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What Do Orientalist Qur'anic Studies Mean For a Muslim?
Oryantalist Kur'an Arařtırmaları Bir Müslüman İçin Ne İfade Eder?

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Abstract

The historical venture of the Qur'ān has assumed a paramount role within Orientalist Islamic studies during the previous two hundred years. Orientalists have pioneered the formalization of Qur'ānic history as an independent scholarly discipline in its contemporary manifestation, thereby delineating foundational research themes and methodologies within this domain. In their fundamental paradigm, these scholars reject the notion that the Qur'ān constitutes a divine revelation bestowed upon the Prophet Muhammad. Within the realm of orientalism, proponents of the perspective positing Muhammad's direct authorship or dictation of the Qur'ān have extensively examined the Qur'ān's composition, thereby tracing its developmental phases subsequent to its initial compilation as a Mushaf. These scholars delved into the surrounding religious and cultural context, particularly emphasizing monotheistic traditions, in their quest to trace the roots of Islam. Concurrently, rigorous investigations of Qur'ānic manuscripts were undertaken, striving to unveil the most authentic and critically analyzed rendition of the Qur'ānic text. Beyond the focus on the Qur'ānic text's historical venture, orientalist displayed a profound curiosity regarding its internal composition. Their inquiries encompassed the intricate interrelationship between surahs and ayahs, exploring the textual cohesion and coherence, alongside the meticulous arrangement of surahs and ayahs. On the other hand, the Muslim scholarly community embarked upon a post-orientalist exploration of the Qur'ānic history, engendering a modernized perspective. Their scholarship, often aimed at counteracting and addressing orientalist contentions, has sought to contextualize and respond to these studies. In this study, I embark on an exposition of Western scholarship pertaining the history of the Qur'ān. My endeavour involves a comprehensive survey of the historical epochs, scholarly inquiries, academic factions, notable scholars and their studies, literary contributions, paradigmatic contentions and methodological approaches that have collectively shaped the venture of Western Qur'ānic historiography from its emergence from the contemporary period up to the current moment. Following this systematic presentation of the orientalist tradition and its accrued body of knowledge, the subsequent discourse delves into the implications of these scholarly developments for researchers within the Muslim academic domain. In this discourse, I meticulously account for the underlying presuppositions and paradigmatic distinctions inherent to both Western and Islamic scholarly realms.

Keywords: Tafsir, Qur'ān, Muslim, Qur'ānic History, Orientalism.

Özet

Kur'an tarihi, yaklaşık son iki yüz yıldır oryantalist İslam araştırmalarından en önemli ve en çok çalışma yapılan alanlarından biri olmuştur. İslam'ın en temel kaynağı olması hasebiyle Kur'an her zaman oryantalistlerin ilgisini çekmiş ve Kur'an üzerine muhtelif açılardan pek çok çalışma kaleme almışlardır. Dolayısıyla modern anlamıyla bir ilim dalı olarak Kur'an tarihinin kurucusu oryantalistler olmuşlar, bu alanın temel araştırma konularını ve yöntemlerini ilk olarak onlar belirlemişlerdir. Temel paradigmaları itibarıyla Kur'an'ın ilahi vahiy olduğunu kabul etmeyip onu bizzat Hz. Muhammed'in yazdığı veya yazdırdığı ön kabulüyle hareket eden oryantalistler, Hz. Muhammed'in peygamberliğinin başından itibaren günümüze kadar Kur'an'ın yazıya geçirilişini ve mushaflaştıktan sonra günümüze kadar geçirdiği aşamaları araştırma konusu etmişlerdir. Bu doğrultuda her şeyden önce Abraham Geiger'in (ö. 1874) öncülüğünde Kur'an'ın kökenini tespit etmeye çalışmışlar, İslam'ın kökenini başta semavi dinler olmak üzere çevre din ve kültürlerde aramışlardır. Hemen hemen eş zamanlı olarak, modern dönemde Kur'an tarihinin kurucu ismi kabul edilen Theodor Nöldeke'nin (ö. 1930) açtığı yoldan giderek Kur'an el yazmaları üzerine yaptıkları çalışmalar üzerinden en otantik metne ulaşma ve kritik edilmiş bir Kur'an metni ortaya koymayı hedeflemişlerdir. Kur'an metninin tarihinin yanı sıra Kur'an'ın iç yapısıyla da ilgilenmişler, sûre ve ayet tertibinin yanı sıra yine sûre ve ayetler arasındaki münasebât, diğer deyişle metniçi bütünlük üzerine de çalışmalar yapmışlardır. Müslümanlar ise modern anlamıyla Kur'an tarihine oryantalistlerden sonra giriş yaparak genelde onların iddialarını cevaplamaya matuf çalışmalar kaleme almışlardır. Bu çalışmada ilk olarak modern dönemde Kur'an tarihinin ortaya çıktığı dönemden günümüze kadar geçirdiği aşamalar, yapılan çalışmalar, ekoller, temel iddialar ve yöntemler ele alınarak Batılı Kur'an tarihi literatürü sunulmuştur. Başta, Kur'an tarihi konularının neredeyse tamamının kurucusu sayılabilecek Alman oryantalist geleneği üzere olmak üzere diğer Batılı geleneklere de dikkat çekilmiş, kronolojikten ziyade ülke ve gelenek bazlı bir anlatım benimsenmiştir. Ekollerin benimsediği

yöntemler arasındaki temel farklar üzerinde özellikle durulmuş, tarihsel süreçte yaşanan kırılma ve dönüşümlere vurgu yapılmıştır. Bu şekilde oryantalist gelenek ve birikim ortaya konduktan sonra bunun Müslüman araştırmacılar için ne ifade ettiği tartışılmıştır. Bu tartışma yapılırken her iki dünya arasındaki ön kabuller ve paradigma farkları göz önünde bulundurulmuştur. Bu mukayese sonucunda Batılı araştırmacılar tarafından oluşturulan birikimin Müslümanlar tarafından uygulanabilirliğinin keyfiyetine ışık tutularak yapılabilecek yeni çalışmalara ve açılacak yeni alanlara işaret edilmiştir.

Keywords: Tefsir, Kur'an, Müslüman, Kur'an Tarihi, Oryantalizm.

