

## ***Nizām al-Qur'ān* and the Unveiling of Qur'anic *Maqāṣid*: An Epistemological Study of Structural *Tafsīr* in Farrin and Chishti**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the relationship between the *nizām al-Qur'ān* approach and the elucidation of the *maqāṣid al-Qur'ān* through an epistemological analysis of two contemporary structural *tafsīr* works: *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation* by Raymond Farrin and *Macro Structure of the Soorahs of the Holy Qur'an* by Khaleel Ur Rahman Chishti. The study is predicated on the premise that structural analyses of the Qur'an serve not only to demonstrate textual coherence but also possess hermeneutic potential for uncovering the internal purposes of individual *sūrah*s. Employing a qualitative methodology grounded in literature review and epistemological scrutiny of *tafsīr*, this article investigates the sources of knowledge, methodological approaches, epistemological orientations, and interpretive validity of the two scholars. The findings indicate that Farrin advances a textual-structural epistemology that effectively maps the internal coherence and symmetry of the *sūrah*s, albeit yielding *maqāṣid* that are primarily descriptive in nature. Conversely, Chishti offers a normative-teleological epistemology explicitly oriented toward the *maqṣad a'zam* (the supreme purpose) of the *sūrah*s, although his structural framework is less formally theorized. This article contends that synthesizing Farrin's structural rigor with Chishti's normative orientation facilitates the development of a more comprehensive *nizām al-Qur'ān*-based *tafsīr* capable of elucidating the *maqāṣid al-Qur'ān*. These findings contribute to advancing methodological dialogue between structural Qur'anic studies and *maqāṣid* discourse within contemporary Qur'anic scholarship.

[Artikel ini mengkaji hubungan antara pendekatan *nizām al-Qur’ān* dan penjelasan *maqāṣid al-Qur’ān* melalui analisis epistemologis terhadap dua karya tafsir struktural kontemporer: *Structure and Qur’anic Interpretation* oleh Raymond Farrin dan *Macro Structure of the Soorahs of the Holy Qur’an* oleh Khaleel Ur Rahman Chishti. Studi ini didasarkan pada premis bahwa analisis struktural terhadap Al-Qur’an tidak hanya berfungsi untuk menunjukkan koherensi tekstual tetapi juga memiliki potensi hermeneutik dalam mengungkap tujuan internal dari surah-surah individual. Dengan menggunakan metodologi kualitatif yang berlandaskan tinjauan pustaka dan pemeriksaan epistemologis terhadap tafsir, artikel ini menyelidiki sumber pengetahuan, pendekatan metodologis, orientasi epistemologis, dan validitas interpretatif dari kedua cendekiawan tersebut. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Farrin mengembangkan epistemologi tekstual-struktural yang secara efektif memetakan koherensi internal dan simetri surah-surah, meskipun menghasilkan *maqāṣid* yang terutama bersifat deskriptif. Sebaliknya, Chishti menawarkan epistemologi normatif-teleologis yang secara eksplisit berorientasi pada *maqṣad a’zam* (tujuan tertinggi) surah-surah, meskipun kerangka strukturalnya kurang secara formal diterapkan dalam teori. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa mensintesis ketelitian struktural Farrin dengan orientasi normatif Chishti memfasilitasi pengembangan tafsir berbasis *nizām al-Qur’ān* yang lebih komprehensif dan mampu mengungkap *maqāṣid al-Qur’ān*. Temuan ini berkontribusi dalam memajukan dialog metodologis antara studi struktural Al-Qur’an dan diskursus tentang *maqāṣid* dalam kajian Al-Qur’an kontemporer.]

**Keywords:** *Nizām al-Qur’ān*, *Maqāṣid al-Qur’ān*, Qur’anic Structural Interpretation, Epistemology of Tafsir, Raymond Farrin, Khaleel Ur Rahman Chishti.

## Introduction

Over the past several decades, Qur’anic studies—across both Islamic and Western scholarly traditions—have persistently engaged with a fundamental interpretive question: whether the Qur’an should be approached as a compilation of independently interpretable verses or as a text characterized by internal coherence and a structured thematic framework.<sup>1</sup> The predominance of atomistic readings has not only resulted in fragmented interpretations but has also impeded systematic efforts to articulate the normative objectives of the Qur’an, particularly at the level

<sup>1</sup> See: M.A. Koç, “An Overview of the Post-1950 Western Scholarship on the Qur’an and Tafsir,” *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 61, no. 2 (2020): 493–504, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.33227/auifd.716654>; Oliver Leaman, “Modern Developments in Qur’anic Studies,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, by Oliver Leaman, ed. Muhammad Abdel Haleem and Mustafa Shah (Oxford University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199698646.013.42>; Muhammed Coşkun, “The Qur’ān’s Self-References to Its Arabic Register,” *Hitit İlahiyat Dergisi* 24, no. 1 (2025): 363–80, <https://doi.org/10.14395/hid.1615562>.

of individual chapters (*sūrahs*). This methodological tension has contributed to the emergence of the *nizām al-Qurʾān* approach, which seeks to interpret the Qurʾan as an integrated structure of meaning by emphasizing the interrelationships among verses and chapters as essential to uncovering the text's internal purpose.

Scholarly concern with Qurʾanic coherence can be traced back to the classical period, most notably through discussions of *munāsabah* (intertextual relationships), although these discussions had not yet crystallized into a comprehensive structural theory. Several classical *mufasssīrūn*, including Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and al-Biqāʿī, explored the interconnections among verses and chapters within the broader discourse of *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*.<sup>2</sup> This concern with coherence was later articulated more rigorously in the thought of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī through the formulation of *nizām al-Qurʾān* and *ʿamūd al-sūrah*, which posit that each chapter possesses a central thematic axis governing its overall structure.<sup>3</sup> Al-Farāhī's theoretical framework was subsequently systematized by Amīn Aḥsan al-Iṣlāhī, who conceptualized Qurʾanic chapters as coherent and autonomous thematic units rather than mere assemblages of discrete verses.<sup>4</sup>

In contemporary discourse, the *nizām al-Qurʾān* approach has been further developed methodologically through the work of Khaleel ur Rahman Chishti. In *Macro Structure of the Soorahs of the Holy Qurʾan*, Chishti outlines systematic procedures for identifying the central theme of each chapter through macro-structural analysis. This method is illustrated through concentric diagrams and is grounded in the principle of *munāsabah*, understood as the internal interrelationship among the components of a chapter.<sup>5</sup> The primary objective of this approach is to elucidate the *maqāṣid al-sūrah* (the internal objectives of individual chapters), thereby framing Qurʾanic structure not merely as a formal arrangement but as a meaningful vehicle for conveying the Qurʾan's normative message.

Parallel to these developments, Qurʾanic studies within Western academia have undergone a significant shift from predominantly diachronic approaches toward synchronic methodologies that conceptualize the Qurʾan as a coherent and structured text. Scholars such as Neal Robinson, Michel Cuypers, Angelika Neuwirth, and Raymond Farrin have proposed diverse models of structural analysis

<sup>2</sup> Mustansir Mir, "Continuity, Context, and Coherence in the Qurʾan: A Brief Review of the Idea of Naẓm in Tafsīr Literature," *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qurʾan and Hadith Studies* 11 (2013): 16–23.

<sup>3</sup> See: ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Farāhī, *Nizām Al-Qurʾān Wa-Taʾwīl al-Furqān Bi-l-Furqān* (Dāʾirah Ḥamīdiyyah Madrasat al-Iṣlāh, 2008); Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qurʾan: A Study of Islāhī's Concept of Naẓm in Tadabbur-i Qurʾan* (American Trust Publications, 1986), 74.

<sup>4</sup> Mir, "Continuity, Context, and Coherence in the Qurʾan: A Brief Review of the Idea of Naẓm in Tafsīr Literature," 23–25.

