A Silent uṣūl Revolution?

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A Silent *uṣūl* Revolution?

Al-Qāsimī, *iǧtihād,* and the Fundamentals of *tafsīr**

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In 1896, a group of Islamic scholars from Damascus that formed a study circle with the reform-oriented scholar Ǧamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1914) was called to the local police station for a long interrogation by the Ottoman authorities. Another group of scholars had accused them of being involved in the practice of *iǧtihād* on account of their regular gatherings in which they discussed a compilation of legal *ḥadīṯ* material together.[1] This led

1.   The text they discussed was ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Šaʿrānī's *Kašf al-ġumma ʿan ǧamīʿ al-umma.* This work appeared in print for the first time in Cairo in 1864. This is a relatively early date for a religious text to be printed, which may indicate its popularity in the scholarly circles of Cairo in that age, liberated as they were from Ottoman restrictions on scholarly culture that were still very tangible in Damascus. Leila Hudson has shown that prints of the work were present in private libraries of Damascus in the time of al-Qāsimī as well, which makes it likely that al-Qāsimī and his group owned a copy as well. Its availability in print probably made it easier for the group to use it for their discussions than it would have been if they had to rely merely on available manuscript copies in Damascus. I have not (yet) been able to locate and

to a scandal in the religious circles of Damascus that became known as the '*Muǧtahid*s' Incident' (*ḥādiṯat al-muǧtahidīn*). It laid bare a bitter conflict between a conservative higher class of religious scholars oriented towards the Ottoman establishment and an upcoming younger middle class of scholars who were seeking religious, societal and political renewal.[2] In the interrogation, the group was reproached, among other things, for independently discussing matters of interpretation of the Qurʾān (*tafsīr*) instead of the standard *fiqh*-manuals that they were expected to limit themselves to (*mā lakum bi-l-tafsīr, wa-ayna antum min kutub al-fiqh al-ḫaṭīr*).[3]

The '*Muǧtahid*s' Incident' offers many insights for the intellectual and social history of Islamic reform movements, but here I wish to focus on two main points that I take as premises in this article. The first is that characterizing post-classical Islamic intellectual history as stifled, backwards and dominated by *taqlīd* is more than just a common trope among Islamic reformists and Orientalists. As Ahmed El Shamsy points out, the recent academic trend of skepticism towards the decline narrative of the post-classical period should not lead to discarding this decline narrative as "modernist slander".[4] Many reformists had genuine grievances about the intellectual climate of post-classical scholarly culture, and trying to change something about it had very tangible social consequences for them; reading a book for free scholarly discussion with a group of friends could get one arrested. For these reformist scholars, the *iǧtihād-taqlīd* dichotomy was very real, not just an exaggerated controversy that served to make themselves more relevant. Opening up this stifled intellectual climate demanded hard work from them, not only by discussing issues and texts outside of the official curriculum, but also by rediscovering the classical intellectual heritage of Islam in the city's libraries.[5]

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look into the catalogue of the al-Qāsimī family library in Damascus, which deserves to be edited and analyzed. See Hudson, "Reading al-Shaʿrānī", pp. 49–50.

2.   A detailed description of this incident can be found in the autobiography of Ǧamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī. See al-ʿAǧmī, *Imām al-Šām fī ʿaṣrihi*, pp. 63–95; Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ǧamāl al-Dīn*, pp. 48-69. David D. Commins has paid considerable attention to this incident, particularly its social ramifications, in his monograph on Syria's religious reform movements: Commins, *Islamic Reform*, pp. 50–53. See also Weismann, "Salafiyya from the Damascene Angle", pp. 211–212; *Taste of Modernity*, pp. 276–281.

3.   Al-ʿAǧmī, *Imām al-Šām fī ʿaṣrihi*, pp. 75, 79.

4.   El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, p. 61. For examples of skepticism towards the decline theory, see El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century*; Gesink, *Islamic Reform and Conservatism*.

5.   El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, pp. 177–178, 238.

The second point is that forming one's own opinions on the meanings of the text of the Qurʾān was apparently considered a threat to the authority of this *taqlīd*-minded dominant scholarly class and its powerful Ottoman patron. It was evidently considered undesirable to engage in exegesis by reading, interpreting and discussing works of *ḥadīṯ* literature independently from the regime of standard manuals, glossary commentaries and super-commentaries that largely governed scholarly discourse in that era. Academic analyses of historical Muslim discussions on the issue of *iǧtihād* and *taqlīd* are mostly confined to the legal realm.[6] As the above anecdote shows, however, these discussions often pertained to much more than just legal issues, and embodied a greater threat beyond the legal-religious power structure of the Empire. They had repercussions for the way other knowledge disciplines (*ʿulūm*) were governed and practiced as well, including the discipline of *tafsīr*, and symbolized a broader emancipation from a strict monopoly on knowledge from a scholarly class and educational practice patronized by the imperial authorities. Al-Qāsimī, the central figure in the '*Muǧtahids*' Incident', is said to have regularly complained about the *fuqahāʾ* of his age, to whom he referred as "the rigid" (*al-ǧāmidūn*) and *ḥašwiyya*.[7]

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6. See, for example, the definition of *iǧtihād* formulated in Hallaq, "Gate of Ijtihad", p. 3. Other examples of the *fiqh*-centeredness of academic scholarship on *taqlīd* and *iǧtihād* are Fekry Ibrahim, "*Taqlīd-ijtihād* Dichotomy"; Peters, "*Idjtihād* and *Taqlīd*". For a critique on the general law-centeredness of the field of Islamic studies, see Ahmed, *What is Islam*, pp. 117–129.

7. Weismann chooses to translate *ḥašwiyya* as "populists" while Commins interprets it either as "those who insert things where they don't belong", or as a derivative of "nonsense". In a letter to Maḥmūd Šukrī al-Ālūsī, al-Qāsimī defines it as "every fanatic rigid emulator or *Ǧahmī*" (*kullu muqallid mutaʿaṣṣib ǧāmid am ǧahmī*). Another letter from al-Qāsimī to Muḥammad Naṣīf suggests that it is a re-enactment of a term from Islamic heresiography, which Hallaq describes as "an ill-defined objectionable indiscriminately applied against various groups who were thought to have possessed a weak apparatus of reasoning and have heavily relied on scripture", and categorically declined *iǧtihād*. In his letter, al-Qāsimī describes how the label has ironically shifted from the historically accused to the accuser: "This was the case of the jealous in the age of *Šayḫ al-Islām* [Ibn Taymiyya], who nicknamed the followers of Aḥmad [b. Ḥanbal] with *ḥašwiyya* and anthropomorphists (*mušabbiha*). On mentioning the *ḥašwiyya*, I tell you that the age has changed its concept. Nowadays the people of Šām and Egypt conceptualize it as a nickname for the rigid (*ǧāmidīn*), the fanatics, the Ǧahmiyya and grave-worshippers (*qubūriyyīn*). Good riddance, this reversal that returned to them." See Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, pp. 296–297; Commins, *Islamic Reform*, pp. 76–77; al-ʿAǧmī, *Rasāʾil*, p. 126; Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ǧamāl al-Dīn*, p. 595; Hallaq, "Gate of Ijtihad", p. 9.

He lamented that

... if they would only use the time they spend on understanding the sayings of
those they conform to (*yuqallidūnahum*) [...] on understanding the Qurʾān and
what can be derived from it. They would completely amaze us and would save
the Muslim community of the rigidity and backwardness that it has fallen into.[8]

Al-Qāsimī's contemporary and interlocutor in Cairo, Muḥammad ʿAbduh
(d. 1905), also put a revived engagement with the meanings and objectives
of the Qurʾān at the heart of his reform project, stressing that this entailed
much more than only *fiqh*:[9]

Some people of this age may say: "There is no need for explanation and con-
templation of the Qurʾān because the preceding grand scholars have already
contemplated the Qurʾān and the Sunna and have extracted the rulings from
them. We only have to look into their books; we are satisfied with them." This
is what some of them claim! Were this claim correct, then seeking explanation
(*tafsīr*) of the Qurʾān would be useless and a waste of time. [...] The Qurʾān came
with much more than just the practical rulings that are conceptually named
fiqh. It contains refinement, calling of the spirits towards their happiness,
undoing them from the state of decay of ignorance towards the pinnacle of
knowledge, and guiding them towards the path of societal life, which none who
believes in God and the Last Day can do without. Guidance towards the most
suitable [path] to gain true understanding can only be found in the Qurʾān.

The same focus on Qurʾān interpretation can already be found a century
earlier. The Indian revivalist scholar Šāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (d. 1176/1762),
considered by many to be the main proponent of *iǧtihād* on the Indian subcon-
tinent, lamented the lack of proper *tafsīr* scholars in his age as well as their
traditional methods of instruction in *tafsīr*. According to him these methods did
not teach students to extract the meanings of the Qurʾān according to proper
fundamentals. He therefore decided to lay down the *qawāʿid* of the knowl-
edge discipline in his treatise *al-Fawz al-kabīr fī uṣūl al-tafsīr* to give students

8.   Quoted without further references in al-Istānbūlī, *Šayḫ al-Šām*, p. 58; al-Sarmīnī, *al-Qāsimī
wa-ǧuhūduhu al-ḥadīṯiyya*, p. 185.
9.   Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār*, vol. 1, p. 70. Also quoted in al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*, vol. 1, p. 197.

proper guidance when engaging with the Qurʾān and *tafsīr* by themselves.[10] It thus seems that calls for *iǧtihād* often went hand in hand with a revival of the scholarly focus on the meanings of the Qurʾān in a broader sense beyond only its legal verses and the knowledge discipline of *tafsīr*.

Based on these two premises, that the grievances of reformists towards the intellectual limitations of post-classical tradition and book culture were real, and that a renewed engagement with the Qurʾān had a central place in their reform project, this article has two objectives. The first is to document and discuss al-Qāsimī's efforts to reinvigorate calls for *iǧtihād* and to break with the existing textual polity of his age in Damascus by (re-)discovering, teaching, editing and publishing works on *uṣūl* of several knowledge disciplines that were largely neglected in post-classical scholarly culture. This intellectual project was, one could argue, a form of *iǧtihād* in itself. The second goal of the article is to clarify al-Qāsimī's practice of interpretation and position on *iǧtihād* by studying his early 20th-century *Tamhīd ḫaṭīr fī qawāʿid al-tafsīr*, the introduction to his Qurʾān commentary *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*. Based on a reading of this text, the article asks whether al-Qāsimī's selective appropriation of until then often marginal scholars in Islamic discourse represented a paradigm shift in *tafsīr*, and whether his approach claimed to necessitate as well as facilitate *iǧtihād* in the field.

