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Application of Roland Barthes' Semiotics to QS. An-Naml [27]: 44 on the Bared Legs of Queen Balqis

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ABSTRACT

In general, every woman exposed legs as a form of a symbol (sign) to be appreciated, adored, and center of attention of men. Surah an-Naml [27]: 44 also mentions the story of bared legs of a woman. Does An-Naml verse 44 have the same sign as the circumstances in general? This paper discusses the meaning of *wa ka shafat 'an saqaiha*, especially Surah An-Naml [27]:44 with a discussion about the meaning of bared legs of Queen Balqis. The use of Roland Barthes' semiotic theory can be carried out through two stages in the semiotic approach. The first stage is an ordinary linguistic system or denotative meaning and the second stage is a mythological system or connotative meaning. The method used in this study is qualitative with a descriptive analysis approach that uses library research data taken from books, journals, and articles related to the theme. This study found the following results: first, the linguistic system in the word *wa ka shafat 'an saqaiha* is not only interpreted as bared legs but it is also transcribed as an expression of Queen Balqis' belief in the water pool. Second, the mythological system in the word *wa ka shafat 'an saqaiha* is that Queen Balqis had a perception failure which showed her inaccuracy and lack of selectiveness in accepting the psychomotor test from Prophet Sulaiman, when she saw a palace floor made of glass, yet Queen Balqis saw it as a large pool of water. Furthermore, Prophet Sulaiman clarified the misperception of Queen Balqis that she believed Sulaiman is not just a king but a Prophet, the messenger of God. This study concludes that: first, Queen Balqis's attitude regarding her bared legs is not to attract or gain appreciation from the opposite sex but as a form of test failure given by Prophet Sulaiman, which made her in awe of Prophet Sulaiman's power and oneness of God. Second, the Queen Balqis incident implies the Prophet Sulaiman's *da'wah* with intelligence.

Keywords: Bared Legs; Linguistic System; Mythology System.

1. INTRODUCTION

The revelation of the Qur'an to the last Prophet is the greatest relic and a precious legacy for Muslims [1], comprising a broad function as a mercy and guidance for the world [2], [3]. The Qur'an contains stories ranging from Prophets and Messengers to historic figures and increases tranquility and persistence in the heart because the Qur'an tells truth, warnings, and advice. The Qur'an is a miraculous privilege that was revealed to the last Prophet Muhammad PBUH [4] with high literary language values [5].

The explanation of a story in the Qur'an is commonly presented repeatedly and in different forms, in an elaborative or brief fashion. However, all of it entails wisdom and very deep meanings as the privilege of the Qur'an. Therefore, the Qur'an should be studied in depth in order to explore the implied meaning and wisdom. This was stated by M. Quraish Shihab about the story in the Qur'an, both factual and symbolic, as one of the efforts and methods of the Quran to guide humans to perfection [6].

The Qur'an contains the ideal type (about the concept) of the archetype (contains various historical data). The study of Quranic science describes the second form as the story of the Qur'an (*qissat Qur'an*) [7]. The

point of the study of the story in the Quran should be maintained. The fascinating story according to the authors recorded in the Qur'an is the story of exposure of bared legs of a woman, Queen Balqis.

