

UMAR IBN KHATTAB AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE QUR'AN

Sarah Fahira Nida, Hasan Bisri, and Safruroh

Abstract: This paper discusses the role of Umar ibn Khattab in the process of Quranic revelation. Various books, especially *Tarikh Khulafa* by Jalaluddin as-Suyuthi, frequently depict Umar ibn Khattab as a figure actively involved in several stages of revelation through his words and actions. Avraham Hakim even considers this to be evidence of Umar ibn Khattab's active partnership with God in the process of revelation. With this background, the paper systematically examines the brief biography, involvement in the revelation process, and contextual interpretation of Umar ibn Khattab. The results and discussion reveal that Umar ibn Khattab was a brilliant, creative, and innovative companion of Prophet Muhammad, affirming his involvement in the revelation process not only due to his selectiveness but also based on his characteristics. Umar ibn Khattab's courage sets a good precedent for a critical stance and contextual interpretation of certain Quranic verses, such as those related to prisoners of war and hypocrites.

Keywords: Umar ibn Khattab; relationship; Qur'an; revelation; contextual interpretation

Abstrak: Tulisan ini membahas relasi Umar ibn Khattab dalam proses pewahyuan al-Qur'an. Dalam beragam kitab, khususnya *Tarikh Khulafa* karya Jalaluddin as-Suyuthi, Umar ibn Khattab cukup sering digambarkan sebagai sosok yang terlibat dalam beberapa proses pewahyuan melalui perkataan ataupun tindakannya. Bahkan, Avraham Hakim menyebut hal tersebut sebagai bukti kemitraan aktif Umar ibn Khattab dengan Tuhan (dalam proses pewahyuan). Dengan latar demikian, tulisan ini secara sistematis membahas biografi singkat, keterlibatan dalam proses pewahyuan dan penafsiran kontekstual Umar ibn Khattab. Dari hasil dan pembahasan, dapat ditemukan bahwa Umar ibn Khattab merupakan sosok sahabat Nabi Saw. yang brilian, kreatif dan inovatif, sehingga keterlibatannya dalam proses pewahyuan terafirmasi bukan hanya dari sisi keterpilihan, melainkan dari sisi kepribadiannya. Atas keberanian itu pula, Umar ibn Khattab adalah preseden yang baik atas sikap kritis dan penafsiran kontekstual terhadap beberapa ayat al-Qur'an, seperti mengenai tawanan perang dan orang-orang munafik.

Kata kunci: Umar ibn Khattab; relasi; al-Qur'an; pewahyuan; penafsiran kontekstual

Introduction

Conceptually, the theological or religious doctrine thinking always refers to two sources: divine revelation as stated in the holy book of the Qur'an and the historical life and prophethood of Muhammad compiled in hadith and sirah (Arib et al., 2022; Kamarudin & Mokodenseho, 2022; Bahren & Mokodenseho, 2023). Through examining these three sources, Muslim scholars aim to internalize and strengthen aspects of faith and Islam, focusing on exploring issues of creed or aqeedah and sharia through a normative-theocentric approach. This involves understanding Islam by emphasizing its Islamic symbols and asserting its correctness, viewing differing perspectives as incorrect or even misguided, and considering the fundamental and authentic teachings of Islam as originating directly from God, untouched by human thought (Abdullah, 2010; Bennett, 2012; Qomar, 2018).

The significance of these three sources for various issues in the lives of Muslim communities has led scholars to delve into their historicity. As generally acknowledged, the Muslim community's foundation and guide for life is the Qur'an, which is in the primary position, followed by the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, documented in hadith and Sirah. This has sparked the attention of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars further to explore the position and relations among these three sources. For instance, according to one opinion, the relationship between the Qur'an and the collection of hadith and sirah is between canon and sub-canon (Majdi, 2022). Still, there are also perspectives positioning hadith and sirah as products of history or fabrications resulting from social-historical evolution and tendentious reflections that developed within Muslim societies during the second-century hijriah. Therefore, they cannot be considered historical documents but texts reflecting the ideas, beliefs, and inclinations of the scholars who produced and disseminated them (Goldziher, 1971).

Regarding the Qur'an as the foundation and guiding principle of the Islamic Community (Mokodenseho & Arib, 2022; Arib & Mokodenseho, 2023), numerous accounts assert the exceptional role of Umar ibn Khattab, one of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (*The Rashidun Caliphate* or *al-Khilāfah ar-Rāshidah*), positioned as an active partner in the process of Qur'anic revelation (in terms of Avraham Hakim). Hadiths detailing Umar ibn Khattab's active

partnership in the revelation process, as documented in *Tarikh Khulafa* by as-Suyuthi (2017), can lead to various assumptions. Some suggest that these hadiths aim to magnify Umar ibn Khattab's leadership image or even discredit other prominent figures like Abu Bakar, Uthman, and Ali, collectively known as the Rightly Guided Caliphs '*The Rashidun Caliphate*'.

