



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AL-TA'RIFAT AND ITS EXPOSITION OF TERMS RELATED TO THE QURANIC SCIENCES

<https://doi.org/10.57033/mijournals-2026-4-0250>

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Received: 15-05-2026

Accepted: 28-05-2026

Published: 09-06-2026



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Abstract. When we speak of the terminology of the medieval Islamic sciences, al-Jurjani's scholarly achievement, al-Ta'rifat, is inevitably mentioned. Studying this work from the standpoint of the Quranic sciences is important for shedding light on the scholar's place in that field. This article deals with the scholarly standing of the medieval Eastern encyclopedist Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjani, the purpose of al-Ta'rifat in defining the Islamic terms, its advantages over other works of its field, the later works written in the same field, and the information on its manuscripts and modern editions. It also examines the terminology of the Quranic sciences and the coverage of Quranic words in al-Ta'rifat in particular the definitions of "Qur'an," "mutashabih," "tafsir," "ta'wil" and "al-tawba al-nasuh."

Keywords: al-Jurjani, al-Ta'rifat, Quranic sciences, definitions, terminology, tafsir, ta'wil, mutashabih.

INTRODUCTION

Considered one of the encyclopedic scholars of the Middle Ages, Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjani (740–816 AH / 1340–1413 CE) was a prominent representative of the scholarly community in the Islamic world of his time. Along with being recognized as an Arabic linguist and philosopher, he was a master of various fields of study taught in the madrasas of that era, including kalam (Islamic scholastic theology), Islamic philosophy, logic, Arabic language and literature, fiqh (jurisprudence) and usul (principles of jurisprudence), tafsir (Quranic exegesis), hadith (prophetic traditions), and the science of disputation (munazara). Historical sources are unanimous regarding his exceptional intelligence,

meticulous scrutiny, rigorous research, deep contemplation, sharp intellect, mastery of eloquence (fasahat) and rhetoric (balaghat), profound knowledge of argumentation and proof-rendering methodologies, and his adherence to the dictates of logic and reason during scholarly discourses.

Historical records indicate that al-Jurjani authored nearly a hundred works across various sciences. However, only a few of his writings earned him global renown as Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjani. Among such works is Kitab al-Ta‘rifat (The Book of Definitions), a treatise dedicated to Islamic scientific and scholarly terminology.

According to the author, this encyclopedia which compiles selections from comprehensive works written in the field of Islamic sciences prior to his era was compiled to facilitate ease of study for seekers of knowledge and is organized in alphabetical order.

MAIN PART

The scope and method of al-Ta‘rifat

In this book, Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjani provided definitions for 2,026 terms. These primarily encompass terminology specific to fields such as kalam, philosophy, logic, nahw (syntax), sarf (morphology), ‘arud (prosody), qafiya (rhyme), tafsir, hadith, fiqh, fara’id (the law of inheritance), usul al-fiqh, hisab (arithmetic), balaghat, tasawwuf (Sufism), astronomy, and medicine.

In al-Ta‘rifat, the lexical meanings of the terms are expounded first, followed by their definitions within specific scientific disciplines. For certain terms, the author bypassed the lexical meanings and initiated the technical definitions directly. While this work elucidates the precise and subtle nuances of words, the definitions of some terms related to Sufism and philosophy remain ambiguous.

To clarify linguistic definitions, the scholar utilized the works of renowned grammarians such as Sibawayh, Ali ibn Hamza al-Kisa’i, and Yahya ibn Ziyad al-Farra. For jurisprudential terms, he drew upon Abu Hanifa, Abu Yusuf, and Imam al-Shafi‘i, while for Sufi terminology, he relied on scholars like Muhyiddin ibn ‘Arabi, Abu Talib al-Makki, and Abd al-Karim al-Qushayri.

Al-Ta‘rifat among the works of its genre

Prior to al-Jurjani, Abu Nasr al-Farabi had written Ihṣā al-‘Ulum (The Enumeration of the Sciences), Ibn Sina authored Aqṣam al-‘Ulum (The Divisions of the Sciences),

Muhammad al-Khwarazmi penned *Mafatih al-‘Ulum* (The Keys to the Sciences), Fakhr al-Din al-Razi composed *Hada’iq al-Anwar* (The Gardens of Lights), and Ahmad al-Farghani wrote *Lata’if al-I‘lam* (The Subtleties of Information). However, these works were not exclusively dedicated to the definition of terminology; rather, they partially allocated space to terms during the broader process of defining various sciences. *Al-Ta‘rifat*, by contrast, stands out among them all as the pioneer work that systematically compiled terms from diverse scientific domains in alphabetical order.

Retaining its significance to the present day, this work served as a foundational source for subsequent treatises, such as al-Tahanawi’s *Kashshaf Istilahat al-Funun wa-al-‘Ulum* (The Revealer of the Technical Terms of Arts and Sciences), Abu al-Baqa’s *al-Kulliyyat* (The General Principles), and Riza Tevfik’s *Mufasssal Kamus-ı Felsefe* (Detailed Dictionary of Philosophy).

