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STEWARDS OF THE EARTH: ISLAMIC ENVIRONMENTALISM IN CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC THOUGHT

by

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A thesis submitted to the Alliance of Civilization Institute in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Civilization Studies

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ACADEMIC HONESTY ATTESTATION

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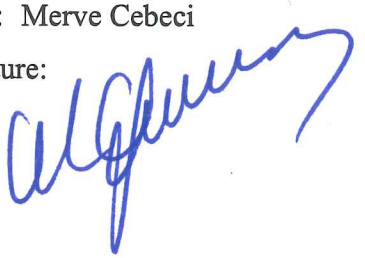

ÖZ

YERYÜZÜNÜN HALİFELERİ:
KLASİK VE ÇAĞDAŞ İSLAM DÜŞÜNCESİNDE İSLAMİ ÇEVRECİLİK

Cebeci, Merve
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Bu tez çalışması, iki farklı döneme ait uzmanların Kur'an'daki bir kısım ayetleri yorumlamasını karşılaştırıyor. Birinci dönem yorumları için 4./10. yüzyılları ile 9./15. yüzyılları arasında yaşamış yedi müfessirin tefsir çalışmaları dikkate alınırken, ikinci dönem için modern "eko-İslam" hareketinin akademik savunucularının Kur'an-ı Kerim ayetleri hakkındaki yorumları dikkate alınıyor. Bu tezde incelenen ikinci dönem yazarlarına göre, İslam geleneği, özellikle Kur'an-ı Kerim, modern bir konsept olan "çevrecilik" ile uyumlu bir şekilde; gezegeninin korunması, hayvan ve bitki hayatlarının himaye edilmesi, ve doğal kaynakların ölçülü kullanımı hakkında öğretiler içeriyor. Bu tez günümüz eko-İslam savunucuları tarafından en çok referans yapılan Kur'an ayetlerini belirleyerek, onların Kur'an ayetlerine getirdikleri yorumlar ile, tarihten çeşitli klasik Sünni müfessirlerin yorumlarını karşılaştırıyor. Böylece eko-İslam'ın köklerinin klasik gelenekten mi geldiğini yoksa İslam düşüncesine yakın zamanda mı eklendiğini inceliyor. İki dönemin yorumlarını karşılaştırdıktan sonra, vardığım sonuç şu ki, bazı düşüncelerin devamlılığının sekteye uğramasına rağmen, İslami Çevreciliğin köklerini klasik İslam düşüncesi geleneğinde görebiliyoruz. Nihayetinde, bu tez yalnızca İslami Çevreciliğin tarihini, kökenini ve gelişimini incelemekle kalmıyor aynı zamanda modern İslam ve onun geleneksel kökleri arasındaki derin ilişkiye ve İslam'ın ana kaynağı olan Kur'an-ı Kerim'in tefsirinin, modern söylem ve güncel meseleler ışığında nasıl şekillendiğine de ışık tutuyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: eko-İslam; İslami Çevrecilik; Kur'an Tefsiri

ABSTRACT

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This thesis studies the interpretations of a set of Qur'anic verses amongst two distinct groups: among traditional Sunni scholarship - represented by the exegetical works of seven scholars living from the 4th/10th to the 9th/15th century - and among modern academic studies of "eco-Islam." The latter group asserts that the Islamic tradition, and more specifically, the Qur'an, contains teachings that advocate for the preservation of the planet's environment, the safeguarding of animal and plant life and the rationed usage of its natural resources, all of which are in harmony with the modern concept of "environmentalism." Identifying the Qur'anic verses that these contemporary thinkers use as evidence for the idea of eco-Islam, this thesis compares their interpretations of the Qur'anic verses with the historical interpretations of a range of classical Sunni exegetes to study whether the idea of eco-Islam has roots within the classical tradition or is a recent introduction to Islamic thought. After comparing the two corpuses, I conclude that despite the existence of a number of discontinuities between them, we can indeed see the roots of Islamic environmentalism in the classical Islamic tradition. Ultimately, this thesis sheds light not just on the history, origins and development of "Islamic environmentalism" - a timely issue in and of itself - but also gives insight into the broader relationship between modern Islam and its traditional roots, and how the interpretative practices of Islam's primary textual authority (the Qur'an) have and have not changed in response to modern discourses and contemporary issues.

Keywords: eco-Islam; Islamic environmentalism; Qur'anic exegesis

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Wa alhamdulilah rabb al-'alamin.

Merve Cebeci

ARLINGTON –VA, 2020

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, environmentalism has become an increasingly pertinent topic in both popular and academic conversations. At our local level, we see Istanbul municipalities opening whole divisions devoted to sustainability practices,[1] on social media we see a growing number of programs and "influencers" advocating for a sustainable lifestyle,[2] and on the corporate level even big brands are promoting their products by associating them with sustainable initiatives.[3] This discourse has expanded into Muslim circles, with Muslim activists, scientists, academics and traditionally-trained scholars weighing in on the subject.[4] Starting from the 1960s with the scholarship of Seyyed Hossein Nasr onwards, there has been a growth in the number of contemporary publications making the case for an "Islamic environmentalism." As their evidence, proponents of this Islamic environmentalism point to Qur'anic verses, Prophetic hadith, and Islamic legal rulings commanding humanity to act moderately, not waste resources or spend excessively, and act as God's stewards on earth, among other examples. For instance, they cite verse 7:31 - "O children of Ādam! Beautify yourselves for every act of worship, and eat and drink [freely], but do not waste: verily, He does not love the wasteful!"[5] to demonstrate that God condemns wastefulness, or they cite verse 30:41 — "[Since they have become oblivious of God,] corruption has appeared on land

[1] "Kompost ve Geri Kazanım Tesisleri: Atık Yönetim Müdürlüğü," last modified July 9, 2015, https://atikyonetimi.ibb.istanbul/hizmetlerimiz/kompost-ce-geri-kazanim-tesisi/

[2] "Kokopelli Şehirde (@kokopellisehirde)," Instagram https://www.instagram.com/kokopellisehirde/?hl=tr

[3] "Grunding Türkiye (@grundigturkiye)," Instagram https://www.instagram.com/grundigturkiye/?hl=tr

[4] See, for example: "IFEES - The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences," http://www.ifees.org.uk/, "The Eco Muslim," http://theecomuslim.com/, "Khaleafa," http://www.khaleafa.com/

[5] Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān: The Full Account of the Revealed Arabic Text Accompanied by Parallel Transliteratipn = al-Qur'ān al-Karīm,* 5th ed., (Bristol: Book Foundation, 2003).

and in the sea as an outcome of what men's hands have wrought: and so He will let them taste [the evil of] some of their doings, so that they might return [to the right path]"[6] to argue that ecological disasters like famines and droughts are a direct result of man's immoral actions, amongst many other lessons to be derived from the Qur'an.

In the English and Turkish academic discourse on the subject,[7] proponents of Islamic environmentalism argue that these Qur'anic commands are in harmony with modern environmentalist principles such as the preservation of the environment, the safeguarding of animal and botanical life, and the rationed usage of natural resources. On the whole, these "Islamic environmentalism" studies present rigorous, well-argued research to show how a concept of Islamic environmentalism can be derived from the Qur'an, and how Islamic environmentalism might take shape in a practical way today. However, despite their frequent and masterful use of Qur'anic verses, writers in this new frontier of eco-Islam have yet to fully come to terms with how their interpretations of the Qur'anic verses correspond with the interpretations of classical Muslim scholars studying these same Qur'anic verses. Furthermore, they have not yet fully answered the question of whether their concept of Islamic environmentalism is a continuation of classical Islamic thought, or is a new way of thinking specific to the modern period.

To attempt to contribute to this conversation, this thesis asks to what extent classical *mufassirūn* (traditionally-trained interpreters of the Qur'an) derived some form of environmentalist messages from the Qur'anic verses in question, and by extension, was there such a thing as a pre-modern Islamic environmentalism? And if not, does that mean that the concept of Islamic environmentalism that is mentioned so frequently today is a product of modern discourse?

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Here and throughout this thesis, my references to the contemporary academic discourse is specifically referencing

To answer this question, I began by identifying which Qur'anic verses are used as evidence in the modern discourse around Islamic environmentalism. Surveying upwards of 80 English and Turkish academic publications on Islamic environmentalism, including books, book chapters, journal articles, theses, public declarations and conference papers, I identified the Qur'anic verses that were used most frequently as evidence for Islamic environmentalism. These verses were cited upwards of twenty-nine times across a variety of modern publications making the case for eco-Islam. As such, I treat these Qur'anic verses as the core Islamic textual authority on which modern Islamic environmentalism relies.

Then, having identified the most frequently referenced verses among modern academic proponents of eco-Islam, I went back to the classical sources to understand how the same verses were understood before the onset of modernity. Specifically, I read the classical Sunni interpretations of these verses as transmitted in the *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis) works of seven key interpreters living from the 4th/10th to the 9th/15th century: al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 864/1459) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyutī (d. 911/1505). Although not exhaustive, these seven references provide what I will argue is a representative sample of the major interpretations that were conceived in pre-modern times in regards to the verses in question. As such, I argue that if there was a kind of Islamic pre-modern concept of environmentalism, or a concern for the environment, it would be at the very least hinted at within the work of one or more of these seven key exegetes.

Finally, having collected a representative sample of the various modern and classical interpretations of these verses, my third step was to compare the two sets of interpretations. My specific goal in comparison was: a) to track how interpretations of these verses have changed between the classical and the modern period and b) to measure whether such environmentalist interpretations have historically been a part of the Islamic tradition or are a recent introduction to Islamic thought.

At the end of this comparison, I conclude that there is a mix of continuities and discontinuities between the classical and the contemporary. While it is possible to track certain influences that the classical commentators have on how contemporary academic thinkers interpret these verses, the classical commentary corpus does *not* seem to be the dominant force guiding how contemporary eco-Islam thinkers interpret these verses. Rather, contemporary thinkers are more guided by their own direct readings of the Qur'an, interpreting it in a way that fits their time and needs, rather than going solely through the classical tradition. Moreover, where the classical tradition tends to focus on particular frame stories and histories that are transmitted in connection to the verses, the contemporary thinkers tend to avoid particularized frame stories and instead universalize the application of these verses. This leads to definite changes between the two corpuses. That being said, I believe that there is enough evidence within the classical tradition to conclude that the roots of the modern discourse on Islamic environmentalism do reach back, at least partially, to the classical material.

Ultimately, this thesis sheds light not just on the history, origins and development of "Islamic environmentalism" — a timely issue in and of itself — but also gives insight into the broader relationship between modern Islam and its traditional roots, and how the interpretative practices around Islam's primary textual authority (the Qur'an) have and have not changed in response to modern discourses and contemporary issues.

1.1 Chapter Summary

In keeping with the summary above, this thesis follows the below structure: Chapter 1 introduces and defines key terms and concepts within the study and then presents a literature review of the relevant scholarship on this subject. Chapter 2 outlines and details the methodology I used to answer my research question, and how I selected sources from both contemporary academic eco-Islam studies, and from the Sunni classical tradition for comparison. Chapter 2 also contains details on the nature of these classical sources and biographical summaries on their authors. Chapter 3 presents the bulk of the data I derived from my study: it includes a detailed breakdown of what the classical

commentators and what the contemporary thinkers said on each verse I studied, organized verse-by-verse. Chapter 3 also contains my comparisons between the content of the two discourses (classical and contemporary) and my analysis of broad continuities and discontinuities from the two sets of sources. This is followed by the closing chapter of the thesis: a conclusion where I explore some of the wider implications of the study and where I also reflect on ways the thesis fell short and how it may be improved as a future project.

CHAPTER 2

KEY TERMS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I introduce a few important terms and concepts in this study before conducting a literature review of relevant publications on the subject matter. The key concept of the entire study is **environmentalism**, which I define as a collection of ideologies that support the preservation and improvement of the earth's ecological health, at both the individual, the societal and the international level. Within the broader corpus of academic material on environmentalism, there is a sub-branch that deals more closely with environmentalism as it is linked to Islamic thought, and that seeks to derive environmentalist principles from Islamic sources like the Qur'an, the Prophetic hadith, and Islamic law. I refer to this discourse with two terms that I use interchangeably: **Islamic environmentalism, and eco-Islam.** This thesis attempts to trace the roots of modern Islamic environmentalism back to the classical Islamic tradition. Obviously, I do not mean to imply that classical scholars were discussing the concept of environmentalism in the sense that we think of it today; "environmentalism" is a concept that was first explicitly discussed as such in the 19th and 20th centuries and it would be anachronistic if applied to the classical period. However, simply because the term and the concept had not been fully defined yet, that does not preclude the possibility that thinkers from the classical period were putting forth opinions and ideas that are in full harmony with what we today call environmentalism.

In the previous paragraph, I have used words like "classical," "contemporary," and "modern." Using these terms I mean the following: by **classical** texts I am referring to scholarship from the Muslim world during the period from roughly the 3rd/9th century to the 9th/15th century. Thus, the texts of *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis) that are the focus of this study may be labelled as "classical *tafsīr*." By **contemporary** I am referring to academic publications (i.e. scholarship published in academic journals or monographs) from the 20th century onwards written in either English or Turkish. I am aware that such a specific usage means

that many other works that could also be considered contemporary are being left out, and I discuss the ramifications of this choice in the conclusion.

2.1 Literature Review

Islamic environmentalism is a topic of significant interest, and has been so for the past few decades. In my research, I found over 200 publications from the 1960s to the present day studying some aspect of Islamic environmentalism. As such an extensive amount of work has been done on this subject, I do not go through every publication title by title, but rather group the published work into several categories based on the theme they focus on, and give a general summary of that theme and the work that has been done therein.

One of the earliest and most revisited topics is Islamic environmentalism's theoretical framework. Seyyed Hossein Nasr may be credited as one of the modern founding fathers of the discourse on this framework. His work traces shifts in the development of environmental thought from the post-Renaissance period down to the present day. In *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man* he looks at the demystification of nature and the de-ontologization of science as a result of positivist thinking. He also lays out a case for using revelation to pursue environmental goals.[8] He gives further background on the history of environmental thought in various philosophical and religious traditions in *Religion and the Order of Nature*.[9] The issue of Islam and the environment is addressed head-on in "Islam and the Environmental Crisis," where Nasr discusses how Islamic sources and traditions may act as guidelines for solving present-day environmental challenges.[10] The same approach, but now focused on Sufi tradition and Sufi thought, may be found in "The Ecological Problem in Light of Sufism," which stresses the idea of the unicity and interrelationship of nature that becomes a cornerstone of the contemporary

[8] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, (ABC International Group Inc, 1997).
[9] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996)
[10] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam and the Environmental Crisis" In *Spirit and Nature*, eds. Steven C. Rockefeller and John C. Elder, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 83–108.

discourse of a "*tawḥīd* paradigm" in Islamic environmentalism.[11] Nasr's extensive scholarship stimulated a number of meta-scholarship works which studied his method even as it continued to develop. Thus, for instance, Marjorie Hope and James Young lay out a survey of Nasr's contribution to the field, and his emphasis on concepts like man's vicegerency on earth, the transcendence of nature and the deep connections between the microcosm and macroscosm in "Islam and Ecology."[12] Another key figure in the field is Fazlun Khalid, founder and director of the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, who combines scholarship with activist work in the field. His writings are useful introductions to the general theory and outline of Islamic environmentalism.[13] Richard Foltz's work has done much to synthesize various sub-branches within this developing field. He served as one of the editors for *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, which contains 23 essays studying the idea of Islamic environmentalism from a wide spectrum of approaches and methodologies, and includes works from Nasr and Ibrahim Özdemir. The latter, whose scholarship on Nursi and Islamic environmentalism we explore further below, also has an important role in the general study of environmentalism, as he analyzes the impact of the modern sciences and a Western world-paradigm on how humans conceptualize their relationship with nature.[14]

A separate conversation in the field has been on Islamic environmentalism in practice (or, as the case may be, *not* in practice). These publications look at the approach different societies in the Muslim world, today and historically, have taken vis-a-vis the environment. In other words, where the previous conversation was about the "theory" of this matter, this discussion is about how that theory has been put to the test in various real-world scenarios. Foltz provides an effective introduction to the topic in *Environmentalism in the Muslim World*,

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[11] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Ecological Problem in Light of Sufism: The Conquest of Nature and the Teachings of Eastern Science" In *Sufi Essays*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 2nd ed., (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991), 152–63.

[12] Marjorie Hope and James Young, "Islam and Ecology," *Cross Currents* 44, no.2 (Summer, 1994): 180-193.

[13] Fazlun M. Khalid, "Applying Islamic Environmental Ethics" in *Environmentalism in the Muslim World*, ed. Richard Foltz, (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2005), 87-111.

[14] İbrahim Özdemir, "Towards an Understanding of Environmental Ethics from a Qur'anic Perspective" in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, ed. Richard Foltz, Frederick Mathewson Denny, and Azizan Haji Baharuddin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 3-37.

which contains essays from key scholars in the field surveying how a number of Muslim societies from Egypt to Turkey to Malaysia are putting into practice environmental initiatives.[15] This concern is echoed in Foltz's "Is there an Islamic Environmentalism?" which studies whether the theory of Islamic environmentalism as espoused by thinkers and writers has actually been successfully applied in lived environments today, and how it can be applied in the future.[16] Arthur Saniotis's "Muslims and Ecology: Fostering Islamic Environmental Ethics" includes an excellent history of Muslim ecological practice in the 18th through the 20th centuries, as well as down to the present day.[17] Then there are more targeted studies as well. Laura Wickström focuses specifically on Turkey in her "Secular and Religious Environmentalism in Contemporary Turkey" with the interesting approach of looking at how an Islamic environmentalism interacts with an officially secular society.[18]

As the topic gathered interest and the number of publications grew, there eventually formed what I refer to as research nodes around individual thinkers — i.e. within the field, some thinkers became a frequent subject of study as pivot points or anchors within the concept of Islamic environmentalism. One of the most prominent such thinkers living at the turn of the 20th century was Said Nursi, an Ottoman Sunni scholar of Kurdish origin well-read in the classical sources. He authored the Risale-i Nur collection which has served as the inspiration for millions of Risale students across the world. There have been a number of publications connected to his work, studying how he approached and thought of Islamic environmentalism in his scholarship. As such studies form a significant part of the field, I review the publications around him below.

Given Said Nursi's role and popularity in both Turkey and across the Muslim world, it is no surprise that there is an extensive body of literature, ranging from

[15] Richard C. Foltz, ed., *Environmentalism in the Muslim World*, (New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2005)

[16] Richard C. Foltz, "Is There an Islamic Environmentalism?," *Environmental Ethics* 22, no.1 (2000): 63-72.

[17] Arthur Saniotis, "Muslims and Ecology: Fostering Islamic Environmental Ethics," *Contemporary Islam* 6, no. 2 (July, 2012): 155-71.

[18] Laura Wickström, "Secular and Religious Environmentalism in Contemporary Turkey," *Approaching Religion* 4, no. 2 (December, 2014): 125-40, https://journal.fi/ar/article/view/67556/27852.

scholarly theses to confessional sermons, studying his life and thought. Amongst the growing fields in this regard is Nursi's view of the environment and of ecology.[19] These works have done a generally excellent job in studying Nursi's environmental thought and surveying the extensive *Risale* corpus. One of the earliest examples of such a work, written by Davud Aydüz in 1998 is "The Approach to the Environment Question of the Qur'an and its Contemporary Commentary, the Risale-i Nur."[20] Quoting from primarily two sources: the Qur'an, and Nursi's *Risale-i Nur* writings, Aydüz provides a general survey of how Nursi used Qur'anic verses to establish a framework for man's treatment of the environment. Additionally, the article delves into biography, narrating incidents from Nursi's life where he manifested a singular care for animals and for the environment in general.

