

Discourse on the Best Interpretation Model: A Critical Review of Traditional Exegesis Products in the Early Era

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Keywords : <i>Interpretation source; tafsir bi al-ma'thūr; mutaqqaddimīn era, tafsir al-Ṭabarī, tafsir al-Samarqandi.</i>	Abstract In addition to interpreting the Qur'an through rational reasoning (<i>ra'yi</i>), scholars also employ an interpretive approach based on narrations, known as the <i>bi al-ma'thūr</i> interpretation. This form of interpretation is esteemed by Ibn Taimiyah and Ibn Kathir and carries high validity and evidential support. To such an extent, outcomes from the <i>bi al-ma'sur</i> interpretation are obligatory and not to be disregarded. This study critically analyzes and validates the <i>bi al-ma'thūr</i> interpretation model that emerged in the <i>mutaqqaddimīn</i> era. The focus is on two seminal interpretations, namely " <i>Jāmi' al-Bayān an Ta'wīl Āyi al-Qur'ān</i> " by Muhammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 H.) and " <i>Bahr al-'Ulūm</i> " by Naṣr ibn Muhammad al-Samarqandi (d. 375 H.). This research employs an analytical descriptive approach and falls under library research since primary data source originates from literature within libraries. The research includes verification, used to reevaluate principles and methods of interpretation in relation to contemporary relevance. Findings reveal that despite being considered the best, the <i>bi al-ma'thūr</i> interpretation model exhibits problematic deficiencies. Among these are weak and even questionable authenticity (<i>munkar</i>) in narrations, often with lacking isnads, making distinguishing between reliable (<i>ṣaḥīḥ</i>) and weak (<i>ḍa'īf</i>) challenging. Many narrations include <i>Isrā'iliyyāt</i> (Jewish and Christian narratives) sans commentary or selective narrators, citing negatively-viewed sources. Therefore, interpreting this model is advised to be avoided by audiences lacking expertise in <i>riwayah</i> and <i>dirayah</i> (methods of narration and interpretation).
Kata Kunci : Sumber penafsiran; <i>tafsir bi al-ma'thūr; era mutaqqaddimīn; tafsir al-Ṭabarī; tafsir al-Samarqandi.</i>	Abstrak Selain penafsiran al-Qur'an dengan pendekatan nalar (<i>ra'yi</i>), para mufasir juga menggunakan pendekatan tafsir dengan riwayat atau disebut dengan <i>tafsir bi al-ma'thūr</i> . Tafsir ini dianggap sebagai model penafsiran terbaik oleh Ibnu Taimiyah dan Ibnu Kathir, serta memiliki validitas dan hujjah yang nilainya sangat tinggi. Bahkan saking tingginya, hasil dari <i>tafsir bi al-ma'thūr</i> wajib diikuti dan tidak boleh diabaikan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara kritis, serta memverifikasi model penafsiran <i>bi al-ma'thūr</i> yang lahir pada era <i>mutaqqaddimīn</i> . Berfokus pada dua tafsir induk, yakni <i>Jāmi' al-Bayān an Ta'wīl Āyi al-Qur'ān</i> karya Muhammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (w. 310 H.), dan <i>Bahr al-'Ulūm</i> karya Naṣr ibn Muhammad al-Samarqandi (w. 375 H). Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif analitis, termasuk penelitian kepustakaan (<i>library research</i>), sumber datanya berasal dari literatur yang berbasis kepustakaan, juga termasuk penelitian verifikasi, untuk mengkaji ulang kaidah-kaidah dan metode penafsiran yang telah berkembang dari sisi relevansinya dengan perkembangan zaman. Hasil penelitian ini adalah meskipun dianggap terbaik, model penafsiran <i>bi al-ma'thūr</i> faktanya memiliki kekurangan dari berbagai sisi. Di antaranya, banyak terdapat riwayat lemah, atau bahkan riwayat <i>munkar</i> , riwayat-riwayatnya minim isnad sehingga tidak bisa dibedakan mana yang <i>ṣaḥīḥ</i> dan yang <i>ḍa'īf</i> , banyak memuat riwayat <i>Isrā'iliyyāt</i> tanpa memberikan komentar atau seleksi perawi, serta mengutip riwayat dari perawi yang dinilai negatif oleh ulama. Tafsir model ini disarankan untuk dihindari bagi audien yang tidak memiliki keilmuan terkait <i>riwayah</i> dan <i>dirayah</i> .
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Introduction

The Qur'an, as a timeless guide for humanity, offers boundless opportunities for extracting meanings and interpretations. Its ongoing interpretation across epochs highlights its relevance to evolving circumstances, reflecting its enduring impact on human life. The Qur'an's continued relevance in contemporary scholarship underscores its timeless nature, unaffected by modern technological advancements. Thus, scholarly endeavors to explore its depths affirm its enduring significance and resilience across diverse contexts and eras, transcending the limitations of time and technological progress.¹ This further validates the Qur'an's miraculous adaptability to evolving conditions, affirming its relevance across time. Consequently, diverse endeavors persist in exploring the Qur'an's meanings and content, catering to the exigencies of each era. Such pursuits underscore the Qur'an's enduring significance, as it consistently offers guidance that resonates with humanity's ever-changing realities. Through continuous examination and interpretation, the Qur'an continues to unveil its profound wisdom, addressing contemporary challenges while remaining faithful to its timeless essence.²

Historically, the interpretation of the Qur'an has evolved considerably, encompassing advancements in its systematics, styles, and interpretative models. Initially, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ served as the primary exegete, providing direct elucidation of its verses. As Islam expanded geographically and intellectually, diverse interpretive methodologies emerged, reflecting cultural, linguistic, and theological nuances. The subsequent generations witnessed the proliferation of exegetical works, spanning classical, mystical, legal, and rationalist traditions. Contemporary scholarship continues to engage with these rich interpretive legacies, employing interdisciplinary approaches to uncover the Qur'an's multifaceted meanings and enduring relevance. Through this dynamic process, the Qur'an continues to inspire and guide humanity across temporal and spatial boundaries.³

During this era, exegesis was relatively limited and frequently intertwined with the Prophet's traditions (Hadith). This symbiotic relationship stemmed from the lesser demand for Qur'anic interpretation, except for verses with complex meanings. Scholars primarily relied on Hadith to elucidate the Qur'an's nuances, enriching their understanding through Prophet Muhammad's teachings. The nascent exegetical efforts laid the groundwork for subsequent interpretive methodologies, shaping diverse approaches to Quranic hermeneutics. Over time, as Islamic scholarship flourished, exegetes developed systematic methods to explore the Qur'an's depths, fostering a rich tradition of interpretation that continues to evolve and inspire intellectual inquiry to this day. This was due to the companions (*ṣaḥābat*) possessing a profound command of the Arabic language and having a natural talent for understanding the Qur'an, which, of course, was revealed in Arabic. Additionally, the companions witnessed firsthand the

¹ Yusuf Baihaqi, "Dimensi Sains Dalam Kisah Al-Qur'an Dan Relevansinya Dengan Keakuratan Pemilihan Kata," *Aqlam: Journal of Islam and Plurality* 3, no 2 (2018): 266.

² Muhammad Abu Zahroh, *Al-Mu'jizah Al-Kubrā Al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 2019), 14.

