



## EXPLORING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NAQOTU IN THE STORY OF PROPHET SALIH: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS BASED ON FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE'S THEORY IN SURAH AL-A'RAF: 73

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Received: March 19, 2024	Reviewed: April-June 2024	Published: July 13, 2024
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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to expand Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic studies on Qur'anic verses by analyzing the meaning of the word naqotu in the story of Prophet Saleh, in order to reveal the symbolism and significance of this miracle. The central question of this research is how to analyze Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory in the context of Qur'an, Surah Al-A'raf verse 3. The research method employed is library research, focusing on the analysis of interpretive texts and semiotic literature. The findings indicate that, based on Ferdinand de Saussure's theory, naqotu (female camel) as a signifier can be understood from the physical aspects that differentiate it from male camels. As a signified, this she-camel symbolizes a miracle that demonstrates God's power surpassing the skills of the Thamud in stone carving and architecture, and represents wealth and prosperity in Arab culture. Thus, this research enriches the field of Qur'anic studies and semiotics through new interpretations of symbolism in the story of Prophet Saleh.

**Keywords:** The story of Prophet Saleh, *Naqotu*, Ferdinand de Saussure's Semiotics

### ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk memperluas studi semiotika Ferdinand de Saussure pada ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an dengan menganalisis makna kata naqotu dalam kisah Nabi Saleh, guna mengungkap simbolisme dan signifikansi mukjizat tersebut. Pertanyaan utama penelitian ini adalah bagaimana menganalisis teori semiotika Ferdinand de Saussure dalam konteks Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-A'raf ayat 3. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah penelitian pustaka, dengan fokus pada analisis teks interpretatif dan literatur semiotika. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa, berdasarkan teori Ferdinand de Saussure, naqotu (unta betina) sebagai penanda dapat dipahami dari aspek fisik yang membedakannya dari unta jantan. Sebagai petanda, unta betina ini melambangkan mukjizat yang menunjukkan kekuasaan Tuhan yang melampaui keterampilan kaum Tsamud dalam seni pahat batu dan arsitektur, serta mewakili kekayaan dan kemakmuran dalam budaya Arab. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini memperkaya bidang studi Al-Qur'an dan semiotika melalui interpretasi baru simbolisme dalam kisah Nabi Saleh.

**Kata Kunci:** Kisah Nabi Saleh, *Naqotu*, Semiotika Ferdinand de Saussure



## INTRODUCTION

The term “*naqotu*” (female camel) in the story of Prophet Saleh in Surah Al-A'raf, verse 73, remains ambiguous. Why did Allah grant Prophet Saleh a female camel as a miracle? To uncover the meaning of “*naqotu*” (female camel) in this story, the author employs Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory, which explores the concepts of signifier and signified. The signifier refers to anything that can be perceived by the mind, such as sound images and visual representations, while the signified represents the meaning or impression of the sign in our minds. This theory will be used to elucidate the meaning of “*naqotu*” (female camel).

Research on the interpretation of Quranic verses using semiotic theory can be categorized into two main trends. The first trend focuses on the fragmentary analysis of words in Quranic verses, as conducted by Sania (2023), Malia & Atmi (2023), Prayoga & Liddini (2022), Indriyanti (2020), Kurniasih et al. (2023), Al Farisi (2023), and Rizal & Sari (2022), who analyzed Quranic words using various semiotic concepts. The second trend involves studies examining stories in the Quran, as performed by Istiqomah (2017), Jamaludin et al. (2021), Fatah (2020), and Akrom (2014), who analyzed Quranic stories using semiotic theory. However, research specifically focusing on the fragmentary analysis of words in Quranic stories using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory remains limited.

This study aims to contribute to the literature on Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory in Quranic verses and enrich Quranic interpretation by providing diverse insights

from various perspectives. This research seeks to answer why the term “*naqotu*” was chosen as Prophet Saleh's miracle and why a female camel emerged from a rock using Ferdinand de Saussure's concepts of signifier and signified.

