



## Construction of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh al-Sakandarī's Tafsir: Tracing Sufistic Epistemology in Qur'anic Interpretation

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**Abstract:** This study aims to reveal the interpretation of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh, spread in his Sufism books. Apart from a historical approach, this library research applies a hermeneutic approach to understand the form of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic interpretation. The results reveal that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's tafsir product includes 630 verses from 89 surahs. The tafsir epistemology applied by Ibn 'Aṭāillāh uses a Sufism approach to reveal the wisdom of the Qur'an. His motivation is to provide guidance for the salik or spiritual travellers and position the Quran as a source of wisdom and the basis for the concept of Sufism. Ibn 'Aṭāillāh Sufistic interpretation complements other tafsir products and emphasises that the style of interpretation is determined by the approach used by the mufassir and the importance of positioning the Qur'an as a source for understanding religion.

**Contribution:** This research contributes to revealing the Sufistic style of interpretation, which is not limited to verses dealing with ethics. The interpretation style lies in the approach rather than in the theme discussed. All verses can be approached from a Sufistic perspective, as conducted by Ibn 'Aṭāillāh.

**Keywords:** Tafsir; sufistic; Ibn 'Aṭāillāh; epistemologi

## Introduction

Interpreting the Qur'an is one of the activities of Sufis because the Qur'an is the basis of the teachings in their worship. Apart from that, the Qur'an and Sufism are two things that cannot be separated because Sufism means having morals with Allah's morals, which are identical to the Al-Qur'an. Sufis also present their interpretations specifically in a book of tafsir. For example, Ibn 'Arabi's book entitled *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, al-Qusyairi's *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, al-Sulami's *Haqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, al-Tastari's *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, Abu Muhammad Ruzbahan's *'Ara'is al-Bayān fī Haqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, Ibn 'Ajibah's *al-Bahr al-Madīd fī Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-Majīd*, and even recently a commentary on the work of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī was published in 2009 entitled *Tafsīr al-Jīlānī*. The existence of tafsir books by Sufis made them recognised not only as Sufism but also as mufassir. Even their thoughts in the field of Quran interpretation have attracted the attention of many researchers.

Ibn 'Aṭāillāh al-Sakandarī was a great Sufi<sup>1</sup> figure who carried out interpretive activities. Only the results of his interpretation were not compiled in a particular book of tasfir, but were scattered in his Sufism works. Ibn 'Aṭāillāh is known as the third teacher in the Shadhiliyya Order, after the founders of the order, namely Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili and Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi. Even though Ibn 'Aṭāillāh is known as a sheikh in a congregation, his intellectual influence is not limited to his local community. Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's works, especially the book *al-Hikam*, are widely read by Muslims across congregations and schools. His work is quite phenomenal. Thus, it is not surprising that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh grew as a scholar with extraordinary influence and depth of knowledge.

In the field of Tafsir, the author sees that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's scientific knowledge is connected with two great figures of the Shadhiliyya Tariqa, namely Abu al-'Abbas al-Mursi, his direct teacher and Abu al-Hasān al-Shadhilī, the founder of the order. This can be seen from Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretations, which quoted many interpretations from these two figures. Even in the book *Latha'if al-Minan*, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh mentions verses that were interpreted by his two teachers.

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<sup>1</sup> In Tariqa Shādhiliyya he is a teacher who has contributed greatly to the preservation and development of Tariqah Syādziliyyah. This is due to two things: firstly, he became a teacher at the third level after Abī al-Hasan al-Syādzalī and Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī. Secondly, he was the one who wrote down the teachings of Tariqah Shādhiliyya, because his two teachers did not write them down. Muhammad 'Abd al-Maqsūd Haikal, *Muqaddimah Al-Hikam Li Ibnu 'Atā'illāh* (Cairo: Markaz al-Ahrām li al-tarjamah wa al-nasyr, 1988), 22.

Among the examples of his interpretation is when interpreting surah al-Duha verse 11 (وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ). According to him, this verse means that *shukr* (being grateful) is done verbally by reporting the pleasure received. Ibn' Athaillah also linked the explanation of this verse to Surah Saba' verse 13 (اعْمَلُوا آلَ دَاوُدَ شُكْرًا), which explains that being grateful for blessings is realised through actions, namely by obeying and carrying out Allah's commands. Ibn' Athaillah also explains the two verses with Surah al-Nahl verse 53 (وَمَا يَكُمُ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ) whose contents show that grateful is also done with the heart, namely by recognising the pleasure received from God. From the three verses above, it can be seen that there are three classifications of gratitude according to the Qur'an.<sup>2</sup>

The interpretation of Ibn' Athaillah above shows that he used the principle of the Qur'an interpretation "Al-Qur'an yufassiru ba'dahu ba'dan". So, he succeeded in formulating a classification of gratitude based on the instructions of the Qur'an. One of the important principles in developing modern-era interpretations of the Quran is the thematic interpretation method (*maudu'i*). Ibn' Athaillah is also a Sufi figure whose interpretations are used as a reference for other commentators, for example, Rashid Rida and Ibn' Asyur. It can be seen in several explanations in their tafsir books. For example, Rashid Rida explained Surah al-Nisa' verse 110 (وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ سُوءًا أَوْ يَظْلِمْ نَفْسَهُ ثُمَّ يَسْتَغْفِرِ اللَّهَ يَجِدِ اللَّهَ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا). This verse states that people who do bad things or wrong themselves and then ask Allah for forgiveness will find Allah as The Most Forgiving. To explain how this could happen, Rashid Rida referred to the interpretation of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh, who explained that this was due to much disobedience, which could give rise to a feeling of destruction and inferiority before Allah, so that is when Allah would forgive them.<sup>3</sup>

Next is Ibn 'Asyur interpreting Surah Ibrahim verse 7 (لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ), he refers to the interpretation of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh who explains that *shukr* to Allah will increase the blessings because basically, the person who is grateful for Allah's blessings is binding on the blessings that (so that it is not

<sup>2</sup> Ibnu 'Atāillāh Al-Sakandarī, *Latā'if Al-Minan* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Qāhirah, 2004), 105. This example is also mentioned by Muḥammad 'Haikal, *Muqaddimah al-Hikam li Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh*. Haikal, *Muqaddimah Al-Hikam Li Ibnu 'Atā'illāh*, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Rasyîd Ridâ, *Tafsîr Al-Qur'ân Al-Hakîm (Tafsîr Al-Manâr)*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 326.