³ Ṣubḥī Al-Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dar Al-Ilm li Al-Malāyin, 1977), 289.

circumstances surrounding the revelation of specific verses, enabling them to grasp the context and background of those verses accurately.⁴

With the expansion of Islam across diverse communities beyond the Arab world, there arose a need for a more comprehensive interpretation of the Qur'an. The companions, drawing from their deep understanding of the Qur'an and guided by the teachings of Hadith and historical context, embarked on elucidating its meanings extensively. This interpretative effort was further carried on by the successors of the companions (*tābi'īn*) and subsequent generations of followers. Their collective contributions not only expanded the scope of Qur'anic interpretation but also enriched the understanding of its timeless message, making it accessible and relevant to people from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This ongoing tradition of interpretation reflects the dynamism and adaptability of Islamic scholarship in addressing the evolving needs and complexities of diverse societies throughout history.⁵ The interpretations from the early generations are often considered by scholars as the best interpretations compared to those that emerged later. These interpretations became popularly known as "*tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*".

However, interpretations originating from the *tābi'īn* (the generation after the companions) are still debated by scholars regarding their legitimacy to be categorized as "*bi al-ma'sūr*" or not. Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr, a contemporary scholar, is among those who agree that interpretations from the *tābi'īn* should be included in the category of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*. He bases this on the observation that many of the books of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* contain narrations from the *tābi'īn*.⁶ Indeed, regardless of the ongoing debate, *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* refers to the narrations from the early generations of Islam, which are regarded as the best period, as elucidated in one of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

The popularity of the interpretation of the Qur'an using the *bi al-ma'thūr* model owes much to the role of Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 H) and his work, "*Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*" (Introduction to the Principles of Qur'anic Exegesis). Through this work, Ibn Taymiyyah effectively put an end to the longstanding dispute between the two camps of interpretation models throughout history, which had been competing for dominance and authority. The victory of the *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* model was established. Furthermore, in subsequent eras, this idea was reinforced by his student, Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 H), through statements in the introduction to his *tafsīr*, "*Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Aẓīm*". Not only that, Imam al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 H) took the next step as a scholar supporting the *bi al-ma'thūr* interpretation model, with his work specifically titled "*al-Durr al-Manṣūr fī al-Tafsīr bi al-ma'sūr*" (The Victorious Pearl in the Supported Interpretation). This work further propelled the *bi al-ma'sūr* interpretation model, making it increasingly prominent and leaving its competitor, the *bi al-ra'yi* model, behind.

After the era of Imam al-Suyūṭī, al-Azhar took on the subsequent role in strengthening the authority of interpretation focused on these narrations, with the

⁴ Muḥammad Ḥusain Al-Dhahabīy, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, Jilid I (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1995), 104.

⁵ Mannā' Al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥiṣ Fi Ulūm Al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1995), 330.

⁶ Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr, *Ulūm al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Dimsiyq: Maṭba'ah al-Ṣabbah, 1993), 74.

emergence of a work in the field of Qur'anic sciences titled "*Manāhil al-'Irfān fi Ulūm al-Qur'ān*" (Springs of Knowledge in the Sciences of the Qur'an). In this book, Muhammad Abdul Azīm al-Zarqānīy (d. 1367 H), who was a sheikh of al-Azhar, categorized types of tafsir into three parts: *tafsir bi al-riwayah* (*tafsir bi al-ma'sūr*), *tafsir bi al-dirāyah* (*tafsir bi al-ra'yi*), and *tafsir bi al-ishāri*. This work significantly influenced the dominance of the interpretation model of *tafsir bi al-ma'thūr* and was frequently cited by *Mannā' al-Qaṭṭān* (d. 1420 H). In his work, al-Qaṭṭān stated that the *tafsir bi al-ma'sūr* must be followed and its interpretation must be taken. His reasoning was that this interpretation could guard against errors and misunderstandings in understanding the Qur'an.⁷

The narrative establishing *tafsir bi al-ma'thūr* as the best interpretation method is multifaceted. Firstly, Allah's superior knowledge ensures coherence among verses revealed in different contexts. Secondly, Prophet Muhammad's role in elucidating the Qur'an guides humanity toward worldly and spiritual fulfillment. His explanations, sourced from revelation, parallel the Qur'anic verses. Thirdly, the companions' direct witness to revelation renders their interpretations profound, often treated as *Marfū' Hadith*. Fourthly, the successors, *tābi'in*, inherit the companions' (*ṣaḥābah*) knowledge, their interpretations carrying similar weight. Thus, despite being secondary to Qur'anic and Hadith interpretations, *ṣaḥābat* and *tābi'in* interpretations are crucial, especially those achieving consensus and lacking room for independent reasoning. This nuanced approach underscores the importance of multiple interpretive layers in understanding the Qur'an thoroughly.⁸

The discussion above illustrates the elevated position of the *bi al-ma'thūr* interpretation model compared to other models, which Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Kathīr regarded as the best interpretations. However, this discourse still leaves many problematic issues that persist to this day. Various perplexing questions regarding this interpretation model continue to arise. Despite relying on narrations, this model of interpretation is not necessarily free from the biases of its authors, their scholarly backgrounds, socio-cultural contexts, and other influences such as sectarianism, politics, and so forth. Therefore, to address these concerns, it is crucial to conduct thorough research into the products of interpretation that employ the *bi al-ma'thūr* method, especially the works of interpretation that emerged during the *mutaqaddimīn* era. This period represents a golden age of interpretation that heavily relied on narrations compared to subsequent periods. It began in the 3rd century Hijri and gradually lost its allure until the 656th Hijri year.

This research focuses on two important books that emerged during that period and received praise from scholars: "*Jāmi' al-Bayān an Ta'wīl Āyi al-Qur'ān*" by Muhammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 H.) and "*Bahr al-'Ulūm*" by Nasr ibn Muhammad al-Samarqandi (d. 375 H). Both of these exegeses are *bi al-ma'thūr* interpretations that have received positive responses from many quarters. This research aims to analyze these two exegeses as representations of the products of interpretation that use the best version of

⁷ Al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāhiṣ Fi Ulūm Al-Qur'an*, 340.

⁸ Al-Zahabīy, *Al-Tafsir wa Al-Mufassirūn...*96.

the interpretation model according to scholars. Furthermore, this research is conducted to verify the discourse of *bi al-ma'thūr* interpretation, which is assumed to be the most accurate method for understanding the Qur'an, by confronting the reality of re-examining the content of the works produced using this method. The research aims to benefit readers of *bi al-ma'thūr* exegeses, enhancing objectivity. Utilizing descriptive-analytical and verificative methods, it re-examines interpretation principles relevant to contemporary development. Conducted as library research, all data are sourced from literature like books and journals.⁹

A Brief Overview of *Tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*

Etymologically, the term "al-ma'thūr" is the passive participle of the root word "athar," which means residue, influence, impact, and trace. Al-Zarkashi mentioned that linguistically, the word "athar" encompasses three meanings: 1) meaning residue, 2) tradition, and 3) meaning sign.¹⁰ *Athar* additionally, it can also mean "khabar," which refers to news or information. However, in this discussion, "athar" specifically refers to the word that signifies tradition. Therefore, it can be concluded that "al-ma'thūr" linguistically means something transmitted or quoted from one party to another, creating a chain of transmission. In the science of hadith, "athar" refers to the remnants of something (*baqiyyat al-shai'*). In terminology, there are two opinions: firstly, it has the same meaning as hadith, both terminologically. Secondly, "athar" differs from hadith in that it encompasses everything attributed to the companions (*ṣaḥābat*) and the successors (*tābi'īn*), whether in the form of actions or sayings.¹¹

