



THE CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT ON THE QUR'AN:

The Discourse of Muḥammad Syahrūr's *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ān*

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ABSTRACT

New methodologies and approaches in the study of the Qur'an are very much carried out by contemporary reviewers. This is actually influenced by the understanding of the Qur'an which always experiences dynamics in the times. This paper specifically addresses Muḥammad Syahrūr's contemporary thinking about the Qur'an in *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ān*. By descriptive-analytical study, the writer concludes understanding the Qur'an according to Syahrūr can be done by contextualizing the Quranic verses with a linguistic structure and scientific, philosophical, historical, psychological, and sociological approaches. He wants the content of the Qur'an to be in harmony with current social dynamics, the readers always actualize themselves extensively by not resting on the products of classical thought that have been considered established and sacred, and the Qur'an as if it had just been revealed, so that it can deconstruct and reconstruct the scientific knowledge of the Qur'an which has been considered final.

ABSTRAK

Metodologi dan pendekatan baru dalam studi Al-Qur'an marak dilakukan oleh para pengkaji kontemporer. Hal ini sejatinya dipengaruhi pemahaman tentang Al-Qur'an yang selalu mengalami dinamika dalam perkembangan zaman. Artikel ini secara spesifik mengulas pemikiran kontemporer Muḥammad Syahrūr tentang Al-Qur'an dalam *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ān*. Dengan telaah deskriptif-analitis, penulis menyimpulkan bahwa pemahaman Al-Qur'an menurut Syahrūr dapat dilakukan dengan cara mengkontekstualisasikan Al-Qur'an dengan struktur linguistik serta pendekatan saintifik, filosofis, historis, psikologis, dan sosiologis. Dia menginginkan kandungan Al-Qur'an selaras dengan dinamika sosial kekinian, para pembaca senantiasa mengaktualisasikan diri secara ekstensif dengan tidak berpijak pada produk pemikiran Islam klasik yang telah dianggap mapan dan sakral, dan memosisikan Al-Qur'an seakan-akan baru saja diwahyukan, sehingga dapat mendekonstruksi sekaligus merekonstruksi tradisi keilmuan Al-Qur'an yang selama ini telah dianggap final.

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Introduction

In the context of modern-contemporary thought, the Qur'an has arrived at a significant position. This is due to the position of Islam as a mercy for the universe (*rahmah li al-'ālamîn*) which necessitates that the Islamic community places a great attention on the revealed text, especially in answering the problems of modernity. The significance of the Qur'an in the context of Islamic thought is evident by the attention of modern Islamic thinkers. The work of these modern thinkers such as Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (1817-1890) with *The Qur'anic Interpretation*, Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849-1905) with *al-Manār*, Abū al-'Alam Azad (1888-1958) with *The Translation of the Qur'an*, Sayyid Quthb (1906-1966) with *Fi Dzilāl al-Qur'ân*, and Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988) with *Major Themes of the Quran* at least has given legitimacy to the reality of the seriousness of Islamic thinkers towards the Qur'an in building Islamic self-identity amidst the challenges of modernity.

This serious thought towards the Qur'an will never meet an end point in the discourse of Islamic thought. A decade before the end of the 20th century, namely in the 1990s, the Islamic world and especially in the Arab countries had been horrified by the appearance of *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ân: Qirā'ah Mu'āshirah* by Muḥammad Syaḥrūr. This book appears different from the work of other contemporary thinkers. This book was allegedly a controversial work, so around 1990-2000 there were no less than 18 books and a number of journal articles that specifically spoke about the Syaḥrūr's book. Many critics who try to criticize the thoughts of Syaḥrūr who tend to enter into the teachings of Marxist-materialistic-secular. The popularity of Syaḥrūr's work is evidenced by the breadth of critics involved in the surrounding debate, ranging from religious experts, linguists, economists, engineers, legal practitioners, journalists, and the academic community.

In this work, Syaḥrūr endeavors to revitalize the understanding of the Qur'an by providing a new paradigm, that the Qur'an is a sacred book of human guidance that must be understood in harmony with the progress of the times, by applying it as if it had just descended. This extraordinary phenomenon is causing anxiety for many parties, how exactly the method that Syaḥrūr carries in its relevance to the reading that he uses on the Qur'an. Specifically, this paper will discuss how the pattern used by Syaḥrūr and what approaches he uses when interpreting the texts of the Qur'anic verses.



To get a comprehensive understanding, the writers try to analyze it from the perspective of constructivism, which is the foundation of philosophical thinking in building the arrangement of knowledge that is done carefully. In addition, the writers conducted a library study which focused on *al-Kitâb wa al-Qur'ân: Qirâ'ah Mu'âshirah* as primary data without ignoring other data that are still considered relevant. This research is also descriptive-qualitative by using analysis techniques, namely describing and analyzing data so that it becomes an idea in the problem being discussed.

Muhammad Syaḥrūr and *al-Kitâb wa al-Qur'ân: Qirâ'ah Mu'âshirah*

This contemporary thinker named Muhammad Syaḥrūr al-Dayyub was born in Syria, Damascus on April 11, 1938 AD.¹ He is the fifth child of Deib bin Deib and Shiddîqah bint Shâlih Filyûn. While his wife's name is 'Azîzah and has five children, namely Thâriq, Laits, Rima, Bashil and Mashun.² Syaḥrūr was born from a free-minded family environment, but the religious piety which is obligatory is still upheld by doing it in addition to practicing the teachings of Islamic ethics.

