Before Orthodoxy; The Story of Abraham's Sacrifice *(Dzabīh)* in Early Muslim Commentaries

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Abstract

The story of Abraham's sacrifice holds significant place in Islam, and what Muslims believe about Ishmael as the intended sacrifice is not the only belief in the Muslim tradition. This paper examines the historical transformation of Abraham's sacrifice narratives in Muslim commentaries (tafsīrs), with a focus on revealing how, when, why, and at whose hands this transformation occurred. Employing the theory of tafsir as a genealogical tradition of Walid A. Saleh and adopting a socio-historical approach, this paper investigates the evolution of the interpretation of the story of dzabīh from Isaac to Ismael and the factors contributing to this evolution. The analysis reveals that in the first four centuries of Islam, Muslim interpretations and attitudes regarding the story of dzabīh were the complete opposite of what is common today. Muslim commentators, such as al-Suddī, Ibn Juraij, Muqatil ibn Sulaiman, al-Thabarī, and al-Samarqandī, firmly believed that Isaac is dzabīh. However, Ibn Athiyyah and al-Baghawī, the commentators of the sixth century hijri, showed different responses towards this story, neutral and favoring Ismael as dzabīh. Additionally, in the eighth century Hijri, Ishmael as dzabīh gained orthodoxy and popularity, as demonstrated by Ibn Taimiyyah and Ibn Kathir. They condemned the pro-Isaac as heretical interpretation and rejected it. Even though they disagree with the pro-Isaac commentators, they still quoted the narrations and opinions of previous commentators by providing counter-arguments, and this is what is called tafsir as a genealogical tradition. Furthermore, power dynamics and the socio-political setting of the eighth century may have had an impact on this change in the story of dzabīh. This evolution highlights the dynamic nature of Islamic interpretation, where interpretation is not necessarily static but evolves over time, shaped by historical contingencies and socio-political dynamics. This historical re-evaluation illuminates the complexity of Islamic intellectual history and the fluidity of religious interpretation in the Muslim tradition.

Keywords: Abraham's Sacrifice, Dzabīh, Isaac, Ismael, Tafsīr and Muslim Commentaries

INTRODUCTION

Most Muslims from all sects and exegetical movements, Sunni and Shi'i alike, now unanimously reject the historicity and validity of Abraham's sacrifice, in which Isaac was regarded as the intended sacrifice (*dzabīh*). Heretics are those who hold and assert that Isaac was dzabīh. Modern Islamic orthodoxy is exemplified by the pervasive rejection of the account of Isaac as *dzabīh*, implying that it is the majority, one can say, the only belief that a Muslim can correctly recognize on this subject. Muslims have been taught for the past two thousand years that the account of Isaac is fraudulent while Ismael represents the truth. The preponderance of contemporary commentaries, such as *Adwā' al-Bayān fī Īdāh al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān* (al- Shanqitī, 1415, p. 317), *al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr* ('Ashūr, 2008, p. 249), *Aysar al-Tafāsir* (al- Jazairī, n.d., p. 381), *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, *Tafsir al-Azhar* (Hamka, 2015, pp. 166–168), *Tafsir Al-Misbah* (Shihab, 2011), and *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (al-Tabātabā' ī, 1417, p. 155) assert that Ismael was the intended sacrifice.

As a matter of historical fact, Islamic orthodoxy has not always prevailed in denying the story of Isaac as *dzabīh*. In the first four centuries of Islam, Muslim interpretations and attitudes regarding the story of *dzabīh* were diametrically opposed to what is prevalent today. As with Christians (Afsar, 2007) and Jews (Firestone, 1998, p. 95), the majority of early Muslims believed that Isaac was the intended sacrifice. In *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Muqātil ibn Sulaimān (d. 150 H), an early Islamic exegete, noted that Isaac was the son of Abraham who was sacrificed (Ljamai, 2020). Furthermore, al-Tabarī (d. 310 H), a great classical tafsīr scholar, shared the same opinion as Muqātil. Al-Tabari considered Isaac to be *dzabīh* (M. bin J. al- Tabarī, n.d., pp. 72–75). The accounts of Muqātil and al-Tabarī lead us to some simple but significant questions that require further investigation. How was the narrative of *dzabīh* transformed from Isaac to Ismael in Muslim consciousness? How did the historical Muslim community's truth change from one thing to another? When did this happen? Where did this happen? Why did this happen? At whose hands did this happen? This paper will therefore study how early Muslim commentaries from the second to eighth century narrated and interpreted the story of *dzabīh*.

