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Orientalists and the Evolution of Shīʻa Exegesis Hermeneutic: A Case Study of Todd Lawson

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Abstract

Todd Lawson – a contemporary orientalist – tries in his *Hermeneutics of pre-modern Islamic and Shi'ite exegesis* to describe and evaluate the types and evolutions of the Twelver Shīʻa exegesis hermeneutics. According to this article, the Twelver Shīʻa exegesis has comprised of four types from its beginning to the contemporary era, including authority-oriented, compromise, mystic-inward (hermeneutic deafness), and philosophical/authority-oriented. The hermeneutic change of the Shīʻa in the interpretation of the Qur'ān from Imām to the exegete and its combination with the mystic and philosophical approaches are the qualities of the second, third, and fourth eras. The evolutions made in the four eras of Shīʻa hermeneutics have been influenced by the cultural-political conditions of the Shīʻa community, the rise of Shīʻa scientific elites, and the effects of Muʻtazila, mystic, and Sunnī esotericist approaches on the Twelver scholars. In this regard, the role of Shīʻa governments such as Buyid and Safavid dynasties and the rise of scholars such as Sayyid Murtaḍā, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, and Mullā Ṣadrā have had outstanding effects on the formation of new hermeneutic types. This article presents Lawsonʻs viewpoints and demonstrates their shortcomings.

Keywords

Todd Lawson, Twelver Shīʻa exegeses, Criticism of orientalists, Hermeneutics of the Qur'ān.

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Introduction

In the past two decades, some orientalists have tried to identify the Shīʻa approach to the hermeneutics of the Qur'ān and so, they have examined the narrative (riwā'ī) and investigative (Ijtihādī) exegeses of the Twelver Shīʻa at historical and functional levels. At the first stage, they have addressed the description and explanation of the historical eras as well as the evolutions of the Shīʻa hermeneutics and the effects it has had on and received from cultural, political, and social relationships between Shīʻa and others. At the second stage, their attention has been mostly on the restoration of the principles and rules used to identify the significations and intentions of the qur'ānic verses in the narrative and investigative exegeses. The examination of the most important writings of the orientalists about Shīʻa hermeneutics indicates that Todd Lawson and Robert Gleave are among orientalists who have addressed these issues in two of their works. Their purposes and concerns are clear to a large extent in the title of their articles "Hermeneutics of pre-modern Islamic and Shi'ite exegesis"[1] and "Early Shi'i hermeneutics: some exegetical techniques attributed to the Shi'i Imams"[2]. One of the key concepts in the articles of both Lawson and Gleave is addressing the theoretical and historical discussions of the Shīʻa narration hermeneutics; issues such as different types and eras of hermeneutics are among the most important discussions in this regard. The reality is that due to the dominant approach in Lawson's article, his work is better in the presentation of a more comprehensive and precise treatment of this issues than Gleave's article. In particular, Lawson's article is important in explaining the historical evolutions and classifying the types of Shīʻa hermeneutics, and its key issue can be called the "types and evolutions of Shīʻa hermeneutics" which has been addressed through a historical approach. However, relying on a certain type of Shīʻa narrative hermeneutics (i.e. hermeneutics of Imām's absolute authority) and via a descriptive-analytical approach, Gleave sets out to examine the interpretive narrations (a term used by him instead of the narrative interpretation) and – using text analysis techniques – tries to explore the meaning extraction techniques in these narrations to assess the Shīʻa narrative hermeneutics theory. Before Gleave, Meir Bar-Asher had examined the same question in an article entitled "Early Shi'i hermeneutics:

1. Todd Lawson, 2012, Vol. XII, pp. 235-239. The persian translation of this article by Muḥammad 'Ḥaqqānī Faḍl has been published in the book *Imāmiyya Interpretation in Western Studies*, published by the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth Recearch Center of Dār al-Ḥadīth in 2016 (85-99). In the study at hand, the references of the author to the page numbers in Lawson's article have been based on this translated work.
2. Gleave, 2013, pp. 141-172.

some exegetical techniques attributed to the Shi'i Imams". Due to the fact that the approach of both articles has been functional hermeneutics, the author of the article at hand has criticized them in another article. It can be said in short that Gleave and Lawson have had two different yet compromisable perceptions about the term hermeneutics. Gleave mostly concentrates on the functional and practical dimensions of hermeneutics in the explanation and interpretation of the text; therefore, he mostly focuses on the hermeneutic principles and techniques used in the interpretive narrations. His view can be called functional hermeneutics. In order to attain this purpose, he has embarked upon meticulousness text analyses and perceptive semantics and has gained good achievements. The outcome of his effort is the discovery and analysis of a literary and semantic hermeneutics theory based on interpretative narrations. In his view, this is a probable theory and there is not sufficient evidence to confirm its cohesion, systematicity, and inclusiveness. However, Lawson pays attention to the doctrinal-historical principles of the Shīʻa hermeneutics and gives in a historical-sociological analysis of its evolutions where the narrative exegeses are representative of a certain type of those evolutions. Moreover, he does not address the restoration and analysis of the rules and techniques of hermeneutics in these exegeses. Lawson's effort can be described as the historical or theoretical hermeneutics of the Shīʻa. Now the question is that from the viewpoint of Lawson, what are the types and qualities of the qur'ānic hermeneutics within the history of Shīʻa exegesis? What criticisms can be made about Lawson's approach to the restoration and analysis of Shīʻa hermeneutics? This research project examines the content, form, and method of his article via an analytical-critical approach.

