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AKHBĀRĪ SHĪ'Ī APPROACHES TO TAFSĪR

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The expression Akhbārī *tafsīr* refers, perhaps misleadingly, to a particular type of quranic interpretation which achieved its final form in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries at the hands of Shī'ī scholars. The prime concern of the Akhbārīs and their 'opponents' the Uṣūlīs was not scripture interpretation *per se*, but rather the more far-ranging discipline of law and its working out – *fiqh*. It is likely that inasmuch as this division or school seems to have come about largely as an alternative theory of jurisprudence, rather than the somewhat more narrow discipline of *tafsīr*, that the title of this paper is ill-conceived. However, the four works treated below do exhibit many similarities in approach and subject matter despite the fact that their authors appear to represent varying degrees of attachment to what might be called strict Akhbārī belief. Because these works appear not to have attracted much attention in the West, a brief survey of their authors and contents will be offered.¹ It should be emphasized that these commentaries are extremely rich in content and that the following represents only the most preliminary sounding of their concerns. It is hoped, however, that by doing this the main purpose of this paper will have been achieved: to draw attention to these commentaries as representative of a more or less distinctive genre of *tafsīr*, one which, from the evidence of their dates of publication, appears to have an enduring place in Shī'ī religious literature. Before turning to the works themselves, a brief characterization of the major doctrinal differences between the Uṣūlīs and the Akhbārīs will provide something of an introduction.

The Akhbārī Uṣūlī debate

The Uṣūlīs recognize four sources of the law: Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, 'aql, and *ijmā'*. The Akhbārīs recognize only the first two, the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*. In some cases, we are told, certain scholars accept only *ḥadīth* as a proper source. Against the Uṣūlīs, the Akhbārīyya consider the entire contents of the 'four

books' of Shī'ī tradition² to be reliable and may even allow traditions from a much wider field, including traditions from Sunnī sources. Akhbārīs also recognize only two categories of *ḥadīth*: sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and weak (*da'īf*), against the four types recognized by the Uṣūlīs: sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*), good (*ḥasan*), continuously-attested (*mutawātir*), weak (*da'īf*). According to the Akhbārīs, *naqlī* legal rulings, decisions based squarely on the traditions, have precedence over *'aqlī* rulings, decisions based on reasoning and analogy (*qiyās*), tools the Uṣūliyya employ and require as part of the necessary *ijtihād* – independent legal reasoning – that is to be applied to the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* for arriving at a legal decision. The Akhbārīs, in short, reject *ijtihād*. Where the Uṣūliyya allow decisions to be made on the basis of conjecture (*ẓann*), Akhbārīs allow a legal decision (*fatwā*) only in the case of certainty (*yaqīn*) derived from a tradition (*khabar* pl. *akhbār*). Where there is no clear text, caution (*iḥtiyā*) must be exercised. The Uṣūlīs divide humanity into two groups: *mujtahid* and *muqallid*. That is, between the Imam and the average believer is interposed an expert in religious matters to whom the believer must defer in matters of religion and law. The leading *mujtahid* of a given generation is called *marja' al-taqlīd* (the object of emulation) and is the ultimate authority in religious matters. Obedience to the *mujtahid* for the Uṣūlīs is obedience to the Imam. Akhbārīs maintain that all men are *muqallid* to the Imam – that is all must emulate the Imam, and the Imam alone and directly in matters of religion which include law. Akhbārīs permit the use of the decisions of a dead jurist, the Uṣūliyya forbid this.³ This characterization should, however, be used with caution as it seems clear that there were varying degrees of attachment to these doctrines on both sides.⁴

It is not possible, or necessary, to survey the history of this dispute; reference is made to a recent summary of the question.⁵ The point to keep in mind here is that the Akhbārī approach, which had apparently been dormant for five or so centuries, began to assert itself in Iran during the Ṣafavid period, especially in the writings of Mullā Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī (d. 1623–24).⁶ It is after this time that a series of Qur'ān commentaries which may be characterized as Akhbārī, were produced. The usual story is that from about the mid-seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth, a battle raged between the two camps. At the end of the day, towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Uṣūliyya emerged victorious. The exact nature of the debate, the *dramatis personae*, and the place where the debate occurred is still a subject for study.⁷

While this particular struggle between the two groups was a fairly late event, traces of the argument can be found throughout the history of Qur'ān interpretation. For example, in the earliest Shī'ī commentaries on Qur'ān 16.6 the bees, which are presented there as having been inspired by God to behave the way they do, are treated as a metaphor for the Imams whose divine knowledge, the honey of the verse, is that which provides this healing.⁸ However, by the time of al-Sharīf al-Rādī (d. 1016), the explanation of the verse had changed considerably: 'This honey is with the *muḥaqqiqīn* from among the *'ulamā'* and does not come from the bellies of the bees'.⁹

Such a shift in exegesis supports Madelung's view concerning the history of the Uṣūlī/Akhbārī dispute. In his discussion of the relationship between Shī'ism and Mu'tazilite theology, he cites a twelfth century work in which the author, one 'Abd al-Jalīl al-Rāzī, describes his theological position as that of the *Imāmiyya Uṣūliyya* as opposed to the position of the *Imāmiyya Akhbārīyya*. Madelung's conclusion is:

These statements show that the conflict between *Uṣūliyya* and *Akhbārīyya* in Imamism is not a phenomenon originating in . . . Ṣafavid times, as is sometimes suggested. . . . The later conflict which centres on technical questions of the principles of the law (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) is rooted in the earlier broader conflict between supporters of speculative theology and traditionalist opponents of reasoning in religion.¹⁰

Types of Shī'ī *tafsīr*

The *tafsīrs* which form the subject of this essay are most usefully contrasted with the standard *tafsīr* works of so-called classical Shī'ism: the two famous commentaries by Ṭūsī (d. 1067) and Ṭabarī (d. 1144). Quite simply, they are worlds apart in style, structure and content. The classical works are interested in grammatical questions, avoid major controversies, and, contrary to the Akhbārī works, relate vast amounts of *ḥadīth* material from Sunnī sources and transmitters such as Ṭabarī, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Mas'ūd, and 'Ā'isha. The works at hand appear to care almost nothing for stylistics, points of grammar and so on, except in so far as such concerns might impinge upon finding the true reading of the verse in question through metonymy or metaphor for the Imam or some related topic such as *walāya*. The Akhbārī approach is distinguished by the employment of vast numbers of oral reports, long since preserved in writing, that bear directly, and sometimes indirectly, on the meaning of the Qur'ān. These oral reports are structurally the same as *ḥadīth* reports but are distinguished from them in this case by the technical term *khabar* because virtually all of these reports are traced to one of the members of the holy family of Shī'ism, the *ahl al-bayt*, namely one of the so-called Fourteen Most Pure Ones, the twelve Imams, Fāṭima and the prophet Muḥammad. A typical Akhbārī commentary will cite a verse, or sequence of verses of the Qur'ān, and then list a number of these oral reports which in some way or another explain the scriptural material.

Structurally then, Akhbārī *tafsīr* is quite similar to a perhaps more familiar type of interpretation, namely *tafsīr bi'l-ma'thūr*. The classic example of this category of exegesis is the massive commentary of Ṭabarī (d. 923) known simply as *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*.¹¹ In fact, the similarities appear at first to be so striking as to generate speculations on the cyclical recurrence of specific types of approaches to scripture. The works considered here are products of Ṣafavid times, a period when a definite world view was in the making and at stake, and

can therefore be compared with the above-mentioned *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* of the late ninth and early tenth centuries during which those materials had been gathered and sorted which would form the basis for another world view. Interestingly, both projects were mounted during periods of decline in their respective political milieus.

But there is another difference between the work of Ṭabarī and the work of our authors: they show a radical disagreement as to the fundamental questions of Islamic religious authority. Many of the traditions cited are explicitly anti-Sunnī in nature, and all either explicitly or implicitly uphold and promulgate the absolute authority of the Imams. The resuscitation of such material began well before the rise of the most recent dispute in the eighteenth century between the Uṣūlīs and the Akhbārīs and is dated from the beginning of the Ṣafavid period itself when traditions long laid to rest were collected and ultimately translated into Persian for the widest possible circulation.¹² Their radicalism has been characterized as affecting three characteristic topics:

... the integrity of the Qur'ān, the status of the Companions, and the position of the Imams. Briefly put, the message contained in these traditions is that certain phrases of the Qur'ān which referred to 'Alī's rights had been deliberately omitted by 'Uthmān and his accomplices; that the great majority of the Companions (including in particular the first three caliphs) were grave sinners or even unbelievers for usurping 'Alī's rights or acquiescing in his usurpation; that the Imams were superhuman, possessed knowledge of the *ghayb* and could perform miracles.¹³

This radicalism is expressed in a method of scripture interpretation most commonly designated by the word *ta'wīl*. The word means 'taking back to the beginning' or 'taking back to first principles'. For the authors presented below, this means reading the verses of the Qur'ān according to the interpretations of the Imams, who are, par excellence, the 'first principles' (*mabādi*) of Shī'ism. But beyond this, *ta'wīl* means an interpretation of many quranic verses which mention such things as 'the Face of God' (e.g. Qur'ān 2.115) as referring specifically to the Prophet and the Imams. So, for the present example:

In a long *khavar*, God addresses the Prophet and the Imams in the *'ālam al-dharr* (the world of the primordial covenant), thus: 'I have appointed you intercessors for Me. All things are passing away except my face, and you are my face which never perishes, and he who turns toward you will likewise never perish.'¹⁴

In contrast, the 'Face of God' is explained by Ṭūsī as follows:

To God belongs the east and the west. So wherever you turn, there is the Face of God. (Qur'ān 2.115)

First comes a long discussion of the meaning of *mashriq* and *maghrib* in which Ṭūsī cites many examples to prove that this refers to the places of the rising and the setting of the sun. This occupies almost three pages of his commentary. As for *wajh Allāh* he cites a *ḥadīth* from Ibn 'Abbās which the Mu'tazilite al-Jubbā'ī also used to bring out the familiar meaning of the expression: this verse was revealed to refute the Jews who objected to the changing of the *qibla* and the meaning is that God is not in one direction (*jihā*) to the exclusion of others. Another *ḥadīth* from Qatāda says that the verse simply indicates the direction of prayer. It is also said, Ṭūsī tells us, that the verse was revealed for those who are unable to determine the correct direction of prayer because of darkness or other impediments. About the phrase there is general disagreement. He then quotes Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Mujāhid to the effect that *wajh* means the direction of the *qibla*, i.e., the Ka'ba. A final quotation from al-Rummānī and al-Jubbā'ī gives the possible equivalence: Face of God = good pleasure of God.¹⁵

The works described below, quite apart from avoiding such authorities as Mujāhid, Qatāda, and al-Jubbā'ī, never delve into lexical questions with the attendant citation of literary *shawāhid*. As stated above, the commentary is offered in the form of statements from the Imams.

