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## Textual Authority and Exegetical Method in Salafī Tafsīr: Reassessing Ibn Kathīr in Contemporary Qur'anic Studies

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### Abstract

*Contemporary Qur'anic studies have been increasingly shaped by contextual, literary, and hermeneutical approaches, yet relatively little attention has been given to how classical transmitted exegesis continues to function as a rigorous interpretive system in modern scholarship. While Ibn Kathīr is among the most widely referenced classical exegetes in the Muslim world, his tafsīr is often treated as a traditional authority rather than critically examined as a structured exegetical methodology with contemporary relevance. This article seeks to fill that gap by reassessing the textual authority and exegetical method of Salafī tafsīr through the interpretive framework of Ibn Kathīr. Using a **qualitative** library research design, this study analyzes primary classical sources, especially Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm, alongside modern scholarly discussions on Salafī exegesis, hadith-based interpretation, and contemporary Qur'anic thought. The analysis is conducted through descriptive, intertextual, and conceptual approaches to examine the epistemic hierarchy of Ibn Kathīr's method, including the use of intra-Qur'anic interpretation, Prophetic traditions, Companion reports, linguistic analysis, and critical engagement with Isrā'īliyyāt. The study **finds** that Ibn Kathīr's exegetical method is not merely a conservative reliance on transmitted materials, but a disciplined hermeneutical model that combines textual fidelity, source criticism, and interpretive coherence. His tafsīr reflects a structured balance between naqlī authority and controlled rational inquiry, making it especially relevant in the face of contemporary challenges such as interpretive subjectivism, decontextualized scriptural readings, and the rapid spread of unverified religious knowledge in digital environments. At the **global level**, this study contributes to contemporary Qur'anic studies by demonstrating that classical Salafī exegesis can still offer a productive methodological framework for discussions of textual authority, authenticity, and responsible interpretation. It also provides a critical intellectual resource for broader debates on religion, knowledge, and hermeneutics in an increasingly plural and digitized world.*

**Keywords:** Salafī Exegesis; Ahl al-Ḥadīth; Ibn Kathīr; Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr; Classical Tafsīr; Contemporary Tafsīr.

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## Introduction

In recent decades, Qur'anic studies has experienced substantial methodological diversification. Alongside classical philological and theological approaches, contemporary scholarship has increasingly incorporated literary theory, contextual hermeneutics, discourse analysis, historical criticism, and sociological inquiry [1]. These developments have enriched the field by expanding the analytical tools available for understanding the Qur'an and its interpretive traditions. At the same time, they have also reshaped the terms through which authority, authenticity, and interpretive legitimacy are discussed within both academic and religious spheres. Within this expanding scholarly landscape, classical tafsir traditions continue to occupy a central yet contested position. They are often invoked either as authoritative repositories of inherited religious knowledge or as historical texts that reflect the intellectual and doctrinal concerns of earlier Muslim communities. However, classical exegetical works are less frequently examined as internally coherent methodological systems capable of contributing to present-day debates in Qur'anic interpretation. This is particularly significant in relation to transmitted exegetical traditions, which are sometimes treated as static or pre-critical in comparison with modern interpretive approaches.

This tendency reveals an important gap in contemporary Qur'anic scholarship. Although Ibn Kathir remains one of the most influential and widely read classical Muslim exegetes, especially through his *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, relatively limited attention has been paid to his work as a structured exegetical methodology rather than merely a canonical reference text. Existing scholarship has largely focused on Ibn Kathir's role within Salafi or Ahl al-Hadith traditions, his dependence on tafsir bi al-ma'thur, or his intellectual relationship to Ibn Taymiyyah. Yet fewer studies have systematically reassessed how his exegetical method constructs textual authority, regulates interpretation, and negotiates the relationship between transmission and reasoning in ways that remain meaningful for contemporary Qur'anic studies [2]. As a result, an important methodological question remains insufficiently addressed: how should Ibn Kathir's tafsir be understood not merely as a product of medieval Sunni orthodoxy, but as a disciplined interpretive framework with ongoing relevance for modern scholarly discussions on authority, authenticity, and scriptural interpretation?

This study matters for at least two major reasons. First, contemporary debates in Qur'anic studies increasingly revolve around the tension between textual authority and interpretive openness. Modern approaches often emphasize contextualization, reader reception, and socio-historical

reconstruction, which have undoubtedly contributed to the field [3]. However, these developments have also raised concerns regarding the boundaries of interpretation and the criteria by which exegetical claims are judged to be methodologically sound [4]. Reassessing Ibn Kathīr's tafsīr is therefore important because it provides insight into a classical model of interpretive discipline that seeks to preserve textual authority without entirely excluding analytical reasoning.

