

THE POSSIBILITY OF WRITING THE HISTORY OF THE QUR'ÂN BY BYPASSING ISLAMIC NARRATIVES AND MATERIALS - STEPHEN SHOEMAKER EXAMPLE

*Kur'an Tarihinin İslami Rivayet ve Malzemelerin Devre Dışı Birakılarak Yazılması İmkânı -
Stephen Shoemaker Örneği-*

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ABSTRACT

Research shows that Qur'ānic studies in the West have navigated away from the Nöldekean-Schwallian paradigm in recent years. By using this paradigm, Western thinkers attempt to write the history of the Qur'ān with the support of Islamic narrations. American orientalist Stephen Shoemaker claims that the revisionist school broke this paradigm and brought a new perspective to the field in 1977. Stating that the Nöldekean-Schwallian paradigm, which followed the standard Sunnī Qur'ānic history, blocked the field until the 1980s, Shoemaker criticizes Islamic narrations and does not take them as references. Shoemaker believes that the studies will not go beyond the Sunnī paradigm by using purely Islamic narrations. The author, who claims that the Qur'ān emerged and was written in a political environment, argues that historians should consider the works of the surrounding cultures. Shoemaker, who uses the historical criticism method used in holy book readings in the West, focuses on what happened to the Qur'ān rather than what the Qur'ān tells us. Is it possible to write the history of the Qur'ān by bypassing Islamic narrations? The main focus of this article is to reveal the answer to this question through Stephen Shoemaker's work *Creating the Qur'an*. The work, published in 2022, was seen by Fred Donner as a milestone for the field and stated that everyone working in this department should read it. Our study will ultimately discuss the impasses of Shoemaker's approach. In this context, the research will generally apply data collection, text, and discourse analysis methods.

Keywords: Tafseer, Qur'ān, Stephen Shoemaker, Historical Criticism, History of Qur'ān.

ÖZ

Son yıllarda Batı'da yapılan Kur'an çalışmalarının Nöldeke-Schwallian paradigmasından ayrıldığı görülmüştür. Bu paradigmanda Kur'an tarihi İslami rivayetlerden destek alarak oluşturulmaya çalışılmıştır. Amerikalı oryantalist Stephen Shoemaker, 1977 yılından itibaren revizyonist ekolün bu paradigmayı kırdığını ve alana yeni bir bakış açısı kazandırdığını iddia etmiştir. Standart Sünnî Kur'an tarihini takip eden Nöldekean-Schwallian paradigmasının 1980'lere kadar alanın önünü tıkadığını belirten Shoemaker, İslami rivayetleri eleştirerek referans almamıştır. Ona göre salt İslami kaynakları kullanmak çalışmaları Sünni paradigmanın ötesine taşıyamayacaktır. Kur'an'ın politik bir ortamda ortaya çıktığını ve yazıldığını iddia eden müellif çevre kültürlerdeki eserlerin göz önünde bulundurulması gerektiğini savunmuştur. Batı'da kutsal kitap okumalarında kullanılan tarihsel eleştiri yöntemini kullanan Shoemaker, 'Kur'an bize ne diyor?' sorusundan ziyade 'Kur'an'a ne oldu?' sorusu üzerinde yoğunlaşmıştır. Dolayısıyla Kur'an tarihini İslami rivayetleri devre dışı bırakarak yazmak mümkün müdür? sorusu makalemizde cevaplandırılacaktır. Bu sorunun cevabını Stephen Shoemaker'ın *Creating The Qur'an* adlı eseri üzerinden ortaya koymaya çalışacağız. 2022 yılında yayınlanan eser Fred Donner tarafından alan için dönüm noktası olarak görülmüş ve bu alanda çalışma yapan herkes tarafından okunması gerektiği belirtilmiştir. Çalışmamızda nihai olarak Shoemaker'ın yaklaşımının çıkmazları ele alınacaktır. Bu bağlamda araştırmada genel olarak veri toplama, metin ve söylem analizi yöntemleri uygulanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tefsir, Kur'an, Stephen Shoemaker, Tarihsel Eleştiri, Kur'an Tarihi.

Introduction

Qur'ānic studies have gained significant momentum in North America in recent years. The translation of the Qur'ān into English by different people and institutions is one of the factors that accelerated this momentum. The increase in the Muslim population, the September 11th attack, and academic studies are among other factors that accelerated this momentum. Despite the increasing studies, there needs to be more Islamic experts in universities. In North America, 1,400 universities provide education in religious studies. Only 10% of these universities have faculty members with expertise in Islamic studies.¹ Stephen Shoemaker, whom we will discuss in our article, works in the field of Qur'ānic studies in America.

In Qur'ānic studies conducted in the West, the Nöldekean-Schwallian paradigm² dominated the field until the 1970s. This paradigm followed the Sunnī standard Qur'ānic history using Islamic sources. Western scholars included Islamic sources in their research about the history of the Qur'ān. Early Western thinkers have argued that writers should read the Qur'ān in parallel with the life of the Prophet Muḥammad (saw). They did not see the text's authenticity as a problem; determining the chronological order of the surahs was the aim. Knowing the order in which the surahs were revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad (saw) and understanding his life is necessary to understand the Qur'ān correctly. However, studies conducted in the Western world in recent years have shown that chronological studies have lost their importance. In recent research, the Qur'ān has been examined more as a historical text. Modern Western thinkers tend to examine the relationship of the text with the surrounding cultures. At the same time, they approach the Qur'ān as a literary text.³

Stephen Shoemaker saw 1977 as a turning point for Qur'ānic studies. Shoemaker said that the works published this year had a tremendous impact. Shoemaker argues that the Nöldekean-Schwallian paradigm had stagnated the studies in the field. He tried to create a history of the Qur'ān by omitting Islamic sources. He mainly focused on Christian sources and believed texts found in surrounding cultures would help understand the formation phase

¹ Carl Ernst, "Reading Strategies for Introducing the Qur'ān as Literature in an American Public University", *Islamic Studies (Islamabad)* 45/3 (2006), 333.

