

Orientalists' Approach to Qur'ānic Text in the 20th Century

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Abstract

The analysis of the Orientalistic research regarding the Qur'ānic text reveals that they have had been unable to understand the true spirit of the revelation. It may be their incapability to perceive the real meanings of the sources of Islam or their pre-planned designs. Nevertheless, their writings reflect the intentions of casting doubts and suspicions about Islamic sources, instead of their honest approach. In this regard they concentrate upon basic textual criticism especially including the collection and compilation of Qur'ān and the controversy of multiple readings of Qur'ān to create misleading doubts and uncertainties in Muslims' minds. The proceeding article has been dedicated for presenting the fundamental ideas of nineteenth centuries' Orientalistic approaches and to take a glance of their claims about Holy Qur'ān, analyzing the methodologies used and sources applied by them. An immense effort has also been rendered to make a critical analysis of these Orientalists' contributions in a chronological order.

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The collection and compilation of Qur'ān and the controversy of multiple readings of Qur'ān are two objections of core value regarding authenticity and illegitimacy of the Holy Qur'ān, because both of these are directly concerned with the Qur'ānic text and words. Words are the real source of meanings and understanding of writing. And if uncertainty is created in accuracy of words then definiteness of meanings gets into trouble and thus becomes misleading. In the same way Qur'ānic text is made subject to numerous doubts. For example, the strategy adopted for preservation for Qur'ān and difficulties in compilation of Qur'ān are viewed by them as defecting. Similarly many reservations regarding Qur'ānic compilation are there like: controversy of order and contents between the codex of Ḥaḍrat Abū Bakr (RA) and those of other companions, reasons of reliance upon codex of Abū Bakar (RA) by Ḥaḍrat 'Uthmān (RA), causes of delegating the responsibility of collection of the Qur'ān to Ḥaḍrat Zaid (RA), some amendments and alterations occurred in the Qur'ānic Text in the reign 'Abd al-Malik bin Marwan etc. According to 'Alī al-Ṣaghīr, approach employed by Orientalists to resolve the textual irregularities of the Qur'ān, is far away from that kind of understanding and wisdom, with which Muslim scholars have presented the solution of these complications. For Orientalists the bibliographical information, the reformation and the correction of historical events carry more importance and lie at the core of their goals. Particularly, their special focus remains on multiple readings of the Qur'ān. They create suspicions in Qur'ānic revelation and present its collection and codification process as a complex academic

phenomenon.¹ The current article has been specified for presenting the important ideas of mid eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' Orientalistic views and estimations about Holy Qur'ān, analyzing the methodologies used and sources applied by them, an immense effort has also been rendered to make a critical analysis of these Orientalists' contributions in a chronological order.

THEODOR NOLDEKE (1836-1930)

German Orientalist Theodor Noldeke was the foremost figure in classical philology. His scholarship received wide and immediate recognition both in Europe and in America and it was well known to the Classicists such as his great contemporary Mommsen, who consulted him on problems pertaining to the Near East.² As a Classicist-Orientalist Noldeke was aware of the duty of the Orientalist toward his non-Orientalist colleague, the Classicist who was conducting researches that involve the Orient but who was unfamiliar with its languages and consequently had to depend upon inadequate and unreliable source material. He criticized the Qur'ān in various aspects like collection of the Qur'ān, variant readings, abrogation, etc. He won prize for his well-known work "*Geschichte des Korans*".³ In this work he largely negated the Islamic understanding of the process whereby the text of the Qur'ān was compiled. It became the foundation of all later Qur'ānic studies for the Orientalists. It is still referred to and is considered an indispensable tool for the Orientalists for further criticism on the Qur'ān.⁴ Noldeke's unique style in raising questions on the authenticity of the Qur'ān has made him unanimously a 'predecessor' in the academic field of Orientalists. Later

