



University of Tehran Press

Journal of Contemporary Islamic Studies (JCIS)

Online ISSN: 2645-3290

Home Page: <https://jcis.ut.ac.ir>

Orientalists and the Theory of Qur'ān Distortion

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ARTICLE INFO

Article type:
Research Article

Article History:
Received 31 May 2022
Revised 17 December 2022
Accepted 18 July 2023
Published Online 29 July 2023

Keywords:

Distortion,
Orientalists,
Narration examination,
Soundness of the Qur'ān,
Qur'ān's text.

ABSTRACT

The Qur'ān distortion or nondistortion is one of the old discussions of Qur'ānic sciences that has been debated since the time of the Prophet's (s) Companions. The Shī'a and Sunnī exegetes have favored the freedom of the Qur'ān from distortion in the introductory discussions of their commentaries in the light of this basic point. In addition to the Muslim thinkers' viewpoints and opinions, the orientalist have examined the Qur'ān from various angles, too, and one of their research domains is the topic of the Qur'ān and its distortion/ non-distortion, and it forms an important part of their Qur'ānic studies. The examination of the orientalist's approach to the distortion/ non-distortion of the Qur'ān and the reaction of Muslim thinkers in their evaluation and criticism of the orientalist's viewpoints is a novel horizon in the way to face the existing orientalist stances. The study at hand collected data via library research and analyzed the collected data via analytical-critical approach. The results showed that the existing grounds in the historical narrations that seemingly imply the occurrence of additive and reductive distortion are invalid in terms of their chains of transmission, content, and Islamic principles. The origin of most of the proposed theories is the lack of a correct understanding of the relationship between verses, which leads to the doubt that the Qur'ānic text suffers from disunity as a result of distortion.

Cite this article: Shamkhi, M. (2023). Orientalists and the Theory of Qur'ān Distortion. *Journal of Contemporary Islamic Studies (JCIS)*, 5 (2), 245-255. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jcis.2023.343737.1285>



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1. Introduction

One of the main principles in knowing and understanding the noble Qur'ān is attention to this point that if this heavenly scripture has been distorted during history or not? In other words, how valid is this text? If we accept that the words of this scripture are issues by God and accept that what is called the qur'ānic text has different readings or changes, the question that comes to mind is that if the existing Qur'ān is the same Qur'ān revealed by God and can be deemed as valid, or is it possible that the Qur'ān has gone through addition, reduction, or both? The discussion of the non-distortability of the Qur'ān is a highly importance discussion, because if the freedom of the Qur'ān from distortion is not proved, any argument based on the qur'ānic verses will come under doubt.

It seems that researching and reflecting upon the non-distortability of the Qur'ān is very important and undeniably required because it clarifies the reality of the discussion to the Muslims more than ever and responds the doubts of reformists about the validity of this divine scripture. One of the important grounds in the orientalist's research activities is the topic of the distortion of the Qur'ān. This article tries to find answers for the following question so as to clarify parts of the discussion of the non-distortability of the Qur'ān and criticize the reformists' viewpoints:

1. How many groups of Western thinkers exist about the theory of Qur'ān distortion?
2. How many classes of doubts exist about the Qur'ān distortion?
3. What reasons can be provided to examine and criticize the orientalist's doubts?

2. The orientalist's qur'ānic studies

As it was mentioned, the orientalist movement is an outlook to the East that follows certain goals. The Qur'ān-researching orientalist can be divided into the following types based on their activities and goals:

1. Extremist orientalist: in the first stage (before the World War I, they were busy writing rebuttals against the Qur'ān (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī, 2017, 130). An example is the Christian scholar John of Damascus (676-749) who formally adopted critical study of Islam and wrote books to reject it (Ḥamdī Ziqzūq, 1985: 19).

In the second stage, they adopted colonization and preaching after the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Some researchers believe that the first and most important purpose of orientalist at this time has been preaching (Fawzī, 1998: 31). Rudi Paret believes that the main purpose of the orientalist in the early years of the 12th century was preaching (Paret, 1967: 11).

Another important drive in the orientalist's studies was colonialism; the relationship between orientalism and colonialism is an undeniable historical fact (Ibid: 31).