² Nöldekean-Schwallian paradigm: The paradigm that writes the history of the Qur'ān using Islamic materials. See. B. Gökkır, *Western Attitudes to the Origin of the Qur'an: Theological and Linguistic Approaches of Twentieth Century English-Speaking World from William Muir to William M. Watt* (The University of Manchester, Ph.D Dissertation, 2002).

³ Travis Zadeh, "Quranic Studies and the Literary Turn", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135/2 (April- June 2015), 329- 340.

of the Qur'ānic text. He analyzed the Qur'ān in terms of its historical context and thematic content rather than solely focusing on its individual verses. He handled the events as a historian without making a theological reading.⁴

Shoemaker, who does not engage in the contemporary debates on internal coherence and unity in the West, focuses instead on the historical development of the text.⁵ Modern Western scholars believe it is impossible to talk about the authenticity of the Qur'ān, which was created in a polemical environment in late antiquity. Analyzing the nazm (unity of order) of verses from an inauthentic text is deemed unnecessary. These scholars believe that understanding the historical setting of the text comes first. Understanding the historical environment will also explain what happened to the text. The main focus of sacred text researchers is not what the authors of the texts believed or wanted to believe. Instead, they aim to put forth the events that took place in history.⁶

Angelika Neuwirth said that the Qur'ān bears the traces of the period in which it was revealed. Reading the Qur'ān as a text from the late antique period is necessary. The Qur'ān cannot be understood from narrations created a few hundred years later. The Qur'ān can be understood with the data of its age. It is necessary to benefit from written materials and the holy book from the Jāhiliyya period. These analyses of Neuwirth show that Western researchers emphasize the historicity of the Qur'ānic text. Studies on the origin and chronology of the early Qur'ān have shifted focus towards prioritizing text's historicity.⁷

Classical literature processes the verse and content of the text simultaneously. Attempts have yet to be made to understand any verse solely through revelation narrations. In the commentaries of the classical period, the relationship between content and verse goes hand in hand. Muslim scholars have argued that the verse of the revelation affects the depth of meaning. Because there is a language issue, it is impossible to encompass the language's subtleties with purely historical information. Their statement that translation activities do not

⁴ Stephen Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an* (California: University of California Press, 2022), 10.

⁵ See. Ersin Kabakçı, *Çağdaş Batı Literatüründe Kur'an Metnine Yaklaşımlar: Metin Bütünlüğü Arayışları* (Çorum: Hitit University, Institute of Social Sciences, Ph.D Dissertation, 2019).

⁶ John Barton, "Historical -Critical Approaches", *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9-20.

⁷ See. Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry and The Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), xxi-xxiv; Angelika Neuwirth, "Locating the Qur'an in the Epistemic Space of Late Antiquity", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 54/2 (2013), 191.

reflect the depth of verses can be read as a reflection of this thought.⁸ Shoemaker's works could not go beyond interpretation without addressing the nazm of the verses. Because how it is said is as important as what is being said in the Qur'ān, which is a divine text. It is impossible for Western researchers who bypass Islamic sources to find answers to how the text is being said through historical-literary criticism methods alone. Understanding the Qur'ān, a divine word, and its history only through these methods poses a challenge.

In this article, Stephen Shoemaker's views on the history of the Qur'ān will be analyzed. The aspects that differ from the Nöldekean-Schwallian paradigm he criticized will be revealed. The author saw the works produced by the revisionist school at the end of the 20th century as very useful and stimulating. Is it necessary to better understand the history of the Qur'ān by differentiating it from the early orientalists and emphasizing the method of historical criticism? Will the bypassing of Islamic sources by orientalist authors yield the desired results in studies conducted in the West? This paper aims to bring answers to these questions. Our article will bring a new perspective to Orientalist studies. In this context, the research will include data collection, text, and discourse analysis methods. In the first two headings, where we discuss the orientalist paradigm's views on the Qur'ān's history, the data collection method reveals the process. Revisionists had begun writing the history of the Qur'ān by omitting the use of Islamic sources. In his 2006 thesis, Yasar Çolak examines the methods revisionists use in their approach to early Islamic history⁹. Another work pertaining the revisionist school is Merve Akgün's thesis called *The Revisionist Orientalists in the History of the Qur'ān*¹⁰. Although both of these works cover the topic of revisionists and Islamic history, they are both shallow in regards to the way the revisionists bypass the use of Islamic sources. This study will examine the case of Stephen Shoemaker. In the following chapters, text and discourse analysis methods will reveal Shoemaker's thoughts about the history of the Qur'ān.

1. Nöldekean-Schwallian Paradigm

The Holy Qur'ān has been preserved by memorization or recording it in writing since its revelation. There is a consensus in Islamic world about the preservation of Qur'ān. This

⁸ Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır, *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili* (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2021), 1/85-98.

⁹ Yaşar Çolak, *Batı'da İslam Tarihinin Erken Dönemine İlişkin Farklı Metodolojik Yaklaşımlar*, (Samsun: 19 Mayıs University, Institute of Social Sciences, Ph.D Dissertation, 2006).

¹⁰ Merve Akgün, *The Revisionist Orientalists in the History of the Quran*, (İstanbul: İstanbul University, Institute of Social Sciences, Master Thesis, 2020).

consensus is reflected in practice in the unity of muṣḥaf in the Islamic world. After the death of Prophet Muḥammad (saw), Abū Bakr (ra) brought together the Qur'ān written on different materials. The collected muṣḥaf was later standardized and sent to different regions during 'Uthmān (ra)'s period.

