

Approaching Mullā Ṣadrā as Scriptural Exegete: A Survey of Scholarship on His Quranic Works¹

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ABSTRACT

This article offers the first comprehensive survey of scholarly literature devoted to the Quranic works of the famous Muslim philosopher, Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640). While taking account of the merits and shortcomings of studies on Ṣadrā's Quranic writings, we will also be concerned with highlighting some of the methodological problems raised by the diverse range of approaches adopted in these studies. Chief amongst them is the tendency to pit Ṣadrā the philosopher against Ṣadrā the scriptural exegete. Such a dichotomy is not entirely helpful, both with respect to painting a clearer picture of Ṣadrā's religious worldview, and to addressing broader questions pertaining to the intimate relationship shared between the "act" of philosophy and the "act" of reading scripture.

Keywords: Islamic philosophy; Quranic hermeneutics; contemporary scholarship.

Over the past three decades, scholarship on the life and thought of Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Shīrāzī (d. 1050/1640)² (commonly known

1. I would like to thank Todd Lawson, Maria Subtelny, Sebastian Günther, Shafique Virani, John Walbridge, Sajjad Rizvi and Rizwan Mohammad for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.
2. Although Ṣadrā's commonly-acknowledged death date is 1050/1640, it has been

as Mullā Ṣadrā) has grown exponentially. Today we have a good idea of the main details of his life and times, especially since certain issues concerning his intellectual contacts, whereabouts, and time of death have recently been reconsidered.³ A number of studies have been carried out on Ṣadrā's eschatology and psychology,⁴ epistemology,⁵ theodicy,⁶ doctrine of causality and physics,⁷ metaphysics,⁸ theory of perception,⁹ and spirituality.¹⁰ We are also well-informed of how Ṣadrā's innovative philosophical

pointed out that his grandson, Muḥammad 'Alam al-Hudā (d. 1115/1703–1704), records an earlier date for his death, placing him in Basra in 1045/1635–1636. It was here that Ṣadrā died *en route* to the Hajj. See Sajjad Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī: His Life and Works and the Sources for Safavid Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 28–30.

3. See Muḥammad Khamenei, *Mullā Ṣadrā: zindagī, shakhsīyyat, wa-maktab-i Ṣadr-i muta'allihīn* (Tehran: Sadra Islamic Philosophy Research Institute, 2000); Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī*, ch. 1.
4. For some recent contributions, see Christian Jambet, *Mort et résurrection en islam: L'au-delà selon Mullā Ṣadrā* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008); Shigeru Kamada, "Transmigration of Soul (*tanāsukh*) in Shaykh al-Mufīd and Mullā Ṣadrā," *Orient* 44 (2009): 105–119; Mohammed Rustom, "Psychology, Eschatology, and Imagination in Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī's Commentary on the *Ḥadīth* of Awakening," *Islam and Science* 5(1), (2007): 9–22.
5. See Ibrahim Kalin, *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mullā Ṣadrā on Existence, Intellect and Intuition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Muhammad Kamal, *Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Philosophy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), ch. 6.
6. See Kalin, "Mullā Ṣadrā on Theodicy and the Best of All Possible Worlds," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18(2), (2007): 183–207.
7. For studies on Ṣadrā's treatment of causality, see Rizvi, "Mullā Ṣadrā and Causation: Rethinking a Problem in Later Islamic Philosophy," *Philosophy East and West* 55(4), (2005): 570–583. See also the articles in Seyed Safavi ed., *Mulla Sadra and Comparative Philosophy on Causation* (London: Salman-Azadeh, 2003). For a fine discussion of Ṣadrā's physics, see Kalin, "Between Physics and Metaphysics: Mullā Ṣadrā on Nature and Motion," *Islam and Science* 1(1), (2003): 59–90.
8. The most recent discussions can be found in Reza Akbarian, *The Fundamental Principles of Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Philosophy* (London: Xlibris, 2009), ch. 2; Cécile Bonmariage, *Le Réel et les réalités: Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī et la structure de la réalité* (Paris: Vrin, 2008); Kamal, *Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Philosophy*, chs. 4–5; Megawati Moris, *Mullā Ṣadrā's Doctrine of the Primacy of Existence (aṣālat al-wujūd)* (Kuala Lumpur: IS-TAC, 2003); Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being* (London: Routledge, 2009).
9. See Safavi ed., *Perception According to Mulla Sadra* (London: Salman-Azadeh, 2002).
10. The survey by Carl Ernst, "Sufism and Philosophy in Mullā Ṣadrā," in *Mullā Ṣadrā and Transcendent Philosophy (Islam-West Philosophical Dialogue: The Papers Presented at the World Congress on Mullā Ṣadrā, May, 1999, Tehran)*, 1: 173–192 (Tehran: Sadra Islamic Philosophy Research Institute, 2001) can be consulted with great profit, as can

insights relate to important non-Muslim philosophical figures. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are the studies carried out by David Burrell and Alparslan Açıkgenç, which compare his ontology with the ontologies of St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) and Heidegger (d. 1976) respectively.¹¹

Şadrā was also thoroughly proficient in all aspects of what is known as the “transmitted” Islamic sciences [al-‘ulūm al-naqliyya].¹² To this effect, he wrote a number of books on the Quran and Ḥadīth. Yet when we consider the amount of attention paid by scholars to this aspect of Şadrā’s oeuvre, we notice that very little work has been done. This lacuna in Şadrāian scholarship has resulted in an unclear picture of Mullā Şadrā’s religious worldview, which explains why his understanding of many questions pertaining to Islamic jurisprudence [fiqh], the *ḥadīth* sciences,¹³ and the Quran remain unanswered.

the following studies: Janis Ešots, “Mullā Şadrā’s Teaching on *Wujūd*: A Synthesis of Philosophy and Mysticism” (PhD diss., Tallinn University, 2007); Zailan Moris, *Revelation, Intellectual Intuition and Reason in the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra: An Analysis of the al-Hikmah al-Arshiyyah* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002); James Morris, “Civilization as Dialogue: Spirituality and Philosophy in Mullā Şadrā and Today,” in *Mullā Şadrā’s School and Western Philosophies (Islam-West Philosophical Dialogue: The Papers Presented at the Second World Congress on Mullā Şadrā, May, 2004, Tehran)*, 1:261-72 (Tehran: Sadra Islamic Philosophy Research Institute, 2005). See also Şadrā, *The Elixir of the Gnostics*, ed. and trans. William Chittick (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2003).

