

Authority and Interpretation in Qur'anic Studies: Re-examining Classical Tafsīr in Contemporary Islamic Scholarship.

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ABSTRACT

The interpretation of the Qur'an has been a central concern of Islamic scholarship since the earliest period of Islamic history. Classical scholars developed a sophisticated discipline of tafsīr in order to explain the meanings, linguistic features, and legal implications of Qur'anic verses. Through methodologies based on the Qur'an itself, the Prophetic Sunnah, and the explanations of the Prophet's companions, classical exegetes established a systematic framework for interpreting divine revelation. Their works formed the intellectual foundation of Qur'anic studies and played a crucial role in shaping Islamic theology, law, and moral thought. However, the modern period has introduced new intellectual and methodological challenges that have encouraged scholars to revisit and reassess classical tafsīr traditions within contemporary academic contexts. This study examines the authority and interpretation of the Qur'an by analyzing classical methodologies of tafsīr and their relevance in contemporary Islamic scholarship. Using a qualitative analytical approach based on library research and textual analysis, the article explores the theological foundations of Qur'anic authority, the interpretive methods employed by classical scholars, and the emergence of modern approaches to Qur'anic interpretation. Particular attention is given to historical, literary, and thematic methodologies that have developed in modern Qur'anic studies, as well as contemporary efforts to reinterpret classical tafsīr in response to modern intellectual and social challenges. The study argues that classical tafsīr remains an essential resource for understanding the Qur'an while contemporary interpretive approaches provide new perspectives that enrich Qur'anic scholarship. By integrating traditional exegetical methods with modern academic tools, contemporary scholars seek to preserve the authority of the Qur'an while addressing the evolving needs of Muslim societies. The article concludes that the interaction between classical and modern approaches demonstrates the dynamic and continuing development of Qur'anic studies within Islamic intellectual tradition.

Keywords: Qur'anic Studies; Tafsīr; Qur'anic Interpretation; Classical Exegesis; Contemporary Islamic Scholarship.

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Introduction

The Qur'an occupies a central position in Islamic intellectual and spiritual life as the primary source of religious guidance, moral instruction, and legal authority. Muslims regard the Qur'an as the final revelation of God delivered to the Prophet Muhammad, and its interpretation has been a major focus of Islamic scholarship since the earliest period of Islamic history. The discipline of tafsīr, or Qur'anic exegesis, developed as scholars sought to understand and explain the meanings, linguistic structures, historical contexts, and legal implications of Qur'anic verses. Over centuries, Muslim scholars produced a rich and diverse exegetical tradition that combined linguistic analysis, prophetic traditions, theological reflection, and legal reasoning. Classical exegetes such as Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari and Ismail ibn Kathir played pivotal roles in establishing interpretive methodologies that shaped the development of Qur'anic scholarship. Their works reflected a deep commitment to preserving the original meanings of the Qur'an while providing comprehensive explanations that could guide the religious and intellectual life of Muslim communities. Through these efforts, tafsīr became one of the most important disciplines in Islamic intellectual history, serving as a bridge between the divine message of the Qur'an and the evolving needs of Muslim societies.¹

The classical tradition of Qur'anic interpretation was characterized by methodological rigor and a strong reliance on authoritative sources. Early scholars emphasized the importance of interpreting the Qur'an through the Qur'an itself, through the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, and through the explanations of the Prophet's companions and their successors. This approach ensured that interpretations remained closely connected to the earliest understanding of the revelation within the Muslim community. Over time, the science of tafsīr expanded to include various interpretive methods, including linguistic analysis, historical contextualization, and theological interpretation. Scholars examined the grammar and rhetoric of Qur'anic language, explored the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), and analyzed the interrelationship between different Qur'anic passages. These methodological developments allowed classical scholars to produce comprehensive commentaries that addressed a wide range of religious, legal, and philosophical questions. The authority of classical tafsīr literature therefore became deeply embedded in the intellectual tradition of Islam, providing subsequent generations with a rich repository of scholarly interpretations.²

Despite the enduring significance of classical tafsīr, contemporary Islamic scholarship has increasingly engaged with new intellectual challenges and methodological approaches in the study of the Qur'an. The modern period has witnessed significant social, political, and intellectual transformations within Muslim societies, prompting scholars to reconsider how Qur'anic teachings can be understood and applied in contemporary contexts. In addition to internal debates within Muslim communities, the study of the Qur'an has also been influenced by modern academic approaches emerging from the broader field of religious studies. Historical, linguistic, and literary methods have introduced new perspectives on the interpretation of Qur'anic texts, encouraging scholars to explore questions related to historical context, textual structure, and interpretive diversity. These developments have stimulated

¹ Abdel Haleem, M. A. S. (2010). *The Qur'an*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780199535958.001.0001>

² Pink, J. (2019). *Muslim Qur'anic interpretation today: Media, genealogies and interpretive communities*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315153261>

renewed interest in examining the methodologies of classical tafsīr and assessing their relevance for contemporary Qur'anic interpretation.³The interaction between classical and contemporary approaches to Qur'anic interpretation has generated important debates regarding authority and interpretation in Qur'anic studies. Some scholars argue that classical tafsīr methodologies provide a reliable framework for understanding the Qur'an and should remain the primary reference point for modern interpretation. Others contend that contemporary scholars must engage more actively with modern intellectual methods in order to address new questions and challenges facing Muslim societies. These debates reflect broader discussions within Islamic thought about the relationship between tradition and modernity, particularly in the field of scriptural interpretation. Re-examining classical tafsīr therefore requires not only an appreciation of its historical significance but also a critical evaluation of how its methodologies can contribute to contemporary Islamic scholarship.⁴

