

The Scientific Miracles of Olive (*Zaitūn*) in the Qur'an: Perspectives of Classic and Scientific Interpretations

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DOI: 10.29240/alquds.v5i2.2680

Submitted: 2021-04-08 | Revised: 2021-08-07 | Accepted: 2021-09-07

Abstract. Today, commentators use scientific interpretation to investigate various types of knowledge presented by the Qur'an, such as some modern commentators combine scientific studies of fruits cited in the Qur'an with their medicinal properties, such as olives (*Olea Europea*). According to Al-Baqi, there are at least 7 (seven) verses that mention 'Zaitūn' (olives), which are spread across seven different letters. The purpose of this article is to dissect the anatomy of classical and scientific interpretations of the olive fruit in the Qur'an. In the scope of library research, this study employed a thematic method that refers to the literature on commentary books, scientific miracles books of the Qur'an about fruits, and articles in reputable journals. According to the findings of this study, olives are known as the name of a blessed fruit that has advantages over other fruits in several interpretations of the Qur'an. There are various interpretations of the word 'Zaitūn'; some argue that it refers to the location where many figs and olives grow, namely Jerusalem, where Prophet Isa was born and received revelation. Whereas, scientific interpretation reveals that olives are effective as herbal medicines capable of treating a variety of diseases such as treating the digestive tract in general (particularly the liver), lowering the risk of high blood pressure, treating joint problems in both hands, and lowering the risk of cancer.

Keywords: scientific miracles; olives; classic interpretations; scientific interpretations

Introduction

The Qur'an which was revealed in the past 14 centuries does not solely talk about *tamhid* (theology), *sharia* (Islamic law) and *da'wah* (call for converting to Islam), but also signs of Allah, the Almighty God's power through scientific data that He himself describes on earth, in sky and in this entire universe. In terms of *ṣalīh li kulli zamān wa makān*, the Qur'an is not only aimed to Arab society during the time of Prophet Muhammad, but also covering the entire human race

throughout this era, including contemporary modern era society with scientific and technological civilization.

As modern scientific inventions of the 20th century come to appear, there is a change in the way modern Muslims view in understanding the verses of Qur'an. Modern scholars of Qur'an Science argue that the verses of Qur'an can be studied through modern scientific approaches. The growing awareness to understand the Qur'an with modern scientific approaches can increasingly open the horizon of Muslim knowledge in this modern era. Therefore, the Qur'an should be understood through scientific approaches¹. The effort made is to construct a logical thinking of the cosmos (*kaunniyah*) verses and correlate them with knowledge and medical science.

Some contemporary interpreters of the Qur'an then made an attempt to integrate the scientific study of plants and fruits mentioned in the Qur'an with its medical fields. Of the plants and fruits mostly mentioned in the Qur'an is Olives (*Zaitun*). Al-Baqi notes that there are at least 7 (seven) verses talking about Olives spread in seven different chapters. One of which is even made by Allah as an object of oath (*qasam*)². Experts in the Qur'an science believe that the fruit referred to by the Qur'an and even used as an object of oath must surely have special features compared to other fruits which are not mentioned.

The distinctive Olives were also conveyed by Prophet Muhammad. He once encouraged his people to use the Olives, saying, "Eat the Olives and use them as oil" (hadith narrated by Ahmad and al-Tirmizī). Based on the eminence mentioned by the Qur'an and based on the hadith, Islamic scholars later believed that Olive was one of the medical scientific miracles. This is also strengthened by a number of modern medical studies which confirm that olive oil when applied to skin has an important role in preventing skin cancer due to sun exposure³.

Responding to the Prophet's advice, the Prophet's companions used to work under the hot sun in the desert for a long time by rubbing olive oil on their skin. Herein lies the medical wisdom of olive oil to prevent skin diseases. Moreover, many other studies talk about the benefits of olives from medical sides, such as olive oil can reduce harmful cholesterol levels⁴. Other studies also claim that olive oil can also reduce high blood pressures. Ripe olives can also be used

¹Muchlis Hanafi, *Tafsir Ilmi: Eksistensi Kehidupan Di Alam Semesta* (Jakarta: Lajnah Penatashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an Kementerian Agama RI, 2015), xviii.

²Mohammad Fuad Abd Al-Bāqī, *Mu'jam Al-Mufabras Li Alfāz Al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyyah, 1996), 334.

³Yusuf al-Hajj Ahmad, *Mawsū'ah Al-I'jāz Al-Ilmi Fi Al-Qur'an Al-Karim Wa Al-Sunnah Al-Mujabbarah* (Damascus: Maktabah Ibnu el-Hajar, 2003), 356.

⁴Nadia Tayyāra, *Mawsū'ah Al-I'jāz Al-Qurāni Fi Al-'Ulum Wa Al-Ṭibb Wa Al-Falak* (Abu Dabi: Maktabah Al-Shafa, 2009), 453.

as coloring substances⁵. And of course, many other benefits of olive oil based on the study of the scientific miracles of Olives in the Qur'an which will be presented in this article. This study used a thematic method. Since this belongs to library research, referring to book literatures; so the references used were books of scientific miracles of the Qur'an about fruits and those related to olives. In addition, other references were referred to the use of classical interpretation books compiled by experts in their fields.

The concept of Scientific Miracles of the Qur'an and Scientific Interpretation

Scientific Miracles of the Qur'an

Classic experts in the Qur'an miracles such as al-Baqillānī concluded that miracles of the Qur'an lie in the beauty of its language and literary aspects, the discussion about predecessors and future events, and the values behind the *sharia* stipulated by Allah⁶. In addition, the miracles can also be found from the verses talking about various scientific knowledge that has empirically been proven. These are called scientific miracles of the Qur'an⁷.

