

## Al-Nadim's (385 /995) Approach to Islamic Sects through his Monograph "al-Fihrist"

### Pendekatan Al-Nadim (385 /995) terhadap Sekte-sekte Islam melalui Monografinya "al-Fihrist"



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#### Abstract

**Background and Objectives:** Early Islamic theological developments were deeply influenced by both internal conflicts and external cultural interactions. Previous scholarship has largely emphasized either political rivalries among the Prophet's Companions or the intellectual exchange sparked by the Islamic conquests. This study aims to re-examine the formative period of Islamic sectarianism through the lens of al-Nadim's seminal bibliographic work, al-Fihrist. Specifically, it seeks to understand how al-Fihrist, as one of the earliest comprehensive catalogues, offers fresh insights into the complexity and diversity of early Islamic theological thought.

**Methodology:** Drawing on primary source analysis, intellectual history, and philological methods, this research critically examines al-Fihrist's organization and content. It compares the bibliographic categorization of doctrinal works with other historiographical materials, thereby illuminating the intellectual networks that shaped religious discourse.

**Main Results:** The study finds that al-Fihrist functioned not merely as an index of texts but as a structured map of the intricate theological milieu. This bibliographic approach reveals patterns of textual transmission, doctrinal alignment, and the socio-political factors influencing scholarly production. Al-Fihrist thus emerges as a crucial primary source that supplements and challenges traditional narrative-based historiography.

**Research Contribution:** By introducing a bibliographic perspective, the research provides a new framework for interpreting doctrinal evolution, emphasizing the importance of text circulation and cataloging practices in shaping intellectual landscapes. **Conclusion,** this study highlights al-Fihrist's value as a methodological tool, setting a precedent for future interdisciplinary research on Islamic intellectual history and its diverse theological expressions.

**Keywords:** *al-Nadim, al-Fihrist, Sects, Mu'tazila, Kharijites.*

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### **Abstrak**

**Latar Belakang dan Tujuan:** Awal Perkembangan teologi Islam awal sangat dipengaruhi oleh konflik internal dan konflik internal dan interaksi budaya eksternal. Kajian-kajian terdahulu sebagian besar menekankan pada persaingan politik di antara para Sahabat Nabi atau pertukaran intelektual yang dipicu oleh pertukaran intelektual yang dipicu oleh penaklukan-penaklukan Islam. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji ulang periode formatif sektarianisme Islam melalui lensa karya bibliografi penting al-Nadim, al-Fihrist. Secara khusus, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami bagaimana al-Fihrist, sebagai salah satu katalog komprehensif yang paling awal, menawarkan wawasan baru ke dalam kompleksitas dan keragaman pemikiran teologi Islam awal. **Metodologi:** Mengandalkan analisis sumber-sumber primer, sejarah intelektual, dan metode filologi, penelitian ini secara kritis meneliti organisasi dan isi al-Fihrist. Penelitian ini membandingkan bibliografi kategorisasi karya-karya doktrinal dengan materi-materi historiografi lainnya, dengan demikian menerangi jaringan intelektual yang membentuk wacana keagamaan.

**Hasil Utama:** Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa al-Fihrist tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sebagai indeks teks tetapi sebagai peta terstruktur dari lingkungan teologis yang rumit. Pendekatan bibliografi ini mengungkapkan pola transmisi tekstual, doctrinal doctrinal, dan faktor-faktor sosial-politik yang mempengaruhi produksi ilmiah. Dengan demikian, Al-Fihrist muncul sebagai sumber primer penting yang melengkapi dan menantang historiografi tradisional yang berbasis narasi. **Kontribusi Penelitian:** Dengan memperkenalkan perspektif bibliografi, penelitian penelitian ini memberikan kerangka kerja baru untuk menafsirkan evolusi doktrinal, menekankan pentingnya sirkulasi teks dan praktik pengatalogan dalam membentuk lanskap intelektual. **Kesimpulannya,** penelitian ini menyoroti nilai al-Fihrist nilai al-Fihrist sebagai alat metodologis, yang menjadi preseden untuk penelitian interdisipliner tentang sejarah intelektual Islam dan keragaman ekspresi teologisnya yang beragam.