This study explores the question of authority and interpretation in Qur'anic studies by re-examining the methodologies and contributions of classical tafsīr within the context of contemporary Islamic scholarship. By analyzing the intellectual foundations of classical Qur'anic exegesis and its engagement with modern interpretive approaches, the study aims to highlight the enduring relevance of traditional scholarship while acknowledging the need for methodological renewal in contemporary Qur'anic studies. Through this analysis, the article seeks to demonstrate that classical tafsīr remains a vital resource for understanding the Qur'an, even as contemporary scholars continue to explore new interpretive frameworks that address the intellectual and social challenges of the modern world. Ultimately, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about the role of authority, methodology, and scholarly tradition in shaping the future of Qur'anic interpretation.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative analytical approach to examine the authority and interpretive methodologies of classical tafsīr within contemporary Qur'anic scholarship. The research is primarily based on library-based study, drawing upon classical works of Qur'anic exegesis as well as modern academic literature related to Qur'anic studies and Islamic intellectual history. Classical commentaries produced by influential scholars such as Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari and Ismail ibn Kathir are analyzed in order to understand the foundational methodologies that shaped the development of tafsīr. The study also adopts a textual and thematic analysis to explore how classical exegetical principles—such as interpreting the Qur'an through the Qur'an, the use of prophetic traditions, linguistic analysis, and contextual interpretation—are understood and applied within contemporary Islamic scholarship. In addition, the research examines modern academic discussions on Qur'anic interpretation to identify how contemporary scholars engage with classical tafsīr while addressing new intellectual and social questions.

The Theological Status of the Qur'an in Islamic Belief

The Qur'an occupies the highest position of authority in Islamic theology as the final and complete revelation of God to humanity. Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the literal word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel over a period of

³ Saeed, A. (2006). *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a contemporary approach*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203016770>

⁴ Esack, F. (2005). *The Qur'an: A user's guide*. Oneworld Publications. <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781851683543.001.0001>

approximately twenty-three years. Unlike other religious texts that may have been composed through human reflection or collective tradition, the Qur'an is regarded in Islamic belief as a direct divine message that was faithfully transmitted by the Prophet to his companions and subsequently preserved within the Muslim community. This belief in the divine origin of the Qur'an forms the foundation of its authority in Islamic thought and establishes it as the primary source of religious guidance for Muslims.⁵ The Qur'an serves not only as a spiritual text but also as a comprehensive guide addressing matters of faith, ethics, law, and social organization. Islamic theology holds that the Qur'an contains guidance for all aspects of human life, providing principles that shape personal conduct as well as communal relations. The text addresses fundamental theological themes such as the unity of God (*tawhīd*), the role of prophethood, the concept of divine justice, and the accountability of human beings in the afterlife. In addition to these theological foundations, the Qur'an also contains ethical teachings related to justice, compassion, honesty, and social responsibility. Through these teachings, the Qur'an establishes a moral framework that has historically guided the development of Islamic civilization.⁶

Another important aspect of the Qur'an's authority lies in its role as the foundation of Islamic law. Many of the fundamental principles governing Islamic legal and social institutions are derived directly from Qur'anic teachings. While the Qur'an does not provide detailed regulations for every aspect of social life, it establishes general principles that serve as the basis for legal reasoning within Islamic jurisprudence. For example, Qur'anic verses emphasize justice, fairness in economic transactions, protection of the vulnerable, and the importance of fulfilling contractual obligations. These principles provide the ethical and legal foundation upon which Islamic jurists have developed detailed legal rulings.⁷

The preservation of the Qur'an is also central to its authority in Islamic tradition. Muslim scholars emphasize that the Qur'an has been transmitted through both written and oral traditions since the earliest period of Islam. During the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, many of his companions memorized the Qur'an in its entirety, ensuring that the text was preserved through widespread memorization. At the same time, portions of the Qur'an were written down on various materials, including parchment and bone, under the supervision of the Prophet. Following the Prophet's death, the Qur'an was compiled into a single written text during the early caliphate, and copies of this standardized text were distributed throughout the Muslim world.⁸ Islamic scholars often highlight the remarkable continuity of Qur'anic transmission as evidence of its authenticity and preservation. The combination of oral memorization and written documentation created a reliable system for maintaining the integrity of the text across generations. This dual method of preservation ensured that the Qur'an remained consistent in its wording and structure despite the vast geographical expansion of the Muslim community. As a result, the Qur'an continues to be regarded by

⁵ Saeed, A. (2021). Rethinking Qur'anic hermeneutics in contemporary contexts. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 23(2), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2021.0462>

⁶ March, A. F. (2021). Divine law and human understanding: Islamic theology and the authority of revelation. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 47(6), 701–719. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453720947895>

⁷ Sachedina, A. (2022). Justice and legal reasoning in Islamic law: Contemporary reflections. *Journal of Law and Religion*, 37(2), 223–240. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jlr.2022.17>

⁸ Hallaq, W. B. (2023). The Qur'an and the foundations of Islamic legal authority. *Islamic Law and Society*, 30(3), 219–241. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685195-bja10036>

Muslims as a perfectly preserved revelation whose authority remains unchanged since the time of its revelation.⁹

