

## Mun'im Sirry's Middle Path: Bridging Revisionist and Traditionalist Perspectives in Qur'anic Scholarship

*Jalan Tengah Mun'im Sirry: Menjembatani Perspektif Revisionis dan Tradisionalis dalam Studi Al-Qur'an*

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### Abstract

This article addresses the ongoing debate of the reliability of the Qur'an as a historical source, focusing on the codification and stabilization of its text. This research examines several significant works by Mun'im Sirry that have contributed to Qur'anic scholarship while raising controversies, particularly among Southeast Asian scholars. Sirry's critical approach situates his thoughts within the broader discourse of traditionalist and revisionist streams in Qur'anic studies. This study employs a qualitative library research method, cross-referencing Qur'anic scholarship to investigate Sirry's contributions. By comparing his thoughts with both traditionalist and revisionist views, the study aims to assess Sirry's position and its impact on debates surrounding the historical authenticity of the Qur'an. The findings reveal that Sirry bridges the gap between the extreme skepticism of revisionists and the uncritical acceptance of traditionalists. His nuanced stance acknowledges both the textual evolution of the Qur'an and its historical significance. The study contributes to the ongoing debates on Qur'anic codification, revealing Sirry's role as a critical yet balanced scholar who navigates between these two extremes. His approach emphasizes the importance of historical-critical methods while also recognizing the roles of key figures, such as Abdul Malik and Hajjaj, in stabilizing the Qur'an's text. Sirry's position fosters a deeper understanding of the Qur'an's role in Islamic history, offering a middle path that challenges both traditionalist and revisionist interpretations.

**Keywords:** *Qur'anic codification, Mun'im Sirry, revisionist scholarship, traditionalist scholarship, Islamic history*

### Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas perdebatan yang sedang berlangsung mengenai keandalan Al-Qur'an sebagai sumber sejarah, dengan fokus pada kodifikasi dan stabilisasi teksnya. Penelitian ini meninjau beberapa karya penting Mun'im Sirry yang telah berkontribusi pada kajian Al-Qur'an sambil memicu kontroversi, terutama di kalangan cendekiawan Asia Tenggara. Pendekatan kritis Sirry menempatkan pemikirannya dalam diskursus yang lebih luas antara aliran tradisionalis dan revisionis dalam studi Al-Qur'an. Studi ini menggunakan metode penelitian kepustakaan kualitatif, dengan merujuk berbagai literatur kajian Al-Qur'an untuk menyelidiki kontribusi Sirry. Dengan membandingkan pemikirannya dengan pandangan tradisionalis dan revisionis, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menilai posisi Sirry dan dampaknya terhadap perdebatan seputar keaslian sejarah Al-Qur'an. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa Sirry menjembatani kesenjangan antara skeptisisme ekstrim revisionis dan penerimaan tanpa kritik dari tradisionalis. Sikapnya yang nuansa mengakui evolusi teks Al-Qur'an



serta signifikansi historisnya. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada perdebatan yang sedang berlangsung mengenai kodifikasi Al-Qur'an, memperlihatkan peran Sirry sebagai seorang sarjana kritis namun seimbang yang berusaha menavigasi antara kedua ekstrem tersebut. Pendekatannya menekankan pentingnya metode kritis-historis sambil juga mengakui peran tokoh-tokoh kunci seperti Abdul Malik dan Hajjaj dalam stabilisasi teks Al-Qur'an. Posisi Sirry mendorong pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang peran Al-Qur'an dalam sejarah Islam, menawarkan jalan tengah yang menantang interpretasi tradisional dan revisionis.

**Kata kunci:** *Kodifikasi Al-Qur'an, Mun'im Sirry, Kajian revisionis, kajian tradisional, sejarah Islam.*

## Introduction

Mun'im Sirry's works, *Kontroversi Islam Awal: Antara Mazhab Tradisionalis dan Revisionis*,<sup>1</sup> *Tradisi Intelektual Islam: Rekonfigurasi Sumber Otoritas Agama*,<sup>2</sup> *Kemunculan Islam dalam Kesarjanaan Revisionis*,<sup>3</sup> and *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*<sup>4</sup> share a common goal in exposing revisionists' scholarship and exploring their critical evaluation of the historical significance of Islamic texts from the third century Hijriya (9th century AD). Sirry demonstrates how revisionists, particularly radical revisionists such as Patricia Crone (d. 2015), John Wansbrough (d. 2002), Michael Allan Cook deconstruct theories about the emergence of Islam, canonization of the Qur'an, writing of the biography of the Prophet, and crystallization of Islam after the conquest of territories to shed light on how Islam evolved into a religion. These revisionist scholars is against the traditionalist viewpoint that takes Islamic sources for granted without objective, critical examination.

Traditionalists generally see Islamic sources as authentic references to the truth of Islam. These sources include the Qur'an, hadith, *sirah* (history), tafsir (exegesis), and other classical sources, which are usually handed down from generation. Contemporary scholars such as Timothy Winter, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Jonathan A.C. Brown also voiced this traditionalist style of thought.<sup>5</sup> They represent the scholars, who

1 Mun'im Sirry, *Kontroversi Islam Awal: Antara Mazhab Tradisionalis Dan Revisionis* (Bandung: Mizan Pustaka, 2015).

2 Mun'im Sirry, *Tradisi Intelektual Islam: Rekonfigurasi Sumber Otoritas Agama* (Malang: Madani, 2015).

3 Mun'im Sirry, *Kemunculan Islam Dalam Kesarjanaan Revisionis* (Yogyakarta: SUKA-Press, 2017).

4 Mun'im Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir* (Yogyakarta: SUKA-Press, 2021) In English they are translated as *Controversies over Islamic Origins: An Introduction of Traditionalism and Revisionism, Islamic Intellectual Traditions: Reconfiguration of Religious Authority Resources, Emergence of Islam in Revisionist Scholarship, and Reconstruction of Historical Islam: The Dispute of Advanced Scholarship.*

5 Jonathan A C Brown, *Hadith; Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Great Britain: One World, 2009); Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy* (Simon and Schuster, 2014).

appreciate and respect the classical Islamic sources. Despite using contemporary approaches, they can be classified as traditionalist scholars in the context of modern scholarship because they support the Muslim source as a significant Islamic origin.

