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The Influence of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān in the Development of Qur'anic Exegetical Methodology: *Cross-Referential and Narrative-Based Approaches*

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to formulate the contributions of Muqātil bin Sulayman (d. 767), a Muslim scholar from Merv, Central Asia, in the formulation of classical Quranic interpretation and its later development, particularly his idea about Cross-referential interpretation, which seeks meaning by connecting terms across different Qur'anic verses, and Narrative-based interpretation, which considers multiple sources to provide context for the verses being explained. Using a descriptive-analytical method, the study examines how these two approaches shaped classical tafsir and its development. The study finds that the first idea became a foundation for orthodox tafsir i.e., *bi al-Ma'thur*, while the second one contributed to early contextual tafsir, though it faced criticism regarding the validity of its sources. Additionally, despite criticisms of foundationalism, cross-referential interpretation became an epistemological basis for the development of modern tafsir methods, such as it is largely used in thematic tafsir (*tafsir maudhui*) and *tafsir maqasidi* (objective-based interpretation), due to their comprehensive and cohesive approach to Qur'anic interpretation.

Keywords: Classical Interpretation; Tafsir *bi al-Matsur*; Tafsir Maudhui; Tafsir Maqasidi.

Abstrak: Tujuan artikel ini adalah merumuskan kontribusi Muqātil bin Sulayman (w. 767), seorang ulama Muslim dari Merv, Asia Tengah, dalam pembentukan tafsir klasik al-Qur'an dan perkembangan selanjutnya, khususnya gagasannya tentang *tafsir silang-referensial* (Cross-referential interpretation), yaitu pencarian makna dengan menghubungkan istilah-istilah antar ayat al-Qur'an, serta *tafsir berbasis narasi* (Narrative-based interpretation), yang mempertimbangkan berbagai sumber untuk memberikan konteks bagi ayat-ayat yang dijelaskan. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif-analitis, kajian ini menelaah bagaimana kedua pendekatan tersebut membentuk tafsir klasik dan perkembangannya. Kajian ini menemukan bahwa gagasan pertama menjadi landasan bagi tafsir ortodoks, yakni *bi al-Ma'tsur*, sedangkan gagasan kedua berkontribusi pada tafsir kontekstual awal, meskipun menghadapi kritik terkait validitas sumbernya. Selain itu, meskipun mendapat kritik atas fondasionalismenya, tafsir silang-referensial justru menjadi basis epistemologis bagi perkembangan metode tafsir modern, seperti yang banyak digunakan dalam *tafsir maudhui* (tematik) dan *tafsir maqasidi* (berorientasi tujuan), karena pendekatan keduanya yang komprehensif dan kohesif dalam penafsiran al-Qur'an.

Kata Kunci: Tafsir Klasik; Tafsir *bi al-Ma'tsur*; Tafsir Maudhui; Tafsir Maqasidi.

INTRODUCTION

Tafsīr al-Qur'an (Qur'anic exegesis) known shortly as tafsīr occupies a central position in the intellectual history of Islam. From its earliest period, tafsīr functioned as a bridge between the sacred text and the evolving needs of the Muslim community. The classical exegetical tradition provided a foundational framework for the emergence of diverse interpretive approaches in the modern era, while simultaneously demonstrating the rich methodological dynamics involved in understanding the Qur'anic message. The history of tafsīr can be traced back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, whose explanations of Qur'anic verses served as the primary reference for his Companions. Ibn 'Abbās, for instance, was renowned as *turjumān al-Qur'ān* for the depth of his knowledge in interpreting complex passages. During the generation of the tābi'ūn, exegetes such as Mujāhid (d. 722 CE/122 AH), Qatādah (d. 735 CE/111 AH), and Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 765 CE/150 AH) began to compile tafsīr works with more systematic methods. Muqātil, in particular, introduced two distinctive approaches: cross-referential interpretation -linking terms across different verses to uncover meaning- and narrative-based interpretation-drawing upon diverse sources to contextualize the verses under discussion.

As emphasized by Yusuf Owa-Onire Uthman, Tafsīr gradually developed into a more methodological enterprise. The Prophet's instruction to his Companions constituted the apex of this progression toward the evolution of Qur'anic interpretation (Owa-Onire Uthman, 2021). This quotation demonstrates that Qur'anic exegesis, from its very inception, was not merely a linguistic elucidation but rather a methodological enterprise that evolved in accordance with the needs of the community. Claude Gilliot underscores that classical and medieval Qur'anic exegesis functioned simultaneously as a doctrinal imperative and a historiographical project, serving to legitimize the community's comprehension of revelation (Gilliot, 1999b). In other words, Qur'anic exegesis performs a dual function: it serves as theological legitimization and as a construction of Islamic historiography. This aligns with Yassine Yahyaoui's findings that tafsīr contributed to shaping early Islamic history by documenting the Prophet's biography and the identity of the Muslim community (Yahyaoui, 2024).

Both of these ideas carry considerable academic significance. Cross-referential exegesis became the foundation of orthodox tafsīr, namely tafsīr *bi al-Ma'thūr*, while narrative-based exegesis contributed to the emergence of early contextual interpretation, though it faced criticism concerning the validity of its sources. Such criticism, however, reveals the epistemological dynamism of classical tafsīr, which continually adapted to the intellectual needs of the community.

In this context, the relevance of Muqātil's thought becomes increasingly evident when linked to the development of exegesis in the modern era. Cross-referential tafsīr, despite being criticized for its foundationalism, in fact provided the epistemological basis for contemporary exegetical methods. This approach has been widely employed in *tafsīr mawdhū'ī* (thematic exegesis) and *tafsīr maqāṣidī* (goal-oriented exegesis), both of which emphasize comprehensiveness and cohesiveness in Qur'anic interpretation. Thus, Muqātil's thought is significant not only in the classical context but also offers a methodological contribution that endures into the present.

The aim of this study is to articulate Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's contribution to the formation of classical tafsīr and to demonstrate his influence on the development of modern exegesis. Employing a descriptive-analytical method, this research seeks to

examine how the two approaches he pioneered shaped the exegetical tradition, while simultaneously opening space for reflection on their relevance to contemporary exegetical methodology.

A number of scholars have devoted considerable attention to the works and thought of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān. Andrew Rippin (1988) situates Muqātil's tafsīr as an early representation of narrative and contextual exegesis, serving as an important source prior to the codification of orthodox interpretation (Rippin, 1988). John Wansbrough (1977) interprets Muqātil's tafsīr as evidence of narrative construction in the formation of Muslim communal identity (Wansbrough, 1977a). Claude Gilliot (1991, 2002) emphasizes that Muqātil's exegesis functioned both as a theological necessity and as a historical undertaking, legitimizing the community's understanding of revelation (Gilliot, 2002). Harald Motzki (2002) examines the isnād and transmission reports in Muqātil's tafsīr, demonstrating that although many of these narrations have been subject to criticism, the work nonetheless remains significant as one of the earliest documentary sources of the exegetical tradition (Motzki, 2002). Walid A. Saleh (2004) highlights the methodological continuity in Muqātil's exegesis, particularly his cross-referential approach, which exerted a significant influence on modern thematic (tafsīr mawdhū'ī) and purposive (tafsīr maqāṣidī) interpretations (Saleh, 2004). The works of Gordon Nickel (2003, 2007, 2011) regard Muqātil as a significant early exegete who underscored the charge of *taḥrīf* against the People of the Book, and whose tafsīr serves as evidence that this narrative had already taken shape in the earliest period of Islam (Nickel, 2003). Crone and Cook regard Muqātil as an early exegetical figure whose tafsīr reveals both Islam's interconnection with Judaeo-Christian traditions and the formative, not yet fully independent, stage of Qur'anic interpretation. They explain that Muqātil's commentary—among the earliest complete tafsīrs—demonstrates the extent to which early Muslim exegesis was indebted to Judaeo-Christian heritage (Crone & Cook, 1977). Herbert Berg views Muqātil as a transitional figure, illustrating how Qur'anic exegesis moved from oral traditions and narrative accounts toward a more systematic written form. Furthermore he explains that “Muqātil b. Sulayman's tafsir, the earliest complete commentary to survive, is crucial for understanding the formative period of Muslim exegesis, despite later criticism of his use of *israilliyyat* and anthropomorphic interpretation.”

Furthermore, in his dissertation (2015), Ahmad Tohe undertakes a comprehensive study of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's exegetical thought, positioning him as an important yet often overlooked figure, with particular attention to his cross-referential and narrative methodologies of tafsīr (Tohe, 2015). Roberto Tottoli (1999) discusses the use of *Isrā'īliyyāt* sources in Muqātil's tafsīr, identifying them as a deliberate exegetical strategy (Tottoli, 1999). Merlin Swartz (2002) dalam bukunya membahas Muqātil sebagai karya awal penting dan mengidentifikasinya sebagai jenis tafsir yang antropomorfisme. In his book (2002), Merlin Swartz discusses Muqātil's tafsīr as an important early work and identifies it as a type of anthropomorphic exegesis. Swartz explains that “Muqātil b. Sulayman was frequently cited as an example of anthropomorphic exegesis, his commentary containing numerous passages in which divine attributes were explained in terms resembling human qualities (Swartz, 2002).” Similar thought was also delivered by Mun'im Sirry (Sirry, 2012). Gregor Schoeler shares the view held by many other scholars who have investigated the early history of Qur'anic exegesis, particularly the role of Muqātil. Schoeler asserts that “Muqātil b. Sulayman's tafsir, one of the earliest complete

commentaries, illustrates the transition from oral transmission to written exegesis, and the persistence of narrative material such as *isrā'iliyyāt* (Schoeler, 2006)."

M. Quraish Shihab (1992), in his works on the methodology of Qur'anic exegesis, frequently refers to Muqātil as one of the early exegetes who played a role in shaping the tradition of *tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*, though with critical reservations regarding the validity of his transmitted reports (Shihab, 1992). Fazlur Rahman (1979, 1980, 1982) underscores the importance of engaging with early exegetical works such as that of Muqātil in order to grasp the historical dynamics of Qur'anic interpretation (Rahman, 1980). In Indonesia, (Abdullah, 2006) and (Arif, 2008) also mention the role of Muqātil in the discourse of classical methodological exegesis when both discuss contemporary development of Quranic exegesis. Meanwhile, in Malaysia, (Wan Daud, 1998) and (Hassan, 1992) place Muqātil's exegesis as part of Classical Quranic exegesis that needed to be further studied in the framework of integration of knowledge and the history of Islam.

