

An Overview of Qur'ānic Studies in the West: Themes, Approaches and Methodologies

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Abstract

The Quran, being foremost religious and sacred book of the Muslims, gained a significant place in the western religious studies since long. From medieval polemical refutation to the contemporary academic studies a significant number of anthological works have been produced by the western scholarship in the Qur'anic studies. A variety of approaches and methodologies have been applied to expound multiple Qur'ānic themes which intermittently resonate among western scholars of Islam. This paper mentions a brief overview of western contribution from medieval to contemporary times and highlights the major themes in the field of western Qur'anic studies. The gradual development in applying the various socio-religious methodologies is cited as well.

Key Words: Qur'ānic Studies, Orientalism, Qur'ānic Translations, Tafsīr, Islam and West

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The study of Islam is a profound tradition in the West. The western scholarship of Islam has mostly been considered a part of Orientalism¹ that traces its history back to medieval times. The campaign was initiated with

political, religious and military purposes as denoted by Edward Said and Norman Danial in their works.²Said frequently uses the term Orientalism for those studying the East and Islam. He also describes that Orientalism has its own aims and objectives although he is criticized by many western writers for his approach. Yet, several Muslim intellectuals agree with his theses. In a Muslim expression, “it was a project of malice that bred out of frustration and it has been a plan to dislodge the noble scripture from its firmly enriched position in the Muslim world”.³

The western thinkers confessing the flaws of the classical orientalism began to distance themselves from their predecessors. Consequently, the usage of the term orientalism has been obsoleted and replaced with the terms such as area studies and religious studies.⁴

Origin of Qur’anic Studies in the West

In early medieval times, the Qur’ān was introduced to the west as production of Prophet Muhammad who was charged with epilepsy. The fact that the Eastern Christianity was dominant in forming the pejorative attitude of the western Christianity regarding the Qur’ān is quite true. Two foremost works that influenced the western Christianity in great deal were the works of Abdul Masihb.Ishaq al-Kindi⁵ and John of Damascus (d.749)⁶. Al- Kindi tried to prove the Qur’an as inauthentic and unoriginal in his treatise, *al- Risāla*. The second was the work of John of Damascus. His work was as influential as *al- Risāla* of Al-Kindi and considered a “stock in trade in the West”.⁷

The Prophet of Islam was portrayed as an imposter and false prophet who conquered the world with the power of his magic. It was impossible to imagine the person of Muhammad without sword whose only purpose was either to kill his opponents or conquer them. The causes of this propagation lie in the hands of clergy men who out of their fear and complex propagated the derogatory foster image of Muhammad. One of the earliest biographers of Muhammad Giubert of Nogent (d. 1124) is reported to say, “it is safe to speak evil of one whose malignity exceeds whatever ill can be spoken”.⁸

The pejorative treatment of Islam has its own roots and causes. Historical accounts reveal that it was the fear of enemy and ‘know the enemy’ strategy

that gave birth to Islamic studies in the West. Bernard Lewes, similarly, counts this reason to be the very basic factor behind Arabic and Qur'ānic scholarship.⁹ Further, he elaborates that Christendom studied Islam to protect the Christians from the Muslim blandishments and to convert the Muslims to Christianity. For this ambition, the Christian scholars created literature with regard to the faith, the prophet, and the book. The literature, polemic in tone and often abusive, aimed to discourage rather to inform.¹⁰ The scenarios of Crusades, the contacts with much advanced culture of the Muslims and the defeat awakened clergy men and they realized the importance of knowing the Muslims. They then realized that to confront the Muslims, they need the weapon of in-depth knowledge of the Qur'ān.¹¹

The Academic Scholarship of the Qur'ān

In the beginning of the 12th century, the Christian theologians began systematic study of Islam in order to refute it. They, in fact, made an effort to make sound assaults on Islam by studying directly fundamental texts of Islam, particularly the Qur'an. Instead of presenting an imaginary picture of Prophet with a bull, it was determined to overthrow Islam on intellectual and rational bases.¹² Indeed, the western scholarship on the Qur'an started with the first translation of the Qur'an in the 12th century. The motive behind the very first rendering was the defense of the Christian faith on rational basis. The outcome could be the same as in the past but they at least acknowledged the worth of direct understanding of the Qur'an. This willingness may be called a step forward for self-defense.

In Medieval times, systematic study of the Qur'ān became necessary for the Christian clerics in order to combat the Islamic threat.¹³ The first half of the twelfth century was a milestone in the history of the oriental enterprise in the Qur'ānic studies. The step was taken on the initiative of Peter, The Venerable (d. 1156) who, like his predecessor John of Damascus, considered Islam a heresy that should be countered. He tried to justify the translation project to be in the interest of Christendom. He ordered his scholars to translate the early polemical works of John of Damascus and Al-Kindi against Islam that are famous now as Toledan Collection. Along with those works,

the Qur'an was first translated in Latin on his expense by the English scholar, Robert of Ketton (d. 1160), and completed in July 1143.¹⁴ Robert also translated some other works of Islamic scholarship related to different sciences.¹⁵ The polemic zeal is evident from the title of this translation, *Lex Mahumet pseudo Prophete* (The Religion of Muhammad, pseudo Prophet).¹⁶ Scholars are of the view that this translation provided the basis for other translations until the seventeenth century¹⁷ and was used as a major source by almost all of the significant European refuters of Islam.¹⁸ By browsing the pages of the translation, one finds plenty of the ridiculous notes. The hostility is clear from the words used in these notes. The favorite noun is *mandex* ("liar"), and adjective *stultissimus* ("extremely stupid").¹⁹ Some scholars opined that despite the polemic zeal, Robert tried to understand the Qur'anic text from the Muslim commentaries, including Tabari's²⁰, which made Arberry, a Twentieth century scholar to comment that "such was the inglorious beginning of English renderings of the Holy Book of Islam inspired by hostile intention".²¹

Arabic text of the Qur'an was published in 1537 at Venice after the printing machine was invented whereas the Latin translation was published in 1543 by Zurich scholar Theodor Bibliander (d. 1564), the editor of the printed edition of the Qur'ān . He was one of the strong proponents of the systematic Qur'ānic studies for refutation. After a long and hard controversy, he was authorized to print the Qur'ān.²² Quite identical to his views was Martin Luther (d. 1546) who expressed his opinion regarding the translation of the Qur'an in the following words:

