Journal of Islamic Philosophy

A Special Issue on Mullā Ṣadrā

Volume 6, 2010
The editors would like to thank Mohammed Rustom for his dedication and cooperation in putting together this special issue of the Journal; indeed the idea of devoting an issue to Mullā Ṣadra was his and for this he is to be commended.
Journal of Islamic Philosophy / 2010

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Journal of Islamic Philosophy
Volume 6
2010
muslimphilosophy.com/journal

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The Nature and Significance of Mullâ Ṣadrâ’s Qur’ānic Writings

Mohammed Rustom

It is fairly well-known among scholars of later Islamic philosophy that Mullâ Ṣadrâ wrote a number of works on the Qur’ān. These consist of some sixteen texts, thirteen of which are independent tafsîrs on select sūras and āyas, and three of which are compositions that deal with various theoretical aspects of the Qur’ān. Although attempts have been made in modern scholarship to describe each of Ṣadrâ’s Qur’ānic works, we still lack a comprehensive overview of their nature and significance. The absence of a thorough presentation of Ṣadrâ’s Qur’ānic writings has, in turn, proven to be a serious stumbling-block in discerning his function as an exegete. Given this lacuna in Ṣadrian scholarship, this article offers a detailed outline of the content, structure, and scope of each of Ṣadrâ’s compositions on the Qur’ān. The material presented here not only broadens our understanding of the importance of Ṣadrâ’s Qur’ānic works, but also sets the stage for a more nuanced approach to the theoretical dimensions of his scriptural hermeneutics.

1 Thanks go to Todd Lawson, Maria Subtelny, Sebastian Günther, Shafique Virani, John Walbridge, Sajjad Rizvi, and Caner Dagli.

2 The first such attempt in modern scholarship is to be found in the monumental al-Dhari‘a ilâ taṣānîf al-shī‘a (Najaf, 1939–87) by Aqā Buzurg Tīhrânî (d. 1391/1970). These entries can be categorized as follows: (1) “basic tafsîr entries,” that is, individual entries which simply list the tafsîrs attributed to Ṣadrâ (Dhari‘a, 4:278–9, 20:76); (2) “isolated tafsîr entries,” which treat each tafsîr work individually (Dhari‘a, 4:331, 334, 336–8, 340, 343–4; 15:252); and (3) “isolated non-tafsîr entries,” which treat Ṣadrâ’s other writings on the Qur’ān individually (Dhari‘a, 2:39; 16:400; 19:62; 21:305, 337). The most recent description of Ṣadrâ’s Qur’ānic works is in Sajjad Rizvi, Mullâ Ṣadrâ Shirāzī: His Life and Works and the Sources for Safavid Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 77–87.


4 For one such attempt, see Rustom, The Triumph of Mercy: Philosophy and Scripture in Mullâ Ṣadrâ (Albany: State University of New York Press, forthcoming),
In the annotated list below, I have divided Şadrâ’s Qur’ânic writings into four general categories: commentaries on individual sûras, commentaries on individual āyas, theoretical works on the Qur’ân, and Qur’ânic works of doubtful authenticity. The list is followed by an appendix that presents a tentative chronology of those works belonging to the first three categories. These titles are considered in relation to themselves and with respect to Şadrâ’s other datable, non-Qur’ânic writings.

**Commentaries on Individual Sûras**

1. *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha*[^5]
   
   This book is Şadrâ’s last complete commentary on a Qur’ânic sûra. Appended to the 180-page published edition of the *tafsîr* are the philosophical glosses of Mullâ ʿAlî Nûrî (d. 1246/1830),[^6] a major follower of Şadrâ’s teachings during the Qajar period, and someone whose writings have served as important philosophical and gnostic texts within the Şadrian tradition.[^7]

   In both its philosophical and mystical content, the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha* is arguably the most profound of Şadrâ’s writings on the Qur’ân, as he brings to bear, in his function as commentator on this sûra, the entire range of his learning, synthetic abilities, and original insights. This work demonstrates in remarkably lucid fashion the manner in which Şadrâ addresses issues in ontology, cosmology, psychology, and eschatology in the language of myth and religious symbolism, closely following the work of Ibn ʿArabî (d. 638/1240).[^8]

   Among the salient aspects of the *Tafsîr Sûrat al-fâtiha* are Şadrâ’s discussion of the cosmos and its contents as so many instantiations

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[^5]: Şadrâ, *Tafsîr al-Qur’ân al-karîm*, ed. Muḥammad Khwâjawi (Qum: Intishârât-i Bidâr, 1987–90), 1:1–183; *Majmû ʿat al-taḥâsîr*, ed. Ahmad Shirâzî (Tehran, lithograph, 1322 AH/1904), 2–41. On first mention of Şadrâ’s tafsîrs, where applicable, I provide the page numbers to both the printed and lithographed editions; subsequent references to the *tafsîr* work in question are to the printed edition only.


or modes of God’s self-praise or ḥamd (signaled by Q 1:2), and his extended treatment of the question of the nature of idol-worship and the Akbarian doctrine of the “God created in faiths” (al-ilāh al-makhlūq flā l-ʿaqāʾid). But the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa’s most important feature is undoubtedly Ṣadrā’s in-depth inquiry into the nature of God’s all-pervading mercy in the afterlife and the resultant salvation of all human beings; an evaluation that is intimately related to the different paths taken by people during their earthly lives. Although Ṣadrā’s tafsīr and non-tafsīr writings broach this and cognate topics, the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa presents a unique soteriological argument, and one that is equally rooted in both Ṣadrā’s ontology and the structure of the Fātiha itself.9

2. Tafsīr Sūrat al-baqara10
This tafsīr work is likely Ṣadrā’s last commentary proper.11 Although incomplete (it stops at the end of the sūra’s sixty-fifth āya), it is his longest work dedicated to the Qurʾān, taking up over 1100 pages. Like the Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa, this commentary is accompanied by Mullā ʿAlī Nūrī’s glosses.12

More than any of his other tafsīrs, Ṣadrā is, in a sense, the most “polemical” in this commentary: in a manner not unfamiliar to his method in several sections of the Asfār, he dedicates a good deal of time to refuting a number of the theological positions held by the Ashʿarī and Muʿtazilī schools, particularly with respect to questions related to God’s foreordainment and the role of human free will, the “eternal” nature of suffering in Hell,13 and the temporal origination of God’s Speech (kalām).

