

THE EVOLUTION OF QURANIC INTERPRETATION WRITINGS IN MALAYSIA FROM THE 17TH TO 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The arrival of Islam in the Malay region has played an important role on the development of intellectual, writing and education among the Malays. Various disciplines of Islamic knowledge has been spread by Malay scholar with the interpretations of Arabic scripts. One of the most important disciplines is the Quranic interpretation that was pioneered by Syaykh Abdul Rauf al-Sinkili (d.1693) from Aceh, Indonesia. The interpretation production continued to spread to Malaysia, Indonesia and Pattani by local scholars. This article will focused on the chronology of the interpretation script writing of the Holy Quran mainly in Malaysia. This is a qualitative research using data gathering method through history and documentation to get the information of the selected scholars and their scripts in Malay language and in Jawi script. Based on the research there are 24 famous Malaysian scholars that has written the interpretations scripts from the 17th century until today. The name like Tok Pulau Manis, Tok Kenali and al-Marbawi proved that Malay scholars had played a very important role in spreading the interpretation of the Holy Quran in mainly in Malaysia and most importantly in the Islamic world.

INTRODUCTION

The spread of Islamic preaching in the archipelago has boosted the development of education and educational writings in Malaysia. Many of the Malay researchers and writers has been found with establishments of related institutions in the Malay region. There are many Islamic scholars started to write Islamic books and interpretations in various fields including the Interpretation of the Holy Quran.

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THE 16th CENTURY

Based on previous research, the Islamic interpretation began simultaneously with the arrival of Islam in the Malay region. The interpretation method being used was orally instead of written method. According to Peter Riddell, among the earliest interpretation piece was about surah al-Kahfi around 1600 century by an unknown writer.² In the early days, Malay Language interpretation was initiated by an Aceh Indonesia writer named Syekh Abdul Ra'uf al-Sinkili al Fansuri who wrote kitab *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* in year 1675.³ Meanwhile some of the earliest interpretation found in Malaysia was the *Tafsir al Hasyimi* written by Kerani Muhammad Hasyim bin al Ghani from Penang in year 1686.⁴

THE 17th CENTURY

An Islamic scholar from Terengganu known as Tok Pulau Manis (d.1736) has written a Malay language interpretation of *Tafsir al-Baydawi* in year 1730. While in Aceh he has produce the Malay language interpretation of *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* written by his teacher Syekh Abdul Ra'uf al Sinkili al-Fansuri. The interpretation of *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* was then brought back to Terengganu to be used as an Islamic reference by the local people. Tok Pulau Manis was the pioneer of the Islamic interpretation writing in Malaysia and has been the trend setter in systematic education in the 17th century.⁵

THE 20th CENTURY

There was no activity of the interpretation writing detected from the 18th century until the 19th century. In the 20th century, the interpretation writing activities were then reinitiated by Malay Islamic scholar in Kelantan starting by Tok Kenali (d.1933). He interpreted part of *Tafsir al Khazin*

² This manuscript was discovered by Peter Riddell from the Cambridge University Library's collections by catalog name MS 116.4.5. It is a private collection owned by a Dutch citizen named Arabist Erpentus. The manuscript was carried out from Aceh by the Dutch colonial in the early 17th century. Peter Riddell (1989), *Earliest Quranic Exegetical Activity in The Malay-Speaking States*, Archipei 38, p. 111-114.

³ Wan Mohd Saghir Abdullah (1999), *Penyebaran Islam & Silsilah Ulama Sejagat Dunia Melayu*, v. 5. Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Pengkajian Khazanah Klasik Nusantara & Khazanah Fathaniyah, p. 19-23, Richard Winstedt (1969), *A History of Classical Malay Literature*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, p. 147-148, Liaw Yock Fang (1993), *Sejarah Kesusasteraan Melayu Klasik*, Jakarta: Penerbitan Erlangga, p. 62-65.

⁴ Wan Mohd Saghir Abdullah (1991), *Khazanah Karya Pusaka Asia Tenggara*, Kuala Lumpur: Khazanah Fathaniyah p. 182-185, Abdul Rahman Hj. Abdullah (2000), *Sejarah dan Tamadun Asia Tenggara Sebelum dan Sesudah Pengaruh Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications & Distributors Sdn. Bhd., p. 410.

