

Hermeneutical Analysis of the Concept of Makkiyah–Madaniyah in *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd

**Muhammad Fadhil Hadziq^{1*}, Muhammad Aqil Abror², Bulqis³, Sri Jomila
Oktari⁴, M. Fauzan Zenrif⁵**

^{1,2,3,4,5}Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang, Indonesia

¹250104320014@student.uin-malang.ac.id, ²240104110179@student.uin-malang.ac.id,

³bulqis02@gmail.com, ⁴tarisrijomila@gmail.com, ⁵zenrif@syariah.uin-malang.ac.id

*Correspondence

DOI: [10.38073/pelita.v4i1.5007](https://doi.org/10.38073/pelita.v4i1.5007)

Received: 23 May 2026

Revised: 15 June 2026

Accepted: 10 July 2026

Published: 16 July 2026

Abstract

This study examines the classification of Makkiyah and Madaniyah in ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān with a focus on Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd’s hermeneutical critique of the classical approach, which tends to be descriptive and narration-centered. The research is important because it reveals epistemological problems in determining Makki–Madani classifications that affect the understanding of the Qur’anic text, the history of revelation, and the relationship between text and law. The method used is library research employing content analysis with a critical-hermeneutical approach to *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* and other classical and contemporary exegetical literature. The findings show that Makki–Madani criteria such as geography, audience, content, and narrations are not absolute and instead represent problematic historical constructions. Abu Zayd also critiques the method of *talfiq al-riwāyāt*, the assumption of *ta’addud al-nuzūl*, and the separation between text and law, all of which contribute to an epistemological crisis in textual understanding. In addition, Qur’anic stylistic features are interpreted as historical indicators reflecting the socio-cultural dynamics of revelation. The study concludes that Makki–Madani should be understood in a historical-contextual and hermeneutical framework as a dynamic process involving text, reality, and interpretation. These findings are significant because they offer a methodological reconstruction in Qur’anic studies that is more critical, integrative, and contextual. This research is expected to contribute to contemporary Qur’anic studies by emphasizing a critical, historical, and dialogical approach to understanding revelation more comprehensively and relevantly for scholarly discourse.

Keywords: *Makkiyah–Madaniyah, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Hermeneutical Analysis, Historical-Contextual Interpretation, ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān.*

Abstrak

Studi ini mengkaji klasifikasi Makkiyah dan Madaniyah dalam ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān dengan fokus pada kritik hermeneutika Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd terhadap pendekatan klasikal, yang cenderung bersifat deskriptif dan berpusat pada narasi (riwayat). Penelitian ini penting karena mengungkap problem epistemologis dalam menentukan klasifikasi Makki–Madani yang memengaruhi pemahaman teks Al-Qur’an, sejarah turunnya wahyu, serta hubungan antara teks dan hukum. Metode yang digunakan adalah penelitian kepustakaan (library research) dengan analisis isi (content analysis) menggunakan pendekatan kritis-hermeneutis terhadap *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* serta literatur tafsir klasik dan kontemporer lainnya. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kriteria Makki–Madani – seperti geografi, khalayak sasaran (audiens), isi, dan riwayat – tidaklah mutlak, melainkan representasi dari konstruksi sejarah yang problematis. Abu Zayd juga mengkritik metode *talfiq al-riwāyāt* (penyelarasan riwayat), asumsi *ta’addud al-nuzūl* (keberulangan

turunnya wahyu), dan pemisahan antara teks dan hukum, yang semuanya berkontribusi pada krisis epistemologis dalam memahami teks. Selain itu, karakteristik gaya bahasa (uslub) Al-Qur'an ditafsirkan sebagai indikator historis yang mencerminkan dinamika sosial-budaya saat wahyu diturunkan. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa Makki–Madani harus dipahami dalam kerangka historis-kontekstual dan hermeneutis sebagai proses dinamis yang melibatkan teks, realitas, dan penafsiran. Temuan ini signifikan karena menawarkan rekonstruksi metodologis dalam studi Al-Qur'an yang lebih kritis, integratif, dan kontekstual. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat berkontribusi pada studi Al-Qur'an kontemporer dengan menekankan pendekatan yang kritis, historis, dan dialogis guna memahami wahyu secara lebih komprehensif serta relevan bagi diskursus akademik.

Kata Kunci: *Makkiyah–Madaniyah, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Analisis Hermeneutika, Penafsiran Historis-Kontekstual, 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān.*

INTRODUCTION

The Study of Makkiyah and Madaniyah is one of the central themes in the discipline of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* and carries broad methodological and hermeneutical implications.¹ The classification of Qur'anic verses according to their period of revelation functions not only as an indicator of historical chronology, but also as an epistemological instrument for understanding the development of the Prophet's mission, the social transformation of the early Muslim community, and the gradual formation of Islamic law.² In the classical tradition, the Makki–Madani distinction is closely related to *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), *nāsikh wa mansūkh* (abrogation), and the stylistic characteristics of the verses, making it an important component in the construction of exegetical methodology.³ Thus, the concept of Makkiyah and Madaniyah is not merely historical in nature, but also determines how the Qur'anic text is understood and interpreted.⁴

However, the development of Makkiyah and Madaniyah studies in contemporary scholarship still tends to remain within a descriptive and classificatory framework.⁵ Most studies focus on identifying textual features such as the length of verses, themes of creed or legal rulings, and classifications based on transmitted reports, without critically examining their epistemological foundations.⁶ Although this approach enriches the available data, it has not sufficiently addressed more fundamental methodological problems, such as the reduction of the Makki–Madani concept to a purely geographical category, the dominance of transmitted reports without historical criticism, and the practice of *talfīq* (harmonization) often used to reconcile seemingly contradictory reports without paying attention to the relationship between the text and its historical context.⁷

In this context, a more critical and hermeneutical approach is needed to reread the

¹ Alamsyah Alamsyah, “Makkiyah–Madaniyah Asy Syatibi Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Pengembangan Pemikiran Islam Substantif Dan Kultural,” *Al-Adyan: Jurnal Studi Lintas Agama* 15, no. 1 (2020): 25–48.

² Siti Qoti'ah, “Pendekatan Historis-Kronologis Tafsir Nuzūlī Dalam Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Ḥadīth Karya Muḥammad 'Izzat Darwazah,” *Qur'anic Interpretation Journal* 2, no. 2 (2025): 164–80.

³ Reno Firdaus Junaidi and Nadana Mardhotillah, “Meninjau Kembali Ilmu Makki–Madani (Refleksi Filosofis),” *Jurnal: Matlamat Minda*, 2022.

⁴ Hardillah Hardillah, Muh Khumaidi Ali, and Awaliyah Musgamy, “Konsep Makkiyah Dan Madaniyah Dalam Al-Qur'an: Analisis Konseptual, Linguistik, Dan Relevansinya Bagi Kehidupan Kontemporer,” *Al-Ilmiya: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 1, no. 4 (2026): 1831–36.