This study focuses on two principal contributions of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's exegetical thought and their influence on the development of modern *tafsīr* methodology. Before exploring these ideas, however, it will first outline the landscape of exegetical practice in early Islam up to the era of Muqātil, accompanied by a brief account of his intellectual biography. In this way, the discussion not only highlights Muqātil's ideas but also situates them within the broader historical trajectory of Qur'anic exegesis.

METHOD

In this study, a descriptive-analytic method is deployed, but to make it operational it should be elaborated as follows: the study constructs its corpus from early *tafsīr* texts attributed to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, alongside later exegetical works that demonstrate thematic and methodological resonance; these texts are then analysed through close reading to identify patterns of cross-referential interpretation and narrative structuring. The interpretive criteria for establishing "influence" across centuries involve tracing methodological continuities—such as the systematic use of intertextual references and narrative framing—while distinguishing them from parallel developments or incidental similarities by situating Muqātil's techniques within the broader historical trajectory of *tafsīr*. Data are presented in a comparative framework that highlights both the internal features of Muqātil's exegesis and its influence in modern thematic and *maqāṣid*-based approaches, thereby allowing the analysis to demonstrate how his methods contributed to shaping later exegetical paradigms. A dedicated methodological subsection should therefore clarify the sources, analytical procedures, and criteria of influence, ensuring transparency in how the research was conducted and how conclusions were drawn.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Early Exegesis before Muqātil ibn Sulaymān:

The Practice of Early Tafsīr

A scholarly discussion of the early history of Qur'anic exegesis inevitably leads to a fundamental question: what actually transpired within the Qur'anic *Urgemeinde*, the earliest community formed around the revelation of the Qur'an during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime in the seventh century, and more specifically within the first fifty years after his death (632–680 CE). Clarifying this formative phase provides a picture of exegetical practices from the Prophet's era up to the time of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (approximately 80 H or between 700–767/775 CE), spanning the late first and early second

Islamic centuries, or roughly the mid-eighth century. Hussein Abdul-Raof identifies this period as a “performative stage,” in which the Qur’an was disseminated and taught by the Prophet to his earliest audience—the Companions—who in turn transmitted the same task to the Successors (tābi‘ūn). This process continued across generations, accompanied by the scholarly instruments and technological means available in each era, thereby shaping the evolving trajectory of Qur’anic interpretation.

Abdul Raof designates the exegetical practices of this period with the terms “Prophet’s exegesis,” “Companions’ exegesis,” and “Successors’ exegesis,” aiming to capture the actual interpretive activity within the Qur’anic *Urgemeinde* (Abdul-Raof, 2010). This designation differs from attributional phrasing such as “Muhammadan interpretation” or “Prophet interpretation.” For instance, possessive expressions like “Prophet’s exegesis” emphasize that the tafsīr derives directly from the Prophet himself, whether in the form of oral explanation or exemplary action serving as a reference for understanding the Qur’an. Such usage is more historical and concrete, linking exegesis to Muhammad as an individual. By contrast, attributional expressions such as “Muhammadan interpretation” or “Prophet interpretation” are more conceptual and ideological, often employed in broader scholarly contexts to denote interpretive approaches or traditions. In other words, Qur’anic exegesis during the *Urgemeinde* remained confined to performative practice. This point has been underscored by scholars such as (Sinai, 2014b), (Wansbrough, 1977a), (Leemhuis, 1988), (Gilliot, 2002), and (Motzki et al., 2010). Sinai explains that Muslim rulers in the Hijaz at the time sought to expand their authority across the Middle East, while the community was in the process of receiving and acknowledging the Qur’an as scripture. Yet this recognition was largely nominal, as there were not yet any records of Muslim scholars systematically engaging in Qur’anic exegesis.

Historians have noted that several figures from the late first Islamic century (seventh century CE) and the early second Islamic century (eighth century CE) began to develop more systematic exegetical thought, employing glosses as well as narrative or contextual explanations. Among these were Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 728 CE), Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr (d. 95 H/714 CE), and Qatāda ibn Di‘āma (d. 118 H/736 CE) (Sinai, 2014a). These exegetical practitioners are identified as students of Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68 H/687 CE). Ibn ‘Abbās himself is reported to have articulated a number of exegetical ideas that were later codified. *Tanwīr al-Miqbās min Tafsīr Ibn ‘Abbās* is often associated with al-Fayrūzābādī (d. 817 H/1414 CE) and has been widely used, though its chains of transmission have frequently been debated by scholars due to the presence of weak reports. Another work, *Ṣaḥīfah ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah*, refers to the transmission of Ibn ‘Abbās’s tafsīr through ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah (d. 143 H/760 CE). This tafsīr is generally considered more reliable in its isnād and has been more readily accepted by specialists. Nevertheless, researchers examine both works cautiously within the context of the formative development of Qur’anic exegesis. Nicolai Sinai, drawing on Claude Gilliot, questions the assumption that Ibn ‘Abbās should be regarded as the progenitor of Qur’anic tafsīr. They suggest instead that his role functioned more as a *bricolage*, bridging the gap between exegetical practices around 60 H/680 CE - 80 H/700 CE, roughly fifty years after the Prophet’s death in 632 CE—and the subsequent period spanning the late first/seventh century and the early second/eighth century (Sinai, 2014a).

Harald Motzki reinforces the above position by tracing exegetical sources through an *isnād-cum-matn* analysis of Q. 15:90–91, which warns against selective reception of scripture—accepting some parts while rejecting others. According to Motzki, it was Sa‘īd

ibn Jubayr, Ḍaḥḥāk, Mujāhid, and Qatāda who engaged in exegetical practice, rather than Ibn ‘Abbās himself. Later scholars, he argues, retroactively linked these practices to Ibn ‘Abbās and treated him as their primary source. Gilliot and Sinai likewise contend that such claims are scholarly constructions designed to reinforce an imagined mainstream of tafsīr. More broadly, Sinai marks the phase prior to the emergence of systematic exegesis as one of Arab identity formation, in which Muslims employed the Qur’an primarily in ritual and devotional contexts. Given that the Qur’an was revealed in Arabic—their native language—and that the Companions directly witnessed the Prophet’s delivery of revelation while the next generation heard it from them, the *Urgemeinde* can be assumed to have understood the Qur’an. Yet, as Daniel Madigan illustrates by drawing on Bronislaw Malinowski’s concept of phatic communication, the Qur’an at that time functioned chiefly as a reminder and proof that God had spoken to the Arabs, with exegetical practice limited to glosses (Sinai, 2014a).

As noted above, what is meant by exegetical practice moving toward a systematic process of understanding the Qur’anic text refers to the students of Ibn ‘Abbās, though records of their activity do not stem from their own era but from later documentation, such as al-Ṭabarī’s *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān fī Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān* (d. 310/923). First, Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 104/722) adopted a mode of Qur’anic exegesis based on religious sources, later termed *tafsīr bi al-ma’tḥūr*, employing a concise and straightforward method; his collected exegetical reflections came to be known as *Tafsīr Mujāhid*. Second, Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr (d. 95/714) emphasized the importance of Companions’ opinions and *Isrā’iliyyāt*, with a tendency toward legal dimensions. Qatāda ibn Di‘āma (d. 118/736), by contrast, stressed the significance of context, and thus considered narrative sources and *Isrā’iliyyāt* useful for interpreting the Qur’an. Other figures include al-Suddi (d. 127/745) with *Tafsīr al-Suddi*, al-Kalbī (d. 146/763) with *Tafsīr al-Kalbī*, and al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) with *Ta’wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah*, whose exegetical thought was theological and rational. Andrew Rippin, as cited by Abdul-Raof, also mentions additional figures and works: *Naskh al-Qur’ān* by al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742), *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* by Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778), *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* by ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 211/827), *Mutashābihāt al-Qur’ān* by al-Kisā‘ī (d. 187/802), *Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān* by al-Farrā’ (d. 207/822), *Majāz al-Qur’ān* by Abū ‘Ubaydah (d. 210/825), and *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān* by Abū ‘Ubaid (d. 224/834) (Abdul-Raof, 2010).

On the other hand, Gilliot identifies several exegetes originating from Central Asia. In the classical era, Central Asia was known as Transoxiana, or in Arabic *Mā warā’ al-nahr*. Among the important cities within this territory were Bukhara, Samarkand, and Khwarazm. Politically, these cities at various times fell under the authority of the Islamic caliphates, including the Umayyads and the Abbasids. Today, Central Asia comprises Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. Yet, in Gilliot’s view, applying the designation “Central Asia” to the early Islamic period is ambiguous and difficult to affirm, since intellectual activity at that time was so interwoven and dispersed across Central Asia, the Middle East, and possibly South Asia. From the perspective of scholarly centers, scholars based in Central Asia could have been active in multiple locations, not confined to their region of origin but also participating in the other two. It is therefore understandable that Gilliot includes Khurasan as part of the classical centers of Islamic learning (Gilliot, 1999a). This region, together with others such as eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan, functioned as a meeting point between Persian, Arab, and Turkic cultures. Among the many scholars of Central Asia, Gilliot mentions

al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Muzāḥim (d. 105/723), who lived in several places including Samarkand and Balkh. His circle of learning extended back to Ibn ‘Abbās, as he is thought to have studied tafsīr with one of Ibn ‘Abbās’s students, Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr (d. 95 H/714 CE).

Like many exegetes of the early Islamic period, Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr’s exegetical thought was later preserved by Juwaybir ibn Sa‘īd al-Azdi al-Balkhī (d. 150 H/767 CE), who was accustomed to delivering religious lectures to a large audience of young people, reportedly numbering around three thousand. It is therefore understandable that his tafsīr drew extensively on *midrashic* sources—materials employed in Qur’anic interpretation that generally derive from Jewish and Christian traditions, known in tafsīr terminology as *Isrā’īliyyāt*—for example, in his discussion of the creation of Adam (Gilliot, 1999a).

Another figure is Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān. His father was the exegete of Balkh, Abū Bistām Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān al-Kharraz al-Nabaṭī (d. 135 H/753 CE), sometimes referred to as Muqātil ibn Duwaldiz (“the leather-stitcher”) or al-Kharraz (“the saddle-maker” or “leather craftsman”). Like al-Ḍaḥḥāk, who was known for his preaching, Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān was also a preacher, and this shaped his exegetical thought, which emphasized the moral dimension of the Qur’an. His tafsīr likewise drew upon midrashic sources (*Isrā’īliyyāt*), for example in his eschatological explanation of the alternation of day and night: each evening the sun is raised to the seventh heaven and placed beneath the Throne, while each morning God determines whether it will rise from the East or the West. Several of his exegetical ideas were cited by al-Ṭabarī as well as by Abū al-Futūḥ al-Rāzī (active until 525 H/1131 CE) (Gilliot, 1999a). Muqātil ibn Sulaymān likewise resided in several places during his lifetime. Born and educated in religious sciences in Balkh, one of the cities of Khurasan (in present-day Afghanistan), he later lived in Marw, another city in the Khurasan region. He subsequently settled in Basra, Iraq, which at the time was a major center of Muslim scholarship, before moving to Baghdad, particularly during the reign of Caliph al-Manṣūr of the Abbasid dynasty. In the final stage of his life, he returned to Basra, where he remained until his death in 150 H/767 CE.

