AN ANALYSIS OF THE SOURCES OF INTEPRETATION IN THE COMMENTARIES OF AL-TABARI, AL-ZAMAKHSHARI, AL-RAZI, AL-QURTUBI, AND IBN KATHIR

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INTRODUCTION

I propose, in this study, to scrutinise the sources of the *tafsirs* (sing. *tafsir*, pl. *tafasir*) of Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310/923), Abu al-Qasim Mahmud ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1143-4), Fakhr al-Din Muhammad ibn 'Umar al-Razi (d. 606/1209-10), Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubi (d. 671-1273), and 'Imad al-Din Isma'il ibn 'Umar ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373). All of these exegetes outline, in their respective introductions, whom they consider to be competent commentators of the Qur'an. Al-Tabari affirms the status of the Companions of the Prophet as being the foremost in the interpretation of the Qur'an. Many accounts are related about the profundity of their understanding of the divine text. He writes,

> Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Shaqiq al-Marwazi informed us, "I heard my father say, 'al-Husayn ibn Waqid told us, 'al-A'mash told us on the authority of Shaqiq, on the authority of Ibn Mas'ud, he said, 'If someone among us memorised ten verses, they would not proceed beyond them (*lam yujawizuhunna*) until he knew their meaning, and acted upon them.'"[1]

Al-Tabari shortly names some leading sources. Ibn 'Abbas and Ibn Mas'ud, somewhat predictably, head the list, after which Mujahid, al-Dahhak, al-Sha'bi, al-Suddi, and Qatada are mentioned. Their inferiority to Ibn 'Abbas and Ibn Mas'ud, however, is explicitly highlighted.[2] It is evident from this roster that, according to al-Tabari, the first four generations' interpretation of the Qur'an is the most correct and as such, they should be the ones an exgete turns to in his commentary. This coincides with Ahmad ibn 'Ali ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani's (d. 852/1449) analysis which comments that it cannot be proven that the sources of the fifth generation heard the

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1 Al-Tabari, Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir. *Jami' al-bayan fi ta'wil al-Qur'an,* ed., Muhammad 'Ali Bidun (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2005), 1: 60-61; 60.

2 Ibid*,* 65-66.

Companions directly.[3] Ibn Kathir echoes al-Tabari's opinion, affirming that the sources of interpretation should be the Qur'an itself, followed by the Prophet and then the Companions. He writes,

> So if someone asks, "What is the best *tafsir*?" [The answer is:] The most correct method is that the Qur'an be explained by the Qur'an for that which is mentioned ambiguously in a place is explained in another. And if you are unable to do that (*fa'in a'yak dhlik*), then you must resort to the *sunna* …. This is why the Messenger said, "Surely, I was given the Qur'an and the like thereof with it," meaning the *sunna*.... If we do not find the explanation in the Qur'an, or the *sunna* then we must resort to the opinions of the *Sahaba* as they are more knowledgeable (*adra*) of it as they witnessed the contexts and circumstances to which it pertains …. If you do not find the explanation in the Qur'an or the *sunna* or from the *Sahaba* then many of the imams of the Successors (*Tabi'in*) should be resorted to.[4]

Al-Zamakhshari, too, mentions the exalted stature of the Prophet and 'his caliphs from the brothers-in-law (*akhtan*) and sons-in-law (*ashar*), and all the 'Immigrants' (*Muhajirin*) and 'Helpers' (*Ansar*).'[5] He continues,

> Know that the text (*matn* pl. *mutun*) of every piece of knowledge and the pillars ('*umud*) of every vocation are from the generations of the scholars whose [opinions] regarding them are close to each other (*mutadaniya*). And the old servants are close to each other (*mutaqariba*) or equal to one another (*mutasawiya*).[6]

Al-Zamakhshari thus, in his own way, agrees with the judgement of al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir. This concurrence may also be inferred from al-Razi's introductory remarks, who writes,

> All that has been reported in the Qur'an and the correct reports which are agreed upon (*al-akhbar al-sahiha al-muttafaq 'alayha*) between the imams which followed,

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3 Ibn Hajar, Ahmad ibn 'Ali al-'Asqalani. *Taqrib al-tahdhib*, ed. 'Abd al-Wahhab 'Abd al-Latif, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1975), 1: 5-6.

4 Ibn Kathir, 'Imad al-Din Abu al-Fayha', *Tafsir al-qur'an al-azim*, ed., Allah Bukhsh Barkhurdaria Trust (Maktabat Dar al-Fayha', 1998), 1:19-21; 18-24.

5 Al-Zamakhshari, Abu al-Qasim Jar Allah Mahmud ibn 'Umar. *al-Kashshaf 'an haqa'iq al-tanzil wa 'uyun al-aqawil fi wujuh al-ta'wil* (Damascus: Dar al-fikr, 1977), 1:11-12.

6 Ibid, 12-13.

> and derived one meaning, is as it is [i.e. they are accurate].[7]

There is even a book of his *tafsir* entitled "The book of the virtues of the rightly-guided Companions."[8] This leaves little room for ambiguity as to whom al-Razi believed to be qualified commentators of the Qur'an. Al-Qurtubi, in his chapter of "The virtues of the Qur'an and its people," writes, "Our scholars, may Allah be pleased with them, have said: As for that which has been reported of the virtues of *tafsir* from the Companions and the Successors …,"[9] from this we can immediately ascertain that al-Qurtubi regards only the Companions and the Successors as suitable interpreters of the divine text. No one else is even considered, only that which has been said by these two parties is worthy of documentation. He continues,

> 'Ali ibn Abi Talib mentioned Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah and described him as having knowledge. So a man said to him, "May I be your ransom! You describe Jabir as knowledgeable, yet you are you!" He replied, "He knew the *tafsir* of the saying of the Exalted, *Surely He who has ordained the Qur'an for you shall bring you back to a place of return (ma'ad)."* Mujahid said, "The most beloved of the creation to Allah, the Exalted, is the most knowledgeable about what He has revealed."[10]

Many other quotations of a similar vein follow these two, all from either the Companions or the Successors, making al-Qurtubi's acceptance of these classes as the premier *mufassirun* (sing. *mufassir*) patently clear.

We thus see that all the *tafsirs* under consideration, more or less, agree that the authorities of interpretation should be the Prophet, his Companions, or the Successors; in that order. What the present work aims to do is establish how far they adhered to it. In order to do this, I propose to count the citations of each *tafsir*. I chose a sample of twenty pages per volume from all the works. Pages within each volume were chosen at random. The results below show only the top sources in each *tafsir.* Each *tafsir* has its individual minimum cut off point ranging from two in al-Zamakhshari's work to seventeen in al-Qurtubi's. This due to the differing amounts of citation in each work. The sources listed are only the ultimate sources (i.e. the earliest name in the

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7 Al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din Muhammad ibn 'Umar ibn al-Husayn ibn al-Hasan. *Mafatih al-ghayb,* ed., Muhammad 'Ali Bidun (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2004), 1:11.

8 Al-Razi, *Mafatih al-ghayb,* 13.

9 Al-Qurtubi, Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Ansari. *al-Jami' li-ahkam al-Qur'an*, ed., Muhammad 'Ali Bidun (21 vols. in 11. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2004), 1: 21.

10 Ibid.

chain of transmission). These are the results:

Al-Tabari

1. Abu al-Hajjaj Mujahid ibn Jabr (d. Mecca, 112-4/730-2) (3rd generation), 193 citations.
2. Abu al-Khattab Qatada ibn Di'ama ibn Qatada al-Sadusi al-Basri (d.113-9/731-7) (4th generation), 180 citations.
3. 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas (d. Ta'if, 68/687) (1st generation), 172 citations.
4. Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. Baghdad, 310/923), 148 citations.
5. Isma'il ibn 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Karima al-Suddi (d. Kufa, 127/745) (4th generation), 70 citations.
6. Al-Hasan ibn Abi al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728) (3rd generation), 60 citations.
7. 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Zayd ibn Aslam (d. Medina, 182/798-9) (8th generation), 55 citations.
8. Abu al-Qasim Abu Muhammad al-Dahhak ibn Muzahim al-Hilali al-Khurasani (d. 105/723?) (5th generation), 45 citations.
9. Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah (d. Medina, 10/632), 41 citations.
10. Sa'id ibn Jubayr al-Asadi (d. Kufa, 95/714) (3rd generation), 33 citations.
11. 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud (d. Medina, 32/653?) (1st generation), 30 citations.
12. 'Ikrima ibn 'Abd Allah (d. Medina, 107/725?) (3rd generation), 29 citations.
13. Al-Rabi' ibn Anas al-Hanafi (d. Basra, 140/757?) (5th generation), 23 citations.
14. Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Salim ibn Abi Umayya al-Tamimi (d. Medina, 153/770) (6th generation), 20 citations.
15. 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Jurayj (d. Mecca, 150/767?) (6th generation), 16 citations.
16. Abu 'Amr 'Amir ibn Sharahil al-Sha'bi (d. Kufa, 105/723?) (3rd generation), 15 citations.
17. Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn Yasar (d. Baghdad, 150/767?) (5th generation), 14 citations.
18. Abu al-'Aliya al-Riyahi Rufay' ibn Mihran (d. Basra, 90-3/709-12)

(2nd generation), 10 citations.

