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THE PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS OF HURUFISM: ON MYSTICAL LETTERISM IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

This paper examines the philosophical hermeneutics of Hurufism, a mystical and esoteric movement within Islamic intellectual history that originated in the 14th century through the teachings of Fazlallah Astarabadi. Rooted in a metaphysical understanding of language, Hurufism asserts that letters, particularly those of the Arabic and Persian alphabets, possess ontological significance and are imbued with divine meaning. Hurufi doctrine regards the human face, body, and scripture as mirrors of a hidden alphabetic order that reflects the structure of the universe. Through a sophisticated synthesis of numerology (abjad), phonetic analysis, and symbolic correlation, Hurufism develops an interpretive system that transcends conventional exegesis. The movement treats the Qur'an not only as a textual revelation but also as a linguistic cosmos, wherein every letter contains infinite layers of esoteric meaning.

The article explores how Hurufism constructs a form of symbolic anthropology, mapping the letters onto the parts of the human body, especially the face, thus turning the human being into a microcosmic text. This embodied hermeneutics reconfigures the relationship between sign and referent, offering a radical alternative to both rationalist theology and legalistic scripturalism. By challenging the binary between the seen (ẓāhir) and the unseen (bāṭin), Hurufi thought contributes a unique and largely overlooked perspective to Islamic epistemology, cosmology, and semiotics. Ultimately, the paper argues that Hurufism should be recognized not merely as a mystical curiosity, but as a profound philosophical enterprise that integrates ontology, language, and revelation into a unified vision of sacred meaning. Specifically, the research introduces the concept of "*ontological hermeneutics of the letter*", a model in which the Arabic letters (ḥurūf) are viewed as metaphysical structures that mediate divine, cosmological, and anthropological knowledge. This model reinterprets Hurufite thought as a philosophy of language and being, grounded in Qur'anic symbolism and informed by esoteric readings (ta'wīl) that operate across scriptural, corporeal, and cosmic levels.

Furthermore, the study proposes the term "*anthropo-cosmic hermeneutics*" to describe the Hurufite view of the human body, particularly the face, as a textual site mirroring both the Qur'an and the divine order. This framework provides an innovative lens through which to read Islamic mystical epistemology and repositions Hurufism as a valuable contribution to the broader Islamic intellectual tradition.

Key words: Islamic mysticism, philosophical hermeneutics, mystical letterism, heterodox communities, abjad system.

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ФІЛОСОФСЬКА ГЕРМЕНЕВТИКА ХУРУФІЗМУ: МІСТИЧНИЙ ЛІТЕРИЗМ В ІСЛАМСЬКІЙ ДУМЦІ

У статті досліджено філософську герменевтику хуруфізму, містичного та езотеричного руху в ісламській інтелектуальній традиції, що виник у XIV столітті на основі вчення Фазлуллаха Астарабаді. Основоположна ідея хуруфізму ґрунтується на метафізичному розумінні мови: літери, зокрема арабського та перського алфавітів, мають онтологічний статус і наділені божественним сенсом. У хуруфітському вченні людське обличчя, тіло і священні тексти розглядаються як відображення прихованого буквено-символічного порядку, який репрезентує структуру Всесвіту. Завдяки витонченому синтезу нумерології (система абджад), фонетичного аналізу та символічних відповідностей хуруфізм формує унікальну інтерпретаційну систему, що виходить за межі традиційної екзегези. У цьому підході Коран тлумачиться не лише як текстове одкровення, а й як лінгвістичний космос, в якому кожна літера містить безмежну кількість езотеричних шарів значення.

У статті розглянуто, як хуруфізм вибудовує своєрідну символічну антропологію, пов'язуючи літери з частинами людського тіла, особливо з обличчям, перетворюючи людину на мікрокосмічний текст. Така втілена герменевтика переосмислює взаємозв'язок між знаком і смислом, пропонуючи радикальну альтернативу як раціоналістичному богослов'ю, так і правовому скриптуралізму (ідея непомильності й достатності тексту). Кидаючи виклик дихотомії між зовнішнім (ẓāhir) і внутрішнім (bāṭin), хуруфітська думка вносить унікальний, але здебільшого недооцінений внесок в ісламську епістемологію, космологію та семіотику. У підсумку доводиться, що хуруфізм слід розглядати не лише як містичну курйозність, а як глибоке філософсько-герменевтичне вчення, яке інтегрує онтологію, мову й одкровення в цілісне бачення священного смислу. Також дослідження вводить концепцію «онтологічної герменевтики літери» – моделі, в якій арабські літери (ḥurūf) розглядаються як метафізичні структури, що опосередковують божественне, космологічне та антропологічне знання. Ця модель переосмислює думку хуруфітів як філософію мови та буття, що ґрунтується на коранічній символіці та сформована езотеричними прочитаннями (taʾwīl), що діють на біблійному, тілесному та космічному рівнях.