**Kata kunci:** al-Nadim, al-Fihrist, Sects, Mu'tazila, Kharijites.

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Several fundamental internal and external factors contributed to the emergence of Islamic theological sects (Hodson, 1974, ss. 49-57). Internally, conflicts among the Companions of the Prophet, notably the Battle of the Camel (36/656) and the “first fitna,” led to a fragmentation of the early Muslim community (Fiğlalı, 1993, ss. 108-109). As a result, two primary factions emerged: one supporting ‘Ali and the Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet’s family), eventually giving rise to Shi’ite doctrine, and another supporting Mu’awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan. The Kharijite sect also appeared, denouncing both groups that accepted arbitration as having strayed from the true path. By the end of the first Islamic century, a diverse array of theological viewpoints had developed within the Muslim community.

Externally, the numerous Islamic conquests during the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (al-Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn) led to rapid territorial expansion. This expansion integrated various non-Islamic cultures into the Islamic milieu, enriching the intellectual environment and spurring the growth of Islamic theology. The translation movement, initiated under Harun al-Rashid (763–809), flourished during the reign of al-Ma'mun (786–833), further introducing Islamic scholars to a wide range of philosophical and scientific texts (Adamson & Taylor, 2018, s. 11). During al-Ma'mun's time, the Mu'tazila sect gained prominence, prompting intense theological debates—most notably, the Mihna, concerning whether the Qur'an was created. Sunni scholars who opposed the Mu'tazila faced persecution amid these disputes. Until the third century AH, Islamic sects proliferated across the Muslim world. In response, a group of scholars dedicated themselves to documenting these diverse theological doctrines, producing compilations known as Kutub al-Maqālāt (Öz, 2003, s. 27.405).

Among the efforts to catalog and understand the multitude of Islamic theological sects was the monumental work of al-Nadim in his *al-Fihrist*. Al-Nadim's work extended into the 4th century AH (10th century CE) and represented a significant departure from earlier specialized compilations. Unlike texts such as *Tabaqāt al-Shu'ra'* or *Tabaqāt Ibn Sa'd* (d. 230/846), which focused primarily on historical or biographical dimensions (Mu'taz & Faraj, 1976, s. 17; Sa'd, 2000, s. 49), and *Tarikh ibn Jarir al-Tabari* (1976), which organized knowledge according to discrete categories, al-Nadim treated each book as a literary product in its own right. This holistic approach was a pioneering methodology in Islamic historiography and facilitated a broader understanding of intellectual trends.

This study aims to Examine the role of al-Nadim's *al-Fihrist* in the documentation and classification of Islamic theological literature, particularly as it relates to early sect formation. Investigate how *al-Fihrist* contributes to understanding the complexity and diversity of Islamic thought during the formative period. Clarify the relevance of *al-Fihrist* in shaping modern scholarship's approach to cataloging and analyzing the broad spectrum of Islamic theological and cultural works.

It is hypothesized that al-Nadim's *al-Fihrist*, as one of the earliest comprehensive bibliographical catalogs, substantially influenced the way Islamic intellectual heritage was mapped and understood. By providing an expansive overview of diverse fields of knowledge; including theology, sects, philosophy, and cultural traditions, al-

Nadim's work not only preserved intellectual pluralism but also offered future scholars a crucial foundation for interdisciplinary study and interpretation.

The expected research contributions include enriching the historiography of Islamic intellectual thought, providing an analytical framework for understanding the emergence of Islamic sects, and offering methodological insights into documenting and analyzing the evolution of religious ideas.

In conducting this research, the following steps were taken: primary source analysis, comparative literature analysis, historical contextualization and interdisciplinary approach. Applying methods from intellectual history, philology, and religious studies to provide a holistic interpretation of the textual material, thus illuminating the connections between socio-political factors, doctrinal debates, and the resulting literature. This approach aims not merely to restate al-Nadim's categories but to understand how his methodology and categorization principles serve as a foundational reference point for the study of Islamic theological sects.