The discourse on scientific miracles of the Qur'an has widely been discussed by experts in classic and contemporary literatures. In classic literature, al-Ghazālī is a figure who agrees with the idea. In his monumental masterpiece, *Ihyā' 'Ulumiddīn*, he quoted Ibn Mas'ud's opinion, stating that those who want to study the predecessors' and successors' knowledge are supposed to study, deepen and conduct researches on the contents of the Qur'an. Al-Ghazālī also stated that all knowledge is included in the deeds and attributes of Allah. This knowledge is not final, but it can develop globally and dynamically⁸.

In another work, *Jawābir al-Qur'ān*, he wrote a special chapter describing the branches of science coming from the Qur'an. According to him, these branches are religion, linguistics, and various world sciences. Sciences which have already existed and those which are still yet unknown to humankind must

⁵Hishām Ṭalbah, *Al-Ijāz Al-Ilmī Fī Al-Qur'ān Wa Al-Sunnah* (Cairo: Der el-Hadis, 2011), 235.

⁶Abu Bakr Muhammad Al-Baqillānī, *Ijāz Al-Qurān*, Beirut: Dar Ihyā' al-'Ulum (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, 1994), 12–14.

⁷Hamudah Muhammad Dawud Sanad, "Al-Ijāz Al-Ilmī Li Al-Qur'ān Wa Al-Sunnah: Nazariyah Wa Al-Taṭbīq," *Kulliyat Al-Dirasat Al-Islamiyyah Wa Al-Arabiyyah*, Dubai Uni Emirat Arab 9 (1995): 83–114.

⁸Abu Hamid Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' Ulumiddin*, Vol. 1 (Cairo: Maktabah al-Taufiqiyah, 2000), 276.

persistently be studied⁹. Obviously, sciences found in the Qur'an require humans to study and investigate¹⁰. Within this scope, the Qur'an serves as a guide, leading to the power of mind which guides people to remain in obedience. The Qur'an with the contents of various sciences is a miracle that must be explored with high intelligence and thoughts¹¹.

In classic literature, al-Suyuthi in his work, *al-Itqān fi'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, stated that the Qur'an serves as a *budān* (guide) for humans endowed with the power of thinking to study the Qur'an which talks about various sciences¹² including linguistics, medicine, technology, astronomy, biology, natural sciences and many others. He categorized various verses into the field of industrialization, such as iron industry, "Bring me blocks of iron!" (QC. Al-Kahf: 96), wood and shipping industry, "And build the Ark under Our 'watchful' Eyes and directions" (QC Hud: 37), building materials industry, "So bake bricks out of clay for me, O Hamān" (QC al-Qasas: 38), and so on¹³.

Whereas in contemporary literature, Zaglūl al-Naggār, Abd al-Daim Kaheel, and Nadia Ṭayyāra are experts who have theoretically and practically conducted researches and written many works on scientific miracles of the Qur'an. Zaglūl al-Naggār is a famous figure in the scientific inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the Qur'an. He investigated and wrote about scientific miracles in the verses of the Qur'an. He wrote more than 150 articles and 50 books covering various scientific studies, including science of the Qur'an, *i'jāz ilmi*, Islamic scientific science, science in hadith, and many others¹⁴. These works has declared him as an expert in Islamic science and scientific miracles of the Qur'an in this modern century.

In explaining this scientific miracle dimension, Zaglūl revealed a lot of amazing and accurate information about the nature of universe and its phenomena which applied science had not arrived yet, except after centuries the Qur'an was revealed. This is a powerful evidence for scientific experts today that the Qur'an is truly the words of Allah calling for mankind since it was first

⁹Abu Hamid Al-Ghazālī, *Jawābir Al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: maktabah al Wahbah, 2003), 217.

¹⁰Ahmad Al-Shirbaṣī, *Qiṣṣat Al-Tafsīr* (Cairo: Dar al-Qalam, 1962), 125.

¹¹Nasaruddin Umar, "Al-Qur'an Abadi Sepanjang Zaman," in *Ensiklopedi Kemukjizatan Ilmiah Dalam Al-Qur'an Dan Sunnah* (PT Kharisma Ilmu, 2008).

¹²Jalāluddīn Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān Fi 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 2, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiah, 1996), 1908–27.

¹³Yusuf Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kaiḥa Nata'amal Ma'a Al-Qur'an Al-Azim* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1999), 416.

¹⁴Zaglūl Al-Naggār, *Qaḍīyyat Al-Ijāz Al-Ilmi Li Al-Qur'an Al-Karim Wa Ḍawābit Al-Ta'amul Ma'aha* (Beirut: Maktabah al-Tsarwah al-Dauliyah, 2009), 4–5.

revealed to have a solid foundation¹⁵. Therefore, according to him, we are only allowed to prove scientific miracles of the Qur'an by making use of facts and laws of science which remain unchanging, despite its possibility to replenish and strengthen the essence in the future¹⁶.

A female expert in *I'jāz Ilmī al-Qur'ān*, Nadia Ṭayyāra, in her work entitled *al-Mansū'ah al-I'jāz al-Qur'ānī fi al-'Ulūm wa al-Ṭibb wa al-Falak*, explained that despite the fact that the Qur'an contains various kinds of sciences, it is not a scientific book as it is understood by Muslim society today. This is because the Qur'an which was revealed in the past 14 centuries contains various scientific facts. As a matter of fact, science continues to advance rapidly, but none of these scientific theories contradict to the Qur'an. In the meantime, theories which are not scientifically proven should not be compared to the words of Allah because science and technology in the future will perhaps reveal the truth and error of these theories¹⁷.