The initial argument of this research is based on the notion that “*naqotu*” (female camel) as a miracle for Prophet Saleh in Surah Al-A'raf, verse 73, holds a special significance. In Arab culture, owning a camel symbolizes wealth and prosperity. Arabs take pride in their camels, raising them to be strong, impressive, and attractive. Camels are used for transportation, livestock, war vehicles, racing, and generating income through gambling (Humaini, 2007). Thus, camels become a cultural symbol for the Arab community due to their specific meanings and benefits.

This cultural symbolism extends beyond the physical attributes of the camel and delves into its role within the socio-economic fabric of Arab society. The camel's emergence from a rock, as mentioned in the Quran, is not merely a miraculous event but also a strategic choice by Allah, intended to resonate deeply with the Arab people. By selecting an animal that epitomizes their wealth and status, the miracle directly challenged the Thamud tribe's perception of power and prosperity. This act of divine intervention demonstrated that true power and blessings come from Allah, not from worldly possessions.

Moreover, the use of the camel as a signifier in the semiotic analysis reveals multiple layers of meaning. The physical presence of the she-camel serves as a tangible proof of Prophet Saleh's divine mission, while

its miraculous origin—emerging from a rock—symbolizes the breaking of natural laws, emphasizing the omnipotence of Allah. The choice of a she-camel specifically highlights themes of nurturing and provision, qualities highly valued in Arab society, further enhancing the miracle's impact.

To recapitulate, the term “*naqotu*” in this context is not just a reference to a female camel but a profound symbol embedded with cultural, economic, and spiritual significance. This multifaceted interpretation enriches our understanding of the Quranic narrative and underscores the intricate relationship between language, culture, and divine revelation in Islamic teachings.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study is based on library research, where the researcher collects, analyzes, and organizes sources from articles, books, and previous studies relevant to the research theme to obtain data (Hadi & Afandi, 2021). To answer the research questions, the author conducts descriptive and analytical research using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory approach, with the concepts of signifier and signified introduced by De Saussure (2011) to analyze the word “*naqotu*” and its meanings or connotations. Specifically, the semiotic theory will help in dissecting the signifier “*naqotu*” and uncovering the signified meanings contained in this term as mentioned in the story of Prophet Saleh in Surah Al-A'raf, verse 73. This theoretical framework is expected to provide a robust analytical tool for exploring the intricate meanings of “*naqotu*” in the context of the holy scripture.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Biography and Semiotic Theory of Ferdinand De Saussure

Ferdinand de Saussure was born on November 26, 1857, in Geneva, and passed away in 1913. He is renowned as a pivotal figure in modern linguistics, coming from a Protestant family background (Velmezova & Fadda, 2022). As a child, Saussure migrated with his family from France to Lorraine due to the religious wars in the 16th century, necessitating their departure from Geneva. From a young age, Saussure demonstrated a remarkable aptitude and proficiency in various fields, especially in languages (Abdullah & Abdillah, 2021). One of the early proofs of his linguistic talent was the publication of his book “*Essai sur les langues*” at the age of 15. In adulthood, Saussure gained widespread recognition with the publication of his seminal work “*Cours de linguistique générale*” (published in English as “*Course in General Linguistics*”) in 1916. Here, he introduced the concept of semiology, the study of signs as an integral part of social life (Lagopoulos & Boklund-Lagopoulou, 2020).

Saussure's theories quickly disseminated across Europe, significantly impacting not only linguistics but also the social sciences and humanities. He began his writing career between 1876 and 1878 while studying linguistics in Leipzig under prominent linguists Brugman and Hiibcchmann (Harimurti Kridalaksaka, 1988). Besides being acknowledged as the father of modern linguistics, Saussure was a brilliant Swiss linguist and a pioneer of structuralism, influencing disciplines such as psychology,

sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and literary studies (Sørensen & Thellefsen, 2022). His extensive reading of American linguistic scholars, including William Dwight Whitney's "The Life and Growth of Language: An Outline of Linguistic Science," profoundly influenced his theoretical work. Saussure earned his doctorate summa cum laude from the University of Leipzig in 1880, having mastered historical linguistics by the age of 21. By 24, he was teaching at two institutions: Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in 1891 and at the University of Geneva, where he taught Sanskrit, Gothic, Old German, and comparative historical linguistics (Harimurti Kridalaksaka, 1988).