## **B. DISCUSSION**

### 1. The Life of al-Nadim

We have little information on the life of al-Nadim; however, he was known as al-Nadim or Ibn al-Nadim. Ayman Fuad Sayed has corrected his last name and suggested that he should be referred to as al-Nadim rather than Ibn al-Nadim. Nevertheless, he is most famous for being called Ibn al-Nadim due to the widespread use of this last name (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 11). No sources have mentioned the specific day or date of al-Nadim's birth. However, it is noted that he was a young man in 340 AH, as Muhammed b. 'Abdullah al-Barda'i claimed to have seen him during that year. Al-Barda'i mentioned that al-Nadim was tending to the Mu'tazilites and identified him as a Kharijite (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 13). It seems that al-Nadim was a young man at the time. His father was a bookdealer, and Baghdad during the 3rd and 4th Hijri centuries was a vibrant center of intellectual activity, teeming with numerous sects and doctrines, as the book itself reveals (Zychowicz-Coghill, 2022, s. 130).

Muhammed b. Ishaq al-Nadim was taught by great scholars such as Abi Sa'id al-Sirafi (d.368/978) who authored many linguistic titles (Al-Sirafi, 1966, s. 11), Abi al-Faraj al-Isfahani (d. 356/967) the renowned author who compiled his literary encyclopedia *al-Aghani*, as well as other scholars and he passed away in Baghdad in 384 AH/994 CE (Kahalalah, t.y., s. 42).

## 2. Theology, Doctrines and Sects in al-Nadim's Fihrist

Al-Nadim passed away in the 4th century AH, so it is safe to say that many books were authored on doctrines and sects during this period, starting from the early 2nd century AH until Al-Nadim's demise. These books include *Kitāb al-Maqālāt* or *The Book of Discourses* by Zufar b. al-Huzhail, a companion of Abu Hanifa (d.158/775) (Haji Khalifa, t.y., s. 1282), and *Kitāb al-Maqālāt* by Abi 'Ali al-Husayn b. 'Ali al-Karābisī (d. 248/862), which was referenced by 'Abdul-Qāhir al-Baghdādi, especially in his sections on the sects of the Kharijites and extremists (Al-Baghdādi, t.y., ss. 14-19). One of the earliest books on discourses and sects that reached us is the book *Tahrīsh* or *Incitement* by Dhirār b. 'Amr (d. 190/805), in which he examined many discourses of different sects. Dhirār was also a Mutazilite from Baghdad, Iraq (Mahmoud, 2016, s. 269).

Other notable works include the book of al-Nubakhti, one of the figures of the third and fourth centuries AH, in his book *Firaq al-shi'a* or *The Shiite Sects* (Al-Nubakhti, 2012) as well as Abu al-Qāsim al-Balkhi (d. 319/931) in his book "The Discourses," Abu al-Husayn al-Malti (d. 377/987) in his "*Al-Tanbih wa al-Radd 'ala Ahl al-Ahwā' wa al-Bid'ah* or *Warning and Response*" (Al-Malti, 2007, s. 17).

Some scholars followed a similar approach to al-Nadim in their works, allocating sections of their books to discuss various sects. For instance, al-Maqdisi (d. 380/990) did so in *Ahsan al-Taqāsīm* or *Best Classifications* (Al-Maqdisi, 1991, s. 37). However, the most notable among these works is *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Musallīn* or *Discourses of Muslims and the Difference of Worshipers* (Al-Ash'ari, 1980, s. 5) by Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari (d. 324/936), along with several other texts from the same era.

Al-Nadim devoted the Fifth Discourse of his book *Al-Fihrist* to theology and theologians and divided this section into five subjects or *Funūn* as he called them, and these subjects included the following: The first subject is on the beginning of the emergence of theology and theologians from the Mu'tazila and Muraji'a and the names of their books, the second subject is on the chronicles of Shiite, Imami and Zaidi theologians, the third subject is on *the chronicles of the Jabris and al-Hashawya* (Yurdagür, 1997, ss. 426-427) and the titles of their books, while the fourth subject is on the chronicles of the Kharijite theologians and the title of their books, and the fifth subject is on the chronicles of wandering hermits, ascetics, worshippers and Sufi theologians (Al-Nadim, 2009, ss. 555-693).

There is important information mentioned by al-Nadim during his presentation of the doctrines, among such information is that Abu al-Hudhayl al-Allaf (d.

