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Evaluating Reports in Tafsīr Al-Marāghī Through Tamḥīṣ Al-Riwāyāt

ABSTRACT: Modern Qur'anic exegesis often calls for the critical screening of inherited reports, yet the relationship between an exegete's declared standards and their actual practice remains insufficiently examined. This article investigates how Aḥmad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī applies the principle of tamḥīṣ al-riwāyāt, articulated in the introduction to Tafsīr al-Marāghī, when interpreting narrative verses. Using qualitative library research and a comparative reading of the primary text, the study identifies eleven candidate passages and examines four selected cases in detail: Hārūt and Mārūt (Q. 2:102), Moses' tablets (Q. 7:145), the accusation against Joseph (Q. 12:77), and the number of the Companions of the Cave (Q. 18:22). The analysis reconstructs three dimensions: sources of information, mechanisms of validation, and the epistemic status assigned to reports. The findings suggest that al-Marāghī's screening is not synonymous with formal isnād criticism. His approach involves rational assessment, comparative verification of scriptural sources, explicit rejection of unreliable narratives, and interpretive preference accompanied by caution toward unsupported claims. The cases demonstrate different evaluative procedures that broadly correspond to al-Marāghī's declared principles, although the grounds of particular decisions are not always sufficiently explicit to establish methodological consistency with equal certainty. The article therefore distinguishes internal methodological coherence from external verification and identifies a limited, functional role for information from the People of the Book.

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A. INTRODUCTION

The renewal of Qur'anic exegesis in the modern period involved more than changes in diction and presentation. It also raised questions about how interpreters should handle reports inherited from earlier tafsir literature, particularly narratives that provide details beyond the Qur'anic text. Aḥmad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī (1883–1952) is a significant figure in this development. His Tafsīr al-Marāghī, first published in Egypt in 1365 AH/1946 CE, is noted for its accessible arrangement, attention to social concerns, and combination of transmitted materials with reasoned explanation. Studies of its general method emphasize its predominantly analytical structure, its introductory summaries of verses, and its efforts to communicate with modern readers (Anshari & Rahman, 2021; Mustofa et al., 2024; Parlina et al., 2021; Suardi, 2022).

Al-Marāghī must be distinguished from his elder brother Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī, who also played an important role in Egyptian religious life. The author of the thirty-part commentary identified the scrutiny of reports as an explicit methodological concern. In the introduction, under the discussion of tamḥīṣ riwāyāt kutub al-tafsīr, he criticizes the unexamined circulation of accounts concerning earlier communities, including materials obtained from the People of the

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Book. His objections refer to claims incompatible with religion, reason, observable reality, or established knowledge (Al-Marāghī, 1946). The point is not that historical reports must always be excluded; rather, their mere presence in a respected commentary does not establish their interpretive authority.

Existing scholarship has clarified al-Marāghī's literary method and interpretive orientation. Research has addressed the organization of his commentary, the exercise of ta'wīl, the use of hadith, scientific explanation, and his handling of theological difference (Gani & Ridho, 2024; Hakim, 2022; Rosyanti, 2018; Sopian et al., 2021). Studies of his intellectual setting also describe the relationship between rationality, reform, and pedagogy (Gad et al., 2021; Mohammad Mas'ud Ubaidillah, 2023). More recent descriptive and educational studies reinforce the continuing influence of the commentary (Maliki et al., 2025; Misnawati & Putri, 2026). These contributions establish the background but rarely make a declared principle of report screening itself the object of a case-based consistency test.

A second body of research uses Tafsīr al-Marāghī to interpret particular themes, including repentance, spiritual illness, and hedonism (Ifa et al., 2024; Nissa et al., 2024; Riski et al., 2024). A third line applies external standards to problematic reports. Ghazali and Elatrash examine contemporary intrusions into exegesis (Ghazali & Elatrash, 2022), whereas Effendi and Afifah evaluate hadith reports in Juz 'Amma (Effendi & Afifah, 2024). Such criticism is important, but identifying a weak report according to hadith criticism does not, by itself, establish that al-Marāghī violated the more varied screening principle he described. The standards of the commentator and the standards of a later critic should first be separated analytically.

