



Philosophical and Ishari Interpretation: Traces of Islamic Thought from the Golden Age to the Decline

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the meaning, history, and limitations of philosophical interpretation; the history of the emergence of philosophical interpretation during the golden age of Islam; the differences between philosophical interpretation and symbolic interpretation; and the history of the emergence of symbolic interpretation at the end of the golden age of Islam. The research method used in this study is library research, with a qualitative approach, aiming to produce descriptive data presented in narrative form. During the Abbasid Dynasty, which was the golden age of Islam at that time, many philosophical books from Greece, Persia, and India were translated, causing philosophical interpretation to develop rapidly from the 8th to the 12th century AD. Philosophical interpretation itself is an interpretation of the Quran using a philosophical approach, oriented towards reason and rationality based on philosophical principles, but with less attention paid to inner meaning. Meanwhile, at the end of the golden age of Islam, philosophical interpretation developed rapidly from the 12th to 14th centuries AD, emphasizing spiritual awareness during the decline of Islam.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Quran is a source of teachings and guidelines for the life of Muslims and occupies a central position in the development of Islamic knowledge. (Abdurrahman, 2015) Along with the development of the interpretation of the Quran from the generation of companions, Tabi'in, Atba Thabi'in, Salafus shalihin and scholars until now using various innovations due to the development of insight in understanding the Quran. (Hidayat, 2020) Many styles of interpretation provide broader insights to the people to be a guide for life. Among the prominent styles of interpretation are the falsafi (philosophical) interpretation and the ishari (Sufi) interpretation. These two styles explore meaning in a unique way. Falsafi interpretation is an interpretation by interpreting the verses of the Quran based on philosophical thoughts or views (Faiziya, 2021) using rationality. Meanwhile, according to Imam Ghozali, ishari interpretation is interpreting with the meaning of the conscience (Nana Mahrani, 2017) using spiritual aspects. These two dimensions respond to the human need to understand the Quran, not only in its textual aspects, but also in its meaning and inner essence. Philosophical and Islamic studies offer a balance between rationality

and spirituality. This indicates that philosophical and Islamic interpretations are a response to the Muslim community's need to interpret Quranic verses in ways that are relevant to the dynamics of life.

Syafieh explains in his article that philosophical interpretation is the gateway to the progress of Islamic thought (Syafieh, 2017) This is supported by Abdurrahman's research which explains that philosophical interpretation is an interpretation where the verses of the Qur'an become a tool for justifying philosophical thought, not philosophical thought becomes a justification for the verses of the Qur'an, therefore the verses of the Qur'an can be interpreted with philosophy (Abdurrahman, 2015) However, in the modern era, Muslims face a big challenge in interpreting the Qur'an in the midst of the current of rationalization, modern science and critical spirituality, many verses of the Qur'an are rationalized so that the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an is critical. This is contrary to the results of Muttaqin's research that the verses of the Qur'an not only have external meaning but also have inner meaning (maknawi).(Muttaqin, 2021) This is in accordance with the ishari interpretation which emphasizes that the verses of the Qur'an are not only external texts but also have inner meaning.(Nana Mahrani, 2017) Akhmad Dasuki in his research uncovering the secrets of philosophical interpretation stated that philosophical interpretation as a rational and philosophical approach is a bridge with spirituality in the study of the Qur'an, although there are still many who debate this.(Anugrah Pangestu, Syahla Ghaziyah, 2025)

History shows that philosophical interpretation emerged at the beginning of the Golden Age and Islamic interpretation emerged at the end of the Golden Age, overlapping each other. Therefore, there are limitations and orientations for each interpretation that can minimize confusion. The emergence of philosophical interpretation occurred due to the interaction of the Islamic world with Greek philosophy during the Abbasid era by translating the books of Aristotle and Plato. With the development of the times, the ulama began to interpret the Al-Quran by including elements of philosophy.(Syam et al., 2023) Several thinkers of philosophical interpretation, including al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Ikhwan al-Safa, included elements of philosophy in explaining a verse or rejected philosophy if it conflicted with the Al-Quran.(Syafieh, 2017) Meanwhile, the emergence of Ishari tafsir grew from the spiritual and spiritual experience of Sufis such as Sahl. al-Tustari, al-Ghazali and Ibn 'Arabi who tried to reveal the inner meanings of each verse of the Koran through self-purification activities.(Anugrah Pangestu, Syahla Ghaziyah, 2025).