⁵ Khoyumatul Kiftiyah, Wahidah Wahidah, and Muslimah Muslimah, “The Theories of Makki and Madani According to Classical and Contemporary Scholars,” *Bulletin of Pedagogical Research* 1, no. 1 (2021): 147–55.

⁶ Khusnul Mubarak and Muhammad Fadhil Hadziq, “Al-Tahlil Al-Dilaly Wa Tathbiq Al-Tarbawi Lima'na Kalimah Mubarak Fi Al-Qur'an Al-Karim 'ala Manzhuri Toshihiko Izutsu,” *Al-Irfan: Journal of Arabic Literature and Islamic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2025): 22–38, <https://doi.org/10.58223/al-irfan.v8i1.298>.

⁷ Afifatul Aspia et al., “Kajian Komprehensif Tentang Konsep Makkiyah Dan Madaniyah Dalam Ulumul Qur'an,” *Jurnal Riset Multidisiplin Edukasi* 2, no. 11 (2025): 735–44.

concept of Makkiyah and Madaniyah as an epistemological construction rather than merely a historical category.⁸ Contemporary hermeneutical approaches emphasize that the Qur'an should be understood as a living text situated within the dialectic between revelation, social reality, and the reader.⁹ Accordingly, the Makki–Madani classification should not be treated solely as historical data, but as part of an ongoing process of meaning production that evolves in response to changing contexts of understanding. This approach allows for a more dynamic reading of the text while avoiding an overly rigid fixation of meaning.¹⁰

Furthermore, a critical study of Makkiyah and Madaniyah opens the possibility of reexamining the foundational assumptions of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, particularly those concerning the relationship between text, history, and law.¹¹ This is important to avoid reducing the meaning of the text to a simplistic chronological scheme and to affirm that the Qur'an possesses linguistic, historical, and contextual dimensions that interact in complex ways. Consequently, this study is not merely descriptive, but also contributes to the development of a more reflective, critical, and contextual methodology of Qur'anic interpretation.¹²

A number of previous studies illustrate this tendency. Research conducted by Fitri Setia Putri and colleagues focuses on geographical classification and the thematic characteristics of Qur'anic verses.¹³ Khairil Gufran Mursyid and Mursyidatul Awaliyah examine the dynamics of Makkiyah and Madaniyah within the framework of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* from a descriptive-historical perspective.¹⁴ Lukmanul Hakim and Afriadi Putra emphasize the function of the Makki–Madani distinction as an instrument for understanding the gradual development of Islamic law.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Afifatul Aspia and colleagues discuss the dimensions of time, place, and methods of classification.¹⁶ Although these studies are valuable, they do not comprehensively address epistemological issues such as the validity of linguistic criteria, the problem of repeated revelation, the relationship between text and law, and the limitations of report-based approaches in explaining the dynamics of revelation.

Based on a review of previous studies, several research gaps remain in Makki–Madani scholarship. First, few studies have examined in depth the epistemological validity of the classical criteria used to distinguish Makki and Madani verses, whether based on geography, audience, content, or chronology. Second, studies on Qur'anic style as a historical indicator for understanding the distinction between Makki and Madani verses remain relatively limited. In addition, criticism of the method of *tafīq al-riwāyāt*

⁸ Piet Hizbullah Khaidir, "METODE HERMENEUTIKA QUR'ANI INTEGRATIF: Analisis Linguistik-Historis Atas Tafsir Surat-Surat Makkiyah M. Quraish Shihab," *Al-I'jaz: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an, Falsafah Dan Keislaman* 7, no. 2 (2025): 1–57, <https://doi.org/10.53563/hq490w12>.

⁹ Zulkarnaen Ritonga et al., "The Hermeneutic Circle In The Tradition Of Islamic Tafsiri: Implications For Renewal," *Jurnal Masharif Al-Syariah: Jurnal Ekonomi Dan Perbankan Syariah* 10, no. 5 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.30651/jms.v10i5.29481>.

¹⁰ Muhammad Syahrul Mubarak et al., *Pemikiran Hermeneutika Dalam Konteks Al-Qur'an Dan Hadits* (Yayasan Tri Edukasi Ilmiah, 2025).

¹¹ Imanudin Imanudin, "Kritik As-Suyuthi Terhadap Epistemologi Tafsir Al-Zamakhshari Dalam Hâsiyah Al-Baidhawī" (Universitas PTIQ Jakarta, 2024).

¹² Mega Septiana Dewi, Amalia Desy Wahyuni Maimun, and Yunita Kumala Sari, *AL-QUR'AN DAN HADIST: Wahyu, Tafsir, Dan Keotentikan* (PENERBIT KBM INDONESIA, 2026).

¹³ Ika Rahmadiningsih et al., "Makkiyah Dan Madaniyah," *Jurnal Al-Mubarak: Jurnal Kajian Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 7, no. 1 (2022): 43–61.

¹⁴ Khairil Gufran Mursyid and Mursyidatul Awaliyah, "Makkiyah Dan Madaniyah Dalam Al-Qur'an," *Tarbawi* 9, no. 01 (2021): 65–82.

¹⁵ Lukmanul Hakim and Afriadi Putra, "Signifikansi Makkiyah Madaniyah Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Penafsiran Al-Qur'an," *RUSYDIAH: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 3, no. 1 (2022): 95–113.

¹⁶ Aspia et al., "Kajian Komprehensif Tentang Konsep Makkiyah Dan Madaniyah Dalam Ulumul Qur'an."

in addressing contradictory reports has not been systematically developed, nor has the phenomenon of *ta'addud al-nuzūl* (multiple occurrences of revelation) been thoroughly analyzed as an epistemological problem in *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. Moreover, there is still a lack of integrative studies that discuss the relationship between text and law (*faṣl bayna al-naṣṣ wa al-ḥukm*) within the framework of Makki–Madani classification. These conditions indicate the need for a new approach that is not only descriptive-historical, but also critical-epistemological and hermeneutical.

In response to these gaps, this study offers a novel contribution in the form of a comprehensive analysis of the Makki–Madani classification from the perspective of the integrative hermeneutics of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. This contribution includes five major aspects: (1) a critique of the traditional criteria of Makki–Madani classification (geographical, audience-based, thematic, and report-based); (2) an analysis of linguistic style as a historical-structural indicator of revelation; (3) a critique of the method of *talfīq al-riwāyāt* in classical exegetical tradition; (4) an epistemological analysis of the assumption of *ta'addud al-nuzūl* (repeated revelation); and (5) a reconstruction of the relationship between text and law from a hermeneutical perspective. Thus, Makki and Madani are no longer understood as merely technical classifications, but as dynamic historical constructions emerging from the interaction between the text, social reality, and the process of interpretation. This study aims to analyze the criteria for distinguishing Makki and Madani verses, examine the role of linguistic style, critique the method of *talfīq al-riwāyāt*, analyze *ta'addud al-nuzūl* as an epistemological problem, and explain the relationship between text and law within the hermeneutical framework of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research. The primary source of data is the book *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ (The Concept of the Text)* by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, particularly the sections discussing the concept of Makkiyah and Madaniyah.¹⁷ Secondary data are drawn from literature on *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, classical exegetical works, books, and scholarly articles relevant to the research topic. This approach was chosen because the object of study consists of texts and conceptual thought that require an in-depth examination of ideas rather than field data. Accordingly, the study focuses on exploring, interpreting, and reconstructing Abu Zayd's thought on Makkiyah and Madaniyah within a hermeneutical framework.¹⁸