The Role of al-Qāsimī in Rediscovering and Printing *uṣūl* Literature

If one wishes to practice *iǧtihād* in any knowledge discipline, most Islamic scholars would agree that thorough knowledge of the *uṣūl* of that discipline is required.[11] From the 18th century onwards, when calls for *iǧtihād* became stronger among revivalist movements, this indeed went hand in glove with an increasing dissemination of *uṣūl* treatises. The goal was to give aspiring scholars the tools to interpret religious sources themselves as well as emancipate them from the boundaries of a set of standard texts and glosses as practiced in the post-classical madrasa curriculum.[12] For most of the 18th and

10. Al-Dihlawī, *al-Fawz al-kabīr*, pp. 15–16.
11. See Hallaq, "Gate of Ijtihad", pp. 4–7.
12. On this growth of *uṣūl* literature in the 18th century, Ahmad Dallal has remarked that "*uṣūl* were not just means of the institutional dispersion of intellectual authority, or for

19th century, Damascus remained unaffected by these revivalist movements and the changes in the textual polity of the age they invigorated; the grip of the Ottoman state on the scholarly infrastructure and religious discourse was too powerful for that.[13]

The scholarly biographies of this age show that *uṣūl* treatises were not a prominent part of the standard scholarly education in Damascus; one would mainly focus on *furūʿ* through a set of standard texts and glosses.[14] In the education of al-Qāsimī, as he discussed in his autobiography for example, only one small introductory treatise on *muṣṭalaḥ al-ḥadīṯ* played a role: a gloss on *al-Bayqūniyya.* Furthermore, only one single very brief text on *uṣūl al-fiqh* is mentioned among the dozens of works he studied with his teachers: a gloss on Tāǧ al-Dīn al-Subkī's *Ǧamʿ al-ǧawāmiʿ.*[15] The same goes for ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Bīṭār (d. 1916), the most senior scholar of the Salafī trend; no specific works of *uṣūl* are mentioned in his biography.[16] The biography of the most prominent scholar of Damascus during al-Qāsimī's education, the official Ottoman Mufti Maḥmūd b. Ḥamza al-Ḥusaynī (d. 1305/1887), does not specifically mention any *uṣūl* treatise as part of his curriculum either, neither as a student nor as a teacher.[17] This Maḥmūd b. Ḥamza was invoked by one of the interrogators during the 'Muǧtahids' Incident': "If Mufti al-Ḥamzāwī was still alive, nobody would have the courage to call for *iǧtihād.*"[18]

The famous *fermān* of 973/1565 prescribing the highest level of the Ottoman madrasa curriculum also does not prioritize *uṣūl* literature; the main focus is on a set of works of *tafsīr, ḥadīṯ, furūʿ al-fiqh,* dictionaries, and a score of glosses on these works. Not a single text on the *uṣūl* of *tafsīr* or *ḥadīṯ* is included.[19]

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prescribing rules and procedures for disciplining fields of knowledge, but were also subversive disciplines through which normative disciplinary authority was questioned and radically undermined". See Dallal, *Islam without Europe*, p. 280.

13.   Perhaps only the Naqshbandiyya-Ḫālidiyya could qualify for that in some phases of its existence. See Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, chaps 1–4.

14.   See al-Ḥāfiẓ & Abāẓa, *Taʾrīḫ ʿulamāʾ Dimašq*; al-Bīṭār, *Ḥilyat al-bašar.*

15.   Al-ʿAǧmī, *Imām al-Šām fī ʿaṣrihi*, pp. 48–49. *Al-Bayqūniyya* is an introductory poem of 34 verses meant for memorization that mentions the basic terminology for classification of *ḥadīṯ* reliability. *Ǧamʿ al-ǧawāmiʿ* is an introductory text focusing briefly on the four main sources of Islamic jurisprudence, Qurʾān, Sunna, *iǧmāʿ*, and *qiyās*. *Šayḫ al-Azhar* Ḥasan al-ʿAṭṭār (d. 1250/1835) named this text as an example of stifled intellectual discussions in the 19th century. See al-Subkī, *Ǧamʿ al-ǧawāmiʿ*; El Shamsy, "Islamic Book Culture", p. 62.

16.   See al-Ḥāfiẓ & Abāẓa, *Taʾrīḫ ʿulamāʾ Dimašq*, vol. 1, pp. 363–366.

17.   See al-Ḥāfiẓ & Abāẓa, *Taʾrīḫ ʿulamāʾ Dimašq*, vol. 1, pp. 79–85.

18.   Al-ʿAǧmī, *Imām al-Šām fī ʿaṣrihi*, p. 86.

19.   See Ahmed & Filipovic, "Sultan's Syllabus", pp. 196–206.

Only at the very end of the *fermān* are two core texts on *uṣūl al-fiqh* specific for the Ḥanafī school included with some glosses. This is a rather thorough program for advanced students, but is still overshadowed by Ḥanafī *furūʿ* works in the curriculum.[20] In descriptions of later Ottoman curricula, *uṣūl* literature becomes more marginalized and taught only in the very last stage of the curriculum.[21] These texts also do not resurface in scholarly biographies in Damascus in the age of al-Qāsimī, neither in Ḥanafī nor in Šāfiʿī circles.[22] Knowledge of the reception of the textual tradition itself was what mattered; the argumentative methods through which this reception was established were secondary and then still only to justify existing rulings, not to criticize them, or to derive new rulings. In times when the place of *iǧtihād* was not so prominent, a basic text like al-Ǧuwaynī's (d. 478/1085) *al-Waraqāt* still remained a popular text among scholars, with several glosses written until the 19th century.[23] While this text was too brief to derive new rulings or for any type of *iǧtihād*, it still had a justificatory function for existing rulings.[24] This is indeed the toolbox of a *muqallid*.

This would appear to be an important correction to the argument made by Wael Hallaq that the gate of *iǧtihād* was never really closed based on the fact that juristic works spoke in detail on the prerequisites for *iǧtihād*, which were not so far-fetched that it would mean that *iǧtihād* could no longer be practiced.[25] This may indeed be the case, but these works themselves were no longer widely spread, known or discussed in the post-classical Islamic tradition; they were not part of the educational curriculum, not even on the highest level, and library culture had become so meagre that such treatises

20. *Al-Tanqīḥ fī al-uṣūl* by al-Maḥbūbī al-Buḫārī (d. 747/1346) and *al-Uṣūl* by ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Pazdawī (d. 482/1089). See Ahmed & Filipovic, "Sultan's Syllabus", pp. 205–206. Robinson also mentions *Manār al-anwār* by ʿAbd Allāh al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310), *al-Muġnī* by Ǧalāl al-Dīn al-Ḫabbāzī (d. 691/1272) and *Muntahā al-suʾāl* by Ibn Ḥāǧib in his list of the Ottoman curriculum in the second half of the 16th century. See Robinson, "Ottomans-Safavids-Mughals", pp. 175–176.
21. See İzgi, *Osmanlı medreselerinde ilim*, pp. 156–174.
22. See al-Ḥāfiẓ & Abāẓa, *Taʾrīḫ ʿulamāʾ Dimašq*.
23. For the impact of al-Ǧuwaynī's *Waraqāt* in later centuries, see the list of glosses mentioned in Vishanoff, *Critical Introduction*, p. 5. See also a letter from al-Qāsimī to Muḥammad Naṣīf on his collection of treatises on *uṣūl al-fiqh*, in which he points out that al-Ǧuwaynī's *Waraqāt* may be a famous text already, but still needs to be accompanied by complementary works due to its brevity. See Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ǧamāl al-Dīn*, pp. 596–597.
24. See Hallaq, "*Uṣūl al-Fiqh* Revisited", pp. 152–153.
25. See Hallaq, "Gate of Ijtihad", pp. 4–7.

were not self-evidently part of the intellectual horizon of local scholars.[26]
The only text on *uṣūl al-fiqh* mentioned as part of al-Qāsimī's education for
example, al-Subkī's *Ǧamʿ al-ǧawāmiʿ*, does have a section on *iǧtihād*, but this is
so brief that it would not give enough tools for a scholar to actually engage
in it.[27] When dealing with the *iǧtihād-taqlīd* dichotomy in *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*,
al-Qāsimī mainly draws upon the works by then marginalized authors such
as Ibn al-Qayyim and Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.[28] These were exactly the type of
authors he tried to bring back from oblivion through his manuscript search
in the libraries of Damascus and his publication efforts.[29]

In a recent article, Hallaq proposes a new periodization of the genre of *uṣūl
al-fiqh*, identifying a little researched period of stability from 1430 to 1830 in
which it "continued to sustain the edifice of the Sharīʿa, pedagogically and
hermeneutically".[30] I agree with this based on the data presented above.
Hallaq also claims, however, that there was a decline and even a destruction
of the genre of *uṣūl al-fiqh* from 1830 onwards until the present day. This is at
odds with my findings, which are further illustrated below and instead show
a renewed creative engagement with the genre from the late 19th century
onwards.

Only at the dawn of the 20th century does this prioritization of *uṣūl* lit-
erature typical for revivalist movements seem to have reached Damascus,
with a clear hope attached that a focus on *uṣūl* would lead to a greater sense
of unity among different schools and would make an end to useless quarrels
on secondary matters.[31] In 1906, the Damascene journal *al-Muqtabas* opened a

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26.   See El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, chap. 2; *idem*, "Islamic Book Culture".

27.   See al-Subkī, *Ǧamʿ al-ǧawāmiʿ*, pp. 118–129. A letter from Muḥammad Bahǧat al-Bīṭār relates
how al-Qāsimī was still teaching this text to them just a few days before he passed away. See
al-ʿAǧmī, *Rasāʾil*, pp. 239–240.

28.   See al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*, vol. 2, pp. 372–373, vol. 3, pp. 431–432, vol. 4, pp. 363–365,
400–401.

29.   The afterword of a collection of philosophical epistles gathered by al-Qāsimī that includes
al-Rāzī mentions that "[o]ne of the primary reasons why the scholars in this day and age are
so deficient is that the works of these *imām*s have become neglected and forgotten". Quoted
in El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, p. 179.

30.   Hallaq, "*Uṣūl al-Fiqh* Revisited", pp. 152–153.

31.   See, for example, the biography of ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm al-Afġānī (d. 1908) who responded to
a question from a student why he spent so much time on teaching *uṣūl al-fiqh* and what the
use of the discipline was, that it was needed for *iǧtihād*. When the student responded with the
remark that the gates of *iǧtihād* were supposedly closed, he sharply answered: "Who closed
them then? May God improve your situation, but the student of knowledge in your country

review of the first printed edition of Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Šāfiʿī's (d. 204/820) *Kitāb al-umm* with the statement that

> the minds of the men of this *umma* of this age have come to realize that from among the grandest causes of revival (*nuhūḍ*) is [...] to work on the books written in the first centuries of Islam, to purely be of service to society, and to be to its use sincerely, without hidden motives or goals. Would the people of every school (*maḏhab*) of the people of the Sunna only return to the fundamentals (*uṣūl*) of their schools, and toss the books of the later generations with all their differences of opinion, then the domain of differences would become much narrower, and wranglers would no longer find a way to say what they say.[32]

In Damascus this was mainly through the efforts of al-Qāsimī. He dedicated much of his time to authoring, collecting, teaching, printing and disseminating works of *uṣūl* of different kinds, stating that "the best way to spread the Salafī school is printing its books. One book [...] is better than a thousand preachers or callers to the religion (*dāʿī*), because the influence of the book remains, and both those who agree and who disagree take it".[33] In their letters, scholars in al-Qāsimī's international network also requested him to undertake this kind of work and to send them titles of *uṣūl*-works present in Damascus.[34] In 1906, he published a compilation of treatises on *uṣūl al-fiqh* according to prominent authorities of all four schools of law, with his own notes and comments added to them.[35] He eagerly sent this printed booklet to scholars he had befriended in other cities and countries, who, as appears

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already claims *iǧtihād* while he has not even read *Nūr al-īḍāḥ* [the most basic instruction text in the Ḥanafī school] yet" (al-Ḥāfiẓ & Abāẓa, *Taʾrīḫ ʿulamāʾ Dimašq*, vol. 1, p. 274).

32. [Author unknown], "Kitāb al-umm", p. 153.

33. Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ǧamāl al-Dīn*, p. 588. Abāẓa and al-Sarmīnī point out that we probably do not know about many treatises edited and published by al-Qāsimī because there was not yet a strong habit of mentioning the name of the editor of a work in his age. See Abāẓa, *al-Qāsimī*, p. 249; al-Sarmīnī, *al-Qāsimī wa-ǧuhūduhu al-ḥadīṯiyya*, pp. 115–116.

34. See Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ǧamāl al-Dīn*, p. 574.

35. Al-Qāsimī had the original publication from 1906 printed and distributed without his own name on it for reasons of safety. See Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ǧamāl al-Dīn*, p. 597; Commins, *Islamic Reform*, p. 112; Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, p. 281. The treatises in question are *Muḫtaṣar al-manār* by Zayn al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī al-Ḥanafī (d. 808/1405), the earlier mentioned *Waraqāt* by the Šāfiʿī scholar al-Ǧuwaynī, *Muḫtaṣar tanqīḥ al-fuṣūl* by the Mālikī scholar Šihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (d. 684/1285), and *Qawāʿid al-uṣūl* by the Ḥanbalī scholar Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Baġdādī (d. 739/1338). See al-Qāsimī, *Maǧmūʿ mutūn uṣūliyya*; idem, *Mutūn uṣūliyya muhimma*.

from his letter exchanges, enthusiastically embraced it and considered it an indispensable contribution for the purpose of *iǧtihād* and reform.[36] He even offered his acquaintance Muḥammad Naṣīf (d. 1971), a Salafī scholar and publisher from Jeddah, to intensively study these texts with him should he visit him in Damascus.[37]

A good example of this emancipatory force of knowledge of *uṣūl* is the response of al-Qāsimī's friend Muṣṭafā al-Ġalāyīnī (d. 1944), a journalist, scholar of the Arabic language and Islamic activist in Beirut. In a letter from 1907, he thanked al-Qāsimī for sending him a copy of his published collection of *uṣūl* treatises:[38]

> The knowledge discipline of *uṣūl* is precious. Those occupied with it are too few to count. This is a severe mistake in my opinion, because—aside from belonging to the Islamic knowledge disciplines through which many religious problems are known—it is a knowledge discipline that is mind-expanding, enlightens the intellect, and considers mankind too high to engage in only pure emulation (*al-taqlīd al-ṣirf*). [...] I think that only a group that does not understand this knowledge discipline correctly at all would rule that emulation (*taqlīd*) is obligatory.

Al-Ġalāyīnī further complained to al-Qāsimī how a fellow reform-oriented scholar who cared deeply about reforming Islamic education still stated in a book on the religious sciences that it is useless to learn *uṣūl* in this age.[39] According to al-Ġalāyīnī, the unpopularity of *uṣūl* was due to the fact that writings in this field were overshadowed by harsh, bitter and impolite polemics, as well as stylistic and linguistic clumsiness. He urges al-Qāsimī to find or author a work on *uṣūl* that is suitable for their own age and that is very clear and easy to read for a non-specialized audience as well, with

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36.   See Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ǧamāl al-Dīn*, pp. 534–537, 539–540, 548, 550, 567, 596, 623–624.

37.   See Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ǧamāl al-Dīn*, p. 597.

38.   Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ǧamāl al-Dīn*, pp. 534–535.

39.   He alludes to Muḥammad Badr al-Dīn al-Naʿsānī al-Ḥalabī (d. 1943), whose *Kitāb al-taʿlīm wa-l-iršād* was published in 1906. He was an Azhar-trained Arabic teacher and journalist originally from Aleppo. He travelled extensively through the Arab and Islamic world, and lived in several cities. Kurd ʿAlī describes him as someone who was pro-Turkish and used to speak badly about Arabs. See Kurd ʿAlī, *Muḏakkirāt*, vol. 2, p. 587; al-Ziriklī, *Aʿlām*, vol. 7, p. 102; al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb al-taʿlīm*, pp. 31-35.

clear examples of how to apply the discussed *qawāʿid*.⁴⁰ This is exactly what al-Qāsimī did in subsequent years in a series of publications.

The same year, al-Qāsimī copied by hand a part on the *uṣūl* of the Ẓāhirī school from a copy of Ibn ʿArabī's (d. 638/1240) infamous *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* that he found in the personal library of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ğazāʾirī (d. 1300/1883).⁴¹ In this fragment, Ibn ʿArabī propagated *iğtihād* and criticized *taqlīd*. Al-Qāsimī published the fragment together with a treatise by Nağm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfī (d. 716/1259) on the principle of unattested benefits (*maṣlaḥa mursala*, pl. *maṣāliḥ mursala*) in *uṣūl al-fiqh*, a principle traditionally only recognized by the Mālikī school.⁴² This is a typical theme related to *iğtihād* and social change. Al-Qāsimī further evoked this principle of *maṣlaḥa mursala* in his discussion of why the new Ottoman constitution should be supported on religious grounds, and asked one of his friends in Cairo, the Ottoman-Arabist politician Rafīq al-ʿAẓam (d. 1925), to look in Cairo for treatises on the subject.⁴³ This task proved to be difficult, which shows how relatively unknown this principle of the Mālikī school was in the scholarly circles of his age, and how al-Qāsimī put it back on the map and into political-reformist use right away.⁴⁴

Putting the *uṣūl*-writings of these authorities in the limelight was a strategic choice, because they were all venerated figures among the conservative mainly Ḥanafī-oriented *taqlīd*-minded class of Damascus. It allowed al-Qāsimī to demonstrate to his contemporaries that their own classical authorities allowed for ample possibilities and tools for *iğtihād*, beyond mere conformism to their sayings. The inclusion of Ibn ʿArabī's non-canonical approach to

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40. See Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ğamāl al-Dīn*, pp. 534–537.

41. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ğazāʾirī owned a copy of the first ever printed version from Cairo. He sent his student Muḥammad al-Ṭanṭāwī (d. 1306/1888) to Konya in 1287/1870 with the sole purpose of correcting that printed version on the basis of the manuscript to be found there attributed to Ibn ʿArabī himself. See al-Ḥāfiẓ & Abāẓa, *Taʾrīḫ ʿulamāʾ Dimašq*, vol. 1, p. 96. That the *Futūḥāt* were available in print at such an early stage of Islamic print culture is a clear indication of the strong grip Ibn ʿArabī's thought still had on Islamic discourse in the 19th century. For his influence on post-classical book culture, see El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, chap. 2.

42. I have not been able to locate the printed version of this collection of treatises, which he does mention in his letter correspondence with al-Ālūsī. According to al-Sarmīnī and al-ʿAğmī, the collection is named *Mağmūʿ šarḥ Arbaʿ rasāʾil fī uṣūl al-tafsīr wa-uṣūl al-fiqh*, or *Šarḥ Arbaʿ rasāʾil fī al-uṣūl*, and contains beside the named treatises a treatise by Ibn Fūrak al-Aṣbahānī (d. 406/1015) and al-Suyūṭī. Al-ʿAğmī claims it was printed in 1907 in al-Maṭbaʿa al-Adabiyya in Beirut. See his *Rasāʾil*, pp. 23, 131; al-Sarmīnī, *al-Qāsimī wa-ğuhūduhu al-ḥadīṯiyya*, p. 156.

43. See Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ğamāl al-Dīn*, pp. 219–220, 532–534.

44. On the impact of al-Qāsimī's rediscovery of the treatise by al-Ṭūfī for later scholarly discourse on *maṣlaḥa*, see El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, p. 178.

fiqh caused particularly great annoyance since he was held in high esteem among the Sufi-traditionalists of Damascus. It also led to further accusations of 'Wahhabism' towards al-Qāsimī by the traditional scholars to whom he referred as the *ḥašwiyya*, who had treated him with suspicion for years for, among other things, not abiding strictly to the *maḏhab*-system.[45]

In 1908, al-Qāsimī published another core text with his own commentary, Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkašī's (d. 794/1392) *Luqṭat al-ʿağlān*, a work covering the disciplines of creed, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, philosophical reasoning (*ḥikma*), and logic.[46] The text was published in Egypt with the help of a medical student from Alexandria who visited al-Qāsimī during the summer months to study with him. Al-Qāsimī was very explicit about the intellectual empowerment he aspired to with this publication, writing to Maḥmūd Šukrī al-Ālūsī (d. 1924) that "[i]f people like us cannot bring about political reform, then at least intellectual reform".[47] In another letter to al-Ālūsī in 1909, al-Qāsimī mentions that he received some prints of yet another treatise on *uṣūl al-fiqh* he edited, *al-Lumaʿ* by the Šāfiʿī scholar Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm al-Šīrāzī (d. 476/1083), based on two manuscripts he himself found in the al-ʿUmūmiyya Library. He expresses his frustration to al-Ālūsī that he read in the biographies on al-Šīrāzī that there are many historical glosses on the work: "It is very regretful that none of them are available to us. By God, how rare beneficial writings have become in our lands over the last centuries."[48]

Al-Qāsimī also authored an influential work on the fundamentals of *ḥadīṯ* studies around this time, which would only be published posthumously.[49] This work shows the same preoccupation with the *uṣūl* of this knowledge discipline as he had shown with the *uṣūl* of jurisprudence and Qurʾān interpretation and aims to empower scholars and students to critically evaluate the reliability of *ḥadīṯ* material themselves rather than uncritically accepting

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45.   See Commins, *Islamic Reform*, pp. 112–113; Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, p. 281; Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ğamāl al-Dīn*, pp. 209–210; al-Sarmīnī, *al-Qāsimī wa-ğuhūduhu al-ḥadīṯiyya*, p. 53.

46.   See al-Zarkašī, *Luqṭat al-ʿAğlān*.

47.   Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ğamāl al-Dīn*, p. 598; al-ʿAğmī, *Rasāʾil*, pp. 78–79; El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, p. 190.

48.   Al-ʿAğmī, *Rasāʾil*, pp. 85–86. Al-Qāsimī's edition also inspired an Egyptian print of the work, edited by Badr al-Dīn al-Naʿsānī. For a review of this edition see [Author unknown], "Maṭbūʿāt wa-makhṭūṭāt: al-Lumʿa fī uṣūl al-fiqh". On al-Naʿsānī, see above.

