

Article

## The Jurisprudential Approach to Interpreting the Qur'an, According to Al-Shahrastani

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**Abstract:** The current research aims to know the foundations and interpretive trends that Al-Shahrastani used to interpret the Holy Qur'an according to the verses that need interpretation or other meanings. Educational institutions, including universities, are particularly reliant on knowledge capital as one of their most critical strategic assets. It is a measure of the collective knowledge, skills, and experiences of the organization's members who make substantial contributions to the attainment of organizational objectives and the enhancement of performance. In order to attain professional excellence and continue their professional development throughout their career paths, lecturers and graduates have made job enrichment a primary objective in a rapidly evolving workplace. The University of Karbala, like other Iraqi universities, encounters numerous obstacles in its efforts to enhance the employment prospects of its faculty and students. The knowledge capital of the teaching personnel is one of the factors that influences this issue. The teaching staff is the foundation of the educational process, responsible for the transmission of knowledge and skills to students and the preparation of them for the labor market. The research structure consisted of four primary paragraphs: the first paragraph addressed the methodology, the second paragraph reviewed the literature related to the primary research variables and their sub-dimensions, the third paragraph focused on the results of the research analysis, and the fourth paragraph concluded the research by reviewing the conclusions and recommendations presented in light of the statistical analysis.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence (AI), Decision-Making, Organizational Efficiency, Case Study, Technological Innovation

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### 1. Introduction

Abu al-Fath al-Shahrastani (d. 548 AH/1153 CE) is renowned as a historian of religions and sects as a result of his book al-Milal and al-Nihal. His book Nihayat al-Iqdam/al-Iqdam fi Ilm al-Kalam, which he compiled after al-Milal, was another highly respected work that established al-Shahrastani as an expert in the field of theology. Additionally, his work Musara'at al-Falasifa demonstrates his extensive knowledge of philosophy and jurisprudence. This leads us to the conclusion that al-Shahrastani is a multifaceted Islamic jurist and thinker. A particular aspect of this diversity is evident in the field of Quranic interpretation. In other words, al-Shahrastani is not only an interpreter but also a jurist, a philosopher, a theologian, and a historian of religions and sects.

Nevertheless, his commentaries on literature have not been widely acknowledged, and as a result, he has not been widely recognized as an interpreter., rhetoric, and Quranic interpretation.

In our current research, we shed light on al-Shahrastani's jurisprudential approach, foundations, and interpretive trends.

The current research methodology was characterized by the following:

#### **First: The study problem**

The study problem was represented by a fundamental question: What are the methodology, foundations, and interpretive trends that Al-Shahrastani relies on in his interpretation of the Holy Quran?

#### **Second: The importance of the study**

This title can achieve a set of results in the scientific and practical aspects, the most important of which are

1. To be a starting point for comparative research in the origins of interpretation and its methods, to establish a study of the different interpretation methods among the various Islamic sects and then select the best of them as an ideal or ideal method to be the pioneer in interpretation among the rest of the Islamic sects.
2. To identify the jurisprudential method, foundations and interpretive trends that have an input in the interpretation of the Holy Quran, especially the hermeneutical and esoteric ones.
3. To discover the different sources of interpretation to identify the specifications of the interpreter in detail among the various Islamic sects and to try to compare them with what the interpreter needs in the interpretive process in the present era.

#### **Third: The aim of the research**

The current research aims to know the jurisprudential approach, foundations and interpretive trends that Al-Shahrastani used to interpret the Holy Quran, and it can be summarized in the following points:

1. Finding the jurisprudential approach, foundations and interpretive trends that were launched in the interpretive approach or the interpretive source through the sultans of the court that were contemporary with it, whether it was a political authority, or an intellectual or cultural authority, or an ideological authority, and so on.
2. Reviewing many of the topics of the sciences of the Holy Quran to know their emergence and causes on the basis that they are a methodological mechanism for the science of interpretation and an introduction to it, and they may have a great impact on the differences in interpretations among Muslims.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **The Research Plan**

In the current research, we will discuss the jurisprudential approach, This article tries to explain Al-Shahrastani's ideas and approaches to understanding the Quran, focusing on his book *Mafatih Al-Asrar* and *Masabih Al-Abbar*. It also tries to give information about Al-Shahrastani's life and works.

Therefore, the current research is divided into two sections:

The first section: Al-Shahrastani's life and works

The second section is Al-Shahrastani's jurisprudential approach, foundations, and interpretive trends.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **A. Section One: Al-Shahrastani's Life and Works**

The first section deals with Al-Shahrastani's life and his most important scientific works, and accordingly, we will divide the current section into two branches: the first branch is his life, and the second branch is his works.

#### **The first: His Life**

"Abu Al-Fath Muhammad bin Abdul Karim bin Abi Bakr Ahmad Al-Shahrastani was born in Shahrastan, a region in Turkmenistan that is situated northwest of Khorasan and is bordered by the Karkum Desert. The date of birth was recorded in the books of biography (Al-Tabaqat) as 467/1074, 469/1076, or 479/1086. The latter date is considered the most accurate, as there is no information available regarding Al-Shahrastani's family, who lived during the Seljuk dynasty (1040-1157 AD). There is no significant information regarding his childhood or adolescence. Nevertheless, it is possible to conclude that he received a decent education, given the content of his works and the environment in which he resided, which was a significant center of knowledge."