11. David Burrell, “Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Mulla Sadra Shirazi (980/1572-1050/1640) and the Primacy of *esse/wujūd* in Philosophical Theology,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1999): 207-219; Alparslan Açıkgenç, *Being and Existence in Şadrā and Heidegger: A Comparative Ontology* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1993). For critical comments on the latter, see Rizvi, *Mullā Şadrā and Metaphysics*, 9.
12. For Şadrā’s training in the transmitted sciences, see Rizvi, *Mullā Şadrā Şhīrāzī*, 5-14.
13. For studies on Şadrā’s interpretations of *ḥadīths*, see Karim Crow, “Mullā Şadrā on the First Intellect in his *Sharḥ Uşūl al-Kāfi*,” in *Eschatology, Exegesis, Hadith (Islam-West Philosophical Dialogue: The Papers Presented at the World Congress on Mullā Şadrā, May, 1999, Tehran)*, 571-590 (Tehran: Sadra Islamic Philosophy Research Institute, 2005); Maria Dakake, “The Origin of Man in Pre-Eternity and his Origination in Time: Mullā Şadrā and Imāmī Şhī’ite Tradition,” in *Eschatology, Exegesis, Hadith*, 147-166; Armin Eschraghi, “‘I was a Hidden Treasure’: Some Notes on a Commentary Ascribed to Mullā Şadrā Şhīrāzī: *Sharḥ ḥadīth: ‘Kuntu kanzan makhfiyyan* (sic),” in *Islamic Thought in the Middle Ages: Studies in Text, Transmission and Translation, in Honour of Hans Daiber*, ed. Wim Raven and Anna Akasoy, 91-100 (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Alī Aşghar Ja’fari, “*Sharḥ-i ḥadīth ‘kuntu kanzan makhfiyyan*,” *Khīrad-Nāma-yi Şadrā* 32 (1381/2002): 61-63, which contains the text of Şadrā’s commentary on this *ḥadīth* edited from two manuscripts; Rustom, “Psychology, Eschatology, and Imagination.” See also Devin

Amongst Ṣadrā's writings in the transmitted sciences, his work on the Quran is most deserving of scholarly attention simply because the Quran occupies central importance in his thought. Although almost all of Ṣadrā's major philosophical writings contain Quranic citations, from early on in his career to several years before his death Ṣadrā wrote a number of commentaries on individual chapters and verses of the Quran. He also devoted at least three other books to certain theoretical aspects of his understanding of Islam's sacred text.¹⁴

In contemporary scholarship, Seyyed Hossein Nasr is the first author to have devoted a serious study to Mullā Ṣadrā's work on the Quran. In his essay on Ṣadrā's Quran commentaries,¹⁵ Nasr discusses the significance of Ṣadrā's work on the Quran. He also takes stock of Ṣadrā's writings related to the Quran and its sciences, which is a practice that would later be taken up by Ibrahim Kalin and Sajjad Rizvi.¹⁶ In many ways, Nasr's seminal article lays the groundwork for further inquiry into Ṣadrā's scriptural hermeneutics, as it effectively conveys the nature,

Stewart's brief and unconvincing inquiry which aims to situate Ṣadrā's *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfi* within the wider Akhbārī-Uṣūlī debate in its Safavid context: "Mullā Ṣadrā's Commentary on *Uṣūl al-Kāfi* as a Response to the Akhbārī Revival," in *Eschatology, Exegesis, Hadith*, 563–570.

14. All of Ṣadrā's writings on the Quran and its sciences have been published in one form or another. I list here the most common editions of works which are unquestionably ascribable to him: *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, ed. Muḥammad Khwājawī (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Ta'rīkh al-'Arabī, 2002, repr. ed.); *Mutashābihāt al-Quran* in Ṣadrā, *Sih risāla-yi falsafī*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Markazī-yi Intishārāt-i Daftar-i Tablighāt-i Islāmī, 1379/2000), 255–284; *Tafsīr al-Quran al-karīm*, ed. Muḥammad Khwājawī (Qum: Intishārāt-i Bīdār, 1987–1890); *Asrār al-āyāt wa-anwār al-bayyināt*, ed. S.M. Mūsawī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Ḥikmat, 1385/2006).
15. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and His Transcendent Theosophy*, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 1997), 123–135. This essay was reprinted the following year in an important collection of articles dedicated to the memory of Toshihiko Izutsu (d. 1993): "The Qur'anic Commentaries of Mullā Ṣadrā," in *Consciousness and Reality: Studies in Memory of Toshihiko Izutsu*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī et al., 47–57 (Leiden: Brill, 1998). It can be noted here that Abū 'Abd Allāh Zanjānī's *Maqālāt fī ta'rīkh al-Quran wa Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī* (Damascus: al-Mustashāriyya al-Thaqāfiyya li-l-Jumhūriyya al-Islāmiyya al-Īrāniyya bi-Dimashq, 2002) has nothing to do with Ṣadrā's Quranic works.
16. See Kalin, "An Annotated Bibliography of the Works of Mullā Ṣadrā with a Brief Account of his Life," *Islamic Studies* 42(1), (2003): 35–41; Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī*, 77–87. A more recent attempt can be found in Rustom, "An Annotated Bibliography of Mullā Ṣadrā's Qur'anic Writings," *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 7 (special issue on Mullā Ṣadrā, guest-edited by Mohammed Rustom) (2011): forthcoming.

content, scope, and significance of his work on the Quran.

