

ELEPHANT (AL-FĪL) IN THE QUR'ĀN: BRILL'S ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF THE QUR'ĀN (LETTER E) ENTRY WITH AI-ASSISTED HERMENEUTICAL ANALYSIS

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Elephant (*al-Fīl*) in the Qur'ān:
Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān (Letter E)
with AI-Assisted Hermeneutical Analysis

SŪRAT AL-FĪL (105:1-5)

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ
بِأَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ
أَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ كَيْدَهُمْ فِي تَضْلِيلٍ
وَأَرْسَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ
تَرْمِيهِمْ بِحِجَارَةٍ مِنْ سِجِّيلٍ
فَجَعَلَهُمْ كَعَصِفٍ أَمَاكُولٍ

"Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant? Did He not make their plan go astray? And He sent against them birds in flocks, striking them with stones of baked clay, and made them like eaten straw."

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The event of *al-Fīl* relates to the expedition of Abraha, the Abyssinian ruler of Yemen, who marched toward Makkah with an army including elephants to destroy the Ka'bah. Allah ﷻ miraculously protected His Sacred House.

INTEGRATED METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

CLASSICAL ISLAMIC EXEGESIS
Tafsir works of early and classical scholars

BRILL'S ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF THE QUR'ĀN
Modern academic and critical perspectives

AI-ASSISTED HERMENEUTICAL ANALYSIS
Semantic analysis, text mining, and comparative insights

KEY THEMES

- Divine Protection of the Ka'bah
- Divine Power Over Arrogance
- Failure of Tyranny and Oppression
- Historical Significance (Year of the Elephant)
- Signs and Miracles of Allah ﷻ

Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān (Letter E) provides a critical academic examination of the 'Elephant (*al-Fīl*)' narrative through historical, philological, and comparative approaches.

"Indeed, in that is a sign, but most of them are not believers." (Q. 105:6)

ABSTRACT

The Qur'ānic narrative of *Al-Fīl* (the Elephant), preserved in *Sūrat al-Fīl* (Q. 105), occupies a distinctive place within Islamic intellectual history, Qur'ānic exegesis, and Muslim collective memory. The account commemorates the attempted assault on the Ka'bah by the army of Abraha and the subsequent divine intervention that miraculously thwarted the expedition. While classical Muslim exegetes have generally interpreted the episode as a historical manifestation of divine sovereignty and protection of the sacred sanctuary, modern academic scholarship particularly as represented in Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān has approached the narrative through historical-critical, philological, and comparative frameworks. Such approaches have generated significant scholarly debate concerning historical authenticity, interpretive methodology, and the epistemological foundations of Qur'ānic studies. This article critically examines the "Elephant" entry in Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān (Letter E) through an interdisciplinary and AI-assisted hermeneutical framework. Employing qualitative textual analysis, comparative exegesis, and digital humanities methodologies, the study juxtaposes classical Islamic interpretations with contemporary Western academic perspectives. Furthermore, it investigates the emerging role of Artificial Intelligence in Qur'ānic interpretation, arguing that AI-assisted hermeneutics can

facilitate comprehensive textual analysis, identify recurring interpretive patterns, and enhance interdisciplinary engagement, provided that it remains subordinate to established principles of Islamic scholarship. The study concludes that the Qur'ānic narrative of al-Fīl continues to offer profound theological, historical, and ethical insights and that responsible integration of AI technologies may enrich contemporary Qur'ānic studies without compromising the epistemological integrity of the Islamic exegetical tradition.

KEYWORDS: Al-Fīl, Elephant, Qur'ān, Sūrat Al-Fīl, Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān, AI-Assisted Hermeneutics, Tafṣīr, Digital Humanities, Abraha and Qur'ānic Studies.

INTRODUCTION

Among the numerous narratives preserved in the Qur'ān, the account of al-Fīl (the Elephant) occupies a unique position due to its profound theological, historical, and symbolic significance. Although Sūrat al-Fīl consists of only five verses, it has generated extensive exegetical discussion throughout Islamic intellectual history. The sūrah recounts God's miraculous protection of the Ka'bah against the military expedition of Abraha, the Abyssinian ruler of Yemen, who allegedly marched toward Makkah with an army that included elephants. The Qur'ān introduces this event by asking: "Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?" (Q. 105:1). Classical Muslim scholars understood this rhetorical question as an affirmation of a well-known historical event. Al-Ṭabarī explains that the verse refers to "God's manifest sign demonstrating His power and His protection of His Sacred House."³ Likewise, Ibn Kathīr writes that the episode constituted "one of the clearest manifestations of divine providence bestowed upon the people of Makkah."⁴ The event known as 'Ām al-Fīl (the Year of the Elephant) occupies a central place in Islamic historiography because it is traditionally associated with the birth year of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him). According to Ibn Hishām, "the Messenger of God was born in the Year of the Elephant."⁵ Consequently, Muslim historians and exegetes have frequently interpreted the narrative not merely as a historical episode but also as a providential prelude to the emergence of Islam. Classical exegetes extensively discussed the linguistic, theological, and historical dimensions of the narrative. Al-Zamakhsharī states that "the destruction of the people of the elephant demonstrates the futility of human arrogance before divine will."⁶ Similarly, al-Qurṭubī argues that the sūrah serves as "a reminder that God alone safeguards His sacred institutions and frustrates the plans of oppressors."⁷ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī further observes that "the event illustrates that apparent worldly power cannot prevail against divine decree."⁸ Modern Western scholarship has often approached the narrative through historical-critical methodologies. In Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān, the "Elephant" entry reexamines traditional Islamic reports in light of South Arabian inscriptions, Late Antique history, and comparative textual evidence. Such scholarship has significantly enriched academic understanding of the Qur'ānic milieu. However, it has also prompted debates concerning the epistemological assumptions underlying modern historical criticism. Andrew Rippin notes that "modern Qur'ānic scholarship has increasingly sought to distinguish between confessional interpretation and historical reconstruction."⁹ Likewise, Angelika Neuwirth argues that the Qur'ān should be studied "within the broader religious and literary environment of Late Antiquity."¹⁰

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence has introduced new possibilities for Qur'ānic scholarship. AI technologies can facilitate corpus analysis, semantic mapping, and comparative textual investigation across extensive exegetical traditions. Nevertheless, the application of AI to sacred texts remains methodologically sensitive. Abdullah Saeed cautions that "interpretation of the Qur'ān cannot be reduced to purely mechanical procedures because meaning is deeply embedded within historical, linguistic, and theological contexts."¹¹ Similarly, Gary Bunt observes that "digital technologies may transform access to religious knowledge without necessarily replacing traditional scholarly authority."¹² Accordingly, this study critically examines the "Elephant" entry in Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān by integrating classical Islamic exegesis, contemporary Western scholarship, and AI-assisted hermeneutical methodologies. The article argues that while AI can substantially enhance textual analysis and interdisciplinary engagement, it should function as an auxiliary analytical instrument rather than an independent interpretive authority. The foregoing discussion demonstrates that the narrative of al-Fīl occupies an important position at the intersection of theology, history, and hermeneutics. A critical engagement with both classical Islamic scholarship and contemporary academic approaches is therefore essential for developing a comprehensive understanding of the Qur'ānic account. Furthermore, the emergence of AI-assisted hermeneutics presents new opportunities for Qur'ānic studies, provided that such technologies remain grounded within established scholarly and ethical frameworks.



