

The Dialectics of Text and Reason: Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī's Contribution to Qur'anic Interpretive Methodology in the 8th Century Hijriyah

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Abstract

This research comprehensively analyzes the methodological framework of Qur'anic interpretation according to Badr ad-Dīn az-Zarkashī, as outlined in *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. The study aims to fill a gap in the literature that often overlooks the legitimacy of *ra'y* (reason/*ijtihād*) in al-Zarkashī's methodology, especially in light of the general perception regarding the dominance of the transmissive-static approach in Sunni exegesis during the 8th century Hijri. Using Gadamer's hermeneutic framework, this research carefully explores how al-Zarkashī categorizes the verses of the Qur'an, identifies the sources of his interpretations, and formulates the mechanism of *ijtihād* as a fundamental and legitimate tool for meaning-making. From a deep analysis, a crucial finding emerged: al-Zarkashī explicitly distinguishes between interpretation based on narration and *ta'wīl* that involves *ijtihād*, opening significant space for the use of reason for verses that do not have a definitive interpretation (*qath'i*). He emphasizes the necessity of *ijtihād* so that the Qur'an can continuously engage in dialectics with the dynamics of the times (*tanazzul*), even daring to reinterpret hadiths that are often misunderstood as prohibitions against *ra'y* with strong arguments. The methodology of *ijtihād* that he advocates is very solid, deeply rooted in the mastery of Arabic linguistic knowledge and *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence). This finding not only enriches the "big picture" of the history of Sunni exegesis in the medieval period by demonstrating that the philological-dialectical model accommodating *ra'y* (opinion) remains significant, but it also positions al-Zarkashī as an important figure who successfully bridges tradition and progressiveness in the realm of Islamic interpretative thought.



[Penelitian ini menganalisis secara komprehensif kerangka metodologis penafsiran al-Qur'an menurut Badr ad-Dīn al-Zarkashī sebagaimana tertulis dalam al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān. Kajian ini berupaya mengisi celah dalam literatur yang seringkali kurang menyoroti secara mendalam legitimasi ra'y (rasio/ijtihād) dalam metodologi al-Zarkashī, terutama di tengah pandangan umum mengenai dominasi pendekatan transmitif-statis dalam tafsir Sunni pada abad ke-8 Hijriah. Dengan menggunakan kerangka hermeneutika Gadamer, penelitian ini menelusuri secara cermat bagaimana al-Zarkashī mengkategorikan ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an, mengidentifikasi sumber-sumber interpretasinya, dan merumuskan mekanisme ijtihād sebagai alat pemaknaan yang fundamental dan sah. Dari analisis mendalam, terungkap sebuah temuan krusial: al-Zarkashī secara eksplisit membedakan antara tafsir yang berbasis riwayat dan ta'wīl yang melibatkan ijtihād, membuka ruang signifikan bagi penggunaan rasio untuk ayat-ayat yang belum memiliki penafsiran yang qath'i. Ia menegaskan perlunya ijtihād agar Al-Qur'an senantiasa berdialektika dengan dinamika zaman (tanazzul), bahkan berani mereinterpretasi hadis-hadis yang sering disalahpahami sebagai pelarangan ra'y dengan argumen yang kokoh. Metodologi ijtihād yang ia usung sangat solid, berakar kuat pada penguasaan ilmu kebahasaan Arab dan uṣūl al-fiqh. Temuan ini tidak hanya memperkaya "peta besar" sejarah tafsir Sunni abad pertengahan dengan menunjukkan bahwa model filologis-dialektis yang akomodatif terhadap ra'y tetap signifikan, tetapi juga menempatkan al-Zarkashī sebagai figur penting yang berhasil menjembatani tradisi dan progresivitas dalam khazanah pemikiran interpretatif Islam.]

Keywords: Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī, Qur'anic Hermeneutics, al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, Ijtihād, Ra'y.

Introduction

Rationality in Qur'anic interpretation, often stigmatized in classical Sunni exegetical discourse, yields a different conclusion upon closer examination. The concept of ta'wīl, frequently associated with ra'y (independent reasoning), is in fact an integral element of exegetical tradition, especially among commentators from the 7th and 8th centuries AH. Walid Saleh, a leading scholar in the historiography of Sunni tafsīr, asserts that classical exegetes did not rely solely on ḥadīth, but drew extensively upon philological and linguistic sciences such as *naḥw*, *ṣarf*, and *qirā'āt* to interpret the Qur'an).¹ These philological models not only shaped early tafsīr but became its methodological backbone throughout the medieval period.

¹ See: W. Saleh, "The Etymological Fallacy and Qur'anic Studies: Muhammad, Paradise, and Late Antiquity," in *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, ed. N. S. Angelika Newrith and Michael Marx (Brill, 2010), 26; Mu'ammār Zayn Qadafy, "Menghidupkan Yang Mati Suri: Walid Saleh Dan Revitalisasi Kajian Sejarah Intelektual Tafsir Klasik," *Suhuf* 15, no. 2 (2022): 438.

Among the figures central to this epistemological evolution is al-Zarkashī (d. 794 AH), whose magnum opus *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān* laid out one of the earliest systematic attempts to codify the sciences of the Qur’an. Although not a *tafsīr* in the traditional sense, *al-Burhān* represents a critical intellectual project aimed at structuring the epistemic foundations of interpretation. Al-Zarkashī’s classification of Qur’anic sciences, his distinction between *tafsīr* and *ta’wīl*, and his measured endorsement of *ra’y* reflect a sophisticated hermeneutical framework shaped by his grounding in *uṣūl al-fiqh* and legal theory.

Broadly speaking, Qur’anic interpretation is categorized into two typologies: *tafsīr bi al-ma’thūr* (transmitted exegesis) and *tafsīr bi al-ra’y* (rational exegesis). However, Saleh² strongly critiques this dichotomy, arguing that such binary classification oversimplifies the multifaceted nature of exegetical writing, which necessarily involves data presentation, analysis, and conceptual synthesis. In practice, most classical exegetes—al-Zarkashī included—merged transmission with rational deliberation in a dynamic hermeneutical engagement.

In Chapter 41 of *al-Burhān*, titled *Ma’rifah Tafsīrih wa Ta’wīlih*, al-Zarkashī presents a nuanced distinction between *tafsīr* and *ta’wīl*, while also offering reconciliation for *ḥadīth* that apparently censure interpretive reasoning. He criticizes contemporary exegetes of his time who, despite limited scholarly grounding, boldly assert Qur’anic meanings without clarity on the nature of interpretation itself.³ His stance on the use of *ra’y* as a legitimate interpretive method is informed not only by theological concern but by a deeper awareness of methodological rigor.

Although *‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān* was not his primary field, al-Zarkashī’s *al-Burhān* has been acclaimed as a foundational work. Mustafa ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā describes it as the finest contribution in the field.⁴ Its initial neglect is often attributed to the author’s difficult handwriting (Ibn al-‘Imād) and limited circulation before being cited by al-Suyūṭī in *Al-Itqān*.⁵ Yet, the comprehensiveness and structure of *al-Burhān* now offer rich insights for modern hermeneutical engagement. While previous scholarship has explored the concept of *ta’wīl*⁶ and the use of reasoning in

² Walid A. Saleh, “Preliminary Remarks on the Historiography of Tafsīr in Arabic: A History of the Book Approach,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 12 (2010): 20.

³ Muhammad bin Bahadır al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi ‘Ulum al-Qur’an*, vol. 2 (Bairut: Dar al-kutub al-Imilyah, 2012), 92.

⁴ AL-Zarkasyi, 2:11.

⁵ Muhammad bin Bahadır al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi ‘Ulum al-Qur’an*, vol. 2 (Kairo: Dar Ihya’ al-Kutub al-Arabiyyah, 1957), 13.

⁶ Kautsar Azari Noer, “Hermeneutika Sufi Sebuah Kajian Atas Pandangan ibn Arabi Tentang Takwil Al-Qur’an” 2, no. 2 (February 2, 2013); Jonwari and Faiz Zainuddin, “Konsep Tafsir Dan Takwil Dalam Perspektif As-Syatibi,” *Jurnal Lisan Al-Hal* 14, no. 2 (Desember 2020); Moh Alwy Amru Ghozali, “Takwil dalam Perspektif Abdul Jabbar (Sebuah Tawaran Hermeneutika al-Qur’an),” *Dialogia* 14, no. 2 (January 20, 2017): 165–85.

Qur'anic interpretation,⁷ there is a significant scholarly gap concerning the specific hermeneutical mechanism articulated by al-Zarkashī in *al-Burhān*. Studies such as those by Alwani⁸ and Ross⁹ emphasize themes such as *waḥdat al-binyān* (structural unity) and classical engagement with Scripture, but they do not critically reconstruct al-Zarkashī's interpretive system as an integrated methodology. Even comprehensive references like *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*¹⁰ and *Coherence in the Qur'an*¹¹ underline the importance of classical epistemologies but treat *al-Burhān* more descriptively than analytically. In essence, no study has yet explicated how al-Zarkashī operationalizes categories such as *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, *ra'y*, and philology as an interlocking interpretive method. This study seeks to fill that lacuna by offering a systematic analysis of his hermeneutical vision.

This study offers a significant contribution to Qur'anic hermeneutics, particularly in elucidating the interpretive mechanism formulated by al-Zarkashī in *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. In contrast to previous research—which has largely focused on broader themes such as the concept of *ta'wīl* or thematic approaches to exegesis—this study undertakes a comprehensive methodological reconstruction of al-Zarkashī's exegetical system. By analyzing the structural and conceptual framework he systematically developed, this research positions *al-Burhān* not merely as an encyclopedic compilation of Qur'anic sciences, but as a coherent and sophisticated epistemological model. The central contribution of this study lies in uncovering how al-Zarkashī integrates rational inquiry (*ra'y*), transmitted authority (*riwāyah*), and philological instruments to construct a method of interpretation that is contextually responsive to the intellectual challenges of his time.

