

POWER, TRADITION, AND IDENTITY IN CLASSICAL QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS: THE LOCALITY OF IBN KATHĪR'S INTERPRETATION AND ITS RELEVANCE TO QIRĀ'AH SAB'AH

Mohammad Safwan Mabur

Universitas Islam Negeri Profesor Kiai Haji Saifuddin Zuhri

Purwokerto, Indonesia

safwan@uinsaizu.ac.id

Abstract: This article explores how the socio-intellectual environment of 14th-century Damascus shaped Ibn Kathīr's preference for certain Qur'anic readings (*qirā'ah sab'ah*) and his rejection of others. While existing studies often examine *qirā'ah* through philological or theological lenses, few have contextualized them sociologically in relation to local power dynamics. This research addresses that gap by analyzing the interplay between Ibn Kathīr's locality, interpretive methodology, and authority structures using Pierre Bourdieu's habitus theory and Max Weber's conflict of authority. Employing a qualitative approach that integrates textual analysis, historical study, and sociological theory, this study finds: (1) The Damascene scholarly habitus—marked by the dominance of the Ahl al-Hadith tradition and Shafī'i jurisprudence—formed Ibn Kathīr's preference for *mutawātir qirā'ah* like Hafs's narration from 'Āsim; (2) Conflicts of religious authority, including tensions with minority sects and Mamluk political structures, catalyzed the exclusion of *qirā'ah shādḡah* such as *arjulakum* in QS. Al-Mā'idah (5): 6; and (3) *Qirā'ah sab'ah* functioned as an arena for the negotiation of Sunnī identity, balancing hermeneutic flexibility and theological orthodoxy. This study contributes a novel sociological perspective to tafsir studies, demonstrating that Qur'anic interpretation is not a neutral act, but

a socially embedded practice shaped by context, power, and identity.

Keywords: *Ibn Kathīr's Interpretation; Qirā'ah sab'ah, Bourdieu's Habitus; Weber's Conflict of Authority; Mamluk Damascus.*

Introduction

Quranic interpretation, as a manifestation of intellectual dialectics between sacred texts and human contexts, never exists in a vacuum. It is a product of epistemological negotiations influenced by locality, social structure, and the dynamics of power surrounding an interpreter. In the classical Islamic tradition, the *Tafsir Ibn Kathīr* (*Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*), written by Imam 'Imaduddīn Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'il bin Kathīr (d. 774 AH/1373 AD) in Damascus during the Mamlūk Dynasty, represents the intersection of scholarship, authority, and locality. This *tafsir bi al-ma'tsur* (based on narration) emerged in 14th century Damascus, which Lapidus (Lapidus, 1967) describes as a meeting point between post-Mongol invasion political stability and rising Sunni orthodoxy with strict educational structures. As a student of Ibn Taimiyyah within the network of Damascus scholars including Al-Dhahabī and Al-Mizzī, Ibn Kathīr developed an interpretive approach responding to both textual tradition and the socio-political dynamics of his era.

The *qirā'ah sab'ah* (seven mutawatir readings of the Qur'an) plays a central role in Ibn Kathīr's interpretation methodology. These readings, codified by Ibn al-Jazari (d. 833 AH), offer hermeneutic flexibility while simultaneously functioning as an arena for contestation of religious authority. Ibn Kathīr typically favored *qirā'ah* conforming to Uthmānī rasm, Arabic language rules, and strong sanad, particularly the narration of Hafs that dominated Damascus (Nasser, 2013). His rejection of *qirā'ah shadhab*, such as the "mālik" reading with a long mim in QS. Al-Fātihah (1): 4, reflects both the puritanical attitude influenced by

Ibn Taimiyyah and the Damascene tradition of narration criticism (Al-Suyuthi, 2003). In this context, *qirā'ah* selections represent not merely phonetic variations but symbols of theological legitimacy reinforcing Sunnī hegemony, making Ibn Kathīr's work an ideal subject for analysis through Pierre Bourdieu's habitus theory and Max Weber's conflict of authority.

Previous studies on Ibn Kathīr's Tafsir have significantly overlooked the sociological dimensions that shaped his interpretive choices regarding *qirā'ah*. Saleh (Saleh, 2004), while characterizing Ibn Kathīr's tafsir as a "project of consolidating Sunnī authority" (p. 23), fails to analyze how this authority-building project specifically manifested in his *qirā'ah* preferences or how Damascus's intellectual environment influenced these choices. Similarly, Nasser's (2013) extensive historical analysis of *qirā'ah* transmission remains limited to technical and philological dimensions, neglecting the power dynamics and social structures that determined which readings gained prominence. Other scholars have examined Ibn Kathīr's methodology (Al-Dzahabi, 2001; Pink, 2021) but treat his interpretive choices as purely theological decisions divorced from socio-political contexts. This critical gap in existing scholarship necessitates a new analytical approach that employs Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Weber's theory of authority conflict to understand how Ibn Kathīr's geographical and intellectual locality in Damascus directly influenced his *qirā'ah* preferences, thereby revealing the underlying power structures that shaped classical Quranic interpretation beyond mere textual considerations.

This study addresses three critical questions that bridge textual analysis with sociological inquiry: (1) how did the Damascene scholarly habitus shape Ibn Kathīr's preference for certain *qirā'ah*? (2) How did the conflict of religious authority during the Mamlūk period influence his rejection of the *qirā'ah shādhah*? (3) What are the socio-historical implications of the relationship between Ibn Kathīr's tafsir and the *qirā'ah sab'ah*?

These questions carry significant theoretical implications by extending Bourdieu's field theory into classical Islamic scholarship, potentially revolutionizing how we understand the formation of religious canon beyond conventional theological frameworks. Practically, this research offers contemporary Muslim scholars and educational institutions a methodological framework for critically evaluating how social contexts influence even the most authoritative interpretations, thereby encouraging more reflexive approaches to religious texts. Furthermore, by illuminating the power dynamics that privileged certain readings over others in formative Islamic scholarly traditions, this study provides valuable insights for modern interfaith dialogue and religious education, demonstrating how seemingly objective textual preferences ultimately reflect deeper socio-political realities rather than absolute divine intent alone.

Methodologically, this study combines textual analysis (Tafsir Ibn Kathīr), historical study of the Damascus context, and application of social theory. This approach allows the reconstruction of the relationship between locality, scholarship, and authority in the interpretation of the Qur'an. Thus, this article is not only relevant to the study of tafsir, but also to the study of the sociology of religion and the anthropology of Islamic scholarship. In a broader context, this study underlines that tafsir is not a neutral activity, but rather a practice laden with negotiations of power, identity, and legitimacy.

This study employs a qualitative interpretive approach to understand how Damascus's locality shaped Ibn Kathīr's interpretation of *qirā'ah sab'ah* through Bourdieu's habitus theory and Weber's conflict of authority (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The methodology integrates three complementary methods: textual analysis of Ibn Kathīr's, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* (1999), focusing on sections discussing *qirā'ah* variations (QS. Al-Fātihah (1): 4, QS. Al-Baqarah (2): 259, and QS. Al-Mā'idah (5): 6); comparative

reading with Al-Suyūṭī's, *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (2003) for epistemological verification; and historical reconstruction of 14th century Damascus under Mamluk rule using both primary sources (Al-Dhahabī's *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*) and secondary literature (Berkey, 1992; Lapidus, 1967) to map scholarly networks and religious authority dynamics that influenced Ibn Kathīr's intellectual development.

The theoretical framework applies Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, symbolic capital, and field to analyze how Damascus's intellectual environment shaped Ibn Kathīr's preferences for certain *qirā'ah*. Habitus, defined as “a system of structured and structuring dispositions that produce practices and perceptions that are considered normal by its practitioners” (Bourdieu, 1990), explains Ibn Kathīr's internalized disposition toward prioritizing authentic sanads and rejecting non-mutawatir readings as reflecting the doxa of Damascus's Ahl al-Hadith tradition (Eickelman, 1985). Weber's theory complements this by illuminating authority conflicts underlying *qirā'ah* choices, distinguishing between traditional authority (based on salaf legacy), charismatic authority, and rational-legal authority (Weber, 1978). Ibn Kathīr's rejection of *qirā'ah shādhah* associated with minority theological groups represents his effort to maintain Sunnī orthodoxy amidst theological contestation, confirming Melchert's (Melchert, 2008) observation that “*qirā'ah* is not only a linguistic issue, but also a political one, because each reading carries a certain claim to authority”.