49.   See al-Qāsimī, *Qawāʿid al-taḥdīṯ*. This work has seen many publications after the first print in Damascus in 1925 that contained laudatory introductions by reformists such as Muḥammad Bahğat al-Bīṭār, Šakīb Arslān and Rašīd Riḍā, and may be considered al-Qāsimī's most popular work to this day.

earlier positions.[50] An exchange of letters with ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Kattānī from Fes shows how annoyed they were with the deplorable state of this discipline in their age.[51]

Al-Qāsimī's occupation with *uṣūl* treatises did not end here. In 1910 he published a review in the reform-oriented journal *al-Muqtabas* of his pupil Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī (d. 1953).[52] This review is a testimony of how print indeed was a silent 'revolution' for *uṣūl* literature specifically and for the Islamic canon in general. It also shows how the local revivalist movements of the 18th century described by Ahmad Dallal indeed did not have a large impact yet on the Syrian and Egyptian scene of scholars until the rise of print.[53] The review was on *Iršād al-fuḥūl ilā taḥqīq al-ḥaqq*, a work on *uṣūl al-fiqh* by the Yemeni scholar Muḥammad al-Šawkānī (d. 1255/1834). This was only just first printed as a critical edition in Cairo.[54] Al-Qāsimī mentions how al-Šawkānī's influence until now was mostly confined to Yemen only, comparing it to a drop in the ocean, and how it is one of the blessings of this age that his work is now first published and thus spread more widely. He praises al-Šawkānī for his independence of mind, his strength in his research, and his clear vision in extracting legal rulings from texts (*istinbāṭ*) as a muǧtahid. This work specifically has extra value according to al-Qāsimī because it is more extensive on issues of consensus (*ijmāʿ*), *iǧtihād* and *taqlīd* than any other work known to him. He closes the review by once again stressing the extreme importance of knowledge of *uṣūl*:[55]

> Concerning the position of the knowledge discipline of *uṣūl*, it is too elevated to know. It is enough that – as the author says – it is the pillar of the pavilion of *iǧtihād*, as well as the foundation upon which the pillars of its building rest, and that it is the knowledge discipline in which the distinguished seek shelter,

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50. The same goes for his close companion Ṭāhir al-Ǧazāʾirī, who also wrote a work on the fundamentals of *ḥadīṯ* narration, which was similarly well received in both Salafī and neo-traditionalist camps in the 20th century. These works have thus far only very lightly been touched upon by Jonathan A.C. Brown, and deserve a separate study similar to this, to see to what extent they meant a paradigm shift for the study of *ḥadīṯ* in their own era. See al-Qāsimī, *Qawāʿid al-taḥdīṯ*; al-Ǧazāʾirī, *Tawǧīh al-naẓar*; Brown, *Canonization*, pp. 310–311.
51. See Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ǧamāl al-Dīn*, p. 568.
52. See al-Qāsimī, "Iršād al-fuḥūl".
53. See Dallal, *Islam without Europe*.
54. See al-Šawkānī, *Iršād al-fuḥūl*.
55. Al-Qāsimī, "Iršād al-fuḥūl", pp. 543–544.

and the refuge to which one flees in deciding upon questions and editing proof texts, in most rulings.

When the Moroccan Sulṭān and scholar ʿAbd al-Ḥafīẓ (d. 1937) visited Damascus in 1913, al-Qāsimī mentioned a manuscript of a treatise by Ibn Rašīq al-Mālikī (d. 632/1235) that he had found in a local library in Damascus and had been teaching to his students for some time. The Sulṭān was very pleased and requested a copy right away, offering to finance its publication and ordering to have it published in Egypt.[56] The same year, just months before passing away, al-Qāsimī published another compilation of treatises on *uṣūl*. This compilation contained a treatise by the Ḥanbalī authority Ǧamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. ʿAbd al-Hādī al-Maqdisī (d. 909/1503), better known as Ibn al-Mubrid. While the first compilation only contained *uṣūl al-fiqh* treatises, this compilation now also contained a work specifically on *uṣūl al-tafsīr*. Al-Qāsimī collated this from fractions of Ǧalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's (d. 911/1505) *al-Nuqāya* accompanied by al-Qāsimī's own notes and commentaries, which I will discuss below.[57] Most notable in the compilation is an excerpt from the *Muḥallā* of the Ẓāhirī scholar Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī b. Ḥazm (d. 456/1064). Al-Qāsimī copied it from an eight-volume manuscript he had found in the local al-Maḥmūdiyya Library during his trip to Medina in 1910.[58] This work is now very well-known

56. See Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ǧamāl al-Dīn*, p. 624. The treatise in question is most likely (a fragment of) *Lubāb al-maḥṣūl fī ʿilm al-uṣūl*, a summary of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī's *al-Mustaṣfā fī ʿilm al-uṣūl*. This manuscript is still present under the shelf mark MS 2798 in the al-Ẓāhiriyya Library in Damascus. I have not been able to locate this perhaps first ever printed edition initiated by al-Qāsimī and Sulṭān ʿAbd al-Ḥafīẓ, and am thus not sure whether they pushed on with the project. Al-Sarmīnī does mention it among al-Qāsimī's writings on *fiqh* as an explanation (*šarḥ*) of the work but does not mention a publication history. See al-Sarmīnī, *al-Qāsimī wa-ǧuhūduhu al-ḥadīṯiyya*, p. 153. Al-Ġazālī's *Mustaṣfā* was first published only few years earlier in two volumes at the Būlāq print in Cairo, between 1904 and 1907. See al-Ġazālī, *Mustaṣfā*.

57. See al-Qāsimī, *Maǧmūʿ rasāʾil*.

58. See al-Qāsimī, *al-Madīna al-munawwara*, pp. 32, 37, 47; Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ǧamāl al-Dīn*, p. 568; Ibn Ḥazm, *Muḥallā*. The complete *Muḥallā* would ultimately be edited and published between 1928 and 1933 by al-Qāsimī's Egyptian student Aḥmad Muḥammad Šākir (d. 1958) together with the Damascene Muḥammad Munīr ʿAbduh Āġā (d. 1948), who lead the Salafī publishing house *Dār al-Ṭibāʿa al-Munīriyya* in Cairo. They were responsible for the publication of several rediscovered classics important to the growing Salafī movement. It would go too far to consider their choice for *al-Muḥallā* the direct result of the influence of al-Qāsimī, but there is an obvious link much as there is with other works later edited by al-Qāsimī's students and colleagues. On their efforts in editing and publishing see Juynboll, "Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir"; Shaham, "Egyptian Judge"; El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, pp. 36–37, 222; ʿAbduh Āġā, *Namūḏaǧ*. Something similar can be said of al-Qāsimī's student Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Ḫaṭīb, who would start a

and particularly popular in purist-Salafī circles, but at the time it was still unpublished, and hardly ever read or discussed. It was considered to be a controversial work and a source for socio-religious unrest. When, in 1913, al-Qāsimī asked a friend in Medina to copy an excerpt on wiping over socks during ablutions (*al-masḥ ʿalā al-ǧawrabayn*) from the *Muḥallā*, the work was no longer available there. The librarian explained that the former *šayḫ al-Ḥaram* had forbidden to keep the work in the library, "because the Wahhābīs transmit things from it that go against the common understanding".[59]

Al-Qāsimī himself ultimately did not introduce a fundamentally new approach to *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *tafsīr* or *ḥadīṯ* in these publications. On the contrary, he merely brought very old and forgotten concepts and texts back into the limelight. However, the impact of that endeavor was not marginal, as is most clear in the case of the politicized concept of *maṣlaḥa*, which would become a key concept for most utilitarian-reformist thinkers of the 20th century. This occurred most notably through the influence of al-Qāsimī's friend Rašīd Riḍā (d. 1935), who heavily relied on the earlier mentioned treatise of al-Ṭūfī in his legal thought in addition to al-Šāṭibī's *Muwāfaqāt*, which, as we will see later, al-Qāsimī also played a significant role in popularizing.[60] By disseminating these core texts on *uṣūl* through the emerging printing press to a larger group of literate people than would ever have been possible within the more confined paradigms of the manuscript tradition, al-Qāsimī was able to place texts and scholars that had largely gone into oblivion in post-classical Islamic book culture at the heart of the scholarly discourse within his network.

Al-Qāsimī's main interest with these publications was to explain the readers, in the words of El Shamsy, "not what to think, but how to argue".[61] His goal was empowerment of a new class of scholars, both locally as transregionally, who would be primarily trained in the emerging secular schools to engage

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Salafī publishing house in Cairo as well, and would among other works publish Ibn Taymiyya's treatise on *uṣūl al-tafsīr*, which was partly a rediscovery of al-Qāsimī. See al-ʿAǧmī, *Rasāʾil*, p. 94; Coppens, "Ottoman Tafsīr Curriculum", pp. 26–27.

59. Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ǧamāl al-Dīn*, p. 627. Ibn Ḥazm was a very new phenomenon for the circle around al-Qāsimī, and was clearly only just in the process of being rediscovered. The Damascene journal *al-Muqtabas* dedicated quite some attention to Ibn Ḥazm's legacy in 1906, among others under the rubrics "Forgotten Pages" (*ṣuḥuf mansiyya*) and "Prints and Manuscripts" (*Maṭbūʿāt wa-maḫṭūṭāt*). See [Author unknown], "Ṣudūr al-Mašāriqa"; [Author unknown], "Ṣuḥuf mansiyya"; [Author unknown], "Maṭbūʿāt wa-maḫṭūṭāt: Mudāwāt al-nufūs"; [Author unknown], "Šiʿr Ibn Ḥazm".

60. See Hallaq, *Islamic Legal Theories*, pp. 214–231; Hamzah, "From ʿIlm to Ṣiḥāfa".

61. El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, p. 198.

with the Islamic primary sources directly, and to make these sources relevant
for a larger audience than just the small clique of Islamic scholars that con-
served their position within Damascene society through their monopoly on
religious knowledge and education. This monopoly was based on what Brinkley
Messick calls "textual polity" or "textual domination".[62] This textual polity was
structured by "genealogical networks" of oral instruction by *šuyūḫ* who had
contributed to a tradition of glossary commentaries and super-commentaries
on standard text manuals. Recognition of scholarship depended on chains of
authorities (*iǧāza*). The situation in Damascus during al-Qāsimī's upbringing
in many ways indeed resembles Messick's famous description of changes in
Yemen's structures of religious authority. This authority was first constructed
around an oral culture of *iǧāza*-bound instruction based on a limited set of
manuals, and then slowly undermined through the rise of texts in print. We
will now have a look at what that meant for the discipline of *tafsīr* in early
20th-century Damascus.

Tafsīr in the Textual Polity of Damascus

The standard educational practice in *tafsīr* in Damascus in the age of
al-Qāsimī and his fellow comrades who had been involved in the '*Muǧtahids*'
Incident' was to study a series of glosses on al-Bayḍāwī's *tafsīr* under the
tutelage of senior scholars, as was the common practice in most of madra-
sa education in the Ottoman Empire and the wider Islamic world.[63] The
commentary of al-Bayḍāwī was still so paradigmatic at this time that even
a reformist scholar like al-Qāsimī's close friend Ṭāhir al-Ǧazāʾirī (d. 1920),
who had intimate knowledge of a much more diverse score of *tafsīr* works
in the libraries of Damascus and had an independent mind in matters of

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62. For what follows, see Messick, *Calligraphic State*, pp. 1, 5, 38, 118, 251–252. On the function-
ing of commentary traditions as "structural textual correspondence" and their role in world
making and (imagined) community building in Islamic history, see also van Lit, "Commentary
and Commentary Tradition".

63. For a discussion of the practice of *tafsīr* in 19th-century Ottoman Damascus, see Coppens,
"Ottoman Tafsīr Curriculum". On the central role of the *tafsīr* of al-Bayḍāwī and its glosses in
madrasa education, see Saleh, "al-Bayḍāwī". On the core *tafsīr* texts of the Ottoman madrasa
curriculum, see Naguib, "Guiding the Sound Mind"; Ahmed & Filipovic, "Sultan's Syllabus",
pp. 207–212; Simsek, "Missing Link".

exegesis, wrote his own gloss on a printed version of al-Bayḍāwī.[64] Indeed, among the scholars involved in the '*Muǧtahids' Incident*', only al-Qāsimī is particularly known for authoring his own full work of *tafsīr* covering the complete text of the Qurʾān. Given the prominence of al-Bayḍāwī's *tafsīr* in madrasa education however, it is reasonable to assume that other scholars, like al-Qāsimī, studied its glossary tradition as part of their traditional education in *tafsīr* as well.[65]

It was also unlikely that one would come across other works of *tafsīr* in Damascus beside the standard texts of the madrasa curriculum. El Shamsy points out how the stocks of private libraries "indicate that at least in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Egypt and Syria, Muslim scholars were familiar with a surprisingly narrow range of scholarly literature, most of it written within three centuries of their lifetimes", and "overwhelmingly focused on a small number of curriculum texts and extensive commentaries on them".[66] Manuscripts of now well-known works from earlier centuries were scarce in the local libraries, and Ṭāhir al-Ǧazāʾirī had just started his tremendous work of cataloguing the local collections and reorganizing them

64. See Muḥyī al-Dīn, *al-Šayḫ Ṭāhir al-Ǧazāʾirī*, p. 70; Lūqā, *al-Ḥaraka al-adabiyya fī Dimašq*, p. 290. I have not been able to trace the manuscript of this gloss.