Suchlike studies are important in showing the orientalists' methods and opinions about the historical evolutions of the various dimensions of Twelver Shīʻa interpretation. This is an important issue that Shīʻa researchers should take into account, but unfortunately our information about the scope, frequency, and methods of the orientalists' Shīʻa interpretation studies does not seem to be so immense. As a result, we should pay attention to the re-exploration and criticism of the Western studies on Shīʻa Ḥadīth and theology. This article might be a beginning to the new studies in this field.

Content evaluation

In this part of the article, the main viewpoint of Lawson in the classification and types of Shīʻa qur'ānic hermeneutics is presented and evaluated. The types, titles, and order is taken from Lawsonʻs article. At the beginning of

every type, a brief description of his viewpoint will be presented and then, under the evaluation title, it will be assessed.

Authority-oriented hermeneutics

Lawson calls the first type of Shīʻa hermeneutics as authority-oriented hermeneutics which has been common among Shīʻa in the historical era starting from the demise of the Prophet (s) to the beginning of the Major Occultation. The doctrinal basis of this hermeneutics is the transfer of revealed and narrative heritage of Prophet Muḥammad (s) to the Shīʻa Imāms and their nomination by the angles. The outcome of this type was changing Imāms into the true interpreters of divine revelation and the speaking Qur'ān in the Shīʻa society. In Lawson's viewpoint, one feature of the time this type began was the appearance of internal conflicts in the Islamic world (the Fitna era), which covers the first three centuries after Hegira. It was in this tense period that the role of an Imām among Shīʻa was defined as the divine leader and his words in the specification of the qur'ānic text were absolutely accepted. The reflection of this hermeneutics is verified by some early Shīʻa exegetic works and Ḥadīth collections such as *Al-Kāfī* (Lawson, 2016: 89-90). In fact, the designers of this hermeneutics were Shīʻa Ḥadīth transmitters who illustrated it in their Ḥadīth collections. The main premises of the first hermeneutic period are as follows.

- The incompleteness of the Qur'ān due to the manipulation of the ʻUthmānic manuscript.
- The disappearance of Imāms sacred scrolls as well as Fāṭima's (s) manuscript.
- The protection of the real Qur'ān by Imāms and its presentation during the return of the Hidden Imām.
- Shīʻa fundamentalist teachings: the establishment of ʻAlīʻs (a) authority as the first Imām, the usurpation of his authority, God's friends and enemies, the Infallibility of Ahl al-Bayt (a), the Occultation period and the reappearance of the Hidden Imām to spread justice in the world (ibid., 90).

Evaluation

1. Although Lawson's dating of the authority-oriented hermeneutics era is true, the general reference he uses to specify the fitna origin and its cultural and political backgrounds is not sufficient, because the Shīʻa saw their scientific existence and social identity in following Imāms, and it was the requirement of their deep-rooted doctrinal foundations in the Qur'ān and Prophetic sunna to believe in such a position for Imāms in the scientific and spiritual guidance of them. It has been

especially necessary for Lawson's article to investigate the result of the suppressive treatment of Shīʻa Imāms by their contemporary governments as an external factor in the establishment of authority-oriented hermeneutics. This shortcoming could be solved by expressing a brief account of the outstanding features of this era and basing it on independent studies.

2. It was appropriate to expand the doctrinal foundations of the first era hermeneutics through references to the Twelver Shīʻa theological sources so that it does not come to the readers that Shīʻa has been separate from the rest of the Islamic world at that time and has recognized some perceptions as its religious beliefs in order to confront other movements as a result of political conditions and the constraints of the time. Lawson knows well that the rival of the Imām-oriented hermeneutics in this era was the Companion-oriented hermeneutics which was based on the theory of the justness and pureness of the Companions which was adopted by the Sunnīs, a view which has foundations similar to those of the Shīʻa hermeneutics. The Shīʻa has numerous qur'ānic, narrative, and logical arguments based on its hermeneutic foundations, the most important of which is the Thaqalayn tradition from the Prophet (s) that emphasizes the pivotal role of Ahl al-Bayt after his demise. In fact, the Imām-oriented hermeneutics has its roots in the Thaqalayn tradition and is the continuation of the Prophet-oriented hermeneutics which has been given by the Prophet (s) to Ahl al-Bayt (Rād, 2011: chapter 3). The Shīʻa has an outstanding figure such as Imām ʻAlī who has been a Companion of the Prophet (s), the fourth caliph in the Sunnī theological and political thought, and the heir of the Prophet of Allāh (s) as confessed by history and Islamic traditions; it is then natural that the Shīʻa tend toward him and his descendants.
3. The disappearance of Lady Fāṭima's (s) manuscript and the relationship between its content and the missing parts of the Qur'ān is not a correct claim, because as the author of that article asserts, its content has not been taken from the Qur'ān and has been an inheritance to Imāms. In essence, that manuscript was never publicized, and so, its disappearance makes no sense (Mahdawīrād, 2002: 2-19; Birinjkār, 2012: 37-52).
4. Some points ascribed to Shīʻa such as the belief in the distortion or the incompleteness of the Qur'ān are not accepted by the mainstream Shīʻa movement and are rather attributed to the Traditionists. The evidences presented for suchlike beliefs have been disputed or