Syaḥrūr's intellectual character building coincided with the political instability of the post-Syrian government of independence in 1947, which continued with ideological chaos. He began elementary and secondary education in al-Midan, located on the edge of the southern city of Damascus which is outside the walls of the old city, precisely in the educational institution 'Abd al-Raḥmân al-Kawâkibî. Syaḥrūr's secondary education was completed in 1957. Then in 1959 he left for a city near Moscow, the Soviet Union, to study civil engineering, where he experienced political-ideological confusion, and became acquainted with and at the same time challenged a Marxist theory known for the concept of dialectical materialism and historical materialism. His encounter with Marxist philosophy teaches Syaḥrūr that an ideology requires the concept of knowledge about things that exist in objective reality.³

Furthermore, in 1964, Syaḥrūr won a Diploma in Civil Engineering, and was appointed as a teaching assistant at the Faculty of Civil Engineering in Damascus University in 1965. In a relatively short time, precisely in 1968, Syaḥrūr was delegated by the University of Damascus to

¹ Muhammad Syaḥrūr, *al-Kitâb wa al-Qur'ân: Qirâ'ah Mu'âshirah* (Damascus: al-Ahâli, 1990), p. 657.

² Muhammad Syaḥrūr, *Dirâsât Islâmîyah Mu'âshirah fî al-Daulah wa al-Mujtama'* (Damascus: al-Ahâli, 1994), acknowledgment.

³ Andreas Christmann, "The Form is Permanent, but the Content Moves: the Qur'anic Text and its Interpretations in Mohamad Syahrour's *al-Kitab wa al-Qur'an*," in Sahiron Syamsuddin (ed.), *Metodologi Fiqih Islam Kontemporer* (Yogyakarta: eLSAQ, 2004), p. 18.



Dublin, Ireland to continue his study through the Master Program in the specialization of Soil Mechanics and Foundation Engineering at the National University of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Syaḥrūr obtained his Master of Science degree in 1969 and his Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) degree in 1972 AD. Then, he was named Professor of Civil Engineering at Damascus University, and managed a small privately owned company in engineering.⁴

Besides being active as a lecturer, in 1982-1983 AD, Syaḥrūr was delegated by Damascus University to become experts on al-Saud Consult Saudi Arabia, and along with some colleagues at the Faculty of Engineering, University of Damascus, he opened a consulting firm Dâr al-Isytisyârât al-Handasiyah technique (engineering consultancy). In addition, Syaḥrūr was also active in studying several scientific disciplines, such as the philosophy of humanism, philosophy of language especially modern linguistics, and the semantics of Arabic. In the field of philosophy of language (*fiqh al-lughah*), Syaḥrūr began to explore it since he studied in Moscow, since his meeting with Ja'far Dakk al-Bâb which was considered central in his thinking in the field of linguistics.⁵

During his career at the University, Syaḥrūr was also interested in abstract domains, such as logic, epistemology, and theology, in response to the defeat of the "Six Days War" of the Arab army in 1967. This background which indirectly helped produce his universal thinking, especially his contemporary reading of the Qur'an. The book which entitled *al-Kitâb wa al-Qur'ân: Qirâ'ah Mu'âshirah* was first published in 1990, becoming Magnum Opus which ignited prolonged reactions and controversy, and in reaction to many books, articles, and other writings appear to reject one or several aspects of Syaḥrūr's thought in the book.

In general, the book *al-Kitâb wa al-Qur'ân: Qirâ'ah Mu'âshirah* by Syaḥrūr is important, because in it he tries to explore the epistemological side that is central to reading his thoughts in full, preceded by an explanation of the linguistic method written by his language teacher, Ja'far.⁶ In 1994, the second thought was published under the title *Dirâsât Islâmîyah Mu'âshirah fi al-Daulah wa al-Mujtama'*. In the book consisting of an introduction, nine discussions, and the closing, he discusses concepts relating to the state of his remote unit.⁷ Then two years later his

⁴ M. Aunul 'Abied Shah and Hakim Taufik, "Tafsir Ayat-ayat Gender dalam Al-Qur'an: Tinjauan terhadap Pemikiran Muhammad Syahrur dalam Bacaan Kontemporer," in M. Aunul 'Abied Shah (ed.), *Islam Garda Depan: Mosaic Pemikiran Islam Timur Tengah* (Bandung: Mizan, 2001), p. 237.

⁵ Ibid., p. 237.

⁶ Ja'far Dakk al-Bab, "al-Manhaj al-Lughawî fi al-Kitâb," in Syaḥrūr, *al-Kitâb wa al-Qur'ân*, p. 19-27.

⁷ Muḥammad Syaḥrūr, *Dirâsât Islâmîyah Mu'âshirah fi al-Daulah wa al-Mujtama'* (Damascus: al-Ahâlî, 1994), with 375 pages.



book, *al-Islām wa al-Īmān: Mandzūmah al-Qiyam*, was published which discussed theological concepts in Islam.⁸

At the turn of the millennium, Syaḥrūr published his fourth book, *Naḥw Ushūl Jadīdah li al-Fiqh al-Islāmī: Fiqh al-Mar’ah, al-Washīyah, al-Irts, al-Qiwāmah, al-Ta’addudīyah, al-Libās*. This book talks about feminism issues after talking about the epistemological-philosophical foundations that underlie further discussion.⁹ His last book is called *Tajfif Manābi’ al-Irhāb*, in which he refutes the interpretation of key concepts in the Qur’an offered by radical Islamic circles.¹⁰ In addition, Syaḥrūr also wrote many scientific articles published in various journals, newspapers and internet sites.

