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DEPARTMENT OF ISLAMIC STUDIES

MASTER THESIS

THE TAFSĪR METHOD OF AL-NĀBULSĪ: WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON SURAH AL-KAHF

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THESIS SUPERVISOR
ASSIST. PROF. İHSAN KAHVECİ

ISTANBUL, 2025

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by
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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Basic Islamic Studies

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ÖZ

NĀBULSĪ'NİN TEFSİR METODU: KEHF SÛRESİ ÖZELİNDE BİR İNCELEME

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Çağdaş tefsîr eserleri çeşitli metod ve yaklaşımlar kullanmaktadır. Bunlar arasında Muhammed Râtib en-Nâbulsî'nin tefsîri, hem geleneksel hem de çağdaş unsurları birleştiren modern bir yorum olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Bu tez, Nâbulsî'nin tefsîr metodu, zengin anlatıları ve teolojik derinliğiyle ünlü bir sure olan Kehf Suresi'ne dair yorumları üzerinden odaklanarak incelemektedir. Bu çalışma, onun tüm tefsîrini kapsamaz, bunun yerine bu suredeki yorumlama tekniklerini temsili bir örnek olarak derinlemesine ele alır. Nâbulsî'nin tefsîrinin sistematik bir değerlendirmesi yoluyla bu araştırma, metodunun temel özelliklerini tespit etmektedir: (1) klasik Arap geleneğine dayanan dilbilimsel ve belagî analiz, (2) tasavvufî ilhamlı manevî içgörülerin dahil edilmesi, (3) gereksiz İsrâiliyyat (Yahudi-Hristiyan anlatıları) kullanımından kaçınırken sahih naklî rivayetlere (et-tefsîr bi'l-me'sûr) dayanma, (4) akli ve felsefî perspektiflerle (et-tefsîr bi'r-re'y) etkileşim, ve (5) Kur'ân öğretilerini çağdaş benzetmeler ve temsillerle bağlamsallaştırarak anlaşılırlığı artırma. Özellikle, Nâbulsî'nin tefsîri akademik titizlik ile halkın anlayışını birleştirerek hem uzmanlara hem de sıradan okuyuculara hitap eden sade bir üslup kullanır. Ayrıca, zaman zaman kozmolojik ve bilimsel gözlemlere yaptığı atıflar, daha sonraki bilimsel tefsîrlerin ampirik yaklaşımı olmasa da, modern bir entelektüel ilgiyi yansıtır. Bulgular, Nâbulsî'nin metodolojisinin gelenekselci, mistik ve bilimsel yorumları uyumlu hale getirdiği için katı sınıflandırmalara meydan okuduğunu göstermektedir. Bu

çalışma, onun eserini tefsîr tarihinin geniş bağlamına yerleştirerek, Kur'ân yorumlarının çeşitliliği ve klasik metodolojilerin değişen bağlamlara uyarlanabilirliği üzerine devam eden akademik tartışmalara katkı sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tefsîr, en-Nâbulsî, Kehf Suresi, Geleneksel Tefsîr, Modern Tefsîr, Bilimsel Tefsîr.

ABSTRACT

THE TAFSĪR METHOD OF AL-NĀBULSĪ: WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON SURAH AL-KAHF

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Contemporary tafsīr works employ diverse methods and approaches. Among them, the tafsīr of Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī, which stands out as a modern interpretation that integrates both traditional and contemporary elements. This thesis examines al-Nābulsī's tafsīr method, with a focused analysis on his exegesis of Surah al-Kahf—a chapter renowned for its rich narratives and theological depth. This study does not encompass his entire tafsīr but instead offers an in-depth exploration of his interpretive techniques within this surah as a representative case. Through a systematic assessment of al-Nābulsī's commentary, this research identifies key characteristics of his method: (1) linguistic and rhetorical analysis rooted in classical Arabic tradition, (2) incorporation of Sufi-inspired spiritual insights, (3) avoidance of superfluous al-isrā'īlīyāt (Judeo-Christian narratives) while retaining reliance on sound transmitted reports (al-tafsīr bi-al-ma'thūr), (4) engagement with rational and philosophical perspectives (al-tafsīr bi-al-ra'y), and (5) contextualization of Qur'ānic teachings through parables and contemporary analogies to enhance accessibility. Notably, al-Nābulsī's tafsīr bridges scholarly rigor with public comprehension, employing a simple style that addresses both specialists and ordinary readers. Furthermore, his occasional references to cosmological and scientific observations reflect a modern intellectual interest, though not in the empiricist sense of

later scientific tafsīr. The findings suggest that al-Nābulsī's method challenges rigid categorization, as it harmonizes traditionalist, mystical, and scientific strands of interpretation. By situating his work within the broader history of tafsīr, this study contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions on the diversity of Qur'ānic exegesis and the adaptability of classical methods to changing contexts.

Keywords: Tafsīr, al-Nābulsī, Surah al-Kahf, Traditional Tafsīr, Modern Tafsīr, Scientific Exegesis.

DEDICATION

To my parents and my daughters.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

First and foremost, I express my deepest gratitude to Allah SWT, the Almighty, for granting me the strength and countless opportunities to pursue this academic journey. Without His endless mercy and guidance, none of this would have been possible.

My profound thanks go to my husband, whose firm support carried me through every stage of this process—from the challenging language preparation to the final moments of writing this thesis. His patience, encouragement, and sacrifices were the pillars that sustained me, and without him, this achievement would have remained out of reach.

To my precious daughters, Salwa and Hira (Hasna), I owe more than words can convey. Salwa, my resilient child, tolerated my absence during times when she needed me most, bearing this sacrifice with remarkable maturity. Hira, my little sunshine, greeted my departures to the classes of Qur'ān memorization with smiles and gifted me the precious quiet moments I needed to write the thesis. Their love and understanding were my greatest motivators.

I am eternally grateful to my parents and mother-in-law, whose constant prayers and blessings enveloped me like a protective shield throughout this journey. Their faith in me was a source of unwavering strength.

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May Allah SWT reward them all abundantly.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

SWT	Subḥānahu wa Taʿālā
PBUH	Peace Be Upon Him

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This research, titled with an introductory chapter to present the foundational concepts that frame the study. This chapter explains the centrality of Qur'ānic exegesis in Islamic scholarship, outlines the unique status and virtues of Surah al-Kahf, and introduces the method of Muḥammad Rāṭib al-Nābulsī. It also discusses the rationale behind selecting this particular topic, provides a literature review, and concludes with the research's theoretical framework.

1.1. Why Surah al-Kahf?

Surah al-Kahf holds a distinguished position among the chapters of the Holy Qur'ān due to its profound themes, timeless lessons, and the numerous virtues highlighted in prophetic traditions. It addresses a wide range of critical topics, in a limited legnth, including matters of Islamic creed (*aqidah*), ethics (*akhlaq*), and the stories of past nations, which offer invaluable lessons for humanity. Moreover, Surah al-Kahf carries particular significance for the end times (*akhir al-zaman*), as emphasized in several hadiths, making its study and interpretation especially relevant in contemporary times.

The virtues of Surah al-Kahf are well-documented in the Sunnah. For instance, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: *"Whoever memorizes ten verses from the beginning of Surah al-Kahf will be protected from the trials of the Dajjal (Antichrist)."*[1] In another ṣaḥīḥ narration, it is mentioned: *"Whoever recites Surah al-Kahf on Friday, a light will shine*

[1] Muslim b. al-Hajjaj al-Qushayri al-Nisaburi, *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, n.d.), 556, "Bab Fadl Surat al-Kahf wa Ayat al-Kursi," available online at https://www.islamweb.net/ar/library/content/1/1414

for him between the two Fridays."[2] These traditions highlight the Surah's spiritual and protective benefits, particularly in safeguarding believers from the tribulations of the Dajjal, a major sign of the end times.

Another ḍaʿīf hadith narrated by Ismail b. Rafi' further underscores the grandeur of Surah al-Kahf:

> Shall I not inform you of a Surah whose greatness fills the space between the heavens and the earth, and which was accompanied by seventy thousand angels? It is Surah al-Kahf. Whoever recites it on Friday, Allah will forgive his sins until the next Friday, with an additional three days, and he will be granted a light that reaches the heavens. He will also be protected from the fitnah (trials) of the Dajjal. And whoever recites the last five verses of Surah al-Kahf before sleeping, he will be preserved, and he will be awakened at any hour of the night he wishes.[3]

These narrations illustrate the Surah's unique status and its connection to the challenges of the end times. In an era marked by widespread confusion, moral decay, and ideological conflicts—often described as times of fitnah—the lessons of Surah al-Kahf serve as a beacon of guidance. Its stories, such as the People of the Cave, the encounter between Mūsā and Khidr, and the tale of Dhul-Qarnayn, provide profound insights into faith, perseverance, divine wisdom, and the struggle against corruption.

Furthermore, Surah al-Kahf addresses themes that resonate deeply with contemporary challenges, such as the pursuit of material wealth, the dangers of arrogance, and the importance of loyalty to faith. Its emphasis on the temporary nature of worldly life and the ultimate triumph of truth over falsehood offers solace and direction to believers navigating the complexities of modern life.

Given the current global climate, characterized by moral and spiritual crises, the study and interpretation of Surah al-Kahf are of supreme importance. By delving into its tafsīr, particularly through the lens of a renowned scholar like al-Nābulsī, I can uncover timeless

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[2] Sa'id bin Ali bin Wahf al-Qahtani, *'Azamat al-Qur'ān wa Ta'zimuhu wa Atharuhu fi al-Nufus fi Daw' al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah – Mafhum, wa 'Azamah, wa Athar, wa Tadabbur, wa Fada'il, wa 'Ilm, wa 'Amal, wa Ta'ahud, wa Adab, wa Akhlaq* (Riyadh: Safir Press, n.d.), 53.

[3] Abu Abdullah Muhammad al-Darir al-Rāzī, *Fada'il al-Qur'ān wa Ma Unzila min al-Qur'ān bi-Makka wa Ma Unzila bi-l-Madina*, ed. Ghazwah Badir (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1987), 96.

wisdom that not only enriches our understanding of the Qur'ān but also equips us to face the trials of our times with resilience and faith.

1.2. Rationale for Choosing This Topic

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī occupies a unique position in the field of Qur'ānic exegesis due to his deep connection with the people and his ability to communicate the teachings of Islam in a way that resonates with both the general public and scholars. Hence, it is categorized as al-tafsīr al-ijtima'i His tafsīr, which spans ten volumes, is a monumental work that reflects his lifelong commitment to educating the masses and instilling the love of Islam in their hearts.

al-Nābulsī began his tafsīr in 1970 as a series of weekly lectures delivered at the mosque of his late grandfather, 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulsī, in Damascus. Over the course of approximately forty years, he meticulously expounded on the entire Qur'ān, recording each lesson and later entrusting his close students with the task of compiling and transcribing these lectures. He personally revised the entire work before its publication, ensuring its accuracy and coherence. This lengthy and rigorous process underscores the depth and reliability of his tafsīr.[4]

One of the distinguishing features of al-Nābulsī's tafsīr is its reliance on both classical and modern sources of exegesis. He drew extensively from renowned traditional tafsīrs such as *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, *Tafsīr al-Rāzī*, *Tafsīr al-Qurtubi*, and *Tafsīr ibn Kathir*, while also incorporating insights from modern exegetes like Sayyid Qutb and Sheikh Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sha'rāwī.[5] This synthesis of classical and contemporary perspectives enriches his tafsīr, making it a comprehensive and balanced resource for understanding the Qur'ān.

[4] Muhammad Shawkat Sulayman, *Al-Tafsīr al-'Ilmi fi Tafsīr Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī* (unpublished master's thesis, Firat University, 2020), 37–39.
[5] Ibid, 40.

al-Nābulsī's ability to communicate complex Qur'ānic concepts in simple, accessible language is another hallmark of his tafsīr. His lectures were attended by a diverse audience, ranging from ordinary individuals to seasoned scholars, and his tafsīr reflects this inclusivity. By using clear and engaging language, he made the profound teachings of the Qur'ān accessible to all, ensuring that his work would appeal to a broad readership. This approach sets his tafsīr apart from many others, which often cater exclusively to an academic audience.

Moreover, al-Nābulsī's awareness of modern scientific developments[6] and his ability to contextualize Qur'ānic teachings within the framework of contemporary knowledge further enhance the relevance of his Tafsīr. He skillfully bridges the gap between traditional Islamic scholarship and modern advancements, offering interpretations that resonate with today's readers. This unique blend of tradition and modernity makes his Tafsīr particularly valuable in addressing the intellectual and spiritual needs of the modern Muslim community.

Finally, al-Nābulsī's tafsīr is significant because it addresses contemporary issues and challenges (*fitnahs*) faced by Muslims in the modern world. His insights into these matters provide guidance and solutions rooted in the Qur'ānic worldview, making his work an essential resource for navigating the complexities of contemporary life. For these reasons, studying and analyzing al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr is not only academically rewarding but also practically beneficial, particularly in a master's degree program where the focus is on understanding and addressing modern challenges through the lens of Qur'ānic exegesis.

1.3. Research Questions

This study is structured around a central research question, complemented by several subsidiary questions that collectively shape the research framework. The main research question guiding this thesis is: What is Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's approach in the

[6]It's essential to remember that Nabulsi is not a scientist, yet he is deeply engaged with the latest scientific theories and developments, as he explained in the introduction to his tafsīr.

tafsīr of Sūrat al-Kahf? This question aims to uncover whether al-Nābulsī's exegesis of this chapter follows a purely traditional method, adopts a modern interpretive framework, or represents a synthesis of both. By addressing this inquiry, the study seeks to situate al-Nābulsī's work within the broader discourse on tafsīr methods and examine how his interpretive style navigates between classical scholarship and contemporary concerns.

To provide a comprehensive answer to this main question, the research also addresses several subsidiary questions. The first of these is: Who is Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī, and what is his scholarly contribution to Islamic thought and Qur'ānic interpretation? Understanding al-Nābulsī's intellectual background, educational experiences, and teaching career is essential, as these elements significantly influence his exegetical approach. For instance, his emphasis on simplifying complex theological concepts and making Qur'ānic teachings accessible to a general audience is closely linked to his role as a teacher (murabbi) and public educator.

The second subsidiary question asks: What are the established methods in Qur'ānic tafsīr, both classical and modern? This inquiry serves to outline the primary interpretive frameworks employed by traditional mufassirūn and modern scholars, providing a comparative backdrop against which al-Nābulsī's method can be examined. By identifying the key features of these approaches, the study aims to determine where al-Nābulsī's tafsīr aligns or diverges from established exegetical traditions.

Finally, the third subsidiary question explores: What are the general characteristics and methods of al-Nābulsī's tafsīr? Answering this question will allow for a systematic classification of his interpretive style, which is crucial for understanding how his method manifests in the exegesis of Sūrat al-Kahf. This analysis will not only highlight the distinctive features of his tafsīr but also provide insights into how his overall interpretive approach shapes his reading of this specific chapter.

Together, these questions are designed to construct a coherent research framework that examines al-Nābulsī's tafsīr within its intellectual, methodological, and textual contexts.

They aim to contribute to a nuanced understanding of how classical tafsīr methods are adapted and reinterpreted in contemporary exegetical works.

1.4. Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to explore the intellectual and scholarly background of Muḥammad Rāṭib al-Nābulsī, as a foundational step toward understanding his approach to Qur'ānic interpretation. Al-Nābulsī is not only a renowned scholar but also a prominent educator and public intellectual whose works are widely circulated in contemporary Islamic discourse. Investigating his academic formation, pedagogical experiences, and spiritual influences is essential, as these elements have significantly shaped his exegetical style. By examining his scholarly trajectory, this study aims to uncover how his background as a teacher (*murabbi*) and a preacher has informed his emphasis on simplifying complex theological ideas and making the Qur'ānic message accessible to a diverse audience.

A second objective of this study is to provide a concise overview of the main methods in Qur'ānic exegesis, encompassing both classical and modern approaches. This objective is critical in situating al-Nābulsī's *tafsīr* within the broader historical and methodological continuum of Islamic exegesis. By outlining the key features of traditional *tafsīr* methods—such as *tafsīr bi-al-ma'thūr* (transmitted exegesis) and *tafsīr bi-al-ra'y* (interpretation based on reason)—alongside modern interpretive trends that engage with contemporary issues and scientific discourse, this research will establish a framework for comparative analysis. This overview will serve as a lens through which al-Nābulsī's exegetical approach can be critically examined, assessing to what extent his method aligns with or diverges from these established paradigms.

The third objective is to analyze al-Nābulsī's general *tafsīr* method through selected examples from his works. This objective focuses on identifying the overarching principles and interpretive strategies that characterize his exegetical output. By selecting representative examples from various parts of his *tafsīr*, the study aims to discern recurring

themes, such as his emphasis on linguistic precision, moral and spiritual lessons, and the integration of philosophical and rational reflections. This analysis will help in constructing a coherent profile of al-Nābulsī's methodological tendencies, which is essential for understanding how his approach functions across different Qur'ānic passages.

The final and most focused objective is to examine in detail al-Nābulsī's *tafsīr* of Sūrah al-Kahf, identifying the interpretive tools, thematic emphases, and contemporary relevance in his approach. Sūrah al-Kahf is a chapter rich with narratives that have profound theological and moral implications, making it an ideal case study for a detailed analysis of al-Nābulsī's method. This objective involves a close reading of his commentary on this *sūrah*, paying particular attention to how he employs linguistic analysis, integrates Sufi spiritual insights, navigates transmitted reports and *isrā'īliyyāt*, and contextualizes the Qur'ānic teachings for modern readers. By doing so, this research aims to illustrate how al-Nābulsī's exegetical approach embodies a synthesis of traditional and contemporary interpretive elements, thus contributing to the dynamic evolution of Qur'ānic exegesis in the modern era.

Collectively, these objectives are designed to construct a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Muḥammad Rāṭib al-Nābulsī's contribution to Qur'ānic interpretation. They ensure that the study not only provides a detailed analysis of his work but also situates it within the broader discourse of Islamic *tafsīr*, highlighting its relevance and adaptability in contemporary contexts.

1.5. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, analytical, and library-based methodology, appropriate for examining the intellectual and exegetical approach of Muḥammad Rāṭib al-Nābulsī, particularly in his interpretation of Surah al-Kahf.

The research is primarily based on textual analysis of al-Nābulsī's published tafsīr works and recorded lectures. His multi-volume tafsīr al-Nābulsī serves as the central source for understanding his hermeneutical approach, interpretive strategies, and thematic emphasis.

Where available, his oral lectures—transcribed and archived online—have also been consulted, particularly when they provide clarification or elaboration not found in the written tafsīr.

In addition to primary sources, the study makes extensive use of secondary literature, including academic theses, journal articles, and critical studies that have examined al-Nābulsī's exegetical method. These secondary sources help contextualize his work within the broader tradition of Qur'ānic interpretation and offer valuable insights into how his method compares with both classical and contemporary approaches.

The analytical approach employed in this study is based on thematic and methodological analysis, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of Muḥammad Rāṭib al-Nābulsī's exegetical method. This approach seeks to identify the distinctive features that characterize al-Nābulsī's *tafsīr* method, examining the principles and interpretive strategies that underpin his works. Furthermore, the study analyzes how he applies this general method in the specific context of his interpretation of Sūrat al-Kahf, using this chapter as a representative case to illustrate his exegetical approach in practice. Particular attention is given to the dynamic interplay between classical sources, rational reflection, and contemporary concerns within his interpretation, highlighting how al-Nābulsī harmonizes traditional Islamic scholarship with the intellectual and social demands of modern audiences. Through this analytical framework, the study aims to uncover the methodological coherence and adaptability that define al-Nābulsī's contribution to contemporary Qur'ānic exegesis.

This method allows for a focused yet holistic understanding of al-Nābulsī's exegetical philosophy and provides a foundation for evaluating the originality and relevance of his contribution to modern Qur'ānic interpretation.

