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TAFSĪR STUDIES IN WESTERN ACADEMIA:
A Bibliographical Survey

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Abstract
This paper observes how the field of *tafsīr* studies has continued to establish itself as an important discipline within Islamic studies in Western academia. It traces how the previous scholarship, which was more preoccupied with Qur'anic studies, has shifted attention to Qur'an commentaries rather than exclusively to the Qur'anic text. Although not an exhaustive survey of all Western works devoted to *tafsīr* literature as it excludes studies on modern *tafsīr*, this paper confirms the significance of the classical and, more importantly, medieval *tafsīr* tradition as a lens through which Islamic intellectual history can be approached. By surveying bibliographical data produced in the past few decades, this article has found that Sunni and mystical Qur'an commentaries have received greater scholarly investigation, that *tafsīr* historians' works have transformed traditional views on the history of *tafsīr*, and that although the field of *tafsīr* studies is still intimately connected with Qur'anic studies, some current publications testify that it might become an independent study.

Keywords
Tafsīr studies, Western academia, bibliographies, Islamic intellectual history

Studi Tafsir Al-Qur'an dalam Kajian Akademik Barat: Sebuah survei bibliografi

Abstrak

Tulisan ini mencermati bagaimana bidang kajian tafsir Al-Qur'an terus memantapkan dirinya sebagai suatu disiplin ilmu yang amat penting di lingkungan dunia akademik Barat. Tulisan ini menelusuri bagaimana kesarjanaan sebelumnya, yang lebih didominasi oleh kajian teks Al-Qur'an saja telah bergeser fokusnya pada kajian tafsir/komentar tentang Al-Qur'an dibandingkan hanya terbatas pada kajian teks Al-Qur'an. Meskipun bukan survei lengkap dari semua karya Barat yang dikhususkan untuk literatur tafsir karena tidak termasuk studi tentang tafsir modern, makalah ini menegaskan pentingnya tradisi tafsir klasik dan, yang lebih penting, abad pertengahan sebagai lensa untuk melihat dan mendekati kajian sejarah intelektual Islam. Melalui data survei bibliografis beberapa dekade lalu, tulisan ini menemukan bahwa kajian-kajian tafsir Al-Qur'an sunni dan sufisme mendapatkan perhatian besar dari para sarjana. Karya-karya tafsir sejarawan telah mengubah pandangan tradisional tentang sejarah tafsir. Meskipun bidang kajian tafsir masih erat hubungannya dengan studi Al-Qur'an, beberapa hasil publikasi akhir-akhir ini menyatakan bahwa kajian tersebut dapat menjadi suatu kajian yang independen.

Kata Kunci:

Studi tafsir, akademia Barat, bibliografi, sejarah intelektual Islam

دراسات التفسير في الأوساط الأكاديمية الغربية:
مسح ببليوغرافي

الملخص

تلاحظ هذه الورقة كيف استمر مجال دراسات التفسير في ترسيخ نفسه باعتباره تخصصًا مهمًا في الدراسات الإسلامية في الأوساط الأكاديمية الغربية. وهو يتتبع كيف أن المنح الدراسية السابقة التي كانت أكثر تركيزا بالدراسات القرآنية ، قد حولت الانتباه إلى تفسير القرآن بدلًا من التركيز على النص القرآني فقط. على الرغم من أنه ليس مسحًا شاملًا لجميع الأعمال الغربية المكرسة لأدبيات التفسير لاستبعاده دراسات التفسير الحديث ، إلا أن هذه الورقة تؤكد أهمية تراث التفسير الكلاسيكي ، ولا سيما الوسطي منه، كعدسة يمكن من خلالها الاقتراب من التاريخ الفكري الإسلامي. من خلال مسح البيانات الببليوغرافية التي تم إنتاجها في العقود القليلة الماضية ، اكتشفت هذه الورقة على أن التفسيرات السنية والصوفية للقرآن قد تلقت تحقيقات علمية أكبر ، وأن أعمال مؤرخي التفسير غيرت وجهات النظر التقليدية حول تاريخ التفسير ، وأنه على الرغم من أن مجال التفسير لا يزال مرتبطا ارتباطًا وثيقًا بالدراسات القرآنية أظهرت بعض المنشورات الحالية على أنها قد تصبح دراسة مستقلة.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

دراسات التفسير ، الأكاديميات الغربية ، الببليوغرافيات ، التاريخ الفكري الإسلامي

Introduction

The current trend in Western scholarship has seen considerable development in the field of *tafsīr studies*. A group of scholars has produced numerous articles, monographs, and volumes that analyze the Muslim exegetical tradition, either to examine an individual exegete and his hermeneutical principles and methods or to uncover how *tafsīr* has evolved and transformed as a genre within the broader Islamic intellectual history. Although the field of *tafsīr* studies does not receive as much scholarly attention as Qur'anic studies yet, it has managed to establish itself as one of the central fields in Islamic studies and as important as studies devoted to Islamic law, theology, philosophy, mysticism, and others. Scholars working on *tafsīr* have offered some theoretical frameworks and analytical methods to scrutinize Qur'anic interpretation from the early, medieval, or modern times of Islam.