In compiling *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur’ān: Qirā’ah Mu’āshirah*, Syaḥrūr did not explicitly mention the background why he wrote it. But implicitly the intention can be captured from initiatives that depart from external factors, namely the idea of Syaḥrūr who wants a contemporary reading of the Qur’an with the concept of “*al-dhikr*”, not including the book of interpretation or *fiqh*. The purpose of writing this work according to Syaḥrūr is not to prove the existence of Allah swt. or to deny Him, but it is left entirely to the rationality of the readers. Syaḥrūr assumes that the problem of faith or denial of Allah is the right of human independence, so that the presentation of works with the concept of “*al-dhikr*” is carried out based on contemporary research approaches, and is worthy of being read by contemporary Islamic society.¹¹

The reason why Syaḥrūr chose *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur’ān: Qirā’ah Mu’āshirah* as his monumental work, because *qirā’ah* activity has a fundamental distinction with *tilāwah* activity. The word *qirā’ah* comes from the word “*qara’a-yaqra’-qirā’ah*” which has the basic meaning of “compiling and gathering”. When *qirā’ah* is associated with a particular object to be understood, it gives birth to the meaning of “reading”, because reading also means bringing together various objects into a unified whole that can be understood. If what is read is a textual object, then what is collected is the letter symbols that form a word and sentence by producing the integrity of

⁸ Muḥammad Syaḥrūr, *al-Islām wa al-Īmān: Mandzūmah al-Qiyam* (Damascus: al-Ahālī, 1996), with 401 pages.

⁹ Muḥammad Syaḥrūr, *Naḥw Ushūl Jadīdah li al-Fiqh al-Islāmī: Fiqh al-Mar’ah, al-Washīyah, al-Irts, al-Qiwāmah, al-Ta’addudīyah, al-Libās* (Damascus: al-Ahālī, 2000), with 383 pages.

¹⁰ Muḥammad Syaḥrūr, *Tajfif Manābi’ al-Irhāb* (Damascus: al-Ahālī, 2008), with 304 pages.

¹¹ Muhammad Insan Esha, “Rekonstruksi Historis Metodologis Pemikiran Muhammad Syaḥrūr,” *Jurnal Al-Huda*, vol. 2, no. 4 (2001): 63.



meaning. In addition, the reading activity is basically also a set of meanings contained in the reading object into an understanding.

While the word *tilâwah* comes from the word “*talâ-yatlû-tilâwah*” which means “to read the reading”. Someone who reads the Qur’an without being accompanied by a description and content of meaning, in truth he is doing activities *tilâwah* not *qirâ’ah* activities. The *qirâ’ah* is reading the Qur’an accompanied by explanations, descriptions, and interpretations. Thus, the distinction between *qirâ’ah* and *tilâwah* activities is clearly visible, which is related to the involvement of a meaning, understanding, explanation and even interpretation.

Specifically, Syaḥrûr’s work, *al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân: Qirâ’ah Mu’âshirah*, is an ambitious project methodology in order to understand the Qur’an from linguistic aspects. This contemporary Qur’anic study carried by Syaḥrûr is aimed at freeing thinking from the hegemony of the past that is so thick in the body of Muslims. At the same time, Syaḥrûr bridges the gap between the time when the Qur’an was revealed and the objective conditions of the Qur’anic believers living in different spaces and times. With this purpose Syaḥrûr also claimed that his work was able to leave the readers of contemporary Islam at risk. In other languages, contemporary Muslim reading should be based on contemporary studies and perspectives.¹²

In the process of pouring the results of his thoughts, Syaḥrûr requires a relatively long period of time, which is 20 years. Syaḥrûr asserted that to produce this work, he had gone through several periods along with the journey and development of academic intellectual. This was revealed by Syaḥrûr to maintain the credibility of the scholarship of his work. The first period began from 1970-1980, as the stage of laying the foundations of the methodology of understanding and testing of the concepts of *al-dhikr*, *al-riṣâlah*, and *al-nubuwwah*, and the determination of basic terms for the concept of “*al-dhikr*”. This stage occurred when Syaḥrûr was active at Dublin Collage of Ireland, as an ambassador sent by University of Damascus to obtain a Masters and Doctoral degree in Civil Engineering (*al-Handasah al-Madanîyah*).

The second period, began in 1980-1986 which was a time of discovery of the methodological foundation of Syaḥrûr’s contemporary reading of the concept of “*al-dhikr*”. This stage has existed since he met with Ja’far in 1980, a lecturer in linguistics who influenced Syaḥrûr’s thought about linguistics, philosophy, and the study of the Qur’an. By studying with Ja’far, Syaḥrûr was able to understand and conceive some important insights. Among them is

¹² Muhammad Yusuf, “Bacaan Kontemporer: Hermeneutika Al-Qur’an Muhammad Syahrur,” *Jurnal Diskursus Islam*, vol. 2, no. 1 (April, 2014): 56, <https://doi.org/10.24252/jdi.v2i1.6509>.



the problem of Arabic linguistics which is an independent authentic language and does not originate from other Semitic languages, such as understanding Arabic linguistics which does not have the concept of the synonym (*lā tarāduf fī lisān al-'Arab*), speech which is a means of expressing meaning, Arabic grammatical structure related to *khobar* sentences in the discipline of *balaghah* and *nahwu*, *balaghah* which are two inseparable disciplines. From these reviews, Syaḥrūr concluded that there had been fatal confusion and error in teaching Arabic in various schools and universities.¹³

Then the third period, in 1986-1990 which is the stage of compiling and writing the main themes, ideas, and thoughts that are built from the “*mushḥaf al-kitāb*”. This period has brought new enlightenment and passion for the development of Syaḥrūr’s intellect, where during the compilation and writing of the book *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur’ān: Qirā’ah Mu’āshirah* in Damascus, he always met his linguistic teacher, Ja’far, to discuss various new concepts and ideas. The results of the discussion called for Syaḥrūr to ask Ja’far to write an introduction for his work and also to compile a brief treatise on the secrets of Arabic linguistics (*asrār al-lisān al-'arabi*) to be published collectively in his book.¹⁴ Based on the brief description above, it can be understood that the work *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur’ān: Qirā’ah Mu’āshirah* was compiled by Syaḥrūr through a very serious livelihood process, and in a relatively span of time long. However, this thought of Syaḥrūr is a result of the thought of the children of the age which is *dzannī* and relative, so that it is always open to criticism and still needs to be appreciated.

