Introduction

Georges Tamer

The fourth volume of the *Handbook of Qurʾānic Hermeneutics* consists of studies on hermeneutical approaches to the Qurʾān in the 19th–20th centuries AD / 13th–15th centuries AH. The most important feature of this era was probably the tension between preserving traditional methods and interpretations of the Qurʾān on the one hand and introducing new ones on the other. The Qurʾānic hermeneutics in this period was deeply rooted in Islamic exegesis, meaning that it is possible to speak of a continuity of certain lines of traditional Qurʾānic exegesis in modern times.[1] There was certainly no comprehensive breakthrough of innovative questions or methods toward approaching the Qurʾān. However, while the scholars presented in this volume continued to base their interpretations on famous classical commentators such as aṭ-Ṭabarī, ath-Thaʿlabī, az-Zamakhsharī, al-Qurṭubī, al-Bayḍāwī, Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī, and Ibn Kathīr, they also began to carefully formulate new questions and develop new methods to approach the Qurʾān according to the needs that arose in the wake of colonialism, scientific progress, and the ideological challenges presented by the modern world.[2]

Many Qurʾān commentaries from this period barely made any substantial additions to the corpus of previously existing interpretations. Nonetheless, two critical issues fueled the emergence of new exegetical trends. The first was the need to demonstrate the compatibility of the Qurʾānic worldview with modern rationalism and the natural sciences. In this sense, one major concern of influential exegetes like Sayyid Aḥmad Khan and Muḥammad ʿAbduh was to work out the ways in which the Qurʾān and modern rationalism do *not* contradict each other. The second theme that stimulated the emergence of new ideas was the search for an appropriate political and social order that would meet the requirements of modernity without contradicting Qurʾānic principles. For example, discussions about the legal status of women arose due to aspirations toward gender equality.[3]

The scholars presented in this volume flourished in lands ranging from Yemen to India, from Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and

1 For a useful overview of classical and medieval Qurʾānic hermeneutics, see Claude Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval," in *EQ*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, accessed August 15, 2023, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00058. Rotraud Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Early Modern and Contemporary," in *EQ*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, accessed August 15, 2023, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00059, offers a systematic overview of modern Qurʾān exegesis summarizing its main features and particularities.

2 Cf. Johanna Pink, *Sunnitischer Tafsīr in der modernen islamischen Welt* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 36 ff.

3 See on this topic: Kathrin Klausing, "Two Twentieth-Century Exegetes between Traditional Scholarship and Modern Thought: Gender Concepts in the Tafsīrs of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī and al-Ṭāhir Ibn ʿĀshūr," in *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre*, eds. Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 419–440.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110582284-001

Iran, to Indonesia, Bosnia, Pakistan, and even the US. Most of them dealt hermeneutically with the Qurʾān under the influence of colonialism. Interpreting scripture was part of their struggle for freedom and independence, and the search for their own Islamic identity. Just as the Qurʾān is inextricably linked to its context, so too are hermeneutical efforts to explain its contents and relate them to the modern social and political contexts of their emergence. Thus, an important concern for these scholars was to emphasize the strongly felt need for educational and social reform in their own societies. Making the Qurʾān's contents understandable to everyone was part of their effort to improve society. Influenced by thinkers such as the European philosophers of the Enlightenment, they saw modern Muslim education as the most necessary means to bring about comprehensive development in their postcolonial countries.

The hermeneutical approaches to the Qurʾān in the 19th–20th centuries show the emergence of new methods, which can be briefly summarized as follows:

– Scientific exegesis (*at-tafsīr al-ʿilmī*): in response to the widespread backwardness of their societies and their refusal to submit to colonial powers, one significant approach in this period was the development of scientific exegesis (*at-tafsīr al-ʿilmī*) based on the conviction that all modern scientific discoveries had been anticipated in the Qurʾān and only needed to be uncovered. While Muḥammad ʿAbduh tried to find modern discoveries in the Qurʾān, e. g., by equating microbes with jinn, the first author to attribute Qurʾānic references to modern scientific discoveries and developments was Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Iskandarānī. Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī is considered to be the most important representative of scientific Qurʾānic exegesis. However, this method was not received with enthusiasm by most scholars. Some of them, like Rashīd Riḍā, Amīn al-Khūlī, Maḥmūd Shaltūt, and Sayyid Quṭb, clearly reject it as it violates lexicographic rules, ignores the contextuality of the Qurʾānic vocabulary, and neglects the fact that scientific achievements are provisional while the Qurʾān is a religious book of universally valid guidance.[4]
– Literary exegesis (*at-tafsīr al-adabī*): another new hermeneutical approach to the Qurʾān in the 20th century consisted in the use of literary methods to explain the Qurʾān. Initiated by Amīn al-Khūlī, this approach treated the Qurʾān as a literary work and analyzed it using modern literary methods. Al-Khūlī considered the Qurʾān to be the most important book written in Arabic which could not be understood adequately without understanding the historical context of its emergence in 7th-century Arabia and without knowing the meaning of its words as they were understood by Muḥammad and his audience. The literary treatment of the Qurʾān attracted the interest of al-Khūlī's disciples, such as his wife ʿĀʾisha ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān

4 Although some classical scholars like al-Ghazālī and Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī thought that the Qurʾān encompasses all sciences, they did not identify scientific achievements documented in the Qurʾān. See my critique in: "Revelation, Sciences and Symbolism: Al-Ghazālī's *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*," in *Islam and Rationality. The Impact of al-Ghazālī*. Papers Collected on His 900th Anniversary, Vol. I, ed. Georges Tamer (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 49–88, especially 77 f.

(usually called Bint ash-Shāṭiʾ), Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalafallah, and later Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, who all further developed al-Khūlī's method, each in her or his own way. Even Sayyid Quṭb, who belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood, was affected by the literary method of interpreting the Qurʾān.

– Emphasizing the historicity of the Qurʾān: the serious attention being paid to the language of the Qurʾān and its first receivers living in 7th-century Arabia corresponded with a wide-ranging interest in its historicity, influenced by the historical-critical treatment of the Qurʾān launched by the German scholar Theodor Nöldeke and developed by his disciples and other European scholars. One of the pioneers of this approach was the Pakistani scholar Fazlur Rahman, who did not write a commentary but proposed in his investigation of the major topics of the Qurʾān a hermeneutical approach that distinguished between its eternal message and its historical context, aiming to emphasize its relevance to the present time.[5]
– The Qurʾān as a constitution: for their part, fundamentalist Qurʾān commentators such as Sayyid Quṭb, Abū l-Aʿlā l-Mawdūdī, and Saʿīd Ḥawwā sought "a new immediacy to the Qurʾān."[6] They tried to eliminate the hermeneutical distance between their world and the world in which the Qurʾān had been proclaimed by claiming immediate access to the true meanings of the Qurʾān, which, according to these exegetes, applies universally and forms the basis for an Islamic political and social order at all times and everywhere.

Most of the scholars whose Qurʾānic hermeneutics are investigated in this volume wrote commentaries explaining the Qurʾān verse by verse (*tafsīr musalsal*) according to the standard order of the suras. Some of these commentators interpreted only one part of the Qurʾān.[7] However, there are scholars who dealt with specific topics in the Qurʾān (*tafsīr mawḍūʿī*, thematic interpretation).[8] A few scholars like Muḥammad ʿIzzat Darwaza arranged their commentaries according to the chronological order of the revelation of the suras.[9]

It is not easy to capture the common features of Qurʾānic hermeneutics in the 19th–20th centuries that are shared by all commentators. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that many modern commentators sought to extract practical and applicable rules from the

5 Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qurʾān* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1989²). Daud Rahbar (1926–2013/1344–1434) is another Pakistani scholar who noted that God's eternal speech is always adapted to its context and that the circumstances in which it is received past and present must be taken into account every time it is interpreted. Cf. Daud Rahbar, *God of Justice: A Study in the Ethical Doctrine of the Qurʾān* (Leiden: Brill, 1960).

6 Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Early Modern and Contemporary."

7 Such as Muḥammad ʿAbduh's *Tafsīr juzʾ ʿamma*, which includes only the interpretation of the last part of the Qurʾān – suras 78–114 – and his exegesis of sura 1, *al-Fātiḥa* (The Opening).

8 Like Fazlur Rahman's book *Major Themes of the Qurʾān* (footnote 5) and ʿĀʾisha ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān's study on the Qurʾānic concept of man *Maqāl fī l-insān. Dirāsa qurʾāniyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1969).