Ṣadrā’s concern with theology is evident in this tafsīr as well. He tackles, albeit briefly, topics such as the “faith” of Pharaoh14 and

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9 For an in-depth analysis of the sources, structure, and content of this work, see Rustom, Triumph of Mercy, chs. 2–5, 7.
11 At Tafsīr, 1:349, Ṣadrā explicitly makes mention of his Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa.
13 Ṣadrā’s view on the question of Hell’s eternality finds its most complete expression in his Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa, for which, see Rustom, Triumph of Mercy, ch. 7.
14 For a helpful discussion of this problem in Islamic thought, see Eric Ormsby, “The Faith of Pharaoh: A Disputed Question in Islamic Theology,” in Reason and
whether or not people will be able to see God in the next life. The most important discussion in terms of theology is the detailed section devoted to āmān, or “faith,” which forms part of his commentary on Q 2:4. After explaining the inadequacy of several of the definitions of āmān, he divides its contents into fairly standard and broad categories: sayings (aqwāl), states (aḥwāl), and actions (aʿmāl). What is interesting in his discussion here is how he relates these three categories to what he calls “the levels and ranks of faith” (darājāt al-āmān wa-marātibuhu). Here, he makes it clear that everyone is a person of faith (muʾmin). What distinguishes one from another is the level of his understanding (fiqh). It is to the degree of one’s understanding of his faith that he will be characterized as more or less faithful.

Important for Ṣadrā’s understanding of the Qurʾān is the section devoted to its inimitability (iʿjāz al-qurʾān), which he is prompted to discuss based on the challenge made in Q 2:23 to produce “a sūra like it” (sūra min mithlihi). Also, there is one particular section in this commentary in which Ṣadrā discusses the “detached letters” (al-hurūf al-muqaṭṭaʿa) of the Qurʾān, closely following Ibn Sīnā’s (d. 428/1037) al-Risāla al-nayrūziyya.

3. Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda

In the introduction to this commentary, Ṣadrā lists eight tafsīrs that he had previously written. Based on Sajjad Rizvi and Muḥsin Bidārfar’s observations, we can date four of them. These dates, along with some internal evidence in one of Ṣadrā’s tafsīrs (see the entry on the Tafsīr Sūrat al-zilzāl below), allow us to safely conclude that the earliest this tafsīr could have been written is 1037/1628. The latest it could have been written is 1042/1632, when Ṣadrā wrote his most important theoretical work on scripture, the Mafātīḥ al-ghayb.

The Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda is 135 pages long. It offers a commentary on each verse, and contains an introduction and conclusion, but lacks chapter divisions. More than anything else, it is structured as a running commentary on Q 32. Although there are subheadings

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throughout the work, as is the case with a number of Ṣadrā’s other *tafsīrs*, they do not seem to play a significant role or have any discernable linguistic/stylistic unity. Rather, they appear to simply divide Ṣadrā’s arguments as he proceeds with his points.

Although Ṣadrā is concerned with questions of eschatology and soteriology in this work (and some of the discussions here may be the direct source of related sections in his *Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātiḥa*), his meditations on the nature of the Qurʾān and its mysterious letters are among its unique features. Several verses of the *Sūrat al-sajda* also prompt him to elaborate on his cosmology, especially as it relates to God’s attributes and the temporal origination (ḫudūth) of the world—which leads to some interesting discussions on psychology, such as the nature of the heart and its relation to the divine Throne, the levels of the “Folk of God” (*darajāt ahl allāh*), and the function of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*). It can also be noted that when Ṣadrā discusses the Muḥammadan Light (*nūr Muḥammadi*) here, he seems to rely on his earlier *tafsīr* works, such as the *Tafsīr Āyat al-kursi* and the *Tafsīr Āyat al-nūr* (for which, see below).

4. *Tafsīr Sūrat yāsīn*17

This commentary was written in 1030/1621. It is essential for dating Ṣadrā’s other writings and for its incorporation of earlier materials, both by himself and the great Persian philosopher, Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī (d. 610/1213–1214), commonly known as Bābā Afḍal.18 Over 450 pages in length and accompanied by Mullā ʿAlī Nūrī’s glosses,19 there are no real divisions in this book, although it does have a number of generic subheadings. Unlike any of his other works on scripture, this text contains an interesting discussion on the value and merit of poetry; this occurs in the context of Ṣadrā’s refutation of the view that the Qurʾān is merely a form of poetry.

By virtue of the eschatological content of the *sūra*, the most significant aspect of this *tafsīr* is its treatment of bodily resurrection and the states of the afterlife. Interestingly, the *Tafsīr Sūrat yāsīn* is

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18 See the entry on the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumuʿa* below. For an introduction to Kāshānī’s life and thought, as well as a translation of more than half of his published works, see William Chittick, *The Heart of Islamic Philosophy: The Quest for Self-Knowledge in the Writings of Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
more concerned with issues of eschatology than any of Ṣadrā’s other books on the Qurʾān. He presents here his fully mature views on the modality of the afterlife with particular reference to the becoming of the soul and the forms it will experience in its posthumous states. Ṣadrā’s psychology and eschatology as detailed here parallel some of his discussions in his *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād* and his treatment of the states of the afterlife in the *Asfār*.