Historically speaking, the field of *tafsīr* studies was and is still one of the components of studies that concentrate on the Qur'an. In his famous book *Qur'anic Studies*, John Wansbrough devotes his last chapter to examining the Qur'an exegetical tradition. Drawing on Midrash studies, he divides the Qur'an interpretative materials into *haggadic* (narrative), *halakhic* (legal), *masoteric* (textual), rhetorical and allegorical (Wansbrough 2004: 119), a categorization that has been refuted by later academicians. Walid Saleh, for example, argues that he avoids using Wansbrough's classification because it can predispose our understanding when used outside its original Jewish contexts (Saleh 2004: 13). The most current volume on the Qur'an, *The Routledge Companion to the Qur'an* (2021), besides providing us with scholarly discussions on historical contexts of and themes in the Qur'an, includes many articles that study some exegetes and their exegetical thoughts. The recent development, nevertheless, has also witnessed several publications that focus exclusively on *tafsīr* and without any obvious connection to Qur'anic studies.

The Invention of *Tafsīr* Studies in the Western Academia

Scholars have credited Ignaz Goldziher's original 1920 monograph, *Die Richtungen der Islamischen Koranauslegung*, which had been translated into Arabic, English, and other languages, as a groundbreaking investigation into Qur'anic exegesis in the Western scholarship. His work provides an extensive overview of the various trends of how Muslims interpreted the Qur'an that includes "traditional, dogmatic, mystical, sectarian, and modern exegesis" (Goldziher n.d.: 6-12), something that, according to Devin Stewart's observation, had not been surveyed in earlier Western research projects (Stewart 2017: 13).

Stewart notes that many early Western scholars of the Qur'an were primarily preoccupied with questions about the origins of the Qur'an. Some of them, most notably Abraham Geiger, argue for the Jewish background of the composition of the Qur'an, while Richard Bell argues for the Christian influences (Stewart 2017: 8). However, in the hands of several scholars who were concerned with inter-religious dialogues, especially W. Montgomery Watt who served as a minister in the Scottish Episcopalian, certain questions that might disturb religious dialogues, such as the Jewish and Christian sources of the Qur'an, were abandoned. Steward writes: "A number of scholars in religious studies who were interested in the Qur'an turned to studies of *tafsīr*.....because it was easier to suggest that al-Ṭabarī or al-Suyuṭī missed something than to suggest that the Qur'an itself was less than perfect" (Stewart 2017: 15).

The reasons for the increasing scholarly attention to the *tafsīr* tradition among Western researchers are undoubtedly manifold, and Steward's assessment is one among many. Bruce Fudge credits Wilfred Cantwell Smith for arguing that Western scholars should consider Muslims' voices and attitudes towards the Qur'an. As Fudge shows, the earliest study of the Qur'an in the West was dominated by philological inquiry and an emphasis on finding the origins or original meanings. These studies favored European approaches to the Qur'an and neglected what Muslims said about their scripture, eventually leading to the dismissal of the *tafsīr* genre in Western scholarship. Fudge argues that any text of scripture does not achieve its scriptural status on its own; it depends on the historical context and the community's consensus (Fudge 2006: 128). Smith, as cited by Fudge, emphasizes the true meaning of the Qur'an lies in the history of its meanings, and he advocates looking forward in search of the effects of the Qur'an for Muslim communities (Fudge 2006: 138). This emphasis on the inevitable relationship between the scripture and its believers opens avenues for better appreciating Muslims' interaction with, including their commentaries on, the Qur'an.

The Study of Early Qur'anic Interpretation

As mentioned, many Western scholars have long been obsessed with the questions of origins, and early Islam has become the most exciting landmark for critical and historical investigations. In this milieu, hadith studies enjoyed widespread and growing severe examinations. In contrast to traditional narratives, Western scholars like Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht, and generations of scholars who follow in their footsteps, openly expressed their skepticism about the reliability of hadith records. They

advanced more sophisticated methodologies to inspect the authenticity of accounts attributed to Muhammad preserved in hadith collections.

