Qur'ānic Hermeneutics with Reference to Narratives: A Study in Classical Exegetical Traditions

Submitted by Khaled Troudi, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arab and Islamic Studies, July 2011

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I certify that all material in this dissertation which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by or any other University.

(Signature)..............................................................
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Khaled Troudi
NOTES

A- References

All Qur'ānic verses and their translations used in this thesis are quoted from ‘Abd Allāh, Yūsuf ‘Alī. The Holy Qur'ān: Text, Translation, and Commentary. (Beltsville, MD: Amāna Publication, 1999). In each quotation of the verse, I have noted the number of Sūrah (Chapter) according to the chronological order of the muṣḥaf followed by the number of the verse (eg: 12:111). This style has been used for both the main document and footnotes. Also, I have used the Harvard style system in the footnotes and cited the full bibliography of all references at the end of the thesis. For example: Rippin (1985: 57) or Ṭabarī (1954, II: 356).

B- Arabic Transliteration

The Arabic transliteration used in this thesis follows the system used by the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter. The tables of transliteration are as follows:

CONSONANTS

| ب | ت | ث | ج | خ | ح | د | ن | م | ل | ك | ق | ف | ق | غ | ض | ط | ظ | ع | ء | ِ | ِ | أ | ِ |
| h | n | l | m | k | q | f | gh | ẓ | ṭ | ḍ | ṣ | s | z | r | dh | d | kh | h | j | th | t | b |

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tā'wil | asbāb | Rāzī | hudā | tafsīr | Abū |

- The position of the closed tā' or tā' marbūtah written in the end of the word in this thesis is to be transliterated as follows: علمية = al-'Ilmiyyah
- The position of the definite article ال is to be transliterated as follows: النزول = an-nuzul. Except for names, such as al-Suyūṭī, al-Dhahabī, al-Rāzī, and so on, the definite article ال is clearly mentioned.
Qurʾānic Hermeneutics with Reference to Narratives: A Study in Classical Exegetical Traditions

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a critical study of the hermeneutical analysis used in classical taṣfīr with reference to some Qurʾānic narrative passages. It examines those discourses that are related to these narrative passages by producing a comparative review of the some widely used Qurʾānic commentaries—namely, those by Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Tha’labī, al-Rāzī, al-Ṭabrisī, Ruzbihān al-Baqī, and Nisābūrī. It critically studies the conditions that influenced the interpreters’ prejudices and preconceptions. Also, this research critically analyzes the gap that exists between these Qurʾānic narratives and their interpretations. This research consists of five chapters.

The first two chapters deal with hermeneutics and narratives with respect to approaches and methods. The last three chapters are case studies, which explore the hermeneutical discourses related to these narratives. An analysis of the early methods of exegesis used on selected Qurʾānic narrative passages—conducted through the interrelated concepts of linguistics, grammar, lexicography, mysticism, history, textuality, and theology—will serve as the framework within which to study the level of understanding of these interpreters of the Qurʾānic text and their impact on the Muslim community. Critical research is conducted and primary sources are used to study how these exegetes understood the Qurʾānic text and contextualized the available knowledge to interpret Qurʾānic narratives on the literary, textual narrative, theological, and mystical levels.
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INTRODUCTION

Muslims consider *tafsîr* literature to be Islam’s most representative hermeneutical tradition, for it deals with understanding the Qur’ânic text’s meaning, represents the efforts of scholars and exegetes to express those understandings in their interpretations, and represents the general discourse that can be described as a dialogue about what is said and what is intended to be said. It searches for the deeper meanings of speech, in doing so it restates what has never been said.¹ The significance of *hermeneutics* is evident in the human sciences. One of its main tasks is to study the distance of the text from the reader and his/her reception of it in its social, linguistic, and historical contexts. The reader’s response is to interact with the text in order to create new readings that share its continuing relevance. This dialectical relationship between text and reader provides the essential capacity for a recipient to produce new understandings and experiences that are located within the text itself. Thus, since *hermeneutics* is considered to be one of the most important Qur’ânic sciences, an extensive survey of the classical-era hermeneutics of the Qur’ân remains the subject of extensive research in both Muslim and non-Muslim institutions.² In addition, classical exegetes spent so much time interpreting the Qur’ânic narrative that it gradually became this genre’s most-debated subject. They claim, however, that such undertakings require the use of specific patterns and techniques to understand the difficulties of its fundamental elements. Therefore, researchers must study how these exegetes understood the Qur’ânic narrative.

¹ Foucault (1973: xvi).
² In this thesis, I will use the terms Muslim and non-Muslim to distinguish between culturally and religiously Muslim scholars, whether in the West or the Muslim world, and non-Muslim scholars, notably in the West. This qualification is not meant to pass judgment on any specific groups or individuals, but rather to culturally contextualize the scholars consulted in this research.
This dissertation is a critical study of the hermeneutical analysis used in classical 
*tafsīr* with reference to some Qur’ānic narrative passages. It examines those discourses that 
are related to these narrative passages by producing a comparative review of the some 
widely used Qur’ānic commentaries—namely, those by Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-
Zamakhsharī, al-Tha’labī, al-Rāzī, al-Ṭabrisī, Ruzbihān al-Baqlī, and Nisābūrī. It critically 
studies the conditions that influenced the interpreters’ prejudices and preconceptions. 
Also, this research analyzes the gap that exists between these Qur’ānic narratives and 
their interpretations.

The first part of this research deals with hermeneutics and Qur’ānic narratives 
with respect to approaches and methods. The second part is the case study, which 
explore the hermeneutical discourses related to these narratives. An analysis of the early 
methods of Qur’ānic exegesis used on selected Qur’ānic narrative passages—conducted 
through the interrelated concepts of linguistics, grammar, lexicography, mysticism, 
history, textuality, and theology—will serve as the framework within which to study the 
level of understanding of these interpreters of the Qur’ānic text and their impact on the 
Muslim community. Critical research is conducted, and primary sources are used to study 
how these exegetes understood the Qur’ānic text and contextualized the available 
knowledge to interpret Qur’ānic narratives on the literary, textual narrative, theological, 
and mystical levels.

The purpose of this research is to present contemporary Muslim and non-Muslim 
readers’ different ways of understanding of the Qur’ānic narrative provided by those 
classical *mufassirūn*. It illustrates the variety of the classical exegetical efforts that have 
been directed to the Qur’ānic narrative text, as well as to create a foundation for a critical 
study of *tafsīr*, which will help contemporary researchers in Islamic studies shed the
baggage of unassociated Qur’ānic narratives and acquire a fresh basis from which to study the Qur’ān.

The reason for using these commentaries is to present the wide range of classical commentators’ works on the Qur’ānic narratives, primarily by guiding the reader through the contextual material. This comparative review will contribute valuable information to the existing repertoire of knowledge on Qur’ānic hermeneutics and narratives and, at the same time, explain the gap between the Qur’ānic text and its interpretations. Another aim has been to display, in particular, the different levels of understanding (Sunni, Shi‘i, and Khariji) and their interpretative voices that have approached these Qur’ānic narrative texts, and to demonstrate, in general, the divergence and convergence of the classical Qur’ānic hermeneutics. However, this dissertation will not engage in presenting sectarian debates or showing any preferences for any theological position, or favor one *tafsīr* over another. It is rather, a presentation of hermeneutical works made by those classical exegetes as they have understood them.

Since my goal is to investigate the gap that exists between the Qur’ānic text and its interpretations, this research will help shed light on the Qur’ānic commentaries’ impact on the early development of Qur’ānic exegesis, as well as the influence that contemporary debates within the Muslim community have had (and continue to have) on the methodological choices available to those who want to approach Qur’ānic exegesis.

The outcome of this research will hopefully be a significant contribution to developing a greater repertoire of literature that can be used to understand Qur’ānic hermeneutics and science. It will be especially useful to those who are seriously seeking knowledge, for it will help them understand the differences between the Qur’ānic narratives’ interpretation and understanding, clarify the reasons for these differences,
enable them to avoid confusion and frustration, and help them develop a better appreciation of various scholarly works. My research is also expected to benefit prospective readers, future Qur’ānic interpretations, academic circles, and the general public. Furthermore, contemporary Muslim scholars can use it to forge a new understanding of the Qur’ānic narratives.

In my dissertation I discuss the qualitative method used to analyze exegetical evidence from the primary sources and, through a comparative, critical, and analytical examination of them, I investigate how the classical commentators used the general available knowledge to understand the Qur’ānic narratives. In order to examine properly the diverse hermeneutical aspects in question, I have employed “external criticism” to study these sources and “internal criticism” to evaluate their accuracy by examining the interpreters’ competency, honesty, and level of bias or subjectivity, if any. This methodology enables me to study the primary sources and, at the same time, identify why there is a gap between the Qur’ānic text and its interpretations.

Furthermore, I have employed comparative, analytical, and critical research to examine the interconnections between Islamic literature and the Qur’ānic narratives and to determine how classical commentators used religious experiences, non-religious texts, and non-Islamic texts to interpret them. This methodology will help identify the dialectical relationship between the commentators and their interpretations, as well as the relationship between the readers and recipients. Since true penetration of the hermeneutics of these Qur’ānic narratives can be gained only through structural, dogmatic, and historical study, the core literature relevant to my research topic highlights the conditions that led to the above-mentioned gap. Hence, all of these issues are quintessential today.
I consider this research methodology to be appropriate, because it critically examines the classical exegetes’ efforts and provides the necessary tools to highlight the classical Muslim understanding of the Qur’ānic narrative text. Moreover, it is quite appropriate because it examines why Muslims believe that the main function of the Qur’ānic narratives is to affirm the continuity of God’s guidance of humanity through revelation.

Given this reality, this introduction attempts to provide an extensive study of the contextual meaning and a conceptual history of both *hermeneutics* and *narrative* in order to underline how the various non-Muslim and Muslim practices of understanding developed. It consists of two main sections. The first section will provide a critical study of *hermeneutics*’ conceptual history and its implications in order to examine its use in the various disciplines created by non-Muslim thinkers. It will highlight the application of Arabic terms to hermeneutical concepts by exposing the different aspects between *tafsīr* and *taʾwīl* and how these terms are being used to approach the Qurʾān. The second section will study the contextual meaning of *narrative* and its use in the various disciplines approached by Muslim and non-Muslim thinkers. It will present a comparative study between the basic elements that constitute the story’s events, actions, time, and space as provided by non-Muslim scholars and their vision toward the narrative in general and Qurʾānic narrative in particular. Also, the level of understanding of the Qurʾānic narrative provided by Muslim scholars through their works will be examined.

1. HERMENEUTICS

The etymological roots of the word *hermeneutics* derived from the Greek verb *hermeneunein*, generally translated as “to interpret,” “to explain,” “to translate,” and the
noun *hermeneunia*, exclusively means “interpretation.” Over the course of non-Muslim history, scholars have produced works on philosophy, religion, linguistics, politics, historical studies, and social science in an attempt to explain hermeneutics. Most of these works, however, emphasized the idea that hermeneutics involves both: the art and the order of the theory of understanding and interpretation of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions. Also, the majority of non-Muslim thinkers agree that there are two strands of hermeneutics: one solely concerned with the nature of the written text, and the other with reading and understanding of reality and everything expressed. Thompson defines hermeneutics as the “discipline that has been primarily concerned with the elucidation of rules for the interpretation of text.” Others, such as Harvey, maintain that hermeneutics is the “intellectual discipline concerned with the nature and presupposition of the interpretation of expressions.” Then, he states that hermeneutics is the theory of understanding texts vis-a-vis their interpretations. In addition, reading a text becomes a new challenge in the way of understanding. Non-Muslim thinkers claim that each reader develops his/her own interpretation of the text, and as well as his/her belief in its validity. In this context, hermeneutics’ main concern becomes “what it means to understand a text, and how understanding and interpretation are determined by the presuppositions and assumptions (the horizon) of both the interpreter and the audience to which the text is being interpreted.” Therefore, the majority of non-Muslim thinkers analyze the science of hermeneutics and its application according to this point

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3 Palmer (1969: 12) and Marle (1967: 12).
4 Ramberg and Gjesdal, “Hermeneutics.”
5 Thompson (1981: 36).
6 Harvey (1987, VI: 279).
7 Ibid.
8 Ramberg and Gjesdal, “Hermeneutics.”
of view. They claim that hermeneutics is applicable in any circumstance in which the meaning is ambiguous, and requires exegesis.\textsuperscript{10} Despite the development of many schools of thought on this term, all of these works agree that the meaning of hermeneutics is far more concerned with the clarification of understanding as a conception itself.\textsuperscript{11} In addition, Jasper, Bruns, and other modern non-Muslim thinkers who have studied hermeneutics’ history and development assume that

> hermeneutics is about the most fundamental ways in which we perceive the world, think, and understand. It has a philosophical root in what we call epistemology—that is, the problem of how we come to know anything at all, and actually how we think and legitimize the claims we make to know the truth.\textsuperscript{12}

Recently, in non-Muslim thought, this same term [hermeneutics] has been used into service as a fundamental name for the science of interpretation in human sciences.\textsuperscript{13}

In addition, Muslim commentators considered that the ambiguous and conflicting meanings of the Qurʾān, as a revealed text, must be understood. Therefore, the science of Qurʾānic interpretation is mainly concerned with explaining its text as a given entity.\textsuperscript{14} In the history of Qurʾānic hermeneutics, Muslim exegetes have provided intensive methods to interpret the Qurʾān. For them, the act of interpreting the Qurʾān is continuous, and the text itself must be readable and interpretable for all time. They believe that every aspect of a Muslim’s life is related to Qurʾānic values and consider them as the most suitable to humankind and applicable to Muslim society. Furthermore, \textit{tafsīr al-Qurʾān} is the most important science in the Islamic tradition because it deals with the proper understanding of the word of God. The literary meaning of the term \textit{tafsīr} is mainly

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{10}] Gadamer (1976: xii).
\item[\textsuperscript{11}] Bruns (1992: 1).
\item[\textsuperscript{12}] Jasper (2004: 3).
\item[\textsuperscript{13}] Rosenberg (1988: 91).
\item[\textsuperscript{14}] Ayoub (1984, I: 1).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
concerned to explain what is meant by a difficult word, especially in Scripture.\textsuperscript{15} However, Muslim exegetes consider that \textit{tafsīr} is the discipline that covers the meaning, explanation, exposition, elucidation, explication, interpretation, and commentary of the Qurʾān. In their exegetical works, \textit{mufassirūn} have commented on theological and mystical subjects, primarily focused on linguistic and lexicographical elements.\textsuperscript{16} Also, Esack states that since the early days of Muslim history, \textit{tafsīr} has been associated with particular theological (Shiʿi, Sunni, and Khariji) and political thought. These affiliations reflected the possible prejudices of the interpreter.\textsuperscript{17} In addition, he disputed that though an etymology of hermeneutics would begin in early modernity, its actual application in numerous fields—such as religious, literary, and legal—can be traced back to the ancients.\textsuperscript{18} Esack concludes that the lack of a conclusive term for hermeneutics in classical Islamic schools of thought and its conspicuous absence in contemporary Qurʾānic \textit{tafsīr} does not indicate of the lack of decisive hermeneutical concepts or processes in Qurʾānic hermeneutics disciplines.\textsuperscript{19} He further stated that the nexus between the theme of the exegesis, the exegete, and the audience is seldom achieved. Esack wrote:

\begin{quote}
The connections between the subject of interpretation, the interpreter and the audience are rarely made. When this is the case, it is usually done with the intention of disparaging the work of the author, or they are made to underline the theological prejudices of the author. \textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

Thus, although this statement is somehow correct, what is legitimate, however, is to argue that this statement accepts the claim that the conceptual meaning of \textit{tafsīr} is not

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{15} Ibn Manẓūr (1999, V: 55).
\textsuperscript{16} Fudge (2003: 6).
\textsuperscript{17} Esack (2002: 142–43).
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 142.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 143.
\end{flushright}
totally different from the meaning of the term hermeneutics itself. Hence, all exegetical works made by Muslims in order to understand the Qurʾān attempt to demonstrate that hermeneutics and *tafsīr* are precisely the work of interpretation. Therefore, a critical study on hermeneutics’ conceptual history and implications must be initiated in order to examine its use in the various disciplines approached by both Muslim exegetes and non-Muslim thinkers.

Historically, Grassie postulates that “hermeneutics first arises in the disciplines of interpreting sacred texts, historical events, and legal codes, but philosophers increasingly see its application to theories of understanding in the broadest sense.”\(^{21}\) Starting with the religious concept, Rosenberg states that hermeneutics referred to Biblical exegesis.\(^{22}\) Some early exegetical works on the Bible mentioned that hermeneutics deals with the interpretation and translation of sacred texts. In other words, hermeneutics was supposedly a science linked directly with Biblical interpretation, and the resulting works reflected the earliest understandings of the different circumstances in which interpretive theories were developed to work out meaning from ambiguous texts or to reconcile problematic ones with existing theology.\(^{23}\) The implication is that religious hermeneutics proved the relationship of “the perennial transcendent horizon of faith vis-à-vis the changing this worldly horizon of history, and the interaction between the search for scientific and religious truth and the realization of human good.”\(^{24}\) Christian interpreters, especially the Church Fathers, have demonstrated that interpretive theory should be limited by the text.\(^{25}\) As their overall goal was to construct a bridge between faith and

\(^{21}\) Grassie, “Hermeneutics in Science and Religion.”
\(^{22}\) Rosenberg (1988: 91).
\(^{23}\) Gadamer (1976: xii).
\(^{24}\) McLean (2003: 8).
\(^{25}\) Ibid., 7.
doubt, their major concern was the nature of scriptural interpretation. This debate engendered two schools of thought: (1) the School of Antioch, which claimed that it should be read literally, and (2) the School of Alexandria, which asserted that it should be read allegorically or figuratively. Later on, and due to new developments, Augustine’s theory of semiotics contributed to stabilizing the Christian hermeneutics. His hermeneutical theory has been profoundly acknowledged by modern thinkers—such as Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur. They claimed that Augustine distinguishes between language and interpretation of Scripture and involves a deeper, existential level of self-understanding. Medieval hermeneutics also represents the most

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27Ibid.
28Ibid., 44.
29Ramberg and Gjesdal, “Hermeneutics.” Also, modern hermeneutics was developed through new philosophical perspectives to demonstrate the great transformation of the nineteenth century hermeneutics to the twentieth century philosophers. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) was the “founder of modern hermeneutics as a science. His attempt was to take a broad view the ancient saying of philology, namely, that understanding a text means understanding it first as well as and then even better than the author does.” Bruns (1991: 2). Therefore, for Schleiermacher, “a text is interpreted from two points of view: grammatical, in relation to the language in which it is written, and psychological, in relation to the mentality and the development of the author.” Inwood (1995: 353). Under the impact of his hermeneutical theory, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) “extended hermeneutics to the understanding of the human behavior and products.” Inwood (1995: 353). Clearly, he was concerned with interpreting ancient texts in their cultural understanding for he locates “hermeneutics within the context of the social sciences. The secularization of hermeneutics is complete.” Jasper (2004: 98). Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) stated that hermeneutics “is concerned with the interpretation of the being who interprets texts and other artifacts, who may become, but is not essentially, either a natural or cultural scientist: the human being or Dasein.” Inwood (1995: 353). However, his 1927 hermeneutical work, Being and Time, had influenced Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), who wrote Truth and Method (1960). In his works, Gadamer affirmed the universality of hermeneutical problems by defining hermeneutics as the “dialogue between the claims of truth on the one hand and the process of method on the other, between an absolute (whether of God or Dasein) demand and the relentless, systematic application of methods and process.” Jasper (2004: 106). Gadamer indicated that hermeneutics “has to do with bridging the gap between the familiar world in which we stand and the strange meaning that resists assimilation into the horizons of our world.” Gadamer (1976: xii). Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) also was influenced by Martin Heidegger’s hermeneutical work, Being and Time. Ricoeur “emphasizes how the text itself may open up a space of existential and political possibilities. This dynamic, productive power of the text undermines the idea of reality as a fixed, unyielding network of authoritative patterns of interpretations.” See Ramberg and Gjesdal, “Hermeneutics.” His hermeneutical theory is linked to studying the structural analysis of the text that, according to him, is “a work of discourse, and hence in the first instance a work.” Ricoeur (1981a: 13). His hermeneutics’ theory is associated with the concept of the text. Therefore, Ricoeur’s hermeneutical theory indicates that “explanation and understanding are no longer contradictory attitudes, as has often been assumed in the history of hermeneutics.” Ricoeur (1981a: 13). In this context, “it seems possible to situate explanation and
important period of change before the Reformation and the Enlightenment. It perceived Biblical meaning as residing in four centers: literal, allegorical, moral, and eschatological. The need for a new interpretation of the Bible became an important religious duty, especially for those who claimed to be Protestant reformists.

In sum, the focal point of the science of the hermeneutics, from an early period, was concerned with the actual process through which one arrives at the meaning of text. In this context, Christian theology developed the sense in which the scriptural meaning took on several non-mutually exclusive layers: hermeneutical, textual, and literary critical meaning. This recognized the intrinsic relationship between history, textual meaning, and interpretation, and became the most debated subject among non-Muslim thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Later, the science of hermeneutics has been developed through different schools of thought—such as, the

interpretation along a unique hermeneutical arc and to integrate the opposed attitudes of explanation and understanding with an overall conception of reading as the recovery of meaning.” Ricoeur (1981b: 161).

Some modern scholars who have studied this period, however, describe it as the continuation of the old Patristic hermeneutics and moves “from scholasticism to the age of enlightenment.” Among the period’s greatest scholars was Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). Aquinas wrote that “the interpretation of Scripture is essentially separated from the study of theology,” for he maintained that “the tendency was for the scripture to become pretexts for the real business and purpose of hermeneutics, which was the teaching and doctrine of the church.” Jasper (2004: 45–68). The work of Aquinas has also influenced the development of modern hermeneutics. Heidegger, however, was mainly interested in Aquinas’s notion of Being, and not in his engagement with specifically hermeneutical issues, such as the proper authorship of certain pseudo-Aristotelian texts, which became as a crucial aspect of Friedrich Schleiermacher’s notion of grammatical interpretation. See Ramberg and Gjesdal, “Hermeneutics.” Under the Protestant reformers Martin Luther (1483–1536) and John Calvin (1509–1564), Biblical hermeneutics took a new direction of revival. For Luther, the most important duty when reading the scripture “was to set the Bible free to interact with the subjective experience of the reader, not to substantiate the theology of the church.” Jasper (2004: 52) Calvin advocated the idea that Biblical hermeneutics “is grounded in rational reflection, self-understanding, and common sense, for he affirmed, without of our selves, knowledge of God does not take place.” For him, the Bible had to be placed in a historical context, “for the reader must appreciate not only his or her own mind but also the very mind of the Biblical author, that is, in the writing of the text prior to the theology and authority of the church.” This development gave rise to a rational turn, which was represented by the great French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650). For him, hermeneutics was an act of interpretation in which “we can now interpret, define ourselves, and indeed our existence and the world in which we live, by our capacity to think quite independently of God.” Ibid, 61–63. In this light, he gave human reason the chance to act freely with regard to the Bible. Later, his definition of hermeneutics became the major problem facing most nineteenth-century thinkers.

Marle (1967: 12).
Ibid.
ontological turn, hermeneutic humanism, objectivity and relativism, critique of ideology, and semiotics and post-structuralism—to come up with a new type of questions about nature of the text and what happens in the process of understanding of anything and how things are. However, for Bruns, hermeneutics does not simply end at meaning; rather, meaning becomes a light emanating from the text, illuminating our hitherto darkened understanding of any particular discourse. Nevertheless, later on, the debates among non-Muslim schools of thought on hermeneutics have influenced contemporary Muslim scholars. However, the next section of this introduction will highlight how Muslims have approached hermeneutics and its implication in \textit{tafsīr}.

1.1 Muslim Approaches to Hermeneutics

Starting with the terminological concepts, it is quite clear that the similarity of the term hermeneutics to the Arabic terms \textit{tafsīr} and \textit{ta'wil} reflect the flexibility of the Qur'ānic exegetical process. Also, as regards their semantic and terminological levels, these Arabic exegetical terms would be, in one sense, a more appropriate method to explain difficult words, rather than an interpretative exegesis, and serve as a basic philological elucidation of the Qur'ānic text. Throughout the hermeneutical analysis of

\begin{itemize}
  \item Bruns (1992: 179).
  \item They have been split into two groups. The first group, among them Rashīd Rīdā and Muhammad 'Abdu, wanted to approach the Qurān from the perspective of the new theories of exact sciences and/or understanding of society dealing with questions such as democracy, human rights and gender equality. The second group—among them, Fazlur Rahman, Muhammad Arkoun, and Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd—has advocated the adoption of the academic methodology of hermeneutics. They attempted to interpret the Qurʾān from its socio-historical context and historical-linguistic perspective. See Esack (2002: 144).
  \item \textit{Tafsīr} is a noun comes from the verb \textit{fassara}, which means, interpretation, explanation, discover, decide, reveal, develop, or disclose a thing that was concealed or obscured; or a meaning perceived by an intellect. Lane (2003, II: 2397); Rāghib (1992:47), Dhahabī (1976, I: 13-17), and Ma'rifat (1997, I: 13). \textit{Ta'wil} comes from the verb \textit{awwala}. It is derived from \textit{iyālah}, which means to shape or arrange a thing so as to place its various significations in their proper perspectives. \textit{Ta’wil}, thus, means the reducing one or two senses, or interpretation, which an expression bears, or admits, to which suits the apparent meaning. See Dhahabī (1976, I: 17-18), Ma'rifat (1997, I: 19) and Lane (2003, II: 2397). Also, \textit{ta’wil} means the final end of matter, as when the Qurʾān says “on a day when its \textit{ta’wil} (fulfillment) shall come” 7:53; the final purpose, meaning, or end of a thing. Ma'rifat (1997, I: 20) and Cf. Stetkevych (1989: 83).
\end{itemize}
the Qurʾānic text, Muslim commentators tended to see each word as embedded in its physical application. As most of them were concerned with linguistic definition and clarification of particular words and phrases, they developed the hermeneutical process through the concept of textual reading. The science of meanings of the Qurʾān (ʿilm maʿānī al-Qurʾān), which attracted a number of classical commentators, was directly concerned with understanding a verse’s basic meanings through interpreting its difficult words or phrases and clarifying its general linguistic problems. Many exegetical works indicated that searching for the true maʿānī al-Qurʾān was the most frequently used method of interpretation for Qurʾānic exegesis at that time. At this level, sharḥ was used as a first step to explain the difficulties of the Qurʾānic passages. Semantically, this term appears to be the most appropriate method to elucidate the Qurʾān. Etymologically, “it ought to denote transparency, or translucency, of a slice thinly cut; but it brings in also other ramifications of the meaning of cutting lengthwise and extends finally into sharraḥa (to be evident [intransitive], as well as to explain [transitive])”

The development of reading the Qurʾānic text was also supported by “tabyīn or bayān,” both of which acquired a kind of connotational semantic and etymological richness that had been encountered in the science of the Qurʾānic interpretation. In this context, Stetkevych wanted to emphasize this opinion by mentioning Ibn Khaldūn’s theory, in which he [Ibn Khaldūn] indicated that ʿilm al-bayān had yet served as the methodological principle of al-Zamakhsharī’s Qurʾānic commentary, technically a tafsīrs.

40 Sharḥ means uncovered, laid open, and the verb sharraḥa means to explain or clarify. Lane (2003, I:1530).
42 Tabyīn and bayān mean clear, plain, manifest. Lane (2003, I:286).
but with more broadly hermeneutical implications.\textsuperscript{44} Also, in the same sense, Stetkevych indicated Saglūl’s interpretation that \textit{tabyīn}, far from becoming an integral classical hermeneutics, failed to perform a hermeneutical role and transformed into a classical literary theory.\textsuperscript{45}

With the development of Qur’ānic exegesis, “the dialectical process of producing meaning in the term \textit{tabyīn}, which was considered to be one of mediation between distance and increasing clarification,”\textsuperscript{46} was replaced by a new meaning for \textit{ta’wīl}, which literally means to return to the beginning. Therefore, hermeneutics is often analogized with \textit{ta’wīl}, as the latter deals with deriving meaning by contemplating on linguistic variables in the text.\textsuperscript{47}

Etymologically, Lane indicated \textit{ta’wīl} as an Arabic term for hermeneutics, which concerns itself primarily with “covert or virtual meaning or it reduces meaning to its ultimate intent,”\textsuperscript{48} that makes it return. The conception of \textit{ta’wīl}, however, is exactly indicated by the distance of ‘\textit{al-bayn},’ and its method of evolving is that of return, a return to the start.\textsuperscript{49} Clearly, the presupposition of the highest intent in \textit{ta’wīl}, as it is in dialectical tension between first-as-last and last-as-first, can be made the foundation of the intellectual paradox.\textsuperscript{50} Al-Suyūṭī also considered \textit{ta’wīl} as an act of referring a Qur’ānic verse back to whatever meanings it can bear.\textsuperscript{51}

\textit{Ta’wīl}, considered to be the figurative interpretation of Arabic literature in general, was used to interpret the Qur’ānic text. In philological terms, \textit{ta’wīl} carries

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid., and see Ibn Khaldūn (2005: 436–37).
\item \textsuperscript{45} Ibid., and see Saghlūl (1964, I: 21-25).
\item \textsuperscript{46} Stetkevych (1989: 92).
\item \textsuperscript{47} Kamali (2003: 119).
\item \textsuperscript{48} Lane (2003, I: 126–27).
\item \textsuperscript{49} Stetkevych (1989: 92).
\item \textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Suyūṭī (1988, IV: 167).
\end{itemize}
several meanings and thus each meaning must be discovered, since the exact meaning is supposedly not apparent at first sight. From this perspective, the main terminological difference between *tabyīn* and *taʾwīl*, is that *tabyīn* interprets figures of speech, while *taʾwīl* makes—that is, reads in, figures of speech. The continuation of meanings in *taʾwīl* is not interrupting, as it was in *tabyīn*. Thus, Muslim exegetes maintained that *taʾwīl* is the science of elucidating the Qurʾānic text’s general as well as particular meanings.

Generally, in *ʿulūm al-tafsīr* works, al-Zarkashī has defined *tafsīr* as

The clarification of the Qurʾānic text has different meanings. It includes elucidation of the occasion or reason of revelation of a verse (*asbāb an-nuzūl*), its place in the chapter (sūrah) to which it belongs, and its story or historical reference. *Tafsīr* must also determine whether a verse or passage belongs to the Meccan or Medinan period of revelation, whether it is *muḥkam* (clear) or *mutashābih* (ambiguous), abrogating (*nāsikh*) or abrogated (*mansūkh*), and whether it has a general (ʿāmm) or specific (khāṣṣ) reference or meaning.

Between the second and fourth Islamic centuries, *taʾwīl* and *tafsīr* were used interchangeably by commentators who wanted to particularize their applications of Qurʾānic exegesis. Historically, there was great debate among the scholars as to whether the proper approach to interpretation of the Qurʾān should be described as *taʾwīl* “focusing on hidden meanings” or *tafsīr* “focusing on explanations of the text.” For example, *tafsīr* was first used to represent the external philological exegesis (the exoteric) as a reference to the Qurʾān; *taʾwīl* was taken to refer to the exposition of the exegesis, dealing purely with the Qurʾānic text (the esoteric). However, these two terms soon came to designate different branches having a direct connection with the general science of Qurʾānic exegesis. Several traditional *tafsīrs* have titles with term *taʾwīl* such

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as, al-Ṭabarî’s *jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta‘wīl āy al-Qur‘ān*, indicate that *ta‘wīl* became almost synonymous with *tafsīr*—and yet commentaries were referred to as *tafsīrs*, not *ta‘wīls*.

In the fourth Islamic century, *tafsīr* was used to indicate a hermeneutical work on the Qur‘ān. After a long period of identical usage, *tafsīr* replaced *ta‘wīl* and, in its general sense, may be characterized as the first step used to explain the Qur‘ānic verse in order to discover its exoteric meaning and application. Due to its scriptural function, *tafsīr* comes the closest to being an equivalent of exegesis; the term is now interchangeable with the concept of Qur‘ānic exegesis. In addition, through the development of exegetical works, the majority of Muslim exegetes who attempted to clarify the distinction between *tafsīr* and *ta‘wīl* concluded that *tafsīr* is concerned primarily with the transmission of tradition, whereas *ta‘wīl* is concerned with the deeper comprehension of the inner meaning of the Qur‘ānic text. Some of them emphasized that *ta‘wīl* must not, however, go beyond the prophetic tradition (Sunnah) when interpreting the literal sense or meaning of the Qur‘ān, because the Sunnah is the primary interpreter of it.

Nevertheless, Poonawala concluded the historical development of the term *tafsīr*:

> From what we know of the early history and development of *tafsīr*, it seems that in the beginning both words [*tafsīr* and *ta‘wīl*] were used synonymously. There is no hard evidence to suggest that *ma‘ānī* (meanings) was the earliest term used for the titles of works on Qur‘ānic interpretation and that *ta‘wīl* was introduced late in the 3rd/early 10th century and was supplanted in the following century.

In addition, Kermani summarized the use of the term *ta‘wīl*:

> In the first period of Muslim theology *ta‘wīl* was the *terminus technicus* for the exegesis of the Qur‘ān, before it became restricted in the realm of religious studies to the allegorical interpretation of the ambiguous verses (āyāt

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57 Wehr (1979: 713).
58 Zarkashî (1972, II: 150).
mutashābihāt), or even acquired negative connotations as it became employed with regard to arbitrary reading of the Qurʾān.61

Therefore, taʾwīl became the most technical term employed by the traditionalists, as well as those who were more rational and mystical in their perspectives, especially when dealing with the Qurʾānic narrative hermeneutical methods.

Unlike the Biblical narrative, the lack of information in the Qurʾānic stories, which are distributed throughout the Scripture with repetitions and stylistic modifications, necessitated expounding to satisfy the curiosity of enthusiastic Muslims.62 In addition, classical exegetes attempted to provide a complete interpretation on the Qurʾānic narrative based on reason and personal opinion by using the tradition of Prophet Muḥammad.

2. NARRATIVE

Non-Muslim narratologists, who study the narrative’s literal aspect, have provided different meanings relating to the narrative’s theory, events, and actions. They define narrative as the narrative discourse of story, where story denotes the individual or sequential events, and narrative discourse denotes the manner in which they are represented.63 Their main task, however, is to make a comparative study between the basic elements constituting its events, actions, time, and space as provided by non-Muslim scholars.

Looking deeper than the events themselves, Ricoeur presents narrative in terms of what makes sequence and change possible: “I take temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity, and narrativity to be the language

structure that has temporality as its ultimate reference.”64 Other narratologists consider the narrative’s structural meaning to be related to a causality factor, which turns the sequence of events into a story.65

In addition to change and causality, Bal relates the experiences mentioned in the narrative by defining the later term as the changing of states (caused – experienced) by actors.66 Therefore, non-Muslim scholars in general view narrative as a kind of discourse that provides a story which can be put to a variety of uses. Narratologists have also stated that any narrative has three fundamental components (story, plot, and narration) and have undertaken several analytical studies to distinguish between them. They claim that since the narration principle has a separate existence from that of the story, it can be told from multiple perspectives.67 At this point, they conclude that each story would be different in its specifics, emotions, and language due to the difference in point of view.68 At the same level, as the plot is also separate from the story, it can just like narration, “be plotted in different ways.”69 This distinction between story, plot, and narration is very important to some of them (narratologists), for they often associate narrative and plot under the umbrella of narrative discourse.70

In addition, time and space are considered fundamental to understanding oral and written narratives. In this case, most narratologists say that these factors mostly affect the process of reading, which is temporally located in the text’s physical space. Claiming that the narrative’s interpretation is influenced by the impact of the temporal and spatial

64 Ricoeur (1981b: 165).
65 Onega and Linda (1996: 3).
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 40.
70 Ibid.
information, they assume that time is an unavoidable factor in narrative theories, as stories are temporally arranged,\(^7\) and into what they refer to as 'story' and 'discourse.'\(^7\)

In oral narratives, story refers to what is told, while discourse refers to the act of telling it.\(^7\) As for written narratives, however, narratologists conclude that, as it is difficult to have access to the time of writing, the time of reading is what is pertinent to discourse.\(^7\)

These two temporalities produce a situation in which the narrative experience is always linked with a temporal relationship. According to Bridgeman, the approaches to space in narrative was introduced by Zoran, who suggests that “spatial relationships can be constructed at a basic and relatively stable topographical level, linking objectives and locations, but they can also apply to movements of things and people around a narrative world.”\(^7\)

Therefore, the spatial element helps readers visualize the narrative’s contents. Furthermore, in this process it is important to recognize the different characters that inhabit their world’s space, both socially and psychologically.

As for the Qur’ānic scripture, Rippin has related the structure of the Qur’ānic narrative with the Biblical one. He maintained that it is impossible to separate the study of the Qur’ān from an earlier Biblical tradition.\(^7\)

Further, he admitted that non-Muslim scholars have studied the Islamic tradition much as they studied Judeo-Christian traditions: as religions with considerable relationships with history.\(^7\)

As for the Qur’ānic narrative in particular, they persisted that these narratives must be examined in the context of the Oriental monotheism of the Near Eastern religious milieu, which preceded

\(^7\) Bridgeman (2007: 53).
\(^7\) Ibid.
\(^7\) Ibid.
\(^7\) Ibid.
\(^7\) Ibid.
\(^7\) Ibid., and see Zoran (1984: 315–19).
\(^7\) Rippin (1983: 45).
\(^7\) Rippin (1998: 352).
Islam’s emergence.\textsuperscript{78} Therefore, they have studied these Qur’ānic narratives from philological, historical, cultural, and socio-political perspectives.

Traditionally, non-Muslim scholars have seen Qur’ānic narratives as copied versions of Biblical stories and their unique narrative style as disjointed and confusing. They assumed that the Qur’ānic narratives were developed with an understanding of the Bible as the source, while the stories themselves were presented as stylized paraphrases meant to emphasize specific messages.\textsuperscript{79}

Also, they claimed that all of the Biblical narrative elements and the Qur’ānic narrative have the same messages, both moral and theological, that can be gleamed from the narrative passages.\textsuperscript{80} In this case, most non-Muslim scholars assumed that the Qur’ānic narratives can be seen only as a reform movement within the Judeo-Christian tradition and influenced by its cultural and socio-political characteristics. They stated that the main conception of both, the Biblical narratives and the Qur’ānic narratives

have a strong bearing on the style of the stories presented as \textit{kitāb} reading, not only forcing on them a distinct linguistic code to distinguish them from profane narrative, but also imbuing these narratives with the new message of imminent eschatological catastrophe, a message which bring the narrative close to as exhortative appeal or, later, a sermon.\textsuperscript{81}

Chronologically, Qur’ānic narratives are frequently accused of missing a historical and chronological context, as well as reiterating narratives with sometimes slight stylistic differences.\textsuperscript{82} Also, they emphasized the idea that unlike the Bible, which dedicates great effort in the careful construction of characters and motives, Qur’ānic

\textsuperscript{78} Rippin (1983: 45).
\textsuperscript{79} Neuwirth (2006: 106).
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 107.
narratives are often secondary to the aims of the narratives themselves.\textsuperscript{83} They claimed that the problematic nature of traditional Islamic sources is that of circular logic: the textual narrative of Islamic origins is narrated by sources imbedded in the Islamic tradition.\textsuperscript{84} While affirming that, they concluded that extra-Islamic sources contemporary to early Islam do exist.\textsuperscript{85} As a result, they considered that all those factors have played a major role in modifying the Qurʾānic text's real sense.

However, all these extensive literary sources gradually undermined non-Muslim scholars' confidence in the majority of the hermeneutical works provided by Muslim exegetes, especially as regards their approaches to the historical studies of Qurʾānic narratives.

2.1 Muslim Approaches to Narrative

In my view and from an Islamic standpoint, Muslims have always believed that the Qurʾān, including its narratives, is the word of God.\textsuperscript{86} In this context, it is quite clear that non-Muslim approaches to the theory of narrative are not applicable to the Qurʾānic narrative. Theologically, Muslims assumed that all aspects of life are somehow connected to the Qurʾān, since Islam can be implemented correctly only if the Qurʾān is understood correctly. Furthermore, they believed that the Qurʾān and the earlier revealed scriptures came from a unique source of revelation, one that addresses the same basic messages about God and the concept of the world, humanity, and creation. The science of tafsīr also deals with the specific instructions addressed directly to the narratives of the Jews and the Christians at given points of time and in particular circumstances.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{84} Donner (1998: 2).
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Saeed (2006:4-5).
Philologically, they considered that, not surprisingly, non-Muslim scholars have applied non-Muslim approach (based on the narrative’s theory) to their study of the hermeneutical literature related to the Qur’ānic narrative. Since they continue to study the narrative of Islam’s origins and critically examine some of its literary aspects, developing a theory based solely on the Qur’ān as a narrative could clarify these diverse aspects. In this context, they wanted to approach the study of the Qur’ān in the same way they had examined the Torah and the Bible. Since they claimed that these Scriptures were nothing more than variant traditions woven together into a single text, they invalidate each other.

Historically, Muslim exegetes considered that non-Muslim scholars have analyzed the multiple traditions of the non-Islamic nations during Islam’s advent and concluded that these traditions gradually influenced the Qur’ān’s interpretation. They claimed that in its examination of the congenial trade relations between Mecca and Christian Abyssinia, the Qur’ān makes numerous references to Christianity and expresses friendship toward its adherents (e.g., 57:27). Although many verses refer to the Jews and Judaism, the majority of them are linked to the period after Prophet Muḥammad migrated to Medina. This period highlighted the Jews’ arguments against the Muslims by emphasizing the tricks that the Jews played on the Muslims.

Nevertheless, these Qur’ānic narratives tell us virtually nothing from a historical perspective about the Jewish communities. The material used to interpret Qur’ānic narratives dealt with Prophet Muḥammad’s relations with the Jews in Medina only. Furthermore, according to 5:51, no record indicates that he had any personal contacts with Jews until that time. In contrast to this historical analysis, Muslim scholars have claimed that from the Qur’ānic perspective, these Qur’ānic narratives’ general purpose is
to show the Meccans that the earlier prophets had succeeded and that their message had triumphed: “There is, in their stories, instruction for people endued with understanding. It is not a tale invented, but a confirmation of what went before it, a detailed exposition of all things, and a guide and a mercy to those who believe.” 12:111.

The Muslim scholars’ approaches to Qur’ānic narrative begin from “We revealed to you the most beautiful stories, in that We reveal to you this Qur‘ān” 12:3. Accordingly, they have asserted that Qur‘ānic scripture contains many miraculous and authentic stories. From a hermeneutical perspective, the majority of Muslim exegetes, who were concerned to interpret such Qur‘ānic narratives, believed that various sections explain other sections through the use of external exegetical materials due to the lack of information provided by the Qur‘ānic narrative itself. Wansbrough stated that this external material was mostly taken from rabbinic literature.87

Esack terms these hermeneutical efforts “narrative tafsīrs,” that is, tafsīrs that expounds on Qur‘ānic narratives by drawing heavily on Near Eastern folklore.88 Furthermore, he explained Wansbrough’s statement by saying that, as the Qur‘ānic narratives are sparse in detail and extremely concise, narrative tafsīrs ventured to answer the natural questions that arose in readers of these seemingly incomplete Qur‘ānic narratives by drawing on parallel Biblical narratives and folklore.89 Muslim exegetes also included many extra-Biblical traditions, known as isrā‘īliyāt,90 such as narratives about major Biblical figures (e.g., Jewish prophets) not mentioned in the

87 Wansbrough (1977: 134).
90 The term isrā‘īliyāt is addressed to the textual material found in a wide range of the Islamic literature, including early tafsīr works brough from Judeo-Christian heritage to provide interpretative information about ancient prophets and pre-Islamic nations mentioned in the Qur‘ān. See Dhahabī (1976, I: 165) and Ma‘rifat (1997, II: 80).
Qurʾān. As a result, several Old Testament patriarchs progressively assumed a major function in their *tafsīrs*. These extra-Biblical narratives turn out to be the stock accounts of the main sections of longer Meccan chapters “onward often form a composite that Mirrors the enactment of a monotheistic liturgical service where the central position is occupied by the reading of the scriptural texts.”

According to Wansbrough, the earliest exegetical works in narrative *tafsīr* were those of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767) and Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d. 146/763). He stated that “the scriptural text was subordinate, conceptually and syntactically, to the *narratio*,” which make it very difficult to separate the original text from the hermeneutical works of the *mufassir*. Therefore, Muslim commentators provided us with legendary extra-Qurʾānic materials that they explained via their Qurʾānic interpretations. They attempted to emphasize by means of their methodologies their different narrative interpretations of the Meccan and Medinan chapters, “the continuing education of listeners and the development of a moral consensus that is reflected in the texts.” The large number of such non-Qurʾānic narratives, which reflect the purpose of the canonization, are assumed to be well-known in the public sphere and especially to the listeners. They need to be studied again as evidence to reveal their developmental stages and emergence in the community and to fill the gap between the Qurʾānic text and its commentary, as well as the gap between the divine and the profane. The collection of such material influenced Arab-Muslim culture and helped it develop a worldview based on the marvelous (ʿajīb) and the unusual. This is striking when we look at how the commentators interpreted Qurʾānic narratives dealing with such Midrashic and Haggadic

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93 Ibid.
narratives as those involving Moses and Pharaoh, Solomon and his kingdom, Joseph and his brothers, and Mary and her son Jesus.

In sum, it has been pointed out that according to the hermeneutical works provided by classical exegetes on some Qur’anic narrative messages, such as narratives of the prophets, did not interpret the text well and needed for more details, such as information about pre-Islamic societies and earlier prophets, language, and mystical issues, in order to enhance many narratives to such an extent that the exegesis seemed to be richer and more majestic than the divine text itself. This contribution, however, reveals knowledge of doctrinal ideas pertaining to the Qur’anic text at the time of Islam’s beginning.

My study consists of five chapters. The first two chapters are on Qur’anic hermeneutics and narratives with respect to approaches and methods. The first chapter examines how Muslims have throughout history understood the Qur’anic text and the type of classical Muslim understanding of the Qur’anic text; it discusses the formative and classical period of *tafsīr*, and underlines the historical development of Muslim exegeses, the impact of the different schools of thought, and the varieties of Qur’anic *tafsīr*. The second part of this chapter discusses the corpus of the selected *tafsīrs*. It indicates the reason for choosing them, and examines the bibliographical sources of Hūd ibn Muḥakkim’s *tafsīr kitāb Allāh al-ʿazīz*, al-Ṭabarī’s *jāmiʿ al-bayān*, al-Zamakhsharī’s *al-kashshāf*, al-Tha’labī’s *al-kashf wa-l-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī’s *majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Rāzī’s *mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, Ruzbihān Baqlī’s *ʿarāʾis al-bayān*, and Nisābūrī’s *gharāʾib al-Qurʾān*. Specifically, it studies the treatment of some Sunni, Shiʿī, Khariji, and Sufi *tafsīr*, its each hermeneutical commentaries’ detailed methodology, and each commentator’s technique. The aim is to sample a range of hermeneutics from different theological viewpoints.
The second chapter studies the nature of the classical understanding of the Qur’ānic narrative in tafsīr works, examines the exegetical concepts of narrative provided by classical exegetes and lexicographers, and addresses the semantic ranges of the Qur’ānic terminologies (qiṣṣah, nabā’, ḥadīth, khabar, and usṭūrah) as well as their exegetical functions vis-à-vis the terms stories or account. It examines the sources used by those classical exegetes to interpret the Qur’ānic narrative, studies these interpretations, and highlights their methods of interpretation. It presents the classical exegetes’ viewpoints on these Qur’ānic narratives’ fundamental functions and investigates their moral and religious functions.

In the third chapter, I examine the hermeneutical works in regard to the Qur’ānic narratives’ literary level, and I explore how the classical mufassirūn understood the language of the Qur’ān, and used Arabic’s grammatical rules (qawā‘id al-lughah) as a fundamental hermeneutical tool to interpret the Qur’ānic narratives. Here, I limit my study in the selected hermeneutical works on the verses 2:31, 12:13-14, and 19:24 to their lexical and grammatical elements that they used to reveal how they interpreted the Qur’ān’s words and structural phrases in order to derive new meanings from the Qur’ānic narrative. In addition, in this chapter, I highlight the basic issues of ījāz al-Qurʾān (the inimitability of the Qur’ān) that relates the Qur’ānic narrative to naẓm al-Qurʾān (the overall coherence of the Qur’ān) and explains why classical commentators paid the same attention to this subject as they did to the lexical and grammatical subjects. I also examine why the exegetes linked this topic to linguistic studies of the literary features of the Qur’ān to help demonstrate its inimitability. I also study the statements of some classical scholars—among them, al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) and al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209)—whose works have proven that the Arabs were aware of and understood the functions of
the Qurʾānic narrative’s coherence. One may find the same type of hermeneutical works with more detailed grammatical, lexical, and literary references in the works of such traditionalists as al-Zarkashi and al-Suyūṭi (d. 911/1505), which help to rebut other scholars’ views and substantiate their own. However, this chapter will examine the claim of these scholars about _naẓm_ (coherence) between words and verses in the sūrah in which they appear; _naẓm_ is a revolutionary _tafsīr_ methodology. Here, I limit my study in the selected hermeneutical works on the verses 12:4, 77 and 82.

In the fourth chapter, I present a critical study of how classical exegetes have used the textual narratives as fundamental and external sources of understanding Qurʾānic narratives. To determine just how much they shaped classical-era exegetical works on the Qurʾānic narrative, in the first section, I will discuss how they understood the textual narrative and outline how they came to see them as a legitimate interpretive resource. In other words, I will analyze how the early exegetical efforts of converts and storytellers helped to formulate these textual narratives as a source of interpretation. In order to reveal the major sources of these early exegetical efforts and their subsequent influence upon early exegetical works and historical writings, especially as regards the exegetical sciences ( _ʿulūm at-taḥṣīr_), I will examine the roles of Ibn ʿAbbās, Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, and Wahb ibn Munabbih in transmitting Biblical scripture to Islam when interpreting the Qurʾānic narrative, and I will also examine their historical and hermeneutical works. I will also focus on the early exegetical approaches of the textual narratives provided by Muqāṭil ibn Sulaymān, Ibn Isḥāq, and al-Ṭabarī, all of whom influenced the classical exegetes in general, and had an impact on the hermeneutical works of al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Thaʿlabī, and Hūd ibn Muḥakkim in particular.
In the chapter’s second section, I will concentrate on verses 10, 19, and 21 of sūrah Yūsuf to show how these classical exegetes used textual narratives to understand the historical aspects of some ambiguities in the Qur’ānic narrative and to emphasize the claim that these narrative texts are historically oriented. Hermeneutically, I will show in this section how classical exegetes considered the textual narrative (as an historical aspect of exegesis), as well as to indicate patterns and techniques common throughout the genre and their clear manifestation in their tafsīrs. I will examine how they sought to provide both the standard academic explanations and, simultaneously, use the textual narrative to explain historical aspects of the Qur’ānic stories. With some emphasis on their methodology of the classical exegetes, I will explain how and to what degree this was achieved.

In the last section, I will study verses 15 and 37 of sūrah Yūsuf in order to analyze how classical commentators used textual narratives to understand various theological aspects related to the Qur’ānic text in their attempt to identify the degree of prophecy of Joseph and other pre-Islamic prophets and to emphasize the basis of Joseph’s mission as a prophet (the Biblical narrative does not consider Joseph a prophet). First, I will analyze the hermeneutical works provided by classical exegetes on the level of prophecy through an etymological study of the terms nabī and rasūl, and then I will discuss why the commentators distinguished between them and emphasized the prophecy level and Prophet Muḥammad’s connection with the Biblical prophets. Second, with some emphasis on their methodology, I will demonstrate how these mufassirūn used these textual narratives to explain the Qur’ānic narratives and to what degree this claim was achieved.
In the fifth chapter, I present a critical study on classical hermeneutical works on the subject of the Qurʾānic narrative’s theological and mystical levels. As a case study, I will examine the essential message of *tawḥīd* occurring in both of the stories of the Prophet Abraham in the Qurʾān. I will first briefly study the major traditional commentaries of the classical exegetes—such as those of Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Thaʿlabī—as well as Nisābūrī and Ruzbihān al-Baqlī, who discussed *tawḥīd* as it relates to the verses 6:74–79 and 2:260. With no claim of doing justice to the complexities of their discussions, I would like to note some of the key issues in their treatment of these two passages. I will discuss the textual analysis, mystical interpretations, and the historical concept of these passages in order to underline the main issues that those exegetes debated.
CHAPTER ONE
QUR’ĀNIC HERMENEUTICS

INTRODUCTION

Muslims have seen the Qur’ānic text as the axis around which Muslim religious sciences have revolved. At their center lies the science of textual interpretation, which has sought to explain and clarify the meanings of the Qurʾān. Yet the variance between the different exegetical works proves the contrary. In fact, the Qurʾānic text does not carry only one meaning, but several, and that is why these exegetical works have been diverse. This phenomenon may be explained through historical influences, for history reveals that those who study the Qurʾān never stop posing questions. Moreover, each author’s spiritual preference has marked the respective exegetical works to the point that one finds various exegetical traditions—such as that based on the Prophet Muḥammad (maʾthūr), or various opinions (rajı). From this important position, one may conclude that the exegetes projected their ideas and doctrinal stances relative to the Qurʾān, while the Qurʾān nourished their souls and spirits with the power of a strongly determined vision concerning the universe and humanity’s position in it. Thus, the relationship between the fundamental text and its key interpreters has been dialectical. This is even more so with the general readership, that is to say most Muslims, each according to his or her level and aptitude of textual comprehension.

After a rapid expansion due to a period of successful conquests, the Muslim community inherited cultures, philosophies, and sciences that were hitherto unknown to them. Through a gradual historical process of social interaction, various influences in all spheres of life were integrated into what developed into what has come to be known as Islamic civilization. By the second and especially third and fourth Islamic centuries, schools and doctrines covering a wide spectrum of interpretation were beginning to
appear. This variety of perspectives can best be described as being along a continuum. At one end was a conformist mindset that rejected all that appeared to be foreign and clung tightly to all that represented the ancient heritage (i.e., the Prophet’s words as well as the Companions’ lifestyle and culture). At the other end, a mindset more open to integrating various cultures and perspectives sought to use them selectively to create new forms of discourse to interpret the Qurʾān. This period was accompanied by a large number of dogmatic *tafsīrs*, which directed the original meaning of the text from the spirit that pervades its true essence. Therefore, most exegetical works state that hermeneutics and Qurʾānic textual interpretation begin with the practical facts known about the Qurʾān’s emergence. In fact, many Muslim scholars assert that exegesis is the most important science of Islamic theology. As a result, all hermeneutical works of the Qurʾān refer not only to the problem of textual interpretation as regards language, but also to that of understanding the past’s texts and cultures within the context of the present, a uniquely urgent issue for Muslims throughout history.

Nevertheless, over the course of Muslim history, many strongly developed approaches to Qurʾānic hermeneutics have become formal disciplines characterized by different approaches, all of which were designed to articulate formal theories that could solve critical problems concerning the Qurʾānic text and its interpretations. These extensive works gave rise to a large body of interpretative works.

In addition, historically, Muslim commentators have ranked al-Suyūṭī’s book, *ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, as the most valuable bibliographical effort of the history of Muslim exegetes. At this level, Ḥafṣī has pointed out that “L’ouvrage d’al-Suyūṭī semble avoir eu une certaine notoriété, comme l’indiqueraient, peut-être, les *ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*.

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1Goldziher (1971, II: 67).
L’auteur n’est pas indiqué, mais on pourrait conjecturer qu’il s’agit d’al-Suyūṭī.”

Later on, his disciple Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Dāwūḍī al-Mālikī (d. 945/1538) wrote in his /tabaqāt al-mufassirūn/, “a remanie et complété les générations d’exégètes. Ses /tabaqāt al-mufassirūn/ sont un répertoire biographique compose de trois cent vingt- cinq folios.”  

In his  
/kashf az-żunūn/, Ḥājjī Khalīfa (d. 1067/1628) also wrote articles on ʿilm al-tafsīr. According to Fudge, Ḥājjī Khalīfa provided a long citation of conflicts and problems regarding tafsīrs, he is mainly concerned with the personal nature of interpretation with their dependency on their own knowledge and custom.  

The works of the two contemporary Sunni and Shiʿi scholars are significant. Muḥammad Hādī Maʿrifat’s  
/at-tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn fī thawbihi al-qashīb/ is from a Shiʿi perspective a chronological, thematic, and critical analysis of the historical development of Muslim tafsīrs. And from a Sunni perspective, Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī’s  
/at-tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn/ also presented a chronological and thematic historical survey of the various schools of Qurʾānic exegesis. Although many texts have been published since,  
/at-tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn/ is still the standard source and the model that all other depends on it.  

Al-Dhahabī divided his entire work chronologically into three parts. The first part is dedicated to analyzing the development of tafsīr during the life of the Prophet and his Companions. The second part is devoted to elaborate the successors’ exegetical efforts. The last part covers the many subsequent centuries of compilation and compendia. Here one finds a long list of famous figures whose names still feature prominently in any

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2 Hafṣī (1977: 5).
3 Ibid.
5 McAuliffe (2003: 313).
history of Qur’anic exegesis: al-Ṭabarî, al-Tha’labî, al-Zamakhsharî, Fakhr al-Dîn al-Râzî. In another word, al-Dhahabî provided a full description of al-mufassîr and his exegetical works, especially in his analysis of the various exegetical schools—among them the Mu’tazila, the Shi’îa, and Sufis, who preferred ta’wil as a major tool to interpret the Qur’ân.7 Nevertheless, with a negative judgment and in scholarly terms, al-Dhahabî’s work cannot be considered objective, for he clearly favors the Sunni school. However, the ṭabaqât al-mufassîrin of al-Suyûṭî, al-Dâwûdî, along with al-Dhahabî’s at-tafsîr wa-l-mufassîrin, became the most fundamental used sources for the history of tafsîr.

In this chapter, I attempt to study the methods of understanding of the Qur’ânic text in Muslim history and provide a critical analysis of the variety of tafsîrs chosen for this thesis. The chapter consists of two sections. In the first one, I will examine the classical understanding of the Qur’ânic text. I will discuss the formative and the classical period of tafsîr and underline the historical development of Muslim exegeses, the impact of the different schools of thought, and the varieties of Qur’ânic tafsîr. Because my aim of this section is to provide a framework to understand Qur’ânic narratives, it is very important for me to introduce some major exegetes from the classical period and kinds of tafsîr to show both their divergences and convergences in Qur’ânic hermeneutics.

Therefore, I devote the second section to discuss the primary sources used in this thesis and why they were chosen. The main sources are selected Qur’ânic commentaries themselves, as well as all of the other exegetical works that, due to the fact that they contain exegetical material related to the subject, were consulted. I will discuss the exegetes and their works by surveying their lives and their works of those commentators. I will highlight a detailed discussion of their centers of learning, and I will devote a

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7 Ibid., (1976, I: 140-476 and II:3-609).
significant amount of space to discussing the studies that have been made on both the commentator and his exegesis, as well as describing and analyzing their exegetical works and the structural and methodological problems that they raise. I will discuss the detailed methodology of the hermeneutical commentary and each commentator’s technique.

1.1 CLASSICAL UNDERSTANDINGS

Historically, specifically during the twentieth century, prominent non-Muslim scholars, such as Wansbrough, Rippin, Berg, McAuliffe and others, who studied the history of early Qur’ānic tafsīr, have disputed that Muslim commentators understood the Qur’ānic text through several different approaches. They became more interested in the full spectrum on the history of the Qur’ānic hermeneutics because the Qur’ān appears to be the heart of the Islamic system and, therefore, must be understood in order to acknowledge the importance of Islam as a world phenomenon.8

Wansbrough, for instance, classified the history of tafsīr into five chronological categories: narrative (haggadic), legal (halakhic), textual (masoretic), rhetorical, and allegorical.9 He argued that these chronological categories reflect the content and mode of a particular tafsīr and reveals a minimum of overlapping and might almost be chronologically plotted in the above sequence.10 Rippin agrees with Wansbrough’s categories, saying that they are, “in true scientific fashion, functional, unified, and revealing.”11 Historically, he admitted that the early tafsīr works were a combination of all five categories.12

8 In this research, I will use all these non-Muslim efforts to support and evaluate my critical study.
10 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
From a terminological point of view, Esack disagrees with Wansbrough’s determination on the use of these terms, when applied to these approaches; he claims that “in addition to the intended point that the Qur’ān is a product of Jewish scriptural tradition, [but it] also has the effect highlighting the Qur’ānic tradition’s supposed emptiness.” Furthermore, in his review of Wansbrough’s Qur’ānic studies, Graham has criticized Wansbrough’s categories. He explains although the identification of similar elements between the Qur’ān and the Jewish scripture create a new lens through which the Qur’ān can be interpreted, this realization does not justify the claim that the Qur’ān was not recognized as a complete text before 200 A.H.

Later on, Berg and McAuliffe both have classified this literature into three categories. Berg accounted the text itself, Prophet Muḥammad, and his successors and students. McAuliffe stated that historically, Qur’ānic exegesis can be segmented into three eras; the formative, classical, and modern. However, it is quite clear that, in order to understand the contemporary Qur’ānic studies, all these non-Muslim efforts have preserved their positions in contemporary Muslim studies and made a great significant contribution to improve the critical study of the Qur’ānic tafsīr history.

1.1.1 The Formative Period of Tafsīr

McAuliffe once opined that the formative period of tafsīr begins from the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad and continues into the early tenth century, as he may be seen as its primary interpreter. Therefore, the first category of the formative period was tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi-l-Qur’ān. It was regarded as the first source for understanding the

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17 Ibid.
text’s meaning. According to Ma’rifat, the primacy of the Qurʾān cannot be challenged because it is the main source of the information needed to interpret its ambiguities.\textsuperscript{18} Also, commentators of the Qurʾān have asserted that the text itself is undeniably true. However, it is the reader that must seek to understand its various possible meanings.\textsuperscript{19} For instance, the majority of the classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī and others have advocated the idea and assumed that the most prominent method to interpret the Qurʾān is the Qurʾān itself. For example, any verses of the Qurʾān conclude at a point; the same point is explained by another verse. Any verse might be briefly mentioned in one place, and then explained in detail in another place.\textsuperscript{20} Al-Dhahabī, however, has identified this type of \textit{tafsīr}:

Any Qurʾānic verse, including, words, phrases and passages, could be explained by another. The general statement (\textit{mujmal}) of the Qurʾānic verse or passage would find clarification in the specific ones (\textit{mubayyin}), the absolute (\textit{mutlaq}) verse could be understood through the restricted (\textit{muqayyad}) ones, and the common (\textit{āmm}) verse could be particularized and became \textit{khāṣṣ}.\textsuperscript{21}

The second category is \textit{tafsīr bi-l-maʾthūr} (\textit{tafsīr} transmitted through prophetic tradition).\textsuperscript{22} Most of the classical commentators, however, considered that the Prophet’s life, words, and actions were a living commentary on the Qurʾān and provide the framework within which \textit{tafsīr} was to be practiced. Al-Ṭabarī, for instance, described this type of \textit{tafsīr} by saying:

The Qurʾān’s true meanings cannot be reached except through interpretation of the Prophet’s sayings for his community of believers. No one can speak about these aspects except through the Prophet’s interpretation, either by means of the

\textsuperscript{18} Ma’rifat (1997, II: 22).
\textsuperscript{19} Shils (2006: 108).
\textsuperscript{20} Ibn Taymiyyah (1983, III: 363).
\textsuperscript{21} Dhahabī (1976, I: 37) and Ma’rifat (1997, II: 22-25).
\textsuperscript{22} In this point, Ayoub has raised an interesting issue; he asserts that \textit{tafsīr bi-l-maʾthūr} “refers primarily to precepts (\textit{aḥkām}) of the Qurʾān.” See Ayoub (1984, I: 22) and Ma’rifat (1997, II: 25).
actual text (ḥadīth) or a proof that the Prophet had established for his community concerning it.\textsuperscript{23}

Therefore, the only source needed for this undertaking is his Sunnah, the only external source that can explain the Qurʾān.\textsuperscript{24} Maʿrifat proposes two conditions in order to accept exegetical works of the Prophet’s companions as a proof of tafsīr: 1) the authenticity of the chain of the ḥadīth that had narrated, and 2) their high level of understandings of the Qurʾānic text. Maʿrifat maintains that when these two conditions are accomplished, the mufassir must use the companion’s tafsīr works to interpret the Qurʾān.\textsuperscript{25} Al-Dhahabī, however, has provided more information about the development of this type of tafsīr and its well-known commentators:

The development of tafsīr bi-l-maʾthūr began as an oral discipline: Transmitting ḥadīths from the Prophet, the different interpretations of his Companions, their Successors, and the Successors’ disciples. The most well-known exegetes among the Companions were ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd (d. 32/652), the prophet’s cousin ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/660), and Ubay ibn Kaʿb (d. 42/662).\textsuperscript{26}

The third category was the tafsīr of the Companions and their disciples, both of which appeared during the spread of Islam and Muslims beyond Arabia. Hence, most traditional exegetes considered that the Prophet Muḥammad is the point of departure of tafsīr, then that of his Companions who transmitted and added to his interpretation, and then that of the successors (tābiʿūn) who, in turn, transmitted and added to the previous exegetical works.\textsuperscript{27} Historically, as scholastic discipline, the generation of the successors (tābiʿūn) appears to be a logical beginning for the science of Qurʾānic exegesis.\textsuperscript{28} Both Watt and Bell indicate that since many non-Arabs converted to Islam, meanings of verses

\textsuperscript{24} Maʿrifat disputes that the Prophet Muḥammad interpreted all the Qurʾān without any exceptions of any verses. Maʿrifat (1997, I: 179).
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.,301.
\textsuperscript{26} Dhahabī (1976, I: 32–36 and 83, 84, 91) and Maʿrifat (1997, I:201-11).
\textsuperscript{27} Zarkashī (1972, II: 156–59) and Suyūṭī (1988, II: 175–77).
\textsuperscript{28} Hamza and Rizvi (2008, I: 2).
that may have been clear to earlier generations now had to be expounded upon, elaborating not only on the meaning, but also the vocabulary and grammatical structure.\textsuperscript{29}

However, the main concern with this type of \textit{tafsīr} is the necessity of Muslims who do not find \textit{tafsīr} in the Qurʾān or in the Sunnah of the Prophet to consult the sayings of the Companions, for they knew best.\textsuperscript{30} The most celebrated exegetes of this category were Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī (d. 44/664), Zayd ibn Thābit (d. 45/665), 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687), and 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr (d. 73/693).\textsuperscript{31}

Nonetheless, the search of new meaning of the Qurʾān was continued for two main reasons: The first is to fully understand every aspect of the text. The second is to draw nearer to God by fulfilling his will and commands.\textsuperscript{32} Thus, the following generations of the \textit{mufassirūn} developed the science of \textit{tafsīr} and took up the interpretations of the Prophet, from the most revered companions and successors, as established by the authoritative chains of transmission to construct a new era of Qurʾānic interpretation named the classical period.