Introduction

There are unsurprisingly fundamental and ontological differences between the Western approach to the Qur'an and the Muslim approach. The reason is that because Orientalists have used the historical-critical methods and approaches to analyze the Qur'an as a mere "subject of historical research and historical document" or in other words as a "historical material" from which they can learn about the Prophet's actions and thoughts. Muslims, on the other hand, mainly as a result of the element of belief, have an ontological relationship with the Qur'an, and therefore see it as the eternal divine word revealed by Allah to Prophet Muhammad as the foundation of their belief, worship, law, and even all their actions and thoughts. To put it in different way, when a Muslim study the Qur'an, they are simultaneously exploring the essence of their own being; a non-Muslim, on the other hand is attempting to study the Qur'an is engaging with a world that is foreign to them, i.e., the "other". Since their objective is primarily centered around "understanding", it is improbable for them to grasp the full significance of this world as profoundly as a Muslim would. It is crucial to bear this fundamental paradigmatic difference in mind when examining Western Qur'anic studies.

The reason why the history of the Qur'an in the modern era, as a subject of Qur'anic sciences, has been written in detail by the Western scholars for the first time with modern methods and techniques is perhaps due to this paradigm difference. In fact, if the statement is not considered anachronistic, the information provided in classical Islamic sources about the "history of the Qur'an" was relatively limited compared to the detailed accounts available from the modern period. Classical sources mainly focused on a limited number of narrations and studies concerning the recitation or rasm al-mushaf. Conversely, Western scholars have meticulously traced the history of written materials from the moment the Qur'an began to be revealed, trying to uncover intricate details of the canonization process during the reigns of Abu Bakr and Uthman. Additionally, they have undertaken thorough investigations into the Qur'an manuscripts that have survived from both that early period and subsequent times. This comprehensive approach has allowed for a more thorough understanding of the historical development of the Qur'an and its written transmission, shedding light on significant aspects that were not as extensively explored in classical Islamic sources.

The aim of this paper is to elucidate the history of academic orientalist Qur'anic studies up to the present-day by employing literature evaluation and discourse analysis methods and explore the implications of these studies for Muslims. The main sources for this research will include the studies on the origins of Abraham Geiger and his contemporaries, the manuscript studies that gained momentum at the outset of the 20th century, and the studies on the Qur'anic text structure, which has emerged as a prominent trend in recent times.

The paper will classify the main themes that Orientalists have been dealt with in the field of Qur'anic history over the last two centuries. It will refer to prominent names, studies

and approaches within each classification. The research will be segmented into three sections. The first part will examine the orientalist's studies concerning the origin of the Qur'ān. The second part will focus on the history of the Qur'ānic text, and the third part will analyze the inner-structural features of the Qur'ān, including the chronological orders of surahs and ayahs (tartib) and interrelations between them (munasabat). Finally, the implications of these studies for Muslims will be discussed.

1. Origin of the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān's origin has been a central focus in contemporary Western Qur'ānic studies. According to their paradigm presented in the introduction, the orientalist who do not accept that the Qur'ān was revealed to Muhammad by Allah, claimed that it was either written by Muhammad himself or dictated by him, suggesting that it did not originate as divine revelation but as a human creation. Although the orientalist agreed on this premise, they differ in their views on how Muhammad created the Qur'ān. Some asserted that Muhammed borrowed the Qur'ān from Judaism or Christianity, while others propose a more comprehensive framework suggesting that he drew inspiration from both monotheistic religions and other surrounding cultures, including paganism. There are even theories suggesting that the Qur'ān was a product of the collective consciousness of Muslims throughout the second and third centuries AH, possibly not in the Hijaz but in Mesopotamia. Consequently, a significant body of literature concerning the "origin" of the Qur'ān has surfaced within orientalist Qur'ānic studies, incorporating these various claims.

Despite the first examples of origin claims dating back to the time when the Qur'ān was revealed, they were largely superficial. The first academic and comprehensive study in the modern period was conducted by the German-Jewish Reformist Rabbi Abraham Geiger (1810-1874). In his doctoral thesis titled *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (What did Muhammad borrow from Judaism?) written in 1832, Geiger drew parallels between the Qur'ān and Jewish sacred sources in terms of beliefs, concepts, worships, stories ect. Based on these parallels, he claimed that Muhammad wrote the Qur'ān by drawing upon the knowledge he acquired from the Jews around him, implying that he borrowed it from Judaism.

Following Geiger's methodology, a consistent endeavour emerged among both Jewish and Christian writers to explore the origin of Islam, particularly through the Qur'ān.¹ To delineate the "origin literature" that surfaced after Geiger's work, some researchers have contended that orientalist almost "hunted for biblical material in the Qur'ān"² and that an "influence paradigm"³ emerged. Although the expressions employed by authors in these studies may vary, the method and essence of the claim, which involves attributing a specific origin, remained unchanged.⁴

¹ Bernard Lewis, *İslâm Dünyasında Yahudiler*, Trans. Belgin Çınar (Ankara: Akılçelen Kitaplar, 2018), 119.

² Walid Saleh, "In Search of Comprehensible Qur'ān: A Survey of Some Recent Scholarly Works", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 5 (2003), 155.

³ Michael Pregill, "Some Reflections on Borrowing, Influence, and the Entwining of Jewish and Islamic Traditions; or, What an Image of a Calf Might Do", *Islamic Studies Today*, ed. Majid Daneshgar - Walid Saleh (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2017), 181.

⁴ Pregill, "Some Reflections on Borrowing, Influence, and the Entwining of Jewish and Islamic Traditions; or, What an Image of a Calf Might Do", 168.

The authors initiate their investigation by identifying foreign (non-arabic) words in the Qur'an and then attempt to demonstrate their Hebrew origin. Subsequently, they compare the stories of the Qur'an with the biblical passages, arguing that these stories must have been borrowed by Muhammad from the Bible. In doing so, they endeavor to depict Islam as a derivative religion, contending that Muhammad fashioned an imitative religion by borrowing from Judaism or Christianity. While claiming this, the terms they generally use have been "borrowing, influence, origins of Islam, Muhammedanism".⁵

In this context, several scholars can be mentioned who have claimed that Islam and the Qur'an have Jewish origins. These scholars include Isaac Gastfreund⁶ (d. 1880), Gustav Weil⁷ (d. 1889), Heinrich Graetz⁸ (d. 1891), Ignaz Goldziher⁹ (d. 1921), Hartwig Hirschfeld¹⁰ (d. 1934), W. Clair Tisdall¹¹ (d. 1928), Theodor Nöldeke¹² (d. 1930), Joseph Horowitz¹³ (d. 1931), C. Snouck Hurgronje¹⁴ (d. 1936), Arent Jan Wensinck¹⁵ (d. 1939), Eugen Mittwoch¹⁶ (d. 1942), Charles Cutler Torrey¹⁷ (d. 1956), Julian Obermann¹⁸ (d. 1956), Israel Schapiro¹⁹ (d. 1957), Arthur Jeffery²⁰ (d. 1959), Alfred Guillaume²¹ (d. 1965), Sholomo Dov Goitein²² (d. 1985), Abraham Katsh²³ (d. 1998).