It will be noted that we said Nasr's work was the first piece to draw "serious" attention to Ṣadrā's function as an exegete in contemporary scholarship. Before his essay appeared, several other studies were carried out on Ṣadrā's hermeneutics in English, Persian, and Arabic, but none of which were as successful in demonstrating the importance of his work on the Quran. The first of these studies was undertaken by Muḥammad Khwājawī in his Arabic introduction to his edition of one of Ṣadrā's books on the Quranic sciences.¹⁷ In this introduction, Khwājawī devotes some attention to Ṣadrā's scriptural hermeneutical methodology and its importance with respect to Ṣadrian metaphysics, while also listing in summary fashion his writings on the Quran. Several years later, Khwājawī returned to the question of Ṣadrā's Quranic writings in a Persian monograph dedicated to his life and work.¹⁸ But nothing new is presented here which cannot be obtained by reading his earlier exposition of Ṣadrā's hermeneutics. The same can also be said about Khwājawī's Persian translations of some of Ṣadrā's works on Quran and its sciences: although they are useful for readers of Persian who have little or no Arabic, they do not present researchers with anything significant which cannot be gleaned from the Arabic originals.¹⁹

An early and fairly helpful discussion concerning the nature and scope of Ṣadrā's Quran-related texts is to be found in Muḥsin Bīdārfar's Arabic introduction to Khwājawī's seven-volume uncritical edition²⁰ of Ṣadrā's

17. See Muḥammad Khwājawī, "Muqaddimat al-muṣaḥḥih," in Ṣadrā, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, 5–74 (from p. 54 in particular). Although not a "study" as such, it is worth noting that in 1971, Mehdi Mohaghegh published a manuscript containing a Persian translation of the introduction and first two parts of one of Ṣadrā's important Quranic works. See Mohaghegh, "Mafātīḥ al-ghayb-i Mullā Ṣadrā," in Mohaghegh, *Bīst guftār* (Tehran: Naqsh-i Jahān, 1971), ch. 8. It can also be noted that in the introduction to his translation of one of Ṣadrā's important philosophical texts, Henry Corbin lists most of Ṣadrā's Quranic works, but does not discuss them in any significant fashion. See Corbin, "Introduction," in Ṣadrā, *Le livre des pénétrations métaphysiques*, trans. Henry Corbin, 35–36, 39–40 (Paris: Verdier, 1988, repr. ed.).

18. Khwājawī, *Lawāmi' al-'arīfīn fī sharḥ aḥwāl Ṣadr al-muta'allihīn* (Tehran: Āriyan Press, 1987), 107–127.

19. Representative examples of these translations can be found in Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr-i Sūra-yi jumu'a*, trans. Muḥammad Khwājawī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā, 1364/1984); Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr-i Sūra-yi mubāraka-yi nūr*, trans. Muḥammad Khwājawī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā, 1363/1983).

20. Cf. Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī*, 80.

partial commentary upon the Quran.²¹ Although Bīdārfar devotes some room to Ṣadrā's method of interpretation, he also attempts to date the composition of each of his works on the Quran and its sciences, basing himself on statements made by Ṣadrā in his vast oeuvre. Some dates are confirmed beyond doubt, but others are somewhat conjectural.²²

The earliest study carried out in English on Ṣadrā's scriptural hermeneutics is Latimah Peerwani's brief article published in 1991.²³ Peerwani lists most of Ṣadrā's writings on the Quran and then goes on to show that Ṣadrā's "method" of interpreting the Quran differs from the approach of the early Twelver Shī'ī exegetes in that he is more philosophical and less concerned with making particular Shī'ī theological arguments. Peerwani is correct to suggest that Ṣadrā's concerns as an exegete are substantially different from other Quranic exegetes. She points out that this is because his approach to the Quran is fundamentally philosophical/mystical in its nature, which she seeks to demonstrate by citing a passage from Ṣadrā's *Tafsīr Āyat al-nūr* ("Commentary on the Light Verse"). Peerwani also notes here how Ṣadrā expounds a four-fold methodology for interpreting the Quran, but bases her exposition on his explanation of different approaches to the Quran's *mutashābih* or "ambiguous" verses. As Peerwani would later realize, an approach which limits Ṣadrā's theoretical hermeneutics to his discussion of the *mutashābih* verses is problematic. This is precisely because Ṣadrā's treatment of the *mutashābih* verses (to which he dedicated an entire treatise)²⁴ belongs to a much wider body of writings in which he lays out his scriptural hermeneutics.²⁵

21. See Bīdārfar, "Taḳdīm," in Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr*, 1: 92, 94, 102-3, 105, 108-111. Khwājawi is commonly mistaken as the author of this introduction.

22. For a comprehensive chronology of their order of composition, see the appendix in Rustom, "An Annotated Bibliography of Mullā Ṣadrā's Qur'ānic Writings."

23. Latimah Peerwani, "Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: The Views of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī," *Proceedings of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies* (1991): 468-477.

24. See Ṣadrā, *Mutashābihāt al-Quran* (pp. 285-310 contain the editor's important Persian glosses on the text). See also Āshtiyānī, "Muḳaddima-yi muṣaḥḥiḥ," in Ṣadrā, *Sih risāla*, 77-179. David Dakake, "Defining Ambiguity: Early and Classical Commentary on the *Mutashābih* Verses of the Qur'ān" (PhD diss., Temple University, in progress), has translated Ṣadrā's *Mutashābihāt al-Quran* as an appendix to his study.

