

## Critical Analysis of J.M.S. Baljon's Perspectives in Tafsir Study

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### Abstrak

J.M.S. Baljon's ideas in the study of Quranic interpretation provide significant contributions through the historical-critical approach it employs. As an orientalist, Baljon explored the historical context of revelation and challenged the traditional interpretations that have long dominated the Islamic world. This approach opens up space to understand the Quran from a broader and more dynamic perspective, which not only considers theological aspects but also historical and sociological dimensions. This research is a narrative study about Baljon J.M.S and his thoughts. This research uses qualitative narrative study through the analysis of books and articles that contain information about Baljon. This analysis demonstrates how Baljon uses critical methods to assess the authenticity and relevance of traditional interpretations in a modern context. However, Baljon's approach has faced criticism, particularly regarding the use of Western assumptions that are considered less relevant to Islamic tradition. These criticisms include concerns about the potential bias and generalization that might overlook the complexity of interpreting the Qur'an. Nevertheless, Baljon's ideas remain relevant in fostering dialogue between Islamic tradition and Orientalist studies, as well as enriching the discourse of exegesis with critical perspectives that can deepen the understanding of sacred texts in contemporary contexts.

### Keywords:

J.M.S. Baljon; tafsir, Islamic studies, historical-critical approach, orientalism

### Introduction

Orientalism, etymologically derived from the word orient which means east and ethnologically means the nations that exist in the east. Oriental means the eastern world or eastern countries (seen from Europe) (Hasan *et al*, 2002). What is meant by the eastern nations is a group of peoples that inhabit the Asian continent and parts of Africa, and even include a small part of the inhabitants of Eastern Europe, all of which are bound by the similarity of history, religion and language (az-Zayadi, 1983). Meanwhile, in terminology, orientalism is interpreted as a way or method used to understand the Eastern world, which includes language, religion, history, customs, civilization and knowledge (Nasution, 1995). Sebagian mengkhususkan usaha tersebut dilakukan oleh orang Barat, bahkan ada yang memahaminya secara lebih sempit, yaitu kajian barat terhadap pemikiran dan peradaban

### Article info:

<https://doi.org/10.29240/jf.v10i1.12342>

Islam (az-Zayadi, 1983). Various references explain the motivation or factors behind the emergence of orientalism among Western thinkers. Mustafa as-Siba'i said that among these factors are religious factors in order to find weaknesses in Islam on the one hand, and on the other hand to help the interests of colonialism, politics and economics. Besides that, there is also a scientific factor or intellectual curiosity who purely and objectively want to study the eastern world, including Islam, they tend to be honest in their research, far from interests. The mistakes that occur in the results of their research are unintentional mistakes, even not uncommon among those who end up converting to Islam (as-Siba'i, 1979).

Islam as a religion based on two sources; The Qur'an and Hadith are not only theological doctrines and social doctrines, but more than that, Islam also gives birth to civilization. The civilization born by Islam through its scholars and intellectuals is not only in the form of a tradition of thought, but also in the form of architecture that can still be witnessed today. This proves that Islam as a religion has provided such a great work ethic for its adherents (Suadi, 2016).

The emergence of orientalism began with a war between the Western world (medieval Christianity) and the Eastern world. This is based on many differences in terms of ideology and religion. The reason for the war was due to the political and religious friction between Western Christians in Palestine and Islam, precisely during the period of the reign of Nuruddin Zanki and S{alahuddin al-Ayyubi. Resistance continues to occur until the next generation by reversing the direction of defeat and victory. Thus, causing Western scholars not to accept their defeat (Abd. Rahim, 2010). The emphasis on orientalism generally began with editing and publishing books on Islamic heritage, studying the regional languages of various Eastern countries, studying various social, economic and psychological factors that influenced the behavior of an eastern nation, studying various sects and schools of belief both moderate and extreme and researching ancient relics (Idri, 2011).