lost), on the other hand, when someone is not thankful for Allah's blessings, he is waiting for his blessings to disappear.<sup>4</sup>

That is the explanation of Rashid Rida and Ibn 'Asyur by referring to Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation. The explanation above shows that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's scientific authority for his interpretation is recognised among other commentators. It is just that he did not write a book of tafsir like other Sufi exegetes. Even in the context of his Sufism teachings, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh is known as a Sufi who always consistently relies on his understanding of Sufism in the Qur'an and hadith. For example, as concluded by Muhammad Haikal; he said that this can be seen, among others, from the frequent verses of al-Hikam combined with the arguments of the Qur'an or hadith.<sup>5</sup>

This shows that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh has contributed to the world of interpreting the Qur'an; even his expertise in the field of interpretation is recognised by other interpreters. Unfortunately, until now, no comprehensive scientific research and study has discussed Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation, so information about Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation, whether in the form of his method and interpretive approach or the problems surrounding it, still appears partial. The existing information is not yet fully strong enough to be used as a reference. This differs from other commentators, including Ibn 'Arabi, al-Qusyairi, al-Sulami and al-Ji Lani, who have been widely studied so that information related to their interpretations is easy to find. This article will examine the characteristics of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh al-Sakandari's Sufistic interpretations, which are spread in his Sufism works, and see the extent of its urgency in developing the study of Qur'anic interpretation.

## Literature Review

The study of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic interpretations is still little. Al-Dzahabi, in his book *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, when discussing Sufi interpretation, revealed information about Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's profile as mufasssīr. Al-Dzahabi explained that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh was a Sufi who interpreted the Qur'an and was referred to by other Sufi commentators. Ibn 'Aṭāillāh is also a Sufi figure who emphasised the need to pay attention to the meaning of a verse; that is al-Dzahabi's explanation. Even though it is short, this is very helpful because it has

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<sup>4</sup> Muḥammad al-Tāhir Ibnu 'Āsyūr, *Al-Tahrīr Wa Al-Tanwīr*, vol. 19 (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah, 1983), 244.

<sup>5</sup> Haikal, *Muqaddimah Al-Hikam Li Ibnu 'Atā'illāh*, 39.

paved the way for the author to explore more about Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's actual method of interpretation.

Secondly, research that is almost similar to the study that the author will carry out, namely a dissertation entitled تفسير ابن عطاء الله لأيات القرآن الكريم written by Miloud Rebiai at the Faculty of Literature and Language, University of Abou Bekr Belkaid (Universite Tlemcen) Algeria in 2012. As far as the author is concerned, this is the only dissertation that discusses Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation. This dissertation discovered the verses Ibn 'Aṭāillāh interpreted as the basis for his Sufism thought.

Miloud Rebiai's study describes the interpretation of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh according to the existing framework of the science of interpretation. In other words, he just categorises the forms of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation, but it still needs to be improved in terms of analysis. This is the difference between Miloud Rebiai's study and the study conducted by the author. The study that the authors will carry out focuses on constructing the concept of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation, its characteristics and its relation to aspects of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretive methodology. In other words, it will try to reveal how to interpret the Qur'an according to Ibn 'Aṭāillāh. So, the focus of the study is not only on what is visible from Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation but rather on capturing the hidden meaning in Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation. In practice, the author will also use a hermeneutic approach and discourse analysis, neither of which was used in Miloud Rebiai's dissertation. So, the difference between the study conducted by the author and the study conducted by Miloud Rebiai becomes clear. This article does not only describe Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation but will try to construct the concept of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic interpretation and its urgency in the study of tafsir. This is important considering that Sufis still produce few interpretive methodological constructions.

## Method

This article is a library research focusing on nine books by Ibn 'Aṭāillāh, which consists of seven books, namely *Tafsīr Surah al-An'ām verse 54*, *al-Hikam*, *Lathā'if al-Minān*, *'Unwan al-Taufīq fī Adab al-Ṭarīq*, *al-Tanwīr fī Isqāṭ al-Tadbīr*, *Tāj al-'Anūs al-Hāwi li Tadhīb al-Nufus*, *al-Qashd al-Mujarrad fī Ma'rifat al-Ism al-Mufrad*, *Miftāh al-Falāh wa Mişbāh al-Arwāh* and *Hatk al-Astār fī 'Ilm al-Astūr*, using the romantic hermeneutic approach promoted by

Schleiermacher,<sup>6</sup> history,<sup>7</sup> and critical discourse analysis to be able to find out the motifs, paradigms of Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh's sufistic interpretation.

In practice, it starts by tracing Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh's interpretation and then classifying the scope of letters, verses and themes. The analysis process continues using a hermeneutical and historical interpretation approach to see how Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh's concept of Sufistic interpretation is an influencing factor and its urgency in the study of interpretation.

## Results and Discussion

### Distribution of Verses in the Works of Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh

There are 630 verses from 89 surahs of the Qur'an, which Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh studied in his nine works of Sufism. In other words, there are 25 surahs that were not discussed by Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh. However, not all surahs studied in Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh's nine books are discussed. This number complements Miloud Rebiai's findings, which stated that there were 306 verses from 73 surahs interpreted by Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh in his books.<sup>8</sup> This difference is due to differences in the number of books used as references. Rebiai uses five books of Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh, while the authors refer to nine books of Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh.

### Sensitivity to Certain Issues

According to Mahmud Shaltut, the Qur'an contains six main points of discussion: faith, morals, instructions for interpreting God's creation, stories of previous people, promises and threats and law. The discussion about the creed contains the pillars of faith, differentiating between disbelief and disbelief. In the aspect of moral studies, the Qur'an explains commendable morals as a means of cleansing the soul and improving the condition of individuals and society.

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<sup>6</sup> Namely hermeneutics contains two aspects of the task, first grammatical and psychological interpretations. These two aspects aim to understand the language as well as understand the psyche. Inyak Ridwan Munzir, *Hermeneutika Filosofis Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz Media, 2010), 70.

<sup>7</sup> Historical methods are useful for critically examining and analysing records and remains of the past. The products of the past are usually recorded in the form of documents or artefacts in addition to traditional imagination. Aji Damanhuri, *Metodologi Penelitian Mu'amalah* (Ponorogo: STAIN Ponorogo Press, 2010), 46. In this study, the historical product that the author is researching is in the form of a book containing a biography of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh or information from scholars and experts related to this study.