Tafsīr 'Ilmī (Scientific Interpretation)

In the contemporary era, there has been a new vision and type of interpretation known as *tafsīr 'ilmī* (scientific interpretation). In this type, when interpreting the verses of the Qur'an, commentators use a set of contemporary sciences, such as astronomy, biology, chemistry, geology, and medicine in explaining the objectives and meanings contained therein¹⁸. In *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrīn*, al-Zahabi explained that scientific interpretation is an interpretation using the scientific terminology approach in narrating the verses of the Qur'an, as well as trying to explore its scientific dimensions and revealing the secrets of miracles related to the scientific information which is possibly unknown to mankind at the time Qur'an was revealed¹⁹.

Scholars have different points of view on the existence of scientific interpretation in the verses of the Qur'an. Some accept and some refuse. Those accepting it make the Qur'an a scientific miracle, so its interpretation may use

¹⁵Zaghlul Al-Naggār, *Tafsīr Al-Āyāt Al-Kaunīyah Fi Al-Qur'ān Al-Karīm* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Syarqiyyah al-Dauliyyah, 2008), 13.

¹⁶Sujat Zubaidi Saleh, "Epistemologi Penafsiran Ilmiah Al-Qur'an," *TSAQAFAH* 7, no. 1 (2011): 234.

¹⁷Ṭayyāra, *Mansū'ah Al-I'jāz Al-Qur'ānī Fi Al-'Ulūm Wa Al-Ṭibb Wa Al-Falak*, 8.

¹⁸Farid Abderrahman, *Ijtihād Al-Tafsīr Fi Al-Qarn Al-Rabi' 'Ashar* (Jeddah: Dar Ibnu Hazim, 1986), 549.

¹⁹Muhammad Husein Al-Zahabī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufasssīrīn, Vol. 2* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1995), 394.

modern scientific theories²⁰. This argument is also based on the fact that all sciences obtained from the Qur'an, after correctly being analyzed, will lead human-thinking to the point that all things said in the Qur'an are true and should be understood based on science development²¹. Of figures who accept scientific interpretation are al-Ghazālī, Fakhruddin al-Rāzī, Tantawi Jauhari, Rasyid Ridha and others.

Meanwhile, among scholars opposing this model of interpretation is al-Shatibi (d. 1388). In his work, *al-Muwāqāt*, he stated that the Qur'an is not aimed at this purpose (interpretation uses a scientific theory approach)²². It means that scientific interpretation style has gone so far that the verses of the Qur'an must be confronted with scientific theories that cannot be justified for decades. The opponents also claimed that the Qur'an does not speak to humans about cosmological problems and scientific truth, rather it is a book of guidance (*hudan*) sent down by Allah for human happiness.

Apart from these pros and cons, in reality, scientific interpretation is increasingly popular and used as a reference in investigating various sciences presented in the Qur'an nowadays. The development of scientific interpretation in the modern era was at least due to the influence of western technology and science development (Europe and the United States) on the Arab worlds and the Muslim regions, particularly in the second half of the 19th century when most Islamic worlds were under the rules of European countries²³. The development of scientific interpretation also implies a change in the perspectives of modern Muslims on the verses of the Qur'an, notably with the emergence of modern scientific discoveries in the 20th century.

Scientific interpretation and its relationship with modern discoveries can be exemplified in the interpretation of the word '*lamusi'un*', derived from QC. al-Zariyat: 47, "*We built the universe with 'great' might, and We are certainly expanding 'it'*". Along with new scientific discoveries, astronomers concluded a theory which can later be said to be scientific, stating that nebulae which lies beyond the galaxy we live in continues to move away at different speeds, even celestial bodies in one galaxy are moving away from each other. This shows that the discoveries of modern science can provide new scientific meanings to the verses of the Qur'an²⁴.

²⁰Imam Musbikin, *Mutiara Al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2014), 48.

²¹M. Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Qur'an* (Bandung: Mizan, 1994), 101.

²²Ibrahim bin Musa Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt Fi Ushūl Al- Syari'ah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2013), 321.

²³Johannes J G Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt* (Brill Archive, 1980), 59.

²⁴Hanafi, *Tafsir Ilmi: Eksistensi Kehidupan Di Alam Semesta*, xiii.

Various interpretations of the Qur'an verses with scientific perspectives which have been carried out do not contradict to the Qur'an along with the findings of modern sciences related to astronomy, medicine, physics, nutrition, health, zoology, botany, oceanology, and so on. Everything goes with what the Qur'an says. This is indeed the miraculous side of the Qur'an and its advantages over other *samawi* (heavenly) books in which they only apply to certain people, whilst the Qur'an applies to all mankind until the end of time, either at the time of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), at present, or in the future²⁵.

Many scientific works, both in the form of interpretations and encyclopedias, have been written by experts. The followings are several experts whose scientific interpretation works have colored the comprehension of the Qur'an verses with scientific approaches, starting from the 14th century to the present contemporary era: Al-Gazali with *Jawābir al-Qur'ān*, Fakhruddin al-Rāzī with *Maḥātib al-Ghaib*, Muhammad Ahmad al-Ghamrawi with *Sunan Allāh al-Kawmiyyah*, Jamāl al-Din al-Fandi with *Al-Gidḏā wa al-Dawā'*, Hanafi Ahmad with *Al-Tafsīr al-Ilmī li al-Ayāt al-Kawmiyyah fi al-Qur'ān*, and Thanthawi Jauhari with *Al-Jawābir fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*²⁶. Meanwhile, Nadia Ṭayyāra wrote encyclopedia entitled *Mawsu'ah al-I'jaz al-Qur'ānī fi al-'Ulūm, wa al-Ṭibb wa al-Falak*, and Yusuf al-Hajj Ahmad with *Mawsu'ah al-I'jaz al-Ilmī fi al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa al-Sunnah al-Muṭabbarah*.