J.M.S Baljon is one of the orientalists who conducts studies on the interpretation of the Qur'an. His most popular work in this field is a book entitled *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation*. Baljon is recognized for his scholarly contributions regarding Pakistan's perspectives on Hadith and religion, alongside the intellectual legacy of Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi. He has produced a considerable body of work on these subjects, offering profound insights into Islamic beliefs and practices (Baljon, 1958), (Nizami, 1988). The evolution of critical analysis within Tafsir studies has been significantly shaped by the groundbreaking contributions of J.M.S Baljon. His groundbreaking theories and methodologies have established new benchmarks in scholarly research within this domain, resulting in numerous accolades and acknowledgment from his colleagues. Baljon's influence in modern literary criticism and theory persists in shaping the understanding and exploration of Tafsir studies, reinforcing his status as a trailblazer in the realm of academic literary studies (Elis, 2002).

The revolutionary contributions of J.M.S. Baljon have profoundly influenced academic study, establishing new benchmarks for methodology

and theory. Nevertheless, the sources do not explicitly reference the contributions of J.M.S Baljon or their influence on scholarly study (Tamer, G, 2024). Baljon's examination of metaphors in Tafsir texts has transformed scholarly interpretation and comprehension of profound meanings in religious writings. Baljon's focus on intertextuality and structural analysis has facilitated a more sophisticated and thorough methodology in the examination of Tafsir texts (Faris, 2023) (Rasool, G, 2019).

To understand how Baljon's thoughts, role and capacity in the study of tafsir, especially contemporary interpretation, the author tries to discuss more specifically his thoughts and views contained in his work. This article will discuss Baljon's biography, then a little about the book *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation*, explain about the study of interpretation and Baljon's role in the study of interpretation, and finally about his views and thoughts in the book.

## Research method

This research uses qualitative research methods to study figures through the analysis of books and articles that contain information about Baljon. This research is a narrative study about Baljon J.M.S and his thoughts. Narrative research itself is a qualitative research approach that emphasizes understanding the meaning and context underlying a person's life experiences. Biographical research can be considered a specific form of narrative research that focuses on the study of an individual's biography.

## Results and discussion

### Brief Biography of J.M.S. Baljon

Johannes Marinus Simon was the son of accountant Simon Albertus Baljon, born January 13, 1836 in Rotterdam, and ended his life on April 2, 1889 in his birthplace. His wife, Neeltje Dingena de Vries, lived in the same area, was born on July 5, 1839 in Breda and died September 15, 1882 in Rotterdam (Mahfudhin, 2022). He started his education as a child in his area. As a teenager, Baljon majored in theology at Utrecht University on September 23, 1879. On May 14, 1884, he received his doctorate under Doedes with the work *De tekst der brieven van Paulus aan de Romeinen, Corinthiërs en Galaten als voorwerp van de conjecturaalcritiek beschouwd* (The text of Paul's letters to the churches in Rome, Corinth and Galatia, as the subject of what is considered the alleged criticism). His paper is also his dissertation to take a doctor's degree (Mahfudhin, 2022). J.M.S Baljon, is a Dutch Islamist who also contributed to Islamic studies. In particular, in the realm of methodological interpretation. In addition, he also gave his criticism of the classical style of interpreters in studying the Qur'an.

Among the papers he produced are *Encyclopedia der Christelijke Theologie*, *De Tekst der Brieven van Paulus Ann de Romeinen de Corinthiers en de Galtiers*, *Jesus Christus Voor Onzen Tijd*, *relegion and Thought of Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi*, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation*, *The Reforms and Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, *How a Western Scholar Interprets Islamic Prophetic Tales* and others. Baljon studied with Prof. A.S. Tritton, A.H. Harley and others,

among others. His scholarly works were dominated by issues of Christian theology, in addition to the ones mentioned above he also wrote on the Greek New Testament, the introduction to the New Testament, commentaries on the book of Revelation, commentaries on the Revelation of John, commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew and commentaries on Paul's letter to Philippians. These comments are interpretations of sacred texts in Christianity. Apart from Christian theology, he also wrote about the thoughts of Indian Muslim figures such as Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi and Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. He also wrote a theological Greek dictionary

### **A Brief Introduction to Modern Muslim Books Koran Interpretation**

As explained by Baljon in the introduction to the book above, this book is a study intended to be a continuation and complement to the last chapter of the book entitled *Die Richtungen der Islamischen Koranauslegung*, by Ignaz Goldziher who is very famous and was published in Leyden in 1920. The last chapter of the book is entitled *Der Islamische Modernismus und seine Koranauslegung* (Baljon, 1969). Baljon saw the need to continue the study that Goldziher had pioneered on modern interpretation, and 40 years later the plan was realized. He considers his book as a contribution that has the advantage of including Urdu language study materials. Although he admits that he has not been able to enrich his work with all the tafsir that has emerged recently, especially the tafsir works of Turkish scientists which have their own value in his studies. This deficiency may be due to limited access to these works or Baljon's inability to understand Turkish (Baljon, 1969).

