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## *'Ayn al-A'Yān*

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## ‘AYN AL-A‘YĀN: THE FIRST PROMINENT QUR’ĀNIC COMMENTARY IN OTTOMAN HISTORY

Halim Calis\*

**Abstract:** Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī (1350–1431) was a prominent early Ottoman scholar. After years of education in Anatolia and Egypt, he served as a *mudarris* (professor) and judge in the Ottoman lands and was later promoted to the post of *Shaykh al-Islām*, the highest office in the Ottoman religious bureaucracy. *‘Ayn al-a‘yān*, al-Fanārī’s partial commentary on the opening chapter of the Qur’ān, is an outstanding *tafsir* work, in which al-Fanārī presents his exegetical theory. In his theory, the Qur’ānic text is assessed as having multi-layered meanings, including an esoteric sense, and as being open to endless attempts at interpretation. Al-Fanārī connects the multiple layers of Qur’ānic meaning with the hierarchical structure of existence theorised in Akbarī metaphysics. Since the text encodes the secrets of existence at an esoteric sense, the task of the commentator involves spiritual experience beyond intellectual enquiry. Therefore, in al-Fanārī’s commentary, the Qur’ānic text functions as an epistemological medium that connects Akbarī ontology to spirituality. The appropriation of Akbarī hermeneutics led al-Fanārī to question the nature and authority of *tafsir* and to redefine the Qur’ān and its exegesis.

**Keywords:** *Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī, Akbarī hermeneutics, Ottoman tafsir tradition, Sufī ishārī tafsir, Ibn al-‘Arabī*

### INTRODUCTION

It is pleasing to observe, in recent years, increasing scholarly attention to the intellectual history of the Ottomans, aside from its political history. Ottoman ‘*ulamā* (scholars), including *tafsir* scholars and commentators, have received their fair share of this attention.<sup>1</sup> The Ottoman *tafsir* tradition cannot be discussed without mentioning Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī (1350–1431), because he was one of the early Ottoman scholars who produced the first outstanding *tafsir* work in Ottoman history. Al-Fanārī was a notable

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent study on the Ottoman *tafsir* tradition, see Talha Boyalıklar and Harun Abacı (Eds.), *Osmanlı’da İlm-i Tefsir* [The Science of Tafsir in the Ottomans] (Istanbul: ISAR, 2019). For a discussion of why Ottoman *tafsir* works have received only little attention from Western and Arabic-language surveys, see Samuel J. Ross, “The Importance of Ottoman *Tafsir*,” in *Osmanlı’da İlm-i Tefsir*, ed. Talha Boyalıklar and Harun Abacı (Istanbul: ISAR, 2019).

scholar who lived in Anatolia at a time when the Ottoman dynasty was on the rise. He contributed to the fields of Islamic jurisprudence, logic and Arabic grammar through his writings, but he is best remembered for his contributions to Akbarī teaching.<sup>2</sup> In particular, he contributed to the Akbarī exegetical tradition with his partial commentary on the opening chapter of the Qur’ān titled “‘*Ayn al-a’yān: Tafsir al-Fātiḥa*.”<sup>3</sup>

‘*Ayn al-a’yān* consists of two parts. The first part, titled *Muqaddima*, is a long prologue and can be considered a self-contained work on the ‘*ulūm al-Qur’ān* (Qur’ānic studies). In this prologue, al-Fanārī discusses the meaning and value of Qur’ānic exegesis (*tafsir*), as well as its status among the Islamic sciences. This discussion is noteworthy, given the context of the ‘*Ayn al-a’yān*. It was written in the period when several important works on ‘*ulūm al-Qur’ān* were completed, including al-Zarkashī’s (d. 1392) *al-Burhān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* and al-Suyūṭī’s (d. 1505) *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*. Although not as comprehensive as either of these, as I discuss below, ‘*Ayn* distinguishes itself as a work that questions the nature and authority of Qur’ānic exegesis.

There are numerous modern studies on al-Fanārī, some of which deal with his thoughts concerning Qur’ānic exegesis.<sup>4</sup> Most of the studies in the Turkish language repeat the

<sup>2</sup> The word *Akbariyya* (the Akbarī school or tradition), derived from Ibn al-‘Arabī’s (d. 1240) epithet al-Shaykh al-akbar (the Greatest Master), has been used to refer to writers who were influenced by Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Sufi doctrines.

<sup>3</sup> This title may mean many things. The most appropriate translation is “the water spring of the notables.” Al-Fanārī’s exposition can be seen as part of a popular Sufi tradition, similar to Akbarī commentary on the Fātiḥa authored by al-Qūnawī. See Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ishāq al-Qūnawī, *I’jāz al-bayān fī ta’wīl Umm al-Qur’ān* [The Inimitability of the Divine Exposition in the Interpretation of the Mother of the Qur’ān], ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-ḥadītha, 1969). This tradition was perhaps rooted in the belief that the whole Qur’ān was summarised in the Fātiḥa. Al-Fanārī quotes a statement attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728) that expresses this belief. According to al-Ḥasan, God has placed the knowledge of all the scriptures in the Qur’ān, then the knowledge of the whole Qur’ān is in the Fātiḥa. Therefore, “whoever knows the interpretation of the Fātiḥa knows the interpretation of all the Holy Scriptures.” See Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī ibn Ḥamza, ‘*Ayn al-a’yān: Tafsir al-Fātiḥa* [The Water Spring of the Notables: Interpretation of the Fātiḥa] (Istanbul: Rifat Bey Matbaası, 1907), 8.

<sup>4</sup> In English, one of the works is the dissertation I submitted to the University of Chicago in 2018: Halim Calis, “Akbarī Hermeneutics in Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī’s Qur’ān Commentary on the Chapter al-Fātiḥa” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2018). In addition, Richard Cooper Repp has written an extensive biography of al-Fanārī; however, he provides no information about the scholar’s works or thoughts because he is primarily interested in al-Fanārī because of his relationship with the Ottoman institution of Shaykh al-Islām. See Richard Cooper Repp, *The Müfti of Istanbul: A Study in the Development of the Ottoman Learned Hierarchy* (N.J.: Ithaca Press London, 1986), 73-98. In Turkish, in his *İslam Hukuku ve Molla Fenârî* [Islamic Jurisprudence and Mulla al-Fanārī] (Istanbul: İşaret Yayınları, 1991), Hakkı Aydın analyses al-Fanārī’s work on Islamic jurisprudence, which is entitled *Fuṣūl al-badā’i fī uṣūl al-sharā’i* [Chapters of Wonders in the Principles of the Religious Laws]. Recep Şehidoğlu discusses al-Fanārī’s thoughts concerning the exegesis of the Qur’ān and analyses al-Fanārī’s exegetical methods in an unpublished dissertation, “*Molla Fenârî ve Tefsir Metodu*” [Mulla al-Fanārī and His Method in Tafsir] (PhD diss., Ankara University, 1992). Mustafa Aşkar discusses al-Fanārī’s approach to the *Waḥdat al-wujūd* in his *Molla Fenârî ve Vahdet-i Vücut Anlayışı* [Mulla al-Fanārī and his Approach to the Unity of Being] (Ankara: Muradiye Kültür Yayınları, 1993). Mehmet Çiçek compares al-Fanārī’s thoughts on the Qur’ān to Fazlur Rahman’s, in his work titled *Geçmiş ve Günümüzde Kur’an: Molla Fenârî ve Fazlur Rahman Örneği* [The Qur’ān in the Past and the Present: The Cases of Mulla al-Fanārī and Fazlur Rahman] (Istanbul: Yedirenk, 2012). Betül Güler discusses al-Fanārī’s thoughts regarding ontology and epistemology in *Molla Fenârî’nin Varlık ve Bilgi Anlayışı* [Mulla al-Fanārī’s Approach to Ontology and Epistemology] (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2016). In addition, a multi-language international symposium on al-Fanārī was held in Turkey in 2009. For the proceedings, see Tevfik

assertion that al-Fanārī aimed at a synthesis among Islamic theology, Islamic philosophy and Islamic mysticism partly based on his ideas presented in the *'Ayn*.<sup>5</sup> Some even claimed al-Fanārī adopted syncretism in his commentary,<sup>6</sup> probably due to superficial readings of *'Ayn*, where he uses Qur'ānic phrases as a pretext for raising many different points in several fields, such as linguistics, rhetoric, theology, jurisprudence and spirituality, to the extent that the *'Ayn* goes beyond being a commentary and, with its many pages, starts to look like a book of grammar, theology or Islamic law. In most of the commentary, he brings together opinions from many sources in these fields. In the current study, I argue that al-Fanārī's aim was not to synthesise; rather, his main concern was Akbarī teaching and he primarily attempted to justify Akbarī exegetical approaches in the *'Ayn*'s prologue by employing the terminology of the classical Islamic scholarly tradition, including the *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*. More specifically, I argue the appropriation of the Akbarī school scriptural hermeneutics led al-Fanārī to question the nature and authority of *tafsir* and eventually to develop an exegetical theory that emphasises the multilayering of Qur'ānic meanings, including their esoteric sense, and the openness of the Qur'ānic text to inexhaustible attempts at interpretation, not just interpretation based on traditional narrations. In the following pages, I will first give al-Fanārī's brief life story and describe his works in print. Then I will discuss the major characteristics of the *'Ayn* and al-Fanārī's approaches to Qur'ānic exegesis, emphasising hermeneutical ideas presented by Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240) and Sadr al-Din al-Qūnawī (d. 1274), which become clearer when they are considered together with al-Fanārī's comments.

