



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Philosophy & Religion***Beyond Tafsir A hermeneutic reading of Qur'anic narrative and the crisis of interpretive authority in contemporary Islamic thought**Ahmed Laklimi¹, Mohamad Abdullah Alsaied¹, Abdulmaeen Mohammed Ahmed Yaarouf Almansoori¹, Majed Alderei¹ & Nasser Salem Alderei¹¹Mohamed bin Zayed University for Humanities, United Arab Emirates*Correspondence: mohamad.alsaied@mbzuh.ac.ae**ABSTRACT**

Contemporary Qur'anic studies increasingly confront tensions between inherited exegetical authority and modern hermeneutic approaches that emphasize interpretive plurality, historicity, and the dynamic production of meaning. Despite the growing integration of philosophical hermeneutics into religious studies, much of the traditional tafsir discourse continues to privilege doctrinal closure and authoritative interpretation over open-ended textual engagement. This tension becomes particularly visible in the interpretation of Qur'anic narratives, where theological, political, and epistemological projections frequently shape exegetical outcomes.

This study investigates the epistemological structure of interpretive authority within classical and contemporary Qur'anic exegesis through a critical hermeneutic analysis of selected Qur'anic narratives. The article aims to examine how authoritative tafsir traditions construct interpretive closure and to explore the extent to which philosophical hermeneutics may provide alternative approaches to Qur'anic meaning production. Methodologically, the study adopts a critical-hermeneutic analytical framework integrating philosophical hermeneutics, discourse analysis, and comparative textual interpretation. Drawing on the works of Gadamer, Ricoeur, Heidegger, and contemporary Islamic hermeneutic thinkers, the analysis focuses on selected narrative models including Adam, Cain, Joseph, and the vicegerency narratives. The study argues that Qur'anic narratives function as open interpretive structures whose meanings cannot be exhaustively contained within singular doctrinal readings. It further demonstrates that many traditional exegetical frameworks reproduce epistemological authority through mechanisms of interpretive stabilization that limit semantic plurality and historical contextualization. The findings suggest that a hermeneutic re-reading of Qur'anic narratives enables a more dynamic understanding of meaning, textuality, and religious interpretation.

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beyond rigid exegetical closure.

The article contributes to contemporary debates in Qur'anic hermeneutics, religious epistemology, and Islamic thought by proposing a theoretically grounded framework for re-evaluating interpretive authority within modern Qur'anic studies.

KEYWORDS: Qur'anic hermeneutics, Tafsir, Ta'wil, interpretive authority, philosophical hermeneutics, Qur'anic Narrative, Islamic thought, religious epistemology, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Contemporary Qur'anic studies, textual interpretation

1. Introduction

The question of interpretation occupies a central position within contemporary religious studies, particularly in debates concerning the relationship between sacred texts, historical consciousness, and the production of meaning. Modern hermeneutics has increasingly challenged the assumption that religious texts possess singular and fixed meanings independent of language, history, and interpretive context. Interpretation, within this framework, is no longer understood as a purely technical recovery of original meaning, but as a historically situated process shaped by linguistic mediation and human understanding.

Within Islamic intellectual history, debates surrounding tafsir and ta'wil represent one of the most significant manifestations of this interpretive problem. Classical Islamic scholarship developed sophisticated exegetical traditions grounded in linguistic analysis, transmitted authority, and juridical reasoning. However, these traditions frequently prioritized doctrinal stability and interpretive regulation through mechanisms designed to preserve inherited understandings and restrict unrestricted individual interpretation (Ibn Taymiyyah, n.d.; Al-Juwaynī, n.d.; Shalabī, n.d.). In this context, interpretive legitimacy became closely connected to structures of epistemological authority governing the boundaries of acceptable meaning.

The distinction between tafsir and ta'wil occupies a particularly important position within these debates. While tafsir was often associated with explanatory exegesis rooted in transmitted authority and linguistic clarification, ta'wil became increasingly linked to deeper interpretive engagement and semantic plurality. Classical uṣūl literature frequently attempted to regulate ta'wil by subordinating interpretation to juridical and theological constraints (Sanū, n.d.). Consequently, interpretive plurality was often restricted through systems privileging inherited authority over open hermeneutic engagement.

Contemporary Islamic thought increasingly confronts the limitations of these inherited interpretive structures in light of modern philosophical hermeneutics. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd argued that religious texts remain inseparable from the linguistic and cultural systems through which meaning is produced (Abū Zayd, 1990). Such perspectives challenge approaches that treat Qur'anic meaning as fully stabilized within inherited exegetical traditions. Similarly, modern hermeneutic philosophy expanded interpretation beyond textual explanation toward broader questions concerning historicity, understanding, and meaning production. Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and later hermeneutic developments emphasized that understanding is shaped by historical consciousness and interpretive situatedness rather than purely objective textual recovery (Dilthey, n.d.; Schleiermacher, n.d.; Muṣṭafā, n.d.).

