

THE ARGUMENT OF AHAD HADITH IMPLEMENTATION IN INTERPRETING THE DEATH OF PROPHET ISA ACCORDING TO MAHMUD SYALTUT AND SIRADJUDDIN ABBAS

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Abstract: *The Argument of Ahad Hadith Implementation in Interpreting the Death of Prophet Isa According to Mahmud Syaltut and Siradjuddin Abbas.* This article aims to discuss some differences between Mahmud Syaltut and Siradjuddin Abbas in interpreting the verses about the death of prophet Isa. This paper also seeks to investigating of how they interpret, what methods they use, and what factors influence these differences. The results of the study reveal that Mahmud Shaltut interpretes the term of the *tawaffa* (Q.S. Âli 'Imrân [3] verse 55) and *tawaffaitani* (Q.S. al-Maidah [5] verse 117) in accordance with the original meaning of "death". On the contrary, Siradjuddin Abbas exegetes the term of *tawaffa* by "grasp". These differences are because Siradjuddin Abbas uses the method of *tafsir bi al-riwayah* and considers them as *hadith[s] sahih*. On the contrary, Mahmud Syaltut uses the method of *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* and does not use such *hadith[s]*. As a figure of reformer in Egypt, the interpretation of Mahmud Syaltut is affected by Muhammad Abduh's opinion who refuses the use of *ahad* hadith in belief/*aqidah* discussion while Siradjuddin Abbas, as a traditional Islamic figure in Indonesia, attempts to counter Muhammad Abduh's opinion because it contradicts to the understanding of *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamaah* that he followed.

Keywords: *hadith ahad; interpretation; death of Prophet Isa.*

Abstrak: *Polemik Penggunaan Hadis Ahad Dalam Menafsirkan Kewafatan Nabi Isa Menurut Mahmud Syaltut Dan Siradjuddin Abbas.* Artikel ini bertujuan untuk membahas beberapa perbedaan antara Mahmud Shaltut dan Siradjuddin Abbas dalam menafsirkan ayat-ayat tentang wafatnya Nabi Isa. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengungkapkan bagaimana mereka menginterpretasikan, metode apa yang mereka gunakan, dan faktor-faktor apa yang mempengaruhi perbedaan tersebut. Hasil penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa Mahmud Shaltut menafsirkan istilah *tawaffa* (Q.S. Imrân [3] ayat 55) dan *tawaffaitani* (Q.S. al-Maidah [5] ayat 117) sesuai dengan makna asli, yaitu "wafat". Sebaliknya, Siradjuddin Abbas menafsirkan istilah *tawaffa* dengan "menggenggam". Perbedaan-perbedaan ini disebabkan karena Siradjuddin Abbas menggunakan metode *tafsir bi al-riwayah* dan memahaminya dengan hadis-hadis sahih. Sedangkan Mahmud Syaltut menggunakan metode *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* dan tidak menggunakan hadis. Sebagai tokoh reformis di Mesir, penafsiran Mahmud Syaltut dipengaruhi oleh pendapat Muhammad Abduh yang menolak penggunaan hadis ahad dalam pembahasan keyakinan/ akidah. Sementara Siradjuddin Abbas, sebagai tokoh Islam tradisional di Indonesia, berupaya menolak pemikiran Muhammad Abduh karena itu bertentangan dengan paham *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamaah* yang dia ikuti.

Kata kunci: *hadis ahad; penafsiran; wafat Nabi Isa.*

Introduction

In the mid-20th century, Islamic world was surprised by the fatwa of international ulama fatwa Syeikh Al-Azhar Mahmud Syaltut, which argued that Prophet Isa (Al-Masih/Jesus) had died and never descended back to the earth at the end of times¹ In contrast to Muslim common

belief (*mufasssir*), Prophet Isa was not crucified or killed (Judas substituted him). He was saved and raised to heaven by Allah², that still alive and would descend back to earth at the end of the times. Syaltut argued that argument was

¹ *Fakta Dan Realita*, (Yogyakarta: LESFI, 2003), p. 219.

² Mun'im Sirry, *Polemik Kitab Suci*, Trans. R Cecep Lukman Yasin, (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2013), p. 31.

¹ Abd. Salam Arief, *Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam Antara*

not based on Quran and Sunna.³

This controversial debate topic was eluded and criticized by ulamas both in Middle East and Indonesian. Regarding to those arguments, ulama who takes Syaltut's fatwa seriously is KH. Siradjuddin Abbas, a traditional Indonesian ulama as well as a public figure of United Tarbiyah Islamiyah (PERTI).⁴ According to Siradjuddin Abbas, Syaltut's fatwa was not in accordance to Islamic *aqidah* similar to Christianity, and violated Quran as well as valid hadiths.⁵

The contrasting understanding between Mahmud Syaltut and Siradjuddin Abbas about the death of Prophet Isa is interesting and valuable to be observed since this *aqidah* issue is essential and eminent in Islam. The understandings of Mahmud Syaltut and Siradjuddin Abbas were selected in this study because they lived in the same era and discussed similar issue in their writings.

Academic debates between Mahmud Syaltut and Siradjuddin Abbas raised in interpreting verses on the death of Prophet Isa. The question is how could Quran proof lead to contrasting interpretations? In this term, Syaltut believed that Prophet Isa was dead and never been returned to the world since none of the verses mentioned, while Siradjuddin Abbas understood the verses adversely.

Some assumptions of the aforementioned contradictory elaboration can be concluded as follows: 1) There are methods differences between Siradjuddin Abbas and Mahmud Syaltut in interpreting verses on the death of Prophet Isa; 2) These differences are not only in terms of methodological factor, but also due to sociological factor or socio-history influences at that time. It is possible that Mahmud Syaltut was not using hadith in his interpretation since he was influenced by Muhammad Abduh and Rasyid Ridha's thought that considered *ahad* hadith could

not be employed in discussing *aqidah* issue.⁶

In addition, the research questions of this study are as follows: 1) How Mahmud Syaltut and Siradjuddin interpreted verses on the death of Prophet Isa? 2) What interpretation methods they employed? 3) Why did differences occur and what factors influenced the differences?