According to the biographical works, al-Shahrastani initiated his education in his hometown at a young age, following his studies of the instrumental/auxiliary sciences, including the Arabic language and literature, mathematics, logic, and other disciplines.

Al-Shahrastani traveled to Nishapur to pursue additional scientific disciplines under the guidance of distinguished scholars in their respective domains. He engaged in the lessons of the teachers who were pupils of Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni (d. 478/1085) in this location. He was taught the principles of jurisprudence by Abu Nasr Abd al-Rahim ibn Abd al-Karim al-Qushayri (d. 514 AH/1120 CE) and Abu al-Muzaffar Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Khawafi (d. 500 AH/1106 CE). One of Imam al-Ghazali's companions, he was a judge and a Shafi'i. He died in the year 505/1111 CE. Hadith was taught to him by Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Ahmad al-Madini (d. 494 AH/1101 CE), and grammar, theology, and metaphysical philosophy were taught to him by Abu al-Qasim Salman (Sulayman?) ibn Nasir ibn Imran al-Ansari (d. 512/1118 CE). Abu al-Qasim al-Ansari, an ascetic and Sufi, was the scholar who had the most significant impact on al-Shahrastani. In his book, "The End of Introduction," Al-Shahrastani states, "We would frequently consult our master and imam, Abu al-Qasim al-Ansari."

After completing his education in Nishapur, Al-Shahrastani relocated to Khwarazm to teach and evangelize. In 510 AH/1116 CE, he traveled to Hijaz to complete his academic studies and conduct the Hajj. Upon his return from Hajj, he made a halt in Baghdad and, with the assistance of As'ad ibn Muhammad al-Mahni (d. 527 AH/1132 CE), was able to teach at the Nizamiyya School. Additionally, he delivered numerous sermons. His sermons were particularly well-received in scholarly circles and were exceedingly popular. In 514/1120 CE, he relocated to Khorasan after spending approximately three years in Baghdad. He commenced his service as the minister of the Seljuk Sultan Sanjar (r. 512-548 AH/1118-1153 CE), Abu al-Qasim Nasir al-Din Mahmud ibn Muzaffar al-Marwazi (d. 530 AH/1135 CE). During this period, he was a member of Sultan Sanjar's inner entourage and became one of his confidants. During his ten-year residence in Khurasan, Al-Shahrastani penned his renowned work, *Al-Milal*, which he dedicated to the vizier Marwazi. Nevertheless, al-Shahrastani substituted the dedication in the introduction with a new one in 526/1132, when Sultan Sanjar adopted a stance that was in opposition to Marwazi. .

Al-Shahrastani served under the 'Alawi master (al-Naqib al-Ashraf) Abū al-Qāsim 'Alī ibn Ja'far al-Musawi (d. 550/1155) at al-Tirmidhi. The latter exhibited interest and reverence for scholars and philosophers. Al-Shahrastani sent the latter a copy of his two books, *al-Muṣārahah* and *al-Milāl*. The duration of al-Shahrastani's tenure in al-Tirmidhi and the date of his return to his homeland are unknown. However, his death records indicate that he spent his final years in Shahrastān. Two distinct dates have been assigned to his death; however, scholars have generally adopted 548/1153 as the accurate date. .

### **Second: His works**

Although al-Shahrastani is well known in the scholarly world, only two of his students, Abu Saad al-Sam'ani (d. 562/1166) and Mujir al-Din al-Baghdadi (d.

592/1196), recorded and published his works. The fact that al-Shahrastani did not teach a large number of students, despite his reputation for great knowledge, can be attributed to the years he spent travelling and working with high-ranking government figures. In keeping with the scope of his vast scientific knowledge and scholarly personality, al-Shahrastani produced a considerable number of works in various fields. Although his works are not numerous, they are related to the history of religions and sects, theology, and philosophy and are of particular importance. The works that have come down to us today can be listed as follows:

1. Al-Milal and al-Nihal: This work, considered to be al-Shahrastani's masterpiece, was compiled in 521/1127-1128. According to some authors, such as Taj al-Din al-Subki, al-Milal is the most valuable work in the field of Islamic heresy, as al-Shahrastani's objective method and approach in citing the views of Islamic sects in a descriptive description of the method made this work of great value. The book, which has been printed and translated into many languages, was translated into French with the encouragement of Ibrahim Madkur. Daniel Guimart and Guy Monod translated the first volume. In contrast, the second volume was translated by Jean Jolivet, again with Guy Monod, under the title *Livre des Religions et des sectes* (Paris and Louvain, 1986, 1993).
2. Nihayat al-Iqdam/al-Iqdam fi Ilm al-Kalam: After al-Milal, al-Shahrastani wrote this work on theology. This work, which includes twenty basic topics, is based on the Ash'ari doctrine but criticizes it in some places, as do the Mu'tazila and some Shi'ite sects. The work was edited by Alfred Guillaume, with indexes (Oxford and London, 1934).
2. Paths of the Philosophers: This work was written in Tirmidhi after the Religions and dedicated to the noble Ashraf Abu al-Qasim Majd al-Din Ali ibn Ja'far al-Musawi. The book, also known as "al-Musari'ah", is a response to the views of Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037) on metaphysical topics. This work was later refuted in a treatise entitled "al-Musari' al-Masaarih", written by the Imami philosopher Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 672/1274) and edited by Suhair Muhammad Mukhtar (Cairo, 1976).
3. Mafatih al-Asrar and Masabih al-Abrar: This book, which constitutes the main subject and source of this research, is al-Shahrastani's Qur'anic commentary, and the introduction to the Qur'anic sciences is followed by the interpretation of the first two surahs of the Qur'an (al-Fatihah and al-Baqarah); each verse is mostly interpreted in a common thematic manner and then the esoteric interpretations are presented under the subtitle (Secrets).
4. This book, which is believed to have been written in the years 538-540/1143-1145, was edited and published by Mohammad Ali Azarshab in two volumes (Tehran, 2008), from the only known manuscript copy of 433 pages, which is in the Library of the Majlis al-Shura Melli in Tehran. In addition, the introduction to Mafatih al-Furqan and the interpretation of Surah al-Fatihah have been translated into English by Toby Meyer under the title *Mafatih al-Asrar: al-Shahrastani's Esoteric Commentary on the Qur'an*. This book, which includes the original Arabic text, was published in collaboration with the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London (Oxford and London, 2009).
5. A Treatise on the Subject of the Necessary Science of Existence (Risalah ila Muhammad al-Ilāqati): This work is addressed to the physician and philosopher Abu Abdullah Muhammad al-Ilāqati (d. 536 AH/1141 CE) and was published as an exact copy in a book written by the scholar Muhammad Reza Jalali Na'ini.
6. A Question (Research) on Proving the Essence of the Individual: This work, which deals with the smallest indivisible particle of matter (the indivisible

part), was published as an appendix to the book *The End of the Ancient* by Alfred Guillaume (Oxford and London, 1934).

7. A Council of Shahrastani's Writings that Dar Khwarazm has criticized: Some years ago, Abu al-Fath al-Shahrastani Na'ini wrote a book called *Sharh Hal and Athar al-Hujjat al-Haqq*, which had this work at the end. Under the title *Ma-jlis: Discours sur l'ordre et la création*, Diane Steigerwald translated it into French. It was released with the original text in Quebec in 1998 by Saint-Nicolas. Also, Steigerwald wrote a piece in which he says Shahrastani uses the idea of "divine word" in this book according to Ismaili terminology.
8. *The Story of Our Prophet Joseph (Explanation/Tafsir of Surah Yusuf)*: This commentary is an interpretation of Surah Yusuf in the Qur'an. Azarshab reports that a manuscript copy of the work is located in the Azhar Library. Shahrastani composed this commentary in accordance with the esoteric, as per Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328), Ismaili concept (according to the Ismaili doctrine).

Although there are numerous sources that cite additional works by al-Shahrastani, it is uncertain whether they are still in existence. The following is a partial summary of some of them: (1) *Al-Manahij and al-Ayat*, (2) *A letter to Muhammad al-Sahlan*, (3) "A letter to Judge Omar ibn Sahlān in response to Ibn Sīnā (Omar ibn Sahlān al-Sāwī wrote a letter in this book entitled *A response to al-Shahrastani*), (4) *Talkhīs al-Qasm li-Madhāhib al-Anam*, (5) *al-Uyūn and al-Anhar*, (6) *al-Irshād ila Aqīd al-Ibād*, "(7) *A letter on the beginning and the return*, (8) *Daqa'iq al-Awhām*, (9) *The story of Moses and al-Khidr*, (10) *History of the wise*.

#### **B. The second section: The jurisprudential approach, foundations and interpretive trends according to Al-Shahrastani**

Al-Shahrastani worked in his jurisprudential interpretive approach with several foundations and trends in order to move towards a complete interpretive encyclopedia built on important pillars. Accordingly, the current section can be divided into five branches:

##### **The first branch: The authority of the Ahl al-Bayt in interpreting the Qur'an**

In the argument of the chapter of his book *Al-Kafi*, Al-Shahrastani posits that the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt are the ultimate authority in the interpretation of the Qur'an. He depicts the Imams in a manner that is similar to the narrations of Al-Kulayni: "They are the inheritors of the Qur'an," "They are one of the two great ones." "The two weighty things," and "They know the worlds and the two existences." Al-Shahrastani posits that the Imams, who are the genuine leaders of guidance, safeguard every aspect of the interpretation and interpretation of the Qur'an, just as the angels supervised every aspect of the revelation of the Qur'an, which came in the Almighty's saying:

" Verily We: It is We Who have sent down the Dhikr (i.e. the Quran), and surely, We will guard it (from corruption). " Managed by guardian angels, the protection of the remembrance itself is managed by the scholars (Imams of the Household) who are aware of the revelation; this is not through prediction or conjecture, but through absolute knowledge of the revelation and interpretation, the definitive and the ambiguous, the abrogating and the abrogated, the general and the specific, the ambiguous and the detailed, the absolute and the restricted, the apparent and the hidden, the command and the prohibition, the lawful and the unlawful, the limits and the rulings. Thus, according to al-Shahrastani, the companions agreed that the knowledge of the Qur'an belongs to the Household of the Prophet, and it is reported in the narration that the companions came to Ali and asked him: Did you have any special knowledge from the household of the Prophet other than the Qur'an? His saying (other than the Qur'an) indicates that the companions agreed that the news of the revelation of the Qur'an and its interpretation belongs to the Household of the



Prophet; in addition to that, Ibn Abbas worked alongside Ali. All scholars of interpretation accept the first, and the Prophet recited the following supplication to him: "O Allah, grant him the understanding of the religion and teach him the interpretation." Al-Shahrastani explains how he trained in the field of interpretation as follows: In my youth, I used to listen to my teachers about interpretation; and over time, I became well-versed in this field, and I recorded what I learned in the matter of interpretation from my teacher, Nasser al-Sunnah Abu al-Qasim Salman bin Nasser al-Ansari. Later, my teacher allowed me to obtain the hidden knowledge and correct principles of the Qur'an that came to us from the Ahl al-Bayt and their close companions.

On the other hand, a person [a divine being?] called to me from the side of a blessed tree to the right of the valley of that blessed place and said: " O Believers, fear Allah and be with those who are Truthful " As mentioned in the hadith about the Prophet Moses and his young companions who travelled a long distance and found the person they were looking for, which is mentioned in the Qur'an:" And they found a servant from among Our servants to whom we had given mercy from us and had taught him from Us a [certain] knowledge". "I also set out on the path of love, searching for faithful servants. Finally, I found one of God's righteous servants. .

Based on these statements, some scholars have claimed that al-Shahrastani's inclination towards Shi'ism may have come from Abu al-Qasim al-Ansari's interest in theology and philosophy, and Toby Meyer, who worked on *Mafatih al-Asrar*, claims that al-Shahrastani's original contact with the Ismaili esoteric heritage may have been through this person.

According to this claim, Abu al-Qasim al-Ansari was a secret Ismaili; however, as Taj al-Din al-Subki recorded, al-Ansari, who was famous for his Sufi identity, was a prominent poet and, according to Ayman Shahada's findings, we find it so, Toby Meyer's conclusion about Abu al-Qasim al-Ansari and al-Shahrastani that al-Shahrastani sharpened his views and interpretive methods of the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt with the Qur'anic secrets he learned from his teacher Abu al-Qasim al-Sadiq al-Ansari, that the latter was in fact a secret Ismaili teacher, and that al-Shahrastani first became acquainted with Ismaili thought through this. The statement mentioned above of al-Shahrastani: "After that, my study of the valuable sayings and opinions narrated from the Ahl al-Bayt and their companions revealed to me the secrets of the Qur'an and its sound principles," is the best evidence of his commitment and obedience to the two weighty things.

In light of this, the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) in his youth, al-Shahrastani listened to the interpretation of the Qur'an from his teachers and recorded, in particular, the interpretations of his teacher Abu al-Qasim al-Ansari; (2) al-Shahrastani came to understand the secrets of the Qur'an by studying the sayings and opinions of the Ahl al-Bayt and their friends; and (3) a person (a divine being?) invited al-Shahrastani to be his faithful servant, and based on this invitation, he went in search, and finally found that faithful servant. According to Ayman Shahada, this mysterious faithful servant was either a contemporary of al-Shahrastani or a symbolic figure, indicating a deep source of Sufi knowledge; however, according to Toby Meyer, this unknown/unnamed person is someone other than Abu al-Qasim al-Ansari, the person who introduced al-Shahrastani to the Ismaili intellectual tradition – most likely a disciple of Hasan ibn Sabbah (d. 518/1124) or even the man himself.

Toby Meyer's views seem to be merely hypothetical; however, we can easily say that al-Shahrastani acquired philosophical wisdom through an unknown spiritual guide, a special source of knowledge, or through his study of the opinions and commentaries of the Imams of the Household. In fact, al-Shahrastani was the first to realize the linguistic specifications of the Qur'an, such as composition, arrangement, rhetoric, and

eloquence, in parallel with the knowledge he acquired in religious sciences and philosophical wisdom. Later, he understood that the divine word was an endless ocean of meaning; again, in keeping with the fruit of his intellectual journey, al-Shahrastani first commented on topics such as readings, grammar, linguistics, and semantics, and then presented the deep and hidden meanings of each verse. However, he did not invent these meanings; on the contrary, al-Shahrastani narrated what he learned from the commentaries of the famous people whom he described as righteous. In his interpretation of the Qur'an, al-Shahrastani sought refuge in God from interpreting according to his personal opinion, regardless of the narration and chain of transmission, which he emphasized repeatedly. However, he made very complex comments, especially under the sub-title Secrets. .

