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<td>Asad Q. Ahmed, Behnam Sadeghi and Michael Bonner (eds), <em>The Islamic Scholarly Tradition: Studies in History, Law, and Thought in Honor of Professor Michael Allan Cook</em>, Leiden: Brill, pp. 293–314.</td>
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<td>You can’t tell a book by its author: a study of Mu’tazilite theology in al-Zamakhsharī’s (d. 538/1144) <em>Kashfā</em></td>
<td><em>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</em>, 75:1, 47–86.</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>Suleiman A. Mourad</td>
<td>The Mu’tazila and their <em>tafsir</em> tradition: a comparative study of five exegetical glosses on Qur’ān 3.178</td>
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INTRODUCTION

Given the pre-eminence of the Qurʾān as the principal scriptural source of Islam, the scholarship associated with its formal and traditional interpretation, commonly referred to as the discipline of *tafsīr*, has unsurprisingly occupied a revered place among the medieval sciences of Islam. Commanding both authority and influence throughout its rich history, such was the vigour and sophistication with which the genre of *tafsīr* developed that by the end of the third/ninth century not only had voluminous commentaries and individualized texts appeared devoted to all aspects of the interpretation of the Qurʾān, but also treatises and tracts were composed which defined elaborate concepts and theories for the broaching of Qurʾānic exegesis. Historically, notwithstanding the fact that the practice of *tafsīr* originally occurred within a variety of applied contexts across a range of subjects, normative exegetical analyses of the Qurʾān soon crystallized in the late second/eighth century and these were delicately configured around the selective paraphrastic and periphrastic treatment of consecutive segments of the Qurʾānic text. The former focused on supplying straightforward lexical equivalents and basic commentary for selected items of the Qurʾān’s vocabulary, while the latter was constellated around a synthesis of discussions of selected Qurʾānic verses, adducing dicta sourced from a traditional hierarchy of exegetical authorities. Employing a discrete range of analytical devices, such treatments aimed at providing a dramatic gauging of the language, narrative, and exempla of the Qurʾān, underpinning its venerated status as the primary scriptural source of the faith.

Over successive centuries, the countenance of the literature of exegesis became impressively wide-ranging, offering discrete treatments of legal, theological, rhetorical, linguistic, narrative, mystical, philosophical, and even scientific topics. Additionally, encompassed under the umbrella of *tafsīr* scholarship was a variegated span of specialized treatises, ranging from texts devoted to the incidence of abrogation in the Qurʾān and occasions of revelation, to disquisitions on the subject of the Qurʾān’s inimitability, elements of which were meticulously subsumed within the more comprehensive exegetical treatments of the text. Despite the diversity of the historical periods, intellectual environments, and geographical regions in which exegetical commentaries and treatises were being produced, they all shared in a common heritage of erudition bequeathed by exegetes associated with the formative
years of Islam’s development. That such activity was taking place in the early tradition was an evident indication of the increasing distinctiveness with which the faith of Islam was defined in the first centuries of its appearance and a reflection of the intellectual maturity of the traditions of learning through which its teachings and doctrines were being preserved, refined, and promulgated. The odyssey undertaken by the formal discipline of tafsīr had been quite remarkable: from a rudimentary tradition of learning initially proffering exegetical musings for the purposes of clarification, edification, and instruction, to a discipline boasting an impressive repertoire of theoretical models and frameworks for appreciating not only the various dimensions of the meaning of the sacred word, but also engaging with aspects of their import within new contexts and circumstances, through inspired processes of discovery and retrieval. With its synergy of ideas and approaches, the science of tafsīr sealed its place among the classical traditions of Islamic thought, historically furnishing in the process a unique platform for the expression of faith, ideology, and doctrine, and one whose importance remains relevant to the present.

Given the significance of tafsīr as one of the classical Islamic sciences, modern academic scholarship has understandably devoted considerable attention to the discipline. The lives and works of the great Qur‘ān commentators have been the subject of detailed scrutiny and analysis; likewise, the historical evolution of the very methods and techniques devised and applied for the interpretation of the text has been carefully charted. Significantly, the literary endeavours of the Qur‘ān commentators serve as a valuable repository of ideas and attitudes spanning crucial historical periods of the Islamic tradition; and, within the framework of the debate over Islamic origins and the authenticity of the early Islamic sources, the literature of early tafsīr together with the issue of its historical provenance has been hugely influential in shaping the various arguments and discussions. Within the discourses of religious reform and modernity, the wider implications of approaches to issues of scriptural interpretation predominate, adding to the significance of the genre of tafsīr both in the context of history, given the role it played in the elucidation of and contextualisation of the scripture sources of Islam, and in terms of modern developments and the quest to articulate novel ways of reading and engaging with these sources. Popular interest in the materials of tafsīr confirms the importance the sacred text and its interpretation presently command. In the Islamic world for centuries the transmission of knowledge was achieved through a traditional lecture system, using oral and written media coordinated through an intricate schema of licences and permissions which governed the reproduction of manuscripts and the dissemination of teachings, with many of the published texts and treatises now in our possession passing through this traditional lecture system. Interestingly, technological advances of the past few decades have created a revolution with regards to the very access to and the availability of the vast corpus of classical and modern Islamic and Arabic literature. The
digitisation of key *tafsīr* collections has meant that manuscripts and texts which were once the exclusive preserve of specialist libraries and collections can now be freely and easily accessed through a range of modern media, providing researchers with a wealth of sources, while also affording the materials a wider audience. The profusion of websites devoted to *tafsīr* from which whole commentaries and treatises can be readily obtained, some of which are original manuscripts, is remarkable. Even individual pages and sections of texts can be accessed and cross-referenced at the touch of a button, a far cry from the age when academic engagement with these materials was pursued solely through the use of manuscripts. Moreover, over the centuries the sheer volume of texts and commentaries devoted to the subject, many of which remain in manuscript form, underlines the fact that the academic exploration of Qurʾānic exegesis is at a critical stage.

**Traditional sources and the history of *tafsīr***

In its conventional formation scholarship germane to the interpretation of the Qurʾān, like many of the religious sciences associated with early and medieval Islamic thought, was about engaging with the perceived legacy of the Prophetic era, giving appropriate form and definition to intertwined aspects of its expression. Notwithstanding the classical sources’ presumption of an ancient distinction between the discipline of *tafsīr* and other areas of learning such as law, *ḥadīth*, theology, history, and biography, medieval accounts of the development of *tafsīr* attached acute importance to the influential role that the exegetical legacy of the Prophet and his Companions played in the evolution of the discipline of exegesis. The traditional view was that explanations of the sacred text by the Prophet, his Companions, and their Successors were part of a living tradition which had been subsequently codified and preserved for posterity through conventional frameworks for the dissemination of knowledge. And, in the same way that precedent and hierarchical authority were used to determine theoretically the tenor of the normative teachings of law, ritual, and theology, the reference to traditional dicta was to play a key role in synthesising approaches to the explication of the text; and within this framework, the chains of transmission (*ismāʿils*) with which dicta and works were supported served as arbiters of textual authenticity. Eventually, all forms of *tafsīr* were presented as being originally formulated around the simple explication of the Qurʾānic elements of language and narrative, using the available corpus of materials conventionally sourced from the Prophetic era and immediately beyond to inform the processes of explanation. The legacy of the Pious Ancestors in this respect was traditionally portrayed as being informed by a utilitarian approach to the Qurʾān in which the contents of the text were provided with apposite resolution and context. Such treatments were seemingly rendered indispensable on the basis of the Islamic faith’s making no distinction between its relevance
to the realm of both the spiritual and the temporal: all aspects of human endeavour fell under its jurisdiction. The inference is that while these luminaries’ reflections on the moral and illustrative stories of the Qurʾān for the purposes of exhortation and instruction formed substantial elements of the discourse of tafsīr, they were also essentially combined with forms of exegesis which were predisposed towards the fleshing out of the legal, ritual, and theological teachings of the Qurʾān. Having been situated within the vector of scholarship which aimed at preserving and expounding upon the scriptural legacy of Islam, such ancient forms of tafsīr were furnished with the imprimatur of the Prophet: classical literature is replete with vignettes which extol those scholars who ‘have acquired knowledge of the Qurʾān and disseminate it’; the Qurʾān itself speaks of the Prophet being sent to divulge and expound upon its contents. Anecdotes attributed to the Pious Ancestors echoed similar sentiments, declaring that the finest persons in the eyes of God are those who are well-grounded in their understanding of the sacred text and that [the pursuit of] knowledge of the Qurʾān was the apogee of wisdom. Exegetes could also draw inspiration from the Prophetic tradition which refers to the Qurʾān’s comprising evident and veiled aspects to its meanings, a tradition which was regularly invoked by classical exegetes of all persuasions. 

The traditional view was that although the approach to the interpretation of scripture refined by ancient luminaries, including the Prophet and the Companions, yielded a much coveted blueprint which later scholarship, guided by deference to precedent, could emulate, there was also room for exegetes to develop their own syntheses of tafsīr, working within the boundaries and guidelines predicated by the existing legacy of scholarship. Still, despite this broad and idealistic characterisation of the original scope of tafsīr, which is redolent of an attempt to underline the historical depth and pedigree of tafsīr, in its subsequent manifestation, the formal interpretation of the Qurʾānic text was symbolized by its preoccupation with the explication of language, exempla, and interrelated narrative elements of the Qurʾān. Such areas became inextricable constituents of the classical discourse of tafsīr and were exponentially complemented with new aspects of investigation as the discipline developed. The exegetical attention which moral and illustrative stories of the Qurʾān received in the literature of tafsīr was a reflection of the fact that such materials originally formed imposing constituents of the Qurʾānic text, being employed for both edification and exhortation. The focus on exempla was to become one of the enduring and popular features of classical tafsīr; through them was presented an accessible medium for the presentation of beliefs and doctrine. Unquestionably, once fully developed as a discipline, such was the broad base and appeal of tafsīr that it accommodated traditional as well as rational approaches, enabling aesthetic, literary, theological, esoteric, sectarian, as well as philosophical treatments of the Qurʾān to emerge. Furthermore, the applied legal and ritual aspects of Qurʾānic explication retained a pervasive presence in the classical literature
of *tafsīr*, even though following the formative years, there were already in existence formal disciplines of learning within which such aspects of scholarship could readily thrive. The traditional accounts of the emergence of the discipline of *tafsīr* are viewed as being somewhat impressionistic and irenic but despite the elusiveness of the precise historical character of the dynamic which delivered the backdrop for the genesis of normative *tafsīr* and its subsequent efflorescence, it is indisputable that the resultant discipline supplied a matrix for a panoply of approaches and syntheses which were informed by an imposing set of hermeneutical tools and premises, enabling the discipline to emerge as one of the distinguished traditions of classical Islamic scholarship.

In the traditional sources it is the Companion figure 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687–8), a cousin of the Prophet, who looms ever so large in accounts of the development of the interpretive tradition of the Qurʾān: he is auspiciously identified as the eponymous figurehead of exegesis in which language, exempla, ritual, law, and even eschatology provided focal points of attention. The celebrated biographical work *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā*, compiled by Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845), preserves a profusion of reports which accentuate Ibn ‘Abbās’ expository skills, intimating that his reputation as an exegete appears to have emerged at a relatively early juncture in the classical literature. Certainly, biographical sources explicitly acknowledge that the Prophet and leading Companion figures served as founts for materials and teachings on *tafsīr* and that their own authenticated exegetical deliberations were deemed indisputably authoritative, despite their being confined to a select number of Qurʾānic verses. However, it is Ibn ‘Abbās who is presented as the putative author of a substantial portion of exegetical dicta, although there do exist reports in which he is portrayed as humbly admitting to his being indebted to Companions such as ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Masʿūd (d. 32/652) for his knowledge of the interpretation of the Qurʾān. Significantly, preserved in the biographical literature is a report in which the Prophet had supplicated that Ibn ‘Abbās be ‘granted wisdom and an understanding of the Book’, while in a related dictum he is described by Ibn Masʿūd as being the veritable explicator of the Qurʾān (*turjumān al-Qurʾān*). Notably, even his ability to adduce poetry to resolve specific philological intricacies encountered in the language of the Qurʾān is typically acclaimed. It was Ibn ‘Abbās who is said to have declared that ‘*tafsīr* has four facets: a facet with which the Arabs are acquainted by virtue of their speech (habits); a facet which no one can be excused of not knowing; a facet which the paragons of knowledge are party to only; and, finally, a facet which is known to God alone: and the individual who claims to share this knowledge is a liar.’ Such statements were useful in regulating and formalizing approaches to *tafsīr* and were often ruminated over for context and bearing in the introductions to key commentaries. He is credited with the authorship of a number of works, although traditional sources as well as modern studies have cast serious doubts on their authenticity. While Ibn
‘Abbās’ precocious talent as an exegete and his expertise on legal and ritual matters are themes frequently accentuated in biographical dicta, of equal importance is the subtle adumbration of a scholarly connection between him and the emerging class of prospective proto-exegetes, including Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 104/722), Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr (d. 95/714), Tāwūs ibn Kaysān al-Yamānī (d. 106/724), ‘Ikrimah Mawlā ibn ‘Abbās (d. 105/723–24), and ‘Aṭā’ ibn Abī Rabāḥ (d. 114–15/732–33).21 Traditional sources uniformly distinguish elaborate hierarchical pedigrees for other cynosures of early tafsīr scholarship: thus the Companion Ubayy ibn Ka‘b (d. 20/641 or 22/643) is referred to as the progenitor of the Medinan tradition of exegesis which later inspired exegetes such as Abū ‘Alīyya al-Riyāḥī (d. 93/712), Muḥammad ibn Ka‘b al-Qurṣānī (d. 118/736), and Zayd ibn Aslam (d. 136/753); whereas, revered figures including ‘Alqama ibn Qays (d. 62/682), Masrūq ibn al-Ajda’ (d. 63/682), al-Aswad ibn Yazīd (d. 95/713), ‘Āmir al-Sha‘bī (d. 110/728), al-Hasan al-Hasān (d. 110/728), and Qatāda ibn Di‘āma al-Sudūsī (d. 118/736), whose exegetical glosses and musings are an inexorable feature of classical tafsīr literature, were cast as heirs to the scholarship of tafsīr bequeathed by the Companion Ibn Mas‘ūd.22 And later proto-exegetes such as al-Daḥḥāk ibn Muzāḥim (d. 102/720) and Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Sudū (d. 127/745), who are both recognized for the prominence of their learning in the field of tafsīr, are influentially linked with paragons of the early tafsīr tradition and, along with a number of the aforementioned luminaries, are credited with being the authors of exegetical treatises, although the generally accepted consensus is that the authorship of fixed works by scholars from this generation was non-existent and that their teachings as preserved in the form of dicta were collated by later disciples as was the case with the tafsīr attributed to Mujāhid.23

Despite this, succeeding generations of exeges such as Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid (d. 154/770), Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767), Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767), Muhammad ibn al-Sā‘ib al-Kalbī (d. 146/763), Sulaymān al-Thawrī (d. 161/787), and Yahyā ibn Sallām (124–200/741–815) are identified as being the authors of exegetical compilations which preserved materials attributed to earlier authorities. Collectively, all of these luminaries are traditionally viewed as positively contributing to the evolution of tafsīr scholarship and their exegetical deliberations and thoughts are frequently alluded to in medieval tafsīr literature.24 Yet, the content of classical exegetical literature shows that tafsīr was not simply a static endeavour which entailed recounting the views of the Pious Ancestors on selected features of Qur‘ānic language and exempla, despite their views being critical to providing a substratum upon which the discipline could build. But rather tafsīr’s strategic base had been purposefully extended to incorporate a pastiche of traditional as well as rationally inspired areas of inquiry. Significantly, added to the panoply of exegetical topics were discussions about technical differences between the terms used to connote the practice of explaining the text, tafsīr and ta’wīl;
the authoritative sources and bases of tafsīr; hermeneutic categories and strategies for the broaching of tafsīr; the legitimacy of tafsīr and the expression of opposition to its practice; the lexical provenance of specific items from the Qurʾān’s vocabulary; the textual transmission of the Qurʾān; and even topics such as the doctrine of the inimitability of the Qurʾān. The generative nature of tafsīr accounts for the lengthy discussions concerning the justification of its pursuit within established theoretical frameworks which featured in classical commentaries. The definition of the boundaries of tafsīr provided in the prolegomena to major tafsīr works offers a good indication of the overall focal points of the discipline and, despite differences in emphasis, it is also reveals an awareness among exegetes of the formal mechanisms and goals of the discipline, a discipline which was to leave its indelible print on the traditions of classical Islamic thought.

**Early tafsīr literature**

Bearing in mind the elaborate procedures of dissemination and transmission which dictated the appearance of the earliest exegetical treatises, with texts often being collated and compiled by the students of given scholars, it is Muqātīl ibn Sulaymān who has the distinction of being recognized as the author of one of the oldest surviving Qurʾānic commentaries. Although within the text, much of Muqātīl’s exegetical deliberations are presented through sinuous chains of transmission, some of which appear editorially glossed, the work is exceptionally portentous, both in terms of its enduring influence upon the forms of tafsīr in which the treatment of Qurʾānic narrative and exempla is prominent, despite the criticisms levelled at its author, and for its place within the general history of the development of tafsīr.25 Significantly, Muqātīl is also the author of a number of shorter exegetical treatises, although later literature credits him with the composition of an impressive array of works, including treatises on abrogation, variae lectiones (qirāʾāt), philology, and even a theological tract.26 Among his extant works, besides the larger Qurʾānic commentary, is a text entitled al-Wujūḥ waʾl-nazāʾir, which focuses on a thematic treatment of the homonymic and polysemic function of selected lexical items of the Qurʾānic vocabulary; and a closely related text which schematically analyses legal dimensions of Qurʾānic vocabulary, albeit emphasising the overall coherent unity of the text. The extant legacy of Muqātīl underlines not only his expertise, but it also bespeaks the impressive levels of scholarship achieved within early exegesis. A cursory review at the content of his commentary shows why this was so. The text begins by referring to thirty paragons of the early tradition from whom the contents of his work were purportedly derived and that twelve of these individuals belonged to the generation who were successors to the Companions.27 Establishing the credentials of the work, Muqātīl then sets about underpinning the importance of tafsīr and
indeed *tawil*, both of which were terms synonymously used to connote the practice of exegesis, highlighting statements to this effect on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās. He also presents an exegetical schema of the Qurān’s contents, which includes notions about the generality and specificity of Qurānic verses; explicit contra ambiguous verses (*muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*); grammatical suppletion and ellipsis; redundancy and completeness in the context of speech; abrogation; hyperbaton and hysteron proteron; homonymity and polysemy; intertextuality; parable; law and its categories, all of which underline the theoretical exactitude in approaches to exegesis which scholars were attempting to accomplish. The traditionist biographical sources are unremitting in their criticisms of Muqātil, especially with regards to his reliability and probity as a transmitter of *ḥadīth*; he is also rebuked for his crude anthropomorphism, although it is fascinating to note that his skills as an exegete were reported to have been acknowledged by notable luminaries. The distinguished jurist Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfī’ī (d. 204/820) is said to have remarked: ‘On matters pertaining to *tafsīr*, people are verily dependent upon Muqātil ibn Sulaymān’; others had spoken of his being the most knowledgeable in *tafsīr*. The ingenuity with which Muqātil presented his exegesis was not lost upon his peers; the ascetic figure ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181/797) is said to have commented, ‘What a *tafsīr*! If only it had (the requisite) chains of transmission (*isnāds*),’ while his namesake and contemporary, Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān, said of him ‘that his knowledge was profound.’

A contemporary of Muqātil, the Kufan scholar Muḥammad al-Kalbī, was also the author of a popular *tafsīr*, although his reliability and integrity as a scholar were repeatedly questioned by prominent *ḥadīth* biographers, adversely affecting attitudes towards his work and overall legacy. Still, despite such censure his exegetical opinions continued to permeate the literature of *tafsīr*; and he was also recognised as a formidable expert on history and genealogy. The medieval biographer of leading exegetes, Shams al-Dīn al-Dāwūdī (d. 945/1538), suggests that respected traditionists did cite exegetical dicta attributed to him in their works. Mention is made of his being the author of a popular *tafsīr* in addition to a work which listed tribes concerning whom specific verses of the Qurān were revealed; also placed among his literary works is a treatise on the types of abrogating and abrogated verses. It is notably highlighted that his legacy in the area of *tafsīr* is immense and that as a scholar of exegesis he is preferred to Muqātil due to the latter figure’s dubious theological views. Al-Kalbī featured as a narrator for one of Ibn ‘Abbās’ informants, Abū Ṣāliḥ ibn Bādhām al-Kūfī, and it was the connection between these two figures, in terms of *isnād* documentation, which was vehemently criticised by traditionist scholars due to the existence of a report in which al-Kalbī freely acknowledged that materials he had related on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ from Ibn ‘Abbās were counterfeit. The fact that exegetes of a traditionalist bent continued to cite him with notable frequency is an indication of his influence as an exegete, yet it
sometimes intimates the supererogatory nature of the contexts in which the tafsīr materials he provides are cited.

Among the early texts there did exist tafsīr compilations which were purely collections of exegetical dicta attributed to the Prophet, the Companions and key Successor figures, many of which were systematically arranged around the individual chapters of the Qur’ān by students of the original compilers. These collections are sometimes viewed as representing a strictly traditionist based approach to tafsīr in which the dicta are presented through appropriate chains of transmission in the same way that the collections of Prophetic traditions or legal works were collated and arranged. Certainly, in such works the level of periphrastic comments is minimal, with the compiler presenting exegetical glosses attributed to early authorities and later generations of exegetes.

The tafsīr compilations associated with ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī and Sufyān al-Thawrī are two such texts, although the issue of whether they were originally independent works or composite collections of diffuse exegetical dicta belatedly collated by students does need to be borne in mind; it is through later recensions that the materials attributed to earlier authors were preserved and promulgated. Sufyān al-Thawrī’s tafsīr was ostensibly transmitted by his student Abū Hudhayfa (d. 226/841), whom the biographical specialists identify as a reliable narrator cited by many of the renowned traditionists of the third/ninth century. The tafsīr covers forty-nine chapters of the Qur’ān adhering sequentially to its traditional order, and it includes a confined selection of reports for each of the selected chapters. The reports are mostly statements attributed to pioneering generations among the early exegetes, but there are occasions when Sufyān is actually proffering an explanation or citing specific Qur’ānic readings, many of which are attributed to the Companion ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ma’sūd. Regarding the citation of earlier exegetical authorities, Sufyān al-Thawrī is reported to have exclaimed: ‘beware of al-Kalb’, although it was pointed out to him, but you narrate materials from him to which he replied: ‘I can distinguish between his truth and lies.’ The tafsīr attributed to ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī (126–211/743–826) is a much more extensive work which essentially comprises exegetical dicta transmitted by his mentor Ma’mar ibn Rāshid through isnāds sourced from earlier luminaries, although many of the chains of transmission for the exegetical dicta do commence with individuals other than Ma’mar. The work was narrated on the authority of al-Ṣan‘ānī’s student Salama ibn Shabib al-Naysābūrī (d. 247/861) by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Salām al-Khushanī (d. 286/902). Set around the individual chapters of the Qur’ān, the level of personal comment originating from ‘Abd al-Razzāq is negligible, although the technical formulae used to signify the modes of transmission within the individual isnāds, chiefly in respect of the employment of terms such as ‘an, ahkbaranā, anba’anā, and qāla, which connotes modes of transmission between al-Ṣan‘ānī and his informants, predicate subtle variations within which
materials were collated and synthesised. Significantly, the text has appended to it a preface in which basic hermeneutical categories of the Qur’ān’s contents are presented. The length of some of the dicta included in the course of the text is striking, while the sheer range of narrative and exempla it comprises is substantial. The text remains a valuable source of materials, preserving a profuse number of statements linked with exegetes such as Mujāhid, ‘Ikrima, Qatāda, al-Ḥasan al-ṣārī, Ibn Jurayj, al-Kalbī, Sufyān al-Thawrī, and other figures whose exegetical statements feature alongside Prophetic dicta and Companion reports; it was a source from which later authors of tafsīr, particularly the work of al-Ṭabarī, drew extensively.

The commentary compiled by the Mālikī scholar ‘Abd Allāh ibn Wahb (125/743–812) characterises the variety of formats prevalent within early forms of exegesis. Again, the text, referred to as al-Jāmi’ī, was transmitted by later authorities, differing in its organization of materials when compared with the treatises of Sufyān and al-Ṣan‘ānī; it adopts a periphrastic method in which isnāds are used to introduce traditionally sourced dicta which in turn offer explanations of individual Qur’ānic verses. And a section of the original text is devoted to a discussion of a number of broad, but briefly surveyed themes, including traditions pertaining to matters of Qur’ānic exhortation; the merits of the Arabic diction in the context of its liturgical recitation; the phenomenon of variants (ḥurūf al-Qur’ān) and the textual transmission of the Qur’ān; abrogation; and even points of ritual such as the obligation of prostrating when reading designated verses from the Qur’ān. Exegetes identified with the early tafsīr tradition are cited in the text, making it a highly significant source, especially as the work was written in Egypt and therefore indicates the historical spread of the scholarship. This should come as no surprise as the earliest grammatical and philological treatises authored by influential linguists were already being promulgated in Egypt and North Africa (al-Maghrib). Perhaps even more influential is the voluminous tafsīr from this period composed by Yaḥyā ibn Sallām, whom the biographical sources link with early Iraqi exegetes, including the students of al-Ḥasan al-ṣārī. Indeed, these sources connect him with some twenty-five early luminaries; and, notably, Ibn Wahb is reported to have been one of his disciples in Egypt. The Andalusian Qur’ān specialist Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī (371–444/981–1053) said of Yaḥyā that he lived for a while in North Africa where he composed his tafsīr, a work he described as being unrivalled in the field. The tafsīrs of both Yaḥyā and indeed Ibn Wahb illustrate not only the alacrity with which the codification of the scholarship of tafsīr had proceeded in the late second/eighth century, but also the gradual emergence of basic hermeneutical categories which were being developed to interpret the text. Furthermore, contributions made to the development of the forms of exegesis by luminaries associated with North Africa, which was host to key centres of learning, are likewise notable. It is worth mentioning that Ibn Khayr al-Iṣḥābī (d. 575/1179), the author of the Fahrasa, a semi-bibliographical
source, provides an extensive list of early and classical exegetical works which were being circulated and taught in Andalusia, and with which he was acquainted. The materials which featured in such works reveal a continuum between the earliest forms of *tafsīr* scholarship and the compilations of the late third/ninth century: conceptual nuances and techniques of engagement with exegetical materials which featured in these texts were exponentially refined in the later literature. Yahyā ibn Sallām makes explicit mention of hermeneutical categories with which scholars of *tafsīr* had to be familiar, included among which are the distinction of Meccan and Medinan categories of verses, abrogation, grammar, hyperbaton, and suppletion, echoing the typology outlined by Muqātil and expounded upon in later exegetical works. Moreover, in the case of Yahyā’s commentary, in it the author is frequently appraising exegetical reports, and passing judgement on their relative importance. Yahyā’s work was well received in al-Andalus and was abridged by the scholar Ibn Abī Zamanīn (324–399/935–1008). Certainly, much has been made of the fact that the commentary written by the Ibādī exegete Hūd ibn Muḥakkam (Flor. fourth/tenth century), a work which was hugely significant, relied upon the work of Yahyā.

**Grammarians and the literature of *tafsīr***

The early grammarian contribution to the literature of *tafsīr* is immense and of far reaching significance: individual scholars produced pioneering treatments of the language of the text and played a pivotal role in formulating many of the paradigms and models which provided the linguistic foundations of analysis utilised in subsequent exegetical literature. Initially, aspects of the formal activity around which early linguistic thought was constellated appear to have been intricately intertwined with the efforts to preserve the very text of the Qurʾān and it was this preoccupation with the preservation of scripture that engendered an upsurge of linguistically focused activity, included among which were the documentation of Qurʾānic readings (*qirāʾāt* or *variae lectiones*); the cataloguing of variances among Qurʾānic codices; the classification of phonological and phonetic conventions germane to the recitation of the Qurʾān; the definition of rules for the addition of diacritics into codices; the provision of lexical paraphrase for the Qurʾān’s vocabulary; the collation of *loci probantes* sourced from poetry; and the documentation of dialects. The sudden and yet dramatic maturation of syntactical models for the explication of the language of the Qurʾān towards the end of the second/eighth century heralded a new phase in the development of exegesis with regards to its scope. Over successive years when composing their own works, authors of exegetical treatises were able to draw from the instruments of analysis devised by grammarians, who were to combine periphrastic treatments of the Qurʾānic narrative and grammatical analysis in their own works, ensuring a symbiotic relationship existed between the disciplines of grammar and exegesis.
One extant work in which the confluence of exegetical and grammatical enterprise appears both highly developed and complementary is the *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān* of Abū Zakariyyaʿ al-Farrāʾ (144–207/761–822), a figure typically recognized as one of the principal architects of an approach to language which later became synonymous with the Kufan tradition of linguistics. Structured around the grammatical analysis of large segments of the text, the *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān* navigates its way through selected verses from each chapter of the Qurʾān. Verses singled out for scrutiny are grammatically fleshed out and verified with reference to textual configuration, variants, dialects, lexical paraphrase, orthographical idiosyncrasies, and issues of transmission. Prominent in the body of analysis is the centrality which poetic citation plays in illustrating the linguistic integrity of usage and conventions, although al-Farrāʿ is at pains to point out that the Qurʾān is 'finer in terms of its linguistic qualities and a stronger proof for citation than poetry.' Infrequent allusions to occasions of revelation, abrogation, Prophetical dicta, and exegetical explanations attributed to earlier exeges do feature in the course of the work, although *Maʿānī* works were principally informed by the quest to justify and defend the linguistic constitution of canon. Al-Farrāʾ’s oeuvre underscores the depth of his Qurʾānic expertise and his refined appreciation of the scholarship associated with the text’s transmission: he composed works on orthographical variances among Qurʾānic codices; others devoted to philological treatments of the Qurʾān and even tracts which dealt with the conventions of Qurʾānic recitation and dialects. His own work was an important grammatical source cited by later exeges, although, intriguingly, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (164–241/780–855), the renowned traditionalist, is reported to have remarked that he used to hold al-Farrāʿ in great esteem until he read his *Maʿānī* text. The fact that parity with models of grammar became a gauge for the justification of the linguistic features of scripture did prove to be controversial and the tensions between traditional approaches to transmission and those which accentuated more rational considerations became an arresting feature of the classical discourses of exegesis and grammar, with arguments about the methods of authentication surfacing in the associated literature.

Further aspects of the contribution to exegesis by grammarians are displayed in the legacy of al-Farrāʾ’s peer and mentor al-Kisāʾī (120–189/738–804). He is frequently cited in al-Farrāʾ’s *Maʿānī* for his expertise on grammar, Qurʾānic readings, and lexical data sourced from Arab tribes and credited with the composition of an impressive array of works, including a work entitled *Mutashābihāt al-Qurʾān*, which lists homographic phenomena among Qurʾānic verses, and a *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*. Such was al-Kisāʾī’s expertise and standing in the textual transmission of the Qurʾān that his distinctive reading was later designated as being one of the seven canonical lectiones of the Qurʾān. Significantly, biographical accounts posit a connection between him and al-Akhfash al-Awsāṭ (d. 215/830), who played a
critical role in the transmission of the Kitāb of Sibawayhi (d. 177/793),
the first systematic and comprehensive study of Arabic grammar, and is the
author of a Ma‘ānī al-Qur‘ān text which biographical sources claim primarily
inspired the works of both al-Farrā’ and al-Kisā‘ī, although al-Akhfash’s
text, despite using a similar framework as al-Farrā’, focuses exclusively on
grammatical issues and topics, occasionally betraying the theological leanings
of its author.53 A further work which belongs to the same historical epoch
is the Majāz al-Qur‘ān composed by Abū ‘Ubayda Ma’mar ibn al-Muthannā
(d. 210/825), a scholar whose contribution to Arabic philology is phenomenal.54
He is the first figure to have coined the phrase majāz for the exemplification
of idiomatic features of the Arabic diction employed in the Qur‘ān, combin-
ing grammatical analysis along with the citation of poetry to illustrate usages
and linguistic conventions.55 In the preface to his work Abū ‘Ubayda makes
the case that the Companions of the Prophet were intuitively able to ap-
plicate the meaning of the language of the Qur‘ān, commenting that while
contemporary generations among the Arabs no longer possessed such skills
of perception, it was still possible to gauge the profundities of the Qur‘ān’s
language and style. He argued that this could be achieved by relating them
to the idiomatic features of Arabic as featured in the language and poetry
of the ancient Arabs which had been preserved for posterity; he speaks of a
symmetry which defined the language of the Qur‘ān and that of the ancient
Arabs; and his own work was about demonstrating and exploring this sym-
metry in the framework of the Qur‘ānic expression. Also featured in Abū
‘Ubayda’s introduction to the Majāz al-Qur‘ān is an ardent defence of the
Arabic character of the Qur‘ān in which it is argued that it comprises no
foreign words; he warns that whoever opines the contrary had spoken the
‘unspeakable.’56
Biographical sources were very hostile to Abū ‘Ubayda’s Majāz al-Qur‘ān:
it was the subject of frequent criticisms originating from Basran and Kufan
peers; furthermore, Abū ‘Ubayda himself was the target of vituperative scorn,
de spite his being subsequently recognized as a formidable Basran scholar,
although whether this was all part of a concerted effort to discredit him in
the later sources remains plausible.57 Among the related criticisms of Abū
‘Ubayda and his work raised in the sources is the contention that he had
resorted to speculative or unfettered reasoning, al-tafsīr bi’l-ra’y, when
explaining Qur‘ānic verses. It is his peer, al-Asma‘ī (122–213/740–828), who
appears in the later biographical sources as being particularly scathing of
his legacy.58 Although the emergence of the schools of grammar had yet to
materialize, it is telling that al-Farrā’ censures opinions offered by Abū
‘Ubayda in his Ma‘ānī.59 Abū ‘Ubayda did court the concept of linguistic
redundancy or pleonasm (ziyāda) as an instrument of grammatical resolution
which probably was a cause of great concern among his peers and successors.
Indeed, references to his reliance on the concept do provoke a number of
criticisms: the idea that embedded with the linguistic configuration of verses
of scripture were lexical elements which were otiose was deemed contentious; it would appear that even the application of the term *zā'ida*, when used to discuss the contents of the Qur’ān, was deemed theologically inappropriate.60 The biographer al-Dāwūdī refers to an anecdote in which it is mentioned that Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām (157–224/774–838) compiled an exegetical-grammatical treatise which fused the linguistic analyses of al-Farrā’ and Abū ‘Ubayda. It is reported that Ibn Sallām was apparently half-way through the text when he received a note from Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, expressing his dismay to learn that ‘you are compiling a work on *qirā’āt* in which you have established al-Farrā’ and Abū ‘Ubayda as authorities in the area of *ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān*: refrain from this.’ He supposedly stopped working on the text.61 The anecdote features in the biographical account of the Basran linguist, exegete, and juris-consult, Ismā‘īl ibn Iṣḥāq al-Jahmī (199–282/813–895), who is described as being the author of a work entitled *Kitāb ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān wa-i‘rābihi*, comprising twenty-five volumes which was based on the original text of Abū ‘Ubayd. Al-Jahmī’s *tafsīr* has not survived but a sizeable fragment of his text devoted to a legal treatment of the Qur’ān entitled *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān* has been published.62 Such biographical reports, if authenticated, do seem to suggest that aspects of the grammatical analysis of scripture were considered by some to be controversial, although in later years such methodologies and frameworks were to become standard instruments of analysis utilised within the scholarship of exegesis.