To explore in depth how al-Zarkashī engaged with the scholarly discourse of the 8th century AH, this study adopts Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of the fusion of horizons as its theoretical framework. This hermeneutical model enables a historically grounded reading that avoids anachronism by drawing upon three foundational pillars: pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*), effective historical consciousness (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), and application (*Anwendung*). Through this approach, the research first traces the formation of al-Zarkashī's intellectual background by examining biographical sources and contemporary texts. It then

⁷ Kholid Al-Walid, "Takwil Epistemologis Ibn Sinā atas Surah Al-Nūr Ayat 35," *Ulul Albab Jurnal Studi Islam* 19, no. 1 (June 25, 2018): 1–24; Nurul Khair, Ahmed Zaranggi Ar Ridho, and Siti Hadaynayah Salsabila, "Takwil As-Sirāṭ Al-Mustaqīm dalam Pembacaan Tafsir Mulla Sadra," *Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 9, no. 2 (December 30, 2020): 29–54.

⁸ Zainab Alwani, "Al-Waḥda al-Binā'iyya Li-l-Qur'ān: A Methodology for Understanding the Qur'ān in the Modern Day," *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice* 1, no. 1 (March 9, 2018), <https://journals.indianapolis.iu.edu/index.php/JIFP/article/view/22350>.

⁹ Stewart Ross, *Qur'an Commentary and the Biblical Turn: A History of Muslim Exegetical Engagement with the Biblical Text* (London: Routledge, 2024).

¹⁰ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017).

¹¹ Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

analyzes the hermeneutical tendencies that characterize his responses to the exegetical traditions of both his predecessors and his contemporaries. The final phase of the analysis establishes a dialogical encounter between al-Zarkashī's intellectual horizon and the historical conditions of his era, revealing how *al-Burhān* not only reflects the legacy of classical Qur'anic exegesis but also embodies interpretive insights with enduring relevance for contemporary hermeneutical discourse. Thus, this study not only repositions al-Zarkashī within the historiography of Sunni *tafsīr* but also proposes a conceptual framework for revisiting classical texts through modern theoretical lenses in a rigorous and responsible manner.

The Intellectual Framework of al-Zarkashī: Historical Context, Intellectual Biography, and His Works

A comprehensive understanding of a scholar's intellectual contributions—such as those of Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Bahādir ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Zarkashī (745–794 AH/1345–1392 CE)—necessitates an in-depth exploration of the historical context, intellectual biography, and literary legacy in which such thought developed. The environment in which a scholar lives and interacts profoundly shapes their intellectual formation and trajectory. Al-Zarkashī's life unfolded amidst the political upheavals and social dynamics of Egypt, primarily under two Mamlūk dynasties: the Baḥrī Mamlūks (648–784 AH/1251–1383 CE) and the Burjī Mamlūks (784–992 AH/1382–1517 CE). The Baḥrī dynasty emerged following the collapse of the Ayyūbid dynasty, beginning with the rule of Izz al-Dīn Aybak al-Turkmānī al-Ṣāliḥī (648–655 AH / 1250–1257 CE), despite internal political intrigue that led to the overthrow of Turanshah (al-Zarkashī, 2002, p. 13; Enan, 1983, p. 22). The Burjī dynasty commenced with the accession of Sultan al-Zāhir Abū Sa'īd Barqūq. Although this dynasty subdued the Baḥrī Mamlūks, it experienced greater instability and was often characterized by the moral decline of rulers who neglected religious education.¹² The Mamlūk era ultimately concluded in 992 AH/1517 CE with the rise of the Ottoman Empire.¹³

Amid fluctuating governance and both internal and external conflicts—including Mongol invasions and the campaigns of Tamerlane—the Mamlūks emerged as a formidable bulwark of the Islamic world. Their success in repelling Mongol attacks marked a crucial turning point that facilitated the revitalization of Islamic intellectual traditions. The fall of Baghdad prompted many scholars to seek refuge in Egypt, transforming it into a new center of Islamic civilization during a golden era following the Abbasid and Umayyad II periods. This flourishing

¹² Yelmi Eri Firdaus, Elfia Elfia, and Meirison, "Rise and Fall of Mamluk Sultanate: The Struggle Against Mongols and Crusaders in Holy War," *Al-Adyan: Journal of Religious Studies* 1, no. 1 (August 6, 2020): 24.

¹³ Bosworth G. E., *Dinasti-Dinasti Islam*, Terj. Ilyas Hasan (Bandung: Mizan, 1993), 92.

intellectual environment played a pivotal role in shaping al-Zarkashī's scholarly development.

Despite these intellectual advancements, the social conditions of al-Zarkashī's era were far from ideal. Persistent warfare resulted in economic instability, food shortages, and a decline in public health. Al-Zarkashī¹⁴ identified clear social stratification within Mamlūk society, leading to unequal access to resources such as food and healthcare. He outlined five principal classes: the Sultan class, which held supreme authority; the Mamlūk military elite, who enjoyed privileged access to education and state information; the intellectuals (*'ulamā'*) and bureaucrats—some of whom were genuinely committed to knowledge, while others served the interests of the ruling elite; the merchant class, which was wealthy yet subordinate to royal authority; and finally, the laboring classes, including artisans and farmers, who lived in poverty and were often subjected to crime and oppression, with farmers being especially burdened by taxes and exploitation.

Notwithstanding the political instability and social inequality of the era, the period of al-Zarkashī is remembered for its remarkable intellectual vitality. The migration of scholars from Baghdad following the Mongol invasion of 1258 ignited a dynamic intellectual resurgence in Egypt. Significant investments were made in the construction of mosques and madrasas, which were generously funded to support research and education. This cultural revival produced a diverse array of scholarly works across various disciplines, including history, *tafsīr*, *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, *ḥadīth* (both *riwāyah* and *dirāyah*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). During the Mamlūk period, four major madrasas were established: al-Madrassa al-Manṣūriyyah and Madrasa al-Qubbah, founded by Sultan al-Manṣūr ibn Qalāwūn, which offered instruction in the four legal schools alongside *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, and medicine; al-Madrassa al-Kāmiliyyah, established by Sultan Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Kāmīl, focusing on *ḥadīth* and Shāfi'ī jurisprudence; al-Madrassa al-Ḥijāziyyah, created by the daughter of Sultan Nāṣir ibn Qalāwūn, reflecting early efforts toward gender inclusion in education; and al-Madrassa al-Nāṣiriyyah, also founded by Sultan Nāṣir, which featured a large library and scheduled prayers led by professors.¹⁵ This conducive intellectual environment, characterized by an abundance of scholars and institutions, provided al-Zarkashī with invaluable support for his scholarly endeavors. He capitalized on these opportunities by actively studying under the renowned scholars of his time, ultimately producing a vast literary corpus despite his relatively short lifespan of 49 years. Reason: The revisions enhance clarity, improve vocabulary, and correct minor grammatical issues while maintaining the original meaning. Al-Zarkashī's exceptional intellect was shaped by a long and arduous pursuit of knowledge. He immersed himself in the vibrant intellectual currents of his era, actively engaging in scholarly circles that brought together

¹⁴ Muhammad bin Bahadir az-Zarkasyi, *Salasil Az-Zahab* (Madinah: Risalah Doktorah, 2002), 18–20.

¹⁵ Al-Zarkasyi, 23–24.

experts in law, *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, and Arabic literature.¹⁶ In addition to his studies in Cairo, he traveled to Damascus and Aleppo to learn from renowned scholars. Among his teachers were Jamāl al-Dīn al-Isnawī (d. 772 AH/1371 CE), Shaykh Sirāj al-Dīn al-Bulqīnī (d. 805 AH/1403 CE), Shihāb al-Dīn al-Adhru‘ī, ‘Umar ibn ‘Umaylah (d. 778 AH / 1376 CE), and the famous *ḥadīth* scholar Ibn Kathīr. After completing his rigorous education, al-Zarkashī returned to Cairo to embark on his prolific writing career.

Al-Zarkashī’s epithet al-Muṣannif (“the prolific author”) is well-deserved. While historical sources vary regarding the exact number of his works, at least 24 have been identified by al-‘Asqalānī, al-Suyūṭī, and ‘Abd al-Ḥayy. Further investigation in the introduction to *Salāsīl al-Ḍahab* reveals an additional 71 works, bringing the total to approximately 95.¹⁷ His contributions span various disciplines. In Qur’anic Studies and *Tafsīr*, he authored *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, a foundational work in the classification of Qur’anic sciences, along with *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (manuscript not yet found) and *Kashf al-Ma‘ānī*. In *Ḥadīth* studies, he wrote ten works, including *al-Ijābah li-‘Irād Mā Istadrakathu ‘Ā’ishah ‘alā al-Ṣaḥābah* and *al-Tadhkirah fī al-Aḥādīth al-Mushtahah*. His most prolific field was jurisprudence, with seventeen works such as *I‘lām al-Sājid bi-Aḥkām al-Masājid* and *Takmilah Sharḥ al-Minhāj*. In *uṣūl al-fiqh*, he authored seven works, including the influential *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, which synthesizes discussions on legal theory, theology, and linguistics from over thirty major texts. His versatility also extended to Arabic language and culture, as demonstrated in works like *al-Azhāriyyah fī Aḥkām al-Ad‘iyah*, which examines the nuances of supplication. Furthermore, al-Zarkashī showcased his multidisciplinary approach by writing across various schools of law (Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Ḥanbalī, Zāhirī) and theological traditions (Mu‘tazilah, Shī‘ah). Although his life was relatively short, his scholarly legacy remains unparalleled. He passed away on 3 Rajab 794 AH at the age of 49. Many of his works have yet to be fully explored—perhaps due to the challenges of deciphering his handwriting or the intellectual rigor of his discourse, which demands deep academic engagement.

