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No Meaning in the Quran: Sukidi's Thought

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Abstract

Where do the meanings lie? This is one of the most intriguing questions in Qur'ānic studies both in the West and the East. Some scholars say that the meaning of the Qur'ān is inherently located in the scripture. Then, Indonesian Salafism came up with the slogan "Back to the Qur'ān". However, some scholars challenged that notion and said that no meaning in the scripture, because meanings are located in the tradition, mufasssīr. Sukidi Mulyadi proposed the notion of "Back to the tradition", instead of to the Qur'ān, because no meaning in the Qur'ān. This article will elaborate the Sukidi's notion, elucidate his arguments, examine the context and implications of his claims, and then compare with the views of some related scholars, such as Mun'im Sirry and Sahiron Syamsuddin. This work will use the application of qualitative content analysis. With this approach, this article will provide valuable insights into the complexities of Qur'ānic exegesis. By doing so, the study not only clarifies Sukidi's contribution but also highlights the broader intellectual dynamics of meaning-making in Qur'ānic exegesis. This article demonstrates the novelty of revisiting Sukidi's thesis in dialogue with contemporary Indonesian scholarship, thereby offering significant insights into the evolving contestations of authority and interpretation in Qur'ānic studies.

Keywords: Sukidi; Locus of Meaning; Qur'ān; Exegesis.

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Introduction

One of the key moments in the modern Islamic world is the Islamic reform movement. Within its central feature is the notion to get back or return to the purity of Islamic scripture and tradition (i.e., the Quran and Hadith). The notions of Islamic reform (*Iṣlāḥ*) and renewal (*Tajdīd*) are often defined as an attempt to return the faith, its scripture, doctrines, and understanding to the original state and scrutinise any deviant additions [1]. However, the adagio of 'back to the Quran and hadith' found itself difficult to implement in the modern era. Nadirsyah Hosen, analysing the term in the Indonesian context, supports this claim by questioning how the return to the sixth-seventh century Arabian lifestyle might cooperate with the twentieth-century problems. The main objection is that the reform movement originally coined by Abd al-Wahhab focuses on relying on the translation of the Quran and hadith without understanding the context of those texts and the Arabian milieu of the sixth-seventh century [2]. Afterwards, the Islamic reform movement shifted toward the effort to establish contextual studies on the early period of Islam. One of the prominent fields of study is the interpretation or the *tafsir* of the Quran.

Current discussions about the interpretation of the Qur'ān are complex and often controversial [3]. Many scholars debate regarding the locus of the meaning. The hermeneutics debate is even more complex. S.R. Burge stated that the meaning is located within the scripture but influenced by the interpretation and understanding of the reader. However, the process of exegesis entails analysing the words and context of the Qur'ān to derive meaning [4]. Every single scholar has their own notion regarding this issue. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, an Egyptian scholar, argues that the scripture itself consists of no fixed meaning but is gradually given meaning through human interpretation. For him, the Quran changed from its very first moment during the revelation. The Quran that arrived to us is a human text (*Naṣṣ insānī*) and no longer a divine text (*Naṣṣ ilāhī*). The Quran illuminate no meaning but invites the reader to interpret based on their context. Thus, the meaning is deeply rooted in the linguistic, historical and cultural context of the interpreter. Abu Zayd rejected the finality of Quranic meaning and introduced the plurality of interpretation [5].

Sukidi Mulyadi is a new scholar in Indonesia who graduated from Harvard University. In the aforementioned debates, Sukidi jeopardizes the scholarly understanding by problematizing the meaning of the Qur'ān. If Muslims are encouraged to return to the Qur'ān and hadith, what if the Qur'ān in itself has no meaning at all? He came up with the notion that no meaning in the scripture. Meaning is located in the tradition. Islamic exegetes throughout history have produced meaning in the Qur'ān. As he said, "Tradition is the reservoir of meaning." The central problem this paper addresses is the tension

between the slogan 'Back to the Qur'ān' and Sukidi's radical claim that the Qur'ān itself has no inherent meaning. This study therefore seeks to answer the following research question: Where does the meaning of the Qur'ān lie—is it inherently found in the text itself, or in the tradition of interpretation—and how does Sukidi's radical thought that "there is no meaning in the Qur'ān" contribute to the contemporary intellectual debate on the locus of meaning? In this research, I want to review Sukidi's thoughts and give large pieces of evidence that he proposed. After that, I want to compare his thoughts with many scholars and exegetes and examine his evidence.