Data collection utilized authoritative classical manuscripts, recent scholarly journals (published within five years), and academic books, with validity ensured through source triangulation comparing exegetical texts with historical records and theoretical literature. The analytical process proceeded iteratively, synthesizing textual evidence from Ibn Kathīr's tafsir with historical contextualization of Damascus's scholarly environment and theoretical interpretations through Bourdieu and Weber's

sociological concepts. This interdisciplinary approach moves beyond mere descriptive analysis to reveal how Ibn Kathīr’s *qirā’ah* preferences reflected not just theological considerations but also the socio-political dynamics of Mamluk Damascus, where scholarly legitimacy depended on negotiating complex relationships between textual authority, intellectual networks, and political power (Berkey, 1992).

Contestation of Authority, the Damascene Scholarly Habitus, and Social Negotiation in the Tradition of *Qirā’ah Sab’ah* from Ibn Kathīr’s Perspective

This study reveals the complex relationship between the locality of Damascus in the Mamluk era, Ibn Kathīr’s interpretation in *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm*, and his preference for *qirā’ah sab’ah*, analyzed through the lenses of Pierre Bourdieu’s habitus theory and Max Weber’s conflict of authority. The main findings indicate that: (1) The Damascus scholarly habitus, characterized by the dominance of the Ahl al-Hadith tradition, the Shafi’ī school, and narration criticism, shaped Ibn Kathīr’s tendency to prefer *qirā’ah mutawātir* such as Hafs’s narration of ‘Āsim; (2) Conflicts of religious authority, both with minority groups such as the Shi’ites and with the Mamlūk political authority, influenced his rejection of *qirā’ah shāẖah*; and (3) Ibn Kathīr’s interpretation reflects a negotiation between theological authenticity and social stability in its historical context. The following is a breakdown of the findings based on textual analysis, historical studies, and theoretical interpretations.

Table 1: Comparison of Qirā’ah Mutawātir and Shāẖah in Ibn Kathīr’s Tafsir

Paragraph	Mutawatir Recitation	Qur’an	Hermeneutic Meaning	Qirā’ah Shāẖah	Reason for Rejection	Theological Context
QS. Al-Fātiḥah (1): 4	Malik, Malik	Hafs, Nāfi’	Mālik: Absolute ownership; Malik: Power as King	Māliki (long mim)	Weak sanad, not in accordance with the Ottoman rasm	Affirming Sunni authority, rejecting minority readings (Ibnu Katsir, 1999)

QS. Baqarah (2): 222	Al-Yathurna, Yattahhurna	Hamzah, Al-Kisa'i	Yathurna: Natural purity; Yattahhurna: Obligation to take a bath	Yatathahharna	No mutawatir, it is against Arabic language rules	Supporting the Sunni fiqh consensus (Ibnu Katsir, 1999)
QS. Mā'idah (5): 6	Arjulikum (kasrah)	Hafs, Nāfi'	Washing the feet is mandatory in	Arjulakum (Fathah)	Associated with Shiites, weak sanad	Rejecting Shiite ritual practices (Ibnu Katsir, 1999)
QS. 'Imrān 146 (3):	Qatala (Madhi)	The majority of qurrā'	Emphasizing historical sacrifice	Yuqtalu (mudhāri')	Less appropriate to narrative context	Strengthening the Sunni narrative about jihad (Ibnu Katsir, 1999)

Damascus Scholarly Habitus and Ibn Kathīr's Qirā'ah Preferences

Analysis of the text of *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* shows that Ibn Kathīr consistently prioritized *qirā'ah* that met three conditions: conformity with the Uthmānī rasm, Arabic language rules, and authentic sanad. This preference was inseparable from the scholarly habitus of Damascus, which was the intellectual center of Islam in the 14th century CE. Damascus, as described by Berkey (1992), was “a scholarly field rich in hadith and fiqh traditions, which strengthened the authority of scholars through sanad and narration criticism” (Berkey, 1992). The *abl al-badith* tradition, which was dominant in this city, emphasized the authenticity of the text through an unbroken chain of transmission, a principle reflected in Ibn Kathīr's *tafsīr bi al-ma'tsur* methodology.

A concrete example is found in the interpretation of QS. Al-Fātihah (1): 4, where Ibn Kathīr discusses the difference in recitation between *mālik* (with alif, “The One Who Ruled”) and *malik* (without alif, “The King”). In *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, he states:

“These two readings are authentic and mutawatir, with *malik* emphasizing God's absolute ownership, while *malik* shows His authority as King. However, readings like Māliki by extending the mim are *shāḫ* and cannot be accepted because of the weak sanad”, (Ibnu Katsir, 1999).

This choice reflects the scholarly habitus of Damascus, which prioritizes *qirā'ah* that has been established among Sunnī scholars, especially the narration of Hafṣ from 'Āsim, which is dominant in the Sham region (Nasser, 2013). The rejection of *qirā'ah shāẖah* also shows the influence of Ibn Kathīr's teachers, such as Ibn Taimiyyah, who are known to be puritanical in maintaining the purity of the sacred text (Melchert, 2008).

In addition, historical analysis reveals that Damascus during the Mamlūk era was a center of education with madrasahs such as Al-Madrasah al-Aṣrafiyyah and Al-Madrasah al-Nūriyyah, where Ibn Kathīr taught and interacted with scholars such as Al-Zāhabī and Al-Mizzī (Lapidus, 1967). This scientific network strengthened Ibn Kathīr's symbolic capital, which allowed him to establish authority in choosing *qirā'ah*. In Bourdieu's framework, this symbolic capital—in the form of mastery of hadith, *qirā'ah*, and connections with prominent scholars—became a tool to maintain his position in the competitive scientific field (Bourdieu, 1990). For example, in QS. Al-Baqarah (2): 259, Ibn Kathīr quotes the *qirā'ah nunshizubā* (with za) from Hafṣ and rejects the *nunshirubā* (with ra) from Ibn 'Āmir if it is not supported by a strong sanad, indicating a tendency to maintain the consensus of the scholars of Damascus (Ibnu Katsir, 1999).

Conflict of Authority and Rejection of Qirā'ah Syadz

This study finds that Ibn Kathīr's rejection of *qirā'ah shāẖah* was not only technical, but also political-social, reflecting the conflict of religious authority during the Mamluk period. In Weber's perspective, Ibn Kathīr's religious authority was traditional, based on the legacy of the salaf and the sanad of knowledge (Weber, 1978). However, the Mamluk period was marked by tensions between the authority of the ulama and political authority, where the ruler often controlled the appointment of religious positions, such as *qādhī* or *mudarris* (Saleh, 2004).

In this context, *qirā'ah shāẓah*—often associated with minority groups such as the Shi'a or Mu'tazilah—was considered a threat to theological and social stability.

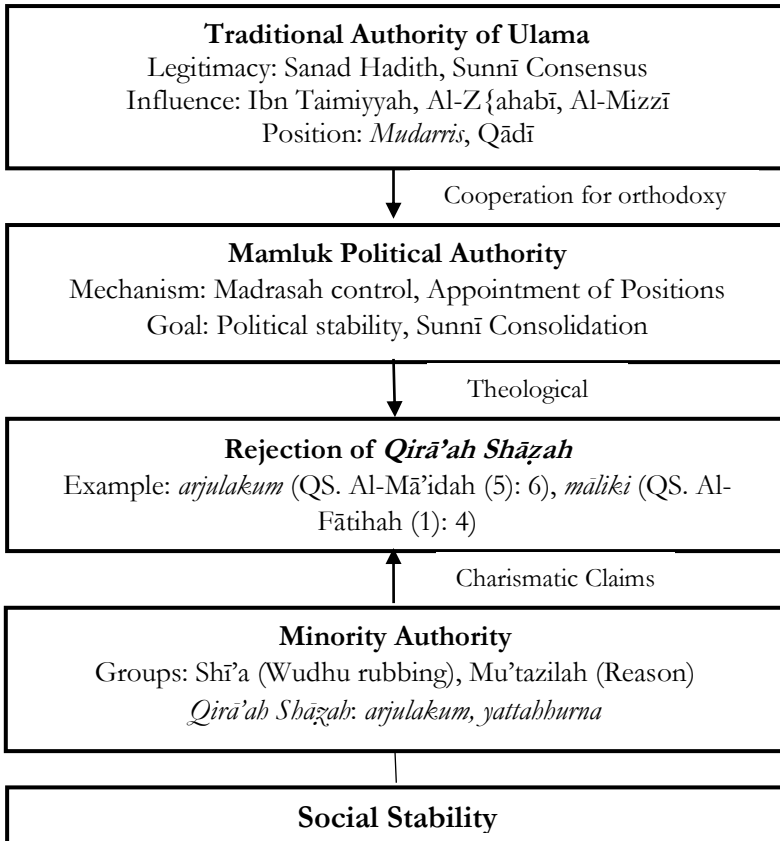


Figure 1: Conceptual Authority Conflict Matrix in the Rejection of *Qirā'ah Shāẓah*

Figure 1 above depicts the conflict of authority between scholars (traditional authority), Mamlūk rulers (political authority), and minority groups (charismatic authority), with a focus on the rejection of *qirā'ah shāẓah*. Elements such as Mamlūk control mechanisms, minority theological claims, and social stability goals are clearly described (Weber, 1978).