His magnum opus, *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, provides a systematic and comprehensive examination of the disciplines related to the Qur’ān. Comprising two volumes (or four in some printed editions), the work contains 47 chapters, beginning with an introduction to the nature of Qur’anic sciences and *tafsīr*. It addresses a wide array of topics, including *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *‘ilm al-mutashābih*, *al-mubhamāt*, Qur’anic lexicography (*gharīb al-Qur’ān*), rhetorical features, and the ethics of reciting the Qur’ān.¹⁸ Al-Zarkashī referenced at least 37 major sources in composing

¹⁶ Al-Zarkasyi, 28.

¹⁷ Al-Zarkasyi, 40.

¹⁸ Muhammad bin Bahadir az-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi Ulum al-Qur’an*, vol. 1 (Bairut: Dar al-Fikr, 2009), 16.

*al-Burhān*¹⁹ drawing from *tafsīr*, *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, Qur'anic jurisprudence, linguistics, rhetoric, and *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*. In its opening sections, *al-Burhān* places a strong emphasis on the spiritual purpose of Qur'anic recitation—not merely as a technical skill, but as a means of divine connection and reflection.²⁰ According to Abū al-Faḍl al-Dimyāṭī, the editor of *al-Burhān*, the book surpasses later works in comprehensiveness, including *Manāhil al-'Irfān* by al-Zarqānī and *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* by al-Suyūṭī. Its superior organization and pioneering structure have secured *al-Burhān* a central place in Qur'anic Studies, attesting to al-Zarkashī's profound scholarship as a prolific and multidisciplinary al-Muṣannif.

Al-Zarkashī and the Contestation of Tafsīr Methodologies in the 8th/14th Century

The development of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) in the 8th century AH / 14th century CE signifies the conclusion of the classical period in the history of Islamic interpretation. This era was significantly influenced by the rule of the Mamlūk dynasty—encompassing both the Bahrī and Burjī branches—prior to the eventual rise of the Ottoman Empire. During this century, numerous prominent exegetes emerged, including Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī (d. 745/1344), Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzī (d. 751/1350), Ibn al-Juzayy (d. 741/1340), Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328), al-Khāzin (d. 741/1341), Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310), Tāj al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Qādir (d. 749/1348), and Abū Su'ūd ibn Muḥammad al-'Imādī (d. 749/1348). Identifying these exegetes enables us to map the exegetical landscape of the time, allowing us to observe which methodologies were predominant and which remained marginal.

The *tafsīr* tradition of the 8th century AH cannot be understood in isolation from the developments of the preceding century. As Walid Saleh argues in his historiographical study of *tafsīr*, exegetical works are inherently genealogical—they do not emerge in a vacuum but are always in dialectical continuity with earlier texts and interpretive traditions.²¹ Therefore, examining the dynamics of *tafsīr* in the 7th century AH is essential for constructing a coherent historical narrative. Key exegetes from that earlier period include Ibn al-Athīr (d. 606/1210), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240), and al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286 or 691/1292). Their exegetical methods provide a crucial reference point for understanding the interpretive dynamics of the subsequent century.

To assess the exegetical trends of the 8th century AH, this study focuses on the methods employed by most exegetes, including their sources and interpretive

¹⁹ Al-Zarkasyi, 1:17.

²⁰ Mia Fitriah Elkarimah, “Munasabah in the Perspective of Science of the Qur'an: Study of Al-Burhan Fi Ulum al-Qur'an Works of al-Zarkasyi (D. 749 H),” *Al-Risalah : Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Pemikiran Islam* 14, no. 1 (2023): 55.

²¹ Qadafy, “Menghidupkan Yang Mati Suri,” 429.

approaches to the Qur'anic text. The aim is to delineate which approaches were considered mainstream and which remained peripheral. Walid Saleh,²² as cited by Muammar, observes that during the medieval period, the dominant exegetical mode was philological. This included disciplines such as Arabic grammar, variant readings (*qirā'āt*), lexicography, and rhetoric.²³ The term “philology” is used here in its broadest sense, encompassing linguistic, literary, cultural, and historical analyses derived from written texts, as defined in standard philological discourse.²⁴ Saleh's use of the term reflects the reality that pre-modern tafsir manuscripts were transmitted orally and inscribed on parchment or animal skin, prior to the advent of the printing press in the modern era.

Today, there is a prevailing academic tendency to assume that the traditional and dominant method has always been the *tafsir bi al-ma'thūr* approach, as advocated by Ibn Taymiyyah. However, Saleh challenges this assumption through his analysis of *Tafsir al-Thalabi* and *Tafsir al-Wahidi*, arguing that this retrospective imposition oversimplifies the complexity of pre-modern exegetical traditions. In this context, the present study specifically focuses on the 8th century AH, aiming to determine where al-Zarkashī fits within this interpretive spectrum.

Exegetical developments in the 8th century AH can be categorized into two major methodological frameworks: the philological-dialectical model and the transmissive-static model. The philological-dialectical model focuses on textual analysis, utilizing linguistic tools such as grammar (*naḥw*), variant readings, lexicography, and rhetorical theory (*balāghah*). This approach is exemplified in works such as *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* by Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, *al-Tashīl li 'Ulūm al-Tafsir* by Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī, *Lubāb al-Ta'wīl fī Ma'ānī al-Tanzīl* by al-Khāzin, and *Madārik al-Tanzīl wa Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl* by Maḥmūd al-Nasafī. These exegetes incorporated discussions on syntax, literary eloquence, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), textual coherence (*munāsabah*), and legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*).

What differentiates their works primarily lies in their jurisprudential affiliations and their stances toward the use of *isrā'īliyyāt* (Judeo-Christian traditions). Ibn Juzayy, for instance, was notable for his explicit rejection of *Isrā'īliyyāt* in *tafsir*.²⁵ The philological-dialectical model can be traced back to the 7th century AH, with paradigmatic examples such as *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* by al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsir Ibn 'Arabī*, and *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl* by 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar al-Bayḍāwī. These works employed philological tools while adapting to the intellectual demands of their

²² Saleh, “Preliminary Remarks on the Historiography of Tafsir in Arabic,” 26.

²³ Qadafy, “Menghidupkan Yang Mati Suri,” 438.

²⁴ “Filologi,” accessed August 14, 2023, <https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/entri/filologi>.

²⁵ Muhammad Ali Iyazi, *Al-Mufasssirun Hayatuhum Wa Manhajuhum*, vol. 1 (Teheran: Wizarah al-Saqafah wa al-Irsyad al-Islami, 1966), 375.

respective periods. Al-Rāzī rejected *isrā'iliyyāt* and distinguished himself through his extensive use of rational *ijtihād*, demonstrating an ability to substantiate transmitted reports with robust logical arguments.²⁶ However, this approach drew criticism from Ibn Taymiyyah, who advocated for the superiority of the *ma'thūrī* method.

The second model, known as the transmissive-static approach, aligns more closely with Ibn Taymiyyah's exegetical vision. Walid Saleh²⁷ describes it as a "radical hermeneutic." The term "transmissive" emphasizes the method's reliance on narrations from the Prophet Muḥammad, his companions (*ṣaḥābah*), and the successors (*tābi'ūn*), while "static" denotes the exegete's limited interpretive agency, which is often restricted to mere transmission without critical engagement.²⁸ Ibn Taymiyyah systematically outlines this method in his work, *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, wherein he advocates for an interpretation that begins with the Qur'ān, followed by explanations from the Prophet, the Companions, and then the Successors.²⁹

Although widely recognized among contemporary readers, this method saw limited application among 8th-century exegetes, being primarily adopted by Ibn Taymiyyah's own students—namely, Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathīr—since Ibn Taymiyyah himself did not produce a complete *tafsīr*. Their respective works, *Badā'i' al-Tafsīr* and *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, reflect an effort to apply his principles. For instance, Ibn al-Qayyim emphasized a Qur'ān-by-Qur'ān interpretation, followed by *ḥadīth*, and he avoided the elaborate analyses typical of the philological tradition.³⁰ Similarly, Ibn Kathīr's introduction to his *tafsīr* states:

"The most effective form of tafsir is that which interprets the Qur'ān using the Qur'ān itself. Ambiguous verses are clarified by other verses. If this is not possible, one should refer to the sayings of the Prophet. In the absence of these, the views of the Companions may be consulted, as they had the closest connection to the Qur'ān in both practice and understanding. If none of these sources are sufficient, one may then consider the opinions of the Successors, such as Mujāhid and others. However, tafsir based solely on unqualified reasoning is impermissible. Conversely, if it is grounded in sound linguistic and legal reasoning, it is permitted."³¹

²⁶ Muhammad Ali Iyazi, *Al-Mufasssirin Hayatuhum Wa Manhajuhum*, vol. 3 (Teheran: Wizarah al-Saqafah wa al-Irsyad al-Islami, 1966), 1109.

²⁷ Walid Saleh, "Ibn Taymiyya and the Rise of Radical Hermeneutics: An Analysis of an Introduction to the Foundations of Qur'ānic Exegesis," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 125.

²⁸ Saleh, 149.

²⁹ Ahmad Ibn Taimiyyah, *Muqaddimah Fi Ushul At-Tafsir* (Bairut: Dar Ibn hazm, 1993), 84–94.