Scholarship on the story of the sacrifice of Abraham and his son *(dzabīh)* in both Western and Muslim scholars revolve around the discussion of whether Isaac or Ismael was *dzabīh*. In his paper "Abraham's Son as the Intended Sacrifice (al Dhabih [Qur'an 37:99 113]): Issues in Qur'anic Exegesis," Firestone analyzed the Tafsir al-Thabari, Tafsir Ibn Katshir, and Tafsir Ibn Taymiyyah. Firestone does not investigate farther on the evolution of the Dhabih story throughout time, hence a full picture regarding its evolution in Qur'anic exegesis is not obtained. Ayaz Afsar has conducted comparative studies of this story in the Qur'an and the Bible (Afsar, 2007; Firestone, 1998; Nahdi, 1993), while Asma Barlas investigated the lesson behind the story of *dzabīh* (Barlas, 2011, p. 56). These issues, however, are of little interest to this study. This study is not concerned with whether Ismael was *the intended dzabīh* or Isaac was not, but with how this story was universally narrated in early Muslim commentaries and how the story of *dzabīh* developed from time to time. This query prompts us to consider how, when, and by whose hand this narrative was transformed into the orthodoxy that the majority of Muslims adhere to today. This study will therefore investigate the interpretations of Q. 37/ 99-113, where the Qur'an narrated the story of *dzabīh*, in Tafsīr al-Suddī (d. 128 AD), Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaimān (d. 150 AD), Tafsīr Ibn Juraij (d. 150 AD), Tafsīr al-Tabarī (d. 310 AD), Tafsīr al-Samarqandi (d. 375 AD), Tafsīr al-Baghawī (d. 516 AD), Tafsīr Ibn Athiyyah (d. 541 AD), Tafsīr Ibn Taimiyah (d. 728 AD) and Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AD) to examine the evolution of this story in Muslim communities from time to time.

These commentaries have been selected in this study for several reasons; the commentaries of al-Suddī, Ibn Juraij and Muqātil ibn Sulaimān are the earliest commentaries in Islam that have reached us and could be of great use in examining how early Muslims perceived the story of *dzabīh;* the commentaries of al-Thabarī and Ibn Kathīr have been selected due to their popularity as well as al-Samarqandi, al-Baghawī, Ibn Athiyyah and Ibn Taimiyyah. In addition, these commentaries have been selected as they represent different centuries, in light of the objective of this study to observe the transformation of the story of Abraham's sacrifice over time. Employing the theory of Tafsīr as a genealogical tradition of Walid A Saleh and the socio-historical approach, this study will provide valuable insights into the development of the story of dzabīh in the Muslim tradition over time, as well as on how early Muslims perceived the story, when it changed, and what factors influenced this transformation. It is particularly relevant for contemporary discussions relating to the history of tafsīrs and the issues of theology and interfaith dialogue as the story is of particular importance to the Semitic religions; Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

This study is qualitative research that aims to understand and analyze the development and evolution of the story of *dzabīh* in Muslim commentaries from time to time. It is crucial to highlight that contexts shape and influence exegetes in understanding religious texts or the Qur'an. Slade (2020) Hence, this study will not only analyze the interpretation of *dzabīh* narratives, but also examine the contexts that influence the interpretation

of the Qur'an. Revealing and analyzing the historical social conditions and political practices is not enough to use qualitative analysis. Therefore, this paper will use a socio-historical approach to understand the social and political context that influenced Sunni and Shi'i tafsīrs.

Bath Ehrman explains that the socio-historical perspective of analyzing a text focuses on understanding how the author's personal and societal background, including their historical experiences and affiliation with various social groups such as family, *mazhab*, or nation, has influenced the way the material is presented. In essence, it seeks to explore the connection between texts (tafsīrs) and the social history of its author and the community they belong to. The underlying theory behind this approach can be summarized as follows: the social history of a community plays a significant role in shaping how it safeguards its traditions. Ehrman (2014) The main focus of this approach is placed on the surrounding. The socio-historical approach aims to uncover the social and historical facts of the lifetime of al-Tabrisī and Ibn al-Jawzī that have contributed to and influenced the writing of their tafsīrs, because, as stated by Hassan Hanafi, tafsīrs represent the social and political commitment of its interpreter (exegete). Hanafi (1996) Besides, this study will employ Walid A. Shaleh theory of tafsīr as a genealogical tradition to examine the continuity and evolution of the story of *dzabīh* in Muslim commentaries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The story of Abraham's Sacrifice in the Qur'an

Abraham, known as Ibrāhīm in Arabic, is a central and significant figure in Islam. He is one of the two most frequently mentioned prophets in the Qur'an after Moses. The Qurán mentions Abraham 69 times in 24 different verses in the Quran.(al- Bāqī, 1364, pp. 1–2) Besides, the Qur'an asserts that the Prophet Muhammad fulfilled Abraham's obligation to propagate the *hanīf* faith (Q. 2/135-138). Furthermore, the Qur'an recognizes Abraham with the titles *khalīl Allāh* and *Ūlul 'Azmi*. In addition to the Qur'an, the hadith refers to Abraham as *khalīl Allāh*. According to Muslim, an Islamic hadith scholar, from Jundub ibn Abd Allah, the Prophet Muhammad was reported to have said:…..indeed, Allah has made me his beloved, just as Allah made Prophet Abraham his lover (*khalīl Allāh*).(al- Usaimin, 1993, p. 395) Abraham was given the title of *khalīl Allāh* for no purpose in particular. God granted Abraham the title of *khalīl Allāh* because he was entirely submissive to Him.