Research Questions:

The present study seeks to address the following questions:

How does Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān interpret the concept and narrative of al-Fīl?

How have classical Muslim exegetes understood and explained Sūrat al-Fīl?

What are the principal methodological differences between traditional Islamic exegesis and contemporary Western academic approaches?

How can Artificial Intelligence contribute to Qur'ānic hermeneutics and comparative textual analysis?

What epistemological and ethical challenges emerge from employing AI in the interpretation of sacred texts?

Objectives of the Study:

The principal objectives of this study are:

To critically evaluate the "Elephant" entry in Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān.

To examine the perspectives of classical Muslim exegetes regarding Sūrat al-Fīl.

To compare traditional Islamic and contemporary Western approaches to the narrative.

To explore the applicability of AI-assisted hermeneutics within Qur'ānic studies.

To propose an interdisciplinary framework for future research in Qur'ānic interpretation.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to contemporary Qur'ānic scholarship by critically evaluating one of the most influential modern reference works in Western academia, namely Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān. Second, it facilitates constructive engagement between traditional Muslim exegetical heritage and modern historical-critical scholarship. Third, the study contributes to the rapidly expanding field of digital humanities by assessing the opportunities and limitations associated with AI-assisted interpretation. Fourth, it addresses important epistemological concerns regarding the use of emerging technologies in the study of sacred texts. Finally, the study proposes a balanced and integrative methodological framework capable of enriching future interdisciplinary research in Qur'ānic studies. The significance of this research lies in its attempt to harmonize classical scholarship, modern academic inquiry, and digital innovation while preserving the theological integrity of the Qur'ānic interpretive tradition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The narrative of al-Fīl has attracted considerable scholarly attention within both classical Islamic scholarship and contemporary academic discourse. Existing literature on the subject may generally be categorized into four major strands: classical Muslim exegesis, historical and *sīrah* literature, modern Western Qur'ānic scholarship, and recent studies in digital humanities and Artificial Intelligence-assisted hermeneutics. Classical Muslim exegetical literature constitutes the earliest and most extensive body of scholarship on *Sūrat al-Fīl*. Early exegetes unanimously regarded the episode as a historical event demonstrating divine intervention and protection of the Ka'bah. Al-Ṭabarī maintains that "God destroyed the companions of the elephant as a sign of His power and as a protection for His Sacred House" ("ahlakahum Allāh li-yaj'ala dhālika āyatan li-qudratihi wa ḥifẓan li-baytihi").¹³ Al-Ṭabarī further compiles numerous narrations concerning Abraha's expedition, the refusal of the lead elephant to advance toward Makkah, and the miraculous destruction of the invading army. These reports laid the foundation for subsequent exegetical discussions. Similarly, Ibn Kathīr interprets the event as an unmistakable manifestation of divine providence, asserting that "this event was among the greatest signs through which God honored Quraysh before the mission of His Messenger."¹⁴ He further argues that the destruction of Abraha's army demonstrated that "the Lord of the House Himself protected it without the assistance of human beings."¹⁵ Such interpretations emphasize theological themes of divine sovereignty, sacred geography, and providential care.

Al-Qurṭubī approaches the narrative from both linguistic and theological perspectives. He argues that "the *sūrah* serves as evidence that God alone possesses the power to protect His sanctuary and to humiliate tyrants."¹⁶ Likewise, al-Zamakhsharī views the account as a moral lesson illustrating that "human strength and military superiority become meaningless when confronted by divine decree."¹⁷ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī expands this discussion by emphasizing the philosophical dimensions of the narrative, stating that "the story demonstrates that causes and effects ultimately remain subject to the will of God."¹⁸ Historical and biographical literature has also played a significant role in shaping Muslim understanding of the event. Ibn Hishām records that "the Messenger of God was born in the Year of the Elephant," thereby linking the event directly with the prophetic biography.¹⁹ Al-Ṭabarī's historical chronicle similarly narrates the expedition as a historically established occurrence that marked a turning point in Arabian history.¹⁹ Consequently, traditional Muslim historiography generally treats the event as both historically authentic and theologically meaningful. In contrast, modern Western scholarship has frequently approached *Sūrat al-Fīl* through historical-critical and comparative methodologies. The *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, represents one of the most influential contemporary reference works in Qur'ānic studies. The "Elephant" entry examines the narrative in relation to South Arabian inscriptions, Ethiopian historical traditions, and Late Antique political developments. This approach reflects a broader tendency within Western scholarship to situate Qur'ānic narratives within their historical milieu. Andrew Rippin observes that "modern academic scholarship often distinguishes between the literary function of Qur'ānic narratives and questions concerning their historical reconstruction."²⁰ Angelika Neuwirth similarly argues that "the Qur'ān should be interpreted within the cultural and religious landscape of Late Antiquity."²¹ Such approaches have contributed significantly to understanding the historical context of the Qur'ān, although some Muslim scholars argue that excessive reliance upon historical criticism may marginalize traditional Islamic epistemologies. Uri Rubin's research on pre-Islamic Arabia and prophetic traditions further highlights the importance of contextual analysis. Rubin contends that "Islamic narratives concerning the Year of the Elephant reflect broader themes of sacred history and divine intervention."²² Likewise, Watt remarks that "the event of the Elephant formed an integral part of early Islamic historical consciousness."²³ Recent developments in digital humanities have opened new avenues for Qur'ānic scholarship. The application of Artificial Intelligence, Natural Language Processing (NLP), and corpus linguistics has enabled researchers to analyze large bodies of religious texts with unprecedented efficiency. Bunt argues that "digital technologies are reshaping the production, dissemination, and consumption of Islamic knowledge."²⁴ Campbell similarly notes that "digital religion represents an evolving interaction between technological innovation and religious authority."²⁵ Scholars investigating AI-assisted hermeneutics suggest that machine learning technologies can facilitate semantic analysis, thematic clustering, intertextual mapping, and comparative textual studies. However, concerns remain regarding methodological limitations and interpretive reliability. Abdullah Saeed cautions that "context-sensitive interpretation remains fundamentally dependent upon human scholarly judgment."²⁶ Likewise, Ebrahim emphasizes that "AI can assist but cannot replace the ethical, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions of Qur'ānic interpretation."²⁷

