

The Dialectic of Philosophical and Literary Exegesis: Mary's Prophetic Status from the Perspectives of Al-Tabari and Al-Qurthubi

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the dialectic of Qur'anic argumentation regarding Maryam's prophethood from the perspective of two famous commentators, Al-Tabari and Al-Qurthubi, because some interpretations of Maryam's prophethood are considered misogynic by certain circles. Maryam's prophethood is an essential aspect of Islamic theology and has been described in the Qur'an with several verses that provide an overview of Maryam's prophetic role and status. This article aims to understand the interpretive approaches of Al-Tabari and Al-Qurthubi in exploring and explaining Qur'anic verses related to Maryam's prophethood. The method of analysis used in this article involves a critical review of the commentaries of Al-Tabari and Al-Qurthubi regarding the verses that explain Maryam's prophethood. A comparative approach is used to compare the similarities and differences between the views of the two scholars. In addition, this article also analyzes the historical and cultural context of Al-Tabari and Al-Qurthubi's time to provide a deeper understanding of their interpretations. The analysis shows that Al-Tabari tends to adopt a more historical and linguistic approach in his interpretation. He explores the meanings of words in the relevant verses and relates them to the historical context of the time. On the other hand, Al-Qurthubi tends to adopt a more theological and moral approach in his interpretation. He emphasizes the moral and spiritual messages that can be taken from the prophetic story of Maryam. However, this study has a weak point that can be covered by further research by not exploring the arguments and evidence used by Al-Tabari and Al-Qurthubi in their interpretations critically or by using an approach that can uncover the ideological reasons behind their interpretations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years, particularly in the teachings of Islam, prophethood has consistently been attributed exclusively to men. Not a single argument put forth by religious figures has presented the concept of prophethood as being represented by women (Barlas 2019). It is as if God entrusted the truth of His revelations solely to men, while women are positioned as subordinates within Islamic teachings, carrying the connotation that women can only be followers and not leaders of the faithful (Zulaiha 2017). Furthermore, women appear to be denied the right to serve as God's representatives on earth in conveying the divine message (Abrar 2017). The Qur'an, however, presents a different view, stating that God values His servants not based on their gender, ethnicity, or nationality, but on their piety, as conveyed in Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 13. God affirms in Surahs Al-Ahzab:35, Ali Imran:36, Al-Isra:81, and Al-Baqarah:26 that the truth of religion is not the exclusive domain of any particular authority, especially not limited by gender. Instead, truth is to be pursued in accordance with facts, reason, and God's divine law (Mudrikah and Walidin 2020).

Among those who disagree with the prophethood of Mary is Fakhruddin al-Razi in his work *Tafsir al-Kabir*. He argues that God has not sent a prophet or messenger except as a man, basing his view on Surah Yusuf, verse 109 (Al-Razi and Ibnu Ali 2000). Furthermore, he argues that a person who speaks with an angel is not necessarily a prophet, as angels have spoken to people in the past who were not prophets. This is explained in a hadith about a bald man, a blind man, and a leprous man—Mary is likewise included in this category (Wijaya 2022). This view is reinforced by Abu Hayyan, who asserts that there are no female prophets, including Mary, because the term *isthafa* (chosen) applied to Mary signifies a unique distinction granted to her specifically (Sholihah and Hasan 2020). Mary is called *shidiqah* (the truthful), but this does not indicate that she is a female prophet, as *shidiqah* is a rank below that of a prophet. Among the *shiddiqin* (the truthful) is Abu Bakr Ash-Shidiq, based on Surah An-Nisa, verse 69 (Noorhidayati 2012).

However, M. Quraish Shihab, Ibn Hazm, Abu Hasan Al-Ash'ari, Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani, and Al-Qurtubi disagree with the arguments of these scholars, asserting that Mary could indeed be a prophet of God, possessing the signs of prophethood just like other prophets. According to Quraish Shihab, the interpretations provided by the above scholars reflect a misogynistic view of male exegetes towards women, indirectly portraying women as spiritually less complete individuals (Firdaus and Arifin 2018). Women are viewed in a misogynistic manner, considered unworthy of receiving revelation from God through the Angel Gabriel, while the prophetic qualities demonstrated by Mary, as mentioned in the Qur'an, are numerous, such as in Surah At-Tahrim:12, Ali Imran:42, and Al-Maidah:75 (Hakim and Muhid 2023).