On the other hand, there are scholars who have argued for a Christian origin of Islam and the Qur'an. This group includes Clair Tisdall²⁴ (d. 1928), Alphonse Mingana²⁵ (d. 1937),

⁵ Özcan Hıdır, *Yahudi Kültürü ve Hadisler* (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2018), 419.

⁶ Isaac Gastfreund, *Mohammed nach Talmud und Midrasch* (Berlin: Hansebooks, 2019).

⁷ Gustav Weil, *The Bible, the Koran, and the Talmud or Biblical Legends of the Mussulmans* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1846).

⁸ Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, Eng. Trans. Bella Löwy (London: Myers, 1904).

⁹ Ignaz Goldziher, *Muhammad and Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917).

¹⁰ Hartwig Hirschfeld, *Judische Elemente im Koran* (Berlin: Selbstverl, 1878); Hartwig Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and the Exegesis of the Qor'an* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902).

¹¹ W. Clair Tisdall, *The Sources of Islam* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1905).

¹² Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans* (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1919).

¹³ Joseph Horowitz, "Jewish Proper Names and Derivatives in the Koran", *Hebrew Union College Annual* 2 (1925), 145-227.

¹⁴ C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mohammedanism* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Son, 1916).

¹⁵ Arent Jan Wensinck, *Mohammeden de Joden the Medina* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1908).

¹⁶ Eugen Mittwoch, *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Islamischen Gebets und Kultus* (Berlin: Verl. D. Königl, 1913).

¹⁷ Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion Press, 1933).

¹⁸ Julian Obermann, "Islamic Origins: A Study in Background and Foundation", *The Arab Heritage*, ed. Nabih A. Faris (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1964).

¹⁹ Israel Schapiro, *Die Haggadischen Elemente im erzählenden Teil da Korans* (Berlin: Forgotten Books, 2018).

²⁰ Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an* (Baroda-Indien: Oriental Institute, 1938).

²¹ Alfred Guillaume, *Islam* (New York: Penguin Books, 1954).

²² Sholomo Dov Goitein, *Jews and Arabs*; Sholomo Dov Goitein, "Muhammad's Inspiration by Judaism"; Sholomo Dov Goitein, *Muhammad's Islam: How a New Religion Developed in the Shadow of Judaism*; Goitein also wrote an article in Hebrew titled "Who Were the Most Important Teachers of Muhammad" see, (*Tarbiz*, 23, 1952).

²³ Abraham Katsh, *Judaism and Islam* (New York: Sepher Hermen Press, 2009).

²⁴ Clair Tisdall, *The Sources of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1905).

²⁵ Alphonse Mingana, *Syriac Influence on the Style of the Koran* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1927).

Tor Andrea²⁶ (d. 1947), Richard Bell²⁷ (d. 1952), Gabriel Said Reynolds,²⁸ Christoph Luxenberg,²⁹ Günter Lüling,³⁰ J. B. Witztum³¹ and Emran al-Bedawi.³²

Studies on the origin of the Qur'ān have extended beyond Judaism and Christianity. In the last four decades, a group of orientalists, known as Revisionists, has garnered attention for their claims suggesting that the origin of Islam should not be confined solely to these two religions. Instead, they propose that it should be explored within the context of the first two centuries of the Hijrah period of the Muslim community, which spread from the Hijaz to Mesopotamia, along with the influence of surrounding religions and cultures. Given the Qur'ān's diverse text types in terms of style and content, it cannot be attributed solely to Prophet Muhammad.

For instance, John Wansbrough (d. 2002) introduced the "source skepticism" approach, which had been observed to some extent observed in orientalist literature before him, and argued that the narrations of this period, defined as the "salvation history", were later fabricated by Muslims to "preserve their history". Consequently, Wansbrough proposed the necessity of writing history based on external sources. This extreme skepticism, which can be viewed as an extension or continuation and developed version of the Goldziher-Schacht tradition, was also embraced simultaneously by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook.³³ Christoph Luxenberg³⁴ and Gerd R. Puin³⁵ can also be mentioned among the names who followed a similar approach.³⁶

In orientalist literature, in addition to studies seeking the origin of the Qur'ān in the surrounding religions or cultures, there are also research endeavors that concentrate on foreign words found in the Qur'ān, aiming to unveil its origin through linguistic analysis. Arthur Jeffery's work *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* exemplifies this genre. In this renowned work, Jeffery employs linguistic methods to ascertain the origins of the Qur'ānic words from languages other than Arabic. He argues that Syriac was the most influential language on the Qur'ān, besides Hebrew, Abyssinian, and other Semitic languages. By providing examples from these languages, Jeffery presents his findings and analysis in support of his claims.³⁷

²⁶ Tor Andrea, *Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum* (Uppsala, 1926).

²⁷ Richard Bell, *The Origins of Islam in its Christian Environment* (London: Routledge, 1968).

²⁸ Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān in its Biblical Context* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

²⁹ Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramic Reading of the Koran* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007).

³⁰ Günter Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, ts.).

³¹ J. B. Witztum, *The Syriac Milieu of the Quran* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017).

³² For a comprehensive study of the claims regarding the Jewish origin of the Qur'ān, see, Necmettin Salih Ekiz, "Oryantalist Literatürde Kur'an'ın Yahudi Kökenli Olduğu İddiası: Abraham Geiger Örneği"; For a detailed evaluation of the Christian origin claims, see, Özcan Hıdır, *Hıristiyan Kültürü ve Hadisler*.

³³ Patricia Crone - Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

³⁴ Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramic Reading of the Koran* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007).

³⁵ Gerd R. Puin, "Methods of Research on Qur'ānic Manuscripts – A Few Ideas"; Gerd R. Puin, "Observations on Early Qur'ān Manuscripts in San'a"; Gerd R. Puin, "Vowel Letters and Ortho-Epic Writing in the Qur'ān".

