Article

The Queen of Sheba in the Sunni Exegetical Tradition

Ismail Lala [ID]

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Gulf University of Science and Technology, Hawally 32093, Kuwait; lala.i@gust.edu.kw

Abstract: Sunni exegetes repeatedly assert the authority of the Qurʾan to explain itself, and the authority of the prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) or early interpretations when explanations cannot be found in the Qurʾan. Yet the treatment that the Queen of Sheba receives by the exegetes reveals that, contrary to their assertions, they are influenced by and are products of their cultural and social milieux. This leads to increasingly androcentric accretions in the Sunni exegetical tradition that depart noticeably from the plain reading of the text. Early *tafsīrs*, such as that of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767), generally remain more faithful to the literal Qurʾanic reading and promulgate a highly positive impression of the Queen of Sheba's character and leadership style. Later commentaries, however, including those of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and ʿImād al-Dīn ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), inevitably influenced by their time, seem to present a more androcentric interpretation that diminishes the agency of the Queen.

Keywords: Qurʾan; exegesis; Bilqīs; Sunni; Muqātil ibn Sulaymān; Al-Ṭabarī; Ibn Kathīr

1. Introduction

The role and portrayal of women in the Islamic past generally and in the Qurʾan specifically has been thoroughly interrogated by modern scholarship. Feminist thinkers question whether the overt maleness of the genre of premodern Qurʾanic exegesis can make meaningful pronouncements about women or whether its ostensible androcentrism inevitably leads to a skewed and biased interpretation of the Qurʾan (Abugideiri 2010; Afsaruddin 2020). Asma Barlas succinctly characterises the problem by observing that.

Muslims have interpreted it (the Qurʾan) as privileging men, which is why the history of Qurʾanic exegesis is more than a moment, or series of moments, of "patriarchalism". It is, rather, a millennium-long history of Muslim patriarchy itself (Barlas 2016, p. 28).

Major proponents of this movement, including Amina Wadud (1999), Fatima Mernissi (1991) and Riffat Hassan (1991, pp. 39–69), among many others, revisit the interpretations of the Qurʾan (and *ḥadīth*), applying feminine hermeneutics, to disinter underlying biases and perceptions that may have influenced interpretations of exegetes. In essence, they "are concerned with 'going back to the sources' and re-evaluating the Qurʾan independently" (Hidayatullah 2014). While this study agrees that intrinsic patriarchal biases have coloured the premodern interpretation of the Qurʾan, it questions whether feminine hermeneutics is the corrective to this, for as Barlas astutely observes, "it is not necessary to use feminine hermeneutics to read the Qurʾan as an anti-patriarchal and egalitarian text" (Guardi 2004, p. 313). This is because refashioning the Qurʾan as a "feminist text" (Barlas 2002, p. 19) undermines the intrinsic egalitarianism of the text. The author agrees with the assessment of Barlas that the Qurʾan is fundamentally egalitarian, yet the androcentric interpretations of some exegetes, due to powerful influences of their socio-cultural milieux, have supressed this feature, as will be shown in the depiction of Bilqīs.[1]

1.1. Aims and Objectives

This study focusses on the story of the Queen of Sheba in the Sunni exegetical tradition to analyse the way in which she is projected. Although not named in the Qurʾan or in

any of the other Abrahamic scriptures in which she also features, the Queen of Sheba is commonly identified as Bilqīs.[2] This article interrogates the interpretative model of each work and scrutinises the resultant interpretations. Subsequently, it conducts a diachronic analysis to see how the perception and projection of Bilqīs changed over time and whether it remained faithful or strayed from the "plain-sense" of the Qur'anic text.

1.2. Problems with Interpreting the Qur'an

One of the fundamental problems interpreters of the Qur'an confront is whether it can have a "plain-sense" meaning: does the Qur'an gain its significance only through interpretation, or does the text itself have an intrinsic, basic meaning that interpreters merely flesh out? Moreover, these considerations operate at differing semantic planes—that of individual words, and on a more general level of overall meaning of verses, thereby compounding the problem.[3] The author agrees with Toshihiko Izutsu and Karen Bauer who assert that retrojected postmodern readings of the Qur'an that seek to evacuate all significations and denotations are inconsistent with the way in which premodern exegetes would have understood or interacted with the text (Bauer 2015, p. 11). As such, we *can* speak of a plain-sense of the Qur'an that consists of a "basic meaning" of its individual words (Izutsu [1964] 1998, p. 19; Izutsu [1959] 2002, pp. 119–78) and an "inherent meaning" (Bauer 2015, p. 11) of its verses.

Another issue that demands our attention is the interaction between the micro and macro-level readings of the Qur'an, in the parlance of Walid Saleh (2004, p. 15; Geissinger 2015, p. 9), or how the synchronic and diachronic readings are related. This arena investigates the nexus of the plain-meanings of the Qur'an with the development and proliferation of its meanings. For, as Bauer notes, "scholars of medieval *tafsīr* have long acknowledged that this genre develops through time . . . there were different types of works, written for different audiences" (Bauer 2015, p. 11).

With the accumulation of interpretations and opinions, polyvalent readings that accommodated various meanings developed (Calder 1993, pp. 101–38). Yet recent scholars suggest that the characterisation of encyclopaedic commentaries, such as those of Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), as simply "storehouses" of all interpretive material from prophetic and early sources, is misguided (Saleh 2016, pp. 180–209, 193). These commentaries may have been the culmination of a stratigraphic exegetical process (Savant 2013, p. 17); however, each exegete did not simply transmit, but "also modified and even erased past interpretations" (Bauer 2015, p. 12). With this in mind, it is difficult to speak of representative exegetical voices in the *tafsīr* tradition in the same way as we used to (Saleh 2016, p. 191). Nevertheless, this does not mean that we cannot select the loudest voices, ones that exerted an undeniable influence on the tradition, whilst simultaneously acknowledging that their voice was merely "one voice among many" (Saleh 2016, p. 191).

1.3. Selection of Commentaries

The three orthodox Sunni commentaries selected for this study are:

1. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767);
2. *Jāmi' al-bayān fī ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* by Al-Ṭabarī;
3. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm* by 'Imād al-Dīn ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373).

There are many reasons for the selection of these commentaries. The *tafsīr* of Muqātil is the earliest complete work we have from this genre, which is only one of the reasons it has exerted such an indelible impact on the genre.[4] As Nicolai Sinai points out, "Muqātil appears to have been among the first scholars who worked their way through the entire Qur'an, from beginning to end, rather than merely transmitting glosses on selected textual segments" (Sinai 2014, p. 130). This became standard *modus operandi* in the genre, as is known. So, too, did the intra-textual awareness of Muqātil, which becomes a feature of later commentaries. It is these characteristics of the work that induce Sinai to declare that "the subsequent *tafsīr* tradition follows squarely in the footsteps of Muqātil, and his commentary appears, indeed, to form a sort of milestone" (Sinai 2014, p. 131).

The second work that forms the focus of this study hardly requires justification; arguably the subject of the most sustained scrutiny of the western scholarly gaze, Al-Ṭabarī's commentary has been so meticulously studied that Saleh concludes that his mode of interpretation now represents the Sunnī hermeneutics of classical Islam: Al-Ṭabarī is taken as the normative expression of the tradition, which leaves us with the impression that *ahl al-ḥadīth* is the major voice in this hermeneutical edifice (Saleh 2016, p. 181).

If Muqātil's work represents the incipient phase of the commentary genre, "the formative period of Qurʾanic tafsir production" (Hidayatullah 2014, p. 25) that "emerged in the "early eighth century . . . (and) extended into early ninth century CE" (Hidayatullah 2014, p. 25) then Al-Ṭabarī's is the "landmark work of . . . (the) late period" (Hidayatullah 2014, pp. 25–26) that began in the 10th century. Much has been made of the "comprehensive, hadith-based format" (Hidayatullah 2014, p. 25) of this period, and Al-Ṭabarī does seem to embody this tendency, yet, as Saleh has shown, Al-Ṭabarī was "far more ideological, far more radical in his work than we have hitherto realised. He was not gathering the Sunnī collective memory so much as reshaping it" (Saleh 2016, p. 186).

Moreover, his purported *ḥadīth*-centrism is called into serious question when one notes the plethora of detailed explanations that omit prior sources, as Saleh observes,

> Al-Ṭabarī's frequent practice of offering lengthy interpretations that are not accompanied by the citation of authorities has gone mostly unnoticed, and yet it is a fundamental part of his exegetical work (Saleh 2016, p. 188).

No less significant is his omission of Muqātil as a source. It was previously assumed that Muqātil's absence from Al-Ṭabarī's work signified that the former did not wield a great deal of influence on the *tafsīr* tradition (Sinai 2014, pp. 116–17; Saleh 2016, p. 206), but with the recasting of Al-Ṭabarī as a shaper of the tradition and not just a storer of it, it now seems that his deliberate omission was an attempt to exclude Muqātil from the conversation and that he wields an inordinate amount of influence on Al-Ṭabarī (Saleh 2016, pp. 188–93).

The third and final Sunni work under consideration is emblematic of a radical shift of parochialisation and monovalency in the tradition and merits our attention for this reason (Calder 1993), as well as its outsized present-day influence (Hidayatullah 2014, p. 26). Ibn Kathīr's *tafsīr* is unique, not only in these aspects, but also in its clear delineation of its interpretive program, which we will have occasion to visit later, and which, as we shall see, may not differ as starkly from the hermeneutics of Al-Ṭabarī, or even Muqātil.