The range of grammatical discussions on Qur’ānic verses propounded upon by figures such as al-Kisā‘ī, al-Farrā’, al-Akhfash, Abū ‘Ubayda, and Sībawayhi was subjected to clarification, qualification, and synthesis by later generations of grammarians and philologists, including luminaries such as al-Mubarrad (210–285–6/815–898), Ibn al-Sarrāj (d. 316/928), Abū ‘Alī al-Fārisī (d. 377/987), Ibn Jinnī (d. 392/1002), al-Rummānī (d. 384/994), Tha‘lab (200–291/815–904), Ibn al-Anbārī (260–328/874–939), and their successors. Furthermore, the stock of linguistic materials accumulated in the works of all these scholars served as critical linguistic sources upon which later medieval exegetes often relied. It is also the case that over successive periods, the authorship of writings which adopted the underlying framework of *ma‘ānī*-type works, with their primary emphasis on resolving and defending the linguistic integrity and distinctiveness of the Qur’ānic diction, continued to be written, although, in instances, the apologetic dimensions of such works were often more pronounced: the *Ta‘wil mushkil al-Qur’ān* composed by Ibn Qutayba (213–276/829–889) uses traditional exegetical themes germane to the transmission of the text of the Qur’ān to defend its linguistic integrity.63 Notably, other writings such as the *Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān* commentary composed by the Basran grammarian al-Zajjāj (241–311/854–923) fused grammatical analysis with the extensive treatment of Qur’ānic narratives, discussing at length exempla, occasions of revelation, instances of abrogation, Prophetic dicta, and even key points of law and theology. Interestingly, al-Zajjāj seldom
identified the sources for his explanatory glosses on Qur’anic exempla, although it is evident that the materials upon which he relied emanated from many of the key exegetes linked with the development of the tafsīr tradition.⁶⁴ Abū Ja‘far al-Nahḥās (d. 338/950), an Egyptian trained linguist, had chosen to make grammatical issues vis-à-vis the corpus of variae lectiones the focus of his work entitled I‘rāb al-Qurʾān. One text which preserves many of the exegetical opinions associated with leading grammarians and philologists is al-Nukat fi‘l-Qurʾān composed by ‘Ali ibn Faḍḍāl al-Majāshi‘ī (d. 479/1086). The work was arranged around the chapters of the Qurʾān but adopted a novel format in which the author introduced a condensed summary of exegetical issues by posing subtle questions which he then proceeded to answer through exegetical glosses; in parts of the text the procedure is reminiscent of a Socratic elenchus. Precociously steering its way through a conflation of exegetical and hermeneutical topics, the work underlines the levels of theoretical scrutiny and resourcefulness achieved within classical exegesis.⁶⁵ Moreover, somewhat related to the ma‘ānī genre of writings were compilations which collated and provided exclusive grammatical syntheses of the canonical and non-canonical readings of the Qurʾān, many of which were compiled by leading Basran and Kufan luminaries.⁶⁶ Appearing under the rubric of ḥujja or ihtijāj works, commentators frequently adduced citations from these collections when introducing or analysing textual features of Qurʾānic canon in their commentaries.⁶⁷

The contribution of philologists and grammarians made by both Basran and Kufan scholars to the genre of writings which appeared under the rubric gharīb al-Qurʾān is immense. In these works select lexemes from the Qurʾān, deemed worthy of attention for their abstruseness, obscurity, and significance were provided with straightforward lexical equivalents. Interestingly, it is Ibn ‘Abbās who is mentioned as the pioneering author of a gharīb al-Qurʾān tract, although classical sources and as modern scholarship have a lot to say about the way in which early authorities such as Ibn ‘Abbās were linked with the authorship of works and exegetical dicta through the processes of pseudepigraphy and ascription.⁶⁸ Other references in the biographical sources to activity in the sphere of gharīb works highlight the endeavour of Abān ibn Taghlib (d. 141/768), who is said to have incorporated a profusion of poetic loci probantes in a work devoted to gharīb al-Qurʾān; the use of poetry as a tool to elucidate Qurʾānic vocabulary marks an important development within early exegesis.⁶⁹ In the Fihrist of Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/990 or d. 393/1003), which provides an inventory of the literary works of the first four centuries of the Islamic tradition, it is stated that Abān was the author of a ma‘ānī al-Qurʾān text in addition to a work on Qurʾānic readings.⁷⁰ While none of his writings has survived, the biographical sources do associate him with a number of scholars whose influence upon the tradition appears much more substantial, although he is frequently cited in later works as a source for various exegetical data.⁷¹ Later figures who are credited with the authorship
of *gharib* works include Mu’arrij al-Sadūsī (d. c. 204/819) Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām and Abū ‘Ubayda.72 Their putative works are not extant, but a summary glimpse of the discussion of obscure lexemes in later exegetical literature reveals the genuine frequency with which such figures are cited as respected authorities on philology. Somewhat related to the *gharib* genre of writings were the tracts which appeared under the rubric *lughāt al-Qurān*. These isolated the origin of individual lexical items in the Qur’ān with reference to indigenous usage and even foreign vernaculars. The materials which featured in early works were not merely used as sources to be derivatively reproduced in later exegetical literature, but the genre of *gharib* flourished *sui generis* over successive centuries. Indeed, like the *ma‘ānī* works they continued to attract the attention of scholars, inspiring a profusion of influential works; included among which were the *Gharīb al-Qurān* text composed by Ibn Qutayba and the text attributed to ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Yazdī; later works include Ghulām Thalab’s *Yāqūtat al-sirāf fī tafsīr gharīb al-Qurān*; Makkī ibn Abī Tālib’s *Kitāb tafsīr al-mushkil min gharīb al-Qurān*; Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Tadhkira al-arīb fī tafsīr al-gharīb*, which the author claimed was unique in its field due to its extending the concept of ‘*gharīb*’ to the individual word (*lafz*) and its meaning (*ma‘nā*); al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī’s *Mufradāt*, which arranged the lexemes alphabetically, providing brief glosses; Abū Ḥayyān’s *Tuhfat al-arīb bi‘mā fī l-Qurān min al-gharīb*, and Ibn al-Mulāqqīn’s *Gharīb al-Qurān*.73 With its accent on brevity and accessibility, the genre of *gharīb* provided a conveniently elaborate medium for illuminating select lexical items of the Qur’ān; it was in these works that scholars could touch upon issues germane to both doctrine and dogma. The intellectual input of the grammarians and philologists formed a constituent part of the rubric of *tafsīr* scholarship and once combined with the review of ritual, law, and exempla, the bases from which exegesis of the Qur’ān could proceed were collectively consolidated.

**Defining the boundaries of *tafsīr***

The circumscription of the theoretical compass of *tafsīr* emerged as an epistemological preoccupation of the classical literature with the prolegomena of the larger texts preserving circumspect summaries of preceding discussions. As has been noted the basic hermeneutical structuring of approaches to *tafsīr* appears to have its provenance in the second/eighth century as intimated by the works of Muqātil, al-Ṣanā‘ī, and Yahyā ibn Sallām.74 The exegete al-Ṭha‘labī (d. 427/1035) spoke of twenty-four broad paths or themes forming the template for his treatment of the Qur’ān, many of which were subsumed under broader headings and given elaborate definition by later exegeses.75 The Mu’tazilite exegete, al-Ḥākim al-Jishumī (d. 494/1101–2), had commented that the sciences of the Qur’ān were copious, but went on to confine them within eight specific categories, which he listed under the
following headings: textual transmission; lexicon; syntax; literary arrangement; meaning; circumstance of revelation; proof and legal implication; and finally, exempla and narrative. The Andalusian jurist and exegete Ibn Juzayy (693–741/1294–1340), who defined *tafsīr* as the explication of the Qur’ān’s import and the clarification of its meaning, identified eleven classical sub-sciences (*funūn*) around which revolved the interpretation of the Qur’ān. Included among which were *qirātā* (the textual transmission of the Qur’ān and its *variae lectiones*), *ahkām* (the text’s legal directives and rulings), *naskh* (the identification of classes of abrogated and abrogating verses applied in the context of law), *ḥadīth* (an awareness of exegetical related dicta and materials germane to the historical background of verses), *qiṣṣā* (the discussion of exempla and narrative), *taṣawwuf* (mysticism and the esoteric dimensions of the text), *usūl al-dīn* (fundamentals of faith), *usūl al-fiqh* (principles of law and their bearing on the explication of the text), *lugha* (philology), *al-naqw* (grammar), and *bayān* (rhetoric). Notwithstanding Ibn Juzayy’s admission that a number of these *funūn* furnished practical tools which facilitated the process of explication, it was around the selective treatment of areas associated with these disciplines that he structured his commentary, emphasising the concision he brought to his approach. It is worthy of note that when referring to the fundamentals of faith (*usūl al-dīn*) and their relationship with *tafsīr*, Ibn Juzayy commented that they essentially turned on the affirmation of doctrine through reference to the Qur’ān, but he also mentioned that groups with vested interests would cite the Qur’ān to support their doctrinal affiliations and polemical views, a reality which underlines the very significance of *tafsīr* and its importance among the religious sciences. The content of early and medieval texts of *tafsīr* was characterised by their commensurate treatment of one or more of these aforementioned areas (*funūn*), with underlying perspectives and interests inexorably influencing the approach adopted by an author.

Traditionalist concerns about the content and focus of *tafsīr* are summarized in an introductory exegetical epistle composed by the Ḥanbalite scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). The epistle presents a synthesis of precepts which it argues should govern the pursuit of Qur’ānic exegesis, with its author remonstrating that *tafsīr* compositions frequently abound with falsehoods, irrelevances, and materials deemed worthless. Ibn Taymiyya represents a body of thought within traditionalist expressions of Islam which was opposed to forms of exegesis precariously considered to be of insipid relevance to the more functional aspects of faith and practice; such attitudes with regards to approaches materialise throughout the history of *tafsīr*, but in the figure of Ibn Taymiyya an assiduous voice could be found to counter what were perceived to be unrelenting extravagances in the pursuit of *tafsīr*. Drawing attention to the importance that authenticated sources should play in resolving differences on points of Qur’ānic interpretation, Ibn Taymiyya propounds the argument that all matters critical to faith and practice would
have been explained by the Prophet, or appropriate evidences would have existed. However, he does concede that the invitation to grapple with the profundities of the meaning of the Qur’ān is something of which the text itself approves, commenting that while a work written on the subject of medicine or mathematics would necessarily require clarification, a sacred text, which exists to offer salvation, guidance, and religious instruction, was \textit{a fortiori} in greater need of apodictic explanation and contextualization. And while deduction and inference were acceptable components of Qur’ānic commentary, in the same way that they are applied when exploring the legal aspects of Prophetic practice, the authenticated materials on exegesis which were sourced from the earliest generations of luminaries should serve as the primary sources of an orthodox approach to \textit{tafsīr}. In his summary it is intimated that the Companions rarely differed on matters of exegesis and that actual incidences of disagreements were never contradictory. Ibn Taymiyya refers to the futility of many of the differences which were voiced in popular Qur’ānic commentary such as speculation vis-à-vis the colour of the dog which features in the Qur’ānic account of the People of the Cave; the reference to the part of the cow with which the slain victim was struck; the physical dimensions of Noah’s ark and the kind of wood from which it was constructed; or indeed the name of the young boy who was killed by al-Khaḍīr in the Qur’ānic account of Moses and his page. In his view there was little gained from the pursuit of such frivolous details; he suggests that such preoccupations encouraged nothing but egregious abuses of the discipline of \textit{tafsīr}, commenting that had such detail been critical to matters of faith, then appropriate evidences surrounding their import would have been provided in the scriptural sources. Such disquiet regarding the direction taken by certain forms of \textit{tafsīr} has its roots within the formative tradition and remained a uniform element of arch-traditionalist concerns about \textit{tafsīr} discourses, although it represents an admission of the influence \textit{tafsīr} wielded; eventually, as we shall observe, even the more conservative forms of \textit{tafsīr} often included material deemed trivial. Moreover, the broader point developed in the course of the epistle, which also includes a section on the best methods for the pursuit of \textit{tafsīr}, is the desire to accentuate the authority of traditionalist frameworks for the pursuit of \textit{tafsīr}. Significantly, within early and classical forms of exegesis there materialised a decisive turn towards the adoption of a characteristically comprehensive approach to the text of the Qur’ān, leaving no facet of its contents and features unexplored or unexplained. Such approaches, which were frequently driven by the desire to make the interpretation of the text relevant to different contexts and circumstances, adopted a sundry blend of both traditional as well as rationally devised strategies and forms of analysis. Within these approaches, it was posited that while due deference should be granted to the established views articulated by the pious ancestors on exegetical matters, \textit{tafsīr} intuitively embodied a nuanced way of engaging with the contents of
the Qur'ān. The role of the exegete was not simply confined to the promulgation and preservation of the stock of exegetical dicta attributed to the earliest generations of luminaries, but rather it also encapsulated the act of interaction with the text, making the discourse of interpretation relevant to different milieux, audiences, and concerns. The dynamic provided by the construct of interaction, which exegetes could validate through reference to Prophetic dicta, yielded a framework that scholarship could work within to harness constructive and resourceful ways of interpreting the Qur'ān. Over the centuries, the vitality of this arrangement created the environment for a rich and broad body of tafsīr to flourish not only in the form of the steady appearance of individual Qur'ānic commentaries and works, but also treatises and tracts which focused on the fleshing out of a specific theme covered within the field of exegesis, allowing theological, legal, literary, mystical, and other discrete treatments to thrive. As previously noted the frameworks of textual analysis utilized within the tradition of tafsīr were brought in from the scholarship associated with subjects such as philology, syntax, morphology, the rhetorical sciences, and variae lectiones, many of which had their own distinguished history; furthermore, themes and topics such as abrogation and chronology; occasions of revelation; the virtues of the Qur'ān; and the doctrine of inimitability were all woven into the standard literary discourse of tafsīr, which was complemented by works which provided summaries and synthesises of the theoretical and methodological concepts applied in the interpretation of the Qur'ān. There is no question that the raw materials of this scholarship were provided by the corpus of individual exegetical dicta which scholars traced to the Prophetic era and the periods beyond, but tafsīr’s splendour lay in its ability to perpetuate the relevance of its discourse, using new areas and topics to expand its remit, while also retaining its traditional core.

Later literature and the legacy of tafsīr

The seminal commentary of Sunnī orthodoxy’s most revered exegete, Muhammad ibn Ja‘rīr al-Ṭabarī (224–310/839–922), Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta‘wīl ayy al-Qur‘ān, a voluminous work which grandly defined the benchmark for traditionalist tafsīr literature, confirms the overarching importance attached to precedent and hierarchical authority within traditional approaches to tafsīr. In the text Prophetic dicta and statements attributed to the Companions alongside those ascribed to pioneering generations of exegetes provide the foundation of his work. Yet also striking within al-Ṭabarī’s text is the author’s circumspect deliberations in which he painstakingly weighs up, contextualizes, and summarises the exegetical dicta, offering his own glosses, thoughts, and preferences. Its exordium sheds considerable light on the historical nature of the methodological preoccupations of classical exegesis and the historical trajectories through which many of its conceptual
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constructs had passed. Indeed, the author’s preliminary deliberations are overwhelmed by discussions germane to the prerequisites for the pursuit of tafsīr. Still, in the works of the earlier scholars such as al-Ṣan`ānī and Yahyā ibn Sallām, al-Tabarī was able to find valuable analogues for basing his own work. And the scholarship of the grammarians provided him with much material for reflection. The attention devoted to the treatment of philological, grammatical, legal and even theological topics is likewise significant as is the coverage of Qur’anic exempla, confirming the diversity of sources upon which he relied. Al-Ṭabarī delivers a cogent case for the use of knowledge of Arabic and the linguistic sciences when gauging scripture; his arguments are reminiscent of the views on the subject presented by Abū ‘Ubayda, confirming the lasting impact which linguistic discussions had upon the discourse of tafsīr. Explaining the importance of the doctrine of the Qur’ān’s inimitability, al-Ṭabarī refers to the irrefutable concord between the language of the Qur’ān and that of the Arabs, in the sense that its language was enshrined in a diction with which the Arabs to whom it was revealed would have been familiar; he reasons that this very fact predicated that a thorough appreciation of the rhetorical and stylistic traits of the Arabic language would yield pertinent analogues for appreciating and understanding the language of the Qur’ān. He even intimates that misunderstandings in the realm of tafsīr were the result of a defective knowledge of the language. Significantly, successive generations of later commentators paid tribute to the achievements of al-Ṭabarī, although it seems probable that his theological conservatism also contributed to the positive reception his work received over the centuries. He was to gain accolades from all quarters: the Egyptian jurist and exegete al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1496) declared that al-Ṭabarī’s work had collated the various strands of tafsīr scholarship and made them accessible. Ibn Taymiyya concluded that al-Ṭabarī’s work was the most sound of Qur’ānic commentaries, commenting that he had not only attached apposite importance to the statements of the pious ancestors, but he also omitted materials of a pejorative quality. Ibn Taymiyya even proffers the view that al-Ṭabarī did not transmit the views of individuals who were criticised by traditionalist scholars, such as Muqāṭil and al-Kalbī, and that he had relied upon authentic isnāds. Interestingly al-Kalbī does feature in his work and even traditionalist scholars were known to have queried the authenticity of certain dicta adduced in al-Ṭabarī’s work, although one suspects that Ibn Taymiyya was speaking in relative terms: namely, among the available tafsīr works, al-Ṭabarī’s commentary was a more reliable text.

While al-Ṭabarī’s work is seen as representing a landmark in the literature of tafsīr due to the significance of its scope, content, and influence, the fecund stream of exegetical works and treatises written both before and after the appearance of his commentary demonstrates the subtle diversity of approaches prevalent in tafsīr and the complexity of the ideological constructs
which informed them. Exegetical literature confirms not only the uniqueness of the forum afforded by the discipline of tafsīr, but also the individuality and creativity with which treatments were achieved as authors mindfully extolled the distinctiveness of their works. Al-Tha'labī uses the introduction to his Kashf wa‘l-bayān to refer to glaring inadequacies in the previous literature before asserting that his commentary of the Qur‘ān would be both comprehensive and consummate; his work had an enormous influence on later exegetical literature.92 His pupil, al-Wāhīdī (d. 468/1076), was the author of three very influential commentaries: al-Bāṣīf, al-Wāṣīf, and al-Waqīz, which were all written for different audiences and purposes. It was al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) who opened the introduction to his commentary, al-Nukat wa‘l-‘uyūn, by declaring that his goal was to explore the less apparent aspects of the Qur‘ān’s meaning, relying upon the preserved statements of the Pious Ancestors and those of the Successors. He also stresses that engaging with such aspects of the text could only be achieved by deference to precedent and individual application; so revered was the commentary that it was the subject of an abridged edition by al-‘Izz ibn ‘Abd al-Salam (d. 660/1261).

Writing in one of Asia’s oldest cities, Abū‘l-Layth al-Samarqandi (d. 373/983), in a work entitled Bahr al-‘ulūm, tied the notion of the Qur‘ān’s inimitability to the question of its interpretation, arguing that the very fact that the Qur‘ān was as a prophetic proof (ṣūjja) for Arabs and non-Arabs, predicated that scholars were obliged to explore its meaning and interpretation, although it was imperative that individuals had to be acquainted with the characteristics of its language and the circumstances which governed the revelation of verses; the crispness and lucidity with which he tackles individual verses are complemented by al-Samarqandi’s impressive marshalling of the sources and his perceptive awareness of the ensuing exegetical debates to which he alludes.93 Al-Samarqandi’s predecessor, Abū‘l-Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), the eponym of the Māturīdī school of theology and the author of the formidable commentary entitled Ta‘wilāt ahl al-Sunna, had made theological and dialectical discussions the focus of his exegetical work, intertwining them with legal, narrative, and traditional topoi. In the introduction to his work al-Māturīdī had spoken of the theoretical distinction between tafsīr and ta‘wil: in his view, the former was specific to rehearsing the authenticated statements of the Companions who were witnesses to revelation; he then explains that ta‘wil was about locating a concatenation of semantic and causal connections which distinguished Qur‘ānic verses. He remarked that on that basis, one had to be cautious when engaging in tafsīr for through it declarations were being made about the Almighty’s intent; on the other hand, ta‘wil was about situating speech within its natural vector without making claims about God’s intent.94 Accordingly, tafsīr operates on a single plane, whereas ta‘wil has many elevations.95 Later generations of Māturīdī theologians attached great importance to the Ta‘wilāt ahl al-Sunna and a commentary of the work was written by one of the students of Abū‘l-Mu‘īn
al-Nasafī (d. 508/1114), Muḥammad al-Samarqandī, who based it on the notes (taʾlīqāt) of his mentor. Interestingly, it is not insignificant that the focus on taʾwīl served as the raison d’être of esoteric tafsīr. Another important theologically inspired work from this period is the tafsīr of the Ashʿarite theologian Ibn Fūrak (348–406/941–1015), who imaginatively arranged his work around a presupposed dialectical format in which a series of brief questions is posited about the lexical items of each of the verses from a chapter under consideration, prompting him to offer shrewd explanatory responses which drew from a selection of linguistic and exegetical sources. The fact that scholars were electing to produce commentaries when there was a surfeit of material already available underlines the prestige which the discipline afforded and the influence it exercised. 

Among the hermeneutical categories which were devised by early exegetes for the classification of the Qurʾān’s contents was the division of its verses into muḥkamāt (perspicacious and self-evident) and mutashābihāt (ambiguous and indistinct) classes; the terms used for this division have their origin in a Qurʾānic pericope, Q. 3:7, which offers an adumbration of two categories of revelation. Later exegetes extrapolated the Qurʾānic understanding of these terms, developing conceptual paradigms which were used to theorise about interrelated approaches to issues of interpretation. Reports attributed to renowned authorities such as Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid, Qatāda, and al-Ḍaḥḥāk do reveal differences with regards to the import of the terms muḥkamāt and mutashābihāt, making it difficult to gauge how the understanding of these terms impacted upon attitudes towards interpretation. Al-Farrāʾ briefly explains that the muḥkamāt include verses which elucidate the lawful and the prohibited and are not subject to abrogation. He then identifies a specific set of verses in which they are exemplified before moving on to place in the category of mutashābihāt the ‘disjointed’ or ‘mysterious’ letters with which twenty-nine chapters of the Qurʾān begin. In his commentary al-Ṭabarānī offers a detailed discussion of the differences about the meaning of these terms, initially suggesting that verses which were muḥkamāt remained self-evident with regards to their meaning and detail insofar as from them proofs issued for legal, ethical, and moral teachings, which make up the bulk of the Qurʾān’s contents, while mutashābihāt verses were connected to an opposition of sorts between recitation and meaning. Al-Ṭabarānī observes that earlier exegetes differed over the technical compass of the two categories with some scholars speculating that muḥkamāt verses were those which retained practical relevance, namely materials with a legal nexus; the view is notably flagged that mutashābihāt verses fell into the class of abrogated or discarded materials. The opinion was also expressed that muḥkamāt verses of the Qurʾān were those which could be readily understood; whereas, mutashābih ones were open to interpretation. For some scholars the category of materials designated as being mutashābihāt applied to the Qurʾān’s subtle references to the signs of the impending judgement together with eschatological allusions and
even the ‘mysterious letters’ of the Qurʾān. On the surface, one might be able to identify lexically the content of *mutashābihāt* verses, but within them lay connotations and significations which were either obscured or simply unknown. It should be noted that the existence of a theoretical division of the Qurʾān’s verses into *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* categories in no way arrested the enthusiasm with which exegetes wrestled with every conceivable aspect of the Qurʾān’s meaning and language. Indeed, this very fact was not lost on Ibn Taymiyya, who lamented that philologists contradicted themselves for although they subscribed to the view that the Qurʾān comprised verses whose meanings were concealed or *mutashābihāt*, they continued to offer views as to their meaning. Incidentally, he was of the opinion that the notion of *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* verses in no way impinged upon scholars’ ability to fathom the meanings of the Qurʾān.

Despite commencing his summary of the different views of the concept of *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* with the statement that resolving their nature remained perplexing and intractable, al-Rāghib al-İsfahānī concludes his survey of existing views with a question which asks about the virtues of the existence of *mutashābihāt* verses in the Qurʾān. He posits that the quest to fathom the import of such verses exercised the mind and that individuals were rewarded for ingeniously dissipating their energies therein. Vagaries surrounding the semantic compass of these terms as reflected in the different definitions provided by early and classical exegetes imply that the categories were never deemed to be prescriptive in ways which curtailed the activities of exegetes. On the contrary, as argued by al-Rāghib, some exegetes spoke of the stimulative effect of this categorisation in that it spurred on scholars to take the act of interpretation beyond the pale of simply recounting the views of early scholarship on the meaning of verses. It is telling that in the opening section of his commentary al-İnbarī mentioned seeking God’s guidance in arriving at the correct views with regards to the Qurʾān’s *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* content. Also significant is the fact that differences regarding issues of designation were exploited to promulgate theological arguments and even used to provide justification for the pursuit of the forms of esoteric *tafsīr*. One renowned exegete remarked that theologians could purposefully cite verses of the Qurʾān which supported their ideologies and expediently place them into *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* categories. So for example, Muʿtazīlī scholars, who as rational theologians advocated the doctrine of man’s free will and the utter transcendence of God, insisting that he cannot be physically seen, would argue that the verse in the Qurʾān, Q. 75:23, which refers to the believers physically seeing their Lord on the Day of Judgement, was simply *mutashābihāt*; it did not predicate that God could be seen; conversely, the verse which pronounces that sight cannot perceive him but it is God who perceives sight, Q. 5:103, would be designated by them as being *muḥkam*; the opponents of such theological views would simply reverse the designation. Al-İnbarī speaks of there being
aspects of the Qurʾān’s meaning which no one can fathom and these relate to its allusions to ages past and future, including the impending judgement day; the blowing of the trumpet; and the descent of Jesus.\textsuperscript{105} The legacy of the muḥkamāt contra mutashābihāt construct is a lasting one to which the prolific vein of the literature of tafsīr bears testimony. Over the centuries, the appeal to this mechanism instilled in exegetes a further sense of purpose with which to engage with the text’s meaning, consigning to history the notion that tafsīr was a somewhat clichéd enterprise.

**Biographical criticism and the early exegetes**

Concerns about the reliability and authenticity of literary reports used interpretively in areas of exegesis, particularly with regards to Qurʾānic exempla, did surface frequently in the classical exegetical and traditionist literature. Furthermore, the probity of a number of renowned early exegetes was called into question as was evident in the case of figures such as Muqāṭṭīl and al-Kalbī: it is notable that the ḥadīth critic Ibn ʿĀdī (277–365/891–976) refers to criticisms aired concerning Ibn Jurayj’s credentials as a transmitter of ḥadīths; yet despite this he does insist that exegetical reports linked to him were accepted.\textsuperscript{106} Due to the fact that materials attributed to such individuals were used for the auxiliary purposes of exhortation and edification, it was conceded that subsidiary criteria could be invoked when citing them, although concerns about the veracity of material remained manifest.\textsuperscript{107} Parallels could be found in the arguments relative to the use of ḥadīths whose isnāds were classed as being defective or weak (ḍaʿīf). In its canons of authentication Muslim scholarship placed immense emphasis upon the scrutiny of the narrators who appeared in the chains of transmissions (isnāds); levels of authenticity turned on judgements germane to the reliability and honesty of the narrators and other sundry criteria, although subtle forms of text (matn) criticism were inherent in the processes of authentication. A tripartite division of traditions into saḥīḥ (authentic), hasan (sound), and ḍaʿīf (weak) categories existed. An authentic tradition had to have a continuous isnād which included individuals deemed trustworthy and reliable. It was further specified that the content of the tradition should not undermine traditions whose authenticity was already established beyond doubt and nor should it suffer from any subtle defect, which could relate to an aspect of its isnād or indeed some feature of the material contained within the report it supported. Generally speaking, traditions which did not fully meet the above criteria were classed as being hasan; dicta whose isnāds failed to meet any of the above conditions stipulated for saḥīḥ and hasan traditions were simply referred to as ḍaʿīf. Technically speaking only traditions which were either saḥīḥ or hasan could be adduced for the synthesis of law, ritual, and doctrine. However, scholars did engage in arguments as to whether those materials classed as being defective could be used for the purposes of exhortation and edification (faḍāʾil al-aʿmāl). Within
the context of *tafsīr* materials, similar considerations applied, allowing defective traditions to be cited for the purposes of edification, illumination, and reflection; hence it would be surmised that their bearing upon legal as well as theological discourses was deemed inconsequential, although, traditionist specialists did regularly raise concerns about the paths of transmission through which materials ascribed to earlier authorities had passed.\(^{108}\)

It is probably in the context of broader issues germane to authenticity and reliability that the *ḥadīth* specialist al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) drew attention to a report stating that the traditionalist scholar ʿAbd ibn Ḥanbal once remarked that ‘three books have no bases: *maghāzī*, *malāḥim*, and *tafsīr*.\(^{109}\) Offering an explanation for this statement, al-Khaṭīb protests that works in these fields were replete with unsubstantiated reports and a surfeit of dubious stories; he explains that questions remained about the reputation of the authors of these works, pronouncing that their transmitters were untrustworthy. He even singles out the treatises of both Muqātil and al-Kalbī, of whose *tafsīr* Ibn Ḥanbal is said to have remarked: ‘From the beginning to its end, it is a concoction’. Similarly, Sufyān al-Thawrī, who had widely trumpeted his own intimate knowledge of the Qurʾān, is reported to have voiced his disapproval of those scholars, such as al-Kalbī, whose interpretation of a chapter of the Qurʾān began with its opening verses and continued inclusively to its very last ones, although this practice was to be one of the characteristic features of so much of the tradition’s later literature and as noted previously Sufyān availed himself of al-Kalbī’s materials in his own *tafsīr* as did numerous exegetes.\(^{110}\)

There was also apprehension about the sheer magnitude of materials being expediently attributed to ancient authorities: the Ashʿārite traditionist al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) referred to a statement in which al-Shāfiʿī is said to have commented that around one hundred traditions on the subject of *tafsīr* only could be accurately attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās; yet, one notes that the exegetical views and statements identified with him in the later literature reached epic proportions.\(^{111}\) Other renowned exegetes are the subject of contradictory statements about the nature of their trustworthiness: al-Suddī is said to have been inveighed against by the *ḥadīth* scholar al-Shaʿbī, although one early biographical text refers to him as an expert on Qurʾānic commentary as well as being a transmitter; others were less complimentary about him and had little confidence in the *isnāds* used for his *tafsīr*.\(^{112}\) His son Muḥammad ibn Marwān was likewise the subject of stinging criticisms to the extent that the *isnāds* in which he featured alongside al-Kalbī and Abū Ṣāliḥ were described as being ‘chains of lies’. In spite of that, concerns about the extent of the reliability of some of the exegetical materials did not impinge upon their being regularly attested or alluded to in later exegetical works.\(^{113}\) The scale of criticisms levelled at Muqātil has already been noted, despite the fact that his talent as an exegete is openly acknowledged and that some of the traditions in which he featured as a transmitter were deemed reliable.\(^{114}\) It was
Ibn Taymiyya who declared that the crude doctrines of anthropomorphism which Muqātil was accused of promoting, as documented in al-Ash'arī’s doxography of sects, Māqālāt al-Islāmiyyūn, were possibly an exaggeration on the part of Mu'tazilite figures and potentially discriminatory sources upon which al-Ash'arī had relied in compiling his work. He even states that there can be no doubt regarding Muqātil’s erudition in tafsīr; still, one noted above that Ibn Taymiyya praised al-Ṭabārī on account of his eschewing the exegetical musings of al-Kalbī and Muqātil. Nonetheless, the criticisms of certain exegetes continued to surface in the biographical literature and even sometimes in the prefatory remarks in commentaries which alluded to criticisms levelled at certain scholars. The Shi‘ite commentator al-Ṭūsī speaks of the need to emulate exegetes whose methods were praised such as Ibn ‘Abbās, al-Hasan al-Baṣrī, Qatāda, and Mujāhid, while avoiding reliance upon those who were excoriated such as Abū Šāliḥ, al-Suddūdī, and al-Kalbī. Even the epithet ‘ḥāṭib layl’, which can figuratively connote acting in an inadvertently reckless or ill-prepared way, is used to describe the exegetical activities of the Basran luminary Qatāda. Related criticisms do exist for individuals such as al-Ḍahhāk, 'Ikrima, Mujāhid, and Yahya ibn Sallām. The discussions about reliability and probity form part of a wider dialectic about authority in the context of the hegemony of traditionalism. Although, it must be borne in mind that in these later periods the repertoire of topics covered in the field of exegesis was vast and the exegetical dicta and discussions from the early generation of scholars formed part of a larger exegetical edifice. Regarding the existence of opposition to tafsīr during and beyond the formative periods, advocates of tafsīr would always argue that opposite frameworks existed for its pursuit and that any hostility was principally directed to forms of exegesis which were deemed utterly speculative or gratuitous. Thus, while successive generations of early luminaries such as ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar (d. 74/692–3), Sa‘d ibn al-Musayyab (d. 94/712) and Shu‘ba Ibn al-Ḥajjāj (83–160/702–776) are said to have shunned and disapproved of tafsīr, such reticent attitudes were traditionally explained away by observations that they were ostensibly opposed to forms of exegesis which focused on the explication of exempla, narrative, and language without recourse to authenticated dicta or because such forms of exegesis were driven by attempts to exploit and subvert the meaning of scripture. Although, it was argued that such reports were seen as being deliberately designed to create the impression of opposition. Elsewhere it was recognized that there was never any suggestion that the Companions themselves provided a commentary of the Qur’ān in its entirety. Shu‘ba is presented as a stern critic of al-Suddūdī, although the latter figure’s exegetical glosses are a permanent feature of the classical literature. While it is reported that whenever Sa‘d ibn al-Musayyab was asked about the explanation of a verse of the Qur’ān, he is said to have retorted that ‘I say nothing about the Qur’ān’ and there are even reports which describe him as being the most learned when it came to legal matters,
but that whenever he was asked about the *tafsīr* of a verse, he held his silence, telling his enquirer to ask the person who alleges that nothing of [the Qurʾān] is concealed from him: namely, ‘Ikrima.’ The impression created by such narratives is that he was refraining from commenting upon aspects of exempla or parts of the Qurʾān which were deemed theological sensitive. During these formative years and over later periods, such opposition did not arrest the enthusiasm with which these areas were broached in the discourse of the early and classical literature of *tafsīr*, underlining the reality that attitudes to the issue of approaches and use of sources varied sharply.

Al-Ṭabarī preserves a statement in his introduction in which ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ʿUmar declares that he had lived at the time of the jurists of Medina such as Sālim ibn ʿAbd Allāh, al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad, Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab, and Nāfiʾ, and each of them viewed ‘*tafsīr*’ with utter consternation. Still, the inclusion of such reports by commentators in their introductory statements is telling for although scholars were acknowledging a divergent view, they were relegating its importance by adducing contradictory dicta which overwhelmingly endorsed the pursuit of *tafsīr*. Indeed, in some works dicta which counsel refrain in matters pertaining to *tafsīr* are simply alluded to or interpreted in ways which confine them to a specific context. Scholars argued that reports such as the dictum ascribed to the Prophet’s wife ‘Ā’ishah in which she had spoken of his abstaining from interpretation, but for a confine number of verses whose import had been inspired to him, had to be understood in the context of his refrain from indulging in the exegesis of topics which either belonged to the realm of the unknown or packed little practical or moral efficacy. Conversely, it was absurd to claim that the construct of opposition applied to forms of exegesis deemed obligatory for the enactment of law, ritual, and dogma, for in the identical vein that scholars spontaneously broached their discussions of jurisprudence and ritual through reference to Prophetic convention and practice, similarly regulated approaches to *tafsīr* with comparable aims were entirely justified; additionally, it was accepted that in the same way that scholars might fail to appreciate subtle aspects of Prophetic practice and convention (*Ṣunna*), it was equally possible that certain meanings of the text could escape their attention. Al-Ṭabarī makes it plain in his own commentary that the import of the legislative discourse of the Qurʾān would have been made manifest by the Prophet.

Also connected to the construct of opposition to *tafsīr* was the marked criticism of so-called *tafsīr bi’l-raʾy* (exploratory exegesis); its specification remained somewhat indistinct, although the attempt by classical commentators to disassociate themselves from the practice of *tafsīr bi’l-raʾy* and the trenchant defences of their endeavours betray aspects of the primary issues at stake. The implication is that following the formative periods, scholars of a sternly traditionalist bent remained vehemently opposed to exegetical endeavour which was deemed to foster a tentatively speculative approach to
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tafsīr, especially if it entailed weighing up or developing exegetical views and analyses without recourse to precedented authority; and this was also the case when such activity was viewed to be of subordinate relevance to faith and practice.124 The importance of this point is that the forms of tafsīr commonly practised in the burgeoning body of classical exegetical literature were based on making informed choices guided by a combination of precedent, circumspect analysis, and judgement; it could be argued that such endeavour belonged to the realm of tafsīr bi’l-ra’y.125 The allusion to the opprobrium engendered by such endeavours formed part of a traditionalist strategy to restrain some of the excesses associated with normative tafsīr.