Крім того, у дослідженні запропоновано термін «антропокосмічна герменевтика» для опису погляду хуруфітів на людське тіло, зокрема обличчя, як текстовий об'єкт, що відображає як Коран, так і божественний порядок. Ця структура забезпечує інноваційний погляд на ісламську містичну епістемологію та переосмислює хуруфізм як цінний внесок у ширшу ісламську інтелектуальну традицію.

Ключові слова: ісламський містицизм, філософська герменевтика, містичний літеризм, гетеродоксальні спільноти, система абджад.

Introduction. Hurufism, an esoteric movement that emerged in the late 14th century under the leadership of Fazlallah Astarabadi, also known as Faẓl-Allāh Astarābādi (Algar, 2004) فضلالله استرآبادى 1339–1394, in Astarābād Province of Safavid Iran (Bosworth and Blair, 1987), also known by a pseudonym al-Ḥurūfī (Mélikoff, 1998) and a pen name Nāimī, presents one of the most intricate and symbolically charged systems of meaning within Islamic mysticism. Rooted in the belief that the Arabic and Persian alphabets contain hidden metaphysical truths, Hurufism articulates a unique worldview in which letters serve not merely as vehicles of language but as sacred signs imbued with divine presence. At the heart of this doctrine lies a hermeneutical method that interprets scripture, the cosmos, and the human being through the symbolic and numerical properties of letters.

This article explores Hurufism through the lens of philosophical hermeneutics, aiming to understand how meaning is constructed, revealed, and concealed within its mystical letterism.

Drawing on the conceptual frameworks of classical Islamic thought and modern hermeneutical theory, this study investigates how Hurufi thinkers engage with language, ontology, and epistemology. In particular, it examines the interpretive strategies employed by Hurufis to uncover layers of significance in the Qur'an, the human face, and the structure of the alphabet itself.

By situating Hurufism within broader currents of Islamic philosophical and mystical thought, this paper seeks to clarify its hermeneutical logic and assess its implications for understanding the nature of meaning in religious language. In doing so, it also offers reflections on the limits of textual interpretation, the sacredness of form, and the philosophical potential of letters as signs of the unseen.

The complexity of the study of Hurufism is determined by several reasons. Firstly, for the Islamic tradition of its time it was, of course, a heresy, and therefore Hurufism and its followers were eradicated by the most brutal methods. In

this regard, secondly, works on Hurufism in general were of a conspiratorial, encrypted and metaphorical nature, and therefore difficult to reconstruct their main ideas and provisions. Thirdly, most of the works were destined for oblivion, as were their authors, who were subjected to the most sophisticated executions. Finally, fourthly, under permanent persecution Hurufism practically disappeared, having been reborn or merged with various movements (Sufism – Bektashism and extreme Shiism – Alevism, etc.), which, naturally, brought their own interpretations to it (Abasov, 2024).

The purpose of the study. The purpose of this study is to develop a new philosophical framework for interpreting Hurufism not solely as a mystical or esoteric current within Sufism, but as a coherent system of Islamic philosophical hermeneutics. By introducing the concepts of "ontological hermeneutics of the letter" and "anthropo-cosmic hermeneutics", the research aims to uncover the semiotic and metaphysical structures underlying Hurufite thought. This framework repositions Arabic letters (*ḥurūf*) as carriers of ontological meaning that mediate between divine revelation, the human body, and the cosmos.

The study seeks to bridge classical Islamic mystical epistemology with contemporary hermeneutic philosophy (Gadamer, Ricoeur, Heidegger), offering a comparative methodology for analyzing symbolic language in Islamic thought. It highlights the Hurufite vision of the human body, particularly the face, as a living script, and presents Hurufism as a unique contribution to Islamic semiotics, theology, and the philosophy of language.