In the science of the Qur'an, "al-ma'thūr" refers to material transmitted from the Prophet, companions (*ṣaḥābat*), and successors (*tābi'īn*), aligning closely with the aforementioned definition. In "*Manāhil al-'Irfān*," al-Zarqāni expounds on "al-ma'thūr," describing it as teachings, actions, approvals, or silent acknowledgments of the Prophet and his close associates, reflecting the broader scope of transmitted knowledge within Islamic tradition. This concept underscores the significance of Prophetic traditions (Hadith) and the early Muslim community's practices in understanding and interpreting the Qur'an. The term "al-ma'thūr" encapsulates a diverse array of transmitted knowledge, serving as a foundational source for Quranic interpretation and enriching scholarly discourse. Through diligent examination and analysis of these transmitted sources, scholars gain deeper insights into the Qur'an's context, enabling them to extract timeless wisdom and guidance relevant to contemporary life.¹²

هو ما جاء في القرآن أو السنة أو كلام الصحابة بيانا لمراد الله تعالى من كتابه

"It is something found in the Qur'an, hadith, or the sayings of the companions (ṣaḥābat), which serves as an elucidation of Allah's will in His book"

⁹ Jani Arni, *Metode Penelitian Tafsir* (Riau: Daulat Riau, 2013), 11-12.

¹⁰ Khalid Usmān al-Sabt, *Nazarāt fi al-Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* (Mekkah: Dār Ṭayyibah al-Khadra', 2019), 198-190.

¹¹ Mahmud Al-Ṭahhan, *Taysīr Muṣṭalah al-Hadīs* (Iskandariah: Markaz al-Hūda li al-Dirasāt, 1415) 16.

¹² Al-Zarqāni, *Manāhil Al-'Irfān fi Ulūm Al-Qur'an*, 10.

With this definition, al-Zarqāni does not include the interpretations of the successors (*tābi'īn*) in the category of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*. Based on the definition above, *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* encompasses at least three things: interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an, interpreting the Qur'an with hadith, and interpreting the Qur'an with the sayings of the companions (*ṣaḥābat*). Meanwhile, the interpretations of the successors (*tābi'īn*) are not included in this category according to al-Zarqāni.

In defining *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*, Mannā' al-Qaṭṭan differs slightly from al-Zarqāni's approach mentioned above. According to him, *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* must go through authentic narrations and follow an agreed-upon sequence, starting with interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an, followed by hadith, as hadith serves as an explanation of the Qur'an. Only after that, interpreting the Qur'an with the narrations of the companions (*ṣaḥābat*). Al-Qaṭṭan argues that the narrations of the companions occupy the third position because they were the generation most knowledgeable about the Book of Allah. Besides requiring authentic narrations, Al-Qaṭṭan also includes the opinions of prominent successors (*tābi'īn*) in *bi al-ma'thūr* interpretation. He argues that the successors commonly learned directly from the companions about the knowledge of the Qur'an and its interpretation.¹³ From this perspective, al-Qaṭṭan positions the prominent successors (*pembesar tābi'īn*) on par with the companions (*ṣaḥābah*) in terms of their interpretative status.

Muhammad Husain al-Zahabi defines *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* as an explanation and detailing derived from the Qur'an itself regarding some of its verses, followed by narrations from the Prophet Muhammad, narrations from the companions (*ṣaḥābah*), and narrations from the successors (*tābi'īn*), which serve as explanations of Allah's will within the verses of His book. From the definition provided by al-Zahabi, it appears that he shares similarities with the definition proposed by al-Zarqāni in terms of not stipulating the condition of the authenticity of the narrations originating from the successors, companions, and Prophet Muhammad. On the other hand, al-Zahabi also agrees with Mannā' al-Qaṭṭan in including the narrations of the successors in the category of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*. The reason al-Zahabi includes the successors in this model is because he observes the empirical reality where many *bi al-ma'thūr* exegeses contain narrations from the successors, such as *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* and others. Al-Zahabi acknowledges that interpretations derived from the narrations of the successors are still disputed among scholars, whether they fall under the category of *bi al-ma'thūr* or *bi al-ra'yi*.¹⁴

Tafsir *bi al-ma'thūr* by al-Ṭabarī

a. About Tafsir al-Ṭabarī

Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarīr bin Yazīd bin Kathīr bin Galib al-Ṭabarī, known for his expertise in history and exegesis, was born in 224 H or early 225 H in Amol or Amuli, the capital of Ṭabaristan, a region within Iran. Raised in a scholarly family, al-

¹³ Al-Qaṭṭan, *Mabāḥiṣ Fi Ulūm Al-Qur'an*, 337.

¹⁴ Al-Zahabī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufasssīrūn*, 147.

Ṭabarī displayed a remarkable dedication to learning from childhood. He memorized the Qur'an by age seven and began writing hadith and leading prayers before turning nine. Al-Ṭabarī's upbringing in a religiously inclined environment greatly influenced his scholarly pursuits. His comprehensive understanding of various fields of knowledge, coupled with his commitment to religious education, laid the foundation for his later contributions to Islamic scholarship. Through his extensive works in history and exegesis, al-Ṭabarī left an indelible mark on Islamic intellectual tradition, earning recognition as one of the most eminent scholars of his time.¹⁵ An achievement not easily attained by someone of his age. This simultaneously serves as evidence that al-Ṭabarī possessed extraordinary genius and was above average.

To satisfy his thirst for knowledge, al-Ṭabarī was willing to travel extensively across various countries, such as Ṭabaristan, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, in pursuit of knowledge. In these countries, al-Ṭabarī studied under renowned scholars in their fields. Thus, fueled by his burning enthusiasm, al-Ṭabarī mastered various fields of knowledge, such as Qur'anic recitation, expertise in the laws of the Qur'an, abrogation (*nāsikh-mansūkh*), as well as proficiency in hadith and the science of hadith. Additionally, al-Ṭabarī also possessed a breadth of knowledge in the civilization of humanity and its history.¹⁶ About his ideology, initially, al-Ṭabarī adhered to the Shafi'i school of thought in jurisprudence (*fiqh*). However, over time, with his mastery of various fields of knowledge, al-Ṭabarī transformed into an absolute mujtahid, capable of independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) and deriving legal rulings from its primary sources, namely the Qur'an and hadith. Subsequently, al-Ṭabarī further developed his ideology by establishing his own school of thought known as *al-Jaririyah*.¹⁷ However, his school (*mazhab*) of thought faded into obscurity over time, so its teachings did not reach subsequent generations.

According to Ahmad bin Kamil al-Qaḍi, al-Ṭabarī passed away precisely at Maghrib time on Sunday, the 28th of Shawwal in the year 310 H. He was then buried at Duha time the following day, Monday, the 29th of Shawwal. His grave lies exactly in his house in the city of Baghdad. On the day of his passing, a multitude of people gathered to pay their final respects, the number of which was countless. His grave was prayed over day and night for months. Mourners came from various walks of life, ranging from scholars to literary figures.¹⁸ Al-Ṭabarī left behind numerous works that proved immensely beneficial for subsequent generations, whether lost to time or still extant. Among the surviving works is "*Tarīkh al-Umam wa al-Muluk*," commonly known as "*Tarīkh al-Ṭabari*." Another notable work is "*Ikhtilāf Ulamā al-Amsār fī Ahkām Syarai' al-Islām*," also known as "*Ikhtilāf al-Fuqahā'*." Additionally, his phenomenal

¹⁵ Sayyid Muhammad Ali Ayāzi, *al-Mufasssīrūn Hayātuhum wa Manhājuhūm* (Ṭahran: Muassasah Al-Tibā'ah wa Al-Nasyr Wuzarā' Al-Auqāf wa Al-Irsyād Al-Islāmi, 1414), 399.