Manuscripts, editions and later reception

Aside from more than 160 manuscript copies of *al-Ta‘rifat* preserved in Turkish libraries, numerous copies continue to be identified in various libraries worldwide. The first edition of the work in another language was published in 1818 by Silvestre de Sacy, featuring the Arabic text alongside a French translation, after which several editions were produced globally. Notably, the work was translated into Persian by Umran Alizade in 1941, and by Hasan Sayyid Arab and Sima Nurbakhsh in 1958; into Turkish by Arif Erkan in 1993; and into French by Maurizio Gloton in 2006.

Supplementing the definitions provided in *al-Ta‘rifat*, Muhammad Abd al-Rauf al-Munawi wrote *al-Tawqif ‘ala Muhimmat al-Ta‘arif* (The Attainment to the Core Definitions). Additionally, there is an anonymous work titled *Mutammimat al-Ta‘rifat* (The Supplement to *al-Ta‘rifat*). Historical sources record that Kemalpasazade authored glosses (*hashiya*) on *al-Ta‘rifat*. A scholar named Abdurrahman Fehmi translated *al-Ta‘rifat* into Turkish with certain additions between 1896 and 1897, publishing its initial sections across several issues of the journal *Mecmua-i Ebüzziya*. Furthermore, between 1891 and 1896, articles were published under the column “*Ta‘rifat-i Seyyid*” in twenty-eight issues of the journal *Maarif*, attributed to authors named A. Shakir and Nüzhet. In 1994, an abridged version titled *Mukhtasar Kitab al-Ta‘rifat* was published by the Dar al-Tawfiq publishing house in Riyadh.

Although this work has not been fully translated into the Uzbek language, contemporary local scholars and researchers frequently cite al-Jurjani’s *al-Ta‘rifat* when

elucidating the meanings of religious terminology. In particular, Sheikh Muhammad Sodik Muhammad Yusuf, when clarifying Sufi terms in his book *Ruhîy Tarbiya* (Spiritual Purification), primarily cites the definition given in al-Jurjani's *al-Ta'rifat*. For instance, regarding the definition of the word *ghiybah* (backbiting), he states: "Al-Jurjani says: 'Ghiybah is mentioning a person's actual faults in their absence'" (Muhammad Sodik Muhammad Yusuf, 2016:264). In explaining the trait of *bukhl* (stinginess), it is stated: "Al-Jurjani says: 'Bukhl is the withholding of one's own wealth'" (Muhammad Sodik Muhammad Yusuf, 2016:401).

Terms of the Quranic sciences in al-Ta'rifat

Alongside the terminology of the aforementioned sciences, al-Jurjani's *al-Ta'rifat* also includes definitions of terms pertaining to the Quranic sciences (*'ulum al-Qur'an*). Specifically, the scholar provided definitions for nearly twenty terms, including *al-Qur'an*, *muhkam* (decisive), *mutashabih* (allegorical), *mutlaq* (absolute), *muqayyad* (qualified), *naskh* (abrogation), *mujmal* (ambiguous), *muqtada al-nass* (the required meaning of the text), *tafsir*, *ta'wil* (interpretation), *mu'awwal* (interpreted), *lahn* (linguistic error), *majaz* (metaphor), *mutawatir* (consecutively transmitted), *mufassar* (unequivocally explained), and *bayan al-tafsir* (the clarification of exegesis).

Regarding the definition of the word *Qur'an*, al-Jurjani states: "It is the (Book) revealed to the Prophet, written in the codices (*masahif*), and transmitted from him in an indubitable and *mutawatir* manner" (al-Jurjani, 2004:146). Following this definition, in accordance with his methodology, al-Jurjani presents the definition of the term according to other scholars, stating: "According to the People of Truth (*ahl al-haqq*), the Quran is: 'The comprehensive, divinely inspired knowledge (*al-'ilm al-ladunni*) and the gatherer of all realities.'"

He defines the word *mutashabih* as follows: "The *mutashabih* is that verse whose meaning remains hidden within the wording itself, and there is absolutely no hope of grasping its comprehension." This definition is considered one of the most flawless and comprehensive definitions given to the term *mutashabih*.

Furthermore, through his definitions of *tafsir* and *ta'wil*, one can easily grasp the distinction between these two concepts: "The lexical root of *tafsir* means to uncover and disclose. In the Sharia, it is the exposition of the verse's meaning, its objective, its narrative context, and the reason for its revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*) through wordings that point to it clearly." Regarding the word *ta'wil*, he writes: "Lexically, *ta'wil* signifies

returning to the origin. In the Sharia, it is directing the wording away from its literal, apparent meaning (al-ma‘na al-zahir) toward a probable alternative meaning (al-ma‘na al-muhtamal). This alternative meaning must align with the Book and the Sunnah, as exemplified in the interpretation of the following verse:

يُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ

“...He brings forth the living from the dead, and He brings forth the dead from the living...” (Surah Yunus, Verse 31)

If the (exegete) intends by this verse the bringing forth of a bird from an egg, this is considered tafsir. However, if the intention is the bringing forth of a believer from a disbeliever, or a scholar from an ignorant person, this is considered ta’wil”.