The data were analyzed using content analysis with a critical-hermeneutical approach. The analytical process was conducted in three stages: first, data reduction by selecting textual passages related to the concept of Makkiyah and Madaniyah; second, data presentation by organizing findings into major themes such as classification criteria, linguistic style, *talfīq al-riwāyāt*, *ta'addud al-nuzūl*, and the relationship between text and law; and third, drawing interpretive conclusions. The analysis involved contextual reading of the text, relating it to historical and epistemological realities, and contrasting it with the views of classical Muslim scholars. Through this method, the study seeks to produce a comprehensive, critical, and systematic understanding of the concept of Makkiyah and Madaniyah from the perspective of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd.¹⁹

¹⁷ Muhammad Rijal Fadli, "Memahami Desain Metode Penelitian Kualitatif," *Humanika: Kajian Ilmiah Mata Kuliah Umum* 21, no. 1 (2021): 33–54.

¹⁸ Endah Marendah Ratnaningtyas et al., "Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif," *Aceh: Yayasan Penerbit Muhammad Zaini*, 2023, 369–3031.

¹⁹ M.B Miles, A.M Huberman, and J Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis, A Methods Sourcebook, Edition 3* (USA: SAGE Publications, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Criteria for Distinguishing Makki and Madani Verses

The discussion of the criteria for distinguishing Makki and Madani verses in the Qur'an cannot be separated from the hermeneutical perspective developed by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. In his view, the classification of Makki and Madani verses is not merely a geographical division between Mecca and Medina, but rather a representation of two crucial historical stages that significantly shaped the formation of the Qur'anic text. He states:

*"The division between Makki and Madani within the text is a division between two important stages that contributed to the formation of the text, both in terms of its content and its structure and composition."*²⁰

This statement demonstrates that the revealed text cannot be separated from the historical reality surrounding it; therefore, each verse must be understood within the context of the social dynamics accompanying it. Abu Zayd thus firmly critiques the traditional approach that tends to view Makki and Madani simply as categories of place without considering the historical dimension and the social transformations that took place. In the classical tradition, Muslim scholars generally used geographical location as the basis for distinguishing Makki and Madani verses. As stated by Al-Suyuti in *Al-Itqān*, as cited by Abu Zayd:

*"Makki refers to what was revealed in Mecca, even if after the Hijrah, while Madani refers to what was revealed in Medina."*²¹

Some scholars, as reported by Al-Suyuti in *Al-Itqān* and cited by Abu Zayd, developed additional classifications, such as verses revealed during the Prophet's travels, by night or by day, and outside both Mecca and Medina, including on mountains, between heaven and earth, and even in caves underground. They also distinguished between verses revealed while traveling and while residing, and connected these categories with post-Hijrah events such as the conquest of Mecca and the Farewell Pilgrimage.²² However, Abu Zayd criticizes this approach as overly reductive. He remarks:

*"All of these detailed divisions are essentially based on the criterion of place, without considering their effect on the content or form of the text."*²³

This criticism shows that a purely geographical approach is unable to explain the transformation in the substance and structure of the Qur'anic text as the Muslim community evolved. In other words, emphasizing location alone neglects the deeper historical dimension, namely the interaction between revelation and social reality.

In addition to geographical criteria, classical scholars such as Al-Zarkashi in *Al-Burhān* and Al-Suyuti in *Al-Itqān*, as cited by Abu Zayd, also employed audience-based criteria. According to this view, verses beginning with the address *"Yā ayyuhā al-nās"* ("O mankind") are considered Makki, whereas those beginning with *"Yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū"* ("O you who believe") are categorized as Madani.²⁴ However, Abu Zayd regards this approach as seriously limited. He states:

²⁰ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, "Mafhūm Al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān" (Casablanca, Maroko: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 2014), h. 75.

²¹ Zayd, h. 76.

²² Zayd, h. 76.

²³ Zayd, h. 76.

²⁴ Mia Fitriah Elkarimah, "Munasabah in the Perspective of Science of the Qur'an: Study of Al-Burhan Fi Ulumul Quran Works of Al-Zarkasyi (D. 749 H)," *Al-Risalah: Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Pemikiran Islam* 14, no. 1 (2023): 47–61.

“This criterion is limited, because many Qur’anic verses are addressed to multiple audiences.”²⁵

This statement indicates that the Qur’anic text possesses a communicative complexity that cannot be reduced to a single type of audience. In reality, Qur’anic verses may simultaneously address the Prophet, polytheists, the People of the Book, and believers. Therefore, an audience-based approach fails to capture the multidimensional nature of revelation and cannot serve as a sufficiently comprehensive basis for classification.

As an alternative, Abu Zayd proposes a more substantial historical approach by considering the Hijrah as the principal criterion for distinguishing Makki and Madani verses. He emphasizes that the Hijrah was not merely a geographical migration, but a profound social transformation. Therefore, the classification should be based on both reality and text: on reality because the movement of the text is linked to historical dynamics, and on the text because its content and structure are shaped by that movement. In this regard, he explains:

“The event of the migration from Mecca to Medina was not merely a change of place. If the stage of da’wah in Mecca was limited to warning and rarely reached the stage of message, then the migration to Medina transformed revelation into a message. The difference between warning and message lies in orientation: warning focuses on rejecting old concepts and introducing new ones, thereby creating awareness of the corruption of reality and the need to change it, whereas message means constructing the ideology of a new society. This transformation did not occur suddenly. The second stage began when the Prophet, after some Muslims migrated to Abyssinia, presented himself to delegations arriving in Mecca during the pilgrimage season, and the people of Yathrib pledged to protect him after accepting Islam. This event marked an important turning point in the history of da’wah, as well as in the dynamics of the movement of the text.”²⁶

This quotation underscores that the Hijrah constituted a turning point that changed the character of revelation from a call to consciousness (Makkiyah) into a structured social system (Madaniyah). Accordingly, the Makki–Madani classification should not be viewed solely in terms of place or audience, but rather within the framework of historical and social transformations that affected the content and objectives of revelation.²⁷ Abu Zayd also critiques the heavy reliance of classical scholars on transmitted reports (*riwāyāt*) as the basis for determining whether a verse is Makki or Madani. He cites the opinion of al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr in *Al-Intiṣār*:

“In determining whether a verse is Makki or Madani, the reference is the memorization of the Companions and the Successors. There is no report from the Prophet concerning this because he was not commanded to convey it. Nor did God make this knowledge obligatory upon the community. Although some of this knowledge may be important for scholars in understanding the history of abrogation, it can be known without an explicit text from the Messenger.”²⁸

This quotation shows that the classification does not rest upon a direct textual authority from the Prophet himself. Consequently, dependence on human memory renders the distinction between Makki and Madani an *ijtihādī* matter, opening the possibility of disagreement among scholars. From this perspective, the classification is no longer viewed as an absolute truth, but rather as an intellectual construction of an

²⁵ Zayd, h. 77.

