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# Negotiating *Isrā'īliyyāt* in Modern Indonesian Tafsir : A Comparative Study of Hamka and Quraish Shihab on the Story of Hārūt and Mārūt

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## Abstract

This study is motivated by the enduring presence of *Isrā'īliyyāt* narratives in several modern Indonesian tafsīr works, despite the reformist movement's emphasis on purifying Qur'anic exegesis from unreliable reports and upholding principles of textual authenticity and rational reasoning. Although the rejection of Isrā'īliyyāt has become a defining feature of reformist exegetical discourse, many modern mufassirs continue to incorporate these narrative elements with varying forms and degrees of acceptance. The story of Hārūt and Mārūt in QS. al-Baqarah:102 serves as a prominent example, as it frequently provokes debate regarding the reliability of its reports, its theological implications, and its connection to Jewish–Christian traditions that have influenced certain strands of Muslim exegesis.This article examines how Hamka and M. Quraish Shihab interpret and reason about this narrative in *Tafsir al-Azhar* and *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ*. This study employs a qualitative library-based approach with descriptive–comparative analysis, using the framework of *Isrā'īliyyāt* criticism and theories of traditional narrative reception in modern tafsīr. The findings show that Hamka adopts a highly selective stance and largely rejects *Isrā'īliyyāt* elements, whereas Quraish Shihab is more accommodating while maintaining caution. These differences highlight the epistemological diversity within modern Indonesian exegesis. The study contributes to Qur'anic hermeneutics in Southeast Asia by illustrating how classical narrative heritage is negotiated alongside modern rationalist demands and contemporary cultural contexts.

**Keywords**: Isrā'īliyyāt, Hārūt and Mārūt, Tafsir al-Azhar, Tafsir al-Misbāh.

## Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh masih kuatnya keberadaan narasi *Isrā'īliyyāt* dalam sebagian tafsir modern Indonesia, meskipun arus utama reformisme menekankan penyucian tafsir dari riwayat yang tidak valid serta pentingnya kemurnian sumber dan rasionalitas. Penolakan terhadap *Isrā'īliyyāt* memang menjadi ciri utama wacana reformasi tafsir, namun faktanya sejumlah mufasir modern tetap memuat unsur-unsur naratif tersebut dengan cara dan tingkat penerimaan yang beragam. Kisah Hārūt dan Mārūt dalam QS. al-Baqarah:102 menjadi contoh yang menonjol karena sering memunculkan perdebatan, baik tentang keaslian riwayatnya, dampak teologis yang ditimbulkannya, maupun kaitannya dengan tradisi Yahudi-Kristen yang turut mempengaruhi sebagian penafsiran Muslim. Artikel ini menelusuri bagaimana Hamka dan M. Quraish Shihab memahami serta menalar kisah tersebut melalui *Tafsir al-Azhar* dan *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ*. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka dengan analisis deskriptif–komparatif, menggunakan kerangka kritik *Isrā'īliyyāt* dan teori penerimaan narasi tradisional dalam tafsir modern. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa Hamka bersikap sangat selektif dan cenderung menolak unsur *Isrā'īliyyāt*, sedangkan

Quraish Shihab lebih terbuka namun tetap berhati-hati. Perbedaan keduanya menegaskan adanya keragaman epistemologis dalam tafsir modern Indonesia. Temuan ini turut memperkaya kajian hermeneutika al-Qur'an di Asia Tenggara, terutama dalam melihat bagaimana warisan klasik dinegosiasikan dengan tuntutan rasionalitas dan konteks budaya masa kini.

**Kata kunci:** Isrā'īliyyāt, Hārūt dan Mārūt, Tafsir al-Azhar, Tafsir al-Misbāh.

## Introduction

The Qur'an's concise and allusive (*mujmal*) style enables it to address diverse audiences and engage with earlier scriptural traditions, such as the Torah and the Gospel. Its broad scope allows the Qur'an to engage with diverse audiences while also fostering meaningful dialogue with other religious texts. This interaction is essential for deepening the understanding of the Qur'an, especially in relation to the historical narratives it contains. Through these engagements, it becomes easier to helps contextualize Qur'anic narratives within the broader Abrahamic scriptural milieu.

Some Western scholars, most notably Abraham Geiger have argued that the Prophet Muhammad borrowed elements from Jewish traditions and that the Qur'an reflects significant influence from Judaism and Christianity in terms of beliefs and doctrines. However, these views are no longer considered relevant in contemporary academic discourse (Armas, 2002). Recent research highlights the complexity of the Qur'an's relationship with earlier scriptures, showing that it cannot be reduced to mere borrowing or unidirectional influence. The apologetic and imperialistic frameworks promoted by Geiger and his followers have fallen out of favor, replaced by more nuanced and constructive approaches in modern Qur'anic studies.

