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ESF SCH EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP

**The Esoteric Interpretation
Of The Qur'an**

Scientific Report



Cambridge, United Kingdom, 17 - 21 July 2006

**Convened by:
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Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Cambridge

Co-sponsored by



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

ESF SCH Exploratory Workshop EW05-335 The Esoteric Interpretation of the Qur'an Scientific Report

Part 1 Executive Summary

1. Composition of Part 2 of the Scientific Report

- (i) Brief outline of the overall content and time frame of the workshop.
- (ii) Summary of the content of the programme, session by session, followed by a resumé of each of the papers within the session, and where available notes on some questions and comments concerning each.

2. Summary of Part 2 of the Scientific Report

(i) **The Programme.**

The workshop lasted the best part of three days from the evening of Monday July 17th to 4pm on Thursday July 20th, opening with a half-hour presentation on behalf of the ESF by Professor Kohlberg prior to the welcoming buffet dinner, and ending with a one-hour round-table discussion on possible activities to follow on from this workshop. The workshop programme went ahead as planned without any major changes, and with only two last minute cancellations: Professor Heath was stranded in Beirut, and Dr Nettler, was unable to come due to ill health. Prof Heath sent his paper, which was read out by Dr Mayer, Dr Nettler's place as chair of the panel on 'al-Andalus and the Ibn 'Arabi School' was taken by Prof Mahmud Kiliç. Dr Mayer took Dr Nettler's place as one of the UK participants of the workshop.

(ii) **The Academic Content**

Introduction

The convenor acknowledged the generous contributions of the sponsors, expressed gratitude to the participants for attending, and addressed both the range of topics that would be covered and inevitable lacunae, which might nonetheless be remedied in the publication of the proceedings. She also expressed the hope that participants would not view the sessions or panels as having fixed boundaries, but allow for a flow and interchange between them.

Opening Remarks

Prof Böwering took the mission statement as the starting point of his opening remarks and reminded participants that 'in the spirit of an exploratory workshop, they should have in mind to discover 'What is the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an?' He then outlined the three approaches to esoteric interpretation of Sufism Ismailism and Shi'ism, and explored some of the things that unite these three different hermeneutical traditions. He ended by stating that the esoteric (*batin*) might be an antidote (to extremism), an antidote that is rooted in Islamic tradition Moreover, the esoteric is what is shared with other religions.

Session 1: Early Approaches to Esoteric Interpretation

Farhana Mayer devoted her paper to the ontological continuum between levels of interpretation and their connection to the understanding of [potential] levels of perfection within the human being, as presented in the commentary attributed to Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765). **Sara Sviri** discussed the metaphysical understanding of the significance of language according to the 9th century mystic al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, and his esoteric hermeneutics of the Qur'an as conveyed through his discussion of Qur'anic verses and words in his other works, such as the *Khatm al-awliya'* and *Kitab 'ilm al-awliya'*.

Session 2: The Hermeneutics of Love Mysticism

In contrast to the first session, which had focused on some of the guiding principles and ontological and metaphysical dimensions of esoteric interpretation, this panel focused more on methodological aspects of esoteric interpretation. In the case of **Annabel Keeler's** paper this was a comparative methodology of the hermeneutics in Sufi commentaries on Surat Yusuf; in the case of **Alan Godlas'** paper, it was the methodology of how we might approach a Sufi commentary, and within that methodology a brief look at the method of Ruzbihan's hermeneutics.

Session 3: The School of Najm al-Din Kubra

This session was devoted to two disciples of the 13th century mystic, Najm al-Din Kubra (d. 1220). **Muhammad Movahedi** discussed the *Bahr al-haqa'iq*, which he contends was composed by Najm al-Din Razi Daya (d. d. 1256), and focused on the hermeneutics and prevailing doctrines of this work, and the connection of the latter to Razi's other works. **Jamal Elias** discussed two exegetical texts composed by 'Ala al-Dawla Simnani (d. 1336). He contrasted the hermeneutical structure proposed in these two works, and he raised the question of why a Sufi should compose a tafsir.

Session 4: Al-Andalus and the School of Ibn 'Arabi

Denis Gril discussed hermeneutical principle of *i'tibar*, in the *tafsir* of the little-known Sevillian master Ibn Barrajan (d. 1141), and the metaphysical significance of the Divine names which are efficient in the world and in man. He suggested that Ibn Barrajan's doctrines may have been influential on Ibn 'Arabi. **Pierre Lory** explored the interpretation of prophets in the commentary of 'Abd al-Razzaq Kashani (d.1330) and their role in the macro/micro 'sacred history' of man that is narrated in the Qur'an.

Session 5: Esoteric Interpretation in the Ottoman Period

Bakri Aladdin's paper examined the hermeneutics of the Naqshbandi Sufi of Damascus, 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (d. 1731), and the way his Qur'anic interpretations manifest the teachings of *wahdat al-wujud* (associated with the school of Ibn 'Arabi). **Mahmud Kiliç's** paper discussed levels of Qur'anic meaning and the ontology of the Qur'an as understood by the Ismaili Haqqi Bursevi (d. 1725).

Session 6: Philosophical Approaches to the Qur'an

This session looked at three approaches to the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an, each issuing from different periods and types of philosophical discourse. **Omar Ali** discussed the interpretation of angels in the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity (*Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa*). **Peter Heath** examined six exegetical texts attributed to Ibn Sina (d.1037), and explored the role that the study of hermeneutics and content can have in assessing the authenticity of such texts. **Shahzad Bashir** discussed hermeneutics and eschatology in the writings of the founder of the Hurufi sect, Fazlallah Astrabadi (d. 1394).

Session 7: Language, Metaphor and Image in Qur'anic Hermeneutics

This session covered two quite different approaches to Qur'an interpretation. **Nasrollah Pourjavady** discussed the literary device known as *lisan al-hal* (in Persian, *zaban-e hal*) and its role in what appeared to be a surprisingly rationalistic hermeneutic presented by Abu Hamid Ghazzali (d.1111) in one of his Persian fatwas. **Amer Latif** examined Rumi's views of the Qur'an, stylistic parallels between the Qur'an and the *Masnawi*, and the use of imagery in Rumi's interpretations of the Qur'an.

Session 8: The Continuing Sufi Tradition of Esoteric Interpretation

Kristin Sands' paper examined the use of vernacular language and concepts in Sufi Qur'an interpretation through an analysis of two twentieth-century commentaries written in English, one by Shaykh Fazlallah Haeri and the other by Lex Hixon (also known as Shaykh Nur al-Jerrahi). This analysis, she proposed, would not only show the adaptation of a genre to a new environment, but would be instructive to our understanding of the role of context in the composition of *tafsir* s in the past.

Summing up

Hermann Landolt acknowledged the richness and variety of approaches to the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an that had been brought together for discussion at the workshop. On the basis on the material that had been presented he made some general conclusions about how we could define esoteric

interpretation, what the approaches had in common and what distinguished them, He also suggested other kinds of text and their interpretations that could be explored in like manner.

Round-table Discussion

This focused on possible topics for follow-up workshops, conferences and research projects. There were proposals for addressing more focused subject matter within the field of esoteric interpretation, and for broadening out to include other interpretative approaches, including those of other faiths, and others for combining the two in successive workshops. The discussion also addressed the practicalities of organising subsequent workshops, in particular, the question of the human resources needed for the setting up and administration of such events.

3. Summary of Part 3 of the Scientific Report

(i) Results of workshop

The workshop demonstrated the value of ‘integrated, comparative and interdisciplinary approach. It helped to establish the esoteric interpretation of the Qur’an as one field of study, which deserved to ‘de-marginalised in the field of Qur’anic studies. It clarified more precisely what distinguished the various approaches and what united them, as well as numerous surprising thematic and methodological correspondences at many levels.

(ii) Contribution to the development of the field

The workshop would contribute greatly to the development of the field both through the publication of the proceedings and through other workshops / academic activities on related topics of significance that could be envisaged through the collective experience gained at this meeting.

Scientific Report: Part 2

Content of Workshop

(i) The Programme

The workshop lasted the best part of three days from the evening of Monday July 17th to 4pm on Thursday July 20th. It opened with a half-hour power-point presentation on behalf of the ESF ably given by Professor Etan Kohlberg prior to the welcoming buffet dinner, and ended with a one-hour round-table discussion on possible activities to follow on from this workshop. Two other short addresses were made during the course of the workshop, apart from the academic presentations of the participants: one at the workshop dinner by Dr Amira Bennison, Director of the Centre of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, under whose auspices the workshop was being held, and the other, prior to the round-table discussion, made by Dr Omar Ali de Unzaga, on behalf of our co-sponsors, the Qur'anic Studies Unit of the Institute of Ismaili Studies. Apart from some recreational activities during the evenings, consisting of a concert of Persian music, a punting tour of Cambridge and a buffet reception at the Golden Web Foundation, the three days were entirely devoted to the academic programme. A consistent level of positive interest and concentrated focus of attention seemed to be maintained by all the participants from start to finish of the workshop.

We were very fortunate in that the workshop programme went ahead as planned without any major changes. We had only two last minute cancellations: Professor Heath was stranded in Beirut after war broke out in Lebanon, but he was able to send us by email both his paper and handout on the Hermeneutics of Ibn Sina. His paper was skilfully read out in abridged form - what Prof. Heath had sent was 25 pages long- by Dr Tobias Mayer, himself a specialist on Ibn Sina. The other cancellation was by Dr Ronald Nettle, due to ill health. His place as chair of the panel on 'al-Andalus and the Ibn 'Arabi School' was taken by Prof Mahmud Kiliç.

(i) The Academic Content

Introduction

The proceedings of the workshop opened with an introduction by the convenor, Dr Annabel Keeler. Apart from formally welcoming all the participants, acknowledging the generous patronage of the two sponsors, and making some practical remarks about the need for each participant to keep to time etc., the main substance of her introduction was to make some general observations about the content and structure of the workshop. Whilst showing appreciation for the scope of papers that were to be presented, which ranged from the earliest manifestations of esoteric interpretation to the present day, and was moreover not restricted to interpretation within the genre of Qur'anic commentaries but also included other forms of literature, she also acknowledged that the workshop obviously had lacunae. For example, there was to be no paper on Twelver Shi'i exegesis, nor any paper on Ibn 'Arabi himself, though his school was to some extent to be represented in at least two or three papers in the existing programme. These lacunae were due in part to cancellations one and two months prior to the workshop by two prospective participants. For the same reason, there was not, as had been hoped, have a paper on Mir Dard, which would have added the dimension of Urdu poetry. However, all the persons concerned had expressed the intention of contributing papers to any publication of the proceedings. With regard to the structure of the workshop, Dr Keeler mentioned the challenge that any convenor faces when trying to plan panels or sessions in which to group the papers, on the basis of short abstracts or, in some cases, titles only. Whilst not wishing to arrange the panels according to chronology, it was at the same time not possible to arrange them entirely according to themes. Thus they had opted for a combination of the two. She advised the participants in any case not to regard these sessions or panels as having fixed boundaries, but to allow for a flow and interchange between them, so that themes and elements might 'reverberate and be picked up in different ways and from

different angles' This would, she suggested, 'give the workshop particular depth'. This is in fact what happened, as will be seen in Section 3 of this report.