The Qur'an depicts the ups and downs of Abraham's life, beginning with his childhood in an idolatrous environment, continuing with his preaching to his father (Q. 19/42-44) and people (Q. 6/75-79), being tested by being thrown alive into the fire by the cruel king Namrud (Q. 21/69), and being tested by Allah to slaughter his son *(dzabīh)* to be closer *(taqarrub)* to God (Qastah, 2022, p. 5). The Qur'an records this story in QS. 37/ 99-113 as follows:

99. He said, 'I will go to my Lord: He is sure to guide me. 100. Lord, grant me a righteous son,' 101. so We gave him the good news that he would have a patient son. 102. When the boy was old enough to work with his father, Abraham said, 'My son, I have seen myself sacrificing you in a dream. What do you think?' He said, 'Father, do as you are commanded and, God willing, you will find me steadfast.' 103. When they had both submitted to God, and he had laid his son down on the side of his face, 104. We called out to him, 'Abraham, 105. You have fulfilled the dream.' This is how We reward those who do good– 106it was a test to prove [their true characters]– 107. We ransomed his son with a momentous sacrifice, 108and We let him be praised by succeeding generations: 109. 'Peace be upon Abraham!' 110. This is how We reward those who do good: 111. truly he was one of Our faithful servants. 112. We gave Abraham the good news of Isaac– a prophet and a righteous man– 113. and blessed him and Isaac too: some of their offspring were good, but some clearly wronged themselves (Abdel Haleem, 2005).

The Qur'an narrates this story briefly and in no detail, as does Bible in Genesis 22/1-19 (Lakhdar, 2001, p. 62). The Qur'ān does not specify the name of Abraham's son to be slaughtered. It only mentions the term *ghulām halīm* (Afsar, 2007, p. 48; Firestone, 1998, pp. 95–96). In addition, the Qur'an also does not explain where the scene of the event occurred. This brief and undetailed narrative has, in turn, prompted debates and disagreements among Muslim scholars. How have Muslim scholars interpreted this story?

Isaac as Dzabīh; Universally Early Muslim Commentaries' Beliefs

This section will investigate how the early commentators interpreted QS. 37/ 99-113 related to the historical account of *dzabīh*. The views of these early Muslim exegetes represent what early Muslim communities universally believed in this matter. This investigation begins with the tafsīr of the second to fourth centuries since no single tafsīr work of the first century of Islam has reached us. Hence, Tafsīr al-Suddī (d. 128), Tafsir Muqātil Ibn Sulaimān (d. 150 AH), Tafsīr Ibn Juraij (d. 150 AH), Tafsīr al-Tabarī (d. 310 AH), and Tafsīr al-Samarqandī (d. 375 AH) will show us general views of early Muslim communities on the historical account of *dzabīh.*

Tafsīr al-Suddī al-Kabir by Ismā'īl ibn Abd al-Rahmān ibn Abī Karīmah al-Suddī al-Kabīr (d. 128 AH) is one of the earliest commentaries to reach us. The story of *dzabīh* is among his concern. Al-Suddī explained that the story begins with Abraham, who prayed to God for a righteous son (Q. 37/100). God responded to Abraham's pray by giving him *ghulām halīm*. Regarding the identity of *ghulām halīm*, al-Suddi believed that *ghulām halīm* is Isaac, based on *riwāyah* he obtained from Asbath from Umar ibn Hammad. al-Suddi said;

> "From Umar ibn Hammad from Asbath from al-Suddi (said): Gabriel came to Sarah and said, "O Sarah, I bring you good news that you will be blessed with a son named Isaac, a descendant of Jacob. Sarah was astonished and patted her face. She said, "I am an old and barren woman" (Q. Al-Zariyat: 29). How could I have had a son? Sarah also told Gabriel, "If the news you convey is true, what is the proof? Then Gabriel took a dry stick, stuck it in, and it moved and grew green. Abraham said that He (Isaac) will be sacrificed to Allah *(zabih lillah)*. When Isaac grew up, Abraham had a dream. In his dream, Abraham was commanded to fulfil his promise to sacrifice Isaac. Verily, Allah has given you the gift of a son from Sarah to be sacrificed. Abraham told Isaac, "Let us go. We will perform a sacrifice for Allah. Abraham took the knife and rope and walked with Isaac to the centre of the hill. Then Isaac asked: O my father, where is your sacrifice? Abraham replied, "O my son, indeed I saw in my dream that I was ordered to slaughter you, so think about what you think?" (Q. 37/102) Isaac replied, "O my father, tighten my bonds so that I do not move, cover me with your clothes so that my blood does not flow, hasten to cut my neck so that death is easy for me". When they were about to slaughter, Abraham and Isaac saw each other. Tears poured down their cheeks. When both of them had surrendered, and Abraham laid his son on his temple, (their patience was evident) (Q. 37/103). Isaac was replaced by a sheep *(kibas)*, and Abraham's dream came true (Q. 37/105)."(Yūsuf, 1414, pp. 402–403)

Al-Suddī's narration above provides information that *dzabīh* was Isaac and that the incident occurred among the hills. It is unclear what hill and in which city the incident occurred. Al-Suddī's account is supplemented by Ibn Juraij (d. 149/150 AH). Indeed, we do not get much information from Ibn Juraij. However, Ibn Juraij mentioned that Isaac was slaughtered in Baitul Maqdis, Sham.(al- Ghanī, 1413, p. 292) Muqātil ibn Sulaimān (d. 150 AH), a Muslim scholar who lived at the same time as Ibn Juraij, provided more detailed information about the historical account of *dzabīh* in his masterpiece, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr.* Muqatil agrees with al-Suddī and Ibn Juraij that Isaac is *dzabīh*. Muqatil wrote in his Tafsir as follows;