Within this context, Qur'anic narrative represents a particularly important field of hermeneutic inquiry. Unlike strictly juridical passages, Qur'anic narratives frequently operate through symbolic, moral, and existential structures capable of sustaining multiple interpretive possibilities. Nevertheless, many traditional exegetical approaches subjected these narratives to processes of doctrinal stabilization that redirected narrative meaning toward theological, juridical, or sectarian objectives. Interpretive activity consequently often reflected the epistemological assumptions of exegetical traditions rather than the open semantic potential of narrative discourse (Al-Qurṭubī, n.d.; Ibn al-ʿArabī, n.d.; Al-Nasafī, n.d.).

The present article examines the epistemological structure of interpretive authority within Qur'anic exegesis through a critical hermeneutic analysis of selected Qur'anic narratives. Rather than approaching tafsir as a neutral explanatory practice, the study investigates how inherited exegetical traditions contribute to the stabilization of meaning and the regulation of interpretive plurality. The article argues that Qur'anic narratives should be approached as open semantic fields whose meanings remain historically renewable rather than exhaustively confined within singular doctrinal interpretations.

The research problem addressed in this article concerns the persistence of interpretive closure within dominant exegetical traditions and the limited integration of philosophical hermeneutics into contemporary Qur'anic narrative studies. Accordingly, the study aims to examine the epistemological foundations of interpretive authority within tafsir traditions, analyze selected Qur'anic narratives through a critical hermeneutic framework, and contribute to contemporary debates concerning religious interpretation and meaning production within Islamic thought.

The article contributes to contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics by integrating classical discussions of tafsir and ta'wil with broader philosophical debates concerning textuality, historicity, and interpretive plurality. The remainder of the article proceeds by reviewing major debates in Islamic and philosophical hermeneutics, presenting the theoretical and methodological framework of the study, and developing a hermeneutic analysis of selected Qur'anic narratives.

2. Hermeneutics and the Problem of Interpretation

2.1 Classical Tafsir and Authority Structures

Classical Islamic scholarship developed highly sophisticated exegetical systems intended to regulate the interpretation of religious texts through linguistic analysis, transmitted authority, and juridical reasoning. Within this framework, tafsir was not merely understood as an explanatory engagement with the Qur'anic text, but as an epistemological structure governing the legitimacy of meaning production itself. The authority of interpretation consequently became closely tied to inherited scholarly traditions, communal transmission, and the preservation of doctrinal stability.

Traditional uṣūl al-fiqh literature frequently approached interpretation through hierarchical systems distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable forms of exegetical engagement. Such distinctions functioned as mechanisms for preserving interpretive authority and restricting unrestricted semantic plurality. In this context, interpretive legitimacy depended largely upon conformity with inherited theological and juridical frameworks rather than independent hermeneutic inquiry (Ibn Taymiyyah, n.d.; Al-Juwaynī, n.d.; Shalabī, n.d.). This tendency contributed to the emergence of what may be described as epistemological closure within traditional exegetical systems. Meaning was frequently treated as something already stabilized within authoritative interpretive traditions rather than as a historically renewable process of understanding. Qur'anic interpretation consequently became deeply connected to structures of doctrinal preservation in which inherited authority often preceded interpretive openness.

The distinction between tafsir and ta'wil similarly reflected broader tensions concerning interpretive regulation and semantic plurality. Classical scholars often associated tafsir with transmitted explanatory authority, whereas ta'wil was treated more cautiously because of its potential to expand interpretive possibilities beyond established doctrinal limits (Sanū, n.d.). As a result, interpretive plurality was frequently subordinated to mechanisms designed to preserve theological coherence and communal stability.

These dynamics became especially visible in the interpretation of Qur'anic narratives. Narrative passages were often incorporated into broader juridical, theological, or sectarian frameworks through selective exegetical procedures that redirected narrative meaning toward predetermined doctrinal objectives (Al-Qurṭubī, n.d.; Ibn al-'Arabī, n.d.; Al-Nasafī, n.d.). Consequently, narrative discourse frequently functioned less as an open semantic field and more as a medium for reinforcing inherited epistemological structures.

2.2 Modern Islamic Hermeneutics

Modern Islamic hermeneutics emerged largely in response to the epistemological limitations of inherited exegetical structures and the growing influence of contemporary philosophy, linguistics, and critical religious studies. Contemporary Muslim intellectuals increasingly questioned approaches that treated religious meaning as fully stabilized within traditional interpretive authority systems.

Among the most influential figures in this field, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd emphasized the inseparability of religious texts from the linguistic, cultural, and historical conditions through which meaning becomes possible. Abu Zayd argued that the Qur'anic text operates within dynamic processes of communication and interpretation rather than existing as a closed semantic structure detached from historical consciousness (Abū Zayd, 1990). His work contributed significantly to contemporary debates concerning textual historicity, interpretive plurality,

and the relationship between revelation and human understanding.

Similarly, modern Islamic thought increasingly reconsidered the epistemological foundations of tafsir itself. Contemporary hermeneutic approaches challenged the assumption that inherited exegetical traditions possess exclusive authority over religious meaning and instead emphasized the role of historical context, language, and interpretive consciousness in shaping understanding. These developments contributed to broader discussions concerning the relationship between authority, interpretation, and meaning production within Islamic intellectual discourse.