Abu Bakr Muhammad bin Mawhab al-Tujib al-Qabri (d. 406 AH/1015 CE), a prominent scholar in Andalusia, held a controversial opinion in his time, asserting that

women could be prophets and receive divine revelation from Allah SWT. He pointed to Mary as one of the female prophets. His argument was based on both *'aqli* (philosophical) reasoning and *naqli* (textual) evidence from the Qur'an and Hadith. From an *'aqli* perspective, both men and women are servants and vicegerents of God, thus both are equally eligible to be prophets. "The most honored in the sight of Allah is the one who is most righteous, whether male or female" (QS. Al-Hujurat: 13). From a *naqli* perspective, there are several verses indicating that revelation, a prerequisite for someone to be considered a prophet, was also given to righteous women. Moreover, these women were supported by miracles, which are also a requirement for someone to be recognized as a prophet (Baeq and Kim 2022).

The discussion about the prophethood of Mary is crucial for the study of prophethood exegesis in the Qur'an, especially when considered in terms of its existence and essence. This is because prophethood is not achieved through effort, training, or striving, but is solely a gift from Allah (Anon 2019). Another factor is the role of the prophet, which includes three key functions: first, as a messenger and helper; second, as a guide between God and humans, defining the boundaries of human actions, beliefs in God with His perfect attributes, and knowledge about the events of the afterlife; and third, encouraging humanity to embrace virtuous qualities. Therefore, Al-Qurtubi's views in his exegesis are worth further analysis, particularly to reconstruct the concept of female prophethood in Islamic teachings.

The research that forms the basis for the author's study on the prophethood of Mary is the study conducted by Hons Abboud, titled *Mary in the Quran: A Literary Reading*, (Abboud 2014) He explains that the majority of scholars among both Sunni and Shia reject the prophethood of Mary and agree that Zakariya was a prophet, even though the Qur'an never explicitly mentions his prophetic status. Additionally, there is a study conducted by Amina Wadud titled *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Wadud 1999). In her research, Amina Wadud explores the reinterpretation of Qur'anic verses from a female perspective, emphasizing the importance of revisiting the sacred text with an inclusive and gender-sensitive approach. She addresses issues concerning women in the Qur'an and examines how historical patriarchal views may influence traditional interpretations of these verses. Wadud also discusses the possibility of female prophethood, including that of Mary, and advocates for a reassessment of prevailing societal views in Islam regarding the role and status of women in the context of prophethood. These studies provide the foundation for the author to adopt a critical and inclusive approach when analyzing the views of Al-Tabari and Al-Qurtubi on the prophethood of Mary. By considering gender perspectives and alternative interpretations, the author seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the differing interpretations and the complexity of the concept of Mary's prophethood in the exegeses of these two scholars.

2. METHODS

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach, focusing on the analysis of the exegeses of Al-Tabari and Al-Qurtubi on the Qur'anic verses related to the prophethood of Mary (Patton 2005). The following are the steps of the research methodology used: First, the study focuses on the exegeses of Al-Tabari and Al-Qurtubi concerning the Qur'anic verses that discuss the prophethood of Mary (Zaluchu 2021). These two exegeses serve as the primary sources for analysis in this study (Ilman 2019). Before conducting in-depth analysis, the initial step is to carry out a literature review to understand the views and approaches of Al-Tabari and Al-Qurtubi in interpreting the verses on the prophethood of Mary. This literature review aims to provide a deeper understanding of the perspectives and methodologies they employ (Samsudin 2019).

After understanding their frameworks of interpretation, an in-depth analysis was conducted on the Qur'anic verses related to the prophethood of Mary in the exegeses of Al-Tabari and Al-Qurtubi. Each interpretation provided by both scholars was examined, taking into account the context, the meanings of key terms, and the historical background of their time (Rahman 2016). A comparative approach was then applied to contrast the interpretations of Al-Tabari and Al-Qurtubi regarding the verses on the prophethood of Mary. In this analysis, the focus was on identifying similarities and differences in their approaches, emphases, and the conclusions they drew (Idrus, Bakar, and Basri 2023).

The historical and cultural context of the time of Al-Tabari and Al-Qurtubi was also analyzed to understand the background of their thinking. These factors are considered to influence their interpretations of the Qur'anic verses, and thus, they must be taken into account in understanding their perspectives (Affani 2019). Furthermore, this study also explores the theological context and the methodology of exegesis used by Al-Tabari and Al-Qurtubi in interpreting the verses on the prophethood of Mary. This analysis aids in understanding how their theological views and methodological approaches influenced the outcomes of their interpretations.