One of the stories in the Qur'an found in Surah An-Naml [27]: 44 tells when Prophet Sulaiman ordered Queen Balqis to enter his Palace. Queen Balqis witnessed that the floor was filled with water like a pond, then she revealed her legs on a surface that was the palace floor covered with glass. Related to this story, most people interpret Queen Balqis' attitude as a natural phenomenon. In other words, her action was very acceptable as an act of avoiding puddles of water that could wet her clothes so there are many messages and roles that should be explored in depth from the story of bared legs of Queen Balqis in Surah An-Naml [27]: 44.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies related to the meaning of the bared legs about the concept of the Queen Balqis story in QS. An-Naml [27]:44 by applying Roland Barthes' semiotic theory can be divided into three aspects. The first is the studies on Queen Balqis. The studies focusing on Queen Balqis mostly considered the theme of her exemplary actions, especially in leading. This was conducted by Ria Astuti [8] and Huzaemah Tahido [9], or example in the values of peace and deliberation as practiced by Ahmad Fadhil Rizki, Sudirman Muhammad Johan, and Afrizal Nur [10]. The second is studies on Surah An-Naml as conducted by Elwi Yandri [11], Syafieh, and Nurbaiti [12]. The third is studies on Roland Barthes' theory as conducted by Azkiya Khikmatiar [13], Dewi Umaroh [14], Wildan Hidayat [15], Abdul Fatah [16], Ardiansyah [17]. From previous studies, in particular, there has not been research on the correlation of the meaning of Queen Balqis' bared legs in Surah An-Naml [27]: 44 using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory.

This study aimed to contribute and enrich the perspective of the interpretation repertoire of the Quranic verses and Islamic studies. This article provides an answer about the application of Roland Barthes' semiotics to the meaning of Queen Balqis' bared legs in Surah An-Naml [27]: 44 and investigates the message contained in the Qur'an by discussing the events of the Queen Balqis' bared legs.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The approach used in this research is a descriptive analysis which belongs to the qualitative research using library study. The authors used two sources that support this research, primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources are written works that come from writers who experience, witness, and complete their writings. Primary sources are verses from the Quran, books, theses, notes, interviews or questionnaires, research reports, and so on. Supporting existing research data requires secondary data, which can be obtained from dictionaries, textbooks, handbooks, indexes, and others [18].

From primary and secondary data, the researchers sought for the relationship with the theme of Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to analyze the meaning of the Queen Balqis' bared legs in Surah An-Naml [27]: 44. The object of study is reading in a linguistic (textual) and mythological (contextual) systems so that the analysis was carried out using through the implementation of Roland Barthes' semiotics theory and involving the internal relationships of the Qur'anic text, intertextuality, background history, *asbab al-nuzul* (circumstances of revelation), and *ulum* study of the Qur'an. This study applied the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes in analyzing the meaning of Queen Balqis' bared legs in Surah An-Naml [27]: 44.

Semiotics Roland Barthes

Semiotics has a derivative form of a word, namely the science of signs. Semiotics also has another term with the same meaning, namely semiology. Semiology and semiotics come from the Greek words 'same' with the meaning of sign interpretation [19] or from the word *semion,* meaning sign [20], [21]. The science of semiotics is referred to as the science that studies or examines signs in delivering a meaning [22], [23], by exploring rules, systems, and the possibility that a sign has meaning therein [19]. According to Saussure, semiotics is a science that has to learn about signs of life in society so semiotics can display element that builds signs and laws that govern that society [21]. If semiotics is included in socio-cultural [24], [25], it will study signs, mass media, meaning in language, art, music, and human efforts that can be represented to an audience [26].

Ferdinand De Saussure, who is the founding father of semiology [27] and a role model for

structuralists [14], [28], [29], is a figure who has laid down the foundation of semiology in his work entitled *Course de Linguistique General*, offering structuralist method in the field of linguistics, which continues to experience development to the social sciences outside language as commonly referred to as "semiotics" [30]. In method perception, semiotic analysis is used to study media texts including magazine or newspaper covers, film advertisements, websites, brochures, visual images, photos, music, and so on [31]–[37]. The focus of Saussure's theory is the emphasis on language as a sign system [23]. Saussure explained that a sign has three aspects, including the sign, the material aspect (which includes sound, letters, images, and motion) of a sign that has a signifying function or is produced by a material aspect (signifier), and mental or physical conceptual which is indicated by the material aspect (signified). The concept of sign and signified created by Saussure was expanded by Roland Barthes [[28], [38], [39].