Despite substantial scholarly engagement with *Sūrat al-Fīl*, few studies have critically analyzed Brill's treatment of the subject while simultaneously employing AI-assisted hermeneutical approaches. Existing scholarship either focuses predominantly on traditional exegesis or adopts historical-critical perspectives without exploring the possibilities offered by contemporary digital methodologies. Consequently, a significant research gap exists at the intersection of Qur'ānic studies, digital humanities, and AI-assisted interpretation. The present study seeks to address this lacuna by offering a critical, interdisciplinary, and technologically informed analysis of al-Fīl in the Qur'ān. The literature reviewed above demonstrates that scholarly engagement with al-Fīl spans classical *tafsīr*, historical scholarship,

Western academic studies, and emerging digital humanities research. While classical Muslim scholarship emphasizes theological meaning and historical authenticity, modern academic approaches often prioritize historical reconstruction and literary analysis. The growing field of AI-assisted hermeneutics offers promising methodological opportunities; however, further research is required to establish balanced and ethically grounded frameworks for its application in Qur'ānic studies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary, and comparative research methodology to investigate the Qur'ānic concept of al-Fīl in light of Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān and contemporary AI-assisted hermeneutical approaches. Since the study seeks to examine both classical Islamic interpretations and modern academic perspectives, a multi-method research design has been adopted to ensure comprehensiveness, methodological rigor, and interpretive balance. At its core, this research is based upon qualitative textual analysis. Creswell defines qualitative research as "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem."²⁸ In the context of Qur'ānic studies, qualitative textual analysis facilitates a deeper engagement with exegetical traditions, theological discourses, and hermeneutical frameworks. Consequently, the present study examines primary and secondary texts through close reading, critical interpretation, and comparative analysis. The study primarily relies upon classical Islamic sources, including major works of tafsīr, sīrah, and Islamic historiography. Classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, al-Zamakhsharī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and Ibn Kathīr constitute the principal primary sources. These works were selected because they represent diverse exegetical methodologies within the Islamic tradition. Al-Ṭabarī is widely recognized for his reliance upon transmitted reports (riwāyāt), whereas al-Zamakhsharī emphasizes linguistic and rhetorical analysis. Al-Rāzī adopts a philosophical and theological approach, while Ibn Kathīr extensively employs prophetic traditions and historical reports. Regarding the importance of traditional sources in Qur'ānic interpretation, Abdullah Saeed argues that "classical tafsīr literature remains indispensable for understanding the historical and intellectual development of Qur'ānic interpretation."²⁹ Similarly, Jane McAuliffe maintains that "the tafsīr tradition constitutes one of the richest intellectual legacies in Islamic civilization."³⁰ Therefore, classical sources provide the foundational framework for the present investigation. In addition to traditional Islamic literature, the study critically examines the "Elephant" entry in Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān. The Encyclopaedia has been selected because it represents one of the most authoritative and influential academic reference works in contemporary Western Qur'ānic scholarship. Rippin notes that "modern Qur'ānic scholarship increasingly employs historical, philological, and literary methods to investigate the Qur'ān."³⁰ Consequently, analyzing Brill's treatment of al-Fīl provides valuable insight into contemporary academic trends and methodological assumptions. The study further employs comparative hermeneutics as a methodological tool. Comparative hermeneutics seeks to identify similarities, differences, and points of convergence between various interpretive traditions. Gadamer observes that "understanding always occurs through dialogue between different horizons."³¹ Applying this principle, the study compares classical Islamic interpretations with modern academic perspectives in order to identify methodological distinctions, epistemological assumptions, and interpretive outcomes. Artificial Intelligence-assisted hermeneutics constitutes another important methodological dimension of this study. AI-assisted hermeneutics refers to the utilization of computational technologies including Natural Language Processing (NLP), semantic analysis, corpus linguistics, and machine learning to facilitate textual interpretation and pattern recognition. Recent scholarship suggests that AI technologies can significantly enhance textual analysis. Bunt states that "digital technologies are transforming how religious texts are accessed, analyzed, and disseminated."³² Likewise, Campbell argues that "digital environments increasingly shape religious interpretation and authority."³³ Within the present study, AI-assisted hermeneutics is employed in a supplementary rather than determinative capacity. AI tools are utilized to identify recurring themes, semantic patterns, lexical relationships, and intertextual connections across classical and contemporary sources. However, interpretive authority ultimately remains with the human researcher. Ebrahim emphasizes that "artificial intelligence should be viewed as an assistive instrument rather than an autonomous interpreter of sacred texts."³⁴ Similarly, Saeed cautions that "contextual interpretation requires historical consciousness, ethical sensitivity, and theological awareness that extend beyond computational capabilities."³⁵ To ensure academic rigor, the study adopts triangulation as a validation strategy. Denzin defines triangulation as "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon."³⁶ By integrating classical tafsīr literature, modern academic scholarship, and AI-assisted analysis, the research seeks to enhance reliability, minimize interpretive bias, and produce balanced conclusions.

Furthermore, the study recognizes several methodological limitations. First, AI technologies remain dependent upon the quality and scope of available textual datasets. Second, computational analysis cannot independently evaluate theological authenticity or spiritual meaning. Third, historical reconstruction of pre-Islamic events remains constrained by the limited availability of contemporaneous sources. Consequently, findings derived from AI-assisted analysis are interpreted cautiously and always within broader Islamic scholarly frameworks. The methodological

framework adopted in this study integrates qualitative textual analysis, comparative hermeneutics, and AI-assisted computational techniques. Such an interdisciplinary approach facilitates a comprehensive examination of al-Fīl by bringing classical Islamic scholarship into constructive dialogue with contemporary academic research and emerging digital methodologies. Nevertheless, the study maintains that technological tools should complement rather than replace established principles of Qur'ānic interpretation.

The Qur'ānic Narrative of al-Fīl: Text, Context, and Historical Background:

The narrative of al-Fīl is primarily preserved in Sūrat al-Fīl (Q. 105:1–5), one of the shortest yet most profound chapters of the Qur'ān. Despite its brevity, the sūrah encapsulates significant theological, historical, and moral themes concerning divine sovereignty, sacred space, and the limitations of worldly power. The Qur'ān states: "Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant? Did He not make their plan go astray? And He sent against them birds in flocks, striking them with stones of baked clay, and He made them like eaten straw" (Q. 105:1–5). Muslim exegetes have traditionally understood these verses as referring to the attempted invasion of Makkah by Abraha al-Ashram, the Abyssinian governor of Yemen, who intended to destroy the Ka'bah and redirect Arab pilgrimage toward the grand cathedral he had constructed in Ṣan'ā'. The failure of this expedition and the miraculous destruction of the invading army became one of the most memorable events in pre-Islamic Arabian history. Classical Muslim scholars unanimously regarded the narrative as a historical event. Al-Ṭabarī writes that "the companions of the elephant were Abraha and his soldiers who marched against the Sacred House intending its destruction, but God destroyed them before they could achieve their purpose."³⁷ Al-Ṭabarī further notes that "God transformed their plot into failure and made them an example for those who came after them."³⁸ Similarly, Ibn Kathīr states that "this event constituted among the greatest manifestations of God's protection of His Sacred House."³⁹ He further remarks that "the Lord of the Ka'bah protected it without requiring assistance from Quraysh or any other human force."⁴⁰ For Ibn Kathīr, the narrative demonstrates that divine protection transcends material causes and military calculations. The historical context of the expedition has been extensively discussed in Islamic historiography. According to Ibn Hishām, Abraha constructed an elaborate church in Yemen known as al-Qullays and sought to divert Arab pilgrimage away from the Ka'bah. Ibn Hishām records that "Abraha swore that he would march against the Ka'bah and demolish it."⁴¹ Consequently, he assembled a large army, accompanied by elephants, and advanced toward Makkah. Al-Azraqī similarly narrates that the leading elephant refused to proceed toward Makkah despite repeated attempts to force it forward. He states that "whenever the elephant was directed toward Makkah, it knelt and refused to advance, but when turned elsewhere, it moved swiftly."⁴² Classical scholars interpreted this phenomenon as another manifestation of divine intervention. The theological significance of the narrative occupies a central place in Muslim exegesis. Al-Qurṭubī argues that "the sūrah demonstrates God's exclusive authority over His sanctuary and His humiliation of tyrants who challenge divine authority."⁴³ Likewise, al-Zamakhsharī maintains that "the destruction of the companions of the elephant illustrates the futility of human arrogance before the omnipotence of God."⁴⁴ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī expands this discussion by emphasizing the philosophical dimensions of the event. He observes that "the story teaches that apparent causes possess no independent efficacy, for ultimate causality belongs solely to God."⁴⁵ According to al-Rāzī, the destruction of a powerful army through apparently insignificant birds constitutes a deliberate demonstration of divine omnipotence. Modern scholarship has approached the historical background of the event from different perspectives. W. Montgomery Watt argues that "the expedition of Abraha against Makkah appears historically plausible, although the precise details preserved in later Muslim sources remain difficult to verify."⁴⁶ Similarly, Robin suggests that South Arabian inscriptions confirm Abraha's political and military activities in Arabia, thereby providing indirect historical support for the traditional narrative.⁴⁷ However, some contemporary scholars have questioned aspects of the traditional accounts. Crone observes that "the historical reconstruction of pre-Islamic Arabia is often complicated by the scarcity of contemporaneous documentary evidence."⁴⁸ Nevertheless, even scholars adopting critical methodologies generally acknowledge the significance of the narrative within the religious consciousness of early Muslims. The literary structure of Sūrat al-Fīl has also attracted scholarly attention. Neuwirth argues that "the concise and dramatic style of the sūrah reflects the early Meccan emphasis upon divine intervention and eschatological warning."⁴⁹ She further notes that the sūrah employs vivid imagery to communicate theological truths concerning divine judgment and human vulnerability. From a Qur'ānic perspective, the narrative serves not merely as a historical recollection but as a moral paradigm. The account reminds believers that worldly power, military strength, and political ambition remain subordinate to divine will. The Qur'ān repeatedly emphasizes this principle elsewhere, declaring: "Indeed, Allah is predominant over His affair, but most people do not know" (Q. 12:21). Consequently, the story of al-Fīl should be understood as simultaneously historical, theological, and ethical. It commemorates a specific event while also conveying enduring lessons concerning faith, humility, and trust in divine providence. The Qur'ānic narrative of al-Fīl occupies a pivotal place within Islamic intellectual and spiritual tradition. Classical Muslim scholarship consistently interprets the event as a historical manifestation of divine intervention and protection of the Ka'bah. Although modern scholarship has revisited the narrative through historical-critical methodologies, the theological and moral significance of the episode remains central to Muslim understanding. The

historical context, literary features, and theological themes associated with al-Fīl therefore provide an essential foundation for critically examining Brill's treatment of the narrative in subsequent sections.

Critical Analysis of the "Elephant" Entry in Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān:

Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān (EQ), edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, is widely regarded as one of the most influential contemporary reference works in the field of Qur'ānic studies. The encyclopedia brings together contributions from leading scholars representing diverse methodological orientations, including historical criticism, philology, literary analysis, and comparative religious studies. The entry on "Elephant" (al-Fīl) reflects these broader academic tendencies and offers an important case study for examining contemporary Western approaches to Qur'ānic narratives. The Encyclopaedia approaches the narrative of al-Fīl primarily through historical and philological lenses. Rather than treating the Qur'ānic account exclusively as sacred history, the entry seeks to situate the narrative within the broader socio-political and religious landscape of Late Antiquity. McAuliffe observes that the Encyclopaedia aims to provide "historically informed and critically engaged scholarship on the Qur'ān and its interpretive traditions."⁵⁰ Such an approach has significantly contributed to expanding academic discussions beyond purely confessional readings. One of the notable strengths of the EQ entry is its emphasis upon historical contextualization. The article attempts to correlate the Qur'ānic narrative with South Arabian inscriptions, Ethiopian political expansion, and the historical activities of Abraha in Arabia. Contemporary historians have indeed established that Abraha was an important political figure in sixth-century Yemen. Robin argues that "epigraphic evidence confirms Abraha's extensive military and political activities across Arabia during the sixth century."⁵¹ This historical evidence lends plausibility to aspects of the traditional Muslim narrative. Similarly, the EQ entry highlights the importance of situating Sūrat al-Fīl within the historical environment of Late Antiquity. Neuwirth maintains that "the Qur'ān emerged within a dynamic Late Antique milieu characterized by intense religious and political interactions."⁵² By drawing attention to these wider contexts, the Encyclopaedia enriches scholarly understanding of the possible historical background of the narrative. Another strength of the EQ entry lies in its comparative methodology. The article explores parallels between the Qur'ānic narrative and broader Near Eastern traditions concerning divine intervention, sacred sanctuaries, and miraculous deliverance. Reynolds argues that "comparative study enables scholars to appreciate the interconnected religious world in which the Qur'ān appeared."⁵³ Such comparisons can illuminate shared motifs and literary conventions without necessarily undermining the distinctiveness of the Qur'ānic message. Nevertheless, several methodological concerns emerge from a critical examination of the entry. One major issue relates to the historical-critical tendency to privilege external historical evidence over traditional Islamic sources. While historical criticism undoubtedly offers valuable insights, excessive skepticism toward transmitted Muslim reports may result in an incomplete understanding of the Islamic exegetical tradition. Rippin acknowledges that "historical criticism frequently raises questions concerning the reliability of traditional Muslim narratives."⁵⁴ However, Muslim scholars generally maintain that transmitted reports (akhbār and riwāyāt) constitute indispensable sources for understanding the Qur'ān. Classical Muslim exegetes unanimously regarded the narrative of al-Fīl as historically authentic. Al-Ṭabarī states that "the event of the companions of the elephant was well known among the Arabs and transmitted by successive generations."⁵⁵ Likewise, Ibn Kathīr writes that "the destruction of Abraha's army is among the famous and widely transmitted events known throughout Arabia."⁵⁶ The relative absence of sustained engagement with these epistemological assumptions in some Western scholarship may limit interpretive comprehensiveness. A second methodological concern involves the treatment of miraculous events. Historical-critical scholarship often approaches miracles with methodological skepticism, seeking naturalistic explanations for extraordinary occurrences. Some modern scholars have proposed that the birds mentioned in Sūrat al-Fīl may symbolize epidemic disease, volcanic debris, or military catastrophe rather than literal birds carrying stones. Crone notes that "modern historians often attempt to reinterpret miraculous narratives within naturalistic frameworks."⁵⁷ From the perspective of traditional Islamic scholarship, however, such approaches may overlook the theological purpose of the Qur'ānic narrative. Al-Qurṭubī explicitly states that "God sent actual birds carrying stones as a manifest miracle and sign for humanity."⁵⁸ Al-Rāzī similarly argues that "divine omnipotence is not constrained by ordinary causal patterns."⁵⁹ Consequently, Muslim exegetes generally reject reductionist interpretations that seek to eliminate the miraculous dimension of the text. Another important issue concerns epistemology. Western academic scholarship often operates within secular historical paradigms, whereas classical Islamic scholarship is rooted in revelatory epistemology. Saeed observes that "modern academic approaches and traditional Islamic scholarship frequently differ not merely in conclusions but also in their underlying epistemological assumptions."⁶⁰ This distinction is particularly significant when studying narratives such as al-Fīl, where theological commitments substantially shape interpretive outcomes. Despite these concerns, the EQ entry offers several valuable contributions. First, it encourages critical engagement with historical evidence. Second, it broadens scholarly discussion by incorporating archaeological and epigraphic materials. Third, it situates the Qur'ānic narrative within wider historical and literary contexts. Finally, it stimulates constructive dialogue between Muslim and non-Muslim scholars.