The emergence of modern Islamic hermeneutics therefore reflects a larger shift from interpretive preservation toward interpretive inquiry. Rather than approaching tafsir as a finalized repository of stable meanings, contemporary hermeneutic thought increasingly treats interpretation as an open and historically mediated process capable of generating renewed understandings of Qur'anic discourse.

2.3 Philosophical Hermeneutics

Philosophical hermeneutics transformed modern understandings of interpretation by shifting hermeneutics from a technical method of textual explanation toward a broader inquiry into the nature of understanding itself. Rather than treating meaning as statically embedded within texts, modern hermeneutics emphasized the historical and existential conditions through which interpretation occurs.

Schleiermacher expanded hermeneutics beyond scriptural interpretation toward a general theory of understanding grounded in language and human consciousness. Dilthey subsequently connected interpretation to the historical comprehension of lived experience and cultural expression, arguing that understanding emerges through engagement with historically situated human meaning (Dilthey, n.d.).

Later hermeneutic developments further radicalized these perspectives. Heidegger reconceptualized understanding as an existential structure inseparable from human existence itself, while subsequent hermeneutic approaches emphasized that interpretation always occurs within historically conditioned horizons of meaning. Interpretation consequently became inseparable from historicity, language, and interpretive situatedness rather than a purely objective recovery of textual intention.

These developments significantly influenced contemporary religious studies by challenging positivist assumptions concerning fixed textual meaning and interpretive neutrality. Hermeneutics increasingly came to emphasize that all understanding is mediated through historically conditioned interpretive frameworks and linguistic structures. Meaning, within this perspective, is continuously produced through interaction between text, reader, history, and interpretive consciousness (Muṣṭafā, n.d.).

Such perspectives provide important conceptual tools for reconsidering Qur'anic interpretation beyond rigid exegetical closure. Philosophical hermeneutics does not necessarily negate religious tradition itself; rather, it exposes the historical and epistemological assumptions governing the production and stabilization of meaning within interpretive communities.

2.4 Interpretation, Language, and Meaning

Modern hermeneutic thought increasingly recognizes that interpretation cannot be separated from language, discourse, and historical context. Meaning is not simply extracted from texts as a preexisting object but emerges through complex interactions between textual structures, linguistic systems, historical consciousness, and interpretive communities.

Within this framework, textual plurality represents a natural consequence of the openness of language itself. Religious texts, particularly narrative discourse, often sustain multiple semantic possibilities that cannot be fully exhausted within singular doctrinal interpretations. Qur'anic narratives consequently operate as dynamic structures of meaning capable of generating renewed interpretive horizons across different historical contexts. Historicity similarly occupies a central place within hermeneutic approaches to interpretation. Understanding is always shaped by historically situated consciousness, cultural assumptions, and linguistic mediation. Religious interpretation therefore cannot be isolated from the temporal and historical conditions through which meaning becomes intelligible.

The relationship between language and meaning also reveals the extent to which interpretation is shaped by broader epistemological and discursive structures. Interpretive traditions frequently construct

systems of authority that regulate permissible meaning production through inherited conceptual frameworks and institutional forms of knowledge. As a result, interpretation often reflects the historical conditions of interpretive communities as much as the textual structures themselves.

Within Qur'anic studies, these dynamics become especially visible in narrative interpretation. Narrative discourse frequently exceeds doctrinal stabilization because of its symbolic, existential, and metaphorical dimensions. Hermeneutic engagement with Qur'anic narrative therefore requires approaches capable of recognizing semantic plurality without reducing interpretation to unrestricted subjectivism.

2.5 Research Gap

Existing studies in Qur'anic interpretation have extensively examined tafsir methodologies, linguistic analysis, juridical reasoning, and the historical development of exegetical traditions. Classical and modern scholarship alike devoted considerable attention to the technical dimensions of interpretation, including philology, rhetoric, legal inference, and transmitted authority.

However, relatively limited scholarship has critically examined the epistemological structure of interpretive authority itself within Qur'anic exegesis. In particular, insufficient attention has been given to the ways in which inherited exegetical traditions contribute to the stabilization of meaning and the regulation of interpretive plurality through mechanisms of epistemological closure.

Similarly, while contemporary Islamic hermeneutics increasingly engages questions of historicity, textuality, and interpretation, relatively few studies have examined Qur'anic narrative specifically as a hermeneutic space capable of sustaining open semantic possibilities beyond rigid doctrinal containment. Much of the existing literature remains focused either on methodological discussions of tafsir or on broader philosophical debates disconnected from detailed narrative analysis.

The present study seeks to address this gap by integrating philosophical hermeneutics with critical analysis of Qur'anic narrative interpretation. More specifically, the article examines how structures of interpretive authority shape meaning production within tafsir traditions and explores the extent to which hermeneutic approaches may reopen Qur'anic narrative to broader horizons of interpretation.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Hermeneutic Consciousness

Hermeneutic consciousness constitutes one of the central concepts underlying contemporary theories of interpretation. Within modern hermeneutics, understanding is not treated as a neutral or purely objective act of textual recovery, but rather as a historically situated process shaped by language, culture, prior assumptions, and interpretive experience. Interpretation therefore emerges through the interaction between text and interpreter within historically conditioned horizons of understanding.