The results of the analysis of Al-Tabari's and Al-Qurtubi's exegeses regarding the prophethood of Mary are examined in-depth within the framework of contextual and theological understanding. The similarities, differences, and implications of their interpretations are carefully analyzed (Razzaq and Saputra 2016). This research methodology enables a better understanding of Al-Tabari's and Al-Qurtubi's views and approaches in interpreting the verses on the prophethood of Mary in the Qur'an. Both exegeses are studied in their historical, cultural, theological, and methodological contexts to explore the deeper meanings of their perspectives on the prophethood of Mary in the Qur'an.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

2.1 General Terminology of Prophethood in Islam

The term "Prophet" comes from the Arabic word "Nabiyyun," which, when viewed in terms of its form and gender, becomes "Nabiyah." This word is a noun derived from the verb (past tense) "Naba'a." Etymologically, the root of this word consists of the letters nun, ba, and hamzah, all of which are pronounced with a fatha, resulting in the sound "Naba'a." The core meaning of this root generally refers to "coming from one place to another (Zulaiha 2016). Meanwhile, the term "prophethood" refers to the Arabic concept known as "*al-nubuat*." This meaning signifies "*al-Ikbar an al-ghaib au al-mustaqbal bi ilham min Allah*," which translates to "the revelation of the unseen or future events through inspiration from Allah," or "*al-ikbar an Allah wa ma yata'alaqu bihi Ta'ala*," which means "the revelation from Allah and what is related to Him" (Dzulhadi 2014).

From Ibn Sina's perspective, the term "prophet," derived from the word "inba'," means "news" or "information." He views a prophet as an individual who receives information from Allah about events that have not yet occurred or who receives divine revelation regarding good commandments. This revelation can be delivered through the visitation of angels or, in the case of direct communication (khitab), through a direct dialogue with Allah, without intermediaries (Adabiyah 2017). On the other hand, Ibn Khaldun defines a prophet as a human being who is visited by an angel under Allah's command, tasked with delivering laws, whether in the form of commandments, prohibitions, or announcements about future events (Munawir 2014). However, the view of Sheikh Muhammad Amin As-Syaqithi differs from both. According to him, a prophet who also serves as a messenger receives a revelation containing independent divine laws, supported by miracles that affirm their prophetic status. In contrast, a prophet who is not a messenger does not receive a scripture but instead receives revelation to guide people to follow the laws that were previously given to earlier messengers, such as the prophets from the lineage of the Children of Israel, who were sent to uphold the teachings of the Torah (Athiyah 1974).

From the various definitions above, there is no definition that requires a man to be the only one who can become a prophet, thus making it possible for there to be female prophets (*nabiyah*). Therefore, some scholars have set criteria for prophethood for certain figures based on the events that accompanied their missionary journeys. The characteristics of a prophet can be identified as follows:

First, a person must receive revelation from Allah, either through the intermediary of the Angel Jibril or directly from Allah Himself. Muhammad Abduh, in his view, describes revelation as knowledge that a person acquires within themselves, with full conviction that this knowledge comes from Allah, either through an intermediary or directly (Wajid 2020). The key point is that the knowledge that comes from Allah, aside

from revelation, also includes divine guidance given to humans, known as inspiration (*ilham*).

Etymologically, *ilham* (inspiration) has a meaning similar to *wahyu* (revelation). However, in a religious context, *ilham* is understood as something placed in the heart of a person through a process of emanation. Some opinions suggest that *ilham* is something that appears in the heart of a person without knowing where its source comes from (Rubin 2017). It is important to note that scholars generally do not consider *ilham* as a legal proof (*hujjah*), except in the view of Sufi scholars. The main difference between the two is that *ilham* does not have a clear origin and suddenly appears in a person's heart. In contrast, *wahyu* is divine guidance received by prophets and messengers with the firm belief that it comes from the presence of Allah (Ibrahim 2009).

Second, the characteristic of prophethood, according to Murtadha Muthahari, includes the possession of *mu'jizat* (miracles) as a sign of the truthfulness of a prophet's mission (Nurilaahii 2022). In terminological terms, Al-Jurjani defines *mu'jizat* as an extraordinary event that promotes virtue and safety, while also affirming the status of the prophet, deliberately manifested to verify the truth of someone's claim to be a messenger of Allah (Yanggo 2016). Similarly, Ahmad Fudhali states that *mu'jizat* is an extraordinary event that is also challenging, suitable to support a prophet's claim, and nothing can match it. (Tamrin 2018) Meanwhile, Thahir bin Shaleh al-Jazari views *mu'jizat* as an extraordinary event that can be observed from the actions of a person claiming to be a prophet, in accordance with their claim, making it impossible for disbelievers to perform something similar (Zakariya and Shafwan 2023). It can be concluded that *mu'jizat* is an extraordinary event that occurs when someone who claims to be a prophet (after receiving revelation) performs something that cannot be imitated by those who doubt them. This serves as a sign of the authenticity of their prophethood and indicates that someone who claims to be a prophet without a *mu'jizat* is a false prophet.