Sukidi is the first Indonesian to receive a PhD in the Study of Religion from Harvard University. He received two master's degrees, namely from Ohio University (2004) and Harvard Divinity School, Harvard University (2006). He received his bachelor's degree from UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. He is known as the son of a peasant in remote Sragen, Central Java. Since studying at UIN, he has been very active in writing in various national media, particularly Kompas. His name was already known as a young intellectual at that time. Not long afterward he suddenly disappeared. Not many people know the news. Apparently, for almost 20 years, he immersed himself in America until he succeeded in obtaining a doctorate from one of the best universities in the world [6],[7].

After returning from America, he shocked the Indonesian public. He called for a new style of Islamic reform. He said that previous Islamic reforms, spearheaded by Nurcholis Madjid, Ahmad Syafii Maarif, and others called for a return to the Qur'ān (*Kembali kepada Alquran*). In fact, according to him, there is no meaning in the Qur'ān. We cannot return to the Qur'ān because the Qur'ān cannot speak by itself.

What must be done to implement the second Islamic reform project is to return to tradition. The tradition in this case is a tradition of interpretation from the era of the Companions until now. Sukidi believes that the early community of interpreters was the most authoritative party in producing the meaning of the Qur'ān. Until now, he continues to write, mainly in Suara Muhammadiyah Magazine, about interpretations of the Qur'ān. His thesis surpasses what Abu Zayd argues: that the meaning of the Qur'ān produced by various interpreters is not only different but also contradictory.

The dissertation he wrote at Harvard was about the gradual meaning of the Qur'ān. The title is *The Gradual Qur'ān: Views of Early Muslim Commentators*. In writing his dissertation, he was directly supervised by William A. Graham. In that dissertation, he took three cases. The first case is a polemic regarding the interpretation of the Qur'ān 17:106 in words "*qur'ānan farraqnāhu*" or "*qur'ānan farraqnāhu*". The first reading means "a Qur'ān that We have divided into pieces", while the second reading means "a Qur'ān that We made clear". The second case

is Qur'ān 25:32, which responds to the request of non-believers to reveal the Qur'ān at one time. Meanwhile, the third case is Qur'ān 53:1-18, which shows a gradual revelation experience.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach and content analysis to reveal Sukidi's thoughts regarding the locus of meaning in the Qur'ān. Qualitative research is used to understand Sukidi's main argument. Meanwhile, the object of this research will focus on three of Sukidi's articles in Suara Muhammadiyah Magazine, the last three editions in 2023, namely the 22nd, 23rd, and 24th editions. It is also necessary to compare Sukidi's thoughts with other scholars from both the West and the East. The research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Sukidi's thought and answer key questions about the locus of meaning in the Quran and contribute to our understanding of the complexity of tafsir studies. The analysis will be conducted by identifying concepts and arguments in Sukidi's writings. These arguments will then be compared with perspectives from other scholars to highlight points of convergence and divergence.

Result and Discussion

Studies on Quranic meanings

The study of the Quranic meanings is abundant. Barbara Stowasser (1995) focused on the journey of Western academia's endeavour in defining the Quran and its meaning [8]. Although Western Quranic scholarship has been advanced with the linguistic approach and historicist erudition, the concept of scripture remains a problem. Western scholarship in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries studied the seventh-century Arabian context to make sense of the emergence of the Quran and its meaning. They focused on digging out the source of Muhammad's idea, which was Jewish and Christian teachings. It was common in Western scholarship to make sense of Islam by comparing it with Jews and Christianity. Scholars such as Richard Simon (1638–1712) argued that Islam was a mixture of Jews and Christianity. However, He did not imply that Islam was a forgery but focused instead on how and why the same customs and beliefs existed across religious boundaries [9],[10,p. 88]. Western scholarship in its search for Quranic meanings is historicist. The meaning of the Quran lies in its historicity and its origin back to the seventh century of the Arabian Peninsula.