Research on isrā'īliyyāt likewise shows that exegetes do not operate within a simple accept–reject binary. Analyses of modern tafsir, al-Ṭabarī, Ibn 'Aṭiyyah, the Mu'tazilī tradition, and Mahmud Yunus identify strategies ranging from quotation and qualified use to suspension of judgment and rejection (Bakalaf, 2021; Basuki et al., 2024; Çelik, 2024; Isnaini, 2022; Khusnah & Noorhidayati, 2024; Mawardi, 2022; Mufida & Mubarok, 2020; Sholihin et al., 2025). Related discussion of al-dakhīl in scientific exegesis further suggests that ostensibly rational explanations also require critical examination rather than automatic endorsement (Qomariyah & Ilyas, 2023).

To specify the research problem, this article adapts Abdul Mustaqim's account of epistemology in terms of sources, interpretive method, and validity (Mustaqim, 2010). Comparable questions about the sources and justification of interpretive knowledge appear in studies of Mahmud Yunus and Muhammad Asad (Nabil Amir, 2021; Nadia, 2023). The present analysis asks, first, how tamḥīṣ al-riwāyāt can be reconstructed as an internal epistemological standard from al-Marāghī's own statements; and second, how far its application to selected narrative verses corresponds to that standard. Its contribution lies in distinguishing consistency of evaluative principle from uniformity of procedure, and in distinguishing internal coherence from the independent strength of a particular exegetical conclusion. A consistent method may permit several forms of verification; an inconsistent practice would require evidence of an unexplained departure from the stated criteria.

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B. RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative library study examines the first edition of Tafsīr al-Marāghī as its primary corpus (Al-Marāghī, 1946). The introductory discussion of tamḥīṣ riwāyāt kutub al-tafsīr provides the principal statement of the commentator's criteria; passages interpreting Qur'anic narratives provide the material against which those criteria are examined. Secondary literature consists primarily of scholarly studies published between 2020 and 2026 on al-Marāghī's method, isrā'īliyyāt, al-dakhīl, hadith, and the epistemology of tafsir. The research does not involve human participants or field interviews.

The primary data were collected directly from Tafsīr al-Marāghī (1946). The methodological principle of tamḥīṣ al-riwāyāt was examined in the introduction (juz 1, p. 19), while the four principal cases were traced to the interpretations of Q. 2:102 (juz 1, pp. 180–181), Q. 7:145 (juz 9, p. 60), Q. 12:77 (juz 13, p. 22), and Q. 18:22 (juz 15, pp. 134–135). Data collection focused on identifying supplementary reports, al-Marāghī's evaluative statements, the grounds of his judgments, and the epistemic status assigned to the information. These passages formed the primary textual basis for the subsequent comparative analysis.

Candidate passages were identified through indicator-based screening of narrative discussions, attending to terms such as riwāyah, riwāyāt, isrā'īliyyāt, Ahl al-Kitāb, and tamḥīṣ, as well as explicit expressions of doubt, rejection, and restriction, including lā yūthaq bihā and lā thiqata bih. The screening identified eleven candidates: Adam (Q. 2:35–37); Hārūt and Mārūt (Q. 2:102); the construction of the Ka'bah (Q. 2:127); those who fled death (Q. 2:243); Moses' staff (Q. 7:107); Moses' tablets (Q. 7:145); Moses' seventy delegates (Q. 7:155); the alteration of ḥiṭṭah (Q. 7:161–162); the accusation against Joseph (Q. 12:77); the Companions of the Cave (Q. 18:22); and the identity of al-dhabīḥ (Q. 37:102–113). This was purposive screening rather than an exhaustive census of every report across thirty parts.

Four passages were purposively selected for detailed analysis: Q. 2:102, 7:145, 12:77, and 18:22. These cases were chosen because they concern identifiable supplementary reports, contain discernible evaluative responses from al-Marāghī, and provide sufficient textual material for examining his reasoning. The remaining seven passages were retained as preliminary screening candidates rather than independently verified control cases. Their inclusion documents the initial identification of potentially relevant passages, but they are not used as additional evidence of consistency. Since the four principal cases were selected for their visible evaluative features, the findings can illustrate how tamḥīṣ al-riwāyāt operates in selected passages but cannot establish its frequency or universal consistency throughout the commentary.