³⁰ Iyazi, *Al-Mufasssirin Hayatuhum Wa Manhajuhum*, 1966, 1:281.

³¹ Al-Hafiz Ibn Kasir, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, vol. 1 (Bairut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Imiyah, 2012), 6–8.

This position reflects Ibn Taymiyyah's own formulation in *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*.³² However, unlike the prevailing philological-dialectical approach, the transmissive-static method remained peripheral. Most exegetes in both the 7th and 8th centuries AH continued to utilize philological analyses. There was no clear dichotomy between *riwāyah* (transmission) and *dirāyah* (critical reasoning); rather, the two often coexisted, enabling exegetical practice to evolve in tandem with the intellectual demands of the time, while remaining within the methodological parameters established in classical *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* literature.

This broader exegetical context is essential for understanding the methodological orientation of al-Zarkashī when he composed his seminal work on Qurʾānic sciences, *Al-Burhān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*. Did he align with the prevailing philological-dialectical approach of his time, adopt the emerging methodology proposed by Ibn Taymiyyah, or attempt a moderate synthesis—appreciating the innovations of Ibn Taymiyyah while still maintaining fidelity to the classical tradition? To answer this question, a closer examination of al-Zarkashī's interpretive views in *al-Burhān* is necessary, particularly his treatment of the distinction between *tafsīr* and *taʿwīl*.

The Mechanism of Qurʾānic Interpretation from the Perspective of al-Zarkashī

The concept of “interpretive mechanism” here refers to the systematic intellectual framework developed by al-Zarkashī in *Al-Burhān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, which serves as a methodological tool for understanding the Qurʾān. The term generally denotes an interrelated mode of operation, like the functioning of a machine. In contrast, is a term frequently employed in Western discourse and overlaps with hermeneutics, a discipline focused on the pursuit of meaning within a text.³³ The combination of these two terms suggests a dynamic process aimed at comprehending a text. In the context of the Qurʾān, the interpretive mechanism specifically refers to the mapping of exegetical principles and the construction of a cognitive framework formulated by al-Zarkashī to understand Qurʾānic verses, as elaborated in Chapter 41 of *al-Burhān*. However, before delving into this, it is essential to first grasp al-Zarkashī's perspective on the distinction between *tafsīr* and *taʿwīl*.

Al-Zarkashī asserts that the highest form of cognitive engagement involves exploring the mysteries of the Qurʾān and revealing its hidden truths.³⁴ This endeavor cannot be approached arbitrarily, as it requires a significant level of literary sophistication. An interpretive framework must be employed to discern the meanings of Qurʾānic verses, which can be broadly categorized into *tafsīr* and *taʿwīl*. Al-Zarkashī examines this distinction in detail in Chapter 41, titled *Maʿrifat Tafsīrihi wa Taʿwīlihi* (Understanding the *Tafsīr* and *Taʿwīl* of the Qurʾān).

³² Ibn Taimiyyah, *Muqaddimah Fi Ushul At-Tafsir*, 84–94.

³³ Fakhuruddin Faiz, *Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: al-Qalam, 2002), 21.

³⁴ Al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, 2012, 2:23.

Historically, the terms *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* have been subjects of contention, particularly regarding the legitimacy of *ta'wīl*. Abū Zayd notes that efforts to marginalize the term *ta'wīl* emerged during the 3rd century AH, driven by political tensions between the Mu'tazilites and the Sunnis. Following the death of Abū Ja'far al-Ma'mūn, the Mu'tazilī school experienced a decline, culminating in the ascension of Caliph al-Mutawakkil, who adopted a pro-Sunni stance. This political shift significantly influenced Qur'ānic interpretation, leading to *tafsīr* becoming the dominant term and eclipsing *ta'wīl*. Nevertheless, despite this historical controversy, scholars have continued to employ both terms as legitimate tools for engaging with the Qur'ān.

Generally, the term is more widely recognized. Upon hearing it, most people immediately associate it with explanatory commentary that clarifies the intended meanings of Qur'ānic verses.³⁵ In contrast, it is often linked to the elucidation of hidden or symbolic meanings, such as dream interpretation.³⁶ Within the Qur'ānic context, it is frequently associated with esoteric or even deviant interpretations. Terminologically, it is defined as the science concerned with the circumstances of revelation, the surahs and their narratives, the occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), and the classification of *makkiyya* and *madaniyya*, *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*, *nāsikh* and *mansūkh*, *ām* and *khāṣṣ*, *muṭlaq* and *muqayyad*, as well as *mujmal* and *mufassar*.³⁷ This field focuses on early exegetical traditions and aims to uncover and clarify meanings (*kashf* and *bayān*). Al-Zarkashī emphasizes that anyone seeking to understand a Qur'ānic verse must examine its context, related narratives, and intrinsic meanings.³⁸ Furthermore, it addresses legal rulings concerning permissible and prohibited actions, divine promises and threats, as well as commands and prohibitions.

Linguistically, *ta'wīl* is derived from the root's *awl*, *ma'āl*, and *'iyālah*. The term *awl* is associated with the phrase "*mā ta'wīlu hādhā al-kalām*" in Q. al-A'rāf [7]: 53, which translates to "What is the outcome of this statement?".³⁹ *Ma'āl* corresponds to the expression "*awwaltuhu fa'ālā*", which implies the appropriate application of a verse. Another perspective traces *ta'wīl* to *'iyālah*, meaning as-siyāsah (governance or management), suggesting that an interpreter organizes the verse in a manner that aligns with its intended meaning.⁴⁰

The distinction between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* lies in both methodology and outcome. *Tafsīr* relies heavily on transmitted reports and the interpretations of early Muslim scholars.⁴¹ Its methodology involves examining elements such as *asbāb*

³⁵ "Tafsir," accessed May 28, 2023, <https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/entri/tafsir>.

³⁶ "Takwil," accessed May 28, 2023, <https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/entri/takwil>.

³⁷ Al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, 2012, 2:91.

³⁸ Al-Zarkasyi, 2:91.

³⁹ Al-Ragib al-Asfahani, *Mufradat Al-Faz al-Qur'an* (Bairut: Daral-Qalam, Damaskus), 99.

⁴⁰ Al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, 2012, 2:92.

⁴¹ Al-Zarkasyi, 2:92.

al-nuzūl, narratives, indications, and classifications of *makkiyya* or *madaniyya*, *muḥkam* or *mutashābih*, *‘ām* or *khāṣṣ*, *muṭlaq* or *muqayyad*, and *mujmal* or *mufassar*.⁴² This analysis is not limited to literal readings; it also includes terminological explanations (*mufradāt*), clarification of ambiguous expressions (*bayān al-mujmal*), restriction of general terms (*taqyīd al-muṭlaq*), and specification of generalities (*takhṣīṣ al-‘ām*).⁴³ As a highly structured process, *tafsīr* adheres strictly to established methodologies, often giving the impression of limited personal reasoning (*ijtihād*). Al-Rāghib al-Asfahānī notes that *tafsīr* tends to focus on apparent meanings (*zāhir*), involving lexical analysis of words and sentence structures.⁴⁴ In this sense, *tafsīr* elucidates the intended meaning of verses primarily from a linguistic perspective, without delving into more intricate dimensions. For example, it clarifies obscure words such as *al-bāhirah*, *aṣ-ṣā’ibah*, and *al-wāṣilah* in Q. al-Mā’idah [5]: 103, or concise phrases such as those in Q. al-Baqarah [2]: 43. Abū Naṣr al-Qushayrī concluded that *tafsīr* pertains to following and listening (*al-ittibā’* and *al-samā’*), whereas *ta’wīl* pertains to legal inference (*istinbāt*).⁴⁵ This view is supported by al-Bājlī, who distinguished *tafsīr* as a discipline rooted in transmitted knowledge (*‘ilm al-riwāyah*) and *ta’wīl* as rooted in rational inquiry (*‘ilm al-dirāyah*). Therefore, meanings derived from the interpretations of early scholars are categorized as *tafsīr*.

In contrast to *tafsīr*, *ta’wīl* emphasizes the interpretive agency of the exegete in uncovering the deeper meanings of Qur’ānic verses. The scope of *ta’wīl* encompasses meanings that are not immediately apparent. However, *ta’wīl* should not dismiss *tafsīr*; rather, it represents a subsequent stage of inquiry that seeks to explore dimensions inaccessible through *tafsīr* alone. Al-Ghazālī contends that *tafsīr* is insufficient for uncovering the realities of meaning (*ḥaqā’iq al-ma’ānī*), and inadequate for bridging the gap between inner meanings and outward expression (*zāhir at-tafsīr*).⁴⁶ Nurcholish Madjid describes *ta’wīl* as metaphorical, aimed at revealing the inner meanings embedded in the verses rather than their literal or textual manifestations. Similarly, Komaruddin Hidayat likens *ta’wīl* to hermeneutics, involving the interpretation of a subject through data, social context, and the psychological dynamics between the speaker and the audience.⁴⁷ While *tafsīr* is inferential (*istidlālī*) in seeking meaning, *ta’wīl* is *ijtihādī*, seeking the most appropriate interpretation.

⁴² Syamsul Wathani, “Konstruksi Ta’wīl al-Qur’an Ibn Qutaybah (Telaah Hermeneutis-Epistemologis)” (Tesis, Yogyakarta, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2016), 86.

⁴³ Muhammad Abdul Azim az-Zarqani, *Manahil Al-‘Irfan Fi Ulum al-Qur’an*, vol. 2 (Bairut: Dar al-Fikr, 1996), 6.

⁴⁴ Al-Asfahani, *Mufradat Al-Faz al-Qur’an*, 636.