25. This treatise actually forms part of a much larger and significant work by Ṣadrā. See Rustom, "An Annotated Bibliography of Mullā Ṣadrā's Qur'ānic Writings." For a survey of the reception of the *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* verses in *tafsīr* literature, and a discussion of the fluid nature of the categories of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*, see Leah Kinberg, "*Muḥkamāt* and *Mutashābihāt* (Koran 3/7): Implications of a Koranic

Peerwani returned to Ṣadrā's hermeneutics in an article published in 1999.²⁶ In her first study she simply listed Ṣadrā's writings on the Quran and its sciences. But in this piece, which is an expanded version of her earlier article, she devotes several lines to three of his non-*tafsīr* works, in each instance following Nasr's characterizations. As alluded to above, what appeared in Peerwani's earlier study as Ṣadrā's fourfold method for approaching the *mutashābih* verses appears in this updated version as Ṣadrā's fourfold method for approaching scripture in general. A key addition to this article is a brief discussion of Ṣadrā's listing of the etiquette [adab] one must observe in order to understand the Quran. Peerwani correctly notes that Ṣadrā borrows this material from Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* ("The Revival of the Religious Sciences").²⁷ The most significant aspect of Peerwani's revised study is her discussion of some of the prominent features of Ṣadrā's "exoteric" philological, historical, and exegetical sources on the Quran.

It would not be an understatement to say that, of all of Mullā Ṣadrā's *tafsīrs*, his aforementioned *Tafsīr Āyat al-nūr* has received the bulk of scholarly attention. This might have something to do with the fact that Ṣadrā's commentary on this verse was the first of his *tafsīrs* to have been translated into a European language. It was initially translated by Mohsen Saleh as a part of his 1992 Temple University doctoral dissertation, although it was never published.²⁸ Peerwani, however, has published her translation of this text.²⁹ When comparing these two English translations of Ṣadrā's *Tafsīr Āyat al-nūr* with one another, it becomes fairly clear that Saleh's translation is more careful and accurate than Peerwani's, although her annotations are more useful in that she tracks down a number of Ṣadrā's Sufi sources. At the same time, Saleh's introduction to his translation, which was later reprinted as a sepa-

Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis," *Arabica* 35 (1998): 142–172.

26. Peerwani, "Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī on the Hermeneutics of the Qur'ān: His Philosophical Meditation," in *Eschatology, Exegesis, Hadith*, 369–390.
27. For Ṣadrā's appropriation of Ghazālī's rules for reciting the Qur'ān, see Peerwani, "Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī on the Hermeneutics of the Qur'ān."
28. See Mohsen Mahmoud Saleh, "The Verse of Light: A Study of Mullā Ṣadrā's Philosophical Qur'ān Exegesis" (PhD diss., Temple University, 1992). The translation of the work is on pp. 84–236 of the study.
29. Ṣadrā, *On the Hermeneutics of the Light Verse of the Qur'ān*, trans. Latimah Peerwani (London: ICAS Press, 2004).

rate article,³⁰ attempts to explain the ways in which Ṣadrā develops the symbolism of light and darkness with respect to his major philosophical doctrines. Peerwani's introduction, on the other hand, pales in comparison. Since her introduction is so closely based on her revised article on Ṣadrā's hermeneutics, very little is done here by way of discussing the history of mystical and philosophical hermeneutics which informs Ṣadrā's approach to scripture in general, and his commentary on the light verse in particular. A summary of the long tradition of philosophical and mystical commentaries on the light verse is in order here, since without a detailed historical and philosophical apparatus, a translation of Ṣadrā's writings can say very little to non-specialists.

Two other scholars have devoted meaningful studies to the *Tafsīr Āyat al-nūr*, each with their own points of emphasis. Like Peerwani, Marcia Hermansen's article does a good job in situating this work within its Sufi context, but, by the same token, it implicitly downplays the importance of the philosophical commentarial tradition on this verse.³¹ Bilal Kuspinar's study, on the other hand, manages to bring out some of the philosophical significance of this work, although his treatment of the topic is rather short.³²

In a sense, the shortcomings of the aforementioned translations and studies of Ṣadrā's *Tafsīr Āyat al-nūr* are redressed in Christian Jambet's new French translation of the work.³³ Jambet's solid translation is accompanied by many helpful notes which gloss key technical terms as they appear in the text. His notes often cross-reference important passages from some of Ṣadrā's other writings, and/or draw the reader's attention to pertinent secondary scholarship. But the greatest merit of this study is the introduction to the translation itself. Not only does Jambet situate Ṣadrā's commentary upon the light verse within its proper textual and historical framework, but he also effectively explains how the "mythic" structure of Ṣadrā's philosophical treatment of light ties into his spiritual perspective.

Apart from the scholarship devoted to Ṣadrā's *Tafsīr Āyat al-nūr*, two

30. Saleh, "Being: The Light of Lights: An Analysis of Mullā Ṣadrā's Commentary on the Verse of Light," in *Eschatology, Exegesis, Hadith*, 321–342.

31. Marcia Hermansen, "Mullā Ṣadrā's Commentary upon the Light Verse (Āyat al-Nūr 24: 35)," in *Eschatology, Exegesis, Hadith*, 409–428.