¹⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufasssīrūn*, 148.

¹⁷ Ayāzi, *Al-Mufasssīrūn Hayātuhum Wa Manhājuhūm*, 340.

¹⁸ Muhammad bin Jarīr Al-Ṭabari, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āyi Al-Qurān* (Cairo: Dar Hijr, 2001), 1.

contribution to the field of exegesis is "*Jāmi' al-Bayān an Ta'wīl Āyi al-Qur'ān*," also known as "*Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*".¹⁹

This book holds a special place in the hearts of scholars throughout history, both in classical and modern times. The commentary has garnered attention and fascination from imams, scholars, historians, and exegetes alike. They have penned golden words about its commentary, expressing pride in its existence, indicating its immensely significant and noble status.²⁰ Abu Bakar bin Khuzaimah said, after borrowing al-Ṭabarī's commentary from Ibn Khalawaih and returning it after years, "I studied it from beginning to end, and I do not know anyone on the face of the earth more knowledgeable than Ibn Jarīr." This is the testimony of a great scholar, after examining, studying, and mastering the commentary. Imam al-Nawawi said of al-Ṭabarī's commentary: "No one has written a commentary like al-Ṭabarī's."

Sheikh Abu Hamid Al-Isfarayini stated: "If someone were to travel to China to obtain Muhammad bin Jarīr's commentary (Tafsir), there would be few commentaries like it." The Islamic historian and hadith expert, al-Hafiz al-Zahabi, said: "And he has a commentary, none has written a commentary like it." Abu Umar al-Zahid, a young man from Ṣaglab, said: "I have read this book from beginning to end, and I have not found a single letter of error in its syntax or grammar." Al-Zarkashi said: "Indeed, Muhammad bin Jarir collected various scattered commentaries for the community, and brought closer what was distant." Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah said: "Muhammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's commentary is one of the greatest commentaries, and it holds a high status."

Al-Ṭabarī's work is regarded as highly significant in interpretation using the narrative or *bi al-ma'thūr* model. It serves as the main reference for exegetes born after his era. This comprehensive commentary covers various fields related to the Qur'an, such as linguistics, syntax, recitation methods, and more. Its organized writing style and systematic approach inspired subsequent commentaries with similar structures. Consequently, it's considered the progenitor of post-era commentaries, earning al-Ṭabarī the title of "teacher of exegetes" or "sheikh of the commentators" among scholars. His expertise in hadith significantly influenced his approach to interpreting Quranic verses. Despite containing narratives based on reason, especially regarding legal verses or jurisprudential discussions, his phenomenal work predominantly employs the *bi al-ma'thūr* method.

In the field of Islamic jurisprudence, al-Ṭabarī studied and mastered the science of fiqh, becoming an expert. Due to his proficiency in fiqh, he attained the level of ijtihad in the Shafi'i school. Not stopping there, he continued to advance until he became an absolute mujtahid with his own school of thought. With this ability, it's no surprise that his interpretations of legal verses are extensive and detailed. In discussing each verse, al-Ṭabarī always presents the opinions of the companions, the successors, and the opinions of the mujtahid imams, then explains their evidence with profound analysis.²¹

¹⁹ Amaruddin, "Mengungkap Tafsir Jami' Al-Bayan Fi Tafsir Al-Qur'an Karya Ath-Thabari," *Jurnal Syadah* 2, no. 2 (2014).

²⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āyi Al-Qur'ān*...36-37

²¹ Sa'īd bin Gulaiḥ Al-Qaḥṭāniy, *Al-Imām Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī wa Manhajuh fi Tafsīr* (t.: t.tp., n.d.), 43.

Next, he weighs these opinions (*tarjih*), then presents his own opinion based on his *ijtihad* through the standards of legal derivation (*istinbâṭ*), making his interpretation one of the primary sources for jurists and mujtahids, especially regarding the opinions of the companions, successors, and extinct schools of thought. After many of his *fiqh* books and other works were lost, *Tafsir al-Ṭabarī* remained the most phenomenal commentary to date. It seems that besides initiating commentaries that followed, al-Ṭabarī indeed deserves the title of *shaykh al-mufasssīrīn*. With the plethora of scholarly disciplines covered within, al-Ṭabarī became an unmatched commentator with vast knowledge in all fields, rendering his commentary the most comprehensive and authoritative.

The method employed by al-Ṭabarī in his exegesis is the *taḥlīlī* method, which involves interpreting the Quranic verses by meticulously examining them from all aspects in accordance with the order of the Uthmanic Mushaf.²² In writing his commentary, al-Ṭabarī begins by mentioning the name of the surah and strengthens it with several related narrations. Then, he explains the reasons for the revelation of the surah or the verses based on these narrations. However, unfortunately, despite the commentary's reliance on narrations, whether from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the companions, or the successors, al-Ṭabarī does not mention the status of these narrations, whether they are authentic (*sahih*) or weak (*da'if*). Although al-Ṭabarī committed to citing his narrations with their chains of transmission, in many cases, he did not trace these chains to correct or weaken them. For example, the narration presented by al-Ṭabarī when interpreting QS. Ṣād: 34. The narration tells the story of Prophet Solomon (AS) when he wanted to build the Temple of Solomon and sought the help of a demon named Ṣakhar. The demon then impersonated Prophet Solomon (AS) and ruled his kingdom for 40 days because his ring was thrown into the sea.²³

²² Asep Abdurrohman, "Metodologi Al-Thabari Dalam Tafsir Jami'ul Al-Bayan Fi Ta'wili Al-Qur'an," *Kordinat* 17, no. 1 (2018).

²³ Al-Thabari, *Jami' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āyi Al-Qurān...* Jilid XX, 89. One example is as follows;