The discussion of opposition to tafsīr and tafsīr bi’l-ra’y features prominently in Ibn Juzayy’s introductory summary. He speaks of divisions among scholars regarding the pursuit of Qur’ānic exegesis, pointing out there were scholars who freely engaged in interpreting the text and expounding upon its meanings and they represented a majority; while conversely there were those individuals who refrained from such endeavours on account of the Prophetic dicta which counselled that exegesis of the sacred word should be approached with absolute caution. To provide some context to the general discussions Ibn Juzayy turns his attention to two relevant dicta: the first of which is the aforementioned tradition linked with the Prophet’s wife ‘Ā’ishah, while the second tradition declares that ‘He who ventures opinions about the Qur’ān and is correct has actually erred’, a dictum which even traditionist specialists suggested was of dubious authority.126 Referring to the first tradition, Ibn Juzayy explains that it was uttered in the context of the Prophet’s abstaining from explaining the import of Qur’ānic verses which were classed as belonging to the realm of the unknown; commenting on the second tradition, he insists that scholars who approached the exegesis of the text through its established sciences and in deference to the statements of the Pious Ancestors could not possibly be accused of indulging in unfettered exegesis.127 Despite the somewhat idealistic tone which colours his account of attitudes towards exegesis, Ibn Juzayy’s deliberation over the issue of opposition and the perils of tafsīr bi’l-ra’y is presented not as an historical phenomenon safely consigned to the past, but rather one with which scholars were continually grappling. Significantly, the general thrust of the discussions about the legitimacy of tafsīr presented by Ibn Juzayy appears with formulaic regularity in the introductions to earlier and later exegetical texts. Such discussions also extend to the theoretical bases and goals of tafsīr and the prominent role that the corpus of exegetical dicta transmitted on the authority of the Pious Ancestors should play in its synthesis.

The locus classicus synonymous with the censure of tafsīr bi’l-ray is the Prophetic dictum which warns that ‘He who interprets the Qur’ān guided by opinion (ra’y) should stake his place in hell’; it was sometimes juxtaposed with a similar tradition condemning individuals who err by venturing opinions on the Qur’ān which by mere coincidence happen to be correct; unsurprisingly,
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numerous classical commentaries referred to these and other related traditions in introductory sections devoted to denouncing tafsīr bi‘l-ra‘y, although, as pointed out, doubts were raised about the authenticity of the supporting isnād documentation for this hadīth; still it was zealously adduced in classical commentaries by authors who maintained that their efforts were free of such reprehensible excesses. The traditionist al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), who cited both hadīths in his Jāmi‘ al-saḥīh collection at the beginning of a section of the work dealing with Qur’ānic exegesis, included a gloss while mentioning these traditions, asserting that a number of the Companions of the Prophet and other individuals were exceptionally strict when it came to permitting the interpretation of the Qur’ān without recourse to ‘ilm, by which he seems to imply knowledge based on precedent. He even declares that while scholars such as Mujāhid and Qatāda are said to have ‘interpreted (fassara) the Qur’ān’ one should not assume that ‘they said of the Qur’ān or interpreted it without knowledge, or proceeded on the basis of their own views.’ Commenting that there do exist reports which would confirm this fact, he adduces a statement in which the exegete Qatāda pronounces that ‘there is not a verse in the Qur’ān, save that I have heard something concerning it.’ Similar assertions are attributed to exegetes such as Mujāhid, who is reported to have declared that ‘I reviewed the mustaf with Ibn ‘Abbās, getting him to pause at every single one of its verses, whereupon I would enquire (of their meaning).’ The appeal to authority in the form of precedent is a topos which pervades the discourse of classical Islamic thought and, like all the traditional sciences, knowledge reliably and accurately transmitted on the authority of the Pious Ancestors theoretically commanded superior weight and influence.

The highlighting of such views created the impression that tafsīr bi‘l-ra‘y encapsulated forms of exegesis which were based on materials not exclusively sourced from the corpora of existing Prophetic dicta or reports emanating from the Companions and the earliest generations of Pious Ancestors. Be that as it may, a considerable portion of the exegetical glosses which appeared in the literature of tafsīr did not necessarily meet the criterion of having been based on an established statement or view, but was arrived at through reference to normative procedures. Offering his own apologia for the pursuit of tafsīr, al-Ṭabarī uses the reference to tafsīr bi‘l-ra‘y to confirm that it was intended to be condemnatory of the exegetical pursuit of aspects of meanings of the text for which no authenticated Prophetic statements existed or areas which belonged the realm of the ‘unfathomable’. Summing up, he even declares that his defence had invalidated the views of those who rebuke the exegesis practised by most commentators. He also dismisses the relevance of the tradition relating to ‘Ā’ishah’s claim that the Prophet refrained from tafsīr with the exception of select verses, inferring from it that the Prophet explained all requisite aspects of the legislative dimensions of the text. This point serves as a corollary to his contention that while it is undeniable that certain figures among the Companions refrained from the practice of tafsīr
and that it was also true that there were individuals who humbly desisted from proffering views on legal matters; their refrain was not indicative of an underlying denunciation of such activity: neither should their diffidence be construed as invalidating the practice of law or indeed tafsīr. Others such as Abū’l-Layth al-Samarqandī identified tafsīr bi’l-ra’y as being exegesis which is spontaneously pursued without one’s being acquainted with the aspects of the Qur’ān’s language and the circumstances of its revelation; and later classical exegetes reiterate similar points.  

Referring to the issue of the interpretation of the Qur’ān and the resort to tafsīr bi’l-ra’y, and intent upon probing the wider issues at stake, the Shāfi’ite scholar Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 555/1111) sheds considerable light on the assertion that tafsīr was a closed endeavour confined to recounting verbatim the exegetical statements dutifully transmitted on the authority of the Prophet, the Companions, and the Pious Ancestors. He eloquently propounds the view that both circumspect inference and independent analysis could be invoked when grappling with the text, arguing that meanings embedded within the Qur’ānic text are potentially infinite and even Prophetic traditions could be cited to support such a view. Al-Ghazālī lays store by the assertion that it would be absurd to claim that exegesis was restricted only to drawing from the pool of transmitted and authenticated statements attributed to the Prophet. He notes that the Companions held contradictory and irreconcilable views on exegetical topics, which would seem to be indicative of the relative latitude granted to exegetes. Al-Ghazālī then explains that this would be inconceivable if tafsīr were confined to samā’ (beliefs determined and accepted by revealed convention). Much of his analysis turns on the import of the Qur’ānic term istinbāt (uncovering meanings) employed in Q. 4:82, and he uses the tradition which speaks of Ibn ‘Abbās’ being granted wisdom in exegesis to infer by implication that its practice entailed processes of deduction and reasoning. In his view reprehensible tafsīr bi’l-ra’y was the corollary of either an insidiously deliberate distortion of scripture for personal and whimsical gain or an ignorant failure to take into account not only the primary value of authenticated dicta and their pertinence to the apparent meaning of the text when engaging in tafsīr, but also standard idiomatic features of the language of the Qur’ān. Using an analogy, al-Ghazālī insists that ‘anyone who claims to have knowledge of the secrets of the Qur’ān without first consolidating this with an understanding of its evident meanings is like a person who claims to have entered the central part of an abode without having passed through its door.’ Al-Ghazālī’s foray into the subject could be seen as a subtle prelude to defending the authority of esoteric treatments of the text, although he takes an unwaveringly stern view of those unqualified to practice in the field. The same topic is explored in the commentary of the Andalusian exegete al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272), who mirrors the case for tafsīr set out by al-Ghazālī, categorically dismissing the suggestion that tafsīr is somehow restricted to conveying an authoritatively
established closed corpus of Prophetic dicta (\textit{mawqūf ‘alā‘l-samā‘}) bequeathed by the first generations of scholars; like al-Ghazālī, al-Qurṭubī recognized that the Prophet’s request that Ibn ‘Abbās be granted the gift of interpretation provided incontrovertible proof of its legitimacy for in order to engage in \textit{tafsīr} one needed to be able to infer and deliberate.

It is the Andalusian scholar Abū Ḥaŷyān al-Gharnāṭī (d. 745/1344) who mentions in his commentary a conversation he had with one of his contemporaries who suggested to him that attempts to understand the meaning of the Qur’ān must be based on ‘\textit{naql}’ (authenticated statements) sourced from scholars such as Mujāhid, Ṭāwūs, ‘Ikrimah, and other notable figures. Abū Ḥaŷyān retorts that \textit{tafsīr} statements emanating from these luminaries are often intensely at odds and contradictory. He even dismisses the idea that the meaning of every Qur’ānic verse was transmitted from generation to generation back to the Companions, explaining that if such views were accepted, then the achievement of later exegetes in the field of \textit{tafsīr} was in effect not ‘\textit{tafsīr}’; such opinions are dismissed by him as being utterly vain.\textsuperscript{138} The fact that such views were pored over reveals the prolonged nature of the discussions and the entrenched nature of opposition to \textit{tafsīr} among certain scholars.\textsuperscript{139} The debates as presented in the later sources reflect an ongoing tussle with the strands of the earlier debates being appropriated and placed within the context of later discourses and developments. In the early periods the discussions may have been initiated in order to pass judgement on the efficacy of speculative attempts to explicate Qur’ānic exempla along with the text’s allusions to eschatological themes, but over successive periods the discourse was revisited in order to counter excesses and brought to bear on new lines of enquiry, including sectarian, mystical, theological, and even philosophical endeavours.

\textbf{The corpus of extra-Islamic materials}

Historically, attitudes among exegetes towards the interpretive use of the body of dicta referred to as the \textit{isrā’īlīyāt}, a pool of Jewish materials which also included Christian and late antique Near Eastern literary sources, do appear to have been neutral. Such materials were frequently adduced in the literature of \textit{tafsīr} to elucidate and contextualise relevant Qur’ānic exempla, parables, and allusive literary passages deemed common to the religious traditions.\textsuperscript{140} Exegetical treatises were replete with these forms of anecdotes with pioneering figures such as Ibn ‘Abbās, Mujāhid, ‘Ikrima, al-Suddī, Qatādā, Ibn Jurayj, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, al-Kalbī, and Muqāṭil all typically cited for having exegetically made use of such materials. Many of these reports are traditionally attributed to figures such as Ka‘b al-ʾAḥbār (d. 32/656) and Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 114/725), who are jointly recognised for their ‘knowledge of the scripture of the People of the Book’; despite the view that they frequently served as nominal pegs upon which unscrupulous narrators
could attach spurious reports. As previously discussed, with regards to ḥadīth based materials, theoretical frameworks were already in place for their scrutiny in the sense that it was expected that dicta used for the synthesis of law and dogma should belong to the corpus of reports classed as attaining specific degrees of authenticity. But legal theorists did acknowledge that traditions classified as being weak (daʿīf) could be cited for their salutary or paraenetic value, although the staunch rejection of the use of materials classed as being deliberately forged or planted (mawḍūʿ) remained unquestionable. It was the traditionalist Ibn Ḥanbal who reportedly spoke of applying a stringency with regards to scrutinizing isnāds used for the purposes of law (al-ḥalāl waʾl-ḥarām), admitting to his being prepared to be more flexible if such materials were used for supererogatory purposes (faḍīl al-aʿmāl). In the context of the corpora of isrāʾīlīyāt, which in certain instances fell outside the compass of ḥadīth literature insofar as they were often not ascribed to the Prophet or Companion figures, a greater measure of latitude prevailed with regards to their usage to the extent that the comparative indifference which marked their salutary use in early and classical forms of literature, including tafsīr, history, and geography, was systematically challenged only in the later periods. Later commentators were clearly of the view that these particular reports could be used for the purposes of reflection (iʿtibāʿ) and illumination (istiṣḥād). Indeed, even authors who questioned the reliability of the materials tended to avail themselves of these sources in their commentaries.

Still, the fact that the corpora of isrāʾīlīyāt were frequently used in the literature of tafsīr for the purposes of attestation stemmed from the very existence of Prophetic traditions which referred to their use. One tradition repeatedly adduced to sanction the practice of utilising such anecdotes for the purposes of reflection is the Prophetic dictum ‘recount the (stories) of the Children of Israel without reproach’ (ḥaddithū ‘an bānī Isrāʾil wa- lā haraj). A further tradition recounted that ‘the People of the Book used to read the Torah in Hebrew, explaining its contents in Arabic to the adherents of Islam, whereupon the Prophet pronounced “believe not the People of the Book nor deny them, but rather say we believe in what was revealed to us and what was revealed to you.”’ Interestingly, al-Bukhārī (194–256/810–870) included the tradition within a section of his ḥadīth collection which covers the permissibility of using translated materials from the commentaries of the Torah and other sacred books. Erstwhile precedents included the report that in the aftermath of the Yarmūk campaign the prominent Companion ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ (d. 44/664) came into possession of scriptures belonging to the People of the Book and that he used to quote from them. Nevertheless, there is a tendency to identify a marked opposition to the use of isrāʾīlīyāt in the works of both Ibn Taymiyya and his pupil Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), who argued that the unregulated resort to such materials had a baleful effect on the quality of the literature of tafsīr. The former scholar outlined strict contexts governing the citation of the corpora of isrāʾīlīyāt;
while the latter insisted in both his Qurʾānic commentary and his historical compendium that although there was a Prophetic tradition sanctioning the citation of these narratives, the fact that their authenticity was neither confirmed or denied in the traditional sources underlined the need to be mindful of the consequences of relying upon them. Ibn Kathīr contends that such dicta should be used for the purposes of reflection only, stressing that it would be inappropriate to utilise them in instances where authenticated traditions were available as he speaks of there being no usefulness derived from citing materials which had been rejected in the light of Islamic materials. Exegetes, littérateurs and historians, including figures such as Muqṭṭil, Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767), al-Ṣanʿānī, Isḥāq ibn Bishr (d. 206/821), and Ibn Qutayba had already made ample use of the Biblical materials attributed to individuals such as Wahb ibn Munabbih and Kaʿb al-ʿAḥbār; but again, the theoretical reality was that these materials did not impinge upon the synthesis of law or dogma, a reality which accounts for the neutrality adopted towards their continued use in later exegetical works and related literature.

The tendency among exegetes to make use of reports deemed questionable but then conclude any ensuing discussions with an emphatic repudiation of their authenticity is a technique employed even in commentaries recognised for favouring a seemingly orthodox approach. The Basran grammarian, al-Zajjāj, who aligned himself with the traditionalist Ḥanbalites, included in his commentary an account of the Prophet king David and the fate of Uriah the Hittite through reference to Q. 38:21–22, which discusses an encounter between David and two angels. Al-Zajjāj provides his reader with all the detail, quoting various extra-Qurʾānic narratives which exegetically supply the pericope with a context, including the reference to David’s inadvertently glimpsing Uriah’s wife and his decision to send him into battle. Yet having related all the intricate detail, al-Zajjāj exclaims that some exegetes highlighted a statement issued by the fourth caliph ʿAlī in which he warned that he would punish anyone insinuating that David had lusted after Bathsheba in a way which casts aspersions against his character. Having recounted the different anecdotes along with the caliph’s warning, al-Zajjāj points out that the fact that David had married the fallen Uriah’s wife was coincidental, exclaiming that the fourth caliph’s intervention corroborated such an explanation. It is worth noting that the same episode is treated with a copiously extended selection of dicta in al-Ṭabarī’s work. The discussion of controversial reports did allow exegetes to make wider theological points: al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), famed for his Qurʾānic commentary which scrutinised rhetorical dimensions of the Qurʾānic diction, highlights the warning issued by the caliph ʿAlī along with a further report in which the controversial telling of this episode is repudiated; he argues that the Qurʾānic depiction of the affair is deliberately allusive; in his view it was despicable to relate dubious reports especially when speaking of Prophets; all of these musings proceed in the
wake of his having detailed the controversial material. The assertion that such reports were false and reprehensible due to their violating the status of Prophethood is also taken up in Ibn al-Jawzī’s treatment of the narrative; yet even his tafsīr harbours a tendency to include dicta of dubious authenticity of which he would have been aware given the fact that hadīth criticism was his forte. And similar patterns can be discerned in later works: the Hanbalite jurist al-Rasʾanī (589–661/1193–1262), who was the author of a renowned commentary entitled Rumūz al-kunūz fī tafsīr al-kitāb al-ʿazīz, methodically recounted every conceivable aspect of the episode before eventually introducing reports which dismiss its veracity. The inclination to relate all the sundry detail of such episodes in the vein of reflection was instinctively characteristic of most exegetical literature. Such patterns of attestation disclose the paraenetic function of tafsīr and the skill with which authors were able to direct and interpret the narrative in ways conducive to the illustration of an underlying perspective or moral imperative. The continued employment of the corpora of isrāʾīliyāt by exegetes suggests that their use for the purposes of citation was inherited from the primitive tradition of exegesis to the extent that over subsequent centuries practices and conventions of citation were simply perpetuated by later exegetes; while, undoubtedly, the preoccupation with the popular explication of narratives in general reflected the prominence attached to exempla in the Qurʿān. That exegetes would seek to flesh out and embellish these literary elements was inevitable and the materials of the isrāʾīliyāt aided the processes of investigation.

More generally, the importance attached to the sub-genre of qiṣṣās is encapsulated by Ibn Juzayy who speaks of the recounting of the stories of ancient Prophets and other interrelated narratives as being one of the critical branches of knowledge embodied by the Qurʿān. He reached the conclusion that one aspect of the wisdom behind the accentuation of qiṣṣās in the Qurʿān is that moral and illustrative anecdotes provided a continuum for salvation history; and they had the capacity to console and imbibe, although he was aware that a number of exegetes had indulged in relating authentic and inauthentic materials about Prophets in ways which undermined the distinction of their status. Interestingly, Ibn Ḥībān (d. 354/965) the hadīth expert, did contend that Muqṭāil used to acquire materials relevant to the Qurʿān from Jewish and Christian sources and it is mentioned that he narrated stories in the main mosque; such reports were clearly meant to underline his unreliability. It is the class of storytellers (qussās) who are frequently held responsible for the proliferation of embellished reports, including isrāʾīliyāt material; yet criticisms of the storytellers have their roots in the early tradition and continued to be expressed in subsequent historical periods. Ibn Qutayba was particularly scathing of their role as propagators of falsehoods, although, interestingly, he did cite isrāʾīliyāt materials in a number of his works. Ibn al-Jawzī’s al-Qussās waʾl-mudhakkirīn, a work devoted to defining the merits, vices, and etiquette of storytelling for a contemporary
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audience, explains that stories regarding the ancient peoples were seldom authenticated, particularly those of the so-called isrā‘īliyyāt; he even remonstrates that the Islamic faith has a more than ample stock of its own literary materials. However, the inclination to cite materials was rarely tempered even among exegetes who advocated caution. Hence a figure such as al-Ṭabarī, who is renowned for his traditionalist approach to tafsīr, makes abundant use of isrā‘īliyyāt and, more significantly, hadīth reports which were classed by traditionist scholarship as being weak. Wahb and Ka‘b al-ʿAḥbār, feature prominently as the source of numerous reports throughout al-Ṭabarī’s text, although the tafsīrs of Muqāṭāt and ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī were already quoting extensively from such sources. It is evident that exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī cited such anecdotes and deliberated over them because they were perceptively working within accepted hermeneutical strictures devised within the discipline. One does need to bear in mind the salutary context in which the materials are adduced, although arch traditionalists continued to express objections to their utility.

A passionate defence of the role of qiṣaṣ and the use of isrā‘īliyyāt in the literature of tafsīr is provided by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, the nineteenth-century Damascene exegete in his commentary, Maḥāsin al-ta‘wil. In his view understanding the narrative elements of the Qurʾān (qiṣaṣ) formed a critical aspect of Qurʾānic exegesis: he explains that those elements in the text which are not related to isrā‘īliyyāt, namely, reports focusing on the life of the Prophet, had been fully clarified by traditionist scholars who determined the veracity of the materials they cited; on the other hand, knowledge about narrative elements of the Qurʾān which recounted Biblical elements were acquired by the Pious Ancestors from materials in wide circulation or from converts who were familiar with the original narratives. He concludes that it was unfair to criticise ancient exegetes for ingenuously utilizing these materials especially as the Prophetic tradition, which makes it plain that one could ‘recount the (stories) of the Children of Israel without reproach’, appeared to provide sanction for their dissemination, irrespective of their status. There is an admission by al-Qāsimī that among these materials were suspect and forged elements, although he explains that later scholarship was alert to this concern, but in his view this should not militate against their being used for the purposes of reflection and contemplation. Indeed, he even illustrates his point by referring to Ibn Ḥanbal’s supposed flexibility on the status of dicta used for paraenetic purposes, suggesting that if this were true, then he would have countenanced greater leniency à propos qiṣaṣ. Consisting of excerpted quotations from classical sources, much of al-Qāsimī’s discussions are aimed at showing that the Prophet and the Companions were largely receptive to utilising these materials for salutary reflection and attestation. And it is the views, robustly articulated by Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā‘ī (d. 885/1480), which are cited by al-Qāsimī to justify their relevance and use.
Medieval tafsîr legacies

The manner by which exegetes justified the composition of their works, especially as they were often revisiting topics and materials which had already been pored over at length in the previous literature confirms the levels of resourcefulness and ingenuity scholars were able to achieve. The brief introduction to Ibn al-Jawzî’s commentary, Zâd al-masîr fi ‘ilm al-tafsîr, mentions his being dismayed by the fact that so many of the works of tafsîr were voluminous tomes from which even scholars possessing prolific skills of memorisation would have flinched. In his view works which were less extensive suffered from being too abrupt and failed to achieve their goals; and even medium sized works were of little benefit as they lacked organisation. Ibn al-Jawzî also laments that commentaries often neglected to cover abstruse grammatical points or delved at length on less pressing philological matters and for all these reasons he had set about producing a tafsîr which he described as being epigrammatic and uncomplicated; even encouraging his reader to try to commit the work to memory, and boasting that his work was sourced from the finest of tafsîrs. Yet despite his various pronouncements, ones senses that Ibn al-Jawzî was also taking advantage of the fact that the discipline of tafsîr provided a useful forum for expressing his theological views. He was renowned among his fellow Ḥanbalite scholars for holding non-conformist theological positions, and certainly uses the opportunity the genre presents, and the audience it was likely to attract, to exhibit his stance on key points of dogma.

The Andalusian exegete Ibn ʿAṭiyya (481–542/1088–1148) declared that his tafsîr, which he entitled, al-Muharrar al-wajîz fi tafsîr al-Kitâb al-‘azîz, aimed at achieving comprehensiveness, brevity, and accuracy; he pronounces that he had filled the work with many of his reflective thoughts on tafsîr, but avoided the inclusion of gratuitous narrative elements unless they had a distinct correlation with the verses under examination. And he insists that his work was sourced from reliable authorities and did not comprise materials from those who advocated a cryptic reading of the text nor indeed individuals who claimed to possess knowledge of the Qurʾān’s esoteric meanings; and therein lies one of the reasons for the composition of his work. The Andalusian scholar Muḥammad ibn ʿAmr al-Qurṭubî was the author of one of most extensive classical treatments devoted to the legal analysis of Qurʾānic verses. The work, entitled al-Jâmiʿ lî aḥkâm al-Qurʾān wa’l-mubayyin li-mā taḏammarna min al-sunna wa-ayyāt al-Furqân, did follow in the wake of a number of compositions which focused extensively on the legal discourse of the Qurʾān. The author does explain that works on jurisprudence and tafsîr often neglected to identify the authors of the statements which are cited in such compilations and that this was something he would remedy in the tafsîr. Al-Qurṭubî explains that his aim was to compose a treatise enshrining pithy discussions on the typical range of conventional exegetical related topics.
which he hoped would serve him as an aide-mémoire. Mention is made of the fact that a wealth of Prophetic traditions would be cited to support the discussions, along with statements from the Pious Ancestors and their successors in order to resolve convoluted issues of interpretation. On the issue of the inclusion of narrative materials and historical reports it is suggested that an element of restriction would be applied unless such material was utterly pertinent to the explication of verses for his aim was to elucidate the legal import of Qurʾānic verses. The level of attention key epistemological paradigms continued to attract underlines the continuity of the discussions when it came to justifying *tafsīr*. The commentary has expanded sections on the authoritative basis of *tafsīr* and the perils of its speculative pursuit (*tafsīr bīl-raʿy*); the doctrine of the seven *ahruf* and its links with *variae lectiones*; the collection of the Qurʾān; the arrangement of the individual chapters and verses of the Qurʾān and sundry orthographical features; the Arabic origin of the vocabulary of the Qurʾān; discussions on the concept of Qurʾānic inimitability; and a section which warns about the spurious nature of reports recounting the virtues of given chapters of the Qurʾān.\(^{169}\)

In the introduction to the commentary composed by al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122), *Maʿālim al-tanzil*, a work which was heavily influenced by al-Thaʿlabī’s *tafsīr*, the author mentions that some of his peers requested that he write a work on the subject and thus he produced a text which was neither tediously lengthy nor vapidly curt. Al-Baghawī does humbly admit that while there is nothing new to add to the *tafsīr* legacy of the pious ancestors, it is important to revive and preserve the materials bequeathed by these earlier luminaries. A list of the scholars and works upon which he relied in composing his work is scrupulously detailed, together with the *insāds* through which he received their materials; among whom are Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid, ʿAṭāʾ, al-Hasan al-Baṣrī, Qatāda, Abū ʿĀliyya, al-Quraṭī, Zayd ibn Aslam, al-Kalbī, al-Dahhāk, Muqāṭil ibn Ḥayyān, Muqāṭil ibn Sulaymān, and al-Suddī; he also mentions that dicta relating to the creation stories were acquired from Wahb ibn Munabbih and Muḥammad ibn ʿIshāq; and also listed are the works on *variae lectiones* used for his commentary. Having described al-Baghawī’s *tafsīr* as being the finest and most eminent of writings in its field, and heaped lavish praise on its author, ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm, otherwise known by the sobriquet, al-Khāzin (d. 725/1324), based his *tafsīr*, which he called *Lubāb al-taʿwīl fi maʿānī al-tanzil*, on a select garnering of the contents of al-Baghawī’s *tafsīr*, augmenting it with material he gleaned from other seminal works. He explains that his role as the work’s author did not go beyond transmitting and selecting from its contents, avoiding prolixity and verbosity. Furthermore, he mentions omitting the lengthy *insāds* that accompany traditions, while also devising a key which could be used to identify the *ḥadīth* collectors from which the traditions cited in the work emanated, although he mentions that the space freed up by the omission of *insāds* was propitiously used to furnish a philological commentary on the language of
the traditions. Despite the contention that he was merely a compiler, al-Khāzin’s impressive ability to coordinate, supplement, and distil al-Baghawī’s materials, confirms not only his proficiency as a writer, but also the depth of his understanding of classical tafsīr discourses. The idea of condensing, abridging, and augmenting previous scholarship is likewise evident in the tafsīr of ‘Abd Allāh ʿAḥmad al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310), who proclaimed that his tafsīr, entitled Madārik al-tanzīl wa-ḥaqāʾiq al-taʾwīl, was composed to provide a medium sized commentary, encompassing aspects of grammar, variae lectiones, and the subtleties of the rhetorical sciences. He explains that the work was critically informed by the doctrinal positions of Ahl al-Sunna and free from the untruth of innovators, adding that it is neither tediously lengthy nor defectively brief, a point which echoes the remarks made in the introduction to the work of Ibn al-Jawzī. Enhancement and expansion provided the backdrop for the tafsīr composed by ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Thaʿālibī (786–875/1384–1470), who revealed that his work, which took the title al-Jawāhir al-ḥisān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān, was an abridged text set around the contents of Ibn ʿAṭīyya’s commentary, being supplemented with an ‘abundance of useful materials derived from the works of leading reliable authorities.’ He proudly mentions having consulted over one hundred books composed by dependable authors, citing in his work their exact words as opposed to conveying the gist of their exegetical thoughts, out of fear of making errors. He even speaks of having employed a system of referencing to differentiate his own thoughts from the statements of the authors he is quoting. One can only admire the precision and determination which individuals brought to the study of tafsīr, but with each writer rests an attempt to present a novel synthesis of the materials of exegesis, although one also needs to bear in mind that individual authors were catering for different audiences and in many ways the inherited body of literature was being vivified to reflect this reality.

One work which has been much vaunted for its unrivalled expertise in the field of rhetorical analysis is the commentary of al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl wa-ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-taʾwīl. Its treatment of the rhetorical and stylistic elements of the Qurʾān set the benchmark for literary analyses of the text, although there were antecedents in the field from which he was able to draw inspiration, including the work entitled Kitāb al-jāmiʿ fī ʿilm al-Qurʾān composed by the Baṣrān grammarian al-Rummānī. Despite the fact that al-Zamakhsharī’s affiliation with the Muʿtazilites is repeatedly denounced, the distinction and scale of expertise his work accomplished led to its being consistently adduced by exegetes of all theological persuasions. It was even the subject of a commentary which set about expunging points of dogma expressed in the work yet deemed contentious within traditionalist circles. In his prefatory remarks al-Zamakhsharī argued that without a thorough grounding in the rhetorical sciences of ʿilm al-maʿānī and ʿilm al-bayān, the literary splendour of the Qurʾān cannot be appreciated; he even confesses that his being able to enlighten his Muʿtazilite cohorts
when interpreting a verse of the Qur’ān with some of its hidden realities positively enchanted them to the extent that they suggested he compose a work on the subject.\textsuperscript{174} Now, while it is important to note that al-Zamakhsharī’s text belongs to the wider body of \textit{tafsīr} literature, it is significant in the context of modern scholarship for it was prominent among the available sources which informed earlier academic studies of the history and development of \textit{tafsīr}. The importance of this text is discussed at length by the Andalusian scholar Abū Ḥāyyān al-Gharnāṭī in his voluminous commentary of the Qur’ān, \textit{al-Bahr al-muhīṭ}. Abū Ḥāyyān, who lectured for a while in Egypt, provides one of the most detailed introductions to the discipline of \textit{tafsīr} in which he sets out not only its avid allure, but also the fact that having reflected upon the existing literature, in his work he would endeavour to condense the drawn out; bring resolution to the indistinct; confine the unrestricted; unlock the locked; assemble the dispersed; and extract materials that he felt were the finest. He reveals that he would be including his own contemplative reflections which were wrought from the science of rhetoric.\textsuperscript{175}

In a section of the introduction devoted to fleshing out his work’s strategy, Abū Ḥāyyān mentions that he will allude briefly to the mystical musings of the \textit{ahl-al-tasawwuf}, should this be deemed appropriate to the lexical significance of a word, albeit eschewing some of the meanings they infer of words; and that this was also the case for ‘sectarian’ exegesis of the text, which he takes the opportunity to censure. He does make a point of emphasising that exegetical works were inundated with unnecessary grammatical, legal, and theological proofs. He also refers to these texts’ tendency to include unauthenticated materials relating to the occasions of revelation and Prophetic dicta on the virtues of the Qur’ān; inappropriate tales; and Biblical accounts which have no place in the works of \textit{tafsīr}.

Again, the idea of revisiting the existing legacy of literature in the context of resolution and revision across the gamut of exegetical topics supplied later authors with new avenues and territory within which they could situate and develop their works. While al-Zamakhsharī excelled in his treatment of the rhetorical areas of the Qur’ān’s language, no author in the field of \textit{tafsīr} was able to emulate the intrepid command, insight, and meticulousness brought by Abū Ḥāyyān to the study of the text’s grammatical features. Although in accentuating the syntactical and the rhetorical elements of the Qur’ān’s language, he never compromised coverage of the other conventional aspects of \textit{tafsīr}, including narrative, and even points of theology and law; and, like so many of his fellow exegetes, often included explanatory glosses relating to Qur’ānic exempla, whose reliability he had initially questioned. Also focusing on grammar and rhetoric was the work of the Egyptian based Syrian exegete al-Samīn al-Ḥalanī (d. 756/1355), a pupil of Abū Ḥāyyān, who described his \textit{tafsīr} as being the product of a lifetime of dedicated scholarship.\textsuperscript{176} Five sub-sciences are identified by al-Samīn as being critical to comprehending the Qur’ān’s meaning and purpose, and these include syntax, morphology,
philology, ‘ilm al-ma‘ānī and ‘ilm al-bayān. According to al-Samīn, a percipient gauging of the Qurān’s meaning could be provided only by an approach which proportionately addressed the text through these disciplines. His work eschewed any sustained discussion of either exempla or narrative. Perhaps one of the most structurally innovative formats for the presentation of the materials of tafsīr was achieved in the commentary entitled Baṣṣār dhawīl-tamyīz fī latā‘īf al-Kūtb al-‘āzīz, which was composed by the distinguished philologist al-Fīrūzābādī (729–817/1327–1414). His organisational skills as a lexicographer are manifestly evident in the work which effortlessly integrates the traditional stock themes of tafsīr with an extensive range of nuanced intentions (maqāṣid) exegetically gleaned from the Qurān.177

The monumental tafsīr entitled Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, composed by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (504–606/1110–1209), a philosopher, Ash‘arite theologian, and legal theorist, combines a forensic treatment of the Qurān through reference to the traditional themes of exegesis together with an engaged reading of the text’s philosophical, theological, legal, and literary dimensions. Accordingly, the work is an invaluable source preserving many of the critical developments taking place within medieval Islamic intellectual thought. Al-Rāzī’s impressive marshalling of the intricate exegetical debates and discussions is evident throughout the commentary. However some critics claimed that his work contained everything other than tafsīr.178 This somewhat strident remark was a criticism of the theological inclinations of the author and his use of tafsīr to propound rational premises informed by his philosophical theology rather than a reflection of the work’s contents and its unrivalled contribution to the genre, despite the fact that his presentation of points of discussion is often labyrinthine and digressive.179 Some of al-Rāzī’s staunchest defenders conceded that though his tafsīr was replete with informative discussions, it did include materials which were deemed ‘superfluous’ and ‘abstruse’. Niṣām al-Dīn al-Naysābūrī (d. 728/1327) makes this very point in his tafsīr, Gharāʾib al-Qurān wa-raghāʾib al-Furqān, mentioning in his introduction that he was asked to compose a work which brought together the essentials on the subject, based on reliably transmitted materials and the statements of trustworthy scholars.180 Having accepted the request and humbly acknowledged his own shortcomings, al-Naysābūrī then proceeds to acknowledge the quality of al-Rāzī’s tafsīr, but he also singles out some of its less appealing features. He mentions that his goal was to flesh out the gist of the explanations offered by al-Rāzī, refining them with essential subtleties which he derived from al-Zamakhsharī’s al-Kashshāf and other works; al-Naysābūrī professes the fact that he would be complementing the materials with his own ‘worn offerings’, although to his credit, he is not slavishly repeating the theoretical deliberations of al-Rāzī, which are often postulating key legal, theological, and philosophical premises, but rather weighing up and contextualising them, addressing objections and questions which are raised in their regard. Impressively, the discussions relevant to al-Rāzī’s tafsīr are embedded
in the much broader narrative of al-Naysābūrī’s work, which is grappling
with a host of other exegetical topics, including esoteric Ṣūfī tafsīr. The
innovative format of themes through which al-Naysābūrī structured his
presentation of the individual chapters betokens the uniqueness of his work;
and having completed his exegesis of the final chapter, al-Naysābūrī pro-
vides his reader with a conspectus of what the work has attempted to achieve.
The dynamic of revising, reviewing, complementing, abbreviating, and
synthesising the contents of existing commentaries served as a catalyst for
exegetical endeavour. And, inevitably, there is also the question of catering
for audiences: it is not infrequent that authors will mention the need to make
the existing corpora of exegetical literature more accessible.

Shīʿism and tafsīr

The range of commentaries composed by Shīʿite luminaries confirms the
venerated status the genre of tafsīr enjoyed within Shīʿism. Hierarchies of
religious authority within Twelver Shīʿism meant that dicta sourced from
the designated imāms were deemed exclusively authoritative for the interpre-
tation of the Qurʾān, echoing the manner by which statements ascribed to the
imāms played a primary role in the interpretation of law and the resolution
of belief and ritual.181 Having accentuating the existence of outer and inner
meanings of the text, the imām was seen as being invested by God with in-
depth knowledge of the Qurʾān.182 Among the early Shīʿite commentaries is
the work known as Tafsīr al-ʿAskarī, which is attributed to the eleventh Imām
Abū Muhammad al-Hasan ibn ʿAlī al-Askarī (d. 260/873–4).183 It is described
as ‘not being a systematic commentary’ but rather one which combines the
presentation of traditional reports in conjunction with selected verses of the
Qurʾān.184 And it is suggested that although the ascription of the work to
al-ʿAskarī cannot be ‘decisively answered’, it was composed in his ‘time and
place.’ Other pre-Buwayhid Shīʿite texts which have survived include the
tafsīr attributed to Furāt ibn Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm al-Kūfī (d. c. fourth/century
century); Tafsīr al-Qummī, which was authored by Abūl-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn
Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, who lived between the third and fourth centuries; a tafsīr composed by Abūl-Nadr Muhammad ibn Masʿūd al-ʿAyyāshī of
Samarqand, who was a contemporary of both Furāt and al-Qummī; and the
tafsīr of Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nuʾmānī (d. 360/971).185 These are all texts
which adopted a selective treatment of Qurʾānic verses through the attestation
of traditions, with general points on the authority of the imām and institutions
such as walāyat (alliance and friendship) being highlighted in the discus-
sions.186 The work of Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), al-Ṭibyān fi tafsīr
al-Qurʾān, adopts an entirely different approach. He begins his work by stating
that none of his Shīʿite predecessors and contemporaries had devoted a com-
mentary to covering the entire text of the Qurʾān and it was filling this lacuna
which inspired him to write his commentary, remarking that in previous
works exegetical materials in the form of dicta were simply collated within the body of ḥadīth collections. Al-Ṭūsī briefly mentions some of the shortcomings of the existing literature: al-Ṭabarî was prolix and protracted; al-Zajjâj and al-Farrâ’ were fixated on grammar and syntax; al-Mufâḍdal ibn Salama (d. 290/902), a transmitter of al-Farrâ’’s Ma’ānī, focused on philology; Abû ‘Alî al-Jubbâ’î (d. 303/915) was interested only in the theological interpretation of the text. Against the background of these works, al-Ṭūsī’s intended aim was to produce an abridged but all-inclusive commentary which encompassed all the sciences (funūn) of the Qur’ān. Technical issues such as the legitimacy of pursuing tafsîr and the need to avoid the resort to unfettered personal reasoning; the doctrine of the Qur’ān being revealed in one mode as opposed to seven; definitions of mutashâbih and muḥkam; the concept of abrogation; and the use of profane poetry for exegetical purposes are all reflected upon in his introduction, demonstrating common theoretical concerns which featured in the works of Sunnî and Shi’îte scholars.