The study is significant because the global circulation of Qur'anic interpretation has been fundamentally transformed by digital media. Tafsīr today is no longer confined to printed commentaries or specialized scholarly institutions; it now moves rapidly across websites, online lectures, social media platforms, and algorithmically curated religious content [5]. While this has democratized access to Islamic interpretive traditions, it has also intensified the spread of fragmented, decontextualized, and weakly sourced explanations of Qur'anic verses [6]. In this context, revisiting Ibn Kathīr is not merely a matter of historical interest, but also an attempt to recover a model of interpretive accountability rooted in textual hierarchy, source criticism, and verification.

The urgency of this reassessment is supported by two broader developments in current scholarship and religious knowledge production. First, recent discussions in Qur'anic studies have shown sustained interest in questions of hermeneutics, authority, and the epistemological foundations of interpretation [7]. Yet within these discussions, transmitted exegetical traditions – particularly those associated with Salafī and Ahl al-Ḥadīth orientations – are often engaged polemically or descriptively rather than analytically [8]. This has left a noticeable gap in efforts to understand how such traditions function methodologically from within their own intellectual logic.

The rise of digital religion has created new challenges for the authentication and dissemination of Islamic knowledge. The widespread availability of tafsīr materials online has undoubtedly broadened access to Qur'anic learning, but it has also made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between academically grounded interpretation and religious commentary lacking methodological rigor [9]. In this regard, Ibn Kathīr's exegetical practice – marked by Qur'an-by-Qur'an interpretation, reliance on Prophetic traditions and Companion reports, linguistic clarification, and critical engagement with *Isrā'iliyyāt* – offers a valuable framework for reconsidering how interpretive credibility may be maintained in an age of informational excess.

Against this backdrop, the present article reassesses Ibn Kathīr's exegetical method within the broader framework of Salafī tafsīr by focusing on the relationship between textual authority and interpretive procedure. Rather

than approaching Ibn Kathīr solely as a transmitter of inherited Sunni orthodoxy, this study treats his tafsīr as a methodologically significant contribution to Qur'anic interpretation [10]. It argues that Ibn Kathīr's exegetical model represents a structured and disciplined approach to tafsīr in which transmitted authority, source verification, and controlled reasoning operate in a mutually reinforcing manner [11]. By re-examining Ibn Kathīr in this way, the article seeks to contribute to contemporary Qur'anic studies in two respects: first, by clarifying the epistemic architecture of Salafī-Ahl al-Ḥadīth exegesis; and second, by demonstrating the continued relevance of classical interpretive models for global discussions on scripture, religious authority, and responsible knowledge production in the contemporary and digital age.

The study of Qur'an interpretation is a scientific field that continues to undergo methodological development throughout Islamic history. From the time of the Companions to the modern era, the interpretation of the Qur'an has never been separated from the social, political, and intellectual dynamics of Muslims. [12] Each period presents a pattern of interpretation that represents a certain epistemological orientation ranging from tafsīr *bi al-ma'thūr* (history-based), tafsīr *bi al-ra'yi* (rational-based), to *philosophical, sūfī, and 'ilmī* tafsīr that emerged later [13]. In this methodological diversity, there is an approach that still maintains the authority of the text and history, namely the Salafī tafsīr or Ahl al-Ḥadīth, which is based on the understanding of the early generation of Muslims (*as-salaf a ṣ-ṣ ālih*) [14].

The Salafī approach emerged as a reaction to the tendency of rationalization and philosophy in the tradition of interpretation that developed since the 4th century A.H. These proponents of the manhaj asserted that the truth of interpretation must be based on three main sources: the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, and the Companions, and reject forms of interpretation based on speculation or superstition without any basis in history [15]. Therefore, the style of Salafī tafsīr is often also called the tafsīr Ahl al-Ḥadīth, because it is based on the methodology of hadith experts in assessing sanad, matan, and the authority of history.

In the historical context, this paradigm gained a strong methodological foothold through the monumental work of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH) with *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wil Āy al-Qur'ān*. However, the peak of the maturity of the method of tafsīr *bi al-ma'thūr* can be found in the work of Ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī (d. 774 AH), a great scholar of Sham who was also known as a direct disciple of Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH) [16]. Through his work *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, Ibn Kathīr combines the disciplines of hadith, history, and Arabic to produce a commentary that has high methodological value and remains the main reference to this day.