justified by the Twelver Shī'a legists (Najjārzādigān, 2003: 135-154; Mahdawīrād, 2003: 356). Moreover, some historical documents used by him are also disputed. For instance, the manipulation of the 'Uthmānic manuscript will be a highly controversial claim. The common belief is that the unification of the Companions' manuscripts has been done by 'Uthmān who did so to have one unique manuscript in order to standardize its recitation (Mīr Muḥammadī Zarandī, 1999: 152; Ma'rifat, 1994, vol. 1: 334-365). Imāms' also confirmed the manuscripts common in the Companions' era in their own practices. Moreover, the presentation of a new book by Imām Mahdī (may God hasten his reappearance) does not mean that there is a shortcoming or fault in the existing Qur'ān; rather, it means he will present the true interpretation of the Qur'ān and will remove any connotative distortion in it.

Therefore, it can be said that Lawson's exposition of the theological, political, and social backgrounds that led to the appearance of the authority-oriented hermeneutics is general and short-term and does not precisely illustrate the reason and manner of its formation among the Shī'a. His account of the doctrinal foundations and the hermeneutic manifestations of this era are based on some extreme narrations or stances in the Shī'a thought that cannot be regarded as the Twelver Shī'a interpretative theory.

Compromise hermeneutics

From the fourth to the seventh century AH, there appeared a kind of compromise between Twelver Shī'a and Sunnī scholars, following which the pivotal role of Imām in the interpretation of the Qur'ān as the foundation of authority-oriented hermeneutics was changed. The Shī'a avoided the fundamentalist teachings of this hermeneutics such as the shortcomings of the Qur'ān, the points that brought about disputes among Shī'a and Sunnī, and the tendency to exaggeration and incarnation. Moreover, this new hermeneutics was supported by the narration of Ḥadīth from Sunnī sources as well as the absorption and expansion of Mu'tazila thoughts. Lawson calls this moderateness and compromise of the Twelver Shī'a with Sunnīs as the compromise hermeneutics, and considers it an important change in the Shī'a hermeneutics in which scholars such as Sharīf Raḍī (d. 405 AH), his bother Sayyid Murtaḍā (d. 436 AH), and Abū Ja'far Ṭūsī (d. 460) mitigated the extremism of the previous era exegetes. Relying on Bar-Asher's study[1], he stipulates that "The overall result of these hermeneutic changes was the acquisition by Shi'ite exegetes of a kind of precedence over the Imam"

1. Bar-Asher, 1999.

(Lawson, 2016: 91). In other words, there occurred a kind of hermeneutic change among Shīʻa scholars from the authority of Imām to the Shīʻa scholar or from the text to the reason. This change led to numerous results, the most important of which was the reduction of the level of tension between the Shīʻa and the Sunnī, and tendency toward the Muʻtazila and the Sunnī traditions; in fact, a kind of diversion from authority-oriented hermeneutics happened.

Evaluation

1. The second era exegetes' change of the interpretation method from narrative interpretation to investigative interpretation is not undeniable, but this change does not necessarily mean the prioritization of the exegetes over Imāms. Although the appearance of the exegeses of this era seems to suggest that – unlike the first era exegeses – the interpreters rather than Imāms' narrations have the most significant role in the interpretation of the Qur'ān, the exegetes did not reject the role and effectiveness of Imāms' narrations in their interpretations. It is clear that they believed in certain conditions for ascertaining the authenticity of the chain of transmission and the thematic validity of the interpretative narrations. Therefore, their free investigation was within the framework of religious texts and intellectual rules of discussion, and did not require the negation of the role of Imām in the interpretation. Similarly, Lawson has not presented any related explicit text and has simply put forth his own perception of the outer appearance of these exegeses, which is false. On the other hand, those exegetes have certain assertions that negate Lawson's stance. For instance, Shaykh Ṭūsī in the introduction of *Al-Tibyān* commentary stipulates that the Twelver Shīʻa scholars all agree that interpretation derived from anything other than the true words of an Infallible is not valid (Ṭūsī, 1988, vol. 1: 4). Therefore, this hermeneutic change or the prioritization of the viewpoints of the Twelver Shīʻa exegetes over those of Imāms do not mean that the Twelver Shīʻa exegetes have discarded Imāms' exegetic legacy and have set their own thought and inference as the criterion for the understanding of the Qur'ān.
2. The acceptance of the Imāmat (leadership) and authority of Imāms as the criterion for the righteousness and bliss has been and is one of the fixed Shīʻa doctrines in all historical eras of this denomination. Now, how can we call the scholars of this era as Twelver Shīʻa and at the same time attribute lack of commitment to the essence and foundational principle of this denomination to them? How can this

