THE CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT ON THE QUR’AN:
The Discourse of Muhammad Syahrûr’s al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân

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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 Muhammad Syahrûr’s contemporary thinking about the Qur’an in al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân. By descriptive-analytical study, the writer concludes understanding the Qur’an according to Syahrûr 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 Muhammad Syahrûr tentang Al-Qur’an dalam al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân. Dengan telaha deskriptif-analitis, penulis menyimpulkan bahwa pemahaman Al-Qur’an menurut Syahrûr 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 berpikah 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.
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 (raḥmah li al-ʿālamīn) 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 Abūl-Ḥasan al-Manṣūrī (1817-1890) with *The Qurʾanic Interpretation*, Muḥammad ʿAbduh (1849-1905) with *al-Manār*, Abū al-ʿĀlam Azad (1888-1958) with *The Translation of the Qurʾan*, Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) with *Fi Ḍīlāl al-Qurʾān*, 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 Qurʾan in building Islamic self-identity amidst the challenges of modernity.

This serious thought towards the Qurʾan 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-Qurʾān: Qiraʿah Muʿāshirah* 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 Qurʾan by providing a new paradigm, that the Qurʾan 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 Qurʾan. Specifically, this paper will discuss how the pattern used by Syaḥrūr and what approaches he uses when interpreting the texts of the Qurʾanic 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-Qurʾân: Qirā’ah Muʿāshirah* 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 Syahrūr and *al-Kitâb wa al-Qurʾân: Qirā’ah Muʿāshirah***

This contemporary thinker named Muhammad Syahrūr al-Dayyūb was born in Syria, Damascus on April 11, 1938 AD.¹ He is the fifth child of Deib bin Deib and Shiddiqah bint Shālih Filyûn. While his wife's name is ‘Aţizah and has five children, namely Thāriq, Laits, Rima, Bashil and Mashun.² Syahrūr 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.

Syahrūr’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-Rahmān al-Kawākibi. Syahrūr’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 Syahrūr that an ideology requires the concept of knowledge about things that exist in objective reality.³

Furthermore, in 1964, Syahrūr 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, Syahrūr was delegated by the University of Damascus to

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¹ Muhammad Syahrūr, *al-Kitâb wa al-Qurʾân: Qirā’ah Muʿāshirah* (Damascus: al-Ahālî, 1990), p. 657.
² Muhammad Syahrūr, *Dirāsāt Islāmīyah Muʿāshirah fī al-Dawlah wa al-Mujāmāt* (Damascus: al-Ahālî, 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. Syahrur 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, Syahrur 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-Isyriyât al-Handasiyâh technique (engineering consultancy). In addition, Syahrur 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-lughâh), Syahrur 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, Syahrur 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 Syahrur’s thought in the book.

In general, the book al-Kitâb wa al-Qur'ân: Qirâ’ah Mu’âshirah by Syahrur 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 fî 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

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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 Garuda Depan: Mosaic Pemikiran Islam Timur Tengah (Bandung: Mizan, 2001), p. 237.
5 Ibid., p. 237.
6 Ja'far Dakk al-Bah, “al-Manhaj al-Lughawi fi al-Kitâb,” in Syahrur, al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân, p. 19-27.
7 Muhammad Syahrur, Dirâsât Islâmîyah Mu’âshirah fî al-Daulah wa al-Mujtama’ (Damascus: al-Ahâli, 1994), with 375 pages.
book, *al-Islām wa al-İmān: Mandzûmah al-Qiyam*, was published which discussed theological concepts in Islam.\textsuperscript{8}

At the turn of the millennium, Syahrūr published his fourth book, *Nahw Ushûl Jadîdah li al-Fiqh al-Islâmî: Fiqh al-Mar’ah, al-Washîyah, al-Irts, al-Qiwâmah, al-Ta’addudiyyah, al-Libâs*. This book talks about feminism issues after talking about the epistemological-philosophical foundations that underlie further discussion.\textsuperscript{9} His last book is called *Tajfîf Manâbi’ al-Irhâb*, in which he refutes the interpretation of key concepts in the Qur’an offered by radical Islamic circles.\textsuperscript{10} In addition, Syahrūr also wrote many scientific articles published in various journals, newspapers and internet sites.