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Yucedogru, ed., *Uluslararası Molla Fenârî Sempozyumu: International Symposium on Molla Fanârî (Bursa: 2009)* [International Symposium on Mulla al-Fanārî] (Bursa: Bursa Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> For example, Tahsin Görgün makes these claims in an entry he wrote on al-Fanārī's thoughts in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, an encyclopedia influential in research in Islamic studies, in the Turkish language. Tahsin Görgün, "Molla Fenari (Düşüncesi)," in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, accessed March 21, 2018, [www.islamansiklopedisi.info](http://www.islamansiklopedisi.info).

<sup>6</sup> Mustafa Öztürk, "Molla Fenari ve Tefsirde Senkretizm," in *Uluslararası Molla Fenârî Sempozyumu: International Symposium on Molla Fanârî*, ed. Tevfik Yucedogru (Bursa: Bursa Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2010).

## AL-FANĀRĪ'S BRIEF LIFE STORY<sup>7</sup>

Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza, better known as Mulla al-Fanārī, was born in 1350. His birthplace is not clear.<sup>8</sup> He spent most of his life in Anatolia at a time that coincided with

<sup>7</sup> Early sources written by al-Fanārī's contemporaries such as Taqiyy al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442), Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 1449), Ibn Taghrībirdī (d. 1470) and ʿAlī ibn Dāwūd al-Ṣayrafī (d. 1494) contain information on him. See Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk* [The Journey for Knowledge of the Kings' States] (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1997), 7:8-9; Ibn Ḥajar Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-ghumr bi-anbāʾ al-ʿumr* [Informing Beginners about News of the Lifetime] (Cairo: al-Majlis al-ʿAlī li-l-shuʿūn al-Islāmiyya, 2009-2011), 3:216-217 and 3:464-465; Abū al-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Manhal al-ṣāfi wa-l-mustawfā baʿda al-wāfi* [The Pure and Perfect Spring after al-Wāfi] (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-ʿĀmma li-dār al-kutub, 1984), 10:40-41; al-Khaṭīb al-Jawharī ʿAlī ibn Dāwūd al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-nufūs wa-l-abdān fī tawārīkh al-zamān* [Pleasure Trip of the Hearts and the Bodies in the Stories of the Time] (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-kutub, 1970), 2:469. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) also reports on al-Fanārī from Ibn Ḥajar and Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Kāfiyājī (d. 1474), al-Suyūṭī's teacher and al-Fanārī's pupil. See Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Bughyat al-wuʾāh fī ṭabaqāt al-lughawīyyīn wa-l-nuḥah* [Desired Knowledge for the Astute on the Classes of the Linguists and Grammarians] (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿāda, 1908), 39. Aḥmad ibn Muṣṭafā Ṭāshkubrīzāda (d. 1561) provides biographical data on al-Fanārī's life in his *al-Shaqāʾiq*, which is the most important source for early Ottoman scholars. See Aḥmad ibn Muṣṭafā Ṭāshkubrīzāda, *al-Shaqāʾiq al-nuʾmāniyya fī ʿulamāʾ al-Dawlat al-ʿUthmāniyya* [Red Anemone on the Scholars of the Ottoman State] (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1975), 17-21; Aḥmad ibn Muṣṭafā Ṭāshkubrīzāda, *Miftāḥ al-saʿāda wa-miṣbāḥ al-siyāda fī mawḍūʿāt al-ʿulūm* [The Key of Happiness and the Lamp of Sovereignty in the Subjects of Sciences] (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2002), 2:109-111. Many later historians, biographers and bibliographers also include al-Fanārī in their works. For example, see Mehmed Mecdī, *Hadāiku ʿş-Şekāik: Tercüme-i Şekāik-i Nuʾmāniyye* [The Garden of Red Anemone: Translation of the *al-Shaqāʾiq*] (Istanbul: n.p., 1852), 47-53; ʿAbd al-Ḥayy ibn Aḥmad ibn al-ʿImād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār man dhahab* [Golden Pieces in the Stories of Those who Have Gone] (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1998), 7:341; Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭālī bi-maḥāsīn man baʿda al-qarn al-sābiʿ* [The Rising Full Moon on the Good Qualities of Those who Came After the Seventh Century] (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1998), 2:140-142; Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī, *Kitāb al-Fawāʾid al-bahiyya fī tarājim al-Hanafīyya* [The Book of Beautiful Benefits in the Biographies of Hanafi Scholars] (Cairo: Aḥmad Nājī al-Jamālī wa-Muḥammad Amīn al-Khānjī, 1906), 166-167; İsmail Belig, *Güldeste-i riyāz-i irfān ve vefeyāt-ı dānişverān-ı nādiredān* [A Rose Bouquet from Wisdom Gardens and Deaths of Famous Scholars] (Bursa: Hüdavendigar Vilayeti Matbaası, 1884), 239-244; Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmānī yāhud Tezkire-i meşāhī-i Osmāniye* [Ottoman Records or Biographies of Ottoman Scholars] (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Amire, 1891-97), 3:159; ʿUmar Riḍā Kahḥāla, *Muʾjam al-muʾallifīn: Tarājim muşannifī al-kutub al-ʿArabīyya* [Encyclopedia of Authors: Biographies of the Writers of Arabic Books] (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1993), 3:269-270; Mehmed Tahir, *Osmanlı Müellifleri* [Ottoman Authors] (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Amire, 1914-1928), 1:390-392; Hüseyin Hüsameddin, "Molla Fenārī," *Türk Tarih Encümeni Mecmuası* 18 (1926); Hüseyin Hüsameddin, "Molla Fenārī," *Türk Tarih Encümeni Mecmuası* 19 (1928).

<sup>8</sup> Some sources mention a village named Fanār as al-Fanārī's place of origin, accepting his epithet *fanārī* as a *nisba* to a place. See Ṭāshkubrīzāda, *al-Shaqāʾiq al-nuʾmāniyya*, 17; Ṭāshkubrīzāda, *Miftāḥ al-saʿāda*, 2:109. However, Fanār's location is not certain in the sources; some point to Transoxiana, while others locate it in Anatolia. See Süleyman Saʿdeddin Müstakimzade, *Mecelletü'n-nisāb fī'n-niseb ve'l-künā ve'l-ekbāb* (facsim.) [The Book of Origins in Epithets, Titles and Nicknames] (Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2000), 241; Belig, *Güldeste*, 239; Tahir, *Osmanlı Müellifleri*, 1:391; İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin İlmiye Teşkilatı* [The Class of Scholars in the Ottoman State] (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi: 1988), 228.

The epithet *fanārī* has other possible meanings. Al-Suyūṭī states he heard from al-Kāfiyājī that *fanārī* indicates an occupation, because it denotes "lantern maker" or "lantern seller" in old Turkish, whose speakers acquired the word *fanar* or *fanār*, which means "lantern," from the Greeks. Al-Suyūṭī, *Bughyat al-wuʾāh*, 39. However, this would be Shams al-Dīn's ancestor's job, not his occupation, because he was a silk merchant. See Ṭāshkubrīzāda, *al-Shaqāʾiq al-nuʾmāniyya*, 19. According to another story, when Shams al-Dīn's grandfather came to Anatolia, he was given a lantern as a gift, then the family came to be known by the epithet "ibn al-Fanārī." See Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *al-Dawʾ al-lāmi li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsiʿ* [The Shining Light for the People of the Ninth Century] (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2003), 3: 115. Another story has it that Shams al-Dīn was given this name after he gave an

the extension of the Islamisation and Turkisation process in Anatolia and the Balkans at the hands of the Ottomans. The Turkoman principalities in Anatolia, known as *Beyliks*, still existed, but they would be soon ended, one by one, by the Ottomans. After he received his early education from his father, who was a Sufi affiliated with the School of Ibn al-‘Arabī,<sup>9</sup> al-Fanārī attended several Ottoman madrasas and studied under prominent ‘ulamā of his time, such as Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ma‘arrī (d. ?), ‘Alā al-Dīn ‘Alī al-Aswad (d. 1397) and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Aqṣarāyī (d. 1370s).<sup>10</sup>

Al-Fanārī then travelled to Egypt to study under Akmal al-Dīn al-Bābartī (d. 1384),<sup>11</sup> an eminent scholar of Ḥanafī jurisprudence and Māturīdī theology.<sup>12</sup> It is reported that al-Bābartī also believed in the Akbarī teaching of the Unity of Beings (*Waḥdat al-wujūd*).<sup>13</sup> In this sense, the intellectual interests of al-Fanārī and al-Bābartī perfectly overlapped; as Ḥanafī and Akbarī, al-Fanārī found an excellent ground for cultivating Sufi ideas at his young age under the tutelage of such an eminent figure as al-Bābartī. Along with al-Fanārī, some other well-known names from Anatolia, including Shaykh Badr al-Dīn ibn Qāḍī Simawna (ex. 1420), were also part of al-Bābartī’s circle.