In contemporary Islamic hermeneutic discourse, this perspective challenges approaches that treat Qur'anic meaning as entirely fixed within inherited exegetical traditions. Rather than assuming that meaning exists independently of interpretive mediation, hermeneutic consciousness emphasizes that every act of understanding is conditioned by epistemological and historical contexts. Consequently, interpretation cannot be separated from the intellectual structures and linguistic assumptions governing interpretive engagement.

Within Qur'anic studies, hermeneutic consciousness becomes particularly significant because of the historical accumulation of exegetical traditions surrounding the text. Classical tafsir literature frequently operated through inherited frameworks that regulated permissible interpretation according to established theological and juridical authorities (Ibn Taymiyyah, n.d.; Al-Juwaynī, n.d.). Hermeneutic approaches, by contrast, emphasize the dynamic relationship between text, interpreter, and historical context, thereby reopening the possibility of renewed engagement with Qur'anic discourse.

Modern discussions of hermeneutics within Arabic intellectual thought similarly emphasized the relationship between understanding, interpretation, and historical situatedness. Contemporary studies introducing hermeneutics into Arabic intellectual discourse increasingly highlighted the role of interpretive consciousness in shaping meaning production and textual understanding (Muṣṭafā, n.d.).

3.2 Interpretive Authority

Interpretive authority represents one of the most important epistemological dimensions of Qur'anic exegesis. Throughout Islamic intellectual history, tafsir traditions developed not only as systems of textual explanation but also as mechanisms regulating the legitimacy of interpretation itself. Authority consequently became inseparable from the production, preservation, and stabilization of religious meaning.

Classical exegetical systems frequently privileged transmitted authority, inherited scholarly consensus, and juridical orthodoxy as primary conditions for acceptable interpretation. Such structures functioned to preserve doctrinal coherence and communal stability by restricting unrestricted semantic plurality. The distinction between legitimate and illegitimate interpretation therefore became deeply connected to broader epistemological systems governing religious authority (Sanū, n.d.; Shalabī, n.d.).

Within this framework, interpretive authority often preceded interpretive openness. Meaning was frequently treated as something already stabilized within inherited exegetical traditions rather than as a continuously renewable process of understanding. This tendency contributed to what may be described as interpretive closure, in which exegetical authority limited the semantic possibilities of Qur'anic discourse through theological, juridical, or sectarian frameworks.

Contemporary Islamic hermeneutics increasingly questions these structures by examining the historical and epistemological conditions through which interpretive authority becomes established and reproduced. Such approaches do not necessarily reject the exegetical tradition itself; rather, they seek to expose the mechanisms through which authority regulates the production of meaning within interpretive communities.

3.3 Textual Historicity

Textual historicity refers to the relationship between texts, historical consciousness, and the temporal conditions through which meaning becomes intelligible. Modern hermeneutic thought increasingly recognizes that interpretation cannot occur outside history because understanding itself is historically situated. Meaning therefore emerges not as a timeless abstraction detached from human experience, but through historically mediated processes of interpretation.

Within contemporary Qur'anic studies, textual historicity remains a particularly sensitive issue because traditional approaches frequently emphasized the transhistorical and absolute dimensions of revelation while minimizing the role of historical mediation in interpretation. However, contemporary hermeneutic perspectives increasingly argue that interpretation inevitably operates within linguistic, historical, and cultural contexts shaping how meaning is understood and reproduced.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd strongly emphasized this relationship between text and historical context by arguing that religious discourse cannot be separated from the cultural and linguistic systems through which it functions (Abū Zayd, 1990). From this perspective, Qur'anic interpretation becomes inseparable from the historical consciousness of interpretive communities themselves.

Textual historicity therefore does not negate the sacred dimension of the Qur'anic text; rather, it highlights the historical conditions governing human engagement with revelation. Interpretation consequently becomes a dynamic process through which meaning is continuously renewed across different historical contexts.

3.4 Epistemic Plurality

Epistemic plurality refers to the recognition that religious texts are capable of sustaining multiple layers and possibilities of meaning. Hermeneutic approaches increasingly reject the assumption that interpretation can be reduced to singular, final, or absolutely closed readings independent of interpretive context.

Within classical Islamic scholarship, interpretive plurality was often constrained by theological and juridical concerns regarding doctrinal coherence and communal unity. Although exegetical traditions occasionally acknowledged semantic multiplicity, interpretive openness frequently remained subordinated to structures of epistemological regulation and inherited authority.

Modern hermeneutic thought, however, increasingly emphasizes that plurality represents a natural consequence of language itself. Because meaning emerges through interpretation rather than existing as a completely fixed object, texts remain capable of generating renewed understandings across changing historical and cultural conditions.

Within Qur'anic narrative discourse, epistemic plurality becomes particularly visible because narrative structures frequently operate symbolically, morally, and existentially rather than through strictly juridical formulations. Narrative discourse therefore resists complete semantic stabilization and remains open to renewed interpretive engagement beyond singular doctrinal containment.