<sup>8</sup> Miloud Rebiai, "Tafsir Ibnu 'Aṭāillāh Li Ayat Al-Qur'an Al-Karim Dirasah Dalaliyah" (University of Abou Bekr Belkaid (Universite Tlemcen) Algeria, 2012), 245.

Incorporated in the study of morals is that the Qur'an mentions despicable morals that can cause harm in life.<sup>9</sup>

Based on the classification of the content of the Qur'an according to Shaltut, it is known that nine books of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh contain verses from the Qur'an with the themes of morals, instructions for managing God's creation, stories of previous people, promises and threats and laws. However, verses about morals dominated in the 630 that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh interpreted. Among the examples of interpretation of moral verses carried out by Ibn 'Aṭāillāh can be seen in the following explanation when Ibn 'Aṭāillāh explained the concept of *qalb salim* in surah al-Shu'ara' verses 88-89 as follows:

يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا بَنُونَ (88) إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ (89)

He explained that *qalb salim* is a heart that has no dependence (*taalluq*) on anything other than Allah. He quoted the letter Al-An'am verse 94,<sup>10</sup> which Ibn 'Aṭāillāh understood as a *dalil* (argument) that a person does not deserve to come to Allah or *wushul* to Allah if there is still something in him other than Allah. In other words, according to Ibn 'Aṭāillāh, a person can come to Allah when he is alone/pure from anything other than Allah.<sup>11</sup> Allah will not meet/encounter a servant unless he has eliminated dependence on other than Allah. Based on Surah al-Duha verse 6.<sup>12</sup> According to Ibn 'Aṭāillāh, a person's heart cannot possibly contain more than one thing. So, a person whose heart is pure from other than Allah is a person who is humble with the view of Allah's grace and cannot possibly rely on anything other than Allah.<sup>13</sup>

This explanation shows morals in managing the heart to become a *qalb salim* that can provide benefits in the afterlife when everything, including wealth and children, no longer provides benefits. In his interpretation, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh linked it with other verses used as support and reinforcement. He even drew on the meaning of the word orphan, which means to lose/not have, as a word that refers to the heart and the day of being orphaned (not having) desires for something other than Allah. In the book Miftah al-Falah, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh explains

<sup>9</sup> Mahmud Syaltut, *Fiqh Al-Qur'an Wa Al-Sunnah* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Anjlu al-Mishriyah, 1934), 18.

<sup>10</sup> وَلَقَدْ جِئْتُمُونَا فُرَادَىٰ كَمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَتَرْكْتُمْ مَا خَوَّلْنَاكُمْ وَرَاءَ ظُهُورِكُمْ ... (94)

<sup>11</sup> Ibnu 'Athailaih Al-Sakandari, *Taj Al-'Arus Al-Hawi Litahdzib Al-Nufus* (Cairo: Kasyidah, 2017), 83.

<sup>12</sup> أَلَمْ يَجِدْكَ يَتِيمًا فَآوَىٰ (6)

<sup>13</sup> Al-Sakandari, *Taj Al-'Arus Al-Hawi Litahdzib Al-Nufus*, 83.

the importance of heart intake. He interpreted surah al-Zumar verse 45 as follows:

وَإِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ اشْمَأَزَّتْ قُلُوبُ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ وَإِذَا ذُكِرَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِذَا هُمْ  
يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ (45)

According to Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh, there are four types of *rizq* (sustenance): *ẓahir* sustenance, inner sustenance, spiritual/secret sustenance, and intellectual sustenance. *Zahir's* sustenance is obtained by utilising the body. Inner sustenance is using the heart, spiritual sustenance is by being calm, and intellectual sustenance is by eliminating one's condition so that one feels at peace with Allah. It is said that for someone who has been able to do dhikr with the essence of dhikr, praise and thanks to Allah, Allah will subdue the whole world for him.<sup>14</sup>

From the explanation above, it can be seen how Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh explains the position of dhikr and the provision of the heart that a servant needs to strive for. This is an essential part of the study of morals, namely that it can lead to happiness in life, both in this world and in the afterlife. Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh also explained one of the critical morals that a person with knowledge has, namely fear (*khashah*) of Allah. He quoted Surah Fathir verse 28 as follows:

...إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ... (28)

According to Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh, fear of Allah (*khashah*) must always accompany the knowledge that is possessed; even knowledge is said to be useful when that knowledge is accompanied by a feeling of fear of Allah. Therefore, according to him, this verse confirms that a scholar/knowledgeable person is someone who has a fear of Allah.<sup>15</sup> With useful knowledge (knowledge accompanied by blessings towards Allah), a person can subdue lust and help its owner obey Allah. It is people who have this beneficial knowledge that Allah promises will provide sufficient sustenance.<sup>16</sup> Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh also interpreted moral verses which contain praiseworthy and despicable qualities. One of them is Surah al-Nahl verse 90 as follows:

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<sup>14</sup> Ibnu ‘Athaillah Al-Sakandari, *Miftah Al-Falah Wa Mishbah Al-Arwah Fi Dzikr Allah Al-Karim Al-Fattah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Alamiyah, 2005), 19.

<sup>15</sup> Ibnu ‘Athaillah Al-Sakandari, *Al-Tanwir Fi Isqath Al-Tadbir* (Cairo: Kasyidah, 2017), 202.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Sakandari, 202–3.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

According to Ibn 'Aṭāillāh, Allah's obligations to humans are physical and spiritual. Physical obligations include obligatory prayers, fasting Ramadan, Hajj, zakat, etc. According to Ibn 'Aṭāillāh, spiritual obligations are divided into two, namely obligations to carry out and obligations to avoid.<sup>17</sup> Fairness, kindness and support to close relatives are obligations that must be carried out. As for evil (*fakhshā*), evil and exceeding limits must be avoided.<sup>18</sup> Allah's obligations to his servants, whether mandatory or sunnah, certainly contain benefits for his servants. Likewise, when Allah forbids his servants, whether haram or makruh, there is also a benefit when they succeed in avoiding them.<sup>19</sup>

Something interesting about Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's explanation above is his firmness in classifying obligations into outer and inner. In general, when ulama explain obligations, they will focus on ritual obligations (*ẓāhir*). Still, here, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh emphasises that there are inner obligations in the form of actions which, according to the classification of the ulama, are not included in the pillars of Islam, which are instead included in the realm of morals. This is one of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's original thoughts, which can drive Muslims to achieve perfect righteousness, both ritually pious and socially.