The superiority of Ibn Kathīr's tafsir lies not only in the authenticity of his sources, but also in the discipline of sanad criticism and his caution towards the narration of *isrā'īliyyāt* [17]. He is known to carefully select narrations, give an assessment of the quality of hadiths, and distinguish between *sahih* narrations, *ḍa'if*, and *mawdhū'*. This approach makes his interpretation an ideal form of Salafī interpretation that not only repeats history, but also conducts scientific verification of it [18].

On the other hand, the presence of Ibn Kathīr's interpretation in the modern era finds its relevance in the midst of the epistemological challenges of contemporary interpretations that tend to be contextual, hermeneutical, and even liberal [19]. In the globalization of Islamic thought, the Salafī *manhaj* is considered a methodological fortress that maintains the purity of the text of revelation from interpretations that are independent of the authority of *nash* and *sanad* [20]. However, this approach is also inseparable from criticism, especially regarding its limitations in answering modern social issues such as religious plurality, gender equality, and Islamic ecology [21].

This study is here to review the relevance of the *manhaj* of Salafī tafsir, especially as represented in the work of Ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī. The main focus of this study is on the methodological character of Ibn Kathīr, the position of his interpretation in the Ahl al-Ḥ adīth tradition, and attempts to contextualize his interpretation in the modern and digital era [22]. With a descriptive-analytical approach based on literature studies to classical works and contemporary research (2020–2025), it is hoped that this study can contribute to the development of sanad-based interpretation studies that remain relevant to the development of Islamic science in the 21st century.

## Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a literature study type, which focuses on deepening the *manhaj* of Salafī interpretation through text analysis and historical-methodological analysis. Primary sources of research include Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* as well as works related to Ahl al-Ḥ adīth such as Ibn Taymiyyah's *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*. Secondary sources consist of modern research, scholarly articles (2020–2025), and digital literature that discuss the development and adaptation of Salafī methodologies in the contemporary era [23]. Data were collected through literature studies, document analysis of the structure of the tafsir methodology, history, *isrā'īliyyāt*, and intertextual analysis between Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Taymiyyah to identify the continuity of the *manhaj* principle.

Data analysis was carried out through descriptive analysis to map the character of *naqli-aqli* in Ibn Kathīr's methodology, followed by critical-

conceptual analysis to assess its relevance in modern contexts, including digital literacy and academic criticism. The synthesis of findings is carried out by linking the principles of salaf tafsir with the development of contemporary science, without relinquishing the foundation of *Ahl al-Ḥ adīth* [24]. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources, consistency of the analytical framework, and historical considerations of the development of the interpretation of the 8th century AH [25]. This method allows a systematic discussion of Ibn Kathīr's manhaj and its relevance in the scientific context of contemporary interpretation.

## Result and Discussion

### 1. Theoretical Basis: Salafī Tafsir Manhaj / Ahl al-Ḥ adīth

#### a). Terminology and Development History

The term *Salafī* is etymologically derived from the word *as-salaf* (السلف) which means "predecessor" or "previous generation" [18]. As for *Ahl al-Ḥ adīth* (أهل الحديث) means "followers of hadith", that is, a group of scholars who make hadith and atsar of companions as the main source of religious understanding [19]. In the context of tafsir, the term *Salafī tafsir* refers to the pattern of interpretation of the Qur'an which is based on the understanding of the early generation of Muslims of companions, tabi'in, and tabi'ut tabi'in called *as-salaf a ṣ-ṣ āliḥ* [28]. Historically, this manhaj developed as a theological and epistemological response to the dominance of rationalism in the interpretation carried out by the Mu'tazilah and Islamic philosophers [21]. At that time, interpretation tended to be influenced by Aristotelian logic and philosophical superstition of *mutasyābihāt* verses. The Ahl al-Ḥ adīth then emerged in the spirit of "methodological purification", i.e. returning the interpretation to the primary source (naql) and rejecting the speculative form of interpretation (*ra'y bi ghayr 'ilm*) [30].