When al-Fanārī returned to the Ottoman lands, he was appointed as a *mudarris* (professor) in Bursa, the capital of the Ottomans.<sup>14</sup> Then he was promoted to the post of *qāḍī* (judge) in Bursa,<sup>15</sup> where he was serving as chief judge when Timur (Tamerlane) (r. 1370-1405), the powerful Turco-Mongol conqueror, decisively defeated the Ottomans at the Battle of Ankara in 1402. Al-Fanārī and other notables were captured when Timur invaded and sacked the city. He was eventually released and took refuge in the Karamanids, one of the Anatolian principalities that had been suppressed by the Ottomans and restored by Timur.<sup>16</sup> Al-Fanārī migrated to Konya, the Karamanids capital in central Anatolia, and stayed there during the civil war that put the Ottoman dynasty in an interregnum period.<sup>17</sup> Al-Fanārī eventually returned to Bursa when Mehmed I (Çelebi) (r. 1413-1421), an Ottoman sultan, ended the civil

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ornamented lantern as a gift to Emir Sultan, a Sufi saint who settled in Bursa and became an advisor and son-in-law of the Ottoman sultan, Bāyezīd I. See Tahir, *Osmanlı Müellifleri*, 1:391.

<sup>9</sup> Tāshkubrīzāda, *al-Shaqā’iq al-nu‘māniyya*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> Al-‘Asqalānī, *Inbā’ al-ghumr*, 3:464.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:465.

<sup>12</sup> For al-Bābartī, see Ibn Ḥajar Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina fī a’yān al-mī’a al-thāmina* [The Hidden Pearls in the Notables of the Eight Hundred] (Hyderabad: Maṭba‘at Majlis Dā’irat al-Ma‘ārif, 1929-1931), 4:250-251; al-‘Asqalānī, *Inbā’ al-ghumr*, 1:298; al-Qāsim ibn ‘Abdullāh Ibn Quṭlūbughā, *Tāj al-tarājim fī ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyya* [The Crown of Biographies in the Classes of Hanafi Scholars] (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Mathannā, 1962), 66; al-Suyūṭī, *Bughyat al-wu‘āh*, 103; Tāshkubrīzāda, *Miftāḥ al-sa‘āda*, 2:243-244; al-Laknawī, *al-Fawā’id al-bahiyya*, 195-199; Tahir, *Osmanlı Müellifleri*, 1:221-222; Kaḥḥāla, *Mu’jam al-mu’allifīn*, 3:699.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn Ḥajar recounts from Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) that al-Bābartī used to believe in the *Waḥdat al-wujūd* (*madhhab al-waḥda*). See al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, 4: 250. Ibn Khaldūn knew al-Bābartī personally and exchanged ideas with him. See Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon Books, c. 1958), 2:229.

<sup>14</sup> Tāshkubrīzāda, *al-Shaqā’iq al-nu‘māniyya*, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Al-‘Asqalānī, *Inbā’ al-ghumr*, 3:465.

<sup>16</sup> Hüsameddin, “Molla Fenârî,” 18, 376-377; İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi: Kuruluşun İstanbul’un Fethine Kadar* [Ottoman History: From the Foundation to the Conquest of Istanbul] (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1947), 1:169; Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin İlmiye Teşkilatı*, 165.

<sup>17</sup> Hüsameddin, “Molla Fenârî,” 18, 377-378.

war, which had lasted for 11 years. He was welcomed with great respect and honour then appointed as a *mudarris* and *qāḍī* again.<sup>18</sup>

Several years later, al-Fanārī set out on pilgrimage in 1419 during the well-known rebellion led by Shaykh Badr al-Dīn ibn Qāḍī Simawna, which disturbed Western Anatolia.<sup>19</sup> When al-Fanārī was in Jerusalem on his way back from Arabia, Sayf al-Dīn al-Mu'ayyad (r. 1412-1421), the Mamluk sultan of Egypt, invited him to Cairo to ask him for news about the Ottomans. Al-Fanārī arrived in Cairo in 1420 and was treated with extreme hospitality by the Sultan.<sup>20</sup> Ibn Ḥajar records an interesting anecdote about al-Fanārī's visit to Cairo:

He (al-Fanārī) was a man of good character and extreme generosity, but he was being criticized because of his affiliation with Ibn al-'Arabī and that he used to teach *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and lecture on it. When he came to Cairo, he displayed nothing about [his interest in Ibn al-'Arabī's teaching]. He performed pilgrimage in the year 822 (1419). When he came back, Sultan al-Mu'ayyad invited him, and al-Fanārī arrived in Cairo and met its notables. He made no remark about the above-mentioned teaching [of Ibn al-'Arabī], which might be criticized. Some who respected him requested him to keep silent on this issue.<sup>21</sup>

Ibn Ḥajar's words give us a hint about the Egyptian scholars' opinion regarding Ibn al-'Arabī. In such an environment, al-Fanārī normally made no mention of al-Shaykh al-Akbar and his school, but he had a chance during his visit to Egypt to teach his own works,<sup>22</sup> give lectures on Islamic law<sup>23</sup> and debate with Egyptian scholars on Arabic grammar.<sup>24</sup> After a two-week stay, al-Fanārī left Cairo in great glory, bearing priceless presents from the Sultan and statesmen.<sup>25</sup>

When al-Fanārī returned to the Ottoman lands after his pilgrimage and visit to Egypt, the rebellion led by Badr al-Dīn had already been suppressed.<sup>26</sup> Upon his return, al-Fanārī was appointed as the *muftī* of Bursa in the time of Sultan Murād II (r. 1421-44 and 1446-51).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-ghumr*, 3:465; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 10:40.

<sup>19</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 7: 8. Badr al-Dīn was al-Fanārī's fellow pupil when he was in Egypt. He was a prominent scholar on Islamic jurisprudence and was influenced by Ibn al-'Arabī's teaching. He was captured and executed in 1420 as a rebellious heretic. For Badr al-Dīn, see Ṭashkubrīzāda, *al-Shaqā'iq al-nu'māniyya*, 33-34; Tahir, *Osmanlı Müellifleri*, 1:39-40; Hans J. Kissling, "Badr al-Dīn ibn Kāḍī Samāwnā," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Brill Online, 2010), <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2>.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 7:8; al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-ghumr*, 3:465; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 10:40.

<sup>21</sup> Al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-ghumr*, 3:465. This passage is from al-Fanārī's entry by Ibn Ḥajar.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 10:41.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 7:9.

<sup>24</sup> Muṣṭafā ibn 'Abdullāh Kātib Chalabī, *Kashf al-zunūn 'an asāmī al-kutub wa-l-funūn* [The Removal of Doubts from the Book Titles and the Arts] (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1982), 1:223.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 7:8-9. According to Ibn Ḥajar, al-Fanārī stayed in Cairo for one and a half months. Al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-ghumr*, 3:216.

<sup>26</sup> Hüsameddin, "Molla Fenārī," 19, 150.

<sup>27</sup> Repp, *The Müfti of Istanbul*, 73-4. For a detailed analysis of the reports about al-Fanārī's appointment as "mufti" in the historical sources, see Repp, *The Müfti of Istanbul*, 91-2. For a discussion of the origin and functions of the post of *mufti* in its early phase in the Ottoman state, see Repp, *The Müfti of Istanbul*, 111-24.

Many Ottoman historians, following Sa‘deddīn Müstakīmzāde (d. 1787), an 18<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman biographer, took this to mean that al-Fanārī became the first *Shaykh al-Islām*.<sup>28</sup>

Near to his death, al-Fanārī went on his second pilgrimage in 1430 to express his gratitude to God for his recovery from temporary blindness.<sup>29</sup> Shortly after his return to Bursa in the spring of 1431, he died<sup>30</sup> and was buried there in the graveyard of the mosque he had built.<sup>31</sup>

## AL-FANĀRĪ’S WORKS

Brockelmann and Baghdādī attribute to al-Fanārī more than 20 works in several fields.<sup>32</sup> Most of them are found in libraries in manuscript form. In addition to ‘*Ayn al-a’yān*, the following are his works in print, all of which were written in Arabic.