²⁶ Zayd, h. 77.

²⁷ Taufiq Ikram Ash Syidqi, “HIJRAH DALAM KONTEKS MASA KE MASA: DARI AYAT MAKKIYAH, AYAT MADANIYYAH HINGGA KONTEKS MASA SEKARANG,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin Ilmu* 2, no. 5 (2025): 235–41, <https://doi.org/10.69714/echjdv34>.

²⁸ Zayd, h. 78.

interpretive nature. This aligns with the hermeneutical approach, which regards human beings as active subjects in understanding the text rather than passive recipients.

On the other hand, classical scholars such as Al-Zarkashi in *Al-Burhān* and Al-Suyuti in *Al-Itqān*, as cited by Abu Zayd, also used content-based criteria. According to this view, verses containing narratives of previous prophets tend to be classified as Makki, while verses dealing with legal rulings are categorized as Madani.²⁹ Thus, the content of the text serves as an indicator for distinguishing the characteristics of revelation based on theme and subject matter.³⁰

Accordingly, earlier scholars formulated several thematic indicators. Any surah containing the address “*Yā ayyuhā al-nās*” and lacking “*Yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū*” was generally considered Makki, with exceptions such as Sūrat al-Ḥajj. Surahs containing the word *kallā* were categorized as Makki because they typically emphasize warnings to disbelievers. Surahs beginning with disjointed letters (*ḥurūf muqaṭṭa‘āt*) were generally considered Makki, except for Sūrat al-Baqarah and Āl ‘Imrān, with differing opinions regarding Sūrat al-Ra‘d. Surahs recounting the story of Adam and Iblis were usually regarded as Makki (except al-Baqarah), while surahs mentioning hypocrites, legal punishments (*ḥudūd*), and obligations were considered Madani.³¹ Likewise, surahs discussing earlier nations were generally categorized as Makki. Nevertheless, Abu Zayd emphasizes:

*“These characteristics are neither absolute nor final, as the early scholars themselves acknowledged; rather, they are only dominant features.”*³²

This content-based approach reflects scholars’ efforts to identify thematic patterns in revelation, but it remains a generalization that is not entirely consistent due to numerous exceptions. Therefore, as Abu Zayd stresses, these criteria should be understood as dominant tendencies rather than absolute boundaries in classifying Makki and Madani verses. This point is further reinforced by Abu Zayd’s statement:

*“Development did not occur suddenly, either in reality or in the text. Therefore, the distinction between Makki and Madani remains general rather than absolute. The difficulty increases because the order of recitation in the muṣḥaf does not correspond to the chronological order of revelation, so Makki and Madani verses may coexist within a single surah. Determining the boundaries of each textual unit and each verse requires careful identification, especially in cases that perplexed earlier scholars. Therefore, the temporal criterion must be considered together with textual criteria, both in terms of content and structure.”*³³

This statement affirms that the classification of Makki and Madani verses cannot be understood rigidly, because the Qur’anic text developed alongside complex socio-historical dynamics. Accordingly, a more comprehensive approach integrating time, context, content, and textual structure is essential in order to avoid simplistic categorizations.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study concludes that the criteria for distinguishing Makki and Madani verses cannot be understood in a singular and absolute manner, whether through geographical, audience-based, report-based, or content-based approaches alone. Although these criteria represent serious scholarly efforts to classify revelation, each has limitations because they are partial, general, and unable to fully explain the complexity of the relationship between the Qur’anic text and the socio-

²⁹ Monjed Ahmad, “بين عالمية القرآن والقول بتاريخانيته: دراسة في نوع المكي والمدني من خلال كتاب الإتيان للسيوطي,” *Tasavvur Tekirdağ İlahiyat Dergisi* 7, no. 2 (2021): 1335–82.

³⁰ Zayd, h. 78.

³¹ Zayd, h. 78.

³² Zayd, h. 78.

³³ Zayd, h. 79.

historical dynamics surrounding it. From the hermeneutical perspective of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, the Makki–Madani classification is best understood as a representation of two historical phases reflecting the transformation of the prophetic mission from a stage of warning to the establishment of a social system (*risālah*). Therefore, the most comprehensive approach is a historical-contextual one that integrates time, social reality, content, and textual structure. In this way, the classification of Makki and Madani is not a final and absolute truth, but a dynamic interpretive construction that must continually be examined critically in order to achieve a more holistic and contextual understanding of the Qur'an.

Linguistic Style in the Classification of Makki and Madani Verses

The discussion of linguistic style as a criterion for distinguishing Makki and Madani verses constitutes an important aspect of the analysis of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, particularly as a critique of the tendency among classical scholars to rely more heavily on transmitted reports than on textual analysis. Abu Zayd argues that if the classification of Makki and Madani verses is *ijtihādī* in nature and therefore not entirely certain, then the approach to the Qur'anic text should not depend exclusively on transmitted reports, but should also incorporate the internal characteristics of the text itself, including its linguistic style. In this regard, he states:

*“If the classification of Makki and Madani is ijtihādī and not entirely certain, then the approach to the text should not stop at transmitted reports, but must open the way for internal textual analysis, including linguistic style.”*³⁴

This view indicates that linguistic style forms part of the structure of meaning capable of revealing the historical context of revelation. One of the most prominent indicators is the difference in verse length between the Makki and Madani periods. Abu Zayd explains:

*“At least two stylistic features can be identified that help distinguish Makki and Madani. Ibn Khaldun referred to one of them, namely the greater length of Madani verses compared to Makki verses.”*³⁵

The short, concise, and rhythmic nature of Makki verses reflects a strong rhetorical character designed to awaken the consciousness of society during the early phase of the prophetic mission. By contrast, the longer Madani verses indicate the need to convey more complex information, particularly regarding legal regulations and the organization of the Muslim community. This distinction confirms that the structure and style of the Qur'an cannot be separated from the socio-historical context in which it was revealed.³⁶

This analysis is further reinforced by Abu Zayd's explanation that the criterion of verse length can be understood through two principal foundations. First is the transition from the stage of warning (*inzār*) to the stage of message (*risālah*). The stage of warning emphasizes the persuasive force of concise and emphatic language, whereas the stage of message requires broader communication through more elaborate linguistic structures. Abu Zayd states:

*“Warning emphasizes the impact of concise and forceful language, whereas message places greater emphasis on the communication of information through a different structure.”*³⁷

³⁴ Zayd, h. 79.

³⁵ Zayd, h. 79.

³⁶ Fatimatuz Zahro, Mumtazul Imamah, and Muhammad Farih, “MODERASI BERAGAMA DALAM PERSPEKTIF HISTORIS: Analisis Makki–Madani, Dan Nasakh–Mansūkh,” *Al-Furqan: Jurnal Agama, Sosial, Dan Budaya* 5, no. 1 (2026): 759–72.

