



Discourse on Skeptical Orientalist Methodology in the Study of Qur'an Codification

Studies by skeptical Orientalists on the codification of the Qur'an, often stereotyped as hostile, actually show a range of methodological approaches rooted in diverse scientific interests. This study aims to analyze the methodologies employed by these Orientalists who question the Qur'an's canonization history. Contrary to popular belief, their research is not solely driven by antipathy but reflects varied scholarly objectives. This analysis uses a qualitative method, drawing on the works of John Wansbrough, John Burton, and Alphonse Mingana, and applies Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of pre-understanding. Findings reveal that the differing perspectives among skeptical Orientalists lead to distinct methodologies. For instance, Wansbrough applies approaches from modern biblical studies—methods that helped liberate biblical studies from rigid interpretations—into Islamic studies, introducing similar skepticism. His approach highlights the need to treat the Qur'an's codification as a historical process, open to verification, selection, and objective analysis.

Keywords: Discourse, Orientalist Methodology, Qur'an Codification .

Kajian para Orientalis skeptis tentang kodifikasi Al-Qur'an, yang seringkali distigmakan sebagai sikap bermusuhan, sebenarnya menunjukkan beragam pendekatan metodologis yang berakar pada berbagai kepentingan ilmiah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis metode yang digunakan oleh para Orientalis yang mempertanyakan sejarah kanonisasi Al-Qur'an. Berlawanan dengan anggapan umum, penelitian mereka tidak semata-mata didorong oleh sikap antipati, melainkan mencerminkan beragam tujuan akademis. Analisis ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, dengan mengacu pada karya John Wansbrough, John Burton, dan Alphonse Mingana, serta menerapkan teori prapemahaman Hans-Georg Gadamer. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa perbedaan perspektif di antara para Orientalis skeptis ini menghasilkan metodologi yang beragam. Misalnya, Wansbrough menerapkan pendekatan dari studi biblikal modern—metode yang membantu membebaskan studi Alkitab dari interpretasi kaku—ke dalam studi Islam, sehingga memperkenalkan skeptisisme serupa. Pendekatan ini menekankan perlunya memperlakukan proses kodifikasi Al-Qur'an sebagai proses historis yang terbuka untuk verifikasi, seleksi, dan analisis objektif.

Kata kunci: Diskursus, Metodologi Orientalis, Kodifikasi al-Qur'an .

Authors:Iqrom Faldiansyah¹

A. Muh. Azka Fazaka

Rif'ah²Muh. Rizaldi³**Affiliation:**¹ IAIN Syaikh Abdurrahman

Siddik Bangka Belitung,

Indonesia

² UIN Sunan Kaljaga

Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Corresponding author:

iqromfaldiansyah@iains

asbabel.ac.id

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Introduction

Orientalist scholars often labeled as skeptics of the Qur'an, in fact, employ varied methodological frameworks and arguments, particularly regarding the study of the history of its codification. The skeptical approach generally assumes that traditional Muslim sources lack historical accuracy or, where such facts might exist, they have been erased.¹⁷ John Burton, for instance, argued, "What we have today in our hands is the mushaf of Muhammad."¹⁸ He contended that all accounts suggesting the Qur'an's compilation after the Prophet's time are fictional stories devised by jurists (*fuqahā'*) to assert the Qur'an as the supreme source of law. In contrast, Wansbrough holds that the formal documentation of the Qur'an did not occur until the early 9th century. His conclusion arose from analyzing recurring themes and variations within the Qur'an.¹⁹ These differing conclusions about Qur'an codification highlight the distinct methodological approaches used by each scholar.

Studies on the history of Qur'an codification have been widely conducted, yet research that specifically examines various orientalist methodological approaches has often escaped scholars'

attention. Previous studies on the history of Qur'an codification tend to follow two main tendencies. First, there are critical studies on issues such as the challenges in Qur'an codification²⁰, the role of political authority²¹, and the importance of recognizing the Qur'an's writing process as a human endeavor that can be objectively tested, analyzed, validated, and verified.²² Second, some studies focused on key figures, both descriptively²³ and critically²⁴, examining their influence on Qur'anic scholars in Indonesia²⁵ and their contributions to the Qur'an's transcription.²⁶ Iffat Batool, in her research on the Encyclopedia of the Qur'an, illustrates that studies in the West are often grounded in a supremacist attitude, which may result in indifference toward the Muslim perspective in Qur'anic discourse.²⁷ Based on current literature, studies exploring the range of methodologies used by orientalists to reconstruct the history of Qur'an codification hold significant value for further research.