1.1.2 The Classical Schools of \textit{Tafsīr}

Several schools of \textit{tafsīr} also appeared, the most important being that of Mecca, where the majority of its well-known scholars were students of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās and his students, such as Saīd ibn Jubayr (d. 95/714), 'Ikrimah (d. 105/723–24), Abū Šāliḥ Badhām (d. 56/676), and Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 104/722),\textsuperscript{33} all of whom were acclaimed during their lifetimes as authorities on Qurʾān \textit{tafsīrs}. In addition, Baṣra was considered

\textsuperscript{29} Watt and Bell (1970: 168).
\textsuperscript{30} Ibn Kathīr (1932, I: 3).
\textsuperscript{31} Dhahabī (1976, I: 32–36 and 83, 84, 91).
\textsuperscript{32} Lichtenstadter (1974: 7).
\textsuperscript{33} Ayoub (1984, I : 27) and Maʿrifat(1997, I:212-16).
the location of most important early school of *tafsīr* and counted al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) and Qatāda ibn Diʿāmah al-Sadūsī (d. 118/736) as its great jurists and Qurʾānic exegetes. From these centers of learning, Sunni commentators wrote numerous *tafsīrs* in the form of ḥadīth compilations. Also, the Shiʿi exegetes like “Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 117/735) and his son Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), Zurāra b. Aʿyan (d. 150/767) and Ḥāzib ibn ʿAbd Allāh (d. 149/765) are principle authorities in the parallel Twelver and Ismaili Shiʿi works.”

However, during the successor’s time, and especially during their disciples’ period, large numbers of written Qurʾānic commentaries began to appear, the earlier ones being *tafsīr* of ibn ʿAbbās, and Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767) (*at-tafsīr al-kabīr*). Moreover, Muqātil advocated the paraphrastic manner to interpret the Qurʾānic text. Usually this method interprets the Qurʾān based on stories taken from preceding Jewish and Christian traditions (*isrāʿīlyāḏ*), the prophetic biography (*ṣīrah material*), and Near Eastern folklore. Some of these old commentaries have come down to us in independent form; however, the major parts of these early exegetical works were transmitted orally, in a simple ḥadīthic form. Therefore, these formal exegetical works have numerous commonalities and can easily be understood as a genre of Qurʾānic studies.

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36. Dhahabī (1976, I:81). Dhahabī also mentioned that Ibn ʿAbbās’s *tafsīr* entitled: *tanwīr al-miqbās min tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās*. Rippin has disputed this title attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, indicating that “the text, often known as *tanwīr al-miqbās min tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās*, is found listed under ibn ʿAbbās in both Brockelman and Zesgin, and studied as such in Wansbrough’s *Qurʾānic studies*. See Rippin (2001:39). Maʿrifat concludes that *tanwīr al-miqbās* is not ibn ʿAbbās’ *tafsīr* because all narrators of its chain are unknown and ibn Ishaq ibn ʿAbdīhīm al-Samarqandi (d. 237/790) was too young to learn from Muḥammad ibn Marwān al-Suddī al-Ṣaghīr (d.186). See Maʿrifat (1997, I: 295–96).
38. Ibid.
However, since the early years of Islamic scholarship, producing *tafsīrs* influenced the science of ḥadīth so much that it became an independent discipline. Al-Dhahabī asserts that the separation of ḥadīth and its development into an independent science was completed by classical scholars and exegetes such as Ibn Mājah (d. 266/886) and Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 318/938).³⁹

However, both Sunni and Shiʿi exegetes assert that the prophetic ḥadīths originally served to clarify difficulties in the Qurʾān. They also wrote chapters to explain some Qurʾānic verses or show historical context in which the verse was revealed. The discipline examining the events that took place before or during the revelation of a verse is known as the occasions of revelation, *asbāb an-nuzūl.*⁴⁰

Later on, Sunni exegetes have relied on the ḥadīth compilations of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), Muslim (d. 262/875), al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), and others, all of which are regarded as authentic sources and have chapters dealing with *tafsīr* based on prophetic sayings. From different point of view, Shiʿi exegetes also have relied mainly on their own ḥadīth collections to explain the Qurʾān. According to Kamali,

> The Shiʿi understanding of ḥadīth also differs to that of their Sunni counterparts in that the Shiʿa include the sayings of their recognized twelve Imāms in the general body of ḥadīth. Two of these Imāms who feature most prominently in this connection are the fifth and the sixth Imāms, Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq.⁴¹

Several chapters are preserved in the best known Shiʿi ḥadīth collections, such as al-Kulaynī’s *al-kāfī,* al-Ṭūsī’s *at-tahdhib,* and Ibn Bābawayh’s *mā lā yahḍuruhu al-faqīh.*⁴²

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³⁹ Dhahabī (1976, I: 44).
⁴⁰ Later on, “the standard work on this subject is taken to be that of al-Wāḥidī (d. 1075), of which there are no printed editions. This work is complemented by of the later Qurʾānic scholar al-Suyūṭī (d. 911), entitled *hubāb an-nuqūl fī asbāb an-nuzūl,* which has also been printed.” See Watt and Bell (1970: 167).
Moreover, to resolve more fully the problems associated with the beginning and early development of Qurʾānic exegesis, non-Muslim scholars assumed that additional research on Qurʾānic exegetical manuscripts would be needed in order to deal with the problematic of the relation between the oral and written forms of ḥadīth in the early days of Islam. They assert that the issue of authenticity applies equally to the ṭafsīr and so have been preferred the actual text of the ḥadīth and its historical context over isnād. Rippin analyzed Sezgin’s aim was to validate the system of isnād by finding documents that correlated with oral transmissions. Berg, with particular concentration on isnād analysis, questions whether it is even possible to verify the authenticity of such exegetical aḥādīth. In addition, Abbott stressed this point with some detail:

In addition, the steps of the transmission of the ḥadīth were carefully examined. Although there was a considerable increase in the ḥadīth of the Prophet and the Companions in the second and thirds centuries of Islam, it was not in number of ḥadīth but in the lines of transmission.

Muslim scholars, however, have seen this matter in a totally different light. The twelfth century was a critical period, for the issue of the prophetic ḥadīths authenticity and authority in ṭafsīr had become so crucial. It has been noted that the classical exegetes’ dependence upon transmitted authority raises the question of the ḥadīths’ authenticity and authority. In this context, ‘Aisha Musa mentions that “the issue of authority has still received far less attention in ḥadīth studies than the issue of authenticity.” She further adds that any criticism of the ḥadīth’s authenticity had to

43 Musa (2008: 7).
46 Abbott (1967: 2).
begin with an examination of isnād itself in its milieu: isnād, especially the reliability of human transmitters, their relations to each other and to their teachers and students.48

In contrast, some classical exegetes opined that examining the prophetic ḥadīth is not so important in some areas, especially in that of tafsīr. The best-known exegetes who advocated this opinion are al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) in his exegetical work, Jāmiʿ al-bayān and such traditionalist tafsīr as al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) in his work, ad-durr al-manthūr fī at-tafsīr bi-l-maʾthūr. According to them, it was crucial to note that at that time an examination of the supporting exegetical ḥadīth concerning the Qurʾānic tafsīr was not a scholarly priority. But not all of them agreed with this opinion. In fact, several classical exegetes maintained that authenticating such ḥadīth was of prime importance, as they had implications on legal and theological issues.49 Therefore, Brinner concludes that Sunni and Shiʿi exegetes, however, have always stated that the use of ḥadīth in any tafsīr is centered not on the reliability and authenticity of narrators but rather on the reliability and authenticity of the collectors of the relevant sources of ḥadīth,50 and Fudge emphasizes that, because much of the ground work of exegetical traditions had already been documented and established, there was little need to reinvent the proverbial wheel.51 With an exception, as Kamali stated, that the Shiʿi side was less strict in this matter that the Sunni one. He writes:

Shiʿi scholars have expressed reservations about the existence of questionable material in their ḥadīth collections as well as about the reliability of ḥadīths in religious matters, they have, on the whole, maintained that obligatory duties of Islam and its injunctions concerning faith and ʿibādah need to be proven as a

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
51 Fudge (2003: 10).
matter of certainty either by authority of the Qurʾān or the authentic Sunnah of the Prophet.  

Another type of *tafsīr* focused primarily on the linguistic elements of the Qurʾān—lexicography, grammar, etymology, eloquence, and syntax, also appeared in the classical period. Philology had developed enough to become a fundamental Islamic discipline, and the study of Arabic grammar, rhetoric, and lexicography, variant readings of the Qurʾān (*qirāʾāt*), as well as pre-Islamic poetry and its interpretation, reached its highest level. Also, philology created a new mode of discourse in Muslim literature to underline Qurʾānic exegesis. Of course, the task of the *mufassir* in this new discipline became more difficult, since many of the classical-era Qurʾānic interpretations were based on existing theology rather than language. Gilliot further describes the period of this *tafsīr* type as “an intermediary and decisive stage, which represented the introduction of grammar and the linguistic sciences,” in science of interpretation (*ʿulūm at-tafsīr*). The best known exegetes in this field are al-Farrāʾ’s (d. 207/822) *maʿānī al-Qurʾān* and Abū ʿUbayda’s (d. 210/824) *majāz al-Qurʾān*.

However, the wide acceptance of these *tafsīr* categories has been debated in theological and philosophical disputations that characterized a new mode of *tafsīr* called *tafsīr* based on opinion (*tafsīr bi-l-raʾy*). However, this mode was opposed by many classical scholars. Rahman states:

Whereas there is some evidence that in the earliest generation after the prophet people were shy of, and even opposed to, any interpretation of the Qurʾān, this attitude soon gave way to all books and old ideas of the new converts . . . such interpretations, which probably sometimes diverged markedly from the obvious

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meaning of the text and had an arbitrary character, were severely attacked as interpretation of arbitrary opinion (tafsīr bi-l-ra’y).\textsuperscript{56}

Several factors, most of which impacted the study of the Qurʾān and the development of its exegesis, led to the appearance of difference and variety in tafsīrs. Among them are the following: 1) the social, political, economic, and cultural changes in Muslim society; 2) the influence of the translation movement,\textsuperscript{57} which led to the appearance of new tools to understand the Qurʾān; 3) the rise of different schools of thought and the formation of sects, each one having its own legal rights, mystical viewpoint, and political and theological perspectives; 4) the founding of the Islamic jurisprudential schools of thought; and 5) the community’s curiosity about religion encouraged the rise of questions that could not be answered solely by faith. As they became more interested in knowing, both rationally and in detail, about some fundamental issues related to the conception Qurʾān, the various exegeses began to reflect their authors’ religious affiliation and interests. Many Muslim scholars—among them grammarians, jurists, mystics, philosophers, and theologians—wrote exegeses to represent their own perspectives.

The earliest and most influential school of Muslim theology and philosophy was that of the Muʿtazilī school, or as they called themselves, \textit{ahl al-ʿadl wa-l-tawḥīd} (People of Justice and Divine Oneness).\textsuperscript{58} Muʿtazilī theology, therefore, was based on five principles (\textit{al-uṣūl al-khamsa}): God’s Oneness (tawḥīd), justice (al-ʿadl), promise and threat (al-ʿwa’d wa al-ʿwaʿīd), the status of the sinner (al-manzila bayn al-manzilatayn),

\textsuperscript{56}Rahman (1966: 40).
\textsuperscript{58}Ayoub (1984, I: 33). Recently, a group of scholars have produced in a multi-volume works entitled: \textit{mawsīʿat tafsīr al-Muʿtazila}, which includes many reconstructed texts including those of Abū Muslim al-Aṣfahānī and other Muʿtazilī exegetes. This work was edited by Khıdır Muḥammad Nabhā and Ruḍwān al-Sayyed and published in Beirut by Dār al-kutub al-ʾilmīyyah (2009).
and the commending the good and forbidding the evil (al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa an-nahyi 'an l-munkar).

Muʿtazilī exegetes, however, insisted on strict rationally in human thought as well as divine action. In order to interpret the Qurʾān, Muʿtazilī exegetes have subjected the Qurʾānic text to all of their doctrinal positions and theological themes, such as “the doctrine of the unity and justness of God, the rejection of any anthropomorphic concepts, the recognition of the intellect as the source of understanding of faith, and the advancement of freedom of will. In this connection belongs also the rejection of unnatural, superstitious concepts.”

Among the well-known Muʿtazilī exegetes of that period were Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāī (d. 303/915), and al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī’s (d. 415/1025) al-mughnī fī abwāb at-tawḥīd wa l-ʿadl. Those on the other side of Sunni dialectical thought developed their own style of Qurʾānic exegesis to oppose the sectarian groups in general, particularly the Muʿtazilī and their views on the Qurʾān. Many exegetical works began to represent their authors’ doctrinal choices and reject Muʿtazilī interpretations. One of them has much of the Māturīdī exegetical material preserved by Abū Maṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) in his major Qurʾānic exegesis taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān or taʾwīlāt ahl as-sunnah.

Philosophical tafsīrs were also well treated by classical exegetes. In contrast to traditional theologians and rhetoricians, Muslim philosophers, who considered themselves to be the only people capable of correct reasoning and rational choice, also

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60 Ibid.
62 Daniel Gimaret has provided an extensive work on Muʿtazilī tafsīr, Le tafsīr d’Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāī, which has not been preserved, but important explanatory material from it has been recently reconstructed from quotations found in later works: une Lecture Muʿtazilite du Coran.
63 Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval.”
favored *ta’wil*. Some of them “maintained that in the unearthing of the deeper layer of
textual meanings, the cultivation of a proper state of hermeneutical preparedness, which
predisposes one to recover the truth, hidden to the uninitiated, is necessary.”

Philosophical exegetes insisted on using philosophical thought and worldviews from all
possible areas to interpret the Qurʾān. Ayoub points out that philosophical *tafsīr*

...often reads more into the Qurʾān than the literal sense seems to bear. It deduced
every possible sense or interpretation of the text. Its vast approaches were at
once theological, metaphysical, mystical, and even popular. Its analytical
approach earned the designation ‘philosophical works’ in the broad sense of the
word. 

However, the most of the philosophical *tafsīrs* could be found in the exegetical
works of the Muʿtazīlī, Shiʿī, and the Sufī brotherhoods. The earliest and well-known
exegete of the philosophical *tafsīr* movement was Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn
Ṣīnā (d.428/1037). His philosophical exegesis covers the following Qurʾānic verses 11:41,

Between the third and the fourth Islamic centuries, Shiʿī *tafsīrs* reached their fully
developed form, having developed in the same circumstances as the general Sunni *tafsīrs*.
The main point of contention between the Sunni and Shiʿī *tafsīrs* is that Shiʿī exegeses
have a more allegorical reading and sometimes finds both a more complicated and more
deeper meaning in the Qurʾānic passage. And for this reason, many non-Muslim and
even Muslim scholars consider Shiʿī *tafsīrs* to be more important and interesting. On the
other hand, some people consider Shiʿī *tafsīr* a sectarian interpretation due to their

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64 Afsaruddin (2001: 317).
66 Dhahabī (1976, II: 424). Also, Ḥasan ʿĀṣī has edited ibn Ṣīnā’s philosophical *tafsīr* works in an article
entitled: *At-tafsīr al-Qurʾānī wa l-lughā as-sūfīyya fī falsafat ibn Ṣīnā*. See ʿĀṣī (1983:84-125). Also, Daniel de
Smet and Meryam Sebti are doing a new edition and study of this philosophical *tafsīr*, which will be
published in French next year probably by Vrin.
Imāms’ historical influence. One of its main features is that “the Qurʾān must always be shown to have relevance or applicability to some persons and situations.” The importance of the Imām’s presence is so crucial in Shiʿi belief that in his absence, the Qurʾān remained silent, and interpreters can easily misunderstand and distort it as they are not rightly guided. Most of their *tafsīrs* attempt to validate the Shiʿi theological stances on the Imamate by reserving solely for them the position of interpreters, as they were guided by God, and their minds flourished with divinely inspired knowledge. Generally, the Imāms are seen as the only legitimate authorities on the Qurʾān after the Prophet. However, this powerful belief in the Imāms’ spiritual function led the majority of the Shiʿi to conclude that only those who had this divine power inspired are interpreters and in their midst knew exactly what God’s will was and were, thus, destined to achieve salvation on judgment day.

Historically, the earliest Shiʿi *tafsīr* school was that of the Zaydīs, represented by the great exegete Abū al-Jarūd (d. 140), whose *tafsīr* is considered one of the earliest Zaydī exegesis. In his *tafsīr*, a large part of his exegesis has been preserved in form of quotations in the *tafsīr* of ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 319/939), one of the greatest Shiʿi exegetes. His work has preserved its significance until the present time. Therefore, during the Shiʿi golden age, specifically during the Buwayhīd period, Qurʾānic exegesis was divided in two specific schools: the pre-Buwayhīd school of exegesis and the post-Buwayhīd school (334–447).

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70 Ibid.
74 Ibid., 9–12.
At this time, Qur’ānic exegetes were influenced by new theological, philosophical, and political developments. The main principle of the pre-Buwayhīd school of exegesis is presented by its large exegetical Qur’ānic works, most of which are based on “ḥadīths of the Shi‘i tradition, selective concern with the text of the Qurʾān, an extreme anti-Sunni tendency and hostile attitude to the Companions of the Prophet and a scant interest in theological themes or specific issues bearing on the institution of the Imāmah.” They commented on the Qur’an. Their commentaries’ general methods consisted of textual and allegorical interpretations that tried to reconcile Qur’ānic texts and existing Shi‘i theology in order to find basic Shi‘i concepts in the Qur’ānic text. Most of the first period’s commentaries were written around the third or fourth Islamic centuries approximately the time between the “Minor Occultation (260 H or 264 H) and the Major Occultation (329 H) of the Twelfth Imām.” The post-Buwayhīd period, however, was considered to be a prolongation of the pre-Buwayhīd period in Qur’ānic exegesis.

In order to understand the Qurʾān’s real meaning and theoretical levels, the majority of Ismaili commentators believed that the Qurʾānic text, as God’s divine word, has two dimensions: ẓāhir, and bāṭin. The ẓāhir (the exoteric or outer dimension), is concerned with morality, ethics, law, etc. The bāṭin (inner dimension), is concerned with metaphysics, divine realities, and transcendental truths. In this context, Poonawala points out that

Ismailis make a fundamental distinction between aspects of religion, the ẓāhir (exterior) and the bāṭin (interior). The former aspect consists of exterior aspects, such as knowing the apparent meaning of the Qurʾān and performing the obligatory acts as laid down in the sharī‘a, the religious law. The latter aspect is

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75 Ibid., 73.
76 Ibid., 86.
77 Ibid., 124.
comprised of knowing the hidden, inner, true meaning of the Qurʾān and the sharīʿa. They further maintain that it is the nāṭiq (lawgiver-prophet) who receives revelation (tanzīl) and promulgates the sharīʿah, while it is his associate and deputy, the wasī (plenipotentiary), who expounds the bāṭin through the science of taʾwil. The zāhir therefore, varies from prophet to prophet in accordance with each epoch, whereas the bāṭin remains unchanged and is universally valid. Despite this twofold division of religion into exoteric and esoteric aspects, Ismailis stress that both are not only complementary to each other, but that they are also intertwined with each other like body and soul. One without the other, therefore, cannot exist.\textsuperscript{79}

These fundamental distinctions between the exterior and the interior—and between the speaking Qurʾān (al-Qurʾān an-nāṭiq) and the book itself sometimes called the silent Qurʾān (al-Qurʾān as-ṣāmit)—have been reflected in their Qurʾānic exegeses.\textsuperscript{80} It is also true, according to them that although an aspect of the Qurʾān can be accessed by everyone, there are hidden meanings that are only apparent to the Imāms, who convey it to their disciples.\textsuperscript{81} Among the works of well-known Shiʿi exegetes of this period were Muḥammad b. Ḥasan b. ʿAlī Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭūsī’s (d. 462/1067) at-tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān and Abū-l-Futūḥ al-Rāzī’s (d. 525/1131) rawḥ al-jinān wa-rūḥ al-janān.\textsuperscript{82}

The majority of the commentators of the Qurʾān have considered that taʾwil was highly advocated in Sufi hermeneutics. Its richness, however, attained the highest level in Muslim history during the classical period, not only because of the influences of numerous political and sectarian movements, but also because of the different understandings and views of Muslim scholars and practitioners of the text. Maʿrifat states:

In accordance to Sufi practical and theoretical classifications, Sufi tafsīr can conveniently be sorted into two categories: theoretical and mystical. Whereas

\textsuperscript{79} Poonawala (1988: 199).
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} Maʿrifat (1997, II: 384 and 390).
practical Sufi exegesis is based on asceticism, renunciation, self-denial, and annihilation, theoretical Sufi *tafsīr* is predicated on research and study.\(^{83}\)

Therefore, Sufi exegesis is an important genre of *tafsīr* in Islamic thought and piety. Classical Sufi exegetes devoted themselves to interpreting the Qurʾān based on their mystical assumptions. The fundamental characteristics in Sufi *tafsīrs* appear in the importance of the nature of the sources of knowledge and the nature of the self-seeking this knowledge. Sufi commentaries, as regards term and content, are different from other types of Qurʾānic exegesis, for most of them reflect mystical ideas and concepts in the Qurʾān.

Since the early days of Islamic mysticism, Sufi commentators have approached the Qurʾān through “allegorical” and “metaphorical” explanations.\(^{84}\) They assert that the understanding of the hidden literal meaning of its text could not be reached until its divine words have been understood. Accordingly, in their interpretative methodologies, Sufi exegetes focus on the Qurʾānic text’s philological meaning to discover its inner meanings. Therefore, the use of mystical language clearly indicates the development of a specific mystical terminology in Sufi *tafsīrs*. Different studies, however, have shown that such language and discourse may appear to be metaphorical even though it actually describes one’s experience in this intermediate reality. Or it may be truly metaphorical, since metaphor and allegorical language was better suited and more accessible than dense philosophy.\(^{85}\) Given that the issue of mystical language is strongly connected with the nature and objective of Sufi *tafsīrs*, Sufi commentators often use mystical language in

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\(^{83}\) Ibid., 525-27.

\(^{84}\) In Arabic literature, metaphor means the “figurative language (*majāz*) as opposed to literal or true expression (*haqiqā*). Therefore, metaphor, like its close associate, simile (*tashbīh, tamthīl*), refers to joining or linking two or more concepts for purposes of comparison or semantic equation.” See Heath, “Metaphor,” (2009). Also, allegory is the expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions of truths or generalizations about human existence; also; an instance (as in a story or painting) of such expression. See “Mariam-Webster online Dictionary.”

\(^{85}\) Heath, “Metaphor,”
symbolic, figurative, and anthropomorphic ways to elucidate the Qurʾān. In this context, Sands writes:

Sufis displayed literally characteristics that not often found in work of tafsīr, creating their own metaphors, wordplay, narratives, and poetry as an integral part of the exegesis, and it is this use of language and style as much specific Sufi doctrines and beliefs that gives Sufi commentary its distinctive character.\footnote{Sands (2006: 67–8).}

In addition to the use of the allegorical and metaphorical interpretations of the language, the development of the mystical vision of the Qurʾānic tafsīr was directly linked with the Sufi idea of bāṭin knowledge (ʿilm al-bāṭin).\footnote{According to Bowering, some scholars and exegetes have claimed that the notion of bāṭin “can be traced back to the refined study of the soul in the circle of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) through the teachings of his mystic disciple ʿAbd ʿl-Wāḥid b. Zayd (d. 150/767).” See Bowering (2003: 347).} Therefore, ʿilm al-bāṭin, as the unlimited level of meaning existed in the Qurʾānic text itself, had its complement in the spiritual knowledge, in which the Sufis acquired through introspection into the inner emotions stirring their souls.\footnote{Ibid.} However, this notion of inner knowledge (ʿilm al-bāṭin) is considered, according to Böwering, as

a divine gift granted to individual Sufis after intense ascetic effort and psychic discipline [on their part]. Possessed by [the] elite of mystics who were granted the inner sight of and insight (baṣīrahā) into the realities, hidden with their souls, ʿilm al-bāṭin was acquired into principal ways: intuition and extrasensory perception.\footnote{Ibid.}

In their mystical tafsīr works, Sufi exegetes have employed various methods of interpretation in order to attain bāṭin and ẓāhir knowledge. They generally distinguished between the exoteric (ẓāhir) and esoteric (bāṭin) levels of meaning. This distinction has its basis in the Qurʾān\footnote{Sufis have assumed that 6:120, 6:151, 7:33, 31:20, and 57:3 indicate the notion of ẓāhir and bāṭin in the Qurʾān.} and also in the prophetic ḥadīth. As for the Qurʾān, the Sufis generally agree that this is not a specific analysis of words and verses but a
hermeneutical approach to the Qur'ān in general. As for the prophetic tradition, one ḥadīth, narrated by ibn Masʿūd and often cited in the Sufi writings, mentions the following terms: ẓahr, baṭn, and muṭṭala. As a result, most Sufi exegetes have disputed the meaning of muṭṭala in order to provide a mystical interpretation of it. Al-Tustarī, for instance, understands muṭṭala as “the heart’s key-hole,” while Ruzbihān assumes that it indicates “people who have been attributed by the unveiling (kashf), eye witnessing (ʿiyān), and explanation (bayān) to their hearts (qulūb), spirits (arwāḥ), intellects (ʿuqūl) and innermost secrets (asrār).” Nisābūrī further explains that muṭṭala is “that destination where, when one arrives at it, one comes to understand essences in their essence.” In addition, al-Kāshānī in his tafsīr, interpreted that “muṭṭala is a place to which one rises up from the limit and beholds the witnessing of the all-knowing.” Nevertheless, all these interpretations come in the context of showing that ẓāhir is the external sense of the Qurʾān, bāṭin is the inner sense, and muṭṭala is the gnostic’s lookout point.

The Sufis’ concept of an esoteric understanding of the Qurʾān is also linked to its hidden meaning (istinbāṭ), a level of understanding that distinguishes Sufi exegetes from other Muslim scholars. Al-Sulamī wrote that the Sufi commentator has gained the ability to practice istinbāṭ in order to indicate the determination of his piety, inwardly and outwardly, and the perfection of his knowledge (marifah), which represents the highest

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92 Sufi exegetes often mention the ḥadīth narrated by ibn Masʿūd: “The messenger of God said: the Qurʾān was sent down in seven aḥruf. Each ḥarṭ has a back (ẓahr) and belly (baṭn). Each ḥarṭ has a border (ḥadd) and each border has a lookout point (muṭṭala).” See Ibn Ḥibbān (1984, I: 243) and Suyūṭī (1988, II:196).
93 Tustarī (1911:16).
95 Nisābūrī (1996, I: 26).
96 Kāshānī (1968, I: 4).
level of faith.\textsuperscript{97} In addition to istinbāṭ, which became the focal point of Sufi hermeneutical methods, the presence of īlm al-īshārah, which indicates the hidden meaning in a given Qurʾānic passage by its subtle allusion (īshārah), led the Sufis to feel obligated to extract it by means of istinbāṭ.\textsuperscript{98} Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, who plumbed the depths of the method of understanding (ṭarīq al-fahm) and of allusion (ṭarīq al-īshārah), explains that most Sufi exegetes acted in this manner due to the knowledge that God has granted them. He concludes that Sufis are called the people of understanding (ahl al-fahm), and among them the actualized (muḥaqqiqūn) have conformed to the Qurʾān and the practice of the Prophet’s Sunnah, externally (ẓāhir) and internally (bāṭin). He writes:

The close link between one’s ability to practice istinbāṭ and one’s strict compliance with the precepts of the divine law are available only to those who act in accord with the book of God, outwardly and inwardly, and follow the messenger of God, outwardly and inwardly. Therefore, God makes them heirs to the knowledge of subtle allusion (īlm al-īshārah) and unveils to the hearts of his elect servants carefully guarded meanings (maʿānī madkhūrah), spiritual subtleties (laṭāʾif) and well-kept secrets.\textsuperscript{99}

On the level of personal experience, Sufi exegetes have used 10:62 to identify themselves as God’s elect friends (awliyāʾ). In his laṭāʾif al-īshārāt, al-Qushayrī explains:

The awliyāʾ came to speak according to their levels of achievements and capabilities, and God inspired in them things by which He has honored them. So, they now speak on behalf of Him, inform about the subtle truths that He has instructed to them, and point to Him . . . this idea has been stated clearly to show that God has honored the elect (asfiyāʾ) among His servants by granting them the understanding of His subtle secrets (laṭāʾif asrārīhi) and His lights, so that they can see the elusive allusions and hidden meaning contained in the Qurʾān.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{97} Sulamī (2001, I: 157).
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{99}Sarrāj (1963: 105).
\textsuperscript{100} Qushayrī (1972, I: 53). Martin Nguyen has written his PhD dissertation, entitled “The Confluence and Construction of Traditions: Al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) and the Interpretation of God’s Word.”(Harvard University: 2009). He studied the connection between the Qurʾānic tafsīr, theology, and mysticism in al-Qushayrī’s work, as a great Sufi exegete of the classical Islam.
Bowering has provided a detailed explanation concerning the exegetical methodology of the most classical Sufi exegetes and their particularities. He discusses the different issues that predominate in the interpretation of the Qur‘ānic content in Sufi *tafsīr*—such as allusion, figurative expressions or metaphors, symbols, and allegories that manifest a specific exegetical method to them. He writes:

> Each verse of the Qur‘ānic phrase was understood as opening vistas to the infinite variety of divine meanings embedded in the unfathomable depth of the Qur‘ān; it became a characteristic feature of the Sufi exegetical approach to concentrate upon keynotes within selected passages of the Qur‘ān. These keynotes, frequently short phrases from a particular verse, are chosen as the focal point of the commentary. Whether taken up in isolation from their contextual environment or in connection with it, these keynotes awaken associations in the mind of the interpreter that spring from the mystical matrix of the Sufi world of ideas. The process of the spiritual encounter between the Qur‘ānic keynotes and the mystical associations achieves level of synthesis which makes it impossible to discern where ‘exegesis’ ends and ‘eigesis’ begins, and where the discovery of the interpreter’s own existence disappears in the revelation of the divine word were required to reflect the various shades and facets of meaning that cannot be captured in one single definitive expression.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, all of these mystical visions became the focal point of their exegeses. Their hermeneutical works, however, indicate that their understanding and attitudes do not differ from their understanding of other sciences. The well-known Sufi exegetical works of the classical era were al-Tustarī Sahl ibn ‘Abd Allāh’s (d. 283) *tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-‘āzīm* and al-Sulamī Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn’s (d. 412/1021) *ḥaqā‘iq at-tafsīr*.¹⁰²

Over the course of Muslim history, the Khariji *tafsīrs* have been considered the most radical. For political, social, and religious reasons, the role of the Qur‘ān in the Khariji dissention is clear in their hermeneutical works. In addition to their unclear *ta‘wil* of the Qur‘ān due to the nomadic nature of their social milieu, their goal is reflected in

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¹⁰² Dhahabī (1976, II: 380 and 384) and Ma‘rifat (1997, II:540 and 543).
the slogan َلَا HideInInspector{h}ُكَمَٰا َيِلَدتَا لِلْلَّهِ, which is derived from the Qur’ān.\textsuperscript{103} In studying a Khariji exegesis, it is quite clear that their main object is to turn the Qur’ān into the only source of guidance. Also, their rejection of the fundamental sources of the Sunnis and other Muslim dogmatic sects “indicates that when implementing the Qur’ān, the Kharijis relied on their own interpretation of the scripture, which is, indeed [the reason why] that most available traditions attack the Khariji for their arbitrary \textit{ta’wil}.”\textsuperscript{104}

However, the majority of Muslim scholars have condemned the Kharijis’ manipulation of the Qur’ān, accusing them of misunderstanding the Qur’ānic message. Also, they claimed that the Kharijis tried, in an ineffective way, to find some interpretations and ideas in the Qur’ānic text that supported their ideological perspective. Politically, the “militant stance comes to the fore in the Khariji interpretation of the Qur’ānic concept of faith.”\textsuperscript{105} As a result, the majority of their Qur’ānic exegeses were influenced by their theological views on faith, which were highly politicized, obsessed with legitimacy and authenticity of authority, and its implications on the discourse on divine predestination/human free will.\textsuperscript{106} The well-known Ibāḍite exegetical works was \textit{tafsīr kitāb Allāh al-ʿazīz} of Hūd ibn Muḥakkim al-Hawwārī (d. 280 or 290/893 or 902).\textsuperscript{107}

In sum, since the early days of Muslim history, the dynamism of the Qur’ānic exegesis has never been stopped. However, this indicates the ongoing dialectical relationship between the Qur’ānic text and its readers is continuous and shows, as McAuliffe points out, that “the pull of the text persists and the desire for the intellectual

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{103} See the verse 6:58.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{104} Rubin (1999: 154).}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{105} Knysh (2006: 220).}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 221.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{107} Dhahabī (1976, II: 315).}
\end{footnotes}
engagement with the divine word remains irresistible.”

Therefore, the accumulated consequences of centuries of exegetical activity led to the variety of *tafsīr* works and its different approaches became more diverse and rich.

However, commentators of the Qur‘ān had showed remarkable preference to the exegesis based on tradition of the Prophet (*at-tafsīr bi-l-ma’thūr*), which continued to predominate in the following centuries. Later on, the contribution of the grammar, linguistics, and philology were important sciences in the history of Qur‘ānic *tafsīr*. Their integration in the science of the Qur‘ānic interpretation provided special theories about the Qur‘ānic language. The exegetical efforts made by theologians and exegetes, however, were not limited the Qur‘ānic text and to the subject to grammar and ḥadīth of the Prophet but they found ways to counterbalance the *tafsīr* works with other sciences, such as dialectic theology (*kalām*) Shi‘i, Sunni, and Ṣufi allegorical and metaphorical hermeneutics.

1.2 DISCUSSION OF THE LITERATURE: THE EXEGETES AND THEIR WORKS

The geographical movement of classical exegetes does not lend itself to presenting a discipline according to regional criteria. In addition, the notion of Central Asia and Middle East may seem too vague. However, I chose Khurasanian and Iranian scholars because the first seven commentaries—those of al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Tha’labī, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Rāzī, Ruzbihān al-Baqlī, and Nisābūrī—originated from Merv, Rayy, Yazd, and Balkh, all of which were known centers of intellectual exchange between Central Asia and the Middle East. The number of scholars in this region, both famous and not-so-famous, was very large. In addition, Khurāsān, particularly the city of Nishapur, was a breeding ground.

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ground for Qur’ānic exegetes. Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, the eighth member of this group, came from a North African city known for its many Muslim scholars active in Islamic studies and theology. These eight Arabic-language commentaries featured in my dissertation represent the different Islamic schools of thought in Muslim history and their divergent spectrums of theological orientation—such as Shi‘i, Sunni, Mu‘tazilī, Sufi, and Khariji. Therefore, establishing a criterion for the best *tafsīr* is hardly possible.

I chose these commentaries as primary sources to help enhance the existing literature on comparative studies about Qur’ānic hermeneutics with reference to narratives because:

1) From different perspectives, their authors used multiple sources of knowledge to interpret Qur’ānic narratives and provided a full coverage of their hermeneutical efforts. As a result, their works have remained the most commonly used *tafsīrs* in this domain.

2) These selected commentaries and their authors remained part of a continuing dialogue between the Qur’ānic text and its readers, presented different hermeneutical voices and styles of *tafsīr*, and were famous in their centers of learning.

3) These selected commentaries provided essential information about their authors, identified details about the historical and socio-political context in which they wrote, and indicated a clear picture of their religio-political affiliations.  

4) These exegetes, who were popular among certain Islamic subgroups, covered almost all Qur’ānic narratives. For example, al-Ṭabarī and al-Tha‘labī’s *tafsīrs*

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were considered the most widely used and were generally popular among most of the people familiar with traditional exegesis and those who preferred more literal translations based only upon the narrations of early Muslims. Al-Rāzī was very popular among Muslims interested in Ashʿarī thought and philosophical tafsīrs and those who were looking for a more rational and liberal approach toward Qurʾānic narratives. Al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ṭabrisī were famous among people who identified with Muʿtazilī and Shiʿī theology. Ruzbihān and Nisābūrī were known among those interested in mysticism and Sufi tafsīr. Hūd Ibn Muḥakkim was popular in their subgroups, and his works were used mainly in the field of sectarian tafsīr.

I have selected specific methodological principles to examine and discuss how these exegetical efforts differ. Given my interests, I will focus on the classical exegetes whose lives and commentaries are studied in this chapter. Chronological considerations have been taken into account in order to provide the full spectrum of the exegetical analysis carried out during the classical eras that formed Islamic thought. I shall begin with Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, who represents the earliest exegete of this corpus.

### 1.2.1 Hūd Ibn Muḥakkim al-Hawwārī (d. 280 or 290/893 or 902)

The first tafsīr of this exegetical corpus is Hūd ibn Muḥakkim al-Hawwārī’s (d. 280 or 290) Khariji and specifically Ibāḍī exegesis, *tafsīr kitāb Allāh al-ʿazīz*. Sharīfī, who provides detailed information about ibn Muḥakkim’s biography in the introduction of his [ibn Muḥakkim’s] tafsīr, mentions:

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110 Recently, the Algerian Ibāḍī Belḥāj ibn Saʿīd Sharīfī edited ibn Muḥakkim’s *tafsīr kitāb Allāh al-ʿazīz* in four volumes.
Ibn Muḥakkim was an Algerian Berber originally from the Hawwārā tribe of ḫrīqiyyah who were Kharijī and supported the Ibāḍī doctrine. In his time, the general cultural atmosphere was influenced by the Ibāḍīs’ major learning centers. Also, the relationship between religion and political structure was supposedly far more straightforward in North Africa.\textsuperscript{111}

However, Bierschenk concludes that the principles and rules of social conduct found in Ibāḍīte society are directly inspired by religious doctrine.\textsuperscript{112} Several recent non-Muslim studies, however, claim that Ibāḍism played a minor role in the development of Ibāḍī thought, even though this thought was preserved both in theory and in practice. After the founding of Tahert, the Imamate’s capital, this city gradually became a major center for propagating Ibāḍī teachings.\textsuperscript{113} The Imāms taught and wrote, and several centers and schools were established to teach the school’s doctrine. Many great Ibāḍī scholars emerged in Jabal Nufusah, Jerba Island, and Central North Africa (i.e., Southern Tunisia and Algeria) and participated a great deal in Ibāḍī studies.\textsuperscript{114} Most of their important works are still extant and deserve special academic attention. But, only in 1885, did Motylinski (1854–1907) provide, according to a list provided by Abū al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Barradī (d. 810), a summary of the Khariji tafsīr written by Hūd.\textsuperscript{115} During his stay in Mzab, Schacht studied a major part of Hūd ibn Muḥakkim’s tafsīr, which was an incomplete manuscript copy of his commentary.\textsuperscript{116} Recently, Gilliot states that

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mais c’est seulement à Monsieur le Professeur Josef van Ess que l’on doit des informations plus précisés sur cet ouvrage, suite a un séjour effectue au Mzab en mars 1974, au cours duquel il put en consulter une partie.\textsuperscript{117}
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\textsuperscript{111} Ibn Muḥakkim (2002, I: 8–9).
\textsuperscript{112} Bierschenk (1988: 108).
\textsuperscript{113} Gilliot (1997: 180).
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Motylinski (1885: 23).
\textsuperscript{116} Schacht (1956: 379) and Gilliot (1996:180).
\textsuperscript{117} Gilliot (1997:181). Also, Gilliot himself authored an extensive study on Ibn Muḥakkim’s exegetical works entitled: “Le Commentaire Qur’ānic du Hūd ibn Muḥakkim.”
However, the *tafsīr kitāb Allāh al-ʿażīz* is considered one of the oldest Kharījī commentaries, which still related to the Ibadīs of the Awres (Algeria), and for this reason, it is very important. It might even be the earliest Qur’ānic commentary ever written. In fact, it actually forms a kind of abridgment of the commentary of Yaḥyā b. Sallām al-Baṣrī, who lived for a period in Kairouan (Tunisia). In addition, the most important published fragments from Yaḥyā ibn Sallām’s commentary indicate that this book is a source of information about the type of exegesis practiced in Baṣra between the second and third Islamic centuries, if not sooner, particularly the exegesis by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and the group that grew around him. These factors, however, reflected the major point of Baṣra’s influence on the Ibadītes of North Africa where the community preserved the same number of legal points.

Any study of Ibn Muḥakkim’s hermeneutical method reveals that he borrowed many of the exegetical traditions contained therein from Ibn Sallām, especially some explanations given by ibn ’Abbās, al-Kalbī, and Mujāhid. Given this reality, Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, like many commentators who mostly relied on opinions of their predecessors and the ḥadīth tradition, rarely offered his own position, and his linguistic style was simple and condensed.

In addition, a large amount of exegetical material, especially that taken from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, is found in this work. Gilliot indicates that Ibn Muḥakkim’s source of *tafsīr* was al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd al-Baṣrī (d. 142/759 or 143). He writes:

*C’est également a ce dernier que Hūd a emprunté les nombreuses traditions d’al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī et notamment celles, moins fréquentes, qui proviennent du *tafsīr*

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attribué à ce dernier dans la recension (‘an) de ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd al-Baṣrī (m. 142/759 ou 143), recension qui donne à penser que le *tafsīr* d’al-Ḥasan a probablement pris une forme écrite seulement dans la génération de ‘Amr.\textsuperscript{122}

Therefore, it is quite clear that ibn Muḫakkim’s *tafsīr* is more concerned with Khariji theological discussions, relevant narrations, and previous opinions than with history and narrative discourse.\textsuperscript{123} In his *tafsīr*, ibn Muḫakkim paid special attention to provide some essential Ḳāḥīṭī materials to articulate his teaching on such issues like *tawḥīd* and *fiqh* (jurisprudence). Also, issues about God, the rejection of anthropomorphism, human action, free will (*qadar*), unbelief (*kufr*), and hypocrisy (*nifāq*) all have the same direct access in the Ḳāḥīṭī tradition and thus forced ibn Muḫakkim to provide a remarkable Qur’ānic interpretation, especially on the story of the prophets. In this context, Gilliot stresses that the first major issue discussed in ibn Muḫakkim’s *tafsīr* is a dogmatic one:

Notably on faith and works and views which stand in opposition to the murji‘i views of ibn Sallām, which are against the Sunni conception of the Prophet’s intercession. Juridical matters in general, as well as those particular to the Ḳāḥīṭītes, are also to be found.\textsuperscript{124}

Nevertheless, the problem of the historical sources and the development of the political conception of the Sunnah and leadership also marginalized the different exegetical works done by the Ḳāḥīṭīs. Therefore, it is quite clear that the commentary discussed above is, above all, a valuable testimony to early Ḳāḥīṭī exegesis. Hence, Hūd ibn Muḫakkim’s *tafsīr* gives us a clear picture of the development of *tafsīr* in North Africa in the classical period.

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\textsuperscript{122} Gilliot (1997: 182).
\textsuperscript{123} Ḥamza and Rizvi (2008, I: 23).
\textsuperscript{124} Gilliot (1997: 182).
1.2.2 Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923)

The second tafsīr of this collection is Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr ibn Yazīd al-Ṭabarī’s jāmiʿ al-bayān ‘an tafsīr āy al-Qurʾān, the oldest and the most known Sunni tafsīr, which was authored between 283/896 and 290/903. Al-Ṭabarī was born in a city named Āmul in Northern Iran in 224/839. He travelled to many learning centers—among them Rayy, Baṣra, Kūfa, Cairo, and part of Syria—to continue his studies and finally he stayed in Baghdād where he spent the rest of his life. In Rayy, he learned the maghāzi ḥadīths of the Prophet Muḥammad from Abū ʿAbd Allāḥ Muḥammad b. Ḥumayd al-Rāzī (d. 248/862), who authorized him to transmit the ḥadīth texts of this book. Also, in Baghdād, he studied the same subject from several famous traditionists of his time, such as Muḥammad b. Bashshār known as Bundār (d. 252/866) in Baṣra, and Abū Kurayb Muḥammad b. al-‘Alāʾ (d.248/862) in Kūfa. Al-Ṭabarī soon became an expert scholar of ḥadīth, fiqh—especially in al-Shāfiʿī’s school—tafsīr al-Qurʾān, and was also an historian. Al-Dāwūdī states:

Al-Ṭabarī was the most prominent scholar of his time. Since his youth, he memorized the Qurʾān, he knew all the variant readings of the Qurʾān (qirāʿāt) as well as their meanings. He knew the ahkām of the Qurʾān as well as the abrogated and abrogation Qurʾānic verses. He knew the authentic and the weak ḥadīth. He knew the sayings of the Companions and the Successors and those who followed them. He distinguished between the permissible from the prohibited. He knew the science of the narrators (ʿilm ar-rijāl). He wrote the famous book in history: tārīkh al rusul waʾl-mulūk, also his jāmiʿ al-bayān’s tafsīr is unique in its classification. He also wrote tahdhib al-athār which was not compared to any other book in its content but he did not accomplish it. He also wrote a good book on qirāʿāt entitled: al-jāmiʿ. He wrote many books in principle of jurisprudence

127 Ḥamawī (1930, VI: 628) and see Bosworth, “al-Ṭabarī Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr ibn Yazīd,”
(usahaan al-fiqh) and preserved many sayings of the famous jurists of his time. However, al-Ṭabarī was unique on some issues that were only referred to him.  

It is quite clear that al-Ṭabarī’s jāmiʿ al-bayān’s introduction offers a full range of exegetical concerns. According to McAuliffe, “the fact that al-Ṭabarī was explicitly aware of the issues of method and hermeneutics receives clear attestation in the introductory material with which he begins his tafsīr.” Thus, al-Ṭabarī’s jāmiʿ al-bayān’s exegetical method is summarized by Maʿrifat, saying:

Al-Ṭabarī cites the verse first, followed by its atypical etymology, and the desinential inflection (iʿrāb) of its obscure part if necessary. He sometimes quotes a few Arab stanzas or proverbs (amthāl) as evidence before interpreting the verse per sé in its appropriate fashion. He then cites a tradition of the prophet or an ancient saying to support his exposition if no other opinions exists, in this case where opinions abound he mentions every one separately. Occasionally, in instance, where opinions conflict he supports a specific opinion citing its linguistic and subjective preferences, and occasionally he provides detailed linguistic and semantic corroborating his exegesis with poetry and literature.

Also, it has been noted that al-Ṭabarī’s tafsīr, jāmiʿ al-bayān, is ranked to be an important example of al-tafsīr bi-l-maʾthūr due to its use of the tremendous number of exegetical ḥadīths. Gilliot also describes al-Ṭabarī’s jāmiʿ al-bayān:

The Qur’ānic commentary of al-Ṭabarī represents the model of classical Qur’ānic commentary, and one may say without exaggeration that, with some exceptions, no original commentary was composed after him. . . . The reason for this fossilization lies to a great degree in the fact that a classical Qurʾān commentary was essentially a commentary ‘by tradition,’ which is to say that a large part of the text is taken up by traditions attributed to the Prophet and especially to the early exegetes, the rest essentially by philological, grammatical or juridical questions.

This claim, to some extent, is true, because this is the aspect of al-Ṭabarī’s general works, especially his tafsīr, which is perhaps the most valuable, as his writings comprise the most complete and singular collection of citations from early authorities—such as the

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works of ibn ‘Abbās, ibn Mas‘ūd, Ubay ibn Ka‘b, and Ibn Isḥāq.\textsuperscript{134} Given this reality, al-Ṭabarī’s \textit{jāmi‘ al-bayān} contains an enormous encyclopedia of relevant orthodox Sunni traditions, narrations, and interpretations, all carefully examined and transmitted.\textsuperscript{135} Compared with al-Ṭabarī’s other major work, \textit{taʾrīkh ar-rusul wa-l-mulūk}, both of his works occupy a common ground, and focus on chains of transmission (\textit{isnāds}), authoritative sources (\textit{marāji‘}), and occasions of revelation (\textit{asbāb-an-nuzūl}).\textsuperscript{136} This shows that al-Ṭabarī in his \textit{tafsīr} works attempted to create a kind of encyclopedia of relevant narrations available to the author,\textsuperscript{137} and at the same time, he wanted to demonstrate that \textit{tafsīr} and \textit{ta’wīl} are synonyms. Usually, al-Ṭabarī presents his critical views on the chains of the various reports, indicating the authenticity of these reports and which one is the most sound.\textsuperscript{138} However, the content of \textit{jāmi‘ al-bayān} also provides interesting encyclopedic exegetical material, which enriches the field of \textit{‘ulūm at-tafsīr}.

In addition to narrations, al-Ṭabarī’s \textit{tafsīr} paid a lot of attention to linguistic and lexical considerations. Therefore, \textit{jāmi‘ al-bayān} contains philological and grammatical material, where al-Ṭabarī especially relies on the Baṣran and Kūfan schools of grammar.\textsuperscript{139} Also, it contains the variant readings (\textit{qirāʾāt}),\textsuperscript{140} which reflect the canonization of the Qur’ānic readings into “the Official Seven,” a process that sought to delimit the minor variant within the text of the scripture.\textsuperscript{141} Hence, it is very important to mention that very often on the basis of grammatical or philological arguments; al-Ṭabarī discusses

\textsuperscript{134} Dhahabī (1976, I: 222).
\textsuperscript{135} Maʿrifat (1997, II: 318).
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{137} Hamza and Rizvi (2008, I:28).
\textsuperscript{138} Dhahabī (1976, I: 212).
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 218.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 214–18.
\textsuperscript{141} Hamza and Rizvi (2008, I:28).
issues relating to theology and dogma. Also, the major aspect of al-Ṭabarī’s tafsīr is the use of the *ijtihād* method. Through his exegetical works, it is quite clear that al-Ṭabarī enters into existing discourses of *al-tafsīr bi-l-ra’y*, controversy surrounding tafsīr, and discussions on previous *mufassirūn*.\(^{143}\)

Nevertheless, al-Ṭabarī’s tafsīr serves as a foundation for all proceeding tafsīrs as both an encyclopedia of relevant traditions and as a landmark for orthodox Sunni exegesis.\(^{144}\) Therefore, he opened the door for future exegetes, such as al-Thaʿlabī, to follow his tafsīr methodology.

1.2.3 Abū Isḥāq Ahmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035)

The third exegesis, al-Thaʿlabī’s *al-kashf wa-l-bayān fi tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, in the edition used for this study, seeks to bring to light a major source in the history of tafsīr.\(^{145}\) An excellent collector of stories of the prophets, as seen in his ‘*ārāʾis al-majālis fi qaṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ',\(^{146}\) this additional knowledge gives a special flavor to his tafsīr.\(^{147}\) However, before analyzing al-Thaʿlabī’s hermeneutical method of tafsīr, it is important to discuss the factors that influenced his Qurʾānic commentary: the cultural atmosphere, the theological and intellectual debates, and the literary trends of his time.

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143 McAuliffe (1991: 43).
144 Ibid.
147 This work, which contains the most extensive version of the classical Islamic interpretation of the tales of the Judeo-Christian and Arabian prophets, has preserved his name and reputation. See Ṣafadī (1962, VII: 307). Tilman Nagel has studied the ‘*ārāʾis al-majālis fi qaṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ’ in one chapter of his dissertation, *Die qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ: Ein Beitrag zur arabischen Literaturgeschichte*, Bonn (1967: 80–102). Recently, there has been renewed interest in al-Thaʿlabī’s *qaṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*. For example: William M. Brinner has produced an English translation, entitled ‘*ārāʾis al-majālis fi qaṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ (Lives of the Prophets) as recorded by Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Thaʿlabī, (Leiden: Brill, 2002).
During the middle of the fourth until the fifth Islamic century, Nishapur was a major center for all polemics, doctrinal, and Islamic sects active at that time. Its cultural atmosphere was so rich in philosophy, theology, literature, and mysticism that it became a source of learning and scholarship, attracting scholars and students in such numbers that it led to a large population. Naturally, its theological and intellectual debates had a major impact on creating this atmosphere in which intra-sectarian fighting, such as between Ḥanafīs and Shāfiʿīs, was just as likely as the Karrāmīs and the Shiʿi debate. As a result, the ʿulūm al-Qurʾān and its exegesis became a major cultural activity. In this milieu, al-Thaʿlabī and his school of tafsīr appeared to play a major role in the development of Qurʾānic exegesis. Among his authorities were Abū Ṭāhir ibn Khuzaymah (d. 387) and Abū Bakr ibn Mahrān al-Muqrī, and his well known student was ʿAli ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṭaḥāwayh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Wāḥidī al-Nishāpūrī.

In studying the structure of al-kashf’s hermeneutical method, al-Thaʿlabī composed a long introduction to explain why he was interested to write this tafsīr. Then, he detailed the different steps that he used to interpret the Qurʾānic text:

I have sorted this tafsīr into twenty-four types: the simples (al-basāʾīf), the introductions (al-muqadimāt), the number of the verses (al-ʿadād), the proper recitations (at-tartīlāt), the stories (qiṣaṣ), the novels (riwāyāt), the variant readings of the Qurʾān (qirāʾāt), causes (ʿilāl), proofs (ḥujaj), Arabic Language and other Languages, grammar, comparisons, commentary, meanings and explanations, directions (jihāt), ambiguities (ghawāmiḍ), problems (mushkilāt), rules (ahkām), jurisprudence, signs, benefits, blessings, news, and related materials all are included in the writing of this tafsīr.

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149 Ibid.
150 Subkī (1964, IV: 58-59) and see Dhahabī (1976, I: 227).
152 Ibid., (2002, I: 75) and see Dhahabī (1976, I:229).
The actual practice of his commentary could not be different from other classical tafsīrs, such as that of al-Ṭabarī.\textsuperscript{153} Maʿrifat summarized al-Thaʿlabī’s hermeneutical method:

One of the fundamental characteristics of this exegesis is its linguistic and literary comprehensiveness, and multiple reading styles. Moreover its incorporation of the language of the predecessors, the excellence of his conveyance and presentation, the multiplicity of his hadiths and information of the shaykhs, and the genuineness of his reports made him our trustworthy exegete. His major drawback was the fact that he didn’t investigate the authenticity of the predecessors’ expositions making him a victim of the same predicament faced by other prolific exegetes. For reasons of the many Judaica fables and forged hadiths he drew on himself and his exegesis the same acerbic disapproval and criticism leveled at exegetes like him. What’s more, his reliance on Shiʿi narratives particularly drew sharp criticism on him; otherwise there is no deference between him and other exegetes.\textsuperscript{154}

After a full discussion of the works of some earlier exegetes and its classification, he presented an extensive list of titles and chains of transmissions (isnāds) of the books he had consulted as well as describing the merits of enjoying the study of the Qurʾān and reading and reciting its verses.\textsuperscript{155} This was followed by his analysis of the structure and form of his exegetical works and a discussion of the meaning of tafsīr and taʾwīl, in which he demonstrated his theoretical understanding of interpretation.\textsuperscript{156} In this context, Saleh has summarized al-Thaʿlabī’s hermeneutical theory:

Al-Thaʿlabī provides his hermeneutical theory, his opinions regarding his profession, and his belief in the stereological benefits of reading the Qurʾān. He also presents a full explanation of such basic Islamic terms as belief (imān), piety (taqwa), caliphate (khalīfah), and sincerity (ikhlāṣ) and so on. In this contest, al-

\textsuperscript{153} Riddell (2006:653). Saleh has made a large claim in which he maintained that it is not al-Ṭabarī but al-Thaʿlabī who deserved to be considered as the founder of classical tafsīr. He states that al-kashf was “written almost a century after al-Ṭabarī’s monumental introduction to his commentary, jāmiʿ al-bayān, al-Thaʿlabī’s introduction shows remarkable independence and an innovative spirit that was never seen before.” See Saleh (2004: 77–8).
\textsuperscript{154} Maʿrifat (1997, II:345).
\textsuperscript{155} In al-kashf, al-Thaʿlabī mentions that he used the chains of the following exegetes: Ibn ʿAbbās, ʿIkrimah, al-Kalbī, Mujāhid, and so on. See al-Thaʿlabī (2002, I: 75–84).
Tha’labī’s dogmatic definitional excursus is one of the innovations that he introduced to the genre which would later become fashionable among exegetes.\(^{157}\)

Thus, when commenting on the Qur‘ān, al-Tha’labī uses *tafsîr b’il-ma’tûr* as a principal method of interpretation. He concentrated first on the text’s moral part (*makārim al-akhlâq*), brought by Ibn ‘Abbâs, ‘Ikrimah, and al-Qatâda’s statements or other ḥadîth narrators to interpret it, and presented ḥadîths from the Prophet to end his explanation.\(^{158}\) Also, the impact of the philological approach in al-Tha’labī’s *tafsîr* is clear. As a classical exegete, he started with a detailed morphological explanation of the Arabic word, its linguistic informants, lexicographical meanings, and philological roots to show how the Arabs of the peninsula had used the term.\(^{159}\) Saleh however concluded that all these different elucidations have merely formed the first part of al-Tha’labī’s hermeneutics, which include the traditional interpretation brought by previous exegetes.\(^{160}\)

In addition, it has been mentioned that *al-kashf* “is primarily anthological in nature.”\(^{161}\) This means that al-Tha’labī used to gather together an extensive amount of traditions and opinions—so many, in fact, that such a vast collection was never to be found in any later work. He integrated the ḥadîths at different levels and through different strategies. Most sources describe al-Tha’labī as a reliable authority.\(^{162}\) In this context, Goldfeld states:

None of them seems to mind that *al-kashf wa-l-bayân* refers to ostracized works of *tafsîr*, like the books of al-Kalbî and Muqâtil b. Sulaymân. The vast exegetic material transmitted by al-Tha’labī seems to be trusted unanimously. The

\(^{157}\) Saleh (2004:76).
\(^{158}\) Al-Tha’labī (2002, I:91).
\(^{159}\) Ibid., (2002, I: 92).
\(^{160}\) Saleh (2004:115).
\(^{161}\) Ibid., 141.
\(^{162}\) Ḥamawī, for example, states that al-Tha’labī was truthful in transmitting and trustworthy the prophetic ḥadîth. See Ḥamawī (1930, II: 104–105).
explanation of this positive consensus of critics seems to be at hand: Al-Tha‘labī handled his asānīd extremely careful and introduced each work he used by the required chain of authorities. The material reached al-Tha‘labī by the best of the methods discussed by the critics, namely samā‘ and qirā‘ah: al-Tha‘labī had each of the commentaries he used dictated to him by an authority.¹⁶³

Due to doctrinal reasons, such Sunni scholars as al-Dhahabī criticized al-kashf for being full of weak ḥadīths as regards the merits of the Qur‘ānic chapters, faḍā‘il as-suwar, the merits accruing from reading certain sūrahs that are connected directly to the isrā‘iliyāt. Al-Dhahabī claimed that the ḥadīths of faḍā‘il as-suwar were not considered authentic and al-Tha‘labī transmitted a large number of them.¹⁶⁴ Ibn Taghribardī reportedly considered al-Tha‘labī a learned scholar but criticized him on the usage of many ḥadīths with weak chains of narration, especially on each new sūrah.¹⁶⁵ Al-Suyūṭī also described al-Tha‘labī as an akhābārī mufassir, who was preoccupied to collect in his tafsīr a large number of tales and the narration of reports from ancient people regardless of whether they were true or made up such as those of al-Suddī al-Ṣaghīr from al-Kalbī and Abī Ṣāliḥ from ibn ‘Abbās.¹⁶⁶

In his tafsīr, al-Tha‘labī expanded and modified the concept of an encyclopedic tafsīr to new heights, including material that hitherto had been excluded as long as it was relevant to the verses he was interpreting.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, in this regard, the major aspect of al-Tha‘labī’s Qur‘ānic commentary appears in the relationship between the theoretical pronouncements and his actual practice when commenting on the Qur‘ān.

In general, al-Tha‘labī’s al-kashf has played a major role in constructing the classical Qur‘ānic exegesis. Its importance to ʿulūm at-tafsīr led Muslim scholars to

¹⁶⁶ Suyūṭī (1988, II: 189) and see Dhahabī (1976, I: 232).
¹⁶⁷ Saleh (2004: 26).
consider it a major classical exegetical work and the departure point for many later Qur’ānic exegetes, which dealt with Qur’ānic interpretation. They have classified this exegesis at the highest level of the classical method of interpreting the Qur’ān and assumed that his extensive exegetical work reflected the intellectual achievement of his time. Al-Tha’labī’s exegesis has preserved an extensive account of Islamic culture in poetry, philology, storytelling, prophetic Sunnah, history, and wisdom literature, representing a new age of *tafsīr*. Therefore, Muslims credit him with thoroughly renovating and reforming the classical Qur’ānic commentary. In this regard, Saleh has concluded

Thus, despite the varied impulses that were pulling al-Tha’labī in different directions, he managed to contain in his commentary a volume of traditions and opinions never found in one work and never to be found in their totality again in subsequent works. His greatest achievement was in being exhaustive while preserving a unity to the work that reflected his singular hermeneutical voice.168

1.2.4 *Abū’l-Qāsim Jār Allāh Maʿmūd b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhshāri (d. 538/1144)*

The fourth exegete, al-Zamakhshāri, the author of *al-kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq at-tanzīl wa ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl*, is a very important and popular Muʿtazilī Qur’ānic commentary. He was born in Khawārizm in 467/1075; his native city was Zamakhshar,169 a center of learning most similar in that time to “Khurāsān and Transoxiana, a bastion of Sunni orthodoxy and scholarship.”170 He widely travelled to different centers of learning, such as Bukhārā, Samarqand, Baghdād, and Mecca to study theology (*kalām*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), literary studies and Arabic grammar, ḥadīth, and Qur’ānic *tafsīr*.171

168 Ibid., 141.
170 Ibn Khallikān (1978, V:168–74) and Bosworth, “Khawārizm,”
171 Dawūdī (1994, II:314) and Dhahabī (1976, I: 430).
During the time of his studying, al-Zamakhsharī was influenced by quite a number of scholars and schools of Muʿtazilī kalām of his time. In theology, he was impacted by the doctrine of Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) through his student Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī (d. 494/1097), who was a student of the great Muʿtazilī master Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ṣādiq al-Khārīzmi and the Bahshamiyya school associated with Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī (d. 321/933).172 In the sciences of the grammar, philology, lexicography, and syntax, al-Zamakhsharī learned from the well-known scholars, Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn al-Muẓaffar Nisābūrī and Maʿmūd b. Jarīr al-Ḍabbī al-Iṣbahānī (d. 507/1113).173

Al-Zamakhsharī is well known by his tafsīr named al-kashshāf and some other works, such as in philology, grammar, eloquence, and inflection. When examining al-Zamakhsharī’s al-kashshāf, one comes to observe that the style of his interpretation is quite different from the previous classical exegetes mentioned above. In this context, both Maʿrifat and al-Dhahabī described al-Zamakhsharī’s knowledge and his al-kashshāf:

Al-Zamakhsharī was well known for his Muʿtazilī theology, fluency in the Arabic language, sayings, and poetry. He was well versed with the sciences of eloquence and inflection and this mastery is well seen in al-kashshāf and clocked it with beautiful cover that other scholars looked at with admiration. Some other exegetes however set their hearts on it and those with insight showered it with their praise. Al-Zamakhsharī combined all these indispensable expedients of the exegete in the compilation of his great Qurʾānic exegesis, al-kashshāf, that is to say, revealer of the Qurʾānic truths, liberator from its limitations, scrutinizer of its obscurities, confirmer of its refutations, epitomizer of its witticism and sophisticated compositions, barer of its simplicity and jewels, carrier of unique fascinating benefits, container of that which cannot soil it, eradicator of meddling, avoidance of boring unpleasant situations. Even if this may not be in al-kashshāf, but have been listed under its canon, it suffices as a goal of real substance and a precious jewel sought after by all.174

To speak about the formal exegetical method of *al-kashshāf*, it is quite clear that al-Zamakhsharī, in his entire *tafsīr* work, has chosen the way to interpret individually the Qur'ānic words and phrases in order to follow the arrangement of the Qur'ānic text rather than the revelation.\(^{175}\)

As a Muʿtazilī theologian, who often mentions in his *tafsīr* works that demonstrate his pride in his Muʿtazilism and identify himself as one of the *ahl al-ʿadl waʿt-tawḥīd*,\(^{176}\) al-Zamakhsharī often uses the five principles of Muʿtazilī theology—especially those dealing with unicity of God (*tawḥīd*)—to interpret the Qur'ānic verses in order to defend Islam from polytheism.\(^{177}\) From this point of view, it is quite clear that through his entire *tafsīr* work, al-Zamakhsharī emphasizes his theological level of understanding God’s absolute oneness (*tawḥīd*), and this has obligated him to offer necessarily Muʿtazilī interpretations pertaining to anthropomorphic verses and emphasizing the created essence of the Qur’ān.\(^{178}\)

In spite of his Muʿtazilī doctrine, as a classical grammarian and rhetorician, al-Zamakhsharī has shown that his *al-kashshāf* contains great literary values by using all aspects of the Arabic language disciplines—especially, philological analysis, poetry, ...
syntactical and lexical usages—and inflections, deviations of the word order and morphology are thoroughly interpreted. Based on these language rules, al-Zamakhsharī often interprets the different stylistic forms of the Qur’ānic text and provides reasons for the apparent literary arguments in it. All these disciplines, however, have been used by al-Zamakhsharī to indicate the Qurān’s rhetorical supremacy and emphasize the doctrine of the Qurān’s inimitability (i‘jāz). In this context, al-Dhahabī discusses the literary value of al-kashshāf.