Recent scholarship invites a more nuanced reassessment of the use of *Isrā'īliyyāt* in Qur'anic exegesis, along with claims that both the Qur'an and its interpretations are shaped by Jewish and Christian traditions, need to be reconsidered. Today's scholarship adopts a more academic and constructive approach, focusing on the historical, theological, and intertextual dimensions of the Qur'an's narratives (Nuryansyah, 2017). It is crucial to critically assess the various interpretations and stories that have emerged throughout the tradition of Qur'anic commentary. Exegesis not only serves as a tool for interpreting scripture but also reflects the intellectual legacy of the Muslim community as it continues to explore the deeper meanings of the Qur'an (Saleh, 2010). This ongoing

engagement with other religious traditions enriches the understanding of the Qur'an. In this way, Qur'anic exegesis offers valuable insights into historical and theological narratives, including those drawn from *Isrā'īliyyāt*.

Examining the *Isrā'īliyyāt* stories of Hārūt and Mārūt in *Tafsir al-Azhar* by Hamka and *Tafsir al-Misbāh* by M. Quraish Shihab is a strategic and representative approach, as these two works capture the two major currents of Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia (Setyaningrum, 2023). Hamka, a modernist-reformist, integrates Islamic teachings with rational thought and social reform, while Quraish Shihab adopts a rigorous academic approach to the tradition of Qur'anic commentary. Hamka's interpretations often draw on socio-cultural contexts, whereas Shihab combines historical and scientific analysis with theological reflection. This study thus offers a comprehensive understanding of *Isrā'īliyyāt* within the Indonesian exegetical tradition, providing insights from both the reformist-modernist school (Hamka) and the critical-academic perspective (Shihab).

A number of previous studies have examined the position of *Isrā'īliyyāt* within the *tafsīr* tradition, yet most have concentrated on their categorization, the authority of the reports, and their historical impact in classical exegesis. For instance, (Mustika, 2023) investigates how Hamka interprets the stories of Prophet Solomon and Hārūt–Mārūt in Q. 2:102 in order to identify the distinctive features of modern Indonesian *tafsīr* and his tendency in employing *Isrā'īliyyāt*. (Hadyan, 2016) traces the *Isrā'īliyyāt* reports in M. Quraish Shihab's *Tafsīr al-Mishbāh*, classifying their types, sources, and epistemological status, while also assessing how Shihab utilizes them without compromising the authority of the Qur'an. (Mufida and Mubarok, 2020) examine the distribution of and attitudes toward *Isrā'īliyyāt* among modern mufassirs through a comparative analysis of the interpretations of Adam's descent from heaven in four contemporary tafsīrs. Meanwhile, (Ghozali, 2024) explores the shifting use of *Isrā'īliyyāt* in three pesantren-based Indonesian tafsīrs by analyzing the story of Jālūt–Ṭālūt, highlighting its descriptive and methodological functions and their implications for exegetical tendencies.

Despite these important contributions, previous studies have not specifically compared the hermeneutical approaches of Hamka and Quraish Shihab in the context of the Hārūt–Mārūt narrative, an account densely intertwined with *Isrā'īliyyāt* and

frequently debated in terms of its authority and validity. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of how these two prominent modern Indonesian exegetes negotiate the presence of *Isrā'īliyyāt*, construct their methodological arguments, and formulate their epistemological positions regarding the problematic reports found in Q. al-Baqarah:102.

## Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a theoretical framework for analyzing how Hamka and Quraish Shihab interpret the story of Hārūt and Mārūt and respond to its Isrā'īliyyāt elements. This study draws on classical methodological categories in Qur'anic exegesis, *ijmālī*, *taḥlīlī*, *mawḍū'ī*, and especially *muqāran*, which enables a balanced comparison of both exegetes and helps identify the shared and differing aspects of their interpretations in a structured manner (Baidan, 2005).

This study also incorporates Schleiermacher's hermeneutical model, which combines grammatical and psychological approaches. Schleiermacher's model is used here not as a theological framework but as a general hermeneutical structure for analyzing the interpreter's linguistic and psychological engagement with the text. The grammatical dimension emphasizes linguistic meaning, historical-linguistic context, and the interplay between textual parts and the whole, while the psychological dimension seeks to uncover the author's intentions and life background. Schleiermacher operationalizes these through divinatory and comparative techniques, allowing interpretation to merge linguistic analysis with an understanding of the author's inner world (Forster, 2002).