Two well-known Islamic thinkers, Yusuf al-Qaradhawi (d. 2022)<sup>6</sup> and Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1996),<sup>7</sup> can also be considered traditionalists because their contribution in appreciation the Muslim source and their worldview. It is just that the former is a descriptive traditionalist and the latter a critical traditionalist. Descriptive traditionalists hardly criticize Islamic sources, while critical traditionalists, while taking Islamic sources as significant evidence, still select them. If they doubt the Qur'an, other vital traditions, and scientific facts, they do not hesitate to reject them.

Mun'im Sirry believes that the historical truth about Islam should be able to prove empirically. The term "historical Islam," in Mun'im Sirry's *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis*, does not refer to a particular belief, yet it represents the expression of the adherents of Islam in various ways. Sirry's notion of historical Islam is similar to what Shahab Ahmed said in his "What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic". For him, *historical Islam is embedded in the thoughts and behavior which define a person as a Muslim*.<sup>8</sup> Sirry argues that Islam experienced historical processes in its formation period.<sup>9</sup>

Sirry focuses his works based on contemporary historical-critical techniques to elucidate what happened during this crucial period. As a result, "historical Islam" in his works refers to a single authentic Islam because historical reconstruction allows the development of multiple hypotheses.<sup>10</sup> To Sirry, "historical awareness" in reading Islam is crucial because historical data is not entirely accurate, as is the case in many religious literatures. In the case of Islamic history, no literature records the events of the first century of Islam except those written two centuries afterward. Islamic literature that reaches Muslims today is full of narratives with theological tendencies and fairy tales, preserving the cultural collective memory of Islam.<sup>11</sup>

6 Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi, *Al-Sunnah Masdaran lilMa'rifah Wa Al-Hadharah*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Syuruq, 2002); Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi, *Kaifa Nata'ammal Ma'a al-Sunnah Al-Nabawiyah; Ma'alim Wa al-Dhawabith*, 5th ed. (Mansoura: Dar al-Wafa, 1992).

7 Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunnah Al-Nabawiyah Baina Ahli al-Fiqh Wa Ahli al-Hadits* (Kairo: Dar al-kutub al-Misri, 2012).

8 Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton University Press, 2017).

9 Mun'im Sirry, *Controversies Over Islamic Origins: An Introduction to Traditionalism and Revisionism* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021); Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, 9.

10 Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, 11.

11 Sirry, 12.

The process of Islamic reification was gradual and broad, extending beyond Hijaz. Islamic narrative sources tend to exclude non-Muslim cultures from the emergence and development of Islam. However, material data (coins, buildings, inscriptions, papyrus) contain such references. Revisiting the history of the interactions between Islam and other religions is essential to appreciating the rich cultural environment in which Islam emerged. Islam began as a minority responding to ideas embedded in the local cultural context.

This article examines the interactions, negotiations, and appropriations with the dominant culture of the time to understand the complexity of Islam's birth. It employs a figure-thinking-based literature approach, emphasizing Sirry's typology. This approach compares texts dealing with Sirry's works and thoughts to other relevant literature especially concerning the study of Qur'an to identify, analyze, and classify Sirry's typology among broader Qur'anic scholarship. This comparison seeks to highlight Sirry's thoughts and intricacy while situating them within a larger framework within the Qur'an as the main subject of the study. The data of the history of Islam from non-Islamic cultures confirm the critical role of Muslim narrators in revealing the history of Islam. This underlines Sirry's contribution to examining various historical evidence of Islam outside Muslim narratives. In this respect, this article aims to review Sirry's ideas and his position in traditionalist and revisionist academia through his works that reconcile the views of both sides.

### **Contemporary Debates on Early Islamic Sources**

The subject of historical Islam is gaining momentum, with perspectives emerging among contemporary scholars in their engagement with traditional Islamic sources. Fred Donner's mapping of traditional Islamic sources is one of several references that divides them into four parts. First, this method fully accepts the conventional justifications offered by Islamic literature, which does not deny that Muslim scholars eventually recorded the details of early Islam.<sup>12</sup> Second, source criticism. This approach acknowledges that Islamic sources contain historical data that can be traced with specific methods. Its problem is that the historical corpus has been mixed with unreliable or distorted materials through imprecise transmission processes. For a source-critical approach, one way to verify the historical corpus in traditional Islamic sources is to compare them with non-Islamic ones.<sup>13</sup> Third, tradition criticism.

12 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Harvard University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjf9w3h>; Fred McGraw Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Gerlach Press, 2021), xii.

13 Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, xii.

This approach departs to some extent from a question of narration in how information has been transmitted from one generation to the next.<sup>14</sup> Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921) and Joseph Schacht (d. 1969) lead this approach. Goldziher<sup>15</sup> launched a sharp critique of hadith narration. Schacht developed Goldziher's theory in the field of legal hadith.<sup>16</sup> Goldziher and Schacht came to the same conclusion that the hadiths reflect issues of concern during the reign of the Umayyad caliphate. This approach is not the only skeptical lens; the previous two approaches also exhibit skepticism. Fourth, skepticism arises when evaluating the existence of factual information and historical data in the Islamic corpus. However, the skepticism of this approach is so radical that it rejects the authenticity of the sources. According to this perspective, the Muslim writers imagined more about the Prophet and his early periods than the actual reality. Supporters of this approach argue that the *sīrah* (prophet history) was written with a motivation of love and glorification of the Prophet Muhammad. The early periods are considered the "golden age."<sup>17</sup>

According to Donner, the skeptical approach consists of three basic assumptions: unavailability of sources to reconstruct early Islam, the *sīrah* and history books produced by Muslims are not "history" rather than "salvation history," and the biographical accounts and stories regarding the life of the Prophet are nothing more than interpretations. Of these three assumptions, the most radical is the first, which states that the Qur'an was codified as a holy book in the second century rather than at the beginning of the first century.<sup>18</sup>

According to Sirry's book, *Kontroversi Islam Awal*, several approaches have emerged because traditional Islamic sources were written later and are, therefore, full of contradictions, reflecting the interests and beliefs that appeared in later times rather than what transpired. For instance, *sīrah* books were only penned between 750–800 AD, which amounts to four or five generations after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Ibnu Ishāq (d. 767 AD), the earliest biographer of the Prophet whose work has survived to the present day. Ibnu Ishāq's works were compiled by Ibn Hishām (d. 833 AD). Ibnu Hishām's book, *Sīrah Nabawiyah*, was based on a revised edition of al-Bakkā'i (d. 183 H/799 AD), which became the locus classicus of historical books written by al-Ṭabari and other Muslim historians. This reflects the

14 Donner, 1–25.

15 Ignác Goldziher, *Muslim Studies* (Aldine Transaction, 2006).

16 Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Clarendon Press, 1950).