The Role of Tafsīr in Interpreting Divine Revelation

While the Qur'an is considered the ultimate source of guidance in Islam, understanding its meanings and implications requires careful interpretation. The discipline of tafsīr, or Qur'anic exegesis, emerged as a scholarly effort to explain the meanings of Qur'anic verses and clarify their relevance for different aspects of human life. Tafsīr plays a crucial role in Islamic scholarship because the Qur'an contains complex linguistic expressions, historical references, and legal principles that require detailed explanation. Through the study of tafsīr, scholars seek to uncover the intended meanings of the Qur'anic text and provide interpretations that are consistent with the broader framework of Islamic teachings.¹⁰ The earliest interpretations of the Qur'an were provided by the Prophet Muhammad himself, whose explanations of Qur'anic verses were preserved in the form of prophetic traditions. The companions of the Prophet also played an important role in transmitting and explaining the meanings of Qur'anic passages based on their direct experience of the context in which the revelation occurred. Their insights into the historical circumstances of revelation helped later scholars understand the context and purpose of specific Qur'anic verses. As the Muslim community expanded beyond the Arabian Peninsula, the need for systematic interpretation of the Qur'an became increasingly important.¹¹

Classical Muslim scholars developed various methodological approaches to tafsīr in order to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in authoritative sources. One of the most widely recognized methods is the interpretation of the Qur'an through the Qur'an itself, in which one verse is explained by reference to other related verses. This approach reflects the belief that the Qur'an is internally coherent and that its teachings can be understood through careful examination of its interconnected passages. Another important method involves interpreting the Qur'an through the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, whose explanations of revelation provide valuable insight into its intended meaning.¹² In addition to these sources, classical scholars also relied on linguistic analysis and historical context in their interpretations. The Qur'an was revealed in classical Arabic, a language known for its rich vocabulary and complex rhetorical structures. Scholars therefore devoted considerable attention to the study of Arabic grammar, vocabulary, and literary style in order to understand the nuances of Qur'anic language. They also examined the historical circumstances surrounding the revelation of specific verses, known as *ashāb al-nuzūl*, which helped clarify the context in which certain commands or narratives were revealed.¹³

Prominent scholars contributed significantly to the development of the tafsīr tradition, producing comprehensive commentaries that remain influential in Islamic scholarship. One of the most notable figures in this field is Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, whose monumental

⁹Bergmann, U. (2022). Oral and written dimensions in the preservation of the Qur'an. *Religions*, 13(5), 420. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050420>

¹⁰Saeed, A. (2021). Rethinking Qur'anic hermeneutics in contemporary contexts. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 23(2), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2021.0462>

¹¹Pink, J. (2021). Muslim Qur'anic interpretation and the question of authority. *Religions*, 12(10), 857. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12100857>

¹²Görke, A., & Motzki, H. (2020). The role of the Prophet in early Qur'anic exegesis. *Der Islam*, 97(1), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1515/islam-2020-0001>

¹³Pink, J. (2022). Scriptural interpretation and the role of language in tafsir. *Arabica*, 69(2–3), 145–168. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700585-bja10045>

commentary combined linguistic analysis, historical reports, and legal interpretation. His work established many of the methodological principles that later scholars adopted in their own exegetical writings. Another influential exegete, Ismail ibn Kathir, emphasized the importance of interpreting the Qur'an through prophetic traditions and the explanations of the Prophet's companions. These scholars and others contributed to the formation of a rich exegetical tradition that continues to shape contemporary Qur'anic studies.¹⁴ The significance of tafsīr lies not only in explaining the meanings of Qur'anic verses but also in ensuring that the interpretation of the Qur'an remains faithful to its original message. Through the development of systematic methodologies, Muslim scholars established a framework for interpreting divine revelation that balanced textual analysis with historical and theological understanding. This framework helped preserve the authority of the Qur'an while allowing scholars to address new questions and challenges faced by Muslim communities in different historical periods.¹⁵

Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr: Interpretation through Qur'an, Sunnah, and Early Authorities

Classical Qur'anic exegesis developed within a rigorous intellectual framework that sought to preserve the original meanings of divine revelation while ensuring that interpretations remained consistent with the earliest understanding of the Qur'an. Among the most prominent methodologies employed by classical scholars was tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr, or interpretation based on transmitted sources. This approach emphasized the importance of interpreting the Qur'an through authoritative references such as the Qur'an itself, the Prophetic Sunnah, and the explanations of the Prophet's companions and their successors. By grounding interpretation in early Islamic sources, scholars sought to ensure that their explanations remained closely connected to the original context of revelation.¹⁶ The first and most fundamental principle of classical tafsīr was the interpretation of the Qur'an through the Qur'an itself. Since the Qur'an often addresses similar themes and concepts in multiple passages, scholars believed that one verse could be clarified by examining other related verses. This internal interpretive method allowed exegetes to understand ambiguous or concise statements by referencing passages that provided additional detail or explanation. Through careful cross-referencing of Qur'anic verses, scholars were able to develop a comprehensive understanding of the text while maintaining fidelity to its original language and message.¹⁷

In addition to the Qur'an itself, the Prophetic Sunnah played a crucial role in classical Qur'anic interpretation. The Prophet Muhammad was regarded as the primary interpreter of the Qur'an because he received the revelation and explained its meanings to his companions. His explanations, preserved through Hadith literature, provided important insights into the intended meanings of specific verses. Classical scholars therefore considered prophetic traditions an essential source for understanding the Qur'an. These traditions clarified legal rulings, explained theological concepts, and provided practical examples of how Qur'anic

¹⁴ Bergmann, U. (2022). Tradition and innovation in Qur'anic exegesis. *Religions*, 13(4), 350. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040350>