This study seeks to circumvent the pitfalls that many before it have succumbed to, as Saleh rightly observes; namely, to deem these voices as representative of their eras. This mantle was long held by Al-Ṭabarī, but as is now apparent,

> Al-Ṭabarī was the representative of one of a multitude of contentious currents inside Sunnism that were attempting to define *tafsīr*. Yet he also enforced a remarkable censorship on large parts of the Sunnī tradition (Saleh 2016, p. 194).

This study assumes the "one voice among many" paradigm when assessing the works under consideration. At the same time, however, it acknowledges that these voices exerted an inordinate amount of influence on the tradition. Though by no means paradigmatic of their respective eras, as no work can be, they still represent the "loudest exegetical voices" among many others. The author thus takes seriously the wise counsel of Saleh that "it is time now for the Sunnī exegetical tradition to escape the confines of being defined by a single exegete" (Saleh 2016, p. 197), but he still recognises, as Bauer asserts, that we can glean "broad trends" from certain influential works (Bauer 2015, p. 24).

The author would like to emphasise that, whilst the aforementioned reasons justify the inclusion of these commentaries for this study, they do not preclude the inclusion of many others. Indeed, Shahla Haeri makes extensive use of Abū Isḥāq al-Thaʿlabī's (d. 427/1035?) rendition of this story in his *ʿArāʾis al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* and how his version promulgates a patriarchal reading of the Qurʾanic narrative (Haeri 2020, pp. 29–50). There is naturally some overlap between this work and Al-Thaʿlabī's commentary, *Al-Kashf wa'l-bayān ʿan tafsīr al-qurʾān*. Nevertheless, in his commentary, Al-Thaʿlabī adheres more

closely to the Qur'anic narrative and his patriarchal proclivities are displayed in more muted and nuanced language (Al-Tha'labī 2002, vol. 7, pp. 204–15). This study is therefore a preliminary work that hopes to provoke a more wide-ranging investigation of this topic in other commentaries.[5] Subsequent studies would also, it is hoped, scrutinise the interplay between the portrayal of Bilqīs in commentaries and other literature, especially when they have been written by the same author as is the case with Al-Tha'labī.

1.4. The Story of Bilqīs in the Qur'an

The relatively short story of Sulaymān and Bilqīs in the Qur'an tells of how Sulaymān finds out from a hoopoe that there is a woman who has dominion over a large kingdom. She and her subjects worship the Sun. Sulaymān resolves to proselytise them and sends a letter with the aforementioned hoopoe to Bilqīs bidding her to come to him in submission. She consults with her viziers and, against their advice of military combat, decides to placate Sulaymān with gifts. Sulaymān is scandalised by the gifts and rejects them. Seeing that her attempt at appeasement has failed, she makes her way to Sulaymān with her army in submission. Meanwhile, Sulaymān has Bilqīs' opulent throne—a symbol of her sovereignty[6]—miraculously transported to him. He has the throne disguised, with its jewels rearranged. When she arrives, the King asks her if her throne is similar to the one he has. She replies, "*it is as though it were the very one*" (Qur'an, 27:42) Sulaymān then has a palace built of glass with water running under it. When Bilqīs is asked to enter it, she turns up her dress exposing her legs because she cannot see that there is glass under the running water. When she is informed of the presence of the glass, she becomes a believer.[7]

2. Methodology

This study investigates the explicitly-stated or implied hermeneutic model of each of these three exegetes. It will then interrogate how faithfully they adhere to their own interpretive program by analysing the sources of their commentary for the story of Bilqīs. The effects of this will then be scrutinised in the dominant features of their exegesis. A binary method of investigation is thus undertaken: first of the interpretative model and sources, and then of the content of the text itself. Regarding the latter, the study considers three key moments in the narrative of Bilqīs:

1. The reception of and reaction to Sulaymān's letter;
2. The initial meeting with Sulaymān;
3. The events of the glass palace.

2.1. The Interpretive Program of Muqātil, Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr

It is not the objective of the author to provide a detailed analysis of the principles and sources of Qur'anic exegesis. This lies beyond the scope of this study and is not directly conducive to the aims mentioned.[8] Instead, my intention is to scrutinise the principles (and sources) of each Qur'anic commentary as outlined by the exegetes themselves and then see how they align with generally accepted principles. As Muqātil does not delineate any in the introduction to his work, let us first look at Ibn Kathīr and Al-Ṭabarī and then tease out Muqātil's hermeneutic from his approach.

Ibn Kathīr sets out a very specific hierarchy for the correct interpretation of the Qur'an:

If someone asks, "What is the best (source of) exegesis?" The response is that the most correct (*aṣaḥḥ*) way to interpret the Qur'an is with the Qur'an, for what is outlined in one place is detailed in another. And if you cannot do that then go to the example of the Prophet (*sunna*), as it explains and makes clear what is in the Qur'an.

If we do not find an explanation in the Qur'an or in the example of the Prophet (*sunna*) then we refer to the opinions of the Companions (of the Prophet) (*ṣaḥāba*) as they are most knowledgeable about it since they witnessed the contexts (*qarā'in*) and situations (*aḥwāl*) that are specific to it.

> If you do not find an explanation in the Qur'an or the example of the Prophet (*sunna*), and do not find (an explanation) from (the opinions of) the Companions (of the Prophet) (*ṣaḥāba*) then refer the matter to the learned scholars of the generation that followed them (*tābi'ūn*) (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 1, pp. 19–22).

Ibn Kathīr provides an extremely specific hierarchy here for exegesis of the Qur'an. It is in the following order:

1. Verses of the Qur'an should be explained by other verses of the Qur'an. If this is not possible then;
2. The example of the Prophet (*sunna*) is used.[9] This includes what the Prophet said or did, or anything of which he approved, explicitly or tacitly. If this is not possible then;
3. The opinions of the Companions of the Prophet (*ṣaḥāba*) should be adopted. If this, too, is not possible then;
4. The opinions of the generation that followed them (*tābi'ūn*) should be examined. If they all agree on something, it should be adopted.

Ibn Kathīr cuts off the sources of Qur'anic exegesis after the early generations. He is adamant that the interpretation of the Qur'an based on one's opinion is strictly prohibited. Saleh notes that, in stating his interpretive program so clearly, Ibn Kathīr has explicitly implemented his "teacher" Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymiyya's (d. 728/1328) hermeneutic model,[10] which he classifies as "radical" (Saleh 2010, pp. 144–47, 152). This is because, according to Ibn Taymiyya, the Prophet Muḥammad explained all of the Qur'an to his Companions, therefore, he elevates Qur'anic exegesis "to the level of prophetic knowledge" (Saleh 2010, p. 128). In so doing, he implies that "that *tafsīr* is a prophetic Sunna that is distinct from the *Sunna*, yet Sunna all the same" (Saleh 2010, p. 131). The ultimate consequence of this is circumscription of acceptable Qur'anic interpretation to the Companions and Successors because "these interpretations are a part of prophetic knowledge" (Saleh 2010, p. 131). Crucially, says Saleh, this shifts the interpretative paradigm from hermeneutical to epistemological since Ibn Taymiyya offers "a method of evaluating the interpretive tradition, rather than a method of arriving at meanings" (Saleh 2010, p. 143).

It is noteworthy, however, that Al-Ṭabarī subscribes to the same exegetical hierarchy that Ibn Kathīr delineates, although he does not explicitly say so. Indeed, Ibn Kathīr's overt reliance on Al-Ṭabarī—whom he cites numerous times during the course of describing his hierarchy—is a testament to the former's agreement with Al-Ṭabarī and that he does not consider Al-Ṭabarī as deviating from this interpretative model (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 1, pp. 19–22). Interrogation of Al-Ṭabarī's own sources of interpretation in the story of Bilqīs as well as his stated principles of exegesis seem to bear out that his hermeneutic did not differ significantly from that of Ibn Kathīr, at least when it came to the most authoritative sources of interpretation. Where he does differ significantly is in not limiting legitimate interpretation to the early generations. It is in this regard alone that one can speak of Ibn Kathīr's (and Ibn Taymiyya's) hermeneutics being "radical".

Interestingly, even though Al-Ṭabarī devotes an inordinate amount of space to proving that interpreting the Qur'an based on the example of the Prophet (*sunna*) is legitimate, he does not feel the need to mention the legitimacy of interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an. This approach is, nevertheless, evident in his commentary. Al-Ṭabarī seems to take it for granted that the Qur'an should be explained by the Qur'an in the first instance (Saeed 2006, p. 43). He thus writes in his interpretation of the verse 4:82,

> *Do they not ponder on the Qur'an*, do the plotters not ponder . . . on the book of God so that they would know that the proof of God is established against them . . . and that you have brought the revelation from God to them . . . in which some parts confirm others, and some parts establish the veracity of others (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 4, p. 182).

Al-Ṭabarī categorically states that parts of the Qur'an confirm and support others. In a similar vein, he writes in his commentary of Q39:23,

> God has sent down the most eloquent message, a book that has topics which
> resemble one another, mentioned over and over again, ... some parts of it re-
> semble others, some parts of it confirm others, and some parts allude to others
> (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 10, p. 628).

Even Muqātil ibn Sulaymān writes in his commentary of this verse that "some parts of it (the Qur'an) resemble others" and "matters are repeated in the Qur'an twice, three times, or even more" (Ibn Sulaymān 2003, vol. 3, p. 131). Indeed, Sinai notes that intra-textuality is a dominant feature of Muqātil's work (Sinai 2014, p. 131). Moreover, it is evident from the general tenor of the commentaries of both Al-Ṭabarī and Muqātil that they subscribe to the principle: the Qur'an should be used to explain itself in the first instance. This should be the first port of call for an exegete. All three exegetes are therefore in lockstep *vis-à-vis* this primary source of exegesis.