paradox be settled? It seems that the lack of precision in the analysis of the change in the interpretive method of the second era Shīʿa exegetes compared to that of the previous era interpreters has led Lawson to this mistake. The works of Shīʿa scholars and exegetes in this era testify the fact that they have been formed around the pivotal role of Imāmat and authority of Shīʿa Imāms. One of the key issues in the works of Sayyid Murtaḍā is addressing Imāmat and its theological aspects. He has written the book *Al-Shāfī fī al-imāmat* to criticize the Muʿtizilī viewpoint and opinions of ʿAbd al-Jabbār Muʿtazilī about Imāmat. Sayyid Raḍī's efforts in collecting the narrations of Imām ʿAlī (a) and other Imāms (Jaʿfarī , 1996: 120-137) as well as the theological books of Shaykh Ṭūsī about Imāmat are also true evidences for this claim (q.v. Group of authors: 2003).

3. Although in Lawson's words, the sociocultural backgrounds of this hermeneutic change have not been examined, Bar-Asher's hints (whose article has been used by Lawson in the analysis of the hermeneutics of this era) indicate the significant role of the Buyid dynasty in this regard. Nonetheless, it has been necessary to clearly specify the point that how the rise of this Iranian dynasty have caused or influenced this change along with related evidences (q.v. Sajjādī, vol. 1: 388). Although this shortcoming is basically true for the Bar-Asher's article, it also is pertinent to Lawson's article as a work that relies on it.
4. The rejection of the reduction of the tension between the Shīʿa and the Sunnī and the ignorance of disputed topics in the works and commentaries of this era are not true in an absolute and general sense. In addition to the Shīʿa themes of the qur'ānic exegeses of this era which emphasize the Shīʿa-based teachings, other theological and jurisprudential works of the Twelver Shīʿa scholars in this era also indicate that the criticism and rejection of non-Shīʿa notions has been constantly pursued and has even found a more argumentative direction. Moreover, the cultural and doctrinal controversies between the Shīʿa and the Sunnī have continued in this era (Būsa, 2011, vol. 1: 239).
5. The notions of exaggeration and incarnation has not been among the doctrinal teachings of the first era real Twelver Shīʿa. Although a movement tried to promote these concepts in Shīʿa works and society, Imāms and their companions opposed them. The importance of questioning the exaggeration and understatement notions has been so high for the Shīʿa that some great Shīʿa narration transmitters such as

Ṣadūq have written books to reject those two concepts (Najjāshī, 195: 392; Ṣadūq, 1984, vol. 2: 220). The scholars of the second era naturally followed the practices of their first era predecessors and rejected those false opinions. Undoubtedly, if the exaggeration and incarnation movement could reappear in this second era, the Twelver Shīʻa scholars would act based on the same practices of Imāms and their companions in the first era. As a result, the lack of treatment of these baseless beliefs does not mean moderateness or reduction of extremism, and should not be taken as a sign of hermeneutic change.

6. The narration of Ḥadīth from Sunnī resources does not necessarily mean their acknowledgment, but they must meet the basic conditions for the authenticity of a Ḥadīth from the Shīʻa viewpoint. This type of narration was common in the second era for discussion purposes, but it was not so widespread and did not mean that the Shīʻa trusted the Sunnī narrations in the principles of theological, jurisprudential, and ethical knowledge. The words of the Companions and the Successor to Companions were not considered as Ḥadīth and – when other conditions were present – were merely regarded as quotations of the words of the Prophet of Allah (s) to support the words of other narrators. Sometimes the narration of these Ḥadīths was due to a jurisprudential requirement and was necessary to discover the opinions and stances of the Sunnī jurisprudents.
7. The tendency to absorb and expand the Muʻtazila thoughts as another outcome of the compromise hermeneutics faces a serious challenge. The foregoing stance is not true if it means the Shīʻa's admission of Muʻtazila doctrinal teachings, because the Shīʻa has its own specific ideas. Shaykh Mufīd as one of the Twelver Shīʻa scholars of this era has suggested that there are more than thirteen essential differences between the Shīʻa and the Muʻtazila (Mufīd, 1993: 4-6). Moreover, that assertion is also wrong if it intends that the Shīʻa learned rationalism from the Muʻtazila, because the consideration of rational thinking has a long history in Shīʻa legacy. From the beginning of the second century AH, the Shīʻa has had theologian philosophers such as ʻIsā b. Rawḍa, ʻAlī b. Islmāʻīl b. Maytham Tammār Baghdādī, Abū Jaʻfar Muḥammad b. ʻAlī b. Nuʻmān and Hushām b. Ḥakam. ʻAlī b. Islmāʻīl b. Maytham Tammār is the first person who has presented theological discussions within the twelve Shīʻa denomination. He has written the books *Al-Imāma* and *Al-Istiḥqāq* (Subḥānī, 1994, vol. 4: 45). Hushām b. Ḥakam has been considered as one of the biggest Shīʻa figures in theology who was so powerful in argumentation and

