

ORIENTALISTIC RESEARCH METHODOLOGY TOWARDS THE QUR'ANIC TEXT (AN ALYTICAL STUDY)

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Abstract: The issue of the authenticity of a text belongs to a branch of scholarship conventionally known as textual criticism. This discipline attempts to determine the origin or authorship of a text, its authenticity, and its original form in case there is a multiplicity of text forms. The fundamental texts of Islamic teachings are the Qur'an and the Sunnah, transmitted and preserved in both oral and written form with an immense care by Muslims. The Qur'an was committed to writing in its entirety during the life time of Prophet Muhammad () himself. Subsequently, it was collected in a codex (mushaf) during the Caliphate of Abu Bakr (11/632-13/634). Its written text was standardized during the Caliphate of 'Uthman b. 'Affan (24/644-36/656). The companions agreed that the text was identical to what the Prophet Muhammad () had received as revelation. The authenticity of the text was confirmed by memorization and the written records of such a large number of people that their agreement to perpetrate a lie was well nigh impossible. The same text was later transmitted continuously from generation to generation.

In the modern world, Orientalism is combating the Muslim world in well organized and scientific manner. Their basic purpose is to prove its superiority and priority over the Muslim World.

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Orientalists never neglect their basic aims during the research in the field of Islamic studies. They use their all resources to present the degraded, denigrated, defective, unclear and negative picture of Islamic culture and history so that European society would not be affected by Islamic culture. Along with some important aims, Orientalists are afraid of increasing ratio of acceptance of Islamic teachings in Europe. After understanding these aims we are right to opine that Orientalists, under the veil of research are trying to create anarchy and mental disturbance in Muslims and in the Islamic world. Due to this, we are tending to look into the reality of Orientalistic so-called scholarship of the Qur'ān and its textual history.

It has been observed that Orientalists keep themselves always busy in finding flaws and deficiencies in Islam and in presenting the fake picture of its universal status, so that, they make the Christian world assure of that Islam is a disintegrated, doubtful, contradictory and stagnant religion. And it is unable to keep pace with modern trends of present civilization.

Under these topics, they break into the minds and beliefs of Muslims and by producing certain doubts in their minds, trying to show the superiority of Western civilization and by producing circumstances suitable to get their missionary and political objectives.

Orientalists are trying to prove the Qur'ānic text as unsecure and unauthentic applying so-called modern and scientific methods. Attempts to distort Islam and its sacred texts are in fact as old as the religion itself, though the strategy behind these efforts has fluctuated according to the intended goal. Beginning with the rise of Islam and up until the 13th century A.H. (7th-18th century C.E.), the first objective was to establish a protective fence around Christians to counteract the rapid advance of the new faith in Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Libya etc. Among the notables of this period were John of Damascus (35-133 A.H./675-750 C.E.), Peter the Venerable (1084-1156 C.E.), Robert of Ketton, Raymond Lull (1235-1316 C.E.), Martin Luther (1483-1546 C.E.) and Ludovico Marraci (1612-1700 C.E.), their approaches full of unsophisticated method. However, the second phase of attack witnessed a shift in posture from defensive to offensive, aspiring to the mass conversion of Muslims or, at the least, of shattering any pride and resistance that emanated from their belief in Allāh. Abraham Geiger (1810-1874) belongs squarely to this second period; his 1833 dissertation, "What did Mohammed take from Judaism?", inaugurated the search for ulterior influences on the Qur'ān and led to innumerable books and articles aimed at branding it a poor biblical counterfeit, replete with mistakes.¹

Summary of Ph.D Thesis

Nevertheless, this is undeniable that modern methods adopted by Orientalists in raising modern intellectual issues are advanced and are in the guise of impartiality as compared to old medieval studies. That's why the former Orientalists i.e. Orientalists of 3rd Century Hijra are ancestors or predecessors but the later generation is some step higher in introducing new forms of research methodology. So Orientalistic thought of middle ages and of modern age is more systematically complicated. As Ismā'il Ibrāhim Nawwāb has presented the view that Orientalists have always been in a same polemical campaign as initiated by John of Damascus, rather in a more intensive manner:

The polemical campaign started by John of Damascus² was now resumed. Fuelled by the ever-volatile mixture of crass ignorance and deep fear of a victorious Islam, the polemics became intensely virulent and vituperative and a totally false, grotesquely distorted and highly offensive image of the Prophet and of his message was propagated. The Qur'ān was represented not just as a pirated version, but a mutilated version, of Jewish and Christian scriptures, and therefore false; in fact a revelation that came after Christianity must be false ipso facto. Islam was portrayed as a religion of violence, idolatry, and licentiousness. Muslims were alleged to worship idols of Muhammad and pagan deities. The Prophet was depicted as a cunning politician, a sexual libertine, an impostor, a hatemonger, and the Anti-Christ. The painful effects of these calumnies can be witnessed to this day.³