³⁷ Zayd, h. 80.

Within this framework, text and law cannot be separated, because both develop as part of a single historical process. Another stylistic feature distinguishing Makki and Madani verses is the attention to *fāṣilah* (the rhythmic ending of verses), which constitutes an essential element of the rhetorical power of Qur’anic language, especially during the stage of warning. Abu Zayd remarks:

*“In warning, the primary concern is rhetorical impact, while the communication of information remains secondary.”*³⁸

Although classical scholars recognized the importance of *fāṣilah*, they generally avoided comparing it to *sajʿ* (rhymed prose), even though the two share similar mechanisms within the Arabic linguistic tradition. This observation suggests that stylistic analysis can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the character of Qur’anic language within its historical and cultural setting.

This stylistic discussion can be expanded by examining the relationship between Qur’anic language and the broader linguistic traditions of Arab culture. Abu Zayd notes:

*“The phenomenon of sajʿ (rhymed prose) was widely known in the divinatory utterances of soothsayers and fortune-tellers, and in the cultural consciousness it was regarded as a sign that such speech possessed a non-human dimension.”*³⁹

He cites as an example the rhythmic statement of a soothsayer:

*“I saw a blaze emerging from darkness, descending upon the land of Tihāmah, devouring every living being with a head.”*⁴⁰

This phenomenon demonstrates that the rhythmic and aesthetic dimensions of language function symbolically to establish the authority and persuasive power of a text. In this context, the similarity between the linguistic mechanisms of the Qur’an and existing cultural traditions does not diminish its sacredness; rather, it illustrates how revelation interacted with the linguistic system familiar to its first audience.

Furthermore, Abu Zayd emphasizes that when stylistic criteria are combined with thematic criteria and the relationship between the text and reality (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), many disagreements among classical scholars concerning Makki and Madani verses can be explained more comprehensively. He states:

*“The tendency of classical scholars to separate the text from reality was intended to preserve its sacredness, but it ultimately hindered a contextual understanding of the text.”*⁴¹

As a result, phenomena such as the disjointed letters (*hurūf muqaṭṭaʿāt*) were often interpreted speculatively rather than within the framework of Arabic linguistic culture. Abu Zayd’s approach therefore underscores the importance of reading the Qur’an as a living text that interacts with historical and cultural realities, producing an interpretation that avoids rigid separation between text and context.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study concludes that linguistic style analysis constitutes an essential approach to understanding the classification of Makki and Madani verses in a more comprehensive manner. Abu Zayd’s perspective demonstrates that differences in linguistic characteristics such as verse length, rhetorical force, and the use of *fāṣilah* are not merely aesthetic features, but also reflections of historical dynamics and social transformation in the process of revelation. Therefore, the classification of Makki and Madani verses should not rely solely on transmitted reports, but must be enriched by textual and contextual analysis that connects the text with socio-cultural reality. In this way, the Qur’an is understood as a living and dynamic text whose

³⁸ Zayd, h. 80.

³⁹ Zayd, h. 80.

⁴⁰ Zayd, h. 81.

⁴¹ Zayd, h. 81.

meaning develops through the interaction between linguistic structure, historical context, and the active role of human beings in the interpretive process.

The Method of Harmonizing Reports (*Talfīq al-Riwāyāt*) in the Hermeneutical Critique of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd

The discussion of the method of *talfīq al-riwāyāt* (harmonization of reports) in the hermeneutical perspective of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd reveals a fundamental critique of the way classical Muslim scholars dealt with conflicting reports concerning the classification of Makki and Madani verses. Abu Zayd argues that the tendency of scholars to engage in *tarjīh* (preference) or even to reconcile contradictory reports stems from their inability to connect the Qur’anic text with its historical and cultural realities. He states:

*“When two reports possess equal strength of transmission, scholars tend to adopt two assumptions. First, that the text was revealed more than once, once in Mecca and once in Medina. Second, that the text was revealed in Mecca, but its legal ruling was only implemented or established during the Medinan phase.”*⁴²

This statement demonstrates that the method of *talfīq* is not a genuinely scientific solution, but rather a form of compromise that obscures the historical distinction between Makki and Madani revelation and separates the text from its context. Abu Zayd further emphasizes that both assumptions carry problematic implications. He states:

*“The assumption of repeated revelation and deferred legal implementation ultimately leads to problematic implications when pursued to their logical conclusions.”*⁴³

This criticism highlights the methodological inconsistency of the classical approach, which prioritized preserving harmony among transmitted reports rather than critically evaluating their validity. As a result, the text loses its historical dimension and becomes detached from the social realities in which it was revealed. Abu Zayd connects this phenomenon to a broader intellectual attitude within the Islamic tradition: the tendency to sacralize the authority of earlier scholars. He writes:

*“The assumption that a verse was revealed multiple times reflects an inability to confront the opinions and *ijtihād* of earlier scholars critically and analytically. This inability stems from belief in the sanctity of individuals, which then leads to belief in the unquestionable truth of their opinions and interpretations. This attitude of loyalty to the past closely resembles contemporary religious discourse, which likewise tends to sacralize inherited reports and merely attempts to reconcile them without the capacity to judge one of them incorrect in pursuit of a scientific understanding.”*⁴⁴

This statement reveals that *talfīq* is not merely a technical issue, but is rooted in an epistemological structure dominated by *taqlīd* (uncritical adherence to authority). Abu Zayd’s critique therefore targets not only the method itself, but also the scholarly mentality underlying it.

In this context, Abu Zayd also criticizes the tendency of scholars to reject no report as long as it satisfies formal standards of transmission. He notes:

“Scholars of the Qur’an generally do not reject any opinion concerning Makki and Madani verses, nor regarding the occasions of revelation. Every opinion is considered to have some basis, and every report possesses legitimacy so long as it is judged authentic according to external criticism, namely the criticism of the chain of transmission and the verification of the narrators’ reliability. If two reports are equally

⁴² Zayd, h. 81.

⁴³ Zayd, h. 81.

