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QURANIC EXEGETICAL ACTIVITIES IN THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO

A Historical Overview

Nadzrah Ahmad¹

Abstract

The study seeks to highlight Quranic exegetical activities in the Malay Archipelago from the earliest period of Islam in the region until the dawn of Dutch colonialism, focusing specifically on Indonesian and Malaysian exegetical works. The study examines the main features of Quranic exegetical activities in the Archipelago by highlighting some concerns on the issue of sources and availability of records. Exegetical works throughout the centuries are briefly presented with an emphasis on prominent works that had contributed greatly to the popular Malay understanding of the Quran. Employing qualitative analysis, the study surveys in particular Malay works of exegesis from the seventeenth century until the early twentieth century which marks the emergence of the modern exegetical approach. Viewed as a whole, the study exposes a collection of exegetical works which had impacted the Malay Islamic World throughout its history, covering both the traditional and modern reformist approaches to Quranic understanding.

Keywords: Quranic exegesis, *tafsīr*, Indo-Malay exegetical works, seventeenth to twentieth century, traditional and modern approach.

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Introduction

Islam in the Malay Archipelago was established through a network of Arab traders who found their way to the islands in their venture of trade.² This view was affirmed by Azra on the basis of established facts and the patterns of trade flow in the area.³ Although the exact date of the establishment could not be established with certainty, historical traces in the Archipelago suggest it could be as early as 1297CE as may be inferred from a gravestone inscribed in Arabic with the name of Sultan Malik al-Salih. Ibn Battuta also mentioned it when visiting Samudra-Pasai in 1345CE on his way from Bengal to China.⁴ The idea of Arab merchants coming to the Archipelago to trade and at the same time to spread their faith is a popular narrative among historians. The initial spread of Islam happened at a slow pace and in most cases, it occurred in the trading areas. In later centuries, as converts to the new religion saw a multi-fold increase, the Malay-Muslim population grew steadily to become the majority. Today Indonesia is the world's most populated Muslim country with Muslims covering ninety percent of the entire population.⁵

Studies on Malay exegetical activities during the past centuries proved to be challenging due to the perishability of manuscripts over time. Although Islam was believed to have arrived in the region in the twelfth century CE, the earliest available Malay work on Quranic commentary could only be traced to the seventeenth century work of Abd al-Rauf of Singkel. Due to the dominance of oral transmission of Quranic learning during the early period of Islam in the Archipelago, there was no great necessity to write the *tafsīr*. Furthermore, it could

² Colin Brown, *A Short History of Indonesia, the Unlikely Nation* (Crows Nest, 2003), 30.

³ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2004), 2.

⁴ Barbara Andaya and Yoneo Ishii. "Religious Developments in Southeast Asia c. 1500–1800." in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, ed. Nicholas Tarling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 1:508–71. doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521355056.011.

⁵ Vincent J. Houben, "Southeast Asia and Islam," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588, no. 1 (July 2003): 149–70. doi:10.1177/0002716203588001010.

also be suggested that the learning of the original source language of Arabic took up a rather long time in the small Muslim community then as there was little need to use it. It was possible that Islam was slow in gaining membership of believers and securing adherents to propagate the beliefs and practices of the religion. The whole process of Islamisation took considerable time before a deeper understanding of the religion and its sources could be fully institutionalised.

With the passage of time there was a need for the growing community of Muslims to have a vernacular Quranic exegesis with a view to deepening their faith in the new religion. However, producing an exegetical work on the Quran or Sunnah requires a building skill which begins with learning the Arabic language besides meeting other requirements. In fact, in Islamic religious thought the science of Quranic interpretation had long been established, but until an exegetical work in the vernacular was available, the community had to rely on Quranic commentaries in Arabic. Thus, it was the case that during the early period of Islam in Malaya the learning activities around the Quran depended considerably on religious teachers from Mecca. To the Malays, Mecca was as much the centre for Islamic learning as it was the centre of the Islamic faith manifested in the sacred journey of the pilgrimage (*hajj*).⁶ The Malays considered it their life's mission to travel to Mecca to perform the *hajj* and reside there for a period of time in order to fulfil their learning activities.

Unavailability of Records

The issue of the scarcity of vernacular exegetical works during the earlier centuries of Islam in the Malay Archipelago has also drawn the attention of several orientalist. A.H. Johns describes it as a paradox for the region to bear a significantly small number of works on *tafsīr*. He was looking into the extent of the circulation of Arabic versions of *tafsīr* in the Malay Archipelago. The most popular works on *tafsīr* among the Malays are *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* with its Malay renderings found in separate fragments, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* by Abd al-Rauf al-Singkeli (d.1693), and *Marāh Labīd* by al-Nawawi of

⁶ Md. Sidin Ahmad Ishak and Muhammad Redzuan Othman, *The Malays in the Middle East: with a Bibliography of Malay Printed Works Published in the Middle East* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 2000), 5.

Banten (d.1897). *Tarjumān* was claimed by Hurgronje to be the Malay rendering of al-Baydawi's *Anwār al-Tanzīl*.⁷ The disparity in the information has been discussed in recent writings by scholars around this particular topic.⁸

The issue is also discussed by Riddell in his work *Islam and the Malay Indonesian World*. In his view, the absence of manuscripts from early Islam in the Archipelago is mainly due to the low physical survival factor of paper for long periods of time as a consequence of the high humidity of the region's climate. He says,

“Our task is hampered by the absence of literary records from the very earliest period of Islam in the region (i.e., 14th-16th centuries), caused by several factors. The most pervasive relates to the climate of the Malay Archipelago; quite simply, the humidity of the equatorial regions works very much against the survival of paper for long periods of time. This means that we would not expect to find manuscripts which survive from the early period of Islam and indeed, no examples of any manuscripts from the Malay world predating the late 16th century are surviving today in the archipelago itself. Another factor works against us finding literary records dating from the early Islamic period in the Malay world; this is connected with the long-established tradition of preservation of texts in the Archipelago. It is likely that old texts were not venerated; they were merely copied and left to wither away. This is no doubt

⁷ Anthony H. Johns, “On Quranic Exegetes and Exegesis a Case Study in the Transmission of Islamic Learning,” in *Islam: Essay on Scripture, Thought and Society a Festschrift in Honour of Anthony H. Johns*, ed. Peter G. Riddell and Tony Street (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 4.