The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, the introductory discussion of tamḥīṣ al-riwāyāt was examined to identify al-Marāghī's evaluative considerations, particularly religion, reason, observable reality, and established knowledge. Second, the four selected cases were analyzed according to the source of information, evaluative action, grounds of assessment, and resulting epistemic status. Third, the relationship between each decision and the declared principles was assessed using three categories. A decision was considered consistent when its evaluative action and identifiable justification corresponded to the declared principles. A possible inconsistency was

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identified when a report appeared to receive interpretive authority despite conflicting with those principles, without a discernible methodological justification. Where the textual evidence did not sufficiently explain the grounds of a decision, its consistency was treated as indeterminate rather than automatically affirmed or rejected. Finally, the results were compared to identify similarities, procedural differences, and possible tensions between evaluative criteria. Following Mustaqim (2010), the categories of sources, validation mechanisms, and epistemic status were employed as analytical tools developed by the researcher rather than classifications explicitly formulated by al-Marāghī.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Al-Marāghī's Intellectual Context and the Declared Standard of Tamḥīṣ.

The distinctive contribution of al-Marāghī's introduction is that it places report evaluation within the practical task of making tafsir intelligible and defensible for a contemporary readership. Born in al-Marāghah in Upper Egypt, he studied within the intellectual environment of al-Azhar and Dār al-'Ulūm. His training and pedagogical interests are reflected in the arrangement of his commentary into vocabulary explanation, general meaning, and extended clarification, with attention to occasions of revelation where relevant (Anshari & Rahman, 2021; Gad et al., 2021). Scholars generally describe the method as taḥlīlī, even though the use of concise introductory explanations gives some sections an ijmālī character (Mustofa et al., 2024; Parlina et al., 2021).

His selective use of inherited narratives also reflects a modern reformist context in which intellectual reason, educational usefulness, and scientific explanation gained prominence in religious commentary (Mohammad Mas'ud Ubaidillah, 2023). Such a context does not imply a wholesale rejection of naql. In al-Marāghī's practice, textual transmission supplies historical and interpretive possibilities while other criteria determine the evidential weight those possibilities deserve. This is consistent with scholarly assessments that find both inherited interpretation and rational argument within his tafsir (Hakim, 2022; Suardi, 2022).

The central declaration appears in the introduction under the theme tamḥīṣ riwāyāt kutub al-tafsīr. Al-Marāghī notes that exegetical curiosity about details of earlier communities led readers to seek additional information from the People of the Book. As such information circulated, some accounts were repeated despite conflicts with religious teaching, reason, observable phenomena, or knowledge considered secure (Al-Marāghī, 1946). The statement gives a rationale for scrutiny, but it is not a manual of isnād evaluation and does not prescribe one mechanical test for every report.

Analytical Reconstruction: Sources, Validation, and Epistemic Status

The first dimension concerns sources of knowledge. The Qur'an has normative priority in explaining its own narratives. Hadith and other transmitted exegetical reports may provide context, but their authority is not identical merely because they are cited in a commentary. Historical narratives, knowledge associated with the People of the Book, rational inference, and claims about the observable world occupy different positions in the hierarchy of warrant. Treating all of these

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items simply as 'reports' would obscure the reasons why al-Marāghī can use one as a reference while withholding assent from another.

The second dimension concerns validation. The introduction supports at least three explicit families of assessment: normative evaluation against religious principles, rational evaluation against what an interpreter judges intelligible, and empirical evaluation against observation or reliably established knowledge (Al-Marāghī, 1946). A fourth, comparative practice is inferred from the case analysis: tracing a claim associated with the People of the Book to relevant texts within that tradition. The distinction matters. Comparative checking is visible in his treatment of Moses' tablets, but it should not be attributed to the introduction as an independently enumerated fourth rule. Similarly, the modern categories of 'normative,' 'rational,' 'empirical,' and 'comparative' validation are descriptive labels introduced here, not terms supplied by al-Marāghī.