Other scholars focus on the meaning of the term Quran and the concept of scripture. Arthur Jeffery (1950), still under the influence of the Western historicist

approach, proposed the concept of Quranic scripture by emphasising the effort of the Prophet Muhammad in shaping and utilising the existing material of Jews and Christians to build scripture for his nascent community [11]. Jeffery approaches the Qur'ān primarily as a scripture, analysing it through the lens of religious-political consciousness. In his view, the Qur'ān functioned as a foundational instrument for constructing the collective religious identity of the early Muslim community. The meaning of the Qur'ān emerges not merely from its textual form, but from its role as scripture – guiding and regulating the life of the community.

To explain how the Qur'ān became meaningful, Jeffery argues that the Prophet Muhammad actively propagated the divine origin of the Qur'ān as revelation and asserted its role in correcting the distortions found in earlier sacred scriptures. For Jeffery, the significance of the Qur'ān is also reinforced by the perceived contradictions within previous heavenly books, which the Qur'ān came to rectify.

Jeffery concludes that the meaningfulness of the Qur'ān as scripture culminates in the Muslim belief in its inimitability (i'jāz) and divine origin. Furthermore, the Qur'ān retains its significance due to its enduring role as a source of guidance and mercy for believers, despite historical criticism and intellectual challenges. Ultimately, the Qur'ān is meaningful because it shapes the religious and social life of Muslims across time.

William A. Graham (1984), in his article, questioned the earliest meaning of the Quran [12]. Filling the previous gap of the scripture concept problem, which was lacking in Western academia, Graham proposes that for the early Muslim community, the concept of scripture in the Quran was primarily focused on the act of oral recitation. It is the active recitorial participation in what is so-called scriptural reality that the Quran was meaningful for the early Muslim community. God wants His servants to hear and recite in their worship. The Quran, as a scripture, thus gives its meaning through the acts of commitment and recitation at every opportunity.

The existing scholarship on the meanings of the Quran mainly focuses on the meaning of 'Quranic' terms, the historicist approach, and the discourse of scripture. This paper will contribute to this scholarship by presenting a conceptual study of a particular scholar's thoughts on the meaning of the Quran through the Quranic exegesis discourse framework, highlighting the exegesis debates regarding the meaning of the Quran.

The Locus of Meaning

Is there an inherent meaning in the QS. Al-Najm (53): 1? Sukidi asked in the opening of his article in the Suara Muhammadiyah Magazine, 22nd edition 2023. "No!" he answered firmly, his own question. The majority of Qur'anic commentators interpreted the opening of An Najm *-wa al-najm idhā hawā-* with "by the stars, when they set, when they disappear". This is a widely accepted meaning, over a long period, and in many parts of the world. This meaning undergoes a canonisation process so that it can be accepted as a single truth.

On the other hand, Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767), as a mufassir who was neglected by the great mufassir who came after him, Al-Ṭabarī, proposed a meaning that was different from the widely accepted orthodox interpretation. In *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān* he wrote:

Allah swears by the Qur'ān by saying: *wa al-najm idhā hawā*, meaning (the descent of the Qur'ān) from heaven to Muhammad –may God bless him and give him peace–, as God says: No! I swear by the gradual revelation of the Qur'ān (Al-Waqiah [56]:75). When the Qur'ān came down, it was revealed in stages: three or four verses, or something similar, and one or two surahs. Therefore, Allah swears by the Qur'ān by saying: None of your companions is astray, namely Muhammad, nor is he mistaken. He also didn't tell any lies. He did not recite this Qur'ān of his own free will, spontaneously.