One example of a verse about faith explained by Ibn 'Aṭāillāh is Surah al-Taubah verse 28 below:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْمُشْرِكُونَ نَجَسٌ ... (28)

Ibn 'Aṭāillāh stated that the meaning of unclean here is not in the real sense. Someone who believes in Allah will seek purity, and these people are special people before Allah. *Shirk* is the cause of the destruction of nature, while Tawhid (monotheism) makes nature prosperous. If the sentence of monotheism can be the cause of natural prosperity, then, of course, it will be more able to make a person's heart prosperous as the place where monotheism resides, making the tongue more prosperous because it is the place where the remembrance of

<sup>17</sup> Al-Sakandarī, *Latâ'if Al-Minan*, 41.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Sakandarī, 41.

<sup>19</sup> Al-Sakandarī, 42.

monotheism is uttered. Therefore, it is appropriate that Allah's forgiveness is available to people who believe in Allah.<sup>20</sup>

Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation shows that he has explained verses related to monotheism. Interestingly, he directs his interpretation of monotheism verses to aspects of Sufism. It can be seen from the expression that the sentence of monotheism will be able to prosper the heart and tongue as the place where the sentence of monotheism is uttered.

Ibn 'Aṭāillāh also interpreted verses of worship, for example, Surah al-Isra' verse 79 as follows:

وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَتَهَجَّدُ بِهِ نَافِلَةً لَكَ... (79)

When explaining this verse, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh said that *tahajjud* is an addition/completion for the perpetrator because of the primacy of Allah, who has given obligations to his servants. According to him, when Allah gives compulsory practices, Allah will provide sunnah practices to make up for the shortcomings of those compulsory practices.<sup>21</sup>

Allah makes allowances for weak people through obligatory practices and opens up opportunities for strong people through sunnah practices. There are some servants of Allah who worship because they are afraid of punishment to save themselves from damage. They do not worship because they long for and love Allah. Their worship is because they fulfil their obligations to obtain good for themselves. This is what makes Allah very surprised.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, there are servants of Allah who perform worship no longer because of the demands of obligation but because they long for Allah. Their hearts are connected to Allah and are free from the world, and even if there is no forbidden time for prayer, they will fill it with prayer and perform practices that exceed their bodily strength.<sup>23</sup>

The explanation above shows that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh brings the interpretation of verses about worship to the dimension of Sufism, raising the reader's awareness of the importance of interpreting worship as a form of love and longing for Allah, not because of goals or profit for oneself. Thus, it is known that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh has high sensitivity in discussing Sufism, especially on the issue of efforts to cleanse the heart (*tahdhīb al-nafs*), instilling awareness about Allah's

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<sup>20</sup> Al-Sakandari, *Miftah Al-Falah Wa Mishbah Al-Arwah Fi Dzikir Allah Al-Karim Al-Fattah*, 66.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Sakandari, *Latâ'if Al-Minan*, 44.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Sakandari, 44.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Sakandari, 44.

power over human life and the importance of building good relationships between humans and Allah. This is evident from the emphasis and concentration of the explanation given by Ibn 'Aṭāillāh, which leads to a discussion of Sufism, especially these three issues.

### Consistency of Shari'a and Ma'rifat Understanding

The concentration of many interpretive scholars is considering the suitability of Sufi interpretations with religious shari'a. This is none other than because of the assumption that Sufi interpretations lead to spirituality and contain mystical elements contrary to monotheism. However, the research results show that not all Sufi interpretations deviate from the values of monotheistic teachings, as the authors mentioned before.

One of the tafsir studies is testing the tafsir products that scholars have carried out called *naqd al-tafsir* studies (tafsir critical studies). One of the barometers is to see the consistency of the interpretation produced with the concept of monotheism. For example, Ihsan al-Amin stated that there are four tools that can be used to criticise interpretations, namely the Qur'an, hadith, language, and the science of Tawhid.<sup>24</sup>

By quoting al-Alusi, Muhammad al-Amin explained that Tawhid is important in looking at an interpretation because it explains what is obligatory and impossible for Allah and the prophethood. Without knowledge of Tawhid, a *mufassir* would fall into disrepute because ignorance of the basics of Tawhid can make someone mistaken in understanding the *zahir* of the verse.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, in this section, explaining Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation of verses dealing with Tawhid is necessary to see how far his interpretation of Sufism/*ma'rifat* is consistent with the concept of shari'a/tawhid. One of the verses about Tawhid that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh interpreted was Surah al-Ikhlās, as stated in his book *al-Qashd al-Mujarrad fī Ma'rifat al-Ism al-Mufrūd*.

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ (1) اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ (2) لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ (3) وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ (4)

According to Ibn 'Aṭāillāh, this surah has particularity, wisdom and knowledge that is very important and rare. The name Allah is the name of God's essence and the term of monotheism. The word *al-Ṣamad* contains the meaning that Allah does not possess human qualities. *Lam yalid* shows the perfection of

<sup>24</sup> Ihsan Al-Amin, *Manhaj Al-Naqd Fi Al-Tafsir* (Beirut: Dar al-Hadi, 2007), 415.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Amin, 416.

Allah, which is unrelated to anything else. As for *wa lam yulad*, it indicates that Allah is *Qadim* (without beginning), *azali*, and at the same time, rejects the notion that Allah is similar to anyone else.<sup>26</sup>

This explanation shows that Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh’s interpretation is still in accordance with the concept of monotheism; no deviant language is found. In fact, uniqueness was found, namely confirming that Allah is the name of God and the name said/read is a form of monotheistic remembrance. Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh directs his explanation to the meaning of dhikr rather than discussing the linguistic aspects and meaning of the word Allah.

