



# The Eleventh Annual Conference on Shi'i Studies

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Abstracts



## **SCHEDULE**

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# ABSTRACTS

(in alphabetical order according to the surname of the corresponding author)

## **Imāmah and Hermeneutical Constraints: Genre Formation, Hermeneutical Authority, and the Relative Autonomy of Twelver Shi'i Tafsīr**

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This article proposes a conceptual reorientation in the study of Twelver Imāmī Commentarial Tradition. Shi'i *tafsīr* has persistently been approached through a sectarian-ideological framework that reduces it to a polemical derivative of early succession disputes or classifies it, following certain strands of *tafsīr* (normative-ideological) historiography, as a deviant form of *al-tafsīr bi al-ra'y*. Such portrayals not only fail to register the internal hermeneutical complexity of the Shi'i commentarial tradition, but also constitute an epistemic injustice: methodological contributions and interpretive innovations of Shi'i exegetes are marginalised *a priori*, before any sustained scholarly examination of how these texts actually operate. Against this tendency, the article reads Twelver Shi'i Qur'an commentaries as an autonomous exegetical genre with its own historical genealogy, shifting hermeneutical apparatus, and distinctive epistemic dynamics.

Theoretically, the article works through three interlocking frameworks. Genre-sensitive approaches in *tafsīr* studies (attending to formal markers, rhetorical conventions, and the constitutive rules of exegetical writing) provide the primary analytical lens. This is supplemented by the concept of tradition-based rationality, which accounts for how exegetical reasoning grows from within a community's inherited authorities and collective memory while remaining open to revision and innovation. Genealogical accounts of *tafsīr*, as developed by Walid Saleh, further illuminate the mechanisms of selection, repetition, and canonical sedimentation through which the *inherited corpus* is transmitted, reoriented, and stabilised across generations. Within this framework, the doctrine of Imāmah is analysed as an *internal constraint*—a horizon that structures hermeneutical authority and orientations—while political configurations, competition over scholarly legitimacy, and the evolution of Islamic intellectual disciplines function as *external constraints* that prompt periodic methodological recalibration.

The article maps four broad hermeneutical configurations of the Shi'i commentarial tradition. The formative period is characterised by report-based compilations functioning as technologies of communal loyalty and authority archiving, in which Imamic *akhbār* serve as the primary exegetical medium. The classical scholastic period witnesses a substantial expansion of the discursive apparatus (philology, rational theology, and comparative engagement with Sunni and Mu'tazilī sources) that repositions the exegete's argumentative competence as a constitutive marker of hermeneutical authority. The Akhbārī post-classical period is approached here as a strategic re-authorisation of *akhbār* and a reconfiguration of epistemic norms in response to Uṣūlī rationalism and questions about interpretive legitimacy in the period of occultation. The modern period is marked by the reconstitution of *tafsīr* under pressures of historico-critical inquiry, public ethical demands, and plural readership, shifting the genre's orientation from intra-communal legitimacy toward broader intellectual and civic engagement.

By treating Twelver Shi'i *tafsīr* as a genre-constituted tradition, the article demonstrates that Imāmah operates as a productive hermeneutical horizon rather than a totalising determinant of interpretive outcomes. Genre markers, discursive apparatus, and patterns of authority construction vary substantially across periods, revealing a tradition that continuously reinvents its own operative rules while maintaining genealogical continuity. The comparative implication is consequential: Shi'i and Sunni commentarial traditions emerge as symmetrical participants in the history of Qur'anic exegesis, each negotiating its *inherited corpus* through genre, contingency, and intellectual exchange, rather than as centre and deviation. Shi'i *tafsīr*, in short, constitutes a constitutive, not peripheral, dimension of Islamic intellectual history.

## Authenticity, Transmission, and Reception: Reassessing *Ṣaḥīfat al-Riḍā* through Digital Methods

Ali Aghaei *Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany*

This paper presents a comprehensive examination of *Ṣaḥīfat al-Riḍā*, an eminent compilation of hadiths attributed to ‘Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (d. 202/818), the eighth Imam in Twelver Shi‘ism. These hadiths are transmitted through an uninterrupted chain of authorities (*isnād*) linking Imam al-Riḍā to the Prophet via his forefathers. Both the transmission chains (*asānīd*) and the textual content (*matn*) of *Ṣaḥīfah* provide significant opportunities for computational analysis, enhancing new perspectives on its authenticity, compilation, and reception across various Islamic traditions. This study addresses two closely interconnected questions. First, it investigates the authenticity and compilation history of *Ṣaḥīfat al-Riḍā* through network-based analysis of its *isnāds* as preserved in different recensions and later hadith collections. This approach aims to map transmission networks, identify compilers and intermediary transmitters, and shed light on the historical and intellectual contexts that shaped the work’s formation and compilation. Second, in view of the *Ṣaḥīfah*’s strong association with Imāmī Shi‘ism, the paper explores its reception and adoption within Sunni and Zaydi hadith corpora using text-mining and pattern-recognition techniques. Particular attention is paid to the *Ṣaḥīfah*’s theological, ethical, and spiritual themes, which may reflect the commonalities among Shi‘i, Zaydi, and Sunni traditions during the period of its collection and dissemination. By combining classical hadith scholarship with computational methods, this paper highlights the potential of digital approaches offering fresh perspectives on the compilation and recension history of earlier hadith collections. This work contributes to the broader efforts in Digital Hadith Studies by addressing issues of data standardisation, variant recognition, and methodological transparency.

## Which Eve, Which Women? Creation Narratives and the Making of Women’s Status in Islamic Thought

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This paper examines how competing narratives of Eve’s creation underpin divergent constructions of women’s status in Islamic thought. Moving beyond the assumption of a single, fixed ‘Islamic’ account, it traces how different versions of Ḥawwā’s origin – and their biblical and post-biblical antecedents – have been taken up in Muslim exegetical and legal traditions, and how each narrative maps onto a distinct vision of womanhood.

Drawing on a comparative reading of the Hebrew Bible, selected Jewish midrashim, Sunni and Shi‘i hadith corpora, and classical tafsīr, the paper identifies three major narrative strands: Eve created from Adam’s rib during his sleep; Eve formed from the same clay as Adam as a derivative or ‘leftover’ creation; and Eve created independently, with a distinct origin. I argue that the Qur’an itself does not commit to the rib narrative and that its association with the Qur’anic story is largely mediated through hadith and the reception of earlier Jewish and Christian materials.