Up to the second Islamic century (eighth century CE), the use of sources derived from the Prophet Muhammad in the form of ḥadīth or Sunnah had not yet been systematically organized. On the other hand, Caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 99/717) was the first Muslim ruler to pay serious attention to the necessity of collecting the Prophet’s ḥadīth and Sunnah. Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741) was the earliest scholar to respond to this call, and his efforts were subsequently continued by the following generations (Tohe, 2015).

This response took on a more scholastic form when Imām al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820) systematized it in his treatise *al-Risālah*. In other words, the early Muslim community at that time did not yet possess a methodological framework for verifying the quality of ḥadīth, unlike the Muslim society of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, when ḥadīth and Sunnah had already been codified and subjected to rigorous selection. The writing of Islamic sciences, including tafsīr, had not yet assumed a scholastic character, as can be seen in works of the third century such as the exegesis of Mujāhid and Sufyān al-Thawrī on portions of the Qur’an. The emergence of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān’s *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* marked the first complete Qur’anic commentary. Although reports indicate that many other exegetes—such as ‘Ikrimah, al-Kalbī, al-Suddi, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, and Abū Bakr al-‘Aṣamm—also produced tafsīr, most of their manuscripts have not survived (Tohe, 2015). According to al-Naẓẓām (d. between 220/835 and 230/845), a Mu‘tazilī thinker, Muqātil’s work was naïve and insufficiently grounded (AlTabari1954 et al., 1965). Ibn

Sa'd (d. 230/844), in his *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*, identifies "Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Balkhī" as an exegete reported by al-Ḍaḥḥāk and 'Aṭā', yet he remains critical of Muqātil's knowledge of ḥadīth (Tohe, 2015).

Muqātil ibn Sulaymān: Biography, Works, and Thought

Biography

Nama lengkap Muqātil bin Sulayman adalah Abu al-Hasan Muqātil bin Sulayman bin Bishr/Bashir al-Asadi (Azdi) al-Khurasani al-Balkhi lahir di Balkh tapi tidak diketahui dengan pasti kapan lahirnya, diduga antara tahun 60-70 H (680-690 M) dan ada juga yang menduga tahun 80 H (700 M). Ia wafat 150 H/767 M, atau ada juga yang mencatat tahun 158 H/775 M. Dia adalah salah seorang terpelajar Muslim penting di abad ke 2 H/8 M. Dia menekuni banyak ilmu-ilmu Islam, khususnya tafsir dan hadis di saat masa-masa awal pembentukan tradisi dan keilmuan Islam. Ahmad Tohe menyebutnya periode literasi (literary period).

The full name of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān is Abū al-Ḥasan Muqātil ibn Sulaymān ibn Bishr/Bashīr al-Asadī (Azdi) al-Khurasānī al-Balkhī. He was born in Balkh, though the exact date of his birth is uncertain—some estimate between 60–70/680–690, while others suggest around 80/700. He died in 150/767, though some sources record 158/775. Muqātil was one of the most significant Muslim scholars of the second/eighth century. He pursued various Islamic sciences, particularly tafsīr and ḥadīth, during the formative period of Islamic intellectual traditions. Ahmad Tohe refers to this era as the "literary period" (Tohe, 2015). In the context of intellectual developments during the first and second Islamic centuries (seventh and eighth centuries CE), Central Asia emerged as one of the early foundations and bases for the growth of Muslim knowledge, including the Islamic sciences. The significance of Central Asia lay in its function as a *bricolage*—a bridge between the knowledge systems of Persia, Greece, India, and China—whose seeds of development were already present in the era of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān. Prior to the eighth century, Persia under the Sasanian Empire (224–651 CE) had established centers of learning in medicine, philosophy, and astronomy, such as Gondeshapur. Greek intellectual heritage, particularly Hellenistic philosophy since the fourth century BCE, continued to exert strong influence into the early Islamic period. Meanwhile, India up to the seventh century maintained robust traditions in mathematics and astronomy. China, for its part, had developed technologies such as papermaking by the seventh century. In other words, Central Asia in the era of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān had already become a meeting point of diverse intellectual traditions, which would flourish even more rapidly after the eighth century (Bregel, 2003). Yuri Bregel describes Central Asia before the arrival of Islamic influence and during the initial stages of Islam's spread (seventh and eighth centuries CE) as follows:

"..., Central Asia extends from the Caspian Sea and the Ural river basin in the west to the Altay mountains and the Turfan oasis in the east, and from the limits of the steppe belt (where it borders the West Siberian forest, the taiga) in the north to the Hindukush and the Kopet-Dagh mountains in the south. But physical geography by itself (even less the contemporary political map of Asia) can hardly define this region, which should instead be approached as a distinct cultural and historical entity. From this standpoint, Central Asia can be defined as the western, Turko-Iranian, part of the Inner Asian heartland; its indigenous population consisted of various Iranian peoples, who have been mostly Turkicized by now, while its growing Turkic population has assimilated its indigenous Iranian culture to various degrees. Beginning with the 8th century A.D., Central Asia was gradually incorporated into the Islamic world (a

process that now distinguishes it from the eastern part of the Inner Asian heartland, Mongolia and Tibet). As part of the Islamic world, it shares many cultural features with its Islamic neighbours to the south and to the west, but it combines them in a unique blend with the features it shares with the world of the Inner Asian nomads. It belongs to both of these worlds, being a border area for each of them" (Bregel, 2003).

During his years of study, Muqātil spent much of his time in Khurasan. Upon reaching adulthood, he resided in Merv, where he composed his Qur'anic commentary. In Merv, Muqātil was active in teaching and delivering sermons at the Jāmi' Mosque. Later in his life, he lived in Iraq—first in Baghdad, and subsequently in Basra, where he remained until his death in 150/767. Reports also indicate that Muqātil spent periods of residence in Yemen, Beirut, and Mecca, where he taught in their mosques (Tohe, 2015).

As noted in the introduction to *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Muqātil acquired his knowledge of the Qur'an and its exegesis from thirty scholars—twelve of whom were members of the generation of the *tābi'ūn* (Successors), while the remainder belonged to the following generation, the *tābi' al-tābi'īn* (Successors of the Successors). Although Muqātil did not position himself as a compiler of exegetical opinions in the manner of al-Ṭabarī, since he consistently adopted a monovalent approach in his interpretation of the Qur'an, his commentary nonetheless preserved several early exegetical ideas. In fact, it was precisely his intelligent use of personal insights, together with his learning from predecessors and contemporaries, that rendered his tafsīr so valuable (Tohe, 2015).

Works of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān

His writings are not only evidence of the intellectual productivity of a second-century Muslim scholar but also mark a formative phase in the development of tafsīr and the Islamic sciences. His principal work is *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, often regarded as the earliest complete Qur'anic commentary to have survived. In this tafsīr, Muqātil combines literal interpretation with extensive narrative, including *isrā'iliyyāt* traditions. The work also displays a polemical tendency, particularly in its critiques of Jewish and Christian communities, while at the same time demonstrating an early effort to connect Qur'anic verses thematically—for example, in discussions of the divine attributes. The tafsīr has been published in several editions, including a five-volume set by Shihātah and a three-volume edition by Farīd (Ibn Sulaymān, 1980). In addition, Muqātil authored *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah min al-Qur'ān*, a work focused on five hundred legal verses. This tafsīr is organized thematically, addressing issues such as marriage, jihad, and other aspects of social law. It is regarded as one of the earliest examples of thematic legal exegesis, with some scholars suggesting possible influence from Zaydī traditions. A critical edition of this work was published by Isaiah Goldfeld in 1980 (Ibn Sulaymān, 2006). Another important work is *al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, a lexical study of Qur'anic terms that carry multiple meanings (polysemy), such as *hudā* and *kufr*. With this work, Muqātil pioneered semantic analysis of the Qur'an, a tradition later refined by exegetes such as al-Damaghānī and al-Suyūṭī. A modern edition of the text was published by Ḥātim al-Dāmin in 2006 (Ibn Sulaymān, 2006).

Taken as a whole, the works of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān illustrate how Qur'anic exegesis in the early Islamic period functioned as a vehicle for narrative, legal legitimation, and linguistic analysis. Although he was later often criticized for his use of *isrā'iliyyāt* and for anthropomorphic tendencies, his writings remain indispensable sources for

understanding the formative phase of tafsīr and the Islamic sciences. Beyond his major exegetical works that have survived, a number of other writings are attributed to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān. While some of these are no longer extant in complete form, or their authenticity is disputed, they are nonetheless significant in demonstrating the breadth of Muqātil's intellectual engagement during the formative period of Islam. First, *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh* (Abrogation in the Qur'an), which discusses verses understood to abrogate or be abrogated. This tradition became a foundational element in uṣūl al-tafsīr and Islamic law, and Muqātil is cited by later scholars, including Ibn al-Nadīm in al-Fihrist, as one of the earliest authors on the subject. Second, *al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazā'ir* (Analogies and Metaphors in the Qur'an), a work focusing on analogical and metaphorical expressions in the Qur'an. In tafsīr literature, this text is sometimes associated or even conflated with *al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā'ir*, since both address semantic nuances of Qur'anic vocabulary. Third, *al-Radd 'alā al-Qadariyyah* (Refutation of the Qadariyyah), which reflects Muqātil's involvement in the theological debates of his time. This polemical treatise, written against the Qadariyyah, also reveals his interaction with figures such as Jahm ibn Ṣafwān, underscoring his role not only as an exegete but also as a theological polemicist. Fourth, *al-Aqsām wa al-Lughāt* (Oaths and Linguistic Nuances in the Qur'an), which examines verses containing oaths (aqsām) and distinctive linguistic features of the Qur'an, highlighting Muqātil's attention to its rhetorical style. Fifth, *al-Taqdīm wa al-Ta'khīr* (Word Order Variations in Qur'anic Syntax), which analyzes differences in word order across Qur'anic verses. This work demonstrates an early effort to systematically understand the syntactic structure of the Qur'an.