Early figures representing this spirit were Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Sufyān ats-Tsaurī, and Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭ abarī, who popularized the narration-based method of tafsir [31]. However, the peak of the codification of the methodology of Salafī interpretation occurred in the 8th century AH with the work of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī, who made sanad and hadith criticism the main epistemological elements in interpretation [13]. This historical development shows that Salafī interpretation is not an anti-rational movement, but a movement to control rationality in order to remain subject to the authority of revelation. In the modern context, it is relevant as a critique of the tendency of free hermeneutics that often ignores the authentic sources of Islam.

## b). The Basic Principles of Salafi Manhaj Tafsir

The Salafi manhaj of tafsir is built on four main methodological principles that are *hierarchical*:

## 1) Interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an

This principle is based on the belief that the Qur'an is an explanation for itself. Ibn Kathīr gave an example by interpreting QS. al-An'ām [6]: 82 via QS. Luqmān [31]: 13, where *the term ḡulm* is interpreted as *shirk*, not social injustice [17].

## 2) Interpreting the Qur'an with the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.

Sunnah is seen as a practical interpretation of revelation, as Allah says in QS. an-Nahl [16]: 44. Ibn Kathīr places hadith as a second authoritative source, by criticizing sanad and rejecting weak hadith (*ḡa'īf*) in the interpretation of the verses of the law and creed [14].

## 3) Interpreting the Qur'an with the atsar of companions and tabi'in.

The opinions of the companions are the third source, because they are direct witnesses of the process of revelation and understand its historical context [15]. However, Ibn Kathīr emphasized that the opinion of the companions is not absolute if it contradicts the authentic narration of the Prophet ﷺ [20].

## 4) Rejecting takwil against the verses of Allah's attributes

The principle *of ithbāt bilā takyīf wa bilā tasybīh* (establishing the nature of Allah without asking "how" and without resembling) is a characteristic of Salafi interpretation [24]. Thus, this manhaj maintains a balance between recognition of the text and the avoidance of *anthropomorphism*. The above four principles show a stratified and systematic epistemological structure, in which the authority of revelation is maintained without ruling out the possibility of the rational use of language. This shows that Salafi commentary acknowledges the function of reason, but places it as *an auxiliary*, rather than *the primary source* of interpretation.

## c). Epistemological Characteristics

Epistemologically, Salafi tafsir has three main characteristics: *naqlīyah*, *manhajīyah*, and *tahqīqīyah* [33].

- 1) *Naqliyah* signifies dependence on the source of authentic narration.
- 2) *Manhajiyah* refers to a hierarchical systematics of interpretation (Qur'an, Sunnah, Companions, Tabi'in).
- 3) *Tahqiqiyah* refers to the spirit of scientific verification of sanad and matan narration [16].

Ibn Taymiyyah asserts that the salaf method is the only valid way to understand the Qur'an, since they best understand the context of revelation and pure Arabic [34]. Ibn Kathīr then expanded this concept by applying the sanad criticism strictly, distinguishing between *sahih*, *hasan*, and *da'if* narration. The epistemology of Salafi interpretation shows the integration between the methodology of hadith and the study of the Qur'an, making it the closest model of interpretation to the discipline of *ulum al-hadith*. This advantage guarantees a strong textual authenticity, although it is often criticized for not giving space to the sociological analysis of the verse.

d). Ibn Kathīr's Position in the Ahl al-Ḥ adīth Tradition.

Ibn Kathīr occupies a unique position as a mufassir-hadīthī, that is, a scholar who combines the expertise of hadith and interpretation in a single scientific framework. In *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, he wrote:

"Whoever interprets the Qur'an with his intellect without history, then he is indeed wrong even though the meaning is true."

This work contains more than 7,000 narrations of hadith and atsar, with an interpretive structure that begins with verses, followed by hadiths, words of companions, then linguistic explanations and brief commentaries. Ibn Kathīr also filters the history of *isrā'iliyyāt* by classification: accepted (which is in accordance with the sharia), rejected (which is contradictory), and silenced (which has no legal or religious implications).