9 Muḥammad ʿIzzat Darwaza, *at-Tafsīr al-ḥadīth* (Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya 1962).

Qurʾān rather than to analyze it in a detached scholarly manner. They aimed to make the Qurʾānic message directly relevant and useful to contemporary believers. Some commentators aligned their exegesis with Salafī ideas, focusing on the aspect of guidance in their interpretations. Furthermore, in modern Qurʾānic hermeneutics, the fundamental conflict between exegesis based on tradition (*at-tafsīr bi-n-naql*) and individual, rationalist exegesis (*at-tafsīr bi-r-raʾy*) persisted, although some commentators, such as ash-Shaʿrāwī, were not interested in addressing it explicitly. Muḥammad Abū Zahra and Hamka, for example, advocated a mixture of both methods. As the presentations of individual scholars in the following chapters will show, most modern exegetes rejected abrogation (*naskh*), instead attempting to resolve apparent inconsistencies between Qurʾānic verses by pointing to the variety of contexts behind such verses. Likewise, most commentators from this period opposed the use of Jewish and Christian traditional materials (*isrāʾīliyyāt*) in Qurʾānic exegesis. In doing so, some of them may have drawn on the dismissive attitude of traditionalist Ibn Kathīr. However, some exegetes, such as Rashīd Riḍā in *Tafsīr al-manār*, explicitly opposed the use of *isrāʾīliyyāt* because they saw in the *isrāʾīliyyāt* an attempt to undermine Islam. This attitude increased significantly with the establishment of the state of Israel.[10] Remarkably, the abandonment of external interpretative materials was accompanied by an increased interest in the interpretation of the Qurʾān through the Qurʾān (*tafsīr al-Qurʾān bi-l-Qurʾān*), which, in turn, corresponded to the traditional teaching which emphasizes that the Qurʾān's coherent structure is one component of its inimitability (*iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*).[11]

In the following, I would like to offer a concise overview of the scholars covered in this volume and their main achievements in the field of Qurʾānic hermeneutics. They are ordered according to the years of their death. The dates given before the backslash (/) are given according to the Julian Calendar and those following the backslash according to the Islamic Calendar.

The democratization of *ijtihād*, or independent reasoning in Islamic jurisprudence, has been a subject of debate among Muslim scholars since the beginning of the 19th century. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī sh-Shawkānī (d. 1834/1250) challenged the traditional notion that it is extremely difficult to become a *mujtahid* (a jurist qualified to engage in *ijtihād*). He argued that the barrier to becoming a *mujtahid* is relatively easy to overcome, contrary to the views of more conservative scholars who advocated closing the gate of *ijtihād* after a certain generation. Ash-Shawkānī's most influential work, *Fatḥ al-qadīr*, is regarded as one of the most important commentaries on the Qurʾān in modern times. It synthesizes the works of earlier scholars and incorporates methodologies from trans-

10 According to J.M.S. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation* (1880–1960) (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 16, a distancing from traditional *isrāʾīliyyāt* is one of the major features of modern Qurʿānic hermeneutics.
11 The briefly stated observations above overlap with the points discussed by Johanna Pink, *Sunnitischer Tafsīr in der modernen islamischen Welt* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 112–122. Cf. also Pink's conclusions to her extensive study and her categorization of modern exegetes, 301–314.

mitted Hadith, the reports of companions, and philology. This commentary gained widespread popularity because it was promoted by reformist scholars such as Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān (1832–90/1248–1307) and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, and it also received support from the Yemeni and Saudi governments. As a result, *Fatḥ al-qadīr* has become a standard reference work among modern Sunni Muslims worldwide.[12]

Another scholar, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Iskandarānī (d. 1888–9/1306), offers a unique interpretation of the Qurʾānic verses by drawing inspiration from diverse sources, including Greek and Muslim philosophers, *tafsīr* and Hadith scholars, jurists, and philologists. He presents a comprehensive, Islamized version of scientific works, with an emphasis on cosmological, natural, and botanical topics. Al-Iskandarānī also criticizes the marginalization of women and addresses the issue of evolution by asserting the divine origin of Adam.

Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1898/1315) was, according to Ignaz Goldziher, the founder of the modern interpretation of the Qurʾān.[13] Khān was an educational reformer on the Indian subcontinent. His experiences during the 1857/1273 uprising against the British led him to explore the interrelation of reason and revelation. He emphasized reason as the ultimate criterion of truth and sought to reconcile miraculous Qurʾānic accounts with natural causation. Sayyid Aḥmad's commentary on the Qurʾān is structured as a series of essays, addressing issues relevant to 19th-century British India, including science and religion, interfaith relations, and rules of warfare, based on modern French and British sociology. He presented 15 hermeneutical principles, affirming the authenticity and inimitability of the Qurʾān. Sayyid Aḥmad's hermeneutics was influenced by scholars associated with Delhi's Madrasa Raḥīmiyya and aimed to broaden Muslim engagement with the Qurʾān.