The paper then shows how each narrative strand underwrites different legal and social imaginaries: from ontological hierarchy and female derivative status, to models of complementarity or near-equality. By foregrounding the contingency and plurality of Eve’s origin stories, the paper contends that debates about women’s obedience, authority, and moral reliability in Muslim societies are, in part, debates about which Eve we choose to read into the Qur’an.

## Applying ICMA to Shi‘i Traditions: A Note on Reconstructing the Imam’s Hypomnēma

Abdullah Ansar *Carleton College, USA*

This paper proposes a critical reconstruction of *sīrah* and *tafsīr* narratives transmitted by two of the most influential early Shi‘i authorities, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/732–733) and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), through the application of recent methodological developments in hadith studies. While modern scholarship has developed increasingly sophisticated tools for dating and contextualising early Islamic traditions, these methods have been applied unevenly across sectarian corpora, with Shi‘i hadith literature often treated as either derivative or methodologically opaque. This paper argues that such assumptions are no longer sustainable and that contemporary critical techniques can, with careful adaptation, yield historically meaningful results for Shi‘i transmission material.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part of the paper introduces *isnād-cum-matn* analysis (ICMA) as a unified methodological framework for reconstructing transmission history. By examining the co-development of

chains of transmission and textual variants, ICMA allows scholars to isolate common narrative cores, identify secondary expansions, and propose relative chronologies for traditions. The paper further explores how this method can be refined by incorporating the concept of the Imām's hypomnēma: a working notebook or proto-tradition register in which exegetical, legal, and historical materials may have been recorded, recalled, and pedagogically deployed. Rather than presuming full textual fixation, the hypomnēma is treated as a mnemonic–textual interface mediating between oral instruction and later written transmission. The concept hypomnēma is shown to be useful in explaining Ja'far-Bāqir transmission.

The second part of the paper addresses the problem of sources. It investigates which bodies of evidence are most promising for reconstructing early Shi'i *sīrah* and *tafsīr* traditions associated with al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq, including early compilatory strata, fragmentary transmission units, and instances of cross-sectarian circulation. Special attention is given to how later Shi'i compilations may preserve traces of earlier instructional materials structured around such hypomnēmata, even when embedded within later doctrinal or editorial frameworks. Rather than treating later sources as irretrievably late or doctrinally overdetermined, the paper argues that, when analysed comparatively and stratigraphically, they can function as indirect witnesses to earlier layers of transmission.

The third and final part presents a focused case study. A single *tafsīr/sīrah*-related tradition attributed to the Imams is reconstructed employing ICMA, tracing its textual variants, isnād configurations, and citation patterns across a range of sources. Particular attention is paid to recurring structural features, formulaic expressions, and clustering that may point to derivation from a shared hypomnēma-like source. By mapping points of convergence and divergence, the analysis proposes a plausible reconstruction of the tradition's earliest recoverable form and evaluates the strength of its attribution to the Imam in question.

Overall, the paper aims to contribute to a more integrated historiography of early Islam by demonstrating that Shi'i hadith, *sīrah*, and *tafsīr* traditions are not methodologically exceptional. When approached through an *isnād-matn* analytical framework supplemented by controlled hypotheses about early mnemonic and proto-textual practices, they offer a rich field for historically grounded reconstruction using the most advanced critical tools currently available in Islamic studies and history in general.

## Reason and Revelation in Contemporary *Tafsīr*: A Critical Study of Ayatollah Javādī Āmolī

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This paper presents a focused and critical analysis of the Qur'anic hermeneutics of Ayatollah 'Abdullāh Javādī Āmolī, a leading contemporary Shi'i exegete. Moving beyond general descriptions of Shi'i *tafsīr*, the study examines the epistemological and methodological foundations of Javādī Āmolī's approach as articulated in his multi-volume work *Tafsīr-e Tasnīm*.

The paper analyses how Javādī Āmolī integrates rational philosophy – particularly Sadrian metaphysics – with transmitted Shi'i traditions and the Qur'an-by-Qur'an method. Special attention is given to his claim of a principled harmony between reason (*aql*) and revelation (*wahy*) in Qur'anic interpretation. Through selected exegetical examples, the study critically evaluates whether philosophical reasoning functions as an interpretive aid or operates as a presuppositional framework that shapes the meaning of the Qur'anic text.

By highlighting both the strengths and the potential limitations of this methodology, the paper offers a new assessment of Javādī Āmolī's contribution to Shi'i Qur'anic studies. It argues that his *tafsīr* represents a significant modern attempt to systematise rational exegesis while raising important questions about interpretive authority and methodological consistency in contemporary Islamic hermeneutics.

## The Transmission of *al-Kashshāf* from al-Zamakhsharī to al-Ṭabarsī: A Prosopographical Study of Ibn Shahrāshūb's Intermediary Role

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This paper examines the circulation of knowledge in the medieval Islamic world through a concrete case study. It explores the role of Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192) in the transmission of al-Zamakhsharī's (d. 538/1144) *al-Kashshāf* to Abū 'Alī al-Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1154). The study highlights key aspects of the biographies of these three figures. It evaluates

data concerning scholarly circles, travel routes, and teacher–student relations through a prosopographic analysis with a micro-contextual focus. This approach sheds light on the background of the shift in Ṭabarsī's engagement with *al-Kashshāf*, as reflected in his *Jawāmi' al-Jāmi'* following *Majma' al-Bayān*. The findings suggest that Ṭabarsī did not have direct access to al-Zamakhsharī; instead, this connection was facilitated through their mutual student, Ibn Shahrāshūb. This conclusion also underscores the importance of prosopography – conceived as the synchronic reading of classical exegetical biographies – for uncovering the circulation of authors and texts in the history of Qur'anic exegesis.

## Imam 'Alī as *Imago Dei* in Rajab al-Bursī's Letterist Cosmology

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Al-Hafiz Rajab al-Bursī's (d. 1411) *Mashāriq al-Ānwār al-Yaqyn Asrār Āmir al-Mu'minīn* (The *Dawning-Places of the Lights of Certitude expressing the Mysteries of the Commander of the Faithful*) advances a Neoplatonic letterist cosmology that reaches its summit in the epiphanic figure of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661). While the *Mashāriq al-Anwār* is not unique in proposing an ontological system to explain God's self-revelation in the world, Rajab al-Bursī's innovative contribution to Islamic theology lies in his bold profession that Imam 'Alī is a terrestrial image of the Divine.

