AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE AESTHETIC COMPONENTS OF HURUFI THOUGHT IN THE TEXTS OF FAZL ALLĀH ASTARĀBĀDĪ

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Abstract

Hurufism, founded by Fazl Allāh Astarābādī in the late fourteenth century CE, is one of the most significant intellectual and mystical movements in Islamic thought. By offering a distinctive interpretation of the relationship between letters, the human being (al-insān), and the cosmos, it developed an intellectual and doctrinal system grounded in the esoteric hermeneutics of letters (taʾwīl al-ḥurūf). Within Hurufi thought, letters are understood not merely as linguistic elements but as loci of divine manifestation (maẓāhir al-ẓuhūr). Although Hurufism has been extensively studied from historical, social, and doctrinal perspectives, the aesthetic components of Hurufi thought have not been the subject of an independent study. This study investigates the aesthetic components of Hurufi thought in the texts of Fazl Allāh Astarābādī using a qualitative descriptive-analytical method based on textual analysis within the framework of Islamic aesthetics. The findings identify three principal aesthetic components of Hurufi thought in the examined texts: the 28- and 32-letter numerical system, the human being (al-insān), and the equinoctial line (khaṭṭ-i istivā). Examining these components through key concepts of Islamic aesthetics-including manifestation (tajallī), divine beauty (jamāl), goodness/excellence (ḥusn), love (ʿishq), the Perfect Human (al-insān al-kāmil), similitude and incomparability (tashbīh and tanzīh), and the relationship between form and meaning (ṣūrah and maʿnā)-reveals the underlying aesthetic structure of Hurufi thought.

Keywords

Hurufism; Fazl Allāh Astarābādī; Islamic aesthetics; 28- and 32-letter numerical system; human being (al-insān); equinoctial line (khaṭṭ-i istivā).

1. INTRODUCTION

Hurufi thought is grounded in a distinctive conception of divine letters as ontological principles underlying creation and the hierarchy of existence (marātib al-wujūd). Within this framework, letters and numbers are understood not merely as linguistic elements but as manifestations of metaphysical reality that structure the relationship between the human being, the cosmos, and the Divine. This conceptual system provides the theoretical basis for examining the aesthetic dimensions of Hurufi thought. Despite the importance of Hurufism in the history of Islamic thought, existing scholarship has predominantly focused on its historical, doctrinal, and heresiological dimensions.[1] Consequently, the aesthetic components of Hurufi thought have received comparatively limited

[1] Among the pioneering works in this field, especially on Hurufi doctrine and history, see Sadeq Kiya, Vāzha-Nāma-yi Gurgānī [The Gorgani Glossary] (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 1951); Abdulbaki Golpinarli, Fihrist-i Mutūn-i Ḥurūfiyya [The Catalogue of Hurufi Texts], trans. Tofigh Hashempour Sobhani (Tehran: Sāzmān-i Chāp va Intishārāt, 1995); Fatih Usluer, Ḥurūfiyya: Tārīkh, ʿAqāʾid, ʿIbādāt, Qiyāmat va … az Ibtidā tā Kūnūn bā Istinād be Manābiʿ-i Dast-i Avval [Hurufism: History, Beliefs, Rituals, the Resurrection and … from the Beginning to the Present, with Reference to Primary Sources], trans. Davud Vafāʾī (Tehran: Mowlā, 2012); Shahzad Bashir, Ḥurūfiyya: Tārīkh va ʿAqāyid [Hurufism: History and Doctrines], trans. Mohammad-Reza Moradi Tadi (Tehran: Nashr-i Ilm, 2016); Tağı Abası, "Investigation of History of Hurufism," International Journal of Social Science Research 8, no. 2 (2019): 13–27. For the published texts, see Clément Huart, Textes persans relatifs à la secte des Houroûfîs (Leyden: E. J. Brill; London: Luzac & Co., 1909); Faẓl Allāh Astarābādī, Jāvīdān-nāma-yi Kabīr, ed. Fatih

systematic attention as an independent field of inquiry. In the field of Islamic aesthetics, scholars have examined concepts such as order, proportion, perfection, divine beauty (jamāl), manifestation (tajallī), and the dialectic of similitude and incomparability (tashbīh and tanzīh) in explaining the nature and foundations of beauty.[2] Given the centrality of these concepts in the texts of Fazl Allāh Astarābādī, examining their relationship to Hurufi thought provides a basis for an aesthetic reading of this intellectual tradition. However, this relationship remains insufficiently explored through systematic analysis of Astarābādī's primary texts. The present study addresses this gap by identifying the aesthetic components of Hurufi thought and examining their relationship to key concepts of Islamic aesthetics. Using a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach, this study adopts a text-centered methodology focused on the Jāvidān-nāma, Arsh-nāma, Mahabbat-nāma, Naw-nāmah, and Dīvān-i Naʿīmī. Rather than treating these works merely as historical documents, the study analyzes them as interconnected systems of meaning whose linguistic, numerical, and conceptual structures embody the intellectual foundations of Hurufi thought. It identifies the principal aesthetic components of this thought by examining the central concepts in Astarābādī's works and their interrelationships within the Hurufi worldview, and interprets them in relation to key concepts of Islamic aesthetics. This article seeks to answer the following questions: What are the aesthetic components of Hurufi thought in the texts of Fazl Allāh Astarābādī? On what philosophical foundations and concepts is this worldview based? How can the aesthetic components of Hurufi thought be interpreted within the framework of Islamic aesthetics, and how do they relate to its key concepts?