⁸ Apparent disparity in determining by which rendering *Tarjumān* could be identified with is evident between the views hold by early scholars and modern scholars. Azra seemed to hold a different view representing *Tarjumān* as consisting of few other sources such as *al-Jalālayn* and *al-Khāzin*. See Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia*, 81.

a result of the difficulty of preserving paper described above.”⁹

This could be an important factor in addition to those discerned earlier. It may be argued that viewing the issue as a whole, both natural factors and poor human handling of the written works as well as the traditional learning culture have led to the disappearance of written works from the first three hundred years of Islam in the Archipelago.

Arabic Exegetical Works as Malay Sources of Reference

It was the exegetical trends followed by some scholars of a particular period or their adoption of a popular method or style that explain why certain books of *tafsīr* became popular in the Archipelago. Indeed, this was and still is the case with exegetical works used as sources of reference by Malay exegetes in Southeast Asia. Initially, as suggested by Johns, the phenomenon was a simple act of translating from the Arabic commentaries and this was done by al-Singkeli in *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*.¹⁰ Later, vernacular *tafsīr* became a trend that was modelled after the method and style of Arabic *tafsīr* and this was the case with many Malay exegetes of the later era.¹¹

However, the popularity of certain Arabic commentaries does not depend solely on their methods and style. Rather, their popularity lies in the choice of topics for commentary that proved to be of interest to the Muslims of the Archipelago. Apparently, the Malay Muslims were interested in hearing stories as was practised in the traditions of animism previously found in Hinduism and their regional beliefs. Thus, in many cases, Arabic commentaries elaborating on Quranic stories always served as popular sources of reference in the early Malay exegesis.

⁹ Peter G. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay Indonesian World Transmission and Responses* (Singapore: Horizon Books Pte. Ltd., 2001), 139.

¹⁰ Anthony H. Johns, *Islam: Essay on Scripture, Thought and Society*, 4.

¹¹ The later era witnessed a complete distinguished method of writing by the Malay exegetes whereby instead of translating from the initial source, they navigated towards utilising only the method or approach used by Arabic *tafsīr* maintaining still their own individual ideals and opinions in the later commentaries. This marks the dawn of modern *tafsīr* era in the Malay Archipelago.

The following section provides a brief account of the major Arabic exegetical works that were used by Malays as sources of reference for the understanding of the Quran.

Al-Baghawi's Ma'alim al-Tanzīl

Al-Baghawi (d. 1122)¹² was a popular source of reference in the past and still is in the current era. The narrative style of his commentary with less exposition of philological, philosophical and mystical elements proved to be a factor in the *tafsīr* becoming one of the main sources of reference in the Malay World.¹³ Perhaps the simplicity of the commentary is the main reason why the *tafsīr* was the choice of the Malay exegetes in the period of Islamic consolidation and development.

Another reason was the popularity of this particular *tafsīr* in the Arab world; its popularity was then transferred to the Malay world by teachers and students coming back from the Middle East. Yet another reason was that the narration of stories in Al-Baghawi's commentary seemed to be well liked and favoured by Southeast Asians. As mentioned earlier, this could be attributed to the Hindu-Buddhism background of the region where stories and epics became part of the belief system and moral values before the coming of Islam.¹⁴ Narration of stories from Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions could be found within his commentary with lengthy and detailed explanations.¹⁵

Al-Baydawi's Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl

Al-Baydawi (d. 1286)¹⁶ is regarded by Muslims in Southeast Asia as

¹² His name is al-Husayn bin Masud al-Farra al-Baghawi. Shafie by denomination, he was born in Khurasan. Abdullah bin Ahmad bin Ali al-Zayd, *Mukhtaṣar Tafsīr al-Baghawī* (Riyadh: Dar al-Salam, 2010), vol. 1, 12.

¹³ Peter G. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay Indonesian World Transmission and Responses*, 141.

¹⁴ Ibid., 143-144.

¹⁵ Ibid., 41-45.

¹⁶ He is Abd Allah ibn Umar al-Baydawi al-Shirazi of Shafie from Azerbaijan. Nasiruddin Abu Said Abd Allah bin Umar bin Ali al-Shirazi, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*, Ed. Muhammad Abd al-Rahman al-Mu'arshili (Beirut: Dar Ihya'

providing one of the most reliable commentaries. In this commentary, al-Baydawi employs a method of phrase-by-phrase exegesis. *Anwār al-Tanzīl* was notable as it served “as valuable compendium comprising wide ranging elements of Islamic sciences.” In addition, the commentary presents a wide range of opinions derived from its sources or predecessors although it does not include any citation of these sources.¹⁷

In the Malay exegetical arena, al-Baydawi’s commentary was one of the main sources of the *Tarjuman* by Singkeli. The fact that it presented concise exegetical comments on different topics made it a complete reference for Malay readers during the period of Islamic consolidation and expansion.¹⁸

Al-Khazin’s Lubāb al-Ta’wīl

Lubāb al-Ta’wīl fī Ma’āni al-Tanzīl is a third-generation commentary that enjoyed popularity in the Southeast Asian region. This commentary adopted the style and method of al-Baghawi to the point of, at times, following the latter ad verbatim.¹⁹ Its exposition of stories received a tremendous reception in many Islamic states of Southeast Asia. The significance of such phenomenon is apparent as Muslims of Southeast Asia were attracted to and very much influenced by narratives in the form of stories as a result of the region’s socio-religious background.²⁰

Al-Khazin in this regard, provided great lengths of narration including those of the Judeo-Islamic traditions (*Israīliyyāt*) so as to suffice his story-telling in a *tafsīr*. Although he adopted and copied at times from his predecessor al-Baghawi, his fame in Malay exegetical writing surpassed the former. The reason could be the usage of easy language and a simpler style of interpretation which excluded many difficult styles and terms which would discourage the novel reader. The story-telling style plus exposition of miraculous stories within

al-Turath al-Arabi, 2010), vol.1, 9.