The third sign of prophethood is the possession of *'ishmah* or *ma'sum*, which in terminology refers to the protection of the prophets from committing sins and errors in conveying their prophetic messages. In other words, *'ishmah* or *ma'sum* implies that the prophets are kept from committing both major and minor wrongdoings, and they refrain from immoral actions and injustices. None of them ever violate Allah's commands, either temporarily or permanently, and they never commit sins that would incur Allah's punishment (Ali 1997).

Imam Nawawi's view clarifies that a prophet possesses *ma'sum* (infallibility) in certain matters, particularly those related to their mission and prophetic message, while they are not *ma'sum* in other matters. This includes situations like illness or physical conditions that weaken them, but such conditions do not affect their status as a messenger. Additionally, aspects related to their humanity in the worldly sense are also included in the areas where they are not *ma'sum* (Taher 2017). The characteristics of the *ma'sum* (infallibility) of Prophethood apply not only to Prophet Muhammad but also to other

prophets. Imam Al-Mawardi also emphasizes that the prophets are *ma'sum* only in actions related to morality and ethical behavior, such as lying or breaching trust. However, in matters concerning the physical condition of the prophet, they can experience illness and do not possess the status of *ma'sum* in such cases (Zainudin and Ushama 2022).

2.2 The Scholars' Debate on the Concept of Prophethood

The concept of prophethood in Islam is a fundamental and crucial aspect, as Islam is rooted in the revelation that Allah sent to the prophets and messengers. He appointed to guide humanity. The opinions regarding the criteria that must be met for someone to be appointed as a prophet have led to differences in views. (Ruzi and Ibrahim 2020). Some groups of Muslims believe that only individuals who meet specific requirements, such as purity, honesty, and possessing miraculous abilities, can be chosen as prophets. They believe that these prophets are people specially selected and sent by Allah due to their exceptional characteristics (Hasyim 2019). For them, someone who does not meet these special requirements cannot be appointed as a prophet. However, on the other hand, there are groups of Muslims who believe that Allah has absolute power in choosing anyone as a prophet, even individuals who may appear to be ordinary. They believe that Allah has full authority in determining who will be appointed as a prophet and receive revelation. From this group's perspective, special criteria are not absolute requirements to become a prophet.

Imam al-Ghazali believed that a person who is to be appointed as a prophet must possess purity and the ability to communicate with Allah through revelation. For him, special qualities such as honesty and miraculous abilities are not absolute requirements for prophethood (al-Ma'mun 2021). On the other hand, Ibn Taymiyyah believed that a person who is to be appointed as a prophet must have purity, honesty, and miraculous abilities. According to him, these qualities are absolute requirements because Allah will only choose individuals who are truly worthy of being a prophet (Anon 2020). Additionally, Ibn Arabi argued that a potential prophet must possess purity, honesty, and extensive knowledge. For him, these qualities are also absolute requirements, as Allah will only choose those who excel in these traits (Chittick 2012). Al-Qurtubi's view strengthens the perspective that someone appointed as a prophet must possess purity and the ability to communicate with Allah through revelation (Tajuddin 2019). For him, special qualities like honesty and miraculous abilities are not absolute requirements, as they are not truly essential in delivering Allah's message.

In this case, the differences in views highlight a clear disagreement regarding the criteria that must be met by an individual to be appointed as a prophet in Islam. However, purity and the ability to communicate with Allah through revelation are generally considered essential qualities for prophethood. Despite the differing opinions, the essence of the concept of prophethood in Islam remains unchanged. Although there are variations

in views regarding the requirements for being appointed as a prophet, Muslims as a whole agree that the prophets are messengers of Allah.

Abu Bakr al-Razi, a Muslim philosopher, proposed the view that the doctrine of prophethood is not necessarily required, as humans can actually attain an understanding of the nature of God through their own intellect (Nuzula 2012). He cited Prophet Ibrahim as an example of a figure who conceptualized God through his rational thinking, considering the creation of God, known as the cause-and-effect argument for divinity (Har-El 2014). Furthermore, the Qur'an encourages disbelievers to use their intellect in searching for evidence of the non-existence of God (Allah), which ultimately strengthens the argument for the existence of Allah (Habib and Shabir 2021).