The recognition of epistemic plurality does not imply unrestricted relativism or interpretive arbitrariness. Rather, it acknowledges that meaning production remains historically dynamic and that interpretive engagement inevitably reflects the epistemological horizons of interpretive communities.

3.5 Narrative Meaning Production

Narrative meaning production constitutes a central component of the present study because Qur'anic narratives frequently function through symbolic, existential, and moral structures that exceed purely doctrinal interpretation. Unlike strictly legal discourse, narrative passages often generate meaning through metaphor, representation, symbolism, and open semantic association.

Traditional exegetical approaches frequently integrated Qur'anic narratives into broader theological, juridical, and sectarian frameworks. Narrative meaning was therefore often redirected toward predetermined doctrinal objectives through selective interpretive procedures (Al-Qurṭubī, n.d.; Ibn al-ʿArabī, n.d.; Al-Nasafī, n.d.). As a result, narrative discourse became partially subordinated to inherited systems of interpretive authority. The present framework approaches Qur'anic narrative differently by treating narrative discourse as an open hermeneutic space capable of sustaining multiple layers of meaning. Narrative interpretation is therefore understood as a dynamic process shaped by symbolic structure, historical consciousness, and interpretive engagement rather than merely the extraction of fixed doctrinal conclusions.

This framework operationalizes contemporary hermeneutic concepts concerning understanding, textuality, historicity, and meaning production within Qur'anic studies. More specifically, it integrates discussions of hermeneutic consciousness, interpretive authority, textual historicity, epistemic plurality, and narrative meaning production in order to examine how Qur'anic narratives remain open to renewed interpretive engagement beyond rigid exegetical closure.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a critical-hermeneutic analytical design grounded in contemporary approaches to religious interpretation and textual analysis. Rather than treating Qur'anic exegesis as a purely descriptive or philological activity, the study approaches interpretation as a historically situated process shaped by epistemological authority, linguistic mediation, and interpretive consciousness. The research therefore operates within a qualitative analytical framework concerned with examining how meaning is produced, stabilized, and regulated within classical and contemporary tafsir traditions.

The study further combines conceptual hermeneutic inquiry with analytical examination of selected Qur'anic narratives in order to investigate the relationship between interpretive authority and semantic plurality within Qur'anic discourse. Particular attention is given to the mechanisms through which inherited exegetical traditions contribute to the stabilization of meaning and the restriction of interpretive openness.

4.2 Methodological Approach

The methodological framework of the study integrates three interconnected approaches: philosophical hermeneutics, discourse analysis, and interpretive textual analysis.

First, the study draws upon philosophical hermeneutics as a conceptual framework for examining the relationship between text, interpretation, and historical consciousness. Hermeneutic approaches emphasize that understanding cannot be separated from language, interpretive context, and historical situatedness. Interpretation is therefore approached not as a neutral recovery of fixed meaning, but as a dynamic process shaped by epistemological assumptions and interpretive frameworks.

Second, the study employs discourse analysis in order to examine how classical exegetical traditions construct interpretive authority through linguistic, theological, and juridical structures. Particular attention is given to the discursive mechanisms through which inherited interpretations acquire epistemological legitimacy

and become reproduced within interpretive communities.

Third, interpretive textual analysis is employed to examine the semantic and symbolic dimensions of selected Qur'anic narratives. Rather than limiting analysis to philological explanation or doctrinal summary, the study investigates how narrative discourse generates multiple layers of meaning and how exegetical traditions selectively regulate these semantic possibilities.

The integration of these methodological approaches enables the study to move beyond purely descriptive discussions of tafsir methodology toward a broader analysis of interpretive authority, textual openness, and meaning production within Qur'anic exegesis.

4.3 Selection of Qur'anic Narratives

The study focuses on selected Qur'anic narratives because narrative discourse represents one of the most hermeneutically open dimensions of the Qur'anic text. Unlike strictly juridical passages, Qur'anic narratives frequently operate through symbolic, existential, moral, and metaphorical structures capable of sustaining multiple interpretive possibilities.

The narratives selected for analysis include:

- the narrative of Adam,
- the narrative of Cain and Abel,
- the narrative of Joseph,
- and the vicegerency narratives.

These narratives were selected for several reasons.

First, they occupy central positions within classical tafsir literature and therefore provide valuable insight into the operation of interpretive authority within inherited exegetical traditions.

Second, these narratives frequently became sites for theological, juridical, political, and sectarian projection within classical interpretation. Exegetical engagement with such narratives often extended beyond narrative analysis itself toward broader doctrinal and ideological objectives.

Third, these narratives possess highly symbolic and multilayered structures that make them particularly suitable for hermeneutic analysis. Their semantic openness allows examination of the relationship between narrative discourse, interpretive plurality, and epistemological closure.

Finally, the selected narratives collectively represent diverse dimensions of Qur'anic discourse, including:

- creation,
- morality,
- political authority,
- human agency,
- and existential meaning.

This diversity enables broader examination of how interpretive authority functions across different narrative and conceptual contexts within Qur'anic exegesis.

4.4 Analytical Procedure

The analytical procedure of the study proceeds through four interconnected stages.