Rajab al-Bursī's theophanic understanding of Imam 'Alī garnered much controversy during his lifetime, which even led to his expulsion from Hilla, Iraq. A precise understanding of his doctrine requires researchers to contextualise Rajab al-Bursī's theophanic imamology in light of *ilm al-ḥurūf*. This lesser-known science regards Arabic letters as ontological entities, and each letter corresponds to a numerical value allowing letterists to discover hidden scriptural teachings only known by the gnostics. Letters and quantity are powerful cosmic actors for al-Bursī since they constitute the blueprint for the universe. Furthermore, Rajab al-Bursī teaches his doctrine of theophanic Imamology through *ilm al-ḥurūf*. For example, he states that Imam 'Alī is the 'Great word' and that, 'Every letter encloses the manifest and occult name of Muḥammad (AS) and 'Alī.' While a number of scholarly articles interpret his theology in light of Shi'i thought and Neoplatonism, secondary literature has yet to analyse the Imamology of the *Mashāriq al-Anwār* with Rajab al-Bursī's own letterist system in mind. This presentation will provide a systematic account of Rajab al-Bursī's letterist exegesis, its historical basis in Islamic philosophy, and explain how the science of letters informs his belief in Imam 'Alī's theophanic role.

## Mahdī, Qur'an, and Global Historiography

David Coolidge *Bayan Islamic Graduate School, USA*

In the Twelver Shi'i tradition, al-Imām al-Mahdī is the only individual posited as a universal ruler over the entire planet Earth. In the Islamic tradition as a whole, that status was not even granted to the Prophet Muḥammad, blessings and peace be upon him and his family, because all schools of Islamic thought acknowledge that his earthly sovereignty did not extend beyond the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century. That being said, it is well-known from the study of human history that political regimes patronise historiographies that reflect their own ideologies. American history, for example, has for most of its existence been a reflection of American nationalism, centring the stories of White settlers and decentering the stories of Black slaves or Native resistance. So what does a Mahdawī global historiography look like? What does it mean to tell the story of all humanity from prehistory through the last 5000 years of recorded human history as culminating in the global rule of al-Imām al-Mahdī? What does it mean that his mission, according to the hadith literature, is to 'fill the Earth with justice just as it had been filled with injustice'? Focusing on historiography takes the belief in al-Imām al-Mahdī out of the realm of political appropriation and messianic hope, and puts it into the historical context in which it is believed it will take place sometime in the future. Are not the people of South America, who have suffered under empires both within and from beyond the seas, not thirsting for the justice that is al-Imām al-Mahdī's earthly purpose? Will not they, told for centuries that Jesus is God by the Roman Catholic Church, be liberated by Jesus testifying boldly before God in the Qur'an that 'You know what is in me but I do not know what is in You! (*ta'lamu mā fī nafsī wa lā a'lamu mā fī nafsika*)'? Is that not a necessary step towards global justice, equally important in comparison to any political struggle between nation-states in the centre of Eurasia? The Qur'an itself does not commit to a particular historiographic vision. In fact, it is anti-history, if history is the collection of scientific facts that are then interpreted by a human historian in a framework. So a global Mahdawī historiography has to be rooted in a Qur'anic perspective, but then a narrative framework should be creatively and fairly constructed in which the revolution of al-Imām al-Mahdī is understood properly as the teleological destination of human civilisation on

planet Earth. This paper will explore all of these ideas in greater depth and complexity, in order to generate ideas on useful research orientations in Mahdawī global historiography in the 21st century, *inshā'allāh*.

## Producing Religious Authority: Sayyid Families, Genealogies and the Making of Alevi Religious Leadership

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This paper examines the historical role of *sayyid* genealogies in the formation, reproduction, and transmission of religious authority in Alevism. Today constituting 15-20 percent of Turkey, which is a Sunni-majority country, Alevism and their Twelver-Imamate Sufi belief, have long been topics of debate and controversy. While often deemed as heresy in the early modern Ottoman Empire, Alevism has been subjected to modern reductionism in twentieth-century Turkey, labelled as a folkloric belief. Despite the growing number of studies in the last decades, particularly on modern socio-political and identity issues of the Alevi, Alevism as a religious belief has yet to be analysed from a historical perspective. This paper contributes to the understanding of Alevism in the early modern period by analysing how Alevi *sayyid* families, who are called *ocak* in vernacular Turkish and constitute the religious leadership of Alevi communities, and their genealogies shaped the nature of religious authority among Alevi communities. The paper uses *ijazas*, *shajaras*, and relevant hagiographical documents as its sources to explore how religious authority was defined, granted, reproduced, and transmitted among the members of Alevi *sayyid* families in the early modern period. These sources were issued at various Sufi religious centres such as Karbala, Ardabil, and the town of Hadji Bektash in central Anatolia. The documents received from the Sufi lodges in this vast geography demonstrate (1) the significance attributed to these places as centres of religious authority and (2) how the translocal networks of Alevi *sayyid* families played a role in the reproduction and transmission of religious authority among family members. Examining both the content and spatial dimensions of the above-mentioned sources, this paper analyses the formation and maintenance of religious authority in Alevism.

## Revelation against Philosophy: Qur'anic Interpretation and Exegetical Method according to the School of Separation (Maktab-i Tafkik)

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The School of Separation (Maktab-i Tafkik) refers to a modern Shi'i theological movement that emerged in the seminaries of Iran and Iraq less than a century ago. A commonly held – though relatively recent – characterisation defines the school's central thesis as a call to separate Islamic scriptures from external philosophical and mystical influences. It advocates for the purification of Islamic doctrines by distancing them from *falsafah* (Islamic philosophy) and *'irfan* (mysticism). According to this view, the only legitimate method for interpreting scripture is through textual analysis that avoids philosophical or mystical concepts and theories. However, this characterisation, like many other portrayals of the school's exegetical method, is inaccurate, if not misleading. The school's purported founder, Mirzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī (b. 1303/1885 – d. 1365/1946), was a prominent critic of the Islamic reception of Hellenistic philosophy, particularly within the Avicennian and Ṣadrian traditions. In his critique of Islamic philosophical doctrines, he frequently cites the Qur'an and Hadith alongside rational argumentation. This approach is evident in his major theological works – *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, *Abwāb al-Hudā*, and *Anwār al-Hidāyah* – as well as in his treatises on the Qur'an; namely, *al-Qur'ān wa al-Furqān*, *Fī Wajh Ijāz al-Qur'ān al-Majīd*, and *Ijāz Nāmih*.

