



Comparative Exegesis of Surah Ar-Rūm 1-5: Theological and Socio-Political Perspectives in Nusantara Islam

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Abstract

The Qur'anic exegesis of QS. Ar-Rūm verses 1–5 deserves special attention for its prophetic narrative of the Roman victory over the Persians, carrying profound theological, historical, and socio-political dimensions. This article compares two exegetical approaches found in Marāḥ Labīd by Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani and Kallā Saya'lamūn by KH. Maimoen Zubair. Employing a qualitative method through library research and comparative analysis, the study finds: (1) Marāḥ Labīd emphasizes the miraculous nature of prophethood using the traditional bi al-ma'tsūr approach; (2) Kallā Saya'lamūn interprets the verses in light of Indonesia's independence struggle, underscoring the synergy between Islam and nationalism; (3) the comparison illustrates a living continuity between classical and contextual exegesis within the Nusantara Islamic tradition. These exegetical insights not only affirm divine sovereignty but also nurture both spiritual consciousness and national identity. The study contributes to thematic Qur'anic exegesis by fostering intergenerational dialogue among scholars, framed within Indonesia's socio-political landscape.

A. INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an, as the divine word of God, radiates light from every angle. No matter where it is approached from, it reveals a distinct illumination—each offering insights that may not be the same from another perspective (Shihab, 2007). This suggests the dynamic and multilayered nature of the Qur'an's content, enabling generations of exegetes from various backgrounds to discover new meanings in response to the evolving needs of their time (Fatah & Karim, 2021).

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The interpretation of QS. Ar-Rūm verses 1–5 thus becomes increasingly relevant in the context of Nusantara Qur’anic exegesis. Esteemed scholars such as Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani and KH. Maimoen Zubair have made significant contributions to the understanding and dissemination of the Qur’an’s message within the social fabric of their respective communities.(Arafah, 2022) In *Marāḥ Labīd*, Shaykh Nawawi presents a classical yet enduringly relevant approach, grounded in *bi al-ma’tsūr* methodology and enriched with Sufi dimensions that address spiritual and religious concerns of society.(Cahyo et al., 2022) Meanwhile, KH. Maimoen Zubair, through the work of his student Lora Muhammad Ismail Ascholy titled *Kallā Saya’lamūn*, offers a more contextual interpretation, reflecting Indonesia’s struggle for independence as a parallel to the Roman victory over the Persians.

A number of previous studies have explored the miraculous nature of the Qur’an more broadly. Mustaqim and Umam examined the Qur’anic miracle from legal and scientific perspectives.(Mustaqim et al., 2021) Stevani Elenia focused on its scientific and thematic dimensions.(Elenia, 2023) Wahyu, Lembayung, and Harun analyzed *i’jāz lughawī* from the lens of Ibn ‘Āshūr.(Batubara et al., 2024) There are also studies specifically addressing *Marāḥ Labīd* and *Kallā Saya’lamūn*. Mujahidin and Asror analyzed methods and scholarly commentary on *Marāḥ Labīd*.(Mujahiddin & Asror, 2021) Erlan, Hamdan, and Andri examined Nawawi al-Bantani’s exegetical perspectives; and Muhammad Hasani explored the interpretive methodology employed in *Marāḥ Labīd*.(Cahyo et al., 2022) Qodri and Kamil investigated eschatological contextualization in *Kallā Saya’lamūn*.(Qodri & Kamil, 2023)

Additionally, comparative tafsir has received attention in works such as Sidik’s study on Sunni-Shi’a interpretations of leadership.(Sidik, 2022) Asy’ari and Syam’s comparison of *al-Sha’rāwī* and *Şafwat al-Tafāsīr* on female leadership.(Asy’ari & Syam, 2022) and Haq’s analysis of moral messages in QS. *al-Baqarah*: 34 and *al-Kahf*: 50.(Haq, 2021)

What distinguishes the present study from previous works lies in its integrative effort to examine two models of Qur’anic exegesis by Nusantara scholars across generations using a comparative approach. This research highlights a dynamic continuity between classical tafsir, represented by Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani, and contextual exegesis as developed by KH. Maimoen Zubair. The comparative analysis effectively reveals their methodological differences and interpretive styles, while affirming the unique contributions each made in responding to the needs of the Muslim community in their respective eras.