⁵ Ismail Che Daud (2001), *Tokoh-Tokoh Ulama' Semenanjung Melayu (1)*, Kota Bharu: Majlis Ugama dan Adat Istiadat Melayu Kelantan, p. 1-15, Abdul Rahman Hj. Abdullah (1997), *Pemikiran Islam di Malaysia Sejarah Dan Aliran*. Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, p. 34, Wan Mohd Saghir Abdullah (1999), *Penyebaran Islam & Silsilah Ulama Sejagat Dunia Melayu*, v.6. Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Pengkajian Khazanah Klasik Nusantara & Khazanah Fathaniyah, p. 17-22, Hamdan Hassan (1984), "Sastera Melayu Islam" in *Kesusasteraan Melayu Dan Islam Suatu Pertembungan Pemikiran*, Sy. Husin al-Attas (ed.), Kuala Lumpur: Sarjana Enterprise, p.98. Muhammad Abu Bakar (1990), *Ulama' Terengganu Suatu Sorotan*, Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publication & Distributors Sd. Bhd., p. 53-54.

to Malay language but the book remain unfound until today. He had also worked on *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* interpretation but it also remain unpublished until today.⁶

In 1927, the *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* was written by Haji Muhammad Sa'id bin 'Umar (d.1932), a famous scholar from Kedah. It was the most comprehensive 30 juzu' interpretation ever written in Malaysia. The writer had used *tafsir tahlili* method and combining the *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* and *bi al-ra'yi*. Meanwhile the interpretations presented in this book is simple, moderate and yet very much suitable for an amateur in the field of tafsir during that time.⁷

Tok Kenali has many successful students that later emerged as famous Islamic scholars. Among them is Syeikh Uthman Jalaluddin al-Kelantani (d.1952). He has produced an interpretation reference for *Tafsir al-Jalalain* in Malay language entitled *Tafsir Bagi Al-Quran Al-Karim : Anwar al-Huda wa Amtar al-Nada* that has been published in the year of 1934. Old style of Malay language was used as the narrative language while including and maintaining the original Arabic languages and terms in his writing.⁸

Syeikh Muhamad Idris al-Marbawi (d.1989) from Perak, was another favourite student of Tok Kenali. He was responsible to write the interpretation of *Surah Yaasin* in 1966 that was published in Egypt but was not widely spread in Malaysia. Apart from that he has also produce other useful and important interpretation such as *Tafsir Al-Quran Al-Marbawi Juzu' Alif Lam Mim*, *Tafsir Juzu' 'Amma*, *Tafsir al-Fatihah*, *Tafsir Nur al-Yaqin* and *Terjemahan Tafsir Fath al-Qadir*.⁹

Maulana Abdullah Awang Nuh (d.1947), a scholar from Pasir Puteh, Kelantan has produced another interpretation for the Holy Quran called *Khulasah al-Quran*. This book was a collection of his preach on Quran interpretation that has been compiled by his student, Wan Ismail b. Wan Nawang. The special thing about this particular book is Maulana Abdullah Awang Nuh did not only preach on the Quran interpretation, but he had also included relevant examples and comments related to social problems, histories as well as current political issues in Malaysia.¹⁰

⁶ Abdul Rahman al-Ahmadi (1972), "Kelantan Sebagai Pusat Kesusasteraan Melayu Yang Unggul" in *Dewan Bahasa* vol.7, July 1972, p.532, Judith Nagata (1984), *The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam Modern Religious Radicals and Their Roots*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, p. 28, A.Azizi Deraman (1992), *Tamadun Melayu Dan Pembinaan Bangsa Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, p.28, Ismail Che Daud (2001), *op.cit.*, p.255-266.

⁷ Muhammad Ismi b. Mat Taib (2003), "*Israilliyyat Dalam Tafsir: kajian Terhadap Kitab Nur al-Ihsan Karya Haji Muhammad Said bin Umar*" (M.A. Dissertation, Fakulti Usuluddin, Akademi Pengajian Islam, Universiti Malaya, p. 51-57, Wan Mohd Saghir Abdullah (2000), *Wawasan Pemikiran Ulama' Asia Tenggara*, vol.2, p.38.