Such concern permeates to studies devoted to other Islamic texts, including *tafsīr*. Many authors and researchers began questioning and analyzing the genuineness of exegetical opinions ascribed to earlier authorities. Some earlier scholars who paid particular attention to early *tafsīr* include Ignaz Goldziher, Harris Birkeland, Nabia Abbott, Fuat Sezgin, and John Wansbrough, a group of scholars that Andrew Rippin surveys in his article, "Early Qur'anic Commentaries" (Rippin 2020). In his other study, Rippin offers two criteria to date early exegetical thoughts, namely *isnād* structure and literary criteria (Rippin 1994). However, Harald Motzki argues that despite Rippin's efforts to offer sophisticated methodologies, there remain some problems with them (Motzki 2006). These ongoing debates over the authenticity and dating of Muslim exegetical tradition among many Western critics are well-documented by Motzki in his article, "The Origins of Muslim Exegesis: A Debate" (Motzki 2010).

Scholarly works that focus on early *tafsīr* are not only preoccupied with the issues of dating the tradition but also with efforts to reveal early Muslim communities' attitudes toward their Qur'an and its exegetical tradition. Harris Birkeland's writing, *Old Muslim Opposition against Interpretation of the Koran*, represents this trend well. He argues that despite no opposition to exegetical activities until the late first century, a compelling force to reject *tafsīr* emerged during the second century, and thereafter the exegetical practices could be justified only if the commentators followed and obeyed strict methods of hadith transmission (Birkeland 1955: 42, republished 1999). A more recent example includes Sukidi's Ph.D. dissertation at Harvard University, "the Gradual Qur'an: Views of Early Muslim Commentators" (2019), which seeks to examine how the concept of the gradual Qur'an was established and developed in early works of Qur'an commentaries. For his part, Mun'im Sirry presents a broad survey of how early Sunni and Shi'i Qur'an commentators interpreted the Qur'anic term *ulū al-amr,* those in authority (Sirry, 2021). Others have opted to study individual early exegetes. For example, Nicolai Sinai analyzes exegetical views ascribed to Muqātil b. Sulayman (d. c. 775) (Sinai 2015), Claudio Gilliot to Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 722 or 721) (Gilliot), and Andreas Gorke to 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr (d. c. 712) (Gorke, 2015). The status and importance of Ibn 'Abbās (d. c. 687) in exegetical tradition have been questioned by Herbert Berg both in his monograph, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam* (2000), and in his article "Ibn 'Abbās in 'Abbasid-Era *Tafsīr*" (2013). In the latter, Berg attempts to demonstrate that this great

early exegete's authority in the Qur'anic interpretative tradition "emerged, peaked, and began to decline congruently with the political and religious power of the 'Abbasid caliphs" (Berg 2013: 493).

Another motivation that leads scholars to concentrate on early *tafsīr* is their views that during the early period, exegetical approaches to the Qur'an were devised, negotiated, and standardized, and subsequent generations of Muslim exegetes only followed them. Wansbrough argues: "the development of Muslim exegetical literature envisaged here required a span of approximately a century and a half, from Muqātil (d. 150/767) to Ibn Quṭayba (d. 276/889). Within that period, the principles of exegesis were evolved and perfected, and it would not be too much to say that thereafter few, if any, methodological innovations were introduced" (Wansbrough 2004: 14). Similarly, Rippin mentions two reasons for the continuous scholarly engagement with the field of early commentaries. First, the focus on early *tafsīr* gives an overview into the development of exegetical methods, and second, it enables scholars to analyze how different methods of Qur'anic interpretation were evaluated and integrated into what become the established form of the *tafsīr* tradition in the third *hijrī* century (Rippin 2020: 607).

As early *tafsīr* proves to be significant for scholarly investigations to examine either the authenticity of its reports, early Muslims' attitudes, or how exegetical techniques were devised in the formative period of Islam, many scholars of *tafsīr* studies dedicate their academic activities mainly to conduct research on early Qur'anic exegesis. In his survey, "the Present Status of *Tafsīr* Studies," Rippin admits that the greatest efforts in *tafsīr* studies until his time appeared in the field of early Qur'an commentaries and the development of the interpretive tradition (Rippin 1983: 226). Rippin himself is a prominent scholar in the early *tafsīr* studies. He authored many excellent articles on them, such as "Ibn 'Abbās's *Al-lugāt fī'l-Qur'ān*" (1981), "Ibn 'Abbās's *Garīb al-Qur'ān*" (1983), "Al-Zuhrī, *naskh al-Qur'ān* and the problem of early *tafsīr* texts" (1984), and "Studying early *tafsīr* texts" (1995). In addition, he also edited some books that become valuable references for the study of exegetical tradition, such as *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an* (1988)*, The Qur'an: Formative Interpretation* (1999), and *The Qur'an and Its Interpretative Tradition* (2001).