"It has struck me that one is able to do nothing more grievous to Mohammad or the Turks, nor more to bring them to harm (more than with all weaponry) than to bring their Koran to the Christians in the light of day, that they may see therein, how entirely cursed, abominable, and desperate a book it is, full of lies, fables and all abominations that the Turks conceal and gloss over. They are reluctant to see the Koran translated into other languages, for they probably feel that it would bring about apostasy in all sensible hearts"... "For if indeed we had been able to have the necessary

document here, it would finally have come to light, and if such a book should be kept in restraint by you (which God may prevent) we will find it somewhere and still release it . . . if the holy fathers don't get the heretical book to read, how would they take steps against its secret poison.”²³

IN the 17th century first English translation was made by Alexander Ross (d. 1654) in 1649. Ross too, frequently uses the harsh and piercing titles for the Prophet in his rendering. His expressions for the Qur'an such as “A gallimaufry of errors,” “Misshapen issue of Mahomet's brain,” or “Corrupted puddle of Mahomet's invention” evidently demonstrate his polemic treatment.²⁴ It is worth mentioning that his translation was the first version of the Qur'an in America, which came out in Massachusetts in 1806 and enjoyed a vast circulation until Sale's translation became the standard text.²⁵

The Italian priest Ludovici Marracci (d. 1700) produced a careful Latin translation of the Qur'an, along with the Arabic text, under the title “Refutation of the Qur'an” in 1698.²⁶ His purpose was highly polemical as he studied Islam in order to destroy it with its own weapons.²⁷

It is quite remarkable that the majority of the early translations were titled as “Mohamed's Qur'an”, “The Qur'an of the Turks”, or “Book of the Turks”. Another noteworthy thing is that most of the translations have a preface or discourse in which the translators tried to occupy the reader's mind and fill him with some presumptions regarding Islam and the Prophet. An example can be seen in the translation of John Rodwell (d. 1900) in which he stressed over the origin of Islam and tried his best to prove that it is the mixture of the Christian and Judaic teachings.²⁸ Even western intellectuals themselves acknowledge the existence of anti- Islamic spirit in these works.²⁹ It was George Sale who recommended the Christians to avoid ill words and reproachful language for a deepest impression³⁰.

Next to the translation, the western literature falls in to three main categories: (1) works that seek to trace the Jewish-Christian influence on the Qur'ān; (2) works that try to rebuild the chronological order of the Qur'ān; (3) works that examine the text or content of the Qur'ān.³¹

The history of Qur'ānic Studies, spanning over centuries from medieval times to modern period, proved itself to be a ground for the upcoming centuries. It was, however, predominated by the polemic fervor of the priests and clergy men. By the passage of time, the bustle was joined by academics with a merger of polemic and intellectual zest.

Contemporary Qur'ānic Scholarship from 20th to 21st Century

As mentioned earlier, that Sale, in his preface to Qur'anic translation has suggested the Christians to adopt a new strategy to study the Qur'an and Islam. His approach was followed in the upcoming centuries as Watt too, proposed his fellows to change the style regarding the Qur'an. He elucidates that western writers have stopped saying that the Qur'an is Muhammad's own book, not because they admitted that, but because of the fact that the Christian- Muslim contacts have increased and so has trade.³² Therefore, a transformation in style is implemented by the scholars of twentieth century onward.

In this century, much interest and concentration is shown in the field of the Qur'anic studies and its sciences. The Qur'anic studies emerged as a significant area of the western scholarship. A rapid growth of literature in relation to the Qur'anic exegeses and sciences can be noticed. Arthur Jeffery, Richard Bell, Regis Blachere (d. 1973) and Rudi Paret, (d. 1983) were the eminent scholars of the field.

The contribution made by the journal "The Muslim World" in the field of Qur'anic studies cannot be ignored. It was launched, as cited earlier, in 1911 by Samuel Zwemer (d. 1952). The journal, originated with missionary zeal, includes thousands of articles related to the Qur'an and its sciences. Generally, most of the journal material holds the traditional Christian stance regarding the Qur'an, its history and collection. Yet, at present, it has developed a welcoming stance for the Muslim contributors as well.³³

In the second half of the 20th century, some new ideas appeared on the horizons of the western scholarship that were highly controversial for both the western and Muslim scholarships. In other words, the western scholars

were divided in two groups. They can be titled as traditional and revisionist³⁴ scholars. This lack of consensus has its origins from the very beginning of scholarly investigation of the Qur'an by the western scholars in the nineteenth century. However, for many years, most of the western scholars adopted a view of the Qur'an and its origins that was presented by the Islamic tradition itself. This group of the scholars, although with critical approach, comes under the category of traditionalist scholars.³⁵ The later, being different in their approaches and styles, denied the authenticity of the master narrative of the Qur'an and questioned the very origin of Islam. They not only declared that the Qur'an is the production of human mind but also developed the theory that it took gradually the position of the authorized text in two centuries after Prophet's demise. Their works were criticized even by the non-Muslim scholars. Among these debatable works were the theories of Günter Lüling (b. 1928) Alphonso Mingana (d. 1937), Yahuda Nevo (d. 1992) John Burton (d. 2001) John Wansbrough, Christophe Luxemburge, Patricia Crone (d. 2015) and Michael Crook.³⁶

The 21st century proved to be a breakdown of traditional divide between the West and Islam. Scholars started collaborating with each other in their researches and findings. One can observe an excess of publications, encyclopedia, journals and companions related to the holy the Qur'an. The movement which was started in the 12th century to refute the book of "infidels" has adopted diversities of styles now. This new era is witnessing the combination of traditional Muslim and the western approaches in the study of the Qur'an. The western scholarship has approached the variation of ways over the twentieth century. Many scholars explored the general areas related to the Qur'an without questioning the Muslim accounts of its origin. While there are others, who tried to apply the methods to the Qur'anic studies, that were used to Biblical studies.³⁷

Somehow, the Qur'anic studies is entering a new era as the old norms of the western scholarship are changed now and challenged in the context of intellectual globalization. Furthermore, involvement of the Muslim scholars in academic activities can be a dynamic factor for transformation.³⁸ Even

though, the reflection of ancient and ingrained notions in recent works is observed from time to time, regarding Islam in general and Qur'anic studies in specific. Despite the assertions of objectivity, many intellectuals could not liberate themselves from the preconceived notions of classical period.

