Dissertation Defense

THE MOST POPULAR TAFSĪR IN ISLAMIC HISTORY:
THE QURʾĀN COMMENTARY OF AL-BAYḌĀWĪ (D. 691/1292)

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Al-Qāḍī al-Bayḍāwī (d. 691/1292) was an Ilkhānid polymath whose works were a staple for madrasa curricula during the post-classical period. His Qurʾān commentary, Anwār al-tanzīl wa asrār al-taʾwil (The Lights of Revelation and the Secrets of Interpretation), stands out as the most popular tafsīr work in Islamic history.

This dissertation provides insights into the historical contexts and the textuality of the Anwār by situating it within the narrative of tafsīr. It makes use of al-Bayḍāwī’s works, sources, reception history, the gloss tradition, and tafsīr works in general. It combines historical contextualization with an analysis of salient features of the Anwār to uncover both external and internal factors contributing to its popularity. It provides a critical biography of al-Bayḍāwī and places the Anwār within the contextual engagements with al-Zamakhshari’s Kashshāf in Shiraz and Tabriz during and after al-Bayḍāwī’s lifetime. Also, this dissertation explores key aspects of the Anwār through the lens of Arabic and Islamic sciences, such as the integration of narrations, inferential exegesis, and practices of verification (taḥqīq).