However, referencing opinions from Madjid (2019) or Cak Nur, who argue that during the prophetic era, none displayed greater passion and steadfast commitment to the Qur'an than Umar ibn Khattab. Even a narration from Prophet Muhammad states that if there were to be another prophet after him, it would undoubtedly be Umar ibn Khattab. Therefore, narratives about Umar ibn Khattab's active partnership in the revelation process should not be casually dismissed. This paper is specifically dedicated to describing the connection between Umar ibn Khattab and the revelation of the Qur'an, delineated into three discussions: a brief biography, involvement in the revelation, and contextual interpretation of selected Qur'anic verses.

Method

Based on the data aspects considered, this paper constitutes a literature review, utilizing literary materials as the focal point of the investigation. From an analytical perspective, this research adopts a qualitative analysis framework, emphasizing deductive-inductive and logical-scientific inference processes, and is characterized by a non-quantitative approach (Kaelan, 2010; Kasiram, 2010; Moleong, 1996; Sugiyono, 2011).

The data sources for this research were compiled from personal collections, encompassing both downloaded scholarly articles and books. The primary data sources include articles from the book titled "Context: 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb" (2017) by Avraham Hakim and the book *Tarikh Khulafa* (2017) by as-Suyuthi. These primary sources, along with related secondary materials on the theme, were systematically analyzed to generate insights and syntheses concerning the exploration and examination of the Western and Islamic perspectives on Umar ibn Khattab and his relationship with the Qur'an (Azwar, 2014; Mustaqim, 2014). Thus, procedurally, this paper produces

descriptive data, represented by written words discussing predetermined subtopics outlined in the introduction.

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Results and Discussion

Short Biography of Umar ibn Khattab

Umar ibn Khattab's full name is Umar ibn Khattab ibn Nufail ibn Abd al-Uzza ibn Rabah ibn Abdullah ibn Qart ibn Razah ibn 'Adi ibn Ka'ab ibn Lu'ay ibn Ghalib ibn Fihrah al-Adawi al-Quraisy. Umar's lineage intersects with the lineage of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) at Ka'ab ibn Lu'ay, the seventh grandfather of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the eighth grandfather of Umar ibn Khattab. He was born 13 years after the Year of the Elephant in Mecca and passed away on the 25th of Dhu al-Hijjah in 23 Hijri, at 63. As commonly narrated, Umar ibn Khattab died due to a stabbing by an enslaved person named Abu Lu'lu'ah while performing prayer and was buried beside the Prophet's (PBUH) grave.

Throughout his life, Umar ibn Khattab was known as a firm, strong, courageous, literate, and unforgiving personality. Before embracing Islam, he was at the forefront of rejecting Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) message and opposing Islam. He did not hesitate to persecute those who openly or were known to have converted to Islam, urging them to return to the religion of their ancestors. However, after embracing Islam, Umar ibn Khattab's characteristics and demeanour became a source of strength for the Muslim

community. This earned him the title of al-Faruq, meaning the differentiator, as he boldly delineated the boundaries between right and wrong, good and bad.

In addition to being known for his distinctive traits and demeanour, Umar ibn Khattab is recognized as a companion of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), possessing greatness, excellence, and uniqueness. For instance, Umar ibn Khattab is counted among the ten companions guaranteed paradise, and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) specifically prayed for Islam to be strengthened by one of the two Amrs, and Umar is classified as one of the *The Rashidun Caliphate*, among other accolades. Umar ibn Khattab is an exceptional and extraordinary companion due to his greatness and virtues. Some narrations even state that Umar ibn Khattab had direct or indirect involvement in the revelation process, a fact acknowledged by a few individuals and many prominent figures.

Moreover, Umar ibn Khattab has a somewhat different perspective towards Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). According to Cak Nur (2019), Umar ibn Khattab perceived Muhammad (PBUH) not merely based on his personality but because he was the Prophet and Messenger, the envoy of God who received revelations. With this viewpoint, Umar ibn Khattab is documented as someone who respected Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) but was not hesitant to voice objections when he felt that the thoughts or actions of the Prophet (PBUH) were not grounded in direct divine guidance. This perspective has given rise to specific discourses in the exegesis or ulumul Quran regarding Umar ibn Khattab's involvement in the revelation process, which will be further discussed in subsequent sub-sections.