Similarly, Egyptian scholar Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905/1323) sought to make the Qurʾān accessible to a modern Muslim audience while addressing the various intellectual and social challenges of his time. He emphasized the moral and doctrinal guidance provided by the Qurʾān, and his work initiated a laicization of Qurʾānic discourses. ʿAbduh employed an ethical and rationalist hermeneutics to extract the moral message of the Qurʾān and take a stand against blind obedience to past authorities. In the commentary *Tafsīr al-manār*, of which ʿAbduh wrote only the first parts and which was elaborated and completed by his disciple Rashīd Riḍā after his death, ʿAbduh emphasized the special harmony between Islam, reason, and science while at the same time striving to eradicate superstitious and folkloristic interpretations. What ʿAbduh and Khan have in common is that when there is a contradiction between the Qurʾānic revelation and modern scientific knowledge, the latter is preferred, and the interpretation of the cor-

12 Johanna Pink, "Where does Modernity Begin? Muḥammad al-Shawkānī and the Tradition of Tafsīr," in Tafsīr *and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre*, eds. Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 323–360, presents a thoughtful evaluation of ash-Shawkānī's Qurʾānic hermeneutics on the threshold of modernity.

13 Ignaz Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* (Leiden: Brill, 1920), 319 ff.

responding Qurʾānic passage is adapted to the current state of scientific knowledge – a methodological principle that can already be found in the Qurʾānic hermeneutics of Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (d. 1198/595).[14]

Next, the focus shifts to Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1914/1332), a prominent figure in the Damascene Salafiyya of the 19th century. Al-Qāsimī advocated inner-Islamic unity and opposed sectarianism, demonstrating pan-Islamic inclinations toward the Shia. His attitude to reform aligned with the *nahḍa* movement that sought to advance intellectual modernity in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon from the middle of the 19th century onward. In his Qurʾān commentary, he exhibits an exceptional, eclectic approach to Sunni *tafsīr* tradition. He includes the works of scholars outside the established Ottoman curriculum, such as Ibn ʿArabī and Ibn Taymiyya, and even incorporates Shiite scholars like Ṭabāṭabāʾī. His adaptation of the works of al-Makkī and al-Ghazālī further demonstrates his tendency to incorporate the teachings of admired Sufis in his understanding of Islamic reform. This approach challenges the tradition of imitation (*taqlīd*) in Qurʾānic exegesis.

It was under the impact of the French occupation of Algeria in 1830/1245 that Ibāḍī scholar Aṭfayyash (d. 1914/1332) carried out his intellectual efforts to spark a renaissance in his religious community. In response to attempts at assimilation, reform movements within Algerian Sunni Islam emerged, emphasizing a return to the Qurʾān as the primary source of Islamic doctrine and legislation. Aṭfayyash played a significant role in introducing the hermeneutic exegesis of ambiguous verses in the Qurʾān, which created an open space for interpretation.

Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Lūqash Tiṭwānī (d. 1923/1341) was a Moroccan Sufi who actively engaged in politics like many Sufis of his time. After the Spanish occupation of Tetouan, he started to behave as an Ottoman subject. In his writings, he presented interpretations of the Qurʾān from three perspectives: the exoteric Islamic understanding, the esoteric level of faith, and the sublime level of understanding known as *iḥsān*, understood as divine favor. He adapted Qurʾānic reflections to align with the political interests and ambitions of the Ottoman Caliphate and to criticize Moroccan society and the Moroccan state.

Ḥamīd ad-Dīn Farāhī's (d. 1930/1349) name became well-known in the Muslim world and academia, particularly in the 1980s, when interest in the structure of the Qurʾān grew, leading to the emergence of the Farāhī school of Qurʾānic exegesis. He thrived during British rule in India and offered Muslims an intellectual foundation rooted in the Qurʾān from which to confront the intellectual modernity emerging in South Asia. Farāhī's work can be seen as an outcome of the interactions that took place between larger Qurʾānic exegetical ideas in British India, and it aimed to develop con-

14 A recent study on ʿAbduh is: Johanna Pink, "ʿAbduh, Muḥammad," in *EQ*, edited by Johanna Pink, accessed August 5, 2023, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_050483. First published online in 2015.

crete methods to interpret the Qurʾān and foster unity among Muslims. Two notable features of Farāhī's Qurʾānic hermeneutics are his specific view of Qurʾānic coherence and his interpretative methods, with which he critically reviewed the Muslim tradition of understanding the Qurʾān. He emphasized the importance of understanding the pre-Islamic Arabian social background in order to grasp the moral fabric emphasized in the Qurʾān.

In his Qurʾānic hermeneutics, Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935/1354) emphasized that the Qurʾān provided guidance for its first audience and was essential for individual and social progress. He connected his interpretations to contemporary events and sought to strengthen Muslims' intellectual independence from European influence while reforming society. Riḍā's vision of reform involved spiritually reenacting the so-called "glorious past" of early pious Muslims (*as-salaf*) to address contemporary issues, which aligned with the Wahhabite religious elite's perspective. Despite disseminating Taymiyyan hermeneutics, Riḍā's own exegetical endeavors often endorsed classical forms of hermeneutics and relied on classical sources. He viewed reform (*iṣlāḥ*) as the dominant prism through which the Qurʾān should be understood as a driving force for comprehensive social reform.