The issue of the compilation of the Qur'ān has created a great debate among orientalists. Stephen J. Shoemaker explored different paradigms on this issue. He harshly criticized the views put forward by German orientalists like Nöldeke and Shwally. Nöldeke argued that the Qur'ān began to be written at the same time it began to be revealed. According to him, words such as “book” and “revelation” indicate this. It is tough to think that the Prophet Muḥammad (saw) did not record the revelation as a document from the beginning. Based on the authenticity of the narrations in which the names of the revelation scribes were mentioned, Nöldeke argued that the revelation was written down from the first years.¹¹ Like Nöldeke, based on some verses in the Qur'ān, Henri Lammens also claimed that the Qur'ān was written down from the earliest periods. Lammens argued that Prophet Muḥammad (saw) was cautioned about the compilation issue based on a verse in Surah Qiyāmah.¹² The revelation informs Prophet Muḥammad (saw) that he should not rush. Lammens states that this verse shows that the compilation of the Qur'ān started early.¹³

Nöldeke reported that the entire Qur'ān was not compiled due to the sudden death of Prophet Muḥammad (saw). He interpreted the narrations about people who were said to have compiled the Qur'ān entirely during the time of the Prophet (saw). He argued that they did not undergo the compilation process through writing activity. He interpreted it as people memorizing the revelation rather than collecting it in a book.¹⁴

Criticizing Nöldeke's views on compilation, Shoemaker argued that this paradigm froze orientalist studies until the 70s. We can say that the orientalist paradigm did not adopt a stand that completely bypassed Islamic narrations until the 1970s. Nöldeke and his students put forward a narrative of the history of the Qur'ān parallel to Islamic sources, especially Sunnī sources. Paul Casanova and Alphonse Mingana, two early orientalists, put forward an understanding of history using Christian sources. This type of research appears to be an exceptional situation. Casanova claimed that the Qur'ān was not compiled and standardized

¹¹ Theodor Theodor, *Geschichte des Qorāns* (Hamburg: Dieterichsche Buchhandlung, 1860), II/1.

¹² al- Qiyāmeḥ 75/16-17.

¹³ Henri Lammens, *Fâtima et les Fides de Mahomet* (Roma: Sumptibus Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1912), 113.

¹⁴ Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, II, 6.

until the time of the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik.¹⁵ However, John Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies*¹⁶, John Burton's *Collection of the Qur'an*¹⁷, and Patricia Crone and Micheal Cook's *Hagarism*¹⁸ have taken a skeptical approach, seeing Islamic narrations as unreliable. We see that, unlike Nöldeke, these thinkers did not adopt the standard Qur'ānic history of Muslims. Shoemaker said that 1977 was a year of change in the history of orientalism. He reported that these works were stimulating and very productive. He believes that the Nöldeke-Schwallian paradigm in the field was broken with these works. This paradigm, which could not be broken for years, prevented potentially valuable studies in the field. Although the revisionist writers posing serious questions about the Nöldeke-Schwallian paradigm from different angles received hostile reactions in the 1980s and 90s, it influenced the revival of creative ideas for the field in the 2000s.¹⁹

2. John Wansbrough's Views on Compilation

John Wansbrough introduced a different paradigm to orientalism with his published works titled *Quranic Studies* and *The Sectarian Milieu*.²⁰ He claims that writing history is a polemical subject.²¹ It contains probable realities rather than definitive information. He argued that historians are people who conduct superficial research. Therefore, according to Wansbrough, historians should focus on language-centered studies.²²

Reaching accurate historical information depends on the collaboration of history and language. Wansbrough argued that not only the Qur'ān but all Islamic literature is the belief of its writers about the past. It is accepted among historians that any work can be miswritten. However, Wansbrough also argued that Islamic literature was written by its followers and should be read more carefully. Although Goldziher and Schacht display a skeptical attitude towards ḥadīth sources and narrations, it is not at the level seen in Wansbrough.

As explained by Wansbrough, the Qur'ān was known among the Muslims even before a manuscript was produced. Wansbrough said that the Qur'ān is a text that has changed and

¹⁵ Paul Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde* (Paris, s.n., 1911), 103-142.

¹⁶ John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004).

¹⁷ John Burton, *Collection of the Qur'ān* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977).

¹⁸ Patricia Crone- Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

¹⁹ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, 22-23.

²⁰ John Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

²¹ John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, xxii- xxiii.

²² Malcolm Yapp et al., "Preface: Professor J. E. Wansbrough". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57/1 (1994), 1-14.

transformed over time.²³ Some sections of the Qur'ān were composed by various communities, perhaps not all in Arabia, but in regions such as Mesopotamia, Syria, and Iraq.²⁴

Wansbrough shows that the Qur'ān was written in the late period, based on the work called *al-Fiqh al-Akbar* written by Abu Hanifa. He states that because there are no verses from the Qur'ān in such works written in the first two centuries, it shows that we do not have a written Qur'ān in this period.²⁵ With this claim, Wansbrough uses the *argumentum ex silentio* evidence. However, this highly controversial evidence is not enough on its own to constitute a sufficient claim. Per Wansbrough, the Qur'ān, which could not complete its development until the end of the second century of the Hijrah, consists of small independent units (prophetic logia). The passages are independent of each other due to their use for preaching purposes in the early period. The passages are different from each other and contain polemics, thus showing that the Qur'ān was created in a sectarian atmosphere where religious groups conflicted.²⁶

According to Wansbrough, the repetitions in the Qur'ān show that a single source did not write the text. The Qur'ān was completed in a long process.²⁷ He continues to state that the transformations experienced during this process need to be examined. Expressions that were later included in the text made the text problematic.²⁸

Wansbrough did not see the Qur'ān as a historical text. According to him, the Qur'ān should be considered literary. We see that Western thinkers, who examined the holy books with literary and historical criticism methods since the Enlightenment period, tried the same method on the Qur'ān. This idea has led Western thinkers to examine divine books as historical and literary texts.