on all the Orientalists followed him in making further contribution to this subject. It is observed that Blachere most of the time pursues in his research methodology the same directions which have been the peculiarities of Noldeke. However, analyzing the textual status of the Qur'ān, Noldeke tried to discuss the sequence of *sūrās* and some other issues relatively profound, intricate containing different controversies. A renowned Muslim scholar Abu 'Abdullah al-Zanjānī (d.1360 A.H.) considers this book the most significant among all the writings rendered by Orientalists on the history of Qur'ān because of its various characteristics and advance approach⁵. Noldeke, in research of his "*Geschichte des Korans*", had relied on the book of Abu al-Qāsim 'Omar b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Kāfi (a Muslim scholar of 5th Century Hijra) which is to some extent related to the same subject matter. He has probed deeply into the history of the Qur'ān by examining its chronological order. He indicates that this book is currently available in "*God Lygad 674 Warn*" Library. He distributes the parts of the Qur'ānic revelation into *Makki* and *Madni*. However, Abu 'Abdullah al-Zanjānī has admired Pro. Noldeke due to his reliance on the book of al-Kāfi, the book of Ibrahim Ibn 'Umar al-Biqā'i titled "نظم الدرر و تناسق الايات" ⁶ "والسور" and also applauded him on arranging bibliographical indexes from 'Al-Fahrist Lil-'Ulūm' by Ibn al-Nadīm (d.380 AH).⁷ While mentioning the arrangements of Qur'ānic Sūrās Noldede, considers "Surah Al-Fātiha" neither from Makkī nor from Madnī. Perhaps, he is not ready to determine his opinion about Fatiha status and remains totally silent in declaring it Makki or Madini, nor he reflects his own idea for some other reason. Having reliance on the descending order of

the *Sūrās*, he shows start of the Qur'ān from *Sūrah al-'Alaq*, then *Surah Al-Qalam* and so on followed in historical order.⁸

Noldeke considers that the Qur'ānic orthographical system is the main reason of the existence of multiple readings of the text of the Qur'ān. Carl Brocklehn also endorsed the same view and in this way this theory was extended with full zeal and zest that the door of different recitations and multiple readings opened through its orthography (*Rasm al-Khaṭ*). He declares it the basic ground on which the Muslim reciters (*qurrā'*) and scholars of Qur'ānic studies seem indulge in the correction of recitations.⁹ The scholars of Islam has denied all these ideas (some of its details will also be discussed in this dissertation) however, in our view, Noldeke is a leading and foremost Orientalist, who laid down the regular and formal foundations of objections about the textual history of the Qur'ān.¹⁰

ARTHUR N. WOLLASTON (1842-1922)

Wollaston is a key figure among the Orientalists of 19th century who claimed the same assertion which is of the earlier Christian and Jews point of view of Qur'ānic authorship by the Prophet of Arabia, his view is explicitly documented in his monograph "The Religion of the Koran"¹¹ where he writes:

That the Koran was really the work of the Prophet of Arabia is beyond dispute, though it must be left to conjecture whether, and to what extent others participated in his design. Pious Muslims, however, would have it believed that the book

was of divine origin, and revealed to Muḥammad on various occasions, sometimes at Mecca, and sometimes at Madina, during a period of twenty-three years.¹²

CLAIR TISDALL (1859-1928)

Rev. W. St. Clair Tisdall is a famous Christian scholar who reproduced the notion of Qur'ānic authorship by human being in his book titled "The Original Sources of The Qur'ān"¹³ In third chapter the influence of Sābian and Jewish ideas and in fourth and fifth chapters influence of Christian and Christian Apocryphal and the involvement of Zoroastrian elements in the Qur'ān have been discussed respectively. In his introductory remarks, at the very beginning of his book, he stated his idea clearly that "there is much truth in the dictum of the ancient Greek philosopher Democritus that "Nothing has sprung from nothing." Islam, as the Religion of Muḥammad is called by its adherents, is certainly no exception to this rule.¹⁴

In his view, a new study of Qur'ān must be made to examine its true textual standard and its derivational sources. The Qur'ān, the traditions of Prophet, taken together, from the foundation of Islam, early commentaries on the Qur'ān is also given much importance and to the deduction from it made by early jurists and doctors of the law....., different sects of *Muḥammadans*, too, accept different collections of Traditions, all these sources are very uncertain to the European point of view.¹⁵ According to him, the book contains some obscure and "errors or at least variations, gradually crept into the text of the Qur'ān as it was recited."¹⁶ Having gone through his "Original Sources of the

Qur'ān" it is repeatedly observed that he depends upon contaminated and unreliable sources.¹⁷ And his study reveals to be based upon suppositions and assumptions without having any solid foundation.