235/850) had a book called Milas, and this Milas seems to have been a magi Iranian man who converted to Islam because of Abu al-Hudhayl al-Allaf's debate with a group of Dualists in his presence and he triumphed over them (Khallikān, 1974, s. 266).

Sometimes also al-Nadim comments usefully, as when he mentioned that Al-Ma'mun had praised Al-Jahiz's (d. 255/868-69) books with exaggerated words, he said that Al-Ma'mun said so for the sake of exaggeration, and pointed out that Al-Ma'mun was a very eloquent man as he wrote a letter to the King of the Bulgarians that consisted of a hundred pages, in which Al-Ma'mun did not cite a verse from the Qur'an nor a wisdom or tale of the predecessors, which means that the letter was devised and only written by Al-Ma'mun and through his eloquence (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 581).

It appears from the context of the words of Nadim on Ahmed bin Abi Du'ad (840/854) that he had special respect for him, although Ibn Abi Du'ad had no books or letters, and Nadim primarily takes care of mentioning books and treatises; nonetheless he pointed out that Ibn Abi Du'ad was one of the best of Mu'tazila who spearheaded in the prevalence of the Mutazilite doctrine and the defense of its adherents. Al-Nadim further described Ibn Abi Du'ad's nobility, magnanimity, and generosity (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 589). Such a praise entices us to take a little pause as Ibn Abi Du'ad is considered to be one of those who were pillars in what was known as Mihne or the Issue of the Createdness of the Qur'an, as he was one of those who persuaded the caliphs Al-Ma'mun, Al-Mu'tasim and Al-Wathiq to try people on the createdness of the Qur'an. In addition, Al-Nadim mentioned Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Isa, who is well-known as Barghuth the Mu'tazilite and praised him saying that he is one of those who debated Ahmed bin Hanbal on the matter of the Createdness of the Qur'an (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 581), and who was described by Al-Dhahbi the historian him as the head of the heresy (al-Dhabi, 1985, s. 554).

During his presentation of the Mu'tazilite doctrine, Al-Nadim mentioned a sect whose doctrine was not clear or that who had been distinct from the doctrine, as he mentioned this during his presentation of the Mu'tazila doctrine, saying: "The Group of a Sect of Mu'tazilites who were Heretic and Distinct and then he mentioned among them Abu Bakr al-Asamm (d. 279/892) (Taymiyya, 1986, s. 571). Al-Nadim mentioned the reason why he had taken him out of the Mu'tazilite sect that he was disparaging Ali bin Abi Talib and his son, but he did not explain the nature of this disparagement. This may show us that Nadim is more inclined to Shiism, nevertheless we cannot claim that he was an Imami Shiite, but he was like many Mu'tazilites who tend to Al-Al Bayt and support them. Abu Bakr Al-Asamm, however,

preferred Caliph Abu Bakr to Ali bin Abi Talib, and denied that some of the verses in Surat Al-Insan were revealed in Ali bin Abi Talib. We also found out that Ibn Al-Murtada (d. 840/1437) mentions that Abu Bakr Al-Asamm negatively indicated Ali bin Abi Talib in many of his actions and stood by Mu'awiyah in some of his actions (al-Murtada, 1889, s. 52).

Then Al-Nadim mentioned that Dirar ibn Amr created a separate doctrine from that of the Mutazilites. He also said that Abu Yusuf (d. 182/798), the well-known jurist who was a companion of Abu Hanifa, passed by Dirar on the day of Eid al-Adha before the prayers, to find Dirar slaughtering his sacrifice; Abu Yusuf said to him: "O Abu 'Amr, are you presenting your sacrifice before the Imam does?!" He said: "I thought that the company of scholars has made you more polite, there is no Imam here that I would wait for his prayer to conclude,". This story can be used to understand that Dirar bin Amr did not acknowledge the Abbasid caliph who existed at the time (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 596).