- *Asās al-taṣrīf*: A short treatise on morphology in Arabic (*ṣarf*).<sup>33</sup>
- *al-Fawā’id al-Fanāriyya: Sharh al-Īsāghūjī*: A commentary on Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī’s (d. 1264) famous treatise on logic, *al-Īsāghūjī*.<sup>34</sup> This is a well-known work in the Indian Muslim territories<sup>35</sup> and Ottoman madrasas.<sup>36</sup>
- *Fuṣūl al-badā’i’ fī uṣūl al-sharā’i’*: A lengthy work on Islamic legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). It was first published in 1872 in Istanbul,<sup>37</sup> then in 2006 in Beirut.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Repp, “Shaykh al-Islam (in the Ottoman Empire),” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Brill Online, 2010), accessed March 21, 2018, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2>. Despite the fact the term *Shaykh al-Islām* was not used as a bureaucratic title and no post equivalent to this rank was clearly defined during al-Fanārī’s time, it seems he took some of the functions of this “later-to-be-established” office on himself. Regarding the question “Was al-Fanārī the first Ottoman *Shaykh al-Islām*?” Repp concludes that Sultan Murād II’s conscious policy to create “a religious authority alongside of the secular power” was partly realised in al-Fanārī. See Repp, *The Müfti of Istanbul*, 123-124.

<sup>29</sup> Al-‘Asqalānī, *Inbā’ al-ghumr*, 3:465. Ibn Taghrībirdī also mentions al-Fanārī’s second pilgrimage but does not refer to his blindness. See Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Manhal al-ṣāfi*, 10:41.

<sup>30</sup> Historical and biographical sources give different dates for al-Fanārī’s death. For an assessment of them, see Repp, *The Müfti of Istanbul*, 93-97.

<sup>31</sup> Tāshkubrīzāda, *al-Shaqā’iq al-nu’māniyya*, 19; Belig, *Güldeste*, 241; Tahir, *Osmanlı Müellifleri*, 1:390.

<sup>32</sup> Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur: Zweite den Supplementbänden angepasste Auflage* [History of Arabic Literature: Second Edition, Adapted from the Supplementary Volumes] (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1943-1949), 2:303-4; Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur: Supplementband* [History of Arabic Literature: Supplementary Volume] (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1936-1942), 2:328-9; Ismā‘īl Bāshā al-Baghdādī, *Hadiyyat al-‘arīfīn: Asmā’ al-mu’allifīn wa-āthār al-muṣannifīn* [The Gift of the Wise: Names of the Authors and Works of the Writers] (Istanbul: Wakālat al-Ma‘ārif al-jalīla fī maṭba‘atihā, 1951-1955), 2:188-9.

<sup>33</sup> Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza al-Fanārī, *Asās al-Ṣarf* [Principle of Morphology] (Cairo: Dār Bayān al-‘Arabī, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> One of the editions is Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza al-Fanārī, *Fenārī* (Istanbul: Dersaadet: 1857-1858). The most recent edition – Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza al-Fanārī, *Al-Fawā’id al-Fanāriyya* [Fanarian Benefits] (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 2014) – was published along with al-Abharī’s *al-Īsāghūjī* and Aḥmad ibn Maḥmūd’s *Qawl Aḥmad*.

<sup>35</sup> Al-Laknawī, *al-Fawā’id al-bahiyya*, 167.

<sup>36</sup> Mehmet Yalar lists 14 glosses on *al-Fawā’id* that are mentioned in the bibliographical sources. See Mehmet Yalar, “Molla Fenārī’nin İsbâgucî Şerhi ve Şark Medrese Geleneğindeki Yeri” [Mulla al-Fanārī’s Commentary on the Isbâgoge and Its Place in the Eastern Madrasa Tradition], in *Uluslararası Molla Fenārî Sempozyumu: International Symposium on Molla Fanārî*, ed. Tevfik Yuçedogru (Bursa: Bursa Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2010), 566-8. This number would be much higher if it included manuscripts in libraries not listed in the sources. The most popular glosses are Aḥmad ibn Maḥmūd ibn Khadir’s (d. 1543) *Qawl Aḥmad* and Burhān al-Dīn al-Bulghārī’s *al-Farāid al-Burhāniyya*.



- *Miṣbāḥ al-uns bayn al-ma'qūl wa-l-mashhūd fī sharḥ Miftāḥ ghayb al-jam' wa-l-wujūd li-l-Qūnawī*: A long commentary in Arabic on al-Qūnawī's key work, *Miftāḥ al-ghayb*, which focuses on metaphysics and has been subjected to many commentaries in Arabic and Persian. *Miftāḥ* has been taught to advanced students in the madrasas of Iran, along with al-Fanārī's *Miṣbāḥ*.<sup>39</sup>
- *Risāla fī al-Taṣawwuf*: A short treatise in which al-Fanārī briefly explains the principles of Akbarī ontology.<sup>40</sup>

## AL-FANĀRĪ'S QUR'ĀNIC COMMENTARY AND SCRIPTURAL HERMENEUTICS

'*Ayn al-a'yān: Tafṣir Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* is the title of al-Fanārī's partial Qur'ānic commentary on the Fātiḥa chapter. It was published in 1907 in Istanbul<sup>41</sup> and it is possible to find many manuscripts in world libraries. Considering that Fātiḥa is only seven short verses, '*Ayn al-a'yān* amounts to a fairly large partial commentary, with 376 pages in its published version. It consists of two parts, a prologue and a commentary on Fātiḥa. The first part, the prologue, makes up approximately one-fourth of the work and is divided into four chapters.

<sup>37</sup> Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza al-Fanārī, *Fuṣūl al-badā'i fī uṣūl al-sharā'i* [Chapters of Wonders in the Principles of the Religious Laws] (Istanbul: Şeyh Yahya Matbaası, 1872).

<sup>38</sup> Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza al-Fanārī, *Fuṣūl al-badā'i fī uṣūl al-sharā'i* [Chapters of Wonders in the Principles of the Religious Laws] (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmīyya, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> William C. Chittick, "Şadr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ishāq ibn Muḥammad ibn Yūnus al-Kūnawī," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 2nd ed., Brill Online, accessed March 21, 2018, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2>; William C. Chittick, "The Last Will and Testament of Ibn 'Arabi's Foremost Disciple and Some Notes on its Author," *Sophia Perennis* 4, no. 1 (1978): 48; Reşat Öngören, "Miftahu'l-gayb," in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, accessed March 12, 2018, [www.islamansiklopedisi.info](http://www.islamansiklopedisi.info). In addition to there being numerous manuscripts in the libraries, the *Miṣbāḥ* was published several times in Iran, together with the text of the *Miftāḥ*. See Şadr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ishāq al-Qūnawī and Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza al-Fanārī, *Miftāḥ al-ghayb and Sharḥuhū Miṣbāḥ al-uns* [The Key of the Unseen and Its Commentary The Lamp of Closeness], 3rd ed. (Tehran: Mawlā, 2009); Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza al-Fanārī, *Miṣbāḥ al-uns fī sharḥ Miftāḥ ghayb al-Jam' wa-l-wujūd Şadr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ishāq Qūnawī* [The Lamp of Closeness: The Commentary of Şadr al-Dīn Qūnawī's the Key of the Unseen of the Unity and Being], 2nd ed. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Fajr, 1985). One of the editions edited by Muḥammad Khājawī also contains six super-commentaries written by Persian writers, including Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989). Khomeini's super-commentary was published separately: Ruhollah Khomeini, *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Fuṣuṣ al-ḥikam wa-Miṣbāḥ al-uns* [Super-Commentaries on the Commentary of the Bezels of Wisdom and the Lamp of Closeness] (Qum: Pasdar-e Islam, 1989-1990). Khājawī has also translated the *Miṣbāḥ* into Persian: Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza al-Fanārī, *Tarjuma-yi Miṣbāḥ al-uns-i Ḥamza Fanārī* [The Translation of Ḥamza al-Fanārī's The Lamp of Closeness], trans. Muḥammad Khājawī (Tehran: Mawlā, 1995). There are other studies on the *Miṣbāḥ* in English and Turkish. See Alan Godlas, "Molla Fanārī and the *Miṣbāḥ al-uns*: The Commentator and the Perfect Man," in *Uluslararası Molla Fenârî Sempozyumu: International Symposium on Molla Fanârî*, ed. Tevfik Yucedogru (Bursa: Bursa Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2010); Muammer İskenderoğlu, *Molla Fenârî'de Tasavvuf Metafiziği: Misbahu'l-Üns Üzerine Bir İnceleme* [Sufi Metaphysics in Mulla al-Fanārī: A Study on the Lamp of Closeness] (Istanbul: Değişim Yayınları, 2016).

<sup>40</sup> Muḥammad Khājawī published this work in Iran along with its Persian translation: Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza al-Fanārī, *Tarjuma wa-matn-i sharḥ-i rubā'ī-i Shaykh-i Akbar Muḥī al-Dīn A'rabi* [The Translation and the Text of the Commentary on a Quatrain by the Greatest Shaykh Ibn al-'Arabi], 2nd ed., trans. Muḥammad Khājawī (Tehran: Mawla, 2007).

<sup>41</sup> al-Fanārī, '*Ayn al-a'yān*. This version contains a lot of errors, poor punctuation and misleading subdivisions. Some parts are misprinted so badly they are illegible. The manuscripts that formed the basis of this edition are not identified. I am currently working on a critical edition of the '*Ayn*.

The commentary, which follows in the second half of the work, contains standard hermeneutic discussions of language, ritual practices, narratives, theology, etc., as well as Sufi exegesis grounded in “allusion” (*ishāra*). In this section, I will discuss the outstanding features of the ‘Ayn and outline al-Fanārī’s approach to scriptural hermeneutics.