> "(and Ibrahim said) he was in Babylon (verily I am a traveller), i.e. one who migrated (to my Lord) to the pleasure of my Lord in Ard al-Muqaddasah / the purified earth (he will guide me) to his religion and he was the first to migrate from among the creatures along with Luth and Sarah. Arriving at Ard al-Muqaddasah, he asked his Lord for a child. Ibrahim prayed 100. (O my Lord, bestow upon me a son who

belongs to the righteous) bestow upon me a righteous son, then Allah granted his request. 101. (So We gave him glad tidings of a patient son) a smart son, Isaac, son of Sarah. 102 (So when the boy came to the age of being able to walk with Ibrahim) and his father (endeavoured) to walk to the mountain (Ibrahim said: O my son, indeed I saw in a dream) as a warning to him in a dream. Ibrahim said: verily, I was commanded in a dream. (Indeed, I slaughtered you, so think what you think) then Ishaq replied (He replied: "O my father, do what you are commanded) obey your Lord, before Isaac said "Do what you saw" to Ibrahim A.S. Ibrahim dreamed this for three consecutive nights. As for Isaac, he fasted and prayed before the slaughter. (Insha Allah you will find me among the patient ones) regarding the slaughter. 103. (when they both surrendered) he said: surrender both of you to the command of Allah swt and obey (and Ibrahim laid his son on his temple) laying his son's forehead, when Ibrahim held his son's head to slaughter him, after Allah knew that both of them were shidiq.104. (and we called him: O Ibrahim, 105. Indeed you have confirmed the dream) in the matter of slaughtering your son, so take the lamb (indeed, We reward those who do good). This is our reward for every good person, so Allah's reward for his goodness and obedience is the forgiveness of his son Isaac. Then Allah said: 106. (This is indeed a real test) i.e. a real pleasure when Allah forgave him and redeemed him with a sheep. 107. (And We redeemed the boy with a great sacrifice.) The sheep was named rozayn, which was classified as a forest goat that had been grazed in the paradise/garden for forty years before it was slaughtered. 108. (We left) We memorialized (for Abraham among those who came later) the good praise that would be spoken of him after he died. As Allah said: 109. (Peace be upon Ibrahim) i.e., the peaceful praise that will be heaped upon him by those who come after him, both the followers of various religions and all people. 110. (Thus, We reward those who do good). 111. (Indeed, he is among Our believing servants), i.e., among those who believe in tawhid. 112 (And We gave him glad tidings of Ishaq, a prophet among the righteous). Allah says: And We gave Abraham glad tidings of Isaac's prophethood after Allah's forgiveness. 113 (And we bestowed upon him) to Abraham. (and to Isaac and their descendants) Abraham and Isaac (who do good) the believers (and the wrongdoers) i.e. the polytheists."(Sulaimān, n.d.)

Muqatil's interpretation discovers some crucial points; first, Isaac was the *dzabīh*; second, the event occurred in al-Ard al-Muqaddasah/ Baitul Maqdis; and third, God substituted Isaac with a sheep named Rozayn. Following this information, we can conclude that early Muslim communities during the second century of Hijri universally accepted that Isaac was the intended sacrifice. The account of Ismael as a *dzabīh* does not appear within second-century tafsir discourse.

Moving to the third and fourth centuries of hijrah, the same narration and universal belief in the story of *dzabīh* spread widely among the Muslim community. al-Tabarī (d. 310) presented two versions of this story; Isaac and Ismael. He, however, believed and recognized that Isaac was the intended son of Abraham to be sacrificed. Al-Tabarī's viewpoint is based on two prior narrations *(riwāyāt)*. The first narration is from Ikrimah with the chain of transmission: Muhammad ibn Humaid- Yahya ibn Wadhih, al-Hussain, Yazid, and Ikrimah. The second narration comes from Qatādah with the following transmission chain: Basyr, Yazīd, Sa'īd, and Qatādah.(M. ibn J. al- Tabarī, 1442, p. 576) Al-Tabarī also references al-Suddī's account, which describes the details of the story of *dzabīh*.(M. ibn J. al- Tabarī, 1442) Al-Tabarī's explanation above shows that until the beginning of the fourth century of hijri, the Muslim community believed that Isaac was *dzabīh*.

Nevertheless, the narration of the story of *dzabīh* still developed into two versions at the end of the fourth century of Hijri. Al-Samarqandī (d. 375 AH), in his *Bahr al-'Ulūm*, noted two narratives about the story of *dzabīh*. The first narrative states that Isaac was a *dzabīh*. Second, the narrative claims that Ismael was a *dzabīh*. As described by al-Samarqandi, the story about Ismael was conveyed by al-Kalbi, Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid and Ibn Umar from Muhammad ibn Ka'ab al-Qarzī. While Muqātil and Ka'ab popularized the narrative of Isaac. Al-Samarqandi demonstrated that those who popularized Ismael grounded their conclusions on the Qur'an and hadith from the Prophet. In contrast, the opinion of those who popularized Isaac relied on a report concerning the Prophet Joseph's exclusive ancestry. However, al-Samarqandi concluded that the generally accepted

opinion at that time was Isaac *(wa al-zāhir 'inda al-'āmmah huwa Ishāq)*. In addition, al-Samarqandī also revealed that the incident occurred in Bayt al-Maqdis.(al- Samarqandī, 1413, pp. 119–120)