³⁶ For a detailed study on the revisionists' approach to the Qur'ān, see, Akgün, *Kur'an Tarihinde Revizyonist Oryantalistler: John Wansbrough, Christoph Luxenberg ve Gerd-R. Puin*.

³⁷ Bilal Gökçür, "Kur'an'da Yabancı Kelimler Meselesine Oryantalist Bir Yaklaşım", *Marife* 2/3 (2002), 135-142.

2. Textual History of the Qur'ān

As Tayyar Altıkulaç, one of the prominent scholars in the history of the Qur'ān in Turkey, asserted, orientalist attempted to construct the history of the Qur'ān until the 1930s based on contradictory narrations. Subsequently, they tried to reach some conclusions by examining old manuscripts and grounding on some textual differences between them.³⁸ Consequently, they collected and micro-filmed Qur'ān manuscripts from diverse regions around the globe, conducting thorough studies. It must be acknowledged that Western scholars were pioneers in investigating critical aspects such as the dating of manuscripts, the material used, information about the copiers, orthography, orthographical similarities or differences, among other relevant topics.

The German orientalist Theodor Nöldeke (d. 1930) is credited with providing the foundational framework for modern Qur'ānic historiography. His seminal work, initially published by Nöldeke as *Geschichte des Qorāns* in 1860, underwent subsequent additions by his students Friedrich Schwally (d. 1919), Gotthelf Bergsträßer (d. 1933) and Otto Pretzl (d. 1941), before reaching its definitive form in 1938. To elucidate the subject matter, the book can be summarized into three main volumes as follows: "The Emergence of the Qur'ān" in the first volume, "The Collection of the Qur'ān" in the second, and "History of the Text of the Qur'ān" in the third.

Early in the 20th century, the absence of a Qur'ānic text that had undergone criticism through historical-critical methods became a prominent topic of discussion within the orientalist circles. Undoubtedly, the influence of historical-critical studies on the Bible played a significant role in bringing this issue to the forefront. Gotthelf Bergsträßer (1886-1933) took the initiative to prepare an expanded edition of Nöldeke's renowned work *Die Geschichte des Qorāntexts*. However, it was Otto Pretzl (1893-1941) who ultimately published this work, as mentioned earlier. Additionally, in 1930, Bergsträßer's himself published his well-known work on the critique of the Qur'ān, titled *Plan eines apparatus criticus zum Koran*. Through his works, Bergsträßer spearheaded the project of studying the history of the Qur'ān by scrutinizing the Mushaf manuscripts during that century. Continuing his teacher's project, Bergsträßer's student Otto Pretzl established a valuable archive by capturing photographs and microfilms of the Qur'ānic manuscripts as part of this comprehensive program.³⁹ During the same period, Arthur Jeffery also engaged in discussions concerning the absence of a criticized Qur'ānic text and actively worked towards this goal.⁴⁰

This archive, consisting of more than 450 photographs captured by Pretzl, was entrusted to Angelika Neuwirth (b. 1943) by his successor Anton Spitaler (1910-2003). Founded in 2007 by Angelika Neuwirth (Head of the Department of Arabic at Freie University in Berlin), Nicolai Sinai (University of Oxford, Oriental Seminar) and Michael Marx (Current Corpus Coranicum Project Research Director) *The Corpus Coranicum Project* is based on Bergsträßer and Pretzl's archives on the text and history of the Qur'ān. Undoubtedly, this ambitious project stands as

³⁸ Tayyar Altıkulaç, *Günümüze Ulaşan Mesahif-i Kadime* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2015), 151.

³⁹ Esra Gözeler, "Corpus Coranicum Projesi: Kur'an'ı Geç Antik Döneme Ait Bir Metin Olarak Okumak", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 53/2 (2012), 222.

⁴⁰ Arthur Jeffery, "Progress in the Study of the Qur'ān Text", *Muslim World* 25 (1935), 4-16; Arthur Jeffery, "The Qur'ān Readings of Zaid B. 'Ali", *Rivista Degli Studi Orientalia* 16/3-4 (1936), 249-289; Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1937).

one of the most significant endeavours in the field of modern Qur'ānic history studies, aiming to systematically compile and provide access to all the documents related to the Qur'ān.⁴¹

Up until now, the archives of Gotthelf Bergsträßer have been largely digitized as part of the project, and numerous materials have been made available on the project's website. Within the scope of the project, the Qur'ānic recitations found in the manuscripts are also subject to meticulous examination, leading to the identification of noteworthy parallels between certain Qur'ānic passages and texts written in the languages of late antiquity prevalent in the geographical region where the Qur'ān was revealed.⁴² On the other hand, it is acknowledged that additional textual material from the early period such as London (MS. Or. 2165, British Library, London) and Saint Petersburg manuscripts, exists and deserves further scholarly attention.

Another prominent figure known for his significant contributions to Qur'ānic manuscripts studies is the renowned French orientalist François Déroche (b. 1952). Between 1978-1983, Déroche worked at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (National Library of France) and published a catalog detailing the characteristics of the Mushaf manuscripts held in this library. Additionally, he has been actively involved in coordinating numerous projects dedicated to the exploration of Mushaf manuscripts.

Notably, Déroche has played a pivotal role in initiatives like the "Coranica"⁴³ and "Paleocoran"⁴⁴ projects, which endeavour to investigate the history of the Mushaf manuscripts and the linguistic structure of the pre-Islamic Arab society by accessing the oldest existing Mushaf manuscripts. As a research director at École Pratique Des Hautes Études, a prestigious institutions in France, Déroche has been supervising numerous dissertations since 1990⁴⁵ with a particular focus on manuscripts in general and Mushaf manuscripts specifically.

François Déroche is a distinguished scholar known for his extensive research on manuscripts, particularly Mushaf manuscripts. Several of his prominent works are worth mentioning:

1. *Manuel de codicologie des manuscrits en écriture arabe*, (BNF, 2000): This handbook provides fundamental information about Arabic manuscripts. It has been translated into English and Arabic.
2. *Le Coran* (Presses Universitaires de France: Paris/France, 2005): In this concise volume, Déroche addresses key issues related to the Qur'ān, including the pre-revelation Arab society, the historical context of the Qur'ān's revelation, its linguistic structure, the oral and written transmission of the Qur'ān, Muslim societies' perspectives on the Qur'ān, and Western perception of the Qur'ān.