Through the interpretation above, Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh has laid an essential foundation for monotheism, namely the unity of Allah. As Ihsan al-Amin mentioned, one of the fundamental interests of the Qur’an is to establish the oneness of Allah and eliminate shirk, the existence of children and things that make Allah similar to his creatures. Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh has done this through the interpretation above.<sup>27</sup>

In the book *Hatk al-Astār fi ‘Ilm al-Asrār* by Ibnu ‘Athailah, which is a discussion of monotheism originating from Ibn ‘Arabi, Ibnu ‘Athailah explains surah al-Anfal verse 17 as follows:

فَلَمْ تَقْتُلُوهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ قَتَلَهُمْ وَمَا رَمَيْتَ إِذْ رَمَيْتَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ رَمَىٰ وَلِيُبْلِيَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ مِنْهُ بَلَاءً حَسَنًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ (17)

According to Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh, this verse is related to monotheism. Tawhid has levels, starting with knowledge (*‘ilm*), circumstances (*ḥāl*), and then knowledge again (*‘ilm ba’da al-ḥāl*). The first knowledge is monotheism through argument (*tawhid al-dālīl*). This is the monotheism of lay people, namely the *zahir* ulama. The second is tawhid through circumstances/conditions (*tawhid al-ḥāl*), namely when Allah has become an attribute of a person. That is, what drives our actions is no longer ourselves but Allah. The third is the second knowledge, namely tawhid *mushāhada*, when seeing everything from the side of Allah Almighty (*al-Wāhid*).<sup>28</sup>

In such conditions, a person’s view of nature will always be directed towards Allah. Everything in nature is nothing but a collection of the results of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibnu ‘Athailah Al-Sakandari, *Al-Qashd Al-Mujarrad Fi Ma’rifah Al-Isim Al-Mufrad* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Alamiyah, 2005), 44.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Amin, *Manhaj Al-Naqd Fi Al-Tafsir*, 415.

<sup>28</sup> Ibnu ‘Athailah Al-Sakandari, *Hatk Al-Astar Fi ‘Ilm Al-Asrar* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Azhariyah li al-Turats, 2016), 21.

God's existence.<sup>29</sup> From this explanation, it can be understood that the concept of tajjali for Ibn 'Aṭāillāh does not mean that a person believes Allah has incarnated or entered within him but it is a condition of always relying on his activities and views on Allah. Everything that a person does leads him to remember and identify with Allah. From this, it can be understood that there is no deviation from the interpretation of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's beliefs.

Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation of other monotheistic verses can be seen when interpreting Surah al-An'am verse 3 as follows:

وَهُوَ اللَّهُ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَفِي الْأَرْضِ... (3)

This verse means that Allah is the Greatest because Allah is the essence that is worshipped, mentioned by name in dhikr, praised and thanked. All servants are under His commands and prohibitions. He knows what is visible and hidden in the heart and knows everything. There is nothing vague before Him.<sup>30</sup>

If translated textually, this verse means Allah is in the heavens and the earth. If it is understood that God is somewhere, then this is wrong because there is a similarity between God and creatures, namely, being somewhere. Therefore, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh did not direct the meaning of the verse above to this erroneous textual meaning.

The authors see that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation is consistent with the belief that has become the consensus of the ulama, namely that Allah is not in a place like his creatures. In fact, from Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation, it is known that he changed the meaning of the verse to one that is easier to understand even for ordinary people and gives the impression of glorifying Allah.

In his book *Latā'if al-Minān*, Ibnu 'Athillah explains the meaning of verse 5 of Surah al-Fatihah by quoting his teacher (Abu 'Abbas al-Mursi) as follows:<sup>31</sup>

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ (5)  
 اياك نعبد شريعةً، واياك نستعين حقيقةً  
 اياك نعبد اسلامًا، واياك نستعين احسانًا  
 اياك نعبد عبادةً، واياك نستعين عبوديةً  
 اياك نعبد فرقًا، واياك نستعين جمعًا

<sup>29</sup> Al-Sakandari, 22.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Sakandari, *Al-Qashd Al-Mujarrad Fi Ma'rifah Al-Ism Al-Mufrad*, 46.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Sakandarî, *Latâ'if Al-Minan*, 125.

This verse means a servant must face Allah with love for Allah and keep his promises to Allah. Allah wants His servants to worship with speech, knowledge and with their bodies and souls and return to Allah by confessing to Allah for all the power and strength they have obtained from Allah.<sup>32</sup>

The interpretation above shows that Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh emphasises the importance of appreciation in a servant's worship, physically and spiritually/innerly employing totality. This interpretation is still in accordance with the concept of *aqidah*, because a person's worship is not only enough with movements and words but must be accompanied by inner appreciation and awareness of glorifying Allah for all his power.

Thus, the interpretation of al-Shadzili quoted by al-Sakandari is valid and does not conflict with the concept of shari'a. Therefore, it can be said that Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh continues to maintain consistency between the understanding of shari'a and *ma'rifat*. This strengthens the fact that the interpretation of Sufis, in this case, Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh, is in accordance with the rules of interpretation and religion, thus refuting the generalisation efforts made by some researchers and commentators who focus on the outer meaning that Sufi interpretations are only a kind of reflection or tend to be inner (*batiniyya*).

### **Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh’s Concept of Tafsir**

The activity of interpretation is essentially to reveal the guidance contained in the Qur'an, as the function of the Qur'an is to provide guidance on the best path, as Allah says in Surah al-Isra' verse 9 below:

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَهْدِي لِلَّتِي هِيَ أَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا  
كَبِيرًا (الإسراء: 9)

In al-Zarkashi's language, these instructions sometimes take the form of Allah's laws and the wisdom/virtue in the Qur'an. Therefore, al-Zarkashi defines tafsir as the science of understanding the book of Allah revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (Qur'an), explaining its meaning, and issuing the laws and wisdom contained in the Qur'an.<sup>33</sup>

Based on the explanation above, it can be seen that sometimes the explanation of the meaning of the Qur'an is in the form of God's laws/orders and wisdom or virtues. From this classification, the author sees that Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh's

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<sup>32</sup> Al-Sakandarî, 125.

<sup>33</sup> Badr al-Din Muhammad bin ‘Abdullah Al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi ‘Ulum Al-Qur’An*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dar al-Turats, n.d.), 13.

interpretation is more inclined towards wisdom than law. This is because the interpretation given by Ibn 'Aṭāillāh contains more of an invitation to goodness that drives people to do good deeds to achieve goodness in this world and the afterlife.