Fred Donner criticized Wansbrough's views.²⁹ We can say that Donner is closer to classical orientalist views than the Revisionist school. He differed from Wansbrough on this issue by saying that the Qur'ān and ḥadīth emerged in response to different needs in different

²³ Yapp, "Preface: Professor J. E. Wansbrough", 1.

²³ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, xvii-xviii.

²⁴ Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (New Jersey: The Darwin Press, 1998), 53; Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 47-50.

²⁵ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 44.

²⁶ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 20.

²⁷ See. Hafsa Nasreen, "Orientalists on Qur'an: A Critical Study", *The Dialogue Quarterly Research Journal* 8/1 (2013), 35-52; See for Turkish translation of this article: Hafsa Nasreen, "Oryantalistlerin Kur'an Üzerine İddiaları -Eleştirel Bir Çalışma-", trans. Ozat Shamshiyev, *ERUIFD* 1/16 (2013), 109-125.

²⁸ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 47-49.

²⁹ G.H.A. Juynboll, "Review of J. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 24/2 (1979), 293- 296.

periods. We believe that he compares the text of the Qur'ān with some topics from ḥadīths to date the text. According to Donner, it is doubtful that the Qur'ān and ḥadīth text came from a single sectarian milieu and emerged in the same period.³⁰

3. Stephen Shoemaker's Views on Compilation

Stephen Shoemaker approached Islamic narrations regarding the compilation of the Qur'ān with suspicion. He opposed the standard Qur'ānic history adopted by Muslims. He thought that this paradigm obstructed the studies in the field. In our opinion, Shoemaker was influenced by Mingana in this regard. Mingana claimed that Nöldeke dominated the field in studies conducted in England and blocked the way of progress.³¹

He said several works published in the field in 1977 posed questions to the Nöldeke-Schwallian paradigm from different angles.³² In the last quarter of the 20th century, harsh criticism came from the revisionist school against Nöldeke. Patricia Crone said that those who do Islamic studies in the West sound like Sunnī Muslims. Crone stated that this is complemented Sunnīsm and that such studies did not contribute to the study of origins.³³ Although Nöldeke has been criticized so much recently, it is undeniable that he has dominated the field for years. His adoption of the standard Qur'ānic history adopted by Muslims reveals his moderation. Neuwirth labels Nöldeke "the rock of our church," showing his position despite the current criticisms directed at him.³⁴

Shoemaker argued that the origin of the Qur'ān remains a mystery. While expressing his ideas about the Qur'ān, he said he expressed his thoughts as a historian, not a clergyman or linguist. He said that considering the Qur'ān as a product of human history would make the issue more understandable, unlike examining the Qur'ān as a Muslim or a linguist. Shoemaker's method examines the Qur'ānic text, which emerged in late antiquity in Western Asia, as a product of religious cultures. Shoemaker stated that he would use modern criticism methods when examining the Qur'ān. It can be observed that the author did not use classical Islamic sources.³⁵

³⁰ Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 46.

³¹ Alphonse Mingana, "The transmission of the Kur'an according to Christian Writers", *Muslim World* 7 (October 1917), 402- 414.

³² Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, 23.

³³ Patricia Crone, "Serjeant and Meccan Trade", *Arabica* 39/2 (1992), 239.

³⁴ Stephen Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammed's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 129.

³⁵ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, 1-3.

John Burton analyzed some Qur'ānic history studies as investigation intuition.³⁶ Shoemaker assessed Schwally's works in this category. Schwally said there were some written sections from the Qur'ān before the death of Prophet Muḥammad (saw). He rejected the narrations about the first Qur'ān compilation made during the time of Abū Bakr (ra). He argued that the third Caliph, 'Uthmān (ra), has brought authority to the jam' tradition of these narrations. Shoemaker evaluates Shwally as an intuitionist and reveals that there is no method.³⁷

Shoemaker argues that religious communities must take a more meticulous approach when discussing historical events. Shoemaker states that believers remember the past as they wish rather than as it was. He believes that we should approach the narrations we receive with skepticism and states that we cannot understand past events through these narrations. Neuwirth said that the history of the Sunnī Qur'ān deviates from the classical narratives of the history of religions. Shoemaker claims that the Sunnī narrative, which deviates from the general acceptance, should provide strong evidence for the codification before the seventh century.³⁸

Shoemaker was skeptical about the compilation studies during 'Uthmān (ra)'s period. He argued that there was no strong state structure in this period. Chase F. Robinson also said that 'Uthmān (ra) was a controversial and unpopular ruler during his time. During his time, the state lacked the equipment necessary for a strong government (official money, government offices)³⁹. Stating extensive discussions about 'Uthmān (ra)'s period, Shoemaker said that the state lacked even the simple elements that carried out its essential functions. The internal conflicts that emerged during this period would continue during the Mu'āwiya period. During the 'Abd al-Malik period that followed, the state would gain power. Shoemaker argues that the codification event, which was said to have transpired during 'Uthmān (ra)'s period, did not happen during this period but instead during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik. Claiming that more people said that this incident took place during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik, Shoemaker said that 'Uthmān (ra) did not have the strength to do this. The author believes the narrations stating that the codification process occurred in the first period were obscure and thus he does not trust these narrations.⁴⁰

³⁶ John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 174.

³⁷ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, 21.

³⁸ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, 39.

³⁹ Chase F. Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik (Makers of the Muslim World)* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 102.

⁴⁰ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, 41-42.