According to the author, these comments are not the product of his thought but are supposed to be manifestations of the wisdom he acquired through his teacher and/or through a deep source of knowledge. At the same time, these comments are the product of the spiritual power that emanated from this wisdom, and the fruit of the revelations that were revealed to him. For this reason, al-Shahrastani called his commentary *Mafatih al-Asrar* and *Masabih al-Abrar*, which emanates from and is in agreement with the theses of the Ahl al-Bayt.

### **The second branch: The systematic arrangement of the Qur'anic topics**

It came in the introduction to the explanation of Al-Shahrastani's interpretive book, entitled *Mafatih Al-Furqan*, as it was distributed over twelve titles and topics that were discussed in the following order: (1) The first and last verses and the period of revelation of the Qur'an, (2) The issue of collecting the Qur'an, (3) The differences of the narrators in the order of revelation of the Qur'anic surahs, (4) Readings, (5) The desirable and undesirable matters for the reciters of the Qur'an, (6) The number of the Qur'anic surahs, verses, words and letters, (7) The prominent interpreters from the Companions and others from the Salaf, and the great works in the field of interpretation, (8) The meaning of interpretation and exegesis, (9) The generality of the specific, the clear and the ambiguous, and the abrogating and abrogated, (10) The divine rulings imposed and renewed on the principles of creation and age and the principles of multiplicity and hydration., (11) The miracle of the Qur'an in terms of composition, eloquence, guidance and others, (12) The conditions of interpreting the Qur'an. Very interesting and thought-provoking information, opinions and reviews are included under these twelve headings.

For example, in the section on the collection of the Qur'an, al-Shahrastani first narrates the successive collection and copying of the Qur'an by Abu Bakr and Uthman, referring to narrations from al-Bukhari's *Sahih* (d. 256/869). But he later cites a narration that says: "Some scholars said: There were many verses in the Qur'an about the virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt, so they deleted them." After that, al-Shahrastani narrates almost all the problematic narrations about the collection of the Qur'an; for example, he narrates that some verses were only found with a companion named Khuzaymah ibn Thabit and that the private copies of the Qur'an that were in possession of some companions, such as Ibn Mas'ud or Ubayy ibn Ka'b, had a different order and content from Uthman's copy. He goes on to say that there were some grammatical errors in Uthman's copy and that some chapters were initially much longer than they were in this copy. The author also tells us how some verses were excluded, such as the verse on stoning, but in the end, al-Shahrastani tells us that there was a consensus that Uthman's copy was the standard one. However, according to al-Shahrastani, this consensus is worthless, as Uthman's copy was crippled by many linguistic errors, as mentioned in the narrations mentioned above. This means that the Qur'an has been distorted and corrupted. At this point, al-Shahrastani says that he feels shocked and disappointed because when the Qur'an was collected and copied, Ali and his copy of

the Qur'an were ignored, even though Ali was a native Arab and was much closer to the Prophet. He surpassed all the members of the copying committee in his understanding of the Qur'an and his writing skills. However, Allah preserved the Qur'an through the Ahl al-Bayt, and thus the text of the Qur'an has reached us today, preserved from all types of distortion, change, omission or addition. .

It is interesting to think that these views were expressed by al-Shahrastani, who was known to be a Sunni, that Uthman's copy was full of grammatical errors and missing verses, followed by his claim that "the text of the Qur'an that we have today is preserved from all change and distortion" – attributing this protection to the people of knowledge. Although it is not stated how this came about – it creates a problem. But it is very difficult to explain that al-Shahrastani's views on this subject are parallel to those of some of the more extreme Shi'ite groups than the Ismailis. As is well known, the Ismaili sect has a strict understanding of the authenticity of the Qur'anic text, although it delves into esoteric interpretations.

### **The third branch: Defining and specifying the Qur'anic concepts**

According to Al-Shahrastani, the topic of generality and specificity has dimensions that differ from its content in the Islamic jurisprudence method. However, many scholars have failed to specify indicators for specific words and concepts in the Qur'an that refer to a specific person/persons (identification of specificities). Al-Shahrastani says: "There is no general term in the Qur'an that is not specific, and no specification that is not specific" (There are no two lams in the Qur'an that are not specialized, and there is no specification that is not linked to personification); then he continues to give the following examples to support this thesis: The word "people" as a general term does not include children or rational people, but only those who are accountable, and the word "O you who believe" in the Qur'anic surahs is specific only to the people of the house and not to the rest of the believers .

### **The fourth branch: Sources of the Interpretive Explanation of the Qur'an**

Sources of Explanation and Its Characteristics The sources used in al-Shahrastani's explanation can be divided into two categories, as the explanation consists of two dimensions. This double dimension is based on the division between revelation and interpretation and between the apparent and the hidden. Indeed, the principle of diversity of terms, which al-Shahrastani sees as one of the keys to the secrets of the Qur'an, represents this double dimension, and thus everything that has a concrete or abstract quality has two poles and two dimensions; for example, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, night and day, long and short, or black and white.