One of this tafsīr’s unique features is its heavy reliance upon the work of Ibn ʿArabī and his followers. Although this is clearly the case in Ṣadrā’s other works, this particular text demonstrates the effectiveness of the formulations of the school of Ibn ʿArabī in discussing some of the most vexing and age-old philosophical problems. In particular, Ṣadrā attempts to address the Neoplatonic belief, discussed by Ibn Sinā 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. A close reading of Ṣadrā’s response to his predecessors reveals that, through the lens of Ibn ʿArabī and his followers, Mullā Ṣadrā offers a remarkable solution which is entirely consistent with his philosophical perspective. Indeed, Ṣadrā’s position here sheds a great deal of light on his understanding of the creative aspect of imagination in the next life.

5. **Tafsīr Sūrat al-ḥadīd**

This book was written around 1022/1613, and is Ṣadrā’s first tafsīr work. It is over 280 pages, and contains an introduction and a conclusion. Like the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda*, it does not consist of chapters as such. Unlike the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda*, however, it makes consistent use of subheadings throughout the work, each of which is referred to as an “unveiling” (*mukāshafa*). In its printed edition, Mullā ʿAli Nūrī’s glosses are also appended to the text.

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22 See Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfī*, ed. Muhammad Khwājawi (Tehran: Muʾassasa-yi Muṭālaʿāt wa-Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī, 1366Sh/1987), 3:116. The text in question makes it clear that Ṣadrā’s *Tafsīr Āyat al-kursī* (a very early work) was written some time after his *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ḥadīd*.

This commentary contains a fine example of how Ṣadrā’s transcendent philosophy (al-ḥikma al-mutaʿāliya) relates to the Qur’ānic message. His doctrine of substantial motion is briefly discussed here, and is linked to his treatment of the increased levels of perception human beings experience in this world and in the next. Consequently, a good deal of this commentary is devoted to matters of psychology and eschatology.

Significantly, Ṣadrā draws on several well-known Qur’ānic symbols, such as the “preserved tablet” (al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ) and the “inscribed book” (al-kitāb al-maṣṭūr), to explain how the soul’s descent into the world, its subsequent development and return to God, and God’s foreordainment of its destiny tie into one another. Here, again, we clearly notice the influence of the school of Ibn ṬArabī upon Ṣadrā’s formulations, especially with respect to his identification of the heart as the locus of the name Allāh, and his understanding of the function of the divine names in the telos of the cosmos.

6. **Tafsīr Sūrat al-wāqiʿa**

The date of the composition of this work is not known, but we can certainly place it between 1030/1621 and some time before Ṣadrā penned his *Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda.* This *tafsīr* is over 120 pages and comes with an introduction, subheadings (but no chapter headings), and a conclusion. It is a straightforward running commentary on the *sūra*’s principle themes: the final day and the afterlife.

Ṣadrā makes it clear in his introduction that one cannot understand these eschatological realities without “tasting” (dhawq) and a heightened state of consciousness (wijdān). Consequently, this commentary contains fairly detailed discussions concerning the states of the grave, the resurrection, and the ranks of souls in the afterlife. As in a number of his other books, Ṣadrā states that the forms of knowledge souls will have in the next life will be commensurate with their levels of knowledge in this life. In his treatment of the function of imagination and its relation to the levels of being, Ṣadrā bases himself on Ibn ṬArabī’s *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* and *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam.*

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25 At *Tafsīr* 7:93, Ṣadrā alludes to his *Tafsīr Sūrat yāsīn*, which was written in 1022/1621.

26 Ibid., 7:36–7.
Perhaps the most interesting features of this commentary are Şadrā’s interpretations of the many eschatological symbols mentioned in the *sūra*. In this sense, this work resembles sections of Şadrā’s *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ḥadid* and the later parts of his *Asrār al-āyāt*, another of his theoretical works on the Qurʾān.

7. *Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumuʿa*[^27]

The exact date of this work’s composition is not certain. Bidārfar considers it to have been written between 1041/1631 and 1050/1640 (Şadrā’s commonly acknowledged death date),[^28] while Rizvi dates its composition between 1041/1631 and 1043–4/1634 (a year before Şadrā’s newly proposed death date).[^29] In the introduction to his translation of Şadrā’s *Iksīr al-ʿārifīn*, William Chittick argues that the *Iksīr*, itself a significant reworking of Bābā Afdal’s *Jāwidān-nāma*, was written in 1030/1621 or perhaps earlier, since the *Tafsīr Sūrat yāsīn*, definitively composed in 1030/1621, contains an expanded version of material already contained in the *Iksīr*. This leads Chittick to conclude that the *Iksīr* must have been written some time before the *Tafsīr Sūrat yāsīn*. This is significant, Chittick argues, because the *Iksīr* itself contains an expanded version of material from Şadrā’s *Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumuʿa*.[^30] If Chittick’s observations are correct, the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumuʿa* would have to be placed before the *Iksīr* and thus in an earlier phase of Şadrā’s career as opposed to a later phase. Bidārfar and Rizvi, on the other hand, do not consider this particular *tafsīr* to be early, most likely because Şadrā does not mention it in the introduction to his *Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda*. But there seems to be another good reason not to consider the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumuʿa* as an early work, namely Şadrā’s explicit mention of his *Tafsīr Sūrat yāsīn* in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumuʿa* itself.[^31]

Şadrā’s *Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumuʿa* is a complete commentary on this *sūra*, and is close to 200 pages in length. The commentary contains

[^28]: Bidārfar, “*Taqdim*,” 1:110.
[^29]: Rizvi, *Mullā Şadrā Shīrāzī*, 84. For Rizvi’s argument in favor of Şadrā’s earlier death date, see 28–30.
[^31]: See Şadrā, *Tafsīr*, 7:218. Moreover, some other internal evidence seems to suggest that this book was written after the *Asfār* (see Şadrā, *Tafsīr*, 7:256), which was completed in 1037/1628 (Rizvi, *Mullā Şadrā Shīrāzī*, 54).
an introduction, twelve chapters called “dawning places” (maṭlaʿ), and a conclusion. Mullā ʿAlī Nūrī’s glosses are appended to the work. Each of the maṭlaʿs of Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumuʿa are centered around one verse of the sūra, the exception being the sixth maṭlaʿ, which contains comments on verses six and seven, and ninth and tenth maṭlaʿ, which, combined, do the same for verse ten. The chapters are composed of the generic subheadings characteristic of a number of Ṣadrā’s tafsīrs. Each maṭlaʿ generally contains several ishrāqāt (illuminations) and any one of a number of subheadings, with names such as “moonlight” (nūr qamarī), “earthly shadow” (ẓill farshī), “moon-shadow” (ẓill qamarī), and “throne-light” (nūr ʿarshī).