19. Abu Rabah ʻAta' ibn Abi Rabah (d. Mecca, 114/732?) (3rd generation), 10 citations.
20. Abu ʻAbd Allah Sufyan ibn Saʻid ibn Masruq al-Thawri al-Kufi (d. 161/778?) (7th generation), 10 citations.
21. Saʻid ibn al-Musayyab ibn Hazn ibn Abi Wahb ibn ʻAmr ibn ʻAbid ibn ʻImran ibn Makhzum al-Qurashi al-Makhzumi (d. Medina, after 90/709) (2nd generation), 9 citations.
22. Abu Hamza Muhammad ibn Kaʻb ibn Salim ibn Asad al-Qurazi (d. Kufa, 120/738?) (3rd generation), 7 citations.
23. Abu ʻAmr ʻAbida ibn ʻAmr al-Salmani al-Kufi (d. 70-2/689-91) (2nd generation), 6 citations.
24. Muhammad ibn Muslim ibn ʻUbayd Allah ibn ʻAbd Allah ibn Shihab ibn ʻAbd Allah ibn al-Harith ibn Zahran ibn Kullab al-Qurashi al-Zuhri (d. Damascus, 123-5/741-3) (4th generation), 6 citations.
25. Abu al-Darda' ʻUwaymir ibn Zayd ibn Qays al-Ansari (d. Sham, 32/652?) (1st generation), 6 citations.
26. ʻA'isha bint Abi Bakr al-Siddiq (d. Medina, 57/677) (1st generation), 6 citations.
27. Abu al-Munkar Ubayy ibn Kaʻb ibn Qays ibn ʻUbayd ibn Zayd ibn Muʻawiya ibn ʻAmr ibn Malik ibn al-Najjar al-Ansari al-Khazraji (d. Medina, 19-32/640-53?) (1st generation), 5 citations.
28. ʻUmar ibn al-Khattab ibn Nufayl (d. Medina, 24/644) (1st generation), 5 citations.

Al-Zamakhshari

1. Abu al-Qasim Mahmud ibn ʻUmar al-Zamakhshari (d. Khwarazm, 538/1143-4), 103 citations.
2. Muhammad ibn ʻAbd Allah (d. Medina, 10/632), 42 citations.
3. Al-Hasan ibn Abi al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728) (3rd generation), 17 citations.
4. ʻAbd Allah ibn ʻAbbas (d. Ta'if, 68/687) (1st generation), 16 citations.
5. ʻAli ibn Abi Talib ibn ʻAbd al-Muttalib (d. Kufa, 40/661) (1st generation), 12 citations.
6. ʻAbd Allah ibn Masʻud (d. Medina, 32/653?) (1st generation), 9 citations.
7. Abu al-Khattab Qatada ibn Diʻama ibn Qatada al-Sadusi al-Basri

(d.113-9/731-7) (4th generation), 7 citations.

8. ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab ibn Nufayl (d. Medina, 24/644) (1st generation), 7 citations.
9. Abu ‘Amr Zabban ibn ‘Ammar ibn ‘Uryan (d.Kufa, 154/770-71?) (5th generation), 5 citations.
10. Abu al-Hajjaj Mujahid ibn Jabr (d. Mecca, 112-4/730-2) (3rd generation), 5 citations.
11. Abu Hanifa Nu‘man ibn Thabit al-Kufi (d. Baghdad, 150/767) (6th generation), 4 citations.
12. Abu al-Munkar Ubayy ibn Ka‘b ibn Qays ibn ‘Ubayd ibn Zayd ibn Mu‘awiya ibn ‘Amr ibn Malik ibn al-Najjar al-Ansari al-Khazraji (d. Medina, 19-32/640-53?) (1st generation), 4 citations.
13. Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Muhammad al-Zajjaj (d. Baghdad, 310/923), 3 citations.
14. Yahya ibn Waththab al-Asadi al-Kufi (d. 103/721-2) (4th generation), 3 citations.
15. ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Amir ibn Yazid (d. Damascus, 118/736) (3rd generation), 2 citations.
16. Abu Zakariyya Yahya ibn Ziyad al-Farra’ (d. Kufa, 207/822-3), 2 citations.
17. ‘Ali ibn Hamza al-Kisa’i (d. Kufa, 189/804-5?) (9th generation), 2 citations.
18. Abu ‘Amr ‘Amir ibn Sharahil al-Sha‘bi (d. Kufa,105/723) (3rd generation), 2 citations.
19. Abu Rabah ‘Ata’ ibn Abi Rabah (d. Mecca, 114/732?) (3rd generation), 2 citations.
20. Ibrahim ibn Abi ‘Abla (d. Jerusalem, 152/769-70) (5th generation), 2 citations.
21. ‘Ikrima ibn ‘Abd Allah (d. Medina, 107/725?) (3rd generation), 2 citations.
22. Isma‘il ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Karima al-Suddi (d. Kufa, 127/745) (4th generation), 2 citations.
23. Muqatil ibn Sulayman al-Balkhi (d. Basra, 150/767) (6th generation), 2 citations.
24. Zayd ibn ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib al-Hashimi (d. Kufa, 123/740-1) (4th generation), 2 citations.

Al-Razi

1. Muhammad ibn ʻAbd Allah (d. Medina, 10/632), 161 citations.
2. ʻAbd Allah ibn ʻAbbas (d. Ta'if, 68/687) (1st generation), 106 citations.
3. Fakhr al-Din Muhammad ibn ʻUmar al-Razi (d. Herat, 606/1209-10), 85 citations.
4. Abu ʻAbd Allah Muhammad ibn Idris ibn al-ʻAbbas al-Shafiʻi (d. Fustat, 204/820) (9th generation), 36 citations.
5. Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Muhammad al-Zajjaj (d. Baghdad, 310/923), 35 citations.
6. Abu al-Qasim Mahmud ibn ʻUmar al-Zamakhshari (d. Khwarazm, 538/1143-4), 32 citations.
7. Al-Hasan ibn Abi al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728) (3rd generation), 31 citations.
8. ʻAsim ibn Abi Najjud Bahdala (d. Kufa, 127/744-5) (6th generation), 29 citations.
9. ʻAli ibn Hamza al-Kisa'i (d. Kufa, 189/804-5) (9th generation), 28 citations.
10. Abu Hanifa Nuʻman ibn Thabit al-Kufi (d. Baghdad, 150/777) (6th generation), 27 citations.
11. Abu al-Hasan ʻAli ibn Ahmad al-Wahidi al-Nisaburi (d. 468/1075-6), 25 citations.
12. Abu al-Hasan al-Hamadhani ibn Ahmad ibn ʻAbd al-Jabbar ibn Ahmad ibn Khalil (d. 415/1024-5), 22 citations.
13. Abu Zakariyya Yahya ibn Ziyad al-Farra' (d. Kufa, 207/822-3) (11th generation), 22 citations.
14. Abu Muslim ibn Bahr al-Asbahani (d.322/933-4), 21 citations.
15. Hamza ibn Habib (d. Kufa, 156/772-3?) (7th generation), 21 citations.
16. Abu al-Hajjaj Mujahid ibn Jabr (d. Mecca, 112-4/730-2) (3rd generation), 21 citations.
17. ʻAbd al-Salam ibn al-Ustadh Abi ʻAli Muhammad ibn ʻAbd al-Wahhab ibn Salam al-Jubba'i (d. 321/933-4), 19 citations.
18. Abu al-Khattab Qatada ibn Diʻama ibn Qatada al-Sadusi al-Basri(d.113-9/ 731-7) (4th generation), 19 citations.
19. Muqatil ibn Sulayman al-Balkhi (d. Basra, 150/767) (6th generation), 18 citations.

20. ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Amir ibn Yazid (d. Damascus, 118/736) (3rd generation), 17 citations.
21. ‘Abd Allah ibn Kathir al-Dari (d. Mecca, 120/737-8) (2nd generation), 16 citations.
22. Abu ‘Amr Zabban ibn ‘Ammar ibn ‘Uryan ibn al-‘Ala’ (d. Basra, 154/770-1?) (5th generation), 14 citations.
23. Abu Bakr ‘Abd Allah ibn Ahmad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Qaffal (d. Khurasan 417/1026?), 13 citations.
24. Isma‘il ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Karima al-Suddi (d. Kufa, 127/745) (4th generation), 13 citations.
25. Abu ‘Ubayd al-Qasim ibn Sallam (d. Mecca, 224/839?) (10th generation), 12 citations.
26. Nafi‘ ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman (d. Medina, 169/785-6) (7th generation), 12 citations.
27. Muhammad ibn al-Sa’ib ibn Bishr al-Kalbi (d. Kufa, 146/763-4) (6th generation), 11 citations.
28. ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab ibn Nufayl (d. Medina, 24/ 644) (1st generation), 11 citations.
29. ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas‘ud (d. Medina, 32/653?) (1st generation), 9 citations.
30. Abu Rabah ‘Ata’ ibn Abi Rabah (d. Mecca, 114/732?) (3rd generation), 9 citations.

Al-Qurtubi

1. Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah (d. Medina, 10/632), 215 citations.
2. ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abbas (d. Ta’if, 68/687) (1st generation), 182 citations.
3. Abu al-Khattab Qatada ibn Di‘ama ibn Qatada al-Sadusi al-Basri (d.113-9/ 731-7) (4th generation), 84 citations.
4. Abu al-Hajjaj Mujahid ibn Jabr (d. Mecca, 112-4/730-2) (3rd generation), 77 citations.
5. Al-Hasan ibn Abi al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728) (3rd generation), 75 citations.
6. Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abu Bakr al-Ansari al-Qurtubi (d. Upper Egypt, 671/1273), 52 citations.
7. Malik ibn Anas ibn Malik ibn Abi ‘Amir (d. Medina, 179/795) (7th generation), 46 citations.