Some studies about Syaltut's thought included women's *fiqh* by Mahmud Arif⁷, political thought aspects by Agus Miswanto⁸, and law hadith by Arif Wahyudi.⁹ Moreover, there is a study conducted about Siradjuddin Abbas' interpretation by M. Baharuddin¹⁰ and Siafuddin Duhri¹¹ that discussed theological aspects. Nevertheless, Mahmud Syaltut and Siradjuddin Abbas interpretation on the death of Prophet Isa is still cannot be compromised. Consequently, this study is quite significant to be discussed due to interpretation related literatures overlook the academic problems.

Method

This qualitative study employed content analysis that analyzed the interpretations of Syaltut and Siradjuddin Abbas on verses of the death of Prophet Isa. In order to examine factors influencing the differences, sociology of knowledge approach was used together with relationism theory proposed by Karl Mannheim. This theory argues that every thought is definitely related with social location or socio-history of community.⁷ The data were collected from (1) primary sources that included Mahmud Syaltut's works such as *al-Fatâwa* and his interpretation, and Siradjuddin Abbas's work of *40 Masalah Agama*, and (2) secondary sources that included books and journal articles discussing about the issue by both public figures. Those data were analyzed by descriptive-comparative-critic and qualitative.

³ Mahmud Syaltut, *al-Fatâwa*, (Kairo: Dâr al-Qalam, 1966), p. 65.

⁴ Siradjuddin Abbas dismissed Syaltut's fatwa in particular in the book of *40 Masalah Agama* in the chapter of death of Prophet Isa. See Siradjuddin Abbas. *40 Masalah Agama* (Jakarta: Pustaka Tarbiyah, 1997), Vol. 1, pp. 324-346.

⁵ Siradjuddin Abbas dismissed Syaltut's fatwa..., p. 324.

⁶ Abduh and Ridha's rejection of the use of *ahad* hadith in *aqidah* matter; see; Mun'im Sirri, *Tradisi Intelektual Islam*, (Malang : Madani, 2015), pp. 81-84.

⁷ Muhyar Fanani, *Metode Studi Islam; Aplikasi Sosiologi Pengetahuan Sebagai Cara Pandang*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2008), pp. 34, 67-69.

Mahmud Syaltut, Siradjuddin Abbas, and Knowledge *Rihlah*

Mahmud Syaltut was born on April 23, 1893 in Minyat Bani Mansur village, Itay Al-Bairut district, Buhaira province. He was raised in farmer family who was faithful, and his father was a charismatic farmer in the village.⁸ Meanwhile, Siradjuddin Abbas was born in Bengkawas Bukit Tinggi, West Sumatra on May 5, 1905.⁹ His father name is Abbas Qadhi bin Abdul Wahab bin Abdul Hakim and his mother is Syekhah Ramlah binti Dja'i, both are ulamas who believed in *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah* and *Syafi'i* maddhab disciples. Therefore, Mahmud Syaltut came from Egypt, Middle East, while Siradjuddin Abbas originated from Indonesia (Minangkabau). They were born and raised in a family who is faithful in religion.

Mahmud Syaltut earned his first education from his father by memorizing Quran verses and did it in 1906 when he was a teenager (13 years old). Afterwards, he entered religious education in Ma'had al-Dîni in Iskandariyah and continued his degree in al-Azhar University.¹⁰

Likewise, Siradjuddin Abbas also started his religious education from his parents around 1910-1912. He learnt Quran reading to his mother and continued study Arabic holy book to his father, Syekh Haji Abbas di Ladang Lawas.¹¹ In 1912 to 1924, Siradjuddin Abbas continued his study in varied Islamic boarding schools in Minangkabau. As he studied and pursued his education there, from 1927 to 1933, he focused on his knowledge by visiting ulamas in Mecca as well as taking pilgrimage in the Holy city.¹²

There are similarities shared between Syaltut and Siradjuddin Abbas in terms of education *rihlah*. The first *rihlah* is that they began their education from parents, and followed by taking religious education (*pesantren/ma'had*) in their origins. Second, after having education in *pesantren*, both of them pursued their study

in Middle East, where Syaltut studied formally in al-Azhar University, while Siradjuddin Abbas visited ulamas in Mecca.

After he graduated from al-Azhar, Syaltut became a teacher in his almamater, Iskandariyah, in addition to being a religious preacher, a writer in a magazine and academic journal published by al-Azhar.¹³ During his life, he was recognized as a public figure that was really care about unity of Muslim. For the last 25 years of his life, he involved in *Jamaah al-Taqrîb baina al-Mazâhib* initiation, an organization aims at gathering among maddhab. The members consisted of Sunni and Syiah in order to vanish maddhab fanaticism in Islamic law.¹⁴

On the other hand, after studying with ulamas in Mecca in 1933, Siradjuddin Abbas returned home to Minangkabau to continue his father's struggle by teaching at Islamic boarding school there.¹⁵ Three years after his return from Mecca, Siradjuddin Abbas was known as ulama and *muballigh* prodigy and persistent to fight for *Ahlussunnah Waljamaah aqîdah* as well as *Syafi'i maddhab*. As a result, he attracted PERTI ulama, an Islamic organization mostly for old people in Bukittinggi. He joined PERTI and was shortly elected as the chairman of PERTI at the 3rd Congress in Bukittinggi in 1936.¹⁶ During his leadership period, PERTI was concerning in social movement and proselytism. Moreover, it successfully had publication of magazine called SOEARTI (SOEARA PERTI) from 1937 to 1942.¹⁷ This magazine was not only beneficial as *wasilah* to deliver information (religious), but also as communication medium between PERTI board members.

The explanations above indicated some similarity in terms of career journey between them. There are three similarities: 1) After returning from Middle East, they devoted to almamater. For example, Syaltut taught *Ma'had al-Dîni* in Iskandariyah, while Siradjuddin Abbas

⁸ Arief, *Pembaruan Pemikiran...*, p. 201.

⁹ Siradjuddin Abbas, *Itiqad Ahlussunnah Waljamaa'h*, ed. 27 (Jakarta: Pustaka Tarbiyah, 1997), p. 370.