The opening lines of Sūrat al-jumuʿa say that Whatever is in the heavens and the earth glorifies (yusabbiḥu) God. This verse allows Ṣadrā to introduce the well-known distinction between necessary and contingent being, since the fact that all things glorify God is itself an indication that they are contingent. Yet not all existents are the same, as some are less dense than others by virtue of their detachment from matter. Thus, the more an existent is characterized by materiality the less intense its glorification of God, and the less it is characterized by materiality the more intense its glorification.

Although it may seem that this commentary deals with questions of ontology more than anything else, this is only true with respect to the first maṭlaʿ. The remaining maṭlaʿs discuss in some detail the divine wisdom behind God’s sending prophets to human-kind, the nature of knowledge and wisdom, and the meaning of death and eschatology. As a corollary of the latter, some attention is paid to questions of psychology. Characteristic of some of his

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32 Those familiar with the Sufi commentary tradition will immediately recognize the (Qurʾānic) term maṭlaʿ (97:5), since it functions as one of the “senses” of Sufi Qurʾānic exegesis. It can be translated in several ways: anagogic sense, lookout point, or transcendent perspective. The way Ṣadrā employs the term here indicates that we should understand it within the context of his treatment of hierarchies (both cosmological and psychological), which are developed throughout the tafsīr work. Thus, in this context, I have translated the term as “dawning place.” For a discussion of this term within the context of the Sufi Qurʾānic exegetical tradition, see Kristin Zahra Sands, Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qurʾān in Classical Islam (New York: Routledge, 2006), 8–12.

33 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 7:446–67.

other writings, such as the Sīh aṣl, Ṣadrā also spends a good deal of time contrasting people who love this world (especially worldly scholars) with those who love the next world.

This commentary’s main area of focus is the “levels of faith” (marātib al-īmān), this is in keeping with Ṣadrā’s pronouncements in his introduction to the text, where he states that the work contains “the mothers of the objectives of faith” (ummahāt al-maqāṣid al-īmāniyya). Perhaps more than his other tafsīrs, in the Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumuʿa Ṣadrā expands on that aspect of the religious life that complements faith, namely practice. Ṣadrā’s concern with religious practice comes out best toward the end of the tenth maṭlaʿ, where he dedicates a profound discussion to the “levels of invocation” or “remembrance” (marātib al-dhikr).

8. Tafsīr Sūrat al-ṭāriq

This is the second shortest of Ṣadrā’s Qurʾān commentaries. It was composed in 1030/1621. Just over fifty pages in length, the Tafsīr Sūrat al-ṭāriq comes with an important introduction, several subheadings with various titles, and a brief concluding paragraph. In his introduction, Ṣadrā’s language betrays its indebtedness to the Sufi Qurʾānic exegetical tradition, as he speaks of his unveiling the “beauty of the brides” (jamāl al-ʿarāʾis) and “virgins” (abkār) of the Qurʾān’s sūras and āyas. He also alludes to the function of the bestowal of divine mercy in comprehending the Qurʾān.

Thematically, the Tafsīr Sūrat al-ṭāriq is similar to parts of the Tafsīr Sūrat al-wāqiʿa. The most interesting section of the commentary is its discussion of cosmology and how the existence of the heavens (samāʾ) mentioned in the opening verse of Sūrat al-ṭāriq point to the existence of God. Here Ṣadrā attempts to establish the contingency of the heavens, and, in doing so, goes on to show how that which is contingent necessarily points to that which is beyond itself, namely the Necessary (al-wājib). One aspect of this commentary not to be found in Ṣadrā’s other tafsīrs is his treatment of the stages of man’s development (prompted by verses six and seven of the sūra). This point is a perfect complement to Ṣadrā’s doctrine

35 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 7:139.
36 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 7:308–59; Majmūʿat, 589–598.
37 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 7:308.
38 Ibid., 7:309.
of substantial motion (al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya), although he does not explicitly draw the connection here.

9. Tafsīr Sūrat al-ʿaʿlā

Like several of the other tafsīrs described above, this work was most likely written after 1022/1613, and certainly before the composition of Ṣadrā’s Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda. A relatively short treatise (less than fifty pages), the Tafsīr Sūrat al-ʿaʿlā is the most structured of all of Ṣadrā’s writings on the Qurʾān. It contains an introduction, seven chapters, and a very short concluding paragraph. Each chapter is entitled tasbīḥ (“declaration of transcendence” or “glorification”), and each tasbīḥ is devoted to one or more of the sūra’s verses.

The sūra begins in the imperative, commanding readers to glorify the name of God (sabbiḥ ism rabbika l-ʿaʿlā), and this is the reason Ṣadrā calls the chapters of his commentary tasbīhs. He begins his commentary by explaining that the primary denotation (al-маqṣūd al-asli) of the root s.b.h. is God’s transcendence and exaltedness. Although the root denotes “glorification,” it does so as a result of stating how other and far removed God is. Thus, each chapter begins with God’s transcendence and then addresses a variety of issues, such as God’s providence and solicitude for His creatures, His attributes, and the types of damnation and felicity people will experience in the afterlife.