⁴⁴ Zayd, h. 82.

authentic, preference is given to the report transmitted by one who directly witnessed the event, or through other methods of tarjīh."⁴⁵

This observation reveals the limitations of external criticism, which does not sufficiently consider content, context, and possible historical contradictions. In other words, the authenticity of the chain of transmission does not automatically guarantee the historical accuracy or interpretive validity of a report. A concrete example cited by Abu Zayd concerns the verse:

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

"And they ask you, [O Muhammad], concerning the Spirit. Say, 'The Spirit is of the affair of my Lord. And mankind have not been given of knowledge except a little.'" (Al-Isrā' [17]: 85).⁴⁶

The report of Ibn Mas'ūd situates the verse in a Medinan context, whereas the report of Ibn 'Abbās places it in a Makkan context. Faced with this contradiction, some scholars such as Al-Suyuti preferred one report, while others such as Al-Zarkashi adopted the method of *talfīq* by asserting that the verse was revealed twice. Abu Zayd comments:

*"This approach is merely an intellectual assumption intended to reconcile conflicting reports."*⁴⁷

This critique shows that *talfīq* tends to avoid epistemological conflict by uniting what may not, in fact, be reconcilable, thereby sacrificing historical precision. Within his hermeneutical framework, Abu Zayd emphasizes the importance of a historical-critical approach that does not merely reconcile reports, but is willing to accept or reject them based on objective analysis. He states:

*"In historical research, it is essential to employ a critical method that accepts or rejects reports on objective grounds."*⁴⁸

This principle underlies a hermeneutical approach that situates the text within a dialectical relationship with historical reality rather than within a network of mutually contradictory reports. Abu Zayd also criticizes the assumption of repeated revelation because of its serious implications, including the possibility that the Prophet himself forgot previously revealed verses. He explains:

*"The assumption that a verse was revealed twice has led to another assumption: that Qur'anic texts already revealed could be forgotten even by the Prophet himself, so that when a similar event occurred, Gabriel had to descend again to remind him of the text previously revealed. Although this assumption may appear plausible, it contradicts many reports demonstrating the extraordinary care of the Prophet and his Companions in preserving the Qur'an. Moreover, Gabriel's descent as a 'reminder' does not necessarily imply repeated revelation, nor does it mean that all reports concerning occasions of revelation or Makki and Madani classification must be regarded as authentic."*⁴⁹

This criticism indicates that *talfīq* is problematic not only methodologically, but also theologically, because it may undermine the doctrine of the preservation and authenticity of revelation.

As an alternative, Abu Zayd proposes an approach that relates the text to historical reality through dialectical analysis. He argues that the verse concerning the Spirit can be explained without resorting to *talfīq* by returning to the historical context of interaction

⁴⁵ Zayd, h. 82.

⁴⁶ Zayd, h. 82.

⁴⁷ Zayd, h. 82.

⁴⁸ Zayd, h. 83.

⁴⁹ Zayd, h. 83.

between the Quraysh and the People of the Book. He rejects the assumption that the Meccan community lacked the intellectual capacity to pose such a question, since this overlooks the historical fact of cultural exchange. This approach demonstrates that the understanding of the text must consider the social and cultural networks that transcended the geographical boundaries of Mecca and Medina.

In this regard, Abu Zayd also highlights the importance of the Prophetic *sīrah nabawiyyah* (biography) as a source connecting the text to reality. He notes that the *sīrah* is capable of explaining the relationship between the Quraysh's questions, their consultations with the People of the Book, and the subsequent revelation. He states:

*"The Sīrah offers an explanation of the causes of revelation that is more closely tied to both the text and reality, and indeed goes beyond this by demonstrating the dialectical relationship between them."*⁵⁰

This suggests that narrative-historical analysis provides a richer alternative to the reductive method of *talfīq*. Nevertheless, Abu Zayd also criticizes the tendency of scholars to neglect *sīrah* reports because of concerns regarding the strength of their chains of transmission. He cites the famous statement of Ahmad ibn Hanbal:

*"Three things have no reliable basis: tafsīr, malāḥim, and maghāzī."*⁵¹

This statement indicates that Imam Ahmad considered these fields Qur'anic interpretation, apocalyptic narratives, and military history to contain many reports lacking strong chains of transmission or full methodological reliability. It reveals a paradox in the Islamic scholarly tradition: reports rich in historical context were often marginalized, while reports with limited contextual value were preserved because of the formal strength of their chains of transmission.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study concludes that the method of *talfīq al-riwāyāt* in the classification of Makki and Madani verses, according to Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, reveals significant epistemological weaknesses in the classical scholarly approach. By reconciling contradictory reports through assumptions such as repeated revelation or deferred legal implementation, this method obscures the historical dimension of the text and reflects the dominance of a *taqlīd*-based mentality as well as the limitations of internal criticism. Consequently, the authenticity of transmission is often prioritized over analysis of context, content, and historical reality, resulting in a fragmented understanding of the Qur'anic text. Abu Zayd therefore proposes a historical-critical hermeneutical approach that rejects artificial reconciliation among reports and emphasizes the necessity of relating the text dialectically to social reality, cultural context, and the Prophetic biography in order to produce a more objective, comprehensive, and academically rigorous understanding of Makki and Madani revelation.

The Assumption of Repeated Revelation (*Ta'addud al-Nuzūl*) and the Epistemological Crisis of the Text

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd offers a sharp critique of one of the major assumptions in the classical exegetical tradition, namely the notion that revelation may have descended repeatedly (*ta'addud al-nuzūl*). According to him, this assumption emerged from the methodological tendency of classical scholars to employ the method of *talfīq* (harmonization of reports) when confronting discrepancies and contradictions in historical accounts regarding the revelation of Qur'anic verses. He states:

"The method of talfīq (harmonization) among differing and conflicting reports regardless of whether these reports are valid in terms of their conformity to actual events or to the textual data has gone beyond the discussion of asbāb al-nuzūl and the

⁵⁰ Zayd, h. 83-84.

⁵¹ Zayd, h. 85-86.

boundaries of distinguishing between Makki and Madani, extending into the realm of the various opinions found in Qur'anic interpretation."⁵²

This quotation indicates that, for Abu Zayd, *talfiq* is not merely a technique of scholarly compromise; rather, it has become an epistemological mechanism that blurs the boundaries of the discipline of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. When all reports are accepted without historical criticism, both *asbāb al-nuzūl* and the Makki–Madani classification lose their methodological function as tools for contextual analysis. As a result, tafsir becomes an accumulation of opinions rather than the outcome of historical verification. Abu Zayd further criticizes the tendency of classical scholars to accept every possible meaning derived from a single text. He writes:

*"Classical scholars, because of their eclectic method, became able to say that the wording of a verse or verses of the Qur'an contains all the various meanings transmitted from their predecessors."*⁵³

According to Abu Zayd, this attitude reflects a loss of awareness of the internal structure of the text. The language of the Qur'an, through its syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, possesses semantic boundaries that guide interpretation toward specific meanings. Through the mechanism of *talfiq*, however, these boundaries become fluid, allowing all meanings to be regarded as equally valid without critical selection. Consequently, the text loses its semantic identity as a linguistic entity rooted in a particular context. Abu Zayd then critiques the logic that extends *talfiq* to the assumption that revelation itself may have occurred repeatedly. He states:

*"As long as this method of talfiq leads to the assumption that a verse or surah may have been revealed twice, then the plurality of meanings becomes dependent upon the repetition of revelation."*⁵⁴

This criticism demonstrates Abu Zayd's rejection of the notion that semantic plurality must be explained by repeated acts of revelation. For him, meaning arises not from the historical repetition of the text, but from the dialectical relationship between the text, the reader, and social reality. If meaning must be justified through repeated revelation, then the text is reduced to a static entity dependent upon external events rather than a living linguistic structure. In the context of conflicting reports regarding Makki and Madani classification, Abu Zayd illustrates how *talfiq* was used to avoid epistemological conflict. He notes:

*"Differences in reports concerning whether Sūrat al-Fātiḥah and Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ are Makki or Madani, together with later scholars' efforts to reconcile all reports, led to the conclusion that both surahs were revealed twice: once in Mecca and once in Medina."*⁵⁵

This example shows how the assumption of *ta'addud al-nuzūl* emerged as an emergency epistemological solution. Instead of selecting or critically evaluating reports, scholars chose to harmonize them all. For Abu Zayd, however, this solution erases the historical boundaries of revelation. In the case of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*, for example, its close association with the institution of prayer makes it historically implausible to assume that it was revealed twice. Thus, the assumption of repeated revelation becomes historically inconsistent. A similar argument applies to *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*. Abu Zayd emphasizes:

⁵² Zayd, h. 86.