Major Themes in the Western Qur'anic Scholarship

It is worth mentioning that out of the vast corpus of orientalist's scholarship, the work related to the contents of the Qur'an is very few.³⁹ It is also perceptible that very few scholars attempted to evaluate the functional power of the Qur'ān through a systematic study of the themes and the contents of the Qur'ān. The grave change that Qur'ān brought in the individual and collective lives has been the least point in the discussions of the western works. The reason is their indulgence in the chronology and history of the text of the Qur'an itself. Moreover, the interest of the western savants in the sources and history of the Qur'an only caused a kind of stagnation in their works.⁴⁰ History of the Qur'an gained their interest to extent that no other subject has gained.⁴¹ Yet, at present, scholars have focused on themes of Qur'ān as well and produced voluminous works.⁴²

A glance on the history of the Qur'anic studies made it easier to summarize the major themes and outlooks with regard to Qur'anic studies in the western academia. The campaign that was initiated with the translation of the Qur'an, has adopted diverse approaches and themes. Almost all of the western works, from Medieval to recent times and from the prefaces of translations to the publications of massive compendiums, focus on those specific pivotal points and themes.

I. Origin of the Qur'an

The idea that Muhammad is sole author of the Qur'ān⁴³ and he developed the essence of Qur'ānic teachings from the sources extant in Arabia at that time, is quite well known in the history of the western scholarship.

In the works of the western scholars, the theory of the origin of the Qur'an appears in abundance. By having a look on history, one can observe a consensus upon the idea of the foreign origin of the Qur'an in the West. Nonetheless, there exist some inconsistencies in the essence of those sources

as one can observe the Jewish scholars asserting emphatically for the Jewish origin⁴⁴ and the Christian, on contrary, declaring Christianity as the key substance.⁴⁵ Perhaps, the most conversed issue in the academic history of the West is the origin of the Qur'an.

From the time of John of Damascus and Peter, The Venerable, to the age of Noldeke and Bell, it has been a well-conceived notion in the western academia. The echoes of pronouncements of so-called borrowing can be heard very clearly till recent stage of advanced approaches and methodologies. Almost all of the western scholars have dealt with this idea more or less with minute discrepancies in their works and majority of them disproved Divine origin of the Qur'an. The first modern scholar who treated the theory was Ibrahim Geiger who focused on the Jewish sources of the Qur'an in his work: "What did Mohammed take from Judaism?"⁴⁶

He was later followed up by many other scholars of the field such as William Muir,⁴⁷ Noldeke,⁴⁸ Richard Bell,⁴⁹ Hartwig Hirschfeld,⁵⁰ C. C. Torrey⁵¹ and many others. The desire to prove that the Qur'an is no more than an echo of Judaism or Christianity is quite dominant even in scholarly and excellent works.⁵² It can be noticed that the traditional Muslim view of the Prophet's illiteracy has been denied by some western scholars who tried to prove presence of written sources for Muhammad(S) and his access to them⁵³ unlike others who were of the opinion of presence of oral traditions for Prophet.⁵⁴

Contrasting to the previous thoughts, a quite different view, regarding the origin of the Qur'an, presented by William Muir, Margoliouth and later on by Montgomery Watt in their celebrated works.⁵⁵ They were of the view that the Qur'an was the product of Prophet's strong will and resourcefulness. Imagination, resolve and consciousness are the most common words found in their works.⁵⁶

Related to the theory of the Christian origin of the Qur'an, another challenging idea was presented in 1974 by Gunter Lulling. According to him, the Qur'an preserves within its text early Christian writings. His approach was that the text of the Qur'an has four parts or levels. Two of them consist

of, either, the Christian hymns that has been composed by the Christian residents of Medina at that time, or the hymns that were adopted by Muhammad and later Islamized by him. What he proposed was the reinterpretation of the Qur'anic text by digging the levels of the Qur'an so as to get the original meaning. His theory has been criticized by even the western academia for not providing sound proofs.⁵⁷

Another theory related to the origin, seeks to expose the social and cultural milieu of Arabia in order to trace the practical elements of the Qur'anic principles. Its proponents tried to find out the religious environment of the then Arabia and hence, proved that Prophet followed the traditions and trends of his time.⁵⁸

The question seems to be not only sensitive but also reductionist as it has only increased the tension between the Muslims and the academic word of the West. One of the modern scholars expresses his point in the following words: "the tension between traditional Muslim and western academic approaches is perhaps nowhere more intense than in discussing this question".⁵⁹

2. History and Chronological Order

One of the most essential themes addressed by the western scholars was the chronological order of the Qur'an. As it is well known that the traditional Muslim view regarding the Qur'anic revelation is that it has been revealed in parts over the period of 23 years and that the recent order of the Qur'an is quite different from its chronological order as the Prophet did not mean to retain the chronological order.

The study of the chronological order is quite significant as it helps in-depth understanding of the Qur'an regarding certain places. Both, Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have shared their scholarly insights in this regard. But, neither of the western efforts for rearrangement has showed satisfactory results. Rather, some of the works of non-Muslims have provoked Muslims' resentment.