Sixth is *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'ān* (Lexicon of Rare or Difficult Qur'anic Terms). Some scholars attribute this work to Muqātil, though many argue that the text was likely composed by a later author. The work functions as a glossary of Qur'anic vocabulary that is infrequently used or difficult to interpret. Finally, seventh is *al-Āyāt al-Mutashābihāt* (Ambiguous Verses in the Qur'an), which examines verses considered *mutashābihāt* (ambiguous or open to multiple interpretations). In some traditions, this text is associated with *al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā'ir*, since both focus on the semantic range of Qur'anic words and verses with multiple possible meanings. Collectively, the works attributed to Muqātil demonstrate that he was not only an exegete but also a theologian, linguist, and polemicist. Even though the authenticity of some texts is disputed, their attribution underscores Muqātil's reputation as a highly influential figure in shaping the early traditions of tafsīr, theology, and Qur'anic linguistics. Two works most frequently linked to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān but debated in terms of attribution are *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'ān* and *al-Āyāt al-Mutashābihāt*. Modern scholarship suggests that *Gharīb al-Qur'ān* likely originated with a later author, while *al-Āyāt al-Mutashābihāt* is more closely aligned with the genre of *al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā'ir*. Relevant academic references with page citations can be provided to substantiate these points (Sinai, 2014b).

Thought of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān

In general, Muqātil was an early exegete whose approach was highly literal and anthropomorphic. Josef Horovitz observed that Muqātil frequently interpreted the divine attributes in a literal manner, reflecting the strong influence of his theological convictions (Horovitz, 1926).

Nevertheless, according to Gilliot, the thought of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān can in fact be categorized as a middle path within Islamic intellectual traditions, situated between

rationalist and literal/textual approaches, though with a stronger narrative and literal tendency. This is evident in his theological reflections when engaging in polemics with Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 128/746) concerning the divine attributes, where Muqātil inclined toward an anthropomorphic understanding—interpreting them in a manner analogous to human qualities (Gilliot, 1999a). In the second Islamic century, when the Muslim community was striving to document its earliest religious heritage, Muqātil's approach is understandable: Muslims required authentic evidence of their presence in history. Literal acceptance and the cultivation of awareness through transmission were viable options in the seventh and eighth centuries CE.

In terms of his writings, Muqātil is known both for his contributions to tafsīr and to ḥadīth. His exegetical thought was more widely received than his work in ḥadīth. For instance, Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820) valued Muqātil's expertise in tafsīr in a manner comparable to his esteem for Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) in the field of ḥadīth (Sinai, 2014a). Meanwhile, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's expertise in ḥadīth was widely criticized by other scholars due to the weak quality of the traditions he transmitted. Terms such as “fabricator,” “weak in isnād,” “neglected,” and “suspect” were frequently applied to him (Sinai, 2014a). Nevertheless, over time the criticisms directed at Muqātil ibn Sulaymān became more rational and proportionate, as the study of ḥadīth was increasingly contextualized within its historical development.

In fact, during the era in which Muqātil composed his exegetical works, the discipline of ḥadīth was still in its formative stages. According to Andrew Rippin, Muqātil's writings reflect this early phase of tafsīr, which remained heavily influenced by oral tradition and *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives. Rippin also notes that Muqātil employed a thematic approach in *al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā'ir* to explain the polysemy of Qur'anic vocabulary (Rippin, 1999).

At that time, the discipline of ḥadīth had not yet been systematically constructed, and the practice of attributing reports to the Prophet Muḥammad was still marked by a certain euphoria. The spirit of the age in the early centuries up to the fourth Islamic century (eleventh century CE) was to ensure that the Muslim community possessed sufficient and authentic data regarding the origins of Islam and its *turāth*. The authenticity of Islamic sources became a prerequisite for the reception of religious authority. John Wansbrough, in *Quranic Studies*, underscores that Muqātil's tafsīr represents one of the earliest complete Qur'anic commentaries to have survived. He assesses the work as being saturated with narrative traditions and *isrā'iliyyāt*, reflecting the conditions of a time when the discipline of ḥadīth had not yet been systematically established. Wansbrough writes, “Muqātil's commentary is the earliest complete tafsir to survive, and it reveals the formative milieu in which exegetical and hadith traditions were not yet clearly distinguished” (Wansbrough, 1977b). This also indicates that the sources available within the Muslim scholarly community were limited and accompanied by a sense of caution in drawing upon traditions outside Islam. Even within the Muslim community, internal sources such as ḥadīth and sunnah were still in the process of being institutionalized.

On the other hand, Ignaz Goldziher, in *Muslim Studies*, highlights that the transmission of ḥadīth in the second Islamic century (eighth century CE) was more a reflection of the need for doctrinal legitimation than of pure historical documentation. He explains that “The hadith in its earliest stage was not a historical record but a means of legitimizing dogma” (Goldziher, 1971). Meanwhile, Joseph Schacht, in *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, emphasizes that the isnād only became systematic at a later stage. In

Muqātil's time, the isnād remained loose and was often employed as a rhetorical device of legitimation. Schacht describe that "The isnad system was projected backwards; in the second century it was still fluid and used for rhetorical authority" (Schacht, 1950). It may be imagined that the fluid use of ḥadīth sources during the first three centuries of the Muslim community—when intellectual disciplines were not yet as rigidly defined as in the modern era and the religious milieu was deeply theological—belonged to a period of searching for appropriate forms of documentation and their ideal application in the construction of Islam itself. Schacht refers to this as "fluidity" and "rhetorical authority."

Gilliot underscores the importance of Muqātil's tafsīr as a pioneering effort to produce a complete and systematic commentary, even though his approach has often been criticized for excessive freedom and for not always adhering to orthodox theological principles (Gilliot, 1991). In a similar vein, John Wansbrough regarded Muqātil's tafsīr as an early example of the "exegetical tradition" that had not yet reached full maturity, reflecting the formative processes of Islamic interpretation (Wansbrough, 1977b). This narrative illustrates that, according to Orientalist scholars, Muqātil's tafsīr and the practice of ḥadīth transmission in the second Islamic century were part of a broader spirit of the age aimed at establishing the authenticity of Islam. This authenticity movement subsequently gave rise to the discipline of ḥadīth and reinforced the political legitimacy of the group known as Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah.

Gilliot and Tohe have found, in three of Muqātil's exegetical works—Tafsīr al-Kabīr, Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah fī al-Qur'ān, and al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm—that Muqātil interpreted the Qur'an with the aim of spreading faith (*īmān*) among Muslims. He did so by conceptualizing the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*), affirming the validity of Muḥammad's prophethood (*taṣdīq*), and rejecting unbelief (*kufr*). He criticized those who associated God with created beings in worship (*shirk*) and those who denied Muḥammad's prophethood (*takdhīb*). Through his theological orientation in tafsīr, Muqātil sought to demonstrate that Islam is the true religion, conveyed by all prophets, including Muḥammad (Wansbrough, 1977b).

For example, in his discussions of interreligious issues involving Jews, Christians, and idol-worshippers, Muqātil grounded his interpretation primarily on the principle of *tawḥīd* above all others. He framed these discussions with illustrations drawn from narrative traditions, whether ḥadīth or *isrā'iliyyāt*, in order to clarify his exegesis of the Qur'an. According to Tohe, this fact reinforces the narrative character of Muqātil's tafsīr (Tohe, 2015).

It can be imagined that the fluid use of ḥadīth sources in the first three centuries of the Muslim community—when intellectual disciplines were not yet as rigidly defined as in the modern era and the religious milieu was deeply theological—reflects a period of searching for appropriate forms of documentation and their ideal application in the construction of Islam itself. Schacht refers to this as "fluidity" and "rhetorical authority." Gilliot emphasizes the importance of Muqātil's tafsīr as a pioneering attempt to produce a complete and systematic commentary, even though his approach has often been criticized for excessive freedom and for not always being consistent with orthodox theological principles (Tohe, 2015).

In his work al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā'ir, Muqātil recognized that Qur'anic verses possess a diversity of meanings (the polysemy of Qur'anic language). Key entries or terms in the Qur'an are understood to have multiple semantic dimensions (al-wujūh wa al-nazā'ir). For example, the key term *jihād* does not merely refer to physical warfare, but more

importantly to civilized actions -whether verbal or otherwise- so long as such actions are undertaken for the sake of God (Tohe, 2015).

Muqātil ibn Sulaymān interpreted Qur'anic verses concerning the divine attributes in a literal (anthropomorphic) manner, such as references to God's hand, face, and eyes. He believed that the Qur'an should be understood within the framework of human reality, including the depiction of God with corporeal attributes, for the purpose of accessibility. This view provoked theological controversy and gave rise to the term "Muqātiliyya" for the group that followed his approach. Conversely, this position stood in opposition to the Jahmiyya, who rejected all divine attributes and emphasized absolute transcendence. According to al-Nazzām, Muqātil was not alone; figures such as 'Ikrimah, al-Kalbī, al-Suddī, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, and Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm also favored interpretations of verses that were considered unusual or unconventional (Tohe, 2015). Ibn Ḥibbān was the first scholar to explicitly record the negative views of the 'ulamā' toward Muqātil, including accusations of falsehood, warnings against his teachings, and severe censure from figures such as Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah (d. 191/814), Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767), Wakī', and Khārijah ibn Muṣ'ab (d. 168/785) (Tohe, 2015).

Nevertheless, some scholars have approached Muqātil's works in a more positive light. For instance, Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 995) portrays Muqātil in a neutral, even somewhat favorable manner in his *al-Fihrist*—likely due to the proximity of their theological orientations as fellow Shi'ites, albeit from different branches (Imāmī and Zaydī). He also records Muqātil's scholarly identity along with a catalogue of the exegetical works he authored (Tohe, 2015). Through his *Tārīkh Baghdād*, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1070) offers a more comprehensive and balanced portrayal of Muqātil. His account includes a biographical sketch, an assessment of Muqātil's scholarly competence in Qur'anic exegesis (though not in ḥadīth), as well as a range of positive evaluations from figures such as Shu'bah, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, and al-Shāfi'ī, who valued Muqātil's contributions to tafsīr despite the controversies surrounding him (Tohe, 2015).

Methodologically, Muqātil may be regarded as having laid the foundations of Qur'anic exegesis through three principal interpretive approaches: **paraphrastic** (breaking down and supplementing verses while clarifying their meaning), **cross-referential** (linking similar words or phrases across different parts of the Qur'ān), and **narrative** (relating verses to their occasions of revelation or to earlier accounts such as the *isrā'iliyyāt*) (Tohe, 2015).