The third dimension is the epistemic status assigned to additional information. A narrative may be cited as evidence of an interpretive tradition without being endorsed as historical fact; it may function as a comparator, be rejected as untrustworthy, or remain unresolved where certainty is unavailable. These outcomes should not be reduced to a yes-or-no classification. In the four cases examined below, the key question is not merely whether an account appears in the text, but what work it is permitted to do and with what degree of confidence. Thus, 'functional authority' designates the restricted use of a source for a particular checking task, not an assertion that the source is infallible or theologically normative.

Hārūt and Mārūt: Rational Appraisal and the Risks of Reinterpretation (Q. 2:102)

In his interpretation of Q. 2:102, al-Marāghī confronts narratives about Hārūt and Mārūt and the nature of magic. Rather than uncritically reproduce the well-known accounts portraying the two figures as angels who committed sins, he directs attention toward explanations of magic that include deception, suggestion, psychological influence, and causes unfamiliar to observers (Al-Marāghī, 1946). The move is evaluative: extraordinary narrative details are not treated as self-authenticating and must withstand further scrutiny. It also shows how a rationalizing concern can shape the positive interpretation he offers.

Al-Marāghī discusses two readings of the expression al-malakayn, distinguished by the vowel on the letter lām, and uses these possibilities to explain Hārūt and Mārūt as human figures rather than accepting the narrative of sinful angels without criticism (Al-Marāghī, 1946). However, the commonly accepted reading al-malakayn (angels), with fatḥah, must be distinguished from the reported reading al-malikayn (kings), with kasrah, which is classified as shādhdhah in discussions of Qur'anic readings. This distinction is important because the existence of an alternative reading does not necessarily establish equal textual authority (Al Ali & Abdelaati, 2025). Al-Marāghī's interpretation consequently demonstrates the role of rational and linguistic considerations in his criticism of inherited narratives, while also revealing the need to evaluate whether the alternative interpretation possesses sufficient textual support.

The case therefore involves two separable judgments. The first is critical: a widely circulated story is not accepted simply because it has become familiar in tafsir literature. The second is

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constructive: al-Marāghī advances an explanation that he considers more reasonable. His procedure can correspond to his declared aim of screening questionable reports without proving that the alternative explanation is necessarily the strongest available. A recent comparative study reaches a different conclusion on the nature of Hārūt and Mārūt, illustrating why internal consistency and independent evidential appraisal should remain distinct (Al Ali & Abdelaati, 2025).

Moses' Tablets: Comparative Checking of Israelite Reports (Q. 7:145)

Q. 7:145 refers to the tablets given to Moses but does not specify their number. Al-Marāghī records differing claims that the tablets were two, seven, or ten. Instead of selecting an account solely on the basis of its circulation among exegetes, he consults Sifr al-Khurūj (Exodus) and cites the description of two tablets within that scriptural tradition (Al-Marāghī, 1946). The importance of this passage lies not only in the number he favors, but in the explicit reason he gives for examining reports associated with Israelite narratives.

Al-Marāghī's evaluation goes beyond a neutral comparison of sources. After consulting the account of the two tablets in Sifr al-Khurūj (Exodus), he explicitly describes conflicting Israelite reports as false (bāṭil) and associates their circulation with fabrication. He then emphasizes the need to examine such reports through the books of the traditions from which they originate, stating: fa-yajibu ʻalaynā an numaḥḥiṣa tilka al-riwāyāt wa nuḥaqqiqahā min kutubihim (Al-Marāghī, 1946). This passage demonstrates that comparative verification does not merely identify differences between sources; it also provides al-Marāghī with a basis for accepting one account and rejecting competing explanations.

This procedure illustrates a significant feature of al-Marāghī's epistemology. Although Exodus does not possess the normative authority of the Qur'an, he assigns it a functional role in evaluating reports attributed to the Israelite tradition. The comparison consequently produces a relatively strong judgment about the credibility of competing narratives. Nevertheless, agreement with an extant scriptural source does not independently establish the historical accuracy of every detail it contains. The case therefore raises an important methodological question: to what extent can a source from the People of the Book serve as a criterion for rejecting other reports? Al-Marāghī's practice suggests that functional authority may extend beyond simple comparison to the evaluation and rejection of alternative accounts, while remaining distinct from normative religious authority.