¹⁰ Abdul Aziz Dahlan, *Ensiklopedi Hukum Islam*, (Jakarta: PT Ichtiar Baru Van Hoeve, 2001), Vol. 5, p. 1689.

¹¹ Sanusi Latif, *Ulama Sumatera Barat*, (Padang: IAIN Imam Bonjol Press, t.t.), pp. 157.

¹² Sanusi Latif, *Ulama Sumatera Barat...*, p. 157

¹³ Arief, *Pembaruan Pemikiran...*, p. 202.

¹⁴ Dahlan, *Ensiklopedi Hukum Islam*, Vol. 5, p. 1689.

¹⁵ Latif, *Ulama Sumatera Barat...*, p. 157.

¹⁶ Latif, *Ulama Sumatera Barat...*, p. 157, However, according to Alaidin Koto Mu'tamar's note, Siradjuddin Abbas was elected in 1935. See Koto, *Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah*, 35 dan 50.

¹⁷ Latif, *Ulama Sumatera Barat...*, p. 157.

continued teaching at Islamic boarding school in Minangkabau; 2) Both ulamas developed their religious understanding towards organization. Syaltut became important person (a teacher and chief) of United Tarbiyah Ismaliyah (PERTI); 3) Both of them began their scientific activities, in which Syaltut through magazine or al-Azhar article journal contribution and Siradjuddin through SOARTI (Soeara Tarbiyah Islamiyah) magazine.

Eventually, Syaltut was appointed as a lecturer in al-Azhar University in 1927, and became a rector of al-Azhar University.¹⁸ While he was being a rector, he had many opportunities to advance innovation. Similarly, Siradjuddin Abbas developed and maintained his religious knowledge by teaching in varied Islamic boarding school, gave sermon, and published books and articles. As Indonesia got its independent, Siradjuddin Abbas and his wife moved to Jakarta to actively bound in engaging PERTI nationally. He involved in political discipline by expanding PERTI to become a political party during post-independence period or Old Order. Consequently, PERTI was more popular either nationally or internationally.

As a chief of a party, Siradjuddin Abbas had received a mandate as a minister.¹⁹ Among many positions, he had been a Minister of Human Development in Ali Sastroamidjojo's cabinet from 1954-1955.²⁰ His period as a chief of PERTI was until 1966 as Soekarno government (Old Order) ended, therefore Siradjuddin Abbas's political career was also ceased.

According to elaboration above, it is assumed that there are similarities between Syaltut and Siradjuddin Abbas towards organization they maintained, and later led them to prominent position. In this case, Mahmud Syaltut became rector of al-Azhar University, while Siradjuddin Abbas as a minister.

Books written by Mahmud Syaltut, during his period as a rector, were *Tafsir al-Qur'a'n al-Karîm al-Ajza' al-Asra al-ûla*, *al-Fatâwa*, *al-Islâm Aqîda wa Syarî'ah*, *Min Taujihât al-Islâm*, *al-Masuliyah al-Madâniyah Wa al-Jinayah Fî al-Syarî'ah al-Islâmiyah*,

Muqâranah al-Mazâhib Fî al-Fiqh, *Fiqh al-Qur`ân wa al-Sunnah*, *Manhâj al-Qur`ân Fî Baina al-Mujtama' Tanzim al-nasl*, *al-Qur`în wa al-Mar'ah*, *Tanzim al-'Alaqah al-Duâliyyah Fî al-Islâm*, *al-Qur`ân wal al-Qitâl*, *al-Islâm wa wujud al-Duwalîy Li al-Muslimîn*, *al-Islâm wa al-Takaful al-Ijtimâ'i ilâ al-Qur`ân al-Karîm*.²¹

Amid his activities in government and politics, Siradjuddin Abbas never forgot his status as Ulama which never been abandoned proselytism and wrote religious books. Moreover, he stayed productive until got aged by publishing books in Indonesian and Arabic language.²² The books written in Arabic included *Sirâj al-Munîr*, (*Fiqh* 2 volume). *Bidâyah al-Balaghah*, (*Bayan*), *Khulâ'ah Tarikh Islâmî*, (*Islamic history*), *Ilmul Insha'*, *Sirâj al-Bayân fî Firasati Ayatil Qur`ân*, *Ilmun Nafs*. Additionally, books written in Indonesian are *I'tiqad Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah*, *Sejarah dan Keagungan Mazhab Syafi'i*, *40 Masalah Agama-Volume I-4*, *Kumpulan Soal Jawab Keagamaan*, *kitab Kitab Fiqih Ringkas*, *dan Perjalanan hidup Nabi Muhammad SAW* 30.²³

Therefore, their works indicate differences, in which Syaltut discussed specifically about Quran interpretation book, while Siradjuddin Abbas mostly wrote interpretation review and thought, particularly in his book entitled *40 Masalah Agama*.

After they contributed their knowledge, both ulamas passed away due to sickness. Syaltut had stroke on November 25, 1963 then his family brought him to al-Agouza Hospital, Cairo. He had a surgery for 3 hours and fortunately his condition recovered gradually. A few moments later, he exhaled his last breath on December 13, 1963 in 70 years old.²⁴ However, Siradjuddin Abbas died on Wednesday, August 5, 1980 in 75 years old after a few days later was nursed in Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital because of heart attack he had.²⁵ During his funeral, people were honoring him. He was buried in Tanah Kusir funeral in South Jakarta and was attended by

²¹ Arief, *Pembaruan Pemikiran...*, pp. 207-208.

²² Latif, *Ulama Sumatera Barat...*, p. 162.

²³ Suprpto, *Ensiklopedi Ulama Nusantara...*, 714.

²⁴ Arief, *Pembaruan Pemikiran...*, p. 203.

²⁵ Abbas, *Sejarah dan Keagungan Mazhab Syafi'i*, 11. see, *I'tiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jama'ah*, 2.

¹⁸ Dahlan, *Ensiklopedi Hukum Islam...*, 1689.

¹⁹ Suprpto, *Ensiklopedi Ulama Nusantara...*, p. 712.