<sup>5</sup> Khaleel-ur Rahman Chishti, *Macro Structure of Soorahs of the Holy Qurʾan* (Dār al-Kitāb al-Salafiyyah, 2012), 13–46.

informed by contemporary literary and linguistic theories.<sup>6</sup> Among these figures, Raymond Farrin occupies a particularly prominent position due to his systematic application of ring composition theory and concentricism to identify symmetry and thematic axes within Qur'anic chapters, thereby establishing their coherence around a central theme.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, structural approaches to the Qur'an have been subject to sustained methodological and epistemological critique. Ahmad Solahuddin argues that Farrin's ring structure theory rests on anthropological assumptions concerning innate human tendencies toward textual organization; while heuristically useful, these assumptions require more rigorous epistemological justification.<sup>8</sup> Nicolai Sinai similarly critiques the symmetry-based approaches advanced by Farrin and Cuypers, suggesting that they risk imposing predetermined formal patterns onto the Qur'anic text, particularly when insufficiently integrated with interpretive methodologies rooted in the Islamic exegetical tradition, such as *munāsabah*.<sup>9</sup> Comparable criticisms have also been directed at Neuwirth's structural methodology, which has been perceived as potentially reducing the Qur'an's polyvalent meanings to overly rigid formal constructs.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, contemporary scholarship on *maqāṣid al-Qur'ān* has largely focused on issues of genealogy, conceptual development, and the formulation of definitions and general principles. Several studies have noted that, despite its emergence as a relatively autonomous field, *maqāṣid al-Qur'ān* research continues to suffer from significant methodological limitations, particularly with regard to the operationalization of *maqāṣid al-sūrah*.<sup>11</sup> As a result, *maqāṣid* studies frequently remain at a normative and abstract level, lacking robust methodological tools for analyzing the internal objectives of Qur'anic chapters in a manner that is both textual and structural.

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<sup>6</sup> See: Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (SCM Press, 2003); Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien Zur Komposition Der Mekkanischen Suren* (de Gruyter, 1996); Michel Cuypers, *The Composition of the Qur'an: Rhetorical Analysis* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Raymond Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text* (White Cloud Press, 2014), 5–16.

<sup>8</sup> Ahmad Solahuddin, "Teori Ring Structure Raymond Farrin Dan Aplikasinya Kepada Q.S. al-Baqarah," *Panangkaran: Jurnal Penelitian Agama Dan Masyarakat* 4, no. 1 (2020): 1–26.

<sup>9</sup> See: Nicolai Sinai, "Review Essay: Going Round in Circles," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 19, no. 2 (2017): 108–224; Anis Tilawati, "Struktur Cincin dalam Al-Qur'an (Perspektif Orientalis—Nicolai Sinai)," *Nun* 4, no. 2 (2018): 51–77.

<sup>10</sup> Rachel Friedman, "Interrogating Structural Interpretation of the Qur'an," *Der Islam* 87, nos. 1–2 (2013): 130–56.

<sup>11</sup> See: Tazul Islam, "Maqāṣid Al-Qur'ān: A Search for a Scholarly Definition," *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 9, no. 1 (2011): 189–207; Tazul Islam, "Maqāṣid Al-Qur'ān and Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah: An Analytical Presentation," *Revelation and Science* 3, no. 1 (2013): 50–60; Tazul Islam, "Identifying the Higher Objectives (Maqāṣid) of the Qur'ān: A Search for Methodology," *Al-Burhan* 3, no. 1 (2018): 16–31; Ulya Fikriyati, "Maqāṣid Al-Qur'ān: Genealogi Dan Peta Perkembangannya Dalam Khazanah Keislaman," *Anil Islam: Jurnal Kebudayaan Dan Ilmu Keislaman* 12, no. 2 (2019): 201–11.

To date, relatively little research has explicitly examined the relationship between the *nizām al-Qur’ān* approach and *maqāṣid al-Qur’ān* studies within the epistemological framework of *tafsīr*. This lacuna has two major implications. First, structural approaches risk devolving into textual formalism, emphasizing symmetry and pattern without a clear orientation toward the Qur’an’s normative objectives. Second, *maqāṣid* studies are deprived of a textual-structural foundation that would enable a more objective and methodologically verifiable identification of chapter-level purposes. Consequently, the relationship between Qur’anic structure and meaning remains an unresolved methodological challenge.

In response to this gap, the present article undertakes a comparative analysis of two seminal works: Khaleel ur Rahman Chishti’s *Macro Structure of the Soorahs of the Holy Qur’an* and Raymond Farrin’s *Structure and Qur’anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam’s Holy Text*. This study employs the epistemology of *tafsīr* as its primary analytical framework and adopts a qualitative research design based on library research, utilizing descriptive and content analysis of primary texts and relevant secondary literature.<sup>12</sup>

The epistemological framework applied in this study draws on Abdul Mustaqim’s analysis of epistemological shifts in *tafsīr*, particularly the transition from mythological and ideological interpretations toward critical and rational modes of reasoning. This framework enables a systematic evaluation of sources of knowledge, interpretive methods, hermeneutic strategies, and criteria of scholarly validity in contemporary Qur’anic interpretation.<sup>13</sup> On this basis, the article argues that the *nizām al-Qur’ān* approach—whether articulated within Muslim or Western scholarly traditions—possesses strong epistemological legitimacy as a methodological tool for elucidating the *maqāṣid al-sūrah*. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute theoretically to the development of a more integrated structural-*maqāṣidī* model of *tafsīr*, while also fostering constructive methodological dialogue between structural Qur’anic analysis and *maqāṣid al-Qur’ān* studies in contemporary scholarship.

### **The Genealogy of *Nizām al-Qur’ān*: From *Munāsabah* to Contemporary Theory**

The study of *nizām al-Qur’ān* (the Qur’an’s structural coherence) should not be regarded as a discipline that emerged abruptly. Although the Qur’an was revealed and developed within the context of Arab society, the recognition of its internal structure is the outcome of a prolonged, gradual, and dialogical intellectual process. Genealogically, the discourse on *nizām al-Qur’ān* is deeply rooted in the evolution of the science of *munāsabah*, which from its inception served as a methodological tool to analyze the interrelations of meaning between verses and chapters.

<sup>12</sup> Samsu, *Metode Penelitian: Teori dan Aplikasi Penelitian Kualitatif, Kuantitatif, Mixed Methods, serta Research & Development* (PUSAKA, 2017), 86–112.

<sup>13</sup> Abdul Mustaqim, *Pergeseran Epistemologi Tafsir* (Pustaka Pelajar, 2008), 73–88.

Etymologically, the term *munāsabah* derives from the Arabic root *nasaba*, which conveys notions of relation, connection, and suitability between elements. Additionally, *munāsabah* is understood as *al-muqārabah*, signifying closeness or equivalence in meaning.<sup>14</sup> Terminologically, *munāsabah* is defined as a rational and argumentative scientific discipline that aligns with common sense. Mastery of this discipline enables an interpreter to recognize that the verses of the Qur'an are meaningfully arranged and interconnected, rather than presented as isolated fragments.<sup>15</sup>

The origins of the study of *munāsabah* can be traced back to the intellectual contributions of Abū Bakr al-Naysābūrī (d. 324 AH), who underscored the significance of inter-verse relationships as a countermeasure to atomistic interpretations of the Qur'an prevalent among certain scholars in Baghdad.<sup>16</sup> Following this initial phase, the study of *munāsabah* experienced a period of stagnation until it was revitalized by Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn al-Zubayr al-Thaqafī (d. 708 AH) through his work *al-Burhān fī Tanāsuh Suwar al-Qur'ān*. This advancement was further developed by Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (d. 794 AH) in *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* and attained a more systematic and applied form in the scholarship of Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī (d. 885 AH), particularly in *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsuh al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*.<sup>17</sup>

Al-Biqā'ī underscored the methodological importance of the science of *munāsabah*, as it facilitates the interpreter's acquisition of justificatory knowledge regarding the structural arrangement of the Qur'an's components.<sup>18</sup> *Munāsabah* may manifest between verses or chapters, be either explicit or implicit, and occur within a single verse or across a broader thematic framework.<sup>19</sup> In exegetical practice, recognition of *munāsabah* is articulated through diverse terminologies, including *tartīb* (al-Ālūsī), *ta'alluq* (Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī), *al-ittiṣāl* and *al-ta'līl* (Rashīd Riḍā), as well as *miḥwar* and *hadaf* (Sayyid Quṭb).<sup>20</sup> This terminological variation reflects a shared epistemological orientation, albeit accompanied by differing methodological emphases.

In the subsequent phase of development, Mustansir Mir introduced the term *niẓām* to signify a shift in emphasis from examining relationships between discrete

<sup>14</sup> Muhammad Daming K., *Keagungan Al-Qur'an: Analisis Munasabah* (Pustaka al-Zikra, 2012), 19.

<sup>15</sup> Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān Fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1957), 35.

<sup>16</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tanāsuh Al-Durar Fī Tanāsuh al-Suwar* (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1986), 22.

<sup>17</sup> Makhfud, "Analisis Al-Munāsabah Fī al-Qur'an: Antara Orientasi I'jāz dan Orientasi Waḥdah," *Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 25, no. 1 (2014): 88–99.

<sup>18</sup> Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm b. 'Umar al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm Al-Durar Fī Tanāsuh al-Āyāt Wa-l-Suwar* (Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, 1969), 6.