⁵³ Zayd, h. 86.

⁵⁴ Zayd, h. 86.

⁵⁵ Zayd, h. 86.

*“From the perspective of linguistic structure, composition, brevity, and recurring fāṣilah, this surah clearly exhibits Makkan characteristics. In terms of content, it deals with monotheism, which constituted the core of the debate with the polytheists.”*⁵⁶

Here Abu Zayd employs stylistic analysis to demonstrate that the linguistic character of the text can serve as historical evidence. Since the content of *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* centers on *tawḥīd*, it corresponds naturally to the Makkan context of confrontation with polytheism. Reports linking it to debates with the People of the Book are therefore historically weak and insufficient to alter its classification. Abu Zayd’s critique becomes even more forceful when he addresses the concept of *al-aḥruf al-sab‘ah* (the seven modes of recitation), which some scholars also interpreted through the logic of repeated revelation. He states:

*“The assumption that surahs and verses were revealed repeatedly did not stop at accepting all opinions and harmonizing them, whether in tafsir or in discussions of Makki–Madani and asbāb al-nuzūl, but was also used to explain the concept of the seven aḥruf, whereby the Qur’an was said to be revealed in seven different forms, each descending separately. Thus, the text was considered to have descended seven times.”*⁵⁷

Abu Zayd argues that this extension illustrates how *talfīq* affects not only *asbāb al-nuzūl*, but also the very structure of the Qur’anic text. If every variant reading is treated as a separate act of revelation, the unity of the Qur’an as a single revelation is obscured. According to him, the concept of *al-aḥruf al-sab‘ah* is better understood as a form of linguistic flexibility intended to facilitate recitation among Arab tribes with different dialects, rather than as evidence of ontological repetition. He further explains:

*“If the concept of the seven aḥruf is understood within the dialectic between the text and reality on the one hand, and within the context of the oral reception and transmission of the text on the other, it can be seen as a response of revelation to reality. But the way al-Sakhāwī understood it only adds to the ambiguity surrounding asbāb al-nuzūl, Makki and Madani, and even the concept of the text itself.”*⁵⁸

This statement encapsulates Abu Zayd’s critique of classical epistemology. The more reports are reconciled through compromise, the more blurred the distinction becomes between historical fact and interpretive construction. The text is no longer understood as an entity with a specific context of meaning production, but as a collection of limitless possibilities detached from historical reality. Abu Zayd ultimately returns the concept to its original sociolinguistic context by stating:

*“The seven aḥruf constitute a facilitation for Muslims in reciting the Qur’an, taking into account the linguistic diversity of the Arabian Peninsula resulting from tribal dialect differences.”*⁵⁹

This assertion reaffirms his view that revelation always interacts with the social and linguistic realities of the first Muslim community. Variations in recitation therefore reflect the responsiveness of revelation to social circumstances rather than evidence of repeated revelation.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study concludes that Abu Zayd regards the assumption of *ta‘addud al-nuzūl* as a symptom of an epistemological crisis in classical Qur’anic studies. This crisis arises from the dominance of the method of *talfīq*, which sacrifices historical criticism in order to preserve the apparent consistency of transmitted reports. As a result, the text becomes detached from historical reality, and revelation is conceived as something that can be repeated indefinitely without clear chronological

⁵⁶ Zayd, h. 87.

⁵⁷ Zayd, h. 87.

⁵⁸ Zayd, h. 88.

⁵⁹ Zayd, h. 89.

boundaries. Abu Zayd offers an alternative in the form of a historical-critical hermeneutics that situates the text within a dialectical relationship with socio-cultural reality. In this framework, meaning no longer depends on repeated revelation, but on historical context and the interaction between human beings and the text.

The Separation between Text and Law (*Faṣl bayna al-Naṣṣ wa al-Ḥukm*) in Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's Critique

The discussion of the separation between text and law in the thought of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd reveals a profound epistemological critique of the classical exegetical tradition, which tends to distinguish between revelation as a linguistic text and law as its normative consequence. For Abu Zayd, this separation lacks a solid foundation, because the relationship between text and meaning is simultaneous and inseparable from the outset. He states:

*“There is no doubt that the relationship of correspondence between the linguistic expression of a text and its meaning is self-evident (badīhī).”*⁶⁰

This statement expresses one of the fundamental principles of Abu Zayd's thought: the organic unity between linguistic form and meaning. By describing this relationship as *badīhī* (axiomatic), he rejects the notion that a text can be understood apart from its legal meaning. This principle becomes the basis of his critique of the separation between text and law in the tradition of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. To reinforce his argument, Abu Zayd cites Ibn Khaldun, who explains the simultaneous nature of revelation:

*“Receiving from the angel and returning to human capacity, together with understanding what is conveyed, all occur as if in a single instant—indeed, closer than the blink of an eye—because this process does not take place within time, but happens all at once. For this reason it is called waḥy (revelation), since the word waḥy in Arabic denotes swiftness.”*⁶¹

Abu Zayd uses this statement to emphasize that revelation is not a linear process (text → meaning → law), but a simultaneous event. Accordingly, law does not arise after the text; rather, it is embedded within the very moment in which the text is revealed. He further develops this argument through modern linguistic theory, stating:

*“The linguistic communicative relationship between sender and receiver is not divided into signs followed later by knowledge of meaning; rather, the process of understanding and decoding the message occurs simultaneously with the act of transmission.”*⁶²

Here Abu Zayd employs communication theory to strengthen his hermeneutical perspective. Legal meaning, in his view, is not a secondary product of interpretation, but an intrinsic part of the communicative structure of revelation itself. However, he criticizes classical scholars for disrupting this organic unity by assuming that the text may precede the law:

*“Scholars of the Qur'an at times abolish this necessary relationship and simultaneity between text and meaning by assuming that the text may precede the legal ruling; that is, the text may be revealed in the Makkan period, while its legal ruling is only established in the Madinan period.”*⁶³

This criticism shows that the central problem lies not in the text itself, but in a linear and historically fragmented mode of reading. Such an assumption creates the illusion that the text was initially devoid of legal meaning. For Abu Zayd, this is

⁶⁰ Zayd, h. 89.

⁶¹ Zayd, h. 89.

⁶² Zayd, h. 90.