undertook discussions with the Mu'tazila. The Shī'a scholars has written books on the rejection of the Mu'tazila, such as *Al-Radd 'alā al-jubā'ī* by Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Quba. Moreover, Ḥasan b. Mawlā Nawbakhtī has written responses to the Mu'tazila. Shaykh Mufīd has criticized parts of the Mu'tazila books, and Sayyid Murtaḍā has argued against the last book of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār entitled *Al-Shāfī fī al-Imāma* (ibid.: 47). A mere look at the book *Awā'il al-maqālāt* by Shaykh Mufīd familiarizes us with the essential differences between these two theological schools. However, the differences of these two groups are not limited to these; rather, there are other differences, too. Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya has noted other differences in his book *Fuṣūl fī al-falsafa al-Islāmiyya.* Moreover, Hāshīm Ma'rūf al-Ḥusnā has written a book entitled *Al-Shī'a bayn al-Mu'tazila wa al-Ash'ariyya* and has expressed the differences of the Shī'a with these two schools. Therefore, some Shī'as have never been influenced by the Mu'tazila; rather – as some researchers have pointed out – it was the Mu'tazila who have been influenced by the Shī'a (Jawādī, 1999: 122-149).

Mystic-inward (hermeneutic deafness)

From the viewpoint of Lawson, there appeared a new set of hermeneutic principles in the Shī'a from the seventh to the tenth centuries AH which regarded the meaning of the Qur'ān to be manifested more in its audience and reader than in its text, a situation that comes into existence during the spiritual evolution of an individual through the various hermeneutic stages. Therefore, a kind of "hermeneutic deafness" – a term used by Henry Corbin – existed between the text and the exegete which refers to the ignorance of the way the reader and the Qur'ān face each other. This hermeneutics has been affected by the mystic thoughts of three notable figures of this era: Suhriwardī with his mystic view to the texts which was influenced by the Platonic theory of World of Ideas; Ibn 'Arabī with his occultist view to the Scripture, and 'Alā al-Dawla Simnānī with his suggestion for the reading of the Qur'ān through the "Seven prophets of one's being". From the viewpoint of Lawson, "Major Shi'ite scholars, such as Maytham Baḥrānī (q.v.; d. ca. 1290), Ḥaydar Āmulī (q.v.; d. after 1385), and Ibn Abī Jumhūr (q.v.; d. after 1499), to name only three, were deeply influenced by the eminent Andalusian Sufi Ibn 'Arabī (q.v.; d. 1240), in whose work they saw the reality of Shi'ism elaborated and explicated. Thus, whereas in the earlier literature a term like Bāṭinī would refer to someone who saw in the Koran references to a secret code which explained the status quo and at the same time validated rival claims for religious authority, the same term now began

to acquire a different meaning; the interior of the actual reader, rather than, or perhaps even in addition to, the interior of the text, was now indicated by the term. Shiʻite theological and philosophical speculation thus became, along with Sufism, one of the major traditions in which such a hermeneutic continued to be evolved (Lawson, 2016: 92). In Lawson's opinion, although ʻAlā al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 737 AH) – the Iranian Ṣūfī – was not a Shīʻa, "His hermeneutics exerted considerable influence on Shiʻite exegetes, especially his method of reading the Koran according to the 'seven prophets of one's being.' According to this method, the continuum from Adam to Muḥammad is understood to represent a hermeneutical ascent, requiring the reader to apply and reapply all his efforts to meditate on the divine verses with the aid of his own private and interior prophetic powers. Influenced by Simnānī, Shiʻite exegetes started to use such forms of scales and hierarchies to represent the same message, namely that scripture contains more than one level of meaning. For the Shiʻites, only God and the holy family know the true meaning, while everyone else must struggle according to this hierarchical principle in order to discover the meanings that make the most existential sense for themselves, in addition, of course, to following the directives in the exegetical transmitted reports (*Akhbār*) of the Shiʻite tradition" (ibid.: 92-93).

Evaluation

1. Although the mystic-inward hermeneutics is common among some Twelver Shīʻa scholars of this era as an epistemological approach, its reflection and prevalence in the Twelver Shīʻa commentaries from the seventh to the tenth centuries as an exegetic approach is not so significant. Therefore, except for Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulīʻs commentary, Lawson does not mention any other commentary in this regard. This era has been almost the declining era of the Twelver Shīʻa exegesis and the soaring era of its jurisprudence, thematic Ḥadīth writing, and exposition. Therefore, the prevalence of this type of hermeneutics cannot be attributed to the Twelver Shīʻa, and we might even note the intelligence of the Twelver Shīʻa scholars in showing no interest in it. Despite the identity of its writer as a Shīʻa, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulīʻs commentary is more an esoteric interpretation and does not address the outer appearance of the qur'ānic concepts.
2. The attribution of this type of hermeneutics to Ibn Maytham also faces some challenges, because his works are in a completely opposite direction. For instance, his method in the interpretation of the verses and analysis of the narrations related to Imāmat in the book *Al-Naja fī al-qiyāma fī taḥqīq amr al-imāma* is the very text-oriented and