Shoemaker explains that it seems more accurate and reliable to say the regulation took place during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik. Chase Robinson reported that, unlike other caliphs, he had the power and resources to do this.⁴¹ We can say that ‘Abd al-Malik, who had a strong governor like Ḥajjāj, established authority in other Muslim regions. Ḥajjāj strengthened the power of the Islamic state at that time by suppressing Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr's rebellions, who had declared his caliphate in Mecca. Shoemaker claims that ‘Uthmān (ra) did not have a strong image because he was deprived of these positions and that it does not seem possible for someone who does not have this power to collect the Qur’ān. It is understandable that Shoemaker, as a historian, draws this conclusion. However, in our opinion, associating a religious event with purely political power is somewhat a reductionist approach. Considering that the internal turmoil and problems during ‘Uthmān (ra)'s period occurred in the last years of his caliphate, drawing the image of a state dominated by anarchy without political power does not comply with historical data.

The first people to say that the Qur’ān was collected during ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwan's period were Paul Casanova and Alphonse Mingana. According to Shoemaker, this perspective was neglected until the last twenty years. Omar Hamdan has been one of the names that has drawn the most attention to the narrations on this subject in recent years.⁴² Shoemaker explains that although Angelika Neuwirth adopts the Nöldekean-Schwallian paradigm, she has recently shown an openness towards it.⁴³

Shoemaker interpreted the narration from ‘Abd al-Malik, "This month (Ramadan) is the month in which I was born, I was weaned, I collected the Qur’ān, and I swore as the caliph." He stated that this narration could not fully resolve the issue. Shoemaker believes that the verb *jama'a* in the ḥadīth may mean that "I" collected or memorized the Qur’ān. Therefore, it is impossible to say anything definitive based on this narration alone. However, this narration provides a broad explanation of other narrations by pointing out that ‘Abd al-Malik collected the Qur’ān.⁴⁴

Ḥajjāj, who sent the new standard Qur’ān to Egypt, Damascus, Medina, Mecca, Kufa, and Basra, not only sent the official muṣḥaf to these regions, but was also the first to initiate

⁴¹ Robinson, *‘Abd al-Malik*, 103.

⁴² Omar Hamdan, "The Second Masahif Project: A step Towards the Canonization of the Qur’anic Text", *The Qur’ān in Context- Historical and Literary Investigations*, ed. Angelica Neuwirth et al, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 795-835.

⁴³ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur’an*, 44.

⁴⁴ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur’an*, 45.

the practice of reading the Qur'ān aloud in mosques. He ordered that personal muṣḥafs in other regions be collected and burned. Personal muṣḥafs that did not match the official muṣḥaf were eliminated, and their owners were given 60 dinars.⁴⁵ Shoemaker says that all of these narratives coincide with the official muṣḥaf narrations that allegedly took place during the time of 'Uthmān (ra). He said that the Qur'ān could not be collected during the time of 'Uthmān (ra) and claimed that the narrations that took place during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik were later used for the period of 'Uthmān (ra).⁴⁶

Omar Hamdan brings up the debate between the Egyptian governor and the central government during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik. Ḥajjāj sent the Egyptian governor to use the official muṣḥaf prepared during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik. The Egyptian governor, who refused to use this muṣḥaf, responded to the central government with his muṣḥaf. We lack information about where this muṣḥaf came from. Hamdan stated that this narration points to the absence of the official muṣḥaf in Egypt during 'Uthmān (ra)'s period. Some narrations about the muṣḥaf that reached the city of Medina raise doubts about 'Uthmān (ra)'s muṣḥaf. It is reported that when the muṣḥaf circulated by Ḥajjāj reached Medina, 'Uthmān (ra)'s family members strongly opposed it. It was said that when the people of Medina asked for 'Uthmān (ra)'s muṣḥaf from their family members, they received a negative response. They say that the official muṣḥaf was destroyed on the day 'Uthmān (ra) died. Shoemaker makes an interesting comment after all these observances. We can say that our Prophet Muḥammad (saw) taught the Qur'ān to his companions while he was alive, and different companions learned and collected the Qur'ān. The official muṣḥaf 'Uthmān (ra) put forward could not go beyond being regional. Based on the above narrations, we can conclude that other Islamic regions were not aware of the official 'Uthmān (ra) muṣḥaf. According to Shoemaker, the official muṣḥaf is circulated only in the Ḥijāz region. Shoemaker stated that this muṣḥaf was not prepared by the committee that included all the companions and that it was a muṣḥaf created only by the companions living in Medina.⁴⁷

Shoemaker states that the orientalist paradigm took the wrong steps in the 18th and 19th centuries. One of these mistakes is portraying Islam as the other of the Christian West. He said that he would not repeat this mistake. Instead, he prefers to compare Islam with the monotheistic religions of the Near East, where it was born. Focusing on the similarities

⁴⁵ Hamdan, "The Second Masahif Project", 823.

⁴⁶ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, 45.

⁴⁷ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, 46-47.

between Islam and the religions of its hometown, Shoemaker did not focus on the differences. There are better methods for the early orientalist paradigm than to portray the East as eccentric and exotic. According to Shoemaker, Islam was not born in the Hıjāz in an isolated environment from other religions. Islam is a religion that has relations with other monotheistic religions in late antiquity.⁴⁸

4. History of the Qur'ān Based on Christian Sources

Believing that what Islamic narrations can say about history is limited, the author tries to decipher history in his own way, using Christian sources. Here, we should not forget that Shoemaker addresses the issues from a historian's perspective. As a Christian theologian, he did not write a refutation. The author, who puts forth examples of rejection in Christian history to better understand the issue, handled these works as a historian. It can be said that the author differs from the early orientalists who have approached the narrations from a clergy standpoint. Shoemaker, who discussed the issues with an academic narrative, expresses his doubts about the standard history of the Qur'ān.