A number of the prominent western figures in this regard are William Muir, Gustav Weil, Theodore Noldeke, Hirschfield, J.M. Rodwell, Regis Blachere, and Richard Bell. The object of this rearrangement was reconstructing the historical sequence of its original structure.⁶⁰ Among them, some have tried to change the order of the verses too.⁶¹ These scholars were of the view that the present order of the Qur'an is a hodgepodge of verses and hence has lost its coherence. Hence, they tried to rearrange the verses and Surahs by following the Muslim traditions partly and by giving considerations to the subject matter.⁶² These steps were not welcomed by Muslim scholars as, according to them, they were not based on sound proofs. Scholars see that the task behind was to show an evolutionary process in the mind of the Prophet that influenced on the mode of expression in the book composed by him.⁶³

The struggle to place the verses in chronological order can be an outcome of unfamiliarity with the Qur'anic style as it does not present its themes and topics in an arranged historical form like other books and consequently appears to the western scholars as scattered, uneven, irregular and patchy. Some other scholars worked on this scheme with the hypotheses that although Qur'ān was collected by redactors with great care but there remained confusion in that process. As the Book was collected from scattered pieces, the text was partially disordered and there remained the possibility of the insertion of the passages mistakenly. Hence "pieces were cut off from a passage and wrongly placed or written on the back of the others and were read continuously".⁶⁴ In order to maintain coherence and consistency, many labors have been spent to rearrange it but at the end it has been admitted that no final result can be acquired in establishing the exact order of the Qur'ānic contents.⁶⁵

Some contemporary scholars believe that the urgency of the task in the 'Uthmānic period led towards a much less systematic ordering of the contents. At that time it was more important to collect the text than to arrange it in systematic order. The task of rearrangement of the contents according to comprehensive sequence was left to later Muslim scholars.⁶⁶ There are others who, after many past efforts for restructuring the Qur'ānic

contents, still endorse the need of rearrangement for a better understanding of the text.⁶⁷

3. Compilation of the Qur'an

In the past centuries, the issue of the compilation was discussed by the western scholars quite frequently. The accounts of their scholarship can be divided into two groups i.e. the traditional scholars and revisionist scholars.

The first category builds their research on the basis of the Muslim accounts related to the collection of the Qur'an, although, they do not accept those records entirely and show a kind of suspicion and consider that their accrued changes in the original text. Among them are Noldeke, Regis Blachere, Arthur Jeffery, Richard Bell and more recent is Angelika Neuwirth.⁶⁸

The second genre totally rejects the traditional Muslim accounts regarding the issue. In divert ways; they tried to propose that historically, master narrative of the origin of the Qur'an is not reliable and consistent. Hence, there is a need to reinterpret those traditions. At the forefront of this group is John Wansbrough, who forcefully discard the Islamic accounts and of the view that the Qur'an was compiled after 150 years the Prophet. Some other prominent scholars are Mingana, Gunter Luling, Norman Calder, Patricia Crone, Michael cook and John Burton who not only rejected the Muslim accounts regarding the collection, but came up with the theory that the holy Qur'an that we have in our hands is compiled by the Prophet himself or compiled after many centuries.

These theories have generated controversy in the field of Qur'anic studies. Yet, the trend has benefited the field as many recent scholars are trying to address the questions put by those revisionists.⁶⁹ The issue of compilation is addressed by recent scholars as well. The modern scholarship too, opines that the traditional Muslim view of the preservation of the Qur'an is simply wrong.⁷⁰ Majority hold the view that by the demise of the Prophet, it was not committed to writing⁷¹ and one cannot be certain about the state of the Qur'ān because of the scarcity of evidence.⁷² Accordingly, they consider that a scientific and undisputed history of the Qur'ān remains to be written.⁷³

4. Multiple Readings of the Qur'an⁷⁴

Though, contradictory to this view, the western scholars of the Qur'anic studies consider them as part of the history of the text. To say differently, it is assumed that the readings did not develop until the fourth century and the existence of discrepancies in readings, according to them, is no more a record of early tradition than the results of exegesis activity. Quite identical to this is the views of recent scholars who consider readings as the result of exegetical activities.⁷⁵ Besides, their contention is that the absence of symbols to represent certain vowels in the early copies of the Qur'an has led the variation in reading.⁷⁶

The western academics made many efforts in finding the variant readings of the Qur'an from time to time. Significant figures who dealt with the genre of multiple readings are Ignác Goldziher (d. 1921), Alphonse Mingana (d. 1937), Arthur Jeffery, and Gerd Piun.⁷⁷

Perhaps, that most influential of all was Arthur Jeffery, who studies readings throughout of his life. In his book "Materials for the history of the text of the Qur'an", he has collected readings from the codices of Ibn-e Mas'ūd, Ubayyi, 'Ali Ibn Abbas and others. His main source was *Kitābul Musāhif* by Ibn Abi Dawud. His intention was to publish a text of the Qur'an with the addition of those readings that he had compiled from several sources.⁷⁸

For this reason, he collected 6000 readings from commentaries, individual codices and other books of linguistics. Despite his claim of rival codices for the codex of 'Uthman and his painstaking efforts for that, he failed to announce the results of the final report of his archive who has been working through 42000 copies of the Qur'an. The results showed no significant discrepancies among them.⁷⁹

In 1972 some significant parchments of the Qur'an were discovered in the great mosque of San'a in Yemen. The then authority of the country took care of those fragments and invited the scholars from Germany to start their research over the parts. Those two scholars were Gerd Piun and H. C. Bothmer⁸⁰ who pointed towards a few minute differences in the variations⁸¹ Anyhow, these findings as they consider are tentative and suggest that existence of these manuscripts indicates that the text or parts of it were

existed in the eighth century and from this skeleton text of manuscripts, the final text of the Qur'an was developed over the next two centuries.⁸² Among recent scholars, John Burton, Wansbrough and his student Rippin, following the theory of Goldziher, are of the opinion that readings were fabricated by jurists to fortify their arguments.⁸³

5. Foreign Vocabulary

One more genre, dealing with the Qur'anic Studies is of those who dealt with the vocabulary of the Qur'an. There is voluminous literature that discusses the supposedly foreign lexis in the Qur'an. A general view about the Qur'anic terms is that every word, for which native philologists or commentators have failed to find a solitary meaning and instead they offered multiple meanings, has a foreign origin. Hence, modern scholars have tried to trace an origin for that word and suggested the meanings according to supposed source.⁸⁴ They traced many words of foreign vocabulary and still there are additions to that. Almost 322 words have been counted in Jeffery's Material for which it suggested that they have Hebrew, Aramaic or Syriac origins.⁸⁵