Tisdall presents some passages through spurious source of literature to cast hesitancy in the veracity of the text. He in the appendix to Chapter II, starts with an allegation that "it is sometimes said in the East at the present day that Muḥammad not only adopted many of the ancient habits and religious rites of the heathen Arabs and incorporated them into Islam, but that he was also guilty of plagiarism in borrowing parts of certain verses of Imra'ul Qais, an ancient Arabic poet. These, it is asserted, may still be found in the Qur'ān."¹⁸

دنت الساعة وانشق القمر
عن غزال صاد قلبي ونفر¹⁹

"In spite of the Eastern story which I have quoted, the balance of probability certainly inclines to the supposition that Muḥammad was not guilty of the daring plagiarism of which he has been accused."²⁰ However, in foot-notes, he again complicates the situation on the base of a fake event which he attributes to Rev. Dr. Zwemer, according to that he (Zwemer) found the same verse in an edition of *Dīwān Imra'ul Qais*²¹ which he had possessed. Tisdall further adds that "a Sheikh taught in al-Azhar²² tells me that this evident quotation perplexes learned Muslims."²³ He precede the discussion further to make more stress that why these couplets are not found in Qais's *dīwān*, because, its compiler has been under scholarly dispute and a huge difference of opinion is emerged in determining it.

ALPHONSE MINGANA (1878-1937)

Mingana was great scholar of Arabic, especially Syrian. He was a member of the Chaldaean Church in Iraq, where he was also professor of Semitic Languages and Literature in the Syro-Chaldaean Seminary at Mosul. He collected invaluable Arabic and Syriac manuscripts that became the foundation for the nebulous Mingana Collection, now housed in Birmingham, U.K. The last twenty years of his life were spent in England where he taught Semitic Languages. His essays were collected in *Woodbriike Studies: Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, Garshuni* (1927).²⁴

DAVID S. MARGOLIOUTH (1858-1940)

Margoliouth was professor of Arabic at the University of Oxford, and a member of the council of the Royal Asiatic Society. He was the author of numerous articles and books on Islam, including *Muḥammad and the Rise of Islam*²⁵ and *Mohammadanism*.²⁶ To prove the change and distortion in Qur'ānic text, D.S. Margoliouth is an Orientalist who selects certain Qur'ānic verses and *Aḥadīth* from the whole archive collection of fundamental Islamic sources and makes them evidence, which assist to present the safety of Qur'ān in suspicious way. He writes a brief introduction of Qur'ānic compilation under the caption "Preservation of the Koran, and probability of its Authenticity"²⁷ in which he asserts that "one fact that emerges from a study of our authorities is that the Prophet kept no official copy of his revelation."²⁸

EDWARD SELL (1869-1932)

In the beginning of 20th century Edward Sell²⁹ has taken a part in discussing the historical character of the Qur'ān. His famous work "*Historical Development of the Qur'ān*" is a highest influential book that puts impacts on all Orientalists to take this view in broader and detailed manner. He declares Qur'ān as result of the phenomenology and historical eventuality which gradually developed with the passage of Prophet Muḥammad's life. He introduces this development in the following words:

It (Qur'ān) is a history of the development of the Qur'ān, showing how its gradual formation was determined by the events of the Prophet's life. Treated in this way, the Qur'ān reveals his change of position towards the various classes of persons with whom he was brought into contact, and by the aptness of its injunctions, its apologies, its denunciations, we are enabled to see how admirably this 'piecemeal' revelation was fitted to meet the requirements of Islam as they arose.³⁰

Since the issue of historical development of the Qur'ān or to prove historical evolution in its text, we may refer towards another aspect which is of commonly attributed to Mingana (d.1937 A.D.) and Arthur Jeffery who have been very keen in manufacturing the case of Qur'ānic textual history. According to both of them, there has been a continuous change in the text of Muslim sacred scripture.³¹

After Noldeke, he is the first who made advance study on the historical status of the Qur'ān expressing the *Sūrās* order as the developments in Prophet's life. In his observation, for example, the Madina *Sūrās* address the Muslims less on dogma than on the laws which should guide them in their daily lives. The Qur'ān, as a whole, is not formed on a fixed plan, but just follows the needs and suggestion of the day and the circumstances of the hour. The fervid eloquence of the preacher is now absent, and the dictates of the practical administrator takes its place. The Prophet deals now with questions of social life, domestic details, peace and war. It may be called by contrast the legal section of the Qur'ān. The style, generally speaking, is that of the third Meccan period and with a few exceptions is not rhetorical. The *Sūrās* are long and probably consist of shorter exhortations and statements made on different occasions, and then afterwards arranged in a *sūrah*, but apparently on no definite plan or system³². He further observes that:

The Arabic arrangement of the contents of the Qur'ān is so confused that it conveys no idea whatever of the growth of any plan in the mind of the Prophet, and it is extremely difficult for the reader to get much intelligible historical information from it; but when the chapters are placed together, with some regards to chronological order, it is possible, as we have tried to show, to trace a gradual development of the purpose Muḥammad had in view in establishing the theoretic system of Islam. The