⁴⁵ Al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi ‘Ulum al-Qur’an*, 2012.

⁴⁶ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Misykat Al-Anwar* (Mesir: Dar al-Qaumiyah, t.th), 49.

⁴⁷ Komarudin Hidayat, *Memahami Bahasa Agama: Sebuah Pendekatan Heremeneutik* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1996), 215.

The domain of *tafsīr* primarily encompasses general vocabulary, rare words (*gharīb al-alfāz*), apparent meanings, transmitted reports, concise expressions, and verses containing narratives that require clarification. Examples include foreign terms such as *al-bāhirah*, *wāṣilah*, and *sā'ibah* in Q. al-Mā'idah [5]: 103; succinct expressions in Q. al-Baqarah [2]: 43; and narrative verses such as Q. al-Baqarah [2]: 189. However, not all practices of *ta'wīl* are legitimized by al-Zarkashī. He stipulates that *ta'wīl* must be consistent with the Qur'ān and Hadith to prevent deviant interpretations that contradict Islamic legal principles. For instance, the *ta'wīl* by certain Rāfiḍī groups of Q. ar-Rahmān [55]: 11 and 22—interpreting *al-baḥrayn* as 'Alī and Fātimah, and *al-maraj al-baḥrayn* as Ḥasan and Ḥusayn—is considered politically motivated and excessively sectarian. For al-Zarkashī, scholarly interpretation must remain objective and just, particularly when engaging with the Qur'ān.

The Classification of Qur'ānic Verses from the Perspective of al-Zarkashī and His Ijtihād Methodology

In his seminal work, *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, al-Zarkashī outlines two principal frameworks for understanding Qur'ānic verses: those that have already been interpreted and those for which interpretation remains undiscovered. Regarding the former, al-Zarkashī categorizes the interpretative sources into three authoritative origins: the Prophet Muḥammad, the companions (*ṣaḥābah*), and the exegetes among the successors (*tābi'ūn*). Verses that lack explanations from these three sources fall into the second category. From this binary classification, al-Zarkashī distinguishes between *tafsīr* (interpretation based on transmitted reports) and *ta'wīl* (interpretation based on reasoned opinion or *ijtihād*). To avoid confusion, the term will be employed as a general designation throughout this paper, though *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* will be retained to highlight their specific connotations.

For over fourteen centuries, the Qur'ān has experienced dynamic interpretive developments. Interpretations have built upon one another from generation to generation, while emerging challenges have prompted the continuous production of exegetical works. According to al-Zarkashī, this expansive interpretive tradition ultimately traces back to three pivotal sources: the Prophet Muḥammad, known as *al-Mufasssīr al-Awwal*,⁴⁸ his *ṣaḥābah*, such as 'Alī and Ibn 'Abbās; and the *tābi'ūn*, including Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Mujāhid, and Muqātil ibn Sulaymān. Citing these three generations is considered obligatory.

First, interpretation based on the prophet's Sayings. Interpretation derived from the Prophet's words is valid, as one of the essential functions of *ḥadīth* is to clarify the Qur'ān (*bayān*). Imām Mālik categorized this explanatory function into five types: *bayān taqrīr* (affirmation), *bayān tafsīr* (clarification), *bayān tafṣīl* (elaboration), *bayān ithbāt* (confirmation), and *bayān tashrī'* (legal prescription).

⁴⁸ Ahmad Hariyanto, "Tafsir Era Nabi Muhammad SAW," *Jurnal At-Tibyan* 1, no. 1 (June 2016): 74.

Meanwhile, Imām al-Shāfi‘ī introduced additional categories, including *bayān takhṣīṣ* (specification), *bayān ta’yīn* (determination), *bayān nasakh* (abrogation), and *bayān ishārah* (indication).

As an example of *bayān tafṣīl* (elaboration), al-Zarkashī cites Qur’ān 2:43: “Establish prayer and give zakat, and bow with those who bow.” This verse does not provide detailed procedures for ṣalāh (prayer); therefore, *ḥadīth* are necessary to clarify the number of *rak‘ahs*, their timing, and procedural elements.⁴⁹ The Prophet’s *ḥadīth*—through his actions (*fi ‘lī*), speech (*qawlī*), and tacit approvals (*taqrīrī*)—serve as essential tools for Qur’ānic interpretation.

Nevertheless, caution must be exercised when selecting *ḥadīth*, particularly concerning weak or fabricated narrations.⁵⁰ Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal’s assertion that three areas lack a sound foundation—among them *tafsīr*—has been regarded as problematic, given that interpretation was practiced during the Prophet’s lifetime. A student of his clarified that this statement referred to the prevalence of non-*marfū‘* (non-Prophetic) reports in *tafsīr* literature, specifically those lacking reliable chains of transmission. While this perspective may not be entirely accurate, the concern is understandable. Despite the existence of weak reports, there are also *ṣaḥīḥ* and *mutawātir ḥadīth* that clearly elucidate verses, such as the interpretation of *ẓulm* in Qur’ān 6:82 as *shirk* (polytheism).⁵¹

Second, interpretation based on the sayings of the companions. The interpretive authority of the Companions ranks just below that of the Prophet. Al-Zarkashī equates their status to that of *marfū‘ ḥadīth*.⁵² Following the Prophet’s death, the responsibility of interpreting the Qur’ān fell to the Companions, due to their proximity to and direct learning from him.⁵³ However, the Companions varied in their knowledge, which led to diverse interpretations of certain verses. This variation prompted critiques of their authority; for instance, the Ḥanbalī school, as cited by al-Zarkashī, includes Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, who argued that the interpretations of the Companions do not constitute binding proof (*ḥujjah*).

Al-Suyūṭī asserted that such interpretations are only acceptable when they pertain to the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), abrogation (*nāsikh mansūkh*), and other matters that are directly transmitted from the Prophet. Nevertheless, al-Zarkashī contends that the interpretations of the Companions—whether transmitted or based on opinion—remain authoritative. Their understanding varied according to their level of interaction with the Prophet. If proximity is the criterion, then Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, and ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib rank highest. However, due to a special distinction,

⁴⁹ Muhammad bin Bahadir az-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi ‘Ulum al-Qur’an* (Kairo: Dar al-Hadis, 2006), 427.

⁵⁰ Al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi ‘Ulum al-Qur’an*, 2012, 2:96.

⁵¹ Ibn Jarir at-Tabari, *Jami’ al-Bayan ‘an Ta’wil Ay al-Qur’an*, vol. 11 (Makkah: Dar al-Tarbiyah wa al-Turas, n.d.), 501.

⁵² Al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi ‘Ulum al-Qur’an*, 2006, 421.

⁵³ Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqallani, *Nukhbah Al-Fikr: Fi Mustalah Ahli Asar* (Bairut: Dar Ibn hazm, 2006), 57.

Ibn ‘Abbās is prioritized because of the Prophet’s supplication for him: “O Allah, grant him knowledge of the religion and teach him the interpretation (*ta`wīl*)”.⁵⁴ This invocation legitimizes his exegetical authority. Al-Zarkashī even identifies Ibn ‘Abbās as the Companion with the most extensive Qur’ānic interpretations.⁵⁵ According to him, the pinnacle of Companion authority lies with ‘Alī, followed by Ibn ‘Abbās, although the latter’s interpretive output is more prolific. Al-Suyūṭī identified the most prominent exegetes among the Companions: Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Ubayy ibn Ka‘b, ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd, Zayd ibn Thābit, Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās, and ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr.⁵⁶

Third, interpretation based on the sayings of the *tābi‘ūn*. The interpretive status of the *tābi‘ūn* has also been a subject of debate, with some scholars questioning their authority based on reports attributed to Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. However, most exegetes acknowledge their contributions, particularly those of early authorities such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Mujāhid, and Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr.

Tābi‘ūn in *tafsīr* literature include: Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Muzāḥim, Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr, Mujāhid, Qatādah, Abū al-‘Āliyah al-Rayyāḥī, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Rabī‘ ibn Anas, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, ‘Aṭā’ ibn Abī Salāmah al-Kharrāsānī, Murrāh al-Hamdānī, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah al-Wālibī, Muḥammad ibn Ka‘b al-Qurazī, Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Kayyān, Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suddī, ‘Ikrimah, ‘Aṭīyyah al-‘Awfī, ‘Aṭā’ ibn Abī Rabāḥ, and ‘Abdullāh ibn Zayd ibn Aslam.

Meanwhile, verses whose meanings have not yet been determined are categorized by al-Zarkashī as requiring further interpretation (*ta`wīl*), which should be approached through *ijtihād*. Such verses are not directly addressed by the Prophet, his *ṣaḥābah*, or the *tābi‘ūn*. In these instances, al-Zarkashī considers *ijtihād* to be a valid tool, provided it is exercised by qualified individuals. Interpretation through *ijtihād* is acceptable if it does not contravene the guidance of *naql* (transmission), reason, the Arabic language, or religious principles.

The Qur’ān contains various types of verses that remain open to *ijtihād*, particularly those involving general and specific meanings (*‘āmm-khāṣṣ*), absolute and qualified statements (*muṭlaq-muqayyad*), abrogating and abrogated rulings (*nāsikh-mansūkh*), as well as verses that appear ambiguous (*mujmal*) or whose meanings are not immediately clear. These interpretive challenges necessitate an *ijtihādī* approach to uncover the intended meanings. For instance, regarding al-yad (hand) in the verse “The hand of Allah is over their hands” [Q. 48:10], is the meaning to be taken literally (i.e., referring to the divine hand) or metaphorically (i.e.,

⁵⁴ Siraj ad-Din Ibn Mulqin, *At-Tauidh Li Syarh al-Jami’ al-Sahih*, vol. 2 (Damaskus: Dar An-Nawadir, 2008), 340.