Ibn Kathīr's position emphasizes the important role of Ahl al-Ḥ adīth as the guardian of the sanad of tafsir, not just the heir of history. He introduced scientific standards that were close to the principles of modern criticism: *source validation*, *data classification*, and *text integration*. Thus, Ibn Kathīr serves as a link between classical orthodoxy and contemporary scientific methodology.

e). The Relevance of Salafi Epistemology in the Modern Era

In the context of modern scholarship, Salafi interpretation faces hermeneutic challenges, especially from a contextual approach that puts the reader's social experience first. However, a number of contemporary studies have shown that Salafi epistemology is precisely relevant as a scientific control

mechanism for the dissemination of digital interpretations without sanad verification [36]. For example, the results of Ananda et al.'s (2025) research show that the principle of sanad in Salafī interpretation can be applied to verify online interpretation data (*digital isnād methodology*), in order to assess the authenticity of sources of interpretation circulating on social media. Thus, Salafi epistemology not only serves for the conservation of traditions, but also has adaptive value to scientific modernity. This analysis shows that Salafi interpretation is not a static doctrine, but an epistemic system that can be integrated into modern scientific verification mechanisms. By combining sanad criticism and criticism of digital sources, Salafi manhaj has the potential to become a model *of interpretation with integrity* in the information age.

## 2. Brief Biography of Ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī

### a). Early Life Identity and Background

His full name is Ismā'il ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr ibn Ḍaw' al-Qurashī al-Baṣrī al-Dimashqī [29]. He was born in the village of Mijdal, near the city of Baṣrah in the region of Busra (Southern Syria), in 701 AH / 1301 AD, and died in Damascus in 774 AH / 1373 AD [38]. Ibn Kathīr grew up in an environment full of scientific and religious activity, as Damascus was at that time the scientific center of the Islamic world under the rule of the Mamluk Dynasty [30]. After his father died when he was a child, Ibn Kathīr moved to Damascus to study. This city is an intellectual forum for various branches of knowledge ranging from tafsir, hadith, fiqh, to history. It was in this atmosphere that Ibn Kathīr's intellectual formation took place within the framework of the sanad tradition and the network of Sham hadith scholars [31].

The social context of 8th-century AD Damascus played an important role in shaping Ibn Kathīr's paradigm. He lived in a transition period between the classical tradition of Ahl al-Ḥ adīth and the birth of the formal madrasah scientific system, so that he was able to combine the discipline of traditional hadith with the systematization of modern knowledge of his time. In other words, Ibn Kathīr is the product of a synthesis between orthodoxy and the institutionalization of knowledge.

### b). Teachers and the Intellectual Environment

Ibn Kathīr gained knowledge from a number of great scholars who later formed the epistemological basis of his interpretation. The most influential teacher in his life was Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah (661–728 AH), a reformist who re-emphasized the principles of understanding salaf and criticism of kalam thought and rational takwil [22]. From Ibn Taymiyyah, he inherited the manhaj

salaf in understanding the Qur'an and Sunnah based on three main pillars: *nash*, *ijmā' salaf*, and *tafsīr bil-ma'thūr* [28].

In addition, Ibn Kathīr also studied with al-Mizzī (d. 742 AH), a prominent hadith scholar and compiler of *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, as well as adh-Dhahabī (d. 748 AH), a historian and hadith critic known for the work of *Siyar A'lam an-Nubalā'* [32]. This network of scholars makes Ibn Kathīr a perfect representation of the Damascus school of sanitation oriented towards the verification of sanad and the rejection of theological speculation.

The intellectual closeness to Ibn Taymiyyah, al-Mizzī, and adh-Dhahabī forms a three-dimensional epistemic matrix in Ibn Kathīr's scholarship:

- 1) Critical-theological (from Ibn Taymiyyah),
- 2) Hadith-analysis (from al-Mizzī), and
- 3) Historical-verifiable (from adh-Dhahabī)

Thus, Ibn Kathīr's methodology in tafsir is not only a personal reflection, but the result of the integration of the Damascus scholarly tradition of the 8th century AH which is very disciplined to the validity of the sources.

#### c). Scientific Works and Academic Contributions

Ibn Kathīr was known as a prolific scholar. Some of his monumental works show the breadth of scientific disciplines he mastered, including:

- 1) *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* is the most influential tafsir work in the Islamic world, based on *the bi al-ma'thūr approach* and the criticism of hadith sanad.
- 2) *al-Bidāyah wa an-Nihāyah* is a book of universal history that includes the stories of the prophets, the history of early Islam, and events up to the Mamluk period.
- 3) *Jāmi' al-Masānīd wa as-Sunan* compiled hadith with sanad systematics, showing his expertise in the science of hadith.
- 4) *Tabaqāt al-Fuqahā' as-Shafi'iyyah*, a biography of the Shafi'iyyah scholars, shows his attachment to the Shafi'i school of fiqh.