2. Scientific orientalist: these came into existence in the past fifty years, after the defeat of the old colonization and appearance of new colonization. They appeared in the form of scientific departments, faculties, and majors of orientalism in the U.S., Europe, Israel, etc., and embark upon writing encyclopedias and seemingly scientific studies ('Aqīqī, 1964: 1148-1166).

Conducting numerous studies, translating fundamental books, printing manuscripts, and developing Islamic and Eastern books and codices are among the scientific services of the orientalist; however, they spread the seeds of distortion, disunity, and opposition to the Qur'ān and Islam in their works.

3. Muslim orientalist: according to some theorists, many orientalist have probed the Arabic language as the culture, literature, and civilization and have found the Qur'ān as its pinnacle, and have explored and studied it with scientific motivations only to know this scripture and enjoy it, and have given in great and praiseworthy works in this regard. Scientific motivation, with all its accessories, is the highest motivation and purpose of some orientalist ('Alī al-Ṣaghīr, 1999: 18).

3. Orientalist and distortion

The orientalist's viewpoints to the distortion of the Qur'ān are not the same:

3.1 Belief in the freedom of the Qur'ān from distortion

This group of orientalist have figured out the reality of this book and have discussed its genuineness. In order to prove their belief and the freedom of the Qur'ān from distortion, they have given in some reasons and evidences:

3.1.1 The implication of verses on the written state of the Qur'ān during the lifetime of the Prophet (s)

Maurice Bucaille is an orientalist that has accepted the divineness of the Qur'ān without any prejudice and believes that the noble Qur'ān testifies about its written state during the lifetime of the Prophet (s) (Bucaille, 1993: 177). Examples of Qur'ānic evidences he uses to support the freedom of the Qur'ān from distortion include “By no means (should it be so)! For it is indeed a Message of instruction: Therefore let whoso will, keep it in remembrance. (It is) in Books held (greatly) in honor, Exalted (in dignity), kept pure and holy, (Written) by the hands of scribes- Honorable and Pious and Just” (Qur'ān 80:11-16) and “An messenger from Allah, rehearsing scriptures kept pure and holy: Wherein are laws (or decrees) right and straight” (Qur'ān 98:2-3).

3.1.2 Scription of revelation during the lifetime of the Prophet (s)

Maurice Bucaille believes that the Qur'ān has been in the written form from the time of the Prophet (s). He gives in some verses as supporting examples, including Qur'ān 25:5; 56:77-80; 80:11-16; 85:21-22; 98:2-3. Relying on these verses, he also believes that the Qur'ān has been written during the lifetime of the Prophet (s) (Bucaille, 1993: 177).

3.1.3 Caliph's supervision of the Qur'ān collected during the lifetime of the Prophet (s)

According to Bucaille (*ibid*: 179-180) and Arberry (Arberry, 2003: 114). After the demise of the Prophet (s), the Caliphs' supervision is another evidence for the freedom of the Qur'ān from distortion. ‘Umar collected the Qur'ān into one volume and preserved it, and then gave it to his daughter Ḥafṣa at the time of his death. ‘Uthmān, the third Caliph, missioned a commission of experts to compare the manuscripts in order to come to one manuscript that has his name on it now. Thus, the examination of the genuineness of the Qur'ānic text was done with utmost precision. ‘Uthmān sent copies of the unique resulting manuscript to Islamic centers. Thus, according to professor Ḥamīdullāh, the present-day copies of the Qur'ān in Tashkent and Istanbul are attributed to ‘Uthmān (Bucaille, 1993: 179-180).

The revelations came down onto the Prophet (s) were from time and time and in pieces, and immediately after the revelation of a verse, He delivered it to his Companions and asked them to not only memorize it but also to write it and make copies of it. The Prophet (s) determined that the new revelation belonged to which part of the general text of the Qur'ān and should be written in which place. This way, the noble Qur'ān was written during the lifetime of the Prophet (s) and was memorized by hundreds of people (Arberry, 2003: 114).

3.1.4 Divine guarantee to guard the Qur'ān

Relying on the noble verse “We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption)” (Qur'ān :9), Arberry states that the divineness of the noble Qur'ān and its safeguarding from distortion has been guaranteed by God.