Another group of researchers has examined some interrelations between Qur'anic exegesis and what later became distinct branches of Islamic knowledge. The intersection between the biography of Muhammad and the exegetical tradition is, for example, analyzed by Maher Jarrar (Jarrar 2020), while that between Arabic grammar and exegesis is studied

by Kees Versteegh (Versteegh 1993 and 2020). For their parts, Roberto Tottoli, Marston Speight, and M. J. Kister focus on the boundaries between Qur'anic exegesis and a hadith collection (Tottoli 2014), the function of hadith as commentary on the Qur'an (Speight 1988), and legends in *tafsīr* and *hadīth* literature (Kister 1988), respectively.

Some other Western scholars are more interested in sketching an overview of the historical evolution of Qur'anic interpretation in the early formative periods of Islam, sometimes also complemented by discussions on its later growth. Fred Leemhuis' article, "Origins and Early Development of the *Tafsīr* Tradition" (1988), represents a focused observation of the history of early exegetical tradition. Claude Gilliot also made a pretty similar attempt in his "The Beginnings of Qur'anic Exegesis" (2001). However, in his other entry, "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Classical and Medieval," published in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* (2001), Gilliot explores not only the early exegetical tradition but also the medieval Qur'anic interpretation. Observing his legacy in subsequent academic works on *tafsīr*, I would suggest that Gilliot left significant impacts in shifting scholarly inquiries which were previously dominated by studies of early *tafsīr* to also engage with medieval Qur'an commentaries seriously.

The survey above illustrates that Western scholarship on the early Qur'anic exegesis is driven to examine one of the followings: 1) the authenticity of exegetical reports, 2) the early Muslims' attitudes to the Qur'an, 3) the importance of the early Qur'an commentators, 4) the development of early interpretative techniques and methods, 5) the interrelation between *tafsīr* and other branches of Islamic knowledge, and 6) the general overview of the historical evolution of *tafsīr* tradition.

The Study of Medieval Qur'an Commentaries

The term 'medieval' period used in this paper refers to a historical period that begins from the third/ninth century, although some scholars, such as Ulrika Martensson, prefer to call this period early medieval (Martensson 2020), while Walid Saleh calls it a classical time (Saleh 2004). To ease my writing, I simply call it medieval. If Wansbrough, as discussed before, restricts the early period of *tafsīr* to the work and life of Ibn Quṭayba, then the medieval here begins after this exegete's life.

My survey reveals that two books written by Gerhard Bowering and Claude Gilliot, respectively, both contemporary, mark a new phase in Western scholarship where academic interests in medieval Qur'an commentaries have been cultivated. Bowering focuses mainly on Sufi commentaries, and his first book, initially his doctoral thesis at McGill

University in 1975, examines the Qur'an commentary of a ninth-century Muslim mystic. His book, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl at-Tustarī* (*d. 283/896*) (1980), remains one of the most important references in the study of mystical interpretation. Comparatively speaking, Gilliot dedicates his research to examining Sunni Qur'anic hermeneutics. In 1982, he submitted his doctoral dissertation, which scrutinized al-Ṭabarī's (d. 923) Qur'an commentary, to Université Paris-III. However, his French dissertation is not translated into English yet nor published for a broader readership. Nevertheless, he continues to author numerous articles, mostly in English, which explore the Qur'anic exegetical tradition. Following these two scholars' studies, Sufi and Sunni Qur'an commentaries have received greater attention from many academicians.

The recent development has witnessed a growing curiosity and investigations into medieval Qur'anic hermeneutics. To systematize the survey, let me begin with works that examine Sufi commentaries. In addition to conducting research on Sahl al-Tustarī's exegesis, Bowering also writes on other Sufi Qur'an commentators, especially al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) in his seminal articles, "Sulamī's Commentary on the Qur'ān" (1991) and "The Major Sources of Sulamī's Minor Qur'ān Commentary" (1996). Moreover, he and Yousef Casewit also produced a critical edition of the twelfth-century Andalusian mystic Ibn Barrajān's Qur'an commentary and provided an introductory note to the exegete and his hermeneutics in their book *A Qur'ān Commentary by Ibn Barrajān of Seville* (*d. 536/1141*) (2015).