⁸ Nik Abdul Aziz b. Nik Hassan (1977), *Sejarah Perkembangan Ulama' Kelantan, Sejarah Gerakan Dan Perkembangan Alam Pemikiran Islam Di Jajahan Kota Bharu 1900-1940*, Kota Bharu: Pakatan Tuan Tabal, p.67-70, Abdul Rahman al-Ahmadi (1972), *op.cit.*, p.532, Ismail Che Daud (2001), *op.cit.*, p.435-450, 503-519.

⁹ Tajuddin Saman & Ab. Manaf Hj. Ahmad (2005), *Tokoh-Tokoh Agama Dan Kemerdekaan Di Alam Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Dakwah Islamiah Malaysia, p. 62-66.

¹⁰ Ismail Che Daud (2001), *op.cit.*, p.309-325, Abdul Rahman al-Ahmadi (1972), *op.cit.*,h. 540

A Malay interpretation called *Ramuan Rapi Dari Erti Surah al-Kahfi* written by Hj. Muhammad Nor bin Ibrahim (d.1987) was published in 1957. He was the former mufti of Kelantan. The 53 pages book was only to interpret surah *al-Kahfi* with a simple and comprehensive style together with relevant English translation in the explanation. His interpretation did not have *Israiliyyat* influence and contains good advice about *aqidah* and current social problem.¹¹

Ustaz Mustafa Abdul Rahman (d.1967) from Gunung Semanggol, Perak has produced *Tafsir al-Quran al-Hakim*. He only managed to write 27 juzu' as he died at the age of 51. This interpretation became an important reference for tafsir teacher mainly in north Malaysia. He had included his own simple and comprehensive comments about other tafsir scholar's opinions especially the *hukum*, *aqidah* and *tauhid* aspect. He had also mentioned about moral and family issue. This book was very popular because of its simple and comprehensive interpretation content of the surah.¹²

Hj. Abdullah Abbas Nasution (d.1969) was born in western Sumatra and had moved to Langgar, Kedah. He was one of the strong individual who had fought for independence. He had written many interpretation masterpiece such as *Tafsir Harian Al-Quran al-Karim*, *Quran Besar Bergantung Makna Jawi Untuk Bacaan Anak Sehari-Hari* and *Tafsir Harian al-Quran al-Karim* to inspire the fighting spirit for independence during the British intrusion era at that time. His main purpose was educate people especially Muslims who had very little knowledge about the interpretation of the Holy Quran at that time. He had brought up many relevant topics of local politics and economic issue in his writings.¹³

A Malay scholar from Pulau Pinang named Syeikh Abu Bakar al-Ashaari (d.1970) had written an interpretation called *Intisari Tafsir Juzuk 'Ammah* that was published in 1962. The method of *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* was used widely together with *tafsir bil-ma'thur* in his writings. He emphasized on the *asbab al-nuzul* in this particular interpretation. Apart from that there is still an unpublished interpretation wrote by him called *Tafsir Surah al-Fatihah*.¹⁴

Nik Muhammad Salleh Wan Musa (d.1971) a famous grandchild of the famous Kelantanese scholar, Tuan Tabal had written *Falsafah Berumahtangga / Tafsir Surah al-Mujadalah*. This

¹¹ Ismail bin Yusoff (1995), "Perkembangan Pengajian Dan Penulisan Tafsir Di Malaysia" (PhD Thesis, Fakulti Usuluddin, UM), p. 170.

¹² Che Hasmawati Che Awang (2005), "Ustaz Mustafa Abdul Rahman: Sejarah Hidup Dan Sumbangannya Dalam Ilmu Hadith Di Malaysia" (M.A. Dissertation, Jabatan Al-Quran Dan Al-Hadith, UM), p. 55-56. Mazlan Ibrahim (2007), "Perkembangan Ilmu Tafsir di Alam Melayu Sehingga Abad Ke-20" in *Islam Di Tanah Melayu Abad Ke-19*, Farid Mat Zain (ed.), Shah Alam: Karisma Publications Sdn. Bhd., p. 140.