This study also demonstrates that Nusantara tafsir does not merely preserve the legacy of traditional scholarship but is also capable of adapting to modern socio-political challenges without compromising the core message of the Qur’an. The study’s limitation lies in its thematic focus on a single passage, which does not encompass the broader exegetical methodologies of both scholars. Therefore, future research is encouraged to further explore the interpretive thought of these figures and compare it with other works by Nusantara scholars in order to enrich the discourse of thematic and contextual Qur’anic exegesis in Indonesia.

B. METHOD

This study focuses on a comparative analysis of the Qur’anic exegesis of QS. Ar-Rūm verses 1 to 5, as interpreted by two influential Nusantara scholars from different generations: Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani in *Tafsīr Marāḥ Labīd* and KH. Maimoen Zubair, whose interpretation is preserved through the work of his student, Lora Muhammad Ismail Ascholy, in *Kallā Saya’lamūn*. Using a qualitative approach based on library research, this study aims to explore how both scholars engage with the same Qur’anic passage through different exegetical methods, theological insights, and social contexts.(Naamy, 2019)

The primary data come from the two tafsir texts, while secondary sources include scholarly books, journal articles, and other references related to Qur’anic interpretation and the development of tafsir in the Malay-Indonesian world. The analysis applies a descriptive and

comparative method within an inductive framework. The process involves three stages: selecting relevant data, organizing the material thematically, and drawing conclusions. Thematic organization focuses on key elements such as theology, prophetic miracles, and the contextual relevance of each work. In the final stage, the study identifies both the shared perspectives and distinct features of each exegete, offering a deeper understanding of how classical and contextual approaches continue to shape the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis in the Nusantara.(Abdussamad, 2021).

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Exegesis of Qs. Ar-Rūm 1-5 in Marāḥ Labīd

Marāḥ Labīd is one of Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani's seminal works, rich in both Indonesian sensibilities and social relevance. In interpreting QS. Ar-Rūm verses 1 to 5, Shaykh Nawawi adopts a combined *ijmālī* (general) and *taḥlīlī* (analytical) method.(Ghozali & Aula, 2023) At times, he interprets the Qur'anic verses in a broad, thematic manner, while at other times, he applies a more detailed analytical approach. This can be seen in the way he often begins his interpretation by presenting the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) that contextualize each verse. His exegetical framework is firmly rooted in the *bi al-ma'tsūr* tradition, drawing upon interpretations from the Qur'an, Hadith, and the statements of the Prophet's companions and their successors. This grounding in transmitted sources underscores his commitment to maintaining interpretive authority.(Taimiyah, 1980)

The character of Shaykh Nawawi's *tafsir* reflects a multidisciplinary style that weaves together elements of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), scientific knowledge, literature, social commentary, and mystical insight (*ishārī*). His treatment of legal verses tends to follow the *Shāfi'ī* madhab, although he occasionally references views from other *madhāhib* as well. His *fiqh*-based perspective reveals his deep expertise in the field, which also explains why many of his works focus on ethics and Islamic law, particularly in matters related to family and community. The formal tone of his language, combined with citations from authoritative classical sources, positions Marāḥ Labīd as a work that not only honors the *salaf* tradition but also offers practical answers to the spiritual and social challenges of his time.(Malihah & Habdin, 2023)

In his interpretation of the Roman victory over the Persians, Shaykh Nawawi emphasizes its theological significance as a prophetic miracle. He connects the verses to their historical background, in which the Quraysh polytheists mocked the Muslims after the initial defeat of the Byzantine Empire. To them, Persia's triumph symbolized the eventual downfall of the Muslims as well. However, QS. Ar-Rūm 1-5 was revealed to inform the believers that the Byzantines would soon be victorious again, within a limited timeframe decreed by God. That prophecy ultimately came true, reinforcing its miraculous nature. For Shaykh Nawawi, this victory is more than a political event; it is a divine sign affirming the truth of the Prophet Muhammad's message and the certainty of God's promises. History, in this view, becomes a stage where divine will manifests and validates the authenticity of revelation.(Al-Bantani, 2019)