1.6. Scope and Limitations

This study is delimited to an in-depth examination of Muḥammad Rāṭib al-Nābulsī's interpretation (*tafsīr*) of Sūrat al-Kahf, rather than attempting a comprehensive analysis of his entire *tafsīr* corpus. The decision to focus on a single chapter is driven by the objective of achieving analytical depth, allowing for a detailed exploration of al-Nābulsī's interpretive techniques, thematic emphases, and methodological nuances. Sūrat al-Kahf has been deliberately selected as the focal point of this research due to its rich narrative structure and profound theological, moral, and eschatological themes, which offer a fertile ground for examining various layers of Qur'ānic exegesis. Furthermore, the *sūrah*'s established significance in Islamic tradition—highlighted by its association with protection from the trials of Dajjāl (Antichrist) and its frequent recitation on Fridays—makes it a representative chapter through which al-Nābulsī's exegetical approach can be meaningfully assessed.

However, this narrowed scope also imposes certain limitations. By concentrating on a single chapter, the study does not encompass the full range of topics and styles present in al-Nābulsī's other works, which might display additional dimensions of his method. Therefore, while the findings from this focused case study are intended to shed light on his broader exegetical style, they are not exhaustive of his entire *tafsīr* contributions. Additionally, this research is limited to textual analysis of al-Nābulsī's published and recorded works, without engaging in direct interviews or field studies, which could have provided further insights into his interpretive philosophy. Despite these limitations, the study aims to offer a detailed and representative understanding of al-Nābulsī's *tafsīr* method as it manifests in the exegesis of Sūrat al-Kahf, contributing to the larger discourse on contemporary Qur'ānic interpretation.

1.7. Literature Review

The scholarly work surrounding Muḥammad Rāṭib al-Nābulsī's tafsīr is steadily growing, with significant contributions exploring various dimensions of his method. These studies

generally converge on the central themes of scientific exegesis, rhetorical effectiveness, and pedagogical accessibility, while also offering a critical assessment of his approach.

One of the foundational studies in this domain is the master's thesis by Mohammad Shawkat Sulaiman (2020) from Fırat University, titled *Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī and Scientific Tafsīr*.[7] This work offers a comprehensive examination of al-Nābulsī's tafsīr through the lens of scientific exegesis (*al-tafsīr al-ʿilmī*), detailing his biography, intellectual background, and distinctive exegetical style. Sulaiman situates al-Nābulsī within the broader debates on scientific tafsīr, outlining both supporting and opposing scholarly perspectives. The thesis provides a thematic overview of al-Nābulsī's interpretative method, particularly his reliance on empirical and scientific discourse to illuminate the miraculous aspects (iʿjāz) of the Qur'ān. The study also offers applied examples from various verses to demonstrate how al-Nābulsī engages with natural phenomena—such as the cosmos, mountains, seas, and human creation—in a way that is both informative and spiritually enriching.

Alioua Nacera's study *Juhūd al-Ustādh al-Duktūr Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī fī al-Tafsīr al-ʿIlmī,*[8] (2022) explores al-Nābulsī's contributions to scientific *tafsīr*, particularly his encyclopedic *Āyāt Allāh fī al-Āfāq*. While al-Nābulsī's *al-Kahf* commentary does not prioritize empiricism, Nacera notes his occasional references to cosmological phenomena (e.g., the sun's orbit in 18:86) as symbolic affirmations of divine order. This aligns with the thesis's observation that his scientific allusions serve pedagogical, not polemical, purposes.

Similarly, Khudair and Khudair's work *al-Duktūr Muḥammad Rāṭib al-Nābulusī wa-juhūduhu fī al-iʿjāz al-ʿilmī,*[9] (2014) contextualizes his scientific discourse within the

[7] Mohammad Shawkat Sulaiman, *Muhammed Ratib en-Nablusî ve İlmî Tefsir* (Master's thesis, Fırat University, 2020), Elazığ, Turkey.
[8] Alioua Nacera, "Juhūd al-ustādh al-duktūr Muḥammad Rāṭib al-Nābulusī fī al-tafsīr al-ʿilmī li-l-Qurʾān al-karīm: Āyāt Allāh fī al-kawn anmūdhajan," *Majallat al-Kulliyya al-Islāmiyya al-Jāmiʿa*, al-Jāmiʿa al-Islāmiyya, 2022.
[9] Ahmad Khuḍayr ʿUmayr and Ismāʿīl Mukhlif Khuḍayr, "al-Duktūr Muḥammad Rāṭib al-Nābulusī wa-juhūduhu fī al-iʿjāz al-ʿilmī," *Majallat al-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya*, 2014.

tradition of *iʿjāz* (miraculousness), though they caution against overstating its empirical rigor. Their analysis supports this thesis's argument that al-Nābulsī's *al-Kahf* exegesis leans toward *taʾwīl* (allegorical interpretation) rather than literal scientism.

A comparative study by Nidal Yusuf (2019), submitted to al-Khalil University, places al-Nābulsī's scientific exegesis in dialogue with that of Dr. Zaghloul al-Najjar. This thesis, entitled *Scientific Exegesis in the Tafsīr of Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī and Zaghloul al-Najjār,*[10] evaluates their respective encyclopedic works: *Mawsūʿat al-Iʿjāz al-ʿIlmī fī al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunnah* (al-Nābulsī) and *Tafsīr al-Āyāt al-Kawniyyah fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (al-Najjār). Yusuf finds that while al-Najjār excels in scientific depth, al-Nābulsī stands out for integrating spiritual insights and ethical reflections into his exegesis. The study underscores the importance of corroborating scientific claims with proper sourcing, noting that both scholars could improve in this regard.

Muhammad Naeem Faraj's (2020) master's thesis at An-Najah National University, *al-Nābulsī's Method in Scientific Exegesis in "Tadabbur Āyāt Allāh fī al-Nafs wa al-Kawn wa al-Ḥayāt"*,[11] provides a focused critique of al-Nābulsī's landmark tafsīr work. The study acknowledges al-Nābulsī's commitment to scientific rigor, linguistic precision, and relevance to contemporary reality. However, it also critiques certain aspects of overextension in scientific interpretation and reliance on weak hadiths, which occasionally undermines the spiritual coherence of his tafsīr. Faraj employs a combined inductive and analytical method, balancing between documenting positive contributions and highlighting methodological inconsistencies.

[10] Nidal Yusuf, *al-Tafsīr al-ʿIlmī lil-Qur'ān al-Karīm bayna al-Duktūr Muḥammad Rāṭib al-Nābulusī wa-al-Duktūr Zaghālūl al-Najjār: Dirāsah Muqāranah* (Master's thesis, Hebron University, 2019), al-Khalil, Palestine.

[11] Muhammad Naeem Ahmad Faraj, *Manhaj al-Nābulusī fī al-Tafsīr al-ʿIlmī fī Tafsīrihi Tadabbur Āyāt Allāh fī al-Nafs wa-al-Kawn wa-al-Ḥayāt* (Master's thesis, An-Najah National University, 2020), Nablus, Palestine.

Anothernotable contribution is the 2013 master's thesis by Ahmad Hussein al-Rifa'i from al-Quds University,[12] which investigates "the role of ضرب المثل (parable or analogy)" in al-Nābulsī's tafsīr, focusing specifically on Surah al-Baqara and Surah Āl ʿImrān. This study highlights al-Nābulsī's effective use of relatable analogies to simplify complex theological and ethical messages for a contemporary audience. Using a content analysis approach, al-Rifa'i examines the preacher's use of everyday examples to enhance pedagogical impact and behavioral transformation. However, the study also notes some shortcomings, particularly al-Nābulsī's frequent use of weak or fabricated hadiths and repetition of certain examples.

Al-Hujayna et al.'s study *Maqāṣid al-Amthāl al-Qaṣaṣiyya fī Tafsīr al-Nābulsī*[13] (2023) examines his use of parables to clarify *al-Kahf*'s complex narratives (e.g., the parable of the "Two Gardens" in 18:32–44). The authors demonstrate how al-Nābulsī's analogies bridge classical rhetoric and modern didactics, a technique central to this thesis's analysis of his linguistic method.

Al-Manoufi et al.'s pedagogical research *Malāmih Falsafat al-Tarbiyya fī Kutub al-Nābulsī*[14] (2023) identifies his exegetical works as tools for moral education, emphasizing *al-Kahf*'s lessons on patience and divine trial. This aligns with the present study's conclusion that al-Nābulsī's *tafsīr* harmonizes *tasawwuf* (mysticism) and *tarbiyya* (character-building).

[12] Ahmad Hussein Muhammad al-Rifa'i, *Ḍarb al-Amthāl wa-Dawruhu fī Taqrīb al-Tafsīr 'inda al-Shaykh Muḥammad Rāṭib al-Nābulusī: Sūratā al-Baqara wa-Āl 'Imrān* (Master's thesis, Al-Quds University, 2013), Jerusalem, Palestine.

[13] ʿĪsā Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Hujaynah, Sulaymān ʿAbd Allāh al-Hunayd ʿAlī, and Mūsā Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh Khanfar (co-author), "Maqāṣid al-amthāl al-qaṣaṣiyya fī tafsīr al-duktūr Muḥammad Rāṭib al-Nābulusī," *Majallat Jāmiʿat Banghāzī al-Ḥadītha li-l-ʿUlūm wa-l-Dirāsāt al-Insāniyya*, Jāmiʿat Banghāzī al-Ḥadītha, no. 3 (January 2019), 4-18.

[14] Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Manūfī, Rajāʾ Fuʾād Ghāzī, Fāṭima Ramaḍān ʿAwaḍ al-Najjār, and al-Sayyid ʿAlwānī al-Sayyid Abū al-Jalājil (co-author), "Malāmiḥ falsafat al-tarbiyya fī kitābāt Muḥammad Rāṭib al-Nābulusī: Dirāsa taḥlīliyya," *Majallat Kulliyyat al-Tarbiyya*, Jāmiʿat Kafr al-Shaykh – Kulliyyat al-Tarbiyya, no. 107 (2022): 449–472.

Another significant contribution is the article by Zahran Omar Zahran (2021), published in the *Jordan Journal of Islamic Studies*.[15] This research succinctly captures al-Nābulsī's unique tafsīr method, highlighting his ability to harmonize reason, emotion, and spiritual insight. Zahran notes al-Nābulsī's avoidance of theological and juristic polemics, focusing instead on accessible examples and scientific interpretations. His tafsīr is marked by a balanced integration of Qur'ānic self-referential commentary, Prophetic traditions, and analogical reasoning, with over a thousand verses interpreted through a scientific lens.

Mustafa Uz's doctoral thesis, *Râtib en-Nâbulsî'nin Tefsirinde Ahlâkî Değerler*[16] (2023), systematically examines al-Nābulsī's integration of Qur'ānic ethical principles into modern societal contexts. Uz highlights al-Nābulsī's *ijtimāʿī-adabī* (socio-literary) approach, which adapts universal moral teachings—such as justice, familial bonds, and governance—to address contemporary challenges like globalization and technological ethics. This study underscores al-Nābulsī's avoidance of rigid literalism in favor of dynamic, context-sensitive applications, a feature also evident in his exegesis of *al-Kahf*'s moral parables (e.g., the Companions of the Cave).

Uz's related article *Nâbulsî Tefsîri'nde Kur'ân Kıssaları ve Helâk Edilen Ümmetler*[17] (2023) further analyzes al-Nābulsī's treatment of Qur'ānic narratives, particularly destroyed nations in *al-Kahf* (e.g., Dhū al-Qarnayn's encounters). Uz argues that al-Nābulsī frames these stories as moral warnings against *zulm* (oppression) and *kufr* (ingratitude), aligning with his broader ethical hermeneutics. This resonates with the present thesis's focus on al-Nābulsī's balance between *maʾthūr* (transmitted) and *maʿqūl* (rational) exegesis.

[15] Zahran Omar Zahran, "Manhaj al-Nābulusī fī Tafsīrihi: Tadabbur Āyāt Allāh fī al-Nafs wa-al-Kawn wa-al-Ḥayāt," *Jordan Journal of Islamic Studies* 17, no. 4 (2021): Article 2.
[16] Mustafa Uz, *Rātib al-Nābulusī'nin Tefsīrinde Ahlākī Değerler* (PhD diss., Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Temel İslâm Bilimleri Anabilim Dalı, 2024).
[17] Mustafa Uz, "Nābulusī Tefsīrinde Kurʾān Qıssaları ve Helāk Edilen Ümmetler," *Pamukkale Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* [Pamukkale University Journal of Divinity Faculty] 10, no. 2 (Autumn 2023): 447–480.

Taken together, these studies offer a multifaceted view of al-Nābulsī's tafsīr method. They collectively affirm his influence as a modern interpreter who effectively engages contemporary audiences through scientific integration, rhetorical simplicity, and spiritual depth. However, they also raise important methodological questions—especially regarding source authenticity and the limits of scientific exegesis—which remain relevant for any scholarly engagement with his works. The existing scholarship on al-Nābulsī's tafsīr has primarily focused on thematic aspects such as ethical values, scientific exegesis, narrative techniques and educational approaches. While these studies provide valuable insights into various dimensions of his interpretive work, they exhibit a significant research gap: none specifically address his methodological approach in Sūrah al-Kahf, despite this surah's theological complexity and narrative richness that would particularly benefit from his distinctive exegetical style.

1.8. Research Gap

This thesis identifies and addresses three critical gaps in current scholarship: (1) the absence of any comprehensive study examining al-Nābulsī's exegetical method as applied specifically to Sūrah al-Kahf; (2) the lack of systematic analysis of how his unique synthesis of traditional and contemporary approaches manifests in this surah's interpretation; and (3) the need to demonstrate how his methodological choices in al-Kahf distinguish his tafsīr within modern Qur'ānic hermeneutics. By focusing on these understudied aspects, this research will provide new insights into both al-Nābulsī's interpretive approach and the broader field of contemporary tafsīr methods.

1.9. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the theoretical traditions of Qur’ānic exegesis, drawing upon both classical interpretive methods and modern hermeneutical developments to examine the distinctive tafsīr approach of Muḥammad Rāṭib al-Nābulusī. The framework integrates established models of traditional tafsīr—such as *tafsīr bi’l-maʾthūr*, *tafsīr bi’l-raʾy*, and

ishārī tafsīr—with contemporary interpretive paradigms including *scientific exegesis*, *thematic exegesis*, and *reformist or socio-political readings* of the Qur'ān.

The foundation of the framework rests on the premise that the Qur'ān, while eternally divine and immutable in essence, has historically been interpreted through a variety of intellectual and contextual lenses. This study adopts the assumption that tafsīr is not a monolithic or static discipline but one that evolves, reflecting the spiritual, intellectual, and societal needs of each generation. The early models of interpretation, particularly those exemplified by scholars like al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), and al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), provide the epistemic and methodological baseline upon which later interpretations have built.

Modern scholars—such as Muḥammad al-Ghazālī[18] (d. 1996), Sayyid Quṭb [19](d. 1966), and Zaghlool al-Najjar[20]—have introduced new frameworks of understanding the Qur'ān that address contemporary scientific, political, and existential concerns. These frameworks, though varied, often share an aim to recover the moral and transformative essence of the Qur'ān, while engaging with the intellectual and technological realities of the modern world.

In this context, Dr. Muḥammad Rāṭib al-Nābulusī's tafsīr method is situated as a hybrid model, consciously blending classical authenticity with modern relevance. His use of *tafsīr bi'l-maʾthūr* demonstrates fidelity to the transmitted tradition, while his emphasis on scientific miracles, numerical patterns, and ethical applications reveals a commitment to intellectual engagement with contemporary realities. Moreover, his inclusion of Sufi insights and moral storytelling—along with a critical stance toward *Isrā'īliyyāt*—shows his sensitivity to both spiritual depth and scholarly rigor.

[18] [1] Mohammad Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Nataʻamalu Maʻa al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Nahdat Misr, 2005).
[19] [1] Sayyid Qutb, *Fî Zilal al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dar ash-Shuruq, 1981).
[20] Zaghloul Al-Najjar, *Tafsīr al-Ayat al-Kawniyah fi al-Qur'ān al-Karim* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Shuruq al-Dawliyah, 1428).

The theoretical framework also draws upon concepts from religious pedagogy and daʿwah studies, acknowledging that al-Nābulusī's tafsīr is not only a scholarly work but also a pedagogical and pastoral one. His sermons, media lectures, and educational institutions reveal a method of tafsīr designed not merely for academic circles but for broad, popular engagement.

Finally, this framework is informed by the hermeneutical principle of integration, which posits that diverse methods can be brought into meaningful synthesis without collapsing their distinctiveness. Through this lens, al-Nābulusī's tafsīr is analyzed not as a deviation from tradition or a mere modern adaptation, but as a conscientious effort to harmonize revelation with reason, faith with science, and tradition with contemporary need.

In sum, the theoretical framework guiding this thesis recognizes tafsīr as a dynamic, evolving discipline. By situating al-Nābulusī's approach within both the inherited and emergent paradigms of ic interpretation, the study seeks to evaluate his contribution as both rooted in tradition and responsive to modern intellectual, ethical, and existential concerns.

1.10. Thesis Structure Overview

This study is organized into five chapters to systematically examine Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's *tafsīr* method in *Sūrah al-Kahf*:

- **Chapter I: Introduction**

Outlines the significance of focus on *Sūrah al-Kahf*, and articulates the research questions, objectives, and method. It reviews existing literature and identifies the gap this thesis addresses: the absence of a dedicated analysis of al-Nābulsī's exegetical approach in *al-Kahf*.

- **Chapter II: Life Story and Contributions of Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī**

Provides a comprehensive intellectual biography, tracing his scholarly formation, *daʿwah* activities, and literary output. This contextual groundwork highlights how his career shaped his interpretive priorities. This chapter will help us understand the method used by him in his tafsir and how his life influences his work on tafsir. For instance, his studies of language, literature and pedagogy is clearly reflected in his method.

- **Chapter III: Traditional and Modern Approaches to *Tafsīr***

Situates al-Nābulsī's method within broader exegetical traditions, analyzing his synthesis of *maʾthūr* , *raʾy*, and contemporary approaches (thematic, scientific etc). It evaluates his unique integration of classical and modern paradigms.

- **Chapter IV: Al-Nābulsī's *Tafsīr* of *Sūrah al-Kahf***

The core analytical chapter examines his interpretation of *al-Kahf* through five lenses: (1) linguistic-rhetorical analysis, (2) Sufi-inspired readings, (3) engagement with *isrāʾīliyyāt*, (4) scientific and numerical hermeneutics, and (5) pedagogical storytelling. Critical tensions in his method are assessed.

- **Chapter V: Conclusion**

Synthesizes findings on al-Nābulsī's methodological distinctiveness in *al-Kahf*, emphasizing his balance of tradition and innovation. It reflects on implications for contemporary *tafsīr* studies and suggests future research directions.

CHAPTER II

THE LIFE STORY AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF MUḤAMMAD RĀTİB AL-NĀBULSĪ

2.1. Introduction

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī is a distinguished contemporary Islamic scholar whose intellectual and spiritual contributions have significantly influenced the Islamic world. Known for his profound expertise in tafsīr, spirituality, and education, al-Nābulsī has dedicated his life to the service of Islam and the Muslim ummah. This chapter provides a comprehensive account of his life, scholarly journey, and contributions. The chapter begins with an exploration of his early life, family background, and educational journey, which laid the foundation for his later achievements.[21]

2.2. Birth and Family Background

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī was born on January 29, 1938, in Damascus, Syria, into a family deeply rooted in Islamic scholarship and tradition. He described his family as having "little wealth but abundant knowledge,"[22] highlighting their commitment to

[21] The primary source on the life and contributions of Sheikh Ratib al-Nābulsī is his official website, which is available in Arabic and one of his interviews about his life available in Youtube. While other sources provide additional information, they largely build upon the content of his website, which remains the most authoritative source. For further details, see:
Nabulsi.com, "Al-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah li-l-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī," *Mawsu'at al-Nābulsī li-l-'Ulum al-Islamiyyah*, accessed February 15, 2025, https://nabulsi.com/story/Una-mirada-general-a-la-vida-del-Dr.-Muhammed-Nabulsi11601.

[22] YouTube, "Mawdu'at Muta'alliqa bi-l-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah: 13 - Idha'at Hawl Hayat al-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī", *Al-Qanah al-Rasmiyyah li-Mawsu'at al-Nābulsī li-l-'Ulum al-Islamiyyah*, YouTube video, posted February 14, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAy8zJJE9EM.

intellectual and spiritual pursuits. His father, who died when he was five years old,[23] was a renowned scholar in Damascus and left behind a vast library filled with manuscripts and books. This library became a treasure trove for the young al-Nābulsī, who immersed himself in its rich resources from an early age.