authority-oriented hermeneutics, and no trace of the effects of mystic-inward hermeneutics can be seen at least in these two books. His main method in his other works such as *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha* and *Qawā'id al-marām fī 'ilm al-kalām* has been the same. Although some have asserted that Ibn Maytham has been affected by mystic tendencies in his philosophical and epistemic discussions in domains other than jurisprudence and Ḥadīth, it was necessary for Lawson to provide evidences for the tendencies of Ibn Maytham,. The attribution of Ibn Abī Jumhūr Aḥsā'ī to Sufism and the influences of that school on his method have been criticized and rejected by Twelver Shī'a researchers (Aḥsā'ī, 1983, vol. 1: 43), while some regarded his references to the poems of some mystics in his works as a form of language beautification and the expression of one's philosophy through opposite words (Ibid.: 15). In his treatise *Al-Rudūd wa al-nuqūd 'alā al-kitāb wa mu'allifihīwa al-awjabat al-shāfiya al-kāfiya 'anhumā* – published in the introduction of the book *'Awālī al-li'ālī* – Āyatullāh Mar'ashī Najafī has answered this doubt about the tendency of Ibn Abī Jumhūr Aḥsā'ī to mysticism. In any case, the use of mystic-inward hermeneutics by Ibn Maytham and Aḥsā'ī in the interpretation of the Qur'ān is doubted because their exegetic works have not survived.

3. Lawson's claim about the change in the meaning of the term *Bāṭin al-Qur'ān* from the text to the reader has not been accepted by the Twelver Shī'a exegetes. His intention might be the Sufi's or mystic's discovery of the reality and inward of the phenomena; although this is similar to esoteric interpretation of the Qur'ān, it is different from it with regard to the method and resources. Another similar stance in hermeneutics is the exegete-oriented viewpoint that deems the text void of meaning and regards the meaning as the exegete's mental perception of the text. This view is not valid in the eyes of the Twelver Shī'a exegetes, because they pay great attention to the purpose of the writer (Rād, 2011: 161; Bāqirī, 2008: 59-61). If any exegete of this era has the stance suggested by Lawson, his viewpoint is not valid for Shī'a as it contradicts the consensus of the Twelver Shī'a scholars.
4. The suggested relationship between the polysemy of the Qur'ān and 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī's pattern and the effect of the latter on the former is incorrect, because polysemy is proved more in the interpretive narrations of Imāms and the Twelver Shī'a commentaries

and has its specific semantic mechanism (Ṭayyib Ḥusaynī, 2009: 89; Naṣīrī, 2007: 79). Therefore, relating it to Simnānī is incorrect.

5. Simnānī's reading of the Qur'ān – which Lawson has used it in his article under the influence of Henry Corbin's studies – faces serious challenges and criticisms. It seems that Simnānī's viewpoint mostly regards the levels of human existence in his epistemic system. In other words, his main purpose is the ontology of the human via a mystic approach in which each existential dimension of the human has its specific functions which are successive and evolvable; therefore, Simnānī has not been an exegete and his main approach has been Sufism and mysticism (q.v. Naṣrullāhī: 2012). This discussion does not have a direct semantic relationship with exegesis and it was better for Lawson to provide evidences for his claim on this relationship so that his intention could get more obvious to the reader.
6. 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī was against illuminative psychology (Āghā Buzurg Ṭihrānī, 1983, vol. 15: 251), excommunicated Ibn 'Arabī and opposed his exposition of the Unity of Being (Naqawī, 1984, vol. 9: 316), and wrote critical appendices to his works including *Futūḥāt* and called it *Al-Ḥutūfāt al-musma'a bil-Futūḥāt* (Burūjirdī, 1995, vol. 3: 685). Now, how could we accept that the Twelver Shī'a scholars believed in three opposing stances and considered them to be in line with each other? It is clear that Lawson has not directly referred to the works of these three figures and has not been aware of their criticisms against and rejections of each other.

All in all, it can be said that the attribution of this hermeneutics to the Twelver Shī'a scholars of this era lacks sufficient evidences and proofs, and its verification is not possible at least in the exegesis and Ḥadīth explanation.

The Safavid philosophical/authority-oriented hermeneutics

"During the Safavid period many of the aforementioned hermeneutical methods became consolidated and started to receive support from two very different directions, namely the Shi'ite tradition of philosophy (*Ḥikmat*) and the corpus of Shi'ite Akābir that were studiously collated, consolidated, and classified during this period. Philosophy, as it was cultivated and practiced within this milieu, served to make sense of the more supra-rational elements found in the Koran and the Hadith … For example, in addition to works of exegesis on a few Koranic sūras, Mullā Ṣadrā wrote a vast commentary on Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*, in which he sought to find the inner philosophic meaning behind apparently irrational beliefs. This resulted in a kind of revivification of much of the pre-Bowayhid exegetical presuppositions through *Ḥikmat*, with a consequent redefinition of the identity of the Twelver Shi'ite

community. The role of Safavid dynasty in the creation of a safe atmosphere for the Twelver Shi'ite scholars in the revival and establishment of authority-oriented hermeneutics in this era is undeniable (Lawson, 2016: 93).