The literary value of al-kashshāf, in spite of its Mu‘tazilite trappings, is unprecedented; with its exposé of the Qurān’s inimitable nuances, its eloquence and magnificent literary composition. Arguably, al-Zamakhsharī is incomparable in exposing the beauty of the Qurān and the mystery of its rhetoric. He excelled in many disciplines in the Arabic language, especially, Poetry, Inflections, Literature and Rhetoric. This literary and scientific distinction added to his exegesis a powerful allure that attracted scholars and exegetes alike. This is not at all strange since al-kashshāf is the first exegesis that uncovered the secrets of Qurānic eloquence (rhetoric), the nuances of its inimitability, the subtleties of its meaning gleaned from its expressed text in a splendid literary matrix and a marvelous constructive style, conferring on al-Zamakhsharī the unique title; Imām of the language and Sultān of the exegetes.

Nevertheless, since its composition, al-Zamakhsharī’s efforts in the study of the Qurānic philology and syntax have been documented. His interpretation of the Qurānic text and grammatical and philological hermeneutics were praised, transmitted, examined, and used by exegetes after him, regardless of their theological schools. Despite the fact that al-Zamakhsharī’s exegesis is clearly affected by his Mu‘tazilī doctrine, evident in the inclination of his Qurānic expressions to that view, he solidly demonstrated his exceptional skills and mental prowess and differentiated between the influence of the act of exegesis and the connection to dogma advocated by the

179 Ibid., 53–54.
183 Hamza and Rizvi (2008, I: 36).
Thus, al-Zamakhshari’s exegetical efforts and method have influenced the works of exegetes of his time, among them al-Ṭabrisī’s majmaʿ al-bayān fi tafsīr al-Qurʾān.

1.2.5 Abū ’Alī Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154)

The fifth exegesis, al-Ṭabrisī’s majmaʿ al-bayān fi tafsīr al-Qurʾān, is the work of a Shi‘i theologian and scholar who was born in 468 H and lived in Mashhad al-Riḍā where he taught, then settled from 523 to 524 H in Sabzawār, Khurāsān, one of the two towns comprising the district bayhaq, where he spent the last thirty years of his life. Al-Ṭabrisī learned from the prominent scholars of his time like Ḥusayn Karimān and others have written some works on al-Ṭabrisī. Karimān’s work entitled, Ṭabrisī o majmaʿ al-bayān, in Persian language: Teheran, (1340-1/1962, I: 167-205). Müsā O. A. ‘Abdul also wrote an extensive English-language study on al-Ṭabrisī’s exegesis, The Qurʾān: Shaykh Ṭabrisī’s Commentary, which includes a brief survey of al-Ṭabrisī’s biography, a detailed study of his tafsīr method, and a full discussion of the theological views presented therein. Kohlberg, E. “Al-Ṭabrisī (Ṭabrisī), Amīn al-Dīn (or Amīn-al-Islām) Abū ’Alī al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154) (Harvard University: 2003). Fudge mentions that “Karimān’s work represents a departure in that he makes extensive use of non-biographical sources, histories, geographies, works of theology or fiqh, and even such methods as cross-referencing biographical statements with the actual contents of al-Ṭabrisī’s work. His is not a traditional work in terms of genre, but he is nonetheless dependent upon the previous biographical genre and its limitations.” Also, after he mentions al-Ṭabrisī’s biography from different sources, Fudge concludes that these additional information enriche the picture of al-Ṭabrisī to some degree, but perhaps they really tell us more about the genre; the biography remains the same. See Fudge (2003:45).

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184 Dhahabī (1976, I: 442).
185 Unfortunately, his exegesis was never studied extensively. In addition to what we can find in al-Dāwūdī’s ūbaqat al-mufassirīn, al-Dhahabī’s critical study in his at-tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn, such Muslim scholars as Husayn Karimān and others have written some works on al-Ṭabrisī. Karimān’s work entitled, Ṭabrisī o majmaʿ al-bayān, in Persian language: Teheran, (1340-1/1962, I: 167-205). Müsā O. A. ‘Abdul also wrote an extensive English-language study on al-Ṭabrisī’s exegesis, The Qurʾān: Shaykh Ṭabrisī’s Commentary, which includes a brief survey of al-Ṭabrisī’s biography, a detailed study of his tafsīr method, and a full discussion of the theological views presented therein. Kohlberg, E. “Al-Ṭabrisī (Ṭabrisī), Amīn al-Dīn (or Amīn-al-Islām) Abū ’Alī al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154) (Harvard University: 2003). Fudge mentions that “Karimān’s work represents a departure in that he makes extensive use of non-biographical sources, histories, geographies, works of theology or fiqh, and even such methods as cross-referencing biographical statements with the actual contents of al-Ṭabrisī’s work. His is not a traditional work in terms of genre, but he is nonetheless dependent upon the previous biographical genre and its limitations.” Also, after he mentions al-Ṭabrisī’s biography from different sources, Fudge concludes that these additional information enriche the picture of al-Ṭabrisī to some degree, but perhaps they really tell us more about the genre; the biography remains the same. See Fudge (2003:45).
his work.\textsuperscript{189} Therefore, this lively socio-political religious environment and intellectual atmosphere influenced al-Ṭabrisī as a scholar and a theologian, and major traces of their influence can be seen in his \textit{tafsīr} works.

Throughout his \textit{tafsīr}, it is quite clear that al-Ṭabrisī has organized his commentary under different titles. He mentions the Variant Reading (\textit{al-qirāʾāt}), the Proof (\textit{al-ḥujjah}), Language (\textit{al-lugha}), Inflection (\textit{al-iʿrāb}), Meaning (\textit{al-maʿānī}), Occasions of revelation (\textit{asbāb an-nuzāl}), and sometimes \textit{naẓm al-Qurān}, the arrangement of the Qur’ānic text.\textsuperscript{190} When interpreting the Qur’ān, al-Ṭabrisī uses a unique method in his \textit{tafsīr}:

For each part of the Qur’ānic text, I have provided an understandable hermeneutical method to explain the opening of sūrah and its Qur’ānic Arabic justification, lexical elements (\textit{lughah}), the grammatical inflection (\textit{iʿrāb}), the circumstance of the revelation (\textit{asbāb an-nuzūl}), and the ordering of the verses and the relation of word meanings to each other (\textit{al-maʿānī}). I usually began my explanation with an introductory discourse on importance of the passages or the entire sūrah, where it was revealed (Mecca or Medina), and the religious merit of reciting the sūrah (\textit{faḍāʾil as-sūrah}). In addition to providing the variant readings and their authorities by citing classical and pre-Islamic Arabian poetry to support my opinion, I always cited the different opinions before giving my own.\textsuperscript{191}

It is quite clear that al-Ṭabrisī’s commentary combines several aspects of other known types of commentary such as grammar, philology, theology, jurisprudence, as well as his discussion of the textual narratives connected to the passage’s \textit{asbāb an-nuzūl}. His \textit{tafsīr} therefore contains a good deal of historical facts, especially those accounts related to the reason for the revelation and the history of the prophets and pre-Islamic nations. In addition, ibn Funduq regarded al-Ṭabrisī as a unique scholar in his combination of skills as a grammarian, linguist, poet, and scholar in numerous other fields, enabling

\textsuperscript{189} ʿAbdul (1977: 4).
\textsuperscript{190} Maʿrifat (1997, II:383).
\textsuperscript{191} Ṭabrisī (1995, I: 36) and Maʿrifat (1997, II:383-84).
many to benefit from him throughout the ages. Since al-Ṭabrisī’s exegesis is mainly concerned with manipulating philological meanings, it contains many philological studies and constantly refers to classical usages and ancient poetry, all of which makes for interesting reading. In this context, al-Ṭabrisī states:

I have brought for the Arabic words every good expressions, for the inflection every clear reason, for the meaning every strong interpretation, for the difficult verses every clear explanation. Giving praise to Allāh, the best supporter for the grammarian, for the Qurʾān-reciter, for the theologian, the best guide for the jurist, and the scholar.

Therefore, al-Ṭabrisī’s tafsīr covers the statements and opinions of theologians (mutakallimūn), traditionalists, commentators, poets, and Arabic sayings (amthāl). In other words, he paid great attention to the grammatical aspects of Qurʾānic words, especially their rhetorical aspects, after which he studied their origins linguistically so that he could ascertain whether they had kept their original meanings or had been used metaphorically. This approach was based on his belief that a language’s rules and variations play an important role in the passage’s meaning. Here, he also gives value to the words’ sounds and the relationships between them, both of which have an impact on the real sense of the Qurʾānic passage.

The theological contents of majmaʿ al-bayān relate what the various schools of thought had to say on many controversial issues. In these cases, al-Ṭabrisī would discuss some theological issues and then give his own judgment. For example, he provided the Shiʿi views in detail when commenting upon Qurʾānic passages important to Shiʿi thought,

194 Ibid.
196 Ibid.
such as *al-rajʿah* and *al-taqiyyah*.\(^{197}\) Al-Ṭabrisī himself indicates in his introduction that he copied from the major Shiʿi Muʿtazilī exegete, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī’s (d. 460/1067) *at-tibyān fī taʾfṣīr al-Qurʿān*.\(^{198}\) According to Fudge, "a good deal of *majmaʾ al-bayān* simply copies *at-tibyān*, often word for word, more often with slight changes in vocabulary or sentences structure that leaves little doubt that have been taken from al-Ṭūsī’s *tafṣīr*."\(^{199}\) Also, as a Muʿtazilī theologian, it is quite clear that al-Ṭabrisī’s *tafṣīr* is influenced by that of al-Zamakhsharī’s exegetical works. He, for instance, summarized al-Zamakhsharī’s *al-kashshāf* in another *tafṣīr* that was entitled *al-kāfī ash-shāfiʿī min kitāb al-kashshāf*.\(^{200}\) A major part of the Muʿtazilī Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbāṭī’s and Abūʾl-Qāsim al-Balkhī commentaries are often cited in his *tafṣīr*.\(^{201}\)

In addition, al-Ṭabrisī gave a sufficient coverage to the verses relating to jurisprudence. Where the Qurʿānic passage deals with controversial jurisprudential or philosophical issues, he cites all of the different views and then gives his own opinion as to how it differs from that of his school of thought, such as the Shiʿi.\(^{202}\) Also, based on his legal perspectives, al-Ṭabrisī often mentioned, without the chains of the narrators, the exegetical authorities of Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid, and Saʿīd b. Jubayr, and he cited Sunni authorities like al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Qatāda, Daḥḥāk, and al-Suddī—and also including Muqātil ibn Sulaymān and the Shiʿi Sulaymān al-Kalbī.\(^{203}\)

Judging from *majmaʾ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī was familiar with *at-taḥfīr bi-l matḥūr*, *bi-l-raʿy*, and *bi-l-ishāra*. He made frequent use of *taʾwīl* to interpret the Qurʿānic text. His

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\(^{197}\) Dhahabī (1976, II: 113) and Maʿrifat (1997, II:388).


\(^{199}\) Fudge (2003:59).

\(^{200}\) Dhahabī (1976, II: 112) and Maʿrifat (1997, II:388).

\(^{201}\) See Ṭabrisī’s work on 6:76. Ṭabrisī (1995, IV: 93–94).

\(^{202}\) Dhahabī (1976, II: 104).

goal was to deduce the Qurʾān’s internal meaning if the explicit one did not clearly express the text’s real message. To accomplish this, he brought preceding as well as succeeding verses into a relative linkage with the passage under discussion in order to maintain a continuity of thought for his readers. 204 However, al-Ṭabri’s tafsīr enjoys a unique position among Muslim scholars, for it is considered a major tafsīr work among the earlier commentaries and, according to some, is the leading tafsīr up to our own time.

In sum, it has been pointed out that one of the most characteristic of al-Ṭabri’s commentary is his desire to find common ground for scholarly Shi‘i and Sunni works. Thus, he presents the views of Shi‘i and Sunni interpretations with equal frequency and at times expresses only Shi‘i preferences. As a result, the Sunni muḥaddithūn and historians of Islam, after going through his work critically, reported that he is moderate in his Shi‘ism

al-Ṭabri is moderate in his Shi‘ism. He does not exaggerate in his Shi‘ism, unlike others among the Imāmī Shi‘i. We have read his tafsīr and do not find in it much fanaticism. Nor can we approach him for cursing any of the Companions or accusing them of anything that nullifies their trustworthiness and piety. 205

Al-Ṭabri’s method of commentary is quite comprehensive. His impact on Shi‘i thought is clear in his judgment on certain Qurʾānic verses. Nevertheless, his works show that he is an independent and free scholar. On some issues, for example, he differed with the Shi‘i and agreed with the Mu‘tazila when their view agreed with his, and the same with the Sunnis.

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204 Dhahabī (1976, II: 141).
205 Ibid., 141.
2.1.6 Abūʿ Abd Allāh b. Umār b. Ḥusayn Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209)

The sixth exegete I am considering is al-Rāzī, the author of *mafāṭīḥ al-ghayb* or *at-tafsīr al- kabūr*. This intellectual reformer and philosopher was born in Rayy in 543 or 544 and died in 606 in Herat. His early education was directed by his father, Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn, the well-known scholar in the fundamentals of jurisprudence (*ʿilm uṣūl al-fiqh*) of Imām al-Shāfiʿī, and the theology (*uṣūl al-fīn*) of Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ismāʿīl al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935). Throughout his work, al-Rāzī forcefully defended the Ashʿarī’s against the Muʿtazila. He studied the philosophy of al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Ibn Sīnā when he was a student of Kamāl al-Samʿānī and Majd al-Dīn al-Jīlī, who was the teacher of the mystic philosopher Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā al-Suhrawardī. Al-Rāzī travelled extensively in Central Asia and, because of his method of teaching, attracted many students to his study circles. According to al-Subkī, al-Rāzī was a brilliant linguist and bilingual, with the ability to switch between Persian and Arabic as needed with little difficulties in effect. However, what differentiated him from other philosophical commentators, such as *ikhwān as-safā* and other Ismaili thinkers, was that he was exceedingly orthodox in his Shāfiʿī Sunni theology.

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208 Dhahabī (1976, I: 294).
210 Subkī (1964, VIII: 86).
211 Ayoub (1984, I: 33).
The greatest accomplishment of al-Rāzī’s exegetical works is found in his tafsīr mafātīḥ al-ghayb. His tafsīr’s major point is seen in his usage of the authorities of the earlier narrations and traditions as references and evidence; he is not constrained by them, nor does he simply reiterate and paraphrase their positions.\(^\text{212}\) Also, al-Rāzī’s approach was multi-faceted: theological, metaphysical, mystical, even popular.\(^\text{213}\) Therefore, his exegesis, which is full of philosophical and theological debates, features a circular and argumentative analytical approach that has earned it the designation “philosophical” in the broad sense of the word. In this context, both Maʿrifat and al-Dhahabī has provided detailed information about al-Rāzī’s tafsīr method. They state:

Al-Rāzī’s exegesis is unique in the way he highlights the textuality (munāsabāt) of verses as well as the textuality of Chapters and he is not satisfied by mentioning one textuality, but often he will cover many of them. He expands on sciences such as mathematical (riyādiyāt) and natural (tabī‘iyāt) sciences as well as others current to his time—such as astronomy (al-falakīyyah). He often touches on the sayings of the Philosophers either to disagree or analysis and often will format his evidence in the logical style of those philosophers without departing from the way of the people of Sunnah. Al-Rāzī, in his tafsīr, hardly passes by a legal containing verse without mentioning the fuqahā’s opinions on that verse especially that of al-Shāfi‘ī school, which he followed. He also expanded on the matters of fundamental (uṣūl), Grammar (nahw), and eloquence (balāghah). At the end, he summarizes what is the best style of exegesis.\(^\text{214}\)

Maʿrifat describes the philosophical and theological style of al-Rāzī’s works in his tafsīr:

Al-Rāzī tends to the philosophical and theological exegeses. For him, these two sciences however are not contradictory. Therefore, he has the tendency to go deep into these two sciences discussing their major arguments and spending a lot of time on them and that sometimes takes him away from the Qur’ānic exegesis to empty sophist philosophical issues. Therefore, al-Rāzī solidifies these issues and digs deep in the research all in its appropriate places without confusing the reader.\(^\text{215}\)

\(^{212}\) Calder and Mojaddedi (2003: 121).
\(^{213}\) Ayoub (1984, I: 33).
In general, one can assume that al-Rāzī’s commentary is a landmark in *tafsīr bi‘l-ra‘y*: *tafsīr* in which Qur’ānic verses are interpreted based on theological and philosophical issues (*masā‘il*) or simply philosophical questions they raise. Also, his *tafsīr* is arguably the largest and most erudite exegesis of the classical epoch that could prove challenging to those without ample comprehension of theological arguments, theories, and parlance. However, in this context, Ayoub concludes that al-Rāzī’s *tafsīr* is directed towards a scholarly audience which requires a great deal of study and knowledge on existing theological discourses. Nevertheless, some modern Muslim and non-Muslim scholars—such as Calder and Mojaddedi—have studied al-Rāzī’s interpretations:

Usually al-Rāzī looked at what he considered to be the text’s apparent problem and then addressed it. Often, he separated the fundamental issues into questions to which he provided multiple answers, thereby reflecting his belief that every part of the Qur’ānic text must have meaning: Things are stated by God the way they are for a reason. Even omitted words have meanings which can be deduced. [In general, his exegesis is] an theological reading with spiritual/mystical tinge, performed through the traditional exegetical tools of grammar, semantics and narrative. There is little appeal to the actual authority of tradition and polyvalence is allowed, but a preference in terms of meaning is always indicated.

2.1.7 Abū Muḥammad ibn Abī Naṣr Shīrāzī Rushbihān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209)

The ecstatic Sufi Shāfi‘ī scholar Abū Muḥammad Rushbihān ibn ‘Abī Naṣr Baqlī Shīrāzī (d. 606/1209), who lived when Sufism became a recognized social movement after long time of private informality, is the seventh exegete to be discussed and the author of *‘arā‘is al-bayān fī haqā‘iq al-Qur‘ān*. In this general spiritual atmosphere, Rushbihān balanced his unusual experience as a Shīrāzī Shāfi‘ī teacher and Sufi master by

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studying the exoteric sciences of Islam. In regard to Ruzbihān’s political situation, Ernst explains the religious developments that influenced Ruzbihān’s mystical thought: “the form of the hagiographical narrative that portrays the deed of Ruzbihān and his descendants testifies to the changing religious situation of the post-Mongol period.”

Ruzbihān’s ʿarāʾis al-bayān fi ḥaqāʾiq al-Qurʾān represents a major “exegetical opus that reflects Ruzbihān’s overriding propensity for visions, dreams, powerful ecstasies and ecstatic utterances that earned him the sobriquet ‘Doctor Ecstaticus’ (shaykh-i shuṭṭāḥ).” In the introduction of his tafsīr, Ruzbihān described the reasons that let him write his mystical exegesis:

And when I found that God’s pre-eternal words had no end in the outer (ẓāhir) and the inner (bāṭin), and no one has reached God’s perfection and His ultimate meanings, because under each letter of His lay oceans of secrets, and rivers of lights, as the words describes the Qādim (the Eternal) and perfection with no limits to its nature or qualities. I set myself to scoop from these oceans of eternity, which scoop of eternal wisdom and endless hints, that missed the scholars, and escaped the wise. I did this by following the path of the early saints, who are guided by the Companions and the path of the prophets.

According to Habīl, Ruzbihān’s tafsīr is the culmination of a Gnostic exegetical tradition. Also, Godlas sees that Ruzbihān’s tafsīr is a combination of two parts: first is an encyclopedia of a mystical Qur’ānic interpretation, and second is a personal reflection based on Ruzbihān’s own spiritual experiences. His largest work, ʿarāʾis al-bayān, is an esoteric Arabic-language Sufi tafsīr comprised almost equally of material from earlier tafsīrs and commentary by the author himself. He included not only his own views, but also substantial Qur’ānic commentary from the earliest Sufi scholar Abū ʿAbd al-Rahmān

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221 Sands (2006: 75).
222 Ernst (1996: 113).
223 Knysh, “Ṣūfism and the Qurʾān.”
Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), the ḥaqāʾiq at-tafsīr; and the ziyādāt ḥaqāʾiq at-tafsīr—and also from Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin al-Qushayrī (d. 1074), the latāʾif al-īshārāt. Most Sufi exegetes consider the ʿarāʾīs al-bayān to be the primary vehicle for the al-Sulamī’s ziyādāt’s transmission and the only viable testament to the existence of its original manuscript. In this context, Ruzbihān then proposed his method of mystical interpretation. He writes:

I classified the Qurʾān in facts and clear statements and the hints of the Merciful in the Qurʾān with nice phrases and honorable turn of statement. I may have explained a verse not explained by my early masters, and after my contribution, I would add there’s that I found that to be of better phrasing and stronger points. However, I let go of many others to keep my book lighter in weight and heavier in details.

Thus, ʿarāʾīs al-bayān fi ḥaqāʾiq al-Qurʾān presents a different tendency, one characterized by “intense visions and powerful ecstasies interpreted in terms of a Qurʾānically based metaphysics.”

Stylistically, Ruzbihān begins his commentary on each Qurʾānic verse with his own exegesis, followed by quotations from al-Sulamī’s ḥaqāʾiq and ziyādāt, and from Qushayrī’s latāʾif. Godlas provides a detailed description on Ruzbihān’s tafsīr style:

Ruzbihān’s ʿarāʾīs al-bayān fi ḥaqāʾiq al-Qurʾān is an entirely mystical commentary. In it the author selects certain verses of the Qurʾān and provides commentary on them from the perspective of the experience of Islamic mysticism. After Ruzbihān presents the verse on which he is commenting, he gives his own mystical commentary, and then may follow that with relevant hadīth and mystical commentary from the earliest generations of Shaykhs. The bulk of the exegeses of the earlier Shaykhs that Ruzbihān cites come from the work of al-Sulamī, but when Ruzbihān cites the master (al-ustāḥ), he is quoting from al-Qushayrī.

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228 Sands (2006: 75).
Therefore, this new style is quite distinct from the Sufis’ Ruzbihān quotes. In his Qur’ānic commentary, Sands describes the mystical experience and the metaphorical interpretation used by Ruzbihān in his *tafsīr*:

Ruzbihān’s role changes from creator of symbols and metaphors to interpreter of those he locates in the Qur’ān, and in these interpretations the influence of Sufi theories and technical terms is more evident, and above all, mystical experience. Unlike the popular homiletical and didactic style of the commentaries of al-Qushayrī or Maybūdī, Ruzbihān’s is visionary and esoteric.\(^{234}\)

Hence, Ruzbihān’s hermeneutical work on the Qur’ān is a metaphorical one. The mystical impact and symbolism method, which is clear in his *tafsīr*, are his major tools to interpret the Qur’ānic text.

\[2.1.8\]  

*Nizām al-Dīn b. al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Khurāsānī Nisābūrī* (d.728/1327)

The eighth exegesis of this corpus is Nisābūrī’s *gharāʿib al-Qurʾān wa raghāʿib al-furqān*, known also as *an-nizām al-a’raj*. He was born in Qum and spent all his life studying and teaching in Nishapur. As a theologian and exegete, Nisābūrī was well known as scholar of sciences (astronomy and mathematic), natural philosophy, the Arabic language, *ta’wil*, and *tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*.\(^{235}\)

Nisābūrī’s *tafsīr* method is quite clear from the introduction of *gharāʿib al-Qurʾān*. The author has declared that he borrowed from al-Rāzī’s *mafātīḥ*, al-Zamakhsharī’s *al-kashshāf*, and other *tafsīr* works. In other words, Nisābūrī summarizes his exegesis from al-Rāzī’s *tafsīr*, and he adds some of what was in the *al-kashshāf* and other exegeses as well as what God made clear to him in this hermeneutical works. He includes what was

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\(^{234}\) Sands (2006: 75-6).

\(^{235}\) Dhahabī (1976, I: 321). In Robert G. Morrison’s work entitled, *Islam and Science: The Intellectual Career of Nizām al-Dīn al-Nisābūrī*, Morrison explains Nisābūrī’s claim in which he indicates that only Sufi practice and theory could connect between science, natural philosophy, and God’s knowledge, which lead Sufis to realize spiritual union with God.
proven from the early community, the Companions and the successors.\textsuperscript{236} However, Nisābūrī’s stance regarding al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī was also unique. In this regard, al-Dhahabī states:

When Nisābūrī summarizes al-Фakhir al-Rāzī’s works, or copies from al-Zamakhsharī’s \textit{al-kashshaf} or any others, he does not copy as others copy in a fixed manner, and assumes that it is not to be questioned or altered, instead, we find him a free thinker, altering what he summarizes or copies. If he finds the material not sufficient, he points it out, and fixes it, and if he sees an incomplete work he will complete it to perfection. We find him often copying from \textit{al-kashshāf} by saying: in \textit{al-kashshāf} it was said so and so, or Jār Allāh said so and so. Or he indicates what the \textit{al-kashshāf} said and was objected to by al-Rāzī then he appoints himself a judge between the two Imāms and passes the judgment.\textsuperscript{237}

Further, Nisābūrī splits his exegetical works into two sections. The first section is dedicated to interpret issues that are related to subjects of wording and the content of the Qur’ānic text. According to al-Dhahabī:

After quoting a group of Qur’ānic verses Nisābūrī gives different readings (\textit{qirāāt}) and recitation pauses and stops (\textit{wuqūf}). This followed by extensive interpretations of Qur’ānic recitation, lexicology, etymology, morphology, grammar, rhetoric, meanings (\textit{ma‘ānī}), explanation (\textit{bayān}), deduction (\textit{istidlāl}), the fundamentals of religion (\textit{uṣūl ad-dīn}), the fundamentals of jurisprudence (\textit{uṣūl al-fiqh}), and jurisprudence (\textit{fiqh}).\textsuperscript{238}

The second section of his \textit{tafsīr} works is primarily dedicated to study the science of mystical states (\textit{‘ilm al-ahwāl}), which forms the basis for \textit{ta’wīl} interpretations. Usually, this section is entitled \textit{ta’wīl}; however, it was mostly borrowed from the mystical \textit{tafsīr} of the Sufi Najm al-Dīn al-Rāzī Dāyā (d. 654/1256).\textsuperscript{239} Sands concludes that Nisābūrī presents, in Sufi context, the Qur’ānic hermeneutics in order “to understand \textit{ta’wīl} as part of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{236} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{237} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{238} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{239} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
methodology of extracting many issues from brief expressions (*istinbāţ al-masā‘īl al-kathīrah min al-alfāz al-qālīlah*).”

**CONCLUSION**

According to what we have seen above, the development of Qur’ānic interpretation in Muslim history indicates that *tafsīr* is the Islamic science of hermeneutics. Qur’ānic hermeneutics has been linked with particular theological (Shi‘i, Sunni, and Khariji) and political thought of the *mufassirūn*. Also, in their exegetical works, exegetes have commented on theological and mystical subjects, primarily focused on linguistic and lexicographical elements, which reflect their possible prejudices and affiliations. Therefore, the need to develop new scientific tools to control the progress of the *tafsīr* was very crucial.

The classical divisions of the Qur’ānic exegesis (*bi-l-ra‘y* and *bi-l-ma‘thūr*) indicate the position of Sunni assumptions toward the science of *tafsīr*. On one side, this approach attempts to show that *tafsīr bi-l-ma‘thūr* came to be promoted as authoritative due to its authenticity and reliability. On the other side, it wants to show that *tafsīr bi-l-ra‘y* is unreliable due to its use of personal opinion as a basic guidance to interpreting the Qur’ān. Nevertheless, the majority of Sunni exegetes persuaded people to accept both types of *tafsīr* as fundamental approaches and major categories that could be used to understand and interpret the Qur’ān. Thus, Saleh indicates that this ideological division of Qur’ānic exegesis was meant to create an orthodox Sunni hermeneutics and discredit all those who strayed from, or disagreed with, it. However, for a proper understanding of the Qur’ān, both schools (Sunni and Shi‘i) claimed some advantages in the Qur’ānic

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text. Both have admitted that the extensive knowledge of the Arabic idioms of the Prophet Muḥammad’s time was fully required. In addition to the classical Arabic language, the knowledge of Arabic grammar, lexicography, and Arabic literature were also highly required. The knowledge of the occasions of revelation (asbāb an-nuzūl) and the historical tradition of the prophetic ḥadīths, which contain detailed descriptions about how the first believers understood the injunctions and statements of the Qurʾān when it first appeared, were highly recommended.

It has been noted that the use of the human reason to interpret the Qurʾānic text had appeared through the development of Muslim sects. However, taʾwīl al-Qurʾān was seen as a natural challenge to early Muslim orthodoxy, which focused more on the Qurʾānic text’s literal meaning. However, its methodological sense was embraced more broadly by the Muʿtazila to circumvent the “anthropomorphist” milieu that savors of textual literalism—i.e., God’s divine attributes—a mere defense strategy for an implicit, yet expressed “orthodoxy” impugned as outright heresy. Before that, taʾwīl became more interested in the exegetical works of the Brethren of Purity (ikhwān aṣ-ṣafāʾ), a group that was considered only a fleeting cultural-historical episode.

The two major groups associated with allegorical interpretation of the Qurʾān are the Shiʿi—among whom the Ismailis are the most enthusiastic practitioners of taʾwīl—and the Sufi brotherhoods. So long as Shiʿism remained unrestricted by inflexible textuality, taʾwīl continued to be used as a resourceful probing apparatus with surreptitious and virtual significance. In most of their exegetical works, the science of tafsīr is absent from their literature, since true meaning can be obtained only through taʾwīl, which

243 Ibid.
244 Ibid.
could be found in the Imāms. Therefore, whereas Shi‘ism accorded a restricted interpretation and attention to the Qur‘ānic text, Sufism abandoned the literal significance and bestowed fresh dynamism to the metaphorical meaning.²⁴⁵ Hence, a Sufi unwavering methodological ability progressed mainly through mystical hermeneutics.²⁴⁶ In Khariji exegeses, the ta‘wil of the Qur‘ānic text is totally absent, because their radical religio-political thought led them to consider all those who refused to embrace their conception of faith and reject “ordinary” authority were declared grave sinners and unbelievers.

In addition, the vitality of exegetical works has remained continuously active. The varieties of interpretation generated by Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha‘labī, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Rāzī, al-Zamakhsharī, as well as Nisābūrī and Ruzbihān, gave birth to many tafsīrs that reflected the educational level of the Muslim community of that period. However, McAuliffe maintained that the fundamental characteristics of these lines of interpretation

are not simply a series of parallel trajectories. There are instances of influence and points of confluence. There are also disjunctions or disruption and even whole scale rejection of the accumulated consequences of centuries of exegetical activity.²⁴⁷

Given this reality, the tradition of producing tafsīrs continues to occupy a major place in Muslim life. For both Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals, these classical tafsīrs and their impact upon Muslim society constitute the base and the background for the flourishing publication of new exegetical works.

In addition, the approaches of the Sufi tafsīrs studied above differ slightly as regards their language and methods of discourse. We have seen that Ruzbihān advocated

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 93.
²⁴⁶ Ibid., 92–93.
the symbolic method in his *tafsīr* and was mystically influenced by al-Sulamī and Qushayrī. Also, I have pointed out that Nisābūrī advocated the mystical and allegorical interpretation when commenting on the Qurʾān. But both of them shared the same hermeneutical works, with little disagreement on key beliefs: the essence of the Qurʾān itself, the process of knowledge acquisition, and the nature of the person who seeks to gain understanding.248

In the next chapter, I will discuss the nature of the classical understanding of the Qurʾānic narrative. I will examine the exegetical concepts of *narrative* provided by classical exegetes and Muslim and non-Muslim lexicographers. In this sense, I will address the various semantic ranges of the Qurʾānic terminologies (*qiṣṣah*, *nabāʿ*, *ḥadīth*, *khabar*, and *ustūrah*) as well as their exegetical applications, vis-à-vis the terms *stories* or *account*. Then, I will critically discuss the fundamental sources and the exegetical methods used by those classical exegetes to understand the Qurʾānic narratives. I will provide a critical study of the essential functions of the Qurʾānic narrative in classical *tafsīrs*. I will highlight and compare the classical exegetes’ viewpoints concerning the religious and moral functions of the Qurʾānic narratives.

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CHAPTER TWO
THE CLASSICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE QUR’ĀNIC NARRATIVE

INTRODUCTION

Qur’ānic narratives do not possess uniformity. Sometimes passages present God as the actual narrator and the prophets as those who speak of his signs or narrate their own personal stories. Similarly, the styles of the Qur’ānic narratives vary—as many of them are introduced with explicit requests designed to make the believers to remember something or someone. In addition, most of these Qur’ānic narrative passages begin with the imperative “remember,” followed by the names and experiences of various prophets. Also, very often these Qur’ānic narratives have the aspect of dialogue between God and his prophet Muḥammad and his preaching amongst the Arabs of his time.¹

On the one hand, readers of the Qurʾān have pointed out the difficulties of limiting the general concepts of narrative as the most appropriate translated word for story or account. In order to determine the given word’s correct meaning, classical exegetes (e.g., Hūd Ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭārī, al-Ṭabrisī, and al-Thaʿlabī) and lexicographers (e.g., Ibn Manẓūr, Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, al-Ḥayyūzābādī, and al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī) composed significant hermeneutical works having different viewpoints on this matter. Most of these works show the impact of additional exegetical materials that helps readers of the Qurʾān understand the literary concepts of a narrative as it appears in the Qurʾān. The aim of those exegetes and lexicographers was to approach the contextual similarities of qiṣṣah, nabāʾ, ḥadīth, khabar, and usṭūrah that applied to a narrative. These words, which frequently appear at the beginning or end of the Qurʾānic narratives, are used in the Qurʾān with very wide-ranging meanings. In this context, Pellat explains:

¹ Tottoli (2002: 4).
The Qurʾān contains a certain number of narratives which are of a religious character and are to serve for the edification of the believers; in the Holy Book “to narrate, tell” is expressed by qaṣṣa, ḥaddatha, and nabbaʾa, three terms which tend later to become specialized, forming with their derivatives and those of other roots a collection of lexicographic material which deserves examination. In fact the diversity of the words used in the first centuries of Islam would seem to indicate that tales, legends and stories of all kinds were in vogue and that they were distinguished from one another with great precision.2

In order to study the etymological concepts of these terms, various non-Muslim scholars have sought to develop a field of semantic analysis—as found in Toshihiko Izutsu’s God and Man in the Qurʾān and Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān, and Daniel A. Madigan’s The Qurʾān’s Self-Image. All of these works have enriched the general field of Qurʾānic studies. Izutsu suggests that the best way to study a given word’s semantic range and determine its real meaning is to ask “what features of the environment are necessary if the word is to be used properly to designate any given event?”3 Madigan, posing this question a little differently, states that “it is not intended that there is a real meaning, a precise meaning or, still less, one permanently valid meaning for each word.”4

On the other hand, classical exegetes have used different sources and exegetical methods to interpret the Qurʾānic narratives. They agreed that the Qurʾān, the prophetic ḥadīth, linguistics and Arabic language rules, mysticism, and theology are the fundamental exegetical sources to interpret the Qurʾānic narrative. For instance, they assumed that the Qurʾān is considered to be the background of all religious instruction and scholarly works. Therefore, they asserted that its text preserves the real meaning of some ambiguities that would appear in the Qurʾānic narrative text. In addition, classical exegetes stated that the Prophet’s sayings are another important source and that these

3 Izutsu (2002: 3).
accounts, as found in all reliable ḥādīth collections, “consist of accounts of the divinely revealed words, deeds, and silent affirmations of the prophet himself, based on what was recorded by his companions as having been heard or seen by them.”

Furthermore, classical exegetes’ approaches to Qurʾānic narrative were associated with studying its literary text. They have asserted that the Qurʾān’s literary meaning is prior to the act of exegesis and represents part of a process rather than a result. Theoretically, they maintained that all of these exegetical efforts on the literary level of the Qurʾān have been applied to its narratives to preserve not only the scriptural text and its past interpretations, but also to accumulate a vast amount of information pertaining to its literary aspect. In this context, grammarians and lexicographers have considered themselves as exegetes and experts of the Qurʾān, and have applied the rules of language and linguistic expertise to explain its underlying narrative message.

In addition, both mysticism and theology have been considered the most fundamental sources to interpret the Qurʾānic narratives. For instance, classical exegetes have projected their doctrinal choices on the text in order to understand its literal meaning. Further, they have asserted that the historical picture of all pre-Islamic prophets, their nations, and the descriptions of their characters and experiences, have revealed how the Prophet’s mission was similar to that of the other prophets, especially as regards calling his people to monotheism (tawḥīd). Some other theological issues had been debated among the classical exegetes—such as the concept of ʿiṣma, the level of prophecy, free will, and the nature of God’s speech—and continue to be discussed. In addition, mystical and allegorical interpretations have been applied to understand the

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5 Brinner (2002: xvii).
Qur’ānic narratives. As the use of allegory and metaphor were the most controversial types of Sufi interpretations, most Sufi exegetes did their best to impart an acceptable interpretation in order to develop a theory of correspondences between the spiritual and the material worlds. In this context, the mystical language used to connect Sufi exegesis and the Qur’ānic narratives represents a major factor of their response to such narratives. In addition, their imagination played a very prominent role, with the result that their hermeneutical works appear to be more suggestive than declarative and their understandings of the Qur’ānic narratives to be mostly allusions (ishārāt) as opposed to explanations (tafsīrs). Thus, their works render the mystical level of understanding of the Qur’ānic narrative and show each exegete’s particular insights.

Finally, over the course of Muslim history, the function of the Qur’ānic narratives are central to the faith and practice of Muslims, perhaps more central and important than in other religions. According to Madigan, this function is far more integral to Muslims than similar traditions are and play a major role in the faith.⁶

Muslims state that the Qur’ānic discourse’s main purpose is to instruct and build the ummah according to its guidance and the Prophet Muḥammad’s model. Therefore, the majority of the classical exegetes’ efforts consisted of examining the close relationship between the Prophet and the Qur’ān. Thus, the impact of this understanding of the type of dialectical relationship helps to emphasize the claim that the Qur’ānic narrative, as one part of the revelation, is something special when it takes the form of God’s direct address to the Prophet Muḥammad.

Therefore, in this chapter, I will critically study the level of the classical understanding of the Qur’ānic narrative. In the first section, I will study the exegetical

⁶ Madigan (2001: 3).
concepts of *narrative* provided by the exegetes cited above and some Muslim and non-Muslim lexicographers. In other words, I will examine the different semantic ranges of the Qur’ānic terminologies (qiṣṣah, nabā’, ḥadīth, khabar, and usṭūrah) as well as their exegetical functions vis-à-vis the term *stories* or *account*. I will then distinguish those terms from the exhortations, instructions, and all other devices that occur in the Qur’ānic text. In the second section, I will critically study the fundamental sources and the exegetical methods used by those classical exegetes to understand the ambiguities of the Qur’ānic narratives. And finally, in the last section, I will provide a critical study on the Qur’ānic narrative functions in classical *tafdīrs*. I will present the classical exegetes’ viewpoints on the fundamental functions of these narratives, and I will delineate the religious and moral functions of the Qur’ānic narratives.

2.1 THE EXEGETICAL CONCEPTS OF NARRATIVE

In order to identify the exact etymological root and level of meaning that could be applied to *narrative*, students of Qur’ānic studies must first be aware of the previous attempts to translate *narrative* in various languages. Unfortunately, most of these efforts only obscured the term’s exact meaning or else conveyed it through an adverb only. Undertaking an extensive study of this term’s semantic range will clarify its hermeneutical role.

Hence, in the pages that follow, I will study the systematic Qur’ānic concepts as well as the semantic ranges of *qiṣṣah, nabā’, ḥadīth, khabar, and usṭūrah*. In addition, I will examine the classical exegetes’ viewpoints on them in order to discover the historical development, which helped Muslim scholars recognize these contextual similarities and create new meanings when dealing with the Qur’ānic narrative text.
2.1.1 The Semantic Range of *qiṣṣah*

Etymologically, *qiṣṣah*, plural *qaṣaṣ* is the *maṣdar* of the verb *qaṣṣa* and is derived from the noun *qiṣṣah*. Semantically, the verb carries the literary sense of “clip and trace, a documented use of the verb recite, relate, as with a piece of news, or the recounting of a dream in its proper manner.” In addition, Macdonald points out that its occurrence in the Qurʾān “is assured and it may be conjectured that, besides *qiṣṣah* and *qaṣaṣ*, infinitives, it was originally *ism nawi‘a* kind of tracing out.” However, readers of the Qurʾān realize that the first term *account*, which occurs in 3:62, is used to translate *qaṣaṣ* as “This is the true account.” In this sense, most of the classical-era hermeneutical works of the Muslim exegetes and lexicographers on this verse indicate that *account* means *stories*. Al-Rāzī, for instance, interprets that the literary meaning of *qaṣaṣ* here to mean the stories or sum of speech containing the guidance to the religion and to the truth. Al-Ṭabrisī writes that the term’s literary meaning is “ *al-khabaru alladhī tatatāba‘u fīhi al-ma‘āni.*” Hence, all of these exegetical works show that *qaṣaṣ* assumes the same meaning in *tafsīr* works.

Nevertheless, the verb *qaṣṣa* and its conjugated forms are frequently used in the sense of telling a story, narrating—or, more exactly, giving a circumstantial account of some event. For example, 12:3 begins with “We will reveal the fairest of stories,” which

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7 Pellat indicates that “ *qiṣṣah* is used for every kind of story, but this word has been applied particularly, through the use of the verb *qaṣṣa* and the noun *qaṣaṣ* in the Qurʾān and of the professional *qussās*, to edifying tales and stories of the prophets. It is to be noted however that nowadays it has been adopted to mean a novel, its diminutive *uqṣūṣah*, pl. *aqāṣīṣ*, being in its turn used for a short story.” See Pellat, “Hikāya.”
8 The terms *qaṣṣa*, *naqussu*, *qassa*, *yaqussu*, *faqṣus*, ... etc, are frequently mentioned in the Qurʾān in twenty-three sūrahs: one time in sūrah 3, two times in sūrah 4, two times in sūrah 6, five times in sūrah 7, two times in sūrah 11, four times in sūrah 12, one time in sūrah 16, two times in sūrah 18, one time in sūrah 20, one time in sūrah 27, three times in sūrah 28, and two times in sūrah 40.
9 Lane (2003, II: 2526).
10 Macdonald (1936, II: 1042).
uses the verb *naqṣṣu* (we narrate) as well as the plural of the noun *qiṣṣah*. While al-Thaʿlabī explained the verb “*naqṣṣu* by *naqraʿu*”13 (we read), al-Ṭabrisī explained “*naqṣṣū* by *nubayyinu aḥsana al-bayān*”14 (‘we clarify or explain the best explanation). However, al-Zamakhsharī admitted that *naqṣṣū* from *al-iqtīṣās* (retaliation) but literally in this case he means narrating the story in different ways.15 Therefore, the proper understanding of this verse represents the full “explanations or narratives that must be cited point by point and in detail in one account, accurately.”16 Other lexicographers opined that *naqṣṣu* signifies “the sense of building or plastering, cutting and shearing. Accurately, duplicate the semantic features already noted of settling account, clipping and retaliating and reciting.”17 Accordingly, Rollins explains that classical exegetes and lexicographers assumed that the literary sense of *qaṣṣa*, when used in the Qurʾān, means to chronologically convey a series of detailed events, with sūrah often being used as an adverb.18 He further claims that they assumed that when this term and its different forms were taken together with the term’s other significations already mentioned, as an example in sūrah *al-qaṣas*, where Moses’s mother says to his sister *qussīhi* (follow him) a sense further illustrated in the sentence found in sūrah *al-kaḥf*, ‘so they went back on their footsteps, following the path they had come’, established a common currency for the term at this point.19

Macdonald also mentions that the term *qaṣaṣan* here means “He traced out step by step, the facts in the case of someone or something and or he made a statement upon

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16 Zamakhsharī (1987, II: 301) and ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm (1975: 82).
17 Lane (2003, II: 2527).
19 Ibid.
Thus, he attempts to translate this term as “narrate” or “recite,” thereby eliminating the sense of “tracing out.”

However, the Qurʾān contains different forms derived from qāṣṣa that provide the general conception of the story that God has given to the prophets, such as “Of some apostles We have already told you the story” 4:162 and “Verily, We shall recount their whole story with knowledge” 7:7. Other verses use qāṣṣa indirectly to mean stories; however, they are understood to mean “recite to humanity.” This contains the meaning of a divine message with miraculous signs, such as “O you assembly of jinn and people. Did not apostles from among yourselves come to you, setting forth to you My signs and warning you of the meeting of this Day?” 6:130.

Finally, in order to address the meaning of qīṣṣah, I will mention that this “form as a noun signifying a particular genre of story does not occur in the Qurʾān.” Macdonald mentions that “in al-fihrīst, Ibn al-Nadīm pointed out that qīṣṣah does not seem to occur as story; rather, it is used here [in Arabic literature] to mean reproduced events.” Also, in Arabic literature, “the term qīṣṣah occurs with two familiar meanings: amr or shaʿn (matter), which appears in the form of ḥadīth as narrative or story.” Most lexicographers, among them al-Zabīdī, admitted that this “means one story after another.” Qaṣṣa and qīṣṣah also were rapidly noted in discussions of Arabic grammar.

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20Macdonald (1936, II: 1042).
21 In his essay, Macdonald mentioned that the term qīṣṣah actually does not occur in the Qurʾān, but the root qasas does, as has been pointed out above, in the form of qasas, perhaps as an infinitive. Macdonald (1936, II: 1042).
22 Ibid., 1043.
Troupeau, for instance, indicates that Sibawayh used *qaṣṣa* as “to narrate,” and *qiṣṣah* as narrative and affairs.\(^{25}\)

Nevertheless, in the preceding portion of my presentation, I have shown how the rich conceptions of *qiṣṣah* present in the Qurʾān’s discourse, as well as the understanding of revelation and canon that it signifies, continue to exert their influence upon the *tafsīr*. However, the term’s continuity becomes important in an individual’s understanding of the Qurʾānic narrative, and this makes it easy, for readers to know the later developments and usages of other applied Qurʾānic terminology that go back to the verses of the Qurʾān itself.

Clearly, the frequent appearance of words, such as *qaṣṣa* and *qaṣaṣ* with their various roots and meanings, that occur in the Qurʾān may have influenced the formation of the phrase *qiṣaṣ al-Qurʾān* and thus have encouraged classical commentators to produce extensive exegetical works on this subject. In this sense, discussing the words composing the phrase *qiṣaṣ al-Qurʾān* is quite common in classical exegetical works.

### 2.1.2 The Semantic Range of *nabāʾ*

In studying the etymological concepts of *nabāʾ* in the Qurʾānic narrative passages, one sees that this word appears extensively with two distinct forms: the singular form *nabāʾ*\(^{26}\) and plural form *anbāʾ*.\(^{27}\) Classical exegetes explained the meaning of *nabāʾ* and *anbāʾ* and concluded that both of them indicate the sense that is applied to *stories* or *events* that correspond exactly to *qaṣaṣ* in the sense of narrative, story, and tale. While al-Zamakhsharī, literally explained *nabāʾ* as the indication of great and awesome news,\(^{28}\)

\(^{25}\) Troupeau (1976: 172).
\(^{26}\) The verses 5:27, 7:176, 10:71, and 28:3.
\(^{27}\) The verses 3:44, 12:102, and 11:49.
\(^{28}\) Zamakhsharī (1987, IV: 206).
al-Rāzī, for instance, figuratively, interpreted *nabā* as the Day of Judgment (*yawma al-qiyāmah*)—or the Qurʾān itself, or the prophecy of Muḥammad.\(^{29}\) Similarly, ibn Muḥakkim interpreted *nabā* to be the Day of Judgment, or the Qurʾān.\(^{30}\)

Also, both Muslim and non-Muslim lexicographers admit that most words like *nabā* and *anbāʾ* converge in the Qurʾān and tend to assume a common signification without losing any of the nuances implied in their original etymologies. In his *lisān al-ʿarab*, Ibn Manẓūr wrote that *nabā* has the meaning of news, while *anbāʾ* has the meaning of proofs.\(^{31}\) At the same level, Pellat indicates that "*nabā* has in the Qurʾān the meaning of "news"—an "announcement" that has been retained until the present day, but it is also has the meaning of an edifying tale, a story of a prophet—however, in this sense, it has been completely replaced by *qaṣāṣ* and *qiṣṣah."\(^{32}\) Wehr, for instance, wrote that *nabā* and *anbāʾ* both contain the meanings of "news, tidings, information, intelligence, announcement, report, new item."\(^{33}\)

It has been pointed out that the root of *nabā* appears in languages preceding Arabic with the meaning of communicating events that have already happened rather than predictions of the future.\(^{34}\) Etymologically, al-Rāghib (d. 565/1169) gave both it and its different forms a lot of attention in his *mufradāt*. For instance, he states that *anbāʾ* must contain three conditional elements to reach the meaning of news with great benefits, gaining knowledge, and authenticity.\(^{35}\) Thus, he classified this term’s meaning and its various forms in the Qurʾānic passages according to these three fundamental

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\(^{32}\) Pella, “Ḥikāya.”

\(^{33}\) Wehr (1979: 935).

\(^{34}\) Izutsu (1964: 182).

elements. For instance, he emphasized that *nabāʾ* and *anbāʾ* in 38:67 “Say: That is a Message Supreme (above all)” and in 11:100 “These are some of the stories of communities that We relate to you,” provide authentic news with great benefits, while 49:6, “O you who believe. If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth,” contains news of great importance and thus must be investigated and looked into deeply. Even though its authenticity outweighs any doubt about it, this news should be reexamined until it becomes absolutely clear.36

According to some lexicographers, the verbs *anbaʾa* and *nabbaʾa* also indicate “the well-informed person” and are very common in the Qurʾān. Lane stated that “when they convey a meaning of knowledge [they] are triple transitive, or may govern three objective complements, the greatest number that any verb can govern”37: for example, see 2:31, “And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said: “Tell me the names of these if ye are right,”” and 12:37, “He said: . . . I will surely reveal to you the truth and meaning of this ere it befall you. . . . For his part, al-Rāghib mentioned that “*nabbaʾa* has a more intensive signification than *anbaʾa* when citing a narrative.38 Accordingly, he interpreted 66:3 as “Who told you this? He said: “He told me who knows and is well-acquainted (with all things)” and 5:105 as “He will show you the truth of all that you do.” He stated that for this reason, the Qurʾān did not use the verb *anbaʾa* in this verse.

Finally, it has been pointed out that *nabāʾ* and *khabar* are synonyms. Pellat mentions that “*khabar* is also Qurʾānic, with a meaning similar to that of *nabāʾ*:

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36 Ibid.
37 Lane (2003, II: 2753).
information, an account of someone or something.” Historically, he indicates that “in later literature this word [khabar] was to have a great vogue and to be applied to a narrative of historical or biographical character.” For instance, Sayyed ‘Abd Rābihī stated that

> the Qur’ān has used nabā‘ and anbā‘ to talk about the event in the past in the early days of human history; but when it uses khabar, it just wants to discover some events not for long time ago in the history, like in verse 9:95, “Allāh has already informed us of the true state of matters concerning you.”

Lastly, qiṣas and nabā‘, which are synonyms, and appear in many verses and narrative passages, also occur in other verses in which their derivable terms appear next to each other. In this connection, “We will relate to you their tidings truly; they were youths who believed in their Lord” 18:13, and likewise, 11:120, which concludes the Qur’ānic narrative portion of sūrah Hūd and reveals a special characteristic: “And all that We relate to you of the tidings of the messengers is that whereby We strengthen your heart. In these there has come to you the truth and the admonition, and a reminder to the believers.” Another example is offered in 28:3: “We will recite to you something of the story (nabā‘) of Moses and Pharaoh.” Here, khabar and nabā‘ are nearly synonymous with particular meanings of ḥadīth: khabar with ḥadīth’s meaning of an allegorical story and nabā‘ as a story or event narrated without judgment.

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39 Pellat, “Ḥikāya.”
40 Ibid.
41 Sayyed (1972: 45).
2.1.3 The Semantic Range of *ḥadīth*

Literary, *ḥadīth* appears to be associated with reporting and representing the past. However, the term occurs many times in the Qur'ānic text with different meanings. Pellat states:

*ḥadīth* as used in the Qur'ān can be translated by “discourse,” but it means also an edifying story (e.g., that of Moses, 20:8–9, 89:15); on the other hand, *aḥādīth* (plural of *uḥdūtha* rather than of *ḥadīth*) is used of legendary tales 23:46–44, 34:18 and, in a general way, of lying talk.\(^{43}\)

Classical exegetes and lexicographers have discussed the Qur'ānic sense of the term *ḥadīth*. For example, 12:111 emphasizes revelation’s general goal: “*In their stories (qasasihim) is surely a lesson for people with minds; it is not a tale (ḥadīth) forged.*” Here *qaṣasihim* and *ḥadīth* refer to *stories* and *tales*. Al-Rāḥib stated that *ḥadīth* in this verse means “what one says in one’s dream: *mā yataḥaddathu bihi al-insānu fī nawmihī.*”\(^{44}\)

Also, according to al-Rāzī, *ḥadīth* could be applied to the entire Qur’ān, as in “*Let them then produce a recital like unto it, if they speak the truth*” 52:34, “*Do you then wonder at this recital?*” 53:59, and “*But what has come to these people, that they fail to understand a single fact?*” 4:78.\(^{45}\)

In 34:19, *ḥadīth* is used and linked directly to *qiṣṣah*: “*At length We made them as a tale (that is told)*” and this means tales to be told.\(^{46}\) In this case, this term also signifies conversation and telling stories, and the *muḥaddith* is the person of many stories, one who relates them well. Likewise, 51:24 asks: “*Has the story of the honored guests of Abraham reached you?*” Krapf distinguishes between *qiṣṣah* and *ḥadīth*, for “the latter is being specifically determined as a tale of the past. The exact entry of *ḥadīth* is ‘stories,

\(^{43}\) Pellat, “*Hikāya*”
\(^{44}\) Rāḥib (1992: 223).
tale account, report, history.”\textsuperscript{47} Lane defines \textit{hadīth} as “a piece of information, intelligence, an announcement, news or tidings, a piece of news, an account, a narration, or narrative, a story employed to signify little and much.”\textsuperscript{48} Etymologically, \textit{hadīth} can mean just about any kind of account—including, as noted, a \textit{qīssah}. Once again, one must factor out such distinguishing features. In this case, it might be advantageous to consider \textit{hadīth} conversely either as a story or a true account with some historical perspectives.\textsuperscript{49}

Therefore, the reader finds, curiously, that this term can mean either history, as in “\textit{Has the story of Moses reached you?}” 79:15, “\textit{Has the story reached you of the forces?}” 85:17, and “\textit{When the Prophet disclosed a matter in confidence to one of his wives}” 66:3. According to al-Rāghib, these verses “are suggesting a true account, a historical or factual narrative, and everything reached by the human being through hearing, or revelation is called \textit{hadīth}.”\textsuperscript{50}

This term, to which the reader is uniformly referred, comes from the roots \textit{ḥadatha}, \textit{muḥdith}, and \textit{iḥdāth} that, according to Lane, mean “new, invented, existed newly, came into exist, one says \textit{ḥadatha amr}, an event originated. Also, it has the sense of narrate, talk, especially alluding to the recounting of the traditions of the prophet Muhammad.”\textsuperscript{51} Al-Rāghib further stated that \textit{ḥadatha} “implies a thing was brought into existence, an innovation,”\textsuperscript{52} such as in “\textit{Whenever a renewed Message from their Lord comes to them, they listen to it as in jest}” 21:2. Thus, \textit{ḥadīth} embraces a semantic range of invention—new things, news, talk, a wonderful story, an evil story, an absurd, laughable

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{47} Krapf (1882: 155).
\item \textsuperscript{48} Lane (2003, II: 529).
\item \textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Rāghib (1992: 223).
\item \textsuperscript{51} Lane (2003, II: 527–28).
\item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
story, a pretty story, a true account, and what God has told his Prophet by inspiration or in a dream, and which the Prophet has told in his own words.

Finally, it has been pointed out that the term hadīth in the Qur‘ān contains an historical concept. Accordingly, Khalidi has associated the meaning of this term with both the Meccan and Medinan periods of the Qur‘ānic revelation:

hadīth has two basic meanings. In Meccan verses especially, the hadīth of Moses or Pharaoh, for instance, mean ‘story’ or, better still, ‘parable.’ In Mediness verses hadīth tends to mean ‘speech’ or ‘report’. This is already, if correct, an indication of a shift in the function of hadīth from a private to a more public role of guidance. 53

### 2.1.4 The Semantic Range of usṭūrah

The Qur‘ān uses asāṭīr al-awwalīn extensively. 54 More interestingly, the context of this phrase meaning ‘stories of the ancients,’ is usually a quotation attributed to the enemies of Islam, such as in verse 6:25 ‘this is naught but stories of the ancients.’ The Quraysh had used it to mock the prophet Muḥammad and refused to accept the message of the Qur‘ān. 55 Etymologically, Jeffery explained that non-Muslim scholars, such as Nöldeke and Horvitz, have proposed different hypotheses regarding this term’s semantic range. Most of them concluded that the word usṭūrah is generally thought to have an untraced origin, having little connection to the obvious suspects of Greek, Syriac, and Aramaic. 56 Similarly Tottoli states that one should not see the usṭūrah as a chronological narrative but rather a moralizing story of monotheism. 57 In addition, Pellat provides a detailed interpretation concerning the term usṭūrah.

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56 Jeffery (1938: 56–7).
**usṭūrah** is Qur’ānic in the expression *asāṭīr al-awwalīn* “the fables of the Ancients”, which has a distinctly pejorative connotation when used by unbelievers inclined to compare the revelation with fables and old wives’ tales to which no credence should be given. The difficulty which lexicographers have in finding the singular of *asāṭīr* proves that this term, probably deriving from the Greek ἱστορία or the Latin *historia*, had served to form a pejorative plural (cf. *abāṭīl*) and that the corresponding singular had been forgotten or had never existed. Nowadays the term has been reinstated in the singular form *usṭūrah* with the particular meaning of legend or myth.\(^{58}\)

Classical lexicographers provided some exegetical works concerning *asāṭīr*. According to Ibn Manẓūr, “the meaning of the term *asāṭīr* is fictions and talks that contain nonsense.”\(^{59}\) Al-Rāghib stated that the meaning of this term is concerned “all fake and false written documents, like in 25:5.”\(^{60}\)—*And they say: ‘Tales of the ancients, which he has caused to be written. And they are dictated before him morning and evening.’*—even though this term’s general concept centers on tales of the ancients, which seem to exist as an oral tradition of myth and fable, convey the meaning that appear in the Qur’ān.\(^{61}\) In this sense, *qiṣaṣ* is contrasted with *asāṭīr*, which are mere fables or legends, false or devoid of morals, as in “*We relate to you the best of qaṣaṣ,*” which implies heavenly selected stories from history based upon preferences accuracy and moral teachings.\(^{62}\)

Classical exegetes and lexicographers concluded that the general Arabic context of *awwalīn* means the ancient generations. They claimed that the Qur’ān uses this term for “those past generations, the memory of whom must have been very clear in the minds of the people of the Prophet Muḥammad’s time.”\(^{63}\) However, according to the Qur’ānic concepts, *asāṭīr al-awwalīn* has no helpful meaning if its distinct words are examined

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58 Pellat, “Ḥikāya.”
63 Tottolli (2002: 12).
separately. This phrase occurs with the same structure in the Qur’ānic narrative passages. In some verses, the Qur’ān describes the unbelievers as having rejected and even mocked the contents of the prophetic passage. Consequently, all of the narratives constitute an essential part of his preaching. When reading 23:83, 26:68, 46:17, and other verses that describe the promise of the resurrection, it is quite clear that these verses gave precise answers to the unbelievers who had stated that “we do not believe and say that these promises are asāṭīr al-awwalīn.” This evidently ironic answer was “spoken jokingly to the Prophet, for he is accused of repeating a sort of fable from time immemorial in which nobody can any longer believe.” Tottoli indicates that this reaction had been shown by the Qurayshītes and the Arabs of the peninsula:

[They] were already aware of the contents of the revelation brought by Muḥammad, at least as far as it concerns eschatological promises, and that they were not inclined to believe in this contents, which were defined as asāṭīr al-awwalīn. [Other verses state] That the unbelievers refuse to put faith in the signs of God and claim that they themselves are able to produce something similar, since all that is being dealt with is but asāṭīr al-awwalīn.

Moreover, in certain verses, this expression could indirectly refer to the stories of punishment, which the Qur’ān contains in abundance. Among the signs dismissed by the unbelievers as asāṭīr al-awwalīn are stories of the prophets. Past events, along with promise of the prophets’ triumph and the unbelievers’ punishment, could by right be included among those signs and be rejected with disgust by those who considered them mere stories or fables of the ancients, handed down and known by everyone, and thus reaching Muḥammad. Up to this point, the expression has, in any case, a very vague meaning.

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64 Ibid., 13.
65 Ibid., 12.
Finally, some Muslim exegetes confused the issue by using *myth* as a synonym for *asāṭīr* or *usṭūrah*. Thus, the concept of *myth* is mostly misunderstood or opposed because its popular usage differs from its literary-critical one. In contrast, *myth*, as used in academic discourse, is employed in a largely positive and functional way. A dominant *myth* of any culture is a story that explains to people the reality and meaning of their world, including their relation to the Creator.\(^6\) *Myths* often include a salvation story, provide patterns of behavior, and are reenacted in ritual. This usage says nothing about whether any given *myth* is historical or fictional.

In the first section of this chapter, I presented the semantic ranges and the distinctions between *qiṣṣah*, *nabāʾ*, *ḥadīth*, *khabar*, and *usṭūrah*, in both Qur’ānic exegesis and Islamic literature. Further, I have offered a comprehensive account of the exegetes’ understanding of Qur’ānic narratives (*qaṣaṣ al-Qur’ān*), especially the stories of the prophets (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*), which has to be considered relevant in Qur’ānic exegesis. Thus, according to the semantic ranges of the terminology that I have provided, from the point of view of the Qur’ān, this terminology reflects a very precise historical situation. According to Wansbrough, “all the terms, in the formulae used, convey more the meaning of *exampla* rather than *historia*.”\(^7\) Therefore, most of these Qur’ānic narratives appear with a kind of terminology that refers to a narrative in the sense of a report of historical events. Thus, the etymological structures of these terms have been studied and used with apparently no difference as regards their meaning and, above all, without a preponderant use of one in preference to the others. In this sense, classical exegetes used

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\(^6\) Bowley (1999: 3).
these technical terms systematically to present a complete understanding of the Qur’ānic narratives.

Students of the Qur’ān have become more confident when studying the semantic ranges of *qiṣṣah, nabāʾ, ḥadīth, khabar, and usṭūrah* as they appear in Qur’ānic exegetical works and Muslim literature indices and lexicons, for in such cases their meanings differ from those found when they are used in other prose genres. They conclude that most of the classical exegetes and lexicographers have assumed that these terms and their derived forms present types of speech that are distinguished from others due to their chronological order and religious functions. Despite the precise meaning implied by this latter expression, the lexicographers, who devote quite a lot of space to studying the root of the terms, hardly provide conclusive definitions of *qiṣṣah, nabāʾ, ḥadīth, khabar, and usṭūrah* at all. Therefore, the domain of each term’s semantic field needs to be explored carefully. Furthermore, the territory and the relationships in the field change over time. For example, in the case under discussion, the range of connotations that can be discerned within the Qur’ān’s own usage is not necessarily the same range of connotations that can be discerned even a short time later, when the makeup and experience of those who read the Qur’ān is quite different. The meaning of the Qur’ān is, therefore, “the history of its meanings.”

2.2 SOURCES AND EXEGETICAL METHODS OF NARRATIVE

Classical exegetes have agreed that the Qur’ān, the prophetic sayings, the Arabic language rules, theology, and mysticism are the most essential sources that could be used to interpret the Qur’ānic narrative. Therefore, in this section, I will critically study how

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68 Smith (1980: 504).
such classical exegetes—like Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Rāzī, as well as Nisābūrī and Ruzbihān al-Baqlī—have used these fundamental sources. And, in regard to similarities and differences, what are their exegetical methods when interpreting the Qurʾānic narrative? I shall begin with the Qurʾān as primary source for them.