The exegetes of this period whose works are considered below are, in the order of the dates of composition of their respective commentaries: 'Abd 'Alī al-Ḥuwayzī (d. before 1693), Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d.1680), Hāshim al-Baḥrānī (d. ca. 1695), and Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Iṣfahānī, al-Sharīf al-'Āmilī (d.1724). Each of these authors has written an introduction for his *tafsīr*. The following examination is restricted for the most part to this introductory material. It will be helpful, as stated above, to bear in mind that even within the so-called Akhbārī school a spectrum of intensity may be discerned. Indeed, it will be seen that it may be doubtful whether Iṣfahānī can be considered an Akhbārī at all. But inasmuch as his *tafsīr* expresses the same 'radicalism' shared by the other authors discussed here, his work has been included.¹⁶

Nūr al-thaqalayn

The first work to be discussed was written by 'Abd 'Alī b. Jum'a al-'Arūsī al-Ḥuwayzī, *Kitāb tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn*, hereafter *Nūr*.¹⁷ The title is taken from the famous *ḥadīth al-thaqalayn*, which exists in many variants. Two of these have been combined in the following translation:

The Prophet said: 'I am soon about to be received . . . I am telling you before I am taken up that I shall leave with you as representatives after me the Book of my Lord, and my progeny, the people of my household. The all-Gracious, all-knowing told me that they [the two weights, *al-thaqalayn*] shall not be separated until they meet me [on the Day of Resurrection] . . . Do not precede them, for you would go astray, and do

not fall behind them, for you would perish. Do not teach them, for they are of greater knowledge than you.'¹⁸

Ḥuwayzī was a contemporary of the great Akhbārī scholar al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1693) who mentions him as a scholar, *faqīh*, reliable collector of *ḥadīth*, pious, a poet and a contemporary master of the arts and sciences.¹⁹ His death date is given as 1112/1700 in the present edition but there seems to be some confusion on this, since ʿĀmilī refers to him as having died.²⁰ Not much is known about his life, but as indicated by his *nisba*, he was from the small town of Ḥuwayza, near Ahwāz in southwest Iran and lived in Shīrāz. Ḥuwayza is remembered in history as the base of the fourteenth century Musha'sha' kingdom brought into being by one who claimed to be the Mahdī.²¹ One of the biographical works says that our author might have been a teacher of Sayyid Ni'mat Allāh al-Tustarī on the basis of an account of an argument which the latter witnessed in the Friday Mosque of Shīrāz between one Ja'far al-Bahrānī and 'my teacher' on the legality of extracting *aḥkāma* from the Qur'ān. From the details of the discussion, it is clear that the unnamed teacher was loathe to apply reason to the interpretation of the Qur'ān.²²

The only known edition of *Nūr* was edited by Ḥāshim al-Rasūlī al-Maḥallātī and printed in Qum during the years 1963–65. This edition is based on three manuscripts of varying completeness.²³ A preface by the highly regarded Shī'ī scholar Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī refers to the *tafsīr* as 'one of the best if not the best' work of its kind.²⁴

The author of *Dharī'a*, Aghā Buzurg Tīhrānī, writes that *Nūr* explains the Qur'ān with transmissions from the *Ahl al-Bayt* and that he has collected these from such works as *al-Kāfi*, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, *al-Iḥtijāj* of Ṭabarsī, several works from Ibn Bābawayh, the *Tahdhīb* of Ṭūsī, the *Kitāb al-ghayba* and the *Manāqib* (works of Ibn Shahrāshūb), and many others. Unfortunately, however, complete *isnāds* are not provided, making it difficult to evaluate this or that specific report (*khābar*).²⁵ Tīhrānī also points out that Ḥuwayzī makes no attempt at discussing the verses with regard to the standard (since Ṭūsī) categories of *alfāz*, *i'rāb*, and *qirā'* 'contrary to the *Tafsīr kanz al-ḥaqā'iq*'.²⁶ The first part of the *tafsīr* was completed by the author in the *madrasa* of the al-Muqayyimiyya Mosque in Shīrāz, in the year 1065/1654; the second, up to the *Sūrat al-Kahf*, was completed in 1066/1655. The third part, from *Sūrat Maryam* to the *Sūrat al-Fāṭir* (*sūras* 19–35), was also completed in 1066/1655. The boundaries of this third part may be conditioned by the equal rank assigned to Mary and Fāṭima (*al-Fāṭir*) in Shī'ism. About the date of the completion of the fourth volume Tīhrānī is silent, saying only that it covers the rest of the Qur'ān.²⁷ This dating indicates that the work was probably extant while Muḥsin Fayḍ was writing his commentary but it appears to have been unknown to him.

This work contains none of the systematized introductory material found below in the other three works. It does, however, contain a short prologue of some interest. This begins with a brief doxology that makes it clear the work is Shī'ī and stresses that the Shī'a are a 'middle community' [Cf. Qur'ān 2.143].

The Imams are described as those who nourish the wretched, the orphan and the prisoner. (Similar dire circumstances are to be referred to again later.) Ḥuwayzī then explains that he undertook this project because of all the Qur'ān commentaries available, some are concerned with grammar, others with *kalām*, others with lexicography, and so on, and he thought it important to add the traditions of the Imams which are indispensable for an understanding of 'the bright lights of the revelation and for revealing the mysteries of some of the *ta'wil*'. The language here indicates that he is singling out the work of Bayḍawī (d.1286)²⁸ as being particularly deficient. He also says that if some of what he relates runs contrary to the *ijmā'* of the Shī'ī community (*al-ṭā'ifa al-muḥiqqa*), he is not interested in this work in doctrine (*i'tiqād*) or (? judiciary) practice (*'amal*). He has, nevertheless, included such material so that the enlightened reader will know 'how and from whom' it was transmitted. The book is meant to be helpful in arriving at basic disclosure (*kashf*) of the truth. Furthermore, Ḥuwayzī defends his taking material from other books besides Ṭūsī and Qummī on the grounds that these two did not transmit *ḥadīth* for many verses of the Qur'ān. He then cites a poem to the effect that what he is doing is out of love for the Shī'a. Since the author is described as a poet, it is possible that these lines are original, but I have not verified this. He closes the prologue by saying that despite numerous difficulties and calamities, his lack of resources – mental and physical, thanks to God's grace he was able to produce the book and he named it *Nūr al-thaqalayn* hoping for some correspondence between the meaning of the name and the value of the book so that by using it one might ultimately attain the 'stations of the Independent'. He then invokes the idea of the 'middle path' once more and hopes for deliverance from sin and error.²⁹ This preoccupation with correct belief and personal misfortune may indicate that our author was somewhat 'marginalized' in his milieu. In the very first *ḥadīth* he cites, which is on the subject of the revelation of the *Fāṭiḥa* and the *āyat al-kursī*, this possibility gains more strength:

The Prophet said: 'When God desired to reveal the *Fāṭiḥa*, the *āyat al-kursī*, (Qur'ān 2.255) the *shahīda 'llāh* (Qur'ān 3.18), and [the verses] Say: 'Praised be God! Owner of Sovereignty! Thou givest sovereignty unto whom thou wilt . . . And thou givest sustenance unto whom thou chooseth without stint' (3.26–27), these passages were hanging from the Throne, and there was no veil between them and God. They said [these verses]: 'O Lord! Thou art casting us down to the abode of sin and unto those who disobey you while we are dependent upon purity and holiness!' Then God said: 'By my power and glory! Any servant who recites you at the end of his *ṣalāt* I will cause to dwell in the *ḥaḏīrat al-quds* according to what is in him. And I will look to him seventy times each day with my hidden eye, and I will award him seventy needs every day, the meanest of which will be [mere] forgiveness. And I will assist him to victory over every enemy. And he will never be prevented from entering Paradise'.³⁰

Al-Şāfi

The second work to be considered is the most famous, namely the commentary of Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d.1680), the student and son-in-law of Mullā Şadrā (d.1640). Muḥsin Fayḍ was a member of the so-called Işfahān school, which was responsible for the elaboration of what became known as the *Hikmat-i ilāhī* movement in philosophy. He was also the author of one of the 'three books' of later Twelver Shī'ism, namely *al-Wāfi*, a compilation of and commentary on the canonical *ḥadīths* of the original 'four books' of Shī'ī traditions.³¹ He was also a teacher of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d.1699), the compiler of the monumental collection of Imāmī lore, *Biḥār al-anwār*, enemy of Şūfism, most powerful religious figure of his time, and teacher of numerous prominent Shī'ī 'ulamā'.

It is because such a thinker as Muḥsin Fayḍ is counted among the Akhbārīs, that it is difficult to consider the movement as 'fundamentalist' pure and simple.³² Apart from his *tafsīr*, Muḥsin Fayḍ, as is well known, produced several other works expounding an intricate, rarified, and quite speculative, spiritual philosophy.³³ The question to be asked, therefore, is how such so-called Akhbārī literalism can be associated with, or perhaps be productive of such an apparent incongruity.

In any case, *Şāfi* was completed in 1664,³⁴ well into the period of Şafavid decline and the full title of the commentary is *al-Şāfi fī tafsīr kalām Allāh al-wāfi*.³⁵ It is introduced with twelve 'prologues' (*muqaddimāt*), which contain the basic presuppositions informing the work. The titles of these introductions are listed here followed by page numbers which indicate the amount of space each topic takes up. Some material from these introductions will be translated as space allows.

1 On the prophetic injunction (*wāşiya*) to cling to the Qur'ān and the virtue of this [15–18].

2 That the knowledge of the Qur'ān is all with the *Ahl al-Bayt* [19–23].

From 'Ali: No verse of the Qur'ān descended on the Prophet but that he recited it to me and dictated it to me so that I could write it in my own handwriting and he taught me its *ta'wīl* and its *tafsīr*, its abrogating and abrogated verses (*nāsikh wa-mansūkh*), its clear laws (*muḥkam*), its ambiguities (*mutashābih*), and he supplicated God on my behalf that he be able to teach me their full understanding (*fahm*) and that I be able to memorize them and not forget a single verse from the Book of God. So there is no knowledge which he dictated to me but I wrote it, and there is nothing he left out neither of command or prohibition, or of what was or what will be, nor was there any book which descended prior to Muḥammad but that he taught it to me and I memorized it and I have forgotten not a single letter.

Al-Bāqir (the Fifth Imam, d.117/735 – disputed) said: 'None but a liar can claim to have collected (*jama'a*) all of the Qur'ān as it came down because none but 'Alī and the Imams after him collected it and memorized it as it came down'. [20]³⁶

Al-Şādiq (the Sixth Imam, d.148/765) said: We are the *rāsikhūn fi'l-'ilm* (mentioned in Qur'ān 3.7: those who are firmly grounded in knowledge) and we know the *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān. [21]

3 That most of the Qur'ān came down about the *Ahl al-Bayt* and their friends and enemies and an explanation of the real meaning (*sirr*) of that. [24–28]

Al-Bāqir: 'The Qur'ān came down in four fourths: one fourth concerns us, one fourth concerns our enemies, one fourth is *sunan* and *amthāl*, and one fourth laws and regulations'. [24]

Al-Bāqir: 'The Qur'ān came down in thirds: one third concerns us, one third concerns our beloved friends, one third concerns our enemies ...'.³⁷ [24]

Al-Bāqir: 'Whenever I hear God mention good people of the community it is us He means, and when bad people are mentioned it refers to our enemies'. [25]

4 Concerning the meanings of the aspects (*wujūh*) of the verses, and the establishing of the *mutashābih* and its *ta'wīl*. [29–34] Here the familiar topics of *zāhir*, *bāḥin*, *naskh*, *muḥkam/mutashābih*, *ḥadd*, and *maṭla'* are treated.

Al-Bāqir said: 'O Jābir, the Qur'ān has an inner meaning, and an inner meaning to that. It also has an outer meaning which has again an outer meaning. O Jābir, nothing is further from the minds of men than *tafsīr al-qur'ān*. The beginning of a given verse may be about one thing while its conclusion is about something else. It is a speech containing many aspects (*wujūh*)'. [29]

The Prophet said: 'The Qur'ān has an outer meaning, an inner meaning, a prescriptive meaning, and a spiritual meaning'. [30]³⁸

Al-Bāqir said: 'The Qur'ān came down in [the mode of] "[Even though I appear to be speaking to someone else] I really mean you, so listen to me well O neighbour! (*iyyaki a'nī wa'sma'ī yā jāra*)"' [30].

Muḥsin Fayḍ explains this last *ḥadīth* (which is a standard feature of the four commentaries studied in these pages) as follows: This is like the speaker who is addressing his speech to someone but really intends another. It is clearly seen in the case of the *ḥadīth* from al-Bāqir in answer to a query from a follower: 'God never reproved his Prophet but that he really intended the message for someone who is not mentioned explicitly in the Qur'ān, as for example in the verse: 'And had We not given thee strength thou wouldst nearly have inclined

to them a little.' (Qur'an 17.74) That is, God means by this someone else. Perhaps the intention here is to those whose names have been removed from the Qur'an by the godless renegades (*mulhidūn*). [30-31]

5 On the prohibition of *tafsīr bi'l-ra'y*. [35-39]

The Prophet said: 'He who interprets the Qur'an according to his own opinion has scored a direct miss with regard to the truth'. [35] The Prophet said: 'He who interprets the Qur'an according to his own opinion will be seated in Hell'. [35] From the Prophet and the Imams: 'It is not permitted to interpret the Qur'an except through sound traditions and clear authority'. [35]

Muḥsin Fayḍ adds: 'If someone claims that the Qur'an has only an exterior meaning, he speaks strictly from self and errs grievously ... the Qur'an, the *akhbār* and the *āthār* all point to the inner meanings (*ma'ānī*) of the Qur'an'. [31-32]

6 On the collection of the Qur'an and its corruption. [40-55]

Al-Ṣādiq said: 'The Prophet said to 'Alī, "O 'Alī, the Qur'an is under my pillow in separate sheets ... take it and collect it together, and do not lose it like the Jews lost the Torah." So 'Alī rushed and collected it in a yellow garment, then he put a seal upon it in his house ...'. [40] From Sālim b. Salma: 'A man was reciting for al-Ṣādiq, and I heard words (*hurūf*) of the Qur'an which were not those that the people are reciting.