²⁰ Howard M. Federspiel, *Jalan Baru Islam*, (Bandung: Mizan), p. 187.

vice President of Indonesia, Adam Malik.²⁶

Mahmud Syaltut, Siradjuddin Abbas, and Interpretations on Verses of the Death of Prophet Isa.

1. Verses about the Death of Prophet Isa

Both Syaltut or Siradjuddin Abbas agreed with Quran topic concerning about the death of Prophet Isa. However, they had different understandings in interpreting and understanding the verses. The verses are as follows:²⁷

- a. Q.S.Ali 'Imrân [3]: 55

إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَٰعِيسَىٰ إِنِّي مُتَوَفِّيكَ وَرَافِعُكَ إِلَيَّ

God said, "O Jesus, I am terminating your life, and raising you to Me." (Q.S.Ali 'Imrân [3]: 55)

- b. Q.S.Al-Nisâ'[4]: 157-158

وَمَا قُلُوهُ يَقِينًا ﴿١٥٧﴾ بَلْ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا
حَكِيمًا ﴿١٥٨﴾

They have no knowledge of it, except the following of assumptions. Certainly, they did not kill him. Rather, God raised him up to Himself. God is Mighty and Wise. (Q.S.Al-Nisâ'[4]: 157-158)

- c. Q.S. Al-Mâidah [5]: 117

فَلَمَّا تَوَفَّيْتَنِي كُنْتُ أَنتَ الرَّقِيبَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَنْتَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ

but when You took me to Yourself, You became the Watcher over them—You are Witness over everything. (Q.S. Al-Mâidah [5]: 117:)

2. Interpretation of Verses on the Death of Prophet Isa

Siradjuddin Abbas and Syaltut have their own argument in defining and interpreting verses of the death of Prophet Isa. The arguments are systematically written in their books respectively. The discussion relies on the comprehension of *tawaffa* in Surah Q.S. Ali 'Imrân[3]: 55 ("ya 'Isa inni

mutawaaffika warâfi'uka ilayya wamuthahhiruka) "O Jesus, I am terminating your life, and raising you to Me, and clearing you of those who disbelieve," word *tawaffaitani* in Q.S. Al-Maidah [5]:117, and *bal rafa'ahullâh ilaihi* in Q.S.Al-Nisâ [4]:158. The followings are quotation of their discussion:

a. The Interpretation by Syaltut:

The first step in his interpretation, Syaltut conducted analysis on word *tawaffâ* beforehand. According to him, the word is often appeared in the Quran with its common meaning of death, and never been defined differently. For instances in Q.S. Al-Sajadah [32]: 11; *Qul yatawaffakum malakul maut...*(Say, "The angel of death put in charge of you will reclaim you. Then to your Lord you will be returned."), Q.S.Al-Nisâ"[4]: 97;*Innallâzi tawaffahumul malâikah...* (...While the angels are removing the souls of those who have wronged themselves...), Q.S. Al-Anfâl [8]: 50; *walau taraiz yatawaffallazina kafaru al-malâikah* (as the angels take away those who disbelieve), Q.S.. Al-An'am[6]: 61;*tawaffathu rusulunâ* (when death overtakes one of you, Our envoys take him away), Q.S. Al-Haj [22] : 5 *waminkum man yutawaffa* (And some of you will pass away, and some of you will be returned to the vilest age), Q.S.Al-Nisâ" [4]: 15; *hatta yatawaffahunnal maut* (confine them to the homes until death claims them), and in Q.S.Yûsuf [12]: 101;*tawaffani musliman* (Receive my soul in submission, and unite me with the righteous).²⁸

After observing the verses above, Syaltut argued that the word "dead" (*tawaffa*) in Q.S. Ali 'Imran [3]: 55 and Al-Mâidah [5]: 117 must be understood in accordance with the meaning of the language, which is truly dead. Thus, Prophet Isa literally had died, and not only going up to the heaven. For Syaltut, the understanding of most Muslims that Prophet Isa would die after returning to earth from heaven is wrong and cannot be justified.

Related to An-Nisâ' [4]: 158 (*bal rafa'ahullah ilaihi*), Syaltut argued that the meaning of the word *rafa'a* in the verse is that Allah raised

²⁶ Mursyid Rahman Aly Langsa, *Profil KH. Sirajuddin Abbas*, accessed Maret 12, 2018.<http://mursyidaliblogspot.com/2009/12/profil-khsirajuddin-abbas.html>

²⁷ See Syaltut, *al-Fatâwa*, pp. 59-60. Abbas, 40 *Masalah Agama*, pp. 330-332, 344.

²⁸ Syaltut, *al-Fatâwa...*, p. 62.

the honor of Prophet Isa, not his body.²⁹ To understand the word *rafa'a* in this verse, it must be associated with the word *rafa'a* in Al-Mâidah [5]: 55 after sentence *warâfi'uka*. There is “*wamuthahhiruka minallazina kafaru*” which means “and cleanses you from those who disbelieve”. According to Syaltut, the word *rafi'uka* mentioned after *mutawaffika* and before *wamuthahhiruka* makes the word *rafa'a* means elevating the honor rather than elevating the body of Prophet Isa. Therefore, An-Nisâ' [4]: 158 actually mentions Allah's promise to Prophet Isa to raise his honor after he died. According to Syaltut, the word *rafa'a* both in An-Nisâ' [4]:58 and Al-Mâidah : 55 only means respect and elevation of his honor.³⁰ Syaltut stated that there are many examples of the word *rafa'a* which means elevation of honor: (i) in An-Nur [24]:36 “*fi buyutin uẓinallahu an turfa'a*” which means “in mosques that have been ordered to be glorified”; (ii) in Al-An'am [6]: 83 “*narfa'u darajatin man nasyâu*” which means “We raise the honor to whom We want”; (iii) in Al-Insyirâh: 4 “*warafa'na laka zikraka*” which means “and We raise your name for you”; (iv) in Maryam [19]: 57 “*warafa'nahu makanan 'aliyya*” which means “and We have raised it to high dignity”; (v) in Al-Mujâdalah [58]: 11 “*yarfa'illahullazina âmanu minkum*” which means “Allah will exalt the honor of those who believe among you”.³¹ Syaltut acknowledged that his fatwa about the death of Prophet Jesus came from the book of *Tafsir Rûh Al-Ma'ânî* of Al-Alusi, which states that Allah had taken Prophet Isa naturally (not killed).³²

Syaltut argued that hadiths which mention the return of Prophet Isa at the end of the time by destroying crosses and killing pigs are not true and cannot be used as proof with the following reasons:³³

- 1) The source of these hadiths are unclear, the meaning is confusing or contrary to the verses of the Quran which state that Prophet Isa was only sent to the children of Israel and was not sent to the people

of the Prophet Muhammad. Therefore, the information written in the Quran must be taken precedence.