This book is a doctoral dissertation, a study of the works of modern Muslim interpretation over the past 80 years, with major references to the works of scientists from the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. The first edition of the book was published in 1961, and the second edition in 1968, was 135 pages long.

The approach used by Baljon in his book *Tafsir Qur'an Muslim Modern*, according to the speaker, is a historical approach or commonly called historical approach or historical criticism. The point of this approach is to critically examine history. The focus of the study is only on the text (written document). As written in this book, he revealed that the purpose of writing his work has a dual goal that is to be directed through the description of the interpretation of the Qur'an, on the one hand it aims to provide information to Western readers about one of the main branches of Muslim science. As a result, on the other hand, it seems that their judgment of this interpretation is considered modern, compared to what they had before (Baljon, 1969).

The content of the book includes introduction and introduction, methods of interpretation, characteristics of the features of the Qur'an, theological issues related to the idea of divinity, freedom of will, reason and revelation, prophethood, universalism, the pillars of Islam and differences of opinion. Furthermore, the discussion of the Qur'an and the present, covers scientific aspects, practical issues, political thinking and social life and ends

with a conclusion (Baljon, 1969). This book was translated into Indonesian with the title Tafsir Quran Muslim Modern by Ni'amullah Muiz, in 1991 and published by Pustaka Firdaus. Another translation of this book entitled Alquran in Modern Interpretation was published in 1990 by the publisher Gaya Media Pratama.

## Tafsir Studies

What is meant by interpretation studies is all forms of research and studies in order to understand the Quran, including those related to methods of understanding the Quran. Activities in the study of the Qur'an include two activities. The first is the interpretation of the Qur'an itself; and the second is research activities around the products of interpretation carried out by previous generations (Rahman et al., 2020).

In general, the study of interpretation can be grouped into two, namely the study of classical interpretation and the study of modern interpretation. The study of classical interpretation can be further broken down into several periods. Period I, the time of the Prophet PBUH, the companions and the beginning of tabiin, where the tafsir has not been written, and in general the narration at that time was spread orally (Zulaiha & Dikron, 2020). Period II, since the official codification of hadith during the time of the caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (99-101 AH), where tafsir was still incorporated into the hadith books, was compiled in one chapter, and the dominant method at that time was tafsir bil ma'sur. Period III, since the compilation of special and independent books of tafsir (Shihab, 1992).

The purpose of studying the science of tafsir is none other than to know the messages, information, instructions, and especially to know the laws exactly as Allah refers to in the Qur'an. Therefore, the Science of Tafsir is a tool for interpreting the verses of the Qur'an. Thus, the need for interpretation cannot be denied or avoided. From this, it is clearly illustrated to the ummah that the Qur'an is a text that allows many readers to see various meanings (Triana, 2019).

Meanwhile, the study of modern interpretation can be said to have started since the 19th century, along with the advancement of science and technology, so that a scientific interpretation pattern was born, and the development of the maudu'i tafsir method to answer the challenges and demands of the modern era in various aspects. During this period, the interpretation of the Qur'an has begun to involve modern theories and thinking (Saputro, 2021). This modern method also arises as a result of the weakness of the previous methods. During this period, in addition to the emergence of tafsir works, works on tafsir methods and mufassirin also appeared, such as the book at-Tafsir wa al-Mufasiirun by Husein az-Zahabiy. Also works on the rules of interpretation such as the book al-Qawaid al-Hisan li tafsir Al-Quran, by Abd ar-Rahman ibn Nasir as-Sa'diy. It is also marked by the activity of orientalists in studying the Qur'an, resulting in many interpretation products. Not only that, the various orientalist works then received responses, reactions, corrections



and criticisms from Islamic scholars, and these activities were also poured into written works, so that the treasures of tafsir literature and its branches became richer .