8. Abu Ja'far Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Isma'il ibn al-Nahhas (d. Egypt, 338-9/950), 45 citations.
9. Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Idris ibn al-'Abbas al-Shafi'i (d. Fustat, 204/820) (9th generation), 45 citations.
10. Isma'il ibn 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Karimah al-Suddi (d. Kufa, 127/745) (4th generation), 42 citations.
11. 'Ali ibn Hamza al-Kisa'i (d. Kufa, 189/804-5?) (9th generation), 37 citations.
12. Al-Dahhak ibn Qays ibn Khalid (d. Damascus, 62/681-2) (1st generation), 31 citations.
13. Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Muhammad al-Zajjaj (d. Baghdad, 310/923), 31 citations.
14. 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud (d. Medina, 32/653?) (1st generation), 30 citations.
15. Abu Zakariyya Yahya ibn Ziyad al-Farra' (d. Kufa, 207/822-3) (11th generation), 30 citations.
16. Abu Hanifa Nu'man ibn Thabit al-Kufi (d. 150/767) (6th generation), 27 citations.
17. Sa'id ibn Jubayr al-Asadi (d. Kufa, 95/714) (3rd generation), 26 citations.
18. Abu 'Abd Allah Sufyan ibn Sa'id ibn Masruq al-Thawri al-Kufi (d. Basra, 161/778?) (7th generation), 25 citations.
19. Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah ibn al-'Arabi al-Andalusi (d. 543/1148-9), 24 citations.
20. 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Zayd ibn Aslam (d. Medina, 182/798-9) (8th generation), 24 citations.
21. 'Umar ibn al-Khattab ibn Nufayl (d. Medina, 24/644) (1st generation), 23 citations.
22. 'Asim ibn Abi Najjud Bahdala (d. Kufa, 127/744-5) (6th generation), 21 citations.
23. Muhammad ibn al-Sa'ib ibn Bishr al-Kalbi (d. Kufa, 146/763-4) (6th generation), 21 citations.
24. 'Ali ibn Abi Talib ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib (d. Kufa, 40/661) (1st generation), 20 citations.
25. 'Ikrima ibn 'Abd Allah (d. Medina, 107/725?) (3rd generation), 20 citations.
26. Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal Abu 'Abd Allah al-Shaybani (d. Baghdad, 241/855) (10th generation), 19 citations.

27. Muqatil ibn Sulayman al-Balkhi (d. Basra, 150/767) (6th generation), 19 citations.
28. Abu ‘Amr Zabban ibn ‘Ammar ibn ‘Uryan ibn al-‘Ala (d. Basra, 154/770-1?) (5th generation) 18 citations.
29. Abu Rabah ‘Ata’ ibn Abi Rabah (d. Mecca, 114/732?) (3rd generation), 18 citations.
30. Abu ‘Ubayd al-Qasim ibn Sallam (d. Mecca, 224/839?) (10th generation), 17 citations.

Ibn Kathir

1. Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah (d. Medina, 10/632), 218 citations.
2. ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abbas (d. Ta’if, 68/687) (1st generation), 84 citations.
3. Abu al-Hajjaj Mujahid ibn Jabr (d. Mecca, 112-4/730-2) (3rd generation), 47 citations.
4. Abu al-Khattab Qatada ibn Di‘ama ibn Qatada al-Sadusi al-Basri (d.113-9/ 731-7) (4th generation), 35 citations.
5. Al-Hasan ibn Abi al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728) (3rd generation), 20 citations.
6. ‘Ikrima ibn ‘Abd Allah (d. Medina, 107/725?) (3rd generation), 20 citations.
7. Isma‘il ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Karima al-Suddi (d. Kufa, 127/745) (4th generation), 18 citations.
8. ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas‘ud (d. Medina, 32/653?) (1st generation), 14 citations.
9. Abu Ja‘far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. Baghdad, 310/923), 12 citations.
10. Al-Dahhak ibn Qays ibn Khalid (d. Damascus, 62/681-2) (1st generation), 11 citations.
11. ‘Imad al-Din Isma’il ibn ‘Umar ibn Kathir (d. Damascus, 774/1373), 11 citations.
12. Abu al-‘Aliya al-Riyahi Rufay‘ ibn Mihran (d. Basra, 90-3/708-12?) (2nd generation), 11 citations.
13. ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Zayd ibn Aslam (d. Medina, 182/798-9) (8th generation), 10 citations.
14. Al-Rabi‘ ibn Anas (d. Khurasan, 140/757-8?) (5th generation), 9 citations.

15. Sa'id ibn Jubayr al-Asadi (d. Kufa, 95/714) (3rd generation), 9 citations.
16. Abu Hamzah Muhammad ibn Ka'b ibn Salim ibn Asad al-Qurazi (d. Kufa, 120/738?) (3rd generation), 8 citations.
17. 'Umar ibn al-Khattab ibn Nufayl (d. Medina, 24/644) (1st generation), 8 citations.
18. Abu Rabah 'Ata' ibn Abi Rabah (d. Mecca, 114/732?) (3rd generation), 7 citations.
19. Zayd ibn Aslam (d. Medina, 136/753-4) (3rd generation), 7 citations.
20. Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abu Bakr al-Ansari al-Qurtubi (d. Upper Egypt, 671/1273), 6 citations.
21. Muqatil ibn Sulayman al-Balkhi (d. Basra, 150/767) (6th generation), 6 citations.
22. 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (d. Medina, 73/692-3?) (1st generation), 5 citations.
23. Al-Barra' ibn 'Azib ibn al-Harith (d. Kufa, 72/ 691-2) (1st generation), 5 citations.
24. Anas ibn Malik al-Ansari al-Khazraji (d. Basra, 92-3/710-3?) (1st generation), 5 citations.
25. Abu 'Abd Allah Sufyan ibn Sa'id ibn Masruq al-Thawri al-Kufi (d. Basra, 161/778?) (7th generation), 5 citations.
26. 'Ali ibn Abi Talib ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib (d. Kufa, 40/ 661) (1st generation), 4 citations.
27. Ibrahim ibn Yazid ibn Qays al-Nakha'i (d. Kufa, 96/714) (6th generation), 4 citations.
28. Sa'id ibn al-Musayyab ibn Hazn ibn Abi Wahb ibn 'Amr ibn 'Abidibn 'Imran ibn Makhzum al-Qurashi al-Makhzumi (d. Medina, after 90/ 709) (2nd generation), 4 citations.

Summary of the *tafsirs*

	Al-Tabari	Al-Zamakhshari	Al-Razi	Al-Qurtubi	Ibn Kathir
Total.citations	1224	257	895	1344	603
Top source	Mujahid	Al-Zamakhshari	Muhammad (s.a.w.)	Muhammad (s.a.w.)	Muhammad (s.a.w.)
Avr.no.of cit/ source	43.7	10.7	29.8	44.8	21.5
Top.gen. (citations)	3rd	After 10th	After 10th	1st	0th
Top.gen. (sources)	3rd	3rd	After 10th	1st and 3rd	1st
Muhammad (% of total)	3.3	16.3	18	16	36.2
Author(%of total)	12.1	40.1	9.5	3.9	1.8
Total.citations of names appearing in all 5 sources	790	107	380	746	451
% of total of names appearing in all 5 sources	64.5	41.6	42.5	55.5	74.8

Total number of citations is the total number of citations in the sample. *Top source* refers to the most oft-quoted source. Average number of citations per source is the quotient of the total number of citations by the sources. Top *generation (citations)* indicates the top generation in terms of the total number of citations. *Top generation (sources)* indicates the generation with the most number of different sources cited. *Muhammad as % of total* indicates what the total number of citations of Muhammad is expressed as a % of the total. *Author as % of total indicates* what the total number of citations the author is expressed as a % of the total. *Total number of citations of names appearing in all 5 sources* is a total of all the citations from all five *tafsirs* of the names which appear in each one. *% of total of names appearing in all 5 sources* is the former expressed as a percentage.

THE *TAFSIR* OF AL-TABARI

The most significant find, one perceives, is that al-Tabari himself, despite cautioning against *tafsir bi'l-ra'y*, appears fourth on the list. This may, however, be explained by the structure of his *tafsir*, in which his opinion, more often than not, seeks merely to elaborate on the opinions of others.

Walid Saleh remarks that al-Tabari either gives his opinion at the end of the opinions of earlier exegetes or adjudicates between them.[11] Based on the evidence of the sources, it cannot be denied that a significant portion of his work consists of his own assertions.

