

CONSTRUCTION OF TAFSIR JAMI' AL-BAYAN 'AN TA'WIL AY AL-QUR'AN; ABU JA'FAR MUHAMMAD IBN JARIR ATH-THABARI

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Abstract

Mastery of classical and medieval interpretive material is very necessary for the construction of new ideas in order to maintain the continuity of an interpretive tradition, and in essence is the basic foundation because it is responsible for the formation of a civilization. This is different from commentators in Indonesia who believe that the study of classical and medieval tafsir has reached a dead end, and that classical and medieval tafsir books are repetitive and boring. This article traces the intellectual journey of Abu Ja'far Muhammad Ibnu Jarir ath-Thabari, from childhood to moving to Egypt and studying with ulama. Also reconstructing the interpretation of Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an and detailing Muhammad Al-Fadhil bin 'Ashur's opinion regarding the meaning of bil ma'tsur which Husein adz Zahabai kept regarding the interpretation of Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta 'wil Ay al-Qur'an. This article asserts that Ibn Jarir ath-Thabari's Tafsir represents a scientific interpretation, prioritizing the analytical side over the atsar side. As a result, this work is a pivotal moment in the method of interpretation, significantly breaking from the science of hadith. Thabari's commentary can be considered a well-rounded

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amalgamation of the two sides. It contains a greater number of hadith narrations than any other books of tafsir bil ma'tsur during its time. Moreover, it presents a scientific theory founded on the comparison and analysis of various opinions, which is accomplished through the examination of the 'illat of the causes of the qorinah (the indicative side of the evidence). This approach was already evident in ath Thabari became the main characteristic of tafsir bir ra'yi (interpretation by reasoning).

Keywords: *Thabari, bil ma'tsur, bir ra'yi, al-Fadhil bin 'Assyur.*

Introduction

The Qur'an is believed to be the word of Allah, revealed to Prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. It is considered the greatest miracle of all time and guides humanity in fulfilling their mandate as caliph on earth. The Qur'an is a holy book, maintaining its sanctity, authenticity, and truth until the last day, and provides guidance for living a meaningful life. The comprehension of the Quran is an ongoing process that dynamically develops in response to historical shifts. The comprehension of the Quran is an ongoing process that dynamically develops in response to historical shifts. The comprehension of the Quran is an ongoing process that dynamically develops in response to historical shifts. As a result, numerous madhhabs and styles have emerged for its interpretation.

The study of the Qur'an has been conducted by numerous scholars, including the Companions during Prophet Muhammad's time. Their expertise and discipline play an integral role. Some scholars investigate the Quran through various approaches, such as historical faith, language and literature, codification, miracle of interpretation, and letter study. This condition not only expresses a Muslim's obligation to understand the language of his faith but also highlights scientific research that advances Islamic thought. Various Western academics participate in the analysis of the Qur'an with varying intellectual perspectives, cultures, and motivations.

Tafsir has undergone significant methodological and substantial development. The presence of schools of interpretation, namely *bi al-ma'tsur* and *bi al-ra'yi*, have contributed to the diversity of Muslim thought. However, an issue that arises in the interpretation of *bi alma'tsur* is the existence of narration variants, which range from valid narrations to narrations that cannot be accounted for according to the parameters of *sanad* and *rijal hadith* in the discipline of hadith science. The method of presentation applied by Imam ath-Thabari is by sorting out several verses of the Qur'an. For example, in one *surah*, the verse is divided into several parts, then in one verse is decapitated into several words, and after that only then Imam ath-Thabari provides a detailed discussion by providing explanations of vocabulary, grammatical aspects, *qira'at* aspects, mentioning *asbab al nuzul* (if any), mentioning various scholarly opinions and commenting on them.

Biography of Ibn Jarir ath-Thabari

Imam ath-Thabari was a highly, esteemed Islamic scholar with expertise in various disciplines including tafsir, history, fiqh, and hadith. His exceptional work in the field of tafsir earned him the title of "Father of Tafsir" and established him as a primary reference in this discipline. Whoever studies tafsir cannot overlook Thabari's work, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, also known as *Tafsir Thabari*.

Full name Abu Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Jarir ath-Thabar was a renowned historian, encyclopedist, tafsir expert, *qira'at* expert, hadith expert, and jurist. He was born in Amul, Thabaristan, which is situated on the southern coast of the sea of Thabaristan (Sea of Qazwayn) in 224 AH/837 AD. Thabar passed away in Baghdad during 310 AH/923 AD. He initiated his studies at a young age, displaying exceptional intelligence². Ath-Thabar memorized the Qur'an since childhood, thanks to the persistence of his parents in guiding him. It is no wonder he became a pious scholar.