Genesis of the Hurufi Order and studies devoted to it. Deeply influenced by Sufi metaphysics Fazlallah developed a unique doctrine centered on the mystical and cosmological significance of letters (*ḥurūf*) particularly the Arabic and Persian alphabets. He claimed that divine truth was encoded in the structure of language, and that the human face and body reflected the sacred geometry of the alphabet.

Hurufism arose during a time of political and religious upheaval, and its teachings were considered heretical by orthodox scholars. Fazlallah was executed in 1394 by the Timurid ruler Miran Shah, but his followers preserved and spread his ideas. After this, the movement shifted westward, especially into Anatolia and the Balkans, where it influenced Bektashi Sufism and various heterodox communities.

The socio-political pressures encountered by the Hurufis in the Iranian cultural sphere, combined with their aspiration to disseminate their teachings more broadly, contributed to the spread of Hurufism into Anatolia and the Balkans during the 15th century. During this formative phase, the entirety of Hurufi literary production was composed in Persian, reflecting both the linguistic context of the movement's origins and its intellectual lineage. Notably, the only figure from this period to write in Turkish was Seyyid Nesimi, a prominent disciple (*khalīfa*) of Fazlallah Astarabadi and one of the seven sacred poets associated with the Alevi–Bektashi tradition. Nesimi's work played a pivotal role in bridging the Persianate Hurufi canon with the vernacular and mystical poetics of Anatolia (Muhîtî, 2016).

Following a series of prosecutions, political repression, and executions, the Hurufis turned their attention toward Anatolia. However, it would be inaccurate to describe this movement as a mass migration. Rather, it involved individual Hurufi thinkers who traveled to Anatolia with the aim of disseminating their ideas. There are several historical examples that support this. For instance, in his work *Kāshif al-Asrār wa-Dāfiʿ al-Ashrār* (1292/1875), Hoca İshak reports that after the execution of Fazlallah, his successor ʿAliyy al-Aʿlā journeyed to Anatolia and introduced Hurufi teachings to the Bektashi order at the Hacı Bektaş lodge. This account is also corroborated by other researchers and scholars in the field (Usluer, 2009).

Mir Sharif said in his Hacname that he came to Anatolia, brought Fazl's books and Hurufism books to Anatolia, and went to the Black Sea coast with his brother (Gölpınarlı, 1991). The historical emergence of Hurufism in the late 14th century occurred against a backdrop of political upheaval and religious contestation within the Persianate Islamic world. Fazlallah Astarabadi's innovative doctrines challenged prevailing orthodoxies, leading to his execution and the suppression of the movement. However, Hurufism's survival and expansion into Anatolia and the Balkans demonstrate its resilience and adaptability amid persecution. Historically, the movement's diffusion influenced various heterodox groups and contributed to the rich tapestry of Islamic mysticism in the region.

We also encounter characteristics of Hurufism in a number of works by the Turkish researcher Abdulbaki Gölpınarlı. In his book "*Mevlanadan*

sonra mevlevilik" (Gö1pınarlı, 1953) author emphasizes the role of sound in the teachings of Hurufism and reveals the connection of the latter with the letter, the word. "Hurufism takes sound and word as the basis of existence. Sound is directly in everything <...> and everything produces it when struck. But it turns into a state of word only thanks to man. From this point of view, the essence of God is man, and accidents are the universe" (Gö1pınarlı, 1953, 311).

Zumrud Kuli-zade's doctoral dissertation "Hurufism and its representatives in Azerbaijan" (1969) can be considered the only monographic work on the analysis of the history and philosophy of Hurufism. In addition, in the space of Azerbaijan, the philosophical aspect of the West-East problem was first studied by Z.Kuli-zade. The Azerbaijani philosopher noted that Hurufism only superficially resembles *Pythagoreanism*. While it deifies numbers and letters and even refers to them as the primary source of all phenomena, it nevertheless does not separate them from these phenomena. From a pantheistic perspective, it holds that there is neither letter, nor sound, nor number without matter (the four elements), just as there is no matter without them. This is the essential distinction between Hurufism and *Pythagoreanism*.