The truth is that everything in the Qur'an has two aspects: faith and disbelief, believer and disbeliever, and sin and good deeds. This double dimension applies to the Qur'an itself, which includes aspects of revelation and interpretation. Once again, the Qur'an also has an apparent and hidden aspect.

Al-Shahrastani, who repeatedly mentions the narrations of the apparent and hidden in the Qur'an, also often mentions the distinction between revelation and interpretation in the interpretation of many verses. According to him, revelation corresponds to the wording of the Qur'an, and interpretation corresponds to the deeper meaning. Again, based on this distinction, revelation is the subject of the science of interpretation, which is concerned with the apparent dimension, which includes language, grammar, rhetoric, linguistics, semantics, readings, and legal rulings. Interpretation is concerned with the deepest meanings and exploring the secrets of the Qur'an.

Based on this decisive distinction, Al-Shahrastani first explains a verse from the apparent dimension and then moves to the esoteric dimension, using different foundations and sources according to the two different styles of interpretation and



mentioning the sources he uses in the apparent hadiths. Among the linguistic sources that Al-Shahrastani refers to are names such as Al-Khalil bin Ahmad (d. 175 AH/791), Sibawayh (d. 180 AH/796), Al-Akhfash Al-Awsat (d. 215 AH/830), and Al-Muhammad. -Al-Asma'i (d. 216 AH/831), Abu Abdullah bin Al-A'rabrah (d. 231 AH/846), Tha'lab (d. 291 AH/904), Al-Azhari (d. 370 AH/980), Al-Jawhari (d. 370 AH/980). 400/1009). He also gives the opinions of commentators such as al-Fara' (d. 207/822), al-Tabari (d. 310/923), Abu Muslim al-Isfahani (d. 322/934), and al-Qaffal al-Shashi (d. 322/365/976). Al-Shahrastani also narrates from scholars of the Companions and Followers, as well as the Imams of the Household, in the interpretation of many verses. Still, he records the hadiths without a chain of transmission and gives special importance to the opinions of al-Qaffal al-Shashi among the sources of interpretation of the Qur'an mentioned, especially with regard to the connection between the verses. . . . According to the author himself, the primary source of the views and interpretations that comprise the distinctive section of the Keys to Secrets, i.e. the Secrets, are the Imams of the Household. It is most likely that al-Shahrastani, who bases his esoteric interpretations on the latter, took these interpretations from sources believed to be attributed to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq and which are respected in the Ismaili esoteric tradition; among them: *The Properties of the Qur'an*, *The Lamp of the Law and the Key to Truth*, *The Secrets of Revelation*, *The Hidden in the Science of Letters*, and *The Book of Monotheism and Management*, which were transmitted by Mufaddal ibn 'Umar al-Ja'fi (d. 128/745). In fact, the narrations he narrated from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq in the twelfth chapter of the introduction confirm this. In one of the statements in these narrations, Imam Ja'far responds to a person called Sadir al-Sayrafi, who asks whether the claim that the Imams of the Household have qualities such as receiving revelation is true or not. He says: "Do not honour those who talk nonsense about us, and we are the proofs of God and His agents over the people. Whatever we say is permissible or forbidden is from the Book of God."

As a result, it seems that the reason for including these sayings in the introduction is to indicate that a large number of the esoteric interpretations attributed to the Imams of the Household are based on the chain of transmission of Imam Ali (peace be upon them) to Ja'far al-Sadiq and that these interpretations differ from the esoteric ones for those who are ignorant of the apparent meaning. Another indication of the reliable sources when narrating the esoteric interpretations of the Shahrastanis is that most of the narrations of the interpretations about the Imams of the Household in Shi'i literature come from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir and Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq. The narrations about Imam Muhammad al-Baqir were mentioned in the interpretations of the Qur'anic verses in the commentary of Abu al-Jarud Ziyad ibn al-Mundhir (d. 150/767); this commentary has partially reached us today through the commentary of al-Qummi attributed to al-Qummi. However, the content of the narrations about Muhammad al-Baqir does not agree with the esoteric interpretations presented by al-Shahrastani under the title Secrets.

Al-Shahrastani does not limit himself to narrations alone; he also records his opinions and views on the mysteries of the Qur'an; however, he does not consider this his own opinion. This is because, as we have mentioned above, through his mysterious sage and/or source of wisdom and his contemplations on the sayings of the Imams of the Household, he acquired a spiritual ability that helped him discover the deep layers of the meanings of the Qur'an. Al-Shahrastani believes that his understanding and interpretation of the Qur'an are correct because of this spiritual competence. In contrast, the Qadarites, Mu'tazilites, Jabiris, Mishbihah, and other sects interpreted the ambiguous verses according to their personal opinions, especially those related to matters such as divine attributes, fate, and destiny. In this way, they erred in interpreting the Qur'an and reached incorrect conclusions.