Muḥammad Syaḥrūr’s Thoughts about the Qur’anic Content Classification

One of Syaḥrūr’s efforts before offering a new method and theory in reading the Qur’an is mapping the Qur’anic verses based on the historical scientific method (*manhaj al-tārīkh al-'ilmī*) as the basis for analysis. This mapping was then made by Syaḥrūr as a platform in determining the appropriate methods and approaches in exploring the contents of the teachings of the Qur’an. In this case, the first step adopted by Syaḥrūr is to “re-invent” the concept commonly used in terms related to the Qur’an. He tried to deconstruct the general definition of traditional and conventional terms by revealing naive, illogical, biased and ambiguous definitions. Then, Syaḥrūr put forward the idea of new meanings with a textual evidence that had never been found before, and finally he introduced a redefinition of the term.

¹³ Yusuf, “Bacaan Kontemporer,” p. 57.

¹⁴ Esha, “Rekonstruksi Historis,” p. 64.



According to Syaḥrūr, what is meant by *al-kitāb* is a general term that brings together all the objects of revelation that Allah conveyed to Muhammad that included the textual form of revelation and its contents. The *al-kitāb* consists of all the verses compiled in the manuscripts starting from surah al-Fâtihah to the end of surah al-Nâs which contains *risâlah* and *nubuwwah* verses.¹⁵ In contrast to the understanding of *al-kitāb* that can be compared to the *mushaf*, Syaḥrūr argues that the Qur'an is not the same as the *al-kitāb*. He understands that the Qur'an is a collection of *mutasyâbih* verses that discuss the laws of the universe (*al-qawânîn al-kaunîyah*), historical provisions (*al-qawânîn al-târikhiyah*), and unseen good news that has already happened (*al-qashash al-qur'âni*) and what will happen as the coming of doomsday, heaven, and hell all of which are stored in the *lauh mahfûdz* and *al-îmâm al-mubîn*. For Syaḥrūr, the Qur'an was present before the *inzâl* and *tanzîl*¹⁶ processes and contained elements of *tasyâbuh* which made it have an *i'jâz* potential aspect.¹⁷

Furthermore, Syaḥrūr stated that when *al-kitāb* was revealed to Muhammad, he was positioned in the capacity as a prophet and apostle, so that the content of the *al-kitāb* has a composition in accordance with the apostolic and prophetic positions of Muhammad. Thus, *al-kitāb* is divided into two major parts, namely *nubuwwah* and *risâlah*. The meaning of *nubuwwah* can be understood as the accumulation of knowledge revealed to Muhammad which then positions it as a prophet, so that the concept of *nubuwwah* includes all information (*akhbâr*) and scientific knowledge (*ma'lûmât*) listed in *al-kitāb*, as knowledge of the universe and historical law which also functions as a differentiator between rights and vanities or between the truth of reality (*haqîqah*) and conjecture (*wahm*).¹⁸

In contrast to *nubuwwah* which is identical with science, *risâlah* is a collection of all teachings that must be used as a guide by all humans, namely worship, social interaction, morals, and *halâl-harâm* delivered to Muhammad which serves as the base of loading (*taklîf*). *Risâlah* is then positioned him as an apostle and synonymous with legal issues.¹⁹ From this understanding, it

¹⁵ Syaḥrūr, *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ân*, p. 54.

¹⁶ *Inzâl* is the process of changing information material (*ma'lûmât*) from an objective form outside of human consciousness, so it cannot be digested into something that is easily understood. Meanwhile, *tanzîl* was understood by Syaḥrūr as sending the Qur'an objectively out of Muhammad's awareness through Gabriel, which happened for 23 years. While in *al-risâlah*, *talâzum* occurred between *al-inzâl* and *al-tanzîl*. Syaḥrūr, *Tajfif Manâbi' al-Irhâb*, in <http://www.shahrou.org/index.2.htm>, accessed Saturday, 13 July 2019.

¹⁷ Syaḥrūr, *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ân*, p. 77.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 54-5.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 37-8.



can be understood that theories about the existence of the universe, humans, and historical interpretations are an integral part of *nubuwwah* and are *mutasyābihāt* verses, in a sense they can be interpreted in several perspectives. For Syaḥrūr, each interpretation certainly includes changes in meaning from ambiguous texts, so that it can bring up two or more perceptions of the same word. Next Syaḥrūr classifies verses in the Qur'an based on the following verses:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

“It is He who has sent down to you, [O Muhammad], the Book; in it are verses [that are] precise, they are the foundation of the Book, and others unspecified. As for those in whose hearts is deviation [from truth], they will follow that of it which is unspecified, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation [suitable to them]. And no one knows its [true] interpretation except Allah. But those firm in knowledge say, “We believe in it. All [of it] is from our Lord.” And no one will be reminded except those of understanding.” (Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 7).

Based on this verse, Syaḥrūr explains *al-kitāb* by dividing it into three categories: *first*, *muhkamāt* verse, which is a collection of *muhkamāt* verses which is specifically termed as *umm al-kitāb* by referring to the redaction of “*minhu āyāt muḥkamāt hunna umm al-kitāb*”. The definition of *umm al-kitāb* cannot be interpreted other than what has been defined in *al-kitāb*, which is a collection of *muhkamāt* verses which is a compilation of laws submitted to the Prophet Muhammad, containing the principles of human behavior such as worship, social interaction, morals and things that make up the minutes. *Second*, the verse of *mutasyābihāt*. *Third*, verses that are not *muhkam* and not *mutasyābih*. The categorization presented by Syaḥrūr is based on Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 7. This explicitly indeed mentions the categories *muhkam* and *mutasyāb*. While the third category is not *muhkam* and not *mutasyāb*, Syaḥrūr interprets based on the fragment of the verse “*wa uhkaru mutasyābihāt*”.²⁰

Related to this discussion, Syaḥrūr develops an argument to strengthen his opinion that the word “*uhkaru*” is a form of *nakirah*, which must be interpreted as “some others, not a whole”. Then the logical consequences will arise the question, if the first part (as a whole) is *muhkam* and part (of the second part) is *mutasyābih*, then what are the other parts? Certainly those who are not *muhkam* and those who are not *mutasyābih* (*lā muḥkam wa lā mutasyābih*). Furthermore,

²⁰ Fuad Mustafid, “Pembaruan Pemikiran Hukum Islam: Studi tentang Teori *Hudud* Muhammad Syaḥrūr,” *Al-Mazhib: Jurnal Pemikiran Hukum*, vol. 5, no. 2 (December, 2017): 310.