Applied to the Hārūt–Mārūt narrative, this framework helps illuminate how Hamka and Quraish Shihab navigate both textual meaning and their respective intellectual environments. The grammatical approach examines lexical choices like *malakain* versus *malikain* and the historical evidence they employ, while the psychological approach reveals how Hamka's reformist leanings shape his rejection of Isrā'īliyyāt and how Quraish Shihab's Al-Azhar background supports a more flexible reading. Ultimately, this perspective shows that their interpretations emerge from the interaction between the text, its linguistic context, and each mufasir's subjective standpoint.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design, as all data analyzed are derived from exegetical texts rather than field observations. The research adopts a descriptive–comparative focus, systematically examining how Hamka and Quraish Shihab interpret the story of Hārūt and Mārūt in Qur'an 2:102. The corpus of the study consists of modern Indonesian tafsīr works that discuss this narrative, while two primary texts are purposively selected purposively by choosing two influential and representative *tafsīr* texts: *Tafsir al-Azhar* (Hamka) and *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ* (M. Quraish Shihab).

These works are selected because of their distinct methodological orientations, particularly in their treatment of *Isrā'īliyyāt*. The researcher functions as the primary analyst, supported by an analytical guideline based on Schleiermacher's hermeneutical framework. This guideline includes grammatical categories, such as lexical analysis, verse structure, and historical references, as well as psychological categories related to the exegetes' intellectual background and their attitudes toward *Isrā'īliyyāt*. Data are examined using qualitative content analysis through thematic coding and cross-text comparison, and hermeneutical interpretation to connect the textual findings with the socio-intellectual contexts of both exegetes. Results are presented through descriptive summaries and comparative interpretations.

## Result

The study finds that *Isrā'īliyyāt* refers to narrative reports attributed to Judeo-Christian tradition and later integrated into Muslim exegetical literature, which, over the course of history, entered Qur'anic exegesis through three stages: moderated transmission during the Prophet's lifetime, wider circulation among the Companions and Successors, and further diffusion through figures such as Kaʿb al-Aḥbār and Wahb ibn Munabbih. The term only acquired a clear technical meaning in the 8th/14th century after being classified by Ibn Taymiyyah and later refined by Ibn Kathīr.

Classical interpretations of the story of Hārūt and Mārūt display considerable diversity: al-Ṭabarī presented multiple reports and occasionally evaluated them, though he often prioritized isnād transmission, al-Qurṭubī rejected the notion of sinful angels,

while Ibn Kathīr adopted a middle position. In the context of modern Indonesia, Hamka is highly selective toward *Isrā'īliyyāt*, rejecting narratives that tarnish the reputation of Prophet Solomon and interpreting Hārūt and Mārūt as *malikain* (two kings). Meanwhile, Quraish Shihab is more open yet remains critical, presenting two possible identities for Hārūt and Mārūt (angels or righteous men) and understanding magic as an illusion that functions as a spiritual test. Both agree that Prophet Solomon did not practice magic.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Hārūt and Mārūt in *Tafsir al-Azhar* and *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ*

| Aspect | *Tafsir al-Azhar* | *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ* |
|---|---|---|
| **Approach to *Isrā'īliyyāt*** | Selectively uses *Isrā'īliyyāt* to enrich interpretation. | Cites *Isrā'īliyyāt* critically, noting their questionable authenticity. |
| **View on Validity of Narrations** | Rejects narrations from figures like Ka'ab al-Ahbar. | Cautions that *Isrā'īliyyāt* are unreliable for theology or law. |
| **Function of *Isrā'īliyyāt*** | Provides supplementary details not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an. | Serves as secondary references for alternative perspectives, prioritizing moral lessons. |
| **Interpretation of Hārūt and Mārūt** | Rejects parts of the story rooted in *Isrā'īliyyāt* and emphasizes its moral lessons. | Presents multiple versions but stresses the importance of the narrative's moral message. |
| **Response to Allegations Against Prophet Sulayman** | Firmly rejects the claim that Sulayman practiced magic, calling it slander from the Israelites. | Asserts that the Qur'an defends Sulayman from accusations of magic, attributing the lies to the devils. |
| **Core Message** | (1) The dangers of magic as a test for humanity. (2) Refutation of slander against Sulayman | (1) All beings, including angels, are subject to divine trials. (2) Magic is an illusion that tests human faith. |
| **Connection with Other Verses** | Focuses on Sulayman's story and Jewish accusations. | Connects the narrative with the verse about the dialogue between angels and humans (Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]:30). |

This comparison highlights that both *Tafsir al-Azhar* and *Tafsir al-Misba*>h incorporate *Isrā'īliyyāt*, but with differing degrees of acceptance and presentation. Hamka adopts a more skeptical stance toward these sources, while Shihab is more open but still cautious, emphasizing the unreliability of *Isrā'īliyyāt*. Both scholars reject the allegation that Sulayman practiced magic, emphasizing that magic, like everything else, occurs only

by Allah's will. However, Hamka focuses more on the practical dangers of magic as a trial for humanity, while Shihab presents it as an illusion that tests faith and spiritual resilience.