¹³ Mustaffa Abdullah (2009), *Khazanah Tafsir Di Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Akademi Pengajian Islam UM, p. 148, 152-157.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, h. 100-110.

interpretation was of 84 pages and only focused on interpretation of verse 1-5 surah *al-Mujadalah*. The writer had included the comments by Syah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi when giving explanations about the interpretation of the selected verses of Quran as well as guidance for women to become a good wife.¹⁵

Tafsir Pimpinan al-Rahman Kepada Pengertian al-Quran by Syeikh Abdullah Basmeih (d.1996) was a popular interpretation among Malaysians. Its clear and simple interpretation writing style and also easy to understand had made it a very suitable reference in Malaysian schools. The interpretation effort had taken place in the reign of Malaysia's first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj. This interpretation had gained special interest by the Malaysian government and had been put under the Prime Minister's Department. It has been reviewed by Dato' Haji Muhammad Nor bin Ibrahim (the author of *Ramuan Rapi dari Erti Surah al-Kahfi*). It was more of a translation instead of interpretation. The initial release was in Jawi and was released in both Jawi and Rumi version later on to promote to both older and younger generations. The author had also produced the translation of *Tafsir Ila al-Quran al-Karim* by Syeikh Muhammad Syaltut from Egypt into Malay language using *Intisari al-Quran* as the title.¹⁶

Tafsir Fi Zilal al-Quran Di Bawah Bayangan al-Quran that was published in 1953 by another Kelantanese scholar called Dato' Yusoff Zaky b. Yacob (d.1999). It was an interpretation of *Tafsir Fi Zilal al-Quran* by the famous Islamic scholar, Sayyid Qutb. He had wrote in his own simple and easy style making the interpretation easy to understand. In this interpretation the writer had explained about the beauty of *uslub*, the *mukjizat* of the Holy Quran in subtle writing style. He had also emphasized on social aspect, contemporary thinking and modernization.¹⁷

Tuan Hj. Yusoff bin Hj. Abdullah al-Rawi (d.2000) from Penang was also one of many interpretation writer in Malaysia. He had written *Tafsir al-Rawi Juzu' 'Amma* in 1950. His writings was also simple, comprehensive and easy to understand. Included in the interpretation were discussions about current issues of Muslims. He focused on the overall topic in a particular surah in his writings like *al-wahdah al-mawdu'iyah* and he also included the *fadilat al-surah*. Among his

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, h. 206-208, 209-211.

¹⁶ Ismail Che Daud (2001), *Tokoh-Tokoh Ulama' Semenanjung Melayu (1)*, Kota Bharu: Percetakan Zul Rahim Sdn. Bhd., p. 2-15. Wan Ramizah Hassan (2000), "Sumbangan Sheikh Abdullah Basmeih Dalam Bidang Tafsir: Kajian Khusus Terhadap Kitab Tafsir Pimpinan al-Rahman" (M.A. Dissertation, Fakulti Usuluddin, Akademi Pengajian Islam, UM), p. 110-118, Jaafar Abdul Rahim (1979), "Tokoh Bulan Ini, Sheikh Abdullah Basmeih Pengarang Yang Tidak Pandai Menaip", *Majalah Siswa*, July 1979, p. 5.

¹⁷ Ismail Che Daud (2001), *Tokoh-Tokoh Ulama' Semenanjung Melayu (1)*, Kota Bharu: Majlis Ugama dan Adat Istiadat Melayu Kelantan, p. 597, Mohd Asmadi bin Yakob (2002), "Terjemahan Tafsir Fi Zilal Al-Quran Oleh Yusoff Zaky Yacob: Suatu Kajian Dari Aspek Metodologi" (M.A. Dissertation, Jabatan Al-Quran Dan Al-Hadith, Akademi Pengajian Islam UM, h. 52-54.

famous references were *Tafsir Juzu' 'Amma* by Imam Muhammad 'Abduh, *Tafsir al-Maraghi*, *Tafsir al-Syawkani*, *The Meaning of The Glorious Quran*, *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* and many more.¹⁸

Syeikh Hj. Abdul Aziz b. Abdul Salam was ustaz Mustafa Abdul Rahman's colleague from Perak. He had written the *Kitab al-Bayan Pada Ta'wil Ayat-Ayat al-Quran* that interprets the 30 *juzu'* of the Holy Quran. He had used the similar method as used in tafsir Imam al-Tabari in *Jami' al-Bayan*.¹⁹