Barthes is known for actively applying Saussurean linguistic and semiological models. Barthes is a character who developed Saussure's theory to be more dynamic, especially his theory of the signifier and the signified. Barthes' signifiers and signifiers have

independence that of Saussure [40]. According to him, a sign will not stop based on the two elements that make it up. Barthes is noted to have developed Saussure's theory of semiotics which only reached the first stage of semiotics or denotation meaning and second stage of semiotics or connotation meaning so that the scope of this second stage is wider given the context where the sign is created [14], [41]. At the denotative level (literal meaning) and connotative level (sociocultural meaning), Barthes notes are inseparable from the role of Saussure's sign and signified function [38], [40], [42]. Barthes calls the first stage of semiotics a linguistic system, which Saussure calls denotative meaning [43]. The key to Barthes' semiotics lies in the second stage of semiotics or connotative meaning which refers to the value-laden denotation [44], [45].

For example, if the meaning of denotation is something indicated by a sign on an object, then the connotative meaning plays a role in describing it or carrying hidden meanings [46]. It will be found from the connotative meaning called "myth" so Barthes refers mythological system as a form of second stage semiotics.

Below is the map.
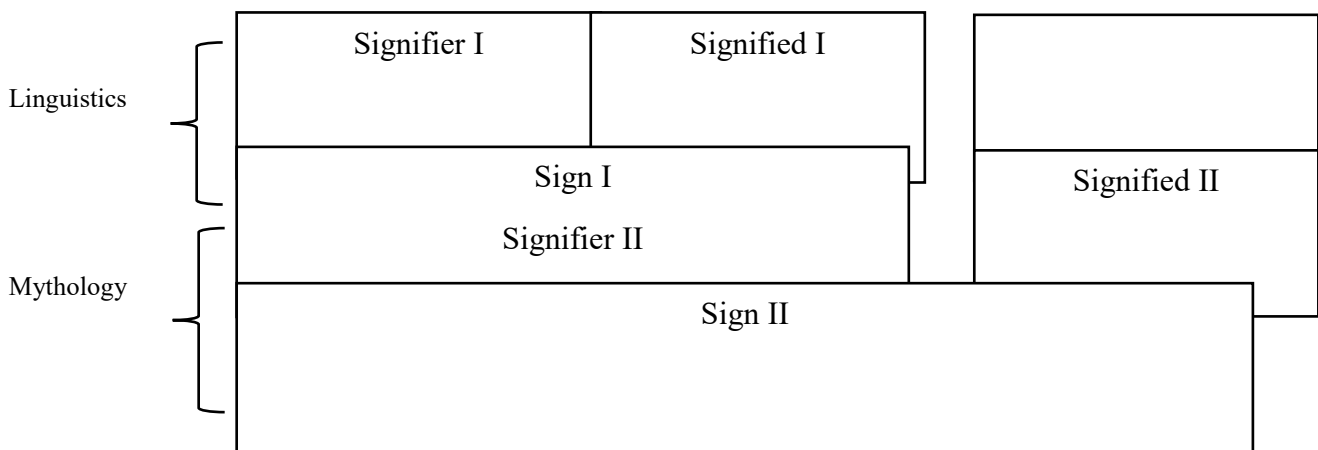
The map illustrates the first linguistic or denotative stage of (1) signifier I and (2) signified I. At the same time, the linguistic stage (denotation sign) includes connotative signifier (3) sign I signifier II. With the intention that the meaning of denotation is only obtained if the sign (material elements) is identified. The

connotation sign does not only contain additional meaning but also the two meanings of the denotative sign. The mythological stage is identical to the ideological operation as Barthes calls it a myth. Myth has a function within the framework of Barthes' semiotics as a revealer and giver of truth to dominant values.