Al-Ṣādiq said: 'Cease that recitation! Recite as the people recite until the Qā'im arises. For when he arises he will recite the Book of God properly (*'alā ḥaddihī*). And he will take out the *muṣḥaf* which 'Alī wrote.' Then he said: 'When 'Alī had finished writing it, he went out to the people and said to them: "This is the Book of God as it was sent down upon Muḥammad. I have gathered it together between two covers (*lawḥayn*)."' They said: "Look! We have a complete *muṣḥaf* of the Qur'an. We do not need [your *muṣḥaf*]!" Then 'Alī said: "You will not see it after today. Never. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon me to tell you about it after I have collected it so that you may [eventually] recite it.'" [40-41]

Al-Bāqir: 'If the Book of God had not been added to and subtracted from, our right (*ḥaqqunā*) would not be obscure to anyone with understanding. When the Qā'im arises, he will correctly read the Qur'an'. [41]

Al-Ṣādiq said: 'If the Qur'an were read as it was revealed you would find us named in it'.³⁹ [41]

7 That the Qur'an explains everything. [56-58]

Al-Ṣādiq said: 'God revealed in the Qur'an the explanation of everything and God did not leave out anything the servant might need so that a servant might not say "If only this had been revealed in the Qur'an ...". Indeed, God *has* revealed it in it'.

Mūsā al-Kāẓim (the Seventh Imam, d.183/799) said: 'Everything is in the Book of God and the *sunna* of His Prophet'.

8 On the divisions of verses and their contents with regard to inner meaning and *ta'wīl* and the types of language and the *qirā'āt*, and what we can gather from this. [59-63]

The Prophet: 'The Qur'an came down in seven *aḥruf*, all of them sufficient and wholesome'.

Muḥsin Fayḍ says the meaning of this is disputed but the accepted opinion appears to be that the seven *aḥruf* refer to seven types of verse: command (*amr*), rebuke (*zajr*), attraction (*targhīb*), intimidation (*tarhīb*), argument (*jadāl*), story (*qiṣṣa*) and similitudes (*amthāl*) (or: *zajr*, *amr*, *ḥalāl*, *ḥarām*, *muḥkam*, *mutashābih*, *amthāl*.) Another tradition says that the Qur'an has seven levels of inner meaning. It is this interpretation that Muḥsin Fayḍ thinks is the most useful. As for actual variants in reading the text, Muḥsin Fayḍ says the best tradition is the easiest to pronounce and the clearest in meaning based on the *akhbār* of the Imams (*ma'sūmīn*). He is in any case interested in the meaning (*ma'nā*), quite apart from matters of grammar. [62]

9 Concerning the actual period when the Qur'an came down. [64-66] It is established here that the Qur'an came down in the month of Ramaḍān, just like other holy books.

10 On the Qur'an as intercessor at the Day of Resurrection and the rewards for memorizing it and reciting it. [67-69]

Al-Bāqir said: 'Recite the Qur'an and elevate yourself, for when a verse is chanted, degree is elevated'.

'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (the Fourth Imam, also known as Zayn al-'Ābidīn, d. 94/712) said: 'He who listens to a single letter of the book of God from any reading, God ordains for him by means of this a good and erases on his behalf a sin and raises his degree. And he who recites the book, no matter how it sounds, God decrees for him for every letter he pronounces a good and erases a sin and raises his station ...' [67]

The Prophet said: 'Illumine your houses with the recitation of the Qur'an and do not make them tombs like the Jews and the Christians

did. They pray in their churches and synagogues but their houses are empty [of prayer] . . .'. [69]

11 On recitation and proper behaviour with the Qur'ān. [70–74].

Muḥsin Fayḍ: 'He who recites the Qur'ān and is not humble nor filled with tender feelings, nor cultivates sadness and fear in his soul (*sirr*), then he has badly misjudged the wont of God and incurred great loss. As for the reciter, he needs three things: a humble heart, a pure body, and an empty place. For when his heart is humble towards God, Satan flees from him; and when his body is free of extraneous things, his heart is purified for the recitation. If not, the impediment will keep him from the light of the Qur'ān and its good effects. When he betakes himself to a mosque alone and withdraws from the masses after he has acquired the first two qualities and communes in his spirit and soul with God, then he experiences the sweetness of converse with God, and the knowledge of His grace and His station through the [resultant] receptivity for His blessings and the wondrousness of his allusions. And when he drinks of this chalice, he will not choose any state (*hāl*) over this state, nor any moment (*waqt*) over this moment.⁴⁰ Nay rather, he will forego all [other] acts of obedience and worship because in him is conversation (*munājāt*) with his Lord without intermediary. So heed how you recite the book of your Lord and the sharing of your [newfound] friendship [with him] and how its ordinances and prohibitions are incumbent upon you, and how you must appropriate the laws. It is a mighty book. Defile it not with any falseness – it is a wise revelation, praised, so recite it in "slow-measured rhythmic tones" [Qur'ān 73.4] and heed its promise and threat, and meditate on its similitudes and preachings and beware that you put the sounds in their proper place.' [73].

From al-Ṣādiq: 'By God! Indeed God has manifested (*tajallā*) himself to his creatures in His speech but they do not see'. [73]

12 Explanation of the technical aspects of this *tafsīr*. [75–78]⁴¹

Mūsā al-Kāzīm said: 'When two *ḥadīths* which contradict each other come to you, compare them (*fa-qishumā*) to the Book of God and to the *ḥadīths* from us. Then the one that resembles these is true (*ḥaqq*), and if it does not resemble them, it is false (*bāṭil*)'.

Muḥsin Fayḍ closes his introduction with the following words:

'Sometimes, in order to disclose the desired goal, it is necessary to take something from *al-Asrār* (the *Tafsīr* of al-Bayḍawī), even though I am

not one of its people. But do not over-react to this because every people, even those, have a knowledge which may be useful . . . and hidden in the essence of their expressions is that which we have discovered through sincere love . . . And to God belongs praise'.

He then lists the abbreviations of the standard Shī'ī works he cites and closes his introduction explaining that sometimes he has left out the *isnād* but that he verifies the *akhbār* through 'a method other than *isnāds*'⁴².

O my brothers, take what I give you with divine power, for an exhortation and healing for what is in the breasts has come from your Lord. God guides by it those who follow his good pleasure to the paths of Islam, and leads them out of darkness into light.⁴³

It has been pointed out that Muḥsin Fayḍ claims that the first transmitters of the exegetic tradition were limited in what they related by *taqiyya* ('pious dissimulation'), with the result that much of the true tradition might have been lost. 'This, of course, left great scope for new ideas in *tafsīr* in the name of recovering the tradition'.⁴⁴ Elsewhere in this recent study, Muḥsin Fayḍ along with Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, are described as 'extremists' for claiming that the Qur'ān which we have has been altered.⁴⁵ This idea of an altered Qur'ān is shared by the authors of the other works to be described. However, Ṣāfi is sufficiently ambiguous on the question to enable another author to cite it in support of his own argument that the Shī'a do not hold that the present Qur'ān is somehow defective.⁴⁶ The relevant passages in Ṣāfi are as follows:

The Qur'ān which is in our hands is not the entire Qur'ān sent down by God to Muḥammad. Rather, there is in it that which contradicts that which God had sent down. There is, moreover, in it that which was altered and changed. There were many things deleted from it, such as the name of 'Alī in many places and the phrase Āl Muḥammad (the family of Muḥammad), as well as the names of the 'hypocrites', where they occur. . . . The Qur'ān, furthermore, was not arranged in accordance with the pleasure of God and his apostle.⁴⁷

In a later passage, Muḥsin Fayḍ offers a more or less standard practical solution to the problem.⁴⁸ This is explained as follows: Muḥsin Fayḍ was bound by tradition, as represented by such venerated Shī'ī scholars as Ṭūsī and Ṭabarsī who had insisted on the authenticity of the text. Ayoub explains, paraphrasing Ṣāfi:

The Qur'ān as it now stands is the word of God which, if interpreted correctly, contains all that the community now needs in the way of legal sanctions and prohibitions, as well as the necessary proofs of the

Imam's high office as its guardians and sole authorities on its exegesis. The Qur'an which is in our hands must, [Muḥsin Fayḍ] argues, be followed during the occultation (*ghayba*) of the twelfth Imam. It must be assumed that the true Qur'an is with him.⁴⁹

Apart from these considerations, this work is distinguished from others by the use of Sūfī terminology (e.g. *hāl*, *waqt*, *munājāt*) and an emphasis on the 'spiritual discipline' of reading the Qur'an as a means of approaching God 'without an intermediary'. We also see a rather liberal attitude to such sources as Bayḍawī and, in the course of the *tafsīr* proper, there is more direct commentary from the author than is the case with either the previous work or the one immediately following.

Al-Burhān

It might be thought that *Ṣāfi* directly influenced the larger *tafsīr* by Sayyid Hāshim al-Baḥrānī (1695 or 1697), completed in 1683 during the reign of the Ṣafavid Shāh Sulaymān (d.1694) to whom the work is duly dedicated. It contains similarly arranged introductory material and repeats many of the same traditions at corresponding verses. However, its author neither cites *Ṣāfi* directly, nor mentions the work in the long list of sources included in his introduction.⁵⁰ Indeed, Baḥrānī explicitly states that he is the first to gather the exegetical *akhbār* of the Imams in such number and that he was preceded in this only by 'Ayyāshī and Ibn al-Ḥajjām.⁵¹ Apparently the earliest source for his life is *Lu'lu'at al-Baḥrayn* by the Akhbārī scholar Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī (d.1772).⁵² Sayyid Hāshim was born in the village of Tawbālī, in one of the districts of Baḥrayn. His father's name was Sayyid 'Abd al-Jawād al-Kattakānī. His birth date is unknown. He died in the small town of al-Nu'aym, whence his remains were returned to Tawbālī for interment in a tomb which subsequently became a well-known place of visitation. Our source says that Baḥrānī gathered *ḥadīths* to a degree matched only by Majlisī and that he wrote a number of books demonstrating his strength in this. He also says that one writer mentions having met Baḥrānī's son in Iṣfahān and at that time was shown seventy-five works by our author.⁵³ The title of the work at hand is *Kitāb al-burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, and it is in four volumes.⁵⁴

For each verse or group of verses, the author lists a series of pertinent *akhbār* from the Prophet or the Imams. As mentioned, the introductory material appears to be modelled after *Ṣāfi*, but this is doubtless not the case.⁵⁵ A more likely model would be Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī.⁵⁶ Inasmuch as Muḥsin Fayḍ was one of Majlisī's teachers, the influence may be indirect. But this is only speculation, as Majlisī is not named by our author either. A brief prologue to the following sixteen chapters begins with a number of reports against *tafsīr bi'l-ra'y*, and other reports which assert that only the Prophet and the Imams were

able to interpret the Qur'an. 'God taught the Prophet the literal text (*tanzīl*) and He taught 'Alī its interpretation (*ta'wīl*)'.⁵⁷

The author of this work laments that notwithstanding such a statement, he finds the people of his time persistent in interpreting the Qur'an according to their selfish needs to uphold their various sects and doctrines, without referring to the Imams, and cites the works of al-Zamakhsharī (d.1144) and al-Bayḍawī as examples of current *tafsīr* authorities.⁵⁸ This statement might also be tacitly directed to such scholars as Mullā Ṣadrā (d.1640), who engaged in a style of exegesis quite different from that of Muḥsin Fayḍ, his student, and the other Akhbārī commentators. Mullā Ṣadrā's commentaries, by comparison with these other works which ceaselessly refer to the *Ahl al-Bayt*, appear to ignore the Imams and the Prophet, even though his entire philosophy may be said to revolve around the institution of *Imāma*; rather, he is concerned with elaborating his *Ḥikmat-i ilāhī* philosophy. But his style is so strikingly different that it could generate doubts as to his 'orthodoxy' (from the Akhbārī point of view) because the all-important *akhbār* are not explicitly marshalled to the task of interpretation. Obviously, the mere fact that Mullā Ṣadrā composed a massive (if unfinished) commentary on the *Uṣūl al-kāfi* demonstrates his devotion to the material. This style of commentary could have rankled men like Baḥrānī, not necessarily because of any displeasure with this philosophy itself, but because what was perceived as the true meaning of the Qur'an, viz., the Imamate, as represented by the *akhbār*, had been subordinated to it.⁵⁹ Baḥrānī's prologue closes with an apology for quoting such authorities as Ibn 'Abbās ('a little') 'since he was after all, a student of the Commander of the Faithful'.