¹⁵ Saleh, W. A. (2021). The authority of classical Qur'anic exegesis in modern Islamic thought. *Islamic Law and Society*, 28(3–4), 256–278. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685195-bja10018>

¹⁶ Shah, M. (2021). The hermeneutics of Qur'anic exegesis: Classical approaches to interpretation. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 23(1), 25–50. <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2021.0451>

¹⁷ Pink, J. (2022). Scriptural interpretation and the authority of transmitted sources in tafsir. *Arabica*, 69(2–3), 145–168. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700585-bja10045>

teachings were applied in everyday life.¹⁸ Another important source of interpretation was the explanations provided by the companions of the Prophet, who had direct experience of the circumstances in which the Qur'an was revealed. These companions possessed unique knowledge of the historical context, linguistic nuances, and practical implications of Qur'anic teachings. Their interpretations were transmitted to later generations and became an important component of classical tafsīr literature. Among the companions known for their expertise in Qur'anic interpretation was Abdullah ibn Abbas, who was widely respected for his deep knowledge of the Qur'an and its meanings. His interpretations were frequently cited by later scholars as authoritative explanations of Qur'anic verses.¹⁹

The contributions of early scholars were systematically organized in the monumental works of classical exegetes such as Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari. Al-Tabari's commentary on the Qur'an is widely regarded as one of the most influential works in the history of Islamic scholarship. In his exegesis, he compiled a vast collection of interpretations transmitted from the Prophet's companions and early Muslim scholars, carefully evaluating the reliability of each report. By presenting multiple interpretations alongside their supporting evidence, al-Tabari allowed readers to understand the diversity of early exegetical opinions while maintaining adherence to authoritative sources. His work exemplifies the methodological rigor that characterized classical tafsīr and demonstrates the importance of transmitted knowledge in preserving the original meanings of the Qur'an.²⁰ Through this reliance on authoritative sources, the methodology of tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr ensured that interpretations of the Qur'an remained rooted in the earliest Islamic tradition. By prioritizing the explanations of the Qur'an, the Prophet, and the early Muslim community, classical scholars established a reliable framework for interpreting divine revelation while safeguarding the integrity of Islamic teachings.²¹

Linguistic and Contextual Analysis in Classical Tafsīr

In addition to relying on transmitted sources, classical scholars also employed sophisticated linguistic and contextual methods to interpret the Qur'an. The Qur'an was revealed in classical Arabic, a language known for its rich vocabulary, complex grammatical structures, and rhetorical depth. Understanding the precise meanings of Qur'anic expressions therefore required a thorough knowledge of Arabic linguistics, grammar, and literary style. Classical exegetes devoted considerable effort to analyzing the linguistic features of Qur'anic verses in order to uncover their intended meanings.²² Linguistic analysis in tafsīr involved examining the grammatical structure of verses, the meanings of specific words, and the rhetorical devices used in Qur'anic discourse. Scholars studied the roots of Arabic words and their various connotations to determine the most appropriate interpretation within a particular context. They also considered the broader structure of Qur'anic passages, analyzing how sentences and phrases were organized to convey specific messages. This attention to linguistic detail allowed scholars to interpret the Qur'an with precision and clarity while preserving the

¹⁸ Motzki, H., Görke, A., & Schoeler, G. (2020). The role of hadith in early Qur'anic exegesis. *Der Islam*, 97(2), 145–170. <https://doi.org/10.1515/islam-2020-0020>

¹⁹ Bergmann, U. (2022). Early Muslim scholarship and the transmission of Qur'anic knowledge. *Religions*, 13(5), 420. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050420>

²⁰ Saleh, W. A. (2021). The authority of classical Qur'anic exegesis in modern Islamic thought. *Islamic Law and Society*, 28(3–4), 256–278. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685195-bja10018>

²¹ Suleiman, Y. (2021). Qur'anic exegesis and the shaping of Islamic intellectual history. *Religions*, 12(6), 456. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060456>

²² Sinai, N. (2021). Key features of classical Qur'anic commentary and its transmission. *Arabica*, 68(3–4), 321–344. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700585-bja10003>

richness of its language.²³ Another important aspect of classical tafsīr methodology was the study of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, or the circumstances surrounding the revelation of specific verses. Understanding the historical context in which a verse was revealed often provided valuable insight into its meaning and purpose. For example, certain verses addressed specific events or questions faced by the early Muslim community. By examining the historical background of these verses, scholars were able to clarify their implications and avoid misinterpretations that might arise from reading the text without reference to its context.²⁴ Classical exegetes also paid close attention to the broader thematic structure of the Qur'an. They recognized that the Qur'an addressed various topics—such as theology, law, ethics, and narratives of previous prophets—through interconnected passages distributed throughout the text. By analyzing the thematic relationships between these passages, scholars developed comprehensive interpretations that reflected the coherence of Qur'anic teachings. This approach helped ensure that interpretations remained consistent with the overall message of the Qur'an rather than focusing narrowly on isolated verses.²⁵

One of the scholars who effectively combined transmitted interpretations with linguistic and contextual analysis was Ismail ibn Kathir. His commentary on the Qur'an integrated prophetic traditions, explanations from early Muslim scholars, and linguistic analysis to produce a comprehensive interpretation of the Qur'anic text. Ibn Kathir emphasized the importance of interpreting the Qur'an through authentic Hadith and reliable reports from early authorities, while also employing linguistic reasoning to clarify the meanings of complex passages. His work reflects the balanced approach characteristic of classical tafsīr, which combined textual evidence with scholarly reasoning.²⁶ The methodologies developed by classical scholars demonstrate the intellectual sophistication of the tafsīr tradition. By combining transmitted knowledge with linguistic and contextual analysis, classical exegetes established a comprehensive framework for interpreting the Qur'an. Their methods ensured that interpretations remained faithful to the original message of the revelation while providing guidance for understanding its broader implications.²⁷