In a section introducing discussions deemed requisite to the study of tafsîr, al-Ṭūsī alludes to the notion of tahrîf (falsification), which he describes as being unseemly, insisting that the idea that there were additions or omissions with regards to the text of the Qur’ān was a contravention of the accepted consensus among Muslims; and he mentions that this was a position supported by the eminent al-Sharîf al-Murtaḍâ (d. 436/1044). It has been pointed out that prior to the advent of the Buwayhids in the fourth/tenth century, a Shi’îte dynasty which enjoyed political dominance under the auspices of the ruling ‘Abbâsid caliphate, there was a tendency within Shi‘ism to dispute aspects of the canonical authority of the codex established by the third caliph ‘Uthmân. The historical depth and nature of the disputes about canon within Shi‘ism remain vague as the late provenance of the available sources which preserve the discussions makes it difficult to determine the genuine extent of the actual arguments and the impact such a doctrine would have had upon the actual development of Shi‘ite exegesis. Nevertheless, it is accepted that the idea of tahrîf or falsification, namely that the original version of the Qur’ān had been corrupted or tampered with to conceal the rights of the imâms, was rife among the more extremist factions. Within mainstream Shi‘ism, views on the notion of falsification are said to have subsided under the Buwayhids, although distinguished luminaries of Twelver Shi‘ism, such as Ibn Bâbawayhi (d. 381/991), al-Shaykh al-Mufîd (d. 413/1022), and al-Sharîf al-Murtaḍâ categorically dismissed the notion of tahrîf.

A second influential post-Buwayhid text was the commentary entitled Majma’ al-bayān fî tafsîr al-Qur’ān composed by Shaykh al-Faḍl ibn al-Hasan al-Ṭabrisî (d. 548/1154). The work begins with an elaborate summary of the illustrious virtues of the study of the Qur’ān, observing that it serves as the basis of all sciences. In the work the point is made that Shi‘ite scholarship on tafsîr had largely focused on producing abbreviated works based on traditionally transmitted dicta, without delving into the meanings
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and profundities of the text, with the exception of al-Ṭūsī, whose commentary would serve as an ‘exemplar’ from which al-Ṭabriṣī would draw in compiling his work. However, despite heaping praise on al-Ṭūsī’s work, he does identify some of its shortcomings with regards to the treatment of grammatical topics. Interestingly, al-Ṭabriṣī mentions that in his youth he had earnestly yearned to write a commentary on the Qurʾān, but that it was not until he reached the ripe old age of sixty, and, following a request from a notable elder, and much circumspect reflection, that he finally set about compiling the work, placing optimum emphasis on the summation, refinement, and presentation of the sciences and branches of knowledge associated with the discipline of tafsīr. He asserts that the work would explore the corpus of variae lectiones with regards to syntax, philology, grammatical complexity, ambiguity, meaning, and aspect; topics such as revelation, exempla, narrative, and law are also covered in the work and al-Ṭabriṣī specifies that the commentary would address issues raised by the Qurʾān’s detractors but that he would also take the opportunity to draw attention to Shiʿite doctrines in terms of principles of faith and subsidiary matters, being both concise and fair in the process. His introduction deals with the enumeration of Qurʾānic verses and its relevance; the scholarly pedigree of the classes of Qurʾān readers; distinctions between the technical import of tafsīr and taʿwīl; the etymology of the word Qurʾān and the names used to divide its chapters; general points on the Qurʾān’s sciences, in which he takes the opportunity to dismiss the notion of tahrīf, replicating al-Ṭūsī’s arguments; and there are sections on the virtues of the Qurʾān and the merits of its recitation.193 His arrangement of the text is inspired as it broaches the exegesis of verses through isolated stock themes such as philology, grammar, meaning, the grammatical rationale of readings (ḥujja), narrative, and circumstances of revelation.

The works of al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabriṣī were important sources for later Shiʿite commentators, who drew from these commentaries along with exegetical sources which featured in the pre-Buwayhid materials. An excellent indicator of the range of attitudes among later Twelver scholars can be found in the work of al-Bahrānī (flor. 11th/18th century), al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān, who was at pains to identify distinctions with regards to authority between Sunnī tafsīr and the Shiʿite materials.194 Al-Bahrānī stressed the primacy of Ahl al-Bayt as the only genuine authorities on tafsīr, contending that proper exegesis of the text could emanate only from these figures as invested in them was divinely revealed knowledge of the Book; he explains that this was not to imply that rational subjects such as grammar and rhetoric were irrelevant to tafsīr, but rather it is through the inmāns that such knowledge formally issued.195 He does use the writings of numerous Shiʿite authorities, including figures such as Ibn Bābawayhi, al-Ṭūsī and al-ʿĀyyāshī, and speaks of his being prepared to refer to Sunnī materials if they were in concord with the transmissions of Ahl al-Bayt or comprised materials which praise them.196 Much earlier, a similar range of exegetical issues and concerns was examined with vigour in the medieval Qurʾānic
commentaries of figures such as Ḥaydar Āmulī (719–787/1319–1385), the author of the celebrated al-Muḥīṭ al-aʿzam waʾl-bahr al-khiḍām, and other classical Shiʿite exegetes; moreover, the sum and substance of early and medieval exegetical thought are appraised and expounded upon in the work of al-Ṭabāṭābāʾī, Al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān. And a defence of Shiʿite hermeneutical principles is fully elaborated upon in the works of contemporary writers such as Abūʾl-Qāsim al-Khūṭārī, the author of al-Bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān.201

Within the Ismāʿīlī (Seveners) branch of Shiʿism, exegesis of the Qurʾān, as pursued through reference to an elaborate process of taʿwīl, was devoted to uncovering the esoteric senses of the text’s meaning, which also remained the exclusive preserve of the legitimate imāms. Ismāʿīlīs embraced a cyclical interpretation of history and religion within which the designated imāms were viewed as being endowed with knowledge of the Qurʾān’s inner purport and meaning insofar as each imām served as the announciator of the Qurʾān (nāṭiq al-Qurʾān). Within this interpretive framework, it was posited that an imām is always present across the ages to provide knowledge of the inner aspect of the Qurʾān, even being in a position to renew and bring up to date its interpretation.198 The more traditional forms of exegesis or tafsīr were entirely immaterial to the overriding procedure of Ismāʿīlī taʿwīl, which was concerned principally with the text’s hidden meanings and truths (ḥaqāʾiq) as uncovered and given definition by the imāms. The Sunnī traditional sources were scathing of the forms of esoteric tafsīr associated with Ismāʿīlīsm with the view repeatedly expressed that such forms of esoteric tafsīr had the potential to lead to the promotion of antinomianism and a relegation of the evident dimensions of the sacred text; such charges were categorically dismissed in the Ismaʿīlī sources.199 Prominent Ismāʿīlī taʿwīl literature included the Kitāb al-kashf, which is ascribed to the Yemeni missionary Mansūr al-Yaman (d. 302/914) and the writings of the influential Fāṭimid jurist al-Qādī al-Nuʿmān (d. 363/974), whose works include Asās al-taʿwīl, Daʾāʾīm al-Islām, and Taʾwīl al-daʾāʾīm. Selective points germane to esoteric taʾwīl are touched upon by Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Rāzī (d. 322/934) in his Kitāb al-lām al-nubuwwa, which comprises a refutation of the skeptical Abū Bakr al-Rāzī.200 Again, these are not works ostensibly concerned with the conventional esoteric (ẓāhirī) aspects of the Qurʾān, but rather they set about situating its esoteric explication within Ismaʿīlī conceptual edifices. Similarly, Ismāʿīlī hermeneutical models were elaborate and intricate, fusing Neoplatonic and spiritual concepts. Significantly, distinct Ismāʿīlī leanings have been detected in the works of the Ashtarite heresiographer ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (479–548/1086–1153) and yet his commentary on the Qurʾān, entitled Mafāṭīḥ al-asrār wa-maṣābīḥ al-abrār, also evinces a creative synthesis of traditional, mystical, and Ismāʿīlī hermeneutics, drawing from an eclectic body of sources. It is this fact which makes the work wholly exceptional for while elements of Ismāʿīlī influences are tangible in the tafsīr, al-Shahrastānī continues to seek to locate a profoundly and vigorous relevance for the Sunnī materials.201
Aspects of Şūfi exegesis

While the more common forms of tafsîr were essentially seen as embodying a search for the exoteric or apparent (zâhir) meaning of the text, Şūfi exegesis was constellated around unravelling the hidden or concealed (bâtin) aspects of the Qur'ân’s meaning with such forms of exegesis taking the label tafsîr al-ishârât (tafsîr via allusions). In the same way that classical tafsîr scholarship outlined an historical pedigree for its tradition of tafsîr, Şūfi exegesis, which generated a significant number of influential commentaries, was traced back to earlier eponyms identified as key contributors to its discourse. Among the texts which are thought to preserve the earliest expressions of exegesis through allusion is the tafsîr of Ja'far al-Ṣâdiq (d. 148/765), which deals with a selection of passages of the Qur'ân. It has been argued that al-Ṣâdiq’s text reflects Şūfi mystical and spiritual ideas which were probably circulating during the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, although the treatise was preserved within a larger work entitled Ḥaqâiq al-tafsîr, which was collated by ‘Abd al-Rahmân al-Sulamî (d. 412/1021), a renowned Şūfi personality and scholar of traditions. Still, the conceptual sophistication of allusive tafsîr is evident in the commentary of Sahl al-Tustarî (d. 283/896), a work which serves as one of the most important sources for the historical development of ideas and concepts within esoteric tafsîr. Significant within Şūfi conceptions of tafsîr is the understanding that the unveiling of the text’s numinous meanings and subtleties along with its hidden secrets and unique sciences is the exclusive privilege of those whose hearts are rendered pure through acts of personal piety and devoted religiosity.

Notably, the basis of the methods by which Şūfîs elicit meanings from the Qur'ân is explained in the text of the celebrated mystic Abû Naṣr al-Sarrâj al-TeXî (d. 378/988), who devotes a section of his influential Kitâb al-luma’ to Şūfi esoteric exegesis. Referring to the fundamentals of ʿilm al-ishârâra, Abû Naṣr intimates that God endows Şūfîs with knowledge of the sacred text by virtue of their concomitant adherence to both the zâhir (internal) and bâtin (external) aspects of the Qur'ân and the Prophetic teachings; he contends that such knowledge would otherwise have remained concealed from them. The examples of ishârâ interpretation comprised in the Luma’, which are attributed to early mystic luminaries, typify the delicate manner by which simple Şūfi concepts and axioms were exquisitely situated within the matrices of Qur'ânic discourse. The nexus between such concepts and the Qur'ân is significant for debates about the origin of mystical constructs, particularly given the contention that nascent mystical ideas were inspired by and derived from a Qur'ânic substrate. Interestingly, the mystic Abû Ṭâlib al-Makkî (d. 386/966) spoke of binary levels of meaning which permeated the Qur’ân: they included the general and the specific; the muḥkam and the mutashâbih; and the exoteric as well as the esoteric. A fine example of the literary efflorescence of Şūfi tafsîr in which traditional exegetical themes are meticulously entwined with...
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mystical and theological constructs is provided in the commentary entitled *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt*, which was composed by the mystic luminary ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (376–465/986–1072).206 Again, within such treatments there is never an attempt to attenuate the importance of the exoteric aspect of the Qur‘ān. Although traditionalist literature does caution against some of the excesses of *tafsīr al-ishārāt*, it is apparent that it was not entirely censured as indeed a not insignificant number of scholars were prepared to mount eloquent defences of its legitimacy.207 With regards to the work of al-Sulamī, it covers the exegesis of some six-hundred verses of the Qur‘ān, introducing mystical deliberations attributed to figures such as Ja‘far al-Šādiq, Sahl al-Tustarī, Ibn ‘Aṭā‘ al-Adamī (d. 309/922), Abū Yazīd al-Bīštāmī (d. 261/874), and al-Shiblī (247–334/861–948). Al-Sulamī’s work was criticized by a number of scholars: the exegete al-Wāqidī is reported to have disavowed al-Sulamī for composing his *tafsīr* and similar denunciations appear in later literature, although his work had its defenders.208 Ibn Juzayy argued in the introduction to his commentary that *tafsīr al-taṣawwuf* constituted a valid dimension of exegesis, referring to its connection with the Qur‘ān on account of the gnostic teachings, spiritual conditioning, and purification of the soul which issue from it. He is keen to stress that Śūfīs had excelled when engaging in Qur‘ānic exegesis and had by virtue of the radiance of their astuteness, stood at the threshold of the essence of the Qur‘ān’s esoteric meanings; but he also admits that there were individuals who immersed themselves in cryptic matters and sought meanings for the text which were uncorroborated by the Arabic language. Referring to al-Sulamī’s *tafsīr*, which he notes had been described by some scholars as full of ‘falsehoods’, he comments that it is fairer to label it as comprising both ‘truths and falsehoods.’209 With regards to his own *tafsīr*, Ibn Juzayy pronounces that he would be relating only that which was considered fine of the *ishārāt al-Śūfīyya*, referring to his discussing twelve ‘states’ of *taṣawwuf* which were enshrined in the Qur‘ān.

The figure whose work definitively epitomised the sophistication brought to bear in Śūfī *tafsīr* is without doubt the Andalusian mystic Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240).210 Not only is his exegesis informed by the profundity of his theosophical thought, but also it is embedded in an intensely rich literary narrative. In the same way that scholars who produced conventional commentaries elucidated, refined, and developed the works of previous authors, comparable patterns of scholarship can be discerned in the literature devoted to *tafsīr ishārāt*. Thus for example, Rashīd al-Dīn al-Maybūdī (d. c. 520/1126) in his *Kashf al-asrār wa-‘uddat al-abrār*, built on the Qur‘ān commentary of ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Anṣārī al-Harawi (d. 481/1089), enhancing the format of his work while also substantially augmenting its content with materials sourced from early cynosures of Śūfī *tafsīr*; other writers such as Ruzbihān Baqlī (d. 606/1209), the author of ‘Arā‘īs al-bayān fī ḥaqā‘iq al-Qur‘ān, fused their highly imaginative esoterical explanations with those of early luminaries.
And this is also true of the work of al-Simnānī (d. 736/1336), demonstrating how later students took up the cudgels of previous scholarship. The commentaries composed by Şaḍr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274) and ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 730/1329–30) provided the mystical thoughts of Ibn ‘Arabī with a decidedly philosophical dimension.

Al-Kāshānī wrote a commentary on Ibn ‘Arabī’s Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam along with his own tafsīr, Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān. In the latter text he speaks of his experiencing revelational moments during which the meanings of individual verses were unveiled to him, although he describes such phenomena as being ephemeral insofar as he had neither the capacity or power to control or detail such moments. Intriguingly, the experience together with its significance is contextualised by al-Kāshānī through reference to the Prophetic tradition which identifies every revealed verse of the Qur’ān as having a zāhr and bātn (outer and inner aspects); and that every one of its single letters (ḥarf) has a specified boundary (ḥadd), which in turn has its point of ascent (matla‘); the proponents of esoteric tafsīr attached great importance to this Prophetic dictum, a tradition which figures such as Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, al-Tustarī, al-Sulamī adduced in their respective works. Al-Kāshānī reveals that the preoccupation with the exterior dimensions of the Qur’ān was the remit of conventional tafsīr, whereas ta’wīl focused on uncovering the interior. Placing esoteric tafsīr within the tenor of the aforementioned Prophetic tradition, al-Kāshānī points out that the boundary is where the comprehension of meanings intersects and transpires, while the point of ascent provides the locus which brings one before the presence of the sovereign and all knowing Being. Extravagant language, mystical imagery, and spiritual ecstasy are characteristically blended throughout al-Kashānī’s work, although inherent in his reflections is the acceptance that levels and states of religious piety had a direct bearing on the quality of the inspired exegetical experience. He is mindful to point out that his exegetical thoughts would reflect upon the veiled interior meanings and not the exterior ones associated with conventional tafsīr, pensively referring to the tradition which censures the whimsical interpretation of the Qur’ān, thereby situating his own efforts within the realm of permissible ta’wīl. Defenders of allusive exegesis assiduously clarified that such forms of esoteric exegesis were never meant to diminish the significance of the more conventional forms of tafsīr. Indeed, the nineteenth-century Iraqi exegete al-Alūsī explained in the introduction to his own voluminous commentary, Rūḥ al-ma‘ānī, in which the legitimacy of tafsīr al-ishārī is defended, that the great Şī‘ī scholars insisted that the perfection of the tafsīr al-zāhir was a prerequisite for the pursuit of the inner aspects of exegesis. And his work was a formidable attempt to forge the disparate strands of tafsīr al-ishārī into a cohesive whole. The genre of Şī‘ī Qur’ānic commentaries confirms both the variety and richness achieved within the literature of tafsīr.
Trajectories of *tafsîr* literature: exegetical tracts and treatises

The authorship of individual treatises and tracts which expanded upon aspects of specific exegetical themes or concepts addressed within the classical Qur’anic commentaries was also the subject of intense activity. For example, the topic of abrogation (*naskh*) was the focus of a number of influential works: Abû ‘Ubayd, the distinguished Kufan philologist was the author of a text on abrogation and indeed al-Hârith al-Muḥāsibî (d. 243/857) devoted a section of his renowned *Kitâb fahm al-Qur’ân* to discussing the phenomenon. Abû Ja’far al-Nahhâs, ‘Abd al-Qâhir al-Baghdadî (d. 429/1037), Makki ibn Abî Tâlib, Ibn Hazm (384–456/994–1064), Ibn al-‘Arabî al-Mu‘ârifî (d. 543/1148), and Ibn al-Jawzî were the authors of texts which pored over and revisited discussions on Qur’anic abrogation. Even the very deliberations on *naskh* ascribed to earlier luminaries such as al-Zuhri (d. 124/741) and Qatâda were collated by students and transmitters and presented in the form of unique treatises. Writers also turned their attention to the subject of the circumstances of revelation, *asbâb al-nuzûl*, which like *naskh*, was already treated within the confines of larger commentaries. ‘Alî ibn al-Ma’dînî (161–234/777–848), who was renowned as al-Bukhâri’s teacher, is credited with having written a text on *asbâb al-nuzûl*. One of the most popular works of the sub-genre was the treatise composed by al-Wâhidî. Interestingly, Abû Hayyân was particularly critical of al-Wâhidî, whom he accused of including mostly inauthentic materials in the work. Other texts devoted to the *asbâb al-nuzûl* included texts authored by Ibn Muṭarrîf al-Andalusî (d. 402/1011), Ibn al-Jawzî, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalânî (773–852/1371–1448) and Jalâl al-Dîn al-Suyûtî.215

Muqṭâ’il ibn Sulaymân’s *al-Wujûh wa’l-nazâ’ir* seems to have inspired a number of treatises which set about augmenting the incidences of polysemy defined by the author. The work entitled *Tâḥṣîl naẓâ’ir al-Qur’ân* was composed by al-Ḥakîm al-Tirmidhî (d. 320/932) and in the text he questioned some of the assumptions used to define this phenomenon. Other notable treatises included the work of Abû Hîlal al-‘Askârî (d. 395/1005) and a comprehensive treatment entitled *al-Wujûh wa’l-nazâ’ir li-alfâz Kitâb illâh al-‘azîz* compiled by al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Dâmîghânî (d. 478/1085), who begins his text by referring to the work of Muqṭâ’il and other writers before expressing his disappointment that they had omitted so many lexical items relevant to the subject and he was going to address this oversight in his work. The concept of the inimitability of the Qur’ân was the subject of a number of important works: al-Khaṭṭâbî (319–388/930–998), al-Bâqillânî (d. 403/1013), al-Rummânî, ‘Abd al-Qâhir al-Jurjânî (d. 471/1078), Ibn al-Naqiß (d. 698/1298), and Kamâl al-Dîn al-Zamlakânî (d. 727/1326), were the authors of treatises which brought together and refined the various strands of thought connected with the doctrine of *i’jâz*, a topic which was discussed within the framework of the larger
Qur'ānic commentaries. Literary aspects of the Qur'ānic expression were also tackled in specialised treatises such as al-Sharīf al-Rādī’s seminal *Talhīṣ al-bayān fī majāzāt al-Qur'ān*, which analysed the incidence of metaphor (*majāz*) throughout the Qur'ān; *al-Jumān fī tashbīḥāt al-Qur'ān* authored by Ibn Nāqiyā al-Baghdādī (410–485/1019–1092) investigated the use of similes and metaphors in the Qur'ān, while the theme of metaphor in the Qur'ān formed the backdrop to ‘Abd al-Salām’s key study. Other specific themes within *tafsīr* which attracted separate treatises included the subject of *mutashābihāt al-Qur'ān*, which inspired a large number of philosophical as well as theological works, including the *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān* of the Mu'tazilite scholar ‘Abd al-Jabbar (d. 415/1025), and the *Milāk al-ta'wīl al-qāṭi‘ bi-dhawā al-ilhād wa’l-ta'ṭīl fī tawjīh mutashābih al-lafz min ayy al-tanzīl* authored by Ibn al-Zubayr al-Thaqafī (627–68/708/1230–1308). Likewise, the area of the legal discourse of the Qur'ān was a subject to which treatises were devoted by prominent authors including al-Naqīq (d. 321/933), Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981), al-Kīyā al-Harrāsī (d. 504/1110), Ibn al-'Arabī, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Razzāq ibn Faras (d. 597/1200), and al-Qurṭubī. The objective of the *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* works was to ruminate over the legal implications and rationale of specific classes of verses in the Qur'ān. Notwithstanding the contention that such areas of scholarship were appropriated from varied and often unconnected disciplines of learning which were secondary to the core interests of *tafsīr* scholarship, the fact remains that they were inspired by an engagement with the text of scripture and became integral elements of the discourses supported and nurtured within *tafsīr* commentaries.

Following on from the compilations of figures such as Sufyān al-Thawrī and al-Ṣaḥābī, ḥadīth scholars such as al-Bukhārī and al-Tirmidhī included in their collections sections which brought together traditions with an exegetical context or connection. Indeed, such was the wide-ranging nature of the section on *tafsīr* in the collection of the traditionist al-Nasāʿī (d. 303/915), *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, that it was published as an independent text. Upon closer examination it is evident that the work is essentially a compendium of Prophetic and Companion traditions which are arranged around the chapters of the Qur'ān, engaging with disparate aspects of its content, whether in the form of an oblique reference to actual verses, which have little to do with their explication, or aspects of their meaning and chronological provenance; the level of normative commentary included by the compiler is minimal. Within the traditionalist camp, such approaches to exegesis, in which scholars were scrupulously recounting the available corpus of traditions, were commended, although the inference that such works were exclusively replete with Prophetic and Companion statements is belied by the fact that such compositions include a variety of materials, many of which are attributed to exegets from the post-Prophetic periods, including al-Suddī, 'Ikrima, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, al-Kalbī, Ibn Ishaq, and Ibn Jurayj.
The traditionist Ibn Abī Ḥātim (240–327/854–938) explained in the introduction to his ḥadīth based tafsīr that he was asked by a number of his students to produce an abridged work which comprised only those traditions whose chains of authority were reliable, dispensing with superfluous references to transmission paths or supportive isnād documentation. He acknowledges that such an endeavour would entail omitting a discussion of readings and their narrations, and even dispensing with a consideration of the asbāb al-nuzūl.222 Despite his dutiful undertaking, the work actually comprises, alongside dicta classed as being ‘traditionally’ authentic, materials attributed to various early exegetes, including individuals whose reliability is questioned in the traditionist biographical literature. However, there is a measure of relativity about his overall approach as the traditions he includes are deemed the best ones available. This is also the case for the work of Ibn al-Mundhir (d. 319/930), whose tafsīr is ḥadīth orientated, citing traditions which are attributed to the Prophet and his Companions but also comprised in the work are recurring references to al-Kalbī, al-Suddī, and other prominent exegetes.223 It was Ibn Taymiyya who praised the efforts of figures such as Ibn Abī Ḥātim and indeed Abū Bakr ibn Mardawayh (d. 410/1019) for their traditionist based approach, although he was obviously aware that these and other related works had materials in them which were not all authenticated. Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 404/955), the author of al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-Sahīḥayn, a supplement to the ḥadīth collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, includes an exceptionally lengthy chapter on tafsīr whose contents range from straightforward exegetical reports, to materials germane to ritual and law.224 Thus the ‘ḥadīth’ based collections were broadly devised compositions which plainly dispensed with materials such as variae lectiones, detailed linguistic analysis, and other rationally focused endeavours.

As has been evident from the discussions on al-tafsīr bi’l ra’y, there has been a tendency to locate such forms of tafsīr within the overarching categories of ma’thūr and ra’y: the former is said to have been informed by scholars merely adducing traditions emanating from a hierarchy of early authorities, especially materials linked with the Prophet and his Companions. While in the case of the latter, it is presumed that exegetes, many of whom belong to the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries, were exercising greater latitude and independence when interpreting Qur’ānic verses, although, as previously mentioned, the act of interpretation also entailed weighing up and expressing preferences with regards to the relevance and accuracy of exegetical dicta. However, whether such an axiomatic division of tafsīr bi’l-ma’thūr and ra’y existed is doubtful. It would appear that later scholarship was essentially speaking of a desideratum with regards to exegetical procedure and selection, although this was later referred to as tafsīr bi’l-ma’thūr; the nomenclature is slightly confusing as it gives the impression that these were exclusively ḥadīth based collections of traditionally authenticated materials with the term tafsīr al-musnad often being applied: a cursory glance through the corpora will show
this is not the case, although al-Nasāʾī’s text certainly comes close to achieving that purpose but so many of the dicta in the text barely impinge upon issues of Qurʾānic exposition. Of course, a large section of Ibn Taymiyya’s *Majmūʿ*, which is devoted to the exegesis of individual chapters of the Qurʾān, does embody the framework which he sets out for the pursuit of *tafsīr*. The Egyptian scholar Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī made *ḥadīth* based *tafsīr* reports the core of his work entitled *Al-Durr al-manthūr fīʾl-tafsīr bīl-maʿthūr*. The work, a distinctive collection of some eleven volumes, was abridged from an earlier endeavour entitled *Turjumān al-Qurʾān*, in which he had included *tafsīr* based *ḥadīths* with their full *isnād* documentation, a fact that he states made the work less desirable for those seeking only the text of the traditions. He omitted the *isnāds* for the *al-Durr al-manthūr* commentary, retaining explicit references only to the works from which the dicta emanated.

Towards a synthesis of the sciences of exegesis

Centuries of sustained and sophisticated scholarship in the field of Qurʾānic exegesis produced a substantial array of linguistic, theological, and legal based concepts and theories through which the text’s exposition was defined. These were often discussed within individual Qurʾānic commentaries or expanded upon in separate monographs. Classical scholarship’s attempts to collate and coordinate these different constructs as synoptically distilled from this earlier enterprise ultimately gave birth to the discipline of Qurʾānic hermeneutics (‘ulūm al-Qurʾān), a field to which a steady stream of works was devoted. One such work, *al-Burhān fī ‘ulūm al-Qurʾān*, authored by the Egyptian scholar Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī, achieves one of the most comprehensive treatments of the subject. The author defined *tafsīr* as a science through which comprehension of the revealed book of God was ascertained, adding that the clarification of the Qurʾān’s meanings and the fleshing out of its legal and sapiential teachings were key objectives of the discipline; but having circumscribed the terrain of *tafsīr*, he expresses his surprise that earlier scholarship had not devoted a text specifically to the classification of the theoretical tools and concepts of exegesis in the same manner by which luminaries within the field of the *ḥadīth* sciences had followed up the collection and codification of the Prophetic traditions by developing methodological frameworks for their authentication; he comments that a similar undertaking within the field of the Qurʾān was a desideratum. The *Burhān* is structured around forty-seven key chapters, comprising materials acquisitively accumulated from centuries of sustained scholarship; in spite of that, the text was not solely concerned with outlining concepts and paradigms which defined the classical science of *tafsīr*, but it also straddled various debates which featured in its past and present discourses. Despite al-Zarkashi’s modest assertion that he had simply provided preliminary summaries of the various exegetical topics and that in his estimation a lifetime
would need to be spent before one might achieve genuine mastery over just one of the many areas which his work examines, its coverage is remarkably thorough and informed and the author’s input is discerning. Beginning with a summary of categories of historical circumstances surrounding the revelation of individual Qur’anic verses and chapters, al-Zarkashī proceeded to cover themes as diverse as the mysterious letters of the Qur’ān and the theory of the text’s inimitability, to the dialectal origin of the Qur’ān’s vocabulary and prerequisites germane to its textual transmission. The sheer scope of al-Zarkashī’s survey is a reflection of the breadth and depth of the scholarship which was achieved within classical exegesis and while his survey does not furnish a causal history of the discipline, it reads as an elaborate digest of recurrent debates and deliberations; the work was also an emphatic statement of intent about the enduring legacy of the discipline and its centrality to the traditions of Islamic thought.

There did exist a number of antecedents in the form of tracts and treatises which examined hermeneutical notions and although none of these works afforded the subject the depth of coverage and detail accomplished by al-Zarkashī’s text, they do intimate the historical depth of the scholarship. Thus for example, the Kitāb fāhm al-Qur’ān of the Sufi luminary al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāṣibī covers topics such as the virtues of the Qur’ān and the division of its verses into muḥkam and mutashābih categories. Also discussed at length in his work are the legal and theological implications of the theory of abrogation. Al-Ḥasan ibn Muhammad ibn Ḥabīb (d. 406/1015) was the author of a tract entitled Kitāb al-tanbih ‘alā faḍl ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān which detailed twenty-five categories of sequences of revelation covering individual Qur’ānic verses. Al-Majāshī provides a detailed listing of hermeneutical categories in the introduction to his al-Nukat fi’l-Qur’ān, revealing the rigour which the conceptualisation of the contents of the Qur’ān was attracting. The text was written as a brief guide to both the interpretation of the text and its categories for his patron and is teeming with quotations emanating from leading exegetes and grammarian figures. Al-Majāshī was a respected scholar with an adept command of linguistic subjects. The anonymous Kitāb al-mabānī, which appears to have been written around the mid-fifth/eleventh century, does amplify the analysis of basic theoretical categories germane to exegesis. It was indeed the Andalusian jurist and exegete Ibn al-ʿArabī who was the author of the celebrated Qānūn al-taʿwīl, which, despite comprising lengthy and digressive autobiographical reminiscences, also includes sections on the mysterious letters of the Qur’ān; the use of parables; and the technical division of the verses of the Qur’ān into muḥkamāt and mutashābihāt categories. The rather discursive manner in which the exegetical themes are discussed is probably due to the fact that the work was reportedly written as a substitute for a perished treatise on the subject by the same author entitled Anwār al-fājr. A much more focused offering is provided by Ibn al-Jawzī in a work entitled Funūn al-asfān fī ‘uyūn ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān, which
includes among its discussions the enumeration of Qur’ānic verses and a treatment of the subject of etymology. The Damascene scholar Abū Shāma (d. 665/1267) compiled the influential work entitled *al-Murshid al-wajīz ilā ʿulūm tataʾallaq biʾl-kitāb al-ʿazīz*, in which particulars surrounding the textual transmission of the Qur’ān are circumscribed. Also of importance were the works of Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfī (d. 716/1316) and al-Kāfījī (d. 879/1474): the former was the author of a treatise entitled *al-Iksūr fī ʿulūm al-tafsīr*, while the latter figure authored *al-Taysūr fī qawāʿid al-tafsīr*. Along with the *Burhān* of al-Zarkashī, the work of the Egyptian scholar, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qur’ān*, serves as one of the most frequently cited popular works on classical hermeneutics. It was substantially modelled on al-Zarkashī’s text, preserving an extensive conflation of quotations on classical hermeneutics. The introduction to the work is particularly useful as al-Suyūṭī enlightens his reader with a survey of texts devoted to the subject of ʿulūm al-Qur’ān, notably listing their contents; in his preamble, like al-Zarkashī, he indicates his surprise that earlier scholars had not brought together scholarship covering the fundamentals of ʿulūm al-Qur’ān in the same way that ḥadīth scholars from the formative periods had codified the sciences of the traditions. Al-Suyūṭī mentions his authorship of a previous work he had dedicated to the subject which he listed as *al-Taṣbīr fī ʿulūm al-tafsīr*, highlighting excerpts from the introduction to a composition on Qur’ānic hermeneutics by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Bulqīnī (762–824/1361–1421), which took the title *Mawāqīṭ al-ʿulūm min muwāqīṭ al-nuḥūm*. Needless to say, the works of both al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī serve as portals to the different strands of scholarship encompassed under the umbrella of classical hermeneutics; they also give an indication of the historical background to the synthesis of ideas, offering their contributions to the discussions. Both works served as sources for later writers on hermeneutics: Ibn ʿAqīl (d. 1150/1737–8) was the author of a treatise entitled *al-Ziyāda waʾl-iḥsān fī ʿulūm al-Qur’ān*, which unquestionably betrays a heavy reliance on both al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī, although, working within the paradigms of revision, augmentation, and qualification, he engagingly managed to revisit categories of classification and incorporate additional sources. There is a tendency to view some aspects of the scholarship which features in the much later materials as being rather derivative and unoriginal; it is important to bear in mind the objectives of such works, in terms of their providing summaries, which also consistently integrate new exegetical elements within discussions.

**Debates about the sources: historical implications of the early tafsīrs**

While the classical literature of tafsīr preserves a copious and diverse corpora of materials, the fact that the earliest extant archival records of the literature appear in the late second/eight century, with recensions being attributed to
earlier authorities raises a number of questions about the actual provenance of these works and even the historical reliability of their content. Thus, while traditional sources identify trajectories which predicate a convergence of early and later tafsīr scholarship, underlining the interplay of oral and written mechanisms for the preservation of knowledge, the extended chronological gaps which separate the appearance of earliest extant literary records from the scholarship of the periods they purport to preserve have led to much debate about whether one can accurately reconstruct or validate the traditional presentation of the history of tafsīr. The sparseness and fragmentary nature of archive materials, including manuscript, numismatic and archaeological evidence, are issues which are prevalent in discussions about Islamic origins. Within this broader context, traditional Muslim accounts in terms of their references to the genesis and development of tafsīr, and even the biographies they present of its principal cynosures, are viewed as being deliberately formulated to present an ideal portrait of the scholarship associated with tafsīr. However, it is important to recognise that with regards to the early literary genres of Islam, it is not the theoretical sophistication and significance of the materials found in the corpora of materials which are in dispute, but rather what remains a point of controversy is the contention that such texts were actually the works of their putative authors or that they preserved authentic dicta or materials emanating from the Prophetic and immediate post-Prophetic periods which were reliably transmitted to posterity through the traditional systems and mechanisms for the dissemination of knowledge.

Traditional frameworks which existed for the transfer of knowledge, with their emphasis on the primacy of the mentor-student relationships, which in turn were regulated by a number of established formats, meant that works ascribed to earlier scholars would often pass through sinuous processes of transmission and editorial review; and, more critically, many of the materials were given formal definition as fixed texts by later students.239 Traditionally, the increasing use of the ismād as an instrument of authentication, which paid due deference to the integrity and reliability of the narrators who transmitted individual reports or whole texts, permitted traditional scholarship to argue that much of the material legacy from this earlier periods had been preserved for posterity using a range of oral and written media.240 Decisively, the debate about authenticity and origins is not restricted to the materials of tafsīr but inevitably extends to all areas of literary activity connected with the genesis of Islam, including the text of the Qurʾān; the Prophetic traditions; jurisprudence; Arabic biography and history; and even theology. The question which is often posed relates to whether the ideas, topoi, and constructs which feature in the early literature reliably preserve historical records of the past, or are such materials the product of subjectively derived impressions of a bygone era, seemingly revealing more about the developed ideologies and beliefs of the historical periods in which they were composed, than those
they purport to portray. Inevitably, debates about authenticity can deflect attention away from the intellectual rigour and profundity of the ideas which feature in the literature, and the ingredients of classical tafsīr represent a hybrid conflation of constructs and themes. Interestingly, in the debate about Islamic origins, it is the significance of the material of early tafsīr which provides the various discussions with valuable points of reference.