² Samsurrohman, "*Pengantar Ilmu Tafsir*", cet.1 (Jakarta: pustaka amzah 2014), hlm. 221

With unwavering family support in learning religious knowledge, Ath-Thabar devoted his life to seeking knowledge by traveling from place to place³.

Baghdad is the city that ath-Thabar chose to study in. The social setting of Baghdad, an Islamic Arab city and center of learning, makes it an attractive destination for knowledge seekers from around the world. Ath-Thabar intended to study with Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal upon arrival, but the Imam had died before he got to the city⁴. After an extensive scholarly journey, ath-Thabari returned to Baghdad and acquired expertise in a range of fields, including Quranic studies, Islamic jurisprudence, prophetic traditions, history, linguistics, literary criticism, and poetry. Additionally, the city of Baghdad served as the birthplace of ath-Thabar's notable works in exegesis, history, literary criticism, Baghdad culture, theology, and diverse essays, all of which he continued to produce until the end of his life⁵.

Ahmad bin Kamil al-Qadi believes that at-Thabar passed away at sunset on the last Sunday of Shawwal in 310 AH. He was buried in his Baghdad residence the next morning, with millions of people attending his funeral procession and praying for him day and night for a few months. at-Thabar is known for leaving behind numerous works on religious and moral knowledge. Ibn Kamil consulted ath-Thabari for religious advice before his death, saying "O Abu Ja'far, you are the proof between us and Allah, so guide us and explain to us how to be safe in the hereafter." ath-Thabari responded by advising that the teachings of Allah's religion are already comprehensive. He recommended practicing the guidance in his books, increasing shahada, remembering Allah, performing ablution more frequently, and maintaining proper gaze⁶.

In Baghdad, he studied with scholars of hadith, fiqh, tafsir, grammar, and nahwu - including Muhammad ibn Abdul Malik ibn Abi Sharib, Isaac ibn Abi Israil, Ahmad

³ Samsurrohman, Pengantar Ilmu Tafsir, pp. 222

⁴ Abi Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir ath-Thabari, *Tafsir Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, Jilid 1, (Jakarta:pustaka azzam 2009), pp. 9.

⁵ Abi Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir ath-Thabari, *Tafsir Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, Jilid 1, (Jakarta:pustaka azzam 2009), pp. 11.

⁶ Abi Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir ath-Thabari, pp. 11.

ibn Mani' al-Baghawi, Muhammad ibn Hamid ar-Razi, Jacob ibn Ibrahim ad-Dawraqi, Umar ibn Ali al-Falasi, and Sufyan ibn Waqi⁷. In Egypt he studied with Muhammad bin Musa al-Harsyi, Muhammad bin Abdul A "ala as-Shan'ani, Ashir bin Muadz, Muhammad bin Asyar Undar, Muhammad bin Basyar al-Anazi and many more. On the way to Kufa he studied with other shaikhs. Then he went to Kufa to study with Abi Kuraib Muhammad bin al-'Ala al Hamdani, Hannad bin Shari, Ismail bin Musa as-Sudda, then he returned to Baghdad and stayed there for a long time and studied the fiqh of the Shafi'i madzhab. Ath-Thabari stayed for a long time in Baghdad until his death in the years before his death, he traveled to several other countries such as Egypt, Sham between 253 and 256 AH and stopped briefly in his homeland, Tibristan in 290 H⁸. In Egypt, he studied with Rabi bin Sulaiman al-Muradzi, Ismail bin Ibrahim al-Muzani, Muhammad bin Abdullah bin Abdul Hakim Ibn Wahhab, Yunus bin Abdul A "la Ashdafy, and other scholars. He also had the opportunity to meet three Egyptian scholars: Imam Aimmah Ibn Huzaimah, Muhammad bin Nasir al-Marwazi, and Muhammad bin Harun ar-Razi⁹.

History of Writing *Tafsir Jami'al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*

Imam ath Thabari's presence, during the late ninth century to the middle of the sixteenth century AD, Muslims were confronted with a variety of ethnicities, a variety of beliefs, a variety of sciences, a variety of religious thought, and a variety of civilizations. Directly or indirectly, there has been cultural interaction with a variety of content, changes in the dynamics of society continue, of course this colors the perspective of the Muslim way of thinking.

In the study of tafsir, it becomes a separate Islamic scientific field. Tafsir has undergone methodological and substantial development, the presence of bi al-ma'tsur and bi al-ra'yi streams of interpretation has contributed to the color of Muslim thought. On the other hand, there is a serious problem in the interpretation bi alma'tsur, namely the presence of variants of narration, from valid narration to

⁷ Abi Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir ath-Thabari, pp. 10.