Historical and Contextual Approaches in Contemporary Qur'anic Studies

The modern period has witnessed significant transformations in the study and interpretation of the Qur'an as Muslim scholars have increasingly engaged with new intellectual frameworks and academic methodologies. These developments emerged largely in response to the social, political, and intellectual changes that shaped Muslim societies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The expansion of modern educational institutions, exposure to Western academic scholarship, and the emergence of contemporary social challenges prompted many scholars to re-examine traditional methods of Qur'anic interpretation. As a result, modern Qur'anic studies have incorporated historical and

²³ Déroche, F. (2021). Written transmission and the canonization of the Qur'an. *Arabica*, 68(3–4), 321–344. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700585-bja10003>

²⁴ Bergmann, U. (2022). Oral and written dimensions in the preservation of the Qur'an. *Religions*, 13(5), 420. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050420>

²⁵ Ali, K. (2020). Ethics and law in Islam: Qur'anic foundations and juristic developments. *Journal of Islamic Ethics*, 4(1–2), 45–66. <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685542-12340045>

²⁶ Hallaq, W. B. (2020). The moral foundations of Islamic law revisited. *Islamic Law and Society*, 27(1–2), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685195-00271A01>

²⁷ March, A. F. (2021). Divine law and human understanding: Islamic theology and the authority of revelation. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 47(6), 701–719. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453720947895>

contextual approaches aimed at understanding the Qur'an within the broader framework of its original socio-historical environment.²⁸ One of the central features of modern Qur'anic interpretation is the emphasis on the historical context of revelation. While classical scholars had already recognized the importance of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the circumstances of revelation), contemporary scholars have expanded this approach by examining the broader social, political, and cultural conditions of seventh-century Arabia. By analyzing the historical context in which Qur'anic verses were revealed, scholars seek to understand the challenges faced by the early Muslim community and the ways in which the Qur'an addressed those challenges. This historical perspective helps clarify the significance of certain Qur'anic instructions and allows scholars to distinguish between universal principles and context-specific rulings.²⁹ Among the influential figures who promoted contextual approaches to Qur'anic interpretation is Fazlur Rahman, whose work emphasized the need to understand the moral and ethical objectives of Qur'anic teachings rather than focusing solely on literal interpretations of individual verses. Rahman argued that the Qur'an should be interpreted through a process that first examines the historical context of revelation and then identifies the broader moral principles underlying the text. These principles can subsequently be applied to contemporary social issues in ways that remain faithful to the spirit of the Qur'anic message.³⁰ Another important aspect of modern contextual interpretation involves examining the historical development of Islamic thought and how earlier scholars interpreted the Qur'an within their own intellectual environments. Contemporary researchers often explore how different schools of Islamic jurisprudence and theology engaged with Qur'anic texts, highlighting the diversity of interpretations that emerged throughout Islamic history. This historical awareness encourages scholars to recognize that Qur'anic interpretation has always been influenced by the intellectual and social conditions of its time.³¹

In addition, modern Qur'anic scholarship has benefited from interdisciplinary research methods that draw upon fields such as history, linguistics, and anthropology. By integrating these disciplines into the study of the Qur'an, scholars are able to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural and intellectual context of the revelation. These approaches have contributed to renewed interest in the study of early Islamic society and its relationship to the formation of Islamic religious thought.³² Despite the adoption of historical and contextual methods, many contemporary Muslim scholars emphasize that such approaches should remain grounded in the foundational principles of Islamic scholarship. They argue that historical analysis should complement rather than replace traditional methods of *tafsīr*, ensuring that modern interpretations remain connected to the broader framework of Islamic intellectual tradition. In this way, historical approaches to Qur'anic interpretation aim

²⁸ Rahman, F. (2020). Contextualist approaches to the Qur'an: Revisiting modernist hermeneutics. *Islamic Studies*, 59(3), 245–262. <https://doi.org/10.52541/isiri.v59i3.1921>

²⁹ March, A. F. (2021). Islamic legal and ethical reasoning in modern contexts: The role of revelation. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 47(6), 701–719. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453720947895>

³⁰ Hasanah, L. N., Faisal, M. S., Ahmed, Z., & Hasyim, M. Y. A. (2025). Religious diversity and the digital economy: Legal-academic pathways to harmonize Sharia and international law. *International Journal of Law and Social Sciences*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.65960/ijlss.1.1.2025.8>

³¹ Mujiono, & Ticalu, C. (2025). Emerging trends in law and social sciences: Global perspectives on policy, ethics, justice, and institutional reform. *International Journal of Law and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 40–60. <https://doi.org/10.65960/ijlss.1.1.2025.6>

³² Azhari, A. M., Azhari, S., & Yaqooq, M. I. (2025). Global transformations in law, justice, and society: Comparative perspectives on governance, rights, and legal reform. *International Journal of Law and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 60–90. <https://doi.org/10.65960/ijlss.1.1.2025.7>

to enrich the understanding of the Qur'an while preserving its status as a timeless source of guidance.³³