In the same way, on the same topics, the Ash'arites also erred in interpreting the Qur'an. It is very interesting how al-Shahrastani marginalizes the Ash'arites and describes all these sects as confused and perplexed in terms of their understanding and interpretation of the Qur'an. He goes on to explain that the main reason for this is their inability to acquire knowledge from the true source and gateway to knowledge, namely Ali and his sons (the Imams of the Household). After discussing this matter, Al-Shahrastani narrates various accounts of Ali's virtues and his absolute authority in understanding the Qur'an, and then he narrates a number of accounts from Ja'far Al-Sadiq.

As the author said in General and Special, there is no general concept in the Qur'an for which a specific word has not been assigned, and there is no specification except within the specification. Accordingly, the attributes of those praised and criticized in the Qur'an can be traced back to specific people who lived during the period of the Qur'an's revelation, as well as to other people who lived after this period through specification. It is useful to explain this by quoting the author's explanation of the Children of Israel's worship of the calf, which he narrated in Q2:54. Al-Shahrastani begins his interpretation of the aforementioned verse by saying: "Those who fear the stories of the Qur'an said..." And he briefly records the following: Every example in the Qur'an has its example in the Muslim community. My intention. A tribulation similar to that which existed among the Children of Israel who worshipped the calf occurred in the Muslim community after the Prophet Moses ascended Mount Sinai. In other words, the Muslim community became slaves to the alleged caliphate, similar to the Children of Israel who worshipped the calf. These caliphs are the Umayyads whom the Prophet described as "I saw in a dream men stomping on my pulpit like donkeys." In fact, some of the Umayyads seized the right of caliphate from the People of the House, the friends of God and His friends, and some of them slaughtered them. When God ordered the Children of Israel to kill each other because of their worship of the calf, His wrath descended upon those who worshipped the calf in this nation, meaning those who martyred Hussein and became the people of the fire, i.e. the followers of the calf. Yazid. Even seventy thousand of Yazid's companions – may God increase their torment in the fire – were killed in a short period of time.

It is possible to communicate with the Imamis through the concepts of the *musta'in-mafrūgh*, which al-Shahrastani considers another important key to the secrets of the Qur'an. The following is an explanation of the basic content of these concepts: There are two different worlds and two different divine commands in the plane of existence. The *musta'in-mafrūgh* denotes the completed world that has reached the point of perfection; the divine decree concerning this world is final. No change is possible in the world of the *musta'in-mafrūgh*. The world of the exception and the *fatwa* have not yet reached perfection and, therefore, have not been completed.

For this reason, the divine rulings in the world of the *musta'in-mafrūgh* are endless. Suppose this distinction is not taken into account. In that case, if the whole world is accepted as the *musta'in-mafrūgh*, and all divine rulings are considered absolute and unchangeable, the idea of compulsion becomes inevitable. If the opposite is accepted, then delegation (complete freedom) is necessary. Both approaches are incorrect; the correct path is to take a path between these two paths that finds expression in the distinction between the *musta'in-mafrūgh* and the *musta'in-mafrūgh*. Al-Shahrastani believes that issues such as predestination (*qadar*), human actions, divine will and human freedom, as well as guidance and misguidance, which are among the most controversial topics in Islamic theology, can only be resolved by this distinction; for example, Q 2:26 says that God has led most people astray by giving examples of mosquitoes and the like, but at the end of the same verse it is stated that only those who have deviated are led astray. Both of these divine statements are certainly true, but the first is a divisive judgment, and the second is an enlightened judgment. There

is a dialectical relationship between these two decrees reminiscent of the relationship between the chicken and the egg. Then, when it is understood that the divisive, which is the decree, is brought about by the appeal and that the inferred judgment is derived from the divisive, it becomes clear that both the idea of predestination and the negation of predestination are incorrect. As for misguidance, we can say the following: God has led people astray, and they have strayed from the right path, but at the same time, these people have actually strayed from the right path, and God has led them astray. This means that immorality occurs with the misguidance of God's imams, and God misguides people because they have strayed from the path of truth by their own will.

#### **The fifth branch: Interpretation and the Esoteric Trend in the Interpretation of the Qur'an**

In *Mafatih al-Asrar*, in addition to many basic views and interpretations about the Imamate, the wills, the Imam, the guardian, and others, which are in line with the views of the Imamis, al-Shahrastani uses esoteric and literal interpretations, such as the letters of the syllable, the number seven, manna and quails, the staff of the Prophet Moses, and the twelve springs that came out of a rock, all of which are widely used in the books of Ismaili philosophers and Sufis with esoteric tendencies, as well as some Imami interpretations, including Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-Arabi (d. 638/1240) and Abd al-Razzaq al-Kashani (d. 736/1335). He also uses different concepts, such as the universal intellect, the universal soul, the tablet, the pen, the substitute, and pegs, all of which are characteristics that document al-Shahrastani's use of esoteric and philosophical sources in more general terms.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The current research aims to know the foundations and interpretive trends that Al-Shahrastani made for his interpretation of the Holy Quran. These foundations were characterized by fundamental rules that helped in interpreting what was esoteric or interpreted.