Moreover, in response to those who deny the freedom of the Qur'ān from distortion, he relies on the noble verse “Or they say: He hath invented it. Say: Then bring ten surahs, the like thereof, invented, and call on everyone ye can beside Allah, if ye are truthful!” (Qur'ān 11:13) and states that God has left open the door for challenge for all ages (Arberry, 2003: 115). Moreover, some orientalist such as Bucaille (Bucaille, 1993: 149-154), William Muir (1912: 14-29), and Friedrich Schwally (Blachere, 1986: 209) emphasize the non-distortion of the Qur'ān. they believe that the Qur'ān – with all its countless copies in vast Islamic countries – has not experienced changes in general and is the same among all denominations. Moreover, before World War I, some orientalist examined numerous handwritten manuscripts and printed copies of the Qur'ān throughout the world and concluded that the texts of all copies of the Qur'ān were the same and no difference existed in them that could imply occurrence of distortion in the Qur'ān (Bundāq, 1983: 24).

3.2 Lack of belief in the freedom of the Qur'ān from distortion

In the eyes of some orientalist, the Qur'ān is not a divine and heavenly revelation, but rather it is the adoption and adaptation of ideas, beliefs, and rituals of that time by a social genius, i.e., Prophet

Muḥammad (s). This approach is vividly observable in the most orientalist works (Durant, 1992, vol. 4: chapters 8 & 9; Watt, 1994: 19-48).

The famous orientalist Goldziher has made utmost effort to reduce the value of the great miracle (the noble Qur'ān). He has used the difference in Readings as a pretext to prove the existence of disagreement and disunity in the divine revelation (one that has been sent down from the skies) in an effort to remove trust in the heavenly revelation and the original manuscript of the Qur'ān (Goldziher, 1995: 304).

The basis of the thoughts of these individuals is that the existing Qur'ān does not match the Qur'ān revealed onto the Prophet (s) and has suffered different distortions in some cases. Thus, in this part, some of these viewpoints are examined and criticized.

3.2.1 Some orientalists believe that doubtlessly parts of the Qur'ān have been destroyed and the Qur'ān is not complete (Bell, 2003: 90; Juynboll, 2022: 376-379).

People such as Shari Lowin (Lowin, 2005, vol. 4: 449), Petrushevsky (Petrushevsky, 1984: 25), Burton (Burton, 2002, vol. 1: 351-361), and Noldeke (Buhl, 1933, vol. 4: 604-608) are orientalists who have claimed the occurrence of reductive distortion in the Qur'ān. Their claims are presented and investigated in the following lines.

3.2.1.1 The deletion of some verses of the Qur'ān chapters

According to this group of orientalists, Qur'ān 33 has been originally longer than Qur'ān 2, and according to some Companions, the Rajm (stoning) verse has been part of the Qur'ān but it has not been entered into its text (Blachere, 1995: 214-215). Moreover, they claim that the chapters Ḥafd and Khal' that existed in Ubayy b. Ka'ab were removed from the Qur'ān during the reign of Abūbakr and were not added to it (Burton, 2022: 117-118).

Analysis and criticism

1. The narrations presented to support the claims about Qur'ān 33 suffer from a kind of disagreement about the claimed verses. For instance, Ḥudhayfa deems the deleted verses to be 70, while 'Āyisha takes them to be 200 verses. Moreover, 'Umar and Ubayy take this chapter to be longer than the Qur'ān 2. The inaccuracy of these verses also brings to mind the question that how the Companions and scribes of the Prophet (s) forgot such a huge volume of a chapter or even did not right it ('Āmilī, n.d.: 345). Moreover, this assertion is suggested only by 'Umar b. Khaṭāb, while the Qur'ān cannot be proved by a solitary narration (Bukhārī, 1981, vol. 8: 33; Ibn Abī Dāwūd, 1996, vol. 4: 144-145; Ibn Māja, n.d., vol. 2: 853; Muslim, 1999, vol. 11: 193).

2. This sentence does not agree with the eloquence and articulateness of the Qur'ān. one of the conditions needed for the stoning sentence is having a spouse. Shaykh is also a title attributed to a person who has got to 40 years old. However, the claimed verse requires that the aged adulterer should be punished, no matter if he has got married or not, and a very young married man should not be stoned. Nonetheless, it is clear that such a ruling is fabricated and cannot be attributed to God's Book ('Āmilī, n.d.: 348).