- 2) These hadiths contain *Israiliyat* because they were narrated by Wahab ibn Munabbih.
- 3) These hadiths contain *mudraj*.
- 4) In terms of *sanad*, these are *ahad* hadiths. Syaltut stated that *ahad* hadiths cannot be used as guidelines for *aqidah*.

b. The Interpretation by Siradjuddin Abbas

According to Siradjuddin Abbas, the word *tawaffa'* in Ali 'Imran [3]: 55 and Al-Mâidah [5]: 117 should not be interpreted as dead. He said that to understand the word in those verses, it must be correlated with An-Nisâ' [4]: 158 which states that Prophet Isa was raised up to the heaven by Allah. In addition, the word *tawaffa'* in the verse must also be interpreted with valid hadiths which mention that Prophet Isa will descend back to the earth at the end of the time, including the following hadith:

عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم والذي نفسي بيده ليوشكن أن ينزل فيكم ابن مريم حكماً عدلاً فيكسر الصليب ويقتل الخنزير ويضع الجزية ويفيض المال حتى لا يقبله أحد حتى تكون السجدة الواحدة خيراً من الدنيا وما فيها³⁴

Abu Hurairah radiallahu 'anhu said that Prophet Muhammad PBUH narrated, “For the sake of the Essence of my soul in His grasp, it will not be long before Ibn Maryam (Prophet Isa) who will be a fair judge, to destroy crosses, kill pigs, free jizyah and abundant property so that there is no anyone wants to accept him.” (Sahih Bukhârî)

According to Siradjuddin Abbas, the hadith above is valid. Therefore the word *tawaffa* in the verses mentioned earlier is more accurately interpreted as “grasping”. Siradjuddin Abbas claimed to take the meaning from the book

²⁹ Syaltut, *al-Fatâwa...*, p. 63.

³⁰ Syaltut, *al-Fatâwa...*, p. 63.

³¹ Syaltut, *al-Fatâwa...*, p. 60.

³² Syaltut, *al-Fatâwa...*, p. 63.

³³ Syaltut, *al-Fatâwa...*, p. 62.

³⁴ See Abbas, *40 Masalah Agama*, Vol 1,335 or see Abu Abdillah Muhammad Ibn Ismail ibn al-Bukhârî, *al-Jami' al-Sâhîh* (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, 1981), Vol. 2, Juz, 4, 143.

of Commentary of Al-Thabari.³⁵ In interpreting the word *tawaffa*, he was also influenced by Muhammad Al-'Arabi ibn Nabbani al-Maghribi. This can be seen when he quoted the book by Muhammad Al-Arabi entitled "Majmu 'Tsalatsatu Rasâil".³⁶

Siradjuddin Abbas criticized Syaltut's opinion for interpreting the meaning of *tawaffa* literally. According to him, the word *tawaffa* in Quran does not always mean death because the word has several meanings according to the context of the verse, among others as follows:³⁷

- 1) Means **to sleep** in Al-An'am "...wahuwallaẓi yatawaffakum billail" (...and He who put you to sleep at night.)
- 2) Means **death** in As-Sajadah [32]: 11 "Qul yatawaffakum malakul mautillaẓi wukkila bikum" (Say, " You will be taken away by the angel of death, who has been charged with you.)
- 3) Means **to suffice** in Ali 'Imrân: 185 "yutawaffauna ujûrakum yaumalqiyâmah" (... and you will indeed be paid your full rewards on the Day of Resurrection.)
- 4) Means **to take the full measure** in Al-Muthaffifin [83]: 2 "allazina izaktâlu'alannâs yastaufûn" (i.e. who, when they measure [a commodity bought] from the people, take the full measure,)
- 5) Means **to fulfill the covenants** in Al-Isra [17]: 34 "Wa'aufu bi al-'ahdi..." (And fulfill the covenants...)
- 6) Means **to take** in Ali 'Imrân [3]: 55 "...ya 'isa inni mutawaffika waraḥimâ ilayya" (O Isa, I shall take you[r soul],¹ and I shall raise you up toward Myself,...)

According to Siradjuddin Abbas, the meaning of word *mutawaffika* in Ali 'Imrân: 55 and *tawaffaitani* in Al-Mâidah [5] : 117 is to take.³⁸ Furthermore, he stated that if *mutawaffika* is interpreted as "dead", then it must also be interpreted with the composition of *taqdim* and *takhir*. Some scholars did interpret the word

tawaffâ in the verse by dead, but they did it by understanding the composition of *khavar* of *taqdim* and *ta'akhir*. He interpreted it as "O Isa, We raised you up to Myself and take your soul after returning you back to the earth."³⁹

Regarding to An-Nisâ'[4]: 158 (...*bal rafa'ahullâhi ilaihi*), Siradjuddin Abbas interpreted that Allah raised up the body and soul of Prophet Isa to heaven and he is now in the glorious place.⁴⁰ According to him, the interpretation comes from hadiths which mention that Prophet Isa will *nazal* or descend back to the earth at the end of the time. He stated that the word *nazal* means going down from a higher place to a lower place (from heaven to earth).⁴¹ Based on a number of arguments above, Siradjuddin Abbas considered that Syaltut's opinions are weak because they are not in accordance with the valid hadiths, agreement of Islamic scholars and expert of sunnah and congregation.⁴²

Similarity, Differences and Analysis

1. Similarity

First, both Syaltut and Siradjuddin Abbas argued that Prophet Isa was not successfully killed or crucified by the Jews. However, they have different opinions about the death of Prophet Isa. Mahmud Syaltut argued that Prophet Isa did not successfully in being killed, but he died naturally.⁴³ On the other hand, Siradjuddin Abbas believed that Prophet Isa was not successfully killed and still alive.⁴⁴

Second, both of their interpretations of Quran used linguistic analysis. However, the results are very different because they were adjusted to their respective interests or understandings. Therefore there are not much similarities between these two arguments.