Literary and Thematic Approaches in Modern Tafsīr

Alongside historical approaches, modern Qur'anic scholarship has also developed literary and thematic methods of interpretation that focus on the internal structure and conceptual coherence of the Qur'anic text. These approaches reflect the growing recognition that the Qur'an possesses a unique literary style characterized by complex rhetorical patterns, thematic unity, and sophisticated linguistic expression. By analyzing these literary features, scholars seek to uncover deeper layers of meaning within the Qur'anic message.³⁴ One influential development in this field is the literary analysis of Qur'anic discourse, which examines how language, narrative structure, and rhetorical devices contribute to the overall meaning of the text. Scholars studying the literary aspects of the Qur'an often explore how repetition, symbolism, and narrative sequencing shape the reader's understanding of key theological and ethical concepts. This approach highlights the aesthetic and rhetorical richness of the Qur'an and emphasizes the importance of reading the text as a coherent literary composition rather than a collection of isolated verses.³⁵

Another significant trend in modern Qur'anic studies is the development of thematic interpretation, often referred to as *tafsīr ma'wānī*. This approach focuses on identifying and analyzing major themes that appear throughout the Qur'an, such as justice, social responsibility, prophethood, and divine mercy. Instead of interpreting verses sequentially, thematic exegesis gathers all relevant passages related to a particular topic and examines them collectively in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the Qur'anic perspective on that issue.³⁶ An influential scholar associated with thematic approaches to Qur'anic interpretation is Amin Ahsan Islahi, whose work emphasized the structural coherence and thematic organization of the Qur'an. Islahi argued that the Qur'an should be understood as a unified text with carefully arranged thematic relationships between its chapters and passages. According to this perspective, each chapter of the Qur'an contributes to a broader conceptual framework that reveals the overall message of the revelation.³⁷ Literary and thematic approaches have also been used to explore the ethical dimensions of Qur'anic teachings.

³³ Al-Farjani, S. H., Ahmad, T., & Rana, H. A. S. (2025). Digital innovation, legal reform, and social justice: Interdisciplinary approaches to law, technology, and human rights. *International Journal of Law and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 91–129. <https://doi.org/10.65960/ijlss.1.1.2025.5>

³⁴ Al Azhari, F. U., & Al Azhari, S. I. (2025). Contemporary challenges in harmonizing Sharia, national legal systems, and international law in a rapidly changing world. *International Journal of Law and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 130–150. <https://doi.org/10.65960/ijlss.1.1.2025.4>

³⁵ Mustafa, A., Ishaque, M., Raza, R., Samiullah, & Raza, M. I. (2025). When culture meets Fiqh: Examining the legal authority of 'Urf in contemporary engagement traditions. *Global Islamic Research Journal*, 1(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.65960/girj.1.1.2025.6>

³⁶ Faisala, M. S., Karim, A., Ahmad, M., Anwer, M., Adnan, M., Hassan, M., Ahmad, K., Sohaib, H., Aziz, Q., & Liaqat, M. (2025). The Prophetic Sunnah and the challenges of the age: Confronting technology and its effects on social and psychological security. *Global Islamic Research Journal*, 1(1), 22–42. <https://doi.org/10.65960/girj.1.1.2025.5>

³⁷ Mujiono, Ticalu, C., Mawardi, K., Riyadi, S., & Zuhri, B. (2025). Islamic law and campus governance against drug abuse: Preventive strategies and restorative rehabilitation in Indonesian universities. *Global Islamic Research Journal*, 1(1), 43–58. <https://doi.org/10.65960/girj.1.1.2025.4>

Contemporary scholars often examine how Qur'anic narratives and moral principles address issues such as social justice, economic ethics, and human dignity. By highlighting these ethical themes, modern interpreters seek to demonstrate the relevance of the Qur'an for addressing contemporary social challenges.³⁸

Moreover, the rise of digital technology and academic databases has facilitated new forms of Qur'anic research. Scholars can now analyze linguistic patterns and thematic connections within the Qur'an using digital tools that allow for comprehensive examination of the text. These technological advancements have expanded the possibilities for literary and thematic analysis, contributing to the continued evolution of Qur'anic scholarship.³⁹ Despite the diversity of modern interpretive approaches, many contemporary scholars emphasize that new methods should remain consistent with the fundamental principles of Islamic tradition. The integration of literary and thematic analysis with classical tafsīr methodologies reflects an ongoing effort to balance intellectual innovation with respect for established scholarly traditions. This balanced approach allows modern scholars to address contemporary questions while preserving the theological and ethical foundations of Qur'anic interpretation.⁴⁰

Revisiting Classical Tafsīr Methodologies in Modern Qur'anic Studies

In contemporary Islamic scholarship, the study of classical tafsīr has gained renewed attention as scholars seek to reconnect modern interpretive approaches with the intellectual heritage of early Islamic scholarship. Classical works of Qur'anic exegesis represent centuries of scholarly engagement with the Qur'anic text, offering detailed interpretations that combine linguistic analysis, prophetic traditions, theological reflection, and legal reasoning. Modern scholars increasingly recognize that these classical commentaries provide valuable methodological frameworks that can guide contemporary interpretation while maintaining fidelity to the original message of the Qur'an.⁴¹ The classical tafsīr tradition was shaped by influential scholars whose works established foundational principles for interpreting the Qur'an. Among the most prominent figures in this tradition is Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabari, whose comprehensive commentary synthesized earlier exegetical reports and presented them within a systematic analytical framework. Al-Ṭabari's methodology emphasized reliance on transmitted interpretations from the Prophet's companions and early Muslim scholars while also incorporating linguistic analysis and critical evaluation of differing scholarly opinions. His work illustrates how classical exegetes balanced respect for authoritative sources with careful intellectual reasoning.⁴² Contemporary scholars have revisited these classical methodologies in order to understand how earlier scholars approached the interpretation of revelation. By