حَدَّثَنَا بَشْرٌ، قَالَ: ثنا يزيد، قَالَ: ثنا سَعِيدٌ، عَنِ قَتَادَةَ، قَوْلُهُ: {وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا سُلَيْمَانَ وَأَلْقَيْنَا عَلَى كُرْسِيِّهِ جَسَداً ثُمَّ أَنَابَ} قَالَ: حَدَّثَنَا قَتَادَةُ أَنَّ سُلَيْمَانَ أَمَرَ بِنَاءَ بَيْتِ الْمَقْدِسِ، فَقِيلَ لَهُ: ابْنِهِ وَلَا يُسْمَعُ فِيهِ صَوْتُ حَدِيدٍ، قَالَ: فَطَلَبَ ذَلِكَ فَلَمْ يَقْدِرْ عَلَيْهِ، فَقِيلَ لَهُ: إِنَّ شَيْطَانًا فِي الْبَحْرِ يُقَالُ لَهُ صَخْرٌ شَبَهُ الْمَارِدِ، قَالَ: فَطَلَبَهُ، وَكَانَتْ عَيْنٌ فِي الْبَحْرِ يَرُدُّهَا فِي كُلِّ سَبْعَةِ أَيَّامٍ مَرَّةً، فَنَزَحَ مَأْوَاهَا وَجَعَلَ فِيهَا حَمْرًا، فَجَاءَ يَوْمٌ وَرُودُهُ فَإِذَا هُوَ بِالْحَمْرِ، فَقَالَ: إِنَّكَ لِشَرَابٍ طَيِّبٍ، إِلَّا أَنَّا أَتَيْتُكَ نُصَيْبِينَ الْحَلِيمِ، وَتُرَيْدِينَ الْجَاهِلِ جَهْلًا، قَالَ: ثُمَّ رَجَعَ حَتَّى عَطَشَ عَطَشًا شَدِيدًا، ثُمَّ أَتَاهَا فَقَالَ: إِنَّكَ لِشَرَابٍ طَيِّبٍ، إِلَّا أَنَّا أَتَيْتُكَ نُصَيْبِينَ الْحَلِيمِ، وَتُرَيْدِينَ الْجَاهِلِ جَهْلًا؛ قَالَ: ثُمَّ شَرِبَهَا حَتَّى غَلَبَتْ عَلَى عَقْلِهِ، قَالَ: فَأَرَى الْحَاتِمَ أَوْ خُتَمَ بِهِ بَيْنَ كَيْفِيهِ، فَذَلَّ، قَالَ: فَكَانَ مُلْكُهُ فِي خَاتَمِهِ، فَأَتَى بِهِ سُلَيْمَانَ، فَقَالَ: إِنَّا قَدْ أَمَرْنَا بِنَاءَ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ وَقِيلَ لَنَا: لَا يُسْمَعَنَّ فِيهِ صَوْتُ حَدِيدٍ، قَالَ: فَأَتَى بِنَيْضِ الْهُدْهِدِ، فَجَعَلَ عَلَيْهِ رُجَاجَةً، فَجَاءَ الْهُدْهُدُ، فَدَارَ حَوْلَهَا، فَجَعَلَ يَرَى بَيْضَهُ وَلَا يَقْدِرُ عَلَيْهِ، فَذَهَبَ فَجَاءَ بِالْمَائِ، فَوَضَعَهُ عَلَيْهِ، فَفَقَطَعَهَا بِهِ حَتَّى أَفْضَى إِلَى بَيْضِهِ، فَأَخَذَ الْمَائِ، فَجَعَلُوا يَقْطَعُونَ بِهِ الْحِجَارَةَ، فَكَانَ سُلَيْمَانُ إِذَا أَرَادَ أَنْ يَدْخُلَ الْحِجَارَةَ أَوْ الْحَمَامَ لَمْ يَدْخُلْهَا بِحَاتَمِهِ؛ فَانْطَلَقَ يَوْمًا إِلَى الْحَمَامِ، وَذَلِكَ الشَّيْطَانُ صَخْرٌ مَعَهُ، وَذَلِكَ عِنْدَ مَقَارِفَةٍ ذُنْبٌ قَارَفَ فِيهِ بَعْضُ نِسَائِهِ، قَالَ: فَدَخَلَ الْحَمَامَ، وَأَعْطَى الشَّيْطَانَ خَاتَمَهُ، فَأَلْقَاهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ، فَانْتَقَمَتْهُ سَمَكَةٌ، وَنَزَعَ مَلِكُ سُلَيْمَانَ مِنْهُ، وَأَلْقَى عَلَى الشَّيْطَانِ شِبْهَ سُلَيْمَانَ، قَالَ: فَجَاءَ فَفَعَدَ عَلَى كُرْسِيِّهِ وَسَرِيرِهِ، وَسَلَطَ عَلَى مَلِكِ سُلَيْمَانَ كُلِّهِ غَيْرَ نِسَائِهِ، قَالَ: فَجَعَلَ يَقْضِي بَيْنَهُمْ، وَجَعَلُوا يُنْكَرُونَ مِنْهُ أَشْيَاءَ حَتَّى قَالُوا: لَقَدْ فُتِنَ نَبِيُّ اللَّهِ؛ وَكَانَ فِيهِمْ رَجُلٌ يَشْبَهُونَهُ بِعَمْرِ بْنِ الْخَطَّابِ فِي الْقُوَّةِ، فَقَالَ: وَاللَّهِ لَأَجْرَبْتَهُ؛ قَالَ: فَقَالَ لَهُ: يَا نَبِيَّ اللَّهِ وَهُوَ لَا يَرَى إِلَّا أَنَّهُ نَبِيُّ اللَّهِ أَحَدُنَا نُصَيْبَةُ الْجَنَابَةِ فِي اللَّيْلَةِ الْبَارِدَةِ، فَيَدْعُ الْغُسْلَ عَمْدًا حَتَّى تَطْلُعَ الشَّمْسُ، أَتَرَى عَلَيْهِ بَأْسًا؟ قَالَ: لَا، قَالَ: فَبَيْنَمَا هُوَ كَذَلِكَ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً حَتَّى وَجَدَ نَبِيَّ اللَّهِ خَاتَمَهُ فِي بَطْنِ سَمَكَةٍ، فَأَقْبَلَ فَجَعَلَ لَا يَسْتَقْبِلُهُ جَنِيٌّ وَلَا طَيْرٌ إِلَّا سَجَدَ لَهُ، حَتَّى انْتَهَى إِلَيْهِمْ {وَأَلْقَيْنَا عَلَى كُرْسِيِّهِ جَسَداً} قَالَ: هُوَ الشَّيْطَانُ صَخْرٌ

The absence of comments regarding the quality of the narrations presented by al-Ṭabarī has led to various speculations among scholars in search of chronological reasons. Among these reasons are, firstly, external factors, where the scholarly climate in the field of hadith during al-Ṭabarī's era did not necessitate mentioning the quality of each chain of transmission presented. Such a phenomenon was common and frequently encountered in works that emerged during the early periods. During this era, mentioning the status of a hadith was rarely done in scholarly works because it was based on the principles of hadith sciences, which stipulated that the obligation to investigate the reliability of the figures in the transmission chain of a hadith was incumbent upon its recipients, as was the obligation to ascertain the level of integrity and criticism of its narrators.²⁴

Therefore, based on the principles of hadith sciences, al-Ṭabarī is considered not to have the responsibility to verify the chains of transmission he mentioned. This is not because Imam al-Ṭabarī was unaware of the chains or their quality, but rather because it was not considered part of his duty as a transmitter of chains. This statement is reinforced by the fact that al-Ṭabarī was an expert in hadith during his time. Additionally, the remarks made by al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalāni (d. 852 H) further support this, stating that the majority of hadith scholars from the era around 200 H and thereafter, when mentioning hadith with their chains of transmission, were of the view that they did not need to verify the quality of those chains.²⁵

Secondly, an internal factor is al-Ṭabarī's expertise in hadith sciences, particularly in the field of chains of transmission (sanad) and their narrators, leading him to assume that the narrations he mentioned already had clear quality and did not need further correction. Al-Ṭabarī adopted a positive thinking approach and believed that his audience, as the recipients of the narrations presented in his tafsir, had reached a level of discernment to distinguish between strong and weak narrations. Another assumption regarding this matter is the possibility that explanations about the quality of narrations along with critiques of their narrators had already been presented by al-Ṭabarī in another work titled "Ṣayl al-Muḏīl." This work contained explanations about the biographies of hadith figures in a large volume, but unfortunately, it did not reach subsequent generations as it was lost to time.²⁶

b. Al-Ṭabarī and the *Isrā'iliyyāt* Polemic

The entry of *Isrā'iliyyāt* narratives into the interpretation of the Qur'an began during the time of the companions. When faced with verses containing the stories of previous nations, the companions interpreted them by referring to the People of the Book who had embraced Islam. This was because the Qur'an and the divine scriptures of earlier communities shared many similarities in content but had distinct characteristics. The Qur'an tended to use concise and succinct narratives, while the

²⁴ Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufasssīrūn*.152.