After the publication of the work of Mingana under the title "Syriac Influence on the Style of the Qur'an" the theory that created a chaos in the field of the Qur'anic scholarship was presented by pseudonym of Christophe Luxemburg. The work became the center of attention in the popular press and was published in the leading journals of North America and Europe. He convicted that the Qur'anic language has Aramaic origin and henceforth, it should be understood with the perspective of that source. With the publication of his work, he intended to solve all of the riddles of the Qur'anic language.⁸⁶ In his book, he made an attempt to suggest the meanings in the light of Syro-Aramaic. For instance, he sees that the term *Hūr* should not be seen as a reference to the virgins of Paradise but, in the light of Aramaic term, to white grapes.⁸⁷ Some view that there are several words that are derived from Chinese.⁸⁸

6. Emendations of the Qur'an

Emendation is a process of dealing with any text with the possibility that there are errors in the text as a result of corruptions and suggesting the possible correct meaning. With regard to the Qur'ān, the western scholarship deals the issue academically and do not consider the sensitivity of the subject. On contrary, it is more than a sensitive topic for Muslims as according to them the Qur'anic text has been preserved under the Divine care and there could not be any chance for any mistake. According to the western intellectuals, the Qur'an is not immune to human errors and that the Muslim argument of perfect and complete preservation of the text from errors is absolutely flat.⁸⁹

The western academic world believes that historical texts contain some corruptions and they are in need of emendations. The Qur'anic studies, in their view, have not benefited much from the science of textual criticism because of the Muslim's belief in the sacredness of the Qur'an. The scholars are of the view that the Qur'an is open to same copyist errors problems that can occur in any other ancient text. Consequently, the issue should be considered as an academic activity far from any bias.

Among a handful of scholars, who have given attention to this subject, the most prominent is James A. Bellamy⁹⁰. Bellamy suggested 29 emendations in the series of his articles dating from 1973 to 2002. He believes that there are a set of serious copyist mistakes in the Qur'an that need scholarly attention. He proposes new words by establishing the roots in Biblical material after scrutinizing these mistakes.⁹¹

7. Apprehension of the contents and themes

A quite recent trend in the field of Qur'ānic studies is the research on themes of the Qur'ān. Many works have emerged discussing the essential subjects of the Qur'ān. Thus a shift in the western Qur'ānic approach can be witnessed, the lack of which has been highlighted earlier by Muslim scholars.⁹² In doing so, the authors address the Qur'ānic themes with multiple approaches and perspectives. The task of exposition of these threads can be limited to one theme or overall topics of Qur'ān.⁹³ A good example of this approach that has dealt the fundamental themes of the Qur'ān is "The Great Themes of the

Qur'ān" by Jacques Jomier (d. 2008).⁹⁴Rippin also illustrates to the increasing interests of the western scholars in the thematic study of Qur'ān.⁹⁵

Methods and Models in the Western Qur'ānic Studies

Throughout the western history of Qur'ānic Studies, two types of groups were involved. First genre was comprised of clergy men and priests who were associated with Church and the sole purpose of whom was to serve the Church and defend their faith. The works produced by the clerics and clergy men were highly polemical. Influenced deeply with antagonism and hostile approaches towards Qur'ān, they played crucial role in the deformation of Qur'ān.

The second category included the secular humanist scholars⁹⁶ who studied religions exclusively for academic interests and were free from dogmatic constraints. This group, in their study of religions, applied the methods used in human and social sciences.⁹⁷

Originally, the methods of Biblical criticism are embedded in Renaissance when the western man liberated himself from revelation. As the Reformation was the offshoot of Renaissance, the critical approaches were applied in this era by Spinoza, Richard Simon and many others who sow the seeds of critical Biblical Studies. There is also a view that the Biblical criticism traces its origins into the Medieval Muslim scholarship as there is plethora of Muslim works applying these methods on Biblical studies. More specifically, the critical works of Ibn Ḥazam (d. 1064) and Ibn Qayyam al Jawziyya (d.1350) are cited as fine examples of these works⁹⁸

Nonetheless, the seventeenth century criticism of the Bible did not hold the traditional views of Christianity and Judaism about the origin and sources of the Old and New Testaments. The scholars of this period replaced the idea of Divine origin of Scriptures by viewing it as a historical literary text that needs critical scrutiny. ⁹⁹

The methods of Biblical criticism were later developed in eighteenth century although the controversy around their application in Biblical studies was still on progress. The traditionalist or conservative group who believed the Holy Books to be the direct words of God, considered these techniques as

incompatible with their belief. Hence, those methods were opposed by them firmly. While there were others who did not consider it as opposition to the Bible.¹⁰⁰ However, modern scholars have the stance that the critical readings in the Biblical texts do not contradict religiosity.¹⁰¹

The emergence of the critical methods affected the overall European religious studies. However, they were not implemented immediately on Qur'ānic studies as the notion of the medieval periods of Islam as a Christian derivative was still sustaining. Exception to this was philological studies of Qur'ān in Germany.¹⁰²

Some of the methods of Biblical criticism that were exercised in Qur'ānic Studies are as following:

Historical criticism or historical-critical method is branch of literary criticism that seeks to investigate earlier texts. This method is further divided in to higher criticism and lower criticism. The two terms were commonly used in the eighteenth century while in twentieth century onwards the frequent exercise for the two methods is historical criticism and textual criticism.¹⁰³

Higher criticism involves the methods such as source, redaction, tradition criticism and form criticism. Source criticism conducts research to acquire the knowledge of the source of the written collection of the text. The practice of these methods was the outcome of intense intra- text contradictions and confusions that scholars explored in their close readings of the Bible and hence, the application of these methods generated tremendous theories on the origin, authorship, date and place of the scriptures. Scholars such as Julius Wellhausen challenged the divinity of Torah by applying the methods of higher criticism. Various other theories such as the multiple sources of Old and New Testaments were introduced though they were not unanimously accepted.¹⁰⁴

Among the other methods is redaction criticism that involves the research about compiling a text, gathering information, modifying and finally creating a final text. While, tradition criticism goes behind the written sources to trace the progress of oral tradition, phase by phase, from its primary state to

further developments. The form criticism aims to discover the process of transmission of traditions from its diffusion to its final form.¹⁰⁵