Syafieh examines the development of philosophical interpretation in the realm of Islamic thought, starting from the definition, history of its emergence, characteristics, figures of philosophical interpretation, and hermeneutics of the Qur'an in the style of modern philosophical interpretation. Abdurrahman conducted research on the methodological approach of philosophical interpretation and Sufi interpretation. Anugrah, through his research, explains the history, methodology, and figures and their works of Sufi interpretation classified by time, namely figures from the classical, medieval, and modern centuries, as well as the influence of Sufi interpretation in Islamic studies. However, previous research has not covered the background of philosophical interpretation at the beginning of the Islamic golden age, nor the background of the emergence of Islamic interpretation at the end of the Islamic golden age.

Based on the above problems, further research is needed regarding the history, limitations, orientation of philosophical and Islamic interpretations as well as the background of the emergence of the style of philosophical and Islamic interpretations. as one form of Islamic thought so that there is no confusion in the interpretation of the Qur'an, research is also needed. The hypothesis of this research, the style of philosophical interpretation arises when the interpretation of the bil ma'tsur is no longer used in its entirety. Then the interpretation of the bil ra'yi is put forward and uses rationality of thought supported by Greek philosophy, then when the rational basis is at the stage of going to God (the highest level) the results of the journey produce an Islamic interpretation that recognizes the meanings of the verses of the Qur'an both outwardly and inwardly.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

• Definition, History of Emergence, and Limitations of Philosophical Interpretation

a. *Understanding Philosophical Interpretation*

Philosophical interpretation comes from two words: interpretation and falsafi. Linguistically, interpretation is the masdar form of the word fasara, which means to reveal, explain, clarify, and detail. Terminologically, interpretation is an explanation of God's words according to human capabilities (Ahmad, 2022). Another opinion states that interpretation is the science that discusses the Al-Quranul Karim in terms of its meaning to what Allah wants, just what is possible. Tafsir is studying, understanding, explaining the Al-Quran both in terms of the depth of meaning, content and purpose desired by Allah SWT to the maximum extent of human ability(Ajahari, 2018).

From the definition above, we can see in general that interpretation is an effort made by humans to understand the Koran according to their abilities.

The word philosophy has several meanings, depending on the schools of thought of philosophers. Etymologically, philosophy comes from Greek, with Latin philosophia, Philos (love) and philia (friendship, attraction to) and Sophos (wisdom, knowledge, skill, practical experience, intelligence) (Lorens, 1996). This is in accordance with the customary Arabic vocabulary structure, which uses the following patterns: fa'lala, fa'lalah, and fi'al. Therefore, the noun form of the word falsafa should be falsafah or filosofi. Terminologically, philosophy means the science that investigates and thinks about everything deeply, seriously, and radically so as to reach the essence of all situations (Aulia, 2016). Several Greek figures expressed their opinions about the meaning of philosophy. Aristotle stated that philosophy is a science that encompasses all truths regarding the sciences of logic, metaphysics, economics, aesthetics, rhetoric, and politics. Meanwhile, according to Rene Descartes, philosophy is defined as a collection of sciences where God, nature, and humans become objects of study (Waris, 2014). A Muslim scholar, Al-Farabi, defines philosophy as the science of the natural world that exists and what its true nature is (Ahmad, 2022). From the above definition, it can be concluded that philosophy is a science used to understand everything through critical and logical thinking.