A significant example is found in the interpretation of QS. Al-Mā'idah (5): 6, which relates to the law of ablution. Ibn Kathīr rejected the recitation of *arjulakum* with fathah (indicating the permissibility of wiping the feet) narrated from Abū ‘Amr, because it contradicts the mutawatir recitation of *arjulakum* with kasrah (obligating washing the feet). He stated:

“Reading with the fathah is shadz and is not in accordance with the ulama consensus, because the Qur'an emphasizes the obligation to wash the feet based on the history of Hafs and Nafi’ ” (Ibnu Katsir, 1999).

This rejection reflects Ibn Kathīr’s attempt to maintain the authority of orthodox Sunnī, which faces challenges from the interpretations of other groups, such as Shi’a, who tend to wipe the feet during ablution (Nasser, 2013). In Weber’s framework, this rejection is a form of conflict between traditional (Sunnī) authority and the charismatic authority of minority groups, who claim legitimacy through alternative readings (Weber, 1978).

Table 2: The Socio-Historical Context of Damascus and Its Influence on Ibn Kathīr’s Tafsir

Aspect	Damascus Context (14th Century CE)	Influence on Interpretation	Habitus Indicator	Authority Indicator
Education	Madrasah (Al-Ashrafiyyah, Al-Nuriyyah), hadith tradition (Lapidus, 1967)	Prioritizing tafsir <i>bi al-ma'tsur</i> , sahih sanad	Internalization of historical criticism	Traditional authority of the ulama
Political	Mamluk dominance, post-Mongol Sunnī consolidation (Berkey, 1992)	Rejection of <i>qirā'ah shaḡab</i> for social stability	Sunnī doxa as the norm	Conflict with Mamlūk political authority
Ulama Network	Relationship with Ibn Taimiyyah, Al-Zāhabī, Al-Mizzī (Melchert, 2008)	Theological purification, Hafs' <i>qirā'ah</i> preference	Symbolic capital of science	Legitimacy through sanad

Theological Threat	Shia, Mu'tazilah, heretical sect (Hodgson, 1974)	Affirmation of orthodoxy through mutawatir qirā'ah	Epistemological rigidity	Resistance to the charismatic authority of a minority
--------------------	--	--	--------------------------	---

Further historical studies reveal that the Mamlūk era was a period of Sunni consolidation after external (Mongol) and internal (heresy) threats. Scholars such as Ibn Kathīr, who also wrote *Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, acted as guardians of orthodoxy by rejecting practices considered heretical, including *qirā'ah shaḡah* (Hodgson, 1974). For example, in QS. Al-Baqarah (2): 238, Ibn Kathīr rejects *qirā'ah hāfīẓū 'ala al-salawāt* with additional letters, because “it is not supported by a strong sanad and has the potential to trigger division” (Ibnu Katsir, 1999). This rejection is in line with the influence of Ibn Taimiyyah, who emphasized the purification of religion from elements considered deviant (Melchert, 2008).

Qirā'ah Sab'ah as an Arena for Theological and Social Negotiations

Text analysis shows that *qirā'ah sab'ah* not only functions as a phonetic variation, but also as a hermeneutic tool that enriches Ibn Kathīr's interpretation. In QS. Al-Baqarah (2): 222, for example, Ibn Kathīr discusses the difference in *qirā'ah* between *yathburna* (without *tashdīd*, “purity from menstruation”) and *yattabburna* (with *tashdīd*, “purification by bathing”). He stated:

“Both readings are valid, with *yathburna* indicating the natural end of menstruation, while *yattabburna* emphasizes the obligation to bathe after menstruation, as narrated from Hamzah and Al-Kisā'i”, (Ibnu Katsir, 1999).

The acceptance of these two *qirā'ah* shows Ibn Kathīr's flexibility in accommodating *mutawātir* variations, as long as they do not conflict with the consensus of scholars. However, this flexibility is limited by his scholarly habitus, which rejects *qirā'ah* that do not meet the requirements of authenticity.

In Bourdieu's framework, *qirā'ah sab'ah* has high symbolic capital because it is recognized by the majority of scholars, so it becomes a tool to strengthen the legitimacy of Ibn Kathīr's interpretation (Bourdieu, 1990). For example, the narration of Hafs from 'Āsim, which is dominant in Damascus, gives Ibn Kathīr the authority to establish a widely accepted interpretation. In contrast, *qirā'ah shāẓah*, such as Ibn Mas'ūd's reading which is not in accordance with the Uthmāni rasm, is considered to threaten Sunnī doxa, namely the belief that only *mutawātir qirā'ah* is valid (Eickelman, 1985). This study finds that Ibn Kathīr's choice of *qirā'ah* often reflects a strategy to maintain Sunnī hegemony in a social context full of theological competition.

Historical studies also reveal that Damascus during the Mamlūk period was an arena for sectarian struggle. The Shāfi'ī school, followed by Ibn Kathīr, dominated educational institutions, but also competed with the Hanbālī (influenced by Ibn Taymiyyah) and Ash'ariyah schools (Saleh, 2004). In QS. Ali 'Imrān (3): 146, Ibn Kathīr accepts *qirā'ah qatala* (violence mādhī, "killed") from the majority of *qurra'* and rejects *yuqtalu* (violence mudhāri', "will be killed") from Hamzah, because it is considered less in accordance with the context of the verse (Ibnu Katsir, 1999). This choice shows a tendency to maintain the authority of the Shāfi'ī school, which emphasizes consistency with the text of the Qur'an and hadith.

Socio-Historical Implications

This finding confirms that Ibn Kathīr's interpretation cannot be separated from the socio-historical reality of Damascus. In the Mamlūk context, interpretation and *qirā'ah* became tools to strengthen Sunnī identity amidst external (e.g., the Mongol invasion) and internal (e.g., theological schools such as the Mu'tazilah) threats. As Hodgson (1974) states, "Mamlūk scholars such as Ibn Kathīr played a key role in maintaining social cohesion through the enforcement of orthodoxy" (Hodgson, 1974). The

rejection of *qirā'ah shāẓah*, as in QS. Al-An'ām (6): 153 (*sirātan* with *sīn* vs. *ṣirātan* with *ṣād*), reflects an effort to prevent the fragmentation of the Muslim community (Ibnu Katsir, 1999).

Further theoretical analysis shows that Ibn Kathīr's interpretation is a product of negotiation between individual habitus (mastery of knowledge) and social structure (Mamlūk and ulema authority). In Bourdieu's framework, this interpretation is a "structured and structuring" practice, which reproduces Sunnī doxa while adapting to power dynamics (Bourdieu, 1977). Meanwhile, in Weber's perspective, Ibn Kathīr's interpretation reflects a conflict of authority between traditional (Salaf-based) legitimacy and Mamlūk political authority, which sometimes tries to control religious discourse (Weber, 1978).

Overall, these findings enrich the understanding of the relationship between tafsir, *qirā'ah*, and social context. Ibn Kathīr acted not only as an interpreter, but also as a social agent negotiating with power structures and religious identities. His preference for *qirā'ah mutawātir* and rejection of *qirā'ah shāẓah* reflect a strategy to maintain Sunnī authority while maintaining the stability of the Muslim community in the context of 14th-century Damascus.