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. ISLAMIC AESTHETICS

2.1.1. BEAUTY AND AESTHETICS

Beauty is one of the fundamental concepts in philosophy, art, and religious and mystical thought. Nevertheless, providing a comprehensive and definitive definition of beauty has always been difficult, and thinkers have held diverse views regarding its nature. In its lexical usage, the term zībā denotes goodness, beauty, pleasing appearance, and adornment, and is used in contrast to ugliness and evil (Dihkhudā, vol. 9, 1998: 13061). The Moin Encyclopedic Dictionary likewise defines beauty as a quality based on order and harmony, accompanied by grandeur and purity, which can stimulate the intellect, imagination, and higher human inclinations and produce pleasure and elation. Accordingly, beauty is regarded as a relative phenomenon (Muʿīn, vol. 2, 1974: 1768). For the systematic study of artistic phenomena, a distinction must be made between "beauty" and "aesthetics." Beauty refers to a quality present in objects, phenomena, or human experience, whereas aesthetics is a discipline that examines the foundations, criteria, and ways of understanding and evaluating beauty. The term "aesthetics" is translated into Persian as zībāʾī-shināsī or ʿilm al-jamāl. It has Greek origins and is derived from the Greek words aisthesis, meaning "sensory perception," and aisthanomai, meaning "to perceive through the senses" (Farzān, 2021: 13). The term was introduced in the eighteenth century CE by Baumgarten[3] and gradually came to be recognized as an independent branch of philosophy. Nevertheless, reflection on beauty has a much older history and, from ancient Greece to the modern period, has developed from a metaphysical approach toward one based on human experience and perception (Pāzūkī, 2013: 16–18).

Usluer (Tehran: Farhangestān-i Zabān va Adab-i Fārsī, 2023). Faẓl Allāh Astarābādī and Derviş Murtazâ, Câvidannâme-i Sağîr ve Dürr-i Yetîm Tercümesi: Farsça-Türkçe Tam Metin, ed. Fatih Usluer (Istanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınevi, 2025).

[2] Shahram Pazouki, Ḥikmat-i Hunar va Zībāʾī dar Islām [The Wisdom of Art and Beauty in Islam] (Tehran: Iranian Academy of the Arts [Farhangistān-i Hunar], 2013); Hasan Bolkhari, Handasa-yi Khiyāl va Zībāʾī: Pizhūhishī dar Ārāʾ-i Ikhvān al-Ṣafā dar bāra-yi Ḥikmat-i Hunar va Zībāʾī [The Geometry of Imagination and Beauty: A Study on the Views of the Brethren of Purity on the Wisdom of Art and Beauty], 1st ed. (Tehran: Matn Publications [Mūʾassasa-yi Taʾlīf, Tarjuma va Nashr-i Āsār-i Hunarī], 2009); Valérie Gonzalez, Beauty and Islam: Aesthetics in Islamic Art and Architecture (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001); Valérie Gonzalez, Islamic Aesthetics: Beauty in Context (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021); Torad Hamadeh, "Zībāʾī dar Āʾīna-yi ʿĀrif: Falsafa-yi Zībāʾī-Shināshī dar Taṣavvuf va ʿIrfān-i Islāmī" [Beauty in the Mirror of the Mystic: The Philosophy of Aesthetics in Sufism and Islamic Mysticism], trans. Ali-Asghar Mohammadkhani, Kitāb-i Māh-i Adabiyyāt va Falsafa [Book of the Month: Literature and Philosophy], no. 92 (June–July 2005): 67–74; Mohammad-Sadegh Kamelan, "Khudā dar Āʾīna-yi Jalāl va Jamāl (Tashbīh va Tanzīh az Dīdgāh-i Muḥyī al-Dīn va Mawlavī)" [God in the Mirror of Majesty and Beauty: Similitude and Incomparability from the Perspective of Ibn ʿArabī and Rūmī] (Master's thesis, Department of Theology and Islamic Studies, Center for Training Seminary Instructors of Qom, Ministry of Culture and Higher Education, 1994); Abdolsamie Farzan, "Barrasī-yi Falsafa-yi Zībāʾī dar Ḥikmat-i Islāmī az Manẓar-i Ibn Sīnā, Shaykh-i Ishrāq, va Mullā Ṣadrā" [An Investigation into the Philosophy of Beauty in Islamic Wisdom from the Perspectives of Avicenna, Suhrawardi, and Mulla Sadra] (Master's thesis, Department of Islamic Philosophy, Al-Mustafa International University, Gorgan Branch, 2021).

[3] Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762): An eighteenth-century German philosopher regarded as the founder of the term "aesthetics" in modern philosophy.

2.1.2. SOME CONCEPTS RELATED TO ISLAMIC AESTHETICS

Within the Islamic tradition, discussions of beauty have generally been articulated in the context of wisdom, mysticism, and theology. In this tradition, beauty is associated with truth and perfection and is explained through concepts such as jamāl and ḥusn. Lexically, jamāl means beauty, adornment, and goodness; in mystical terminology, it refers to the manifestation of the beloved's perfection and the disclosure of the attributes of divine grace and mercy (Ibn Manẓūr, 1995, vol. 11: 126; Ibn Fāris, 1984, vol. 1: 481). From this perspective, the world is a mirror of divine beauty, and formal beauties are manifestations of the One Reality. Accordingly, the perception of beauty can serve as a means of passing from multiplicity to unity (Jāmī, 1991: 588–589).