3. The verse rhyme does not agree with that of the Qur'ān 33. Moreover, the ruling of the Rajm verse contradicts the Qur'ān 24:2. All in all, it is unlikely that the stoning ruling be suggested in the Qur'ān via revelation, because in the Ignorance Days, various types of polygamy was common and it was difficult to distinguish them from adultery (Bell, 2003: 9).

4. Lack of agreement with qur'ānic style, entailment of a prayer-like content, existence of linguistic problems (khal' is used for idols), and syntactic problems (yajfuraka, which is not clear how it can become transitive per se) prevent acceptance of these words as qur'ānic verses (Rāmyār, 1990: 350-353).

5. As mentioned above, the origin of the two claimed chapters Ḥafd and Khal' is a supplication in salāt that has been attributed the Prophet (s) and recorded by Ubayy b. Ka'b at the end of his manuscript. This has been a common act to write some supplications at the end of manuscripts (Bāqilānī, n.d., vol. 1: 397; Muḥammadī, 2006: 163-180).

6. The committee and representatives that were asked by 'Uthmān to unify the Qur'ān manuscripts recorded in the unique manuscript what was originally in the Qur'ān and abandoned other things. The act of this group shows that these two so-called chapters were extensively known as supplications rather than chapters (Ma'rifat, 1993: 130-141).

3.2.1.2 Destruction of parts of the Qur'ān in Battle of Yamāma

Muir (Muir, 1878: 38) and Burton (Burton, 2002, vol. 1: 351-361) are among the orientalist who have taken the Battle of Yamāma as a factor in the distortion of the Qur'ān. They claim that this incident moved Muslims to write the Qur'ānic text on sheets during the time of Abūbakr as they feared that more memorizers of the Qur'ān who had most of the Qur'ān in their minds could pass away and take their memorized texts with themselves into grave.

Analysis and criticism

1. The original version of this incident is introduced by Sunnīs in famous resources such as *Fath al-bārī* and *Tārīkh Ṭabarī* as a definitive and well-known happening (Ibn Ḥajar 'Asqalānī, 1988, vol. 7: 447; Ṭabarī, 1967, vol. 3: 29). In this event, 360 Emigrants and Helpers of Medina, 300 Emigrants residing in areas other than Medina, and 300 Successors of Companions were killed (Ibn Kathīr, 1987, vol. 2: 2).

2. Not all memorizers of the Qur'ān took part in this battle, and most of the participants of the battle were the reciters of the Qur'ān, from among whom some survived. The martyrs of this battle were mostly new converts, most of the Qur'ān was written in one way or another up to that time, and the demise of the memorizers did not mean that part of the Qur'ān was lost (Bell, 2003: 7).

3. A little reflection in the Sunnī narrations indicates that the purpose of narrators is to exaggerate the Caliph's deed in the compilation of the Qur'ān (Iskandarlū, 2006: 259-260).

4. According to some researchers, the Caliphs feared if the Qur'ān reciters and memorizers were killed in the Battle of Yamāma and the reading of the Qur'ān would be entangled with mistakes and faults (Ḥujjatī, 1981: 269).

As it was mentioned, the existence of some narrations about the compilation of the Qur'ān and other reasons lead to the fact that the Qur'ān was written and compiled during the lifetime of the Prophet (s).

3.2.1.3 Deletion of Nūrayn and Parts of the Qur'ān 24

Shari Lowin (Lowin, 2005, vol. 4: 450) and Goldziher (Goldziher, 1995: 2) are among people that believe that part of the Qur'ān 24 and a chapter called Nūrayn have been deleted from the existing manuscript. Noldeke introduces the Shī'a as one of the groups who believe in distortion of the Qur'ān. He suggests the reasons for this as their belief in the deletion of the two chapters Nūrayn and Wilāyat from the Qur'ān (Noldeke, 1909: 327).

Analysis and criticism

1. With regard to the Nūrayn chapter, the Shī'a scholars believe that this chapter is fabricated, as none of the Shī'a scholars has entered it into his books and has not discussed it; on the other hand, the style of this chapter has no agreement with the Qur'ānic verses (Mu'addab, 2008: 33).