In his interpretation, Muqātil interprets the first verse of Surah An Najm as "God swearing by the gradual revelation of the Qur'ān". This, according to Sukidi, has an aspect of novelty that is not commonly found in the orthodox tradition of interpreting the Qur'ān. Muqātil is the producer of a new meaning, "God swears by the Qur'ān", and at the same time provides the context for the revelation of the Qur'ān that occurs in a particular polemic, namely Muḥammad's conversation with the unbelievers in Mecca [13]. As comparison, the early Shiite commentary of this verse, which belongs to Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi (919-920 CE), offered a different meaning. For him, *an-najm* means the Prophet Muhammad and *idzā hawā* refers to the state of the Prophet, who travels through the air during his miraculous journey (*mi'raj*). The first verse of al-Najm refutes any doubt regarding the event of the spiritual journey of the Prophet to the highest sky [14, p. 337].

In the next edition (Suara Muhammadiyah 23rd 2023), Sukidi wrote the polemic of QS. An-Najm [53]: 11, *mā kadhāba al-fu'ādu mā ra'ā*. There are two main interpretations in this verse, namely, Muhammad PBUH saw Gabriel and Muhammad PBUH saw Allah. The first interpretation is represented by Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Al-Ḥaqq b. 'Aṭiyya (d. 541/1147) in *Tafsīr Ibn 'Aṭiyya: al-Muḥarrir al-Wajīz fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-'Aẓīz*. Ibn Aṭiyya wrote: "Abd Allah b.

Mas'ūd, Qatāda b. Di'āma, and the majority of scholars argued that the object of the Prophet Muhammad's vision (*al-mar'ī*) was Gabriel. Muhammad saw Gabriel on two different occasions. Once on earth and once in the sky near *sidrat al-muntahā* on the night of *mi'rāj*." Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī in his commentary *al-Kasysyāf*, interpret this verse that the prophet was not lying while seeing the shape of Gabriel [15, p. 1059].

Meanwhile, Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās, a companion who was most familiar with tafsir and was specifically prayed for by the Prophet to be clever in terms of tafsir, gave the interpretation in this verse that Muhammad PBUH saw Allāh. He mentioned three things. First, Muḥammad PBUH saw Allah. Second, he saw Allah with his heart. Third, he saw Allah with his heart twice. The ability to see God was a special ability given to the chosen Prophet, in contrast to the two previous prophets: Ibrāhīm and Mūsa [16]. 'Ali Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummi, in his commentary, propose a very different meaning regarding the verse. This verse mainly discusses the *imamate* of Ali, which was given as *wahy* (revelation) from God to the Prophet Muhammad and that the Prophet did not lie about this revelation that he witnessed himself [14, p. 338].

Sukidi proposed another opinion about 'seeing God'. In the 2023, 24th edition of Suara Muhammadiyah Magazine, he wrote that, different from Ibn 'Abbās, numerous commentators argued that Muhammad PBUH saw God by his eye. They were Anas b. Mālik (d. 94/712), Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), and 'Ikrima Al-Barbarī Al-Baṣrī (d. 106/724). This notion was written by Abū Muḥammad Al-Ḥusayn b. Mas'ūd Al-Baghawī (d.516/1122) in his book, *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl*. The same comment also came from Muqātil b. Sulaymān al-Balkhī. [17]

As additional data, I want to take several examples written by Sukidi in his dissertation at Harvard University. He wrote about polemics in QS. Isra' [17]:106, where there are two main models of interpretation in Islam. The first group read the verse with *faraqnāhu*, which means "a Qur'ān that We made clear/plain". Meanwhile, the second group reads with *farraqnāhu*, which means "a Qur'ān that We have divided into parts/pieces". Al-Ṭabarī, as one of the greatest interpreters of Islam, classified two groups of interpreters with a majority and a minority. What he calls the majority are interpreters who read with the first reading, *faraqnāhu*, whose meaning is close to "And a Qur'ān that We made certain (*aḥkamnāhu*), detailed (*faṣalnāhu*), and clear (*bayyanāhu*)".