Notwithstanding the author himself, it can be seen that the top six names all belong to the first four generations. Ibn Mas'ud (no. 11, 30 citations), whose merit and reliability is discussed by al-Tabari, is cited far fewer times than his contemporary Ibn 'Abbas (no. 3, 172 citations), who is among the most oft-quoted. This is the case in all the *tafsirs* under review. Of the 29 names, twenty belong to the first four generations. This means 893 of 1224 citations (73.0%) are from the first four generations. This percentage swells to 83.0% if al-Tabari is taken out of the equation. The most well-represented generation, both in terms of sources and citations, is the third. This supports Claude Gilliot's claim that the Successors "achieved fame in the science of exegesis."[12] It also corroborates Nabia Abbot's assertion that 'the hadith and personal opinions of second-generation Muslims far exceeded those of the Companions and the Prophet.'[13] The ninth and tenth generations have no representation. The fourth generation has only three sources (Qatada, al-Suddi, and al-Zuhri), but is second in terms of citations. The first generation has the greatest number of sources (six) after the third generation (seven) and is third in terms of percentage after the third and fourth generations. However, if the twin pillars of Ibn 'Abbas and Ibn Mas'ud are removed, the number of citations between the remaining five Companions dwindles to 22 (1.8%). This is because the prominent Companions such as 'A'isha, 'Umar, Abu al-Darda', and Ubayy ibn Ka'b, are cited a mere five or six times. This confirms Gilliot's claim that apart from a select exegetical coterie, of whom Ibn 'Abbas and Ibn Mas'ud were naturally members, the well-known Companions contribute little to the *tafsir* tradition.[14] The Prophet himself is only cited 41 times, constituting less than 4% of the total.

Al-Tabari's top source is Mujahid, unlike the *tafsirs* of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and even al-Razi who have the Prophet as their top source. The only other *tafsir* in which the Prophet is not the most cited is that of al-Zamakhshari, and even in this *tafsir* the Prophet is cited far more times

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11 Walid Saleh, The *formation of the classical tafsir tradition: the Qur'an commentary of al-Tha'labi*> (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004), 141.

12 Claude Gilliot, "The beginnings of Qur'anic exegesis," in *The Qur'an: formative interpretation,* The formation of the classical Islamic world, ed. Andrew Rippin (Aldershot, Brookfield USA, Singapore, Sydney: AshgateVariorum, 1999), 8-9; 1-29.

13 Nabia Abbott, "The early development of *tafsir*," in*The formation of the classical Islamic world, The Qur'an: formative interpretation*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Aldershot, Brookfield USA, Singapore, Sydney: AshgateVariorum, 1999), 34; 29-41.

14 Gilliot, "The beginnings of Qur'anic exegesis,"8-9.

(in terms of percentage) than in this *tafsir*. And yet, Taqiyy al-Din Ahmad ibn ‘Abd al-Halim ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) exalts al-Tabari’s *tafsir* as, ‘Among the most splendid and greatest *tafsirs bi’l ma’thur* in terms of value,’[15] even though he says the *sunna* is ‘The explainer (*shariha*) and the elucidator (*muwaddiha*) of the Qur’an.’[16] He even cites Imam Shafi‘i as having said, ‘Every judgement of the Messenger of Allah is that which we understand from the Qur’an.’ (*Kull ma hakama bihi rasul Allah, fahwa min ma fahim hu min al-Qur’an.*)[17] So how are we to reconcile these two conflicting statements? This is explained by Ibn Taymiyya when he speaks of the sources of discrepancy among commentators. He remarks that when we know not the truth regarding a disagreement:

> There is no benefit speculating on the different opinions regarding it. It is like knowledge when what is narrated from the *hadith* (pl. *ahadith*) does not have any proof as to its authenticity, and things of that sort …. And it is known that most of what has been transmitted in *tafsir* is like what has been transmitted regarding the Prophetic expeditions (*maghazi*) and battles (*malahim*)! And this is why Imam Ahmad said, “Three things do not have a chain of transmission (*isnad,* pl. *asanid*): *tafsir*, the battles, and the Prophetic expeditions.” And it has been transmitted, “Do not have a source (*asl* pl. *usul*).” That is, a chain of transmission! As they have been overcome by incompletely transmitted Prophetic traditions that go back no further than the second generation (*marasil,* sing. *mursal*) like what ‘Urwah ibn Zubayr (d. 94/712-3), al-Sha‘bi (d. 104/ 722?) al-Zuhri (d. 124/742), Musa ibn ‘Uqba (d. 141/758), and Ibn Ishaq (d. 151/767-8) mention, and those who came after them like Yahya ibn Sa‘id al-Umawi (d. 194/ 809-10), al-Walid ibn Muslim (d. 195/810-1), al-Waqidi (d. 207/823?), and so forth, regarding the Prophetic expeditions. [18]

This may be a possible explanation for the relatively diminished role of the Prophet in al-Tabari’s *tafsir*. However, if it explains why the Prophet does not feature prominently in al-Tabari’s *tafsir*, then it does not explain why this is not the case for the rest of the commentaries under consideration. Even

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15 Ibn Taymiyya, Taqiyy al-Din Ahmad ibn ‘Abd al-Halim, *Muqaddima fi usul al-tafsir,* 1st ed. (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 1994), 81.

16 Ibid, 84.

17 Ibid, 84-85.

18 Ibid, 52-53.

if al-Zamakhshari, al-Razi, and especially Ibn Kathir, whose total number of citations is far less than that of al-Tabari, had recourse to al-Tabari's *tafsir*, from which they could extract the *hadiths* for inclusion in their work, as has been suggested by J. Cooper,[19] al-Qurtubi, who actually surpasses al-Tabari in terms of total citations (1344, as opposed to al-Tabari's 1224), still has the Prophet as his top source. This would seem to confirm Ibn Hanbal's claim that the *tafsir* tradition allowed far more uncorroborated material than its legal counterpart. It would appear that the later exegetes following al-Tabari were hampered by the inundation of *hadiths* of questionable quality. This they permitted in their respective *tafsirs* as, by then, it seemed folly to rely on anything else.

It is clear from the results that none of the Readers of the Qur'anic Readings feature in al-Tabari's final list[20]. This does not mean, of course, that he does not cite them, only that their role in this *tafsir* is a minor one, which would imply the Readings are not as important to al-Tabari as they are to the other commentators. This, however, seems highly improbable as al-Tabari was one of the six principal Students of the Readings in the Later Middle Ages.[21] It is more likely that as al-Tabari himself was a Student of the Readings, he was more inclined to give his own opinion on the Readings rather than that of the other Students, which would be subsumed in the overall catageory of al-Tabari's citations. Also, it could be that since al-Tabari wrote an independent work focusing exclusively on the Readings, as asserted by Franz Rosenthal, he decided to omit this facet of inquiry from his *tafsir*.[22]

The highest ranking authority in al-Tabari's commentary who is not mentioned in all five *tafsirs* and is outside the first four generations is 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Zayd ibn Aslam (position 7, 55 citations). He is also mentioned to a lesser degree in the commentaries of al-Qurtubi (position 20, 24 citations) and Ibn Kathir (position 13, 10 citations). Ibn Zayd, according to Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn 'Uthman al-Dhahabi (d. 748/1374), was 'a man of Qur'an and *tafsir*' who 'collected a *tafsir* in one volume' and wrote 'a book on *nasikh* and *mansukh*'.[23] Yaqut ibn 'Abd Allah

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19 John Cooper, *The commentary on the Qur'an by Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), xxiv.

20 For a definition of what is meant by 'Readers' and 'Students' of the Qur'anic Readings, as well as a list of all the names, please refer to Christopher Melchert, 'Ibn Mujahid and the establishment of the seven Qur'anic readings', *Studia Islamica* 91(2000): 5-22.

21 Ibid, 9.

22 Al-Tabari, Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir. *Tarikh al-rusul wa al-muluk*, *The history of al-Tabari: general introduction, and, from the creation to the flood*, trans. and ed., Franz Rosenthal (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 1:93-7.

23 Al-Dhahabi. Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn 'Uthman. *Siyar a'lam al-nubala*', ed., 'Ali Abu Zayd (Beirut: Muassasa al-Risala, 1981), 8:309.

al-Hamawi (d. 626/1229?) confirms the existence of this *tafsir*, and lists it among al-Tabari's sources.[24]

Of the seven sources exclusive to al-Tabari's *tafsir*, al-Dahhak ibn Muzahim al-Hilali is by far the most oft-quoted (position 8, 45 citations). Al-Dhahabi confirms he wrote a *tafsir* and characterises him as being among the 'receptacles of knowledge' (*min aw'iyat al-'ilm*).[25] However, he concedes that 'he was not considered excellent in his narration of *hadith*' (*laysa bi'l-majawwad li hadithihi*).[26]He does, nevertheless, give him the middling rank of *saduq*.[27] He goes on to say that Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855), Yahya ibn Ma'in (d. ٢٣٣/847?), and others, did attest to his trustworthiness (*waththaqahu*), but that Yahya ibn Sa'id declared him to be weak (*da"afahu*) and it was said that he 'falsified' (*yudallis*) traditions.[28] Sufyan al-Thawri is quoted as having said, 'Al-Dahhak used to teach and never took money for it,'[29] which is taken to be a sign of his reliability. However, according to al-Dhahabi, al-Dahhak does not feature in the two *Sahihs* (sing. *sahih,* pl. *sihah*).[30] Ibn Hajar, on the other hand, does think he appears in *Sahih al-Bukhari* as a commentator of the Qur'an.[31] It is clear that al-Dhahabi is conflicted about al-Dahhak as he gives the following accounts about him,

> Shu'ba transmitted from Mushash that he said, "I asked al-Dahhak, "Did you ever meet Ibn 'Abbas?" He replied, "No."
>
> Shu'ba transmitted from 'Abd al-Malik ibn Maysara that he said, "Al-Dahhak never met Ibn 'Abbas, he only met Sa'id ibn Jubayr when he brought him water and took *tafsir* from him."
>
> Yahya al-Qattan said, "Shu'ba denied that al-Dahhak ever met Ibn 'Abbas." Then al-Qattan said, "Al-Dahhak, in our opinion, is weak."[32]

Al-Dahhak cuts an equally divisive figure in Jamal al-Din Abu al-Hajjaj Yusuf al-Mizzi's (d. 742/1341) work. On the one hand he informs us,

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24 Yaqut, Ibn 'Abd Allah al-Hamawi. *Kitab irshad al-arib ila ma'rifat al-adib (Mu'jam al-udaba'/Tabaqat al-udaba')* ed., D. S. Margoliouth, 2nd ed. (London: Luzac and Co., 1929), 6:2454.