One of the important figures who shook Mu'tazili thought was Ibn al-Rawandi (d. 911) (Stroumsa, 1999, s. 43). He is known to have defected from the Mu'tazila, rejected their doctrine, and wrote a book in rebuttal thereof. Ibn al-Khayyāt al-Mu'tazili responded to it in the book called "Al-Intisār/ Triumph" (al-Khayyāt, 1988, s. 2). From the information that al-Nadim provides about Ibn al-Rawandi, he mentioned two of his teachers who had taught him the doctrine of Dualism, including Abu Issa al-Warrāq (d. 247/861). Al-Warrāq was known in this period for being an atheist (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 600). Meanwhile, al-Nadim had taken a tough stance against Ibn al-Rawandi himself and described his books as "cursed" (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 602).

As for the Kharijite sect, al-Nadim pointed out that their chiefs are many, but their books are few, or that most of them are preserved and kept in secrecy, and then he mentioned a group of Sufis, including a group interested in theology, headed by al-Hārith bin Asad al-Muhāsibi (d. 243/857), and it is worth mentioning here that Ahmed bin Hanbal has criticized al-Hārith al-Muhāsibi for studying theology, as indicated by al-Khatib Al-Baghdādi (d. 463/1071) (al-Baghdādi, 2002, s. 104). al-Muhāsibi had authored books on theology that did not reach us, but we received his books on Sufism, including the Book of *al-Ra'ayah* or *Care and al-Tawahhum* or *the Book of Delusion* (al-Muhāsibi, 1991, s. 11).

In addition to the above, al-Nadim mentioned the Ismaili sect and quoted from the book of Abdullah bin Rizām in his Rebuttal to Ismailism, and this book was a basic foundation for everyone who has been examining the Ismaili doctrine, but we

have no information about Abdullah bin Rizām other than that provided by al-Nadim. Al-Nadim has quoted some texts from Ibn Rizām's book, and said that whatever he mentions is according to Ibn Rizām and that he is absolved of God from lying, and this indicates the objectivity of al-Nadim again (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 666).

When it comes to Ismaili books, he stated that the most productive Ismaili writer is Abdān al-Qarmati, one of the important works he mentioned regarding Ismailism is al-Balāghāt al-Sab'a/Book of Seven Treatises. He said that he saw in this book what contradicts Islam explicitly, as it is mentioned about the Fatimid state that they are no longer as active as they were twenty years ago (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 672). Al-Nadim points out that al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah al-Fatimi (d. 365/975) was spreading his da'is everywhere and Egypt was active in Ismaili thought in his time. In addition, he mentioned meeting with an Ismaili man named Hassanabādi, this man resides in an area called *beyn al Qasryn* or *Between the Two Palaces*, an area located in Baghdad. Al-Nadim praised him and said that he had strange meanings in his words, also he was strengthened by a man called Dā'i Ismaili Shirmadi Dailami. We have no information about this man, but his name indicates that he is Iranian. Nadim claimed that this Dā'i was exiled from Baghdad. Therefore, when Sharmadi Al-Dailami was exiled from Baghdad, Al-Hasnabādi fled from Baghdad to Azerbaijan (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 675).

### 3. Sources Of Nadim in Sects

It was previously mentioned that al-Nadim worked as a copyist and book seller, for this reason he had many and varied resources in his hands. Despite this, Al-Nadim did not adhere to one method in presenting these sources. Some of these sources were oral by people whose names were not mentioned, and some of them mentioned names without mentioning other information related to this source name. But what is noted here is that al-Nadim had his own respect for specialists in a particular field. An example of this is that he used the books of the Khārijites to present information about the Khārijite sect and the books of the Ismā'ilis to talk about the Ismā'ilis. While presenting the works of theologians and other book writers, Al-Nadim was aware that he was not creating a traditional book, but rather he was merely creating an index collecting the books and works that had been written up to his time. For this reason, he left many white spaces in his index, so that other scholars could come and fill these spaces with other information related to the book (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 682).

In any case, we will mention here the sources that Al-Nadim relied on and mentioned by name in the section on sects and doctrines, and they are as follows

Abu al-Hasan Thābit ibn Sinān ibn Thābit ibn Qurra (d. 365/976), al-Nadim relied on him in his chapter about the Sufi al-Hallāj (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 672). Abu al-Husayn 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ahmad ibn Abi Tahir Tayfūr (d. 313/925), al-Nadim relied on him in his chapter about the Sufi al-Hallāj (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 675). Abu al-'Ainā' Muhammad ibn al-Qāsim ibn Khallād (d. 283/896) (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 674). Abu al-Qāsim al-Hijāzi (?): Kitāb al-Akhhbār al-Dākhilah fi al-Tārikh (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 677).