Mohammad Aslam Parvaiz's "Environmental Ethics - The Human Role As Advocated by the Qur'an and Elucidated by Ustad Nursi," follows in the same mould.[21] Parvaiz references verses from the Qur'an and explores how Nursi understood them in light of his environmental thought. Parvaiz offers several fascinating insights, and he goes beyond the *study* of Nursi's environmentalism to actually *apply* the Nursian framework of seeing nature (and the divine design therein) as a book to be learned from, and to guide our human interactions. But fascinating applications aside, the article is very brief and is more of an introduction than a detailed study; Parvaiz does not delve deeply into the *Risale*

[19] In what follows, I present a rather extensive literature review of the scholarship on Nursi and environmentalism. This review might seem longer than what is necessary for the purposes of this thesis topic. There are two reasons for this atypical length: first, as I mentioned earlier, Nursi *was* a key subject of study for many scholars of eco-Islam, so there are quite a number of important works on his environmental thought. Second, an earlier variant of my thesis project was actually focusing specifically on Nursi's environmental thought. Even though I eventually re-oriented my thesis towards the project that is presented here, I still believe that some of the material that I researched in that earlier version of my project that has relevance to Islam and environmentalism as a general topic, hence why I am including the literature review material here.

[20] Davud Aydüz, "The Approach to the Environment Question of the Qur'an and its Contemporary Commentary, the Risale-i Nur" in *A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'an: The Example of Risale-i Nur*, (Istanbul: Sözler Publications, 2000), 625-59.

[21] Mohammad Aslam Parvaiz, "Environmental Ethics - The Human Role As Advocated by the Qur'an and Elucidated by Ustad Nursi: Bediüzzaman Said Nursî" in *Bringing Faith, Meaning and Peace to Life in a Multicultural World: The Risale-i Nur Approach*, (İstanbul, Turkey: Nesil, 2004), 228-38.

corpus, nor does he provide contextualization of Nursi's thought in general environmental theory or in Islamic thought.

Presented in a related symposium, but addressing the issue from a different approach, Kadir Canatan in "The Paradigmatic Background to the Ecological Crisis and Said Nursi's Cosmological Teachings" explores the extent to which Nursi's views on the environment were a response to modern materialist thought and its "secularization" of nature."[22] Canatan traces how a materialist view of the environment originated in 17th century Enlightenment circles and eventually spread to the Ottoman intellectual milieu as Ottoman scholars increasingly received their training in Europe. He then singles out Nursi's *The Treatise on Nature* for close study, arguing that the treatise was written to combat a materialist conception of nature. Thus the piece presents Nursi's work in the context of developments in the Western or Western-oriented intellectual elite.

Writing for the collection *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, Oliver Leaman also explores the potential for a Nursian environmentalism in his "Islam, the Environment, and Said Nursi."[23] There, he highlights the commonly referenced notion of "nature as a book" in the Nursian framework. Whereas Canatan earlier contrasted Nursi with the materialists, Leaman contrasts Nursi's thought with Sufi ideas of transcendence. In Leaman's analysis, Nursi does not seek to "transcend" nature and the material world; rather, he uses the materiality of the world, its tangibility and our ability to closely observe it, measure it and study it, as a means to better know God, His names, and His attributes. Leaman connects such an approach to the Qur'anic portrayal of nature, as the Qur'an directs humans to look at God's signs in the material, physical world.[24] Leaman's book chapter represents a serious

[22] Kadir Canatan, "The Paradigmatic Background to the Ecological Crisis and Said Nursi's Cosmological Teachings" in *A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'an: The Example of Risale-i Nur*, (Istanbul: Sözler Publications, 2000), 609-24.

[23] Oliver Leaman, "Islam, the Environment, and Said Nursi" in *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. M. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi', (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 255-62.

[24] See, for instance, Qur'an 2:164: "Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, and the [great] ships which sail through the sea with that which benefits people, and what Allah has sent down from the heavens of rain, giving life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness and dispersing therein every [kind of] moving creature,

contribution to the study of Nursi and environmentalism, and takes the much-needed step of putting Nursi in conversation with other Islamic thinkers.

Some scholars of Nursi touched on the issue of his environmentalist thought without focusing on it directly. Sabahaddin Zaim in his "The Treatise on Frugality" studies Nursi's work of the same title, written in 1934.[25] Referencing the Qur'an, the Prophetic hadith, and one work of the *Risale* corpus, Zaim explores the connection between Nursi's emphasis on frugality, and his views on moral economics and environmental thought, ultimately coming to the conclusion that *the* solution to the environmental crisis is to practice frugality as espoused in Nursi's treatise. Another, more recent work, has also taken the Nursian concept of frugality as its main focus: Heather Fagan's "Islamic Iktisad (Frugality): Solution to Consumerism as the Root Cause of Environmental Destruction."[26] Fagan builds off of earlier scholarship on Nursi's view of frugality to build a complex framework around the concept of *iqtisad* (frugality) in Islamic thought. She categorizes *iqtisad* into four main groups and gives specific examples of each using Qur'anic verses and Prophetic hadith, ultimately suggesting that *iqtisad* is a crucial principle in Islamic environmental ethics.[27]

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and [His] directing of the winds and the clouds controlled between the heaven and the earth are signs for a people who use reason."

[25] Sabahaddin Zaim, "The Treatise on Frugality" in *The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, (İstanbul, Turkey: Sözler Publications, 1997), 174-84.

[26] Heather Fagan, "Islamic Iktisad (Frugality): Solution to Consumerism as the Root Cause of Environmental Destruction," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2016): 65-80.

[27] A few non-academic pieces exploring Nursi's environmental thought also bear mention here. İsmail Kocaçalışkan's "Risale-i Nur'un Yaklaşımı ile Çevresel Farkındalık" highlights important aspects of man's relationship with the environment. He points to the brotherhood between man and nature and provides examples of how Nursi highlights the constant supplication existing in creation. Kocaçalışkan also narrates anecdotes from Nursi's own life as to how he constantly maintained a caring attitude towards nature. See İsmail Kocaçalışkan, "Risale-i Nur'un Yaklaşımı ile Çevresel Farkındalık," *Katre, Uluslararasi Insan Arastirmalari Dergisi* 2, no. 3, (January, 2017): 113–25. Cevat Çakır in "Çevre ve İktisat" follows the idea of frugality, putting wastefulness at the core of the environmental crisis, and offering examples from Nursi's life to demonstrate how one can lead a conscious, frugal life. See Cevat Çakır, "Çevre ve İktisat," *Köprü - Üç Aylık Fikir Dergisi*, no. 107 (Summer, 2009). Habiba Abu Zayd's "The Culture of Environment in Islamic Thought Through the School of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi" published in the Arabic journal *al-Nur* argues that Nursi's *Risale* corpus provides a crucial ethical foundation for reforming man's attitude towards nature. See Habiba Abu Zayd, "The Culture of Environment in Islamic Thought through the School of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi." النور للدراسات الحضارية و الفكرية 7, no. 14 (2016): 107–22.

Sadık Kılıç's "The Message of the Risale-i Nur in the Ecological Context" stands out from other pieces in that it explores other "traditional" (i.e. non-materialist) approaches to environmental ethics, including those of Native American and Hindu traditions.[28] Additionally, it provides some contextualization of Nursi's thought vis-a-vis more recent developments in environmental ethics. However, as the paper was published in 1998, such a contextualization is now somewhat dated. Moreover, despite its attempt to provide a historical-intellectual contextualization of Nursi's environmentalist thought, and to compare it to other non-materialist approaches, the paper surprisingly neglects to study general Islamic environmental thought, with the ultimate result that Nursi is orphaned from the Islamic intellectual discourse from which he came, and placed in conversation with other, more distant, schools of thought.

Perhaps the scholar who has done the most work on Nursi's environmentalist thought is İbrahim Özdemir. Specifically, his article "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Approach to the Environment" and his book *The Ethical Dimension of Human Attitude towards Nature: A Muslim Perspective* have particular relevance to the topic of this thesis.[29] The former, published in 1998, focuses directly on Nursi and his understanding of man's role vis-a-vis the environment. It is sourced from extensive references to the *Risale* corpus, and represents the deepest use of references I could find in an article connecting Nursi and environmentalism. The latter, a 2008 edition of Özdemir's PhD thesis originally published in 1996, briefly touches upon Nursi's thought. Özdemir here focuses more on Western environmental thought, providing an excellent history of Western environmental ethics. Taken together, Özdemir's writings represent perhaps the most rigorous study of Nursian environmental thought, complete with a nuanced analysis of how Nursi characterized the Western tradition's treatment of nature.

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[28] Sadık Kılıç, "The Message of the Risale-i Nur in the Ecological Context" in *A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'an: The Example of Risale-i Nur*, (Istanbul, Turkey: Sözler Publications, 2000), 660-79.

[29] İbrahim Özdemir, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Approach to the Environment" in *A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'an: The Example of Risale-i Nur,* (Istanbul, Turkey: Sözler Publications, 2000), 680-703. Also, İbrahim Özdemir, *The Ethical Dimension of Human Attitude towards Nature: A Muslim Perspective*, 2nd ed., (Istanbul: Insan Publications, 2008).

On the whole, these works do an excellent job studying Nursi's work and comparing his environmental thought with prevailing Western manifestations of environmentalism. That being said, there exists a tendency to put Nursi in direct conversation with Western counterparts without fully exploring how Nursi's views on the environment developed from his Islamic intellectual heritage. Those times that scholars do explore the subject of Nursi's Islamic heritage, it is usually focused on drawing a connection between Nursi's thought and Qur'anic verses or Prophetic hadith — i.e. the original sources of Islamic thought. This no doubt has its uses, and has been a crucial step in understanding Nursi's environmental thought. However, this approach means that we do not get to fully see the role of the thirteen centuries of Islamic scholarship that lay between him and the revelation of the Qur'an. This under-emphasis of the classical heritage is not specific to studies on Nursi's environmental thought, but is a general characteristic of the study of Islamic environmentalism in general.

The amount of publications on Islamic environmentalism are many and varied. Some of these studies are narrow and focused, others are broad and general. On the whole, the scholarship on the issue has been very fruitful, and Islamic environmentalism has within the past 6 decades, blossomed into a kind of sub-field of its own. However, that being said, there is always room for growth, and there are still many gaps within the existing literature. The main focus in such studies so far has been on how we can articulate an "Islamic" form of environmentalism based on the Qur'an and the Prophetic hadith. Within such studies, there are two key time periods: the earliest years of Islam (when the Qur'an was being revealed and the Prophet was actively teaching and guiding the community, including teaching them how to treat the surrounding environment), and then contemporary years (and what modern environmentalist discourse has to say about the state of our environment today, and the frameworks and systems that may help humanity conceptualize its role in the environment). However, between the formative period and the contemporary period are many centuries of scholarship that I argue have not been adequately studied or explored. This thesis seeks to play a part in filling in that gap, by studying to what extent contemporary studies on Islamic environmentalism correspond to classical Islamic scholarship. In this regard, I have found only a

few studies that pursue a similar path and make the classical heritage their primary lens when studying Islamic environmentalism. "Seeing the environment through Islamic eyes: application of Shariah to natural resources planning and management" by Safei el-Deen Hamed attempts to derive a system of resource preservation and environmentally conscious consumption from the classical corpus of material on Islamic law.[30] This study, though it is fulfilling a much-needed function, focuses more on the impact of the *legal* material of the classical period rather than the Qur'anic *tafsīr* material. Moreover, these sources tend to approach the issue from *within* the discourse of Islamic environmentalism. In other words, they are attempting to formulate a system of ethics and are trying to see what they can learn from the classical material to do so. In contrast, this thesis is not attempting to build its own system of ethics, but rather, is positioning itself as an observer attempting to evaluate the degree to which existing systems of eco-Islam correspond with classical thinking.

Some works have approached the classical tradition from specific angles. J. Wilkinson provides a study of water usage, water law, and water utilization technology (including in the classical period) in "Muslim land and water law."[31] Another work focuses on the role of the public inspector of the early and classical period as a mechanism for ensuring the protection of animal rights and other ecological practices.[32] Foltz provides a survey of animal rights in Islamic law specifically, and Muslim attitudes towards animals generally, in *Animals in Islamic Traditions and Muslim Cultures*.[33] Working in the same direction is the book *İslam Hukukunda Hayvan Hakları* by Adnan Koşum, which discusses a system of animal rights based on classical Islamic law.[34] A third work also

[30] Safei El-Deen Hamed, "Seeing the Environment through the Islamic Eyes: Application of Shariah to Natural Resources Planning and Management," Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics 6, no. 2 (August, 1993): 145-64.

[31] John C. Wilkinson, "Muslim Land and Water Law," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, (1990): 54-72.

[32] Othman Abd-ar-Rahman Llewellyn, "The Basis for a Discipline of Islamic Environmental Law" in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, ed. Richard Foltz, Frederick Mathewson Denny, and Azizan Haji Baharuddin, (Cambridge, Mass: Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2003), 185-247.

[33] Richard Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Traditions and Muslim Cultures*, (Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2006).

[34] Adnan Koşum, *İslam Hukukunda Hayvan Hakları,* (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2018).

related to animal rights is provided by Lenn Goodman, who translated the writings of the Ikhwan al-Safa on animal-human relations — a very fascinating work that demonstrates how certain concepts within our modern discourse of Islamic environmentalism are presaged in this mock case between animals and man.[35] These sources all serve the very useful purpose of evaluating the classical corpus of material, but they tend to focus on the legal corpus rather than the *tafsīr* corpus, and thus they fulfill a different function than this thesis.

[35] Ikhwan al-Safa (The Brethren of Purity), *The Case of the Animals versus Man Before the King of the Jinn*, trans. Lenn Evan Goodman, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978).

CHAPTER 3

IDENTIFYING THE SOURCES

To return to the original question of the thesis, I am studying whether the concept of Islamic environmentalism, and the Qur'anic interpretations that are used to support it have any precursor interpretations in classical Islamic discourse. To answer this question, I first had to identify two sets of sources: the contemporary texts which argue in favor of an Islamic environmentalism, and the classical texts which would potentially contain precedents of that same concept. This chapter discusses *what* texts I selected for study, *why* I selected these particular texts to answer my research question and *how* I organized my study of these texts. The first half of the chapter discusses how I selected and treated texts from my modern pool of sources, and the second half of the chapter discusses how I selected and treated texts for the classical pool.

3.1 Building a Discourse Map from the Modern Sources:

I begin my research by collecting as many contemporary English and Turkish sources on Islamic environmentalism as I could find. I searched online research databases to formulate a list of any and all publications on Islam and ecology. In doing so, I collected over 200 sources, which I listed chronologically. This master list provides a sense of the general parameters of the literature on Islam and ecology: when these types of studies began, at what points various sub-topics became popular, and who the scholars of this field were. The earliest texts are few: the 60s and 70s had only a few publications, most of them by Nasr. Only in the 1980s do we see a significant proliferation of publications on "Islam and ecology," "Islam and the environment," and "Islam and the ecological crisis." It is at this time that we start to see the work of scholars like Ziauddin Sardar and William Chittick. In the 1990s the field takes off — I was able to find 71 books or journal articles published in just a decade. It is at this point that some of the major conceptual foundations of Islamic environmentalism start to spread: ideas like "the whole world is a *masjid*" and "the vicegerency of man on

earth." At the same time, scholarship around Nursi's environmental thought also expands during this 10-year period. From 2000 to 2017 the pace of new scholarship decreases, with only 43 publications that I could find within the 17-year period. Scholarship in this period features a more closer focus on Islamic environmentalism "in practice" — looking at the impact of the theorizations of the 80s and 90s on actual policy across the Muslim world.

With this list of 200 organized chronologically, I then selected 80 texts to input into the Atlas TI program for further study. In making this selection of 80 input texts, I made sure to vary the year and publication type to get a representative slice of the entire spectrum of publications; however, I also had to favor those sources that were readily available in digital format, as the Atlas TI program requires digital inputs.

I input those 80 texts into the Atlas TI program and formed a discourse map based on the methods we studied in the "Discourse Analysis" course offered by MEDİT. Specifically, because the goal of my discourse map was to display how Qur'anic verses were being used in this set of sources, and what Qur'anic verses were being cited most frequently, I followed the below methodology: first, I went through each of the eighty texts and made a "quotation selection" for every occasion where the author quotes or references any Qur'anic verse. For each of these "quotation selections" I attached a "code" that was based on the verse being quoted. By the end of this process, I had recorded 1,373 quotation selections, which were referencing 836 different Qur'anic verses — nearly one-seventh of the entire Qur'an. However, there was a definite difference in the number of references each of these 836 verses received; some verses were referenced 10 times, some referenced even 20 times, but the majority were only referenced once or twice across the entire body of 80 publications.

This collection of quotation selections provided me with a map of the Qur'anic verses being used in the modern discourse on eco-Islam. Most importantly for my purposes, using the codes I had included for each reference, I was able to derive a list of the most frequently referenced verses in this discourse. I ultimately decided to study the five most frequently cited verses for my thesis —

this represents verses that were cited 29 times or more times across the 80 sources. While with enough time I could have lowered that bar to ten or fifteen mentions and thereby included more verses for analysis, given the time constraints, five verses was the most effective way to proceed for a Master's level project. These five verses were:

1. Verse 7:31, referenced a total of 35 times across the 80 sources.
2. Verse 30:41, referenced a total of 32 times across the 80 sources.
3. Verse 2:30, referenced a total of 30 times across the 80 sources.
4. Verse 6:38, referenced a total of 29 times across the 80 sources.
5. Verse 17:44, referenced a total of 29 times across the 80 sources.

By this point, I had arguably found what I was looking for in the modern sources: the core set of Qur'anic verses that formed the foundation upon which the case for an Islamic environmentalism was being built. However, at this point, I must justify why I focused so closely on the Qur'anic verses, to the exclusion of other evidences and arguments that the proponents of eco-Islam were using. I acknowledge that in the contemporary publications, the scholars who argued for the existence of an Islamic form of environmentalism used a *wide* variety of sources. This included Qur'anic verses, but it also included other sources, like Prophetic hadith, Islamic legal rulings, or arguments based on general principles of Islamic law. Therefore, it would be a mischaracterization and an oversimplification to say that these scholars relied exclusively on Qur'anic verses to make their arguments. Ideally, with enough time, I would have been able to include the hadith references and the references to pre-modern legal rulings when constructing my discourse map of how modern scholars talked about Islamic environmentalism; however, due to time constraints, I had to limit how I approached this discourse. On the whole, I found that scholars more frequently used Qur'anic verses to make their arguments than they used other pre-modern sources of Islamic law, like hadith or legal rulings, so I decided to focus exclusively on the Qur'anic verses. I believe this was the most effective choice, as the Qur'an was very frequently used in this discourse, and also because the Qur'an is essentially the source of all other sources of Islamic thought. Even the Prophetic hadith and Islamic legal rulings ultimately go back

to the Qur'anic teachings in classical Islamic hermenutics, and the Qur'an is considered the first source of law in Islam.[36]

3.2 Identifying the Classical Sources:

Having identified the 5 most frequently used verses in the modern discourse around eco-Islam, I had to understand how these verses were interpreted in the classical sources. In particular, I had to see if there was any hint of these verses being used to discuss environmental concerns. To do so, I turned to the genre of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*).

The science of Qur'anic exegesis is one of the earliest and most central texts of the classical Islamic sciences. Initially beginning as a collection of the opinions and interpretations of Companions and early authorities on the grammar of certain Qur'anic verses, *tafsīr* soon developed into a whole genre of Qur'anic interpretation.[37] *Tafsīr* works studied the Qur'an from a wide variety of approaches. Their commentary on the verses included information on: the definition of relatively unknown words, the grammar and syntax of the verse, legal and theological points that may be derived from the verses, spiritual and moral lessons to take away, the extended story taking place within the verses (for instance, if it is the story of a Prophet, the commentary might include the background for that story), the chronology of revelation (important for studying which verses abrogate and which verses are abrogated) and the context of revelation (important for studying the legal impact of a verse).[38]

Why select *tafsīr* for this step of my research? I selected *tafsīr* because this genre provides what I believe is the most efficient way to analyze how these Qur'anic verses were understood amongst classical Muslim scholars. The *tafsīr* texts

[36] Mohammad Hashim Kamali in his textbook on Islamic law - *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* - refers to the Qur'an as "the first source of the *Sharī'ah*" See: Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, 3rd rev. and enl. ed., (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 2003), 16.

[37] A. Rippin, 'Tafsīr' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, P.J. Bearman (Volumes X, XI, XII), Th. Bianquis (Volumes X, XI, XII), et al., 2nd ed.