Semiotics in the Perspective of the Interpretation of the Qur'an

In a study involving Qur'an interpretation, semiotics is also used as a tool in studying the signs of the Qur'an with the scope of the principal unit, namely the verses, by connecting the respective elements such as letters and words as well sentences. This way is a form of application of semiotic theory to the study of Qur'anic texts which includes the structure of language diversity with the variations of signs contained in the Qur'an. Semiotics is considered a very precise study of the Qur'anic text and will certainly be a very fascinating study [13].

Semiotics was born from the school of structuralism-linguistics and the Qur'an s a literary work that emerged according to the situation in the Arab at that time, thus a structural and system analysis should be studied further. Sacred scripture is a text whose existence is considered a passive text. The text can turn itself into an active text if someone reads it and provides an interpretation so that semiotics is relevant in understanding the Quran [47].

The Qur'an with all of the verses therein as a form of a collection of signs containing signifier and signified has a dialectical relationship. The markers are in the form of Arabic text, in form of words, verses, letters, *surah*, sentences, and the relationships among them. The signified is a mental aspect or can be referred to as the concept that lies behind the signifier. The two have a relationship defined by the conventions surrounding the Qur'an. The first level is occupied by linguistic analysis or linguistic code. The second level has a higher discussion and convention level than the discussion of the first convention, namely analysis related to *Asbab An-Nuzul*, the relationship of the Qur'anic text, intertextual text, historical background, as well as other scientific studies of the Qur'anic *ulum* (knowledged) [13], [14], [19].

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Roland Barthes' Semiotics application to Surah An-Naml [27]: 44

The authors attempted to apply the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes with a discussion that focuses on the Queen Balqis' bared legs in Surah An-Naml [27]: 44, as follows.

قِيلَ لَهَا ادْخُلِي الصَّرْحَ ۖ فَلَمَّا رَأَتْهُ حَسِبَتْهُ لُجَّةً وَكَشَفَتْ عَنْ سَاقَيْهَا ۚ قَالَ إِنَّهُ صَرْحٌ مُمَرَّدٌ مِنْ قَوَارِيرَ ۗ قَالَتْ رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي وَأَسْلَمْتُ مَعَ سُلَيْمَانَ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Then she was told, "Enter the palace." But when she saw the hall, she thought it was a body of water, so she bared her legs. Solomon said. "It is just a palace paved with crystal." ˹At last˺ she declared, "My Lord! I have certainly wronged my soul. Now I ˹fully˺ submit myself along with Solomon to Allah, the Lord of all worlds."

Linguistic System

The first stage in Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is in the denotation meaning or the linguistic system. This first stage of analysis was applied textually on bared legs of Queen Balqis in An-Naml [27]: 44 by examining the meaning of the dictionary and the opinions of the *mufassir* (explainer of Quran).

The word *kashafat* is a form of *fi'il madi* (past verb) which refers to *dhamir hiya* (a woman) from *tasrif kashafa-yakshifu-kashfan* which means to bare, open, and reveal. The word *saqaiha* comes from the word *saaqun-saaqaani-suuqun* which means calves, shins, and legs. According to Ibn Kathir in his book *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-'Adzim*, Surah An-Naml verse 44 is interpreted as "Queen Balqis bared her legs without a slightest doubt that there was water pool "[48]. In the book of commentary Al-Qurtubi asserts *wa kashafat 'an saqaiha* "and the bare of legs" [49]. Imam Tabari in the book Jami 'Al-Bayan interprets the word *wa kashafat 'an saqaiha* with "and the bared of calves" [50]. Hamka in his book *Tafsir Al-Azhar* states *wa kashafat 'an saqaiha* is "then she paddled her thighs" [51]. Sayyid Qutb says *wa kashafat 'an saqaiha* in his book by "and she revealed her calves" [52]. Then, according to Quraish Shihab in the book of *Tafsir Al-Mishbah,* the meaning of *wa kashafat 'an saqaiha* is "and she opened her calves" [53]. Therefore, the scholars agree with the figure who revealed that legs refer to Queen Balqis which indicates that Queen Balqis avoided the large pool of water on the floor of Prophet Sulaiman's palace to wet her clothes.