THE 21st CENTURY

The effort of the interpretation works has been continued by the contemporary scholar in Malaysia. Most of them are still active in their effort to spread Islamic knowledge until today. Ustaz Mohd Pauzi Awang for example had written *Tafsir al-Quran Juzu' 'Amma*. This interpretation was published in 1964 and consists of 156 pages. He was borned in 1937, at Machang, Kelantan. He was a former lecturer in the Islamic Academy, University of Malaya. The review in this interpretation was simple and pact of essential contents. His writing style was very structured and organized making it easy to read and understand to be a good reference by the local community. He also included several conflicts from different ulama' regarding to a certain issue and also scientific explanations to support his arguments like the Darwin theory in surah *al-'Alaq*, the five stars in surah *al-Syams* and the doomsday *al-Naba'*. There were psychological aspect brought up in his interpretation.²⁰

Wan Ahmad bin Wan Ali or known as Abi Lukman was another Kelantanese scholar and his humble interpretation named *Tafsir Juzu' 'Amma* only contains 68 pages. He interpreted from surah *al-Fatihah* until surah *al-Tariq* in a simple way. However it is very difficult to get a copy of it and it has not been republished until today.²¹ Tuan Hj. Nik Muhammad Adeeb (d.1964), a former kadi of Kelantan had also produced *Tafsir Juzu' 'Amma*. It was part of his book called *Rahsia Menghadap Tuhan*. This book was a simple explanatory because of it comprehensiveness of a particular surah.²²

While in Terengganu *Al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Quran* was published in 1993. It was a compilation of Friday preaches by Hj. Abdul Hadi Awang at Rusila mosque, Marang, Terengganu. He had used *tafsir bil ma'thur* method, tafsir of the *salaf* and *khalaf*. He had also included his own comments

¹⁸ Mujahid Hj. Yusof Rawa (2001), *Permata Dari Pulau Mutiara*, Kuala Lumpur: Warathah Haji Yusof Rawa, p. 5, Ismail bin Yusoff (1995), *op.cit.*, h. 163, 222.

¹⁹ Mustaffa Abdullah (2009), *op.cit.*, h. 118 -120.

²⁰ Ismail bin Yusoff (1995), *op.cit.*, h. 165-166, Mustaffa Abdullah (2009), *op.cit.*, h. 268-274.

²¹ Ismail bin Yusoff (1995), *op.cit.*, h. 167, 313.

²² Ismail bin Yusoff (1995), *op.cit.*, h. 168-169, Mustaffa Abdullah (2009), *op.cit.*, h. 192-194.

regarding the current issues to that all Muslims are more alert and realised about their conditions and responsibilities.²³

Current Minister of Kelantan Dato' Hj. Nik Abdul Aziz bin Nik Mat had written kitab *Tafsir Surah Hud*. It was from a recorded preach from his lectures at Dewan Zulkifli, Kota Bharu that was recorded by as student from Maahad Da'wah wal Imamah. Besides, *Tafsir Surah Yunus* was a compilation of his Friday preach and *Tafsir al-Furqan* was from his series of interpretation preach compiled by his student, Mashhudi Bunyani.²⁴

Meanwhile, Abdullah al-Qari b. Hj. Salleh from Kubang Kerian, Kelantan had never published any complete version of interpretation. However, he had managed to create a difference in interpretation method through reviews that are based on the Quranic perspectives. Among his early masterpiece were *Tafsir surah al-Ikhlash*, *Mencari Hidayah al-Quran Perintis Intisari*, *Surah Tabaarak Pencegah Seksaan Kubur* (Surah al-Mulk), and *Tahukah Kamu Tentera Bergajah* (Surah al-Fiil).²⁵

Zainudin Idris who was born from Kubang Kerian Kelantan in 1937 had produced an interpretation called *Tafsir al-Quran al-Hakim* that was compiled from his lecture notes. This interpretation was initially released in Jawi script, but had been translated into Rumi script by Abdul Manaf Husin²⁶.

