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The 'Athari *Tafsīr* in Imami Thought: History, Structure, and Epistemological and Methodological Issues

Various schools of Qur'ānic exegesis have emerged over time, one of which relies on transmitted reports from the Sunnah, as imparted by the Holy Prophet and the Ahl Al-Bāyt.

The heritage of *Ḥadīth*-based exegesis has long been present in Imāmi exegetical tradition, as well as in their jurisprudential and theological discourse. However, a strong movement arose during the Akhbāri period, which sought to make the transmitted hadiths the exclusive and the one and only authority for Qur'ānic interpretation, arguing that the Qur'ān cannot be understood independently of the *Ḥadīth* corpus. As a result, Athari exegesis flourished during this time.

In this paper, I will first explore the historical development of reliance on exegetical narrations among the Imāmi Shi'a from the early centuries, revealing that the early Shi'as viewed *Ḥadīth* as one of the sources for understanding the Qur'ān's meaning, not as the sole authority. This trend changed with the rise of the Akhbāri school. Therefore, I will examine why this movement leaned toward restricting Qur'ānic interpretation to *Ḥadīth*. What were the epistemological and historical reasons that led to this shift? Additionally, I will trace the heated debates between the Akhbāri movement and the Uṣūli school, which emerged later and continues to this day. As a result of this historical analysis, I will also seek to uncover the influence of the Akhbāri movement on contemporary exegetical practices.

In the second part, I will critique the epistemological and methodological foundations of this movement, as well as its rationale for marginalising other sources of interpretation. Why did it take a negative stance on the concept of "Exegesis of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān"? Why do its prominent figures today criticise the exegetical approach of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāi? Were there doctrinal principles or concerns about preserving Shi'a identity that motivated this movement to think in this way?

In this paper, I will analyse the internal structure of the Athari movement, present the debates surrounding it, and offer a critical examination of the principles upon which it is based, along with the potential consequences of its approach.



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Dr. Haidar Hobbollah is a distinguished scholar specialising in Qur'ān and Hadith sciences, Islamic jurisprudence, and comparative religions. He holds a PhD in Christian Theology and Comparative Religions from the University of Religions and Denominations in Iran, along with advanced degrees in jurisprudence and Qur'ānic studies. With nearly three decades of academic experience, he has taught extensively in the Islamic seminary of Qom and various universities.

Dr. Hobbollah is currently the Head of the Department of Hadith and History at Al-Mahdi Institute. He has supervised numerous graduate students and has been an influential figure in Islamic scholarship, contributing as a professor, researcher, and journal editor. He has served as the editor-in-chief of several academic journals, including *Al-Ijtihad wa Al-Tajdid* and *Nosos Mu'aserah*, and has held advisory roles for prestigious publications in Germany and Azerbaijan.

A prolific author, Dr Hobbollah has written 24 books covering Islamic theology, jurisprudence, and interfaith studies, including *The Concept of Sunnah in Imami Shi'i Thought and Jurisprudential Maxims of Relations with Other Religions*. His research explores the intersections of Islamic law, philosophy, and contemporary religious thought, engaging with scholars globally through conferences and publications.