2. Differences

First, in the terms of originality of interpretation. The discussions about the death of

³⁵ Abbas, 40 Masalah Agama..., pp. 334, 346, 347.

³⁶ Abbas, 40 Masalah Agama..., p. 344.

³⁷ Abbas, 40 Masalah Agama..., p. 345

³⁸ Abbas, 40 Masalah Agama..., p. 346.

³⁹ Abbas, 40 Masalah Agama..., p. 347.

⁴⁰ Abbas, 40 Masalah Agama..., pp. 333-342.

⁴¹ Abbas, 40 Masalah Agama..., p. 343.

⁴² Abbas, 40 Masalah Agama..., pp. 343,348.

⁴³ Syaltut, al-Fatâwa..., p. 64.

⁴⁴ Abbas, 40 Masalah Agama..., pp. 331-333.

Prophet Isa have actually been carried out since the classical to contemporary eras. The period of interpretation is divided into four eras, namely classical, medieval, modern, and contemporary. To simplify this paper, there will be a number of opinions from the interpreters of each era. At-Thabarî for the classical era, Al-Râzî for the medieval era, Muhammad Abduh for the modern era and *Tafsîral-Misbah* of Quraish Shihab for contemporary era.

When interpreting An-Nisâ'[4]: 158, At-Thabarî said that Prophet Isa could not be crucified or killed.⁴⁵ When interpreting Al-Imrân [3]: 55 and Al-Mâidah [5]: 117, he first described the differences of opinion about the meaning of *mutawwafika*. However, Thabarî concluded by interpreting it as Allah took or saved Isa from the earth. Whereas *falammatawaffaitani* similar to *falammaqabadtani* means that Allah raised Isa up to the heaven and purified him from the non-believers.⁴⁶

When interpreting Al-Imrân [3]: 55, Al-Râzî described various kind of interpretations. He was more inclined to the most recent opinion he quoted by reading the verse with the structure of *taqdim* and *ta'khîr*. The opinion that is considered *râjih* by Al-Râzî is:

والمعنى: أني رافعك إليّ ومطهرك من الذين كفروا
ومتوفيك بعد إنزالي إياك في الدنيا، ومثله من التقديم
والتأخير كثير في القرآن.⁴⁷

Translation of Ali 'Imrân[3]: 55 "O Isa, I shall take you[r soul],¹ and I shall raise you up toward Myself, and I shall clear you of [the calumnies of] the faithless, and I shall set those who follow you above the faithless until the Day of Resurrection. Examples of verses like this, which are read with the structure of *taqdim* and *ta'khîr*, are widely found in the Quran."

Muhammad Abduh in *Tafsîr al-Manâr* argued that Prophet Isa died as a human being in accordance with his fate. Abduh stated that Ali

'Imrân[3]: 55 mentioned the good news of Allah saving over His Prophet from the deception of Jews and Romans who intended to kill him by crucifixion. Allah made the deception happen and they could not make Prophet Isa die of crucifixion. The word *tawaffâ* has literal meaning to take, and it is used specifically for the meaning of death. Thus, the meaning of the verse according to Abduh is "O Isa, I took you[r soul] and raised you up towards Myself" as it happened before to Idris that is mentioned in *warafa'nahu makanan 'aliyya*. When Muhammad Abduh quoted various opinion of interpreters, he concluded that hadiths which mention that Prophet Isa will descend to the earth cannot be used in creed or information that was unclear.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, Quraish Shihab⁴⁹ interpreted Al-Imrân [3]: 55 and Al-Mâidah [4]: 117 as verses that tell about the guile that Allah did to the non-believers and the climax is when He said to Isa "O Isa, I shall take you[r soul],¹ and I shall raise you up toward Myself, and I shall clear you of [the calumnies of] the faithless who intended to kill you..."

After delivering the interpretation, Quraish Shihab explained the differences of opinion of the Islamic scholars in understanding the word *mutawaffika*. According to him, the literal meaning of the word is "fully", in which in Quran it can be translated as death or sleep. However, in interpreting this word, there are two different opinions. Zamkashyari interpreted the verse as "I take you[r soul]", while Al-Sya'rawi understood it as "I fully take you[r soul], but not with your body". According to Sya'awi, Allah took his soul and body that could not be reached by non-believers, that was on His side. Quraish Shihab also explained that the word *ilaihi* is interpreted by most if Islamic scholars as "to the heaven" and some understand it as other meanings.

After explaining the differences of those opinions, Quraish Shihab asserted that theory about Prophet Isa had died naturally is not in accordance with hadiths that say he will descend

⁴⁵ Abiy Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabariy, *Jâmi'ul Bayân Fiy Ta'wil al-Qur'ân*, (Bairut: Dâr al-Kutûb al-Ilmiyyah, 1993), Vol. 4, p. 356.

⁴⁶ Abiy Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabariy, *Jâmi'ul...*, Vol. 3, 290, vol. 5, 139.

⁴⁷ Fakhruddin Muhammad ibnu Umar ibnu al-Husain ibn al-Hasan Ibnu 'Ali al-Râzî, *Tafsîr al-Kabîr/Mafâtîh al-Gaib*, (Bairut: Dâr al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2009), pp. 60-61.

⁴⁸ Muhammad Rasyid Ridho, *Tafsîr Alqurân al-Hakîm (al-Manâr)*, (Bairut: Dâr al-Kutûb al-Ilmiyyah, 2005), Vol. 3, pp. 260-261.