### *The Layers of Qur’ānic Meaning*

The most outstanding feature of al-Fanārī is his emphasis on “layers of meaning” (or “*marātib al-ma‘na*,” as he puts it),<sup>42</sup> which include, but are not reducible to, esoteric meaning. The idea that Qur’ānic interpretation cannot be reduced to its literal sense because it contains hidden meanings beneath its outward expression has stood out in many Sufi writings since the early period of Sufism. According to Sufi hermeneutics, the esoteric meaning is not accessible to everyone; only the spiritually elite can detect the inner sense of the Qur’ān.<sup>43</sup> Al-Fanārī, following the Sufi writers before him, reads the Qur’ān as a text that has an esoteric meaning besides its literal one. However, the simple dichotomy of esoteric and exoteric meanings in Qur’ānic interpretation does not adequately explain al-Fanārī’s exegetical approach. He embraces a fourfold interpretational system based on a Prophetic tradition that was well known, especially in Sufi circles: “The Qur’ān was sent down in seven readings. Each letter of the Qur’ān has an exterior (*ẓahr*) and an interior (*batn*). Each letter has a limit (*ḥadd*) and each limit has an observation point (*maṭla‘/muṭṭala‘*).”<sup>44</sup>

Following Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Qūnawī, al-Fanārī takes the abovementioned *ḥadīth* as the basis of his scriptural hermeneutics. Ibn al-‘Arabī was the first Sufi who associated the *ḥadīth* with the Akbarī theory of ontological levels.<sup>45</sup> According to him, the notions of the *ḥadīth* (*ẓahr*, *batn*, *ḥadd* and *maṭla‘/muṭṭala‘*) refer to ontological depths, all of which are understood in Akbarī metaphysics as hierarchical manifestations of the divine essence. Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, as the first Akbarī writer to systematise the ontological levels, identifies five, which are famously referred to as the “five presences” (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-khams*).<sup>46</sup> In his commentary, al-Qūnawī explains these levels through the notions of *ḥadīth*: *ẓahr* represents the physical forms (*al-ṣuwar al-mahsūsa*) in existence; *batn* refers to a deeper form of existence, where heavenly spirits (*al-arwāḥ al-qudsiyya*), which are hidden from the eyes, reside; *ḥadd* is the intervening level and pertains to the intervening world (*‘ālam al-mithāl*), which marks the boundary between the visible and invisible worlds; and *maṭla‘/muṭṭala‘* refers to the level of the divine names, where the other three levels have their origin.<sup>47</sup> Al-

<sup>42</sup> Fanārī, *‘Ayn al-a‘yān*, 90.

<sup>43</sup> For a study on the mystical interpretation of the Qur’ān, see Kristin Zahra Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur’ān in Classical Islam* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> For a comprehensive study of the *ḥadīth* and its interpretation by Sufi and non-Sufi scholars over time, see Halim Calis, “The ‘Four Aspects of the Qur’ān’ Ḥadīth and the Evolution of Sūfī Exegesis until Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī (d. 834/1431),” *Journal of Qur’ānic Studies* 22, no. 3 (2020): 1-34.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī might have been influenced by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, who interpreted the *ḥadīth*, for the first time, as indicating that one of the layers of the Qur’ānic meaning is the spiritual experience of witnessing God. See Calis, “Four Aspects of the Qur’ān,” 11.

<sup>46</sup> William C. Chittick, “The Five Divine Presences: From Al-Qūnawī to Al-Qayṣarī” *The Muslim World* 72 (1982): 109.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Qūnawī, *I’jāz al-bayān*, 378.

Qūnawī further developed this idea and extended the semantic scope of the notions to cover the ontology of the divine speech and the multiple layers of the Qur’ānic meaning, besides the ontological levels.<sup>48</sup> In other words, he understands all these levels as stages where the divine attribute of speech (*kalām*) and the divine name of the speaker (*mutakallim*) manifest. For example, *zahr* refers to the physical form of divine speech we call the Qur’ān. As a result, these levels are different forms of the same reality. To complete the number of ontological levels, al-Qūnawī invented another term – *mā ba‘da al-muṭṭala‘* (“what is beyond transcendence”).<sup>49</sup> This refers to the first manifestation of the divine essence in existence, which would be the first ontological level that differentiated from the essence before the divine names.<sup>50</sup> Al-Qūnawī also attempted to interpret the Fātiḥa chapter according to layers of meaning based on the notions of the *ḥadīth*; that is, he understands the verses of Fātiḥa as having various meanings, each of which points to a different ontological level of existence.

In a further step, based on the *ḥadīth*, al-Fanārī connects all the elements of his scriptural hermeneutics by juxtaposing his understandings of epistemology, ontology, spirituality and exegesis. When he lists the dimensions of Qur’ānic meaning a qualified commentator can extract from the text, he states,

If I clearly mention the levels of meaning in any place, I do not exceed the four because these are the principles (*kulliyāt*) of the meanings. For what is comprehended (*mudrak*) is either perceptible (*ḥissī*) which would be *zahr*, or spiritual (*rūḥānī*) which would be *batn*, or metaphysical (*ma‘nawī*) and nominal (*asmā‘ī*, i.e., pertaining to the divine names) which would be *muṭṭala‘*, or imaginal (*khayālī* and *mithālī*) which would be limits (*ḥudūd*). These are the levels according to the five divine presences (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-khams*). As for divine absolute unity, it would be beyond transcendence (*mā ba‘da al-muṭṭala‘*). God knows best.<sup>51</sup>

In this passage, al-Fanārī takes the concepts he mentions as the names of ontological levels of existence and divine speech, as the names of multiple Qur’ānic meanings, and as the names of what can be comprehended by a human being. What he suggests is that the gradual manifestation of the divine essence in existence and in divine speech results in a multiplicity of meanings in the Qur’ānic text. These meanings can be grasped by a qualified commentator; however, grasping the hierarchically varied meanings of the text goes beyond being an intellectual activity and involves spiritual experience, which is needed to make sense of what lies beyond the physical world. In other words, a commentator not only understands the meaning of the text on an intellectual level, but also experiences, according to their spiritual capacity, what the depths of the text correspond to the realities of the divine manifestation that passes through the ontological levels. Therefore, according to al-Fanārī, exegesis has not only an epistemological aspect, but also a spiritual aspect.

Al-Fanārī applies the theory of *marātib al-ma‘nā* in the *‘Ayn*. When he comments on the phrases of the Fātiḥa chapter, he establishes a clear connection between spirituality and

<sup>48</sup> Calis, “Four Aspects of the Qur’ān,” 15.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Qūnawī, *I‘jāz al-bayān*, 498.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 378; al-Fanārī, *‘Ayn al-a‘yān*, 10.

<sup>51</sup> Al-Fanārī, *‘Ayn al-a‘yān*, 90.

ontology, both of which have hierarchical levels. In his commentary on the phrase “taking refuge in God” (*isti‘ādha*), for example, he associates the layers of meaning with the notions mentioned in the *ḥadīth* by stating that *zahr* is the oral pronunciation of the *isti‘ādha*, *baṭn* is emancipating the self from all connections other than God by internalising these words, *muṭṭala‘* is annihilating the self, and *mā ba‘da al-muṭṭala‘* is transcending self-annihilation.<sup>52</sup> What attracts our attention in this comment is that the various levels of advancement in spirituality occur in accordance with the ontological depths, which are taken by the Akbarī school as a gradual manifestation of divine essence. Namely, as the wayfarer advances in their spiritual journey, they pass through steps where they experience the depths of existence. The final and highest point of the spiritual journey is to realise that God is the only real existence, because He is the only source of all existence and there is only God at the first ontological level. The wayfarer who has reached this point must be unaware of even their annihilation, because otherwise this would be a claim to have existence. In another interpretation of the *isti‘ādha*, al-Fanārī associates the layers of meaning at the levels of *baṭn*, *muṭṭala‘* and *mā ba‘da al-muṭṭala‘* with divine actions (*af‘āl*), divine attributes (*ṣifāt*) and divine essence (*dhāt*), respectively.<sup>53</sup> This interpretation also emphasises a hierarchical order among *dhāt*, *ṣifāt* and *af‘āl*, as well as the phases of spiritual experience related to them. As seen in the examples, in al-Fanārī’s exegetical practice, the connections among spirituality, ontology and layers of Qur’ānic meaning are established through the notions of the *ḥadīth*.