2. It seems that these orientalist's resources for this claim is the book *Dabistāni madhāhib*, which definitely is not a scientific book. The author of this book is not mentioned in any Rijālī book. Based on what Riḍāzāda Malik, who has done a study on this book, has obtained from the text of this book, the author of the book has been alive up to the year 1690. He takes the attribution of this book to Muḥammad Ḥasan Kashmīrī weak and – due to many reasons – unreal (Kaykhusru, 1983, vol. 2: 22).

3. According to some researchers, no one has seen the book *Al-Mathālib* as the source in which this chapter is mentioned, and no interpreter has reported the existence of such a book ('Āmilī, n.d.: 367-368; Ma'rifat, 1993: 163).

4. Regis Blachere, the French orientalist, has deemed this chapter to be fabricated and emphasizes that its style is an imitation of the Qur'ānic style (Blachere, 1986: 210).

5. When expressing his views to the Shī'a, Goldziher generally relies on books that are scientifically invalid and unauthoritative. In this case, he has suggested the foregoing doubts based on two interpretive books attributed to the Shī'a, i.e., *Bayān al-Sa'āda fī maqāmāt al-'ibāda* and a commentary called *Tafsīr 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm Qumī*.

Āqā Buzurg Tihirānī is the first person to talk about the inaccuracy of attributing the whole existing commentary to 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm Qumī, and believes that Abulfaḍl 'Abbās b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim, the pupil of 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm, whose name is written at the beginning of the existing commentary, has

entered narrations of Abū al-Jārūd – the narrator of some content in the commentary from Imām Bāqir (a) and others – from the middle of the first volume of the commentary into it (Qumī, 1984, vol. 4: 303); however, there is no evidence for this stance and ‘Abbās b. Muḥammad Qāsim is one a teacher of book’s author that which reaches ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm’s through the book’s author (Āqā Buzurg Tihrānī, n.d., vol. 4: 304-305). ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm Qumī has had a commentary, but there are evidences that the existing commentary attributed to his is in fact a commentary by another author.

3.2.1.4 Deletion of the name of Imām ‘Alī (a)

Some orientalist believe that the volume of the Qur’ān (before the development of the ‘Uthmānic manuscript) has been larger than the existing manuscript, and because of some reasons, the verses about Imām ‘Alī (a) were removed from the Qur’ān during the process of the unification of Qur’ānic manuscript. In order to prove his theory of reductive distortion, Noldeke relies on narrations that express the deletion of the name of Imām ‘Alī (a) from the Qur’ān (Noldeke, 1909: 326).

Blachere is among the people who accuse Shī‘a of taking the common clause “hādihā širātun mustaqīm” to be originally “hādihā širātu ‘alayyin mustaqīm,” and that after the demise of the Prophet (s), the name of seventy opponents and hypocrites were removed from the existing Qur’ān by some people (anti-‘Alī movement) (Blachere, 1986: 209). He believes that the phrase “fī ‘Alī” (in or about ‘Alī) that has been about Imām ‘Alī (a) has been removed from verses such as “Believe in what Allāh Hath sent down” (Qur’ān 2:91) and “But Allāh beareth witness that what He hath sent unto thee” (Qur’ān 4: 166).

Petrushevsky and Kohlberg believe that the justification of the Shī‘a for the absence of Imām ‘Alī’s (a) name in the Qur’ān is that the name of ‘Alī (a) was removed by the assistant of Zayd b. Thābit in the process of unification of the Qur’ānic manuscripts. Thus, they do not take the formal text of the Qur’ān – which is accepted by the Sunnīs – as impeccable and believe that this text does not fully match the originally revealed text (Petrushevsky, 1984: 286).

Analysis and criticism

1. Imām Khumaynī has given in a comprehensive opinion in this regard. He asserts that if the name of Ahl al-Bayt (a), especially Imām ‘Alī (a), was stipulated in the Qur’ān, they would rely on this point in their arguments based on the Qur’ānic verses, and there would be no reason for the Prophet (s) to introduce them via any specific act (Khumaynī, 1994: 245-246).