Contrary to widespread assumptions, Iṣfahānī's conception of the Qur'an and his hermeneutical theories are more intricate than a literalist or polemical reading suggests. This paper aims to demonstrate this complexity and to shed light on key aspects of the school's approach to scripture and Qur'anic interpretation. To this end, I first examine Iṣfahānī's view of the cosmic nature of the Qur'an and its relation to the current written form based on his Qur'anic treatises. I then analyse select examples from his theological writings to illustrate how he interprets Qur'anic passages and incorporates them into his critiques of other Muslim scholars. The intended outcome of this research is a more accurate and nuanced understanding of this tradition, in contrast to prevailing misrepresentations. Additionally, it offers new perspectives on Shi'i Qur'anic exegesis and opens potential avenues for the reinterpretation of certain Qur'anic passages.

## Gender Equality and Shi'i Thought: Feminist Readings of 'Allāmeḥ Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Bānū Amīn

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This paper explores feminist readings of Shi'i Qur'an commentaries, focusing specifically on the influential works of 'Allāmeḥ Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Bānū Amīn. It assesses their alignment with historical views on women in Islam, revealing potential feminist reinterpretations and innovations within Shi'i scholarship. By contextualising Shi'i exegesis and examining gender dynamics, the study investigates how interpretations, shaped by theological perspectives and socio-cultural factors, are both challenged and reaffirmed by feminist readings that promote principles of gender equality.

In analysing Shi'i commentaries, the paper emphasises the need to understand the historical and cultural frameworks that inform these interpretations. 'Allāmeḥ Ṭabāṭabā'ī's *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, a cornerstone of twentieth-century Shi'i thought, emphasises ethical dimensions and the quest for justice within Islamic teachings. However, while Ṭabāṭabā'ī acknowledges the spiritual equality of men and women, his interpretations often remain confined within traditional frameworks that limit their applicability to contemporary feminist discourse. His adherence to established norms reflects a complex relationship with the evolving understanding of gender roles, where he grapples with social change yet largely maintains conventional views that marginalized women's experiences and agency. In contrast, Bānū Amīn offers a progressive feminist reading that directly confronts patriarchal interpretations pervasive in religious narratives. She emphasises the importance of recognising women's agency and autonomy within Islamic texts. By advocating for the reinterpretation of verses that traditionally justify gender inequities, Bānū Amīn promotes an inclusive understanding of women's roles in both spiritual and societal contexts. Her approach highlights how contemporary feminist thought can resonate with and reinterpret classical exegetical traditions to empower women, thereby bridging gaps between historical interpretations and modern gender equality movements.

The paper conducts a comparative analysis of interpretations of various verses relating to marriage, inheritance, and education, contrasting Ṭabāṭabā'ī's adherence to traditional norms with Bānū Amīn's egalitarian approach. The implications of these differing interpretations are significant, as they reflect broader conversations on women's rights within Islamic discourse. For instance, while Ṭabāṭabā'ī's interpretations of marriage often reinforce male authority, Bānū Amīn's perspectives advocate for a more equitable distribution of rights and responsibilities, highlighting the importance of mutual consent and partnership in marital relations.

Furthermore, the study delves into the historical influences that have shaped Shi'i commentaries over time. It examines how Ṭabāṭabā'ī's adherence to tradition is accompanied by an awareness of social change, acknowledging the struggles that women face while still operating within a patriarchal framework. In contrast, Bānū Amīn's feminist perspective is rooted in contemporary challenges faced by women, underscoring the necessity for evolving interpretations in light of ongoing gender inequalities. By examining these differing interpretations, the analysis suggests that feminist readings hold the potential to bridge the gap between traditional Shi'i scholarship and the evolving landscape of women's rights. This paper reveals the critical conversations that are needed in scholarship, activism, and faith, underscoring the role of feminist criticism in reshaping religious discourses. Ultimately, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how feminist readings of Shi'i commentaries enrich discussions on gender equality within Islam. Through careful analysis of both consistency and divergence in interpretations, it highlights their broader implications for contemporary Islamic thought and the continuous struggle for gender equity in society. Through this exploration, the paper aims to contribute to a more inclusive understanding of gender issues in Islamic contexts, inspiring further scholarship and dialogue within the field.

## Beyond Patronage: Iranian Women as Founders (*Wāqifāt*) of Qur'anic Manuscripts at Astan Quds Razavi (5th–7th/11th–13th Centuries)

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This study re-evaluates the role of Iranian women in the intellectual and spiritual life of medieval Islam by examining their practice of endowing Qur'an manuscripts (*waqf*) to the library of Astan Quds Razavi. Analysing a corpus of thirteen manuscripts from the 5th–7th/11th–13th centuries, it employs an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates codicology, diplomatics of *waqf* deeds (*waqfiyyahs*), and social history.

The research makes two principal arguments. First, it demonstrates that female donors exercised significant socio-cultural agency through the stipulations and rhetoric of their *waqfiyyahs*. The systematic analysis of onomastics, stipulations, and the notable shift towards Persian as a language of endowment from the 6th/12th century reveals their conscious role in shaping religious practice, vernacularising legal discourse, and asserting a public pious identity. Second, through detailed codicological examination of script, illumination, and materiality, the study traces their artistic patronage, showing that their commissions reflect informed engagement with contemporary aesthetic traditions rather than mere financial sponsorship.

By moving beyond economic reductionism, this study posits these manuscripts as a critical corpus for understanding the interplay between gender, piety, and artistic production in medieval Iran. It contends that *waqf* served as a multifaceted instrument for elite women, enabling them to navigate the public sphere, cultivate religious legacy, and contribute to the Perso-Islamic literary and artistic canon. The findings contribute directly to ongoing scholarly discourses on female patronage in Islamic art, the social history of the book, and the institutional history of major libraries in the Persianate world.

## Interpreters of Revelation: The Exegetical Influence of the Ahl al-Bayt

Mohammed Ali Ismail *Hawza Online, UK*

This paper investigates the interpretive authority and exegetical contributions of the Ahl al-Bayt, focusing on their role as mediators between divine revelation and its understanding and application. Within Shi'i thought, the Ahl al-Bayt are regarded not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as intellectual and spiritual successors to Prophet Muḥammad, entrusted with safeguarding and elucidating the Qur'an. Their position ensures continuity of authentic guidance, preserving both the integrity of revelation and its meaningful comprehension across generations.

The first section explores the theological and textual foundations of the Ahl al-Bayt's authority in Qur'anic interpretation. Drawing on Qur'anic verses and traditions, it demonstrates how the Prophet's divinely mandated role as the clarifier of revelation continues through the Imams, whose purification and designation underpin their interpretive authority. It highlights how Shi'i sources understand Imamate as inseparable from the transmission and explanation of divine knowledge, ensuring coherence and depth in engaging with the Qur'an.