## Discussion

### *General Discourse of Isrā'īliyyāt*

Etymologically, Etymologically, *Isrā'īliyyāt* is the plural of *isrā'īliyyah* and refers to accounts originating from the traditions of the Children of Israel. It derived from the Hebrew name "Israel," meaning "servant of God," a title given to Prophet Ya'qūb (Jacob) and his descendants, the Bani Isrā'īl (Avivy, et al., 2015). This community is frequently mentioned in the Qur'an, reflecting its narrative (Al-Bāqi, 2012). Historically, the descendants of Bani Isrā'īl later came to be known as Jews and Christians, and those among them who accepted the teachings of Prophet Muhammad were identified as Muslims (Shuhbah, 1408). Quraish Shihab classifies Jews and Christians as *Ahl al-Kitāb* (Shihab, 1996).

Terminologically, scholars have defined *Isrā'īliyyāt* from various perspectives. Hamka views them as narratives originating from Jewish–Christian traditions that later entered Islamic exegesis (Hamka, 1989). Goldziher regards them as Judeo-Christian materials incorporated into Qur'anic exegesis in an effort to harmonize scriptural traditions (Goldziher, 1944). Al-Dhahabī distinguishes between (1) ancient Judeo-Christian accounts introduced into *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* as supplementary explanations, and (2) fabricated stories inserted by groups hostile to Islam, such as the tale of *Gharānīq*, which are rejected for being misleading and lacking credible sources. This distinction underscores that some *Isrā'īliyyāt* may provide useful contextual information, while others must be dismissed for contradicting essential Islamic teachings (Khodijah, 2025). The following are the attitudes of classical exegetes toward *Isrā'īliyyāt:*

Table 2. Classical exegetes's attitudes toward *Isrā'īliyyāt*

| Aspect | Scholar / Source | Position / Category | Summary |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Classification of *Isrā'īliyyāt*** | Ibn Taymiyyah | Three categories | (1) In accordance with the Qur'an → accepted; (2) In contradiction → rejected; (3) Unclear → suspended (*mauqūf*) (Al-Dhahabī, 1990). |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Ibn Khaldūn | Moderate–selective | May be used if filtered; some are true, others are not. |
| | Muḥammad ʻAbduh | Strong rejection | Avoids *Isrā'īliyyāt* due to their potential to distort *tafsīr*. |
| | Rashīd Riḍā | Stricter than ʻAbduh | Considers many *Isrā'īliyyāt* reports irrelevant and obstructive to understanding the verses (Anwar, 1999). |
| | Modern studies | Critical approach | Highlight the low reliability of Jewish reports and their impact on *tafsīr*. |
| **Function of *Isrā'īliyyāt* in *Tafsīr*** | Ghozali (2024) | Two functions | (1) Adds narrative–moral detail; (2) Influences exegetes' methodological approaches to verses. (Ghozali, 2024) |
| ***Tafsīr* of Hārūt–Mārūt (Middle Period)** | Al-Ṭabarī | Records without critique | Quotes two reports from Kaʻb al-Aḥbār: Hārūt–Mārūt were tested with desire, chose wine, then fell into sin (adultery–murder–shirk). Offers no final evaluation (Al-Ṭabarī, 2007). |
| | Al-Qurṭubī | Strong rejection | Asserts angels cannot sin; considers Hārūt–Mārūt to be human. Views Kaʻb's reports as weak (Al-Qurṭubī, 2006). |
| | Ibn Kathīr | Moderate | Accepts the story as a special case permitted by God, thus not violating angelic infallibility (Ibn Kathīr, 1997). |
| **Spectrum of Mufassir Positions** | Most accepting → most rejecting | Al-Ṭabarī → Ibn Kathīr → Al-Qurṭubī | Shows the methodological diversity in the use of Isrā'īliyyāt. |

## *The Interpretation of Hārūt and Mārūt in Tafsir al-Azhar by Hamka*

Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, better known as Hamka, was one of the most influential Muslim scholars in Southeast Asia (Nurtawab, 2024). Born on February 17, 1908, in Minangkabau, West Sumatra, and passing away in 1981 (Herlambang & Parwanto, 2023), Hamka came from a respected family of reformist scholars. His father, Abdul Karim Amrullah, was a prominent figure and co-founder of the reformist journal *al-Munir*, which played a critical role in spreading modern Islamic thought in Indonesia. *Al-Munir* shared the same vision as *al-Manār*, a reformist platform founded by Muhammad Rashid Riḍa in Egypt that significantly shaped modern Islamic thought throughout the Muslim world (Azra, 1999). Hamka's intellectual outlook was profoundly shaped by Egyptian reformers, including Muhammad ʻAbduh (d. 1904), his student Rashid Riḍa (d. 1935), and Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966). The influence of these thinkers

extended beyond the Arab world and shaped the intellectual currents in Southeast Asia. Egypt's role in disseminating Islamic renewal became a pivotal source of inspiration for Hamka's efforts to cultivate modern Islamic thought in Indonesia and beyond (Feener, 1998).