Sufis' unique contributions to the Islamic exegetical tradition are underlined by Kristin Zahra San in her monograph, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam*. In that book, she offers rigorous observations on several Sufi commentators and their exegetical principles and methods (San, 2006). A twelfth-century Persian *tafsīr* work by Rashīd al-Dīn al-Maybudī (d. 1135) is carefully examined by Annabel Keeler in her monograph *Sufi Hermeneutics The Qur'an Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn al-Maybudī* (2006). Martin Nguyen conducts an extensive examination of *Laṭāif al-Ishārāt* authored by the eleventh-century great mystic al-Qushayrī (d. 1074) in his book *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar: Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayrī and the Laṭāif al-Ishārāt* (2012). In his other writing, Nguyen focuses on the exegete's *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, a Qur'an commentary written before his *Laṭāif al-Ishārāt* and only available in manuscripts (Nguyen, 2013). For his part, Toby Mayer translated and provided some notes on al-Shahrastānī's (d. 1153) Qur'an commentary in his book *Keys to the Arcana: Shahrastānī's Esoteric Commentary on the Qur'an* (2009). Among key references for the study of

Sufi Qur'anic interpretation includes *The Spirit and The Letter: Approaches to the Esoteric Interpretation of the Qur'an,* edited by Annabel Keeler and Sajjad Rizvi (2016).

Some other Western scholars have opted to outline an overview of the history of Qur'anic exegesis within a particular period, encompassing several names of exegetes. In her monograph *Qur'anic Christians An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (1991), Jane Dammen McAuliffe provides a chapter "From Ṭabarī to Ṭabāṭabā'ī" to examine ten exegetes and their interpretative methodologies. These Qur'an commentators include al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144), Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī (d. 1131), Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1201), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210), Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373), Kashānī (d. 1329), Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) and Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1981) (McAuliffe 1991: 38-89). McAuliffe's survey is broad and is intended to cover exegetes from several Muslim groups; Sunni, Shi'i, Mu'tazila, and Sufi, and from different eras; medieval and modern times. For his part, Norman Calder attempts to depict the exegetical activities that took place in a period between al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr (Calder 1993).

Gilliot undertakes a more comprehensive survey of the exegetical tradition in the medieval period. In his entry "Qur'anic Exegesis" (2000), Gilliot highlights several major exegetes and influential exegetical trends in both classical and medieval periods. It is in this chapter too that he accentuates decisive roles played by the school of Khurasan, especially in Nishapur, in maturing the exegetical tradition, a topic that is later addressed by subsequent scholars, such as Walid Saleh and Martin Nguyen. Some Shi'i Qur'an commentators are also investigated by Gilliot, such as al-Ṭabrisī (d. 1154), an exegete later studied more comprehensively by Bruce Fudge in his monograph. Now paying attention to the Mu'tazila exegetical tradition, Gilliot does not only offer accounts on the famous Mu'tazila exegete al-Zamakhsharī but also on other prominent but less known exegetes, such as al-Jishumī (d. 1101) whose Qur'an commentary has been currently available in print. Several years later, Suleiman Mourad dedicated his scholarship to examining al-Jishumī's exegetical legacy. Gilliot goes on to delineate some other prominent exegetical streams, such as the theological interpretation that includes al-Māturīdī (d. 944) and al-Rāzī, and the mystical understandings of the Qur'an (Gilliot 2000: 101-116). Witnessing Gilliot's tremendous intellectual legacy and influence on the subsequent generation of scholars, I would credit him as a great inspiring figure in the field of medieval *tafsīr* studies as Andrew Rippin for the early *tafsīr* scholarship.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, major medieval Qur'an commentaries have received increasingly rigorous scholarly investigation.

An encyclopedic Qur'an commentary by an eleventh-century Sunni Nishapurian Qur'an commentator, al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1035), is subjected to Walid Saleh's examination in his splendid monograph, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition the Qur'an Commentary of al-Tha'labī* (*d. 427/1035*) (2004). In this book, Saleh emphasizes the importance of the Nishapuri school of exegesis. Al-Tha'labī, his main teacher Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 406/1016), and his brilliant pupil al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076), constituted one of the most important exegetical streams in Nishapur (Saleh 2004: 28). Some years later, Saleh explores al-Wāḥidī's interpretative methodologies and his roles the *tafsīr* tradition, in his seminal articles, "The Last of the Nishapuri School of *Tafsīr*: al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076) and his Significance in the History of Qur'anic Exegesis" (2006) and "The Introduction to Wāḥidī's *al-Basit*: An Edition, Translation and Commentary" (2013).

More recently, Martin Nguyen attempts to expand the study of the Nishapuri school of exegesis to include other influential exegetes. In his insightful article, "Exegetes of Nishapur: A Preliminary Survey of Qur'anic Works by Ibn Ḥabīb, Ibn Fūrak, and 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī" (2018), Nguyen gives more elaboration on Ibn Ḥabīb who has received limited attention in the academia as well as announces the two other prominent exegetes; Ibn Fūrak and 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī. It is important to note that al-Qushayrī, whom Nguyen thoroughly examined in his book *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar,* and al-Sulamī, a Sufi exegete studied by other scholars, including Bowering, belonged to the Nishapuri school too. Gilliot, the first in the Western academia to recognize the significance of the Nishapuri school, recounts twelve exegetes associated with the school (Gilliot 2000: 103-107). Too important Nishapur was for medieval Qur'anic exegetical activities, Karen Bauer even states: "if an author wished to produce a well-respected work of *tafsīr*, he would do well to spend some time in Nishapur" (Bauer 2013b: 40).