10. Tafsīr Sūrat al-zilzāl

By far the most modest of Ṣadrā’s commentaries on a Qurʾānic sūra—both in size and scope—this thirty-four page work contains a short introduction, generic subheadings, and a brief conclusion. We know that this tafsīr was written some time before 1042/1632, since Ṣadrā refers to it by name in his Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda. And, more significantly, he explicitly mentions his famous al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya in this tafsīr. As Rizvi observes, the Shawāhid must have been completed before 1041/1631, since in this text Ṣadrā speaks of his esteemed teacher, Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631), as still alive. The Shawāhid is a mature work and was the subject of a number of

41 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 7:410–44; Majmūʿat, 607–613.
42 Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 7:435.
43 Rizvi, Mullā Ṣadrā Shirāzī, 59.
important commentaries, the most significant of which is by the Qajar philosopher and follower of Ṣadrā, Mullā Hādī Sabziwārī (d. 1289/1873). According to Rizvi, the Shawāhid was completed between 1030/1621 and 1040/1630, but certainly before 1041/1631. Since the Asfār was completed in 1037/1628 and the Shawāhid was in all likelihood written after the Asfār’s completion, it would be safe to date the completion of the Shawāhid somewhere between 1037/1628 and 1041/1631. Since the Tafsīr Sūrat al-zilzāl mentions the Shawāhid, the earliest it could have been written is 1628. We can, therefore, locate the date of this tafsīr’s composition somewhere between 1037/1628 and 1041/1632.

There are a few instances in this tafsīr where Ṣadrā directly links the notion of “scripture” to his ontology and cosmology. Some interesting points also emerge in his exposition of the nature of the scrolls (ṣuḥuf) of peoples’ deeds which will be brought forth on the final day. Although this particular sūra does not mention these scrolls, its last two verses speak about people “seeing” their good and evil actions. The notion of “seeing” in the afterlife is therefore one of the major themes that runs through this commentary.

Commentaries on Individual Āyas

11. Tafsīr Āyat al-kursī

This work, which is over 300 pages long, was written around 1022/1613 and is thus one of Ṣadrā’s earliest works devoted to the Qurʾān. Contrary to what the work’s title indicates, it is not only a commentary on the Throne verse (Q 2:255). Half of the text is actually a commentary on the two verses that follow it. The book is divided into an introduction, twenty discussions (maqāla) with different generic titles, and a conclusion. The first eleven discussions are devoted to commenting on the Throne verse, discussions twelve to fifteen to Q 2:256, and discussions sixteen to twenty to Q 2:257. Like his Tafsīr Sūrat al-baqara, Ṣadrā’s comments on the other two

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verses of this sūra also allow him to address issues related to the meaning of faith and unbelief.

The mention of “intercession” in Q 2:255, “the firm handle” (al-ʿurwat al-wuthqā) in Q 2:256, and God’s walāya in Q 2:257 prompts Ṣadrā to discuss the institution of the Imamate and its legitimacy, as well as the reality of “intercession” on the day of judgment, concerns that he does not display in any of his other tafsīrs.46 It is difficult to determine why the distinctly “Shīʿī” character of this book almost disappears by the time we reach Ṣadrā’s final tafsīr. At the same time, his last work on “scripture,” the incomplete Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfī (completed in 1043–4/1634), is just as Shīʿī in nature as the Tafsīr Āyat al-kursī.

Ṣadrā also deals here with the nature of being, God’s mercy, and the divine names and attributes. Significantly, several key features of this work in matters concerning eschatology and soteriology, the significance of the tahālīl formula, and the nature of God’s essence and attributes, parallel or even correspond to sections of Ṣadrā’s Tafsīr Sūrat al-fātihā, and thus partly serve as one of this text’s main sources.

12. Tafsīr Āyat al-nūr

Completed in 1030/1621, Ṣadrā’s extensive commentary on the light verse (slightly over eighty pages) contains an introduction, six sections (fuṣūl, often divided into subsections with various generic subtitles), and a concluding statement (khātima wa-wasiyya). Of all of his works on the Qurʾān, this tafsīr has received the most attention in modern scholarship. There seems to be a good justification for this, since this particular tafsīr represents many of Ṣadrā’s central concerns as a philosopher/mystic commenting upon scripture.

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46 One of the alternative titles of this work is Tafsīr al-ʿurwat al-wuthqā. This term may be linked with the intercession granted by the Imams and the well-known hadith of the “ship of Noah” (safīnat Nūḥ). See Muhammad Khwājawi’s introduction in Ṣadrā, Tafsīr, 4:5. This title (i.e., Tafsīr al-ʿurwat al-wuthqā) has at times been mistakenly attributed to Ṣadrā’s son. See Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Shāh, Ṭarāʾiq al-ḥaqāʾiq, ed. Muḥammad Jaʿfar Maḥjūb (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi Sanāʾī, 1960), 1:182. ʿAbd al-Nabī Qazwīnī, Tatmīm Amal al-āmil, ed. Sayyid Aḥmad Husaynī (Qum: Maktabat Āyat Allāh Marʿashī, 1987), 51, seems to attribute this work to Ṣadrā’s son as well, but refers to it as Tafsīr Āyat al-kursī.

Since there is a fairly long commentary tradition on the light verse, Şadrā draws on the commentaries by Ibn Sinā, Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), and Naṣīr al-Dīn Ğūsī (d. 672/1274). Apart from his citations from the Imams, he also demonstrates his familiarity with the sayings of the Sufis, citing figures such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), Kḥarrāz (d. 286/899), Dhū l-Nūn (d. 245/860), Abī Yazīd Bištāmī (d. 234/848 or 261/875), Shiblī (d. 334/946), and, indirectly, ʿAyn al-Qudūt Hamadānī (d. 526/1131). As would be expected in this commentary, Şadrā clearly identifies light with being and brings it to bear upon the verse's pregnant symbology. This then allows him to relate the fundamentality of light and the verse's symbols to his psychology, cosmology, and anthropology. The nature and cosmic function of the Perfect Man is brought out particularly well here. Unlike Şadrā’s other *tafsīrs*, there seems to be more emphasis in this text upon the question of self-knowledge, once again evincing the influence of the work of Bābā Afḍal.