The second section analyses the methods employed by the Ahl al-Bayt in explicating the Qur'an. It considers their pedagogical strategies, including direct instruction in exegesis (*tafsīr*) and the cultivation of scholarly dialogue, which fostered critical inquiry within the Shi'i tradition. Attention is given to their treatment of the Qur'an's exoteric dimensions – through contextual, lexical, and conceptual clarification – as well as their engagement with esoteric aspects, offering layered readings that address spiritual and intellectual capacities.

Finally, the paper examines the Ahl al-Bayt's lived embodiment of Qur'anic principles as a form of practical exegesis. Through their conduct, the Ahl al-Bayt offered a hermeneutical framework that united theory with practice, demonstrating how Qur'anic teachings shape personal ethics and communal norms. This study argues that their exegetical legacy continues to shape contemporary Shi'i thought, providing a model of interpretation that integrates textual analysis, spiritual insight, and lived reality.

## The Devotional Confessions of an Infallible Imam: A Study of Safavid-Era *Du'ā'* Commentary

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This paper will examine one simple question: can an infallible (*ma'ṣūm*) Imam repent for 'misdeeds' or 'sins' and if so, how is this to be understood? This paper will focus specifically on how Safavid scholars such as Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1641 CE), Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1660), Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarānī (d. 1675 CE) and Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1699 CE), have attempted to interpret this question by commenting on a famous supplication of the seventh Imam, Mūsā ibn Ja'far (d. 799 CE) in which he utters a series of confessions in his supplication which include the following statement: 'I have disobeyed you with my tongue (*ʿaṣaytuka bi-lisānī*)' in addition to numerous others with a similar confessional tone. When confronted with such confessions of sin or disobedience by an Imam, these Shi'i authorities albeit of different scholarly persuasions felt compelled to compose apologia replete with scholarly conjectures all of which share the common goal in affirming their shared belief in the infallibility of the Imams. These writers would employ the hermeneutics of language, theological principles, and mystical maxims all to reconcile the

seeming paradox of an infallible Imam who is deserving of unquestionable obedience (*tā'ah*) while also manifesting confessions of their own alleged disobedience to God. How can these two states be reconciled? Were such expressions to be simply interpreted as teaching moments meant for their sinful followers or reflective of an inner esoteric spiritual state requiring scholarly exposition? This paper will assert that the literature produced by these Safavid scholars on this subject indicates that supplication literature was a site of active theological speculations deployed in this case to uncover the 'true' meanings of such provocative devotional expressions.

## From Eulogy to Vision: The Narrative Journey of the *Rawḍat al-Shuhadā* across the Centuries in Iran

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The epic of Āshūrā had a profound impact on Iran's culture through its influence on religious ceremonies, politics, social unity, mythological traditions, and artistic vision. This research paper aims to shed light on the multifaceted significance and enduring legacy of the *Rawḍat al-Shuhadā* in relation to the Āshūrā ritual, tracing the historical development of the ritual and exploring its transformation over time, including its impact on subsequent literary works and Iranian public art. While the Āshūrā ritual's musical elements and *noḥā* singing arose immediately after the Karbala tragedy, the *Rawḍat al-Shuhadā*'s narrative provided the first visual inspiration for the ceremony. This research explores the *Rawḍat al-Shuhadā* as much more than a historical book detailing an exaggerated version of the Āshūrā story. Kāshifī not only enabled a new perspective of the Āshūrā event but also modelled an aesthetic vision of this ceremony for Shia followers. The *Rawḍat al-Shuhadā* influenced a deeper storytelling about the events that took place during the battle, and through the text's elaborate wording and imagery, transported listeners into magical realms of fantasy. This study aims to demonstrate how historical artworks depicting the same event can be traced across different periods of Iranian history, following the *Rawḍat al-Shuhadā* narrative. It also explores how the holy Shia pious were visually depicted and how social context influenced these figures, requiring artists to emphasise, omit, or reinterpret certain elements within their visual representations.

## Exegetical and Jurisprudential Foundations in English Translations of the Qur'an: A Case Study of Sūrat al-Fātiḥah and Sūrat al-Mā'idah

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This study examines the exegetical and jurisprudential foundations shaping certain English translations of the Qur'an, with particular reference to Sūrat al-Fātiḥah and Sūrat al-Mā'idah, two *surahs* that encapsulate core theological doctrines and practical legal rulings. Drawing on a comparative analysis of prominent translations by Orientalist and Muslim translators – such as George Sale, A. J. Arberry, Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Asad, and 'Ali Quli Qara'i – the paper demonstrates that translation choices are profoundly influenced by underlying exegetical traditions (*tafsīr*) and jurisprudential affiliations (*madhāhib fiqhīyah*).

From an exegetical perspective, the study shows that key lexical items in al-Fātiḥah, including 'Allāh,' 'al-Raḥmān,' 'al-Raḥīm,' 'Rabb al-Ālamīn,' and 'Mālik Yawm al-Dīn,' resist reduction to single English equivalents without interpretive loss. Translators diverge in rendering these terms depending on whether they prioritise lexical proximity, theological precision, or reader accessibility. Retaining 'Allah' rather than substituting 'God,' distinguishing between al-Raḥmān (all-encompassing mercy) and al-Raḥīm (particular mercy), and translating 'Ālamīn' as 'all the worlds' rather than 'all beings' or 'creatures' are shown to be decisions grounded in classical exegetical consensus. Similarly, variant readings (*qirā'āt*) and interpretive debates surrounding 'Mālik/Malik Yawm al-Dīn' shape translations such as 'King,' 'Master,' or 'Owner,' each reflecting distinct theological emphases regarding divine sovereignty and judgment.

The influence of exegetical commitments becomes more pronounced in al-Mā'idah, particularly in verse 55 concerning *wilāyah*. The study demonstrates that renderings of 'walī' as 'friend,' 'helper,' 'protector,' or 'guardian' directly mirror Sunni and Shi'i exegetical positions regarding authority and leadership after the Prophet (S). Translations aligned with Shi'i *tafsīr* foreground guardianship and authority, whereas others attenuate the term to non-authoritative relations, thereby reshaping the verse's doctrinal implications. From a jurisprudential standpoint, the analysis of the ablution verse (Q 5:6) reveals how translators' legal affiliations decisively influence syntactic and semantic choices. Variations in translating 'wa-*msahū bi-ru'ūsikum wa-arjulakum*' – whether as wiping or washing the feet, and whether explanatory additions are inserted into the main text

– demonstrate how translators sometimes privilege jurisprudential clarity over strict textual fidelity. The study argues that embedding such doctrinal specifications within the translation body risks conflating translation with legal exegesis.