25 Ibid, 4:598.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid, 599.

29 Ibid.

30 Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar a'lam al-nubala*', 4:599.

31 Ibn Hajar,*Tahdhib al-tahdhib*, 4:454.

32 Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar a'lam al-nubala*', 4:599.

'Zayd ibn al-Hubab said from Sufyan al-Thawri, "Take your *tafsir* from four [people]: Sa'id ibn Jubayr, Mujahid, 'Ikrimah, and al-Dahhak."'[33] And on the other, he writes,

> Abu Usama said from al-Mu'alla, from Shu'ba, from 'Abd al-Malik ibn Maysara who said, "I asked al-Dahhak, "Did you hear [*tafsir*] from Ibn 'Abbas?" He replied, "No." I said, "So from whom did you take that which you are talking about?" He replied, "From so-and-so and so-and-so."[34]

This shows that al-Dahhak, though valuable with regards to his own interpretation of the Qur'an, cannot be deemed to have reliably transmitted the opinions of the Companions, nor can those who transmit *hadith* from him and allege it originated earlier, what Joseph Schacht terms the 'backwards growth of *isnads*',[35] be depended upon.

So what conclusions can we draw from these results? It would be safe to say, based on the al-Tabari's sources, that *Jami' al-bayan fi ta'wil al-Qur'an* is predominantly a *tafsir* based on the opinions of the *Tabi'un* (sing. *tabi'*) of as 73% of all its citations are from the first four generations. However, there are question marks, such as al-Tabari's own interjections, which comprise twelve per cent of the sample. The finding that not even four per cent of the citations are traced directly to the Prophet is another cause for concern. Joseph Schacht asserts that the development of the *tafsir* and legal traditions were mutually exclusive which accounts for the increasingly prophetic citation in the latter. It is his contention that even in these, it is the Companions and Successors who have had a greater influence, with the *sunna* of the Prophet being the exception, rather than the rule.[36] The findings from the *tafsir* of al-Tabari, at least, corroborate this claim. However, as the Prophet is the top source of all the other works here considered (notwithstanding the author himself in al-Zamakhshari's case) it proves that in the late Middle Ages, the Prophet superseded the Companions and Successors in citationary terms. This chimes with John Wansbrough's argument that 'canonization of the Quranic revelation could only have been effected within the community once its content could be related to that of the *prophetical Sunna*.'[37]

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33 Al-Mizzi, Jamal al-Din Au al-Hajjaj Yusuf. *Tahdhib al-kamal fi asma'al-rijal*, ed., Bashshar 'Awwad Ma 'ruf (Beirut: Muassasa al-Risala, 1994), 13:293.

34 Ibid, 293-94.

35 Joseph Schacht, *The origins of Muhammadan jurisprudence* (Oxford: Calrendon Press, 1950), 165.

36 Schacht, *Muhammadan jurisprudence*, 3:137.

37 John Wansbrough, *Quranic studies: sources and methods of scriptural interpretation* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 52.

THE *TAFSIR* OF AL-ZAMAKHSHARI

The most striking thing about the analysis of *al-Kashshaf*, which is predominantly regarded as a *tafsir bi'l-ra'y*[38], (though this assignation is largely fictitious as the present study attests), is that the Prophet's citations constitute over sixteen per cent of the total. This is approximately five times the percentage offered by al-Tabari which is seen as a *tafsir bi'l-ma'thur*[39], and as such, would be expected to have a far greater number. The most well-represented generation, in terms of sources, is the third, something it has in common with al-Tabari's *tafsir*. The second, seventh, eighth, and tenth generations have no representation at all, which would suggest a quasi-dualistic quality with the vast majority of all sources coming from either the first three generations (46.7%) or after the tenth generation (42%). Together these constitute almost 90% of all of al-Zamakhshari's sources. It would appear that one of the author's aims may have been to marry old and new perspectives on the interpretation of the Qur'an. However, one should not forget that if the modern (i.e. post 10th generation) sources constitute 42% of the total, then 40.1% of that is al-Zamakhshari himself. Helmut Gatje, thus, correctly observes that 'Zamakhshari's commentary is characterized more strongly by the personal view-point … of the author.'[40] It therefore emerges that al-Zamakhshari uses the well-known sources of the first three generations to buttress his own assertions. This, it may be argued, is a device employed by all exegetes, but in few is the endeavor so brazen.

It is evident from the findings that both al-Hasan al-Basri and Mujahid ibn Jabr cut major figures in the *tafsir* of al-Zamakhshari (position three and ten respectively). This would seem to corroborate Andrew Lane's assertion that the author depended on the *tafsirs* of these individuals without acknowledging his debt to them (on the basis of which he argues it is actually a *tafsir bi'l ma'thur* and not a *tafsir bi'l ra'y*).[41] However, Lane also mentions al-Suddi and Sufyan al-Thawri in this catageory, and this, according to the present study, seems implausible as the former is mentioned a mere two times and the latter, not at all.[42]

'Ali, among the Companions, features particularly prominently in *al-Kashshaf* and even Zayd ibn 'Ali is cited. This may be explained by the

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38 Andrew J. Lane also questions the usefulness of such traditional classifications in *A Traditional Mu'tazilite Qur'an Commentary: The Kashshaf of Jar Allah al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/ 1144)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 231.

39 See previous section on the *tafsir* of al-Tabari.

40 Helmut Gatje, *The Quran and its exegesis*, trans. and ed. Alford T. Welch (London, Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), 35.

41 Lane, *Kashshaf*, 199-219.

42 Ibid.

relative theological proximity of the *Zaydis* and the *Mu'tazilis*. Indeed, Abu al-Faradh Muhammad ibn Abi Ya'qub Ishaq al-Warraq al-Baghdadi al-Nadim, a prominent Shi'i, looks very favourably upon them, describing Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Zayd al-Wasiti, a *Mu'tazili*, as 'the scholar whose spirit was most fearful of God.'[43] On the other hand, it may simply be because the other three Caliphs 'did not explain the Qur'an much,'[44] as Gilliot claims. This, he alleges, can be explained by 'their premature deaths.'[45] This does not, however, explain 'Ali's absence from the other commentaries. Also, Gilliot's contention is not supported by this study as it is 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, not 'Ali, who is mentioned in all the *tafsirs*.

Mu'tazili sources are conspicuous by their absence in this *tafsir*. It would seem al-Zamakhshari did not feel the need to fortify his interpretation with that of other Mu'tazilite scholars. Muqatil ibn Sulayman, who has endured many accusations of 'extreme anthropomorphism'[46] and whose 'prestige as a traditionist is low',[47] is given a fleeting mention in this *tafsir*.[48]Al-Dhahabi quotes Ibn al-Mubarak (d. 181/797) as having said vis-à-vis Muqatil's *tafsir*, 'What a wonderful *tafsir*, if only he were trustworthy!' (*Ma ahsana tafsirahu law kana thiqa*!)[49] He subsequently informs us of the sources of skepticism, among them was Muqatil's extraordinary claims of being knowledgeable about everything. He writes,

> It has been said: He (Muqatil) said, "Ask me about anything under the Throne!" (*Saluni 'amma dun al-'arsh*!) They asked him, "Where are the bowels of the ant?" (A*yna am'a' al-namla?*) So he fell silent. And they asked him, "When Adam performed the pilgrimage, who shaved his head?" (*Lamma hajja Adam, man halaqa ra'sahu?*) So he replied, "I don't know." Waki'(d. 197/812/3) said, "He was a liar."[50]

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43 Al-Nadim, Abu al-Faradh Muhammad ibn Abi Ya'qub Ishaq al-Warraq al-Baghdadi. *Kitab al-Fihrist,* Gustav Flugel (Leipzig: Verlag von F. C. W. Vogel, 1872), 182.

44 Gilliot, "The beginnings of Qur'anic exegesis," 7.

45 Ibid.

46 Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi, Andrew Rippin, *Classical Islam: a sourcebook of religious literature,* trans. and ed. Andrew Rippin, 1st ed. (London, New York: Routledge, 2003), 105.

47 Ibid.

48 See Muqatil ibn Sulayman, *Tafsir Muqatil ibn Sulayman* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2003). For comments on this issue, see also Calude Gilliot, "The Beginnings of Qur'anic Exegesis," 17.

49 Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar a'lam al-nubala*', 7:201.