⁸ Abi Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir ath-Thabari, pp. 10

⁹ Abi Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir ath-Thabari, pp. 10

narration that cannot be accounted for according to the parameters of sanad and rijal hadith in the discipline of hadith science. Meanwhile, the orientation of tafsir studies has interacted with other disciplines such as fiqh, kalam, balagah, history and philosophy. The influence of elements outside Islam has also colored the style of interpretation, including *isra'iliyat*¹⁰.

After the era of al-Mutawakkil, one of the mu'tazilah religious rational schools disappeared, and the traditional Ash'ariyah school emerged, later referred to as Sunni. Other sects also contributed to the development of Muslim thought throughout history. Imam ath Thabari was influenced by the complexity he witnessed in his own country, which impacted his scientific thinking in the field of Islamic thought. He engaged in scientific dialogue and responded through his written works. The impact of Imam al-Thabari's adherence to the madhhab is evident in his work. His popularity within his country and neighboring cities is undeniable and can be attributed to the school of thought he followed.

Imam al-Thabari initially belonged to the Shafi'i school of thought but later founded his own school by applying his mastery and understanding of *ijtihad* tools to form his own opinions, which he staunchly defended. As a result, his school gained a considerable following. However, towards the end of his life, al-Tabari faced accusations of adhering to Shi'aism from his opponents, simply because he narrated traditions advocating love for the Ahlul Bayt of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Imam al-Tabari is commonly recognized as a Sunni, as opposed to a Rafidi. This is supported by his works in both history and tafsir. Specifically, his tafsir book was written during the third century H and was taught to his students over the course of eight years, from 282 to 290 H.

¹⁰ M. Rusydi Khalid, "*Mengkaji Metode para Mufassir; Mana-hij alMufassirin*", Cet. I (Makassar: Alauddin University Press, 2012), pp. 5

Construction of Tafsir Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an.

Ath-Thabari from the first pages of writing emphasized that he was making a work that was expected to be more perfect than what had been written by his predecessors in this regard he said "When I try to explain the interpretation of the Qur'an and explain its meanings which, God willing, will be a book that covers everything that people need to know more than all other books that have existed before, I try to mention the arguments that have been agreed upon by the scholars and those that are in dispute, explain the reasons for each school of thought and explain the correct reason according to me in the related matter briefly"¹¹. This statement shows that Tobar intended to apply the same method and systematic writing to his tafsir as he had applied to his other books.

Among the important elements utilized by the author was the examination of the study's theme. In this case, the author relied on existing opinions that are corroborated with the sanad of the verse, hadith, and atsar for each verse of the Qur'an. This approach ensured comprehensive coverage of all existing opinions with minimal gaps. In the introduction to his book, the author expresses seeking divine guidance in interpreting Qur'anic verses related to concepts such as muhkam and mutasyabih, halal and haram, general and specific, global and detailed, nasikh and mansukh, clear and vague, and only accepts interpretations that remain objectively grounded¹².

Imam ath Thabari diligently explains each aspect in his book with great care, analyzing every hadith and atsar pertaining to the interpretation of each verse of the Qur'an. He ensures clear understanding by elaborating on the asbabun nuzul, rulings, qiroa'at, and certain sentences that require further explanation. Such thoroughness is evident throughout all parts of his book. All of this was done to produce a flawless book of interpretation that can cater to the requirements of all individuals.

¹¹ Abi Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir ath-Thabari, pp. 51

¹² Abi Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir ath-Thabari, pp. 51

It can be said that Imam ath Thabari has succeeded in doing all this brilliantly, where his book - on this side has been able to exceed the previous tafsir book, which is more complete in terms of study material is greater than the content is more varied. This is an acknowledgment of those who have studied his tafseer where some of them said "Indeed no one has ever compiled a book like it" and said "Indeed no one has been able to add to it and there is no book that resembles it. It is said that if a scholar announces his intention to write ten books based on Tafsir Thabari, dealing with various disciplines, then they will have successfully completed their task. The extensive and scientific content in this book makes it a source of material for various themes, including the study of the Nahwu language, Asbabun Nuzul, legal verses, matters of faith, Qira'at, and others¹³.

Ath Thabari provides both scholarly explanations and his own opinions. He presents evidence and justifies what he believes to be the correct opinion. For instance, he states, "I explained the reasoning of each school of thought and determined what I believe is the correct opinion." On this side, the scholarly figure of al-Tabari is perceived as a mature and reliable source of knowledge, with a diverse range of scientific disciplines. His writing is characterized by careful study and astute conclusions.