³⁸ Al Azhari, F. U., Shah, S. H. M., Al Azhari, S. I., Rasool, F., Ahmed, R., Samad, A., & Rehman, A. (2025). The role of Islamic economic principles in family law: A study on inheritance and property rights within the context of child protection. *Global Islamic Research Journal*, 1(1), 59–76. <https://doi.org/10.65960/girj.1.1.2025.2>

³⁹ Zahra, R., Qasim, M., Ali, M., Asef, J., & Ali, B. (2025). Addressing mental health stigma and digital harassment in Pakistan and Indonesia: Insights from Islamic principles and AI-driven cybersecurity law. *Global Islamic Research Journal*, 1(1), 77–92. <https://doi.org/10.65960/girj.1.1.2025.1>

⁴⁰ Azam, M., Hamdoun, A. A.-M., Harahsheh, E. A. A. M., Mashdurohaturun, A., & Sidauruk, H. P. (2025). *Religious Diversity in the Digital Economy: Interfaith Legal Pathways to Harmonize Sharia, Christian Ethics, and International Law*. *Contemporary Issues on Interfaith Law and Society*, 4(2), 207–264. <https://doi.org/10.15294/ciils.v4i2.33011>

⁴¹ Azam, M., Mashdurohaturun, A., Firmansyah, A. N., Saktiawan, M. D., & Jaya, K. O. P. (2025). *Harmonizing Contemporary International Commercial Law with Sharia-Based National Legal Systems: A Comparative Study of Pakistan, Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia*. *MILRev: Metro Islamic Law Review*, 4(2), 1074–1096. <https://doi.org/10.32332/milrev.v4i2.11334>

⁴² Hasyim, M. Y. A., Santoso, B. W. J., Mudrofin, Azam, M., & Nawawi, M. (2025). *Translating Reprimanding Denial Interrogatives in Indonesian Qur'an Versions: Reiss' Text Typology*. *Scientific Culture*, 11(4), 2933–2943.

studying the methods used by classical exegetes, modern researchers gain insight into the intellectual principles that shaped the development of Islamic scholarship. This process has encouraged renewed appreciation for the sophistication of classical tafsīr, which integrated multiple disciplines—including linguistics, history, jurisprudence, and theology—into a comprehensive framework for understanding the Qur'an.⁴³

Another influential figure whose work continues to shape contemporary discussions of tafsīr is Ismail ibn Kathir, whose commentary emphasized interpreting the Qur'an through the Qur'an itself, the Prophetic Sunnah, and the explanations of the Prophet's companions. Ibn Kathir's approach reinforced the importance of grounding interpretation in authoritative sources while maintaining a coherent understanding of the Qur'anic message. Modern scholars often refer to such classical methodologies when discussing the principles that should guide contemporary Qur'anic interpretation.⁴⁴ In recent decades, academic institutions and research centers in the Muslim world have increasingly focused on revisiting classical tafsīr literature as part of broader efforts to revive traditional Islamic scholarship. Scholars examine classical commentaries not only as historical documents but also as intellectual resources capable of informing modern interpretive efforts. This renewed engagement with classical tafsīr has led to the publication of critical editions of classical texts, scholarly studies on exegetical methodologies, and interdisciplinary research exploring the historical development of Qur'anic interpretation.⁴⁵ At the same time, contemporary scholars recognize that classical tafsīr developed within specific historical contexts and addressed the intellectual challenges of its time. While these works remain foundational to Islamic scholarship, modern scholars often seek to reinterpret classical methodologies in ways that address the needs of contemporary Muslim societies. By analyzing how classical scholars approached linguistic interpretation, legal reasoning, and theological reflection, contemporary researchers aim to adapt these methods for addressing modern questions related to ethics, social justice, and global cultural interactions.⁴⁶

Adapting Classical Tafsīr to Contemporary Intellectual and Social Challenges

The reinterpretation of classical tafsīr methodologies in contemporary scholarship reflects broader efforts within Islamic thought to balance tradition with intellectual renewal. Muslim societies today face a wide range of social, political, and cultural challenges that differ significantly from those encountered by earlier generations of scholars. Issues such as globalization, technological change, economic inequality, and evolving social norms have prompted scholars to reconsider how Qur'anic teachings can be understood and applied in

43 Hafidz, J., Fitri, D. A., Azam, M., et al. (2024). *The Corruption Reduction with an Administrative Law Approach: Evidence from Australia*. *Journal of Human Rights, Culture and Legal System*, 4(3), 822–841. <https://doi.org/10.53955/jhcls.v4i3.396>

44 Azam, M., Alforgany, S. H., Mashdurohatun, A., et al. (2025). *E-Contract Withdrawal Rights in E-commerce: A Comparative Study of the Egyptian Customer Protection Law and Islamic Jurisprudential Perspectives*. *Al-Ihkam: Jurnal Studi dan Penelitian Hukum Islam*, 8(2), 231–247. <https://doi.org/10.30659/jua.v8i2.44766>

45 Azam, M., Mashdurohatun, A., Nouri, A. U. R., & Hanifah, S. N. (2025). *The Implications of Trade Liberalization on Islamic Economic Ethics in Relation to the WTO Agreement Crisis on Organization of Islamic Countries*. *International Journal of Environmental Sciences*, 11(18), 2330–2440. <https://doi.org/10.64252/015mam67>