[38] Ibid.

gather within them a whole panorama of legal, moral, linguistic, historical and spiritual points of commentary on each verse of the Qur'an. The authors of these texts did not just include their own interpretations, but also recorded the interpretations of their teachers, earlier scholars and other authority figures within classical Islamic intellectual history. As such, the *tafsīr* genre acts as a meeting point for various interpretations and uses of the Qur'anic verses. In short, it provides what I believe is the best (but not the only) resource to glimpse into the pre-modern discourse around these verses. As before, I acknowledge that these Qur'anic verses are not solely used by the *mufassirūn* (scholars of *tafsīr*); rather, works of hadith and law and other texts would have also discussed the meaning of these Qur'anic verses. However, whereas the *tafsīr* genre presents a clear reference method for accessing commentary on a given verse (*tafsīr* texts are typically organized verse-by-verse[39]), it is much more difficult to track down specific references to a verse in non-*tafsīr* texts. Given the limited time and resources of a Master's thesis project, I decided it would be best to concentrate my efforts on the genre in which I knew I would have clear results for the interpretation of these verses: the genre of *tafsīr*.

Having decided that I would focus on *tafsīr*, I had to decide which *tafsīr* texts in particular to study. In selecting these texts, I attempted to reach a relatively broad chronological range; the earliest of the seven texts I selected is from the 10th century: the *tafsīr* of Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). This *tafsīr* is considered one of the master-texts of *tafsīr* and is also one of the earliest extant texts in the genre. The latest *tafsīr* I included is from the 15th century. Thus taken together, the range of *tafsīr* covers the formative and the classical period of the Islamic sciences. The texts are also geographically spread across the Muslim world, from Cordoba in the West to Herat in the East. The select texts also have different focuses, giving us a more representative view of the various sub-genres within *tafsīr* literature. For instance, al-Zamakhsharī's *tafsīr* is almost exclusively focused on the language, grammar and syntax of the

[39] These commentaries are typically organized verse-by-verse, with every verse receiving its own separate paragraph, or at least sentence, of commentary. However, there are exceptions to this rule, and sometimes, verses are grouped together and treated as one section with the commentary addressed to the entire section. In general though, the organization of *tafsīr* texts is very accessible, and by knowing the verse one is studying, one can easily access the relevant *tafsīr*.

Qur'an, and thus provides us with linguistic *tafsīr* while the *tafsīr* of Ibn Kathir is focused more on the history, and the context of revelation around a particular verse, thus giving us historical and hadith-based *tafsīr* of the same set of verses. Al-Qurṭubī's *tafsīr* is focused on legal rulings, and discussing the legal implications of the verses in question. Altogether, with these seven we get a nice cross-section of the different types of possible *tafsīr*. Finally, I selected these *tafsīr* because they act as key nodes within the field that contain and compile information from other works of *tafsīr* as well. For instance, al-Tabari is famous for devoting the bulk of his *tafsīr* to recording the positions and interpretations of earlier scholars and authority figures, like the famous Companion and Qur'an exegete Ibn 'Abbās. Thus by reading al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, we get not only his interpretation, but also what is ostensibly the interpretations of a whole range of early figures, including Companions and Followers. In describing al-Ṭabarī's methodology in a biographical encyclopedia entry, Bosworth states that his *tafsīr* and *tarīkh* together preserve the "the greatest array of citations from lost sources" of early Islam.[40] While of course, including more *tafsīr* texts in addition to the seven chosen here would provide even more representative coverage, I believe, because of the above reasons, that these seven texts strike a good balance between feasibility and representativeness.

Because of their popularity, most of these *tafsīr* texts have been translated into Turkish, and as indicated in my footnotes, I relied mostly on the Turkish translations, although with reference to the Arabic originals as needed. Before proceeding to the individual verse-by-verse interpretations of these two sets of sources, I introduce the seven tafsir texts, along with their authors, in a series of short biographical notices:

al-Ṭabarī: Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Yazīd al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) was a polymath of the early Islamic tradition, a master-jurist, historian and exegete; Bosworth describes him as "most famous as the supreme universal historian and Ḳurʾān

[40] C. E. Bosworth, C.E. "Al-Ṭabarī" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, P.J. Bearman (Volumes X, XI, XII), Th. Bianquis (Volumes X, XI, XII), et al., 2nd ed., https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-tabari-COM_1133

commentator of the first three or four centuries of Islam."[41] A native of Ṭabaristān and the son of a local notable, al-Ṭabarī began his travels and studies of the Qur'an and Prophetic hadith at an early age, leaving his hometown at age 12 and travelling to various regional centers of knowledge, including Rayy and then Baghdad, Basra and Kufa, and in a later round of journeys: to Syria, Palestine and Egypt, before ultimately settling in Baghdad, the *de facto* capital of the Islamic world at the time. His inherited estate meant he was able to remain relatively independent from the pressure of any kind of patron or administrative overseer. His scholarship emphasized the use of *ijtihād* — independent legal reasoning — and it thus comes as no surprise that he eventually left the Shāfi'ī *madhhab* which he initially followed to form his own *madhhab*: the Jarīriyya school based on his own distinct understanding of the law and Islamic legal principles.[42] Though it drew a number of prominent scholars in his time, the school eventually was assimilated back into the Shāfi'ī school, which was far more dominant in the region. As for his works, out of the many texts attributed to him, his two most famous and circulated works are his *History* (*Mukhtaṣar tārīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk wa al-khulafā'*) — a 12 and a half volume history beginning with the Creation and the histories of ancient prophets and peoples down to 10th century — and his *Tafsīr* (*Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*) — the work we study here. It is "probably considered as al-Ṭabarī's outstanding achievement," and is one of the earliest extant works of *tafsīr*. Together the two works, in their breadth and depth, form what Bosworth terms "the most extensive of extant early works of Islamic scholarship" and preserves "for us the greatest array of citations from lost sources."[43] To form these works, he had access to a broad range of sources "written down during the two centuries from *ca*. 50/670 to *ca*. 250/864."[44] aa

al-Zamakhsharī: Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) was born to a local imām in Zamakhshar. Al-Zamakhsharī began his study as both a student of the Qur'an and the pre-Islamic Arabic literary heritage. At the same

[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.

time, he worked as a scribe-copyist in Khwarazm and as a poet seeking patronage. However, despite the numerous attempts to find a patron who would reward his praise poetry, he was unable to do so, most likely because of his Mu'tazilī beliefs which were increasingly unpopular under the local Seljuk rule.[45] Eventually he found support from the *amīr* of Mecca, a fellow Mu'tazilī, and under his patronage, he authored a *diwān* (anthology) of poetry as well as his *tafsīr* of the Qur'an: *al-Kashshāf*. As he was an enthusiast of the Arabic language (he was "most basically motivated in his scholarship to serve and promote the Arabic language"), his *tafsīr* accordingly focuses on the language and grammar of the Qur'anic verses and their linguistic beauty.[46] Despite some pushback complaining about the text's Mu'tazilī leanings, the *tafsīr* has remained an indispensable component of the traditional curriculum on the language of the Qur'an.

al-Rāzī: Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Rāzī, commonly referred to as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) was a famous theologian and exegete of Sunni Islam. Born to a preacher of Rayy, al-Rāzī pursued his initial studies in the literary, religious and philosophical sciences in his hometown. He undertook a number of journeys in the Islamic East, visiting Bukhara, Ghazna, Samarqand, and even Herat, where he ultimately settled down. He was "a teacher celebrated throughout the whole region of Central Asia" and the author of a prodigious number of texts.[47] Most of his scholarship focused on theology, philosophy and Qur'anic exegesis. The *tafsīr* I study below — termed both *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* and *Kitāb al-tafsīr al-kabīr* — is an 8 volume work into which al-Rāzī "put...all his knowledge both of philosophy and religion."[48]

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[45] W. Madelung, "al- Zamakhsharī," in E*ncyclopaedia of Islam, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, 2nd ed.,* https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-zamakhshari-COM_1469?s.num=1&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-2&s.q=al-zamakhshari

[46] Ibid.

[47] G. C. Anawati, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, 2nd ed., https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/fakhr-al-din-al-razi-COM_0206?s.num=5&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-2&s.q=al-razi

[48] Ibid.

al-Qurṭubī: Abū ʻAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) was a scholar of Mālikī *fiqh* based in Andalusia. He was born and studied in Cordoba, which was at the time a regional center of scholarship and learning. However, when the city was captured during his youth, he emigrated to Alexandria and later Cairo where he was ultimately buried. However, despite the heavy Shāfiʻī presence in the Egypt of his time, al-Qurṭubī remained a staunch Mālikī and this is reflected in his *tafsīr* work (*al-Jāmi li aḥkām al-Qur'ān*). Specifically, the text is meant to show how Mālikī legal rulings derive from Qur'anic verses, and the *tafsīr* as a whole acts as a legal commentary on the Qur'anic verses. Despite the author's focus on Mālikī law, the text includes a great variety of legal issues and has remained a popular choice for study down to the present day, and has been the subject of a number of translations into Turkish, Urdu and Bengali.

al-Bayḍāwī: ʻAbd Allāh b. ʻUmar b. Muḥammad al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286) was a Shāfiʻī chief judge based in Shiraz. He authored works on a variety of subjects, including exegesis, jurisprudence and theology; however, as Robson notes, "his works are generally not original, but based on works of other authors."[49] Accordingly, his most famous work — the *tafsīr* titled *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-taʾwīl* — is based on al-Zamakhsharī's earlier text, but from a more Sunni perspective. It also adds al-Bayḍāwī's own commentary on variant recitations and interpretations of the verses. The work "has been very popular," has itself received "numerous commentaries" and is also a part of the modern curriculum at Azhar.[50]

Ibn Kathīr: Ismāʻīl b. Umar b. Kathīr, commonly referred to as Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) was a prominent historian and hadith scholar of Mamluk, Syria. He studied in Damascus under prominent Shāfiʻī teachers before becoming a close student and supporter of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). He was also son-in-law to al-Mizzī, "one of the most famous traditionists of Syria" and student of the

[49] J. Robson, "al-Bayḍāwī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P.,Heinrichs, 2nd ed. https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-baydawi-SIM_1310?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-2&s.q=baydawi

[50] Ibid.

famous historian al-Dhahabī and thus with these three relations Ibn Kathīr garnered a reputation for hadith and history expertise.[51] Not surprisingly, he authored a work of history that would become one of the most famous of the genre, especially in contemporary times: *al-Bidāya wa al-nihāya*. As for his work on hadith, he concentrated mainly on prosopography of early hadith transmitters. Both of these specializations combine in his *tafsīr*, which includes a focus on history, hadith and the context of revelation (i.e. the events happening in the Prophet's time) when certain verses were revealed.

al-Jalālayn: The final *tafsīr* is actually the combination of two works of *tafsīr* by two individuals both titled Jalāl al-Dīn: Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 864/1459) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyuṭī (d. 911/1505). The former — Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Maḥallī — was a Shāfi'ī scholar based in Cairo. Although none of his works apart from the *tafsīr* are published, he taught law in two local *madrasa*'s and his scholarship seems to have enjoyed some success amongst other scholars.[52] The later, Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyuṭī was a student of al-Maḥallī and also based predominantly in Egypt. His fame would surpass that of his mentor, however, and "at present" he is "recognised as the most prolific author in the whole of Islamic literature."[53] Born in Cairo to a teacher of Shāfi'ī law, al-Suyuṭī followed the classical curriculum in his youth, studying the Qur'an and its commentary, hadith and law under prominent scholars of the city. By the age of 18 he had himself become a teacher of Shāfi'ī law and was trusted with handling certain legal cases. Something of a prodigy, by the time he was 30 his works were known throughout the Muslim world, and he had become a sought-after teacher. At one point, the Abbasid caliph (albeit a

[51] H. Laoust, "Ibn Kathīr," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, 2nd ed., https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ibn-kathir-SIM_3237?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-2&s.q=Ibn+Kath%C4%ABr

[52] Ch. Pellat, "al-Maḥallī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, 2nd ed., https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-mahalli-SIM_4776?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-2&s.q=al-mahalli

[53] E. Geoffroy, "al-Suyūṭī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, 2nd ed., https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-suyuti-COM_1130?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-2&s.q=suyuti

figure-head under Mamluk rule) appointed al-Suyuṭī "supreme judge" of the land. In his scholarship he was remarkably versatile, authoring hundreds of texts. Where many of these were sizable and based on a "multidisciplinary approach," his methodology in *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* seems to have been one of simplicity, providing a straightforward commentary of each verses's primary meaning without adding notes or branching off into the discussions in which earlier commentators engage.[54]

[54] Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

VERSE-BY-VERSE ANALYSIS

In the previous chapter, I detailed the process by which I identified five key verses in the modern discourse around eco-Islam, and how I gathered a pool of classical *tafsīr* to study the classical interpretations of those same verses. This chapter now shows the next step in that process: studying the classical and contemporary interpretations of these five verses. The chapter proceeds verse-by-verse sequentially, in order of how many references each verse received in the contemporary discourse. Thus the most referenced verse — verse 7:31, referenced 35 times — comes first, followed by the second most referenced, and so on. For each verse, I begin with the classical interpretations, looking at how each of the *tafsīr* texts individually discusses the verses before summarizing the classical interpretations. Then I look at how the verse was used in the modern discourse through the Atlas TI program.

Finally, having summarized the interpretations of the verse from both the classical and contemporary pool of sources, I compare the two groups and look for evidence of environmental ideas in the classical works. My primary goal in comparison is to see where there were continuities and where there were disruptions in the usage of these verses. In particular, I seek to understand whether the ideas of Islamic environmentalism that were being emphasized in modern interpretations were actually present in classical interpretations, and by extension, whether the idea of an Islamic environmentalism has been present — in some form or another — since classical times or is a product of contemporary discourse on environmentalism in general.

As a disclaimer, I understand that this involves, to some degree, a comparison between two differing categories (between apples and oranges, so to speak). In an ideal world, I could compare two texts of the same category: so we have texts on eco-Islam in modern studies, I would take these and compare them to texts on eco-Islam in the pre-modern world. The obvious problem here is that as far as I

know, no such texts exist, at least not that I have been able to find. In comparing the pre-modern *tafsīr* to the modern studies, I do not expect to find exact correspondence in terms of the format, the structure, and even the content of these texts. These are two distinct genres of scholarship from two very different time periods, so it is natural for there to be fundamental differences in how they approach the Qur'an. The pre-modern *tafsīr* have their own structure and focus compared to the modern eco-Islam studies, and therefore a straight one-to-one comparison between the texts will obviously yield far greater differences than similarities. Therefore, I attempt to keep my points of comparison focused on the specific issue at hand: the idea of environmentalism. I am not looking for exact points of equivalence between the two, but rather I am looking for the intellectual lineage of this idea, tracing its line of descent back into the classical sources — in other words, the ideas do not need to be articulated in the exact same way, but there does need to be some genetic similarity between the two. Specifically, what I am looking for are potential connections between the two sets of interpretations, to see if there are roots and seeds of the modern idea of Islamic environmentalism in the classical sources. While obviously such interpretations would not be framed as "environmentalist" given that this is a modern concept, there is a chance that pre-modern sources were advocating for the same goals as modern environmentalist movements, namely: safeguarding the earth's natural resources, treating animals and other lifeforms with dignity, and so on. It is traces of those interpretations that I am searching for in my comparison section.

4.1 Verse 1: 7:31

My Atlas TI discourse map demonstrates that the verse 7:31, from the Sūrat al-A'rāf, is the most referenced Qur'anic verse in my network map of eco-Islam discourse, being referenced a total of 35 times across the 80 texts. The translation of the verse is as follows:

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ خُذُوا زِينَتَكُمْ عِندَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا ۚ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ[55]

O children of Ādam! Beautify yourselves for every act of worship, and eat and drink [freely], but do not waste: verily, He does not love the wasteful![56]

4.1.1 Classical Interpretations:

al-Ṭabarī: al-Ṭabarī's commentary on the verse begins by explaining the context of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) of the verse.[57] *Sabab al-nuzūl* commentary focuses on the circumstances in the Prophet's biography that relate to the given verse, and sometimes include details on exactly when and why the verse was revealed at a given time. In this case, al-Ṭabarī argues that the context of revelation was that the non-Muslim Arabs of the Prophet's times used to follow two practices that are being condemned in this verse: they used to make *ṭawāf* (circumambulation) around the Ka'ba without wearing any clothes, and they also used to arbitrarily declare certain meats to be forbidden during their worship at the Ka'ba. Then the verse comes, al-Ṭabarī writes, to tell the people to clothe themselves (here he includes reports that "beautify yourselves" means to cover one's *'awra* i.e. private parts) and to eat and drink without paying attention to those arbitrary rules the non-Muslims were following. He then comments on the second part of the verse to say that it is permissible to eat and drink from permissible things, but one should not do *israf* i.e. be wasteful, for wastefulness is forbidden.

al-Zamakhsharī: al-Zamakhsharī begins by summarizing the meaning of the verse, then he also mentions the same information on the context of revelation that al-Ṭabarī mentioned: namely, that the non-Muslims had a practice of

[55] Qur'an 7:31.
[56] Unless otherwise stated, all translations of the Qur'anic verses are from Muhammad Asad's translation *The Message of the Qur'an.* Muhammad Asad, "The Message of the Quran," *Muhammad-Asad*, http://www.muhammad-asad.com/Message-of-Quran.pdf, 290.
[57] Ebû Cafer Muhammed b. Cerir et-Taberî, *Taberî Tefsiri*, trans. Hasan Karakaya and Kerim Aytekin, 4 (İstanbul: Hisar Yayınevi, 1996), 35.

performing *ṭawāf* without clothes.[58] Afterwards he includes several other reports saying that "beautifying" oneself means wearing nice perfumes and combing one's hair, and he emphasizes that it is part of the Prophetic *sunna* to look after one's appearance.

al-Rāzī: al-Rāzī also repeats al-Ṭabarī's information about the non-Muslim Arabs making *ṭawāf* without clothing and also abstaining from certain meats — here al-Rāzī asserts a legal ruling that eating and drinking permissible things is always permissible unless there is a specific circumstance (like fasting) where there is another restriction placed by revelation.[59] However, the custom of the non-Muslim Arabs to abstain from the meat arbitrarily has no basis in revelation and should not be imitated. In discussing the second half of the verse, al-Rāzī talks about what *isrāf* means. He says there are two opinions in this regard: the first is that a person should not eat and drink so much so that it becomes harmful to him, nor should they spend so much that their spending becomes harmful for them — in other words, it is about general spending and consuming behavior. The second opinion is that this *isrāf* is referring to a specific practice among the non-Muslim Arabs which was to arbitrarily consider some domesticated animals to be forbidden to eat, and thus they would be "wasting" the meat of those animals by forbidding them when God had made permissible for them.[60] However, between the two opinions, al-Rāzī prefers the first opinion, which defines *isrāf* as a general behavior of wasting. He ends his discussion by emphasizing that the verse says "God does not love the wasteful," which, al-Rāzī says, is a very immense threat against wastefulness.

al-Qurṭubī: al-Qurṭubī divides his *tafsīr* of the verse into several points. The first point is that this verse addresses all of humanity.[61] He argues that even though it was revealed in response to the specific practice of the non-Muslim

[58] Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar Zamakhsharī, *El-Keşşâf 'an hakā'ıkı ğavâmidı't-tenzîl ve 'uyûni'l-ekāvîl fî vucûhî't-te'vîl: Keşşaf tefsiri* trans. Muhammed Coşkun and Murat Sülün, 1, (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2016), 834.
[59] Fahruddîn Er-Razî, *Tefsîr-i Kebîr: Mefâtîhu'l-Gayb*, ed. Ahmet Hikmet Ünalmış, 10, (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 1998), 343-346.
[60] Ibid, 10:346.
[61] İmam Kurtubî, *El-Câmiu li Ahkâmi'l-Kur'ân*, trans. M. Beşir Eryarsoy, 3rd ed., 7 (İstanbul: Buruc Yayınları, 2005), 316-325.