Definitions of Quranic vocabulary

It is well known that the Holy Quran contains 77,347 words, of which 14,721 are unique words used without repetition. Alongside the terms of Quranic sciences, Kitab al-Ta‘rifat elucidates the definitions of 341 words explicitly mentioned in the Holy Quran. Among them are expressions such as al-ufuq al-a‘la (the highest horizon), al-ufuq al-mubin (the clear horizon), al-kitab al-mubin (the clear book), qaba qawsayni (two bows’ length), majma‘ al-bahrayn (the junction of the two seas), al-A‘raf (the Heights), ‘ayn al-yaqin (the eye of certainty), tabdhir (squandering), ulu al-albab (people of understanding), umm al-kitab (the Mother of the Book), yawm al-jam‘ (the Day of Gathering), and al-tawbah al-nasuh (sincere repentance), which are expressed exactly as they appear in the Quranic text.

Al-Jurjani provides the following exposition regarding the phrase al-tawbah al-nasuh: “It is the firm resolve not to return to the likeness of the sin committed. Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with them both) said: ‘Al-tawbah al-nasuh is remorse with the heart, seeking forgiveness with the tongue, physical abandonment of the sin, and the absolute intention never to return to it.’ It is said that lexically, tawbah means ‘returning from sin’. The word التوب [al-tawb] is also used to denote this meaning. Allah the Almighty says:

غَافِرِ الذَّنْبِ وَقَابِلِ التَّوْبِ

“The Forgiver of sin, the Acceptor of repentance...” (Surah Ghafir, Verse 3).

It is also said that التوب [al-tawb] is the plural form of التوبة [al-tawbah]. In the Sharia, repentance is defined as: ‘Returning from blameworthy conduct to praiseworthy

conduct.’ According to all scholars, immediate repentance is obligatory (wajib). The obligatoriness of repentance is substantiated by the statement of Allah the Almighty:

وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ

“And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers...” (Surah An-Nur, Verse 31).

The necessity of immediate repentance arises because delaying it carries the inherent risk of persisting in a forbidden act. The term *inabah* (turning unto God) is also close to *tawbah* both legally and lexically. According to one perspective, *al-tawbah al-nasuh* means leaving no trace of the sin in one’s actions, whether publicly or privately. Another view suggests that it guides its practitioner to salvation in both this world and the Hereafter. It is also argued that repentance consists of confession, remorse, and cessation.

Repentance embodies three meanings. The first is remorse; the second is abandoning the return to what Allah has prohibited; and the third is striving to redress acts of injustice and wrongdoing”.

Furthermore, the work features the verbal noun (*masdar*) forms of words mentioned as verbs in the Holy Quran such as *istitah* (capability), *israf* (extravagance), *tafrit* (negligence), *tafakkur* (reflection), *tawakkul* (reliance), *mash* (wiping), *nisyan* (forgetfulness), and *tayammum* (dry ablution) which can also be classified as definitions of Quranic vocabulary. Concurrently, although the book defines terms originally found in the Holy Quran like *masbuq* (preceded/overtaken) and *mamdud* (extended), these cannot be categorized as definitions of Quranic words because their contextual meanings in the text do not align with the verse’s semantic application. For example, in the Quran, the word *المسبق* [*al-masbuq*] occurs twice meaning “incapable/outrun,” whereas in *al-Ta’rifat*, the word is treated according to its jurisprudential (*fiqhi*) definition, referring to a latecomer who joins the congregational prayer after it has already commenced.

Quranic verses and hadiths as textual proofs

In *al-Ta’rifat*, Quranic verses and prophetic traditions (*hadiths*) are systematically employed to clarify word meanings. Across the definitions of sixty-nine terms, eighty-five verses from forty-three different *surahs* are brought forward as textual proofs. Among these, eight verses are cited more than once.

Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjani was an encyclopedic scholar of his era who authored works spanning nearly all the sciences widely studied during his time. Although *Kitab al-*

Ta‘rifat was written in response to a contemporary necessity for a dictionary of religious terminology, it has fulfilled and continues to fulfill the needs of scholars and students not only in his own era but up to the present day. This enduring relevance serves as a primary indicator of its profound significance. At the same time, analyzing al-Ta‘rifat a work widely recognized and revered in the sphere of Islamic terminology from the 15th century to the modern day from the perspective of Quranic sciences demonstrates the pivotal role that Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjani’s heritage played in the development of medieval Quranic studies.

CONCLUSION

Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjani was an encyclopedic scholar who wrote works spanning almost all the sciences studied in his time. Although *Kitab al-Ta‘rifat* was written in response to a contemporary need for a dictionary of religious terminology, it has met and continues to meet the needs of scholars and students not only in his own era but up to the present day, and this enduring relevance is a primary indicator of its significance. Analysing *al-Ta‘rifat*, a work revered in the sphere of Islamic terminology from the fifteenth century to the present, from the standpoint of the Quranic sciences demonstrates the pivotal role that al-Jurjani’s heritage played in the development of medieval Quranic studies.

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