65. In the biographical literature of the involved scholars in the incident, ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Bīṭār (d. 1916), Tawfīq al-Ayyūbī (d. 1932), Amīn al-Safarǧalānī (d. 1916), Saʿīd al-Farā (d. 1925), and Muṣṭafā al-Ḥallāq (d. 1911), I could not find concrete information on which works of *tafsīr* they studied during their traditional education. Only the autobiography of al-Qāsimī and his *iǧāzāt* contain some clear indications on the role of al-Bayḍāwī in his curriculum. Given the number of shared teachers of these scholars it is most likely that they all followed a similar curriculum. See al-Bīṭār, *Ḥilyat al-bašar*, vol. 1, p. 19; al-Ḥāfiẓ & Abāẓa, *Taʾrīḫ ʿulamāʾ Dimašq*, vol. 1, pp. 298–230, 363–366, 368–369, 448–449, 531–534; Coppens, "Ottoman Tafsīr Curriculum", pp. 20–24.

66. El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, p. 32; *idem*, "Islamic Book Culture", p. 61. The al-Ẓāhiriyya Library counted 221 works of *tafsīr* (55 in print, 166 manuscripts) around 1900, but individual volumes of every single work were probably counted, making the total of actual works less than that. It is likely that most available works were part of the Ottoman curriculum, as can still be seen in a al-Ẓāhiriyya manuscript catalogue from 1980: al-Bayḍāwī and Abū al-Suʿūd with glosses are dominant, and it indeed lists every volume separately. The catalogue from 1900 of the nearby al-Ḫālidiyya Library in Jerusalem, established with the help of Ṭāhir al-Ǧazāʾirī and visited by al-Qāsimī in 1903, further confirms that: most of the 52 *tafsīr* works catalogued are typical for Ottoman scholarly culture, and separate volumes of the same work are all catalogued separately. See al-Zayyāt, *Ḫazāʾin al-kutub fī Dimašq*, p. 17; Ḥaymī, *Fihris al-Ẓāhiriyya*, vol. 3; [Author unknown], *Barnāmiǧ al-maktaba al-Ḫālidiyya*, pp. 14–17.

into the now famous al-Ẓāhiriyya Library.[67] Printed works of *tafsīr* were also
not yet widespread; only the presses in Istanbul, Cairo and Calcutta had
started printing works of *tafsīr* in the course of the 19th century, limiting
themselves to the standard madrasa works of al-Bayḍāwī, al-Zamaḫšarī and
Abū al-Suʿūd, as well as larger commentaries popular in Ottoman scholarly
circles, like al-Rāzī's *Mafātīḥ al-ġayb* and al-Burṣawī's *Rūḥ al-bayān*.[68] In one
of his letters al-Qāsimī complained that printed works published in India did
not reach Damascus because of a lack of trade. He was very curious to see the
Indian print of the *tafsīr* of al-Baġawī (d. 516/1122), for example, because of
the praise this work received from Ibn Taymiyya as being closest to the way of
the *salaf*.[69] The now standard work of Ibn Kaṯīr—to which al-Qāsimī frequently
refers in *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*—would not be published independently in Egypt
until later, first in 1924 by al-Qāsimī's friend Rašīd Riḍā and then re-edited in
the 1950s by al-Qāsimī's student Aḥmad Muḥammad Šākir.[70] Al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*
was for a long time even considered completely lost in manuscript form and
would only be printed for the first time in 1903–1904.[71] Šihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī's
Rūḥ al-maʿānī was printed in Cairo from 1884 to 1893 through the efforts of
his son Nuʿmān.[72] Although he does not mention it once in his own *tafsīr*, it is
likely that this work was available to al-Qāsimī given his good contacts with
the al-Ālūsī family.

Al-Qāsimī's 17-volume work of *tafsīr*, *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*, thus forms an ex-
traordinary exception to the conventions of his age, and a very clear break
in form, content and style from the post-classical madrasa curriculum and
its glosses. He quoted sources that he oftentimes himself had to discover in
manuscripts and that were very untypical for his age. As he stated himself in
one of his letters, his ambition was to stay as close as possible to the method

67. El Shamsy has shown that also in Cairo's private libraries the basic *tafsīr* texts by
al-Ǧalālayn, al-Bayḍāwī, al-Zamaḫšarī, and glosses on them were dominant. See El Shamsy,
"Islamic Book Culture", p. 74.

68. See Simsek, "Missing Link", pp. 178–180; Coppens, "Ottoman Tafsīr Curriculum", pp. 20–22.
See also the excerpt on *tafsīr* from Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī's *Kitāb al-taʿlīm wa-l-iršād*, who offers a
strikingly similar narrative on the state of the genre as an eye-witness in 1906. See al-Ḥalabī,
Kitāb al-taʿlīm, pp. 19–24; *idem*, "al-Tafāsīr wa-l-mufassirūn".

69. See Ẕ. al-Qāsimī, *Ǧamāl al-Dīn*, pp. 609–610.

70. See Saleh, "Historiography of *tafsīr*", p. 15.

71. See Simsek, "Missing Link", pp. 178–180; El Shamsy, "Islamic Book Culture", p. 74.

72. See Nafi, "Alusi", p. 493, n. 79.

of al-Baġawī that was venerated by Ibn Taymiyya, and to include all sayings on qurʾānic verses by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim he could find:[73]

> The Qurʾān commentators after them were not interested in relating their sayings. I would regret it if their investigations into many verses would bring no benefit [for others]. I therefore took complete care of all they said. Thus, our commentary took a magnificent shape, because it is adorned and beautified by the sayings of these two unique suns.

It was thus al-Qāsimī's explicit intention to save the Qurʾān interpretations by these now iconic figures from oblivion, and to implement what Walid Saleh calls the "Ibn Taymiyyan paradigm" that would dominate the 20th century.[74] It was arguably even the first explicit representative of this paradigm in the modern age. Al-Qāsimī's *iǧtihād* in the *tafsīr* tradition was thus about more than tackling the new demands of the modern age through the Qurʾān, as we know so well from ʿAbduh's and Riḍā's *Tafsir al-manār*; it was an attempt to redefine the canon of the history of *tafsīr* in a direction that he felt more affinity with than he did with the standard texts of the madrasa curriculum. His reformist *iǧtihād* was not so much about modernizing the tradition, it was about purifying and redirecting the tradition towards historical sources that he deemed methodologically and epistemologically more correct.

This clear break in form, style and content does not only count for his written *tafsīr*, but also for how he taught the discipline in his public lessons. His former student Maḥmūd al-ʿAṭṭār (d. 1944) relates how he was amazed when he first visited a *tafsīr* lesson given by al-Qāsimī in the al-Sināniyya Mosque. Not only was he surprised to see how many representatives of the Damascene cultural scene gathered for his lessons, but the content of his lessons was also nothing like al-ʿAṭṭār was used to. There was no simple repetition of the glosses with their subtleties of grammar and rhetoric in al-Qāsimī's lessons, but rather a subtle attack, through the medium of *tafsīr*, on the negative social consequences of the culture of visiting graves and the creedal errors of seeking intercession of *awliyāʾ*. Al-ʿAṭṭār describes how his father, due to peer pressure from other scholars, at first forbade him to join the lessons. However, after he accompanied his son once, he became so impressed that he

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73.   Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ǧamāl al-Dīn*, p. 610.
74.   See Saleh, "Historiography of *tafsīr*", pp. 10–16.

kept attending the classes as well.[75] This anecdote neatly shows how *iğtihād* not only had consequences for the way *fiqh* was conceptualized and taught, but also for *tafsīr* along with matters of creed and practice. It also shows how this project of *iğtihād* had serious social consequences for scholarly relations in the time of al-Qāsimī.

Uṣūl al-tafsīr as a Separate Genre

The fact that the need for *iğtihād* was felt in a larger realm than only ju-risprudence, as discussed earlier, is indicated by developments in the field of *uṣūl al-tafsīr*. Like other *uṣūl* literature, this saw an increased dissemination from the late 18th century onwards. After being virtually non-existent as a separate genre for most of Islamic intellectual history, in the 18th cen-tury Šāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī authored *al-Fawz al-kabīr fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*. Ibn Taymiyya's *Qawāʿid fī al-tafsīr* was a virtually forgotten text and would only become influential in print after its rediscovery in Damascene circles in the early 20th century. These two treatises would become widely disseminated works and would have a great impact on later works on the discipline, most notably in the 20th century.[76]

This renewed interest in *uṣūl al-tafsīr* stands in stark contrast with the almost complete silence of the centuries before that. Compared to the vast amount of *tafsīr* literature produced over the centuries, and the central place that the commentaries of al-Zamaḫšarī, al-Bayḍāwī and Abū al-Suʿūd had in madrasa curricula, primarily though glosses, it is striking how few separate works there are dealing with the *uṣūl* of the discipline.[77] Oftentimes some fundamentals are briefly mentioned in introductions to works of *tafsīr*.[78] As

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75.   See Kanʿān, "Talāmīḏ al-Qāsimī", pp. 405–412. On the importance of refuting the promi-nent cult around graves of *awliyāʾ* for al-Qāsimī and his scholarly companions and the role of treatises of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim in that, see El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, pp. 191–197.
76.   See Ibn Taymiyya, *Uṣūl al-tafsīr*; al-Dihlawī, *al-Fawz al-kabīr*. Another notable premodern exception is al-Kāfiyağī, *Qawāʿid ʿilm al-tafsīr*.
77.   For a discussion of recent developments in *uṣūl al-tafsīr*, see Saeed, "The Shāhīn Affair". Saeed shows that even in our contemporary age there is still a lot of unclarity over what exactly are the fundamentals to be applied by a *mufassir*, and that it still is an underdeveloped genre in many ways. See also Sulaymān *et al.*, *al-Taʾlīf al-muʿāṣir fī qawāʿid al-tafsīr*.
78.   For an overview of such introductions, see Gilliot, "Traditional Disciplines", pp. 329b–330a. For more detailed discussions of examples of such introductions, see Bauer, "Justifying the Genre"; Saleh, "The Introduction to al-Wāḥidī's *al-Basīṭ*".

noted by Karen Bauer, certain elements are constantly mentioned in these introductions as fundamentals of the discipline: knowledge of the Arabic language and linguistics, questions of *nasḫ*, distinguishing the *muḥkam* and the *mutašābih*, variant readings, and law.[79] Sometimes the fundamentals of *tafsīr* are incorporated, albeit briefly, in works on *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* and considered a part of that discipline of knowledge. This is the case, for example, in Ǧalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, which contains a separate chapter on the fundamentals of *tafsīr* and which al-Qāsimī adopted in the introduction to his *tafsīr*.[80]