Opening address: Professor Gerhard Böwering

Professor Böwering began by stating that his opening remarks would follow on from the mission statement of the workshop, and he suggested that, in the spirit of an exploratory workshop, participants should have in mind to discover 'What is the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an?' He then presented some general observations of his own. He firstly contrasted the exoteric and esoteric interpretations of the Qur'an. While exoteric interpretations all follow a similar pattern: Qur'anic verses followed by commentary; and use a great number of sources, resulting in voluminous texts, esoteric interpretation is more selective, certain verses are chosen that are more relevant. One should not forget also that esoteric interpretation is to be found in treatises, philosophical works etc, not connected to *tafsir* structure.

Developing his discussion of esoteric interpretation, Professor Böwering explained how it is often an instrument through which esoteric teachings are communicated. He then defined more closely the categories of esoteric interpretation stating that it seemed to include three approaches: Sufi, Ismaili and Imami. He defined these three approaches as follows:-

1) Sufi

Sufis see the Qur'an as having the 'Divine speaker' behind the text.

Listening is important, and the response to the recitation of the text, that is, the impact of the scripture through the ear upon the heart. Key words or 'keynotes' strike an inner chord where an existential interest is found. Sufis contemplate the text with two kinds of remembrance (*dhikr*): an awareness both of time beyond death, and of the return to the origin – these two 'directions' of infinity are drawn into his awareness, realised in the moment of mystic experience. Professor Böwering further observed that the actual wording (of the Qur'an) is not important for Sufis in their exegesis, but what the Qur'an itself activates within them. There is also often in Sufi interpretation a thin borderline between eisegesis and exegesis.

2) Ismaili

Here also esotericism is at work. In its early form it was wedded to the interpretation of letters, principles of male and female in the universe, and doctrines of creation and cosmology. Also important in Ismaili interpretation was the principle that the 'name' includes both concept and reality, and resultant possibility of passing from the name of a thing to its essence. The interpretation of space and time are both essential to the way that the Ismaili looks at the Qur'an. Neo-platonic influence was evident in the way that the cosmic process of the spheres is related to Ismaili values. Some Aristotelian principles may also be at work, with ideas of form and matter, and the cycle of descent and ascent from the Creative command: 'Be!' (*kun*) → emanation through cosmic descent → earthly sphere of the human world where ascent begins once more.

In practice, Ismaili interpretation involves the deliberate use of Qur'anic words, which are sometimes removed from their etymological meaning, for example, the Throne and Footstool (*'arsh* and *kursi*), which come to represent the Intellect and Universal Soul (*'aql* and *nafs al-kull*).

Again, we find in Ismaili interpretation a 'clicking' between the eisegesis and the exegesis, and it sometimes appears to be widely speculative.

3) Imami (Twelver Shi'i)

Perhaps because he was running short of time, Professor Böwering had rather less to say about the Imami approach to esoteric interpretation. But he emphasized the centrality of Imams in the religious structure, including the methodology of Qur'an interpretation, and the awareness also of the presence of the Hidden Imam. A fundamental principle is that of the privilege invested in particular human beings to interpret, through them it may be opened to the masses. Of great importance in Imami interpretation is the principle of spiritual guidance, and the centrality of teachers who control the interpretation of verses.

Having outlined these three approaches to the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an, Professor Böwering, again returning to the mission statement of the workshop, posed the question, what unites

these three approaches? The answer in his view is that that all share the idea of an inner reality (*batin*), which can be reached through effort as well as divine grace. All emphasize also the need for the purification of the soul. Each one also finds keynotes within the sacred text, which resound with their own world-view or experience. Essentially, all are involved with the ultimate search of all human beings: what am I about? What am I here for?

As a final note, Professor Böwering added that the esoteric (*batin*) is an antidote (to extremism), an antidote that is rooted in Islamic tradition. Moreover, the esoteric is what is shared with other religions.

Session 1: Early Approaches to Esoteric Interpretation

Summary: This was particularly apt as the first session of the workshop, not only because it covered some of the earliest manifestations of esoteric interpretation, but also because each of the three speakers chose to focus on some of the essential guiding principles and ontological and metaphysical dimensions of esoteric interpretation according to the exegetes they had studied.

Farhana Mayer devoted her paper to the ontological continuum between levels of interpretation and their connection to the understanding of [potential] levels of perfection within the human being, as presented in the commentary attributed to Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 765). To begin with, she made it clear that her paper would not address the question of author-ascription and the composition of the text, and stated that her study was of the *matn*, of Ja'far's comments that were included in Sulami's *Haqa'iq al-tafsir* as edited and published by Paul Nwyia. As yet she had not included in her study comments included in Sulami's supplement to his commentary, the *Ziyadat al-haqa'iq*. The theoretical framework for her paper was the tradition related from Ja'far al-Sadiq in the introduction to Sulami's *Haqa'iq*, according to which 'the Book of God has four things: literal expression (*'ibara*), allusion (*'ishara*), subtleties (*lata'if*) and deepest realities (*haqa'iq*),' these being for the commonalty, elite, friends [of God], and prophets respectively. Ms Mayer informed us that the three interpretative levels that are encountered in Ja'far al-Sadiq's *tafsir* are those of *ishara*, *latifa* and *haqiqa*. *Ishara*, she explained, involved three 'styles' of interpretation: *tatbiq*, which she defined as 'the symbolical interpretation based on macro-micro cosmic correspondences'; *ta'wil*, whereby 'the literal is used as a springboard for disclosing broader, deeper interpretations based on associated meanings derived from the root letters of words'; and *jafir*, 'pertaining to the esoteric significance of letters'. Through a close examination of Ja'far al-Sadiq's interpretations of certain verses, starting with that of the Meccan hills of Safa and Marwa (Q. 2:158), which involved the *ishari* level of *tatbiq* and *ta'wil*, through to interpretations at the level of *lata'if* and *haqa'iq*, Ms Mayer explained subtle complexities of his understanding of the relationship between God and man, and of man's inner spiritual constitution. Man comprises potentially 'Safa', symbolising the spirit (*ruh*), in its purity from the 'dirt of contrast' to God (*mukhalafa*) and 'Marwa', 'symbolising heroic virtues in performing services for its Lord.' *Mukhalafa* (contrast or opposition) is contrasted with *muwafaqa* (harmony), these two being pivotal terms in Ja'far al-Sadiq's commentary. The latter brings life to the soul, whereas the former brings death. God's enlivening the soul is also His permeating the heart with His lights, which as Ms Mayer's explains, are elsewhere identified as Divine qualities. In his interpretation of 'upholding the pledge' (Q. 4:59), Ja'far al-Sadiq shows how the *awliya* are those who have excised from themselves all other than God, and become effaced so that He becomes the replacement of their souls for them, and in his commentary on Q. 19:93, he explains that the slave either comes to God either poor and wretched through his own qualities, or noble and dignified through the qualities of God (*al-Haqq*). Through her discussion of Ja'far al-Sadiq's interpretation of Moses and the burning bush, Ms Mayer concludes that the prophets (*anbiya*) are those who are 'qualified with the Divine character; they have had all their own qualities effaced from them to make room for the Divine replacement'. For their part, the saints (*awliya*) too have had all that is other than God excised from them, so that neither the prophet nor the saint have any 'soil' to obscure the *haqiqa* in them. Thus both might be described as 'theophanic souls', these being elsewhere in the commentary identified as 'angels'.

Questions and comments: Prof. Godlas emphasised the challenge of identifying sources for Ja'far al-Sadiq's commentary. Dr Pourjavady observed other applications of the term *Lata'if* in Sufi literature, followed by other observations on this subject by Prof. Landolt.

Sara Sviri discussed the metaphysical understanding of the significance of language according to the 9th century mystic al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi. Although no actual Qur'an commentary by him has survived, his esoteric hermeneutics of the Qur'an are clearly conveyed through his discussion of Qur'anic verses and words in his other works, such as the *Khatm al-awliya'* and *Kitab 'ilm al-awliya'*. In his works, Tirmidhi contemplates the power of words, 'words behind which is God'. When discussing the Qur'anic verse 6: 115, which refers both to the 'perfect word' and the 'perfect words' of God, Tirmidhi identifies the single word as God's existence-bestowing command 'Be!' (*kun*), the creative logos. From this single word the multiplicity of beings come into existence and these too are God's words – and Dr Sviri drew our attention to the Sufi science of cosmogony, through which the knowledge of the beginnings [of the cosmos] (*'ilm al-bad'*) and the science of letters (*'ilm al-huruf*) are connected. Mystics practise an intensity of inward listening (*istima'*) through which they try to understand what a word means in itself. The very word for name (*ism*), is basically made up of two letters, one which signifies the illumination of a thing, and the other its hidden aspect. This led Dr Sviri to discuss Tirmidhi's hermeneutical concept of 'sacred acronyms', whereby every word is an acronym for something. It is the saints who know how to do the deciphering. During her presentation Dr Sviri, briefly discussed the way in which some of these key concepts were taken up and developed by Ibn 'Arabi in the 12th century.

Questions and comments concerned terms related to those raised in the talk (e.g. *'ilm al-hudur*), whether Tirmidhi had a science of 'nature' like the Ismailis, whether the building block was the word or the letter, and which was more powerful?