⁴¹ Gözeler, "Corpus Coranicum Projesi: Kur'an'ı Geç Antik Döneme Ait Bir Metin Olarak Okumak", 225.

⁴² Gözeler, "Corpus Coranicum Projesi: Kur'an'ı Geç Antik Döneme Ait Bir Metin Olarak Okumak", 227-248.

⁴³ Launched in 2011, the Project, apart from Déroche, was managed by experts in this field in the West, such as Christian Robin, Michael Marx, Angelika Neuwirth. For further information about the project, see <http://www.coranica.de/>. Accessed March 23, 2023. [Erişim tarihi?](#)

⁴⁴ It is a project that aims to understand better the history of the Qur'ān by considering the mushaf manuscripts in Egypt with different readings. For detailed information about the project, see. <https://paleocoran.eu/>.

⁴⁵ For some of the dissertations that Déroche supervised, see. <http://www.theses.fr/026825635#> Accessed March 23, 2023.

3. *Le livre manuscrit arabe, Préludes à une histoire* (BNF, January 2005): Published version of Déroche's four lectures on manuscripts delivered at the National Library of France in November 2001. This work has also been translated into Arabic.

4. *Qur'āns of the Umayyads* (Leiden: Brill, 2014): This work focuses on subjects such as the Parisino Petropolitanus Mushaf manuscript, believed to have been copied in the early period, and the transmission of the Qur'ān through Mushafs written in Hijazi script. It emerged from a series of lectures given by Déroche at the Leiden University Center for the Study of Islam and Society.

5. *The Abbasid Tradition: Qur'āns of the 8th to 10th Centuries AD.* (The Nour Foundation, 1992): This publication is part of the Islamic Art Collection of Nasser D. Khalili, an Islamic art researcher and collector. It includes catalog information and images of 98 mushaf manuscripts.

6. *La Transmission écrite du Coran dans les Débuts de l'islam: Le codex Parisino petropolitanus* (Leiden: Brill, 2009): This study centers on a manuscript known as *Parisino petropolitanus*, of which initial copies were found in the Amr b. al-As Mosque in Fustat, Egypt, in the 18th century, with its leaves scattered across different parts of the world. Déroche's evaluation suggests that it is a comprehensive work dealing with the Mushaf manuscript, copied by five calligraphers, encompassing all its elements. Déroche has also published the Paris and London Mushafs. Through his works, he has become one of the most prominent scholars in the field of Qur'ānic manuscripts.⁴⁶

Another contemporary orientalist who draws attention out by his studies and assertions regarding Qur'ānic manuscripts is Gerd R. Puin (b. 1940). Puin gained recognition through his research on the Qur'ān manuscripts discovered in al-Jamiu'l-Kabir in Sana'a in 1972, which drew the attention of the scholars working in the field due to his sceptical theories. Between 1981 and 1984, Puin led the project "Restoration and Cataloging of Arabic Manuscripts" (Restaurieren und Katalogisieren arabischer Handschriften) in Sana'a, funded by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Among his renowned works are the articles "Vowel Letters and Ortho-Epic Writing in the Qur'ān" and "Observations on Early Qur'ān Manuscripts in San'a". Puin posited that the San'a manuscripts could challenge Muslims' unwavering belief that the Qur'ān has been transmitted unchanged from generation to generation until the present day, arguing that the text of the Qur'ān never had a fixed and unchanging structure.⁴⁷ Puin's skeptical perspectives on the history of the Qur'ān created a stir, particularly when Toby Lester, in his article titled "What is the Qur'ān?" published in the Atlantic Monthly in January 1999, based his claims about the authenticity of the Qur'ān on Puin's views.⁴⁸ Notably, other significant works

⁴⁶ For more information on his works, see Ahmet Harman, "Fransız Müsteşrik François Déroche'un Mushaf Yazmaları Çalışmalarına Dair Birkaç Not", 269-271.

⁴⁷ Karl-Heinz Ohling vd., "Kur'an Araştırmalarının Yeni Yolları", Trans. Günay Özer, *KSÜ İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 4 (2004), 121-141.

⁴⁸ For Lester's article, see. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1999/01/what-is-the-koran/304024/>, Accessed April 04, 2022. Lester's article was later published as a book chapter. See. Toby Lester, "What Is the Koran?", *What the Koran Really Says*, ed. Ibn Warraq (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 107-128.

have also been conducted on the San'a manuscripts by scholars such as Asma Hilali,⁴⁹ Éléonore Cellard,⁵⁰ Behnam Sadeghi, and Mohsen Goudarzi.⁵¹

In Russia, the St. Petersburg Public Library and the Asian Academy of Sciences initiated research on ancient Mushafs found within the country in 1881. These Mushafs were compiled and preserved, resulting in a collection of pieces at the Russian National Library and another collection of 171-piece at the St. Petersburg Branch of Institute of Oriental Studies. The most important components of these collections include Mushaf copies and fragments written in Kufic calligraphy. Among the renowned specimens in this collection is the Tashkent Mushaf.⁵²

In England, the inception of Qur'ānic manuscript studies in its modern sense can be attributed to Alphonse Mingana (1878-1937), an Iraqi-born Chaldean traveler who later settled in England. Mingana made significant contributions to Mushaf manuscript studies through textual analysis and orthographic examinations. In his work titled *Leaves from Three Ancient Qur'āns Possibly Pre-Othmanic*, published in 1914, he posited that three distinct Qur'ān fragments belonged to a period preceding the reign of the third caliph, Uthman. A contemporary scholar, Alba Fedeli, thoroughly examined Mingana's fragments, which remain preserved in the collections of the Cadbury Library of the University of Birmingham, as part of her PhD dissertation. Employing carbon testing, she revealed that these fragments, written on sheep or goat skin, date back to the years between 569-645 CE.⁵³

Additionally, several prominent scholars should be noted for their recent and ongoing studies on the history of Mushaf manuscripts. Among these scholars are Nabia Abbot (d. 1981),⁵⁴ Yasin Dutton,⁵⁵ Alba Fedeli,⁵⁶ Nicolai Sinai,⁵⁷ Marijin Van Putten,⁵⁸ Heythem Sidky⁵⁹

⁴⁹ Asma Hilali, *The Sanaa Palimpsest: The Transmission of the Qur'ān in the First Centuries AH*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁵⁰ Éléonore Cellard, "The Şan'ā' Palimpsest: Materializing the Codices", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 80/1 (ts.), 1-30.