Joseph's Alleged Theft: Explicit Downgrading of Narrative Credibility (Q. 12:77). When discussing Q. 12:77, al-Marāghī considers the brothers' allegation that Joseph had previously stolen something. Traditional explanations include a story about Joseph, his paternal aunt, and an object concealed to allow him to remain in her care. The report appears in the commentary as background to an accusation, but its inclusion should not be mistaken for acceptance of its content. Al-Marāghī explicitly states, wa hādhihi al-riwāyāt lā yūthaq bihā ("these reports cannot be

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trusted"), and emphasizes that these reports do not establish that Joseph actually committed theft (Al-Marāghī, 1946).

This is the clearest negative assessment in the selected corpus. A supplementary story is mentioned, then deliberately deprived of the standing needed to substantiate a claim about a prophet. The difference between documenting a view and endorsing it becomes especially important here: a later researcher who counts every cited narrative as accepted evidence would misread the function al-Marāghī assigns to the story. The epistemic outcome is not full exclusion from the page but exclusion from the set of trustworthy explanations.

At the same time, the explicit verdict should not be confused with a complete technical demonstration of why each transmission fails. The passage as presented does not provide a systematic chain-by-chain examination of transmitters. The grounds of criticism must therefore be stated with appropriate precision: al-Marāghī rejects the reliability of the narrative and the inference of Joseph's actual wrongdoing; this does not mean that the commentary has carried out full hadith authentication. The point reinforces the distinction between report screening in tafsir and independent sanad analysis discussed in scholarship on hadith use (Effendi & Afifah, 2024; Rosyanti, 2018).

The Companions of the Cave: Interpretive Preference and Epistemic Restraint (Q. 18:22).
Q. 18:22 presents competing claims concerning the number of the Companions of the Cave. In interpreting this verse, al-Marāghī gives preference to the view that they numbered seven, citing a report attributed to Ibn 'Abbās and drawing on the wording of the Qur'an. He argues that the first two numerical claims are described as conjecture (rajman bi al-ghayb), whereas the third is not explicitly characterized in the same way. On this basis, he regards the third opinion as correct. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that no sound prophetic hadith decisively establishes their number (Al-Marāghī, 1946).

Al-Marāghī's preference for the number seven does not eliminate his broader concern about unsupported claims. When explaining the Qur'anic instruction qul rabbī a'lamu bi 'iddatihim, he emphasizes that knowledge should be referred to Allah when reliable evidence is unavailable. His interpretation therefore combines a reasoned preference based on textual indications with caution against asserting details without sufficient justification. He also questions the reliability of supplementary information from the People of the Book when it lacks convincing evidence (Al-Marāghī, 1946).

This case demonstrates a distinction between interpretive preference and epistemic certainty. Al-Marāghī does not suspend judgment entirely, since he explicitly favors the opinion that the Companions numbered seven. However, his reasoning also establishes a limit on claims that cannot be supported by sufficient evidence. The application of tamḥīṣ al-riwāyāt therefore involves evaluating competing opinions, identifying the interpretation considered strongest, and maintaining caution regarding information that remains uncertain. This combination illustrates how the same epistemological principle can accommodate both tarjīḥ and restraint.

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Table 1
Four Applications of Tamḥīṣ al-Riwāyāt

Passage	Material assessed	Main procedure	Epistemic outcome
Q. 2:102 — Hārūt and Mārūt	Popular narrative details and accounts of magic	Rational appraisal; alternative reading	Popular details rejected or distanced; alternative proposed
Q. 7:145 — Moses' tablets	Competing reports on the number of Moses' tablets	Comparison with Exodus and rejection of conflicting accounts	Two tablets preferred; contradictory reports rejected
Q. 12:77 — Joseph	Reports explaining an allegation of theft	Explicit reliability judgment	Narrative mentioned but deemed untrustworthy
Q. 18:22 — Companions of the Cave	Competing numerical traditions	Textual preference and epistemic restraint	Seven companions preferred; unsupported certainty restricted

Source: The authors' comparative reading of al-Marāghī (1946, juz 1, 9, 13, and 15).