Dr Ali Qutbuddin examined Fatimid-Ismaili esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*) as exemplified in the works of al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi (d. 1078). He began by explaining that although Qadi Nu'man is considered to be the founder of the written tradition of Ismaili *ta'wil*, it was al-Mu'ayyad who discussed the hermeneutics of *ta'wil*. Dr Qutbuddin observed that Ismaili *ta'wil* is not speculative in nature, but based upon a systematic hermeneutic. He began by raising two questions: 'What is the need for *ta'wil*?' and 'Why is there an inner meaning (*batin*)?' In answer perhaps to both these questions he cited a saying of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, according to which every Qur'anic verse has a multiplicity of meanings. In justifying *ta'wil*, Qadi Nu'man (quoted by al-Mu'ayyad?) discusses the inevitability of *ta'wil*, and justifies it for the following reasons: firstly, every word comprises its outward aspect (*zahir*) as signifier, and inward aspect (*batin*) as signified; secondly, the Qur'an at times appears to contradict itself; thirdly, certain things in the Qur'an, such as the speaking of inanimate objects, can only be explained through esoteric interpretation; lastly, why would God send a message that people cannot understand? The language sent to prophets was the language of the physical world, so that the divine message was clothed in phenomena from the physical environment. Ismaili hermeneutics recognises the physical sensory realm (*mahsus*) and the spiritual realm (*ma'qul*). Dr Qutbuddin devoted the last part of his paper to al-Mu'ayyad's interpretation of the gardens beneath which rivers flow, highlighting al-Mu'ayyad's esoteric explanation of why the rivers flow beneath the gardens. In terms of hermeneutics, he pointed out that while exoteric commentators add something to make sense of this idea, the Ismaili commentators rather turn to the etymology of the Qur'anic words to draw out the esoteric meaning.

Questions and comments: among these was a discussion of Qutbuddin's use of the contrasting terms *zahir* and *ta'wil*, instead of the usual *zahir* and *batin*. Prof. Böwering challenged Dr Qutbuddin's notion that Ismaili *ta'wil* was systematic rather than speculative.

Session 2: The Hermeneutics of Love Mysticism

Summary: in contrast to the first session, this panel focused more on methodological aspects of esoteric interpretation. In the case of Dr Keeler's paper this was a comparative methodology of the hermeneutics in Sufi commentaries on Surat Yusuf; in the case of Professor Godlas' paper, it was the

methodology of how we might approach a Sufi commentary, and within that methodology a brief look at the method of Ruzbihan's hermeneutics.

Dr Annabel Keeler introduced her paper (which was accompanied by power-point presentation) as being work in progress, and part of a wider comparative study she is making of Sufi commentaries on the Qur'anic story of Joseph. The object of her study is to explore doctrinal and hermeneutical developments that can be seen in the way that Sufis interpret this story over time. Her choice of the story of Joseph (related in Sura 12 of the Qur'an) was due to the fact that this story seems to have provided Sufis with particular scope to expound their doctrines. However, their ability to expound these doctrines in their interpretations of the story depended, she explained, on the hermeneutical approach of the exegetes. She noted that she had thus far found three distinct hermeneutical approaches, or 'prophetologies', in Sufi commentaries on this Sura. In the first, represented overall by the commentaries of Tustari, Sulami and to a certain extent, Qushayri, the identity of the prophet is retained as prophet, while each action or saying of the prophet or other figure in the story, is separately interpreted (in its own right), either to explain a mystical state or station, or to derive from it some ethical, theological or spiritual lesson ('*ibra*'). In the second approach, exemplified by the commentaries of Maybudi and Ruzbihan Baqli, the prophet becomes a prototype of the spiritual seeker or wayfarer on the path to God, while actions and sayings of the prophet (or other figure in the story) may be interpreted as alluding to a state or station experienced by them, but also often as an indication of progress on the spiritual path. In the third approach, exemplified by the commentaries of Najm al-Din Razi and Kashani, prophets and other figures in the story are taken as symbols to represent different aspects of the inner make-up of the human being: the heart, the intellect, the spirit and so on, in the spiritual journey towards to the One. After this introduction, Dr Keeler devoted the rest of her paper to exemplifying the first two of these approaches, paying particular attention to the way that the prophetology of Maybudi was influenced by the mystical doctrines of love.

Questions and comments: unfortunately no discussion ensued concerning possible reasons for this hermeneutical development proposed in Dr Keeler's conclusion. However, there was an interesting discussion of the literary merit of Maybudi's commentary, and how close this brings the work to other Sufi works outside the *tafsir* genre. Farhana Mayer observed that in Ja'far al-Sadiq's commentary, as cited by Sulami, Zulaykha's 'bodily love', is contrasted with the purer spiritual love of the women of Egypt.

Prof. Alan Godlas began his paper by explaining that although the title of his paper, in which the word "love" was nowhere to be found, might seem inappropriate in a panel on the hermeneutics of love mysticism, nevertheless, given that Ruzbihan Baqli (d. 1209) is well known for his treatise on love, the *Abhar al-ashiqin* and love mysticism is present everywhere in his works, the "perfume of love" would be inescapable even though the main focus of his talk was to be on Ruzbihan's method of hermeneutics. Professor Godlas then argued for the importance of Ruzbihan's esoteric commentary on the Qur'an, the '*Ara'is al-bayan*, on the basis firstly of the high quality of the sayings of Ruzbihan himself, secondly, on account of the material that he transmitted from earlier commentators in the work, and thirdly, because of the influence of the '*Ara'is* on later Sufi Qur'an commentaries. Regarding the second of these points, Professor Godlas made some valuable observations about the question of 'plagiarism in respect of drawing material from earlier works, and whether or not quotations from such works may be considered to represent Ruzbihan's own views. He then moved on to the main topic of his paper, which concerned the need to find a satisfactory methodological approach for the study of 'complex and lengthy Sufi texts.' He criticised the amorphous and undisciplined approach to Islamic studies that seems to be prevailing in the United States, and then suggested some possible reasons for this lack of discipline. He then argued that researchers and students should be encouraged to develop and follow methodologies and analytical disciplines that can be utilized by others, and he proposed one possible system which he called "Religiology", a framework which could allow the student 'to gain a systematic and coherent approach to an author's worldview', and which would increase understanding, rather than simply increasing knowledge. Religiology asks questions about beliefs under the categories of epistemology, ontology (including theology, cosmology and eschatology), anthropology, psychology, teleology and methodology. Having outlined this methodology, Dr Godlas then showed the fruits of approaching Ruzbihan's

'*Ara'is al-bayan* according to the first two of these categories, namely, epistemology, which included an examination of some of the subtleties of Ruzbihan's hermeneutics, and ontology. Within his discussion of Ruzbihan's hermeneutics he coined some original terminology to describe Ruzbihan's method of interpretation drawing terms from ecology and mathematics, such as 'ecosystems', 'niche hermeneutics' and an 'algebraic' mode of interpretation.

Session 3: The School of Najm al-Din Kubra

Summary: this session was devoted to two disciples of the 13th century mystic, Najm al-Din Kubra (d. 1220), the first being Najm al-Din Razi Daya (d. d. 1256) and the second, 'Ala al-Dawla Simnani (d. 1336). These two mystics are not only connected through their spiritual descent from Najm al-Din Kubra; they are also linked through a tradition of Sufi Qur'an interpretation to which they both contributed. This *tafsir* tradition was probably initiated by their spiritual master, Najm al-Din Kubra himself, though there is debate as to whether his contribution remained as part of the written corpus of this school's exegetical tradition.

Mohammad Movahedi read his paper in Persian, but had kindly provided an English translation of his whole paper, which was available for the participants to read. Dr Movahedi's paper began with the observation we find in Razi's Qur'an commentary, the *Bahr al-haqa'iq* a manifestation of the same world-view that is presented in his other works, particularly his *Mirsad al-'ibad*. This world-view involved the interpretation of everything, from natural phenomena to the celestial bodies, according to a spiritual, often metaphysical, perspective. Dr Movahedi then outlined some of the predominant themes and doctrines that prevail in the commentary, such as the condemnation of the commercial and worldly tendencies that were creeping into Sufism, and some of the teachings of Ash'arite theology, including an interesting analogy to explain the doctrine of divine predestination versus human free will. Each of these discussions occurs in the context of a Qur'anic verse, and Dr Movahedi pointed out that most of these teachings are to be found in Razi's *Mirsad al-'ibad*, one of the main reasons for his arguing for Razi's authorship of the *Bahr al-haqa'iq*. He then went on to discuss the hermeneutics of the commentary, beginning with several interpretations that systematically contrast the outward and inward significance of a topic raised by a Qur'anic verse, such as wine, fasting, and Safa and Marwa. Another kind of interpretation which he discussed was that which he termed '*dhawqi*', that is, interpretations that spontaneously arise on the basis of mystical experience or 'tasting'. Lastly, Dr Movahedi mentioned Razi's repeated assertion that esoteric interpretation must presuppose a familiarity with, and acceptance of the exoteric meanings of the Qur'an.

Questions and comments: Dr Pourjavady challenged Dr Movahedi's argument that the similarity of content between the *Bahr al-haqa'iq* and Razi's *Mirsad al-'ibad* proved that the former was also a work of Razi, since he had found evidence to indicate that Razi's *Mirsad al-'ibad* was in fact a translation of an earlier work in Arabic by another Sufi. Professor Landolt also pointed out that a lengthy article by Prof. Ballanfath argued against Razi's authorship of the commentary.

Jamal Elias discussed two exegetical texts composed by 'Ala al-Dawla Simnani, one of the most influential figures in the history of Islamic mysticism in the Persian-speaking world, and a member of the Kubrawi school of Sufism. Prof. Elias began by providing some background to Simnani's oeuvre, which is said to have comprised more than a hundred works, some seventy of which are now extant. Simnani's Qur'an commentary consists of two distinct works, one a partial commentary on the Qur'an, known as the *Tafsir al-Najm*, and the other a lengthy introduction known as the *Matla' al-Nuqat*. These were apparently composed at different times in Simnani's life, the introduction evidently being written after the commentary since it refers to the latter in a number of places. Dr Elias raised the question of why Simnani did not simply continue the existing unfinished commentary deriving from Najm al-Din Kubra, or Najm al-Din Razi (see above). Dr Elias then compared the structure of the two exegetical works and noted that while his introduction delineates a seven-fold theory of the *lata'if* (subtle centres of mystical experience or intellection within the human being) each corresponding to one of the prophets, and in conformity with the Prophetic tradition according to which each verse has seven meanings and within that ten further depths of meaning. However, Dr Elias noted that the seven-fold hermeneutic that is outlined in his introduction is not carried over to

Simnani's commentary, where groupings of four and ten are more prominent. Dr Elias ended his talk by raising the question of why a Sufi who has composed numerous works to expound his doctrines should compose a commentary on the Qur'an in order to convey his teachings, as some have proposed. He contended rather that the reason for composing a commentary on the Qur'an in this instance might simply have been as an act of piety.

Questions and comments: these largely centred on a discussion of the last point raised by Dr Elias, there being some who could not agree that it would simply be an act of piety, and who insisted there was a didactic element to the composition of a tafsir, and those who found this suggestion helpful.

Session 4: Al-Andalus and the School of Ibn 'Arabi

Summary: although there was, in fact, no paper on Ibn 'Arabi himself as part of this panel, it did comprise one paper on the little-studied commentary by Ibn Barrajan (d.1141), a Sufi master by whom Ibn 'Arabi was almost certainly influenced, and a paper on the Qur'anic interpretations of one of the foremost disciples of the Ibn 'Arabi school, 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Kashani (d.1330).