### ***Waḥy (Revelation) as the Process of Divine Manifestation***

In the *‘Ayn*, al-Fanārī deals with the question of the nature of revelation. More specifically, he tries to find an answer to the question of how eternal divine speech can manifest in limited human language. In answering this question, al-Fanārī emphasises there are several types of speech. He states,

This [revelation] is like the meanings taking the appearance of the imaginal images (*ṣuwar khayāliyya*) that contain parts (*ajzā‘*) freed from chronological order (*min ghayr taqaddum wa-ta’akhhur*).<sup>54</sup> Since the imaginal (*khayālī*) speech is not like the perceptible (*ḥissī*) one, it would also not be like the mental (*‘aqlī*) or the spiritual (*ma‘nawī*) speeches for sure.<sup>55</sup>

Al-Fanārī means to say there are various levels of divine speech on a line from divine essence to human language, just like the ontological levels of existence discussed earlier. Here, the stages of *khayāl* (the imaginal realm that represents an intervening stage between the levels of existence), *ḥissī* (the perceptible realm), and *‘aqlī* and *ma‘nawī* (the spiritual realm) indicate the levels of existence and levels of divine speech. Al-Fanārī implies that divine revelation is the process of transformation of divine speech through ontological phases, from divine essence to the scriptures expressed in different languages. The level of *khayāl* (imagination) is the stage where divine essence potentially manifests as the plurality

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> “Without any chronological order,” seems to mean “the potentiality” (not actuality) of the speech parts.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 45.

of creation. The composite nature of Qur'ānic language appears potentially at the same level. The actual plurality of creation appears in the physical world, whereas the verbal expression of the Qur'ān is the manifestation of divine speech eventuated at the level of sensible speech. According to al-Fanārī, this means all these different phases of speech are different forms of the same reality.

However, why do the physical forms of the same reality differ, as there are many divine scriptures in different languages? Al-Fanārī answers this question by drawing on the theory of “connections” (*muta'allaqāt*) he learned from al-Qūnawī. Accordingly, every divine attribute has two aspects: (1) from the perspective of its relationship with the divine essence, it is possessed of absolute singularity (*aḥadiyya*); and (2) from the perspective of its relationship with existence, it accommodates plurality. It is like the relationship between an eye and the plurality of sight. The eye is one, but its connection with the multitude of objects causes the plurality of sight.<sup>56</sup> Divine speech (*kalām*), as a divine attribute, also has two sides: its compositeness in the level of sensible speech is due to its connections. In other words, the “connection” between God and human prophets gives the divine revelation its distinctive characteristics, such as its language and content. In sum, divine speech emanates from divine essence and metamorphoses into different forms at different levels, such as at the levels of *ḥissī*, *khayālī*, *aqlī* and *ma'nawī*, as they are designated by al-Fanārī. The final “verbal” form of speech takes on a specific shape according to its collocutor.

### ***The Qur'ān: A Physical Manifestation of Divine Speech***

Al-Fanārī defines the Qur'ān as a physical manifestation of divine speech, expressed in Arabic. This definition is in keeping with the ideas he embraces regarding the ontological levels of divine speech and he takes pains to tailor the definition in such a way as to not go beyond the idea of the Qur'ān's being the manifestation of divine speech in the physical world. Therefore, al-Fanārī insists the definition of the Qur'ān must refer only to what is manifested through the Prophet as “the Qur'ān” and should not include eternal speech.<sup>57</sup> In this regard, he criticises other definitions that do not seem to offer complete exclusivity because of the terms they use, such as *nuzūl* (coming down), which associate them with eternal speech or the angel's recitation.<sup>58</sup> In his opinion, dissociating the definition from eternal speech is much more fitting to the limitations of our knowledge, because human beings cannot define an eternal concept that is beyond their limited knowledge; they can define only what they comprehend. Therefore, the eternal form of speech that is beyond human capacity should not be subjected to definition. More important, al-Fanārī's main concern is to emphasise that the Qur'ān is no more than the physical manifestation of divine speech at the level of *ẓahr*, so the definition of the Qur'ān should be isolated from the other levels.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Al-Fanārī emphasises the difference by calling this eternal form “*al-Qur'ān al-qadīm*” (eternal Qur'ān). See al-Fanārī, *Ayn al-a'yān*, 42-43.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 43.

### ***Tafsir: Indecisive Comments on the Meaning of the Qur'ān***

Al-Fanārī opens the prologue of *'Ayn al-a'yān* with a discussion on *tafsir*, the Islamic discipline whose subject is the Qur'ān (but in this case, not referring to a method of interpretation).<sup>59</sup> The discussion consists of several subsections, which include the definition of *tafsir*, its subject, and its relationship with the other Islamic sciences. Al-Fanārī formulates his own definition:

*Tafsir* is the knowledge of the states of God's speech in terms of its Qur'ānness and in terms of its indication to God's intention that is known or assumed according to the human capacity.<sup>60</sup>

First of all, *tafsir*, in al-Fanārī's opinion, should be defined as "knowledge" (or study) (*ma'rifa*), rather than a systematic science (*'ilm*), which it is defined as by many scholars, such as Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390).<sup>61</sup> Al-Fanārī wants to point out the fact that *tafsir* has no authority to determine God's intention in most of the Qur'ān by preferring *ma'rifa* over *'ilm*. As epistemological notions, *'ilm* and *ma'rifa* literally mean "knowledge," but they have been treated as different concepts in the Islamic literature.<sup>62</sup> The two most common differences discussed by Muslim scholars are: *'ilm* refers to the comprehension of universals (*kulliyāt*) and is pertinent to assent (*taṣdīq*), whereas *ma'rifa* refers to the comprehension of particulars (*juz'iyyāt*) and concerns conceptualisation (*taṣawwur*).<sup>63</sup> *'ilm* is also used to refer to systematic sciences that have methodologies and principles (*al-uṣūl wa-l-qawā'id*); *ma'rifa* lacks these characteristics. Al-Fanārī emphasises, since *tafsir* has neither methodology nor universal principles, except in a few cases, it cannot be defined as *'ilm*, unlike other Islamic sciences that are bound to syllogistic logic, such as the Islamic philosophy of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*).<sup>64</sup> The following example, which is given by al-Fanārī when he mentions some of the principles discussed by commentators, reveals what he understands of the principles (*qawā'id*): every address in the Qur'ān that begins with "*Yā ayyuhā al-nās!*" (O people!) is directed to Meccans, with "*Yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū!*" (O believers!) to Medinans, and with "*Yā ahl al-Kitāb!*" (O people of the Book!) to Jews and Christians.<sup>65</sup> In this regard, a "principle" refers to a systematic method that always gives the same result.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 4-13.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 5. "*'Ilm al-Tafsīr ma'rifat aḥwāl kalām Allāh ta'ālā min ḥaythu al-Qur'āniyya wa-min ḥaythu dalālatuh 'alā mā yu'lam aw yuẓann annahū murād Allāh bi-qadar al-ṭāqat al-insāniyya.*"

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 4. Al-Taftāzānī defines *tafsīr* as: "It is the science (*al-'ilm*) that investigates the states (*aḥwāl*) of the words of God's speech in terms of their indication (*al-dalāla*) to the intention (*al-murād*)." Al-Fanārī cites al-Taftāzānī's definition from the latter's super-commentary on al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf*, which has not yet been published. Al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 1414), who also wrote a super-commentary on *al-Kashshāf* and criticised al-Taftāzānī on many points, adopted his rival's definition. See 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *al-Ḥāshiyā 'alā al-Kashshāf li-l-Zamakhsharī* [Annotation on al-Zamakhsharī's the Discoverer] (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, 2016), 110.

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of these differences, see Ed., "'Ilm,'" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed., Brill Online, accessed March 21, 2018, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2>; Roger Arnaldez, "Ma'rifa," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed., Brill Online, accessed March 21, 2018, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2>.

<sup>63</sup> Al-Fanārī, *'Ayn al-a'yān*, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 79.

The description of *tafsir* as related to either assent (*taṣdīq*) or conception (*taṣawwur*) has been debated in several works in Qur’ānic studies. For example, ‘Abd al-‘Azīm al-Zurqānī, a prominent contemporary Egyptian scholar of Qur’ānic studies, reports that ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm al-Siyalkūtī (d. 1656), a notable Mughal gloss writer, asserts that *tafsir* is a science of concepts because its only function is linguistic delineation (*al-ta‘ārif al-lafẓiyya*). Conversely, al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī treats *tafsir* as a science that produces assent because it becomes a determining factor (*yataḍamman ḥukm*) for the language of the text by assigning meanings to the words.<sup>66</sup> Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Kāfiyajī (d. 1474), al-Fanārī’s pupil, agrees with al-Jurjānī that the outcomes of *tafsir* should be considered assent, in consequence of his idea that *tafsir* has principles (*qawā‘id*).<sup>67</sup> Al-Kāfiyajī then attempts to enumerate and explain these *qawā‘id* in his work on the Qur’ānic sciences, but it cannot be said he succeeds, for his brief work falls far short of providing principles that satisfactorily respond to needs. Several of the principles he identifies concern only the subjects of *muḥkam/mutashābih* (obvious/unclear verses) and *naskh* (abrogation in the Qur’ān).<sup>68</sup> As a matter of fact, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, al-Kāfiyajī’s student, expresses his dissatisfaction with his teacher’s work in the introduction of his *al-Itqān*.<sup>69</sup>

The characterisation of *tafsir* as *ma‘rifa* rather than as *‘ilm* inevitably results in the acceptance of the idea that a multiplicity of interpretations of the same text should be considered valid, an idea favoured by Sufis, especially Akbarīs. For to say that *tafsir* has neither methodology nor principles makes its outcomes (most of its outcomes, according to al-Fanārī) inconclusive (*ẓannī*). If we consider that methodologies and principles are established through inductive reasoning, i.e. through analysis of individual comments leading to general conclusions, again we face the fact pointed out by al-Fanārī that most of the comments are conjectural because they are based on either reason or singular *ḥadīth* (*āḥād*).<sup>70</sup> That is, (a) *tafsir* does not have the authority to produce certain knowledge because it lacks universal principles, or (b) most comments provide only conjectural knowledge, so *tafsir* is not able to derive principles from them; either way, *tafsir* does not deserve to be called *‘ilm* rather than *ma‘rifa*. With this well-considered detail, not only does al-Fanārī question the authority of *tafsir* to determine God’s intention in the words of the Qur’ān, but he also validates interpretive efforts based on means other than narration by placing them on equal terms. Otherwise, *tafsir* would be reduced to “exegesis by tradition,” by which static interpretation is continuously passed down.