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Muqātil interpreted the Qur'ān in a singular manner, without presenting the divergent opinions of other scholars, even though he had studied under numerous teachers. He functioned more as an independent exegete, selecting and authoritatively articulating his own views, rather than as a compiler of multiple perspectives in the manner of al-Ṭabarī (Tohe, 2015).

Muqātil's Tafsīr Methodology

Based on a close reading of three of Muqātil's works—*al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah min al-Qur'ān*, and *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*—Ahmad Tohe formulates Muqātil's hermeneutical framework into four key considerations. The first is the identification of five major Qur'anic themes: command, prohibition, promise, threat, and reports of earlier events (Tohe, 2015). These five thematic categories constitute the basic framework of exegesis. The second consideration is the typology of Qur'anic discourse, expressed in binary classifications such as *khāṣṣ*–*āmm* (particular–general) and

mutashābih–muḥkam (ambiguous–clear) (Tohe, 2015). Tohe emphasizes that Muqātil employed this dichotomy to clarify the distinction between verses that are clear and those that are ambiguous, as well as between general and particular verses. The third consideration is the necessity of interpretation. Muqātil explains that “Whoever reads the Qur’ān but does not know its meaning is illiterate” (Tohe, 2015).

Tohe interprets this statement as evidence that Muqātil underscored the urgency of tafsīr, or the necessity of grasping the Qur’ān’s message, as a prerequisite for the valid act of recitation. The fourth consideration is educational virtue. Muqātil maintained that studying and teaching the Qur’ān constitutes *farḍ kifāyah*, a collective obligation. Tohe frames this as the social responsibility of the *ummah* (Tohe, 2015). Ahmad Tohe’s reconstruction is persuasive and provides readers with a helpful framework for situating Muqātil’s exegetical works as a human endeavor to comprehend the Divine Word. It illustrates how Tohe structures Muqātil’s reading of the Qur’ān within the bounds of human consciousness and capacity to grasp the Sacred Text—through thematic analysis, typology of discourse, the necessity of interpretation, and the educational virtue of the Qur’ān.

Beyond this, Muqātil employed a variety of exegetical methods to interpret the Qur’ān, underscoring the importance of interpretation grounded in the Qur’ān’s complex linguistic structure. His approach encompassed several dichotomies that facilitated textual understanding. First, he identified the thematic structure of the Qur’ān. Second, he utilized three principal exegetical methods: paraphrastic, cross-referential, and narrative. Third, he also applied techniques such as verse segmentation, specification of particular meanings, and supplementation of meaning to enhance clarity of comprehension (Tohe, 2015).

The first exegetical method is the identification of the Qur’ān’s thematic structure. Muqātil ibn Sulaymān begins his interpretive approach by recognizing that the Qur’ān is composed of five principal categories: command (*amr*), prohibition (*nahy*), promise (*wa’d*), threat (*wa’id*), and historical narratives (*qaṣaṣ*). This classification serves as a foundational framework for understanding the practical and applicative functions of Qur’ānic verses. In *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, for example, when interpreting Q. al-Baqarah [2]:2 - “*Dhālika al-kitābu lā rayba fīh, hudan lil-muttaqīn*” - Muqātil explains that “al-kitāb” refers to the Qur’ān, which provides guidance through commands and prohibitions, as well as promises and threats directed toward the God-conscious. Tohe elaborates that Muqātil identifies the Qur’ān as consisting of five major themes, namely command (*amr*), prohibition (*nahy*), promise (*wa’d*), threat (*wa’id*), and historical narratives (*qaṣaṣ*). This classification reflects his view that the Qur’ān is a practical guide for human conduct and a record of divine interaction with past communities (Tohe, 2015).

The second exegetical method comprises paraphrastic, cross-referential, and narrative approaches. Muqātil employed three principal techniques in interpreting the Qur’ān:

First, Paraphrastic (tafsīr bi al-tafsīr). Muqātil breaks a verse into smaller segments and clarifies its meaning by inserting supplementary phrases or explanatory glosses. He frequently adds interpretive words not found in the original text but intended to render the verse more explicit and accessible to readers. For example, in his commentary on Q. al-Fātiḥah [1]:7 - “*ṣirāṭ alladhīna an ‘amta ‘alayhim*” - Muqātil explains that “those whom You have blessed” refers to the prophets, the truthful, the martyrs, and the righteous. Tohe notes that in applying his method, Muqātil breaks down a verse into smaller parts and adds explanatory phrases to clarify the meaning. He often inserts interpretive glosses that

are not in the original text but are meant to make the verse more accessible to readers (Tohe, 2015).

Second, Cross-referencing. Muqātil connects similar words, phrases, or themes across different parts of the Qur'ān. The purpose of this method is to elucidate the meaning of a verse by referring to another verse that shares comparable wording or thematic resonance. For instance, in his interpretation of Q. al-Baqarah [2]:2, he refers to Q. al-Nahl [16]:89 to explain that the Qur'ān functions as comprehensive guidance encompassing all matters. Tohe observes that the cross-referencing method is used by Muqātil to connect similar words, phrases, or relevant passages mentioned in different places in the Qur'ān. According to Tohe, this technique allows Muqātil to interpret one verse in light of another (Tohe, 2015).

Third, Narrativizing. In this method, Muqātil incorporates stories related to the verses, whether in the form of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) or *isrā'iliyyāt* (narratives from Jewish-Christian traditions). The aim is to provide historical context and enrich the understanding of the verse's content. For example, in his interpretation of the story of Abraham and the sacrifice of Ishmael, Muqātil includes an extended narrative that explains the background of God's command and Abraham's response, including the dialogue between father and son. Tohe explains that Muqātil includes the narrativizing method to any narrative reports that either situate the revelation of a verse (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) or relate the story unfolded in the verse to the narratives of the past, biblical or otherwise (*isrā'iliyyāt*) (Tohe, 2015).

The Third Method of Muqātil's Tafsīr is the clarification of Qur'anic verses through detailed analysis, which he accomplishes by breaking down the verse, assigning specific meanings, and supplementing it with additional narrative. The purpose of this method is to render the verse clearer by means of analytical precision. This approach enables Muqātil to communicate the Qur'an's message in an interactive and narrative manner, while also providing information needed by the wider community.

The first technique is segmentation of the verse (*Tajzī' al-āyāt*). Muqātil frequently divides long verses into smaller parts so that each segment can be understood with greater focus. For example, in Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 2 - *Dhālika al-kitābu lā rayba fihi hudan lil-muttaqīn* - Muqātil separates the verse into two parts: "*Dhālika al-kitābu lā rayba fihi*", which affirms the authority of the Qur'an, and "*hudan lil-muttaqīn*", which designates its function as specific guidance for the God-conscious. Through this segmentation, the meaning of the verse becomes clearer: it both asserts the legitimacy of the Book and explains its guiding role.

The second technique is specification of meaning (*Takhṣīṣ al-ma'nā*). Muqātil does not always interpret words in their general sense; rather, he narrows the meaning to fit the context. For instance, the phrase "*lil-muttaqīn*" in Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 2 is not interpreted broadly as "the God-conscious," but specifically as those who avoid polytheism and believe in God. In this way, Muqātil's tafsīr becomes more contextual, aligning with the circumstances of revelation.

The third technique is completion of meaning (*Takmīl al-ma'nā*). Muqātil adds narrative or explanatory material to complete verses that appear concise. For example, in Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 30 concerning the creation of Adam, the verse only mentions God's dialogue with the angels. Muqātil supplements this with the story of Adam being taught the names, the angels' debate, and Adam's superiority. These additions render the Qur'anic message more narrative and accessible, though some scholars criticize them for

incorporating *isrā'iliyyāt*. Together with segmentation and specification, this completion of meaning makes the verse clearer and more comprehensive. Thus, Muqātil's exegetical method demonstrates how the Qur'anic message, when analyzed through these three techniques, becomes more explicit and communicable (Tohe, 2015).

In other words, through this third method the exegete is afforded the opportunity to supplement the text with relevant information so that the Qur'anic message becomes more accessible to the reader. Yet, several scholars have criticized this interpretive strategy, since it is not without risk. The exegete may fall into the trap of adding detailed information that lacks strong sources or even exceeds the intended message of the Qur'an itself. Nevertheless, such risks, in the author's view, can be anticipated by applying rigorous epistemological principles -namely, by verifying the validity of the sources employed and the logic upon which the interpretation rests.

The Influence of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān on Qur'anic Exegetical Methodology

In this discussion, the author limits the construction of Muqātil's influence on the development of Qur'anic exegetical methodology in the modern era to two specific aspects: *cross-referential interpretation* and *narrative-based interpretation*. Other methodological contributions of Muqātil certainly deserve separate attention. Before examining these two aspects in the modern period, however, the discussion will first be introduced by considering the impact of Muqātil's thought on these same dimensions during the pre-modern (classical) period.

The Influence of Muqātil's Tafsīr Methodology in the Classical Era

The exegetical methodology introduced by Muqātil ibn Sulaymān left a significant imprint on the classical tafsīr tradition. His techniques of *cross-referencing reading*- linking verses that share themes, terminology, or concepts to clarify or reinforce meaning- and *intra-textual reading* -connecting one verse with another within the Qur'an- were widely adopted by subsequent generations of exegetes. The focus of cross-referencing reading lies in constructing thematic networks of verses, often across different sūrahs, to build an ideological or thematic panorama that may encompass systematic discussions of major topics such as *tawhīd*, justice, or jihad. Intra-textual reading, by contrast, emphasizes discovering coherence of meaning through the principle that "the Qur'an explains itself" (*al-Qur'ān yufassiru ba'duhu ba'dan*). This may involve connections within a single sūrah or across multiple sūrahs, but its aim is to affirm the unity of textual structure—for example, Q.S. *al-Mulk* [67]:2 on the trial of life and death is more fully understood in light of Q.S. *al-Insān* [76]:2 on the creation of humankind for testing. In this sense, intra-textual reading provides the theoretical foundation for the practice of cross-referencing. Put succinctly, cross-referencing reading encompasses intra-textual reading whenever relevant to the discussion.