One individual whose work was particularly influential in highlighting the issue of the reliability of the early Islamic sources is Ignaz Goldziher, particularly in the context of hadīth literature. Pursuing arguments with reference to doubts about the authenticity of the traditions, in his Muhammedanische Studien Goldziher advanced the argument that the hadīth do not ‘serve as a document for the history of the infancy of Islam, but rather as a reflection of the tendencies which appeared in the community during the mature stages of its development.’ Goldziher made the point that it was not possible to express even a tentative view as to which parts of this large corpus of extant hadīth represented the original core of authentic material, which he assumes must have existed. In numerous ways Goldziher laid the foundation for a much more sceptical approach to the available sources and this was a theme taken up in a number of subsequent studies; in the context of tafsīr literature, it was an approach which categorically dismissed the historical value of allegedly earlier texts as records of an ancient tradition of Qur’ānic interpretation; it was suggested that the materials in such works were redolent of a conspicuous attempt to create historical depth for the scholarship of tafsīr.

In 1920 Goldziher published his work on the early and classical traditions of Qur’ānic commentary, Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung. The work posited that the history of exegesis had to be understood in the context of how the various religious movements associated with the early Islamic tradition attempted to interpret the Qur’ān in ways which sought to justify their own developed ideological and intellectual views. According to Goldziher, the earliest stages of exegesis were linked with the gradual attempts to achieve the textual stability of the Qur’ān, which in its early format remained voluble. Significantly, Goldziher argued that there was marked opposition to the practice of tafsīr, which continued into the late second/eighth century. He concluded that references in the exegetical literature to early authorities such as Ibn ‘Abbās were fallacious and that very little of what is ascribed to him can safely be considered authentic due to his being regularly invoked to furnish credibility to exegetical glosses and explanations.

The concerns about authenticity raised by Goldziher with regards to Prophetic traditions were revisited by Joseph Schacht, who envisaged his work on The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence to be ‘a not unworthy continuation of the studies he (Goldziher) inaugurated.’ Focusing on the compilations of the Qur’ān commentators, the whole argument surrounding the paradigm of authenticity was taken to levels of increasing intricacy by
the work of John Wansbrough, a principal revisionist scholar whose theories inexorably shaped current debates on the issue of Islamic origins. It was Wansbrough’s interrogation of the literature of early tafsīr which led him to question the relationship between the status of the Qurʾān as a fixed text (textus receptus) and what he perceived to be the insidious role that the literature of tafsīr played in the observable processes associated with canonization. Critical in his deliberations was the identification of the form, design, and context of strategies and methodologies applied within the early and medieval literature of tafsīr. Basing his argument on the lack of datable archival records and sources prior to the second/eighth century, Wansbrough considered it conspicuous that the profusion of questions about the meaning and form of the sacred text emerged only in the exegetical literature of the third/ninth century and not prior to that period; insofar that texts were ascribed to earlier authorities or presented as having emanated from them was of little consequence in his view for their true provenance could not be substantiated. He argued that an examination of the available literature showed that ‘both the document of revelation and the corpus of pre-Islamic poetry were being there assembled, juxtaposed, and studied for the first time.’ Moreover, Wansbrough reasoned that in its earliest format tafsīr was pursued within a narrative framework which he termed haggadic, stressing that the ‘chronological sequence of literature on the Qurʾān did not presuppose a standard or ne varietur textus receptus as early as the middle of the first/seventh century’ and on that basis the ‘Uthmānic codex must be seen as a post third/ninth century occurrence composed from a conflation of Prophetic logia.’

In the context of the tafsīrs of Muqātil and al-Kalbī, it was conspicuous to him that they comprised intrusive elements and stylistic fluctuations which impinged upon their overall textual integrity and reliability as evidence of tafsīr in the periods they were alleged to have been composed. A summary glimpse of some of the isnāds of the dicta which feature throughout these works along with discussions within the tafsīrs betrays numerous anachronisms in the form of glosses which originated from later individuals, although technically speaking the procedures which governed the transmission of texts would have allowed such additions to be critically distinguished. Still, in view of that, Wansbrough concluded that ‘haggadic’ works such as the tafsīr works of both Muqātil and Kalbī ‘are not earlier than the date proposed to mark the beginnings of Arabic literature, namely, 200/815.’ He estimated that the appeal to loci probantes in the form of poetry as a tool for elucidating the Qurʾānic expression, which was conspicuously endorsed by dicta attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās, did not occur before the third/ninth century; indeed his view was that the normative discipline of tafsīr did not emerge before the third/ninth century. And that the use of profane language as an interpretive tool surfaced with regularity in exegetical texts which were masoretic in design, such as al-Farrāʾ’s Maʿānī. Wansbrough defined masoretic tafsīr
as encapsulating forms of exegetical scholarship which focused on the textual specifics of the transmission of the Qurʾān and its linguistic justification with reference to variant readings of scripture, grammatical analysis, and lexical explanation, which, according to Wansbrough’s typology, developed belatedly. Wansbrough concluded that the Qurʾān must have emerged as a fixed text much later than the periods specified in the traditional sources, although this was just one of many interrelated and broader suppositions which issued from his work. 253 His views regarding the emergence of the beginnings of Arabic literature in the early third/ninth century together with the issues they raise with regards to the authenticity of materials prior to this historical juncture continue to be debated. Wansbrough’s broader thesis was that the Qurʾān had its origins in an Iraqi milieu and that in light of his reading of the literary function of the earliest literature, the traditionally promoted Hijāzī framework of the Qurʾān was contrived. 254 He maintained that ‘seventh century Hijāz owes its historiographical existence almost entirely to the creative endeavour of Muslim and Oriental scholarship.’ 255 Also relevant to the whole issue of authenticity was the question of whether traditional methods for the transmission of later literary texts inspired confidence or were they too vulnerable to the processes of manipulation. 256  

The recent work of François Déroche on the Le Codex Parisino-petropolitanus, which consists of fragments from a Qurʾānic manuscript discovered in the ‘Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ mosque in Fustat, Egypt together with the manuscript finds at Ṣanʿā’, necessitates a fundamental rethink with regards to Wansbrough’s conclusion à propos the historical confines for the emergence of the Qurʾān as a fixed text. 257 Déroche suggests that the manuscript could be a copy of an older codex, proposing the third quarter of the 1st/7th century as the date of its origin. But he does question whether the traditional accounts of the genesis of the ‘Uthmānic codex can be reconciled with the ‘technical possibilities of the Arabic script towards the middle of the 1st/7th century’ and that the caliph’s role in establishing a vulgate may have been less ambitious than traditionally implied. 258 Déroche explains that also debatable is the relationship between oral and written transmission in these early periods and that the role of orality in the context of a recited text remains unresolved. 259 Déroche does speculate that the Parisino-petropolitanus would have been subjected to emendation and corrections over a long time span and that this would have led to the eventual elimination of discrepancies. Yet he concludes that the efforts of the scholars of second/eighth century, mostly the readers and grammarians who feature so prominently in the literature of tafsīr, were to play a critical role in establishing the fields of learning associated with the Qurʾān’s transmission; he also adds that it was the Qurʾānic codex of the first/seventh century which provided the reference point for their endeavour. 260 The oral pre-history of the Qurʾān is a theme salient in the work of Angelika Neuwirth, who argues that the ‘heterogeneous ensemble’ which came to represent the canonical Qurʾānic text must have been established
before the period of the great conquests. She makes the case that the canonical text was formed from a nucleus of preceding materials which were oral in terms of their organic countenance and liturgical with regards to their primary function: her contention is that the processes of canonization had meant that ‘neatly structured chapters’ were juxtaposed with materials whose structure was much more loose. Her conception of the genre of the Sūra, as introduced by the Prophet, visualises its becoming ‘blurred in the consciousness of the later community.’ Although identifying an Arabian context to these materials and supplying an earlier date for the emergence of a redacted text, the denouement of Neuwirth’s synthesis is that the literature of tafsīr in both its early and classical expression belongs to a discourse which is historically detached from the text it seeks to elucidate.

A theoretical attempt to bridge the conceived historical gap between the extant literary texts and their presumed antecedents is provided in the work of Gregor Schoeler. In his influential Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums Fuat Sezgin had argued that written materials had always been in existence within the Islamic tradition and that it was possible to reconstruct originals which served as the sources of later extant works. With regards to Sezgin, Rippin made the point that ‘he wants to prove the existence of these early written documents in order to establish claims for the validity of ḥadīth transmission and the isnād mechanism’, but that ‘his listing of tafsīr works reveals, however, a flimsy basis for his position: author’s names proliferate, for example, because a listing in Ibn al-Nadīm’s Fihrist has proven sufficient to justify an entry even though there is no actual evidence of the text’s existence.’ A similar position to Sezgin’s one was advocated by Nabia Abbott, who posited that written antecedents had been in circulation in these earlier periods; she contended that they were ostensibly utilised in the later literature. Schoeler sought to develop a different explanation, referring to the fact that a number of studies had identified discrepancies in Sezgin’s central thesis about the existence of original texts and had demonstrated that works such as the tafsīr attributed to the exegete Mujāhid were never fixed texts but simply subsequent arrangements or citations which had surfaced in later works, referring specifically to there being ‘a high degree of discrepancy between those different versions.’ Schoeler believed that Sezgin’s position had been influenced by his desire to illustrate the authenticity of the texts and the materials they comprised, and his thesis about the mechanisms which governed the transmission of knowledge within the Islamic tradition was an attempt to find a compromise solution which would reconcile ‘diametrically opposed points of view.’ Inspired by the work of Aloys Sprenger, he proposed that a distinction should be drawn ‘between notes intended as aides-mémoire or lecture notes, and published books’, arguing that the notion of fixed books, with the exception of the Qurʾān, did not exist until the late second/eighth century. In his view Sībawayhi’s Kitāb was the first fixed book
of its kind in the Islamic tradition; he argued that the conventional frameworks and methods for the dissemination of knowledge relied upon a complementary fusing of oral and written media which was presented through the system of lectures and conventional teaching practices with mentors delivering their lectures to auditing students. This meant that mentors were able to revise and even amend their notes, which when individually preserved for fixed formats over later periods, led to the emergence of variants. Indeed, Schoeler did suggest that scholars ‘even as late as the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, often did not give their work a definite, fixed shape.’ The critical distinction provided by the Greek terms hypomnēma (pl. hypomnēmata) and syngramma (pl. syngrammata) is introduced by Schoeler to illustrate the process of transmission and its manifestation within Islamic contexts and indeed it is used to highlight perceived conceptual shortcomings inherent in Sezgin’s Geschichte: Schoeler argues that despite the achievement of Sezgin’s work, it failed to distinguish between the notion of syngramma and hypomnēma; nor did it entertain the existence of such a distinction.

In the context of the early work on tafsīr attributed to Mujāhid, which was formally circulated under the title Tafsīr Warqā’ an Ibn Abī Najīḥ, Schoeler estimated that it fell into the category of works which most likely constituted original lecture notes preserved, transmitted, and even revised by a succession of students, although hypothetically, rules existed to enable additions to be distinguished. It would be argued that by the application of Schoeler’s theory to a text such as Muqātil’s tafsīr, one would be able to explain the existence of anachronistic glosses in the text and its isnāds; however, in contrast, Wansbrough’s theory is informed by the parameters of style and literary form, which are not addressed in Schoeler’s work, for in the former’s judgement, it is the literary countenance of given texts which can help resolve the issue of historical provenance. Schoeler’s work attempts to offer a workable solution to the thorny question of authenticity, offering an explanation for the redaction of early texts, although whether the theory is reductive in terms of its reliance upon works whose historical constitution is the subject of speculation is a moot point. It was Fred Leemhuis who postulated the existence of a common living tradition of knowledge from which later scholars extracted and to which they gave form in the guise of fixed literary works; this explanation was used to account for the constitution of Mujāhid’s tafsīr.

In his quest to uncover the origin of the Arabic grammatical terminology that features in the Kitāb of Ṣibawayhi, the first comprehensive analysis of the language which furnished the theoretical basis for centuries of Arabic linguistic thought, Kees Versteegh, turned his attention to the exegetical treatises ascribed to Muqātil, Muḥammad al-Kalbī, Sufyān al-Thawrī, Mujāhid, and Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid, whose dicta were transmitted by the Yemeni traditionist ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī. Versteegh had previously
been an advocate of the thesis that Arabic grammar was modelled on Greek linguistic concepts which had filtered through via translations from Syriac. Having isolated a list of basic grammatical terms in Muqāṭil’s *tafsīr*, which suggested that primitive grammatical ideas were already in circulation prior to Sībawayhi, Versteegh concluded that ‘the earlier hypothesis of a Greek origin for certain terms was rendered inoperative on the basis of the data in the early commentaries’. Examining further traces of grammatical terminology in the first extant exegetical treatises, Versteegh inferred that the indigenous school of language, later associated with the Kufans’ tradition and figures such as al-Farrā’ and al-Kīsā’ī, formed part of an earlier heritage of learning which developed independently and was closely aligned with the study of the Qur’ān and its readings; according to Versteegh, Sībawayhi’s achievement in the field of language was his introduction of a wholly innovative approach and framework which revolutionised the study of language, placing it firmly on an evidently more systematic setting.

In the context of the extant exegetical texts, Versteegh reasoned that notwithstanding the distinctions proffered by Schoeler with regards to the conventions adhered to in the transmission of knowledge, the texts of exegetes such as Muqāṭil and Kālbi, far from being haggadic products of the post second/eighth century, had their origins in the earlier tradition; the implication is that the historical trajectories taken by developments in terminology and concepts predicate a greater depth to the literature than hitherto recognised by Wansbrough. Versteegh did postulate that the forms of scholarship associated with the Kufans’ grammatical tradition tended to focus on the treatment of *ma’ānī* type works which were configured around the selective grammatical treatment of the Qur’ānic text; whereas their Basran peers incorporated aspects of Qur’ānic analysis into a much more general theory of language. Nevertheless, despite this assertion it is unquestionable that the Kufans were just as interested in more general treatments of philological and syntactical thought in addition to writing within the *ma’ānī al-Qur’ān* and the *ghaarīb al-Qur’ān* genres. The works of al-Akhfash and al-Zajjāj intimate that authorship in the field of *ma’ānī* was common to the emerging linguistic schools of Kufa and Basra. Versteegh did speak of his being mystified by the absence of any historical connection between Muqāṭil and the various Kufan grammarians and concluded that there must have been a common source upon which both groups were dependent and ultimately based their analyses, surmising that a proto-Ibn ‘Abbās commentary, as it was transmitted by Muqāṭil, would have ‘served as the basis for grammatical teaching in the Kufan tradition.

The literature of early *tafsīr* continues to play a pivotal role in the discussions germane to authenticity and origins. The historical disjunction between the appearance of the earliest extant *tafsīr* texts and the traditional dates for the imposition of the ‘Uthmānic codex has led to speculation about the genuine authority of the Qur’anic explanations proffered by early exegetes,
especially given that frequent differences existed among commentators on questions relating to Qurʾānic vocabulary, along with explanations of the legal and theological import of certain verses. The suggestion is that there exists an incontrovertible distinction between the meaning of the Qurʾān in a seemingly original context and its interpretation in the later literature, in which it is assumed that a subjective range of doctrinal, social, and ideological expediencies was subconsciously driving exegetical discourses. A Wansbroughian explanation would seek an answer in the late development of the Qurʾān and its gradual separation from Prophetic logia to the extent that the delayed emergence of fixed canon resulted in a less than focused understanding of the original elements of the text. Such an explanation would supposedly account for why exeges of the second/third centuries were often viewed to be venturing guesses as to the meaning of certain verses. Somewhat connected to this issue is the exegetical role that the biographical accounts of the life of the Prophet appear to play in furnishing the text of the Qurʾān with an historical background and context which subsequently becomes the template for the pursuit of tafsīr. Again, the contention is that the biographical literature, whose late provenance is emphasized, represents a subjective attempt to make sense of an allusive Qurʾānic narrative and is therefore exegetical in terms of its overall countenance and design. Others have questioned whether one can explain the genesis of the biographical literature purely in terms of its being created to provide the Qurʾān with a narrative.

Another important point raised with regards to the debate about the historical value of tafsīr, stems from the assertion that the Qurʾān needs to be understood through reference to its relationship with the corpora of Christian and Jewish materials, on the basis that Qurʾānic exempla were ultimately engaging with a substrate of late antique religious narratives. Ex hypothesis, there exists a disjunction between the Qurʾān and its commentaries on the basis that ‘tafsīr is the product of a society removed from the period of Islamic origins’ and that even the earliest exeges ‘were unable to understand basic elements of the Qurʾān’; within the framework of such views, it would be considered imperative to broach the Qurʾān in conjunction with the materials which preceded it and not with the tafsīr materials which are supposedly posterior to the text they seek to elucidate. The creation of a distinctiveness which provided the nascent faith with broader lines of definition is also seen as having an impact on the characterisation of emerging doctrinal discourses. And it would be argued that the explication of the Qurʾān which features in traditionally produced commentaries was a reflection of such processes. Ultimately, whether such views fully appreciate the theoretical thrust and context of the discourses of early tafsīr remains debatable. Still, it is the technical tools and methodologies applied in Qurʾānic exegesis and the history of their development which make the discipline so unique in its original context, notwithstanding the achievements of the great literary works of the commentators.
INTRODUCTION

Introducing the Collection

The principal aim of this Collection is to provide a representative selection of the modern academic scholarship devoted to the study of *tafsīr* in its early and medieval setting, focusing on key aspects of historical genesis; classical discourses; and literary achievements, although materials devoted to contemporary issues do feature in the Collection. The Collection is arranged around four broad headings, which are further divided into six thematic parts. Volume I of the Collection focuses on the themes of ‘Gestation and Synthesis’ and features materials which cover the history and development of *tafsīr*, including the emergence of the earliest literary texts. Volume II takes as its focal point materials which explore the ‘Theory and Constructs’ of classical *tafsīr* scholarship with a specific interest in the procedural and conceptual exegetical devices which became essential elements of hermeneutic discourses. Volume III is devoted to the ‘Scholarship of *Tafsīr*’ and reviews the legacy of the great commentators along with the various genres and features of commentaries which the tradition produced. Volume IV is devoted to a broader range of areas under the heading ‘Topics, Themes, and Approaches’ within classical and modern exegesis. Although taken separately, Volumes III and IV are not thematically exclusive as they cover interrelated topics and subjects common to both volumes. The quality and quantity of the articles and research materials devoted to the academic exploration of *tafsīr* have made the process of selecting articles an unenviable one; ultimately, priority was given to materials which fitted in with the overall thematic arrangement of the Collection and are available in the English language. A representative bibliography of works connected or relative to the scholarship of *tafsīr*, including many of the primary reference sources of the discipline, has been provided in the section on notes.

An extensive summary of the literature of classical and medieval exegesis is mapped out in Claude Gilliot’s survey with which the collection opens. Gilliot examines the historical genesis of the various genres within *tafsīr*, covering narrative, traditional, legal, theological, and mystical based treatments of the Qur’ān. This includes the conceptual relevance of various epistemic themes frequently discussed in classical commentaries, including technical nuances between *tafsīr* and *ta’wil*; the notion of opposition to *tafsīr*; and the traditional division of Qur’ānic verses into ambiguous contra unambiguous categories. Prominent in his digest of classical scholarship is the contribution made by grammarians to *tafsīr*, which Gilliot considers to be seminal as far as early developments within the genre are concerned. Abū ‘Ubayda’s *Majāz al-Qur’ān* and al-Farrā’ī’s *Ma’ānī* are considered by Gilliot to augur the introduction of the grammatical sciences into exegetical works and that written works emerged ‘at least by the early second/eighth century.’ And he argues that the exegesis of the text was not the preserve of the commentators but rather it surfaced in all sorts of literary formats. It is the history and
development of *tafsīr* and the emergence of its earliest literary texts which are examined in Fred Leemhuis’s survey of the ‘Origins and Early Development of the *tafsīr* Tradition.’ In this piece the pivotal issue of the authenticity of the earliest exegetical materials is assessed with reference to the *tafsīr* attributed to Mujāhid, which was transmitted as *Kitāb al-tafsīr ‘an Warqā’ ibn ‘Umar* (d. 160/776) ‘an *Ibn Abī Najīh* (d. 131/749 or 132/750) ‘an Mujāhid. The question raised by the chapter is: ‘are the claims of the authors of the late second and third Islamic century, that they pass on the materials of older authorities, historically correct?’ Mujāhid is of course a notable early exegete whose contributions to interpretation feature across the gamut of Qurʾān commentaries; yet in Leemhuis’s effort an attempt is made to determine the historical origin of the actual text on *tafsīr* with which he was linked. Sezgin had deduced from the existence of the *tafsīr* that scholars such al-Ṭabarī had access to original literary sources and that they could be reconstructed from the later sources. Separately, Leemhuis and Georg Stauth had both produced detailed studies of the text and concluded that the written fixation of the works that transmit Mujāhid’s *tafsīr* took place ‘around the middle of the second century.’ And on that basis he argues that before that time the conception of ‘definitive and complete literary works’ did not exist. However, Leemhuis was not suggesting that the material was the blatant product of deliberate forgery, but rather in the case of the *tafsīr* of Mujāhid, it was ultimately the remnant or deposit of a ‘living tradition’ which was fixed subsequently. The contention that earlier works could be reconstructed was, on the basis of his findings, historically unsustainable; they simply did not exist originally in a fixed format. According to Leemhuis, the materials which contributed to the contents of classical *tafsīr* would have originally been part of the ‘living tradition.’

In the *Fihrist* Ibn al-Nadīm devotes the third section of his opening chapter to scholarship on the Qurʾān, enumerating the vast range of works which were connected either with the textual transmission of the text or its exegesis. Following a discussion of the individuals and works associated with the transmission of the Qurʾān and its codification, Ibn al-Nadīm introduces the various disciplines and sub-genres of Qurʾānic exegesis, listing the extant and putative texts composed in the various fields. His inventory encompassed general commentaries on the Qurʾān and grammatical works which featured under the rubric *maʿānī, mushkil,* and *majāz al-Qurʾān,* to texts written on the grammatical and philological treatments of the Qurʾān. In his article Dimitry Frolow posits the view that far from being a random listing of works and their authors, which has a wider signification, the *Fihrist* offers one of the ‘earliest Muslim conceptions of the history of *tafsīr*’ and one which, in Frolow’s understanding, is ‘definitely Shīʿite in outlook’ and that this characteristic sets it apart from al-Suyūṭī’s *Iṣṭāqān,* whose conception of the history of the Qurʾānic sciences pursues a dissimilar trajectory. Staying with the history of *tafsīr,* in a contribution which offers critical
observations about the historical status of the discipline of *tafsīr* and its treatment in both classical Islamic and Western academic scholarship, Bruce Fudge provides an explanation as to why the field of *tafsīr* has received less academic attention than the study of the Qurʾān and that as a discipline it is ‘seldom treated on its own terms.’ Fudge takes the view that the ‘genre occupies a somewhat marginal or at least subordinate place’ within the larger scheme of the Islamic sciences’, contending that most of the authors of the seminar texts of *tafsīr* were principally renowned for their expertise in other religious disciplines; and that it was the presuppositions and premises of such disciplines and outlooks which ultimately impinged upon the countenance of their contributions to *tafsīr*. Within the context of this view, *tafsīr* is not considered to be ‘a priority’ as a discipline but simply a format within which to promulgate ideas cultivated in more prominent areas of learning; Fudge even contends that the existence of exegetes as an independent class of scholars remains historically vague, although examples where the influence of *tafsīr* has been critical are acknowledged. It is of course fascinating to observe that the ubiquitous refrain found in the introductions to the classical commentaries was the declaration that *tafsīr* was the most esteemed of all the religious sciences; Fudge would consider such claims to be vaporous even arguing that the Orientalist assumption that there existed an exalted status for the discipline is ill-informed.

Efrīm Rezvan’s survey of the genre of *tafsīr* switches attention to the historical confines of its scholarship and the concepts and ideas which prefigured approaches to interpretation. In his overview wider socio-political, theological, and cultural contexts are delicately highlighted. Variances with regards to the content and focus of individual *tafsīr* works are discussed along with their underlying aims. The literature of the modern era is assessed both in terms of the continuum which defines the generic boundaries of pre-modern and modern works and the overriding ideological strictures which defined their content; and the adaptability of the discipline is assessed in light of the modern attempts to attempt to reconcile scientific material within traditional *tafsīr* discourses. Rezvan makes the interesting observation that expressions of contemporary exegesis show that the ‘boundaries between “progressive” and “conservative” between “topical” and “archaic” are constantly shifting.’ Charting the historiography of *tafsīr* through reference to the histories of *tafsīr* published in Arabic forms the focus of the final chapter in this part by Walid Saleh. He develops the view that the identification of the modern ideological camps which have played pivotal roles in the publication of major *tafsīr* works is key to comprehending the technical importance attached to the categorisation of the genres of *tafsīr*. Saleh also uses his survey to deconstruct the misleading use of the term ‘al-tafsīr bi’l-ma’thūr’ in the sense that it should not be understood as exclusively embodying traditionally transmitted exegesis, which was traced to the earliest authorities. In his work Saleh has consistently argued that the discipline of *tafsīr* was uniquely placed
at the summit of the Islamic sciences in the sense that it offered an unrivalled format through which ideas and thoughts could be nurtured and fleshed out. On a more general point Saleh does take the view that the scholarship of classical Qur’ānic interpretation has failed to attract the interest it warrants when compared with the other Islamic sciences as the genre is mistakenly viewed as being mired in stagnation and repetitive.

The early literature which defined the crystallization of the genre of *tafsīr* provides the background for Part 2 of the Collection in which the issues of dating and authenticity are examined.²⁸⁷ It opens with Claude Gilliot’s examination of the beginnings of Qur’ānic exegesis in which he cogitates the wider implications of the impact of the ‘irruption of grammar into exegesis’ and the effect it had upon the processes of formalizing the discipline of *tafsīr*. Gilliot argues that ‘the discipline is marked by hagiography and bears all the marks of salvation history.’ Moreover, in his survey of the types of exegetical literature and their procedural features, Gilliot emphasises issues such as ascription, anachronism, retrojection, and religious opposition to illustrate the ‘deceptively artificial’ nature of this discipline and its actual purpose and design: namely, the quest for historical and religious legitimacy. Interestingly, in a later piece of work by Gilliot (Chapter 1 in the Collection), he did accept that the existence of *tafsīr* materials had an earlier provenance than he hitherto countenanced. While Gilliot sets out to locate the dynamic which foreshadows the Muslim tradition’s presentation of its history of *tafsīr*, fundamentally calling into question the historicity of the scholarship it professes to embody, Kees Versteegh refers to this scholarship in order to uncover the origins of the grammatical terminology which featured in the earliest grammatical treatises.²⁸⁸ It is Muqātil ibn Sulaymān’s *Tafsīr* which is examined in this investigation and in it Versteegh concludes that the primitive existence of terminologies in the *tafsīr* hinted that there was an internal dimension to their development which, through later stages of progression, were refined by both Kufan and Basran grammarians and used in their earliest treatises. As mentioned previously, Versteegh had considered the idea that Greek linguistic models were relied upon by Arabic grammarians for developing terminologies and it was his study of Muqātil’s *tafsīr* which led to his revision of this view.²⁸⁹ Among the conclusions drawn by Versteegh were that Kufan scholars were affiliated to an ancient tradition of language study; the Basrans, inspired by Sibawayhi, revolutionised the study of language, promoting new ideals and terminologies. Versteegh adopted a similar approach in his examination of the work on the subject of *Gharīb al-Qur’ān*, attributed to Zayd ibn ‘Alī (d. 124/741). Of course, the importance of such findings are premised by the general attitude one adopts towards the authenticity of the sources, and indeed this is a point which Versteegh concedes. It was the pitfalls of using texts whose provenance was the subject of dispute which were discussed by Andrew Rippin in a review article devoted principally to Versteegh’s monograph entitled *Arabic Grammar and Qur’ānic Exegesis*
in Early Islam, although Miklos Muranyi’s publication of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Wahb’s al-Jāmi: Ṭafsīr al-Qur‘ān is also briefly considered. Rippin had made the point that the paucity of the sources together with concerns about their authenticity renders establishing the history of their intellectual development a burdensome task. In his view such a state of affairs accentuates the importance of John Wansbrough’s work and his arguments about the early literary sources. As Rippin explains he was the first individual to analyse the content of early ṭafsīr texts and their relationship with the rise of the canonical status of the Qur‘ān. Taking up the arguments about stylistic and functional variations in literary texts as advocated by Wansbrough, Rippin drew attention to the fact that the forms of exegetical analysis with which the texts studied by Versteegh are concerned do betray characteristics of analysis which were decidedly posterior to the periods from which they were alleged to have emanated. Versteegh had used the texts of Mujāhid, Sufyān al-Thawrī, al-Kalbī, Muqātil, and ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī as sources for his study of Qur‘ānic exegesis, endeavoursing to trace the embryonic synthesis of grammatical concepts through references to these ṭafsīr texts. Versteegh had taken the view that exegesis had arisen out of the need to ‘investigate’ religious and social practices. While accepting that Versteegh’s analysis of the ‘material at hand is illuminating and thorough’, Rippin’s reservation is that the value of such sources for the purposes of ‘history’ is problematic. His line of argument is that these texts might contain an ‘historical kernel of truth’ but one is unable to determine where that actually exists within a given text. Rippin also takes the opportunity to discuss the existing scholarly consensus on the texts used by Versteegh, including a number of texts not included in the survey; they include Abū ‘Ubayd’s Faḍā’il al-Qur‘ān and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Wahb’s al-Jāmi’, which was produced in a polished critical edition by Muranyi. The text is an example of the ‘early periphrastic type of exegesis’, although the work, along with Ibn Wahb’s companion text on the sciences of the Qur‘ān, was not available for Versteegh’s survey. Muranyi takes the view that the ṭafsīr yields insights into the state of Islam in the early second/eighth century, although Rippin points out that this is based on traditional isnād dating criteria; however, he happily accepts ‘there can be little doubt about the third century date of the manuscript’ and the ‘comparatively early nature of the material.’

The debate about authenticity is explored in two further studies by Rippin included in Part II of the first volume: the first of which considers some of the problems resulting from the attempt to resolve the history of the emergence of early ṭafsīr texts and is based on a study of the text on abrogation attributed to Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī. Despite being published in 1984, the broad issues it raises about dating, authenticity, particularly with regards to whether materials derived from later compilations but ascribed to an earlier author are the products of bona fide transmission, and the literary format of early works, remain just as relevant today. Through a forensic analysis
of both its textual transmission and content, Rippin proceeds to the view that even though one might find among such compilations specific elements which betray an early provenance, as is the case for this text, also embedded within its narrative are materials whose countenance are redolent of a developed stage in legal discussions, although the broader point alluded to by Rippin is the question of whether texts such as this one should be ‘relied upon to provide a source of early material.’ In a second article by Rippin the issue of the accuracy of the ascription of texts is revisited in an attempt to deal with the problem of the proliferation of ascription which surrounds the text known as Tanwīr al-miqbās min tafsīr Ibn ‘Abbās. The contention that the text should be treated as the Kitāb al-wādīḥ fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān, a work by ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Dīnawārī (d. 308/920), had been first mooted in Rippin’s article on al-Zuhārī’s Kitāb al-naskh, in which he mentioned that Wansbrough had simply noted that al-Dīnawārī’s work was a verbatim reproduction of al-Kalbī’s text. But in this article Rippin seeks to justify the relationship between the ascribed versions of this text, which are essentially identical, yet linked with four different authors: Ibn ‘Abbās, al-Kalbī, al-Dīnawārī, and al-Fīruzābādī, the author of the lexicon al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭī, with the aim of pondering the wider implications of the accuracy of ascription.292 Rippin believes that the insidious use of an isnād which presupposes the text’s connection with Ibn ‘Abbās is a remnant of the tafsīr bi’l-ra’y and tafsīr bi’l-ma’thūr debates in which attempts were made to restrain the resort to opinion in tafsīr and accentuate ‘the most honourable material that may be found in the tradition’ and that this dovetails with struggles for religious authority; furthermore, it is posited that a more profound significance to the invoking of Ibn ‘Abbās rests with his becoming ‘a mythic exemplum for the Muslim community.’293

More recently, while accepting the conclusions reached by Rippin regarding the dating of the Tanwīr al-miqbās and the fact that it is neither the work of al-Kalbī nor al-Fīruzābādī, but actually al-Dīnawārī’s Kitāb al-wādīḥ fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān, in his contribution to the discussions Harald Motzki has suggested that questions do linger about the text: namely, the precise identity of the author of the text; the relationship between al-Kalbī’s text and the Kitāb al-wādīḥ; and the issue of the reliability of Rippin’s method of dating the text.294 On the first point Motzki concludes that the actual author of the text is Abū Muḥammad ibn al-Mubārak al-Dīnawārī, who was theologically linked with the Karrāmites; on the second point, Motzki argues that there is evidence to suggest that al-Dīnawārī (al-Mubārak) was also the transmitter of Ibn al-Kalbī’s text, which he frequently used and often adapted. But Motzki also made the case that it is possible to identify original fragments of al-Kalbī’s tafsīr which were used by later exegetes and which differed from the materials transmitted by al-Dīnawārī, indicating the possibility that the materials have their provenance in al-Kalbī’s era. Finally, on the point of the methods used for dating, Motzki believes that a critical study of isnāds
and indeed biographies is crucial to resolving issues of the historical chronology of texts and while dating on the basis of literary and stylistic conventions is entirely valid, its combination with the former process is much more productive. While not disputing the dating of the Kitāb al-wādīh by Rippin, Motzki posits the existence of an early source in the form of al-Kalbī’s tafsīr. But the thrust of Rippin’s argument relates to the broader issue of whether one can rely upon such literary materials as sources for the earlier periods due to the complexities of their composite constitution.

The traditionally prolific role accorded to Ibn ‘Abbās as the progenitor and author of a large portion of corpus of tafsīr dicta forms the subject of Herbert Berg’s study of how his prominence in Qur’ānic exegesis is linked with the political and religious power of the ‘Abbāsid caliphate.295 With regards to the historical Ibn ‘Abbās, Berg makes the point that even a tentative reconstruction of this figure’s life is fraught with difficulties due to the unreliable and tendentious nature of biographical sources on him, noting that even early sources such as Ibn Sa’d’s al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā comprised significant amounts of legendary material about his personage. Interestingly, the reference to the Prophet’s supplicating that Ibn ‘Abbās be granted wisdom and the ability to interpret the Qurān does feature in Muqātil’s tafsīr. Berg points out that scholars such as Sprenger, Nöldeke, and Schwally had already raised doubts about the authenticity of the materials attributed to him, although it was Harris Birkeland who suggested that his opinions were a sociological fact in terms of their representing ‘the consensus of the Muslim community at the end of the second/eighth century.’ Following a quantitative survey of sample references to Ibn ‘Abbās in the Tafsīr al-Jāmi‘ of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Wahb; the section on tafsīr in al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ; and al-Ṭabarī’s Tafsīr, Berg set out to determine whether the status of Ibn ‘Abbās developed prior to the political aspirations of Ibn ‘Abbās’ grandson Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī (d. 125/743) and the importance of his reputation in subsequent periods. The survey does evaluate the type of reports in which he is adduced and the centrality of his personage within these materials. The conclusion reached is that his status is by no means static and that some aspects of his reputation was achieved before the ‘Abbāsids became ‘players in Islamic politics’, but that it was enhanced further at the heart of ‘Abbāsid power, although Berg also detects a decline in his status much later.