Whereas Muḥsin Fayḍ's introduction was divided according to the number of Imams revered by the Shī'a, Baḥrānī's work is introduced by sixteen chapters (sing. *bāb*) which provide a useful summary of the major themes of his *tafsīr*.⁶⁰ A list of these will further illustrate the concerns of this work.

Chapter 1: on the pursuit of knowledge (*'ilm*)⁶¹ [5-7]

'Alī said: 'I heard the Prophet say: "The search for knowledge is a religious duty for every Muslim, so seek it at those places where you may expect it to be found (*maẓānnihi*), and acquire it from its people"'. [5]

The Prophet said: 'If a believer dies and leaves behind one page upon which knowledge is written, this single page will be interposed between him and hell until the Day of Resurrection. Then God will give him for each letter on it a city seven times larger than the earth.' [6]

The Prophet answered one of the Anṣar as follows: He had been asked: 'O Messenger of God, what is the reality of knowledge?' He replied: 'Hearkening to it'. 'Then what?' asked the man. He replied: 'Heeding it'. 'Then what?' The Prophet answered: 'Memorizing it'. 'And then what, O Prophet?' He said: 'Acting upon it'. 'And then?' The Prophet answered: 'Promulgating it'. [7]

Chapter 2: on the Excellence (*faḍl*) of the Qur'ān. [7–9]

The Prophet: 'God will never punish the heart that contains the Qur'ān'.

The Prophet: 'The best of you are those who study and teach the Qur'ān'.

Al-Bāqir said about the Qur'ān: 'It is neither creator nor created, rather it is the speech of the creator'. [8]

'Alī said: 'In the Qur'ān is information about what came before you, and tidings about what will come after you, and judgement on what concerns you now'. [9]

Chapter 3: concerning the 'two weights'. This refers to the *Ḥadīth al-thaqalayn*, related from the Prophet. [9–14]. A version of this *ḥadīth* has been given above. This chapter lists no less than thirty-two variants of this report. The importance in this context is that it establishes the Imams as the sole interpreters of the Qur'ān. This tradition, and its variants, provides support for the basic Shī'ī notion of the 'Speaking Qur'ān' (i.e., the Prophet and the Imams) and the 'Silent Qur'ān' (i.e., the Qur'ān itself).

Chapter 4: on the *ḥadīth al-thaqalayn* from the opposing point of view. [14–15] This view is summarized by Bahrānī as 'whatever the believer needs is in the Qur'ān,' the implication being that there is no need to consult the *akhbār*, and he lists eighteen *akhbār* to this effect from the Imams.⁶² From the heading, however, it is obvious that our author does not agree with this doctrine.

Chapter 5: that no one but the Imams collected (*jama'a*) the Qur'ān as it was revealed and that the *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān is with the Imams. [15–17]

Al-Bāqir said: 'None but the *awṣiyā'* (the Imams) can claim to have collected all of the Qur'ān, its *ẓahr* and *batn*'. [15]

Al-Ṣādiq: 'By God, I know the Qur'ān from first to last as if it were in the palm of my hand. In it is information about heaven and earth, what was and what will be, as God himself has said about it: "It is an explanation of all things" (Qur'ān 12.89)'. [15]

Al-Ṣādiq was asked if some of the Imams were more knowledgeable than others. He replied: 'Yes, but with regard to commands, prohibitions and *tafsīr*, they are one'. [17]

Al-Ṣādiq: 'Alī was the master of commands and prohibitions and the knowledge of the Qur'ān. And we are the same'. [17]

The Prophet said: 'Among you is one who will fight for the *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān as I have fought for its *tanzīl*. That one is 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib'.⁶³ [17]

'Alī said: 'Whatever is between the two covers (*lawḥayn*), indeed I know it'. [17]

'Alī said: 'No verse came down but that I know about whom it was revealed, and where it was revealed, and upon what subject it was revealed. My Lord has given me a knowing heart and a speaking tongue'. [17]

Chapter 6: on the prohibition of *tafsīr bi'l-ra'y* and the prohibition of disputation (*jidāl*).⁶⁴ [17–19]

The Prophet said: 'God cursed those who dispute in matters of religion through the tongues of seventy prophets. He who argues about the verses of God has committed *kufṛ*, as stated in the verse: "None can dispute about the verses of God but the unbelievers. Let not their strutting about the land deceive you". (Qur'ān 30.4) He who explains the Qur'ān according to his own opinion has insulted God. And he who gives a *fatwā* without knowledge, the angels of heaven and earth curse. Any innovation (*bid'a*) is an error, and error is the path to hell'. The Prophet was asked: 'O Prophet direct me to salvation'. The Prophet replied: 'When opinions differ, you should consult 'Alī. He is the Imam of my community and the Caliph over them after me. He is the distinguisher between truth and falsehood. Whoever asks of him is answered. Whoever seeks guidance from him is guided. Whoever seeks the truth from him finds it . . . All who object to him are destroyed . . . Indeed 'Alī is of me. His spirit is my spirit. His clay is my clay. He is my brother and I am his brother. He married my daughter Fāṭima, the queen of the women of paradise. And from him issue the two Imams of my community, and my two sons, the two princes of the youths of paradise, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, and nine others of the progeny of Ḥusayn. The ninth one is the Qā'im of my community who will fill the earth with justice as it is now filled with iniquity and oppression'. [18]

Al-Bāqir said: 'Nothing is more remote from the minds of men than the explanation (*tafsīr*) of the Qur'ān. The first part of a verse may be about one thing, the middle about another and the end about yet another . . .'. [19]

Al-Bāqir said: 'None interprets one part of the Qur'ān with another part but that he commits *kufṛ*'. [19]

Chapter 7: that the Qur'ān has an external and an internal meaning, and a general and particular application, and clear verses (*muḥkam*) and ambiguous verses (*mutashābih*), and abrogating (*nāsikh*) and abrogated (*mansūkh*) verses, and that the Prophet and the people of his House know these and they are 'those who are firmly rooted in knowledge' (Qur'ān 3.7, *al-rāsikhūn fi'l-ilm*). [19–21]⁶⁵

Al-Şādiq said: 'We are the people obedience to whom God has made obligatory. To us belongs the booty and to us belongs the best property, and we are the *rāsikhūn fi'l-'ilm* and we are the objects of envy alluded to in the verse: "Or do they envy mankind for what God has given them of his bounty?" (Qur'ān 4.54)' [21]

Fuḍayl b. Yasār said to al-Şādiq: 'The people are saying that the Qur'ān came down in seven *aḥruf*. Al-Şādiq said: 'The enemies of God lie. The Qur'ān came down in one *ḥarf* from the One'. [21]

An appendix to this chapter entitled 'And from the *ṭarīq al-jumhūr*', offers a single *ḥadīth* from the *Kitāb ḥilyat al-awliyā* which goes back to 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd who said: 'The Qur'ān came down in seven *aḥruf*. There is not a single letter but it has an exterior and an interior meaning and with 'Alī is the knowledge of these'. [21]

Chapter 8: that the Qur'ān came down in [several] parts (*aqsām*) [21]⁶⁶

'Alī: 'It came down in three parts: one third concerning us and our enemies, one third concerning *sunna* and one third concerning obligations and laws'.

Al-Şādiq: 'The Qur'ān came down in fourths, one fourth about the permitted things, one fourth about the forbidden things, one fourth about the *sunna* and laws and one fourth concerned the stories of the past and prophecies about the future'.

Al-Bāqir: '[The Qur'ān came down] in fourths, one fourth about us and one fourth about our enemies and one fourth about *sunna* and examples and one fourth about obligations and laws. And to us pertain the most important parts'.⁶⁷

In addition to these *akhbār* (also quoted by Muḥsin Fayḍ), Baḥrānī adds another appendix entitled *Min ṭarīq al-jumhūr*. He quotes from Ibn al-Mughāzālī⁶⁸ a *ḥadīth* transmitted from Ibn 'Abbās according to whom the Prophet said, 'The Qur'ān is in fourths: one fourth concerns us specifically, the *ahl al-bayt*; one fourth on *ḥalāl*; one fourth on *ḥarām*; and one fourth on *farā'id* and *aḥkām*. By God, the most valuable parts of the Qur'ān are about us'. [21]

Chapter 9: this chapter deals with the principle that some verses in the Qur'ān were revealed in the mode of *īyyāki a'nī wa'sma ī yā jāra*. [22]

Whereas Muḥsin Fayḍ sought to explain this topic in his own words, Baḥrānī merely cites three *ḥadīths* which mention it, e.g.:

Al-Şādiq said: 'Indeed the Qur'ān came down in the mode of *īyyāki a'nī wa'sma ī yā jāra* . . .

The example given is the same as in *Şāfi*: 'and had we not confirmed

thee, surely thou wert near to inclining unto them a very little' (Qur'ān 17.74)⁶⁹ [22]

Chapter 10: what pertains to the Imams in the Qur'ān [22–23]⁷⁰

In addition to *ḥadīths* quoted by Muḥsin Fayḍ in his sixth chapter (see above) 'On the collection of the Qur'ān and its corruption', Baḥrānī quotes the following:

From Dāwūd b. Farqad: 'I said to al-Şādiq, "Are you the *ṣalāt* in the Book and are you the *zakāt* and are you the *ḥajj*?" He said: "We are these as well as the fast and the sacred month and the sanctuary (*balad al-ḥaram*) and the Ka'ba and the *qibla* and the face of God (*wajh Allāh*) and the verses (*āyāt*) and the clear verses (*bayyināt*). And our enemies are designated in the Qur'ān as indecency (*al-faḥshā'* and *al-munkar*), insolence (*al-baghy*) and wine (*al-khamr*) and gambling (*al-maysir*) [etc.] . . ." [22]

Al-Şādiq said: 'We are the source of every righteousness and our enemies the source of all evil . . .'.⁷¹

Chapter 11: entitled simply 'Another chapter'. [23–26]

The purpose here is to nuance the ideas introduced in the previous chapter. Baḥrānī quotes a long *ḥadīth* to the effect that it is not correct to imagine that such words and topics in the Qur'ān as wine, prayer, and so on refer to people (the Imams and their opponents) if such a belief causes one to neglect the actual carrying out of the obligations of religion. This danger must be avoided at all costs. In addition, the following is offered:

Al-Şādiq wrote to Abū 'l-Khaṭṭāb (founder of the extremist group bearing his name, executed 135/755): 'It has reached me that you allege that wine is a man, that fornication is a man, that *ṣalāt* is a man, that fasting is a man, but it is not like that. We are the root of good and its branches are obedience to God. Those who show enmity towards us are the root of evil and its branches are rebellion against God'. Then he wrote: 'How can one obey what (*man*) he does not know and how can one know what he does not obey?!'

This chapter closes with a statement from the Prophet which says that he who observes the laws without knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of the Prophet, this observance is void. [26]

Chapter 12: on the meaning of *al-thaqalayn* and *al-khalīfatayn* according to the *ṭarīq al-mukhālīfin*. [26–28].

This chapter lists sixteen reports from such works as the *Musnad* of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, the *Saḥīḥ* of Muslim, and the *Tafsīr* of al-Tha'labī, which support

the above-mentioned idea of the 'two weights' bequeathed by the Prophet for the guidance of his community.