Ḥusn is likewise associated with perfection, proportion, and goodness. At the lexical and conceptual level, al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī regards it as referring to things that are beautiful from the perspective of insight and thought, thereby linking beauty to intellectual and spiritual discernment (Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 1990, vol. 1: 491). This connection between beauty and perception is further developed by Avicenna in Fī Māhiyyat al-ʿIshq[4], where he uses ḥusn in reference to beautiful faces and forms and associates love with the perception of beauty (Rabīʿī, 2011: 109). In the illuminationist tradition, Suhrawardi moves beyond the merely perceptual dimension by relating ḥusn and jamāl to perfection. This metaphysical understanding is further elaborated by Mulla Sadra, who connects ḥusn with the degrees of existence and thus interprets beauty in relation to the hierarchical structure of being (Farzān, 2021: 174; Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, 1981, vol. 9: 344). Love (ʿishq) occupies a fundamental position in Islamic mysticism and is closely associated with jamāl and ḥusn. Aḥmad al-Ghazālī regards the beauties of the world as manifestations of divine beauty and presents love as arising from an encounter with beauty and ḥusn (Ghazālī, 1986: 42). In this account, beauty serves as the object of perception, while love emerges as the spiritual response to it. Mulla Sadra, in turn, defines love as "awareness of perfection" (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, 2002: 235). Thus, love is not merely an affective response to beauty; it may also become a means through which the human being moves toward perfection and truth. This understanding of beauty is directly connected to the concept of tajallī (manifestation). In Islamic mysticism, beauty is realized through the manifestation of truth from concealment into disclosure, and ḥusn cannot be conceived apart from tajallī (Pāzūkī, 2013: 26). Muslim mystics regard the world as the arena in which the divine names and attributes are manifested, and they understand created beings as manifestations of the Divine. Accordingly, beauty is the mode through which truth manifests itself across the degrees of existence.

Among these, the Perfect Human (al-insān al-kāmil) is regarded as the most comprehensive manifestation of the divine names and attributes and the fullest locus of the manifestation of divine ḥusn. He is the mirror of divine beauty and the locus in which the attributes of majesty and beauty are united (Nasafī, 1980: 17; ʿAyn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī, 1962: 272). This understanding of tajallī and the Perfect Human is also connected to the two fundamental concepts of tashbīh and tanzīh. In the Islamic tradition, God is manifested in the forms of the world on the one hand, while the Divine Essence remains transcendent and free from any resemblance to created beings on the other. Mystics generally emphasize the unity of these two dimensions: the Divine manifests itself through its forms while remaining beyond them (Pāzūkī, 2013: 83). Thus, although the beauties of the world are signs and manifestations of truth, they also convey meanings and interpretive implications that transcend their outward forms.

Accordingly, form is a mode of the manifestation of meaning, and meaning becomes manifest through form. A beautiful form may convey an esoteric and symbolic meaning and provide a means of passing from the outward appearance to meaning (Pāzūkī, 2013: 73–76). Ibn Arabi likewise maintains that every outward form has an inward dimension and that no form reveals the whole of reality; rather, alongside its external manifestation, everything possesses an inner and interpretive meaning (Ṣāfiyān, 2009: 209). These principles provide a theoretical framework for understanding Hurufi thought, in which letters and written forms are understood not merely as linguistic elements but as manifestations of truth and bearers of symbolic and esoteric meanings. Accordingly, the correspondences among letters, the human being, and the structure of the universe reveal letters as sites for the manifestation of meaning and truth.

2.2. HURUFISM

2.2.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND THE FORMATION OF HURUFISM

Between the seventh and ninth centuries AH, the interaction between Shiʿism and Sufism, particularly around the concept of walāyah, provided a context for the emergence of new intellectual and religious movements. The weakening of the Abbasid caliphate and the Timurid policy of religious nonpartisanship also contributed to the

[4] Literally, Treatise on the Essence of Love.

expansion of Sufi orders and movements. During this period, orders such as the Noorbakhshia and the Niʿmatullāhiyya developed and played a role in the dissemination and continuity of Shiʿi and mystical ideas (Jaʿfariyān, 2000: 515–516; Mīrjaʿfarī, 2000: 166–167).

In continuation of these developments, Hurufism may be understood as the outcome of the continuity and transformation of Shiʿi and Sufi currents during the two centuries preceding its emergence. Fażl Allāh Astarābādī, the founder of this movement, was born around 740 AH in Astarābād. His familiarity with mystical traditions, travels to cultural and religious centers, and visionary and revelatory experiences played a role in the formation of his thought and religious mission (al-Shaybī, 1980: 170; Bashīr, 2016: 19–21; Aksu, 1995: 277). Through interpreting the meanings of letters and their relationship to divine truth, he established a system of thought in which letters, the human being, and the universe acquired meaning within a network of symbolic and esoteric correspondences. He thus became known as "Fażl Allāh Hurufi," and his followers as Hurufists (Usluer, 2012: 11).

Following opposition from the jurists and the Timurid government, Fażl Allāh was executed on Miran Shah's orders in 796 AH. Hurufism, however, continued through his disciples and successors. Nasimi in Aleppo and ʿAlī al-Aʿlā in Anatolia were among the most important propagators of the movement. By transmitting Hurufi teachings to the Bektashi order, ʿAlī al-Aʿlā also contributed to its expansion in Anatolia and the Balkans (Gölpınarlı, 1991: 144; Usluer, 2012: 9–12). Thus, Hurufism became an influential mystical movement in Iran, Anatolia, and the Balkans.