50 Ibid, 202.

That al-Zamakhshari mentions Muqatil ibn Sulayman, could be interpreted as his penchant for existing *tafsirs* upon which he relied, according to Lane's theory. This opinion is somewhat endorsed by the presence of Ibrahim ibn Abi 'Abla (see below). Muqatil ibn Sulayman is also mentioned in the works of al-Qurtubi (position 27, nineteen citations) and Ibn Kathir (position 21, six citations). This would suggest that, though he was not perceived as being a reliable traditionist, his *tasfir* was used by many exegetes after him.

It is due to his lack of *Mu'tazili* sources that one observes that there are only three sources which are exclusive to al-Zamakhshari; of these the presence of Zayd ibn 'Ali has already been explained. Yahya ibn Waththab al-Asadi al-Kufi makes the list, presumably, because he was a leading *Muqri*' (Reader) which has a bearing on the grammatical aspects of the Qur'an; something al-Zamakhshari's *tafsir* is renowned for.[51] Indeed, it is apparent that the Readers play an important role in this *tafsir* with Ibn al-'Ala' being cited as many times as Mujahid. However, all the Reader citations constitute only a paltry 3.5% of the total, another testament to al-Zamakhshari's self-reliance when it comes to the Readings and grammar. Ibrahim ibn Abi 'Abla may have been quoted as he too had a *tafsir*, according to al-Dhahabi (although he does not mention the title). He, also, was an accomplished grammarian.[52]It could be due to a combination of these two factors that he was cited enough times to appear on al-Zamakhshari's list.

A final point worthy of note is the relative paucity of overall citations, especially when one compares it with the formidable total accrued by al-Qurtubi, whose total is over five times that of al-Zamakhshari. This merely adds further credence to the contention that al-Zamakhshari's aim was not to produce an all-encompassing *tafsir bi'l ma'thur* but to give his interpretation of the text. Indeed, 'he omits parts of the traditional material and only includes what he himself considers important.'[53] Even in this, he was not as assiduous as al-Tabari, al-Qurtubi, Ibn Kathir, or even, al-Razi, as he is satisfied 'with abbreviated references to origins or omits them altogether."[54] Wansbrough writes that by al-Zamakhshari's time,

> Quranic interpretation had long since achieved the status of normative discipline and the exegete was free to select from the tradition those elements most suited to his purpose and, moreover, to arrange them according to

51 Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar a'lam al-nubala*', 4:379.
52 Ibid, 20:199.
53 Gatje, *The Quran and its exegesis,* 36.
54 Ibid.

a large number of priorities.[55]

This is plain to see in this *tafsir*. Another reason for the low total could be that 'minor, dissenting, and unpopular interpretations [were introduced] anonymously.'[56] All these characteristics of al-Zamakhshari's work leads us to conclude that whatever this *tafsir* is, a *tafsir bi'l ma'thur* (if, indeed, such a thing exists), it is not.

THE *TAFSIR* OF AL-RAZI

The *tafsir* of al-Razi, in many ways, marks the middle road between the *tafsirs* under review: the author constitutes 9.5% of the total, more than Ibn Kathir (1.8%) and al-Qurtubi (3.9%), but less than al-Zamakhshari (40.1%) and al-Tabari (12.1%). The total number of sources, too, at 895, though less than al-Qurtubi (1344) and al-Tabari (1224), is more than al-Zamakhshari (257) and Ibn Kathir (603). Calder comments of al-Razi that his 'relative lack of sympathy with the established forms of *tafsir* is marked also by a very considerable diminution in named authorities.'[57] Here Calder compares al-Razi's *tafsir* with that of al-Tabari and al-Qurtubi, and his conclusion is proved by this study.

In other ways, however, al-Razi's work is very much on the fringes: it has, for example, eight sources after the tenth generation who appear on its most cited list, considerably more than any other *tafsir* and the same number are exclusive to this *tafsir*, again more than the other *tafsirs*. This could be seen as another manifestation of his 'lack of sympathy with the established forms of *tafsir,*' which is exhibited in the form of different sources being cited. The second and eighth generations have no representation, something it has in common with the *tafsir* of al-Zamakhshari. Members of the first generation are cited 126 times (14.1% of total), but if Ibn 'Abbas is removed only 20 citations remain. The Prophet, interestingly, is cited 161 times (18.0% of total). This is more than any other *tafsir* (in terms of percentage) except Ibn Kathir.

So what does this mixed bag of statistics mean? Indeed, al-Razi himself is mélange of incongruities. One the one hand, he is a *Shafi'i* scholar about whom Ibn Kathir writes, 'He wrote a useful translation of *Shafi'i* [*fiqh*].'[58]

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55 Wansbrough, *Quranic studies,* 139.

56 Ibid.

57 Norman Calder, "Tafsir from Tabari to Ibn Kathir: problems in the description of a genre, illustrated with reference to the story of Abraham," in *Approaches to the Qur'an*, ed. G.R. Hawting, Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, 1st ed. (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), 101-141; 114.

58 Ibn Kathir, 'Imad al-Din Isma'il ibn 'Umar. *al-Bidaya wa al-nihaya*, 2nd ed. (Beirut:

Al-Dhahabi describes him as 'The great scholar (*al-'allama al-kabir*) who was master of many disciplines (*dhu funun*).'[59] 'Izz al-Din ibn al-Athir al-Jazari (d. 630/1233?) also mentions him in a very positive light. He recounts a story of how al-Razi preached to the sultan Shihab al-Din, saying in his palace, "'O Sultan! No sultan of yours has survived… and surely our return is to Allah!" (*la sultanak yabqa ... wa inna maraddana ila Allah!*) Upon which, the sultan wept audibly.'[60] However, there are many things about al-Razi that Ibn Kathir finds disconcerting. He remarks, 'There are strange things attributed to him.' (*yunsabu ilayhi ashya' 'ajiba)*.[61] Both al-Dhahabi and Ibn Kathir narrate the story of al-Razi on his deathbed when he is reported to have said,

> I have pondered the paths of theology (*al-turuq al-kalamiyya*),and the plains of philosophy (*manahij al-falsafa*) and I have not found that they cure a sick person ('*alilan*) or quench the thirst of a thirsty one (*ghalilan*). And I have found the closest of paths [to the truth], the path of the Qur'an. I recite in affirmation (*aqra'u fi al-ithbat*): *The Beneficent, seated upon the Throne, To Him ascend all discourse*. And I recite in repudiation (*aqra'u fi al-nafy*): *There is nothing like Him*. And whoever has tried as I have, will know the like of which I know (*wa man jurriba mithla tajribati, 'arafa mithla ma'rifati*).[62]

This reveals al-Razi's repudiation of figurative *Mu'tazili* interpretations. It is little wonder then that this is al-Dhahabi's last word on al-Razi and that in Ibn Kathir's account, too, this statement is given pride of place. These two stalwarts of conventionalism are pleased to report al-Razi's deathbed affirmation of *Sunni* orthodoxy. But for al-Razi to have written what he did, he must have held it to be true.

In order to decipher how to characterise al-Razi's magnum opus, then, we must look further into the individual sources he cites. The first point of interest is the prominence of Imam al-Shafi'i (position 4, 36 citations.) This, of course, is to be expected as al-Razi was himself a *Shafi'i*.[63] Al-Zamakhshari's conspicuousness (position 6, 32 citations) could also be foreseen as al-Razi is renowned for rebutting many of the *Mu'tazili*

Maktaba al-Ma'arif, 1977), 13:55.

59 Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar a'lam al-nubala*', 20:500.

60 Al-Jazari, 'Izz al-Din ibn al-Athir. *al-Kamil fi al-tarikh*, ed. Carlous Johannes Tornberg (Beirut: Dar Sadar and Dar Bayrut, 1966), 12:214-16;216.

61 Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wa al-nihaya,* 13:55.

62 Ibid, 56, and al-Dhahabi, *Siyar a'lam al-nubala*', 20:501.

63 Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wa al-nihaya,* 13:55.

assertions of al-Zamakhshari.[64] Ibrahim Abu Ishaq al-Zajjaj's credentials require some scrutiny as he features very highly (position 5, 35 citations) on al-Razi's most oft-quoted list. Abu al-Faraj 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Ali ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597/1201) writes of him, 'He was of the people of refinement and knowledge, with good principles of faith (*i'tiqad* pl. *i'tiqadat*).'[65] However, he rebukes al-Zajjaj for taking a salary for teaching. He remarks,

> I have seen many of the people of *hadith* and knowledge reading these writings and boggling at [the offence caused by] this act (*yata'ajjabun*), deeming it appropriate (*mustahsinin*), unaware of the underlying wickedness of it.[66]

Even 'Umar Rida Kahhala is uncharacteristically silent on the issue of his trustworthiness, refusing to cite anything but his works.[67] But if Kahhala is muted on the issue, the irrepressible al-Dhahabi is not, he confirms that al-Zajjaj, 'used to earn one dirham as a glass-maker every day, then he educated (*addaba*) the vizier, al-Qasim ibn 'Ubayd Allah and this was the means of his wealth, then he became of the repentant.'[68] Interestingly, al-Zajjaj is not exclusive to al-Razi's work, he also cuts a minor figure in the *tafsir* of his *Mu'tazili* predecessor (position 13, 3 citations.) The specific citations attributed to al-Zajjaj in each *tafsir* would require further study.