In compiling *al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân: Qir’â’ah Mu’âshirah*, Syahrūr 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 Syahrūr who wants a contemporary reading of the Qur’an with the concept of “al-dhîkr”, not including the book of interpretation or fiqh. The purpose of writing this work according to Syahrūr is not to prove the existence of Allah swt. or to deny Him, but it is left entirely to the rationality of the readers. Syahrūr 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-dhîkr” is carried out based on contemporary research approaches, and is worthy of being read by contemporary Islamic society.\textsuperscript{11}

The reason why Syahrūr chose *al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân: Qir’â’ah Mu’âshirah* as his monumental work, because qir’â’ah activity has a fundamental distinction with tilâwah activity. The word qir’â’ah comes from the word “qara’a-yaqra’-qirâ’ah” which has the basic meaning of “compiling and gathering”. When qir’â’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

\textsuperscript{8} Muḥammad Syahrūr, *al-Islām wa al-İmān: Mandzûmah al-Qiyam* (Damascus: al-Ahâlî, 1996), with 401 pages.

\textsuperscript{9} Muḥammad Syahrūr, *Nahw Ushûl Jadîdah li al-Fiqh al-Islâmî: Fiqh al-Mar’ah, al-Washîyah, al-Irts, al-Qiwâmah, al-Ta’addudiyyah, al-Libâs* (Damascus: al-Ahâlî, 2000), with 383 pages.

\textsuperscript{10} Muḥammad Syahrūr, *Tajfîf Manâbi’ al-Irhâb* (Damascus: al-Ahâlî, 2008), with 304 pages.

\textsuperscript{11} Muḥammad Imsn Esha, “Rekonstruksi Historis Metodologis Pemikiran Muḥammad Syahrūr,” *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 tilawah comes from the word “talāyatlū-tilāwah” 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 tilawah not qir’ah activities. The qir’ah is reading the Qur’an accompanied by explanations, descriptions, and interpretations. Thus, the distinction between qir’ah and tilawah activities is clearly visible, which is related to the involvement of a meaning, understanding, explanation and even interpretation.

Specifically, Syahrur’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 Syahrur is aimed at freeing thinking from the hegemony of the past that is so thick in the body of Muslims. At the same time, Syahrur 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 Syahrur 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, Syahrur requires a relatively long period of time, which is 20 years. Syahrur 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 Syahrur 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, abrisâlah, and al-nubuwâwah, and the determination of basic terms for the concept of “al-dhikr”. This stage occurred when Syahrur was active at Dublin College of Ireland, as an ambassador sent by University of Damascus to obtain a Masters and Doctoral degree in Civil Engineering (al-Handasah al-Madaniyyah).

The second period, began in 1980-1986 which was a time of discovery of the methodological foundation of Syahrur’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 Syahrur’s thought about linguistics, philosophy, and the study of the Qur’an. By studying with Ja’far, Syahrur 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 tarādūf ɬi ɮisân al-'Arab), speech which is a means of expressing meaning, Arabic grammatical structure related to khabar sentences in the discipline of balaghah and nahwu, balaghah which are two inseparable disciplines. From these reviews, Syahrûr 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 “mushhaf al-kitâb”. This period has brought new enlightenment and passion for the development of Syahrûr’s intellect, where during the compilation and writing of the book al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân: Qirâ’ah Mu’âshirah in Damascus, he always met his linguistic teacher, Ja’far, to discuss various new concepts and ideas. The results of the discussion called for Syahrûr to ask Ja’far to write an introduction for his work and also to compile a brief treatise on the secrets of Arabic linguistics (astrâr allîsân al-arabî) to be published collectively in his book.14 Based on the brief description above, it can be understood that the work al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân: Qirâ’ah Mu’âshirah was compiled by Syahrûr through a very serious livelihood process, and in a relatively span of time long. However, this thought of Syahrûr is a result of the thought of the children of the age which is dzannî and relative, so that it is always open to criticism and still needs to be appreciated.