However, when we accept that commentators only presume to know God’s intention in most cases, are we subordinating God’s intention to the commentators’ conclusions for most

<sup>66</sup> Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīm al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-‘irfān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* [The Springs of Wisdom in Qur’anic Studies] (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā’ al-kutub al-‘Arabiyya: ‘Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1943), 1:471.

<sup>67</sup> Muḥyī al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Kāfiyajī, *al-Taysīr fī qawā‘id ‘ilm al-Tafsīr* [The Facilitation in the Principles of Tafsir] (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qudsī, 1998), 30.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-72.

<sup>69</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* [The Perfection in Qur’anic Studies] (Cairo: al-Hay’at al-Miṣriyya al-‘amma li-l-kutub, 1974), 1:16-17.

<sup>70</sup> According to the Hanafi school with which al-Fanārī was affiliated, singular *ḥadīth* provide conjectural knowledge.

of the Qur'ān? In other words, are we accepting as many divinely intended meanings as there are numbers of comments on a given Qur'ānic verse? The question “Can we know God’s intention with certainty?” is an important topic of debate in Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>71</sup> Al-Fanārī, who transfers this discussion into the context of *tafsir*, seems to embrace a partial relativism, saying, “Multiplicity is not in a generic truth (*al-ḥaqīqa al-naw‘iyya*); rather, in its different particulars (*al-juz‘iyyāt al-mukhtalifa*) due to diversity of perceptors (*qawābil*).”<sup>72</sup> What are generic truths? Al-Fanārī does not explain this, but I think he means the foundational principles in the Qur'ān upon which the Muslim community have agreed. These are absolute and do not differ with respect to different perceptions; however, apart from these universal principles, particulars are open to diverse interpretations. Another important point is that al-Fanārī does not argue with the monosemy of parts of the Qur'ān whose meanings are agreed upon through self-evidence or through a consensus of transmitted reports. As we saw above, al-Fanārī accepts layers of Qur'ānic meaning, which means a commentator can understand meanings other than the apparent ones. This means even unambiguous verses of the Qur'ān are open to exegetical searches for deeper meanings; namely, the “known” intention of God in any part of the Qur'ān does not negate the possibility of other “assumed” intentions in the same part. Therefore, not only does al-Fanārī place meanings extracted from the text into two categories, certain and uncertain, but he also concludes that attempts at interpretation in certain and uncertain areas are equally valid. Al-Fanārī paraphrases al-Qūnawī here:

All interpretations of the Qur'ānic text based on either sound narration (*riwāya saḥīha*) or sound rational deduction (*dirāya saḥīha*) are God’s intention. But this is according to the levels (*marātib*) and receivers (*qawābil*), not [binding] for everyone.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Al-Fanārī informs the reader that a similar debate on the definition of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) occurred between al-Taftāzānī and Ṣadr al-Sharī‘a ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd. See al-Fanārī, *Ayn al-a‘yān*, 5.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Al-Fanārī quotes al-Qūnawī with considerable difference. Al-Qūnawī states: “Among the words of the Qur'ān, there is no word that has many meanings in the language but all its meanings are meant by God. If a commentator comments on God’s speech [i.e., the Qur'ān] according to the requirement of its language and in a way that does not violate the indubitable religious principles (*al-uṣūl al-shar‘iyya al-muḥaqqqa*), this [comment] is true and God’s intention. [The accuracy of the comment] is with respect to the commentator and those who share his state, taste, and understanding.” See al-Qūnawī, *I‘jāz al-bayān*, 334. As can be seen, al-Fanārī sounds his opinion more than quoting or paraphrasing al-Qūnawī. In fact, al-Qūnawī makes this statement in line with Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ideas about literalist esotericism. Ibn al-‘Arabī displays extreme loyalty to the etymology of Qur'ānic words. When he interprets the text, he sometimes produces alternative interpretations focusing on the cognates of words. Consequently, he adopts a hermeneutical principle that can be epitomised as: “If a cognate of the word supports an interpretation, that interpretation must be accepted as valid.” Ibn al-‘Arabī clarifies this, stating, “Every sense (*wajh*) which is supported (*iḥtimal*) by any verse in God’s Speech (*kalām*)—whether it is the Koran, the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel, or the Scripture—in the view of anyone who knows that language (*lisān*) is intended (*maqṣūd*) by God in the case of that interpreter (*mutaawwil*). For His knowledge encompasses all senses... Hence, every interpreter correctly grasps the intention of God in that word (*kalima*). This is the truth, ‘[a Mighty Book:] to which falsehood comes not from before it nor from behind it; a sending down from One Wise, Praiseworthy’ (41:42) upon the heart of him whom He chooses from among His servants. Hence no man of knowledge can declare wrong an interpretation, which is supported by the words (*lafẓ*). He who does so is extremely deficient in knowledge. However, it is not necessary to uphold the interpretation nor to put it into practice, except in the case of the interpreter himself and those who follow his authority.” See Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* [Meccan Openings] (Republic of Yemen: Wizārat al-



In this statement, al-Fanārī lays down two conditions for the validity of any interpretation of scripture: (a) it must be based on sound narration or sound rational deduction, and (b) it should not claim to bind anyone other than the commentator. If these conditions are met, any comment is considered legitimate and true. The detail of adding the word “assumed” to the definition of *tafsir* indicates all comments, even different or opposing ones, are equally valid. Al-Fanārī also links the multiplicity of valid comments to differences among the commentators as he explains differentiations of divine speech according to the different collocutors. In this sense, what commentators experience when commenting on scripture is similar to what prophets experienced during the revelatory process. The scriptural text manifests as various interpretations by the commentators, just like divine speech, which is manifested by the prophets. In short, there may be more than one true comment on the text. However, we can speak of different degrees in the preferability of the comments, according to the various capacities of the commentators.

Therefore, al-Fanārī adds another detail to the definition with the phrase *human capacity* (*al-tāqat al-insāniyya*) regarding the knowledge of God’s intention. This detail implies a gradation in exegesis (and in exegetes), which is the fundamental aspect of Sufi Qur’ānic hermeneutics. The more a commentator increases their scholarly and spiritual capacity, the nearer they draw to knowing God’s intention; that is, the more acceptable are the comments they offer.

## AL-FANĀRĪ’S LEGACY IN QUR’ĀNIC STUDIES

Al-Fanārī made an impact on discussions within Qur’ānic studies regarding the nature and authority of *tafsir* as an Islamic discipline. His ideas entered the discussions through several channels, one of which was his student Muhyī al-Dīn al-Kāfiyājī, who established himself in the Egyptian Mamluk madrasas as a leading scholar and who was a prolific writer on many religious and non-religious subjects.<sup>74</sup> One of al-Kāfiyājī’s treatises, *al-Taysīr fī qawā’id ‘ilm al-Tafsir*, which was about the Qur’ānic sciences, won recognition as one of the early examples of this genre.<sup>75</sup> Al-Kāfiyājī does not cite al-Fanārī in his *al-Taysīr*, but he evidently follows the latter’s line of argumentation in many places. A large part of the treatise

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Thaqāfa, 2010), 5:22. The translation is Chittick’s – William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989), 244. In this passage, Ibn al-‘Arabī emphasises: (a) Every interpretation allowed by the letter of the text is among the meanings intended by God; therefore, no one has the right to falsify an interpretation that is etymologically possible; (b) however, this interpretation cannot be imposed upon one as the sole truth; it is subjective and binding only to the interpreter and to those who choose to accept his authority. For the passages where Ibn al-‘Arabī expresses similar thoughts, see Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, 6:631, 10:207.

<sup>74</sup> For al-Kāfiyājī, see Franz Rosenthal, “Kāfiyājī,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., Brill Online, accessed March 21, 2018, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2>.