Building on the preceding literature review, this study aims to investigate the diverse methodological approaches employed by skeptical Orientalists in their studies of the Qur'an's

¹⁷ Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Cet. II; Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1999), 20.

¹⁸ John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ān* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 239-240.

¹⁹ Herbert Berg, *Islamic Origins and the Qur'an* dalam *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 56-57.

²⁰ Munawir Munawir, "Problematika Seputar Kodifikasi Al-Qur'an," *MAGHZA: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 3, no. 2 (2018): 148-63.

²¹ Muhammad Anshori, "Otoritas Politik dalam Kodifikasi Mushaf Pada Masa Khulafā' Al-Rāsyidīn," *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Ushuluddin* 18, no. 2 (2019): 197.

²² Jauhar Azizy and Muhammad Sairi, "Al-Qur'an Antara Wahyu Aural dan Kodifikasi 'Uthmani," *Ilmu Ushuluddin* 5, no. 2 (2020): 75-90.

²³ Iffat Batool, "An Outline of the Recent Western Academic Trends in the Historical Study of the Quran An Outline of the Recent Western Academic Trends in the Historical Study of the Quran," *Malakand University Research Journal of Islamic Studies* 4, no. June (2022): 41-46.

²⁴ Iffat Batool, "A Study of The Contemporary Western Academic Approaches to 'History of The Qur'an':

The Case of Encyclopedia of The Qur'ān," *Hamdard Islamicus* 43, no. 1 (2020): 1-23; Asep Musaddad, "Kemunculan Lingua Sacra Dalam Sejarah Al-Qur'an (Perspektif John Wansbrough)," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 17, no. 1 (2018): 25 ; Muhammad Alwi HS, "Kritik Atas Pandangan William M. Watt Terhadap Sejarah Penulisan Al-Qur'an," *Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 2, no. 1 (2021): 162-84; Hamed Purrostami, "Examination of the View of John Burton Concerning the Relationship between Abrogation and Collection of the Qur'ān," *Review of European Studies* 9, no. 1 (2017): 254 ; Hamdan Hidayat, "Pengaruh Nasakh Mansukh Terhadap Kodifikasi Al-Qur'an Perspektif John Burton," *Cendekia: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 6, no. 2 (2020): 166-91.

²⁵ Sirajuddin Bariqi, "Pengaruh Theodor Noldeke Terhadap Studi Sejarah Al-Qur'an di Indonesia," *Suhuf* 11, no. 2 (2018): 237-56.

²⁶ Ali Fitriana Rahmat, "Ibnu Muqhlah (W. 328 H): Sejarah dan Sumbangsihnya dalam Penulisan Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Al-Fanar* 4, no. 1 (2021): 45-62.

²⁷ Batool, "A Study of The Contemporary Western Academic Approaches to 'History of The Qur'ān': The Case of Encyclopedia of The Qur'ān.", 18.





codification. To achieve this objective, this article seeks to answer three research questions. First, what are the various methodologies used by skeptical orientalists in their studies of Qur'an codification history? Second, what factors contribute to the development of these diverse methodological approaches? Third, what are the implications of these methodologies for the study of Qur'an codification? This study uses a qualitative method, drawing from the primary works of John Wansbrough, John Burton, and Alphonse Mingana, along with secondary supporting literature. These figures were chosen due to their distinctive perspectives, which diverge from traditional sources and employ unique methodologies that shape their conclusions on the canonization process. Employing Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic approach, particularly the theory of pre-understanding, this study explores the underlying factors influencing the methodological choices of these scholars and the implications of their work for Qur'anic studies and the broader comprehension of skeptical orientalist methodology.