This study adopts a *philosophical-hermeneutical methodology*, integrating conceptual analysis with close textual interpretation. The *primary objective* is to examine the epistemological, ontological, and semiotic assumptions underlying Hurufi thought, particularly as they pertain to the metaphysical role of language and letters in the constitution of meaning. Rather than approaching Hurufism solely as a historical or theological phenomenon, this research treats it as a form of speculative philosophy embedded within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

The study begins with a close reading of key Hurufi texts, including the writings of Fazlallah Astarabadi, analyzed in light of their symbolic structure and philosophical content. These texts are not merely interpreted historically but are treated as sites of philosophical reflection, where language becomes a medium of metaphysical inquiry. Hermeneutic concepts drawn from thinkers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Martin Heidegger inform the analysis, particularly in relation to the fusion of horizons, the being of language, and the limits of interpretability.

Martin Heidegger, in *Being and Time* (1926), argued that understanding is not simply a cognitive act but a fundamental mode of being. For Heidegger, we are always already situated in a world of meaning, and our interpretations emerge from this pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*) (Heidegger, 1926). Language is not a neutral tool but the "house of Being" – it reveals and conceals truth. In the context of Hurufism, Heidegger's insight allows us to view letters not as static signs, but as dynamic openings to Being, where symbolic language participates in the disclosure of the sacred.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, building on Heidegger, developed the idea of the fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*) in *Truth and Method* (1960). According to Gadamer, understanding occurs through a dialogical process where the historical horizon of the interpreter interacts with that of the text. Interpretation is not about reconstructing an original intention, but about entering into a living conversation with tradition (Gadamer, 1960). This is especially relevant to Hurufi texts, which are deeply symbolic and require the interpreter to engage not only intellectually, but existentially bringing their own horizon into dialogue with the esoteric layers of meaning.

Furthermore, both thinkers emphasize the limits of interpretability: not everything can be fully articulated or grasped conceptually. This resonates with the Hurufi belief that divine truth is encoded in letters and numbers, but ultimately transcends rational exposition. Their hermeneutics help us understand how the act of interpretation in Hurufism is not merely exegetical, but ontological, an unveiling of hidden being through symbolic form.

Comparative references to other mystical-philosophical systems, such as the thought of Ibn ʿArabi and the metaphysical linguistics of Kabbalah, serve to clarify the distinctiveness of Hurufi hermeneutics by situating it within a broader esoteric tradition that links language, ontology, and divine revelation. Ibn ʿArabi's doctrine of the "letters of creation"[1] and his concept of the Logos (*al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya*)[2] provide a rich Islamic precedent for understanding language as a manifestation of divine realities, yet his metaphysics tends to

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[1] Ibn al-ʿArabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn. *The Meccan Revelations*. Translated by William C. Chittick and James W. Morris. New York: Pir Press, 2004.

[2] Ibn al-ʿArabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn. *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. Translated by R. W. J. Austin. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980.

emphasize unity and inwardness over the structural symbolism central to Hurufism. Similarly, Kabbalistic interpretations[3] of the Hebrew alphabet, particularly in Lurianic and earlier medieval traditions, reflect a profound engagement with the sacredness of letters, numerology, and divine names. However, the Hurufi system distinguishes itself through its more radical literalism, anthropocentric symbolism (especially in the human face), and a pronounced political-theological dimension. By drawing these comparisons, the study highlights both shared epistemic assumptions across mystical traditions and the unique interpretive strategies that define Hurufi engagement with language as both a mystical and ontological vehicle.

Language, ontology, and the sacred in manuel thought. The Qurʾān, as the uncreated Word of God (*manu Allāh*), holds a central place in Islamic epistemology and cosmology. Its linguistic form, its letters, sounds, and arrangement, is not merely incidental but divinely chosen and preserved. This sacralization of language, especially in the Arabic script, laid the foundation for later mystical interpretations that saw meaning not only in verses and words, but in the very letters themselves.

Hurufism radicalized this tendency by asserting that letters are the ontological atoms of the universe. Fazlallah Astarabadi proposed that every element of creation corresponds to a specific letter or numerical value, and that true knowledge arises from uncovering these correspondences. For Hurufis, each letter had a wajh (face/aspect), both literal and symbolic, mirroring the divine names and attributes. The human face itself, according to Astarabadi, was composed in the shape and logic of the letters an anthropomorphic script in which God's message is inscribed.

In this regard, Hurufi hermeneutics does not merely interpret the Qurʾān or other sacred texts; it reinterprets the entire cosmos as a text a legible structure composed of divine signs (*āyāt*), each letter imbued with metaphysical force. The alphabet thus becomes a spiritual map, and interpretation becomes a sacred journey toward decoding the hidden layers of being.