2. Most of the narrations that suggest the removal of the names of Imāms (a) from the Qur’ān come from extremist narrators. Thus, knowing extremists and their activities is important in interpreting these narrations. Accordingly, the congruity of the content of the distortion narrations and the extremists narrators’ beliefs – in the light of the backgrounds that existed then – casts doubts on these narrations, even if their chains of transmission are deemed as sound (Dānishnāmiyi Jahāni Islām, 2001, vol. 6).

3. It is evident that this claim of Blachere about this Shī‘as is nothing but an accusation. Numerous traditions have been narrated from Imāms (a) against this claim. For instance, it is narrated by Suwayd b. ‘Aqla that Imām ‘Alī (a) said, “By God! ‘Uthmān did nothing about manuscripts without consulting us. He concluded with us about readings and said, ‘I have been told that some people say “my reading is better than yours” and this is something near disbelief.’ I told him, ‘What is your opinion?’ He said, ‘I think there should be one manuscript in the hands of people and no disagreement should be among them.’ We said, ‘It is a good idea”” (Suyūfī, n.d., vol. 1: 10).

4. It is noteworthy that once, people such as Samura b. Jundab started subjective interpretation of the Qur’ān in order to impose their opinions on others, and finally semantical distortion occurred (Ma‘rifat, 1993, vol. 2: 13-16; Ṭāhirī, 2006: 56). This is a definitive issue accepted by Muslims. However, the distortion that orientalist claim is verbal distortion that is not accepted by Muslims.

3.2.2 Additive distortion

Some doubts cast by the orientalist imply the distortion of the Qur’ān by addition, which includes numerous cases. Some of these are as follows.

Addition of some verses and chapters to the Qur'ān

Some individuals such as Watt (Watt, 1994: 21) believe that the verses “Muḥammad is no more than a messenger: many were the messenger that passed away before him. If he died or were slain, will ye then turn back on your heels? If any did turn back on his heels, not the least harm will he do to Allāh; but Allāh (on the other hand) will swiftly reward those who (serve Him) with gratitude” (Qur'ān 3:144) and “Truly thou wilt die (one day), and truly they (too) will die (one day). In the end will ye (all), on the Day of Judgment, settle your disputes in the presence of your Lord” (Qur'ān 39:30-31) have not been part of the Qur'ān but have been put into the Qur'ān later. Buhl has accused Shī'a of additive distortion (Buhl, 1950: 561).

Noldeke (Noldeke, 2008: 252-256) and Blachere (Blachere, n.d.: 35) have taken the absence of the Qur'ān 1, 113, and 114 in Ibn Mas'ūd's manuscript as a reason for the distortion of the Qur'ān and state that these chapters have been two supplications added to the Qur'ān.

Analysis and criticism

1. Shī'a and Sunnī scholars agree that additive distortion has not occurred.

2. In the interpretations about the Qur'ān 23:14, the story of Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ has been explained completely; it is not the same as presented by Watt (Kāshānī, 2002, vol. 4: 430; Samarqandī, n.d., vol. 2: 476; Ṭabrisī, 1986, vol. 17: 180-181; Zamakhsarī, 1987, vol. 3: 179).

3. It is appropriate that before presentation of this discussion, they looked for the cause of revelation of these noble verses. According to what has been mentioned about the cause of revelation of the Qur'ān 3:144; this verse was revealed after the doubt in the hearts of Muslims after Battle of Badr and the rumor about the death of the Prophet (s). The second set of verses (Qur'ān 39:30-31) are also intended to prepare the Muslims' hearts for the demise of the Prophet (s) (Zamānī, 2006: 269).

4. In criticism of Buhl's assertion, it can be said that his claim is baseless. Moreover, the additive distortion cannot be accepted by a claim that does not have any sound narrative chain of transmission and is not referred to in any of the authoritative Shī'a and Sunnī resources.

5. Qur'ān 1 is among the first chapters revealed in Mecca. There is a narration from Imām 'Alī (a) transmitted by Ṭabrisī via Sa'īd b. Musayyib according to which the Qur'ān 1 is the first chapter revealed in Mecca (Ṭabrisī, 1986, vol. 10: 613).