This study argues that the diverse methodological approaches employed by Orientalist scholars have led to a range of conclusions. The skepticism of Orientalist scholars toward traditional sources has shaped their approach to Islamic history. For example, Wansbrough claimed that traditional narratives are merely a form of salvation history.²⁸ Moreover, the

presence of numerous contradictions in historical accounts poses a significant challenge for historians studying Islamic history.²⁹ However, Fred M. Donner argues that this skepticism should not lead to the outright dismissal of all traditional sources, as they still contain elements of truth³⁰, and rejecting them entirely fails to provide a convincing alternative source.³¹

Diverse Methodologies of Skeptical Orientalists in the Study of Qur'an Codification

The rise of the rationalist tradition, resulting from the European "Enlightenment," led to a shift from dogmatic to rational approaches in religious traditions, inspiring methodical steps in religious studies.³³ As a result, previously unquestioned divine truths began to be subjected to rational inquiry³⁴, as evidenced by the emergence of scientists and philosophers who challenged church doctrines, particularly in the field of geography. This shift was driven by a humanist perspective that assumed humans could control both the world and themselves.³⁵ This transformation is also evident in numerous studies attempting to uncover the "authentic" Bible, which became a methodological foundation for orientalist studies of the Qur'an.³⁶ Consequently, the Enlightenment's influence extended beyond the study of the Bible, shaping the approach to the Qur'an as well. This shift moved the focus from polemical to scientific approach.³⁷

²⁸ John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), xxi.

²⁹ Mun'im Sirry, *Kontroversi Islam Awal: Antara Mazhab Tradisionalis dan Revisionis* (Bandung: Mizan, 2015), 29.

³⁰ Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 52.

³¹ Munirul Ikhwan, "Drama Ilahi: Sebuah Upaya Dalam Membaca Kronologi Wahyu Al-Quran," *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith* 10, no. 2 (2020): 202–38.

³³ Fred M. Donner, *Reflections on the History and Evolution of Western Study of the Qur'an, from ca. 1900 to the Present* in Mun'im Sirry, *New Trends in Qur'anic Studies: Text, Context, and Interpretation*, 22-24. Abd. Rahim,

"Sejarah Perkembangan Orientalisme," *Jurnal Hunafa* 7, no. 2 (2010): 188 ; Irzak Yuliardy Nugroho and Imam Syafi'i, "Metode Studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an Kontemporer: Respon Terhadap Pandangan Orientalis Pada Al-Qur'an," *Asy-Syaro'ah: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 8, no. 2 (2022): 100.

³⁴ M Darajat Ariyanto, "Teologi Kristen Modern di Eropa," *Suhuf* 22, no. 2 (2010): 157–83.

³⁵ Hasyim Asy'ari, "Renaissance Eropa dan Transmisi Keilmuan Islam Ke Eropa," *JUSPI (Jurnal Sejarah Peradaban Islam)* 2, no. 1 (2018): 1.

³⁶ Ikhwan Agustono, "Potret Perkembangan Metodologi Kelompok Orientalis dalam Studi Al-Qur'an," *Studia Quranika* 4, no. 2 (2020): 159.

³⁷ Andrew Rippin describes it as "The modern study of the Qur'an," where the Qur'an is approached as a critical, impartial pursuit of knowledge (non-polemical) and





Influenced by the European Enlightenment, Orientalist scholars have used at least six primary methods in their study of the Qur'an: philology, historical criticism, textual criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, and editorial criticism. Orientalist scholars often employ these methods in tandem. Abraham Geiger's work exemplifies this approach, as he utilized both historical criticism and philology to demonstrate the influence of Jewish and Christian traditions on the Qur'an. In other words, he used the philological method in analyzing a set of vocabulary indicated to share similarities with the Judeo-Christian tradition and also in parallel used historical criticism in viewing the originality and historicity of the Qur'an by placing it in the context of late antiquity.³⁸

The formulation of the Qur'an as a closed corpus³⁹ went through at least three phases, each with distinct motives. The first phase, known as the prophetic phase, involved the memorization of the Qur'an by the Prophet's companions and the writing of verses on materials such as date palm stems and animal skins. The second phase took place during the caliphate of Abu Bakr, initiated by Umar bin Khattab, who feared that

the Qur'an might be forgotten as many of its memorizers had perished in the Battle of Yamamah.⁴⁰ The final phase occurred during the caliphate of Uthman bin Affan, aiming to standardize the Qur'an's recitation. This codification effort was prompted by disputes and debates in various regions over differences in Qur'anic recitation. This account, commonly accepted by Muslims, has faced criticism from Western scholarship.