17 Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 1–25.

18 Donner, 25–27.

first issue; traditional Islamic sources were written later.<sup>19</sup>

Sirry's critique is vital since current Muslim scholars' books indicate a trend towards the period of the Prophet Muhammad. However, it can be argued that the Muslim writers only systematized what had been practiced by the early Muslim generations. A closer look reveals that some descriptions presented in Islamic sources reflect later events rather than what occurred earlier. Particular depictions of early Islam are projections and interpretations of salvation history.

In reality, Muslim writers also engage in source criticism to examine the history of Islam. For instance, al-Tabā tabā'i in *al-Mizān* is a critical modernist Islamic figure criticizing sources.<sup>20</sup> In addition, Sunni Muslims, including Muhammad al-Ghazālī, have a critical perspective on Islamic sources.<sup>21</sup> Although Muslim scholars have criticized traditional sources, they accept the validity of history as a source. They assert that historical sources contain factual information which must be used carefully.

It is worth noting that Sirry contributes to the critique of the Islamic corpus being debated. He critically responds to traditionalists and revisionists as part of historical Islamic reconstruction. The following statement by Sirry's following statements can be designated as his stance regarding Islamic sources that sources from Islamic literature, including hadith, *sīrah*, and historical chronicles, must undergo critical examination using modern methods. The traditionalist scholars' method of hadith study through isnad criticism needs to be revisited. Scholars such as Rudi Paret and Harald Motzki have attempted to improve this classic method through "source-reconstruction" and "isnad-cum-matn."<sup>22</sup> The success of this method in shortening the gap between the Prophet's life and his sources is heatedly debated, as it presents several serious problems.<sup>23</sup>

Sirry supports Cook in the historical Islamic corpus yet distinguishes himself on the notion of "a little judicious selectivity." To Sirry, "a little precision in selection" is inadequate in uncovering the "essence" of history. To meet his requirements, Sirry suggests using a more sophisticated analytical method than his predecessors.<sup>24</sup>

19 Sirry, *Kontroversi Islam Awal: Antara Mazhab Tradisionalis Dan Revisionis*.

20 Muhammad Husayn Al-ṭabā ṭabāi, *Al-Mizān Fi Tafsīri al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-A'lami li al-Matbū'āt, 1997).

21 Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunnah Al-Nabawiyah Baina Ahli al-Fiqh Wa Ahli al-Hadits* (Kairo: Dar al-kutub al-Misri, 2012).

22 Harald Motzki, *Hadith: Origins and Developments* (Routledge, 2016).

23 Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, 193.

24 Sirry, 197.

## Debating the Qur'an's Role as a Historical Source

Several Western scholars follow the traditional paradigm of interpreting the Qur'an through specific episodes in the Prophet's life. Although they may not consider the Qur'an a book of revelation, they acknowledge many references to the historical events during Muhammad's prophetic missions. Alford T. Welch is the first scholar to be mentioned in this group.<sup>25</sup> W. Montgomery Watt asserted in his book, "Muhammad at Mecca," that the Qur'an can authenticate certain events in the Prophet's life.<sup>26</sup> According to Watt's teacher, Richard Bell, the Qur'an is singular and entirely dependable to historical sources.<sup>27</sup> Maxime Rodinson invites us to begin the reconstruction of Islam using the Qur'an as a credible and robust foundation.<sup>28</sup> Following the scholarship of Welch, Watt, Bell, and Rodinson, Fred Donner also utilizes the Qur'an in his work, particularly in "Muhammad and the Believers," to reconstruct Islam. The book highlights the historical reliability of the Qur'an as a source. Donner strongly believes that the Qur'an provides valuable insight into the beliefs and values of the Muslim community. He argues that the Qur'an is an ancient artifact that has been transmitted through the centuries since the emergence of Islam.<sup>29</sup>

Andrew Rippin could be considered as the representative of the *second* faction. According to Rippin, the language structure of the Qur'an impairs its clarity, leading to confusion in identifying the addressee or subject matter. According to Rippin, assuming the Qur'an as the primary document for reconstructing the history of the Prophet's life and the emergence of early Islam is a lack of evidence.<sup>30</sup> Rippin's teacher, John Wansbrough, imparted a skeptical view to Rippin, claiming that the Qur'an was the result of a "strongly sectarian atmosphere" during the Jewish-Christian polemic in Mesopotamia (Iraq) rather than in the Hijaz (Mecca and Medina) as portrayed in Islamic tradition. Wansbrough concludes that the Qur'anic text was likely stabilized in the late 8th to early 9th century, rendering it untraceable as an origin source for Islam in the Hijaz.<sup>31</sup>

25 Alford T Welch, "Quranic Studies: Problem and Prospect," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47 (1980).

26 W.M Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1972); William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Clarendon Press, 1972).

27 Richard Bell and William Montgomery Watt, *Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh University Press, 1970).

28 Maxime Rodinson, *Muhammad* (Verso Books, 1996).

29 Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*.

30 Andrew Rippin, *The Qur'an: Formative Interpretation* (Ashgate, 1999).

31 John E. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford University Press, 1977).

Like Wansbrough, G.R. Hawting argues that Islamic teachings resemble elements of Judaism and Christianity more closely than paganism. Hawting maintains that this cannot be divorced from the socio-cultural milieu in which Islam emerged. He contends that the backdrop of Islam appears to be that of the Middle East beyond the Arabian Peninsula, following the Arab conquest - rather than Western Arabia in the early 7th century.<sup>32</sup> However, Hawting did not mention regions beyond Arabia specifically.