¹⁷ Peter G. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay Indonesian World Transmission and Responses*, 47.

¹⁸ Ibid., 142.

¹⁹ Ibid., 45.

²⁰ Ibid., 143-145.

the *Lubāb* won the interest of the Malay Muslim readers thus making it a popular source of reference for Malay exegesis.

Al-Suyuti's Tafsīr al-Jalālayn

Throughout the Malay Archipelago, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*²¹ became the most referred *tafsīr* to this day. It is well received because of the simplicity of its commentary. Its linguistic style is comprehensible to non-Arabic speakers especially the Southeast Asian Muslims. The *tafsīr* in this regard is easier to handle for non-specialist readers compared to al-Baydawi's *tafsīr*. "The *Jalālayn* commentary includes an ongoing paraphrase of the Quranic text, though in less detail than al-Baydawi's commentary."²²

Although, like al-Baydawi, al-Suyuti also provided his readers with supplementary linguistic explanations, information on variant readings, materials from the Hadith and narrative elements, the information he presented was found to be more broad-based and relevant for less specialised audiences. The *tafsīr* was meant for imparting Quranic meaning and understanding without getting into scholarly details.²³

²¹ Double authorship was involved in this work. The first was by Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli and the second by Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti. Initially the work was written by al-Mahalli and later al-Suyuti came in continuing the writing of the *tafsīr*. See al-Adnah Wi, ed. Sulayman bin Salih al-Khuzzi, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn* (Medina: Maktabat al-Ulum wa al-Hikam, 1997), 336-337. The first figure was Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Ibrahim al-Mahalli al-Shafie. He was born in Egypt in the year 791H. He was a prominent figure during his life for the knowledge and understanding he possessed. He was known for *fiqh*, principles of jurisprudence, syntax, logic and others. He was known to be obliged to the way of the *salaf*. He passed away in the year 864H. Muhammad Husayn al-Dhahabi, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrīn*, (Saudi Arabia: Wizarat al-Shuun al-Islamiyyah wa al-Awqaf wa al-Dawah wa al-Irshad, 2010), v.1, 333. Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, also known as Abd al-Rahman bin Abu Bakr bin Muhammad al-Suyuti al-Shafie was born in 849H. He passed away in 911H. Al-Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrīn*, v.1, 180. See also Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Quran*, (Beirut: Maktabah al-Risalah, 2008), 13.

²² Peter G. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay Indonesian World Transmission and Responses*, 48.

²³ Ibid.

In the Malay Archipelago, the *Jalālayn* has been translated into a few languages including Malay. The fame it holds owes much to its relative accessibility to many non-Arabic Muslims who favour the *Jalālayn* for its comprehensive approach to Quranic understanding. The impact of the *Jalālayn* on Malay exegesis is quite evident. The first Quranic commentary written in Malay called *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* (1675) is undeniably a selective rendering of the *Jalālayn*. In addition, another *tafsīr* written in Arabic in 1897CE by a Malay scholar also used the *Jalālayn* to compile his work called *Marāh Labīd*.²⁴ These works prove the *Jalālayn*'s wide usage and popularity across time.²⁵

Malay Quranic Exegeses of the Seventeenth Century

Tarjumān al-Mustafīd

The first Malay commentary of the whole Quran was authored by Abd al-Rauf al-Singkeli around 1675CE. He was known as Tengku di-Kuala and was known to have taught in Aceh in 1661 CE. He gained popular saint-like esteem among the people. Apart from *Tarjumān* he was also accredited for compiling at the request of Safiat al-Din – Queen of Aceh – the Shafie's jurisprudence source of reference called *Mir'āt al-Ṭullāb fī Tashīl Ma'rīfat al-Aḥkām al-Shar'īyyah lī Mālik al-Wahhāb* between 1641 and 1675.²⁶

The *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* was his *magnum opus* written in the Malay Jawi script. It was claimed to be a translation of the authoritative Arabic commentary *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār*

²⁴ The *Marāh Labīd* was written by Muhammad al-Nawawi al-Jawi. According to Snouck Hurgronje's writing when he met with al-Nawawi during his visit to Mecca in 1884 he acknowledged the Batenense scholar with high regard. Karel A. Steenbrink, *Beberapa Aspek tentang Islam di Indonesia Abad ke-19* (Jakarta: P.T. Bulan Bintang 1984), 117. Anthony H. Johns, *Islam: Essay on Scripture, Thought and Society*, 6. Both sources cited from Snouck Hurgronje. C., *Mecca in the Later Part of the 19th Century*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1931) translated from its original German language form, 1888-1889.

²⁵ Peter G. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay Indonesian World Transmission and Responses*, 146-147.