2.2.1 The Qurʾān

According to Muslim scholars, the primacy of the Qurʾān cannot be challenged because it is the main source of the information needed to interpret its narrative. Therefore, classical exegetes, like ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Rāzī, and others, have advocated this idea and assumed that the most prominent method to interpret the Qurʾānic narrative is the Qurʾānic text itself. They asserted that the real meaning is already existed in Qurʾānic text and it is the task of the mufassir to draw out it by interpretation. In another words, the mufassirūns’ task is to show that each story relates to the sūrah is likely to be sūrah, and the fragmented nature of the Qurʾān is a precisely crafted narrative tool. For example, any verse in the Qurʾān contains a complete idea, and this same point may be explained by another verse. Also, they affirmed that the Qurʾān not only presents some interpretative vocabularies and ideas, but also themes that provide exegetical material on the history of the prophets and other major subjects. Donner gives a concrete example about the Qurʾānic presentation of the prophets’ history. He says: “The apostles and prophets are not successive links in

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70 Tottoli (2002: 17).
chain of historical evolution . . . but merely repeated examples of an eternal truth, idealized models to be emulated.”\textsuperscript{73}

Furthermore, as the Qurʾān usually presents only one portion of a story at a time; each one is usually self-contained. The contemporary Muslim scholar Muhammad Mahmoud describes the structure of the Qurʾānic narratives as divided into two types: the narrative sequence and a sub-text narrative.\textsuperscript{74} Given that \textit{tafsīr} is one of the most important fields for revealing the Qurʾānic narratives’ meaning, at least in a scholarly milieu, the \textit{mufassirūn} must know the fundamental elements of these sub-text narratives as well as their totality, which “make up an implied primary text from which the sub-texts are generated.”\textsuperscript{75} Except for sūrah \textit{Yūsuf}, however, the primary narrative text does not figure in the Qurʾān. At this point, the \textit{mufassirūn} need to reconstruct and order all of the sub-text’s elements according to their chronological sequence and follow the story’s events through their linear generative schemes.

However, classical exegetes have always recognized that the Qurʾān has different presentations of narrative. According to Mīr:

\begin{quote}
The story of Adam 2:30-39 is complete in itself, as that of Abraham and Lot 11:69-83. Just as only that part which contributes to the sūrah’s overall theme will be told, we find that if several stories contribute to that end, they will be combined in a single sūrah, as in sūrahs 18, 21, and 25.\textsuperscript{76}
\end{quote}

For hermeneutical purposes, the classical \textit{mufassirūn}’s most important task is to discover the rule that determines which portion of the story will be narrated to complete the story’s meaning. Therefore, they were concerned to collect some Qurʾānic verses to accomplish some historical events or explain some terminologies ambiguities contained

\begin{footnotesize}
\item Donner (1998: 84).
\item Mahmoud (1995: 201).
\item Ibid.
\item Mīr (2000: 8).
\end{footnotesize}
in the narrative text and reconstruct its parts in order to comprehend its general theme. Thus, they have advocated a similar method to interpret the Qur’ānic narrative with the Qur’ānic text itself. Accordingly, they assumed that the Qur’ān would explain the abbreviated section with another section that contained details—as for example, the case of the story of Adam and Satan, in which there was a brief mention in some places and detailed information in others. Also the story of Pharaohs and Moses was abbreviated in some places and detailed and expanded in others. 

For instance, ibn Muhakkim augments the verse 2:55 “O Moses! We shall never believe in thee until we see Allāh manifestly,” but ye were dazed with thunder and lighting even as ye looked on.”—with—“O my Lord! if it had been Thy will Thou couldst have destroyed, long before, both them and me: wouldst Thou destroy us for the deeds of the foolish ones among us? this is no more than Thy trial: by it Thou causest whom Thou wilt to stray, and Thou leadest whom Thou wilt into the right path.” 7:155. Thus, ibn Muhakkim’s main purpose, therefore, is to have a clear interpretation about the people who asked Moses to see God manifestly.

In addition, from the literary standpoint, classical exegetes have classified the Qur’ānic narratives according to their different forms and styles. They made great efforts to show how the Qur’ān links all the narrative sub-texts of one story from different sūrahs to present a complete literary meaning. For instance, both al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī indicate that there is an omission (ḥadhīf) in 12:45 “But the man who had been released, one of the two (who had been in prison) and who now bethought him after (so

77 Dhahabī (1976, I:38).
79 Mīr has classified these narratives’ sub-texts according to their styles; he says: “long (e.g., the story of Joseph) or not-so-long (e.g., the stories of Moses, Jesus, and Abraham), short (mukhtasār), a verse or two (e.g., the People of the Garden), and very brief (ishārah). See Mīr (2000: 8).
long) a space of time, said: ‘I will tell you the truth of its interpretation: send ye me (therefore).’” And the omission (ḥadhf) is replaced by the phrase send me. Both have asserted that there is no need to mention it because the meaning of the verse should be read: “Send me to Joseph. He came to him and asked him for the interpretation of the dream.” Similarly, al-Ṭabrisī interprets 19:7 “O Zakariya! We give thee good news of a son: His name shall be Yahya: on none by that name have We conferred distinction before.” by means of the phrases “His prayer was answered.” and “His name shall be Yahyā.” Al-Ṭabrisī also asserts that this verse was fully explained by the verse 3:39, “While he was standing in prayer in the chamber, the angels called unto him: ‘(Allāh) doth give thee glad tidings of Yahya, witnessing the truth of a Word from Allāh, and (be besides) noble, chaste, and a prophet, of the (goodly) company of the righteous.” Al-Zamakhsharī interprets 19:9: “He said: ‘So (it will be) thy Lord saith, “that is easy for Me: I did indeed create thee before, when thou hadst been nothing!” by the Qur’ānic phrase ‘that is easy for Me.’ Al-Zamakhsharī emphasizes that this verse is like the verse 15:66: “And We made known this decree to him, that the last remnants of those (sinners) should be cut off by the morning.”

Finally, in order to explain the Qur’ānic narrative with the Qur’ān itself, classical exegetes were concerned to collect sub-texts that contain the general statements (mujmal) explained by the detailed (mubayan) ones. For example, ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Rāzī were interested to explain the words that have been received by Adam in the verse 2:37: “Then learnt Adam from his Lord words of inspiration, and his Lord Turned towards him; for He is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.”

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82 Zamakhsharī (1987, II: 324).
have narrated on the authority of Mujāhid, Qatādah, Ibn ‘Abbās, and Ibn Zayd, that the words of inspiration have been detailed in the verse 7:23 “They said: ‘Our Lord! We have wronged our own souls: If thou forgive us not and bestow not upon us Thy Mercy, we shall certainly be lost.’”83 Similarly, in the same narrative, some Qur’ānic terms appear to be different in their content or synonymous in their meaning, like the story of the creation of Adam. First, in 7:12, 1:61, and 38:71, it is mentioned that he was created from mud (ṭīn), and 38:71 and other verses like 18:38 mention he was created from earth (turāb), and some others like 15.28 say clay (ṣalsāl) and ḥamā’ masnūn. According to al-Dhahabī, the majority of the classical exegetes have used these different terms to interpret the different stages that Adam went through from creation until he received the soul.84

2.2.2 The Prophetic ḥadīth

After the Qur’ān, the Prophet’s sayings (ḥadīths) preserve a special place in Islamic literature.85 It has been noted that since the beginning of Islam, ḥadīth and tafsīr have been closely connected—that is, the divine word and the prophetic words are interrelated.86

Therefore, the integrations of the prophetic ḥadīth into the Qur’ān commentaries of ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha’labī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī, and al-Rāzī were attained through different methods and strategies. For instance, the Ḥadīthite exegete ibn Muḥakkim presents a well-established method in using ḥadīth when he interprets the Qur’ānic narrative. Through his tafsīr, he uses the prophetic tradition that was narrated

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84 Dhahabī (1976, I: 38).
85 Hermeneutically, Chapter four will be dedicated to present extensive works in using textual narrative in tafsīr.
by the Prophet’s Companions, such as Ibn ʿAbbās, Ibn Masʿūd, and others. He does this by quoting them and those who also quoted them. Ibn Muḥakkim also uses the tafsīr works of the successors, in particular al-Ḥasan and Mujāhid, and extensively narrates from al-Kalbī.\(^87\) In addition, Ibn Muḥakkim rarely mentions the full isnād of the prophetic ḥadīth.\(^88\) Hence, the methodology he used was totally depended on the narrative text (al-matn) and minimized or eliminated completely the chain of transmission, keeping only the name of the Companion that narrated the ḥadīth from the prophet. Ibn Muḥakkim rarely mentions the successors, the successor’s successors and his teachers’ names.\(^89\)

What is striking is that when ibn Muḥakkim explained a Qurʾānic narrative, he considered it as a separate entity from the Qurʾānic text. Therefore, he begins first by citing the accounts that help understanding the vocabulary or the general meaning. In many places of his tafsīr, he would say: “al-Ḥasan said this and that” or “Mujāhid said this and that;” for example, when he interprets the verse 7:108, Ibn Muḥakkim quotes Mujāhid: “naza‘a’ means: “he pulled his hand out of the pocket of his shirt.”\(^90\) And also he quotes from al-Ḥasan: “he took it out by God as a lantern.”\(^91\) In addition, if the Qurʾānic narrative has other ḥadīth material, which provides more explanations or gives the reasons of revelation, ibn Muḥakkim depended on al-Kalbī’s narrations.\(^92\) Also, it is

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\(^87\) Ibn Muḥakkim (2002, I: 34).
\(^88\) In the introduction of Ibn Muḥakkim’s tafsīr, Sharīfī comments on the methodology of Ibn Muḥakkim of depending on the narration in his exegesis. He says: “this is a major error in methodology that Ibn Muḥakkim should not have fallen in to as he was writing in the age where the chain of transmission was well adhered to science of ḥadīth.” See Ibn Muḥakkim (2002, I: 37).
\(^89\) Ibn Muḥakkim (2002, II: 34).
\(^90\) Ibid.
\(^91\) Ibid.
\(^92\) For example, in the same verse, he narrated on the authority of al-Kalbī who said: “It reached us that Mūsā said: O Pharaoh, what is in my hand? He said a staff. So Mūsā though it and it turned in to a hudge serpent filled the room with its size, then it descended over Pharaoh to swallow him so he called: O Mūsā, O Mūsā, so Mūsā grabbed it from its tail and it reverted back to a staff. After that Pharaoh said: Any other signs Mūsā? He said yes. He said what is it? So Mūsā took out his hand and said: what is this? He said your hand. So Mūsā put it in his pocket and then took it out and became so white that it will amaze any one with
observed that in some places of his *tafsīr*, if ibn Muḥakkim was to depend on the hermeneutical works of Ibn Salām, he would say: “Some of them said” or “some of them mentioned.” In other places he would say: “it reached me from so and so.”

Generally, it has been noted that al-Ṭabarī’s *jāmiʿ al-bayān* is based on the narration of the prophetic ḥadīth, especially when explaining the Qurʾānic narrative. It is clear that al-Ṭabarī wanted to emphasize the *tafsīr bil-maʿthūr*’s method in exegetical works. In other words, he asserts that the need to revert back to the knowledge established by the Companions and the successors, which has been narrated from them properly. Al-Ṭabarī sees that this is the most prominent method to interpret the Qurʾānic narrative. Therefore, in his works, prior to mentioning the meaning of the verse or the Qurʾānic narrative passage, he lists the full chain of the transmitters of the ḥadīth. His methodology can be described as follows: First he explains the general meaning of the verse that is related to the narrative, then he summarizes his interpretation by saying: “as a result of what I have said the same that exegetes have said.” Then, at that point, he cites the people who narrated that with “*dhikru mann qāla dhālika*”; he continues by listing all the traditions that explained the verse—with his own chain of transmission connected with the Companions or the Successors. For example, al-Ṭabarī interprets the verse 7:108. He says:

> It means that Moses took out his hand and it was white for all who looked at it, and as it was related to us that Moses’ hands were black (*ādam*) and God turned

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93 For example: When interpreting the verse 7:128, he said: “that is the land of Egypt where they removed the children of Israel out of it. And some of them said: therefore, they will kill the children of the people of Egypt. Similarly, when Pharaoh said, in the verse 40:26, kill your children as you killed theirs.” See Ibn Muḥakkim (2002, II: 36).
them white as sign to prove his prophethood.” Then, al-Ṭabarī cites all the traditions that explain this event.⁹⁴

In addition, in order to interpret the stories that linked with the lives of the Biblical prophets, al-Ṭabarī in his tafsīr provides a large number of prophetic ḥadīths. In his works, it is quite clear that the structure of the prophets’ biographies and the textual narratives of the pre-Islamic prophets are reconstructed by the use of traditions that come from extra-Islamic sources selected after a certain level of investigation.⁹⁵ Also, other prophetic ḥadīths are mentioned with full discussion of certain exegetical investigations, but the stories are predominantly made up of extra-Islamic narrations or writings.⁹⁶ Thus, such approaches are in the majority, given that al-Ṭabarī’s tafsīr represents the model for all subsequent classical exegetes. In dealing with history of the prophets mentioned in the Qurʾān, any reconstruction that sought to define the contents of the Qurʾānic message in historical terms, al-Ṭabarī provided a typical structure: the Prophet’s life and his community’s experiences are preceded by such stories, above all those of the Biblical prophets.

Following al-Ṭabarī’s method, the integration of prophetic ḥadīth is quite noticed in al-Thaʿlabī’s exegetical works. Therefore, the hermeneutical approach to the Qurʾānic narrative made by al-Thaʿlabī was clearly textual narrative based and, like al-Ṭabarī, belongs within the general stream of tafsīr style of his previous generation. As a primary

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⁹⁴ In this verse, al-Ṭabarī cites many traditions to explain Moses’s hand. He started: 1) “Al-ʿAbbās narrated to me, he said: Yazīd told me, he said: al-Ṣabāgh b. Zayd, from al-Qāsim b. Abī Ayyūb, said: Saʿīd b. Jubayr, on the authority of ibn ʿAbbās said: he pulled his hand out of his pocket and saw that it was white without blemish then he re-tucked it in his sleeve where it turned back to its original color.” 2) Al-Muthannā narrated to me, he said: ʿAbd Allāh said Muʿāwiya narrated to me from ʿAli ibn Abī Ṭalḥah on the authority of ibn ʿAbbās. . .3) Muḥammad ibn ʿAmr narrated to me; he said: Abū ʿĀṣim narrated to me. He said ʿIsā narrated to me from ibn Abī Nujayḥ on the authority of Muḥāhid. . . .4) Mūsā ibn Hārūn narrated to me, he said: Abū saʿīd narrated to me who said I heard Muḥāhid said... Al-Ḥārith narrated to me, said ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz narrated to me, said; Abū Saʿīd narrated to me who said; I heard Muḥāhid said... ” See Ṭabarī (1954, XII: 17).
⁹⁶ Ibid.
source to interpret the ambiguities of the Qur’ānic narratives, it is quite clear that in *al-kashf* there is no single verse or Qur’ānic narrative passage that is not affected by the presence of the ḥadīth literature. When interpreting the Qur’ān, to support some theological and historical issue, in addition to mythical legends, al-Tha‘labī presented a considerable number of prophetic ḥadīths, which reflected the extent of the textual narratives in his *tafsīr* works.

Similarly to ibn Muḥakkim, al-Tha‘labī, however, did not cite the entire chain of the transmission of the hadīth, but very often he mentions only the Companion, like, “Ibn ‘Abbās said,” or the successor, like “on the authority of Mujāhid or al-Ḥasan said,” or like “on the authority of Wahb and Ka‘b said.” Sometimes, al-Tha‘labī put narrators together (ibn ‘Abbās and al-Suddī), and after that, he narrated the ḥadīth text. These methods of using the narrations are the most predominant in al-Tha‘labī’s exegetical works on the Qur’ānic narratives. Thus, al-Tha‘labī’s *al-kashf* seems to be the richest source for the history of the prophets in Islam. Several sources of ḥadīth traditions that he used referred to Biblical literature and other Jewish scriptures in order to provide an extensive interpretation for those stories related to the Jews. Other sources referred to Christianity when dealing with stories related to Mary and Jesus; other exegetes referred to Arabian and mystical sources to interpret stories related to the Arab prophets.

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97 Al-Tha‘labī mentions in the introduction of his *tafsīr* all sources of ḥadīth that he uses along with the chain of the transmissions. See al-Tha‘labī (2002, I: 75–84).
98 For example see al-Tha‘labī’s interpretation of 7:116, where he mentions the following narrators: Ibn ‘Abbās, ibn Ishāq, and al-Suddī altogether. See al-Tha‘labī (2002, IV: 268).
99 See al-Tha‘labī’s interpretation of the verse 7:118; he mentions the interpretation of the Jewish name al-Nadr ibn Shāmīl to explain this verse. Al-Tha‘labī (2002, IV: 270).
100 See al-Tha‘labī’s interpretation of the verse 19:9–11.
101 See al-Tha‘labī’s interpretation of the verse 7:72–79.
Al-Ṭabrisī’s commentary contains a good deal of prophetic ḥadīths, which explain some historical ambiguities, especially those related to the reason for the revelation (asbāb an-nuzūl) and the history of the prophets. When explaining these Qur’ānic narratives and the various ḥadīth reports connected to them, al-Ṭabrisī would use the traditionalists’ method of listing the chains of authorities (namely, those related to Ibn ʿAbbās, Muqātil, Mujāhid, Qatāda, and Saʿīd ibn Jubayr) to show which companions had first-hand knowledge of the explanation of the Qur’ānic text. Therefore, he cited all accounts that help understand the Qur’ānic narrative. Similar to other classical exegetes, however, al-Ṭabrisī used different reports from other exegetes, especially on such chains of traditions (isnād hadīths). But always, he made his choice on presenting those chains that were lacking in other exegetical works.

Al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī’s hermeneutical methods in using prophetic ḥadīth when interpreting the Qur’ānic narratives are totally different from that of other classical exegetes mentioned above. Al-Zamakhsharī, for instance, uses the ḥadīth tradition to clarify some literary or historical or theological difficulties that are only related to the Qur’ānic narratives. Therefore, he rarely mentions the chain of transmissions of the ḥadīth of a Companion like ibn ʿAbbās or a successor like Mujāhid. In contrast, al-Rāzī’s tafsīr uses the prophetic ḥadīth extensively, but most of the time, he criticizes the content of ḥadīth when it contradicts with the Qur’ānic text. For example, his rationality in using these reports led him to exclude many of the isrāʾilīyāt accounts on the grounds

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102 See for example his exegetical works on sūrah al-fātiha. Ṭabrisī (1995, I: 48).
104 ʿAbdul (1977: 30).
106 For example see al-Zamakhsharī’s work on 2:259 when he mentions ibn ʿAbbās’ reading to clarify the meaning of the verb tabayyan. Zamakhsharī (1987, I: 391).
that they were introduced by converts according to their own understanding. Technically, al-Rāzī believed that these accounts contain little of any interest and benefit for the science of *tafsīr*, because they are narrated by one narrator, are unclear, and contradict each other in most cases. He, therefore, indicates that it is better to avoid these *isrā‘īliyāt* accounts and accept that the silence on the investigation of such subjects is a duty, because there is no true text can be found among them due to their weakness and irrational sense.\(^{107}\)

2.2.3 Grammar, Lexicography, and Linguistics

Exploring the role of linguistics in hermeneutics is essential to understanding Qur'ānic narrative texts and its interpretations. In this case, language is considered an essential factor in the study of the Scriptures, for they are somehow primordial to the material that constitutes the universe.\(^{108}\) Its function is a major tool to understand the history of the theory of metaphors and the linguistic problems that deal with Qur'ānic exegesis, especially in the classical era of Islam. Thompson has explained the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s idea, which provides a new model of hermeneutics by disputing the role of human language; Ricoeur admitted that language is the construction of a deep symbolic structure of the universe,\(^{109}\) and explained that the universe itself—which is constituted through semiotic/semantic processes and not human language—reflects a semiotic/semantic structure internally.\(^{110}\) However, considering that human language is a semiotic and semantically rich universe, Grassie attempts to support this

\(^{107}\) See al-Rāzī’s works on 7:107–8 when he rationally criticizes the use of the traditions that interpret this passage. Rāzī (1995, XIII: 157–58).

\(^{108}\) Hermeneutically, Chapter three will be dedicated to present an extensive works in linguistics and Arabic language rules.

\(^{109}\) Thompson (1981: 52).

\(^{110}\) Ibid.
belief by showing that “words achieve their denotative function only through connotative associations in established usage. Because the function of language is first established in connotation, the result is a theory of metaphors as linguistically primordial.”

Theoretically, classical exegetes such as Ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī Tha’labī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī, and al-Rāzī have agreed with the idea that “the Qurʾān is an authoritative proof; it is standard to which everything must be held;” they have asserted that the use of poetry, philology, and grammatical and rhetorical structures of the Arabic language, which more or less exist independently of the body of the Qurʾān itself, increases the proper meaning of the Qurʾānic narrative text. Practically, those exegetes have assumed that everyone who knew Arabic language rules, the science of the grammar, inflection (iʿrāb), and the inimitability of the Qurʾān (iʿjāz al-Qurʾān), would know the meaning of the Qurʾānic narrative discourse, and would know undoubtedly the intended meaning of God. Further, they admitted that the language of the Qurʾān has many aspects (dhū wujūh), which allowed for both metaphorical and allegorical interpretations that were relevant to the word of God. Also, they assumed that the Qurʾānic narrative text itself provides them with the necessary means for explaining the subject with full of possibilities.

For example, classical exegetes have examined the literary level of the Qurʾānic narrative passage’s wording and the grammatical determination of the “Hast thou not Turned thy vision” (alam tarā) 2:258 and the pronoun refers to whom in the Qurʾānic phrase “because Allāh had granted him power.” While Ibn Muḥakkim interprets that the

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111 Grassie, “Hermeneutics in Science and Religion.”
pronoun refers to the King Nimrūd,\textsuperscript{113} al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī and al-Rāzī have agreed in using the grammatical orientation of the phrase \textit{“Hast thou not Turned thy vision”} (alam tarā), but they used different methods of interpretations. For instance, al-Ṭabarī interprets that this is a wondering from God by mentioning his prophet Muḥammad to the one how argued with Abraham about his lord. He interprets that is when the article (ilā) entered the phrase, and that is what Arabs do when they want to wonder about a man’s bad actions they said, did you see this person did this and that.\textsuperscript{114} Al-Tha’labī mentions that it was argued and disagreed; the root is proof (ḥujjah), that is Nimrūd. Grammatically, he explains that the article (الن) clarifies the proof of why God gave him the kingship but he transgressed.\textsuperscript{115} Both al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ṭabrisī have provided similar and more grammatical explanations on the phrase \textit{“Hast thou not Turned thy vision.”} Al-Zamakhsharī, for instance, says:

\textit{‘alam tarā’} denotes wonderment about Nimrūd’s disputation concerning God and his disbelief in Him. It is also closely related to the verb \textit{‘ḥājja’} (dispute, argue) which suggests a dichotomous meaning: first, instead of thankfulness and submission to God, Nimrūd exemplified ungratefulness and ingratitude by his supercilious and unreasonable disputation on account of his transient kingship, which was bestowed on him by God. The same is what God said: \textit{And have ye made it your livelihood that ye should declare it false?} 56:82. Second, he hubristically made the vapid argument only when God gave him sovereignty as the king.\textsuperscript{116}

Al-Rāzī presents two grammatical interpretations about the pronoun (Ha) when interpreting the phrase \textit{because Allāh had granted him power}.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibn Muḥakkim (2002, I: 242). King Nimrūd is mentioned in the book of Genesis 10:8–12. Exegetically, al-Ṭabrisī and al-Tha’labī have narrated on the authority of Mujāhid and others that “the man who argued with Abraham about God was a king called Nimrūd, he was the first to act arrogantly in the earth . . . and it is disputed that Abraham’s encounter with him comes after or before the fire episode. See Ṭabrisī (1995, II: 167–68) and Al-Tha’labī (2002, II: 239).
\textsuperscript{114} Ṭabarī (1954, V: 492).
\textsuperscript{115} Al-Tha’labī (2002, II: 239).
The first is that the pronoun “Ha” [him] in (He gave him) belongs to Abraham, this means that God gave the Kingship to Abraham, and for evidence they used Kingship in the verse here by means of prophethood and establishing religion. Also, it means that would not give the kingship to disbeliever who claims divinity, and the pronoun refers to the closest mentioned noun and in this case is Abraham. The Second is that the pronoun refers to the person who argued with Abraham, which is the opinion of the majority.  

Therefore, the application of the different points of view regarding grammar on the Qur’anic narrative has provided new understandings and helps the readers to understand the method of the classical commentators who delineated the Qur’anic narrative’s grammatical structure in order to provide another level of classical Muslim hermeneutics. In addition, for instance, classical exegetes admitted that the application of language analysis on Qur’anic narrative has impacted the basic meanings of the individual expressions, while an emphasis on inflection or pronunciation developed the analysis of the language used in the structure of the whole phrase or verse of the Qur’anic narrative passage. Therefore, all classical tafsīr works on Qur’anic narrative cannot be distinguished from other types of literary analysis, such as commentaries on poetry. Thus, all of these grammatical and lexicographical efforts are necessary to understanding the Qur’anic text’s essential elements, right down to the setting and etymology of an individual word. This sort of activity can promote or propagate a worldview, a scholarly methodology, or an orientation. However, all these classical philological and grammatical approaches to the Qur’anic narratives are based on the works of the early Kūfan and Baṣran schools of the Arabic language.

2.2.4 Mysticism and Theology

The Qur’anic narrative presents quite a number of theological subjects that became the focal point of early Muslims’ thought and reflected their visions toward God’s

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words, the creator, the universe and man’s position in it, and the prophecy level. Also, the Qur’ānic narrative plays a major role in Muslim theology, representing an important progress within the development of monotheism as it has been derived from previous religions. Therefore, the main concerns of the classical exegetes were to discover the hidden meaning existing in the wording of the Qur’ānic narrative message, which is closely tied to its eloquence and literary style.

For example, one of the proofs of God’s omnipotence is His Capacity and His Alone to give life and cause death is clearly indicated in the verse 2:258. Thus, classical exegetes have raised a theological question to understand why Abraham mentions life before death, while in 26:81, He mentions death before life. Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī and al-Tha’labī have reported that Nimrūd brought two prisoners, and had one killed readily and allowed the other one to stay in life, maintaining this is how I [Nimrūd] also give death and life. Therefore, there is a detailed discussion among classical exegetes, such as al-Ṭabrisī and al-Rāzī, about how Nimrūd tried to demonstrate his ability and power to give life and death.

Al-Ṭabrisī for instance discusses this divine power in the context of the theological argument between Abraham who believed in God and Nimrūd who claimed divinity for himself. Abraham argued that God alone gives life and causes death. Al-Ṭabrisī asks why Abraham began with God giving life before talking about His power to cause death. It is, al-Ṭabrisī says, because the gift of life is the greatest divine bounty. The debate between Abraham and Nimrūd shows the absurdity of Nimrūd’s demonstration of this power for himself. Thus, he did by bringing two men reprieving the

120 Ibid.
guilty and killing the innocent man.\textsuperscript{121} Al-Ṭabrisī concludes that this was a proof of the ignorance of an unbeliever. This is because Nimrūd relied simply on a verbal answer with regard to the actual intent. Nimrūd, thus, neglected the argument of giving life to the dead person and death to a living one, which only God can do and no other.\textsuperscript{122}

The \textit{mufassir} who analyzed this issue most extensively was al-Rāzī. For instance, he argued that there is no contradiction between the two passages 2:258 and 26:81. He asserts that the Prophet Abraham has raised the point of the giving of life and death “because he believed that God can be known only through His divine attributes and acts.”\textsuperscript{123} Al-Rāzī comments at length on this verse, we shall illustrate his approach by looking at his interpretation on the phrase \textit{My Lord is He Who Giveth life and death.} He said: \textit{"I give life and death"}. 2:258. Al-Ṭabrisī, we saw, interprets this in the context of divine bounty, al-Rāzī however prefers theological argument as for putting the gift life before the cause of death in the verse, in his saying \textit{My Lord is He Who Giveth life and death}. Al-Rāzī answers the proof in the context of calling to God should be absolutely clear.\textsuperscript{124} Al-Rāzī continues: “there is no doubt that the marvels (‘\textit{ajā‘ib}) of the creation in the context of life giving are being discerned by people is far more complete, for this reason it is important to mention life before death.”\textsuperscript{125}

One of the points of intense debate among classical Muslim exegetes and theologians was the question of whether God can be seen with the eye or not. Thus, the vision (\textit{ru‘ya}) of God was a point of contention between the Mu‘tazilites and Ash‘arites.

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{123} Rāzī (1995, IV: 23–26).
\textsuperscript{124} Rāzī (1995: IV: 26).
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
\end{footnote}
For example, al-Zamakhshari argues concerning the verse "O my Lord! show (Thyself) to me, that I may look upon thee." 7:143. He writes:

It is not possible for a great prophet like Moses to request to see God, particularly after his people were punished for asking the same thing "And remember ye said: "O Moses! We shall never believe in thee until we see Allāh manifestly, but ye were dazed with thunder and lighting even as ye looked on." 2:55. Moses thus wanted to demonstrate to his people the impossibility of seeing God. He therefore asked for it for himself. 126

I stated in chapter one that Sufis believe that the Qur‘ān is the fundamental source of mystical thought, inspiration, and asceticism, and thus, they maintain that all of their concepts and terms originate in it. Therefore, Sufi tafsīr, which is also known as al-tafsīr al-ishārī or bi-lishārah (Qur‘ānic exegesis through allusion) "is a little-studied, controversial, and voluminous genre of Qur‘ānic commentary, the key feature of which is the ‘unveiling’ (kashf) to the individual Sufi commentator of a relationship between a Qur‘ānic verse and Sufi concepts." 127 It also represents the metaphysical dimension of the Sufi commentators’ consciousness and existence. 128 Therefore, Sufi exegetes have found in the Qur‘ānic stories, especially in the qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ, a common ground that could be used to reflect their mystical understanding and express it in their tafsīrs. In addition, they have claimed that all Sufis believe that prophets mentioned in the Qur‘ānic narratives and the hadīth literature “represent the perfect human model, and embody the ultimate human quality in God’s eyes. [And], because of their unique role as the standard bearers of the divine-human and human-divine relationship, prophets become the special focus of human history." 129

126 Zamakhshari (1987: II: 111-14). In order to demonstrate the important Mu’tazilite doctrine in the vision of God see al-Zamakhshari’s work on No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision: He is above all comprehension, 6:103. Zamakhshari (1987, II: 41).
128 Ibid.
Since the early days of Islamic mysticism, Sufi commentators have approached the Qur’ānic narrative through allegorical and metaphorical interpretations because they believe that its text “may be understood as including this multilayered depth of divine meaning hidden underneath the literal meaning.”\textsuperscript{130} In addition, Sufi commentators have asserted that “\textit{bāṭin}, as the inexhaustible level of meaning contained in the divine word of the Qur’ān, had its counterpart in the spiritual knowledge the Sufis acquired through introspection into the inner emotions stirring their souls.”\textsuperscript{131} In this context, developing the mystical vision of the Qur’ān was directly linked with the Sufi idea of \textit{bāṭin} knowledge and allegorical and metaphorical interpretations of the mystical language of the Qur’ān.\textsuperscript{132}

Generally, both Ruzbihān Baqlī’s and Nisābūrī’s methods of interpretation when they approach the Qur’ānic narrative are a completely mystical and metaphorical one. They link their hermeneutical efforts of the Qur’ānic verses, phrases, or words to their mystical experiences and Sufi orientation. For example, one of the popular and multi-discussed stories in the Qur’ān is the story of Moses and al-Khīḍr. Both Ruzbihān and Nisābūrī interpret the difference between the mystical concepts of the phrase \textit{min ladunī ‘ilmān}, the God-given knowledge of al-Khīḍr, and Moses’s knowledge mentioned in sūrah \textit{al-kahf}. Nisābūrī writes:

\begin{quote}
When the two men met, al-Khīḍr said: I have knowledge which God has taught me and which you do not have. You also have knowledge which God has taught you which I do not have. When they entered the ship, a bird stood at the edge of the ship and took some water with its beck, al-Khīḍr said: neither your knowledge
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{130} Bowering (2003: 347).
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{132} However, this notion of inner knowledge (\textit{ʿilm al-bāṭin}) is considered “a divine gift granted to individual Sufis after intense ascetic effort and psychic discipline [on their part]. Possessed by [the] elite of mystics who were granted the inner sight of and insight (\textit{baṣīraḥ}) into the realities, hidden with their souls, \textit{ʿilm al-bāṭin} was acquired in two principal ways: intuition and extrasensory perception.” Ernst also indicates that all of these definitions “accomplish a powerful rhetorical transaction; the person who listens to or reads these definitions is forced to imagine the spiritual or ethical quality that invoked by the definition, even when it is paradoxical.” See Ernst (1997: 23–24).
nor mine would decrease God’s knowledge as much as this bird took with its beck water from the sea.\textsuperscript{133}

Nisābūrī however agrees that this is true because the knowledge of any human is finite while the knowledge of God is infinite and there is no comparison between the infinite and the finite in any way.\textsuperscript{134}

Ruzbihān Baqlī relies on his masters in his definitions of Sufi terms and concepts. With regard to the expression ‘\textit{ilm laduni} (the knowledge for the presence of God) he quotes ibn ‘Atā’, al-Ḥasan, al-Qāsim, and al-Junayd:

Knowledge for the presence of God (‘\textit{ilm laduni}) is a direct knowledge without mediation, intended for revelation or unveilings (kushūf) not through a dictation of letters. Yet the person to whom knowledge is given it is through witnessing of spirits. According to al-Ḥasan, ‘\textit{ilm laduni} is an inspiration which God the truth (al-ḥaqq) makes it eternal through His secret (sirr), which is not controlled by being turned away from. According to al-Qāsim, knowledge for the presence of God is not knowledge through deduction, which is attained through struggle and mediation; it is knowledge from the divine presence not through mediation. According to al-Junayd, knowledge from the presence of God is what decisively controls of the divine mysteries without circumstance or conflict with reality. It is rather revelations of divine lights (\textit{anwār}) of the hidden unknowns. This occurs to the servant when he prevents his limbs from all acts of disobedience and annihilates movements from all volitions and thus he becomes a ghost before God (al-ḥaqq) without any desire or wish.\textsuperscript{135}

Hence, in addition to what he quotes from Sufi masters, Ruzbihān’s method of interpreting the Qur’ānic narrative is to concentrate on applying his extensive vocabulary of mystical terms such as unveilings (kushūf), witnessing (mushāhadāt), deduction (\textit{istidlāḥ}), secret of the secret (sirr as-sirr), and so on- to emphasize the Sufi context in his hermeneutical efforts on the Qur’ānic narratives. Similarly, when Nisābūrī approaches these Qur’ānic narratives, his method is a mystical and allegorical one. He uses different mystical terms such as \textit{qalb}, ‘\textit{aql}, \textit{maqām}, \textit{nafs mutma’innah}, and

\textsuperscript{133} Nisābūrī (1996, VI: 17).
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
mulhamah, al-kamālāt al-nazariyya wal-ʿamaliyya, al-ʿaql al-fāriq and so on in his Sufi hermeneutics to indicate the existence of the allegorical and mystical interpretation.\textsuperscript{136}

However, when studying classical Sufi hermeneutical works, one eventually realizes that all of them are characterized by the exegete’s particular determinations and selections that led him to choose certain mystical teaching materials which met his criteria. In other words, the exegete’s approach determines which source materials will be selected as well as which methodological approach will be used—for example, in addition to the Qurʿānic text and the prophetic hadīth literature, the use of a particular regional religious orientation or intellectual outlook or a particular attitude to the Sufi tradition. Therefore, these approaches have been used to construct the model of Sufi thought as a way to approach the Qurʿānic narrative.

\textbf{2.3 THE ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS OF NARRATIVE}

In the Qurʿān, there are some verses which clearly mention the essential functions of the Qurʿānic narratives. According to 11:120 and 12:111 and from a Qurʿānic perspective, these narratives’ general purpose is to show the Meccan people that the earlier prophets had succeeded and that their message had triumphed. Another function of these verses was to console the Prophet Muḥammad and give him the courage he needed to face the Meccan opposition. In this sense, Tottolli and Khalidi maintain that classical exegetes viewed that the Qurʿān’s narrative passages are mentioned for specific reasons: to serve and indicate the purpose of the words of God, which are revealed to the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{136} For example, the two orphans are considered as “the soul at peace and the inspired soul (an-nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah wa-l-mulhamah). The treasure located under the wall, meaning the obtainment of theoretical and practical perfection (al-kamālāt an-nazariyyah wal-ʿamaliyyah), is waiting for them. The father is seen as the discerning intellect (al-ʿaql al-fāriq) who wanted to protect this treasure until his sons had matured under the sheykh’s instruction and his kindly and indulgent guidance.”\textsuperscript{136} Nisābūrī (1996, VI: 17) and see Sands (2006: 93).}
prophet Muḥammad, and represent great examples of moral life when the subject is related with the missions of the prophets.\textsuperscript{137} In addition, Khalidi concludes that most of them shared the same “story of the lonely voice crying out against the injustice or indifference of their communities and undergoing similar social, political and spiritual crises. Their credibility is always at stake, and turmoil seems to be inescapable consequence of their mission.”\textsuperscript{138} Accordingly, and from a religious point of view, classical exegeses asserted that the purpose of the Qurʾānic narratives is profoundly different.

However, to illustrate the classical commentators’ general views concerning the functions of the Qurʾānic narrative, Gilliot explains al-Ṭabarī’s position on the precise determination of the events recounted in the Qurʾānic narrative passages. Al-Ṭabarī indicates that the importance of these functions lies in the priority of the religious meaning of the events that proceeded and in a sense to prepare the way for Islam.\textsuperscript{139} For instance, al-Tha‘labī is considered the classical period’s best exegete in this field, for he related the functions and the purposes of the Qurʾānic narratives with God’s wisdom (ḥikmah). In his ‘arā‘is al-majālis, al-Tha‘labī mentioned five considerations:

First: the Qurʾānic narratives indicate the proof of the prophecy of Muḥammad, who being illiterate, could not otherwise have known these stories. Second: they recount to Prophet Muḥammad stories in order to draw lessons that provide a useful example for him and his people. Third: they indicate the favor in which the prophet Muḥammad and his companions were held compared to those in the past. Fourth: they reinforce the faith of the prophet’s successors. Fifth: they keep alive the memory of those prophets and their people in order to preserve their memory and the recounting of their deeds.\textsuperscript{140}

For al-Tha‘labī, however, the connection between the Qurʾānic narratives and their functions in his tafsīr is the central reason for undertaking a work of this sort. Also,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[137] Tottoli (2002: 4) and Khalidi (1994: 9).
\item[138] Khalidi, ibid.
\item[140] Al-Tha‘labī (2002: 2–3).
\end{footnotes}
throughout his hermeneutical works on the *qasas*, al-Ṭabrisī, for instance, connected the Qur’ānic narratives’ functions with the hermeneutical act of the *mufassir*’s religious dogma and the value of the religious lessons that could be learned when he offers the lists and arrangements circulating around the Qur’ānic narrative passage or personage appearing in the text.\(^{141}\) Similarly, al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī, after addressing some contextual issues related to Qur’ānic narrative passages, pointed out the lessons to be learned before projecting their doctrinal choices and summarizing the transmitted exegetical traditions.\(^{142}\)

Most of these classical exegetes assumed that the Qur’ānic narrative’s fundamental functions are not limited to a simple collection of some historical events that happened to pre-Islamic nations or an organic tale of the creation only; rather, their functions, which are required to be implemented in the Muslim community’s daily life, are clear in the Islamic message itself. Accordingly, classical exegetes claimed that “the aspect of the Qur’ānic narrative is not aimless storytelling, but rather it has an important function in the Qur’ān.”\(^{143}\) In this sense, most of the primary hermeneutical works are devoted to demonstrating these Qur’ānic narratives’ formal aspects and functions within the Qur’ānic revelation itself. These exegetes, however, adopted this method to underline the Qur’ānic narrative text’s central and most substantial part in order to offer a detailed exposition of their general contents.

For example, classical exegetes indicated that these Qur’ānic narratives only appear to be repeated throughout the Qur’ān, for each sūrah presents a narrative’s different aspects, describes hitherto unmentioned scenes, and emphasizes a different

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\(^{141}\) See al-Ṭabrisī (1995, II:260). Also, in may Qur’ānic passages al-Ṭabrisī’s aim is to indicate the divine protection of the Prophet Abraham. See Ṭabrisī (1995, IV: 90).


\(^{143}\) Pauliny (1999: 318).
side. These sides are repeated so that a new meaning can emerge, a different exemplary scene is made known, and a different meaning is emphasized. Generally, some relevant details are mentioned at one place while some others are added or subtracted at other places.

According to these exegetes, repetition also functioned as a way to explain the significance of the subject discussed in order to reveal their lessons. In addition, they explained why the Qurʾān repeats a single narrative at different places with different wordings, as in the accounts of Moses, Pharaoh, and Noah, and Adam’s creation. Other stories are placed in a setting that differs from one telling to another, according to the demands of the situation. Thus, classical exegetes assumed that these Qurʾānic narrative passages are neither contradictory nor repetitive, but serve to emphasize different aspects of the event depending on its particular context, and largely as a lesson to the Prophet’s community. Religiously, al-Suyūṭī asserts that the repetitions can be used as a means of reminding people of the significance of the Qurʾānic narratives.\footnote{Suyūṭī (1988, II: 204–205).} In other words, these repetitive stories attempt to remind people of the difference between believers and non-believers, and their significances come to demonstrate that the divine message inherently contains an element of repetition.\footnote{ʿAbdul Şamad (2008: 2).}

Classical exegetes further asserted that the main tasks of Qurʾānic hermeneutics are to discover how these Qurʾānic narratives function as ways to explain some difficulties connected with the narrative passages and to provide more details about the moral tendencies evident in these accounts. In this sense, they were convinced that because of some of the narrative material in the Qurʾānic narrative, their objectives were...
not to present a particular episode about people mentioned in any historical sequence of events, but their aim is to provide examples of the moral choice between belief and unbelief, good and evil and so on.\textsuperscript{146} A key reason for this appears to be that references to past events were not intended to give historical information, but to reveal a moral or religious purpose related to the community’s life. For instance, the Qur’ān is not interested in where Adam lived, when Moses left Egypt, or when the Pharaoh died; rather, it is more concerned with how Moses proclaimed God’s message to the Pharaoh, how Pharaoh reacted, and about Pharaoh’s subsequent behavior toward Moses’s people.

In their hermeneutical works, classical exegetes asserted that all of the Abrahamic tradition’s prophets received essentially the same message from the same source and that their lives follow closely similar patterns. Therefore, the Qur’ānic narratives’ focal point is to indicate the prophecy of Muhammad and teach believers how to learn from his predecessors’ lives and activities. Therefore, classical exegetes were expected to know the origins and the growth of the elements of Islamic prophetology so that they can emphasize the focal point of these Qur’ānic narratives’ functions, specifically the life of the Prophet and his successors. In this context, Jan Pauliny wrote: The challenges, successes, and the failures of the other prophets is a mirror to the Prophet—to illuminate his mission and his tasks.\textsuperscript{147}

Another function of the Qur’ānic narratives is to warn the people. These narratives are usually associated with the prophets and their missions. According to classical exegetes, the Prophet Muḥammad was instructed to inform his followers of these accounts of punishment so they can learn from the tragic end of the earlier

\textsuperscript{146} Rippin (1993: 253).
\textsuperscript{147} Pauliny (1999: 319).
communities. Most of their exegetical work emphasize that these stories were revealed to remind people of how true believers act in certain situations.

CONCLUSION

In the first section of this chapter, I presented the research of the classical exegetes and lexicographers on the semantic ranges of *qiṣṣah*, *nabāʾ*, *ḥadīth*, *khabar*, and *ustūrah*, and I concluded that none of these exegetical works provided a proper definition for *narrative* that could be applied to *story* or *account* when studying the etymological level of the Qur′ānic narratives. Thus, the classical exegetes and lexicographers did not distinguish between all parts of the Qur′ānic revelation and did not accept the claim that the narrative parts in Qur′ān are a unique genre and different from the remaining revelations.

Clearly, the problem of translating *narrative as story or account* from the Qur′ānic concepts has intensified the need to find a single word that can serve as an accurate translation for *qaṣas*. With some hope, Izutsu admits that “some of the complex connotations of the Qur′ān′s *qaṣas* and writing language will come to light as it is allowed to interpret its own concepts and speak for itself.” Other non-Muslim scholars such as Madigan asserted that the existence of just one real meaning is absurd, claiming that it is mistaken to expect that “there is a real meaning, a precise meaning or, still less, one permanently valid meaning for each word.” In this connection, he [Madigan] strongly criticized Izutsu′s approach, which he said is “predicated on the belief that people in

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149 Izutsu (2002: 3).
different cultural situations will use words to categorize and divide up reality in different ways.”

Therefore, classical exegetes such as Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Tha‘labī, al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Rāzī, as well as Nisābūrī and Ruzbihān al-Baqlī, have considered that the Qurʾān, the ḥadīth, linguistics, and Arabic grammar and philology, and mysticism and theology were the fundamental tools to interpret the Qurʾānic narrative. For instance, they assumed that these stories are different in their styles and forms. They asserted that in the Qurʾān, very often these stories appear to be more abbreviated rather than detailed. Therefore, these classical exegetes sought to provide as full an explanation as possible. Through different methods and techniques, they have used the Qurʾānic text as a primary source to interpret its narratives. They asserted that this method was preferred by the companions in order to establish the meanings of the Qurʾān. They assumed that this is not an automated procedure; on the contrary, it is a process that requires significant contemplation. So these processes mentioned above are not achievable by everyone, instead it is an art reserved for those with vision and knowledge.

In addition, the impact of this approach (using ḥadīth) on Qurʾānic narrative tafsīr let the Qurʾān and ḥadīth continue to be more linked and strongly tied in Ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, Tha‘labī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī, and al-Rāzī’s hermeneutical works. Some of them clearly mention the extra-Qurʾānic materials used that included accounts and legends attributed to transmitters belonging to the first generations of Muslims, and were chosen from an enormous mass of traditions that were spread during Islam’s early

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151 Ḥaddīth
152 Dhahabī (1976, I: 38).
centuries. In other words, these materials were the same as those found in Qur’ānic exegetical works and all religious literature. Classical exegetes introduced nothing original into the structure of their works, but rather displayed their differences by revealing their attitude toward the ḥadīth material used and through the choice of the traditions cited.

From another point of view, classical exegetes such as Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarî, al-Tha‘labî, al-Zamakhshari, al-Ṭabrisī, and al-Rāzī used different sources and methods when dealing with the Qur’ānic narratives. They wrote extensive exegetical works to interpret them by means of different levels. Literally, they devoted a vast amount of time and space to showing that the Qurʾān’s narrative style is both eloquent and inimitable as well as a source of grammatical and lexicographical information. Theologically, they emphasized the fact that the Qurʾān always presents these narrative passages in a straight manner in order to realize tawḥīd and thereby remove any elements that contradict pure monotheism. Mystically, they maintained the use of spiritual experience and mystical language to stray in the vast realm of Sufi ideology. Using allegorical and mystical interpretations of the text led a number of Sufi interpreters, like Ruzbihān and Nisābūrī, to rely heavily upon imaginative interpretations in order to find hidden meanings. This applies to large numbers of Qurʾānic narratives, metaphorical and figurative language, numerous texts related to the Unseen, and to a significant number of the Biblical prophets mentioned in the Qurʾān.

Historically, classical muḥaffirūn (mufassirūn) assumed that the Qurʾānic narrative has reached the level of serving as a source of history by recounting the historical facts and situations to achieve that level. But they concluded that the main functions of the Qurʾānic narratives have been connected with the religious and moral lessons to be learned in
order to emphasize their impact upon Muslims throughout history and down to our own
time. For this reason, Khalafallah concludes:

The most importance message of the Qur’anic narratives accumulates in the
religious values (qiyam) they contained. Therefore, the psychological aspects
connected to the events are the predominant issue and this particularity is the
essential point of the literary elaboration necessary in the communication
between the one who spreads the message—Muḥammad—and his addressee.\footnote{Khalafallah (1965: 29).}

In addition, according to Donner, classical exegetes have concentrated on showing
that the Qur’anic narratives and their related events were understood into direct contact
with the reality of the Muslim community in an unparalleled style.\footnote{Donner (1998: 83). He indicates that they emphasized that the

ultimate point of some stories of the prophets is therefore to give powerful
assistance to the prophet Muḥammad to induce him to carry out his mission with
patience and faith notwithstanding the setbacks and opposition he encountered
and the vexations and humiliation he faced.\footnote{Ibid.}

In the following chapter, I will study the type of hermeneutics that has been
applied to the Qur’anic narrative’s literary level, which are primarily found in the works
of Hūd Ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Tha’labī, al-Ṭabrisī, and al-Rāzī. I will
study the function of the Arabic language rules (qawā’id al-lughah al-‘arabiyyah) used by
these mufassirūn as a basic hermeneutical tool, such as the lexical and grammatical
orientation elements, to interpret and understand the Qur’anic narratives. I will examine
the basic issues of ijāz al-Qurʾān (the inimitability of the Qurʾān) that relate the Qur’anic
narrative to naẓm al-Qurʾān (the overall coherence of the Qurʾān) and analyze why
classical commentators have treated this subject as deeply as they did the lexical and
grammatical ones. I will show to what extent most classical exegetes have linked the

\footnote{Khalafallah (1965: 29).}
\footnote{Donner (1998: 83).}
\footnote{Ibid.}
subject of *nazm al-Qurān* by means of linguistic studies of the literary aspects of the Qurʾān in order to demonstrate its inimitability.
CHAPTER THREE
LITERARY HERMENEUTICS AND THE QUR’ĀNIC NARRATIVE

INTRODUCTION

The need to study the relationship between the literary level of the Qur’ānic narrative in its cultural context and the nature of the Arabic language in its classical structure has become one of the most discussed subjects in the modern academic world. Muslim and non-Muslim scholars assumed that the importance of the history and literary study are the same, but for significance in order of time is the literary study that has the first right. In this context, the Qur’ān would be more clearly understood once it has been read in the light of its exact literary structure. In addition, the absolute nature of the Qur’ānic meaning must be studied and compared to the human being’s imperfect grasp of the language of which it is comprised.

According to 12:2, 16:103, and 26:195, the Qur’ān was revealed in Arabic and its language is the clearest Arabic (‘arabiyyun mubīn) with the clear Arabic tongue (lisānun ‘arabiyyun mubīn). Accordingly, both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have discussed the subject of Qur’ānic Arabic language. From the Muslim standpoint, the Islamic tradition often indicates that the Qur’ān was preserved and documented with the dialect of the Quraysh, the prophet Muḥammad’s tribe, for it was also the classical language known to and understood by all the Arab tribes of the peninsula in general. In his risālah, al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820) stated: Through His book, God addressed the Arabs by their mother tongue (Arabic) based on their knowledge of its broad meanings, and indeed what they know of their language is its profound comprehensiveness. Also, in his muqaddimah, Ibn

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Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) has remarked that the Qurʾān was revealed in the language of the Arabs and according to the styles of their rhetoric so that all of them could understand it.⁴ Other Muslim traditionalists, such as al-Ṭabarī, Abū ʿUbayda, al-Bāqillānī, and Ibn Fāris, have assumed that the Qurʾān was revealed in a pure Arabic tongue.⁵

Therefore, a profound reflection upon the semantic dimensions of Qurʾānic words and phrases shows that Qurʾānic Arabic is not the Arabic used today, nor the Arabic literature produced by al-Mutanabbī (d. 354/955) and al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122). Muslim scholars, asserting that the Qurʾān was revealed in the Arabic of such highly acclaimed Arab poets, such as Labīd (d. 25 H) and Imruʾ al-Qays (d. 41 H), as well as such extraordinary Arab orators as Quṣṣ Ibn Sāʿidah (d. 23 before Hijra),⁶ say that it must, therefore, be interpreted in the light of this particular level of Arabic only. In this context, one comes across to see that the earliest Qurʾānic muṣfassir ibn ʿAbbās, who had discussed the appearance of non-Arabic words in the Qurʾānic text and the ḥadīth literature, had supported his idea with having special interest in searching for the Arabic words’ origin and meaning from the the pre-Islamic Arabic poetry.⁷ Others, such as al-Suyūṭī, have assumed that non-Arabic words entered the language from foreign travelers and were integrated into Arabic before the time of the Prophet.⁸ Also, they have discussed that identical and uniformity meanings of words in Arabic and other languages are purely coincidental.⁹

In contrast, Esack has explained philologically that the approaches to this matter of Jeffrey and Rippin, and other non-Muslim scholars, contain the belief that “the Arabic...
of the Qurʾān was not peculiar to any tribe but was a kind of [dialect] that was understood by all throughout ǧīz—the identical position of classical Arabic today.””

Furthermore, they have referred “the term ʿarabiyyah to the literary language of the Bedouins” of the Arab peninsula and have concluded that the Arabic language of the Qurʾānic text is more similar to the language used by classical Arab poets of that time. Ibn Khaldūn has emphasized that the dialect of the Quraysh tribe was the most flowing, accurate, and the purest dialect among the tribes of the Arab peninsula because the Qurayshītes were not impacted by the non-Arab people.

In addition, non-Muslim scholars have studied the Qurʾān’s literary level and style in detail. Most of them claimed that the Qurʾān’s use of rhetoric and eloquence has no parallel in Arabic literature. Arbuthnot, for instance, states:

The Qurʾān is regarded as a specimen of the purest Arabic, written in half poetry and half prose. It has been said that in some cases grammarians have adapted their rules to agree with certain phrases and expressions used in it, and that though several attempts have been made to produce a work equal to it as far as elegant writing is concerned, none has as yet succeeded.

Similarly to Arbuthnot, the modern thinker Boulatta indicates that the distinctiveness of the Qurʾān is twofold: its peculiar literary form and its divine origin.

In this regard, most of the non-Muslim scholars have agreed that the language in the Qurʾān is the standard of the Arabic language. Rosenthal, for instance, opined that “the Qurʾān was also a linguistic document of incomparable importance. It was viewed as a

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11 Ibid., 67.
12 Ibid.
14 Arbuthnot (1885: 5).
16 Stubbe (1911: 70).
source of grammatical and lexicographical information.”17 Furthermore, philologists and
grammarians often mentioned that

Muslims of all ages are united in proclaiming the inimitability not only of its
contents but also of its style . . . and in forcing the high Arabic idiom into the
expression of new ranges of thought the Qurʾān develops a bold and strikingly
effective rhetorical prose in which all the resources of syntactical modulation are
exploited with great freedom and originality.18

However, the disputation among Muslim and non-Muslim scholars about the
genre of Qurʾānic Arabic has never ended and continues to preserve its place in their
academic disputes.

In addition, over time, the Qurʾānic literary level became highly developed and
eventually a work of art in itself. For instance, classical exegetes maintained that the level
of the Qurʾānic language is precise and accurate in both meaning and expression. At this
point, it is quite clear that studying these various hermeneutical works reveals that
tafsīr’s meticulous attention to every detail of the Qurʾān—from pronunciation to meaning
—makes them unique in their commentaries and different from the genres of textual
study.19 Further, a complete knowledge of Arabic was required and used to interpret the
Qurʾān. Yet the explanation of certain difficult words, phrases, and verses found therein
became necessary after the Companions and the followers passed away. For this reason,
classical exegesates initiated and then developed the fields of philological and grammatical
Qurʾānic interpretation to “explore its ramifications as much as possible, as well as to
make the text understandable to the populace.”20 The most influential works of literary
criticism of that time were al-Farrāʾ’s (d. 207/822) maʿānī l-Qurʾān, Abū ʿUbayda’s (d.
209/824) majāz al-Qurʾān, and Ibn Qutayba’s (d. 276/889) taʿwīl mushkil al-Qurʾān.

18 Gibb (1963: 36).
19 Fudge (2003: 94).
20 Rippin (1990: 85).
Wansbrough, for instance, disputed the historical usage of lexicography and grammar in classical *tafsīrs*. He admitted that the Qur'ānic hermeneutics had dealt with “lexical explanations, grammatical analysis and an agreed apparatus of variant readings of the Qur'ān.”21 In this regard, Muslim scholars have seen that such philological, lexical, and grammatical elaborations constituted the main part of the Qur'ānic exegetical endeavor.22 As for the Qur'ānic narrative’s literary excellence in particular,

a competent knowledge of the Qur'ān is indispensable as an introduction to the study of Arabic literature [and] will be admitted by all who have advanced beyond the rudiments of the language. From the purity of its style and elegance of its diction, it has come to be considered as the standard of Arabic.23

In addition, Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have shown that classical commentators linked this topic by undertaking linguistic studies of the Qur'ān’s literary structure to show its inimitability and claimed that the “Qur'ān’s abiding miracle with which it has challenged humankind’s intellectual abilities in all ages is its literary eloquence (*faṣāḥah*), rhetorical excellence (*balāghah*) and lucid expression (*bayān*).”24 These and such other elements—for example, the lexical meaning and beauty of the Qur'ānic words; the Qur'ān’s order and composition; textual beauty and perfection; stylistic originality and uniqueness; the superiority, power, and truth of its meaning; and the purity and fluency of its grammatical language—have been studied and explained through a special science known as *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*. In addition, the notion of the Qur'ānic inimitability (*iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*), which has been developed throughout Muslim history, caused the study of the hermeneutics of the Qur'ānic narrative’s literary structure in

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tafsīr literature to become crucial. Many exegetical works have been produced on this subject.

Historically, it has been noted that the theological disputations among Muslim theologians (mutakallimūn) about the nature of the Qurʾān has led to the appearance of the doctrine of the Qurʾānic inimitability (iʿjāz al-Qurʾān). The general context of this doctrine was to highlight the distinction linguistic qualities of the Qurʾān as an evidence of Muḥammad’s prophethood, and show the level of the classical literary criticism as it related to the eloquent style of the Qurʾān, whose language is a model of the most eloquent Arabic.

Theologically, it has been noted that the issue of iʿjāz al-Qurʾān is linked to the proof of Muḥammad’s prophethood. The Ashʿarī theologian and exegete Abū Baker al-Bāqillānī indicated that the sign of Muḥammad’s prophethood is based on iʿjāz al-Qurʾān, and that his status has been valid from time of the revelation of the Qurʾān until the day of resurrection. However, in Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī’s extensive work on iʿjāz al-Qurʾān, he mentions that the Qurʾān is so well organized and so marvelously arranged, and so high is its literary excellence that it is beyond what any human being could achieve. Thus, in this sense, Martin states that “al-Bāqillānī presents himself as a non-specialist in Arabic literary theory who wishes to show that humans cannot attain the level of stylistic achievement of the Qurʾān.” In addition, Rippin mentions that al-Rummānī, in his an-nukat fī iʿjāz al-Qurʾān, has devoted a large part in his works to discuss the arguments for

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25 Martin, “Inimitability.”
26 Ibid.
27 Bāqillānī (1954: 13).
28 Ibid., 45.
29 Martin, “Inimitability.”
the inherent inimitability of the Qur’ānic language. He further explains that al-Rummānī has provided an analysis of ten rhetorical figures that make up the Qur’ān’s literary eloquence. Also, Ibn ʿAṭiyyah, for instance, has discussed the arrangement of the Qur’ānic text as literature, the reliability of its meaning, and the eloquence of its words.

Moreover, from another theological perspective, Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Sayyār al-Nazzām (d. 230/845) held a different view on the nature on Qur’ānic language. For instance, he advocated the view of the divine intervention (ṣarfaḥ), which indicates that the level of the Qur’ān linguistics was not able to be understood by peoples’ understanding of language before the coming of Islam. In this context, the classical theologian Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/936) has preserved in his maqālāt al-Nazzām’s theory of the divine intervention (ṣarfaḥ):

The al-Nazzāmiyyah admitted the miraculous of the Qur’ān only through the notion of ṣarfaḥ. They maintained that before the coming of Islam the Arabs of the peninsula were able to have a complete speech similarly to the Qur’ānic Arabic with respect to linguistic purity and eloquence. After the coming of Islam this ability was taken away from them and they were deprived of their knowledge of it, and thus they became unable to produce speech similarly to the Qur’ān.

Later on, the theory of ṣarfaḥ has been accepted by some Muʿtazila and Imāmī Shiʿi theologians, and it also found some rejecters among the majority of Sunnī mutakallimūn. In this context, Martin indicates that

al-Nazzām’s doctrine of the Qur’ānic miracle through divine intervention (ṣarfaḥ) was refuted by his illustrious pupil, al-Jāḥiz, who argued that the Qur’ān was inimitable on the basis of its composition (taʾlīf) and its structure or arrangement of words (naẓm).

31 Ibid.
33 Also, similarly to al-Ashʿarī’s interpretation, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Khayyāṭ, in his Kitāb al-Intiṣār, has discussed the issue of al-Nazzāmiyyah’s theory of ṣarfaḥ. See Khayyāṭ (1957: 28) and Martin, “Inimitability.”
34 Ibid.
The main task I would like to address in this chapter is the type of hermeneutics that has been applied to the Qur’ānic narrative’s literary level, which is primarily found in the works of al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Rāzī, al-Tha’labī, and Hūd Ibn Muḥakkim—all of whom sought to collect what earlier scholars had said and analyzed the Qur’ān’s message from traditional, philosophical, philological, and rational angles. I will use all of these approaches to support my analytical study.

This chapter consists of two main sections. In the first section, I will study the function of the rules of the Arabic language (qawā’id al-lughah al-‘arabiyyah), used by the classical muḥaffazān mentioned above, as a fundamental hermeneutical tool to interpret the Qur’ānic narratives. In its first and second parts, I will limit my study of the selected hermeneutical works to the functions of the lexical and grammatical elements that the muḥaffazān used to reveal how they interpreted the Qur’ānic text’s words and structural phrases to produce new meanings from the Qur’ānic narrative.

In the second section, I highlight the basic issues of ʾiṣḥāq al-Qurʾān (the inimitability of the Qurʾān) that relate the Qur’ānic narrative to ʾnaẓm al-Qurʾān (the overall coherence of the Qurʾān), and I explain why classical commentators have treated this subject as deeply as they did the lexical and grammatical ones. I examine why they linked this topic by means of linguistic studies of the Qurʾān’s literary aspects, in order to demonstrate its inimitability. In a special section, I claim that some classical scholars—among them, al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) and al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209)—proved that the Arabs were aware of and understood the functions of the Qur’ānic narrative’s coherence. One may find the same type of hermeneutical works with more detailed grammatical, lexical, and literary references in the works of such traditionalists as al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), and these works helped to prove their own. This section also
examines the claim of these scholars about the *naẓm* (coherence) between words and verses in the sūrah in which they appear, which is a new *tafsīr* methodology.

### 3.1 THE FUNCTIONS OF THE RULES OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE

Historically, classical exegetes put most of their efforts into studying the literal meaning of Qur'anic Arabic by examining each word and identifying its lexical and grammatical orientation. At the sentence level, they provided a direct word-for-word interpretation. Most of them honored the literal meaning of each word and the structure of the language. Also, throughout Muslim history, the “Qur'anic philology evolved such disciplines as phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicography, semantics, and rhetoric.”

While these disciplines strongly influenced the classical exegetical works, commentators of the Qur'ān became more interested in applying, linguistically, new methods to the Qur'ānic text in order to better understand its meanings. Definitely, this gave rise to literary criticism, especially in the discipline of philology.

When studying the different hermeneutical literary works on the Qur'ānic narrative text produced by classical commentators, one sees an extensive use of grammatical morphology and syntax, as well as lexical techniques, as fundamental tools designed to elucidate and interpret the ambiguity of small Qur'ānic sections and the meanings of difficult words and phrases. At this level, classical exegetes concentrate their grammatical and lexical orientation efforts, as basic sources of elucidation, on the works of such classical grammarians as Sibawayhi’s (d. 180/796) *al-kitāb* (representative of the Baṣran School) and al-Farrāʾ’s (d. 207/822) *maʾānī al-Qurʾān* (representative of the Kūfān

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School); both of whose works represent a thorough examination of the Qurʾān with special attention to its grammar.

Furthermore, with a new perspective, Rippin indicates that “al-Farrāʾ’s technical terminology can be shown to contain many elements which are not found in earlier works.” One purpose of this lexicon, then, was to provide a research tool that can resolve some of these structural questions. However, with all of the relevant words isolated, Kimberg analyzes al-Farrāʾ’s position in this matter:

Al-Farrāʾ’s position with the history of Arabic grammar becomes clearer. The terminology included in the lexicon covers syntactic, morphological, phonetic and prosodic terms, as well as general and methodical terminology. The terminology included in the lexicon is often not technical or semi-technical. This lexicon is an indispensable tool for numerous projects and will take its place alongside the very limited number of other works that provide a basis for historical Arabic lexicography.

However, Versteegh linked al-Farrāʾ and Sibawayhi’s works to the early exegetical works. In this sense, he indicated that “both the maʾānī al-Qurʾān and the kitāb Sibawayhi presuppose a tradition of grammatical study and preoccupation with language. Such a tradition is found in the exegetical studies of the early Islamic period.” In this context, Wansbrough concluded that the success of classical grammarians and lexicographers was due to their creative and productive linguistic works; he claimed that “for the textual history of Muslim scripture, the activity of masoretes was not only creative but productive of postulates which became the foundations of both grammar and lexicography.”

In addition, in order to study the sounds associated with meanings of the Arabic words, classical Muslim scholarship paid a lot of attention to the sound of Arabic words.

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40 Wansbrough (1977: 208).
Classical exegetes and grammarians have considered that these sounds are arbitrarily assigned meanings, and in which the possibilities for words to carry different significations are well accounted for. For instance, Mottahedeh maintains that whether sounds of words and their meanings are arbitrary or not, this issue was the main tension between the essentialism of most definitions of knowledge and the conventionalism of the theory of language recognized by Muslim scholars.  

3.1.1 The Grammatical Hermeneutics

As the Qur’ān attempts to construct a dialectical relationship between its literary level and the capacity of human language on the one hand, and between the text itself and the universe on the other, classical commentators believed that its language is distinct from every other discourse due to its unique syntax and composition, as well as the means by which it was communicated to humanity. Accordingly, Rippin mentions that the different analytical studies of the early tafsīr texts show that the use of the science of grammar let classical exegetes “attempt to argue for a natural development of at least some of the terminology. Words started out being used in non-technical general sense but can eventually be seen, in some instances, to emergence with a particular technical employment.”  