Olives in the Qur'an Interpretation Perspectives

Many fruits are mentioned in the Qur'an, one of which is olives. Husayn al-Shafi'i in his masterpiece entitled '*al-Dalīl al-Mufabras*' explains that the term 'olives' is mentioned in the Qur'an for 7 times in 5 different chapters, with various derivations. Sometimes the term is referred to as '*zaitūn*', 4 times found in chapter *al-An'am* (6): 99 and 141, chapter *al-Nabl* (16): 11, and in chapter *al-Tīn* (95): 1. Another term is called as '*zaitūnan*' for once in chapter *Abasa* (80): 29. Another is referred to as '*zaitūba*' for once in chapter *al-Nūr* (24): 35. Lastly, it is also referred to as '*zaitūnal*' once in chapter *al-Nūr* (24): 35²⁷.

²⁵Ṭayyāra, *Mawsu'ah Al-I'jaz Al-Qur'ānī Fi Al-'Ulūm Wa Al-Ṭibb Wa Al-Falak*, 10.

²⁶Izzatul Laila, "Penafsiran Al-Qur'an Berbasis Ilmu Pengetahuan," *Epistemé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 9, no. 1 (2014): 45–66.

²⁷Hosen Muhammed Fahmi Al-Shāfi'ī, *Al-Dalīl Al-Mufabras Li Alfāz Al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Der el-Hadis, 2000), 464.

Table 1, Olive Verses Interpretation

Olive Verses	Commentators	Interpretation
Shura ‘Abasa verser 22, Shura al-Nahl verses 11	Al-Shawkānī	The creation of olive tree which has many benefits for human health
Shura al-Tīn verser 1	Al-Rāzī	That ‘ <i>zaitūn</i> ’ is the name of fruit known today, indicating the excess content of the fruit.
	Al-Qurṭubī	That ‘ <i>zaitūn</i> ’ refers to <i>al-Aqsa</i> mosque.
	Al-Ṭabarī	The name of a certain type of tree or fruit on the reason that the Arabs do not recognize the word ‘ <i>zaitūn</i> ’ as a place, they only refer ‘ <i>zaitūn</i> ’ as the name of a type of tree or fruit.
Shura al-An’ām verses 99 and 141.	Ibnu Kathīr	There is a process similarity between 3 fruits -palm, olive, and pomegranate- from its seed shapes, trees, and fruit colors. However, it has a different taste and smell.
Shura al-Nūr verses 35	Al-Shawkānī	Olive is called a blessed tree, the fruits of which can be used as oil which can be used as an igniter for lamp. According to Al-Shawkānī, olive tree in this verse lies in the desert, which is not covered by any sun, both at rising and setting time.
	Ibnu Kathīr	The olive tree in the Sahara field is not covered by the shade of other trees, nor covered by mountains, nor is it in a cave.

From the Qur’an verses using the term ‘*zaitūn*’, 3 of which talk about olive tree, such as in chapter *al-An’am* (6): 99 and 141. Both verses almost have similar redactions when talking about olives. In both verses, Allah talks about the creation of various trees, including palm trees, olive trees and pomegranate trees. Allah has created those trees in different shapes, colors and flavors²⁸. In

²⁸Imaduddīn Ibnu Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur’an Al-‘Azīm* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2000), 118.

chapter *Abasa* verse 29, Allah also implicitly talks about the creation of olive tree which has many benefits for human health²⁹.

The last redaction of the term '*zaitūn*' is found in chapter *al-Tīn* (95): 1. In this verse, Allah makes an oath by the words '*al-Tīn*' and '*al-zaitūn*'. Al-Razi explains that interpreters are in a debate over the meaning of the word '*zaitūn*'. Some argue that '*zaitūn*' is the name of fruit known today, indicating the excess content of the fruit. There are also some arguing that '*zaitūn*' refers to a place where many figs and olives grow, that is Jerusalem, the place where Prophet Isa was born and received revelations³⁰. Some other state that '*al-zaitūn*' refers to *al-Aqsa* mosque³¹.

Al-Ṭabarī prefers defining '*zaitūn*' in the verse as the name of a certain type of tree or fruit on the reason that the Arabs do not recognize the word '*zaitūn*' as a place, they only refer '*zaitūn*' as the name of a type of tree or fruit³². Meanwhile, Al-Marāghī argues that the word '*zaitūn*' means Noah period. According to him, after some time, the large ship he was on board was about to land, Noah saw a bird carrying an olive leaf, as a sign of salvation and safety³³.

Shihab argues that interpreters arguing that '*zaitūn*' is the name of a particular tree or fruit tend to link it with the oath made by Allah in this verse and the fourth verse which state that man was created by Allah in the very best shape. Shihab continues, interpreters explain that when Allah made an oath by the name of a tree or fruit, the tree or fruit must have many benefits. Allah's oath in this verse is also a sign that human beings created by Him also have potentials to be able to give many benefits as the olive plant or fruit does³⁴.

In the Qur'an, chapter *Nūr* verse 35, olive is referred to the word '*zaitūnaḥ*' and '*zaitūbaḥ*'. In this verse, olive is called a blessed tree, the fruits of which can be used as oil which can be used as an igniter for lamp. According to Al-Shawkānī, olive tree in this verse lies in the desert, which is not covered by any sun, both at

²⁹Muhammad bin Ali bin Muhammad Al-Shawkānī, *Fath Al-Qadir Al-Jami' Baina Fannai Al-Riwayah Wa Al-Dirayah Min 'Ilm Al-Tafsir*, Vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar Ibnu Hazim, 2014), 457.

³⁰Fakhruddin Al-Rāzī, *Al-Tafsir Al-Kabir Aw Mafatih Al-Gayb*, Vol. VIII (Cairo: Der el-Hadis, 2012), 233.