al-Samarqandi and other early Muslim scholars provide us with clear information regarding the story of *dzabīh*. Until the end of the fourth century of Hijri, Muslims generally believed that the story of *dzabīh* was the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Sarah, which took place at Bayt al-Maqdis or Syam, not the story of Ismael as the majority of contemporary Muslim community believes. Al-Tabarī and al-Samarqandī first recorded the narrative of Ismael in the early and late fourth century of hijri in their tafsīr. However, they believed that the story of Isaac as *dzabīh* was widely recognized and believed in Muslim society. It must be highlighted that the narrative of *dzabīh* evolved from the second to the fourth centuries. The narrative of *dzabīh* was still solitary in the second century, in which the narrative of Isaac was universally portrayed in tafsīr literature. However, over the years, the story of *dzabīh* evolved into two primary narratives, with the narrative of Isaac as *dzabīh* being the most famous and popular in the commentaries. The account of this early tafsīr literature also calls into question when and why the story of Isaac became the story of Ismael in the Islamic tradition. Who first popularized the narrative of Ismael as *dzabīh* in tafsīr?

The Islamic Orthodoxy; Transforming Isaac to Ismael as Intended Sacrifice

The account of Abraham and his son's sacrifice continues to evolve throughout history. All of this is confirmed in the Muslim tafsīr tradition. Subsequently, by the end of the fourth-century Hijri, the narrative of *dzabīh* was still popular with the account of Isaac in tafsīr literature. The fifth century was an entirely distinct narrative. Tafsir coming from the fifth-century hijri reveals a change and a considerable modification in the narrative of *dzabīh*. The narrative of *dzabīh* no longer belongs to Isaac and Sarah but to Ismael and his mother, Hagar.

In the sixth century, Al-Baghawī (d. 516 AD), a prominent commentator, hadith and Shafi'ī scholar, appeared to have popularized Ismael as *dzabīh*. Al-Baghawī, however, provides two versions of the *dzabīh* narrative. He discovers that the notion of Isaac as *dzabīh* was popularized by the companions of the Prophet ('Umar, 'Alī, Ibn Mas'ūd and Ibn 'Abbās) and *tābi'īn* (Ka'ab al-Akhbar, Said ibn Jubair, Qatādah, Masrāq, Ikrimah, 'Athā', Muqātil, al-Zuhri and al-Suddī). While Abdullah ibn Umar, Sayyid ibn al-Musayyab, al-Shafi'bi, al-Hasan al-Bashri, Mujahid, al-Rabi' ibn Annas, Muhammad ibn Ka'ab al-Qarzhi, and al-Kilabi promoted Ismael's viewpoint. Both perspectives were narrated by the Prophet Muhammad, according to al-Baghawī. Furthermore, Al-Baghawi includes a narration on Arab-Jewish identity politics referring to Ibn Abbās's narration, "Ismael was the intended *dzabīh*, but the Jews falsely claimed that Isaac was *dzabīh."* A narration on Caliph Umar ibn Abdul Aziz, the Caliph of the Bani Umayyah who ruled from 717 to 720 AD, backs up Ibn Abbas' opinion. Umar ibn Abdul Aziz once questioned a Jewish convert to Islam regarding the intended *dzabīh*. The Jewish man said that the *dzabīh* was Ismael, which the Jews understood, but they were jealous of the Arab Muslims as this *dzabīh* verse explains your forefathers' (Arabs') privilege. Hence, Al-Baghawī tends to agree with the opinion that popularizes Ismael as *dzabīh*. This can be observed when al-Baghawī interprets QS. 37/103 by mentioning Ismael and Hagar after providing two interpretations of QS. 37/ 101.(al- Baghawī, 1989, pp. 47–48)

Ibn 'Athiyyah (d. 541 AH), another tafsīr scholar from Andalusia, Spain, who lived during the sixth century, described a similar discussion concerning whether Isaac or Ismael was *dzabīh* referring to the Qur'an. Ibn Athiyyah's explanation, in *al-Muharrar al-Wajiz*, also shows that the transforming narrative of *dzabīh* has expanded into the arena of identity politics as al-Baghawī interpretation. Unfortunately, Ibn Athiyyah did not clarify which viewpoint he preferred. Ibn Athiyyah solely discussed the various perspectives on *dzabīh*.(Ibn Athiyyah al-Andālusiah, 2010, p. 1582) From al-Baghawi and Ibn Athiyyah, we know another complete version of the story of *dzabīh*: Ismael was the intended sacrifice. It took place in Makkah, Hijaz or Mina. Ibn Athiyyah's

writing also demonstrates that the discussion over the story of *dzabīh* has become increasingly narrow and has moved to identity politics between Arab and Jewish. Following Al-Bagahwi and Ibn 'Athiyyah's interpretations, the narrative of Ismael as a *dzabīh* has gained popularity in the Muslim community's minds and is, in a sense, more famous than the narrative of Isaac.