Muhammad Syahrûr’s Thoughts about the Qur’anic Content Classification

One of Syahrûr’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-târîkh al-‘ilmî) as the basis for analysis. This mapping was then made by Syahrûr 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 Syahrûr 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, Syahrûr 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 Syahrûr, what is meant by al-kitâb 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-kitâb 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. In contrast to the understanding of al-kitâb that can be compared to the mushaf, Syahrûr argues that the Qur’an is not the same as the al-kitâb. He understands that the Qur’an is a collection of mutasyâbih verses that discuss the laws of the universe (al-qawânîn al-kauniyyah), historical provisions (al-qawânîn al-târîkhiyyah), and unsewn good news that has already happened (al-qashash al-qur’ânî) and what will happen as the coming of doomsday, heaven, and hell all of which are stored in the lauh mahfûd and akîmân al-mubîn. For Syahrûr, the Qur’an was present before the inzâl and tanzîl processes and contained elements of tasyâbuh which made it have an i’jâz potential aspect.

Furthermore, Syahrûr stated that when al-kitâb was revealed to Muhammad, he was positioned in the capacity as a prophet and apostle, so that the content of the al-kitâb has a composition in accordance with the apostolic and prophetic positions of Muhammad. Thus, al-kitâb 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-kitâb, as knowledge of the universe and historical law which also functions as a differentiator between rights and vanities or between the truth of reality (hâaqiqah) and conjecture (waqm).

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. From this understanding, it

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15 Syahrûr, al-Kitâb 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 Syahrûr as sending the Qur’an objectively out of Muhammad’s awareness through Gabriel, which happened for 23 years. While in al-insâlah, talâzum occurred between al-insâl and al-tanzîl. Syahrûr, Tajjîf Manâhi’ al-îf, in http://www.shahrour.org/index2.htm, accessed Saturday, 13 July 2019.
17 Syahrûr, al-Kitâb 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 *nubuwâwah* and are *mutasyâbihât* verses, in a sense they can be interpreted in several perspectives. For Syahrûr, 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 Syahrûr classifies verses in the Qur’an based on the following verses:

> هوُ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مُنِّيَةٌ مَّحَكَّمَاتٍ مِّنْ أَمْمِ الْكِتَابَ وَأَخَرَّ مَنْتَخَبَاتٍ فَأَمَّا الْكِتَابُ فِي فُلُوْجِهِمَّ زُنُّ "فَيَشَقُّونَ مَا نُشَابِهَ مِنْ مَهَابَةِ الْبُعْقَةِ الْعَلَّمِيَّةِ وَمَهَابَةٍ تَأْوِيلَهُ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّسُوْلُ إِنَّ الْعَلَّمَ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَا بِهِ كُلُّ مِّنْ عَنْدَ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَدْعُو إِلَّا أَوْلُ الْأُثَّابُ

“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 unspecific. As for those in whose hearts is deviation [from truth], they will follow that of it which is unspecific, 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.” (Âli ‘Imrân [3]: 7).

Based on this verse, Syahrûr explains *al-kitâb* by dividing it into three categories: first, *muḥkamât* verse, which is a collection of *muḥkamât* verses which is specifically termed as *umm al-kiṭâb* by referring to the redaction of “*minhu âyât muḥkamât hunna umm al-kiṭâb*”. The definition of *umm al-kiṭâb* cannot be interpreted other than what has been defined in *al-kiṭâb*, which is a collection of *muḥkamât* 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 *mutasyâbihât*. Third, verses that are not *muḥkam* and not *mutasyâbih*. The categorization presented by Syahrûr is based on Âli ‘Imrân [3]: 7. This explicitly indeed mentions the categories *muḥkam* and *mutasyâb*. While the third category is not *muḥkam* and not *mutasyâb*, Syahrûr interprets based on the fragment of the verse “wa uhkarna mutasyâbihât.” 20

Related to this discussion, Syahrûr develops an argument to strengthen his opinion that the word “*ukhrân*” 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 *muḥkam* and part (of the second part) is *mutasyâbih*, then what are the other parts? Certainly those who are not *muḥkam* and those who are not *mutasyâbih* (*lâ muḥkam wa lâ mutasyâbih*). Furthermore,

20 Fuad Mustafid, “Pembaruan Pemikiran Hukum Islam: Studi tentang Teori *Hudud* Muhammad Syahrur,” Al-Mazahib: Jurnal Pemikiran Hukum, vol. 5, no. 2 (December, 2017): 310.
Syahrûr gives this third part with the term *tafshîl al-kitâb* by referring to the word of Allah in the Yûnus [10]: 37, as follows:

وَمَا كَانَ هَذَا الْقُرآنَ أَن يُفْتَرِى مِنْ دُونِ اللّهِ وَلَكِنْ تَصْدِيقُ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلُ الْكِتَابِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُبُّ 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." (Yûnus [10]: 37)