Scientific Habitus and the Dynamics of Power: Epistemological, Sociological, and Theological Dimensions of Identity and Legitimacy in *Qirā'ah Sab'ah*

The findings of this study reveal that Ibn Kathīr's interpretation in *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azīm* regarding *qirā'ah sab'ah* is a product of a complex dialectic between scholarly habitus, the social structure of Damascus in the Mamlūk era, and the conflict of religious authority. Through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's habitus theory and Max Weber's conflict of authority, this analysis attempts to dissect how locality shapes Ibn Kathīr's *qirā'ah* preferences, as well as the sociological and theological implications of these choices. This analysis is divided into three main focuses:

(1) Scholarly habitus as a determinant of the epistemology of interpretation, (2) Conflict of authority as a power dynamic in the rejection of *qirā'ah shāẓah*, and (3) *Qirā'ah sab'ah* as an arena for negotiating Sunnī identity and legitimacy. This approach allows for a deeper exploration of the dimensions of Ibn Kathīr's interpretation, not only as a textual activity, but also as a social practice laden with political and historical meaning.

Scientific Habitus as a Determinant of the Epistemology of Interpretation

Bourdieu's concept of habitus, defined as "a system of dispositions that produces practices and perceptions that are considered normal" (Bourdieu, 1990), is key to understanding why Ibn Kathīr chose mutawatir qirā'ah, such as Hafs's narration of 'Āsim, and rejected *qirā'ah shāẓah*. Ibn Kathīr's scholarly habitus was formed through long socialization in the Damascus environment, which was an intellectual center with the tradition of Ahl al-Hadith, the Shafi'ī school, and strict criticism of narration. This environment, as described by Makdisi (1981), created "an institutionalized educational structure, in which sanad became the benchmark of authenticity" (Makdisi, 1981). In this context, Ibn Kathīr internalized the tendency to prioritize qirā'ah that met the requirements of mutawatir, in accordance with the Uthmāni rasm, and supported by a strong sanad.

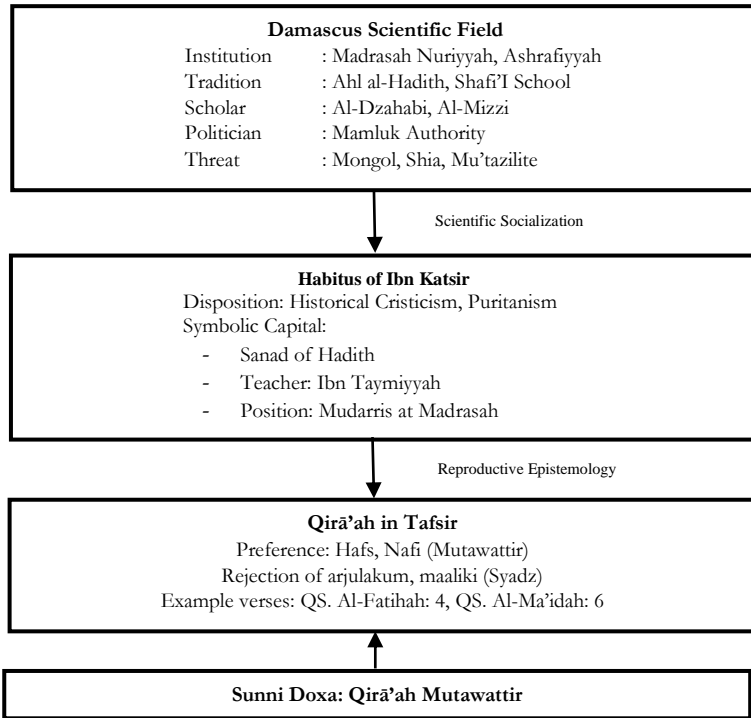


Figure 2: Dynamics of Scientific Habitus in the Damascus Field and Its Influence on Qirā'ah

Figure 2 above explains how Ibn Kathīr's scholarly habitus was formed through socialization in the Damascus scholarly field, influencing his *qirā'ah* preferences in *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*. The main elements include educational institutions, hadith tradition, the influence of the teacher (Ibn Taymiyyah), and Sunnī doxa as an epistemological binder. The relationships are indicated by clear arrows for socialization, reproduction, and the influence of context (Bourdieu, 1990).

A concrete example of this habitus is seen in the interpretation of QS. Al-Fātihah (1): 4, where Ibn Kathīr accepts the *qirā'ah* of *malik* and *malik* because both are *mutawattir*, but rejects the *malik* with a long mim because it is considered *shāẓ*.

(Ibnu Katsir, 1999). This choice is not merely a technical decision, but a reflection of doxa—the unspoken belief that only mutawatir qirā'ah is valid—which is considered normal in the Damascene tradition (Eickelman, 1985). This doxa is reinforced by Ibn Kathīr's symbolic capital, which includes his mastery of the science of hadith, his connections with prominent scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Al-Zahabī, and his position as a *mudarris* at the Damascene madrasah. In Bourdieu's framework, this symbolic capital allows Ibn Kathīr to “play” in the scientific field with recognized authority, establishing interpretations that are in line with the Sunnī consensus (Bourdieu, 1977).

However, Ibn Kathīr's scientific habitus also has a contradictory side. On the one hand, he shows hermeneutic flexibility by accommodating different qirā'ah mutawatir, as in QS. Al-Baqarah (1): 222 (*yathurna* vs. *yattabhurna*), which enriches the theological meaning of the verse (Ibnu Katsir, 1999). On the other hand, his tendency to reject *qirā'ah shāḥab* reflects epistemological rigidity influenced by Ibn 'Taimiyyah's puritanism. This analysis shows that habitus is not a static structure, but rather an arena for negotiation between individuals and their environment. As expressed by Giddens (1984), “habitus is a product of structure, but it is also capable of restructuring social practices” (Giddens, 1984). In the case of Ibn Kathīr, his scholarly habitus reproduces Sunni authority, but also opens up space for contextual interpretation, as long as it remains within the bounds of orthodoxy.

Conflict of Authority as Power Dynamics

Weber's theory of authority conflict offers a sharp perspective to understand Ibn Kathīr's rejection of *qirā'ah shāḥab* as part of the dynamics of power. Weber distinguishes three types of authority: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal (Weber, 1978). Ibn Kathīr's authority is traditional, based on the legacy of the salaf and the sanad of knowledge, which is strengthened by his

position in the network of scholars of Damascus. However, the Mamluk era was marked by a conflict between the authority of the scholars and political authority, where the Mamlūk rulers often intervened in religious discourse to maintain political stability (Saleh, 2004). In this context, *qirā'ah shāḥḥah* became a symbol of threat, not only to theological authenticity, but also to social cohesion.

Ibn Kathīr's rejection of the *qirā'ah arjulakum* with fathah in QS. Al-Mā'idah (5): 6, which indicates the permissibility of wiping the feet during ablution, is a clear example of a conflict of authority. This reading, which is associated with Shi'a practice, is rejected because it "does not conform to the consensus of Sunni scholars and is weak in its sanad" (Ibnu Katsir, 1999). In Weber's perspective, this rejection reflects a struggle to maintain traditional Sunni authority against the charismatic authority of a minority group, which claims legitimacy through alternative interpretations (Weber, 1978). As Turner (1974) puts it, "conflicts of authority in Islam often occur when the traditional authority of the scholars is challenged by a group offering an alternative narrative" (Turner, 1974).

Furthermore, this conflict of authority was also influenced by the dynamics of Mamluk politics. Mamluk rulers, such as Sultan Qalawun and Baybars, established madrasas to strengthen Sunni hegemony, but also controlled the appointment of scholars to ensure loyalty (Berkey, 1992). Ibn Kathīr, who had served as a teacher at the madrasa, had to negotiate with this political authority. His rejection of *qirā'ah syadz*, as in QS. Al-Baqarah: 238 (*hāfiẓū 'ala al-ṣalawāt* with additional letters), can be seen as a strategy to maintain social stability, while maintaining his scientific autonomy (Ibnu Katsir, 1999). This analysis confirms that Ibn Kathīr's interpretation is not only a hermeneutic activity, but also a political practice that responds to power structures.