His desire to add new knowledge makes his tafsir kiab stronger and richer. Where a reader will find new knowledge that is not found in other books. This is evident in ath Thabari's writing style which always makes comparisons with his famous phrases such as: "the correct opinion in that case according to me is..." or "according to us" or saying "the most correct opinion between these two opinions" or "among the existing opinions is..." or saying, ...and the qiroat that I choose is..." and so on.

In this manner, Ath Thabari has taken a significant methodological stride where tafsir is not merely an explanation of narrations and atsar, commonly referred to as tafsir bil ma'tsur (interpretation by history). Rather, Ath Thabari's work amalgamates tafsir with analytical studies. As a result, some expert scholars

¹³ Syamsuddin Muhammad bin Ali Ad-Duadi, *Thabaqat Al-Mufassirin*, Jilid (Dar Al-Kutb Ilmiyah, 1983M).pp 114.

consider it a novel tafsir model. Ibn Jarir ath-Thabari's Tafsir is considered a scientific interpretation that emphasizes the analytical aspect rather than the atsar side. This work serves as a critical step in tafsir methodology, with far-reaching impacts breaking the previously linked relationship between Tafsir and the science of hadith¹⁴.

According to him, this has the effect that those who consider Thabari's commentary to be "tafsir bil ma'tsur" only look at its appearance, where he contains many traditions and isnads, they do not pay attention to the method adopted by Thabari and the goals he wants to achieve from mentioning the hadith narrations¹⁵.

Perhaps Thabari's tafsir can be described as a balanced and thorough combination of both perspectives. The inclusion of a multitude of hadith narrations surpasses those found in the books of tafsir bil ma'tsur from his era, while also offering a scientific theory that compares and analyzes multiple opinions. This is accomplished through a careful examination of the 'illat, or causes, of the qorinah, or indicative evidence. This was observed in ath Thabari prior to it becoming the prominent feature recognized as tafsir bir ra'yi (interpretation by personal reasoning)¹⁶.

From the above explanation in interpreting ath Thabari took the following steps: a). Taking the path of interpretation or takwil, b). Interpreting verses with verses (munasabah) and Observing the correlation of verses before and after even though in a relatively small cadre, c). Interpreting the Qur'an with hadith. d). Relying on language analysis for words whose history is disputed, e). Exploring poetry and analyzing Arabic prose when explaining the meaning of vocabulary and sentences. f). Paying attention to the aspect of I'rab in the analogical thought process for ditashih and tarjih, g). Exposing the various qira'at in order to reveal the meaning

¹⁴ Muhammad Al-Fadhil bin 'Asyur, "At-Tafsir wa Rijaluhu", www.akademya.net 1997, pp 36

¹⁵ Muhammad Al-Fadhil bin 'Asyur, "At-Tafsir wa Rijaluhu"... pp. 37

¹⁶ Muhammad Husain al-Zahabi, "Al-Tafsir wal Mufasssirun", (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1976), pp.268.

of verses, h). Disclosing differences in the field of fiqh and Islamic legal theory (ushul fiqh) for the sake of analysis and istinbat hukum, i). Synchronizing the meaning of the verse to obtain clarity in order to capture the meaning as a whole.

Conclusion

Imam ath-Thabari, also known as Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir ibn Yazid ibn Katsir ibn Ghalib ath-Thabari (or alternatively, Yazid ibn Khalid ibn Katsir ibn Ghalib), lived from 839 to 923 AD and was renowned for his exceptional intellectual insight. His contributions had a significant impact on the community, making him a highly respected figure. His expertise lay in narrating the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, as well as in the field of narration and recounting the histories of important figures and individuals. Ibn Jarir ath-Thabari was a renowned mufasir, muhaddis, and historian. His work in tafsir even led to the formation of a distinct Islamic scientific discipline.

Tafsir has undergone methodological and substantial development, the presence of bi al-ma'tsur and bi al-ra'yi schools of interpretation has contributed to the color of Muslim thought. On the other hand, there is a serious problem in the section of tafsir bi al-ma'tsur, namely the presence of variants of narration, from valid reports to reports that cannot be accounted for according to the parameters of sanad and rijal hadith in the discipline of hadith science.

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There are various aspects that have not been addressed in this paper, namely further research on the Science of Qiraat in Jami' al-Bayan with the question of why Imam ath Thabari did not include the narrations of qiraat, even though the book of tafsir uses so many qiraat.

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