This three-page, incomplete commentary on Q 27:88, *And you look at the mountains, deeming them to be still . . . ,* seems to have first been attributed to Şadrā by Āqā Buzurg. It might be best to place this work at a very early period in Şadrā’s career because of its distinctly Shīʿī undertones. Assuming that this treatise is an early work, it might be a good example of what Şadrā had in mind when he spoke of his “miscellaneous writings” (*mutafarraqāt*) on the Qurʾān, and

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50 See Āqā Buzurg, *Dharīʿa*, 4:278.

51 In two places, the text mentions the *tafsīr* of a certain “ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm,” which is most likely a reference to the important early Shīʿī Qurʾān commentator, al-Qummī (d. 307/919). Şadrā also makes a somewhat opaque reference to the “*shiqshiqiyya*,” which he appears to link to the “people of intelligence” (*ahl al-fatāna*), from whom the reality of the final hour is not hidden. See Şadrā, *Majmūʿat*, 615. To readers familiar with the *Nahj al-balāgha*, the term *shiqshiqiyya* evokes the book’s famous third sermon.
which he distinguished from his more complete *tafsīrs*. Indeed, the work is “scattered” in that it reads like a set of stray reflections on Q 27:88. In terms of both style and content, this text resembles Şadrā’s other *tafsīrs*, and so there is no good reason to assume that he is not its author, especially since the treatise clearly alludes to (but does not develop) Şadrā’s doctrine of substantial motion.

**Theoretical Works on the Qurʾān**

14. *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*

In the final phase of Şadrā’s career, his writings on the Qurʾān took on a slightly different focus. Whereas before 1041/1631 he had written a number of independent commentaries on *sūra* and *āya*, from 1041/1631 to the end of his life he began to write books that deal with a variety of hermeneutical questions and themes related to the Qurʾān. This shift in focus is best evidenced in the *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (cf. Q 6:59) written in 1042/1632.

It is not quite clear why Şadrā did not devote a treatise to independent questions concerning the Qurʾān until a much later date in his intellectual life. It would be incorrect to say that the *Mafātīḥ* was written after Şadrā’s intellectual perspective had crystallized, since his first *tafsīr* work is quite mature, and was completed a considerable time after the commencement of the *Asfār*. It would also be incorrect to say that Şadrā wrote the *Mafātīḥ* as an “introduction” to his Qurʾān commentaries, since there is little evidence in the *Mafātīḥ* itself that suggests this. All that we can say with certainty is that, after having already written over ten *tafsīrs*, Şadrā’s perspective deepened by the time he penned the *Mafātīḥ*, and he was thus in a better position to address the general hermeneutical questions and important themes related to the Qurʾān. Thus, the *Mafātīḥ* can be said to present the epitome of Şadrā’s hermeneutical approach to the Qurʾān.\(^{54}\)

The published version of the *Mafātīḥ* is over 700 pages and is accompanied by Mullā ʿAlī Nūri’s extensive glosses.\(^{55}\) The book contains an important introduction and twenty chapters or “keys”

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(mafātīḥ), the first ten of which comprise part one, and the last ten of which comprise part two. Each chapter consists of various subtitles, all of which have specific titles.

Technically speaking, the Mafātīḥ is not a work on the Qurʾān or on Qurʾānic hermeneutics, since only the first two miftāḥs are concerned with the Qurʾān as such. Miftāḥ 1 (which is a significantly expanded discussion of several sections of Ṣadrā’s Asfār and, to a lesser extent, parts of his Tafsīr Sūrat al-sajda) and miftāḥ 2 inform the remaining eighteen miftāḥs in such a way that, without them, understanding how the Mafātīḥ in its entirety is meant to outline Ṣadrā’s hermeneutics is impossible. Thus, miftāḥ 4, which concerns the different types of “inspiration” (ilhām) a person may receive, cannot, in and of itself, function as an outline of Ṣadrā’s hermeneutics, but it does inform what Ṣadrā says in miftāḥ 1, where he discusses “revelation” (waḥy). This means that the book’s chapters beyond miftāḥ 2—dealing as they do with such topics as the nature of knowledge, angelology, eschatology, the creation of the world, and wayfaring on the path to God—do not allow one to abstract Ṣadrā’s hermeneutical theory proper. They function as practical applications of the theoretical considerations laid out in miftāḥ 1 and miftāḥ 2, or, in rare cases, elaborate upon some of the ideas discussed in them. From this perspective, those sections in miftāḥs 3–20, where Ṣadrā deals with the Qurʾān, resemble his reflections on its verses to be found in his tafsīr and non-tafsīr works.

15. Asrār al-āyāt wa-anwār al-bayyināt

The Asrār al-āyāt was written during the final phase of Ṣadrā’s career. It is over 200 pages in length, while Mullā ʿAlī Nūrī’s glosses are longer than the book itself. The Asrār consists of an introduction and three sections (ṭaraf). Each section is subdivided into several subsections known as “places of witnessing” (mashhad), each of which contains several principles (qāʿida). The scope of this work is vast, for in it Ṣadrā discusses a wide range of theological and philosophical topics, often drawing upon verses of the Qurʾān in his discussions.

57 Ibid., 223–522.
The *Asrār* deals with various philosophical and mystical issues: the path of the wayfarers to God and the method of those who are “firmly rooted in knowledge” (an allusion to Q 3:7), proofs for God’s existence, the nature of the Supreme Name (*al-ism al-aʿẓam*) and its locus of manifestation (*maẓhar*, i.e., the Perfect Man), the Muhammadan Reality, the temporal origination of the world, meditations on the transience of this worldly life, and eschatology. In the *Asrār*, Ṣadrā also discusses the names and qualities of the Qurʾān, the difference between God’s speech and His book, the modality of revelation to the prophets, the nature of the divine book, God’s address (*khiṭāb*) to His creatures, and the “Perfect Words” (*al-kalimāt al-tāmmāt*) referred to in a famous ḥadīth.