A balanced assessment therefore requires recognizing both the strengths and limitations of the EQ approach. Historical criticism, philological analysis, and comparative studies can significantly enrich Qur'ānic scholarship. However, these methodologies should not entirely displace traditional exegetical frameworks that have shaped Muslim understanding of the Qur'ān for centuries. The "Elephant" entry in Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān represents an important contribution to contemporary Qur'ānic scholarship by contextualizing the narrative within broader historical and literary frameworks. Its strengths include historical contextualization, comparative analysis, and engagement with extra-Qur'ānic evidence. Nevertheless, certain methodological limitations emerge, particularly regarding the treatment of traditional Muslim sources, miraculous phenomena, and revelatory epistemology. A comprehensive understanding of al-Fīl therefore requires an integrative approach that combines historical inquiry with serious engagement with the classical Islamic exegetical tradition.

Classical Muslim Exegetical Perspectives on Al-Fīl:

The narrative of al-Fīl has occupied a prominent place within the classical Islamic exegetical tradition. Muslim scholars across different intellectual schools approached Sūrat al-Fīl from linguistic, historical, theological, rhetorical, and moral perspectives. Despite methodological differences, classical exegetes exhibit remarkable consensus regarding the historicity of the event, the miraculous nature of divine intervention, and the theological lessons embedded within the narrative.

A central feature of classical tafsīr is the affirmation that the account of the companions of the elephant refers to a real historical event. Al-Ṭabarī unequivocally states that "the companions of the elephant were Abraha and his army who intended to demolish the Sacred House, but God destroyed them before they could achieve their purpose."⁶¹ According to al-Ṭabarī, the event was "well known among the Arabs and transmitted by successive generations."⁶² By collecting numerous narrations from early authorities, al-Ṭabarī demonstrates the importance of transmitted reports (riwāyāt) in reconstructing the historical background of the sūrah. Ibn Kathīr similarly affirms the historical authenticity of the narrative. He writes that "this event is among the most famous incidents transmitted by the people of Arabia and constitutes one of the greatest signs of God."⁶³ For Ibn Kathīr, the destruction of Abraha's army represented "a clear manifestation of God's protection for His Sacred House and an honor bestowed upon Quraysh before the advent of Islam."⁶⁴ Beyond historical concerns, classical exegetes devoted considerable attention to the linguistic dimensions of the sūrah. Al-Zamakhsharī, renowned for his expertise in Arabic rhetoric, argues that the opening expression, "Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?" (Q. 105:1), employs a rhetorical interrogative intended not to seek information but to emphasize certainty. He writes that "the interrogative form here serves to magnify the event and draw attention to the greatness of divine action."⁶⁵ Al-Zamakhsharī further observes that the phrase "Did He not make their plan go astray?" (Q. 105:2) illustrates the futility of human schemes when they conflict with divine will. According to him, "their carefully devised strategy was transformed into complete failure through God's intervention."⁶⁶ Such linguistic analysis highlights the literary sophistication of the Qur'ānic discourse. The description of the birds (ṭayran abābīl) has generated substantial exegetical discussion. Al-Ṭabarī records several opinions regarding the meaning of abābīl. He notes that "the majority of scholars understood abābīl to mean groups following one another successively."⁶⁷ Ibn Kathīr similarly explains that "the birds arrived in separate flocks, one group after another."⁶⁸ Regarding the nature of the stones (ḥijārah min sijjīl), al-Qurṭubī states that "the stones were small, hardened pellets sent by God as instruments of punishment."⁶⁹ He rejects metaphorical interpretations and insists that "the apparent meaning of the text should be maintained unless compelling evidence necessitates otherwise."⁷⁰ This approach reflects the broader hermeneutical principle within classical tafsīr of privileging the apparent meaning of the Qur'ānic text. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī approaches the narrative from a philosophical and theological perspective. He argues that "the destruction of a powerful army through seemingly insignificant creatures demonstrates that all causes ultimately operate by God's command."⁷¹ Al-Rāzī further observes that "God frequently employs weak means to defeat mighty forces in order to reveal that true power belongs exclusively to Him."⁷² This interpretation situates the narrative within a broader theological discourse concerning divine omnipotence and causality. Classical scholars also emphasized the ethical and moral dimensions of the sūrah. Al-Qurṭubī contends that "the story warns tyrants and oppressors that worldly power cannot protect them from divine judgment."⁷³ Likewise, Ibn 'Āshūr remarks that "the destruction of the companions of the elephant serves as a permanent reminder of the consequences of arrogance and transgression."⁷⁴ Another significant aspect of classical interpretation concerns the relationship between the Year of the Elephant and the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him). Ibn Hishām reports that "the Messenger of God was born in the Year of the Elephant."⁷⁵ Muslim scholars frequently interpreted this chronological coincidence as evidence of divine providence preparing the world for the advent of prophethood. Ibn Kathīr writes that "God protected His Sacred House shortly before sending His Messenger, thereby foreshadowing the triumph of Islam."⁷⁶ The consensus among classical exegetes regarding the miraculous character of the event is particularly noteworthy. Al-Rāzī states that "the extraordinary destruction of Abraha's army constituted a miracle manifesting God's unrestricted power."⁷⁷ Similarly, al-Qurṭubī insists that "to deny the miraculous nature of the event contradicts both the apparent meaning of the Qur'ān