<sup>19</sup> See: Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān* (Dār al-'Ilm li-l-Malāyīn, 1977), 152; Daming K., *Keagungan Al-Qur'an: Analisis Munasabah*, 22.

<sup>20</sup> See: Daming K., *Keagungan Al-Qur'an: Analisis Munasabah*, 22; Siti Mulazamah, "Konsep Kesatuan Tema Al-Qur'an Menurut Sayyid Quṭb," *Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 3, no. 2 (2014): 229–31.

textual units to recognizing the Qur'an's overarching structural coherence. Conceptually, *munāsabah* serves to identify connections between verses and chapters, whereas *nizām* highlights the structural integration that generates unified meaning within a single chapter or across the entire *muṣḥaf*. However, the construction of *nizām* remains contingent upon awareness of *munāsabah*, which functions as its analytical foundation.<sup>21</sup>

In his historical analysis, Mir delineates several stages in the evolution of the concept of *nizām al-Qur'ān*. The initial stage is evident in al-Ṭabarī's tafsīr *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, which, although not explicitly intended to elucidate *nizām*, demonstrates sustained efforts to preserve continuity of meaning between verses.<sup>22</sup> The subsequent stage is characterized by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, in which he more systematically argues that the secret of the Qur'an's meaning lies in *munāsabah* and the thematic coherence of each chapter. According to al-Rāzī, an objective interpretation reveals a single purpose that unifies the verses from the beginning to the end of the chapter.<sup>23</sup>

A more practical formulation of *nizām* is evident in the work of al-Biqā'ī, who begins interpretation by establishing the *gharaḍ* (purpose) of a chapter.<sup>24</sup> He then divides the verses into several units to examine their *munāsabah* (correlative) relationships. Employing a linguistic methodology, al-Biqā'ī identifies multiple forms of *munāsabah*, ranging from inter-chapter relations to thematic integrations that constitute a central axis of meaning.<sup>25</sup>

The modern theoretical formulation of *nizām al-Qur'ān* reached its apex in the scholarship of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī and was further developed by his student, Amīn Aḥsan al-Iṣlāḥī.<sup>26</sup> Al-Farāhī was the first *mufasssīr* to systematically articulate conceptual arguments concerning the Qur'an's structural unity in his seminal work *Nizām al-Qur'ān wa Ta'wīl al-Furqān bi al-Furqān*. His engagement with this issue was driven by a critique of atomistic interpretive approaches, the absence of rigorous responses to allegations of Qur'anic disorganization, and his conviction that the arrangement of Qur'anic verses is both deliberate and deeply meaningful.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Mir, "Continuity, Context, and Coherence in the Qur'an: A Brief Review of the Idea of Nazm in Tafsir Literature," 17–18.

<sup>22</sup> Mir, "Continuity, Context, and Coherence in the Qur'an: A Brief Review of the Idea of Nazm in Tafsir Literature," 17–18.

<sup>23</sup> Mir, "Continuity, Context, and Coherence in the Qur'an: A Brief Review of the Idea of Nazm in Tafsir Literature," 18–21.

<sup>24</sup> Mir, "Continuity, Context, and Coherence in the Qur'an: A Brief Review of the Idea of Nazm in Tafsir Literature," 21–23.

<sup>25</sup> Sawaluddin Siregar, "Munāsabāt Al-Qur'an Perspektif Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī," *Yurisprudensia* 4, no. 1 (2018): 98.

<sup>26</sup> Mir, "Continuity, Context, and Coherence in the Qur'an: A Brief Review of the Idea of Nazm in Tafsir Literature," 23–26.

<sup>27</sup> Farahī, *Nizām Al-Qur'ān Wa-Ta'wīl al-Furqān Bi-l-Furqān*, 17–21.

Within al-Farāhī's methodological framework, *munāsabah* and *nizām* are treated as distinct yet inseparable concepts. *Munāsabah* establishes relational links between verses and chapters, whereas *nizām* integrates these relations into a cohesive structural whole.<sup>28</sup> Al-Farāhī further introduced the notion of *'amūd*, defined as the central theme of a chapter that functions as its governing axis of meaning. He argued that each Qur'anic chapter possesses a single *'amūd*, despite addressing multiple subsidiary themes. The defining characteristics of *'amūd* include centrality, concreteness, uniqueness, universality, and a hermeneutic dimension.<sup>29</sup>

Al-Farāhī's intellectual legacy was subsequently expanded and refined by Amīn Aḥsan al-Iṣlāḥī. Having studied under al-Farāhī in 1925, al-Iṣlāḥī adopted *nizām al-Qur'ān* as the foundational framework of his monumental *tafsīr*, *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*, composed over approximately twenty-three years. Al-Iṣlāḥī explicitly acknowledged his work as a continuation of al-Farāhī's intellectual project, while introducing several refinements. Most notably, he classified the Qur'anic chapters into seven thematic groups and advanced the concept of paired chapters (*sūrah* pairs) that mutually illuminate meaning.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Nizām al-Qur'ān* across Traditions: From Orientalism to Structural Readings**

The development of the study of *nizām al-Qur'ān* (the Qur'anic system or structure) within the Western scholarly tradition is inextricably linked to the extensive history of Qur'anic studies grounded in Orientalism. In contrast to the Islamic *tafsīr* tradition, which cultivates structural awareness within a normative and theological framework, Western scholarship initially emerged amid religious polemics and political agendas before gradually evolving into a critical academic discipline. Consequently, the concept of *nizām al-Qur'ān* in Western scholarship did not originate as a fully developed methodological framework; rather, it emerged through a protracted evolution of interpretative approaches to the Qur'anic text, ranging from theological polemics and historical analysis to structural-synchronic readings.

The initial phase of Qur'anic studies in the Western context was characterized by polemical Orientalism with apologetic objectives. A notable development during this period was the translation of the Qur'an into Latin, initiated by Peter the Venerable (1092–1156) following the conquest of Toledo in 1085 CE. This endeavor, subsequently known as the Cluniac Corpus (1142–1143 CE), involved translating the

<sup>28</sup> Farahi, *Nizām Al-Qur'ān Wa-Ta'wīl al-Furqān Bi-l-Furqān*, 74–75.

<sup>29</sup> Miatul Qudisia, "Konseptualisasi dan Implementasi 'Amūd pada Penafsiran Ḥamīd Al-Dīn al-Farāhī" (UIN Sunan Ampel, 2019), 33–42.

<sup>30</sup> See: Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an: A Study of Islahi's Concept of Naẓm in Tadabbur-i Qur'an*, 38–39; Muhammad Izzul Haq Zain and et al., "Amin Ahsan Islahi's Surah Pairs Concept: Review Interpretation of Q.S. al-Kāfirūn and Q.S. al-Naṣr in the Tadabbur-i Qur'an," *IAI al-Khairat*, 2020, 874–75.

Qur'an and other Islamic texts with the explicit aim of providing theological material for the critique of Islam.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, the Qur'an was treated primarily as an object of polemical discourse rather than as a text warranting internal analysis, resulting in a near-complete neglect of its structural and coherent features.

This polemical tradition persisted until the era of Riccoldo da Monte Croce (d. 1320) and Theodor Bibliander (d. 1564). However, a paradigm shift emerged in the eighteenth century with the work of George Sale, specifically his publication *The Koran Commonly Called Alcoran of Mohammed* (1746).<sup>32</sup> Unlike his predecessors, Sale adopted a more rational and comparatively objective stance, even defending Islam against certain ecclesiastical accusations. Comparable perspectives were also evident in the works of Adrianus Reland and Josef von Hammer-Purgstall, who began to focus on the rhetoric and composition of the Qur'an.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, this approach had yet to develop into a systematic structural analysis.

In the nineteenth century, Qur'anic studies in the Western academic tradition underwent a significant transformation characterized by the adoption of a historical-critical methodology. Gustav Weil, through his works *Mohammed der Prophet* (1843) and *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in den Koran* (1844), approached the Qur'an primarily as a historical source for understanding the life of the Prophet Muḥammad.<sup>34</sup> This methodological perspective was further developed by scholars such as Aloys Sprenger and William Muir, culminating in the seminal contribution of Theodor Nöldeke with his *Geschichte des Qorans*, which systematically classified the Qur'anic revelations according to their chronological order.<sup>35</sup> While this historical-critical approach significantly advanced Qur'anic scholarship, it often resulted in the fragmentation of the Qur'anic text and overlooked the cohesive structural unity of the *sūrah*s.