2.2.2. HURUFI WORLDVIEW

The Hurufi worldview is not merely a collection of beliefs about letters but a system of thought in which letters possess an ontological status and mediate the manifestation of divine truth. In this view, the Divine Word is the first manifestation of the Divine Essence and appears in the form of letters; letters are therefore not merely linguistic elements but existential realities and a basis for interpreting and understanding the world. A fundamental concept in this thought is taʾwīl, understood as returning the apparent meaning of the Word to its original and esoteric meaning (Khiyāvī, 2000: 214). Closely related to Islamic esotericism, taʾwīl provides a means of moving beyond the outward forms of religious texts and attaining their inner meanings. The Hurufis regarded themselves as the "People of Interpretation" (ahl al-taʾwīl) or the "People of the Inner Meaning" (ahl al-bāṭin) and considered taʾwīl a means of discovering divine truth and attaining divine knowledge. Citing the ḥadīth "Whoever knows himself knows his Lord,"[5] they regarded self-knowledge as a path to knowledge of God. The disconnected letters of the Qur'an were viewed as keys to understanding the Qur'an and bearers of divine mysteries (Huart, 1981: 3; Gölpınarlı, 1995: 87). By interpreting Qur'anic verses and ḥadīths, they established a symbolic network connecting letters, numbers, the human being, and the structure of creation.

Accordingly, letters transcend their status as linguistic elements and become ontological realities through which divine manifestations are revealed across the degrees of creation. The Hurufis regarded creation as the result of the divine command "Be" (kun) and maintained that, since this command consists of letters, letters form the foundation of every created being. They also explained the actualization of creation through the Word and sound (Usluer, 2012: 81). They established an intrinsic relationship between letters and numbers based on numerical values, the number of dots, and written structure, viewing this system as an expression of the inner and mysterious order of creation (ibid.: 16). Similar conceptions can be found in Neoplatonic, Mandaean, and Kabbalistic thought, in which the Word and letters possess a sacred origin and a fundamental role in creation (Pakalın, 1983, vol. 1: 856–857; Ünver, 2003: 18–19; Goldziher, 1978: 400). In the Islamic world, thinkers and mystics such as Abu Mansur al-ʿIjli, Rajab al-Bursi, Sahl al-Tustari, Hakim al-Tirmidhi, al-Hallaj, al-Buni, and Ibn Arabi likewise placed, in different ways, the primacy of letters or the command "Be" at the foundation of their explanations of existence (Usluer, 2012: 82–83; Ḥallāj, 1989: 55; al-Būnī, n.d.: 59; İbnü'l-Arabî, 1992: 189; Kam & Aynî, 1992: 182–183). The Hurufis, citing the verse "His command, when He intends a thing, is only that He says to it, 'Be,' and it is" (Qur'an 36:82[6]), regarded the world as the result of the Divine Word and its manifestation through letters. Drawing on statements attributed to Imam Ali, they viewed the dot as a symbol of unity and the letter as a sign of multiplicity (al-Aḥsāʾī, 1985, vol. 4: 129). Unlike some other letter-oriented movements, they considered all letters ontologically eternal and equal, assigning none superiority over another (Usluer, 2012: 85). Fażl Allāh likewise regarded letters as divine attributes and maintained that no divine name exists outside the domain of letters (ibid.: 86). Consequently, in his thought, letters are manifestations of the divine Names and Attributes; through them, the Divine Word becomes manifest and is actualized in the world. These principles underpin Hurufi aesthetics, in which beauty transcends sensory and formal qualities, reflecting the manifestation of the Divine Word, the order of creation, and divine truth.

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[5] «مَنْ عَرَفَ نَفْسَهُ فَقَدْ عَرَفَ رَبَّهُ»

[6] «إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ»

3. AESTHETIC COMPONENTS OF HURUFI THOUGHT

A systematic examination of Faẓl Allāh Astarābādī's primary texts identifies three fundamental components of H-urufi aesthetics: the 28- and 32-letter numerical system, the human being, and the equinoctial line. Each component is examined below through textual evidence and in light of concepts from Islamic aesthetics, thereby clarifying its place within the Hurufi aesthetic system.

3.1. THE 28- AND 32-LETTER NUMERICAL SYSTEM

The 28- and 32-letter numerical system is a central principle in Faẓl Allāh Astarābādī's thought, on the basis of which other Hurufi teachings are interpreted. Within this intellectual framework, numbers possess more than quantitative value; they express the sacred structure of existence and the degrees of the manifestation of the Divine Word. Faẓl Allāh distinguishes between the twenty-eight letters of Arabic and the thirty-two letters of Persian, regarding these two systems as two degrees of the manifestation of a single truth. In his view, the Qur'an was revealed through twenty-eight letters, whereas the Jāvdānnāma is organized according to thirty-two letters. This relationship is therefore not merely linguistic but reflects different degrees of divine manifestation. Accordingly, the history of prophethood is also interpreted through this numerical system: Adam is associated with nine letters of essence and knowledge, Abraham with fourteen letters, Moses with twenty-two letters, Jesus with twenty-four letters, Muhammad with twenty-eight letters, and Faẓl, as the final manifestation, with thirty-two letters (al-Shaybī, 1980: 210).

To explain this system, Faẓl Allāh begins with the status of the uttered word (lafẓ), since he regards the Divine Essence as beyond sensory perception and maintains that knowledge of it is possible only through utterance: "Know that if there were no utterance, knowledge of the Presence of Divine Unity would be impossible. For the Glorious Presence is not perceptible and cannot be apprehended through the senses. Therefore, when the Glorious Presence wishes to disclose itself, this cannot occur without the mediation of utterance" (Jāvidān-nāma, manuscript M, fol. 162b; Astarābādī, 2023: 331). He then emphasizes the precedence of utterance over meaning: "Utterance precedes meaning. What God intends is [conveyed] through meaning, and the proof is that the Glorious Presence lies beyond sensory perception. Thus, utterance is indispensable, through which the Glorious Presence discloses its Essence" (ibid.).