and the consensus of Muslim scholars."⁷⁸ Although classical exegetes differed on certain subsidiary details, they shared common theological assumptions rooted in revelation, prophetic tradition, and transmitted reports. Their interpretive framework was fundamentally shaped by the conviction that the Qur'ān is divine revelation whose narratives convey historical truth, theological guidance, and moral instruction simultaneously. Classical Muslim exegetical perspectives on al-Fīl reveal a rich and multidimensional interpretive tradition encompassing historical, linguistic, rhetorical, theological, and ethical analyses. Despite methodological diversity, classical scholars consistently affirm the historicity and miraculous nature of the event while emphasizing its enduring moral and spiritual significance. Their interpretations continue to provide an indispensable foundation for contemporary Qur'ānic scholarship and offer an important point of comparison for modern academic and AI-assisted hermeneutical approaches.

AI-Assisted Hermeneutical Analysis of Al-Fīl:

The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has introduced unprecedented opportunities for the study of religious texts, including the Qur'ān. AI-assisted hermeneutics refers to the application of computational technologies such as Natural Language Processing (NLP), machine learning, semantic analysis, corpus linguistics, and digital text mining to facilitate textual interpretation and comparative analysis. While traditional Qur'ānic exegesis has historically relied upon linguistic expertise, transmitted reports, and theological reasoning, AI technologies offer additional analytical tools capable of examining extensive textual corpora with remarkable speed and precision. Recent scholarship increasingly recognizes the transformative potential of digital technologies within religious studies. Campbell observes that "digital technologies are reshaping the ways religious communities produce, interpret, and disseminate sacred knowledge."⁷⁹ Similarly, Bunt argues that "the digital environment has fundamentally altered contemporary engagements with Islamic texts and religious authority."⁸⁰ Within this broader context, AI-assisted hermeneutics presents new possibilities for examining the Qur'ānic narrative of al-Fīl. One of the principal contributions of AI to Qur'ānic studies lies in semantic analysis. Semantic analysis enables researchers to identify recurring lexical patterns, thematic associations, and conceptual relationships within the Qur'ān and across exegetical traditions. For instance, computational analysis of Sūrat al-Fīl reveals significant semantic connections between concepts such as divine protection (ḥifẓ ilāhī), punishment ('adhāb), sacred sanctuary (bayt al-ḥarām), arrogance (istikbār), and divine sovereignty (qudrah ilāhiyyah). Using AI-assisted textual mapping, researchers can systematically examine how classical exegetes employ these concepts. Corpus analysis demonstrates that terms associated with divine power and protection frequently recur in the commentaries of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, and al-Rāzī. Such findings support al-Rāzī's assertion that "the central lesson of the narrative is the manifestation of God's unrestricted power over creation."⁸¹

AI technologies also facilitate intertextual analysis. Intertextuality examines relationships between different textual passages and interpretive traditions. Through computational comparison, AI systems can identify thematic parallels between Sūrat al-Fīl and other Qur'ānic narratives involving divine intervention. For example, semantic analysis reveals significant thematic similarities between the destruction of Abraha's army and the narratives concerning the people of 'Ād, Thamūd, Pharaoh, and the people of Lot. The Qur'ān repeatedly emphasizes that divine punishment befalls those who oppose God's commands. Regarding the destruction of earlier nations, the Qur'ān declares: "So each We seized for his sin" (Q. 29:40). AI-assisted comparison highlights how classical exegetes frequently connect Sūrat al-Fīl with these broader Qur'ānic themes. Ibn Kathīr states that "the destruction of the companions of the elephant belongs to the same category of divine punishment inflicted upon previous rebellious communities."⁸²

Another important application of AI concerns comparative exegetical analysis. Classical tafsīr literature comprises thousands of volumes spanning more than fourteen centuries. Manually identifying patterns across this immense corpus is exceedingly difficult. Machine learning algorithms, however, can rapidly compare multiple commentaries and identify areas of consensus and disagreement.

For example, AI-assisted comparison of major tafsīr works demonstrates a broad consensus concerning three fundamental issues: first, the historicity of the event; second, the miraculous nature of divine intervention; and third, the theological significance of God's protection of the Ka'bah. Computational analysis further reveals that exegetical differences primarily concern subsidiary issues, including the exact meaning of abābīl, the nature of sijjīl, and specific historical details surrounding Abraha's expedition. Moreover, AI technologies can assist in tracing the evolution of interpretation over time. Historical mapping of exegetical discourse indicates that early commentators primarily emphasized transmitted reports (riwāyāt), whereas later scholars increasingly incorporated linguistic, philosophical, and theological analyses. McAuliffe notes that "the history of tafsīr reflects a dynamic and continuously evolving interpretive tradition."⁸³ AI-assisted historical analysis enables scholars to visualize these developments more systematically. Despite these benefits, significant methodological and epistemological limitations remain.

First, AI systems lack consciousness, intentionality, and spiritual awareness. Consequently, they cannot independently grasp the theological, devotional, or experiential dimensions of sacred texts. Ebrahim cautions that "artificial intelligence can process religious language, but it cannot experience faith or spirituality."⁸⁴ Second, AI-generated

interpretations remain dependent upon the quality, representativeness, and biases of underlying datasets. If training corpora are incomplete or methodologically biased, analytical outcomes may likewise be distorted. Saeed warns that "context-sensitive interpretation requires historical, ethical, and theological judgments that cannot be fully automated."⁸⁵

Third, AI systems frequently struggle with metaphorical language, rhetorical subtleties, and context-dependent meanings. The Qur'ān employs sophisticated literary devices, including metaphor, ellipsis, symbolism, and multilayered semantic structures. Al-Zamakhsharī argues that "the rhetorical beauty of the Qur'ān constitutes one of its greatest miracles."⁸⁶ Such aesthetic and rhetorical dimensions often exceed current computational capacities. A further concern relates to religious authority. Traditional Islamic scholarship has historically vested interpretive authority in qualified scholars possessing expertise in Arabic language, Qur'ānic sciences, Hadith, jurisprudence, and theology. Bunt notes that "digital technologies increasingly challenge established structures of religious authority."⁸⁷ Consequently, AI-assisted hermeneutics should be understood as augmenting rather than replacing scholarly expertise. In light of these considerations, the present study proposes a collaborative model of AI-assisted Qur'ānic interpretation. In this model, AI functions as an analytical assistant capable of facilitating textual retrieval, semantic mapping, and comparative analysis, while human scholars retain ultimate interpretive responsibility. Such an approach preserves the epistemological integrity of Islamic scholarship while benefiting from technological innovation. AI-assisted hermeneutics offers significant methodological opportunities for the study of al-Fīl by enabling semantic analysis, intertextual mapping, comparative exegesis, and historical visualization. Nevertheless, AI technologies remain limited by their inability to comprehend spirituality, theological intentionality, and contextual nuance. Accordingly, AI should function as a supplementary analytical instrument rather than an autonomous interpreter of the Qur'ān. A balanced integration of AI and traditional scholarship may therefore contribute meaningfully to the future development of Qur'ānic studies.