Muḥammad Iqbal (d. 1938/1357), a prominent philosophical and literary figure in 20th century Muslim India, was not a conventional Qurʾānic exegete. However, his thought is relevant to the field of Qurʾānic exegesis from one specific angle. He was concerned about the depressing state of India's Muslim community and believed that real change in society would begin by transforming how people thought. He paralleled this view with the Qurʾānic idea that inward change precedes outward change. In his poetry, Iqbal engaged with the Qurʾān through paraphrastic renditions of its verses. He emphasized the unity of humanity as a foundational teaching of the Qurʾān. Aside from paraphrasing Qurʾānic verses with literary merit, Iqbal was interested in drawing practical and social lessons from the Qurʾān for the Muslim community.

ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd b. Bādīs's (d. 1940/1358) Qurʾānic hermeneutics was intricately connected to his political, social, and religious view of colonial Algeria. He deliberately used simple language that would be understood by a broader audience, aiming to reach all Algerian Muslims, not just scholars. Instead of delving into lexicography or grammatical intricacies, Ibn Bādīs strove to make the Qurʾān accessible to everyone. The primary topics he addressed were religious and moral in nature. He expressed concern about ignorance, cultural and religious stagnation, and the emergence of a new generation drifting away from religion. The most urgent matters in his eyes were to mount resistance against "Francization" (French cultural influence) and to advocate for traditional popular religious practices, which were facing opposition from religious scholars. Even today, Ibn Bādīs remains a central figure in discussions surrounding national identity, Arabization, and the role of Islam in Algerian society.

Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī (d. 1940/1359), an Egyptian thinker, commentator, and anti-colonialist, has been recognized as the most prominent representative of the "scientific interpretation" (*at-tafsīr al-ʿilmī*) of the Qurʾān. He aimed to bridge the gap between

the modern sciences and Islamic traditions, and wrote his commentary, supplemented with notes on modern scientific findings, in response to Muslims' perceived "backwardness" compared to Europe in the 19th–20th centuries. Jawharī's commentary on the Qurʾān was inclusive and comprehensive, discussing various Islamic sects and also examining lesser-known (non-)Muslim communities such as Chinese, Japanese, Malay, Turkish, and West African communities. He emphasized the importance of Asian languages and philosophies, including those of China and Confucius, alongside Islamic ones for Muslims, dedicating specific sections of his commentary to these often-neglected materials.

Compared to other Muslim scholars in jurisprudence and theology, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā l-Marāghī (d. 1945/1364) had a relatively small and concise body of work. Most of his publications were short epistles written for specific occasions or in the course of his work as a supreme judge and Shaykh al-Azhar. He did not publish any monographs. In the field of Qurʾānic studies, al-Marāghī took an eclectic approach, addressing the issue of translating the Qurʾān into other languages and specific verses in short treatises and Ramadan lectures. Surprisingly, he did not support the Salafi emphasis on the Arabic nature of the scripture; instead, he argued in favor of translating the Qurʾān and using translated passages in prayer. He based his arguments on classical scholarship and his own theological reasoning, avoiding the impression that he was merely yielding to external pressure. Finally, al-Marāghī rejected the idea of interpreting the Qurʾān in the light of the modern natural sciences.

The Qurʾān commentary of Najdī scholar ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān as-Saʿdī (d. 1957/1376) played a significant role in educating religious scholars in Saudi Arabia. It is characterized by its easy-to-understand style, making it accessible to students of Islamic theology and laypeople alike. This style was well-suited to the public educational infrastructure implemented by the Saudi government in the mid-20th century, where religious education was integrated into various curricula, including the natural sciences. The commentary aligns with Saudi national identity, where being a Muslim is considered essential. As-Saʿdī's deliberate omission of any mentions of differences in opinions and scholarly discussions of Qurʾānic interpretation serves to deliver and explain the meaning of the Qurʾān's content without getting caught up in the complexities of varying opinions.

Abūl Kalām Āzād (d. 1958/1377) was deeply involved in Indian politics and fought for freedom from British rule. After his release from prison, he founded journals and newspapers in which he vehemently criticized British government policies. His ideas were circulated throughout South Asia. He was influenced by Shāh Walī Allāh and followed his principles. He was also inspired by German orientalists, especially in his discussions of historical issues in the Qurʾān. Āzād aimed to make his interpretation of the Qurʾān accessible to ordinary people, emphasizing the importance of simplicity and clarity in conveying its true message without unnecessary details.