On this basis, Faẓl Allāh explains creation through the Divine Word "Be" (kun). In his view, kun is not merely a creative command but the eternal Divine Word through which all beings came into existence, each serving as a manifestation of that Word: "Since God created all things through the word 'Be,' which is His eternal Word, He made the created thing a manifestation of that Word, so that its encompassing presence might become manifest" (Jāvidān-nāma, manuscript M, fol. 70b; Astarābādī, 2023: 163). The reality of kun is not confined to the two letters kāf and nūn; rather, it unfolds through the thirty-two Divine Words. Faẓl Allāh regards these Words as the reality of God's eternal Names and Attributes, which are neither created nor separate from the Divine Essence (ibid., fol. 426b; ibid.: 822). Faẓl Allāh then extends this relationship between the Divine Word and creation to the world. Beings are not merely creatures standing in opposition to the Creator; they are manifestations of the eternal Divine Words. Time is likewise one of the levels through which these Words become manifest. He considers time the receptacle in which things appear:

"The hours, days, and nights are the receptacle of all things, as indicated by 'أَيَّامٍ سِتَّةٍ فِي وَالْأَرْضَ السَّمَاوَاتِ خَلَقَ' ('He created the heavens and the earth in six days'; Qur'an 11:7). He divided time according to the number of His Word and Speech, from which the beings originating through the word kun come into existence. He placed the receptacle, namely Adam, within that time, together with everything contained in the six days and in 'أَلْفَ خَمْسِينَ مِقْدَارُهُ كَانَ يَوْمٍ فِي سَنَةٍ' ('in a Day whose measure is fifty thousand years'; Qur'an 70:4), and the contained is divided according to the structure of time" (Jāvidān-nāma, manuscript M, fol. 78b; ibid.: 177).

This sacred order is also reflected in the cosmos. Faẓl Allāh explains the structure of the celestial spheres through the division of the zodiacal sphere according to the numerical systems of twenty-eight and thirty-two: "The celestial spheres have been divided through the division of the zodiacal sphere into thirty-two and twenty-eight, so that the manifestation of 'عَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا' ('And He taught Adam the names-all of them'; Qur'an 2:31) may occur. Therefore, their inner reality must possess the form of thirty-two and twenty-eight" (Jāvidān-nāma, manuscript M, fol. 256a; Astarābādī, 2023: 516).

This numerical order extends beyond the celestial spheres to the elemental world, where the four elements are likewise understood as manifestations of the cosmic structure. Faẓl Allāh expresses this correspondence in the following verse:

“So that from every direction there may be thirty-two lines,
Water, earth, air, and fire, without error” (Arsh-nāma, manuscript M, fol. 3a).

He locates the origin of this order in the thirty-two eternal Divine Words:

“Thirty-two are the Words from God in pre-eternity,
Established and self-subsistent in the Eternal Essence.
Encompassing all things in terms of Essence,
They have been the attributes of the Most High Divine Essence” (ibid.).

Fażl Allāh extends this system to the whole of existence, regarding the two worlds as manifestations of the thirty-two Divine Words:

“The Essence, which consists of thirty-two letters,
Is the two worlds themselves, both as container and contained” (Nuʿaymī & Nasīmī, 1974: 31).

In the Naw-nāmah, he further describes the thirty-two Words as eternal, everlasting, and subsistent through the Divine Essence, emphasizing their encompassing presence in all things:

“Know how the thirty-two ancient, eternal, and everlasting Words, which subsist through the Divine Essence, encompass all things, and how all things are manifestations of the Word … All things are entirely dependent on the Word. The existence of things is through the Word, while the Word subsists through its own Essence” (Naw-nāmah, manuscript A, fol. 96a). The same idea is reflected in his verse:

“Whatever you see is alif, bā, tā, and thā;
Apart from the Face of the Most High God, nothing exists.
The heavens and the earth have been transformed,
Their place taken by the everlasting Word” (Arsh-nāma, manuscript F, fol. 14b).

The 28- and 32-letter numerical system in Fażl Allāh’s thought is therefore not merely symbolic or numerological; it provides a basis for explaining the structure of existence and the manifestation of divine truth. The relationship between the twenty-eight and thirty-two letters expresses two degrees of a single truth, while creation, prophethood, time, the celestial spheres, and other levels of existence are interpreted through the same thirty-two eternal Words.

Fażl Allāh’s emphasis on the precedence of lafẓ in knowing the Divine Essence, his explanation of creation through the Divine Word kun, and his identification of the thirty-two Words with the divine Names and Attributes show that letters and numbers are vehicles through which truth is disclosed. This understanding corresponds to the relationship between form and meaning, as well as to tajallī (manifestation), jamāl (divine beauty), and ḥusn(proportion, order, and excellence) in Islamic aesthetics. Beauty thus arises not from number or outward form alone, but from the harmonious and meaningful order through which divine truth becomes manifest. In this system, number is not merely a quantity but a bearer of ontological meaning.

Nevertheless, the 28- and 32-letter numerical system finds its fullest manifestation in the human being. The following section therefore examines the place of the human being within the aesthetic structure of Hurufi thought.

3.2. THE HUMAN BEING

In Fażl Allāh Astarābādī’s intellectual system, the human being is central to explaining the relationship between God, the universe, and the Divine Word. In his view, the human being is the most comprehensive manifestation of the divine Names and Attributes, and his distinctive status is grounded in concepts such as aḥsan taqwīm (the fairest form), divine vicegerency, creation in the image of the Merciful, and the comprehensive manifestation of the divine Names. He states in the Jāvidān-nāma: “Man was created in the fairest form and, by virtue of “إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً” (‘Indeed, I am placing a vicegerent on earth’; Qur’an 2:30) and “الرحمن صورة على و صورته على آدم الله خلق” (‘God created Adam in His image and in the image of the Merciful’), was God’s vicegerent, created in the form and with the attributes of God, the manifestation of all the Names of God, and superior to the angels and other creatures.” (Jāvidān-nāma, manuscript K, fol. 4b; Astarābādī, 2023: 49)