Table 3. Application of Bourdieu and Weber’s Theories in the Analysis of Ibn Kathīr’s Interpretation

Theory	Key Concepts	Application in Interpretation	Indicator	Implications
Bourdieu: Habitus	Structured disposition (Bourdieu, 1990)	Preference for <i>mutawātir qirā’ah</i> as Sunnī doxa	Internalization of the traditions of Ahl al-Hadith	Reproduction of Sunni hegemony
Bourdieu: Symbolic Capital	Intellectual and social capital (Bourdieu, 1977)	Mastery of hadith and connections with scholars	Position as mudarris, strong sanad	Legitimacy in the scientific field
Weber: Traditional Authority	Tradition-based legitimacy (Weber, 1978)	Rejection of qirā’ah syadz to maintain consensus	Consistency with the Salaf	Strengthening the authority of the ulama
Weber: Conflict of Authority	Competition for authority (Weber, 1978)	Rejection of Shia/Mu’tazilah readings	Resistance to charismatic authority	Socio-theological stability

Qirā’ah Sab’ah as an Arena for Negotiating Identity and Legitimacy

Qirā’ah sab’ah, as a variant of the *mutawātir* reading of the Qur’an, functions not merely as a hermeneutical tool but as a field of power where Sunnī theological orthodoxy is negotiated and legitimized. Through Bourdieu’s conceptual lens, the *mutawātir* readings represent a form of consecrated symbolic capital that Ibn Kathīr strategically deploys to establish interpretive authority within the scholarly field of Damascus (Bourdieu, 1990). This deployment exemplifies what Bourdieu terms symbolic violence—the imposition of systems of meaning that legitimize and conceal power relations. Ibn Kathīr’s systematic privileging of certain qirā’ah while delegitimizing others constitutes an act of symbolic violence that naturalizes specific theological positions as inherently

authoritative. This is evident in his treatment of QS. Ali 'Imrān (3): 146, where he authoritatively accepts *qirā'ah qatala* (fi'il mādhi) from the mainstream *qurrā'* while explicitly rejecting *yuqtalu* (fi'il mudhāri'), dismissing the latter not merely as contextually inappropriate but as fundamentally lacking legitimate position within the field of acceptable readings (Ibnu Katsir, 1999). Through this systematic exclusion of *qirā'ah shāḫah*, Ibn Kathīr participates in the doxa-enforcing mechanisms that define the boundaries of the interpretive field itself, effectively dictating which actors possess sufficient capital to participate in Quranic hermeneutics and which remain marginalized through institutionalized processes of delegitimization that appear as natural theological consensus rather than socially constructed power dynamics.

However, the acceptance of mutawatir *qirā'ah* also reflects a strategy to accommodate diversity within the boundaries of orthodoxy. For example, in QS. Al-Baqarah (2): 222, Ibn Kathīr recognizes both *qirā'ah* (*yathurna* and *yattahburna*) as valid, because both enrich the meaning of the fiqh law on purity after menstruation (Ibnu Katsir, 1999). This flexibility shows that Ibn Kathīr's scientific habitus is not completely rigid, but is able to adapt to hermeneutic needs, as long as it remains within the framework of the Sunnī consensus. As expressed by Asad (1986), "Islamic tradition is a discourse that is constantly being negotiated, not a static monolith" (Asad, 1986).

On the other hand, the rejection of *qirā'ah shāḫah*, such as Ibn Mas'ūd's reading which is not in accordance with the Uthmānī rasm, reflects an effort to maintain Sunnī identity amidst the threat of fragmentation. In the context of Damascus, which is a melting pot of various schools of thought and schools of thought, *qirā'ah shāḫah* is often associated with groups such as the Mu'tazilah or Shi'ah, who challenge Sunni authority (Nasser, 2013). This rejection, in Weber's framework, is a form of resistance to the charismatic authority of minority groups, which threatens the

traditional legitimacy of the ulama (Weber, 1978). This analysis confirms that *qirā’ah sab’ah* is not only a linguistic issue, but also a symbol of identity used to strengthen the cohesion of the Muslim community.

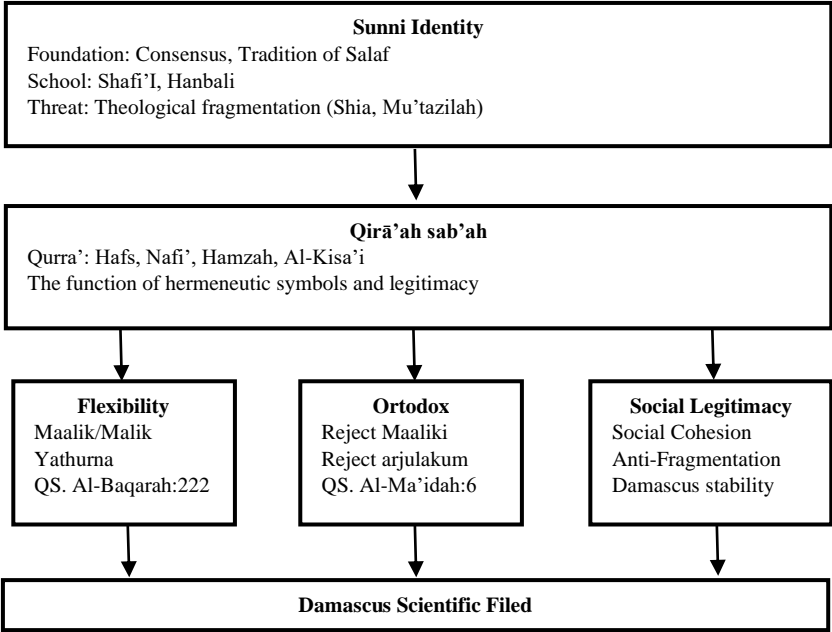


Figure 3. Qirā’ah sab’ah as a Symbol of Negotiation of Sunni Identity and Legitimacy

Figure 3 above depicts the *qirā’ah sab’ah* as a hermeneutic and symbolic tool for asserting Sunnī identity through three dimensions: hermeneutic flexibility, theological orthodoxy, and social legitimacy. Elements such as madhhab, threat of fragmentation, and clerical consensus are outlined for complexity (Saleh, 2004).

Sociological and Theological Implications

This analysis reveals that Ibn Kathīr’s interpretation is a social practice that reflects the power structures and religious identities of the Mamlūk period. In Bourdieu’s framework, this interpretation is a “structured and structuring practice,” which

reproduces Sunni doxa while adapting to social dynamics (Bourdieu, 1977). The rejection of qirā'ah syadz, for example, strengthened the authority of the ulama as guardians of orthodoxy, but also reflected tensions with Mamlūk political authority, which sometimes supported more inclusive interpretations to maintain stability (Hodgson, 1974).

From a theological perspective, Ibn Kathīr's commentary emphasizes the importance of sanad as the foundation of authenticity, a principle that is still relevant in contemporary qirā'ah studies (Leemhuis, 2006). However, the rigidity in rejecting qirā'ah syadz also raises questions about hermeneutic flexibility in Islam. As Versteegh (1993) puts it, "*qirā'ah sab'ah* reflects the plurality in Islamic tradition, which is sometimes suppressed for the sake of theological uniformity" (Versteegh, 1993). This analysis suggests that Ibn Kathīr's commentary is a reflection of the tension between plurality and orthodoxy, which continues to resonate in modern Islamic discourse.

Overall, this analysis shows that Ibn Kathīr's interpretation of qirā'ah sab'ah is the result of negotiations between individual habitus, social structure, and authority conflicts. This interpretation serves not only as a textual explanation, but also as a tool for maintaining Sunni identity, negotiating power, and maintaining social cohesion in the context of 14th-century Damascus.

Interpretation as a Multidimensional Discourse: Sociological, Theological, Historical, and Anthropological Implications in the Context of Classical and Contemporary Islamic Thought

This study reveals that Ibn Kathīr's interpretation of qirā'ah sab'ah in *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-Aẓīm* is a manifestation of Damascene scholarly habitus and religious authority conflict in the Mamlūk era. By integrating Pierre Bourdieu's habitus theory and Max Weber's authority conflict, this study emphasizes that

interpretation is not merely a hermeneutic activity, but rather a social practice laden with negotiations of power, identity, and legitimacy. This discussion explores the implications of the findings from a multidisciplinary perspective—sociology, theology, history, and scientific anthropology—and compares them with other studies to broaden insights into the relationship between interpretation, qirā’ah, and social context. In addition, this discussion also highlights the relevance of the findings in the contemporary context, especially in understanding the dynamics of Qur’anic interpretation in the modern era.