Based on the definition in the first stage, which is linguistic analysis, it is concluded that the meaning of the word *wa ka shafat 'an saqaiha* in An-Naml [27]: 44 is bared legs.

Mythology System

In the next stage, the second stage of Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is connotative meaning or mythological system. This system has a way of working by conducting a contextual analysis of the verse as a form of expansion and deepening of meaning [13]. Thus, it is requisite to do a contextual reading of the An-Naml [27]: 44. This level is retroactive or hermeneutic which involves the intertextuality of the Qur'an, the internal relations of the text, historical background, *asbab al-nuzul*, and other Qur'anic studies [19].

Meaning related to the representation of An-Naml [27]: 44, is a psychomotor test. The clause "*udkhuli al-sarha* (enter the palace)" means that this test is the second test that was periodically given by Prophet Sulaiman to Queen Balqis.

The first test as represented in QS. An-Naml [27] : 42 is cognitive intelligence. Sulaiman had moved the throne of Queen Balqis with the help of people who gained knowledge from the people of the book, then Sulaiman ordered his followers to alter it yet maintained the authenticity of the throne. However, Queen Balqis remained to notice the alteration. The cognitive intelligence test was shown by a clause in the form of a question given by Prophet Sulaiman as to Queen Balqis "*ahakadha 'arshuk* (is this your throne?)", Queen Balqis did not answer with "yes" or "no", but answered it with the phrase "*ka annahu hua* (as if it were my throne)".

When analyzing Queen Balqis's answer contained in An-Naml [27]: 42, the incident illustrates prudence and intelligence above the average possessed by Queen Balqis, as well as the mental strength to choose an equitable answer in a critical situation she was experiencing, [54] which implies Queen Balqis's success in the first test, showing her intelligence and answers with a diplomatic-critical tone.