According to Fazlur Rahman, Western Qur'anic studies have traditionally been categorized into three primary streams: research focusing on Judeo-Christian influences, investigations into the chronology of the Qur'an, and thematic or structural analyses. The first two streams have historically been more prominent, whereas structural studies were relatively marginalized, as they were perceived to overlap with the domain of normative Muslim *tafsīr*.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, this dynamic

<sup>31</sup> See: Ihwan Agustono, "Potret Perkembangan Metodologi Kelompok Orientalis dalam Studi Al-Qur'an," *Studia Quranika* 4, no. 2 (2020): 163–65; Yusuf Hanafi, "Qur'anic Studies Dalam Lintasan Sejarah Orientalisme Dan Islamologi Barat," *Hermeneutik* 7, no. 2 (2013): 239.

<sup>32</sup> Muhammad Anshori, "Tren-Tren Wacana Studi al-Qur'an dalam Pandangan Orientalis di Barat," *Nun* 4, no. 1 (2018): 22–23; Hanafi, "Qur'anic Studies Dalam Lintasan Sejarah Orientalisme Dan Islamologi Barat," 239–42.

<sup>33</sup> Hanafi, "Qur'anic Studies dalam Lintasan Sejarah Orientalisme dan Islamologi Barat," 243–44.

<sup>34</sup> Ah. Fawaid, "Dinamika Kajian Al-Qur'an di Barat dan Dampaknya pada Kajian al-Qur'an Kontemporer," *Nuansa* 10, no. 2 (2013): 237–38.

<sup>35</sup> Fawaid, "Dinamika Kajian Al-Qur'an di Barat dan dampaknya pada Kajian al-Qur'an Kontemporer," 239.

<sup>36</sup> Fawaid, "Dinamika Kajian Al-Qur'an Di Barat dan Dampaknya Pada Kajian al-Qur'an Kontemporer," 240–41.

began to shift in the latter half of the twentieth century, concomitant with internal critiques addressing the limitations inherent in diachronic approaches.

The transition from diachronic to synchronic methodologies has facilitated a novel framework for interpreting the Qur'an as a unified and coherent text. Stefan Wild observed a resurgence of interest in the Qur'an as a *textus receptus* characterized by internal integrity.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Michel Cuypers noted that, beginning in the early 1980s, Qur'anic studies increasingly concentrated on examining the composition of *sūrahs* to elucidate their internal coherence.<sup>38</sup>

Within this context, Western scholars explicitly engaged in developing structural analyses of Qur'anic *sūrahs*. Angelika Neuwirth, in her dissertation *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (1981), conceptualized Qur'anic *sūrahs* as communicative units reflecting interactions among God, the Prophet, and the listening community. By integrating literary and historical approaches, Neuwirth introduced the notions of the pre-canonization and post-canonization Qur'an, arguing that structural analysis of *sūrahs* is essential for understanding the dynamics of revelation.<sup>39</sup>

Ian Richard Netton developed a structural-semiotic approach through his analysis of *Sūrat al-Kahf*. Employing semiotic theory and literary criticism, Netton segmented the *sūrah* into theological units (*theologemes*) and identified archetypal patterns (*archetypes*) that contribute to the coherence of the *sūrah*'s meaning. These concepts enhanced the methodological toolkit for analyzing Qur'anic *sūrahs* within Western scholarship.<sup>40</sup>

Neal Robinson advanced a structural methodology grounded in linguistic analysis, rhythm, rhyme, and verbal communication. In his work *Discovering the Qur'an*, Robinson demonstrated that the structure of Qur'anic *sūrahs*—both Meccan and Medinan—exhibits internal coherence demonstrable through systematic textual analysis rather than reliance on theological presuppositions alone.<sup>41</sup> This approach reinforced the view that *sūrah*-level unity constitutes a textual phenomenon open to scholarly verification.

Although Western structural studies have not produced normative *tafsīr* works in the manner characteristic of the Islamic tradition, their contributions remain significant in cultivating awareness of the Qur'an's coherence and structural organization. Nevertheless, such analyses generally remain descriptive and formal in nature and are not explicitly oriented toward elucidating the normative objectives of the Qur'an. By contrast, within the Islamic *tafsīr* tradition—particularly through

<sup>37</sup> Stefan Wild, *The Qur'an as Text* (Brill, 1996), vii–ix.

<sup>38</sup> Cuypers, *The Composition of the Qur'an: Rhetorical Analysis*, 5.

<sup>39</sup> Lien Iffah Naf'atu Fina, "Membaca Metode Penafsiran Al-Qur'an Kontemporer di Kalangan Sarjana Barat: Analisis Pemikiran Angelika Neuwirth," *Ulumuna* 18, no. 2 (2014): 271–78.

<sup>40</sup> Nilna Fadlillah and Hasan Mahfudh, "Kajian Struktural-Semiotik Ian Richard Netton Terhadap Q.S. al-Kahf," *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith* 9, no. 2 (2019): 305–6.

<sup>41</sup> Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, 76–77; 197–203.

the development of *nizām al-Qur’ān* by al-Farāhī and al-Iṣlāhī—structural analysis is intrinsically directed toward identifying the *‘amūd*, or central purpose, of a *sūrah*, which serves as the foundation for normative interpretation.

Although the study of *nizām al-Qur’ān* in both Eastern and Western contexts arises from distinct intellectual genealogies and employs divergent methodologies, it nevertheless reflects a convergent epistemological orientation: the rejection of atomistic readings and the affirmation of *sūrah*-level unity of meaning. The principal divergence lies in the ultimate analytical objective. In Western scholarship, structure functions primarily as a neutral analytical tool, whereas within the Islamic *tafsīr* tradition it serves to elucidate the *maqāṣid*, or internal purposes, of the Qur’an.

On this basis, the *nizām al-Qur’ān* approach may be understood as a methodological bridge linking textual analysis with the study of Qur’anic *maqāṣid*. However, integrating these domains requires epistemological vigilance to prevent structural analysis from collapsing into formalism and to ensure that *maqāṣid* studies remain firmly grounded in objective textual foundations. This framework provides the basis for a critical examination of two contemporary structural models—those proposed by Khaleel ur Rahman Chishti and Raymond Farrin—which will be addressed in the following section.

### **Khaleel Ur Rahman Chishti’s Macro Structure of the Soorahs of the Holy Qur’an**

To evaluate the contribution of Qur’anic interpretation grounded in *nizām al-Qur’ān* (the Qur’anic system) within contemporary Qur’anic studies, this section examines Khaleel ur Rahman Chishti’s work, *Macro Structure of the Soorahs of the Holy Qur’an*, through the lens of the epistemology of *tafsīr* (Qur’anic exegesis). The analysis centers on the author’s intellectual background, the epistemological foundations underpinning his interpretation, the sources and methodologies employed, as well as the validity and limitations inherent in the structural approach he proposes. This framework facilitates not only a description of the distinctive features of Chishti’s *tafsīr* but also a critical evaluation of its epistemological positioning within the broader discourse of *nizām al-Qur’ān* and *maqāṣid al-Qur’ān* (the objectives of the Qur’an).

Khaleel ur Rahman Chishti is not a scholar of Qur’anic studies trained within the traditional *tafsīr* educational framework. He obtained a master’s degree in Plant Science from the University of California, Davis, in 1974. His professional career as a horticulturist and international project manager developed alongside his involvement in Islamic *da‘wah* and education, particularly in North America through organizations such as ISNA and ICNA beginning in 1975. From 1994 onward, he devoted himself fully to these activities in Pakistan. In addition, he served as an educator at several institutions, including the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI). (Chishti, 2012, pp. 5–6).

This non-traditional background carries important epistemological implications. Chishti's *tafsīr* does not aim to rival classical *tafsīr* works in terms of philological analysis or *madhhab* debates; rather, it is designed with an educational and pedagogical orientation, particularly for modern, educated audiences. Accordingly, structural approaches, diagrammatic visualization, and thematic simplification constitute prominent features of his *tafsīr*. Interpretive authority in this work is established not through reliance on classical scholarly *isnād* (chains of transmission) but through methodological coherence and communicative effectiveness in elucidating the objectives of Qur'anic *sūrahs*.<sup>42</sup>

The epistemological foundation of Chishti's *tafsīr* is articulated through twenty interpretive principles outlined in the introduction to his work. These principles include interpreting the Qur'an by the Qur'an itself, recourse to the Prophet's *ḥadīth*, the views of the Companions and *Tābi'īn*, Arabic linguistic conventions, and the use of controlled reasoning (*ra'y*) that remains consistent with the text. Within the framework of *nizām al-Qur'ān*, the most pivotal principle is the assertion that each *sūrah* constitutes a unified thematic entity (*waḥdah al-sūrah*). Accordingly, interpretation should aim to elucidate the macrostructure, microstructure, and central theme of the *sūrah*.<sup>43</sup>

Epistemologically, these principles reflect a synthesis of traditional authoritative sources and contemporary methodological tools. However, in contrast to the al-Farāhī and al-Iṣlāhī traditions—which situate *nizām* within a normative *tafsīr* framework—Chishti emphasizes the operational and heuristic functions of *nizām* as a means of facilitating understanding. This orientation is evident in his tendency to simplify methodological discourse and to prioritize structural clarity over the elaboration of complex *tafsīr* theory.