Of the sources limited to al-Razi's *tafsir*, 'Abd al-Salam al-Ustadh al-Jubba'i is striking due to his well-known *Mu'tazil* stance. He is also renowned as having taught many people the *Mu'tazili* doctrine, which is why al-Dhahabi calls him '*al-Ustadh*'[69] and concludes his paragraph on him with the corroboratory phrase, 'He had many students.'[70] It may be that al-Razi sought to quash many of the teachings of this famous tutor in his *tafsir*. It seems that many of the sources restricted to al-Razi's *tafsir* are either *Mu'tazili* or *Shafi'i*: his intent in both cases is evident.

Another discovery this study yields is how pronounced the presence of the Readers is in this work. It is the only work in which all seven of the

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64 Calder, *Classical Islam*, 121.

65 Ibn al-Jawzi, Abu al-Faraj 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Ali ibn Muhamad. *al-Muntazam fi tarikh al-umam wa'l-muluk* ed. Muhammad 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata' and Mustafa 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata', 1st ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1993), 13:223.

66 Ibid, 13:225-26.

67 Kahhalah, 'Umar Rida. *Mu'jam al-mu'allifin: tarajim musannifi al-kutub al-'Arabiyyya* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Muthanna, 1983?), 13:355.

68 Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar a'lam al-nubala*', 14:360.

69 Ibid, 15:63.

70 Ibid, 64.

Qur'anic Readers are present in the final register.[71] The collective Reader total amounts to 137 citations which is 15.3% of the total. This shows how important the different Readings were to al-Razi due to their influence on religious laws imposed in, and doctrinal articles derived from, the Qur'an.[72]

THE *TAFSIR* OF AL-QURTUBI

Al-Qurtubi's *tafsir*, despite its size and fidelity to polyvalency of interpretations, racks up some impressive statistics: the Prophet constitutes sixteen per cent of the total. In terms of citations, this is more than any other *tafsir* notwithstanding Ibn Kathir's work, with which it is comparable (215 citations compared with Ibn Kathir's 218 citations). This validates Calder's analysis that, in al-Qurtubi's *tafsir*, 'the primary resource which he brings to the text is *hadith*.'[73] That is, *hadiths* not previously adduced by al-Tabari. The first generation is the most well-represented both in terms of citations and sources (five sources, 218 citations, 21.3%). The total number of citations exceeds any other under review (1344 citations). The percentage of sources after the tenth generation is lower than that of al-Tabari (11.3% compared with 12.1% for al-Tabari). And his own opinion accounts for only 3.9% of the total as opposed to 12.1% for al-Tabari. On all accounts of authoritativeness and exhaustiveness, then, he trumps al-Tabari. (This is, of course, if we suppose that even weak *hadiths* are still highly reliable, see *Limitations*). In this regard, this study corroborates Calder's claim that,

> In all formal respects, Qurtubi belongs firmly within the tradition initiated and defined by Tabari; his artistry, however, is measurably greater …. It is in these senses that one might claim for his *tafsir* that it is the most complete fulfillment of the possibilities of the tradition.[74]

Al-Qurtubi's work is also the only *tafsir* here considered, in which all the four imams make the final list. This is not to be wondered at since his *tafsir* is renowned for its legal slant as is evidenced by the title of the work: *al-Jami' li-ahkam al-Qur'an* ('The compendium of legal rulings of the Qur'an'). This also accounts for the prominence of the Readers as this has a bearing on legal aspects as stated above. Imam Malik is the most quoted of the four imams (position 7, 46 citations), which is to be expected given al-Qurtubi was himself

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71 The 'seven Readers' refers to 'Readers,' of the Qur'anic Readings as defined in Christopher Melchert in "Ibn Mujahid and the establishment of the seven Qur'anic readings," 5-22.

72 For a particularly significant example of how the Readings affect the translation and thus, the prescription of certain Islamic Laws, see Q5:6.

73 Calder, *Classical Islam*, 97.

74 Calder, "Tafsir from Tabari to Ibn Kathir," 110.

a *Maliki*.[75] However, it is a testament to his egalitarian approach and distinctive scrupulousness that Imam al-Shafi'i is cited almost as many times (position 9, 45 citations), followed by Imam Abu Hanifa (position 16, 27 citations), and finally Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (position 26, 19 citations).

Nevertheless, al-Qurtubi's fidelity to Imam Malik does not simply take the guise of direct citation, one observes that many of his post tenth generation scholars such as Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah ibn al-'Arabi al-Andalusi, were also *Maliki* jurists.[76] Al-Dhahabi, though more interested in where he buried his father, also mentions that he wrote his own *tafsir* of the Qur'an.[77] It is clear, however, from the titles of his works listed by al-Dhahabi, that though he was very much a polymath, one of his main interests was *fiqh*.[78] Al-Dhahabi is full of praise of this scholar, describing him as having 'a piercing intellect' (*thaqib al-dhihn*), being 'sweet of speech' ('*adhb al-mantiq*), 'abundant in good qualities' (*karim al-shama'il*), and having 'complete dominion' (*kamil al-su'dud*). He also comments that 'his administration was praised' (*humida sayasatuhu*), and that 'he was a man of power and authority' (*kana dha shidda wa satwa*) but he was 'deposed' and thereafter 'devoted himself to the propagation and recording of knowledge' (*aqbal 'ala nashr al-'ilm wa tadwinihi*). [79] Ahmad ibn Yahya Dabbi (d. 599/1202-3), too, corroborates this account of Ibn 'Arabi. He writes that the Andalusian was 'a jurist, a *hafiz*, a many-sided scholar ('*alim mutafannin*), a famous *muhaddith'*, and 'a man of culture' (*adib*) who wrote 'pure poetry' (*ra'iq al-sh'ir*), of which he lists a few samples.[80] In short, he was 'a master of his time' (*ra'is waqtihi*).[81]

This raises the question of whether al-Qurtubi was just as fastidious in the criticism of the credentials of his other sources before including them in his magnum opus. The only other sources exclusive to the al-Qurtubi's *tafsir* are Malik ibn Anas ibn Malik ibn Abi 'Amir and Abu Ja'far Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Isma'il ibn al-Nahhas. The reputation of the former is such that he requires no further mention here. The latter, too, does al-Dhahabi celebrate, remarking that, in his time, he was compared to Ibn al-Anbari (*kana yunazzar fi zamanihi bi Ibn al-Anbari*).[82] The roster of his works makes apparent that his specialty was Arabic grammar and linguistics; many

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75 Mawil Izzi Dien, *Islamic Law*: *from historical foundations to contemporary practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 18.

76 Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar a'lam al-nubala*', 20:198.

77 Ibid, 199.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid, 200.

80 Dabbi, Ahmad ibn Yahya. *Bughyat al-multamis fi tarikh rijal ahl al-Andalus* (Cairo: Dar al-Katib al-'Arabi, 1967), 92-99.

81 Ibid, 92.

82 Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar a'lam al-nubala*',15:401.

of his works on this topic are still widely used.[83] Muhammad ibn al-Hasan Abu Bakr al-Zubaydi (d. 379/989/90) describes him as 'broad in knowledge' (*wasi' al-'ilm*), 'having reported many transmissions' (*ghazir al-riwaya*), and 'having written much' (*kathir al-ta'lif*). He continues, 'He has books on the Qur'an which are useful, among them, *Ma'ani al-Qur'an*, and *I'rab al-Qur'an*.'[84] Both these sources agree, it seems, on the authority of al-Nahhas; they likewise agree on his transmission of many *riwayas* (sing. *riwaya*, pl. *riwayat*). Al-Dhahabi says, 'He transmitted much from 'Ali ibn Sulayman al-Saghir,'[85] it thus behoves us to determine who this man was and whether transmissions from him are credible. Al-Dhahabi gives him the much coveted rank of *muwaththaq* in *hadith*.[86] This high opinion is called into question by al-Zubaydi who remarks that 'Ali ibn Sulayman (d. Baghdad 315/927?) used to memorise the defamatory poems (*hija'*) of Ibn al-Rumi about him and then dictate them. So when Ibn al-Rumi saw that they did not affect him, he stopped.[87] This may be interpreted in two ways: it could be that al-Zubaydi is praising 'Ali ibn Sulayman for his patience and humility. However, he perhaps is drawing attention to 'Ali ibn Sulayman's warranting such derision from Ibn al-Rumi. Yaqut seems to prefer the latter interpretation.[88] He also writes that 'Ali ibn Sulayman was 'very given to jest' (*kathir al-mazah*),[89] and that 'he was not very knowledgeable in transmitting reports or grammar.'[90] This underscores that even if the sources themselves are reliable, as is the case with all of al-Qurtubi's sources, the people from whom they transmit may well be less so.

THE *TAFSIR* OF IBN KATHIR

The *tafsir* of Ibn Kathir, though chronologically the last, is the earliest in terms of the sources cited. That is to say, almost all of Ibn Kathir's sources and citations are from the first four generations (20 of 28 sources, 540 citations, 90.0% of total). The Prophet accounts for a staggering 36.2% of all citations, a figure not even approached by the other works. This substantiates Calder's claim that 'any systematic reading of his work will reveal that his primary objective is to measure the text of the Qur'an against the established

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83 Ibid. I refer to *I'rab al-Qur'an* and *al-Kafi,* which are continue to be very popular.

84 Al-Zubaydi, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan Abu Bakr. *Tabaqat al-nahwiyyin wa al-lughawiyyin*, ed. Muhammad Abu al-Fadl Ibrahim, 1st ed. (Egypt: Muhammad Sami Amin al-Khanji al-Kutubi, 1954), 239.