Arabs doing their clothless *ṭawāf*, the ruling it makes is valid for all places of worship — i.e. one should not approach any place of worship in such an unclothed state. The second point deals with various interpretations of the word "*zīna*"[62] which Asad has translated as "beautify" above. Al-Qurṭubī, like the exegetes before him, interprets this to mean covering one's private parts during prayer. He lists various legal positions on the matter and explains the legal reasoning behind this and what happens to one's prayer if this pre-condition is violated.[63] Afterwards, he discusses what it means to eat and drink but not waste — he cites a report from Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687) — the cousin of the Prophet and also considered one of the most authoritative scholars in Qur'anic exegesis — that says that God has allowed people to consume and to wear what they want, so long as there is no waste and no arrogance in it.[64] Al-Qurṭubī then goes on to mention two different rulings regarding eating and drinking more than one needs: the first opinion is that it is *ḥarām* (forbidden) to eat and drink more than one needs, and the second opinion is that it is *makrūh* (disliked). He then offers various legal reasons to support the second opinion. After this, he discusses some of the wisdom and lessons to take from this warning to not waste: he says that it is physically healthier for people to eat less. He asserts that there are two types of health remedies for man: one is to take medicines, and the other is to abstain from food consumption, and if both methods are used together that will have the most effective results. But if you had to choose one over the other, abstaining from food would be better, he says.[65] He also narrates a hadith saying that one does not fill a worse vessel than one's stomach.[66] He discusses how eating and drinking only a little is a characteristic of a true believer.

al-Bayḍāwī: al-Bayḍāwī gives a general overview of the meaning of the verse, and then discusses the legal obligation to cover one's private parts.[67] Like earlier texts, he gives the context of revelation as the customs of the non-Muslim Arabs

[62] "Zīna" directly translates as adornment, embellishment and clothing. This is not to be confused with "zinā" which means adultery.
[63] Ibid, 7:318.
[64] Ibid, 7:320.
[65] Ibid, 7:321.
[66] Ibid, 7:320.
[67] Kâdı Beydâvî, *Muhtasar Beydâvî Tefsîri: Envâru't-Tenzîl ve Esrâru't-Te'vîl*, trans. Şadi Eren, 2 (İstanbul: Selsebil Yayınları, 2011), 26.

during Hajj. Then when defining *isrāf*, he says it is to consider what God made permissible as impermissible, and also to gravitate towards what is forbidden, and to eat in excess. He narrates the same Ibn ʻAbbās report saying that God allowed eating and drinking so long as it is done without *isrāf* and without arrogance.[68] He also cites a description that the science of medicine is fully conveyed in half of this verse — this seems to be similar to al-Qurṭubī's commentary that abstaining from food and being careful in consumption is a key part of staying physically healthy.[69]

Ibn Kathīr: Ibn Kathīr also references the customs of the non-Muslim Arabs — it is quite clear that this is a foundational theme in the classical interpretation of this verse. He goes into slightly more detail about these customs than the other texts before explaining what "*zīna*" means in this context.[70] He then makes an inter-genre reference by saying that many *mufassirūn* interpreted the verse this way so it must mean this. This reference is interesting because it shows how certain interpretations gain momentum once they have been included in enough *tafsīr* texts. Then Ibn Kathīr relates how the Prophetic practice was to wear nice perfume and nice clothes on the day of Jumuʻah. Then when commenting on wasting, he cites a number of hadith: he cites the hadith about man not filling any vessel worse than his stomach, and also another hadith that eating whatever your heart desires is a form of wasting. He also includes the same description that al-Bayḍāwī did about how half of this verse contains the science of medicine within it: which is to eat and drink but not be excessive.[71]

al-Jalālayn: The *tafsīr* of the Jalālayn is quite straightforward — it does not add any extra commentary or discussions, but sticks to a minimalist interpretation. In this case, the *tafsīr* does not mention anything besides the general meaning of the verse as translated above.[72]

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[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] İbn Kesîr, *Hadislerle Kur'an-ı Kerim Tefsiri*, (İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 2005), 2937-38.
[71] Ibid.
[72] "Tafsir al-Jalalayn," *al-Tafsir,* Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, trans. Feras Hamza, 2017, https://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=74&tSoraNo=7&tAyahNo=31&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2

4.1.2 Summary of the Classical Interpretations:

To summarize, the traditional interpretations of this verse tend to treat the verse in separate parts. They start with the "*O children of Ādam! Beautify yourselves for every act of worship,"* part as one section and the rest as another, although some of them divided the verse into three, taking the "*verily, He does not love the wasteful"* part on its own as well. For our purposes, because the contemporary discourse focuses on the concept of *isrāf* (as we shall see below), that is also what I focus on in these classical interpretations.

Here the classical scholars discuss "*israf"* in various scopes. Some of them see *isrāf* as limited to just the consumption of food and drink, while others expanded it to include spending money on clothing. However, the Ibn 'Abbās narration that was included in multiple *tafsīr*s seems to consider clothing to be within the definition of *isrāf*.

A separate discussion some of the *tafsīr* have around *isrāf* is based on notions of permissible and forbidden. al-Baydawi's summary of *isrāf* is that it means regarding something that is permissible to be impermissible, to gravitate towards the impermissible, and to eat and drink in excess. Thus for him, *isrāf* is also about inverting God's rulings, and following arbitrary rulings instead.

Finally, a third discussion around *isrāf* involves medicine and physical health. Some of the *tafsīr*s discuss the harmful effects of *isrāf* on one's body. They point to the hadith about not filling any worse vessel than one's stomach. At the same time, they discuss how excessive eating and drinking is not the characteristics of a true believer. Finally, they emphasize how the closing phrase of the verse emphasizes how much God dislikes the act of *isrāf*. There seems to be a focus not just on the physical impacts of *isrāf* but the spiritual impacts as well. However, in both cases, the harm is directed inwards — i.e. by committing *isrāf* one is harming oneself. So far, there is no mention that committing *isrāf* also leads to harming the environment and one's surroundings.

4.1.3 Contemporary Interpretations:

In the contemporary works on eco-Islam that I input into Atlas TI, the verse is quoted in full but the vast majority of the discussion on the verse centers around the second part, about eating and drinking but not wasting. However, a handful do address the first part of the verse, and others comment on both the first and second parts.

In "İslam Dini'nin Çevreye ve Çevre Sorunlarına Bakış Açısı" by Elif Ekinci, the first part is referenced as such to make the point that cleanliness is part of belief in Islam and is a measure of one's devotion to God.[73] Adding to this is the article "Hz. Peygamber'in -Sallahü Aleyhi ve Sellem - Sünnetinde Çevreye Şefkat" by Recep Ertuğay, in which the first part of the verse is quoted by itself and the author comments that just like we should be careful about the cleanliness of the mosque, we should also be careful of the cleanliness of the earth, because the earth is the mosque of the believer.[74] In this way, the author seems to be directing the idea of "zīna" outwards to cleanliness, and thus one should beautify the earth as one beautifies oneself.

Regarding the second part of the verse starting with "*eat and drink...*" the contemporary scholars have to a great extent taken this verse and connected it to the issues of ecological sustainability. Here the verse is used to encourage careful, moderate consumption and to discourage wasting earth's resources. Thus some argue that *isrāf* is condemned as it despoils the earth[75] and has harmful results for the earth[76] and so on. Humankind is ordered to lead a balanced life, because his consumption decisions impact not just himself, but the environment and other beings in the environment. Everyone's sustenance must

[73] Elif Ekinci, "İslam Dini'nin Çevreye ve Çevre Sorunlarına Bakış Açısı," *Erzincan Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 11, no. 1 (2017): 134.
[74] Recep Ertuğay, "Hz. Peygamber'in -Sallahü Aleyhi ve Sellem- Sünnetinde Çevreye Şefkat," Kafkas Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi 6 (2019): 54.
[75] Foltz, "Is There an Islamic Environmentalism?," 65.
[76] Akrum Helfaya, Amr Kotb, and Rasha Hanafi, "Qur'anic Ethics for Environmental Responsibility: Implications for Business Practice," *Journal of Business Ethics* 150, no. 4 (July, 2018): 1119.

be cared for thus humans must make sure not to abuse the resources of others nor to limit their access to these resources.[77]

Similar to some of traditional interpretations, some contemporary scholars have taken the command of not wasting to be related to clothing as well. For example in "Kur'an Işığında Çevre Gerçeği ve Çevre Bilinci" by Necdet Çağıl, the author suggests that because the idea of putting on nice clothes is mentioned before the eating and drinking part in the verse, this means that the prohibition of not wasting extends to one's clothing as well.[78]

Overall, then, there is a focus on the idea of *isrāf* and its prohibition, and an interpretation of *isrāf* as being related to excessive consumption of earth's resources, and the disruption of the surrounding ecosystem.

4.1.4 Comparing the Classical and the Contemporary:

When we compare the repeated reports and content in the classical interpretations and the various points made by the contemporary interpretations around this verse, we find some similarities but also breaking points. Virtually all of the classical commentators gravitate first towards the reported historical context around the revelation of the verse. They focus on discussing the customs of the non-Muslim Arabs that reportedly lead to this verse being revealed. Thus they see the initial meaning of the references to clothing, eating and drinking to be in connection to those specific historical customs, to teach the Muslims to cloth themselves at all times, and to eat and drink freely, ignoring the arbitrary rules of the non-Muslim customs, but to also be careful not to waste. The contemporary interpretations, on the contrary, do not focus on that *sabab al-nuzūl* aspect at all. The stark contrast goes to show how each genre has different goals, and also different approaches to the use and need for authoritative

[77] Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Chapter 12: Islam and the Environment: An Examination of the Source Evidence" in *Islamic Perspectives on Science and Technology: Selected Conference Papers,* ed. Mohammad Hashim Kamali, Osman Bakar, Daud Abdul-Fattah Batchelor, and Ruqayah Hashim, (New York, NY: Springer, 2016), 184.
[78] Necdet Çağıl, "Kur'an Işığında Çevre Gerçeği ve Çevre Bilinci," *Ekev Akademi Dergisi* 12, no. 36 (2008): 28.

sources. By that, I mean that the classical commentators seem to be keen to imitate or repeat the commentary of their earlier peers — so once a certain interpretation is included in al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, for instance, it is included in many of the others. Moreover, the classical scholars seem to be focusing on providing reports of other authority figures like Ibn 'Abbās, and they seem to want to diminish their own voices in the interpretation process. However, the contemporary scholars seem to be much more comfortable branching away from specific reports, and instead offering their own interpretation of what the verse means in connection to their own times.

Where we do start to see similarities is in the discussion around eating, drinking and *isrāf*. The classical commentators cite various rulings against eating and drinking excessively, and they emphasize how *isrāf* is bad for one's health. The contemporary scholars pick up on the same concept, and they discuss the harms of being excessive and doing *isrāf*. However, the *isrāf* that the two groups talk about has one key difference: among the classical commentators, the harm of *isrāf* seems to be directed inwards: one harm's one's spiritual and physical health by doing it. However, in the contemporary interpretations, the harm of *isrāf* is seen as also going outwards: so that other people, the surrounding ecosystem and the local environment are all harmed by one's *isrāf*, and therefore, they argue, God's prohibition of *isrāf* is a prohibition of wasting the earth's resources.

4.2 Verse 2: 30:41

The next most frequently referenced verse is 30:41, the 41st verse of Sūra al-Rūm. The verse is referenced a total of 32 times across the contemporary sources. The translation of the verse is as follows:

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُم بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ (٤١[79])

[79] Qur'an 30:41.

"[Since they have become oblivious of God,] corruption has appeared on land and in the sea as an outcome of what men's hands have wrought: and so He will let them taste [the evil of] some of their doings, so that they might return [to the right path]."[80]

4.2.1 Classical Interpretations:

al-Ṭabarī: al-Ṭabarī's commentary begins by conveying the general meaning of the verse: *fasād* has appeared in the land and the seas because man has tried to attain things that are forbidden to him. Then al-Ṭabarī focuses on the different meanings for *barr* (translated above as "land") and *baḥr* (translated above as "sea"). There are multiple interpretations for both words, he points out. Some say that the *barr* refers to deserts that have no water, and that the *baḥr* does not actually mean "sea" but means cities that are next to rivers or coastal land. This, he says, is the way the Arabs used the word at the time. Others say that the *barr* refers to areas where people live in tents (i.e. nomadically, so this would be unsettled land), whereas *baḥr* relates to villages (i.e. lands that have been settled and have built houses within them). A third position is that the words simply mean land and sea. Al-Ṭabarī concludes the discussion by saying that his opinion is that the two words are meant to encompass *all* that there is on earth — land and sea and everything within them. His next point of focus is on the idea of *fasād*, which Asad translates as "corruption." He cites various early authorities on how they interpreted *fasād*, and what it means for *fasād* to spread across land and sea, or across settled and unsettled lands. He divides this discussion into the *fasād* of the land and *fasād* of the sea. The former involves killing: when mankind sheds the blood of one another, this is what *fasād* on land means. He traces this back to the first act of murder in the story of the two sons of Ādam: Qābīl and Hābīl (or Cain and Abel in the Biblical tradition). As for the latter — *fasād* of the sea — this is when rulers unjustly take possession of ships. This interpretation seems to reference another portion of the Qur'an, the story of Prophet Mūsā and Khiḍr, where Khiḍr tells Prophet Mūsā about a certain king

[80] Asad, 849.

who is taking the people's boats from them unjustly.[81] In both cases, God punishes these *fasād* acts so that people might be warned, ask forgiveness, and rectify their actions.[82]

al-Zamakhsharī: al-Zamakhsharī also begins by providing a general meaning of the verse. He discusses various examples of what *fasād* on land and sea looks like: it can be drought, famine, inefficiency in agricultural production, unprofitable trade, human and animal deaths due to plague, an increase in fires and drowning and other calamities, and hunters coming back from their hunt empty-handed.[83] In general, he summarizes, it is the decrease in the benefits man receives from the world around him, and an increase in his harm and loss. He also narrates a report from Ibn 'Abbās interpreting the spread of *fasād* across land and sea as meaning the soil of the land becomes unproductive (i.e. defertilized) and the creatures of the sea die (i.e. loss of food from the sea). Al-Zamakhsharī also mentions that for Arabs, the term *fasād* means rain stops coming down on land, and at sea, sea-creatures die and decline in number. Thus where al-Ṭabarī seems to interpret *fasād* as the individual actions of humanity (killing each other or taking ships unjustly), al-Zamakhsharī offers another layer of interpretation where *fasād* involves acts of Divine will (droughts, famines) that are made as a result of man's evil choices. This *fasād* has definite consequences in what we today term natural resources: the sea-creatures dying down, the soil becoming less fertile, and the rain decreasing.

al-Rāzī: al-Rāzī references a few other Qur'anic verses to help interpret this one. Specifically, he cites Sūrat al-Anbiyā', 22 and also Sūrat Maryam, 90-91, which Asad translates as: "had there been in heaven or on earth any deities other than God, both [those realms] would surely have fallen into ruin! But limitless in His glory is God, enthroned in His awesome almightiness [far] above anything that men may devise by way of definition!"[84] (21:22) and "whereat the heavens might well-nigh be rent into fragments, and the earth be split asunder, and the

[81] The story may be found in Chapter 18 of the Qur'an: Sūrat al-Kahf.
[82] Et-Taberî, 6:416-417.
[83] Zamakhsharī, 4:240–242.
[84] Asad, 674.

mountains fall down in ruins! That men should ascribe a son to the Most Gracious"[85] (19:90-1) respectively. In al-Anbiyā', 22, the reason for this spread of *fasād* is shown to be *shirk* (polytheism and idolatry). When *shirk* is done publicly and openly, *fasād* spreads throughout the earth. In Maryam, 90-91, the verse talks of how if what the polytheists say was actually true (i.e. if it were true that multiple deities existed), then the earth and the land and the skies would have collapsed. Thus he seems to be explaining the *fasād* of our verse as linked to the practice of idolatry. The world's normal state, he seems to imply, is to be in a state of balance and goodness, but when *shirk* occurs, and people become ignorant of the fact that it is God who upholds the order of the land, the seas and the skies, then God takes away some of that order and has *fasād* spread, so that man realizes the consequences of his polytheism and returns to God. Afterwards, al-Rāzī also takes up the discussion of the various meanings of *barr* and *baḥr*. The term *baḥr* could have meant coastal cities, he writes, because the Arabs used to seek to build their cities near water and called them *baḥr*. As for what *fasād* means, he says that it could be flooding, or on the opposite end of the spectrum, soil becoming barren and lifeless. It could also mean water becoming bitter, and the loss of springs and wells. As for the final part of the verse, he says this is showing how God is waiting for His creation to turn back from their wrongs even though He knows they will not. He does this so that others will take an example and understand.[86]

al-Qurṭubī: al-Qurṭubī opens his *tafsīr* by looking at the various meanings for *barr, baḥr,* and *fasād*. He includes many of the opinions of the earlier *tafsīr* texts, especially when discussing what it means for *fasād* to spread throughout land and sea (loss of rain, loss of water and sea-creatures, and so on). He then writes that the meaning of the verse is that because disobedience has spread throughout land and sea, God withholds raining down rain, and the cost of man's needs (i.e. food and water) has increased and become difficult to attain. Thus God makes them taste some punishment for their actions so that they might repent.[87]

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[85] Asad, 643.
[86] Er-Razî, 18:121-22.
[87] Kurtubî, 13:494–96.

al-Bayḍāwī: al-Bayḍāwī begins by looking at various meanings of *fasād*; he mentions droughts, plagues, increases in fires and drowning and decreases in *baraka* (i.e. the blessings and abundance of the surrounding land).[88] Linked to this spread of *fasād* is the spread of oppression, he writes. He then discusses the land vs. sea dichotomy, and repeats what earlier *tafsīr*s talked about: that on land, *fasād* can mean humans killing each other, and on sea it can be rulers unjustly taking people's ships and sea-vessels. For both cases, he provides a historical example — so he mentions the Cain and Abel story for humans killing each other on land, and for the sea, he mentions the story of a ruler named 'Ummān who was known to seize ships unjustly. Thus al-Bayḍāwī combines both the interpretations of *fasād* being something related to human-action (i.e. by their killing each other and taking ships unjustly) and also being something outside of man's control (i.e. the decreasing abundance and fertility of the land, the increase of plagues, famines and droughts).

Ibn Kathīr: Ibn Kathīr looks first at the difference between *barr* and *baḥr*. As we've seen with earlier *tafsīr*s, he cites different opinions for what these mean, but ultimately settles on "land and sea." Then he discusses what the spread of *fasād* across land and sea mean before focusing on the idea of how God's punishment on earth can bring people back to good actions, and can actually be better than God not punishing people — he cites a hadith that teaches that it is more likeable for the dwellers on earth to have punishment on earth then to have it rain for forty consecutive days, every morning. The reason for it being [better is that] when the punishment is applied, people or [at least] most of them, refrain from committing sins.[89] Thus in a way, God causing these signs of *fasād* to appear on earth is a way for Him to warn of the evil consequences of man's actions, so that they refrain.

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[88] Beydâvî, 3:499.

[89] Ibn Kathīr "Tafsīr al-Qurān al-Aẓīm," *al-Tafsir,* Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, https://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=7&tSoraNo=30&tAyahNo=41&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1

al-Jalālayn: The Jalālayn's straightforward *tafsīr* explains that the *fasād* is "rain being withheld and vegetation diminishing" on land, and on areas near rivers and water, it is "waters diminishing."[90]

4.2.2 Summary of the Classical Interpretations:

For our purposes, the key concept here is of *fasād*, as this concept will be picked up and closely studied by contemporary interpreters. Among these classical interpretations, we find three main discussions around *fasād*. The first sees *fasād* as something related to human action. Thus al-Ṭabarī talks of how *fasād* on land is when man kills man (which he links to the original murder of Cain and Abel), and *fasād* on sea is when rulers unjustly seize ships. A second discussion sees *fasād* not as human actions but as environmental occurrences mostly beyond human control. Thus, al-Zamakhshari describes it as referring to an increase of plagues, famines and droughts, and a decrease in soil fertility and abundance. Al-Bayḍāwī combines the two and argues that it is both sides: a loss of abundance in the land, and increase in droughts, disasters and so on *and* also the spreading of violent human acts like men killing each other and rulers unjustly seizing ships. A third discussion around *fasād* links it to *shirk*. Here, al-Rāzī emphasizes how God is the One who upholds all of creation, and that were the polytheistic beliefs actually true, it would mean the collapse of all of creation. Thus, al-Rāzī seems to suggest, when people hold polytheistic beliefs and ignore God's role in creation, God allows *fasād* to spread in land and sea so that they realize how God had been merciful on them earlier and so that they be grateful and repent.