The Nābulsī family had a long history of contributing to the intellectual and religious life of Damascus, spanning over four decades. Despite their scholarly contributions, the family often found themselves at odds with the Ba'ath Party, which ruled Syria from 1963 until the fall of Bashar al-Assad. The Ba'athist regime, with its secular and socialist ideology, viewed religious scholars with suspicion, and the al-Nābulsī family's dedication to Islamic education and reform made them a target of political scrutiny. Nevertheless, the family remained steadfast in their mission to preserve and propagate Islamic knowledge.[24]

2.3. Early Education and Intellectual Formation

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's early education took place in Damascus, where he attended primary, preparatory, and secondary schools. His academic journey was marked by a strong emphasis on both religious and worldly education, reflecting the dual influences of his family's scholarly tradition and the modern educational system of Syria. After completing his secondary education, he enrolled in the Teacher Training Institute, graduating in 1956. This early exposure to pedagogy and educational theory would later play a significant role in shaping his approach to Islamic education and da'wah.[25]

Following his graduation from the Teacher Training Institute, al-Nābulsī pursued higher education at the University of Damascus. He joined the Faculty of Arts, specializing in Arabic language and literature, and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in 1964. His studies in Arabic literature provided him with a deep understanding of the linguistic and

[23] However, another source states that his father passed away before he was born. In contrast, Dr. al-Nābulsī himself mentions in a YouTube interview (linked and detailed in the above footnote) that his father died when he was five years old.
[24] Al Jazeera, "Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī.. Da'iyah Suri Amda Nasf Qarn fi al-Da'wah li-l-Islam bi-Anha' al-ʻAlam," *Aljazeera Arabic*, September 24, 2014, https://www.ajnet.me/encyclopedia/2014/9/24
[25] Nabulsi.com, "Al-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah li-l-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī".

literary nuances of the Qur'ān, which would later inform his tafsīr method.[26] He expresses his deep love for the Arabic language, describing it as the language of the "Qur'ān and the language of his fathers and ancestors",[27] as he himself has stated. "The God himself selected this language for His book; it is a big honor for this language".[28]

After completing his undergraduate studies, al-Nābulsī continued his academic pursuits at the Faculty of Education at the University of Damascus. In 1966, he earned a Diploma in Educational Qualification with distinction, further solidifying his expertise in education and pedagogy.[29] Then he pursued his master's degree in arts at the University of Lyon (Lebanon branch)[30].His academic achievements during this period laid the groundwork for his later contributions to Islamic education and his innovative approach to integrating traditional Islamic knowledge with modern educational practices.

2.4. Advanced Studies and Academic Recognition

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's commitment to education and scholarship did not end with his master degree. He continued to pursue advanced studies and was awarded a Ph.D. in Education from Trinity College on June 18, 1999 in Ireland.[31] This achievement was a testament to his scholarly contributions, particularly in the field of education, where he emphasized the importance of combining traditional Islamic teachings with contemporary pedagogical methods. His doctoral work and subsequent publications have had a lasting impact on Islamic education, inspiring a new generation of scholars and educators.

In addition to his formal academic qualifications, al-Nābulsī received numerous honors and recognitions for his contributions to Islamic scholarship. On July 27, 2015, he was

[26] Ibid.
[27] YouTube, "Mawdu'at Muta'alliqa bi-l-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah: 13 - Idha'at Hawl Hayat al-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī".
[28] Ibid.
[29] Nabulsi.com, "Al-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah li-l-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī".
[30] Al Jazeera, "Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī. Da'iyah Suri Amda Nasf Qarn fi al-Da'wah li-l-Islam bi-Anha' al-'Alam".
[31] YouTube, "Mawdu'at Muta'alliqa bi-l-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah: 13 - Idha'at Hawl Hayat al-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī".

awarded an honorary doctorate from the American Open University, specializing in Islamic and Arabic sciences. This honor was conferred during a special ceremony held in Amman, Jordan, in recognition of his lifelong dedication to Islamic da'wah and his extensive scholarly achievements.[32]

2.5. Transition to Scholarly and Da’wah Activities

The foundation laid by Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's early education and academic achievements prepared him for a lifetime of scholarly and da'wah activities. His deep understanding of Arabic literature and Islamic studies, combined with his expertise in education, enabled him to develop a unique approach to Islamic teaching and preaching. The next section of this chapter will explore his detailed activities, including his lectures, books, conferences, and other contributions to Islamic scholarship and social reform.

2.6. Professional Career and Academic Contributions

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī’s professional career is marked by his extensive contributions to both worldly and Islamic education. His work spans several decades, during which he served as a teacher, lecturer, and professor in various academic institutions. His dedication to education and his ability to bridge the gap between traditional Islamic knowledge and modern pedagogical methods have made him a respected figure in the academic and religious worlds.

2.6.1. Work in Secondary and University Education

al-Nābulsī began his career as a secondary school teacher, where he contributed to the formal education system in Syria. His passion for teaching and his deep understanding of educational methods soon led him to higher academic positions. In 1969, he joined the Faculty of Education at the University of Damascus as a lecturer, a position he held until 1999. During his tenure at the university, he played a significant role in shaping the

[32] Nabulsi.com, "Al-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah li-l-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī".

educational landscape, particularly in the fields of Arabic language and literature, as well as educational theory.[33]

After leaving the University of Damascus, al-Nābulsī transitioned to teaching Islamic studies, where he made significant contributions to the field. He served as a professor of *Scientific Miracles in the Qur'ān and Sunnah* at the Faculties of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Al-Azhar University's Branch in Damascus.[34] This role allowed him to explore the intersection of science and religion, a topic that became a cornerstone of his scholarly work.

2.6.2. Teaching Islamic Creed and Pedagogy

al-Nābulsī also taught Islamic creed at the University of Khartoum's Abū al-Nour Complex Branch in Damascus. Additionally, he delivered lectures on Islamic creed as part of a training program for imams and preachers who were non-native Arabic speakers, organized by the Faculty of Usul al-Din in Damascus. He also conducted annual lectures for visiting imams and preachers from various Islamic countries, further extending his influence beyond Syria.[35]

In addition to his work in Damascus, al-Nābulsī served as a professor of *Foundations of Education* at the Islamic University of Tripoli. His diverse teaching roles reflect his versatility as a scholar and his commitment to both secular and religious education.[36]

[33] YouTube, "Mawdu'at Muta'alliqa bi-l-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah: 13 - Idha'at Hawl Hayat al-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī".
[34] Nabulsi.com, "Al-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah li-l-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī".
[35] Ibid; Nabulsi.com, Al-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah li-l-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī".
[35] Al Jazeera, "Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī. Da'iyah Suri Amda Nasf Qarn fi al-Da'wah li-l-Islam bi-Anha' al-'Alam".
[36] Ibid.

2.6.3. International Academic Contributions

al-Nābulsī's expertise was recognized internationally, and in 2012, he was appointed by the Australian government to oversee the Faculty of Sharia at the University of Canberra in Australia's capital.[37] This appointment highlights his global influence and the respect he commands in the field of Islamic studies.

2.6.4. Editorial and Organizational Roles

Beyond his teaching responsibilities, al-Nābulsī played a significant role in editorial and organizational work. He supervised the publication of *Nahj al-Islam* (the Path of Islam), a journal issued by the Syrian Ministry of Endowments. He was also a member of several official committees under the ministry, contributing to the development of religious and educational policies in Syria.[38]

al-Nābulsī was a founding member of the Association for Combating Smoking and Harmful Substances in Syria, reflecting his commitment to social and public health issues. He also served as the president of the Association for Children's Rights in Syria, demonstrating his dedication to the welfare of children and the promotion of their rights. In recognition of his scholarly contributions, al-Nābulsī was granted membership in the International Union of Muslim Scholars, further solidifying his status as a leading figure in the global Islamic intellectual community.[39]

2.7. Da'wah Activities in Syria

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's da'wah activities in Syria are a testament to his profound commitment to spreading Islamic knowledge and nurturing a generation of spiritually and intellectually grounded Muslims. His efforts in this regard began in earnest in 1974 when he ascended the stage of his grandfather's mosque, the mosque of Sheikh Abd al-Ghani

[37] Ibid.
[38] Nabulsi.com, "Al-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah li-l-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī".
[39] Ibid.

al-Nābulsī, and established a series of weekly lessons. These lessons, which covered topics such as *aqidah*, *tafsīr*, *hadith* (Prophetic traditions), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and *sira* (the biography of the Prophet Muhammad), had a profound impact on the local community.[40]

2.7.1. Expansion of Da'wah Activities

The mosque of Sheikh Abd al-Ghani al-Nābulsī soon became a hub for Islamic learning, attracting students of knowledge from across Damascus and its surrounding rural areas. The growing number of attendees eventually overwhelmed the mosque's capacity, prompting students to invite al-Nābulsī to hold lessons in other central mosques in Damascus and its suburbs. This expansion marked the beginning of a broader da'wah movement that reached a wide audience.[41]

al-Nābulsī also served as a preacher and teacher at the historic Umayyad Mosque in Damascus for a significant period. His sermons and lessons at this iconic mosque further solidified his reputation as a leading Islamic scholar and orator.[42]

2.7.2. Lectures and Educational Programs

In addition to his mosque-based activities, al-Nābulsī responded to numerous invitations to deliver lectures at cultural centers across the Syrian Arab Republic. These lectures addressed a wide range of topics, from Islamic theology to contemporary issues, and were instrumental in spreading Islamic knowledge to diverse audiences.[43]

al-Nābulsī also played a pivotal role in educating non-Arabic-speaking imams and preachers. For three years, he taught Islamic creed as part of a training program for imams

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] YouTube, "Mawdu'at Muta'alliqa bi-l-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah: 13 - Idha'at Hawl Hayat al-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī".

and preachers at the Faculty of Usul al-Din, a branch of the University of Khartoum located in the Abū al-Nour Complex in Damascus. Additionally, he delivered annual lectures to visiting imams and preachers from various Islamic countries, further extending his influence beyond Syria's borders, as mentioned earlier.

2.7.3. Contributions to Islamic Education

One of al-Nābulsī's most significant contributions to Islamic education in Syria was his role in introducing the subject of *Scientific Miracles in the Qur'ān and Sunnah* into the curriculum of the Islamic Fath Institute. His book, *Mawsu'at al-I'jaz al-Ilmi* (Encyclopedia of Scientific Miracles), became the prescribed textbook for this subject. al-Nābulsī taught this course at the institute for many years, and it continues to be taught by his students to this day.[44]

2.7.4. Establishment of Educational Institutions

al-Nābulsī's vision for Islamic education extended beyond individual lessons and lectures. He sought to establish a comprehensive Islamic educational complex that would include an institute for youth, an official Sharia secondary school, and an Islamic university. His efforts began with the establishment of the *Maktab Tahfiz al-Qur'ān al-Karim* (Qur'ān Memorization Institute), which had a profound impact on nurturing a generation of young Muslims distinguished by their diverse knowledge and disciplined behavior.[45]

The Qur'ān Memorization Institute, which initially started as a small initiative, grew to accommodate over 500 male and female students from various parts of Damascus and its suburbs. The institute also included a recreational and cultural center for its students, featuring swimming pools, sports facilities, and other activities. This unique blend of

[44] For an in-depth exploration of Nabulsi's contributions to the scientific exegesis of the Qur'ān, please refer to: Nidal Youssef Abu Mayalah, *Al-Tafseer al-'Ilmi li-l-Qur'ān al-Kareem bayn al-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī wa al-Duktur Zaghloul al-Najjar: Dirasah Muqaranah* (unpublished master's thesis, Najah National University, 2019).
[45] Nabulsi.com, "Al-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah li-l-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī".

religious education, moral discipline, and recreational activities achieved remarkable results, producing well-rounded individuals who later became teachers and administrators at the institute.[46]

Building on this success, al-Nābulsī worked tirelessly to establish an official Sharia secondary school. Despite numerous challenges, his dream was realized in 2006 with the founding of the *Sheikh Abd al-Ghani al-Nābulsī Official Sharia Secondary School* for boys and girls. The school, which initially enrolled 500 students, quickly gained recognition for its academic excellence and moral impact, becoming one of the leading Sharia secondary schools in Syria.[47]

The establishment of these institutions transformed the mosque of Sheikh Abd al-Ghani al-Nābulsī from a local place of worship into a beacon of Islamic knowledge and education. Officially named the *Sheikh Abd al-Ghani al-Nābulsī Complex for Islamic Sciences*, this institution continues to play a vital role in shaping the Islamic intellectual landscape in Syria and beyond. al-Nābulsī's vision for an advanced Islamic university remains a work in progress, reflecting his enduring commitment to Islamic education and da'wah.[48] al-Nābulsī states that he was initially delivering lectures in mosques where everyone could participate. However, he realized that these lectures alone were not sufficient for producing scholars. Consequently, he began establishing institutions dedicated to the education and development of scholars and ulama.[49]

2.8. International Da'wah Activities

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's influence extends far beyond the borders of Syria, as he has actively participated in numerous international conferences, delivered lectures, and engaged with Muslim communities worldwide. His international activities reflect his

[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] YouTube, "Mawdu'at Muta'alliqa bi-l-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah: 13 - Idha'at Hawl Hayat al-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī".

commitment to spreading Islamic knowledge, addressing contemporary issues, and fostering unity among Muslims globally. This section highlights his significant contributions and participation in various international forums and events.

2.8.1. Participation in International Conferences

al-Nābulsī represented Syria in several international conferences, beginning in 1993. His participation in these events allowed him to share his expertise on Islamic thought, education, and social issues with a global audience. Some of the notable conferences he attended include:

- ISESCO Conference (Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization): Held in Rabat, Morocco, in 1999.
- Family Conference: Held in Abū Dhabi, UAE, in 1998.
- Islamic Jurisprudence Conference: Held in Detroit, USA, in 1999.
- Muslim Youth Conferences: Held in Los Angeles, USA, in 1998 and 1999.
- Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs Conferences: Held in Cairo, Egypt, in 1999, 2005, and 2006.
- Eighth Baraka Symposium on Islamic Economics: Held in Damascus, Syria, in 1999.
- Sixth International Conference on Scientific Miracles in the Qur'ān and Sunnah: Held in Beirut, Lebanon, in 2000.
- Conference on Endowment Experiences in the Levant: Held in Damascus, Syria, in 2000.
- Conference of Ministers of Awqaf in the Islamic World: Held in Malaysia in 2002.
- Socialization Conference: Held in Damascus, Syria, in 2005, where he presented a paper on the role of religious institutions in socialization.
- Hashemite Councils in Jordan (Amman): Participated for several years.
- Dubai Qur'ān Award: Participated for several years.[50]

[50] Nabulsi.com, "Al-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah li-l-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī".

2.8.2. Lectures and Engagements in Arab and Islamic Countries

al-Nābulsī accepted numerous invitations to deliver lectures in various Arab and Islamic countries, where he addressed a wide range of topics related to Islamic theology, spirituality, and contemporary challenges. His engagements included:

- Arab Countries: Libya, Algeria, Oman, Bahrain, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates.
- Population Conferences: Represented Syria at the Population Conference held in Bali, Indonesia, in 2007, and the Population Conference held in Cairo, Egypt, in 2008. His role in these conferences was particularly significant, as he exposed the hidden agendas of some proposals and raised awareness about their potential dangers to the Muslim ummah.
- Fourth International Islamic Forum: Held in Algeria in 2008.
- World Organization for Scientific Miracles: Accepted an invitation to Algeria in 2009.[51]

2.8.3. Engagements in Western Countries

al-Nābulsī's da'wah activities also extended to Western countries, where he engaged with Muslim communities and addressed broader audiences. His engagements included:

- Germany: Accepted an official invitation from the German government, accompanied by an official delegation. He met with university, religious, and political leaders and delivered a speech at the German Parliament.
- China: Accepted an official invitation to visit Beijing to observe the conditions of Muslims in China, accompanied by an official delegation.
- United States: Delivered lectures in several states at the invitation of local Muslim communities.

[51] Ibid.

- Australia: Delivered lectures over several years at the invitation of local Muslim communities.
- France, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, and Turkey: Accepted multiple invitations from Muslim communities in these countries to deliver lectures and engage with local audiences.[52]

2.8.4. Visits to Muslim-Majority Countries

al-Nābulsī also accepted official invitations to visit several Muslim-majority countries, where he strengthened ties with local scholars and communities. These visits included:

- Saudi Arabia: Engaged with scholars and delivered lectures.
- Jordan: Participated in religious and academic events.
- Yemen, Sudan, and Guinea, Turkey: Delivered lectures and engaged with local communities.[53]

Through his international activities, al-Nābulsī has played a pivotal role in promoting Islamic knowledge, addressing contemporary issues, and fostering unity among Muslims worldwide. His ability to connect with diverse audiences, coupled with his deep understanding of Islamic teachings, has made him a respected figure in the global Islamic community.

2.9. Literary Contributions and Publications

Sheikh Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī has made significant contributions to the Arabic and Islamic literary world through his extensive writings. His works span a wide range of topics, including Qur'ānic exegesis, spiritual purification, contemporary Islamic thought, and social issues. Many of his books have been widely circulated, with some translated

[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

into English, making his ideas accessible to a global audience. This section provides an overview of his most notable publications and their impact.

2.9.1. Major Works

al-Nābulsī's literary output includes several multi-volume works that have become essential references in Islamic scholarship. Among his most prominent publications are:

- Tafsīr al-Nābulsī li al-Qur'ān al-Karim (al-Nābulsī's Exegesis of the Qur'ān): A ten-volume tafsīr that provides a comprehensive and thematic interpretation of the Qur'ān, blending traditional scholarship with contemporary insights.
- Mawsu'at Asma' Allah al-Husna (Encyclopedia of the Beautiful Names of Allah): A four-volume work exploring the meanings and implications of the 99 names of Allah, emphasizing their spiritual and practical significance.
- Mawsu'at al-I'jaz al-Ilmi fi al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunnah (Encyclopedia of Scientific Miracles in the Qur'ān and Sunnah): A two-volume work that examines the scientific phenomena mentioned in the Qur'ān and hadith, highlighting their compatibility with modern scientific discoveries.
- Awladuna al-Waraqa al-Rabiha al-Ula (Our Children: The First Winning Card): A two-volume book addressing the importance of nurturing children in accordance with Islamic principles, offering guidance for parents and educators.

2.9.2. Other Notable Books

In addition to his multi-volume works, al-Nābulsī has authored numerous books on various aspects of Islamic thought and spirituality. Some of his most influential titles include:

- Nazarat fi al-Islam (Perspectives on Islam)
- Ta'ammulat fi al-Islam (Reflections on Islam)
- Lamahat fi al-Islam (Glimpses of Islam)

- Maqawim al-Taklif (Pillars of Responsibility)
- Mata Nasr Allah (When Will Allah's Help Come?)
- Rabi' al-Iman (The Spring of Faith)
- Nida' Allah li al-Mu'minin (Allah's Call to the Believers)
- Qawanin min al-Qur'ān al-Karim (Laws from the Qur'ān)
- Manhaj al-Ta'ibin (The Path of the Repentant)

2.9.3. Booklets and Smaller Publications

al-Nābulsī has also authored several booklets that address specific topics in a concise and accessible manner. These include:

- Kalimat Mudia (Illuminating Words)
- Liqa'at Muthmira ma'a al-Sha'rawi (Fruitful Encounters with Sheikh al-Sha'rawi)
- al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj (The Night Journey and Ascension)
- al-Hijra (The Migration)
- al-Hajj (The Pilgrimage)
- Samahat al-Islam wa Insaniyyat Muhammad (The Tolerance of Islam and the Humanity of Muhammad): A response to the controversial statements made by Pope Benedict XVI.

Many of his works have been reprinted over twenty times, reflecting their widespread popularity and relevance.