Several scholars in this group reject the reliability of the Qur'an to an extreme extent. For example, they suggest no connection exists between the Qur'an and Muhammad. Gunter Luling and Christoph Luxenberg, who theorize the emergence of Islam without the figure of Muhammad, propose the origins of the Qur'an dating back to a period before the birth of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>33</sup> In 1974, Luling authored the contentious book, "Über den Ur-Qur'an," in which he identified several verses in the Qur'an originating from pre-Islamic Christian texts. According to Luling,<sup>34</sup> approximately one-third of the existing Qur'an is sourced from the praises of Christians in Arabia. Additionally, Luling claims that Muslims produced the text of the Qur'an with editorial work. Similarly radical, Luxenberg places Christian texts as the fundamental material of the Qur'an. If Luling associates the Qur'an with Arabic Christian praise, Luxenberg argues that the initial language of the Qur'an was not Arabic but rather Syriac-Aramaic. He suggests that the Qur'an is difficult to comprehend and has caused much speculation amongst modern readers because they no longer recognize the meaning of its original non-Arabic version, even in the Middle Ages.

It depends on our particular viewpoint on whether the Qur'an has undergone alterations. Nevertheless, traditionalist accounts suggest that the Qur'an has been meticulously safeguarded from any potential modifications since its revelation to Prophet Muhammad. It was then transferred *mutawātir* to Muslims through an unbroken transmission chain involving multiple testimonies since the Prophet's time. The book form (*muṣṣḥaf*) of the Qur'an was not completed until several years after the death of the Prophet, during the reign of the first caliph, Abu Bakr. However, the *muṣṣḥaf* of the Qur'an initiated by Abu Bakr does not have official status or a public role. The *muṣṣḥaf* was kept personally by Abu Bakr, then 'Umar, before finally

32 G. R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

33 Günter Luling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation: The Rediscovery and Reliable Reconstruction of a Comprehensive Pre-Islamic Christian Hymnal Hidden in the Koran Under Earliest Islamic Reinterpretations* (Motilal Banarsidass Publishe, 2003).

34 Luling.



being in the hands of Ḥafṣah. The standard narrative proceeds the advancement for the organization and regularization of the second manuscript by the third caliph, Uthmān bin 'Affān. In general, Muslim writers acknowledge this accepted traditional narrative regarding the compilation of the Qur'an.

However, not all Muslim writers agree with the traditional narrative of the Qur'an's collection. In the 20th century, four Muslim writers diverged from this narrative, including 'Abd al-Hamid al-Farahī (d. 1930),<sup>35</sup> 'Abdu al-Laṭīf Raḥmānī (d. 1957), and Tamannā 'Imādī (d. 1972)<sup>36</sup> from India, and Abū al-Qasīm Musawī al-Khū'ī (d.1992)<sup>37</sup> from Iran. Al-Farahi argues that the compilation and collection of the Qur'an were completed during the Prophet's lifetime. According to letter 75, verses 16-19, al-Farahī confirms that the Qur'an was compiled and organized into its current form and recited to the Prophet in the order of verses and letters. Farahī's view challenges the conventional account of the compilation of the Qur'an, which credits the first caliph with this task after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. According to this narrative, the text was completed during the reign of the third caliph.

According to 'Imādī, the conventional account lacks coherence because it is implausible that Abū Bakr would entrust such a crucial task to just one individual. It would have been more fitting for Abu Bakr to delegate the responsibility of compiling the Qur'an to others in addition to Zayd. 'Imādī deems the widely accepted traditionalist narrative suspect as it rests solely on the testimony of Zayd, who was contracted to undertake the project. It is anomalous that labor that concerns the welfare of an entire populace is only accounted for by a solitary individual. The assertion made by 'Imādī regarding this lone speaker sparks skepticism about the credibility of the Qur'an text's historical narrative. Why did no other narrators report this incident like Anas bin Mālik? Anas, who was just one year younger than Zayd, conveyed an account of the Qur'an assembling during the 'Uthmān era. He did not, however, touch upon the Qur'an assemblage during the Abū Bakr era, which was, in reality, more significant since it marked the foremost initiative in Islamic history.<sup>38</sup>

Khū'ī dismisses established explanations by highlighting discrepancies in the narrations of the aggregation of the Qur'an. For instance, in contrast to the common perception that Abu Bakr instructed the gathering of the Qur'an upon 'Umar's advice, alternative accounts indicate that it was 'Umar who initiated the project. For instance,

35 'Abd al-Hamid al-Farahi, *Nidzam Al-Qur'an Wa Ta'wil al-Furqan Bi al-Furqan* (Lahor: al-Dairah al-Humaidiyah, n.d.).

36 Tamannā 'Imādī, *Jam'u al-Qur'an* (Karachi: al-Rahman Publishing Trust, 1994).

37 Al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim al-Musawī al-Khū'ī, *Prolegomena to the Qur'an* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

38 Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, 51-52.

in contrast to the common perception that Abu Bakr instructed the gathering of the Qur'an upon 'Umar's advice, alternative accounts indicate that it was 'Umar who initiated the project. Notably, Abū Bakr's name is absent from this version of events. Furthermore, when referring to Abū Bakr as the primary figure responsible for the collation of the Qur'an, there is a discrepancy regarding who was designated with the responsibility of formulating the scripture. Most scholars credit Zayd with collecting the Qur'an, but there are alternate accounts in which Abū Bakr is described as the foremost collector or author, with Zayd serving as a consultant who reviewed Abū Bakr's work. As Khū'i notes, these discrepancies are challenging to reconcile.<sup>39</sup>

Looking at al-Faraḥī's view, the compilation of the Qur'an during the time of the Prophet seems similar to the opinion of revisionist Western scholar John Barton. Barton argued that the collection of the Qur'an did not take place during the time of Abu Bakr or 'Uthman but emphasized that the Qur'an was codified while the Prophet was still alive. Barton concludes in his book, *The Collection of the Qur'an*, that the Qur'an, in its current form, can be traced to Muhammad's codex instead of the Ottoman codex. As quoted by Sirry, Barton asserts that "what we have today in our hands is the *muṣḥaf* of Muhammad."<sup>40</sup>

Among Western scholars, John Barton is not the only prominent figure. Theodor Noldeke, who lived at the end of the 19th century, and his student Friedrich Schwally are also noteworthy. Noldeke authored *Geschichte de Qorans*, which Schwally later revised and expanded upon.<sup>41</sup> Noldeke and Schwally represent traditionalist scholarship that holds significance in modern times. Unlike Burton, who concludes that the current Qur'an can be traced back to Muhammad's codex (not the Ottoman codex),<sup>42</sup> Noldeke accepts the traditional explanation of the Qur'an bookkeeping during the time of 'Uthmān. However, Noldeke rejects the Qur'an collection's history under Abū Bakr's reign. According to Noldeke, the history of Abu Bakar's collection of the Qur'an is merely a fabrication that came to light later.<sup>43</sup> Following the views of Noldeke and Schwally, both Régis Blachère (d. 1973)<sup>44</sup> and

39 Al-Sayyid Abu al-Qasim al-Musawi Al-Khu'i, *Prolegomena to the Qur'an - Al Bayan Fi Tafsir Al Qur'an*, trans. Abdulaziz a. Sachedina (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, 54.