Accordingly, Syahrûr breaks down each of the three categories mentioned above. First, including the verses of *muhkamat* which functions as the main of the *al-kitâb* (*umm al-kitâb*) and presenting Muhammad’s apostolic signs (*risâlah*) are verses related to the theme of worship, ethics (morals), temporary and local laws, as well as teachings (*ta’lîmât*) which are not included in the category of determining the law, both general for Muslims and specifically for the Prophet. Second, the prophethood (*nubuwah*) which is represented in the category of verses *mutasyâbihât*, includes the Qur’an and *alsab’ al-matsâni*. 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-qawânîn al-‘âmmah wa al-juz’îyah*), the history of generations (*qawânîn al-târîkh*), and historical law (*qawânîn al-târîkh*). Third, verses that do not fall into the two categories above are called *tafshîl al-kitâb* or explanatory verses, namely verses that provide explanations of the contents of the *al-kitâb* (*al-âyât al-sharîh li muhîtawât al-kitâb*).

From this it is clear that Syahrûr’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 Syahrûr’s conception of the Qur’an, *nubuwah* and *risâlah*, we can consider the diagram below:

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21 Syahrûr, *al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân*, 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
Muḥammad Syahrūr's Thought towards Nubuwwah and Risālah of Muhammad
Diagram 4
The Differences between the Quran and Umm al-Kitâb According to Muḥammad Syahhûr

| al-Kitab          | Qur’an | al-Sab’ al-Matsânî | Tafshîl al-Kitâb | Umm al-Kitâb |
|-------------------|--------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Truth \(\text{al-ḥaqq}\) |        |                    |                 |              |
| General law governing existence \(\text{al-qawānīn al-ʿāmmah al-lāzimah li wal-wajjūd}\) |        |                    |                 |              |
| The law of history \(\text{al-qawānīn al-tārikhiyāh}\) |        |                    |                 |              |
| Law of the elements of natural formation \(\text{qawānīn ju`iyât al-thabi’āh}\) |        |                    |                 |              |
| Changes in natural phenomena \(\text{tashrîf alḥdāts al-thabi’āh}\) |        |                    |                 |              |
| General and specific instructions: wills \(\text{al-furqān al-ʿāmm wa al-khâsh: al-washāyā}\) |        |                    |                 |              |
| The law which is limited by time \(\text{al-ahkām al-maḥalliyāh}\) |        |                    |                 |              |
| The law which is enforced according to the context of the situation \(\text{al-ahkām al-dzarfiyāh}\) |        |                    |                 |              |
| General teaching, but not legislation \(\text{tālimāt ‘āmmah, laisat tasyri’āt}\) |        |                    |                 |              |
| Special teaching, but not legislation \(\text{tālimāt khâshshah, laisat tasyri’āt}\) |        |                    |                 |              |

Diagram 5
The Differences on the Conception of Nubuwwah and Risālah

| Criteria                  | Nubuwwah              | Risālah                      |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Characteristics           | Consisting of objective sciences \(\text{maudhū’ī}\) | Consists of laws \(\text{al-ahkām}\) which are subjective. |
| Functions                 | Distinguishing between right and vanity Position Muhammad as a | The difference between \(\text{ḥalāl}\) and \(\text{ḥarām}\) |

The Contemporary Thought on the Qur’an | Eko Zulfikar
Model of Approach to Syahrûr’s Quranic Interpretation

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

a. Linguistic Approach

The linguistic approach (al-manhaj al-lughawi) implemented by Syahrûr in interpreting the Qurʾān produces a very different conclusion from the mainstream understanding of Muslims so far. By studying linguistics with Jaʿfar Dakk al-Bâb, he describes this linguistic approach as the main foothold in the introduction of his first book; al-Kitâb wa al-Qurʾān: Qirāʾah Muʿāshirah.