The final article in this section by Harald Motzki offers a comprehensive study of the general state of play with regards to the academic debate about the origins of Muslim exegesis.296 Pointing out that since the beginning of the twentieth century Western academic scholarship has taken a generally negative view of the reliability of the traditional accounts of the genesis and development of the discipline of exegesis, particularly the role envisaged of Ibn ‘Abbās in its history, Motzki pores over the key perspectives which scholars have advocated. Among which is the position of individuals such as Fuat Sezgin, Nabilia Abbott, Isaiah Goldfeld, who were all sympathetic
to the traditional view and even accepted the existence of early written sources, and Kees Versteegh, who argued that the extant literature provides ‘a clear picture’ of Ibn ‘Abbās’ teachings. And the perspectives of those scholars such as Wansbrough, Rippin, Gilliot, and indeed Berg, who held strong reservations about Ibn ‘Abbās’ historical status as the founder of exegesis. Leemhuis’ theory, discussed above, is seen by Motzki as offering an intermediate solution with regards to his postulating the existence of a ‘living tradition’ which yielded the sources for the classical tradition’s construction of tafsīr. Although having previously questioned the accuracy of Berg’s classification of academic scholarship into sanguine and sceptical camps vis-à-vis the reliability of the sources, particularly in terms of his critique of Berg’s rejection of the utility of isnāds, Motzki focused on a study by Berg in which the latter drew parallels between the underlying assumptions adopted by ‘sceptical’ and ‘sanguine’ scholars and the conclusions they often reached; Berg had used forms of analysis synonymous with both camps to illustrate his assertion. Motzki takes the position that Berg’s application of the isnād-cum-matn approach lacks accuracy and sophistication, maintaining that he also fundamentally misconstrues Motzki’s own standpoint regarding the authenticity of the hadīths. Motzki then explains that he does not believe that traditions are largely authentic but rather that the traditions found in extant compilations were not the invention of the authors of these works but rather they have a history which extends backwards. Furthermore, he also questions Berg’s submission that the ‘common link should be viewed as a common source for, not the originator of, the matn.’ The common link here is defined as ‘the key transmitter whom many or most transmitter lines of a tradition have in common.’ But Motzki counters that he does entertain the idea that the common link can be the originator of a tradition or a collecting transmitter, and in instances even a fiction. In many senses the distinctions highlighted by Motzki reflect his position that sweeping generalizations about the origin of the sources need to be avoided.

Much of the chapter discusses points raised in Berg’s article, allowing Motzki to set out his thesis of how it is possible to differentiate between exegetical materials that might be deemed reliable from those which are evidently not. Part of the chapter is devoted to exploring the exegesis found in a number of the earlier commentaries, including the works of Muqātil, Abū ‘Ubayda, al-Farrā’, al-Akhfash, al-Kalbī, and Zayd ibn ‘Alī, all of whom, he concludes, combine elements of early exegesis without disclosing their sources. Suppositions to which Berg subscribes provide the backdrop for many of the discussions and also included is an extended treatment of the general tenor of Wansbrough’s arguments and views with regards to the development of early exegesis in which Motzki defends the efficacy of historical source analysis and the isnād-cum-matn method. He argues that such methods can be used constructively to determine whether sources derive from the persons to whom they are ascribed and whether they can be faithfully reconstructed.
Under the heading theories and constructs of *tafšīr*, Volume II of the Collection includes studies which focus upon ‘Procedural and Conceptual Exegetical Devices’ utilised within classical exegesis. It begins with John Wansbrough’s study investigating the technical significance of the term *majāz*, which serves as an explanatory tool in Abū ‘Ubayda’s commentary, *Majāz al-Qur‘ān*. Wansbrough did conclude that the study of variant readings of scripture, grammatical analysis, and lexical paraphrase were all elements of masoretic exegesis. He estimated that the term *majāz* as used by Abū ‘Ubayda’s simply connoted periphrastic exegesis, epitomising the ‘insertion of explanatory elements into elliptic phraseology.’ Wansbrough linked *majāz* to the processes of textual restoration (*taqdīr*), which aimed to ‘alleviate the strictures imposed upon the language by Qur‘ānic diction’, thereby providing textual clarity as opposed to literary embellishment. It was much later that *majāz* was used technically to exemplify metaphorical expressions and the figurative usage of language. In Wansbrough’s thesis there existed both grammatical as well as doctrinal reasons behind the use of the *majāz* mechanism. Similar exegetical techniques, which are employed in Saadya Gaon’s treatment of Targum and Masorah, are referred to for the parallels they offer. Wansbrough does remark that it is a short step from exegetical to rhetorical *majāz* and it the latter topic which is examined in Wolfhart Heinrichs’ study. The origin of the term *majāz* had previously been the subject of an extended treatment by Heinrichs in which he concluded that *majāz* technically connoted the explanatory rewriting of phrases, particularly idioms and other rather obscure forms of Qur‘ānic expressions; and in this sense, it was primarily an instrument of grammatical resolution. With such a view Heinrichs countered Wansbrough’s argument that the term was initially linked with the process of grammatical suppletion or *taqdīr*. A previous study of the term by Almagor had concluded that the term was applied to qualify modes of expression. Such studies are significant in that they attempt to draw attention to the technical development of the terminology used by early exegetes. Subsequently, *majāz* was antithetically paired with the term *haqīqa* and used to connote the veridical-metaphorical status of language, although Heinrichs showed that in Abū ‘Ubayda’s text, the employment of explanatory rewriting might include figurative language but this was incidental to its original function. He felt that the reasons for the term’s assumption of a theological function had to be sought in the activities of the Mu‘tazilites, who, by creating the notion of the *majāz* expression, were in a position to explain away conceptually the anthropomorphic imagery of scripture. In the current survey Heinrichs traces the literary theory of *majāz* as developed and articulated by a number of influential classical luminaries. In Haggai Ben-Shammai’s article an attempt is made to survey the status of literary forms of parable and simile (*mathal*) in early exegesis. Ben-Shammai draws attention to the theological strictures which were sometimes applied when dealing with the phenomenon of *mathal*. 
The history and origin of the practice of using poetry to elucidate the lexical import of words and phrases in the diction of the Qurʾān are themes explored in Issa J. Boullata’s chapter. It is based on a study of a fifth/eleventh century medieval manuscript comprising the work originally ascribed to Ibn ʿAbbās, Masāʾil Nāṭīʿ ibn al-Azraq, in which the practice of explaining lexical items in the Qurʾān through reference to poetry is justified; the tract was eventually preserved in al-Suyūṭī’s Itqān. Accepting the view that an accumulation of materials in the form of loci probantes attributed to figures such as Ibn ʿAbbās had taken place over the centuries, Boullata advocates that the notion that the existence of an authentic core of materials originated with Ibn ʿAbbās is not improbable, although the import of oral transmission in the dissemination of knowledge within traditional societies is viewed by Boullata as being important. It was Wansbrough who first argued that the use of poetry in exegetical treatises (especially masoretic works) was a later development and he had already concluded that the arguments adduced in the treatises ascribed to Ibn ʿAbbās betrayed ‘an exegetical method considerably posterior to the activity of Ibn ʿAbbās’; and Rippin’s work had likewise reached similar conclusions. Rippin would argue that the inability to distinguish the inauthentic from the authentic materials undermines the value of a source in arguments about history, a point which Boullata also concedes.

Within the early Arabic linguistic tradition the use of poetry as an instrument for the elucidation of the language of the Qurʾān does not appear to have gone unchallenged. There are statements attributed to the Kufan philologist Abū Bakr ibn al-Anbārī (260–328/874–939) in which he sets out a convincing defence of the practice against the charge that by relying upon poetry in the form of loci probantes to explain aspects of the Qurʾānic diction, one had made profane poetry the basis (āṣl) of the Qurʾān (al-kitāb); the theological ramifications were significant. Ibn al-Anbārī counters this argument by invoking the authority of the Companions, to whom an abundance of materials on ‘gharīb’ and ‘mushkil’ is ascribed, arguing that their reflections therein are supported by the citation of poetry. One can certainly identify such opposition as a recurrent phenomenon with which scholars had to contend as opposed to constituting an early concern which disappears in the later exegetic tradition as the prolific use of poetry predominated within exegesis. And it is in the introduction to al-Naysābūrī’s Gharāʾib al-Qurʾān that the subsidiary function of gharīb as an instrument for the elucidation of elements of the Qurʾānic diction is reiterated. Also of interest is the fact that the use of poetry to justify variae lectiones was the subject of a protracted debate within the grammatical tradition with certain scholars objecting to the undermining of the linguistic configuration of readings on the basis of the attestation of poetic proofs (shavāhid).

The division of Qurʾānic verses into muḥkamāt and mutashābihāt categories by classical exegetes provides the central theme of Leah Kinberg’s
comparative study. Her aim is to trace the trajectories of the discussions in the exegetical literature, thereby showing the diversity and differences which accompanied the exegetical definitions of these terms. The nexus between the concept of *mutashābihāt* and the theme of opposition to exegesis remained the subject of much debate. It was Goldziher who first claimed that the voluminous literature of *tafsīr* concealed the fact that initially scholarship in this discipline was actively discouraged by the Pious Ancestors and that opposition to its practice continued well into the second century; evidently, he had in mind the forms of *tafsīr* condemned in the statement of Ibn Ḥanbal and areas of exegesis made popular by the class of storytellers. And he refers to the questionable report in which (Ibn) Ṣābīgh was flayed by the second caliph ʿUmar for persistently asking questions about verses supposedly belonging to the realm of the *mutashābihāt*; Goldziher placed the discussions about opposition within the context of the tradition which censures *tafsīr biʾl-raʿy* to buttress his line of reasoning that during these formative periods opposition to *tafsīr* was intensely entrenched. His argument was challenged by Harris Birkeland in a study which took an in-depth look at the whole question of opposition against the interpretation of the Qurʾān in these periods. He largely dismissed the conclusions of Goldziher, proposing that the seeds of hostility towards the practice of *tafsīr* appeared only towards the end of the first/seventh century and that piety lay behind the reticence that scholars of a stern religiosity showed towards *tafsīr*, particularly against forms of exegesis which were championed by so-called heretics. Birkeland believed that a virtual consensus emerged vis-à-vis specified exegetical topics and explanations within each chapter of the Qurʾān at the beginning of the third/ninth century. However, the materials in the form of traditions associated with this consensus were normatively authenticated and attributed to the father of exegesis, Ibn ʿAbbās; Birkeland’s view was that these materials probably embodied common opinions on *tafsīr* held by scholars in traditionist circles, about 200 A.H. (815–6 C.E.), and they later surfaced in the work of al-Ṭabarī.

In her collection of monographs devoted to the study of Arabic papyri, the volume treating Qurʾānic commentary revisited the issue of opposition to *tafsīr*. Questioning the premises and conclusions reached by both Goldziher and Birkeland, Nabia Abbott argued that it was the Qurʾānic verses designated as being *mutashābihāt* around which opposition to *tafsīr* was constellated. But she speaks of its being symbolised by a somewhat guarded approach when encroaching upon the exegetical limits and sensitivities of such verses. Abbott did observe that it was paradoxical that cynosures who were spoken of as being ardent opponents of *tafsīr* happened to be the source of exegetical glosses and anecdotes conspicuously used to explicate verses. Revisiting this issue, Wansbrough’s placed the discussions on an entirely different plane, focusing on the design and content of the earliest literary texts. And in doing so he highlighted what he perceived to be methodological oversights which
plagued the approaches of both Birkeland and Abbott: namely, they invariably treated the traditional narratives as comprising authentic records of the early periods, and in Birkeland’s case, this is true for the majority of the biographical reports upon which he relied to counter Goldziher’s arguments.\textsuperscript{307} Indeed, Wansbrough even described Abbott’s approach as being simplistic: in his view only the literary interrogation of the countenance of the extant sources could uncover the significance of the exegetical ideas and views expressed in the literature. His own findings led him to speculate about the emergence of canon. A fleeting review of the content of early \textit{tafsīr} literature confirms that the \textit{muḥkam-mutashābih} antithesis in its later expression was hardly a construct which arrested the pursuit of \textit{tafsīr}; it had a largely symbolic function with regards to the identification of types of verses. In Kinberg’s article it is argued that the \textit{muḥkam-mutashābih} antithesis allowed a resourceful configuration of exegetical activity which medieval scholarship expediently utilised to pursue all sorts of exegetical leads.\textsuperscript{308}

Further analysis of the concepts of \textit{Muḥkamāt} and \textit{mutashābihāt} is developed by Jane McAuliffe in a chapter which sums up their wider hermeneutical implications. With reference to a number of twentieth-century critical literary discourses, she is interested in exploring the potential role the concepts play in ‘constructing bridges between medieval commentaries and contemporary theories.’ Interestingly, McAuliffe does conclude the chapter by remarking that classical commentators found in the juxtaposition of ideas about \textit{muḥkamāt} and \textit{mutashābihāt} an ‘opportunity for the kind of full intellectual, moral, and spiritual engagement that the text incessantly demands’; it was this very point which formed part of the wider treatment of the potential of the taxonomy by al-Rāghib al-İsfahānī, outlined above. The hermeneutical continuum which unambiguously links the works of al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr is a theme reviewed in a further contribution by McAuliffe. It is intriguing to note that McAuliffe explains that al-Ṭabarî’s commentary is instinctively viewed as being an important example of \textit{al-tafsīr bi’l-maṭhūr}, but as she emphasises it is so much more than simply a collection of traditional dicta. This in many ways highlights the fact that such labels do tend to be misleading when applied to the extant exegetical literature.

Moving away from the more theoretical aspects of Qur’ānic hermeneutics to a more general issue of interpretation, it is the subject of \textit{tafsīr bi’l-ra’y}, as treated by al-Ghazālī in his \textit{Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn}, which is discussed in the contribution by Muhammad Abul Quasem.\textsuperscript{309} It is posited that although al-Ghazālī did not bequeath an exclusive commentary, he did leave a number of treatises such as the \textit{ Jawāḥīr al-Qur’ān} and other works from which his thoughts on exegetical issues and topics can be distilled, showing that his exegetical legacy is quite substantial. The suggestion is that through an analysis of the arguments about \textit{tafsīr bi’l-ra’y}, al-Ghazālī was able to illustrate that when properly regulated, such circumspect forms of exegesis were entirely normative and legitimate; and that there was no other way of meaningfully
engaging with the Qurʾān. Moreover, he went on to argue that forms of Ṣūfī exegesis which probed for latent meanings of the text were equally valid if earnestly broached. Abul Quasem takes the view that al-Ghazālī’s contribution to the debate lay in his systematisation of exegetical ideals already formulated by earlier generations of Ṣūfī exegetes. Staying with the figure of al-Ghazālī, Mesut Okumuş’s study attempts to show the extent to which the framework of Qurʾānic hermeneutics which he adopted was influenced by the philosopher Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037). Classical as well as modern scholarship had long recognised that certain aspects of al-Ghazālī’s thought was heavily influenced by Ibn Sīnā, and in this chapter Mesut Okumuş traces influences in al-Ghazālī’s treatment of exegetical themes which are linked to discussions about the existence of God and the divine attributes through reference to the Qurʾān’s Light Chapter, Q. 24:35, and his Mishkāt al-anwār. Authorial intention within the framework of the modern hermeneutic argument which predicates that a text’s meaning rests upon the ideas (or sign sequence) which the author intended to convey as opposed to the ideas inferred from the text by the reader or interpreter serves as the backdrop to Ulrika Mårtensson’s examination of the exegesis of Q. 24:35 (the ‘Light Verse’) by both al-Ṭabarî and al-Ghazālī. Mårtensson posits that the two scholars’ approach to the explication of these verses is commensurate with the modern hermeneutic concept of authorial intention. She does situate her treatment within the vector of arguments about the semantic compass of taʿwīl as understood by classical exegetes as representing a quest for the intended meaning; and also highlighted is the notion that Ismāʿīlī exegesis of the Qurʾān evinces a distinct exemplification of the hegemony of the interpreter as the source of meaning.

The epistemic value of language within Qurʾānic commentary is dealt with in Versteegh’s study of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s exegesis of the opening chapter of the Qurʾān. Versteegh is interested not only in the way that al-Rāzī’s training as a legal theorist is reflected in the definitions he postulates, but also in the developments across the various disciplines of learning in the fourth/tenth century and particularly the manner by which leading grammarians of Muʿtazilite leanings were influencing the theoretical discourses of the period. This is followed by Hartmut Bobzin’s study of the use of variant readings in the popular and influential commentary entitled, Tafsīr al-jalālayn, which was composed by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥalli (d. 864/1459). Bobzin is particularly interested in the manner by which such readings are used to illustrate Qurʾānic glosses.

Classical debates surrounding the corpus of ḵisrāʾīliyyāt and their historical roots as ancillary exegetical aids are the focus of two separate studies: the first of which is by Jane McAuliffe and she chooses to analyse successive exegetical treatments of Q.2:67–73, one of the set of verses highlighted by Ibn Taymiyya in his Muqaddima as an example of a pericope which, in his view, had attracted much worthless and banal speculation on the part of
classical exegetes. McAuliffe seeks to investigate how references to the *isrā‘īliyāt* impacted upon successive commentators’ treatment of these verses in the light of Ibn Taymiyya’s claim that such musings engendered nothing but futile exegetical divergences (*ikhṭilāf*).

She ponders the profounder implications of the expressions of opposition to the use of these materials and questions why such a hermeneutic of denial was sustained, although one does need to bear in mind that despite such warnings the materials continued to be used in ways which were productive. In Roberto Tottoli’s contribution a survey of the origins of the term *isrā‘īliyāt* and its attestation in the early and classical literature is extended to include attitudes to the *isrā‘īliyāt* in the more recent exegetical sources. Distinctly related to the preceding discussions are the arguments surrounding the use of the Bible as a critical analogue for the interpretation of the Qur’ān as advocated by the Egyptian exegete, al-Biqā‘ī, and these are considered in Walid Saleh’s study. Al-Biqā‘ī, was the author of a treatise entitled *al-Aqwāl al-qawimah fi ḥukm al-naqil min al-kutub al-qadim* in which he defended the use of the Bible as a basis for the interpretation of the Qur’ān. He had made illustrious use of the technique in his seminal commentary, *Naẓm al-Durār fi tanāsub al-ayyāt wa‘l-suwar*. Saleh weighs up the wider implications of al-Biqā‘ī’s insistence on using the Bible as a ‘proof text’, noting that he was not only quoting from Biblical scriptures verbatim, but also often superseding Islamic narratives. Al-Biqā‘ī was heavily criticised by his peers but he defended his position, prompting numerous legal edicts and acrid discussions in which the distinguished traditionist and historian al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497), along with a number of other notable figures, emerged as vociferous opponents. Saleh noted that modern scholarship has principally focused on al-Biqā‘ī’s involvement in Sūfī and philosophical controversies: he had subjected the mystic Ibn al-Fārid (576–632/1181–1235) to excoriating criticism; Saleh expresses the view that his exciting exegetical legacy has been largely overlooked despite its enormity. He argues that *tafsīr* provided a unique setting for the promulgation of ideas and standpoints of a non-exegetical flavour and in this sense it preserves significant aspects of the cultural development of Islamic intellectual history; indeed, the exegetical thought of al-Biqā‘ī together with his legacy serves as a useful demonstration of this fact. Somewhat related to the aforementioned discussions is Andrew Rippin’s study which reviews the identification of foreign exegetical items in Qur’ānic exegesis through the work of the polymath Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūtī, who authored a number of related treatises. Rippin explores the role such exegetical processes played in classical scholars’ attempt to find various solutions to issues of interpretation, which were then given broader contextual import. Rippin sees the discipline of *tafsīr* as being characterised by an acquisitive dynamic which accentuated the ideals of applied relevance and he concluded that the concept of the foreign word provided an apposite framework for situating the explanations of meanings.
Another important exegetical category is the *asbāb al-muzūl*, which formed a salient area of focus within Qur’anic commentaries. In his article Rippin contended that the *asbāb al-muzūl* materials in question were not halakhic in origin in terms of their being of functional relevance to the legal treatment of the Qurʾān as suggested by Wansbrough, regardless of the sub-genres in which they appear, but rather they were haggadic in countenance and probably promulgated by storytellers and preachers for their edifying utility. The exegetical genre of abrogation is the subject of David Powers’ study and in it he reviews the historical relevance of the different literature devoted to *naskh*. His aim is to evaluate classical perceptions and applications of this doctrine in the traditional discourses, drawing attention to the way patterns of a theory of abrogation fit in with the textual history of the Qurʾān and its emergence as canon.

It has been suggested that the Muʾtazila contribution to the classical scholarship of exegesis has been only fleetingly explored in modern academic scholarship with the work of al-Zamakhsharī often providing the principal focal point of attention. Of course, in all forms of classical Islamic scholarship the contribution to theoretical and practical discourses is not exclusively defined by preconceived theological propensities. Yet, recent studies of a number of exegetical treatises composed by Muʾtazila authors do reveal interesting nuances within syntheses of theory and methodology. An important Muʾtazila *tafsīr* is the unpublished commentary of al-Hākim al-Jishmū, whose work has been the subject of a number of detailed studies by Suleiman Mourad, who explains that while al-Zamakhsharī rarely identifies the exegetical views of his Muʾtazila cohorts, al-Jishmū provides details of the actual authors of various exegetical glosses. The contribution by Mourad represents a serious attempt to offer an appraisal of al-Jishmū’s legacy, reviewing the hermeneutical strictures which he brought to bear in his exegetical treatment of the Qurʾān. General hermeneutical principles applied by exegetes are also explored through the translation of two key texts by Jane McAuliffe, the first of which consists of a section of Ibn Taymiyya’s famous *Muqaddima fi 'usūl al-tafsīr* followed by a translation and commentary based on the introduction to the *tafsīr* composed by the Hanbalite scholar Ibn al-Jawzī. The introduction to the commentary *Anwār al-tanzil*, composed by the Shāfiʿite exegete al-Bayḍāwī, is the subject of Yusuf Rahman’s study which offers a tentative sketch of the hermeneutical bases of the commentary. The work is viewed as being typically Ashʿarite in its theological outlook and heavily reliant on the compilations of his predecessors, al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī, yet as Rahman points out, al-Bayḍāwī does adhere to an elaborate methodology throughout the text which he carefully outlined in his introduction.

The common theme of the final three chapters of this volume is provided by overall frameworks of method and theory within Qur’anic hermeneutics, beginning with an attempt by Yeshayahu Goldfeld to explain the genesis of
classical Islamic exegetical concepts in the light of Jewish antecedents. Interestingly, while modern scholarship has been sceptical of the claims made in the later sources about the historical status of figures such as Ibn ‘Abbās and the existence of early treatises and tracts, Goldfeld takes a very positive view of the reliability of the traditional sources, identifying a distinct measure of accuracy in the transmission of early exegetical texts.\(^{323}\) Referring to the *tafsīr* of Ibn ‘Abbās, he speculates that ‘a degree of augmentation, interpolation, and editing had probably accompanied the transmitted original’, but nevertheless an original text did exist.\(^{324}\) He argues that exegetical precepts employed by Ibn ‘Abbās were in point of fact sourced from Judeo-Christian concepts of scriptural interpretation. It is through the introduction to Muqāṭīl’s *tafsīr*, whose methodology is seen as encapsulating the Jewish theory of exegesis as refined by the Sopherim, that Goldfeld gauges the trajectories of this assumed nexus. Gregor Schwarb’s extended study is also based on a comparative approach which analyses the interdependence defining the classical articulation of legal hermeneutics and the principles of exegesis in Islamic and Jewish scholarship.\(^{325}\) Schwarb is concerned with examining facets of the interplay between *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *uṣūl al-tafsīr* in the context of literature of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries. The final chapter of the volume is a study by Peter Heath of the hermeneutical processes applied by al-Tabarî, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn ‘Arabī in the exegesis of a Qur’ānic pericope.\(^{326}\) While the study is principally concerned with the broader implications of the significance of Islamic interpretational methods, with the aim of promoting a trans-disciplinary comparison, it does offer a synthesis of the general critical basis which allows interpretation to facilitate dialectically generative processes.

The scholarship of *tafsīr* with regards to principal commentators and their commentaries provides the focus for many of the chapters in Volume III of the Collection. The general context to most of the themes, personalities, and works examined in this volume’s chapters has already been touched upon in the former part of the introduction. It is the legacy of Muqāṭīl ibn Sulaymān which features in the first two contributions, beginning with Nabia Abbott’s edition of folios from his treatise *al-Wuğūh wa’l-nażā’ir*, which is derived from her larger work on *Arabic Literary Papyri: Qur’ānic Commentary*. It includes discussions of the development of *tafsīr* and Abbott’s thoughts on the issue of opposition to *tafsīr* in the early periods and its probable links with the issue of the interpretation of *mutashābihāt* verses. Changes in attitudes towards the exegete Muqāṭīl in the later historical periods are examined in Mehmet Koç’s article, which outlines reasons for these developments. Koç advocates the view that there may have been common theological affinities between Muqāṭīl and later exegetes who set about invigorating and restoring Muqāṭīl’s legacy within exegesis. Walid Saleh has observed that al-Tha’labī had been influential in propagating the exegesis of Muqāṭīl; Koç concludes that all such observations have implications for the history of
exegesis. The biographical sources tell of the intriguing historical relationship between Muqātīl and his predecessor al-Ḍāhkhāk ibn Muzāḥim: the former claimed to have studied with him, although there are discrepancies in the data of which biographers were suspicious. And, it is al-Ḍāhkhāk’s putative tafsīr, as collated from disparate sources, which is meticulously mined by Versteegh for its discussion of linguistic concepts. This chapter is followed by Mårtensson’s preliminary study which, through reference to the notion of authorial intention, probes the relationship between Aristotle’s Politics and Rhetoric and elements of the hermeneutical thrust of al-Ṭabarî’s commentary and the Qur’ān. Her approach does illustrate some of the fascinating structural features of al-Ṭabarî’s commentary. Another significant scholar whose importance has been hitherto overlooked in studies of tafsīr is the exegete from Nishāpūr, al-Wāḥidī, whose life and works are examined by Walid Saleh in a chapter which also assesses the strength of his intellectual legacy. Assessing the distinction of his oeuvre, Saleh maintains that al-Wāḥidī deserves to be considered one of the seminal exegetes of medieval Islam. Striking a more general note, Saleh draws attention to the fact that so much of the written legacy of tafsīr has yet to be published and therefore, in many senses, current scholarship’s understanding of the relationship which defines the different exegetical works, sub-genres, and authors, together with its appreciation of the extent of the discipline’s wider influence within the context of Islamic thought, remains somewhat provisional. And key to Saleh’s overview of tafsīr is the belief that the commentary of the ‘Nishapuri’ school ushers in a highly classical style of tafsīr with the work of al-Tha‘labī being distinctively radical in that it transformed the parameters of the scholarship associated with medieval Qur’ānic commentary. This of course has ramifications for the idea that the legacy of al-Ṭabarî was so commanding in the history of classical tafsīr.

The designation of tafsīr as a genre together with problems encountered when developing a description of its formal characteristics are assessed in a study by Norman Calder. Proceeding on the basis that the most fundamental character of the genre was the presence of canon, segmentation, lemma, and comment, Calder explores some of the tensions inherent within the genre, asserting that works in which such structures were not systematically present did not belong to the genre, but rather to its margins. He argues that polyvalence, in terms of presenting the gamut of views held with regards to different verses, was a defining feature of the classical works being creatively synthesised by al-Qurṭubī, whose work provides a superlative example of what the genre could achieve. He also stresses the point that the ‘qualities which distinguish one mufassir from another lie less in their conclusions as to what the Qur’ānic text means than in their development and display of techniques which mark their participation in and mastery of a literary discipline.’ Moreover, it is the individual mastery of both al-Ṭabarî and al-Qurṭubī which Calder sets out to highlight. Calder does suggest that
until the period of Ibn Kathīr, the exegesis or measuring of the Qur’ānic text was set around certain broad categories: orthography, lexis, syntax, rhetoric, symbol/allegory, which he defined under the heading instrumental structures and ideological structures, which included prophetic history, theology, eschatology, law and taṣāwuf. Intriguingly, these categories seemingly matched those circumscribed by Ibn Juzayy above. Particular significance is attached to the fact that the aforementioned subjects were independently studied for their own sake and permitted of indefinite extension beyond the constraints of the Qur’ānic text. Calder would argue that such an observation emphasises the independence provided by the discipline of tafsīr insofar as a text devoted to the subject represented a work of art, allowing given authors the licence to display the virtuosity of their approaches.

Commentaries and scholarship associated with Shī‘ite, Ismā‘īlī, and Mu‘tazilite figures and thought are explored in the next selection of chapters. A survey is provided of the tafsīr ascribed to the eleventh Imām al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī by Meir Bar-Asher, who argues that the work comprises materials which link it to the era in which al-‘Askarī lived, making it an historically important text. Whether it can be accommodated with Calder’s definition of tafsīr in terms of structure and contents is a moot point. Underlining the fact that there existed a broad spectrum of views prevalent with Ismā‘īlism, Azim Nanji reviews its treatment of key Qur’ānic concepts, using them to illustrate the general thrust of Ismā‘īlī approaches to Qur’ānic interpretation. Kristan Sands’ chapter discusses the popularity of a Persian commentary on the Qur’ān composed by Ḥusayn Vā‘iz-I Khashāfī (d. 910/1504–5). The work, entitled Mavālib-I ʿaliyya, successfully combined Šūfī themes with an eloquently composed narrative which avoided polemical matters, making the text popular among Shī‘ite and Sunnī audiences. This is followed by a chapter in which Suleiman Mourad seeks to demonstrate the traces of Mu‘tazilite influences in the works of the Shī‘ite exegete al-Ṭabriṣī and the Sunnī figure Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, using the commentary of al-Ḥākim al-Jishumī to shed some light on the survival of Mu‘tazilite ideas within exegesis. The chapter is proceeded by a second contribution in which Mourad presents a comparative study of five exegetical glosses of Q. 3:178 from the work of al-Jishumī. An even earlier commentary in which theological discussions resonated among the more generic narrative themes of tafsīr is provided in Abū Manṣūr al-Māṭūrūdī’s Tāʾwīlāt ahl al-Sunna. In a detailed study of the work by Manfred Götz it is suggested that the work is invaluable for the intellectual history of classical theology, in that it preserves disputes attributed to Mu‘tazilite scholars and advocates of a strictly corporeal and literalist approach to theology. Yet notwithstanding the text’s theological value, its coverage of conventional themes is significant for it comprises exegetical materials derived from earlier authors. Switching focus to another seminal author, the exegetical legacy of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī has been examined in a number of studies by Jacques Jomier, and in this
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contribution an assessment is made of the sources of the work and the uniqueness of its approach. 338

Topics relating to Śūfi tafsīr are the subject of a number of studies in this volume. Certainly, Calder has drawn attention to the problems of description within genres of tafsīr and even argued that mystical tafsīrs such as al-Tustarī’s work do not exhibit sufficiently sustained treatments of sections of the Qur’ān and are therefore marginal works within the genre. 339 Still, historically, esoteric exegesis or tafsīr ishārī as practised by Śūfi luminaries did have its defenders and detractors both in the formative and later periods; its proponents shared the view that its paradigms and conceptual trajectories have their origins in the early tradition. The work of Gerhard Böwering has been especially influential in drawing attention to and providing syntheses of the features of early Śūfi tafsīr: his study of the work of al-Tustarī remains one of the most seminal academic examinations of the genre. In his contribution to this section Böwering presents a study of the minor commentary composed by al-Sulamī, the author of the famous Haqā’iq al-tafsīr, which preserved a repository of Śūfi exegetical sources attributed to early mystics. Böwering explains that the minor tafsīr, which was referred to as Ziyādāt haqā’iq al-tafsīr, was written to serve as a supplement to the former work and its importance rests in the fact that it adumbrates the exegetical musings of previous mystics as opposed to al-Sulamī’s own interpretations. 340 The question of whether Śūfi tafsīr can be considered a discrete genre of tafsīr is addressed in the contribution by Jamal Elias, who argues that the individual treatises produced by Śūfi figures often focused on concerns which may well have been broadly aesthetic as opposed to being informed by strictly doctrinal concerns and exigencies; on this basis, he argues that such forms of exegesis fall within the subsectional margins of the genre of tafsīr. Issues of classification should not detract from the intrinsic value of such works, which are delicately geared towards uncovering the veiled meanings of the text, but Elias’ point is that such works do not belong to a separate exegetical class of writings. In his chapter Muhammad Abul Quasem made the point that although al-Ghazālī never composed an actual tafsīr, the many works he authored such as his Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn, Mishkāt al-anwār, Iljām al-‘awāmm ‘an ‘ilm al-kalām, Jawāhir al-Qur’ān, and Qāmūn al-ta’wil do include a treasure trove of his thoughts on exegesis. It is al-Ghazālī’s theory of esoteric exegesis as distilled from his written legacy which is given thought in Nicholas Heer’s study with the aim of shedding light on its principal features. 341 Based on a study of the Laṭā’if al-ishārāt of al-Qushayrī, Annabel Keeler’s contribution examines the notion that Śūfi interpretation of the Qur’ān mirrors the individual spiritual outlook and preoccupations of the actual ‘interpreter’. Keeler also assesses the role of its author as a murshid (spiritual guide) and the influence of the religious and cultural milieu of Khurāsān. 342 The preconceptions brought to the interpretation of the Qur’ān by various exegetes, particularly with regards to philosophical, mystical, and even
theological prejudices, are touched upon in Sajjad Rizvi’s study of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī’s exegesis of the basmala within the specific context of the opening chapter of the Qurʾān. Referring to the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam and its chapter on the Prophet Zechariah, Rizvi demonstrates how his treatment is a reflection of the metaphysics of the school of Ibn ‘Arabī.343

Philosophical exegesis together with the contribution to its synthesis by Yaʿqūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī (d. c. 256/870) and Ibn Sinā is the subject of two separate studies by Jules Janssens.344 Notwithstanding the fact that examples of such exegesis are often restricted to individual verses and are hardly sustained treatments of consecutive segments of the Qurʾān, Janssens argues that such scholars are offering sui generis approaches to issues of interpretation informed by specific ideological concerns and are worthy of study as a unique sub-genre. In the first of his two contributions he presents a study of the significance of al-Kindī’s exegesis of specific verses and his role as a pioneer in nurturing exegetical ideas, the intricate threads of which were taken up by Ibn Sinā and it is this figure’s work which is carefully scrutinised in Janssen’s second article. The final contribution to the volume is Todd Lawson’s study of the Bāb’s tafsīr of two short chapters of the Qurʾān. It has been argued that such descriptions of tafsīr do stretch the elasticity of the genre of commentaries both in terms of their form and content, but Lawson argues that Qurʾānic commentary played a significant role in the development of the Bābī movement.345 Indeed he notes that the Bāb’s own commentaries of Qurʾānic verses, which were bereft of any professionally derived understanding of the text, were innovative and popular among the movement. The disjunction between such forms of ‘tafsīr’ and traditionally based treatments of Qurʾānic narratives is self-evident.

Studies of general exegetical topics, themes, and approaches which predominate within the overall framework of classical tafsīr scholarship form the bulk of the contents of the final volume of the Collection, although it should be borne in mind that issues covered in Volumes III and IV do overlap considerably as the tenor of themes tackled between them is frequently contiguous, despite the former being generally devoted to commentators and their commentaries and the latter following up on themes or specific topics within a scholar’s work; modern issues within exegesis are covered as a subject in Part VI of the volume. Under the heading Topics and Themes of Exegesis, Part V begins with a study by Anthony Johns, who revisits exegetical accounts of the Qurʾānic pericope on Solomon and the horses. Johns is mainly concerned with probing deliberate shifts in the accommodation of spiritual as well as ideological exigencies in Muslim intellectual history, highlighting the individuality and creativeness which different exegetes needed to foster when interpreting the Qurʾān. In many ways Johns’ observations capture the dynamic which lay at the heart of the Muslim exegetical tradition: namely, its ability to build upon the traditional emblems of exegetical narratives and invigorate them in ways which make them relevant to new
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discourses and settings. Shifts in interpretation are likewise probed in Andrew Rippin’s study of how and why the figure of Samson was treated in classical and tafsīr literature. Samson is not mentioned by name in the Qurʾān but both al-Ṭabarī and al-Tha’labī made him the subject of detailed narratives. The wider import of the metamorphosis of the interpretation of narratives propelled by ‘finding what needs to be found’ is a key theme of the chapter. Issues concerning the paradigm within which the academic study of religion is currently situated are also given thought.