Chapter 13: on the reason that the Qur'ān was revealed in Arabic and that its miraculosity is in its arrangement (*nazm*) and that its meaning is newly applicable through the course of time. It contains, among others, the following *ḥadīth*:

Al-Ṣādiq said: 'God did not make the Qur'ān for one time to the exclusion of others, or for one people to the exclusion of others. Thus it is new for each time, and fresh for each succeeding generation until the Day of Resurrection'. [28]

Chapter 14: any *ḥadīth* which does not agree with the Qur'ān is rejected (*mardūd*). [28–29]

Chapter 15: on the first and the last *sūras* sent down. [29]

Chapter 16: the books from which material for this book was taken. [30–31] After listing a bibliography of over fifty works, he reproduces, *verbatim*, most of the introduction to al-Qummī's *Tafsīr*. [31–41]⁷²

The problems treated here include those of abrogation (*naskh wa-mansūkh*, including the question of *taqdīm* and *ta'khīr*), clear and ambiguous verses (*muḥkam wa-mutashābih*), verses which fall into the category of generalities with specific applications (*lafẓ 'āmm wa-ma'nā khāṣṣ*), and specific statements which have a general application (*lafẓ khāṣṣ wa-ma'nā 'āmm*). Verses are cited which show that they were interrupted in the course of their revelation and continued later (*al-munqaṭa'a wa'l-ma'fūf*), and which employ one word when another is intended (*ḥarf makān ḥarf*) such as Qur'ān 2.150, where *illā alladhīna zalamū minhum* should be read as *wa-lā alladhīna* . . . [32–33]

The problem of contradiction in the Qur'ān (*mā huwa 'alā khilāf mā anzala 'llāh*) is also treated. Here, an example is made of Qur'ān 3.10 'You are the best nation ever brought forth to men, bidding to honour, and forbidding dishonour, and believing in God'. Al-Ṣādiq is reported to have said to the reciter of this verse: 'How is it that the best community killed 'Alī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn?' The anonymous reciter then asked, 'How was it really sent down then, O son of the Messenger?' Al-Ṣādiq said: 'Like this: "You are the best Imams (*a'imma* replaces *umma*) ever brought forth to men . . ." . . .'⁷³ Qummī, quoted by Baḥrānī, then lists several other similar cases. [34]

Another sub-section deals specifically with corruption (*muḥarraf*) of the text, perhaps implying that the above category describes verses which were accidentally misread. The example given here is Qur'ān 4.166: 'But God bears witness to that which He has sent down to thee; He has sent it down with his knowledge; and the angels also bear witness; and God suffices for a witness'. This verse was

originally revealed as: 'God testifyeth to that which He has sent down about 'Alī'. Then came 'He revealed to him His knowledge and the angels testify to this'. [34]

Qummī then treats the subject of quranic words which appear to be in the plural, but whose meaning is singular (*lafẓ jam'/'ma'nā wāhid*), and vice versa (*lafẓ wāhid/'ma'nā jam'*). In addition, the problem of verbs in the past tense which actually refer to the future (*lafẓ māḍī wa-huwa mustaqbal*) is discussed, citing Qur'ān 39.68 as an example, in which *wa-nufikha fi'l-ṣūr* is to be read as 'For the trumpet shall be blown'. [34]

Qummī says also that the verses in one *sūra* may be completed in another *sūra*; or, that in the case of abrogation, one half of a verse may be affected while another is not. In other cases, it is possible to derive the interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of a verse from the text of the Qur'ān itself (*tanzīl*), or by reference to this text. Elsewhere, the Qur'ān has verses which indicate that its interpretation was already apparent in the common usage of the Arabs before the revelation codified this usage, while some verses show that the meaning of a particular verse came as something new after the revelation. [34–35]

Various other principles of exegesis are thus described by the author of this commentary, and the introduction is concluded by a series of refutations (*radd*) of various groups which include the *Zanādiqa*, by which astrologers are intended; the idol-worshippers; the *Dahriyya*, 'materialists'; those who deny divine reward and punishment; those who deny the ascension and night journey and the beatific vision of the Prophet; those who deny the existence of heaven and hell; those who deny the efficacy of man's will (*al-mujbira*); the Mu'tazila; those who deny the Return (*al-raj'a*); and those who describe God. [36–40]

Anwār

Al-Mawlā al-Sharīf al-'Adl Abū 'l-Ḥasan b. al-Shaykh Muḥammad Ṭāhir b. al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Mūsā b. 'Alī b. Ma'tūq b. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Fatūnī al-Nabāfī al-'Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī al-Ghawarī was the author of the fourth and final work to be treated here. He is known as Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Sharīf al-'Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī, and his work is entitled *Mir'āt al-anwār wa-mishkāt al-asrār fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān*.⁷⁴ He was the son of the sister of al-Amīr Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Khātūnābādī, one of the more prominent scholars of the late Ṣafavid period, and who himself was a student and son-in-law of Majlisī. This exegete was also a student of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, from whom he had two *ijāzas*,⁷⁵ and al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī.⁷⁶ In addition, Iṣfahānī had *ijāzāt* from several other notable 'ulamā' of his time,⁷⁷ and was the teacher of students who would later influence the minds of such seminal figures as Sayyid Mahdī Baḥr al-'Ulūm (d. 1797).

He lived for many years in Najaf, where he died.⁷⁸ According to the author of *Lu'lu'at*, he was a subtle scholar, trustworthy and just (*muḥaqqiq, mudaqqiq, thiqa, ṣāliḥ, 'adl*). Apparently, Iṣfahānī and his father (who had come to visit his son in Najaf sometime after 1688) were known as something of a scholarly

team, hosting meetings of the friends (*rufaqa'*).⁷⁹ In short, his reputation as a scholar is firmly established.⁸⁰

Apart from the book at hand, he wrote a *Kitāb al-fu'ād al-gharawiyya* 'nothing of which remains except a portion on *uṣūl al-fiqh*' (it is described as treating the laws which derive from the *akhbār*),⁸¹ and a *Kitāb diyā' al-'ālimīn fī 'l-imām*.⁸² He also wrote on *furū' wa-uṣūl*,⁸³ and a *risāla* on foster relationship in which there are some statements on the revelation (*al-tanzīl*). He begins it by quoting al-Muḥaqqiq al-Dāmād.⁸⁴ In addition to a *sharḥ* on *Al-Kifāya*, he wrote also a *Kitāb sharī'at al-shī'a wa-dalā'il al-sharī'a* which is a commentary on Muḥsin Fayḍ's *Al-Mafātīḥ al-sharā'i*.⁸⁵ Such titles suggest a stronger interest in *fiqh* than one might expect from an Akhbārī. Iṣfahānī is in fact compared with one Sayyid Muḥammad ibn 'Alī Ibn Ḥaydar al-Mūsawī al-'Āmilī al-Makkī known as Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥaydar (d.1726),⁸⁶ who wrote a *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān dealing with *uṣūl* and *furū'*,⁸⁷ and was the student of our author from whom he received an *ijāza*, or teacher's licence.

According to *Dharī'a*, one manuscript of the work comments on verses up to the middle of the *Sūrat al-baqara* while another takes the commentary up to 4.4.⁸⁸ The first volume, of over 20,000 lines, was published in Iran in 1303/1885, but was, 'due to the lack of information on the part of the publisher', attributed to one Shaykh 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Kāzarūnī, about whom nothing else is said. According to Tihirānī 'In what concerns the quranic sciences nothing like it has been written'.⁸⁹

This work is often referred to by Corbin in his magisterial study of Shī'ī Qur'ān interpretation.⁹⁰ Corbin, either contrary to *Dharī'a* or perhaps speaking of another edition, says that the work was lithographed in 1878 in Tehran, but agrees with *Dharī'a* that its authorship was wrongly ascribed. Thanks to the 'vigilance bibliographique' of Nūrī Ṭabarsī, the work was re-edited and printed in Tehran in 1955, under the correct name of Iṣfahānī. This edition, according to Corbin, continued the tradition of treating the work as an introduction to *Burhān*, but Iṣfahānī was apparently unaware of the *tafsīr* by Baḥrānī.⁹¹

At some point, this later edition was published in an independent volume; its title page says that the work is 'like the introduction to the *Tafsīr* of al-Baḥrānī'. In it, the editor promises to publish a second volume which would contain the balance of Iṣfahānī's work, but this second volume has not yet appeared. It is this edition, containing only a lengthy introduction to the *tafsīr* proper that is treated below.

The work is divided in three prologues (*muqaddimāt*), two of which will be described in detail. The corresponding *maqālāt* into which they are divided are designated by Arabic numerals. Finally, the *fuṣūl* into which these *maqālāt* are further sub-divided, are designated by lower case Roman numerals.

Prologue I

All of the esoteric content of the Qur'ān concerns the notion of *walāya* and the Imamate, just as its exoteric content concerns *tawḥīd* and *nubuwwa*. This pro-

logue contains three *maqālāt*, the first *maqāla* has five *fuṣūl*, the second also has five, and the third has none. [4–36]

Maqāla 1: that which is proven by the *akhbār* adduced in this prologue:

- i The Qur'ān has esoteric dimensions, the verses are susceptible of *ta'wīl*, and that meaning of the Qur'ān is not restricted to only one era, but continues at all times for all people. [4]
- ii Several reports to the effect that the inner meaning of the Qur'ān is related to the Imams, their *walāya*, and their followers. [4–6]
- iii On the task of harmonizing (*tanāsuh*) the exoteric with the esoteric, and the similarity (*tashābuh*) between the esotericists (*ahl al-ta'wīl*) and the exotericists (*ahl al-tanzīl*). [6–8]
- iv The imperative (*wujūb*) of belief in both the exoteric and esoteric content of the Qur'ān. This is similar to the necessity of belief in both the clear (*muḥkam*) and ambiguous (*mutashābih*) verses. [8–12]
- v That the knowledge of the *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān, or rather the complete knowledge of it, is with the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Also included here is the citation of *akhbār* forbidding *tafsīr al-Qur'ān* through personal opinion (*al-ra'y*), or without heeding the Imams. [12–15]

Maqāla 2: the second essay deals with the doctrine that the general meaning of the word of God pertains to *tawḥīd* and *nubuwwa* on the surface (*ṣarīḥan wa-tanzīlan*), and to *walāya* and *imāma* in its inner meaning (*baḥṭhan wa-kināyatun wa-ta'wīlan*) according to the *akhbār*. [19]

- i Some of what our '*ulamā'* have written about the greatness of the Imams and their *walāya*, and the disbelief (*kufr*) of their rejectors. [19–21]
- ii A few of the *akhbār* concerning the imperative of the *walāya* of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, and of their love (*maḥabba*), and obedience to them. This is the anchor of *īmān* and the condition for God's acceptance of all deeds and for one's leaving (truly) the domain of *kufr* and *shirk*. Also included is a condemnation of the rejection (*inkār*) of *walāya* and doubt about the Imams. [21–23]
- iii Confessing the *imāma* of the Imams and their love and *walāya* comes after the confession of the *nubuwwa* of the Prophet in the course of correct religion and faith, just as the confession of *nubuwwa* comes after the confession of *tawḥīd*. [23–25]
- iv *Walāya*, together with *tawḥīd*, was presented to all creation, and the covenant implying it was imposed upon all creation, and all the prophets were sent with it for all creation, and that *walāya* was sent down in all the holy books and imposed upon all nations. [25–28]
- v That the Prophet and the Imams were the first to be created and that *the walāya* is the cause in the process of creation (*al-'illa fi 'l-ijād*) and the principle in obedience. [28–33]

Maqāla 3: the third *maqāla* [which contains no subsections] says that the esoteric content of the Qur'ān pertains to *walāya* and the Imamate, according to the *akhbār* which indicate that this community follows the practices (*sunan*) of previous religious communities in all their deeds. [33–36]

The object of this lengthy segment is to establish the recurring nature of the breaking of the covenant. Just as the Calf was worshipped in the time of Moses, so have the Muslims erred in misplacing their allegiances. A number of *ḥadīth* are marshalled to explain two verses of the Qur'ān: 'That ye shall journey on from stage to stage' (Qur'ān 84.19) and 'That was the way of God in the case of those who have passed away of old – thou wilt find for the way of God aught of power of change' (33.62, cf. 35.43, 48.23)

'Alī said: 'This means that you will travel the road of the previous communities in perfidy (*ghadr*) towards the *awṣiyā'* after the *anbiyā'*. Al-Bāqir said: 'This community travelled after its Prophet stage by stage in the cause of *fulān* and *fulān* and *fulān*'.⁹²

Al-Ṣādiq, in answer to a letter from al-Mufaḍḍal on some problems raised by the *malāhida* and the *ghulāt*, wrote: 'As for what you mention towards the end of your letter, that they claim that God, the Lord of the worlds, is the Prophet, and your comparison with this belief and the belief of those who say about Jesus what they say, indeed, the ways (*sunan*) of the past are here and now repeated, just like sheep following sheep.⁹³ So know that this community will err like the community before them, etc'. [34]

A number of reports from *kutub al-ʿamma* (Sunnī books: the *Saḥīh*, *Musnad*, and so on), are then presented to support this idea.