In addition, Ibn Kathīr also wrote theological treatises, among them *al-Ijtihād fī Ṭalab al-Jihād* and *al-Fitan wa al-Malāḥim*, which described his views on jihad, slander, and the end times based on the evidence of naqlī [33]. In terms of contributions, Ibn Kathīr succeeded in uniting the three domains of tafsir, hadith,

and history in one salafi epistemic framework [34]. His approach to the text shows the character of an interdisciplinary scientist who remained faithful to the principle of sanad [43]. In the modern context, this is equivalent to the source triangulation approach in scientific research, where the validity of data is obtained through cross-disciplinary confirmation.

#### d). Scientific Characteristics and Intellectual Ethos

Ibn Kathīr is known to have a meticulous and critical scientific ethic of narration. In writing tafsir, he refused to quote a hadith without checking the sanad and the credibility of the narrator [44]. He often wrote commentaries such as "*hadzā ḥadīthun gharīb jiddan*" (this hadith is very foreign) or "*lā aṣla lahū*" (there is no original) to show his caution in judging the hadith used by other mufassir. In addition to scientific rigor, Ibn Kathīr also stood out for his attitude of moderation and scientific justice. He did not reject the views of non-Salafi scholars as long as they had a solid basis in nash or Arabic. This shows that, despite being based on the Salafi manhaj, Ibn Kathīr still opened up a space for healthy and objective scientific dialogue. Ibn Kathīr's character shows that scientific objectivity and sanad integrity are the main foundations of Salafī interpretation. His approach teaches that scientific truth is not just about "what the text says," but also "how the text is verified and understood in a disciplined manner." Thus, Ibn Kathīr affirms the position of interpretation as a religious science that has a validation methodology equivalent to modern empirical science.

#### e). Death and Intellectual Legacy

Ibn Kathīr died in Damascus in 774 AH / 1373 AD, after experiencing blindness in his old age due to the intensity of reading and writing. He was buried next to the tomb of his teacher, Ibn Taymiyyah, in the Ṣūfiyyah cemetery complex, Damascus. His works and thoughts continued to be passed down through generations of scholars after him, especially among modern Salafi mufassir and muḥaddith, such as 'Abd ar-Raḥmān as-Sa'dī, Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, and Ibn Bāz. His commentary also became the main curriculum reference at international Islamic universities, such as the Islamic University of Medina, Al-Azhar, and LIPIA Jakarta. Ibn Kathīr's legacy proves that the power of classical scientific methodology can transcend time. With his steadfastness to the principles of sanad and nash, he succeeded in creating a model of interpretation that remains relevant and authoritative in the digital age. Therefore, Ibn Kathīr was not only a classical mufassir, but also an architect of the epistemology of Islamic scientific interpretation that still inspires modern interpretation research today.

### 3. Structure and Method of Tafsir Ibn Kathīr

#### a). Main Approach: Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr

Tafsir *al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* by Ibn Kathīr emphasizes the principle of tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr, which is to interpret the Qur'an based on the Qur'an's own text, the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ, atsar sahabat and tabi'in.

##### 1) Tafsir of the Qur'an with the Qur'an

Ibn Kathīr prioritizes the interconnectedness between verses, emphasizing that one verse can explain another, so that the interpretation is holistic and contextual. This approach shows that the understanding of the Qur'an cannot be fragmentary, but must place the verses in a network of meanings that reinforce each other.

##### 2) Interpretation with the Hadith of the Prophet ﷺ

The hadith quoted is always accompanied by verification of the sanad and its status (saheeh, hasan, dha'if if relevant). Ibn Kathīr makes a critical comment, asserting that the use of weak hadith is only allowed to enrich the understanding of the context, not as a legal basis. This analysis shows methodological rigor consistent with the Salafī manhaj.

##### 3) Tafsir with Atsar Sahabat and Tabi'in

The opinions of the companions and tabi'in are used as references, but only authentic and reliable atsar. Ibn Kathīr prioritizes atsar that corresponds to nash, rejecting speculation that has no basis in sanad. This confirms the orientation of his interpretation on authentic and historical traditions.

##### 4) Language Analysis and Sentence Structure

The Arabic language is analyzed to clarify the meaning of words and syntax, but Ibn Kathīr does not interpret them independently based on rhetoric alone. The analysis of language here is instrumental, that is, to support the interpretation of Nash, not to replace the postulates.