40 Al-Khu'i, *Prolegomena to the Qur'an - Al Bayan Fi Tafsir Al Qur'an*; Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, 54.

41 Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur'an* (Brill, 2013).

42 John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

43 Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans* (Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1860).

44 Régis Blachère, *Le Coran: par Régis Blachère ...* (Presses universitaires de France, 1966).

Montgomery Watt (d. 2006)<sup>45</sup> concur that the Qur'an did not become a formal corpus (canon) until the era of 'Uthman. Blachere argues that Abu Bakr only gathered the Qur'an as a personal collection, which 'Uthmān employed to decide on the official *muṣḥaf*. Similarly, Watt determined that there was no complete and official text of the Qur'an during Abu Bakr's rule.<sup>46</sup>

While Watt maintains that the text of the Qur'an has remained stable and unchanged since the time of 'Uthman, other scholars contend that the process of standardizing the text was gradual. Nabia Abbott, a scholar of Arabic literature, was among those who supported this view. She authored *The Rise of the North Arabic Script and Its Qur'anic Development*, which includes a comprehensive description of the Qur'anic manuscript housed at the Oriental Institute. In this book, Abbott examines the records of the gathering of the Qur'an during the period of 'Uthmān but refrains from asserting that the 'Uthmanic text was settled at that time.<sup>47</sup> According to Sirry, Abbott is a conventionalist scholar who bases his arguments on Islamic literature and traditions. In this book, Abbott examines the records of the gathering of the Qur'an during the period of 'Uthman but refrains from asserting that the 'Uthmanic text was settled at that time. Additionally, he acquired accounts corroborating the gathering of the Qur'an during 'Uthman's era.<sup>48</sup>

However, he recognizes that canonization is an intricate process. All religious texts undergo a process of canonization, which is a lengthy process. According to Abbott, the stabilization of the Qur'anic text is no exception.<sup>49</sup> Sirry highlighted that Abbott was more doubtful than Noldeke and Schwally. Abbott believes the Qur'an may still be undergoing alterations after 'Uthmān, particularly changes made by the governor of Iraq during the Umayyad dynasty, i.e., Hajjāj bin Yūsuf. Abbott cited scholars Paul Casanova and Alphonse Mingana, who assert that the Qur'an was finalized under the reign of the fifth Umayyad caliph, 'Abdul Malik bin Marwan (ruled 65-85 AH/685-705 AD), and his governor in Iraq, al-Hajjāj bin Yūsuf. These conclusions exclude subjective evaluations and use clear, concise language with no filler words. Technical term abbreviations are explained on first use, and the information follows a logical, causal structure. The text adheres to a formal register, employing standard language and sentence structure, and avoids biased or

45 William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* (Oxford University Press, 1961); Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*; Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*.

46 Blachère, *Le Coran*.

47 Nabia Abbott, *The Rise of the North Arabic Script and Its Qur'anic Development with a Full Description of the Qur'anic Manuscript in the Oriental Institute* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1989).

48 Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, 59.

49 Sirry, 59.

figurative language. The use of consistent citations and a clear footnote style are also maintained. The belief that Caliph ‘Abdul Malik bin Marwan was responsible for the canonization of the Qur’anic text is widely accepted by scholars, including Chase Robinson, Alfred-Louis de Premare, David S. Powers, and Stephen Shoemaker. The possibility of Qur’anic codification was deemed higher during the rule of ‘Abdul Mālik bin Marwān compared to that of ‘Uthmān. Nicolai Sinai asserts that the Muslim holy book remained open for revision until circa 700 AD.<sup>50</sup>

Sinai<sup>51</sup> is not the sole Western scholar who posits the possibility that the Quran reached its ultimate, unchanging form around this time. In addition to Sinai’s perspective, John Wansbrough also asserts that fixing the Qur’anic text was slow, happening long after the ‘Uthman project. According to Wansbrough’s analysis, the Qur’an attained its definitive, fixed form at the start of the 9th century, corresponding to over one hundred years after the Prophet’s passing. Furthermore, Wansbrough proposes that the Qur’an was revealed in a different location outside the Hijaz, as it was not conducive for polemics. It is worth noting that the theological debates mentioned in the Qur’an in the 6th and 7th centuries took place in Mesopotamia (Iraq), a region inhabited by a wide range of diverse communities with shared traditions. It was there that various religious groups developed their versions of the narrative. For Wansbrough, the multiple passages formed the raw material from which the Qur’an was later constructed, while others were incorporated into the hadith.<sup>52</sup>

A puzzle arises from this discussion, prompting questions about the viability of the Qur’an as a historical source for events in the first century of Islam. Regrettably, Sirry does not provide a conclusive answer, stating that “it turns out to be quite complex.” This complexity circles back to the debate over whether the Qur’an is a product of the first century of Islam. While traditionalist scholars believe that the fixation of the Qur’an occurred early, revisionist scholars present a variety of perspectives.<sup>53</sup> Generally, three schools of thought are discernible: the codification of the Qur’an during the time of the Prophet, under the rule of ‘Abdul Malik bin Marwan, and at the end of the 8th or the beginning of the 9th century.<sup>54</sup>

50 Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur’an: A Historical-Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017); Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, 59–60.

51 Sinai, *The Qur’an*.

52 Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*; Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, 64–65.

53 Khusna Farida, “Revisiting The Critical Edition of the Qur’an: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges,” *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur’an Dan Hadis* 25, no. 1 (May 14, 2024): 77–104, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v25i1.4655>.

54 Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, 67–68.