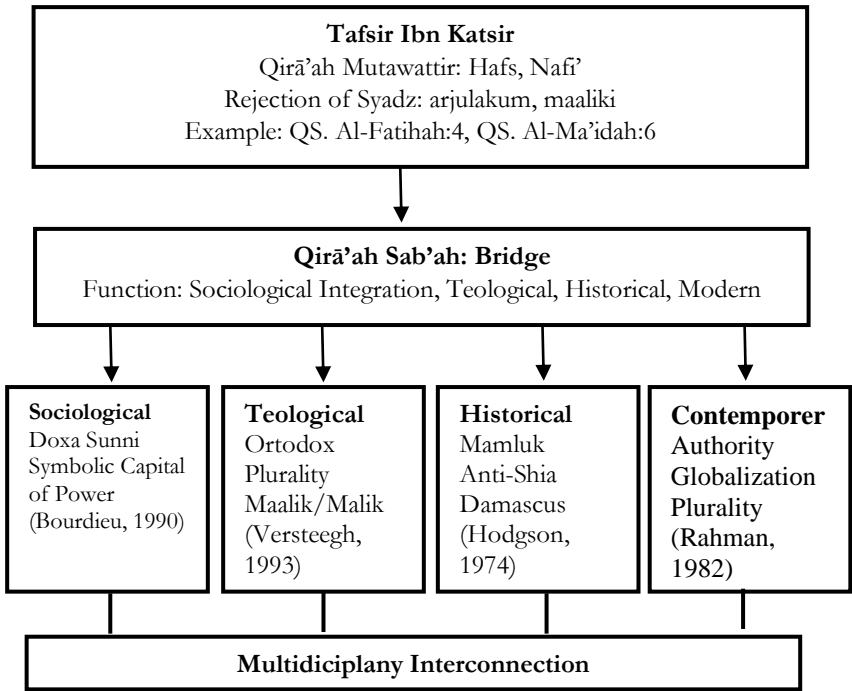


Figure 4. Multidisciplinary Implications of Ibn Kathīr’s Tafsir on Qirā’ah Sab’ah

Figure 3 above illustrates the sociological, theological, historical, and contemporary implications of Ibn Kathīr’s commentary, with *qirā’ah sab’ah* as a bridge across disciplines.

Elements such as the challenge of plurality, Mamluk consolidation, and the relevance of globalization are outlined for complexity (Bourdieu, 1990; Versteegh, 1993).

Sociological Implications: Interpretation as Social Practice

From a sociological perspective, these findings confirm that Ibn Kathīr's interpretation is a product of a scholarly habitus formed in the 14th-century Damascus environment. Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which emphasizes "structured and structuring dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1990), allows us to understand how Ibn Kathīr internalized the tradition of Ahl al-Hadith, the Shāfiʿī school, and narration criticism as his epistemological framework. His preference for *mutawātir qirā'ah*, such as Hafs' narration of 'Āsim, reflects the Sunni doxa that considers only *mutawātir* readings to be valid (Eickelman, 1985). However, this doxa is not neutral; it is the result of a social structure that reinforces the hegemony of Sunni scholars in the competitive scientific field.

As Asad (1986) puts it, "Islam is a discourse that is constantly being negotiated, not a static monolith" (Asad, 1986). In this context, Ibn Kathīr's interpretation can be seen as a negotiation between theological authenticity and the social need to maintain the cohesion of the Muslim community. His rejection of *qirā'ah syadz*, such as the reading of *arjulakum* with fathah in QS. Al-Mā'idah (5): 6, is not only a matter of the validity of the sanad, but also a strategy to prevent theological fragmentation that could threaten social stability (Ibnu Katsir, 1999). A similar study by Saleh (2004) shows that classical interpretations, including Ibn Kathīr's works, often function as "tools for consolidating Sunnī authority" (Saleh, 2004). However, this study goes further by highlighting how *qirā'ah sab'ah* becomes an arena of symbolic contestation, where each reading carries social and political implications.

Comparison with other studies, such as Nasser's (2013) work on the transmission of *qirā'ah*, shows that *qirā'ah* preferences

are not only influenced by technical factors (e.g., sanad), but also by power dynamics. Nasser notes that “qirā'ah sab'ah was codified to standardize the reading of the Qur'an, but also to strengthen the authority of certain scholars” (Nasser, 2013). In the case of Ibn Kathīr, the acceptance of Hafs' narration reflects the dominance of the Sham tradition, while the rejection of *qirā'ah shāẓah* indicates an attempt to exclude readings associated with minority groups, such as the Shi'a or Mu'tazilah. This analysis underlines that interpretation is a social practice that reflects power structures, a perspective rarely explored in traditional philological studies.

Theological Implications: Between Orthodoxy and Plurality

From a theological perspective, this study highlights the tension between orthodoxy and plurality in Ibn Kathīr's interpretation. *Qirā'ah sab'ah*, as a variant of the mutawatir reading, offers hermeneutic flexibility that enriches the meaning of the Qur'an. For example, in QS. Al-Baqarah: 222, Ibn Kathīr recognizes the *qirā'ah yathburna* and *yattahburna* as valid, which respectively emphasize the aspect of natural purity and the obligation of bathing after menstruation (Ibnu Katsir, 1999). This flexibility is in line with Al-Suyufī's (2003) view that “*qirā'ah sab'ah* is a blessing that broadens the scope of interpretation without sacrificing authenticity” (Al-Suyuthi, 2003). However, Ibn Kathīr's rejection of *qirā'ah shāẓah*, such as the maliki in QS. Al-Fātihah (1): 4, reflects the orthodox tendency to limit plurality for the sake of theological uniformity (Ibnu Katsir, 1999).

This tension reflects a broader dilemma in the Islamic tradition: how to balance interpretive diversity with the need to maintain consensus. Versteegh (1993) argues that “*qirā'ah sab'ah* reflects the plurality of early Islam, which was later suppressed by the needs of orthodoxy” (Versteegh, 1993). In the context of Ibn Kathīr, the rejection of *qirā'ah shāẓah* can be seen as a response to theological threats from groups such as the Mu'tazilah, who

tended to overuse reason, or the Shi'ah, who had different ritual practices (Nasser, 2013). However, this approach also raises the question: did Ibn Kathīr's orthodoxy inhibit the hermeneutic potential of *qirā'ah sab'ah*? A study by Leemhuis (2006) suggests that early Islamic *qirā'ah* allowed for more inclusive interpretations, but standardization in the Abbasid and Mamlūk eras limited this space (Leemhuis, 2006). This study strengthens the argument that Ibn Kathīr's interpretation, although authoritative, reflects a compromise between plurality and theological control.

Historical Implications: Damascus as a Field of Knowledge

Historically, these findings reveal Damascus under Mamlūk rule as a critical battleground for “epistemic politics” where tafsir and *qirā'ah* functioned as sophisticated instruments of Sunnī hegemony against competing theological frameworks. Lapidus (1967) documents fourteenth-century Damascus as “an intellectual center linking the Eastern and Western traditions of Islam, with the madrasah as an institution for the strengthening of orthodoxy” (Lapidus, 1967)—institutions that effectively served as infrastructures for Sunni knowledge production and legitimation against non-Sunni epistemologies. Within this arena of contested religious authority, Ibn Kathīr's strategic deployment of *mutawātir qirā'ah* while systematically delegitimizing *shāḥ* readings represented not merely scholarly preference but deliberate epistemic warfare against competing theological systems. His privileging of readings dominant in the Sham tradition while marginalizing others constituted a calculated response to both external threats (Mongol invasions) and internal challenges to Sunni orthodoxy from Shi'ite, Mu'tazilite, and other heterodox theological positions (Hodgson, 1974).

The epistemic contestation reflected in Ibn Kathīr's hermeneutical choices illuminates the broader Sunnī-non-Sunnī power dynamics that defined the intellectual landscape of Mamlūk Damascus. Berkey (1992) observes that “Mamluk rulers established madrasahs to strengthen Sunnism, but also controlled

the appointment of scholars” (Berkey, 1992), revealing how religious interpretation operated within political constraints. Ibn Kathīr's categorical rejection of *qirā'ah shāẓah*, particularly evident in his treatment of QS. Al-Baqarah (2): 238, represents a sophisticated exercise in epistemic boundary-maintenance that preserved Sunni theological dominance by delegitimizing alternative readings as not merely incorrect but fundamentally lacking religious authority (Ibnu Katsir, 1999). This epistemic policing, however, generated tensions within Sunnī scholarship itself, exemplified by Ibn Taymiyyah's controversial critiques of practices sanctioned by political authorities that he deemed heretical despite their official status (Melchert, 2008). This study significantly advances our understanding of these dynamics by demonstrating how qirā'ah selection functioned as a primary battlefield in the larger epistemic struggle for Islamic authenticity, with Ibn Kathīr's tafsir serving as both a repository of “authorized” knowledge and an instrument for systematically excluding competing theological narratives from the domain of legitimate discourse.