In the seventh century, Ismael's story became more popular than Isaac's one. Ibn Taimiyah (661-728 AD), a notable medieval Muslim intellectual, likewise popularized that Ismael was *dzabīh*.(Ibn Taimiyah, n.d., p. 6) He confirmed this issue in his *Majmū'ah al-Fatawā*, in addition to his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. On the other hand, he denied that Isaac was *dzabīh*. He contended that the notion of Isaac as *dzabīh* was unacceptable since it was transmitted by *ahl al-kitab* (people of the book). Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyyah argued that *ahl al-kitab*'s narrative could not be accepted because their sacred text has been distorted and is no longer authentic. Ibn Taimiyyah emphasized that *dzabīh* is more appropriate for Ismael since he is reported as a patient person by Q. 21/85 as *ghulām halīm* in the account of *dzabīh* is likewise given as a patient character Q. 31/102.(Ibn Taimiyah, 2005, pp. 44–45)

During seventh-century hijri, the argument over the narrative of *dzabīh* heated up. Ishmael's popularity as a *dzabīh* grew unstoppable. Ibn Kathīr (700-774 AH), a reference tafsīr scholar and student of Ibn Taymiyah, was primarily engaged with this subject. Indeed, in *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, Ibn Kathīr is regarded as one of the most extensive tafsīr scholars in offering an argument on *dzabīh*. He is a leading medieval scholar and widely referred to by contemporary commentaries. Ibn Kathīr, like previous tafsīr scholars, presents two versions of the *dzabīh* account, the story of Isaac and Ismael. Based on Ibn Kathīr's writing, there have been at least six narrations that propagate Ishaq as *dzabīh*, namely the narration of Ibn Mas'ūd, Ikrimah from Ibn Abbās, al-'Abbas and Caliph 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib in which this narrative was chosen by the well-known exegete, al-Tabarī (d. 310 AH) in *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*. Furthermore, Ibn Kathīr describes that the narration of Isaac as a *dzabīh* was also transmitted by 'Ikrimah, Sa'id ibn Jubair, Mujāhid, al-Shafi'i, 'Ubaid ibn 'Amir, Abū Maisarah, Zaid ibn Aslam, Abudllāh ibn Shaqiq, al-Zuhri, al-Qasim ibn Abī Bazah, Mahkul, Usmān ibn Hadhir, al-Suddī, al-Hasan, Qatādah, Abu Huzail and Ibn Sābit.(Kathīr, 1999, pp. 27–32) However, for Ibn Kathīr, all of the narrations concerning Isaac come from Ka'ab al-Akhbar, a former Jew. So, what is wrong with Ka'ab's narration?

Ibn Kathīr questioned the authenticity of these narrations to explain the Qur'anic account of *dzabīh* because these narrations were all derived from Ka'ab al-Akhbar, who was *ahl al-kitab*. Ka'ab frequently spoke to Muslims about his holy texts.(al- Dzahabī, 1989, p. 12) Ibn Kathīr argued that Muslims never need a single word from Jew's sacred book since it has been corrupted, including the story of Abraham's sacrifice.(Kathīr, 1999) In other words, Ibn Kathīr intended to demonstrate that Ka'ab's narration is rejected because it is based on a corrupted and false scripture.

Ibn Kathīr, on the other hand, accepts that the correct transmission of *dzabīh* narrative is the version that promotes Ismael. Ibn Kathīr mentioned several various accounts of Ismael as *dzabīh*. For instance, two Ibn Abbās narrations as follow:

> "Sa'id ibn Jubayr, 'Amir al-Shafi'bi, Yusuf ibn Mahran, Mujahid, 'Atha' (and others said, from Ibn 'Abbas (said): *zabih* is Ismael AS."

> "Ibn Jarir said: Yunus told me, Ibn Wahhab told us, Amr ibn Qais told me, from 'Atha' ibn Abi Rabbah, from Ibn 'Abbas (said): The one who was to be redeemed was Ismael. The Jews took Ishaq, and they lied about it."(Kathīr, 1999)

The first narration of Ibn 'Abbās above clearly states that Ismael is *dzabīh*. While the second narration of Ibn 'Abbas not only mentions Ismael as a *dzabīh*, but also brings up something that has been taboo, the Jewish lie about Isaac being slaughtered. Unfortunately, Ibn Abbas does not explain why the Jews lied about Isaac as *dzabīh*. However, according to Ibn Kathīr, this occurred because the Jews were envious of the Muslims. After

all, it was the Arabs' ancestors who were murdered, not their own. Furthermore, Ibn Kathīr declares that interpreting the narrative of a Jewish convert to Islam's testimony to Caliph Umar ibn Abdul 'Azīz concerning *dzabīh* as reported earlier by Ibn 'Athiyyah, clarifies the circumstances and motives.(Kathīr, 1999)

In addition to the above narrations and opinions, Ibn Kasir also corroborates his view with the narration of Ibn Ishāq from Muhammad ibn Ka'b al-Qurdi. The narration reveals that Ismael is the son of Abraham, whom the Qur'an refers to as *dzabīh*. The fact has been revealed in the Qur'an that Allah has given good news to Abraham in the form of Isaac's prophethood QS. 37/ 112 and from Isaac a descendant named Ya'qub QS.11/ 71. If Isaac is referred to as *dzabīh* by the Qur'an, according to Ibn Kathīr, it is contrary to the instructions of the verse. Since God had promised prophethood and descendants from Isaac, how could God command Abraham to slaughter Isaac?(Kathīr, 1999)