⁶³ Zayd, h. 90.

epistemologically impossible. He demonstrates the logical contradiction inherent in this assumption:

*“Logically, they should also allow for the opposite possibility: that the legal ruling was established first in the Makkan period, and that the text expressing it was revealed later in the Madinan period. Yet the first assumption leads to the existence of ‘suspended’ texts without legal meaning; and a text without meaning loses its essential character as a text.”*⁶⁴

This *reductio ad absurdum* shows that if the text can precede law, then law could also precede the text, thereby undermining the very concept of revelation as linguistic communication. Abu Zayd also critiques the narrow understanding of “text” in the classical tradition. He states:

*“The assumption of the delay of the text in relation to the legal ruling emerged because scholars neglected the existence of the Sunnah as text.”*⁶⁵

Here he points out that the concept of text was often reduced exclusively to the Qur’an, while the Sunnah was not consistently treated as a linguistic text with its own semantic and legal significance. This oversight creates an epistemological imbalance in understanding Islamic law. He notes that jurists, in fact, adopted a more integrated approach:

*“The jurists considered the Qur’an and the Sunnah as the basis for deriving rulings, and they also regarded consensus (ijmā’) as a textual proof, even though they differed concerning analogy (qiyās). In other words, they treated all of these as legal evidences capable of establishing rulings.”*⁶⁶

Abu Zayd thus shows that the legal tradition itself contains a more coherent epistemological integration than some exegetical approaches. He summarizes his critique as follows:

*“Had scholars of the Qur’an paid attention to the interrelationship among these legal evidences, they would have realized that the assumption that the revelation of the text was delayed in relation to the law is merely a mental construct resulting from the separation between the two dimensions of religious text.”*⁶⁷

This statement represents the essence of Abu Zayd’s argument: the separation between text and law is an epistemological construction rather than a textual reality. A concrete example appears in the case of the verse on *tayammum*, which some scholars classify as Madinan:

*“The verse of tayammum is regarded by some as Madinan on the basis of its occasion of revelation, even though this clearly conflicts with the fact that prayer had already been prescribed in Mecca.”*⁶⁸

This example demonstrates that reports of *asbāb al-nuzūl* cannot always serve as definitive chronological evidence. Historical facts and textual structure must also be considered. Abu Zayd then formulates his key principle:

*“The text does not precede the law; rather, text and law emerge simultaneously. Moreover, the verse in Sūrat al-Mā’idah under discussion is not fundamentally a text about ablution, but a text about tayammum. The mention of ablution serves merely as an introduction to tayammum, which is the central issue behind the revelation of the verse.”*⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Zayd, h. 90.

⁶⁵ Zayd, h. 90.

⁶⁶ Zayd, h. 90.

⁶⁷ Zayd, h. 91.

⁶⁸ Zayd, h. 92.

⁶⁹ Zayd, h. 93.

This statement articulates Abu Zayd's model of simultaneity: text is not a preliminary stage before law, but part of the very process through which law is constituted. The same reasoning applies to verses concerning Friday prayer and zakat. Abu Zayd explains:

*"The verse on Friday prayer does not establish the obligation of the prayer itself, but commands believers to abandon trade when the call to prayer is proclaimed. Likewise, the verse on zakat does not legislate zakat, but clarifies its distribution and identifies those entitled to receive it."*⁷⁰

This demonstrates Abu Zayd's structural-linguistic approach, which interprets texts according to their internal function rather than through external juridical assumptions. Finally, Abu Zayd summarizes the methodological roots of these errors:

*"A number of methodological errors in Qur'anic studies stem from three principal causes: first, the failure to distinguish between linguistic meaning and legal meaning; second, reliance on exegetical reports from Companions and Successors projected onto Madinan contexts; and third, confusion between the original context of revelation and later applications of the verse."*⁷¹

Therefore, Abu Zayd rejects the assumption that text precedes law and insists that text, meaning, and law emerge together in a single dialectical process intimately connected to historical reality. Changes in legal understanding result not from a delay between text and law, but from the evolving interaction between the text, social reality, and human interpretation.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study concludes that Abu Zayd's critique of the separation between *al-naṣṣ* (text) and *al-ḥukm* (law) affirms their organic and simultaneous unity within the revelatory process. The separation proposed by some classical scholars is viewed as an epistemological construction arising from a linear-historical approach rather than from the nature of the text itself. Through a structural-linguistic perspective and communication theory, Abu Zayd demonstrates that text, meaning, and law emerge together in a single dialectical process closely tied to the historical and social context of revelation. Consequently, the assumption that text precedes law is a methodological illusion that leads to misunderstanding the function of the Qur'an. Legal meaning is inherent in the structure of the text from the outset, while the development of legal understanding results from the dynamic interaction between text, reality, and readers across time.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the criteria for distinguishing Makki and Madani verses in the perspective of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd cannot be understood through a single approach, whether geographical, audience-based, report-based, or content-based, because each of these approaches is partial and unable to capture the historical and structural complexity of the Qur'anic text. Abu Zayd emphasizes that the classification of Makki and Madani represents two historical phases in the development of revelation, closely linked to the social transformation from the stage of warning (*inzār*) to the establishment of a social system (*risālah*). Therefore, the most appropriate approach is a historical-contextual one that integrates chronology, social reality, thematic content, and the linguistic structure of the text, enabling the Qur'an to be understood as a dynamic text that continuously interacts with its historical context.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that linguistic style analysis and criticism of the method of *talfīq al-riwāyāt* (harmonization of reports) reinforce the view that

⁷⁰ Zayd, h. 94.

⁷¹ Zayd, h. 95.

understanding the Qur'an cannot be separated from its internal linguistic structure and the socio-cultural context in which it was revealed. Differences in linguistic characteristics between Makki and Madani verses such as the length of verses, rhetorical force, and the use of *fāṣilah* (rhythmic endings) reflect the historical dynamics of revelation, which are neither static nor uniform. Meanwhile, the practice of combining reports in the classical tradition reveals a tendency toward epistemological compromise that may obscure the historical dimension of the text. Accordingly, this study contributes to the development of Qur'anic studies as an academic discipline by emphasizing the importance of a historical-critical hermeneutical approach capable of bridging the relationship between text, language, and reality in a more comprehensive and contextual manner.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. It focuses primarily on Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* and related literature through a library-based hermeneutical approach without systematically comparing his ideas with those of other contemporary Muslim scholars or examining their practical implications for modern Qur'anic interpretation. As a result, the findings remain predominantly theoretical and conceptual. Future research is therefore encouraged to conduct comparative studies between Abu Zayd and other contemporary thinkers, such as Fazlur Rahman, Mohammed Arkoun, or Amina Wadud, as well as to explore the application of the historical-contextual understanding of Makki–Madani classifications in contemporary Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic legal reasoning, and interdisciplinary Qur'anic studies. Such investigations would further enrich the discourse on Qur'anic hermeneutics and clarify the continuing relevance of Abu Zayd's epistemological framework in addressing contemporary interpretive challenges.

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