In general, philosophical interpretation is an interpretation that tends to interpret certain verses in the Koran which are considered to require a rational and philosophical approach (Dasuki et al., 2025), the discussion is dominated by philosophical theories. (Husnul Hakim & Ahmad, 2022) In this case, the verses of the Qur'an function more as justifications for the thoughts written, not as thoughts that justify the verses, such as the interpretations carried out by al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and the Ikhwan al-Shafa (Al-Zahabi, 2003). Philosophical interpretation according to Adz-Dzahabi is an attempt to interpret the verses of the Qur'an in line with philosophical thought or interpretation of the Qur'an using philosophical theory. According to Quraish Shihab, philosophical interpretation is an attempt to interpret the Quran in relation to philosophical issues (Quraish Shihab; dkk, 1999). Philosophical interpretation is an interpretation dominated by philosophical theories as its main paradigm. This means that the verses of the Quran can be interpreted with a philosophical approach because these verses are related to philosophical issues or explained through philosophical theories (Lusianasta Mandini Hermanto Putri et al., 2025).

According to Muhammad Ali ar-Ridha'i al-Isfahani, philosophical interpretation is a method of interpreting the Quran that refers to three sources with different philosophical approaches. First, the Peripathic philosophy (al-Masya'iyah), which is rooted in Aristotelian thought, prioritizes a rational, logical, and deductive approach to understanding the Quranic texts. Second, the Illumination philosophy (al-Isyraqiyah), a school of thought that developed with the influence of Neo-Platonism, which prioritizes the concept of illumination as a way to understand reality. In this philosophy, knowledge and truth are considered as forms of illumination from divine light that illuminate the human heart and mind. Third, the Theosophical philosophy (al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah) is a combination of the previous approach with approaches to aspects of metaphysics, cosmology, anthropology, and psychology. The main focus in this philosophical interpretation is to interpret the verses of the Quran related to the nature of God's existence, His attributes, His form, as well as fundamental concepts such as monotheism, reason, miracles, and cause and effect (Dasuki et al., 2025). Based on the above understanding, it can be concluded that philosophical interpretation is an attempt to interpret the Quran carried out by humans using a philosophical theoretical approach so that the interpretation is rational and based on logical thinking.

b. History of the Emergence of Philosophical Interpretation

Philosophical interpretation can be said to have emerged since the time of the companions, namely Abdullah bin Mas'ud who lived in Iraq, where the Iraqi people had extraordinary thought processes. (Syafieh, 2017). The emergence of philosophical interpretation was during the Abbasid Caliphate, initially making Al-Hasyimiyah the Capital of the State, then Al-Manshur moved it to Baghdad in 762 AD, so the center of government of the Abbasid Dynasty was in the middle of Persia and received a very strong influence of Persian culture. (Aminullah, n.d.)

This influence is clearly seen with the very rapid development of science and the spread of Islamic culture in every region of Islamic rule so that at that time there was a translation of foreign books into Arabic. One of the books translated was a book of philosophy from Greek, Persian and Indian philosophers. Many Greek philosophies were translated such as Plato (427-347 BC), Aristotle (384-322 BC), Plotinus, and the Neoplatonists. One of the figures in translation, namely Hunain Ibn Ishak and his family, besides translating about medicine, also about philosophy (Lusianasta Mandini Hermanto Putri et al., 2025). The process of translation and scientific research was carried out from the Caliphate of Al-Manshur (775 AD) to its peak during the Caliphate of Al-Ma'mun (883 AD) (Ahmad Dasuki, Muhamad Rulyawan Sihab, 2025) in the center of Baghdad through the Bayt Hikmah institution

(Priyoyudanto, n.d.). These books were then distributed among Muslims, sparking their interest in reading them, as they had not previously encountered similar literature. These translations gave rise to Islamic figures specializing in philosophy, known as philosophers. Muslim philosophers include Al-Farabi (870-950 CE), Ibn Sina (980-1037 CE), and Ibn Masykawaih (932-1030 CE). (Syam et al., 2023)