With the passage of time, the methods were applied to other holy texts as well. In nineteenth century, the historical critical method with its subdivisions was implemented to Qur'ānic Studies.¹⁰⁶ It would not be erroneous to say that majority of the western scholars of Qur'ānic studies made attempts to employ this method in their researches on Qur'ān but very few had expertise and excellence in this field. Among the earlier scholars who applied this method on Islamic studies and subsequently on Qur'ānic studies are Gustave Weil, Alloys Springer and William Muir in their works of the biographies of the Prophet. They presented some critical theories on the nature and origin of the Qur'ān and ḥadīth collection. Another critical scholar who applied the same method to Qur'ān was Wellhausen, who along with his studies of Old Testament, made the Qur'ān an object of his intense studies.¹⁰⁷

The application of Source-critical method in Qur'ānic studies directed the scholars to break down the Qur'ānic revelation to Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian and other religions. By employing this technique, various approaches found their way in to the field such as comparative, contextual and literary perspectives. The comparative study of Qur'ān further breaks up either in comparison of the Qur'ānic words or contents with the Bible or their assessment in relation to the Christian or Jewish milieu of Arabia.¹⁰⁸

The tendency of the comparative study of Islam, Christianity and Judaism has a rich and in the words of Bazzano “notorious” history.¹⁰⁹ More specifically, the trend to study the Qur'ān in comparison to Old and New Testaments has its traces in the past centuries. In the entire history of Qur'ānic studies in the modern and the postmodern era, the theme of the origin of the Qur'ān was of great magnitude. The western scholars, by applying this method, have thoroughly evaluated the Qur'ānic contents by tracing their bases in either Biblical or Jewish traditions. Many of the recent works focus on those contents comparison to the Bible specifically. Nevertheless, it appears that

with the examination of the Biblical themes, efforts were made to prove the borrowed nature of Islam.¹¹⁰

Textual Criticism

The lower criticism or Textual criticism deals with various copies of the transmitted text are compared with the conviction that they may contain errors. The researcher makes a comparison and implies the most suitable vocabulary from the same language or from even a cognate language.

In literary analysis, like comparative approach, labors were exerted to find out the foundations of the Qur'ānic vocabulary in Syriac and other languages. One can locate numerous works on the issue of literary investigation in Qur'ān. It can be noticed that in the course of application of these methods on Qur'ānic studies, the western scholars employed the Biblical and Jewish terminologies such as canonization, recession, textual criticism that are purely related to the historical studies of the Old and New Testament scriptures.

Social Scientific Methods

With the emergence of social sciences in nineteenth century and its further development in twentieth century, Biblical scholars soon realized the significance of these sciences in the thorough comprehension of the historical and social background of the Bible. Many scholars applied the social sciences research methods to interpret the Biblical texts.¹¹¹ As popular attitude towards Qur'ān was influenced by religion, the academic studies of Qur'ān were naturally molded by these trends. The present day scholars emphasize on the usage of various methods such as anthropological, archeological, philosophical and sociological in Qur'ānic Studies as well.¹¹²

Another contemporary method, social sciences case study research is prevalent. The method aims at the case study research of the smaller Muslim society with regard to their relationship with Qur'ān. Many scholars have focused in their works the role of Qur'ān in everyday Muslim life and its function in the integration of the Muslim society. More significantly, the endeavor to discover the reasons and factors for Muslims' extreme devotion for their holy texts is rather visible.

Sometime employing statistical methods, the researcher tends to provide a paradigm of Muslim societies in regard to Qur'ān.¹¹³ Consequently, a shift can be observed from the study of Islam and Qur'ān entirely from the texts to the study of Muslim societies. The special issue of Journal of Qur'ānic Studies in 2013 should be mentioned in this regard which was dedicated to the study of Qur'ānic exegesis in Africa. Moreover, the trend to investigate the Socio-Qur'ānic terms in the light of its connections with Muslim society is also common.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

The history of the western Qur'ānic scholarship of medieval times, influenced by the highly polemical works of Eastern scholars, demonstrates that the Qur'ān has been the victim of distortion and misinterpretation. This fact is acknowledged by many recent western scholars as well. The extremely distorted images of Islam by the Christian missionary have resulted in an antagonism that has affected the entire history of the relationship of the East and the West.

Mainly, the western Qur'ānic scholarship started with the emergence of the first rendering of Qur'ān followed by a long series of translations. Indeed, the translators of the Qur'ān, from Medieval to modern times, can be declared among the most accountable authorities in the process of deformation as most of them have presented a pejorative conception of Islam in their preliminary discourses and prefaces.

Moreover, a backward glance demonstrates a significant development in the phases of the Western Islamic studies. The medieval image of the Prophet Muhammad from the false Prophet has developed in the modern ages to his recognition as a sincere leader and their description of the Qur'ān as an absurd and patchwork has changed to its recognition as an inspiring book of Islam. With the emergence of academic approaches in the modern times, the intensity of bitterness and hostility in the writings style of the western scholars has reduced to greater extent. Moreover, it is a fact that many of the current western writers have attempted to rid themselves from the chains of

bias and prejudice although they are very few such as Annemarie Schimmel, Karen Armstrong, John Esposito, Joseph Lombard, William Chittick etc.

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¹The term Orientalism was coined in 1769 and denotes to both the artists who represented the Orient in their paintings and the scholars who specialized in the Eastern cultures, religions and languages.

²Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient with New Afterwards* (London: Penguin books, 1995) See also the works of Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Oxford: One World, 1997)

R.W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (England: Harvard University Press, 1978). There are many others who have critiqued Orientalism as a discipline. But among Western scholars there are some who have advocated it in the sense that they pointed out the vast corpus of literature produced by Orientalism in the form of translations and edited works such as Albert Hourani and Lewes Bernard.

³ Pervaiz Manzoor, "Method against Truth: Orientalism and the Qur'ānic Studies" <http://www.pmanzoor.info/Method-Truth.htm>

⁴ Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 103.

⁵Abdal Mahish al-Kindi is pseudo-name of an Iraqi Christian writer of the 10th century. His work has been known as *Risālāt al Kindi* (letters of al-Kindi). He wrote these letters to his Muslim friend who invited him to accept Islam. In these letters, he made a detailed refutation of Islam and he invited his Muslim friend to convert to Christianity. The Arabic text of these letters had a significant impact on Latin European views of Islam via its translation by Peter, The Venerable.