In Islamic metaphysics, language is not a human invention but a divine bestowal. The Qurʾān is described as the uncreated word of God (*manu Allāh ghayr makhlūq*), and its linguistic structure is viewed by many theologians and mystics as reflecting the order and intelligibility of the cosmos itself. Classical Islamic scholars such as al-Farabi and al-Ghazali emphasized the ontological link between names and named realities, a view that became especially pronounced in the esoteric philosophies of later Sufis like Ibn ʿArabi, who held that naming is a creative act, echoing the divine kun fa-yakūn ("Be, and it is").

In this context, Hurufi thought radicalized the established Islamic belief in the sanctity of language by asserting that letters themselves are primordial substances of being. Rather than simply vehicles of meaning, letters in Hurufi cosmology are seen as the elemental forms through which divine reality manifests. Fazlallah Astarabadi's system proposes a numerological and symbolic structure whereby each letter corresponds to cosmic principles, stages of creation, and attributes of God. The body, especially the human face, was seen as a microcosmic "text" composed of letters, thereby collapsing the boundaries between script, revelation, and human ontology.

This profound sacralization of language placed Hurufism in alignment with broader currents of Islamic gnostic thought, but also marked it as distinct in its emphasis on alphabetic mysticism. Unlike other Sufi traditions that focused on the inner meanings (*bāṭin*) of words or verses, Hurufism turned its attention to the mystical structure of language itself – to the sacred potential of phonemes, shapes, and numeric values.

In Hurufi metaphysics, the human face is not merely a biological or aesthetic phenomenon, but a site of profound theological significance. Fazlallah Astarabadi and his followers interpreted the human visage as a living cosmic text a surface upon which the letters of divine speech are inscribed. This notion stems from the belief that language is not just a communicative tool but a pre-eternal structure woven into the fabric of creation. Each letter (*ḥarf*) possesses a wajh – a "face" or "aspect" – that reveals a layer of divine reality. In this framework, the face becomes both a literal and symbolic embodiment of divine names (*asmāʾ Allāh*) and attributes (*ṣifāt*).

The alignment of facial features with specific letters – eyes with ʿayn (ع), nose with alif (ا), mouth with mīm (م), and so on – formed the basis of a sacred

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3 Aryeh Kaplan, *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation in Theory and Practice*, York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1997, https://leonbahrmanministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Aryeh-Kaplan-Sefer-Yetzirah2.pdf

semiotics that permeated Hurufi texts and practices. This anthropomorphic reading of the script made the human form into a microcosmic Qurʾān, elevating the body to the status of revelation. Through meditative contemplation of the face, one could engage in a hermeneutical act akin to scriptural exegesis: reading the divine through the geometry of the human.

According to the Hurufis, the human face consists of seven unmarked features. These include hair, four eyelashes and two eyebrows.

Picture 1. Hurufi face depiction using letters

Image source: Hacı Bektaş Veli Museum https://mediumturkiye.com/on-sekiz-bin-alem-3bb7069930f8

Picture 2. According to Hurufis, the musanna script describes the manifestation of Fazlullah on the human face

Image source: https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/fazlullah-i-hurufic

Moreover, this symbolic anatomy functioned as a mode of resistance against abstract theologies that distanced God from creation. By locating divine

Picture 3. Human body as text

Image source: https://tameta.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/s5-b2.jpg

traces within the human body, Hurufism grounded spiritual knowledge in embodied experience. The face, thus, was not merely the "mirror of the soul" but a mirror of the divine, containing within it the alphabet of sacred being.

Curiously, eminent Islamic scholars who were engaged with "huruf", such as Mansur Al Hallaj (858–922), Ibn Al Nadim, Ibn Arabi (1165–1240), Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) were always at the forefront of these heated topics. Certainly, initial efforts to provide an exegesis of "Holy Texts" can be read in the works of Hallaj Mansur, who lived in the 10th century. He was a propagandist of the Qaramatians, who tried to explain the Korʾan by Te'vil (signs of God). Indeed, Hallaj Mansur was the first Islamic lettrist to discuss the secret content of letters and numbers in his tract "Kitab al-Tavasin" and his divan. More dangerously perhaps, he uttered while in a mystical reverie the forbidden phrase "Ana-l Hakk" meaning "I am the Truth", a statement reserved for God himself. By implication, this scholar appears to be claiming that both the Universe and God are in Human beings. Consequently, he was arrested, and after 11 years in prison was tortured and then executed in the year 922 C.E.(Hurufis – Heretics of Islam, 2009).