32. Bilal Kuspinar, "Mullā Ṣadrā on the Light-Verse," in *Eschatology, Exegesis, Hadith*, 357–368.

33. See Ṣadrā, *Le verset de la lumière commentaire*, trans. Christian Jambet (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2009). Appended to Jambet's translation is the Arabic text of the *Tafsīr Āyat al-nūr*, which is derived from Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* 4: 345–427.

other short studies examine his insights on particular Quranic verses. The first of these studies again comes from the pen of Jambet, in his brief inquiry into Ṣadrā's treatment of Q 2:256, which states that "there is no compulsion in religion."³⁴ Ṣadrā, as one would expect, reveals himself here to be more concerned with an apolitical interpretation of this verse than anything else. Jambet astutely demonstrates how, for Ṣadrā, "religion" is understood in its deepest sense to be an interior matter. As such, there can be no compulsion in religion because the choice to live the religious life is entirely dependent upon one's own initiative. It is interesting to note here that Jambet does not address what seems like an obvious question: could Ṣadrā not have been concerned with providing an interpretation of this verse because he himself fell victim to the persecution of the more exoteric 'ulamā' of his time, whose blindness to the inner life he repeatedly criticizes?³⁵

A second and more substantial engagement with Ṣadrā's approach to a single Quranic āya can be found in Annabel Keeler's study of his commentary on Q 32. This article is concerned with Ṣadrā's interpretation of verse four of the sūra, in which he tackles the problem of creation in time within the framework of his ontology.³⁶ Keeler's piece also includes some perspicacious remarks on Ṣadrā's exegetical method, and highlights the rhetorical and exegetical function of the introduction to his commentary on Q 32. Unlike other scholars who have written on Ṣadrā's Quranic hermeneutics, Keeler attempts to situate his work on the Quran within the wider tradition of Sufi Quran commentary.

Turning to other studies on Ṣadrā's Quran-related writings, Sayyid Sadru-

34. See Jambet, *The Act of Being: The Philosophy of Revelation in Mullā Ṣadrā*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 420–423, which summarizes the author's argument from a previously-published pamphlet (which I have been unable to obtain): *Pas de contrainte en religion: Une approche de la question de la liberté en Islam* (Paris: ESCP-EAP, 2004). Jambet's *The Act of Being* was originally published in French as *L'acte d'être: la philosophie de la révélation chez Mollā Ṣadrā* (Paris: Fayard, 2002). *L'acte d'être* does not contain the section on Q 2: 256.

35. See, in particular, the introduction to his Persian work on Sufi ethics, *Sih aṣl*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Tehran: Tehran University Press, 1961). Since the appearance of Nasr's edition of this work, which was reprinted in 1998, another edition by Khwājāwī has also been published. For a translation of the *Sih aṣl*, see Ṣadrā, *Challenging Islamic Fundamentalism: The Three Principles of Mullā Ṣadrā*, trans. Colin Turner (London: Routledge, 2010).

36. See Annabel Keeler, "Mullā Ṣadrā's Commentary on *Sūrat al-Sajda*," in *Eschatology, Exegesis, Hadith*, 343–356.

ddin Taheri's treatment of resurrection in Ṣadrā's Quranic commentaries does not focus on a particular tafsīr work, but does offer some interesting general observations on aspects of his eschatology.³⁷ He notes, for example, that Ṣadrā addresses a problem in one of his tafsīrs about a Neoplatonic doctrine discussed by Avicenna (d. 428/1037) and defended by Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) concerning the attachment of souls to celestial bodies in the afterlife in order to undergo physical punishment for sins committed on earth. Significantly, Ṣadrā's response to this long-standing debate in Islamic thought is resolved in one of his ḥadīth commentaries in which he draws on the notion of imaginal bodies, as discussed by Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) and his followers. Ṣadrā later incorporated this commentary into his exegesis of Q 36, perhaps because of the sūra's eschatological nature.³⁸

The studies carried out by Mudabbir Azizi,³⁹ Hasan Sa'idi,⁴⁰ and Dihqan Mangabadi⁴¹ approach Ṣadrā's Quranic hermeneutics in summary fashion. Azizi's article offers a sampling of some of his comments on various āyās, both in his tafsīr and non-tafsīr writings. He moves between Ṣadrā's interpretation of the light verse, stories of some Quranic prophets, and verses concerning the remembrance of God without any real sense of a unifying theme behind the interpretations presented. Azizi's study, therefore, is a mishmash of different reflections offered by Ṣadrā on a select number of Quranic verses.

Mangabadi's essay, on the other hand, is generally better organized and thematically united. Its most useful discussion is its treatment of Ṣadrā's critique of exoteric approaches to the Quran. But how this aspect of Ṣadrā's hermeneutics ties into Mangabadi's discussion of his understanding of the different levels of scriptural interpretation, or the detached letters [al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa'a], remains unclear. Mangabadi also considers the influences of earlier commentators on Ṣadrā's tafsīr, but confines himself to scholars of tafsīr proper. This is indeed misleading, since there are many other source materials for Ṣadrā's tafsīr writings.

37. Sayyid Sadruddin Taheri, "A Critical Study of Resurrection in the Qur'ānic Commentary and Philosophical Ideas of Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn," in *Eschatology, Exegesis, Hadith*, 45–76.

38. See Rustom, "Psychology, Eschatology, and Imagination."

39. Mudabbir Azizi, "Mullā Ṣadrā's Gnostic Approach Towards the Qur'ānic Verses," in *Eschatology, Exegesis, Hadith*, 445–466.

40. Hasan Sa'idi, "Illumination, Unveiling and Intuition in Mullā Ṣadrā's Qur'ānic Commentary," in *Eschatology, Exegesis, Hadith*, 519–538.

41. Dihqan Mangabadi, "Mullā Ṣadrā's Method of Qur'ānic Commentary," in *Eschatology, Exegesis, Hadith*, 429–444.

Unlike Mangabadi, Sa'idi manages to account for some of Ṣadrā's more mystical sources in his tafsīrs, and is able to draw a somewhat clearer link between Ṣadrā's critique of exoteric approaches to tafsīr and his insistence upon "unveiling" [kashf] as the most superior hermeneutic tool one can employ in understanding the Quran. Yet when it comes to Ṣadrā's treatment of unveiling, Sa'idi ignores the long tradition of discussions on this topic which influenced him (particularly Ibn 'Arabī). Nor does Sa'idi attempt to explain how Ṣadrā's metaphysics relates to his understanding of the Quran. This last dimension of Ṣadrā's hermeneutics has been ignored by most authors, but is something which lies at the heart of his approach to the Quran.