Western scholars have proposed four main periods for the Qur'an's canonization: during the time of Uthman bin Affan (Noldeke-Schwally), Muhammad (John Burton), Abd al-Malik (Alphonse Mingana), and the early 9th century (Wansbrough). Noldeke, while agreeing with the traditional narrative about the chronological order of the Qur'an, employed a psychological approach to the Prophet, analyzing the text through a philological lens to determine its chronology.⁴¹ Mingana, on the other hand, based his arguments on Syriac Christian sources, while Wansbrough utilized literary analysis, focusing on recurring themes and narratives within the Qur'an.⁴² In contrast to these scholars, Burton attempted to explain the Qur'an's compilation

uninfluenced by church institutions. See Marco Schöller, "Post-Enlightenment Academic Study of the Qur'an," in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, vol. IV (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 187.

³⁸ Agustono, "Potret Perkembangan Metodologi Kelompok Orientalis dalam Studi Al-Qur'an"; Angelika Neuwirth, "The 'discovery of Writing' in the Qur'an: Tracing an Epistemic Revolution in Arab Late Antiquity," *Nun* 2, no. 1 (2016): 25–55; Andrew C. Smith, "Moses and Pharaoh's Magicians: A Discursive Analysis of the Qur'anic Narratives in the Light of Late Antique Texts and Traditions," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 20, no. 1 (2018): 67–104; Angelika Neuwirth and Dirk Hartwig, "Beyond Reception History: The Qur'anic Intervention into the Late Antique Discourse about the Origin of Evil," *Religions* 12, no. 8 (2021): 39–54; Marco Demichelis, "Quranic Christology in Late Antiquity. 'isa Ibn Maryam and His Divine Power (Energeia) in the Islamic Revelation," *Religions* 12, no. 11 (2021); Andrew J. O'Connor, "Qur'anic Covenants Reconsidered: Mithaq and 'ahd in Polemical Context," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 30, no. 1 (2019): 1–22; Juan Cole, "Paradosis and Monotheism: A Late Antique Approach to the Meaning of Islām in the Quran," *Bulletin of*

the School of Oriental and African Studies 82, no. 3 (2019): 405–25.

³⁹ The formulation of the Qur'an as a closed corpus in Qur'anic scholarship is commonly referred to as *jam'u al-Qur'an*. This term can be defined in two ways: (1) *hafazahu*—the collection through memorization (retaining it in the heart); and (2) *kitābuhu kullih*—the collection through writing the entire Qur'an. The latter can involve either separating the verses and surahs, where each is written in a separate container, or organizing all verses and surahs together on a single sheet. For further reference, see: Manna al-Qat}tan, *Mabāhith fi 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. trans. Aunur Rafiq El-Mazni, *Pengantar Studi Ilmu al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Pustaka al-Kautsar, 2005), 150–151; Achmad Abubakar, dkk, *Ulumul Qur'an: Pisau Analisis dalam Menafsirkan al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Semesta Aksara, 2019), 49.

⁴⁰ Cahaya Khaeroni, "Sejarah al-Qur'an (Uraian Analitis, Kronologis, dan Naratif Tentang Sejarah Kodifikasi Al-Qur'an)," *HISTORIA: Jurnal Program Studi Pendidikan Sejarah* 5, no. 2 (2017): 195.

⁴¹ Munirul Ikhwan, "Drama Ilahi: Sebuah Upaya dalam Membaca Kronologi Wahyu al-Qur'an".