Accordingly, human superiority derives not from physical resemblance to God but from the comprehensiveness of the human being’s manifestation of the divine Names and Attributes. Fażl Allāh interprets the ḥadīth “خَلَقَ اللَّهُ آدَمَ عَلَى صُورَتِهِ” (‘God created Adam in His image’) as referring to the manifestation of the divine Attributes in human existence, which appear in the form of the thirty-two Words. For this reason, he calls Adam the “Greatest Name” and the “Name of the Merciful”: “Adam is the Greatest Name of God because he is the manifestation of all things … Thus, Adam, who is the Name of the Merciful, is created in the image of the Merciful and is the Greatest Name; Allah and the Merciful are one” (ibid., manuscript M, fol. 129b; ibid.: 264; ibid., fol. 388a; ibid.: 743).

This comprehensiveness is also evident in the ontological relationship between the human being and the universe. In Fażl Allāh's view, the universe is not understood as a collection of ontologically independent realities; rather, its levels of existence are interpreted in relation to the reality of the human being: "The sphere of earth, air, water, and fire is the remainder of human existence and a part of human existence … All things possess the potential to be a single hair of Adam … Thus, before the existence of Adam, all things were potentially one Adam, and in reality, all things constituted a single human existence" (ibid., fol. 22a; ibid.: 76).

Fażl Allāh extends this relationship to the level of nuṭq (speech), which he regards as a distinctive capacity of the human being in relation to other creatures: "Consider the form of Adam, the order of things, and whatever you observe, and recognize divine unity and Adam as the manifestation of speech. Thus, potentially, Adam's speech exists in things, and the speech of Adam is present in all things, as [God says]: 'أَنْطَقَنَا اللَّهُ الَّذِي أَنْطَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ' ('God has caused us to speak, He who causes all things to speak'; Qur'an 41:21). By this, he meant that speech is specific to Adam" (ibid., fol. 22a; ibid.: 76). Here, nuṭq signifies more than verbal expression; it denotes an ontological mode through which the Divine Word becomes manifest in the human being. This conception also prepares the ground for interpreting the human face as the visible locus of the Divine Word and its numerical structure.

The comprehensiveness of the human being is also manifested in his facial form. Fażl Allāh regards Adam as the "Guarded Tablet of God" and the manifestation of the thirty-two Divine Words. He interprets the teaching of the Names not as instruction of verbal forms, but as the bestowal of the reality of the divine Names and Words upon the human being. In his view, Adam's face is the locus of the manifestation of these Words. Accordingly, he understands the verse "وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا" ("And He taught Adam the names-all of them"; Qur'an 2:31) as referring to the creation of Adam's face in correspondence with the thirty-two Divine Words (Maḥabbat-nāma, manuscript V, fol. 110a). In Naw-nāmah, he likewise calls Adam the "Guarded Tablet," the "Clear Book," and the "Clear Imam," presenting his face as the manifestation of everything contained in the Divine Word (Naw-nāmah, manuscript A, fol. 87b; manuscript M, fol. 7a).

Within this framework, the human face is the locus of manifestation of the "sevenfold script" (khaṭṭ-i sabʿ mathānī) and the thirty-two Divine Words. Citing the Qur'anic verse "وَجْهَهُ إِلَّا هَالِكٌ شَيْءٍ كُلُّ" ("Everything will perish except His Face"; Qur'an 28:88) and the ḥadīth "رَبَّهُ عَرَفَ فَقَدْ نَفْسَهُ عَرَفَ مَنْ" ("Whoever knows himself knows his Lord"), Fażl Allāh regards knowledge of the human face as a path to divine knowledge (Jāvidān-nāma, manuscript K, fol. 156a; Astarābādī, 2023: 418). In his view, the lines of the face are not merely natural features, but signs of the pre-eternal Word and the "divine script" that appears upon Adam's face and is realized through the 28- and 32-letter numerical system (ibid., fol. 20a; ibid.: 83). He considers the source of these lines to be the seven ummī lines[7], which, through the division of the face along the equinoctial line, are doubled symmetrically and, in relation to the four elements, give rise to the 28- and 32-letter systems. The same idea is expressed in Maḥabbat-nāma, where God inscribes the knowledge of the twenty-eight Words and four additional Words upon Adam's face through the "script of power," so that, by reading these lines, the human being may attain knowledge of the Divine Words and ultimately knowledge of the Real (Maḥabbat-nāma, manuscript M, fol. 92a; manuscript V, fol. 92a). This idea is also expressed poetically in Arsh-nāma:

"Thirty-two are the attributes of Divine Majesty;
You are not separate from the thirty-two.
Look within your own existence;
See yourself as thirty-two throughout.
Connected with the Divine Essence,
This has been disclosed from before the Most Holy" (Arsh-nāma, manuscript Q, fol. 76a; manuscript M, fol. 74b).

Beyond its role as the visible locus of the Divine Words, the human face also constitutes a principal form through which beauty is manifested in Fażl Allāh's thought. Human beauty does not derive from physical features or outward proportion alone, but from the manifestation of the divine Names, Attributes, and Words in human existence. He clarifies this idea in his interpretation of the story of Joseph by relating Joseph's beauty, Zulaikha's love, the angels' prostration before Adam, and the attraction of beings toward the human being to the manifestation of "complete knowledge" and the locus of the thirty-two Divine Words (Jāvidān-nāma, manuscript K, fol. 153a; Astarābādī, 2023: 410).