The influence of Muqātil's cross-referencing method can be seen, for instance, in al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE), who adopted Muqātil's technique and reinforced it with a strong emphasis on *isnād* (chains of transmission). He critically selected sound *isnād* in accordance with the standards of *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl*. In his interpretation of Q.S. *al-Baqarah* [2]:256 ("*lā ikrāha fī al-dīn*"), al-Ṭabarī not only connected it with Q.S. *al-Tawbah* [9]:5 ("*fa-qtulū al-mushrikīn...*"), but also constructed his argument on the basis of transmitted reports with continuous chains reaching back to the Companions. One important narration he cites comes from Ibn 'Abbās, transmitted through the chain: *ḥaddathanā Ibn*

Ḥumayd, qāla: ḥaddathanā Salamah, ‘an Ibn Ishāq, ‘an ‘Āṣim ibn ‘Umar, ‘an Mujaḥhid, ‘an Ibn ‘Abbās, which states that the verse was revealed concerning an Anṣār who compelled his son to embrace Islam, but was later abrogated by the “verse of the sword.” This demonstrates that al-Ṭabarī employed intra-textual reading as the basis for his cross-referencing practice. By listing transmitters in full and critically evaluating the reports, he ensured that his tafsīr was not merely narrative but also authoritative and legalistic. This approach underscores the position of *tafsīr bi’l-ma’thūr* grounded in sound ḥadīth as the principal foundation for understanding the Qur’an, and it established al-Ṭabarī’s tafsīr as a pivotal reference in the classical exegetical tradition (AlTabari1954 et al., 1965).

Further Development in al-Rāzī’s Tafsīr al-Rāzī (d. 1210 CE) expanded the method of cross-referencing into the domain of theology (*kalām*). He sought to reconcile verses that emphasize God’s transcendence and nearness—such as *Q.S. al-Ḥadīd* [57]:4—with verses that appear anthropomorphic, such as *Q.S. al-A‘rāf* [7]:54. In al-Rāzī’s hands, Muqātil’s techniques of cross-referencing and intra-textual reading evolved into instruments for constructing more complex theological arguments. By systematically juxtaposing and harmonizing such verses, al-Rāzī demonstrated how exegetical methodology could serve not only to clarify textual meaning but also to underpin sophisticated theological discourse (Rāzī, 1981). Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373 CE) highlighted Muqātil’s weakness in failing to employ *isnād* systematically. Nevertheless, he retained Muqātil’s method of intra-textual reading. For example, Ibn Kathīr draws upon *Q.S. al-Kāfirūn* [109]:6 (“For you is your religion, and for me is mine”) to contextualize *Q.S. al-Baqarah* [2]:256 (“There is no compulsion in religion”), thereby reaffirming the interrelationship of verses as a key to interpretation. In this way, Ibn Kathīr demonstrates both a critical stance toward Muqātil’s methodological shortcomings and a selective appropriation of his hermeneutical insights, ensuring that intra-textual coherence remains central to exegetical practice (Ibn Kathīr, 1999).

Although Muqātil has often been criticized for methodological weaknesses, the legacy of intra-textual reading that he pioneered proved to be highly influential. Classical exegetes not only adopted his approach but also developed and critiqued it in accordance with the intellectual and theological needs of their respective eras, as illustrated by the three exegetes discussed above. John Wansbrough confirms the fact that Muqātil’s tafsīr was still interwoven with historical and theological narratives and lacked a rigorous system of *isnād*. This observation underscores both the innovative and contested nature of Muqātil’s contribution: while his methods opened pathways for thematic and intra-textual analysis, they also raised enduring questions about the standards of authenticity and epistemological rigor in Qur’anic exegesis (Wansbrough, 1977b).

Meanwhile, Nicolai Sinai observes that Muqātil’s tafsīr exhibits a systematic form of intra-textual reading. Although Muqātil’s exegetical thought has often been criticized by classical scholars, Sinai argues that his interpretive method opened the way for the development of tafsīr as an independent intellectual genre. In this perspective, Muqātil’s contribution is not merely a matter of narrative expansion but represents an early attempt to establish exegetical practice as a structured discipline (Sinai, 2014a).

The Influence of Muqātil ibn Sulaimān’s Methodology in Modern Tafsīr

The methodological influence of Muqātil ibn Sulaimān in modern Qur’anic exegesis (19th–21st centuries) is evident in the revival of intra-textual and thematic approaches that he pioneered. Although Muqātil was frequently criticized for his weak control of *isnād*,

the structural practice of linking verses across the Qur'an became a foundational element for modern exegetes such as Muḥammad 'Abduh and Fazlur Rahman. They adopted the principle of verse correlation to construct normative arguments that were contextual, while applying stricter rational and ethical filters. Thus, Muqātil's legacy was not replicated in its entirety but reformulated into a flexible methodological framework relevant to modern exegetical discourse.

Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) revitalized thematic exegesis (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*), including the practice of intra-textual reading, as a response to atomistic interpretations that detached verses from the broader Qur'anic context. This approach demonstrates methodological continuity with Muqātil ibn Sulaimān, recognized as a pioneer of intra-textual reading in classical tafsīr. Just as Muqātil connected one verse with another to build thematic understanding, 'Abduh interpreted Q.S. *al-Baqarah* [2]:256 ("lā ikrāha fī al-dīn") by referencing Q.S. *al-Kahf* [18]:29 ("al-ḥaqqu min rabbikum fa-man shā'a falyu'min wa-man shā'a falyakfur") to affirm the principle of religious freedom. However, unlike Muqātil, whose approach was largely narrative and less critical of sources, 'Abduh integrated rational and ethical considerations within the framework of modernity. In this way, 'Abduh not only inherited Muqātil's cross-referential method but also reformulated it to address the socio-political challenges of his time (Riḍā, 1947).

This pattern, in subsequent developments, resonates in the work of Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), *Fī Ṣilāl al-Qur'ān*, where cross-referencing is employed to affirm the coherence of revelation. For instance, in his interpretation of Q.S. *al-Ikhlāṣ* [112:1–4], Quṭb connects it with Q.S. *al-Baqarah* [2:163] and Q.S. *al-An'ām* [6:19], thereby constructing an ideological panorama that underscores the Qur'an's central theme: the oneness of God. He writes, "All these verses, though dispersed across different sūrahs, unite in a single tone, affirming the oneness of God and rejecting every form of polytheism." In this way, Quṭb demonstrates how Muqātil's cross-referential method could be reformulated into a modern exegetical strategy that emphasizes thematic unity and theological coherence (Quṭb, 1980).

In this way, Quṭb demonstrates that *tawḥīd* is not merely a theological doctrine but the foundational principle animating the entire Qur'anic value system, extending from social ethics to political order. His approach illustrates that verses dispersed across different sūrahs mutually reinforce one another, forming a coherent and harmonious network of meaning. Thus, Muqātil may be regarded as the pioneer who ignited awareness of textual interconnectedness, while Quṭb systematically and ideologically articulated this awareness—transforming tafsīr from a mere explanation of verses into a conceptual map that unveils the Qur'an's internal harmony.

Amin Ahsan Islahi (d. 1997) formalized the method of cross-referencing in his *Tadabbur-i-Qur'an* by emphasizing the unity of each sūrah as a complete exegetical unit. Whereas Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767) was known for his narrative tafsīr that connected stories across sūrahs to highlight textual interconnectedness, Islahi systematically developed this approach by demonstrating that every sūrah possesses a central theme binding its verses together. For example, in his interpretation of Q.S. *al-Baqarah*, Islahi links the verses concerning Abraham's supplication (2:127–129) with those on the change of the qiblah (2:142–150), and further connects them with the verse on the leadership of the community (2:143). Through this method, Islahi illustrates how thematic coherence within a single sūrah can be uncovered by tracing interconnections among its verses,

thereby advancing Muqātil's legacy into a more systematic and structural framework (Islahi, 2004).

Through this cross-referencing, Islahi underscores that the overarching theme of the sūrah is the formation of the Muslim community as an *ummataṇ wasaṭan* (a middle or balanced community), entrusted with the responsibility of spiritual and moral leadership. By linking Abraham's supplication, the change of the qiblah, and the verse on communal leadership, Islahi demonstrates that the sūrah's structure coheres around the central idea of the Muslim community's vocation as a divinely mandated bearer of ethical and spiritual guidance (Roborgh, 2014).

In sum, the influence of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's exegetical methods of cross-referencing and intra-textual reading is considerable. His contribution lies in laying the foundation for an interpretive approach that connects verses and narratives across sūrahs. This pattern also provided direction for *tafsīr bi'l-ma'thūr*, which emphasizes transmitted reports while still employing verse correlation, and simultaneously opened the way for modern thematic approaches. Sayyid Quṭb, in *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, developed cross-referencing to affirm ideological coherence—for example, linking Q.S. *al-Ikhlāṣ* [112] with Q.S. *al-Baqarah* [2:163] and Q.S. *al-An'ām* [6:19] to underscore the theme of *tawḥīd*. Amin Ahsan Islahi, in *Tadabbur-i-Qur'an*, emphasized the unity of the sūrah, as in Q.S. *al-Baqarah*, by connecting Abraham's supplication (2:127–129), the change of the qiblah (2:142–150), and the concept of *ummataṇ wasaṭan* (2:143). These examples demonstrate a methodological continuity: from transmitted-report exegesis to thematic interpretation, affirming that awareness of the Qur'an's textual interconnectedness is a guiding thread running through the history of tafsīr from the classical to the modern period.

The Legacy of Muqātil's Narrative-Based Interpretation: From Isrā'īliyyāt to Contextual Tafsīr

The narrative method of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, though often criticized for its reliance on *Isrā'īliyyāt*, nonetheless constitutes an important foundation of tafsīr, as it underscores the interconnectedness of stories and verses within the Qur'an. The substance of this narrative concept is not merely a framework or medium, but rather a content-driven approach that positions stories as explanatory devices for revelation, enriching detail through transmitted reports, affirming thematic coherence, and serving both didactic and hermeneutical functions. This pattern was developed by classical exegetes: al-Ṭabarī integrated narrative reports with linguistic analysis; al-Tha'labī emphasized popular stories; al-Qurṭubī connected narrative material with legal rulings; and al-Suyūṭī reinforced the principle that the Qur'an interprets itself through its network of stories. In the modern era, the narrative dimension was transformed, Tantāwī Jawharī emphasized scientific aspects, Muḥammad 'Abduh revived social exegesis, Sayyid Quṭb underscored ideological coherence through cross-referencing, Muḥammad Asad advanced rational interpretation, and Fazlur Rahman developed the "double movement" hermeneutic, stressing both historical relevance and contextual application. Thus, Muqātil's narrative method stands as an early link connecting classical *riwāyah*-based tafsīr with modern approaches that highlight narrative unity, thematic coherence, and social relevance.