Another question is what the purpose of the *fasād* is. Ibn Kathīr emphasizes that the *fasād* is indeed a punishment, but it is a punishment that is meant not to destroy people but to bring them back to good action. Taking this together with al-Bayḍāwī's interpretations, we get the idea that the decrease in natural resources and fertility is meant as a sign to humanity to be more careful in their relationship with God, and to not treat each other unjustly.

[90] "Tafsir Al-Jalalayn," *al-Tafsir,* Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought.

Apart from the concept of *fasād*, many of the *tafsīr*s also focus on the dichotomy between *barr* and *baḥr*. This is a repeated point of exploration between the various texts, and they offer different opinions of it being land vs. sea, or desert land vs. inhabited land, or land-locked areas vs. coastal cities.

4.2.3 Contemporary Interpretations:

In the contemporary works, interpretations of the verse center around a few central issues which I organize thematically below.

Fasād: One of the biggest points of discussion is around the concept of *fasād* as used in the verse. In general, the contemporary studies understand this *fasād* to refer to general ecological problems (like loss of resources, famines and droughts), although they do not completely discount more spiritual and sociopolitical meanings (like some people oppressing others). Thus it is a combination of harm to the social order within humans and to the natural order within the surrounding environment, and it extends from problems like drought and famine all the way to environmental pollution and climate change. Here *fasād* is defined as the opposite of righteousness, worship of one God (*tawḥīd*), and moderation in consumption.[91] Likewise, those who do *fasād* are people who deny the existence of God, practice injustice and behave excessively.[92] They do not follow moral and religious principles when consuming, and instead just pursue whatever they desire.[93] This is linked to the next theme: that of inward and outward states.

Inward and Outward States: Some of the authors also focus on how the verse describes a situation where the corrupt inward state of man is reflected in the outward state of his environment by Divine decree. In other words, when people break off their relation with God and good character, then problems in the earth

[91] Bahattin Dartma, "Kur'an ve Ekoloji," *Darulkitap*, 2004. https://darulkitap.kuranikerimde.com/kuran/v2/kuran/72/1.htm, 6.
[92] Karem S. Ghoneim, "The Quran and the Environment," *Islam Online Archive*. https://archive.islamonline.net/15584.
[93] Dartma, 6.

and the environment occur.[94] The crisis in their inward state spills over into the outward state of things.[95] Such an argument is made in "İslam Kültürü Açısından Çevre-İnsan İlişkisi Üzerine" by Muammer İpek.[96]

Balance: Another key concept in the contemporary discussions around this verse is the idea of balance. There is an existing balance in the environment, and the Qur'an orders humanity to preserve that balance but instead man too often disrupts that balance.[97] Thus Karem Ghoneim writes that "Mischief on the land and sea is inflicted by man's unwary interference with the natural laws and environmental systems that are ultimately against his own interests."[98] The author then defines environmental pollution — the ultimate disruption of natural balance — as "the main form of corruption on earth."[99] This comes as a manifestation of denying God's order of preserving the habitat. Many interpreters emphasize the phrase in the verse that this spread of corruption is an outcome "of what men's hands have wrought" — in other words, this is a direct consequence of mankind's actions.[100] However, there is a natural response to this, some of the studies argue: climate change. This is a direct response to the immoral and unethical use of natural resources that destroys the environment."[101] This is how God warns mankind to stop disrupting the balance and repent, before it becomes too late.[102] Other interpreters see climate change and other environmental crises to be just one aspect of God's punishment — so when the verse says "He let them taste…" the word "taste" suggests that there is

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[94] Şahin Efil, "Kur'an'da Çevrenin Metafizik Temeli ve Çevre Ahlakı", 2:205-15. İstanbul, 2008, 209.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Muammer İpek, "İslam Kültürü Açısından Çevre-İnsan İlişkisi Üzerine," *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 14, no. 3 (2014): 234.
[97] İbrahim Özdemir *Çevre ve Din*, (Ankara: Çevre Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1997) 136-7. A similar idea of ecological balance is discussed by Ahmet Bozyiğit. See: Ahmet Bozyiğit, "İslam Ahlak Öğretisinde Çevre Bilinci," *Siirt Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 3, no. 2 (2016): 12.
[98] Ghoneim.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Zeki Yıldırım, "Kur'an ve Çevre Sorunları," *Atatürk Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, no. 38 (2012): 79.
[101] Riham R. Rizk, "Islamic Environmental Ethics". *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research* 5, no. 2 (September, 2014): 200.
[102] See Aytekin Demircioğlu, "Environment and Ecological Balance in Islamic Thought," *Gaziosmanpaşa Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 3, no. 2 (2015), 133. Also see: Adi Setia, "The Inner Dimension of Going Green: Articulating an Islamic Deep-Ecology," *Islam & Science* 5, no. 2 (Winter 2007): 148.

a greater punishment awaiting those who continue to cause this harm in the afterlife.[103] At the same time, the ending of the verse "that they might return" is interpreted as also providing some hope for a better environment in the future.[104]

Individual and Social Responsibility: The interpreters also emphasize how the verse centers the blame of this spread of *fasād* on humanity's actions. So, for example Zeki Yıldırım says the reason for the destruction and corruption on earth is the human being, and that will only change when we abide by the laws that God set.[105][106]

Land, Sea and an Interconnected Ecosystem: Although this was not a repeated idea, I did find one author who explicitly interpreted the mentioning of land and sea as being a reference to the entire world ecosystem. In "Kur'an Işığında Çevre Gerçeği", Necdet Çağıl says that the verses's mention of corruption "spreading in land and sea" is meant to stand for the ecosystem.[107] All living organisms live on either land or sea (with sea including freshwater as well), he says, and the verse illustrates how both environments are closely related to each other, and that the harm that goes to one also goes to the other.[108] Because humans are also a part of this ecosystem, any imbalance on the part of human beings impacts the entire system.

Finally, we also have the very interesting case of two contemporary interpreters who explicitly go back and show how their interpretations are in line with the classical exegetes. In "Islamic ecotheology based on the Qur'ān," Soumaya Ouis points out how the *tafsīr*s of al-Bayḍāwī and Ibn Kathīr also interpreted *fasād* in a way that suggests ecological crises, drought and decrease in agricultural production.[109] Likewise, Çağıl adds that al-Zamakhsharī defines *fasād* in a way

[103] İsmail Kocaçalışkan, "Risale-i Nur Un Yaklaşımı Ile Çevresel Farkındalık," *Katre, Uluslararası İnsan Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2, no. 3 (January 2017): 118.
[104] Efil, 209.
[105] Yıldırım, 97.
[106] Ertuğay, 53.
[107] Çağıl, 22.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Soumaya Pernilla Ouis, "Islamic ecotheology based on the Qur'ān," *Islamic Studies* 37, no. 2 (1998): 151-81

that is very much in line with the contemporary idea of *fasād* as the deterioration of ecological balance.[110]

4.2.4 Comparing the Classical and the Contemporary:

Between the classical and contemporary interpretations we see a few striking similarities and continuities. From the classical commentaries, we see the idea that one understanding of the spread of corruption is drought, famine, lack of rain, the defertilization of land and other problems that today we would term "ecological problems." As can be expected, this interpretation is heavily used amongst the contemporary sources, as it reinforces the idea that man's actions are causing these ecological disasters, and that man must stop and repent. Moreover, both the classical and the contemporary see the environment as tied to some form of *baraka* or blessing. In other words, the bounty of the natural world is not just a random occurrence, but is an act of mercy and a gift from God that can be taken away if mankind disobeys.

Both the classical and the contemporary also see the main reason for *fasād* spreading as man's own actions. When man disrupts the natural balance and disobeys God's laws, the corruption spreads as a consequence of that choice. This is also evidence for the idea that the inward states of mankind reflect on the outward environment. The classical commentators say the cure for this is for man to repent, and to believe in God. The contemporary thinkers pick up on this idea and emphasize that this Qur'anic connection between the inward and outward state is evidence that "no amount of scientific environmental action can fully work without spiritual renewal within mankind, and why, conversely, spiritual renewal needs also environmental action to be successful."[111]

But beyond these similarities, there are also some significant differences. Both sets of sources mention the idea that this decreasing fertility, dropping water levels and lack of abundance is a sign for man to rectify his actions. However,

[110] Çağıl, 35.
[111] İbrahim Özdemir, Savaş Alpay, and Dilek Demirbaş, "Environment and Islam," *Journal of Economic Cooperation and Development* 34, no. 4 (2013): 11-12.

they differ in what exactly has to be rectified. The classical interpreters focus on actions of belief — i.e. idolatry causes this corruption to spread, so by believing in God, the corruption will not spread. On the other hand, the contemporary interpreters agree with that but also add a few more layers of actions that must change: it is not just about belief in God, but also about not being excessive in consumption, and the increase of pollution. In other words, among the contemporary commentators, there is an assumption that to be resource-conscious, and to not waste, are part of Islamic behavior and is encompassed in the idea of man's not spreading corruption. However, the classical commentators seem to take a simpler view of the matter: they do not mention the consumption of resources or other such actions, but instead see the main evil act as *shirk*, or murdering another human being, or spreading oppression.

Furthermore, some of the negative consequences that the classical commentators mention are not mentioned by contemporary interpreters. For example, al-Zamakhsharī mentions how a decrease in trade and fruitful business is one of the negative consequences of this corruption spreading throughout the land, but the contemporary scholars focus not on this kind of economic detriment, but the ecological harms of the corruption spreading. In a similar way, the classical commentators talk about acts of oppression, like murdering a human or like seizing their ship at sea illegally, but the contemporary do not focus on these impacts; rather, they focus on the famine, droughts and other ecological interpretations of corruption.

4.3 Verse 3: 2:30

The third most frequently referenced verse is 2:30, from Sūrat al-Baqara, being referenced a total of 30 times across the contemporary sources. The translation of the verse is as follows:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً ۖ قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَن يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ (٣٠[112])

[112] Qur'an 2:30.

AND LO! Thy Sustainer said unto the angels: "Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it." They said: "Wilt Thou place on it such as will spread corruption thereon and shed blood — whereas it is we who extol Thy limitless glory, and praise Thee, and hallow Thy name?" [God] answered: "Verily, I know that which you do not know." (2:30)[113]

4.3.1 Classical Interpretations:

al-Ṭabarī: al-Ṭabarī's begins by giving a general interpretation of the verse. To better understand his interpretation, however, we must look to the verse before and the verse after 2:30, because al-Ṭabarī interprets them together:

Thus, al-Ṭabarī looks at (2:29): "He it is who has created for you all that is on earth, and has applied His design to the heavens and fashioned them into seven heavens; and He alone has full knowledge of everything."[114] And he looks at (2:31): "And He imparted unto Adam the names of all things; then He brought them within the ken of the angels and said: 'Declare unto Me the names of these [things], if what you say is true.'"[115]

al-Ṭabarī talks about how the previous verse says that the earth has been made subservient to mankind, and then this verse mentions mankind as a *khalīfa* on earth, and then the verse immediately after discusses the why mankind is distinct.[116] The message of all three, he seems to be suggesting, is connected; the earth is subservient to man, but man's role is of being a caretaker of the earth, and he should be careful to avoid failing this special responsibility. Al-Ṭabarī also focuses in on the meaning of several key words: "*arḍ*" (which Muhammad Asad translates above as "earth") could also mean specifically Mecca, he says. The word "*khalīfa*," — which can linguistically be translated in a variety of ways, including: successor, leader, ruler — means, according to al-Ṭabarī, "the one who comes and takes over after a predecessor." This would suggest that man

[113] Asad, 31.
[114] Ibid, 31.
[115] Ibid, 32.
[116] Et-Taberî, 1:163-176.

had a predecessor on earth, and al-Ṭabarī offers some thoughts as to who this might be. He says that some scholars were of the opinion that this *khalīfa* means mankind is a successor to the *Jinn* who inhabited the earth before them. Others say the Prophet Ādam specifically is being called *khalīfa* because he will be the leader amongst the various servants of God. Al-Ṭabarī then says that one of the lessons we must take from this verse is that just like Ādam is appointed a *khalīfa*, the Muslim community must also have a *khalīfa* amongst themselves. Al-Ṭabarī then goes into an extensive legal and political discussion about the requirements and criteria for selecting a *khalīfa*, including that the person be male, free, mature, just, strong and intelligent, and be from Quraysh, although he mentions there is some difference of opinion on that last point. After this, al-Ṭabarī addresses the statement of the angels who fear that man will shed blood and cause *fasād* in the earth. He opens his discussion with the question: how did the angels know what mankind would do before mankind was even sent down to earth? In other words, why did they think mankind would cause so much *fasād*? Al-Ṭabarī answers this question by giving several different opinions: some say that the angels had seen the example of the *jinn* beforehand, and knew that the *jinn* had caused much corruption so they assumed mankind would do the same; others say that the angels were told this would happen by God, so they wanted to understand why God was placing mankind on earth. Finally, al-Ṭabarī discusses the final part of the verse, where God says He knows what the angels do not know. Al-Ṭabarī offers two opinions on what the nature of this knowledge is: that it is knowledge about Iblīs and his hidden arrogance and pride (which the angels were not of aware of), or that it is knowledge that there would be many good, righteous people who would come from the lineage of Prophet Ādam. Al-Ṭabarī does not take a final position on either one, but says both are possible interpretations of the nature of this secret knowledge.[117]

al-Zamakhsharī: al-Zamakhsharī provides a few grammatical points before he also focuses on the meaning of the term *khalīfa*.[118] He says that it refers to the person who succeeds another person in a certain role. Thus it is referring to Prophet Ādam and his descendants as the people who come to inherit the earth

[117] Ibid.
[118] Zamakhsharī, 1:342.

after another group.[119] This would seem to imply that al-Zamakhsharī is referring to the *Jinn* before humanity; however, al-Zamakhsharī also notes that it is possible that the *khalīfa* is being used in the sense of God's vicegerent, such that Prophet Ādam is God's vicegerent on earth, like all the other Prophets.[120] Like al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī also asks the question of how the angels knew that mankind would shed blood and spread corruption on earth. He answers that they either learned it from God, from the *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ* (the Preserved Tablet), or from observing the previous inhabitants of earth (i.e. the *Jinn*). Also like al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī ends his commentary by discussing the knowledge that God has and the angels do not: he says this may have to do with God knowing the future good that would come out of the situation, and it might also be connected to God teaching Prophet Ādam the name of all things, while the angels were not given this knowledge.[121]

al-Rāzī: al-Rāzī has a particularly extensive commentary on this verse. He discusses some of the grammar of the verse, including the usage of the term "Lo!"[122] Then he focuses on the angels and their role in Islamic theology. He mentions how there are different views about their corporeality and their status vis-a-vis the Prophets.[123] He mentions how angels exist both on earth and in the heavens, and how they can take different forms, including human forms, when they need to.[124] He discusses how many angels might exist, citing a Prophetic hadith which states that every step one takes on earth, there is an angel there, and they are all in a constant state of worship to God.[125] He also details how angels are of different ranks within themselves, and mentions that there are several archangels.[126] Later he also narrates various reports about how the angels are incapable of disobeying God's orders, and therefore are completely free from sin.[127] All of this discussion of the angels and their nature is perhaps meant by

[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid, 344.
[122] Er-Razî, 1:230.
[123] Ibid, 232-33.
[124] Ibid, 234.
[125] Ibid, 236.
[126] Ibid, 239.
[127] Ibid, 246.

al-Rāzī to contrast with the state of humans, who are too often disrupting and sabotaging their relationship with God, and spreading corruption on earth just as the angels feared. Then he moves on to discuss other key points of interpretation. He mentions that "*arḍ*" here refers to the whole world, and Ādam is made a *khalīfa* for all of it. That brings him to a discussion on the *khalīfa* and the nature of *khilāfat*.[128] Al-Rāzī defines *khalīfa* as the person who succeeds a predecessor. He notes that some say this refers to the *jinn* — i.e. humanity is the successor to the *jinn*, while others say that it refers to Prophet Ādam as the one who was appointed by God to lead humanity and act as God's steward on earth. He notes that the latter position is supported by reports from Ibn 'Abbās and Ibn Mas'ūd (d. 32/653).[129] He defines this aspect of *khalīfa* as, "to be given the right to issue rulings and to rule as a vicegerent of God."[130] A third opinion reported from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728)[131] is that men are called *khalīfa* because they succeed each other in multiple generations — this is perhaps meant to contrast with the angels, who do not die and therefore presumably do not have a concept of predecessor-successor (*khalaf-salaf*). Al-Rāzī then discusses the exact manner and nature of the praise that the angels make to God — he says some opinions held that this was praying (as Muslims pray), others held that it was thanking God, and extolling His being utterly free from any deficiency, and that it also entailed turning their hearts away from anything but God.[132] This focus on the angels' *tasbīḥ* and *taṣdīq* to God is perhaps meant to act as a contrast to the two actions they fear will result from mankind: the shedding of blood and spreading of corruption. The angels' seem to contrast the two outcomes in their question, and al-Rāzī may be picking up on that contrast by discussing the nature of their worship here. Finally, he ends his *tafsīr* by addressing the question of the nature of the knowledge God has that the angels do not know, as referenced in the verse. Al-Rāzī says this may refer to how God knows that in the future there will be good, righteous people descending from the first generation of humans, or it may refer to how Iblīs was still amongst the

[128] Ibid, 243-44.
[129] Ibn Mas'ūd: a prominent early Companion, considered one of the master-scholars of the Companion generation.
[130] Ibid, 253.
[131] Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī: a scholar, hadith transmitter and theologian from the early Followers - he is considered an expert authority in the Sunni tradition.
[132] Ibid, 255-60.

angels and regarded by the angels as a devout worshipper, whereas God was aware of the inward state of Iblīs, and his hidden arrogance and hypocrisy[133] — in other words, God knew the inward states of creation, whereas the angels were judging by their observations of the outward.

al-Qurṭubī: al-Qurṭubī starts with a basic explanation of the grammar of the verse before explaining the nature of the angels as beings that God sends as messengers to His prophets.[134] Then al-Qurṭubī comes to the concept of *khalīfa*. He says that God making a *khalīfa* on the "*arḍ*" refers first to Mecca, then to the entirety of the world, with the understanding that Mecca is the metaphysical center of the earth.[135] As for *khalīfa***,** he interprets it as meaning that humanity is sent to earth as successors to beings that inhabited earth before them — either angels or *jinn*. Alternatively, he says, some scholars interpreted this to refer specifically to Prophet Ādam, who was given the right to govern as God's vicegerent on earth. From this point he moves on to a broader legal discussion about the role of a caliph in Islam. He asserts that this verse is one of the proofs that the community *must* have a *khalīfa* who will ensure the unity of the community, and who is followed by the members of the community. He narrates several reports and hadith that also talk about the need to have a *khalīfa.*[136] He gets into some discussion about how the *khalīfa* is to be selected, and the criteria for that.[137] In that discussion, he includes details that al-Ṭabarī had also mentioned: namely, that the *khalīfa* must be a free male individual from Qurayh, must be knowledgeable in law, must be just, and must be the most intelligent of the community. He also discusses several political scenarios like what necessitates deposing a ruler if they fail to meet these criteria, and what to do if one has given an oath of allegiance to one leader and then a second rival leader emerges.[138] After this extended legal discussion, al-Qurṭubī returns to the verse to discuss the reasons for the angels' question. He explains that the angels asked this either because they feared that the descendants of the first humans would

[133] Ibid, 261.
[134] Kurtubî, 1:535.
[135] Ibid, 536.
[136] Ibid, 537.
[137] Ibid, 543-45.
[138] Ibid, 545-50.