At the age of 16, Hamka traveled to Yogyakarta, where he immersed himself in Islamic studies and socialist ideas under the guidance of leading intellectuals. His time in Yogyakarta, a city known for its religious and cultural diversity, profoundly shaped his belief in a "renewed form of Islam." For Hamka, Islam was not merely a set of doctrines but a living faith that must actively address modern social challenges. During his time there, he also joined *Jong Islamieten Bond*, a Muslim youth organization, solidifying his role as a promising young intellectual. In 1927, Hamka embarked on a spiritual journey to Mecca, where he refined his knowledge of Islam and the Arabic language. Although his stay was brief, it marked a turning point in his intellectual journey. Upon returning to Indonesia, Hamka became a prolific writer, journalist, and preacher through his involvement with the Muhammadiyah movement. His prominence grew further when he was appointed as the imam of the al-Azhar Mosque in Jakarta. It was during his tenure at this mosque that Hamka developed his magnum opus, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, originally delivered as a series of morning lectures. These lectures were later compiled into book form, making *Tafsir al-Azhar* one of the most influential Qur'anic commentaries in Indonesia (Sirry, 2016). The first edition was published in 1967, with a revised version following in 1970 (Shomad, et al., 2024).

Hamka's interpretive approach in *Tafsir al-Azhar* follows the *al-adabi al-ijtima'i*, method, a style also employed in *Tafsir al-Manar* (Rouf, 2020). In the first volume, Hamka presents a comprehensive introduction before beginning his exegesis based on the *tartib mushafi*. His introduction covers essential topics such as Qur'anic sciences, the auxiliary disciplines required for interpretation, and discussions on the Qur'an's miraculous nature (*i'jaz* al-Qur'an). He also explains the methodology behind his tafsir, the principles guiding it, and the rationale for naming the work *Tafsir al-Azhar*. In his discussion of Qur'anic narratives, Hamka emphasizes that the Qur'an is not only a source of laws and theological doctrines but also contains historical stories intended to provide moral lessons. However, he notes that interpreting these stories can be challenging due to the blend of logical and seemingly illogical elements, many of which originate from

*Isra'iliyyat*, narratives transmitted by figures like Kaʿab al-Ahbar and Wahb ibn Munabbih. These accounts were later incorporated by some companions into their Qur'anic commentaries.

Hamka adopts a cautious approach when dealing with *Isrā'īliyyāt* narratives. He avoids including stories that lack sound authentication from the Prophet Muhammad or those that contradict reason or the teachings of the Qur'an. In Hamka's view, mixing credible interpretations with unreliable reports risks obscuring the Qur'an's true message for readers. Nevertheless, Hamka does not entirely dismiss *Isrā'īliyyāt* accounts. On occasion, he includes them in his commentary, but only as illustrative lessons, not as authoritative interpretations. This careful approach reflects Hamka's effort to counter the influence of preexisting commentaries that had become popular among the public but were filled with fantastical and unreliable stories. His stance also underscores his belief that Qur'anic exegesis should be grounded in scholarly rigor and rational inquiry, in line with the demands of modern times. Hamka's classification of *Isrā'īliyyāt* follows the framework previously outlined by Ibn Taymiyyah, as discussed earlier in this study (Hamka, 1989).

Following the examination of the external factors that shaped Hamka's thinking and the development of *Tafsir al-Azhar*, attention now shifts to the intrinsic aspects of his exegesis. One significant feature is Hamka's narrative approach in addressing *Isrā'īliyyāt*, particularly in his commentary on the story of Hārūt and Mārūt. In his interpretation of Surah al-Baqarah (2:102), Hamka draws on *Isrā'īliyyāt* found in the Torah to provide context.

> *Tersebut di dalam Perjanjian Lama, dalam "Kitab Raja-Raja I", Fasal 11 dari atar 1 sampai 10, bahwa Nabi kita Sulaiman alaihis salam di hari tuanya telah menyembah berhala, untuk menuruti kehendak isteri-isteri baginda yang banyak itu. Di situlah tersebut bahwa isteri baginda Sulaiman 700 dan gundiknya 300. Dikatakan pada ayat 3 bahwa segala isterinya itu menyesatkan baginda. Sehingga baginda dirikan beberapa rumah penyembahan berhala, dan turut baginda pergi menyembah berhala itu, sehingga Tuhan Allah murka kepadanya, dan menyatakan bahwa setelah ia mangkat Kerajaannya akan mundur, tidak semegah di zaman ayahnya Nabi Daud lagi. "Kitab Raja-Raja" yang menuliskan ceritera Nabi Sulaiman murtad itu menurut kepercayaan orang Yahudi adalah termasuk dalam gabungan Kitab Taurat juga. Dengan demikian orang*