Some Sunni theological Qur'an commentaries are also subjected to academic investigations. A major Sunni Qur'an commentary with massive theological inclinations, the exegetical work of al-Rāzī is carefully examined by Tariq Jaffer in his excellent monograph, *Rāzī Master of Qur'anic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning* (2015). A contemporary to al-Ṭabarī, al-Māturīdī (d. 944) and his Qur'anic exegesis were researched by Manfred Gotz in his 1965 German article, which was later translated to English, "Māturīdī and his Kitab Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān" (1999). A. M. A. Galli's study, "Some Aspects of al-Māturīdī's Commentary on the Qur'an" (1982), attempts to disclose the exegete's conception of *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*, his sources, his attitudes towards Qur'anic stories and ambiguous verses, and to what

extent the author use the Qur'an to formulate his theological views (Galli 1982: 3). More recently, Walid Saleh proposes a fruitful reexamining of al-Ṭabarī's exegetical work through al-Māturīdī's *tafsīr* in his paper, "Rereading al-Ṭabarī through al-Māturīdī: New Light on the Third Century *Hijrī*" (2016).

Another influential medieval *tafsīr* work by al-Bayḍāwī (d. 1319) was analyzed by Yusuf Rahman in his article, "Hermeneutics of al-Bayḍāwī in His *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*" (1997). More recently, the history of the rise and fall of al-Bayḍāwī's exegetical work was examined by Walid Saleh. As he points out, al-Zamakhsharī's Qur'an commentary was highly popular in the medieval era and was used by the Sunnis in their seminaries. He even says: "if you were to visit any seminary in the Islamic world in the eighth/fourteenth century, you would have found that al-Zamakhsharī's Qur'an commentary was the most authoritative Qur'an commentary used by the Sunnis" (Saleh 2021: 72). Some may wonder how such a Qur'an commentary by a Mu'tazila author could enjoy widespread popularity among the Sunnis. This is undoubtedly an interesting topic that has triggered lively discussions among scholars (Saleh 2013 and 2015).

However, the popularity once enjoyed by al-Zamakhsharī's work had been replaced by al-Bayḍāwī's since the late ninth/fifteenth century in Cairo (Saleh 2021: 74). Al-Bayḍāwī's commentary then became the standard *tafsīr* textbook used in *madrasa* curricula of the Islamic world for centuries. Nevertheless, his Qur'an commentary has been replaced by Ibn Kathīr's exegetical work as the most popular *tafsīr* among Sunni Muslims in the modern period. Ibn Kathīr was a student of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), and his status has been elevated by the modern Salafi movement (Saleh 2021: 75). Ibn Taymiyya's treatise on the principles of Qur'anic exegesis, *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, was examined by Jane Dammen McAuliffe in her "Ibn Taymiyya: Treatise on the Principle of *Tafsīr*" (2015) and by Walid Saleh in his "Ibn Taymiyya and the Rise of Radical Hermeneutics: An Analysis of *An Introduction to the Foundations of Qur'anic Exegesis*" (2015). The nature of the relationship between Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Taymiyya was problematized by Younus Y. Mirza in his thought-provoking article, "Was Ibn Kathīr the 'Spokesperson' for Ibn Taymiyya? Jonah as a Prophet of Obedience" (2014) and again in his latest article, "*Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr:* A Window onto Medieval Islam and a Guide to the Development of Modern Islamic Orthodoxy" (2021).

Both Andrew J. Lane and Kifayat Ullah devote thorough examinations of al-Zamakhsharī's exegetical work in their monographs, *A Traditional Mu'tazilite Commentary: The Kashshāf of Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī* (2006) and *Al-Kashshaf: Al-Zamakhsharī's Mu'tazilite Exegesis of the Qur'an* (2017)