Al-Ṭabarī considers the first interpretation to be the correct interpretation while the second is the wrong interpretation because it cites three early interpretive authorities who he considers preferring the first model of interpretation, namely Ubayy b. Ka'b (d. 21/642), 'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās (d. 687), and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Therefore, according to Tabari, the second interpretation is invalid. This was denied by Sukidi, who believed that actually Ibn 'Abbas and Ubayy b. Ka'b can be included in both groups of interpreters, while al-Ḥasan al-

Baṣrī mentions the first interpretation in his tafsir, but aims to convey the meaning according to the second interpretation. As Sukidi wrote:

“This exegetical report proves that al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī preferred to read the first form of the verb, *faraqnāhu*, as having the meaning of the second form, namely as indicating a gradual, piecemeal revelation of the Qur’ān over eighteen years.” [18].

Apart from the three major interpreters above, there are also other early interpreters who fall into the category that Tabari calls 'minorities', including Sa'id b. Jubayr, Abū Rajā' al-ʿUṭaridī, Qatāda b. Dī'āma, Ismā'il al-Suddī, al-Ḥasan b. Dinār, Muqātil b. Sulaymān, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zayd b. Aslam, and Yaḥyā b. Salam. Meanwhile, medieval commentators who took the same position included Abū al-Layth Naṣr b. Muḥammad al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983), Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Wāhidī (d. 486/1076), Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥaqq b. 'Aṭīyya al-Andalusī (d. 541/1147), Abū 'Alī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154), Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210).

Table 1. Classification from Al-Ṭabarī

No	Interpreter	First reading (<i>faraqnāhu</i>)	Second reading (<i>farraqnāhu</i>)
1	al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī	√	
2	'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās	√	
3	Ubayy b. Ka'b	√	

Table 2. Classification from Sukidi

No	Interpreter	First reading (<i>faraqnāhu</i>)	Second reading (<i>farraqnāhu</i>)
1	al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī		√
2	'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās	√	√
3	Ubayy b. Ka'b	√	√

Where is the locus of meaning? According to Sukidi, the answer is clear. No meaning in the scripture of Qur’ān because the locus of meaning is located in the exegesis tradition. Tradition is the reservoir of meaning. Interpreters (*ahl al-ta'wīl*; *ahl al-tafsīr*), throughout the centuries, have been producing the meaning of the Qur’ān. The differences, and contradictions, of the meanings is the clear proof that there is no inherent meaning in the scripture. What plays a central role is not divine revelation, but rather a community of interpreters. they produce a diversity and contradiction of meaning. without the role of interpreter, the Qur’ān will forever remain a silent holy book.

Sukidi criticized Islamic reform in Indonesia which called for a return to the Qur’ān. According to him, returning to the Qur’ān will only end in futility because God does not reveal the meaning in the text of the Qur’ān and the text also does not carry the original meaning desired by God in the process of revelation. In An-Najm [53]: 11, *mā kadhaba al-fu'ādu mā ra'ā*, for example, God

does not provide clear information about who Muhammad saw, whether Allah or Jibril, and with what he saw, whether with eyes or heart. There is no inherent explanation in the verse. Referring directly to the Qur'ān does not lead Muslims to clear answers to these two critical questions, because the locus of meaning is not in the Qur'ān, but is in the collective memory of the interpreters of the Qur'ān. So, the meaning of the Qur'ān is not divinely given, but a humanly constructed meaning.

Scholarly Debate

This issue, certainly, has been debated at length by recent scholars. The debate about the locus of meaning of the Qur'ān is a sensitive debate and has far-reaching implications. One of the implications is about the sacredness of the Qur'ān. Needless to say, the Qur'ān is the holy book of more than a billion Muslims throughout the world. Questioning the sacredness of the Qur'ān means questioning the sacredness of a book that is a guide for Muslims around the world. Therefore, this debate is interesting and at the same time breaks down the existing status quo in the study of the Qur'ān, especially those carried out by scholars in the Eastern tradition.