Prologue II

This prologue has no *maqālāt* and seeks to establish that there are some alterations (*taghyīr*) in the Qur'ān, 'and this explains why guidance is placed in the divine command (*amr*) of *walāya* and *imāma*, and is also an allusion to the virtues of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, and the obligation of obedience to the Imams according to the esoteric content of the Qur'ān and its *ta'wīl*. In the absence of explicit statements in the Qur'ān on this matter, one arrives at this conclusion through metaphor and symbols and allusions in its literal text (*tanzīl*). It comprises four *fuṣūl*: [36–51]

- i Concerning the collection of the Qur'ān, its incompleteness and alteration from reports which our friends (i.e. the Shī'a) related. [36–39]
- ii Concerning the collection of the Qur'ān, its incompleteness and alteration, and the disagreement about this in the reports of the Sunnīs (*mukhālīfin*). [39–43]
- iii The report of the *zindīq* who brought 'Alī proof of the alteration of the Qur'ān and the misdeeds of the hypocrites regarding the word of God. This

report is long, containing many things which were deleted from the Qur'ān. [43–48]

- iv A resumé of the statements of our 'ulamā' concerning the absence of alteration of the Qur'ān and its non-existence and the falseness of the argument of those who deny alteration. [49–51]

Prologue III

Prologue III [52–348] is composed of two *maqālāt*, the first divided into seven *fuṣūl*:

Maqāla 1: certain verses in the Qur'ān are explained by *akhbār* which offer a *ta'wīl* through metonymy and allusion. These require *al-majāzāt al-'aqliyya*, others are self-evident through *al-majāz al-lughawī*:

- i What God means to be interpreted as *bāṭin*. [52]
Al-Ṣādiq: 'Whatever is good in the Qur'ān pertains to us or our Shī'a'.
- ii What is to be interpreted through reference to the past. [53]
Al-Ṣādiq said: 'The 'people of Moses' in the Qur'ān means the people of Islam'.
- iii That God intends in some speeches in the Qur'ān, according to the principle of *ta'wīl* and *baṭn*, an addressee other than that which the *zāhir* would suggest. [53–54]
Al-Ṣādiq said: 'The Qur'ān came down in [the mode of] *iyāki a'nī...*'

Here Iṣfahānī repeats the words of Muḥsin Fayḍ (unascribed): 'It is like a man who addresses a statement to one person and means another addressee'. Then the example of Qur'ān 17.74 given by both Muḥsin Fayḍ and Baḥrānī, adding that the *khabar* of the Zindīq supports this. He adds:

Perhaps the meaning is in what 'Alī al-Riḍā (the eighth Imam, d.203/818) wrote to 'the Byzantine' that al-Ṣādiq said. Sometimes something is said about someone which is not applicable to him, but turns out to be applicable to that one's son. Following this reasoning, if we see the *Umma* in the station of the son of the Prophet and the Imam and there is something good or bad about it, then we turn to what has been related to the Prophet or the Imam. By contrast, what is ascribed to God about Himself by *majāz* is related to his near servants, and an expression of God's about rejection of *walāya* may be taken as referring to rejection of the prophethood of the Prophet. Therefore, because 'Alī, by relation to the Prophet, may be considered his son, it pertains to him as well. [53]

The Prophet said about the verse: 'Do you two cast into hell every rebel ingrate' (Qur'ān 50.24) 'I and 'Alī cast into hell each of our enemies'.

Al-Šādiq said about the verse: 'Say: we believe in God and that which was revealed to us' [Qur'ān 2.136] 'The speakers are the people of Muḥammad'. And about 'And if they believe in the like of that which ye believe, then they are rightly guided' [Qur'ān 2.137] 'these are the rest of humanity'.

In *al-Kāfi* from al-Bāqir (about the above two verses): 'He means by "Say: we believe", 'Alī and Ḥasayn and Fāṭima and the rest of the Imams. And "if they believe" means humanity [in general] "in the like of that which ye believe", that is 'Alī and Fāṭima and Ḥasayn and Ḥusayn and the Imams after them. And "then they are rightly guided. But if they turn away then they are in schism". (Qur'ān 2.137)

And "there hath come unto you a Messenger, (one) of yourselves" (Qur'ān 9.128) the addressee here is the Imams in general. Likewise, "Yet ye will not unless God willeth" (Qur'ān 76.30) the addressee is the Imams. There are many such examples in the Qur'ān. "Give thanks unto me and unto thy parents. Unto me is the journeying" (Qur'ān 31.14). The two parents are the parents of knowledge and the bequeathers of laws, and mankind is commanded to obey them. "The journeying" is the journeying of the servants to God. He then quotes his teacher Majlisī, "author of the *Bihār*" to the effect that the two parents are the Prophet and 'Alī.

Ṣfahānī invites us to think strenuously about the difference between this doctrine and the previous one. [54]

- iv That many pronouns refer, according to *ta'wīl*, to something which is not explicitly mentioned such as *walāya*, 'Alī and the like. [54–55]
- v Whatever God has knowledge of, past or future, He informs us about, even if it is by means of past events which we must interpret. [55]
- vi That many things which God says of Himself in the Qur'ān actually refer to the Prophet and the Imams. (E.g. Qur'ān 43.25 and 88.26) [55–57].

Al-Šādiq said: 'God does not become angry as we do, but he created the *awṣiyā*' for himself to become angry (in his stead). They are his creation and vassals (*marbūbūn*). He also made their good pleasure represent His good pleasure'.

- vii That many statements in the Qur'ān which employ the words *ilāh* and *al-rabb* refer to the Imams. [57–59]

This long section mentions several *ḥadīth* to support this doctrine. One example: al-Šādiq said about the verse: 'Choose not two gods, there is only one God' (Qur'ān 16.51), that it means 'take not two Imams, there is only one Imam'.

A long appendix (*tadhīl*) to the first *maqāla* of this prologue is concerned with the repudiation (*daf*) of *ghulūw* and *tafwīḍ* (immoderate attitudes toward the Imamate). [59–69] The gist of this section is perhaps best summed up by the support it draws from the famous *ḥadīth* that underscores the difficulty of true belief, since it is obvious that there is a fine line between *ghulūw* and the beliefs so far enumerated. This *ḥadīth* is as follows:

The Prophet said: 'Indeed the knowledge (*'ilm*; *ḥadīth* in other variants) of the People of Muḥammad is overwhelming and exceedingly abstruse (*ša'ibun mustaṣ'abun*). None may be given to have true faith in it except the angels who have been brought near, or the sent prophets, or the faithful servant whose heart God has tested to be able to have faith. So whatever comes to you of knowledge of the People of Muḥammad, your hearts must become supple for it. . . . And whatever your hearts recoil at, then take it to God, the Prophet, and to the Sage of the People of Muḥammad'. [61]

This section also affirms that the Imams are indeed created by God and that nothing in the world resembles God. [68]

Maqāla 2: the second *maqāla* of the third prologue is what Corbin calls a *clavis hermeneutica*. [69–348] In many respects, this is the most impressive portion of the volume. It is actually a 'dictionary' of over 1300 quranic words that are explained by the *ḥadīths* of the Imams. It shows an almost incredible erudition and ability for systemization, complete with cross references to both other dictionary entries and the introductory material. It is an invaluable aid in the study of Shī'ism.

Khātima [348–362]: this contains two *faṣḥ*:

- i On the *ta'wīl* of the disconnected letters. [348–353]
- ii On some of the lessons (*fā'ida*) to be drawn [from all this]. This contains eight separate lessons that summarize the foregoing, the last of which is on the Return (*al-raj'a*), and quotes the famous *ḥadīth* of al-Mufaḍḍal on the events surrounding the return of the Mahdī. [358–362].

Conclusion

Enough has been offered of these commentaries to permit a few general observations. First, whatever else Akhbārī scholars might have been, the results of their exegesis of the Qur'ān cannot really be classified as 'literalist' in the usual sense of the word. That is to say, their so-called literalism must be seen to pertain to a veneration for the statements of the Imams on a given verse of the Qur'ān. Many of these statements are concerned precisely with the 'inner meaning' of the text, and for that are usually not what one would describe as straightforward interpretations of the literal text. Insofar as these interpretations by the Imams themselves are rigorously adhered to, the Akhbārī project may be seen to be 'fundamentalist'. However, at this stage in the exegetic process the act of interpretation has already gone beyond the *ipsissima verba* of the Qur'ān itself.

The concern with systematizing the material, evident in three of the four works is noteworthy in itself. The elaboration of such structures lends credibility

to the actual arguments presented by presenting them in a measured (rational) form. The 'harmony' of the structure is meant to mirror and uphold the truth of the claims it conveys. The edifice thus constructed is convincing, even if many of the arguments presented are judged non-rational. Most interestingly, it is clear that the length and complexity (and therefore the 'rhetorical value') of these introductions grew as the fortunes of the ruling power, the Ṣafavids, declined.

Further, these structures address what was obviously felt to be a need of the times, namely, to enhance both the authority of the Qur'ān text and the authority of the Imams. The exegetical project outlined above has attempted to fuse permanently these two elements so that, for example, the Qur'ān could no longer be read without summoning forth the presence (*walāya, maḥabba*) of the Imam. It has been argued that the act of reading/interpretation is in any case a process of making present 'what otherwise remains absent':

Effective symbols allow the hidden to shine forth or to emerge from concealment into 'the open'. . . . This presencing is the eventuation of truth or the occurrence of *alētheia*. *Alētheia* unites the interpreting subject and the symbolized object.⁹⁴

Obviously such an insight is especially compelling in the context of Twelver Shī'ī Qur'ān interpretation which in some sense may be thought to have as its *raison d'être* a compensation for the absence of its most important element – the Imam. As far as uniting the subject and the symbolized object is concerned, we have but to recall the words of Muḥsin Fayḍ – admittedly perhaps the most mystically inclined of our authors – when he speaks above of unmediated access. Insofar as reading may be considered 'participation in a text' then the reading of the Qur'ān for our authors becomes also a participation in the charisma of the Imams. Put another way, if it is true that a text is not only read by the reader, but also in some way 'reads' the reader, then we have with the Shī'ī Qur'ān and its encounter, a situation in which the believer is 'read' not only by the text, but also by the Imam. The bond thus established is an expression of what may be called, in this case, 'the intimacy of reading' and constitutes the prime religious fact of Shī'ism, a fact which is, in Corbin's words, *en acte*. Speaking of the commentaries of Baḥrānī and Iṣfahānī, he has written:⁹⁵

Par tous les textes mis ainsi en œuvre, le shī'isme se fait entendre essentiellement comme une religion d'amour spirituel, à tel point, les textes y insistent, qu'en l'absence de cette dévotion d'amour, il ne saurait être question de la validité d'aucune œuvre pieuse, ni même de satisfaire aux obligations de la *sharī'at*. Or, tout cela est dit sans qu'il soit même question de soufisme; c'est un élève de Majlisī qui parle, ou bien laisse la parole aux *ḥadīth* des Imams dont il a une connaissance extraordinairement approfondie. Cette constatation aura une grande importance pour le prolongement de ces recherches.⁹⁶

Because of the fusion of Imam and text, the Qur'ān then is also experienced as a charismatic text. Or more properly, its already considerable charisma is greatly enhanced. The act of reading then obviously involves, to some degree, an appropriation of this charisma by the reader. We see the 'logical' culmination of this process in the Qur'ān commentaries of the Bāb (d.1850), who depended heavily on the *akhbār* in his early *tafsīr*, but appears to have abandoned their explicit use in later similar works. In this later phase of commentary, it is virtually impossible to distinguish between commentary, text, reader, God, Prophet, and Imam. In short, the exegetical act became scripture.⁹⁷

The Akhbārī enterprise may be thought to have issued in another religious movement that apparently sought to bridge the gap between the literalists and the traditionalists. Although the early leaders of the Shaykhī school do not appear to have composed major commentaries on the Qur'ān, they did write commentaries on well-known prayers and sermons of the Imams.⁹⁸ Indeed, one of these, the *Commentary* by Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī (d.1825), a native of Baḥrayn, on the *Grand prayer of visitation* ascribed to the Fourth Imam, 'Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn, Zayn al-'Abidīn is interesting here for the appearance in it of many of the doctrines about and attitudes to the Qur'ān found in the works above. It is significant that the *Prayer* may have had during Shaykh Aḥmad's time something of the status of an alternative Qur'ān, being arranged in 114 verses.⁹⁹

This points to one of the most remarkable results of the Akhbārī project, namely the transformation of the Qur'ān text into 'another Qur'ān'. That is, the Qur'ān of the Akhbārīs becomes something of a New Testament for Islam. Such a phenomenon is surely not peculiar to the Akhbārī approach, but it does give a most instructive example of tendencies found not only in Qur'ān interpretation in general, but in any act of interpretation.