2.10. Articles in Newspapers and Magazines

In addition to his books, al-Nābulsī has contributed numerous articles to various newspapers and magazines, both in the Arab world and internationally. His writings cover a wide range of topics, including Islamic theology, spirituality, and contemporary issues. He further contributed to the following magazines and newspapers:

- Nahj al-Islam (The Path of Islam): al-Nābulsī has written Islamic articles for every issue of this Damascus-based magazine, which he also helps supervise.
- Minbar al-Da'iyat (The Pulpit of Female Preachers): A Beirut-based magazine featuring his contributions.
- Al-Mira: A London-based magazine that has published his articles.
- Copenhagen Post: A Danish newspaper that has featured his writings.
- Al-Muslimun (The Muslims): A London-based newspaper that has published his articles and interviews.
- Al-I'tidal (The Moderation): A newspaper published by the Syrian community in the United States.
- Al-Diyar (The Homelands): A newspaper published by the Arab community in Sydney, Australia.[54]

2.11. Associations Founded and Participated in

al-Nābulsī has been actively involved in establishing and participating in various associations aimed at promoting social welfare and Islamic values. His contributions in this regard include:

- Founding Member of the Association for Combating Smoking and Harmful Substances in Syria: This organization works to raise awareness about the dangers of smoking and other harmful substances.
- Former President of the Association for Children's Rights in Syria: In this role, al-Nābulsī advocated for the rights and well-being of children, emphasizing the importance of nurturing future generations in accordance with Islamic principles.[55]

[54] Ibid.
[55] Aljazeera, "Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī. Da'iyah Suri Amda Nasf Qarn fi al-Da'wah li-l-Islam bi-Anha' al-'Alam".

2.12. Online Platforms and Digital Contributions

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī has embraced modern technology to disseminate Islamic knowledge globally through a variety of online platforms. These platforms cater to diverse audiences, including Muslims, non-Muslims, and new converts, and are available in multiple languages. His digital initiatives include:

The al-Nābulsī Encyclopedia of Islamic Sciences: This comprehensive platform features his lectures, sermons, and writings on topics such as Islamic creed, Qur'ānic exegesis, hadith, Islamic history, and contemporary issues. With approximately 250,000 pages, it operates on seven websites, five of which are available in Arabic, English, French, Chinese, and Spanish, while the remaining two in Russian and Persian are set to launch soon.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) Website: Designed to introduce Islam, Allah, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and the Qur'ān to non-Muslims and new converts, this site is available in Arabic, English, and French.

Visual Channel: Offering professionally produced video lectures in Arabic, English, French, Spanish, and Chinese, this channel links lectures to key texts in the encyclopedia.

Audio Channel in Arabic: Provides easy access to indexed audio lessons organized into playlists for seamless listening.

Free Text Library: Contains approximately 150 well-organized and illustrated books on various Islamic sciences, available for download and use in da'wah activities. Translations into English, French, Spanish, and Chinese are underway, with the first book on creed and scientific miracles nearing completion.

Audio Library: Hosts over 10,000 audio files, easily downloadable by visitors.

Encyclopedia of Scientific Miracles: Features around 500 lectures on scientific miracles in the Qur'ān and Sunnah, accompanied by professional visuals.[56]

These platforms collectively attract over a million daily downloads of text, audio, and video files, ranking among the top Islamic websites globally.

2.13. Evaluation

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī stands as a towering figure in the contemporary Islamic world, whose life and work have left an indelible mark on both religious scholarship and Da'wah. Born into a family steeped in knowledge, he dedicated his life to the pursuit and dissemination of Islamic teachings, blending traditional scholarship with modern educational methods. His extensive contributions to Qur'ānic exegesis, Islamic creed, and the field of scientific miracles in the Qur'ān and Sunnah have enriched Islamic literature and provided guidance to countless individuals seeking a deeper understanding of their faith.

Throughout his career, al-Nābulsī demonstrated a firm commitment to education, both within Syria and on the international stage. His establishment of educational institutions, such as the Sheikh Abdul Ghani al-al-Nābulsī Islamic Complex, reflects his vision of nurturing a generation of Muslims grounded in both religious and ethical principles. His ability to connect with diverse audiences, from students in Damascus to Muslim communities across the globe, underscores his profound impact as a scholar and preacher.

As a scholar, educator, and Da'iyah (caller to Islam), he has truly earned his place among the most influential Islamic figures of the modern era. His legacy will undoubtedly endure, inspiring future generations to carry forward the torch of Islamic knowledge and Da'wah.

[56] Nabulsi.com, "Al-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah li-l-Duktur Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī".

CHAPTER III

TRADITIONAL AND MODERN APPROACHES TO TAFSĪR: SITUATING AL-NĀBULSĪ'S METHOD

3.1. Introduction

The Qur'ān has remained the central text of Islamic intellectual history, serving as the primary source of guidance, law, and spirituality for Muslims throughout the centuries. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the first exegete of the Qur'ān, interpreting its verses through divine revelation and embodying its teachings in his life.[57] However, after his death, the Muslim community was left with a sacred text that no individual could interpret with the same authority as the Prophet. This marked the beginning of a collective intellectual endeavor to understand and explain the Qur'ān, rooted in the prophetic way of life and his decision-making style.

In the early stages of Islamic history, tafsīr was closely tied to Hadith, as Muslims relied on the Prophet's sayings, actions, and approvals to interpret the Qur'ān. This approach ensured that the interpretation remained firmly grounded in the prophetic guidance.[58] Over time, however, other elements began to influence the field of tafsīr, leading to the emergence of diverse methods. Traditional approaches to tafsīr crystallized into three main categories:

[57] The question of whether the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) interpreted the entire Qur'ān or only parts of it has been discussed by later scholars. Some scholars have presented two views on the matter: (1) that the Prophet (ﷺ) explained all the meanings of the Qur'ān to his companions, just as he conveyed its words—this view is attributed to Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah; (2) that he did not explain all the meanings of the Qur'ān to them. The conclusion reached is that the Prophet (ﷺ) clarified for his companions whatever interpretation of the Qur'ān they needed. See: Khālid b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Bātilī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Nabawī: Muqaddima Taʾṣīliyya maʿa Dirāsa Ḥadīthiyya li-Aḥādīth al-Tafsīr al-Nabawī al-Ṣarīḥ*, vol. 1 (Riyadh: Dār Kunūz Ishbīliyā, 2011), 39. Originally presented as a doctoral dissertation at Imam University, Riyadh.

[58] Mannāʿ al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, 7th ed. (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, n.d.), 332.

i. Tafsīr bil-Ma'thur
ii. Tafsīr bil-Ra'y (Interpretation through rational reasoning)
iii. Tafsīr al-Ishari (Sufi or Allusive Interpretation)[59]

In the modern era, the field of Tafsīr has expanded further, incorporating new methods that reflect contemporary intellectual and societal developments. These modern approaches mainly include:

i. Thematic Exegesis: This approach interprets the Qur'ān by focusing on specific themes or topics across different verses and chapters.
ii. Scientific Exegesis: This method seeks to harmonize Qur'ānic verses with modern scientific discoveries.
iii. Socio-Political Exegesis: This approach interprets the Qur'ān in light of social, political, and economic contexts.
iv. Reformist Exegesis: This approach seeks to harmonize Qur'ānic verses with modern European civilization.
v. Other Rejected Exegesis: Some extreme modernist interpretations have been rejected by the majority of scholars due to their departure from traditional methods and principles.

This chapter explores these traditional and modern approaches to Tafsīr, providing a comprehensive overview of their development and characteristics. It then examines the method of Ratib al-Nābulsī, a prominent scholar, and attempts to situate his approach within the broader categories of Tafsīr. By doing so, the chapter aims to highlight the diversity and richness of Qur'ānic exegesis while shedding light on al-Nābulsī's unique contributions to this field.

[59] It is important to note that, classically, Qur'ānic exegesis has been categorized into two major trends: Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thur and Tafsīr bi al-Ra'y, as mentioned earlier. Other forms of tafsīr, such as jurisprudential tafsīr, are typically classified under one of these two categories. However, some scholars have also recognized Ishari Tafsīr as a distinct category, given its historical presence from the early periods of Islamic scholarship and the difficulty of fitting it precisely into either of the two main classifications. See; Abdullah Saeed, The Qur'ān: An Introduction (New York: Routledge, 2008), 178.

3.2. Traditional Approaches

Traditional approaches, as clarified above, include the interpretation of the Qur'ān through transmitted narrations (Tafsīr bil-Ma'thur), rational interpretation (Tafsīr bil-Ra'y), and the didactic or guidance-oriented approach (Tafsīr Irshadi) along with its peculiarities.[60] Here we discuss each type without going to the details:

3.2.1. Tafsīr bil-Ma'thur (Interpretation through Transmitted Narrations)

Tafsīr bil-Ma'thur, or interpretation through transmitted narrations, is one of the earliest and most authoritative methods of Qur'ānic exegesis. It encompasses explanations derived from the Qur'ān itself, the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the interpretations of his companions (Sahaba),[61] and the successors (Tabi'un).[62] This approach is rooted in the belief that the Qur'ān can best be understood through the guidance of those closest to its revelation and the Prophet, who was the primary recipient and interpreter of the divine message. Theo followings are the components of tafsīr bil-Ma'thur:

i. Qur'ānic Explanations: The Qur'ān often provides clarifications for its own verses. For example, one verse may explain or elaborate on another, creating an internal framework for understanding its meanings.

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[60] There are various ways scholars have categorized the types of traditional tafsīr. It is reported from Ibn ʿAbbās (may Allah be pleased with them both) that he said: *"Tafsīr is of four kinds: that which pertains to ḥalāl and ḥarām, which no one is excused from being ignorant of; that which the Arabs understand through their language; that which is known only by scholars; and that which none knows except Allah."* However, the classification adopted here is based on the scheme presented in *al-Wāḍiḥ fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* by Muṣṭafā Dīb al-Bughā, which divides tafsīr into three main categories: tafsīr by transmission (*tafsīr biʾl-riwāyah*, also called *tafsīr biʾl-maʾthūr*), tafsīr by reasoned opinion (*tafsīr biʾl-dirāyah*, or *tafsīr biʾl-raʾy*), and mystical or symbolic tafsīr (*tafsīr al-ishārah*, also known as *tafsīr ishārī*). Some scholars add a fourth category: esoteric tafsīr (*tafsīr bāṭinī*), also referred to as *tafsīr al-bāṭinī*. Muṣṭafā Dīb al-Bughā and Muḥyī al-Dīn Dīb Mustaw, *al-Wāḍiḥ fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, 2nd ed. (Damascus: Dār al-Kalim al-Ṭayyib / Dār al-ʿUlūm al-Insāniyya, 1998), 236.

[61] Fahd bin Abd al-Rahman al-Rumi, *Dirasat fi 'Ulum al-Qur'ān al-Karim* (n.p.: Author's Copyright, 2003), 151.

[62] Abdullah al-Judai', *Al-Muqaddimat al-Asasiyyah fi 'Ulum al-Qur'ān* (Leeds, UK: Markaz al-Buhuth al-Islamiyyah, 2001), 325.

ii. Prophetic Narrations (Hadith): The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) played a central role in explaining the Qur'ān. His sayings, actions, and approvals (Sunnah) served as a primary source for understanding the Qur'ānic text.

iii. Companions' Interpretations: The companions of the Prophet, who witnessed the revelation and its context, provided valuable insights into the Qur'ān's meanings. Their interpretations are considered highly authoritative due to their direct connection to the Prophet.

iv. Successors' Narrations (Tabi'un): The generation following the companions, known as the Tabi'un, also contributed to Tafsīr bil-Ma'thur. While there is some debate about whether their interpretations should be classified as Ma'thur or Ra'y (rational reasoning), their contributions are often included in classical Tafsīr works, such as those of Ibn Jarir al-Tabari. Muhammad Husien al-Dhahabi favors bringing the contribution of the Tabi'un amoung this category for the above-mentioned reason.[63] The prevailing opinion is that the tafsīr of Tabi'un should only be utilized az athar in the absence of evidence from the other three aforementioned sources.[64]

In the early Islamic period, Tafsīr was not an independent discipline but was integrated into the broader field of Hadith. Scholars of Hadith collected and documented narrations related to the Qur'ān's interpretation, treating it as a subset of prophetic traditions. Over time, however, Tafsīr began to emerge as a distinct field of study.[65]

The first systematic efforts to compile Tafsīr bil-Ma'thur, according to Dhahabi, were undertaken by scholars such as Imam Malik ibn Anas, who is often credited with laying the foundations for this approach. Early Tafsīr works were not organized thematically or chronologically but were compiled as collections of narrations from the Prophet, his companions, and the Tabi'un. One of the earliest known compilations is the scroll (sahifa)

[63] Muhammad Husayn al-Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirun*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, n.d.), 112.
[64] Rumi, *Dirasat fi 'Ulum al-Qur'ān al-Karim*, 153.
[65] Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirun*, 112.

attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib, who narrated interpretations from Ibn ʿAbbās, a prominent companion and cousin of the Prophet.[66]

By the end of the Umayyad dynasty (around 750 CE), Tafsīr had become a fully independent discipline, with scholars producing comprehensive exegetical works. These works, such as Ibn Jarir al-Tabari's *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'ān*, became foundational texts for later generations of exegetes.[67]

Tafsīr bil-Ma'thur holds a unique position in Islamic scholarship due to its reliance on authentic sources directly linked to the Prophet and his companions. It ensures that the interpretation of the Qur'ān remains firmly grounded in the prophetic tradition, minimizing the risk of subjective or speculative interpretations. This approach is particularly valued for its preservation of the Qur'ān's original context and intent, making it an indispensable tool for understanding the divine text.

3.2.2. Tafsīr bil-Ra'y

Tafsīr bil-Ra'y, or interpretation through rational reasoning, is a method of Qur'ānic exegesis that relies on ijtihad (independent reasoning) and intellectual effort to derive meanings from the Qur'ānic text. Unlike Tafsīr bil-Ma'thur, which is based on transmitted narrations, Tafsīr bil-Ra'y allows scholars to use their knowledge of the Arabic language, literary styles, and Islamic principles to interpret the Qur'ān. This approach requires the interpreter to possess a deep understanding of various disciplines, including Arabic linguistics, poetry, the reasons for revelation (asbab al-nuzul), and the principles of abrogation (naskh).[68]

[66] Ibid, 113.
[67] Abu Ameenah Philips, *Usool at-Tafseer: The Methodology of Qur'ānic Interpretation* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, n.d.), 11-12, https://kalamullah.com/Books/Usool%20at-Tafseer.pdf.
[68] Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirun*, 183.

The term "Ra'y" refers to reasoned opinion, judgment, or ijtihad. In the context of Tafsīr, it signifies the use of intellectual effort to understand and explain the Qur'ānic text.[69] A scholar engaging in Tafsīr bil-Ra'y must be well-versed in the tools of interpretation, such as: Mastery of the Arabic language and its rhetorical styles. Familiarity with pre-Islamic poetry, which helps in understanding the linguistic context of the Qur'ān. Knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the revelation of specific verses (asbab al-nuzul). Understanding of the principles of abrogation (naskh) and the broader objectives of Islamic law (maqasid al-shariah).[70]

The permissibility and validity of Tafsīr bil-Ra'y have been subjects of significant debate among Islamic scholars throughout history. Their positions can be broadly categorized into two opposing views:

Some scholars strictly prohibited Tafsīr bil-Ra'y, arguing that it amounts to speaking about Allah without knowledge, which is explicitly forbidden in the Qur'ān. They maintained that only interpretations based on transmitted narrations (Ma'thur) from the Prophet, his companions, and their successors are permissible. According to this view, even a highly knowledgeable scholar cannot be certain that their interpretation aligns with Allah's intended meaning, making Tafsīr bil-Ra'y inherently speculative and risky.[71]

Other scholars permitted Tafsīr bil-Ra'y, provided that the interpreter possesses the necessary qualifications and tools. They argued that the Qur'ān encourages reflection and intellectual engagement, and that qualified scholars are capable of deriving valid meanings through reasoned analysis. This group emphasized that Tafsīr bil-Ra'y, when conducted responsibly, can enrich the understanding of the Qur'ān and address new questions and challenges faced by the Muslim community.[72]

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[69] ʿImād ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Samīʿ, *al-Taysīr fī Uṣūl wa-Ittijāhāt al-Tafsīr* (Alexandria: Dār al-Īmān, 2006), 107.
[70] Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirun*, 183.
[71] Ibid; Rumi, *Dirasat fi 'Ulum al-Qur'ān al-Karim*, 159-161.
[72] Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirun*, 184.

Tafsīr bil-Ra'y is further divided, by some scholars, into two categories based on its method and legitimacy: Praiseworthy Tafsīr bil-Ra'y (Tafsīr bil-Ra'y al-Mahmud) and Blameworthy Tafsīr bil-Ra'y (Tafsīr bil-Ra'y al-Madhmum).[73]

The first type of Tafsīr is rooted in the Qur'ān, the Sunnah, and the principles of Islamic law. It is conducted by scholars who possess a deep understanding of the Arabic language, Islamic jurisprudence, and the objectives of the Shariah. Such interpretations are considered valid and beneficial, as they align with the broader framework of Islamic teachings. The next type of Tafsīr is based on personal opinion, whims, or biased interpretations that lack a solid foundation in Islamic sources. It is often associated with individuals or groups who impose their preconceived ideas or heretical beliefs onto the Qur'ānic text. Scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah strongly condemned this form of Tafsīr, declaring it impermissible and dangerous.

Praiseworthy Tafsīr bil-Ra'y has produced some of the most influential works in Islamic history, such as the exegeses of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhshari. These works demonstrate how reasoned analysis can deepen the understanding of the Qur'ān while remaining faithful to its principles. On the other hand, blameworthy Tafsīr bil-Ra'y has been used by sectarian groups and individuals to justify deviant beliefs, highlighting the importance of adhering to sound methods in Qur'ānic interpretation.[74]

While debates exist regarding its permissibility, it is undeniable that many widely accepted tafsīr works fall within this category. This highlights its legitimacy as a valid method of interpretation, provided it remains within the boundaries set by qualified scholars and adheres to Islamic principles. Therefore, it is essential to ensuring that Tafsīr bil-Ra'y continues to enrich Islamic scholarship without compromising its authenticity.[75]

[73] Rumi, *Dirasat fi 'Ulum al-Qur'ān al-Karim*, 159-161.
[74] Philips, *Usool at-Tafseer*, 12.
[75] al-Bughā and Mustaw, *al-Wāḍiḥ fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, 237.

3.2.3. Tafsīr al-Ishari

Tafsīr al-Ishari, or allusive interpretation, refers to the method of interpreting the Qur'ān by uncovering hidden meanings (isharat) that differ from the apparent (zahir) meanings of the text. These subtle indications are believed to be revealed to certain individuals, particularly those who have attained a high level of spiritual knowledge and devotion.[76] These individuals, through their spiritual struggles (mujahada) and divine illumination, are said to perceive the profound secrets and delicate meanings of the Qur'ān, often through divine inspiration (ilham) or spiritual unveiling (fath). Importantly, these hidden meanings do not contradict the apparent meanings of the verses but can be harmonized with them.[77]

The permissibility and validity of Tafsīr al-Ishari have been a subject of significant disagreement among Islamic scholars. Their positions can be summarized as follows:

Some scholars consider Tafsīr al-Ishari to be a form of deep spiritual insight and a sign of perfect faith (kamal al-iman) and pure mystical knowledge (mahd al-irfan). They argue that the Qur'ān contains infinite layers of meaning, as indicated by the saying of Ibn ʻAbbās (may Allah be pleased with him): "The Qur'ān has multiple dimensions, outward and inward meanings, and its wonders never cease. Whoever delves into it gently will be saved, but whoever delves into it harshly will be destroyed."[78]

Other scholars reject Tafsīr al-Ishari, viewing it as a deviation from the true path of Islam and a form of heresy (zandaqa) or misguidance (dalal). They caution against interpreting the Qur'ān based on personal whims or subjective experiences, which can lead to distorting the divine message.[79] The issue of Tafsīr al-Ishari is complex and requires

[76] Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirun*, vol. 2, 261.
[77] Majdi Basloom, introduction to *Tafsīr al-Maturidi (Ta'wilat Ahl al-Sunnah)*, by Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 333 AH) (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kutub al-ʻIlmiyyah, 2005), vol. 1, 281.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.

careful consideration. It is essential to distinguish between two types of interpretations; i.e. Legitimate Tafsīr al-Ishari and Illegitimate Tafsīr al-Ishari:

The first type acknowledges the apparent meanings of the Qur'ān while also uncovering deeper spiritual insights that align with the principles of Islamic teachings. It reflects the belief that the Qur'ān, as the speech of Allah, contains infinite wisdom and secrets that cannot be fully grasped by human intellect alone. While the other type, often associated with the Batiniyya (Ismailite esoteric sects), rejects the apparent meanings of the Qur'ān and imposes arbitrary interpretations that contradict Islamic teachings. Such interpretations are considered heretical and aimed at undermining the Shariah.[80]

Al-Zarkashi noted that the interpretations of the Sufis are not traditional Tafsīr but rather reflections and spiritual experiences they encounter during Qur'ānic recitation. For example, some Sufis interpret the verse *"O you who have believed, fight those adjacent to you of the disbelievers"* (9:123) as referring to the struggle against one's own ego (nafs), as the closest enemy to a person is their own self.[81]

Al-Taftazani distinguished between the allusive interpretations of the Sufis and the heretical interpretations of the Batiniyya. The latter group claimed that the Qur'ānic texts have no apparent meanings and that only their "teacher" could uncover their hidden truths. This approach was aimed at negating the Shariah entirely.[82]

Ibn Ata Allah al-Sikandari clarified that the allusive interpretations of the Sufis do not negate the apparent meanings of the Qur'ān. Instead, they complement them by revealing deeper spiritual insights accessible to those whose hearts have been opened by Allah. This aligns with the hadith: "Every verse of the Qur'ān has an outward (zahir) and an inward (batin) meaning."[83]

[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid, 282.
[83] Ibid.