respectively. Lane's survey demonstrates that the medieval scholars' views of al-Zamakhsharī and his *tafsīr* work were positive (Lane 2006: xxii). Many Sunni scholars credited him as a man of many merits (*kathīr al-faḍl*), God-fearing (*ṣāliḥ*), and that his works, including his Qur'an commentary, bear witness to his abundant merit (*wufūr faḍlih*) (Lane 2006: xv). Lane also notices that when a scholar criticizes him, such criticism is usually supplemented by praise or, at least, prayers for God's mercy (Lane 2006: xix). For his part, Ullah states that the earliest copy of *al-Kashshāf* was made only four years after the author passed away. He goes on to state that *al-Fihris al-Shāmil* mentions 843 manuscripts of *al-Kashshāf*, out of which 443 are available in many libraries around the world. He remarks that "no other book in the history of *tafsīr* has been commented upon in the forms of *sharḥs*, *ḥāshiyas*, and *mukhtaṣars* more than *al-Kashshāf*" (Ullah 2017: 4). The significance of al-Zamakhsharī's exegetical enterprise was already recognized by medieval Muslim authors, such as Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalūsī (d. 1344). In the introduction to his Qur'an commentary, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, Abū Ḥayyān praises al-Zamakhsharī and his contemporary Andalusian exegete, Ibn 'Aṭiyya (d. 1146), as the knights of the field (of *tafsīr*) and the masters of the (Arabic) eloquence (*fārisā maydan wa mumārisa faṣāḥah wa bayān*) (Al-Andalūsī 2010, vol. 1: 112). More recently, some of Ibn 'Aṭiyya's Qur'anic exegesis is studied by Muammar Zayn Qadafy (2021).

The Mu'tazila exegetical tradition is an object of academic inquiry for some other scholars, most notably Suleiman Mourad. In one of his studies, Mourad compares the interpretations of the certain verse by five Mu'tazilite exegetes; Ibn al-Khallāl al-Baṣrī (d. after 988), al-Rummānī (d. 994), al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1024), al-Jishumī (d. 1101), and al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144) (Mourad, 2013). In his other research, he exclusively analyzes al-Jishumī's introduction to his *tafsīr* work (Mourad, 2013). Particularly interested in the Mu'tazila exegetical tradition, Mourad traces the influences of the Mu'tazila interpretative legacy on Sunni and Shi'i *tafsīr* works. In his article, "The Survival of the Mu'tazila Tradition of Qur'anic Exegesis in Shi'i and Sunni *Tafāsīr*," he demonstrates that although the Mu'tazila as a theological group did demise, its exegetical tradition continued to influence other Muslim camps. For example, Mourad demonstrates the reliance of the Sunni exegete and theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf* and the influences of al-Jishumī's *Tahdhīb* on the Twelver Shi'i Qur'an commentator al-Ṭabrisī's (d. 1154) *Majma' al-Bayān* (Mourad 2010: 83).

Concerning the Shi'i interpretative tradition, Meir M. Bar-Asher's monograph, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imami Shiism*, represents the first attempt in the Western academia to conduct a comprehensive

investigation into the early Imāmī exegetical tradition (Bar-Asher 1999). A volume edited by Farhad Daftary and Gurdofarid Miskinzoda, *The Study of Shi'i Islam: History, Theology and Law,* provides some articles on Shi'i Qur'anic interpretations. One of them is contributed by Andrew Rippin that sketches the Shi'i exegetical activities in its formative and medieval eras, while another one by Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi focuses on esoteric inclinations in the Qur'an commentary of al-Ḥibarī (d. 899) (Daftary and Miskinzoda 2014). For his part, Mahmoud Ayoub studied some principles and development of the Twelver Shi'i Qur'anic exegesis (Ayoub 1988) while Ismail K. Poonawala devoted a section on the conception of esoteric interpretation in the Ismā'īlī Shi'i group (Poonawala 1988). While many scholars working on Shi'i *tafsīr* works write their research in articles, Bruce Fudge examines the Qur'an commentary of the twelfth-century Shi'i scholar al-Ṭabrisī in his monograph, *Qur'anic Hermeneutics: al-Ṭabrisī and the Craft of Commentary* (2011). Although the Shi'i exegetical thought continuously attracts scholarly exploration, it has still enjoyed more limited attention than the Sunni Qur'anic interpretation.

Concluding Notes

The fact that medieval Qur'an commentaries have continuously received increasing academic attention illustrates a significant shift in the underlying paradigm possessed by Western scholars. While the researchers of the early *tafsīr* texts, most notably Wansbrough, see in early commentaries a peak of methodological innovation and negotiation and later exegetes simply followed them, a group of scholars of medieval *tafsīr* emphasizes that the whole picture is not that simple. As long as Muslims interact with, interpret, and impose meanings on the Qur'an, their engagement with and commentaries on the scripture deserve scholarly investigations. As Bauer points out, the central aim of the *tafsīr* studies in academia is not to uncover the meanings of the Qur'an but to analyze how exegetes construe its meanings and to unearth their aims, methods, sources, and context, to gain "a clearer understanding of what they are saying, why they were saying it in particular ways, and how this process both uncovers and creates meaning in the text of the Qur'an" (Bauer 2013a: 1). Some proponents of *tafsīr* studies view *tafsīr* as a genre (Pink and Gorke 2014: 1-6) which is as important as other genres of Islamic knowledge, like Islamic law, theology, philosophy, or mysticism. They are part of what the scholars name Islamic intellectual history, and to study medieval *tafsīr* means to appreciate the complexity of how Muslims, in particular history, engaged with the meanings of the Qur'an.