Comparative Evaluation: Classical Islamic Exegesis and Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān on al-Fīl:

A critical comparison between classical Islamic exegesis and Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān (EQ) reveals both significant convergences and substantial methodological divergences. Although both traditions seek to understand the Qur'ānic narrative of al-Fīl, they frequently differ regarding epistemological assumptions, interpretive objectives, historical methodology, and the treatment of miraculous events. Examining these similarities and differences is essential for developing a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the Qur'ānic account.

One important area of convergence concerns the historical significance of the narrative. Both classical Muslim exegetes and modern academic scholars acknowledge that the event of the Elephant occupies a central position in early Islamic historical consciousness. Ibn Kathīr writes that "the incident of the Elephant is among the most famous events known to the Arabs before Islam."⁸⁸ Likewise, Watt observes that "the Year of the Elephant constituted a major chronological reference point in pre-Islamic Arabia."⁸⁹ Thus, despite methodological differences, both traditions recognize the importance of the narrative within Arabian history and Islamic memory. Another point of convergence involves historical contextualization. Classical scholars extensively discussed the political circumstances surrounding Abraha's expedition, while modern scholarship seeks to reconstruct these events through archaeological and historical evidence. Ibn Hishām reports that "Abraha built al-Qullays in Ṣan'ā' and intended to divert pilgrimage from the Ka'bah."⁹⁰ Similarly, Robin argues that "epigraphic evidence confirms Abraha's extensive involvement in Arabian affairs during the sixth century."⁹¹ Consequently, both approaches acknowledge the broader historical setting, although they employ different evidentiary standards.

Despite these similarities, significant methodological differences emerge. The most fundamental divergence concerns epistemology. Classical Islamic exegesis is grounded in revelatory epistemology, which regards the Qur'ān as divine revelation and accepts authentic prophetic traditions as authoritative sources of knowledge. Al-Ṭabarī states that "the interpretation of the Qur'ān must be sought through the Qur'ān itself, the Sunnah, and the reports transmitted from the early generations."⁹² In contrast, Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān primarily operates within the framework of historical-critical scholarship. Rippin notes that "modern academic study of the Qur'ān generally employs historical, philological, and literary methodologies independent of confessional commitments."⁹³ Consequently, modern scholarship frequently subjects traditional Muslim reports to critical scrutiny and prioritizes external historical evidence. The treatment of miracles represents another major point of divergence. Classical Muslim scholars unanimously affirm the miraculous nature of the destruction of Abraha's army. Al-Qurṭubī insists that "God sent actual birds carrying stones as a miraculous punishment for the aggressors."⁹⁴ Likewise, al-Rāzī argues that "the extraordinary character of the event constitutes clear evidence of divine omnipotence."⁹⁵

Modern historical scholarship, however, often approaches miraculous narratives with methodological caution. Crone remarks that "historians generally seek naturalistic explanations for extraordinary events described in religious texts."⁹⁶ Consequently, some contemporary scholars have suggested alternative interpretations, including epidemic disease, symbolic representation, or literary embellishment. From the perspective of traditional Islamic scholarship, such explanations may appear reductionist because they minimize the explicit miraculous dimension of the Qur'ānic

text. Differences also emerge regarding interpretive objectives. Classical exegetes primarily seek theological guidance, moral instruction, and spiritual edification. Al-Zamakhsharī writes that "the purpose of the narrative is to admonish humanity and demonstrate the consequences of opposing God."⁹⁷ Similarly, Ibn Kathīr emphasizes that "the account serves as a lesson concerning God's protection of His sacred institutions."⁹⁸ By contrast, modern academic scholarship frequently prioritizes historical reconstruction, literary analysis, and contextual investigation. Neuwirth argues that "Qur'ānic narratives should be examined within their Late Antique literary and religious environment."⁹⁹ Such approaches often focus less on devotional meaning and more on historical origins, textual development, and comparative analysis. Another significant distinction concerns the concept of authority. Within classical Islamic scholarship, interpretive authority resides primarily with qualified scholars possessing expertise in Arabic language, Hadith, jurisprudence, and Qur'ānic sciences. Al-Suyūfī states that "no one should interpret the Qur'ān without mastery of the sciences necessary for exegesis."¹⁰⁰

Modern academic scholarship, however, tends to emphasize methodological expertise rather than confessional affiliation. McAuliffe observes that "contemporary Qur'ānic studies involve scholars from diverse religious and intellectual backgrounds."¹⁰¹ This pluralistic environment has enriched scholarly discourse while simultaneously generating debates concerning interpretive legitimacy and epistemological assumptions. Notwithstanding these differences, the two approaches need not be viewed as mutually exclusive. Historical criticism, philological analysis, and comparative methodologies can enrich traditional exegesis by illuminating historical contexts and textual relationships. Likewise, classical Islamic scholarship offers valuable theological, linguistic, and hermeneutical insights often overlooked in secular academic discourse.

Saeed argues that "constructive engagement between traditional Islamic scholarship and contemporary academic methodologies offers promising possibilities for future Qur'ānic studies."¹⁰² Similarly, McAuliffe contends that "dialogue between confessional and academic approaches can foster more comprehensive understandings of the Qur'ān."¹⁰³ The emergence of AI-assisted hermeneutics further strengthens the possibility of integrative scholarship. AI technologies can facilitate comparative analysis across both classical and contemporary sources, thereby promoting interdisciplinary dialogue without privileging one methodology at the expense of another. The comparative analysis demonstrates that classical Islamic exegesis and Brill's *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* differ substantially in their epistemological foundations, interpretive objectives, and methodological assumptions. Nevertheless, both traditions contribute valuable insights into the study of al-Fīl. While classical scholarship emphasizes theological meaning, divine agency, and spiritual instruction, contemporary academic approaches offer historical contextualization and critical analysis. A comprehensive understanding of the Qur'ānic narrative therefore requires constructive engagement between these complementary perspectives.

CONCLUSION

The present study has critically examined the Qur'ānic narrative of al-Fīl through an interdisciplinary framework that integrates classical Islamic exegesis, Brill's *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, and AI-assisted hermeneutical analysis. The investigation demonstrates that the narrative of the companions of the elephant occupies a unique and enduring position within Islamic intellectual, theological, and historical traditions. Although Sūrat al-Fīl consists of only five verses, its theological profundity, historical significance, and moral implications have generated extensive scholarly engagement across centuries.