⁴² Mun'im Sirry, *Kontroversi Islam Awal: Antara Mazhab Tradisionalis dan Revisionis*, 142–144.





within the framework of the theory of abrogation.⁴³

A critical reading of the history of the Qur'an's codification conducted by the skeptical orientalist group often employs literary criticism and source criticism as methodological foundations. Wansbrough, in particular, uses these approaches in his examination of this topic. Through source criticism, he raises fundamental questions, such as what evidence exists to suggest that the Qur'an was reformulated, added to, or altered during the canonization process. He also argues that Muslim sources reflect "salvation history",⁴⁴ and therefore should not be considered historical facts. Additionally, Wansbrough applies literary criticism by analyzing recurring stories within the Qur'an, suggesting they indicate that the Qur'an originated from various sources and locales with similar traditions—what he refers to as "prophetic logia." To support this, Wansbrough examines four elements characteristic of prophetic logia: retribution, signs, exile, and covenants. This leads him to conclude that the codification of the Qur'an occurred only in the ninth century.⁴⁵

John Burton's controversial analysis of the Qur'an's codification, which concludes that the Qur'an was collected during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime, employs a tradition criticism approach.⁴⁶ This approach, influenced by scholars like Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht, involves analyzing hadith to uncover underlying interests and motivations.⁴⁷ Burton applies this method to narrations about the Qur'an's codification, identifying contradictions regar-

ding the timing and agents of the process. He argues that these contradictions, coupled with the absence of Muhammad's direct involvement, suggest a later date for the Qur'an's compilation. Additionally, Burton examines three classifications of the *nāsikh-mansūkh* theory, further supporting his thesis.⁴⁸ While skeptical of traditional Muslim sources, Burton nonetheless utilizes the Qur'an and hadith as primary sources for his analysis.

In contrast to the previous methods, some skeptical Orientalists, like Alphonse Mingana, have employed historical criticism to reconstruct the Qur'an's codification. Mingana exclusively relies on Christian sources and completely disregards Muslim sources in his study. He cites several Christian authors, such as F. Nau, an anonymous author published by Guidi, and John Bar Penkaye. Notably, the references Mingana uses are from authors whose writings, in Syriac, were published soon after the emergence of Islam. John Bar Penkaye, an eyewitness to the Arab conquests during Caliph 'Abd al-Malik's rule, for example, claimed that he was unaware of any holy book belonging to the Arabs (Muslims).⁴⁹ Similarly, F. Nau recounts a meeting between Amr bin 'Ash and John I in 18 AH, during which it was noted that Muslims at that time did not possess a holy book.⁵⁰ Based on these references, Mingana concludes that the codification of the Qur'an likely occurred in the early 8th century AD.

⁴³ Purrostami, "Examination of the View of John Burton Concerning the Relationship between Abrogation and Collection of the Qur'an"; Hidayat, "Pengaruh Nasakh Mansukh Terhadap Kodifikasi Al-Qur'an Perspektif John Burton."

⁴⁴ John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, xxi.

⁴⁵ Mun'im Sirry, *Kontroversi Islam Awal: Antara Mazhab Tradisionalis dan Revisionis*, 142-143.

⁴⁶ The tradition criticism approach focuses on the issue of narration, centering on how information within the

Islamic tradition is transmitted from one generation to the next, both orally and in writing. See Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, 20.

⁴⁷ John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an*, 5.

⁴⁸ John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an*, 7.

⁴⁹ Alphonse Mingana, "Transmission of The Qur'an according to Christian Writers", *The Muslim Word* 7 (1971), 406.

⁵⁰ Alphonse Mingana, "Transmission of The Qur'an according to Christian Writers", 402.