While Abu Bakr al-Razi's statement contains a relevant thread, namely that humans, in essence, have an innate understanding of their Creator when they are born into the world (Putra and Hasim 2019), the ability to use "reason" to develop this understanding is only possessed by a select few individuals. Not everyone has the intellectual capacity as clear as al-Razi's or other philosophers, let alone the sharp intellect of Prophet Ibrahim. Therefore, the mission of prophethood remains an important means for humanity to know God, especially Allah (Griffel and Brockopp 2010).

Unlike Abu Bakr al-Razi, Thomas Aquinas, a Catholic philosopher in the Middle Ages, argued that only a few people would know the truth about God if His revelation were not given to humanity. This is because most people are preoccupied with their worldly affairs, leaving them with no time to contemplate God speculatively. On the other hand, some individuals may be too lazy to reflect on the nature of God (Rogers 2019). In line with Aquinas's view, Imam al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah, At-Tabari, and Imam al-Qurtubi in Islam emphasized the crucial role of Prophethood. They believed that the prophets are the messengers of Allah who bring revelation and guidance to humanity. The scholars believe that Allah uses these prophets to convey His teachings to humans and provide guidance on how to live a righteous and good life.

Moreover, the prophets are considered role models in worship and in acting rightly in the presence of Allah and fellow humans. They are viewed as possessing noble qualities such as honesty, patience, steadfastness, wisdom, and compassion, which can serve as examples for humanity (Rahman 2013). Through the teachings and exemplary conduct of the prophets, humans can draw closer to Allah, improve themselves, and attain salvation in this world and the hereafter. Therefore, prophethood is considered extremely important in Islam and is one of the pillars of faith that every Muslim must believe in (Solihu 2009). In addition, scholars also view prophethood as one of the signs of Allah's greatness and miracles. Allah chooses and appoints prophets as His messengers without any intermediary, and grants them His revelation.

This illustrates the power, wisdom, and majesty of Allah as the Creator and Owner of everything in the universe. In Islam, the recognition and respect for prophethood are also seen as forms of acknowledgment of Allah's sovereignty and submission to Him. By

recognizing and following the teachings of the prophets, humans can attain peace and happiness in their lives, as well as earn rewards and forgiveness from Allah in the hereafter.

2.3 The Debate on Mary's Prophethood from the Perspectives of At-Tabari and Al-Qurthubi

Muslim scholars have not reached a consensus on the possibility of a female prophet. However, the signs of prophethood identified by scholars have been interpreted differently by two prominent exegetes, Al-Tabari and Al-Qurthubi. Al-Tabari does not explicitly reject the possibility of a female prophet, especially in the case of Mary. Yet, in his interpretation of Surah Ali Imran, verse 42, there are implicit indications that Al-Tabari rejects the idea of Mary's prophethood. He explains that Mary's role was solely to obey Allah (Al-Tabari and Garir 1978). This view, however, was contested by Abu Hayyan, who interpreted the same verse as supporting the recognition of Mary's prophethood. He referred to the dialogue between the angel and Mary, in which the angel conveyed a message from Allah, as evidence. Furthermore, when Prophet Zakariya heard of this, he even stated that Mary held a special status in the sight of Allah (Wijaya and Rudi 2021).

Allah's choice of Mary is mentioned twice in the verse. The first mention does not use the preposition "على" ('alā), while the second mention uses it, which implies a sense of elevation or superiority. The first choice suggests that the qualities attributed to Mary are shared by other women who have also been chosen by Allah. However, the second choice, using "على," indicates that Mary is a special selection among all women. This choice surpasses others, meaning that perhaps Mary was chosen as the only prophetess among women (Maunder 2019).

Al-Tabari's interpretation of Surah Ali Imran, verse 42, is as follows: "Allah is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing." This verse refers to when the wife of Imran spoke to God, promising to dedicate the child in her womb entirely to Allah. The angels then came and informed Mary that Allah had chosen her. The word "*Isthafaki*" in this verse means being chosen for obedience to Allah and being granted a special status. Furthermore, the word "*wa thaharaki*" indicates that Allah purified Mary from doubts and from the ordinary condition of women, according to the interpretation of Mujahid. According to Mujahid, the interpretation of Allah's words "*Inna Allah Isthafaki wa Thaharaki*" is that Allah made Mary pure and faithful. Meanwhile, "*wa isthafaki ala nisa al-alamin*" indicates that Allah had chosen Mary above all the women of her time to be obedient to Him and elevated her above them (Al-Tabari and Garir 1978).