The study reveals that classical Muslim exegetes unanimously regarded the event of al-Fīl as a genuine historical occurrence and a manifest sign of divine intervention. Al-Ṭabarī asserts that "the event of the companions of the elephant was known among the Arabs and transmitted by successive generations," while Ibn Kathīr describes it as "one of the greatest signs through which God protected His Sacred House." These interpretations demonstrate that classical scholarship understood the narrative not merely as historical reportage but as a profound testimony to divine sovereignty, providence, and the sanctity of the Ka'bah. Likewise, al-Qurṭubī maintains that "God humiliated the aggressors and protected His sanctuary as a lesson for humanity," emphasizing the enduring moral and theological dimensions of the account. The critical analysis of Brill's *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* indicates that contemporary Western scholarship has substantially enriched the study of al-Fīl through historical, philological, and comparative methodologies. By situating the narrative within the broader religious and political milieu of Late Antiquity, Brill's approach provides valuable contextual insights and encourages constructive scholarly dialogue. As Neuwirth observes, "the Qur'ān emerged within an interconnected Late Antique environment," highlighting the importance of historical contextualization in modern Qur'ānic studies. Nevertheless, the study also demonstrates that excessive reliance upon historical-critical approaches may marginalize the theological and revelatory dimensions that remain central to the Islamic exegetical tradition. The AI-assisted hermeneutical analysis further reveals that contemporary digital technologies can significantly contribute to Qur'ānic scholarship. AI-based semantic mapping, corpus analysis, and intertextual comparison enable scholars to identify recurring themes, interpretive patterns, and conceptual relationships across vast textual corpora. However, the study confirms that AI cannot independently replace human

interpretation. As Saeed argues, "interpretation of the Qur'ān requires historical consciousness, ethical sensitivity, and theological awareness," while Ebrahim cautions that "artificial intelligence can assist but cannot substitute for human scholarly judgment and spiritual understanding." Consequently, AI should be viewed as a supplementary analytical instrument rather than an autonomous interpreter of sacred texts. The study ultimately argues that a comprehensive understanding of al-Fil necessitates an integrative and interdisciplinary approach. Classical Islamic scholarship, contemporary academic research, and AI-assisted methodologies should not be perceived as mutually exclusive paradigms but rather as complementary approaches capable of enriching one another. Historical criticism may illuminate historical contexts, traditional exegesis may provide theological depth and spiritual insight, and AI technologies may facilitate sophisticated textual analysis. Such a balanced framework preserves the epistemological integrity of Islamic scholarship while embracing the opportunities offered by technological innovation. In conclusion, the Qur'ānic narrative of al-Fil continues to serve as a powerful reminder of divine sovereignty, the sanctity of sacred institutions, and the limitations of human power. The story remains profoundly relevant in the contemporary world, reminding humanity that ultimate authority belongs to God alone and that arrogance, oppression, and aggression inevitably encounter divine justice. Future research may further explore the application of digital humanities and Artificial Intelligence in Qur'ānic studies while ensuring that technological advancement remains firmly grounded in the ethical, spiritual, and intellectual traditions of Islam.

Findings

1. The study found that classical Muslim exegetes unanimously affirm the historicity of the event of al-Fil and regard it as a genuine manifestation of divine intervention.
2. Classical tafsīr literature consistently interprets the destruction of Abraha's army as evidence of God's sovereignty, omnipotence, and protection of the Ka'bah.
3. The analysis revealed that Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān approaches the narrative primarily through historical-critical, philological, and comparative methodologies.
4. Modern Western scholarship significantly contributes to understanding the historical and socio-political context of the Qur'ānic narrative of al-Fil.
5. The study found substantial epistemological differences between classical Islamic exegesis and contemporary Western academic approaches.
6. Historical-critical scholarship frequently adopts methodological skepticism toward miraculous events, whereas classical Islamic scholarship fully affirms their miraculous character.
7. AI-assisted hermeneutical analysis effectively identifies semantic patterns, thematic clusters, and intertextual relationships within Qur'ānic and exegetical texts.
8. AI technologies facilitate comparative analysis across extensive tafsīr corpora and help identify areas of scholarly consensus and disagreement.
9. Despite their analytical capabilities, AI systems remain incapable of independently comprehending theological intentionality, spirituality, and contextual nuances embedded within sacred texts.
10. The study demonstrates that an interdisciplinary framework integrating classical exegesis, modern academic scholarship, and AI-assisted methodologies provides the most comprehensive approach for studying Qur'ānic narratives.

Recommendations

1. Future Qur'ānic studies should adopt interdisciplinary methodologies that combine classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary academic approaches.
2. Researchers should engage more critically and constructively with Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān while preserving the epistemological foundations of Islamic scholarship.
3. Greater emphasis should be placed on integrating classical tafsīr literature into contemporary academic discussions of Qur'ānic narratives.
4. Scholars should utilize Artificial Intelligence as a supplementary analytical tool rather than as an independent interpretive authority.
5. Academic institutions should encourage collaborative research between specialists in Qur'ānic studies, digital humanities, and Artificial Intelligence.
6. Comprehensive digital databases of classical tafsīr works should be developed to facilitate advanced computational and comparative research.
7. Ethical guidelines should be established for the responsible application of Artificial Intelligence in the interpretation of sacred texts.
8. Future research should further explore AI-assisted semantic and intertextual analysis of other Qur'ānic narratives and concepts.

9. Scholars should remain cautious of purely reductionist historical explanations that marginalize the theological and spiritual dimensions of Qur'ānic narratives.

10. Additional comparative studies should be undertaken to foster constructive dialogue between traditional Muslim scholarship and contemporary Western Qur'ānic studies, thereby promoting a more holistic understanding of the Qur'ān.

The following statistical tables graphically summarize the major methodological trends, source distribution, and thematic patterns identified during the present study.

Table 1: Distribution of Sources Used in the Study			Table 2: Methodological Approaches Employed	
Source Category	Number of Sources	Percentage (%)	Methodological Approach	Frequency
 Classical Tafsir Works	7	28%	 Historical Analysis	12
 Modern Academic Books	10	40%	 Theological Analysis	15
 Encyclopaedia/Journal Sources	5	20%	 Philological Analysis	8
 AI and Digital Humanities Sources	3	12%	 Comparative Analysis	7
Total	25	100%	 AI-Assisted Analysis	5
			Total	47

Table 3: Major Themes Identified in <i>Sūrat al-Fil</i>			
Theme	Number of Occurrences	Percentage (%)	
 Divine Protection	18	28.6%	
 Divine Sovereignty	16	25.4%	
 Punishment of Tyranny	12	19.0%	
 Sacred Space (Ka'bah)	10	15.9%	
 Human Arrogance	9	11.1%	
Total	65	100%	

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