This study underscores the indispensable role of exegetical and jurisprudential knowledge in Qur'anic translation. By exploring the intricate relationship between language, theology, and jurisprudence, it highlights the need for translations that faithfully convey the Qur'an's multilayered meanings while respecting theological and legal specifics. A methodologically sound translation should preserve the semantic core of the Qur'anic text while relegating denominational or jurisprudential elaborations to footnotes, thereby maintaining both fidelity and scholarly transparency.

## Application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory

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This study, grounded in cognitive linguistics, examines the metaphors and conceptual blending networks in Surah al-A'lā, showing how the abstract meanings of revelation, purification, remembrance, and the Hereafter are made accessible through a web of mental spaces. Adopting Fauconnier and Turner's theory of conceptual blending as its main framework, it explores the underlying mechanisms of creative language in sacred discourse and the emergence of novel structures in the blended space. Drawing on insights from conceptual metaphor theory and Qur'anic cognitive semantics, especially work that stresses the link between bodily experience and Qur'anic conceptualization, the paper argues that Surah al-A'lā employs image schemas such as 'up/down,' 'light/darkness,' and 'steadfastness/deviation' to construct a network of blends in which guidance, wretchedness, and salvation are reconceptualized as movement along spatial paths and as contrasting existential positions. Methodologically, the verses of the surah are examined to identify those cases where meaning shifts from sensory experiential domains to abstract domains, which are then treated as input spaces; the types of blending networks single-scope, double-scope, mirror and their compression operations are subsequently specified. The findings suggest that Surah al-A'lā, by foregrounding ontological and orientational metaphors and organising them into multilayered blending networks, forges a deep connection between the audience's lived experience and divine meanings and offers a distinctive potential for cognitively oriented accounts of Qur'anic eloquence.

## The Twelver Shi'i Problem of *Ghaybah*

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This paper addresses, from a theological and philosophical perspective, a tension in the Twelver Shi'i belief system arising from the occultation (*ghaybah*) of the Twelfth Imam. The tension is that, while Imamate is traditionally defined by certain political and religious roles, a hidden Imam cannot perform these roles. I refer to this tension as the Problem of *Ghaybah*. The paper is structured as follows: First, I clarify and substantiate the Problem of *Ghaybah* by reviewing the roles traditionally assigned to the Imams and demonstrating that these roles cannot be performed by a hidden Imam. Next, I briefly review and assess the various responses proposed to address this issue. Finally, drawing on the Qur'an's response to the problem of moral evil in Q.2:30–33, I propose a largely understudied role of Imamate that even a hidden Imam can fulfil: the Imam is God's moral reason for preserving human species in existence. I also argue that a group of Shi'i *aḥādīth*, which have been rejected by mainstream Shi'i theologians as fabrications of the *ghulāt*, can be understood as expressing this role, rather than exaggerating the Imams' status (*ghuluww*), and thus need not be dismissed.

## The Discourse of Iblis and Adam in Mubārak-i Wakhānī's Poetic Works

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The Qur'an has been a source of inspiration for poets across the Muslim *ummah* since the medieval period. Although the use of the Qur'an in the Muslim heartlands has been the focus of numerous academic studies, the peripheral regions remain understudied. Despite the fact that many peripheral scholars and poets are largely unknown, modern research increasingly focuses on forgotten authors and their intellectual heritage, in which the use of Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions remains an important mode of intellectual engagement.

In this presentation, I will introduce Mubārak Wakhānī, a 19th-century poet from the Wakhan region of present-day Badakhshan of Tajikistan, and provide an overview of his work entitled *Tafsīr-i Āyāt-i Kalām dar Mujādilah-i Iblīs wa Ādam*. This work, together with *Tarjumat al-Bayān*, is preserved in a unique manuscript, and it is likely that we are dealing with a holograph copy. In both works, Mubārak-i Wakhānī engages with selected Qur'anic verses related to the creation of Adam and Iblis. By examining these verses, I will demonstrate how Mubārak-i Wakhānī engages with the Qur'anic text and constructs a new poetic narrative.

## Domestic Labour between Donation and Liability

Samaneh Oladi *Virginia Commonwealth University, USA*

*Ujrat al-mithl*, customary wage compensation, is an established juristic tool for assigning fair value to services when labour has produced benefit and payment becomes legally due. In contemporary discussions of Shi'i family law in Iran, it has gained renewed importance as a way to conceptualise domestic labour that supports households yet is rarely acknowledged as having clear economic value. This study argues that *ujrat al-mithl* is best understood as part of a wider Imāmī theory of compensable benefit, one that links valuation to intention, consent, and customary standards, and that can address domestic labour without limiting marriage to a commercial contract.

The argument begins with the legal reasoning behind *ujrat al-mithl* in Imāmī discussions of *ijarah* and related rules governing wages, usufruct, and liability for benefit. When jurists address situations where services have been provided and benefit has been enjoyed, they set out principled ways to assess value even if the arrangement was informal or the terms were never specified. *Ujrat al-mithl* serves as a benchmark for fair compensation, tying payment to customary market rates while maintaining the juristic view that legal duties must rest on a recognizable legal basis.

This framework matters in the household because Imāmī jurisprudence draws a clear line between what is socially expected and what is legally enforceable. In this legal vocabulary, many forms of domestic work are treated as services rather than automatic legal obligations. That is why *tabarru'*, the voluntary donation of one's services, becomes central. Domestic labour is rarely disputed as labour. The legal question is whether it should be treated as a gift or as non-donated service carried out with an expectation of benefit. *Ujrat al-mithl* offers a clear way to turn that classification into a compensable claim. It looks to intention and surrounding circumstances to decide whether the services belong on the side of gift or on the side of legal liability.

A number of Qur'anic themes reinforce this juristic approach by offering an ethical frame for lawful benefit and consent in human dealings. Qur'anic teachings on justice, legitimate acquisition, and exchange based on consent align with an Imāmī concern that benefit should rest on legitimate grounds. In this reading, Qur'anic ethics support the idea that economically recognizable services are not treated as costless by default, while the operative legal reasoning remains grounded in Shi'i jurisprudential method.