Like Mangabadi's study, Abū l-Qāsim Ḥusayn-Dūst's inquiry into the function of the detached letters in Ṣadrā's hermeneutics is welcome, but significantly underdeveloped.⁴² Although one of the few scholars to have drawn serious attention to Ṣadrā's treatment of the detached letters, Ḥusayn-Dūst does not fully demonstrate how Ṣadrā's account of the detached letters in his tafsīr writings relates to God's speech and human becoming. Indeed, Ṣadrā's treatment of the detached letters in his tafsīr works must be read in conjunction with cognate discussions elsewhere in his vast oeuvre, where he draws important connections between God's words in their state of non-deployment and the detached letters of the Quran. These insights, coupled with his ontology, allow Ṣadrā to explain the inextricable link between the Quran and the human self.⁴³

Two scholars who have explicitly discussed Ṣadrā's ontology vis-à-vis the Quran are Fāṭima Ārānī⁴⁴ and Muḥammad Khamenei, one of Iran's foremost contemporary philosophers.⁴⁵ In their studies, Ārānī and Khamenei demonstrate the fundamental importance of the notion of levels [marātib] in Ṣadrā's Quranic writings and how they relate to his ontol-

42. Abū l-Qāsim Ḥusayn-Dūst, "Ḥurūf-i munqaṭi'a-yi Quran dar ḥikmat-i muta'āliya-yi Mullā Ṣadrā," *Khīrad-Nāma-yi Ṣadrā* 36 (1383/2004): 58–63.

43. I provide a detailed analysis of this aspect of Ṣadrā's thought in my forthcoming monograph on his Quranic hermeneutics.

44. Fāṭima Ārānī, "Mabānī-yi 'irfānī-yi ta'wīl-i Quran az manẓar-i Ṣadr-i muta'allihīn," *Khīrad-Nāma-yi Ṣadrā* 42 (1384/2005): 63–74; Taṭābuq-i madārij-i Quran wa-ma'ārij-i insān az manẓar-i Ṣadr-i muta'allihīn," *Khīrad-Nāma-yi Ṣadrā* 32 (1381/2002): 46–52.

45. Muḥammad Khamenei, "Fahm-i kalām-i Khudā dar maktab-i Mullā Ṣadrā," *Khīrad-Nāma-yi Ṣadrā* 31 (1382/2003): 19–25; "Uṣūl-i tafsīrī wa-hirminūtik-i Quranī nazd-i Mullā Ṣadrā," *Khīrad-Nāma-yi Ṣadrā* 18 (1378/1999): 64–71. These two works were originally published as *Principles of Interpretation and Quranic Hermeneutics According to Mullā Ṣadrā* (London: ICAS, 1999), 27–64.

ogy. Human beings increase in perception as they shed their materiality, which means they become more real because they increase in being [wujūd]. The deeper one penetrates being, the deeper one penetrates the Quran, which is the book of being. Khamenei also manages to touch on some of the basic issues related to Mullā Ṣadrā's Quranic hermeneutics, particularly the ways in which his metaphysics ties into his understanding of the divine word. But, given the brevity of Khamenei's two studies, they leave much to be desired with respect to the theoretical development and practical application of Ṣadrā's scriptural hermeneutics.

Sasha Dehgani's forthcoming anthology promises to offer the first selections of Ṣadrā's work on the Quran in German translation.⁴⁶ It will be particularly interesting to see what kind of tafsīr materials Dehgani includes in his anthology, especially since, as the title of his book suggests, he clearly sees in Ṣadrā's Quranic writings an underlying Shī'ī theosophical perspective. If by "theosophy" Dehgani means an esoteric approach in which philosophy and mysticism are united to expound the deepest truths contained within the Quran, then Ṣadrā would certainly say that his Quranic works are "theosophical." At the same time, a simple perusal of Ṣadrā's tafsīr reveals very little explicitly "Shī'ī" material. Indeed, answering the question of how Shī'ī Ṣadrā himself is seems to be the first step in determining whether or not we can call his writings in general, and his tafsīr in particular, "Shī'ī theosophy" as Dehgani—undoubtedly following Henry Corbin (d. 1978)⁴⁷—would like to suggest.⁴⁸

Apart from the aforementioned studies carried out by Khwājawi and Āshtiyānī, we only have one monograph in Persian which engages Ṣadrā's Quran commentaries.⁴⁹ Muḥammad Taqī Karāmatī's aim in writing his book was to demonstrate how philosophical arguments influence Ṣadrā's tafsīrs. But since Karāmatī is not concerned with studying

46. Ṣadrā, *Schittische Theosophie: Die Koranexegese von Mullā Ṣadrā*, trans. Sasha Dehgani (Berlin: Suhrkamp Insel, forthcoming).

47. For an insightful inquiry into the "Shī'ī" nature of Ṣadrā's thought, see Hermann Landolt, "Henry Corbin's Understanding of Mullā Ṣadrā," in *Mullā Ṣadrā and Transcendent Philosophy*, 1: 172 (reprinted in Landolt, *Recherches en spiritualité iranienne* [Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 2005], 364).

48. Cf. Abū l-Qāsim Nakūdiyān-İşfahānī, "Dīdgāh-i Mullā Ṣadrā pirāmūn-i nām-hā wa şifāt-i Quran," *Khīrad-Nāma-yi Ṣadrā* 24 (1380/2001): 83–87.

49. Muḥammad Taqī Karāmatī, *Ta'thīr-i mabānī-yi falsafī dar tafsīr-i Ṣadr al-muta'allihīn* (Tehran: Sadra Islamic Philosophy Research Institute, 1385/2006).

Ṣadrā's tafsīrs as Quran commentaries proper (a problem to which we will return shortly), he does not successfully accomplish the goal of his study. Rather, the book amounts to a fairly superficial discussion of how Ṣadrā makes philosophical arguments (such as proofs for the existence of God and bodily resurrection) in sections of his Quranic writings.