### **Baljon's Views and Thoughts in Modern Muslim Newspaper Interpretation**

In the introduction to this book, Baljon criticizes the commentators among Muslims who put forward views that have actually been expressed repeatedly before, then they give the impression as if they were the first to find them. This accusation is related to the originality of the works and thoughts of modern Muslim mufassir, in other words they have plagiarized. Another accusation is that most Muslim scholars are stagnant and introverted, they only look at the views of others with the motive of defending principles and beliefs, and are rarely based on a determination to seek the best understanding of the Qur'anic text. This is understood from Baljon's words as follows:

"Often views are brought to the fore, as if pronounced for the first time, whereas in fact the same had been said repeatedly before. Too little di muslim scholars endeavour to amend and continue arguments and findings of colleagues. When they refer to views of others, it is mostly when contending about principles and rarely because of a desire to reach a better apprehension of the Koran text."

According to him, although there are less cooperative attitudes, there is a collective feeling among modernists about the importance of opening up new ways of interpretation.

In the introductory chapter, Baljon put forward several views, including that there are similarities between the Muslim belief in the Qur'an as a revelation from Allah, and the belief of Christians – especially the orthodox – in the Gospel as the word of God. This is at the theoretical level. Meanwhile, at the practical level, there is a difference between the two, Christians do not understand and practice the Gospel literally, as Muslims do with the Quran. A Christian fundamentalist can easily abandon the rules of his scripture, such as the rules of food and the election of church councils, for a reason. This kind of attitude is very difficult for a modern Muslim to do, he will take the guidance of the Qur'an very seriously.

According to Baljon, the so-called modern interpretation of the Qur'an is an attempt to adapt the verses to the guidance of the times, and it has indeed become a necessity since the death of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Because the various thoughts contained in the Qur'an are immediately felt to need reinterpretation. This demand is increasingly felt necessary after contact with foreign civilizations becomes more and more intensive, precisely through the rapid expansion of the power of the Muslims (Baljon, 1969).

That need became more pronounced, especially when Islam came into contact with Greek culture. And it was felt even more during the friction between Islam and the development and progress of 18th and 19th century

Europe, at the same time when Muslims were in a period of decline. Politically, Muslims were colonized by the West; religiously, there was a tendency to distort and attack the teachings of the Quran; socially, the structure of Muslim society was rigid and passive, in stark contrast to the active and dynamic life of the West. However, the scholars responded to this situation by limiting and confinement themselves, especially through various inappropriate efforts in the form of maintaining the traditional way of life and thinking, while the interpreters of the Qur'an did not welcome the current call.

According to Baljon, the pioneer of modern interpretation of the Qur'an among Muslims was Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi (1703-1762), his works showed a positive reaction to the call of the times. Through his works entitled Hujjat Allah al-Balighah and Ta'wil al-Ahadis fi Rumu Qisas al-Anbiya and others, ideas such as the rationalization of the basis of Islamic codification, including linking the events of punishment that befell the previous people with the laws of nature, not merely a miracle that is not related to natural factors. Likewise, when he talks about the problem of karma, as a miracle, he relates it to causes that do not contradict the laws of nature, this has to do with the state of prime-psychology (Baljon, 1969).

Another figure appointed by Baljon as a modern interpreter of the Qur'an is Ahmad Khan (1817-1898). According to Ahmad, the truth contained by the Qur'an must be able to be displayed in the spirit of every era. He succeeded in completing the interpretation of the Qur'an for the first 17 letters of 6 volumes. The year of the first publication of the book, 1880, can be said to be the date of the birth of modern Qur'anic interpretation (Baljon, 1969).

Furthermore, Baljon features Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), a current figure with Ahmad Khan, from Egypt. Both have the idea of advancing the people through social and educational reforms. However, the difference is that Abduh expressed his ideas in theological works (tauhid) through the book Risala at-Tauhid (1897). In 1898 Muhammad Rasyid Rida proposed to Abduh to write tafsir, although it was denied, but finally Abduh produced a tafsir work, which was then continued by his students. The most special feature of Abduh's tafsir (according to Baljon) is his great desire to impart moral lessons whenever the text of the verse gives him a chance (Baljon, 1969).

