

INTERPRETATION AND VIEWS OF QURANIC  
COMMENTARIES ON THE PLANET BASED ON  
*AL-KAWKAB* AND *AL-KAWAKIB* TERMS

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**Abstract:**

*This paper examines the occurrence of the terms al-kawkab (plural, al-kawakib) in the Qur'an and investigates the views of classical and contemporary Quranic commentaries concerning the interpretation of the meanings of these terms. In general, the Qur'an uses al-kawkab as the singular term and al-kawakib as the plural term. The argument among Quranic commentaries concerning the interpretation of the meaning of al-kawkab (plural, al-kawakib) in the Quran revolve around whether it refers to either a planet or a star. Thus, this paper attempts to reconcile this contradiction in the meaning of al-kawkab (plural, al-kawakib) among Quranic commentaries by considering the Arabic lexical sources as well as the various Quranic allusions. The data collections involved library research based on the primary and secondary sources relating to the planets in the solar system. After examining the views on the Quranic commentaries, the authors conclude that the meaning of the term al-kawkab (plural, al-kawakib) in the Quran refers to a planet.*

**Keywords:** planet, *al-kawkab*, *al-kawakib*, Quranic commentaries, Islamic astronomy

## Introduction

The Greeks and other astronomers of old were aware of the Moon, the stars and five planets - Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn - in the night sky. Human knowledge concerning the basic content of the solar system remained largely unchanged from ancient times until the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the invention of the telescope made it possible for more detailed observations to be conducted. Galileo Galilei was the first person to capitalize on this new technology. Galileo's discovery of the phases of Venus and four moons orbiting Jupiter early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century helped to change mankind's vision of the universe forever.

As technological advances continued, knowledge concerning the solar system improved rapidly. Astronomers began discovering objects invisible to the naked eye. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, astronomers had found Saturn's rings (1659), as well as the planets Uranus (1781) and Neptune (1846), many planetary moons, and the first asteroids orbiting the Sun, mostly in a broad band lying between Mars and Jupiter. Based on current knowledge, our solar system is known to contain one star (the Sun), eight planets, 166 moons (at last count) orbiting those planets, eight asteroids and more than 100 Kuiper Belt objects larger than 300 kilometres (200 miles) in diameter and tens thousands of smaller (but well studied) asteroids and Kuiper Belt objects.<sup>1</sup>

Based on the study of modern astronomy, it is believed that the solar system formed approximately 4600 million years ago as a result of the accumulation of the gas and dust in space that formed the sun and other planets. A planet is an object that does not shine, but reflects the light rays of the sun. The planets in the solar system consist of Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune.<sup>2</sup> A star is a gaseous and luminous object that is formed from a nebula cloud. The molecular clouds contain dust, hydrogen

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<sup>1</sup>Eric Chaisson and Steve McMillan, *Astronomy Today*. Ed. 7 (United States: Pearson Education, 2014), 158.

<sup>2</sup>Barakat 'Uthwan al-Bathayanah, *Muqaddimah Fi 'Ilm al-Falak* (Irbid: Dar al-Musayyarah, 2003), 95.

and helium which undergo the process of nuclear fusion in the core to form continuity during the formation of a star.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, the Quranic commentaries are not clear in their interpretation of the pronouncement of the term *al-kawkab* (plural, *al-kawakib*). Generally, the term *al-kawkab* (plural, *al-kawakib*) means a planet. However, there are variations in the interpretation of the Quranic commentaries for both these words in that some commentaries refer to them as a planet and others state that they mean a star.

For example, the interpretation in Surah al-An'am verse 76 :  
 "When the night covered him over, He saw a star: He said: "This is my Lord". But when it set, He said: "I love not those that set".<sup>4</sup>

Classical Quranic commentaries also differ in their interpretation of *al-kawkab*. Some classical Quranic commentaries such as Ar-Razi<sup>5</sup>, az-Zamakhshari<sup>6</sup>, Ibnu 'Abbas<sup>7</sup>, as-Suyuti<sup>8</sup> and al-Baghwi<sup>9</sup> infer that *al-kawkab* means a planet, while other classical Quranic commentaries like Ibnu Kathir<sup>10</sup> state that *al-kawkab* means a star. Some contemporary Quranic commentary interpretations such as Syed Qutb<sup>11</sup> dan Rasyid Ridho<sup>12</sup> agree with the assertion that

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Gordon Smith, *The Illustrated Guide To The Solar System* (London: South Water, 2009), 50-51.

<sup>4</sup> Quranic translation adapted from the famous translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

<sup>5</sup> Fahkrudin Ar-Razi, Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Umar Ibn al-Hassan Ibn al-Hussin al-Yatimi. *Mafatih al-Ghaib* (at-Tafsir al-Kabir) (Beirut: Dar Ihya' at-Turath al-'Arabi, 1999), 13:38.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Zamakhshari, Abu al-Qasim Mahmud Ibn 'Amru Ibn Ahmad. *Al-Kasyaf an Haqaiq Ghawamid at Tanzil* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1985), 2: 39.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Fairuzabadi, Abu Thahir Muhammad bin Ya'kub, *Tanwir al-Miqbas Min Tafsir Ibnu 'Abbas (Tafsir Ibnu 'Abbas)* (Beirut: Dar al-'Asyraq Li at-Tiba'ah wa an-Nasyr, 1988), 137.