Umar ibn Khattab's Involvement in the Revelation of the Qur'an

In several narrations, Umar ibn Khattab's involvement in the revelation of the Qur'an is illustrated by his ability to formulate rules or take a stance on a particular issue according to the Qur'an before the revelation concerning the same matter. In other words, Umar ibn Khattab had an extraordinary ability to "read the mind of God." In this context, when someone expressed an opinion on a matter and Umar ibn Khattab articulated his opinion on the same issue, the Qur'an was revealed according to the thoughts of Umar ibn Khattab. This statement is reinforced by comments attributed to Mujahid bin

Jabr and Ali bin Abi Thalib, as quoted by Hakim (2017), stating that some decisions in the Qur'an were based on the views, ideas, or expressions of Umar ibn Khattab.

Statements regarding Umar ibn Khattab's involvement in revelation have given rise to an expression, some directly associated with Umar ibn Khattab himself, suggesting mutual understanding, agreement, or approval between Allah SWT and Umar ibn Khattab in the revelation of the Qur'an regarding specific matters. In this context, Hakim (2017) quotes two versions of Umar ibn Khattab's expressions about his relationship with Allah SWT, narrated by Ibn Hanbal. In the first version, Umar ibn Khattab declares, "I agree (*wāfaqtu*) with God in three things," while in the second version, Umar ibn Khattab states, "God agreed with me (*wāfaqanī*) in three things." The first version assumes that Umar ibn Khattab reads the thoughts of God, while the second version concludes that God reads the thoughts of Umar ibn Khattab.

In another narration, Umar ibn Khattab seems to dictate Allah SWT's revelation to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This occurred when Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) conveyed the revelation of the Qur'an, Surat al-Muminun (23:12-14), regarding the creation of humans. After hearing a detailed explanation of the creation of humans, Umar ibn Khattab exclaimed, "Glory be to Allah, the Best Creator (*fata'bārakaallahu absanul khāliqīn*)."
Subsequently, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) responded, "Thus, the revelation was revealed, O Umar!" (Muqatil in Hakim, 2017). From this account, Umar ibn Khattab, once again, appears to be reading the mind of God, or God reads the mind of Umar ibn Khattab, resulting in the exact words of verse 14 of Surat al-Muminun being uttered by Umar ibn Khattab.

The explanation and descriptions above further strengthen the view that Umar ibn Khattab is one of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) companions who possessed extraordinary abilities and uniqueness. This is not only due to the characteristics and attitudes of Umar ibn Khattab but also undoubtedly the blessings bestowed by Allah SWT, the Most Merciful. The greatness or uniqueness of Umar ibn Khattab's position in the history of Islamic civilisation is not only acknowledged by Muslims but also recognised by non-Muslims. For instance, although differing from conventional and common understanding, Crone & Cook (1977) position Umar ibn Khattab as al-Masih

or the saviour and Muhammad as someone holding a position similar to John the Baptist. The basis for this argument stems from analysing the term *al-Farūq* (Umar's title) in Syriac literature, which conveys the meaning "the saviour." Thus, since ancient times, Umar has positioned himself and has been positioned as a central figure in Islamic civilisation.

In addition to the cases explained earlier, as-Suyuthi (2017), in the book *Tarikh Khulafa*, specifically discusses *muwāfaqatu 'Umar*, referring to the opinions of Umar that are agreed upon or affirmed by the Qur'an and believed to be a chronological factor in the revelation of several verses in the Qur'an. The instances of *muwāfaqatu 'Umar* cited by as-Suyuthi in his book are as follows:

1. Umar ibn Khattab's statement to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to designate the station of Ibrahim as a place of prayer, which resulted in the revelation of Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 125: "And take, [O believers], from the standing place of Abraham a place of prayer."
2. Umar ibn Khattab's suggestion to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that his wives should wear hijab. Subsequently, verse 31 of Surah An-Nur was revealed: "...and let them drape their headcovers over their chests..."
3. When the wives of the Prophet, including Umar ibn Khattab's daughter Hafsah, were jealous of each other, Umar advised Hafsah against such behaviour, warning her that the Prophet might divorce her and that Allah would replace her with a better wife. Following this advice, a Quranic verse was revealed with the same content: "It may be if he divorced you (all), that his Lord will give him in your place wives better than you..."
4. In a narration about the prohibition of intoxicants (khamr), before the revelation of the specific verse, Umar prayed: "O Allah, make it clear to us regarding intoxicants with a clear statement." Subsequently, the verse "They ask you about wine and gambling..." was revealed. Despite this, Umar prayed again due to concerns about the long-term negative effects of intoxicants, leading to the revelation of Surah Al-Ma'idah, verse 90: "Indeed, intoxicants, gambling..."