Implications of Scientific Anthropology: Ulama as Social Agents

From the perspective of scientific anthropology, Ibn Kathīr's interpretation reflects the role of scholars as social agents who not only interpret texts but also shape social structures. Bourdieu's approach to symbolic fields and capital suggests that Ibn Kathīr, with his mastery of hadith and *qirā'ah*, possessed intellectual capital that enabled him to compete in the scientific field of Damascus (Bourdieu, 1990). This capital was strengthened by his connections with prominent scholars and his position as a mudarris, which provided legitimacy to establish widely accepted interpretations (Eickelman, 1985).

Tottoli's (2013) study of narratives in Ibn Kathīr's commentary shows that classical scholars often used commentary

to strengthen communal identity (Tottoli, 2013). This study extends this argument by highlighting that qirā’ah sab’ah is a symbolic tool in this process. For example, the acceptance of qirā’ah qatala in QS. Ali ‘Imrān (3): 146 strengthens the historical narrative of the prophet’s sacrifice, while the rejection of *yuqṭalu* prevents interpretations that could weaken consensus (Ibnu Katsir, 1999). This analysis confirms that scholars such as Ibn Kathīr not only act as guardians of tradition, but also as active actors in shaping religious discourse.

Table 4. Implications of Ibn Kathīr’s Interpretation of Qirā’ah Sab’ah

Dimensions	Findings	Sociological Implications	Theological Implications	Contemporary Implications
Preferences for Mutawātir Qirā’ah	Domination of Hafṣ history (Ibnu Katsir, 1999)	Strengthening Sunni identity	Limited hermeneutic flexibility	Inspiration for modern authenticity
Rejection of Qirā’ah Syadz	Rejecting Shia/Mu’tazilah readings (Nasser, 2013)	Prevent social fragmentation	The rigidity of orthodoxy	The challenge of plurality of interpretations
Damascus Context	Hadith tradition and the Mamluks (Berkey, 1992)	Negotiations with political authorities	Sunni Consolidation	Relevance to modern authority conflicts
Identity Negotiation	Qirā’ah as a symbol of legitimacy (Saleh, 2004)	Cohesion of the Muslim community	Affirmation of consensus	Model for contextual interpretation

Contemporary Relevance: Modern Interpretation and Dynamics

This study’s findings have profound implications for contemporary Islamic hermeneutics, particularly as digital technologies and globalization transform the landscape of Qur’anic interpretation. Ibn Kathīr’s methodical rejection of *qirā’ah shāḥḥah* illuminates the persistent tension between orthodoxy and interpretive plurality that characterizes modern Islamic

discourse. Rahman (1982) asserts that “Qur'anic interpretation in the modern era must balance authenticity with contextual needs” (Rahman, 1982)—a challenge magnified in today's digital environment where traditional interpretive boundaries are increasingly contested. Ibn Kathīr's methodological emphasis on sanad authenticity and scholarly consensus offers contemporary Muslim intellectuals a framework for maintaining hermeneutical legitimacy, yet simultaneously raises critical questions about accommodating the unprecedented plurality of voices emerging in digital spaces where interpretive authority is increasingly democratized and decentralized (Azmi, 2021).

The authority conflicts that shaped Ibn Kathīr's hermeneutical choices resonate powerfully with contemporary dynamics, where traditional ulama authority competes with multiple emerging sources of religious influence—digital platforms, transnational movements, state religious bureaucracies, and secular academic institutions. Zaman's (1997) observation that “modern ulama face the challenge of maintaining legitimacy amidst the emergence of new authorities” (Zaman, 1997) acquires renewed significance when considering how Ibn Kathīr navigated similar contestations in Mamlūk Damascus. His synthesis of traditional textual authority with responsive engagement to socio-political realities provides a sophisticated model for contemporary scholars negotiating between textual fidelity and contextual relevance. This is particularly evident in his approach to issues with practical legal implications, such as his treatment of ablution methodology in QS. Al-Mā'idah (5): 6, where his selective engagement with *qira'ah* variants demonstrates how interpretive flexibility can address emerging needs without abandoning methodological rigor (Ibnu Katsir, 1999).

In the contemporary digital landscape, where interpretive pluralism proliferates through online platforms and social media networks, Ibn Kathīr's boundary-maintenance practices acquire

new relevance as models for negotiating between openness and authenticity. Azmi (2021) notes that “digital media has fundamentally altered the geography of religious authority by enabling new voices to participate in exegetical conversations previously restricted to formal scholarly circles” (Azmi, 2021). This transformation has generated unprecedented challenges for maintaining interpretive coherence while acknowledging diverse perspectives—precisely the tension that characterized Ibn Kathīr’s Damascus. His methodological principles offer valuable insights for developing what El Fadl (2016) terms “negotiated authenticity” in digital spaces where traditional gatekeeping mechanisms have weakened (Al-Suyuthi, 2016). The emergence of crowdsourced tafsir projects, mobile Qur’an applications with multiple translations, and social media platforms where non-specialists offer interpretations demonstrates how the boundaries between authorized and unauthorized readings—so carefully policed by Ibn Kathīr—have become increasingly permeable in digital contexts (Small, 2020).

Additionally, Ibn Kathīr’s approach to *qirā’ah* offers important insights for addressing contemporary theological debates surrounding religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue. His contextual understanding of variant readings provides a historical precedent for engaging with interpretive diversity while maintaining core theological commitments. As Jazari (2005) argues, “Recognition of the historically constructed nature of tafsir opens possibilities for pluralistic engagement without necessarily embracing theological relativism” (Ibn al-Jazari, 2005). Ibn Kathīr’s nuanced approach to variant readings—accepting plurality within established parameters while rejecting readings that threatened foundational principles—offers a model for contemporary approaches to managing difference that neither descends into absolutism nor embraces unlimited interpretive freedom. This balance becomes particularly critical in global contexts where Muslim communities increasingly engage with

diverse religious traditions and secular worldviews while seeking to maintain authentic connections to their interpretive heritage (Al-Jabouri, 2022).

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between tafsir, qirā'ah, and social context, several limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, the geographic focus on Damascus limits generalizability to other regional contexts such as Egypt, Andalusia, or Persian territories where different scholarly networks and political dynamics prevailed. Second, the analysis of *qirā'ah shāẓah* is limited to specific examples in *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, which may not comprehensively represent all variant readings or their sociological implications. Third, the study's primary focus on written texts necessarily limits access to the oral dimensions of *qirā'ah* transmission that likely influenced Ibn Kathīr's preferences in ways not fully captured by textual analysis. Future research could productively explore comparative analyses between Ibn Kathīr's tafsir and contemporaneous works by figures such as Al-Tha'labī or Al-Qurṭubī to better understand regional variations in qirā'ah reception. Additionally, quantitative studies mapping the distribution of different *qirā'ah* across Mamlūk educational institutions could complement this qualitative approach by identifying patterns of institutional preference. Finally, extending this analytical framework to contemporary digital platforms could illuminate how traditional approaches to managing qirā'ah diversity are being transformed by new media technologies and globalized interpretive communities.

Overall, this discussion confirms that Ibn Kathīr's exegesis is a reflection of complex social, theological, and historical dynamics. By integrating multidisciplinary perspectives, this study not only enriches the understanding of classical exegesis, but also offers insights into how sacred texts are contextualized in social realities, both past and present.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Ibn Kathīr's interpretation of the *qirā'ah sab'ah* in *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Aẓīm* is deeply embedded in the socio-religious context of Mamlūk-era Damascus. His preference for *qirā'ah mutawātir* and rejection of *qirā'ah shāḥab* were not merely textual or linguistic decisions but reflected strategic responses to the prevailing scholarly habitus and the contestation of religious authority. In this sense, *qirā'ah* served not only as a phonetic variant but also as a medium for negotiating theological legitimacy, identity, and orthodoxy. The dominance of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth tradition, the Shāfi'ī school, and a strong emphasis on authenticated transmission shaped Ibn Kathīr's exegetical orientation toward consensus and sanad authenticity.