Qur'ān when thus read possesses an attractive interest, as we see in it the workings of the mind of one who, whatever view we may take of his claims and positions, was undoubtedly a great man. It is only by reading it in this way that the gradual change of style also is noticed.³³

While discussing the chronological order, he asserts:

Critics of the Qur'ān, who look at it from the chronological standpoint, note the tediousness of the later *Sūrās*. It is said by Noldeke that 'if it were not for the exquisite flexibility of the Arabic language itself, which, however, is to be attributed more to the age in which the author lived than to his individuality, it would be scarcely bearable to read the latter portions of the Qur'ān a second time'. Stanley Lane Poole³⁴ says that 'but for the rich eloquence of the old Arabic tongue, which gives some charm even to inextricable sentences and dull stories, the Qur'ān at this period would be unreadable. As it is we feel we have fallen from poetry to prose, and the matter of the prose is not so superlative as to give us amends for the loss of the poetic thought of the earlier time and the musical fall of the sentences.'³⁵

In his view Muslim scholars of Qur'ānic studies have never given its due consideration to the matters like various readings of the text, date of the *Sūrās*, the spirit of the Higher Criticism and there has been a serious lack of scientific aptitude in Muslim scholarship.

IGNAZ GOLDZIHHER (1850-1921)

Goldziher was German scholar of Islamic studies who criticized the fundamentals of Islamic belief i.e. the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. His basic theory was to negate the authenticity of these basics of the Islam. He alleged that *Ḥadīth* literature came into existence at the earliest in the 2nd century of Islam and the similar case with the Qur'ān. His major work on Islamic Studies is *Muslim Studies*, which was published first time in 1971 at London.³⁶

Goldziher also participates in making the view of Qur'ānic evolutionary stages to criticize its divine credibility among the scriptures. According to him, Muḥammad's life after his migration to Madina at once evolves into a dual strategy plan. He writes:

This Medina decade was therefore a time of attack with sword and pen, as well as of defense. The change in Mohammed's prophetic character necessarily made itself felt in the style and rhetorical content of the Koran. Even the oldest records of the book have clearly differentiated between the two divisions of the 114 *Sūrās* into which its contents are divided-differentiating with sure instinct the Mecca from the Medina parts.³⁷

He discusses another account of this expansion in Muḥammad's mission and thinking, while observing decline in style and rhetoric. He never tries to have a glance on the maturity and elevational necessities of the people at that time and ignores the reality that rhetoric becomes invaluable where the injunctions and commandment are involved.

Gradually, however, the prophetic energy weakens in the Medina messages in which the

rhetoric, having lost all vigor, because of the triviality of the object, had dropped to a lower plain and sunk to the level of common prose. With clever calculations and consideration, with wary cunning and policy, he now agitates against the internal and external opponents of his aims, he organizes the faithful, enacts, as has already been pointed out, civic and religious laws for the developing organization, as well as rules for the practical relations of life. He even at times includes in the divine revelations made to him his own unimportant personal and domestic affairs.³⁸

Goldziher considers the followers of Muḥammad as blind believers of Qur'ān, according to him, Mohammad himself declared his Koran an inimitable work and His followers, without considering any one of its parts as having more merit than another, regarded the book as divinely supernatural, sent to them through the prophet. In fact it was to them the supreme miracle by which the prophet established the truth of his divine mission.³⁹

He then moves towards the differences occurred in the Muslim scripture "The Koran then, is the first basis of the religion of Islam, its sacred writing, its revealed document. In its entirety it represents a combination of the two first epochs in the infancy of Islam, differing so much from one another".⁴⁰

Furthermore, he declares the Qur'ān as the result of Muḥammad's own mental changes, as well as to various personal experiences, Mohammed himself was forced to nullify several Koranic revelations by means of newer divine revelations, thereby conceding that he abrogated by divine command that which, a short time before, had been revealed as the word of God.⁴¹ Just because of indulging in an intrigue situation of not knowing the concept of 'abrogation' he concludes Islam and the Qur'ān in the following words:

We cannot understand Islam without the Koran, but the Koran does not by any means afford us a complete understanding of Islam in its course through history.⁴²

Regarding the Qur'ānic text and multiple readings, Goldziher discussed a detailed and formal discussion. In his celebrated book “مذاهب التفسير الإسلامى” (*Madhāhib al-Tafsīr al-Islāmī*), he starts the first chapter with a controversial remarks on Qur'ānic multiple recitations, he considers the report of *sab'at aḥruf* (سبعة احرف) as unauthentic and fabricated.⁴³