²⁶ Richard Winstedt, *A History of Classical Malay Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 147.

al-Ta'wīl by al-Baydawi (d. 1286), but some scholars have argued that it is a Malay rendering of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*. According to Riddell, the composition of the *Tarjumān* is more consistent with al-Jalalayn's than with al-Baydawi's works.²⁷ This observation is supported by Johns.²⁸ To this date, the only available record shows that *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* was the first Malay exegetical work and the oldest to have survived extinction. Hurgronje in a rather cynical comment concludes that *Tarjumān* is merely a bad rendering of al-Baydawi. Azra disagrees with Hurgronje arguing that the *Tarjumān* is based on several Arabic sources and not solely on al-Baydawi.²⁹

Marāh Labīd

Marāh Labīd is another commentary of the whole Quran produced in the region. It was written by Nawawi of Banten (d.1897). The *tafsīr* was written in Arabic and published in Mecca around 1800 as Nawawi spent most of his life there.³⁰ He was said to have been influenced by the idea of Islamic revival championed by al-Afghani. He was aware of the Aceh War initiated by the Dutch colonial power and the capture of Bonjol.³¹ In his exegetical work, Nawawi maintained his narrative style of approaching Quranic verses without offering his own opinions but rather merely its content accompanied by his sources of information. A similar style was adopted by al-Singkeli.

Classical Malay Exegeses of the Eighteenth Century

Information on Quranic exegetical work written in the eighteenth century is indeed scarce. Perhaps the only available information was found in a few articles discussing Malay exegeses. One of these articles was on al-Singkeli and his *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, and it mentioned some of his students and their works. Among the pupils of al-Singkeli was Haji Abdul Malik bin Abdullah (1089H/1678M-

²⁷ Ibid., 161.

²⁸ Anthony H. Johns, *Islam: Essay on Scripture, Thought and Society*, 4.

²⁹ Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia*, 81.

³⁰ Karel A. Steenbrink, *Beberapa Aspek tentang Islam di Indonesia*, 121.

³¹ Anthony H. Johns, *Islam: Essay on Scripture, Thought and Society*, 6-7.

1149H/1736M) or better known as Tok Pulau Manis of Terengganu. Born in Pauh, Hulu Terengganu, Abdul Malik was one of the descendants of Syarif Muhammad from Baghdad.³²

Shaghir mentions the connection between al-Singkeli and Tok Pulau Manis in their teacher-student relationship. He asserts that the latter studied with al-Singkeli in Aceh before continuing his studies in the Haramayn. Shaghir also relates a local tradition claiming that while in the Haramayn, Tok Pulau Manis studied with Ibrahim al-Kurani, Al-Singkeli's teacher.³³ Azyumardi Azra disagrees, arguing that the time span between the demise of al-Kurani and the birth of Tok Pulau Manis did not support the claim. He maintains that when al-Kurani died, the latter was not even born yet. In this case, Azra suggests the possibility of Tok Pulau Manis having studied with a disciple of al-Kurani rather than the Sheikh himself.³⁴

Apart from teaching, Tok Pulau Manis was known to have written a few works in the area of Shariah and Fiqh. He was also said to have copied *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* in the 1730s.³⁵ Yet, his famous work to date is the *Sharah Hikam* a translation and explanation of the *al-Hikam*, a renowned Sufi work by Ibn Ataillah (d.709H/1309M). This work by Ibn Ataillah was among the main references for the Tariqat al-Shadhiliyyah practiced by Tok Pulau Manis and many of his contemporaries. The *tarīqāt* was founded by Sheikh Abu Hasan al-Shadhili (d. 656H/1258M) from Morocco.³⁶ Another work by Tok Pulau Manis is *Kitāb Kifāyah* consisting of discussion on *Fiqh* and *Uṣūl al-Dīn*.³⁷ Tok Pulau Manis died in Terengganu in the year 1149H/1736M³⁸ at the age of 86 and was buried there.

³² "Tok Pulau Manis Syekh Abdul Malik Terengganu," Ulama Nusantara, accessed October 25, 2018, <http://ulamanusantara.blogspot.com/2007/10/tok-pulau-manis-syeikh-abdul-malik.html>.

³³ Wan Mohd. Shaghir Abdullah, *Perkembangan Ilmu Fiqh dan Tokoh-Tokohnya di Asia Tenggara* (Solo: Ramadhani, 1985), 46.

³⁴ Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia*, 86.

³⁵ Mazlan Ibrahim *et al.*, "Development of Quranic Exegesis in Malay Archipelago: A Special Reference To Malaysia" *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences* 5, no.5 (2011): 453.

³⁶ Wan Mohd. Shaghir Abdullah, *Perkembangan Ilmu Fiqh dan Tokoh-Tokohnya di Asia Tenggara*, 46.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "Tok Pulau Manis Syekh Abdul Malik Terengganu," Ulama Nusantara, accessed

The Silent Era of the Nineteenth Century

To this date, no records could be found on exegetical writings in the nineteenth century. The century was identified with Western colonisation and the warfare it generated, which led to socio-economic instability in Southeast Asia, a factor which might have led to the temporary neglect of academic development. Dutch policy, especially over Indonesia, imposed a ban on the entry of Islamic literature through the returning *hajjīs* (pilgrims) and students from the Middle East.³⁹ Another plausible factor in this context was the period of ‘academic preparation’ for the younger Muslim generation. It was during this era that many Malay Muslim children were sent by their parents to the Haramayn to obtain knowledge. Many of them returned at the end of the century and became intellectual activists at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Haziyah notes that in Malaysia alone, beginning in the early twentieth century, the writing of *tafsīr* somehow paced up rather than slowed down as compared to other areas of Islamic studies such as jurisprudence, ‘*aqīdah*, history and *taṣawwuf*. There was a new emphasis on the purpose of studying the Quran, hence the importance of *tafsīr*. The Quran was initially learnt for recitation purposes in the five daily prayers. But with the new understanding of the Quran, *tafsīr* lessons were inserted during the teaching of *fiqh*, *aqīdah* *taṣawwuf* and so on.⁴⁰

Modern Malay Exegeses of the Twentieth Century

The twentieth century witnessed the flourishing of exegetical activities in the Malay world carried out by many Indonesian and Malaysian writers. Muhammad Nur Lubis outlines more than fifty works on Quranic exegesis of the twentieth century which he later

October 25, 2018, <http://ulamanusantara.blogspot.com/2007/10/tok-pulau-manis-syeikh-abdul-malik.html>.