Ongoing research on Qur'anic exegetical tradition in Western academia reveals some findings that are remarkably different from what traditional narratives propose. In his *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn*, Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī draws a hierarchy of Qur'an commentaries that places *al-tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* (exegesis with transmitted materials from earlier authorities) in the first class, while *al-tafsīr bi al-ra'y* (exegesis with personal analyses) is regarded to be secondary or even marginal (Al-Dhahabī no year, vol. 1: 147). This picture, however, is not descriptive but prescriptive. It does not present the 'real' history but reflects a doctrinal assessment of what sort of *tafsīr* texts 'should' be considered the most authoritative. In contrast, some empirical pieces of evidence, as shown by the scholars of *tafsīr* studies discussed earlier, proves that al-Zamakhsharī's and al-Bayḍāwī's *tafsīr* works, which fall into the category of *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* in the traditional accounts, were too influential, widely circulated, and continually read and taught in the medieval Islamic *madrasa* for centuries. Moreover, the usefulness of the traditional classification of *tafsīr* between *bi al-mathūr* and *bi al-ra'y* types has been questioned and considered insufficient by many *tafsīr* historians. Saleh proposes a category of what he calls 'encyclopedic' and '*madrasa*-style' Qur'an commentaries (Saleh 2006: 16-17), while Bauer offers six modes that can be employed to study the genre of *tafsīr*, namely to consider the geography like Nishapur, human networks like the teacher-student relationship, an exegete's use of particular terminology like his use of term *ẓāhir*, the development of a hermeneutical system, the boundaries of the *tafsīr* and other fields of Islamic knowledges, and the study of *tafsīr* texts as an object like the rise and fall of al-Bayḍāwī's Qur'an commentary that we discussed previously (Bauer 2013a: 11-14).

The field of *tafsīr* studies, while now receiving more academic attention, is still intimately connected to Qur'anic studies. Numerous articles on *tafsīr* surveyed in this paper are scattered in volumes and journals devoted to the study of the Qur'an, such as *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies, Encyclopedia of the Qur'an, Approaches to the Qur'an,* the most current *The Routledge Companion to the Qur'an*, and *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, as well as in other volumes assigned to the study of Islam in general. Nevertheless, the recent development has witnessed some publications designed to exclusively cover articles on *tafsīr* without any tie to Qur'anic studies, such as Mustafa Shah (ed.) *Tafsīr: Interpreting the Qur'an,* Karen Bauer (ed.) *Aims Methods and Contexts of Qur'anic Exegesis* (*2nd/8th – 9th-15th c.*), and Andreas Gorke and Johanna Pink (eds.) *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre.* This suggests that more scholars in Western academia dedicate their careers to

studying *tafsīr*, allowing it to be a remarkably developing field.

Nevertheless, despite this significant development, we still lack scholarly studies on many other prominent exegetes of the medieval period. As Samuel Ross presented in the Freiburg Conversation on tafsir and transregional Islamic networks (2020), we still do not have a single study on many important medieval Qur'an commentators, among others Abū Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 983) and ʻAbd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Nasafī (d. 1310), despite the fact that their *tafāsīr* were among the top fifty Qur'an commentaries by manuscript evidence. In addition, the development of *ʻulūm al-tafsīr* seems to receive less attention than the history of *kutub al-tafsīr.* We do have several works on the *ʻulūm al-tafsīr* genre. David S. Powers, for example, analyzes the growth of abrogation theory (*naskh*) and states, "the number of verses that are considered to have been abrogated increased dramatically between the eighth and eleventh centuries (al-Zuhrī mentions 42 abrogated verses, al-Naḥḥās, 138, and Ibn Salāma, 238)…" (Powers 1988: 122). Another example includes Sahiron Syamsuddin's analytical study of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* in the views of al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī. He shows how the former used those two exegetical concepts to support the Sunni orthodoxy, while the latter expresses the theological views of the Mu'tazilites (Syamsuddin 1999: 73). However, the number of studies devoted to *ʻulūm al-tafsīr* is still fewer compared to those on *kutub al-tafsīr.* This demonstrates that what we have understood about the history and development of *tafsīr* tradition is much less than what we have not known yet.

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