If we examine the issues raised by Orientalists concerning the addition or subtraction in the Qur'ānic text chronologically, it would become clear that they have been shifted from simplicity to the complexity. For example, during the reign of Holy Prophet Muhammad () non-believers only made claims to prove that Holy Qur'ān does not belong to Almighty Allah. They named the Qur'ānic subjects as fictitious and spurious stories of past generations. Sometimes they named the Qur'ānic text as poetry or the work derived from popes or Christian clergy men.

To break up with this unauthentic way for the first time, John of Damascus proposed the contradictory view about Qur'ān formally. He is considered as famous scholar of religious theologies of middle ages. He accused Islam and the Holy-Qur'ān in defense of Trinity. But answers to those accusations were given by his contemporary Abu 'Isā al-Warrāq appropriately. Same behavior towards Qur'ān was adopted by Peter the Venerable of Western Christendom. He was the head of priests of Clunial Churches. He, along with his four companions translated the important

texts of the Holy Qur'ān and Islamic heritage through great movement of acquaintance with Islam.

Beside the criticism of later Orientalists of this group, this thing becomes clear that slips of John of Damascus got prominent place in the collection of Islamic writings and translations of Clunial Corpus or Toledo Corpus, Generally, west plated negative emotions for Islam and Qur'ān at intellectual level. To be very clear, in the West, this collection has been remained as a basic source for introduction to Islam and Qur'ān for centuries. And this collection provided base for interesting topic of criticism of Qur'ān in the West. In the 15th century, after retiring from church John of Segovia translated the Holy Qur'ān in Latin to solve the differences / of Islam and Christianity and through a dialogue i.e. "Contra frentia" laid emphasis on the reconciliation of Islam and Christianity. To develop the theory of John of Segovia, people like Nicholas came on the scene but during the efforts of reconciliation, in 1691 AD a church of Rome published a book named "Prodromus ad Refutation Alcorani" and the central point of the book was, 'now to criticize the Holy Qur'ān'. In this book, Holy Qur'ān is being discussed in undesirable manner.

These ancient Orientalistic views and methodologies of research were changed when in 1967, Vatican accepted Islam as a Semitic Religion. In contrary to clearly biased behaviour towards Qur'ān, now the research methodologies have been entirely changed.

Orientalists have been, very expeditiously, communicating the traditions of variations in the Qur'ānic text and its related ancient scriptures and foliage since the last century. Theodor Noldeke, the famous Orientalist has discussed these subject matters in his book *Tārikh al-Qur'ān* (1860). His contemporary, Goldziher argued about the variation and indetermination of the Qur'ānic text in his book titled "*Maḥāhib al-Tafsir al-Islāmi*". Arthur Jeffery took up the ancient codices and 'Uthmānic scriptures of the Holy Qur'ān as a special target. He tried to make the Qur'ānic text doubtful by declaring the variant readings of the Qur'ān rootless.

Alphonse Mingana (d. 1937 A.D) and Agnes Lewis Smith bought some old Qur'ānic pages from a commercial antiquary in Syria and published them as "Leaves from Three Ancient Qur'āns: Possibly Pre-Othmānic with a list of their variants". Discovery of Qur'ānic fragments and other scriptures of texts of Muslim heritage from the Jām' Mosque of ʿĪan'ā' is a part of this chain.

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Conclusively, all these efforts are the different ways to create doubts about the authenticity of ‘Uthmānic Manuscripts or codices and in the text of Holy Qur’ān indirectly. In the near past a book titled "The True Furqan" by Dr. Anis Shorosh has been published by the America and Israel in which, versus to Holy Qur’ān, false and ridiculous material comprising of 77 Suras, was propagated in Arabic and English languages simultaneously. Another ridiculous work appeared by Brother Mark in 2000. He posted a detailed document with the title of "A Perfect Qur’ān. The nine parts of this book comprises of 32 chapters and four indexes. For criticizing the Qur’ān through fake traditions, the first three parts and first index have been devoted for the purpose to present the Qur’ān as a book full of mistakes and textual corruption.