Baljon also mentions Tantawi Jauhari (d. 1940) by his tafsir al-Jawahir, as an interpretation with a scientific approach accompanied by various practical advice, by placing the text of the verse at the top resembling the title. For example, when he interprets the verse about hell, he describes the condition of the earth as a sphere containing fire, he also talks about volcanology. Another example when he interprets Q.S. an-Nisa: 119, about the prohibition of altering Allah's creation, he brings the meaning of the verse to the educational context where a teacher should not demand a task from a student beyond his ability. Baljon considered such an interpretation to be wrong, but the error was forgivable and should be dealt with fairly, considering that Egyptian society at that time had just come into contact with the scientific advances that came from the West. Associating science with the

interpretation of the Qur'an, is useful to prevent public suspicion of science (Baljon, 1969).

Baljon also mentions the name of Muhammad Ahmad Khalaf Allah, with his work entitled *al-Fann al-Qasasi fi al-Quran al-Karim*, a study of the literary arrangement in the stories of the Qur'an. Besides that, there is Muhammad Kamil Husain with his main contribution on biblical topics, which is collected in his work entitled *Mutanawwi'at*. Baljon considered this to show Egypt's rapid progress in the field of Qur'anic studies, so that these works became the subject of the study of Bara's orientalism.

Besides the names above, Baljon also mentions the name of Abu al-Kalam Azad (1888-1958). He held the view that religion and science were interrelated, and he acknowledged the existence of universal religion despite different rituals and beliefs, in order to show a universal truth that is so desperately needed by humans. On this basis, Azad wrote his commentary entitled *Tarjuman al-Quran* (1930).

In addition, Muhammad Inayat Allah Khan, better known as al-Masyriqi. His work is titled *Tazkirah*, taken from Q.S. al-Muddassir: 54. An overview of the difficult task in building the nation. Referring to Q.S. an-Najm: 39-40, where these two verses are in the context of the principles of monotheism, al-Masyriqi concludes that shirk is understood as anything that hinders man from striving, and prevents him from maintaining unity. Another work is the hadith of the Quran, an attempt to display the Qur'an's high value of science in order to achieve evolution and unification. And the last mentioned is Ghulam Ahmad Parwez (born 1903), he joined the *tulu' al-Islam* research center, an institute that actively interprets the Qur'an based on modern thinking, and is reluctant to use hadith in interpreting the Qur'an. Parwez came up with his work *Ma'arif al-Quran* (1941-1949), a model of interpretation that did not follow the traditional style of interpreting the Qur'an according to the order of letters and verses. According to Baljon, parwez's interpretation resembles a Biblical Theology in Christian terminology. He grouped the themes of the Quran, and compared them so that you can see the amazing connection of thoughts, as well as imaginative ideas from the Qur'anic storehouse. Ali Mustafa Ya'kub categorized Parwez as anti-hadith or sunnah inkar, he founded an association called *jam'iyah ahl alQuran*, one of his ideas that the procedure of prayer depends on the policy of the head of state.

Furthermore, Baljon reviewed the ways of interpretation. According to him, there are a number of objections among modern mufassirs to the classical interpretation. Here Baljon quotes Azad's view that everyone can interpret the Qur'an and that it is not a monopoly of the believers and mujtahids, based on the understanding of Q.S. an-Nisa: 82-84.

Baljon quoted H.A.R. Gibb that among those criticized from classical interpretation was the use of *Israiliyyat* in describing the stories of the Qur'an, as well as the inclusion of Byzantine and Iranian cultural influences in the interpretation. The most important principle in the interpretation that the



Qur'an has explained itself, is based on Q.S. al-Qiyamah: 19. Thus Baljon quoted from Muhammad Aslam Jairajpuri.

According to Baljon, in addition to other verses that can explain a verse that is still vague, an interpreter can also make use of existing history, as Azad did by involving ancient interpretations and modern research and thinking models, including not leaving aside the hadith explanation of the Qur'an. However, it is limited to accepting the narration of Ibn Abbas and some tabi'in, because the narration is considered a testimony of those who can be erroneous.

Baljon said that many modernists in the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent consider historical explanations derived from history or the sunnah to be human fantasies. According to Ahmad Khan, the Qur'an itself has stated the difference between man-made stories and news that comes from God. In Surah al-Kahfi it is told about ashab al-Kahf briefly, and in verses 12-13 it is stated "We tell you their story truthfully", the word bil-haqq here shows that the previous story is not the story that God wants to tell, but it is what the society has been doing. Only then did God explain the true story, which did not emphasize the miraculous nature so much (Baljon, 1969).