To support his interpretation, Shaykh Nawawi draws from several *bi al-ma'tsūr* sources, particularly Hadith. One of the key narrations he includes is a *ḥadīth* from al-Tirmidhī, transmitted by Ibn 'Abbās, in which the Prophet Muhammad informs Abū Bakr that the term *bid'* in the verse (meaning "a few years") refers to a period between three and nine years:

عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ قَالَ لِأَبِي بَكْرٍ فِي مُنَاحَبَةِ (الْمُغَلَبَةِ الرُّومِ) "أَلَّا احْتَضَّتْ يَا أَبَا بَكْرٍ فَإِنَّ
الْبِضْعَ مَا بَيْنَ الثَّلَاثِ إِلَى تِسْعٍ" هَذَا حَدِيثٌ حَسَنٌ.

"From Ibn 'Abbās, Rasulullah ﷺ said to Abū Bakr regarding the verse 'Alif-Lām-Mīm. The Romans have been defeated...': 'Should you not have made your claim more precise, O Abū

Bakr? For biḍ' refers to a period between three and nine years.'" (At-Tirmidzi, 1970)

This hadith is critical in confirming the accuracy of the prophecy. In addition to Hadith, Shaykh Nawawi also incorporates reports from the tābi'īn to provide further context for the revelation and its historical setting. (Al-Bantani, 2019) This methodological reliance on authoritative narrations reflects his commitment to delivering a reliable and theologically sound exegesis, one that is not merely speculative but rooted in verified Islamic tradition.

Moreover, Shaykh Nawawi devotes particular attention to the idea of divine intervention in the unfolding of historical events. He interprets the Roman victory as a manifestation of sunnatullāh, or the divine laws that govern the rise and fall of nations. While the Byzantines initially suffered defeat, it was through God's will that they later regained their strength and achieved victory within the period He had promised. His interpretation reminds Muslims that both victory and loss are under God's control, and that history itself is a reflection of divine purpose. According to Shaykh Nawawi, these events cannot always be explained through human logic, but they carry divine wisdom meant to strengthen faith and encourage trust in God's plan. (Al-Bantani, 2019)

Overall, Shaykh Nawawi's tafsir in Marāḥ Labīd presents the Roman victory not merely as a historical episode but as compelling evidence of divine revelation. His interpretation synthesizes classical sources—such as sound hadiths and asbāb al-nuzūl reports—into a framework that is both scholarly and spiritually resonant. By emphasizing the theological meaning behind the event and the certainty of divine promise, he reminds readers of the importance of faith, patience, and submission to God's wisdom. (Zubairin, 2020) His tafsir ultimately offers a profound reflection on how worldly events are orchestrated within a greater divine order, assuring believers that both triumph and trial unfold according to God's perfect plan.

The interpretation of QS. Ar-Rūm verses 1 to 5 by Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani in Marāḥ Labīd reflects the strength of classical approaches in uncovering the theological dimensions of the Qur'an. His emphasis on tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr reveals an exegetical integrity rooted in authoritative sources, reaffirming the position of his work as part of the intellectual legacy of the early generations. One of the logical consequences of this method is the cultivation of a deep conviction in the truth of divine revelation and the purity of the Prophet Muhammad's mission. This tafsir is not merely a textual reading, but a spiritual foundation that strengthens faith, especially during historical moments of hardship such as the colonial era. (Fadliah, 2022) Within the socio-religious context of 19th-century Nusantara, this interpretation served both as moral reinforcement and as intellectual enlightenment, connecting the Roman victory to proof of prophethood.