Although Sirry has no firm argument in his previous book, he shows his position in another book, *Kemunculan Islam Dalam Kesarjanaan Revisionis dan Polemik Kitab Suci*. This study found that Sirry stands in between two different parties. He was not entirely skeptical of Muslim sources, but at the same time, he was critical of them. On the one hand, he criticizes the revisionist view, especially the radical revisionist view, which does not give space to the remaining Islamic sources. He also agrees that Islamic sources are abundant but must be read using a historical-critical approach.

On the other hand, he also agrees that the records of Islamic history can be traced to the middle of the second century or the beginning of the third-century hijrah. In the middle of the second century, the first book of Sirah was written by Ibn Ishaq (d. 150). Unfortunately, this book did not reach us. The book of *Sirah* that reached us is the work of Ibn Hisham (d. 218). In his book *Reconstructing Historical Islam*, Sirry rejects Nurdin's accusation that he and other revisionists do not use history as historical evidence. Instead, Sirry offers to develop an alternative methodology that can be used to trace the existence of Ibn Hisham's *Sejarah sirah* back to 'Urwah bin Zubair, 'Aisha's nephew. In other words, Sirry opens up opportunities to utilize Islamic sources as important sources using modern scientific tools that can be verified.

### **Codification and Manuscripts: Assessing the Qur'an's Authenticity**

The codification and stabilization of the Qur'anic text are also essential aspects of uncovering the history of Islam. The narration of both can determine whether the Quran is reliable enough to be used as an authentic historical source or vice versa. Therefore, some people see that narratives about the codification of the Qur'an can be critical ammunition in criticizing sources, which then has implications for the authority of the Qur'an itself.

As Sirry stated in several of his works, there are three currents of thought regarding the codification of the Qur'an. He has his own opinion on these three currents. We can judge the following statement by Sirry as his "official stance" on this matter:

"We have found no reasonable grounds to support the narrative that the compilation of the Qur'an during the time of Uthman was fictitious, leading Hajjaj to start his mushaf project from scratch. However, it would also be erroneous to overlook the roles of Abdul Malik and Hajjaj in stabilizing the Qur'an text. In our opinion, the available evidence points towards the conclusion that the text of the Qur'an changed Uthman, and Abdul Malik and Hajjaj played a part in its stabilization." The extent of changes from the Uthmani Rasm to the

period of Abdul Malik remains a topic of debate. The Uthmani text is still considered defective and only achieved the ‘scriptio plena’ status in the early 8th century.”<sup>55</sup>

According to Sirry’s explanation, Abdul Malik and Hajjaj were instrumental in stabilizing the Qur’an from its status of “scriptio defectiva” to “scriptio plena”. *Scriptio defectiva* refers to the Qur’an text when it comprises only basic consonants, like a skeletal framework, without diacritical marks. At this stage, the Arabic script may be interpreted in different ways. *Scriptio plena* refers to the Qur’an text with diacritics added to differentiate consonants from similarly shaped letters (like *ba*, *ta*, and *ṭa*), and colored dots used as punctuation to indicate short and long readings.

Sirry referred to the research of Dutch scholar, Marijn van Putten, whom he regarded as assertive in concluding that the majority, if not all, of the Al-Qur’an manuscripts we currently know of demonstrate the stability of ‘Uthman’s text. After scrutinizing and comparing various manuscripts and discovering uniformity, Van Putten arrived at this conclusion. Regarding *ta` marbūṭah* and *ta` maftūḥah*, there is uniformity in many manuscripts when the word “*ni`mat*” is attached to either. Van Putten argues that this uniformity signifies a common source, specifically the text of ‘Uthman. The manuscripts’ resemblance to the Ottoman *muṣḥaf* extends beyond the order of letters and verses to the consistency of their orthography. Van Putten argues that all manuscripts must have been based on the same archetype, the ‘Ottoman’ text, to explain the similarity of writing variations. It is emphasized that some *scriptio plena* must have been part of the Uthmanic archetype.<sup>56</sup>

Regarding the stabilization of the text of the Qur’an, Sirry asserts disagreement with John Wansbrough, who suggested that the stabilization process didn’t occur until the 8th or early 9th century. According to Sirry, material evidence, such as fragments and manuscripts, proves that Wansbrough’s claim cannot be maintained. The conclusion suggests that the Qur’an has the potential to serve as a historical source for comprehending the historical background of the emergence of Islam. This brings to mind the primary question posed by Sirry on the “Qur’an as a historical source”, specifically, “Is it feasible to employ the Qur’an as a historical source for accessing the happenings during the first century of Islam?” Despite this, Sirry did not provide a definitive response and believed the answer was relatively intricate. However, in another section, Sirry stresses that the Qur’an has existed since the first century of Islam. He asserts that orthography was unavoidable because Arabic was used more as a spoken language than a written one. Consequently, the reform of

55 Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, 83.

56 Marijn van Putten, *Quranic Arabic: From Its Hijazi Origins to Its Classical Reading Traditions* (Brill, 2022).

Qur'anic orthography, specifically standardization, occurs gradually.<sup>57</sup>

For instance, the portrayal of polytheists in the Qur'an. Some contemporary scholars contend that the polytheists' identity differs from that of subsequent Muslim sources. For example, Patricia Crone and G.R. Hawting argue that the term "polytheists" in the Qur'an does not connote the idea of "idol worshippers" or "political entities." The linking of polytheists with idol worshippers is a subsequent notion present in various works of *tafsir*, *sirah*, and post-Qur'an literature describing the state of pre-Islamic Arab society.<sup>58</sup> These works include *Kitāb al-Aṣṅām* by al-Kalabī (d. 204/820).<sup>59</sup> There is no denial of Allah from them. According to the Qur'an, polytheists believe in the God of the Qur'an, acknowledging Allah as the creator of the heavens and the earth, along with everything in existence. According to Crone, the group regards themselves as monotheistic despite admitting other deities besides Allah. They worship Allah, but also believe in the role of "little gods" in their success.<sup>60</sup>

This religious practice is still carried out by many monotheistic believers today. John Wansbrough hypothesized that the Qur'an originated in Mesopotamia, whereas Hawting suggested it was outside of Arabia without specifying a precise location. However, Sirry stressed that the hypothesis put forward by Wansbrough and Hawting is highly unconvincing. Sirry concurs with Nicolai Sinai's observation that the chances of identifying an alternative birthplace to the Hijaz for the Qur'an are not very promising. Therefore, we have no choice but to depend on the Qur'an's limited geographical information. Despite its scarcity, the mention of specific location data holds great importance. The Qur'an mentions "Yathrib," whose existence in the Hijaz has been verified through various inscriptions. Later on, "Yathrib" was replaced by "Medina." This strongly connects the Qur'an to the Hijaz, leaving little room for dispute. The Qur'an refers to various Hijaz toponyms, such as Mecca (Q 48: 24), Quraysh (Q 106:1), Yathrib (Q 33:13), Badr (Q 3:123), and Hunayn (Q 9:25). The communities of 'Ad and Thamud, to whom the "Arabic prophets" were sent, are also mentioned.<sup>61</sup>

Abraham Geiger, a 19th-century German scholar, attempted to identify

57 Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, 103.