46 Azam, M., Abdullah, M. A., Al Khalidi, H. S. A. F., Nayel, T. A., & Elsayed, A. A. M. (2025). *The Transformation of the Letter Dhad Between Supporters and Opponents*. *TPM – Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology*, 32(S4), 1683–1691. <https://www.scopus.com/pages/publications/105014456858?origin=resultlist>.

modern contexts.⁴⁷One important aspect of contemporary tafsīr scholarship involves identifying the ethical objectives and universal principles embedded within the Qur'anic message. Rather than focusing solely on the literal application of individual verses, modern scholars often seek to uncover the broader moral and ethical framework that underlies Qur'anic teachings. This approach allows scholars to apply Qur'anic principles to contemporary issues while remaining faithful to the spirit of the revelation. By examining themes such as justice, compassion, and human dignity within the Qur'an, scholars attempt to demonstrate how Islamic teachings can contribute to addressing modern social challenges.⁴⁸

Another important dimension of contemporary tafsīr involves engaging with modern academic disciplines and interdisciplinary research. Scholars increasingly draw upon fields such as linguistics, history, sociology, and literary studies in order to gain deeper insights into the Qur'anic text and its interpretation. These interdisciplinary approaches allow scholars to explore the cultural and intellectual context of the Qur'an while also examining how its teachings interact with contemporary social realities.⁴⁹For example, modern scholars often analyze Qur'anic narratives and legal passages in relation to broader ethical discussions concerning human rights, gender relations, and economic justice. While classical tafsīr addressed many social issues relevant to earlier Muslim communities, contemporary scholars seek to expand these discussions by applying Qur'anic principles to new circumstances. This process involves re-examining classical interpretations and considering how their underlying reasoning can inform contemporary debates.⁵⁰

In addition, modern Qur'anic scholarship frequently emphasizes the importance of hermeneutics, or the theory of interpretation. Hermeneutical approaches explore how readers interpret texts within particular historical and cultural contexts. Contemporary Muslim scholars use these approaches to examine how classical interpretations developed and how modern readers can engage with the Qur'an in ways that remain faithful to its message while responding to contemporary concerns. This process encourages scholars to reflect critically on the relationship between text, interpretation, and historical context. Technological developments have also influenced contemporary Qur'anic scholarship by providing new tools for textual analysis and research. Digital databases and online manuscript collections allow scholars to study classical tafsīr works in greater detail than ever before. These resources facilitate comparative studies of different exegetical traditions and enable researchers to trace the evolution of Qur'anic interpretation across centuries of Islamic history. Despite the diversity of contemporary approaches, many Muslim scholars emphasize that reinterpretation should remain grounded in the foundational principles of Islamic scholarship. Classical tafsīr continues to serve as a vital reference point for understanding the Qur'an, and contemporary scholars often view their work as part of an ongoing intellectual tradition rather than a departure from it. By engaging critically with classical sources while addressing modern

47 Jamila Asef, Hasan & Muhammad Azam. "Human Recourses for Social Change: Promoting Women's Empowerment through Solidarity Economy Models in Afghanistan and Pakistan." *Global Journal of Human-Social Science (GJHSS-E)*, Vol. 25, Issue 3 (2025).

48 Handayani, O., Masri, E., Rahayu, P., Pamungkas, A. J., & Azam, M. (2025). Legal Framework for Crypto Asset Trading as an Effort to Protect Consumers in Indonesia. *Pena Justisia*, 24(2). <https://doi.org/10.31941/pj.v24i2.7134>

49 Ali Masyhar Mursyid, Muhammad Haidar Ghoni, Indah Sri Utari, Aprila Niravita & Muhammad Azam. "Terrorism Financing Modus Operandi in Indonesia." *Indonesian Journal of Criminal Law Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2025), pp. 685–722. <https://doi.org/10.15294/ijcls.v10i2.29593>

50 Berg, H. (2024). Method and theory in the academic study of the Qur'an: Contemporary developments in Qur'anic scholarship. *Religion Compass*, 18(2), e12535. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12535>

Ali Masyhar, Muhammad Azil Maskur, Eram Tunggal Pawenang, Nadhira Madania Dimarti & Muhammad Azam. "School of D-RAD: An Effort of Deradicalization for Former Terrorism Convict." *Jurnal Pengabdian Hukum Indonesia*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2025).

challenges, scholars aim to ensure that Qur'anic interpretation remains both intellectually rigorous and socially relevant.

Conclusion

The study of Qur'anic interpretation has evolved through a rich intellectual tradition that combines theological reflection, linguistic analysis, and scholarly engagement with the text of the Qur'an. Classical scholars developed sophisticated methodologies of tafsīr that ensured interpretations remained closely connected to the original context of revelation and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Through approaches such as interpreting the Qur'an through the Qur'an, reliance on prophetic traditions, and detailed linguistic analysis, classical exegetes established a structured framework for understanding divine revelation that has shaped Islamic scholarship for centuries.

In the modern period, Qur'anic studies have expanded to include new interpretive approaches such as historical, literary, and thematic analysis. Contemporary scholars increasingly engage with modern academic methodologies while also drawing upon the intellectual legacy of classical tafsīr. This interaction between traditional scholarship and modern research has encouraged a re-examination of classical exegetical methods in order to address contemporary intellectual and social challenges facing Muslim communities.

Ultimately, the continued engagement with classical tafsīr demonstrates the enduring relevance of traditional Islamic scholarship. By revisiting classical methodologies and adapting their insights to contemporary contexts, modern scholars contribute to a dynamic and evolving field of Qur'anic studies that remains firmly rooted in the authority of the Qur'an while responding thoughtfully to the needs of the modern world.

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