Regarding the meaning of wisdom itself, al-Jurjani defines it as correct words regarding the nature of something based on human abilities or words that are in accordance with the truth, which is clean. Wisdom is divided into two, namely, the wisdom of *al-maṭṭuqah biha* and the wisdom of *al-maskut 'anha*. The wisdom of *al-maṭṭuqah biha* contains the knowledge of shari'a and tariqa. The wisdom of *al-maskut 'anha* is a secret of nature that cannot be revealed by the formalistic ulama (*al-rusum*) and common people.<sup>34</sup>

Ahsin Sakho stated that the meaning that many Sufis produce is the meaning drawn from verses of the Qur'an, which is not obtained from the sound of the pronunciation but from the impression created by the pronunciation in the mind of the interpreter who has a bright heart and mind, without cancelling the meaning of the pronunciation.<sup>35</sup> According to al-Dzahabi, what the Sufis do is beautiful goodness because, through their interpretation, they have presented lessons, instructions and meanings resulting from the reflection that resemble the meaning of the Qur'an, which can lead believers to goodness.<sup>36</sup>

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that interpretation, according to Ibn 'Aṭāillāh is to reveal the wisdom values contained in the Al-Qur'an, which aims to awaken the consciousness of the soul to lead humans to achieve goodness both in this world and in the afterlife. This concept is still in line with and does not deviate from the concept of interpretation understood by ulama tafsir.

### **Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic Tafsir Method**

Based on observations of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's works, the author sees that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's exegetical method can be categorised as a *maudhu'i* (thematic) method. It is because Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretations scattered in his books have two characteristics of the *maudhu'i* method: interpreting Qur'anic verses based

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<sup>34</sup> 'Ali bin Muhammad al-Syarif Al-Jurjani, *Al-Ta'rifat* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Alamiah, 1983), 91–92.

<sup>35</sup> Ahsin Sakho Muhammad, *Membumikan Ulumul Qur'an* (Jakarta: Qaf Media, 2019), 181.

<sup>36</sup> Muhammad Husain Al-Dzahabi, *Al-Tafsir Wa Al-Mufasssirun* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1976), 274.

on the theme being studied. The second is to follow the Qur'an principle, *Yufassiru ba'dahu ba'dan*, one of the crucial principles in the *maudhu'i* interpretation method.

The first characteristic is that the verses interpreted by Ibn 'Aṭāillāh refer to specific themes discussed by Ibn 'Ataillah. For example, when looking at the book *al-Tanwīr fī Isqāṭ al-Tadbīr*, which contains various themes in the field of Sufism, it can be seen that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh presents the interpretation of the verses according to the theme of discussion. When Ibn 'Aṭāillāh explains the theme of patience, he offers a sub-discussion that contains verses related to each theme and their interpretations. This can be seen in the following explanation:

One of the subsections on patience in the chapter is that Allah will help His servants accept Allah's provisions and the arrival of the light of help. In explaining this sub, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh quoted Surah al-Ṭūr verse 48 as follows:

وَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ فَإِنَّكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا... (48)

According to Ibn 'Aṭāillāh, this verse explains that the light of Allah makes a person realise that the provisions he finds come from his Lord (Allah), who gives goodness to him so that he should be patient because if you believe that the provisions are not from Allah, it will result in a heavy heart in carrying it out provisions that have been given.<sup>37</sup>

Still, in the chapter on patience, in another sub title, namely Allah strengthens his servants to accept the provisions and witnesses the goodness of his patience. Ibn 'Aṭāillāh quoted the verse related to this, Surah al-Zumar verse 10, with the following interpretation:

...إِنَّمَا يُؤْتِي الصَّابِرُونَ أَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ (10)

According to Ibn 'Aṭāillāh, this verse explains that when Allah has determined pain for a servant, Allah has prepared his virtues and blessings.<sup>38</sup> This is one example that shows that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation falls into the *maudhu'i* (thematic) method, taking into account the two peculiarities of the thematic method, namely interpreting the verses of the Qur'an by referring to specific themes and explaining the content of the themes in verses by referring to other verses of the Qur'an. This indirectly shows that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation, which emphasises aspects of purifying the soul and revealing

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<sup>37</sup> Al-Sakandari, *Al-Tanwir Fi Isqath Al-Tadbir*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Sakandari, 28.

wisdom in the Qur'an, is not entirely based on signs but also uses the tools of exegetical knowledge.

### **Motifs and Paradigms of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic Tafsir**

The authors see that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic interpretation has the mission/goal of presenting the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an for the salik/spiritual traveller focused on purifying the soul (sufism). This is because Ibn 'Aṭāillāh focuses on revealing wisdom (*ḥikma*) related to morals or purification of the soul, as mentioned in the previous chapter, even though the verses being interpreted are verses of worship, faiths, stories or other things, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh only reveals meanings related to morals and purification of the soul.

For example, when interpreting Surah al-Tauba verse 60 (إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقَاتُ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ) (وَالْمَسْكِينِ), in general, *mufassir* explain this verse as indicating groups who are entitled to receive zakat (*aṣnāf zakat*), one of which is needy and the poor. In contrast, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh does not explain this meaning but instead presents another meaning. According to him, this verse means that someone who wants help/gifts from Allah must eradicate poverty and lack of wealth around him.<sup>39</sup>

Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretation above awakens a person's heart to eradicate poverty. He does not link it to the law of fiqh, which requires giving zakat to the needy and disadvantaged, but relates it to the arrival of God's grace by means of eradicating poverty.

Therefore, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic interpretation is very relevant for people who already have a basic knowledge of Sufism and are focused on purifying their hearts. At the same time, this Sufistic interpretation is not suitable for those who wish to deepen the concepts of fiqh or creed, which express many of the thoughts of theologians, because when Ibn 'Aṭāillāh discusses verses about Tawhid, he presents explanations from theologians, but directs them more towards relationships of God and creatures, as explained in the previous chapter.

The motif of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic interpretation in the form of an attempt to present the meaning of the Qur'an to the students/salik can be understood because Ibn 'Aṭāillāh was a shaykh/murshid who occupied an essential position in the Shadziliyya Tariqa. He was the third teacher to occupy a strategic role in the Shadziliyya Tariqa after his teacher (Abu al'Abbas al-

<sup>39</sup> Al-Sakandari, *Taj Al-'Arus Al-Hawi Litahdzib Al-Nufus*, 80.

Mursi) and the founder of this tariqa (Abu al-Hasan al-Shadzili), so Ibnu 'Athailah had responsibility.

Besides, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's position as a Sufi and Tariqa murshid demands responsibility for preserving the knowledge of Sufism and continuing to produce students and murshids, which ultimately lead them to become saints/lovers of Allah. This is the second and third motive behind Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic interpretation, namely preserving the teachings of Sufism and leading practitioners of Sufism to become guardians/lovers of Allah.