Al-Ṭabarī, as stated, takes this for granted and does not even broach the issue in his introduction. He seems far more concerned with affirming prophetic exegesis as a primary source of Qur'anic commentary (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 1, pp. 56–57, vol. 1, p. 66). He writes,

> There are aspects of Qur'anic exegesis that would not be known but for the
> explanation of the Messenger, peace be upon him. ... and the Messenger of God,
> peace be upon him, would not have known it except if God had taught him
> through revelation (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 1, p. 63).

The significance of prophetic exegesis is also underscored in the commentary of Muqātil. In his introduction and the beginning of his exegesis of the first chapter, we see direct quotes of the Prophet along with full chains of transmission (*asānīd*, sing. *isnād*) (Ibn Sulaymān 2003, vol. 1, pp. 23–24). However, Muqātil is not always this fastidious about providing chains of transmission for his citations. Indeed, this is one the principal charges levelled against his exegesis. 'Abd Allāh ibn Mubārak (d. 181/797), for instance, was astounded by the depth of Muqātil's knowledge when he read his commentary, but bemoaned the want of chains of transmission (Ibn Sulaymān 2003, vol. 1, p. 7). Significantly, the only complaint Ibn Mubārak, who was a well-known early authority of *ḥadīth* (Melchert 2015, pp. 49–69), had was the lack of citation of chains of transmission. His lament signifies that Ibn Mubārak recognised Muqātil's exegesis was based on *ḥadīth*.[11] In fact, in the albeit small sample of the story of Bilqīs, Muqātil's foregrounding of *ḥadīth* is evident (see Table 1). It is clear, then, that all three exegetes are, again, in agreement that the second major source of Qur'anic exegesis is a prophetic interpretation.

The third level of exegesis that Al-Ṭabarī allows is the interpretations of "the early generations (*salaf*) (which are) the Companions of the Prophet (*ṣaḥāba*) and the scholars, and the later generations (*khalaf*) (which are) the generation that followed them (*tābi'ūn*) and the scholars of the Muslim nation (*umma*)" (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 1, p. 66). As stated, Ibn Kathīr is far more eager to circumscribe legitimate interpretation of the Qur'an to the generation that followed the Companions (*tābi'ūn*), whereas Al-Ṭabarī makes allowances for generations after this as well. This has a bearing on the overall tone of their respective commentaries: whereas the most oft-cited generation for Ibn Kathīr is the generation of the Companions of the Prophet, it is the third generation for Al-Ṭabarī (Lala 2012, pp. 1–32) (Although, the results from the story of Bilqīs are different, see Table 1). The commentary of Muqātil, being so early, does not have to deal with the opinions of later generations. However, it is significant that Muqātil, in the same way as Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) after him, takes the authority of the exegete to explain the Qur'an for granted, whereas Al-Ṭabarī does not (Saleh 2016, p. 186).

All three exegetes, nevertheless, agree on the general sources of Qur'anic interpretation. Indeed, these are widely accepted principles for Qur'anic exegesis, as mentioned by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) (Al-Suyūṭī 2010, pp. 572–74). And while it would be anachronistic to suggest that Muqātil and Al-Ṭabarī were committed to Ibn Taymiyya's hermeneutical program in the way Ibn Kathīr was, their own stated claims and sources of exegesis seem to suggest that they do, in principle, agree that the Qur'an, the Prophet

Muḥammad, his Companions and the Successors, in that order, should be the foremost authorities of Qur'anic interpretation.

What must now be considered is how far they adhere to their explicitly stated principles. As this study focusses exclusively on the exegesis of the story of Bilqīs, it behoves us to scrutinise how many times in the course of explicating this story each exegete explains the Qur'an with the Qur'an, explains the Qur'an with a direct quote from the Prophet, and explains the Qur'an with the interpretations of the Companions along with the generations that came after them.

2.2. Sources of Qur'anic Interpretation

The first two categories (explaining the Qur'an with the Qur'an and explaining the Qur'an with a direct quote from the Prophet) are easily discerned. In order to determine the next two categories, we must look at all the ultimate sources of interpretation i.e., the last source in the chain of transmission. The results, based on frequency, are listed in the Appendix A. Table 1 summarises the main findings of this analysis.

3. Results

Analysis of Results

There are a number of interesting observations that can be made from a scrutiny of the sources of exegesis in the passages relating to the story of Bilqīs:

1. Muqātil, whose commentary is less than half the length of Ibn Kathīr's and less than a quarter of the length of Al-Ṭabarī's,[12] explains the Qur'an with the Qur'an as many times as Ibn Kathīr (6) and more than Al-Ṭabarī (4).
2. Muqātil uses a direct quote of the Prophet Muhammad to explain the Qur'an once in his *tafsīr* of this story. This is the same as Al-Ṭabarī. Ibn Kathīr mentions a direct *ḥadīth* four times.
3. There is remarkable consistency between the commentaries in that the top generation of sources is the third, both in terms of citations and number of sources.
4. Abū Ṣāliḥ al-Sammān is the only authority to appear in all three commentaries.
5. Muqātil, who does not really name-check sources, only has one explicitly cited source, besides the Qur'an and the Prophet, in his commentary of these passages.
6. Ibn 'Abbās and Mujāhid emerge as the principal sources of exegesis in both the commentaries of Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr.
7. Almost 80% (18 of 23) of Al-Ṭabarī's sources appear in the commentary of Ibn Kathīr.
8. Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, who both wax lyrical about the dangers of interpreting the Qur'an based on one's own opinion (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 1, p. 22; Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 1, pp. 58–59),[13] explicitly give their opinion nine and three times respectively.
9. Ibn Kathīr, who seems to circumscribe legitimate interpretation of the Qur'an to the generation that followed the Companions (*tābi'ūn*) (up to and including the sixth generation according to Ibn Ḥajar's classification), ironically, cites the greatest number of sources from the seventh generation onwards (6).

Table 1. Sources of Qur'anic interpretation.

	Muqātil	**Al-Ṭabarī**	**Ibn Kathīr**
Qur'an citations	6	4	6
Ḥadīth citations	1	1	4
Total citations	8	168	117
Top source	Qur'an	Mujāhid	Ibn 'Abbās
Average number of citations/source	1	6.7	3.9
Top generation (citation)	3rd	3rd	3rd
Top generation (source)	3rd	3rd	3rd
Number of source after 7th generation	n/a *	2	6
Source after 7th generation (%)	n/a *	16.7	12.8
Qur'an (%)	75	2.4	5.12
Prophet (%)	12.5	0.6	3.4
Author (%)	n/a *	5.4	2.6

* These are not applicable to Muqātil as he gives his opinion freely without prefacing it.

4. Discussion of Results

These results indicate that, despite generally acknowledging the same principles and sources of Qur'anic exegesis, the product in each case is different. What is most significant is what the cold facts and figures do not betray, and that is the level of implicit authorial involvement in the commentaries. For though it may appear that being the seventh (nine citations) and twelfth (three citations) most cited authorities in their respective commentaries is bad enough for Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, respectively, who spill so much ink on the dangers of interpreting the Qur'an according to one's opinion. Their involvement in their works is far greater than this; this is because these citations only reveal the explicit opinions of these exegetes when their true contribution is far greater. Saleh has already observed this in the commentary of Al-Ṭabarī (Saleh 2016, p. 188), the present study finds that the work of Ibn Kathīr is susceptible to the same charge.

Al-Ṭabarī, it is seen, at times, harmonises between differing opinions, at others, gives preference to one over others, and at others still, adds his own opinion to the mix (Cooper 1987, p. xxiv; Berg 2000, p. 122; Saleh 2004, p. 141). So even though Al-Ṭabarī seems to champion polyvalent meanings of the Qur'an, the readings are always subordinated to a prior framework of acceptable opinions (Birkeland 1956, pp. 9–10; McAuliffe 1991, p. 44; Kopf 1999, p. 219), with his own opinion frequently buttressed by reports (Berg 2000, p. 128) Indeed, the arrangement of the reports also betrays the author's preference (Tayob 1993, pp. 157–72, 157), with the opinion he favours most, often given first (Tayob 1993, p. 157). Even the chain of transmissions (*asānīd*, sing. *isnād*) reveal Al-Ṭabarī's "ideological agenda" (Berg 2000, p. 126). This is what leads many Qur'anic specialists to deem the general bifurcation of "exegesis based on reports" (*tafsīr bi'l-ma'thūr*) and "exegesis based on opinion" (*tafsīr bi'l-ra'y*) to be a fictitious one because every commentary is based on the opinion of the exegete (Saleh 2004, p. 16). Such a conclusion is given credence by the fact that many Companions of the Prophet refrained from explaining the Qur'an because they deemed any interpretation to be polluted by their opinion (Birkeland 1999, pp. 41–80). Al-Ṭabarī addresses this issue in the introduction to his work and effectively puts it down to the overcautiousness of some Companions. He gives the counterexample of many other Companions who openly engaged in interpretation of the Qur'an and thereby condones, and even advocates, the enterprise (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 1, pp. 62–64).

If the commentary of Al-Ṭabarī cannot truly be called an exegesis based on reports, then neither can the commentary of Ibn Kathīr.[14] For Ibn Kathīr also falls prey to the same trap of subordinating the opinions he cites to "prior intellectual convictions" (Calder 1993, p. 124). Specialists go as far as to assert that his preoccupation with accounts of Jewish origin (*isrā'iliyyāt*) is a means to dismiss those opinions that do not conform to his

predetermined framework of authoritativeness (Tottoli 1999, pp. 193–210, 193). It is in this regard that one of the most conspicuous vestiges of Ibn Taymiyya's radical hermeneutic program is seen in this work, as Hidayatullah explains:

> Ibn Kathīr was heavily influenced by Ibn Taymiyya's suspicion of the use of *isrāʾīliyyāt* to interpret the Qurʾan, his condemnation of *al-tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*, and his strict adherence to the traditions of the Prophet and the Companions. Therefore, Ibn Kathīr's tafsir assigns virtually absolute authority to the example of the Prophet and his Companions, calling for a "radical return" to early Islam and discounting much of the exegetical tradition since then (Hidayatullah 2014, p. 25).