An explanation for the relative absence of separate works on *uṣūl al-tafsīr* may be that several other disciplines of knowledge come together in explaining the Qurʾān (language, *ḥadīṯ*, *fiqh*, *kalām*, *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, etc.). For many centuries, therefore, scholars did not deem it necessary to treat it as a separate discipline of knowledge.[81] The influential Ottoman *šayḫ al-Islām* Mullā Šams al-Dīn al-Fanārī (d. 834/1431), for example, argued in the introduction to his *tafsīr* of *al-Fātiḥa* that "*tafsīr* does not have fundamentals from which particulars are derived" (*laysa li-ʿilm al-tafsīr qawāʿid yatafarraʿu ʿalayhā al-ǧuzʾiyāt*) like other disciplines of knowledge, and that the madrasa curriculum offered all necessary tools to engage oneself with *tafsīr*.[82] In the one work on the fundamentals of *tafsīr* known to us from the same era in Ottoman intellectual history, *al-Taysīr fī qawāʿid ʿilm al-tafsīr*, Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Kāfiyaǧī (d. 879/1474) also sees mastering all these disciplines as an absolute prerequisite to be a *mufassir*. He identifies 15 disciplines the *mufassir* needs in order not to merely speak out of one's own baseless opinion; seven of them deal with different aspects of linguistic analysis; the other disciplines are the variant readings (*qirāʾāt*), causes of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), knowledge of the transmitted stories referred to in the Qurʾān (*ʿilm al-āṯār wa-l-aḫbār*), knowledge of the Sunna, the fundamentals of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), good character (*aḫlāq*), speculative theology (*ʿilm al-naẓar wa-l-kalām*), and probably the most remarkable, knowledge directly given

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79. See Bauer, "Justifying the Genre", p. 52.
80. See al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, pp. 449–532.
81. See also Saeed, "Shāhīn Affair", pp. 114–115, for some medieval scholars like al-Zarkašī and al-Ṭūfī, who lamented the underdevelopment of *uṣūl al-tafsīr* and stated it was not sufficient to apply the principles of *uṣūl al-fiqh* to the text of the Qurʾān, which entailed more than just jurisprudence.
82. See al-Fanārī, *ʿAyn al-aʿyān*, p. 5.

by God (ʿilm al-wahba) as a consequence of acting upon one's knowledge.[83] Al-Kāfiyağī nonetheless argues that the discipline needs separate uṣūl, however, to further regulate how these disciplines are employed in the context of tafsīr. Precise knowledge of the meanings of the Qurʾān is a prerequisite for obtaining rulings and guidance from it as well; the knowledge discipline of tafsīr, he argues, is itself a fundamental (qāʿida) for other knowledge disciplines.[84]

When al-Qāsimī became interested in defining these uṣūl he thus did not have much to build upon. His treatise published in 1913 that he based on al-Suyūṭī's al-Nuqāya with his own comments is a good illustration of that. A short review in al-Muqtabas on his publication of the four uṣūl treatises of which it was part praised it as the most important treatise of the four, because it was the first in its kind on the fundamentals of tafsīr.[85] It was still very basic and typical in its selection of topics however: asbāb al-nuzūl, lines of transmission of the qurʾānic corpus, rules of qirāʾa, and some notes on vocabulary and meanings related to aḥkām. In notes throughout the treatise, he frequently refers to his own Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl and its introduction, an indication that it was either his intention to eventually publish it or that it had some kind of readership in his direct circles despite not being published yet.[86] Although the goal of this short treatise seemed to be to teach basic literacy in tafsīr, his notes throughout suggest that he wished to prepare a new generation for becoming muğtahids to explain the Qurʾān themselves.[87] In a discussion on variant readings, for example, he compares the stiffness and partisanship of the grammarians to the stifled muqallidūn in fiqh.[88] On several occasions he addresses issues that a muğtahid should be aware of when using aḥādīṯ or sayings of the Companions in interpreting the Qurʾān.[89] His notes on matters of asbāb al-nuzūl, for example, deal with an issue that clearly shows the influence of

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83.   See al-Kāfiyağī, Qawāʿid ʿilm al-tafsīr, pp. 10–12. "Who has mastered these knowledge disciplines is no longer explaining the Qurʾān by one's opinion" (Qawāʿid ʿilm al-tafsīr, p. 12).

84.   See al-Kāfiyağī, Qawāʿid ʿilm al-tafsīr, p. 14.

85.   See [Author unknown], "Mağmūʿ rasāʾil", p. 214.

86.   See al-Qāsimī, Mağmūʿ rasāʾil, pp. 3, 5, 8, 10, 21, 22, 25–26. When al-Qāsimī had just passed away in 1914, Muḥammad Bahğat al-Bīṭār wrote to al-Ālūsī that it was their intention to publish Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl as soon as possible. It was only in the late 1950s, however, that the work was finally published for the first time. See al-ʿAğmī, Rasāʾil, p. 240.

87.   El Shamsy holds that this set of treatises was purposely published for instruction in those schools. See El Shamsy, Islamic Classics, p. 190.

88.   See al-Qāsimī, Mağmūʿ rasāʾil, p. 11.

89.   See al-Qāsimī, Mağmūʿ rasāʾil, pp. 7–8.

Ibn Taymiyya's *Qawāʿid fī al-tafsīr*: the status of sayings of Companions on the Qurʾān and differences of opinion among them. In his comments, al-Qāsimī explains what the implications of this are for the *muǧtahid*; when a saying is 'elevated' (*marfūʿ*) to a Companion, one cannot do further *iǧtihād* on the issue or speak from one's own opinion, because this is the most reliable form of *tafsīr* one can find. When confronted with contradictory material, it is upon the *muǧtahid* to always rely upon the most trustworthy narration, thus choosing the "most correct" opinion.[90] *Iǧtihād* in *tafsīr*, according to this vision, thus mainly revolves around identifying the strongest sayings from among the Prophet and the Companions to interpret the meanings of the Qurʾān. This is exactly what Saleh calls "radical hermeneutics". [91] Al-Qāsimī promotes *iǧtihād* in this context for purification of the tradition rather than for innovation or modernization; *uṣūl* are mainly needed to distinguish between correct and incorrect forms of interpretation.

Tamhīd ḫaṭīr fī qawāʿid al-tafsīr

The introduction to al-Qāsimī's Qurʾān commentary *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl* may be considered a separate work in itself, with a much more ambitious agenda than the short treatise based on al-Suyūṭī's *al-Nuqāya*. It even bears a separate title: *A Critical Introduction to the Fundamentals of Qurʾān Commentary* (*Tamhīd ḫaṭīr fī qawāʿid al-tafsīr*). A cursory reading of the work directly reveals that *Tamhīd ḫaṭīr*, as is the case with most of al-Qāsimī's works, is not an original composition by the author himself; most of the work consists of large paraphrased sections from other works.[92] The two most important treatises on *uṣūl al-tafsīr* from which al-Qāsimī incorporates entire sections into his work are Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 728/1328) *Qawāʿid fī al-tafsīr*, in the rediscovery of which al-Qāsimī played a significant role, and Šāh Walī Allāh's al-Dihlawī's *al-Fawz al-kabīr fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*.[93] Another work that figures prominently in his introduction, and which is strictly not a treatise on the fundamentals of *tafsīr*

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90. See al-Qāsimī, *Maǧmūʿ rasāʾil*, pp. 7–9.

91. Saleh, "Radical Hermeneutics", pp. 125–126.

92. On his works being largely collections of sayings from other scholars and the criticism this provoked among some scholars of the generation after him, see al-Sarmīnī, *al-Qāsimī wa-ǧuhūduhu al-ḥadīṯiyya*, pp. 118–127.

93. On how he knew of these two works and how he played a role in the print of Ibn Taymiyya's treatise, see Coppens, "Ottoman Tafsīr Curriculum", pp. 26–27; El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, p. 188.

but of *fiqh*, is Abū Isḥāq al-Šāṭibī's (d. 790/1388) *al-Muwāfaqāt fī uṣūl al-šarī ͨa.*
Roughly half of *Tamhīd ḥaṭīr* consists of material copied from the *Muwāfaqāt.*[94]
It is no exaggeration to state that this work, of which he discussed Part Four
on *iǧtihād* and *taqlīd* in detail with some colleagues during a journey to Beirut,
is at the heart of his project in *Tamhīd ḥaṭīr.*[95] That he copied so much from
it by hand is also an indication that the work was not widespread or well
known in his surroundings. Simply referring to it was not enough; he really
had to offer the text himself to the prospective reader.[96] To have a work on
uṣūl al-fiqh taking such a prominent place in an introduction to a work of *tafsīr*
may seem counterintuitive, but on closer inspection is not so strange at all.
Linguistic analysis and philosophy of language have always had a prominent
place in *uṣūl al-fiqh*, to the extent that some have even proposed to translate
the discipline of Islamic legal theory with the term 'hermeneutics'.[97]

Other sources from which al-Qāsimī derives significant passages are
al-Suyūṭī's *al-Itqān fī ͨulūm al-Qurʾān*, Ibn Ḫaldūn's *Muqaddima*, Muḥammad
b. al-Murtaḍā al-Yamānī's (d. 840/1436) *Īṭār al-ḥaqq ͨalā al-ḫalq*, Ibn Taymiyya's
Kitāb al-īmān, ͨIzz al-Dīn b. ͨAbd al-Salām's (d. 660/1262) *al-Išāra ilā al-īǧāz
fī baͨḍ anwāͨ al-maǧāz*, and many smaller extracts from other very diverse
authors and works often not directly related to *tafsīr*. With the exception of
al-Suyūṭī's *Itqān*, practically all works he cites were not household names
in the scholarly culture in Damascus in his age. They caught his particular
attention through his international contacts, his travels, new publications
and the reorganization of the libraries of Damascus into the al-Ẓāhiriyya
Library.[98] *Tamhīd ḥaṭīr* was thus a typical product of the broader intellectual

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94.   See al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*, vol. 1, pp. 30–32.

95.   See Ẓ. al-Qāsimī, *Ǧamāl al-Dīn*, p. 159; Commins, *Islamic Reform*, p. 62. The edition they
discussed in Beirut and which al-Qāsimī used as a source must have been the first printed
edition ever from Tunis, which appeared in 1884. The no longer extant edition from 1909,
published in Kazan with a Turkish foreword from the Tatar Islamic modernist Mūsā Ǧār Allāh
Bīǧī, only consisted of Part One. The passages in *Tamhīd ḥaṭīr* are mainly derived from Part Two
and Three of the Tunis edition, but it is safe to say that the complete work was available to
him. See al-Šāṭibī, *Muwāfaqāt*. For the publication history of *al-Muwāfaqāt*, see Masud, *Shatibi's
Philosophy*, p. 82.

96.   This point is also made by al-Sarmīnī in his explanation of why al-Qāsimī copied so much
from other authors in his works. See al-Sarmīnī, *al-Qāsimī wa-ǧuhūduhu al-ḥadīṯiyya*, pp. 125–126.

97.   See Vishanoff, *Islamic Hermeneutics*; Yunis Ali, *Medieval Islamic Pragmatics*. Hallaq also
considers language theory one of the three main pillars of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, beside *kalām* and *fiqh*.
See Hallaq, "*Uṣūl al-fiqh* Revisited", pp. 143–144.

98.   See El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, pp. 177–182; Coppens, "Ottoman Tafsīr Curriculum",
pp. 24–30.

horizon created by the library endeavors of al-Qāsimī and his friend Ṭāhir al-Ǧazāʾirī, and a clear break with the textual polity of Damascus' dominant scholarly class that he considered stifled.