This distinctive convergence of linguistic ontology, mystical anthropology, and letteral symbolism sets Hurufi hermeneutics apart within the broader spectrum of Islamic esotericism. It not only extended Ibn ʿArabi's notion of the "Perfect Human" (*al-insān al-kāmil*), but also paralleled developments in Jewish Kabbalah and Christian Neoplatonism, where letters and faces similarly mediate between the finite and the infinite.

The ontological hermeneutics of the letter in hurufism. This section explores the core philosophical structures that underlie Hurufite thought, arguing that Hurufism develops a distinctive model of ontological hermeneutics, in which letters (ḥurūf) are not merely linguistic symbols but metaphysical operators. Hurufite hermeneutics thus represents a radical departure from standard exegetical frameworks in Islamic theology by merging the ontic structure of the cosmos, the human body, and the Qurʾanic text into a unified semiotic system.

In classical Hurufite doctrine, as developed by Fazlallah Astarabadi, each letter of the Arabic alphabet is charged with ontological significance. Letters are not neutral tools of representation; they are divine traces, ontological forms that precede and structure the appearance of meaning in the universe. Fazlallah asserts that creation unfolds through the articulation of divine names (asmāʾ Allāh), and these names in turn are composed of letters – thereby assigning primordial status to the ḥurūf.

Hurufism posits that Arabic letters are **pre-ontological codes**, containing the very essence of divine being. The 28 letters correspond to cosmic principles, elements of the human body, and stages of spiritual ascent. Letters are not signs of things – **they are things**, or rather, the structure through which things come into being. This radical position reconfigures language from a tool of representation into a **cosmic architecture of existence.**

This perspective parallels ideas in Western philosophical hermeneutics, particularly Heidegger's concept of language as "the house of Being". Yet Hurufism goes further: the letter is not just the medium of being, it is being inscribed. This shift allows us to speak of an "ontological hermeneutics of the letter," where to read is to access the metaphysical structure of reality.

The Human Face as a Semiotic Site: Anthropo-Cosmic Hermeneutics. One of the most striking aspects of Hurufite hermeneutics is its correlation between letters, the human body, and the cosmos. Fazlallah constructs an interpretive system in which the human face mirrors the structure of the Arabic script, and in particular, the arrangement of letters in divine revelation. The eyes, nose, ears, and other features correspond to specific letters, transforming the face into a living text, a Qurʾan in human form.

This concept exemplifies what may be called "anthropo-cosmic hermeneutics": the view that the human being, far from being a passive recipient of revelation, is an active exegetical space, wherein the divine word manifests itself in form and structure. In this framework, taʾwīl becomes embodied; the act of interpretation is not only textual, but also corporeal and cosmic.

This view aligns with Ibn ʿArabī's doctrine of the "Perfect Human" (al-insān al-kāmil) as a locus of divine self-disclosure, yet Hurufism gives this doctrine a radical semiotic turn by assigning specific letters to physical attributes, making the human body both a signifier and a sacred text.

Since the Quran consists of 28 letters, the secrets of the Quran are revealed on the face of a person. The seven lines on the face correspond to the seven verses of the Surah Fatiha. Since Fatiha is the quintessence of the meanings of the Quran, it is the mother of the book, "Ummu l-Kitab" (Şenödeyici, 2015, 221).

Circularity and Semiotic Recursion: A Mystical Hermeneutic Model. The Hurufite method of interpretation does not follow a linear trajectory from sign to meaning. Instead, it reflects a circular hermeneutic model, in which the parts (letters) endlessly refer to the whole (cosmos, body, revelation) and vice versa. This recursive model resonates with the hermeneutic circle described by Gadamer: the idea that understanding emerges through a dynamic interplay between whole and part.

However, Hurufism extends this principle into the mystical domain. Meaning in Hurufism is never fixed or closed; it unfolds continuously through deeper levels of esoteric interpretation (bāṭin), numerological symbolism (ʿilm al-jafr), and visual analogies. This suggests a layered ontology of meaning, where each act of reading reveals not a static truth, but a new mode of being.