It is different from the second test in QS. An-Naml [27] : 44, Prophet Sulaiman a.s tested Queen Balqis. The results of the second test were more complex than the previous one, which was marked by Queen Balqis' inaccuracy and less selective in looking through and distinguishing the floor. When Sulaiman said "*udkhuli al-sarha* (enter the palace)". According to the situation and conditions that crossed Queen Balqis's mind, she perceived that a large pool of water was "*hasibathu lujjatan*" so that from the incident, Queen Balqis unwittingly exposed both her legs, thus her clothes remained dry as indicated by the clause "*wa kashafat 'an saqaiha*".
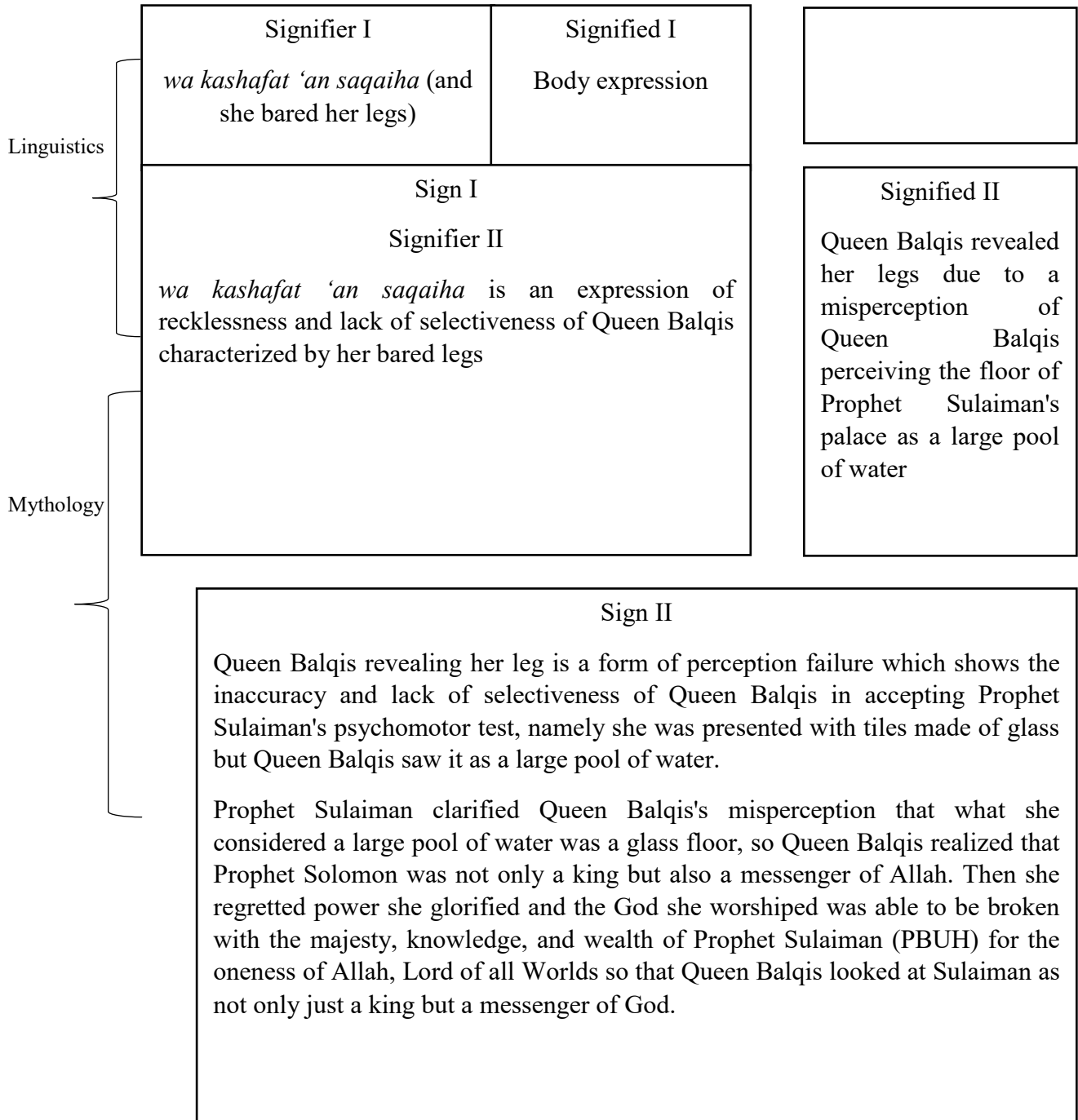
Thus, the clause has shown a symbol of Queen Balqis' psychomotor failure in the test she was presented with. But the failure in this second stage does not imply her lack of cognitive intelligence in making options, but rather a mentality. The mental condition at that time was not cohesive, counterproductive, and ambiguous which caused her soul to waver. [7]

The failure analysis became more visible when there was clarification regarding the misperception of the floor which was seen as a large water pool. This clarification was stated by Prophet Sulaiman with a very strong idea "*innahu sarhun mumarradun min qawarir* (this is a court paved with tiles of glass). Following the clarification from Prophet Sulaiman, Queen Balqis realized her failure in the psychomotor test, making her regret her action. Even Hamka said that Queen Balqis lost and fell to the captive of Prophet Sulaiman [51].

In her failure Queen Balqis mentions two regret clauses; The first is the *rabbi inni zalamtu nafsi* clause, which shows that she regretted the theological system that she had long adhered to. The second regret is indicated by the clause *wa aslamtu ma'a sulaman li Allah rabb al-'Alamin* to follow Sulaiman's belief and adorn oneself with things that are righteous and noble [53].