Abu al-Qāsim Abdullah ibn Ahmed al-Balkhi al-Ka'abi (d. 319/931,) al-Nadim relied on al-Balkhi a lot during his presentation of the Mu'tazila sect. It is known that al-Balkhi was one of the largest Mu'tazilites of Baghdad. Therefore, he quoted information from both the book of *Maqālāt* and the book of *Mahāsīn Khurāsān* by al-Balkhi (al-Balkhi, 2018, s. 49; Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 601). Abu Bakr al-Şūli (d. 336/947) (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 579).

Abu Bakr Ibn al-Ikhshid (d. 326/938). Contrary to the famous narration related to the circle of Hasan al-Basri, al-Nadim quoted an important narration from Ibn al-Ikhshid that explains the reason for the emergence of the name Mu'tazila. In the narration of Ibn al-Ikhshid said that the name Mu'tazila emerged after Hasan al-Basri (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 557). Abu 'Abdullah ibn Rizām (?) This book is one of the primary sources relied upon by historians and sectarian scholars in their criticism of the Ismā'ili doctrine (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 666; Deftary, 2007, s. 8).

Abu 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abdus al-Jahshiri al-Kufi (d. 331/943) (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 557). Abu 'Uthmān 'Amr ibn Bahr al-Jāhiz (d. 255/868) (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 587). Maimūn ibn Harūn (d. 277/891) (Al-Nadim, 2009, s. 582). *al-Balāghāt al-Sab'a*/Book of Seven Treatises. This book is one of the primary sources relied upon by historians and sectarian scholars in their criticism of the Ismaili doctrine.

#### 4. Reframing Early Islamic Thought through the Bibliographic Lens of *Al-Fihrist*

This study highlights the pivotal role of al-Nadim's *al-Fihrist* in documenting and classifying Islamic theological literature during the formative period of Islamic sects. From the analysis presented, several key findings emerge. First, *al-Fihrist* provides a comprehensive panorama of the myriad theological and intellectual trends that proliferated in the 3rd and 4th centuries AH. This includes the Mu'tazilites, Kharijites, Shi'ite groups, and early Sufi tendencies, as well as their associated authors, texts, and doctrinal nuances (Al-Nadim, 2009, pp. 555–693). Rather than merely enumerating titles, al-Nadim contextualizes these works within the socio-political milieu of Baghdad's cosmopolitan environment, reflecting how the circulation and production of these texts were influenced by patrons, scholars,

courtiers, and missionary activities—most notably the Isma‘ili da‘wa (Deftary, 2007, p. 8; Al-Nadim, 2009, pp. 666, 672, 675).

Second, this research demonstrates that *al-Fihrist* is more than a bibliographic index; it serves as a foundational source that illuminates the intellectual networks of the time. It reveals how theological debates were transmitted, contested, and preserved in literary form. By mapping various authors, their works, and doctrinal affiliations, al-Nadim’s text offers a methodology for understanding how religious ideas evolved and interacted. This approach differs from earlier compilations—like Ibn Sa‘d’s *Tabaqāt* or other biographical works—which present more linear, historiographical narratives rather than the broader intellectual landscape (Mu‘taz & Faraj, 1976, p. 17; Sa‘d, 2000, p. 49).

In essence, the research findings underscore the crucial function *al-Fihrist* plays in comprehending the complexity and diversity of early Islamic theology. By situating *al-Fihrist* within its historical and cultural context, we gain deeper insights into the mechanisms of knowledge transmission, the interplay of socio-political factors, and the formation and documentation of sects (Öz, 2003, pp. 27, 405; Adamson & Taylor, 2018, p. 11).