Table 1 summarizes the four principal cases. It shows diverse procedures rather than a fixed authentication algorithm. The procedures differ according to the nature of the information being evaluated: rejecting questionable narratives through rational assessment, comparing competing reports with their claimed textual sources, discrediting unreliable accounts, and preferring a particular interpretation while recognizing the limits of available evidence. The common feature is an attempt to assign different degrees of authority to different forms of information.

Based on the proposed consistency criteria, the cases of Hārūt and Mārūt, Moses' tablets, and the Companions of the Cave indicate provisional correspondence with al-Marāghī's declared principles, although the strength of their supporting evidence varies. The case of Joseph remains indeterminate regarding the specific grounds of rejection, despite the explicit negative judgment. These findings suggest a recurring evaluative orientation rather than uniformly established methodological consistency.

The Seven Additional Candidates and the Limits of the Screening

Seven additional narrative passages were identified during the preliminary screening: Adam (Q. 2:35–37), the construction of the Ka'bah (Q. 2:127), those who fled from death (Q. 2:243), Moses' staff (Q. 7:107), the seventy delegates (Q. 7:155), the alteration of ḥiṭṭah (Q. 7:161–162), and the debated identity of al-dhabīḥ (Q. 37:102–113). These passages were initially identified because they appeared to contain potentially relevant forms of evaluative treatment of supplementary information. However, they were not subjected to the same detailed textual examination and coding applied to the four principal cases. In the absence of independently verified quotations, precise textual locations, and complete coding records for each passage, they are retained only as preliminary candidates. Accordingly, they are not treated as confirming or contradicting the findings derived from the four primary cases.

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The cautious interpretation is that the principal four cases provide evidence of a recurring evaluative orientation; the broader screening shows where its range may be investigated next. Neither set establishes the proportion of all reports al-Marāghī rejects or accepts across thirty volumes. A comprehensive test would need a transparent survey of both concordant cases and instances in which transmitted material appears to remain unchallenged despite possible conflicts with his criteria. The present findings are consequently case-bound rather than universal.

The strongest result of the four-case comparison is not that al-Marāghī applies a uniform technique. On the contrary, the actual operations vary substantially. He offers rational analysis in the discussion of Hārūt and Mārūt, uses Exodus to assess and reject competing reports concerning Moses' tablets, explicitly questions the reliability of narratives surrounding Joseph's alleged theft, and favors the opinion that the Companions of the Cave numbered seven while maintaining caution toward unsupported claims. If consistency were defined as identical techniques in every passage, the evidence would show inconsistency by definition. That definition, however, would ignore the multiple evaluative considerations already present in the introductory principle (Al-Marāghī, 1946).

The consistency assessment must distinguish between an identifiable evaluative action and the justification supporting it. The four cases provide different degrees of evidence for this relationship. In the discussion of Hārūt and Mārūt, rational considerations are visible, although the evidential strength of the alternative interpretation remains open to examination. In the account of Moses' tablets, comparison with Exodus provides an identifiable procedure, but agreement with that source does not independently establish historical certainty. In the case of Joseph, al-Marāghī explicitly rejects the reliability of certain narratives, while the precise grounds of that judgment are not fully elaborated. The account of the Companions of the Cave similarly demonstrates the importance of Qur'anic textual indications and caution toward unsupported claims. These findings suggest a recurring evaluative orientation, but they do not provide equally strong evidence of methodological consistency in every case.

The distinction between consistency, possible inconsistency, and indeterminate evidence establishes the limits of the present assessment. A contradiction cannot be inferred merely from the presence of a questionable report, since citation does not necessarily imply endorsement. Conversely, the use of a recognizable evaluative procedure does not automatically establish consistency when its justification remains unclear. A stronger indication of inconsistency would require evidence that al-Marāghī grants authority to information that conflicts with his declared standards without providing a defensible methodological distinction. Because the selected cases predominantly contain explicit evaluative responses, they are more suitable for examining the operation of tamḥīṣ than for measuring the frequency of inconsistent practices. The results must therefore be understood as a limited case-based assessment rather than a comprehensive demonstration of methodological consistency.