Syahṛūr gives this third part with the term *tafshīl al-Kitāb* by referring to the word of Allah in the Yūnus [10]: 37, as follows:

وَمَا كَانَ هَذَا الْقُرْآنُ أَنْ يُفْتَرَى مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنْ تَصْدِيقَ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلَ الْكِتَابِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ مِنْ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

“And it was not [possible] for this Qur’an to be produced by other than Allah, but [it is] a confirmation of what were before it and a detailed explanation of the [former] scriptures, about which there is no doubt, from the Lord of the worlds.” (Yūnus [10]: 37)

Accordingly, Syahṛūr breaks down each of the three categories mentioned above. First, including the verses of *muhkamāt* which functions as the main of the *al-Kitāb* (*umm al-Kitāb*) and presenting Muhammad’s apostolic signs (*risālah*) are verses related to the theme of worship, ethics (morals), temporary and local laws, as well as teachings (*ta’limāt*) which are not included in the category of determining the law, both general for Muslims and specifically for the Prophet. Second, the prophethood (*nubuwwah*) which is represented in the category of verses *mutasyābihāt*, includes the Qur’an and *al-sab’ al-matsānī*. In this case, the Qur’an includes verses related to natural law, both universally applicable to the universe and specifically related to space and time constraints (*al-qawānīn al-‘āmmah wa al-juz’iyyah*), the history of generations formerly (*qashshas*), and historical law (*qawānīn al-tārikh*). Third, verses that do not fall into the two categories above are called *tafshīl al-Kitāb* or explanatory verses, namely verses that provide explanations of the contents of the *al-Kitāb* (*al-āyāt al-sharīhah li muhtawayāt al-Kitāb*).²¹

From this it is clear that Syahṛūr’s understanding of the Qur’an is very much different from conventional understanding. But this conception is precisely an important one, because in this way it can deconstruct as well as reconstruct the reading of the scriptural texts which so far have been considered final. To see more clearly Syahṛūr’s conception of the Qur’an, *nubuwwah* and *risālah*, we can consider the diagram below:²²

²¹ Syahṛūr, *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur’ān*, pp. 55-6.

²² Syamsuddin, *Metodologi Fiqih Islam*, pp. 27-32.