²⁵ Zaid bin Ali Mahdi Mahārisy, *Manhaj al-Imām al-Ṭabari fi al-Qirā'āt wa Ḍawābid Ikhtiyārihā fi Tafsīrih* (Riyad: Dar al-Tadmuriyah, n.d.), 105-106.

²⁶ Mahārisy, *Manhaj al-Imām al-Ṭabari*...104-106

Torah and the Gospel tended to employ relatively more detailed expressions. Since then, *Isrā'iliyyāt* narratives have become one of the sources of interpretation for the companions regarding the verses of the Qur'an.²⁷

The *Isrā'iliyyāt* narratives continue to be a prevalent reference in narrative-based exegeses, including Tafsir al-Tabari. In his interpretation, al-Tabari often mentions *Isrā'iliyyāt* stories scattered throughout several chapters of the Qur'an. These *Isrā'iliyyāt* stories are traced back to narrations from figures like Ka'ab al-Ahbar (d. 32 AH), Wahb bin Munabbih (d. 113 AH), Ibn Juraij (d. 150 AH), al-Suddi (d. 127 AH), and others. Additionally, al-Tabari frequently cites *Isrā'iliyyāt* stories attributed to Muhammad bin Ishaq (d. 151 AH), originating from Christians who converted to Islam. As an example, when interpreting Surah al-Kahf: 94, al-Tabari mentions the following narration.

حَدَّثَنَا ابن حميد قال: حَدَّثَنَا سلمة قال: حَدَّثَنَا محمد ابن إسحاق قال: حَدَّثَنِي بعض
مَنْ يسوق أحاديث الأعاجم من أهل الكتاب ممن قد أسلم، مما توارثوا من علم ذى
القرنين أَنَّ ذَا القرنين كان رجلاً من أهل مصر، اسمه مرزبا بن مردبة اليونانى من
ولد يونن بن يافث بن نوح.. إلخ

“Tells me Ibn Humaid, he said; tells Salamah, he said; tells me Muhammad bin Ishaq, he said; narrated to me some of those who narrate the hadiths of non-Arabs, namely the People of the Book who converted to Islam and who have inherited the knowledge of Dhul-Qarnayn through generations, they say that Dhul-Qarnayn was someone from Egypt named Mirzaba bin Mirdabah al-Yunani, who belonged to the lineage of Yunan bin Yafits bin Noah.....”

In addition to the narration above, al-Tabari often mentions similar narrations in his tafsir. For example, when interpreting Surah Al-Baqarah [2]:102, which explains about the two angels Harut and Marut. In that verse, al-Tabari presents several *Isra'iliyyat* narrations that tell the story of Harut and Marut as two angels sent down to earth as a test to see their actions when they became human. It started when the angels "protested" to Allah about humankind who constantly sins and follows their desires.²⁸ It turns out that the hadiths explaining the story of the two angels are all considered very weak (*garīb*).²⁹ The most authentic and reliable chain of narration for this story comes from Abdullah bin Umar, who narrated it from Ka'ab al-Ahbar, not directly from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).³⁰ Even the content of the story about Harut and Marut, which is widely narrated by the majority of commentators, is a fabrication by the Children of Israel. It was accepted by a group of early scholars only to relay the story to others, as a narrative (حكاية) and not as a valid tradition (تحديث).³¹ Furthermore, Imam al-Qāḍi 'Iyāḍ (d. 544 H) affirmed that the story of Harut and Marut narrated by

²⁷ Al-Ḍahabīy, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufasssīrūn*...123.

²⁸ Al-Thabari, *Jamī' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āyi Al-Qurān*...Jilid II, 341.

²⁹ A hadith narrated solely by its narrator in transmitting it, or a hadith whose content is not mentioned by any other narrator.

³⁰ Ismail bin Umar Al-Dimsyiqi, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'an Al-Azīm*, Jilid I, 240-243.

³¹ Ismail bin Umar Al-Dimsyiqi, *Al-Bidāyah wa Al-Nihāyah*, Jilid I (Cairo: Dar Hijr, 1997), 83.

commentators from historians does not have any direct narration from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, whether it is classified as authentic (ṣaḥīḥ) or weak (ḍa'īf).³²

It seems that al-Ṭabarī's scholarly background in history significantly influenced his interpretation of the Qur'an, resulting in many stories from Jews and Christians being found in his tafsir. Although there are *Isrā'īliyyāt* narrations mentioned by al-Ṭabarī accompanied by criticism, many narrations are still overlooked, and al-Ṭabarī chooses to remain silent. Al-Zāhabī stated that *Isrā'īliyyāt* narratives still require thorough criticism and caution, similar to other tafsir works that often contain similar stories and false narratives. In fact, despite being authored by a great and eminent commentator, this tafsir still contains many weak narrations, including some that are considered munkar, such as when al-Ṭabarī mentions the futūn hadith (the story of the trial of Prophet Musa AS found in Surah Ṭaha:40).

Furthermore, as previously explained, this tafsir contains many *Isrā'īliyyāt* narrations, especially in various verses explaining the stories of previous prophets. Not only that, in interpreting Surah Al-Ahzab:37, al-Ṭabarī presents a narration about the story of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ when he married Zainab binti Jahsh, which originates from unreliable sources (storytellers) and narrations from false witnesses.³³ In this narration, it is told that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was actually attracted to Zainab, who was still the wife of his adopted son, Zaid. He wanted Zaid to divorce her so he could marry her, but this desire was concealed in his heart.³⁴ Although this story is clearly fabricated, al-Ṭabarī does not criticize it at all or issue a warning. On the contrary, al-Ṭabarī appears to support it by presenting several similar narrations.³⁵

In addition to the above-mentioned issues, Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī does not include the general principles commonly mentioned by scholars in writing Qur'anic exegesis, namely the distinction between Makkiyah (revealed in Mecca) and Madaniyah (revealed in Medina) verses, which play a vital role in Qur'anic studies. Al-Ṭabarī's approach differs from other scholars in that he does not explain the status of the surahs and verses in terms of Makkiyah or Madaniyah. Al-Ṭabarī directly interprets the verses using narrations originating from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Companions, or the

³² 'Iyād bin Musa Al-Yahṣabiy, *Al-Syifā Bi Ta'rīf Huqūq Al-Mustafā*, Jilid II (Beirut: Dar Al-Fikr, 1988), 175.

³³ Muhammad bin Muhammad Abu Syuhbah, *Al-Isrā'īliyyāt wa Al-Maudhū'āt Fi Kutub Al-Tafsīr* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Sunah, 1408), 123.

³⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āyi Al-Qurān...* Jilid XIX, 114-115. Riwayatnya sebagai berikut;

يقول تعالى ذكره لنبية صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عتابا من الله له (و) اذكر يا محمد (إذ تَقُولُ لِلَّذِي أَنْعَمَ اللهُ عَلَيْهِ) بالهداية (وَأَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِ) بالعتق، يعني زيد بن حارثة مولى رسول الله صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ (أُمْسِيكَ عَلَيْكَ زَوْجَكَ وَاتَّقِ اللَّهَ) وذلك أن زينب بنت جحش فيما ذكر رآها رسول الله صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فأعجبته، وهي في حبال مولاه، فألقى في نفس زيد كراهتها لما علم الله مما وقع في نفس نبيه ما وقع، فأراد فراقها، فذكر ذلك لرسول الله صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ زيد، فقال له رسول الله صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: (أُمْسِيكَ عَلَيْكَ زَوْجَكَ) وهو صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يجب أن تكون قد بانته منه لينكحها (وَاتَّقِ اللَّهَ) وخف الله في الواجب له عليك في زوجتك (وَتُخْفِي فِي نَفْسِكَ مَا اللَّهُ مُبْدِيهِ) يقول: وتخفي في نفسك محبة فراقه إياها لتتزوجها إن هو فارقها، والله مبد ما تخفي في نفسك من ذلك (وَتُخْفِي النَّاسَ وَاللَّهُ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تُخْفَاهُ) يقول تعالى ذكره: وتخاف أن يقول الناس: أمر رجلا بطلاق امرأته ونكحها حين طلقها، والله أحق أن تخشاه من الناس.

³⁵ Muḥammad Ḥusain al-Zāhabī, *Al-Isrā'īliyyāt fi al-Tafsīr wa al-Ḥadīṣ* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1990), 104.

Successors.³⁶ Meanwhile, this principle is highly needed by Quranic scholars. This is because Quranic verses cannot be separated from the knowledge of whether they were revealed in Mecca or Medina. This knowledge is also relevant to understanding the concept of abrogation (*nasīkh*) and abrogated (*mansūkh*). Additionally, knowing whether a verse is Makkiyah or Madaniyah helps one understand the meaning of the Quran, as understanding the time and place of revelation enables a clearer comprehension of the purpose and context of the verses.³⁷ Furthermore, *Tafsir al-Ṭabarī* also includes explanations of the linguistic aspects in interpreting a verse, as well as its grammatical analysis (*i'rab*). However, at times, *al-Ṭabarī* elaborates too extensively on these aspects, which may come across as verbose and divert the focus from the intended meaning of the verse.³⁸

Tafsir *bi al-ma'thūr* by al-Samarqandi

a. About Tafsir al-Samarqandi

Al-Samarqandi was not only renowned as a commentator on the Quran but also as a proficient scholar in jurisprudence and hadith. His full name was Naṣr Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Ibrahim al-Khaṭṭab (d. 375 H). The name "al-Samarqandi" refers to the region of Samarkand, located east of Bukhara', which is now within the geographical boundaries of Uzbekistan, a part of the Russian state. In his time, al-Samarqandi was known by the kunyah Abu Laiṣ al-Samarqandi. Additionally, he had two other epithets, namely al-faqīh and imam al-huda, but he was most known by the former, indicating that al-Samarqandi reached an extremely high level in jurisprudence, unparalleled in his era. Al-Samarqandi cherished the epithet of al-faqīh, as it is said that he received this title directly from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in a dream while composing his book *Tanbīh al-Ghāfilīn*.³⁹

Regarding his birth, scholars and historians do not provide clear information, and the same goes for details about his family. However, it is estimated that Al-Samarqandi was born between approximately 301 H to 310 H. Similarly, there are differing opinions among scholars regarding the year of his death. Al-Dawudi mentioned in the book "*Tabaqāt al-Mufasssirīn*" that Al-Samarqandi passed away on the night of Tuesday in the month of Jumadil Akhir in the year 393 H. In "*al-Tabaqāt al-Saniyyah*," it is stated that he died on the night of Tuesday in the year 383 H. On the other hand, "*al-Jawahir al-Mudhiyah*" mentions that Al-Samarqandi died in the year 373 H on the same day. Meanwhile, Haji Khalifah stated in the book "*Kasyf al-Dzunūn*" that Al-Samarqandi died in the year 376, 383, or 375 H.⁴⁰

Al-Samarqandi was a prolific scholar, evident from the numerous works he produced in various fields of knowledge. Among his writings are "*Khizanah al-Fiqh*,"

³⁶ Ayazi, *Al-Mufasssirūn Hayātuhum wa Manhājuhūm*...402

³⁷ Al-Rumi, *Dirāsāt fī Ulūm al-Qur'an al-Karīm*...146

³⁸ abdurrohman, "Metodologi Al-Ṭhabari Dalam Tafsir Jami'ul Al-Bayan Fi Ta'wili Al-Qur'an." 83.

³⁹ Muhammad Abdul Syufūq Al-Aṣṭal, "Al-Imām Al-Samarqandi wa Manhājuhu fī al-Qirā'at fī Tafsīrih Baḥr al-Ulūm" (*al-Jami'ah al-Islamiyah Gazah*, 2011), 24.

⁴⁰ Naṣr bin Muhammad bin Ahmad Al-Samarqandi, *Tafsīr Al-Samarqandi* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, 1993), 7.

"Tanbīh al-Ghâfilīn," which contains advice and morals. In the field of jurisprudence, Al-Samarqandi authored "'Uyūn al-Masâil fī Furū' al-Fiqh al-Hanafī" and "al-Nawâzil fī al-Fatâwâ." Another notable work by Al-Samarqandi is "Bustân al-'Arifīn" and "Tafsīr al-Samarqandi." This commentary is written in three large volumes published by Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣhriyah. Additionally, there are two manuscripts housed in the al-Azhar library, the first consisting of two volumes, while the second comprises three volumes. "Tafsīr al-Samarqandi" has been compiled with its hadith by Sheikh Zainuddin Qasim ibn Qaṭlubughā in 854 H.⁴¹

In composing his commentary, al-Samarqandi combined the methods of "tafsīr bi al-riwâyah" (exegesis based on transmission) and "tafsīr bi al-dirâyah" (exegesis based on rationality). However, upon examination, the interpretation based on transmission predominates over rational interpretation. Al-Samarqandi's commentary does not begin with a sermon, introduction, or an explanation of the science of exegesis in its preface like many commentators. Instead, it starts with a chapter motivating the study of exegesis. In this chapter, al-Samarqandi mentions several hadiths related to the virtues of the Qur'an, the virtues of interpretation, and its conditions. This chapter also explains the prohibition of interpreting the Qur'an with logic along with its evidences. After that, al-Samarqandi begins his commentary with Surah al-Fātiḥah. As for the sources of interpretation referenced by al-Samarqandi, they tend towards transmissions from the *ṣaḥābah* and *tābi'īn*, such as 'Abdullah bin 'Abbās (d. 68 H), 'Abdullah bin Mas'ūd (d. 32 H), Hasan al-Baṣri (d. 110 H), and others.⁴²

Regarding the approach used by al-Samarqandi in writing his commentary, Tafsīr al-Samarqandi contains explanations of language, grammar, and morphology in greater proportion than other explanations. For each elucidated verse, al-Samarqandi begins by explaining the meaning of each sentence and the wording of the verse, supported by poetry and other evidence. Thus, it can be concluded that in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an, al-Samarqandi employs a linguistic and literary approach, or a linguistically oriented one. In various instances, al-Samarqandi extensively cites Tafsīr al-Zamakhshari and Tafsīr Ibn 'Aṭiyah, especially in matters related to the science of grammar and sentence structure.⁴³

Al-Samarqandi interprets verses using the *bi al-ma'thūr* method, which is an interpretation of the Qur'an that explains a verse with reference to narrations from the companions and successors. However, it is unfortunate that Al-Samarqandi rarely mentions the chains of transmission from his teachers for the narrations used in interpreting the Qur'anic verses. In fact, the majority of his chains of transmission are not mentioned, but rather attributed directly to the successors or companions. Furthermore, Al-Samarqandi does not provide comments or preference regarding the differences in narrations and opinions included in his commentary, as Imam al-Ṭabarī did. Similarly, when including *Isrā'iliyyāt* narrations, he does not comment on those narrations. Another weakness of this commentary is that often in interpreting verses,

⁴¹ Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufasssīrūn*..161

⁴² Ayazī, *Al-Mufasssīrūn Hayātuhum Wa Manhājuhūm*...175

⁴³ Ayazī, Ayazī, *Al-Mufasssīrūn Hayātuhum Wa Manhājuhūm*...,180-181.