Tamhīd ḥaṭīr discusses eleven "Fundamentals" (*qawāʿid*) in depth: the basic source references for *tafsīr* (1); dealing with differences of opinion, specifically among the Companions (2 and 3); occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) (4); rules of abrogation (*al-nāsiḫ wa-l-mansūḫ*); variant readings (6); stories of the Prophets and *Isrāʾīliyyāt* (7); some linguistic notes (8); the simplicity of the language of the *šarīʿa* (9); incitement to reward and threat of punishment (*al-tarġīb wa-l-tarhīb*) (10); and metaphorical language (11).[99] Most of these fundamentals are not surprising but were typical for introductions to Qurʾān commentaries, as we have seen in the former paragraph. The second and the third as well as the seventh to the eleventh, however, deserve some special attention because they contain some thoughts and ideas relating to the theme of *iǧtihād* that were not mainstream in the age of al-Qāsimī. In addition, some of the sections discussed under the headings of the separate fundamentals show some remarkable digressions from the general theme addressed in the fundamentals, which uncover a depth of discussion unusual for the genre of *uṣūl al-tafsīr* thus far.

"The *šarīʿa* is illiterate": Promoting an Egalitarian Religious Epistemology

Most of the discussion on Fundamentals Seven to Ten consists entirely of long passages taken from al-Šāṭibī's *Muwāfaqāt* without interruption. Most of these deal with linguistic matters, and are employed by al-Qāsimī to underline the relative simplicity and universal accessibility of the language of the Qurʾān. This may be understood as a way to reclaim the interpretation of the Qurʾān from the scholarly elite in his age and their scholastic intellectualism, and to replace it with what Shahab Ahmed recently dubbed "social egalitarianism of simple truth", a text-based epistemology negating the epistemic registers of philosophy and mysticism.[100] Ahmed holds this to be typical for modern Islam, which gradually replaced more complex and hierarchical epistemological schemes of premodern Islam.

99. See al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*, vol. 1, pp. 215–216.
100. Ahmed, *What is Islam*, p. 521.

Al-Qāsimī includes a long passage from the *Muwāfaqāt* on what is implied by traditions that state that the Qurʾān has both an outer (ẓāhir) as an inner (bāṭin) meaning.[101] Sufi commentators have often used these traditions to legitimize their interpretations by allusion (išāra) of the Qurʾān, and the idea that a spiritually elevated rank enables one to uncover the hidden inner meanings of the text. This creates a hierarchy in the possibility of understanding the Qurʾān correctly: there is a fundamental epistemological inequality depending on one's spiritual state.[102] In the passages quoted by al-Qāsimi, al-Šāṭibī does not deny the reliability of traditions on this subject. He proposes, however, to interpret the outward merely as the recited text, while the inner signifies the intended meaning of the text that God bestows upon humans. This bestowal is dependent on one's endeavor in studying rather than one's spiritual state as the Sufi interpreters by so-called 'allusion' (išāra) understood it; God grants this understanding to whomever contemplates (yatadabbar) the Qurʾān. It is thus accessible for all who study hard enough to reach a certain level of Islamic knowledge to understand these inner meanings.

Fundamental Nine is another fine example of this "social egalitarianism of simple truth" that al-Qāsimī tries to promote through his borrowings from al-Šāṭibī. He selects a passage in which al-Šāṭibī pleas for the fundamental intelligibility of the šarīʿa for everyone, whether literate or illiterate, whether Arab or non-Arab, whether strong or weak, whether male or female, and whether highly intelligent or less intelligent.[103] As al-Šāṭibī formulates it himself: "The measure of understanding the šarīʿa is in conformity with the participation of everyone, which encompasses the illiterate, as it also encompasses the rest."[104] As Hallaq has pointed out, for al-Šāṭibī this was a way to reclaim Islamic discourse from what he considered scholarly abuse of the šarīʿa through linguistic manipulation, and to counter elitist scholarly discourses that associated the Qurʾān with rational sciences of which the Arabs had no knowledge at the time of revelation, and which was too hard to understand for the ordinary Muslim in his own age as well.[105] Given Islam has a universal message for all mankind, the only correct way to understand the qurʾānic text is within the boundaries of the meanings that were both linguistically

101. See al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*, vol. 1, pp. 41–57; al-Šāṭibī, *Muwāfaqāt*, vol. 3, pp. 204–220.

102. See Keeler, "Ṣūfī *tafsīr* as a Mirror", p. 2; Böwering, "Scriptural Senses", pp. 346–365.

103. See al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*, vol. 1, pp. 57–69; al-Šāṭibī, *Muwāfaqāt*, vol. 2, pp. 41–51.

104. Al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*, vol. 1, p. 67; al-Šāṭibī, *Muwāfaqāt*, vol. 2, p. 51.

105. For a discussion of this theme within the broader context of al-Šāṭibī's *Muwāfaqāt*, see Hallaq, *Islamic Legal Theories*, pp. 171–172, 181; Masud, *Shatibi's Philosophy*, pp. 176–181.

and intellectually feasible for the generation of Arabs on the peninsula that received this revelation. This indeed leads to a radical 'Salafī' hermeneutics: the generation of the *salaf*, with their relatively plain epistemological framework, is the lens through which the *šarī'a* should be understood. It is thus intelligible for the ordinary believer in every age, as a message for all of mankind in all ages is supposed to be. The remaining tools of the *mufassir*, then, are philology, consisting of linguistic analysis and scrutinizing transmissions from the Prophet and the Companions on reliability; rational sciences and mysticism no longer play any part in understanding the Qur'ān.

The passages that al-Qāsimī borrows from the works of Ibn Taymiyya have a similar goal of underlining the Qur'ān's intelligibility for every believer, regardless of their intellectual capacities, and show the same preoccupation with philological tools to do so. In *Tamhīd ḥaṭīr*, the works of Ibn Taymiyya are most referred after the passages quoted from al-Šāṭibī. Two works are central in this: Ibn Taymiyya's *Qawā'id fī al-tafsīr* and his *Kitāb al-īmān*. The complete content of *Qawā'id fī al-tafsīr* has satisfactory been treated by Saleh, and there is no need to repeat that here.[106] It is worthwhile mentioning, however, that in Fundamentals Two and Three, the question in Ibn Taymiyya's treatise of differences of opinion among the Companions, like earlier in his discussion of *al-Nuqāya*, has al-Qāsimī's specific attention. Like Ibn Taymiyya, al-Qāsimī considers the explanations of the Prophet and the Companions to be the most weighty and therefore needing extra scrutinization to see whether certain points of difference of opinion are complementary or contradictory. In the case of contradictory sayings, the most reliable must be chosen.[107] This is ultimately a matter of *iǧtihād*, and much of the content of *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl* may be understood as such.

Fundamental Eleven, on the question whether the Qur'ān contains metaphorical language (*maǧāz*), consists of lengthy passages from Ibn Taymiyya's *Kitāb al-īmān*.[108] This work was first printed in Cairo in 1907 after al-Qāsimī's visit to Cairo in 1903–1904, but it must have been available to him through his international contacts.[109] Al-Qāsimī copied the passage on language theory from this work, specifically the much discussed dichotomy between the

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106. See Saleh, "Radical Hermeneutics".

107. See al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl*, vol. 1, pp. 19–26.

108. For his quotations from *Kitāb al-īmān*, see al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl*, vol. 1, pp. 136–157.

109. See Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-īmān*. This work was edited by earlier mentioned Badr al-Dīn al-Naʿsānī al-Ḥalabī. It seems he was not part of the Salafi trend per se. Perhaps he was rather interested in *Kitāb al-īmān* as a linguist because of the philosophy on language it contains than

'literal' (*ḥaqīqa*) and the 'figurative' (*maǧāz*).[110] Ibn Taymiyya's argument against this conventional division is long and complex, and does not need to be discussed at length here. The gist of his argument is that considering the classification of meanings as either *ḥaqīqa* or *maǧāz* as accidental to the essential meaning of words (*ʿawāriḍ al-alfāẓ*) is a later invention of mainly Muʿtazilī-inclined linguists, and cannot be traced back to the Prophet, the Companions or the *salaf*. It is therefore an invalid argument according to Ibn Taymiyya, and should be replaced by the 'pragmatic' or 'contextual' idea that the meaning of a word does not have an essential meaning prior to its usage in a particular context. There is no 'literal' or 'real' meaning ascribed to the word as such; the meaning, rather, depends entirely on its context. As such, the text of the Qurʾān and the speech of the Prophet have to be contextualized within the broader linguistic conventions of the moment of revelation. What it meant in that time within the frame of reference of those who first heard it is the only valid interpretation, and later understandings from other interpretative frameworks and dogmatic underpinnings derived from speculative theology (*kalām*) should not be projected onto them.[111]

This is yet another indication of al-Qāsimī's adoption of radical Salafī hermeneutics that ultimately necessitate *iǧtihād* in reinterpreting the Qurʾān in his own age. For al-Qāsimī to subscribe to this is a radical departure from the dominant tradition of 'figurative' linguistic interpretations of certain creedal qurʾānic verses, necessitated by Muʿtazilī and Ašʿarī speculative theology, that are at the heart of the commentaries of al-Zamaḫšarī and al-Bayḍāwī. To propose this in his introduction entails an emancipation from these works and their glosses, and a project of linguistically reinterpreting the entire Qurʾān according to this Taymiyyan principle. Since no complete *tafsīr* explicitly and consistently based on this principle existed yet in the age of al-Qāsimī—with only Ibn Katīr perhaps coming close—a new *iǧtihād* in *tafsīr* would be needed to correct the linguistic and theological understandings dominant in the post-classical tradition.

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for its religious ideas. See Kurd ʿAlī, *Muḏakkirāt*, vol. 2, p. 587; al-Ziriklī, *Aʿlām*, vol. 7, p. 102; al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb al-taʿlīm*, pp. 31-35.

110. See al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*, vol. 1, pp. 136–157; Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-īmān*, pp. 34 ff. For an overview of the *ḥaqīqa*-*maǧāz* discussion, see Shah, "Philological Endeavors I" and "Philological Endeavors II".

111. See al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*, vol. 1, pp. 222–254; Shah, "Philological Endeavors I", pp. 29–30, 42; "Philological Endeavors II", pp. 43–53, 60–62; Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, pp. 41–42, 115–116. See also Yunis Ali, *Medieval Islamic Pragmatics*.

That this inclusion of Ibn Taymiyya's view on the matter was an explicitly ideological choice for al-Qāsimī and not just a matter of allowing a plurality of voices in his introduction is confirmed by his quotations from ʿIzz al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Salām al-Sulamī's *al-Išāra ilā al-īǧāz fī baʿḍ al-anwāʿ min al-maǧāz* that directly follow on Ibn Taymiyya in the same section.[112] Al-Sulamī's book is very rich and nuanced in its discussions on various types of *maǧāz* language in the Qurʾān and differs significantly from the approach of Ibn Taymiyya. Al-Qāsimī, however, decided to only quote a short passage from this work on the reasons why the Qurʾān contains so much repetition, as well as a short passage on the types of *tafsīr*, which confirms the primacy of the *salaf* in interpreting the Qurʾān, and the primacy of *ḥaqīqa* over *maǧāz* if possible.[113] Al-Qāsimī thus only selected what fitted in his ideological agenda of the primacy of the Prophet, Companions and the *salaf* in matters of interpretation and stressing the clear unambiguous language of the Qurʾān. These points are the common thread through the entire *Tamhīd* and what keeps the authors and works that he draws upon together, authors who normally represent very diverse doctrines in Islamic thought.[114] Epistemological egalitarianism in interpreting the Qurʾān was al-Qāsimī's main goal.