Diagram 1

Muhammad Syahrūr's Thought towards Qur'an

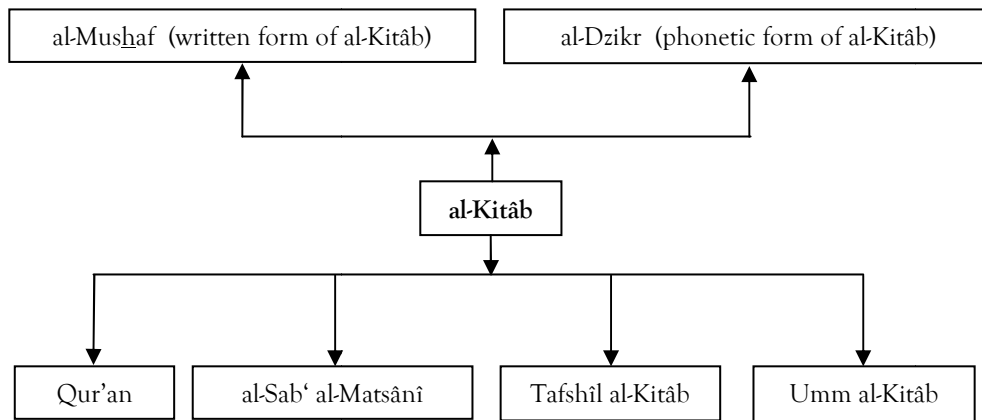


Diagram 2

Muhammad Syahrūr's Thought towards Muḥkamāt and Mutasyābihāt Verses

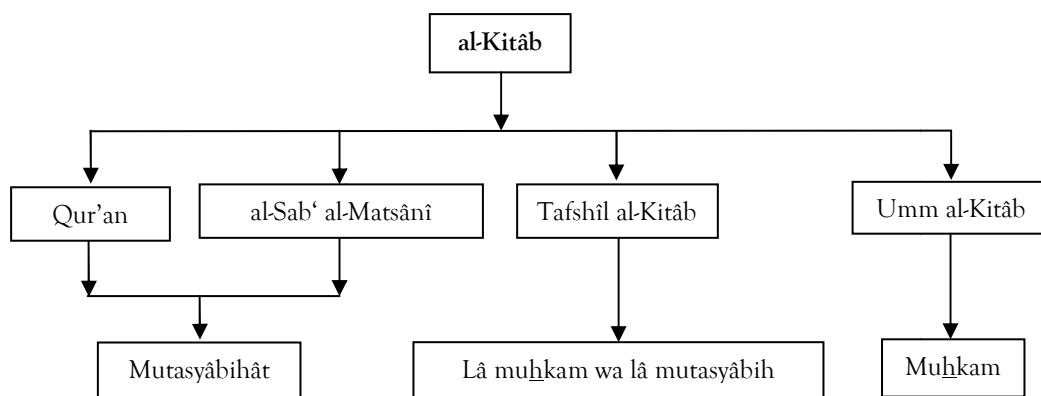


Diagram 3

Muhammad Syahrūr's Thought towards Nubuwwah and Risālah of Muhammad

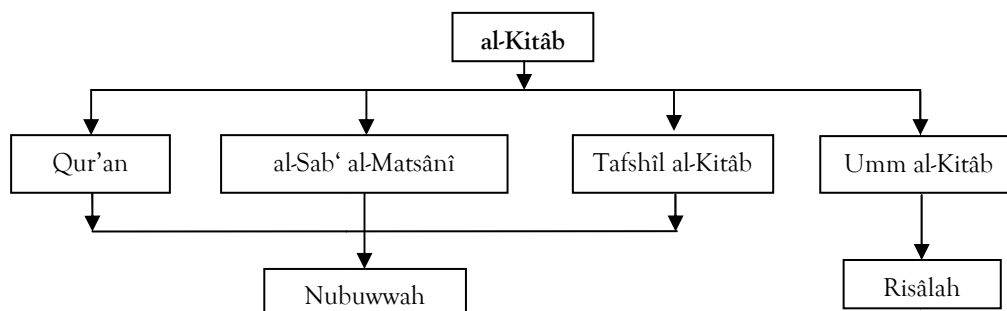




Diagram 4

The Differences between the Quran and *Umm al-Kitāb* According to Muḥammad Syahrūr

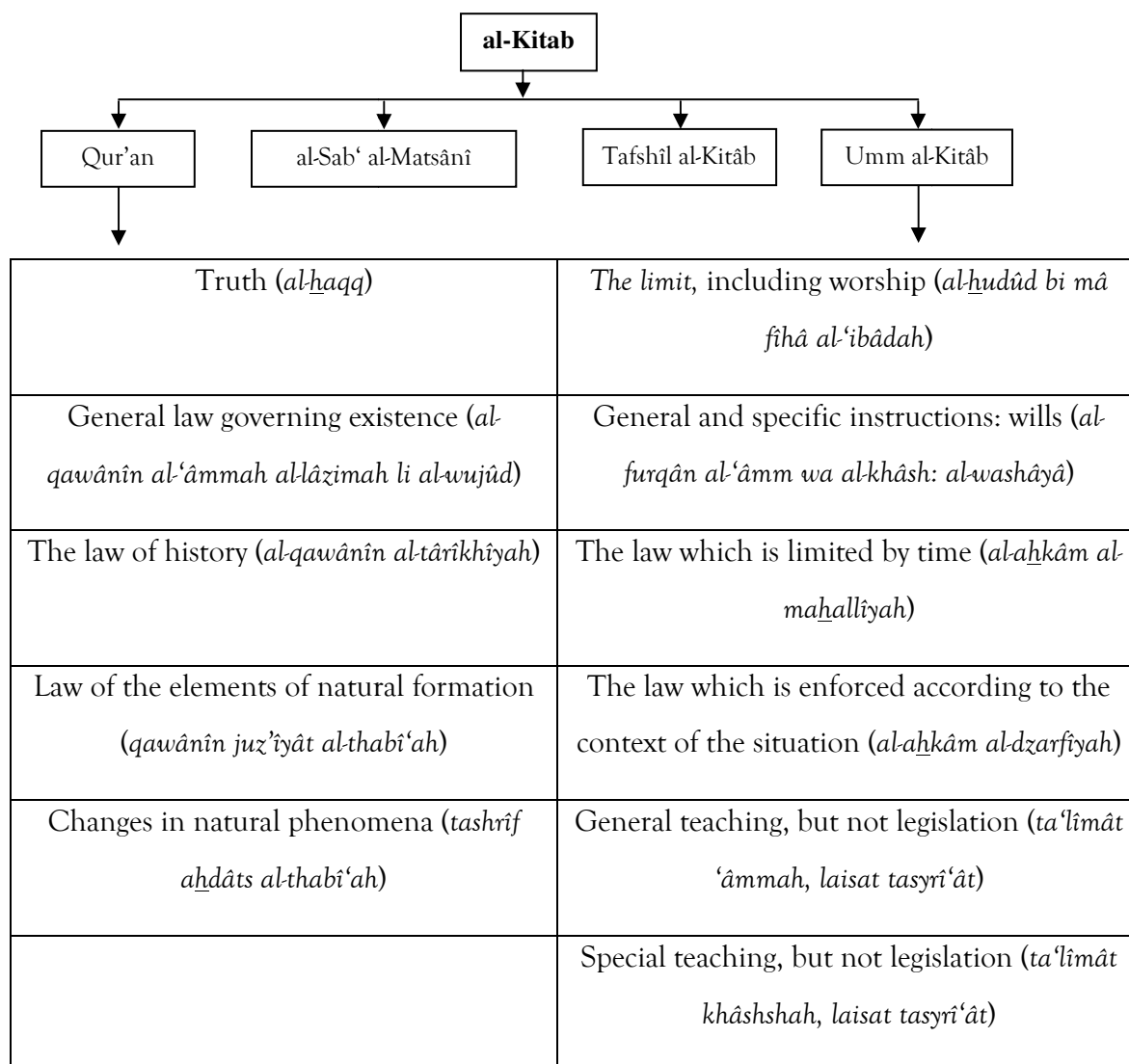


Diagram 5

The Differences on the Conception of *Nubuwwah* and *Risālah*

Criteria	<i>Nubuwwah</i>	<i>Risālah</i>
Characteristics	Consisting of objective sciences (<i>maudhū'i</i>)	Consists of laws (<i>al-aḥkām</i>) which are subjective.
Functions	Distinguishing between right and vanity Position Muhammad as a	The difference between <i>ḥalāl</i> and <i>ḥarām</i>



	prophet	Position Muhammad as an apostle
Contents	Universal rules of the universe, rules of history, <i>aḥsan al-qashash</i> , particular rules of natural phenomena, <i>aḥsan al-ḥadīts (al-sab‘ al-matsâni)</i> , explanatory verses (<i>tafsîr al-kitâb</i>)	<i>Hudûd</i> , <i>‘ibâdât</i> , <i>al-akhlâq (al-washâyâ)</i> , and <i>ta‘lîmât</i> which is special or general, but not included in the sharia, and teaching information that has been applied to the prophet, local and temporal