Despite this, analysis of the sources shows that his commentary is suffused with exegetical material after this period. But even all this does not disclose the full extent of authorial involvement because a close reading of the commentaries of Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr exhibit that the exegesis is mainly carried out by the commentators themselves with all the authorities crowded in a few details. This gives the impression of commentaries based on opinions of prior authorities, but it is actually interpretation of the author with the addition of authorities to flesh out some minor details, as Saleh observes in Al-Ṭabarī's work when he declares that there is "extensive material presented without any authority" (Saleh 2016, p. 188). In this regard, the commentary of Muqātil is not substantially different from that of Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. The only difference is that Muqātil does not name-check his authorities as do his later counterparts. This makes it seem as though his approach is more opinion-based (Ibn Sulaymān 2003, vol. 1, p. 10), whereas he adopts the same approach as Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. It is for this reason that the commentaries agree on so many details, such as the name of the man who transported Bilqīs' throne and that he was able to do so because he knew the greatest name of God (*ism Allāh al-aʿẓam*) etc. (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, p. 484; Ibn Sulaymān 2003, vol. 1, p. 10; Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, pp. 522–23). If Muqātil is not as punctilious as his fellow exegetes in disclosing his authorities with full chains of transmission, it may be because the tradition was in its embryonic stages and the norm of citing full chains of transmission was not yet fully established (Gilliot 1999, pp. 1–28, 17; Sinai 2014, p. 114).

All this would suggest that the designation of Al-Ṭabarī as being the major repository of all the knowledge pertaining to Qurʾanic interpretation up to his era is an erroneous one (Berg 2000, p. 122), for as Saleh notes, "he was not 'gathering', he was not only 'adjudicating' the *tafsīr* tradition; he was profoundly reshaping it" (Saleh 2016, p. 198). It is only the knowledge that he had predetermined that would make the cut, which he allowed in his commentary. "He was presenting us then not with how *tafsīr* was at his time, but with how he wanted *tafsīr* to be practised" (Saleh 2016, p. 198). Ibn Kathīr takes this process further by curtailing the number of valid opinions even more. So, the primary determinant in a Qurʾanic commentary is the influence of the author. This is in spite of each exegete adhering to a model of exegesis that aims to mitigate, if not eliminate, authorial influence. This assertion is buttressed by the fact that almost 80% of Al-Ṭabarī's sources appear in the commentary of Ibn Kathīr, yet the commentary of the latter seems to strike a slightly more misogynistic tone than his predecessor. It is therefore the author, and by extension, the era of which he is a product that determines what the Qurʾanic exegesis will be. Bauer argues that, despite their assertions to the contrary, cultural era and context play a significant role in Qurʾanic exegesis. She writes,

> The interpreter of the Qurʾān presents 'truth' by calling forth past witnesses . . . those witnesses include the Prophet's *ḥadīths*, the interpretations of his Companions, grammatical analysis, and the interpretation of past exegetes. But . . . works of Qurʾānic interpretation are rooted in particular times. The present always shapes the interpretation of the past (Bauer 2015, p. 19).

The polyvalent readings of the Qurʾan provide fecund soil for later exegetes to interpret the Qurʾan according to accepted opinions of their time (Wansbrough 1988, p. 45). Qurʾanic exegesis of the story of Bilqīs starts off from a rather neutral and egalitarian perspective but

becomes increasingly androcentric and patriarchal. It is the social and cultural milieux of the authors that inform and affect their opinions, opinions that are the principal factor in the tenor of a commentary.[15] The increasingly misogynistic authorial opinion determines how Bilqīs is viewed and portrayed and marks an ever-widening break from the early *tafsīr* tradition. Let us now look at the exegesis of the story of Bilqīs in the commentaries to see exactly how this plays out.

5. The Exegesis of the Story of Bilqīs

There are many points of interest in this story. In order to facilitate analysis, there will be a strong focus on three key points in the narrative. The first pivotal moment is when Bilqīs receives the letter from Sulaymān.

5.1. The Reception of and Reaction to Sulaymān's Letter

One of the surprising things about Al-Ṭabarī's commentary of this story is that he does not even mention Bilqīs' name until well into the narrative (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, p. 513),[16] and even then, one of the first details we learn is that she was half-jinn with hooves for feet (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, p. 513). Both Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr after him attribute this to Qatāda (d. 117/735) and add, rather pointedly, that Bilqīs did not ascend to the rank of ruler, but was born into it (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, p. 480; Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, p. 513). Haeri elucidates that this was a common feature of medieval exegetes who, influenced by their socio-cultural background, perhaps unknowingly undermined her leadership in this way:

> As she was "historicised" in the patriarchal imagination of medieval biographers and exegetes, she was, however, demonized as half-jinn, her sovereignty was delegitimized, her authority was usurped, and her autonomy was brought under the control of a husband. In the Quranic revelations, neither is she the daughter of a jinn princess—and hence, not an imposter or a usurper ruler—nor is her sovereignty rejected by the rank and file (Haeri 2020, p. 49).

Jamal Elias affirms that Bilqis' leadership was seen as an "aberration" (Elias 2009, p. 70). In another work (Stowasser 1997, p. 65), when Bilqīs was mentioned in his presence Ibn Kathīr cited the prophetic saying that "a people that entrusts its affairs to a woman will not flourish" (Al-Bukhārī 2001, vol. 6, p. 8), despite the fact that Muḥammad said this as a prediction of the demise of the Persian empire, not as a general ruling (Stowasser 1997, p. 66; Lamrabet 2016, pp. 25–35). Al-Ṭabarī does, nevertheless, mention that Bilqīs became very skilled in the art of governing and that she was "intelligent (*labība*) and refined (*adība*)" (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, p. 516). Ibn Kathīr is generally less charitable and cites opinions, on more than one occasion, intimating that she was rather uncouth (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, pp. 482, 486). Interestingly, Muqātil does not make any reference to how Bilqīs came to power.

Whereas the Qur'an makes numerous allusions to Bilqīs' shrewdness, Ibn Kathīr, under the influence of his time, makes relatively few references to it in his commentary (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, pp. 482, 486). He even assigns credit for discerning the true nature of Sulaymān's letter to her male viziers. When Bilqīs read the letter, "they knew it was from the prophet of God, Sulaymān, peace be upon him" discloses Ibn Kathīr, "and that they would have no power to confront him" (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, p. 481). Not only does this attribute true cognisance of the situation to males, it appears to subvert the literal wording of the text in which her viziers advise Bilqīs that they have great military might, insinuating thereby that the combat option would be a feasible one. It is she, in the literal reading of the Qur'anic narrative, who explicitly restrains their militaristic proclivities (Qur'an, 27:34–35).

Not going as far, Al-Ṭabarī, too, influenced by his socio-cultural context, diminishes Bilqīs' agency when he explains that the Queen, in effect, asks for a formal legal opinion (*futyā*) (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, p. 514).[17] This sorts ill with the ensuing narrative in which Bilqīs, having attained the "legal opinion" she sought, disregards it. Wadud categorically rejects the interpretation that Bilqīs' consultation was due to indecision, and affirms that

Bilqīs' "postponement of the decision on this case is not for lack of decisive ability, but for protocol and diplomacy" (Wadud 1999, p. 41). She notes "the Qur'an shows that her judgement was better than the norm, and that she independently demonstrated that better judgement" (Wadud 1999, p. 42). Asma Lamrabet, too, views this episode as paradigmatic of Bilqīs' inclusive leadership style and representative of her perspicacity, neither of which her viziers had (Lamrabet 2016, pp. 25–35). Barbara Stowasser mentions that Ibn Kathīr is elsewhere rather more generous in his assessment of Bilqīs' decision to not wage war and praises her with "*male* powers of discrimination"(Stowasser 1997, pp. 65, 154). Muqātil seems more faithful to the Qur'anic narrative in his exposition of the reception of Sulaymān's letter. He writes,

> So, the hoopoe (*hudhud*) carried the letter in his beak and flew until he reached the head of the woman. He fluttered about a little while people were looking on. The woman then lifted her head, so the hoopoe cast the letter in her lap. When she saw the letter, and saw the seal upon it, she trembled and was humbled, and those soldiers with her were humbled because the sovereignty of Sulaymān, upon him be peace, was due to his ring. So, they knew that the one who sent the bird was a mightier sovereign than she was. She thus said, "A king has sent this bird, surely he has mighty sovereignty, and then she read the letter" (Ibn Sulaymān 2003, vol. 2, p. 474).

Muqātil explains that Bilqīs immediately realised the significance of the letter from the seal over it. Those around her also appreciated the gravity of the situation, but ostensibly, they did so from Bilqīs' reaction to the seal. Bilqīs goes on to explain to her audience that the letter is from a mighty king, even before she reads the contents of it. This intimates not only her unmistakable judgement, but also the confidence of the onlookers in her assessment. She discerns just from the seal, even before she has read the letter, that Sulaymān is a mighty king, and they discern from her reaction that the letter has been sent by someone with greater military might than theirs. Bilqīs then affirms the suspicion of her audience by explicitly stating that the letter was indeed sent by a king of immense power.