According to Abdurahman al-Kalami, philosophical interpretation is also called al-Kalami philosophy. He emphasized that the development of natural philosophy (al-falsafat ath-thabiyyah) began with the translation of Greek philosophical works into Arabic. At that time, there was a fusion between discussions of the empirical world (al-kain al-mahsus) in the natural sciences with the theological thinking of the al-Jahmiyan and Mu'tazilah groups. The presence of this style of philosophical interpretation became a gateway for the advancement of Islamic thought. The emergence of philosophical interpretation with a rational-philosophical character coincided with the Dark Ages in the Western world, namely between the 5th and 15th centuries AD, starting after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in 476 AD until the beginning of the Renaissance in the 15th century (Lusianasta Mandini Hermanto Putri et al., 2025). With the stagnation of science in the Western world, the Islamic world actually experienced a period of intellectual enlightenment. The role of Muslim philosophers at this time was very large so that they could develop scientific knowledge.

According to Hasan Hanafi, the development of philosophy in the Islamic world was not only translating Greek and Persian texts into Arabic, but there were three phases of development of philosophy in the Islamic world, namely: First, the translation phase and including the preservation of scientific sources of the conquered Islamic lands; second, philosophy was completely transformed into domestic traditions after translation; third, the compilation of works (Husnul Hakim & Ahmad, 2022). The development of philosophy in the Islamic world was supported by two things, namely "imported products" and tradition. Imported products were products from Greece that were transformed into Islamic traditions. Traditions were in the form of theology which developed after philosophical criticism was launched (Hanaf, 2015).

Muslim philosophical thought gave rise to schools of thought, such as the Mu'tazilah. The Mu'tazilah became the official school of thought of the Abbasid dynasty, influencing views on the attributes of God. Despite much debate, philosophical interpretations persist, and are necessary for certain verses that require a rational and philosophical approach. (Ahmad Dasuki, Muhamad Rulyawan Sihab, 2025)

The interpretation methods at that time were interpretation by bil ma'tsur and bil rayi. The interpretation by bil rayi was influenced by philosophical and scientific thought. However, along with the development of philosophy in the Islamic world, there was a conflict that arose due to the view that the interpretation of the Qur'an was dominated by the color of Greek philosophy. In responding to the intervention of Greek philosophy in the process of interpreting the Qur'an, Muslims were divided into two groups, namely: First, the group that rejected philosophy, assuming that philosophy contradicted Islamic teachings. This group radically rejected philosophy and tried to distance philosophy from its people on the basis of maintaining the need for Islamic faith, both among theologians and jurists by developing distinctive theology to see the deviations of philosophers and Sufis (Yamani & Dkk, 2021). Imam Al-Ghozali as one of its figures referred to philosophers as a group of heretics. In his work, Al-Ghazali did not oppose it completely or reject the philosophical approach, but rather Al-Ghazali disliked and criticized the metaphysical speculation by Ibn Sina (Faiziya, 2021). Second, the group that accepts philosophy: combines philosophy and religion, even though there are ideas that contradict the texts of sharia (Anugrah Pangestu, Syahla Ghaziyah, 2025). This group argues that the numerous verses in the Quran concerning afala ta'qilun, afala tatadabbarun, afala tatafakkarun, and so on, indicate that philosophy and Islam do not contradict reason. This group seeks to find a compromise between philosophy and religion and attempts to uncover all of these contradictions. However, this revelation has not found a common ground, resulting in a half-hearted interpretation of the Quranic verses because their interpretation of the Quran is based solely on philosophical theory, which contains many things that cannot be applied and are forced upon the Quranic texts.

c. *Limits of Philosophical Interpretation*

The interpretation of the Quran has many forms, depending on the expertise of the interpreters. This results in different interpretations with different characteristics. Because of the different interpretations, boundaries are necessary to ensure that the discussion of each interpretation does not deviate from the scope and scope of that interpretation. One such interpretation that has limitations is philosophical interpretation. Muhammad Ali ar-Ridha'i al-Isfahani stated that the main focus of philosophical interpretation includes verses discussing the existence of God, the essence of being, His attributes, the levels of monotheism, the problem of reason (al-'Aql), the soul (al-Nafs), miracles (al-'Ijaaz), and the problem of cause and effect (*al-'Aliyah*) (Putra, 2017). The scope of philosophical interpretation studies is not far from the object of philosophical study itself. This is due to the existence of scope or