Baljon also praised Parwez's attitude towards anti-hadith, especially in interpreting the Quran. Parwez argues that the word hikma in Q.S. al-Baqarah : 123-129 is understood as sunnah, according to him the word means wisdom, because in Q.S. Luqman : 11-12, Luqman is also given wisdom, so wisdom must be understood more broadly. Q.S. al-Hasyr : 7, also cannot be understood as an order to practice the sunnah, because the verse talks about the distribution of the spoils of war. Likewise Q.S. an-Najm: 3, it cannot be understood that anything that comes out of the mouth of the Prophet (peace be upon him) is a revelation. because if that is the understanding, then why did the Prophet PBUH get criticism in Q.S. at-Taubah : 43, and Q.S. al-Isra : 74-76. And why did the Prophet wait for revelation to come down when dealing with problems that do not have legal provisions in the Qur'an. Including all verses that command obedience to the Prophet (saw), all of them are in the context of obedience to the leader (Imam) and not about the obligation to practice the sunnah. According to Baljon, this is one of the modernist objections to the classical interpretation tradition.

Parwez also objected if the Qur'an was narrowed down in its understanding in certain meanings and intentions. In fact, our insight into the scriptures develops with the times. For example, Q.S. Yunus: 92, about Allah's promise to save the body of Pharaoh, as evidenced by the discovery of the mummy of Ramses II.

Ahmad Khan also criticized the classical mufasssirs related to the attitude of relying too much on lexical works (such as vocabulary dictionaries), even though it is possible that the meaning of a word or sentence in the Qur'an is not in line with the meaning given by lexical dictionaries (Baljon, 1969). Khalaf Allah includes regretting the attitude of continuously obeying the literal

understanding of a word, regardless of the composition of the text and the psychological background of a term.

Another criticism is the attitude of the mufassir who make authentic narration as the benchmark for the truth of a detailed explanation of a story. Even though the truth of the Messenger is only related to supernatural news, not related to empirical facts, in other words, the Prophet's news regarding the issue of empirical facts may be missed, but if it is related to the supernatural then it is forever true, this is in line with Q.S. Ali-Imran : 39-44.

Khalaf Allah also criticized some mufassir such as ar-Razi when interpreting Q.S. Yasin: 1-9/10. With a description that is too long and not necessary about qada and qadar, even though the meaning of the Qur'an in that part is not that. According to Baljon, Muslim modernists are greatly influenced by rational forces. Therefore, one of the main goals of modern interpretation activities is to empty the text of elements of legends and primitive ideas. Then he gave some examples.

According to Abd al-Hakim, Q.S. al-A'raf : 170-171 and Q.S. al-Baqarah : 60-63, it is not necessary to understand that Allah lifted the hill above their heads, and the hill floated in the air. The meaning of this verse is that the Children of Israel are in the hilly area of Sinai, and there are some rocks that look like hoods, under which people can take shelter, the scene gives the impression that stones are about to fall on their heads.

Q.S. ali Imran: 32-37, according to Parwez it is not necessary to understand that food descends directly from heaven to Maryam, without any intermediaries. But the meaning of the verse is that some of the people at that time sincerely came to the temple to give gifts, alms and offerings to the monks and nuns.

Some modernists try to minimize supernatural elements in understanding the text of the Qur'an. Q.S. al-Kahfi : 62-63, tells that the fish brought by Moses (as) and his helper went to the sea in a strange way. Ali Fikra, the son of Muhammad Abduh, interpreted the word *ajaban* in that verse, that Moses was surprised because he and his helper did not pay attention to the fish in the basket, so the fish jumped into the sea.

Q.S. al-Maidah : 112 Regarding the request of Isa to Allah to bring down food from the sky, according to Azad, this verse does not show a miracle, because when Isa was going to eat with his people, the food was not available, so on the basis of bad taste towards his people who asked him to ask Allah to bring down food from the sky, but the request was not granted.