⁶Tolan, "European accounts", 233-234.

⁷ Andrew Shryock, *Islamophobia/Islamophilia*: (Indiana: Indiana University Press). 30

⁸Southern, *Western views*, 32

⁹Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) In his assessment of this treatment, he states: "It was fear, more than any other factor, which led to the beginnings of Arabic scholarship Europe, to the discipline which centuries later came to be known as Orientalism." 13

¹⁰ Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 86

¹¹Endress, *Islam*, 6.

¹² John Tolan, "European Accounts". 232

¹³ Fazlur Rehman, "Some Recent Books on the Qur'ān by Western Authors." *The Journal of Religion* 64, no. 1 (Jan, 1984): 73-95

¹⁴ Southern, *Western views*, 34-5

¹⁵ Eugene A. Myers, *Arabic Thought and Western Learning in the Golden Age of Islam* (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing co, 1964), 81

¹⁶ Thomas Burman, *Reading the Qur'ān in Latin Christendom: 1140- 1560* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press. 2007), 15.

See also: Southern, *Islam through Western Eyes*. 85

¹⁷ Gerhard Endress, *Islam: an Historical Introduction*, Trans. C. Hillenbrand (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 7.

¹⁸ Hartmut Bobzin, "A Treasury of Heresies". In Wild, Stefan, ed. *The Qur'ān as Text* (New York: E.J.Brill)

¹⁹Burman, *Reading the Qur'ān*, 60

²⁰Burman, *Reading the Qur'ān*, 36-7

See also: Bruce Lawrence, *The Qur'ān- A Biography* (London: Atlantic Books. 2006), 35, 101

²¹ Arberry, *The Koran*, 7

²² Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, 173. See also: Harry Clark, "The Publication of the Koran in Latin a Reformation Dilemma" *The Sixteenth Century Journal*. 15, no. 1 (1984): 3-12. 3

²³ Luther in den Rat zu Basel, October 27, 1542 as quoted by Hagenbach, in "The Publication of the Koran in Latin: A Reformation Dilemma", 299

²⁴. See: Alexander Ross, "A needful Caveat," appended to the translation of the Alcoran of Mahomet, (1649) cited in Henry Stubb, "An Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahomatenism", ed. Shairani, H. M. K. (Lahore: Orientalia. 1954) 253

²⁵ Ibrāhīm Kalin, "Roots of misconception by Ibrahim" In E.B.Lombard, Joseph, ed. *Fundamentalism and the Betrayal of Tradition* (Lahore: Suhail academy, 2007), 157-8

²⁶ He entirely followed in his edition the Islamic system of numbering of the surahs and Āyāt.

<https://exhibitions.cul.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/Qur'ān/Qur'āns/printed>

²⁷ Bernard, *Islam and the West*, 88

Burman, *Reading*, 150

²⁸ Rodwell, *The Qur'ān*, 9

²⁹ A Bausani, "On Some Recent Translations of the Qur'ān". *Nuwmen* 4, no. 1 (1957): 75-81

³⁰ Sale, *The Qur'ān*, viii

³¹ Rehman, *Major Themes*, v

³² Bell, *Introduction*. v

³³ For further detail: Abdullah Abdul Karīm and Mustafa Aābi. "Egocentric or Scientific: The Christian Perspective of the Qur'ān." *Journal of Qur'ānic Research and Studies*. 1, no. 1 (2006): 1-16

³⁴ In historiography, the term means to reinterpret the historical events opposing traditional view. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/revisionist>. The application of this term to the second group has been criticized and declared as to be a loose term by recent writers. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, Michael Marx, ed. *The Qur'ān in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), Introduction

³⁵ Actually traditional Western scholars do not accept the Divine origin of Qur'ān. But, what they simply believe is that Muhammad was a sincere and honest person. He truly believed that he was receiving Revelation. But, did the Archangel came to him with Revelation really, is according to them, a disputed issue.

³⁶ Gabriel. *The Qur'ān*, 129-30

³⁷ Saeed, *Qur'ān, an Introduction*, 105

³⁸ John Voll, "Changing Western approaches to Islamic Studies". In Mumtaz Ahmad, Zahid Bukhari and Sulayman Nyang, eds. *Observing the Observer, the State of Islamic Studies in American Universities*. (London: The international institute of Islamic thought, 2012), 29

³⁹ Pervez Manzur, "Method against Truth: Orientalism and Qur'ānic Studies." *Muslim World Book Review*. 7, no. IV (1987)

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- ⁴¹Khidhar Shaib, Nubuwwatu Muhammad FilFikrīl Isteshrāqī Al Muā'sir (Riyadh: Maktaba tul Abika, 2002), 280.
- ⁴² Andrew Rippin, "Qur'ānic Studies". In Clinton, Bennett, ed. *The Bloomsbury Companion to Islamic Studies* (Bloomsbury: New York. 2013), 68-9
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- Hatwing Hirschfield, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of Koran* (London: Royal Asiatic Society. 1902), 5
- ⁴⁴ Theodore Noldeke, *The history of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill. 2013), 7
- ⁴⁵ Bell, *The origin*
- ⁴⁶ Ali, *The Qur'ān and the Orientalist*, 26
- ⁴⁷ *The Life of Muhammad* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co, 1861)
- ⁴⁸ The History of the Qur'ān.
- ⁴⁹ The Origin of Islam in its Christian environment.
- ⁵⁰ *Jüdische Elemente im Koran* (Berlin: Selbstverl, 1878)
- ⁵¹ *The Jewish foundation of Islam* (New York, 1933)
- ⁵² Rehman, *Major Themes*, iv.
- ⁵³ See for example: KennethCragge, *The call of the Minaret* (Oxford: One World., 2000), 66
- ⁵⁴ Newman, *The Qur'ān*, 9
- ⁵⁵ Christopher Buck, "Discovering". In Rippin, Andrew, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān* (USA: Blackwell Publishing. 2004), 39
- ⁵⁶ Bauben Jamal, *Image of the Prophet Muhammad in the West, a Study of Muir, Margoliouth and Watt*. (Saudi Arabia: the Islamic foundation united kingdom, 1996)
- ⁵⁷ Fred Donner, "The Qur'ān in recent scholarship" in *The Qur'ān in its historical contex*, 29- 50
- ⁵⁸ M. A. Draz, *Introduction to the Qur'ān* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1011), 99
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- See also: Gustav Weil. "An Introduction to the Qur'ān". *The Biblical World*. 5, no. 3(Mar 1895):181-191
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- ⁶⁴ Bell, *The Qur'ān*. vi
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⁶⁸Donner, Fred. *The Qur'ān*, 31