The work titled *Macro Structure of the Soorahs of the Holy Qur'an* was originally written in Urdu and published in 2011, followed by its English translation by Habib-ur-Rahman Chishti in 2012. The study covers all 114 *sūrahs* of the Qur'an, arranged according to the *muṣḥaf* order. Its primary objective is to delineate systematically and concisely the structure and central theme of each *sūrah*, based on the assumption that contemporary readers—including those proficient in Arabic—often engage with the Qur'an without fully apprehending the overarching purpose of individual *sūrahs*.<sup>44</sup>

Methodologically, Chishti adopts a relatively consistent approach to analyzing the structure of *sūrahs*. Each analysis begins with basic information about the *sūrah*, including its number and name, the number of verses, its classification as *Makkiyyah* or *Madaniyyah*, and its thematic paragraph divisions. He then presents a

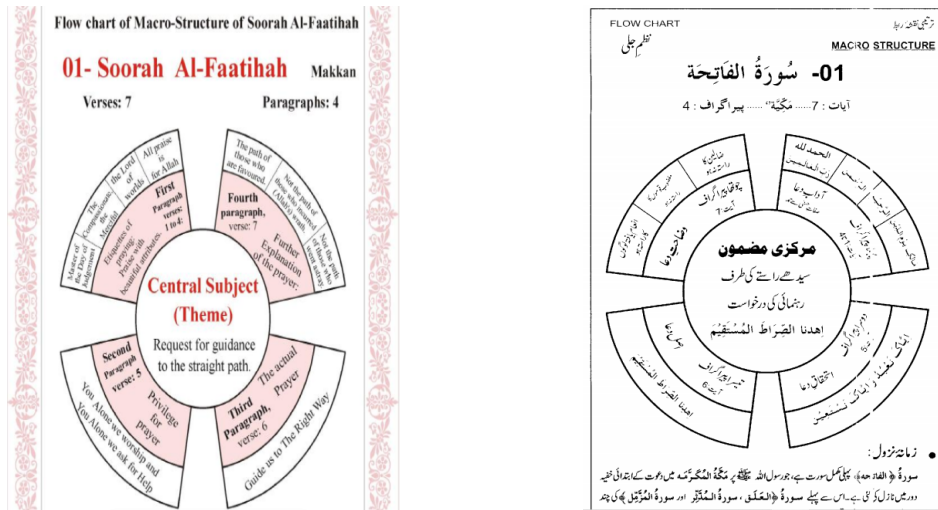
<sup>42</sup> Chishti, *Macro Structure of Soorahs of the Holy Qur'an*, 14.

<sup>43</sup> Chishti, *Macro Structure of Soorahs of the Holy Qur'an*, 13–25.

<sup>44</sup> Chishti, *Macro Structure of Soorahs of the Holy Qur'an*, 5–6.

visualization of the *sūrah*'s structure in the form of a circular diagram (flow chart), placing the central theme (*markazī maḍmūn*) at the center, with verse units and their subsidiary themes arranged concentrically around it.<sup>45</sup>

**Figure 1**  
**Flow chart of macro-structure (English Translation and Urdu Version)**



Source: Chishti (2012)

The subsequent stage encompasses explanations of the period of revelation, the historical context, distinctive features of the *sūrah*, the virtues (*faḍā'il*) associated with certain *sūrahs*, and the *munāsabah* (intertextual relationships) with the preceding and succeeding *sūrahs*. The analysis is further refined through the identification of keywords as elements of the microstructure, culminating in an affirmation of the *sūrah*'s central theme. This methodological pattern is consistently applied throughout the *tafsīr*.<sup>46</sup>

Chishti's *tafsīr* draws upon four principal interpretive sources. The foremost source is the Qur'an itself, which is analyzed through a verse-by-verse interpretive approach. This method is exemplified in the elucidation of *ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* in Q. al-Fātiḥah [1]:7, where cross-references to other verses such as Q. al-Nisā' [4]:69 and Q. al-Mā'idah [5]:44 are employed.<sup>47</sup> The second source comprises the Prophet's *ḥadīth*, particularly in explicating the virtues of specific *sūrahs*, as illustrated by the *ḥadīth* describing al-Fātiḥah as *al-sab' al-mathānī* (the seven oft-repeated verses).<sup>48</sup> Third, historical data are utilized to contextualize the revelations, for instance, in the analysis of Q. al-Nisā' in relation to the social conditions following the Battle of

<sup>45</sup> Chishti, *Macro Structure of Soorahs of the Holy Qur'an*, 48.

<sup>46</sup> Chishti, *Macro Structure of Soorahs of the Holy Qur'an*, 39–53.

<sup>47</sup> Chishti, *Macro Structure of Soorahs of the Holy Qur'an*, 53.

<sup>48</sup> Chishti, *Macro Structure of Soorahs of the Holy Qur'an*, 49–50.

Uḥūd (Chishti, 2012, p. 97).<sup>49</sup> Finally, *ra'yy*, or rational reasoning, is applied to discern structural and thematic relationships among verses and *sūrah*s.

Methodologically, Chishti's *tafsīr* is classified as *tafsīr mawḍū'ī al-sūrah* (thematic *sūrah*-based *tafsīr*), as it treats the *sūrah* as an autonomous thematic unit. The approaches employed include structural *munāsabah*, historical analysis, and linguistic examination. For example, the morphological analysis of the term *al-Raḥmān* identifies it as an *ism mubālaghah* (intensive noun) in the *fa'lān* pattern, signifying the vastness and intensity of God's mercy.<sup>50</sup>

From the standpoint of epistemological validity, Chishti's *tafsīr* demonstrates coherence validity, as its interpretive outcomes consistently align with the methodological principles established at the outset. Moreover, the work exhibits pragmatic validity by effectively facilitating readers' comprehension of the purpose and thematic progression of each Qur'anic *sūrah* in a systematic and applicable manner, particularly for contemporary educated audiences. Nevertheless, this validity remains predominantly intra-textual. The resulting macrostructure is largely contingent upon the interpreter's construction; therefore, caution is warranted against treating it as definitive, normative, or universally binding.

Chishti's *tafsīr* exemplifies an educational and heuristic model of *nizām al-Qur'ān*. Its principal strength lies in its capacity to simplify the complexity inherent in *sūrah* structures and to convey the Qur'an's thematic objectives in a visual and systematic manner. Its limitation, however, concerns the relatively limited theoretical engagement with the boundaries of interpretive subjectivity and the mechanisms required for intersubjective validation of the proposed structure. This observation provides an important epistemological basis for comparison with other structural models, particularly that of Raymond Farrin, which will be examined in the subsequent section.

### **Raymond Farrin's Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation**

In the advancement of contemporary scholarship on *nizām al-Qur'ān* (the Qur'an's system or order), Raymond Farrin's *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text* represents the most systematic and rigorously argued structural-literary approach within the Western academic tradition. Distinct from descriptive studies that focus exclusively on textual coherence, Farrin explicitly foregrounds structure as the central hermeneutic framework for Qur'anic interpretation. Consequently, an epistemological analysis of this work is essential not only to assess its methodological rigor but also to examine critically the assumptions, sources of knowledge, and limits of validity inherent in the structural interpretation it advances.

<sup>49</sup> Chishti, *Macro Structure of Soorahs of the Holy Qur'an*, 97.

<sup>50</sup> Chishti, *Macro Structure of Soorahs of the Holy Qur'an*, 53.