The most recent work which makes a diverse selection of materials from Ṣadrā's Quranic writings available in a European language is Jambet's monograph, *Mort et résurrection en islam*.⁵⁰ In this study of Ṣadrā's eschatology, Jambet offers over sixty pages of select translated passages from Ṣadrā's Quranic writings. In keeping with the monograph's theme, these translations have to do with death, the day of judgement, resurrection, and Hell. Jambet's introductions and notes to the selected passages help put their ideas in context, although his French translations are somewhat free. Perhaps the greatest merit of these translations is that they allow readers to see how Ṣadrā approaches scripture as a philosopher/mystic through his comments on several key Quranic eschatological texts and symbols.

Jambet's concern with Ṣadrā's work on the Quran goes back to an earlier, ground-breaking study of Ṣadrā's philosophy. Published originally in French and then refined and translated into English, *The Act of Being* goes a long way in relating how Ṣadrā's ontology is an exposition of the self-revelation of being through its different modes [anḥā'] of gradation. Jambet is fundamentally concerned in this study with the main outlines of Ṣadrā's metaphysics, psychology, and eschatology. He relates all three of these domains to Ṣadrā's teachings on the "movement" or "act" of being, and how its devolution relates to the soul's becoming/destiny. Jambet's approach is certainly to be appreciated, since it helps make the ideas in Ṣadrā's tafsīr more widely available.

Like Karāmatī's aforementioned Persian monograph, Jambet treats Ṣadrā's tafsīr like any of his other writings. Thus, Jambet is not concerned with demonstrating the manner in which Ṣadrā's tafsīr reads as tafsīr, nor does he wish to bring Ṣadrā's scriptural concerns into direct conversation with his ontology. Although Jambet's purpose is not to discuss Ṣadrā's Quranic hermeneutics as such, his book nonetheless manages to draw out the cosmological implications of the ways in which being is a form of revelation. But since *The Act of Being* does not pay attention to Ṣadrā's explication of philosophical concepts within the framework of the Quran's universe of discourse, the Quran is regarded by Jambet

50. See Jambet, *Mort et résurrection en islam*, 209-18; 232-289.

as simply the locus for Ṣadrā's philosophical reflections.⁵¹ Why would a philosopher be concerned with commenting upon scripture? How does Ṣadrā use scripture to make his philosophical arguments? These are the types of questions which Jambet, and, to a greater extent, Karāmatī, could have asked before undertaking their respective projects.

The questions raised by Karāmatī and Jambet's studies are in fact indicative of a much wider problem in current approaches to Ṣadrā's work on the Quran. A number of scholars besides Karāmatī, such as 'Alī Arshad Riyāhī,⁵² and Taheri,⁵³ all favour the position that Ṣadrā comments upon the Quran in order to demonstrate one of his philosophical teachings. This type of characterization creates an unnecessary dichotomy between the act of philosophy and the act of reading scripture. It also privileges the notion that Ṣadrā is a philosopher first and scriptural exegete second. Yet there is something much more organic happening when Ṣadrā, as an accomplished philosopher/mystic, draws on the Quran as an exegete. A similar point has been made by Muṣṭafā Burujirdī⁵⁴ and, more forcefully, Muḥammad Bīdhandī in his short study of Ṣadrā's understanding of the nature of esoteric interpretation [ta'wīl].⁵⁵ Examining Ṣadrā's treatment of the relationship between outer [zāhir] and inner [bāṭin] approaches to the Quran, Bīdhandī argues that the basis of Ṣadrā's ta'wīl is the Quran itself. This means that the Quran is not simply interpreted by Ṣadrā through the lens of his philosophy, thus reading inner meanings out of the text. Rather, it is the Quran which allows him to make his inner readings of its verses.

To say that Ṣadrā's philosophical doctrines are given expression in

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51. The same holds true for his latest article on Ṣadrā, "L'essence de Dieu est toute chose": Identité et différence selon Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā)," in *Le shī'isme imāmīte quarante ans après: hommage à Etan Kohlberg*, ed. Mohammad Ali-Amir Moezzi et al., 269–292 (Turnhout, Brepols, 2009).
 52. 'Alī Arshad Riyāhī, "Ta'thīrāt-i muthbat wa-yā manfī-yi falsafa-yi Ṣadrā dar fahm-i ū az āyāt-i Quran," *Khīrad-Nāma-yi Ṣadrā* 35 (1383/2004): 50–58.
 53. Taheri, "Guzārashī az tafāsīr," *Khīrad-Nāma-yi Ṣadrā* 1 (1374/1995): 57–63.
 54. Mustafa Burujirdī, "Ta'thīr-i Quran-i karīm dar shaklgīrī-yi ḥikmat-i muta'āliya," *Khīrad-Nāma-yi Ṣadrā* 20 (1379/2000): 57–60. This article was also published in English in slightly expanded form: "The Impact of the Quran in (sic) the Development of the Transcendent Philosophy," in *Mullā Ṣadrā and Transcendent Philosophy*, 2: 397–407.
 55. Muḥammad Bīdhandī, "Barrasī wa-taḥlīl-i barkhī ta'ammulāt-i ta'wīl-yi Mullā Ṣadrā dar kitāb wa-sunnat," *Khīrad-Nāma-yi Ṣadrā* 38 (1383/2004): 4–16. Cf. his comparative article on the hermeneutics of Ṣadrā and Heidegger: "Barrasī-yi taṭbīqī-yi ta'wīl-i Mullā Ṣadrā wa-hirminūtīk-i Haydigar," *Khīrad-Nāma-yi Ṣadrā* 53 (1387/2008): 61–72.

his Quranic writings is not to endorse the simplistic characterization that reduces his work on the Quran to nothing more than a set of philosophical “glosses” upon scripture. Ṣadrā does not merely approach the Quran as a thinker who seeks to justify his philosophical and mystical positions by using the Quran’s dicta. Rather, he finds within the Quran the same vision of reality at which he arrived through the long and arduous process of study and self-purification. Thus, Ṣadrā’s approach to the Quran is philosophical because his philosophy is Quranic.⁵⁶ The difference between his strictly-defined philosophical writings and his tafsīr compositions is that the former (although not entirely) are more concerned with explicating the nature of reality in purely philosophical terms. But when Ṣadrā approaches scripture, he is able to discuss the same themes he takes up in his philosophical works in more familiar “religious” language, as he is now operating, qua exegete, within the framework of the Quran’s mythic structure.⁵⁷ Thus, any study of his work on the Quran should be as much concerned with delineating his function as a scriptural exegete as it should be with demonstrating his concerns and methods as a religious thinker.