Mun'im Sirry, a traditional boarding school student from Madura who is now one of the great Qur'ānic scholars in America, also contributed ideas on this issue. According to him, the location of meaning can be assumed to be in the text, behind the text, or in front of the text. The meaning in the text (text-centered approach) is when an interpreter attempts to understand the meaning that already exists in the Qur'ān. The implication is in the interpretation of the interpretation of the Qur'ān with the Qur'ān (*tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*). Meaning can also be found behind the text, namely in the author (author-centered approach). In this case, God is considered to have a specific purpose, so that the meaning is not in the text, but in the author's mind. *Asbāb al-nuzūl* and the life history of the Prophet can be used as sources in this approach, but are not the only things that can describe the meaning of the Qur'ān. Meanwhile, the last approach means assuming that the location of meaning is in front of the text or the reader (reader-centered approach). This approach has implications for the understanding that there is no text without a writer, however, without readers, the text would have no meaning. So, instead of believing in one particular locus of meaning, Mun'im Sirry affirms three locus of meaning at once [19].

Furthermore, Sirry represents a revisionist scholar who believes that Muslim sources, such as *sīrah* and *tafsīr*, cannot be used to reveal the context of early Islam and the revelation of the Qur'ān. Revisionists present a different perspective, arguing that it is problematic to depend solely on conventional sources to recreate early Islamic history. In fact, we have relatively few written

records from the first century of Islam except the Qur'ān itself. A lack of trustworthy contemporary sources is a major issue since the key principle of critical historians is to avoid using materials that are not from the time period of the event they are studying. Making reference to subsequent Muslim literature explicitly violates this fundamental tenet of the historical-critical method. Therefore, it makes sense that a large number of modern critical historians have chosen to recreate early Islamic history using non-Muslim extra-Islamic sources, with a focus on histories published closer to the time when Islam first appeared on the global scene such as Biblical literature [20].

According to this group, the main requirement that must be adhered to by historical writers is to use sources that are contemporaneous with the events they record. *Sīrah* and *tafsīr* literature clearly does not meet this qualification because it was written in a later era. Muslim sources also often present contradictory information and are often filled with dogmatic biases. In short, traditional sources are not reliable enough to use to understand the historical context of early Islam and the original meaning of the Qur'ān. To reveal the original meaning of the Qur'ān, a scholar should dialogue the Qur'ān with the literature that came before it, namely Biblical literature and its exegesis, not with what came after it, namely Qur'ānic exegesis, because The Qur'ān responds or dialogues with texts that came before it.

Sirry calls this approach revisionist, the antithesis of traditionalist. Traditionalists, on the one hand, believe that the historical writings of Muslim academics from the classical period can be utilized as a means of reconstructing the history of Islam's formation. Very few Muslims want to publicly disagree with this viewpoint, which is supported by the majority of Muslim intellectuals, particularly those who reside in the Islamic world. On the other hand, revisionist academics present a different perspective, arguing that it is challenging to depend solely on conventional sources to recreate early Islamic history. However, it is incorrect to see the distinction between revisionist and traditionalist as a serious debate. According to Sirry, the two different techniques have created numerous valuable and important methods to assess the available materials [20].

In this debate, Sahiron Syamsuddin came up with the idea of *Ma'na-Cum-Maghza*. In this theory, an interpreter must look for the initial meaning, text, or objective meaning that is understood by the first listener. After that, the person must contextualize with the world around him. The *ma'na-cum-maghza* approach is an exegetical method where one attempts to understand the historical meaning (*ma'na*) of a text (the Qur'ān) as it was originally understood by its audience and to develop its significance (*maghza*) for the current circumstances. This technique is similar to the methodical substance of other phrases. It's known as the "double movement" approach of Fazlur Rahman.

Abdullah Saeed outlines his "contextualist approach" in his books *Interpreting the Qur'an* [21] and *Reading the Quran in the 21st Century* [22]. Nevertheless, it appears that Saeed's contextualist method and Rahman's double movement are limited to the interpretation of Qur'anic legal texts. However, the ma'na-cum-maghza method is meant to be applicable to the entirety of the Qur'an.