⁵¹ Behnam Sadeghi - Mohsen Goudarzi, "San,â 1 and the Origins of the Qur'an", *Der Islam* 87 (2012), 1-129.

⁵² Necmettin Gökür, "Giriş", *Kur'an Araştırmaları ve Oryantalizm*, 5.

⁵³ Necmettin Gökür, "Batı'da Kur'an Tarihi Araştırmaları: Tematik Alanlar, Paradigmalar ve Yöntemler", *Kur'an Araştırmaları ve Oryantalizm*, ed. Bilal Gökür vd. (Istanbul: İfav Yayınları, 2022), 19.

⁵⁴ Nabia Abbot, *The Rise of North Arabic Script and its Qur'anic Development*, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri* I-III.

⁵⁵ Yasin Dutton, "Red Dots, Green Dots, Yellow Dots & Blue: Some Reflections on the Vocalisation of Early Qur'anic Manuscripts—Parts I", *JQS* 1 (1999), 115-140; Yasin Dutton, "Red Dots, Green Dots, Yellow Dots, Blue Part II", *JQS* 2 (2000), 1-24; Yasin Dutton, "An Early Mushaf According to the Reading of Ibn 'Āmir", *JQS* 3 (2001), 71-90; Yasin Dutton, "Some Notes on the British Library's 'Oldest Qur'ān Manuscript' (Or. 2165).", *JQS*, (2004), 43-71; Yasin Dutton, "An Umayyad Fragment of the Qur'ān and its Dating", *JQS* 9 (2007), 57-87.

⁵⁶ Alba Fedeli, "Early Evidences of Variant Readings in Qur'anic Manuscripts", *Die dunklen Anfänge*, ed. Karl-Heinz Ohlig - Gerd R. Puin (Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2005), 293-316; Alba Fedeli, "Mingana and the Manuscript of Mrs. Agnes Smith Lewis, One Century Later", *MO* 11 (2005), 3-7; Alba Fedeli, "A.Perg.2: A Non-Palimpsest and the Corrections in Qur'anic Manuscripts", *MO* 11 (2005), 20-27.

⁵⁷ Nicolai Nicolai Sinai, "Beyond the Cairo Edition: On the Study of Early Qur'anic Codices", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 140/1 (2020), 189-204; Nicolai Sinai, "When did the consonantal skeleton of the Qur'ān reach closure?", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77 (2014), 273-292.

⁵⁸ Marijin Van Putten, *Qur'anic Arabic: From its Hijazi Origins to its Classical Reading Traditions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2022).

⁵⁹ Heythem Heythem Sidky, "On the Regionality of Qur'anic Codices", *JIQSA* 5 (2020), 133-210.

and Keith Small.⁶⁰ A thorough examination of their works reveals that they have extensively scrutinized the Qur'ānic manuscripts that have survived to the present day using various methodologies, thereby making significant contributions to the field.

Last but not least, it can be asserted that orientalist perspectives on the history of the Qur'ān can be broadly classified into two primary approaches. The first approach is the "traditional orientalist approach", exemplified by scholars like Theodor Nöldeke, wherein the focus is on constructing a historical narrative based on Islamic sources and traditional accounts. On the other hand, the second approach entails the "revisionist orientalists" represented by figures such as John Wansbrough and Gerd R. Puin, who adopt a more skeptical stance by critically analyzing and scrutinizing Islamic literature and narrations as historical sources.

3. Inner Structure of the Qur'ān

In conjunction with research on the Qur'ān's origin and Qur'ānic manuscripts, the inner structure of the Qur'ān has also been a significant area of interest for Orientalists. Studies conducted in this direction can be divided into two primary themes: "Discussions on the Order of the Chapters and Ayahs of the Qur'ān" and "Discussions on the Textual Unity of the Qur'ān".

3.1. Order of the Chapters and Ayahs of the Qur'ān

The order of the Qur'ānic surahs and verses has been first discussed in the Western orientalist context by the German orientalist Gustav Weil (1808-1889). In his work *Historisch-Kristische Einleitung in der Koran*, published in 1844, Weil highlighted the challenge of comprehending the Qur'ān in the traditional Mushaf order, which does not follow the chronological sequence of revelation. He proposed an alternative chronological order based on factors such as Asbab an-Nuzul narrations and changes in subject and style. Subsequent scholars who delved into this matter shared the common goal of rendering the Qur'ān more intelligible, historically coherent, and a complete text.

Theodor Nöldeke remains again the primary source for Western researchers investigating the history and chronology of the Qur'ān. He extensively addressed this subject in his aforementioned work on Qur'ānic history. Nöldeke's classification of the Meccan period into sub-periods in terms of the chronology of the Qur'ān has been widely accepted and regarded as a reliable chronology in the Western scholarship.

In his book titled *The Corān: Its Composition and Teaching*,⁶¹ William Muir adopts a different approach from the dual Meccan-Medinan distinction in the Islamic tradition, dividing the chronology of the Qur'ān into six periods. According to Muir, the first five periods are Meccan, while only the last period is Madinan. Notably, Muir does not consider the 18 short suras as divine revelations from God during the first Meccan period; instead, he dates them to a time preceding the initiation of the Prophet Muhammad's prophethood mission.

⁶⁰ Keith Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011).

⁶¹ William Muir, *The Corān: Its Composition and Teaching and the Testimony It Bears to the Holy Scriptures* (Londra: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1878).

Hubert Grimme, in his works *Mohammed I: Das Leben*,⁶² which focuses on the life of the Prophet Muhammad, and *Mohammed II: Einleitung in den Koran*,⁶³ which attempts to explore the systematic and theology of the Qur'ān, not only delved into the subject of chronology but also proposed a specific chronology of the Qur'ān.