Denis Gril began his paper by introducing the little-known Sevillian master, Ibn Barrajan, who was a scholar of exoteric sciences as well as a Sufi, a philologist and hadith scholar with a knowledge of speculative theology (*kalam*) as well as the philosophy of al-Anadalu. The fact that he died in prison was an indication of tensions between spiritual figures and the Almoravid dynasty in Spain, and, as Dr Gril observed, this shows that esoteric interpretation might have political implications. The only author to have been influenced by Ibn Barrajan appears to have been Ibn 'Arabi. Ibn Barrajan's commentary on the Qur'an is still little known, and Dr Gril suggested that one reason for this might be its mode of composition. In his commentary, Ibn Barrajan keeps close to the literal meaning of the Qur'an, more so than other Sufi commentators, maintaining a close relation between the outward meaning of the Qur'anic word and its inner significance. He has what Dr Gril terms an 'holistic' view of the universe, according to which the whole world is to be read as a [divine] book. The Divine names are according to Ibn Barrajan, 'efficient' both in the world and in man, and are a key for the perception of the world, as they are for understanding the significance of the Book and for spiritual ascent. In the Qur'an, we find the *'ibra* which is the divine sign, the inward aspect, the *'ibara*, (expression), which bears the divine sign. The main trend of Ibn Barrajan's hermeneutic consists in the drawing out (*i'tibar*) of the *'ibra* from the *'ibara*, in other words, a 'transposition' (again, *i'tibar*) from the verses of the Qur'an (or the signs of the universe) to their eschatological meaning in the other world, which, as Ibn Barrajan explains, is the origin of this one. Although, Ibn Barrajan does not mention the well-known hadith,, which exhorts people to take on the qualities of God (*takhalluq bi-akhlaq Allah*), but he speaks of the transformation of lower qualities within the human being into higher qualities. Dr Gril concluded his paper by stating that while the work of Ibn Barrajan represented on the one hand, both a continuation of the teachings of al-Masarra'i and an anticipation of the achievement of Ibn 'Arabi, on the other hand it should be recognised for its own style and originality.

Pierre Lory began his paper by acknowledging a change in his own understanding of Kashani's hermeneutics. To begin with when studying the *Ta'wilat al-Qur'an*, he had gained the impression that Kasha`ni's interpretations of the stories of the prophets were in some way 'artificial' or contrived, in that Kashani was systematically using them to draw parallels between the Qur'anic text and the Sufi path. Now, after much rereading of the *Ta'wilat*, Prof Lory had come to realise that for Kashani, 'sacred history is a commentary on the sacred Book and of God's eternal purpose in creation', rather than the other way round. According to Kashani's doctrine, Creation is the Universal Spirit's self-realisation in time and space and the world may be compared to 'an immense alchemical device to obtain sainthood (*wilaya*)'. Thus the Qur'an is a book on the 'history of the progressive unification of spirit and matter in Man' or 'the evolution of the human heart towards its divine reality'. The culmination of that history is the resurrection, which here, as Prof Lory indicates, includes both the 'greater resurrection' (that, is spiritual rebirth), and the 'lesser resurrection' at the end of time. All the events in the lives of the prophets are to be read as keys to understand this sacred history. Prof Lory went on to show these two levels of sacred history throughout his discussions of examples from

Kashani's interpretations of the prophets Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. For example, Moses might at one level represent a phase of exteriority and legalism in religion in the sacred history of Man, but at the same time it might also represent a tendency in Sufism to observe the exoteric without consideration of the spiritual dimension. Similarly, the figure of Jesus could be understood as a phase in sacred history of emphasis on the esoteric dimension of religion. At another level, Christians might be understood as Sufis who neglect the *shari'a*. The complete and synthetic vision was brought by Muhammad, who united outward appearance and inward experience, and this is why the Sufi must be 'Muhammadan'. Prof Lory devoted the rest of his paper to illustrating Kashani's spiritual eschatology through examples of his interpretations of the figure of Jesus, which included an interesting discussion of the meaning of Jesus' designation as the 'Spirit of God' (*Ruh Allah*).

Questions and comments: Professor Kohlberg (?) asked about the role of Idris, who is included by Kashani alongside the *Ulu'l-'azam* in one formulation of his sacred history of prophets. Dr Keeler spoke of the three prophetologies in Maybudi's *Kashf al-asrar*, one at the literal level, one at the level where the prophet is understood as a prototype of the mystical wayfarer, and the third at the level of what might be called 'metahistory'.

Session 5: Esoteric Interpretation in the Ottoman Period

Summary: the topic of this session was particularly welcome, as the chair, Jamal Elias noted, because the Ottoman period of Sufi literature is extremely rich and has hitherto been far too neglected in Islamic studies. The first paper examined the hermeneutics of the Naqshbandi Sufi of Damascus, 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (d.1731), and the way his Qur'anic interpretations manifest the teachings of *wahdat al-wujud* (associated with the school of Ibn 'Arabi) and the second, discussed levels of Qur'anic meaning and the ontology of the Qur'an as understood by the Jerrahi/Jelvati Sufi of Bursa, Ismaili Haqqi Bursevi (d.1725).

Bakri Aladdin explained that the subject of his talk, the *Wujud al-Haqq*, of 'Abd al-Ghani Nabulusi revealed both aspects of the history of Sufi interpretation, and the practical application of Sufi *ta'wil* in order to support the theory of the oneness of being (*wahdat al-wujud*). Though not a formal commentary on the Qur'an, Nabulusi's *Wujud al-Haqq*, includes more than 250 references to Qur'anic verses (some of them cited a number of times) as well as around 100 references to hadith, which Nabulusi introduces to corroborate the views he presents on the basis of authentic Sufi experience. Nabulusi states that the purpose of his book is 'The unveiling of the meanings of the belief of [God's] friends... that is in accordance with all that has been revealed in the Qur'an and conveyed through the Prophetic sunna.' Beyond this stated aim, Dr Aladdin, suggest that Nabulusi's work, probably had a polemic aim, namely the refutation of a small treatise, entitled *Fadihat al-mulhidin*, (falsely attributed to al-Taftazani but, Dr Aladdin contends, in fact composed by Muhammad 'Ala al-Din al-Bukhari, one of the pupils of Taftazani), which comprises a systematic attack on Ibn 'Arabi and his *Fusus al-hikam*. Although, Nabulusi names neither this book nor its author in his *Wujud al-Haqq*, he is clearly responding to criticisms presented in Bukhari's work. In the course of his refutation of these views Nabulusi shows the doctrines of *wahdat al-wujud* to be in harmony with the Ash'arite/Sufi thought. It is in the eighteenth chapter of his work that Nabulusi presents his discussion of Ash'arite/Sufi theories of Qur'an interpretation, which, as Dr Aladdin shows, conform to those proposed by Ghazali, Ibn'Ata al-Iskandari and other earlier figures of Sufism. Before systematically setting out the different categories of interpretation, Nabulusi dismisses attacks on Sufi interpretation made by Ibn Taymiyya and cited in Suyuti's *Itqan*, and he condemns as slanderers those who criticise Sufis for having 'no openings or emanation to their hearts from God', citing Q. 18: 109 in support of his argument. Nabulusi distinguishes between two kinds of Qur'anic interpretation: one that of traditional commentators, which is based on 'circumscribed areas of concern and precisely defined meanings', and the other, that of Sufis, based on inspiration. However, Nabulusi adds the caveat that Sufi interpretation is 'not definitive', and that meanings that arise from such interpretations do not represent one meaning to the exclusion of others. Moreover, like Ghazali and others, Nabulusi insists that this kind of interpretation does not involve a rejection of the literal meanings of the verses. Dr Aladdin devoted the main part of his talk to illustrating the way in which Nabulusi refutes those who condemn Ibn 'Arabi for holding the belief that God and creation are one.

In this discussion he distinguishes between two kinds of being, the first, Absolute Being, and the second, contingent being. According to the mystics, the first being is an independent Essence, which both manifests itself to contingent beings and veils itself through them. Nabolusi identifies this divine process of manifestation and veiling with the words of Q. 55:54, 'he is always in activity'. Nabolusi also identifies this second level of being with the 'Muhammadan Light' from which God created all things, and here Dr Aladdin suggested that he was drawing on the concept of the 'Muhammadan reality', prevalent in the school of Ibn 'Arabi. He further suggested that Nabolusi's understanding of the perpetual manifestation might be a substitution for the Avicennan concept of intermediaries. Evident from Dr Aladdin's paper was the way in which Nabolusi corroborates each stage of his argument with a Qur'anic quotation, but Dr Aladdin further exemplified Nabolusi's hermeneutics of *wahdat al-wujud* by examining his interpretation of the *muhkam* and *mutashabihat* verses in the Qur'an, and of the famous hadith of the four levels of meaning in the Qur'an, *zahir*, *batin*, *hadd* and *matla'*. Having mentioned Nabolusi's concurrence with most Ash'arite Sufis, and indeed with Ibn 'Arabi, on the limits of 'aql, Dr Aladdin concluded his paper by discussing some of the influences on Nabolusi's thought, such as that of the Egyptian Sufi, 'Ali Wafa, 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani, foremost disciple of Ahmad Ghazali, and Sadr al-Din Qunawi.

Questions and comments: Prof Kiliç asked whether or not Nabolusi had composed a complete *tafsir*; Dr Aladdin's answer was that he had not. Dr Qutbuddin asked in relation to the interpretation of the *mutashabihat* verses whether Nabolusi held the same belief as Mu'ayyad that belief in God must come after knowledge, and Dr Aladdin replied that Nabolusi's was really the Sunni position. Prof Kiliç further asked if there was in Nabolusi's *tafsir* anything that would distinguish him from the school of Ibn 'Arabi. Dr Aladdin answered that N is the last great representative of the school of Ibn 'Aarbi, but quite freely draws on other Sufi schools, and synthesises views of different Sufis without distinguishing them. Prof Bowering asked about the influence of 'Ayn al-Qudat, raising the matter of Nabolusi's acquaintance with Persian Sufi literature.