The first stage involves examination of selected classical exegetical interpretations associated with the chosen Qur'anic narratives. This stage focuses on identifying dominant interpretive patterns within traditional tafsir literature and examining the theological, juridical, and epistemological assumptions underlying these interpretations.

The second stage analyzes the mechanisms through which interpretive authority is constructed within exegetical discourse. Particular attention is given to:

- appeals to transmitted authority,

- doctrinal stabilization,
- semantic restriction,
- and the regulation of legitimate interpretation.

The third stage applies a critical hermeneutic reading to the selected narratives by examining their symbolic, existential, and open semantic dimensions beyond rigid doctrinal containment. This stage investigates how narrative discourse may sustain broader interpretive possibilities than those preserved within inherited exegetical structures.

The fourth stage synthesizes the findings through a comparative analysis of classical tafsir and contemporary hermeneutic approaches. The study consequently evaluates the extent to which philosophical hermeneutics may contribute to reopening Qur'anic narrative as a dynamic space of meaning production rather than a fully stabilized doctrinal system.

Through this analytical procedure, the study seeks to examine the relationship between interpretation, authority, and textual openness within contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics.

5. Qur'anic Narrative Beyond Interpretive Closure

5.1 Adam and the Problem of Symbolic Meaning

Traditional Reading

The narrative of Adam occupies a foundational position within Qur'anic exegesis and Islamic intellectual history. Classical tafsir traditions frequently approached the narrative through theological, juridical, and cosmological frameworks intended to clarify questions concerning creation, obedience, sin, human nature, and divine command. Exegetical discussions often focused on literal and doctrinal dimensions of the narrative, including the nature of prostration, the status of Adam, the meaning of the forbidden tree, and the theological implications of human error (Al-Qurṭubī, n.d.; Al-Nasafī, n.d.).

Within many classical interpretations, the narrative was incorporated into broader theological systems emphasizing moral instruction, prophetic status, and the origins of human responsibility. Meaning consequently became closely connected to doctrinal stabilization rather than open symbolic interpretation.

Hermeneutic Tensions

Despite the coherence of traditional exegetical approaches, the Adam narrative contains symbolic and existential dimensions that exceed purely doctrinal explanation. The narrative raises broader hermeneutic questions concerning human consciousness, knowledge, temptation, freedom, and existential responsibility. Such dimensions frequently remain partially constrained within exegetical systems primarily concerned with theological clarification.

Hermeneutic tensions emerge particularly in relation to the symbolic structure of the narrative itself. Elements such as the tree, descent, knowledge, and divine instruction operate simultaneously on linguistic, symbolic, and existential levels. The narrative therefore resists complete reduction to singular theological formulations.

Re-reading

A hermeneutic re-reading approaches the Adam narrative not merely as a historical or doctrinal account, but as an open symbolic structure concerned with the human condition itself. Within this perspective, the narrative becomes a representation of existential consciousness, moral responsibility, and the tension between limitation and freedom.

Rather than treating meaning as fully exhausted within inherited exegetical formulations, hermeneutic interpretation recognizes the narrative's capacity to generate renewed understandings across different historical contexts. Symbolic elements consequently remain semantically dynamic rather than fully stabilized through singular doctrinal readings.

Epistemological Implications

The Adam narrative demonstrates how interpretive authority frequently regulates symbolic plurality through

doctrinal stabilization. Hermeneutic analysis reveals that narrative discourse often sustains broader semantic possibilities than those preserved within inherited exegetical systems. Consequently, interpretation becomes an open epistemological process rather than the recovery of fully closed meaning.

5.2 The Crow Narrative and Moral Construction

The Qur'anic narrative of the crow within the story of Cain and Abel represents another important example of narrative openness within Qur'anic discourse. Traditional exegetical approaches frequently interpreted the narrative within moral and juridical frameworks concerned with crime, repentance, burial practices, and ethical instruction (Al-Qurṭubī, n.d.).

However, the narrative simultaneously contains broader symbolic dimensions concerning violence, moral consciousness, shame, and the emergence of human ethical awareness. The crow functions not merely as an explanatory detail within the narrative, but as a symbolic mediator through which moral recognition becomes possible.

Hermeneutic analysis reveals that the narrative exceeds purely legal or moralistic interpretation because its symbolic structure invites reflection upon the origins of ethical consciousness itself. The narrative therefore operates as an existential and anthropological discourse concerning the development of human moral awareness. Traditional exegesis frequently stabilized the meaning of the narrative through transmitted reports and juridical explanation, thereby narrowing its symbolic openness. A hermeneutic re-reading instead approaches the narrative as a dynamic representation of ethical formation and existential confrontation with violence and death.

5.3 Joseph and the Multiplicity of Meaning

Among Qur'anic narratives, the story of Joseph possesses one of the richest structures of semantic plurality and interpretive openness. Classical tafsir literature often emphasized the narrative's moral, theological, and pedagogical dimensions, particularly themes concerning patience, providence, temptation, forgiveness, and divine wisdom (Al-Nasafī, n.d.; Ibn al-ʿArabī, n.d.).