Whereas classical Islamic exegesis often seeks to uncover legal or theological meaning in scripture, Hurufism aims at ontological

transformation through interpretation. In this way, Hurufite hermeneutics aligns more closely with ritual and symbolic epistemologies, where reading is a mode of participation in the divine order, not mere analysis of a text.

From a philosophical standpoint, Hurufism proposes a pre-modern Islamic semiotics, wherein language and being are inseparably intertwined. Its emphasis on the performative and transformative role of letters anticipates modern discussions in symbolic anthropology, mystical linguistics, and philosophical theology.

In sum, Hurufism can be understood as a profound experiment in Islamic philosophical hermeneutics, offering a radical alternative to both rationalist and traditionalist models of interpretation. Its core claim, that letters contain, reveal, and constitute the structure of divine reality, situates it within a lineage of speculative thought that deserves renewed scholarly attention, particularly in light of contemporary debates in philosophy of language and semiotics.

In Hurufism, Arabic letters are considered not only as elements of writing, but as living entities through which God reveals Himself in the world. The *abjad system* (where each letter has a numerical value) is used for: interpreting the Quran (ta'wil), decoding the cosmos, understanding man as a microcosm. Letters are signs of the Divine, and numbers are their vibrations in matter.

The word *abjad* is an acronym derived from the first four consonantal shapes in the Arabic alphabet – Alif, Bá, Jim, Dál. As such abjad designates the letters of the Arabic alphabet (also known as alifbá') in the phrase *hurúf al-abjad*. An adjective formed from this, *abjadí*, means a novice at something. Nowadays the Arabic alphabet does not follow the sequence a-b-j-d, but rather the order: A-B-T-Th-J-H.-Kh-D (the basic shapes of the letters A-B-J-D without their diacritical dots do, however, occur in that order, insofar as T and Th are distinguished from B only by dots, and the H. and Kh from the J only by dots). However, the order A-B-J-D is quite ancient, insofar as the word abjad is not of Arabic origin, but comes from earlier written alphabets, perhaps from Phoenician though the sequence may be as old as Ugaritic. In any case, it certainly predates the writing down of Arabic, as can be seen by comparison of Hebrew (Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Daleth) and Greek (Alpha Beta Gamma Delta). The Arabic alphabet and the corresponding numerical values known as abjad are therefore derived from earlier prototypes, as the following comparison shows:

Hebrew: Aleph = 1 Beth = 2 gimel = 3 daleth = 4
Greek : alpha = 1 beta = 2 gamma = 3 delta = 4
Arabic: alif = 1 bá' = 2 jím = 3 dál = 4 (Lewis, 1999; Balli, 2010, 12).

One of the central ideas of Hurufism: the human face is the calligraphy of God, where: Each part of the body is a letter and at the same time a sign of the Divine Order. Hurufi texts are full of symbolism of the number 28 (Arabic letters) and 32 (Persian letters). According to Usluer (2009), these texts connect the letters to parts of the human body (Rexhepi and Xhafçe, 2024, 51). This "body writing" is a striking example of *anthropo-cosmic hermeneutics*, in which the abjad becomes a map of divine anatomy (Balli, 2010, 12–15).

Hurufism employs the Abjad system to decipher the hidden layers of the Qur'an: letter codes – numbers – esoteric meanings; a movement from the outer (ẓāhir) to the inner (bāṭin) dimension of the text. Although numerical calculation is used, the Hurufite use of Abjad is not a form of divinatory numerology. Rather, it is an *ontological semiotics*, in which: letter its sign, number its measure of energy or meaning, word its manifestation of the Divine.
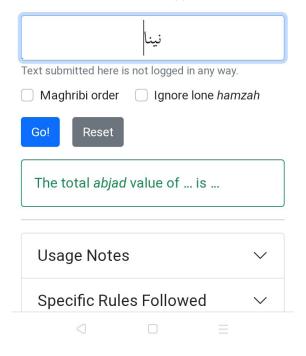
The Abjad system in Hurufism serves as a foundational code that unites text (the Qur'an), body (the human being), cosmos (the world), and the Divine (the source). Hurufism transforms Abjad into a philosophical-mystical system, where letters and numbers form the essence of the language of Creation. Through this lens, it offers a unique form of Islamic hermeneutics, integrating semiotics, anthropology, cosmology, and theology.