Whereas Al-Ṭabarī downgrades Bilqīs' agency in line with medieval sensibilities (Haeri 2020, p. 50), making her dependent on the formal legal opinion of her viziers, Muqātil—consonant with the literal Qur'anic text—assigns ultimate authority and piercing insight to Bilqīs. Even before she solicits their opinion, Bilqīs, according to Muqātil, remarks,

> If this king fights for worldly gain, then we shall provide him with what he desires of it, but if he fights for his Lord, then he will not seek worldly gain or desire it, nor will he accept any of it; (he will accept) only submission (Ibn Sulaymān 2003, vol. 2, p. 475).[18]

It is only after this incisive and entirely accurate assessment of the intentions and objectives of Sulaymān that she consults her viziers, according to Muqātil. He clearly articulates that after she makes this declaration, only "then does she seek their counsel (*istishārathum*)" (Ibn Sulaymān 2003, vol. 2, p. 475). Celene Ibrahim likens Bilqīs' speech to that of a prophet (Ibrahim 2020, pp. 98, 147), and underscores that it was her decisiveness that saved her people (Ibrahim 2020, p. 97). Haeri agrees that the perspicacity and agency of the Queen have been undermined by medieval exegetes. She writes,

> Biographers have paid little or no attention to the Queen's wishes and agency. It is not her brilliant diplomacy and successful peace-making initiatives to avert a certain war that is utmost in the minds of patriarchal exegetes, but rather the control of this "haughty"—read autonomous—woman's body, and restriction of her mobility and sexuality through marriage (Haeri 2020, p. 47).

Al-Ṭabarī seems to cast doubt on Bilqīs' decisiveness because of her collaborative leadership style, whereas Na'eem Jeenah observes that the Queen was collaborative but decsive (Jeenah 2004, pp. 47–58). Further, if Al-Ṭabarī insinuates Bilqīs was indecisive; centuries later, Ibn Kathīr selectively cites the opinion of Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728)

that her viziers were wrong to defer to her judgement, writing, "they entrusted the matter to a boorish woman (*'ilja*)[19] who would beat her breasts" (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, p. 482). Significantly, this opinion does not appear in the commentary compiled from the explicatory notes of Al-Ḥasan in which he even-handedly supplies minor details of the event without offering opinions (Al-Baṣrī n.d., vol. 2, pp. 184–85).[20] Nevertheless, Ibn Kathīr does accept that "after they said to her what they said, she was even more resolved (*aḥzam*) than them, and more knowledgeable about the predicament with Sulaymān"(Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, p. 482). Yet he seems to attribute this to their "magnanimity" in *allowing* her to make the decision that enabled her to come to the right conclusion, and he lays the credit of her being more knowledgeable than her viziers at the feet of Sulaymān because it was he who sent the hoopoe and "she had witnessed in the case of the letter (delivered) by the hoopoe, a truly wonderous thing" (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, p. 482). The insight Bilqīs displayed in her correct assessment of the situation and the erroneous judgement exercised by her male viziers is here due to her having witnessed the miraculous actions of the hoopoe, and their not being privy to this event. Haeri points out that other medieval exegetes even deride Bilqis' viziers as "submissive men" who were manipulated by a "cunning woman" (Haeri 2020, p. 40).

It is at this juncture that the Queen decides upon the exploratory course of action that she adopts, according to Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, p. 482; Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, pp. 515–16). What appears to be something that she had decided upon and divined from reading the letter, or even just upon receiving it, in the literal text and the *tafsīr* of Muqātil (i.e. that Sulaymān was a prophet of God), turns out to be the fruit of her deliberation with her advisors in the *tafsīr* of Al-Ṭabarī, and perhaps even, due to the viziers' perspicacity in the commentary of Ibn Kathīr.

The gifts she sends also provides rich fodder for the exegetes. Muqātil waxes lyrical about this issue. He writes that among the gifts Bilqīs sent were 100 male servants disguised as females and 100 female servants disguised as males, as well as a small box (*ḥuqqa*) with two jewels in them: one with a hole in it and the other without. She pronounced that if Sulaymān was a prophet, he would be able to tell the difference between the males and females, he would be able to tell what was in the small box, and he would reject the gifts. If, on the other hand, he was a king, he would accept the gifts and not be able to tell what was in the small box or tell the difference between the disguised sexes. When they came to Sulaymān, he asked all the servants to perform ablution (*wuḍū'*). Since males wash the back of the forearm whilst performing ablution and females, the front of the forearm, Sulaymān was able to distinguish between them. He then shook the small box and Gabriel came to him and told him what was in it. After that, the emissaries of Bilqīs asked him for water that had not fallen from the sky or sprung from the ground. Sulaymān ordered horses to be brought and they were spurred to gallop until they began to perspire. He then gathered the perspiration and gave it to them. Finally, he rejected the gifts that had been offered by Bilqīs (Ibn Sulaymān 2003, vol. 2, pp. 475–76).

Al-Ṭabarī also mentions from numerous authorities that Bilqīs sent Sulaymān disguised male and female servants along with other gifts as a trial (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, pp. 516–17). Framed in this way, the test of recognising her disguised throne to which Sulaymān subjects Bilqīs becomes a reciprocal test akin to recognising the disguised male and female servants. The entire interaction between Sulaymān and Bilqīs thus becomes a battle of wits, with each sizing up the other. Ibn Kathīr seems a little more parsimonious, for while he also recounts the incident of the disguised servants and perspiration, he says that "most of them are taken from unreliable accounts of Jewish origin (*isrā'iliyyāt*)" (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, pp. 482–83).[21] It is unclear whether he is referring only to the account of perspiration or both accounts. He then shuts down these interpretative possibilities, proclaiming "what is obvious is that Sulaymān, peace be upon him, did not properly look at what they brought, nor did he concern himself with it; rather, he turned away from it" (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, p. 483).[22] By summarily dismissing this incident—which plays such a major role in the commentaries of Muqātil and Al-Ṭabarī—the test of recognising

her throne to which Bilqīs is put by Sulaymān loses its significance of reciprocity. This is no longer a battle of wits; it is reduced to Sulaymān assessing Bilqīs.

5.2. The Initial Meeting with Sulaymān

If we follow the narrative of Muqātil and Al-Ṭabarī, when Bilqīs arrives to meet Sulaymān—who has had her throne miraculously transported to him and disguised—the shoe is now on the other foot. It is Sulaymān who tests the intelligence of Bilqīs, just as she tested his when she sent the gifts. He asks her casually as they pass by her throne, "*Is your throne like this*?" She replies, "*It is as though it were the very one*" (Qur'an, 27:42). This retort is generally acknowledged by exegetes as being consummately canny. Ibn Kathīr writes that "this is the height of intelligence and judiciousness" (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, p. 485). Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr both mention that Bilqīs gave a veiled response (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, p. 485; Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, p. 527), but do not elaborate as to why this was so resourceful. It is only Muqātil who explains:

> She surely knew it [was hers], but she used terms of similitude with them just as they used terms of similitude with her. For if it were said to her, "Is this your throne?" She would have said, "Yes." (Then) it would have been said, "So if it is your throne, then locking your doors did not avail you" (Ibn Sulaymān 2003, vol. 2, p. 478).

Muqātil explicates that, because her throne was a symbol of her sovereignty, Bilqīs could not openly admit the throne was hers as doing so would expose her weakness. At the same time, she could not deny that it was her throne because it would display ignorance. Her response straddles the fine filament between these two undesirable outcomes. This is the reason it is so astute. Moreover, her response was in the same register of ambiguity as their question. In not mentioning all of this, however, Al-Ṭabarī leaves the door open for the possibility that Bilqīs was unsure as to whether it was her throne when the Qur'anic narrative is clear that this was not the case. In fact, the final opinion Al-Ṭabarī quotes is that Bilqīs doubted (*shakkat*) whether it was her throne (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, p. 527).

5.3. The Events of the Glass Palace

There seems to be some disagreement amongst Qur'anic exegetes *vis-à-vis* the episode of the glass palace: what was Sulaymān's objective behind constructing it? The two dominant opinions are that he did it to proselytise Bilqīs or to see whether or not she had hooves for feet (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, pp. 485–86; Ibn Sulaymān 2003, vol. 2, p. 478; Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, pp. 528–30). If it is the former, the trial of the throne becomes a means to gauge the Queen's intelligence so that he could calibrate his message accordingly.[23] Al-Ṭabarī is the only exegete who countenances the possibility that Sulaymān does this as a test for Bilqīs in response to the test to which she subjected him when she sent male servants disguised as females and female servants disguised as males (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, p. 528).

The *tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr seems to dedicate an inordinate amount of space to the issue of Bilqīs' legs, which suggests that it was more of a concern in his time. "Her mother was a *jinni* so the ends of her feet were like hooves of an animal," is how he begins his commentary of this story (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, p. 480). Al-Ṭabarī, too, spills much ink over the issue (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, pp. 528–30). Muqātil mentions the legs of Bilqīs at the end of the story but the episode is framed as a machination of the *jinns* to dissuade Sulaymān from marrying her because they no longer wished to be subjugated by him. Fearing that an alliance between Sulaymān and Bilqīs would lead to many more years of bondage because of "what she has in terms of knowledge", they disseminated a rumour that she had hooves for feet because her mother was a *jinni* (Ibn Sulaymān 2003, vol. 2, p. 478). Ibn Kathīr mentions that she had hooves for feet at the beginning of his commentary and dismisses this at the end stating that it was an error by 'Aṭā' ibn al-Sā'ib (d. 136/753?) which probably came from the people of the book (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, p. 486). Muqātil, whilst also mentioning that Bilqīs' mother was a *jinni*, makes no mention of her legs and

feet until the end and takes pains to underscore that it was on account of her intelligence and her knowledge that the match was an unfavourable one for the *jinns*. This is the reason they circulated such a rumour.