Model of Approach to Syaḥrûr’s Quranic Interpretation

In an effort to neutralize the stagnation of Arab-Islamic thought and as a solution to solve various contemporary problems, Syaḥrûr tried to offer methods and approaches in interpreting the Qur’an, including:

a. Linguistic Approach

The linguistic approach (*al-manhaj al-lughawî*) implemented by Syaḥrûr in interpreting the Qur’an produces a very different conclusion from the mainstream understanding of Muslims so far. By studying linguistics with Ja‘far Dakk al-Bâb, he describes this linguistic approach as the main foothold in the introduction of his first book; *al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân: Qirâ‘ah Mu‘âshirah*.

Based on his scientific linguistic approach, Syaḥrûr concludes that language is an important medium for humans to communicate with each other. For this reason, Syaḥrûr, like al-Jurjânî, stresses the existence of language links on the one hand and thought on the other. For Syaḥrûr, the human’s thought does not arise at once, but instead develops naturally. Likewise language with its system develops according to the development of human society and does not appear at once. According to Syaḥrûr, the origin of this language was not revealed (*tauqîfî*) as confirmed by Ibn Fâris, but was made and constructed from codes that were laid out in reality as believed by Ibn Jinnî and al-Jurjânî.²³

A representative example with this linguistic approach can be found when Syaḥrûr interprets the words *qisth* and *‘adl* in the verse polygamy:

²³ Syaḥrûr, *al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân*, p. 30.



وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مَثْنَىٰ وَثُلَاثَ وَرُبَاعَ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَلَّا تَعُولُوا

“And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice].” (Al-Nisâ’ [4]: 3)

When interpreting this verse, Syaḥrūr does not give a lengthy explanation related to the meaning of the words *qisth* and ‘*adl*. He only examined in terms of language and does not mention the slightest meaning of justice as what should be applied in polygamy. According to Syaḥrūr, the origin of the word *qasatha* in Arabic is to show something that has two opposing meanings. The first meaning is “justice and help”, while the second meaning is “tyranny and oppression”. For the first understanding, Syaḥrūr refers to the explanation of al-Mâ’idah [5]: 42, al-Hujurât [49]: 9, and al-Mumtaḥanah [60]: 8, while in the second sense, Syaḥrūr refers to al-Jinn [72]: 14. Similarly, the word *adl* has two different meanings, it can mean *istiwâ’* which means “the same or straight” and can also mean *al-a’wâj* which means “crooked”.²⁴

b. Intratextuality approach

In the science of interpretation, the main object of interpretation is the text of the Qur’an. The interpretation of the Qur’an as a scientific activity demands its own methodological formulation. In order to continue to spread the consistency of his universality, this reading of Syaḥrūr based on the principle of intratextuality produces a different interpretation. As an example of Syaḥrūr’s intratextuality approach, it can be seen from the his *hudûd* theory to the verses regarding clothing. He explains it based on the following verse:

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَعْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوهِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوِ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولِي الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَىٰ عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

“And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion off] their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers,

²⁴ Ibid., p. 30.



their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed." (Al-Nûr [24]: 31)

In this verse, Syaḥrūr uses the context of the discussion by describing the problematic about women's clothing. He relies on the problem of decoration (*zīnah*) revealed in the fragment of the verse: "*wa lā yubdīna zīnatahunna illā mā dzahara minhā*" (and do not show *zīnah* except what appears). According to Syaḥrūr, the women's body as a whole is a decoration (*zīnah*) which is globally divided into two: first, female body parts that are naturally exposed (*al-dzāhir bi al-khalq*), such as the head, abdomen, back, two legs and two hands. Second, female body parts that are naturally hidden (*ghair al-dzāhir bi al-khalq*), that is, that God has hidden in the shape and composition of the female body.²⁵

This second part includes an the verse: "*wal yadhribna bi khumûrihinna 'alâ juyûbihinna*" (and they should close the *khimâr* to *juyûb*). According to Syaḥrūr, the word *juyûb* is a plural form of the word *jaib*, meaning an open part that has two levels - not just one level, because basically the word *ja-yā-ba* comes from *ja-wa-ba* which means "hole located to something". The term *juyûb* on a woman's body has two levels at once which specifically are; the part between two breasts (*mā baina al-tsadyain*), the lower part of the breast (*mā tahta al-tsadyain*), the lower armpit (*tahta al-ibthain*), pubic (*al-farj*), and two buttocks (*al-alyatani*). All these parts are called *juyûb* which must be covered by women.

Because Allah only ordered to cover *juyûb*, according to Syaḥrūr, the minimum limit (*al-hadd al-adnâ*) women's clothing is to cover these five parts. While the maximum limit (*al-hadd al-'alâ*) is determined by the Messenger of Allah in his saying: "*kull al-mar'ah 'awrah mâ 'adâ wajhihâ wa kaffaihâ* (the whole female body is *aurat* except the face and both palms). So that "legitimate" women dress in any model while moving between the minimum and maximum limits.²⁶

However, in implementing the minimum and maximum limits of the clothing, it should consider the situations and conditions in which and when the clothes will be worn, such as natural, social, and cultural aspects, because one of the goals of clothing is to avoid *adzâ*

²⁵ Ibid., p. 618.

²⁶ Nur Mahmudah, "Al-Qur'an Sebagai Sumber Tafsir dalam Pemikiran Muhammad Syaḥrūr," *Hermeneutik*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2014): 275.