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⁷⁰ Andrew Rippin, *The Qur'ān and its Interpretive Tradition* (Great Britain: Ashgate, 2001,) xv

⁷¹ "The Rise of Islam" in *Blackwell Companion to the history of Middle East* ed. Youssef Choueiri, (Blackwell Publishing Limited: U.S.A, 2005),10

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⁷³ *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*. (Leiden: Brill, 2006)

⁷⁴The traditional Muslim belief is that multiple readings of the Qur'ān are the part of revelation and that the Prophet himself taught readings to his companions. Mostly the Western scholars use the word 'variants' for readings. According to a celebrated Muslim scholar, to use the term multiple readings is more suitable than variants. He believes that the variants denotes to uncertainty resulted from corruption in the text or scribal error. On contrary, the case of readings is rather different in the sense that they are authentic was part of revelation. See; A'zami, Mustufa. *The history of the Qur'ānic text, from revelation to compilation*. England: Islamic Academy. 155.

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⁷⁷ He is a German scholar of the Qur'ānic historical orthography. He is also a specialist in Arabic paleography.

⁷⁸ Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of Qur'ān* (Leiden: E.J.Brill.1937), Preface

⁷⁹ Muhammad A.Chaudhary, "Orientalist on Variant Readings of Qur'ān: The case of Arthur Jeffery". *The American Journal of Islamic social sciences*. 12, no. 2 (1995):170-184. 181.

⁸⁰ He is a German scholar and a specialist in manuscript study. He was invited to conduct a research on the Ṣan'a fragments together with Gerd Piun.

⁸¹ Gerd Piun, "Some observations on San'a fragments". In Wild, Stefan, ed. *The Qur'ān as Text*(Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 107-111.

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⁸⁴ Walid Saleh, "The Etymological Fallacy and Qur'ānic Studies: Muhammad, Paradise and Late Antiquity", in *The Qur'ān in context*, eds. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 649- 98. 649

⁸⁵ Michael Carter, "Foreign Vocabulary". In *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, 122.

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⁸⁷Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic*, 247-253

⁸⁸Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic*, 121

- ⁸⁹ DevinStewart, "Notes on emendations of the Qur'ān" *The Qur'ān in its historical content*, 228-9
- ⁹⁰ Heis Professor Emeritus of Arabic Literature at the University of Michigan.
- ⁹¹ See for detail: James A.Bellamy, "Textual Criticism of Qur'ān", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. no, 1. 121, (2001):1-6.
- ⁹² The late Fazlul Reḥmān was of the view that this genre has received the least attention of the Western scholars. *The major themes*, xii
- ⁹³ See for instance the works of; Tamara Soan, "Introducing" and Buck, Christopher "Discovering" in *Blackwell*. These works have in general dealt with the basic topics of the Qur'ān. The article of Denial Madigan on the themes of Qur'ān specifically represents the idea of God and His attributes in the Qur'ān. See: McAuliffe, Jane, ed. *The Cambridge companion to the Qur'ān*.79-98
- ⁹⁴ Originally, the work was produced in 1997 in French. It was translated into English by Zoe Hersov.
- ⁹⁵ AndrewRippin, 'Qur'ānic Studies'. InBennett, Clinton, ed. *The Bloomsbury companion to Islamic studies* (London: Bloomsbury. 2013), 88
- ⁹⁶ Humanist is the scholar believing in Humanism. Humanism is a philosophical approach developed in Modern times that believes in value and agency of human beings and generally deals doctrines of faith with critical approach giving priority to human rationale. It also believes in the capability of human beings to lead their moral and ethical life without the help of religious dogmas.
- ⁹⁷ Hasan, Khalifa. *Dirasatul Qur'ānul Karim*. 4-5
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- ¹⁰³ N. Richard Soulen, *A Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co, 2002.)158-59.
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- See also: [www. Britannica.com/topic/historical-criticism-literary-criticism](http://www.Britannica.com/topic/historical-criticism-literary-criticism)
- ¹⁰⁶ Khalifa. *Dirasatul Qur'ānul Karim*. 10.
- ¹⁰⁷ Khalifa, *Dirasatul Qur'ānul Karim*, 19-20
- ¹⁰⁸ There are numerous works that have approached this theme. An instance of the recent works that are entirely dedicated to this theme is "The Qur'ān in context".
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¹¹⁰ Perhaps, one instance will suffice here. Following the idea of Noldeke, Kavin Blader says that the prophet must have heard orally the story of Alexander the Great as the story was already circulating in the surroundings of Makkah. "The Alexander Legend in the Qur'ān". In *The Qur'ān in its historical context*, 175

In the same book, many examples based on this concept can be located. See for instance; Samir Khalil, "The Theological Christian influence on the Qur'ān", 141. Another recent work that conducts a comparative study of the Qur'ānic contents with Christian poetry of thence Arabia is "An early Christian Arabic account" in *The Qur'ān in context*, 349

¹¹¹ *The new Cambridge history of the Bible; from 1750 to the present*, ed. Riches, John (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 160- 62.

¹¹² William Al-Sharif, *Rethinking Qur'ānic Studies* (Scotland: Jerusalem Academic Publications), 7

¹¹³ See for instance: Jamro Houtsonen, "Traditional Qur'ānic Education in a Southern Moroccan Village". *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 26, no. 3 (Aug., 1994), pp. 489-500.

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¹¹⁴ See for instance: Elizabeth Urban, "The foundations of Islamic society as expressed by the Qur'ānic term Mawla". *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies*. 15, no. 1. 1-22.

The writer has attempted to show that how this term identify the bonds of help, cooperation and assistance that united the early Muslim society as one entity.