The slight change in tone between the commentaries of Muqātil on the one hand, and Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr on the other, is perceptible. Nonetheless, if it is clear here, it is even more explicit when we read Al-Ṭabarī's repeated allusions to Bilqīs' "donkey-like" legs (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, p. 529).[24] Most conspicuously, it is in the conversation between Sulaymān and Bilqīs that there seems to be a step-change in tone. Muqātil writes that when Sulaymān saw Bilqīs' hairy legs and had an aversion to the hair, she remarked, "Surely you don't know what a pomegranate is until you taste it." To this Sulaymān retorted, "What is not sweet for the eyes is not sweet for the mouth" (Ibn Sulaymān 2003, vol. 2, p. 478). This is where Muqātil leaves the conversation between them. Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr report it rather differently.

Al-Ṭabarī writes simply that Sulaymān disliked the hair on her legs and disapproved of shaving, so she used a depilatory agent (*nūra*) to remove it (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, p. 529). Even more explicitly, he cites the following interpretation:

> They (Bilqīs' legs) were hairy, so he said, "Is there anything that can remove this?" They replied, "Shaving (them)". He answered, "No, shaving leaves a mark." He thus commanded her to use a depilatory agent, and that is what she did (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, p. 530).

Ibn Kathīr produces a more detailed account, but the general tenor is the same as that of Al-Ṭabarī. He explains that when Sulaymān saw Bilqīs' legs, he realised that they were beautiful. However, they were hairy because, reasons Ibn Kathīr, "she had no husband" (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, p. 486). Sulaymān, thus, wanted her to remove the hair so it was said to her, "Shave (them)." She replied, "I can't do that." Sulaymān disapproved of that (anyway) so he said to the *jinn*, "Do something besides shaving that gets rid of this hair," so they used a depilating agent, and she became the first person to use a depilating agent (Ibn Kathīr 1998, vol. 3, p. 486).

It is clear that what Muqātil depicts as a witty repartee between Sulaymān and Bilqīs, in the exegesis of Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, due to a consolidation of gender norms, becomes a man telling a woman what to do and her quietly acquiescing. Haeri observes that "by the Middle Ages the story of the Queen of Sheba had been incorporated into a rigid patriarchal sensibility and biases" (Haeri 2020, p. 50). Inevitably influenced by such sensibilities, the versions presented by Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr diminish the rank of Bilqīs in a way that Muqatil does not.

6. Conclusions

The foregoing cursory analysis of the way in which Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr commentate the story of Sulaymān and Bilqīs has shown that, despite the differences in the end result, their hermeneutic principles and sources of interpretation are similar. The reason their commentaries differ is androcentric accretions have seeped into the *tafsīr* tradition in accordance with cultural perceptions. Ibrahim writes that the story of the Queen of Sheba may be summarised in the following way:

> She is a wise leader with a magnificent throne. She rules her kingdom and vies with Solomon for political power; when she travels to visit Solomon on a diplomatic mission, she correctly identifies her disguised throne, is impressed by Solomon's architectural prowess, and converts to monotheism (Ibrahim 2020, p. 151).

Generally, however, the commentary of Ibn Kathīr seems to deviate somewhat more from this due to the preoccupations of his era, such as the amount of space afforded the discussion of Bilqīs' legs, even though he ultimately dismisses it. Furthermore, the selection of a dubious opinion that the uncultured Queen would beat her breasts in his commentary would have been more in line with the accepted views of his time. Other

aspects, such as giving credit for correct comprehension of Sulaymān's letter to Bilqīs' viziers and disregarding the trial set for Sulaymān by Bilqīs, add to the impression that Ibn Kathīr was operating in an androcentric world that had rigid gender roles assigned. Haeri notes that medieval treatments of this story disregard the primary message of faith and reimagine it in terms of gender rivalry. She writes,

> Indeed, the Queen's gender is immaterial to her leadership and governance. It is, rather, her faith that is at the center of the Quranic revelations. But in its medieval reconstructions, it is gender politics that takes the center stage (Haeri 2020, p. 46).

Al-Ṭabarī, typically, strikes a slightly less patriarchal note—Bilqīs is intelligent but indecisive, she is cultured but meek. Although there are times when the interpretation Al-Ṭabarī offers is seemingly more misogynistic than Ibn Kathīr, such as downplaying Bilqīs' intelligence by allowing the possibility—against the literal word of the Qur'anic text—that she doubted whether the disguised throne was hers. Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's early *tafsīr* generally gives a more nuanced and egalitarian version of events, which is more faithful to the literal text of the Qur'an. Stowasser, in her analysis of this story, observes that,

> As (a)ctors in Qur'anic history, they (women) function as images, or metaphorical extensions, of that historical reality, which God revealed to His Prophet. Muslim interpretation extended the images' symbolic range to accommodate a variety of later readings that often changed their first, Qur'anic, didactic import. Though differing among themselves, the later formulations share in the fact that they were, and are, culturally determined (Stowasser 1997, p. 82).

This "culturally determined" tendency, which changes the "first, Qur'anic . . . import" is conspicuously present in the depiction of Bilqīs. Aisha Geissinger draws attention to the androcentrism of premodern Qur'anic interpretation, and highlights that "the entire enterprise of Quranic exegesis . . . is far from being gender-neutral. On the contrary, its foundational concepts are based on gendered notions that have more often been taken for granted than critically examined" (Geissinger 2015, p. 16). She goes on to explicate the inextricable connection between gender and socio-historical settings: "Gender is a social construction, and gendered categories, whether of persons or concepts, take different forms in various cultural, religious and historical contexts" (Geissinger 2015, p. 16). Moreover, these "historically contingent" (Geissinger 2015, p. 16) gender categories are operational at both "individual and societal levels" (Geissinger 2015, p. 16), as the analysis of Bilqīs has shown.

Bauer believes it is axiomatic that context determines interpretation. Yet, as the analysis of the commentaries of Muqātil, Al-Ṭabarī, and Ibn Kathīr throws into sharp relief, exegetes seem to present their respective works in an ahistorical and "static" way by appealing to the timeless authority of the Qur'an, *ḥadīths* and early sources, postulating that their interpretation of these sources was, by extension, also timeless. She writes,

> Many of the interpreters . . . attempt to abide by theories of interpretation . . . (in which) the ultimate sources of Qurʾānic commentaries lie in the past and are timeless: the language of the Qurʾān itself, the ḥadīths of the Prophet and his Companions (Bauer 2015, p. 19).

However, "context influences interpretation" (Bauer 2015, p. 19). Each exegete is a product of his time, and his commentary is a testament to the way in which women were viewed in that era. Haeri laments that within this story "in its medieval reconstructions and interpretations, the central issue of faith becomes secondary to political rivalry and the need for patriarchal conquest and domination" (Haeri 2020, p. 50). Despite numerous and vociferous protestations, the foregoing has shown that the primary determinant in any *tafsīr*, even those regarded as nothing but repositories of prophetic traditions, is the opinion of the exegete. These opinions are influenced by a number of factors, such as "individual reasoning, genre constraints, social custom/common sense/ethical considerations, and recourse to rational or scientific proofs" (Bauer 2015, p. 24). However, as Bauer notes, "broad trends" can be observed through analysis of these works (Bauer 2015, p. 24). Through

the portrayal of Bilqīs, we see that Qurʾanic commentaries in the Sunni tradition absorb and normalise the more gynophobic interpretations of earlier commentaries in a continual process that leads to the interpretations of later commentaries being quite at odds with earlier ones, and more significantly, with the Qurʾanic narrative itself.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Muqātil ibn Sulaymān

1.   Abū Ṣāliḥ al-Sammān (d. 101/720) (3rd generation),[25] 1 citation.

Al-Ṭabarī

1.   Abūʾl-Ḥajjāj Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 114/732?) (3rd generation), 27 citations.
2.   ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687) (1st generation), 24 citations.
3.   Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Zayd ibn Aslam (d. 182/799?) (8th generation), 19 citations.
4.   Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 110/728) (3rd generation), 18 citations.
5.   General, 16 citations.
6.   Abuʾl-Khaṭṭāb Qatāda ibn Diʾāma ibn Qatāda al-Sadūsī al-Basrī (d.119/737?) (4th generation), 12 citations.
7.   Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), 9 citations.
8.   Abuʾl-Qāsim Abū Muḥammad al-Ḍaḥḥāk al-Hilālī al-Khurasānī (d. 105/723?) (5th generation), 8 citations.
9.   ʿAbd al-Malik ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767?) (6th generation), 8 citations.
10. Abū Ṣāliḥ al-Sammān (d. 101/720) (3rd generation), 4 citations.
11. Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq ibn Yasār (d. 150/767?) (5th generation), 3 citations.
12. ʿIkrima ibn ʿAbd Allāh (d. 107/725?) (3rd generation), 2 citations.
13. Al-Ḥasan ibn Abiʾl-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) (3rd generation), 2 citations.
14. Saʿīd ibn Jubayr al-Asadī (d. 95/714) (3rd generation), 2 citations.
15. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Shaddād (d. 82/701?) (2nd generation), 1 citation.
16. Abū ʿAmr ibn ʿAmmār ibn ʿUryān ibn al-ʿAlāʾ (d. 154/771?) (5th generation), 1 citation.
17. Abū Ḥamza Muḥammad ibn Kaʿb al-Quraẓī (d. 120/738?) (3rd generation), 1 citation.
18. Ḥakīm ibn Jābir (d. 95/714?) (3rd generation), 1 citation.
19. Ḥusayn ibn Abī Shaddād (d. unknown), 1 citation.
20. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd (d. 32/653?) (1st generation), 1 citation.
21. Muḥammad ibn Muslim ibn ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Shihāb ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Zahrān ibn Kullāb al-Qurashī al-Zuhrī (d. 125/743?) (4th generation), 1 citation.
22. Shuʿayb al-Jubāʾī (d. unknown), 1 citation.
23. Yazīd ibn Romān (d. 130/748) (4th generation), 1 citation.