³⁹ Suminto Husnul Aqib, *Politik Islam Hindia Belanda* (Jakarta: Lembaga Penelitian Pendidikan Dan Penerangan Ekonomi Dan Sosial, 1985), 9.

⁴⁰ Haziyah Husin and Latifah Abdul Majid, “Early Development of Quranic Exegesis in Malaysia”, *International Journal of Asian Social Science* 3, no. 8 (2013): 1733.

selectively elaborates on.⁴¹ However, the actual number is believed to be more especially when three countries with Muslim majority are counted for their exegetical works namely Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. Generally, exegetical works during this era could be divided into two categories: the complete Quranic interpretation; and the partial interpretation of the selected chapters. For the purpose of this study, only the first category will be viewed and discussed briefly.

Among the early-modern Malay Quranic exegetes (beginning from 1920s) were A. Hasan⁴² who wrote *Tafsīr al-Furqān* in 1928, Mahmud Yunus⁴³ with his *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* in 1938, Teungku Muhammad Hasbi ash-Shiddieqy with his *Tafsīr al-Nūr* in

⁴¹ Muhammad Nur Lubis, *Data-Data Terbitan Awal Penterjemahan dan Pentaftiran Al-Quran di Alam Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Al-Hidayah Publishers, 2002), 3-6.

⁴² Ahmad Hasan first published the *tafsīr* in 1928 with little success due to a long queue. In 1953, he began the commentary work as proposed by Saad Nabhan, a famous publisher at the time. The second attempt, an entirely different work with renewed style was completed in 1347H/1956M bearing similar title as its predecessor, *Tafsīr al-Furqān*. Its first Malaysian print was done by Pustaka Aman Press, Kota Bharu, Kelantan in 1971. Although the *tafsīr* was printed in Indonesian language and writing, it has been reprinted seven times since its first publication. Muhammad Nur Lubis, *Data-Data Terbitan Awal*, 30-31.

⁴³ Mahmud Yunus was born in 1899 in Sungayang, Batusangkar, Kabupaten Tanah Datar, Sumatera Barat. He came from a learned family as his father and grandfather were all *imāms* teaching Islam in the *surau*. He studied with Muhammad Thaib Umar, a *tajdīd* activist, before leaving for al-Azhar in 1924. It was during this time that Mahmud Yunus was introduced to reform movement together with Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (Haji Rasul) and Haji Abdullah Ahmad. He died in 1983 at the age of 83. Among his works which remained on demand are *Kamus Arab Indonesia*, *Tafsīr al-Quran al-Karīm*, *Durūs al-Lughah al-'Arabīyyah* and *Sejarah Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia*. Abuddin Nata, *Tokoh-Tokoh Pembaruan Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2005), 57-61. Eficandara Masril, Mohd. Nasran Mohamad, Muhammad Adib Samsudin and Anwar Fakhri Omar, "Prof. Dr. H. Mahmud Yunus: Tokoh Mujaddid dari Minangkabau", *Prosiding Nadwah Ulama' Nusantara (NUN) IV: Ulama Pemacu Transformasi Negara*, ed. Azmul Fahimi Kamaruzaman, Ezad Azraai Jamsari, Ermy Azziaty Rozali, Farid Mat Zin, Hakim Zainal, Izziah Suryani Mat Resad @ Arshad, Maheram Ahmad, Md Nor Abdullah, Napisah Karimah Ismail and Zamri Arifin, (Bangi: Jabatan Pengajian Arab dan Tamadun Islam, FPI, UKM, 2011), 135-141. Source: <http://www.ukm.my/nun/prosiding%20atas%20talian.htm> (Accessed on: 10/01/2013).

1952⁴⁴, Ahmad Sonhadji Muhammad with his *Tafsīr 'Abr al-Athīr* in 1960⁴⁵, Haji Abdul Malik bin Abdul Karim bin Amrullah (Hamka) with his *Tafsīr al-Azhar*⁴⁶ in 1966, and M. Quraish Shihab who authored *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*⁴⁷ in 1997. This section discusses briefly some of the well-known exegetical works of the twentieth century.

⁴⁴ His full name is Teungku Muhammad Hasbi ash-Shiddieqy bin Teungku al-Qadhi Seri Maharaja Mangkubumi Husein bin Masud. He was born in 1904 in Lhokseumawe, North Aceh. His father was a man of great knowledge and a judge. He started learning from his father in his *pesantren* and later he travelled to learn from a few other figures. He studied Arabic from Sheikh Muhammad bin Salim al-Kalali, a well-known *Ālim* of Hijāz. He also travelled to Surabaya to learn from Ahmad Soekarti in 1926. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Majīd al-Nūr* was written in October 1952 and was first published in 1956 by the Bulan Bintang Publisher, Jakarta. It carries ten volumes with moderate extent.

⁴⁵ Sonhadji was born in 1922 in Desa Pengging, Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia. Later, his family moved to Rengat, Singapore and he was mainly brought up there. He received his early education from his father who was a religious teacher. He learned the Quran and Arabic calligraphy from his mother. After gaining some qualifications, he continued to study at Madrasah al-Junied in Singapore for six years. When the Japanese invaded Singapore, his education was put to hold. Since then, he was involved in teaching activities especially at Madrasah al-Junied. *'Abr al-Athīr* initially started as a series of lecture on the Radio of Singapore (SBC). Later, the work was printed under the name *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* in Singapore before further improvements were given to the structure and print which resulted in the second print in Kuala Lumpur with its new title, *Tafsīr 'Abr al-Athīr*. Zulkifli Yusof, *A Study of 'Abr al-Athīr and Sonhadji's Methodology in Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Singapore: Ahmad Sonhadji Muhammad, 2002), 161.