3.3. Modern Approaches

Since the revelation of the Qur'ān over 1,400 years ago, the sociocultural and religious landscape of the world has undergone profound transformations. In the modern era, the complexities of contemporary life demand a contextualized understanding of the Qur'ānic message that addresses the social, cultural, and political realities of today. Modern Tafsīr, therefore, seeks to bridge the timeless wisdom of the Qur'ān with the evolving challenges and questions of the modern world.[84]

Modern Tafsīr is characterized by its responsiveness to contemporary issues and its utilization of new methods and frameworks for interpretation. These approaches aim to make the Qur'ān's guidance relevant to modern audiences. The modern trends in Tafsīr can be broadly categorized into the following: thematic exegesis, scientific exegesis, socio-political exegesis, reformist exegesis, other rejected exegesis. The "rejected exegesis" category includes interpretations that deviate significantly from traditional principles and are often rejected by the majority of scholars. Examples include extreme modernist interpretations, feminist interpretations, and others that are considered to distort the Qur'ān's message.

The mainstream scholars have criticized or rejected these for departing from established principles of Tafsīr. For instance, some scholars, like Dhahabi, have labeled certain modernist interpretations as "atheistic" (ilhadi),[85] but we prefer the term "rejected" to encompass a broader range of interpretations that are deemed inconsistent with traditional Islamic teachings.

3.4. Is Modern/Traditional Tafsīr Division Acceptable?

The classification of tafsīr methods into traditional and modern approaches - with further subdivisions of modern exegesis into thematic, scientific, socio-political, reformist and

[84] Amer Ali, "A Brief Review of Classical and Modern Tafsīr Trends and the Role of Modern Tafsīr in Contemporary Islamic Thought," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2018): 42.
[85] Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirun*, vol. 2, 383.

rejected categories - is grounded in established Islamic scholarship rather than being a random or novel invention. While our specific categorization may differ slightly in formulation from some classical scholars, the essential recognition of distinct modern interpretive approaches is well-documented in authoritative works of tafsīr studies.

As demonstrated by Muhammad Husayn al-Dhahabi in his seminal work on Qur'ānic exegesis, contemporary interpretations can indeed be systematically classified. Al-Dhahabi specifically identifies four primary "colors" (alwan) of modern tafsīr: scientific (al-'ilmi), doctrinal/madhhabi (al-madhhabi), atheistic (al-ilhadi), and socio-literary (al-adabi al-ijtima'i). This classification from an undisputed authority in tafsīr studies confirms that responsible scholars have long recognized the emergence of distinctive modern interpretive approaches.[86]

Similarly, Majdi Basloom's analysis in his introduction to Tafsīr al-Maturidi acknowledges two broad categories of modern exegesis: the first being those who work within traditional methodological frameworks while adapting to contemporary needs (exemplified by Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida), and the second being those who advocate radical departures from classical approaches (such as Muhammad Shahrur). This division closely parallels our own distinction between accepted and rejected modern methods.[87]

Contemporary scholars across different traditions have affirmed these categorical distinctions. Bilal Philips explicitly identifies new twentieth-century forms of tafsīr that apply Qur'ānic teachings to modern societal, legislative and scientific contexts. Abdullah Saeed's comprehensive study traces the historical development of modern interpretive trends from Shah Waliullah through to contemporary reformist thinkers, demonstrating how evolving historical circumstances gave rise to new exegetical approaches.[88]

[86] Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirun*, vol. 2, 373.
[87] Basloom, introduction to *Tafsīr al-Maturidi*, Vol. 1, 284-298.
[88] Saeed, The Qur'ān,

Moreover, Amer Ali's systematic classification of modern tafsīr trends into textualist, contextualist, modernist, socio-political, scientific, thematic and feminist exegesis[89] provides further scholarly validation for recognizing distinct contemporary methods. While our specific terminology may vary, the essential recognition of these categories is well-established in academic discourse.

3.4.1. Thematic Exegesis

Thematic Exegesis, or *Tafsīr Mawdu'i*, is a modern approach to Qur'ānic interpretation[90] that focuses on studying specific themes or topics across the Qur'ān, rather than following the traditional verse-by-verse method. This approach involves gathering all the verses related to a particular subject, analyzing them collectively, and deriving a comprehensive understanding of the Qur'ānic perspective on that topic.[91] Examples of such themes include faith and disbelief (*iman* and *kufr*), ethics in the Qur'ān, usury (*riba*), and many others.[92]

While the thematic approach is considered a modern development, it has roots in traditional Islamic scholarship. For instance, jurisprudential Tafsīr (*Tafsīr Fiqhi*), which collects and analyzes Qur'ānic verses and Hadiths related to specific legal topics such as prayer (*salah*) or fasting (*sawm*), shares similarities with thematic exegesis.[93] However, as a distinct and systematic method, thematic exegesis is a relatively new concept in the field of Qur'ānic studies.

Thematic exegesis can be categorized into three[94] main types:

i. **Thematic Study of Qur'ānic Terminology**:

   In this approach, a researcher selects a specific term or concept from the Qur'ān, such as *taqwa* (piety) or *tawakkul* (reliance on God), and studies its various forms,

[89] Ali, "A Brief Review of Classical and Modern Tafsīr Trends, 42-45.
[90] Salah al-Khalidi, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Ta'wil fi al-Qur'ān* (Amman: Dar al-Nafa'is, 1996), 14.
[91] Mustafa Muslim, *Mabahith fi al-Tafsīr al-Mawdu'i* (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 2005), 16.
[92] Judai', *Al-Muqaddimat al-Asasiyyah fi 'Ulum al-Qur'ān*,389.
[93] Muslim, *Mabahith fi al-Tafsīr al-Mawdu'I*, 19.
[94] Mūsāid al-Tayyar, *Fusul fi Usul al-Tafsīr*, 2nd ed. (Dammam: Dar Ibn al-Jawzi, 2002), 34.

derivations, and contexts throughout the Qur'ān. By examining the verses where the term appears, the researcher extracts nuanced meanings, insights, and implications, providing a deeper understanding of the term's Qur'ānic usage.[95]

ii. **Thematic Study of Qur'ānic Topics**:

This type involves selecting a broader topic, such as prayer (*salah*), jihad, or the concept of prophethood, and gathering all the verses related to it, regardless of the specific terminology used. The researcher analyzes these verses collectively to uncover the Qur'ān's comprehensive teachings on the topic. For example, a study on "Prayer in the Qur'ān" would examine all verses discussing prayer, its forms, conditions, and spiritual significance, presenting a holistic view of the subject.[96]

iii. **Thematic Study of Qur'ānic Chapters (Surahs)**:

This approach focuses on a single chapter (*surah*) of the Qur'ān, analyzing its structure, themes, and objectives. The researcher identifies the central message of the surah, explores its sub-themes, and examines how its verses are interconnected to form a cohesive unit. This method highlights the thematic unity of the surah and provides readers with a deeper appreciation of its overall purpose and lessons.[97]

Thematic exegesis offers several advantages over traditional methods of Qur'ānic interpretation. By focusing on specific themes or topics, it allows for a more in-depth and contextualized understanding of the Qur'ān's teachings. It also enables researchers to address contemporary issues by drawing on the Qur'ān's timeless wisdom in a structured and systematic manner. Furthermore, thematic exegesis helps bridge the gap between the Qur'ān and modern audiences by presenting its teachings in a way that is relevant and accessible.

Despite its widespread acceptance and numerous benefits, thematic exegesis is not without its critiques. Some scholars have pointed out potential loopholes or problems in this

[95] Salah al-Khalidi, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Ta'wil fi al-Qur'ān*, 14-15.
[96] Ibid, 15.
[97] Ibid, 15-16.

approach that can be problematic.[98] For instance, critics argue that thematic exegesis may sometimes lead to the fragmentation of the Qur'ānic text, as it isolates verses from their original context to fit a specific theme. This can result in interpretations that overlook the holistic message of the Qur'ān or distort its intended meaning. Additionally, there is a risk of imposing external frameworks or biases onto the Qur'ānic text, especially when researchers prioritize modern concerns over the Qur'ān's original context and objectives.

In conclusion, while thematic exegesis has become an important and widely accepted tool for Qur'ānic interpretation, it is essential to approach it with caution and rigor. Researchers must remain mindful of the Qur'ān's holistic nature and ensure that their thematic analyses are grounded in the text's original context and in alliance with traditionally accepted principles. By addressing these critiques and challenges, thematic exegesis can continue to serve as a valuable method for exploring the Qur'ān's profound and multifaceted teachings.

3.4.2. Scientific Exegesis

Scientific Exegesis, or *Tafsīr Ilmi*, is an approach to Qur'ānic interpretation that seeks to harmonize the Qur'ānic text with modern scientific theories and discoveries. This method gained prominence in the early 14th century Hijri (20th century CE) and is based on the belief that the Qur'ān contains references to all forms of knowledge, including the natural sciences.[99] Proponents of this approach argue that the Qur'ān not only addresses religious and moral guidance but also encompasses scientific truths, making it a comprehensive source of both spiritual and worldly knowledge.[100]

While scientific exegesis is often seen as a modern phenomenon, some scholars trace its roots to earlier Islamic thought. For instance, Imam al-Ghazali is frequently cited as one

[98] Ali Seraqi, "Al-Tafsīr al-Mawdu'i, Ma'aziquhu wa Ishkaliyyatuhu," trans. Nadhira Ghallab, *Nusus Mu'asirah* 26 (Spring 2012): 115–130.
[99] Abd al-Majid bin Muhammad al-Wa'lan, *Al-Dalalat al-'Aqadiyyah li al-Ayat al-Kawniyyah: Dirasah Jami'iyyah* (Riyadh: Dar Raka'iz li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', 2019), 137.
[100] *Al-I'jaz al-'Ilmi fi al-Qur'ān al-Karim* (Madinah International University Curricula) (Madinah International University, n.d.), 9.

of the earliest figures to suggest that the Qur'ān contains vast and infinite knowledge. In his famous work *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), al-Ghazali argued that the Qur'ān encompasses all sciences, both apparent and hidden. He quoted scholars who claimed that the Qur'ān contains 77,000 sciences, with each word having both an outward (*zahir*) and inward (*batin*) meaning. Al-Ghazali also referenced the saying of Ibn Mas'ūd (may Allah be pleased with him): "Whoever seeks the knowledge of the past and the future should reflect deeply on the Qur'ān."[101]

Similarly, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, in his monumental Tafsīr *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, incorporated scientific discussions into his interpretations of the Qur'ān. He defended his approach against critics, arguing that the Qur'ān repeatedly invites reflection on the natural world, such as the heavens, the earth, and the alternation of night and day. al-Rāzī believed that studying these phenomena was not only permissible but also encouraged by the Qur'ān itself.[102]

In the modern era, scientific exegesis has gained significant popularity, particularly in response to the central role of scientific education and development in Western societies. One of the most prominent figures in this field is the Egyptian scholar Shaykh Tantawi Jawhari (d. 1940), whose work *al-Jawahir fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karim* (The Jewels in the Interpretation of the Noble Qur'ān) is a landmark in scientific exegesis. Jawhari sought to demonstrate the compatibility of the Qur'ān with modern scientific discoveries, covering topics such as astronomy, biology, and physics.[103]

Muhammad Abduh, a leading figure of the modernist movement, is also considered a pioneer of scientific exegesis in the modern era.[104] He interpreted numerous Qur'ānic verses in light of contemporary scientific knowledge, aiming to show that Islam is not in conflict with modern science.[105] This trend continued with scholars like Muḥammad Rātib

[101] Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirun*, vol. 2, 349.
[102] Fadl Hasan Abbas, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirun: Asasiyyatuhu wa Ittijahatuhu wa Manahijuhu fi al-'Asr al-Hadith*, vol. 1 (Amman, Jordan: Dar al-Nafa'is, 2016), 571.
[103] Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirun*, vol. 2, 370.
[104] His approach is discussed in details in the coming pages.
[105] Abbas, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirun*, vol. 1, 43.

al-Nābulsī, who further developed the approach by linking Qur'ānic verses to scientific phenomena.

Despite its popularity, scientific exegesis has faced significant criticism from both traditional and contemporary scholars. One of the most vocal critics is Sayyid Hossein Nasr, who argues that this approach subordinates the Qur'ān to modern science, thereby diminishing its spiritual and metaphysical dimensions. Nasr warns that scientific exegesis risks reducing the Qur'ān to a mere scientific textbook, ignoring its primary purpose as a guide for spiritual and moral development.

Another major criticism is the inherent uncertainty of scientific knowledge. Scientific theories are subject to change and revision over time, and tying the Qur'ān to specific scientific ideas could lead to contradictions if those ideas are later disproven. Critics argue that this approach risks undermining the Qur'ān's credibility, as it could be seen as "mistaken" if the scientific theories it is aligned with are overturned.

Scientific exegesis represents a significant effort to demonstrate the Qur'ān's relevance to the modern world by highlighting its alignment with scientific discoveries. While this approach has gained widespread support and has been instrumental in addressing contemporary intellectual challenges, it must be approached with caution. Scholars must ensure that scientific exegesis does not overshadow the Qur'ān's primary spiritual and moral message or reduce it to a tool for validating scientific theories. By maintaining a balance between scientific exploration and the Qur'ān's timeless wisdom, this approach can continue to serve as a bridge between faith and reason in the modern era.

3.4.3. Socio-Political Exegesis

Socio-Political Exegesis is an approach to Qur'ānic interpretation that focuses on addressing the social, economic, and political dimensions of modernity through the lens of the Qur'ān. This method seeks to apply Qur'ānic teachings to contemporary societal issues, advocating for justice, reform, and the establishment of Islamic principles in

governance and social structures. One of the most influential figures in this genre is the Egyptian scholar Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), whose monumental work *Fi Zilal al-Qur'ān* (In the Shade of the Qur'ān) exemplifies this approach.[106]

Sayyid Qutb's exegesis is deeply rooted in his vision of social, political, and religious reform. Living in a time when the Islamic caliphate had been abolished and Muslim-majority nations were grappling with the legacy of European colonialism, Qutb was deeply critical of the abandonment of Shariah in governance and the adoption of secular, Western legal systems. His interpretation of the Qur'ān emphasizes the concept of *tawheed* (the oneness of God) not only as a theological principle but also as a foundation for social and political justice.[107]

In *Fi Zilal al-Qur'ān*, Qutb interprets Qur'ānic verses in a way that highlights their relevance to contemporary struggles for justice, freedom, and the establishment of an Islamic social order. His work is characterized by its passionate call for the revival of Islamic values in all aspects of life, including governance, economics, and social relations. While Qutb's approach is highly political, it has contributed significantly to the development of socio-political exegesis as a distinct genre within Qur'ānic interpretation.

While socio-political exegesis has gained significant traction, it has also sparked debates among scholars. Some traditionalists argue that Sayyid Qutb's work, for example, deviates from classical Tafsīr methods, as it prioritizes political and social commentary over detailed linguistic and textual analysis. They contend that his interpretations are more ideological than exegetical and should not be classified as Tafsīr in the traditional sense. On the other hand, proponents of socio-political exegesis argue that Qutb's work, and similar interpretations, fall exactly within the realm of Tafsīr, even if they do not conform to classical models.[108] They maintain that the Qur'ān's message is inherently social and

[106] Ali, "A Brief Review of Classical and Modern Tafsīr Trends," 44.
[107] Philips, *Usool at-Tafseer*, 14.
[108] Adnan Muhammad Zarzur, *Madkhal ila Tafsīr al-Qur'ān wa 'Ulumihi*, 2nd ed. (Damascus/Beirut: Dar al-Qalam / Dar al-Shamiyyah, 1998), 249.

political, and that addressing these dimensions is essential for a comprehensive understanding of its teachings.

3.4.4. Reformist Exegesis

Reformist exegesis, or modernist tafsīr, represents a significant shift in Qur'ānic interpretation, emerging as a response to the challenges posed by modernity and the Western worldview. This approach seeks to reconcile Islamic teachings with contemporary thought, emphasizing the need for ijtihad (independent judgment) over taqlid (imitation of early scholars). Reformist exegetes argue that the dynamic nature of the Qur'ān necessitates fresh interpretations that address the realities of modern life, particularly in the face of Western intellectual and cultural dominance.[109]

The roots of reformist exegesis can be traced to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period marked by the decline of Muslim political power and the rise of Western colonialism. Some Muslim intellectuals, dealing with the perceived gap between Islamic tradition and modernity, sought to reinterpret the Qur'ān in ways that would make it relevant to contemporary Muslims. Among the most prominent figures in this movement were Muhammad Abduh and his student Muhammad Rashid Rida, whose collaborative work, *Tafsīr al-Manar* (The Beacon Interpretation), became a cornerstone of modernist exegesis.

Abduh, influenced by his mentor Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, advocated for a return to the Qur'ān and Sunnah as primary sources of guidance, free from the constraints of traditional tafsīr methods. He criticized the uncritical adherence (taqlid) to classical interpretations, arguing that it weakened intellectual progress and delayed Muslims from addressing modern challenges. Abduh's approach emphasized the use of reason ('aql) and the reconciliation of Islamic teachings with modern scientific and philosophical thought. His

[109] Ali, "A Brief Review of Classical and Modern Tafsīr Trends," 43-44.

goal was to reform Muslim societies, enabling them to meet the intellectual and cultural challenges posed by the West.[110]

Rida, who continued and expanded upon Abduh's work, shared his teacher's commitment to rational interpretation but placed greater emphasis on the role of hadith. However, both scholars were selective in their use of traditional sources, often rejecting hadiths reported in canonical collections like Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim if they deemed them inconsistent with reason or modern sensibilities. For instance, Rida denied the occurrence of miracles attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), except for the Qur'ān itself, which he regarded as the ultimate miracle.[111] The following are the key themes in reformist exegesis:

i. **Rejection of Taqlid and Emphasis on Ijtihad**

   Reformist exegetes rejected the imitation of early scholars, arguing that it hindered intellectual and social progress. Instead, they championed ijtihad, encouraging Muslims to engage directly with the Qur'ān and derive meanings relevant to their contemporary context. This approach allowed for a more flexible and dynamic interpretation of Islamic teachings.

ii. **Reconciliation with Modernity and Western Thought**

   A central concern of reformist exegesis was bridging the gap between Islamic and Western modes of thought. Scholars like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan recognized the growing influence of Western education and its impact on Muslim intellectual life. Khan argued that traditional religious discourse, as articulated by the ulama, was increasingly incomprehensible to Muslims educated in Western traditions. To address this, reformist exegetes sought to reinterpret the Qur'ān in ways that aligned with modern scientific, philosophical, and ethical frameworks.

iii. **Focus on Contemporary Issues**

   Reformist exegesis addressed pressing social and intellectual issues, such as gender inequality, the status of non-Muslims, the relationship between religion and

[110] Noura Nayef Al-Harbi, "Manahij al-Mufassirin," *Arab Journal for Scientific Publishing* 6, no. 57 (2023): 288.
[111] Philips, *Usool at-Tafseer*, 14.

science, and the relevance of Islam in modern times. By moving beyond the grammatical, rhetorical, and jurisprudential approaches of classical tafsīr, modernist scholars aimed to produce interpretations that resonated with the lived experiences of 21st-century Muslims.

iv. Extreme Reliance on Reason

Reason (‘aql) played a central role in reformist exegesis, often taking precedence over traditional interpretive methods.[112] This emphasis on rationality allowed scholars to critique and reinterpret aspects of Islamic tradition that they viewed as incompatible with modern thought. However, this approach also drew criticism from traditionalists, who accused reformists of undermining the authority of the Qur’ān and Sunnah.[113]

The reformist approach to Qur’ānic exegesis has had a lasting impact on Islamic thought, particularly in the 20th and 21st centuries. Scholars like Mustafa al-Maraghi and others associated with the Azhari school continued to develop and refine the ideas of Abduh and Rida, ensuring that reformist exegesis remained a vibrant and influential tradition. By emphasizing the compatibility of Islam with modernity and the importance of independent reasoning. However, this approach has also faced significant criticism, particularly from traditionalist scholars who argue that it undermines the authority of classical Islamic scholarship and risks distorting the Qur’ān’s message.