Ibn Kathīr's notes in *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* show that the discussion of the story of *dzabīh* became an arena for political identity between Arabs and Jews at the end of the eighth-century hijrah. However, the seeds of identity struggle had already appeared in the sixth century in the *Tafsīr of al-Baghawī* and *Ibn 'Athiyyah*. This information at least counters Firestone's finding that the arguments for Ishmael's case were laid out in the eighth and ninth centuries. However, this opinion was not widespread for centuries, and it was not until the time of the intellectual giants Ibn Taimiyyah and Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373) that a significant shift towards Ismael occurred in the interpretive tradition.(Firestone, 1989; Mirza, 2013, p. 277) This paper finds that the case for Ishmael is put early in the *Tafsīr of al-Baghawī*, but not as strongly as the arguments of Ibn Taymiyah and Ibn Kathīr. Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Taimiyah developed the arguments already noted by al-Baghawi and Ibn 'Athiyyah.

The idea of Ismael as an intended sacrifice *(dzabīh)* gained widespread acceptance and became orthodox after the period of Ibn Kathīr until now.(Sirry, 2018, pp. 109–113) Imam Ahmad Mustafa al-Marāghī (1300 H/ 1883 AD - 1371 H/ 1952 AD) asserts in *Tafsīr al-Marāghī* that Ismael is Abraham's son whom the Qur'an refers to as *dzabīh*.(al- Marāghī, 2007, pp. 76–77) Other contemporary tafsir scholars, such as Sayyid Quttub (1906-1966),(Qutub, 2003, p. 2993) Ibn 'Ashūr (1296-1939 AD/ 1879-1973)),('Ashūr, 2008) Hamka (1908-1981),(Hamka, 1986, pp. 166–168) Alī al-Shabūni (1930-2021),(al- Sābūnī, 1981, p. 330) M. Quraish Shihab (1944- present),(Shihab, 2011) share similar interpretations as Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH) and Ibn Taimiyah's interpretations (d. 728 AH). In short, from the sixth century until the present, the story of Ismael as *dzabīh* has been considered the Islamic orthodoxy. The story of Isaac as *dzabīh,* however, has been considered heresy.

The Evolution of the Story of *Dzabīh* and its Impact on Arab Identity Politics in Medieval Tafsīr

The previous information shows that the interpretation of the story of *dzabīh* changes from the account of Isaac to Ishmael in Muslim commentaries. On the other hand, the interpretation presented in *tafsīrs* continually relies on transmissions (*riwāyāt)* and previous interpretations or commentaries. Walid Saleh refers to this as a genealogical tradition.(Saleh, 2004, p. 14) In other words, contemporary interpretations that acknowledge Ismael as a *dzabīh* are extensions of earlier commentaries, particularly Tafsir al-Baghawī, Ibn Taimiyah, and Ibn Kathīr. The understanding of Ismael as *dzabīh* has now become Islamic doctrine. On the other hand, the understanding of Isaac as *dzabīh* is considered heretical. According to Talal Asad, a contemporary Muslim scholar, orthodoxy emerges from the link between power and truth. Asad writes;

> "Orthodoxy is crucial to all Islamic traditions........both are missing something vital: that orthodoxy is not a mere body of opinion but a distinctive relationship a relationship of power to truth. Wherever Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust correct practices and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace incorrect ones, there is the domain of orthodoxy. The way these powers are exercised, the conditions that make them possible (social, political, economic, etcetera), and the resistances they encounter (from Muslims and non-Muslims) are equally the concern of an anthropology of Islam, regardless of whether its direct object of research is in the city or in the countryside, in the

present or in the past. Argument and conflict over the form and significance of practices are therefore a natural part of any Islamic tradition".(Asad, 2009, p. 22)

Asad emphasizes the importance of orthodoxy in the Islamic tradition. Power, social environment, politics, economics, and the hostility Muslims encountered all contributed to establishing orthodoxy. Tafsir orthodoxy on the *dzabīh* stories among Muslims is also not eliminated. Tafsirs were written at specific times and places to address issues of the day. The preceding discussion demonstrates that the story of *dzabīh* shifted to the story of Ismael in the seventh and eighth centuries of Hijri. What happened in the seventh and eighth centuries that influenced the interpretation of the story of *dzabīh* from the prior account of Isaac to the story of Ismael?

One of the arguments put forward by Ibn Kathīr to reject Isaac as a *dzabīh* is that Isaac's interpretation relied on *isrā'iliyyāt* (al- Qattān, 2008, p. 344) from former Jews. Ibn Kathīr, a leading medieval scholar and widely referred to by contemporary commentaries, argued that the *riwāyāh* was heretical because it referred to the holy book of the Jews that is no longer authentic.(Kathīr, 1999) However, the *isrā'iliyyāt* was used by early tafsir scholars such as Ibn Juraij, al-Suddi, Muqatil ibn Sulaiman, al-Thabari and al-Samarqandi to interpret the Qur'an, including the story of *zabih*. This case shows a paradigm shift in viewing *isrā'iliyyāt* among tafsir scholars in the early Islamic and medieval periods. The medieval period standardized the use of *isrā'iliyyāt* in Tafsir in a way that had never happened before. According to Ibn Kathīr, there are three categories of *isra'iliyyat*: (1) that which is known to be accurate; (2) that which is known to be untrue and must be rejected; and (3) that which is ignored. For Ibn Kathīr, *isrā'iliyyāt* information about Isaac as *dzabīh* is classified as *isrā'iliyyāt*, which is known to be incorrect.(Kathīr, 1999) This type of classification has never been found in the commentaries before Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Taimiyyah.