Raymond Farrin is a Professor of Arabic in the Department of Arabic and Foreign Languages at the American University of Kuwait. He earned his doctorate in Near Eastern Studies from the University of California, Berkeley, following approximately seven years of intensive research in Cairo focused on classical Arabic language and literature. This academic formation has strongly shaped Farrin's emphasis on textual and literary analysis and explains his reliance on modern literary theory as the primary framework for interpreting the Qur'an.<sup>51</sup> From an epistemological perspective, this approach conceptualizes the Qur'an primarily as a literary text characterized by a formal structure amenable to systematic analysis.<sup>52</sup>

Farrin presents his work as a significant advancement in Qur'anic literary studies, aiming to synthesize the legacy of classical Arabic *tafsīr* with modern structural theory. He challenges the longstanding claim that the Qur'an is unsystematic or fragmented, arguing instead that it exhibits a highly precise and coherent structural organization. This coherence, he contends, is manifested through a complex network of symmetry, including parallel, chiasmic, and especially concentric patterns. Such patterns operate at multiple levels of the text, encompassing individual verses, *sūrah*s, paired chapters, chapter groups, and even the Qur'an as a whole.<sup>53</sup>

Within Farrin's epistemological framework, structure functions not merely as a literary ornament but as an epistemic instrument that actively shapes meaning. By identifying the symmetrical structure of a *sūrah*, interpreters can discern the central theme that operates as the pivotal axis of the text's significance. On this basis, Farrin advocates structural analysis as the primary methodological approach to Qur'anic interpretation, while simultaneously criticizing atomistic methods that isolate individual verses without regard for the coherence of the text's overall composition.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the assumption that symmetrical structure is intrinsic to the text invites epistemological scrutiny concerning the extent to which such structure reflects an objective textual reality or a hermeneutic construct introduced by the interpreter.

Farrin articulates two principal motivations for this study. The first is to respond to critiques claiming that the Qur'an lacks order and structural unity. The second is to demonstrate that structural analysis transcends formal description, functioning instead as an interpretive framework that enables a holistic and contextual understanding of Qur'anic meaning.<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, structure is framed

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<sup>51</sup> Raymond Farrin, *Abundance from the Desert: Classical Arabic Poetry* (Syracuse University Press, 2011), viii.

<sup>52</sup> Solahuddin, "Teori Ring Structure Raymond Farrin dan Aplikasinya Kepada Q.S. al-Baqarah," 21.

<sup>53</sup> Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*, 6–7.

<sup>54</sup> Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*, 10–11.

<sup>55</sup> Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*, 6–7.

not merely as an object of analysis but as a foundational element for legitimizing interpretation.

The book is systematically organized into an introduction, six substantive chapters, a conclusion, and three appendices that map structural relationships among *sūrahs*, *sūrah* pairs, and *sūrah* groups within the Qur'an. In the introduction, Farrin traces the historical development of discussions concerning Qur'anic unity and coherence, beginning with Abū Bakr al-Nīsābūrī. He argues, however, that within the classical *tafsīr* tradition, structural awareness developed only partially and largely in a linear fashion. Farrin cites Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Qurtubī, al-Biqā'ī, and al-Ālūsī as exegetes who engaged extensively with *munāsabah* (textual coherence) but did not articulate a fully holistic reading of *sūrahs*. According to Farrin, a comprehensive methodological articulation of Qur'anic structure emerged only in the twentieth century through scholars such as Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī, Amīn Aḥsan al-Iṣlāhī, Sayyid Quṭb, and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī.<sup>56</sup>

Chapter One, entitled *Framing the Qur'an*, examines *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* as the foundational framework of the Qur'an. Chapter Two, *The Chapter as Unity*, advances the notion of *sūrah* unity through an in-depth analysis of *Sūrat al-Baqarah*. In this chapter, Farrin proposes a comprehensive concentric structure in which all verses are interpreted as components of an integrated thematic whole. He argues that concentric arrangement constitutes the dominant symmetry pattern in the Qur'an, characterized by a central thematic axis surrounded by paired verse units that mirror one another.<sup>57</sup>

In his analysis of *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, Farrin divides the chapter into seven principal structural units: A (verses 1–39), B (verses 40–112), C (verses 113–141), D (verses 142–152), C' (verses 153–177), B' (verses 178–242), and A' (verses 243–286). Unit D functions as the thematic axis, while the remaining units form coherent symmetrical pairs. Although this model demonstrates a high degree of methodological precision, the resulting structure remains interpretive in nature and thus allows for alternative structural configurations.

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<sup>56</sup> Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*, 10–21.

<sup>57</sup> Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*, 22–32.

**Figure 2**  
**Principal structural unit of *sūrah al-Baqarāh***

A (1-39)  
 B (40-112)  
     C (113-41)  
         D (142-52)  
             C' (153-77)  
                 B' (178-242)  
                     A' (243-86)

Source: Farrin (2014).

Chapters three and four elaborate on the concept of chapter pairs. In chapter three, Farrin examines pairs consisting of short and long chapters, exemplified by Q. al-Falaq–al-Nās and Q. al-Baqarah–Āl ‘Imrān. Chapter four extends this analysis to medium-length chapters, such as Q. Yūsuf and Q. al-Ra’d, which Farrin contends are organized into a three-part concentric structure that mutually complements one another.<sup>58</sup> This methodology broadens the understanding of *nizām* from the level of individual chapters to encompass inter-chapter relationships.

Chapter Five advances the analysis to the level of chapter groups, specifically the classification of Qur’anic chapters into large, coherent units. At this stage, Farrin systematically categorizes all 114 chapters of the Qur’an into distinct structural groups, thereby conceptualizing *nizām* not merely as a localized phenomenon but as an overarching principle governing the organization of the Qur’an in its entirety.

**Figure 3**  
**Mapping of Qur’an chapter groups**

[1]  
 2-5  
   6-9  
     10-15  
       16-21  
        22-24  
        25-32  
        33-39  
        40-46  
        47-49  
        [50-56]  
        57-66  
        67-72  
        73-80  
        81-88  
        89-92  
        93-98  
        99-104  
        105-108  
        109-112  
        [113-14]<sup>12</sup>

Source: Farrin (2014).

<sup>58</sup> Farrin, *Structure and Qur’anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam’s Holy Text*, 33–47.

Chapter Six, titled *Central Group*, advances the thesis that the structural core of the Qur'an is located within Q. 50–56, which comprises seven *sūrahs*. Farrin correlates this observation with Q. al-Ḥijr [15]:87, referring to the phrase *sab 'an min al-mathānī*, and posits the hypothesis that those repeatedly mentioned therein should be identified as this central group of *sūrahs*.<sup>59</sup> While this proposition is innovative, it remains speculative, as it rests on the assumption that the macrostructure of the Qur'an can be represented concentrically without methodological inconsistency.

Farrin's approach to identifying the main idea of a *sūrah* can be systematized into four stages: providing a general exposition of the *sūrah*; mapping the verse structure according to symmetry theory; formulating partial themes within each structural unit; and confirming the central theme as the focal point of the overall meaning.<sup>60</sup> Although this methodology demonstrates a high degree of internal consistency, it requires caution to avoid the artificial imposition of symmetrical patterns onto the text.

From the standpoint of interpretive sources, Farrin's work relies primarily on the Qur'an itself, employing a verse-by-verse interpretive method. He also engages selectively with the views of classical *mufasssīrūn*, notably Ibn 'Abbās, particularly in the linguistic analysis of the term *rabb al- 'ālamīn*, which is understood as the Lord of all rational beings.<sup>61</sup> Historical data do not constitute a central component of his analysis; instead, the methodological emphasis is placed on internal textual relationships and compositional unity.

Methodologically, Farrin explicitly adopts a literary structuralist approach by employing the theory of ring composition as articulated by Mary Douglas. This framework encompasses parallel, chiasmic, and concentric patterns, with concentricity identified as the dominant structural form.<sup>62</sup> Epistemologically, the incorporation of this literary-anthropological theory enriches the structural analysis of the Qur'an; however, it also raises critical questions concerning the compatibility of cross-disciplinary theoretical models with the revealed text and with the Islamic interpretive tradition.

From the perspective of interpretive epistemology, Farrin's study exhibits strong coherence validity, as the application of structural theory is maintained consistently from the micro to the macro level. The work also demonstrates pragmatic validity by providing an analytical framework that enables readers and

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<sup>59</sup> Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*, 73–77.

<sup>60</sup> Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*, 15–28.

<sup>61</sup> Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*, 11–12.

<sup>62</sup> Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*, 15–16.

researchers to apprehend systematically the themes and objectives of Qur'anic *sūrahs*. Nevertheless, this validity remains largely intra-textual and depends heavily on the presupposition of symmetry as a universal organizing principle. Consequently, Farrin's approach risks reducing the semantic complexity of the Qur'an to a formalized schematic if it is not complemented by hermeneutic sensitivity and sustained engagement with normative interpretive traditions.

Farrin's work represents a significant contribution to the development of structural-literary interpretation within contemporary *nizām al-Qur'ān* studies. Its principal strength lies in its methodological rigor and the innovative extension of structural analysis to encompass the Qur'an in its entirety. Its limitations, however, include the potential for excessive structuring and the absence of clear mechanisms for intersubjective validation of the proposed macrostructure. This epistemological issue is crucial for a comparative assessment of Farrin's approach alongside normative-educational *nizām al-Qur'ān* models, such as those developed by Khaleel ur Rahman Chishti, which will be addressed in the following comparative discussion section.

