <u>third</u>, valid quotations from good quality of authoritative sources.[97] Some accounts found in al-Sulami's *Ḥaqā'iq 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-khaṭa' fī al-dalīl, lā fī al-madlūl*). Such methodological faults had been also conducted by other groups of scholars among jurists, theologians, and preachers (*wā'iẓ*), besides the Sufis.[98] Within his own principles of Qur'ānic 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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[94] "*Wa al-ilhām al-mufassar bi ilqā'i ma'nan fī al-qalb bi ṭariq al-fayḍ laysa min asbāb al-ma'rifa bi ṣiḥḥati al-shay' 'inda ahli al-ḥaqq ḥattā yarida bihi al-i'tirāḍ 'alā ḥaṣri al-asbāb fī al-thalāthati al-madhkūra.*" Al-Taftazānī, *Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya [li Najm al-Dīn 'Umar al-Nasafī] fī Uṣūl al-Dīn wa 'Ilm al-Kalām*, ed. Claude Salāma (Damascus: Manshūrāt Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa al-Irshād al-Qawmī, 1974), 41.

[95] See A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (New Delhi: Oriental Books, 1979), 264.

[96] He wrote, "*Qad dhakara Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān fī Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr 'an Ja'far b. Muḥammad wa amthālihi min al-aqwāl al-ma'thūra mā ya'lamu ahlu al-marifati annahū kadhaba 'alā Ja'far b. Muḥammad.*" Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū Fatāwā*, Riyaḍ: Wizārat al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya wa al-Awqāf wa al-Da'wa wa al-Irshad, 1995, XI, 581.

[97] *Wa kitāb ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr li Abī 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī yataḍammanu thalāthata anwā'in: aḥaduhā nuqūlun ḍa'ifa 'ammān nuqilat 'anhu mithlu akthari mā naqalahu 'an Ja'far... al-thāni an yakūna al-manqūlun ṣaḥīḥan lākinna al-nāqila akhṭa'a fīmā qāla, wa al-thālith nuqūlun ṣaḥīḥa 'an qā'ilin muṣib.* Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū Fatāwā*, XIII, 242-243.

[98] *Wa ammā alladhīna yukhṭi'ūna fī al-dalil lā fī al-madlūl fa mithlu kathīrin min al-ṣūfiyyati wa al-wu''āẓ wa al-fuqahā' wa ghayrihim yufassirūna al-qur'āna bima'ānin ṣaḥīḥatin lākinna al-qur'ān lā yadullu 'alayhā mithla kathīrin mimmā dhakarahu Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī fī ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr.* Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū Fatāwā*, XIII, 362-363.

valid analogy, it would be accepted.[99] 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-targhīb wa al-tarhīb*) as well as for exhortation of excellent activities (*faḍā'il al-a'māl*).[100] Such an application is actually highly acceptable as long as it is not in opposition to a formal interpretation of the Qur'ān and the Sunna.

In various opinions issued after the diffusion of the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* and other mystical commentaries on the Qur'ān, we observe the tendency to marginalize the mystical interpretation. Such was clear from the Ḥanafī criticism that the theological consequences of refracting certain Qur'ānic verses from their obvious meaning could lead to an accusation of heresy, due to the Ḥanāfites rejection to include the inspirational meaning to be sorts of valid argument. In Ibn Taymiyya's valuation of al-Sulamī's *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, the credentials of the mystical interpretation of the Qur'an 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-Dhahabī (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-Dhahabī's opinion about the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* as recorded in *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya Kubrā* by Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 769/1368) saying, "A book named *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* belongs him (i.e. al-Sulamī); 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."[101] 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

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[99] *Fa inna al-Shaykh Abā 'Abd al-Raḥmān dhakara fī ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr min al-ishārāt...fa in kānat al-ishāratu i'tibāriyyatan min jinsi al-qiyās al-ṣaḥīḥ kānat ḥasanatan maqbūlatan.* Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū Fatāwā*, VI, 376-377.

[100] *Fatilka al-ishārāt hiya min bāb al-i'tibār wa al-qiyās, wa ilḥāqu mā laysa bi manṣūṣin bi al-manṣūṣ mithlu al-i'tibār wa al-qiyās alladhī yasta'miluhu al-fuqahā' fī al-aḥkām, lākinna hādhā yusta'malu fī al-targhīb wa al-tarhīb wa faḍā'il al-a'māl...* Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū Fatāwā*, VI, 377.