Bediuzzaman Said Nursī (d. 1960/1379) was a prominent Turkish thinker and scholar who had a significant impact on the social and intellectual development of Islam in

modern Turkey. His career began in the late 19th-century Ottoman seminaries and continued into the 20th century, covering both the Ottoman and Turkish Republic periods. In his approach to the Qurʾān, Nursi criticized the use of *isrāʾīliyyāt*. He believed that the Qurʾān itself and authentic Hadiths were the primary sources for understanding the Qurʾān. Instead of relying on the *isrāʾīliyyāt*, he advocated using modern sciences and scientifically confirmed information along with true narratives and reliable historical sources.

Maḥmūd Shaltūt's (d. 1963/1383) Qurʾānic commentary is distinctive in its thematic approach. Rather than adhering to traditional verse-by-verse interpretation, Shaltūt views each sura as a self-contained unit and discusses its themes under frequent subheadings. This method, known as "thematic interpretation" (*tafsīr mawḍūʿī*), has been influential in modern Muslim reasoning about the Qurʾān. Shaltūt's focus on contemporary social and legal issues, rather than the original context of revelation, made his commentary relevant and innovative to his readers. His departure from classical methods of exegesis and his use of jurisprudential tools to derive normative deductions have led to a clearer and less ambiguous understanding of the Qurʾān.

Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1966/1385) developed the method of *at-tafsīr al-adabī*, a literary interpretation of the Qurʾān. He was influenced by Muḥammad ʿAbduh's idea of reforming society through religion. Like ʿAbduh, al-Khūlī observed the lack of education and outdated habits among the Egyptian people. Al-Khūlī's approach to the Qurʾān recognized and accepted a certain degree of ambiguity, but he differed from traditional interpreters by focusing on the linguistic and verbal dimensions. He believed that Qurʾānic words had multiple meanings and that their literal and metaphorical aspects could be understood through literary study. Al-Khūlī's method of literary interpretation served as a sociopolitical and ethical program, aiming to educate Egyptians and transform their religiosity from mere ritual practice to socioethical engagement. He criticized traditional exegesis for failing to reveal the true intention of the Qurʾān, which he saw as a guide for Muslims to achieve social balance. Through his literary method, he moved away from sacralizing the text in its sequential order and instead emphasized understanding and contextualizing its messages.

In his commentary, which covers only the first 27 suras of the Qurʾān, Muḥammad Abū Zahra (d. 1974/1394) combines original and traditional scholarship with a religious focus on the socially relevant issues of his time. He addresses these issues in simple language, following a social reformist and apologetic program similar to that of Rashid Riḍā in *Tafsīr al-manār*. Abū Zahra pays special attention to topics such as social order and family law. He distances himself from earlier works of Qurʾānic exegesis that prioritize scholastic and linguistic discussions over the spiritual dimension of the Qurʾān. He is known for rejecting traditional concepts of abrogation (*naskh*), viewing the verse (*āya*) as a miraculous sign from God that cannot be abrogated. Methodologically, he combines *tafsīr bi-r-raʾy* (interpretation based on personal opinion) and *tafsīr bi-l-maʾthūr* (interpretation based on transmitted reports), but remains critical of excessive reliance on traditions of the sunna.

The early 20th-century political and social circumstances in Lebanon and the world deeply influenced Muḥammad Jawwād Mughniyya's (d. 1979/1400) interpretative approaches. Through his travels and writings, he aimed to inform Islamic society about Westernization, oppression, and colonialism while urging Muslims to think critically about their religion and promoting unity among Islamic denominations. Mughniyya was openly anti-colonial and particularly critical of the United States' support for Israel, which he saw as an enemy of Arabs and Islam. The civil war in Lebanon and the conflict between Israel and the Arab world added to the challenges faced by Muslims in the region. Mughniyya's hermeneutical approach was shaped by these political and social developments, and he adopted a persuasive approach in his exegetical volumes. While avoiding references to *asbāb an-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) and *isrāʾīliyyāt*, his works reflected various theological, jurisprudential, intellectual, and educational perspectives.

Like many modernist commentators, Maḥmūd Ṭāliqānī (d. 1979/1399) emphasized the Qurʾān and Hadith as the authoritative sources for interpreting the Qurʾān. He took the approach of interpreting the Qurʾān with the Qurʾān (*tafsīr al-Qurʾān bi-l-Qurʾān*) promoted by Islamic modernists like Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā. His commentary is eclectic, drawing on various discursive layers, including the modernist Islamic approaches seen in *al-Manār*, and Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī's and Ahmad Khan's commentaries. It also contains a strong political dimension, denouncing Western imperialism and Zionism while promoting pan-Islamism. Additionally, Ṭāliqānī incorporates Shiite traditions and exegetical works into his commentary. He criticizes the over-rationalization of Qurʾānic stories, instead allowing for various interpretations, ranging from the scientific to the mystical, in order to preserve the richness of the Qurʾān's meanings.