16. *Mutashābihāt al-qurʾān* 58

Although we do not have a date of composition for this short treatise on the “ambiguous” verses of the Qurʾān, it may have been written after the *Mafātīh*, since parts of the treatise seem to expand on shorter discussions in corresponding sections of the *Mafātīh*. 59 The treatise itself consists of an introduction and five chapters (*fuṣūl*), and is no more than thirty pages long.

Ṣadrā begins this text by summarizing the problem of the ambiguous verses and briefly highlighting the views of his predecessors. Here, he charges a number of Qurʾān commentators’ interpretations of these verses as being nothing more than sophistry. Ṣadrā then launches an attack on the interpretations of scripture carried out by “the deniers of the divine attributes” (*ahl al-taʿṭīl*). After clearing the ground, so to speak, he moves on to his own treatment of the ambiguous verses, discussing the nature of metaphor and explaining how unveiling (*kashf*) functions in the interpretation of these verses. Ṣadrā is careful to tell his readers that not all verses that cannot be understood rationally are to be interpreted metaphorically. It is


59 Cf. Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, “*Muqaddima-yi muṣahhiḥ*,” 77. Āshtiyānī’s glosses to this text, which are to be found in Ṣadrā, *Sih risāla*, 285–310, mainly consist of those excerpts from the *Mafātīh* that discuss the Qurʾān’s *mutashābih* verses.
precisely through “unveiling” that one can come to know the reality of those Qur’ānic passages that seem to defy reason.

**Qur’ānic Works of Doubtful Authenticity**

17–19. **Tafsīrs Sūrat Yūsūf, ṭalāq, and qadr**

Carl Brockelmann ascribes the *Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsūf* to Ṣadrā. But no reference to this work is found in Ṣadrā’s writings; and there does appear to be one rather late reference to the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ṭalāq*. There do not appear to be any extant manuscripts of the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ṭalāq* or the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-qadr*.

20. **Tafsīr Sūrat al-ḍuḥā**

Several authors, the first of whom appears to have been Āqā Buzurg, have ascribed this title to Ṣadrā. The *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ḍuḥā* is listed in the “individual tafsīr entries” of the *Dharī’ā*, but does not appear among the titles listed in its “basic tafsīr entries.” It is difficult to determine whether or not the first of the two “basic tafsīr entries” was written before the entry on the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-duḥā* found its way into the list of “individual tafsīr entries.” Although the former’s entry number is 1283, and the latter is numbered 1466, its precedence relates to alphabetical order. Thus, it is not possible to judge whether or not Āqā Buzurg wished to amend his first list of “basic tafsīr entries” but did not have the opportunity to do so. In fact, the volume in which both of these entries appear was edited and printed after Āqā Buzurg’s death under the care of his sons. The problem is further complicated by the fact that the first list of “basic tafsīr entries” says the source for its listing of Ṣadrā’s tafsīrs is a collection of Ṣadrā’s tafsīr printed in 1333/1914. But the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ḍuḥā* is reported by Āqā Buzurg to have been found in a printed collection of his tafsīrs dating to 1332/1913. All subsequent entries in the *Dharī’ā* that make reference to this printed collection date it to 1332/1913, so the 1333/1914 date is likely to have been a slip of the

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61 Āqā Buzurg, *Dharī’ā*, 4:338. For my tripartite division of the *Dharī’ā*’s entries on Ṣadrā’s Qur’ānic works, see n. 1 above.

62 See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v.v. “al-Ḍarī’ā elā taṣānīf al-šī’ā” (by Etan Kohlberg).

63 Āqā Buzurg, *Dharī’ā*, 4:338. The collection of Ṣadrā’s tafsīr used by Āqā Buzurg seems to be different from the lithographed edition in my possession, because the latter was printed some ten years earlier and, more importantly, because it does not contain the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-duḥā*. 
pen on the part of the author. The fact that Āqā Buzurg does not have an entry on this work in his listing of “individual *tafsīr* entries” may also call its attribution to Ṣadrā into question. According to Nahīd Bāqirī Khurramdashtī and Fāṭima Aṣgharī, this title is extant in manuscript form.\(^{64}\)

21. **Tafsīr Sūrat al-ikhlāṣ**\(^ {65}\)

This title is not commonly ascribed to Ṣadrā, but is included in some of the more recent bibliographies of his works.\(^ {66}\) Because the text cannot be dated to any particular period, if Ṣadrā is its author, he could have written it at any point in his career. Compared to his other *tafsīrs*, the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ikhlāṣ* is structured differently, and its discussions are not as detailed as those in texts of a similar size (i.e., less than forty pages). The *tafsīr* is strangely divided into two parts, which seem to be two separate treatises. Part 1 consists of an introduction composed of six sections or “merits” (fāʾida), comments on the sūra’s verses, and a conclusion that is composed of two “merits.” The first part of the commentary is mostly concerned with proving God’s oneness. There is nothing specifically Ṣadrian about this part of the commentary. The language is fairly straightforward, and a reliance upon the terminology of the school of Ibn ʿArabī is evidenced throughout.

The second part of the *tafsīr* is also a running commentary on each of the verses of Q 112. In the introduction to the second part, which is the most important section of the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ikhlāṣ*, the author briefly discusses the symbolism of the letters of the *basmala*.


The *Māʾānī* was first listed by Khurramdashtī and Aṣgharī.\(^ {67}\) They say that it is a short treatise that discusses some of the individual terms and/or phrases found in the Qurʾān. Sadrā does not appear to refer to this work in his writings. In all likelihood, it too is an excerpt from a larger work. This hypothesis may be correct, since in Āqā

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\(^{64}\) Nahīd Bāqirī Khurramdashtī (with the assistance of Fāṭima Aṣgharī), *Kitābshināsī-yi jāmiʿ-ī Mullā Šadrā* (Tehran: SIPRIn, 1999), 72.