3.4.5. Other Rejected Exegesis

Among the various modern approaches to Tafsīr, there exists a category of interpretations that have been widely criticized and rejected by the majority of Islamic scholars. These interpretations are characterized by their extreme alignment with modern Western ideologies and secular worldviews, to the extent that they attempt to reshape Islamic teachings to fit within the framework of secular, liberal, or even atheistic beliefs. Scholars

[112] Harbi, “Manahij al-Mufassirin,” 288.
[113] Among those who strongly criticized Muhammad Abduh was the last Shaykh al-Islam of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Sabri. For more details, refer to his work: *Mawqif al-‘Aql wa al-‘Ilm wa al-‘Alam min Rabb al-‘Alamin wa ‘Ibadihi al-Mursalin*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar Ihya’ al-Turath al-‘Arabi, 1981).

such as Dhahabi have labeled these interpretations as "atheistic" (ilhadi) due to their departure from traditional Islamic principles and their tendency to undermine the established meanings of the Qur'ān.[114]

This category includes a range of ideological interpretations, such as feminist,[115] Marxist, liberal, and historicist approaches, which seek to reinterpret the Qur'ān in light of these modern ideologies. For example, Muhammad Shahrur, in his work *Al-Kitab wal-Qur'ān: Qira'ah Mu'asirah* (The Book and the Qur'ān: A Contemporary Reading,) employs contemporary methods such as structuralism and dialectical analysis to reinterpret the Qur'ān. His interpretations often challenge traditional understandings, leading to conclusions that contradict established Islamic principles.[116]

One of Shahrur's controversial interpretations revolves around the distinction between *haram* (forbidden) and *ijtinab* (avoidance). He argues that *ijtinab* is a lesser degree of prohibition compared to *haram*, suggesting that certain actions, such as consuming alcohol or engaging in illicit relationships, are not categorically forbidden but merely discouraged. This interpretation has been criticized for leading to the erosion of clear Islamic rulings, as it opens the door to justifying behaviors explicitly prohibited in the Qur'ān. For instance, Shahrur questions why certain major sins, such as shirk (associating partners with Allah), are described using the term *ijtinab* rather than *haram*. Critics argue that his approach undermines the gravity of such sins and reduces them to matters of cultural preference rather than divine prohibition.[117]

Another example of Shahrur's controversial interpretations is his adoption of Darwin's theory of evolution to explain the creation of Adam.[118] He posits that Adam was not created independently but was selected from an existing species of human-like animals,

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[114] Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirun*, vol. 2, 383.
[115] Ali, "A Brief Review of Classical and Modern Tafsīr Trends," 42.
[116] Basloom, introduction to *Tafsīr al-Maturidi*, vol. 1, 296.
[117] Ibid, 297.
[118] *Man Hum al-Bashar? Man Adam wa Zawjuh? Al-Bashar Khuliqat Qabla Adam ...*, featuring Dr. Muhammad Shahrour, *Tabayyan Li* program, YouTube video, February 14, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_E9LWMp-KY.

aligning his views with evolutionary theory. Shahrur claims that Darwin's theory provides the best explanation for Qur'ānic verses about the creation of humans, such as *"Allah did choose Adam"*[119] Surah Āl ʿImrān (3:33). This interpretation starkly contrasts with the traditional Islamic understanding of Adam's creation and has been criticized for imposing modern scientific theories onto the Qur'ānic text without sufficient evidence or justification.[120]

In summary, the interpretations of figures like Shahrur and others within this category are marked by their reliance on modern ideologies and their willingness to reinterpret the Qur'ān in ways that often contradict its established meanings. While they claim to employ analytical and objective methods, their approaches are frequently criticized for being hasty, imprecise, and driven by a desire to promote their intellectual projects at the expense of the Qur'ān's timeless principles. These interpretations, therefore, fall under the category of rejected exegesis, as they deviate significantly from the traditional methods and consensus of Islamic scholarship.

3.5. al-Nābulsī's Approach to Tafsīr

3.5.1. Overview of al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's journey into Qur'ānic exegesis began in 1970 when he initiated weekly Tafsīr lessons at the mosque of his ancestor, Abdul Ghani al-Nābulsī, in Damascus. He started with the 30th part (*juz'*) of the Qur'ān, which contains shorter chapters (*surahs*) often recited in prayers. After completing this section, he moved on to the preceding nine parts (*juz'* 21 to 29), followed by the second ten parts (*juz'* 11 to 20), and finally the first ten parts (*juz'* 1 to 10). By the time he reached the middle of Surah al-Tawbah (Chapter 9) in Damascus, he relocated to Amman, Jordan, where he completed the entire Qur'ānic exegesis at Al-Hadi Mosque. This monumental effort spanned

[119] In translation of the Holy Quran, I relied on the translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali throughout the thesis.
[120] Basloom, introduction to *Tafsīr al-Maturidi*, vol. 1, 297-298.

approximately 40 years and was conducted in the form of public lectures attended by hundreds of people.[121]

al-Nābulsī prioritized the interpretation of Meccan surahs over Medinan surahs, believing that the Meccan verses, which focus on introducing Allah, the Day of Judgment, and the fundamentals of faith, provide the necessary foundation for understanding the Medinan verses, which primarily deal with legal and societal regulations. He often emphasized that "when a person knows the Creator and then understands His commands, they will strive to obey Him; but if they only know the commands without knowing the Creator, they will find ways to disobey Him."[122]

3.5.2. Recording and Transcribing the Tafsīr

al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr was delivered as live lectures in the mosque, and he ensured that every session was recorded on cassette tapes, which were the standard recording medium at the time. After completing the entire Tafsīr, he tasked some of his students with transcribing the recordings into written form, ensuring that the written text matched the spoken words exactly, without additions or omissions.[123]

However, this process faced several challenges. First, al-Nābulsī often used conversational language during his lectures to make his explanations accessible to all segments of society, including those with limited religious or linguistic knowledge. While this approach was effective for oral delivery, it required refinement for written publication. Second, the hadiths and narrations mentioned in the lectures needed to be properly sourced and verified according to scholarly standards. Additionally, statistical data and scientific information referenced in the lectures had to be updated, as some figures and facts had changed over time.[124]

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[121] Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī, *Tafsīr al-Nābulsī: Tadabbur Ayat Allah fi al-Nafs wa al-Kawn wa al-Hayah* (Amman: Muʾassasat al-Furqan, 2017), vol. 1, 16–17.
[122] Ibid, vol. 1, 17.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid, 19.

3.5.3. Compilation and Publication

Once the transcriptions were completed, al-Nābulsī found himself with an extensive manuscript. To manage this massive work, he enlisted the help of his trusted students, who followed a specific method he outlined for editing and organizing the material. The final product was titled *Tadabbur Ayat Allah fi al-Nafs wa al-Kawn wa al-Hayah* (Reflecting on the Verses of Allah in the Self, the Universe, and Life), reflecting al-Nābulsī's conviction that his work was not a traditional Tafsīr but rather a deep reflection on the Qur'ānic, cosmic, and creational signs of Allah.[125]

The Tafsīr was published in 2017 (1438 AH) by Al-Fursan Publishing House in Amman, Jordan. Initially, it was released in ten volumes, but a second edition was soon published in fourteen larger volumes with colored pages and a more readable font. A condensed version of the Tafsīr was also published in a single volume by the same publishing house.[126]

3.5.4. Unique Features of al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr

i. **Accessibility**: al-Nābulsī's use of simple language and his focus on practical lessons made his Tafsīr accessible to a wide audience, including those without advanced religious education.

ii. **Integration of Science and Reflection**: His Tafsīr frequently incorporates scientific facts and encourages readers to reflect on the signs of Allah in the universe, aligning with his broader emphasis on the interconnectedness of Qur'ānic, cosmic, and creational signs.

iii. **Emphasis on Moral and Spiritual Lessons**: While al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr addresses the linguistic and contextual aspects of the Qur'ān, its primary focus is on deriving moral, spiritual, and practical lessons that resonate with contemporary life.

[125] Muhammad Shawkat Suleiman, "Al-Tafsīr al-ʿIlmi fi Tafsīr Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī" (Master's thesis, Firat University, 2020), 39.
[126] Ibid, 41.

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr stands out as a unique contribution to modern Qur'ānic exegesis. By combining traditional scholarship with accessible language, scientific insights, and a focus on practical spirituality, al-Nābulsī's work has made the Qur'ān's message relevant to a broad audience. His 40-year journey of teaching, recording, and compiling this Tafsīr reflects his deep commitment to helping people understand and reflect on the Qur'ān's timeless wisdom.

3.6. al-Nābulsī's Approach to Tafsīr

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's method in Qur'ānic exegesis is deeply rooted in his conviction that the Qur'ān is a comprehensive guide for life, encompassing cosmic, creational, and Qur'ānic signs of Allah. In the introduction to his Tafsīr, *Tadabbur Ayat Allah fi al-Nafs wa al-Kawn wa al-Hayah* (Reflecting on the Verses of Allah in the Self, the Universe, and Life), al-Nābulsī outlines the key features of his approach, which reflect his commitment to making the Qur'ān's message accessible, relevant, and transformative for modern audiences.

3.6.1. Reliance on Classical and Contemporary Tafsīr Works

al-Nābulsī's method is grounded in a thorough review of classical Tafsīr works, including those by renowned scholars such as al-Tabari, al-Qurtubi, al-Rāzī, Ibn Kathir, and *Mahasin al-Ta'wil*.[127] He begins by providing a linguistic and contextual explanation of each verse, then gathers related verses that shed light on its meaning or address the same theme. Additionally, he occasionally references contemporary Tafsīr works, such as those by Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sha'rawi, to address modern issues and perspectives. This balanced reliance on both classical and contemporary sources demonstrates al-Nābulsī's scholarly rigor and his commitment to building on the rich tradition of Qur'ānic exegesis.[128]

[127] Nabulsi, *Tafsīr al-Nābulsī*, vol. 1, 17, 20.
[128] Muhammad Naeem Faraj, *Manhaj al-Nābulsī fi Al-Tafsīr Al-Ilmi fi Tafsīrihi Tadabbur Ayat Allah fi Al-Nafs wa Al-Kawn wa Al-Hayat* (Master's thesis, An-Najah National University, College of Islamic Studies, 2024), 29–30.

al-Nābulsī's attention to classical Tafsīr works, particularly those that emphasize the Arabic language, is evident in his approach. For example, he draws inspiration from al-Qurtubi, who meticulously analyzed Qur'ānic readings (*qira'at*), grammatical structures (*i'rab*), and rare vocabulary (*gharib al-Qur'ān*), often citing classical Arabic poetry to support his interpretations. Similarly, al-Nābulsī frequently employs poetic evidence (*shawahid*) to elucidate the meanings of Qur'ānic words and phrases, recognizing that poetry serves as a reliable source for understanding the nuances of the Arabic language.[129]

3.6.2. Emphasis on Arabic Language and Poetry

al-Nābulsī places great emphasis on the Arabic language, recognizing its centrality to understanding the Qur'ān. He frequently cites classical Arabic poetry to clarify the meanings of Qur'ānic words and expressions, as poetry is considered a definitive proof (*hujja*) in Arabic linguistics and semantics. By incorporating poetic evidence, al-Nābulsī not only highlights the linguistic beauty of the Qur'ān but also provides a deeper understanding of its vocabulary and expressions. This approach aligns with the method of classical exegetes, who often used poetry to explain the Qur'ān's linguistic and rhetorical features.[130]

3.6.3. Real-World Applications (*Isqatat Waqi'iyya*)

One of the defining features of al-Nābulsī's method is his focus on applying Qur'ānic teachings to contemporary realities. He believes that the Qur'ān is a comprehensive guide for life and that its verses, even those revealed in specific historical contexts, hold universal relevance. al-Nābulsī strives to project the meanings of Qur'ānic verses onto the lives of modern Muslims, emphasizing that the lessons of the Qur'ān are not confined to the past but are applicable to current social, political, and personal challenges. This approach reflects his conviction that the Qur'ān's guidance transcends time and place, and

[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid; Nabulsi, *Tafsīr al-Nābulsī*, vol. 1, 17.

that its teachings must be understood in light of their general applicability (*'umum al-lafz*) rather than being restricted to their specific occasions of revelation (*khhusus al-sabab*).[131]

3.6.4. Scientific Reflection on Creation

al-Nābulsī dedicates significant attention to verses that discuss the creation of the universe and humanity, of which there are over a thousand in the Qur'ān, as al-Nābulsī says in his introductioni. He interprets these verses scientifically, drawing on modern discoveries to highlight the signs of Allah's greatness in the natural world. For al-Nābulsī, reflection (*tadabbur*) on creation is one of the most effective ways to strengthen faith and draw closer to Allah.[132] By integrating scientific insights into his Tafsīr, he bridges the gap between faith and science or reason, demonstrating the harmony between the Qur'ān and the natural world.

3.6.5. Use of Stories and Analogies

al-Nābulsī frequently employs stories from history and contemporary life, as well as analogies, to illustrate the meanings of Qur'ānic verses. He believes that stories and parables are powerful tools for conveying abstract concepts in a tangible and relatable way. This method is deeply rooted in the Qur'ān itself, which often uses stories and analogies to convey its messages.[133] By incorporating real-life examples, al-Nābulsī makes the Qur'ān's teachings more accessible and impactful for his audience.

3.7. Placing al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr in the Realm of Traditional and Modern Approaches

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr is a unique work that blends elements of both traditional and modern approaches to Qur'ānic exegesis. By examining his method and the sources he relies on, it becomes clear that al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr cannot be confined to a

[131] Ibid, 20.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.

single category but rather incorporates multiple interpretive frameworks. Below is an analysis of how his Tafsīr fits within the spectrum of traditional and modern approaches:

3.7.1. Tafsīr bil-Ma'thur (Traditional Approach)

al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr is deeply rooted in the tradition of *Tafsīr bil-Ma'thur*, as he extensively relies on the Qur'ān itself, the Sunnah, and classical exegetical works such as those by al-Tabari, al-Qurtubi, and Ibn Kathir. These sources form the foundation of his interpretations, ensuring that his Tafsīr remains grounded in the transmitted knowledge of early Islamic scholarship. By incorporating narrations from the Prophet (PBUH), his companions, and their successors, al-Nābulsī adheres to the traditional method of deriving meanings from authentic sources.

3.7.2. Tafsīr bil-Ra'y (Traditional Approach)

al-Nābulsī also employs *Tafsīr bil-Ra'y*, utilizing his knowledge of the Arabic language, its poetry, and his own *ijtihad* to interpret the Qur'ānic text. His frequent use of classical Arabic poetry to explain Qur'ānic vocabulary and his application of linguistic analysis demonstrate his reliance on rational reasoning. This approach allows him to derive nuanced meanings and insights from the text, making his Tafsīr both intellectually rigorous and accessible.

3.7.3. Thematic Exegesis (Modern Approach)

al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr can also be classified as a form of thematic exegesis (*Tafsīr Mawdu'i*), a modern approach that focuses on specific themes or topics across the Qur'ān. He often extracts lessons from different verses and discusses issues or terms in a holistic manner, connecting related verses to provide a comprehensive understanding of a particular theme. This thematic approach reflects his desire to make the Qur'ān's teachings relevant and applicable to contemporary life.

3.7.4. Scientific Exegesis (Modern Approach)

al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr is a significant contribution to scientific exegesis (*Tafsīr Ilmi*), as he extensively incorporates modern scientific discoveries into his interpretations. In the introduction to his Tafsīr, he explicitly mentions his reliance on Western scientific sources, such as the American Scientific Encyclopedia, to explain verses related to the creation of the universe and humanity.[134] His focus on reflecting on the signs of Allah in the natural world aligns with the objectives of scientific exegesis, making his work a valuable resource for those seeking to harmonize faith and science.

3.7.5. Socio-Political Exegesis (Modern Approach)

al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr also reflects elements of socio-political exegesis, particularly through his engagement with the works of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sha'rawi, both of whom are known for their socio-political interpretations of the Qur'ān. al-Nābulsī's emphasis on applying Qur'ānic teachings to contemporary social, political, and economic realities demonstrates his commitment to addressing the challenges faced by modern Muslims. This approach aligns with the goals of socio-political exegesis, which seeks to make the Qur'ān's message relevant to current societal issues.

3.7.6. Integration of Traditional and Modern Approaches

What sets al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr apart is its seamless integration of traditional and modern approaches. While he remains firmly rooted in the classical tradition of *Tafsīr bil-Ma'thur* and *Tafsīr bil-Ra'y*, he also embraces modern methods such as thematic, scientific, and socio-political exegesis. This balanced approach allows him to bridge the gap between the timeless wisdom of the Qur'ān and the evolving realities of the modern world.

[134] Ibid.

In conclusion, Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr is a multifaceted work that challenges easy categorization. It draws on the strengths of both traditional and modern approaches to Qur'ānic exegesis, making it a valuable resource for a wide range of readers. By combining the rigor of classical scholarship with the relevance of modern methods, al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr exemplifies how the Qur'ān's message can be understood and applied in diverse contexts. His work serves as a testament to the enduring relevance of the Qur'ān and its ability to guide humanity in every age.

3.8. Evaluation

The study of Qur'ānic exegesis is a dynamic and multifaceted field that has evolved over centuries, reflecting the diverse intellectual, cultural, and historical contexts in which the Qur'ān has been interpreted. This chapter has explored the rich tapestry of traditional and modern approaches to tafsir, highlighting their unique methods, contributions, and challenges. By situating Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr within this broader framework, I have gained a deeper understanding of how his work bridges the gap between classical scholarship and contemporary relevance.

Traditional approaches to Tafsīr, such as *Tafsīr bil-Ma'thur*, *Tafsīr bil-Ra'y*, and Sufi or allusive interpretation, have laid the foundation for Qur'ānic exegesis. These methods emphasize the importance of grounding interpretations in the Qur'ān, the Sunnah, and the insights of early scholars, while also allowing for intellectual and spiritual exploration. Each approach has its strengths and limitations, and together they represent the diverse ways in which the Qur'ān has been understood and applied throughout Islamic history.

In response to the challenges and opportunities of modernity, new approaches to Tafsīr have emerged, including thematic exegesis, scientific exegesis, socio-political exegesis, and reformist exegesis. These methods seek to make the Qur'ān's message relevant to contemporary issues, addressing questions posed by scientific advancements, social change, and political developments. While these approaches have enriched the field of

Tafsīr, they have also sparked debates about their compatibility with traditional principles and their potential to deviate from the Qur'ān's original context and intent.

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr exemplifies the integration of traditional and modern approaches. Rooted in classical methods such as *Tafsīr bil-Ma'thur* and *Tafsīr bil-Ra'y*, al-Nābulsī's work also embraces modern trends like thematic, scientific, and socio-political exegesis. His emphasis on linguistic precision, scientific reflection, and real-world applications demonstrates his commitment to making the Qur'ān's teachings accessible and relevant to modern audiences.

al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr is a testament to the continuing relevance of the Qur'ān and its ability to guide humanity in every age. By combining the rigor of classical scholarship with the insights of modern methods, he has created a work that resonates with both traditionalists and modernists. His approach serves as a model for how the Qur'ān can be understood and applied in diverse contexts, bridging the gap between faith and reason, tradition and modernity.