Another result of this type of interpretation may be seen in the writings of the second leader of the Shaykhīs, Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī (d.1843). This has to do with the basic notion of religious authority that may be thought the foundation of the Akhbārī method, namely, that the only final authority is the Imam, and that this can permit a certain hermeneutical freedom otherwise nonexistent. This is seen expressed in the following statement:

O my brother! Read the Qur'ān and never abandon it. It is more valuable for you than anything else. If you persevere you will see the truth (*sirr*) of what I have said. After you have understood all this, you will have understood a certain portion of the knowledge of the Qur'ān. But you will also have understood that it is not possible to read it as it is in itself, because this is impossible for us, the *muslimūn* and *mu'minūn*. This kind of reading is only possible for prophets and Imams . . . The relatively small understanding which you have should never be confused with *the* knowledge of the Qur'ān. This is why you must never oppose someone who affirms something and who seeks to prove his statement by reading the Qur'ān differently to the way you read it . . .

When you have understood that the true meaning, the spiritual Idea (*ḥaqīqa*) of the Qur'ān is a code (*ramz*) which only God Most High, the Prophet and the members of his House understand, and that it is the members of this House who teach this code to whoever resides in their House . . . then it will be clear that our understanding of this code varies according to the diversity of our faculties of understanding.¹⁰⁰

Finally, it may be said with some justification that due to the vicissitudes experienced by the Muslim world community today – the challenges posed to it both from within and without, the uncertainty of the political situation, the problem of various Islamic nations within a community that longs for unity – that in some sense there exists a spiritual diaspora. The Muslim Holy Land is obviously geographically defined in the narrow sense as the Ḥaramayn and al-Quds. But speaking broadly, Islam suggests that wherever the community exists, there too exists the Holy Land. It is precisely because of the stresses and dislocations brought about by 'various Muslim communities' instead of the ideal one, that such a Holy Land does exist but elsewhere than in the geo-political realm. The tradition, and pre-eminently the Qur'ān itself, function as the major features of this holy landscape, this *imaginaire*.¹⁰¹ With this examination of Shī'ī *tafsīr*, we are permitted an insight into the statement that the Imam himself is the *balad al-ḥaram*. This hermeneutical landscape, with all its distinctiveness, provides for the reader not only a home but a true paradise.

Notes

- 1 Notable exceptions are Mahmoud Ayoub, 'The speaking Qur'ān and the silent Qur'ān', *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qur'ān*, ed. A. Rippin, Oxford 1988, pp. 177–198; Henry Corbin, particularly in his long discussion of Shī'ī *tafsīr*, *En Islam iranien*, Paris 1978, I, pp. 135–218; 3, pp. 214–32. In addition, Goldziher described many aspects of the type of *tafsīr* under discussion here in *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegungen*, Leiden 1952, pp. 263–309.
- 2 These four books are: *al-Kāfi fi 'ilm al-dīn* by Kulaynī (d. 939 or 940); *Man lā yahduruḥu al-faḥīh*, by Ibn Bābawayh (d. 991); *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār* both by Ṭūsī (d. 1067).
- 3 A fuller tabulation of the differences between the *Uṣūlīs* and the *Akhbārīs* is in Moojan Momen, *An introduction to Shī'ī Islam*, Oxford 1985, pp. 223–225.
- 4 Etan Kohlberg, 'Some Aspects of Akhbārī Thought', *Eighteenth-century renewal and reform in Islam*, Syracuse N. Y. 1987, pp. 133–160.
- 5 Andrew Joseph Newman, III, *The development and political significance of the rationalist (usūlī) and the traditionalist (akhbārī) schools in Imāmī Shī'ī history from the third/ninth to the tenth/sixteenth century A. D.* 2 pts. in 2 vols Ann Arbor 1988 [Ph. D. UCLA 1986]. See also Madelung, 'Akhbārīyya', *EI2*, suppl. pp. 56–57.
- 6 He himself is credited with a *tafsīr* (apparently unedited). Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-Shī'a*, (25 vols) Tehran and Najaf 1936–1978 (*Dharī'a*), XVIII, p. 365.
- 7 See for example Juan Cole, 'Shī'ī clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722–1780: The Akhbārī-Uṣūlī conflict reconsidered', *Iranian Studies*, XVIII (1985) pp. 3–34. The author argues convincingly that the Akhbārīs were never strong in major Iranian centres,

that the conflict began after the migration of large numbers of Uṣūlī scholars from Iran to the Shī'ī shrine cities in Iraq as a result of the Zand invasion.

- 8 Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm b. Furāt al-Kūfī (d. c. 912), *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī*, Najaf 1353/1934, p. 84.
- 9 Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Talkhīṣ al-bayān fi majāzāt al-qur'ān*, Cairo 1374/1955, p. 193.
- 10 Wilferd Madelung, 'Imamism and Mu'tazilite theology', in J. Aubin, (ed.) *Le Shi'isme Imamite: colloque de Strasbourg, 1968*, Paris 1970, p. 21.
- 11 But a more instructive type is that of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's *al-Durr al-manthūr* written in the seventeenth century. My thanks to Norman Calder for pointing this out.
- 12 Kohlberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 147–8.
- 13 Kohlberg, *op. cit.*, p. 148.
- 14 *Anwār*, p. 324.
- 15 *Tibyān*, I, pp. 321–325.
- 16 Apart from the commentaries of these authors, we know of another *tafsīr* project which has not yet been published but which is perhaps an even better example of the type under discussion here. Corbin draws attention to the work by Shaykh Ḥusayn Yazdī, still in manuscript in Kirmān, which comprises eight volumes in-folio but which covers no more than the *Sūrat al-baqara*. Corbin's interest in such works was restricted to the purely spiritual or 'irfānī motifs which they contain. He seems to have been thoroughly uninterested in the question of the 'alteration of the Qur'ān', or other highly polemical aspects. Corbin, *Annuaire de l'École pratique des Hautes Études: section des sciences religieuses*, Paris 1965–6, pp. 107–8.
- 17 'Abd 'Alī al-Ḥuwayzī, *Kitāb tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn*. 5 vols edited by Ḥāshim al-Rasūlī al-Mahallāī, introduction by Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī. Financed by al-Ḥājī Abū al-Qāsim, known as al-Sālik, second edition, Qum, Maṭba'at al-Ḥikma, 1383–5 [1963–5].
- 18 Ayoub's translation, 'Speaking', p. 180.
- 19 al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Amal al-'Āmil*, (2 vols.) ed. Aḥmad al-Ḥusaynī, Najaf, 1964, 2, p. 154; *Dharī'a*, XXIV, p. 345. He is called a staunch Akhbārī in Madelung, 'Akhbārīyya', *EI2*, (Suppl. Fasc. 1–2), p. 57.
- 20 *Amal al-'Āmil*, II, p. 154; 'Abd Allāh b. 'Isā (d. c. 1718), *Riyād al-'ulamā' wa-ḥiyād al-fudalā'*, (6 vols) Qum 1401[1981], III, pp. 149–150.
- 21 Momen, *op. cit.*, pp. 99–100.
- 22 *Riyād al-'ulamā'*, III, pp. 149–150.
- 23 *Ibid. Nūr*, I, p. iv and *Nūr*, 5, p. ii.
- 24 *Nūr*, I, p. iii.
- 25 *Dharī'a*, XXIV, p. 345, no. 1967.
- 26 *Ibid.* The *Tafsīr kanz al-ḥaqā'iq wa-baḥr al-gharā'ib* by Mīrẓā Muḥammad b. Riqā b. Ismā'īl b. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qummī al-Mashhadī, a student of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī. Some manuscripts bear the title *Kanz al-daqa'iq. Dharī'a*, XVIII, pp. 151–152.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 Viz. *Anwār al-tanzil wa-asrār al-ta'wil*.
- 29 *Nūr*, I, pp. 2–3.
- 30 *Nūr*, I, p. 3.
- 31 The 'three books' are *al-Wāfi*, *Waṣā'il al-shī'a* by al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī (d. 1104/1692); and *Bihār al-anwār* by Majlisī (d. 1111/1699).
- 32 He is explicitly characterized by no less an Akhbārī source than Yūsuf al-Bahrānī (d. 1772), *Lu'lu'at al-Baḥrayn*, Beirut 1986, p. 121. See Corbin, *En Islam Iranien*, IV p. 250. See the reference to 'the stagnant and narrow-minded attitude of the Akhbārīs' by Murtada Mutahhari in *Shi'ism: doctrines, thought, spirituality*, eds Nasr, Dabashi, Nasr, Albany N. Y. 1988, p. 32.