*Yahudipun percaya bahwa Nabi Sulaiman telah kafir. Inilah yang dibantah keras oleh ayat ini.*

Hamka explains that this verse refutes the Jewish accusations against Prophet Sulayman, alleging that he became an apostate, worshipped idols due to his wives' influence, and practiced witchcraft. Hamka dismisses these claims in the Torah as baseless and illogical for a prophet of Allah. According to Hamka, this narrative is not a divine revelation but one inspired by devils, who are also said to have taught sorcery to two individuals in Babylon: Hārūt and Mārūt. While most commentaries interpret these two as angels (*malakaini*), Hamka supports the alternative reading of *malikaini* (kings), based on the recitations of Ibn ʻAbbas and Abu Aswad. Although the majority of scholars favor the interpretation that Hārūt and Mārūt were angels, Hamka disagrees. He aligns with the view that they were two pious men so revered in Babylon that they were regarded as angelic figures. According to the narrative, a person once approached Hārūt and Mārūt seeking to learn magic. They taught him the art but warned him not to misuse it for evil purposes. However, the man disregarded their warning and used magic to sow discord between married couples, separating husbands from their wives.

Hamka also references a report from the Companion, Abdullah bin Umar, which tells of angels questioning why many of Adam's descendants disobey Allah. In response, Allah states that if the angels were placed in human circumstances, they too would disobey Him. To demonstrate this, Allah sent two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt, to the world. However, they ended up committing grave sins, including adultery and drinking alcohol. As punishment, Allah suspended them between heaven and earth. The woman who led them into sin was named Zuhrah, who, according to the story, was cursed by Allah and transformed into a star. Hamka discusses various interpretations of this story. Al-Suyuti, in *Al-Durr al-Manthur*, includes the narrative without comment. Ibn Kathir reproduces parts of it but rejects its authenticity, while al-Qurtubi outrightly denies its validity and links it to Kaʻab al-Ahbar, a Jewish convert to Islam known for narrating *Isrā'īliyyāt*. Similarly, al-Razi deems the story illogical, dismissing it as a fable. Al-Tabari even interprets the conjunction *wa* in the phrase *wama unzila* as negating the teaching of magic by Hārūt and Mārūt, thereby rejecting the story altogether. In his concluding remarks, Hamka draws several important lessons from this narrative. First, he underscores that the Jewish accusations of Prophet Sulayman's apostasy are false. Second, he emphasizes the

dangers of magic, cautioning that studying it brings harmful consequences and can corrupt anyone involved (Hamka, 1989).

### *The Interpretation of Hārūt and Mārūt in Tafsir al-Misbāh by M. Quraish Shihab*

M. Quraish Shihab, born on February 16, 1944, in Rapang, South Sulawesi, was born into a scholarly religious family (Asysyifa, 2023). He began his education at the Darul-Hadith Islamic boarding school in Malang before continuing his studies at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, where he earned his bachelor's degree in Qur'anic studies in 1967 and a master's degree in 1969. Shihab's academic career took off when he became Vice-Rector at IAIN Ujung Pandang (now UIN Alauddin Makassar). He later completed his PhD at al-Azhar in 1982. In 1984, Shihab moved to IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta to continue his academic and administrative work. In 1998, he was appointed Indonesia's Minister of Religious Affairs and later served as the country's ambassador to Egypt, Somalia, and Djibouti (Syamsuddin, 2021). During his ambassadorship, Shihab embarked on a monumental project: the composition of *Tafsir al-Misbāh* (Ali, 2023). This multi-volume work became one of the most influential contemporary Indonesian tafsirs, securing his position as one of the most influential Muslim scholars in Southeast Asia.

Tafsir al-Misbāh employs a tahlīlī method enriched by linguistic, theological, and socio-contextual perspectives. Shihab approaches each verse from multiple perspectives, combining theological, linguistic, and social insights. The first volume was published in 2000, with the final volume released in 2003 (Rohman, et al., 2024). His position as ambassador gave him the time and space to focus on the project, which he began in Cairo in June 1999 and completed in Jakarta in September 2003. The interpretative framework of *Tafsir al-Misbāh* reflects the social-literary approach (*al-adabī al-ijtimā'ī*), which prioritizes contemporary social issues (Fuadi, 2021). Shihab's commentary engages in dialogue with the Qur'anic text, emphasizing the Qur'an's relevance to modern life. His goal is to present the Qur'an not merely as a sacred text for ritual recitation but as a source of practical guidance. The title *al-Misbāh* (meaning "lamp") symbolizes the Qur'an's role in illuminating the path for humanity (Nurrohim & Jannah, 2020).