inevitably be corrupt, or because they observed the *jinn* and saw them to have caused much bloodshed, and therefore feared it would be the same case with humanity.[139] He then briefly discusses the nature and manner in which the angels praise God before ending with a short discussion of the nature of God's knowledge referenced at the end of the verse. This specific knowledge, al-Qurṭubī says, may be that God knows Iblīs to be corrupt even while the angels still admire Iblīs as he worships God amongst them, or it may be that God knows righteous descendants will come from the humans, or it may be something else entirely.[140]

al-Bayḍāwī: al-Bayḍāwī defines the word for angels "*malā'ika*" as having the meaning of ambassadors or messengers — i.e. they are the beings God sends to the prophets to convey His message.[141] Like al-Rāzī and others, he enters into extensive detail about the nature of the angels and their different ranks. He discusses how they each have different jobs that they fulfill. As for the angels who ask God this question — he says it may refer to *all* the angels or just to a certain portion of them who were on earth and saw what the *jinn* had done to the earth previously.[142] He then discusses what *khalīfa* means: like the others, his primary definition is that it is someone who succeeds a predecessor in a certain role or function. He says here it might refer to Prophet Ādam, acting as God's vicegerent on earth, or it may refer to *all* of God's Prophets, who are meant to show humanity how to properly behave.[143] He then moves on to the question of the angels — he says it is a question born from *ta'ajjub* (bewilderment). He explains that the angels know the proper role of a *khalīfa* is to take care of the trust he is given, so they are wondering how will humans, who will shed blood and spread corruption, fulfill the role of *khalīfa*?[144] He is careful to point out that the angels' question is not meant as a rejection or as a complaint, because they would not have such a reaction to God's decision. It is similar, he says, to how a student would ask a teacher for clarification on a point that they have not fully

[139] Ibid, 550.
[140] Ibid, 556.
[141] Beydâvî, 1:108.
[142] Ibid, 109.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid, 111.

understood.[145] Al-Bayḍāwī then addresses the question of how the angels knew mankind would spread corruption: he says that either God gave them that knowledge, or they read it from the *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ*, or they were comparing mankind to the *jinn*. Al-Bayḍāwī explains that what the angels did not realize, however, is that mankind had a great potential to do good deeds even as they were given free will to choose between good and evil.[146]

Ibn Kathīr: Ibn Kathīr also discusses the meaning of *khalīfa* as one of the first points of his *tafsīr*. He says one meaning may be that it is referring to how humanity will have generation after generation — each generation succeeding the previous one as their *khalīfa*s, "generation by generation, era by era."[147] He explains that the term *khalīfa* here is not referring just to the Prophet Ādam, otherwise the statement of the angels worried about the spread of corruption would be inappropriate, as it would be insulting Prophet Ādam. Rather, it is referring to his descendants as well. Ibn Kathīr then explains that the question of the angels was not meant as a complaint but rather, they were trying to understand the wisdom behind the decision. From their point of view, if the purpose of man is to worship God, then they also worship God, so they are attempting to understand why humans would be created. God's response is that He knows what they do not know. Ibn Kathīr interprets this as referring to the good that will come from mankind, despite the evil and the corruption that will also result. He also sees it as referring to the Prophets and righteous believers who will come as descendants. Like other commentators before him, Ibn Kathīr defines *arḍ* as first referring to Mecca, then to the whole world with Mecca at the center. He then discusses the nature of the angels' praise and worship of God — in their statement, they are emphasizing that they are constantly worshipping God. After this, he enters into the discussion about the nature of the angels. He notes that while all Muslim scholars agree that angels exist, there is a difference of opinion regarding the nature of their essence — their form and their outward manifestations are not fully known. He also details that there are two main types

[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid, 111-12.
[147] Ibn Kathīr "Tafsīr al-Qurān al-Aẓīm," *al-Tafsir,* Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought.

of angels: those who are constantly doing nothing but worship God, and those who are worshiping God while also fulfilling some function on earth or in the heavens. He also narrates reports which talk about individually named angels in the Islamic tradition, like Jibrīl and Mikāyīl.

al-Jalālayn: The Jalālayn *tafsīr* connects the reference of *khalīfa* to Prophet Ādam specifically, "who shall act as [God's] deputy by implementing [His] rulings therein"[148] The *tafsīr* also explains the spreading of corruption and spilling of blood as being linked to the *jinn* who used to inhabit the earth. Specifically, the *tafsīr* mentions that the angels had been sent down to clear the earth from *jinn* and drive them back, so the angels' question is trying to understand why a new species similar to the *jinn* would be placed on the earth. God's answer — that He knows what they do not — is a reference to Him knowing that the progeny of Prophet Ādam will include both the very righteous and the absolute sinner.

4.3.2 Summary of the Classical Interpretations:

The classical commentaries generally focus on a few key areas. As we shall see, the key issue for our purposes is the nature and definition of *khalīfa*. There are various opinions related within each commentary on this issue, and the individual commentators rarely take a definite position in favor of one or the other. However, the main positions come down to three: one is that the *khalīfa* referred to here is solely Prophet Ādam, whose role as *khalīfa* is to be God's vicegerent on earth. The second is that it refers to both Prophet Ādam and also all the other Prophets after him, whose role as *khalīfa* is to deliver God's message to humanity and rule in accordance with God's will. The third is that it refers to all of humanity, who inherit from one another, generation after generation, and who altogether are inheriting the world from the *jinn*. In this interpretation, they are not the vicegerents of God on earth, but rather the *successors* (i.e. the *khalīfa*'s) to the *jinn*.

[148] "Tafsir al-Jalalayn," *al-Tafsir,* Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought.

In this discussion on *khalīfa*, many of the commentators expand into extensive legal topics as well. These include legal rules on how to select the leader, what the criteria are for the leader and what to do when there are multiple leaders operating at once.

Apart from the *khalīfa* discussion, these classical texts also extensively discuss the nature of the angels and their role in creation: they detail what types of angels there are, what they are made of, what their role and function is in the world. This focus on the nature of angels is understandable because this is commentary on the second Sūra of the Qur'an: Sūrat al-Baqara, verse 30. Therefore, sequentially it is one of the first verses in the Qur'an and it may be one of the first mentions of the angels as well. Therefore, because the *tafsīr* is also going sequentially, this may be the first time the authors are defining "angel" for the reader and so they give an extended introduction to the concept. There is also commentary on the nature of the angels' question: some of the commentators go out of their way to emphasize that the angels were not complaining or rejecting God's decree, but were asking the question to understand the situation. Moreover, the commentaries speculate as to how the angels knew that humanity would spread corruption, and they answer with several possibilities: the angels knew because they had seen the *jinn* do that before, the angels knew it from God, or the angels knew it because they read it from the *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ*. When it comes to angels, the commentators also discuss the nature of their worship and praise for God, as described in the verse.

Finally, the commentators also try to explain what the hidden knowledge is that God knows but the angels do not: some say it is that good offspring will come from Prophet Ādam, others say that it is that there is inward evil in Iblīs though the angels do not perceive it, thereby demonstrating that their judgement by the outward states based on their limited knowledge is flawed to some degree.

4.3.3 Contemporary Interpretations:

In contemporary studies, the main issue that scholars pick up on is the role of *khalīfa*. It plays a central role in the notion of man's responsibility to take care of

the earth in Islamic environmentalism. Among those authors who emphasize this understanding of *khalīfa* is: E.O Ekpenyong in "Islam and Global Ecological Crisis: An Eco-Theological Review," and Soumaya P. Ouis in "Islamic ecotheology based on the Qur'ān."[149] Others point out that this concept of *khalīfa* is not solely one of power and supremacy over the earth; rather, as Chittick emphasizes, the concept of *khalīfa* cannot be understood without also understanding the servanthood of man before God.[150]

With *khalīfa* interpreted this way, the contemporary writers tend to translate the term here as representative, vicegerent, viceroy, guardian and steward of the *arḍ* — which many of them equate with the environment. There is almost universal agreement that the *khalīfa* here means the vicegerent of God on earth[151] and the steward of the environment.[152] Thus as Adi Setia summarizes, stewardship and trusteeship are two faces of *khalīfa*.[153] These interpretations are nicely summarized in "Islamic Environmental Ethics" by Riham R. Rizk:

> A khalifa is one who inherits a position or trust, holding it responsibly and in harmony with its bestower. He does not violate the trust. The verbal root of khalifa is khalaf, which means, "He came after, followed, succeeded". Ironically, it can also mean "be at variance with, offend against, violate or break a rule, command or promise"... Of the nine times the word khalifa and its plural are found in the Qur'an, seven times it is used in conjunction with the prefixed '-al-ard- or "on earth". In each case, it refers to a person, people or humanity in general, to whom God

[149] E.O Ekpenyong, "Islam and Global Ecological Crisis: An Eco-Theological Review," *International Journal of Asian Social Science 3,* no.7 (2013): 1593 as well as M. Izzi Dien, "Islam and the Environment: Towards an "Islamic" Ecumenical View," *QURANICA 5,* no. 2 (2013): 48 and S. P. Ouis, "Islamic ecotheology based on the Qur'ān," *Islamic Studies 37,* no. 2 (1998): 154 and finally: A. Saniotis, "Muslims and Ecology: Fostering Islamic Environmental Ethics," *Contemporary Islam* 6, no. 2 (2012): 158.

[150] William C. Chittick, "'God Surrounds All Things'; An Islamic Perspective on the Environment," *The World & I* 1, no. 6 (June 1986): 676.

[151] For example: Munjed M. Murad, "Islamic Environmental Stewardship: Nature and Science in the Light of Islamic Philosophy," *Union Theological Seminary*, (2010): 7 and A. Abedi-Sarvestani and Mansoor Shahvali, "Environmental Ethics: Toward an Islamic Perspective," *American-Eurasian J. Agric. & Environ. Sci 3,* no. 4 (2008): 615 and İbrahim Özdemir, "Muhammed Iqbal and Environmental Ethics," *Acta Via Serica 2,* no. 2 (2017): 97.

[152] For example: Abdelzaher, Kotb and Helfaya, 630; and Saniotis, 158; and Hamza Aktaş, "İslam'da Çevre Bilinci ve Eğitimi," *Turkish Studies* 9, no. 8 (Summer 2014): 164. See also: Cafer Sadık Yaran, "İslam Çevre Etiğinin Dört Kuramı ve Sekiz İlkesi: Hiyerarşik Bir Sınıflandırma Denemesi," *Uluslararası Çevre ve Din Sempozyumu,* (2008): 121-33.

[153] Setia, 132.

> has entrusted part of His power on earth. The term has been variously translated into English as a successor, deputy, viceroy and trustee or steward.[154]

One important discussion that these studies enter into when interpreting this verse is that of the responsibility that comes with being *khalīfa*. These interpretations emphasize that while God did make subservient to mankind the earth and the earth's creatures, this does not give man the right to abuse other creatures; rather, it gives him the responsibility to look after them and care for them as God's steward on earth. This is emphasized by Abedi-Sarvestani and Shahvali in "Environmental Ethics: Toward an Islamic Perspective."[155] Ouis in "Islamic Ecotheology Based on the Qur'ān" quotes Seyyid Hussein Nasr as saying, "As khalifat Allah, he must be active in the world, sustaining cosmic harmony and disseminating the grace for which he is the channel as a result of his being the central creature in the terrestrial order."[156] In "Islam and Deep Ecology" by Nawal Ammar, the relationship is not one of ownership over other creatures, but of management.[157]

Part of this responsibility is avoiding abusing the environment, but another part is also actively cultivating land and building civilization. Thus Ammar argues in "Islam and Deep Ecology" that *khalīfa* has a dual role to both use the resources of the earth to fulfill his needs and then to also manage the resources in a way that increases and does not decrease them.[158] Kamali in "Islam and the Environment: An Examination of the Source Evidence" puts it more explicitly:

> Vicegerency confers on human beings, individually and collectively, the mission and responsibility to build the earth and harness its resources with moderation and care for its ecological balance (Q. al-Baqarah 2:30). Vicegerency is guided in turn by the principles of trusteeship (amānah), moderation (iʿtidāl, wasaṭiyyah) and justice (ʿadl). Building and development (iʿmār) with their broader physical and non- physical

[154] Rizk, 197.
[155] Abedi-Sarvestani and Shahvali, 615.
[156] Ouis, 154, quoting from Nasr, *Sacred Science,* 13.
[157] Nawal Ammar, "Islam and Deep Ecology" in *Deep Ecology and World Religions : New Essays on Sacred Ground*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb and David Landis Barnhill, (State University of New York Pres, 2001), 198.
[158] Ibid.

> ramifications are another aspect of vicegerency that is informed, in turn, by the higher goals and purposes (maqāṣid) of Islam and its sharīʿah. Other aspects of iʿmār that are highlighted in the sources include due observance of the divinely ordained cosmic equilibrium, greening the earth through agriculture (tashjīr, ḍharʿ) and cleanliness (ṭahārah) as discussed below.[159]

For Kamali, then, the building up of land and its cultivation is a key component of man's *khilāfa* on earth.

Amongst the contemporary commentaries, I did find one author who referenced earlier *tafsīr*s on the verse — Setia notes in "The Inner Dimension of Going Green: Articulating an Islamic Deep-Ecology" that according to al-Rāzī, the *khalīfa* is "one who succeeds another and stands in his place" (as we saw above).[160] However, Setia seems to collapse some of al-Rāzī multiple interpretations down to one position, as she writes that al-Rāzī saw the *khalīfa* as referring to Prophet Ādam *and* his progeny who are considered God's representatives or vicegerents on earth. While this is certainly one of the main interpretations al-Rāzī and the others offer, it is not the *only* position, despite that being the implication of Setia's treatment of it. As we saw, al-Rāzī's *tafsīr* was particularly extensive, with a range of positions for each issue, so it is not easily simplified into one single position as suggested in "The Inner Dimension of Going Green: Articulating an Islamic Deep-Ecology."

4.3.4 **Comparing the Classical and the Contemporary:**

The key shared concept between the classical and the contemporary writings is that of the *khalīfa*. Both sets talk about what it means for man's actions on earth. For the contemporary writers, this is the single most emphasized aspect of the verse. They interpret *khalīfa* as God's vicegerent on earth, and steward of the environment. However, while their interpretations do fit with some of the positions of the classical scholars, the contemporary writers seem to not be aware of, or at least not mention, the various other interpretations offered by the classical works. For example, many of the classical commentators narrate

[159] Kamali, 176.
[160] Setia, 131.

positions which interpret *khalīfa* as referring only to Prophet Ādam or to Prophet Ādam and other prophets. In those cases, it is not given a universal meaning but is connected directly to prophethood. In this interpretation, the role of *khalīfa* is to enforce God's laws in society. Other interpretations amongst the classical commentators is that humans are the successors (*khalīfa*s) to the *jinn*. Under these interpretations, the idea of being the vicegerent of God is not mentioned; rather, men are inheriting the earth from its previous inhabitants. A third interpretation is that *khalīfa* in this case is simply referring to the fact that mankind will have many generations, and each generation is a *khalīfa* - a successor - to the previous generation. However, the point here is that in the contemporary discussions all of these interpretations are simplified or collapsed down to the single idea that man is God's vicegerent and is steward of the earth. This interpretation is not unprecedented amongst classical commentaries, but it is also not representative of the full range of established interpretations.

In addition to this, there are other differences - other conversations and positions from the classical commentaries that are left out of the contemporary discussions. Amongst these are the discussions around the role and nature of the angels. However, because these topics are not of immediate connection to Islamic environmentalism, it is understandable that the contemporary writers do not mention such issues when interpreting the verse.

4.4 Verse 4: 6:38

The fourth most frequently referenced verse is 6:38, the 38th verse of Sūrat al-Rūm, being referenced a total of 29 times across the contemporary sources.The translation of the verse is as follows:

وَمَا مِن دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا طَائِرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّا أُمَمٌ أَمْثَالُكُم ۚ مَّا فَرَّطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِن شَيْءٍ ۚ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يُحْشَرُونَ (٣٨[161])

[161] Qur'an 6:38.

...although there is no beast that walks on earth and no bird that flies on its two wings which is not [God's] creature like yourselves: no single thing have We neglected in Our decree. And once again: Unto their Sustainer shall they [all] be gathered.[162]

4.4.1 Classical Interpretations:

al-Ṭabarī: al-Ṭabarī's commentary is relatively short compared to his commentary on other verses. He explains that the verse is referencing Judgement Day, when all humans and animals will be subject to judgement. The animals will be given their dues and take their rights out over one another and on humans who might have abused them. It seems to act as a general reminder that man's actions are accountable, not just towards other human beings, but to animals as well, who have their own rights in Islam. al-Ṭabarī does not get into much detail about that, but he is referencing an important idea that will be taken up by the contemporary thinkers.[163]

al-Zamakhsharī: al-Zamakhsharī's commentary is likewise rather short. He emphasizes that there is no creature that God does not keep an account of their actions, and also there is no creature that God does not destine its provisions, its deeds and its time of death. In other words, nothing can escape His knowledge; His authority encompasses everything and He is the One planning every detail of creation, which is recorded in *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ*.[164]

al-Rāzī: al-Rāzī's commentary begins with a discussion of how this verse connects to the preceding and following verse, how the animals resemble humanity in terms of being an *umma* and also what the book that is mentioned in the verse means.[165] For our purposes, however, the most important point is his discussion around the rights of animals. He stresses how animals that were abused and oppressed in this world will be able to get their due retribution on the

[162] Asad, 251.
[163] Et-Taberî, 3:486-88.
[164] Zamakhsharī, 1:638.
[165] Er-Razî, 9:412-18.