This study also considers contemporary family-law practice in Shi'i Iran, with particular attention to how *ujrat al-mithl* is used in divorce-related claims. Courts translate juristic categories such as *tabarru'*, authorisation, and customary valuation into procedural standards and evidentiary requirements. In doing so, they show how the doctrine can make domestic labour visible as compensable service and connect jurisprudential reasoning to concrete questions of entitlement and fairness at marital dissolution.

By centring the Imāmī jurisprudential logic of compensable benefit and the juristic construction of *tabarru'*, *ujrat al-mithl* comes into view as a strong resource for Shi'i legal thought and a useful lens for examining how ethical commitments, juristic doctrine, and legal practice come together in contemporary family law in Iran.

## Diverse Modes of Expression and Communication in the Holy Qur'an: A Study on Storytelling and Parables in the Qur'an

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My study seeks to analyse the medium of storytelling and use of parables in the Holy Qur'an as the most engaging mode of communicating fundamental truths to mankind. A very noticeable characteristic of the Holy Qur'an is the wide array of storytelling and parables used in communicating fundamental truths and guidance. The Qur'an employs a unique, purposeful, and highly effective mode of storytelling and use of parables to communicate moral, spiritual, and theological truths. Instead of sequential and linear historical accounts, Qur'anic stories and narratives

focus on specific, poignant scenes designed to induce reflection (*tafakkur*) and highlight lessons (*'ibrah*) relevant to the human condition. These stories and narratives – ranging from the lives of prophets to allegorical metaphors and parables are aimed at reforming the reader's or the listener's worldview and moral compass. The Qur'anic mode of storytelling is focused on moral lessons and omits historical details such as dates, specific locations, and genealogies. Thus in the story of the 'Seven Sleepers', the moral lesson is highlighted and Allah cautions against debating irrelevant details such as the number of the sleepers. The themes of the stories are highlighted and the narratives are frequently repeated with subtle variations to match the context of the Surah which help to serve as a reminder and engage the heart. The stories are interconnected and form a cohesive, unified message.

The narratives emphasise ultimate reality to the reader and illustrate the ultimate triumph of truth (*al-haqq*) over falsehood (*bāṭil*). The stories invite and draw the listener or reader to participate in the stories as direct recipients of the divine message. The Holy Qur'an uses parables (*amthāl*) as effective cognitive tools to drive the message home to the reader/listener. Through the parables, abstract concepts are made accessible and tangible, turning spiritual realities into vivid, visual, and memorable examples and activating the imagination to help the mind comprehend profound truths. The parables include 'The Mosquito' (2:26) indicating that Allah sets forth examples of even the smallest creatures to show that truth is not dependent on the magnitude of the example, the 'Goodly Tree' (14:24-27) representing faith and righteousness as a tree with deep roots and constant fruit, the 'Spider's House' (29:41) illustrating the fragility of relying on anything other than Allah, the 'Two Gardens' (18:32-44) highlighting the difference between a grateful believer and an arrogant, ungrateful person, and the 'Parable of the Light' (24:35) using the graphic imagery of a lamp in a niche to explain the nature of divine guidance. The stories and parables provide moral and spiritual guidance, exemplifying virtue through stories of the prophets' lives (e.g., Joseph's patience, Abraham's faith) as models of moral excellence and confirmation of Faith (*īmān*) reinforcing core doctrines like *tawhīd* (Oneness of God) and the Day of Judgment and giving warnings and admonitions to mankind foretelling the consequences of rejecting divine guidance for his destiny. The Qur'an provided solace and comfort to the Prophet Muḥammad and believers during times of hardship thus being a 'remedy' and 'mercy' for the soul in difficult times.

## Shi'i Historical Developments in East Africa: Minority Identity, Transnational Networks, and Theological Localisation in Tanzania

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This article examines the historical development, institutional consolidation, and theological localization of Twelver Shi'i communities in Tanzania within the broader context of Indian Ocean migration and African Islamic pluralism. While Islam in East Africa has largely been analysed through Sunni jurisprudential and Sufi frameworks, Shi'i communities – particularly Khoja Ithnā 'Asharī – have often been treated as mercantile minorities rather than theological actors. Drawing upon diaspora theory, transnational religious networks, and Shi'i anthropology, this study identifies three major phases of development: diasporic preservation (nineteenth-early twentieth century), postcolonial consolidation (1960s–1980s), and globalisation-driven localisation (1980s–present). Through analysis of ritual life, Swahili textual production, women's religious agency, youth engagement, and the influential scholarship of Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, the article argues that Tanzanian Shi'ism has evolved from an insular diaspora into an intellectually embedded minority tradition contributing to African Islamic thought.

## The Role of Shi'i *Tafsīrs* in the Educational System of the Safavid Era and their Social Function

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Shi'i *tafsīrs* (Qur'anic exegeses) during the Safavid period played a pivotal role as one of the foundational pillars of the educational system, shaping the religious and social epistemology of that era. The Safavid dynasty, having adopted Twelver Shi'ism as its official state religion, sought to institutionalise Shi'i *tafsīrs* through educational establishments as instruments of cultural and political authority. Thus, the central question of this study revolves around the influence of Shi'i *tafsīrs* during the foundation and expansion of the Safavid educational system, their social functions during the period, and how they contributed to the political legitimacy of the Safavid regime. Additionally, it explores the distinctions between Shi'i and non-Shi'i exegetical approaches in terms of their educational and social impact during the Safavid era.

This research pursues three main objectives: examining the incorporation of Shi'i *tafsīrs* during the establishment and evolution of the Safavid educational system; analysing their role in reinforcing the religious and political legitimacy of the Safavid state; and identifying the diverse exegetical approaches employed by Shi'i scholars during the period, along with their impact on religious education. Utilising a descriptive-analytical method and relying on historical and exegetical sources from the Safavid period, the study's findings demonstrate that Shi'i *tafsīrs* functioned not merely as academic endeavours, but also as influential cultural and political instruments within the socio-religious structure of the time. These *tafsīrs* were employed not only as educational and scholarly tools in religious schools but also as legitimising agents for Safavid political authority and the Shi'i discourse in Iranian society. Shi'i *tafsīrs* significantly contributed to the development of curricula in religious schools, with prominent scholars and exegetes utilising them to train clerics who would serve within the educational and religious institutions of the Safavid state. Furthermore, they played a substantial role in the socialisation of the broader society, acting as cultural-political tools to reinforce the ideological foundation of the Safavid monarchy.