Mahmud Kiliç began his paper by providing a brief background to the life and works of Ismail Haqqi Bursuwi. Although he was a prolific author who composed some 110 books in different areas of the religious sciences, including a commentary on Rumi's *Masnawi*, five tracts on the construction of the Ottoman state according to esoteric principles, and divan of poetry, these were mainly composed in his native Ottoman Turkish. Many of his lesser-known compositions remain in manuscript form, and it is only recently, due to the efforts of some young scholars, that more of his Turkish works are being published. His masterpiece and probably his best-known work is his voluminous commentary on the Qur'an, the *Ruh al-Bayan*, composed mainly in Arabic and Persian. However, this work, consists of a 'notebook for the purposes of teaching' and is made up of a great deal taken from the works of other commentators and poets. In order to truly understand Ismail Haqqi's hermeneutics it is necessary, Prof Kiliç suggested, to study his other works. The most valuable source on the subject, which was composed in Ottoman Turkish is the *Kitab al-natija*, from which most of the material discussed by Dr Kiliç in his paper was derived. To begin with, he explained that Ismail Haqqi shares the same ideas of the hierarchy of being with Ibn 'Arabi. Moreover Haqqi believed that just as all physical things in the phenomenal realm have an ontology, so the sacred texts have an ontology. Haqqi also draws parallels between the human being and the Qur'an. Like the human being, the Qur'an has a body and a spirit, an uncreated aspect and a created aspect. Just as the human soul has degrees so the Qur'an has multiple levels of meaning. Prof Kiliç cited several hadiths which Haqqi uses to support this principle, among them the famous hadith which speaks of the *zahir*, *batin*, *hadd*, *matla'*. According to Haqqi, the *zahir* represents the meaning which first comes to the mind from the literal meaning of the verses; the *batin* represents subtleties (*lata'if*) necessary for the first contemplation; the *hadd* represents the summit of the understanding of the intellect and comprehension, while the *matla'* signifies the divine secrets and signs, which may be revealed through divine openings to great saints. According to another hadith, the Qur'an and man are like twin brothers. In the realm of greater reality (*jam' al-jam'*) both were the same reality, but when they were caused to descend to the created world they began to separate from each other; one taking on flesh and bones and the other, letters and sounds. In effect then, Haqqi teaches that anyone who reads the Qur'an reads himself. Dr Kiliç then described some other ways in which Haqqi explains the ontology of the Qur'an, such as its descent first from the *lawh al-mahfuz*, to *umm al-kitab*, thence to *al-furqan* thence to the Qur'an and lastly to the

mashaf. Cosmogony also makes its appearance in the teachings of Haqqi, as when he identifies *Umm al-kitab* with the origin of the universe, and with the spirit or intellect - according to a well-known hadith, the first thing that God created. Thus, *Umm al-kitab* is the origin of the book of being (*asl kitab al-wujud*), and everything in the world is that book. Prof Kiliç also showed how Haqqi depicts the relationship between the Prophet and the Book: the Qur'an is the spoken book (attribute) and the Prophet is the essential book (essence). The Qur'an was revealed to the heart or reality (*haqiqa*) of Muhammad and the saints can learn it from the heart or reality of Muhammad. He ended by citing the well-known hadith about the four levels of meaning in the Qur'an (cited in the first paper in this workshop) in which Haqqi interprets *'ibara* to represent the *shari'a*, *ishara* to represent *tariqa*, both of which are necessary for the *lata'if*, gnosis (*ma'rifa*) through inspiration, and *haqa'iq* in which there is no separation between reader and word.

Questions and comments: Dr Lewisohn wanted more information on Haqqi's commentary on Rumi's *Masnawi*. Prof Landolt asked for clarification for the level indicated by *lata'if* in Haqqi's interpretations of two hadiths. Prof Godlas needed clarification of the sources used for the information.

Session 6: Philosophical Approaches to the Qur'an

Summary: this session looked at three approaches to the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an, each issuing from different periods and types of philosophical discourse: the first that of the 8th century Epistles of the Brethren of Purity (*Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa*), who are said to manifest an early philosophical form of Ismaili thought; the second that of Ibn Sina (d.1037), and the third, that of the writings of the founder of the Hurufi sect, Fazlallah Astrabadi (d. 1394).

Omar Ali opened his paper by saying that he would leave aside the question of the authorship, date and religious affiliation of the Ikhwan al-Safa. Instead, his presentation would be based on an intra-textual analysis of Qur'anic quotations in the *Epistles*, focusing on their discussion and interpretation of verses relating to angels. In his talk he also wished to raise the question of whether Qur'anic quotations were used in the *Epistles* as a cloak to cover the Neoplatonic heterodoxy of the Ikhwan al-Safa, as Netton has asserted, or whether they are rather an intrinsic component of the authors' discourse and an integral source of their thought. Dr Ali informed us that there were almost fourteen hundred Qur'anic citations in the *Epistles*, of which some verses were cited repeatedly. Often the Ikhwan simply allude to Qur'anic words or phrases, without stating that they are doing so. In order to understand the hermeneutics of the Ikhwan, he emphasized the importance of examining the 'co-text' of each Qur'anic citation. For this purpose, he had adopted a threefold methodological approach involving: a) 'use-as-meaning', that is, understanding the particular use of the verse in its co-text; b) determining the exegetical function of the co-text, i.e. how the co-text influences the way that the reader looks at the verse that is going to be cited; and c) the principle of relevance, which looks at the reason why the authors have inserted the particular citation. During the course of his paper, Dr Ali illustrated some of the many ways that angels are interpreted in the *Epistles*, explaining these with the help of diagrams displayed in power-point presentation. These interpretations of angels provided insights into many aspects of the philosophical doctrines of the Ikhwan al-Safa. The examples also demonstrated the hermeneutical principles held by the authors of the *Epistles*, which Dr Ali explained as: their belief in the importance of defending the validity of both philosophy and religion, and a conviction that there is a direct relationship between revealed scripture and philosophical enquiry at three levels: a) the identity of their aim (the purification of the soul); b) the correlation of their concepts, and c) the correspondence of the terminologies used in both realms. Overall, Dr Ali defined these exegetical principles as 'harmonising hermeneutics' – a 'hermeneutical stand that attempts to discover an eternal wisdom that is common to revelation and philosophy'.

Questions and comments: Ms Mayer asked where the spirit (*ruh*) was positioned in the brethren's cosmology. She also suggested that a fruitful area of study might be the ranks of angels in relation to prophets and the ranking within each of these two categories of being.

Peter Heath's paper (read by Tobias Mayer) addressed two main issues: Ibn Sina's philosophical hermeneutical method and the authenticity of the texts on which we can rely to analyse it. During the course of his discussion we saw a significant interaction between these two kinds of engagement with the sources. Prof. Heath firstly outlined the relevant texts, all of which are available in published form, and of which only two are of undisputed authority. They are firstly the philosopher's treatise 'On the Proof of Prophecies', and secondly some brief comments in the third chapter of the 'Physics' in his *Book of Indications and Admonitions*. Both of these texts contain short interpretations on the Light verse (Q. 24:34), while the former also contains Ibn Sina's comments on Q 17: 69, and Q. 74: 30 and 31. Prof Heath then discussed the six texts of Qur'anic interpretation whose authenticity is open to discussion, and considered along the way different categories of later audience reception for Ibn Sina's works, and why some might be more meticulous in their concern about the issue of authenticity than others. Regarding the question of authenticity and the mode of interpretation that is evident in these exegetical texts, he mentioned Ibn Sina's interest in the possibilities of symbolic language and his famous assertion that his philosophical writings had both esoteric and exoteric dimensions. Having addressed the external evidence for the authenticity of the texts whose authorship by Ibn Sina was uncertain, Prof Heath analysed and elucidated the two interpretations of the Verse of Light from the authentic texts, which clearly represented concepts that are known in Ibn Sina's other works. In the process of his interpretation, he explained, 'the verse's primary analogies, such as "God is Light" and "His light may be compared to a niche that enshrines a lamp" are displaced or superseded and inner intellectual meanings are brought to the fore', and he added that the whole exercise provides an example of 'religious validation of philosophical truth.' Apart from the congruity between these two texts in terms of content, four methodological elements could be derived from the commentaries: (1) equation of symbolic and terminology between religion and philosophy, (2) equation of symbolic and conceptual hierarchies, (3) mutual elucidation, and (4) mutual validation. Prof Heath then applied these principles, as well as comparative testimony of conformity of content with Ibn Sina's other works to offer judgements on the authenticity of the other commentaries attributed to the philosopher.

Comments: Prof Landolt observed that the view that the content of the third (?) chapter of Ibn Sina's *Book of Indications and Admonitions* is not 'esoteric' was first expressed by Suhrawardi, who considered it to be still part of Ibn Sina's peripatetic philosophy and not really a manifestation of the *hikmat mashriqiyya*.

Shahzad Bashir began his paper by providing us with some background on the Hurufis, a medieval sect which was based on the works and personal inspiration of Fazlallah Astrabadi (d. 1394). Although Hurufi literature bears extensive similarity with the works of Sufis, drawing on the same themes from the Qur'an and hadith, their treatment of materials is distinctive and differs from most Sufi approaches. Their designation as Hurufis derives from the fact that the sect's proponents devoted significant attention to the interpretation of letters of the alphabet, and letters had an important role in the movement's hermeneutical method. However, this name should not, Dr Bashir, pointed out, lead us to believe that their interest was in the letters in themselves, but they form the basis of a 'comprehensive interpretive paradigm aimed not at the alphabet itself, but at all observable reality'. Letters are a key (?) in the 'human being's ability to penetrate the barrier that divides the apparent from the hidden'. Numerical associations are also a significant element in their hermeneutics, with particular importance being accorded to the number seven – seven lines on the human face, which parallel the seven verses of the Fatiha. Dr Bashir examined his subject in two sections: firstly the way that the Hurufis understand the Qur'an, and secondly, their interpretations of issues relating to eschatology, and study was centred on Fazlallah's *Javidnama*. The Qur'an is understood by them to refer to two things: 1) the body of Adam as the culmination of the process of creation, and 2) the sounds and letters of God's revelation whose ultimate form is the text received to Muhammad. The key to the correct interpretation of the Qur'an according to the Hurufis is the ability to correlate these two Qur'ans. Dr Bashir then chose to illustrate this hermeneutical principle by analysing Hurufi interpretations of certain eschatological topics. These were of particular importance to the Hurufis, who believed they were living in apocalyptic times. To cite one example from Dr Bashir's paper, the

‘Hour’ is understood by Fazlallah to connect two key moments in cosmic history: the creation of Adam, and the final revelation of the truth behind this creation, which marks the end of time, and both of these moments are designated as Friday in the cosmic week. Dr Bashir concluded by making some general observations about Hurufi interpretation, pointing out that it was quite eclectic in character, that it laid no particular stress on the literal meanings of the Qur’an, but at the same time, it showed a striking juxtaposition of intense concentration on the text and infinite freedom of interpretation. He finished by stating that the claim made for the veracity of the Hurufi interpretations was made on the basis of Fazlallah’s status as God incarnate, and therefore tied to Fazlallah’s claim about his own authority as interpreter. This, Dr Bashir argued might be said of all traditions of esoteric interpretation; Sufi, Shi’i and philosophical interpretation were all concerned with the question of wilaya or religious authority, without which esoteric interpretation would be a ‘free-wheeling exercise’.