Day of Judgement, when they are all resurrected. He defines various examples of what this "oppression" means: it can mean how one strong animal harms a weak animal, it can mean when humans overload the burden they place on an animal, it can mean when a domesticated animal is slaughtered but not with the intention of eating its meat, and it can even apply to those animals who were slaughtered for meat, but then the person eating that meat did not say "bismillah" before eating it.[166]

al-Qurṭubī: al-Qurṭubī begins by explaining what the two descriptions "*dābba*" and "*ṭā'ir*" mean — the former relating to creatures that walk on land, and the latter referring to winged creatures that fly.[167] Then he explains how animals are an *umma* like humans: they are created by God, they worship God, and like humans, they will be resurrected on the Day of Judgement to have an accounting of their actions. Here he narrates a Prophetic report stating that on that day, the hornless creature will take its rights from the horned creature.[168] Thus the creatures that were weaker and were wronged on earth, by humans or by other animals, will have their rights given to them on that day, and the creatures who did wrong will face retribution.[169] The takeaway for al-Qurṭubī is that because they are an *umma*, humanity must not violate their rights and must treat them as God commands. He also mentions other ways in how animals are an *umma* like humans are an *umma*: they have names for each other and call each other by those names amongst themselves, and they seek their provision from God, just as humans do. He then discusses what the verse is referencing when it mentions a "book": he says it is the *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ* which records everyone's actions; alternatively, it might refer to the Qur'an.[170] His final comments focus on the ending of the verse: that all creatures would be brought before their Lord. He comments that this is again referencing the Day of Judgment when animals and humans will be brought before God, and the abused animals will claim their rights against their abusers. Al-Qurṭubī explains that at the end of this process of retribution, the animals will not be made to enter heaven or hell, but will simply

[166] Ibid, 9:423.
[167] Kurtubî, 6:581.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid, 6:582.
[170] Ibid.

be turned into dust. The disbelieving humans, destined for the fire, will see this and will exclaim, "O would that I were turned into dust!" as well, wishing that they could share the fate of the animals rather than bear the consequences of their actions in the afterlife.[171] The main lesson al-Qurṭubī seeks to convey is that if animals will be held to account for the things they did to each other, then man must be even more fearful of being held to account for what he did to both other humans and to animals.

al-Bayḍāwī: al-Bayḍāwī discusses much of the same material covered by the earlier commentators. He defines the words "*dābba*" and "*ṭā'ir*." He discusses how animals have an *umma* similar to humans, and how their states, actions, deeds and provision are all destined by and recorded by God. He also explains that the reference to "book" is indicating either the *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ* or the Qur'an. Finally, he concludes by saying that all these creatures will be brought before their Lord to be given their rights over each other, and he narrates the Prophetic hadith about the hornless animal getting its right over the horned animal.[172]

Ibn Kathīr: Ibn Kathīr begins by discussing what is meant by the *umma* of birds and creatures — i.e. if they are each a separate *umma* or if they are altogether one single *umma*.[173] He also discusses what it means that nothing is neglected in the book — explaining that this means that this book has a record of everything — both good and bad — committed by every being.[174] Ibn Kathīr then includes an interesting report that 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, during the time of his caliphate, was lamenting the fact that he could no longer see any crickets in the surrounding lands. He sent people to different places to see if they could locate any, and one of his riders came back with a handful of them and placed them before the caliph. 'Umar says "Allah Akbar!" out of delight for finding these creatures again, and then he relates a hadith he heard from the Prophet which mentions that God Most Exalted has created one thousand *umma*s — six

[171] Ibid, 6:583.
[172] Beydâvî, 1:717.
[173] İbn Kesîr, 2610.
[174] Ibid.

hundred of them are in the sea, and four hundred are on land. The first of these *umma*s to be destroyed will be the crickets — once they are destroyed, the road to destruction will continue for the other *umma*s, one-by-one.[175] The story ends there and Ibn Kathīr does not offer much commentary on it, but it is itself a very fascinating report that seems to be referencing the fact that species will slowly go extinct one-by-one. 'Umar's delight at finding the crickets is therefore due to his happiness that the extinction process had not yet begun during his reign as caliph. Ibn Kathīr ends his commentary by discussing what will bring all of these *umma*s together as referenced in the verse. He says it could either be death, which is the shared fate of all these creatures, or it could be the Day of Judgement, in which all these creatures will be brought together for judgement and for rights and retribution. Here he also includes the Prophetic report about the hornless animal taking its rights from the horned animal, and also how the disbelieving human, when he says how all the animals are turned to dust, will exclaim, "O I wish that I were dust" so that he could avoid the punishment of the afterlife.[176]

al-Jalālayn: The Jalālayn's commentary is quite short. They define what "*dābba*" means as "animals that crawl on the earth" and then also explains how these creatures are an *umma* like humans: in the way that its creation, provision and destiny have all been ordained by God, just like that of humans.[177] They define the book being referenced here as the *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ* and then they explain that when all these creatures are gathered together on judgement day, "the hornless sheep shall retaliate against the horned ram and then it will be said to the animals, 'Be dust.'"[178]

4.4.2 Summary of the Classical Interpretations:

For our purposes in comparing classical to contemporary discussions, the most important point in the above commentaries is the discussion of the rights of

[175] Ibid, 2610-11.
[176] Ibid, 2611-12.
[177] "Tafsir Al-Jalalayn," *al-Tafsir,* Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought.
[178] Ibid.

animals. In this regard, many of these classical commentaries include the Prophetic hadith about the hornless animal taking its rights from the horned animal. This hadith brings the commentators to a discussion of the rights of animals, and how they will receive retribution on the Day of Judgement for all of the wrongs done to them by other animals and (by implication) from humans as well. The power dynamics here are also important — the hadith mentions the hornless taking rights from the horned; the suggestion seems to be that the weaker will take their rights from the stronger. In such a scenario, it would seem that humans — with all of their civilization, tools and organized hunting and cultivation — are more powerful than even the horned animals. So by implication, they should be even more afraid that they will be held to account on the Day of Judgement for what they did with the rights of the animals that were weaker than them. This fearfulness that man should have is demonstrated by the words of the disbeliever when he sees the animals turned to dust: "O I wish that I were dust!" Here the commentators are emphasizing that humans must be even *more* careful than the horned animals in how they treat others, because whereas the animal will simply be turned to dust after the retribution, the disbeliever will have to suffer in the afterlife.

Another major point of discussion is how the animals can be an *umma* comparable to that of the humans. The commentators give different explanations, but the most frequent explanation is that they are similar to humans in that their provision, their time and place of death, and their actions are all pre-ordained.

Then there are a handful of small matters of definition — some of the commentators focus on defining what "*dābba*" and "*ṭā'ir*" refers to, and some also define what the "book" is that is mentioned in the verse, noting that it is either the *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ* or the Qur'an.

4.4.3 Contemporary Interpretations:

Within the contemporary discourse on eco-Islam, this verse comes up frequently as evidence for the concept of animal rights in Islam. This verse, alongside

various Prophetic hadith on caring for and not abusing animals, is put forward as a guide on how humanity should conceptualize animal rights. Thus these thinkers argue that the verse shows just how important the rights of animals are in Islam.[179] Özdemir in *An Islamic Approach to the Environment* says that the verse shows how animals are a key element of the world's ecosystem.[180] Similarly, Ammar argues that the verse shows a unity of creation — the whole universe being represented in one system of interconnected *umma*s of all the servants of God.[181] It comes as a reminder that humans are *not* the only *umma* on earth, and thus they do not have exclusive rights to all of earth's resources, but must share it with the other *umma*s of animals and living things.[182] With this shared nature, Abdul Haseeb Ansari says in "Sustainable Development: Islamic Dimension with Special Reference to Conservation of the Environment," that humans should not dominate these creatures, but strive to nurture a harmonious relationship with them.[183] Foltz even says that this verse seems to be "tempering the hierarchical notion of stewardship implied in the concept of khalifa."[184] In other words, where the idea of *khalīfa* seems to place humans above all other creatures on earth, as caretakers or as rulers, this verse seems to address them all in the shared term of *umma*s who are all under God's dominion. This sentiment is echoed in the arguments of "Basic paper on the Islamic principles for the conservation of the natural environment*,"* by Abou Bakr Kader, Abdul Latif Al Sabbagh, Mohamed Al Glenid, and Mouel Izzidien, who say that serving human beings is *not* the sole purpose of animals, but that they serve an even greater purpose: which is to praise God.[185] Man must respect that and not abuse them, and even more than that, man must develop and conserve this wildlife ecosystem.[186]

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[179] İbrahim Özdemir, *An Islamic Approach to the Environment*, 19.
[180] Ibid, 20.
[181] Ammar, 197.
[182] Özdemir, *Çevre ve Din,* 119.
[183] Abdul Haseeb Ansari, Umar A. Oseni, and Parveen Jamal, "Sustainable Development: Islamic Dimension with Special Reference to Conservation of the Environment," *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences* 6, no. 5 (2012): 613.
[184] Foltz, "Is There An Islamic Environmentalism?" 65.
[185] Abou Bakr Ahmed Ba Kader, Abdul Latif Tawfik El Shirazy Al Sabbagh, Mohamed Al Sayyed Al Glenid, and Mouel Yousef Samarrai Izzidien, "Basic paper on the Islamic principles for the conservation of the natural environment*," IUCN Environmental Policy and Law Paper*, no. 20 (Switzerland: 1983): 17.
[186] Ansari, Oseni, and Jamal, 613.

The contemporary thinkers also explore in what respect the *umma* of these creatures is like humanity's *umma*, as expressed in the verse. Thus one point mentioned is that animals, like humans, praise and worship God.[187] Others point out how animals have habitats, are social, have kinship ideas like humans and are created from earthly materials like mankind is — as distinct from the *jinn* and the angels.[188] Dartma even quotes al-Rāzī's commentary on this point, saying that they are like us because their sustenance and their time and place of death are predestined.[189] He also points out that animals eat, drink and reproduce, and that they have some degree of reasoning capacity, emotions, feelings and an ability to use tools — all ways in which God made them similar to humans.[190]

Finally, some contemporary thinkers also emphasize that the verse and the attached Prophetic hadith show us that being good to animals can be the difference between one's salvation and damnation. Thus Sayed Haneef writes that: "Kindness to animals (domesticated or wild) becomes the cause of salvation and cruelty to them will cause damnation in the hereafter."[191]

4.4.4 Comparing the Classical and the Contemporary:

Between the classical and the contemporary there is a lot of common ground to track similarities. This is especially true in their respective discussions of the rights of animals and the need to ensure animals are not mistreated. Both sets of interpretations emphasize this point. Even more interesting, both sets of interpretations refer to the same source evidences when studying the verse; for example, they both frequently cite the Prophetic hadith about the hornless and the horned animal. In this regard there is a strong continuity between the two sets of interpretations.

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[187] Ammar, 197.
[188] S. Nomanul Haq, "Islam," in *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Dale Jamieson, (John Wiley & Sons: 1991), 154.
[189] Dartma, 11.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Sayed Sikandar Shah Haneef, "Principles of Environmental Law in Islam," *Arab Law Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (2002): 250.

The two bodies of material also have a strong continuity in how they discuss the question of the animal *umma* being similar to the human *umma*. Both sets focus on this discussion and mention details on how they are similar. One contemporary author even quotes al-Rāzī on his description of the similarities.

However, as can be expected, the contemporary thinkers provide a set of answers that are more grounded in modern discourses and discussions. For instance, in the discussion of the rights of animals, the classical thinkers speak in mostly general terms, whereas the modern thinkers are explaining nuanced systems of animal rights and protection of wildlife. Or in discussing how the two *umma*'s are similar, most of the classical commentators just provide the same answer: they are similar because like humans, they have a predestined provision, time of death, and set of actions. However, the modern thinkers take this comparison farther, and they explore other ways in which animals and humans are similar — for example, in the way they both have kinship bonds, have some sense of social organization, use tools and so on. Thus they expand on the idea of similarities with observations and evidence that perhaps classical commentators did not know or did not deem as important to discuss.

Of course, beyond these discussions, there is material in the classical commentaries that is left almost completely out of the contemporary interpretations — issues like the nature of the "book" being referred to in the verse, or the exact definition of "*dābba*" and "*ṭā'ir*." However, this is to be expected because while the *tafsīr*'s main goal is to provide a complete commentary on the verse, the contemporary studies are looking at the verses from the perspective of Islamic environmentalism and how this verse specifically applies to that concept.

That being said, the continuities we see in the discussion of animal rights and the discussion of similarities between the animal and the human *umma*s make this verse have one of the closest correspondences between the classical and contemporary that we have seen so far. They are, of course, not one-to-one equivalent, but there is a clear line of descent showing how the issues that are

discussed by classical scholars are discussed in a relatively similar way by contemporary scholars.

4.5 Verse 5: 17:44

The fifth most frequently referenced verse is 17:44 from Sūrat al-Isrā'. Being referenced a total of 29 times across the contemporary sources, this verse is actually as frequently referenced as the previous verse. The translation of the verse is as follows:

تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَن فِيهِنَّ ۚ وَإِن مِّن شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَٰكِن لَّا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ ۗ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا (٤٤[192])

The seven heavens extol His limitless glory, and the earth, and all that they contain; and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise: but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him! Verily, He is forbearing, much-forgiving![193]

4.5.1 Classical Interpretations:

al-Ṭabarī: al-Ṭabarī focuses on one main question when commenting on this verse: first, when the verse says "there is not a single thing but extols…" how many things is it actually referring to? Al-Ṭabarī says that there are two main interpretations: it can either mean that everything that has a soul (i.e. is animate) is praising God, or it can mean that everything living and non-living (i.e. literally, every single thing in creation) is praising God.[194] Various scholars took one or the other position, but al-Ṭabarī seems to lean towards the second opinion. He gives two reports to support that position: a report narrating that the Companions of the Prophet heard morsels of food making *tasbīḥ* (saying "Glory be to God!").[195] The second report narrates the story of how the Prophet used to

[192] Qur'an 17:44.
[193] Asad, 584.
[194] Et-Taberî, 5:287-88.
[195] Ibid, 5:287.

give the weekly Friday sermon atop the stump of a tree in the mosque, but that eventually a pulpit was made and when he began to use the pulpit instead of the tree stump, the stump began to cry until the Prophet comforted it and calmed it down. These two reports suggest that inanimate objects like the ground or like a tree stump can also praise God and articulate themselves, and therefore, the interpretation of the verse would be that *all* things, not just the beings that we consider animate, praise God. Al-Ṭabarī adds that this includes animals, who do *tasbīḥ* of God with their own tongues in a language we do not understand.[196]

al-Zamakhsharī: al-Zamakhsharī's commentary focuses on a similar issue, noting that *everything* makes *tasbīḥ* of God, even though "you fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him." Al-Zamakhsharī specifies that the "you" being addressed here is the disbelievers, who are unable to see how all creation worships God because they do not reflect on God's creation and they do not recognize the proofs of the Creator. With this in mind, al-Zamakhsharī translates the last part of the verse "Verily He is forbearing, much-forgiving" as also being addressed to the disbelievers, as God is being forbearing to them by not punishing them immediately, even though they deserve it due to their heedlessness and their ignoring of the *tasbīḥ* of God's creatures.[197]

al-Rāzī: al-Rāzī, like al-Ṭabarī before him, has an extensive discussion about what exactly is included in the "not a single thing…" part of the verse. One side of the debate says it is referring to animate things, like humans and animals, while the other side says it refers to all things, living and non-living.[198] Ultimately, al-Rāzī seems to side with the latter opinion, as al-Ṭabarī did, and he says that it represents the "*majāzī*" (i.e. metaphorical) *tasbīḥ* that all things do.

al-Qurṭubī: al-Qurṭubī's commentary also begins by discussing what is meant by everything making *tasbīḥ*. He says one interpretation is that it refers to everything that has reason (*'aql*), and the reference to the heavens and the earth is actually a reference to the reasoning beings that *inhabit* the heavens and the

[196] Ibid.
[197] Zamakhsharī, 3:1123-24.
[198] Er-Razî, 14:494-96.

earth (i.e. the angels, the *jinn*, the humans). A second opinion is that the verse means "everything" in a general sense, i.e. every created thing. Then al-Qurṭubī branches into a side discussion to try to explain how inanimate things could make *tasbīḥ*: he says that their very existence is a form of *tasbīḥ* to God, because their existence is a proof of God's ability to create.[199] Alternatively, if one were to interpret it literally, then it would just be that everything is making a form of *tasbīḥ*, but humanity simply cannot understand the language or their method by which other things make *tasbīḥ*. A third opinion, however, does not interpret the verse as referring to non-living things. Rather, only living things make *tasbīḥ*, this position says. As evidence for their argument, they cite three reports, al-Qurṭubī notes: first, a report from Ikrima who said that the tree makes *tasbīḥ* but not the tent pole (i.e. the pole made of wood from a dead tree); second, a report from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī that the tree makes *tasbīḥ* but not the table; third, a Prophetic report wherein the Prophet learns that two people are being punished in their graves for sins they have done, and so he orders that a tree be planted over their graves and says, "my hope is that as long as these [trees] do not dry up, their punishment will be lightened."[200] This statement is significant because when the Prophet reportedly says, "as long as these [trees] do not dry up" it means that when they are alive (and not dry), they are praising God and doing *tasbīḥ* and therefore lightening the punishment of the sinners, but when they dry up and die, they stop making *tasbīḥ* so their positive impact is gone.[201] This is a rather clever way of deducing that living things (like a tree) make *tasbīḥ* while non-living things (like a table or dead tree) do not. However, these are not the only relevant reports, and al-Qurṭubī actually cites nine other references to support the position that *everything*, and not just living things, makes *tasbīḥ* of God. With all those references, al-Qurṭubī concludes that *all* things make *tasbīḥ* of God, not just living things.[202]

al-Bayḍāwī: al-Bayḍāwī combines the two positions we have seen so far, saying that *tasbīḥ* can mean both a literal *tasbīḥ* of God (for things that can speak), or it

[199] Kurtubî, 10:404.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid, 10:405.
[202] Ibid, 10:406-7.

can be a metaphorical *tasbīḥ* (for non-living things). The metaphorical *tasbīḥ* involves them being an evidence for God's power to create — similar to what al-Qurṭubī says about the *tasbīḥ* of non-living things. As for those who do not understand (i.e. those addressed by the verse) — al-Bayḍāwī says this refers to the polytheists, who do not understand or comprehend how everything makes *tasbīḥ* because they do not think and reflect on creation. As for the last part of the verse, al-Bayḍāwī says that God is "forbearing" in that he does not immediately punish the polytheists even though they deserve it, and He is "much-forgiving" in that He forgives those who repent.[203]

Ibn Kathīr: Ibn Kathīr begins by noting that *tasbīḥ* can come in many varieties and languages — it includes witnessing that God is One, and acting as a proof of His Oneness, and everything is doing this *tasbīḥ*.[204] As for why humans might not understand the *tasbīḥ*, the reason is because our language is different. But nevertheless, he argues, the animals, plants and even objects like rocks and stones make *tasbīḥ*. That being said, Ibn Kathīr also mentions that another opinion (one that he himself does not seem to agree with, but would like to mention) is that only things with a soul do *tasbīḥ*, meaning living things. In this opinion, non-living things no longer make *tasbīḥ*, and their argument for that is the same Prophetic hadith about the tree over the grave benefitting the buried people until it dries up. Like, al-Bayḍāwī, Ibn Kathīr then mentions that the closing part of the verse means that God is forbearing with the people who deserve punishment, because He delays their punishment, and He is forgiving with the people who repent and turn back to Him.[205]

al-Jalālayn: The Jalālayn's commentary simply says that everything — literally everything — does *tasbīḥ* of God but that humanity does not understand because this *tasbīḥ* is in a different language. They also comment that God being "forbearing" means that He does not rush in punishing humanity.[206]

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[203] Beydâvî, 2:649.
[204] İbn Kesîr, 19:90-91.
[205] Ibid.
[206] "Tafsir Al-Jalalayn," *al-Tafsir,* Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought.

4.5.2 Summary of the Classical Interpretations:

The bulk of material in the classical commentaries on this verse tend to focus on the question of what is meant by "everything does *tasbīḥ*" — is it all reasoning beings (like humans, *jinn* and angels), all living things (which would include animals and plants) or all things in an absolute sense? These positions all have verses, hadith and reports that would seem to support them, but the majority opinion amongst these commentators above is that the verse refers to *all* things. That is what al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr and the two Jalāl al-Dīn's all agree on. This *tasbīḥ* is simply happening in a language we cannot understand, which is why we do not notice it. A variant position of this is that everything does do *tasbīḥ*, but that *tasbīḥ* of the non-living things is done not through them actually saying something, but through them acting as an evidence and manifestation of God's power to create — this is how al-Zamakhsharī explains the issue. Al-Rāzī offers something similar when he says that the *tasbīḥ* of the non-living things is a *majāzī* (metaphorical) *tasbīḥ*.

Apart from this, the classical commentators engage in two other major discussions: who are the people who fail to understand the *tasbīḥ* of all things? Is it just the polytheists, or is it all humanity? Some — al-Zamakhsharī, al-Bayḍāwī and al-Rāzī — mention it may refer to just the polytheists, who in their heedlessness do not reflect on God's signs and do not notice the *tasbīḥ* of all things. Others say that this is addressing all of humanity, and human beings cannot understand the *tasbīḥ* because they are not speaking the same language. The second discussion is about God being forbearing and forgiving — most of the commentators understand this to be referring to polytheists and repenters respectively. In other words, God is forbearing with the polytheists by not punishing them right away, and He is forgiving with those who repent.

4.5.3 Contemporary Interpretations:

In contemporary interpretations, this verse is frequently used to discuss the need to protect animals and plants,[207] and the idea of a "*tawḥīdī* paradigm" of

[207] Özdemir, *Çevre ve Din,* 161.

nature.[208] In this *tawḥīdī* paradigm, there is a harmony within all of creation that unifies everything.[209] The harmony is that everything — from the plants to the animals to the rocks to all living and non-living things — is all in worship of God, and united in recognizing His Oneness. As the classical commentators pointed out, everything worships God by their own special language, even if humanity cannot observe or understand it. The contemporary thinkers take this further, emphasizing that because all of these things are worshipping God, humanity must protect these things, avoid causing harm, keep them clean, maintain a balance, and in general, live in harmony with the world and the surrounding environment.