He first referenced the work titled *Fount of Knowledge*, written by John of Damascus (675-749) in 730. John of Damascus did not call Muhammad (saw)'s followers Muslims or Arabs. His preferred nomenclature was "Ishmaelites". He saw Muslims as a heretical sect of Christians.⁴⁹ John of Damascus's grandfather was a governor responsible for the economy in Syria at the end of the Roman Empire. His father, Sarjūn b. Manşūr, served as a secretary from Mu'āwiya's reign to 'Abd al-Malik's reign. John held essential positions in the Umayyad state in the 680s and 690s. According to Shoemaker, John's family background and the duties he took in the Umayyad government caused him to live in an environment where Islam was practiced. Therefore, his ideas, different from the Islamic tradition, should not be perceived as polemic. Shoemaker stated that Islam was still a developing religion during the reign of John and claimed that he witnessed this development. In Shoemaker's narratives about this period, Islam appears as a religion that was trying to find its way as a monotheistic religion in Late Antiquity and was in development.⁵⁰

John of Damascus, who used the name "Mamed" for Muḥammad, claimed that the Prophet Muḥammad (saw) said "stupid" things and gave titles to them; referring to the surahs and their names. He is the first Christian theologian to quote from the Qur'ān without

⁴⁸ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, s.10.

⁴⁹ John of Damascus, *Saint John of Damascus Writings*, trans. Frederic H. Chase (New York: 1958).

⁵⁰ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, 50-51.

mentioning the name of the Qur'ān. Despite all of his polemical attitude, Shoemaker believes that the ideas put forward by John of Damascus should be taken into consideration. Because he is knowledgeable about the period in which he lived. Shoemaker considered it normal that John of Damascus chose critical language instead of descriptive language and used derogatory expressions. His hostility towards Islam, rather than other religions and sects, is one of the biggest obstacles to John of Damascus's ability to make an objective interpretation. His view of Islam as a heretical movement centering on Christianity stems from his religious ties.

John of Damascus does not use the name Qur'ān. Instead, he uses the expressions "*graphie-scripture*" and "book (*biblos*)".⁵¹ John Meyendorff, a Western thinker, said he only knew the verses he referenced.⁵² In addition, it is a scientific misfortune that Shoemaker ignores the narrations about Christians reading and learning the Qur'ān during the Umayyad period and does not make an explanation.⁵³ Even though he and his family work in the upper echelons of the state, it is a reductionist approach to think that this provides an opportunity to learn the Qur'ān first-hand. The information given by John of Damascus about the Qur'ān strengthens the possibility that he obtained this knowledge second-hand.

John of Damascus says there is another surah in the Qur'ān called The Camel of God⁵⁴. Yet, there is no such surah in the Qur'ān. Shoemaker said that the present-day Qur'ān and the things in the possession of John of Damascus are not the same. However, according to Shoemaker, John of Damascus is the most critical non-Muslim witness to the early history of the Qur'ān. The idea that Islamic narration, which we see in John Wansbrough and the revisionist school, cannot be a historically reliable source for the Qur'ān influenced Shoemaker. In the first part of his book, the author kept his distance from Islamic narrations, and in the second part, he consulted written sources in the surrounding cultures for the early history of the Qur'ān. We can also say that the author was influenced by the French school on the history of the Qur'ān rather than the British or German school. Alfred-Louis de Premare and Claude Gilliot are the French orientalist referred to by the author. What led the author to the French orientalist was that most orientalist in America, England, and Germany followed Nöldeke's paradigm for many years.

⁵¹ John of Damascus, *Saint John of Damascus Writings*, 153.

⁵² John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), 51.

⁵³ See Mustafa Fayda, "eş-Şürütü'l-Ömeriyye", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Access 2 October 2023).

⁵⁴ John of Damascus, *Saint John of Damascus Writings*, 157.

Another non-Islamic source is the letter written by Leo III to “Omar II. Shoemaker said that this letter points to the practice of collecting the Qur’ān during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik and Ḥajjāj. Leo III, who was invited to Islam by Caliph “Omar II, responded harshly. Leo III harshly criticized the practices and belief system of Islam in his letter. His letter mentioned that Ḥajjāj collected the Qur’ān and started the official muṣḥaf practice. He did not provide any information about ‘Uthmān (ra)’s period. Stating that Muslims spoke Arabic then, Leo III argued that Ḥajjāj efficiently collected the Qur’ān and its official compilation. However, it is not easy for him to do this in the Christian world because different languages are spoken in the Christian world.⁵⁵

According to Leo III's claim, while Ḥajjāj was compiling the Qur’ān, he eliminated several works of Abu Turab, that is, ‘Ālī (ra). The works belonging to ‘Ālī (ra) are the works of the Shiites in Kufa. These works, which were in the possession of Shiite groups that opposed the reign of the Umayyads, were eliminated. Omar Hamdan reported that this conflict, which has increased since Ibn Ziyād, was political. Ḥajjāj and his team eliminated the muṣḥafs held by other groups with the official muṣḥaf application.⁵⁶

In addition to using non-Islamic sources, Shoemaker occasionally references paleographic studies. He claims that those researching the Qur’ān have recently moved away from the Nöldeke-Scwallian paradigm. They said the latest version of the Qur’ān was revealed at the end of the seventh century. Shoemaker referred to Deroche's paleography study. According to his work, the Qur’ān took its final form in the seventh century.⁵⁷

According to Shoemaker, Christian authors such as John of Damascus and Leo III mentioned above do not mention a Qur’ān collected in the first century of the Hijrī calendar, which is a big question mark. Christians and Jews, who have a tradition of books, cannot be expected to be unaware of the book of Islam, which is a monotheistic religion. The two Christian authors do not mention a Qur’ān compiled before Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik. Shoemaker claims that the silence of non-Islamic sources about the compilation of the Qur’ān in the first Hijrī year raises questions.⁵⁸

Alphonsa Mingana also made the same criticisms based on the Christian sources put forward by Shoemaker. In his work titled *The Transmission of the Qur'an*, the compilation

⁵⁵ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, 58.