Until today, Dr. Abdul Hayyei Abdul Sukor is on the process of writing Malay contemporary interpretation. He was born in Kubang Kerian in 1947 and was a former lecturer of Islamic Academy of University of Malaya. He had managed to produced kitab *Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin* for juzu' 28 and 29. This interpretation was suggested by Malaysia's former 5th Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi in his meetings with Malaysian scholars in Putrajaya on 3rd October 2006. This interpretation is a compilation of *tafsir bil ma'thur* and *bi al-aqli* method taken from current famous scholar like Imam al-Qaradhawi, al-Tantawi and Syeikh Faisal Mawlawi. This is going to be a contemporary scripture and it will include deviations, liberalisme, feminisme, ekstremisme, fanatisme and eskapisme. This script is still in process and is expected to complete by the year of 2022.²⁷

Overall, the books of tafsir Malay in Malaysia since the 16th until the 21st century was produced by scholars from five states namely Penang and Perak (both with three scholars), Kedah and

²³ Ismail bin Yusoff (1995), *op.cit.*, h. 176-178, Mustaffa Abdullah (2009), *op.cit.*, h. 301-304

²⁴ Mustaffa Abdullah (2009), *op.cit.*, h. 245-246.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, h. 255-261.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, h. 281-283.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, h. 292-295.

Terengganu (both with two scholars) and lead by the scholars' of Kelantan were fourteen scholars as the following graph:

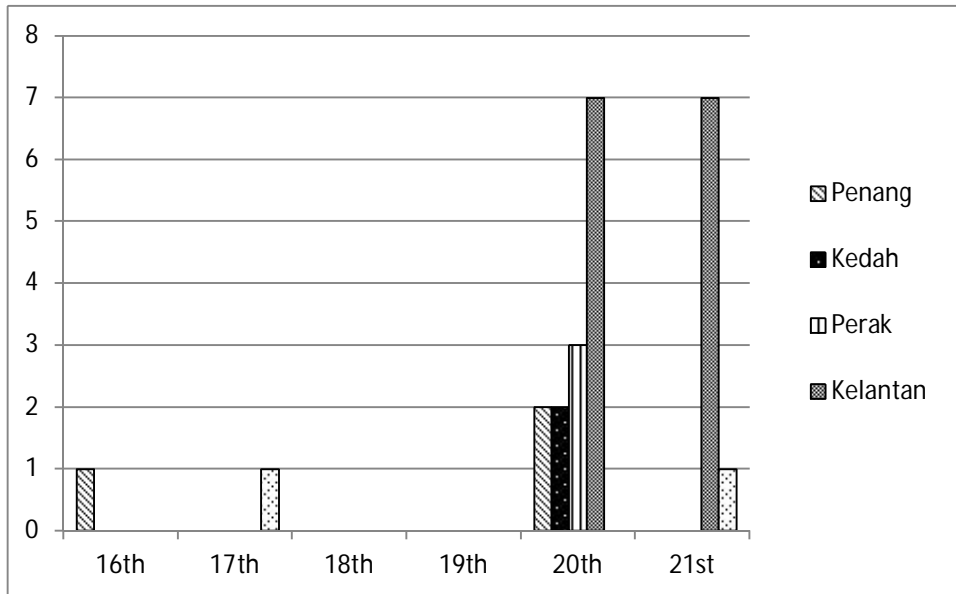


Figure 1 : Graph showing the number of prominent works of Quranic Interpretation by Malay scholars in Malaysia since 16th to 21st century.

CONCLUSION

The Quranic interpretation writing in Malaysia included several phase according to the century movements. In the 16th century the interpretation production by Islamic scholar was rather slow due to the fact it was the early stage of the spreading of Islam in Malaysia. Later in the 17th century a few interpretation script were produced. However the interpretation style is rather traditional and some Arabic wordings from the Middle East were used by our local scholar in their writings. During the 18th-19th century was the frozen era where there was no interpretation scripts ever discover during that time.

However the interpretation script writing began to pick up its place when a lot of Malay language interpretations has been produced in Malaysia. This has caused a major impact in the interpretation

development. The interpretation script writing continues in the 21st centuries with the production of contemporary interpretation scripts relevant that are to current social environment in Malaysia. They have incorporates various current issues elements in their writing thus attracting the various level of society interest towards better understanding of Islam based on Al-Quran and Sunnah.

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