It can easily be observed a variety of his false assertions about the vagueness of Qur'ānic text, that speaks volume about his “honest and true research”, according to him, more distortions and twisting are in Qur'ānic text as compare to other revealed books, despite the fact that he never saw the other heavenly books in their original form (text). In spite of this, yet he is hell-bent to consider Qur'ān as a most faulty book as compare to other divine scriptures.⁴⁴ He holds the emptiness of formal dots and vowel-points the reason of various recitations and readings and mentioned some examples of such variants, but leaves scores of examples which had the possibilities of multiple readings due to (mode of) probability in writing, but they were read only in one way, It proves, that the differences of recitations is not due to writing but came into being by following of the traditions.⁴⁵ By making the Qur'ānic codex of the companions as touchstone, he mentions the differences in Qur'ānic *Maṣāihif* of 'Uthmān without any certified reference and even did not care to provide any authentic proof through genuine and reliable *Ḥadīth*.

DUNCAN BLACK MACDONALD (1863-1943)

Duncan Black MacDonald (1863-1943) was an American Orientalist. According to MacDonald the revelation received by

Prophet were not anything extraneous but it was a state within himself which has resulted from a prolonged thinking and observations and to which he sincerely believed to be the voice of Allah or an angel. He says:

It is evident that, from comparatively early days, he had trances; fell into fits in which he saw and heard strange things. There came to him voices, either, apparently, in a trance condition or when he was awake..... So there the voices came to him; there he even saw figures..... Now, the conception of possession by a spirit was a high possibility.⁴⁶

About the nature of compilation of the Qur'ānic text, he holds the view that "the Qur'ān is simply a collection of fragments gathered up from those trance utterances of Muḥammad. When we look at it, as it is in itself, we find that it is an absolute chaos, yet a chaos, curiously enough, with a mechanical arrangement.⁴⁷We find a great many of them couched in short, broken, jerky language, and we find a great many others couched in long, winding sentences, clumsy and lumbering to the last degree.⁴⁸ MacDonald describes the Qur'ānic style as being, "exactly the form of language that was used in heathen Arabia by the soothsayers"⁴⁹

REGIS BLACHERE (1900-1973)

Blachere, a well-known French Orientalist, born in 1900 AD, got his education in *Rabat* (Morocco) and received doctoral degree in 1939.

After that he was appointed as professor at the University of Sorbonne.⁵⁰ It is also said that Blachere has been serving as a minister of foreign affairs in the Foreign Ministry of France. Discussing his works Najib al-‘Aqiqi has mentioned his famous books. The most significant among them is (قواعد نشر و ترجمة النصوص العربية) and Translation of Qur’ān in French language which published in three Volumes in Paris in 1947 to 1952.⁵¹

Regarding the Qu’anic history, in his famous book “القرآن نزوله تدوينه “ (Al-Qur’ān Nuzūluhū Tadwīnuhū Tarjamatuhū wa Ta’tthīruhū), he discusses about the research in Islamic sciences and inclines to create doubts, suspicions and fallacies about the origin of the Qur’ān.⁵² Although his teachers think about Blachere that he is a modest and realistic research scholar. He is considered in the list of those persons who have just and matured approached.⁵³ But according to Dr. al-Tehami Nuqrah, Blachere left no stone unturned to create doubts and suspicions about Qur’ān. He claimed, despite the arguments of safety of the Qur’ān that Qur’ān was not written in the period of Muḥammad. In his view, during the revelations, the feelings of deep fear occupied him. Hence, it was difficult for him to dictate the revelations. Besides this, the Jews of Madina were in full control of all the resources of writings and there was a conflict between Jews and Muslims. By all these arguments, Blachere concludes that the compilation could not complete in the whole period of Prophet-hood and memorizing or learning Qur’ān by heart by simple relying on the memory was also not possible, he also expresses this doubt that some

trifle additions may be mixed up with Qur'ānic text which were considered Qur'ān in later times.⁵⁴

Blachere is of the view that Prophet (PBUH) was not keen interested in writings of revelations. The logics and reasons of his opinion are mere figment of his imagination that has no relations with reality by any stretch of imagination. It is a matter of great surprise that he has no traditional, logical or historical proof. Although, the arrangements adopted for compilation of Qur'ān were not, in any way, less than that of done by Holy Prophet (PBUH) for preservation of Qur'ān by memorizing it. He forbade his companions at first to write *Ḥadīth* only for this reason that the resources should be utilized only for writing of Qur'ān and the sayings of Prophet might not be mixed up with Qur'ān.⁵⁵ As there is saying of Holy Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ* by Muslim:

لا تكتبوا عنى غير القرآن ومن كتب عنى غير القرآن فليمح، وحدثوا عنى ولا حرج.⁵⁶

“Don't write except Qur'ān from me,
the one who has written except Qur'ān,
he should omit that, present them orally
from me, there is no fault in it.”