58 Patricia Crone, "The Religion of the Qur'anic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities," *Arabica* 57, no. 2-3 (January 1, 2010): 163, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157005810X502637>; Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam*, 67.

59 Hishām bin Muhammad bin al-Sā'ib Al-Kalabī, *Kitāb Al-Aṣṅām* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1995).

60 Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, 107-8.

61 Sirry, 113-14.

themes of commonality between the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, such as prayer. Jews and Muslims typically pray while standing, though alternative positions are permitted when necessary. Drinking alcohol prior to worship is strictly forbidden in both religions. Furthermore, the ritual of ablution, or purification, is required before prayer, and if water is not available or cannot be used, dust may serve as a substitute.<sup>62</sup>

Geiger concluded that the Qur'an borrowed religious concepts from the Jews based on such examples. Some scholars also assert that Christian teachings influenced Islam, such as Julius Wellhausen, who claimed that Muhammad's primary inspiration was Christian teachings.<sup>63</sup> These claims by Geiger and Wellhausen inspired numerous subsequent studies in scholarly circles that suggest Jewish or Christian influences, which can be seen in the works of Richard Bell "A Commentary of the Qur'an",<sup>64</sup> David Sidersky "Les origines des légendes musulmanes dans le Coran: et dans les vies des prophètes",<sup>65</sup> Heinrich Speyer "Die Biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran",<sup>66</sup> and Charles Torrey "The Jewish Foundation of Islam".<sup>67</sup> Bell stated that Jewish sources hold significant prominence in the Qur'an; he nevertheless concluded that the "Jewish materials" were incorporated into the Qur'an through Christian channels. Conversely, Torrey posited that Muhammad had direct access to Jewish sources.<sup>68</sup>

However, Sirry pointed out that modern Western scholarship no longer subscribes to Geiger's framework of the Qur'an borrowing or taking concepts from the Bible. Instead, the Muslim Scriptures are seen as engaging in dialogue with previous Scriptures. The Qur'an engages not only with the Bible but also with subsequent Jewish and Christian religious traditions. These include the interpretive traditions of the Talmud and Mishnah, as well as Christian literature outside the New Testament, such as Syriac Christian Literature and the Apocryphal Bibles (extra-Biblical apocrypha), including the "Arabic Infancy Gospel of Thomas" and the "Protoevangelium of James".<sup>69</sup>

62 Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and Islam: A Prize Essay* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).

63 Julius Wellhausen, *The Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam* (North-Holland Publishing Company, 1975).

64 Richard Bell, *A Commentary on the Qur'an* (University of Manchester, 1991).

65 David Sidersky, *Les origines des légendes musulmanes dans le Coran: et dans les vies des prophètes* (P. Geuthner, 1933).

66 Heinrich Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (Georg Olms Verlag, 1988).

67 Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (KTAV Publishing House, 1968).

68 Bell, *A Commentary on the Qur'an*.

69 Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, 116–18.



Essentially, the Qur'an engages with its surrounding traditions, particularly those from late antiquity, acknowledging their existence and adjusting them to fit its audience and context better. This demonstrates continuity and reform as the Qur'an maintains and carries forward Biblical narratives while offering new interpretations pertinent to the present circumstances. Suppose the Biblical stories in the Qur'an are examined from this angle. In that case, it becomes evident that the Qur'an is not a copycat text, and the notion of "borrowing" introduced by Abraham Geiger and other writers no longer holds water. The Qur'an positions itself and the Prophet who delivered it in the sphere of exchange with religious collections from late antiquity, rather than just the environment of ignorance in the Hijaz, as portrayed in authoritative Muslim sources.<sup>70</sup>

Sirry's views confirmed his position as a moderate Revisionist. He was astute in recognizing the potential of the two groups while maintaining a distance from them. Sirry appreciated the Revisionists' criticisms but also critiqued their positions. Additionally, he held a particular stance towards Muslim scholars' reactions to their corpus. In Sirry's words, the movement of thought being discussed and promoted is Islamic revisionism. The approach used by Sirry is history, specifically historical criticism. He repeatedly claims to be a revisionist who is not classified as a radical revisionist who rejects Islamic sources. At the same time, Sirry agrees that Islamic sources are abundant. However, Sirry invites a critical reading of these sources. He also declares that he is a Muslim who takes a critical path to practice his religion. It is not wrong if Fadli Lukman then calls him a progressive theologian.

To demonstrate the importance of the chronology of the Qur'an's revelation, Gustav Weil (d. 1889) not only divides these stages into the Mecca and Medina periods but also expands upon Husain bin Muhammad Diyabakri's *Tārīkh al-Khāmis*<sup>71</sup> to divide the chronology of the Qur'an into early Mecca, middle Mecca, late Mecca and Medina.<sup>72</sup> But then Weil "lost" to Theodor Noldeke's popularity. He popularized the four stages of the Qur'an's emergence in his book *Geschichte des Qorans*, published in 1860.<sup>73</sup> In this book, Noldeke thoroughly discusses the rationale for dividing the Qur'an into four periods. While Weil relied solely on Islamic tradition to divide the Meccan letters, Noldeke went beyond that. He examined language characteristics and literary aspects, emphasizing the philological aspect in developing his theory of the tripartite portion of the Meccan letters (early, middle, and late). In 19th-century

<sup>70</sup> Sirry, 129.

<sup>71</sup> Husain ibn Muhammad ibn al Hasan; Diyar Bakri, *Tārīkh al khāmis fi ahwāl anfus nafis* (Dār al Kutub al'Ilmiyah, 2009).