The same connection between beauty, the face, and the Divine Words is reflected poetically in Arsh-nāma, where the reader is invited to read the "Book of the Face" and the thirty-two divine lines:

[7] When the human being is born from Eve's womb, seven divine inscriptions appear upon the face: one line of hair on the head, two eyebrows, and four eyelashes; every divine address is associated with these seven lines.

"When you become enamored of someone's face,
You have become enamored of God's face, and nothing more.
The enchanting face is the Book of the Real;
The seeing eye has no patience before it.
From it, behold again, read again, and seek again
The thirty-two divine lines" (Arsh-nāma, manuscript F, fol. 74b).

In his *Dīvān-i Naʿīmī*, Fażl Allāh likewise presents the human face as a "Book" of divine manifestation and its lines as bearers of the mysteries of pre-eternity and post-eternity:

"If you wish to find a way to the source of the soul,
And rise from the abode of the mystics like the moon,
Read in the Book of the faces of the beautiful
The secret of pre-eternity and post-eternity from the black lines" (Dīvān-i Naʿīmī, manuscript N, fol. 19a).

Taken together, these discussions show that the human being occupies a culminating position in Fażl Allāh's thought, as the Divine Words, the numerical system, and the structure of creation attain their fullest manifestation in human existence. This conception corresponds to the Perfect Human (al-insān al-kāmil) in Islamic aesthetics, understood as a comprehensive manifestation of the divine Names and Attributes. Accordingly, Fażl Allāh interprets the ḥadīth "خلق الله آدم على صورته" ("God created Adam in His image") not as physical resemblance to God but as the manifestation of divine Names, Attributes, and Words in human existence, without identifying the human being with the Divine Essence. This understanding reflects the principles of tashbīh and tanzīh, which affirm divine manifestation in created forms while preserving the transcendence of the Divine Essence. From this perspective, Joseph's beauty, Zulaikha's love, and the angels' prostration before Adam reflect responses to divine truth manifested in human form, with love serving as an apprehension of beauty. This manifestation becomes visible in the human face, where the numerical systems of twenty-eight and thirty-two letters emerge through the symmetrical arrangement of its lines, establishing the conceptual basis for examining the equinoctial line and symmetry.

3.3. THE EQUINOCTIAL LINE

The equinoctial line is one of the most fundamental concepts in Fażl Allāh Astarābādī's thought and plays a central role in explaining the relationship between the human being, the universe, and the Divine Words. In Hurufi thought, the equinoctial line refers to a vertical line that is visible in some beings and concealed in others, dividing each being into two parts. From Fażl Allāh's perspective, this line is not merely a geometrical or outward phenomenon; rather, it is a universal principle upon which the order of creation is founded.

Fażl Allāh explains this meaning by referring to the verse "أَوَلَمْ يَرَى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا" ("Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the earth were joined together, and We separated them?"; Qur'an 21:30). He interprets the separation of the heavens and the earth as the manifestation of the divine equinoctial line: "The heavens and the earth were all joined together and placed upon one another. How did We separate them, and manifest the divine equinoctial line according to this meaning: "اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ" ("Guide us to the straight path"; Qur'an 1:6), "إِنَّ رَبِّي عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ" ("Indeed, my Lord is on a straight path"; Qur'an 11:56)" (Jāvidān-nāma, manuscript M, fol. 372b; Astarābādī, 2023: 410).

In this formulation, the equinoctial line is presented as the manifestation of the "straight path" (ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm) within the order of creation and as an expression of divine order. Fażl Allāh extends its scope to the whole of existence and considers no level of being to be outside it: "Whether [they are] devils, ants, snakes, or insects, all are upon their own equinoctial line: "إِنَّ رَبِّي عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ مَا مِن دَابَّةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ آخِذٌ بِنَاصِيَتِهَا" ("There is no creature except that He holds it by its forelock. Indeed, my Lord is on a straight path"; Qur'an 11:56). Thus, there is no creature that is not upon the divine path and the divine equinoctial line" (ibid., fol. 147a; Astarābādī, 2023: 121). He further invites the reader to observe the traces of this principle throughout the various levels of existence: "Proceed from the equinoctial line of Adam and the face of Eve to all things, including plants and animals, the center of the Kaʿba, which is the navel of the earth, the equinoctial line of the zodiac, and the heavens" (ibid., fol. 259b; ibid.: 522). The reader is thus encouraged to contemplate the leaf of a tree, a grain of wheat, a poppy seed, animals, and other beings in order to recognize throughout creation the same system of divine inscription and the twenty-eight and thirty-two Words that are manifested in the human face (ibid.).

After establishing the presence of the equinoctial line throughout creation, Fażl Allāh turns to the human face, which he regards as the fullest manifestation of this principle. In his view, the divine inscription upon Adam's face is initially structured according to the twenty-eight-letter system; through the operation of the equinoctial line, however, it expands into thirty-two lines, which serve as manifestations of the thirty-two Divine Words. These Words possess a reality subsisting through the Divine Essence, and all beings and events, from pre-eternity to post-eternity, fall within the scope of their knowledge. Adam's face is therefore regarded as the "Guarded Tablet of

God." Fażl Allāh explains that the passage of the equinoctial line across the face divides the line of the parting into two and, together with the two eyebrow lines, four eyelash lines, two nasal lines, two cheek lines, two upper-lip lines, and one line beneath the lower lip, produces sixteen lines on each side and thirty-two lines in total. In this process, each set of seven ummī or abīlines[8] is increased to eight through the operation of the equinoctial line. Since each of these eight lines is constituted by the four elements-earth, water, air, and fire-their total becomes a manifestation of the thirty-two Divine Words. Fażl Allāh applies the same principle to the white lines[9] and the sensory organs of the face, interpreting the entire structure of the human face according to this thirty-twofold system (Jāvidān-nāma, manuscript M, fol. 370b; ibid.: 714). Having elucidated the structure of the face, Fażl Allāh invites the reader to move from contemplation of the human face to the recognition of the same order throughout creation: "Proceed from this Guarded Tablet and divine script to all the lines of things, including plants, animals, and seeds; proceed to the stars, and seek in all things the divine inscription contained in the Guarded Tablet, just as Adam's Guarded Tablet manifests the knowledge of the thirty-two Words" (ibid.). Thus, the human face is not the endpoint of Fażl Allāh's explanation but the starting point for understanding the universe. The order disclosed through the equinoctial line and the thirty-twofold system in Adam's face thereby becomes a basis for reading and interpreting the same divine order throughout the rest of creation.