Beyond strengthening faith, Shaykh Nawawi's interpretation also builds the awareness that history is not a sequence of coincidences, but part of sunnatullah, the divine law governing the world. At a time when Muslims were marginalized under colonial rule, this tafsir fostered the belief that divine help would surely come, even in the face of adversity. The Byzantine victory over Persia is positioned as a metaphor for the eventual rise of Islam from its decline. This is where the logical impact of his tafsir becomes evident: it encourages the faithful not to fall into despair, for history is always governed by divine wisdom. Indirectly, this interpretation becomes a form of spiritual therapy, guiding believers through hardship with theological clarity and encouraging resilient optimism. (Adib, 2022).

2. Exegesis of QS. Ar-Rūm 1-5 in Kallā Saya'lamūn

Kallā Saya'lamūn is a compilation by Muhammad Ismail Al-Ascholy that documents the Qur'anic reflections of KH. Maimoen Zubair, particularly from his teaching sessions. His interpretation of QS. Ar-Rūm verses 1 to 5 follows a thematic approach and is highly contextual, placing these verses within the historical struggle of the Indonesian people. (Manzilina & Zaidanil Kamil, 2024) KH. Maimoen views the shifting power between Byzantium and Persia as a reflection of Indonesia's journey through colonialism and its fight for independence. In his

analogy, the Dutch are seen as the Byzantines from Europe, while the Japanese represent Persia from East Asia, both playing roles in a period of harsh oppression. (Al-'Ascholy, 2023) This tafsir goes beyond literal meaning, offering a reading grounded in Indonesia's history and social context, turning the passage into a source of national spirit and inspiration.

KH. Maimoen's approach emphasizes the harmony between Islamic values and nationalism in Qur'anic interpretation. He argues that Islam and nationalism are not in conflict, but rather can support and strengthen each other, especially in the context of national struggle and state formation. (Al-'Ascholy, 2023) His interpretation serves as both a spiritual and moral foundation for the fight for independence, the building of unity, and the preservation of divine blessings for Indonesia.

Kallā Saya'lamūn explicitly draws a parallel between the Byzantine-Persian conflict and Indonesia's colonial experience, where the Dutch and Japanese are seen as alternating forces of oppression. This change in power is understood as part of sunnatullah, or the divine laws that govern the course of history. Independence, in this view, is not only the result of human effort but also a manifestation of God's will and mercy. (Al-'Ascholy, 2023)

KH. Maimoen's tafsir highlights several key social and political themes, including the idea of independence as a form of jihad in the path of God, the blessings granted to a faithful nation, the importance of Islamic brotherhood and national unity, and the value of interreligious tolerance. His commentary encourages optimism, affirming that Indonesia, despite its long period of colonization, is a blessed nation. As such, Muslims are called to protect that blessing by building a just, harmonious, and inclusive society. Through this lens, Kallā Saya'lamūn not only deepens the theological richness of Nusantara exegesis, but also offers meaningful contributions to the development of a faith-based national consciousness. (Al-'Ascholy, 2023)

In contrast to Shaykh Nawawi's theologically focused approach that highlights prophetic miracles, KH. Maimoen Zubair in Kallā Saya'lamūn brings QS. Ar-Rūm verses 1 to 5 into the historical reality of the Indonesian people. His contextual interpretation is a testament to the flexibility of Qur'anic meaning and its ability to engage with the socio-political conditions of the ummah. The logical consequence of this perspective is the realization that Indonesia's struggle for independence was not merely a political movement, but part of a broader struggle in the path of God, jihad fī sabīlillāh, inspired by Islamic values. This tafsir positions the Qur'an as a source of moral legitimacy for the nationalist movement, and demonstrates that nationalism and Islam are not opposing forces, but mutually reinforcing. (Asif & Azis, 2021)

Furthermore, KH. Maimoen Zubair's tafsir successfully builds a national narrative in which Indonesia is seen as a land favored and blessed by God. The Roman victory over Persia is no longer viewed as a distant historical episode but is interpreted as a symbol of Indonesia's triumph over Dutch and Japanese colonization. Here, the strategic value of his tafsir emerges: it instills a collective awareness that independence is not simply the result of physical strength, but a part of divine will. The logical implication of this reading is the strengthening of a national identity that is both religious and patriotic, encouraging Indonesian Muslims to preserve independence through the values of unity, justice, and tolerance. (Anam & Hasan, 2022).