In the view of Muslims, Blachere is an Orientalist who evoked the doubts and suspicions about the definitive verses of Qur'ān which have not a whit of justice. A person who contends that the origin of Qur'ān was extracted from churches and monks and the stories mentioned in it were actually the famous short stories of the Arab peninsula, and so many others claims without evidences and

arguments. How can he be attributed with the qualities of justice-loving and moderate? Rather, it can be said that Blachere is a prejudiced and prepossessed Orientalist, who remained unsuccessful in understanding the Qur'ān as he himself admitted that non-Arab fall a pray to suspicions in understanding of Qur'ān.⁵⁷

ARTHUR JEFFERY (1892-1959)

Arthur Jeffery -an Australian-origin American Orientalist- professor of Semitic Languages at Columbia University and at Union Theological Seminary, was one of the great scholars of Islamic Studies. Apart from numerous articles in learned journals, Jeffery wrote two works that are considered more critical in their respective domains, in 1937 *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān : The Old Codices*, and in 1938 *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*. The latter was tour de force that reviewed about 275 words in the *Qur'ān* that were regarded as foreign. This survey led him to examine texts in Ethiopic, Aramaic, Hebrew, Syrian, Greek, Latin, and Middle Persian, among other languages. His research led him to look for and at manuscripts in the Middle East, including Cairo. Other works include *The Qur'ān as Scripture* (1952).⁵⁸ The most prominent research work of Arthur Jeffery was editing and research of *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif* by Ibn Abi Dāwūd. In his book “*Material for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān*” he tried to equate the *Maṣāḥif* of companions with that of ‘Uthmān (RA). Regarding the compilation of Qur'ān and its different recitation and multiple readings, he further compiled two manuscripts titled “*Muqddimatān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur'ān*”.⁵⁹

Jeffery pointed out almost more than six thousand places that were different from the *Mushaf of ‘Uthmān* (R.A.). He collected all these differences of *qira’āt* from the books of exegesis, lexicons and Arabic literature etc. For this purpose *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif* by Ibn Abi Dawud remained his basic source.⁶⁰ While presenting narrations and the versions of different recitations of companions and successors of companions rival to the *Muṣḥaf of ‘Uthmān*, Jeffery completely neglected this reality that all those companions whose *Maṣāḥif* are different from that of ‘Uthmān (R.A) favoured and forwarded the arranged Qur’ān of ‘Uthmān (R.A.), even some of them were directly member of that committee, for example Ubai Bin Ka’b (R.A.) was associated in accumulation of Qur’ān and ‘Ali (R.A.) particularly indorsed and praised this great work.⁶¹ As, Abū ‘Ubaid al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d.224 A.H.), quoted the statement of ‘Alī (R.A) as:

”لو وليت لفعت في المصاحف الذي فعل عثمان“⁶²

“If I were assigned this responsibility, I myself would do the same regarding Qur’ān as ‘Uthmān (R.A.) had done”

Jeffery in the preface of “كتاب المصاحف” followed his predecessor, Noldeke, Schewally, Bergistrasser and Pritzl in choosing Qur’ānic text as his subject of research, and specially mentioned some conclusions on the base of the book of Noldeke on the history of the Qur’ān. In his own view, these conclusions are extracted from the discussions of these Orientalists. By careful reading, we may find numerous fallacious and contradictory points. Jeffery did not take care to give logical or traditional arguments in all these researches. The sequence and order of Qur’ān has special importance in the topics along with the differences in the Codices of Companions and Qur’ān recitations, which Jeffery discussed in the preface of “*Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*” and in “*Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur’ān*”, he writes while discussing the sequence of Qur’ān:

فان علماء الغرب لا يوافقون على ان ترتيب نص القرآن كما هو اليوم في ايدينا من عمل النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم.⁶³

“The scholars of west are not agreeing on the present order of the definitive verses of Qur’ān as by the action of Prophet (PBUH)”.