⁵⁶ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, 52-55.

⁵⁷ François Deroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads: A First Overview* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 94-97; Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, 68.

⁵⁸ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, s. 56.

and official standardization of the Qur'ān did not occur until the 'Abd al-Malik period. Mingana also took this view from Paul Casanova. Paul Casanova said that Ḥajjāj carried out the collection of the Qur'ān under 'Abd al-Malik's instructions.⁵⁹ Alphonse Mingana mentions that the collection function of the Qur'ān is not mentioned in Ibn Sa'd's work *al-Tabaqāt*. According to him, Ibn Sa'd lived two hundred years after the Prophet (saw) and did not mention anything related to jam'. Ibn Sa'd lived before Bukhārī. Mingana believes there is no reason to prefer the narrations mentioned by Bukhārī regarding jam'. Choosing between reliable Bukhārī sources and other Islamic sources containing complex narrations is difficult. Referring to non-Islamic narrations, Mingana primarily focused on Syrian-Christian sources.⁶⁰ While talking about the history of the Qur'ān, Shoemaker tried to create a narrative through other sources, ignoring the historical value of the narrations belonging to Muslims.

Shoemaker responded to Motzki's criticisms of Mingana. Motzki, who was in search of a new method on the history of the Qur'ān, argued that Mingana could not create a history of the Qur'ān based on a few Christian works. The use of *argumentum ex silentio* evidence was considered a weakness by Motzki.⁶¹ Shoemaker claimed that there were not as many Christian sources for early Islamic history as Motzki stated. In his work *Seeing Islam as Others Saw*⁶², Robert Hoyland cited more than 130 non-Islamic sources for the early period. Sixty of these works were written in the first century of the Hijrah. According to Shoemaker, 60 works are not a small number. None of these 60 works mention the Qur'ān, which was written in the first century Hijrah.⁶³

Nicola Sinai also said that Christian sources should not be ignored. The author stated that we have three Christian sources for the first period and that some Islamic sources are compatible with these works. Sinai said that the early narrations about 'Uthmān (ra) collecting the Qur'ān came only from al-Zuhrī. He continues by stating that the Qur'ān contained anachronisms. Stating that there are signs that the Qur'ān was affected by the events after the year 650 Hijrah, Sinai said there were some corrections after this date. Sinai, who said that the Bible contained anachronisms, also made the same claim about the Qur'ān. Islam interacted with Christianity and Judaism after 650. According to Sinai, the discussions and problems

⁵⁹ Kasanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde*, 103- 142, 162.

⁶⁰ Mingana, "The Transmission of the Kur'an", 25-47.

⁶¹ Harald Motzki "The collection of the Qur'an: A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments", *Der Islam* 78/1 (2001), 1-34.

⁶² Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1997).

⁶³ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, 57.

that arose between religions during this interaction were later reflected in the text of the Qur'ān.⁶⁴

Shoemaker criticized the unacceptable interpretations of outsiders in religious studies. Wilfred Cantrell Smith argued that for religious studies to be acceptable, representatives of the religion being studied must approve the views. He states that a person who studies the Qur'ān should approach the Qur'ān like a Muslim.⁶⁵ Smith founded the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University in 1951. According to Shoemaker, Smith trained researchers with the Islamic perspective in his doctoral program there. The research conducted in this program must be convincing and compatible with the beliefs of believers. Shoemaker, who thought Smith's perspective occupied McGill, said this paradigm continues. Shoemaker said that Smith's respectful approach to religions and the Qur'ān was very effective, especially in studies conducted in North America. On the other hand, Shoemaker stated that this stance, as a historian, negatively affected the studies carried out.⁶⁶ Shoemaker put aside theological concerns and examined the Qur'ān as a historian.

5. Pacification of the Classical Tafsir Tradition

According to Shoemaker, the issue of when the Qur'ān was compiled is essential. He devoted the first three chapters of his work to topics related to the history of the Qur'ān. Shoemaker did not consider the reading in the order of revelation, one of the methods used by the early orientalists to understand the Qur'ān. He continued his research mainly on the relationship of the Qur'ān with surrounding cultures and the history of the Qur'ān. The author's goal is not to understand the Qur'ān as a religious text. The formation process of the text and the factors affecting it are among the author's priorities. We see different examples of this paradigm in contemporary orientalist studies. In the work titled *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*⁶⁷, written by Gabriel Said Reynolds, the author stated that he would not make a reading based on the history of the Qur'ān. According to Reynolds, reading the Qur'ān and the Bible simultaneously will make the text more understandable. He advocated retrospective reading. Some topics that remain closed in the Qur'ān can be found with details in the Bible.⁶⁸ Gabriel Said Reynolds aims to develop a method for reading the Qur'ān. Stating that Wansbrough gave the beginning of the third Hijrī century as the earliest date for the

⁶⁴ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, 58-59.

⁶⁵ Wilfred Cantrell Smith, *Religious Diversity: Essays* (New York, Harper& Row, 1976), 31.

⁶⁶ Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, 3-4.

⁶⁷ Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

⁶⁸ Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, 3-23.

compilation of the Qur'ānic text, Reynolds stated that he had no such concerns. Reynolds focuses on how to read the Qur'ān rather than when, how, and where it was composed.⁶⁹ Shoemaker offers a historical perspective rather than a method because his distrust of the standard Qur'ānic history necessitates this.