5. When Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) frequently sought forgiveness for a particular group, Umar remarked, "It is all the same for them." After this, Surah Al-Munafiqun, verse 6, was revealed.
6. During the incident of the false accusation against Aisha (the event of Ifk), Umar expressed disbelief that Allah would deceive the Prophet in his marriage to Aisha. Consequently, verse 16 of Surah An-Nur was revealed: "Exalted are You! This is a great slander."
7. The story of Umar ibn Khattab engaging in marital relations with his wife during the night while fasting. Initially prohibited, Umar consulted with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), leading to the revelation of Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 187.
8. The account of Umar ibn Khattab sleeping and a servant entering prompted Umar to pray to Allah: "O Allah, make it unlawful for someone to enter a house without permission." Subsequently, the verse regarding seeking permission to enter homes was revealed.

Here are several narratives demonstrating the *muwāfaqah* (conformity or agreement) of Umar ibn Khattab's words, statements, and actions with the rules or laws revealed by Allah SWT through His command to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Some scholars mention that Umar's muwāfaqah occurred in more than 20 events, and the eight points highlighted here are considered well-known and valid evidence supporting the claim that Umar ibn Khattab's statements and actions served as a chronological foundation or reason for the revelation of a Quranic verse. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to consider Umar ibn Khattab as someone capable of anticipating the thoughts or revelations of God.

Contextual Interpretation of Prisoners of War and Hypocrites

In addition to being positioned as someone involved in the revelation of the Qur'an, Umar ibn Khattab is also known as an individual who generated brilliant ideas and thoughts, sometimes differing significantly from the prevailing understanding of his time. Concerning the text of the Qur'an, Umar was the initiator of the codification of scattered and dispersed verses. According to Cak Nur (2019), when tracing the historical roots of the codification of the Qur'an, it is impossible to overlook Umar ibn Khattab's creativity as the originator of ideas and the bearer of such innovative

concepts. Cak Nur asserts that Umar's bold proposal for codifying the Qur'an to Abu Bakar is evidence of Umar ibn Khattab as a firm believer who is not dogmatic, utilizing his intellectualism through innovative actions without precedence.

Moreover, the intellectual courage and creativity of Umar ibn Khattab reached a point where he seemed to confront and contradict the literal text of the Qur'an and hadith, categorizing Umar ibn Khattab's interpretation as contextual. In a contextual sense, the term contextual interpretation of the Qur'an refers to interpreting the message and teachings of the Qur'an by considering the context of the text and its application (Saeed, 2016). In other words, this writing positions Umar ibn Khattab as someone capable of explaining the message and teachings of the Qur'an in line with historical considerations of the text and the historical context of its application, particularly regarding prisoners of war (Badr) and hypocrites (Abdullah bin Ubay).

Firstly, Umar ibn Khattab's opinion on the prisoners of war from Badr was expressed after the victory of the Islamic community over the Quraysh disbelievers. At that time, the Muslim community managed to capture many prisoners of war from the Quraysh disbelievers. Subsequently, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) consulted with the companions to determine the fate of these prisoners. As known, rules or laws regarding prisoners of war had yet to be established, and no Quranic verses were revealed. Therefore, sharp differences of opinion arose, especially between Prophet Muhammad and Abu Bakar on one side and Umar ibn Khattab on the other.

In one version, it is narrated that Abu Bakar suggested freeing the prisoners of war upon payment of ransom by their respective families. Abu Bakar stated:

"Do not kill them, for Allah supports us in seeking retribution, killing the polytheists, and defeating them. It is better to let them atone for their sins through the ransom they pay, as the redemption money will strengthen Islam and help finance the war against them. Perhaps God will transform them into supporters of Islam, and they may convert to our religion."

However, in contrast to Abu Bakar's opinion, Umar ibn Khattab proposed and insisted that the prisoners of war from Badr, belonging to the

Quraysh disbelievers, should be killed out of fear that they might leak information and prepare retaliation against the Muslim community. Another reason Umar ibn Khattab considered was that these Badr prisoners of war were leaders of the Quraysh who deliberately and consciously left Mecca to kill Muslims outside Mecca. Umar said, "Kill them all because they are the leaders of the disbelievers and leaders of those who deviate from the right path."