Questions and comments: Prof Kohlberg asked if much else has been published on the Hurufis, to which Prof. Bashir mentioned his own book published last year and a couple of dissertations in progress in France. Prof Lory asked about how the Hurufis’ articulate the translation from Arabic to Persian in the science of letters. Dr Sviri remarked that there was much in Prof Bashir’s paper that reminded her of Hakim Tirmidhi.

Session 7: Language, Metaphor and Image in Qur’anic Hermeneutics

Summary: this session covered two quite different approaches to Qur’an interpretation, the first, what appeared to be a surprisingly rationalistic hermeneutic expressed by Abu Hamid in one of his Persian fatwas, and the second, the use of imagery in Rumi’s interpretations of the Qur’an. What both papers had in common was the consideration of interpretative responses to the rhetorical style of the Qur’an.

Nasrollah Pourjavady discussed Abu Hamid Ghazzali’s concept of *lisan al-hal*, and its use in the interpretation of the Qur’an. *Lisan al-hal* (in Persian, *zaban-e hal*), which literally means the ‘language of one’s state or state of being’, was a literary device by which a writer would attribute words to an animal, inanimate object or non-human being, while being aware that the animal or object in question did not or could not speak. *Zaban-e hal* was an established rhetorical tool in Persian literature by the time of Ghazzali, though he was, as Dr Pourjavady observed, the first person to discuss the term in an analytical manner, particularly in connection to Quranic interpretation. Ghazzali applied the idea of *zaban-e hal* to certain statements made, or events described, in verses of the Qur’an, and he even advocated that it was among five kinds of knowledge that were indispensable to anyone wanting to penetrate into deeper meanings of the Qur’an. Among the verses that Dr Pourjavady cited to illustrate the way in which Ghazzali interprets the Qur’an using the idea of *zaban-e hal* was Q. 6: 40, and the words ‘We [God] say to it ‘Be! And it is.’ In his interpretation, Ghazzali poses the logical question: Did God address the thing in before its coming into existence or after? If it was before, then how could it obey the command, and if it was after then, what need was there for it to be commanded to come into existence? Ghazzali also poses the theological idea of infinite regress, i.e. if God had to create the word with a word etc). His conclusion is that this verse must be understood as a Qur’anic instance of *zaban-e hal*. Another verse to which Ghazzali applies this same rationalistic principle is Q. 7: 172, which describes the ‘Covenant of Alast’. According to this verse, God draws the seed of the descendants of Adam from his loins and asks them ‘Am I not your Lord?’ to which they reply, ‘Yes, we bear witness’. Dr Pourjavady devoted most of his talk to this instance of Ghazzali’s application of *zaban-e hal* to the Qur’an, providing us first with some background as to how others, such as Mu’tazilite and Shi’ite commentators, had interpreted the verse, but focusing in particular on the interpretation of earlier Sufis, who variously saw this as an indication of a kind of human pre-existence in a pre-eternal world, in which pure state they had gnosis of God or the vision of Him, it being the spiritual aim for us in this life to remember and fulfil our pre-eternal covenant with God. Ghazzali, despite his affinity with Sufism, did not ascribe to the view that this verse was describing a pre-existence of human beings; in fact, as Dr Pourjavady informed us, in the Persian *fatwa* in which he presents this opinion on the verse, Ghazzali explicitly states that he does not believe

in a pre-existence of the soul before this world. Ghazzali's opinion on this matter did not prevail in later Sufism, however, as is evidenced by the writings of Abu Hamid's younger brother and soon after in the commentary of Maybudi. One other matter of interest relating to the subject of *zaban-e hal* was related by Dr Pourjavady in his talk, namely the question of mythology, and those mystics (including, according to him, Rumi) who continued to believe that mountains, stones etc could actually speak. Thus, going back to the definition of *zaban-e hal*, it can only really be considered as a literary device when the writer is aware that the animal or inanimate object etc. is not able to speak.

Comments and questions: Dr Pourjavady's paper appeared to raise more controversy than any other, this mainly involving consternation among the listeners at the idea that Abu Hamid Ghazzali did not believe in the pre-existence of the soul and an actual encounter between the spirits of human beings and God in the Spiritual world. The discussion digressed to the topic of the relative merits of the poetry of Attar and Rumi.

Amer Latif addressed three main issues in his paper: 1) What Rumi says about the Qur'an; 2) Comparisons that have been made between Rumi's *Masnavi* and the Qur'an; and 3) Rumi's employment of images in his interpretation of the Qur'an. Concerning the first of these topics, Prof Latif observed that Rumi clearly distinguishes between form (*surat*) and meaning (*ma'na*), outward (*zahir*) and inward (*batin*), or body (*jism*) and spirit (*jan/ruh*), and he showed how Rumi presents this principle using different imagery, such as a two-sided brocade, or a woman who has a husband and is also nursing an infant. In the latter, there is also the idea of a hierarchy of understanding: those who are like infants in what they derive from the Qur'an and those who have attained perfection and have a different enjoyment and understanding of the Qur'an. Rumi provides an explanation of the difference between the outward and inward meanings when he comments on Q. 2:125 and the understanding of the house at Mecca. To understand this as the Kaaba is 'true and good' but beyond that is an esoteric meaning as when the mystics say that it represents 'men's interiors'. Prof Latif also discussed Rumi's insistence that people must have the proper 'adab' towards the Qur'an, comparing it to a bride who will not show her face simply by your tearing aside her veil. Furthermore, Rumi, like other Sufis before him showed how in the absence of prophets, it is their heirs, whose egos are effaced in God, who are able to understand the Qur'an correctly, and like other Sufis he insists that the seeker after meaning must start from the literal level 'giving water to the fields of the Qur'an' by performing the obligatory acts enjoined upon the believers. Other images Rumi uses to convey the different ways in which the Qur'an may be understood are that of eating bread, and the Qur'an being a 'hundred tongued' so that it will speak to every ear that lends itself to it in its own language. Prof Latif then addressed Jami's description of Rumi's *Masnavi* as 'the Qur'an in Persian' and the somewhat less bold statement made by Hadi Haeri that the *Masnavi* is a '*tafsir* of the Qur'an'. Dr Latif then spent some time firstly showing how Rumi himself suggested an equivalence between his *Masnavi* and the Qur'an, the mainly on the basis of the divine inspiration that caused it to be expressed. But since the same could be said of many Sufi works, Prof Latif pointed to particular stylistic features which both the Qur'an and the *Masnavi* had in common. These were: 1) both share 'multivocality; 2) the use of imagery; 3) *tafsir*, and 4) the style of argumentation. Prof Latif devoted the final part of this talk to presenting some examples of Rumi's use of images in interpreting the Qur'an, focusing mainly on the different stories of Moses and Pharaoh in the *Masnavi*. What was significant here was the way in which Rumi interprets in a metaphorical way figures or images mentioned in the Qur'an, and then creates his own metaphors and images to convey or further elaborate these interpretations. Prof Latif ended his paper by suggesting that Rumi's *Masnavi* can be seen as 'a thematic commentary on the Qur'an composed in a Qur'anic style whose hallmark is the use of images and analogies a primary modes of communication.'

Session 8: The Continuing Sufi Tradition of Esoteric Interpretation

Summary: this was particularly appropriate as a final session of our workshop not only because it brought us up-to-date, as it were, in the realm of esoteric interpretation, but also because it brought into focus an element present in earlier traditions of esoteric commentary, that had not received much

attention in the other panels, namely the role and importance of context, vernacular, and 'target audiences' in the composition of such commentaries.

Kristin Sands' paper examined the use of vernacular language and concepts in Sufi Qur'an interpretation through an analysis of two twentieth-century commentaries written in English, one by Shaykh Fazlallah Haeri and the other by Lex Hixon (also known as Shaykh Nur al-Jerrahi). This analysis, she proposed, would be useful not only for showing the adaptation of a genre to a new environment, but also in illuminating how it has been used in the past. Dr Sands began by indicating the aptness of the English words 'exoteric' and 'esoteric' to reflect accurately the Arabic terms *zahir* and *batin*. The English word esoteric also suggested the idea of a communication restricted to a small group of people, which paralleled the Sufi linking of the inner level of meaning with the 'elect' (*khass*) or 'elect of the elect' (*khass al-khawass*). Actually, however, Sufi interpretations were not always only privately disseminated but might also be intended for more public audiences, (exemplified by the commentaries of Qushayri, Maybudi and Kashifi, Dr Sands suggested). It is the public dimension of Sufi Qur'an interpretation that is most obvious in the two commentaries that Sands then proceeded to examine. The historical circumstances in which these commentaries were written are quite different from those of classical Sufi commentaries, reflecting 'the tensions of different times and places'. In the case of the classical Sufi commentators it might be the tension between the worldviews of 'exoteric scholars' and themselves, whereas the two twentieth-century commentators were addressing non-Arabic speaking Muslims and non-Muslims and responding to 'a Western secular and materialist mindset, ignorant of and usually prejudicial towards Muslim beliefs and practices.' These two commentators seek to 'make the Qur'an accessible and demonstrate its attractiveness to an audience that has often found it an incomprehensible and off-putting text'. Prof Sands cited Mahmoud Ayoub and Douglas-Klotz who hail *ta'wil* as exemplified by Haeri and Hixon as 'the most effective way to make the Qur'an available to men and women of every age', and as the 'methodology best suited for translating between Semitic languages and concepts', and she then set about exploring the claims made by Ayoub and Douglas-Klotz by examining a selection of interpretations of Qur'anic terms and concepts, illustrating the different approaches of the two exegetes. Broadly speaking, Haeri's approach is primarily etymological, but also sometimes symbolic or allegorical. Haeri also often uses scientific terminology to describe phenomena such as angels, Satan, human activity and the afterlife. Angels are described as forms of energy, as unseen forces constantly at work in nature, while Satan is a kind of energy, only pertaining to human beings, that creates disorder. The punishment of the afterlife is presented as a result of cause and effect. Hixon's approach is different, though sometimes produces similar results. His book, in contrast to Haeri's five-volume commentary, consists of a collection of meditations, and Hixon does not class his interpretation as *tafsit*, describing instead as an 'invocation' of the Qur'an. Notable in Hixon's commentary is his use of expressions of intimacy and endearment on the part of God towards His addressees, which serve to emphasise God's 'all-encompassing and close relationship with humans and all of creation', and to emphasize the experiential nature of revelation. Key issues which Hixon addresses in his interpretations include: competing truth claims of religion and science, as well as those of different religions, and the characterisation of Islam and the Qur'an as fierce, unforgiving and violent. Prof Sands concludes by again relating these methods in general terms to the universally held principles of Sufi interpretation.