Ibn Kathīr

1.   ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687) (1st generation), 18 citations.
2.   Abūʾl-Ḥajjāj Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 114/732?) (3rd generation), 15 citations.
3.   General, 11 citations.
4.   Abuʾl-Khaṭṭāb Qatāda ibn Diʾāma ibn Qatāda al-Sadūsī al-Basrī (d.119/737?) (4th generation), 9 citations.
5.   Zuhayr ibn Muḥammad (d. 162/779?) (7th generation), 5 citations.
6.   Al-Ḥasan ibn Abiʾl-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) (3rd generation), 4 citations.
7.   Saʿīd ibn Jubayr al-Asadī (d. 95/714) (3rd generation), 4 citations.
8.   Yazīd ibn Romān (d. 130/748) (4th generation), 4 citations.
9.   ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Zayd ibn Aslam (d. 182/799?) (8th generation), 3 citations.
10. Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq ibn Yasār (d. 150/767?) (5th generation), 3 citations.

11. ‘Ikrima ibn ‘Abd Allāh (d. 107/725?) (3rd generation), 3 citations.
12. ‘Imād al-Dīn Abū'l Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn ‘Umar ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), 3 citations.
13. Isma'īl ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suddī (d. 127/745) (4th generation), 3 citations.
14. Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 110/728) (3rd generation), 3 citations.
15. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Shaddād (d. 82/701?) (2nd generation), 2 citations.
16. Abū Ṣāliḥ al-Sammān (d. 101/720) (3rd generation), 2 citations.
17. ‘Abd al-Malik ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767?) (6th generation), 2 citations.
18. Abū Ḥamza Muḥammad ibn Ka'b al-Quraẓī (d. 120/738?) (3rd generation), 2 citation.
19. Sufyān ibn ‘Uyayna (d. 196/812?) (8th generation), 2 citations.
20. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Lahī'a (d. 96/715?) (7th generation), 1 citation.
21. Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Barazī (d. unknown), 1 citation.
22. Abu'l-Qāsim Abū Muḥammad al-Ḍaḥḥāk al-Hilālī al-Khurasānī (d. 105/723?) (5th generation), 1 citation.
23. Abū Rabāḥ ‘Aṭā' ibn Abī Rabāḥ (d. 114/732?) (3rd generation), 1 citation.
24. ‘Aṭā' al-Khurasānī (d. 135/752?) (5th generation), 1 citation.
25. Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), 1 citation.
26. Muḥammad ibn Muslim ibn ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Shihāb ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Zahrān ibn Kullāb al-Qurashī al-Zuhrī (d. 125/743?) (4th generation), 1 citation.
27. Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab ibn Ḥazn ibn Abī Wahb ibn ‘Amr ibn ‘Abīd ibn ‘Imrān ibn Makhzūm al-Qurashī al-Makhzūmī (d. after 90/709) (2nd generation), 1 citation.
28. Shu'ayb al-Jubā'ī (d. unknown), 1 citation.

Notes

[1] The author wishes to make clear that he does not assert the exegetical tradition does not have any positive protrayals of women. The work of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān and other works, as well as the commentaries of Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr in parts, have represented women in a positive light. Hosn Abboud (2005, pp. 183–96) and Younus Y. Mirza (2021, pp. 70–102) have shed light on this topic. The point the author makes is there is a general trend towards more patriarchal readings of the Qur'an due to increasingly powerful sociopolitical influences in which women were held in very low regard during the high to late Middle Ages (Spellberg 1994).

[2] For details on different variations of her name as well its meaning and the wider significance of it, see the study by Shahla Haeri (2020, pp. 29–31). Haeri also discusses the implications of relegating the status of queen to that of concubine in the widespread adoption of the name (ibid).

[3] An excellent analysis of the micro-level of individual words is provided by Toshihiko Izutsu ([1964] 1998, [1959] 2002).

[4] For more information on the significance of Muqāti's work, see Mehmet Akif Koç's study (Koç 2008, pp. 69–101). See also the works by Nicolai Sinai (2009; 2014, pp. 113–43).

[5] One anonymous reviewer legitimately asks whether we can confidently say that the later exegetes are simply reflecting the androcentric bias of their age. Whilst the findings of this preliminary study support that conclusion, a more comprehensive study that interrogates more commentaries from different historical periods and analyses the perception of women in those eras would better equipped us to answer this question.

[6] Jacob Lassner writes that even though there were many symbols of Sulymān's soveriengty, most notably his signet ring that was the mark of God's vicegerent on Earth, nothing "received such prominence in so wide a variety of cultures as did this legendary throne" of Bilqīs. (Lassner 1993, p. 77).

[7] The entire story unfolds in verses 27:20–44.

[8] A detailed survey of the principles of exegesis is given by Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymiyya in *Muqaddima fī uṣūl al-tafsīr* (Ibn Taymiyya 1980) and Recep Dogan (2014). For excellent general works on the Qur'anic sciences, see the wroks of Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Suyūṭī (2010) and Muhammad Badr al-Dīn Al-Zarkashī (2008).

[9] Al-Ṭabarī mentions that ‘Ā'isha bint Abū Bakr (d. 58/678), the wife of the Prophet, said that he explained very few verses of the Qur'an (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 1, pp. 62–64). The reason for this, it is suggested, is that there were few misunderstandings amongst the Companions of the Prophet as to the meaning of the Qur'an since it was revealed in their dialect and they were aware of the reasons for the revelation of the verses (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) (Leemhuis 1988, pp. 13–30, 14).

[10] This view has been called into question by Younus Mirza who sees Ibn Kathīr's comentary as a reaction to the *kalam*-heavy figurative *ta'wīl* of his Shāfi'ī-Ash'arī co-religionist, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) (Mirza 2014, pp. 1–19).

[11] Sinai believes that Muqātil drew heavily from *qaṣaṣ* material to explain the Qur'an (Sinai 2014, pp. 117–22). The results from this study suggest that it is more likely he drew it from prophetic sayings.

12   Based on a cursory analysis of the number of volumes in each commentary, the number of pages in each volume and the number of lines on each page/size of text.

13   They both base this on the traditions of the Prophet, "Whoever interprets the Qur'an according to his opinion, let him assume his seat in the Fire," and "Whoever interprets the Qur'an according to his opinion and is right, is still wrong." The former saying is found in many compilations of prophetic traditions (Al-Tirmidhī 1975, vol. 5, p. 199; Al-Baghawī 1983, vol. 1, p. 258; and Al-Nasā'ī 2001, vol. 7, p. 286). The latter also features in many compilations (Al-Tirmidhī 1975, vol. 5, p. 200; Al-Baghawī 1983, vol. 1, p. 259; Abū Ya'lā 1984, vol. 3, p. 90; Al-Rūyānī 1995, vol. 2, p. 145; Al-Bayhaqī 2003, vol. 3, p. 540; Abū Dāwūd 2009, vol. 5, p. 494; Al-Ṭabarānī n.d., vol. 5, p. 208).

14   Although this is how they have been categorised in many cases (Shiḥāta 1972, p. 176; McAuliffe 1988, pp. 46–62, 48).

15   The various social and cultural structures and mechanisms that influence the interpretations of the exegetes lie beyond the purview of this study. It is hoped that subsequent works will build on this one to disinter these factors.

16   Al-Ṭabarī mentions Bilqis' name a full eight pages after the beginning of the story. Until then, he simply refers to her as the one woman who rules over Saba'.

17   It may be argued that Al-Ṭabarī's language is merely a reflection of the verbal form of this term employed by the Queen of Sheba in the Qur'anic text. However, the use of *futyā*, with all its legal connotations, has the effect of seeming to downgrade the Queen's agency.

18   Al-Ṭabarī also makes this point, but in not foregrounding it like Muqātil, he diminishes its import (Al-Ṭabarī 2005, vol. 9, p. 515). Geissinger points out that "the roles played by authorial selectivity and framing" are among the major problems of the genre (Geissinger 2015, pp. 5–6).

19   *'Ilja* is the feminine of *'ilj*, which is defined as "a harsh, coarse man" (Ibn Manẓūr 1999, vol. 10, p. 248).

20   Al-Ḥasan does use the term *'ilja* to describe Bilqīs when she enters the glass palace (Al-Baṣrī n.d., vol. 2, p. 185), but in this context, it seems he uses it to describe how the harshness of Bilqis' way of life melts away as she gazes upon the splendour of Sulaymān's sovereignty.

21   For more details on *Isrā'iliyyāt*, see the study by Sayyid Reza Moaddab et al. (2016, pp. 47–66).

22   This is another example of Ibn Kathīr's proclivity to strive for one correct reading (Calder 1993, pp. 101–38).

23   Although Mustansir Mir questions whether the glass palace made her convert suddenly. For Mir, the mode of the Qur'an's reasoning is analogical and not logical. So he asserts that the conversion in the glass palace was the culmination of a steady belief that had been germinating a long time before. He writes, "the queen had, for some time, been inwardly convinced of the truth of Solomon's faith (Q. 27:42), and the incident at the glass castle caused her to take the final step of announcing—formally and publicly—her conversion" (Mir 2007, p. 50).

24   Lamrabet notes the tendency of premodern exegetes to describe Bilqīs' legs in this way (Lamrabet, *Women*, 25–35).

25   Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) classifies all the transmitters in terms of generations. The generations listed are based on this. The first generation is that of the Companions of the Prophet, generations two through six are those who have, or could potentially have met the Companions, generations seven through nine are those who met, or could potentially have met the Followers (*tābi'ūn*), and generations ten through twelve are those who narrated *ḥadīths* from the previous group. In terms of dates, the following applies: generations 1 & 2, up to 100/719?, generations 3–8, 100/719? to 200/816?, generations 9–12, after 200/816? (exceptionally, before this as well) (Al-'Asqalānī 1986, vol. 1, pp. 1–2).