### **Comparative Epistemological Synthesis: *Nizām al-Qur'ān* and the *Maqāṣid al-Qur'ān***

Drawing on the epistemological framework of structural interpretation advanced by Raymond Farrin and Khaleel Ur Rahman Chishti, it can be asserted that the application of *nizām al-Qur'ān* (the Qur'an's system) extends beyond merely demonstrating the internal coherence of the text. Rather, it functions as a hermeneutic tool that directs interpretation toward uncovering the Qur'an's fundamental purpose. By treating the *sūrah*'s structure as the foundational framework of interpretation, the interpreter is guided to identify the central message that undergirds the entire semantic structure of the *sūrah*. In contemporary interpretive discourse, these purposes are articulated within the conceptual framework of *maqāṣid al-Qur'ān* (the objectives of the Qur'an).

The term *maqāṣid al-Qur'ān* consists of two elements: *maqāṣid* and *al-Qur'ān*. The word *maqāṣid* is the plural of *qaṣada*, which, according to Aḥmad ibn Fāris, denotes "to aim at" or "to direct toward a particular goal".<sup>63</sup> Ibn Manẓūr further explains that the term encompasses meanings such as "the straight path," "moderation," and "the ultimate objective".<sup>64</sup> With respect to *al-Qur'ān*, its etymology signifies a perfect recitation and also implies gathering or compiling, as noted by M. Quraish Shihab.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Ahmad Ibn Faris, *Maqāyīs Al-Lughah* (Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2008), 95.

<sup>64</sup> Ibn Manzur, *Lisan Al-Arab* (Dar Sadir, 2000), 353.

<sup>65</sup> M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Qur'an: Tafsir Maudhu'i Atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat* (Mizan, 1996), 3.

*Maqāṣid al-Qurʾān* may be defined as the primary objectives underlying the revelation of the Qurʾān, aimed at realizing human welfare (*maṣlaḥah*) (al-Ḥamīdī, 2007, p. 31). In contemporary scholarship, Tazul Islam emphasizes that *maqāṣid al-Qurʾān* constitutes a distinct discipline devoted to uncovering the core teachings of the Qurʾān by tracing the fundamental meanings embedded in the *muḥkamāt* verses.<sup>66</sup>

From a genealogical perspective, Ulya Fikriyati outlines the development of *maqāṣid al-Qurʾān* studies in four phases: the nucleus diaspora, the pre-theoretical applicative phase, the contextual formative phase, and the contextual transformative phase.<sup>67</sup> Within this framework, the *nizām al-Qurʾān* approach is particularly significant at the level of *maqāṣid al-sūrah* (the objectives of the *sūrah*), which posits that each *sūrah* possesses a principal objective (*maqṣad a ʿẓam*) that governs its overall structure and meaning. In parallel, Wasfī ʿĀshūr Abū Zayd classifies *maqāṣid al-Qurʾān* into five categories: general *maqāṣid*, specific *maqāṣid*, *maqāṣid al-sūrah*, *maqāṣid al-āyah*, and *maqāṣid* at the level of words and letters.<sup>68</sup> Among these categories, *maqāṣid al-sūrah* represents the most salient epistemological intersection with the *nizām al-Qurʾān* approach as articulated by Farrin and Chishti.

In this regard, both Farrin and Chishti proceed from the assumption that each *sūrah* of the Qurʾān embodies a single central meaning, albeit through distinct epistemological trajectories. Farrin begins by examining the symmetrical structure of the text—particularly ring composition—in order to inductively identify the central theme. Chishti, by contrast, foregrounds the normative objective of the *sūrah* as the primary interpretive framework and subsequently employs structural analysis to clarify and substantiate that objective. This divergence in orientation significantly shapes their respective conceptualizations of *maqāṣid al-sūrah*.

To assess this epistemological convergence and divergence, the following analysis focuses on three *sūrahs* interpreted by both Farrin and Chishti: Q. al-Fātiḥah, Q. al-Baqarah, and Q. Yūsuf:

#### *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah*

In Farrin’s analysis, *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* is divided into three sections: verses 1–3, verse 4, and verses 5–7. Farrin excludes the *basmalah* from the primary structural components, arguing that the symmetrical unity of the *sūrah* remains intact without it.<sup>69</sup> The central section (verse 4) functions as the theological axis, while the opening

<sup>66</sup> Islam, “Maqāṣid Al-Qurʾān: A Search for a Scholarly Definition,” 205.

<sup>67</sup> Fikriyati, “Maqāṣid Al-Qurʾān: Genealogi Dan Peta Perkembangannya Dalam Khazanah Keislaman,” 201–11.

<sup>68</sup> Wasfī ʿĀshūr Abu Zayd, *Metode Tafsir Maqāṣidī: Memahami Pendekatan Baru Penafsiran al-Qurʾān* (Qaf Media Kreativa, 2019), 29–66.

<sup>69</sup> Farrin, *Structure and Qurʾanic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam’s Holy Text*, 11.

and concluding sections form a symmetrical pair that encapsulates the relationship between praise and supplication.

**Figure 4**  
**Thematic concentric structure of *sūrah al-Fātiḥah***

Praise of God, Lord of all peoples	(Awesomeness)
Merciful and Compassionate	(Mercy stressed twice)
Master of the Day of Reckoning	(Awesomeness)

Source: Farrin (2014).

Based on that structure, Farrin concludes that the central theme of Q. al-Fātiḥah is the relationship between worship and prayer, which constitutes the fundamental link between humans and God.

**Figure 5**  
**Thematic axis of *sūrah al-Fātiḥah***

Show us the Straight Path	(Guidance)
Path of those You favored, Not of those who incurred wrath	(Mercy emphasized) (God not associated with wrath: Mercy emphasized)
Nor those who went astray	(Lack of Guidance)

Source: Farrin (2014).

Therefore, from the two rings above, according to Farrin, there is an issue related to mercy that is emphasized twice in the middle of both rings above. Thus, it can be concluded as follows.

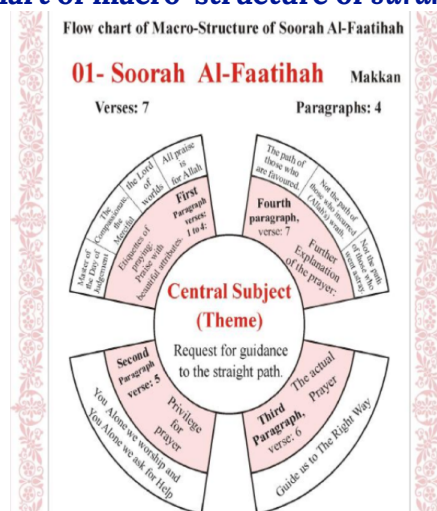
**Figure 6**  
**Concentric structure of worship and supplication in *sūrah al-Fātiḥah***

Ring: Worship	(Mercy centered and stressed twice)
Center: Worship and Supplication	
Ring: Supplication	(Mercy centered and stressed twice)

Source: Farrin (2014).

Conversely, Chishti categorizes Q. al-Fātiḥah into four thematic sections: the etiquette of prayer (verses 1-4), the essence of worship and prayer (verse 5), the true supplication (verse 6), and an elucidation of the path being sought (verse 7). According to Chishti, the central theme (*markazī maḍmūn*) of this chapter is the petition for guidance toward *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaḳīm* (the straight path).

**Figure 7**  
**Flow chart of macro-structure of sūrah Fātiḥah**



Source: Chishti (2012).

This comparison demonstrates that Farrin emphasizes descriptive *maqāṣid* derived from the structural elements of the text, whereas Chishti explicitly formulates normative *maqāṣid* aimed at the guiding function of the surah.

### Sūrah al-Baqārah

In his interpretation of Surah al-Baqarah, Chishti delineates the chapter into four principal sections, each representing a distinct phase in the evolution of the community's leadership. The overarching theme of this chapter is articulated as the transition of religious leadership to the Muslim community, characterized as a *wasath* (moderate) community.<sup>70</sup>

In contrast, Farrin organizes this chapter into seven concentric units (A–B–C–D–C'–B'–A'), positioning the central section (verses 142–152) as the pivotal element of meaning. Rather than condensing the *maqāṣid* (objectives) of the chapter into a singular normative statement, he highlights a complex network of meanings encompassing monotheism, moral responsibility, and divine justice.<sup>71</sup>

This distinction highlights that Farrin's epistemology primarily focuses on delineating structural meanings, whereas Chishti advances further by articulating the normative objectives of the surah.