Summing up

Hermann Landolt began by remarking generally about the Workshop that so many different aspects of Qur'an interpretation had been brought together and discussed in one place. He observed that the richness of all this variety of traditions is almost bewildering, such that it might perhaps be more apt to speak of esoteric interpretations (plural). Similarly, it might be better to speak of esotericism rather than mysticism. The word esotericism has a 'good pedigree'; deriving from the esota, meaning internal, it is a simple translation of the Arabic *batin*, and *batin* is used in Islamic literature, in the two traditions of Sufism and Shi'ism/Ismailism. However, *batin* in these two traditions doesn't mean the same thing. Prof Landolt suggested that one might distinguish between a *batin* that concerned the individual soul, what is invisible in man, what Eliade termed the *axis mundi* of the microcosm, a ladder which you can climb from the *nafs* to the *ruh* to the subtle realities (*lata'if*). Theoretically, this

involves man and God (the *batin* for Sufis). On the other hand there is the *batin* that concerns the group (Shi'ism and Ismailism). Prof Landolt then observed that these two views of *batin* have correspondences with applications of the Qur'anic term *wilaya*, such that *wilaya* might be understood as the *wilaya* of God (as would be understood by mystics such as Ibrahim Adham and Abu'l-Hasan Kharraqani, who claimed only to derive guidance from God, or in another Qur'anic context it has the meaning of 'solidarity', in which meaning it might have the social implication of the need to belong to the right group. This would be that emphasized in Shi'ism and Ismailism. However, Prof Landolt conceded that there might be overlapping between these two categories of concern for the individual and the group, since after all Sufis are usually attached to a Shaykh and *tariqa*.

Prof Landolt also remarked that if esotericism becomes a school doctrine, it can also become another kind of exotericism, and he cited 'Ayn al-Qudat's claim that the shaykh he followed who was illiterate and had no Arabic, yet knew the Qur'an better than any scholars.

Prof Landolt took up Prof Böwering's definition of the three approaches to esoteric interpretation of Sufism, Ismailism and Shi'ism, and then added a fourth, that of philosophy, since that had also been included in the workshop. But, he added there are different kinds of philosophy; that of the Ismaili philosophers representing a more radical form of Neo-Platonism, that that of the peripatetic philosophers, the former being reminiscent of Proclus, with all his hierarchies of spiritual worlds and intermediaries. This was connected, he suggested to the plurality of the imams in Ismailism, going back to before Muhammad, and their cyclical worldview of the Qur'an.

Another point Prof Landolt added (since he preferred not to go over what had already been said) was his proposal that there were other texts that could be the subject of *ta'wil* such as hadiths, particularly those that keep recurring in Sufism such that they become part of their 'système de référence'. Similarly for philosophers there is the *Theology of Aristotle*. He then recalled the idea that had been mentioned in one of the papers of one myth being explained by another myth, one analogy being explained by another, and he observed that words are always myths, i.e. they tell a story, and you can never say exactly what that is (at which he made the exception of a rationalist Mu'stazilite like Ghazzali, though he suggested, harking back to the discussion of Dr Pourjavady's paper, that Ghazzali was anyway a multi-faceted person). This led him to suggest that the kind of rationalist reductionism exemplified by Ghazzali's interpretation of the covenant could not really be called esoteric, because it doesn't allow more than one way of thinking about it., and in fact what is typical about the *ta'wil* of all three approaches is that it allows for many possibilities – not to say that anything goes, of course.

Prof Landolt then looked more closely at some aspects of *ta'wil*, from the point of view of Ismailism and Shi'ism, noting along the way that Suhrawardi cites the same Qur'anic verse (q. 75:19) in relation to his concept of *al-mazhar al-a'zam* ('a paraclete-like figure') as is cited by Qadi Nu'aman concerning the need for someone to be appointed (i.e. Ali) to perform *ta'wil*. He also remarked on the messianic element which is more prevalent in some forms of *ta'wil*.

He then highlighted again the problem of categorisation that had been mentioned in one of the papers, and the fact of overlapping of these. In this regard he proposed that ideally the field might go beyond the traditional '*naql/aql*' dichotomy to think about a metaphysics of imagination, a term first coined by Corbin and then adopted by Chittick, though in practice it might be difficult to pin down. For example, even though Suhrawardi speaks of imagination as a third intermediary level between matter and spirit, when we look at his *ta'wilat* they often 'boil down to being '*aqli* in the end. This desire, therefore, Prof Landolt wished to put on the table without himself having a solution.

Turning to some of the matters that had come up during the workshop, the different levels of meaning, he mentioned the importance of Ja'far al-Sadiq in defining the gradation of four levels of esoteric meaning. This brought him to the question of how faithful Sulami was to the tradition of his interpretation, how much he left out, in any case there is great divergence in the manuscripts of

Sulami's commentary. He then reminded us that Amir's Moezzi's absence from our workshop was due to his journey to India to examine the Qadi Nu'man tradition of Ja'far's commentary.

Other themes he recalled were that of prophetic models, as the three kinds of prophetology in Dr Keeler's paper, and the almost 'Hegelian model' of prophetic history presented in Prof Lory's paper on Kashani, with its manifestations in the successions of prophets of *zahir, batin, zahir, batin*. A similar dialectical approach was to be found in Simnani, not so much in his *tafsir* but in his separately composed introduction. Prof Landolt also expressed interest in Prof Elias' suggestion that in the case of Simnani, writing a *tafsir* might be an aesthetic act of piety. This he felt required further elaboration: why were *tafsirs* being written and for whom.

Prof Landolt ended his summing up by alluding to the final paper in the workshop, and he proposed that in order to study traditional texts it is useful to study present-day Sufis or others 'belonging to the fold', and he ended with an anecdote about his own experience of this when he found acquaintance with a Sufi shaykh in Iran helped him to understand more about the 11th century Sufi Abu Sa'id b. Abi'l-Khayr.

Round Table Discussion: Future Plans for Development of the Field

The one-hour discussion was entirely centred on the discussion of different ideas for possible workshops and conferences that would develop the field and build on what we had achieved in this workshop, as well as the problems involved in organising further activities of this kind. There appeared to be two main trends of thought among the participants as to the way forward for future workshops or conferences: on the one hand there were those who, for different reasons, felt that we should broaden the scope of this workshop to include other approaches to interpretation. On the other, there were those who felt that, in terms of esoteric Qur'an interpretation, we should try to go deeper by remaining with the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an, and focusing on particular themes or verses.

Gerhard Böwering suggested that we would only be likely to attract funding by broadening out to include the exoteric interpretation of the Qur'an. This would have the added benefit of further establishing of esoteric interpretation as a valid tradition of Qur'anic commentary and as a field of academic study. An idea added to this was that one could have a series of workshops involving various approaches to Qur'an interpretation, each being focused around a different topic or verse.

Among the topics suggested for exploring more specific areas within the realm of esoteric interpretation were: prophetology, angelology, light, cosmology, interpretation outside the *tafsir* genre, the Light Verse, Surat al-Fatiha. Farhana Mayer suggested a combination of, to begin with, holding more focused workshops in the field of Muslim esoteric interpretation and then broadening out to hold a workshop that included esoteric interpretation of other scriptures, for example the New Testament and the Judaic scriptural and commentarial traditions. This would be an important way towards increasing understanding between the three religions.

The rest of the discussion concerned the logistics of organising such events, and the inevitable expenditure of time and energy that this involves. Dr Keeler made it clear that it was impossible for her to envisage undertaking the organisation of another workshop in the near future. She pointed out that it was really a two-person enterprise (at least), because it required the academic to conceive the idea, select the participants and plan the programme, as well as a person to assist with the administration later on – for this workshop we had been fortunate in having the help of Phoebe Luckyn-Malone, Secretary of the CMEIS. Dr Rizvi pointed out that in the UK there is no administrative back-up for organising extra-curricular academic enterprises. Others pointed out that the situation was similar in the States and over most of Europe. Dr Lewisohn suggested that the Qur'anic Studies Unit at the Institute of Ismaili Studies would be ideally placed to organise further workshops, since they could employ someone to do the administrative work. It was decided that we should appoint a committee in due course from among the participants, and start to plan further activities in consultation with Omar Ali at the IIS. Meanwhile participants were urged to send any ideas by email to Dr Keeler.

Scientific Report: Part 3

Results and contribution to the further development of the field

(i) Results

To assess the results achieved by this event, it might be useful to look again at the aims expressed in the mission statement of the workshop, and consider to what extent these were fulfilled. Certainly, our workshop proved the value of an ‘integrated, comparative and interdisciplinary approach’. What had hitherto consisted of a range of disparate, though in many cases ground-breaking, monographs and articles in different areas of the esoteric interpretation of the Qur’an, could now be considered as one field of study, a field which in itself is vast and ‘bewilderingly rich’ (to use Prof. Landolt’s words), comprising a variety of subtle and refined traditions of Qur’an interpretation, each of which required a depth and rigour of scholarship to do it justice. The gathering certainly gave participants the confidence that the field could be ‘de-marginalised’ and had the potential to put itself fully on the wider map of Qur’anic studies. The comparative and interdisciplinary nature of the workshop made it possible to understand more precisely similarities and differences between the different approaches to interpretation, and realise the overlapping that inevitably occurs between the categories in which we place them – some of the surprising instances of correspondence and overlapping between these approaches in terms of both hermeneutic and content will be listed below. In general all felt that they had gained a clearer and fully idea of what we can call ‘the esoteric interpretation of the Qur’an’.

The scope of the workshop, encompassing not only different traditions of interpretation, but also different genres and historical periods, made participants aware of the breadth and wider relevance of what is often thought to be a specialised if not rarefied area of study, and it helped to provide them with a sense of solidarity for developing the field. At the same time, it created a desire to focus in future workshops on particular areas of the field, as was mentioned above in the report on the round-table discussion.