Implicitly, An-Naml [27]: 44 contains an explanation that Queen Balqis revealed her legs as a form of perception failure which shows the inaccuracy and lack of selectiveness of Queen Balqis in receiving the psychomotor test because Prophet Sulaiman acknowledged that Queen Balqis had failed the second stage of the test. Prophet Sulaiman clarified himself with the misperception of Queen Balqis, that what she considered a large pool of water was tiles made of glass, making Queen Balqis realize that Prophet Sulaiman was not just a king but also the messenger of Allah. She eventually regretted herself with what she had worshiped, power and the God, and those could be broken with the majesty, knowledge, and wealth of Prophet Sulaiman for the oneness of Allah, Lord of all Worlds. So, Queen Balqis saw Sulaiman as not only just a king but a messenger of Allah as well.

The following table shows the results of Roland Barthes' semiotics application with An-Naml [27]:

Signifier I	Signified I
wa kashafat 'an saqaiha (and she bared her legs)	Body expression

Sign I

Signifier II

wa kashafat 'an saqaiha is an expression of recklessness and lack of selectiveness of Queen Balqis characterized by her bared legs

Signified II

Queen Balqis revealed her legs due to a misperception of Queen Balqis perceiving the floor of Prophet Sulaiman's palace as a large pool of water

Linguistics

Mythology

Sign II

Queen Balqis revealing her leg is a form of perception failure which shows the inaccuracy and lack of selectiveness of Queen Balqis in accepting Prophet Sulaiman's psychomotor test, namely she was presented with tiles made of glass but Queen Balqis saw it as a large pool of water.

Prophet Sulaiman clarified Queen Balqis's misperception that what she considered a large pool of water was a glass floor, so Queen Balqis realized that Prophet Solomon was not only a king but also a messenger of Allah. Then she regretted power she glorified and the God she worshiped was able to be broken with the majesty, knowledge, and wealth of Prophet Sulaiman (PBUH) for the oneness of Allah, Lord of all Worlds so that Queen Balqis looked at Sulaiman as not only just a king but a messenger of God.

5. CONCLUSION

Roland Barthes has advantages in developing Saussure's theory more dynamically using signifier and the signified theory. From Saussure's theory, as he called it the first stage of semiotics (linguistic system or denotative meaning), Barthes re-developed to the second stage of semiotics (mythological system or connotative meaning). In the scientific interpretation of the Qur'an, semiotics is applied in studying the signs contained in the Qur'an as basic units by naming them as verses that connect several elements such as sentences, words, and letters. The interesting topic is Roland Barthes's use of

semiotics in his analysis of verses or texts in the Qur'an yielding a higher analysis, not only linguistic or linguistic analysis but also related to the intertextuality of the Qur'an, the internal relations of the text, historical background, *asbab al-Nuzul*, and the study of the Qur'an.

Concerning the analysis above, it can be concluded that the first stage of semiotics (linguistic system) in the word *wa kashafat 'an saqaiha* is not only interpreted as the reveling of the legs but also as an expression of the inaccuracy and lack of selectiveness of Queen Balqis in looking through the palace floor as a large pond. Then the second stage of semiotics or the mythological system in the word *wa kashafat 'an saqaiha* is the perception failure of Queen Balqis which shows the inaccuracy and lack of selectiveness of Queen Balqis in accepting Prophet Sulaiman's psychomotor test when she was presented with floor with tiles of glass and she perceived it as if it were a large pool of water. Furthermore, with his intelligence, Prophet Sulaiman made a clarification regarding Queen Balqis's misperception that what she once considered a large pool of water was a floor covered with glass in order to make Queen Balqis regret power she had glorified and God she worshiped could be broken with the majesty, knowledge, and wealth of Prophet Sulaiman, for the oneness of Allah, Lord of all Worlds. Therefore, Queen Balqis saw Sulaiman as not just a king but also a messenger of God.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

The recommendation of this research is to explore the interpretation of the Qur'an from various points of view, and to provide the widest opportunity for researchers in reading the Qur'an either semiotics, semantics, hermeneutics and so on so that it can reveal meanings that are rarely known.

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