⁴⁹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsîr al-Misbah; Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian Alquran*, (Jakarta: Lintera Hati, 2002), Vol, 2, pp. 103-105.

back to the earth even though those hadiths are doubted by some researchers because it comes from the Ka'ab al-Akhbar, Wahab bin Munabih (*israiliyat*). Quraish Shihab also defined that the belief whether Prophet Isa had died or not was not something related to the principles of religious teachings.

When interpreting An-Nisâ '[4]: 157-158, Quraish Shihab stated that Prophet Isa was not successfully crucified. According to him, a Muslim is obliged to believe that Isa was not crucified, nor was killed, but was saved by Allah. However, we should not question the way how Allah saved him because the meaning because the notion of *balrafa'ahullâhuilaihi* is disputed by Islamic scholars.⁵⁰

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that Syaltut's interpretation in terms of originality was influenced by Muhammad Abduh's renewal thoughts. There are two matters of Syaltut's influence on Abduh: first, in terms of interpretation, and second, he refused to use *ahad* hadith in the matter of *aqîdah*. On the other hand, Siradjuddin Abbas's interpretation in terms of originality was influenced by the commentaries of the *Ahlus-Sunnah-Wal-Jama'ah* (especially the commentary of Al-Thabari), which in fact accepted valid hadiths in any matter, and contradicted the opinion of Muhammad Abduh.

The second difference is in terms of methods. Even though the two scholars used the same grammatical analysis, but the method was different. In linguistics analysis, Syaltut used the method of interpretation of *bi al-ra'yidan*, instead of *bi al-riwâyah* (in this case not using hadith). Meanwhile, Siradjuddin Abbas conducted linguistics analysis using the interpretations of *bi al-riwâyah* or *bi al ma'sûr*, namely interpreting verses using hadith (*yufassir Quran bi al-Hadith*). This was seen when these two scholars analyzed the language of the words *tawaffa* and *rafa'a*. Syaltut translated the word *tawaffa* literally as death, while Siradjuddin Abbas interpreted it metaphorically as "to take" because there are hadiths mention that Prophet Isa will descend back to the earth at the end of the time.

Another difference is the interpretation of word *rafa'a*. In the linguistics analysis, Syaltut interpreted the word as raising up his honor, not his body. However, Siradjuddin Abbas interpreted *rafa'a* in accordance with its original meaning, which is raising up only the body and soul of Prophet Isa.

Sociological Approach

Mahmud Syaltut is a reformist scholar who prioritizes renewal in his opinion. The Egypt situation at the time, which was open to change and improvement, helped Syaltut continue improving his idea of renewal.

According to Abdul Salam Arief's study, the idea of Syaltut's renewal thought was obtained when he studied at Ma'had al-Dini Iskandariyah. This Ma'had in its curriculum incorporated general/modern knowledge (*al-hadittsah*), as well as encouraged the freedom of thought of its students. Madrasah al-Ma'had al-Dini since its inception in 1903 has adopted the idea of Muhammad Abduh about the need to incorporate general sciences and appreciate freedom of thought.⁵¹

The results of Abdul Salam Arief's study is consistent with an assumption that Syaltut was influenced by the thought of Muhammad Abduh, which in this case did not accept *ahad* hadith to be used in discussing *aqîdah*. Syaltut's rejection of the use of *ahad* hadith when interpreting verses about the death of Prophet Isa can be seen in his writing *al-Fatâwa* as follows:

.....الأخبار بنزول عيسى وإذا صح الحديث فهو حديث أحاد، وقد أجمع العلماء على أن أحاديث أحاد لا تفيد عقيدة ولا يصح الاعتماد عليها في شأن المغيبات.⁵²
 "... As if the hadiths mentioning the descend of Isa are shahih, but the hadiths are ahad and cannot be used in discussing aqîda matters."

Siradjuddin Abbas's view, the validity of the sanad of a hadith is enough to be used as a proposition in any matter, especially in interpreting the verses about the death of the

⁵⁰ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Misbah; Pesan...*, pp. 651-652.

⁵¹ Arief, *Pembaruan Pemikiran...*, p. 221.

⁵² Syaltut, *al-Fatâwa...*, p. 62.

Prophet Isa, as the following expression:

*“As a result, it can be said ijma’ (agreed) among Islamic scholars since the beginning until now, except Syaltut, that the Prophet Isa was appointed by Allah. He will die 40 years after descending back to the earth on the end of the world, according to the traditions of shahî, which Muslim Bukhari and others have mentioned above. Whoever says that the Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) passed away before being appointed, he has opposed the traditions of the Prophet who are valid and unquestioned, and he has come out of the circle of the Ahlussunnah waljamaah, na’uzubillah”.*⁵³

Based on the data above and Karl Mannheim’s theory of relationism, there are differences between Syaltut and Siradjuddin Abbas when interpreting the verses about the death of Prophet Isa. The differences were more dominated by socio-cultural factors, historical at that time, namely ideological influence. Syaltut, with the advanced climate of Egypt and accepting renewal, was motivated to develop freedom of thought and be influenced by the thought of Muhammad Abduh who did not use hadith in interpreting the verses concerning the death of Prophet Isa. Therefore, his interpretation was similar to Muhammad Abduh’s. Likewise, Siradjuddin Abbas, as a figure of the Elderly People in Indonesia who had tied himself up to the theology of *Asya’riyah* and *fiqh* of the *Shafi’i* school, caused him to counter the opinions that were contrary to the understanding of the Old People he adopted. Siradjuddin Abbas wanted the understanding of Muhammad Abduh and Syaltut (who reject the use of hadith in discussing *aqidah* issue) not to enter Indonesia, because it is considered to damage the unity of the faith of Indonesian Muslims.⁵⁴

Hadith Approach

The discussion between Syaltut and Siradjuddin Abbas about the death of Prophet Isa only revolves around the debate over the

meaning of the word *tawaff* and *rafa’a*. The two scholars did not discuss whether Prophet Isa was crucified or not. This is because both Syaltut and Siradjuddin Abbas agreed that Prophet Isa was unsuccessfully crucified or killed. Their differences were only in the matter of understanding the death of Prophet Isa, as previously explained.