<sup>75</sup> The most recent publication of *al-Taysīr* is al-Kāfiyājī, *al-Taysīr fī qawā’id ‘ilm al-Tafsir*. Al-Kāfiyājī believed that no one preceded him with a work in this class, but al-Suyūṭī states his teacher, al-Kāfiyājī, was not aware of al-Zarkashī’s *al-Burhān* and al-Bulqīnī’s *Mawāqī’ al-‘ulūm*. See al-Suyūṭī, *Bughyat al-wu’āh*, 48. Al-Suyūṭī also wrote one of the most important works in the field, titled *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*.

obviously summarises or paraphrases from the *‘Ayn*. The difference seen in al-Kāfiyājī’s *Taysīr* is his discussion of the principles of *tafsīr*, because he, unlike al-Fanārī, believes *tafsīr* has principles (*qawā‘id*) and he explains these principles, albeit unsatisfactorily, because his short treatise only briefly discussed the topics of *muḥkam/mutashābih* (obvious/unclear verses) and *naskh* (abrogation) in the Qur’ān and identified a few principles regarding them.<sup>76</sup> However, we would not be wrong to suggest al-Fanārī influenced him, even in the originality he manifested. Al-Fanārī’s emphatic insistence on the lack of principles and methodologies in *tafsīr* probably prompted al-Kāfiyājī to attempt to identify principles and methodologies. As a result, *al-Taysīr* was treated with admiration; however, al-Kāfiyājī’s heavy dependence on the *‘Ayn* has remained unnoticed.

One of the items al-Kāfiyājī took from the *‘Ayn* was the definition of *tafsīr*. He formulated the following statement by actually integrating two definitions made by al-Taftāzānī and al-Fanārī, both of which are discussed in the *‘Ayn*: “[*Tafsīr* is] a science in which the states of God’s speech are investigated, commensurate with the human capacity, in terms of their indication to the divine intention.”<sup>77</sup> This definition won great popularity, especially in modern works of Qur’ānic studies.<sup>78</sup> However, since al-Kāfiyājī did not discuss the parts of the definition, as al-Fanārī did, the latter’s intention – by including the detail “human capacity” – to point out that commentators only “presume” to know God’s intention in most cases, was not fully apprehended in the later works.

In addition, al-Kāfiyājī adopted the list of sciences that was to be employed in exegesis of the Qur’ān, which had first been itemised by al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1108 or 1109)<sup>79</sup> then expanded by al-Fanārī, with minor differences, to 16 sciences.<sup>80</sup> Al-Kāfiyājī’s list, which enumerates 15 sciences, became widespread after being included by al-Suyūṭī, along with explanations, in his famous *al-Itqān*.<sup>81</sup> The list also contains the God-inspired knowledge (*‘ilm al-mawhibā*) that al-Fanārī calls *‘ilm al-ḥaqā‘iq* (science of truths). By this, he obviously means esoteric mystical knowledge. However, al-Suyūṭī treats *‘ilm al-mawhibā* as

<sup>76</sup> See al-Kāfiyājī, *al-Taysīr fī qawā‘id ‘ilm al-Tafsīr*. al-Suyūṭī, al-Kāfiyājī’s student, expresses his dissatisfaction about his teacher’s work. See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 1:16-17.

<sup>77</sup> Al-Kāfiyājī, *al-Taysīr fī qawā‘id ‘ilm al-Tafsīr*, 30.

<sup>78</sup> It seems Muḥammad ‘Alī Salāma (d. 1942), one of the contemporary Azharite professors, was the first to popularise the definition among Egyptian scholars. See Muḥammad ‘Alī Salāma, *Manhaj al-furqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* [Method of Proof in Qur’anic Studies] (Cairo: Dār Naḥdat Miṣr, 2004), 2:6. Then Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīm al-Zurqānī (d. 1948) analysed the definition in his *Manāhil*. See Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-‘irfān*, 1:471-2. Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī (d. 1977), former Egyptian minister and Shaykh of al-Azhar, known by his important work, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufasssīrūn*, also discussed the definition. See Muḥammad Ḥusayn Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufasssīrūn: Baḥth tafṣīlī ‘an nash’at al-tafsīr wa-taṭawwuruh, wa-alwānuh, wa-madhāhibuh, ma’a ‘arḍ li-ashhar al-mufasssīrīn* [Interpretation and Interpreters: Detailed Study on the Origin of Tafsīr, its Development, Sorts, and Schools with the Presentation of Well-Known Commentators] (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-ḥadītha, 1976-1989), 1:15.

<sup>79</sup> Abū al-Qāsim Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddima jāmi‘ al-tafāsīr: Ma’a Tafsīr al-Fātiḥa wa-maṭāli‘ al-Baqara* [Introduction to the Compiler of Commentaries with the Interpretation of Fātiḥa and the Beginning of Baqarah] (Kuwait: Dār al-Da’wā, 1984), 94-6.

<sup>80</sup> Al-Kāfiyājī, *al-Taysīr fī qawā‘id ‘ilm al-Tafsīr*, 27-9.

<sup>81</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 4:213-6. Many writers have cited the same list from al-Suyūṭī. For example, see Ṭāshkoprīzāda, *Miftāḥ al-sa’āda*, 2:82-4; Muḥammad A’lā ibn ‘Alī al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn* [The Discoverer of the Terminology of the Arts] (Beirut, Lubnān: Dār al-Kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 1998), 1:34-37; al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufasssīrūn*, 1:265.

ordinary piety. Being at pains to explain this inclusion of God-given knowledge among the other sciences “accessible” to human effort, al-Suyūṭī underlines the importance of pious practices to understanding the Qur’ān more thoroughly. In the pages that follow, he completely rules out esoteric interpretation and quotes antithetical, and even anathematising, opinions against Sufi esoteric exegesis. Al-Suyūṭī’s efforts to isolate the *‘ilm al-mawhiba* from Sufi esoteric knowledge did not escape the notice of Abū al-Thanā al-Ālūsī (d. 1854), a notable thinker and commentator who was the mufti in Ottoman Baghdad. He states *‘ilm al-mawhiba* is for the cognisance of esoteric secrets (*al-asrār*), not for seeking to explain the textual meanings of the Qur’ān.<sup>82</sup>

Al-Fanārī’s ideas also found a way into scholarship through Kātib Chalabī (d. 1657), the great Ottoman historian, bibliographer and geographer. In his monumental bibliographical dictionary, *Kashf al-zunūn*, Kātib Chalabī places al-Fanārī’s explanations of the definition of *tafsir* at the beginning of the section he reserves for *‘Ilm al-tafsir*, accentuating the importance of the discussion.<sup>83</sup> After a long quotation, he refers readers who want to learn the subtleties of the science of *tafsir* to the *‘Ayn*. Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān al-Qannawjī (d. 1890), an Indian scholar and statesman who is considered one of the founders of the reformist Ahl-i Ḥadīth movement in India, includes the same discussion in his *Abjad al-‘ulūm*, an encyclopaedic work on the sciences and outstanding representatives of the sciences in the history of Islam.<sup>84</sup> He also approvingly mentions al-Fanārī’s definition in the introduction to his voluminous Qur’ānic commentary, *Fath al-bayān*.<sup>85</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Al-Fanārī’s *‘Ayn al-a’yān* stands out in the history of Qur’ānic exegesis mainly because of two important features. First, its prologue includes a critical discussion regarding the nature of Qur’ānic exegesis and the limits of its authority to know God’s exact intention in Qur’ānic text. Here, al-Fanārī justifies interpretive methods on other bases besides narration, including esoteric exegesis. Accordingly, a commentator can extract meanings not voiced by tradition, including esoteric ones, which are not certain to be God’s intention. In this study, I argue that al-Fanārī questions the authority of *tafsir* to know God’s exact intention in the text to make possible his Sufi hermeneutics, which favour fluidity instead of unilaterality and stasis. Second, the commentary section of the *‘Ayn* contains outstanding examples of esoteric exegesis presented through the theory of “*marātib al-ma’nā*.” Al-Fanārī’s esoteric interpretation, which does not disregard literal meaning, makes multiple meanings of the same Qur’ānic text possible. These multiple meanings are analogous to the “layers”

<sup>82</sup> Maḥmūd ibn ‘Abdullāh al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma’ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm wa-l-sab‘ al-mathānī* [The Spirit of Meanings in the Interpretation of the Great Qur’an and the Seven Pairs] (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2005), 1:7.

<sup>83</sup> Kātib Chalabī, *Kashf al-zunūn*, 1:427-8.

<sup>84</sup> Muḥammad Şiddīq Ḥasan al-Qannawjī, *Abjad al-‘ulūm* [Alphabet of the Sciences] (Damascus: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-irshād al-qawmī, 1978), 2:176-8.

<sup>85</sup> Muḥammad Şiddīq Ḥasan al-Qannawjī, *Fath al-bayān fī maqāṣid al-Qur’ān* [Opening of the Elucidation in the Objectives of the Qur’an] (Cairo: ‘Abd al-Muhyī ‘Alī Maḥfūz, 1965), 1:7.

hierarchically lined up to correspond to the hierarchy of ontological and spiritual levels expounded upon by the Akbarī school. At the level of esoteric sense, the text encodes the secrets of existence, which the commentator who has reached a certain spiritual level can decipher. In this regard, in al-Fanārī's commentary, the exegesis of the Qur'ān has an epistemological function to connect Akbarī ontology to spirituality.

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