- 33 E. g., *Kalimāt-i maktūneh*; etc. See also the condemnation of him in *Lu'lu'at*, p. 121 for holding to the belief in *waḥdat al-wujūd*, which he picked up 'from Ibn al-'Arabī, the *zindīq*' and about which Muḥsin Fayḍ wrote a 'clearly loathsome' treatise against which Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī apparently wrote a refutation. The sources vary on his output, putting the total figure between 80 and 200 works. See now the translation of one of his political theory treatises: 'Two Seventeenth-Century Persian Tracts on Kingship and Rulers', translated by William C. Chittick in Said Amir Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and political culture in Shi'ism*, Albany N. Y. 1988, pp.269–284. As Kohlberg has pointed out, this figure needs to be studied more. Apart from the brief article in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, see also Jane I. Smith, *An historical and semantic study of the term 'Islam' as seen in a series of Quran commentaries*, Missoula 1975, pp. 146–159. Smith says that *tafsīr* is less sectarian than other forms of religious writing (p. 142).
- 34 According to the 1898 Tehran edition, cited by Goldziher, *Richtungen*, p. 278.
- 35 *Al-Ṣāfi fī tafsīr kalam Allāh al-wāfi*, 5 vols edited by Ḥusayn al-A'lamī, Beirut [1399/1979]. In addition to this, there is also a lithograph dated 1283 [1866]. This edition is in folio and runs to 495 pages of 37 lines to the page. It contains no indexes or divisions in the text (apart from those which occur at the beginning of a new *sūra*) and is therefore somewhat difficult to use.
- 36 N. B. here the possible semantic equivalence between *ḥifẓ* and *jam'*. On this see Wansbrough, *Qurānic studies: sources and methods of scriptural interpretation*, Oxford 1977, p.46.
- 37 Quoted by Ayoub, p. 188.
- 38 *Zahr, baṭn, ḥadd, maṭla'*. Three variants of this follow, one from the Prophet, one from 'Alī and one from al-Ṣādiq. The report from 'Alī is virtually identical to the statement of Sahl Tustarī (d.896), quoted in Wansbrough, *Qurānic studies*, p. 242. Cf. Tustarī's *Tafsīr*, pp. 2–3 where this statement is introduced with 'Sahl said: ...'. The variant from al-Ṣādiq changes the elements completely: '*ibāra, ishāra, laqā'if, and ḥaqā'iq*. Each of the four is appropriate to a group of people: '*awwām, khawāṣṣ, awliyā'*, and *anbiyā'*'".
- 39 Quoted in Ayoub, 'Speaking', p. 183.
- 40 Both *ḥāl* and *waqt* are technical terms from classical Sūfism.
- 41 *Ṣāfi*, I, pp. 15–79.
- 42 Cf. below the possibly similar 'methodology' of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī.
- 43 *Ṣāfi*, I, 78. Cf. Kohlberg, p. 142 for the use elsewhere by Muḥsin Fayḍ of the idea of 'holy power' as a distinguishing feature of the true scholar.
- 44 Ayoub, 'Speaking', p. 186.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 182.
- 46 Maulavī Muhammad Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, pp. xci-xcii.
- 47 *Ṣāfi*, p. 13, translated in Ayoub, p. 190.
- 48 *Ṣāfi*, p. 15.
- 49 Ayoub, *op. cit.*, p. 190.
- 50 *Burhān*, I, pp. 30–1.
- 51 *Burhān*, I, pp. 4.
- 52 Beirut 1986, pp. 63–66.
- 53 *Lu'lu'at*, p. 64, see also *Burhān*, IV, p. 552. For a discussion of some of these works see *ibid.* pp. 552–556.
- 54 Al-Baḥrānī, al-Sayyid Hāshim, *Kitāb al-burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'an*, 4 vols, edited by Maḥmūd ibn Ja'far al-Mūsawī al-Zarandī and Najī Allāh ibn Karīm Allāh al-Tafarushī al-Bāzarjānī. (with the financial backing of al-Ḥājj Abū al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad Taqī known as al-Sālik al-Iṣfahānī) Tehran 1375 [1955]. It was first printed in 1290[1873]. The second printing edited by Maḥmūd ibn Ja'far al-Mūsawī al-Zarandī, Najī Allāh ibn Karīm Allāh al-Tafreshī al-Bāzarjānī, Muḥammad ibn al-Maḥmūd Mīrẓā 'Alī Akbar, an Iraqi *mujtahid*. The third edition, containing marginal corrections to the second by Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Tafreshī Darūdī was published at Qum by al-Maṭb'at al-'Ilmiyya, 1394[1974]. Baḥrānī wrote another work of *tafsīr*, also in several volumes, entitled *Kitāb al-Hādī wa-ḍiyā' al-nādī fī tafsīr al-Qur'an*. This work is unpublished.
- 55 *Burhān*, I, pp. 2–40.
- 56 *Bihār*, XCII and XCIII, pp. 1–145 = *Kitāb al-Qur'an*. This material is a source for the author of the last work to be discussed below. It is arranged in 30 chapters of basic hermeneutic principles followed by separate chapters on the special virtues of each of the *sūras*. Volume 93, mentioned by Ayoub, p. 185, contains a long treatise on interpretation ascribed to 'Alī (pp. 1–97) followed by the lengthy report of the Zindīq mentioned above, p.25 (pp. 98–142) and closes with a chapter entitled 'Miscellanies' (pp. 142–145). This material awaits detailed analysis.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 58 *Ibid.*
- 59 Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr Ṣadrā*, Shīrāz 1332 [1914]. [Contents: *Tafsīr al-Fāṭiḥa; Tafsīr al-Baqara; Tafsīr Āyat al-Kursī*]. Other works dealing with the Qur'an by Mullā Ṣadrā are: *Asrār al-āyāt*, edited with prolegomena and notes by Muhammad Khājavi, Tehran 1360 [1981], and is thematic rather than *seriatim*; *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Wāq'ia* (56), n. p.; n. d. *Mutashābihāt al-Qur'an in idem, Three treatises ...*, edited with an introduction and notes by Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Ashṭiyānī, English preface by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Mashhad 1392 [1973], pp. 75–121. On Mullā Ṣadrā's 'Imāmocentrism' see James Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne*, Princeton 1981, p. 14.
- 60 *Burhān*, I, pp. 5–40.
- 61 Cf. the equivalence '*ilm = ḥadīth (akhbār)*'.
- 62 *Burhān*, I, pp. 14–15.
- 63 A similar tradition is quoted in *Richtungen*, p. 278.
- 64 *Burhān*, I, pp. 17–19.
- 65 *Ibid.*, pp. 19–21.
- 66 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 67 All three *ḥadīths* are from *ibid.*
- 68 D.1090–91, author of *Manāqib 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib*, Tehran 1394 [1974].
- 69 *Ibid.*, p. 22. This subject does not appear to have been discussed by al-Suyūfī, *al-Iqān*. It may be peculiar to Shī'ī *tafsīr*. See also *Sharḥ Ziyāra*, (n.94 below) p. 123.
- 70 *Burhān*, I, pp. 22–3.
- 71 All five statements from *ibid.* pp. 22–3, nos. 3, 4, 5, 9, and 10.
- 72 *Burhān*, I, pp. 31–41; cf. al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, pp. 3–15.
- 73 Quoted in *Richtungen*, p. 282–283.
- 74 *Tafsīr mir'āt al-anwār wa-mishkāt al-asrār*, introduction and table of contents by Maḥmūd ibn Ja'far al-Mūsawī al-Zarandī, (financed by al-Ḥājj Abū al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad Taqī), Tehran 1374 [1954].
- 75 The first dated 1096 [1684], the second 1107[1695] (*Dharī'a*, I, 149.).
- 76 *Lu'lu'at*, p. 107.
- 77 See *Anwār*, pp. 2–3. He was apparently survived by a son of some reknown, al-Mawlā Abū Tālib ibn al-Sharīf Abī al-Ḥasan al-Gharawī (*Lu'lu'at*, p. 108, n.44), who is mentioned by al-Jaza'irī in *al-Ijāza al-kabira*.
- 78 Corbin says he spent most of his life in Iṣfahān, *Annuaire*, 1965–6, p. 107.
- 79 *Lu'lu'at*, p. 108.
- 80 'My father was asked one day: "Who is the best scholar of Najaf, Abū al-Hasan or al-Shaykh Sulaymān (d. 1120/1708)?" As for al-Sharīf Abū al-Hasan, I have quizzed him several times in Iṣfahān and in Mashhad and in our town whenever we met, and he remained with us a long time, I consider him very learned'. Quoted in *Lu'lu'at* p. 107 from the *al-Ijāza al-kabira* of al-Jaza'irī.

- 81 Bahrānī, *Lu'lu'at al-Bahrayn*, 'It exists in our library in manuscript with two prologues: 1. "On *uṣūl al-dīn*" was written in the year 1111 in Najaf al-Ashraf. 2. "On *uṣūl al-fiqh*" dated 1112, Najaf".
- 82 *Lu'lu'at*, p. 107, n.43.
- 83 *Lu'lu'at*, p. 107, and I have this book. It was completed in 1112.
- 84 Doubtless the famous Mir Dāmād (d.1631), the teacher and father-in-law of Mullā Ṣadrā. The author of *Lu'lu'at* says that he has written a refutation of this particular *risāla* (p. 108).
- 85 *Lu'lu'at*, pp. 107–109.
- 86 *Dharī'a* mentions him, II, p. 517.
- 87 'It is a big volume, its like has not been written, on *uṣūl, furū' al-faqhīya*. It is found in the library in Isfahan of al-Shaykh Abu l-Majid Agha Riza al-Iṣfahānī. He also wrote a *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf*. He inclined to the belief that the three caliphs were good Muslims in the time of the Prophet and not *munāfiqūn*, but they apostasized after the Prophet died'. *Ibid.*
- 88 *Dharī'a*, XX, p. 264.
- 89 See *Dharī'a*, vol.20, pp. 264–5 for a description of the manuscripts and their location. One of them was in the hand of Shaykh al-'Allāma al-Nūrī (al-Ṭabarsī al-Nūrī) (d.1902) who also mentions Iṣfahānī at the end of his *Mustadrak al-Waṣā'il*, (a commentary or 'corrective to' the *Waṣā'il al-Shī'a* (by al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī) (5 vols) Cairo [1957–1962], III, p. 385. His *Faṣl al-khiṭāb fī ithbāt taḥrīf kitāb rabb al-arbāb* (Persia, 1298/1880), a book devoted to upholding the belief in the corruption of the Qur'ān, is treated in E. Kohlberg, 'The Imamite Attitude to the Qur'ān' in *Islamic philosophy and the classical tradition*, eds Stern, Hourani, Brown, Oxford 1972, pp. 209–224.
- 90 Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, see index '*Tafsīr Mir'at al-Anwār*' & *idem*, *Annuaire*, 1965–6, pp. 106–108.
- 91 Corbin, *Annuaire*, 1965–6, p. 107.
- 92 The first three caliphs.
- 93 *Shāh bar shāh*, a rare lapse into Persian.
- 94 Mark Taylor, *Erring: A postmodern A/theology*, Chicago 1984, p. 57.
- 95 Corbin, *Annuaire*, 1965–6, p. 107.
- 96 Corbin, *Annuaire*, 1965–6, p. 108.
- 97 Lawson, 'Interpretation as Revelation', in *Approaches*, pp. 223–253 and *idem*. 'The terms remembrance (*dhikr*) and gate (*bāb*) in the Commentary on the *Sūra* of Joseph', *Studies in honor of the late Hasan M. Balyuzi*, ed. M. Momen, Los Angeles 1988, pp. 1–63.
- 98 The most recent detailed account of the Shaykhiyya is Vahid Rafati, 'The development of Shaykhī thought in Shī'ī Islam', Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles 1979; Corbin *En Islam iranien*, IV, pp. 205–300 and his earlier 'L'École shaykhī en théologie shī'ite', *Annuaire de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études: section des sciences religieuses* (1960–1961), reprinted with Persian translation by Firaydūn Mahmanyār, Tehran 1967, pp. 1–59, and *Terre celeste et corps de résurrection: de l'Iran mazdéen à l'Iran Shī'ite*. Paris 1960. Other important discussions of this subject are: Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and renewal*, Ithaca 1989, pp. 48–69; Said Amir Arjomand, *The shadow of God*, Chicago 1984, q. v. Index 'Shaykhism'; Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and dissent*, Syracuse 1982, pp. 37–58. Although his scholarship is frequently disparaged, one should also mention the even earlier works of A. L. M. Nicolas, *Essai sur le Chéikhisme II: Séyyed Kazem Rehtī*, Paris 1914; *Essai sur le Chéikhisme III: la doctrine*, Paris 1911; *Essai sur le Chéikhisme IV: la science de Dieu*, Paris 1911; *Essai sur le Chéikhisme I: Cheikh Ahmed Lahçahi*, Paris 1910. A recent work, unavailable to me, is Aflatun

- Jalali, 'The Shaykhiyya of Hajji Muhammad Karim Khan in Kirman', Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Manchester 1982.
- 99 Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī, *Sharh ziyāra al-jāmi'a*, Tehran 1276/1859. An example of sanctifying a text by arranging it according to the number of quranic *sūras*, may be seen in a recent edition of the *Ziyārat al-jāmi'a* which was divided into 114 verses by Muhammad Tha'rullāhī (d.c. 1962), in his *Kitāb sabīl al-falāh*, mentioned in Corbin, *Annuaire*, 1968–9, p. 152. This may have been a long-standing practice, in which case Shaykh Aḥmad's *Commentary* on the *Ziyāra* might also have been seen, in some way, as a new Qur'ān.
- 100 From Corbin's French translation of this passage of Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī, *Sharh āyat al-kursī*, Tabriz c. 1860, p. 3 in *En Islam iranien*, I, pp. 209–10.
- 101 See Mohammad Arkoun, 'Algeria', *The politics of Islamic revivalism*, ed. Shireen T. Hunter, Bloomington 1988, pp. 171–186; *idem*, 'The notion of revelation: from Ahl al-Kitāb to the societies of the Book', *Die Welt des Islams*, XXVIII (1988), pp. 62–89.

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IS THE QUR'ĀN TRANSLATABLE?

Early Muslim opinion*

A. L. Tibawi

Source: *The Muslim World* 52 (January 1962): 4–16.

I

Every translation of the Qur'ān proclaims its own inadequacy. For it must necessarily include those verses which are clear in their emphasis that the Word of God was revealed to Muḥammad in the Arabic tongue. "Verily, We have made it an Arabic Qur'ān, haply ye will comprehend it."¹ Every translation in any language, classical or modern, foreign or Islamic, includes a score or so verses in different chapters which enshrine the same or similar pronouncement.² Their total import is that any translation, like any commentary in Arabic or in any other language, is no more than an approximation of the meaning of the Qur'ān, but not the Qur'ān itself.

Our examination of the subject starts from this point. We have to discuss questions at once historical, juristical, theological and rhetorical. Some of these questions were raised, in a preliminary form, even in the days of the Prophet and his immediate successors. But their formulation and development came with the jurists, traditionalists, commentators, theologians and philologists later on. As regards the days of the Prophet, there are certain reports of a historical nature which deserve to be considered first. But since some of them do not occur in the early sources, the historian who considers also their content may be tempted to question their authenticity.

The belief that the Qur'ān is a literal transcript of the Word of God from a safely preserved tablet (*lauḥ mahfūz*) in heaven revealed to Muḥammad in Arabic must be squared with the other belief that Muḥammad's mission is to mankind as a whole and not only to the Arabs. How in practice did the Prophet or his immediate successors face the problem – if or when they had to face it – of preaching the divine message to those non-Arabs who were unable to comprehend it in Arabic? Historically the problem did not become very pressing till the Muslim conquerors came in close contact with non-Arabs, notably Persians, after the death of Muḥammad.