Shihab was motivated to write *Tafsir al-Misbāh* by his concern about the growing tendency among Muslims to focus on the beauty of Qur'anic recitation at the expense of

deeper understanding. His objective was to restore the Qur'an's function as a comprehensive guide for personal and societal development. By encouraging readers to engage with the Qur'an's messages thoughtfully, *Tafsir al-Misbāh* aims to ensure that the Qur'an's teachings remain relevant and applicable in the modern world (Romziana & Fajarwati, 2023).

In his commentary on Surah al-Baqarah (2:102), M. Quraish Shihab provides a nuanced understanding of the narrative surrounding Hārūt and Mārūt, especially regarding sorcery and its connection to *Isrā'īliyyāt*. Shihab's interpretation begins by addressing and refuting the accusation that the Prophet Sulaiman engaged in magic, a claim explicitly rejected by the Qur'an. He underscores that Prophet Sulayman did not practice sorcery; rather, it was the devils who disseminated magic and spread falsehoods to tarnish Sulayman reputation and that of his son among the Israelites, despite Sulayman's revered status as a prophet. Shihab argues that if the Israelites could fabricate such lies about Sulayman, their slander against the Prophet Muhammad, an outsider to their lineage, would be even more malicious. Shihab also links this verse to the historical fragmentation of the Kingdom of Israel following Sulayman's death. Drawing on the interpretation of Tahir ibn 'Ashur, he explains that Sulayman's kingdom was divided into two parts: one ruled by his son, Rahbi'am and the other by Yurbi'am, a former subordinate. To undermine Sulayman's legacy, his enemies circulated baseless accusations, including the claim that he had used magic to consolidate his authority

Shihab then turns to the narrative of Hārūt and Mārūt, the two figures mentioned in the Qur'an as having taught sorcery in Babylon. He outlines two major interpretive trends found in classical and modern scholarship on their identity and role. According to one view, Hārūt and Mārūt were exceptionally righteous humans, elevated to the status of angels due to their piety. The second view holds that they were, in fact, actual angels sent to earth. While both angels taught sorcery, they explicitly warned their students that magic was a trial, one that could lead to disbelief. Shihab emphasizes that sorcery is distinct from divine miracles, which originate from God's will and are beyond the influence of demonic forces. Despite these warnings, some individuals disregarded the guidance and misused magic to create discord, particularly to separate spouses.

Shihab highlights that Allah allowed the existence of sorcery as a means of testing human beings. He stresses that no harm can be inflicted through magic unless it occurs with Allah's permission, underscoring that even seemingly supernatural phenomena are subject to divine control. Those who engage in sorcery, such as the Jews who sought to imitate the magic of Hārūt and Mārūt, ultimately gain no benefit, either in this world or the hereafter. Instead, they bring harm upon themselves, as sorcery yields only harm and offers no real advantage.

Shihab also connects the story of Hārūt and Mārūt to the Qur'anic narrative of the angels questioning Allah's decision to appoint humankind as His vicegerents on earth. When Allah announced His plan to create Adam as His representative (*khalifah*), the angels expressed doubt about the wisdom of this decision. To demonstrate the angels' limitations, Allah tested Adam by teaching him the names of things unknown to them. A second, more practical test involved sending two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt to earth, where they were exposed to human temptations. Despite their celestial origin, they succumbed to these temptations, which, according to some scholars, included the allure of a woman. Shihab interprets the story symbolically, suggesting that it serves as a reminder that even those who perceive themselves as morally or intellectually superior can falter under real-world pressures. Additionally, he delves into the linguistic nuances of the Arabic word *sahar* (magic), which connotes something obscure or deceptive. *Sahar* distorts reality, causing people to see things as they are not. Shihab concludes that magic, at its core, is an illusion, a tool through which Satan deceives humanity, particularly through harmful practices like black magic (Shihab, 2007).

## *A Comparative Analysis of Hārūt and Mārūt in Tafsir al-Azhar and Tafsir al-Misbāh*

Hamka engages with *Isrā'īliyyāt* but does so critically. He stresses that not all *Isrā'īliyyāt* are acceptable, particularly those that portray prophets negatively, such as the claim that Prophet Sulayman engaged in idolatry. Hamka explicitly rejects the narrations of Kaʿab al-Ahbar, a Jewish convert to Islam, who frequently transmitted *Isrā'īliyyāt*. Hamka critiques the Old Testament narrative, which accuses Sulayman of apostasy due to the influence of his wives, labeling it an illogical fabrication by the Jews. He argues that

the relevant Qur'anic verse refutes this slander, affirming that Sulayman did not disbelieve; rather, it was the devils who spread sorcery. In interpreting Hārūt and Mārūt, Hamka diverges from mainstream exegesis. He adopts the reading "malikain" (two kings) instead of "malakain" (two angels), in line with the readings of Ibn 'Abbas and Abu> Aswad. He also incorporates narratives suggesting that these two figures were enticed by worldly temptations, leading them to sin.