<sup>8</sup> As-Suyuti, Jalal al-Din Abdurrahman Ibn Abu Bakar. *Ad-Durrur al-Manthur fi at-Tafsir al-Ma'thur* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2000), 3: 46.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Baghwi, Abu Muhammad a-Husin Ibn Mas'ud al-Farra' al-Baghwi al-Syafi'i. *Ma'alim at-Tanzil* (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya' at-Turath al-'Arabi, 2000), 2: 137-139.

<sup>10</sup> Ibnu Kathir, Abu al-Fida' Ismail Ibn Kathir al-Qurasyyi ad-Dimsyaki. *Tafsir al-Quran al-'Azim*. (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1997), 2: 156.

<sup>11</sup> Syed Qutb, Ibrahim Hussin as-Syaribi, *Fi Zilal al-Quran* (Kaherah: Dar

*al-kawkab* means a planet. In contrast, Az-Zuhaili<sup>13</sup> interpret the term *al-kawkab* as a star.

As Nurul Hidayah Awang @ Ab Rahman et al.<sup>14</sup>, Raihana Abdul Wahab and Ishak Suliaman<sup>15</sup>, state that terminology such as *an-nujum*, *al-kawkab*, *at-thariq*, *al-khunnas*, *as-syi'ra*, *al-buruj* and *al-misbah* can be interpreted to mean stars. However, in reality all these terminologies have their own meanings and features based on the Quranic commentaries views and opinions concerning the term *al-kawkab* (plural, *al-kawakib*).

Hence, this paper explores the views on this issue according to the classical Quranic commentaries such as Ibn Kathir (774H/1372), al-Qurtubi (671H/1272), at-Tabari (310H/922), az-Zamakhshari (538H/1143), ar-Razi (606H/1209), as-Suyuti (911H/1505), al-Baghwi (510H/1116), al-Baidhawi (685H/1286) and as-Syaukani (1250H/1834), and contemporary Quranic commentaries such as Rashid Ridha (1354H/1935), Sayyid Qutb (1385H/1965) and al-Zuhaili. As will be seen, the distinct trends among the Quranic commentaries help determine the term *al-kawkab* (plural, *al-kawakib*). In addition, this discussion may reconcile the seemingly contradictory usages between the Quranic commentaries of the term.

This article discusses the various Quranic references to the term *al-kawkab* (plural, *al-kawakib*) with the intention of demonstrating that it is used in the Quran in a somewhat more unstable way than most scholars tend to assume. Its aim is to show that the Quran itself does not seem to dismiss the possibility that

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as-Syuruk, 1991), 86.

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Rasyid bin Ali Ridho bin Muhammad Syamsuddin bin Bahauddin. *Tafsir al-Quran al-Hakim (Tafsir al-Manar)*. (Mesir: al-Hay'ah al-Misriyyah al-'Ammah Li al-Kitab, 1990), 7: 467.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Zuhayli, Wahbah Ibn Mustafa. *At-Tafsir al-Munir* (Damsyik: Dar al-Fikr, 1998), 7: 260.

<sup>14</sup> Nurul Hidayah Awang @ AbRahman et al., "The Concept of Companion Star According To Quranic Verses and Astronomy," *Al-Bayan* 10, no. 1 (Jun 2012): 85-100.

<sup>15</sup> Raihana Abdul Wahab et al., "Death of Stars From Quranic Perspective and Its Correlation to The Astronomical Context," *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research* 12, no.1 (2012): 119-123.

*al-kawkab* (plural, *al-kawakib*) might have two or more contradictory meanings. My argument is that the meaning of *al-kawkab* (plural, *al-kawakib*) in the Quran is not self-evident, and that the variation in its usage not only creates the possibility for diverse interpretations among the Quranic commentaries, but that it must also be adapted and integrated with modern astronomy. It is only in later exegetical works that the terms *al-kawkab* (plural, *al-kawakib*) acquires a stable, fixed meaning. Therefore, studies about the interpretation of the term *al-kawkab* (plural, *al-kawakib*) require clarification as it is easy to understand the term in relation to a planet in the solar system based on the Islamic astronomical perspective.

### Definition of the Planet by Linguists

Before discussing further about planets and the interpretations in the Quranic commentaries, a brief definition of a planet is given here based on the usage of these terms among linguists. Linguists say that the term *al-kawkab* (plural, *al-kawakib*) has two different meanings. One group says that it means a planet and the other is of the view that it means a star.

Ibn Manzur<sup>16</sup> is one of the linguists who feel that *al-kawkab* (plural, *al-kawakib*) means a planet. Therefore, *al-kawkab* was deemed to refer to a planet in the sky and was linked with the nature of light. According to Al-Harawi<sup>17</sup>, al-Laith stated that, in his opinion *al-kawkab* was known to be a planet in the sky. It is likened to light and therefore it is known as a planet. In addition, al-A'sya argued that *al-kawkab* is on the east side of the planet that is illuminated by the sun.

*Mu'jam al-'Alfaz Wa al-A'lam al-Qur'aniyyah*<sup>18</sup> also states that *al-kawkab* (plural, *al-kawakib*) means a planet. *Al-kawkab* means a dark celestial body where the light and the heat of the planet's temperature depend on the star (sun). In addition, *Mu'jam al-Lughah*

<sup>16</sup>Ibnu Manzur. *Lisan al-'Arab* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' at-Turath al-'Arabi, 1999), 12: 189.

<sup>17</sup>Abu Mansur, Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn al-'Azhar al-Harawi, *Tahzib al-Lughah* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' at-Turath al-'Arabi, 2001), 10: 218.

<sup>18</sup>Muhammad Ismail Ibrahim. *Mu'jam al-'Alfaz wa al-A'lam al-Qur'aniyyah* (Qaherah: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1998), 464.