The Driving Factors Behind the Methodological Approaches of Skeptical Orientalists

John Burton's thesis, which aimed to uncover the socio-political interests underlying the narrations of the Qur'an's codification⁷⁴, was the driving force behind his use of the tradition criticism approach, similar to his predecessor Goldziher. Both scholars placed hadith within the context of political and religious contestation, viewing them as attempts to justify various issues that arose later. Burton concluded that the motive for the Qur'an's collection during Uthman's time was to support local fatwas on topics like inheritance and marriage, which were still being debated.⁷⁵ To substantiate this claim, Burton employed the tradition criticism approach, re-examining the history of hadith transmission.⁷⁶

Wansbrough pursued a different goal to make the study of Islamic studies, including the Qur'an, which resembles modern Bible studies by employing the same methodologies. Wansbrough argued that the Qur'an is virtually unknown as a document susceptible of analysis by the instruments and techniques of Biblical criticism.⁷⁷ Additionally, the sub-title of his work – *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* – clearly outlines his thesis. As Andrew Rippin noted, Wansbrough's claims about the Qur'an, prophecy, and sacred language are a logical consequence of applying Biblical criticism to Islamic studies.⁷⁸

Alphonse Mingana primarily relied on Syriac Christian sources, believing they offered a more accurate historical perspective than Muslim writings. These sources, written close to the early Islamic period, align with the historical critical principle of using contemporary evidence. However, Mingana acknowledges the limited

information available in early Syriac Christian texts regarding the Qur'an's codification and the emergence of Muslim society.⁷⁹ As he stated:

"In considering the question of the transmission of the Qur'an according to Christian writers, the reader will feel that he is more in the domain of historical facts than in that of the precarious hadith; unfortunately, any information found in books written at the very beginning of Islam, is naturally scanty."⁸⁰

Further analysis of these scholars' methodologies reveals a shared tendency to reinterpret Islamic sources through external historical frameworks, often distancing themselves from traditional Islamic narratives. Burton's focus on socio-political motivations is an attempt to decode the intentions behind Qur'anic compilation, while Wansbrough's adaptation of Biblical criticism methods signifies his broader ambition to secularize the approach to Qur'anic studies. Mingana's use of Syriac sources reflects his view that early Islamic history should be viewed through a non-Muslim lens to achieve objectivity. Each scholar, through distinct yet intersecting approaches, underscores a broader objective of critical detachment in Qur'anic studies, aiming to challenge established Islamic historiography and its intrinsic assumptions.

Implications of Various Skeptical Orientalist Methodologies for the Study of the Qur'an Codification

The diversity of orientalist methodologies and their resulting conclusions challenge the notion that such studies are inherently polemical or apologetic towards the Qur'an. In fact, the underlying factor of these methodological

⁷⁴ John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ān*, 7.

⁷⁵ John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ān*, 239.

⁷⁶ This is reinforced by Burton's thesis categories, which he refers to as "by applying the new perspective to the elucidation of a single long-recognised problem". See John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ān* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 5.

⁷⁷ John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, xxi.

⁷⁸ John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, xiv.

⁷⁹ Alphonse Mingana, "Transmission of The Kur'an according to Christian Writers", 402.

⁸⁰ Alphonse Mingana, "Transmission of The Kur'an according to Christian Writers", 402.





variations is the effort to present historical facts. For instance, Alphonse Mingana uses historical criticism as a methodology in his study of the history of Qur'anic canonization, where one of the method's indicators is to present sources that were written not long after, or even contemporaneous with, the historical events. Thus, Mingana's approach of using non-Islamic sources to examine the process of Qur'anic codification, along with his alternative conclusions, is a logical outcome of his scientific methodology and not intended as a polemic against the Qur'an or Muslims.

The emergence of various methodological steps above also has implications for the importance of positioning the process of writing the Qur'an as a human process that can be tested, selected, proven and verified objectively. Abd Moqsith Ghazali, for example, in his book questions grammatical errors in the Qur'an. He managed to show several *ṣaḥīḥ* narrations for his claim about grammatical errors in the Qur'an. In the narration, Urwah bin al-Zubair asked 'Aisyah about grammatical deviations in the Qur'an found in Q. Ṭāha [20]:63, Q. al-Nisā' [4]:162 and Q. al-Mā'idah [5]:69 to which 'Aisyah then answered that the errors occurred due to carelessness in copying the Qur'an manuscript.⁸⁸ Looking at the narration above, the process of writing the *mushaf* is a human process that can be tested and verified objectively.