The difference in the interpretation method between Syaltut and Siradjuddin Abbas is a difference that can be accounted for, because it is still in the *majâl al-ikhtilâf* (region of difference of opinion) which can be tolerated. From some references that are common among Sunni scholars, the difference between interpreters in interpreting the verses about the death of Prophet Isa can be summarized into the following three groups:

1. *Mufasssir* groups who understand that the word *mutawaffika* is in accordance with its common meaning, which is death. This means that Prophet Isa has died in *sunnatullah*, as represented by M. Abduh and Mahmud Syaltut.
2. *Mufasssir* groups that understand the words *mutawaffika* using its *ta’wil* meaning, with the meaning of “grasping”. By using this understanding, Allah saved the body and soul of Prophet Isa. The Prophet has not died, and later will descend back to earth. Al-Thabarî and Siradjuddin Abbas are among the believers of this understanding.
3. *Mufasssir* groups that interpret *mutawaffika* with its apparent meaning of death, but the verse is understood to be structured *taqdim* and *ta’khir* which gives an understanding that Allah raised Prophet Isa, and purified him from the non-believers, then will take his soul after he descends back to earth. al-Râzî is among the believers of this interpretation.

These differences give an understanding that the verses about the death of Prophet Isa is not *Qathi ‘al-dilâllah*, so that every Muslim may make an understanding that he thinks is strong and correct. However, after making comparison and analysis, and in relation to various other opinions, it can be understood that the group of second and third understanding seem stronger and more acceptable with the reason that the

⁵³ Abbas, *40 Masalah Agama...*, p.348.

⁵⁴ Siradjuddin in various writings rejected Muhammad Abduh’s thoughts and understanding, among others, can be seen : *40 Masalah Agama*, Vol. 1, 9, No. 1, 2, p. 232.

interpretation of the first group as represented by Syaltut has a weakness because it does not use hadith in its interpretation at all (not in line with the hadith). This does not correspond to the ways of interpreting Quran since the interpreters need other information, especially valid hadiths.

The verses about the death of Prophet Isa need to be understood with a theological approach or *imani* approach.⁵⁵ Borrowing Yûsuf al-Qardhawi's theory, it can be argued that one of the ideal steps to interpret the Quran is to interpret it with valid hadiths.⁵⁶ A Muslim is obliged to accept valid hadiths, even though the information is contradictory to the human senses (*aqidah* issue).⁵⁷

The hadiths mentioning that Prophet Isa will descend at the end of time are valid (at least according to the criteria of Al-Bukhari, although *ahad*). These hadiths can be used as a tool in understanding words *tawaffâ* and *rafa'a* when understanding verses about the death of Prophet Isa. From this theory, it can be concluded that Prophet Isa was not successfully crucified because Allah had saved him,⁵⁸ is now still alive and will later appear at the end of the time and then Allah will take his soul.

Conclusion

Syaltut, Siradjuddin Abbas and other *mufasssir* such as al-Thhabarî, Al-Râzî, Muhamamd Abduh, and Quraish Shihab agreed that Prophet Isa had not succeeded in being crucified or killed by Jews, but Allah had saved him. Syaltut and Siradjuddin Abbas have different understanding on the way Allah saved the Prophet. Syaltut

argued that Prophet Jesus had died naturally (normally, naturally) and would not descend back to earth at the end of time. The reasons underlying Syaltut's arguments are that the ulama believed word *katatawaffâ* in Q.S. Al-Imran [3]: 55 and *tawaffâini* in Q.S. Al-Mâidah [5] : 117 must be understood intrinsically which means to die, while the word *rafa'a* (Q.S. Ali 'Imrân [3]: 55, and Al-Nisâ '[4]: 178) must be understood using its *ta'wil* meaning which means lifting the degree rather than lifting the body. On the other hand, Siradjuddin Abbas argued that Prophet Isa is still alive in the heaven, and later will descend back to earth at the end of time. Siradjuddin Abbas believed that the word *katatawaffâ* in Q.S. Al 'Imrân [3]: 55 and *tawaffâini* in Q.S. Al-Mâidah [5] :117 must be understood using their *ta'wil* meaning as "grasping" because it is explained by valid hadiths, while the word *rafa'a* is understood intrinsically which is to raise the body of Prophet Isa to the heaven.

The interpretation methods used by these two ulamas are generally similar, namely linguistics analysis. The difference is only in the approach used. Siradjuddin Abbas, in analyzing the language, used the approach of *al-riwâyah* or *bi al-ma'sûr* in understanding Quran language by confirming it with the Prophet's hadiths. Meanwhile, Syaltut used *bi al-ra'yi* approach and did not use hadith in the discussion analysis due to *ahad* hadith. The difference is also caused by historical social factors at that time. Syaltut with a "climate" of renewal in Egypt was motivated to accept the thoughts of Muhammad Abduh who did not use hadith in discussing *aqidah* issue. Likewise, Siradjuddin Abbas, as a leader of the Old People in Indonesia, was encouraged to counter opinions that were contrary to the ideology he embraced and did not want the thought of Muhammad Abduh to enter Indonesia.

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⁵⁵ *Imani* approach is to believe or justify information based on revelation (the Qur'an and the Sunnah) even though the problem cannot be understood using the five senses, reason, and human reason (*aqidah*), further see Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan Alquran*,), ed. 19 (Bandung: Mizan, 1999), p. 338.

⁵⁶ Muhammad Yûsuf al-Qardhawi, *Berintreksi dengan Alquran*, trans. Abdul Hayyie al-Qattani (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1999), p. 323.

⁵⁷ Yûsuf al-Qardhawi, *Bagaimana Memahami Hadis Nabi SAW*, terj. Muhammad Al-Baqir, fifth edition, (Bandung: Karisma, 1997), p. 189.

⁵⁸ How does Allah save Prophet Isa is something that is not clear because the meaning is disputed, see again at the opinion of Qurasih Shihab from this paper. See also Karel Steenbrink, *Nabi Isa dalam Alquran*, tranl. Sahiron Syamsuddin, (Yogyakarta: UIN SUKA, 2015), p. 96.

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