[101] Al-Dhahabī said, "*wa lahu kitāb sammāhu "Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr" laytahu lam yuṣannifhu fa innahu taḥrif wa qarmaṭa fa dūnaka al-kitāb fa satarā al-'ajab.*"Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā*, IV, 147.

to al-Suyūṭī, was because his *tafsīr* was as if condemned (*ghayru maḥmūd*).[102] It is clear from al-Dhahabī'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 Qarmaṭiyya movement, which is something exaggerated like in the case of al-Ḥallāj.[103]

Despite such harsher criticism, however, al-Sulamī continued to receive respect for his capability as a traditional scholar among the early medieval Shāfiʿites. This appraisal is quite clear in al-Subkī, who followed al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, defending al-Sulamī's reliability in the field of ḥadith. Al-Khaṭīb asserted that the rank (*qadr*) of Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī among his native contemporaries was honorable (*jalīl*) as he was also a praiseworthy (*maḥmūd*) traditionist.[104] Al-Subkī followed al-Khaṭīb's opinion as he argued that Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān was right to have been reliable so far.[105] 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 Qarmaṭī. Much criticism directed against the *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr* was because al-Sulamī had confined himself in his compilation to mention only some sorts of allegoric interpretation (*taʾwīlāt*), while it was inconceivable for the Sufis that their words were in contradiction to the formal interpretation.[106]

Concluding Remarks

What outweighed crucial role of al-Sulamī in composing the *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr* 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-Naysaburī called "the distinction between the concept of *tafsīr* and *taʾwīl*" as it had been propagated almost a half century earlier by al-Māturidī. He had conceived *tafsīr*

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[102] He wrote, "*wa innamā awradtuhu fī hādha al-qismi lianna tafsīrahu ghayru maḥmūd.*" Al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirīn*, I, 98.

[103] The accusation of al-Sulama's being a Qarmaṭī as appears in al-Dhahabī (al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-Kubrā,* IV, 147) was of the reason he was associated with al-Ḥallāj (cf. L. Gardet, "al-Hallādj" in *EI²*, III, 99b). In fact, al-Sulamī quoted many traditions originated from al-Ḥallāj in his *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr* as specifically collected by Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*, 359 – 412.

[104] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād aw Madīnat al-Salām,* vol. ii, 348; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-Kubrā,* IV, 145.

[105] Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-Kubrā,* IV, 145.

[106] Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-Kubrā,* IV, 147.

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'wīl*. It was the contentious nature of the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* 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 *tafsīr* employed by al-Sulamī as a Sufi in his traditional way of interpretation on such mystical understanding.

Al-Sulamī 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, laṭā'if, and ḥaqā'iq,* al-Sulamī had certainly collected some sorts of extreme categorical interpretations: He employs the method of *ibāra*, which is basic, to provide *ḥaqā'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 *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* 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 Bāṭinī ta'wīl. After conducting a scrutinized observation to the compendium, we can visibly say that al-Sulamī 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-Tustarī. Despite still collecting sayings of those two respected figures among Sufis on some of their ethical prescriptions, al-Sulamī 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 'Aṭā' in interpretating QS 2:284, "To God belongs all that is in heavens and what is on earth." Commenting the verse, Ibn 'Aṭā' said, "To God belong two cosmic realms (*kawnāni*), 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

everything."[107] In this clearly traditional stance, al-Sulamī was quite consistent as he brought in Ibn ‘Aṭā’s traditional view related to the meaning of Divine Attribute of *al-Badīʿ*, which is accordingly meant to be the Innovator (*mubdiʿ*) of things out of nothingness (*min ghayri shay’*).[108]

In short, despite the contentious nature of its style of interpretation the *Ḥaqā’iq al-Tafsīr* by al-Sulamī 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-Sulamī 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-targhīb wa al-tarhīb*) as well as for exhortation of excellent activities (*faḍā‘il al-a‘māl*), upon which the use of weak traditions might not be considered problematic at all. *Wallāhu a’lam.*

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[107]He said, "*Qāla Ibn ‘Aṭā’: lillāhi al-kawnāni huwa mubdi‘uhuma min ghayri shay’(in); faman ishtaghala bihimā ishtaghala bi lā shay(in) ‘an kulli shay’(in)."* Al-Sulami, *Ḥaqā’iq al-Tafsir,* I, 84.

[108] Al-Sulami, *Ḥaqā’iq al-Tafsir,* IIi, 322.

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