Additionally, the diversity of methods offered in Qur'anic studies can enrich and support the concept of an interdisciplinary approach in this field. Amin Abdullah, with his integration-interconnection epistemology, is a prominent advocate for an interdisciplinary approach in Islamic studies. His epistemology aims to position Islamic thought within an open and inclusive discourse. In other words, Amin's epistemology facilitates dialogue between

various methods, knowledge traditions, and scientific disciplines as a means to minimize polemical, conflictual, and dichotomous reasoning in developing Islamic thought and knowledge.⁸⁹ The practical applications of his epistemology are evident in several of his works across various fields, including Islamic philosophy, scriptural interpretation, Islamic theology, and Islamic education⁹⁰, among others.

The growing acceptance of interdisciplinary methodologies reflects a paradigm shift in how Islamic studies are approached, moving away from strictly traditional frameworks towards a more nuanced and multifaceted exploration of the subject matter. This shift has the potential to create new pathways for research and scholarship, ultimately leading to a deeper and more holistic appreciation of the Qur'an and its role in both historical and contemporary contexts. By integrating insights from fields such as sociology, anthropology, history, and literary criticism, scholars can better understand the socio-cultural dynamics that have influenced the interpretation and reception of the Qur'an throughout history.

Methodological Dialogue: Addressing the Heterogeneity of the Skeptical Orientalist Approach to the Qur'an

The study of skeptical orientalists, often stereotyped as antipathetic to the Qur'an, reveals significant methodological diversity when examined through a methodological lens. Skeptical orientalist scholars critically explore the history of Qur'anic codification, with some employing literary and source criticism as foundational methodologies. Others in this group use historical criticism and tradition criticism to reconstruct the history of Qur'anic codification. This variety in methodological approaches reflects the distinct objectives within their study of Qur'anic history. For example,

⁸⁸ Abd. Moqsith Ghazali, et. al, *Metodologi Studi al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2009), 81-82.

⁸⁹ Alim Roswanto, et. al, *Islam, Agama-Agama dan Nilai Kemanusiaan: Festschrift Untuk M. Amin Abdullah* (Yogyakarta: CISForm, 2013), 39.

⁹⁰ M. Amin Abdullah, et. al, *Implementasi Pendekatan Integratif-Interkonektif dalam Kajian Pendidikan Islam* (Yogyakarta: Pascasarjana UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2014)





John Burton aims to uncover socio-political interests embedded in accounts of Qur'anic codification. In contrast, Wansbrough seeks to approach Islamic studies, and specifically Qur'anic studies, through methods commonly applied in modern Biblical scholarship.

The methodology of skeptical orientalists concerning Qur'anic codification reveals three key insights. First, pre-understanding, as described by Hans-Georg Gadamer⁹¹, shapes the interpretive framework of orientalists like John Wansbrough, John Burton, and Alphonse Mingana. Second, the diverse methodological foundations of these skeptical scholars demonstrate that their aim is not to discredit Islam. Third, this methodological diversity contributes to the production of progressive knowledge grounded in well-established methodologies within Islamic studies. The range of orientalist methodologies in Qur'anic studies thus marks significant developments in this field.

The contributions of orientalist scholarship, even among scholars often considered skeptical, are noteworthy for Islamic and Qur'anic studies. Firstly, they enrich and support the interdisciplinary approach within Islamic studies. Equally important, particularly in the context of Qur'anic codification, is the new perspective they offer on viewing the Qur'an's composition as a human process that can be objectively tested, examined, and verified—thus encouraging scientific engagement with the Qur'an. Another crucial contribution is the shift in perspective these studies prompt, challenging the perception that skeptical orientalist discourse on Qur'anic

studies stems from polemic or apologetic intentions.

This study reviews the diverse methodologies employed by skeptical orientalist scholars in examining the history of Qur'anic codification, applying Gadamer's concept of pre-understanding to observe how these scholars' interpretive frameworks shape their methodological approaches. Previous research on orientalist perspectives has mainly focused on critically analyzing the views of individual scholars on Qur'anic studies, such as Iffat Batool's critical review of the Encyclopedia of the Qur'an⁹², as well as works by Hamed Purrostami⁹³ and Muhammad Alwi Hs.⁹⁴ However, these efforts have largely overlooked the reasoning behind the methodologies applied in studies of Qur'anic codification. Thus, this study aims to identify the factors driving skeptical orientalist methodological choices, contributing to an understanding of the underlying reasoning.