Hartwig Hirschfeld proposed an alternative approach, suggesting the division of the Meccan surahs based on six distinct literary criteria: 1. First Proclamation 2. The Confirmatory Revelations 3. The Declamatory Revelations 4. The Narrative Revelations 5. The Descriptive Revelations 6. The Legislative Revelations. However, in the Medinan period, Hirschfeld refrained from forming sub-categories as found in his prior works. Furthermore, his classification encountered challenges in determining the chronological order of certain verse groups.⁶⁴

Richard Bell's scholarly focus primarily centered on verse groups rather than surahs, and he adopted a methodology for dating individual verses by distinguishing between Meccan and Madinan contexts.⁶⁵ In a later period, W. Montgomery Watt further advanced Richard Bell's approach, implementing more substantial modifications and refinements to the methodology.⁶⁶

In his scholarly work titled *Discovering the Qur'ān: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, Neal Robinson dedicated two separated chapters to the dating of Qur'ānic revelation. In the fourth section of his book, he ascertained the chronological order of the surahs by drawing upon traditional sources, incorporating aspects such as Asbab an-Nuzul, Naskh and Meccan-Medinan distinctions. The fifth section of his work involved an evaluation of Western approaches, exemplified by Theodor Nöldeke and Richard Bell.⁶⁷

Among the studies carried out in the Western academia in this context, the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*,⁶⁸ stands out as a significant resource, encompassing numerous articles on the subject. In particular, Gerhard Böwering's article titled "Chronology and the Qur'an" merits mention, as he tackled the matter of the verse order in relation to Islamic tradition and assessed Western approaches. Furthermore, he deliberated the feasibility of examining and dating the verses based on their contents.⁶⁹

⁶² Hubert Grimme, *Mohammed I: Das Leben* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1892).

⁶³ Hubert Grimme, *Mohammed II: Einleitung in den Koran, System der Koranischen Theologie* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1895).

⁶⁴ Hartwig Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran* (Londra: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902).

⁶⁵ Richard Bell, *The Qur'ān Translated with a Critical Re-arrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937-1939). Also see. *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān.*, prepared by W. Montgomery Watt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970).

⁶⁶ W. Montgomery Watt, *Companion to the Qur'ān* (Londra: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1967).

⁶⁷ Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'ān: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (Londra: SCM Press, 2003).

⁶⁸ *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (I-VI), Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.) (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2000-2006).

⁶⁹ Gerhard Böwering, "Chronology and the Qur'ān," *EQ*, v.1, pp. 316-335. For more detailed information on the issue of dating the Qur'ānic suras and verses, see. Esra Gözeler, *Kur'an Ayetlerinin Tarihlendirilmesi* (Istanbul: KURAMER, 2016), pp. 127-199.

3.2. Discussions on the Textual Unity of the Qur'ān

For a long time, in the Western literature, the Qur'ān has often been characterized as a text lacking chronological order, literary coherence and containing numerous repetitions. However, upon closer examination, Nöldeke's proposed chronological sequence, for instance, reveals minimal divergence from the traditional Meccan-Medinan classification. This convergence may stem from the insufficiency of historical data essential for establishing an unequivocal chronological arrangement of surahs and verses. Consequently, the proposed orders have predominantly aligned with the traditional lists, subject to scholarly debate, and generally, have remained confined to overarching conjectures grounded in stylistic and contextual analyses.

The final quarter of the 20th century marked a juncture wherein the pursuit of chronological arrangement reached an impasse, leading to the emergence of novel inquiries within the realm of Qur'anic studies. Preceding this era, endeavours to establish the dating of verses had achieved limited advancement, and numerous literary intricacies attributed to the text remained unsolved. Therefore, during this period, prompted by the influence of contemporary literary theories, the paradigm of "history-based" readings, characterized by attempts to organize verses and surahs in chronological succession, underwent a transition toward "literature-based" analyzes aimed at comprehending the rationale behind the Mushaf order.

This evolving approach not only critiques the pursuit of chronology due to limitations encompassing historical data, subjectivity, reductionism, generalization, and eclecticism, but also introduces a fertile ground for fresh avenues of research, fortified by elements such as intertextuality, rhetorical analysis, oral and textual context.⁷⁰

As elucidated by Ersin Kabakçı in his study on this historical progression, along with Angelika Neuwirth's⁷¹ "Literary-historical Approach", names such as Mustansir Mir,⁷² Neal Robinson,⁷³ Mathias Zahniser⁷⁴ and Nevin Reda⁷⁵ have contributed to this discourse thorough

⁷⁰ For detailed information on text integrity discussions, see. Ersin Kabakçı, *Çağdaş Batı Literatüründe Kur'an Metnine Yaklaşımlar: Metin Bütünlüğü Arayışları* (Ankara: Fecr Yayınları, 2020).

⁷¹ Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien Zur Komposition der Mekkanischen Sûren* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007); Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry and The Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Angelika Neuwirth, "Form and Structure in the Qur'ān", *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006).

⁷² Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an: A Study of Islâhî's Concept of Nazm in Tadabbur-i Qur'an* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986); Mustansir Mir, "Unity of the Text of the Qur'ān", *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006).

⁷³ Neal Robinson, *Kur'an'ı Keşfetmek: Örtülü Bir Metne Çağdaş Bir Yaklaşım*, Trans. Süleyman Kalkan (Istanbul: Kuramer, 2018).

⁷⁴ Mathias Zahniser, "Major Transitions and Thematic Borders in Two Long Suras: al-Baqara and al-Nisa", *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, ed. Issa Boullata (New York: Routledge, 2000); Mathias Zahniser, *The al-Baqara Crescendo: Understanding the Qur'ān's Style* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2017).

⁷⁵ Nevin Reda, "Holistic Approaches to the Qur'an: A Historical Background", *Religion Compass* 4/8 (495M.S.), 2010.

the “Thematic-Structural Approach”. Concurrently, Michael Cuypers⁷⁶ and Raymond Farrin⁷⁷ have engaged with the subject employing the “Search for Symmetrical Integrity in the Context of Semitic Rhetoric” methodology. While these approaches exhibit methodological disparities, a shared theme prevailing across the works of these scholars lies in their concerted emphasis on the existence of a literary cohesion within the current Mushaf arrangement. Their collective intention resides in the direct scrutiny of the Qur’ānic text, underscoring its literary significance, as opposed to embarking upon historical-critical investigations of the Qur’ān.⁷⁸

Conclusion

Upon juxtaposing the historical trajectory of investigations into the history of the *Qur’ān* within the West and the Islamic context, a notable observation arises indicating that Orientalist Qur’ānic studies determined and shaped the thematic contours and principal areas of discourse within this domain. This phenomenon is primarily attributed to the genesis of Mushaf manuscripts studies within the Western hemisphere, commencing from the latter half of the 19th century. Over time, these studies have acquired institutional recognition and gradually evolved into a professional discipline, facilitated by the integration of technological advancement like carbon testing.