3. Comparative Perspective on the Exegesis of QS. Ar-Rūm 1-5

The hermeneutical approaches found in Marāḥ Labīd by Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani and Kallā Saya'lamūn, which records the tafsir lessons of KH. Maimoen Zubair, reveal significant similarities and differences. Marāḥ Labīd represents a classical hermeneutic model that combines *ijmālī* (general) and *taḥlīlī* (analytical) methods, with a strong emphasis on *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*—interpreting the Qur'an through the Qur'an itself, authentic Hadiths, and the narrations of the Prophet's companions and their successors. When interpreting verse 4 of QS. Ar-Rūm, Shaykh Nawawi cites the view of the Tābi'ī scholar Ismā'īl ibn 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Suddī (Adz-Dzahabi, 1980):

قال السدي: فرح النبي ﷺ والمؤمنون بظهورهم على المشركين يوم بدر وظهور أهل الكتاب على أهل الشرك

"Al-Suddī explained that this verse refers to the joy of the Prophet Muhammad and the believers at their victory over the polytheists at the Battle of Badr, as well as the victory of the People of the Book over idol worshippers." (Al-Baghawi, 1989)

On the other hand, Kallā Saya'lamūn adopts a contextual and thematic hermeneutic that is more responsive to Indonesia's historical and socio-political dynamics. KH. Maimoen Zubair interprets QS. Ar-Rūm verses 1 to 5 through the lens of Indonesia's anti-colonial struggle and nationalist spirit. In this tafsir, the verses are framed under the theme Ālīf Lām Mīm: Indonesia yang Diberkahi (Indonesia, the Blessed Nation). KH. Maimoen affirms:

فهذا الأمر يدل أن بلادنا بلاد مرضية مباركة

"This matter shows that our country is a land that is accepted and blessed by God." (Al-'Ascholy, 2023)

This statement implies that the Roman victory over the Persians is reinterpreted as Indonesia's triumph over colonialism, affirming that Indonesia is a blessed homeland. Thus, the nation's struggle and eventual victory are seen as part of a grand divine plan.

Both Marāḥ Labīd and Kallā Saya'lamūn reflect the historical and cultural contexts of their respective periods in distinct but equally relevant ways. In Marāḥ Labīd, Shaykh Nawawi upholds the legacy of classical Islamic scholarship, which remained dominant in 19th-century Nusantara. His exegesis prioritizes textual preservation and draws heavily from sound Hadiths and the statements of the early generations. This approach illustrates how sacred texts were interpreted in a society that was still grappling with early colonialism and striving to preserve its religious identity and scholarly traditions.

In contrast, Kallā Saya'lamūn offers a more contemporary and applied perspective. KH. Maimoen Zubair connects QS. Ar-Rūm verses 1 to 5 directly to Indonesia's 20th-century independence movement, turning the passage into a symbol of optimism and divine blessing amid Dutch and Japanese occupation. (Al-'Ascholy, 2023) His thematic and contextual approach presents the Qur'an as a moral and political source of strength that inspires society to build national identity and social unity. By highlighting the nation's historical and cultural realities, this tafsir shows how the Qur'anic message remains alive and relevant across changing times and social conditions.

In this way, the two works reflect the historical and cultural setting of their time through the methods and emphases they adopt. Marāḥ Labīd preserves the authenticity and continuity of classical tafsir in the context of early colonial encounters, while Kallā Saya'lamūn links Islamic teachings to the spirit of nationalism and modern liberation.

Despite their different orientations, both tafsirs share a foundational recognition of prophetic miracles and the absolute power of God in directing human history. They affirm that divine revelation is the ultimate source of truth and guidance in interpreting QS. Ar-Rūm verses 1 to 5. However, their theological emphases differ. Marāḥ Labīd focuses more on spiritual depth and classical textuality, stressing the certainty of divine promise and the authenticity of revelation. Meanwhile, Kallā Saya'lamūn places greater emphasis on socio-political engagement and nationalism as concrete expressions of Islamic values, contextualized within Indonesia's struggle for independence and national identity.