The Influence of Muqātil's Narrative-Based Interpretation in the Classical Era

Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's narrative tafsīr, which emphasized recounting Qur'anic stories derived from midrashic traditions and linking verses across sūrahs, exerted significant

influence on al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, even though al-Ṭabarī developed a more systematic approach. Whereas Muqātil tended to interpret through narrative flow, often drawing on *Isrā'iliyyāt*, al-Ṭabarī adopted the narrative spirit but combined it with sound reports and linguistic analysis. For example, in his interpretation of the story of Adam, al-Ṭabarī not only cited diverse reports but also connected Q.S. *al-Baqarah* [2:35] with Q.S. *Ṭāhā* [20:120–121], weighing lexical meanings and syntactic structures to clarify the context. In this way, Muqātil's narrative influence remained present as inspiration, but in al-Ṭabarī's tafsīr it was transformed into a more critical and balanced exegesis -integrating transmitted reports, linguistic precision, and textual coherence (Ṭabarī, 1954).

Al-Tha'labī (d. 1035), in *al-Kashf wa al-Bayān*, openly compiled *Isrā'iliyyāt* as part of his tafsīr, making it one of the works most saturated with popular stories. In this process, he frequently referred to the tafsīr of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, particularly in the narrative of Adam's creation, thereby illustrating how Muqātil's narrative method was inherited and popularized within the classical exegetical tradition. Whereas Muqātil emphasized textual interconnectedness through limited use of *Isrā'iliyyāt*, al-Tha'labī expanded this by integrating narrative traditions from diverse sources—including Jewish and Christian reports—to produce a tafsīr that was communicative and accessible to a broad audience. Thus, Muqātil's influence is clearly visible in al-Tha'labī's work, though expressed in a more open orientation toward *Isrā'iliyyāt*, offering interpretive illustrations that were engaging and widely appealing (al-Tha'labī, 2002).

In line with al-Tha'labī, al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273), in *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, employed narrative material selectively, in contrast to Muqātil's more liberal acceptance of stories. Al-Qurṭubī frequently weighed the validity of transmitted reports and rejected accounts he deemed weak (*ḍa'īf*), such as the story of the golden calf that allegedly “produced a mooing sound” in the narrative of the Israelites' worship. This critical stance illustrates how Muqātil's narrative method was inherited yet refined, with al-Qurṭubī integrating narrative elements into his exegetical framework while maintaining a stricter commitment to authenticity and legal relevance (al-Qurṭubī, 1964).

Al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505), in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, presents a compilation style of tafsīr by gathering a wide range of narrative reports, including those originating from Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, but subjecting them to the scrutiny of ḥadīth criticism. Like al-Ṭabarī, al-Suyūṭī emphasized the authority of *isnād* and the quality of transmitted reports, ensuring that his tafsīr was not only rich in narrative material but also attentive to source validity. For instance, in his interpretation of Q.S. *al-Baqarah* [2:51] concerning the Israelites' worship of the calf, al-Suyūṭī cites reports from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Muslim*, which explain that the calf was fashioned from their gold ornaments and produced sound because Satan entered into it. This method illustrates how Muqātil's narrative legacy was preserved yet refined, with al-Suyūṭī combining narrative abundance with critical evaluation to maintain exegetical credibility (al-Suyūṭī, 2003). Another example appears in al-Suyūṭī's interpretation of Q.S. *al-Fātiḥah* [1:7] concerning “those who have incurred [God's] wrath” and “those who have gone astray.” Al-Suyūṭī cites ḥadīth from *Musnad Aḥmad* and al-Tirmidhī, which interpret *al-maghdūb* as referring to the Jews and *al-dāllīn* as referring to the Christians. This illustrates his compilative yet critical approach: while drawing upon Muqātil's narrative legacy, al-Suyūṭī anchors his tafsīr in authoritative reports, thereby ensuring that narrative material is not only abundant but also validated through recognized chains of transmission (al-Tirmidhī, 1996).

From the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's narrative method, though heavily imbued with *Isrā'iliyyāt* and therefore subject to considerable criticism, became a foundational element of classical tafsīr. Many exegetes after him—such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha'labī, al-Qurṭubī, al-Suyūṭī, and numerous others—followed this method in varying forms. This trajectory demonstrates how Muqātil's narrative style was adapted, critiqued, and refined within the classical exegetical tradition, leaving a lasting imprint on the development of Qur'anic interpretation.

The Influence of Muqātil's Narrative-Based Interpretation in the Modern Era

The narrative method of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān continued to exert influence in the modern period, though in new forms that were more critical and contextual. Modern exegetes adapted the narrative spirit with distinctive emphases: Muḥammad 'Abduh, through *Tafsīr al-Manār*, highlighted social relevance; Sayyid Quṭb, in *Fī Ḍilāl al-Qur'ān*, developed cross-referencing to affirm the coherence of Islamic concepts; Tantāwī Jawharī emphasized rationality through scientific approaches; Muḥammad Asad advanced a rationalist tafsīr; and Fazlur Rahman articulated his "double movement" hermeneutic, stressing the interconnection between text and historical context and its application to modern realities. Thus, Muqātil's narrative-based method did not remain confined to classical stories but became a methodological foundation that continued to transform, inspiring modern tafsīr to affirm the Qur'an's coherence while addressing contemporary challenges. In other words, the sources of narrative interpretation evolved from *Isrā'iliyyāt* to other frameworks such as history, science, and lived experience, explored through contextual readings—both textual and interpretive.

Muḥammad 'Abduh, in *Tafsīr al-Manār*, employed Muqātil's narrative method not by relying on *Isrā'iliyyāt*, but by situating the verse under interpretation within a narrative framework. He chose this narrative pattern to demonstrate coherence among verses and their relevance to social life. For example, in his interpretation of Q.S. *al-Fātiḥah* [1:5] ("*‘iyyāka na‘budu wa ‘iyyāka nasta‘īn*"), 'Abduh connected it with Q.S. *al-Baqarah* [2:2–3] concerning piety and prayer, thereby showing that the narrative of worship does not end with ritual practice but extends to social and moral attitudes. In this way, 'Abduh employed narrative interpretation as a strategy to preserve the relevance of the Qur'an's message for the development and needs of modern society (Riḍā, 1947).

The influence of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's narrative method is clearly visible in the tafsīr of Tantāwī Jawharī (d. 1940) and Muḥammad Asad (d. 1992), even though both rejected the use of *Isrā'iliyyāt*. Jawharī nonetheless retained *asbāb al-nuzūl* as a historical device to preserve the continuity of revelatory narratives. He extended Muqātil's narrative pattern by refusing to read verses in isolation, instead situating them within a broader and contextual storyline. For example, in his interpretation of Q.S. *al-‘Alaq* [96:15], Jawharī connected the verse to the earliest events of revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad, thereby making historical narrative the primary medium for elucidating meaning. Here it becomes evident that the substance of narrative tafsīr—textual interconnectedness, historical information, and didactic function—remained foundational, though reworked through modern approaches that emphasized scientific and social relevance (Jawharī, 1923).

Through his work *The Message of the Qur'ān*, Muḥammad Asad adopted Muqātil's narrative logic by employing the Prophet's *sīrah* as an interpretive framework. For instance, in his commentary on Q.S. *Āl ‘Imrān* [3:123–126], Asad connects the verses to the

historical event of the Battle of Badr, thereby making historical narrative the primary medium for elucidating meaning and relevance. In other words, Asad demonstrates that his exegetical method remains rooted in the Qur'an's narrative pattern: verses are read within a coherent network of stories, supplemented with historical information to clarify the message, while the guiding function of narrative is preserved—even as it is reframed through rational and contextual approaches (Asad, 1980).

In conclusion, the influence of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's narrative method in the tafsīr tradition not only established stories as a primary medium of interpretation but also intertwined with the principles of cross-referencing and intra-textual interpretation. Cross-referencing is evident, for example, in Sayyid Quṭb's tafsīr of Q.S. *Āl 'Imrān* [3:123–126] concerning the Battle of Badr, which he connects to the theme of struggle and divine assistance reappearing in Q.S. *al-Anfāl* [8:9–10]. In this way, the Badr narrative is read as part of a larger thematic framework on *jihād* and God's support, demonstrating how Muqātil's narrative legacy evolved into a methodological foundation for modern exegetes who sought to highlight the Qur'an's internal coherence and enduring relevance (Quṭb, 1980). Meanwhile, intra-textual interpretation is evident in al-Suyūṭī's tafsīr, which affirms the principle *al-Qur'ān yufassiru ba'duhu ba'dan* ("the Qur'an explains itself"). For example, Q.S. *Yūsuf* [12:111] – "Indeed, in their stories there is a lesson" – is understood by referring back to the preceding verses narrating the story of Joseph. In this way, the verses mutually elucidate one another within a single narrative network, demonstrating how intra-textual coherence functions as a hermeneutical strategy that preserves both the unity and the didactic purpose of Qur'anic storytelling (al-Suyūṭī, 2003). Thus, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's narrative method was not merely about arranging stories; it evolved into a hermeneutical framework that affirmed the coherence of Qur'anic meaning through a network of narratives, themes, and mutually explanatory verses. In this way, both classical and modern tafsīr moved beyond the details of transmitted reports toward readings that are systematic, thematic, and contextual, demonstrating the enduring methodological significance of Muqātil's legacy.

The Influence of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān on Thematic and Maqāṣidī Exegesis

Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's method of cross-referencing laid an important foundation for the development of *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* (thematic exegesis) and *tafsīr maqāṣidī*, by affirming thematic coherence, rejecting atomistic interpretation, and prioritizing authorial intent along with contextual flexibility. This pattern is evident in Ibn Qutaybah's (d. 889) *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, which grouped verses according to linguistic themes; (Qutaybah, 1954). al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī's (d. 1108) *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, which expanded analysis on the basis of individual words; (al-Iṣfahānī, 1992) and (al-Ghazālī, 1996) *Nahwa Tafsīr Mawḍū'ī*, which formalized modern thematic exegesis by affirming Muqātil's holistic approach as a precursor. At the same time, intra-textual interpretation also contributed to this trajectory, as emphasized by al-Suyūṭī in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* through the principle *al-Qur'ān yufassiru ba'duhu ba'dan* ("the Qur'an explains itself"). For instance, Q.S. *Yūsuf* [12:111] is understood in light of the preceding verses narrating the story of Joseph, thereby demonstrating how verses mutually elucidate one another within a narrative framework (al-Suyūṭī, 2003). Thus, Muqātil's legacy—through cross-referencing and intra-textual interpretation—became an epistemological foundation for thematic and maqāṣidī exegesis, emphasizing the unity of narrative, thematic coherence, the intent of verses, and contextual relevance.