Developments within literary Qurʾānic interpretation are explored in Mahmoud Ayoub’s contribution, which attempts to gauge them through the distinct contributions to the scholarship made by the fourth/tenth century scholar al-Shārīf al-Rādī. Ayoub focuses not only on his literary accomplishments, but also takes into consideration theological factors which shaped al-Rādī’s thought. This is pursued through reference to his works which include Talkhīṣ al-bayān ʿalā majāzāt al-Qurʾān, Majāzāt al-āthār al-nabawiyyya, and the published volume of his larger tafsīr. Aspects of al-Rādī’s exegetical methodology are discussed in light of his understanding of both the technical connotation of ta’wīl and the class of verses designated as belonging to the mutashābihāt. Ayoub does take the opportunity to cover al-Rādī’s approach to issues which impinge upon Christological debates. The hermeneutical tenets which informed the conceptual bases of the tafsīr entitled Mafāṭīḥ al-asrār wa-maṣāḥih al-abrār which was composed by al-Shahrastānī, the author of the renowned work on heresiography al-Mīlāl wa’l-nihāl, are the subject of a preliminary evaluation in Toby Mayer’s study. Crucially, Mayer argues that while a form of Ismāʿīlī gnosis was a distinct complement of al-Shahrastānī’s theological affiliations, his outlook and approach to tafsīr remained inexorably informed by a paradigm of eclecticism in which traditional narratives were still made utterly relevant to the general thrust of his exegetical strategy in this esoteric commentary. Theology is a central theme of the next chapter which probes the regular criticisms levelled at the commentary of al-Zamakhsharī in the classical Sunnī literature. Traditional literature does entertain the claim that it was replete with explanations which were shaped by the Muʿtazilite leanings of the work’s author. Indeed, those commentaries which incorporated and built upon the themes elucidated in the work of al-Zamakhsharī often boast of the fact that such leanings had been expunged when integrating, assimilating, and developing its ideas, although the fact that it was essentially a literary commentary alleviated some of the sensitivities surrounding its being pooled for materials. Andrew Lane has been particularly interested in drawing attention to the arguments, first articulated in the classical sources and repeated within modern scholarly circles, about the Muʿtazilite nature of al-Zamakhsharī’s tafsīr. Lane argues that the proposition that the work was Muʿtazilite in terms of its theological orientation was inferred not from a close reading of the text, but simply based on an acceptance of the medieval biographical materials in which the
author is castigated; Lane questions whether *al-Kashšāf* actually evinces an overtly Mu'tazilite theology and dialectic, arguing that the criteria for classifying the commentary as such are too vague and that in essence it should be viewed as being a standard work which occasionally assimilates Mu'tazilite ideas into a traditional framework. A close reading of two Sūras of the Qur'ān is offered to demonstrate his main argument.

The manner by which Qur'ānic commentary is used to evaluate not only historical narratives but also to illustrate through a process of comparison the phenomenon of differentiation which disentangles the import of the Qur'ān as an autonomous text and the layers of meaning which successive generations of exegesists imposed upon its narratives via interpretation has featured prominently in the work of Uri Rubin; he is specifically interested in locating an original connotation which is embedded in the Qur'ān's discourse and not the works of the exegesists per se. In his article Rubin reviews the historical implications of the exegetical musings over the Qur'ānic reference, Q.2: 198, and the fact that exegesists, through the attestation of traditional dicta, supported the view that the verse tacitly approved of the combination of trade with the performance of the pilgrimage. Among the conclusions reached by Rubin is that Mecca was originally a pilgrim fair and that the concession to trade was developed in later exegetical discussions. The finding leads him to question the thesis advanced by Patricia Crone, which counters this view of the Meccan sanctuary and the other stations associated with the *Hajj* as places of pilgrimage. Another interesting use of exegetical discussions to unravel what is believed to be the original intent of Qur'ānic verses is attempted in Stefan Wild's review of Q.3:7. Wild sets out to clarify the scriptural prehistory of the verse and its treatment by classical exegesists, placing the discussions within the confines of the notion of the Qur'ān's self-referentiality. In Gerhard Böwering's study it is Şūfi interpretations of 'the Light Verse' which are analysed. Referring to an original substrate for the verse's import and the inevitable shifts from exegesis to eisegesis, Böwering argues that the allegorical explanations refined by Şūfis to flesh out narratives of the Light Verse owe their provenance to a Christian dialectical context. Aspects of the relationship between the Qur'ān and its commentaries together with the act of interpretation as a tool to buttress the authority of the exegete are reviewed in Brannon Wheeler's chapter. He explains that nineteenth century perceptions that the Qur'ān and its corpora of commentaries misunderstood materials derived from Jewish and Christian sources have tended to obscure the nexus between the Qur'ān, its commentaries, and other forms of extra-Qur'ānic sources. Wheeler's view is that via elaborate processes of interpretation, commentators were able to create for themselves paradigms of authority. Şūfi interpretations of the opening chapter of the Qur'ān which feature in al-Sulamī's *Haqā'iq al-tafsīr* are explored in Mohammed Rustum’s study for their relevance to developments of the concept of gnosis in Şūfi tafsīr;
Furthermore, Rustum weighs up the individual authority of al-Sulamī as a Ṣūfī commentator.\textsuperscript{355}

Topics and themes of a more specific variety are tackled in the next selection of chapters. The first of which is Gordon Nickel’s examination of the notion of *taḥrīf*: namely, the idea that previous Jewish and Christian scriptures had been corrupted or falsified over time, with reference to the work of the exegete Muqāṭṭil ibn Sulaymān. Nickel takes the view that the author’s understanding of *taḥrīf* differs from later expressions of the notion and this very fact has implications for developments in the way the notion of *taḥrīf* was interpreted by later exeges:\textsuperscript{356} Jane McAuliffe’s chapter presents case studies of select references in the Qur’ān and *tafsīr* to Christians in the commentaries of three luminaries: al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, and al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī. Her aim is to exemplify attitudes to Christians and Christianity within expressions of classical Muslim thought, dwelling upon the polemics of perception and other factors governing approaches to interpretation.\textsuperscript{357} Interestingly, it was polemical reasons which lay behind the decision by Peter the Venerable (1092–94/1156) to commission Robert of Ketton (flor. 1136–57) to produce a Latin translation of the Qur’ān as part of a project to translate classical Islamic texts. Ketton, who was otherwise famed for his renditions of Arabic scientific texts, was criticised by a number of medieval writers for his having produced a translation which to all intents and purposes constituted an exuberant paraphrasing of the original. The issues surrounding the translation and the subject of its achievement are considered by Thomas Burman. While not questioning the characterisation of Ketton’s effort, which was the first complete translation of the Qur’ān into a Western language, Burman argues that there were subtle influences which accounted for the rendition produced by Ketton: namely, the fact that he had relied heavily upon the works of classical exegetes in determining the countenance of his translation and so the paraphrasing for which he is criticised overshadows the intricacy of the efforts of Ketton and to an extent the sources utilized for his effort, which is compared with the translation by Mark of Toledo (flor. 1193–1216). Questions raised by Burman’s study include the role and impact which classical commentaries have had upon endeavours in the area of translations of the Qur’ān, principally given the differences expressed among commentators as to the import of key words and phrases and issues of subjectivity; broader implications for more contemporary efforts are also discussed.\textsuperscript{358} It is the theme of astrology which is reflected upon in Robert Morrison’s survey of how the early exegetes dealt with the subject in their commentaries.\textsuperscript{359} Morrison pays specific attention to the late antique context which provided the backdrop to the various discussions, probing differences between theologians and exegetes à propos the science of astrology. Fascinatingly, Morrison shows that exegetes tended to be less hostile to the science than their theologian cohorts, who voiced objections to the fact that the causal framework informing astrological discussions and predications impinged upon theological conceptions.
of divine omnipotence. Exegetes on the other hand accepted that there was an overall theoretical pertinence to astrology, despite their harbouring reservations about its broader function. The final chapter of Part V features a chapter by Karen Bauer which considers the matter of whether the works on tafsīr from the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries were produced with a non-specialist audience in mind. Bauer develops the argument that such works were actually intended for a specialised audience. The context for this survey is the question of the centrality of tafsīr works to Muslim intellectual life as defined by Walid Saleh’s characterisation of tafsīr with reference to its function within the wider community. He had attached marked significance to the terms ‘madrasa’ and ‘encyclopedic’ to identify the audiences (and levels) for whom such works were intended. The introductions to tafsīr often include comments lamenting the fact that readers were not equipped to deal with voluminous works and Bauer seeks to show that although such commentaries were widely read, their characterisation remains quite complex due to the sophistication of the different forms of the texts. Of course, one needs to bear in mind that Bauer is principally concerned with the legacy of the exegetes from ‘Nishapur’, whose contribution to the study of tafsīr during this historical period was incontrovertibly immense, although the scholarship of tafsīr has an incredibly extensive geographical and historical compass.

The final part of Volume IV is devoted to issues and approaches which feature in discussions of modern Qur’ānic hermeneutics. The question of identifying a modern system of hermeneutics through which engagement with the Qur’ān as a living text can be developed is tackled in Farid Esack’s article. Esack suggests that hermeneutical strategies have been somewhat shackled by the tendency to take into account traditional approaches to the concept of the Qur’ān’s inimitability and theological discussions germane to the doctrine of the eternity of the Qur’ān when developing strategies. He argues that this factor raises the question of what constitutes an authentic appreciation of the Qur’ān and facilitates a recovery of its meaning, especially in the context of the discourse of reform and modernity. Contemporary debates germane to how one approaches the interpretation of the Qur’ān also feature in Abdullah Saeed’s contribution in which he outlines the specifics of a contextualist approach to the interpretation of the Qur’ān. Saeed explains that in such readings the ethico-legal context of the text is accentuated in ways which take into account the changing dynamic of conditions and circumstance. The suggestion is that in classical tafsīr appreciation of the socio-historical context attached to scripture was nonexistent and Saeed seeks to explain the complexity of the challenges proponents of the contextualist approach invidiously face. Against the backdrop of the primacy of traditionalist models of Qur’ānic interpretation in the modern Islamic world, recent trends within Qur’ānic hermeneutics from the nineteenth century until the present are explored in Erik Ohlander’s survey, which sheds light on modernist, Islamist, scientist, traditionalist, revisionist, and feminist
exegetical strategies. Ohlander notes that despite the hegemony which the traditionalist model retains, new ideas and approaches are being countenanced. Reformist thought and its relation to Qur’anic interpretation as articulated in the work of Nasr Abu Zayd provides the focal point for Massimo Campanini’s chapter. The relationship between strategies for the contemporary interpretation of the Qur’ān and new perspectives on political reform forms an important component of Campanini’s treatment. The final chapter in the volume and the Collection features Johanna Pink’s study of the notions of tradition, authority, and innovation in modern tafsīr literature. Her aim is to explore the dynamic which shaped the production of tafsīr under the condition of the modern state, using modern works written in Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, and Turkish. Using the exegetical discussions of the interpretive quandaries presented by Q.9:111–12, Pink takes the opportunity to draw attention to regional tendencies which are inherent in contemporary exegesis and some of the strictures imposed by the genre.

The sophistication and quality of the profusion of literary works devoted to tafsīr serve to underline its enduring historical legacy. The Shāfi‘īte exegete al-Bayḍawī (d. c. 716/1316) once described the discipline of tafsīr as the most magnificent of the sciences in respect of its scope and the most distinguished in terms of its superiority and status, adding that it rests as the veritable head of the religious sciences; it was a view shared by so many of his peers and predecessors. Across the early, classical, and modern historical periods, exegesis of the sacred text was not vapidly confined to a dutiful recounting of the corpora of exegetical statements bequeathed by earlier scholarship, but, additionally, it turned on the constructive assimilation of resources, paradigms, and ideas, employing linguistic, narrative, legal, theological, mystical, and rhetorical frameworks of reference to clarify, contextualise, and venerate the Qur’ān. Accordingly, the vitality of the discipline of tafsīr is reflected in its ability to inspire, while also providing a unique forum for contributions to the intellectual discourses of Islamic thought. Interestingly, Harris Birkeland once remarked in a 1956 publication that following the work of al-Thābarī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Rāzī essentially nothing new has entered orthodox tafsīr, adding that ‘later commentators chiefly copy and rearrange or make abridgements of older works.’ There is a tendency to view the early and medieval traditions of exegesis as encapsulating a stagnant enterprise in which scholars haphazardly disseminated the endeavours of earlier luminaries, demonstrating little originality or imagination. While such impressions of tafsīr underestimate the distinctiveness and richness of the genre and the fecund vein of associated literature and scholarship it inspired, they were to an extent influenced by the fact that a large portion of the materials of the discipline remained in manuscript form. The wealth of tafsīr texts currently available is truly striking and this is despite the fact that vast amounts of the extant manuscript tradition still await publication. Ultimately, such materials will incontrovertibly enhance and facilitate
academic attempts to come to terms with the history and development of *tafsīr* and allow a greater appreciation of the variety and depth of learning accomplished within the discipline. For all these reasons the academic study of *tafsīr* remains quite a challenging but ultimately auspicious endeavour.\(^{368}\)

**Notes**

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6 The classical literature listed a number of explicit modes for the transmission of knowledge: the first of which is sama, this related to active audition and was considered the most esteemed form of transmission. It entailed a student listening to his mentor who would be reciting or reading from memory or a book; dictation was also involved. 2) Qirāʾa: this involved reading before a mentor from memory or a book. It is sometimes referred to as ‘Arḍ and was likewise applied to instances if a student was present when someone else was engaged in qirāʾa with a mentor. The teacher would listen and be in a position to correct
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7 Concerns have been raised about the academic quality of some of the available critical editions. Notwithstanding the active production of critical editions of exegetical manuscripts, there are numerous theses and dissertations on exegetical subjects and commentators which are available on the internet. For CDs which have elaborate search engines See (www.turath.com) Also http://www.altafsir.com/ hosts a very large collection of online classical commentaries. While for


12 The division of tafsīr into two broad categories: tafsīr biʿl-maʿthūr and tafsīr biʿl-raʿy is misleading in that exegesis which was exclusively anchored to a traditionally defined corpus of data (tafsīr biʿl-maʿthūr) is difficult to substantiate. In modern treatments such as Muḥammad al-Dhahābī, ʿSubḥī Ṣālīḥ, and others the division is used as the basis for the classification of types of tafsīr; the division is arbitrary as the contents of the classified texts often defy such compartmentalisation. This is clearly shown by Walīd A. Saleh, ‘Preliminary Remarks

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18 The sources very deliberately present the view that even stern opponents of forms of tafsir seemingly recognised his brilliance as an exegete: in one report the Companion Ibn ‘Umar famed for his strict religiosity was asked about the meaning of the Qur’anic verse (Q. 21:30). He advised his questioner that he should solicit Ibn ‘Abbās’s interpretation of these verses and return to him with his explanation. Upon relating to him the gist of his exposition, Ibn ‘Umar is reported to have exclaimed that ‘I used to be displeased by Ibn ‘Abbās’ audaciousness when explaining the Qur’ān, but I now appreciate that he has indeed been bestowed with knowledge.’ See Itqān: vol. 2, p. 373.

19 Comparable testimonies praising his knowledge resonate in the literature of the hadīth: in the Musnad of Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal. 9 vols. Edited by Shu‘ayb Arna‘ūṭ and ‘Adil Murshid. Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, vol. 4, p. 244 (hadīth no. 2422) in which the wording differs (Allāhumma ‘a‘tī Ibn ‘Abbās al-ḥikma wa ‘allimhu al-ta‘wīl); al-Bukhārī’s collection of traditions includes a report which states that the Prophet is said to have embraced Ibn ‘Abbās, requesting that he be blessed with ‘knowledge of the book’ and in a second citation ‘be blessed with knowledge of faith and ta‘wil’, in later periods the term ta‘wil was to take on theological importance, although earlier it was used synonymously to denote tafsīr. And Ibn Ḥanbal’s Musnad has a similar report. Also see Muhammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, al-Jāmi‘ al-musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ, p. 9 (tradition no. 17) and p. 306 (traditions no. 3756). This statement features in Muqāṭṭal’s Commentary on Sūrat al-Naṣr

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مَسِيحٌ رَسُولٌ اللهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم يُبْدِيه على رأس ابن عباس وقال الله تعالى في الدين وعلمه التأويل


20 This is quoted in ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣaḥābī’s tafsīr see below; cf. al-Muḥāṣibī, Fāhmin al-Qur’ān, p. 329 and al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi‘ al-bayān, vol. 1, p. 75. It also features in Ibn Taymiyya’s Majmū‘, vol. 13, p. 384. A similar statement is quoted in the introduction to Muqāṭṭal’s Tafsīr. Traditionist scholars do point out that the isnād is technically defined as munqatī’; namely there is a gap between the individual narrating the tradition and its author (Ibn ‘Abbās).

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See al-Baghawī, Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn ibn Maṣʿūd. *Maʿālim al-tanzīl.* 8 vols. Edited by Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh al-Nimr, ‘Uthmān Jumʿa, Sulaymān Muṣliḥ. Riyyūd: Dār al-Tayba 1409 A.H., vol. 1, pp. 34–37. In a section of the *Iṭqān* which deals with the classes of exegetes (*Ṭabāqāt al-mufassirūn*) al-Suyūṭī identifies ten figures among the Companions who are renowned for their exegetical knowledge and they include: the four caliphs, Ibn Maṣʿūd, Ibn ‘Abbās, Ubayy ibn Kaʿb, Zayd ibn Thābit, Abū Mūsā al-ʿAṣhwārī, and ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr. However, he then points out that among the caliphs, ‘Alī’s exegetical legacy was more prolific, while the others were rarely cited, a fact he attributes to their having died so early in the course of Islam’s development, vol. 1, pp. 372–82.


Features of the transmission of Muqāṭīl’s text are discussed at length by Versteegh, who makes the important distinction that individuals who were collating the works of earlier authors always indicated separate quotations, distinguishing them from the main text. So despite the stuttered nature of the narrative, the integrity of the original work is considered intact. See Kees Versteegh. *Arabic Grammar and Qur’ānic Exegesis in Early Islam.* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993, p. 93. Cf. Sezgin who refers to nine manuscripts of the work (Sezgin, 1967, p. 37.) and Claude Gilliot. ‘Muqāṭīl, grand exégète, traditioniste et théologien maudit’. *Journal Asiatique* (1991:279), pp. 39–92, pp. 40–51.

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See also al-Dhahabî, Shams al-Dîn Muhammâd ibn Ahmad. *Mîzan al-‘ta’dîlî fi naqd al-rijân.* 4 vols. Edited by Muhammad Bijawi. Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, 1992, vol. 4, pp. 173–5. Ibn al-Nadîm identifies Muqâtil as a member of the Zaydites; he also says he was a traditionist scholar and a reader (*qârî*). *Al-Fihrist:* p. 227. See also *Encyclopaedia of Canonical Hadîth,* pp. 431–434. It is reported that a copy of Muqâtil’s *tafsîr* was found in the possession of the traditionist Ibn ‘Uyayna, who when asked whether he transmitted materials on his authority he replied no, adding that he used the text for purposes of corroboration and as an aid. Ibn Hâjar’s *Tahdîh al-tahdîh,* vol. 10, p. 279.

Even the existence of a text which is ascribed to him is the subject of a dispute. The manuscript of his *‘tafsîr*’ is in the Chester Beatty Collection (Ms. no. 4224) (see also the Ayasofa Ms. 118 and Hamidiye Ms. 40). Rippin makes the point in both his study of the dating of the *tafsîr* Ibn ‘Abbâs and his review of Versteegh’s work, both included in this collection, that ‘Versteegh continues Wansbrough’s nomenclature of calling this work *Tafsîr al-Kalbî* and that there are very few grounds on which to do so.’ Later on he points out that the work is from a time well past al-Farrâ’. (*Miszellen,* pp. 320–321. ‘Studying Early Tafsîr Texts’ (Chapter 10). More recently Motzki has argued that an original Kalbî text was in existence and may have served as the prototype and source of later quotations, although the text used by Versteegh was actually the work of al-Dinawarî. And it is clear that although the work erroneously identified with al-Kalbî is of a late provenance, this would in no way impinge upon his legacy and activity as an exegete in the early periods. For the traditionists’ criticism see al-Nasâ’î, *al-Du‘âfâ wa‘l-matrûkîn.* Edited by Kamâl Yûsuf al-Hûtî and Burân al-Danâwî. Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqâfiyya, 1985, p. 211. He is described as being *matrûk al-hadîth,* which is simply a technical term to indicate that an individual’s traditions were discarded due to issues regarding his reliability as a transmitter, especially when his narrations contradicted accepted materials. Some traditionist scholars would argue that such an individual’s narrations should not be used even for purposes of reflection.

The issue of his reliability will be discussed below. His full name is Muhammad ibn al-Sâ’îb al-Kalbî, Abû’l-Nâdr; Ibn al-Nadîm mentions his standing as a distinguished scholar of *tafsîr,* recording that he was brought to Basra by Sulâyman ibn ‘Alî and there he dictated his *tafsîr* to groups gathered at the latter’s home. Having reached a verse of the ninth chapter of the Qur’ân he appeared to contravene the conventional explanation of the verse and those writing down his version quickly objected. But al-Kalbî is reported to have refused to continue dictating unless it was written down as ‘it was revealed.’ The matter was brought to the attention of Sulâyman who instructed those present to write it down in accordance with al-Kalbî’s version and discard everything else. Ibn al-Nadîm. *al-Fihrist,* pp. 107–8. Al-Dhahabî, Shams al-Dîn. *Siyar a’lâm al-nubalî,* vol. 6, pp. 248–249. Al-Dhahabî describes him as being of Shî’ite inclination.

The work of al-Dâwûtî. *Tabaqât al-mufassîrin.* vol. 2, p. 149. (entry no. 491). Ibn Abî Hâtîm’s. *Al-Jarh wa’l-ta’dîl,* vol. 7, p. 271. The point is made that al-Firûzâbâdî made regular use of the *ismâd* in the *Tanwîr* work. It is even suggested
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in Ibn ‘Adī that al-Kalbī was asked to separate the materials he narrated on Abū Sālīh’s authority from his own personal dicta and it transpired that he had little to say about the matter. Ibn ‘Adī al-Jurjānī, *Al-Kāmil fi ẓu‘afā’ al-rijāl*, vol. 6, p. 2127.

35 Sufyān al-Thawrī, ibn Sa‘īd ibn Masrūq. *Tafsīr Sufyān al-Thawrī*. Riyadh: Muhamad ‘an Abī Hudhayfa al-Nahdī, edited by Imtiyāz ‘Alish Arshī. Rampur: Silsalat Maṭbū‘āt Maktabat Riḍā, 1965. The more recent Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya is a reproduced version of the Rampur edition. Wansbrough describes the *tafsīr* as consisting of somewhat disjointed observations.’ (p. 137, *Q.S*). Wansbrough did hint that it was difficult to explain lacunae in the manuscript, although he accepted that ‘the work was no more than an extrapolation of Sufyān’s utterances.’ (p. 138). See the study of this *tafsīr* by Versteegh *Arabic Grammar and Qur’ānic Exegesis*: pp. 111–113.

36 *Tafsīr Sufyān al-Thawrī*: pp. 15, 71, 82. It is reported that Sufyān al-Thawrī left his books in the care of ‘Ammār ibn Sayf, asking him to bury them in the event of his death. Ibn Sa‘īd, *Tābaqāt*, vol. 6, p. 388.


38 There are two manuscripts of this *tafsīr* the first of which is in Ankara and the second in Egypt. The Ankara version is incomplete and the edition of this work, which was published in Riyadh, begins from the opening chapter of the *Qur’ān* and has no preface: al-Ṣan‘ānī, ‘Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām. *Tafsīr Abī al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī*, 3 vols. Edited by Muṣṭafā Muḥammad Muhammad. Riyadh: Dār al-Rushd, 1999. Indeed, the editor points out that he relied on sources such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Suyūṭī to reconstruct the early part of the text. The Egyptian manuscript does feature the introductory section, although parts of it are damaged: al-Ṣan‘ānī, ‘Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī. *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīz al-musammā Tafsīr Abī al-Razzāq*. 2 vols. Edited by ‘Abd al-Muṭṭī Amīn Qal‘ajī. Beirut, Dār al-Ma‘ārif: 1991. Again, both editors point out that due to the quality of the manuscript, various sources were used to reconstruct and collate the edited edition, although Qal‘ajī referred to both the available manuscripts.


40 Ibn Ḥajar’s *Tahdhib al-tahdhib*, vol. 6, pp. 71–74. He is described as being more pious than Ibn al-Qāsim, but that his piety prevented him from taking up official positions. And al-Dhahabi, Shams al-Dīn. *Siyār al-lām al-nubalā‘*, vol. 9, pp. 223–234. Brought up in Egypt, Ibn Wahb is viewed as the chief authority for traditions sourced to Egyptian scholars and the *Ahl al-Hijāz*.

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See Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Abī Zamanīn, Abū ‘Abd Allāh. Taṣfīr al-Qur‘ān al-‘Azīz. 5 vols. Interestingly, in the introduction to the work. Ibn Abī Zamanīn explains that he read Yaḥyā’s book and found that it has lots of repetition and traditions which are superfluous to the actual exegesis of individual verses and rendered the book lengthy. He set about abbreviating the work in a way which would make the work accessible to students of his day. Al-Dānī


49 Al-Farrā, Abū Zakariyyāya Yahyā ibn Ziyād. *Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 14. The word i’rāb is used in the text and one senses in this context that it embodies the finer features of the language as opposed to simply grammatical inflection.


His work was ‘reconstructed’ by collating dicta attributed to him in various sources. Note the *Mushtabihāt al-Qurʾān,* also referred to *Mutashābihāt,* has been republished by Al-Yāsin in *Abḥāṯ fi tāʾrikh al-ʿarabiyya wa-maṣādīriḥā.* Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1996, pp. 123–42. See John Wansbrough’s discussion of the work in *Qurʾānic Studies,* pp. 212–5. And Rippin’s discussion of the issue of dating early materials in Chapter 11 of the Collection. The traditional sources relate that ‘Affī ibn al-Mubārak al-ʿAhmar (d. 194/810) was responsible for codifying the works of Kisāʾī. See Ibn al-Anbārī. *Nuzhat al-aliḥbāʾ fi ṭabāqāt al-udabāʾ.* Edited by Ibrāhīm al-Samarāʾī. al-Zarqāʾ: Maktabat al-Manār, 1985, p. 80. One needs to bear in mind that the traditional biographical sources place both al-Kisāʾī and al-Farrāʾ as students of Abū Jaʿfar al-Ruʿāsī, who is said to have been the author of a *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān* text.

The *qirāʾāt* encapsulate the corpus of readings which Muslim scholarship associated with the Qurʾān’s textual transmission and recitation. The consensus readings are not radical variations of the standard text but traditionally reflect subtle distinctions which appear at the morpho-syntactic and morpho-phonological levels: they encompass a whole range of vocalic and consonantal variants; and even phonological traits; they are therefore viewed as variations anchored to the skeletal text (*rasm*) of the Qurʾān and seen as being ostensibly univocal. The more pronounced variants do feature consonantal variants and manifest instances of exegetical interpolation which are declared non-liturgical by traditional scholarship. So al-Kisāʾī’s recitation constituted his synthesis of transmitted conventions of the recitation of the text which would have been attributed by him to earlier authorities: Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qaṣṭalānī, *Laṭāʿif al-ešārāt li-funun al-qirāʾāt.* Edited by ʿAbd al-Ṣābīr Shāhīn and ʿAmīr al-Sayyid ‘Uthmān. Cairo: Lajnat ʿIḻyāʾ al-Ṭurāṭ al-Islāmī, 1972; al-Īmām Abū Zurʿā, *Hujjat al-qirāʾāt.* Edited by Saʿīd al-Afghānī. Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Risāla, 1979. A glossary of readings is provided in *ʿAbd al-Salām Makram and ʿAhmad Mukhtar ‘Umar, Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt al-Qurʾānīyya maʿa muqaddima fī-l-qirāʾāt wa-ashhar al-qarrāʾ.* 8 vols.


55 Abū ‘Ubayda’s use of the term majāz was at the centre of arguments about the existence of metaphor in Arabic: see Ibn Taymiyya, Ahmad b. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm. 1983. Kitāb al-Imān. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyya, p. 80. This is derived from Ibn Taymiyya’s Majmū‘.

56 Abū ‘Ubayda, Majāz, vol. I, p. 8. Philologists often appealed to a phenomenon called tawāfuq, ‘relative coincidence’ to explain perceived lexical parallels in meaning and usage among the vocabularies of different languages. It is a concept to which many of Abū ‘Ubayda’s linguist peers referred and it is reiterated by al-Ṭabarī in the extensive introduction to his commentary.


59 It is striking that al-Farrāʾ actually uses his Ma‘ānī to question Abū ‘Ubayda’s analysis of Q.1:7. He asserts that ‘Someone who has no knowledge of ‘arabiyya claims that the meaning of ghayr in Q.1:7 is equivalent to siwā (an exceptive particle) and that lā is sillā (linguistically redundant).’ Such references confirm the levels of scholarly interaction among early individuals. Ibn al-Nadīm includes a report which states that due to the utter contempt in which he was held by his Basran colleagues no one attended his funeral. The sources also disparage his unkempt appearance and even his faith is questioned. See Führst, p. 59. Cf. R. Sellheim, Die Gelehrtenbiographien des Abū ‘Ubaydallāh al-Mazrubānī in der Recension des Ḥāfiz al-Yaghmūrī, Bibliotheca Islamica. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1964, p. 124.

60 Many other grammarians do refer to al-hurūf al-zawā‘id but it would seem that the frequency with which Abū ‘Ubayda invokes this phenomenon is contentious. Thus, in his analysis of the language of scripture. Al-Zayjāj voices reservations
while discussing Q.2:34. Abū ‘Ubayda had suggested that the particle which introduces the verse was otiose, ‘min al-ḥurūf al-zawā‘id: Ma‘ānī al-Qur‘ān wa-‘rābuḥu’, vol. 1, p. 108. The editor of the text notes that al-Ṭabarī, al-Nahḥās, and al-Mubarrad objected to his reference to ḥurūf al-zawā‘id in this instance. See al-Zarkashi’s Burḥān, vol. 2, pp. 177–8 in which he mentions that notable Zāhirite scholars took exception to the use of the term.


62 Al-Jahjāmī. Ahkām al-Qur‘ān. Edited by ‘Amīr Ḥasan Ṣabrī. Beirut: Dār ibn Ḥazm, 2006. See the Fīhrīst for a discussion of al-Jahjāmī’s legacy: Ibn al-Nadīm, p. 40. cf. al-Khaṭīb’s Ta‘rīkh Baḡdād. See the introduction by Šabrī in which he lists all the works on the subject. Al-Šahīfī is said to have authored a work on the topic which is lost; a different collection of material attributed to him on the subject was separately put together by al-Bayhaqī and circulated under the title Ahkām al-Qur‘ān.


Kathīr; al-Yamāma, 1980–1992. ‘Abd Allāh Wayahbī. ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām: Ḥayātuhu wa-āthārāhu wa-manhajahu fī’l-tafsīr. Riyād: Wizārat al-Ma‘ārif, 1982. See also ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s nubadāh (un) min maqāṣid kitāb illāh al-‘azīz. Edited by Ayman ‘Abd al-Razzāq. Damascus: Maktabat al-Ghazzālī, 1995. This will be discussed in detail below. He is also mentioned as the author of Kitāb al-lughāt fī’l-Qur‘ān and Masā’il Nāfī’ ibn al-Azraq. These texts were the subject of detailed studies by John Wansbrough and Andrew Rippin. Wansbrough pointed out that the substance of the arguments adduced in these treatises betrayed ‘an exegetical method considerably posterior to the activity of Ibn ‘Abbās’. (Q.S., pp. 216–8). Wansbrough felt that the citation of profane literature as a tool of scriptural explication would not have been employed in the early Islamic exegetical tradition. And the authenticity of the famous report in which Ibn ‘Abbās refers to poetry being the register of the Arabs is questioned. Andrew Rippin produced a study of the three treatises attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās, and concluded that the treatise entitled al-Lughāt fī’l-Qur‘ān comprised strata of ‘discrete methodologies and terminologies.’


See Fīrāṣt, p. 276


For more on the figures see: Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qūfī. Inbāb al-ruwāt and Ibn al-Anbārī. Nuzhat al-abībā’. Mu’arrīj was a a pupil of the 2nd/8th century figure al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad himself renowned for devising the first Arabic lexicon, the Kitāb al-‘Ayn.


Muqāṭīl, vol. 1, p. 27.


Ibn Juzayy divides his introduction into two broad sections, the first of which consists of twelve chapters: the opening chapter deals with the revelation of the Qurʾān and the traditional account of its codification; the second discusses the Meccan and Medinan provenance of its chapters and verses; the third covers the epistemic thrust of the Qurʾān and its underlying doctrinal and spiritual goals; the fourth articulates the branches of knowledges connected with the study of the Qurʾān such as abrogation, as defined above; the fifth enumerates twelve
aspects of the phenomenon of differences among exegetes and their causes; the sixth outlines the classes of exegetes and their literary legacies; the seventh returns to the subject of abrogation, which was previously placed among the sciences of the Qur’ān, and defines its different categories and the relationship it has with specification (taḵḥīṣ), restriction (taqyīd), and exception (istiḥlāʾ); the eighth chapter is devoted to the types of Qur’ānic recitation and their textual transmission; the ninth is also related to recitation, qualifying the sub-genre of points of inception and pauses in the reading of the text; the tenth chapter outlines basic rhetorical devices and traits relative to the Qur’ān; the eleventh constitutes a summary of the inimitability of the Qur’ān; the twelfth included dicta on the virtues of the Qur’ān. The second section of his introduction focuses on an analysis of the philological bases of lexical items from the Qur’ān which is ingeniously arranged in alphabetical order, covering nouns, verbs, and particles.

Although it has become conventional to refer to qirā’āt as variants, they are considered liturgically valid if they meet certain criteria. However, also existing among the corpora of qirā’āt are readings which form evident departures from the standard skeletal text (rasm); these feature consonantal variants along with graphic instances of exegetical interpolation and modifications in the word order of certain verses. See the discussion in lfn 52.

Such concerns are consistently alluded to in the prolegomena of classical tafsīr texts.

Underlining the importance of relying on trustworthy transmitters, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, the ḥadīth critic, posited the view that there is no way of understanding anything from the meanings of the book of God nor indeed the Prophetic sunna without recourse to the authenticated corpus of transmitted reports (al-naql wa’l-riwāya), Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Al-jarḥ wa’l-ta’dīl. vol. 1, p. 5.


Ibn Taymiyya’s Muqaddima offers a discussion of the best methods of exegesis and proceeds by circumscribing a descending order of priorities in exegesis. The primary basis is to use the Qur’ān to interpret the Qur’ān; and that this process should be buttressed by references to the Prophetic Sunna. The second preferred form of exegesis relies on the attestation of the dicta ascribed to the Companions; however, he notes, this should be resorted to only if the reliance upon the Qur’ān to explicate the Qur’ān is exhausted. The third form of exegesis to which he refers is one which addsuce the plethora of exegetical statements derived from the Successors, although it is pointed out that there rulings or responsa on legal issues are not technically binding (unless backed up by Prophetic authority) and therefore, equally, they are no more authoritative in matters of exegesis. Ibn Taymiyya, then switches his attention to most contentious form of exegesis tafsīr bī’l-ra’y. It is worth comparing some of these categories with Ibn al-Wazīr, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn al-Muṭrāṭā. Izhār al-ḥaqq ‘alā’l-khalq fi radd al-khilafāt ilā al-madhāḥib al-ḥaqq min ṣūl al-tawḥīd, 2nd ed. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1987, pp. 146–54, which comprises a section discussing the best forms of tafsīr.

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87 Included among the topics were: the Arabic character of the vocabulary of the Qur’ān; etymology; dialects in which the Qur’ān was revealed; the authority of canon; exegetical categories of the Qur’ān’s discourse; preset categories for the broaching of ta‘wil; opposition to forms of tafsīr which elevate personal opinion; the merits of tafsīr; the form and context of the Prophetic approach to tafsīr; Companion exgetes; and luminaries whose learning in tafsīr was praised and those individuals who were reprimanded.

88 There has been a tendency to view al-Ṭabarî’s work as providing a *terminus a quo* for the appearance of such compilations. This is a point made by Ibn ‘Ashūr in his history of tafsīr.

89 For other approaches to *iʿjāz* see Michel Cuypers, ‘Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the naẓm of the Qur’ānic Text.’ *Journal of Qurʾānic Studies* (2011:13.1), pp. 1–24.

90 Al-Zarkashī: *al-Burhān*, vol. 2, p. 159.

91 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ*, vol. 13, p. 385. Muqātil is quoted only once in the work, but al-Kalbī is quoted comparatively more frequently. It would be argued that reports which included references to such figures were possibly authenticated by alternative sources.
Al-Tha’labī, *Kashf*, vol. 1, p. 75.


The manuscript for this work is found in the Maktabat Fayd Allāh al-Afendi in Istanbul (no. 50). Only parts of the work have been published by the University of Umm al-Qurā as a series of masters theses with the original manuscript beginning from Sūrat al-Muʾminūn. Ibn Fūrak. *Tafsīr al-Insān Ibn Fūrak*. Mecca: Ḫāmaʿat Umm al-Qurā, 2009/1430 A.H. See Ibn Fūrak, Muḥammad ibn...
Qur’ān Q.3:7, states that ‘it is He who has revealed to you verses of scripture which are muḥkamāt (perspicacious and self-evident) and others which are muṭashābāhāt (ambiguous and polyvalent)’ adding that ‘those who are perverted dissipate their energies seeking the meaning (ta’wil) of that which is ambiguous; but its meaning is known only to God; and those firm in knowledge, saying this is all from God.’ The very exegesis of this verse was the subject of profuse deliberation in the classical literature. The ambiguity concerning the grammatical structure within the verse was also the subject of much conjecture: for having asserted that its meaning is known only to God, the verse adds a further statement ‘and those firm in knowledge’, which some consider to be grammatically coordinate with the previous part of the verse as opposed to being inchoative.