Saussure's renowned semiotic theory revolves around the concepts of the Signifier and the Signified. He proposed that a sign consists of two inseparable components: the Signifier, which is the tangible aspect that can be seen, heard, or touched (such as sounds, written words, or objects), and the Signified, which is the abstract concept it represents. Thus, a sign is anything that conveys meaning, uniting the concrete with the abstract, form with meaning, and the sound image with the concept (De Saussure, 2011).

### Applying Ferdinand de Saussure's Semiotics to Q.s Al-A'raf Verse 73

This study employs Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory of Signifier (sign) and Signified (meaning) to explore the meaning of the term "naqotu" in Q.s Al-A'raf verse 73. The steps undertaken are as follows: First, to identify the Signifier and Signified of the word "naqotu," the researcher will examine the complete story of Prophet Salih using

tafsir literature and previous research that discusses his story. Second, the study will identify the Signifier of the word "naqotu" (female camel) by examining the observable and experiential aspects of the female camel. Third, the study will reveal and delve into the Signified or meaning of the word "naqotu." Additionally, this research cites the verse that narrates the story of Prophet Salih, which reads:

وَالِى ثَمُودَ أَخَاهُمْ ضَلِحًا قَالَ يَتُومِرِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ  
مِنَ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ قَدْ جَاءتْكُمْ بَيِّنَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ هَذِهِ نَاقَةُ اللَّهِ  
لَكُمْ آيَةٌ فَذُرُّوهَا تَأْكُلْ فِي أَرْضِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَمَسُّوهَا بِسُوءٍ  
فَيَأْخُذْكُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٣﴾

*"We have sent to the Thamud their brother, Salih. He said, 'O my people, worship Allah; you have no deity other than Him. Verily, there has come to you a clear proof from your Lord. This is the she-camel of Allah, a sign for you. So leave her to graze in Allah's land and do not touch her with harm, lest you be seized by a painful punishment.'"*

Besides this verse, several surahs briefly recount the complete story of Prophet Salih, from the beginning to the end, during his mission to preach to the Thamud people. The researcher has compiled the following surahs: the story of Prophet Salih is narrated in various surahs of the Quran, including Surah Al-Qamar, verses 23-32; Surah Fussilat, verses 17-18; Surah An-Naml, verses 45-53; Surah Ash-Shu'ara, verses 141-159; Surah Al-Isra, verse 59; Surah Al-Hijr, verses 80-84; Surah Hud, verses 61-68; and Surah Al-A'raf, verses 73-79. Prophet Salih's lineage traces back to Salih bin Asif, ultimately to Sam bin

Nuh. He belonged to the Thamud tribe, although there are differing opinions among historians about the origin of Prophet Salih's tribe. Some believe that the Thamud were descendants of the 'Ad people, while others suggest they were remnants of the Amaliqah tribe who migrated to the region known as Hijr. Another opinion, presented by Al-Shabni and considered more accurate, asserts that the Thamud were an Arab tribe that emerged after the 'Ad.

It is narrated that initially, the Thamud requested Prophet Salih to demonstrate his prophethood by producing a she-camel from a rock. By Allah's permission, Prophet Salih fulfilled their request. The she-camel symbolized Prophet Salih's miracle, as indicated in Surah Hud, verse 64: "This is the she-camel of Allah, a sign for you." Al-Qasimi notes that this attribution is metaphorical, implying that neither Prophet Salih nor anyone else had the right to claim ownership of the she-camel. It signifies the grandeur and power of Allah. The Thamud's request to Salih resulted in the she-camel's miraculous birth.