##### 5) Isra'iliyyāt

Some verses are accompanied by the history of isra'iliyyāt, but Ibn Kathīr always gives a critical assessment: accepted, rejected, or referred to as a complement to the historical narrative. This shows an objective and selective attitude towards non-Islamic sources that are considered relevant.

b). Ibn Kathīr's methodology shows a distinctive epistemic consistency:

- 1) Source validity is a top priority;
- 2) The balance between text and context is maintained systematically;
- 3) Critical of foreign narratives (isra'īliyyāt) without neglecting their historical value;
- 4) Language is used as a tool of clarification, not as a basis for speculative interpretation.

In summary, Ibn Kathīr's structure and methods combine nash authority, sanad verification, and language analysis, so that his interpretation remains an important reference for Salafi mufassir as well as contemporary studies.

#### 4. The Relevance of Ibn Kathīr's Methodology in the Contemporary and Digital Era (With Naqli and Aqli Patterns)

a). The Challenges of Tafsir in the Modern Era

The 21st century presents new challenges for the study of interpretation due to the explosion of digital information and the ease of dissemination of content without verification [45]. Many online interpretations or social media ignore the validity of nash and the validity of sanad, resulting in distortions of understanding.

In this context, Ibn Kathīr's method shows the strength of the naqli (text-based and nash) and aqli (rational and analytical) patterns.

b). Naqli Pattern (Textual)

Corak naqli Ibn Kathīr menekankan:

- 1) Tafsir bi al-Ma'thūr: Interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an, the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ, and Atsar Sahabat/Tabi'in.
- 2) Verification of sanad: All hadiths and atsars are checked for validity before being used as a basis for interpretation.
- 3) Critical of isra'īliyyāt: Non-Islamic narratives are textually selected to remain nash.

This naqli pattern shows Ibn Kathīr's commitment to the authority of the nash, so that his interpretation is authentic, avoiding speculative or popular interpretations.

c). Aqli pattern (Rationale)

Ibn Kathīr's pattern of aqli appears in:

- 1) Language and syntax analysis: Ibn Kathīr interprets the meaning of words based on grammatical logic and sentence context, not just literal interpretation.
- 2) Cohesion between verses: The interpretation of verse one is used as a tool to understand other verses rationally, building a logical and coherent narrative.
- 3) Filtering *isra'iliyyāt* and digital content: Selection based on logic and historical relevance.

The pattern of aqli shows a balance between text and ratio, so that Ibn Kathīr's method remains rational while adhering to the authority of the *nash*. This makes it an epistemic guide to digital literacy, where users must critically sort out the content of interpretation.

d). The Integration of Naqli and Aqli in the Digital Era

Ibn Kathīr's method can be applied in several aspects in modern times:

- 1) Digitization of classics: Ensuring broad access, while maintaining *nash* verification.
- 2) Online tafsir education: The aqli pattern helps students or readers understand the context and structure of the verse logically, while the naqli pattern maintains authoritative accuracy.
- 3) Content literacy: Digital information filtering can mimic Ibn Kathīr's principles: source validation (*naqli*) and relevance analysis (*aqli*).

Ibn Kathīr's method integrates the *naqli* and *aqli* patterns in a balanced manner, so that the interpretation remains authentic, rational, and relevant in the digital age. This principle has become a modern epistemic model to avoid distortion of interpretation in online media.

## 5. The Relationship of Ibn Kathīr's Methodology with Ibn Taymiyyah

Recent research by Wara et al. (2024) found a strong intertextual pattern between *Ibn Kathīr's Muqaddimah Tafsīr* and *his teacher's Muqaddimah Tafsīr U ṣūl al-Tafsīr*.

The analysis shows that both emphasize three main principles:

- a) The priority of tafsir bil ma'thūr interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an, the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ, and atsar sahabat.
- b) The authority of the companions as a source of interpretation emphasizes the importance of the atsar of the companions and tabi'in to understand the verses authentically.
- c) Rejection of philosophical and isyārī interpretations avoids speculative or Greek/Isyārī-based interpretations, preserving the purity of the nash.

This connection confirms that Ibn Kathīr inherited the spirit of renewal of the Ahl al-Ḥ adīth in the 8th century A.H., with a focus on the purification of sources and the filtering of history. This approach became the foundation of the systematic and authentic Salafi/ahl al-ḥ adīth methodology, while at the same time affirming the intellectual continuity of his teacher, Ibn Taymiyyah.