After Mullā Ṣadrā, his pupil Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī wrote the book *Kalimāt Maknūna* and so provided us with one of the best philosophical explanations of the world of Ideas. In the introduction of his commentary of the Qur'ān entitled *Al-Ṣāfī fī tafsīr kalām Allāh al-wāfī,* he specified his hermeneutic and methodological principles. With regard to form, this commentary is similar to the traditional Ḥadīth-oriented works, because the author selects several narrations to explain every verse and sometimes adds his own explanations to them (Ibid). The results of this new hermeneutics was the return of the hermeneutic teachings of the first era to the Shī'a thought based on the philosophical justifications. Therefore, we witness the renewed suggestion of teachings such as the concentration on the character of Imām, the distortion of the Qur'ān, multiple readings of the Qur'ān, etc. in this era. Meanwhile, the exegetic and narrative works of Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī has had a great effect on the later Twelver Shī'a scholars, although they have had some opponents, too (ibid).

Evaluation

1. Lawson has been rather successful in the specification of the founders of philosophical /authority-oriented hermeneutics of the Safavid era, but has ignored the popularity of other Shī'a hermeneutic groups in this era such as the textualism of Majlisī and Jazāyirī. One of the main shortcomings of Lawson's article is his generalization of one particular hermeneutic type to all Twelver Shī'a scholars. The philosophical hermeneutics of Mullā Ṣadrā and Fayḍ Kāshānī were not the dominant models of this era, and there even existed some opposition to them.
2. The revival of Shī'a identity and hermeneutics of the first era is more indebted to the Safavid political thoughts and the prevalence of traditionalism in this era, and limiting it to the hermeneutics of Mullā Ṣadrā and Fayḍ does not match the reality so much.
3. Part of the fourth introduction of Fayḍ in *Tafsīr al-ṣāfī* which is allocated to the justification of the revelation of the Chastisement verses to the prophets in the form of the "Beat one to frighten another" is one of the literary hermeneutics principles used to understand the Qur'ān (Mahdawīrād, 2011: 3-21) and has no relationship with the philosophical hermeneutics. Other parts of his introduction also do not indicate philosophical tendencies, and it was better for Lawson to

clarify from which part of Fayḍ's introduction he has extracted his philosophical tendency, and how.

Formal evaluation

The examination of Fayḍ's article revealed that it has shortcomings in its structure, concepts, premises, and resources. In this section, some of the main instances of these shortcomings are provided.

Concepts

Although Lawson has defined the most essential concept of his work – i.e. hermeneutics – at the beginning of the article, the course of the article shows that the concept of hermeneutics in the eyes of the author has been very expanded and close to the concept of discourse. Therefore, it has been necessary to specifically distinguish it from interpretive discourse. It seems that the interpretive discourse has a more general meaning than hermeneutics and several types or groups of hermeneutics can exist within a single discourse.

Structure

Structurally viewed, the development of the discussion in the article body is done without the use of subheadings which might guide the reader. In the main part of the article, the author has merely used a general heading "Hermeneutics of Shi'ite exegesis". Moreover, the article does not entail results and conclusion sections.

Premises

1. Lawson has tried in the introduction of the article to familiarize the reader with the main question of the article – which is based on the premise "the permissibility of the investigative interpretation" – because the discussion on hermeneutics relies on the possibility of interpretation for the audience who have lived after the Revelation era and the Companions' era. Therefore, he has taken the famous theory in the Companions' era as the license for interpretation, even though some of the Companions believed in the prohibition of or severe caution against the interpretation. Unfortunately, Lawson has not addressed this minority group of Companions who have been against interpretation, and has not even provided a reference to the secondary sources in this regard.
2. In the introduction of the article when Lawson introduces the outstanding works of the qur'ānic sciences, he does not mention the Twelver Shī'a legacy in the qur'ānic sciences domain; whatever he introduces is taken from the Sunnī qur'ānic sciences. The reader of the

article might think that the Shīʿa has not had any theory and legacy in this era, a perception which is against history and the existing evidences of the efforts of the Shīʿa in this domain. It was more appropriate for Lawson to express the role the Twelver Shīʿa in the qur'ānic sciences as well. Great efforts have been done in this regard, out of which we can refer to the *History of Qur'ānic sciences works* by Muḥammad ʿAlī Mahdawīrād and the *Qur'ānic sciences in Ahl al-Bayt's (a) school* by ʿAlī Aṣghar Nāṣiḥiyān. The precious collection *Al-Tamḥīd fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* by Muḥammad Hādī Maʿrifat also represents the contemporary legacy of the Twelver Shīʿa in the qur'ānic sciences. Of course, the introduction sections of the ancient and later investigative commentaries of the Twelver Shīʿa are also replete with the issues and discussions of the qur'ānic sciences; it seems that Lawson has not been aware of them due to his unfamiliarity with Arabic and Persian languages.