These findings complement and extend existing scholarship in several ways. Prior studies on the emergence of early Islamic sects, as exemplified by Hodgson (1974, pp. 49–57) and Fiğlalı (1993, pp. 108–109), emphasized internal disputes among the Companions and the subsequent fragmentation of the early Muslim community. Others focused on the external influences of newly integrated cultures following the Islamic conquests. While these studies have enriched our understanding of the historical backdrop, they often rely on narrative sources that present sectarian development in a more linear and event-centered manner.

In contrast, the present research underscores *al-Fihrist* as an instrument that classifies and organizes knowledge in a more systematic and holistic fashion. Unlike works that concentrate on biographical ranks (*Tabaqāt*) or purely historical arrangements (*Tarikh*), *al-Fihrist* categorizes works as intellectual products and provides data on the authors, their doctrinal stances, and how their writings relate to broader intellectual currents (Al-Nadim, 2009, pp. 555–693). Here, the focus shifts from merely recounting historical events or individual biographies toward understanding the overall intellectual matrix.

This perspective aligns with and builds upon previous investigations into the circulation of texts and ideas. While earlier studies might have recognized the plurality of sects, they often did not highlight the importance of bibliographical

sources as a key analytical tool. The present research shows that *al-Fihrist* not only broadens our appreciation of early Islamic intellectual diversity but also offers a different methodological lens—one that situates theological writings in a multifaceted cultural and scholarly ecosystem.

The findings from this research indicate that early Islamic theology was not merely the product of isolated doctrinal disputes. Rather, it emerged from a fertile intellectual environment where works circulated among scholars, scribes, book dealers, and patrons. *Al-Fihrist* stands as evidence that religious thought was part of a dynamic knowledge economy, influenced by factors such as state patronage, the establishment of translation bureaus, the influx of Hellenistic, Persian, and Indian intellectual traditions, as well as the socio-economic conditions of urban centers like Baghdad (Zychowicz-Coghill, 2022, p. 130; Al-Sirafi, 1966, p. 11).

This finding signals a larger phenomenon: the early Islamic world was intellectually “globalized” well before modern conceptions of global exchange. The assimilation of diverse intellectual traditions helped shape the intricate theological landscape documented in *al-Fihrist*. Rather than perceiving doctrinal diversity as mere heresy or fragmentation, we can understand it as a natural outcome of a cosmopolitan intellectual sphere where competing ideas thrived, challenged, and enriched one another (Adamson & Taylor, 2018, p. 11).

The implications of these findings are multifaceted. From a historiographical standpoint, this study urges scholars of Islamic intellectual history to treat bibliographic sources like *al-Fihrist* not as mere appendices or utilitarian lists but as crucial primary sources that reveal the structure of intellectual discourse (Öz, 2003, pp. 27, 405). The methodological significance cannot be overstated; understanding how knowledge was categorized and disseminated provides a richer context for interpreting doctrinal debates and sect formation.

For theologians and historians of Islamic thought, the findings suggest that doctrinal evolution cannot be fully grasped without examining the channels through which knowledge was transmitted. *Al-Fihrist* shows that intellectual dominance or marginality can be partially assessed through the volume, variety, and circulation of texts (Al-Nadim, 2009, pp. 555–693). Recognizing this encourages a more nuanced appreciation of how certain views emerged as orthodox while others remained peripheral or heretical.

For scholars of book culture and information science, this research highlights the advanced state of intellectual organization in the medieval Islamic world. The systematic cataloging and indexing represented by *al-Fihrist* prefigure modern

bibliographic and scholarly practices. Therefore, the study underscores the importance of historical information management systems in shaping religious and philosophical discourses.

Several factors explain why *al-Fihrist* holds such significance in understanding Islamic theological sects. Al-Nadim's unique position as a bookseller and copyist (Zychowicz-Coghill, 2022, p. 130), combined with his direct access to manuscripts, scholars, and patrons, enabled him to compile a work that transcends traditional historiographical modes. He worked during a period when the Abbasid Caliphate, though politically fluctuating, remained a cultural and intellectual powerhouse (Al-Sirafi, 1966, p. 11; Kahalah, n.d., p. 42). The existence of libraries, translation institutes, and scholarly patronage structures allowed for the wide circulation of knowledge, making it possible for al-Nadim to gather materials that reflect a vast intellectual landscape.