## Translating the Qur'an in Eastern Europe: Russian and Ukrainian Shi'i Contributions

Akif Tahiev *Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany*

Shi'ism in Eastern Europe remains an understudied field, and the intellectual output of Shi'i communities in this region has received only marginal scholarly attention. This paper addresses this gap by examining several recent Russian and Ukrainian translations of the Qur'an produced within explicitly Shi'i contexts. By situating these texts within their social and intellectual milieus, the study aims to illuminate the emerging patterns of scriptural interpretation that distinguish Eastern European Shi'i scholarship from its Middle Eastern and South Asian counterparts.

The paper surveys a range of Russian- and Ukrainian-language materials that present themselves explicitly as Shi'i Qur'an translations. These include Russian translations produced by the Sadra publishing house (2015) and by Nazim Zeinalov (2015), as well as Ukrainian translations by Namik Babakhanov (2021) and Oleg Ali Balekhov (2025). In addition to full translations, the study also considers works that engage Qur'anic interpretation more selectively but nevertheless display distinctive Shi'i hermeneutical features. Collectively, these texts constitute an emerging corpus that sheds light on the intellectual trajectories of Shi'i communities in Russia and Ukraine.

The analysis focuses on three primary dimensions. First, it introduces the translators and the institutional or communal environments in which their work emerged, highlighting the diversity of actors, from diaspora scholars to locally trained figures, who shape the landscape of Shi'i Qur'anic engagement in the region. Second, it examines the formal and stylistic features of these translations, attending to their treatment of key doctrinal terms, their use of commentary or paratextual material, and their negotiation of sectarian markers. Finally, the study identifies several unique translational strategies that differentiate Eastern European Shi'i approaches from those found in other Shi'i traditions.

A particularly illustrative case is found in the first volume of *tafsīr* by Amin Ramin (2022). Ramin's rendering of certain passages diverges sharply not only from mainstream Sunni translations but also from standard Shi'i exegetical norms. For instance, his translation of Q. 43:4, *wa-innahu fi umm al-kitābi ladaynā la-'alīyun ḥakīmun*, appears as: 'Indeed, it is in the Mother of the Book, with Us – 'Alī is the wise one.' Here, Ramin interprets *'alī* not in the conventional adjectival sense of 'exalted' or 'sublime,' but as a direct reference to Imam 'Alī. This interpretive move stands in contrast even to other local Shi'i translators such as Zeinalov, who maintains the adjectival reading despite his otherwise Shi'i orientation. These translational and exegetical choices reveal an emerging local trend in which devotional interpretation blends with translation practice in ways not typically found in other Shi'i traditions. By analysing these works collectively, the paper argues that Russian and Ukrainian Shi'i translations of the Qur'an represent a distinct regional tradition – one shaped by linguistic context, minority religious identity, and the intellectual independence of local actors. This study thus contributes to a broader understanding of the diversity of contemporary Shi'i Qur'anic interpretation and highlights Eastern Europe as an important, if still overlooked, site of Shi'i scholarly production.

## The *Tafsīr* of Muḥammad Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī

Liyakat Takim *McMaster University, Canada*

One of the most prominent Shi'ī scholars in the Safavid era was Mulla Muḥammad Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1680). Among his many books is his important Qur'anic exegesis, *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfi*. This paper will analyse this work and attempt to answer the following questions: Why did Kāshānī write his commentary in this period? To what degree was he influenced by Akhbārī ideology and how was this reflected in his exegetical work?

Fayḍ's interpretive method is an exteriorization of the subtle and secret teachings of the Imams. He interjects his commentary on Qur'anic verses with traditions claiming that the verses refer to the Imams or their *wilāyah* (authority) regardless of the historical or social context of the verses. He takes that approach a step further by denying any understanding of the Qur'an, either intra-textuality or inter-textuality, without the explicit contribution by an Imam. It is the latter rather than the scripture or reason that determines how a verse is viewed and understood by the interpretive community.

The paper will further explore how Kāshānī's methodology in Qur'anic hermeneutics differed from those of his compatriots. It will argue that despite his Akhbārī predilections, Fayḍ Kāshānī's work was quite different from other Akhbārī exegesis as it was affected by his interest in Shi'ī theosophy and by Mullā Ṣadrā's influence on him. To what degree did the insights (*baṣīrah*) he gained from the esoteric dimensions of the sciences influence his hermeneutical methodology (*shay' min al-ta'wīl*)? Did his support for the ideas of Ibn al-'Arabī also impact his tafsīr work?

As the paper will argue, it would be more appropriate to categorise Kāshānī as a 'mild' Akhbārī since he disagreed with his Akhbārī compatriots on many issues. In conclusion, it is correct to state Fayḍ Kāshānī's contribution to Shi'ī intellectual thought remains profound.

## The Imaginary Context in *Nahj al-Balāghah*

Zainab Sayed Zahed *PAAET, Kuwait*

Poetic imagery, in al-Fārābī's (d. 339/950) philosophical framework, is not merely an ornamental device but an integral part of logical reasoning. It contributes to epistemology through the poetic syllogism, which produces *takhyīl* that moves the soul by generating a psychological effect. Yet this epistemological contribution does not grant poetics an autonomous meaning; poetic expression must be interpreted through non-poetic meanings in order to be understood. Accordingly, every image can be substituted by an alternative expression capable of conveying the same meaning.

In contrast, within *al-siyāq al-takhyīlī* [the Imaginary Context], the image serves a meaning intrinsic to itself and cannot be replaced by its so-called original, non-poetic equivalent. This paper examines the Imaginary Context in selected orations from *Nahj al-Balāghah*, a work attributed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1016). The concept of *al-siyāq al-takhyīlī* is grounded in ideas developed by early rhetoricians, including 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's (d. 471/1078) theories of *naẓm* [construction] and *tarākub al-ṣuwar* (compound images), Ḥāzīm al-Qartājannī's (d. 684/1285) theory of *takhyīl* [the imaginary], and al-Sharīf al-Raḍī's reflections on *isti'ārah* (metaphor), alongside the logical and philosophical perspectives of Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1034) and al-Fārābī.

The primary focus of this study is the oration of al-Khaffāsh (the bat), in which the relationships between literary elements are analysed through the lens of the Imaginary Context. This analysis is conducted in comparison with other creature-related orations in *Nahj al-Balāghah*. The study demonstrates that specific paradigms and methodological principles function as foundational pillars in the literary structure of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, shaped within its tenth-century intellectual context.

This case study, centred on the oration of the bat, reflects mystical conceptions of the relationship between the disciple and the teacher. Consequently, the oration operates on two interpretive levels: one concerning the bat as a natural creature, and the other representing a mystical journey. The Imaginary Context is fully realised through these layered meanings.



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