3. Lawson has considered the treatment of the methodology of interpretation as part of the discussions of the qur'ānic sciences books. After introducing the significant works of the qur'ānic sciences such as Zarkashī's *Al-Burhān* and Suyūṭī's *Al-Itqān*, Lawson asserts, "… these works are more concerned with how one interprets rather than with the actual interpretation itself" (REFERENCE?). Nonetheless, the interpretive method is a specific term and has a meaning different from that of the qur'ānic sciences; the books on the latter do not address interpretation methods. The qur'ānic sciences books mostly express the foundations and principles of interpretation rather than the interpretation method. The method is a more precise concept compared to these foundations and principles and is attributed to the manner of the exegete's use of the interpretive sources for the explication of the significations and intentions of the qur'ānic verses. It was better for Lawson to provide a precise definition of the qur'ānic sciences and clarify its difference with the interpretive method.
4. It seems that the author deems the Shīʿa interpretation hermeneutics as ended by Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, because the ending part of his article makes no reference to the Shīʿa interpretive legacy formed after Fayḍ's era (which was the pinnacle of the third era philosophical /mystic hermeneutics); although the interpretive evolutions of the contemporary era are influenced by the era of Mullā Ṣadrā and Fayḍ, new interpretive discourses have also been formed in it. Moreover, opposition to philosophy in the Separation Discourse (which was established against the Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy and its proponents)

is of great importance. The specific rationalism that has appeared in the thirteen and fourteen centuries along with novel literary and semantic approaches should be also reflected upon and examined; this shortcoming should be dealt with in the new edition of the article.

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Lawson frequently uses secondary sources and it seems that he has not have access to the Shīʿa and Sunnī interpretive sources, and most of his article is based on the previous studies of other orientalists. His lack of reference to the primary Shīʿa sources in the explication of the doctrinal teachings of this denomination is a proof to this claim; it shows that Lawson has not have sufficient familiarity with this denomination, its doctrinal principles, and its pure theological legacy, and has judged its doctrinal teachings based on one or two articles. Moreover, his reference to Arabic sources is very limited and this indicates that he has not have direct reference to some of the commentaries discussed in the article text.

Methodology evaluation

Lawson's method for the collection of data appropriate for the topic of the article has been library research-document analysis, and his analytical approach in the typology of the Shīʿa hermeneutics has been historical phenomenology. It seems that he has not been successful in the application of this approach, because sufficient and comprehensive sources and documents have not been at his disposal for this phenomenological undertaking, and he has mostly relied upon secondary sources. Therefore, there are doubts about the comprehensiveness of the data and the accuracy of the analyses of the article, some of which were pointed out in the content evaluation section.

The selection of certain interpretive hermeneutics types and their generalization to all Shīʿa scholars is observed in Lawson's classification. That is to say, his article accentuates one type of hermeneutics in every era and this way makes the reader think that that type of hermeneutics has been accepted by all Twelver Shīʿa scholars in all interpretive schools and Shīʿa intellectual sphere in that era. However, the historical reality is not this and there have coexisted various other hermeneutic stances in the same era. In fact, a kind of obsession to accentuation of certain cases is seen in his article.

Conclusion

Lawson has not placed the formal Twelver Shīʿa interpretation theory as the criterion for reviewing the Shīʿa hermeneutics in its historical eras; selective treatment and generalization and introduction of a certain stance as the

formal Shīʿa hermeneutics theory in the four eras have been the main problems of his method for the treatment of the main question of the article. He has not shown precision and comprehensiveness in historical phenomenology of the hermeneutics of each era and the analysis of its grounds and foundations. Therefore, his expositions need revision and more evidences. Lawson's exposition of the theological, political, and social grounds for the appearance of authority-oriented hermeneutics is general and short-term and does not provide a precise picture of the reason and manner of its formation among the Shīʿa. His account of the doctrinal foundations and the hermeneutic manifestations of this era are based on some extreme narrations or stances in the Shīʿa thought that cannot be regarded as the Twelver Shīʿa interpretative theory. Lawson's analysis of the hermeneutic change from Imām to exegete in the second era lacks explicit evidences and is based on his incorrect analysis of the outer appearance of the commentaries of this era. The scientific interactions of the Twelver Shīʿa scholars with the Sunnī and Muʿtazila scholars was due to the cultural conditions of Baghdad in those days which pushed them to comment on and criticize each other. The mystic-inward hermeneutics of the third era was not the dominant tendency of the Twelver Shīʿa scholars and only Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī has used it via an esoteric interpretation approach. Lawson has neglected the prevalence of other hermeneutic stances of the Shīʿa in the fourth era such as the textualism of Majlisī and Jazāyirī. The hermeneutic philosophies of Mullā Ṣadrā and Fayḍ Kāshānī were not the dominant tendencies of this era and there were even some popular opposition to them. Two important problems can be seen in Lawson's method: failure to apply the historical phenomenology and – consequently – the incomprehensiveness of the findings of his study.

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