³¹Muhammad ibn Ahmad Al-Qurthubi, *Tafsir Al-Qurthubi*, Vol. 9 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2014), 547.

³²Ibnu Jarir Al-Ṭabarī, *Jami' Al-Bayan Fi Ta'wil Ay Al-Qur'an*, Vol. 12 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2009), 631.

³³Mustafa Al-Marāghī, *Tafsir Al-Tafsir Al-Marāghī*, Vol. 8 (Beirut: Darul Fikir, 2002), 193.

³⁴M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan, Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, Vol. 15 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2005), 375.

rising and setting time³⁵. Olive oil produced from the tree is the best. The notion of olive tree as a blessed tree is also mentioned in chapter *al-Mukminūn* (23): 20.

Ibn Kathir described the word ‘*zaitūnah*’ as the olive tree that does not grow in the eastern part. As a result, the morning sunlight cannot reach it, nor does it grow in the western part, as a result of which, there is a part not exposed to the sunlight when it penetrates towards the west. However, it grows in the middle area which is always exposed to the sunlight from the morning to evening, so that the oil it produces is clear, good and shiny. Ibn Kathir also quoted Ibn Abbas's interpretation, that the olive tree in the Sahara field is not covered by the shade of other trees, nor is covered by mountains, nor is it in a cave. In short, the tree is covered by nothing. That is why this kind of tree produces the best oil³⁶.



Pic 1, Olive tree



Pic 2, Olive oil

³⁵Muhammad bin Ali bin Muhammad Al-Shawkānī, *Fatḥ Al-Qadīr Al-Jamī' Baina Fannay Al-Riwayah Wa Al-Dirayah Min 'Ilm Al-Tafsīr, Vol. 3* (Beirut: Dar Ibnu Hazim, 2014), 439.

³⁶(Kathīr, 2000, p. 347)

Olive, a Blessed Tree

In the scientific world, olive tree has a scientific name called '*olea europea*' which is still classified into *oleaceae* family. Olive is a tree called by the Qur'an (chapter *al-Mu'minūn* verse 20) as a blessed tree. This tree is called by archaeologists as the oldest tree in the world. In Palestine, a 2,000-year-old olive tree was once found. The information was obtained from archeological sources showing that olives were found around 5,000-3,000 BC. Olives can be found in the Arabian Peninsula and Mediterranean countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Morocco, Turkey, Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal, as well as California State in America, Mexico, Peru and Southern Australia and some Asian countries³⁷.

In Prophet Noah's story, when he was about to land from the ship after Allah had sent a terrible flash flood to his unbelievers, he got news from a bird which was sent over to find information on land which was no longer inundated. The bird gave information by carrying a leaf from an olive tree. Noah was very glad; Allah had allowed himself and his followers to prosper the earth again. From this story, it is known that at that time, olive trees were already available there³⁸. Al-Qurtubi explains, this olive tree was the first tree to grow on earth, first to grow back after the Noah flood, grew in the houses of the Prophets and a number of holy places. This tree was even prayed for by the blessings of 70 Prophets³⁹.

This olive tree seems special because the whole parts of the tree can provide benefits to mankind. From its wooden trunks, tall buildings can be built and pulpit poles stand upheld. From its leaves, a crown can be made for the champion in a sport event. Its branches can be used as a sign of peace, kindness and loyalty; its fruits can be used as a food flavoring. Oil taken from olive juice can be used as a material to turn the lights on. Its fruits and oil can also be used as medicine for various types of diseases⁴⁰.

³⁷Ahmad, *Mawsū'ah Al-Ijāz Al-Ilmī Fī Al-Qurān Al-Karīm Wa Al-Sunnah Al-Mujabbarah*, 456.

³⁸Mubashir & Mahran, *Ghaḏā' Wa Al-Dawā' Fī Al-Qur'ān Al-Karīm* (Cairo: Der el-Fikr, 2010), 438.

³⁹Muhammad ibn Ahmad Al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr Al-Qurṭubī, Vol. 3* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiah, 2014), 322.

⁴⁰Mubashir & Mahran, *Ghaḏā' Wa Al-Dawā' Fī Al-Qur'ān Al-Karīm*, 439.

Olea europaea is a shrub which can last for a long time. According to Johnson, the classification of olive plants is as follows: Kingdom: *Plantae*, Sub Kingdom: *Tracheobionata*, Super Divisio: *Spermatophyta*, Divi Asio: *Magnoliophyta*, Class: *Magnoliopsida*, Sub Class: *Asteridae*, Family: *Oleaceae*, Genus: *Olea*, Species: *Olea europaea*⁴¹. Al-Naggār asserts that olive tree family includes 28 species and there are about 500-600 types of flower plants spread in the whole wide world in cold and cool regions, also spread in special areas. Most are in the Mediterranean regions, and in the southwest of Asian continent. Although this tree is widespread, it belongs to a rare tree species because it is a strong tree in an area⁴².

Olive tree is a tree with a long lifespan of more than a hundred or even thousands of years. *Olea europaea* plant reaches 3-15 meters in height. This plant continuously produces fruits without human labor assistance, as it will always look beautiful to be seen⁴³. Olive tree keeps going green and its leaves live for 3 years, before new leaves appear. At the end of spring, olive tree will bloom in the shape of a bunch of 10 to 40 flowers in each group. However, only 1 out of 20 flowers will turn to olives⁴⁴.

In the next phase, Olive tree is usually blooming between June and October. Olive oil can be of good quality after 6-8 months of blooming period. At that time, it turns to black, indicating that it is fully ripe. In terms of harvesting time, it usually starts from September to March of the following year. The wood of olive tree has a beautiful golden brown color. Moreover, Romans pay an honor to olive tree wood by strictly having it forbidden to be used as fire woods⁴⁵.