In the end, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) decided to follow Abu Bakar's opinion, not to kill the prisoners of war and to release them through ransom. This decision was based on the fact that some of the captives were blood relatives of several companions. However, Allah revealed Surah al-Anfal verse 67, approving Umar ibn Khattab's opinion and rebuking Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). In this matter, Umar ibn Khattab was portrayed as the only companion who rejected ransom for the prisoners of war and demanded the killing of the Quraysh disbelievers.

Hakim (2017) mentioned that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Abu Bakar seemed to be influenced by tribalism (ashabiyah), a characteristic principle of the pre-Islamic Jahiliyyah era. On the other hand, Umar ibn Khattab appeared to represent the spirit of Islam: to fight against disbelievers regardless of their status. Not only did Umar reject ransom for the prisoners of war, but he also refused his share of the spoils of war. This was evident when Umar became the second caliph after Abu Bakar, shortly after the wars in Syria and Iraq. At that time, Umar ibn Khattab refused to distribute agricultural lands and part of the war spoils among the Muslim soldiers (Hukmiah & Saad, 2020). Instead, he distributed these lands to local farmers, sparking strong protests from some companions led by Bilal bin Rabah. He claimed that Umar ibn Khattab had deviated from the Quranic provisions and the Prophet's tradition. However, after consultation and support from prominent companions and presenting his interpretation of the Islamic teachings behind his policy, Umar ibn Khattab gained the confidence to implement his decision (Madjid, 2019).

From this incident, once again, it is evident that there is alignment and agreement between Umar ibn Khattab's opinions and the Word of Allah, indicating that Umar was a companion of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who

understood the moral and religious ethics of the Quran and Sunnah most profoundly. This further strengthens Umar ibn Khattab's image as an active and intellectually competent partner of his time. In fact, in one narration, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Abu Bakar admitted their guilt for not following Umar's suggestion. They stated that if a divine punishment were to be sent down, Umar would be the only one spared.

Another interpretation of Umar ibn Khattab is related to Abdullah bin Ubay, the leader of the hypocrites in Medina. At that time, Abdullah bin Ubay passed away, and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was invited to lead the funeral prayer by Abdullah bin Ubay's son, who was a brave and devout Muslim. This invitation was intended to show sympathy towards Abdullah bin Ubay's son. However, Umar expressed his disapproval of what Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) intended to do, saying, "O Messenger of Allah, will you offer the funeral prayer for the enemy of Allah, Abdullah bin Ubay, who spoke ill on such and such day?" In another narration, Umar said, "O Messenger of Allah, how can you pray for this hypocrite, whereas during his lifetime, he said, 'The strong among us will drive out the weak from among us'?" (as-Suyuthi, 2017).

Umar quoted Surah al-Munafiqun verse 6, stating that Allah will not forgive the hypocrites, whether Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) seeks forgiveness for them or not. Then, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained that the intention was to please the heart of Abdullah bin Ubay's son, based on the permission mentioned in Surah at-Tawbah verse 80. However, later, Allah revealed Surah at-Tawbah verse 84, "*Wa lā tushalli 'alā abadin minbum māta abadan wa lā taqum 'alā qabrihi...*" "And do not pray [the funeral prayer, O Muhammad], over any of them who has died - ever - or stand at his grave..." (as-Suyuthi, 2017).

In this context, Hakim (2017) views that Umar ibn Khattab not only succeeded in interpreting Surah at-Tawbah verse 80 and Surah al-Munafiqun diligently but also contributed to the revelation of Surah at-Tawbah verse 84, which imposes a complete prohibition on forgiveness for the hypocrites, thus justifying his opinion. On the other hand, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is depicted as moderate and desires to please the heart of Abdullah bin Ubay's son, intending to perform the prayer more than 70 times for the forgiveness

of Abdullah bin Ubay. However, Umar ibn Khattab argued that the expression "70 times" in verse 80 is symbolic and not to be taken literally. Thus, verse 84 signifies Allah's approval of Umar ibn Khattab's symbolic and broad interpretation of the verse, rejecting Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) concrete and narrow interpretation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, regarding the theme of Umar ibn Khattab's relation with the Qur'an, three points can be summarized: first, Umar ibn Khattab is known as a steadfast believer, courageous, intellectually strong, innovative, and creative companion; second, the relationship between Umar ibn Khattab and the Qur'an emerges in his involvement in constructing the historical context (asbab al-nuzul), making some of his words and actions foundational chronological references for scholars of exegesis and Quranic sciences; third, due to his strong intellectualism, innovation, and creativity, Umar ibn Khattab is also engaged in interpreting Quranic verses in a contextual manner of his time, sometimes leading to resistance among fellow companions against his policies and interpretations.

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