Yanis Ešots’ forthcoming article on Ṣadrā’s Quranic hermeneutics provides us with the most recent and perhaps telling example of why such an approach is so crucial to further advancement of our present state of knowledge of Ṣadrā’s Quranic works. Since this piece is devoted to Ṣadrā’s theoretical understanding of scripture,⁵⁸ the author mainly focuses on Ṣadrā’s *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (“The Keys to the Unseen”). The *Mafātīḥ* has generally been considered to contain a summa of Ṣadrā’s scriptural hermeneutics. This is something we affirmed in a recent study, while also highlighting the significance of this work’s introduction.⁵⁹ By focusing on some of the *Mafātīḥ*’s central themes, Ešots therefore effectively

56. For more on this point, see Marḍiyah Akhlāqī, “Sirisht-i ma’nāṭ wa-zabān-i waḥy az dīdgāh-i Ṣadr al-muta’alīhīn,” *Khīrad-Nāma-yi Ṣadrā* 52 (1387/2008): 70–86; ‘Alī-Rīḍā Dihqānpūr, “Ruykard-i ḥikmat-i Ṣadrāṭ ba-tafsīr-i Quran,” *Khīrad-Nāma-yi Ṣadrā* 56 (1388/2009): 54–68; *Nasr, Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and His Transcendent Theosophy*, 71.

57. See the insightful observations in Ghulām-Rīḍā A’wānī and Nāṣir Muḥammadī, “Zabān-i Quran wa-zabān-i tamthīl az dīdgāh-i Ṣadr al-muta’alīhīn,” *Khīrad-Nāma-yi Ṣadrā* 54 (1387/2008): 4–17.

58. Ešots, “The Quranic Hermeneutics of Mullā Ṣadrā,” in *Esoteric Approaches to the Quran*, ed. Annabel Keeler and Sajjad Rizvi (forthcoming).

59. Rustom, “Mullā Ṣadrā’s Prolegomenon to the *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 9 (1), (2007): 128–133.

demonstrates the range of Ṣadrā's concerns as a philosopher/mystic commenting upon scripture. Here we learn of Ṣadrā's understanding of divine and human speech, the reason for God's revealing the Quran, and, once again, the rules for interpreting the Quran.

However, Ešōts does not present Ṣadrā's scriptural hermeneutics in its fully developed form. In order to do this, attention must be paid to his understanding of the detached letters (as already discussed) and what is known to Islamic cosmology as the "perfect words" [al-kalimāt al-tāmmāt]. Without a thorough analysis of these concepts, a direct link between Ṣadrā's Quranic hermeneutics and ontology cannot be made, and his understanding of the nature of the Quran—and hence his approach to it in terms of theory and practice—will remain unclear. One example shall suffice. The author discusses Ṣadrā's explanation of the manner in which the divine word descends and becomes a book. Apart from missing several crucial points mentioned in the text of the *Mafātīḥ* itself, we walk away with an unclear picture of how the descent of the divine word is related to the ascent of the soul, which has everything to do with the link Ṣadrā draws between the Quran and being, and which itself presumes a thorough discussion of the detached letters and the perfect words.

For both Ṣadrā and the long line of Sufis and Islamic philosophers before him, there is an intimate correspondence between the Quran and the human self. Since being is a prototype of the self and the Quran is the book of being, the Quran is also a prototype of the self. How this idea relates to Ṣadrā's understanding of the Quran and his hermeneutical theory is significant. Paying attention to this question will afford researchers the opportunity to trace the development of Ṣadrā's understanding of the nature of scripture, his conception of revelation, and his self-perception as an exegete. This, in turn, can only help inform contemporary approaches to cognate questions.

The one study which seems to set the tone for future work on Ṣadrā's tafsīr writings is Shigeru Kamada's article on his commentary upon the *Sūrat al-zilzāl* ("The Chapter of the Earthquake").⁶⁰ This study of Ṣadrā's hermeneutics is clear in its presentation and sound in its interpretations. While taking account of the different approaches to his thought and noting the relative paucity of thorough studies in Ṣadrāian scholarship, Kamada turns to the *Mafātīḥ*, demonstrating his reflections on the

60. Shigeru Kamada, "Mullā Ṣadrā Between Mystical Philosophy and Qur'ān Interpretation through his Commentary on the "Chapter of the Earthquake"," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 2(2), (2005): 275–289.

nature of the Qur'ān and the manner in which it should be approached. He does this through citation and careful examination of several of the text's most important passages. This then allows him to discuss the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-zilzāl*, citing passages from this work and analyzing them with respect to Ṣadrā's ontology and psychology. The most important aspect of Kamada's study is the connection he draws between Ṣadrā's understanding of the inner dimensions of scripture and the inner dimensions of the soul. This results in an interesting discussion of the correspondence drawn by Ṣadrā between the "unfolding" of the text of being and the "imprinting" of the human soul. Future research on Ṣadrā's Qur'ānic writings is likely to reveal the importance of this theme in his thought, and how it ties into many if not all of the key philosophical and theological issues he attempts to tackle in his capacity as one of the last pre-modern philosophers writing on scripture.

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