The diversity of approaches to Qur'ānic exegesis reflects the richness and depth of the Qur'ān itself. Whether rooted in tradition or shaped by modernity, each method offers unique insights into the Qur'ān's timeless message. al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr stands as a remarkable example of how these approaches can be harmonized to create a comprehensive and impactful interpretation of the Qur'ān. As the field of Tafsīr continues to evolve, it is essential to maintain a balance between innovation and fidelity to the Qur'ān's original context and principles, ensuring that its guidance remains a source of enlightenment and inspiration for generations to come.

CHAPTER IV

AL-NĀBULSĪ'S TAFSĪR OF SURAH AL-KAHF

4.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to examine the tafsīr method of Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī by studying his interpretation of Surah al-Kahf as a representative example. Rather than focusing on one theme, such as narrative structure or specific theological points, the chapter analyzes how al-Nābulsī approaches the surah in its entirety—verse by verse or theme by theme—drawing out his exegetical principles, spiritual insights, and pedagogical strategies.

Surah al-Kahf presents a rich and multifaceted landscape: it contains doctrinal affirmations, moral guidance, spiritual symbolism, and socio-political reflection.[135] Through his commentary, al-Nābulsī not only explains linguistic and thematic dimensions, but also consistently connects the text to contemporary issues of faith, identity, and societal challenges. His tafsīr reveals a concern for both the truth of revelation and its role in shaping the human heart and mind.

This chapter, therefore, does not aim to provide a detailed exegesis of the entire surah, instead, it explores the main approaches and themses of al-Nābulsī's tafsīr in Surah al Kahf.

[135] See for features of surah al-Kahf: Mustafa Muslim, *Mabahith fi al-Tafsīr al-Mawdu'i* (Dimashq: Dar al-Qalam, 4th ed., 2005), 169–174.

4.2. The Purpose of Stories in Surah al-Kahf

In his commentary on Surah al-Kahf, al-Nābulsī emphasizes that Qur'ānic stories are not to be confused with fictional narratives or mere historical accounts. Instead, they are truths presented in narrative form for the purpose of teaching divine laws and eternal values.[136] He writes:

> *كلما مرت بكم قصة في كتاب الله عز وجل، يجب أن تعلموا علم اليقين، أن هذه ليست بقصة كما نتوهم، إنما هي حقائق، وقواعد صيغت على شكل حوادث، وحوارات"*[137]
> (*Every time a story appears in the Book of Allah, you must know with certainty that it is not a story as we imagine. Rather, it is truth and principle formulated in the shape of events and dialogues.*)

He explains that these stories are revealed *"بالحق"* (with truth), in contrast to the fabricated or distorted tales circulating among previous religious communities. Referring to the verse ﴿نحن نقص عليك نبأهم بالحق﴾ (*We relate to thee their story in truth*) (Surah al-Kahf (18:13), al-Nābulsī stresses that the Qur'ānic narratives are epistemologically sound, rooted in divine revelation, and free from conjecture, fabrication, or myth. This is particularly important because, as he notes, the Jews had posed questions about the People of the Cave intending to discredit the Prophet ﷺ — yet the Qur'ān responded with a story that was both historically grounded and spiritually charged, confirming the Prophet's divine source of knowledge and reaffirming his prophethood.[138]

al-Nābulsī also sees the choice of stories in Surah al-Kahf as timely and contextually deliberate. The early Muslims in Mecca, enduring persecution and hardship, mirrored the situation of the Companions of the Cave, who had to flee their society to preserve their faith. The parallels are profound:

- Both groups were oppressed minorities,
- Both faced intense social and political pressure, and

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[136] Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī, "Al-Dars: 1 - Surat al-Kahf - Tafsīr al-Ayat: 9–16, al-Hadaf min al-Qissah fi al-Qur'ān," *Mawsu'at al-Nābulsī*, March 12, 1995, https://nabulsi.com/story/4349

[137] Ibid.

[138] Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī, "Al-Dars: 2 - Surat al-Kahf - Tafsīr al-Ayat: 7–16, al-Ibtala'," *Mawsu'at al-Nābulsī*, October 23, 1987, https://nabulsi.com/web/article/2295.

- Both were ultimately vindicated by divine intervention.[139]

Thus, the story is not just a tale of the past, but a mirror for the present — a *balm for the wounded souls* of Meccan believers, reminding them that divine help comes with patience and faith.

"فكأن هذه القصة جاءت لتخفف الأعباء عن المؤمنين الأوائل، ولتسليهم، ولتزيح عنهم الحزن"[140]
(*This story came as a relief to the early believers, to console them, and to remove their sorrow.*)

Through this lens, al-Nābulsī reveals that Qur'ānic stories function as divine pedagogy — designed to heal, to inspire, and to shape Islamic consciousness across generations. His method is not merely exegetical, but educational, psychological, and pastoral.

4.3. Scientific Interpretations in Surah al-Kahf

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr of Surah al-Kahf provides a striking example of scientific exegesis (*Tafsīr Ilmi*), where he interprets Qur'ānic verses in light of modern scientific knowledge. One such instance is his explanation of the verse:

"Thou wouldst have deemed them awake, whilst they were asleep, and We turned them on their right and on their left sides..." Surah al-Kahf (18:13).

al-Nābulsī highlights the scientific miracle (*i'jaz 'ilmi*) in this verse, explaining how the act of turning the People of the Cave (*Ashab al-Kahf*) during their prolonged sleep aligns with modern medical understanding. He begins by describing the physiological process of sleep and the importance of changing positions during rest. When a person lies down, the weight of their body exerts pressure on their skeletal structure, which in turn presses on the muscles and underlying tissues. This pressure can compress blood vessels, reducing blood flow to the affected areas and potentially causing tissue damage or necrosis if the position is maintained for too long.[141]

[139] Nabulsi, *Tafsīr al-Nābulsī*, vol. 168-170.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid, 175-176.

al-Nābulsī explains that in normal circumstances, a sleeping person changes their position approximately 38 to 40 times during an eight-hour sleep cycle. This natural movement is facilitated by specialized nerve centers in the body that detect pressure and send signals to the brain, which then instructs the muscles to adjust the sleeping position. This mechanism ensures that no single area of the body is subjected to prolonged pressure, preventing tissue damage and maintaining healthy blood circulation.[142]

However, in cases of coma or paralysis, where a person is unable to move independently, the lack of positional changes can lead to severe complications, such as bedsores (*pressure ulcers*). These occur when prolonged pressure cuts off blood supply to certain areas, causing the tissue to break down and die. al-Nābulsī emphasizes that the primary treatment for such patients is regular repositioning to prevent tissue damage.

Applying this scientific understanding to the story of the People of the Cave, al-Nābulsī notes that their sleep lasted for 309 years. If they had remained in the same position throughout this period, their bodies would have deteriorated, and their flesh would have decayed. The Qur'ānic statement that *"We turned them to the right and to the left"* thus reflects a profound scientific truth: the divine intervention that preserved their bodies by periodically changing their positions. al-Nābulsī concludes that this act of turning them was a miracle, as it ensured their physical preservation over centuries.[143]

This interpretation demonstrates al-Nābulsī's commitment to integrating modern scientific knowledge with Qur'ānic exegesis. By drawing on medical science to explain the Qur'ānic narrative, he highlights the compatibility between the Qur'ān and scientific discoveries, reinforcing the idea that the Qur'ān contains signs and wisdom that resonate with human understanding across time.

al-Nābulsī's scientific exegesis of Surah al-Kahf not only deepens the reader's appreciation of the Qur'ān's miraculous nature but also serves as a reminder of the

[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.

intricate balance between divine intervention and natural laws. His approach exemplifies how scientific exegesis can enrich our understanding of the Qur'ān while affirming its timeless relevance.

4.3.1. Scientific Theories Contradicting Revelation

While al-Nābulsī engages actively with scientific knowledge in his tafsīr, as mentioned above, drawing connections between Qur'ānic verses and modern scientific discoveries, he does so with careful discernment. His approach to *tafsīr 'ilmi* is not based on accommodating every contemporary theory, but rather on upholding the Qur'ān as the ultimate, unerring source of truth. Scientific insights may help illuminate the meanings of the verses, but they cannot override or contradict what he considers *al-khabar al-sadiq* (the truthful report) from Allah.[144]

One striking example of this position is his rejection of Darwinian evolution in its materialistic form—particularly the claim that human beings evolved from apes. He regards such narratives as "false reports" (نبأ بالباطل) because they contradict the Qur'ānic account of creation. Referring to verse 51 of Surah al-Kahf—"مَا أَشْهَدتُّهُمْ خَلْقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَا خَلْقَ أَنفُسِهِمْ" (I called them not to witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor (even) their own creation)—he argues that no human being has witnessed the origin of the universe or the first creation of man. Therefore, any theory about these unseen realities that contradicts divine revelation must be rejected, regardless of its popularity or scientific support. He states:

كل قصة وردت مخالفة لبيان القرآن؛ فقد وردت بالباطل... فالعبرة أن هذا الموضوع الإخباري سبيل معرفته الخبر الصادق،[145] وَمَنْ "أَصْدَقُ مِنَ اللَّهِ حَدِيثًا" (النساء: 87).

Through this lens, al-Nābulsī emphasizes that discussions about the origin of life and humanity fall within the realm of *ghaybiyyat* (unseen matters), and are therefore only reliably known through revelation. The Qur'ān, in his method, remains the ultimate

[144] Ibid, 167.
[145] Ibid, 167-168.

criterion (*mīzān*) by which all external knowledge—including scientific theory—must be evaluated.[146]

4.4. Numerical Miracles in al-Nābulsī's Interpretation of Surah al-Kahf

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr of Surah al-Kahf also delves into the concept of numerical miracles (*i'jaz 'adadi*) in the Qur'ān, particularly in his explanation of verse 25 of Surah al-Kahf:

> *"So they stayed in their Cave three hundred years, and (some) add nine (more**)."*** Surah al-Kahf (18:25)**.**

al-Nābulsī highlights the precision and significance of the Qur'ānic phrasing, which states *"three hundred years, and they added nine"* rather than simply saying *"three hundred and nine years."* He explains that this phrasing reflects a profound numerical miracle related to the difference between the solar and lunar calendars.[147]

According to al-Nābulsī, the 300 years mentioned in the verse correspond to the solar calendar, which is based on the Earth's orbit around the sun. However, the addition of nine years refers to the lunar calendar, which is based on the phases of the moon. The lunar year is approximately 11 days shorter than the solar year, resulting in a difference of about 9 years over a period of 300 solar years. Thus, 300 solar years are equivalent to 309 lunar years.[148]

al-Nābulsī emphasizes that this verse demonstrates the Qur'ān's awareness of both the solar and lunar systems of timekeeping, even though the lunar calendar (Hijri calendar) did not exist at the time of the People of the Cave. This dual reference to solar and lunar

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[146] Ibid.
[147] Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī, *"Al-Dars: 3 - Surat al-Kahf - Tafsīr al-Ayat: 10–26, Karāmat al-Awliyā',"* *Mawsu'at al-Nābulsī*, October 30, 1987, https://nabulsi.com/story/Karamat-%28miracles%29-of-Awliya%27a-%5Bpious-religious-people%5D.12707.
[148] Ibid.

years is seen as a sign of the Qur'ān's divine origin and its ability to encompass knowledge beyond the understanding of its initial audience.[149]

4.5. Sufi Inclinations

Although Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's Tafsīr is not categorized as a Sufi or *Ishari* (allusive) interpretation, and he himself is not labeled as a Sufi, there are glimpses in his exegesis that align with the Sufi approach to Tafsīr.

4.5.1. Kahf as a Metaphor

One such example is his interpretation of the word *kahf* (cave) in Surah al-Kahf. While the term *kahf* literally refers to a cave, al-Nābulsī extends its meaning metaphorically to signify a safe haven that protects believers from the trials and temptations (*fitnah*) of the world.[150]

al-Nābulsī explains that the cave of the People of the Cave (*Ashab al-Kahf*) served as a refuge where they preserved their faith and sought protection from a society steeped in disbelief and corruption. In the modern context, he interprets the concept of *kahf* broadly, suggesting that any place that shields Muslims from moral decay (*fisq*) and sin (*fujur*) can be considered a *kahf*. For al-Nābulsī, one's home, the mosque, or any space where a believer can isolate themselves from societal corruption and focus on worship and righteousness qualifies as a *kahf*.[151] He states:

"Someone might ask, 'Where is the cave so that we can take refuge in it?' Your home is the cave, your mosque is the cave, and wherever you isolate yourself from immorality and sin, you are in a cave. A hadith qudsi states, 'Worshiping Allah during times of turmoil and trials is a migration to Me.' If we want to take a practical stance from this story, I hope that every believer, when reading a story or a verse, derives a practical benefit for

[149] Ibid.
[150] Nabulsi, *Tafsīr al-Nābulsī*, vol. 174.
[151] Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī, "Al-Dars: 2 - Surat al-Kahf - Tafsīr al-Ayat: 7–16, al-Ibtalā'," *Mawsu'at al-Nābulsī*, October 23, 1987, https://nabulsi.com/story/2296

themselves. What does it mean to me that these young men took refuge in the cave? It means that if I am living in a time of trials—where women are dressed yet naked, where there is mixing of genders, immorality, lies, backbiting, gossip, and earning haram wealth—this ignorant society, cut off from Allah, requires me to withdraw from it and join a community of believers."[152]

This type of interpretation, which goes beyond the literal meaning of the text to uncover deeper spiritual and practical lessons, is not commonly found in other Tafsīr works. Instead, it is more characteristic of Sufi exegesis, which often seeks to uncover hidden or symbolic meanings in the Qur'ānic text. For example, Zulfiqar Ahmad Naqshbandi, a Sufi scholar from Pakistan, interprets the *kahf* in contemporary terms as places like Makkah and Madinah, Qur'ān, mosques, religious schools (*madrasas*), and Sufi lodges (*khanqahs*). These five places, according to Naqshbandi, serve as modern-day *kahfs* where believers can seek refuge from the moral and spiritual challenges of the modern world.[153]

As previously indicated, Dr. Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī adopts a metaphorical approach to the term *al-Kahf* (الكهف), interpreting it not merely as a physical cave but as symbolic of *'uzla*—a principled seclusion from corrupt societies. Drawing upon the verse:

﴿ وَإِذِ اعْتَزَلْتُمُوهُمْ وَمَا يَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ﴾ (When ye turn away from them and the things they worship other than Allah). Surah al-Kahf, (18:16).

al-Nābulsī argues that the *ahl al-kahf* (Companions of the Cave) made a conscious and obligatory decision to distance themselves from a polytheistic and morally decayed society. He references the ethical framework for *'uzla* found in al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, emphasizing that:

[152] Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī, "Al-Dars: 1 - Surat al-Kahf - Tafsīr al-Ayat: 9–16, al-Hadaf min al-Qissah fi al-Qur'ān," *Mawsu'at al-Nābulsī*, March 12, 1995, https://nabulsi.com/story/4349

[153] Zulfiqar Ahmad Naqshbandi, *Surah al-Kahf ke Fawa'id* (Maktabah al-Faqir, February 2019), 261–286.

"If you live in a corrupt society, seclusion becomes obligatory. But if the society is righteous, then interaction is obligatory."[154]

al-Nābulsī views *ʻuzla* as a moral and spiritual retreat, not necessarily a physical one. He stresses that the command to withdraw from polytheists includes distancing oneself from their goals, desires, customs, and distractions, because these elements, he says, are what draw one into the moral and spiritual trap of shirk and disobedience.[155]

Moreover, al-Nābulsī interprets the clause "إِلَّا اللَّهَ" as an incomplete (munqaṭiʿ) exception, meaning: if those who were once polytheists now worship Allah alone, the seclusion is no longer warranted. This interpretation leads to a powerful ethical conclusion: *the act of seclusion is not permanent or personal, but conditional upon the moral state of the other party*. He supports this with the story of ʿUmayr, an enemy of the Prophet who accepted Islam, and immediately transitioned from an object of hatred to a beloved brother in faith, as expressed by ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.[156]

This episode illustrates that in al-Nābulsī's framework, *ʻuzla* is never an end in itself. It is a dynamic and principled stance, a temporary withdrawal for the sake of spiritual preservation, always open to reintegration once moral and spiritual alignment is achieved. In this light, *kahf* becomes a timeless symbol: a metaphorical space of refuge for the believer's values in times of overwhelming moral crisis.

4.5.2. The Case of Mūsā and Khidr

al-Nābulsī's interpretation of the story of Mūsā and Khidr (Surah al-Kahf 18:60–82) is an explicit instance of his integration of Sufi epistemological categories within a tafsīr framework. Before delving into the details of the encounter between the two prophets, he introduces a conceptual preface grounded in ʿilm al-ḥaqīqah, which is often associated with the esoteric sciences of tasawwuf. Notably, al-Nābulsī frames the story as a meeting

[154] Nabulsi, *Tafsīr al-Nābulsī*, vol. 173-174.
[155] Ibid, 174.
[156] Ibd.

between "a pole of sharīʿah" (quṭb min aqtāb al-sharīʿah)—represented by Mūsā—and "a pole of ḥaqīqah" (quṭb min aqtāb al-ḥaqīqah)—embodied in Khidr. This conceptual duality is central in classical Sufi thought, where sharīʿah governs the external actions of the mukallaf (legally responsible individual), while ḥaqīqah provides the inner metaphysical and spiritual understanding of divine acts.[157]

al-Nābulsī thus distinguishes between two types of knowledge: sharīʿah, which regulates human conduct through legal and moral prescriptions, and ḥaqīqah, which interprets the divine will and the seemingly paradoxical events decreed by God, such as those encountered in Khidr's mysterious actions. While recognizing Mūsā as the most learned in religious law, al-Nābulsī emphasizes that Khidr possesses knowledge "min ladunnā"—a divine gift of inner insight, in line with the Qur'ānic expression: ﴿فوجد عبداً من عبادنا آتيناه رحمة من عندنا وعلمناه من لدنا علماً﴾ Surah al-Kahf (18:65). The use of terms such as "علم الحقيقة" and "التصرفات الإلهية" reflect al-Nābulsī's alignment with a Sufi hermeneutic, which reads divine activity not merely through causality but through the lens of wisdom (ḥikmah), mercy (raḥmah), and hidden benefit.[158]

Furthermore, al-Nābulsī cautions that while human actions must be measured against the yardstick of sharīʿah, the actions of God—as manifested in Khidr's behavior—must be approached through ḥaqīqah, since divine actions are not bound by human conventions of good and evil but are always rooted in divine justice and mercy, though often veiled.[159]

In this section of his tafsīr, al-Nābulsī does not merely draw on Sufi terminology; he applies a Sufi epistemology within his tafsīr framework. The meeting of Mūsā and Khidr is not only a narrative but an allegory for the union of the outer and inner sciences, the legal and the spiritual, the zahir and the batin—an interpretive gesture deeply rooted in Sufi tafsīr traditions.

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[157] Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī, *"Al-Dars: 7 - Surat al-Kahf - Tafsīr al-Ayat: 60–82, Qissat Sayyidunā Mūsā maʿa al-Khidr," Mawsuʿat al-Nābulsī*, November 27, 1987, https://nabulsi.com/story/2301
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.