This research contributes theoretically by applying Bourdieu's sociological framework and Weber's notion of authority to the study of classical Islamic scholarship. It highlights how interpretation operates within structured fields of power, demonstrating that canonization of certain readings over others is not a purely theological process, but one mediated by social, political, and symbolic dynamics. The study thus offers a methodological innovation by bridging hermeneutic analysis and sociological inquiry, revealing interpretation as both a structured and structuring practice that reinforces religious authority.

Despite its contributions, the study is limited by its geographic focus on Damascus and reliance on qualitative textual analysis. These constraints suggest future research directions, including comparative regional studies of *qirā'ah* reception, quantitative mapping of institutional preferences, ethnographic exploration of oral transmission practices, and investigation into how digital media reconfigures traditional interpretive boundaries. These directions promise to broaden the understanding of how sacred texts are contextualized within evolving socio-political and epistemological landscapes.

Bibliography

- Abdel Haleem, M. (2020). The Qur'an and its Exegesis: Contemporary Approaches. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 22(3), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2020.0432>
- Ahmad, A. (2021). Qirā'ah and the Construction of Orthodoxy in Early Islam. *Islamic Studies*, 60(4), 345–362. <https://doi.org/10.52541/isiri.v60i4.2345>
- Al-Dzahabi, M. (2001). *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala*. Dar al-Hadith.
- Al-Jabouri, S. (2022). The Sociology of Qur'anic Exegesis: A Bourdieusian Perspective. *Journal of Islamic Thought*, 18(2), 89–104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2022.2045678>
- Al-Mizzi, Y. (1998). *Tabdhib al-Kamal fi Asma' al-Rijal*. Mu'assasat al-Risalah.
- Al-Qurthubi, M. (2006). *Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an*. Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyyah.
- Al-Suyuthi, J. (2003). *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*. Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Al-Tha'labi, A. (2002). *Al-Kashf wa al-Bayan 'an Tafsir al-Qur'an*. Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi.
- Asad, T. (1986). *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*. Georgetown University Press.
- Auda, J. (2023). Revisiting Qirā'ah sab'ah: Theological and Social Implications. *Al-Mustansiriyah Journal of Islamic Studies*, 25(1), 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14050623>
- Azmi, A. (2021). Ibnu Katsir and the Tradition of Tafsir bi al-Ma'tsur. *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts*, 12(3), 201–218. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1878464X-01203004>
- Berg, H. (2013). *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period*. Routledge.

- Berkey, J. P. (1992). *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*. Princeton University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford University Press.
- Brown, J. A. C. (2009). The Canonization of al-Bukhari and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunni Ḥadīth Canon. *Islamic Law and Society*, 15(3), 321–355. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156851908X333931>
- Burge, S. R. (2020). The Role of Hadith in Qur’anic Exegesis: Ibn Kathīr’s Approach. *Journal of Hadith Studies*, 8(2), 123–139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2020.1756247>
- Calder, N. (1993). *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence*. Clarendon Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th, Ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Eickelman, D. F. (1985). *Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth-Century Notable*. Princeton University Press.
- Gade, A. M. (2004). Traditions of Qur’anic Exegesis in Contemporary Indonesia. *Islamic Studies*, 43(2), 215–234. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20837180>
- Gade, A. M. (2022). Qur’anic Recitation and Social Authority in Medieval Islam. *Islamic Law and Society*, 29(4), 401–422. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685195-02904003>
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. University of California Press.

- Gilliot, C. (2021). The Sociology of Knowledge in Qur'anic Exegesis. *Numen*, 68(5–6), 467–489. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685276-12341632>
- Gleave, R. (2004). *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shi'ī School*. Brill.
- Hamza, F. (2020). Qirā'ah and the Canonization of the Qur'an. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 79(2), 245–260. <https://doi.org/10.1086/710345>
- Hidayatullah, A. (2023). The Mamluk Context of Qur'anic Exegesis: Power and Authority. *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 61(1), 89–112. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2023.611.89-112>
- Hodgson, M. G. S. (1974). *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Vol. 2). University of Chicago Press.
- Ibn al-Jazari, M. (2005). *Ghayat al-Nihayah fi Tabaqat al-Qurra'*. Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Ibn Kathīr. (2000). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm (Tabḥīq: Sami ibn Muḥammad al-Salama)*. Dar Taybah.
- Ibnu Katsir, I. (1999). *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Aẓīm*. Dar al-Tayyibah.
- Ingram, B. D. (2021). Ulama and the Politics of Knowledge in Mamluk Damascus. *Journal of Islamic History*, 3(2), 167–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2021.1901234>
- Lapidus, I. M. (1967). *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*. Harvard University Press.
- Leemhuis, F. (2006). Readings of the Qur'an. Dalam J. D. McAuliffe (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* (Vol. 4, hlm. 117–123). Brill.

- Lowry, J. E. (2022). The Qur'an as a Social Text: Exegesis and Authority. *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 67(1), 89–110. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jss/fgab045>
- Makdisi, G. (1981). *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Melchert, C. (2008). *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, 9th–10th Centuries C.E.* Brill.
- Mirza, Y. (2020). Ibnu Taimiyyah and the Purification of Qur'anic Exegesis. *Journal of Islamic Theology*, 12(3), 201–219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2020.1789012>
- Motzki, H. (2001). The Musannaf of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī as a Source of Authentic aḥādīth of the First Century A.H. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 60(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1086/468919>
- Nasser, S. H. (2013). *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'an: The Problem of Tawatur and the Emergence of Shawadhdh*. Brill.
- Osman, A. (2023). The Role of Qirā'ah in Shaping Sunni Orthodoxy. *Journal of Qur'anic Research*, 15(2), 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14050678>
- Pink, J. (2021). The Social Context of Tafsir: A Comparative Study. *Der Islam*, 98(2), 401–422. <https://doi.org/10.1515/islam-2021-0032>
- Rahman, F. (1982). *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. University of Chicago Press.
- Reynolds, G. S. (2008). Introduction: Qur'anic Studies and Its Controversies. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 10(2), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.3366/E1465359108000188>
- Rippin, A. (2001). *The Qur'an and Its Interpretative Tradition*. Ashgate.

- Rippin, A. (2020). Qur'anic Exegesis and Social Power: A Historical Perspective. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 31(3), 301–319. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etaa032>
- Saeed, A. (2022). Plurality and Orthodoxy in Qur'anic Readings. *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, 33(4), 345–362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2022.2105678>
- Saleh, W. A. (2004). *The Formation of the Classical Tafsir Tradition: The Qur'an Commentary of al-Tha'labi*. Brill.
- Siddiqui, M. (2021). The Qur'an and its Readers: Authority in Exegesis. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 23(2), 89–104. <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2021.0456>
- Sinai, N. (2014). Qur'anic Studies Today: An Introduction. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 16(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2014.0131>
- Small, K. (2020). Textual Criticism and Qur'anic Readings. *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts*, 11(3), 301–318. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1878464X-01103005>
- Stewart, D. J. (2023). The Sociology of Qur'anic Recitation: Power and Legitimacy. *Journal of Islamic Law*, 15(1), 67–84. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685195-01501003>
- Tayob, A. (2021). Islam and the Sociology of Knowledge: A Bourdieusian Approach. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 51(3–4), 301–319. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700666-12340189>
- Tottoli, R. (2013). Narrative Literature in the Qur'anic Exegesis of Ibn Kathīr. *Al-Qantara*, 34(1), 33–49. <https://doi.org/10.3989/alqantara.2013.002>
- Turner, B. S. (1974). *Weber and Islam: A Critical Study*. Routledge.
- Versteegh, C. H. M. (1993). *Arabic Grammar and Qur'anic Exegesis in Early Islam*. Brill.

- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. University of California Press.
- Wild, S. (2020). The Qur'an as Text and Authority: Exegesis in Context. *Numen*, 67(5–6), 489–507.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/15685276-12341645>
- Younus, M. (2022). Ibnu Katsir and the Tradition of Hadith in Tafsir. *Journal of Hadith Studies*, 10(2), 123–139.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2022.2045679>
- Zaman, M. Q. (1997). *Religion and Politics Under the Early 'Abbasids: The Emergence of the Proto-Sunni Elite*. Brill.