Al-Samarqandi uses phrases like "قال بعضهم كذا وقال بعضهم كذا" ("Some scholars said..."), but does not specify which scholars are meant. This means that the opinions he presents in interpreting the verses are very weak and cannot be scientifically justified, especially when related to legal verses (fiqh). Additionally, in his commentary, Al-Samarqandi sometimes relies on narrators who are considered weak, such as al-Kalbi (w. 146 H)⁴⁴, riwayat Asbāt (w. 170 H)⁴⁵ from al-Suddi, and others like him who are considered negatively by scholars.⁴⁶

Another important fact to underline is that not all interpretations from the companions (ṣaḥābat) are accepted. Therefore, scholars classify these narrations by examining their chains. For example, the narrations from Ibn 'Abbās, which are frequently used by al-Samarqandi, come from several chains. Among them is the chain from Ikrimah (d. 104 H) or Sa'id bin Jubair (d. 95 H) from Ibn 'Abbās. This chain is considered authentic by scholars because the credibility of its narrators has been verified through the science of al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil. Then there are the narrations through the chain of al-Ḍahhak from Ibn 'Abbās, which is still questioned by scholars because its chain is interrupted as al-Ḍahhak never met Ibn 'Abbās. The weakest chain is the narration through al-Kalbi from Abi Shalih from Ibn Abbas, as al-Kalbi is suspected of fabricating narrations. Besides Ibn 'Abbās, other companions whose narrations are used by al-Samarqandi include Ibn Mas'ud, whose chains are often not mentioned.⁴⁷

b. The Issue of *Isrā'iliyyāt* in Tafsir Al-Samarqandi

Like many other Tafsir *bi al-ma'thūr*, in Al-Samarqandi's Commentary, there are still many *Isrā'iliyyāt* narrations quoted from the People of the Book who embraced Islam, such as Abdullah bin Salam (d. 43 H), Ka'ab al-Ahbār, Wahb bin Munabbih, and others. For example, the *Isrā'iliyyāt* stories mentioned by Al-Samarqandi when interpreting the story of Moses and the stone, the story of David and his wife Urayya, as well as false narratives related to the story of Iram. Furthermore, in this commentary, there are also fabricated narrations attributed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, although they are relatively few. Al-Samarqandi seems to be inconsistent with his statement in the introduction where he said: "Indeed, irrelevant stories and *Isrā'iliyyāt* histories should not be mentioned in the science of commentary."⁴⁸

The *Isrā'iliyyāt* narrations from the People of the Book, as classified by scholars, are divided into three categories. First, *Isrā'iliyyāt* narrations that are confirmed to be true by the Qur'an and the Prophet's hadith. These narrations are considered authentic but are not necessary because their information is already present in the Qur'an and hadith. They may be narrated for the purpose of reinforcement and to provide evidence

⁴⁴ Muhammad bin al-Sāib bin Bisyr al-Kalbi, a mufassir, historian, expert in lineage, but adhering to Shi'a ideology and considered unreliable in hadith transmission (*matrūk al-hadīth*).

⁴⁵ Asbāt bin Naṣr al-Handani, a narrator of hadiths who is considered honest but prone to making mistakes.

⁴⁶ Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufasssīrūn*.,162

⁴⁷ Al-Samarqandi, *Tafsīr Al-Samarqandi*... 53-54

⁴⁸ Ayazī, *al-Mufasssīrūn Hayātuhum wa Manhājūhum*.. 182.

of the truth of the Qur'an's content from their books (People of the Book). An example of this type of narration is the story of Khidr, who met Prophet Moses in Surah al-Kahf, where similar information is also found in an authentic hadith narrated by Imam Bukhari. Second, *Isrā'iliyyāt* narrations that are confirmed to be false because they contradict Islamic law and authentic sources or are against reason. For example, stories of previous prophets that undermine their infallibility. These narrations should not be accepted or transmitted to others. Third, narrations that do not fall into the first or second category, but are somewhere in between. These narrations are neither confirmed nor rejected, as they may contain truth or falsehood. These three types of *Isrā'iliyyāt* narrations are found in Al-Samarqandi's Tafsir, which would not be problematic if the author critiqued or commented on them, but he did not do so.⁴⁹

The explanation above shows that tafsir using the *bi al-ma'thūr* approach indeed holds a very high position and noble value in terms of validity and persuasiveness. However, this approach is not without its shortcomings, which make its interpretation problematic and even weaken it. Additionally, tafsir using the *bi al-ma'thūr* method is minimal in terms of isnad. Discarding the chain of transmission in a narration contributes significantly to the inclusion of *Isrā'iliyyāt* stories and false narrations in Qur'anic tafsir works. When the chain of transmission of a narration is mentioned, the weaknesses of that narration can be easily detected. Therefore, in *bi al-ma'thūr* tafsir, narrations or opinions attributed to the *ṣaḥābah* or *tābi'īn* are often included without selecting their narrators, or many are not even mentioned, resulting in a mixture of authentic and weak narrations. Distinguishing between truth and falsehood in interpretations related to these narrations becomes difficult.⁵⁰

Closing

The statement that exegesis is a product of personal thought characterized by assumptive and subjective nature is not only applicable to interpretation using the rational approach (*ra'yi*), but also extends to interpretation employing the method of tradition (*al-ma'sūr*). There remains a gap and a role for the exegete in selecting a tradition to become the interpretation of a particular verse. Indeed, traditions are often used as a means to legitimize and justify the inclinations of the exegete. Thus, the objectivity and validity of the results of an interpretation are no longer measured solely by the method employed as the tool of interpretation. The findings of this article demonstrate that the model of interpretation through *al-ma'thūr* remains problematic and requires caution, despite receiving much appreciation and praise from the scholarly community.

For instance, the omission of quality assessment for the displayed traditions, the presence of numerous *Isrā'iliyyāt* narratives without criticism, the inclusion of weak and rejected traditions, and even narratives that undermine the prophetic status pose significant concerns. Among these crucial issues, both Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī and Tafsīr al-

⁴⁹ Al-Samarqandi, *Tafsīr Al-Samarqandi*...55

⁵⁰ Shuhbah, *al-Isrā'iliyyāt wa al-Maudhū'at*,... 91-93.

Samarqandī, representing exegeses of the early era, are influenced by internal and external factors, adapting to their respective audiences at the time of compilation. Therefore, despite employing the best versions according to scholars, these exegeses are not necessarily relevant to the current era. This is because the audience's capacity to comprehend the information contained therein has evolved significantly over centuries and is no longer akin to that of ancient times. Especially for beginners delving into the field of Qur'anic exegesis without a profound understanding of related sciences (*riwāyah* and *dirāyah*), it is advisable to avoid exegeses following the bi al-ma'thūr model originating from this early period.

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