⁴⁶ Haji Abdul Malik bin Abdul Karim bin Amrullah was born in Sungai Batang, Maninjau, West Sumatra Indonesia in the year 1908. His initial education began at home and he learned Quranic recital and foundation of Islam from his father and his stepsister, Fatimah. At the age of eight he was sent to a village school and two years later to Madrasah Sumatra Tawalib. In 1924, he travelled to Java and there he learned from Umar Said Tjokroaminoto, Muhammad Surio Baranoto and Haji Fakhruddin the leader of Muhammadiyah. He also learned from his brother-in-law, Ahmad Rashid Sutan Mansur management and secretarial skills. The *tafsīr* gained its name on the occasion of Hamka being honoured with Doctorate by al-Azhar University. He started the writing of the *tafsīr* in 1958 following his return from Cairo and completed the work while he was in detention (1964-1965). Muhammad Nur Lubis, *Data-Data Terbitan Awal*, 128.

⁴⁷ Muhammad Quraish Shihab was born in Rappang, South Sulawesi, Indonesia in the year 1944. His father was a scholar in Quranic exegesis and also the ex-rector of IAIN Alauddin Ujung Padang South Sulawesi. His father was among the founders of

Sheikh Muhammad Said bin Umar and Tafsīr Nūr al-Iḥsān (1927)

Sheikh Muhammad Said bin Umar Khatib from Kedah was born in 1270H/1854M in the village of Kuar and died in 1352H/1932M. He received his education from Sheikh Wan Mustafa al-Fathani or better known as Tok Bendang Daya, the founder of Pondok Bendang Daya, Patani. Like many *ulama*’, he later continued his studies in Mecca but no further details on his life could be found.⁴⁸

He was known to have written two works. The first, *Fatawā al-Qāḍī fī Ahkām al-Nikāḥ*” (The *Fatwas* of the Judge in Marriage Laws), was completed in 1320H/1902M and the second, *Tafsīr Nūr al-Iḥsān*, between 1344H/1925/6M to 1346H/1927M. The *tafsīr* was both in the form of a Malay translation and commentary of the whole Quran. It was the second such *tafsīr* after *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*. The *tafsīr* consists of four chapters and 1544 pages. The first print was undertaken by Matbaah Dar Ihya al-Kutub al-Arabiyyah, Egypt in 1349H. The writing of *Nūr al-Iḥsān* was done mostly on the order of the Sultan of Kedah.⁴⁹ The *tafsīr* is acknowledged as the first complete Malay *tafsīr* in Malaysia.⁵⁰

Universitas Muslimin Indonesia Makasar and became its principal between the years 1959-1965. His early education started in Ujung Pandang after which he continued on to secondary school at Malang, East Java. At the same time, he also attended a religious school at Pondok Pesantren Darul Hadits al-Faqihiyyah under the tutelage of al-Habib Abd al-Qadir bin Ahmad bin Faqih. In 1958, together with his younger brother, he departed for Cairo, Egypt and there he was accepted to second *thanawiyyah* at al-Azhar after which he managed to pursue his Bachelor’s Degree in *uṣul al-dīn*. Later, he obtained his Master’s Degree in 1969 and completed his Doctorate Degree in 1982 both at al-Azhar University. *Tafsīr al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan dan Kesperasian al-Quran* was first published in the year 2000M/1421H by Penerbit Lentera Hati in cooperation with Iman Jama’ Islamic Public Library, Jakarta. The *tafsīr* consists of fifteen volumes. Mazlan Ibrahim *et al.*, *Pengenalan Tokoh dan Kitab-Kitab Tafsir Melayu Ulama Nusantara* (Kuala Lumpur: Fakulti Pengajian Islam Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2009), 124-131.

⁴⁸ Wan Mohd. Shaghir Abdullah, *Koleksi Ulama Nusantara* (Kuala Lumpur: Khazanah Fathaniyah, 2009), vol. 1, 189-190.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 190-192.

⁵⁰ Haziyah Husin and Latifah Abdul Majid, “Significance of Malay Qur’anic Commentary for the Malay Muslim Community in Malaysia”, 160.

A. Hassan and al-Furqān: Tafsīr al-Qur'ān (1928)

Ahmad Hassan first published his *tafsīr* in 1928 containing only some initial parts of the whole work due to the publication queue imposed by the publisher on all manuscripts to be printed due to limited resources. He later on published another part of the *tafsīr* in 1941 and began to reproduce the whole *tafsīr* in 1953 with the support of Saad Nabhan, a famous publisher at the time. The entire work was completed in 1347H/1956M bearing the title of *Tafsīr al-Furqān*. Its first Malaysian print was undertaken by Pustaka Aman Press, Kota Bharu, Kelantan in 1971.⁵¹ It has been reprinted seven times since its publication.⁵²

Abdul Halim Hasan et al. and Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm (1936)

The *tafsīr* was written by three Malay exegetes, namely Abdul Halim Hasan, Zainal Arifin Abbas and Abdul Rahim Haitami from Medan, North Sumatra. It was first published in Medan in the year 1937 by Toko Buku Islamiyah. In Malaysia, Persama Press, Achen Street in Penang, did the first print in 1969.⁵³ The authors began writing their *tafsīr* during Ramadan 1355H at the Madrasah Islamiyah al-Arabiyyah next to Masjid Raya, Binjai, Langkat.⁵⁴ This was during the post-colonial era when there was an urge to revive Islamic teaching in the post-colonial Muslim nation of Indonesia, especially on the understanding of the Quran.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Muhammad Nur Lubis, *Data-Data Terbitan Awal*, 30-31.

⁵² Howard M. Federspiel, *Popular Indonesian Literature of the Qur'ān* (New York: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, 1994), 58.

⁵³ Abdul Halim Hasan et al., *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Medan: Firma Islamiyah, 8th edition., 1955), v.1.

⁵⁴ Abdul Halim Hasan et al., (1955), v.1, 12.