This idea was nothing short of revolutionary, despite the fact that the great Qur’ānic exegetes did not go so far as to replace an accepted reading by one considered to be more correct from a linguistic standard.  

However, these classical exegetes were interested in analyzing the Qur’ānic narrative’s language and structure while explaining its text. This approach, which is a clear assumption in every exegetical text, allowed them to pursue their fundamental

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41 Mottahedeh (1997: 64).
interest in the structure of language itself, since grammar and the science of *tafsīr* belong to the same discipline and depend upon the structure of the language. In this matter, I will examine the grammatical functions of the hermeneutical literary works. I will limit the study to the works of al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, al-Ṭabrisī, and al-Tha’labī in their discussion of the narrative passage of the verse 2:31 of sūrah *al-baqarah* and the verse 19:24 of sūrah *Maryam*. The grammatical functions of the hermeneutical works of the narrative passages on the verses 12:13–14 of sūrah *Yūsuf* as found in al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, and al-Ṭabrisī, all of whom polished Jacob’s words as a concrete example when he said: “*Really it saddens me that ye should take him away: I fear lest the wolf should devour him while ye attend not to him.*” 12:13—and “*They said: ’If the wolf were to devour him while we are (so large) a party, then should we indeed (first) have perished ourselves!’*” 12:14—will be examined also.⁴⁴

Grammatically, al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Ṭabrisī have considered the structural meaning of “*should devour him while ye attend not to him*” subordinate to “*Really it saddens me that ye should take him away.*”⁴⁵ Further, al-Ṭabarī considered that the structural meaning of the verse is: “*Really it saddens me that you go with him (Joseph) to the desert and I fear lest the wolf should devour him while you attend not to him.*”⁴⁶ Al-Zamakhsharī, for instance, has provided more grammatical explanations concerning the *lām* of *ibtidā*’, which is associated in the verb *layuḥzinūnī* (saddens me), in order to produce more meanings from the verse. He considered that this *lām* is for the initial action as in the verse 16:124: “*But Allāh will judge between them on the Day of Judgment, as to their differences.*” (*inna rabbaka layaḥkumu baynahum*). It can be

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⁴⁴ In both passages, Ḥūd ibn Muḥakkim did not provide grammatical hermeneutics on these verses due to its traditional *tafsīr* nature.


⁴⁶ Ṭabarī (1954, XV: 573).
subsumed under what Sibawayh has called “\( \text{\textit{min sabyi al-mudāra'ah}}, \)”\(^{47}\) which means that this \( \text{lām} \) comes to emphasize the meaning of the verb in the present time (\( \text{al-mudāra} \)).\(^{48}\) Accordingly, al-Zamakhsharī explained that the grammatical position of \( \text{lām} \) of \( \text{ibtidā'} \) in the verse comes to emphasize two different things concerning Joseph’s brothers apology to Jacob: first, their going with Joseph and leaving their father, makes Jacob very sad, because he could not endure waiting to see Joseph for more than one hour. Second, Jacob becomes more afraid in case that the wolf may devour Joseph while his brothers did not attend to him.\(^{49}\) In addition, al-Zamakhsharī explained that the phrase \( \text{la'}\text{in akalahu ad-dhib} \) (If the wolf were to devour him) is in the nature of an intended but unmentioned oath—this is to say, “by God” if the wolf would eat him while he was with us, we shall truly be losers. This last phrase serves as the answer to the oath and the conjunction \( \text{(wāw)} \) in the phrase (\textit{while we are so large a party}) denotes a state or condition that is of Joseph’s brothers.\(^{50}\) However, al-Zamakhsharī’s exegetical efforts on the verse 12:13 have distinguished him from other classical exegetes by using the Arabic grammar as a tool of interpretation to continue the process of understanding.

Further, al-Ṭabrisī added more grammatical interpretations concerning the structural linguistics of \( \text{la'}\text{in akalahu ad-dhib} \) (If the wolf were to devour him) by stating that the \( \text{lām} \) of preposition (\( \text{la'}\text{in} \) (\( \text{نئٍ} \)) must be associated with the \( \text{lām} \) of oath (\( \text{lām al-qasam} \)) and that \( \text{wa innā lakhirāsirūn} \) (we are indeed the losers) is its answer.\(^{51}\) Al-Ṭabrisī concluded that the literal meaning of the verse is: “By God, if Joseph is eaten by the wolf

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\(^{47}\) Such Arabic articles like: - لام الأبداء - إن - come in a phrase or sentence before the verb in the present time to emphasize the meaning of something.

\(^{48}\) Zamakhsharī (1987, II: 448).

\(^{49}\) Ibid.

\(^{50}\) Ibid.

we are indeed the losers” (wa Allāhi idhā Akala ad-dhib Yūsufa Innā ithan lakhāsirūn).\textsuperscript{52}

Al-Rāzī, however, provided a deep grammatical analysis on the verse 12:14. He claimed that in order to interpret la‘in akalahu ad-dhib (If the wolf were to devour him), one should propose two possible meanings for the lām. First, the meaning of the article ْيَُ (in “if”) indicates that the consequence is attached to the condition, thereby meaning “if this condition happened then indeed we are the losers.” Therefore, the lām is introduced to emphasize in. “indeed if.” Second, the lām implies the oath, as if to say: “By God, if he is eaten by the wolf we are indeed the losers.”\textsuperscript{53}

Hence, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, and al-Ṭabrisī have assumed that the different meanings of the lām of the preposition (lā‘in نئٍ) have played major grammatical and structural roles in producing new meanings of the verse.

Al-Rāzī then discussed the grammatical position of the letter wāw in “wa naḥnu ‘uṣbah.” He stated that the wāw here is wāw al-ḥāl (comes), which describes the condition’s status. Thus, he explains that this verse means: “They swear that if what is feared happens, namely, the wolf taking Joseph and the condition is that there are ten of them, and then indeed they are the loser.”\textsuperscript{54} He also considered that the clauses of “Really it saddens me that ye should take him away: I fear lest the wolf should devour him while ye attend not to him” are independent and that Jacob initially declined with two separate sentiments (sadness and fear), while Joseph’s brothers answered only to the second (the fear of the wolf) because their jealousy and anger toward their father was caused by this excessive affection for Joseph. So when they heard that statement, they ignored it.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Rāzī (1995, IX: 100).
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 101.
3.1.2 The Function of the Variant Readings (qirāʿāt)

For grammatical purposes, the use of qirāʿāt (variant readings of the Qur’ān) was the most important element in early classical tafsīrs. According to Shah, classical exegetes assumed that qirāʿāt “served a very functional approach to exploring linguistic constructs, developing rudimentary models and techniques of analysis which were adapted to the service of scripture, especially in terms of physical preservation.”

Therefore, the Qur’ānic narrative text allows several recitation styles for different pronunciations. This can also affect the meaning. In such cases, in order to explain the difficult section or phrase, grammatical terminology was applied to understand and produce new meanings.

In the story of Adam’s creation, verse 31 of sūrah al-baqarah states: “Then He presented them unto the angels” (Thumma ‘araḍahum ‘alā al-malāʾikati). Classical exegetes have discussed the variant readings of the word ‘araḍahum (presented them). According to al-Zamakhsharī, Ubay’s reading had the singular feminine form ʿaraḍahā, and Ibn Masʿūd read it with the plural feminine ‘araḍahunna, even though the verse should be referred to the named things (musammayāt) only. In this context, al-Zamakhsharī insisted that even in a verse that has different readings the names could not be appeared. In contrast, al-Ṭabrisī indicated that the verse should be referred to the meanings of the names (maʾānī al-asmā) only. He explained that the sense of the three readings indicated that Adam’s presentation of the names was concerned only with their meanings.

59 Ibid.
Al-Ṭabarī provided a detailed discussion about the meanings and usages of ‘araḍahum, ‘araḍahā, and ‘araḍahunna. He explained that the Arabs used hā and mīm (e.g., ‘araḍahum) only for people and angels. For other creatures, such as animals, they used hā and alif (e.g., ‘araḍahā) or hā and nūn (e.g., ‘araḍahunna). Moreover, citing 24:45, he asserted that the Arabs have also used hā and mīm, hā and alif, and hā and nūn for all kind of creatures’ names, including those of people and angels. In using qirāʾāt, it is quite clear that al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Ṭabrisī all sought to provide more meanings associated with ‘araḍahum, which clearly indicates the level of understanding reached by the classical mufassirūn.

Also, in verse 24 of sūrah Maryam—“But (a voice) cried to her from beneath the (palm-tree): ‘Grieve not! for thy Lord hath provided a rivulet beneath thee’”—in the phrase But (a voice) cried to her from beneath (fanādāhā minn taḥtihā here, the article is read both as minn and mann). Al-Zamakhsharī wrote that mann taḥtahā indicates the Angel Gabriel, who came to help Maryam deliver Jesus—or, according to the reading of ‘Āṣim and Abī ‘Amr, it means Jesus himself. Al-Zamakhsharī provided the following grammatical analysis to support his interpretation. According to Qatādah, he relates that the subject of the verb nādāhā refers either to Gabriel or Jesus, and the subject hā in taḥtahā refers to the palm tree. Al-Tha’labī gave the same interpretation by using technical terminology to clarify the grammatical position of mann or minn in the verse. He interpreted nādāhā man or (min) taḥtahā, by saying: those who read mann with a (fāṭḥah) above the mīm mean Jesus, who spoke to his mother Maryam, and thus

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60 Ṭabarī (1954, I: 518).
61 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
becomes an اسم موصول (ism mawṣūl) and means الذي (alladḥī); those who read من with a (kasrah) beneath the mīm means that Gabriel spoke to Maryam from the mountain or the small river, and thus من in this case becomes حرف جر. However, both al-Zamakhsharī and al-Tha’labī mentioned that Zur and ‘Alqamah read fakhāṭabahā instead of nādāhā, to indicate that the latter has the meaning of discourse.

Al-Rāzī provided more grammatical details in the clause But (a voice) cried to her from beneath’ fanādāhā min taḥtiḥā. He began to interpret the verse by mentioning the different related readings: nādāhā mann or (min) taḥtahā has two readings. The common reading, fanādāhā, means “he called her.” The other reading is fakhāṭabahā, instead of nādāhā, which means “he addressed her.” This was the reading of Zur and ‘Alqamah. Al-Rāzī disputed the grammatical issues of the different meanings given to mann or minn after he addressed them to their readers (Qurrā). He says: mann, the common reading, means “the one beneath her”; minn, the other reading, means “called from beneath her.” This is the reading of Nāfī, Ḥamzah, and Kisā’ī. Al-Rāzī then provided the different meaning of al-munādī (the caller) indicated in fanādāhā.

The issue of the caller has three possibilities in this verse. First, that the caller is Jesus, which is the opinion of al-Ḥasan and Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr. Second, the caller is the Angel Gabriel acting as the midwife. Third, that the above two options depend on whether we read with mann (which refers to Jesus) or minn (which refers to the angel). These two interpretations are the opinions of ibn ‘Uyaynah and ‘Āṣim.

Furthermore, al-Rāzī provided more details concerning the first option, which is closer to the meaning for the following four cases:

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64 Al-Tha’labī (2002, VI: 211).
66 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
First, the article *mann* is used when it is known previously that someone was under her. This was known to be Jesus, and the meaning corresponds to this. As for *minn*, it does not indicate that it was the angel and this supports our proposition. Second, “below her” or “beneath her” is not a fitting location for an angel to be, as it is the location of impurity and a view of her private parts. Third, *nādāhā* “he called her” is a verb, and verbs must have objects previously referenced. This verse referenced Gabriel or Jesus; however, Jesus is a closer reference in *faḥamalathu fantabadhat bihi* and *bihi* (meaning “him”) refers to Jesus, which makes him the preferred object. Fourth, this is the proof of al-Ḥasan bin ‘Ali, who says that if Jesus did not talk to her, she would not know to point him to speak on her behalf. So the meaning “her” is that God made Jesus speak to comfort his mother and soften her heart so she would witness first-hand the glad tidings she had received from Gabriel previously—that her son will have a sublime position.70

Al-Rāzī added that those who identify the caller as Gabriel maintained that he spoke to Maryam at this point to remind her of the glad tidings he had previously brought to her. He explained the issue of *mann taḥtahā* (from beneath her) as moot if we say that the caller is the infant (Jesus); however, if we say it is Gabriel, it can have two meanings:

First, if we take a fixed reference point, for example the palm tree, whoever is closer to it is *fawq* (above), and whoever is further is *taḥt* (beneath).71 In addition, al-Rāzī asserted that al-Kalbī explained this verse by pointing to *idh jāʿakum min fawqikum wa min asfala minkum* (they came on you from above you and from below you).72 He then went on to say that some of them claimed that the angel called her from the end of the valley. Second, one position is elevated above the other.73 More precisely, al-Rāzī said that according to ‘Ikrimah, Maryam was on high ground, like a hill, and Gabriel called to her from a place that was lower than the palm tree.74 Hence, al-Rāzī concluded that in each case, Maryam may have been placed higher than Gabriel or not, for the text here is not

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70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 The verse 33:10.
74 Ibid.
clear.\textsuperscript{75} Thus, it is quite clear that al-Rāzī’s hermeneutical efforts on this verse indicate the decision to use Arabic grammar and qirāʾāt as tools to interpret the Qurʾānic narrative text in order to produce new meanings and further the process of understanding.

Nevertheless, using such variant readings allowed classical exegetes to devote many pages to detailed explanations of how different grammatical orientations (\textit{wujūḥ al-ʿiʿrāb}) produce different senses of meanings (\textit{maʿānī}) that could be discovered in the Qurʾānic narrative texts, all of which encouraged the continual process of understanding. Thus, while the inflection section gives a selective analysis of those lexemes’ places in the structure of the whole phrase or verse, the lexicon section discusses the individual utterance’s basic significations.

3.1.3 The Grammatical and Lexicographical Hermeneutics

Throughout Muslim history, lexicography and the study of the Qurʾān usually went hand in hand. Rarely do those who consult a lexicon challenge in order to undermine the exegetes’ writings. The lexical meanings of the Qurʾānic terms have significant functions in developing Qurʾānic hermeneutics. The majority of classical exegetes admitted that this field “attempts to look at the morphological structure and the semantic function of lexical units and to analyze the use of vocabulary.”\textsuperscript{76} Al-Rāzī, for instance, stated:

This intentionality of the text is dependent on that fact that the same Qurʾānic word may be used differently in different places with different meanings or used in contradiction to some logical premise because there is a such contradiction. Also, such Qurʾānic word may be interpreted figuratively or used briefly, and then it is important that the Qurʾānic word could be interpreted figuratively.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{75} Rāzī (1995, XI: 206).
\textsuperscript{76} Rippin (1995: 31).
\textsuperscript{77} Rāzī (1995, I: 34).
Accordingly, the study of several Qur’ānic terms shows that the majority of the classical *mufassirūn* rarely agreed on the meaning of most of the Qur’ānic terms. Thus, it should be not surprising that they offered various interpretations in order to provide several lexical meanings for one word, for they wanted to display to the readers their disagreements. This can hardly be used as a criterion to decide which meaning is the “real” one. In this sense, Rosenthal stated:

> It might seem an all too obvious and unconvincing argument to point to the constant differences of the interpreters and conclude from their disagreement that none of them is right. However, there is something to such an argument. Although most of the commentators have their special axe to grind, one should think, at least in a number of instances, that if an evident and simple explanation existed, there would have been much less obstinate disagreement.  

With interest increasing in lexical function in the Qur’ānic narrative, the use of poetry as a source material for definitional analysis was very crucial to the classical exegetes. Fudge asserts that “the closest early parallel is probably poetic commentaries, due to their attention to provenance, syntax, meaning, and, especially, lexicography.”  

He further explains that as both: an interpretive work and a preservative one. “It is worth noting that the desire to preserve and understand early Arabic poetry and its language was part of the project to retain knowledge of the Qur’ān’s and the Prophet’s language.”  

Al-Suyūṭī narrates on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās that if you want to know the meaning of a Qur’ānic word, whose meaning is not clear to you, look for it in the Arab poetry, because poetry is the dictionary of the Arabs.  

Therefore, Knysh explained that for classical exegetes, this issue has been linked to theological debate among them:

> Since God had spoken to the Arabs in their own language, it is only natural to the exegetes to interpret His revelation by means of their profane diction and poetry.

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78 Rosenthal (1953: 68).
79 Fudge (2003: 94).
80 Ibid.
In line with this premise, the exegetes elucidated the grammatical and semantic intricacies of the Qur’ān by freely quoting linguistic evidence derived from pre-Islamic poetry.\textsuperscript{82}

Furthermore, the issue led modern scholars to conclude that when using poetry, the theoretical analysis of the Arabic language and literature has influenced Qur’ānic hermeneutics. The impact is well explained by Fudge; he says: “the presence of poetic citations indicates a later dating; this is related to the growing prestige of Arabic and the tongues of the Bedouins, and to the emerging disciplines of lexicography and grammar.”\textsuperscript{83}

When reading what the hermeneutical works have to say about 12:24—“And (with passion) did she desire him, and he would have desired her, but that he saw the evidence of his Lord: thus (did We order) that We might turn away from him (all) evil and shameful deeds: for he was one of Our servants, sincere and purified”—as found in al-Tha’labī’s \textit{al-kashf wa al-bayān} or any other classical \textit{tafsīrs}, it is quite clear that using stanzas of poetry to elucidate Qur’ānic terms is an important method. In this sense, the terms \textit{hammat} (did she desire him) and \textit{hamma} (he would have desired her) could be the best examples, for they have a direct approach to language and, according to the exegetes, one that shows how these various interpretations were usually employed only to support the literal sense of the language. Their first task was to clarify the possible lexical meanings of \textit{hamma}, which they usually did at the beginning.

According to Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, the literal meaning of \textit{hamma} is “what she wants for herself, when she was ready to sleep with him” (\textit{mā arādat bihi ḥīna ḥīna iḍṭaja’at lahu}).\textsuperscript{84} Therefore, he provided no deep grammatical or lexicographical explanations on its literary meaning. Usually, the nature of his \textit{tafsīr} indicates only the

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\textsuperscript{82} Knysh (2006: 213).
\textsuperscript{83} Fudge (2003: 145).
\textsuperscript{84} Ibn Muḥakkim (2002, II: 264).
general meaning of the Qur‘ān’s words. Al-Ṭabarī provided several explanations for this term. In one of them, he assumed the emphasis of the two desires (hammat bihi and hamma bihā) and explained that the woman desired Joseph and that he desired her; however, both parties had no decisive intention of fulfilling this mutual sexual desire. Thinking, but not acting upon such a desire, is permissible.85

Unlike Ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī interpreted the literal meaning of hamma as lying somewhere between action and non-action (bayna al-fi‘li wa at-tark).86 Al-Tha‘labī added more lexical interpretations: hamma either means the decisive intention to do something or indicates something that someone may have thought of doing (ḥadīthu al-mar‘i nafsahu wa lammā yaf‘alu dhālika).87 He proved this by quoting a poetic verse from ‘Umayr ibn ḍā‘ī al-Barjamī:

٨٨ هممت ولم أفعل وكدت وليثيي * تركت على عثمان تبكي حلائله

Both al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ṭabrisī stated that hamma’s literary meaning is the decisive intention to do something crucial (‘azm), or the thinking of doing something even if there is no decisive intention to do it.89 Moreover, for al-Ṭabrisī, the main topic was the meanings of this verb’s interpretations (wujūh at-tafāsīr). He focused on its grammatical nature to provide another meaning: in the verse, hamma and hammat are changed from the perfect to the imperfect tense; the sense (al-ma‘nā) is substituted for

85 Ṭabarī (1954, XVI: 47).
86 Ibid.
88 The meaning of the verse is: I almost did, but did not act; I came close, would that I have left Authman’s wives to weep over him.
the desire (irāda) and the like.⁹⁰ He proved his interpretation by quoting a poetic verse of Ka‘b ibn Zuhayr:

فَكَمْ فِي هُمْ مِن سَيْدٍ مَتَوْسِعٍ وَمِن فَاعِلٍ لِلْخَيْرِ إِن هُمْ أَوْ عَزٌّ⁹¹

Al-Rāzī also mentioned the different literary meanings for hamma given in the earliest tafsīrs and then discussed the subject in more detail.⁹² Like al-Zamakhsharī, he argued that some have interpreted this word as a desire for sexual union with the woman.⁹³ But al-Rāzī referred to different interpretations because hamma denotes intention, and that the action should be ascribed to the intention to each person that best suits him or her.⁹⁴ Therefore, what is natural for a woman is her desire for sexual pleasure, and what is suitable for a messenger sent by God to humanity is to attempt to forbid a person from disobeying God and to enjoin him or her to do good and abandon evil.⁹⁵ He also offered another argument: hamma refers to the whispering of a person’s soul, based on his assertion that a beautiful and attractive woman, when presented to a fully virile young man, always leads to inner conflict between natural desire and the better judgment of the soul and reason. This encounter sometimes strengthens natural desire and, at other times, the call of reason and wisdom.⁹⁶ Al-Rāzī added that hamma also indicates the attractions of natural desire, which the vision of the divine proof refers to as the attraction of servanthood (to God).⁹⁷

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⁹¹ The meaning of the verse is: how many of them were generous Hors-man and also doer good as he so intended and desired.
⁹⁴ Ibid.
⁹⁵ Ibid.
⁹⁶ Ibid.
⁹⁷ Ibid.
Nevertheless, linguistically speaking, Ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, al-Thaʿlabī, and al-Ṭabrisī stated that the concept of *hamma* itself cannot be changed. Therefore, the number of its possible meanings can be reduced to a few explanations based on linguistic elements that limit the central character’s thoughts. This is the gist of their general discussion of this particular word’s literary meanings.

Shiʿi, Muʿtazilī, and Ashʿarī exegetes, however, have radically changed this discussion by looking at it from the point of view of theological issues that are directly related to the concepts of prophethood, sin, and ḫiṣmah (divine protection). In their exegetical works, Ḫiṣmah was often supported by citations of early Arabic poetry and explained by lexical and grammatical usage. For example, al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ṭūsī98 viewed the issues of sin, prophecy, and ḫiṣmah as representing most theological arguments, especially when discussing the different meanings (*maʿānī*) of *hamma*. Al-Ṭūsī, for instance, distinguished between the decisive intention (*hamma*) and the intention to commit a sin (*al-ʿazm alā fiʾl al-маšiyah*) and maintained that *hamma* could not be ʿazm because a decisive intention to commit a sin is itself a sin.99 He supported his opinion with a detailed explanation from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, stating that the woman’s decisive intention was a bad and immoral desire, while Joseph’s *hamma* was natural, for it is natural for men to desire women.100 Therefore, he concluded that Joseph had no decisive intention to sin and that such an understanding does not affect the verse’s meaning. Accordingly, he assumed that the second *hamma* refers to Joseph’s decisive intention to push her away.101 His understanding of prophethood in this verse is close to

98 In this point, I will use al-Ṭūsī’s exegetical works because he provided more theological interpretations on the verb *hamma* from Shiʿī point of view than al-Ṭabrisī.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
the traditionalist Sunni explanations, such as those of al-Ṭabarī, who claimed that Joseph’s *hamma* was the intention to push her away.\(^{102}\)

Similarly, al-Zamakhsharī explained that all of *hamma*’s meanings are related to natural sexual desire.\(^{103}\) In order to emphasize the concepts of prophethood and ‘*iṣmah*, he asked how a prophet could be so ready to sin and then devised a detailed explanation that distinguished between Joseph’s and the women’s natural desires:

Joseph did not initiate the advance, and it was only the physical desire inherent in his status as a young man that almost moved him, an impulse which was expected from similar situations as a woman’s advances can render a man’s mind and will useless.\(^{104}\)

Theologically, al-Zamakhsharī explained that God’s sign held his natural sexual desire in check.\(^{105}\) He supported his interpretation by claiming that the rest of the verse indicates that God praised Joseph for his resistance and patience, which was no easy thing in such a situation. In fact, God described him as *min ‘ibādinā aṣ-ṣāliḥīn* (from our righteous servants).\(^{106}\) In his capacity, al-Zamakhsharī concluded that the people of divine oneness and justice (*ahl al-‘adl wa’t-tawḥīd*) believed that God protected him from sin (*ma‘ṣūm*),\(^{107}\) which clearly explained the Mu’tazili standpoint toward the concepts of prophethood, sin, and divine protection (*‘iṣmah*).

Al-Rāzī asserted that the arguments for the prophets’ divine protection (*‘iṣmah*) are many:

Adultery is one of the most reprehensible sins; likewise, cheating a person who treats one kindly is one of the great sins. Another great sin is to act dreadfully toward one who does well to you. Another reprehensible sinful act is when a

\(^{102}\) Ṭabarī (1954, XVI: 43).

\(^{103}\) Zamakhsharī (1987, II: 456).

\(^{104}\) Ibid.

\(^{105}\) Ibid.

\(^{106}\) Ibid., 311.

\(^{107}\) Ibid., 456.
young man is treated well, having his person and honor well-guarded, and yet he commits the most dishonorable acts toward his generous benefactor.\textsuperscript{108}

Al-Rāzī further argued if these full characteristics were ascribed to wicked people it would be unaccepted by Him, who would be then attributed to one of God’s messengers who was supported by God with clear miracles.\textsuperscript{109} He, therefore, concluded that God could not shower a prophet with praise after ascribing to him one of the most evil actions—namely, committing adultery with his master’s wife.\textsuperscript{110} He also claimed that a prophet’s sin would be clearly identified, and that the prophet would practice humility and remorse before God as signs of his repentance. Yet nothing is said about Joseph’s sin or repentance.\textsuperscript{111} To enhance his interpretation, al-Rāzī said that everyone involved—Joseph himself, the woman and her husband, and God—testified to Joseph’s innocence and purity.\textsuperscript{112} Joseph’s testimony is clear in verse 12:26: “It was she that sought to seduce me from my (true) self;” then woman’s testimony: “Said the ’Aziz’s wife: ‘Now is the truth manifest (to all): it was I who sought to seduce him from his (true) self: He is indeed of those who are (ever) true (and virtuous).’” And her husband said: “Behold! It is a snare of you women! truly, mighty is your snare! O Joseph, pass this over! (O wife), ask forgiveness for thy sin, for truly thou hast been at fault!” 12:28–29.\textsuperscript{113} The women who had been presented also denied the accusation: “(Allāh) preserve us! No evil know we against him!”\textsuperscript{114}

Finally, al-Rāzī explained that God Himself testified to Joseph’s purity four times:

“We might turn away from him (all) evil and shameful deeds” (the lām in linaṣrifa is for

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 118–19.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 119.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
emphasis—“shameful deeds” are obscene acts); Joseph “was one of Our servants, sincere and purified,” in 25:63, that “the servants of (Allāh) Most Gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, “Peace!” and Joseph “was one of Our servants, sincere and purified (innahu min ‘ibādinā al-mukhlaṣīn).”

Accordingly, al-Rāzī opined that al-mukhlaṣīn could be read either as a subject (or an actor) or as an object that is object of the act of someone else. He explained that according to the first reading, Joseph was completely sincere in his obedience, while the second reading indicates that God had made him pure and sinless. According to the other reading, Joseph was completely innocent. Hence, al-Rāzī concluded that Joseph was innocent of any vain action and unlawful intention. He claimed that this is the general opinion of scholars, exegetes, and theologians. Moreover, this is the opinion that we adopt and defend.

In addition to using poetic citations on Joseph’s purported behavior and the grammatical explanations of “did she desire him, and he would have desired her, but that he saw the evidence of his Lord,” other differed meanings of this verse are concluded by Goldman:

It is related that he was led away from temptation when he saw the “proof of his lord” (burhān rabbīhi), variously interpreted as an image of the master of the house or as an image of his father Jacob. Other interpretations understand the interruption as a “call” of divine origin telling Joseph not to sin or as the actual appearance on the wall of Qur’ānic verses warning against sin.

However, classical mufassirūn have used lexical and grammatical meanings to arrange and then divide this verse’s meanings in a more systematic manner, whereas al-

\[115\] Ibid.
\[116\] Ibid.
\[117\] Ibid.
\[118\] Goldman, “Joseph.”
Zamakhsharī wrote extensive exegetical works using language and theology, al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī, al-Rāzī, and al-Ṭabrisī provided more literary explanations.

For example, al-Ṭabrisī stated that the status of lawlā in the verse had different methods of linguistic explanation: first, the conditional conjunction of lawlā (fī ḥālat ash-sharf) provides a meaning like “he would have affected her” and has been implied from the verse; or second, the use of at-taqdīm wa-t-taʾkhīr (a hysteron proteron), in which the verse's two clauses are reversed; and third, that hamma is used figuratively (ʿalā sabīl al-majāz) and thus the meaning is having only a natural inclination toward, as opposed to committing, sin.\(^\text{119}\) Hence, for theological purposes, his grammatical analysis seeks to show that God protected him (maʿṣūm) and that he therefore did not sin, which also confirmed his prophethood.

In explanation of the literary meaning of the clause walaqad hammat bihi (did she desire him), al-Zamakhsharī indicates that the woman tried to seduce Joseph and that he was about to respond in kind, but refrained from doing so because he saw God’s sign.\(^\text{120}\) Linguistically, he interpreted this clause’s structure as that of a conditional conjunction; it could be read as “if it was not for the sign from his God, he would have accepted her advances.”\(^\text{121}\) In addition, he provided several possible meanings based on the conditional conjunction lawlā: first, Joseph did not respond physically to his desire; rather, he only thought about it, as when one says: “I would have killed him but for the fear of God;”\(^\text{122}\) second, lawlā could cover both hammat bihi and hamma bihā, and in term of desire on Joseph’s part (hamma bihā) was excluded.\(^\text{123}\) In this context, he wrote that the reader

^{120}\) Zamakhsharī (1987, II: 456).
^{121}\) Ibid., 311.
^{122}\) Ibid.
^{123}\) Ibid.
should end the sentence after *hammat bihi* and begin a new one at *hamma bihā lawlā an raʿā buhāna rabīhi*, as this arrangement is more conducive to showing the difference between the two intentions.\(^{124}\) Thus, al-Zamakhsharī stressed the period’s importance in regard to distinguishing between the two meanings of *hammat bihi* and *hamma bihā*; also, as regards the grammatical status of *lawlā*, he asked why the conditional answer of *hamma bihā* was implied and why it did not appear in advance? He asserted that *lawlā* can never have its conditional answer in advance,\(^{125}\) on the grounds that having the condition followed by the conditional answer is a linguistic Arabic structure that always appears in this format and can never be changed. However, implying parts of this construct is permissible if the evidence of the remaining parts’ meaning indicates the implied portion.\(^{126}\)

With another possible explanation, al-Zamakhsharī disputed the claim that having the conditional conjunction start with *lawlā* meant that it referred only to *hamma bihā* and not to the entire sentence *walaqad hammat bihi wa hamma bihā*. He opined that *hamma* is concerned with the meanings, not the roots or substances.\(^{127}\) Therefore, he figuratively (*majāzan*) considered that *walaqad hammat bihi wa hamma bihā* means human sexual liaison (*al-mukhālaṭah*), which naturally requires two people; each person has to agree to this concept agreement.\(^{128}\) Also, he added that this liaison would have been consummated if God had not stopped Joseph,\(^ {129}\) and that God has articulated both *hammat* and *hamma* in order to provide more details (*‘alā sabīl al-tafṣīl*) when He said *walaqad hammat bihi wa hamma bihā*, as this clearly indicates that each person wanted

\(^{124}\) Ibid.  
\(^{125}\) Ibid.  
\(^{126}\) Ibid.  
\(^{127}\) Ibid.  
\(^{128}\) Ibid.  
\(^{129}\) Ibid.
to satisfy his or her sexual desire for the other. However, God’s sign held Joseph back; therefore, lawlā was in fact directly related hamma bihā only.\textsuperscript{130} And in the fifth possible explanation, along with many other classical exegetes, al-Zamakhsharī provided other hermeneutical works on ‘did she desire him, and he would have desired her but that he saw the evidence of his Lord’ to show the different accounts of those who claimed that Joseph did not sin because God protected him and of those who claimed that he intended to commit adultery but turned away from it.\textsuperscript{131}

Al-Rāzī opined that the exegesis of the verse did she desire him, and he would have desired her but that he saw the evidence of his Lord must fall in one of two categories of tafsīr: first is to deny that Joseph ever showed any sexual desire for his master’s wife. The proof of this is God’s saying (وهم بها) and he would have desired her with the primes of the word (لا) but that he saw the evidence of his Lord.\textsuperscript{132} Al-Rāzī further discussed the famous grammarian al-Zajjāj’s opinion and others who offered two arguments against this interpretation: the prime of لولا is not common in Arabic and the primes of لولا should be preceded by the letter lām as, for example, in wa laqad hammat bihī wa rahamma bihā lawlā.\textsuperscript{133} However, the second argument is a grammatical objection, the meaning of which cannot be rendered in English.

Al-Rāzī argued against al-Zajjāj’s grammatical arguments at some length; he claimed that al-Zajjāj added nothing of substance to the argument discussed above. In sum, he concluded that if Joseph had not felt any desire, the phrase but that he saw the evidence of his Lord would be meaningless.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{132} Rāzī (1995, VII: 120).
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
As for the second category, al-Rāzī asserted that if *hamma* denotes an actual intention and attempt to do something, *hamma* should not be taken literally because attributing the act of nearly achieving something to a woman is impossible,\(^{134}\) because *hamma* denotes attempting to do something and such an act cannot be ascribed to women. This leads to the supposition of an intending, but an additional act that is not mentioned.\(^{135}\)

Al-Rāzī indicated that some may argue that if this interpretation is true, the phrase *but that he saw the evidence of his Lord* would be meaningless. He gives two reasons for his assertion that this interpretation is the possible one:

The first is that had Joseph pushed her away from him or used force against her, she would have killed him or be committed to do something else as God informed Joseph that striking the woman would have led to his perdition. The other reason is that God knew that if Joseph pushed the woman away to prevent her from approaching, his garment would have been torn from the front. God knew, however, that a witness would argue that if Joseph’s garment were torn from back that he would be telling the truth and she would be lying. But if it were torn from the front, she would be telling the truth and he would be lying. Hence, this running away from her became a proof of his innocence.\(^{136}\)

Al-Rāzī’s second argument clearly indicates that, at least in general parlance, *hamma* means desire. Therefore, God meant that Joseph desired the woman and she desired him, *but that he saw the evidence of his Lord*—in other words, he would have had sex with her if God had not sent a sign.\(^{137}\) Accordingly, al-Rāzī concluded that it is not acceptable to say that Joseph desired her. This interpretation is supported by the phrase *and he would have desired her, but that he saw the evidence of his Lord* and the

\(^{134}\) Rāzī (1995, VII: 121).
\(^{135}\) Ibid.
\(^{136}\) Ibid.
\(^{137}\) Ibid.
conditional answer of *lawlā* here is *muqaddam*, as it is being said: “You will be one of those who have been doomed, but someone has saved you.”

Similarly, al-Tha’labī stated that some later scholars have said this does not suit the prophets and so interpreted the verse as meaning that he ran away from her. But this is not correct, because it is mentioned in the verse. Others said he wanted to hit and push her and that the sentence ends at the end of the clause *did she desire him* and a new one starts with *and he would have desired her*. Like al-Rāzī, al-Tha’labī provided the same grammatical explanation concerning the verse *but that he saw the evidence of his Lord* as regards *taqdīm* and *taʾkhīr* (*hysteron proteron*) of *jawāb lawlā* and supported his analysis by quoting a poetic verse of Imru’ al-Qays:

[verse translation]

To conclude, the lexical function provided the interpreter with one element in the overall context: the notion related to the status of Arabic as well as its connection with establishing the Qur’ān as an authoritative source within the emergent Muslim community. Having the citations readily available in the lexicon assures the work’s value for generations to come and certainly facilitates its usage, even for those who have a copy of the text on hand. In this context, it is quite clear that the discussion among classical exegetes produced complex grammatical, lexical, and theological efforts regarding the phrase *did she desire him, and he would have desired her but that he saw the evidence of his Lord*, which have led to different interpretations in the distinctive dialectic style of the verse.

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138 Ibid., 120.
140 The meaning of the verse is: If souls were left to die naturally, but it is a situation of people killing each other.
Structurally, this Qur’ānic phrase appears to be a problem in Arabic grammar due to its conditional conjunction *lawlā*, for it is not clear that *lawlā* should precede its apparent main clause *hamma bihā*. However, all of these classical exegetes have agreed that the verse’s first part, *for she desired him*, poses no problem and is not considered part of the main phrase in the conditional conjunction. Theologically, the major point in these exegetical efforts is that the theological impact on the hermeneutics of the Qur’ānic story text, that have been the first priority to diminish the literary structure of the Qur’ānic narrative to be continued, which is clearly indicated in the issues discussed by those exegetes who were concerned about the concepts of sin, prophethood, and ‘ʿisma. In this context, the majority of classical commentaries hardly concerned themselves with the literary structure of the Qur’ānic narrative or with the function of the philological details and the relationship of words to each other and the role of grammatical usages.

As it turns out, however, corroborative grammatical evidence is an unreliable guide to the definitive establishment of a verse’s meaning, and the usage of the lexical meaning is a priority in the interpretation of the Qur’ānic text. There is also the function of the inimitability of the Qur’ān (*i$jāz$ al-Qurʾān*), used as a fundamental tool to understand the literary nature of the Qur’ānic narrative.

### 3.2 THE ESSENTIAL FUNCTION OF *I$jāz*$

It has been mentioned that the Qur’ān’s literary eloquence, rhetorical excellence (*balāghah*), and lucid expression (*bayān*) eventually became an academic discipline named, *i$jāz$ al-Qurʾān*, that ultimately challenged the ability of readers of the Qur’ān to resolve the text’s linguistic ambiguity. Accordingly, classical exegetes have studied the essential functions of *i$jāz* related to the Qur’ānic narrative discourse connected with the stories of the prophets (*qiṣṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*). The majority of the exegetes have classified
these Qur’anic narratives into unclear (al-mutashābih); elliptic (ījāz), characterized by great conciseness (iḍmār), brevity (ḥadhīf); and repetition (takrār), the same story appearing in various passages.

While al-Ṭabarī remarks that the majority of the narrative texts in the Qur’ān are unclear due to their ambiguities in the words and meanings, al-Zarkashī for instance assumed that the issues of unclear Qur’ānic verses or passages (mutashābihāt) are strongly connected with the inimitability of the Qur’ān. Therefore, the need to study the function of ijtāz in the Qur’ānic narrative discourse became quite crucial. Hence, in order to understand its essential function in the subject of repetition (takrār), conciseness (iḍmār), and brevity (ḥadhīf), I will approach this through the function of nazm al-Qur’ān.

3.2.1 The Function of Nazm

In the sense of interpreting the Qur’ānic narrative text and knowing its literary level, such classical Muslim scholars of Qur’ānic rhetoric as al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868-9), al-Wāsiṭī (d. 309/921), al-Rummānī (d. 384/998), al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388/998), al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), and al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078) opined that the Qur’ānic rhetoric, which essentially sets language of the Qur’ān apart from the works of classical Arab poets and orators, is inherent in the nazm al-Qurʾān. Most of these classical scholars paid special attention to the Qur’ān’s inimitability and, therefore, identified its coherence as an inimitable feature. Al-Khaṭṭābī, for instance, explained the strong connection between the nazm al-Qurʾān and its eloquence (balāghah), which indicates the ijtāz al-Qurʾān. He

141 Ṭabarī (1954, III: 103).
142 Zarkashī (1972, II: 112).
143 Al-Jāḥiẓ was criticized by al-Bāqillānī for his understanding of the concept of nazm al-Qurʾān; al-Bāqillānī maintained that al-Jāḥiẓ was not the first to produce works on nazm al-Qurʾān. See Bāqillānī (1954: 6).
assumed that *nasūm* is more important than words and meanings, for he stated the need to have a good understanding on the various types of *nasūm* is of more benefit than the need to choose which word or meaning is the right one, because the reader understands the words in their relation to each other, and it is by good thinking that the parts of an expression become well constructed.\textsuperscript{144}

Al-Bāqillānī, who explained *nasūm* in terms of Qur’ānic *balāghah* and *bādi‘*, claimed that the Arabic language of the Qur’ānic text constructs an important relationship between words and meanings which constitutes the *nasūm*.\textsuperscript{145} Al-Jurjānī, who considered *nasūm* the primary proof of *ījāz al-Qur‘ān*, explained that *nasūm* is the connection of the words between each other in a way that would create between them a fundamental relation.\textsuperscript{146} Therefore, for him *nasūm* is the Qur’ānic challenge sent to the Arabs to provide coherent expressions either equal to Qur’ānic eloquence or near to it.\textsuperscript{147} In addition, al-Jurjānī asserted that grammatical meanings are the fundamental elements that constitute *nasūm*, and thus, according to Mīr, he [al-Jurjānī] “relies heavily on Arabic poetry and refers to the Qur‘ān relatively infrequently, which signifies that the idea of *nasūm* in him becomes somewhat independent of the issue of *ījāz* and subject of interest in itself.”\textsuperscript{148} In this context, Martin concludes:

Whereas al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Rummānī, al-Bāqillānī, ‘Abd al-Jabbār and others had based their theories of *ījāz* on the qualities of the inimitable composition (*nasūm*) of words and phrases in the Qur‘ān, thus resting the case for miracle solely on style and linguistics, al-Jurjānī argued that the overall composition of the Qur‘ān, its meaning as well as its wording, was the true miracle.\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{144} Rummānī, Khaṭṭābī, and Jurjānī (1968: 36).
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid and Bāqillānī (1954: 51–52).
\textsuperscript{146} Jurjānī (1969: 43–44).
\textsuperscript{147} Rummānī, Khaṭṭābī, and Jurjānī (1968: 141).
\textsuperscript{148} Mīr (1986: 16).
\textsuperscript{149} Martin, “Inimitability.”
At the level of how Qur’anic tafsīr works, it has been pointed out that the argument of the Qur’anic naẓm is a Mu’tazilī idea. For instance, al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024) was the first exegete to mention in his tanzīḥ al-Qur’ān ‘an al-maṭā‘īn the coherence among Qur’anic verses, including the literary structure of the Qur’anic narrative.\(^{150}\) Also, al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) appears to be one of the first exegete to develop the essential semantic meanings of Qur’anic words in his tafsīr. In fact, his hermeneutical works show Qur’anic naẓm explains the Qur’anic i‘jāz. Al-Zarkashī describes what amounts to be the methodological approach of al-Zamakhsharī to naẓm al-Qur‘ān:

It is imperative for the exegete of the luminous and miracle words of God to endeavor and keep the beauty of the Qur’ānic style intact and must safeguard its perfect eloquence. The exegete should also ensure that the challenge of the Qur’ān safe from the polemics of the critics.\(^{151}\)

In addition, Mīr explains that al-Zamakhsharī used naẓm through different complicated terms, such as grammatical and rhetorical once.\(^{152}\) He added that the notion of the Qur’ānic excellence is well indicated in al-Zamakhsharī’s tafsīr, because al-Zamakhsharī tried to determine the excellence of Qur’ānic naẓm.\(^{153}\) As his exegetical efforts on this matter preserved their complete and balanced expression,\(^{154}\) his impact on later Muslim exegetes has been profound upon those tafsīrs that represent the rational trend in classical Qur’ānic hermeneutics. For example, al-Rāzī seems to have followed al-Zamakhsharī’s works in establishing the excellence of Qur’ānic naẓm. In his mafātīḥ al-ghayb, he generally uses the vision of traditional and rational tafsīr methodology to understand the coherence of the Qur’ānic narrative text, which he attempted to apply to

\(^{150}\) Khan (2008: 22).
\(^{151}\) Zarkashī (1972, I: 311).
\(^{152}\) Mīr (1986: 15).
\(^{153}\) Ibid.
\(^{154}\) Ibid., 16.
the entire Qurʾān. He asserts that the Qurʾān is inimitable because of the eloquence of its words, the nobility of its messages, its arrangement, and the coherence among its verses (naẓm āyātihi). Therefore, with the notion of subtleties knowledge (laṭīfah ʿilmiyyah), al-Rāzī practically implements naẓm in his efforts to open up the Qurʾān’s message. Mīr indicates that Nisābūrī, who was quite influenced by al-Rāzī’s method, “represents an advance over al-Rāzī in that he does not counte himself with connecting individual verses to one another, but, typically, divides a sūrah into number of passages and tries to link up these passages by connecting the dominant ideas in them.” Also, al-Zarkashī mentioned that al-Rāzī has provided an outstanding work in discovering the science of textuality (munāsabah). Influenced by the works of al-Rāzī and Nisābūrī, al-Biqāʾī (d. 885/1480) defines the Qurʾānic naẓm as the different types of understanding by means of which one could differentiate the reasons for common relationship between various verses of the Qurʾān.

In our own time, Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farahī, Amīn Iḥsān Iṣlāḥī, and others have continued studying the Qurʾānic coherence, in regard to declensions and styles used in the Qurʾānic text. However, all these aspects of the Qurʾānic language were taught via Farahī’s mufradāt al-Qurʾān, asāliḥ al-Qurʾān, jamhūr al-balāghah, and majmūʿat-tafāsīr as well as Iṣlāḥī’s tadabbur al-Qurʾān. According to Mīr, these scholars have begun to recognize that the “Qurʾān comes to possess a unity that would justify its finished form as the starting point of a literary investigation.” Also, he explained that all of them assume the necessity of distinguishing from classical exegesis by “regarding the Qurʾān as

156 Mīr (1986: 18).
157 Zarkashī (1972, I: 35).
possessing significant coherence,”\textsuperscript{161} and the Qurʾān should be treated as it is.\textsuperscript{162} At this level, \textit{naẓm al-Qurʾān} could be applied to the Qurʾān as a whole. Classical exegetes were interested in “the fact that all the verses of a sūrah are so well-connected to one another that the sūrah appears a wonderfully organized and coherent, hence cogent speech of God. This is a revolutionary methodology of \textit{tafsīr} of the Qurʾān.”\textsuperscript{163} However, İslâhi mentioned that in terms of ideas and meanings, the need to apply \textit{naẓm} as a new method to \textit{tafsīr} works became very important. He claimed that \textit{naẓm} helps understand the Qurʾān as a unity of message and explores the various developments of new meanings of the verses.\textsuperscript{164} He further explained that the complete understanding of ījāz (ellipsis) and hadhf (brevity) as fundamental features of the classical Arabic language help resolve the complexity of the meanings of verses.\textsuperscript{165} Therefore, İslâhi understood that all commentators of the Qurʾān who used classical Arabic language—especially its grammatical orientation in order to interpret the text—should have been aware of these two dimensions of the texts’ statements (hadhf and ījāz), which find it difficult to trace co-relationships among a sūrah’s verses because the Qurʾān has used the same Arabic styles of speech in its discourses.

To articulate this theory on the Qurʾānic text, rhetoricians assumed that different steps toward actualizing \textit{naẓm} as a proper methodology must be undertaken to interpret the Qurʾānic text as a whole. In this context, they emphasized that it is necessary for the \textit{mufassir} to have a good understanding of the opening verse or verses of a sūrah, in order to know the “recognition of the link between a sūrah concerned and its preceding and

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\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{162} Khalfallah (1965: 22).
\textsuperscript{163} Khan (2008: 22).
\textsuperscript{164} İslâhi (1986, I: 20–23).
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
Also, they asserted that the following steps are no less important than the reflection and recognition of naẓm. They opined that the recognition of the main theme of a sūrah as well as the sub-themes contained in it, is due to the consideration of the semantic dimension of the words and phrases in every single verse, and the direct as well as indirect existence of the brevity (ḥadḥf) and ellipsis (ījāz) of the different statements that estimate the styles of speech in the verse. All these tools, however, must be well mastered and known by the mufassir in order to understand the coherence of the Qur’ānic text and its narrative.

In addition, it has been noted that the notion of repetitions has attracted the readers of Qur’ānic narratives with their different styles through the Qur’ān. They have observed that most of these Qur’ānic narratives are not complete in one sūrah, except for that of Joseph; it is also apparent that the Qur’ān usually places the story’s different parts in other places. Therefore, some stories are so fragmented that the Qur’ānic narrative can be reconstructed only by collecting together its different parts. Thus, the form of the important repetition-style Qur’ānic narrative can be seen in some stories that have no specific location but extend over several sūrahs, such as narratives about Moses, portions of which appear in al-baqarah, al-a’rāf, al-qāṣaṣ, al-shu’arā’, Yūnus, and ṭāhā.

Furthermore, classical exegetes considered that the Qur’ānic narratives are unclear as regards their meanings and words due to their repetitions in different passages. Hermeneutically, they maintained that repetition functioned as a way to elucidate the significance of the subject discussed in order to reveal their lessons. They have demonstrated that “in each instance, the [sūrah] deals with the events and facts

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167 Ibid., 30–33.
appropriate to the [sūrah's] context and overall atmosphere as compatible with the tone of each instance.”¹⁶⁸ Stylistically, they want to show that the sounds of these repetitions are different and have a major impact on the reader and listener. Some episodes portray God as addressing the reader or listener directly, while others show how prophets speak to God or how God speaks to them.¹⁶⁹

At the level of words and phrases, al-Suyūṭī indicates that the notion of repetition in the Qur‘ān is due to its eloquence and the excellence of its Arabic language:

Repetition of the Arabic phrase is considered more eloquent than the excellent speech (fāṣīḥ al-kalām), and it has been said if speech is repeated it is emphasized. This is because when stories are repeated they are confirmed. God informs the people in the Qur‘ān that repeating narratives in his saying: ‘Thus have We sent this down—an arabic Qur‘ān—and explained therein in detail some of the warnings, in order that they may fear Allāh, or that it may cause their remembrance (of Him);’ 20:113.¹⁷⁰

Al-Suyūṭī provided extensive interpretations concerning this issue. He further indicates that when a story is repeated there is in every sentence an addition or deletion—some parts forwarded (taqdīm) or others delayed (ta‘khīr) or putting in words of its components.¹⁷¹ Al-Suyūṭī, however, asserted that the Qur‘ānic narrative style in each occurrence is also different. This shows the wonderful way of using different narratives to signify one meaning in different forms of coherence and pleasure which attract the mind to listen to it again and again.¹⁷²

In addition, al-Zarkashī asserted that the general goal is to show that these repetitions require a sound grasp of Arabic to be fully understood and, at the same time, to bring out and establish the Qur‘ān’s miraculous nature and eloquence by providing the

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¹⁷¹ Ibid.
¹⁷² Ibid.
same meaning in various ways and styles so that the repetition does not seem repetitious. Thus, one event may be described in many ways in several surahs but still reflect what God wanted to emphasize and highlight in the respective surah. For example, some dialogues “may be cited in different [surahs] using a number of different wordings to convey the meaning of that dialogue, such as the dialogues between prophets of their people like the story of Moses in the Qurʾān that uses different wordings to describe the same events.” This issue, however, has opened the door to Muslim exegetes of the qiṣṣa al-anbiyāʾ, among them al-Thaʾlabī, who disputed its dialogical style, a unique point of the Qurʾānic narrative. He focused on describing with detail the dynamic picture of events recounted in the Qurʾānic narratives. Through this genre, he enabled the readers to relive the various events, one after the other. Throughout the plot’s activity, he tried to emphasize the main functions of the religious events appearing in the Qurʾānic narrative. By offering some additional relevant information, he provided complete exegetical expositions of the dynamism and atmosphere governing the entire dialogue style.

Therefore, there is no doubt that the coherence of the Qurʾānic narrative words and phrases must take the first place in the theory of naẓm. However, classical exegetes asserted that anyone who used classical Arabic and its grammatical orientation to interpret the text should have to use different linguistic features, such as notion of repetition (takrār), ellipsis (ḥadhīf) and conciseness (iḍmār), to elucidate the Qurʾānic narrative’s discourse and meaning. According to them, this literary genre is unique in its rhetorical and cohesive style.

173 Zarkashī (1972, III: 102).
175 See al-Thaʾlabī’s interpretations on the conversation between Moses and Pharaoh on the verses 7:103–29.
Theoretically, classical exegetes maintained that all Qur’ānic narrative texts, especially the story of Joseph, are linguistically well-structured and that their words are linked together in sentences that, in turn, are connected together to form larger units. More precisely, every word is coherently related to the other words in the verse and to the words of other verses in a particular sūrah. For the purpose of meaning, the significance of the Qur’ānic narrative lies in the consistency of these elements. These rhetorical and cohesiveness elements are combined in such a way that they interlock and become so inseparable that the words of the Qur’ānic narrative text cannot be divorced from each other. Furthermore, classical exegetes asserted that this unique combination captivates the reader and results in effective communication.

Practically, it is quite clear that according to naẓm theory the verse 12:4: “Behold! Joseph said to his father: ‘O my father! I did see eleven stars and the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrate themselves to me!’” could be the best example to be studied as a Qur’ānic narrative verse composed of various elements and words arranged in a specific style. However, in the verse—“I did see eleven stars and the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrate themselves to me!”—the repetition of the phrase I did see twice may indicate that Joseph first told his father that he saw in a dream the eleven stars and sun and the moon because his father asked him how did you see them, and he answered, “I saw them prostrate themselves to me.” For instance, al-Ṭabrisī who interpreted the vision as the imagination of the meaning of a thing as it would actually appear when a person is awake, but explained that at the time the person was enveloped with sleep. Thus, when he imagines the meaning of the thing it is as though he sees it.176

Accordingly, al-Ṭabrisī explained that the phrase, *I did see* appears twice for emphasis only. He opined that this was because the duration of the time for the speech was getting longer, but the meaning is, “I did see eleven stars, the sun, and the moon prostrate before me.”\(^{177}\) In contrast, al-Zamakhsharī denied that the phrase *I did see* was a meaningless repetition. He interpreted that if you say what is intended from repeating *I did see*, I will say it is resumed speech was a reply to Jacob’s question, “How did you see them?”\(^{178}\)

Al-Rāzī agreed with al-Zamakhsharī in principle. He related from the well-known al-Qaffāl that the first *I did see* indicates his vision of the eleven stars, the sun, and the moon. The second vision indicates that he saw them prostrated before him.\(^{179}\) Also, al-Rāzī mentioned that some others claimed that one of the two visions was real and the other was in the dream. However, he also said that this interpretation is too general.\(^{180}\) Al-Rāzī concluded that the second vision of the prostration mentioned in the verse could be meant either figuratively or actually. He preferred, however, the real prostration as he sees no harm and Joseph seeing the stars, the sun, and the moon prostrate before him. In this sense, both al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ṭabrisī have argued that God did not use the feminine participle *sājidāt* because God’s wish was to describe the act of the stars, sun, and moon with what a human being may do. This is as God said “*O, ants enter into houses.*”\(^{181}\)

Structurally, al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī then argued the impact of the repetition of the phrase *I did see* on the place order of the sun, moon, and the eleven stars. They

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\(^{177}\) Ibid., and Ṭabarī (1954, XV: 557).

\(^{178}\) Zamakhsharī (1987, II: 302).


\(^{180}\) Ibid.

claimed that if this is what was said, why did God, in the verse place the sun and moon after the eleven stars? Both al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī have explained that it is because God wanted to conjoin them as a means of specification.\textsuperscript{182} Al-Zamakhsharī added that by this God wanted to show their status among the luminous heavenly bodies. It is also possible that the conjunction \textit{wāw} (with) means along with \textit{ma‘a}, that is to say “I saw the stars along with the sun and moon.” Therefore, he was interested in the description of the stars, sun, and moon as if they were rational beings. God did that in order to attribute to them an act usually associated with rational beings.\textsuperscript{183}

Another important aspect of Qur’ānic style is making veiled reference or conciseness (\textit{idmār}) to a thing without plainly mentioning it. Al-Zarkashī, for instance, mentioned that it is necessary for an understood text to retain a trace of supposed deleted text in the actual speech of the intended text.\textsuperscript{184} The best example is: “\textit{They said: ‘If he steals, there was a brother of his who did steal before (him).’ But these things did Joseph keep locked in his heart, revealing not the secrets to them. He (simply) said (to himself): ‘Ye are the worse situated; and Allāh knoweth best the truth of what ye assert!’}” 12:77. Thus, the question here is to what does the phrase, \textit{But these things did Joseph keep locked in his heart, revealing not the secrets to them}, refer?

Al-Zamakhsharī, for instance, interpreted the phrase \textit{But these things did Joseph keep locked in his heart, revealing not the secrets to them} refers to Joseph’s saying, “Ye are the worse situated.” He claimed that the use of the feminine subject in the verb \textit{fa‘asarrahā} (keep locked) refers to the phrase or sentence both being feminine nouns

\textsuperscript{183} Zamakhsharī, ibid.
\textsuperscript{184} Zarkashī (1972, III: 102).
(mu’annath) Ye are the worse situated. Al-Zamakhsharī admitted that this part of the Qur’ānic verse can be understood only through the demand of exegesis (sharīṭatu at-tafsīr). He cited ibn Mas‘ūd who read the phrase fa’asarrahā with fa’asarrahu, using the masculine subject in the verb asarra (keep locked). Ibn Mas‘ūd intended words (kalām) that are masculine. Al-Zamakhsharī concluded that this means that Joseph said secretly to himself, “Ye are the worse situated.” This is what he actually “kept locked in his heart.”

Al-Rāzī explains that the subject (هن) in the verb fa’asarrahā refers to two things. First, he quoted from al-Zajjāj who said, “Joseph kept locked in his heart” refers to his approach of his brothers in his saying, “Ye are the worse situated.” Al-Zajjāj argues that “Joseph kept locked in his heart” is a statement that demands interpretation. That is to say he “kept locked in his heart” the phrase means Ye are the worse situated. Al-Zajjāj agrees with al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation in using Ibn Mas‘ūd’s reading and the linguistic status of the feminine subject (هن: ها) in the verb fa’asarrahā, which refers to the phrase or sentence both being feminine nouns (mu’annath), “Ye are the worse situated.” Al-Rāzī further mentions that the well-known grammarian Abū ‘Ali al-Fārisī had rejected al-Zajjāj’s interpretation. He (al-Fārisī) explains that the iḍmār, according to the required interpretation, is two types. First, it must be explained by a singular word (kalimah) or phrase (jumlah). In other words, both (kalimah and jumlah) must be strongly connected with the sentence in which the iḍmār has been applied. Second, al-Fārisī opined that there is no iḍmār in the verse, this is because the sentence, “Ye are the worse

186 Ibid.
187 Ibid.
189 Ibid.
situated” indicates what “Joseph kept locked in his heart,” which means the *tafsīr* is disconnected from the phrase.\(^{190}\) Al-Fārisī further explained that if there is an *iḍmār*, it must be said “that was not true” as an answer made by Joseph to his brothers.\(^{191}\)

Hence, al-Rāzī has rejected Abū ‘Ali al-Fārisī’s interpretations. He says that the subject (هو: *Hā*) in the verb *fa‘asrahā* refers to the answer as if in the fact that they said, “If he steals, there was a brother of his who did steal before (him),” and Joseph concealed their answer at that time and did not revealed to them until another time due to some circumstances. Al-Rāzī further adds that it is possible that the subject (هو: *Hā*) refers to the speech itself and the meaning of the verse becomes: Joseph kept in his heart the detailed aspects of that incident (theft), and he did not explain to them how it had happened because there is no harm in that.\(^{192}\) Hence, al-Rāzī’s main interest is to provide more analytical explanations on this verse just to emphasize the *iḍmār*.

Another important aspect of Qur’ānic style is making an implicit *ḥadhf* (brevity) in the verse in order to refer to a thing or event. Al-Zarkashī points out that the well-known grammarian al-Mubarrad says: concerning this point, brevity (*ḥadhf*) applies to a places where the wording agrees with the main clause but the meaning is different. This depends on the possibility of having an argument in favor of what is to be deleted based on a rational proof or proof text.\(^{193}\) Therefore, the verse under discussion, “ask at the town where we have been,” 12:82 belongs to the tense moment before Joseph announces himself and his brother (*Benyamīn*) to the rest of his brothers; the dramatic moment is deleted by the implicit *ḥadhf* reference to a thing or event supposedly to be said or

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\(^{190}\) Ibid.
\(^{191}\) Ibid.
\(^{192}\) Ibid., 188–89.
\(^{193}\) Zarkashī (1972, III: 146).
intended but not expressed in the Qur‘ān. However, al-Zarkashī quotes from al-Zamakhsharī that it is not correct to delete an additional word, phrase, or sentence in every instance—nor could another phrase be added before it except through a clear proof and without any uncertainty as in the verse “ask at the town where we have been.”\footnote{Ibid.} Thus, al-Zamakhsharī interprets this phrase by saying: “You should send to the people of the town and ask them about the details of the story.”\footnote{Zamakhsharī (1987, II: 337).} Therefore, he did not consider the Qur‘ānic phrase \textit{ask at the town where we have been} contains a brevity (ḥadhf).

Al-Rāzī interprets the phrase \textit{ask at the town where we have been} in two ways. The first is “ask the people of the town,” but the word ‘people’ is left out for brevity and dramatic effect. This technique is well known among the Arabs.\footnote{Rāzī (1995, VII: 194).} Then, the second interpretation is al-Rāzī’s citation of al-Anbārī’s view, which is “ask the town the caravan and even the walls, all would answer you affirming that of what we say, this is because you are one of the great prophets. Hence, it is not impossible that God would make these lifeless (jamādāt) objects speak to tell you that what we speak is the truth.”\footnote{Ibid.} With this interpretation, al-Rāzī emphasized the notion of ḥadhf in the Qur‘ānic text.

In sum, classical commentators made great strides in establishing \textit{naẓm} within the large units found in individual sūrahs. Even though they focused their hermeneutical efforts on developing \textit{naẓm} among the verses of a given sūrah, they continued “to discuss \textit{naẓm} in the sense of [an] ideal word-meaning relationship.”\footnote{Mīr (1986: 19).} When dealing with \textit{naẓm}, however, it seems that the interpretation of various verses in the Qur‘ānic narrative may appear to be disconnected due to the \textit{muḥāṣṣir’s} ignorance of the pre-Islamic styles of
oration. Due to this, the Qur’ānic narratives’ original importance may not be fully grasped. Despite what has been said about the Qur’ānic narrative technique, Muslim scholars who have examined them in this light relate that the Qur’ān usually describes only a portion of a story at a time and that the portion in question is usually self-contained. All but a few classical exegetes largely ignored *naẓm al-Qurʾān*, for they were only interested in resolving the text’s linguistic ambiguity. Therefore, they chose the relevant words and verses and tried to explain them in the light of their understanding of Arabic language and literature. Basically, they sought to derive the text’s legal principles and commands and ignore other factors, including the coherence between words and verses of the sūrah in which they appear.

Nevertheless, classical exegetes and rhetoricians assumed that all words of a Qur’ānic sentence represent a particular sequence organized to be attractive. Accordingly, they all understood *naẓm* as some kind of a relationship between words used and meanings intended, and they all try to prove that the Qur’ān far excels any other discourse. In addition, they asserted that if a verse’s existing word order was altered or if any of the original words were replaced with synonyms, the sentence would lose its rhetorical inimitability. Therefore, according to these exegetes, *naẓm al-Qurʾān* helps develop a new *tafsīr* methodology to show the Qur’ān’s excellent features.

CONCLUSION

It has been pointed out that the classical *tafsīr* works uphold the idea of the Qur’ān as scripture. However, this phenomenon is not reached in point of view of the form or content but “in an active, subjective relationship to persons, and as part of a

199 Ibid.
200 Fudge (2003: 95).
cumulative communal tradition.”\(^{201}\) Therefore, classical commentators of the Qurʾān always stated that the Qurʾān’s literary meaning is prior to the act of exegesis and represents a process rather than a result. Hence, all of these exegetical efforts focused on the Qurʾān’s literary level have been applied to its narrative passages to preserve “not only the scriptural text and its past interpretations, but also to accumulate a vast amount of information pertaining to its literary aspect.”\(^{202}\)

Therefore, classical exegetes’ approaches to Qurʾānic narrative were associated with studying its literary text. They held that the language of the Qurʾān has many aspects (\(\text{wujūh}\)), which allowed several interpretations relevant to the word of God. Also, they asserted that the text itself provides the exegetes working on the subject with full range of possibilities. This richness, though, is tempered by the overarching insistence that there could really be only one intended meaning and that the singularity of intended meaning has to reach an accommodation with the fact that language rarely permits such unequivocal judgments.

In many ways, most of the classical commentators agreed that if the obvious sense of the Qurʾānic verse related to its meaning, then exegetes who mastered the Arabic language and its inflection must know the meaning of its discourse, and certainly the intended meaning of God.\(^{203}\) Hence, this is quite clear that all classical commentators agreed that the scripture of the Qurʾānic text is the divine book, which for everyone must be what is true and reliable.\(^{204}\) In addition, Calder has pointed out that “the text of the Qurʾān takes on meaning only when it is systematically juxtaposed to certain structures which exist independently more or less of the Qurʾān itself; notably the grammatical and

\(^{201}\) Graham (1987: 5).
\(^{202}\) Fudge (2003: 95).
\(^{204}\) Suyūṭī (1988, II: 122).
rhetorical structures of the Arabic language.”205 Also, in this sense, Carter asserts that it should be noted that the “grammarians were reluctant to recognize themselves as experts on language par excellence. Rather, they seem to have considered themselves as interpreters of the Qur’ān, who employed their sense of language and linguistic expertise to elucidate its underlying message.”206 With this analysis, it is quite clear that the power of grammatical interpretations has provided new understandings of the Qur’ānic stories and helps the readers to understand the method and to know how the classical commentators treated the Qur’ānic narrative’s grammatical structure to provide a great level of classical hermeneutics.

Also, for instance, classical exegetes admitted that the “lexicon section treats the basic significations of the individual utterances, while the inflection section gives selective analysis of the places of those lexemes in the structure of the whole phrase or verse.”207 Technically, these observations are quite accurate, although they may not suffice to distinguish tafsīr works from other types of literary analysis, such as commentaries on poetry.