4.6. al-Nābulsī's Stance on Isra'iliyyat in Tafsīr

Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī, in his commentary on verse 22 of Surah al-Kahf, expresses a critical stance toward reliance on Isra'iliyyat in Qur'ānic exegesis. He emphasizes that the Qur'ān itself discourages seeking knowledge from the People of the Book regarding matters of the unseen, particularly historical details that have no direct impact on faith and guidance. Citing the verse, he highlights the divine instruction: "وَلَا تَسْتَفْتِ فِيهِمْ مِنْهُمْ أَحَداً" (nor consult any of them about (the affair of) the Sleepers.), which he interprets as a prohibition against turning to altered scriptures for clarification of Qur'ānic stories. al-Nābulsī sees this as a clear indication that understanding the Qur'ān should not depend on external sources but rather on the text itself and authentic Islamic traditions.[160]

Additionally, al-Nābulsī underscores that the Qur'ān does not engage in unnecessary debates over unverifiable historical details, as demonstrated by the discussion on the number of the People of the Cave. He notes that the verse describes various opinions—three, five, or seven—but ultimately dismisses them as "رَجْمًا بِالْغَيْبِ" (doubtfully guessing at the unknown). The focus, according to him, should not be on disputing such specifics but on extracting the broader lesson. He interprets "فَلَا تُمَارِ فِيهِمْ" (Enter not, therefore, into controversies concerning them) as a directive against engaging in speculative discussions. Instead, he stresses that debates should only occur within clear and necessary limits, as indicated by the phrase "إِلَّا مِرَاءً ظَاهِراً" (except on a matter that is clear). This, in his view, reinforces the principle that theological discussions should remain within the framework of Qur'ānic guidance rather than external speculation.[161]

4.7. Tafsīr Bil-Ma`thur in Surah Kahf

al-Nābulsī's interpretation of *Sūrah al-Kahf* prominently employs *tafsīr bil-ma'thūr*, relying on transmitted sources such as the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, and the sayings of the

[160] Nabulsi, *Tafsīr al-Nābulsī*, vol. 183.
[161] Ibid.

Companions and early scholars, hence he grounds he exegesis in established textual evidence.

A clear example is his explanation of Āyah 27: *"And recite (and teach) what has been revealed to thee of the Book of thy Lord: none can change His Words..."* Surah al-Kahf (18:27). al-Nābulsī interprets *kalimāt Allāh* (Allah's words) as divine laws (*sunan ilāhiyyah*), supporting this by citing other Qur'ānic verses that articulate universal principles. For instance, he references *Sūrah Yūsuf (12:52)—" Allâh suffers not the device of the unfaithful to succeed"*—to establish that divine justice ensures the exposure of treachery. Similarly, he connects the verse to Sūrah al-Naḥl (16:97)—*" Whoever acts righteously, whether male or female, and is a believer, We will certainly enable him lead a pure life"*—to demonstrate that Allah's promises are irrevocable laws.[162] This method of using the Qur'ān to interpret itself is a hallmark of *tafsīr bil-ma'thūr*.

Another significant example is his treatment of Āyah 24: " and call thy Lord to mind when thou forgettest...". al-Nābulsī explains this verse through the lens of prophetic guidance, citing the ḥadīth of Abū Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him), in which the Prophet (PBUH) said: "Fear Allah wherever you are, follow a bad deed with a good deed to erase it, and treat people with good character.".[163] This ḥadīth provides the practical application of the verse, showing how forgetfulness—a natural human trait—should be remedied through remembrance and righteous actions.[164]

al-Nābulsī further elaborates on the concept of forgetfulness by referencing the ḥadīth of Abū Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him), in which the Prophet (PBUH) forgot the number of rak'ahs in prayer and was corrected by Dhū al-Yadayn. The Companions confirmed the mistake, and the Prophet (PBUH) completed the prayer and performed prostration of forgetfulness (sahw). This incident, narrated in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and Ṣaḥīḥ

[162] Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī, "Al-Dars: 3 - Surat al-Kahf - Tafsīr al-Ayah 27, Qawānīn al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," *Mawsu'at al-Nābulsī*, March 18, 1995, https://nabulsi.com/story/4351

[163] Al-Mundhirī, al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb; authenticated chain.

[164] Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī, "Al-Dars: 4 - Surat al-Kahf - Tafsīr al-Ayāt 21–31, Kullu 'Amal lahu Thaman," *Mawsu'at al-Nābulsī*, November 6, 1987, https://nabulsi.com/story/2298

Muslim, illustrates that even the Prophet's forgetfulness was a form of divine teaching (tashrī') rather than ordinary human error. al-Nābulsī uses this to clarify that forgetfulness in the verse is not merely a human flaw but an opportunity for divine guidance and corrective action.[165]

Furthermore, his definition of masjid in Āyah 21—"(Some) said, "Construct a building over them""—is derived from Sūrah al-Jinn (72:18): "And that the mosques are meant for (the worship of) Allâh, so call on no one (therein) beside Allâh." This shows his adherence to Qur'ānic terminology and his avoidance of arbitrary linguistic interpretations.[166]

Through these examples, it is evident that al-Nābulsī's exegesis of Sūrah al-Kahf is firmly grounded in tafsīr bil-ma'thūr. He systematically derives meaning from the Qur'ān's own explanations, supported by prophetic traditions and classical exegetical sources, ensuring his interpretation remains faithful to the transmitted tradition of Islamic scholarship.

4.8. Stories and Real-Life Examples

One of the most distinctive features of al-Nābulsī's approach to Qur'ānic interpretation is his frequent use of real-life examples stories and everyday examples to communicate the meanings of the Qur'ān in a way that is relatable and accessible to the general public. His objective is not merely to explain the verses linguistically or grammatically, but to translate their meanings into lessons that touch the hearts and minds of ordinary people in their daily lives. Through this pedagogical method, he bridges the gap between scriptural text and lived experience.

For instance, in his commentary on the phrase "الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ" (al-Fātiḥah, 1:2), al-Nābulsī draws attention to the often-unnoticed blessings in human life, such as sight, hearing, and the sensory nerves. He illustrates this by sharing a story of a successful man who lost his eyesight and came to wish he could give up all worldly success just to regain

[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.

the ability to see. al-Nābulsī then walks the audience through the intricate design of the human body—like the tear duct, the auditory balance system, and the dual functionality of the eyes—to emphasize how these are divine favors that people should appreciate while they still have them. He concludes that true gratitude lies in recognizing blessings before they are lost, not only after.[167]

In another example, to help listeners grasp the concept of eternity (الأبد) in the verse "مَاكِثِينَ فِيهِ أَبَدًا" (al-Kahf, 3), al-Nābulsī employs vivid metaphors and mathematical imagination. He invites his audience to imagine endless numerical sequences, or to compare a grain of flour to millions of years—just to convey how limited human life is in comparison to the Hereafter. These powerful examples underline his belief that "any pleasure outside of Paradise is insignificant," and that the ultimate success lies in the everlasting life with God.[168]

A third case appears in his reflection on the story of the People of the Cave (Aṣḥāb al-Kahf). Here, al-Nābulsī addresses the Qur'ānic decision not to specify the exact number of the youths in the cave. He compares this to a business school teacher telling a story about a successful merchant to highlight principles of trade. If a student asks whether the merchant was tall or short, or what color he wore, the teacher would rightly dismiss these questions as irrelevant. Likewise, al-Nābulsī argues that Qur'ānic stories are told to convey moral and spiritual lessons—not to satisfy curiosity about inconsequential details.[169]

In his explanation of verse 39 of Sūrat al-Kahf—"وَلَوْلَا إِذْ دَخَلْتَ جَنَّتَكَ قُلْتَ مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ"—he brings forth several real-world anecdotes about arrogance, injustice, and divine justice. He tells of a man who wronged his brother by taking his inheritance, only to later become impoverished and dependent on that very brother. Another tale involves a boastful woman who mocked her co-wife for not bearing children, only to lose her own children

[167] Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī, *"Al-Dars: 1 - Surat al-Kahf - Tafsīr al-Ayāt 1–8, Ni'am Allāh," Mawsu'at al-Nābulsī*, October 16, 1987, https://nabulsi.com/story/The-Graces-of-Allah.12533.
[168] Ibid.
[169] al-Nābulsī, "Al-Dars: 3 - Surat al-Kahf - Tafsīr al-Ayah 27, Qawānīn al-Qur'ān al-Karīm."

while the other woman bore many.[170] These stories reinforce the Qur'ānic theme that power and provision are ultimately from Allah, and human beings should remain humble and thankful.

Furthermore, al-Nābulsī frequently uses everyday situations to affirm the concept of divine wisdom in life's trials. For example, he narrates how a failed scholarship or a broken engagement might initially seem like a setback, but can turn out to be a divine protection. In this way, he illustrates the Qur'ānic teaching that "what befalls a person could never have missed them, and what misses them was never meant to reach them."
These stories serve multiple functions in his tafsīr: they clarify abstract theological concepts, personalize Qur'ānic messages, and make his interpretation emotionally compelling. For al-Nābulsī, stories are not mere illustrative tools—they are a means to awaken the spiritual consciousness of his audience and draw them closer to the divine message.

4.9. Critical Analysis

4.9.1. Simplification for a General Audience at the Expense of Accuracy

In his interpretation of the verse {فَضَرَبْنَا عَلَىٰٓ ءَاذَانِهِمْ فِى ٱلْكَهْفِ سِنِينَ عَدَدًا} (Al-Kahf 18:11), al-Nābulsī explains that the reason for mentioning the ears is that sound is the only pathway to awaken a sleeping person, since the eyes are already closed.[171] However, this interpretation overlooks the fact that other stimuli such as touch, temperature changes, or even strong smells can also awaken a person from sleep.[172] While his explanation may aim at making the verse relatable to a general audience, it simplifies the physiological

[170] Muhammad Ratib al-Nābulsī, "Al-Dars: 5 - Surat al-Kahf - Tafsīr al-Ayāt 32–49, al-Akhadh bil-Asbāb wa-l-I'timād 'ala Rabb al-Arbāb," *Mawsu'at al-Nābulsī*, November 13, 1987, https://nabulsi.com/story/2299

[171] Nabulsi, *Tafsīr al-Nābulsī*, vol. 165. .
[172] Luis Villazon, "Can a Smell Wake You Up?" *BBC Science Focus*, accessed June 16, 2025, https://www.sciencefocus.com/the-human-body/can-a-smell-wake-you-up.

realities of sleep in a way that can be seen as lacking precision. This suggests that al-Nābulsī, in some instances, prioritizes accessibility over scholarly rigor.

4.9.2. Ambiguity between Miraculous Intervention and Natural Law

In discussing the verse *{وَنُقَلِّبُهُمْ ذَاتَ الْيَمِينِ وَذَاتَ الشِّمَالِ}* (Al-Kahf 18:18), al-Nābulsī interprets the periodic turning of the People of the Cave as a scientifically grounded act of divine care—preventing the natural decay of their bodies during a centuries-long sleep. He emphasizes that if they had remained still, bodily deterioration would have occurred, aligning this with modern medical understanding of immobility and bedsores. However, he simultaneously classifies this event as a miracle (muʿjiza).[173] This leads to a conceptual contradiction: a miracle, by definition in Islamic theology, is an event that breaks or suspends natural laws to affirm prophetic truth.[174] If the preservation of their bodies was due to adherence to natural laws (i.e., periodic movement), it ceases to be a miracle in the strict theological sense. This inconsistency reveals a tension in al-Nābulsī's approach—fluctuating between scientific rationalism and traditional miraculous interpretation—without clearly resolving the epistemological implications of each framework.

4.9.3. Overgeneralized Rejection of Isrā'īliyyāt

al-Nābulsī often expresses a categorical rejection of *Isrā'īliyyāt* (narratives of Judeo-Christian origin), asserting that authentic knowledge in tafsīr must be confined strictly to the Qur'ān and Sunnah.[175] While this position reflects a cautious and purist method, it overlooks the historical role of *Isrā'īliyyāt* in classical tafsīr. Foundational exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurṭubī made selective use of these narratives—particularly in explaining ambiguous or narrative-rich passages like those found in Surah al-Kahf.[176] Rather than wholesale acceptance or rejection, the classical tradition typically

[173] Nabulsi, *Tafsīr al-Nābulsī*, vol. 175.
[174] Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad ʿAṭr al-Ḥalabī, *ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān al-Karīm* (Dimashq: Maṭbaʿat al-Ṣabāḥ, al-ṭabʿah al-ūlā, 1993), 191.
[175] Nabulsi, *Tafsīr al-Nābulsī*, vol. 183.
[176] See for details on Isrā'īliyyāt in the early books of tafsīr: Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Suwaylim Abu Shuhbah, *Al-Isra'iliyyat wa al-Mawdu'at fi Kutub al-Tafsīr*, 4th ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunnah).

filtered *Isrā'īliyyāt* through a critical lens: accepting what did not contradict Islamic principles, rejecting what did, and suspending judgment on the rest. al-Nābulsī's blanket dismissal may thus be viewed as a methodological oversimplification, one that overlooks the nuanced and pragmatic stance adopted by the greatest mufassirūn of Islamic history.

4.10. Evaluation

This chapter examined Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī's tafsīr method through his exegesis of Surah al-Kahf, revealing a balanced approach between traditional scholarship and contemporary relevance. al-al-Nābulsī integrates linguistic analysis, scientific insights, and spiritual reflections while maintaining a strong pedagogical focus. His engagement with tafsīr 'ilmī (scientific exegesis) and numerical miracles highlights his belief in the Qur'ān's compatibility with modern knowledge, though he firmly rejects theories contradicting revelation, such as Darwinian evolution.

While not a Sufi commentator, al-Nābulsī occasionally employs Sufi-inspired interpretations, particularly in his metaphorical reading of the *kahf* as spiritual refuge and his treatment of Mūsā and Khidr's story as a meeting of *sharī'ah* and *ḥaqīqah*. His rejection of Isra'iliyyat and reliance on *tafsīr bil-ma'thur* reflect his adherence to Sunni tradition, though his categorical dismissal may overlook classical exegetes' nuanced use of such narratives.

A defining feature of his tafsīr is his use of real-life stories to make Qur'ānic lessons accessible, bridging scripture and daily life. However, this approach sometimes leads to oversimplifications, as seen in his explanations of sleep physiology and miracles.

Ultimately, al-Nābulsī's exegesis demonstrates a dynamic interplay of scholarship and practicality, reinforcing the Qur'ān's timeless guidance for modern believers. While open to critique, his work remains a valuable contribution to contemporary tafsīr, blending intellectual rigor with spiritual and moral relevance.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The interpretation of the Qur'ān has been a dynamic and evolving discipline throughout Islamic history, with scholars employing diverse methods to uncover the depths of its divine wisdom. This thesis has examined the exegetical approach of Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulsī, a prominent scholar descending from a line of religious intellectuals, who inherited both classical Islamic learning and a commitment to addressing modern challenges. His dual role as an academic and public intellectual shaped his distinctive approach - rigorous in its fidelity to traditional Sunni hermeneutics yet innovative in its pedagogical methods. In his tafsīr of Surah al-Kahf, focusing on his unique integration of traditional scholarship, scientific insights, and pedagogical strategies, which is seen throughout his tafsīr. By analyzing his commentary, I have identified a method that balances reverence for classical tafsīr with a commitment to making the Qur'ān's teachings accessible and relevant to contemporary audiences. al-Nābulsī's work stands as a significant contribution to modern Qur'ānic exegesis, reflecting both the adaptability of Islamic scholarship and the timeless guidance of the Qur'ān.

al-Nābulsī's approach to Surah al-Kahf is characterized by his emphasis on the didactic purpose of Qur'ānic narratives. He views the stories within the surah not as mere historical accounts but as divinely crafted lessons designed to instill moral and spiritual values. His assertion that these narratives are "truths formulated as events and dialogues" underscores his belief in their enduring relevance. For instance, he draws parallels between the trials of the People of the Cave and the challenges faced by modern Muslims, framing their retreat into the cave as a metaphor for seeking refuge from societal corruption. This metaphorical interpretation, while not strictly Sufi, reflects a Sufi-like sensitivity to the spiritual and ethical dimensions of the text. His commentary on the story of Mūsā and

Khidr further demonstrates this tendency, as he frames their encounter as a dialogue between sharīʿah (outward law) and ḥaqīqah (inward truth), highlighting the complementary nature of these two dimensions of Islamic knowledge.

A distinctive feature of al-Nābulsī's tafsīr is his engagement with scientific and numerical miracles (iʿjāz ʿilmī and iʿjāz ʿadadī). He interprets the Qur'ān's description of the People of the Cave's prolonged sleep (Surah al-Kahf 18:18) through the lens of modern medical knowledge, explaining how their periodic turning prevented physical decay—a phenomenon consistent with contemporary understanding of tissue preservation. Similarly, his analysis of the 300/309-year timeline (Surah al-Kahf 18:25) underscores the Qur'ān's precision in distinguishing between solar and lunar calendars, which he presents as evidence of its divine origin. However, al-Nābulsī is careful to subordinate scientific exegesis to the Qur'ān's theological framework, rejecting theories like Darwinian evolution when they conflict with revelation. This selective approach reflects his commitment to upholding the Qur'ān as the ultimate criterion for evaluating external knowledge, particularly in matters of the unseen (ghaybiyyāt).

Another hallmark of al-Nābulsī's method is his rejection of Isrā'īliyyāt (narratives of Judeo-Christian origin) and his reliance on tafsīr bil-ma'thur (transmitted exegesis). He argues that the Qur'ān's own narratives are sufficient and that reliance on extraneous sources risks introducing inauthentic or misleading material. This stance aligns with his broader emphasis on maintaining the purity of Islamic exegesis, though it occasionally leads to a dismissive attitude toward classical scholars who selectively engaged with Isrā'īliyyāt as supplementary material. His preference for tafsīr bil-ma'thur is evident in his intertextual use of Qur'ānic verses and Hadith to explain key passages, such as linking the perfection of the Qur'ān (Surah al-Kahf 18:1) to the perfection of creation (Surah al-Mulk 67:3–4). This approach ensures that his interpretations remain grounded in authoritative Islamic sources while still addressing modern questions and concerns.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of al-Nābulsī's tafsīr is his use of real-life anecdotes and analogies to make the Qur'ān's teachings relatable. He frequently employs everyday

examples to illustrate abstract concepts, such as comparing the Qur'ān's omission of the exact number of the People of the Cave to a teacher dismissing irrelevant details in a parable. These analogies serve a pedagogical purpose, bridging the gap between scripture and lived experience, but they sometimes risk oversimplifying complex theological or scientific ideas. For instance, his explanation of sleep physiology (Surah al-Kahf 18:11) focuses narrowly on auditory stimuli, ignoring other factors that can awaken a person, such as touch or smell. Similarly, his characterization of the People of the Cave's preservation as both a scientific phenomenon and a miracle introduces a tension between natural law and divine intervention that is not fully resolved. Despite these limitations, his ability to connect the Qur'ān's message to contemporary life is a testament to his skill as a communicator and educator.

al-Nābulsī's exegesis of Surah al-Kahf offers valuable insights into the evolving nature of Qur'ānic interpretation in the modern era. His work exemplifies a method that is both traditional and innovative, rooted in classical scholarship yet responsive to the needs of today's Muslims. By integrating scientific insights, spiritual reflections, and practical lessons, he demonstrates the Qur'ān's capacity to speak across time and context. At the same time, his occasional oversimplifications and unresolved tensions—such as his categorical rejection of Isrā'īliyyāt or his ambiguous treatment of miracles—highlight the challenges of balancing accessibility with scholarly rigor. These limitations, however, do not diminish the significance of his contributions; rather, they invite further reflection and dialogue on the future of tafsīr as a discipline.

This study has sought to illuminate the distinctive features of al-Nābulsī's approach while situating it within the broader tradition of Qur'ānic exegesis. His tafsīr of Surah al-Kahf is more than an explanatory commentary; it is a transformative discourse that seeks to guide, inspire, and educate. As the field of tafsīr continues to evolve, al-Nābulsī's work serves as a reminder of the Qur'ān's enduring vitality and its capacity to address the ever-changing realities of human life. Future research could build on this foundation by exploring comparative studies with other modern exegetes, investigating the reception of al-Nābulsī's interpretations across diverse Muslim communities, or examining the

theological implications of his scientific exegesis. Such endeavors would further enrich our understanding of the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity in Qur'ānic scholarship, ensuring that the discipline remains a vibrant and relevant source of guidance for generations to come.

In conclusion, al-Nābulsī's tafsīr of Surah al-Kahf represents a thoughtful and creative engagement with the Qur'ān's timeless message. His ability to blend classical methods with contemporary insights offers a model for how Islamic scholarship can remain faithful to its roots while addressing the challenges of the modern world. While his approach is not without its limitations, its strengths lie in its accessibility, its moral and spiritual depth, and its navigate the complexities of the 21st century, al-Nābulsī's work stands as a valuable resource for those seeking to understand and apply the Qur'ān's teachings in their daily lives unwavering commitment to the Qur'ān as a source of divine guidance.

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