⁵⁵ The exegetes stated the significant reason for the writing of the *tafsīr*. See Abdul Halim Hasan, et al., *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Penang: Persama Press, 1953), vol.1, 2. Abdul Halim Hasan et al., *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Penang: Persama Press, 1955), vol.1, 7.

The *tafsīr* was first published in the form of twenty pages magazine once a month starting from April 1937. Then due to high demand, it was published twice a month. The *tafsīr* was reprinted and republished several times by different publishers. Firma Islamiyah Medan published and printed the *tafsīr* for five times from 1936 to 1961. While Yayasan Persatuan Amal Bakti had published the book nine times from 1937

The *tafsīr* is greatly influenced by the thoughts of religious reformism⁵⁶ (*fikrat al-tajdīd al-dīnī*), especially those of Abduh through *al-Manār*. It refers mostly to *al-Manār* by Rashid Rida and *al-Jawāhir fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān* by Tantawī Jawhārī, and a combination of other books of *tafsīr*, both classical and contemporary, such as *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān* by al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿĀzīm* by Ibn Kathīr, *Mafāṭīḥ al-Ghayb* by al-Razī, *al-Jāmiʿ fī Ahkām al-Qurʾān* by al-Qurtubī and *Anwār al-Tanzīl* by al-Baydawī. Other sources of reference were also utilised, including those written from the perspectives of various *madhhabs* and the writings of Muslims and Westerners in classical and contemporary eras. The approach in the commentary veers towards the implementation of the permissible interpretation through reasoning (*tafsīr bi al-raʾy al-maḥmūd*) with a combination of both the narrative (*manthūr*) and reasoning (*maʿqūl*) methods of Quranic interpretation.⁵⁷

Mustafa Abdul Rahman Mahmud and Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Hakīm (1949)

Mustafa Abdul Rahman Mahmud was born in Gunung Semanggol, Perak in 1918⁵⁸ and received his early education from his father who

to 1960. In Malaysia, Persama Press, Penang had done a single print from 1952 to 1955 in Arabic script (*Jawī*). In 1969, Pustaka Antara Kuala Lumpur published the Roman edition in two volumes only. At the break of World War II, the publication of the commentary faced some technical problems causing the operation to halt. Abdul Halim and his team noted in the preface of the *tafsīr* that the supplies of papers from the Europe especially Norway was cut during this time. Following the end of the war, the publication of the *tafsīr* resumed with rapidity due to the high demand coming from both countries; Indonesia and Malaysia. Today, the *tafsīr* is no longer available in bookstores. It is no longer reprinted or republished in both countries. The exegetes managed to complete the *tafsīr* until *Sūrah al-Anʿām* verse 38-39. Abdul Halim Hasan et al. (Medan: Firma Islamiyah, 1955), vol.1, 12.

⁵⁶ The reformists aimed at purification of Islamic belief and practice from non-Islamic elements caused by non-Islamic Mysticism, blind *taqlīd*, magic and animism. Fauzan Saleh, *Modern Trends in Islamic Theological Discourse in 20th Century Indonesia: A Critical Survey* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 85.

⁵⁷ Nadzrah Ahmad, “*Methodology and Issues within Tafsīr al-Quran al-Karīm by Abdul Halim Hasan et al.*,” (PhD diss., International Islamic University Malaysia, 2014), 69-70.

⁵⁸ Tajudin Saman, *Tokoh Ulama Nusantara* (Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing Sdn.

was also a knowledgeable and renowned scholar having received his education in al-Azhar, Egypt and Mecca. Later, Mustafa joined Madrasah Idrisiyyah, Kuala Kangsar for three years before continuing his studies at Madrasah al-Ihya' al-Sharif which, during the time, was under the tutelage of his father and Abu Bakar al-Bakir.⁵⁹ His proficiency in the Arabic language enabled him to view numerous Arabic references in his father's collection. Although he was not able to continue his studies at al-Azhar, his knowledge of Islam was considered to be at par with those who studied abroad.⁶⁰

His commentary work *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-Hakīm* began when he moved to Tanjong Tokong at Batu Feringghi, Penang. Here, he gave lectures on Islam to the local Muslims. It was during this period that he realised the importance of having a Malay *tafsīr* in order to educate the Malay Muslims in the Quran and its content.⁶¹ The *tafsīr* was written in the Jawi script of the Malay language and consists of 27 volumes. Each volume comprised one chapter of the Quranic *juz'*. Unfortunately, he died before completing his work on the whole Quran. The *tafsīr* was printed and published by Mohammad Ali bin Haji Mohammad al-Rawi, Persama Press, Penang in 1949.⁶²

Shiddieqy and Tafsīr al-Nūr (1952)

Teugku Muhammad Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy bin Teugku al-Qadhi Seri Maharaja Mangkubumi Husein bin Mas'ud was born in 1904 in Lhokseumawe, North Aceh. His father was a man of great knowledge and a judge.⁶³ He started learning from his father in his *pesantren* and later travelled to other places to learn from a few other figures. He learned Arabic from Sheikh Muhammad bin Salim

Bhd., 1993), 36.

⁵⁹ Wan Sabri Wan Yusof et al., "Mustafa Abdul Rahman Mahmud (1918-1968), Twentieth Century Malay Qur'anic Interpreter," *Monograph on Selected Malay Intellectuals* (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2003), 261.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 265-266.

⁶² Ismail Abdullah and Shayuthi Abdul Manas, "The Influence of *Tafsir Al-Maraghi* on Mustafa Abd al-Rahman's Malay Exegesis," *Journal of Islam in Asia* 2, no.1 (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2005): 215.