When explaining the concept of tawakkal, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh explained that submission is only to Allah. If someone places their hopes on something other than Allah, then they will be disappointed. Then Ibn 'Aṭāillāh stated, "الم تسمع قوله",<sup>40</sup> Here, it can be seen that Surah al-Ra'd verse 43 is used to strengthen Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's explanation and be the basis for the concept of tawakkal explained by Ibn 'Aṭāillāh.

The interpretation activities carried out by Ibnu 'Athailah are focused on revealing the wisdom contained in the Qur'an to awaken the soul's awareness so that it can lead humans to achieve goodness both in this world and in the afterlife. The motive for Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic interpretation is to guide students/salik, preserve the teachings of Sufism and lead Sufism practitioners to become guardians/lovers of Allah. Furthermore, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh positioned the Qur'an as a source of wisdom and as the basis for Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's understanding of Sufism. This is the paradigm/pattern of thinking surrounding Ibn 'Aṭāillāh in interpreting the Qur'an, thus making Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interaction pattern with the Qur'an different from other commentators or Sufis.

### **Characteristics of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic Tafsir**

The number of verses interpreted by Ibn 'Aṭāillāh is not much different from al-Sulami, a Sufi who died in 1012 AD/412 AH, interpreting around 600 verses of the Qur'an.<sup>41</sup> The scope of the surah interpreted by Ibn 'Aṭāillāh is smaller than that of al-Tustari, a Sufi who died in 896 AD/283 AH. Al-Tustari's interpretation covers the entire surah, although he only interpreted some verses.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Al-Sakandari, *Al-Tanwir Fi Isqath Al-Tadbir*, 120.

<sup>41</sup> Abi 'Abd al-Rahman Muhammad bin al-Husain Al-Sulami, *Haqa'iq Al-Tafsir* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Syarqiyah, 1989).

<sup>42</sup> Sahal bin 'Abdullah Al-Tustari, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Azhim* (Cairo: Dar al-Harm li al-Turats, 2004).

Al-Zarqani stated that although al-Tustari's interpretation covers the entire surah of the Qur'an, not all verses were interpreted by al-Tustari.<sup>43</sup> The interpretations of al-Tustari and al-Sulami are collected in one book whose presentation follows the sequence of the mushaf, namely *Tasīr Al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* and *Haqā'iq al-Tafsīr*. Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's interpretations are not collected in one particular book but are scattered throughout his works. Al-Qushairi (d.465 H) also interpreted the Qur'an and collected it in a specific book of Tafsir with the title *Laṭā'if al-Isīl*.

Regarding the scope of the themes of the verses interpreted by Ibn 'Aṭāillāh, it can be seen that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh interprets various themes contained in the Qur'an, including the themes of morals, creeds, laws, instructions for paying attention to the universe, stories of previous people as well as promises and threats, as previously explained.

This differs from other Sufi commentators who only limit their studies to verses about morals. The next difference is that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh is very attentive and has high sensitivity to reveal the value of Sufism from all the verses he interprets, especially on the issue of cleansing the heart (*tahdhīb al-nafs*), cultivating awareness about God's power over human life and the importance of building good relations between humans and God.

Al-Qusyairi explained that the needy and poor have the right to receive zakat because of their condition. Al-Qusyairi quoted the opinion of the jurists, including Abu Hanifah, who argued that people experiencing poverty (*miskīn*) have no wealth at all. In contrast, the poor (*faqīr*) are people who have provisions for living but still lack. Al-Qusyairi also quoted al-Shafi'i, who opposed Abu Hanifah's opinion. After that, al-Qusyairi mentioned the views of the Sufis, both those who chose Abu Hanifah's opinion and those who chose al-Shafi'i's opinion.<sup>44</sup>

This explanation shows that although al-Qusyairi and Ibn 'Aṭāillāh were great Sufis, they had different attitudes. Al-Qusyairi continues to reveal the fiqh side when interpreting verses that contain fiqh. Meanwhile, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh continues to show the side of Sufism even though the verses he interprets are

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<sup>43</sup> Muhammad 'Abdul 'Azhim Al-Zarqani, *Manahil Al-'Irfan Fi 'Ulum Al-Qur'an*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1995), 72.

<sup>44</sup> Abi al-Qasim 'Abdul Karim bin Hawazin bin 'Abdul Malik Al-Qusyairi, *Latha'if Al-Isyarat* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Alamiah, 2007), 428.

about fiqh. Here, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's sensitivity to Sufism is visible when interpreting the verses of the Qur'an.

In other words, whatever theme of the verse that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh interprets, he will reveal the value of Sufism contained in that verse, as explained in the previous discussion. When Ibn 'Aṭāillāh interpreted Surah al-Thalaq verse 12 about the creation of the heavens and the earth in layers, Ibnu 'Athallah did not bring his explanation to the command to contemplate the universe but explained the importance of having an awareness that Allah has prepared good fortune for humans.

The final characteristic of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic interpretation product is that his interpretation consistently maintains and harmonises the understanding of *shari'a* and *ma'rifat*. The characteristics of interpretive products like this are critical. One of the standards for acceptance of interpretive products is the consistency of the resulting interpretation with the concept of monotheism, as explained, among others, by Ihsan al-Amin, who stated that there are four tools for carrying out interpretive criticism, namely Qur'an, hadith, language, and the science of Tawhid.<sup>45</sup>

Even in the case of Sufi interpretations, this criterion is often used as a basis for rejecting Sufi interpretations, even though Sufi interpretations based on monotheism are undoubtedly different from interpretations that deviate from agreed religious values (*qath'i*).<sup>46</sup>

With the evidence that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic interpretation is consistent and follows the values of the *shari'a* or *qath'i* religious teachings, it is proof that the interpretation of Sufis, which is following religious teachings can be accepted as the interpretation of the *mufassir* in general.

### The Urgency of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic Tafsir

The trend of studying books of tafsir, or *mufasir* thoughts, has so far been limited to *mufassir* who wrote the book. Therefore, explanations of the verses of the Qur'an are dominated by *mufassir* who have books of tafsir. In fact, if we refer

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<sup>45</sup> Al-Amin, *Manhaj Al-Naqd Fi Al-Tafsir*, 415.