The distinguishing characteristic of Muḥammad Bāqir aṣ-Ṣadr's (d. 1980/1400) thought was his inclination toward change in both interpretative method and content. Initially, he focused on understanding the Qurʾānic signifiers to avoid eisegesis, but he later sought to change them to provide a new interpretation. His thematic interpretation involved rearranging the sequence of Qurʾānic verses according to his preferred thematic order, which he referred to as *istinṭāq*, meaning the "inquest" into or "interrogation" of the Qurʾānic text.

Hamka (Haji Abdulmalik ibn Abdulkarim Amrullah) (d. 1981/1401), a prominent figure in Islamic modernism, was deeply influenced by the modern reformist educational environment in Egypt during the 19th century. His ability to reconcile Islamic studies with literary elements, combined with his social activism, journalism, and preaching, made his works widely accessible and admired by a diverse audience. His masterpiece, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, provided rich new insights into the verses of the Qurʾān, deeply influencing millions of Muslims in the Malay-Indonesian world to this day. While Hamka's intense focus on colonialism and modern Judeo-Christian-atheist conspiracies against Islam has captivated the interest of many Muslims, it has made him an exception to rather than a representative of modern Qurʾānic exegesis.

Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981/1401) understood Qurʾānic hermeneutics as the philosophical application of the onto-epistemology of transcendent wisdom. His

primary concern was to empower religious discourse to address modernity. He advocated a "presuppositionless" approach to God's word, positioning it above human discourses, including modern ones, and establishing it as the ultimate authority for judging the validity of human words. Through his commentary, Ṭabāṭabāʾī solidified Qurʾānic exegesis as a rational rather than purely scriptural discipline in the Shiite religious institution.

Husein Djozo (d. 1982/1402), a prominent Bosnian religious scholar in the 20th century, lived during a challenging time for religious beliefs and institutions. He praised the exegetical work of Muḥammad ʿAbduh but did not blindly follow his approach. Unlike ʿAbduh, Djozo did not interpret Qurʾānic injunctions based on modern scientific theories and rejected associations of microorganisms with evil spirits. Instead of a verse-by-verse commentary, Djozo adopted a thematic approach to interpreting the Qurʾān. He advocated metaphorical interpretations when literal meanings contradicted common sense or empirical evidence. His commentary, though incomplete, is a valuable resource for studying the Qurʾān in the Bosnian language. Through his works, Djozo aimed to liberate the Qurʾān from authoritarian commentaries that he believed had contributed to the decline of Islamic thought.

Pakistani scholar Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988/1408) emphasized the importance of understanding the context of the Qurʾān, linking its revelation to Prophet Muḥammad's personality and the conditions of his society. This approach suggests that the Qurʾān's content was significantly influenced by its historical context. Rahman highlighted the Qurʾān's focus on ethics and justice, which he believed should be a primary focus for interpreters. He viewed the Qurʾān not merely as a legal document but as a book of moral principles and exhortations. Rahman distinguished between normative Islam and historical Islam, believing that separating the two was essential for modernizing Islamic learning. He adopted an objective hermeneutical approach, seeking to understand the stable meaning of the text and the original intent of its author. He believed that the Qurʾān possessed transcendent objectivity related to God's intentions during revelation. In cases of conflict between the Hadith and the Qurʾān, Rahman prioritized the Qurʾān as the primary source.

Saʿīd Ḥawwā (d. 1989/1409), a Muslim revivalist, believed that Muslim society was dominated by corruption and that Islam was being humiliated due to ignorance of the religion and Western innovations. In his commentary on the Qurʾān, he focused on examining its textual coherence, seeking thematic unity and structural coherence at both the level of suras and verses. He identified pivotal verses in each sura, which he believed provided the key to understanding the meaning of all the verses in that sura. His interpretation was holistic, viewing the Qurʾān as a coherent book, and cumulative, incorporating the unity of various levels of the Qurʾān into subsequent ones. To demonstrate the integrity of each sura, he divided each sura into smaller thematic parts and examined the connection between the parts and the pivotal verses of the sura.