⁶³ Mazlan Ibrahim et al., *Pengenalan Tokoh dan Kitab-Kitab Tafsir Melayu Ulama Nusantara*, 40.

al-Kalali, a well-known *‘alīm* of Hijāz. He also went to Surabaya in 1926 to learn from Ahmad Soekarti. *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān: al-Nūr* was written in October 1952 and first published in 1956 by the Bulan Bintang Publisher, Jakarta. It carries ten volumes of moderate length.⁶⁴ Shiddieqy later authored *al-Bayān* in 1966.⁶⁵

Ahmad Sonhadji Muhammad and Tafsīr ‘Abr al-Athīr (1960)

Ahmad Sonhadji was born in 1922 in Desa Pengging, Surakarta in Central Java, Indonesia. Later, his family moved to Rengat, Singapore and he was mainly brought up there.⁶⁶ He received his early education from his father who was a religious teacher. He learned the Quranic Arabic calligraphy from his mother. After gaining a few qualifications, he continued to study at Madrasah al-Junied in Singapore for six years.⁶⁷ When the Japanese invaded Singapore, his education was put to halt. Later, he was involved in conducting religious activities especially at Madrasah al-Junied.⁶⁸

‘Abr al-Athīr initially started as a series of lectures on Singapore radio (SBC). Later, the work was printed in Singapore with the title *Tafsīr al-Qurān*. A new revised edition of the *tafsīr* was published in Kuala Lumpur under the title, *Tafsīr ‘Abr al-Athīr*.⁶⁹ The *tafsīr* consists of thirty volumes, with each volume comprising a commentary on a *juz*⁷⁰ of the Quran.

HAMKA and Tafsīr al-Azhār (1980’s)

Haji Abdul Malik bin Abdul Karim bin Amrullah (HAMKA) was born in Sungai Batang, Maninjau in West Sumatra, Indonesia in the year 1908.⁷¹ His father was a great Muslim scholar of the time and a

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Muhammad Nur Lubis, *Data-Data Terbitan Awal*, 99.

⁶⁶ Zulkifli Yusof, *A Study of ‘Abr al-Athīr and Sonhadji’s Methodology in Tafsīr al-Qur’an*, 161.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Mazlan Ibrahim et al., *Pengenalan Tokoh dan Kitab-Kitab Tafsīr Melayu Ulama Nusantara*, 113.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 115.

⁷⁰ The Quran is divided into thirty equal parts, each part being called *juz*.

⁷¹ Hamka, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup*, (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1966), 2.

leader of the Islamic reform movement.⁷² His initial education began at home where he learned Quranic recitation and the foundation of Islam from his father and his stepsister, Fatimah. At the age of eight he was sent to a village school and two years later to Madrasah Sumatra Tawalib. In 1924, he travelled to Java and there he studied under Umar Said Tjokroaminoto, Muhammad Surio Baranoto and Haji Fakhruddin the leader of Muhammadiyah. He also learned about management and secretarial work from his brother-in-law Ahmad Rashid Sutan Mansur.⁷³

He started writing the *tafsīr* in 1958 on his return from Cairo and completed the work while he was in detention (1964-1965).⁷⁴ It is written in the Indonesian language in the Roman script and carries one hundred books covering the whole thirty *ajza'* (sing: *juz'*) of the Quran. The title of the *tafsīr* was given on the occasion of HAMKA being conferred an honorary doctorate by Al-Azhar University.

M. Quraish Shihab and Tafsīr al-Mishbah (1997)

Muhammad Quraish Shihab was born in Rappang in South Sulawesi, Indonesia in the year 1944. His father was a scholar in Quranic exegesis and also a former Rector of IAIN Alauddin Ujung Pandang, South Sulawesi. His father was among the founders of Universitas Muslimin Indonesia in Makasar and became its Principal between the years 1959-1965.⁷⁵ His early education started in Ujung Pandang after which he continued to secondary school at Malang, East Java. At the same time, he also attended a religious school at Pondok Pesantren Darul Hadits al-Faqihiyyah under the tutelage of al-Habib Abd al-Qadir bin Ahmad bin Faqih.

In 1958, together with his younger brother, he departed for Cairo, Egypt and there he was accepted to second *thanawiyah* at

⁷² Hamka, *Ayahku Riwayat Perjuangan Hidup Dr. H. Abdul Karim Amrullah dan Perjuangan Kaum Agama di Sumatera* (Jakarta: Penerbit UMMINDA, 1982), 339.

⁷³ Hamka, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup*, 45.

⁷⁴ Islah Gusmian, *Khazanah Tafsir Indonesia: dari Hermeneutika ke Ideologi* (Yogyakarta: PT. LKiS Printing Cemerlang, 2013), 49 cited from Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (Jakarta: Pembina Massa, 1967), vol.1, 41.

⁷⁵ Mazlan Ibrahim et al., *Pengenalan Tokoh dan Kitab-Kitab Tafsir Melayu Ulama Nusantara*, 124.

al-Azhar after which he pursued his Bachelor's degree in *uṣūl al-dīn*. He obtained his Master's degree in 1969 and completed his Doctorate in 1982 both at al-Azhar University.⁷⁶ *Tafsīr al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian al-Qur'an* was first published in the year 2000M/1421H by Penerbit Lentera Hati in cooperation with Iman Jama' Islamic Public Library, Jakarta. The *tafsīr* consists of fifteen volumes.⁷⁷

Conclusion

Exegetical activities in the Malay Archipelago were initially carried out in the characteristic form of traditional oral transmission of Quranic learning. Later, Quranic commentaries developed to embrace the substance and style of modern Quranic exegetical writings. Despite the scarcity of the early exegetical sources, the writing of *tafsīr* grew in number as dictated by the changing needs of Malay Islamic religious culture. The initial approach of translating selected Arabic *tafsīr* works into Malay was replaced over time by exegetical works written by indigenous Islamic scholars who were guided in their approaches and styles by their respective ideologies and inclinations in the understanding of Quranic verses. The modern era was characterised by an adoption of such trends and approaches. Modern Muslim reformist movements played a major role in shaping the method of Quranic commentaries in the Malay world of the modern era.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 126-127.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 131.

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