References

Abboud, Hosn. 2005. 'Idhan Maryam Nabiyya' ('Hence Maryam is a Prophetess'): Muslim Classical Exegetes and Women's Receptiveness to God's Verbal Inspiration. In *Mariam, the Magdalen, and the Mother*. Edited by Deirdre Joy Good. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 183–96.

Abū Dāwūd. 2009. *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*. Beirut: Dār al-Risāla al-'Ālamiyya.

Abugideiri, Hibba. 2010. Revisiting the Islamic Past, Deconstructing Male Authority: The Project of Islamic Feminism. *Religion & Literature* 42: 133–39.

Abū Ya'lā, Aḥmad ibn 'Alī. 1984. *Musnad Abū Ya'lā*. Damascus: Dār al-Ma'mūn lil'l-Turāth.

Afsaruddin, Asma. 2020. Women and the Qur'an. In *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*. Edited by Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 527–40.

Al-'Asqalānī, Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Ḥajar. 1986. *Taqrīb at-Tahdhīb*. Aleppo: Dār al-Rashīd.

Al-Baghawī, Al-Ḥusayn. 1983. *Sharḥ al-Sunna*. Beirut and Damascus: Al-Maktab al-Islāmī.

Al-Baṣrī, al-Ḥasan. n.d. *Tafsīr al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī*. Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth.

Al-Bayhaqī, Abū Bakr. 2003. *Shu'b al-Īmān*. Riyad: Maktabat al-Rushd wa'l-Tawzī'.

Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl. 2001. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār Tūq al-Najāt.

Al-Nasā'ī, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān. 2001. *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla.

Al-Rūyānī, Abū Bakr. 1995. *Musnad al-Rūyānī*. Cairo: Mu'assasa Qurṭuba.

Al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn. 2010. *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya.

Al-Ṭabarānī, Abu'l-Qāsim. n.d. *Al-Mu'jam al-awsaṭ*. Cairo: Dār Ḥaramayn.

Al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr. 2005. *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya.

Al-Tha'labī, Abū Isḥāq. 2002. *Al-Kashf wa'l-Bayān 'an Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-'Arabī.

Al-Tirmidhī, Abū 'Īsā. 1975. *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*. Egypt: Maṭbaʿa Muṣṭafā al-Bābī.

Al-Zarkashī, Muḥammad Badr al-Dīn. 2008. *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth.

Barlas, Asma. 2002. *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Barlas, Asma. 2016. Patriarchalism and the Qur'an. In *Patriarchal Moments: Reading Patriarchal Texts*. Edited by Cesare Cuttica and Gaby Mahlberg. Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 27–34. [CrossRef]

Bauer, Karen. 2015. *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'ān: Medieval Interpretations, Modern Responses*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Berg, Herbert. 2000. *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam*. Surrey: Curzon Press.

Birkeland, Harris. 1956. *The Lord Guideth: Studies on Primitive Islam*. Oslo: H. Aschehoug.

Birkeland, Harris. 1999. Old Muslim Opposition against Interpretation of the Koran. In *The Qur'ān: Formative Interpretation*. Edited by Andrew Rippin. Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, pp. 41–80.

Calder, Norman. 1993. Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description of the Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham. In *Approaches to the Qur'ān*. Edited by Gerald R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader Shareef. London: Routledge, pp. 101–38.

Cooper, J. 1987. *The Commentary of the Qur'ān by Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dogan, Recep. 2014. *The Science and Methodology of the Qur'ān: Usūl al-Tafsīr*. New Jersey: Tughra Books.

Elias, Jamal J. 2009. Power, Prophecy, and Propriety: The Encounter of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 11: 57–74. [CrossRef]

Geissinger, Aisha. 2015. *Gender and Muslim Constructions of Exegetical Authority: A Rereading of the Classical Genre of Qur'an Commentary*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Gilliot, Claude. 1999. The Beginnings of Qur'ānic Exegesis. In *The Qur'ān: Formative Interpretation*. Edited by Andrew Rippin. Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, pp. 1–28.

Guardi, Jolanda. 2004. Women Reading the Qur'ān: Religious Discourse and Islam. *Hawwa* 2: 301–15. [CrossRef]

Haeri, Shahla. 2020. *The Unforgettable Queens of Islam: Succession, Authority, Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hassan, Riffat. 1991. Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam. In *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions*. Edited by Paula M. Cooey, William R. Eakin and Jay B. McDaniel. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, pp. 39–69.

Hidayatullah, Aysha. 2014. *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ibn Kathīr, 'Imād al-Dīn Abū'l Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar. 1998. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*. Damascus: Maktabat Dār al-Fīḥā'.

Ibn Manẓūr, Muḥmmad ibn Mukarram. 1999. *Lisān al-'Arab*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādar.

Ibn Sulaymān, Muqātil. 2003. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya.

Ibn Taymiyya, Taqī al-Dīn. 1980. *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Rayyān.

Ibrahim, Celene. 2020. *Women and Gender in the Qur'an*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Izutsu, Toshihiko. 1998. *God and Man in the Koran*. North Stratford: Ayer Company Publishers. First published 1964.

Izutsu, Toshihiko. 2002. *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an. Montreal and Kingston*. London: McGill-Queen's University Press. First published 1959 as The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran.

Jeenah, Na'eem. 2004. Bilqis: A Qur'ānic Model for Leadership and for Islamic Feminists. *Journal for Semitic Studies* 13: 47–58.

Koç, Mehmet Akif. 2008. A Comparison of the References to Muqātil b. Sulaymān (150/767) in the Exegesis of al-Thaʿlabī (427/1036) with Muqātil's own Exegesis. *Journal of Semitic Studies* 53: 69–101. [CrossRef]

Kopf, Lothar. 1999. Religious Influences on Medieval Arabic Philology. In *The Qur'ān: Formative Interpretation*. Edited by Andrew Rippin. Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, pp. 215–42.

Lala, Ismail. 2012. An Analysis of the Sources of Interpretation in the Commentaries of Al-Ṭabarī, Al-Zamakhshari, Al-Razi, Al-Qurtubi, and Ibn Kathīr. *Quranica* 2: 17–48.

Lamrabet, Asma. 2016. *Women in the Qur'an: An Emancipatory Reading*. Markfield: Kube Publishing Ltd.

Lassner, Jacob. 1993. *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Leemhuis, Fred. 1988. Origins and Early Development of the Tafsīr Tradition. In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*. Edited by Andrew Rippin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 13–30.

McAuliffe, Jane Dammen. 1988. Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: The Views of Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*. Edited by Andrew Rippin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 46–62.

McAuliffe, Jane Dammen. 1991. *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Melchert, Christopher. 2015. Ibn Al-Mubarak's Kitāb Al-Jihād and Early Renunciant Literature. In *Violence in Islamic Thought from the Qur'an to the Mongols*. Edited by Robert Gleave and István Kristó-Nagy. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 49–69.

Mernissi, Fatima. 1991. *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. Translated by Mary Jo Lakeland. Cambridge: Perseus Books.

Mir, Mustansir. 2007. The Queen of Sheba's Conversion in Q. 27:44: A Problem Examined. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9: 43–56. [CrossRef]

Mirza, Younus. 2014. Was Ibn Kathīr the 'Spokesperson' for Ibn Taymiyya? Jonah as a Prophet of Obedience. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 16: 1–19. Available online: http://www.jstor.org/stable/24280456 (accessed on 20 July 2021). [CrossRef]

Mirza, Younus. 2021. The Islamic Mary: Between Prophecy and Orthodoxy. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 23: 70–102. [CrossRef]

Moaddab, Sayyid Reza, Fazel Asadi Amjad, and Hossein Sattar. 2016. Isra'iliyyat or Traditions of Jewish Origin: A Major Instance of Transferred Traditions. *Religious Inquiries* 5: 47–66.

Saeed, Abdullah. 2006. *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*. London and New York: Routledge.

Saleh, Walid. 2004. *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Saleh, Walid. 2010. Ibn Taymiyya and the Rise of Radical Hermeneutics: An Analysis of An Introduction to the Foundations of Qur'ānic Exegesis. In *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*. Edited by Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed. Oxford and New York: PhilPapers, pp. 123–62.

Saleh, Walid. 2016. Rereading al-Ṭabarī through al-Māturīdī: New Light on the Third Century Hijrī. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 18: 180–209. [CrossRef]

Savant, Sarah Bowen. 2013. *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shiḥāta, Abd Allāh Maḥmūd. 1972. *Tarīkh al-Qur'ān wa'l-Tafsīr*. Cairo: Al-Hay'at Al-Miṣriyyat Al-'Amma Li'l-Kitab.

Sinai, Nicolai. 2009. *Fortschreibung und Auslegung: Studien zur Frühen Koraninterpretation*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Sinai, Nicolai. 2014. The Qur'anic Commentary of Muqātil b. Sulaymān and the Evolution of Early Tafsīr Literature. In *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre*. Edited by Andreas Goerke and Johanna Pink. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 113–43.

Spellberg, Denise A. 1994. *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of 'A'isha bint Abi Bakr*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Stowasser, Barbara. 1997. *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tayob, Abdulkader. 1993. An Analytical Survey of al-Ṭabarī's Exegesis of the Cultural Symbolic Construct of Fitna. In *Approaches to the Qur'ān*. Edited by Gerald R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader Shareef. London: Routledge, pp. 157–72.

Tottoli, Roberto. 1999. Origin and Use of the Term Isrā'iliyyāt in Muslim Literature. *Arabica* 46: 193–210. [CrossRef]

Wadud, Amina. 1999. *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wansbrough, John. 1988. *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.