Shihab similarly emphasizes that the Qur'anic verse aims to counter the allegation that Prophet Sulayman practiced magic. He explains that the devils propagated this slander to tarnish Sulayman's reputation. Shihab notes that if the Jews were willing to defame their own prophet, they would be even more hostile toward Prophet Muhammad While Shihab acknowledges the *Isrā'īliyyāt* origin of the Hārūt and Mārūt story, he takes a more analytical approach. He presents two major interpretations: first, that Hārūt and Mārūt were exceptionally pious humans, perceived as angels; and second, that they were indeed angels sent as a divine test. Shihab leans toward the view that the narrative represents a spiritual trial and emphasizes that magic can only affect individuals with Allah's permission. Shihab also addresses the linguistic aspect of the word *sahẖar* (magic), explaining that it refers to something ambiguous or deceptive. He clarifies that magic is not a miracle but rather an illusion designed to distort reality and deceive people. He warns that involvement in magic only brings harm, both in this world and the hereafter.

## *Interpretive Analysis and Its Implications for Indonesian Qur'anic Exegesis*

The differences in Hamka's and Quraish Shihab's approaches to *Isrā'īliyyāt* did not emerge suddenly; rather, they are rooted in the socio-intellectual background, methodological orientation, and scholarly horizons that shaped each of them. Hamka emerged from the early 20th-century reformist tradition, heavily influenced by the reformist rationalist ideas of Egyptian thinkers such as Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida (Azra, 1999). This reformist current emphasized the purification of Islamic teachings from superstitious elements, including *Isrā'īliyyāt*, which were considered to undermine the purity of faith (Fattah et al., 2023). Therefore, Hamka's highly selective and critical stance can be understood as an effort to safeguard the authority of the Qur'an from unverifiable narrations that were perceived to demean the dignity of the prophets.

In contrast, Quraish Shihab was shaped by the Al-Azhar academic tradition, which is more historical, philological, and analytical (Mujahidin, Itmam, & Rofiq, 2024). This approach enabled Shihab to adopt a more inclusive attitude toward *Isrā'īliyyāt*, not to validate them, but to understand the interpretative discourse comprehensively while acknowledging its epistemic limitations. Thus, their differences reflect two main hermeneutical currents in modern Indonesian tafsir: reformist-rational (Hamka) and academic-critical (Shihab), each developing distinct strategies in negotiating problematic narratives such as the story of Hārūt and Mārūt.

Based on the above analysis, these methodological differences have several significant impacts on the development of tafsir studies in Indonesia, including:

1. Hamka's critical approach has the impact of strengthening the tendency to purify tafsir from foreign elements. This stance encourages mufassir scholars to use rationality and theological consistency as the primary standards for accepting a narration.
2. A second impact of Hamka's approach is the emergence of a modernist tafsir tradition that emphasizes practical morality and the social relevance of Qur'anic verses, making tafsir a guide for ethical conduct in contemporary life.
3. Quraish Shihab's analytical approach has a different impact, opening space for tafsir studies that are more historical, intertextual, and academic. His presentation of various narrational versions, including *Isrā'īliyyāt*, promotes a more dialogical model of tafsir.
4. A further impact of Shihab's approach is evident in the development of contemporary tafsir research that not only repeats classical narratives but also critically examines the source, function, and context of each narration in greater depth.
5. Overall, both approaches have positively impacted the corpus of Indonesian tafsir: Hamka reinforces a rational-theological foundation, while Quraish Shihab broadens academic and methodological horizons, allowing *Isrā'īliyyāt* studies to develop more maturely and multidimensionally.

## Conclusion

The study shows that Hamka and Quraish Shihab negotiate *Isrā'īliyyāt* in distinct yet complementary ways within the narrative of Hārūt and Mārūt. Hamka adopts a selective and highly critical stance, rejecting reports that undermine prophetic integrity and emphasizing rational clarity along with the moral dangers of magic. In contrast, Quraish Shihab employs a more analytical and inclusive method, presenting multiple interpretive possibilities, whether Hārūt and Mārūt were angels or righteous men, while consistently highlighting the epistemic uncertainty of *Isrā'īliyyāt*. Despite their different orientations, both exegetes concur that Prophet Sulaymān was innocent of sorcery and that magic functions only as a divine test, not an autonomous supernatural force. These findings affirm that modern Indonesian tafsir is characterized by methodological plurality shaped by reformist rationalism on the one hand and critical-academic inclusivity on the other. The study also highlights how each exegete balances inherited narrative traditions with contemporary interpretive demands. Future research is encouraged to extend this comparative approach to other Qur'anic stories involving *Isrā'īliyyāt*, exploring how shifting socio-cultural contexts and evolving hermeneutical frameworks continue to shape exegetical engagement with pre-Islamic narrative materials.

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