limitations in the discussion of philosophical interpretation, including: discussing the doctrine of montheism or the oneness of Allah SWT; discussing the issue of prophecy; discussing the issue of reconciliation between philosophy and religion (Syam et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, according to another opinion states that the limits of philosophical interpretation are interpretations based on logic or liberal and radical philosophical thought. Philosophical interpretations make philosophy a crucial variable. The meaning of philosophy here is not merely a discussion of methods of thought, but rather, philosophy has become a discipline that discusses the relationship between humans and God and the existence of God. Because the scope or limits of philosophical interpretation is to comprehensively reveal the Qur'an's views on beliefs and theological systems. The process is also not carried out by siding with a particular school or school of thought, but rather an effort to seriously explore the Qur'an's views on theological issues (Syam et al., 2023).

2.2 Differences in the Orientation of Philosophical Interpretation and Islamic Interpretation

In the study of tafsir, commentators have developed different approaches according to their respective goals and methods of interpretation. Two prominent approaches are philosophical tafsir and Islamic tafsir. Philosophical tafsir, in interpreting the Quran, utilizes texts, reason, and logic to find meanings consistent with human reasoning based on knowledge. The meaning of the Quran found is rational. Verses are understood logically and captured by humans. Therefore, the meaning obtained can be proven philosophically. Each verse has a specific meaning without having to be analyzed through an Islamic approach. This suggests that religious teachings use a logical approach to encourage humans to think about the greatness of the Creator, thereby achieving intellectual and faith-based beliefs. (Faiziya, 2021)

In other words, in tafsir ishari, interpreting the verses of the Qur'an using texts and signs obtained from spiritual understanding, which is based on the sincerity of a Sufi. Sufis interpret the verses of the Qur'an found through the hidden meanings of the verses of the Qur'an that can only be grasped by a clean heart. The verses of the Qur'an contained have other meanings behind the apparent meaning. Tafsir ishari still accepts the apparent meaning, after understanding it, it traces the inner meaning to know the wisdom behind the apparent meaning. (Abdurrahman, 2015)

2.3 Causes of the Emergence of Philosophical Interpretation at the Beginning of the Islamic Golden Age

At the beginning of the Islamic Golden Age, scholars focused not only on governance but also on advancing scholarship. This rapid development was marked by the influx of non-Islamic sciences into Islam and the influence of Islamic scholars. The emerging ideas not only contained religious elements but also combined religious and rational thought. Among the ideas introduced at that time was philosophical thought, which influenced the study of the Quran. Factors behind the emergence of philosophical interpretation at the beginning of the Islamic Golden Age include:

a. *Economic Stability*

The Abbasid Empire was located in the fertile Mesopotamian region, a major factor in its abundant agricultural output. Agricultural products not only met domestic needs but also became export goods. Industrial types such as textiles, paper, and metals experienced rapid development. Their high quality made industrial products highly sought after and exported abroad. Traders became the driving force of the vast regional economy, increasing the circulation and exchange of commodities, both by land and sea. The leaders recognized the importance of this economy, as the progress or decline of a country was determined by its economy. (Nurtanti & Wulandari, 2023) The stronger the dynasty's economy, the Abbasid gold dinar currency became the standard for international trade. (Zaitun, 2024).

Smooth trade was supported by stable security and order, creating a conducive economy. Caliph Harun ar-Rasyid enforced the payment of taxes derived from the economic growth of those who could afford them. On Harun ar-Rasyid's commission, Abu Yusuf wrote the book *al-Kharaj* on taxation. Economic progress spurred the development of culture, art, and science. (Fahmi et al., 2025).