Olive flowers are small in size, white or beige in color, with about 6.10 mm in length. Flowers bloom in October to March. Ovoid olives, which are small in size, light green with white patches and turning dark purple when ripe, with 10 mm in diameter, are sharp in shape⁴⁶. Olive ripeness is determined by its color. Olives with green color are not fully ripe yet. Meanwhile, black olives indicate fully ripe. Both of these olives (ripe or almost ripe) are usually consumed as food flavoring. Ripe olives can be used to make oil by squeezing⁴⁷. Olives contain various vitamins and nutrients, but are usually not eaten directly (before processed) due to their metallic flavors.

⁴¹J.M Johnson, *Fructose. In Encyclopedia of Food Science, Food Technology and Nutrition*, ed. R. Macrae, R. K. Robinson, and M. Sadler. (London: Academic Press Ltd, 1993), 405.

⁴²Al-Naggār, *Tafsir Al-Āyāt Al-Kaunīyah Fi Al-Qur'an Al-Karīm*, 314.

⁴³Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishab: Pesan, Kesan, Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an, Vol. 15*.

⁴⁴Al-Naggār, *Tafsir Al-Āyāt Al-Kaunīyah Fi Al-Qur'an Al-Karīm*, 316.

⁴⁵Mubashir & Mahran, *Ghaḥā' Wa Al-Dawā' Fi Al-Qur'an Al-Karīm*, 432.

⁴⁶Johnson, *Fructose. In Encyclopedia of Food Science, Food Technology and Nutrition*.

⁴⁷Mubashir & Mahran, *Ghaḥā' Wa Al-Dawā' Fi Al-Qur'an Al-Karīm*, 453.

Not only can the fruits be taken advantage, but also the leaves. The leaves of olive tree contain substances which are beneficial for the human body and in some cases, they can treat a number of diseases, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and prevent cancers and treat various diseases caused by viruses. More specifically, olive leaves can treat joint diseases, rheumatic, and diseases on hair, nails, skin and teeth⁴⁸. Another benefit of olive leaves is that they can be used as a media to clear up wounds by ancient Jewish society. In addition, olive leaves also contain anti-microbial substances and are very effective in exterminating a number of fungi, viruses and bacteria.

Table 2, Olive Efficacy⁴⁹

Types of Olive	How to Use	Medical Benefits
Olive Oil	Smear on pores	Preventing any substances from passing through it
Olive Oil	Smear on hair	Making hair beautiful and long
Olive Oil	Smear on skin	Treating measles
		Serving as an antitoxin
		Rejuvenating digestive organs, particularly liver
Olive Oil	Potion (as a drink)	Reducing blood pressure, cholesterol absorption in the body and cholesterol circulation in the blood
Olive Oil		Treating rheumatoid arthritis. This type of inflammatory disease attacks the joints of hands, feet and others
		preventing other cancers, such as colon cancer, uterine cancer, and ovarian cancer

⁴⁸Tayyāra, *Mamsū'ah Al-I'jāz Al-Qurāni Fī Al-'Ulum Wa Al-Ṭibb Wa Al-Falak*, 456.

⁴⁹A Kiritsakis and P Markakis, "Olive Oil: A Review," *Advances in Food Research* 31 (1988): 453–82.

Olive Oil	Mixed food	Making food more delicious and nutritious
Olives	Cooked, processed and eaten	Making food more nutritious and increasing appetite

Olives in Modern Herbal Medicine: Scientific Interpretation

Olive is a tree blessed by Allah with many features. In the Qur'an, chapter *al-Mukmin* verse 20, Allah says: "... and also a tree which grows on Mount Sinai which produces oil and relish as a food for those who like to eat it." According to interpreters, the tree referred to in the above verse is olive tree. Of which fruits can be used for oil and food for its consumers⁵⁰. Whereas, the mention of Mount Sinai as a place where the olive tree grows, they suggest that this tree first grew and spread on the Mount Sinai⁵¹. On that basis, experts of scientific interpretation believe that this verse contains scientific miracle aspects from olives.

In addition to the verse above, the scientific miracle of olive oil is also revealed by the Qur'an in chapter *al-Nūr* verse 35, "... lit from 'the oil of' a blessed olive tree, 'located' neither to the east nor the west, whose oil would almost glow, even without being touched by fire." Experts of scientific interpretation assert that this verse contains scientific miracle of olive oil. Also, its scientific miracle was conveyed by Prophet Muhammad in his saying, "Eat olives and use them as oil, because they grow from a blessed tree" (Hadith narrated by Ahmad and al-Tirmizi). With this scientific miracle, experts believe that olive oil has many benefits for human life, whether consumed for food flavoring or used as medicine.

In traditional treatment, Ibn Qayyim (w. 1350) in the book entitled *Zād al-Ma'ād* explains that olive oil can be used to cover pores of the body and prevent substances passing through the pores. If used after having a warm bath, olive oil will repair and moisturize the body. If used as hair oil, it will make your hair beautiful and long. Olive oil is also efficacious for treating measles and various other diseases. Besides, based on the quality of oil, Ibn Qayyim explains that the olive oil quality depends on the quality of the olives. The juice from the ripe fruits

⁵⁰Al-Shawkānī, *Fath Al-Qadir Al-Jāmi' Baina Fannay Al-Riwayah Wa Al-Dirayah Min 'Ilm Al-Tafsir*, Vol. 3, 325.

⁵¹Fakhruddin Al-Rāzī, *Al-Tafsir Al-Kabir Aw Mafatih Al-Gayb*, Vol. VIII (Cairo: Dar al-Hadis, 2012), 45.

is the best. Oil from olives is still cold and dry in nature. Oil from red olives has medium quality and that from black olives is balanced as hot and moist in nature⁵².