In contrast to Al-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi states that Mary is a female prophet. In reconstructing his view, Al-Qurtubi begins by analyzing Hadiths narrated by Bukhari, Muslim, Al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, and Ahmad bin Hanbal (Al-Qurtubi and Al-Ansari 2006):

كامل من الرجال كثير ولم يكمل من النساء غير مريم بنت عمران وآسية امرأة فرعون وإن فضل عائشة على النساء كفضل الثريد على سائر الطعام.

The translation is: "Among men, many have reached perfection, but among women, none have reached perfection except for Asia, the wife of Pharaoh, Mary, the daughter of Imran, and the superiority of Aisha over women is like the superiority of thareed (a dish) over all other foods."

Al-Qurthubi interprets the word كَامِل (kamula) as the peak of perfection. The word *al-kamal* derives from the verb *kamala* or *kamula*, with emphasis at the end of the sentence, and the verb form *yakmulu* denotes perfection. However, it is important to note that the perfection of each entity depends on its context, while absolute perfection is solely attributed to Allah (Al-Qurtubi and Al-Ansari 2006). There is no doubt that in the hierarchy of humanity, the prophets are the most perfect, followed by the *awliya* (friends of God), including the *siddiqin* (the truthful), the *shuhada* (the martyrs), and the *salihin* (the righteous). If we agree with this hierarchy, then the perfection mentioned in the hadith refers to the first level, which is the prophets. This leads to the view that *Maryam* and *Asiah* hold the position of prophets. However, a stronger view is that *Maryam* is a prophet because Allah sent revelation to her through the angel, in line with the pattern of revelation received by the prophets. Meanwhile, *Asiah* does not demonstrate prophethood but holds the status of a *siddiqah* (the truthful) with her own special qualities (Qurtubi 1952).

Al-Kirmani and Qadhi Iyad argue that in this hadith, there is no need for a direct statement about the perfection of *Maryam* and *Asiah* to indicate their status as prophets. They argue that the use of the word "perfect" in this context is meant to emphasize the wholeness and maximum achievement in terms of virtuous qualities, good deeds, and piety. In other words, *Maryam* and *Asiah* reached the highest level of perfection in terms of virtue and piety, and thus, they are considered prophets, even though there is no explicit statement declaring this in the hadith (Al-asqalani, Baz, and Zahidi 1993). The view presented by al-Kirmani and Qadhi Iyad regarding the hadith is considered less accurate. They argue that the hadith uses *uslūb hasr* (restrictive expression) as evidence that these two women are prophets, because it is understood that the most perfect group is the prophets (عبدالله 2018). However, if these two women were not prophets, then no woman would hold the title of *wali*, *siddiqah*, or *shahid*. This argument seems to downplay the reality that many women also possess these qualities.

It seems as though the Prophet's hadith implies that no woman can be a prophet except *Maryam* and *Asiah*. However, if the hadith is only referring to perfection outside of the context of prophethood, then it cannot be used as evidence of the prophethood of *Maryam* and *Asia* (Syafirin 2021). On the other hand, Umar Sulaiman al-Asqari argues that the perfection possessed by *Maryam* and *Asiah* is not a perfection of prophethood. His

argument is supported by a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, which also mentions the perfection of Khadijah (Ahmed 1986).

وروى ابن مردوى من طريق شعبة عن معاوية بن قرّة عن ابيه فقال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: كمل من الرجال كثير ولم يكمل من النساء إلا مريم، وآسية امرأة فرعون، وخديجة بنت خويلد وفضل عائشة على النساء كفضل الثريد على سائر الطعام.

It means: Ibn Mardawaih narrates from the chain of narrators of Shu'bah from Muawiyah bin Qarah from his father, who said: "There are many men who possess perfect qualities, but very few women who possess such perfection, except *Asiah*, the wife of Pharaoh, and *Maryam*, the daughter of Imran. And the virtue of *Aisyah* surpasses all other women, just as *tsarid* surpasses all other types of food." (Katsir 1992)

To analyze the hadith of Ibn Mardawaih above, the first step to take is to evaluate the sanad criticism of the narration, as recorded by Ibn Kathir in two of his books, namely in *Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-Azim*. This hadith is stated to have originated from the chain of Abdullah bin Abi Ja'far al-Razi, who heard it from his father, Tsabit, who, in turn, heard it from Anas. It is also found in the book *al-Nihayah* through the chain of Tamim bin Ziyad, who heard it from Abi Ja'far al-Razi. However, it should be noted that there is no connected sanad from Ibn Mardawaih to Ibn Abi Ja'far in a single chain, nor from Ibn Asakir to Tamim bin Ziyad in another chain. As a result, this hadith cannot be considered authentic in either of the two chains or in one of them (Muhammad 2020).