b. *Political Stability of Government and Military*

At the height of Islam, the Abbasid dynasty succeeded in establishing an empire, replacing the Umayyad dynasty. This success was achieved through a transparent and open government system, which also positioned intellectuals and scholars in state development and ensured a more equitable distribution of power. The Abbasids wielded strong political and military power. For example, during the Caliphate of Abu Ja'far al-Mansur,

they appointed a vizier to oversee the department, (Fahmi et al., 2025) formed a professional special force made up of very tough slaves and required all levels of society to serve in the military.. PThe development of Islamic civilization became the focus of the Abbasid dynasty and was supported by defense and security. This was motivated by the desire of many to separate themselves from the power of the Abbasid dynasty (Nurtanti & Wulandari, 2023).

c. Translation of Foreign Books

In terms of science, the steps taken were to translate foreign works. During the reign of Harun Ar-Rasyid, a translation institute was established, led by Yuhana bin Musawyh. Yuhana, along with Hunain bin Ishak, translated Greek works into Arabic. During the Caliphate of al-Ma'mun, the Bayt al-Hikmah library was not only a place to store books, but also a university that produced Muslim intellectuals and became a gathering place for scientists to translate important works. In terms of translation, al-Ma'mun supported and paid high salaries for translations with an amount equivalent to its weight in gold. The caliphs at that time were known for their love of books, thus bringing policies towards increasing the development of science. Sciences were studied during the Abbasid period, both in religious and social sciences, and scientific development was very rapid.(Hasibuan, 2017)

The Abbasid dynasty prioritized the development of Islamic civilization and the advancement of science. This was marked by progress in various fields influenced by the scientific heritage of previous civilizations.(Zaitun, 2024) The branches of science that experienced progress were the natural sciences and the rational sciences. One of the scientific sciences that developed at that time was philosophy, which influenced the interpretation of the Quran. (Fahmi et al., 2025) Philosophical science from Greece, Persia, India and so on entered the Islamic world and influenced the way scholars understood the Qur'an using the lens of philosophical science. Thus, philosophical interpretation emerged with a combination of rationality and understanding of the Qur'an.

2.4 Causes of the Emergence of Tafsir Ishari at the End of the Golden Age of Islam

Along with changes in the habits of Muslims in terms of life, namely the Islamic rulers at that time were oriented towards worldly life without prioritizing spirituality and felt themselves to be representatives of God who must be obeyed. In addition to leaders who were wavering in their Islamic personality, attacks from outside and from within influenced the pre-existing systems, resulting in decline.(Zulfikar, 2019) This had an impact on people's thinking, the development of the interpretation of the Qur'an also experienced changes according to human needs. The need for a rational approach to the Qur'an had reached a point of human saturation and shifted to increasing attention to understanding religion in the inner aspect. A rational approach was unable to answer deep spiritual needs. This need became the basic principle for humans to seek other things they needed, namely through an inner approach in understanding the Qur'an. Behind the emergence of the ishari interpretation, Muslims at that time used a philosophical approach to interpreting the Qur'an based on the rationality of the mind. Over time, Muslims who experienced cultural development needed interpretations from something other than a rational approach. This led to the development of Islamic interpretations to address the problems facing humanity at that time. These issues included the emergence of heretical sects and fanaticism.(Fathiha, 2021) So that the scholars see that using the lens of interpreting the Quran rationally is not enough to maintain the success of the people. An inner approach develops that interprets the Quran with the heart and emphasizes that humans are personally close to God Almighty.

3. CONCLUSION

This study has found that philosophical interpretation is an interpretation that uses a philosophical approach and is oriented towards the use of reason and rationality. Philosophical interpretation attempts to understand the verses of Allah using a logical approach and philosophical principles. Philosophical interpretation has limitations in its study, namely that it tends to emphasize the rational aspect so that the inner meaning is less considered. From the 8th to 12th centuries AD, philosophical interpretation experienced rapid development with the translation of Greek philosophical books during the Abbasid Caliphate. The translation of these books was inseparable from economic, social, and political aspects, so that the development of science was rapid. On the other hand, there is Islamic interpretation that experienced rapid development at the end of the Islamic golden age from the 12th to 14th centuries AD. The development of Islamic interpretation can build awareness of the importance of spiritual awareness amid the decline of Islamic civilization.

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