At first glance, the exegetical framework of Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī (d. 1997/1418) appears to be schematic. While some scholars find his claim that virtually all Qurʾānic suras exist

in pairs to be an exaggeration, those who have studied his work in Urdu find his pairings and explanations plausible. However, his exegesis is not free of discrepancies, ambiguities, or questions about the validity of some arguments. One strong aspect of his system is the relationship that he suggests between Meccan and Medinan suras in sura groups. However, there are some imbalances and odd pairings. Moreover, his claim about the Qurʾān itself suggesting the idea of sura pairs and groups also raises questions. Nonetheless, Iṣlāḥī has made a significant contribution to Qurʾānic studies with original insights and applications of his methodology.

Muḥammad Mutawallī sh-Shaʿrāwī (d. 1998/1419) was a prominent Muslim preacher who introduced television as a medium for delivering Qurʾānic interpretations alongside traditional sermons. He gained fame by preaching on state-controlled media, reaching millions of Egyptians each week. Besides using innovative technology, ash-Shaʿrāwī relied on well-established methods of Qurʾānic exegesis. He often interpreted the Qurʾān intratextually, using one verse to clarify another, and he also employed Hadith and the historical circumstances of revelation (*asbāb an-nuzūl*) to explain verses. His skill in the Arabic language allowed him to focus on the meanings of words and the relationships between them. As a preacher, he used stories, metaphors, and examples from everyday life to explain the Qurʾān and incorporated poetic verses and other rhetorical tools to engage his audience effectively.

As we can see, the works of the scholars presented in this volume represent various contexts and interests in the 19th–20th centuries, highlighting the close relationship between Qurʾānic hermeneutics and the historical contexts in which it developed. All of them emphasize the need for comprehensive reform through scriptural interpretation rather than by simply modifying outdated legal rulings. Each scholar brought unique perspectives and methodologies to Qurʾānic exegesis, reflecting the diverse contexts and challenges of their times.[15]

This fourth volume of the *Handbook of Qurʾānic Hermeneutics* highlights the Qurʾānic hermeneutics of Muslim scholars who flourished in different parts of the world. Authors from different regions and academic disciplines have contributed to this volume. The history of Qurʾānic hermeneutics is marked by its diversity; its scholarly treatment must be just as diverse, as manifested in this volume and all other volumes of the *Handbook*.

It is painful that some other scholars of Qurʾānic hermeneutics who were supposed to be included in this volume are missing. They include Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī (d. 1854/1270), Aḥmad Muṣṭafā l-Marāghī (d. 1952/1364), Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966/1386), aṭ-Ṭāhir b. ʿĀshūr (d. 1973/1393), Muṣṭafā Khomeinī (d. 1977/1397), Abū l-Aʿlā l-Maudūdī (d. 1979/1399), Muḥammad ʿIzzat Darwaza (d. 1984/1404), and ʿĀʾisha ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān (Bint ash-Shāṭiʾ) (d. 1998/1419). The reason that there are no chapters devoted to them in this volume

15 Majid Daneshgar, *Studying the Qurʾān in the Muslim Academy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), offers an interesting overview of recent academic engagement with the Qurʾān.

is that the colleagues who undertook to write these chapters did not fulfil their duty, despite several reminders. It was no longer possible to continue to wait for them or to find substitute authors.

No authors could be found for studies on other scholars who should have been considered in this volume either. Among them are Muḥammad Abū Zayd ad-Damanhūrī, Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd, ʿAbd al-Jalīl ʿĪsā, ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Khaṭīb, Ḥāfiẓ ʿĪsā ʿAmmār, Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Munʿim al-Jamāl, Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Munʿim Khafājī, Muḥammad Maḥmūd Ḥijāzī, Muṣṭafā as-Saqqāʾ, Muḥammad al-Amīn ash-Shinqīṭī, Muḥammad Sayyid Ṭanṭāwī, Muḥammad ʿAlī ṣ-Ṣābūnī, Ibrāhīm al-Qaṭṭān, Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, Zaynab al-Ghazālī, Aḥmad Ḥanafī, Shauqī Ḍayf, Rāshid ʿAbd Allah Farḥān, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. ad-Dardīr, Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalaf Allāh and ʿAbd al-Munʿim Aḥmad Tuʿaylab.

Although it is almost impossible to exhaustively cover all hermeneutical approaches to the Qurʾān in this or any other era of Qurʾānic scholarship, the outlined shortcomings will hopefully be corrected in a forthcoming, updated version of this volume.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Sam Wilder, Mr. Andreas Knöll, and Mr. Yaaqub Kutterer for their assistance editing the contributions of this volume. I would also like to thank Dr. Katrin Hudey and Dr. Torsten Wollina from the publishing house Walter de Gruyter and Dr. Lydia J. White for their kind and cooperative support.