85 Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar a'lam al-nubala*', 15:401.

86 Ibid, 14:481.

87 Al-Zubaydi, *Tabaqat al-nahwiyyin wa al-lughawiyyin,* 126.

88 Yaqut, *Mu'jam al-udaba',* 5:220-225;224.

89 Ibid, 5:222.

90 Ibid, 220.

collections of the prophetic *hadith*.'[91] Ibn Kathir also appears to advocate the *operor ut ego operor* approach to *tafsir bi'l-ra'y,* as his own contribution constitutes a meagre 1.8% of the total, less than half of his closest rival. Almost three-quarters of his sources (74.8%) are to be found in all five works. The only slight surprise, it may be argued, is the importance attached to the opinion of al-Tabari, who is cited more times than the author himself (cited twelve times as opposed to eleven for Ibn Kathir). His *tafsir* is also in complete agreement with al-Tabari's when it comes to the scarcity of Readers (See Reader analysis). It is apparent from this evidence that Ibn Kathir relied heavily on the *tafsir* of al-Tabari, and succeeded in authoring a bowdlerized version of it. Calder writes that Ibn Kathir believed that many exegetes 'wasted their time and passed on lies.'[92] He alleges that this is 'an opinion reflecting a lack of faith in every major exegete from Tabari to Qurtubi.'[93] This seems extremely unlikely given Ibn Kathir's reliance on al-Tabari's *tafsir*. Of course, the possibility that Ibn Kathir cites al-Tabari in order to refute his arguments cannot be completely dismissed. However, this too, seems implausible as the top sources for each generation of both works, save the sixth, are the same. Calder charges Ibn Kathir with impoverishing the *tafsir* tradition with his approach in which he argues for a 'single "correct" reading.'[94] He quotes Ibn Kathir as having said that whatever is '"of no use or value in practical religion" should be abandoned.'[95] This conclusion seems to be at odds with his dependence on a *tafsir*, which Calder affirms, is firmly polyvalent.[96] It is more probable that he simply selected, what he considered to be, the more reliable interpretations from al-Tabari's *tafsr*. This would then be a move towards concision and manageability of an increasingly large tradition without scorning the tradition itself.

However, to reduce Ibn Kathir's work to an abridgement of al-Tabari's, is to do it a grave disservice. Indeed, it may be observed that there are five sources exclusive to this *tafsir* (four, if Ibn Kathir himself, is removed), more than two other works here reviewed. Two of these four ('Abd Allah ibn 'Umar ibn al-Khattab and al-Barra' ibn 'Azib ibn al-Harith) are from the first generation, with the other two (Zayd ibn Aslam and Ibrahim ibn Yazid ibn Qays al-Nakha'i) being from the third and sixth generations respectively. Such is Ibn 'Umar's reputation that we need not question his credentials, suffice it to say, he is cited in all of the six main *hadith* books.[97] Al-Barra,

91 Calder, "Tafsir from Tabari to Ibn Kathir," 130.
92 Ibid, 121.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid, 124.
95 Ibid, 121.
96 Ibid, 110.
97 Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar a'lam al-nubala*', 3:203.

too, is unimpeachable: he witnessed many of the Prophetic expeditions, but was too young to participate.[98] He also transmitted many *hadiths*, of which 22 are to be found in the *Sahihayn*, fifteen more in al-Bukhari's *sahih* alone, and six in Muslim.[99] Concerning Zayd ibn Aslam, al-Dhahabi writes,

> He used to have a circle for learning in the mosque of the Messenger. Abu Hazim al-A'raj said, "Verily, I saw, in the circle of Zayd ibn Aslam, 40 jurists with less hair than us (*adna khasla*) than us [i.e. older], helping one another in what has gone before us [*hadiths*], and I did not see in his gathering any doubters (*mutamarin*) or any disputers (*mutanazi'in*) regarding *hadiths* which do not benefit us."[100]

Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari (d.256/870) comments that 'Ali ibn al-Husayn sat by Zayd ibn Aslam in his gathering and transgressed the etiquette of the gathering by talking about irrelevant things to which Zayd replied, 'A man may only sit in this gathering to speak about that which will benefit his religion.'[101] The reputation of this '*alim* (pl. *'ulama'*), too, it seems, is irreproachable, which leaves only al-Nakha'i.

Al-Dhahabi writes of al-Nakha'i, 'He, and al-Sha'bi were *muftis* of the people of Kufa in their time, he was a pious man, a jurist, [and] god-fearing.'[102] It seems that all of the sources which make Ibn Kathir's list are of the highest order in terms of their reliability.

LIMITATIONS

Of the many limitations to a study of this type is the chracterisation of what is attributable to the author. This work includes only those citations the authors openly attribute to themselves prefacing them with phrases such as '*qultu*.' However, many other citations could easily by assigned to them which are less explicitly framed. Even in the numerical analysis of the explicit statements, one cannot adequately gauge the author's intervention. For example, al-Razi's interjections tend to be very long and complex. This study takes no account of the length of these 'painstaking arguments,'[103] which compels

98 Ibid, 3:195.
99 Ibid, 3:195-96.
100 Ibid, 5:316.
101 Al-Bukhari, Muhammad ibn Isma'il. *Kitab al-tarikh al-kabir,* ed. M. 'Abdul Mu'id Khan, 1st ed. (Hyderabad: Matba'at Jam'iyat Da'irat al-Ma'arif al-'Uthmaniyya, 1941-64), 2:387.
102 Ibid, 3:203.
103 Gatje, *The Quran and its exegesis,* 37.

Calder to describe al-Razi as an 'intellectual diamond cutter.'[104] Indeed, the very arrangements in which the opinions are presented have been known to betray the authors' own proclivities.[105] Calder writes,

> It is obviously true that the exploration of the text … is achieved to a considerable degree through the citation of authorities. The personal input of an individual exegete is measured both by his selection and manipulation of past authorities and his additions to these.[106]

This study cannot measure this 'manipulation'. It may also be that one exegete adduces the same *matn* through a series of different *isnads* whereas another is content to simply give the most well-known; a device to which Wansbrough alludes.[107] This is frequently the case in al-Tabari's work. A study of this kind does not recognise repetition. A *tafsir* may be lacking a certain element due to the author's having written another work on that particular issue (as is the case with Reader analysis being omitted in al-Tabari's *tafsir*). This would then give a false impression as to whether or not the author regards that facet of inquiry as important.

There is also the matter of the circumstances in which certain citations are presented, which this study does not address. Nor does it take account of various suspect citations of trustworthy sources or trustworthy citations of suspect sources. Indeed, one of the chief limitations of this study is its consummate contextual dissociation, such that we do not know who is responding to whom, why, when, or how, resulting in blind speculation and unsubstantiated conjecture. Indeed it may be the case that an exegete cites many early sources in order to repudiate them, or later sources to corroborate them. Gatje writes that al-Tabari 'openly expresses reservations concerning the validity of certain material and does not spare the pupils of Ibn 'Abbas.'[108] This casts Mujahid in a completely different light. It may be that the reason he is al-Tabari's top source is because of a combination of this corroboration and refutation. Finally, there is the lack of contextualisation with regards to the authenticity of *hadiths*. Weak *hadiths*, in this study, as they are attributed to the Prophet, would carry the same weight as corroborated ones.

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104 Calder, "Tafsir from Tabari to Ibn Kathir," 114.

105 'Abdulkader Tayob, "An analytical survey of al-Tabari's exegesis of the cultural symbolic construct of *fitna*" in *Approaches to the Qur'an,* ed. G. R. Hawting and 'Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 157.

106 Calder, "Tafsir from Tabari to Ibn Kathir," 109.

107 Wansbrough, *Quranic studies*, 1.

108 Gatje, *The Quran and its exegesis,* 34.

CONCLUSION

Despite the numerous limitations and large scope of this study, some tangible conclusions may be drawn, the most important of which is that though all the commentators agree the Qur'an should be interpreted by the Prophet (s.a.w.), his Companions (r.a.), and the *Tabi'un*, it is only Ibn Kathir, and to a lesser degree, al-Qurtubi and al-Tabari, who can legitimately claim to have truly adhered to this. It is also interesting to note that the Prophet (s.a.w.), though unanimously seen as the definitive interpreter of the Qur'an, plays a minor role in these commentaries (notwithstanding the *tafsir* of Ibn Kathir). Ibn 'Abbas, on the other hand, affirms his position as "*Imam al-Mufassirin*" as he is the most cited Companion of the Prophet (s.a.w.) according to all the commentaries here reviewed. Mujahid and al-Hasan al-Basri stand out as the two major exegetes of the third generation, while Qatadah is consistently the most cited member of the fourth. It would appear from this analysis that the contribution the "Readers" and "Students" make to the commentaries is largely negligible (with the exception of the former to the tafsir of al-Razi, and the latter to the *tafsir* of al-Tabari). The tafsir of al-Qurtubi seems to be the most well-sourced, closely followed by al-Tabari. Al-Zamakhshari's *tafsir* is the least cited which is probably due to the fact that he features significantly more prominently in his *tafsir* than any of his counterparts do in theirs. Finally, al-Razi's reputation as a stalwart of *Sunni* orthodoxy against the perceived Mu'tazili onslaught is confirmed as a conspicuously large proportion of his *tafsir* appears to be a response to al-Zamakhshari.

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