It would seem that this ancient system was only accessible to the initiated, but today even this is available to technology. An abjad calculator has been created, where any word (by Arabic or Persian) can be calculated online, the computer has turned the sacred into the public domain (Abjad calculator, 2017).

Hurufism as an Ancient Form of Semiotic Digitalization. We know that digitalization is the process of converting information into digital form (0 and 1), enabling it to be processed electronically. More broadly, it refers to the use of digital technologies for processing, storing,

Abjad Calculator

In the box below, enter a word or phrase, or anything you like, *in Arabic or Persian script*. (If this poses a problem, see the "Usage Notes.") Then hit "Enter" or click the "Go!" button, and the total numerical *abjad* value of your input will be returned. Use the optional checkboxes if you're working with the Maghribi system, or if you prefer *not* to assign value to the pseudo-letter *hamzah* in its isolated state (ء).

نينا

Text submitted here is not logged in any way.

☐ Maghribi order   ☐ Ignore lone *hamzah*

Go!   Reset

The total *abjad* value of … is …

Usage Notes   ⌄

Specific Rules Followed   ⌄

◁   ☐   ≡

Picture 4. Abjad calculator

Image source: https://www.abjadcalc.com/

and analyzing information. Although Hurufism and modern digitalization emerge from vastly different historical and philosophical contexts, there are some intriguing parallels, especially regarding the sacred and structural significance of signs.

In Hurufism, letters and numbers are codes of the Divine. Modern digitalization also treats information as code: everything can be expressed through symbols and numbers (bits). In both systems, everything can be encoded, whether it is a spiritual message or digital data. We can be asserted that world as text, as metadata. Hurufis saw the world as a text woven from letters. The digital age envisions the world as an informational model: data, symbols, signals. Both assume that reality can be deciphered through signs, whether letters or bits.

Hurufism seeks hidden meanings through the analysis of letters and numbers. In the digital era (e.g., in cryptography, big data, AI), data also contains hidden layers that require interpretation. Hurufism is oriented toward revelation, sacred texts, and subjective interpretation; digitalization is oriented toward efficiency, algorithmic processing, and practical texts. One could say that Hurufism is an ancient form of "semiotic digitalization", in which letters and numbers served as a means to perceive the Divine world, while modern digitalization is a rationalized and algorithmized continuation of the same idea: to represent and understand the world through codes, data, signs, and their processing.

Conclusions. This article presents a new philosophical framework for understanding Hurufism, positioning it not merely as a mystical or heterodox branch of Sufism, but as a distinct system of Islamic philosophical hermeneutics. While previous scholarship has emphasized the esoteric and poetic dimensions of Hurufism, this study is the first to articulate its underlying ontological and semiotic logic in dialogue with contemporary hermeneutic philosophy.

Specifically, the research introduces the concept of "*ontological hermeneutics of the letter*", a model in which the Arabic letters (ḥurūf) are viewed as metaphysical structures that mediate divine, cosmological, and anthropological knowledge. This model reinterprets Hurufite thought as a philosophy of language and being, grounded in Qurʾanic symbolism and informed by esoteric readings (taʾwīl) that operate across scriptural, corporeal, and cosmic levels.

Furthermore, the study proposes the term "*anthropo-cosmic hermeneutics*" to describe the Hurufite view of the human body, particularly the face, as a textual site mirroring both the Qurʾan and the divine order. This framework provides an innovative lens through which to read Islamic mystical epistemology and repositions Hurufism as a valuable contribution to the broader Islamic intellectual tradition.

By bridging Hurufism with modern theories of hermeneutics (Gadamer, Ricoeur, Heidegger), the article contributes to comparative Islamic philosophy, Islamic semiotics, and philosophical theology, offering a new methodology for

interpreting the symbolic function of letters in Islamic thought.

Hurufism offers a profound reconfiguration of Islamic hermeneutics by treating letters not merely as textual elements but as ontological codes embedded in the human and cosmic order. Through its radical semiotic theology, Hurufism blurs the boundaries between body, text, and revelation, articulating a vision of the world as divine inscription. As such, it presents a rich but underexplored resource for contemporary Islamic philosophy, hermeneutics, and mystical epistemology.

Future research may further explore how Hurufite thought relates to Ismaʿili cosmology, or modern theories of symbolic cognition, thereby situating it more firmly within both classical and modern Islamic intellectual frameworks.

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