Related to this discussion is the idea that the entire universe has a metaphysical dimension in addition to its physical dimension.[210] It is in this metaphysical dimension that all of creation is making *tasbīḥ* of God, in a language humanity cannot understand. But even though man does not understand or hear, the entire earth is in remembrance of God, and therefore, by extension, the entire earth is a place of remembrance of God — in other words, the entire earth is a masjid, a sacred space.[211] There is not a single place in it where worship of God is not taking place.[212] In this regard, a famous Prophetic hadith about the whole world being the masjid of the believer is mentioned by classical commentators.[213] This means that humanity must take care of the entire world, not just of animals and plants. The same reverence that believers show for the masjid and other sacred spaces should be shown to the entire earth. As a side-note: when using the term "sacred space" I use it in the popular sense of a place of worship. This is an important distinction because some contemporary thinkers in the discourse take issue with labelling nature as "sacred," which they argue is a form of polytheism. Rather, "nature reflects the glory of sacredness but is not itself

[208] Sayed Sikandar Shah, 245.
[209] Ibid.
[210] İbrahim Özdemir, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Approach to the Environment," in *A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'an: The Example of Risale-i Nur*, (İstanbul, Turkey: Sözler Publications, 2000), 5.
[211] Yıldırım, 84.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Vehbi Karakaş and Nurdan Mendeş, "Çevre Kavramına Kur'an ve Sünnet Merkezli bir Yaklaşım," *Ekev Akademi Dergisi*, no. 63 (January 2015): 364.

sacred," in other words, it reflects the power of the Creator, and should be respected because of its Creator, not because of what it is itself.[214]

The two previous points were picked up by a significant number of the contemporary thinkers, and were repeated themes. In addition to these recurring themes, I also found a few less frequent ideas that were nonetheless fascinating for their insight. A few of the thinkers actually referenced the classical tradition, especially al-Zamakhsharī's concept that the non-living beings do *tasbīḥ* not through actual words, but through their being manifestations and signs of God's power to create.[215] Another thinker — Ahmet Erkol in "İslam Kozmoloji Öğretisinde Allah - Tabiat ve İnsan İlişkisi Bağlamında Doğa ve Doğanın Korunması" — argues that humanity must keep its environmental footprint light because causing a disruption in the harmony of creation causes a disruption in the *tasbīḥ* that all things are making to God.[216]

4.5.4 Comparing the Classical and the Contemporary:

There are several key points where there are aspects of continuity and discontinuity between the classical and the contemporary — I proceed through these various points below. First is the question: who makes this *tasbīḥ*? In the classical sources, there is an extensive discussion as to how absolute and general the Qur'anic verse is when it says "and there is not a single thing but it extols…" — is this referring to living things, or reasoning things, or things with souls? Or does it include non-living things as well? The classical commentators tended towards saying the verse means "everything" in an absolute, general sense, and this is also the position that most of the contemporary sources take.[217]

Then the next point is: how does everything make *tasbīḥ*? The classical commentators have a lengthy discussion in this regard about how non-living

[214] Ammar, 196.
[215] Recep Ardoğan, "İslam'da Çevre Teolojisinin Pratiğe Yansıması: Çevre Ahlakı," *Birey ve Toplum* 2, no. 3 (Spring 2012): 123.
[216] Ahmet Erkol, "İslam Kozmoloji Öğretisinde Allah - Tabiat ve İnsan İlişkisi Bağlamında Doğa ve Doğanın Korunması," *Marife Dini Araştırmalar Dergisi* 18, no. 2 (December 2018): 580.
[217] Yaran, 132.

things, or non-humans, might make *tasbīḥ*. Several options are presented: they make *tasbīḥ* but not in a language humans understand, they make metaphorical *tasbīḥ*, or their making *tasbīḥ* is just their existence, which acts as a proof of God's creative power and thus is in praise of Him. The contemporary thinkers also take differing positions in this regard, although the general trend is to simply acknowledge that all things make *tasbīḥ*, all things are in worship of God, and humans just do not have the capacity to understand *how* that is happening. I was interested to see how modern thinkers would interact with the idea of non-living things making *tasbīḥ*, given that they are publishing before a more skeptical world than their pre-modern counterparts, and given that the idea of non-living, inanimate objects making *tasbīḥ* might seem out of place in modern studies. However, I was surprised to see that on the whole, a wide number of these contemporary sources actually followed the example of the classical interpretations, and understood the verse to mean that everything, including inanimate objects, are making *tasbīḥ*. That being said, I did notice a little more of a tendency to lean towards al-Zamakhsharī's explanation that non-living things do *tasbīḥ* by their existence, and are not actually speaking *tasbīḥ* of their Lord, and al-Zamakhsharī is mentioned by name to cite this position, which is breaking away from the more mainstream position of the other classical commentators. This may in part be due to al-Zamakhsharī's Mu'tazilite theology, as Mu'tazilism tends to be characterized as more "rationalist" and less "tradition-based" than the orthodox theological schools of Islam.

However, despite these similarities, it must also be recognized that the classical texts are not really deriving from this verse a call to action to protect the world or protect the environment. While they do seem to encourage not being heedless, and reflecting on God's signs, obeying God, and making repentance, they are not saying that this verse should be the standard for setting up society-wide action. In contrast, the contemporary thinkers *do* see in this verse, and others, a call to action; if all things are making *tasbīḥ*, then humanity must protect them, and must protect the environment we are all in.

Then there is the question of: who is being addressed in "but you fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him"? This is a point where the classical

discussion — debating whether this means all human beings or just the polytheists who are heedless of God's sights — far outweighs the contemporary thinkers, who do not seem to feel a need to debate the question, and tend to assume it is simply addressing all of humanity.[218] Correspondingly, while the classical *tafsīr* debate whether the reason for not knowing is being heedless and not reflecting (like the polytheists) or just not knowing the language (like all humans), the contemporary thinkers simply conclude that this is a matter of just not knowing the language.

Another point of discussion that seems important to the classical texts but not to the contemporary texts is the question of who the ending of the verse is connected to; in other words, when God says He is forbearing and much-forgiving, is it meant to be directed to different groups of people? The classical commentators say the forbearing aspect is addressed to the disbelievers, who are not being punished immediately despite deserving it, while the much-forgiving aspect is addressed to the repenters, who acknowledge their wrong and repent to God. As for the contemporary thinkers, I did not find any contemporary commentary about this last portion of the verse in their thought processes. This seems to be a general pattern — the contemporary thinkers also tended to not discuss the ending portion of the previous verse we looked at above. However, I would argue that this last portion of the verse is actually crucial to how we understand the entirety of the verse, as it is teaching us how the Creator describes Himself, and is emphasizing certain aspects of Himself (have forbearance and forgiveness) that are key to motivating humanity to seek to repent, to refrain from their wrong actions in how they treat the world, and to repair the damage they have done. In other words, this is a key part of the verse.

Altogether, then, there are quite a few similarities and points of continuity — e.g. in how all things are being described here, and all things are making *tasbīḥ* — but there are also several other issues that are important to the classical commentaries that are generally overlooked by the contemporary writers. Moreover, the systematic action that is being advocated by the contemporary

[218] Mawil Izzi Dien, "Islam and the Environment: Theory and Practice," *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 18, no. 1 (April 1997): 2.

thinkers is not really found in the classical sources, which seem to emphasize instead one's personal relationship with God, and are not advocating for a kind of systematized society-wide effort to protect and preserve the environment.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters, I detailed: a) how I identified the Qur'anic verses which form the core of the contemporary discourse around Islamic environmentalism; b) how I collected and studied two sets of interpretations — one from the classical Sunni tradition, and one from modern scholars of environmental Islam — regarding these Qur'anic verses; and c) how those two sets of interpretations compare with each other, what continuities and discontinuities exist between the two sets, and what this tells us about the development of the idea of an *Islamic* environmentalism. The data presented in the previous chapter has helped shed light on the extent to which the classical *tafsīr* have impacted contemporary interpretations and contemporary notions of Islamic environmentalism. In the comparison sections that follow each verse's commentary, we have seen the following trends:

Where the classical texts tend to provide a wide spectrum of interpretations and positions for a given verse, the contemporary thinkers tend to focus on the one interpretation that is most relevant to their purposes. This is, to some degree, expected given the difference in the genres of these texts. Whereas the *tafsīr* texts are meant to give wholistic commentary on the verses, the contemporary writings on eco-Islam are referencing the verses with the goal of making the case for an Islamic environmentalism. Therefore, the fact that they narrow down the spectrum of interpretations and discussions to only that which they find relevant to Islamic environmentalism is natural.

Secondly, where the classical texts tend to provide framestories, details on the context of revelation, and also additional stories or historical data that is said to be connected to a verse, the contemporary thinkers most of the time do not mention any of this attached framestory information. Rather, the contemporary thinkers tend to universalize the meaning and impact of the Qur'anic verses, and

they avoid saying that this verse is meant to refer to a certain group in the past. To give an example: where the classical commentators interpret 7:31 to be referring to the practice of the non-Muslim Arabs to make *ṭawāf* without wearing anything, the contemporary thinkers do not mention any such practice. Here, the classical interpreters see the verse as referring directly to a certain scenario in the past, whereas the contemporary have generalized the impact of the verse by not mentioning that scenario.

Thirdly, regarding how mankind is supposed to take lessons from these verses, the classical *tafsīr*s seem to be encouraging individual spiritual changes, i.e. changes between how one interacts with God. On the other hand, the contemporary thinkers tend to emphasize the society-level actions that must be undertaken, and they tend to interpret verses as a society-wide call to action. That is not to say that the contemporary writings completely ignore the spiritual side of the verse. They do often acknowledge how this verse encourages one to develop a relationship with God. However, they also take things further, and add on an additional layer of encouragement by trying to derive from the verse a systematic and complex plan of action for how to better protect the environment. A good example of this difference is in how the two groups referenced our fifth verse: where the classical *tafsīr*s mainly saw this verse as an encouragement to reflect on God's signs and repent to God, the contemporary thinkers mentioned those actions while also encouraging the need to protect the entire world and ensure its continued harmony.

That being said, there are also a significant amount of continuities between the two. First of all, we see several instances where the contemporary sources quote directly from the classical traditions. This occurs with al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn Kathīr and others. In addition to these direct references, we also see continuity in how they approach certain issues — for example, animal rights, and the relationship between the human *umma* and the *umma*s of the animals in our fourth verse: 6:38.

To summarize, the answer of how much of an impact the classical texts had on this contemporary eco-Islam discourse is mixed. There is a definite influence

there, and even some explicit references back to the classical tradition; however, the classical corpus does *not* seem to be the dominant force in the contemporary discourse. Rather, the contemporary writers are more influenced by their own direct readings of the Qur'an, interpreting it in a way that fits their time and needs, rather than going solely through the classical tradition. They are also interested in the universal applicabilities to these verses, rather than in the particular frame stories and historical scenarios attached to the verses.

However, the fact that there is some change and some discontinuity is inevitable, especially given all that has happened between the classical period and modernity. In fact, just the onset of modernity alone has caused massive changes in how we think and how we relate to the Qur'an and the Islamic tradition. The intellectual, scientific and cultural changes that accompanied the start of modernity has had an impact on virtually every corner of the world, and the Islamic world's transition into modernity was one fraught with conflict and controversy. Among a great many other changes, the traditional way of looking at human history, human society, and mankind's role in the wider world — as God's *khalīfa* on earth — was challenged by the popular sentiment that empirical science, with its claims about man's place in the natural world, was contrary to and dominant over religious belief. This intellectual conflict has tended to produce two extreme reactions on the part of Muslim thinkers: one extreme is to completely abandon the classical tradition and claim that it was backwards and useless. The other extreme is to argue that whatever "good" things modernity offers — (e.g. science and technological advancement, democracy, rational thinking, freedom of expression, etc.) — was already fully present in the Islamic tradition, a claim that is too often made without taking a wholistic and sincere view of the tradition, and a claim that overemphasizes minority or obscure opinions rather than faithfully representing what would have been the actual mainstream positions of the classical period. In both of these extreme cases, modernity has impacted and skewed how the modern Muslim views the classical tradition, and so we must be wary of offering any easy answers when it comes to the existence of an Islamic environmentalism. However, in the case of Islamic environmentalism, I believe that this study of the classical tradition has provided enough evidence to say that there definitely

is a basis for Islamic environmentalism within the classical tradition. This is not in the exact form and to the same extent that some contemporary thinkers have argued — but the roots are certainly there, as shown in the famous classical texts we've studied. If I may use what is an appropriate metaphor for a project on environmentalism: we can think of the idea of Islamic environmentalism as a tree growing out of the Islamic tradition. In this tree, some branches have been grafted on that come from outside the tradition, from a completely different tree (i.e. modern environmentalist thought); other branches of the tree have been pruned or completely cut off (i.e. the aspects of the classical texts that are skipped over in the contemporary discourse). However, despite both of these additions and subtractions, we can still say that the roots of this tree — of this contemporary discourse — are in the Islamic tradition.

5.1 Limitations, Drawbacks, and the Potential for Future Studies:

In this thesis, I have attempted to bring attention to an existing gap within the Islamic environmentalism discourse, but I acknowledge that it is not without its fair share of flaws, gaps, and methodological issues. Perhaps the biggest flaw is the limited use of sources and the attempt to compare what are essentially two different types of scholarship: *tafsīr*s on the one hand, and studies on environmental Islam on the other. In the case of the *tafsīr*s, these are obviously not monographs on environmentalism, but rather vast works of exegesis that touch on a wide range of issues from legal to spiritual to historical. Therefore, much of the material included in the *tafsīr*s on the verses we studied was not of direct relevance to environmentalism, but was more focused on the linguistic aspects of the verses. While I freely admit that this creates issues in the comparison, this is a limitation not of my own choice but due to the nature of the available classical sources. Based on the evidences used by modern eco-Islam proponents, *tafsīr* was the best set of sources I could identify for a potential comparison. Now within *tafsīr*, I could have included more works besides the seven selected above. Also, with my modern sources on environmental Islam, I had to limit myself to only 80 sources out of the inital 200 I had identified as being relevant. This means I left out many sources that could have offered potentially different ways of making the case for an Islamic environmentalism.

This choice was a product of the limited time and expectations of a master's thesis project.

To address some of these flaws, a future iteration of this research could do the following: first, and most obvious, is to include more sources. "More sources" for the modern period would mean going beyond the 80-some texts I input into Atlas TI to include more of the original pool of 200 sources discussing environmental Islam I had initially collected. As for the classical period, there are a number of directions in which the source pool can expand. More *tafsīr* texts could be included in the research. In its current state, the thesis has what I argue is a good representation of early and classical Sunni thought, but this means leaving out *tafsīr*s from the 16th to the 20th centuries. An expanded project would benefit from *tafsīr*s from this later period, including the substantial work done in *tafsīr* by Ottoman-era scholars as well as the *tafsīr*s of 19th and 20th Muslim intellectuals writing on the cusp of modernity and who in many ways act as a bridge between the traditional and the modern periods. With an expanded set of 19th/20th century thinkers, we may be able to find more examples of an emerging discourse around environmentalism and environmentalist issues that act as the link between our classical and contemporary writers. Apart from expanding the timeline we pull from, the sources of non-Sunni Muslim scholars could also be considered; e.g. Shi'a *tafsīr*s from the classical down to the modern period.

Apart from increasing the number and range of *tafsīr* works, a future project should also expand beyond the genre of *tafsīr* and look into two other key sources in Islamic thought: hadith collections and attached hadith commentary, as well as Islamic law (*fiqh*) books and attached legal commentary. However, there would be significant obstacles in attempting to attain this more wholistic picture of the classical period. Where we have a rich literature of *tafsīr* around virtually every verse in the Qur'an, the same is not the case for hadith collections and books of law. Only a few collections of hadith have multiple commentaries on them, unlike the Qur'an which has countless commentaries. With this lack of direct commentary on every hadith collection, it is difficult to predict whether the hadith that modern scholars use in their eco-Islam arguments

would actually have explicit commentary in the pre-modern tradition. Tracking down how that hadith was understood by classical scholars without any direct commentary from those scholars would thus present a very substantial academic challenge. Still, if accomplished, the result would provide much more holistic coverage of the classical interpretations than the thesis in its current form provides.

Apart from increasing the type of sources in our two pools, an updated study could also benefit from adding additional lenses of approach to the intellectual history approach used here. Specifically, taking insight from the longue durée approach,[219] an updated study could look at the impact long-term environmental and geographical changes had on classical scholarly discourse (if it had any impact at all). For instance, there is evidence of multiple measurable changes in average temperature from the 10th to 19th century in the northern hemisphere. Such evidence has resulted in what has been called a "medieval warm period" from roughly 950 to 1250 succeeded by a "little ice age" from the 16th to 19th centuries. Is there any evidence that such periods witnessed a heightened awareness of the fragility of the earth's ecosystem, and the need to take steps to preserve its resources? While I admit long-term temperature changes may very well have gone completely undetected in those periods, there were other, more noticeable long-term developments, like crop intensification and increased crop yields with growth of agricultural technology and techniques. Is there any evidence that the growing abundance of food and sustenance impacted how classical scholars understood the Qur'anic verses on the natural world and the resources God provides to man within it? On the other hand, there were also regional-level crises that today would be understood as stemming from environmental factors, including famines, plagues, and earthquakes. How did scholars understand these events — were they interpreted as a punishment for society's going astray, or as a test, or as a natural part of the way God designs the world? Further research could chronologically map the dates of these regional-wide developments and study how the classical scholarly discourse

[219] The longue durée approach, associated with the French Annales school of history, involves studying history from a macro-chronological perspective, i.e. studying long-term developments and changes rather than short-term political and military events.

about the world, the ecosystem, and role of God and man in such developments changed in response.

Another interesting direction a revised study might go is to study eschatological works within the classical tradition and the impact such works might have on an understanding of man's role in the world. In classical Islamic eschatology, the world has a definite end date — at some point, a cataclysmic set of events will occur by Divine decree, triggering the Final Day and the judgement that will sort humanity between heaven and hell. Numerous Qur'anic verses describe how, for instance, the mountains will be levelled, the seas will boil, and other cataclysmic events will happen. Therefore, a key part of Islamic eschatology is the belief that whatever mankind does, the world is destined to be destroyed sooner or later. Did this eschatological belief have an impact on how classical Muslim civilization viewed its role vis-a-vis the preservation of natural resources and taking care of the natural environment? Whether or not there is enough evidence to come to conclusions one way or another, it would be interesting to contrast this eschatology and the implications it has on human behavior with the principles that underlie many forms of environmentalism today: which is that humans have ultimate agency to control the history and trajectory of the world around them, and that by making certain choices, they can extend the use of the world's resources indefinitely. A closer study of the role Islamic eschatology plays in influencing pre-modern and modern conceptions of the environment would thus further help understand some of the different forms environmentalism has taken and might take in the future.

As the above discussion shows, this field is quite fertile, and there is room for many exciting and insightful projects in the future. At the same time, excellent work has already been done. This study, while it necessarily involves a certain amount of critical scrutiny of the contemporary discourse on eco-Islam, and poking around looking for discontinuities and points of rupture, is not meant as a critique of the modern discourse around eco-Islam. On the contrary, I am deeply invested in the study of the environment, concerned by the growing environmental crisis, and inspired by the work of scholars who, seeing Islam in every aspect of life, seek to understand what an Islamic way to treat the environment entails. I am humbled by the work they have done in this regard.

Thus in its conclusion, this thesis is meant to emphasize not the gaps and ruptures, but the bright horizon of opportunities for future study in this field. I believe this thesis contributes to one corner of the field that has not received as much attention, and despite its drawbacks and flaws, I hope it can play a part in furthering research into the concept of Islamic environmentalism.

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APPENDIX

The following Appendix contains a list of the sources that I input into Atlas TI to build my Qur'anic verse discourse map:

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December, 2011: Participant at the 3rd International Congress on Quality in Education, Konya

February, 2013: Organizer at the Syria Symposium from the Global and Regional Perspectives at Şehir University, Istanbul

October, 2013: Coordinator at the 2nd Turk Arab Youth Congress, Istanbul

April, 2014: Participant at the Intensive week-long Residential Course on Modern Muslim Theology, IIKV, Istanbul

June, 2014: Participant at the 6th International Graduate Conference on Nursi Studies, IIKV, Istanbul

2015: Participant at Modern Political Thought Reading Circle, BISAV Foundation, Istanbul

November, 2015: Organizer at Two Hands, One Brush with Doctors Worldwide

April, 2018: Participant at Higher Education and Organization of Knowledge Workshop at Şehir University

May, 2020: Presenter at Ibn Haldun University Graduate Conference

Membership:

2010: Bosphorus Chronicle, Writer

2012-2014: BISAV (Science and Art Foundation), KADEME Programme

2012-2014: Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Youth Congress, Foreign Affairs Commission

Languages:

Turkish

English

Arabic

Ottoman Turkish