The endeavours undertaken by orientalists to construct a critical edition of the Qur’ān have spanned a duration of slightly over a century. However, this undertaking has not culminated in the realization of its intended objective. Andrew Rippin (d. 2016), a prominent contemporary Western scholar in Qur’ānic studies, attested to this reality by asserting that the limited availability of historical data precludes the imminent attainment of this ambition.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, it remains a perpetual requirement for Western scholars specializing in Qur’ānic research, and the aspiration to address this exigency shall endure unabated.

Conversely, a segment of the Muslim scholars contend that the pursuit of Orientalists in this endeavour encompass motives extending beyond the realms of mere scientific or academic exploration; their objectives, as posited by these scholars, subsume the generation of an alternative text that diverges from the prevailing monolithic Mushaf revered among Muslims. Tayyar Altıkulaç, for instance, maintains that due to the inherent paradigmatic disparities in the analytical approach between orientalist scholars and their Muslim counterparts concerning Mushaf manuscripts, discrepancies such as erroneous writings or subsequent corrections identified within these manuscripts were construed by certain orientalists as indicators of modification and corruption. In contrast, Muslim scholars interpreted such discrepancies as minimal scribe errors.⁸⁰ Put succinctly, the orientalists’ identification of divergences within the

⁷⁶ Michael Cuypers, *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur’an* (Miami: Convivium, 2009); Michael Cuypers, *The Composition of the Qur’an: Rhetorical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Michael Cuypers, *A Qur’anic Apocalypse: A Reading of the Thirty Three Last Sûrahs of the Qur’an* (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2018); Michael Cuypers, “The Semitic Rhetoric in the Koran and a Pharaonic Papyrus”, *US China Foreign Language* 8 (2010), 8-13.

⁷⁷ Raymond Farrin, *Structure and Qur’anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam’s Holy Text* (Ashland-Oregon: White Cloud Press, 2014).

⁷⁸ For detailed information on text unity discussions, see, Ersin Kabakçı, *Çağdaş Batı Literatüründe Kur’an Metnine Yaklaşımlar: Metin Bütünlüğü Arayışları* (Ankara: Fecr Yayınları, 2020), 3rd chapter.

⁷⁹ Andrew Rippin, “The Present Status of Tafsir Studies”, *The Muslim World* 72 (1982), 224.

⁸⁰ Altıkulaç, *Günümüze Ulaşan Mesahif-i Kadime*, 151.

manuscript copies they scrutinized was construed as evidence of disparate "Qur'āns". This preposition may best be elucidated by positing that it is intended to facilitate the formulation of an alternative textual rendition.

This objection assumes significance in light of the endeavours pursued by orientalists to "compose a critical Qur'ānic text". As expounded by Necmettin Gökkır, the outcomes engendered by Western scholars engaged in Qur'ānic historiography tend to transcend the confines of epistemological and methodological significance, and instead, acquire a distinctly existential essence.⁸¹ For the vantage point of the Muslim perspective, characterized by an unwavering belief in the Qur'ān as the "unchanging divine word," the crux of the matter becomes manifest. Stated differently, irrespective of the methodologies employed or the deductions drawn within these scholarly inquiries, the conviction concerning the Qur'ān undergoes a transmutation into an identity delineation that transcends the realm of mere knowledge.

It is precisely this divergence in perspective and paradigm that delineates the viability of Western methodologies and spheres of investigation, as adopted by Muslims within the domain of Qur'ānic historiography. In essence, the faith of a Muslim researcher, irrevocably grounded in the Qur'ān's preservation, imposes a constraint beyond which he cannot traverse. Consequently, the methodologies and outcomes in question may hold utmost epistemological significance for him, with no further implications. In truth, it appears that historically and in the modern era alike, this unwavering conviction has served as the foundational impetus behind Muslims refraining from undertaking the exploration of the Qur'ānic history akin to their Western counterparts and abstaining from endeavours such as manuscript analysis and the pursuit of an authentic corpus. The disparities that can be observed between the ancient copies of a text already preserved will hold no significance in the perspective of a devout believer who has this belief—keep in mind that it is already known that until now, no substantial deviations have come to light substantiating the existence of an alternative alternative text beyond scribal discrepancies and variant readings.

To elucidate further, as expounded by Gökkır stated, the chronological arrangement of surahs and verses holds limited significance for a Muslim when utilized to substantiate notions of human intervention or a human-centered ontological conception pertaining to the nature of the Qur'ān. Conversely, its acceptance gains credence when its function pertains to the acquisition of knowledge and meaning within the realms of epistemology and methodology. In other words, if the chronological arrangement fails to yield an epistemological benefit and merely serves as a repository for data concerning the Qur'ān's existence and definition, it aligns with the orientalist paradigm, rendering its endorsement impossible. Similarly, methodologies employed to date ancient manuscripts such as the Carbon-14 test, are deemed permissible as long as they contribute to historical understanding; however, if they assert a role in shaping the identity of the Qur'ān, both the methodology and its outcomes are relegated to a marginal position. The linguistic and scriptural attributes of ancient Mushafs are embraced when they facilitate the comprehension of the Qur'ān, yet dismissed when suggestive of a human origin devoid of divine revelation.⁸²

⁸¹ Gökkır, "Batı'da Kur'an Tarihi Araştırmaları: Tematik Alanlar, Paradigmalar ve Yöntemler", 23.

⁸² Gökkır, "Batı'da Kur'an Tarihi Araştırmaları: Tematik Alanlar, Paradigmalar ve Yöntemler", 24.

It is imperative to clarify that these assertions are not intended to preclude Muslims from engaging in Qur'ānic studies parallel to their Western counterparts. On the contrary, methodologies cultivated within Western scholarship possess the potential to elucidate and improve Muslims' comprehension of the sacred text, provided they operate within the stipulated parameters. Indeed, the pioneering endeavours of Tayyar Altıkulaç, emblematic of recent progresses made by Muslims in the historiography of the Qur'ān, stands as compelling and illuminating instances that underscore this potential.

However, it is noteworthy that the studies and initiatives undertaken within the Western context have, thus far, yet to realize their intended objectives; instead, they seem to reaffirm the beliefs held by Muslims.

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Etik Beyan / Ethical Statement:

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