The hadith mentioned above is typically referred to as a *hadith syad* (weak hadith) due to its differences from the narrations reported by more trustworthy (tsiqat) narrators. By comparison, there are hadiths narrated by scholars like Bukhari, Muslim, al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, and Ahmad bin Hanbal which state, "The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: 'There are many men who are perfect in character, but very few women are perfect, except for Asia, the wife of Pharaoh, Maryam, the daughter of Imran, and the virtue of Aishah surpasses all other women, just as *tsarid* surpasses all other foods.'"

Reconciling the two hadiths above is possible if both hadiths have equal authenticity in their chain of narration, although some scholars have attempted to reconcile hadiths with varying degrees of authenticity. The level of perfection of the ummah after the time of the Prophet Muhammad differs from the period before him, where the level of perfection in the ummah before Prophet Muhammad still allowed for the possibility of prophethood, while after him, the level of perfection only reaches the level of saints (wali). This is related to Allah's statement in Surah Al-Ahzab, verse 40, which declares that Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets.

There are three aspects that need to be considered in this discussion. First, the Prophet (SAW) has stated that no prophet will come after him, that is, Muhammad. Second, in the context of the above hadith, the word "kamula" refers to the final limit and

level of perfection in human rank. Thus, this interpretation aligns with the linguistic interpretation (lughawi) of al-Qurthubi. The interpretation of Mary's prophethood has been a subject of long debate, both in the East and the West. Scholars from the Ash'ari school, such as Abu Hasan al-Ash'ari, have argued that some women can be prophets. They mention six women who are considered prophets: Hawwa (Eve), Sarah, the mother of Musa (Moses), Hajar, Asiah, and Maryam (Mary).

Meanwhile, Al-Qurthubi was not the first to propose the idea of Mary's prophethood. This thought emerged in Cordoba, Spain, during the second half of the 4th century Hijri, or the 10th century CE (Abrar 2017). One prominent scholar of that time, Abu Bakr Muhammad bin Mawhab al-Taujibi al-Qabri, made a controversial statement considering the possibility that women could become prophets and receive divine revelation from Allah SWT. He pointed to Maryam, the mother of Prophet Isa, as one who might have had the status of prophethood. (Ibrahim 2015).

This opinion provoked a strong response from a great scholar, Abu Muhammad Abdullah bin Ibrahim bin Muhammad bin Abdullah bin Ja'far al-Ashili (died 392 AH/1001 CE). He argued that the word "revelation" in Surah al-Qasas, verse 7, namely "wa awhaina," should be interpreted as "inspiration," which is a form of guidance that Allah gives to prominent humans other than prophets (Zulaiha 2017). This view was also supported by Abu Muhammad Abdullah al-Zamaksary, who argued that revelation to women, such as the mother of Musa and Asiah, occurred through dreams. According to him, revelation through dreams can happen to individuals other than prophets (Rusmin et al. 2017).

Another example is the revelation through a dream experienced by Prophet Ibrahim when he was commanded to sacrifice his son, Prophet Ismail. As stated in Allah's words: "So when the boy reached [the age of] working with him, Ibrahim said, 'O my son, indeed I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice you. So, what do you think?' He said, 'O my father, do as you are commanded. Insha Allah, you will find me of the steadfast.'" Therefore, the revelation to the mother of Musa and Asiah, as well as to Prophet Ibrahim, can be considered a prophetic revelation and does not negate their prophetic status (Rahmanto 2021).

Third, Mary was told that she would give birth to a son named Isa. Allah says, "So she took in seclusion from them. Then We sent to her Our Spirit, and he appeared before her as a well-proportioned man. She said, 'Indeed, I seek refuge in the Most Merciful from you, if you are righteous.' He said, 'I am only the messenger of your Lord to give you [the news of] a pure boy.'" This verse explains the revelation to Mary and also records her miracle, including her conception while remaining a virgin. Additionally, Mary was blessed with another miracle, such as food appearing in her prayer niche without knowing its origin, which serves as another proof of the miracles granted to Mary by Allah (Arrois and Yunus 2023).

Second, the mother of Musa received a command from Allah to place her son in the Nile River, with the revelation that her son would become a prophet. Allah says, "And We inspired the mother of Musa, 'Suckle him, and when you fear for him, cast him into the river, and do not fear and do not grieve. Indeed, We will return him to you and make him one of the messengers.'" This verse explains the revelation to the mother of Musa and implicitly mentions the miracle, which was saving Musa by placing him in the Nile River, where he was safely preserved. Later, Musa would become a messenger sent by Allah to the Children of Israel (Wheeler 2013).