Thus, all of these grammatical and lexicographical efforts are given to understanding the Qur’ānic text’s essential elements, right down to the individual word’s orientation and etymology. This sort of activity can promote or propagate a worldview, a scholarly methodology, or an orientation. The classical exegetes, however, acknowledged that these meanings are not always self-evident and are difficult to discern with absolute certainty. Calder has explained this issue in detail:

The problem is invariably one of bringing the internal structures and the external ones into some kind of harmony. This was a process of the course which prejudiced the independence of the scholastic disciplines, not least those of grammar and rhetoric. In practice, the independent analysis of grammar was, just, preserved.\textsuperscript{208}

Therefore, the issues of the external and internal factors have been debated by modern scholars to indicate that the function of using grammar and lexicography was also impacted by the beliefs of the \textit{mutassir}. Fudge explains this point by stating that the Qur’ānic meanings have been evaluated according to some external factors, such as logic, dogma, grammar, or history. However, he maintains that the only solution “is to argue that the interpretation of the Qur’ānic text is not contrary to doctrine, for it is accomplished by taking recourse not to narrative interpretation only, but also to the functions of grammar and lexicography.”\textsuperscript{209} He supported his idea by mentioning Wansbrough’s analysis who considered that hermeneutical instrument named analogy (\textit{qiyās}) is split into two cases: the first one depends upon a textual similarity and the second one is derived from the rational or causal relation.\textsuperscript{210}

In addition, there is no doubt, that \textit{naẓm} of the Qur’ānic narrative appeared to be very old proposed methodologies for the interpretation of the Qur’ānic narratives. By applying this method, their meanings become coherent and cohesive and emphasize the essential notion of \textit{iʿjāz}. If the conventional \textit{tafsīr} system is applied to understanding the divine words, the Qur’ānic narratives may appear to be closely connected with one another. In this sense, \textit{naẓm} is meant to maintain the rhetoric and eloquence of the original, revealed words of the Qur’ān. Some modern Muslim scholars have developed a \textit{tafsīr} methodology of the practical principles of \textit{naẓm} and styles because they believe

\textsuperscript{208} Calder (1993: 105).
\textsuperscript{209} Fudge (2003: 102).
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., and Wansbrough (1970: 17).
that this duty is very important and pushes them to look into this proposed methodology and improve it further in order to do justice to the Qurʾān’s message.

Also, classical-era exegetical works must be given a lot of consideration. Modern scholars believe that these works help establish new dimensions and disciplines in the field of Qurʾānic hermeneutical studies. Along with these works, one should ponder the need to develop a new field dealing with the Qurʾānic narrative and its coherence. A few works dealing with some literary aspects of the Qurʾānic narrative exist in European languages. There is, however, a great need to develop a new theory that is based on recognition of the subject as an independent field and that will also have an integrated view of the Qurʾān’s various literary aspects. In this regard, modern Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, with their highly developed discipline of literary criticism, can make a significant contribution.

In the following chapter, I will critically study how the use of the textual narrative in classical tafsīrs represents the search for the intended meanings of the verses of the Qurʾānic stories. Also, through these classical exegete’s efforts, I will show how such meanings could be reached only with the help of these textual narratives. Therefore, many Qurʾānic verses, if literally interpreted, may not provide a satisfactory meaning. This, however, applies to a large number of Qurʾānic stories, metaphorical and figurative language, and especially several verses related to theological aspects, and a significant part of the narratives of the Biblical prophets also deals with the historical aspects of the Qurʾān.
TEXTUAL NARRATIVE HERMENEUTICS AND THE QUR’ĀNIC NARRATIVE

INTRODUCTION

Throughout Muslim history, commentators of the Qur’ān have used different sources to interpret the Qur’ānic narratives. Given their assertions that the primacy of the Qur’ānic text could not be challenged—and that it contained enough information to explain the apparent ambiguity of its narrative passages—the Qurʾān itself became the ultimate source for interpreting earlier scriptural narratives. Other exegetes, however, claimed that the Qurʾānic text alone was not enough to provide a full understanding, for at a certain level the majority of its narrative passages provide only an incomplete description of the events and people mentioned therein. Therefore, they assumed that the Prophet’s sayings and other textual narratives occupy a special place in Islamic literature. As a result, the prophetic ḥadīth and tafsīr have been closely connected since the beginning of Islam.

They also agreed that there is no distinction between authority in ḥadīth and tafsīr and that both have been used to achieve the same purposes.¹ For example, the exegetes noted that the historical concepts of the passages’ events are contained within the Qurʾānic text and that the Prophet Muḥammad would explain them to his community. Their investigation of these issues, however, led to the appearance of ḥadīth and accounts of historical writings that strongly impacted the exegetical works dealing with the Qurʾānic narrative. In addition, classical exegetes and historians drew upon external references and other literature derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition.

(isrā‘īliyāt) to clarify such Qur’ānic passages. Most of this scriptural literature was
canonized as a textual narrative or presented in the form of ḥadīths.²

Hermeneutically, since some verses cannot clarify all aspects of the Qur’ānic
narrative on their own, classical exegetes asserted that these textual narratives’ religious
value and authority were secondary to that of the Qur’ān, but were the most significant
source of interpretation (after the Qur’ān), and served as a major guide to understanding
the difficulties found within the Qur’ān. Along with historians, therefore, they assumed
that these interpretative textual narratives functioned as a fundamental source of
knowledge needed to explain the Qur’ānic narrative. This approach helped create a
“parallel text,” a vast collection of textual narrative material, which included narratives
found in the Qur’ān that were then enriched with many details. In this context, it is
quiete clear that a large number of early tafsīr works were collections of traditions with
their chains of transmission.³

Given that a major part of these textual narratives emphasizes the connection
between the Biblical prophets and Muḥammad’s prophethood, Muslims have preserved
many of those narratives that refer to the pre-Islamic prophets, especially those
mentioned in the Bible, in order to define Prophet Muḥammad’s role and mission
properly. Therefore, most of the classical exegetes used these parallel texts, which their
contributions progressively augmented,⁴ as the fundamental interpretative source for
understanding the Qur’ānic narrative. Kermode called this pre-hermeneutical act of

² According to Stewart, “Rubin’s work contains a great deal of useful information culled from a wide variety of ḥadīth collections and other sources. The result is a rich understanding of the early Muslim use of Qur’ānic and Biblical material in commenting on and arguing over the issues of their day.” See Stewart (2003: 639).
³ Fudge (2003: 10).
interpretation an “interpretation by augmentation, not exegesis.” In contrast, al-Suyūṭī explained that “interpretation by augmentation” can be used only to clarify the difficulties of Qur’ānic statements, like many aspects of the scripture are opened to investigation. However, in this regard, it is so important to consider that the citation of the textual narratives made by these classical exegetes was in the context of much of the lexicographical material and these works must be viewed in the terms of overall picture of the establishment of a fixed religious system.

In studying how the hermeneutical literature of the Qur’ānic narratives developed, one comes across with some well-known works produced by classical exegetes and historians. The general purpose of such works is to present the prophets’ historical approaches and the chronological structure of their stories, both of which contributed to a more or less accessible interpretation of the Qur’ān.

The resulting genre, which has been closely associated with Ka‘b al-Aḥbār (d. 32/652), ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās’ tafsīr (d. 65/686), and Wahb ibn Munabbih’s (d.110/732) kitāb al-mubtadā’ wa-qīṣāṣ al-ānbiyā’ (qīṣāṣ al-akhbār), which deals with the lives of the Jewish prophets, began as an interpretative textual narrative of the prophets rather than a strict interpretation of the Qur’ān’s verses. Similarly, the earliest written work focusing on the Qur’ānic narratives was Ibn Isḥāq’s sīrah ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/750). This work, which preserves the lives of the prophets as an introduction to Prophet Muḥammad’s life, uses textual narratives as its fundamental structure. Following the example of Ibn Isḥāq’s work, Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muslim ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), author of kitāb al-maʿārif, seems to have been the first Muslim author to write an Islamic history, which

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5 Kermode (1979: 81).
also included multiple Biblical narratives and histories as they were precursors to the Islamic traditions. His historical material, however, became the fundamental source for his and subsequent generations.

Another historical work of considerable importance for this method of interpreting the Qur’ānic narrative is the taʾrīkh of the Imāmī Shi’i historian al-Ya’qūbī (d. 284/824), whom Muslim and non-Muslim scholars consider the first Muslim historian to write a universal history and take almost the entire range of human culture for this kind of study. Regardless of whether he wrote his taʾrīkh from a Shi’i standpoint or not, Millward argues that al-Ya’qūbī’s taʾrīkh shows a positive pre-possession on the important issues to the Shi’i prospective of early Muslim history. In addition, one factor that separates him from his contemporaries is his presentation of the historical narrative’s isnād. Millward states that al-Ya’qūbī presents his material in a continuous textual narrative that is uninterrupted by isnāds.

In addition, some high-level exegetical works, which were richly illustrated with depictions of the prophets in certain scenes from well-known and popular stories, also used textual narrative as sources of interpretation. Al-Ṭabarī’s historical and exegetical writings, understood to represent the ideal example of Muslim historiography and exegesis during its formative period, is said to be the most robust early historical exegesis and contains numerous narrations, traditions, and writings that it alone

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8 Adang (1966: 35).
10 Millward (1964: 332).
11 Ibid.
preserved. The great example for al-Ṭabarī was Ibn Ḥishām, whose method he followed closely.

In ta'rikh ar-rusul wa-l-mulūk and jāmi‘ al-bayān, al-Ṭabarī summarized a huge number of reports, accounts, and material that he had collected from earlier historians and exegetes and offered the most celebrated example of a universal history from the pre-Islamic period up to his own time. Unlike al-Ya‘qūbī’s ta‘rikh, in his ta‘rikh and tafsīr, al-Ṭabarī relies heavily on the isnād mechanism to authenticate and examine his traditions. As a jurist and student of tradition, he carefully, almost obsessively relates all his chains in their entirety, and he will often relate multiple chains for the same narration as he collected it from different isnād. Al-Ṭabarī, who did not follow the example set by ibn Qutayba and al-Ya‘qūbī, was reluctant to quote accounts from the Jewish and Christian scriptures in his ta‘rikh. According to al-Shahrastānī, al-Ṭabarī’s book deals with the ancient nations, including their political and prophetic history in chronological order, along with variant accounts.

Following al-Ṭabarī’s method, al-Tha‘labī’s al-kashf wa-l-bayān used textual narratives as a source of understanding. He was also the first Qur’ānic commentator known to have written a complete book on this topic (‘arā‘is al-majālis: qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā‘), which represents another genre of independent material on prophetic legends, which were collected and became widespread. Other exegetical works, such as ma‘ālim at-

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13 Adang (1966: 43).
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 If this is the case, however, what does al-Ṭabarī mean when he says in his tafsīr, “wala-qadd sa‘āl nā ahl al-kitāb al-awwal” in filling in gaps in the Adam narrative in sūrah al-Baqara? See Ṭabarī (1954, I: 449–60).
18 Shahrastānī (1968: 64).
19 Dhahabī (1976, I: 337).
20 Recently, some non-Muslim scholars have approached the qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā‘ subject from different perspectives: Marianna Klar’s book, Interpreting al-Tha‘labī’s Tales of the Prophets: Temptation,
In this chapter, I will present a critical study of how classical Qur’ānic commentators used the textual narratives as principal and external sources of understanding Qur’ānic narratives. To determine just how much they shaped classical-era exegetical works on the Qur’ānic narrative, I will discuss in the first section how they understood the textual narrative and outline how they came to see them as a legitimate interpretive resources. In other words, I will analyze how the early exegetical efforts of converts and storytellers helped to formulate these textual narratives as a source of interpretation. In order to reveal this phenomenon’s major sources and its subsequent influence upon early exegetical works and historical writings, especially as regards the exegetical sciences (ʿulūm at-tafsīr), I will examine the roles of Ibn ‘Abbās, Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, and Wahb ibn al-Munabbih in transmitting Biblical scripture to Islam when interpreting the Qur’ānic narrative, as well as their historical and hermeneutical works. I will also focus on the early exegetical approaches of the textual narratives provided by Muqāṭīl ibn Sulaymān, Ibn Iṣḥāq, and al-Ṭabarī—all of whom influenced the classical exegetes in
general—as well as on the hermeneutical works of al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Thaʿlabī, and Hūd ibn Muḥakkim.

In the second section, I will concentrate on verses 10, 19, and 21 of sūrah Yūsuf in order to show how these classical exegetes used textual narratives to understand the historical aspects of some ambiguities in the Qur’ānic narrative and to emphasize the claim that these narrative texts are historically oriented. Hermeneutically, this section will show how classical exegetes considered the textual narrative (as an historical aspect of exegesis) to indicate patterns and techniques common throughout the genre and their clear manifestation in their tafsīrs. I will examine how they sought to provide both the standard academic explanations and, simultaneously, use the textual narrative to explain the Qur’ānic stories’ historical aspects. With some emphasis on their methodology I will explain in the present section how and to what degree this was achieved.

The last section will study verses 15 and 37 of sūrah Yūsuf in order to analyze how classical commentators used textual narratives to understand various theological aspects related to the Qur’ānic text; their intention was to identify the prophecy level of Joseph and other pre-Islamic prophets and to emphasize the basis of his mission as a prophet (the Biblical narrative does not consider Joseph a prophet.) First, I will analyze the hermeneutical works provided by classical exegetes on the level of prophecy through an etymological study of the terms nabī and rasūl and then discuss why the commentators distinguished between them and emphasized the prophecy level and Prophet Muḥammad’s connection with the Biblical prophets. Second, with some emphasis on their methodology, I will demonstrate how these mufassirūn used these textual narratives to explain how and to what degree this claim was achieved.
4.1 UNDERSTANDING THE TEXTUAL NARRATIVES

Historically, the original source of these textual narratives came from ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās, the well-known and youngest Companion, and early storytellers’ and converts’ exegetical works. Classical exegetes and historians assumed that these storytellers and converts had many elements in common. First, they stated that ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās was considered one of the most prominent Qur’ānic exegetes of his time. He wrote on Qur’ānic *tafsīr*, Islamic law (*fiqh*), the *sūrah* of the Prophet, the history of the pre-Islamic nations, and ancient Arabic poetry. His *tafsīr* works were based on a large collection of written texts that took the form of textual narratives, with *isnāds* that usually went back to one of his immediate students. His most prominent students were ‘Abd Allāh ‘Ikrimah (d.105/723), Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d.104/722), and Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr (d.95/714).

Second, they claimed that the storytellers and converts were the first Muslim scholar experts on Biblical narratives, and that their writings and teachings were the catalyst for the spread of prophetic narratives and legends. In addition, they related many textual narratives as a type of early *tafsīr* work at a time preceding the strict ḥadīth standards had yet to be developed, and when such traditions were freely used in meeting exegetical practice. Therefore, based on some Biblical references, most of these textual narratives presented detailed descriptions of the Biblical narratives about the prophets,

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24 Converts, especially former Jews and Christians, who were familiar with the Bible, and storytellers (*quṣṣāṣ*), were experts due to their spiritual leadership and performance. Both of these groups provided information that explained the Qur’ānic narratives about the universe’s creation and the Biblical prophets, and thus put into circulation a growing mass of stories and legends. See Athamina (1992: 53–74).
26 Ibid., 79–84.
27 Ibid., 106.
28 Ibid., 104–107.
30 Ibid., 106.
their nations, and events that occurred during their long lives. In addition, they explained how God mentioned the miracles with which they were sent, their messages to their people, their opponents’ resistance, the message’s stages and evolution, the believers’ reward, and the unbelievers’ fate. For these reasons, and without providing any critical study, the textual narratives attributed to them found their way into Islamic literature, especially *tafsīr* and works on history.

According to Muslim sources, the most prominent convert, Ka’b al-Aḥbār, was regarded as the most knowledgeable transmitter of Biblical textual narratives and legends about the prophets of the pre-Islamic nations and Biblical figures, and much of the information presented in later works was attributed to him. Tottoli states that Ka’b’s name is a chief narrator in such textual narrative traditions and his name appears in numerous such transmissions. Muslim tradition, however, has preserved some contradictory reports on this matter, especially the description of Ka’b’s wisdom as well as his deep knowledge of Jewish texts and Yemenite legends that have been attributed to him. In this regard, classical exegetes and historians, especially Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha’labī, and Ibn Isḥāq, preserved many of the textual narratives recounted by Ka’b al-Aḥbār to explain the Qur’ānic narrative. This indicates the high regard in which his writings were held. Some testimonies explicitly state that he was not the originator of

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30 In order to authorize the Biblical material, Muslim exegetes debated the legitimacy of using Biblical narratives as a secondary source. Some non-Muslim and Muslim scholars have criticized the resulting exegetical works. Originally, these criticisms were made on the references that Muqātil, Ibn Isḥāq, and al-Ṭabarī subjected the material cited, especially in transmitting historical information related to the Arab and Biblical traditions. Most of these criticisms were directed toward those who propagated the traditions originating from storytellers, converts, and the authenticity of the narrative text itself.

31 Abū Ishāq Ka’b ibn Maṭṭā al-Himyari was known as Ka’b al-Aḥbār is trustworthy (*thiqah*). He became a Muslim during the reign of Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. He belongs to the second level (*tabaqah al-muhaddithīn*). He lived during both *jāhilīyyah* and Islam. He lived in Yemen before he moved to Syria. He died during the caliphate of ʿUthmān, exceeding one hundred years of age. See ‘Asqallānī (1960, II: 339).

certain traditions; however, certain books on the stories of the Bible and the prophets did circulate bearing his name as the author.

No less important in this matter was the appearance of textual narratives related to Wahb ibn Munabbih, a Yemenite of Persian descent who had been a student of Ibn ʿAbbās. Wahb was famous for his knowledge of the *ahl al-kitāb*’s traditions, with which he did his best to provide extensive interpretative material for the Qurʾānic narrative. According to Ibn Khallikān, he was well trained in Jewish traditions (namely, the prophets’ narratives, their religious life, and stories concerning the children of Israel), on which he wrote a great deal.

An examination of Wahb’s works reveals that he presented his materials in a strict chronological order. Most of his writings deal with the narratives of Biblical personages that have been mixed with tales of ancient Yemenite kings, as well as some interpretations of Qurʾānic verses, religious lectures, proverbs, and tribal genealogies of pre-Islamic times. In his *irshād al-arīb*, Yāqūt mentions that Wahb’s most notable work is his book of ḥimyar’s crowned kings, in which he wrote extensive reports and narratives about them as well as their proverbs and poems. This is to indicate that he had a great knowledge about the history of pre-Islamic nations, including the Biblical prophets and personages. Although none of his works have survived, they were extensively quoted in such later works as Ibn Qutayba’s *kitāb al-maʿārif*, al-Ṭabarī’s *tārīkh* and *tafsīr*, and al-Maqdisī’s *kitāb al-badʿ wa-l-tārīkh*. Ayoub states that “it will be clearly seen that the traditions attributed to him [Wahb] were not only Biblical and Talmudic but even popular...

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33 Adang (1966: 21).
37 Adang (1966: 11).
hagiographic materials. All these are woven together in interesting although often apparently confused [textual] narratives."

As the Islamic empire spread, the converts’ impact on establishing Muslim exegesis started with their propagation of stories attributed to the Biblical prophets that existed in their respective scriptures. This was done to provide evidence to resolve various arguments, among them a precise definition of the Prophet’s role. Critical statements of the converts’ technical methods, as well as the authenticity of their materials, did nothing to lessen their popularity. Extra-Qur’ānic Biblical stories enjoyed a rapid oral diffusion and reflected the typical expediencies of oral narration. This diffusion took place far earlier than that of the first-written documents, especially in the case of the textual narrative, which the exegetes used and included in increasingly elaborate works from the first Islamic century onward.

The history of written works documenting the Muslim approach to the textual narratives related to the Biblical tradition began with Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767). His systematic exegesis, which contains elements of the textual narrative style, features a large section devoted to explaining the Qur’ānic narratives. At a certain level, his works represent an early exegetical work, as Qur’ānic narratives and quoting traditions are given preference over theological concerns. Later on, his tafsīr was accepted as an example of the classical style and a fundamental source for classical exegetes dealing with the Qur’ān’s stories. Most of these exegetes—among them Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Tha’labī—were influenced by Muqātil’s hermeneutical methodology and, thus, adopted his principal goal, to create an organic narrative around the Qur’ānic texte

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which seeks to put in order the words of God,\textsuperscript{40} as their own. Thus, many pages in their commentaries consisted of paraphrased narrative passages and interpretations of the Biblical prophets in which he [Muqātil] names the unnamed in the Qur‘ānic narratives, usually ascribing to them names that represent their actions or roles in the textual narrative, which is distinctive in oral narration.\textsuperscript{41} Except for al-Zamakhsharī, who rarely mentions Muqātil in his \emph{tafsīr} works, we find al-Rāzī and al-Ṭabrisī have transmitted textual narratives on Muqātil’s authority in order to interpret such Qur‘ānic narrative passages without providing additional details.\textsuperscript{42}

This connection with \emph{tafsīr} led classical exegetes to use the textual narratives narrated by Mujāhid ibn Jabr—and, above all as far as the stories of the prophets are concerned, ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 211/826)—“who relied upon the interpretation of the authorities of the previous generations.”\textsuperscript{43} Most of these classic commentators—especially, al-Ṭabarī, Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Rāzī, al-Ṭabrisī, and al-Tha‘labī—narrated the same textual narratives given by al-Ṣan‘ānī and Mujāhid in order to explain some of the Qur‘ānic passages that deal with Biblical stories.

Ibn Isḥāq was the first Muslim historian to produce a complete account of a major part of the Qur‘ānic narrative. According to Islamic historical reports, he wrote between 740 and 775 C.E.,\textsuperscript{44} and based his research on a wide range of available Arab legends, oral reports from converts and storytellers, and the Biblical tradition. Ibn Isḥāq collected all of the textual narratives related to the universe’s beginning and creation (\emph{kitāb al-mubtadā‘}), the narratives of the pre-Islamic nations, and accounts about the Prophet’s life

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 100.
\textsuperscript{43} Tottolli (2002: 98).
\textsuperscript{44} Khalidi (1994: 35).
(sīrah) and military expeditions (maghāzī). Usually, his own work contains many of the same ḥadīths he collected.\textsuperscript{45}

He was influenced by the work of Wahb ibn Munabbih, especially when dealing with the Biblical prophets and Wahb’s \textit{kitāb al-mubtadāʾ} and the \textit{kitāb al-mabʾāth}. Therefore, he connects the \textit{sīrah} and the Qurʾān to previous scriptures through the \textit{sīrah} stories. According to Jenkins, Wahb freely employed Judaica (\textit{isrāʿīliyāt}) which were obtained from the People of the Book.\textsuperscript{46} Tottoli indicates that much of Ibn Isḥāq’s work was lost, and that only his work pertaining to the Prophet’s life continued to exist.\textsuperscript{47} Other reports indicate that the first section that deals with the Biblical prophets was saved, as some portion was also saved by al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī, al-Maqdisī and Ibn Hishām, and others.\textsuperscript{48}

In addition, classical exegetes and historians, especially al-Ṭabarī, made extensive use of Ibn Isḥāq’s textual narrative materials and relied on his works to interpret the Qurʾānic narrative, especially when confronted with those traditions that connect the Prophet’s mission with the pre-Islamic prophets and emphasize the early Muslim community’s triumph. In addition, they found other useful exegetical material, such as the Prophet’s traditions and sayings and large quotations from pre-Islamic poems and Arab legends.\textsuperscript{49} For this reason, one concludes that classical exegetes and historians repeatedly mentioned Ibn Isḥāq’s name.

As I have indicated above, al-Ṭabarī was reluctant to quote textual narratives from the Jewish and Christian scriptures in his \textit{taʾrīkh} and \textit{tafsīr} works. Most of the classical

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{46} Jenkins (2003: 296).
\textsuperscript{47} Tottoli (2002: 129).
\textsuperscript{48} Adang (1966:15).
\textsuperscript{49} In particular, al-Ṭabarī “owed much to Ibn Isḥāq in both conception and form.” See Tottoli (2002: 129).
exegetes were influenced by the *jāmiʿ al-bayān*, which dedicates long passages to the Biblical prophets, explains Qur’ānic stories, and presents numerous traditions that repeatedly with contrasting contents.50 Moreover, in repetitions that considerably enlarged the length of the classical commentaries, most exegetes copied large sections of the same textual narratives used by al-Ṭabarī to comment upon various Qur’ānic verses. Gilliot has described al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr* as a paradoxically unifying power in spite of its profusion of variant and diverse versions and that is what gives it its persuasive force, all this allowed the story of salvation to take root in the collective memory of the Muslim community.51

Therefore, the majority of classical commentators subsequently followed al-Ṭabarī’s exegetical works when commenting upon the Qur’ānic narratives. In addition to the various classical disciplines, al-Ṭabarī used to interpret the Qur’ānic narrative passages, the classical exegetes adopted the method of explaining every complete Qur’ānic narrative part and the different traditions about the Biblical prophets, which always had the major role in their *tafsīrs*, and used them exactly as al-Ṭabarī did.

Except for al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, and al-Ṭabrisī, the classical exegetes did not take everything away from the method of al-Ṭabarī’s hermeneutical works; but in their Qur’ānic commentaries, they used the same textual narratives as al-Ṭabarī did. They referred to the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās, Ka‘b, Wahb ibn Munabbih, Ibn Ishāq, Qatādah, Mujāhid, and Muqātil, which explains the preference of one approach over another or one tradition over another.52

50 Ibid., 102.
Following al-Ṭabarî’s method, al-Tha’labî used some textual narratives that attempted to describe the number of prophets, including those belonging to the Biblical traditions that were not mentioned in the Qurʾān. He paid more attention to the textual narratives describing Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and Jesus—especially to the story of Moses, which at a hundred pages, resembles a novel, full with vivid description as well as unique and suspect narrations. However, al-Tha’labî was not the only exegete to illustrate his tradition-based exegesis by interpreting the stories of the prophets; in fact, most classical exegetes considered the organization of exegetical works based upon the traditions of preceding generations, in which every verse is explained word by word, and often relying upon the same material and sources.

In his *tafsîr*, al-Tha’labî used the commonest names found in al-Ṭabarî’s *tafsîr*—such as Ka‘b, Wahb ibn Munabbih, Qatādah, ibn Ishāq, ibn ʿAbbās, Muqātil and Mujāhid—who were considered the most important names of the classical era of Qur’ānic exegesis. In addition to exegetical considerations, al-Tha’labî collected textual narratives that pointed out and offered to the reader the most surprising examples of the prophets’ experiences. Of less importance, at least from this perspective, was the story’s source, which was hidden within the vague initial mention of the experts on such stories and behind which collections of traditions deriving from the highly criticized circle of the storytellers could be hidden. Besides the question of the sources utilized, the textual narratives related to the stories of the prophets presented by al-Tha’labî demonstrated a valuable literary elaboration. The goal, therefore, was to provide religious instruction and

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53 Ibid., 101.
to entertain and draw the reader’s or listener’s attention with a well-structured and balanced work.

In sum, the appearance of some external traditions and exegetical legends regarding the textual narratives indirectly helped early Muslim exegetes explain the ambiguities appearing in the Qur’ānic narrative. During the first two centuries of Islamic history, the textual narratives relating to the Biblical tradition occupied most Muslim writings. At that time, classical exegetes only knew of the Biblical characters via interpretations of the Qur’ānic narratives that spread both orally and in various types of literature. Most of these materials, which had been transmitted by Ibn ʿAbbās, Kaʿb, Wahb, and their successors, spread quickly by word of mouth and found their way into popular literature, Qur’ānic commentary, prophetic tradition, and historiography. For instance, many exegetical works made by classical exegetes (e.g., al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī) and historiographers (e.g., Ibn Isḥāq, al-Yaʿqūbī, and al-Maqdisī) preserved detailed information passed on by the converts, storytellers, and Ibn ʿAbbās and his students.

As regards using the textual narratives as a secondary source to interpret Qur’ānic narratives, classical exegetes devoted a great deal of time and space to translating or transmitting Judeo-Christian narratives. The major characteristics of such exegetical works have been heavily criticized by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. These criticisms were often directed toward those who propagated the traditions originating from storytellers, converts, and Ibn ʿAbbās and his students. Despite these criticisms, however, their exegetical works attained popular success. Al-Thaʿlabī’s work, for example, became the best known and most useful collection of stories of the prophets. Even though the classical exegetes had to codify the numerous (and often contrasting)
traditions before they could claim to be providing a complete account of the topic, they nevertheless listed the authorities and opinions of the ancients on such questions. Reference has already been made to the critical analysis to which Muqātil and al-Ṭabarî subjected the material they cited. They always emphasized their position and exercised clear judgment. This did not always happen, however, in their stories of the prophets; in fact, while they generally did not use traditions and interpretations cited by suspect exegetes or transmitters, they partially abandoned their judgement when dealing with historical information related to the Arabs’ and the Biblical past. Yet this does not mean that the traditions concerning the Biblical prophets were collected without any regard for their authenticity.

Hence, in the following sections, I will study the level of understanding that could be attained by Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarî, al-Zamakhsharî, al-Rāzî, al-Tha’labî, and al-Ṭabrisî by using textual narratives to interpret the historical and theological aspects of the Qurʾānic narratives.

4.2 HISTORICAL ASPECTS

Khalafallah mentions that Classical Qurʾānic commentators made two assumptions: (1) that the Qurʾānic narrative texts are historically oriented; and (2) that the Qurʾān has made the basic historical elements of these narratives, which exist in time and space, as well as the distinct characteristics of the people mentioned therein, very vague. Khalidi writes that “the Qurʾānic vision of history rests upon a certain conception of time and space to express that conception.” Accordingly, Muslim exegetes believed that these Qurʾānic

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54 Khalafallah (1965: 29).
55 Khalidi (1994: 8).
narratives could not be understood until their historical ambiguities had been resolved. Therefore, familiarity with the Qur‘ān’s style of relating to history in order to approach its Qur‘ānic narratives became crucial, for these [textual] narratives refer to events in human history and can be cross-checked with other sources and traditions, where such data are available. With all the linguistic and perceptual limitations surrounding the recording of these events, they remain grounded in the experiential world.\textsuperscript{56}

For example, al-Ṭabarī and al-Tha‘labī wrote that the Qur‘ānic discourse of Pharaoh disputing Moses’ claim of prophethood refers to an actual historical event and serves an historical function.\textsuperscript{57}

In their quest to understand the historical aspects related to the Qur‘ānic narrative text’s eloquence and characteristics, classical exegetes argued over its stylistic and concise eloquence as “one attribute that differentiates the Qur‘ān’s way of recounting history from traditional history telling.”\textsuperscript{58} In this sense, those exegetes who worked on the historical level of the Qur‘ānic narrative’s linguistic style often mentioned that some of them appeared to consist of disconnected events that happened in no clear chronological order. In order to clarify and stress a certain point, they assumed that this might have been done because each event represents a change in the [Qur‘ānic] narrative context by ‘when’ (\textit{idh}), rather than by ‘then’ (\textit{thumma}) or ‘therefore’ (\textit{fa}) both of which indicate that the events are mentioned in their chronological order like the story of Ibrāhīm and his son Ismā‘īl in 2:123–27.\textsuperscript{59}

Thus, classical exegetes interested in studying the Qur‘ānic narratives’ historical aspects and influences upon Qur‘ānic hermeneutics and the development of understanding tried to provide extensive citations and used different textual narratives

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{56} Saeed (2006: 94).
\textsuperscript{58} Fatūḥī (2005: 2).
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 7.
\end{flushleft}
to elucidate the passage’s historical ambiguity. Therefore, they speculated that such an account of these explanatory texts usually took the form of narratives included in later collections of historical accounts. They also stressed their belief that this external (non-Qur’anic) information concerning the pre-Islamic nations—even though most of these passages lacked dates, places, and other relevant details, as well as technical linguistic rules—served as fundamental sources for interpreting the events recounted in the Qur’anic narratives. For example, the Qur’an refers to Shu‘ayb’s people and some of his teachings. But in order to have better understanding of them and the teachings, exegetes claim that some basic historical data is crucial as the Qur’an provides not even the most basic of details concerning them. At this level, most of these hermeneutical works show that the Qur’an always passes over the small details that are given prominence in traditional historical accounts. However, the Qur’an does mention the people of Shu‘ayb as the people of Median.

In illustrating the Qur’anic narratives’ historical events, the interpreters mainly used an exegetical methodology designed to provide as many details as possible from reliable sources. They often relied upon historical reports, some of which could be found in the Qur’an, thereby allowing them to explain the event by means of other verses. But most of the time they used reports attributed to the Prophet, as well as other external documents, artifacts, archeological, and anthropological evidence, to support their interpretations. Another important source was the Bible, especially narratives about

\[\text{\textsuperscript{60}}\text{Saeed (2006: 95).}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{61}}\text{Ibid., 94.}\]
mutually mentioned individuals, nations, and events particularly in relation to Qur‘ānic texts.\footnote{Ibid.}

This effort started with al-Ṭabarî, who preserved a large part of these textual narratives in his *tafsīr* to interpret the stories found in verse 7:7 and verse 10:10.\footnote{Ṭabarî (1954, XII: 497 and XIII: 13).} He addressed these Qur‘ānic narratives and discussed the prophets’ personalities from the viewpoint of an historian, not as an exegete. Al-Zamakhsharī also emphasized this view when he addressed 88:21–24, “Has *the story of the disputants reached you.*” He did not, however, pay a lot of attention to its literary level because he believed it did not coincide with the entire Qur‘ānic narrative’s historical aim.\footnote{Zamakhsharī (1987, IV: 366–70).} Al-Ṭabrisī and al-Rāzī applied the same method to the story of Adam and Iblīs mentioned in 2:30–38 and 88:71–86.\footnote{Ṭabrisī (1995, I: 176–85) and Rāzī (1995, I: 313).} Al-Tha‘labī’s *tafsīr* features many textual narratives to emphasize the historical level of 2:259: “*Or (take) the similitude of one who passed by a hamlet.* . . .”\footnote{Al-Tha‘labī (2002, II: 242–51).}

Thus, as I mentioned above, the textual narrative would take priority over the narration to interpret the text’s historical ambiguity. Therefore, those following the early exegetes and the majority of their successors practiced this methodology and occasionally cited long pieces of narrative texts, especially when commenting on the Qur‘ānic narrative. Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarî, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Rāzī, and al-Tha‘labī all presented their materials in a consistent and distinct fashion, as we will see in several examples taken from sūrah *Yūsuf*. For some reason, they cited textual narratives from Ibn ‘Abbās, Ibn Iṣḥāq, Qatādah, Mujāhid, and Muqātil ibn Sulaymān in an
attempt to balance the coexistence of the scriptural text with the narration. Al-Rāzī, for instance, combined textual and narrative citations.

Many exegetical works on Qurʾānic narratives quickly become overwhelming. Thus, due to the cumulative nature of the genre on the one hand, and to my particular analysis of Qurʾānic narrative in exegesis on the other, a broader scope is required. The following will demonstrate that considering the Qurʾānic narrative as an historical aspect of exegesis reveals patterns and techniques common throughout the genre and their clear manifestation in classical commentaries. In this case, I will examine how the exegetes were forced to provide both the standard academic explanations and, simultaneously, to use the textual narrative to interpret Qurʾānic stories. With some emphasis on their methodology, the present part will explain how and to what degree this was achieved.

The most basic historical form of the textual narratives as found in these commentaries on 12:15—“and agreed to put him in the bottom of the well (ghayābāt al-jubb)”—deals with how Joseph’s brothers betrayed him after convincing their father to let him accompany them on an excursion. Concerning this phrase’s literary meanings, the majority of classical commentators provided very different historical information for the well’s type, location, and distance from Jacob’s house.

In his discussion of the well incident, al-Ṭabarī presented two possible locations: the place of the well is in Syria (al-shām), related on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās67 and the well is located in Jerusalem (bayt al-maqdis), narrated on the authority of Qatādah.68 Al-Tha’labī included the same textual narratives, but added that it was located “between

67 Ṭabarī (1954, XV: 566).
68 Ibid.
Egypt and Midian,” related on the authority of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār.\textsuperscript{69} Traditionally, both exegetes sought to collect a large number of textual narratives in order to provide all of the available historical information on this particular topic.\textsuperscript{70}

After presenting detailed linguistic explanations of its literary meaning, al-Zamakhsharī listed several possibilities regarding the assembled historical information: that the well is said to be in Jerusalem, the land of Jordan, between Egypt and Midian, and located three \textit{farsakhs} from Jacob’s dwelling.\textsuperscript{71} Generally, he often uses “it is said” (\textit{qīla}) to indicate the multiplicity of the textual narratives on a particular event’s historical aspect and, therefore, rarely mentions the narrator’s name.

Al-Rāzī offered a novel and, from his point of view, convincing argument about its location. For instance, he devoted the following textual narratives to explaining the \textit{bottom of the well} and its location. He narrated on the authority of Qatāda that “the well was of Jerusalem.”\textsuperscript{72} Al-Rāzī also related, on the authority of Wahb ibn Munabbih, that “the well is in the land of Jordan” and, on the authority of Muqātil, that “it is at a distance of three \textit{farsakhs} from Jacob’s house.”\textsuperscript{73} After reviewing the various textual narratives already discussed, he concluded that “the well was the widely known source of water for caravans and other travelers in the area.”\textsuperscript{74} Thus, he understood that according to the definite article ‘\textit{al}’ in \textit{ghayābāt al-jubb}, the well was widely known to Joseph’s contemporaries. Therefore, Joseph was thrown into it with the expectation that he would be picked up by a caravan and thus saved from perdition.\textsuperscript{75}

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\textsuperscript{69} Al-Tha’labī (2002, V: 202–203).
\textsuperscript{70} Hūd ibn Muḥakkim did not provide detailed exegetical works on this particular Qur’ānic verse.
\textsuperscript{71} Zamakhsharī (1987, II: 432).
\textsuperscript{72} Rāzī (1995, IX: 98).
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
Al-Ṭabrisī wanted to provide some historical information according to the authorities of these textual narratives, and also how they were used, concerning the well’s locations. He related on Qatādah’s authority that “the well was in Jerusalem.” He also located it in the “land of Jordan,” but without specifying a particular location. In addition, he relates on the authority of Wahb ibn Munabbih and Ka’b al-Aḥbār that it “was located somewhere between the land of Midian and Egypt” and states that it was close “to Jacob’s house at the distance of three farsakhs.” Similarly to al-Rāzī, al-Ṭabrisī was more concerned with interpreting the definite article as emphasizing “that it was known to them (maḥūdun ʿindahum) in its surrounding area because the caravans usually came to it.”

As these commentators differ over the well’s exact location, the use of textual narrative in tafsīr works is not to make a clear discovery of the actual thing mentioned, but rather to expound upon a seemingly incomplete Qur’ānic narrative pasage. Obviously, for classical exegetes these textual narratives represented the most basic form of interpretation, due to their conciseness and strong connections to the Qur’ānic text’s meanings. For some reason, the discussion about the well’s location became relevant for historiographical purposes. But, at any rate, it helped the classical exegetes to continue the process of understanding and the production of new meanings.

The second Qur’ānic passage I would like to address here is:

*Then there came a caravan of travellers: they sent their water-carrier (for water), and held own his bucket (into the well). . . He said: “Ah there! Good news! Here is a (fine) young man!” So they concealed him as a treasure! But Allāh knoweth well*
all that they do! The (Brethren) sold him for a miserable price, for a few dirhams counted out: in such low estimation did they hold him! 12:19.

With these verses, one can find the same style of interpretation. For historical purposes, classical exegetes were devoted to using different textual narratives to resolve the Qur’ānic texts’ exegetical problems. In these verses, the problem of knowing the actors and the personages of the story and its context become more complex.

With regard to the identity of the caravan and especially the man who took Joseph out of the well, both the Biblical and Islamic traditions present confused historical accounts. For historical purposes, both considered these two identities to be crucial. The Genesis account speaks of an Ishmaelite or Midianite caravan, and Nisābūrī relates on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās that “Then came travelers (sayyārah),” a group of people travelling between Midian and Egypt who reached the well three days after Joseph was thrown into it. Muqātil added that the caravan sent Mālik ibn Duʿr ibn Midian ibn Ibrāhīm, the friend of God, to the well to get some water, and that he lowered his buckets into the well.

Exegetes also attempted to identify the man who discovered and rescued Joseph. The Qur‘ān refers simply to a man who “who let down his bucket” (adlā dalwah). Al-Rāzī narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās that “the man was named Mālik ibn Duʿr al-Khuzā‘ī.” Both al-Zamakhsharī and al-Tha‘labī interpreted this phrase by mentioning Mālik ibn Duʿr al-Khuzā‘ī, but without providing a complete textual narrative. Al-Ṭabrisī indicated that this man was named Mālik ibn Zuʿr instead of Mālik ibn Duʿr. Hence, this

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82 Genesis 37:27.
84 Ibn Sulaymān (2003, II:142).
controversy clearly emphasizes the multiplicity of the textual narratives used to identify this unknown man.

In addition, al-Rāzī and al-Tha'labī both discussed the meaning of sayyārah (a caravan of people).88 Al-Rāzī narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās that “Then came travelers” (jā’at sayyārah) means the “caravan” (al-qāfilah)89 and, that according to ibn ‘Abbās, “they also said a band of Arabs, and they camped near the well, heading towards Egypt.”90 Al-Zamakhsharī indicated the caravan’s origin: it was coming from Midian and heading toward Egypt.91 Al-Rāzī narrated on the authority of ibn ‘Abbās that the caravan is said to have lost its way between Midian and Egypt by divine intervention and thus came to a well located far from any town or settlement and usually frequented by shepherds.92 Also, he reported on the authority of ibn ‘Abbās that “the well’s water was salty but became sweet for Joseph.”93 According to these two reports, al-Rāzī asserted that the caravan’s appearance was important for Joseph’s life, that Joseph was a prophet of God and, thus, his life was divinely controlled and his prophethood was supported by miracles. Al-Tha’labī advocated the same interpretation and provided the same story; however, he did not mention any textual narrative relating to the verse.94

As for the second person’s identity, the one who had been called after Joseph was found, classical exegetes provided different textual narratives to elucidate “‘Good news!’ he said. ‘Here is a (fine) young man’” For instance, ibn Muḥakkim narrated on the authority of al-Ḥasan: “The man who let down his bucket (adlā dalwah) in the well said to

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90 Ibid.
91 Zamakhsharī (1987, II: 308).
93 Ibid.
his friend Good news. He (his friend) asked: “What is behind you?” “He said: ‘Here is a young man.’ And they took him out of the well. Ibn Muḥakkim did not identify the two men, for his intent was to use the additional information provided by the text, as an historical source, to understand why the friend said “Good news.” Also, he used the question given by the narrator (al-Ḥasan) to provide a complete interpretation of “Here is a young man” and to indicate that both of them removed Joseph from the well.

Al-Ṭabarī interpreted the Qur’ānic word bushrā as the name of the man called by the one who found Joseph. He narrated on the authority of al-Suddī that “when Joseph was found by one man of the caravan he called his friend, named bushrā, ‘Good news!’ he said. ‘Here is a young man.’” Also, al-Ṭabarī narrated on the authority of al-Suddī that “then came travelers, and they sent one of them, a water-drawer, who let down his bucket,” and it came up with Joseph hanging, ensnared. Then the man called out to one of his friends, named “bushrā,” “Good news!” he said. “Here is a young man.” In both narrative texts, al-Ṭabarī understood bushrā not as good news, but as the second man’s name. As a classical historian, al-Ṭabarī sought to cite as much historical information as he could to provide all of the word’s possible meanings. In contrast, al-Rāzī narrated on the authority of al-A‘mash, that “when the man found Joseph, he called a woman; her name was “bushrā.” Al-Rāzī quoted from Abū ‘Alī al-Fārisī that bushrā can be a woman’s name if it indicates the noun of al-bishārah, which is an attribute of the good news.

Both al-Tha‘labī and al-Ṭabrisī narrated on the authority of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār:

96 Ṭabarī (1954, XV: 3).
97 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
When the two men saw Joseph standing before them, they were amazed by his beauty, beaming with an angelic smile. His face was bright, his hear was smooth and his eyes was beautiful. When he laughs or speaks you see light shone from his mouth. No one could describe him. Joseph had half the beauty of Adam and he had an extraordinary resemblance to him. Also, it is said that he inherited this beauty from his grandmother Sarah, who was given one-sixtieth of the goodness. Then the man who let down his bucket’ said Good news.100

Both exegetes, however, considered this report as providing important historical information on Joseph’s beauty.

When they interpreted the verse, “They hid him as merchandise,” al-Ṭabrisī and Hūd Ibn Muḥakkim were interested in knowing who hid Joseph. They narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās that some say they concealed him (akhfawhu) from their companions, saying that he is merchandise (bidā‘ah) entrusted to us by the people of the oasis to sell for them in Egypt. Some said that these people were Joseph’s ten brothers, who were nearby when they took him out of the well. So they came and said that “this youth (ghulām) belongs to us, he ran away from us.” So they bought him from them, hid him as merchandise, and sold him.101 Muqāṭīl, who also wanted to know who hid Joseph, explained that the cupbearer (as-sāqī) who came across him said to those who were with him: “If your companions ask you about this youth (ghulām), say the people of the oasis gave him to us to sell him in Egypt.”102 Nisābūrī relates on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās that “They hid him as merchandise” refers to Joseph’s brothers when they told the caravan’s members, “this youth (ghulām) belongs to us, he ran away from us.”103

The Qurʾān briefly mentioned that Joseph was carried off and sold (alladhī shtarāhu) to a man in Egypt.104 Classical exegetes have reported that the man who bought

104 “ʿAzīz Miṣr (“the mighty one of Egypt”) is the most common Arabic name for the Biblical Potiphar. The name is based on the title al-ʿazīz (“the mighty one”) given in the Qurʾān to the person who bought the
Joseph was named “Qiṭfīr” or “Iṭfīr.” Al-Ṭabarī related on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās that the man’s name was Qiṭfīr. This is an attempt to arabize the name Potiphar, as mentioned in Genesis. He also mentioned that Ibn Isḥāq reported the name Iṭfīr as being somewhat closer to Potiphar, and added that the man was the high minister in the administration of King al-Rayyān ibn al-Walīd a Malachite monarch, and added some important historical details by explaining that Qiṭfīr was someone important and thus suggested to his wife that they adopt Joseph. Al-Ṭabarī identified Qiṭfīr’s wife as Zulaykhah, the daughter of Moses—and, after looking further into the story, observed that she was a beautiful and well-kept woman. This might explain her desire for Joseph.

Al-Rāzī presents a detailed outline of Joseph’s life from the time he was thrown into the well until his death and he also described the identity and the place of origin of the man who brought Joseph from his brothers or Qiṭfīr, who bought him in Egypt. Al-Rāzī reported that Qiṭfīr paid twenty dirhams for Joseph. In a more dramatic report, he mentioned that Joseph was purchased and that Qiṭfīr paid his weight in silver, musk, and

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105 Ṭabarī (1954, XV: 17). According to Heller, “Qiṭfīr is one of the most common names for the Biblical Potiphar in Islamic tradition. There is considerable confusion regarding his name. It is probably a corruption of Fiṭfīr, based upon an early scribal error. Other forms of the name based on confusions of similar letters in Arabic script are Qiṭfīn, Qiṭ‘īn, and Qiṭṭīn. The form Qiṭfīr is frequently corrupted further to Iṭfīr.” See Heller, “Ḳiṭfīr.”

106 Genesis 39:1–12.


108 Ibid.

109 Ibid.

110 “Potiphar was childless; because he had no children, he bought Joseph and entrusted him to his wife Zulaykhah. According to other reports, Potiphar was not attracted to women but was in some way attracted by Joseph’s handsomeness, as was his wife. In some Arabic dictionaries ʿAzīz Miṣr is defined as the ruler of Egypt and Alexandria, and in some Ottoman texts the epithet is applied to the Mamlūk sultans of Egypt, although it does not appear to have been an official title.” Tottoli, “ʿAzīz Miṣr.”


112 Ibid.
silk. He then took the seventeen-year-old Joseph to his wife, and Joseph stayed with Qīṭfīr’s family for thirteen years. King al-Rayyān ibn al-Walīd met Joseph, believed in him, died, and was succeeded by Kabous.\textsuperscript{113}

Al-Rāzī related another account in the exegesis of the Qur’ānic phrase 40:34 \textit{And to you there came Joseph in times gone by, with Clear Signs}, (\textit{walaqad jā‘akum Yūsufu min qablu}) according to which Pharaoh succeeded King al-Rayyān and ruled until the time of Moses—in other words, the king lived for four hundred years.\textsuperscript{114} After relating these fanciful and often contradicting accounts, al-Rāzī doubted them and asserted that perhaps Pharaoh’s Moses was descendent of Joseph’s Pharaoh.\textsuperscript{115} Al-Rāzī said “one should know that none of these reports are supported by the Qur’ān and/or based on a sound account. As the exegesis of the Qur’ān does not depend on any of these reports, a wise person need not mention them.”\textsuperscript{116}

In sum, classical Qur’ānic commentators and ḥadīth transmitters sought to fill in the gaps in Joseph’s story in order to present a continuous Qur’ānic narrative. But since they had no specific sources of historical references, they resorted to Midrashic traditions. This is clearly the case with the quasi-historical narrative. Due to some potential difficulties facing them, classical exegetes depended upon prior historical knowledge as well as on the information given in the Qur’ān to interpret the Qur’ānic narrative.\textsuperscript{117} They asserted that using such related textual narrative versions of any Qur’ānic stories must require a more or less common historical knowledge that could be derived from or related to another scriptural text, especially when the \textit{mufassir} was

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117} Fudge (2003: 144).
dealing with such Qur’ānic stories as Joseph’s. The textual narrative based on historical knowledge of Joseph’s story “has elements not found in the Qurʾān, and the Muslims’ knowledge of these becomes a necessity when reading tafsīr works to clarify the story’s ambiguous points.” This becomes clear when the classical exegetical works provide such names (e.g., the name of the water carrier, the caravan, bushrā, Iṭfīr, Qiṭfīr, Zulaykhah), places (e.g., the well’s location, Midian and Egypt), and information about who hid and sold Joseph, and other details. Such additional information led the mufassir to see the information in textual narratives as the only fundamental historical source for answers that could not be found in the Qurʾān. Therefore, the use of these sources was important, and in some ways, a prerequisite for understanding the Qurʾānic text, for it helped the commentators comprehend the story’s complexity and other matters. Although the textual narrative’s power may have provided some historical information to help them fill in the gaps, the simple accumulation of descriptive details did not satisfy the classical exegetes, especially when they sought for the story’s real meaning. But these textual citations may create some new gaps in their narratives styles, and filling in such gaps could not, at least theoretically, be achieved.

Modern Muslim scholars such as Rashīd Riḍa, Khalafallah, and Fudge, disputed the use of the textual narratives based on hagiographical sources in tafsīr works, which provide the context of history for Qur’ānic narrative and ḥadīth traditions. They maintained that most of the classical exegetes believed that the Qurʾānic narratives’ ambiguities would remain unresolved without consulting the isrāʾīliyāt materials. They assumed that doing so does not compromise the sacred text. Once these sources are

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118 Ibid., 143.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
identified, interpreters should try to reconstruct the events. However, these modernist Qur’ānic scholars strongly criticize the applicability of using textual narratives, especially those in the Bible, as a second historical source on the grounds that non-Qur’ānic and non-prophetic knowledge cannot be used to interpret the Qur’ānic narratives. Most of them kept away from discussing historical events unless such things were specifically connected to a Qur’ānic or otherwise Islamic narrative.\textsuperscript{121} They opined, therefore, that classical exegetes did not realize “that historical distance and witnesses’ perceptions affect the understanding of an event.”\textsuperscript{122} Their methods of the historical texts in tafsīr works have clearly connected the past with the present, even if the exegetes are trying to provide an approximate meaning of the text.\textsuperscript{123}

In addition, contemporary Muslim and non-Muslim Qur’ānic scholars argued that the Qur’ānic narratives’ message did not focus only on history, but also on the educational dimensions of historical events. Therefore, its unique style of relating history differentiates it from ordinary written historical documents. After a profound study of the different hermeneutical works dealing with the Qur’ānic narrative’s historical aspect, modern scholars have concluded that most of those classical mufassirūn have used the classical historians’ methodology to explain the Qur’ānic narrative. In this point, Rashīd Riḍā stated:

\begin{quote}
History is not one of the Qur’ānic objectives and aims, and the historical issues, time and space related to the pre-Islamic nations with their Prophets, are not the purposes of the Islamic religion in anyway. But these narratives mentioned in the Qur’ān have a simple religious message: to guide the believers to the right path, which is one of the fundamental elements of the Islamic religion.\textsuperscript{124}
\end{quote}

In this context, Donner concludes that

\textsuperscript{121} Fudge,(2003: 144).
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 95.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{124} Riḍā (1927–1936, IV: 7).
the Qurʾān can be seen to be profoundly ahistorical, for it is simply not concerned with history in the sense of development and change, either of the prophets or people before Muḥammad, or of Muḥammad himself, because in the Qurʾān the identity of the community to which Muḥammad was sent is not historically determined, but morally determined.\textsuperscript{125}

Later on, Khalafallah strongly criticized the classical exegetes’ interpretation of the Qurʾānic narratives in the light of a historical point of view. He proposed a new approach by seeking to indicate the narrative style of the Qurʾān and, above all, to preserve historical events. But this imagined imprecision is of no importance, for these stories were known to Muḥammad and his people and, therefore, the historical reconstruction of the events was not the fundamental goal of the revealed word.\textsuperscript{126} Also, Ronald wrote that historical narratives were meant to be didactic and moralizing so as to warn or encourage readers and listeners.\textsuperscript{127}

\textbf{4.3 THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS}

This section analyzes how classical commentators—in their attempt to identify the prophecy level of Joseph and other pre-Islamic prophets and to emphasize the basis of his mission as a prophet (the Biblical narrative does not consider him a prophet)—used textual narratives to understand various theological aspects related to the Qurʾānic text. The reason for this is that, historically, many scholarly discussions have shown that this mixed prophetology presumably existed in Arabia before Islam although the process whereby it was achieved, as well as the formative period of the tradition are not known. But the existence of the tradition does show that the Arabs had come to achieve a prophetology that was independent of the Biblical tradition.\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{125} Donner (1998: 84).
\textsuperscript{126} Khalafallah (1965: 29).
\textsuperscript{127} Ronald (1984: 52).
\textsuperscript{128} Rahman (1994: 82).
Therefore, one must understand the exegetical works and etymological concepts of *nabī* and *rasūl* if one is to comprehend how classical exegetes used these textual accounts to interpret the Qur’ānic narrative.

The concepts of prophecy are important issues for classical theologians and exegetes. Thus, they devoted considerable time and space to answering critical issues related to the prophecies of some of the prophets mentioned in the Qur’ān. Also, they knew that the Qur’ān neither offers a complete definition of prophecy nor distinguishes between *rasūl* and *nabī*, and only provides a base for further discussion and expansion.\(^{129}\) In addition, it claims that the level of prophecy is indivisible 2:136 and that not all prophets are equal 2:253. Moreover, it has been noted that all Biblical personages mentioned in the Qur’ān are regarded as prophets by the Qur’ān itself and subsequent Islamic tradition.

As a result, classical exegetes drew distinctions between a *nabī* and a *rasūl* and comprehensively discussed the various levels of each. On the assumption that these terms were meant to indicate the level of Muḥammad’s prophethood and its connection to the pre-Islamic prophets, they produced significant hermeneutical works based on their belief that Muḥammad, like those who came before him, was a prophet and a messenger sent by God as a guide to humanity.\(^{130}\)

Lane writes that the etymological concept of *rasūl* is derived from the verb *arsala* (to send).\(^{131}\) When used in the Qur’ān, it can also be “applied to the angel of the revelation, one who is sent by God to the prophet and in this latter meaning the term

\(^{129}\) Tottoli (2002: 12).
\(^{130}\) Ibid., 71.
\(^{131}\) Lane (2003, I: 1083).
safar is also used once 80:15.” In addition, the religious concept of rasūl can be applied to anyone who is sent with a divine message. Al-Rāzī stated that its general concept signifies that a prophet, or one who receives revelation, is obliged to pass it on to his people. Thus, the Islamic tradition perceives a rasūl as God’s representative among the representative’s people, one who has the responsibility and authority deriving from that role, and one who is intimately related to them, namely, being one of them as well as a native speaker of their language. Other Qur‘ānic verses call some prophets rusul and mursalūn (the plural forms of rasūl and mursal, respectively), meaning that those people received their own messenger and thus the opportunity to be guided to faith in God. The term rasūl is only Qur‘ānically employed for Noah, Ishmael, Moses, Lot, Jesus, Hūd, Ṣaṭiḥ, and Shu‘ayb. Non-Muslim scholars, on the other hand, have defined rasūl as someone “who brings a new religion or a major revelation.”

Etymologically, non-Muslim thinkers disagree on the origin and concept of nabī. Jeffery stated that it is an Arabic word with its root in Aramaic. Izutsu provided a detailed explanation of its origin:

It is true that the particular connotation of transmitter of divine revelation was something completely foreign to the Bedouin Arabs, who had no idea at all of what revelation was. And in this sense it certainly belonged to the circle of the monotheistic ideas that was historically bound up with a long Biblical tradition; and so it is but natural that the word nabī should not appear in the pre-Islamic poetry of the Bedouin. But this should not be taken to mean that the word itself is [a] direct borrowing from the Hebrew. The word nabī, in both its formation and its root meaning, belongs to the genuine Arabic stock.

133 Watt and Bell (1970: 25).
135 The Qur‘ān also refers to Elijah in 37:123, Jonah in 37:139, and Aaron, who is mentioned twice alongside Moses, mursalūn. The mysterious messengers referred to in sūrah Yāsīn are also defined as mursalūn. See Tottolli (2002: 72–77).
137 Jeffrey (1938: 276).
Rahman agreed with Izutsu that *nabī* means a reporter of news from God, not about the future, but about God’s warning to the sinners and glad tidings to the believers.\(^1\)\(^\text{39}\) Clearly the Qur’ānic understanding of *nabī* does not coincide completely with the Biblical one. The Qur’ān uses this term mainly to emphasize the Prophet’s level of prophethood as a *nabī*, as one like the Biblical prophets. In addition, its meaning is used exclusively as a name for Prophet Muḥammad and also refers to many of the prophets in the Biblical tradition.

In the Islamic tradition, *nabī* means a prophet without new law or scripture.\(^1\)\(^\text{40}\) This concept, however, could be applied to any chosen by God,\(^1\)\(^\text{41}\) such as a *nabī* who was sent to an existing divine religious tradition.\(^1\)\(^\text{42}\) This term, along with its two plural forms (*nabiyyūn* and *anbiyāʾ*) occurs in the Qur’ān with different meanings. *Nabī* emphasizes the level of the prophethood of Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Enoch (Idrīs), Job, Jonah, Zechariah, John the Baptist, Jesus, Elijah, and Lot. Remarkably, according to Tottoli, this list contains “three particularities that warrant attention: 1. Adam is not included; 2. all belong to the Biblical tradition; 3. and some have already been included in the list of messengers.”\(^1\)\(^\text{43}\)

Most classical exegetical works devote many pages to connecting the fundamental function of these two terms with those Islamic theological concepts related to the Prophet’s level of prophethood and mission. Given that they wanted to assume that these terms distinguished between messengers and prophets according to their prophetology

\(^{1}\)\(^\text{40}\) Ibid.
\(^{1}\)\(^\text{41}\) Brinner (2002: xvi).
\(^{1}\)\(^\text{42}\) Johnson (1999: 112).
\(^{1}\)\(^\text{43}\) Tottoli (2002: 73).
levels and that this distinction has no parallel in the other Abrahamic faiths, their definitions have remained fixed in Muslim theology. As a result, all prophets are divided into two overlapping categories: rasūl and nabī.

In order to highlight the level of Joseph’s prophethood, Ibn Muḥakkim related on Mujāhid’s authority that “Of a surety thou shalt (one day) tell them the truth of this their affair while they know (thee) not” means that God had bestowed prophethood upon Joseph when he was thrown into the well. In addition, he emphasizes Joseph’s prophethood when he repeats the traditions of other exegetes, notably al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, which interpreted the same Qur’ānic phrase as meaning that Joseph would inform his brothers of all the events that occurred between them before he revealed his true identity to him. Based on this, Ibn Muḥakkim attempted to distinguish between Joseph’s prophethood and the incident of the well by claiming that God had not bestowed prophethood upon Joseph’s brothers at that particular time.

Further, Ibn Muḥakkim provided two views on this verse’s meaning to indicate the prophecy level of Joseph and his brothers. He explains that the Qur’ān refers to Joseph’s brothers as patriarchs (asbāṭ) who, according to 4:163, received revelation from God. Others have said that God revealed to Joseph, when he was in the well, what his brothers intended to do for him.

Also, in order to emphasize Joseph’s prophethood, ibn Muḥakkim interpreted “Thus will thy Lord choose thee and teach thee the interpretation of stories (and events)” to mean that God would teach Joseph how to interpret dreams and visions accurately,

146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid., 259.
which can be done only through divine revelation and prophethood. This is Mujāhid’s view.\textsuperscript{149} In this sense, it is quite clear that ibn Muḥakkim wanted to emphasize that divine dreams could be also a kind of revelation given to Joseph.

Finally, Ibn Muḥakkim related on Mujāhid’s authority that “\textit{and perfect His favor to thee and to the posterity of Jacob—even as He perfected it to thy fathers Abraham and Isaac aforetime! for Allāh is full of knowledge and wisdom},” means that God would complete His favor upon Joseph by making him a prophet, just as he would perfect all of Jacob’s sons. Thus, Jacob told his son what God had revealed to him about the prophethood of all his sons.\textsuperscript{150} Basing himself upon this view, Ibn Muḥakkim opined that God elected and favored Joseph with prophethood and that God had informed Jacob of these things.\textsuperscript{151} Hence, he asserted that “\textit{And I follow the ways of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob}” indicates that he preferred the religion of Abraham and Isaac through prophethood.\textsuperscript{152}

Al-Ṭabarī presented several related interpretations of “\textit{Of a surety thou shalt (one day) tell them the truth of this their affair while they know (thee) not}.” Most of these interpretations, however, briefly comment on diverse meanings. He related on the authority of Mujāhid and Qatādah: “God revealed to Joseph that he would tell his brothers what they had done to him.”\textsuperscript{153} Al-Ṭabarī noted that “revealed” (\textit{awḥaynā}) is commonly used to refer to prophetic revelation. According to this narrative text, al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī agreed with al-Ṭabrisī regarding Joseph’s prophethood and his

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 257.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 268.
\textsuperscript{153} Ṭabarī (1954, XV: 575).
reception of divine revelation.\textsuperscript{154} They were, however, more interested in Joseph’s experience in the well.\textsuperscript{155} Hence, according to them, this verse clearly indicates that Joseph was a prophet who received revelation from God.\textsuperscript{156}

Similarly to al-Ṭabarī in this context, al-Rāzī’s interpretation of “\textit{Of a surety thou shalt (one day) tell them the truth of this their affair}” is based on two exegetical views. He said that the first view asserts that Joseph received revelation and prophethood from God.\textsuperscript{157} Yet, al-Rāzī mentioned that, according to some related textual narratives, this view’s adherents disagreed on Joseph’s age at that particular time. He explained the claim of some exegetes who indicated that Joseph was seventeen-years-old; others said he was a young boy. God, however, perfected his rational faculty and enabled him to bear the burden of prophethood.\textsuperscript{158} In other words, al-Rāzī used the rational analysis method to emphasize Joseph’s prophethood.

The second view is based on the literary meaning of revelation (\textit{waḥy}). Similarly to al-Ṭabarī’s interpretation, al-Rāzī explained that revelation (\textit{awḥaynā}) in this verse denotes inspiration (\textit{ilhām}), which is commonly used to refer to prophetic revelation.\textsuperscript{159} He further concludes that this is similar to 16:68 and God saying, “\textit{wa-awḥaynā ilā}.”\textsuperscript{28:7} However, al-Rāzī mentioned that he prefers the first view because “\textit{Of a surety thou shalt (one day) tell them the truth of this their affair}” refers to Joseph.\textsuperscript{161}

As for the actual fulfillment of divine revelation, al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha’labī, and al-Ṭabrisī interpreted \textit{“while they know (thee) not”} as meaning that Joseph would inform

\textsuperscript{155} Al-Tha’labī (2002, V: 201).
\textsuperscript{156} Ṭabarī (1954, XV: 575).
\textsuperscript{157} Rāzī (1995, IX: 102).
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
his brothers of their evil acts before they knew who he really was. They mentioned on the
authority of Ibn ‘Abbās the following account:

When Joseph’s brothers came before him to buy grains, Joseph took a measuring
vessel that he hit with his hand and gave off a sound like that of a bell. He said:
“This measuring vessel says that you had a brother from your father whom he
preferred to the rest of you. Furthermore, you took him away and threw him into
a dark well.” Joseph hit the measuring vessel a second time and it gave a ringing
sound. Then he said: “You went to your father and said: ‘The wolf has eaten him’
and brought Joseph’s blood-stained shirt to him: ‘They stained his shirt with false
blood.’” Joseph’s brothers said to one another that this measuring vessel indicates
exactly what we did to Joseph.162

Al-Rāzī used the same narrative text to interpret “Of a surety thou shalt (one day)
tell them the truth of this their affair while they know (thee) not.” He presented three
possible interpretations in order to highlight Joseph’s prophethood. The first
interpretation is that God informed Joseph that he would be saved from his trial and have
power over his brothers before they knew his true identity.163 The rest of this
interpretation repeats exactly what al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha’labī, and al-Ṭabrisī said.164

The second possible interpretation is that while Joseph was in the well, God
revealed to him that he would inform his brothers of their evil acts before they
recognized him.165 In this context, al-Rāzī attempted to indicate that God kept Joseph’s
prophethood secret from his brothers for fear that they would otherwise become even
more envious of him and attempt to kill him.166 According to al-Rāzī, however, this claim
emphasizes that Joseph had received revelation to hide his prophethood, which is clearly
explained in the following possible interpretation.