\(^{67}\) Khurramdashtī and Aṣgharī, *Kitābshināsī-yi jāmiʿ-ī Mullā Šadrā*, 74.
Buzurg’s content description of Ṣadrā’s *Mafātīḥ*, he states that one of the sections in *miftāḥ* 1 is about the “*māʿānī al-alfāz al-mufrada*” of the Qurʾān. Going on this description alone, it appears to correspond to *miftāḥ* 1:1–3. The *Risāla fī rumūz al-qurʾān*, which is only listed by Brockelmann, is likely to be the same as the *Maʿānī*, or at least a part of it, since its title indicates that it corresponds to *miftāḥ* 1:1, which is about the symbols (*rumūz*) of the Qurʾān.

Thanks to Ṣadrā’s inventory of books in his personal library, we know that he was familiar with the *tafsīr* of the famous Sunnī theologian and exegete, Abd Allāh al-Bayḍāwī (d. 716/1316), parts of whose *Anwār al-tanzīl* were in his possession. However, the common attribution of a set of glosses on this text to Ṣadrā under the title *Taʿlīqaʿalā Anwār al-tanzil* is, in all likelihood, mistaken.

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70 See Ṣadrā, *Yāddāsht-hā-yi Mullā Ṣadrā hamrāh bā fihrīst-i kitābkhāna-yi shakhṣī-yi Mullā Ṣadrā*, ed. Muḥammad Barakat (Qum: Intishārāt-i Bīdār, 1377Sh/1998). It is reproduced in English in Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī*, 117–135. For the entry on Bayḍāwī, see ibid., 118–119. This inventory of works, although very useful, certainly does not present us with a complete listing of all of the texts in Ṣadrā’s possession over the course of his career. According to the editor of the catalog of Ṣadrā’s personal library, the latest Ṣadrā could have drawn up this list would have been around two decades before his death (see Ṣadrā, *Yāddāsht-hā*, 8–9).
71 For this work, see Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzil wa-asrār al-taʿwil* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1911).
Appendix

Toward a Chronology of Mullā Ṣadrā’s Qurʾānic Works

Below is a tentative chronology of Ṣadrā’s Qurʾān-related compositions which are of unquestionable authenticity. The first table considers these works alone, and the second with respect to his datable, non-Qurʾānic writings. In order to avoid confusion, I have only employed Gregorian dates.

A Tentative Chronology of Ṣadrā’s Qurʾānic Works

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<td>Shortly after <em>T. S. Hadid</em></td>
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<td>After <em>T. S. Fātiḥa</em></td>
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74 The dates given in this tentative chronology are based on the following (in their order of usefulness): Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī*, 51–135; references within Ṣadrā’s writings; Bidārfar, “Taqdīm,” 110–1; Chittick, “Translators’ Introduction,” xix–xx.
A Chronology of Ṣadrā’s Qur’ānic Works vis-à-vis His Datable, non-Qur’ānic Writings

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<tr>
<td>1614</td>
<td>Wāridāt</td>
<td>1621?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1618</td>
<td>Kasr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1606–20</td>
<td>Sh. al-Hidāya</td>
<td>Completed around 1606, reworked in 1620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* 1621</td>
<td>T. Ā. Nūr</td>
<td>Before <em>T. S. Sajda</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* 1621</td>
<td>T. S. Tāriq</td>
<td>Before <em>T. S. Sajda</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1621?</td>
<td>Ilksīr</td>
<td>Possibly before <em>T. S. Yāsīn</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* 1621</td>
<td>T. S. Yāsīn</td>
<td>Before <em>T. S. Sajda</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* 1621–32</td>
<td>T. S. Wāqī’a</td>
<td>Before <em>T. S. Sajda</em>; after <em>T. S. Yāsīn</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* 1621–32</td>
<td>T. S. ‘Alā</td>
<td>Before <em>T. S. Sajda</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1623</td>
<td>Risālat al-ḥashr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1624</td>
<td>Masā’il</td>
<td>Incomplete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1624–25</td>
<td>Hudūth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* 1628–32</td>
<td>T. S. Jumu’ā</td>
<td>Before <em>T. S. Sajda</em>; after <em>T. S. Yāsīn</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1628</td>
<td>Asfār</td>
<td>Commenced in 1606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1628</td>
<td>Mashā’ir</td>
<td>Likely after Asfār</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1628–31</td>
<td>Shawāhīd</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* 1628–32</td>
<td>T. S. Zilzāl</td>
<td>Before <em>T. S. Sajda</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* 1628–32</td>
<td>T. S. Sajda</td>
<td>After all of the above (but not <em>T. S. Jumu’ā</em>?) after <em>Mafātīh</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* 1631</td>
<td>Asrār</td>
<td>Possibly after <em>Mafātīh</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* 1632</td>
<td>Mafātīh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* 1632–34</td>
<td>Mutashāb</td>
<td>Most likely after <em>Mafātīh</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* 1632–34</td>
<td>T. S. Fātīha</td>
<td>After <em>Mafātīh</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* 1632–34</td>
<td>T. S. Baqara</td>
<td>After <em>T. S. Fātīha</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1634</td>
<td>Sh. al-Kāfī</td>
<td>Incomplete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1628–34</td>
<td>Ta’liq Ilāhiyyāt al-shifā</td>
<td>After Shawāhīd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1632–34</td>
<td>Ta’liq Sh. Ḥikmat al-ishrāq</td>
<td>After <em>T. S. Fātīha</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1632–34</td>
<td>‘Arshiyya</td>
<td>After Ta’liq Sh. Ḥikmat al-ishrāq</td>
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