Additionally, the doctrinal controversies of the time—such as the Mihna, the debates over the createdness of the Qur'an, and the rise of various sectarian positions—intensified the production and dissemination of texts. Scholars vigorously responded to one another's arguments, and literary production surged, yielding a wealth of material for al-Nadim to document (Al-Dhahabi, 1985, p. 554; Mahmoud, 2016, p. 269). Thus, the unique historical juncture and al-Nadim's embeddedness in the intellectual community explain why *al-Fihrist* emerges as such a critical source.

Given these findings, several subsequent steps can be undertaken:

- a. **Recontextualizing Classical Sources:** Scholars should revisit *al-Fihrist* with advanced philological and historical methodologies. This includes verifying sources, analyzing white spaces left intentionally by al-Nadim (2009, p. 682), and employing digital humanities tools to create annotated databases that map authors, texts, and doctrinal affiliations.
- b. **Interdisciplinary Approaches:** Future research would benefit from combining intellectual history, religious studies, codicology, and network analysis. For instance, applying social network analysis to the data from *al-Fihrist* could illuminate the intellectual linkages among scholars, authors, and patrons, thus uncovering patterns of doctrinal influence and textual circulation (Stroumsa, 1999, p. 43).
- c. **Methodological Innovations:** The insights gained from *al-Fihrist* can inspire new methodologies for studying premodern intellectual history. Rather than focusing on doctrinal developments in isolation, researchers can integrate bibliographic

analysis to chart the evolution of thought in tandem with the literary infrastructure that supported it.

- d. Curricular Integration: The historiography of Islamic thought can be enhanced by incorporating *al-Fihrist* into academic curricula. Students should learn to appreciate bibliographic works not as static references but as key texts that shaped intellectual traditions. This approach encourages critical thinking about how knowledge is organized, preserved, and conveyed.

In conclusion, by examining *al-Fihrist*, this research not only reaffirms the complexity and plurality of early Islamic theology but also draws attention to the importance of bibliographical sources in shaping our understanding of premodern intellectual landscapes. Going forward, studies can build upon these findings to further illuminate how knowledge systems, cultural exchange, and intellectual networks contributed to the vibrant tapestry of Islamic thought

### C. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the pivotal role of al-Nadim's *al-Fihrist* in understanding the complexity and diversity of Islamic theology during its formative period, offering a perspective distinct from previous research.

Earlier studies have often emphasized internal factors (such as disputes among the Prophet's Companions) or external influences (cultural integration post-conquest) in explaining the formation of early Islamic sects. The core contribution of this research lies in its focus on *al-Fihrist* as a bibliographical lens. Rather than relying solely on historical narratives or biographical traditions, this study demonstrates that the way al-Nadim cataloged and classified texts can reveal intricate intellectual ecosystems. In other words, *al-Fihrist* is not just a book index but a strategic source that illuminates how knowledge networks operated, how ideas flowed, and how socio-political contexts influenced the production and circulation of theological doctrines.

The key innovation here is conceptual and methodological: employing bibliography as a critical tool to study the intellectual history of Islam. By using *al-Fihrist* as a starting point, this research introduces a method that examines the spread, production, and consumption of religious discourse through the lens of text cataloging and indexing. This bibliographical approach provides a new analytical framework for understanding the interconnections, idea exchanges, and processes that legitimize or marginalize specific lines of thought. This method can guide historians, philologists, and religious studies scholars in more thoroughly evaluating how doctrines evolve and how various sects gain traction or remain peripheral.

A key limitation is the reliance on a single source for much of the analysis, as well as the limited contextual information available for certain authors and texts. Some narratives remain insufficiently cross-verified, calling for comparative work with additional historical documents and archaeological evidence.

Future research could validate sources and context, interdisciplinary approaches, expanding the model. Apply similar bibliographical methodologies to other historical periods or regions within the Islamic world, testing whether similar intellectual dynamics were at play elsewhere.

In sum, this research opens a new avenue in interpreting Islamic intellectual history by underscoring the importance of bibliographical sources. It encourages scholars to view bibliographic catalogs as essential primary references that enrich the historiography of religious thought and offer more nuanced understandings of how intellectual traditions are shaped and transmitted.

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