He traces the source of the order of creation back to the creative command kun ("Be"), regarding it as the origin of the truth that becomes manifest in the equinoctial line, the divine inscription, and the thirty-twofold system: "Proceed through all things according to this division, for they come into existence through the word kun, which in essence consists of thirty-two Words" (ibid., manuscript K, fol. 198a; ibid.: 522). All levels of existence are brought into being through the word kun, while the equinoctial line, as a manifestation of this creative order, reveals the principles of proportion and symmetry throughout creation. The Hurufis also explain this relationship through the two letters kāf and nūn: the equinoctial line divides each being into two halves, the first corresponding to kāf and the second to nūn (Usluer, 2012: 246). Accordingly, the same truth manifested in the thirty-twofold system, the divine inscription, and the human face originates in the word kun, while the equinoctial line reveals how this truth becomes manifest and ordered across the different levels of existence.

What distinguishes the equinoctial line in Fażl Allāh's thought from a merely natural or geometrical feature is its role in organizing creation. By dividing beings into two corresponding parts, it reveals a shared principle across the levels of existence, from the heavens and earth to plants, animals, and, most significantly, the human face. This principle reaches its fullest expression in Adam's face, where the equinoctial line establishes two corresponding halves and actualizes the numerical systems of twenty-eight and thirty-two, transforming the face into a medium through which the Divine Words become manifest. This conception can be understood through Islamic aesthetics, in which ḥusn denotes proportion and equilibrium, while jamāl signifies the manifestation of divine perfection throughout existence. Accordingly, facial beauty derives not merely from outward symmetry but from its connection to the Divine Words and the sacred order of creation. The two halves of the face thus reveal an underlying unity within apparent distinction, making symmetry a sign of a single reality manifested in balanced form. The equinoctial line therefore functions as a medium of tajallī (manifestation), through which the truth expressed in the numerical systems of twenty-eight and thirty-two becomes perceptible in the human face and across the levels of existence, revealing the relationship between the Divine Words, creation, and beauty.

4. CONCLUSION

An analysis of Fażl Allāh Astarābādī's texts shows that, within the Hurufi intellectual framework, letters constitute the foundation for interpreting existence and uncovering meaning. Concepts such as the human being, the Qur'an, numbers, and the universe acquire their significance in relation to this letter-centered system. Accordingly, Fażl Allāh's thought can be approached aesthetically through the fundamental concepts of Islamic aesthetics, thereby clarifying the internal structure of his intellectual system. In this reading, the 28- and 32-letter numerical system, the human being, and the equinoctial line emerge as the three components around which the aesthetic structure of Hurufi thought is organized. The 28- and 32-letter numerical system explains the degrees of the manifestation of truth and the sacred order underlying creation; the Perfect Human is the most comprehensive manifestation of the Divine Names, Attributes, and Words, and his position acquires meaning in relation to divine truth; and the

[8] When the human being is in the mother's womb, certain lines appear on the face, which are called the *ummī* lines. These seven lines consist of the hair on the head, four eyelashes, and two eyebrows. At puberty, seven additional lines appear on the faces of males: two beard lines, two lines inside the nostrils, two moustache lines, and one line beneath the lip. These are called the *abī* lines, meaning lines attributed to the father. Together, they are referred to as the black lines (Usluer, 2012: 239).

[9] The white lines are the hairless areas between the black lines (ibid.).

equinoctial line, through symmetry, proportion, and order, reveals how this truth becomes manifest in the human face and subsequently throughout the universe. The relationship among these three components shows that beauty in Fażl Allāh's thought rests upon an interconnected network of concepts, including tajallī (manifestation), jamāl (divine beauty), ḥusn (proportion and excellence), ʿishq (love), the Perfect Human (al-insān al-kāmil), tashbīh and tanzīh(similitude and incomparability), and the relationship between form and meaning. These concepts do not function independently in his thought; rather, through their interaction, they constitute the conceptual network of Hurufi aesthetics. On this basis, the principal contribution of this study is the formulation of an analytical framework for interpreting the aesthetic components of Fażl Allāh Astarābādī's thought on the basis of his texts. The novelty of this framework lies in revealing the systematic relationship between the principal components of Fażl Allāh's thought and the concepts of Islamic aesthetics, demonstrating that these components do not operate independently but constitute the aesthetic structure of Hurufi thought through a network of conceptual relationships. Beyond clarifying the theoretical foundations of Hurufi aesthetics, the proposed framework also provides an analytical model for revisiting the theoretical foundations of Islamic arts and examining the relationship between letters, form, meaning, and manifestation in works of art. It may therefore be applied in future studies to analyze the reflection of Hurufi thought in arts such as calligraphy, manuscript painting, and Islamic architecture, particularly with regard to their theoretical foundations, formal structures, and symbolic systems. Furthermore, applying this framework to comparative studies of Hurufism and other mystical and philosophical traditions of the Islamic world may contribute to a more precise understanding of Fażl Allāh's position in the history of Islamic thought and art, while opening new avenues for interdisciplinary research in Islamic art.

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