Conclusion

In the beginning of this article two main objectives were formulated: first, to document and discuss al-Qāsimī's contribution to the discourse of *iǧtihād* by (re-)discovering, teaching, editing and publishing works on *uṣūl* neglected

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112. ʿAbd al-Salām's *Išāra ilā al-īǧāz* was first printed in Istanbul in 1896, and thus easy to obtain for al-Qāsimī. See al-Sulamī, *Išāra ilā al-īǧāz*.

113. See al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*, vol. 1, pp. 157–162.

114. See, for example, a later passage taken from al-Ġazālī's *Ilǧām al-ʿawāmm ʿan ʿilm al-kalām* that warns the commoners against understanding God's attributes in any other way than how the *salaf* understood them. Al-Qāsimī quotes this in a chapter called "That which is right concerning the verses on the attributes [of God] is the way of the *salaf*", between authorities like Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim. Al-Ġazālī's thought on matters of *kalām* was of course much more complicated than that, but al-Qāsimī deliberately chose what fit his agenda. This is also one of the few chapters in which al-Qāsimī himself is very outspoken about his own opinion on the matter in between the passages he borrows from other works. The success of his *tafsīr* in later Salafī circles is also partly because of his approach to this matter. See al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*, vol. 1, pp. 206–212; Coppens, "Ottoman Tafsīr Curriculum", p. 28, n. 57.

in post-classical scholarly culture; second, to clarify whether his selective appropriation in *Tamhīd ḫaṭīr* of until then often marginal scholars in Islamic discourse represented a paradigm shift in *tafsīr* that necessitated as well as facilitated *iǧtihād* in the field.

To start with the second point, a close reading of *Tamhīd ḫaṭīr* and the sources al-Qāsimī refers to makes clear that he certainly was not a proponent of a new hermeneutical theory related to the project of modernism as a response to the dominance of the West. Rather, his call for *iǧtihād* in the context of *tafsīr* was a response to what he perceived as the stifled religious discourse of the religious class patronized by the Ottoman authorities. His goal was not so much to engage in an accommodation of the qurʾānic message and the specific needs of an Islamic modernity, but rather to 'purify' Islamic understandings of the Qurʾān. If there is anything specifically 'modern' about his agenda in *Tamhīd ḫaṭīr*, it is his stress on establishing the 'most correct' interpretation, and his non-hierarchical and anti-elitist approach to the language of the Qurʾān. He thus worked towards an epistemologically more monovalent and egalitarian understanding of the Qurʾān that would dominate the 20th century.

Does this "social egalitarianism of simple truth" now imply that the Qurʾān is equally accessible to anyone according to al-Qāsimī? Certainly not. Al-Qāsimī's compilation of the fundamentals of *tafsīr* is still highly technical. It is clearly still a scholarly discourse that demands a high level of education to enable individuals to participate in it. It would thus be wrong to claim that his project of *iǧtihād* would lead to a kind of 'democratization' of knowledge or the participation of literally anyone, even unschooled persons, in Islamic discourse.[115] Surely, al-Qāsimī was aiming for a larger audience than just traditional madrasa students and fellow scholars with his writing and teaching, as is clear from the many students he received from the secular schools, as well as influential Arabist political figures and intellectuals like Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī and Šakīb Arslān. However, strict rules are still applied to accessing genuine Islamic knowledge. Deep knowledge of the Arabic language is needed, of the main source texts and of the *uṣūl* of several disciplines. It still demands hard work from specialists, as well as hard work to become a specialist. In this regard, al-Qāsimī does not lower the standards compared to premodern curricula; one could perhaps even contend that he rather raised the standards, certainly in the sense of scholarly creativity and precision

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115. For this discussion, see Brown, "Is Islam Easy to Understand?".

needed to draw the right conclusions from the primary sources. Trusting on the received tradition as a *muqallid* was not sufficient anymore after all; the task was now to discover the one correct interpretation. The epistemology of interpretation, however, had 'flattened'; no advanced spiritual training in a Sufi order, or deep philosophical understanding was needed anymore to approach the Qurʾān; deep knowledge of language and sayings of the Prophet, Companions and the *salaf* sufficed. This made *iǧtihād* on the meanings of the Qurʾān epistemologically a whole lot more accessible for anyone willing to put in hard work, and less hierarchical. Anyone with a certain amount of learning capacities and serious commitment to study could come to a good basic understanding of the Qurʾān according to this epistemic scheme.

Recently, a captivating discussion has taken off on possible genealogical trajectories from historical 'modern' or 'reformist' Salafism of the likes of al-Qāsimī, Riḍā and ʿAbduh to the contemporary 'puritan' Salafī movement.[116] Whether there is continuity between these movements is contested. Given the influence of texts by, for example, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Ḥazm in 'puritan' circles, one could say that there is more to that discussion than meets the eye. Further research is needed to see whether there indeed is a clear genealogical line from al-Qāsimī's project to puritan Salafism as it developed later in the 20th century. I tend to think there is a lot still to discover there given the popularity in puritan-Salafī circles of many themes and texts that al-Qāsimī also engaged with, and lineages of relationships of scholarly peers and students reaching to illustrative figures like Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, Aḥmad Muḥammad Šākir, and through his friend Muḥammad Naṣīf even to the Saudi scholars Ibn Bāz and al-ʿUṯaymīn, who all put their stamp on 'puritan' Salafism. It is likely that with his emphasis on *uṣūl* texts in several knowledge disciplines, both teaching and publishing them, al-Qāsimī contributed in many ways to the hermeneutical and epistemological prerequisites for the later 'puritan' Salafī project. Al-Qāsimī perhaps may be considered one of the main architects for the dominance of this hermeneutical paradigm in modernity, this approach "being the most active theoretically, thus enforcing a sort of complete

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116. See Lauzière, *Making of Salafism*; Lauzière, "Construction of Salafiyya"; Griffel, "What do we mean by 'Salafi'?"; Wagemakers, "Salafism's Historical Continuity"; Weismann, "New and Old Perspectives". For an overview, see Wagemakers, "Salafism's Historical Continuity", p. 209, n. 13.

hegemony on hermeneutical theorisation".[117] He certainly was the first to so emphatically and consistently push this agenda in a modern work of *tafsīr*.

Considering the many treatises that al-Qāsimī rediscovered, edited, published and taught, one could say that to be able to engage in *iğtihād*, al-Qāsimī and his peers first had to undertake another form of *iğtihād*: broadening the intellectual horizon by rediscovering these forgotten classics. This was a two-sided process for al-Qāsimī: on the one hand travelling and corresponding with friends abroad to collect new prints available mainly from India and Egypt; on the other hand rediscovering long forgotten manuscripts, and teaching, editing, printing and disseminating them. Al-Qāsimī may not have been the most original of authors, certainly not in comparison with his Egyptian colleagues ʿAbduh and Riḍā, and hardly authored works in his own words. He was, rather, a collector, composer and editor. For this he was later criticized by his prominent student Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī. This criticism was understandable in an age in which libraries were more organized and printed books were widely available. Al-Qāsimī had to largely do without these conveniences, however, and copying large parts of printed texts and manuscripts was practically the only way to have them read by and taught to a larger group of people.[118] When one looks at his efforts in this field, one can still see his tremendous achievement in putting forgotten treatises and authors back in the limelight. He thus put knowledge of *uṣūl* back on the map and enabled an entire generation after him to reconstruct Islamic thought based on a re-evaluation of its main source texts. Perhaps this was the true *iğtihād* of his age. The study of this type of endeavor has only just really kicked off, with the recent work of El Shamsy and Saleh as crucial landmarks.[119] Much work is still to be done to understand the crucial impact of the rise of print and modern critical editorship on Islamic intellectual discourse.

117. Saleh, "Historiography of *tafsīr*", p. 16.
118. This point is also made by al-Sarmīnī, *al-Qāsimī wa-ğuhūduhu al-ḥadīṯiyya*, pp. 118–121.
119. See El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*; "Islamic Book Culture"; Saleh, "Historiography of *tafsīr*".

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Abstract / Résumé / ملخّص

If one wishes to practice *iğtihād* in any knowledge discipline, knowledge of the *uṣūl* of that discipline is required. In facilitating this focus on *uṣūl* necessary for *iğtihād*, Ğamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1914) from Damascus was a pivotal figure in the early 20th century. I argue that al-Qāsimī did not introduce a fundamentally new approach to the fundamentals of *fiqh*, *tafsīr* or *ḥadīṯ*. He merely brought long forgotten concepts and texts back into the limelight. This still both necessitated and facilitated *iğtihād* in a wider realm than only *fiqh*, also including *tafsīr*, *ḥadīṯ*, creed, and even linguistics. I first show how al-Qāsimī revived direct engagement with the Islamic primary sources in his environment by disseminating diverse works on *uṣūl*. Second, I show how his treatise on the fundamentals of *tafsīr* necessitated a project of reinterpreting the entire Qurʾān according to these fundamentals.

Keywords: *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *uṣūl al-tafsīr*, Ğamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1914), Islamic print culture.

﹏

Si l'on souhaite pratiquer l'*iğtihād* dans un domaine de la connaissance, la connaissance des *uṣūl* de ce domaine est requise. Ğamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (m. 1914) de Damas a été une figure centrale au début du xxᵉ siècle en ce qu'il a remis en valeur l'importance des *uṣūl* nécessaires à l'*iğtihād*. Dans cet article, je défends la thèse qu'al-Qāsimī n'a pas introduit une approche fondamentalement nouvelle des fondements du *fiqh*, du *tafsīr* ou du *ḥadīṯ*. Il s'est contenté de reprendre des concepts et des textes oubliés depuis longtemps. Son travail a cependant nécessité et facilité le développement de l'*iğtihād*, non seulement dans le domaine du *fiqh*, mais aussi du *tafsīr*, du *ḥadīṯ*, de la ʿaqīda et même de la linguistique. Je montre d'abord comment al-Qāsimī a encouragé un accès direct aux textes islamiques classiques dans son milieu intellectuel en diffusant divers travaux sur les *uṣūl*. Je montre ensuite comment son traité sur les fondements du *tafsīr* a nécessité un projet de réinterprétation de l'ensemble du Coran en fonction de ces mêmes fondements.

Mots clés : *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *uṣūl al-tafsīr*, Ğamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (m. 1914), culture islamique de l'imprimé.

⌒

إذا رغب عالمٌ من العلماء في ممارسة الاجتهاد في أيّ علم من العلوم، فإنّ معرفة أصول هذا العلم أمرٌ مطلوب. لعب جمال الدين القاسميّ الدمشقيّ (ت ١٩١٤م) دورًا محوريًّا في أوائل القرن العشرين بما سهّل التركيز على الأصول المطلوبة للاجتهاد. أقترحُ في هذا المقال أنّ القاسميّ حتّى ولو لم يقدّم نهجًا جديدًا في أصول الفقه أو التفسير أو الحديث، حيث إنّه اكتفى بإحياء بعض المفاهيم والنصوص المنسيّة منذ زمنٍ طويل، فإنّه اجتهد وساهم في تسهيل الاجتهاد وتطويره في كلّ من مجالات الفقه والتفسير والحديث والعقيدة وحتّى اللغة. وهكذا، أوّلًا، فإنّي أثبتُ كيف أحيا القاسميّ قراءة النصوص التراثيّة في دوائره من خلال نشر أعمالٍ متنوّعة عن الأصول. وثانيًا، أوضّحُ كيف استلزم بحثُه في أصول التفسير مشروعَ إعادة تفسير القرآن بأكمله وفقًا لهذه الأصول.

كلمات مفتاحيّة: أصول الفقه، أصول التفسير، جمال الدين القاسميّ (ت ١٩١٤م)، ثقافة الطباعة الإسلامية.