This distinction also prevents an opposite overcorrection. External studies identifying problematic reports are valuable, but they do not logically refute the internal claim without showing that the material was treated contrary to the declared screening criteria. Conversely, a reconstruction that

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finds coherence cannot substitute for a modern assessment of the historical and textual soundness of every positive interpretation. Methodological coherence and evidential success are related but analytically distinct properties.

Internal Epistemological Appraisal and External Hadith Criticism

The notion of internal criticism used here concerns an interpreter's own rules for employing information in tafsir. Its immediate object is the relationship between declared method and interpretive decision. External criticism asks whether a report or explanation satisfies other scholarly standards—for example, the methods of sanad and matn criticism or classifications of al-dakhīl. Both are legitimate, but they answer different research questions. Treating them as interchangeable risks judging a commentator for failing to perform a task he did not claim to perform.

Al-Marāghī's introductory appeal to religion, reason, observation, and warranted knowledge does not amount to a manual of jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl. His explicit mistrust of accounts about Joseph therefore cannot be translated into a technical ruling on every chain of transmission. In the same way, his use of Exodus in interpreting Moses' tablets is a source-comparison practice, not hadith authentication. Studies of al-dakhīl and hadith reports in his commentary make important contributions precisely because they can supply standards that complement, rather than merely repeat, this internal reconstruction (Effendi & Afifah, 2024; Ghazali & Elatrash, 2022).

Wider scholarship supports the need for that distinction. The treatment of isrā'īliyyāt differs among al-Ṭabarī, Ibn 'Aṭiyyah, modern Indonesian commentators, and Mu'tazilī exegesis; their different methods cannot be reduced to one binary standard (Basuki et al., 2024; Çelik, 2024; Isnaini, 2022; Mawardi, 2022)**.** Even within a single commentary, a transmitted report may be included to explain a disputed view, support an inference, or illustrate a source that ought not to be trusted. Any external evaluation must establish which of those roles the report actually plays.

Functional Authority and the Place of the People of the Book.

The accounts of Moses' tablets and the Companions of the Cave illustrate different ways in which al-Marāghī evaluates information associated with the People of the Book. In the first case, he uses Exodus to support his preference for two tablets and explicitly rejects conflicting reports. In the second, he favors the number seven based on Qur'anic textual indications while discouraging unsupported claims about uncertain details. These cases demonstrate that information from the People of the Book does not occupy a single, fixed epistemic position. Its value depends on the type of claim, the available evidence, and the role assigned to it within the interpretation.

This relational view may be described as functional authority. The term means that a source may be useful for comparing claims, reconstructing a narrative tradition, or identifying a point of disagreement without being granted autonomous authority over Qur'anic interpretation. Functional use is therefore different from theological endorsement. The distinction accords with scholarship that warns against treating isrā'īliyyāt as one undifferentiated class of material (Bakalaf, 2021; Mufida & Mubarok, 2020)**.** Modern studies of disputed Israelite stories likewise demonstrate that exegetical choices may involve cautious quotation, partial acceptance, or explicit

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rejection rather than indiscriminate borrowing (Khusnah & Noorhidayati, 2024; Sholihin et al., 2025).

Functional authority nevertheless requires careful qualification. In the case of Moses' tablets, al-Marāghī does not merely identify agreement between sources; he treats the information in Exodus as grounds for rejecting contradictory narratives. This gives the source a stronger evaluative function than simple historical comparison. However, the reliability of an extant textual tradition and the historical truth of its contents are not necessarily identical. Al-Marāghī's decision can therefore be understood as consistent with his practice of evaluating inherited reports while remaining open to further examination of the evidential strength of the source itself. This distinction preserves the analytical value of functional authority without treating comparative verification as an unquestionable guarantee of historical accuracy.

Rational Evaluation and the Limits of Epistemological Filtering.