166 Ibid.
The third exegesis asserted that God ordered Joseph to hide his whereabouts from his father because God had decreed that Jacob should suffer great sorrow so that he might turn frequently to God. Joseph, therefore, did what he did in order to obey God’s decree.¹⁶⁷

The second example I would like to address is the hermeneutical works of Ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, al-Tha’labī, and al-Ṭabrisī on

“Said one of them: ‘I see myself (in a dream) pressing wine.’ Said the other: ‘I see myself (in a dream) carrying bread on my head, and birds are eating thereof.’ ‘Tell us [Joseph] (they said) the truth and meaning thereof: for we see thou art one that doth good (to all).’”

In this discussion, I will highlight the theological aspects of some textual narratives used by those exegetes to emphasize Joseph’s prophethood.

It has been noted that most classical exegetes preceded their exegetical works on this verse by starting to interpret “Now with him there came into the prison two young men” in order to discuss the identity of these particular prisoners. Further, different textual narratives featuring different chains of transmission have been used to indicate the name of the king and the two young men, as well as why they were imprisoned. For instance, al-Ṭabarī related on Ibn Isḥāq’s authority that Joseph was imprisoned with two young men belonging to King al-Rayyān ibn al-Walīd.¹⁶⁸ Al-Tha’labī wrote that they were named ‘Mijlath’ and ‘Nabū’, both unusual Arab names. Nabū was the king’s cupbearer (as-sāqī).¹⁶⁹ For historical purposes, it is interesting to observe here that the traditions about Joseph in Egypt have arabized the names of the king and his people. Furthermore, al-Ṭabrisī related on the authority of al-Suddī and Qatādah that one of the men intended to

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.
¹⁶⁸ Ṭabarī (1954, XVI: 96).
poison the king and that the other one was his accomplice.\textsuperscript{170} Al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī, however, say nothing about this particular verse because they considered Joseph’s prophethood in a different context. Both, however, dwell at some length on the story of Joseph and his two cellmates.

In order to discuss the meaning of this verse and the interpretation of the two dreams as a sign of Joseph’s prophethood, al-Zamakhsharī sought to show that Joseph was a prophet even before his imprisonment and that he had the characteristics of a prophet, especially when he was dealing with the prisoners. He relates on Qatādah’s authority the following textual narrative:

There were in the prison with Joseph men who suffered neglect and sorrow because they were forgotten. Joseph, however, called out to them: “Be of good cheer, be patient, and God will reward you.” The men then loved and admired him, and told him that they loved him. The warden also loved him and allowed him to move freely in the prison. His cellmates asked him who he was, and he answered: “I am Joseph, son of Jacob, who is one of God’s elect, who was the son of Isaac, the sacrifice to God,\textsuperscript{171} the son of Abraham, God’s intimate friend.”\textsuperscript{172}

Also, al-Zamakhsharī mentioned that Joseph’s cellmates told him that they loved him a great deal, but that he begged them not to, for nobody loved me, but his love was affection to me.\textsuperscript{173} This indicates that the prisoners were impressed by Joseph, who had, as a prophet, a good reputation among them. Furthermore, al-Zamakhsharī relates on al-Sha‘bī’s authority that these two men tested Joseph by asking him to interpret their dreams:

The cupbearer dreamed that he stood by a grape wine in which has three branches of grapes. He took the grapes, pressed them, and offered to the king to

\textsuperscript{170} Ṭabrisī (1995, V: 400).
\textsuperscript{171} It should be noted that the Islamic tradition largely called Ishmael, not Isaac, “the sacrificed to God.”
\textsuperscript{172} Zamakhsharī (1987, II: 320).
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
drink. The king’s baker recounted a dream of three baskets full of different kinds of food and that wild beasts eating of these baskets.  

Then, al-Zamakhsharī relates Joseph’s prophethood in his interpretation of “He said: ‘Before any food comes (in due course) to feed either of you, I will surely reveal to you the truth and meaning of this ere it befall you: that is part of the (duty) which my Lord hath taught me. I have (I assure you) abandoned the ways of a people that believe not in Allāh and that (even) deny the Hereafter.’” He is interested in showing that Joseph is not bragging; rather, he wanted to impress them in order to use the power to call them to faith in God.  

Al-Zamakhsharī further explains that Joseph tells them that knowledge of the Unseen does not depend upon astrological signs or consultations with evil spirits, for he said: “I abandoned the religion of those who do not believe in God and deny the Hereafter, and I followed the religion of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for this is the religion of pure faith in God.” Al-Zamakhsharī, therefore, concludes that after telling them of his own prophethood, Joseph mentioned these three men to inform his cellmates that he came from a line of prophets. After this, al-Zamakhsharī spent the rest of his exegesis explaining the grammar of this account and its plausibility.  

Al-Rāzī dwelled at some length on “He said: ‘Before any food comes (in due course) to feed either of you, I will surely reveal to you the truth and meaning of this ere it befall you: that is part of the (duty) which my Lord hath taught me. I have (I assure you) abandoned the ways of a people that believe not in Allāh and that (even) deny the Hereafter.” He asserted that this verse consists of six possible interpretations: the first  

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174 Ibid.  
175 Ibid.  
176 Ibid.  
177 Ibid.
three deal with Joseph’s ability to interpret dreams, and the last three with his prophethood.\footnote{Rāzī (1995, IX: 139).}

The first possible interpretation is that Joseph mentioned his ability to reveal to his cellmates what food would be given to them before answering the man who would be crucified.\footnote{Ibid.} In this case, al-Rāzī indicated that Joseph used this clear prediction to announce his ability concerning food to make his answer to the unfortunate man more palatable.\footnote{Ibid.} Thus, he used this method to encourage them to pay closer attention in order to know about their dreams’ interpretations.

The second possible interpretation is that Joseph may have meant to tell them that his knowledge far surpasses dream interpretation, which, is in any case, based upon his supersession and guess work.\footnote{Ibid.} For instance, al-Rāzī asserted that Joseph may have intended to tell them that he cannot know the Unseen, for only God has such knowledge, but that his ability to interpret dreams and predict events was unsurpassed at that time.\footnote{Ibid.} In this case, Joseph attempted to make them distinguish between his ability to interpret dreams (as a characteristic of his prophethood instead of some kind of soothsaying and evil act) and receiving revelation.

The third possible interpretation related by al-Rāzī on al-Suddī’s authority was that Joseph’s ability was to tell them about the kind of food they may have dreamed of: “\textit{Before any food comes (in due course) to feed either of you, I will surely reveal to you the truth and meaning of this ere it befall you: that is part of the (duty) which my Lord hath taught me. I have (I assure you) abandoned the ways of a people that believe not in}\textbf{\textit{}}\textit{\text{}}

\footnote{Rāzī (1995, IX: 139).}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
According to this Qur’ānic narrative text, Joseph clearly wanted to tell his cellmates about the food they would receive to impress them by showing them that he knew what they would eat. Hence, it is interesting to observe here that 3:49 reports a similar manner of preaching by Jesus: “And I declare to you what ye eat, and what ye store in your houses,” in order to let people believe in the prophets’ missions.

According to the first possible interpretation, al-Rāzī clearly attempted to emphasize Joseph’s prophethood to demonstrate that his ability to interpret dreams was a gift given by God and that he cannot know the Unseen or engage in any kind of soothsaying or consultation with evil spirits.

He then provided the second group of three possible interpretations. In his words, the fourth exegesis is that Joseph may have decided to use this piece of information to tell the two men that he was a messenger sent by God to let them know that they should be more concerned with the affairs of the Hereafter than with those of this world. After he dissociates himself from those who deny God’s oneness, Joseph acts as a prophet who looks for ways to convince his cellmates to accept his faith and believe in God. Also, because they were not familiar with the monotheistic religion of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Joseph insisted that accepting the religion of tawḥīd (belief in one God) requires belief in the Day of Judgment and the rejection of polytheism.

The fifth possible interpretation is that Joseph, in his capacity as a prophet, may have tried to urge the man destined for crucifixion to embrace Islam so that he would not

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183 Ibid.
184 Ibid.
185 Ibid.
die as an unbeliever.\textsuperscript{186} Al-Rāzī supported this interpretation with 8:43 “\textit{Remember in thy dream Allāh showed them to thee as few: if He had shown them to thee as many, ye would surely have been discouraged, and ye would surely have disputed in (your) decision; but Allāh saved you: for He knoweth well the (secrets) of (all) hearts.”\textsuperscript{187}

The sixth possible interpretation is that Joseph’s prediction is not based on a dream, but rather a waking state. In other words, any food sent to his cellmates as provisions would be known to him as regards its kind, color, and healthy or unhealthy nature.\textsuperscript{188} Al-Rāzī further explained that this was based on reports that it was usual for the king to order that poisoned food be sent to those whom he wished to kill. Thus, Joseph had to predict whether the food would be poisoned or not.\textsuperscript{189}

In this context, al-Rāzī carefully discussed the issue of Joseph’s prophethood by claiming that people might wonder how this verse could be used to express the miracles attributed to Joseph before he publically declared his prophethood.\textsuperscript{190} Al-Rāzī answered that both—“\textit{this is part of what my God had taught me}” and “\textit{I follow the ways of my fathers - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and never could we attribute any partners whatever to Allāh. that (comes) of the grace of Allāh to us and to mankind: yet most men are not grateful}”—support this supposition.\textsuperscript{191} Then, he concluded by remarking that Joseph said: “\textit{I have not told you these truths depending on soothsaying and astrology, rather I did so in accordance with that which God revealed to me and informed me of.”}\textsuperscript{192} In addition, al-Rāzī noted that the question of why Joseph proclaimed his ability to foretell the future

\textsuperscript{186} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.
may be raised.\textsuperscript{193} He indicated that the answer is that when Joseph claimed to be able to foretell the future and claimed to be a prophet, that he added that he came from a line of prophets, for his father, grandfather, and great grandfather were all prophets and messengers of God.\textsuperscript{194} Finally, al-Rāzī disputed the question—When should a prophet follow his own religious law?—as the reason why Joseph said, “\textit{and I follow the religion. . .}” The answer in this case was: he was a prophet; he followed the law of Abraham.\textsuperscript{195}

Al-Ṭabrisī, however, presented some new insights in his interpretation of “\textit{that is part of the (duty) which my Lord hath taught me}” to emphasize Joseph’s prophethood. He explains that it is neither through his two cellmates who said to him, how could you interpret a dream when you are neither a possessed poet (\textit{kāhin} or \textit{shā‘ir}) nor a fortuneteller.\textsuperscript{196} Al-Ṭabrisī insists that Joseph told them that he was a messenger of God and that God Himself had informed him of that.\textsuperscript{197} He further explained that this may have been accomplished through creating knowledge in Joseph’s heart, through revelation, or through God having manifested. The proof of prophethood could lead to the certain knowledge of this fact.\textsuperscript{198} Al-Ṭabrisī used this Qur’ānic passage to assert that Joseph came from a long line of prophets.\textsuperscript{199} Also, he interprets “\textit{and I follow the religion. . .}” as that it was not fit for Joseph and his ancestors after they became prophets to ascribe partners to God or to follow any religion other than that of the one God.\textsuperscript{200} However, from a Shi‘i theological perspective, al-Ṭabrisī used the verse to assert Joseph’s prophetic mission.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{196} Ṭabrisī (1995, V: 402).
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid.
In sum, classical exegetes were expected to know the origins and growth of Islamic prophetology’s various elements so they can emphasize the focal point of these textual narratives’ theological aspects, specifically when they deal with the life of the prophets sent to the pre-Islamic nations. For them, the meaning and the difference between rasūl and nabī seem to be intimately connected and complementary to Muḥammad’s mission. Although such distinctions are in some way doubtful, since the Qurʾān describes some religious personages as both rasūl and nabī 7:158 and 19:51–54, some distinction is clearly intended, as in 22:52. Historically, it also appears that “the frequency of use of nabī increases from the later Meccan period through the Medinan period.”201 In terms of universal responsibility, according to the Islamic tradition, a rasūl indicates someone more important than a nabī. But many exegetical works show that the Qurʾānic text itself emphasizes the auxiliary nature of nabī to rasūl, such as when comparing Aaron to Moses in 19:51–53.

In addition, most classical exegetes adopted specific methods to underline the textual narrative’s primary and most substantial part in order to offer a detailed exposition of the Qurʾānic narrative’s general contents. They believed that the textual narratives provided more detailed information than the Qurʾānic text itself. Also, they asserted that the fundamental role of the textual narrative was not limited to a simple collection of some historical events that happened to pre-Islamic nations only; rather, their theological aspects, which are required to be implemented in tafsīr works, are clear in the Islamic literature.

Therefore, according to the case studied above, on the one hand, we see that ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Ṭha‘labī, and al-Ṭabrisī have shown that the main task of

Qur’ānic hermeneutics is how to use textual narratives as a method of interpretation to resolve some difficulties connected with the Qur’ānic narrative passage and to provide more details about evident theological tendencies, such as the level of Joseph’s prophethood. For them, however, the connection between the textual narratives and how they functioned in hermeneutics was the central reason for undertaking a work of this sort. Also, the use of textual narratives was crucial because they offered the different lists and arrangements circulating around the Qur’ānic narrative passage and the persons appearing in the text.

Al-Rāzī, for instance, differed from ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha’labī, al-Ṭabrisī, and other classical exegetes. After addressing some contextual issues related to the Qur’ānic narrative passage, he pointed out some theological lessons that have to be learned before summarizing the transmitted exegetical traditions. On the other hand, Ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha’labī, and al-Ṭabrisī continued to use these textual narratives to help clarify what is unclear in the Qur’ānic passage (e.g., the names of the king’s cupbearer and baker). Remarkably, due to the lack of textual narratives related to the verse under discussion, both al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī provided extensive rational interpretations of Joseph’s teaching *tawḥīd* to his cellmates and of his interpretation of their dreams.

**CONCLUSION**

The classical *mufassirūn* used textual narratives (parallel texts) as their fundamental source to interpret Qur’ānic narratives and emphasize the claim of their historical and theological aspects. In fact, they went even further by considering the accounts of storytellers and converts as sources of essential interpretations. Many Qur’ānic commentators (e.g., al-Ṭabarī al-Zamakhsharī, al-Tha’labī, al-Rāzī, al-Ṭabrisī, and
Hūd ibn Muḥakkim) and historiographers (e.g., Ibn Isḥāq and al-Yaʿqūbī) preserved a great deal of detailed information passed on by such people. Over time, most of these scriptural literatures were canonized as ḥadīth texts transmitted by chains of valuable authorities (asānīd, sing. isnād). Classical exegetes and historians made extensive use of Ibn ʿAbbās, Qatādah, Mujāhid, Kaʿb, Wahb, and Ibn Isḥāq’s material when trying to interpret the Qurʾānic narratives, especially when confronted with traditions connecting the Prophet’s mission with the pre-Islamic prophets and emphasizing the early Muslim community’s triumph. In particular al-Ṭabarī, who quoted textual narratives from the Biblical Scriptures’ narrators in his taʾrīkh and tafsīr, used Ibn Isḥāq in both conception and form. Following the example of al-Ṭabarī’s works, al-Thaʿlabī seems to have been the best-known classical scholar to add this legendary information in both his tafsīr and his ‘arāʾis al-majālis. His material became the fundamental source for future Muslim and non-Muslim scholars in studying the Qurʾānic narrative. From another perspective, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, and al-Ṭabrisī’s willingness to use textual narratives, including discussions of their contents, set them apart from classical exegetes.

As for the nature of the exegetical works composed on the Joseph narrative, classical commentators of the Qurʾān saw it as the Qurʾān’s best story. Thus, it has a specific status in Islamic literature. This vision led to the use of certain exegetical sources, such as textual narratives, which helped develop existing ideas to complete the hermeneutical works of the Qurʾānic story of Joseph. Classical exegeses are full of interpretations of the stories collected by Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid, al-Suddī, Qatādah, Muqātil, and Ibn Isḥāq in order to fill in details of the Qurʾānic passages’ spaces and gaps. The exegetes, however, wanted to recount these textual narratives as single units, instead of as fragments of tales collected by many transmitters, even if they repeated
themselves. Therefore, citing these authorities gradually become more complex and continued to enjoy a wide popularity that influenced the Qur’anic text in general and its narrative in particular.

In interpreting verses 10, 15, 19, 21, and 37 of surah Yusuf, classical exegetes wrote extensive exegetical works to identify the Qur’anic narratives’ various aspects. Historically, they asserted that the textual narratives reached the level of serving as a source of history by recounting the historical facts and situations to achieve that level. They claimed that, according to these textual narratives, the historical ambiguities would be largely resolved by providing information not known from earlier sources about Joseph and his family. But one can see how such mufassirūn would be obliged to provide the standard academic explanations that relate to the Qur’anic narrative.

The approach adopted in this case study will enable us to better understand how classical Qur’ān commentators approached the Qur’ānic narrative’s theological levels. In addition, it is important to understand why they, according to their level of understanding, sought to interpret the various genres of Qur’ānic narratives in order to explain the existing ambiguities when dealing with the textual narratives. One must also examine the mufassir’s attitude toward the accumulation of details, such as names, which is predominant in the earlier stage of Qur’ānic exegesis. These exegetical works gave rise to “the narrative expansion”\[202\] that are, by definition, exegetical because “they are based on something that is in the text an unusual word or turn of phrase that sets off the imagination of the exegetes, or simply some problem in the plot that requires some resolution.”\[203\]

\[203\] Ibid.
Theologically, the exegetes wanted to emphasize the fact that the Qurʾān always presents these narrative passages in a positive framework in order to realize tawḥīd and thereby eliminate any elements that contradict pure monotheism. They wanted to emphasize the use of textual narratives to roam in the vast realm of showing the Qurʾānic narratives’ theological aspects. In addition, the influence of such transmitted traditions “had a particular significance in developing the disputes and polemics of a sectarian nature that took place during the early Islamic period, especially in the subject ofʿīṣmah between the Shiʿi sects.”

Concerning sūrah Yūsuf itself, dreams are the focal point to this Qurʾānic narrative. The essential message is to show how dreams are interpreted in order to emphasize Joseph’s prophethood. The dreams of Joseph’s two prison mates are explained by different textual narratives that have been cited by most classical exegetes and in tafsīr literature. This passage has embodied the main qualities of Joseph as a prophet who has knowledge, faith, and honesty and who inherited prophethood from his father Jacob (Yaʿqūb). For them, Joseph can thus be seen only as a prophet, who received revelation from God, and this emphasizes the basic example presented in the Qurʾān.

In contrast, a significant number of modern and contemporary scholars continue to insist on evaluating the textual narratives based on how well they conform to the Qurʾānic narrative’s explanations. Accordingly, most of their exegetical works seek to educate Muslims about how the Qurʾān is to be read and interpreted in light of the classical formula and knowledge. As a result, these textual narratives are accepted by many and used to support tafsīr works. Other scholars neither accept nor reject these

\[204\] Ibid.
\[205\] Goldman, “Joseph,”
materials. For instance, they claim that such information must be accepted solely because of the tradition narrated by Ibn ʿAbbās; however, other information must be rejected because it has been proven false and contradicts Islam’s message. When modern Muslim scholars encounter these textual narratives, they continue to judge them as a source of supplemental details for better understanding the Qur’ānic narratives, but only insofar as its information may be verified by referring to the Qur’ān or confirmed through the Prophet’s statements. For many reasons, Muslims reject any notion of human influence upon the Qur’ān’s style or content and describe the contributions of these materials as being of limited importance vis-à-vis being a contribution to understanding the Qur’ān. The views and approaches of modern and contemporary exegetes, however, lie outside the scope of this study.

In the following chapter, I will focus on another type of hermeneutics that is applied to the Qur’ānic narrative in classical *tafsīr* works. I will present a critical study of the theological and mystical levels of hermeneutical works on the Qur’ānic narratives—works that have been provided by several classical exegetes such as, al-Ṭabarī al-Zamakhsharī, al-Thaʿlabī, al-Rāzī, al-Ṭabarīsī, Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, as well as the two mystical commentators Ruzbihān al-Baqlī and Nisābūrī.
CHAPTER FIVE
THEOLOGICAL AND MYSTICAL HERMENEUTICS AND THE QUR’ĀNIC NARRATIVE

INTRODUCTION

Classical exegetes paid great attention to studying the Qur’ānic narratives on the theological and mystical levels. Over the course of time, they began to claim that the Qur’ānic narrative was directly related to its main religious goals and theological guidelines and that the Qur’ānic narratives’ main purpose was to realize the message of God’s absolute unity and uniqueness (tawḥīd), which is clearly mentioned in 21:25 and represents the fundamental message brought by the prophets. According to Murata and Chittick:

The fundamental message of the prophets is all the same: ‘There is no god but God.’ In brief, Muslims understand the word God to refer to the reality that reveals itself through the Qur’ān, and they understand God to refer to anything that is falsely described by any of the qualities that the Qur’ān ascribes to God.¹

Therefore, Muslims believe that all messengers come with a message of the oneness of God (tawḥīd), which announces that experienced reality, comes from, and returns to, God.² Hence, tawḥīd, in its true sense, is an essential monotheism, which means “the act of believing and affirming that God is one and unique (wāḥid), in a word, monotheism.”³ Even so, this concept of God’s unicity is summarized in sūrah al-ikhlāṣ (112). Al-Ṭabrisī wrote that sūrah 112 is named sūrah at-tawḥīd, which declares that God is aḥad (the One), and that He has no equal.¹ Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, for instance, mentions that ibn Mas’ūd used to read al-wāḥid instead of aḥad.⁵ However, in order to understand

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³ Gimaret, “Tawḥīd.”
the real meaning of *al-ʔad* and *al-wāḥid*, classical exegetes have provided extensive hermeneutical works on both terms. They have agreed that *al-ʔad* and *al-wāḥid* indicate the meaning of God’s oneness and singleness.⁶

Therefore, classical exegetes have asserted that Qur’ānic narratives can be considered one of the most important instruments of Islamic theology and ethics. They had begun to connect the theological considerations with all of the narratives mentioned in the scripture—such as the creation of the universe and Adam, the history of the prophets sent to their people or to humanity at large, and others that shared the main aim: the belief in one God. Also, the major theme of tawḥīd has been mentioned extensively through many Qur’ānic narratives, especially when the prophets encountered opposition from their people. Most of the resulting conversations between them are described in separate Qur’ānic discourses. Usually, the reader of these stories finds the following motifs: a description that shows the prophets calling their nations to believe in one God and abandon their idolatry; how these prophets insisted that their message is meaningful, consistent, and fortified with such evidence as eloquent arguments and signs; how their opponents suspected, challenged, speculated upon their claims; and how the prophets refuted their objections. These Qur’ānic narratives usually end with a similar conclusion: the prophets’ audiences were split into two groups: those who accepted the prophetic message and became monotheists (*muwahhidūn*), and those who rejected it. Generally, these stories of the prophets are found to be variations on one subject, “when repeated, often with the same phrases from one prophet to another,

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⁶ Rāzī provides three different points of view about *al-wāḥid* and *ʔad* (the One): 1) *ʔad* means that God is one (*wāḥid*); 2) *al-wāḥid* and *ʔad* are antonyms; 3) *al-wāḥid* comes to affirm statement while *ʔad* is used for negation. See Rāzī (1995, XVI: 181).
creates an impression of one divine revelation frustrated by pride or ignorance, opposed by powerful kings or corrupted by the willful distortions of disputing schismatics.”

Theologically, the classical exegetes’ overriding ambition was to appeal to the people’s hearts and minds in order to influence them to become aware of the truth and, ultimately, believe in God’s Oneness. For instance, they interpreted the Qur’anic narratives in ways designed to highlight the personal inclinations that characterize the unbelievers, such as the story of the Prophet Ibrāhīm that will be examined in this chapter. In this case, the Qur’anic text and its interpretation usually revealed that the unbelievers were not standing on any firm theological ground. However, according to these exegetical works, the Qur’anic narratives are among the most successful methods of achieving this end result, for they manifest their underlying wisdom in a live and dynamic real-life setting to which all people can relate, instead of just talking about it in abstract terms.

Furthermore, at the intellectual level, classical theologians and exegetes asserted that *tawḥīd* represents the highest stage of knowledge to which humans have attained, either intellectually or spiritually.\(^7\) Also Gimaret mentioned that “the profession of [a] monotheistic faith being characteristic of Islam, it should come as no surprise that certain authors have defined the totality of Muslims by the expression *ahl at-tawḥīd*.\(^9\) In this context, Muslims through their history have noted the appearance of certain sects, which “have claimed to represent strict monotheist orthodoxy better than others and have therefore reserved the expression for themselves such as the Mu’tazila, who called

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\(^7\) Khalidi (1994: 10).
\(^8\) Riḍā (1996: 86).
\(^9\) Gimaret, “Tawḥīd.”
themselves *ahl al-‘adl wa at-tawḥīd* and sometimes simply *ahl at-tawḥīd*.”¹⁰ Accordingly, they have connected this subject with the essential unity of all scripture sent before the Qur’ān. Also, they have made a great effort to provide comprehensive exegetical material concerning the Islamic concept of the God-humanity relationship, which constitutes the basic theological principle of *tawḥīd* and fulfills the fundamental message of the Qur’ānic narrative. In addition to the *tafsīr* works, most of this literature is often found with different titles, which have a direct relationship to the science of *‘ilm al-kalām*—“the principles of religion (*uṣūl ad-dīn*), as defined by the various theological schools, which the word ultimately represents.”¹¹ On this subject, Shah writes:

‘*‘ilm al-kalām* had acquired two inter-related senses: first, in its wider generic sense *kalām* provided a platform for the rational synthesis of the panoply of religious dogmas and was viewed as being a form of scholastic theology, which also was defined under the rubric *uṣūl ad-dīn*; while, in a more confined sense, it was used to connote a sophisticated dialectical technique based on a form of dialogue that was employed by scholars engaged in theological discussions.¹²

From the Sunni perspective, such hermeneutical works as Ibn Khuzayma’s *kitāb at-tawḥīd*, Ḥambalī Abū Ya’lā’s *al-mu’tamad*, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash’arī’s *maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn wa-kḥtīlāf al-muṣallīn*, and al-Māturīdī’s *kitāb at-tawḥīd*. Al-mughnī fī abwāb al-‘adl wa at-tawḥīd*; in addition, the work of the great Mu’tazilī’s theologian and exegete al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār was also well recognized as having investigated the subject of *tawḥīd* with a much broader and philosophical perspective.

From a Khariji point of view, Hoffman asserts that the Ibāḍīs advocate the Mu’tazilī’s position on the questions of *tawḥīd*:

The Ibāḍīs adopt the positions of the Mu’tazilī on the questions of *tawḥīd*: rejecting a literal interpretation of all anthropomorphic descriptions of God;

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¹⁰ Ibid.
¹¹ Ibid.
denying the possibility of seeing God in this life or the afterlife; rejecting the existence of eternal attributes in God that are distinct from His essence.\textsuperscript{13}

Muḥammad ibn Adam al-Kawthārī’s \textit{Seeing God in Dreams: Waking and the Afterlife} and Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Khalīlī’s \textit{The Incontrovertible Truth (al-ḥaqq ad-dāmīgh)} are the most representative of these genre of literature on ībāḍī theology. As is proved by the very well-known work, entitled \textit{awā’il al-maqālāt}, of the great Imāmī master al-Mufīd, and Ibn Bābawayh’s \textit{kitāb at-tawḥīd}, Shi‘ī Imāmī thought also has something to offer in this matter.

Mysticism is theology, but not strictly speaking, \textit{kalam}. According to Seyyed Ḫusayn Naṣr, Sufis believe that “Allāh is first and before everything else One, and it is the Oneness of God that lies at the center of both the Qur‘ānic doctrine of God and Islamic spirituality.”\textsuperscript{14} Thus, according to the Sufi tradition, “the notion of \textit{tawḥīd} has given rise to intense speculation; from a simple concept, it is transformed into a spiritual experience.”\textsuperscript{15} Sufi works, such as al-Ghazālī’s \textit{iḥyā‘}, Ibn ʿArabī’s \textit{al-futūḥat al-makkiyyah} and al-Qushayrī’s \textit{risālah} all have proposed different categorizations on the mystical view of \textit{tawḥīd}. Gimaret, for instance, mentioned that al-Junayd distinguishes four steps, starting from the simple attestation of unicity which is sufficient for ordinary believers, and culminating in the highest rank reserved for the élite, when the creature totally ceases to exist before his Lord, thus achieving \textit{al-fanā‘ fī at-tawḥīd}.\textsuperscript{16}

In this regard, the most important Qur‘ānic verses upon which Ibn ʿArabī focused in his \textit{tawḥīd}’s teachings are 44:38 and 23:116. In commenting on it, he said:

\begin{quote}
This is the \textit{tawḥīd} of the Real, which is the \textit{tawḥīd} of the He-ness. God says, ‘Did ye then think that We had created you in jest, and that ye would not be brought
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13} Hoffman, “Ībāḍī Islam: An Introduction.”
\textsuperscript{14} Naṣr (1997: 312).
\textsuperscript{15} Gimaret, “Tawḥīd.”
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
back to Us (for account)?’ This is the same meaning as His words, ‘We created not the heavens, Pl earth, and all between them, merely in (idle) sport.’ Hence, ‘there is no God but He’ [in the above passage] is a description of the Real.\(^{17}\)

Therefore, the need to study the level of understanding of the classical exegetes on Qur’ānic narrative relating to this matter becomes so crucial in contemporary Qur’ānic studies. It is worthwhile to have a rather extended discussion of the Muslim concept of \textit{tawḥīd}. All of these concerns lead to a more extended explanation of how \textit{tawḥīd} was understood in classical Islam through the context of historical relationships and circumstances. However, in this chapter, I present a critical study on the hermeneutical works of the Qur’ānic narrative’s theological approaches including mystical ones provided by classical exegetes. It consists of two main sections. As a case study, I will examine in this chapter the level of classical Muslim understanding on the issues related to \textit{tawḥīd} by interpreting the story of Prophet Abraham narrated chronologically in the two Qur’ānic passages: 6:74–79 and 2:260.

\textbf{5.1 THEOLOGICAL AND MYSTICAL HERMENEUTICS OF ABRAHAM’S NARRATIVE}

In the Islamic tradition, the story of Prophet Abraham has been documented in many interpretation and historical works (\textit{tafsīrs}) and (\textit{ta’rīkh}s). Historically, for Muslims Abraham, the greatest of all monotheists stands against the Meccan pagans who worship their idols in the darkness of ignorance, where the divine communication was ended.\(^{18}\) Many Qur’ānic narratives contain repeated references to the life of Prophet Abraham, who is of great prominence because the Qur’ānic message makes him the ideal precursor of Prophet Muḥammad. Theologically, the Qur’ān mentions that Abraham, as neither a Jew or Christian, was not succeeded by Moses or Jesus but by Muḥammad, who was the

\(^{17}\) Ibn ʿArabī , quoted in Chittick (1994: 134).

legitimate successor. Therefore, many verses, such as 12:37–40 and 6:74, clearly state that the idea of a pure monotheistic religion, which is attributed to Prophet Abraham, was primarily developed to warn against the cult of pagan deities. According to the Islamic tradition, the Arabs were familiar with the Abrahamic heritage and considered Abraham the first builder of the Ka'bah and the initiator of the religions practice there. Also, it has been noted that the line of monotheistic succession began with Prophet Abraham, passed through subsequent prophets, and then reached Prophet Muḥammad—all without any deviation. In this sense, some verses, among them 30:30, 32, and 43 describe the Prophet Muḥammad like the Prophet Abraham “as true monotheist (ḥanīf), whose religion is a calling back to the truth of monotheism and the straight one (ad-dīn al-qayyim) from the deviations of paganism.

Non-Muslim scholars—such as Wensinck, Moubarac, Eisenberg, Geiger, and Hurgronje—have paid particular attention to the Muslim view of Islam as a restoration of the religion of Abraham. Bijlefeld states:

Hurgronje has reconstructed the development of the Ibrāhīm story in the Qurʾān. He pointed out that in the Meccan revelations Abraham is one among the many messengers sent before Muḥammad. He draws attention to the fact [that] even [when] the word milla is used in connection with Abraham in verse 12:38 it is not yet exclusively his religion. Later on, he recognizes to date that all millat Ibrāhīm passages as Medinan.

20 Firestone, “Abraham.”
21 The Qurʾān uses the term ḥanīf to indicate the straight line and criticize both the Arab pagans and some earlier communities for their deviation from it. Muslims believe that the People of the Book were among the earlier monotheistic communities, but that, according to Qurʾān 6:160 and 6:164, they have not been able to keep this line straight. If they had been able to keep it straight, no sectarian splits would have arisen. In this sense, neither the Arab pagans nor the Jews and Christians were ḥanīfs. See Firestone, “Abraham.”
In contrast, Bijlefeld mentions that Muslim scholars critically rejected this claim and indicated that *millat* Ibrāhīm is the preferred Qur’ānic expression. Further, they assumed that not because of Abraham who was the founder of the *millat*, but because of his supreme place in it and his recognition by Arabs.26 In this context, Muslims have fairly recognized that the life of the Prophet Abraham is typologically connected to the Prophet Muḥammad. According to Geiger, the Prophet Abraham was the Prophet Muḥammad’s exemplar, a “great prototype, the man of whom he thought most highly, and the one with whom he liked best to compare himself in opinion.”27 Also, Hauglid states that Prophet Abraham “is the perfect religious model for the subsequent entrance of Muḥammad into Islam through divine election.”28 At this level, Mubarak sees that Islamic faith as centered in the Abrahamic religion. Citing 60:4, he links this faith in a special way with Ibrāhīm, the model of the believers.29 However, in this context, the claim that “the prophet Muḥammad has clearly realized his position as being in the direct line of Prophetic succession to earlier Prophets and that the pagan Arabs are wrong in their idolatry and other communities are wrong in their schismatic character”30 becomes an important theological issue in the Islamic tradition. It is, then, as I mentioned above “in a solidly Meccan context with pagans as its addresses that the Qur’ān develops its image of Abraham as the super-Prophet and arch-monotheist.”31

In what follows, I will examine the essential message of *tawḥīd* according to both of the Prophet Abraham’s stories. I will first briefly study the major traditional commentaries of the classical exegetes—such as those of Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, 

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26 Ibid.
29 Mubarak (1958: 115).
31 Ibid.
al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Tha’labī as well as Nisābūrī and Ruzbihān al-Baqlī, who discussed *tawḥīd* as it relates to the verses 6:74–79 and 2:260. With no claim of doing justice to the complexities of their discussions, I would like to note some of the key issues in their treatment of these two passages. I will discuss the textual analysis, mystical interpretations, and the historical concept of these passages in order to underline the main issues that the exegetes debated.

5.1.1 God’s Oneness

*Lo! Abraham said to his father Āzar: "Takest thou idols for gods? For I see thee and thy people in manifest error." So also did We show Abraham the power and the laws of the heavens and the earth, that he might (with understanding) have certitude. When the night covered him over, he saw a star: He said: "This is my Lord." But when it set, he said: "I love not those that set." When he saw the moon rising in splendour, he said: "This is my Lord." But when the moon set, he said: "unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray." When he saw the sun rising in splendour, he said: "This is my Lord; this is the greatest (of all)." But when the sun set, he said: "O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to Allāh. "For me, I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I give partners to Allāh." 6:74–79*

Classical Qur’ānic commentators have used these verses to affirm God’s divine oneness (*tawḥīd*). Ibn Muḥakkim, the earliest exegete to use different textual narratives to elucidate the Qur’ānic narrative’s theological aspects, understood this passage as indicating Abraham’s desire to know the eternal God. Accordingly, he assumed that since his youth, Abraham was prepared to be God’s messenger of *tawḥīd* and His existence. Thus, he relates on al-Kalbī’s authority:

Abraham was born during the reign of the tyrannical king Nimrūd. Nimrūd’s magicians informed him that a child will be soon born who will change the religion of this subject and destroy his kingdom. Nimrūd therefore gave order that men and women should not come together to prevent pregnancy. He did this for a year and any woman who gave birth to a boy, he immediately killed him. Abraham’s father came home one day and found his wife cleansed from her menstrual cycle, he slept with her and after nine months she ran a way to the bank of a dry river, where she gave birth to Abraham. She put the child under a growth of bamboo and returned home to tell her husband. He went to the child and dug for him a cave where and he left him and placed a big rock at the mouth
of the cave to prevent wild beasts from attacking his son. The child’s mother secretly went to nurse the child until he grew up. One day Abraham asked his mother, who is your lord? She said your father and then he asked who is my father’s lord? She said keep quiet. She then returned to her husband and told him “you see the child we were talking about, who will change the religion of the whole world he is your son.”

In order to emphasize his argument even further, basing himself on al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Ibn Muḥakkim, asserts that in this passage God used His creation to show Abraham signs of His oneness and existence. In this context, he interprets malakūt as “the power and the laws of the heavens and the earth” by the Owner of the heavens and the earth and reports, on Mujāhid’s authority, that “the power and the laws of the heavens and the earth” are the signs of the heavens and the earth.

Arguing that Abraham saw the heavenly bodies and the different creatures of the earth, he [Ibn Muḥakkim] relates the following account:

Abraham ran away from an extremist tyrant (Nimrūd). He was placed in a cave and his nourishment came out of the tips of his fingers, thus he would suck the tip of any of his fingers, where he found nourishment. When Abraham left the cave God showed him the kingdom of the universe, the sun, the moon, and the stars. He showed him the kingdom of the earth, mountains, and animals. He showed him his great creation.

With more details, Ibn Muḥakkim interprets that when it was dark Abraham, seeing a star from the cave’s mouth, said: “This is my Lord.” Ibn Muḥakkim asserts, however, that this is the interpretation of the verse—“When the night covered him over, he saw a star: he said: “This is my Lord.” But when it set, he said: “I love not those that set”—which theologically means that “I do not like God that is not eternal.” He then says that when Abraham saw the sun he left the cave, went to his idol-worshipping

34 Ibid., 538.
36 Ibid., 539.
people, and said: "O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to Allāh."\(^{37}\)

Al-Ṭabarī relates two accounts. The first one, which largely resembles that of Ibn Muḥakkim, indicates that Abraham was sent to his people as a proof of God’s oneness. He reports from Ibn Ishāq:

Abraham’s father was called Āzar\(^{38}\) from a little town near Kūfa called Kūtha. When God intended to send Abraham as a proof of His oneness to his people and the only two prophets between Noah and Abraham were Hūd and Šālih. Astrologists went to Nimrūd, who was the king of the eastern land, and informed him that Abraham will be soon born and that he would destroy his people’s idols. Abraham was born secretly and his mother did not inform her husband until Abraham grew up and left the cave. It is reported that Abraham grew in one day as one would in a month; he was in the cave for fifteen months. When Abraham left the cave with his mother one night, he saw the star, the moon, and the sun and took each of them as his lord, but when each of them set he exclaimed: “O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to Allāh. “For me, I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I give partners to Allāh.”\(^{39}\)

Al-Ṭabarī raises another theological argument related to a ḥadīth, narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās, that Abraham believed that these heavenly bodies were his real Lord.\(^{40}\) Theologically, al-Ṭabarī argues that it is impossible for a true prophet to associate others with Him even for a moment. In other words, he strongly criticized those traditionists who claimed that a prophet could have worshipped that which is not God before reaching the age of majority and beginning his ministry. In his person, such an individual would have to have been completely innocent of such worship, regardless of his age.\(^{41}\)

\(^{37}\) Ibid.
\(^{38}\) In the Book of Genesis 11:24–32, Abraham was the son of Terah, while in the Islamic tradition, commentators of the Qur’ān have differed on whether the name of Abraham’s father was Āzar or Terah (Tāriḥ). See Ṭabarī (1954, XI: 481).
\(^{39}\) Ṭabarī (1954, XI: 481).
\(^{40}\) Ibid.
\(^{41}\) Ibid.
Al-Ṭabarī also mentioned that these traditionalists argued that if Abraham had ever rejected God, he would have been an unbeliever (kāfir) and, therefore, no different from the idolaters. He brought this point up to explain that God chooses a messenger based solely to that person’s moral lifestyle and worship of Him.\footnote{Ibid.} In his own words, however, this argument rests on the doctrine that all prophets enjoy divine protection (‘īsmah) and therefore cannot sin.\footnote{Ibid.}

Finally, al-Ṭabarī concluded that any claim that Abraham’s declaration of a star, the moon, and the sun to be his Lord should be taken as a denial of this fact, because even though they were luminous and more beautiful than his people’s idols, they could not be worshipped due to their being subject to impermanence and setting.\footnote{Ibid.}

Al-Tha‘labī reports much of the same material. After disputing the issue of the divine protection attributed to Abraham so that this messenger could not sin, he offered four theological interpretations for “So also did We show Abraham the power and the laws of the heavens and the earth, that he might (with understanding) have certitude” to emphasize God’s Oneness.

The first interpretation, related on the authority of Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr and Mujāhid, states:

God placed Abraham on a great rock and showed him the kingdom of the heavens and the earth from his throne to the lowest level of the earth, He also showed him his place in paradise, God also showed the inheritance of the earth with their evil deeds. Abraham asked God to destroy them and began himself to curse them, but God answered “I am more merciful towards my servant more than you; go down to them perhaps they would repent.”\footnote{Al-Tha‘labī (2002, IV:161).}
The second interpretation asserts that in order to distinguish between worshipping God, the creator of the universe, and worshiping idols, Abraham systematically explained to his people why they were misguided. He wanted to adduce cogent evidence against the idols while magnifying their objects to draw lessons of guidance from their source.\textsuperscript{46} Al-Tha'labī also uses “but when it set” to emphasize this theological argument by showing that Abraham stated the intrinsic weakness of the setting star to demonstrate the futility of glorifying, worshipping, and deifying it.\textsuperscript{47}

The third interpretation further explains that Abraham’s example was said to be similar to that of a reformer who tries to help an idol-worshipping people distinguish right from wrong.\textsuperscript{48} Al-Tha'labī argues that in order to gradually show his people their error, Abraham pretends to glorify their idol while highlighting its worthlessness. When the king asked him why he criticized the idols,\textsuperscript{49} al-Tha'labī explains that Abraham wanted to prove to his people that they were wrong. This technique in no way involved any skepticism about his Lord; rather, it was no more than simple irony—“this is my Lord—to you, but when it set, he said ‘I love not those that set.” Al-Tha'labī mentions that Abraham behaved the same way when he saw the full moon and when the sun arose, by saying ironically, “This is greater.”\textsuperscript{50}

Seeking a better theological understanding, al-Tha'labī offered a linguistic interpretation: the verse in question contains a certain brevity and assimilation stated in “this is my Lord,” which is similar to “And remember Abraham and Ismā'il raised the foundations of the House (With this prayer): ‘Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us: For

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid, 164.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid., 165.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
"Thou art the All-Hearing, the All-knowing" 2:127, which means that “they said Our Lord accepts this deed from us.” He concluded that, similarly, when the star, moon, and sun set (highlighting their disappearance), he said: “I don’t like those that set (disappear) as God.”

In his interpretation, al-Ṭabrisī intended to extend Abraham’s divine protection from sin back to Adam, for he reports that Āzar was either Abraham’s maternal grandfather or uncle. This is the Shi‘i point of view, which is based on the belief that the ancestors of prophets, all the way back to Adam, were believers in one God. In this context, he quoted a ḥadīth of the Prophet, who said: “God continued to move me from the purified loins of men to the purified wombs of women until he brought me forth into your world without any uncleanness of the age of ignorance (jāhiliyyah) that is the age of idol worship.” He also states that classical Qur’ānic commentators have four theologically divergent interpretations of this passage.

The first one, based upon his understanding of Abū ‘Ali al-Qāsim al-Balkhī’s opinion that Abraham said this at a time of mature understanding and after careful deliberation through level-headedness and insightful mental exercise. Al-Ṭabrisī mentions that al-Balkhī opined that Abraham had from one hour to one month to think on the kingdom of the heaven and the earth:

It is after God had matured Abraham’s mental faculties, perception and observation to their zenith that he saw the star (for his people who worshipped the celestial bodies). He though aloud “this is my Lord” but when it set he reasoned that ‘rising and setting’ are qualities only fit for a created being and not of the creator. He imposed the same judgment on the sun and moon when they arose in their splendor, emphasizing that setting/disappearance is not an intrinsic attribute of God. Consequently, he averred “O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to Allāh. For me, I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and never

51 Ibid.
"shall I give partners to Allāh." This encounter happened immediately after his knowledge of God and His attributes which could not be associated with His creatures.\(^{53}\)

The second interpretation concerns al-Ţabrisī’s explanation of Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbāṭī’s opinion that Abraham said this before he reached this mental maturity and deliberated upon God’s creatures only after he reached it:

When Abraham saw the star and its splendor he thought that was his Lord, but when it set changing from one stage to another he said “I don’t like those that set.” Abraham imposed the same judgment on the moon when it arose in its splendor and set (observing that it was bigger and more luminous) He said “unless my Lord guide me,” to the right path, favor me to the desired objective in His unicity, “I shall surely be among those who go astray” by worshipping these creatures. Now when he saw the sun filling the earth with its brilliance, and splendor he again said “this is my lord this is bigger than the star and the moon.”

When the sun set he said to his people “O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to Allāh” who created all of us. When God bestowed him with matured understanding and careful deliberation through level-headedness and perspicacious mental exercise he excelled in understanding the stark difference between the qualities of the creatures and the attributes of God. He said “For me, I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth,” genuinely inclining away from polytheism to the unicity of God “and never shall I give partners to Allāh.”\(^{54}\)

Al-Ţabrisī mentioned that Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbāṭī raises two other theological questions. The first one is how could Abraham say this in such an emphatic manner when he had no knowledge of this, the uncertainty expressed in an emphatic statement is repugnant.\(^{55}\) In an attempt to deal with this, al-Jubbāṭī offered two possibilities:

a) Abraham didn’t say that emphatically but by way of suggestion and reflection, as one may say upon beholding a time-honored creature in the (mistaken) belief that it is eternal only to realize later on that such a belief is absurd —“Is this (really) your Lord?” b) Abraham expressed his thought aloud; however, thought processes can include statements and ideas that may not be emphatic or real. Through cogent proof that one may correct himself/herself and abandon a previous (and erroneous) thought.\(^{56}\)

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 93.
\(^{54}\) Ibid., 93–94.
\(^{55}\) Ibid.
\(^{56}\) Ibid.
Al-Jubbā‘ī’s second theological question dealt with Abraham’s fascination with seeing these celestial bodies that he had not seen before and whether, in practical terms, it could be possible that he was seeing them for the first time. Al-Jubbā‘ī’s response is that it could be that Abraham did not see them until then, because it is narrated that he was born in a cave and anyone who is inside the cave would not be able to see the heaven. When Abraham reached the period of matured understanding after careful deliberation through level-headedness and insightful mental exercise he left the cave and saw the heaven. It could be possible that Abraham saw the heavenly bodies before that but he did not think about them because he was too young to do that.57

The third interpretation is that Abraham said, “This is my Lord,” with uncertainty. Rather, he knew emphatically that his Lord is not one of the celestial bodies. Al-Ṭabrisī explains:

Abraham has chosen to say that in order to decry the practice of his people and to direct their attention to the fact that the true One worthy of worship should not be similar to His creature. Abraham therefore says “This is my Lord” based on one of two interpretations: (a) his people’s religion and belief or (b) questioning and warning them of worshiping the heavenly bodies.58

The fourth interpretation is that Abraham was using sarcasm to point out to his people their low mental level and the falsehood of idolatry:

Abraham criticized his people for worshipping devoutly the sun, moon, stars and fire. That is why when he saw them worshipping those bodies he maintained “This is my Lord” in accordance to your claim. Just as he said in 28:62, “Where are my ‘partners’ whom ye imagined.” Here, however, Abraham ascribed to himself a belief that they had. It is also said that he intended a condition; if these bodies are your Lords, as you claim, then they are my Lord. In reality, theses bodies were not their Lords nor were the heavenly bodies his Lord.59

Finally, al-Ṭabrisī concluded that this passage indicates the creation of heavenly bodies and a cogent evidence of the Creator’s existence. He asserts that these bodies were created due to their positions, which are a clearer indication of their movements.

57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 94.
59 Ibid.
Accordingly, as they move and stop, they must be created. Since they were created, they must have a creator.\textsuperscript{60} And according to these creations, al-Ṭabrisī further states that: “God (the Creator) must be able and, as He created them systematically and with precision, He therefore must be knowledgeable and, since He is both knowledgeable and able, He must exist and be alive.”\textsuperscript{61}

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets God showing Abraham the kingdom of heaven and earth to show him His lordship and sovereignty and to teach him how to correctly deduce valid arguments.\textsuperscript{62} Thus, we can see that al-Zamakhsharī is interested in how reason helps one acquire divine knowledge. He uses this story to argue that Abraham actually meant to guide his people rationally to the fact that God, who created everything and controls all of their movements, manages their rising and setting.\textsuperscript{63}

Al-Rāzī discusses at length Abraham’s high status among the pre-Islamic Arabs, who recognized him as their ancestor, such as Jews, Christians, and Muslims who never affirm his high status with God. He states:

Abraham’s status with God rests also on his fulfillment of the covenant of servanthood with God, as God says: “\textit{And fulfill your covenant with Me as I fulfill My Covenant with you}” 2:40. Abraham was obedient to God in that he was one of His virtuous friends. He dedicated his heart to divine knowledge (\textit{‘irfān}), his son as a sacrifice to God, his body to the fire—\textit{We said: “O Fire! be thou cool, and (a means of) safety for Abraham!”}—21:69, and offered his wealth to the angels who visited him: ‘\textit{Then he turned quickly to his household, brought out a fatted calf,}’ 51:26. Thus, Abraham deserved God’s bounty for he made Him acceptable to all people of all religions. Since, moreover, Abraham was acceptable to the polytheists of Mecca, God invoked his status as an argument against them.\textsuperscript{64}

Speaking of the popular belief regarding heavenly bodies and their alleged influence on the affairs of this world and the role of the prophets, al-Rāzī argues that the

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} Rāzī (1995, VII: 36–37).
prophets, due to their high status with God, can prove that stars have no such influence and that even if the stars actually do have such an influence, there is no doubt that they were created in time. It is, therefore, more proper to worship the Creator rather than His creatures. “Abraham’s argument with his father regarding the worship of the stars would only be established on the denial of their divinity and, therefore, of their influence on events here on earth. Therefore, his father’s and his people’s idol worship is utter foolishness.”

In addition, al-Rāzī emphasized God’s Oneness by arguing that belief in a multiplicity of deities is irrational:

Abraham tried to establish a logical relationship between the two verses, namely, the one condemning idol worship and the other one denying the stars’ divinity, because they could not help or harm anyone. One idol would be enough; this belief in more than one divine being is logical fallacy, for God said: *If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods [and goddesses] besides Allāh, there would have been confusion in both! But glory to Allāh, the Lord of the Throne: (High is He) above what they attribute to Him.* 21:22. Also, because Abraham repudiated idolatry when saying “*For I see thee and thy people in manifest error,*” he was able to behold the kingdom of the heavens and the earth.

Al-Rāzī continues to offer theological interpretations about the impact of God’s light on the human spirit in order to explain the manifestation of His majesty to Abraham when he saw the kingdom of heaven and earth. He says:

*The light of God shines forth forever and never ceases and is never extinguished. Furthermore, human spirits would not be deprived of this light except through a veil. This veil is the preoccupation with other than God exalted be He above this being true, then to the extent that this veil is removed, the divine manifestation increases. This is because all things other than God are vanities and a veil separating human beings from God.*

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65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
Then, al-Rāzī concludes that Abraham saw the kingdom of heaven and earth not once, but many times. God revealed them to him even when he was a child so that, as an adult, he would be among those who had certainty of faith “that he might (with understanding) have certitude.”

Al-Rāzī’s argument rests on Abraham’s repeated perception of the kingdom of heaven and earth. Through his repeated encounters with them, Abraham begged (tawassala) God to manifest His majesty, holiness, and infinite greatness to him. Al-Rāzī says that even though God’s creations are finite in their essence and attributes, their proofs of the essences and attributes are infinite. He then quotes al-Juwaynī:

The aspects of God’s knowledge are infinite as the aspects of each of them are also infinite. This is because the single essence may be placed in spaces which themselves are infinite. It is also possible to describe Him with infinite attributes.

Al-Rāzī asserts that the proof of God’s kingdoms, as well as His attributes and majesty, are likewise infinite. Then he analyzes that if this is the case, then this child’s knowledge of God and His attributes cannot be attained all at once; rather, they must be acquired gradually. This is why God said: “So also did We show Abraham the power and the laws of the heavens and the earth, that he might (with understanding) have certitude.”

Al-Rāzī argues that Abraham saw the kingdom of the heavens and earth with his inner vision, not with his actual vision, for malakūt means that God is the owner of the heavens and earth, which also indicates His power. By saying that it can be known by
rational choice, he further assumes that the meaning of malakūt is useless if we interpret the kingdom of the heavens literally.\textsuperscript{75}

Al-Rāzī indicates that God mentions vision (irā‘ah) at the beginning of “So also did We show Abraham,” by way of generalization and then interprets it (the vision) by the next verse “When the night covered him over...” to indicate that irā‘ah, which means that Abraham’s vision was an expression and interpretation of that indication.\textsuperscript{76}

Al-Rāzī also explains that God says at the end of “That was the reasoning about Us, which We gave to Abraham (to use) against his people” to indicate that the actual vision could not be used as a proof to Abraham’s people because they did not believe in God’s Oneness until they have received a clear inimitable proof.\textsuperscript{77} Thus, he concludes that using the star as an indication was the best way for both Abraham and his people to discuss God’s Oneness.\textsuperscript{78}

Finally, al-Rāzī concludes this section by mentioning that the inner sight (ru‘yā al-qalb), with regard to this interpretation, embraces all monotheists (muwaḥḥidūn). Therefore, what virtue could Abraham gain by it? Al-Rāzī’s replies that all monotheists, irrespective of their knowledge and provenance of this proof, perceive the signs of God’s wisdom in every single creature of the universe, and with this universal knowledge, God favors only the greatest honored among His prophets.\textsuperscript{79}

Ruzbihān’s commentary on this passage corresponds with the multifaceted vision of divine presences that comprise the totality of Divine Reality as seen from the Sufi perspective. He comments on the verse So also did We show Abraham the divine realms

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
(malakūt) of the heavens and the earth, that he might be among those who have attained to certitude (al-māqīnīn), saying:

In the same manner in which We favored Abraham in pre-eternity (al-azāl) with intimate friendship (khullah) We showed him the divine domains of the heavens and earth made manifest from the light of the attributes of pre-eternity (anwār ṣifāt al-azaliyyah) and the eternal essence (adh-dhāt as-sarmadiyyah) upon the looking glass of the divine domains of the heavens and earth: conjoining his intimate friendship with God and the rectitude of his love and his increased longing for the beauty of pre-existence (jamāl al-qidam); so that he would be among those who witnessed (min al-shāhidīn) Our meeting (liqā‘anā) in the Station of Certainty through the mediation of the realm of dominion (mulk) and the divine domains (malakūt).  

Ruzbihān asserts that God showed Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and earth in order that he may not be preoccupied with it but rather turn to God, who holds dominion over all creation.  

Ruzbihān further relates that the well-known Sufi master Naṣr Abādī, said:

God did not say that Abraham ‘was shown’ the domains of the heavens and earth because it is not possible for secondary causes to perceive through other secondary causes, on the contrary secondary objects can only perceive the divine domains through the primary causes (al-uṣūl). God showed Abraham all these things so that he may be able to advance towards the kingdom of God’s greatness and for the remembrance of the station of those who attained proximity to God.  

Ruzbihān also reports from another well-known Sufi master, Fāris ibn Ḇisā al-Dīnawarī al-Baghdādī (d. 340/951), that the verse signifies that beginnings of the knowledge of the Unseen, which leave the souls free from anything but the vision of God.  

Ruzbihān, therefore, concludes that people of this opinion present this as one proof of divine God’s oneness.

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81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
In his interpretation of the Qur’ānic verses “When the night covered him over, He saw a star: He said: 'This is my Lord.' But when it set, He said: 'I love not those that set.' Ruzbihān continues his discourse upon the divine realms and their relationship to the intimate knowledge of God:

God be exalted tested his intimate friend (al-khalīf) Abraham with difficult trials (balāyād); among them were the visions of the malakūt that he may occupy himself with the sweetness of their vision and neglect seeing pre-eternity (al-qidam). He also tried him at the beginning stage of his journey with the station of ambiguity (maqām al-iltibās) with the appearance of a star the light in which was manifest the light of action (al-fi’l al-khāṣ) in the form of the star named Shi‘rā.⁸⁵ He [Abraham] perceived this light when the night of testing darkened and saw with the eye of self-direction (irādah) the light of his own discrete [self-derived] action that is derived from lights of the attributes. Thus, he exclaimed in wonderment (ta‘ajub), This is my Lord.⁸⁶

Thus, Ruzbihān concludes that here the cycle of self-direction spent itself and Abraham was sustained by the light of divine proximity that brought him to the station of diminution (maqām al-qillah).⁸⁷

The next stage in Abraham’s journey from self-direction to the Station of Certainty, in which God is seen as the sole agent behind the manifest orders, comes with Abraham’s vision of the moon: When he saw the moon rising in splendour, he said: "This is my Lord." But when the moon set, He said: “unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray.” After which, Ruzbihān writes:

When the night of the separation came upon him from the first earlier station, the light of the divine attribute issued from the substance of the divine essence and appeared from the light of (al-fi’l al-khāṣ) action appeared in the moon. He [Abraham] looked at it and witnessed the attribute of acts (before their

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⁸⁵ The star named al-Shi‘rā is mentioned in the 53:49. According to Ruzbihān, al-fi‘l al-khāṣ (mediated Divine command), which in the story of Abraham is as follows: stars (nujūm) are mediated by the desire irāda, the moon (qamar) is mediated action, and finally the sun (shams) mediated manifestation. Ruzbihān (2008, I: 375–76).
⁸⁶ Ibid.
⁸⁷ Ibid.
conception on the level of *irādah* (*mushāhadat as-ṣifat bi-l-fi‘l*). Thus, he explained with longing, *this is my Lord.*

Ruzbihān sees this as the conclusion of the stage of intimate friendship. Here Abraham is sustained in the light of union and brought to the Station of Love. Ruzbihān writes:

He made him taste the sweetness of Divine reality (*al-ḥaqīqa*) the joy of its secret. His longing from more knowledge welled up and the lights of the essence manifested themselves in the attributes. Both of the lights of divine essence and attributes manifested themselves within the Divine action.

In commenting on—“*When he saw the sun rising in splendor, he said: 'This is my Lord; this is the greatest (of all).’ But when the sun set, he said: 'O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to Allāh.’*”—Ruzbihān writes:

These lights manifested themselves in the sun. Whereupon all became clear (*ṣafā waqṭahu*) and the sun rose and the darkness of the night of separation passed and Abraham looked at it and beheld the majesty of the eternity (*al-qidam*) in the mirror of the sun, he then with the tongue of passionate love said, ‘*This is my Lord.*’

Ruzbihān concludes this section with Abraham’s perception of the absolute unicity of Divine pre-eternity devoid of all secondary causes and intermediaries, writing:

He [Abraham] then reached a state wherein he jealousy guarded his love of Divine pre-eternity free of any perception of secondary causes. In this vision of eternity the divine signs set in the effacement of the majesty of the lights of pre-eternity revealing the pure essence of pre-eternity to him and he fled from God to God and affirmed Divine unicity through His Oneness saying to the soul the demanded its portion of the vision of the creation alluded to as the star of divine action, ‘*I love not those that set.’*
Ruzbihān identifies this perception of absolute unicity as state for those who fall into the depths of the effacement before the waves of God’s majesty as it manifested. Wherein Ruzbihān writes:

He [Abraham] then said to the intellect that demands the vision of the divine decree (al-ṣadāqa) through the vision of the moon that is the mirror of the light of the attribute, ‘unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray,’ those who remained in the station of ambiguity from the perception of the attributes themselves without intermediaries, for if God does not guide me through Him to Himself, I would remain distant from Him through Him. He [Abraham then] said to the heart demanding its portion of the Station of Passionate Love and its infatuation with the ecstasy of love through perceiving secondary causes while fleeing from being consumed in the fires of Divine Glory, O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to Allāh; they flee to Him from other than He. Though there may be secondary causes that lead to Him, I perceive Him with no intermediary, I perceive Him only through Him; I forego any of my share in secondary means.\(^92\)

Nisābūrī treats the verses under discussion as one continuous passage. His interpretation is a largely allegorical one. He uses the Qur’ānic words to present the mystical view of faith and certainty; he comments that Abraham saw the inner dimension of the kingdom of these things to distinguish himself from Āzar and his people:

Abraham may become one of the people of certainty when the majestic of these kingdoms on disclose in the same manner he attained certainty of the error (dalāl) of Āzar and his people. When the night of darkness of mortal humanity came up on him the rain of the cloud of divine succor fell on the earth of his heart with the help of guidance. This cause to sprout the seed of intimate friendship with God had placed in his heart. He saw the light of the right apprehension in the image of the star rising from the horizon from the heaven of the spirituality, thus, he exclaimed, ‘this is my lord.’\(^93\)

Nisābūrī continues his allegorical interpretation of the heavenly bodies. He allegorically explains that the star, which was seen by Abraham as a mystery star, is not the star itself:

So by saying this, Abraham meant this mystery of the star is not the star itself. Even though he did not disclose this to his soul as it was said: my heart plunged

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\(^{92}\) Ibid., 377.

(hawā) and my body did not know for the body is in exile and the spirit is in its true home. If the soul has uttered falsehood in what it says to the star “this is my lord,” the heart did believe what it saw from the star.94

It is quite clear that Nisābūrī here employs the words of 53:11—The (Prophet’s) (mind and) heart in no way falsified that which he saw—to present his mystical interpretation of the two verses. Nisābūrī then quotes the following verse of mystical poetry:


do ٔنى يعهى ثّ ثذَي
فبنجغى في غشثةٔانشّ في ٔطٍ

Therefore, Nisābūrī interprets that what Abraham saw was not by the ordinary vision. He assumed that Abraham uses his inner sight (innermost heart) to see the star, Nisābūrī says:

Abraham said ‘this is my lord,’ but when the light of the right apprehension was veiled by the power of the creaturely attributes then Abraham returned to his inner qualification and when he encountered the star of the heaven with its setting (al-ghurūb) his own inner most heart exclaimed: I love not those that set.96

Thus, Nisābūrī continues to employ the same allegorical and mystical interpretation on the verse—But when the moon set, He said: "unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray—and emphasizes that his mystical hermeneutics resembles, as Nwyia points out, a discourse of mirrors between two inwards (bāṭin): the mystic one and the Qur’ānic text one,97 and show that Abraham separates himself from errors like that of Āzar and his people. Nisābūrī writes:

When the skylight (rawzanah) of his heart was opened wide towards the kingdom of the moon the light of lordship was manifested to him through the mirror of the moon, he said: ‘this is my lord,’ but when the moon set at as he returned to its

94 Ibid.
95 Hence, mystically, Nisābūrī wants to say that Abraham’s heart has plunged without knowing its body, which indicates allegorically the separation of the body and the heart. Ibid.
96 Ibid.
qualifications his longing increased and he said: if my lord does not guide me by lifting the veil of qualification and sustaining me in the existence of creation I would be one of the people of error like Āzar and his people.\textsuperscript{98}

Nisābūrī goes on to use different allegorical and mystical language to interpret Abraham’s vision of the sun:

When the veil of qualifications was torn and the sun of guidance comes out of the clouds of human mortality and the earth of the heart shown forth with the light of its lord, Abraham said: “this is my lord,” but when the sun of guidance set manifesting its greatness and might in order that Abraham himself may get away from a polytheism and egoism (\textit{anāniyyah}).\textsuperscript{99}

Nisābūrī then quotes the following verse of mystical poetry:

\begin{quote}
 إنّ شمس النهار تغرب بالليل \& شمس القلوب ليست تغيب
\end{quote}

Nisābūrī, therefore, indicates that after Abraham has separated himself from any direction of polytheism and egoism, he freed his heart from the net of conjecture and imagination. Nisābūrī writes:

Thus, Abraham disassociated himself from all the things other than God or things that are equal to God. The strengths of intimate friendship pulled him away from any direction of polytheism; therefore the attribute of hearts was freed from the net of conjecture and imagination and thus Abraham said to his people “I am free from all you associate with God.”\textsuperscript{101}

Nisābūrī then concludes:

It may occur to the mind that Abraham was faced with the darkness of error, he thus considered first the world of bodies as they set in the horizon of alteration he discerned that are not fit for divinity. He therefore left the realm of the bodies and went to the realm of the souls, which manages the realm of bodies, but he saw them also set in the horizon of perfectibility. Thus, they were essentially the same as the realm of the body which was lower than them thus, Abraham went up from the realm of the souls to the realm of immaterial intellect, but he saw these intellects set in the horizon of possibility. Therefore, they remained only God the necessary being (\textit{al-wājib al-ḥaqq}). Some identify the star with sense perception

\textsuperscript{98} Nisābūrī (1996 , V: 110–11).
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{100} Hence, allegorically, Nisābūrī wants to say that the sun of the day sets at night but the sun of the heart and guidance never sets. Ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
and the moon with imagination and the sun with conjecture and reason. This means these three perceptible potencies are weak, possessing finite power. However, the guardian (al-mudabbiรฉ) of the universe dominates them and exercises power over them.  