Still some scholars were even arguing that mutashābīh verses were seemingly inscrutable and known only by God. This view is attributed to al-Sha’bī and Sufyān al-Thawrī, although in the latter’s tafsīr he simply includes a view attributed to al-Dahḥāk mentioning that muḥkamāt verses were abrogating ones; and mutashābīh ones were abrogated. Thawrī, Tafsīr, p. 34. As mentioned above, variations à propos the grammatical parsing of the verse did allow scholars to interpret the verses in ways which justified their explanations.

philologists offer views on exegesis which have no valid precedent. This has been published as a separate work: Ibn Taymiyya. *İdārə Sûrat al-Iklâş*. Kuwait: Maktubat al-Manâr al-İslâmiyya, 1977, pp. 203–4.


This is also something summarised by al-Suyūtī: *Iṣṭānūn*, vol. 2, pp. (section 80: Ṭabaqāt al-mujassimīn).

See al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Ja‘mī* li-akhlāq al-rāwī wa-ādāb al-sāmi‘. Edited by Maḥmūd al-Taḥlīlī. Riyād: Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif, 1983, vol. 2, p. 162 (reports nos. 1493–1500). The actual reference by Ibn Ḥanbal to maghāzī, malāḥīm, and tafsīr appears with different wordings in the later literature such as Ibn Taymiyya’s *muqaddima fi l-tafsīr*, which is included in the *Fatāwā*, and al-Zarkashi’s *Burhān*, vol. 2, pp. 156–57, which is in section forty-one which deals with tafsīr and ta‘vil. The report and its variant versions are discussed at length by Goldziher in *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*, pp. 57–58 cf. Harris Birkeland, *Old Muslim Opposition Against the Interpretation of the Qur‘ān*. Oslo, 1956; Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri II*. Qur‘ānic Commentary: Maghāzī, malāḥīm, and tafsīr: the terms are respectively rendered as biography (maghāzī) pre-Islamic epic and adventure (malāḥīm); and Qur‘ānic commentary for more on maghāzī see see Martin Hind’s contribution entitled ‘Maghāzī and Sīra in Early Islamic Scholarship.’ In *La vie du Prophète Mohomet: Colloque de Strasbourg, Octobre 1980*. Paris, 1983. Edited by Toufic Fahd, pp. 57–66. Martin Hinds concluded that the use of the term maghāzī in these early contexts was not especially applied to military raids but rather it served as the technical equivalent of sīra, and thereby encapsulated the topics of general history and biography.

Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s. *Al-Ja‘r wa-l-ta‘dīl*, vol. 1, pp. 116–117. And vol. 7, p. 270 f. In the same section is a report in which Sufyān claims that al-Kalbī is said to have admitted that materials he had transmitted on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās were fabrications (*loc. cit.*).


117 According to the lexicographical sources, the term is derived from the activities of someone who ventures out into the night in order to gather wood but in doing so inadvertently picks up a snake, which then bites him releasing its venom, killing him. It is the Basran lexicographer of the second/eighth century, Abū ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAṣir, who is quoted for this explanation. Ibn Ṭaymiyya used the term when describing the work of al-Thaʿlabī, whom he accused of promulgating materials he found in the books of *tafsīr*, not paying attention to whether they were authentic, weak, or even fabricated, although he does concede that religiously speaking al-Thaʿlabī was inherently good. Ibn Ṭaymiyya, *Majmūʿ*, vol. 13, p. 354.

118 See the discussion in the introduction to Ibn ʿAṭīyya al-Andalusī’s *al-Muḥarrar al-wafīz*, vol. 1, 33–36.

119 This is evident in the introductory sections of the standard *tafsīr* literature: for example see Al-Ṭabarī. *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl ayy al-Qurʾān*. vol. 1, pp. 77–93.


122 See for example al-Ṭabarī, who devotes a whole section to dismissing those who use the report to question the validity of *tafsīr*: Al-Ṭabarī, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jaʿrī. 1969. *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl ayy al-Qurʾān*, vol. 1, pp. 88–91. Abū Ḥayyān *Tafsīr al-BAhr al-muḥīṭ*, vol. 1, p. 119. And it is frequently implied that differences among the Companions of the Prophet on the subject of *tafsīr* were rarely attested.


124 Yet, in the later periods *tafsīr* by its very nature also took on a somewhat exploratory dimension in which exegetes weighed up, contemplated, and determined the import of selected verses across a range of applied contexts. The use of rational models and paradigms in later periods was simply aimed at facilitating intellectual processes. Later scholarship does offer conjectures of theoretical methods and strategies for the pursuit and practice of *tafsīr*, but such descriptions were often expressed as a desideratum.

125 For more on this see: Chapter 6 of the Collection: Saleh, ʿPreliminary Remarks on the Historiography of *tafsīr*, pp. 28–9 and the features of Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s *Tafsīr*.

126 See the discussion below in fn no. 128.


128 The tradition first appears in the *Musnad of Aḥmad*: *Musnad*, vol. 3, p. 496 (*ḥadīth* no. 2069); it also features in tradition nos., 2429 (vol. 4); in this *iṣnād* the first figure in the chain is Muʿammar, whom traditionists rank as being weak; 2974 (vol. 5), in which the wording differs; and 3024. With regards to its being attested in the introductions to *tafsīr* see for example: al-Ṭabarī;
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Qurtubî; Ibn ‘Aṭiyya; al-Baghwî, and Ibn Juzayy. The tradition is supported by an *insâd* which includes Wakî, Sufyân (al-Thawrî), Sa‘îd ibn Jubayr and Ibn ‘Abbâs, although in the technical literature questions were raised about the status of the *insâd* as one of its transmitters is classed as being weak (‘Abd al-A‘lâ al-Tha‘labî). See the editors’ notes on the margins of the *Musnad*. Cf. John Wansbrough on Tirmidhî’s section on *tafsîr bi‘l-ra‘î* in *Qur‘ânic Studies*: pp. 182–3, in which he also evaluates the reference to ‘ilm made by al-Tirmidhî.


Al-Ṭabarî, Abû Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarîr. 1969. *Jâmi‘ al-bayân ‘an ta‘wîl ayy al-Qur‘ân*, vol. 1, pp. 90–91. See also the *Majmû‘*, vol. 13, p. 332. Ibn Taymiyya states that it was for these reasons that Sufyân al-Thawrî said: If *tafsîr* reaches you from Muḥâjid, then it should suffice you’, adding that al-Shâfî‘î, al-Bukhârî, al-Imâm Ahmad ibn Hanbal and other scholars, who were authors of *tafsîr* works, all relied on materials from Muḥâjid. In Suyûtî’s *Itqân* the additional point is made regarding the above narration that Muḥâjid asked about the object and circumstances of these verses’ revelation. See also Juynboll *Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadîth*, p. 430.


Al-Ṭabarî, *Jâmi‘ al-bayân*, vol. 1, pp. 84–89. He even speaks of there being issues with regard to the *insâd* of the tradition.


Kristin Zahra Sands. *Ṣâfi Commentary on the Qur‘ân in Classical Islam*: Sands argues that Ibn Taymiyya’s *Muqaddimah* was almost ‘a point by point rebuttal of al-Ghazâlî’s arguments for not confining Qur‘ânic commentary to the transmitted tradition.’ P. 55. But the sort of arguments articulated by al-Ghazâlî with regards to the pursuit of *tafsîr* were ones with which all most classical exegetes would identify, including al-Ṭabarî, who deals with similar objections raised by *man ankara tafsîr al-mu‘assirîn* in his introduction. The idea that Ibn Taymiyya was claiming that the Prophet explained the whole Qur‘ân as suggested by Sands ties in with his view that knowledge which is requisite to the foundations of faith and practice would have to be explained; however, the suggestion is that neither the Prophet nor the Companions pored over every aspect of the text for had it been necessary they would have done so. Ibn Taymiyya’s concern is the obsessive focus on minutiae which one encounters in the works of the exegetes. Sectarian as well as mystical approaches to *tafsîr* are dealt with in other parts of the *Majmû‘*.

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135 Ibn Taymiyya, Majmu‘, vol. 13, pp. 39–65. Again it is implied that they were used for the purposes of illustration and not for determining religious convictions.


The biographical data suggest that Muqāṭil himself gained quite a reputation as a storyteller in that he used to narrate tales in the mosque at Merv.


Al-Ṭabarānī, Jāmi’ al-bayān, vol. 18, pp. 104–5. Thus for example, his treatment of the account of Dhū’l-Qarnayn relies not only on isrā’īliyyāt, but he is also citing traditions whose authenticity is traditionally questioned. When discussing the identity of Dhū’l-Qarnayn, he cites a chain of authority in which the famous historian Muḥammad ibn Iṣḥāq introduces, by way of an unnamed figure, Wahb ibn Munabbih, of whom he says: ‘he possessed knowledge of the ancient past’ and that he used to assert that Dhū’l-Qarnayn was from the ‘ahl al-Rūm’ and that his name was Alexander. See *Mu’jam al-ṣagāh ilī ruwāt al-Imām Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarānī*, 2 vols. Edited by Akram al-Fālūjī al-Ṣābahī. Ammān: Dār al-Ṣābahīyya; Dār Ibn ‘Affān. 1425 A.H.

Al-Ṭabarānī, Jāmi’ al-bayān, vol. 18, pp. 104–5. This was technically referred to as tadhīl, namely concealing the identity of a narrator for which Ibn Iṣḥāq was regularly criticised. For a biography of Wahb see al-Dhahabī, al-Sīyar al-ṭālâm, vol. 4, pp. 545–547. It is pointed out that he has only a single tradition in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* collections on the subject of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ’s ability to write. (no. 112 in al-Bukhārī)


Of course, technically speaking the concept of ādāla, namely the probity and integrity of the class of Companions, meant that it was inconceivable that esteemed individuals would propagate materials deemed inauthentic and religiously suspect, although their names are invoked in the processes of ascription.

Included among the corpora of tradition were the direct views expressed by the Prophet, which included pronouncements and judgements as well as words of exhortation; discussions of his views; opinions and words of exhortation attributed to the Prophet; accounts of his sanctions and deeds; reports eulogizing his qualities and characteristics; and anecdotes recounting aspects of historical events in his lifetime. A substantial number of the Prophetic reports pertain to the lives of the Companions, whose own dicta were important in the synthesis of the notion of the concept of Sunna.
contemporaries and later scholars was the frequency with which errors occur in some of his writings. It was attributed to the fact that he authored so many texts, often simultaneously, without stopping to reflect (review) upon a completed work; and he was said to rush into authoring texts on subjects with which he was not thoroughly acquainted. Ibn Rajab’s Kitāb al-dhayl, vol. 1, p. 414. He was accused of an inclination to ta’wil, which in a theological context, meant explaining away the literal language of scripture when faced with scriptural verses whose anthropomorphic thrust was apparent, including the use of metaphor to obviate imagery predicated of the Almighty and this is something that he does throughout the tafsīr. Loc. cit. the science of hadīth was often viewed as his forte. See Ibn Rajab, vol. 1, pp. 414–20 for lists of his works.


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186 Meir Bar-Asher argues that there are four characteristics of pre-Buwayhid Ḥanāfī exegesis: exegesis by Ḥadīth; a selective concern with the text of the Qurʾān; scant interest in theology and in certain issues bearing on the institution of the imāma; an extreme anti-Sunnī tendency and a hostile attitude to the Companions of the Prophet (p. 73).


188 Key doctrinal differences with Sunnītes are regularly dealt with in the tafsīr.

189 The recent publication of a critical edition of a third/ninth century text on the subject of variæ lectiones attributed to the Shī‘ī author Ahmad ibn Muḥammad al-Sayyārī provides an indication of the somewhat opaque history of the construct of tahrīf. Revelation and Falsification: the Kitāb al-qira‘āt of Ahmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī Critical Edition with an Introduction and notes by Etan Kohlberg and Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi. E.J. Brill, Leiden 2009. Although clearly subscribing to the doctrine of falsification both in the introduction to the work and in the main text, it is noticeable that instances of alleged tahrīf are restricted to selected verses within documented chapters of the Qurʾān. These tend to be instances in which lexical substitution, vocalic and consonantal variants, and textual interpolation are highlighted in ways which fortify ideological and theological motifs of Shī‘ism, although it is within the textual boundaries of the traditionally compiled ‘Uthmānic codex that this is constellation. The introduction was originally published under the title: ‘Revelation et Falsification: introduction à l’édition du kitāb al-qira‘āt d’al-Sayyārī.’ Journal Asiatique (2005:293), pp. 663–722. Meir Bar-Asher. Scripture and Exegesis in Early Ḥanāfi Shī‘ism.

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See the introduction to Revelation and Falsification. Also see review by Mustafa Shah in Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies (2011:74.02), pp. 316–19. Elsewhere, I have pointed out that ‘It is important to note that the construct of tahrîf has a somewhat vague history both in terms of its provenance and semantic compass, which appears to have gone through several phases of gestation.’ To suggest that there existed a uniform notion of tahrîf ab initio is difficult to substantiate. Texts devoted to tahrîf are ascribed to various individuals who precede al-Sayyârî such as Muḥammad b. Khâlid al-Barqî (flor. early 3rd/9th century); additionally, there are statements attributed to eminent Shi‘ite authorities, but these surface in the later literature. (the discussion in f/ns 189 and 191 is mostly based on a summary of the review of the work in the Bulletin) For more on the different sects and groups see al-Nawbakht al-Maktaba al-Murtadawiyya, 1932.

Al-Ṭabritsî, Abû ‘Alî al-Fadîl ibn al-Ḥasan. Majma‘ al-Bayân fi tafsîr al-Qur‘ân. 5 vols. Beirut: Dâr Maktabat al-Ḥayât, n.d. In fact he states that it is the most noble, resplendent, astounding, auspicious, revered, unsurpassed, beneficial and constructive of all the sciences (vol. 1, p. 19.). Writing from a Sunnî perspective, al-Dhahabî describes his tafsîr as being a monumental work despite its Shî‘ite and Mu’tazili leanings (p. 109). Also vocalised as Ṭabarsî.

Al-Ṭabritsî, Majma‘, vol. 1, pp. 22–34. Interestingly, he claims that the traditions which touch upon their being omissions originated with the ashâb al-hudith, who were unaware of the flaws with regards to their authenticity. This is a theme taken up by Hossein Modarressi. ‘Early Debates on the Integrity of the Qur‘ân.’ Studia Islamica (1993:77), pp. 5–39, although see the point made in
the review of Kohlberg/Moezzi with regards to the Sunnī aim of such discussions. And it is also linked with the idea of the Qur'ān being revealed in one harf and not seven as was the predominant view in Shī'ism. For later trends within Shī'ite exegesis see Todd Lawson. Akhbārī Shī'ī Approaches to tafsīr. In Approaches to the Qur'ān. Edited by G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader pp. 173–210.


al-Qādir al-Nu'mān. Asās al-Ta'wil, pp. and Farhad Daftary. A Short History of the Ismailis. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998, pp. 2, 33, 51, 86, 92, 94, 138, 139, 142, 167. Daftary sees these processes as having their origin in the Shī'ī milieus of Iraq, p. 51. Daftary argues that early Ismā'īlī sources accorded equal significance to both the zāhir and the batīn and this can be inferred from later Fātimid literature. He also points out that the anti-religious views propagated by the Qarāmīta in Bāḥrayn were used to tar the Ismā'īlī movement (pp. 52–3) by Sunnī opponents. Still, mainstream criticisms of such approaches abounded: the Andalusian legal theorist Abū Ishaq al-Shāṭibī describes such forms of batīnī


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207 Kristin Zahra Sands. Ṣūfī Commentaries, p. 3. She refers to the ‘unending process’ of interpretation which is different for each individual and that in this sense Ṣūfī interpretations are ‘suggestive rather than declarative’, adding that ‘they therefore indicate possibilities as much as they demonstrate the insights of each writer.’ An survey of tafsīr al-īsḥāra is provided by al-Dhahabī see al-Tafsīr wa-l-muṣaffirūn, vol. 2, pp. 366–454. Al-Dhahabī in his history of tafsīr speaks of bāti‘i forms of tafsīr undermining zāhirī exegesis. Al-Dhahabī, al-Tafsīr, pp. 382–399. Note also that some scholars pointed to its being a largely subjective exercise predisposed to the vagaries of individual experience: Some classical scholars divided tafsīr al-īsḥārī into two strands: the first of which encompasses exegetical allusions that were readily reconciled with the general strictures of traditional teachings; while the second is viewed as embodying allusive exegetical thoughts, which verged on the incomprehensible for the uninitiated. The Ḥanbalite theologian and Jurist Ibn Qayyim (d. 751/1350) equated tafsīr al-īsḥārī with exegesis by analogy, although he stipulated general conditions which had to be applied when assessing the value of such forms of exegesis. Ibn al-Qayyim: al-Tīyān fī aymān al-Qur‘ān. Edited by ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sālim. Jeddah: Dār ‘Ālam al-Fāw‘īd, 2008, p. 124 ff.


212 This is incorrectly published as *Tafsīr Ibn ‘Arabī, Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-Kārim*. 2 vols Edited by Muṣṭafā Ghālib. Dār al-Andalus, 1978. Cf. with al-Nu‘man’s reference in *Asāṣ al-ta‘wil*, p. 30 and the tradition he quotes which mentions the Prophet declaring that each verse revealed to him had a zāhir (outer) and a bāṭin (inner) sense.


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221 al-Nasāʾī, Ahmad ibn Shuʿayb Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. Tafsīr al-Nasāʾī. 2 vols. Edited by Ṣāḥbī ibn ʿAbd al-Khāliq al-Ṣāḥīfī and Sayyid ibn ʿAbbās al-Jālīmī. Muʿassasat al-Beirut: Kutub waʾl-Thaqāfā, 1990. It is notable that al-Zarkashī states that his effort on tafsīr existed as a text which collated the statements of the Companions and the Followers, al-Burḥān, vol. 2, p. 159. Whether al-Nasāʾī’s work was originally an independent work was even debated among classical scholars.


Similar theoretical distinctions between the meaning of tafsîr and ta‘wil were discerned as far back by Muqâtîl ibn Sulaymân (150/767). During the early years of its development, the term tafsîr was interchangeably used with the word ta‘wil to denote the practice of exegesis with a number of the seminal works from the first three centuries of the Islamic tradition often featuring one of the terms in their title. See Andrew Rippin. ‘Tafsîr’ and Claude Gilliot. ‘Exegesis of the Qur‘ân: Classical and Medieval.’ In Encyclopaedia of the Qur‘ân. Edited by Jane McAuliffe, 5 vols. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001–6, vol. II, pp. 99–124. It is suggested that the etymology of the word is Syriac. As discussed in the section on the grammarians and early tafsîr, exegetical literature fell under a number of different rubrics, including gharîb texts, which were devoted to the selective lexical paraphrasing of the Qur‘ân’s vocabulary; Ma‘âni texts, which pursed the grammatical justification of the language of the Qur‘ân, often using poetic citation; lughât texts which probed dialects and the etymology of words in the Qur‘ân; Mushkil texts which probed grammatical singularities of the Qur‘anic dictio.


Note in al-Zurqâni’s Manâhîl al-‘irfân fî ‘ulûm al-Qurân, he mentions the work by al-Hûfî (d. 430/1039) entitled al-Burhân fî ‘ulûm al-Qurân, suggesting it is one of the earliest texts on the subject which mixes commentary with basic hermeneutical categories, vol. 1, pp. 35–36. The title has proved to be questionable as elsewhere it is argued that it was simply ‘tafsîr’ and not ‘ulûm’. As Yâqût and Ḥâjjî Khalîfâ both provide al-Burhân fî tafsîr al-Qur‘ân as the title.

Arthur Jeffery. Two Muqaddimas to the Qur‘anic Sciences; the Muqaddima to the Kitâb al-Mabânî, and the Muqaddima of Ibn ‘Atîyya to his Tafsîr, edited from the manuscript in Berlin. Cairo: Mâṭba‘at al-Sûnna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1954. The mabânî is dated to the mid-fifth/eleventh century. See the preface to the work which mentions the author’s reference to commencing the work in 425/1033.
and the fact that the text was used by Nöldeke. A number of research papers have speculated over the source of the text and its provenance; some suggest the North African origin. (MS Wetzstein 93 Berlin State Library).


For details on the debate about the authenticity of the sources across the Islamic sciences see Herbert Berg. (ed.), *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, Islamic History and Civilization, Studies and Texts, vol. 49. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003. The basis for this endeavour stems from an earlier project on Islam for the publication *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* (1996), which was edited by Berg and entitled *Islamic Origins Reconsidered: John Wansbrough and the Study of Early Islam*. Berg devoted the project to an assessment of the late John Wansbrough’s impact on the debate concerning the origins and development of the Islamic tradition. The theme of salvation history played a significant role in Wansbrough’s attempts to unravel the genesis of the Islamic tradition and the emergence of the Qur’ān. Berg invited individual scholars to contribute to an issue of the aforementioned journal, hoping that defenders, sympathisers, and opponents of Wansbrough’s theory might share a circumspect discussion of his views. Berg believed that an issue of the journal which presented the broad spectrum of opinion on this emotive topic would prove to be invaluable. However, only those scholars who were advocates of Wansbrough’s thesis and those who sympathised with his views took the opportunity to contribute, rendering the edition of the journal in question a rather ‘one sided perspective’, although Berg adds that it was positively received. The book therefore attempts to address this balance and is divided into four principal sections, namely: A. History and Sīra; B. Sunnah and Ḥadīth; C. Qur’ān and Tafsīr; and, D. Shari‘ah and Fiqh, although these are described by Berg as being ‘arbitrary headings’. The work comprises a total of twelve articles on specific aspects of the early Islamic tradition and the importance of the sources used to substantiate classical perceptions of the respective disciplines. Cf. Herbert Berg. ‘Ibn ‘Abbās in ‘Abbasid-Era tafsīr’, in *Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies*, pp. 129–146. Also see Andrew Rippin, ‘Western Scholarship and the Qur’ān.’ In *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’ān*, pp. 235–51. See also Manfred Kropp (ed.). *Results of Contemporary Research on the Qur’ān: the Question of a Historio-critical Text of the Qur’ān*. Beirut: Orient-Institut; Würzburg: Ergon in Kommission, 2007.

243 For a detailed survey of the core issues in the context of ‘Islamic Origins’ and authenticity see Fred Donner. *Narratives of Islamic Origins: Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*. New Jersey: Princeton, 1998. Donner refers to the positivist outlook of the ‘Descriptive Approach’ which worked within the confines of the Islamic tradition’s accounts of its development; he also speaks of the ‘Source Critical Approach’, which he points out has its origins in the middle of the nineteenth century and focuses on reviewing ‘patent contradictions and logical absurdities in the sources through careful comparative source criticism’ on the basis that the sources comprised both authentic and inauthentic materials and he points out that one of its assumptions is that the extant materials were based on written transmission (p. 9). Donner places Goldziher’s work within the framework of a ‘Tradition-Critical Approach’ which is formulated around his rejection of the authenticity of the traditions on the basis that the extant sources are the culmination of long periods of reworking and development, although Donner adds that Goldziher was less skeptical about the historiographical sources and he does accept that there is an historical kernel of truth which lay at the heart of these materials (pp. 14–15). Finally Donner identifies the ‘Skeptical Approach’ which he suggests represents an ‘outgrowth of Goldziher’s work’ on the basis that it goes a stage further in dismissing that there is ‘any kernel of historical fact that might tell us “what actually happened”’ (pp. 20–21). For the debates on hadîth see the definition offered by Berg above. Cf. John Barton’s *The Nature of Biblical Criticism*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007, which discusses at length The ‘Historical-Critical Method’, pp. 31–68. Jane Smith I. *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term ‘Islâm’ as Seen in a Sequence of Qur’ân Commentaries*. Missoula, MT: Missoula Scholars Press, 1975.


John Wansbrough. *Qur’anic Studies*, p. 121.


John Wansbrough. *Qur’anic Studies*, p. 144. And in the same vein works attributed to Ibn ‘Abbâs contained elements ‘considerably posterior to the activity’ of that figure. Cf. pp. 158 f in which it is argued that ‘the historical processes of tafsîr cannot be reconstructed before the beginning of the third/ninth century.’


Wansbrough’s theory rests on the belief that the whole of the exegetical literature from the early third/ninth century is aimed at presupposing the existence of a fixed canon. Wansbrough refers to a promotion of the exegesis of language, probing shifts in literary styles, aims, and the functional utility of the materials as a means of gauging historical fact.

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255 He states that ‘all that we have is what we have been told.’ John Wansbrough. ‘Res Ipsa Loquitor: History and Mimesis.’ Reproduced in Herbert Berg (ed.), *Method and Theory*, pp. 3–19, pp. 6–7. Wansbrough made the case that historical ‘fact’ is not decisively determined by archival or indeed archaeological artifact, but rather, to all intents and purposes, it furtively resides in the literary countenance and features of given texts. Wansbrough’s admission that the structural features and formulaic phraseology he used to identify discrete exegetical layers of scripture and their historical depth in the early Islamic source material, were in his own words, an ‘experiment’. Berg argues that Wansbrough’s principal contribution to the debate on Islamic origins rests with his advocating a return to critical scholarship in approaches to issues of authenticity and ascription as far as the Islamic sources are concerned. With regards to the principles of exegesis, his view was that these were perfected by the time of Ibn Qutayba and that ‘thereafter few, if any, methodological innovations were introduced.’


number of fragments which originally belonged to an ancient Qur’anic manuscript discovered in the mosque of ‘Amr ibn al-Âş mosque in the old city of Fustat, the former Egyptian capital; they were brought back to France by Jean-Joseph Marcel (1776–1856) and supplemented with Qur’anic folios also brought back from Egypt by Jean-Louis Asselin de Cherville (1772–1822). Asselin’s folios were acquired by the Bibliothèque royale, while Marcel’s folios eventually ended up in the National Library of Russia in Saint Petersburg. Other related materials were in the possession of the Vatican and the David Khalili collection. The portion of the manuscript covers about 45% of the Qur’anic text and Déroche suggested that the codex originally comprised between 210–220 folios, adding that five scribes worked on the text. It is only following the recent restoration of the folios that the work could be examined. Déroche also outlines some of the physical problems with manuscripts of this nature. Cf. Adam Gacek. *Arabic Manuscripts: a Vademecum for Readers.* Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009.


259 Even in the light of recent studies of manuscript evidence, it has been argued the imposition of the consonantal skeleton (rasm) of the Qur’ân, around which the readings were constellated, is considerably later than the periods suggested in the ‘traditional’ narratives. See for example: David Powers, *Muhammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2009, pp. 227–8. There is a detailed refutation of the thesis advanced by Powers set forth in a Review Article by Walid Saleh in *Comparative Islamic Studies* (2010:6.1.2), pp. 251–264; also see: Gerald Haw- ting. Review of *Muhammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making

François Déroche. La Transmission, p. 178.


Rippin’s comments were made back in 1982: Andrew Rippin. ‘The Present Status of Tafsīr Studies.’ The Muslim World (1982:72), pp. 224–238, p. 228. This is taken up further in Rippin’s study of the naskh text attributed to al-Zuhri (see below). However, Rippin does acknowledge that Sezgin’s work draws attention to ‘a substantial body of material coming from at least the second and third centuries.’ (p. 228).


Gregor Schoeler. The Oral and the Written in Early Islam, p. 29. Schoeler did suggest that the aversion to reliance on the written word alone was also a factor in play: ‘Do not take knowledge from the ṣaḥāfiyyīn’; and, ‘a ṣaḥāfī should not be allowed to issue edicts for people, nor should a muṣḥafī teach them readings (qirā‘a)’ are viewed as dicta comprising examples of this attitude; moreover, he pointed to analogues within the context of the prohibition to writing down Prophetic hādīth. For more on issues of transmission see Joseph Kister, ‘Lā taqrā‘a ‘l-Qur‘āna ‘alā muṣḥafīyyīn wa-lā tahmišī ‘l-ilma ‘ant l-ṣaḥāfiyyīn: Some Notes on the Transmission of Ḥadīth.’ Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam (1998:22), pp. 127–62.

Gregor Schoeler. The Oral and the Written in Early Islam, p. 33. It would be argued that scholars did not leave ‘behind or edit books in the sense of final, revised redactions of their material.’ One issue which remains unresolved within the context of the framework suggested by Schoeler is the fact that the biographical traditions and materials, upon which Schoeler often relied, do speak of fixed texts being bequeathed and written.

Gregor Schoeler. The Oral and the Written in Early Islam, pp. 28–31, 36–9, and 43. Wansbrough commented that ‘despite careful and often illuminating analysis of technical terminology, the studies of both authors (Abbott and Sezgin) suffer, in my opinion, from an ingenuous acceptance of the isnād apparatus, but represent at the same time a not altogether unexpected reaction to the work of Goldziher and Schacht.’ John Wansbrough. Qur‘ānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation, p. 140.

Gregor Schoeler. The Oral and the Written in Early Islam, p. 47.

It was assumed that Dionysus Thrax’s Ṭechnē grammattē in its Syriac form played a part in the formation of Arabic grammatical models. Despite moving away from the Greek hypothesis, Versteegh did continue to uphold the notion of voie diffuse, which predicates that the local living tradition of Hellenistic enlightenment had filtered through to influence the Arabs’ cultural ideas and the manner in which these were expressed. Notwithstanding Syria, Versteegh singled out indigenous regions such as Ḥarrān, Nisibis, Hīrā, and Edessa, as being locations where Hellenistic cultural ideas prevailed. (see his “Origin of Qiyās, p. 12:
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274 This has been a theme in the work of Uri Rubin.

275 In a related context see for example Patricia Crone ‘Two Legal Problems Bearing on the Early History of the Qur’ān.’ Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam (1994:18), pp. 1–37, pp. 1–2. And more generally Patricia Crone. ‘How Did the Qur’ānic Pagans Make a Living?’ Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies (2005:68), pp. 387–99. Patricia Crone, ‘The Religion of the Qur’ānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities.’ Arabica (2012:57.2.3), pp. 151–200. She argues that the legal discussions on the import of ‘kalāla, kitāb in Q.24:33, were unintelligible to the early commentators, as were several non-legal phrases and passages (al-samad, possibly al-rajm, the mysterious letters and Surat Quraysh).’ In the former article she concludes that only an abandonment of ‘the conventional account of how the Qur’ān was born’ would explain why this was so. For an alternative explanation of the genesis of the traditional sciences see John Burton. ‘Qur’ān and Sunnah, a Case of Cultural Disjunction.’ In Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins. Edited by Herbert Berg. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003, pp. 137–157.

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279 Gabriel Reynolds. *The Qurʾān and its Biblical Subtext*. London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 3–22, especially p. 19 and pp. 20–22 and see the review of this work by Angelika Neuwirth in the Journal of Qur’ānic Studies (2012:14.1), pp. 131–38; and Idem. ‘Orientalism in Oriental Studies: Qurʾānic Studies as a Case in Point.’ *Journal of Qur’ānic Studies* (2007:9.2), pp. 115–27. See also the review by Amidu Sanni in the Journal of Islamic Studies (2012), pp. 359–64. Reynolds’ view is that the *muḥāfāṣirīn* are not reliable preservers of an unbroken chain of Qurʾānic interpretation. He argues that in seeking to locate the apposite historical context to understanding the Qurʾān, he is not concerned with the issue of the canonical emergence of the text, but rather it is how this text ‘of the Qurʾān might best be read,’ p. 13. Reynolds states that the tafsīr materials represent a ‘remarkable literary achievement’ to be appreciated in their own right; and in this regard he speaks of the creativity and virtuosity of the *muḥāfāṣirīn* in shaping the Qurʾān’s narratives (p. 228). His view is that ‘the Qurʾān is in conversation with a larger literary tradition’, p. 36. However, he claims that these tafsīrs ‘do not preserve

280 The issue of the quest for distinctiveness is developed by Todd Lawson in his treatment of the Islamic narratives on the crucifixion; the doctrine is viewed as a reflection of a ‘communal desideratum to show just how distinctive, in a sectarian milieu, this new religion was.’ Todd Lawson. The Crucifixion and the Qur‘ān: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought. Oxford: One World Publications, 2009, p. 20. See the review of this in Journal of Qur‘ānic Studies (2010:12), pp. 191–203.

281 It should be noted here that although Colin Turner’s Qur‘ān collection in the same series did include a confined number of articles which covered aspects of tafsīr, it was principally concerned with general treatments and studies of the Qur‘ān; whereas, this collection seeks to broach the Qur‘ān extensively through the classical discipline of tafsīr with regards to academic scholarship which probes the development of early tafsīr; concepts and hermeneutics; medieval exegetes and their works; themes and genres of classical exegesis; and aspects of modern approaches to the text.


There is an interesting parallel here: namely, Wansbrough’s argument about the authenticity of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’s Risāla fiʾl-qadar and his view that the text had its origins in the late eighth century. Wansbrough reasoned that the epistle’s failure to include Prophetic traditions was not an indication of its early origin but a reflection of the debate within Islam about the authority of sources: usūl. And the epistle’s aims were to promote the independent authority of the Qurʾān to the exclusion of the Prophetic traditions. For more on this see: John Wansbrough, Qurʾānic Studies, pp. 91–2 and pp. 160–3 and also see Suleiman Ali Mourad. Early Islam between Myth and History: Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110H/728CE) and the Formation of his Legacy in Classical Islamic Scholarship. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2006 in which Mourad explains how pseudepigraphy,
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author transfer, and back projection were used to inflate the biography of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Also see the Review Article by Mustafa Shah in Journal of Qur’ānic Studies (2009:11.2), pp. 93–119. Equally, if one takes on board Walid Saleh’s synopsis of the misleading character of the tafsīr bi‘l-ma’thūr discussions, then the issue of appealing to authority is academic in the loose sense of the word.


296 Harald Motzki. ‘The Origins of Muslim Exegesis. A Debate.’ In Analysing Muslim Traditions Studies in Legal, Exegetical and Maghāzī Hadīth. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2010. Edited by Harald Motzki with Nicolet Boekhoff-Van der Voort and Sean Anthony, pp. 231–303. It should be noted that the chapter was originally written in 2003 as a journal article; however, because of its length, it was never published as such, until it was printed in the aforementioned work, along with five other pieces by Motzki and articles by Nicolet Boekhoff-Van der Voort and Sean Anthony respectively.

297 Motzki zooms in on the arguments developed in Herbert Berg’s ‘Competing Paradigms in the Study of Islamic Origins: Qur’ān 15:89–91 and the Value of isnāds.’ pp. 259–290, in Method and Theory. Berg had concluded that a consensus among the different camps with regards to the historical value of hadīths and isnāds would never be reached.


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305 See Goldziher, Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung, p. 58. ‘Es fand sich eine Menge neugieriger Schriftgelehrter, die die Lücke des Korans aus dem Verkehr mit Juden und Christen ausfühlten und die von ihnen erhaltenen, oft in sehr missverstandener Weise wiedergegebenen Erzählungen noch aus eigener Phantasie ergänzten und als Erklärungen des Korans preisgaben.’ He is speaking of the interest in legendary tales and materials from Christian and Jewish sources which were used by scholars to embellish the Qur’ān’s narrative.


307 A parallel here is provided perhaps by the arguments about the opposition to writing down traditions and the arguments put forward by Gregor Schoeler and Michael Cook. When Schoeler referred to the Umayyads’ opposition to the writing down of traditions, Cook countered by stating that the position taken by Schoeler assumes that the reports are authentic. Cf. Wansbrough, Qur’ānic Studies, pp. 158–60. This is also an argument used by Rippin to question Versteegh’s study of early exegetical texts: namely, how can one draw conclusions of an historical nature about the content of literary materials and concepts, when the very texts used to formulate and construct such assumptions have a problematic provenance? While the counter view is that the sophistication of the texts is overlooked by the focus on issues of historicity.


Ulrika Mårtensson. ‘“The Persuasive Proof”: A Study of Aristotle’s Politics and Rhetoric in the Qur’ān and in al-Ṭabarī’s Commentary.’ Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam (2008:34), pp. 363–420. Interestingly, with regards to attributing the rhetorical structures in the Qur’ān to Aristotelian analogues, the historical inconsistencies relating to the availability of Aristotle’s work in such nascent periods appear insurmountable. Indeed, even tracing the impact of the Organon upon fields of scholarship such as grammar, in which its influence was considered even more plausible, has been shown to be flawed. See the various articles on the translation of Aristotle in Ramzi Baalbaki (ed.). The Early Islamic Grammatical Tradition. Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate/Variorum, 2007.


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which predates *tafsīr* discourses. He is not specifically interested in the exegetes and their works.


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