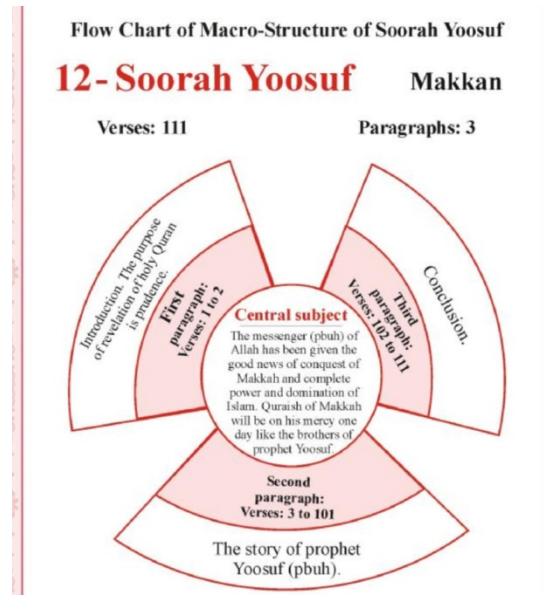
<sup>70</sup> Chishti, *Macro Structure of Soorahs of the Holy Qur'an*, 61.

<sup>71</sup> Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*, 28–29.

Sūrah Yūsuf

Chishti divides Surah Yūsuf into three primary sections and interprets its central theme as the proclamation of good news regarding the triumph of the da'wah and the future prospects of Islam.<sup>72</sup>

**Figure 8**  
**Flow chart of macro-structure of sūrah Yūsuf**



Source: Chishti (2012).

Farrin also segments this letter into three symmetrical parts (A-B-A'), conveying a universal message regarding the oneness of God and the importance of steadfast faith when confronting trials.

**Figure 10**  
**Symmetrical (A-B-A') narrative structure of sūrah Yūsuf**

- A Prologue
- B Joseph Story
  - a Dream
    - b Brothers' trick; well; travel to Egypt
    - c Joseph established in house
    - d Attempts at seduction
      - e Prisoners' dreams; Joseph's sermon; king's dream
    - d' Admission of guilt; forgiveness
  - c' Joseph established in land
  - b' Joseph's tricks; drinking cup; travel to Egypt
  - a' Dream fulfilled
- A' Epilogue

Source: Farrin (2014).

<sup>72</sup> Chishti, *Macro Structure of Soorahs of the Holy Qur'an*, 195.

The analysis of the three case studies indicates that Farrin’s *nizām al-Qur’ān* approach effectively demonstrates the textual coherence and structural unity of the Qur’an in a rigorous and systematic manner. However, this approach predominantly yields descriptive *maqāṣid* and has yet to fully engage with the normative-teleological dimension of the Qur’an’s *maqāṣid*. In contrast, Chishti’s approach explicitly aims to elucidate the purpose of guidance and the practical orientation of the surahs, although the structural framework employed is comparatively less formally rigorous than Farrin’s symmetry theory.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the *nizām al-Qur’ān* approach attains its fullest epistemological potential in elucidating the Qur’an’s *maqāṣid* when the rigorous structural analysis advanced by Farrin is integrated with the normative-teleological framework proposed by Chishti. The synthesis of these two methodologies facilitates the emergence of a structural exegesis that is both textually coherent and normatively as well as contextually pertinent within contemporary Qur’anic studies.

**Table 1**  
**A comparison of Farrin's and Chishti's epistemology in the unveiling of the *maqāṣid* of the surah**

Epistemological Aspect	Raymond Farrin	Khaleel Ur Rahman Chishti
Intellectual Background	Western academic specializing in Arabic literature and modern structural theory; operating within a non-normative tradition of Qur’anic Studies	Non-traditional Muslim intellectual with a <i>da’wah</i> -educational orientation; rooted in the normative <i>tafsīr</i> tradition
Object of Interpretation	The internal structure of the Qur’an as a coherent literary-religious text	Qur’anic <i>sūrah</i> s as units of guidance possessing normative objectives
Sources of Interpretation	The Qur’an itself ( <i>tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi al-Qur’ān</i> ); selective use of classical exegetes; modern literary theory	The Qur’an; Hadith; opinions of the Companions and <i>tābi’in</i> ; Arabic language; controlled <i>ra’y</i>
Theoretical Framework	Ring composition and concentricism theory (Mary Douglas); literary structuralism	Farāhī’s <i>nizām al-Qur’ān</i> principle; concepts of macro-structure and central subject

Method of Analysis	Symmetry analysis (parallel, chiasmatic, concentric); mapping the structure of verses and <i>sūrah</i> s	Thematic paragraph division; identification of macro-structure and micro-structure
Primary Unit of Analysis	Small rings, chapter unity, chapter pairs, chapter groups	Paragraphs, partial themes, and the central theme of the <i>sūrah</i>
Epistemological Orientation	Inductive–descriptive: from structure to meaning	Teleological–normative: from purpose to structure
Conception of Nizām	Nizām as evidence of coherence and textual design in the Qur’an	Nizām as a pedagogical means to understand the objectives of guidance
Conception of Maqāṣid	<i>Maqāṣid</i> understood as central themes inferred from structural analysis	<i>Maqāṣid</i> formulated as an overarching normative objective ( <i>maqṣad a’zam</i> )
Level of <i>Maqāṣid</i>	Predominantly descriptive <i>sūrah</i> -level <i>maqāṣid</i>	Explicit <i>sūrah</i> -level <i>maqāṣid</i> with a practical orientation
Epistemological Validity	High coherence validity (consistency of method and results); limited pragmatic validity	Strong pragmatic validity (guidance function); moderate coherence validity
Main Strengths	Structural precision and methodological consistency	Clarity of normative objectives and applicative orientation
Limitations	Tends to stop at mapping meaning without explicit normative articulation	Structure is less formally theorized
Contribution to <i>Maqāṣid</i> Studies	Provides textual tools for tracing central themes	Affirms <i>sūrah</i> -level <i>maqāṣid</i> as the primary goal of <i>tafsīr</i>

Source: Author’s analysis.

### Conclusion

This study underscores that the *nizām al-Qur’ān* approach in contemporary exegesis should not be perceived as monolithic but rather as operating within diverse epistemological frameworks, as exemplified in the works of Raymond Farrin and Khaleel Ur Rahman Chishti. Both scholars regard the structural composition of the *sūrah* as a crucial component for comprehending the Qur’an; however, they diverge significantly in their epistemic orientations, methodologies, and interpretive objectives.

Raymond Farrin’s approach exemplifies a textual–structural epistemology grounded in the analysis of symmetry and internal coherence within the Qur’anic

text. By employing ring composition theory and concentricism, Farrin demonstrates that the Qur'an exhibits a deliberate and consistent structural design, thereby facilitating the identification of the central theme of a *sūrah* as well as the unity of the Qur'an in its entirety. From the perspective of *maqāṣid al-Qur'ān*, Farrin's principal contribution lies in offering a rigorous methodological framework for descriptively tracing the *maqāṣid* of a *sūrah*. Nevertheless, this predominantly structural epistemological orientation remains largely confined to mapping meaning and has not been explicitly extended to the formulation of normative *maqāṣid* that function as practical ethical or legal guidance.

In contrast, Khaleel Ur Rahman Chishti advances Qur'anic exegesis grounded in the concept of *nizām al-Qur'ān* within a normative-teleological epistemological framework. By emphasizing the *maqṣad a'zam* (the supreme purpose) of each *sūrah* as the central objective of interpretation, Chishti employs the Qur'an's structural organization as a pedagogical instrument to direct readers toward its guidance-oriented and practical message. This methodology demonstrates substantial pragmatic validity, particularly in facilitating readers' comprehension of the normative aims and directional intent of individual *sūrahs*. Nevertheless, when compared with Farrin's approach, Chishti's structural framework is less theoretically formalized and relies more heavily on descriptive thematic categorization.

This study contends that the epistemological potential of *nizām al-Qur'ān* in elucidating the *maqāṣid al-Qur'ān* is maximized when Farrin's systematic and rigorous structural analysis is integrated with Chishti's normative-teleological framework. Such a synthesis enables the development of a structural exegetical model that is both textually coherent and normatively as well as contextually relevant, thereby addressing communal needs and contemporary humanitarian challenges.

The primary contribution of this article lies not in the introduction of new exegetical data but in the formulation of an integrative epistemological framework that connects structural analysis of the Qur'an with *maqāṣid al-Qur'ān* discourse. This framework is expected to foster a more interdisciplinary, critical, and applicable methodology of exegesis within contemporary Qur'anic studies, while also strengthening academic dialogue between Muslim exegetical traditions and modern Western Qur'anic scholarship.

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