In respect to delve into the investigation and evaluation of the work of Orientalists regarding the major issues of Qur’ānic text, this thesis has been focussed in the following twofold points:

1. The foundations and principles of Orientalistic scholarship and objections on textual history of the Qur’ān with a critical analyses of the actual position of these principles.
2. To analyse the Orientalistic scientific research methodologies implemented for the textual criticism.

In this respect it is a dire need of time, to study deeply, the doubts and changing views of Orientalistic research methodology.

SCOPE OF THE WORK

Muslim scholars use the term *nass* (pl. *nusus*) for “text” which refers to the text of the Qur’ān and Hadith commonly. But the focus has been made only to the text of the Qur’ān. Its meaning refers to to a certain level of textual clarity: an expression or phrase or sentence of the Qur’ān which indicates a particular meaning, not admitting any other than that. In the modern Arabic language, however, the word *nass* has become common equivalent for the English word “text.” It means “the text or very word of an author, book, writing or passage.” Thus, ever since initial reference to the revealed texts, the term *nass* in its contemporary usage moved toward the general meaning of text. Therefore, when used, it needs an objective, such as in the expression *al-Nass al-Qur’āni* as in this thesis same expression has been confined.

As the Orientalists seem enthusiastic in establishing different versions of the Qur'ān, they have been interested in its alleged textual variations. In this thesis, all the text related issues have not been discussed, but only textual-variations related topics like, the issue of multiple readings, the Qur'ānic Orthography, the codices of the Companions and the transmissions leading to controversies in the Qur'ānic text alongwith Orientalistic methodologies towards them have been made subject of discussion. And the issues like 'Amud, Naḥam, compilation history and Nasakh etc. in the meaning of explicit have not been included in the scope of this thesis. Similarly, transmissions which led to exegetical diversity also don't fall within the domain of this dissertation. An attempt has been made to bring out the significance of response to Western deviated thoughts in a parallel academic style and methodology.

NEED FOR THE WORK

Many Orientalists have repeatedly proclaimed that the Qur'ānic text is hardly a preserved and divined speech of God; rather, it is composed and fabricated by the Prophet of Islam. At the same time, many of the Western scholars bluntly described Qur'ānic textual developments and evolution by highlighting some major issues like multiple readings, 'Uthmānic recensions, codices of companions, orthography arrangement of verses and suras and some transmissions apparently leading towards controversies in the text of the Qur'ān. The most significant Orientalists who heavily contributed in inflating these notions including Nöldeke (1836-1930), Goldziher (1850-1921), Bergsträsser (1886-1933), Tisdall (1859-1928), Jeffery (d. 1952) and Schacht (1902-1969). A new phase, beginning in the mid 20th century, among the followers of this school are Rippin, Crone, Power, and not least of all Wansbrough, whose theory, that the Qur'ān and Hadīth are a community product spanning two centuries which were then fictitiously attributed to an Arabian prophet based on Jewish prototypes, is doubtlessly the most radical approach to ousting the Qur'ān from its hallowed status.

The present work, it is hoped, will introduce a new parallel approach in responding to modern Western academicians' views and explore the myth of their scientific research methodology by making a thorough study of their past and present scholarship of Qur'ānic textual studies.

SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

Since no prior academic research on Orientalistic methodological approaches regarding the Qur'ānic text has been rendered except some splendid relevant works, such as of Muhammad Mustafā al-'Aḥamī's

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“History of the Qur’ānic Text: from Revelation to Compilation”, Muhammad Mohar Ali’s “The Qur’ān and the Orientalists”, Muhibb ud-Din ‘Abdus Subhān Wā‘iz’s edited work of “Kitāb al-Masāhif” by Ibn Abi Dāwud⁴, Professor Dr. Mohammad Akram Chaudhry’s article on “Variant Readings of the Qur’ān and Orientalism: The Case of Arthur Jeffery”, Dr. Muzaffar Iqbal’s article on McAuliff’s Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān, Dr. Labib al-Sa‘id’s “Al-Mushaf al-Murattal”, Fikret Karcic’s “Textual Analysis in Islamic Studies: A Short Historical and Comparative Survey” and Professor Dr. Hafiz Mahmood Akhtar’s doctoral dissertation on “Tadwin-e- Qur’ān and Orientalism” have been a constant source of assistance in heading towards right direction. However, for deriving the ideas of Orientalistic approach and research methodology, I have also taken assistance from the basic Muslim scholars’ works like Ibn Qutaiba’s “Tā’wil Mushkil al-Qur’ān”, Ibn Hazam’s “Al-Rad ‘Ala al-Firaq”, Ibn al-‘Arabi’s “Al-‘Awāsīm min al-Qawāsīm”, Al-Ghazālī’s “Al-Rad ‘ala al-Bāṭniyya wal Filāsifa”, Muḥammad Rashid Raḥḥā’s “Al-Rad ‘alan Nasārā wa Shubḥātuhum” and other refutations to the misleading objections of Westerners regarding the Qur’ānic text, I also took benefit of some of the contemporary relevant Arabic literature whose references have been given in their places.