In sum, according to Abraham’s story, it is quite clear that prioritizing the use of textual narratives (parallel texts) to interpret theological arguments (e.g., God’s oneness and existence) had a major influence on Ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Tha’labī’s hermeneutical works. We have seen that Ibn Muḥakkim sought to show that Abraham’s challenge was to know God as the perfect and the eternal One and deny what his people were worshiping. Al-Ṭabarī also uses textual narrative to emphasize how Abraham was prepared to be a messenger of God since he was born; his interpretation, however, is quite different from Ibn Muḥakkim’s. Al-Ṭabarī is more interested in arguing for the divine protection of all prophets against committing sins or rejecting the true faith. He further discusses that if Abraham had ever rejected faith in God, he would be just the same as rejecters of faith. Al-Ṭabarī asserts that that Abraham’s declaration of star, the moon, and the sun to be his lord should be interpreted figuratively (‘alā sabīl al-majāز) and not as a denial of this fact (‘alā sabīl al-ḥaqīqah). Al-Tha’labī uses the textual narrative to interpret how Abraham saw the kingdom of the heavens and the earth as indicating God’s Oneness and mercy for His servants. In addition, he dedicates a section to disputing the argument of how Abraham addressed his people and challenged them over the validity of their idolatry by providing critical proof against it. Al-Tha’labī also draws a significant point when he interprets “but when it set” to indicate the eternal God could never set—unlike the star, the moon, and the sun. Finally he uses linguistic interpretation (brevity and assimilation) to sharpen his theological assertion about God’s Oneness.

102 Ibid.
Each of these three classical exegetes preserved many textual narratives to interpret the passages dealing with Abraham and reflected their traditional method of *tafsīr*—namely, using language to open the door to future classical *mufassirūn*, such as al-Ṭabrisī and al-Rāzī, to raise other theological arguments related to Abraham’s story.

From the Shi‘i standpoint, al-Ṭabrisī seeks to emphasize the divine protection of all prophets, which is quite clear in his hermeneutical interpretation of this person’s life. Firstly, al-Ṭabrisī discusses al-Balkhī’s opinion on Abraham’s statement that “this is my Lord” to emphasize that Abraham had reached the period of mature understanding. Secondly, al-Ṭabrisī disputes the great Mu‘tazīlī theologian and exegete Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī’s opinion about this phrase. As mentioned above, this latter exegete had opined that Abraham had said this before he had reached his maturity and that when he attained mental maturity what he perceived of God’s creatures stirred him to deliberation. Further, al-Ṭabrisī mentioned Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī’s theological arguments about this phrase; al-Jubbā‘ī indicates that Abraham said those words to both suggest and reflect upon its absurdity and to express his thought aloud through cogent proof that one may correct himself and abandon a previous thought. Thirdly, al-Ṭabrisī argues that Abraham’s statement was said through uncertainty. Al-Ṭabrisī indicates that Abraham knew emphatically that his Lord is not in the form of the heavenly bodies, but he based his statement according to his people’s religiosity of worshiping the idols in order to warn them. Fourthly, al-Ṭabrisī asserts that Abraham’s statement was designed to criticize his people and demonstrate their mental level and the falsehood of idolatry. Thus, al-Ṭabrisī, according to Abraham’s story, disputes these theological arguments to emphasize that the creation of heavenly bodies is a convincing evidence of God’s existence and oneness.
Al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī both are interested in using reason in order to attain divine knowledge. Al-Rāzī, for instance, found this story to be the best example to prove that Abraham meant to guide his people rationally to the fact that these heavenly bodies had been created by God. First, he studies Abraham’s status among the pre-Islamic Arabs, the Jews, Christians, and Muslims who recognized him as their ancestor. Second, with regard to popular belief, al-Rāzī spoke about the heavenly bodies and their alleged influence on the affairs of this world and how the prophets had to prove that they have no such influence. Third, al-Rāzī offers theological interpretations about the impact of God’s light on the human spirit in order to explain the manifestation of God’s majesty to Abraham when he saw the kingdom of the heaven and earth. Finally, al-Rāzī argues that Abraham saw this kingdom with his inner vision and not with his actual vision. He explains that *malakūt* means that God is the owner of the heavens and earth, which also indicates His power. Al-Rāzī asserts that God’s power cannot be seen with one’s actual vision but can be known by rational choice. He further assumes that the meaning of *malakūt* would be useless if we interpret the kingdom of the heavens literally.

Ruzbihān’s understanding of Abraham’s passage corresponds with the many-sided vision of divine presences that contain the totality of Divine Reality as seen from the Sufi perspective. On the one side, Ruzbihān asserts that God showed Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and earth in order that he may not be preoccupied with it but rather turn totally to God. This, according to Ruzbihān, signifies that the knowledge of the Unseen helps to leave the soul free from anything but the vision of God. Ruzbihān, therefore, emphasizes that people who hold this opinion present this as one proof of God’s oneness.

On the other side, Ruzbihān, metaphorically, approaches the passage in order to be among those who have attained certainty (*al-mūqinīn*). He indicates that the divine
realms and their relationship to the intimate knowledge of God could be reached through several stages. In the first stage, he assumes that the verse mentions the cycle of self-direction spent itself and Abraham was sustained by the light of divine proximity, which brought him to the station of diminution (maqām al-qillah). The next stage indicates Abraham’s journey from self-direction to the Station of Certainty, in which God is seen as the sole agent behind the manifest order, which comes with Abraham’s vision of the moon. Hence, Ruzbihān sees this level as the conclusion of the stage of intimate friendship (khullah). In the last stage, Ruzbihān indicates that here Abraham is sustained in the light of union and brought to the Station of Love. Finally, Ruzbihān concludes that Abraham’s perception of the absolute unicity of Divine pre-eternity devoid of all secondary causes and intermediaries, which Ruzbihān identifies as experienced by those who fall into the depths of the effacement before the manifestation of the waves of God’s majesty.

Nisābūrī understands the passage under discussion as a continuous one. His interpretation is largely an allegorical one. He uses the Qur’ānic words to present the mystical view of faith and certainty. Nisābūrī interprets Abraham’s seeing the inner dimension of the kingdom of the heaven and earth to separate himself from Āzar and his people. Nisābūrī continues his allegorical interpretation upon the heavenly bodies. He explains the star that Abraham saw is a mystery star; it is not the star itself. Therefore, he interprets that what Abraham saw was not an ordinary vision. He assumed that Abraham uses his inner sight (innermost heart) to see the star. He further uses different allegorical and mystical language to interpret Abraham’s vision of the moon and sun. Nisābūrī, therefore, concludes that after Abraham has separated himself from any direction of polytheism and egoism, he freed his heart from the net of conjecture and imagination.
In the following section, in order to emphasize the message of divine oneness (tawḥīd) on the verse 2:260, I will study the theological hermeneutics made by Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, al-Tha‘labī, al-Ṭabrisī as well as the mystical tafsīr made by Ruzbihān al-Baqlī and Nisābūrī. I will examine another Qur‘ānic narrative passage of the Prophet Abraham, in which, he asked his Lord to show him how He revives the dead.

5.1.2 God’s Reviving The Dead

The example that we shall analyze in this section is the verse 2:260:


I disagree with Yusuf ‘Ali’s translation of the word Qalbī into the phrase My own undertaking; hence I render the word Qalbī as my heart.

Al-Ṭabarī and Al-Tha‘labī narrate on the authority of al-Ḥasan and Qatādah, that “Abraham saw a dead animal being demolished by the beasts of the land and the fish of sea” and a detailed tradition belonging to ibn Jurayj and ‘Aṭā‘ al-Khurasānī: “It was the cadaver of a donkey by the seashore of ṭabariyyah.” According to Ibn Zayd, the dead animal was a whale that “when the wave came in, the fish of the sea came and ate of it; hence some of it fell into the sea. When the wave went out, the beasts of the land (ṣibā‘ al-arḍ) came and ate of it; hence some it fell on dry land and became dust. When the beasts of the land left, birds came and ate of it; hence some of it was carried away and spread by the wind. When the prophet Abraham saw this,
Abraham went out one day and saw a dead animal being eaten by the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth. Some of the flesh of the dead animal, which the birds carried, fell in the water and were consumed by the fish. Abraham wondered: how the flesh of the animal would be gathered and brought back to life? Abraham then asked his Lord to ‘Show me how Thou givest life to the dead’ and the divine question posed: ‘Dost thou not then believe?’ Abraham answers ‘Yea! but to satisfy My own heart.’ This is after I have seen some of the flesh of the dead animal scattered on the becks of the birds, the mouths of the beasts, and the stomachs of the fish.106

Therefore, Ibn Muḥakkim presents an elaborate discussion of “Take four birds...”:

Abraham took four birds with different colors, different names, and different feathers. He took a cock, Peacock, eagle, and raven. Abraham cut the heads of these four birds, mixed their blood and their feathers and scattered them and placed them on four different mountains. He placed on every mountain some of the bones, the feathers and blood of the four birds. Then the birds were called by voice that said: “O scattered bones, torn flesh, and severed veins come back together. So that your souls come back to you, thus, the blood float to blood, and feathers flew to one another, and the bone to the bone. Thus, the bloods of the birds come together as did their feathers, their flesh, and their bones.” Abraham then was told that when God created the world, He places his house (al-ka‘bah) in the center. He made four corners for the earth and for the house four pillars. Each pillar placed on a corner of the earth. God then sent four winds over each the four corners of the earth named: north, south, sweet wind, and strong wind. When they shall be blown in the day of resurrection all these who were killed and those who were dead, all the dead and murdered people will come together from the four foundations of the earth and its four corners just as the four birds that came together from the four mountains as God says: And your creation or your resurrection is in no wise but as an individual soul: for Allāh is He Who hears and sees (all things), 34:28.107

Among the classical commentators considered in this study, only Ibn Muḥakkim discusses the connection between the four birds with earth’s four corners and the

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107 Ibid., 245.
Ka‘bah’s location. It seems here that he wants to conclude his discussion in such a way as to link the Ka‘bah to Islamic eschatology.

As noted earlier, Ibn Muḥakkim largely agrees with al-Ṭabarî’s interpretation; however, the latter adds an interesting query to the general discussion: Was Abraham commanded to call the four birds when they were torn apart and scattered on four mountains, or did he do so after they had been brought back to life? Al-Ṭabarî opines

If it had been commended to call them when they had been torn apart and dead there is no way that they could answer his call and run to him. If on the other hand Abraham was commended to call the four birds after they were revived and after he saw them scattered on four mountains also there is no need for Abraham to call them. It has been suggested that God commended to Abraham to call the four birds after they were cut up into pieces. It is however the command of the divine creative and not a command related to Abraham’s servanthood to God.

Al-Ṭabarî concludes that this resembles the case of the people who were transformed into apes, after which God said to them: “Be ye apes, despised and rejected’ 2:65.

Al-Tha‘labî is interested in the degrees of certainty in knowledge. Relying on 102:7—Again, ye shall see it with certainty of sight!—that distinguishes the knowledge of certainty (‘ilm al-yaqīn) from the higher degrees, which the Qur‘ān calls the “essence of certainty” or the “certainty without any doubt,” he writes:

Abraham asked God to show him how he survive the dead in order for him to see it and his certainty of faith maybe increased. Thus, God reproaches him with the words ‘Dost thou not then believe?’ and Abraham answered his Lord ‘Yeal but to satisfy My own heart.’ Abraham here emphasizes the idea that narrative is not the same as seeing.

Al-Tha‘labî then provides three possible meanings for “Yeal but to satisfy My own heart”:

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109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
First, is that my heart might achieve tranquility of seeing with direct witnessing. Second, the state of peace and tranquility is achieved through the accusation of Satan whispering and being conquered and lost. Third, is that Abraham asked God to show him how to revive the dead only to increase his certainty and showing then his arguments against the weak king Nimrūd of that time. This also meant to strengthen the reality of Abraham’s intimate friendship with God and for him to know that God will answer his request.\footnote{Ibid.}

Therefore, in addition to asserting that Abraham wanted his knowledge of certainty to become the actual essence of certainty,\footnote{Ibid.} he comments that this is when a person knows something for certain, yet he wishes to see it with his or her own eyes.\footnote{Ibid.} He concludes that it is also the same as the believers wishing to see God, Paradise, and Prophet Muḥammad, even though they have complete faith in these things.\footnote{Ibid.}

Al-Tha‘labī then turns to the verse’s traditional interpretation, as exemplified in the prophetic ḥadīth: “For every verse of Qur‘ān there is an inner and outer and for every letter there is a limit and a way to transcended.”\footnote{Ibid., 257.} He thus asserts that its exoteric meaning is what all of the commentators have agreed upon.\footnote{Ibid.} Its inner meaning is that Abraham was commanded to kill four things in his soul (nafs) with the knife of resolution, as he was ordered to kill the four birds with an iron knife.\footnote{Ibid.} Al-Tha‘labī concludes that the four birds have symbolic meanings: the eagle represents long life, the peacock refers to the pleasure and beauty of this world, the raven refers to strong attachment, and the rooster represents lust.\footnote{Ibid.}

Al-Rāzī begins by comparing Abraham’s conversation with God to show him how to revive the dead and ‘Uzayr’s request of God to do the same thing. He writes that while

\begin{footnotes}
\item[Ibid.] Ibíd.
\item[Ibid.]
\item[Ibid.]
\item[Ibid.]
\item[Ibid.]
\item[Ibid., 257.]
\item[Ibid.]
\item[Ibid.]
\item[Ibid.]
\item[Ibid.]
\end{footnotes}
Abraham kept a proper etiquette with God, ‘Uzayr actually doubted God’s ability to bring the owners’ of the dead bones back to life. This is why Abraham experienced God’s answer through the four birds, while ‘Uzayr experienced in himself God’s power to revive life.\textsuperscript{120}

Al-Rāzī then raises the important issue of the prophet’s divine protection (‘īṣmah) from doubt and error.\textsuperscript{121} He argues against those who thought that Abraham doubted both the origination (mabda’) of all things to God and their return (ma‘ād) to Him. He criticizes their claim that Abraham’s doubt as to God’s origination of all things by citing his statement that “this is my Lord,” and his doubt as to the latter in his request to “Show me how Thou givest life to the dead.” His answer to God’s question “Dost thou not then believe?” with “Yea! but to satisfy My own heart,” shows God protected Abraham from error. Attributing doubt to Abraham implies unbelief (kufr) on his part.\textsuperscript{122} Al-Rāzī assumes that since God informed Abraham of his ability to revive a dead animal that had been eaten by land beasts and fish, there is no need to illustrate that by bring the four birds back to life.\textsuperscript{123} He asserts that from the state of servanthood to God, Abraham asked God how he would revive the dead animal and that God answered by displaying His power from the place of lordship.\textsuperscript{124} He considers the four birds an illusion (ishārah) that represents the four fundamental substances of which both animals and plants are made;\textsuperscript{125} however, he does not specify what these four elements are.

\textsuperscript{120} Rāzī (1995, IV: 42).
\textsuperscript{121} Ṭabarî and other classical exegetes emphasized in their interpretations of this verse that Abraham wanted to see this “how God raised the dead, not because of any doubt he had in Him and His power.” See Ṭabarî (1954, V: 491).
\textsuperscript{122} Rāzī (1995, IV: 42–43).
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 43.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
Al-Ṭabrisī presents a clear and well-constructed summary of the views of traditionists and Qur'ānic exegetes, including that of Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. He adds that the most plausible interpretation is that Abraham desired actual direct visual experience of God's ability to revive the dead, even though he knew this already from the viewpoint of logical argument (istidlāl) and proof (burhān). He made this request so that “all uncertainty and whisperings of Satan would be removed.”

Al-Ṭabrisī reports from Mujāhid and Sa'īd b. Jubayr that Abraham answered God's “Dost thou not then believe?” with “Yea! but to satisfy My own heart”—in other words, he wanted to see this directly so his heart would be at peace.

After discussing what other exegetes said about this entire incident, al-Ṭabrisī offered a comparison with Moses, who in 7:143, asked God to display Himself to him directly: “My Lord! show (Thyself) to me.” Al-Ṭabrisī suggests that Moses asked for a miracle to remove his doubts and human obligation and this by the principles of necessity and cannot be subject to doubt in any way. On the other hand, Abraham asked for a specific divine potency that leaves room for a person's faith and hence for reward and punishment. Al-Ṭabrisī concludes that there are differences in life situations: sometimes giving a direct answer is better, as God did to Abraham—and other times, withholding it is better, particularly since God did not make a human vision of Him an obligation of obedience.

Al-Zamakhsharī is interested in the rational proof and argument implied in the verse's interpretation. For example, he asks how God could question Abraham's faith

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127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
when he knew that Abraham was the most faithful man alive.\(^{131}\) According to him, God asked the question so that Abraham would answer it. He did for those who could hear it.\(^{132}\) Al-Zamakhsharī interprets “Yeä! but to satisfy My own heart” means that his heart may increase in tranquility and peace by adding to the knowledge of logical argument and proof.\(^{133}\) This is because he concludes that the manifestation of different proofs creates greater tranquility in the heart and greater certainty as well. Al-Zamakhsharī believes that knowledge attained via logical proof and argument may be subjected to doubt; however, necessary knowledge is beyond doubt and conjecture.\(^{134}\)

In his commentary on the above verses, Ruzbihān offers a figurative interpretation in which he comments upon Abraham’s request to see God in the clothing (\(\text{libās}\)) of the created world.\(^{135}\) Ruzbihān asserts that Abraham’s request, “My Lord! Show me how Thou givest life to the dead,” means that he was asking Him to show him the truth (\(\text{ḥaqīqa}\)) of the inner insights (\(\text{buṭnān}\)) of divinity and lordship (\(\text{al-ulūhiyyah wa-ar-rubūbiyyah}\)) in order to increase his knowledge so that he would no longer have any doubt or uncertainty.\(^{136}\) In other words, Abraham’s request was an integral aspect of his spiritual station as God’s intimate friend (\(\text{khalīl}\)) so that he may attain absolute unity (\(\text{al-ittihād}\)).

“Show me” the truth (\(\text{ḥaqīqa}\)) of the inner insights (\(\text{buṭnān}\)) of divinity and lordship (\(\text{al-ulūhiyyah wa-ar-rubūbiyyah}\)) from Abraham (\(\text{al-Khalīl}\)) is his utmost emersion in longing (\(\text{ishtiyāq}\)) and his being plunged (\(\text{hawā}\)) in the secret (\(\text{sirr}\)) of his beloved (\(\text{ḥabīb}\)) and in the attributes (\(\text{awṣāf}\)) of His power (\(\text{qudra}\)). For the lover (\(\text{al-muḥibb}\)) desires to encompass the reality of the essence of his beloved (\(\text{al-maḥbūb}\)) in all his facets. And this is among the conditions of attaining to

\(^{132}\) Ibid.
\(^{133}\) Ibid., 392.
\(^{134}\) Ibid.
\(^{135}\) Ruzbihān (2008, I: 105). Also, see page 106 where he says: “Abraham sought to witness God’s attributes (\(\text{sifāt}\)) in the clothing (\(\text{libās}\)) of God’s signs (\(\text{āyāt}\)).”
unity with God (al-ittiḥād), which in essence means he has attained to higher states of certainty and been granted access to the realities of the state of establishment in the Divine. For without doubt, God is far above being perceived by anyone of His creatures.  

Ruzbihān then metaphorically portrays the dialogue between God and Abraham when he asked “How do you bring the dead back to life?”—to which God responded “Have you not believed?” Abraham affirmed that he did so only to put his heart at peace.

Then God responded to His intimate friend Abraham: ‘Dost thou not then believe? That you cannot perceive Me across the borders (sharāʾīf) of the secret of eternity (sīr al-gidam), for you are a created being (makhlūq), a hostage of temporal attributes (nuʿūt al-ḥadath). Then, Abraham said: ’Yea! but to put my own heart at peace,’ after perceiving myself in the exaltedness of Your Lordship (rubūbiyah), for otherwise my heart will never cease seeking to witness the beauty of Your Lordship.  

In this discourse, Ruzbihān distinguishes between Abraham’s request and Moses’ request to look upon God. He explains that Abraham desired to pass beyond the fragility and weakness of servanthood, became clothed in the purity of Lordship, and witnessed the absolute Lordship and divine reality of the One beyond being witnessed, while Moses only desired to see God.

Through his request was a ruse (ḥīlah) to surpass the fragility and weakness of servanthood (ʿajz al-ʿubūdiyyah) and become clothed (yaltabisu) in the purity of Lordship. Therefore, Abraham’s request was greater than that of Moses, since the latter asked to have the veil removed in order to see God, while Abraham desired to attain to the Divine reality of the knowledge of the One (ṣāḥib) being witnessed and His absolute Lordship (ṣīr rubūbiyatihi).  

Ruzbihān then asserts that when God knew Abraham’s desires, as outlined above, He told him to take four birds and tame them to turn to thee.

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137 Ibid., 106–107.
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
140 In addition to their tafsīr works, the major issue that Sufi commentators have stressed here is the mystical meanings given to the four birds. In this context, Ernst points out: “In the Islamic tradition, notable early explorations of the symbolism of birds and flights can be found in the writings of philosophers, Sufis, and poets such as ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), al-Ghazālī (d. 504/1110), al-Suhrawardī (d. 538/1143), and al-Ṭūsī (d. 602/1206). The four birds can represent the four stages of spiritual development: from the beginning to the end. In this context, Ernst points out: “In the Islamic tradition, notable early explorations of the symbolism of birds and flights can be found in the writings of philosophers, Sufis, and poets such as ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), al-Ghazālī (d. 504/1110), al-Suhrawardī (d. 538/1143), and al-Ṭūsī (d. 602/1206). The four birds can represent the four stages of spiritual development: from the beginning to the end.
When God knew that Abraham meant by his request that he was seeking the knowledge of Lordship (῾ulūm ar-rubūbiyyah), the realities of God’s eternal attributes (ḥaqā῾iq šifāt al-qidamiyyah), and the nature of His Endless Essence (kunh al-dhāt as-sarmadiyyah), then God said: “Take four birds; Tame them to turn to thee.”

In his interpretation of “Take four birds ...,” Ruzbihān explains that these four birds are of the inner realm that exists in the cage of the human body: the intellect (‘aql), the heart (qalb), the ego-self (nafs), and the spirit (rūḥ). Then, he provides a mystical interpretation: “turning the birds to fly to you” (ṣurhunna ilayka) as sacrificing each bird with the knife of the appropriate inner attitude on the mountain, which symbolizes the four foundations of Divine reality. In the case of Abraham, this metaphoric treatment represents his central role as one who offered sacrifice in both the Biblical and Qur’ānic traditions. Here, each mountain can be seen as an altar upon which each of the human psyche’s four inner facets is offered to God and thereby transformed.

In saying, Take four birds God alluded to the birds of the inner realm (al-bāṭin) which are imprisoned in the cage of the human body. They are the four birds of the Unseen (al-ghayb): the first is the intellect (al-῾aql); the second is the heart (al-qalb); the third is the self (an-nafs); and the fourth is the spirit (ar-rūḥ). When He said, Tame them to turn to thee he meant, kill (sacrifice) the bird of the intellect with the knife of love (maḥabbah) at the door of the Realm of Dominion (al-malakūt); kill (sacrifice) the bird of the heart with the knife of the longing (shawq) at the presence of the Realm of Divine Majesty (janāb al-jabarūt); kill (sacrifice) the bird of the self with the knife of passionate love (῾ishq) in the spaces (mayādīn) of Divine Unicity (al-fardānīyāh); and kill (sacrifice) the bird of the spirit with the knife of weakness (῾ajz) in the vastness of the mysteries (asrār) of Divine Uniqueness (al-wahdānīyāh).

In his commentary on “put a portion of them on every mountain,” Ruzbihān alludes (in mystical terms) even more specifically to the Divine geography constituting the Unseen realm’s four realms, referred to above. Here again we see the mountain understood as an altar.

587/1191), al-Khāqānī (d.595/1199), and above all in the great mystical epic of Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 610/1213), mantiq al-῾ayr or the Language of the Birds.” See Ernst (1999: 354).


142Ibid., 107.
Place the intellect on the mountain of Divine Majesty (al-‘azamah), until the lights of the sovereignty of Lordship (salṭanat ar-rubūbiyyah) accumulate over it and the intellect takes on its attributes so that it perceives Me through Me after its effacement in Me; place the heart on the mountain of Divine Magnificence (kibriyāʾ) until I clothe it in the radiance of My sanctity (qudsī) and it wanders in the vast wilderness (baydāʾ) of reflection (at-ta’fakkur) bathed in the attributes of the absolute light of Divine Love (ṣirf nūr al-maḥabbah); then place the ego-self upon the mountain of exaltedness (al-‘izzah) until I clothe it in the light of Divine Sublimity in order that it becomes at peace as the flood of My Lordship flows over it (jarayan) until it (an-nafs) neither disputes with Me in the state of servanthood nor seeks the attributes (awṣāf) of Lordship; finally, place the spirit on the mountain of Divine Eternal Beauty until I clothe it with the light of light, the exaltedness of exaltedness, and the holiness of holiness, so that it expands within a state of intoxication (munbasītatan fi aṣṣ-ṣukr) and at peace within [a state of] sobriety (muṭmaʿīnatan fi aṣ-ṣaḥwi); passionate in expansiveness (‘āshiqatan fi ḍīnbasīṭ), stable in ecstasy (rāsikhah fi l-ījād). When these four birds have all become clothed in My attributes (ṣifāt), they will fly upon the wings of Lordship in the air of Divine Being (huwiyah) and they will perceive Me in the clothing of enduring permanence and eternity (ad-dāyūmīyah wa l-azaliyyah).

From here, Ruzbihān continues his discourse on “and call to them: They will come to thee (flying) with speed.” He metaphorically connects this call as “the voice of the secrecy of infatuated love” (ṣawt as-sirr rāsikhah fi l-ījād) used to call the four birds together with the Essence of Divine Lordship:

Then call them with the voice of the secret of passionate love and the murmurs of longing, and the ringing of the bell of love from the gardens of Divine proximity to the world of Divine intimate knowledge. They will come to you with the speed of the wings of the sovereignty of Lordship (sulṭān ar-rubūbiyyah) toward the essence of servanthood with the Divine beauty of uniqueness (aḥadīyāh) and you will see Me after assembling them all in the meadow (marbaʾ) of your chest (ṣadr) with the eyes of the Realm of Absolute Divinity (ʿuyūn al-lāhūtiyyah) and light of the Realm of Divine Dominion (wa nūr al-malakūtiyyah).

Ruzbihān concludes this passage by elucidating the direct relationship between Abraham’s state after his experience with the Divine and the two Divine attributes cited at the end of the verse: al-ʿAzīz and al-Ḥakīm.

Then know that Allāh is Exalted in Power, Wise. Al-ʿAzīz (The All Powerful) by exalting you through the intimate knowledge (ʿirfān) of these meanings and

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143 Ibid.
144 Ibid.
unveiling for you His pre-eternal attributes (ṣifātihi al-qadīmah); al-Ḥakīm (The All Wise) by in His manifestation (zuhūr) of the marvels (gharāʿib) of Divine Theophany (rajalīh) within the secret of your innermost spiritual realms (bāṭinuka).  

Nisābūrī approaches the verse under discussion from an allegorical and mystical viewpoint. He begins by sensing in Abraham’s request (“show me...”) a similarity to Moses’ request in 7:143: “O my Lord! show (Thyself) to me, that I may look upon thee.”

Nisābūrī the mystic, when comparing the two requests, writes:

Moses was a man given to drink the spiritual wine of love (sāḥibu sukr), while Abraham was a man of satiety (sāḥibu ray). Therefore, Moses did not observe proper etiquette with God and therefore he was subjected to hardship (naṣab) and fatigue (ta‘āb). He was disciplined by the punishment of a sinner and for this reason God says ‘By no means canst thou see Me (direct)’. Moses the drinker of the spiritual wine was in state of intoxication, while the well satisfied Abraham was always in the state of sobriety. The state of intoxication of Moses expressed itself in his relation to God in his request to see Him openly and against this in his saying ‘this is no more than Thy trial.’

He sees three important inner meanings in God’s question: “Dost thou not then believe?”

First, do you not believe when you were in the front of Nimrūd telling him that God’s raising the dead? Second, do you not believe with certainty in the vision of God in Paradise? Third, is Abraham’s possible doubt when he asked his Lord to show how he revives the dead? And His answer, do you not believe? In his mystical state Abraham answered in all three queries ‘Yea! but to satisfy My own heart, asserting that he asked God not to show him how he can revive the dead but how he does so.”

In order to indicate the relationship between the beloved (God) and the lover (Abraham) and its attributes’ role, Nisābūrī presents a mystical and allegorical meaning of “take four birds”:

When you [Abraham] became covered by yourself from your Lord and annihilated by the cover of your attributes from God’s attributes then the veil of your essence

145 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
became alienated from your Lord’s essence. Yet if you will die to your attributes, certainly you will live in God’s attributes and have the substance of His essence.\textsuperscript{148}

In his allegorical interpretation, he links the meaning of the four birds with the four human attributes made from the four elements belonging to the clay, the original element from which all human beings were shaped. Each element, which is attached to its mate, produces two attributes:

From dust and water come the mates of greed and miserliness, which always are together. From fire and air come anger and sexual desire. Each one of the two attributes has a mate with which it stays. The mate of greed is jealousy. The mate of miserliness is resentment. The mate of anger is arrogance. Sexual desire has no mate, but it could be among the attributes and attached to it. Thus, these four attributes and their three mates represent the seven doors of Hell fire. People shall enter through these seven doors each in according to its attributes. “To it are seven gates: for each of those gates is a (special) class (of sinners) assigned.”\textsuperscript{149}

Accordingly, Nisābūrī gives four symbolical attributes to the birds that God asked His intimate friend Abraham to slaughter: the peacock represents miserliness, the raven refers to greed, the cock refers to sexual desire, and the eagle refers to human anger.\textsuperscript{150}

Nisābūrī then mystically links his interpretation of “\textit{Tame them to turn to thee}” with the essential meaning of 21:69:

When Abraham slaughtered these birds with the knife of truthfulness and their attributes came to an end in him, there is no gate left for him by which he could enter into the fire. Hence, when he was thrown in it, “\textit{Fire became for him coolness and peace}.”\textsuperscript{151}

Therefore, Nisābūrī interprets “\textit{put a portion of them on every hill and call to them}” by relating allegorically each portion to the human faculty in order to symbolize the four mountains:

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
In order to show that God would revive these annihilated four attributes with His attribute of life-giving (muhīyī) and manifest himself to him through this attribute, Abraham was ordered to slaughter these attributes as a condition to live in God’s life. This is the essential meaning of the prophetic ḥadīth: The believer continues to be closed to Me through the additional prayers (nawāfil) until I love him. When I love him I shall be his hearing (sam‘ān), vision (baṣāran), tongue (lisānan), and hand (yadan). Then through Me he shall hear, through Me he shall see, through Me he shall talk, and through Me he shall act.\(^{152}\)

He concludes this section by drawing a parallel allegorical interpretation between Abraham, the intimate friend of God (Khalīl), and the Prophet Muḥammad, the beloved (ḥabīb) of God, through God’s manifestation to both of them:

God manifested himself to his intimate friend Abraham through only one of his attributes and that his power to revive the dead, which is the life-giving (muhīyī). But he manifested himself to his beloved Muḥammad in all his attributes on the night of the heavenly journey (mi‘rāj): For truly did he see, of the Signs of his Lord, the Greatest. 53:18. However, God’s friend Abraham asked his Lord the vision for himself alone, while God’s beloved Muḥammad asked the vision for both himself and for his community in his prayer: O! My Lord, show us things as they are? Both prophets therefore have been considered as the elect of the elect of humanity.\(^{153}\)

In sum, when examining the different classical hermeneutical interpretations of 2:260, one soon realizes that most of those exegetes have differed to some extent in understanding the message of tawḥīd as it relates to this passage. Those who advocated the textual narrative method of interpretation—among them Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha‘labī—have provided a similar hermeneutical analysis in an attempt to present all of the traditions that give a general picture of this account. This led them to describe the type of revived animal, its different names, and the place of the event itself. For example, they asserted that the four birds were the peacock, the raven, the cock, the eagle and that the event took place on the seashore of ṭabariyyah. They related their

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\(^{152}\) Ibid.
\(^{153}\) Ibid.
interpretations to the verse’s asbāb an-nuzūl and made great efforts to cite as many traditions as possible to fill the gap and complete their exegetical works.

Those who approached 2:260 rationally wrote theological, dogmatic, and mystical tafsīrs that reflected their own opinion of Abraham’s request. This is a crucial theological problem, especially when it relates to the meaning of “Dost thou not then believe?” Most of them, however, such as al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī, and al-Rāzī, disputed the claim that God protects His prophets from error and unbelief on the ground of the ḥadīth narrated by Ibn ʿAbbās: “There is no other verse in the Qur‘ān more difficult to my understanding than this one.”

In addition, the issue of doubt played an important role among those classical mufassirūn who sought to interpret this passage and emphasize God’s oneness. They asserted that doubt is an act of unbelief (kufr) and should not be ascribed to the prophets, who are believed to be protected from sin (maʿṣūmūn). In this context, they asked if Abraham’s question represented doubt or if it was simply a request to see God’s power. All of them agreed, however, that Abraham’s request was not due to any lack of faith on his part, but only because he wished to see with his eyes what he already knew, add certainty to his faith, or find greater certainty. In order to emphasize this idea, they all mentioned al-Bukhārī’s tradition that, according to Abū Hurayrah, the Prophet said: “We are more admirable of doubt than Abraham, when he said: ‘My Lord! Show me how Thou givest life to the dead.’”

Sufi thought has played an important role in understanding this verse. From a mystical standpoint, both Ruzbihān and Nisābūrī disputed the type of knowledge that

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155 This ḥadīth is narrated by al-Bukhārī when he interpreted the verse 15:51; see Sahih, Chapter 11, ḥadīth no: 3372.
Abraham wished to receive and discussed the different mystical meanings attributed to the four birds, the mountains, and what they represent for the Sufi tradition in order to emphasize the idea of *tawḥīd*.

Ruzbihān’s figurative interpretation mentions Abraham’s request to witness God in the clothing of the created world. He asserts that Abraham was asking God to show him the truth of the inner insights of divinity and lordship in order to increase his knowledge; leaving therein neither doubt nor uncertainty. In his perspective, Abraham’s request is an integral aspect of his spiritual station as the intimate friend of God so that he may attain to the condition of absolute unity. Ruzbihān then portrays this metaphorically by “recounting” the dialogue between God and Abraham when he asked his Lord “How do you revive the dead?” to which God responded “*Have you not believed?*” Abraham affirmed that he did, but that he sought this only to put his heart at peace. From this discourse, Ruzbihān distinguishes the difference between Abraham’s request and Moses’ request: Abraham desired to pass beyond the fragility and weakness of servanthood and become clothed in the purity of lordship and witnesses the absolute lordship and Divine Reality of the One witnessed, while Moses only desired to see God. Ruzbihān then asserts that when God knew exactly what kind of knowledge that Abraham desired, He commanded Abraham to take four birds and tame them in order to turn to him.

Mystically, Ruzbihān explains the four birds are of the inner realm that exists inside the human body: the intellect, the heart, the ego-self, and the spirit. He mystically interprets the sacrificing of each bird with the knife of the appropriate inner attitude on the mountain, which symbolizes the four foundations of Divine Reality. This metaphoric treatment represents Abraham’s central role as one who offered sacrifice in both the
Biblical and Qur’anic traditions. Also, each mountain can be seen as an altar upon which each of the human psyche’s four inner facets is offered to God and transformed. In his commentary on “put a portion of them on every mountain,” Ruzbihān alludes in mystical language even more specifically to the Divine geography constituting the Unseen domain’s four realms referred to above. Here again, we see the mountain’s spiritual symbolism as an altar. From here, Ruzbihān continues his discourse on “and call to them: They will come to thee (flying) with speed.” He metaphorically connects this call as “the voice of the secrecy infatuated love” used to call the four birds together to the Essence of Divine Lordship. He ends this passage by elucidating upon the direct relationship between Abraham’s state after his experience with the Divine and the two divine attributes cited at the end of the verse: al-ʿAzīz and al-Ḥakīm.

Nisābūrī, the mystic, gives this verse an allegorical and mystical interpretation to emphasize the divine oneness (tawḥīd). First, he compares the two requests by revealing the similarity of Abraham’s request (“show me....”) and that of Moses to see God openly. Then, Nisābūrī sees three important meanings of insight in God’s saying “Dost thou not then believe?”

In order to indicate the relationship between the beloved (Abraham) and the lover (God) and the role of the divine attributes, Nisābūrī presents a mystical and allegorical meaning for “take four birds,” which are the four human attributes made from the four elements, of which the clay was the substance from which humanity was formed. Each element, which is attached to its mate, produces two attributes. Therefore, when God asked Abraham to slaughter four birds, Nisābūrī gives them four symbolical attributes: the peacock represents miserliness, the raven refers to greed, the cock refers to sexual desire, and the eagle refers to human anger. Nisābūrī then mystically links “Tame them
“to turn to thee” with the essential meaning of 21:69 and interprets “put a portion of them on every hill and call to them” by allegorically relating each portion to the human faculty in order to symbolize the four mountains. He concludes this section by drawing a parallel allegorical interpretation between Abraham, the intimate friend of God, and the Prophet Muḥammad, the beloved of God, through God’s manifestation to both of them.

CONCLUSION

Nonetheless, with this identical method of interpretation, classical exegetes have provided similar hermeneutical works on both 6:74–79 and 2:260 to emphasize God’s oneness. This clearly indicates the degree to which their works are influenced and guided by the theological and mystical views of the various sects to which the mufassirūn belonged. The issue of whether theological hermeneutics can inform theology or vice versa has become crucial to understanding classical tafsīrs. Part of the reason for these different hermeneutical efforts is to indicate the importance of theology in tafsīr works. Therefore, the classical exegetes did not distinguish between exegetical methods and theological thinking, for they assumed that the exegetical methods could help the theological thinking make its claims more intelligible. Also, they claimed that along with the primary task of interpreting, theological and mystical hermeneutics could help exegetes show God’s unicity, as presented in the Abraham narratives, with precision and intelligibility. Hence, hermeneutics and theology can inform each other according to their epistemological limitations, as traced by classical Muslim dogma. However, it is important to free the interpretations of the Qur’ānic narratives from dogmatic theology in order to understand Islam’s historical context and heritage and to affirm the faith. This undertaking can also help develop theological doctrines and systems on a sounder basis,
for it provides some objectivity and firm criteria by which reading the scriptural narrative from a theological point of view provides a satisfactory meaning.

Allegory and metaphor were used in the most controversial types of Sufi interpretations. Most Sufi exegetes did their best to impart an acceptable interpretation in order to develop a theory of correspondence between the spiritual and the material worlds. Alfred further notes that this approach changes the Qurʾānic presentations of narratives into symbolic works, and the persons involved into symbols of virtue or vice.156

On the one hand, Ruzbihān’s use of metaphor as regards Abraham is very important. This method of interpretation was explained by Keeler, who claims that Sufi exegetes “should remove the rust of worldliness from the mirror of his soul or heart, polishing it so that it may reflect the truth.”157 Therefore, this metaphorical interpretation became prominent for Ruzbihān, who also advocated and embraced the vision of an esoteric dimension not “to delimit the interpretation of metaphors, but rather to better understand their import through elaboration or meditation.”158 Thus, for him the Qurʾān’s metaphorical language “was an object of profound reflection, a pathway that enabled believers to bridge the physical world of human activity to the spiritual realm of divine truth.”159 Therefore, as Lory states, this particular Sufi tafsīr explained the relationship between the practical intellect and the theoretical one:

The practical intellect deals with the particulars of external material world while the theoretical intellect has the potential to understand universal concepts received from the active intellect (al-ʿaql al-fāāl), either through a slow process of applied logic or immediate intuition (ḥadas), a potential which may or may not be actualized.160

158 Heath, “Metaphor.”
159 Ibid.
On the other hand, Nisābūrī’s model for allegorical interpretation and allegorizing scriptural texts was clearly derived from neo-Platonic sources. Under this philosophical influence, he allegorized the passages concerning Abraham to discover their esoteric meanings. Therefore, his mystical language indicates the sense of connecting Sufi exegesis with the Qur’ānic narrative and represents the major factor in his response to such stories as those of Abraham discussed above. In addition, his imagination caused his hermeneutical works to appear to be more suggestive than declarative, and his understandings of the Qur’ānic narratives to be mostly allusions (ishārāt) as opposed to explanations (tafsīrs). Thus, his works render the mystical level of understanding about the Qur’ānic narrative text and demonstrate his particular insights.

Based on these assumptions, both Nisābūrī and Ruzbihān represent classical Sufi commentators who used the Qur’ānic text and sources of self-seeking knowledge as fundamental tools to interpret the Qur’ānic narratives. Such exegesis shows “the resemblance between the subject matter of the treatise and the content of some Sufi works.”161 These characteristics distinguish Sufi hermeneutical works from other traditional tafsīrs “both in terms of content, which reflects Sufi ideas and concepts, and the variety of styles ranging from philosophical usage to popular preaching to literary narrative and poetry.”162 Therefore, Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have stated that the different methods of interpretation and the nature of the Qur’ānic text’s mystical vision were essential parts of the general culture and not of the object of the culture of early classical Islam.163

162 Sands (2006: 1).
CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have concentrated my research to provide a critical, analytical, and comparative study of the hermeneutical analysis used to understand the Qur'ānic narratives passages by Hūd ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Tha'labī, al-Rāzī, al-Ṭabrisī, Ruzbihān al-Baqlī, and Nisābūrī. I have demonstrated how these exegetes contextualized the available sources for them. I critically addressed these sources and analyzed the conditions that influenced these interpreters’ preconceptions in order to examine the genre of their understandings of those discourses that are related to these Qur'ānic narrative texts. I therefore see the need for a brief summary of the approaches, problems, critiques, methods, ideas, and motivations of the commentators whose tafsīrs are used in this dissertation. This I shall undertake in the rest of this conclusion.

Since the early days of Muslim history, tafsīr al-Qurʾān is the most important science in the Islamic tradition because it deals with the appropriate understanding of God’s word. Thus, the literary meaning of the term tafsīr is mainly concerned to explain what is meant by a difficult word, especially in Scripture. In addition, the muḥaffazūn considered that tafsīr al-Qurʾān is the discipline that covers the meaning, explanation, exposition, elucidation, explication, interpretation, and commentary of the Qurʾān. Therefore, the hermeneutical concepts of tafsīr works made by those exegetes indicate the Qur'ānic hermeneutics disciplines, even though the lack of a definite term for hermeneutics in the classical Qur'ānic tafsīr and its remarkable absence in ‘ulūm al-Qurʾān.

To understand properly the different exegetical methods of classical approaches to Qur'ānic hermeneutics with reference to narratives, I have realized that since the early
days of Muslim history, developing the contextual meaning of *ta’wil*, which was applied to hermeneutics, helped classical exegetes establish *tafsīr bi-l-ra’y, tafsīr bi-l-maṭhūr*, and other *tafsīr* schools. The use of reason to interpret the Qurʾānic text, which appeared via the development of Muslim sects, was also considered necessary. The two major groups associated with metaphorical and allegorical Qurʾānic interpretations were the Shiʿi among whom the Ismailis were the most enthusiastic practitioners of *ta’wil*, and the Sufis. I have pointed out that *ta’wil al-Qurʾān*, however, was seen as a challenge to early Muslim orthodoxy, which focused more on the Qurʾānic text’s literal meaning, by the Khariji sect due to its radical religio-political thought.

Therefore, I have concluded that the ongoing dynamism of the *tafsīr* works and varieties of interpretation produced by classical *mufassirūn* of the Qurʾān reflected the educational level of the Muslim community’s elite at a particular time. In general, for them, the Qurʾān is the divine book to which everything must be held.¹ Then, I have demonstrated that classical exegetes from different schools of thought—such as ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Thaʿlabī, al-Ṭahābī, al-Rāzī, Ruzbihān al-Baqālī, and Nisābūrī—claimed some priorities to explain the Qurʾānic narrative text. For a proper understanding of the Qurʾān, they asserted that an extensive knowledge of Qurʾānic language, Arabic idioms of Prophet Muḥammad’s time, classical Arabic (namely, grammar, lexicography, and literature), religious and mystical experiences, knowledge of the occasions of revelation, and the historical tradition of the prophetic ḥadīths—containing detailed descriptions of how the first generation of Muslims understood its injunctions and statements—were absolutely necessary.

¹ Suyūṭī (1988, II: 122).
Also, to understand properly the different exegetical approaches to the Qur’ānic narrative, it is quite clear that since the early days of Muslim history, classical exegetes—such as ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha’labī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī, and al-Rāzī—have developed new contextual meanings and functions of narrative from different perspectives and methods. At the etymological level, I have shown that these exegetes along with some lexicographers disputed the semantic ranges of qaṣaṣ, nabāʾ, ḥadīth, khabar, and ustūrah in order to provide a proper definition for narrative, one that could be applied to story or account. And yet I have noticed that their hermeneutical works show no difference between these various meanings because they claimed that all parts of the Qurʾān are considered to be on the same level. Concerning the translation of narrative as story or account, Izutsu and other scholars, with whom I agree, in this field assert that the Qurʾānic concepts have intensified the need to find a single word that can serve as an accurate translation for qaṣaṣ. Others say that such a statement is absurd, for different cultural situations will always be a major factor when it comes to categorizing the reality of words.

However, through my study, I have noticed that the classical exegetes’ methods of interpreting the Qurʾānic narrative were different. The eight selected exegetes for this study have used various sources in their attempts to do so; the majority of them considered that the Qurʾān itself is the fundamental source for interpreting the scriptural narratives. Related to this was their assertion that its primacy could not be challenged because all these exegetes believed that only the Qurʾān provides the necessary information to explain the apparent ambiguity found in some of its narrative passages. Other exegetes, however, claimed that additional sources were needed to provide the fullest possible understanding, especially when it came to those passages dealing with
earlier revealed religions. Thus, they viewed the prophetic ḥadīth as an additional and ultimate source. This approach helped to create a vast collection of ḥadīth material as a “parallel text,” one that includes narratives found in the Qurʾān that were then enriched with many extra-Qurʾānic details. But this does not mean that the classical exegetes collected such traditions without any regard for their authenticity. In fact, most of their works on the science of ḥadīth stressed their position, indicated their clear judgment on the isnād, and codified the numerous (and often contrasting) traditions before they claimed to provide a complete account of the topic. Moreover, they listed all of the earlier authorities and opinions on such questions. Despite these criticisms, however, their exegetical works were successful. In this consideration, the works of al-Ṭabarī, and al-Thaʿlabī became the most famous and useful collections of such stories in tafsīr literature.

Given that the concepts used to understand these Qurʾānic narratives are part of the mufassirūn’s conceptual framework (e.g., beliefs and desires), classical exegetes held that interpreting them was necessary in order to understand the Qurʾānic narrative more completely. They asserted that linguistics and Arabic language rules, theology, and mysticism are the most important sciences in tafsīr works. Therefore, all these approaches were considered major sources to interpret the Qurʾānic narrative.

Classical exegetes, who often disputed these Qurʾānic narratives’ main functions in their tafsīrs, nevertheless, strove to identify them. Most of their works show that these Qurʾānic narratives are connected with the religious and moral lessons that have been directed toward Muslims since the beginning of time. They assumed that these Qurʾānic narratives carry the message of truth, illustrate the moral lessons that could be taught via a complex event or a detail, and relate events that brought people into direct contact with reality in an unparalleled style. Therefore, they sought to emphasize that the
lessons to be learned have a strong connection with the Islamic tradition, especially on
the behavioral level—and, to a lesser extent, that Muslims should view these Qur’ānic
narratives as the major way of assisting Prophet Muḥammad and encouraging him to
carry out his mission with patience and faith.

At the literary level, the classical exegetes’ approaches were associated with
studying the Qur’ānic narratives’ literary text. Theoretically, they assumed that the
Qurʾān’s literary meaning was prior to any exegesis and, thus, represented a process
rather than a result. This indicated that everyone who knew Arabic and its inflection
(ʾiʿrāb) would also know the meaning of the Qurʾān’s narrative discourse and God’s
intended meaning. They advocated that Qurʾānic Arabic has many aspects (dhū wujūh), a
reality that allows various interpretations, all of which are applicable to the Qurʾān, and
that the text itself provides them.

Practically, I have remarked that the grammarians and lexicographers saw
themselves as exegetes and experts of the Qurʾān and considered their duty to apply
Arabic grammar and their linguistic expertise to explain the Qurʾān’s underlying
narrative message. According to them, Arabic’s grammatical rhetorical structures and
variant readings, which more or less exist independently of the Qurʾān, help the Qurʾānic
narrative text to convey its proper meaning. Also, for instance, lexicographers state that
applying the lexical section to the Qurʾānic narrative impacts the basic meaning of the
individual expressions, while the inflection section develops the analysis of the places of
those vocabularies in the structure of the whole phrase or verse.

However, applying grammatical and lexicographical structures to the Qurʾānic
narrative on the verses 2:31, 12:13–14, and 19:24, which I have discussed, provided new
understandings and helped the readers understand the method of those classical
commentators who delved into the Qur’ānic narrative’s grammatical and lexicographical structure in order to provide another great level of classical Muslim hermeneutics. In other words, all of these efforts sought to understand the Qur’ānic text’s essential elements, right down to the individual word’s place and etymology. In this context, I have noticed that the resulting *tafsīr* works cannot be distinguished from other types of literary analysis, such as commentaries on poetry. This use of *tafsīr* has promoted a worldview, a scholarly methodology, or an orientation.

In addition, *naẓm* was presented as proposed methodology designed to interpret the Qur’ānic narratives by making them more coherent and cohesive. Also, it was meant to maintain the Qur’ānic message’s rhetoric and eloquence as they originally appeared in the revealed words. Thus, according to the hermeneutical works of those classical exegetes on the verse 12:4, 77, and 82, they maintained that the notion of repetition, brevity, and conciseness all of these literary-level exegetical efforts have been applied to Qur’ānic narratives not only to preserve the scriptural text and its past interpretations, but also to accumulate a vast amount of information pertaining to its literary aspect.

The use of the textual narrative material in classical *tafsīrs* also represents the search for new meanings of the words used in the Qur’ānic stories. According to the classical exegetes, these meanings could be brought out only with the help of these external textual narratives. In this case, one has to consider how citing these external accounts must be viewed in the terms of establishing a fixed religious system. For this reason, many Qur’ānic texts, if they are interpreted literally in the context of this lexicographical material, may not provide a satisfactory meaning. This applies to many Qur’ānic stories, metaphorical and figurative language, several texts related to the
Unseen, and a significant part of the stories concerning the Biblical prophets mentioned in the Qur’ān.

Practically, according to the hermeneutical efforts made by Ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha’labī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī, and al-Rāzī on the verses 12:10, 19, and 21, it is quite clear that those exegetes have shown the importance of using textual narratives to understand the historical aspects of some ambiguities in the Qur’ānic narrative, and at the same time, emphasized the idea that these narrative texts are historically oriented. In another word, hermeneutically speaking, those exegetes have considered the textual narrative (as an historical aspect of exegesis) as well as indicated patterns and techniques common throughout the genre and their clear manifestation in their tafsīrs. In this context, they wanted to provide both the standard academic interpretations and, at the same time, use the textual narrative to explain the Qur’ānic stories’ historical aspects. At certain degree, those exegetes have successfully demonstrated and emphasized that historical aspect of the Qur’ānic narrative was achievable.

Also, in order to understand different theological aspects related to the Qur’ānic narrative text, Ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha’labī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī, and al-Rāzī used textual narratives and created an extensive canon of hermeneutical works on verses 12:15 and 37 to analyze their attempts by identifying the prophecy level of Joseph and other pre-Islamic prophets and indicating the basis of Joseph’s mission as a prophet. After they provided the level of prophecy through an etymological study of the terms nabī and rasūl and then discussed the difference between them and emphasized the prophecy level and Prophet Muḥammad’s connection with the Biblical prophets, those
exegetes, with some emphasis on their methodology, demonstrated the importance of using these textual narratives to explain how and to what degree this claim was achieved.

Nevertheless, due to these reasons, classical exegetes concluded that the Qur’ānic narrative serves as a source of history and theology by recounting the historical and theological facts and situations that brought about that particular situation. In short, they assumed that the main purpose of these Qur’ānic narratives was to preserve the history of previous prophets’ nations and their theological mission.

On one other side, classical exegetes have held that the Qur’ānic narrative can be considered one of the most important instruments of Islamic belief and ethics and, thus, tried to link its theological considerations to the major theme of tawḥīd, which is mentioned extensively in many Qur’ānic stories. They further asserted that these Qur’ānic narratives’ main purpose is to provide a complete interpretation of the theological level, one that would be relevant to all human beings and seen as the universal or primordial Islam’s submission to God, the creator of the universe.

At the exegetical level, Ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha’labī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī, and al-Rāzī provided extensive theological hermeneutical works on Prophet Abraham’s narrative, as mentioned in 6:74–79 and 2:260. Through a different level of understanding, I have noticed that ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Tha’labī have prioritized the use of textual narratives (parallel texts) to interpret theological arguments about God’s Oneness and God reviving the dead. Their aim is to present all the traditions that explain the general theological meaning of these accounts. Thus, they practiced tafsīr bi-l ma‘thūr to reflect their traditional method of tafsīr. However, most of their interpretations have been related to the verse’s asbāb an-nuzūl and made great
efforts to cite as many traditions as possible to fill the gap and provide answers to crucial theological issues.

Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, and al-Ṭabrisī however were interested in using reason in order to acquire divine knowledge. Both al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī, for instance, found the passage 6:74–79 to be the best example to prove that Abraham wanted to guide his people rationally to believe that these heavenly bodies had been created by God. Al-Ṭabrisī aim however has been to emphasize the Shi‘i point of view. He attempted to indicate the divine protection of all prophets, which was clearly occupied his hermeneutical works. In the verse 2:260, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, and al-Ṭabrisī have also discussed theological and dogmatic tafsīrs that reflected their own opinion of Abraham’s request. They discussed the major theological problem that has addressed the meaning of “Dost thou not then believe?” which reflects the issue of doubt played a major role among those classical exegetes who sought to emphasize God’s Oneness. All of them however have agreed that God protects His prophets from error and unbelief. Also, they emphasized that the issue of doubt is an act of unbelief and should not be attributed to the prophets, who are known to be protected from sin.

On the other side, Sufi exegetes considered the metaphorical and allegorical interpretation of the Qur’ān is the fundamental source of self-seeking knowledge. They insisted on discovering its deeper meanings to justify the Sufi worldview and find their ideas in these texts within an Islamic framework. These philosophical and mystical approaches allowed them to allegorize the Qur’ānic narrative text and find its esoteric meanings behind the literal ones. Therefore, for Sufis these stories became the central theme that reflects the general culture of early classical Sufi Islam. For instance, Sufi commentators considered that all Qur’ānic narratives are humanly accessible and
divinely mysterious. In addition, they sought to use the Qur’ānic stories of the prophets as vehicles to illustrate the states and stations of the mystical way. Therefore, their hermeneutical efforts differed from the traditional and rational tafsīrs because they applied their mystical and allegorical visions to the Qur’ānic narrative texts.

At the exegetical level, I have discussed how Ruzbihān and Nisābūrī provided extensive mystical and allegorical hermeneutical works on Prophet Abraham’s narrative, as mentioned in 6:74–79 and 2:260. Both Ruzbihān and Nisābūrī’s understandings of Abraham’s passages agrees with a multiphase of divine presences that contain the totality of Divine Reality with the use of metaphorical and allegorical interpretations as provided by the Sufi exegetes.

In the passage 6:74–79, Ruzbihān mystically interprets that God showed Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and earth in order that he may not be preoccupied with it but rather turn totally to God. Ruzbihān explains that this stage indicates that the knowledge of the Unseen helps to leave the soul free from anything but the vision of God. He further approaches the passage in order to realize the claim that Abraham wanted to be among those who have attained certainty (al-mūqinīn), intimate friendship (khullah), and reached the stage of the absolute unicity of Divine pre-eternity. Therefore, Ruzbihān’s presentation of the several stages helps to emphasize the relationship between the divine realms and the intimate knowledge of God. He asserts that through the cycle of self-direction, which brought Abraham to the station of diminution (maqām al-qilla), Abraham’s journey from self-direction to the Station of Certainty, in which God is seen as the sole agent behind the manifest order, comes from Abraham’s vision of the moon, the stage of intimate friendship, and Abraham’s perception of the absolute unicity of Divine pre-eternity eliminate of all secondary causes and intermediaries. Therefore,
after all these stages, Ruzbihān concludes that people, who hold this opinion, present this as one proof of God’s Oneness.

Similarly, Nisābūrī understands the passage 6:74–79 as continuous one. Allegorically, he interprets Abraham’s seeing the inner dimension of the kingdom of the heaven and earth to separate himself from Āzar and his people. Therefore, Nisābūrī indicates that what Abraham saw was not by an ordinary vision. He assumed that Abraham uses his inner sight (innermost heart) to see the star, the moon, and the sun. He further uses different allegorical and mystical language to explain the kingdom of the heaven and earth that Abraham saw are a mysterious, not the real one. Nisābūrī, therefore, concludes that after Abraham has separated himself from any direction of polytheism and egoism, he freed his heart from the net of conjecture and imagination.

In the passage 2:260, from a mystical standpoint, I have concluded that both Ruzbihān and Nisābūrī disputed the type of knowledge that Abraham wished to receive and discussed the different mystical meanings—attributed to the four birds and the mountains—and what they represent for the Sufi tradition in order to emphasize the idea of *tawḥīd*.

Ruzbihān’s mystical interpretation indicates that Abraham’s request to witness God in the clothing of the created world. Further, he explains that Abraham was asking God to show him the truth of the inner insights of divinity and lordship in order to increase his knowledge; leaving therein neither doubt nor uncertainty. Ruzbihān further emphasizes that Abraham’s request is an integral aspect of his spiritual station as the intimate friend of God so that he may attain to the condition of absolute unity. Then, Ruzbihān uses this passage to explain the difference between Abraham’s request and Moses’ request. Therefore, he interprets that when God knew exactly what kind of
knowledge that Abraham desired, He commanded Abraham to take four birds and tame them to turn to him. Mystically, Ruzbihān indicates that the four birds symbols of the inner realm, which exists inside the human body: the intellect, the heart, the ego-self, and the spirit. He, symbolically, interprets the sacrificing of each bird with the knife of the appropriate inner attitude on the mountain, which symbolizes the four foundations of Divine Reality. Also, he allegorizes each mountain can be seen as an platform upon which each of the human psyche’s four inner facets is offered to God and transformed. Ruzbihān continues his discourse on “and call to them: They will come to thee (flying) with speed.” He metaphorically connects this call as “the voice of the secrecy infatuated love” used to call the four birds together with the Essence of Divine Lordship. He ends this passage by elucidating upon the direct relationship between Abraham’s state after his experience with the Divine and the meanings of al-ʿAzīz and al-Ḥākīm, the two divine attributes cited at the end of the verse.

Nisābūrī provides an allegorical and mystical interpretation in order to emphasize the divine oneness (tawḥīd). He interprets the relationship between beloved (Abraham) and the lover (God) and the divine attributes’ role. He presents a mystical and allegorical meaning for “take four birds,” which are the four human attributes made from the clay from which humanity was formed. He indicates that each element, which is attached with its mate, produces two attributes. Therefore, when God asked Abraham to slaughter four birds, Nisābūrī provides them four symbolical attributes: the peacock represents miserliness, the raven refers to greed, the cock refers to sexual desire, and the eagle refers to human anger. Nisābūrī then mystically connects “Tame them to turn to thee” with the essential meaning of 21:69 and interprets “put a portion of them on every hill and call to them” by allegorically connecting each part to the human faculty in order to
symbolize the four mountains. He concludes this passage by drawing a parallel allegorical interpretation of Abraham, the intimate friend of God, and the Prophet Muḥammad, the beloved of God, with God’s manifestation to both of them.

Regardless of how the two stories linked to these passages were interpreted by the traditionalist (Ibn Muḥakkim, al-Ṭabarî, and al-Tha’labî), rationalists (al-Zamakhsharî, al-Rāzī, and al-Ṭabrisî), and Sufi (Ruzbihān and Nisābūrī) classical exegetes’ methods, the resulting differences created a new gap between the story’s text and the act of hermeneutics itself.

In general, it is quite clear that the classical mufassirūn faced one major difficulty: explaining what is mentioned in the Qur’ānic narrative text and accounting for what is not mentioned. This issue became more problematic with later exegetes, who proposed different methods. Usually, they provided new type of details after depending upon the original version of the story’s text. The citation of large sections of textual narrative in tafsîr works still exist—and along with the addition of some new accounts, grammatical, lexicographical, theological, and mystical interpretations linked to an older authority.

These extant chronological classical Qur’ānic exegeses represent a major form of literary production in Qur’ānic hermeneutics and narratives. This literary genre and its academic disciplines—especially its linguistic scope, theological affiliation, and mystical view—constitute and continue to be the major part of the future Qur’ānic sciences. This reality indicates quite clearly that each new generation of scholars reads and understands the Qur’ānic narratives within its members’ own frames of reference after projecting their doctrinal choices onto it.

Also, due to the ideological impact, the very act of interpretation is subjected to certain limitations provided by the interpreters, rather than by what is being interpreted.
Therefore, the majority of these hermeneutical works are considered new and based on the interpreter's point of view. But the degree to which the exegetical works are influenced and guided by the ideological views of the various sects depends upon the groups to which the mufassirūn belonged. This shows that the context of tafsīr al-Qurʾān has emphasized the importance of the dialectical relationship between the text and the readers. The mufassirūn, therefore, understand the text in accordance with the attributed beliefs. In this context, Stern concluded:

Interpreters confronted with texts that originated in historically remote times or in geographically faraway places may ascribe their own beliefs to the authors of these texts, or they may assign them beliefs they consider reasonable. They will then understand or infer what is written in accordance with the attributed beliefs. On the other hand, based on their understanding of the constituent parts of a given text, they may offer an account of what is written and infer the author's relevant beliefs.²

This hermeneutical process of preparedness permits the reader to constitute the text “not as the place of all possibilities but rather as the field of oriented possibilities.”³ This type of hermeneutical reading helps preserve the fundamental structure of the explicitness of the text and its spirit. In this context, Afsaruddin explains that such meaning is brought to light within the confines of the interpreter's existing beliefs and knowledge—a “pre-understanding.”⁴ Therefore, in this sense, classical tafsīr works are viewed as a continual process of understanding to enrich the Qurʾānic hermeneutics and the sciences of the Qurʾān in general.

Moreover, there is no doubt that these classical-era Qurʾānic commentaries are the most valuable mode of understanding, as an original source of meaning, their literary texts. Many critical studies have appeared to show that the exegetical works of the

³ Eco (1979: 76).
Qurʾān are simply “an act of appropriation in which the interpreter assimilates, adopts and comprehends a text on the horizon of his existence.”\textsuperscript{5} Also, such studies confirm the dialectical relationship between the text and its interpreters. According to these views, modern intellectuals want to imply that these hermeneutical works were the results of the reader’s effort to recover the text’s or passage’s hidden meaning. They claimed that “this hidden meaning is retrieved according to the reader’s prior conceptual and experimental knowledge that has been referred to as pre-understanding.”\textsuperscript{6} However, \textit{tafsīr al-Qurʾān}, in this sense, “is viewed as a kind of searching for the intention of God and his prophet, with the attendant requirement that may attempt to interpret such texts, or to establish an approach to tackle this task must take the above parameters into account.”\textsuperscript{7}

Thus, these various concepts of understanding represent an ongoing productive process through which interpretations of that which is being defined will invariably continue to change during the course of one’s learning process. Therefore, hermeneutical analyses could be considered as the key to understanding texts and tradition, as well as to accepting their intended meanings and claims of truth. The dialectical process between what the \textit{mufassir} provides and the act of hermeneutics becomes less important than what the text itself says. In this sense, the Qurʾānic text remains a complete entity, while the \textit{mufassir} does not. The historical contextualization of Qurʾānic exegesis in each linguistic expression must adapt itself to its audience’s cultural horizon in order to be intelligible. New readings of these \textit{tafsīrs} must, therefore, be based on an understanding of the historical background of their origins.

\textsuperscript{5} Rizvi (2006: 58).
\textsuperscript{6} Afsaruddin (2001: 316).
\textsuperscript{7} Yūnus (2000: 41).
However, the variety and versatility of Qur’ānic interpretations are so necessary to the interpretive process that most classical exegetes seek to strengthen the art of exegesis and develop the conception of the hermeneutical process vis-à-vis the Qur’ānic narrative. But, to some extent, it is crucial for researchers to pay more attention to the historical development of the Qur’ānic tafsīr in order to show how the Qur’ān takes meanings in their Islamic context and demonstrates the contextual gap between the contemporary reader and the socio-political and historical context. Also, researchers must consider the importance of the use of the new sciences—such as anthropology, the history of religions, semiotics, and epistemology—as frameworks to interpret the Qur’ānic text in light of today’s needs.

I have come to the end of my investigation of some aspects and examples of Qur’ān interpretation. I am, however, aware of the richness and complexity of my sources and the centrality of the personalities I selected for examination—Abraham, Moses, and Joseph—in the popular piety of Muslims throughout their long history. I have in this dissertation concentrated on classical hermeneutics with the view of preparing the grounds for further studies. The classical Qur’ān commentaries I used themselves call for further study and analysis. The eight tafsīrs I chose for my work are good representative samples of the major trends of Islamic thought at the time of their appearance. The trends they represent are sectarian (Sunni, Khariji, and Shi‘i) mystical and theological (Sufism and kalām), as well as traditional narratives going back to ancient Islamic and pre-Islamic traditions. The influences of these literary genres on modern and contemporary exegeses are beyond doubt. I therefore hope that other scholars would find my humble contribution to the science of scriptural hermeneutics helpful in discovering new horizons in Qur’ānic studies.
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SECONDARY SOURCES


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