Olive oil comes from olives which have been ripe by extracting them into vegetable oil, which can reach 60-70% of a medium sized fruit. Olive oil is composed of a number of very important chemical compounds, that is, of glycerin and fatty acids (glycerides). Fatty acids are great in number found in olive oil content⁵³. Olive oil varies according to its colors, flavors and places where it grows. There is one with golden and dark green color. There is one with sharp and soft flavor. To get a liter of olive oil, five kilograms of its fruits is needed to be extracted or squeezed. Olive oil is the only oil which can be drunk directly or consumed after being extracted. Olive oil produced from black olives is the best type and works well as an antitoxin⁵⁴.

Some of the latest methods used to extract olive oil are carried out by repeated filtration. This method is not very good because it can eliminate the oil content which actually makes the body healthy. Olive oil should not be heated on fire until boiling since it can actually turn into a poison. The oil extracted at normal temperatures is actually able to withstand heat as high as 270 degrees Celsius. Olive oil is often processed first with soda before it is fermented to remove the bitter flavor. This method can eliminate polyphenols which are actually useful for the body⁵⁵.

In terms of health, recent studies prove that olive oil is beneficial for digestion tool in general, especially for liver. Olive oil also has a better quality than other oils, either vegetable or animal oils, because it has no effect which can cause diseases in the blood circulation and arteries such as those found in other types of oils⁵⁶. It is said that olive oil contains potassium, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, iron, copper, sulphur and others, with additional compositions of compounds reaching 1000 compositions, and inside of it are several chemical compounds, all of which are very beneficial for the human body and some are

⁵²Ibnu Qayyim al- Jauziyah, *Zad Al-Ma'ad Fi Hady Khair Al-Ibad* (Beirut: Muassasat al-Risalat, 2009), 708.

⁵³Al-Naggār, *Qadīyyāt Al-Ijāz Al-Ilmi Li Al-Qur'an Al-Karim Wa Dawābit Al-Ta'amul Ma'abā*, 143.

⁵⁴Ahmad, *Mawsū'ah Al-Ijāz Al-Ilmi Fi Al-Qurān Al-Karim Wa Al-Sunnah Al-Mujabbarah*, 469.

⁵⁵Ṭayyāra, *Mawsū'ah Al-Ijāz Al-Qurāni Fi Al-'Ulum Wa Al-Ṭibb Wa Al-Falak*, 457.

⁵⁶Ṭayyāra, *Mawsū'ah Al-Ijāz Al-Qurāni Fi Al-'Ulum Wa Al-Ṭibb Wa Al-Falak*.

very important for health. And from here, we know that the eminence of olive oil or fatty acids, and vegetable oils are best sourced from olive oil ⁵⁷.

Olive oil is also efficacious to reduce blood pressure, cholesterol absorption in the body, cholesterol circulation in the blood to about 13%, and bad cholesterol in the blood known as low density lipoprotein (LDL) to about 21% and to increase good cholesterol in the blood or high density lipoprotein (HDL) the body needs. This is strengthened by a study on the inhabitants of Crete Island, Greece, who are widely known as the least affected by coronary heart disease in the world. Apparently, the oil they consume the most in daily food comes from olives. Olive oil has been medically proven to be able to reduce harmful cholesterol levels and also to prevent the occurrence of blood vessel blockage and coronary heart disease. In addition, olive oil is also an antioxidant because it contains vitamin E and polyphenolic compounds which can prevent blood vessel blockage ⁵⁸.

Another benefit of olive oil is to reduce the risk of high blood pressure. This is proven by Dr. Aldo Ferrara with his study from the University of Naples, Italy published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* magazine, on March 27, 2000. He examined 23 cases of people affected by high blood pressure. The lowest blood pressure among of whom was found to be at the level of 165/104 mmHg who took hypertension medication. Those with high tensity were divided into two groups; the first one was recommended to consume food containing sunflower oil, while another group was recommended to consume virgin olive oil. The result of the study showed that those consuming olive oil went thorough a decrease in blood pressure by seven points, while it did not occur to the group given sunflower oil. Patients who consume food rich in olive oil content can reduce the dose of hypertension medication they need by half, of course, under the doctor supervision ⁵⁹.

Another study claims that olive oil can treat *Rheumatoid Arthritis*. This type of inflammatory disease attacks the joints of both hands, both legs, and others. Scientists assume that there is a contradicting correlation between olive oil consumption and the case of inflammatory disease. The *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* magazine on November 1999 edition published a study on 145 people with *Rheumatoid Arthritis* in southern Greece. They were then compared to healthy people. This study showed that consuming olive oil played a role in preventing the occurrence of *Rheumatoid Arthritis*. People with less olive oil consumption had

⁵⁷Abdullah Abelaziz Al-Muslih; Abdjawad Al-Sāwī, *Al-Ijāz Al-Ilmi Fi Al-Qur'an Wa Al-Sunnah* (Jeddah: King Fahd al-Watani, 2008), 342.

⁵⁸Tayyāra, *Mawsū'ah Al-Ijāz Al-Qurani Fi Al-'Ulum Wa Al-Ṭibb Wa Al-Falak*, 458.

⁵⁹L. Aldo Ferrara et al., "Olive Oil and Reduced Need for Antihypertensive Medications," *Archives of Internal Medicine* 160, no. 6 (2000): 837–42.

a risk of developing inflammatory disease, compared to those with more olive oil consumption⁶⁰.