<sup>46</sup> The fundamental difference between Sufi and Inner (bāṭin) interpretations lies in the interpreter's attitude towards the outer/zahir meaning of a verse. Inner interpreters no longer recognise the *zahir* meaning of the sentences used in the Qur'an or assume that the meaning of the signal is what the verse means. Meanwhile, Ishārī interpreters still recognise the meaning of the *zahir* verse but add new meanings from what they have obtained. M. Quraish Shihab, *Kaidah Tafsir* (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2013), 373.

to the ulama's explanation of the requirements for mufasir, there is nothing that requires a mufasir to have a book of tafsir. Instead, they emphasise extracting the meaning of the Qur'an based on the necessary scientific equipment and the good ethics of the person doing the interpretation.<sup>47</sup> After that, the interpretation is tested through interpretive criticism to see whether the resulting interpretation follows religious teachings.

Also, if you look at history, you will find that the companions and tabi'in who were famous for mastering tafsir, such as Ibn 'Abbas and Mujahid, did not have tafsir books. The book *Tanwīr al-Miqbas* is an example of a compilation carried out by al-Fairuz Abadi. Other scholars also collected interpretations of the Prophet's two wives, Aisyah and Umm Salamah, al-Shafī'i, and other scholars, so we can now read and study the characteristics of their interpretations.

Therefore, the study of ulama who carry out Qur'an interpretation activities (even though they do not have a book of tafsir) can be a new trend so that they can develop the study of the Qur'an, especially enriching the characteristics of interpretation of the Qur'an that could not have been done by the ulama who have books of interpretation.

This study shows that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic interpretation has unique characteristics in terms of interpretive products and epistemology. In the context of developing tafsir studies, the urgency of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic interpretation can be seen from three sides, namely the concept of tafsir, the tafsir approach and the tafsir paradigm, namely related to positioning the Qur'an during the interpretation process.

The first urgency of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic interpretation is his concept of interpretation, which emphasises revealing the wisdom of the Qur'an, as has been mentioned that the meaning of wisdom is the truth about the nature of something that is not widely expressed by others which focuses on the literal aspect.

Esoteric interpretation/revealing a verse's wisdom or inner meaning is still often considered deviant. According to the author, this is due to two reasons. Firstly, interpretations are still found in the name of Sufis who have fallen into spiritual understanding, as shown by al-Dzahabi in his book *al-Ittijahat al-*

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<sup>47</sup> Among other Nurrudin 'Itr, *'Ulum Al-Qur'an Al-Karim* (Damascus: Mathba'ah al-Shabah, 1993), 94–96; Manna' Al-Qathan, *Mabahisfi 'Ulum Al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, n.d.), 321–24; Khalid 'Aburrahman Al-'Ak, *Ushul Al-Tafsir Wa Qawa'iduhu* (Beirut: Dar al-Nafa'is, 1986), 185–201.

*Munharifah*.<sup>48</sup> The second, especially among Indonesian people, there is a kind of bias between the concept of Sufism and the occult and medicine, so that when presented with interpretations from Sufi circles whose meaning is rarely expressed by *mufassir*, they are generally thought to come from practitioners of the occult and so on.

Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh proved that revealing the wisdom contained in the Qur'an does not necessarily make the resulting interpretation deviant. Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh also proved that focusing on the wisdom in the Qur'an can provide a more heart-touching meaning and motivation to carry out the commands in the verse.

The second urgency of Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh's Sufistic interpretation is in the aspect of the interpretation approach. In the study of interpretation methodology, the terms interpretation source (*mashadir*), interpretation method (*manhaj*), interpretation approach (*ittijah, tariqa*) and interpretation style (*laun*) are known; an interpretive approach that gives birth to interpretive styles. The resulting interpretation will have linguistic features if the *mufassir* uses a linguistic approach. Likewise, when a *mufassir* uses a Sufism approach, his interpretation will be identical to the Sufism style.

However, many researchers in tafsir have not given explanations that confirm this. So far, when a researcher/writer of a book of tafsir discusses a pattern of interpretation, the examples presented are verses related to that pattern. For example, when discussing a style of fiqh, the example is the ulama's interpretation of verses dealing with fiqh. When discussing theological features, what is exemplified is the ulama's interpretation of verses about Tawhid.<sup>49</sup> This gives the impression that the style is determined by the studied verse rather than the approach used.

According to the authors, the basis for assessing the style of an interpretation by referring to the verse being discussed is not appropriate because the style of an interpretation is determined by the approach used. Therefore, the assessment of Rawa'i al-Bayan as a book of tafsir as a style of fiqh is not because the verses discussed are related to Islamic law but because the approach used is a fiqh approach, so the explanation is more directed to the laws of each issue discussed.

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<sup>48</sup> Muhammad Husain Al-Dzahabi, *Al-Ittihat Al-Munharifah Fi Tafsir Al-Qur'an Dawafi'uha Wa Daf'uha* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1986), 71–82.

<sup>49</sup> Badri Khaeruman, *Otentisitas Hadis: Studi Kritis Atas Kajian Hadis Kontemporer* (Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya, 2004), 123–36, 157–67.

This is where the urgency of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh's Sufistic interpretation is seen in the aspect of the tafsir approach. Based on the explanation that has been mentioned, it is known that Ibn 'Aṭāillāh does not only discuss verses about morals. On the contrary, Ibn 'Aṭāillāh discusses more verses, whether about law, worship, stories, Tawhid or commands to pay attention to the universe, but those verses are studied, and their Sufistic meanings are revealed.

## Conclusion

The characteristics of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh al-Sakandari's Sufistic interpretation consist of two aspects; *first*, the tafsir product, which includes 630 verses from 89 surahs, its sensitivity to the discussion of Sufism and its conformity with the understanding of shari'a. *Second*, the epistemology of interpretation, which includes activities to reveal the wisdom of the Qur'an, using a Sufism approach in interpreting all verses, motivation for interpretation to guide *sālik* and positioning the Quran as a source of wisdom and the basis for the concept of Sufism.

The urgency of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh al-Sakandari's Sufistic interpretation can be seen from three sides, namely completing a product of interpretation that reveals the wisdom of the Qur'an, emphasising that the style of interpretation is determined by the approach used by the interpreter and the importance of positioning the Qur'an as a source of understanding religion.

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A.I.K. conducted data collection, analysis and formulated methodology; M.I. reviewed the draft article and research concept; D.M. and N.F.A performed data curation, typed and edited.

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