This standardization indicates a sentimental view towards non-Muslim communities, especially Jews and Christians. What happened between Islam, Christianity and Judaism in medieval times? History records that in medieval times, there was sharp friction between Muslims and Christian Jews, which Ibn Kathīr witnessed first-hand. Relations between religious communities at that time were not harmonious. Ibn Kathīr wrote, in *Fadāil al-Qur'ān,* that in 767 AH, on Wednesday 22 Muharram, Europeans entered and occupied Iskandariah. Many Muslims were killed and taken prisoner in this event. These thrilling and sad events reached Egypt immediately. Inevitably, this event made the commander of the Egyptian army intervene. A week after the Europeans occupied Iskandariah, Egyptian army troops (al-syalisy al-Mishri), came to Iskandariah and forced the Europeans out of Iskandariah. Because of the strength of the Egyptian army, the Europeans left Iskandariah. Nevertheless, the Europeans held four thousand prisoners, seized many properties, taken to a barn near the sea. This event caused the Muslims of Iskandariah to cry and grieve. This sad news reached Damascus, the preachers mentioned the event on the pulpit, and the congregation wept.(Kathīr, 2012, pp. 24–25)

The European treatment of the Muslims of Iskandariah will never be forgotten, and they retaliated by dehumanizing the Christians-Jews, violently expelling the Christians-Jews from their land. The Christians-Jews feared being killed and fled as far as they could from their homes.(Kathīr, 2012) So that religious sentiments at that time gained momentum. In such an atmosphere, Ibn Kasir tried to dialogue between the past's text and the reality surrounding it. Political tensions between Muslims, Jews and Christians have ridden Ibn Kathīr in producing his understanding of the story of *dzabīh*. In addition, as noted by Reufan Firestone, in medieval times, the Abbasid dynasty consolidated and standardized practices and beliefs.(Firestone, 1998)

Furthermore, the narration on Jewish jealousy of Muslims lends support to the tafsīr of Ismael as *dzabīh*. Mun'im Sirry, a professor of Islamic studies at Notre Dame University, claims that the interpretation of *dzabīh*, in which Ismael was *dzabīh*., is to strengthen Arab identity.(Sirry, 2018) In other words, it is an ideological interpretation demonstrating Arab ethnic superiority over non-Arab entities. Firestone added that the Abbasid

period was a period of ethnic fanaticism *(shu'ubiyyah)* and anti-Arab movement intellectuals. According to Firestone, the Abbasid political authority and political situations at the period affected and influenced the interpretation of the story of *dzabīh*.(Firestone, 1998)

Thus, the change, weakening and elimination of the story of Isaac as a *dzabīh*, has been influenced by power and socio-political-economic conditions that developed in the eighth century. The standardization, consolidation and unification of Islamic practices and beliefs by the Abbasid dynasty became one of the crucial factors for shifting the story of *dzabīh* in the medieval *tafsīr* literature, especially *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*. However, al-Baghawi, a prominent commentator, hadith and Shafi'ī scholar of sixth century, popularized Ismael as a *dzabīh* earlier. Ibn Kasir and his main teacher, Ibn Taimiyah, were so vocal in opposing the interpretation of Isaac as a *dzabīh* and bringing the discourse of *dzabīh* to the contestation of identity politics between Arab and non-Arab ethnicities to reclaim Arab identity.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the majority of early tafsir literature, such as Tafsīr al-Suddī, Ibn Juraij, and Muqātil, believed and recognized Isaac as the intended sacrifice *(dzabīh.).* The story of *dzabīh* developed into two versions, Isaac and Ishmael, as reported by al-Tabarī at the beginning of the fourth century. Al-Tabarī, on the other hand, preferred Isaac's version over Ismail's. The story of Isaac as *dzabīh* remained popular and well-known in tafsīr literature until the end of the fourth-century Hijri, as can be seen in Tafsīr al-Samarqandī. In the sixth century hijrah, al-Baghawī began to popularize Ishmael in his tafsīr, although not with a firm argument. Subsequent commentaries, such as Tafsir Ibn Athiyyah, were silent and did not give a defence to any particular opinion. In the eighth century, the story of Ismael as an intended sacrifice *(dzabīh)* became more popular, as in Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Taimiyyah. Ismael as intended *dzabīh* became orthodoxy while the story of Isaac as *dzabīh* was no longer recognized and even regarded as heretical. This shift in the story of *dzabīh* occurred due to two main factors, namely the power of the Abbasid regime in standardizing, consolidating and unification of Islamic practices and beliefs and socio-political-economic conditions in medieval times where relations between religious communities were increasingly tense with the development of strong Arab fanatic movements and anti-Arab ethnicity. This transformation underlines the dynamic character of Islamic interpretation, which has been influenced by historical circumstances and sociopolitical dynamics and thus not always rigid. This historical reassessment highlights the nuanced nature of Islamic intellectual history and the variety of religious interpretation in the Muslim tradition. Given the variety of interpretation of the story of dzabīh, Islamic traditions inspire us to fostering tolerance and understanding within the Muslim and other religious communities.

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