Shoemaker also did not trust Sīra sources describing the life of the Prophet Muḥammad (saw). Henri Lammens did not see the Sīra sources as the date by which the Muslim community remembered the life of the Prophet. According to him, Sīra is something that commentators developed over time to explain tafsir. Therefore, Sīra is a product of Qur'ān commentary and cannot be used to explain the Qur'ān.⁷⁰ We need to mention a point here. Research on the Sana'a manuscripts found in Yemen has greatly impacted the academic world. Although the manuscripts containing significant information about the history of the Qur'ān are not evidence on their own, they contain confirming information. Some Western writers, based on the Sana'a manuscripts, said that the writing of the revelation dates back to the time of the Prophet Muḥammad (saw). Behnam Sadeghi has argued that recent studies strongly suggest that the practice of writing occurred before the death of the Prophet Muḥammad (saw), not during the 'Uthmān (ra)'s period.⁷¹

Using non-Islamic sources will help us understand the environment in which the Qur'ān took shape. However, bypassing Islamic literature shows ideological prejudices.⁷² Ignoring Islamic sources to understand the Qur'ān and its history shows that Qur'ānic studies conducted in the West manipulate the field. Qur'ānic studies remain stuck under the epistemic dominance of Western thought, which pacifies the field. Western-based studies have been seen as critical and original by Western writers. The views put forward in the shadow of Qur'ānic sciences were believed to be flawed. However, as Saleh stated, we are faced with an orientalism that says nothing but non-rational things in an artificial language.⁷³ Joseph Lombard, an American researcher of the Qur'ān and Sufism, expressed this problem in his article published in 2022. Lombard, who works at Hamad Bin Khalifa University, argued that they should decolonize Qur'ān studies in the West.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, 13.

⁷⁰ Henri Lammens, "The Koran and tradition: How the life of Muhammad was composed", *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. Ibn Warraq (New York: Prometheus, 2000), 179- 181.

⁷¹ Behnam Sadeghi et al., "Sana'a 1 and the Origins of the Qur'an", *Der Islam* 87 (2012), 22-23.

⁷² Zadeh, "Quranic Studies and the Literary Turn", 339.

⁷³ Walid Saleh, "Review Article: Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet" *Comparative Islamic Studies* 6/1-2 (2011), 256.

⁷⁴ Joseph Lombard, "Decolonizing Qur'anic Studies", *Religions* 13/2 (February 2022), 1-14.

Conclusion

Shoemaker found the information provided by the Qur'ān about its history insufficient. The author, who is not concerned with in-text problems, has highlighted historical data. He used the method of historical criticism, accusing early Orientalism of being confined to chronological studies. According to this method, we are not dealing with what happened but what was understood by those who transcribed these texts. To better reveal the history of the Qur'ān, following the regional historical timeline would be more accurate, according to the author. Shoemaker did not use non-Islamic sources to confirm the traditional narrative. According to Shoemaker, examining the text of the Qur'ān as interpreted and produced (exegetical and derivative) instead of authentic is a necessary beginning. Shoemaker, who did not rely on religious data, was not consistently devoid of such information. The author, who argues that theological concerns affect religious texts, used non-Islamic texts to support this. He has a skeptical approach about the standard history of the Qur'ān and so focuses on non-Islamic sources (mainly Christian) from the first century Hijrah. His attribution of particular importance to Christian texts does not arise from his prejudices. He used these texts because there was no language barrier.

The author did not use derogatory statements about the Qur'ān and the Prophet Muḥammad (saw) and acted with objective academic concerns. Shoemaker tried to trace what the text says rather than what is understood from it. He bracketed the sanctity of the text while revealing what the Qur'ān said.

Shoemaker applied the principle of correlation, one of the elements of historical criticism, to the text. We see that the author frequently uses this element, which is based on examining historical events without separating them from their broader context when discussing the history of the Qur'ān. Neuwirth stated that a more accurate approach would be to read the Qur'ān as a text from late antiquity. He evaluated the Qur'ān in terms of content and style. Likewise, Shoemaker, who sees the Qur'ān as a late antique text, did not examine the content and style of the text while revealing the history of the Qur'ān. He did not subject the Qur'ān to literary examination.

It can be seen as a significant break in the Qur'an studies conducted in the West that the Qur'ān is seen only as a historical text. As Joseph Lumbard stated, decolonizing Qur'ānic studies can be seen as the first step in overcoming this misfortune. In our opinion, understanding the Qur'ān by ignoring exegetical sources is not an accurate method. It is

crucial that the early orientalist, who tried to understand the Qur'ān in the order of its revelation, did not wholly ignore Islamic sources, although they kept their distance from them. We see that Watt reads the Qur'ān based on the life of the Prophet Muḥammad (saw) and uses Islamic sources. Even though it is considered a big claim that he sees this method as the only valid method, it points to the change in the oriental paradigm. The main reason for this change is that chronology studies have not made the desired progress. While in-text evaluations came forth in the early studies, historical data, as shown in Shoemaker, have gained significant importance in Qur'ānic studies in recent years. This situation, which we cannot see in Nöldeke, Weil, and Watt, has shown that different brackets have been opened in new Qur'ānic research. Likewise, Shoemaker focused on the history of the Qur'ān rather than studying the text's unity (coherence, unity, as a whole), which has become widespread in the Western world in recent years.

It is helpful to read the text in studies to understand the Qur'ān and its history. However, it is not acceptable to prioritize the text of the Qur'ān and other holy books and non-Islamic texts. Reading the Qur'ān through the methods of criticism applied to other holy books may make sense for a Western person. It offers the opportunity to compare sacred texts for those who have a prejudiced approach to Islam. However, it has been overlooked by Western researchers that the Qur'ān does not witness the reform movements that the Western world witnessed. Undoubtedly, the Qur'ān can be better interpreted with the Jewish and Christian materials from surrounding cults. However, it should not be concluded that the Qur'ān is imperfectly dependent on other surrounding cultural texts in order to be understood. The Qur'ān, a divine word, can give a preliminary impression to its reader with its content. Despite this, it should not be forgotten that the text exists in its nazm.

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