At the same time, the narrative operates through highly complex symbolic and psychological structures extending beyond singular moral interpretation. Dreams, concealment, desire, exile, political authority, and reconciliation function simultaneously on personal, existential, social, and symbolic levels.

Hermeneutically, the Joseph narrative demonstrates the multilayered character of Qur'anic storytelling. Meaning is generated not only through explicit doctrinal lessons but also through narrative structure, symbolic repetition, emotional movement, and existential transformation. The narrative consequently resists complete semantic closure because each interpretive horizon reveals new dimensions of meaning.

This plurality becomes particularly important in relation to interpretive authority. Traditional exegetical approaches frequently attempted to stabilize the narrative within predetermined moral and theological frameworks. However, hermeneutic analysis demonstrates that narrative meaning remains historically renewable and interpretively dynamic.

The Joseph narrative therefore represents an important example of how Qur'anic discourse continuously exceeds rigid exegetical containment through symbolic complexity and narrative openness.

5.4 Vicegerency and Political Projection

The vicegerency narratives represent one of the most politically significant fields of Qur'anic interpretation. Classical exegesis frequently approached concepts such as *khilāfah*, authority, governance, and human succession through theological and juridical frameworks closely connected to broader political and doctrinal debates.

In many exegetical traditions, interpretations of vicegerency became intertwined with historical discussions concerning political legitimacy, communal leadership, religious authority, and governance structures. Narrative discourse was therefore often integrated into broader systems of political and theological reasoning rather than examined solely within its symbolic and existential dimensions (Al-Qurṭubī, n.d.; Ibn al-ʿArabī, n.d.).

Hermeneutically, however, the concept of vicegerency may be approached beyond exclusively political interpretation. The narrative structure of vicegerency simultaneously raises broader questions concerning human responsibility, ethical agency, stewardship, knowledge, and existential accountability.

A critical hermeneutic reading therefore distinguishes between the symbolic openness of narrative discourse and the historical projection of political meaning onto the text. Such analysis does not deny the political dimensions of interpretation; rather, it examines how historical exegetical traditions frequently transformed narrative discourse into a framework for legitimizing broader structures of authority.

Within this perspective, vicegerency emerges less as a singular political doctrine and more as an open anthropological and ethical concept concerning the human condition itself. Narrative meaning consequently remains resistant to complete ideological stabilization because the symbolic structure of the text exceeds any single historical or political interpretation.

This analysis further demonstrates how interpretive authority frequently operates through the selective stabilization of meaning within broader theological and political frameworks. Hermeneutic engagement with Qur'anic narrative therefore seeks not to abolish inherited interpretation, but to reveal the historical and epistemological processes through which interpretive closure becomes established.

6. Discussion

6.1 Tafsir and Epistemological Authority

The analysis conducted throughout this study demonstrates that classical tafsir traditions functioned not only as systems of textual explanation but also as epistemological structures regulating the legitimacy of interpretation itself. Interpretive authority within these traditions was closely connected to inherited scholarly transmission, theological orthodoxy, and juridical stabilization. Consequently, the production of meaning frequently occurred within predefined doctrinal and epistemological boundaries.

This tendency became particularly visible in the interpretation of Qur'anic narratives. Exegetical engagement often redirected narrative openness toward broader theological, legal, and political frameworks, thereby limiting semantic plurality through inherited structures of interpretive regulation. Meaning was therefore frequently approached as something preserved within authoritative traditions rather than continuously renewed through historical and interpretive engagement.

The findings of the present study suggest that interpretive authority operates not merely through explicit doctrinal control, but also through the stabilization of interpretive assumptions that gradually become normalized within exegetical discourse. Such processes contribute to what may be described as epistemological closure, in which inherited interpretation acquires the status of normative meaning itself.

6.2 Hermeneutics and Interpretive Plurality

The study further demonstrates that philosophical hermeneutics provides important conceptual tools for reconsidering Qur'anic interpretation beyond rigid exegetical closure. Hermeneutic approaches emphasize that interpretation is historically situated and mediated through language, consciousness, and interpretive context. Meaning consequently cannot be fully reduced to singular or permanently fixed formulations.

Within this framework, interpretive plurality emerges not as a methodological deficiency but as a natural consequence of the openness of language and the historical dynamism of understanding. Qur'anic narratives therefore remain capable of generating renewed semantic possibilities across different interpretive horizons.

The present analysis does not advocate unrestricted interpretive relativism. Rather, it argues that interpretive plurality constitutes an essential dimension of textual engagement itself. Hermeneutic inquiry consequently shifts attention from the search for fully closed meaning toward examination of the conditions through which meaning becomes historically and epistemologically possible.

Such an approach allows Qur'anic interpretation to be reconsidered as an ongoing process of understanding rather than a finalized repository of doctrinal conclusions.

6.3 Qur'anic Narrative as Open Meaning System

One of the central findings of this study concerns the distinctive hermeneutic structure of Qur'anic narrative discourse. Unlike strictly juridical formulations, Qur'anic narratives frequently operate through symbolic, existential, moral, and metaphorical structures that resist complete semantic stabilization.