The topic of diverse skeptical orientalist methodologies remains open for further study, particularly by examining various scholars within different contexts. Although in contemporary times most orientalist scholars have shifted from polemical aims toward critical, impartial inquiry and are no longer influenced by church institutions in their study of the Qur'an, some still prioritize polemics over scientific investigation. As Donner notes, "The tradition of anti-Islamic religious polemic never died out in the west, but rather has persisted in the writings of some authors right up until the present day, sometimes with noteworthy vigor."⁹⁵ Therefore, this study recommends

⁹¹ Hans Georg Gadamer's theory of pre-understanding posits that a person's prior knowledge and experiences shape their interpretation of a text. Gadamer stressed the inevitability of pre-understanding, arguing that it serves as a foundational element in interpretation, enabling a dialogue between the reader and the text. Without this pre-understanding, effective interpretation becomes challenging. See, Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika dan Perkembangan Uloom Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Nawasea Press, 2017), 80-81.

⁹² Batool, "A Study of The Contemporary Western Academic Approaches to 'History of The Qur'an': The Case of Encyclopedia of The Qur'an."

⁹³ Purrostami, "Examination of the View of John Burton Concerning the Relationship between Abrogation and Collection of the Qur'an."

⁹⁴ HS, "Kritik atas Pandangan William M. Watt terhadap Sejarah Penulisan Al-Qur'an."

⁹⁵ Fred M. Donner, *Reflections on the History and Evolution of Western Study of the Qur'an, from ca. 1900 to the*





continuing this discussion with a broader scope, incorporating various perspectives, methods, approaches, theories, and contexts.

Additionally, the examination of these methodologies can highlight how cultural, social, and historical contexts influence scholarly interpretations. Engaging with these factors not only enriches our understanding of the Qur'an but also fosters a more comprehensive discourse in Islamic studies. This ongoing dialogue can pave the way for future research to further interrogate the methodologies of skeptical orientalists, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced and informed understanding of the Qur'an and its impact across different scholarly traditions. Such explorations can also aid in reconciling various perspectives, thereby enriching the academic landscape surrounding the Qur'an and fostering mutual understanding among scholars and practitioners alike.

Conclusion

The diverse methodologies used by skeptical orientalist scholars, which gives rise to various implications concerning the history of the Qur'an's codification, demonstrates a strong scientific basis for their study. For example, John Burton's preconception, which situates the hadith within political and religious contestation or specific social interests, leads him to view hadith as primarily a means of justifying recent issues. In other words, Burton approaches narratives about the Qur'an's collection during Uthman's time with suspicion, viewing them as influenced by political interests. This perspective led him to adopt tradition criticism for reconstructing the Qur'an's codification history, a method previously applied by Ignaz Goldziher in examining the hadith promoting visits to the three holy mosques, which was based on a similar pre-understanding.

This study challenges the perception that skeptical orientalist studies stem solely from a polemical or apologetic stance towards the

Qur'an. Adnan Armas, for example, argues that Jewish and Christian orientalists aim to discredit the Qur'an, claiming they view it with hostility and deny it as divine revelation. Armas bases this on orientalist critiques that often fault the Qur'an when it diverges from Biblical norms. However, Biblical principles used by some orientalist figures, including John Wansbrough, represent the interpreter's horizon—what Gadamer terms the reader's pre-understanding—which inevitably interacts with the text's own horizon. Consequently, it is inaccurate to state that these figures solely intend to undermine the Qur'an.

This research limits its focus to the variety of skeptical orientalist methodologies represented by John Wansbrough, John Burton, and Alphonse Mingana within the context of the Qur'an's codification history. The author acknowledges that this study remains incomplete, with further analysis needed across a broader range of orientalist skeptic methodologies. Expanding this research could clarify the motivations behind different methodological choices that yield alternative conclusions from traditional sources among skeptical orientalists. Future studies could delve into additional figures and varied contexts, offering richer insight.

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