Sayyid Qutb claims that the wording of the verse indicates the she-camel was no ordinary camel, underscoring its unique nature. However, Qutb warns Muslims against becoming entangled in controversies regarding the she-camel's origins. Concerning how the she-camel should be treated, Prophet Salih instructed the Thamud to let her graze undisturbed (Surah Al-A'raf, verse 73, and Surah Hud, verse 64) and to share water with her, alternating days between the she-camel and the Thamud, and not to harm her. Any violation of this would bring severe

punishment from Allah upon the Thamud (Surah Ash-Shu'ara, verses 155-156).

Nevertheless, the Thamud disregarded their agreement with Prophet Salih and killed the she-camel. Though the killing was carried out by one or two individuals, it was a collective decision of the Thamud, making them all accountable. Consequently, Allah's punishment befell them as described in Surah Al-A'raf, verse 73, Surah Hud, verse 64, and Surah Ash-Shu'ara, verse 155-156, taking three forms: the thunderous blast (*Sba'iqab*, Surah Fussilat, verse 17), a piercing cry (Shayhah, Surah Al-Qamar, verse 31) that ruptured their eardrums, and a devastating earthquake (Rajfah, Surah Al-A'raf, verse 78).

Prophet Salih had warned them before the punishment descended, saying, "Enjoy yourselves for three days; then the punishment will overtake you." According to a narration, over these three days, their faces underwent changes: on the first day, they turned yellow; on the second day, red; and on the third day, black. On the fourth day, the thunderous blast (*Sba'iqab*) and the earthquake (Rajfah) obliterated them. (Abi Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir al-Thabari, n.d.).

Based on the historical references mentioned above, the researcher analyzes the issue using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory, which consists of the signifier and the signified. *Firstly*, considering the theory of the signifier for the word "*naqotu*" (female camel), the signifier can be observed through various physical aspects. Female camels are generally smaller in size compared to male camels, have smoother fur, and possess a thinner or more slender neck. Their backs are shorter, and in some species, female camels have smaller

horns or may even lack horns entirely, unlike male camels which typically have larger horns. Thus, it can be concluded that the signifier of the female camel primarily pertains to its physical characteristics (Suheriyanto, 2018).

*Secondly*, when discussing the signified of the word “*naqotu*,” it is essential to understand the context of the female camel as a miracle granted by Allah to Prophet Salih. Every prophet has been endowed with various miracles as signs of their prophethood, aimed at undermining the prevalent forms of superiority of their times. For instance, Prophet Musa was given a staff that could transform into a serpent and part the sea (Rahmad et al., 2017), because sorcery was considered highly superior during his era. Similarly, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was given the miracle of the Qur'an, as eloquent Arabic poetry was greatly esteemed and respected during his time (Khodijah et al., 2023).

The author's analysis suggests that the signified meaning of the female camel as a sign of Prophet Salih's prophethood was to challenge the expertise of the Thamud people, who were skilled in stone carving and architecture. Allah caused the female camel to emerge from a rock to demonstrate His superior power over the Thamud people's skills. This act served as a clear sign that divine power surpasses human craftsmanship.

Additionally, the researcher found a cultural reason for choosing a camel as the miracle for Prophet Salih. In Arab culture, camels symbolize wealth and prosperity. By selecting a camel, Allah chose a symbol that resonated deeply with the people of that time, further reinforcing the significance and

impact of the miracle. Therefore, the camel was not only a miraculous sign but also a culturally significant symbol that underscored the message of divine power and authority..

## CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study reveals that the term “*naqotu*” in Surah Al-A'raf, verse 73, traditionally translated as “she-camel,” carries a deeper meaning than typically depicted. Using Ferdinand De Saussure's semiotic theory of signifier and signified, this research uncovers that the term “*naqotu*” (she-camel) can be interpreted from various physical aspects. Furthermore, from the signified perspective, the emergence of the camel from the rock serves to undermine the superior skills of the Thamud tribe. The selection of the camel by Allah as a sign of Prophet Saleh's miracle is also significant, as in Arab culture, the camel symbolizes wealth and prosperity.

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