In this study, various methodologies have been adopted; like historical methodology to present a thorough view of Orientalistic approaches since the first revelation came down to Prophet till the recent day. Similarly, comparative methodology has also been observed in the first chapter. Moreover, overall analytical and critical methodologies remained central while delving into the special case studies in fourth and fifth chapters which reveals and retrieves the attention towards western scholars’ deficiencies in the field of research in Islamic and Oriental studies. This analysis also affirms the authenticity of the Qur’ānic textual corpus. For the purpose of appropriate presentation of transliteration ‘Islamic Studies font’ has been exercised throughout the thesis.

PLAN OF WORK

The dissertation consists of five chapters. In first chapter, some preliminary significant points including an introductory discussion of Orientalism, its study of Islamic sources, the ways of their plundering and looting Islamic manuscripts from all over the Muslim world to edit them while distorting the facts and a comprehensive account of Muslims foundation for research have been described.

In the second chapter a historical study of Orientalistic approaches towards the Qur'ānic text since the first revelation came down upon Prophet Muhammad () through angel Gebrail has been analyzed. In this way the reaction of early non believers, views of the non-Muslim scholars of Medeval ages, analyses of the scholarship of 18th to 20th century Orientalists and the application of reduction and revision theories of recent Western scholars have also been dealt with a critical approach.

In the third chapter Foundations or the tools of Orientalistic scholarly study of Qur'ānic text has been the central and focusing point. Similarly, the sources exercised by Westerners for the criticism of the divinely ordained Qur'ānic text and their so-called scientific methodologies have also been studied in detail. In the same chapter, "Psychological Projection" in the Orientalistic methodology also been detected while making arguments to prove it. Whereas, the last two chapters; fourth and fifth have been specified for the case studies of representatives among the Orientalists of the last century who have rendered their endeavours in making a new developmental historical wave in the study of the Qur'ānic textual history. Arthur Jeffery, Alphonse Mingana and Goldziher from predecessors and Puin, Lester, native Orientalist Ibn Warraq and the case shorosh in his ridiculous "The True Furqan" from the successors have been selected for special scrutiny.

Finally, I am to confess that this work would have not assumed its current final shape without the divine hand. Whatever seamless material is there is by the grace of the Almighty. And if there is any wrong or fault, that owes to my humanly weaknesses and the devil. Moreover, putting efforts to my heart's content is source of pleasure for me. Still I don't claim the production of this magnum opus which was not possible for someone else, as Allah says

وما اوتيتم من العلم الا قليلا and وفوق كل ذى علم عليم

For me to be proud aspiring Muslim knowledge seekers to go after Orientalism to keep a strict check over the intellectual war ignited by it.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ¹ Al-A‘ Lami, Muhammad Mustafā, *History of the Qur’ānic Text*, p. 7
- ² For a detailed study of John of Damascus, the first architect and coryphaeus of the critique of Islam and the Prophet, and of the church leader's family, religious and Umayyad background and especially for the texts of his polemics against Islam in English translation, see Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus: The "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden: 1972); for John of Damascus in general and his polemical position against Islam in particular, see the pertinent parts of the five-volume monumental work on Christianity (1971-1989) by Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Vol. 2: *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom [600-1700]* (Chicago: 1974), especially pp. 227-242; also B. Kotter, "John Damascene, St.," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Palatine, IL: 1967); reprinted 1981; 17 vols., Vol. VQ, pp. 1047-1049; Herbert Thurston and Donald Attwater, eds., *Butler's Lives of the Saints* (New York: 1956), pp. 689-691.
- ³ Ismā‘il Ibrāhīm Nawwāb, *Muslims and the West in History*, in *Muslims and the West: Encounter and Dialogue*, Edited by: Zafar Ishāq Ansāri & John L. Esposito, Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University, Islamabad, 2001, pp. 11-12
- ⁴ *Kitāb al-Masāhif: Dirāsah wa Tahqiq wa Naqd*, ‘Abdus Subhān presented it as doctoral theses and got the degree from Jāmi‘ah Umm al-Qurā, *Qism al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah*, Makkah al-Mukarramah, 1995/1416, Two Volumes.