Several other scholars developed *tafsīr maqāṣidī* in ways that, directly or indirectly, were rooted in Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's narrative legacy and holistic reading of the Qur'an. First, al-Shāṭibī (d. 1388), in *al-Muwāfaqāt*, emphasized that all Qur'anic rulings ultimately aim to serve the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*—such as justice, mercy, and public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*) (al-Shāṭibī, 1997). This line of thought appears to be built upon Muqātil's holistic reading, which emphasized the interconnectedness of verses within a single network of meaning. Second, Ibn 'Āshūr (d. 1973), in *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah al-Islāmiyyah*, formalized the concept of Qur'anic purposes, including the idea of *taḥdīth al-ni'am* (renewal of blessings), by employing cross-referencing patterns to derive *maqāṣid* principles from the interrelation of verses (Ibn 'Āshūr, 2001).

Third, Jasser Auda (contemporary) has advanced *tafsīr maqāṣidī* through modern methodological tools, employing the *maqāṣid* framework to reinterpret Qur'anic verses on gender, warfare, and pluralism. His approach demonstrates how Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's legacy of holistic and narrative-based interpretation continues to inspire contemporary scholarship, now articulated through systematic methodologies that address pressing ethical and social issues in the modern world (Auda, 2008). Meanwhile, through his *maqāṣidī* approach, Jasser Auda reinterprets Qur'anic verses on male–female relations by emphasizing the *maqāṣid* of justice and equality. For example, Q.S. *al-Nisā'* [4:34]—often understood in hierarchical terms—is read within a *maqāṣidī* framework to affirm protection and responsibility rather than domination. In this way, Auda demonstrates how the narrative legacy of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān can be reformulated through contemporary hermeneutics, transforming potentially hierarchical readings into interpretations that uphold ethical universality and gender equity (Auda, 2008). In his interpretation of Qur'anic verses on warfare, such as Q.S. *al-Baqarah* [2:190]—“Fight in the way of God against those who fight you, but do not transgress”—Jasser Auda emphasizes the *maqāṣid* of mercy (*raḥmah*) and the protection of life. He rejects literalist readings that legitimize violence without contextual consideration and instead underscores that the Qur'an's purpose in prescribing warfare is defense rather than aggression. In this way, Auda reframes martial verses within an ethical framework that prioritizes human dignity and the preservation of life, demonstrating how *maqāṣidī* hermeneutics can transform potentially harsh injunctions into principles of justice and compassion (Auda, 2008). Jasser Auda also reinterprets Qur'anic verses on religious diversity, such as Q.S. *al-Hujurat* [49:13]—“We created you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another”—by emphasizing the *maqāṣid* of coexistence and social welfare (*maṣlaḥah*). He rejects exclusivist interpretations that generate conflict and instead underscores that the Qur'an's purpose is to build a plural and just society. In this way, Auda situates diversity as a divine gift and frames pluralism as a central ethical objective of the Qur'an, thereby extending Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's holistic narrative legacy into a contemporary *maqāṣidī* hermeneutic (Auda, 2008). Auda's approach demonstrates continuity with Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's contextual flexibility, yet it is enriched by systems theory and contemporary methodologies. Thus, the trajectory of *tafsīr maqāṣidī* from al-Shāṭibī to Auda illustrates how Muqātil's narrative legacy was transformed into a hermeneutical framework that emphasizes the purposes, coherence, and social relevance of the Qur'an.

Muqātil's method of cross-referencing can be regarded as a proto-*maqāṣidī* approach, since from the outset he underscored the coherence and objectives of Qur'anic verses rather than mere textual literalism. This initial intuition became the foundation for modern *maqāṣidī* exegesis, which is now employed to address contemporary issues. In the

field of bioethics, for example, *maqāṣidī* tafsīr emphasizes the protection of life (*ḥifẓ al-naḥs*) and public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), so that verses on human creation—such as Q.S. *al-Mu'minūn* [23:12–14]—are read within the framework of medical ethics and reproductive technology (Kamali, 2008). In the field of human rights, *maqāṣid* such as justice and human dignity are employed to interpret Qur'anic verses on religious freedom—for example, Q.S. *al-Baqarah* [2:256]: “There is no compulsion in religion.” In this reading, exegesis does not stop at textual literalism but emphasizes the higher objective of safeguarding freedom. Thus, the verse is understood not merely as a prohibition of coercion but as a normative foundation for protecting individual conscience and ensuring the dignity of human choice within a plural society (Ibn 'Āshūr, 2001). In interreligious dialogue, the *maqāṣid* of coexistence and mercy (*raḥmah*) are employed to interpret Qur'anic verses on diversity, such as Q.S. *al-Hujurat* [49:13]—“We created you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another.” In this reading, Qur'anic exegesis becomes a foundation for pluralism and cross-faith cooperation. The verse is not reduced to a descriptive statement of human difference but is elevated into a normative principle that affirms diversity as a divine will and frames it as the basis for building just, cooperative, and inclusive societies (Auda, 2008). Thus, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's narrative intuition and cross-referencing method proved to be the initial link that enabled tafsīr to evolve toward a *maqāṣidī* orientation, one that emphasizes coherence, purpose, and the social relevance of the Qur'an in addressing modern challenges.

Furthermore, the influence of Muqātil's narrative method on the development of thematic exegesis can be illustrated through the case study of the theme of “justice.” Muqātil employed a cross-referencing approach by connecting Q.S. *al-Nisā'* [4:135]—“Stand firmly for justice”—with Q.S. *al-Mā'idah* [5:8]—“Do not let the hatred of a people lead you to injustice.” In doing so, he underscored that justice transcends tribal loyalty and stands as a universal principle (Ibn Sulaymān, 1980). This approach illustrates how Muqātil read the Qur'anic verses not atomistically but within a coherent narrative network. In modern *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* (thematic exegesis), the theme of justice is developed more systematically by gathering all relevant verses—such as Q.S. *al-Nisā'* [4:58] on trust (*amānah*) and Q.S. *al-Naḥl* [16:90] on the command to act justly—and then analyzing them collectively. In this way, thematic exegesis extends Muqātil's proto-*maqāṣidī* intuition into a structured methodology that highlights the Qur'an's ethical coherence and universal principles (al-Ghazālī, 1996). In summary, justice is understood as a Qur'anic imperative that transcends themes and contexts, becoming a foundational principle that affirms the *maqāṣid* of the Qur'an. In other words, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's narrative method can be regarded as the initial link in the genealogy of thematic and *maqāṣidī* exegesis, both of which emphasize coherence, purpose, and social relevance.

At the same time, contemporary reformists such as Amina Wadud explicitly continue Muqātil's tradition of narrative and cross-referencing exegesis by situating contested verses—such as Q.S. *al-Nisā'* [4:34]—within the *maqāṣid* of gender equality. In *Qur'an and Woman*, Wadud interprets this verse by cross-referencing Q.S. *al-Aḥzāb* [33:35], which affirms the spiritual equality of men and women. In doing so, she reframes male authority (*qiwāmah*) not as domination but as responsibility, which must be balanced with the principles of justice and mercy (*raḥmah*) (Wadud, 1999). In *Inside the Gender Jihad*, Amina Wadud expands this approach by emphasizing that Qur'anic interpretation must be oriented toward universal *maqāṣid* such as justice, compassion (*raḥmah*), and social welfare (*maṣlaḥah*). Within this framework, gender relations are read not in terms of hierarchy but

as partnership and cooperation. By shifting the hermeneutical focus from literalist readings to overarching ethical objectives, Wadud situates the Qur'an as a text that mandates egalitarian collaboration, thereby extending Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's narrative and cross-referencing legacy into a contemporary feminist *maqāṣidī* paradigm (Wadud, 2006). Thus, Wadud demonstrates methodological continuity: Muqātil's logic of cross-referencing, which rejected the fragmentation of verses, became an initial step later developed in modern thematic and *maqāṣidī* exegesis to affirm the Qur'an's relevance to contemporary issues such as gender equality.

As a conclusion to this subchapter, it is clear that Muqātil ibn Sulaymān played a pioneering role in opening the path toward *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* and *maqāṣidī*. Through his method of cross-referencing, he rejected atomistic readings and emphasized coherence and higher ethical purposes, even if not yet formulated systematically. His interpretation of Q.S. *al-Nisā'* [4:34], linked with Q.S. *al-Baqarah* [2:228] and Q.S. *al-Rūm* [30:21], illustrates his effort to maintain textual balance and to suggest justice within household relations (Ibn Sulaymān, 1980). Ibn 'Āshūr subsequently developed this intuition into an explicit *maqāṣidī* framework, interpreting Q.S. *al-Nisā'* [4:34] through the principles of *al-'adl* (justice) and *al-ta'āwun* (cooperation), and situating it within the broader context of social reform against pre-Islamic patriarchy. This evolution underscores a clear continuity: Muqātil laid the groundwork of coherence and ethical implication, while Ibn 'Āshūr systematized it into a comprehensive theory of *maqāṣid* (Ibn 'Āshūr, 2001). Contemporary reformists such as Amina Wadud continue this tradition by interpreting Q.S. *al-Nisā'* [4:34] through the *maqāṣid* of gender equality—for instance, by cross-referencing Q.S. *al-Aḥzāb* [33:35]. In doing so, she situates contested verses within a broader hermeneutical framework that emphasizes justice, spiritual equality, and ethical responsibility, thereby extending Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's narrative and cross-referencing legacy into a feminist *maqāṣidī* paradigm (Wadud, 1999). This demonstrates that Muqātil's logic of cross-referencing was the first step toward thematic and *maqāṣidī* exegesis, which emphasizes justice, mercy (*raḥmah*), and the social relevance of the Qur'an. By rejecting atomistic fragmentation and highlighting coherence and ethical purpose, Muqātil laid the groundwork for interpretive traditions that later evolved into systematic thematic and *maqāṣidī* frameworks.

CONCLUSION

Although often criticized and marginalized within the classical tradition, the exegesis of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān made a significant contribution to the development of Qur'anic interpretive methodology. Through his cross-referencing approach, he rejected atomistic readings and emphasized the coherence of verses, while his narrative method preserved historical context and highlighted the function of stories as a medium of interpretation. This intuition later became the foundation for the emergence of *tafsīr mawḍū'ī*, which stresses thematic unity, and *tafsīr maqāṣidī*, which is oriented toward ethical and social purposes. By prioritizing textual coherence, ethical intent, and historical relevance, Muqātil can be regarded as one of the earliest links connecting *tafsīr bi'l-riwāyah* with systematic and contextual approaches in the exegetical tradition.

This legacy demonstrates that, despite his controversial position, Muqātil's contribution remains significant in shaping the trajectory of Qur'anic interpretation toward a more holistic and adaptive reading.

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