This method is predicated on the idea that all texts, including the Qur'anic text, have historical significance that is unique to its environment for the first time. This is a result of Muhammad receiving the Qur'ān in culturally specific circumstances. Because of this, it is crucial for an interpreter to consider both the text's historical context and the text itself in order to fully get the text's original meaning. It is important to analyze the language of the Qur'ān in the context of 7th and 1st-century Arabic. This method is predicated on the idea that all languages have both synchronic and diachronic elements. The diachronic language component is one that varies periodically, whereas the synchronic component is the one that is constant. Someone must be aware of how a term, idiom, phrase, and structure develop in order to avoid misinterpretations of a text. For instance, the Arabic term *ikhlas*, which shows the process of purifying something, is subject to change. The term has a pre-Islamic meaning that describes a secular process of purifying something. This word can be found in both religious and secular contexts in the Qur'ān. Its meaning is identical to that of tawhid (the unity of God) in the Qur'anic context, where it refers to a monotheistic belief and deed. The fact that the *sūra* whose verses discuss monotheism is known as *sūra al-ikhlas* provides evidence in favor of this conclusion. Muslim scholars therefore describe the phrase as the act of directing all good deeds solely toward obtaining God's grace. It indicates that, while maintaining its fundamental meaning, it has connotations that are pre-Qur'anic and post-Qur'anic [23].

The next interesting debate, apart from discussing the locus of meaning in the Qur'ān, is how Sukidi pays great respect to the early interpreters. He has at least three reasons. First, the early tradition of Islamic interpretation is the most important phase in the formation of the meanings of the Qur'ān, which are not single and monolithic, but multivocal and contradictory. The diverse interpretations within this early tradition opened up creative space for different readings of the Qur'ān and interpretations of its meaning. Interestingly, the early tafsir books not only record the history of interpretation from the early commentators but also record the traditions originating from memorisers of the Qur'ān (reciters of the Qur'ān).

Second, the early Islamic exegetical tradition formed a community of interpreters spread throughout the Islamic world, so that the interpreters not only carried the text of the Qur'ān in memory but also responded to challenges in various places, with constantly changing situations. This also makes each

interpreter's interpretation more diverse. Third, the early Islamic interpretive tradition marked the formation of a new intellectual class after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad. This new class was filled by ulama who were at the forefront of reading the Qur'ān creatively and producing various meanings of the text, without any psychological obstacles due to the Islamic orthodoxy framework that had not yet been formed at that time. In this pre-orthodoxy phase, various interpretations of the Qur'ān were open, flexible, and relaxed. Contradictory and sharp differences in interpretation freely and fluidly occur [24].

Meanwhile, some scholars, for example, Patricia Crone, are very firm in deconstructing the authority of early scholars. Rather than confirming what the exegetes remembered, Crone stated that the exegetical literature indicates what they chose to believe. The exegetes were no more knowledgeable than we are about the meaning of this sūra. Instead of providing their memory of what Muḥammad intended to convey when he spoke these passages, they are providing a lot of speculations based just on the verses themselves. They did not know the original meaning of those words [25].

Conclusion

Sukidi's thinking, as manifested in the concept of "Back to Tradition," highlights the importance of tradition in forming interpretive models for the contemporary world. In tradition, meaning lives, develops, and dialogues with each other. This existing meaning lives without fear of the boundaries of orthodoxy, which has recently become stronger. This thinking emphasises the importance of understanding and absorbing Islamic intellectual heritage as a means of understanding the meaning of the Qur'an in depth. In this context, understanding the "locus of meaning" is the key to exploring and appreciating the complexity of meaning in the Islamic tradition. Sukidi's thoughts invite Muslims to develop insight and awareness of the diversity of interpretations in Islamic history, while understanding that meaning does not lie in sacred texts, but in intellectual dialogue and continuous tradition. in-depth and ongoing dialogue in understanding the meaning of Islam, as well as offering valuable contributions to the development of contemporary Islamic thought.

To take everything into account, this study reveals that Sukidi's thinking contributes to expanding the discourse on interpretation by emphasizing tradition as the reservoir of meaning. This study's contribution lies in its effort to highlight the shift in the locus of meaning from text to tradition, while simultaneously opening up a space for discussion about the plurality of interpretations in Islam. Further studies could be directed at exploring Sukidi's thoughts in other works, or at broader comparisons with Muslim and non-

Muslim scholars to enrich understanding of the dynamics of Qur'anic interpretation in the modern era.

Author Contributions

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