The workshop began with an awareness of some of the contrasting criteria that distinguish some of these approaches to interpretation, such as the attitude towards the literal meaning of the Qur’anic verses. Whilst some of these differences were confirmed and yet understood in a more nuanced manner through the presentations, what was more striking was what united the different traditions. In his opening address, Prof Bowering had spoken in broad terms of what he considered to be unifying or shared principles underlying the different traditions, these being Sufism, Ismailism and Twelver Shi’ism, - he did not mention philosophy, but this was later added by in Prof Landolt, in his concluding remarks. These shared principles included: the awareness of an inner reality (*batin*), the need for the purification of the soul, and the search of all human beings to understand why they are here. However, the workshop presentations enabled participants to see both the extraordinary variety that these shared principles manifested in different commentators and their commentaries, and at the same time the fascinating correspondences between them. These included the following themes and areas:

- Concept of an outer and inner meaning of the Qur’an
 - Zahir* and *batin*
 - lafz sura* and *ma’na*
 - dalil* and *madlul*
 - Relationship between these two.
- Concept of levels of meaning: four, seven, ten (or an infinite number)
 - a) Intended for different ranks of humanity
 - b) Associated with different levels of gnosis or different ‘subtleties’ (*lata’if*) within the ‘heart’ or consciousness of the human being
 - c) Associated with different prophets

- The Qur'an and Creation as two forms of Revelation, man and the Qur'an as two forms of Revelation. Sacred history and the Qur'an as a narration of the seeker's / humanity's journey towards the Divine
- The power of words, the Divine word, the significance of the Divine command 'Kun'. The significance and power of letters.
- Cosmogony
- The Prophet's role in the Revelation linked to his role in the Creation:
Logos – Umm al-Kitab – Muhammadan Reality – Muhammadan Light.
- Prophetology: different approaches to the roles of prophets in esoteric interpretation, cyclical views of the prophetic unfolding
- Angelology: perfected human beings as angels, human beings with fully realised intellects as angels in *potentia*, divine words / Qur'anic verses as angels, angels as forces in the cosmos or nature.
- Contemplative practise and the Qur'an, the importance of listening (*istima* '), seeking the presence (*istihdar*) of the reality of the divine word, ascending stages of the spiritual path revealing higher levels of meaning.
- Authenticity of, and within, texts
- Context and author/audience relationship in hermeneutics
- Variant usage of terminology

(ii) Contribution to the further development of the field

Although it was not discussed at the round-table discussion, there was unanimous agreement among the participants that the proceedings of the workshop should be published. Indeed, we have already had expressions of interest in publishing the papers from academics representing two publishing houses. There can be no doubt that such a publication would contribute not only to establishing the particular field of the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an, but would add an important dimension to the fields of Qur'anic studies, Sufism and philosophy, and would generally be welcomed as a resource for the history of Islamic thought and in comparative religious studies.

Apart from this publication, the best way ahead in order to further develop the field would be to build on the foundation of this workshop with further workshops, conferences and research projects, such as those that were put forward in the round-table discussion, or even drawing on some of the themes and correspondences listed above. The ideas generated by the experience of this workshop will be invaluable in planning any of these enterprises. Human and financial resources are all that are needed to realise this; there is no lack of interest, expertise and imagination. It should also be added that participants felt that the opportunity to come together and share ideas, both in the forum of the workshop and outside in smaller groups, making contact sometimes for the first time with people in the field, would itself be a contribution both to their own work and more generally to the field.

Part Four

WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

Monday 17 July 2006

16.00 - 18.00 *Registration at Wolfson College*

18.30 *Drinks in the Combination Room, Wolfson College*

Presentation of the European Science Foundation (ESF)

Etan Kohlberg (Jerusalem) (Standing Committee for the Humanities)

19.00 *Welcoming Buffet Dinner*

Tuesday 18 July 2006

Workshop begins in the Sidgwick Hall, Newnham College

09.00 - 09.15 **Introduction**

09.15 - 10.00 **Opening address**
Gerhard Böwering, University of Yale

10.00 - 10.15 *Refreshments*

Session 1: Early Approaches to Esoteric Interpretation

(Chair: **Gerhard Böwering**)

10.15 - 11.00 *'Qualities' as the ontological continuum between ishāra, latīfa and haqīqa in the tafsīr ascribed to Ja'far al-Sādiq (d. 148/765)*
Farhana Mayer, University of Oxford

11.00 - 11.45 *Hakīm al-Tirmidhī's Hermeneutics of Letter and Sound*
Sara Sviri, Hebrew University

11.45 - 12.30 *Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī on Ismā'īlī Ta'wīl: The fruits of heaven and the rivers flowing below it*
Ali Qutbuddin, Institute of Ismaili Studies

12.45 - 14.15 *Lunch in the Barbara White Room, Newnham College*

Session 2: The Hermeneutics of Love Mysticism

(Chair: **Leonard Lewisohn**)

14.15 - 15.00 *Maybudī's Prophetology of Love: the Case of Joseph and Zulaykhā*
Annabel Keeler, University of Cambridge

15.00 - 15.45 *Ruzbihān al-Baqlī's Hermeneutical Worldview in his 'Arā'is al-Bayān: A Religiological Approach*
Alan Godlas, University of Georgia

15.45 - 16.15 *Refreshments*

Session 3: The School of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā

(Chair: **Hermann Landolt**)

16.15 - 17.00 *Hermeneutics and Prevailing Themes in Najm al-Dīn Rāzī's Bahr al-Haqā'iq*
Mohammad Movehedi, University of Qom

- 17.00 - 17.45 *'Alā' al-Dawla al-Simnānī and the Methodological Limits of Tafsīr*
Jamal Elias, University of Pennsylvania
- 19.00 *Conference Dinner in the Combination Room, Wolfson College*
- 20.30 *Concert of Persian Music in the Lee Seng Tee Hall, Wolfson College.*
Amir Hosein Pourjavady: setar.

Wednesday 19 July 2006

Session 4: Al-Andalus and the School of Ibn

'Arabi

(Chair: **Mahmud Erol Kiliç**)

- 09.30 - 10.15 *Ibn Barrajan's Commentary between Cosmology and Eschatology*
Denis Gril, Université de Provence
- 10.15 - 11.00 *Eschatology in Kāshānī's Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*
Pierre Lory, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Sorbonne
- 11.00 - 11.15 *Refreshments*

Session 5: Esoteric Interpretation in the Ottoman Period

(Chair: **Jamal Elias**)

- 11.15 - 12.00 *Aspects of the Sufi Qur'an interpretation of Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1134/1731) and its affinity with wahdat al-wujūd*
Bakri Aladdin, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales
- 12.00 - 12.45 *Multiple Degrees of the Qur'an: Bursevi's Approach*
Mahmud Erol Kiliç, Marmara Üniversitesi
- 13.00 - 14.30 *Lunch in the Barbara White Room, Newnham College*

Session 6: Philosophical Approaches to the

Qur'an

(Chair: **Nasrollah Pourjavady**)

- 14.30 - 15.15 *The Interpretation of Qur'anic verses on the angels in the Epistles of the Pure Brethren (Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Safā)*
Omar Ali De Unzaga, Institute of Ismaili Studies
- 15.15 - 16.00 *Ibn Sīnā's Qur'anic Hermeneutics*
Peter Heath, American University of Beirut
- 16.00 - 16.45 *Hurūfī Interpretations of the Qur'an's Description of Paradise and Eternal Life*
Shahzad Bashir, Carleton College
- 16.45 - 17.00 *Refreshments*
- 18.30 - 19.30 *Punting on the River Cam (weather permitting), Granta Boat & Punting Company*
- 20.00 *Buffet and Reception at the Golden Web Foundation*

Thursday 20 July 2006

Session 7: Language, Metaphor and Image in Qur'anic Hermeneutics

(Chair: **Alan Godlas**)

- 09.30 - 10.15 *Abū Hāmid Ghazzālī's Idea of Lisān al-hāl and its Role in Qur'anic Interpretation*
Nasrollah Pourjavady, Freie Universität Berlin
- 10.15 - 11.00 *Mithl and Mithāl: Rumi's Use of Images and Analogies in Interpreting the Qur'an*
Amer Latif, Marlboro College
- 11.00 - 11.30 *Refreshments*

Session 8: The Continuing Sufi Tradition of Esoteric Interpretation

(Chair: **Sajjad Rizvi**)

- 11.30 - 12.15 *Making It Plain: Sufi Commentaries in English in the Twentieth-Century*
Kristin Sands, Sarah Lawrence College
- 12.30 - 14.00 *Lunch*
- 14.00 - 14.45 Summing up
Hermann Landolt, Emeritus Professor, McGill University
- 14.45 - 15.45 **Round-table discussion: Future Plans for Development of the Field**
(Chair: **Annabel Keeler**)
- 15.45 - 16.00 *Refreshments*
- End of Workshop*
- Departure (or Friday 21 July 2006)*

Part Five

Participants: Statistical Information

Geographical distribution by country of affiliation (residence)

Country	
CH	1
DE	1
ES	1
FR	3
IL	1
IR	1
SY	2
TR	2
UK	8
US	6
Total	26

Gender distribution

7 F 19 M

Age distribution

< 30	30-50	>50
2	13	11

Detail

Bakri ALADDIN, Country of Origin: Syria, Recently retired from the French Institute, Paris. Around 60.
Omar Ali DE-UNZAGA, Country of Origin: Spain. Age: 30s.
Mahmut AY, Country of Origin: Turkey. Age: around 30
Shazad BASHIR, Country of Origin: US. Age 30-40.
Gerhard BÖWERING, Country of Origin: Germany, Age: around 60.
Shirine DAKOURY, Country of Origin: Syria. Age 30-40.
Jamal ELIAS, Country of Origin: US. Age: around 40
Alan GODLAS, Country of Origin, US. Age: around 50.
Amina GONZALES COSTA, Country of Origin, Spain, Age, late 20s.
Denis GRIL, Country of Origin, France. Age: 50s.
Annabel KEELER, Country of Origin: UK. Age: 50s
Mahmud Erol KILIÇ, Country of Origin: Turkey. Age: 40s.
Herman LANDOLT, Country of Origin: Switzerland. Age 65+
Amer LATIF, Country of Origin: US. Age: around 30.
Leonard LEWISOHN, Country of Origin, US. Age: 50s.
Pierre LORY, Country of Origin: France. Age: 50s
Samir MAHMUD, Country of Origin: Australia. Age: around 30.
Farhana Mayer, Country of Origin: UK. Age: 30-40.
Tobias Mayer, Country of Origin: UK. Age around 40
Mohammad Movahedi, Country of Origin: Iran. Age: around 40.
Reyna Elizabeth PASCO VELASCO, Country of Origin: Mexico. Age 30s-40s.
Nasrolaah POURJAVADY, Country of Origin: Iran, Age: 60s.
Ali QUTBUDDIN, Country of Origin: India. Age: 30s.
Sajjad RIZVI, Country of Origin: UK. Age 30s
Kristen SANDS, Country of Origin: US. Age: 50s.
Sara SVIRI. Country of Origin: Israel. Age: 60s.

Part Six

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