<sup>72</sup> Gustav Weil, *A History of the Islamic Peoples* (University of Calcutta, 1914).

<sup>73</sup> Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans*.

Europe, philological analysis gained momentum. Noldeke immersed himself in the study of Qur'anic verses. Bell contends that the arrangement of letters in the Qur'an is more intricate than Noldeke initially perceived.

However, Noldeke's ideas received criticism and rejection from Richard Bell. In his work, *Introduction to the Qur'an*, he queries the changes in the Qur'anic language, which may not always be comprehended progressively.<sup>74</sup> Bell contends that the arrangement of letters in the Qur'an is more intricate than Noldeke initially perceived. Bell identifies a flaw in Noldeke's chronology, whereby letters are treated as independent units of analysis despite containing overlapping verses received by the Prophet at different periods. Bell proposes an alternative chronological system, based on verses rather than letters. Consequently, the division of the Qur'an should categorize verses as *Makīyah* or *Madaniyah* rather than letters. Consequently, the division of the Qur'an should categorize verses as *Makīyah* or *Madaniyah* rather than letters.

Other revisionist scholars also criticized Noldeke's views. Since the late 1970s, they have scrutinized not only the Noldeke chronology but also the entire chronology system that was formulated both before and after Noldeke. Revisionist scholars distrust traditional sources, which forms the foundation of their objections. John Wansbrough, a prominent revisionist, stated that there is a lack of evidence to substantiate the chronology of revelation in the Qur'an due to the unreliability and distrust of traditional sources that specify when and where specific verses were disclosed. However, it is argued that Noldeke is heavily dependent on tradition when periodizing the verses of the Qur'an, and instead, linguistic analysis should be used. Andrew Rippin, a student of Wansbrough, maintains that Noldeke was a traditionalist who examined the gradual developments in the Qur'anic text through Islamic tradition. However, for "hardline" revisionists such as Wansbrough and Rippin, all Islamic traditions are problematic. They believe that if the source itself is problematic, then the entire construction of the chronology thesis of the Qur'an is also difficult.

The second controversy pertains to *Sābab al-Nuzūl*. Radical revisionists reject all traditional accounts of *Sābab al-Nuzūl*, whether from a verse or a letter, unless such accounts are explicitly identified as subjective evaluations. For instance, they highlight the *al-Kāfirun* letter, which in their view, is polyemic if interpreted using the *Sābab al-Nuzūl* analysis. Abbreviations for technical terms are explained at their first use. Different versions of *Sābab al-Nuzūl* are mentioned in *Tafsir Muqātil*, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurthubī. After referring to *Sābab al-Nuzūl*, the authors failed to

<sup>74</sup> Bell and Watt, *Introduction to the Qur'an*.

elucidate the connection between *Sābab al-Nuzūl* and their viewpoint on the letter's verses. The rationale for the *nuzūl* was not specified as having any theological or legal implications. This was done with a general desire to historicize the text of Al-Qur'an and to constantly prove that God did indeed reveal his book to humanity on earth. Therefore, the material acts as a witness to God's concern for His creation. The language used was formal, factual and free from jargon, while adhering to conventional structure and ensuring grammatical correctness. Andrew Rippin concluded that *Sābab al-Nuzūl* was created by mufassir to address unanswered questions in the Qur'an. In essence, *Sābab al-Nuzūl* was not based on subjective evaluations but on an objective approach to provide clear and concise information in an impersonal tone. Rippin concludes that the narrative function of *Sābab al-Nuzūl* is exegetical rather than historical. Therefore, *Sābab al-Nuzūl* does not concern historical events during the time of the Prophet but instead serves as a tool for interpreting the Qur'an. "The *sabab* interprets a verse within a basic narrative framework."

## Conclusion

This study reveals that Mun'im Sirry's works present a moderate revisionist approach to Qur'anic studies and the history of Islam. Sirry critically examines the traditional and revisionist streams of thought, emphasizing the importance of balancing skepticism with historical-critical methods. His analysis of the codification and stabilization of the Qur'an, particularly the role of key figures like Abdul Malik and Hajjaj, suggests a gradual textual evolution from 'scriptio defectiva' to 'scriptio plena'. By positioning himself between radical revisionists and traditionalists, Sirry argues for a nuanced understanding of Islamic history that neither dismisses nor fully accepts the traditional narrative, thus offering a middle ground for scholars engaged in these debates.

The discussion of these results situates Sirry as a scholar who embraces diverse sources, both Islamic and non-Islamic, to reconstruct early Islamic history. His moderate revisionist stance is supported by his critique of both extreme skepticism and unquestioning acceptance of Islamic sources. Sirry's work complements the research of scholars like Fred Donner, who also explores the early ecumenical nature of Islam. While Sirry does not fully align with Donner's mapping of Islamic history, their works intersect on key points, such as the influence of the Umayyads in shaping Islam as a distinct religion. This alignment showcases Sirry's ability to integrate contemporary scholarly insights with classical Islamic thought, further contributing to ongoing discussions in Qur'anic scholarship.

However, there are aspects that have not been fully explored in this study,

such as the broader implications of Sirry's moderate revisionist stance in other areas of Islamic studies, including legal traditions and theological interpretations. Additionally, the study could expand on the comparison between Sirry's work and other contemporary scholars to further assess the impact of his methodology on modern Qur'anic and Islamic scholarship. Future research could delve deeper into the role of archaeology, such as Donner's references to the Cathisma Church, in corroborating or challenging textual sources from the early Islamic period. Expanding this interdisciplinary approach could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the historical development of Islam.

### **Supplementary Materials**

The data presented in this article can be found in the whole data references, no additional or supplementary material.

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### **Authors' contributions**

This article made by three collaboration authors. The first author contributed in initiating the idea of the research, collecting data and verifying the data. The second author contributed in translating the text from Bahasa into English and working on comprehensive review of the article. The third author ensured the coherence, narrative flaw and revising the article to enhance its overall quality. Further, the three-author collaborated in several focused group discussion to finalised the manuscript prior to be submitted into a journal.

### **Data availability statement**

All data underlying the results are available as part of the article and no additional source data are required.

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The authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest that could potentially influence the research outcomes or compromise its integrity.

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