⁵⁵ Al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi ‘Ulum al-Qur’an*, 2006, 421.

⁵⁶ Abd ar-Rahman as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan Fi Ulum al-Qur’an* (Madinah: Majma’ al-Malik Fahd li Tiba’ah al-Mushaf Asy-Syarif, 1873), 187.

referring to power or authority)? Resolving such questions requires *ta'wīl* through reasoned effort and exegetical tools.

Additionally, some words carry multiple meanings (*ishtirāk al-lafẓī*), such as in the verse “Divorced women must wait for three *qurū*” [Q. 2:228]. Classical exegetes debated whether refers to the menstrual period (*ḥayḍ*) or the period of purity (*ṭuhr*). Similarly, ambiguity arises in phrases like “the seven oft-repeated” [Q. 15:87], which some interpret as referring to the seven long surahs (*sab‘ al-ṭiwāl*), while others understand it to mean al-Fātiḥah. Such divergent interpretations necessitate independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) when no definitive textual evidence (*naṣṣ*) is available.

Al-Zarkashī further explains that in the absence of authoritative transmission (*naql*), linguistic analysis becomes essential. This analysis includes examining words with multiple interpretations or understanding terms whose usage differs from contemporary norms. For example, the word in Qur’ān 20:18— “It is my staff”—literally means a stick or staff, but it can also signify strength, leadership, or support, depending on the context. In such cases, the interpreter must assess usage based on pre-Islamic poetry, lexicographical sources, and the broader Qur’ānic discourse.

To avoid errors in such efforts, interpreters must not rely solely on their own understanding. Instead, they should draw upon four core disciplines: (1) *naql*—the transmitted sources; (2) *‘aql*—sound reasoning; (3) the Arabic language and its grammatical structures; and (4) *al-uṣūl al-dīniyyah*—the foundational principles of Islamic theology and jurisprudence. Only those who are well-grounded in these areas may engage in interpretive *ijtihād* responsibly.

Al-Zarkashī’s classification provides a clear methodological distinction in Qur’ānic interpretation: those based on transmission (*tafsīr*) and those that require reasoned analysis (*ta'wīl*). The former relies on the authority of the Prophet, the *ṣaḥābah*, and the *tābi‘ūn*, while the latter allows qualified scholars to continue uncovering meanings within the divine text through principled *ijtihād*.

The Synthesis of al-Zarkashī’s Knowledge in the Mechanism of Qur’ānic Interpretation

The interconnectedness of al-Zarkashī’s knowledge, particularly regarding the mechanisms of Qur’ānic interpretation as articulated in *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, stems from the breadth and depth of his scholarly construction. According to Gadamer, pre-understanding always plays a central role in the act of understanding, shaped by the traditions and presuppositions embedded in the era in which one lives.⁵⁷ Al-Zarkashī’s intellectual context—emerging in the post-Mongol resurgence of Islamic civilization after the fall of Baghdad in 1258 CE—granted him

⁵⁷ Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika Dan Pengembangan Ulum Al-Qur’an* (Yogyakarta: Pesantren Nawasesa Press, 2017), 80.

extensive access to a rich array of sources. In his reconstruction of Qur'ānic interpretive methodology, al-Zarkashī frequently references seminal works such as *al-Mufradāt* by al-Rāghib al-Asfahānī, *Syu'ab al-Īmān* by al-Bayhaqī, *al-Kāmil fī Du'afā' ar-Rijāl* by al-Ḥāfiẓ Abū Muḥammad ibn 'Adiyy, *Fatāwā Ibn Ṣalāḥ*, and many others. These texts inform and support the arguments he constructs in *al-Burhān*.

Al-Zarkashī developed his interpretive framework through an in-depth engagement with the views of Qur'ānic exegetes and the broader discipline of Qur'ānic sciences—particularly in the section titled *Ma'rifat Tafsīrihi wa Ta'wīlihi* (Knowing the *Tafsīr* and *Ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān). He underscores the distinction between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*, although some scholars consider them synonymous. Broadly, *tafsīr* refers to the activity of understanding Qur'ānic verses by elucidating their apparent meaning, based on linguistic analysis and transmitted reports from the Prophet (SAW), the *ṣaḥābah*, and the *tābi'ūn*—without delving into abstract or complex dimensions. In contrast, *ta'wīl* involves analytical reasoning (*ra'y*) in interpreting verses.⁵⁸ Al-Zarkashī cites al-Bājī's clear distinction between the two: *tafsīr* is rooted in *riwāyah* (transmission), while *ta'wīl* is based on *dirāyah* (intellectual reasoning).⁵⁹ Accordingly, meanings transmitted from earlier scholars fall under *tafsīr*, whereas unexplained verses require an interpretive process known as *ta'wīl*.

Al-Zarkashī's mechanism of interpretation reflects two dominant tendencies deeply internalized within him: his pre-understanding, grounded in profound mastery of *ḥadīth* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Although *al-Burhān* is regarded as his magnum opus, his scholarly expertise is most pronounced in these two domains. In *ḥadīth* studies, he studied under al-Adzrū'ī and Ibn Kathīr and authored numerous *ḥadīth* works, such as *al-Tadhkirah fī al-Aḥādīth al-Musytahirah*, later abridged by al-Suyūṭī into *al-Durar al-Muntathirah fī al-Aḥādīth al-Musytahirah*. In *uṣūl al-fiqh*, his authority is evident in works such as *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* and *Salās al-Ḍahab*. These two disciplines are heavily embedded in *al-Burhān*, shaping the epistemological horizon that undergirds his interpretive methodology.

Al-Zarkashī's expertise in *ḥadīth* is evident in how he employs prophetic traditions to argue for the legitimate use of *ra'y* in Qur'ānic interpretation. Gadamer asserts that understanding is not a mere representation of past meanings, but a fusion of the horizon of the text's author and that of the present reader. Grodin articulates this as the integration of what is understood, rather than a reconstruction of the past.⁶⁰ Al-Zarkashī problematizes *ḥadīths* often cited to prohibit *ra'y*, analyzing them individually and deriving conclusions from their respective narratives. These conclusions represent a revision of earlier pre-

⁵⁸ Al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, 2012, 2:92.

⁵⁹ Al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, 2006, 417.

⁶⁰ F. Budi Hardiman, *Seni Memahami Hermeneutik Dari Schleiermacher Sampai Deridda* (Yogyakarta: PT Kanisius, 2015), 163.

understandings, consistent with Gadamer's claim that preconceptions must remain open to critique—whether those of the reader or the text.⁶¹

Al-Zarkashī critiques and reinterprets two key *ḥadīths* narrated by al-Bayhaqī and al-Tirmidhī. The first states: “Whoever speaks about the Qur’ān without knowledge, his place is in Hell.” The second reads: “Whoever interprets the Qur’ān by his opinion, even if correct, has erred.” According to al-Zarkashī, these *ḥadīths* do not categorically prohibit the use of *ra’y* in interpretation. Instead, they caution against opinion devoid of scholarly grounding (*burhān*). In contrast, reasoned interpretation anchored in knowledge is permissible. Regarding the second *ḥadīth*, al-Zarkashī scrutinizes the expressions *bi al-ra’y* and *faqad akhta’a*. He argues that what is prohibited is *ra’y* lacking any evidence (*ar-ra’y alladhī yaghlibu min ghayr dalīl qāma ‘alayh*), while *ra’y* supported by evidence (*ar-ra’y alladhī yusniduhu burhān*) is allowed.⁶² He substantiates this interpretation with al-Bayhaqī’s view in *Syū‘ab al-Īmān*, which resonates with al-Zarkashī’s own epistemic horizon.

He also references a statement attributed to Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq: “What sky would shelter me and what earth would carry me if I were to interpret the Qur’ān with my opinion?” At first glance, this appears to condemn the use of *ra’y* in interpretation. However, when contextualized with other reports, it becomes clear that Abū Bakr was warning against interpretation lacking any prior knowledge. For example, in a narration recorded by Muṣ‘ab in *al-Muwatta’* of Imām Mālik,⁶³ Abū Bakr says: “What earth would carry me, and what sky would shelter me if I said something about Allah which I do not know?” Here, the wording used is *mā lā a lamu*, not *bi al-ra’y*. This suggests that Abū Bakr refrained from interpreting the Qur’ān in the absence of prior understanding. This point is further supported by a report in which Abū Bakr was asked about the term *kalālah* in the Qur’ān. He replied: “I will give my opinion. If I am right, it is from Allah, and if wrong, it is from myself and Satan. *Kalālah* refers to one who has neither children nor parents”.⁶⁴ Al-Zarkashī, drawing on his *ḥadīth* expertise, recognizes this report as a valid basis for allowing the use of *ra’y* in Qur’ānic interpretation.

Al-Zarkashī also problematizes the phrase *faqad akhta’a* (“he has erred”). He argues that this phrase emphasizes the necessity of deferring to experts. Linguistic analysis should be left to language specialists, while knowledge of *nāsikh-mansūkh* and *asbāb al-nuzūl* should be drawn from the Companions, who were eyewitnesses to the revelation. Their reports are grounded in the Prophet’s teachings. In other words, if a verse’s meaning has already been clarified by the Prophet or his Companions, that should suffice. If not, one should seek interpretations from

⁶¹ Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika Dan Pengembangan Ulum Al-Qur’an*, 80–81.

⁶² Al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi ‘Ulum al-Qur’an*, 2006, 424.

⁶³ Malik bin Anas, *Al-Muwatta’*, vol. 2 (Bairut: Muassah Ar-Risalah, 1991), 166.