The current research reached the following most important results:

1. The interpretation of the Quran, *Mafatih Al-Asrar*, attributed to Al-Shahrastani, has the characteristics of works written within the framework of Shiite thought. However, the information related to the external interpretations of the verses presented under titles such as system, revelation, interpretation, language, and meanings is mostly descriptive and completely consistent with other Shiite and Sunni interpretations in terms of expression and content. This correspondence is not the primary characteristic but rather a secondary feature because the unique and original position of *Mafatih Al-Asrar* is not the door to explaining the external meaning but rather the door to interpretation related to secrets.
2. Moreover, most of the commentaries in the Secrets section, which can be found under the interpretation of almost every verse, are esoteric, while *Mafatih al-Asrar*, in its most general terms, can be described as an eclectic commentary; the verses are interpreted first according to their external meaning and then according to their esoteric aspects, with the two commentaries presented under separate headings (except in a few places); this is a clear indication of the eclectic structure of the work.
3. Shahrastani's esoteric commentaries are expansions of the concepts of esotericism and interpretation of the Imamis, especially the early Akhbari scholars, such as al-Kulayni, al-Ayyashi, and al-Saffar al-Qummi; all of them repeated in their works the narration: "The Qur'an has an external and an esoteric dimension," although what they are referring to here is not clearly stated, because in the Akhbari Imami school there is a repeated emphasis on the dual dimension of the Qur'an, using

the concepts of esotericism and interpretation; but no adequate clarification has been provided that would allow us to understand the deep meaning attributed to the concepts of esotericism and interpretation.

4. It is emphasized in the commentary that the sole authority for interpreting and explaining the Qur'an is the Imams. Moreover, the esoteric interpretations of the Imams of the Household are rarely mentioned in the Imami Shi'ite sources. More precisely, the Imami Shi'ite literature provides clear and understandable narrations from the Imams of the Household. Since interpreting the Qur'an by personal opinion was forbidden in the Imami Akhbari school, the scholars of this school refrained from interpretation. Al-Shahrastani took his place alongside the Akhbari school in the matter of interpreting the Qur'an by personal opinions. Still, he also stated that being familiar with the opinions and interpretations of the Imams regarding the Qur'an gave him wisdom and spiritual strength, which enabled him to make personal interpretations that were supported.
5. Al-Shahrastani combined the traditional/textual line of the Imamiyyah with Shi'ite wisdom and insight or gave an esoteric color to the external approach of the Imamiyyah in interpreting the Qur'an with interpretations based on a philosophical vision. In this way, al-Shahrastani constantly referred to the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt, most often referring to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq; more precisely, he used various works attributed to Ja'far al-Sadiq, which are also highly respected in the Ismaili tradition.
6. Al-Shahrastani's esoteric and literalist interpretations of some verses (especially those relating to the disjointed letters and the number seven), his attribution of certain Qur'anic concepts to specific persons, his assignment of symbolic meanings to them, and his use of concepts such as the creation of 'Umar, the counting of the tartub, and the divine word in parallel with Ismaili terminology should not be taken as evidence that he is an esoteric Ismaili. Rather, he used Ismaili terminology only as a tool to introduce philosophical depth to the thought of the Imami Akhbari school of thought. The identity that al-Shahrastani presented in *Mafatih al-Asrar* is a Shiite Akhbari Imami identity, not an Ismaili esoteric identity. His alienation of the Jabriyah, Murji'ah, Karamiyyah, and even Ash'ariyah, and his accusation of them of misunderstanding and misinterpreting the verses related to divine attributes, destiny, and human actions, is important evidence of the identity. What is presented, especially in *Mafatih al-Asrar*, is far removed from the extremist Sunni identity.
7. Al-Shahrastani's taking different positions in different works reminds us of the search for truth that al-Ghazali described in *al-Munqidh*. It is noteworthy that both Zahir al-Din al-Bayhaqi and Ibn Taymiyyah found similarities between al-Shahrastani and al-Ghazali and that each of them mentioned these two names in the same context. While al-Ghazali ended his journey in search of truth with rich Sunni Sufi wisdom, al-Shahrastani, as is evident from *Mafatih al-Asrar*, which he wrote in his last years, completed the same journey by arriving at philosophical philosophy—insight into the Shiite Imami matrix. In fact, al-Shahrastani showed his inclination towards Shiism by dedicating *al-Milal andal-Masarah* to al-Naqeeb al-Ashraf Ali ibn Ja'far al-Musawi and then reinforced his Shiite inclination in his interpretation of the Qur'an.
8. al-Shahrastani presented opinions parallel to the opinions of the Sunnis when necessary, for example, in the issues of the readings and the seven conditions, and thus we see that he was not bound to one sect; on the contrary, he was a free scholar, defending the opinion that he saw as correct without caring about the school to which he belonged, but it is necessary to emphasize that the identity reflected in *Mafatih al-Asrar* strongly indicates an inclination towards Shiism and not as a purely Shiite belief.

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