Baljon argues that symbolic meanings are often found in Qur'anic texts, such as Muhammad Rahim ad-Din's interpretation of Q.S. at-Tin: 1-3, the word *tin* means Mount Sinai or Mount Judi where Noah's ship landed (AS), then the word *olive* indicates the city of Syria, and the word *tur sinin* indicates Mount Sinai where Moses received the Torah, and the word *al-balad al-Amin* means Mecca. These verses give a signal to the place or region where the social and religious reform began and developed (Baljon, 1969).

Modern interpretation also associates itself with current phenomena that are up to date. When Tantawi Jauhari interpreted Q.S. al-A'raf: 29-31, on the prohibition of living excessively, he compared the excessive lifestyle practiced by the King of Morocco at the wedding reception of his two children, with the simplicity of the Belgian prince Leopold with Queen Astrid of Sweden at their wedding ceremony.

Another example of a modern interpretation that Baljon admires is Ahmad Khan's description of the interpretation of verses that tell the story of *ashab al-kahf*, in contrast to the explanation of the classical *mufasssirs* who believe that they slept for centuries but did not die. Ahmad Khan said they were completely dead, the truth is that their bodies were lying somewhere where no air was coming in, they became like mummy, and when viewed from a small hole, they looked like living bodies without any signs of damage. So that people who see them, think they are sleeping. Azad then added that the words *aiqaz* and *ruqud* do not mean waking up and sleeping, but meaning life and death. Their posture at that time was like that of a hermit who was worshipping. Their bodies swayed back and forth because of the flow of air coming from the two departments and the fresh wind kept their bodies from decaying so that people who see them, think they are sleeping. Azad then added that the words *aiqaz* and *ruqud* do not mean waking up and sleeping, but meaning life and death. Their posture at that time was like that of a hermit who was worshipping. Their bodies swayed back and forth because of the flow of air coming from the two departments and the fresh wind kept their bodies from decaying.

### **J.M.S. Baljon dan Studi Tafsir**

From Baljon's presentation in his work, the author can group the forms of Baljon's research in the study of interpretation into several groups. First, the study related to *manahij al-Mufasssirin*, which is clearly seen in the introduction, the *mufasssir* discussed is a modern *mufasssir*, who is moderate-minded, and even lists figures who have liberal, secular ideas with a set of ideas that are contrary to the mainstream of Islamic scholars. Baljon presents a brief biography of the *mufasssir*, then their works, with an emphasis on their new methods and ideas in understanding a verse. The figures studied by Baljon are arranged by year.

The two studies related to the ways of interpretation of modernists, here it can be seen that Baljon is very appreciative of new ideas in interpretation, and tends to underestimate the scientific value of classical interpretations. The criticism is very easily directed at the old interpretations, while he seems to be very satisfied with the new ones, despite the many confusions. Some of the interpretations that he considers to have only been made in classical interpretations, such as the symbolic meaning of *surah at-Tin*.

Third, Baljon conducts research on theological issues that are central themes in the interpretation of the *Qur'an*, such as the problem of God,

freedom of will, reason and revelation, prophetic problems, universalism, pillars of Islam and polemics.

Fourth, in a simple form, Baljon conducts a study of aspects of the Qur'an in relation to the modern world, resembling a *maudhu'i tafsir* in a minimalist form. The aspects studied include scientific aspects, political aspects, and socio-economic aspects.

## Conclusion

From the discussion above, the author can draw several conclusions as follows:

- a) J.M.S Baljon is an orientalist who has conducted studies on interpretation with a historical approach or commonly called *historical approach* or *historical criticism*.
- b) His study of modern Muslim interpretation is not comprehensive, and is still limited to modernists in India-Pakistan and some figures from Egypt.
- c) In his study, Baljon criticized more of the products of classical interpretation. And there is a lack of refutation or criticism of modern interpretation products.
- d) Baljon's studies in tafsir include *manahij mufassirin* and *maudhu'i tafsir* in the context of modern times.

## Suggestion

Here, the author suggests that studies and studies on modern interpretation must be carried out with an honest and objective attitude. Not all products of new interpretation are in accordance with scientific principles, in fact, it is not uncommon for there to be confusion and bias of interests. And not all old interpretations must be accepted or rejected, all must be weighed fairly so that Muslims can get a complete, correct and useful understanding of the Qur'an

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