⁶⁴ Maulud as-Sariri, *Syarh Nayl Al-Muna Fi Nazm al-Muwafaqat Li Asy-Syatibi*, vol. 4 (Bairut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Imiyah, 2015), 351.

qualified scholars in later generations. Ultimately, *faqad akhta'a* refers to interpretation unaccompanied by sufficient knowledge—whether linguistic, contextual, or otherwise (al-Zarkashī, 2006, p. 425). Al-Zarkashī contends that interpreting these two *ḥadīths* as outright prohibitions of *ra'y* would drastically limit Qur'ānic comprehension. If fewer people understand the Qur'ān, it undermines its role as a guide for humanity. To prevent this, he offers an alternative interpretation of these *ḥadīths*. Supporting his argument, he cites Abū al-Layth's view that the revelation of the Qur'ān constitutes a binding *ḥujjah* for humanity. If interpretation were forbidden, its authoritative force would be obscured.⁶⁵ According to Gadamer, such supporting citations reflect a basic understanding that reveals al-Zarkashī's alignment with positions that resonate with his own interpretive horizon.

Al-Zarkashī's mastery of *uṣūl al-fiqh* is equally prominent, as seen in his frequent use of its technical terms, such as *ijtihād* and *istinbāt*. A comparison of *al-Burhān* and his *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīt* reveals shared terminology, indicating that the latter served as a conceptual foundation for his interpretive methodology. Al-Zarkashī redefines *ra'y* in *'ulūm al-Qur'ān* through the dual lenses of *ijtihād* and *istinbāt*, borrowing these from *uṣūl al-fiqh*. In this field, *ijtihād* refers to two domains: (1) issues not definitively addressed by Qur'ānic or *ḥadīth* texts (*al-masā'il al-furū'iyyah az-ẓanniyyah*), and (2) legal questions arising from new realities not explicitly treated in foundational sources (*al-masā'il al-fiqhiyyah al-waqā'iyyah al-mu'āsirah*).⁶⁶ *Istinbāt*, meanwhile, denotes the derivation of legal rulings from revealed texts through *ijtihād*. These two aspects also apply in the field of Qur'ānic exegesis.

Al-Zarkashī argues that, from a hermeneutical standpoint, the Qur'ān consists of two categories: verses that have already been interpreted, and those that remain open to interpretation. The former is evident from the vast *tafsīr* corpus, which covers nearly all 114 surahs. He supports this by referring to the dual concept of *nuzūl* and *tanazzul*.⁶⁷ While *nuzūl* denotes the completed historical descent of the Qur'ān, *tanazzul* refers to its ongoing engagement with temporal realities. The Qur'ān must remain in dialogue with evolving contexts. According to al-Zarkashī, the only means of sustaining this dialogical process is through *ra'y*. Thus, his central thesis becomes clear: employing reason in interpreting the Qur'ān ensures its continued relevance. Reason, when grounded in scholarly rigor, is not blameworthy. In Gadamerian terms, this reflects *Vorsicht*—al-Zarkashī's pre-established conviction regarding the legitimacy of interpretive reasoning alongside transmitted reports. This also functions as his *Vorgriff*, linking *uṣūl al-fiqh* methodologies to his reading strategies and interpretive approach.

⁶⁵ Al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, 2006, 425.

⁶⁶ *Ushul Fiqh Metode Ijtihad Hukum Islam*, vol. 2 (Yogyakarta: Unimma Press, 2019), 19.

⁶⁷ Al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, 2006, 424.

Al-Zarkashī's command of Arabic language also constitutes an integral part of his *uṣūl al-fiqh* expertise. He elaborates on the linguistic dimensions of Qur'ānic interpretation in *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīt*, asserting that mastery of Arabic is a prerequisite for analyzing Qur'ānic verses. He outlines a methodological framework comprising two key processes: the analysis of individual words (*mufradāt*) and of sentence structures. The former includes three subcategories: semantic analysis (*lughah*), morphological derivation (*taṣrīf*), and etymology (*ishtiqqāq*). The latter involves both grammatical analysis (*i'rāb*) and rhetorical analysis—drawing on the sciences of *ma'ānī*, *bayān*, and *badī'*.

Al-Zarkashī and the Historical Context Shaping His Thought

Hans-Georg Gadamer posits that every interpreter inevitably exists within specific historical contexts that shape their understanding of the texts they analyze. He refers to this concept as “effective historical consciousness”.⁶⁸ In the case of al-Zarkashī, rather than directly interpreting the Qur'ān, his scholarly endeavor focused on reconstructing the mechanisms of Qur'ānic interpretation. This required a profound engagement with both the intellectual currents of his time and the body of literature that discussed interpretive methodologies. Such awareness of historical situatedness leads to what Jean Grondin terms the *genetivus subiectivus*—a form of self-consciousness shaped by one's participation in the intellectual ethos of a specific era.⁶⁹ Therefore, historical understanding entails not only grasping past phenomena through surviving works but also recognizing the ongoing influence of those works within the development of intellectual history.⁷⁰

Al-Zarkashī's intellectual journey traversed two major urban centers: Aleppo and Damascus. His initial destination was Aleppo, where he studied under Shihāb al-Dīn al-Adhrū'ī, a prominent *ḥadīth* scholar. He later continued his studies in Damascus, becoming a student of Ibn Kathīr. This encounter with Ibn Kathīr is particularly significant, given Ibn Kathīr's influential role in the 8th century AH as a leading proponent of Ibn Taymiyyah's interpretive theory. Walid Saleh argues that this theory significantly altered the trajectory of the Sunni *tafsīr* tradition. During the 8th century AH, two major exegetical paradigms coexisted: the transmissive-static model, championed by Ibn Kathīr, and the philological-dialectical model, which was dominant in the works of al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī. To assess al-Zarkashī's position within this exegetical spectrum, it is essential to examine his intellectual milieu and scholarly influences.

During al-Zarkashī's lifetime, Qur'ānic exegesis was predominantly characterized by philological-dialectical approaches rather than the transmissive-static model. This observation aligns with Saleh's assertion regarding the

⁶⁸ Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika Dan Pengembangan Ulum Al-Qur'an*, 79.

⁶⁹ Hardiman, *Seni Memahami Hermeneutik Dari Schleiermacher Sampai Deridida*, 178.

⁷⁰ Hardiman, 176.

genealogical nature of medieval *tafsīr*, wherein exegetical works emerge through dialectical engagement with inherited textual traditions rather than in a historical vacuum.⁷¹ The term “philology” in this context encompasses Arabic grammar, Qur’ānic recitations (*qirā’āt*), lexicography, and rhetoric.⁷² The *tafsīr* literature of the period typically integrated insights from these disciplines to develop coherent interpretations of Qur’ānic verses. Notable works from the 8th century AH include *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* by Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, *al-Tashīl li ‘Ulūm al-Tafsīr* by Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī, *Lubāb al-Ta’wīl fī Ma’ānī al-Tanzīl* by al-Khāzin, and *Madārik al-Tanzīl wa Ḥaqā’iq al-Ta’wīl* by Maḥmūd al-Nasafī. This exegetical tradition can also be traced back to earlier works such as *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Jāmi‘ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān* by al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr Ibn ‘Arabī* (also known as *Raḥmat min al-Raḥmān*), and *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta’wīl* by al-Bayḍāwī.

Such philological approaches faced significant criticism from Ibn Taymiyyah, particularly concerning the methods employed by al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī. In Ibn Taymiyyah’s perspective, the appropriate method was that of *ma’thūr*, which can be referred to as the transmissive-static model. Walid Saleh characterizes Ibn Taymiyyah’s approach in his *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* as a “radical hermeneutic”.⁷³ This method prioritizes interpreting the Qur’ān through the Qur’ān itself (*tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi al-Qur’ān*), followed by the statements of the Prophet, and then those of the Companions and the successors (*tābi‘īn*). It is often cited as the ideal approach. However, despite its theoretical appeal, this model was not widely adopted by exegetes in the 8th century AH. In fact, Ibn Kathīr’s *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm* stands out as the only comprehensive example of its kind. This suggests that Ibn Taymiyyah’s exegetical influence remained limited within the broader Sunni *tafsīr* traditions of the period.

The 8th century AH was a significant period during which al-Zarkashī studied, taught, and produced numerous scholarly works. His contributions to *ḥadīth* studies and *uṣūl al-fiqh* are widely recognized. However, one of his works appears to diverge from his primary areas of expertise: *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*. The term is used here because, unlike many exegetes, he did not author a comprehensive *tafsīr* to apply the theoretical insights presented in *al-Burhān*. Although al-Suyūṭī mentions that al-Zarkashī composed a *tafsīr*, it has not survived. This loss may be attributed either to the complete disappearance of the manuscript or to the existence of a copy that remains unedited due to various challenges. Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī notes, for instance, that al-Zarkashī’s handwriting was notoriously difficult to read.⁷⁴ A parallel

⁷¹ Qadafy, “Menghidupkan Yang Mati Suri,” 429.

⁷² Qadafy, 438.

⁷³ Saleh, “Ibn Taymiyya and the Rise of Radical Hermeneutics: An Analysis of an Introduction to the Foundations of Qur’ānic Exegesis,” 125.

⁷⁴ Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Al-Durar al-Kamīnah Fi al-‘Aḥyān al-Mi’ah al-Saminah*, vol. 3 (Bairut: Dar al-Jail, 1993), 397.

case can be found in Ibn Taymiyyah, who similarly wrote a work on *tafsīr* methodology but did not produce a *tafsīr*, specifically *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*.