(interference) as explained by Allah in al-Aḥzâb [33]: 59: “Dzâlika adnâ an yu’rafna fa lâ yu’dzain” (That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused). In Syaḥrûr’s understanding, *adzâ* (distraction) in this verse can be natural (*thabî’î*), and can also be social (*ijtimâ’î*), such as insults, ridicule and isolation from association.

Critical Analysis of Muḥammad Syaḥrûr’s Thoughts

In the course of Islamic history, the discourse about the method of interpreting the Qur’an is not a new phenomenon, because since the beginning of the existence of Islam on earth various methods have been tried to be formulated and applied by classical and contemporary commentators. This phenomenon is a symptom of the high intention of Muslims to always dialect between the Qur’an as a text (*nash*) is limited, with the development of social humanitarian problems faced by humans as an unlimited context. This is also the implication of the theological view of Muslims that the Qur’an is *shâlih li kull zamân wa makân* (the Qur’an is always in harmony with the development of time and place).

One contemporary figure who contributed to offer thematic methods (*maudhû’î*) in understanding the content of the Qur’an is Muḥammad Syaḥrûr. He has his own term for methodological devices which according to him get justification from al-Muzammil [73]: 4 with *manhaj altartil*. This method is then put by Syaḥrûr as one of the main principles in the interpretation methodology or commonly called *qirâ’ah mu’âshirah*.

Al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân: Qirâ’ah Mu’âshirah is an ambitious project carried by Syaḥrûr in order to understand the Qur’an which basically has the goal of freeing itself from the hegemony of the doctrine of the past that was so overwhelming that the Arab-Islamic world experienced stagnation of thought, furthermore the stagnation of civilization because it does not dare to break, even beyond classical reasoning and at the same time trying to bridge the time gap between the Qur’an revealed and the objective conditions of the Koran readers who live in different spaces and times.

Therefore, Syaḥrûr calls again related to the definition of the Qur’an with a new paradigm. Syaḥrûr argues that in understanding the Qur’an, Muslims should be positioned as the early generations of Islam. In other words, in understanding the Qur’an, “treat the Qur’an as if the Prophet had just died yesterday”. This kind of understanding has made it important for Muslims to understand the Qur’an in accordance with the context in which they live and



eliminate traps in the products of past thought. Consequently, the results of the interpretations of the classical and middle generations of Muslims are not binding on modern Muslim society, because they are a form of response, interpretation of the Qur'an, and not final. Likewise with what the Prophet Muhammad did, none other than one form of model of the interpretation of the Qur'an in accordance with the context of space and time he was at that time. Therefore, the basic assumption of the methodology applied by Syaḥrūr is the juxtaposition between reason, revelation and reality.

In order to interpret the Qur'an as an effort to find solutions to contemporary problems, Syaḥrūr has offered various innovative and revolutionary theories, especially in the interpretation of the Qur'an. This is very apparent from the large influence of his educational background as an engineer who also studies modern linguistic studies, philosophy, and the humanities. So, it is very obvious when Syaḥrūr uses these sciences as an approach to interpret the Qur'an. Hence, it is not surprising that the results of his study are unique and very different from the mainstream in the Islamic world.

However, judging from his biography and some of his theories, Syaḥrūr has no background in Islamic studies, especially in the aspect of language. Yūsuf al-Shaidāwī, in his book, *Baidhah al-Dik*, gives a specific and systematic critique of language errors in Syaḥrūr's *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ān: Qirā'ah Mu'āshirah*. Among al-Shaidāwī's criticisms is how Syaḥrūr was wrong in taking and interpreting the original word of *al-Kitāb*. According to him, this definition shows that Syaḥrūr does not master the history and development of Arabic.²⁷ In another part, Syaḥrūr also divides the verses of the Qur'an into two main parts: *muḥkam* and *mutasyābih*. According to al-Shaidāwī, this classification is not based on the knowledge of *nahwu* and *sharaf* that is strong, because Syaḥrūr has misunderstood the meaning of this verse from the grammatical aspects.²⁸

Overall, Syaḥrūr's mistake in studying the Qur'an is his weakness in terms of linguistic knowledge. This is understandable considering he came from a technical education background, not Islamic studies, let alone Arabic. In his education, he did learn autodidact language with his teacher, Ja'far Dakk al-Bâb, but that was not enough. Lack of understanding Syaḥrūr language is reflected in his book, *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ān: Qirā'ah Mu'āshirah*. In this book, al-Shaidāwī found more than 80 Syaḥrūr's errors in his Qur'an study project. In

²⁷ Yūsuf al-Shaidāwī, *Baidhah al-Dik: Naqd Lughawiy li Kitāb al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ān li Muḥammad Syaḥrūr* (n.p.: al-'Awunihay, n.d.), p. 14.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51.



addition, the application of the triadic concept to the position of the Qur'an, where it positions the Qur'an as being relatively dynamic, cannot be justified. One of the characteristics of the Qur'an itself is its truth in all times and conditions. So, the opinion that says that the truth of the Qur'an is relative and can be re-interpreted until changing the laws and regulations, as Syaḥrūr's opinion above certainly cannot be justified.

Conclusion

According to the brief understanding above, it can be concluded that Muḥammad Syaḥrūr in his monumental work, *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ān: Qirā'ah Mu'āshirah*, tried to carry out a process of "re-reading" of the Qur'anic text with a contemporary approach model. This reading of the contemporary Qur'an seeks to bridge the time gap between the time the Qur'an was revealed and the objective conditions of the Qur'an readers who are still alive following the current developments. The basic assumption of the interpretation methodology initiated by Syaḥrūr is to use reason and reality that emphasizes the linguistic and intratextuality aspects, so that it can deconstruct and reconstruct the science of the Qur'an and the classification of its contents which has been considered final.

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