Based on his scientific linguistic approach, Syahrûr concludes that language is an important medium for humans to communicate with each other. For this reason, Syahrûr, like al-Jurjânî, stresses the existence of language links on the one hand and thought on the other. For Syahrûr, 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 Syahrûr, 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 Syahrûr interprets the words qisth and ‘adl in the verse polygamy:

23 Syahrûr, al-Kitâb wa al-Qurʾān, p. 30.
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-Nisa’ [4]: 3)

When interpreting this verse, Syahrûr does not give a lengthy explanation related to the meaning of the words qîsth 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 Syahrûr, 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, Syahrûr refers to the explanation of al-Mâ’idah [5]: 42, al-Hujurat [49]: 9, and al-Mumtañahah [60]: 8, while in the second sense, Syahrûr 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 Syahrûr based on the principle of intratextuality produces a different interpretation. As an example of Syahrûr’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:

“...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 of] their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers,

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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-Nâr [24]: 31)

In this verse, Syahrûr uses the context of the discussion by describing the problematic about women's clothing. He relies on the problem of decoration (zînah) revealed in the fragment of the verse: “wa là yubdîna zînatinahunna illâ mà dzahara minhâ” (and do not show zînah except what appears). According to Syahrûr, the women's body as a whole is a decoration (zînah) which is globally divided into two: first, female body parts that are naturally exposed (al-dzâhir bi al-khalq), such as the head, abdomen, back, two legs and two hands. Second, female body parts that are naturally hidden (ghair al-dzâhir 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 yadhrîbna bi khumûrîhinna ‘alâ juyûbihinna” (and they should close the khimâr to juyûb). According to Syahrûr, 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 jaâ-ba comes from ja-â-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 (mâ baina al-tsadyain), the lower part of the breast (mâ tahtâ al-tsadyain), the lower armpit (tahtâ al-ibthain), pubic (al-farj), and two buttocks (al-âlyatani). All these parts are called juyûb which must be covered by women.

Because Allah only ordered to cover juyûb, according to Syahrûr, the minimum limit (al-hâdd al-adnâ) women’s clothing is to cover these five parts. While the maximum limit (al-hâdd ala’lâ) is determined by the Messenger of Allah in his saying: “kull almar’ah ‘awrah mà ‘adâ waajihâ wa kaffâihâ (the whole female body is aurât 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 Syahrur,” Hermeneutik, vol. 8, no. 2 (2014): 275.
(interference) as explained by Allah in al-Ahzab [33]: “Dzâlika adnâ an yu’rafnâ fa là yu’dzain” (That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused). In Syahrûr’s understanding, adzâ (distraction) in this verse can be natural (thabî’tî), and can also be social (ijtimâ’i), such as insults, ridicule and isolation from association.

Critical Analysis of Muḥammad Syahrûr’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 zaman 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’i) in understanding the content of the Qur’an is Muḥammad Syahrûr. He has his own term for methodological devices which according to him get justification from al-Muzammil [73]: 4 with manhaj al-tartîl. This method is then put by Syahrûr 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 Syahrûr 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, Syahrûr calls again related to the definition of the Qur’an with a new paradigm. Syahrûr 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 Syahrûr is the juxtaposition between reason, revelation and reality.

In order to interpret the Qur’an as an effort to find solutions to contemporary problems, Syahrûr 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 Syahrûr 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, Syahrûr has no background in Islamic studies, especially in the aspect of language. Yûsuf al-Shaidâwî, in his book, Baidhah al-Dîk, gives a specific and systematic critique of language errors in Syahrûr’s al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân: Qirâ’ah Mu’âshirah. Among al-Shaidâwî’s criticisms is how Syahrûr was wrong in taking and interpreting the original word of alkitâb. According to him, this definition shows that Syahrûr does not master the history and development of Arabic. In another part, Syahrûr also divides the verses of the Qur’an into two main parts: muhkam and mutasyâbih. According to al-Shaidâwî, this classification is not based on the knowledge of nahwe and sharaf that is strong, because Syahrûr has misunderstood the meaning of this verse from the grammatical aspects.

Overall, Syahrûr’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-Báb, but that was not enough. Lack of understanding Syahrûr language is reflected in his book, al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân: Qirâ’ah Mu’âshirah. In this book, al-Shaidâwî found more than 80 Syahrûr’s errors in his Qur’an study project. In

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27 Yûsuf al-Shaidâwî, Baidhah al-Dîk: Naqd Lughawiy li Kitâb al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân li Muhammad Syahrûr (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 Syahrûr’s opinion above certainly cannot be justified.

Conclusion

According to the brief understanding above, it can be concluded that Muhammad Syahrûr in his monumental work, al-Kitâb wa al-Qur’ân: Qir’ah Mu’âshirah, 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 Syahrûr 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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