Al-Zarkashī's intellectual lineage connects him to Ibn Taymiyyah through his direct studies under Ibn Kathīr in Damascus. Ibn Kathīr, a prominent scholar of his time, authored significant works such as *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* and *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*. According to Saleh, the latter exemplifies Ibn Taymiyyah's exegetical theory.⁷⁵ As a scholar, al-Zarkashī would undoubtedly have engaged with both this *tafsīr* and the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah. However, *al-Burhān* does not reference either of them. This omission may be attributed to the profound influence of his training in *uṣūl al-fiqh*, which seems to have shaped his interpretive perspective more significantly.

Al-Zarkashī's intensive study of *uṣūl al-fiqh* is particularly evident in his relationship with Jamāl al-Dīn al-Isnawī (d. 772 AH/1370 CE), a renowned jurist and legal theorist. Ibn Hajar confirms that al-Zarkashī completed his training under al-Isnawī.⁷⁶ Thus, his earliest and most foundational scholarly engagements were in *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Before studying with al-Adhrū'ī and Ibn Kathīr, al-Zarkashī had already been a student of Sirāj al-Dīn al-Bulqīnī (d. 805 AH/1402 CE), another authority in jurisprudence and legal theory. During the intervals between these studies, he also actively participated in scholarly circles covering various disciplines, including jurisprudence, *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, and Arabic literature.⁷⁷ Regarding his studies with Ibn Kathīr, historical accounts suggest that this was among his final scholarly engagements before returning to Egypt, where he spent the remainder of his life. This implies that he was already an accomplished scholar, particularly in *uṣūl al-fiqh*, by the time he studied under Ibn Kathīr.

Despite his connection to Ibn Kathīr, al-Zarkashī's scholarly orientation appears to align more closely with *ḥadīth* than with *tafsīr*. His travels and studies under Ibn Kathīr in Damascus did not significantly shape his approach to Qur'ānic interpretation. Historians provide limited details about his intellectual experiences in this context. However, one frequently cited anecdote, reported by Ibn Hajar, offers insight into his scholarly habits: al-Zarkashī was known to visit bookshops daily, reading entire volumes without purchasing them, and then returning home to transcribe and integrate the contents into his own works.⁷⁸ This story illustrates his voracious reading habits and extensive intellectual exposure. It is therefore unsurprising that his *al-Burhān* references work such as *al-Kashshāf*, which has long been a part of the Sunni exegetical canon. His reliance on *al-Kashshāf* was likely a strategic choice influenced by its scholarly reputation. Walid Saleh notes that three

⁷⁵ Saleh, "Ibn Taymiyya and the Rise of Radical Hermeneutics: An Analysis of an Introduction to the Foundations of Qur'ānic Exegesis," 125.

⁷⁶ Ibn Hajar al-'Asqallani, *Inba' al-Gumar Bi Anba' al-Gumar*, vol. 1 (Kaior: Dar Ihya' al-Turas al-Islami, 1998), 446.

⁷⁷ Al-Zarkasyi, *Salasil Az-Zahab*, 28.

⁷⁸ al-'Asqallani, *Al-Durar al-Kaminah Fi al-A'yan al-Mi'ah al-Saminah*, 3:397.

exegetes—al-Baydāwī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Rāzī—have dominated Sunni madrasa curricula since the 7th century AH.⁷⁹ This underscores the enduring impact of al-Zamakhsharī and suggests that his philological methodology also influenced al-Zarkashī. This influence not only shaped al-Zarkashī’s intellectual orientation toward philology but also fostered a deeply personal engagement with the history of *tafsīr*. His access to the exegetical tradition was facilitated not only through scholarly transmission (*sanad*) but also through his extensive and dedicated reading practices.

Al-Zarkashī’s Historical Consciousness in Qur’ānic Interpretation

Al-Zarkashī’s historical awareness forms the foundation of his hermeneutical engagement with texts related to the mechanisms of Qur’ānic interpretation. These experiences ultimately shaped his understanding of meaning and led to the development of a methodological framework, culminating in his seminal work, *Al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*. His profound pre-understanding of *uṣūl al-fiqh* enriched his analysis of *ḥadīth* sources pertinent to Qur’ānic exegesis. His assertion that the Qur’ān must continually engage in a dialectic with the realities of its time serves as the basis for legitimizing *ra’y* (reasoned opinion) as a tool for understanding the Qur’ān. Just as jurisprudence must address new legal issues that were not encountered during the time of revelation, so too must *tafsīr* interpret Qur’ānic verses in accordance with contemporary developments.

Traditions that some scholars have interpreted as prohibiting the use of *ra’y* in Qur’ānic exegesis were, in fact, employed by al-Zarkashī to advocate for its permissibility. He juxtaposed these traditions with other *ḥadīths* and analyzed them contextually, leading to alternative conclusions that he considered more accurate. These conclusions were arguably shaped by his affiliation with Shāfi‘ī legal reasoning. Imam al-Shāfi‘ī is renowned for synthesizing the textualist orientation of Mālikī thought with the more context-sensitive reasoning of Ḥanafī jurisprudence. This intellectual heritage subtly influenced al-Zarkashī’s own methodology, which aimed to reconcile textual fidelity with contextual understanding—a hermeneutical principle that likely emerged organically throughout his formative scholarly journey.

Another fundamental factor that shaped al-Zarkashī’s intellectual landscape was the prominent influence of philological-dialectical *tafsīr*, both during his era and in the preceding centuries. Figures such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī emerged as towering exegetes, whose works elicited both acclaim and critique. Despite these varied responses, al-Zarkashī frequently referenced al-Rāzī’s opinions in *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīt*, particularly in discussions that underscored the necessity of mastering the Arabic language. He firmly asserted that without a strong command of Arabic, one

⁷⁹ Saleh, “Preliminary Remarks on the Historiography of Tafsīr in Arabic,” 10.

could not fully comprehend the meanings of the Qur'ān, as its language of revelation was Arabic.⁸⁰ This stance further reinforced his advocacy for the use of *ra'y* in *tafsīr*.

These facts clearly illustrate al-Zarkashī's position within the historical trajectory of Sunni exegesis and further substantiate Walid Saleh's argument regarding the prevailing hermeneutical traditions of the medieval Sunni world. The philological-dialectical model was evidently more prominent during this period than the transmissive-static approach advocated by Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Kathīr. At the very least, al-Zarkashī's openness to *ra'y* in interpreting the Qur'ān significantly contributes to the study of medieval Sunni *tafsīr* history. Despite having studied under Ibn Kathīr through direct *sanad*, al-Zarkashī—guided by his historical awareness—chose to align himself with the dominant exegetical tradition of his era, which favored a philological and dialectical methodology.

Conclusion

This study examines the methodological framework of Qur'ānic interpretation as formulated by Imām Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī, as articulated in his seminal work, *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. Through a comprehensive analysis of his categorization of verses and interpretive mechanisms, the most significant and striking finding of this research is al-Zarkashī's explicit and systematic legitimization of *ra'y* (rational reasoning/*ijtihād*) as an essential tool for understanding the Qur'ān, particularly its unexplained or open-ended dimensions—despite the prevailing dominance of a transmission-based (*riwāyah*) discourse. He not only permitted its use but also developed a robust framework of *ijtihād* grounded in Arabic linguistics and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, even critically re-evaluating *ḥadīths* often cited to prohibit *ra'y* and offering compelling counterarguments. This indicates that, although he was connected through *sanad* to the *ma'thūrī* tradition via Ibn Kathīr, his profound historical consciousness and intellectual pre-understandings led him to adopt a considerably more progressive stance within the Sunni exegetical tradition.

The primary contribution of this study to the broader scholarly discourse lies in its revision and enhancement of our understanding of the intellectual dynamics within medieval Sunni *tafsīr*. It challenges the widely accepted view that the 8th century AH marked a consolidation of the *ma'thūrī* tradition following the influence of Ibn Taymiyyah. By examining al-Zarkashī's thought, this research demonstrates that the philological-dialectical approach—which allows for the use of *ra'y*—remained both dominant and relevant. Al-Zarkashī not only affirmed the foundational importance of *riwāyah* for verses that had already been interpreted by the Prophet, the Companions, and the Successors, but he also innovatively developed a *ta'wīl* methodology grounded in linguistic sciences (including *mufradāt*,

⁸⁰ Muhammad bin Bahadir az-Zarkasyi, *Al-Bahr al-Muhit Fi Ush al-Fiqh*, vol. 2 (Kuwait: Dar as-Safwah, 1992), 5.

taṣrīf, *ishtiqqāq*, *i' rāb*, *ma' ānī*, *bayān*, and *badī'*) and the principles of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. This underscores the notion that Qur'ānic interpretation is not static but responsive to the needs of the time (*tanazzul*), and that reasoned interpretation (*ra'y*) rooted in scholarly expertise is indispensable for the Qur'ān to remain a living guide for humanity. Al-Zarkashī's bold reinterpretation of *ḥadīths* prohibiting *ra'y*, along with his justification of *ijtihād* as a means of facilitating an ongoing dialectic between the Qur'ān and temporal reality, constitutes a significant expansion of the classical Islamic hermeneutical tradition.

Nonetheless, this study is constrained by the unavailability of al-Zarkashī's complete works, particularly his lost *tafsīr*, which could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the practical application of his theoretical framework. Consequently, while this research offers an in-depth examination of his theoretical positions, certain nuances regarding their practical implementation or alternative perspectives may remain unaddressed. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, the findings clearly demonstrate that al-Zarkashī successfully formulated a powerful synthesis between the tradition of *riwāyah* and the necessity of knowledge-based *ra'y*, positioning him as a pivotal figure who bridged the gap between conservatism and progressivism in the history of *tafsīr*.

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