#### 6. Criticism and Academic Issues

##### a). Criticism and Academic Issues of Ibn Kathīr's Methodology

Although Ibn Kathīr's Tafsīr is considered authoritative, a number of academic criticisms have emerged:

##### 1) Limitations of rational perspective (aqli)

Some researchers consider that Ibn Kathīr is too focused on nash, so he does not explore much rational and thematic interpretation [46].

##### 2) Criticism of the use of isra'īliyyāt

Although selective, some atsars isra'īliyyāt are still used to clarify the historical context, which has caused controversy among modern researchers.

##### 3) Contemporary critique of methodological rigidity

Ibn Kathīr's method is considered less adaptive to interdisciplinary studies, such as modern linguistics, the sociology of the Qur'an, and contextual interpretation. This criticism shows that although the methodology is very systematic, it is necessary to integrate modern methods in order to remain relevant in the contemporary academic realm.

b). Contemporary Relevance

Ibn Kathīr's methodology remains relevant because:

- 1) Nash's authority remains an epistemic foundation amid the proliferation of popular interpretations on social media.
- 2) The balance of naqli and aqli patterns allows adjustments in modern tafsir education and digital literacy.
- 3) The application of the sanad verification method and language analysis can be used as a guideline to avoid distortion of online interpretation [20].

Ibn Kathīr offers a stable epistemic model, in which textual and rational precision can be applied in the modern era.

c). Salafi Manhaj Discourse in the Digital Era

The digital era has created new dynamics in the spread of Salafi manhaj:

- 1) Advantages of digitalization: Salafi classics and interpretations are now globally accessible, facilitating academic study and da'wah.
- 2) The challenges of mis-information: Many interpretations are disseminated without verification, demanding that the reader have critical literacy based on Ibn's naqli and aqli patterns Kathīr.
- 3) Discourse shift: Digital media allows for an open academic debate between traditional Salafi methodologies and contextual interpretations of the Modern.

This discourse shows the need to adapt classical methodology with digital tools, without sacrificing the basic principles of Salafi manhaj.

d). Synthesis and Renewal of Manhaj

The reform of the Salafi manhaj can be done through:

- 1) Integration of naqli and aqli patterns: Maintaining the authority of the text while increasing relevance rasional.
- 2) Strengthening digital literacy: The use of interpretive content validation algorithms, digitization of classical books, and the preparation of e-learning based of sanad.

- 3) Interdisciplinary approach: Combining linguistics, sociology, and cultural studies to understand the context of sentences are more in-depth.

This synthesis emphasizes that Salafi manhaj remains relevant, but must be brought into the contemporary realm through methodological adaptation, digital literacy, and interdisciplinary approaches. This renewal does not replace the Nash principle, but rather strengthens epistemic application in the modern context.

## Conclusion

Based on the recent review of the manhaj of the Salafī/Ahl al-Ḥ adīth tafsir, especially on *the Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* by Ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī (d. 774 H), several conclusions can be drawn: (1) The methodology of Ibn Kathīr's Tafsir highlights the tafsir *bi al-ma'thūr*, that is, the interpretation based on the history of the Qur'an, the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ, and Aṣar Sahabat. This confirms Ibn Kathīr's consistency in maintaining the authority of primary sources and prudence in accepting *isra'īliyyāt*. (2) The connection with the principle of Ahl al-Ḥ adīth is evident in the focus on purification of history, constancy in the salaf creed, and rejection of speculative or philosophical interpretations. This approach affirms the intellectual continuity of Ibn Taymiyyah as a teacher and his influence on Ibn Kathīr's manhaj. (3) The contemporary relevance of Ibn Kathīr's method remains high. Although classical, its principles can be applied in modern studies with a critical reading of sanad, social context, and the use of digitalization for education and the dissemination of interpretation. (4) Criticism and challenges show the need for integration between traditional methodologies and interdisciplinary approaches, so that interpretation remains relevant in academic, social, and digital media contexts. Ibn Kathīr's methodology of tafsir is the most authentic representation of the manhaj of Ahl al-Ḥ adīth, with a balance between textual authority and rationality. With contemporary adaptation through sanad literacy, contextual analysis, and the use of digital technology, this manhaj remains relevant, can be maintained, and becomes an authentic model of interpretation learning for the modern generation.

## Author Contributions

**Iklil Nasrullah:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - review & editing, Supervision, Project administration. **Muhammad Alfa Choirul Murtadho & Khoirul Umami:** Methodology, Writing - review & editing, Investigation.

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