Many studies have uncovered that there is a strong correlation between olive oil consumption and a low average number of breast cancer cases. As revealed by Prof. Dr. Gerd Assamann, the chairperson of the Institute for Arteriosclerosis Research at the University of Münster, Germany, and one of the world's most famous Arteriosclerosis experts. A study on 2,564 women with breast cancer, the results of which were published in 1995, confirmed that there was a contradicting correlation between breast cancer and olive oil, that is, consuming olive oil is essential for self-protection and prevention from breast cancer. A number of other studies have shown that consuming olive oil can prevent other cancer attacks, such as colon cancer, cervical cancer, and ovarian cancer⁶¹.

Differences between Classic and Scientific Interpretations on Olives

In the interpretation of Olives by classic scholars, they are more likely to interpret normatively and present various differences among scholars in perceiving the word '*Zaitun*'. According to al-Razi's commentary of QC al-Tin: 1, commentators disagree on the meaning of the word '*Zaitun*'. Some argue that *zaitun* is the name of the fruit that is known today, exemplifying the benefits of the fruit's content. Some believe that what is meant is the location where many figs and olives grow, namely Jerusalem, the location where Prophet Isa was born and received revelation. Al-Razi's commentary simply describes different perspectives on the meaning of *zaitun*.

In contrast to them, scientific commentators employ auxiliary sciences to interpret the meaning of the Qur'an verses. They also link specific themes studied to various terms, theories, and scientific research findings. For example, when commenting on *zaitun*, Zaglul al-Najjar reveals the elements and properties of olive oil. He asserted that olive oil is composed of a number of very significant chemical compounds, namely glycerin and fatty acids (glycerides), fatty acids in large amounts in olive oil. Ahmad also revealed the various advantages of olive oil's color changing. He stated that there's olive oil with golden and dark green in

⁶⁰Athena Linos et al., "Dietary Factors in Relation to Rheumatoid Arthritis: A Role for Olive Oil and Cooked Vegetables?," *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 70, no. 6 (1999): 1077–82.

⁶¹Al-Sāwī, *Al-I'jāz Al-Ilmi Fi Al-Qur'an Wa Al-Sunnah*, 359.

colors. The flavor is both sharp and soft. One liter of olive oil requires the extraction or squeezing of five kilograms of fruit.

There is also a significant difference in how classic commentators interpret the word '*Zaitun*' in QC al-Nur: 35. Despite the fact that this verse is highly scientific, some classic commentators have explained it simply, without presenting scientific principles. For instance al-Shawkany, he interprets '*Zaitun*' as '*Zaitunal*' and '*Zaituha*'. In this verse, '*Zaitun*' is referred to as a blessed tree, and the fruit of the tree can be used to make oil that can be used to light lamps. According to him, the olive tree in this verse is in the desert, where the sun does not rise or set. Despite being a modern-day commentator, he does not explain the benefits of olive fruit and olive oil in his commentary.

When interpreting the blessing in this olive, Al-Qurtubi is also relatively normative. He claimed that this olive tree was the first to grow on Earth, the first to grow even after Noah's flood, growing in the houses of the prophets and other holy places. This tree was even blessed by 70 Prophets who prayed for it. According to him, the blessing of olive is due to the fact that it is prayed for by a number of prophets and grows in their various places of worship.

Whereas, scientific commentators describe the blessings of olives in QC al-Nur: 35, they pay more attention to the many benefits of olives for human health. It is also supported by scientific studies. Al-Tayyara revealed the Olive blessing that its oil is beneficial to the gastrointestinal tract in general, particularly the liver. Olive oil's quality also outperforms that of other oils, both vegetable and animal oils, because it lacks the effects that can cause diseases of the circulation and arteries that are found in other types of oils. While Muslih and Sawi explained that the blessing of olives is found in the content of olive oil, which is beneficial for human physical needs due to the presence of potassium, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, iron, copper, sulfur, and others, with addition of compound mixtures reaching 1000 compositions, and it is composed of several chemical compounds, all of which are very beneficial to the human body and some of which are considered necessary for health.

Conclusions

Modern scientific discoveries of the twentieth century changed the way modern Muslims perceived in understanding the verses of the Qur'an. Modern scholars of the Qur'an discipline argued that the verses of the Qur'an can be studied with a modern scientific approach. This interpretive approach with scientific theories is called *tafsir ilmi* (scientific interpretation). It is an effort to understand the verses of the Qur'an which contain scientific signs from the perspective of modern science. Also, *tafsir ilmi* is commentators' hard work to reveal the relationship between the cosmological verses in the Qur'an with scientific discoveries aiming to reveal scientific miracles.

In the Qur'an, the word 'Zaitūn' (Olive) has various forms, found in 7 (seven places), the commentators have different opinions; Some argue that *zaitūn* is the name of a fruit as it is known today, with its efficacies. In addition, some assert that *zaitūn* is the place where many olives grow, that is Jerusalem where Prophet Isa was born and received revelation (al-Razī). Several other commentators claim that *zaitūn* refers to the al-Aqsa mosque (al-Qurṭubī). Al-Ṭabari states that *zaitūn* in the verse is the name of a type of tree or fruit popular among the Arabs (al-Ṭabari). Meanwhile, al-Maragi explains that the word *zaitūn* means the time of Prophet Noah since at a particular time when the giant ark he was on was about to land, he saw birds carrying olive leaves, as a sign of security and safety.

In the meantime, in scientific interpretation studies, experts explain more about the benefits and efficacies of olives for herbal medicine for the human body. These benefits are sometimes generated after being extracted into olive oil, sometimes as food ingredients. Some of Olive efficacies based on scientific researches are as follows; it serves as a herbal medicine that can treat various diseases including treating the digestive organs in general (particularly liver) and arthritis in both hands, reducing the risk of high blood pressure and breast cancer. It is also effective in reducing dangerous cholesterol levels and preventing clogged arteries and coronary heart diseases.

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