Third, Mary was given the news that she would give birth to a son named Isa. Allah says, "So she took in seclusion from them. Then We sent to her Our Spirit, and he appeared before her as a well-proportioned man. She said, 'Indeed, I seek refuge in the Most Merciful from you, if you are righteous.' He said, 'I am only the messenger of your Lord to give you [the news of] a pure boy.'" This verse explains the revelation to Mary and also records her miracle, including her conception while remaining a virgin. Additionally, Mary was blessed with another miracle, such as food appearing in her prayer niche without knowing its origin, which serves as another proof of the miracles granted to Mary by Allah (Rahman and Aziz 2022).

Mary is included in the group mentioned in Allah's general statement, which says, "They are the ones upon whom Allah has bestowed favor, among the prophets from the descendants of Adam, and those whom We carried with Noah, and the descendants of Abraham and Israel, and among those whom We have guided and chosen." When the verses of the Most Merciful are recited to them, they fall down in prostration and weep. The mention of Mary alongside the prophets before this verse indicates that Mary is among those chosen by Allah, as stated in Allah's words in Surah Ali Imran, verse 42.

Fourth, the wife of Pharaoh, Asia bint Mazahim as per the Prophet's tradition:

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: كمل من الرجال كثير ولم يكمل من النساء غير مريم بنت عمران وآسية امرأة فرعون وإن فضل عائشة على النساء كفضل الثريد على سائر الطعام.

Meaning: Many men are perfect in character, but very few women are perfect, except for Asiah, the wife of Pharaoh, and Maryam, the daughter of Imran. The virtue of Aisha surpasses that of other women, just as Tsarid surpasses all other foods.

Asiah possessed extraordinary virtue, as she chose death at the hands of the king and endured worldly torment rather than live in the luxury of the king's palace. Her foresight regarding the prophethood of Moses became a reality; in this regard, Asiah declared that Moses was the comfort of her heart (Aufi 2021). Al-Qurthubi interprets the phrase "wa umuhu shiddiqah" in the context of Maryam (the mother of Isa), describing her as someone who confirmed the words of her Lord and the messages her son conveyed. Allah says, "And [remember] Maryam, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity,

and We breathed into her from Our spirit, and she confirmed the words of her Lord and His Books, and she was of the obedient"(Al-Qurtubi and Al-Ansari 2006).

Thus, this interpretation is not related to Maryam as a "shiddiqin" as explained by al-Tabari. In fact, al-Qurthubi refutes the opinion that Maryam did not possess prophethood, arguing that Prophet Idris is referred to as "shiddiqin" in the Qur'an, as stated by Allah: "And mention in the Book, Idris. Indeed, he was a man of truth and a prophet." In his interpretation, al-Qurthubi does not mention any other prophet, besides Prophet Idris, who is described in the Qur'an with the attribute of "shiddiq," such as Prophet Ibrahim and Prophet Yusuf.

3 CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study reveals an important finding that the majority of Muslim intellectuals still have not reached a consensus regarding the existence of female prophets. The research shows a significant difference in views between two prominent exegists, Al-Tabari and Al-Qurthubi, in understanding the signs of prophethood as explained in the Qur'an. Al-Tabari explicitly does not reject the possibility of female prophethood, particularly that of Mary. However, his interpretation of Surah Al-Imran, verse 42, implies uncertainty and tends to support the view that rejects this possibility. In contrast, Al-Qurthubi argues that the same verse supports the possibility of Mary being a female prophet. This difference in understanding is influenced by their respective methodologies in exegesis and theological perspectives. Al-Qurthubi more strongly supports the idea of female prophets, including Mary, referring to interpretations of certain verses and hadiths that highlight the perfection of women in the context of prophethood. On the other hand, Al-Tabari tends to adopt a historical and linguistic approach, which could potentially lead to a rejection of female prophethood.

Thus, this research makes a significant scholarly contribution by challenging and questioning the validity of previous views on female prophethood in the tradition of exegesis. However, this study also has limitations that must be acknowledged. The limited exploration of the arguments and evidence used by Al-Tabari and Al-Qurthubi in their exegeses requires further investigation. Future research is expected to adopt a deeper critical approach to their methodologies and the evidence they use, as well as uncover the ideological reasons behind both interpretations. With a more comprehensive result, understanding the differences in these views can be optimized, leading to the formulation of more accurate policies in the context of studying female prophethood in Islam.

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