The possibility of testing narratives against reason, observable reality, and established knowledge is a major element in al-Marāghī's modern approach (Gani & Ridho, 2024; Mohammad Mas'ud Ubaidillah, 2023). It helps explain why the interpreter is willing to question elaborate stories that had previously circulated within commentary traditions. Yet rational evaluation poses a methodological challenge: an account judged implausible in one intellectual context is not always disproved, and the interpreter's favored alternative may rest on linguistic or historical judgments that themselves require examination.

The Hārūt–Mārūt passage shows this limitation sharply. Suspending trust in a sensational narrative can be compatible with tamḥīṣ, while the particular replacement interpretation must still be appraised through the wording of the verse, relevant qirā'āt, transmitted explanations, and the history of interpretation. The existence of scholarly disagreement on the identification of the two figures demonstrates that a rationalizing choice cannot be treated as the final result of the screening process simply because the rejected account seems implausible (Al Ali & Abdelaati, 2025).

The same caution applies to appeals to science. What a given era considers established knowledge may later be modified, while not every apparent conflict with ordinary observation warrants dismissing a narrative. Scholarship on al-dakhīl in scientific exegesis is useful here because it exposes the risk of granting scientific rhetoric an authority that exceeds its actual evidence (Qomariyah & Ilyas, 2023). Thus, the strongest formulation of tamḥīṣ is a disciplined process of assigning warrants and limits, not the assumption that rationality automatically produces a superior interpretation.

This analysis advances a small but useful refinement in the study of tafsir epistemology. The relation between sources, method, and validity formulated in Mustaqim's framework and developed in other studies of interpretive knowledge (Mustaqim, 2010; Nabil Amir, 2021; Nadia, 2023) can be examined not only as a general profile of a commentator but also as a test of the relationship between methodological declaration and documented application. In this case, that

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move makes it possible to identify what is internal to the exegete's own standard and what comes from subsequent disciplinary critique.

The resulting contribution has three parts. First, tamḥīṣ al-riwāyāt is reconstructed as a layered way of giving different epistemic statuses to information rather than a synonym for technical sanad criticism. Second, case comparison reveals that procedural difference need not entail contradiction if the procedures are directed toward a shared evaluative principle. Third, the treatment of Ahl al-Kitāb supports the distinction between the normative authority of revelation and the limited utility of an external textual tradition as a comparative source. None of these claims requires affirming that al-Marāghī's every interpretive decision is ultimately correct.

The research design also indicates what a stronger future test should involve. A broader corpus could examine reports in legal verses, asbāb al-nuzūl, eschatology, and narratives not selected for their visible evaluative wording. An explicit record of each report's location, the author's response, alternative explanations, and negative cases would permit a more stringent assessment of consistency. Such a study could also compare al-Marāghī's internal criteria with independent hadith and textual analysis without confusing the two levels of argument. The present four cases offer a structured starting point, not a substitute for that comprehensive audit.

D. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that tamḥīṣ al-riwāyāt in Tafsīr al-Marāghī functions as an epistemological principle for evaluating the credibility and interpretive authority of supplementary reports rather than as a uniform procedure of technical isnād criticism. The four selected cases reveal different applications of this principle. In Q. 2:102, al-Marāghī questions inherited narratives through rational and linguistic considerations; in Q. 7:145, he employs Exodus to evaluate and reject conflicting Israelite reports; in Q. 12:77, he explicitly challenges the reliability of accounts concerning Joseph's alleged theft; and in Q. 18:22, he favors the opinion that the Companions of the Cave numbered seven while emphasizing caution toward claims lacking sufficient evidence. These findings indicate correspondence between his declared evaluative principles and the selected applications, despite differences in procedure. They also demonstrate that sources associated with the People of the Book may acquire functional authority without possessing normative authority equivalent to the Qur'an. Nevertheless, methodological coherence does not necessarily guarantee the evidential strength of every interpretive conclusion. Because the study examines four purposively selected cases, its findings cannot establish universal consistency throughout the commentary. Further research should include both supporting and potentially contradictory cases to assess the broader application of tamḥīṣ al-riwāyāt.

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Author Contributions

The authors contributed to the conceptualization, analysis, drafting, and revision of the manuscript. Both authors approved the final version and accept responsibility for the work.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this research or its publication.

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