The contribution of these two tafsirs to the discourse of Nusantara Qur'anic exegesis is both substantial and complementary. Marāḥ Labīd stands as a strong foundation of traditional hermeneutics, safeguarding established methods and authoritative sources, and remains a key reference for classical tafsir. At the same time, Kallā Saya'lamūn expands the interpretive

horizon by integrating social and political realities with nationalistic ideals, making the Qur'an a living source of meaning in modern society. The synthesis of these traditional and contemporary approaches builds a progressive and adaptive continuity in the development of Nusantara tafsir, enriching Indonesia's religious, intellectual, and cultural heritage.

When comparing the two tafsirs, it becomes clear that they reflect the character of their respective historical contexts. Marāḥ Labīd reinforces the classical exegetical tradition by preserving traditional scholarly disciplines, while Kallā Saya'lamūn offers a modern face of tafsir that responds directly to issues of nationhood and Indonesian identity. Their common ground lies in a shared value orientation—both regard the Roman victory as a sign of divine intervention and a source of spiritual strength for the ummah. Yet, it is precisely their differing approaches that enrich the discourse of Qur'anic interpretation in the Nusantara, showing that the Qur'an is not only a sacred text to be recited but also a living guide that engages with the realities of society.

The logical consequence of this comparison is a greater openness toward the development of an integrative model of tafsir—one that brings together the methodological strength of tradition and the social sensitivity of contemporary thought. Marāḥ Labīd anchors the scholarly authority needed to interpret revelation, while Kallā Saya'lamūn acts as a bridge between the text and lived experience. Together, they demonstrate that tafsir is not merely an academic product, but an expression of faith and culture that grows with the times. Their continued relevance marks the continuity and adaptability of Nusantara Qur'anic interpretation as a living intellectual legacy that is dynamic, reflective, and responsive to its social environment.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and analysis of QS. Ar-Rūm verses 1 to 5 as interpreted in Marāḥ Labīd and Kallā Saya'lamūn, three main conclusions can be drawn. (1) Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani, through Marāḥ Labīd, employs a tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr approach that combines general (ijmālī) and analytical (taḥlīlī) methods. His interpretation emphasizes the prophetic miracle as a theological affirmation of divine revelation and God's sovereignty over historical events. (2) KH. Maimoen Zubair, in Kallā Saya'lamūn, offers a contextual and thematic interpretation by relating the Roman victory over Persia to Indonesia's struggle for independence. His reading affirms that nationalism is not in conflict with Islam, but instead reflects its values and mission. (3) The comparison between the two interpretations demonstrates a continuity in the tradition of Nusantara Qur'anic scholarship, where the classical approach, grounded in authoritative sources, is able to engage meaningfully with contemporary methods that respond to the needs of the time. Despite differences in method and focus, both interpretations affirm divine will as the ultimate force behind human history. This study contributes meaningfully to the development of Qur'anic interpretation in the Indonesian context. It shows that generational and methodological differences do not hinder the integration of Islamic values with local socio-political realities. Through a comparative lens, this research reinforces the status of Nusantara tafsir as an intellectual tradition that not only preserves classical authenticity but also responds to national challenges. It also highlights the transformative power of Qur'anic interpretation in shaping spiritual, national, and cultural awareness in society. The main limitation of this research lies in its narrow scope, which focuses only on a single set of verses interpreted in two works. It does not yet explore the broader range of methodologies or thematic insights that may be found in the full corpus of both exegetes. For this reason, future studies are encouraged to examine more diverse themes in the works of Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani and KH. Maimoen Zubair, and to expand the comparative framework to include other figures within the Nusantara tafsir tradition. Such efforts will further enrich the landscape of local Qur'anic interpretation and enhance its relevance in addressing the complexities of the modern age.

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