The narratives examined in this article demonstrate that Qur'anic storytelling continually exceeds narrowly doctrinal interpretation through symbolic complexity and semantic openness. The narratives of Adam,

Cain and Abel, Joseph, and vicegerency each reveal multiple layers of meaning extending beyond singular exegetical containment.

Traditional tafsir literature frequently integrated these narratives into broader theological and juridical systems, thereby partially restricting their interpretive plurality. However, hermeneutic analysis demonstrates that narrative discourse remains capable of sustaining renewed interpretive engagement across changing historical and intellectual contexts.

Qur'anic narrative therefore functions not merely as illustrative religious history but also as an open system of meaning production. Interpretation within this framework becomes an active engagement with symbolic structures rather than the extraction of completely stabilized doctrinal conclusions.

6.4 Religious Interpretation and Human Historicity

The findings of this study further reinforce the inseparability of religious interpretation from human historicity. Hermeneutic analysis demonstrates that interpretation is always shaped by historical consciousness, linguistic mediation, and epistemological context. Exegetical traditions consequently reflect not only textual engagement, but also the intellectual, theological, and historical conditions through which interpretation emerges.

This perspective carries important implications for contemporary Qur'anic studies. The recognition of historicity does not negate the sacred dimension of the Qur'anic text; rather, it highlights the historical situatedness of human understanding itself. Interpretive traditions therefore cannot be treated as historically neutral or epistemologically absolute structures detached from the intellectual conditions of their production.

The study consequently emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between the sacred text itself and the historical processes through which meaning becomes institutionalized within interpretive communities. Such distinction allows greater critical awareness regarding the relationship between authority, interpretation, and historical consciousness within religious discourse.

6.5 Beyond Doctrinal Closure

The broader implications of this study concern the possibility of approaching Qur'anic interpretation beyond rigid doctrinal closure while maintaining scholarly and hermeneutic rigor. The analysis demonstrates that inherited exegetical traditions frequently stabilized meaning through theological and epistemological mechanisms that limited semantic openness within narrative discourse.

A hermeneutic approach does not seek to abolish classical tafsir traditions nor to replace inherited scholarship with unrestricted subjectivism. Rather, it seeks to reopen interpretive engagement by recognizing the dynamic relationship between text, language, history, and understanding.

Within this framework, Qur'anic interpretation becomes an ongoing intellectual process rather than a completely finalized system of meaning. Narrative discourse consequently remains capable of generating renewed ethical, existential, and symbolic understandings across changing historical contexts.

The present study therefore contributes to contemporary debates in Islamic hermeneutics by emphasizing the importance of interpretive plurality, textual openness, and epistemological self-awareness within Qur'anic studies. More broadly, the analysis highlights the continuing relevance of hermeneutic inquiry for contemporary religious interpretation and the study of sacred texts.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the epistemological structure of interpretive authority within Qur'anic exegesis through a critical hermeneutic analysis of selected Qur'anic narratives. By integrating discussions from classical tafsir traditions with contemporary hermeneutic approaches, the article investigated how inherited exegetical systems contributed to the stabilization of meaning and the regulation of interpretive plurality within Qur'anic discourse. The analysis demonstrated that classical tafsir traditions frequently operated through broader epistemological structures intended to preserve doctrinal coherence and interpretive authority. Within these systems, narrative discourse was often incorporated into theological, juridical, and political frameworks that limited semantic openness through inherited mechanisms of interpretive regulation.

At the same time, the study showed that Qur'anic narratives possess symbolic and existential dimensions that exceed rigid exegetical containment. The narratives of Adam, Cain and Abel, Joseph, and vicegerency each

revealed forms of semantic plurality that cannot be fully exhausted within singular doctrinal interpretations. Hermeneutic analysis consequently highlighted the dynamic and historically renewable character of narrative meaning production.

The article further argued that philosophical hermeneutics provides important conceptual tools for reconsidering Qur'anic interpretation beyond epistemological closure. Interpretation, within this framework, is understood as a historically situated process shaped by language, consciousness, and interpretive context rather than the purely objective recovery of fixed meaning.

The study contributes to contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics by critically examining the relationship between interpretive authority, textual openness, and semantic plurality within Islamic exegetical traditions. More specifically, it contributes to current discussions concerning religious interpretation, historicity, narrative discourse, and the epistemology of meaning production within Islamic thought.

The findings additionally suggest broader implications for Islamic studies and contemporary religious hermeneutics. Reconsidering Qur'anic narrative as an open hermeneutic space allows greater analytical attention to the historical and epistemological conditions through which meaning becomes stabilized within interpretive traditions. Such approaches may contribute to more critically self-aware forms of religious interpretation capable of engaging both inherited scholarship and contemporary hermeneutic inquiry.

Ultimately, the study argues that Qur'anic interpretation should not be reduced to a closed system of doctrinal preservation detached from historical consciousness and interpretive plurality. Rather, the Qur'anic text remains capable of sustaining renewed horizons of understanding through ongoing hermeneutic engagement. The continuing dialogue between Islamic exegetical traditions and contemporary hermeneutic theory therefore represents an important field for future scholarship in Qur'anic studies, religious interpretation, and contemporary theories of meaning.

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