There is a vagueness and obscurity in this statement of objection that “The sequence of the text of Qur’ān”, because the sequence of verses and the arrangements of *Sūrās* both are the parts of Qur’ān. It is very important to mention here that the Orientalists selected the sequence of the *Sūrās* and the verses of Qur’ān as the topic of discussion, so that they might prove Holy Qur’ān as a fallacious, faulty and unarranged book. In their views, Qur’ān is not according to that sequence in which it was revealed. As, Rodwell wrote in the preface of the translation of Qur’ān, that the present sequence of Qur’ān is according to the arrangements of Zaid Bin Thābit, during the accumulation of Qur’ān, as the verses of the Qur’ān was provided from different places he, compiled it in that sequence without any order and no historical connection or sequence was kept in mind at that time.⁶⁴

RICHARD BELL (1876-1952)

Richard Bell is one of the most important scholars among the Orientalists whose fame is beyond the boundaries. His translation of the Qur’ān⁶⁵ with the special rearrangement of Qur’ānic chapters is considered unique in Western literary circles⁶⁶. On the subject of Qur’ānic textual history, its origin and compilation process, he wrote another book with the title “introduction to the Qur’ān”⁶⁷, in which his focus lies on the origin, form, structure, style, compilation of *surahs*, their chronological order and sources of the Qur’ān. In the first chapter, he traces the historical situation in which Muḥammad (PBUH) started to proclaim the divinely ordained discourse and messenger ship. While introducing the edited work of Arthur Jeffery

on *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif* by Ibn Abi Dawud, Bell meticulously makes comparison of pre-“Uthmānic material and its ‘slight readings variations’ with that of ‘early European literary texts’. However, he concludes his view about the work of “Uthmān’s revision in a categorical that “On general grounds then, it may be concluded that the “Uthmānic revision was honestly carried out, and reproduced, as closely as was possible to the men in charge of it, what Muḥammad had delivered.”⁶⁸

He also delivered some lectures on the early environment of those days when Qur’ān revealed. These lectures later on got published in a monograph under the caption “The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment”.⁶⁹ This study provides a detailed description of the alleged sources for a new born religion Islam.

Richard Bell, has raised another issue that belongs to the matter of repetition, disordered arrangement of *Surahs* and verses in the Qur’ān. In an article⁷⁰ he, pointed out that at many places in the Qur’ān, there are passages of different *sūras* which do not connect with what precedes like “in *Surah* xxiii, v.101 does not have any connection with the passage of vv. 66 ff....the main idea of the two passages is the same. Both describe the effect upon the unbelievers of the actual coming of “punishment” upon them....There are other similarities between the two passages”.⁷¹ Bell also reviews the works of some eminent Orientalists like Schwally, Jeffery, Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838), Gustav Weil, Hirschfeld, Paul Casanova and others. After discussing some significant aspects on the authenticity and completeness of the Qur’ānic text, he asserts that “Modern study of the Qur’ān has not in fact raised any serious question of its authenticity.”⁷²

W. MONTGOMERY WATT (1909-2006)

Another very famous figure among the contemporary Orientalists is Watt Montgomery Watt who got mostly the influence of the views of Goldziher. Goldziher’s influence on Watt is obvious from the latter’s recognition...he [Goldziher] combined a sureness of judgment, and his many articles in learned journals on theological subjects are still

nearly all of the highest importance... so that with good reason he is generally regarded as the founder of the modern discipline of Islamic Studies.⁷³

If one looks at the work of Montgomery Watt, it must be said that, unlike many of his contemporaries, he is in his examination of Arabic sources on the whole extremely careful, and thorough, and has made some contributions to the details of life of the Prophet Muḥammad; one also observes some strange things. At the end of his book on Islam and Integration of Society he very generously concedes that Islam in the future may, after all, have some role to play in the world. But he says Islam “must admit the fact of its origins”? Namely, admitting and agreeing to the whole Orientalist thesis that the Qur’ān is nothing but a hotchpotch of quotations from the Torah, New Testament and other sources. In other words, that Islam should, or the Muslims should, voluntarily dissolve Islam and then they will have a role to play in the future of the world.⁷⁴ Montgomery Watt seems to be very active among those who called the text of Qur’ān, the creation of Muḥammad (PBUH). His objections give the smell of hostility and prejudice against Islam and Qur’ān like other Orientalists, further we need not to give importance to his artificial atmosphere and fictional discourse of reasoning, as the asset of research, because in his views “imaginary” possibilities and suppositions have more importance than reported narrations and evidences. In this regard, he only finds faults in fundamental and definite sources of Islam only on the bases of possibilities, for example, he expresses the possibility, while denying

the revelation, he asserts that “what seems to man from outside himself, may actually come from his unconscious”⁷⁵

He more explicitly distorting the Islamic theme of ‘*Wahī*’ expresses the possibility that the environmental elements of many years have influenced his (Prophet of Islam) passions and emotions so much that they might appear at time in the form of “revelation”.⁷⁶

As the purpose of Orientalists is to create doubts so, they emit such spitefulness that has no solid foundation. For example Montgomery Watt writes:

From an early point in his Prophetic career...
Muhammad thought of the separate revelations
he was receiving as constituting a single Qur’ān.
After he had been a year or two in Medina,
however, he thought of them as constituting, The
Book, which, it was his task to produce.⁷⁷

The concepts of Montgomery Watt and Bell are the primary steps to declare Qur’ān as tampered and distorted book. The thing that is hidden in the difference of the Book and al-Qur’ān, according to them, the safety of Qur’ān without any change and distortion is dubious and it is the purpose and aim of research of these Orientalists. Watt propagated the absence of *mu’awwadhatain* (معوذتين) in the Codex of ‘Abdullah bin Mas‘ūd (R.A.). In his view, Ibn Mas‘ūd (R.A.) did not consider these *Sūrās* as the part of Qur’ān,⁷⁸ besides this he presented a lot of objections on narrations regarding the compilation of the Qur’ān in the reign of Abū Bakr (R.A.).

After evaluation, the contents of the literature of Watt, we find that he consulted and followed mostly his teachers’ views like Richard Bell, Bull, Kaitani, Goldziher, Jeffery, Nicolson, Noldeke, Torry and beside this, Encyclopedia of Islam is the major source for his research writings. Although, we find the reference of *Al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* by al-Bukhārī in his writings but he took help from a French translation of al-Bukhari as he tried to comprehend Qur’ān from the translation of Richard Bell.⁷⁹

JOHN BURTON

The famous John Burton is one of the contemporary Orientalist who also selected the text of Qur'ān for his scholarly interest. He has written a book titled "The Collection of the Qur'ān". Some significant topics such as the compilation, codification, collection and the subject of annulling and abrogation of Qur'ānic verses have been discussed in detail. John Burton wrote this book with the cooperation of his companion, Dr. John Wansbrough.⁸⁰

Putting different objections on the compilation and accumulation, John Burton denied the presence of Qur'ān in a form of book in the period of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH), in this regard he writes that "its collection was not under taken until sometimes after the death of the Prophet".⁸¹ Relying on some traditions he adopts this idea that due to its incompleteness, the *tawatur* of Qur'ān is also affected.⁸²

On the base of saying of Zaid (R.A) in a tradition, "فقدت آية" (means I could not find the last two verses of *Sūra al-Touba*) John Burton asserts the distortion and incompleteness of the Qur'ān. After the reference of Zaid (R.A) he writes:

All these elements predispose one to an expectation that the edition prepared by Zaid might be incomplete The Qur'ān text which come down to us from 'Umar's day are unquestionably incomplete.⁸³

This notion established because of misunderstanding of the tradition of Zaid Bin Thābit (R.A) by John Burton and other Orientalists. The meaning of Zaid's statement is that while writing he could not find these verses from anyone. It doesn't mean that the verses of *Sūra al-Tauba* and *Sūra al-Aḥzāb* besides Abū Khuzaimah (R.A) and Khuzaimah Bin Thābit al-Anṣārī (R.A) were not learnt by heart by other companions of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) also.

John Burton has also discussed the issue of *Maṣāḥif of Ṣaḥāba* in detail in his book. He asserts that all *Maṣāḥif* attributed to companions, or other copies of the Qur'ān found in big cities or differences of multiple readings or recitations attributed to some individuals are invented by linguists later on.⁸⁴

It should be clear that John Burton tries to reach to conclusion about Qur'ānic text and its multiple readings which he has already formulated in his mind. For this purpose, he only picks those narrations which harmonize to his specific thoughts. Thus, the narrations which are contrary to his bent of mind are not considered for scholarship.

Concluding Remarks

Collection and compilation of Qur'ānic verbatim have always been an arena of controversy among the Orientalists regarding authenticity of the Holy Qur'ān. Through these objections Qur'ānic text has been a perpetual subject to frequent misgivings in the 20th century. It is an established fact that the method applied by Western scholars to determine the textual indiscretions of the Qur'ān, is totally different from that kind of understanding and wisdom, with which Muslim scholars have presented the solution of these complications. For Orientalists the bibliographical information, the reformation and the correction of historical events carry more importance and lie at the core of their goals. The current review study has been quantified for presenting the significant notions of mid eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries' Orientalistic understandings and approximations regarding the Qur'ān. It has also been observed that in the 20th century, almost the same approach in all Orientalists, and it is really a partial attitude in the field of scientific research and hardly justified.

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- ²¹ Having gone through the *Dīwāns of Imra’ul Qais*, the above mentioned couplets are not found.
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