6. In the presentation of their ideas about distortion, this group of orientalist have pursued only damaging and invalidating the Qur'ān, because they have relied on weak reasons and baseless content in an effort to prove and impose their opinions, with no valuable result. Noldeke and some other orientalist have not understood well the correct meaning of some specialized terms of Qur'ānic sciences such as abrogation, cause of revelation, etc., and using their incorrect grasp have cast doubts about the Qur'ān (Dihqānī, 2017: 100).

Doubting the genuineness of abbreviated letters

Noldeke believes that the abbreviated letters are in fact the beginning or ending of the names of the manuscript owners. He later gave up this theory. He has named another orientalist (Hirschfeld) as supporting his theory (Noldeke, 2008: 141-143).

Analysis and criticism

1. Various opinions have been given about the abbreviated letters by exegetes and Qur'ān researchers (Suyūṭī, n.d., vol. 1: 71; Zamakhsarī, 1987, vol. 1: 29-31; Zarkishī, 1957, vol. 1: 167-169). However, none of these opinions is similar or even close to the assertions of Noldeke and other orientalist. The question is then that how orientalist have made such a claim about these letters without any narrative support and valid chain of transmission?

2. How is it possible that the names of Imāms (a) – with their divine and religious position and status and the efforts they made about the Qur'ān and religious issues – are not mentioned in the Qur'ān, but the name of Companions are mentioned in it?

3. In addition to the Prophet (s) and Infallible Imāms (a), Companions also made great efforts to protect the Qur'ān from distortion. Now, how is it possible that they have made such a grave mistake without any objection from Imāms.

4. It is not reasonable at all that the owners of various manuscripts write the initial letters of the names of their contemporary figures in their manuscripts. Thus, it is necessary to return to the same Islamic theories, extract various opinions, and compare them (Şubhī Şālih, 1988: 358).

Doubting the genuineness of the text of the Qur’ān

Goldziher is one of the orientalist that has cast doubt on the genuineness of the Qur’ān in his works and has doubted the night journey of the Prophet (s) (referred to in the Qur’ān 17:1). He believes that this has been only a dream, could have not historically happened in the real world, and disagrees with the messengership claim of the Prophet (s) (Goldziher, 1995: 4).

Analysis and criticism

1. Some individuals have rejected the nocturnal Ascent and have said that this has not occurred, while some have attributed this to Kharijites (Ibn Shahr Āshūb, 1960, vol. 1: 177). It is evident that this viewpoint is false and unacceptable based on the consensus of Shī‘a and Sunnī about nocturnal Journey incident. Most Muslim thinkers believe that the Prophet (s) have ascended from the beginning to the end of the journey – even into the skies – with both his body and his soul (Fakhr Rāzī, 1995, vol. 20: 292; Ibn Jawzī, 2001, vol. 3: 109-110; Subhānī, 2006, vol. 1: 381-382; Ṭayyib, 1995, vol. 8: 216-217).

2. Narrations that introduce the Ascension of the Prophet (s) to has happened in dream have faulty chains of transmission and are weak. To criticize the content of these narrations, some scholars have said that dream is experienced by both good and bad humans, and even corrupt humans can have dreams. Moreover, dreams is nothing among people other than imagination, and cannot be used as the basis of argumentation (Ṭabātabā’ī, 1997, vol. 13: 24). Based on these narrations, the Ascension of the Prophet (s) is not important. However, his Ascension was a wonderful incident, and the best evidence for this stance is the use of the word “subhān” (glory) at the beginning of the Journey verse, which implies the occurrence of an unusual and miraculous event. Moreover, the history of Islam also supports the fulfilment of Ascension in real, non-dream conditions. We read in history that when the noble Prophet (s) talked about Ascension, polytheists intensely rejected it and took it as a pretext to attack him (Mūsawī, 2017: 33).

3. Nocturnal journey of the Prophet (s) to the heavens is supported by widely narrated Shī‘a and Sunnī traditions. The denial of suchlike issues, interpreting and justifying it as spiritual ascension, or taking it as a dream comes from the lack of information about Imāms’ (a) narrations or weakness of belief (Majlisī, 1989, vol. 18: 289-290).

4. The question of Ascension is not limited to the Qur’ān 17:1, and Goldziher’s doubt has been made without any research background. He has expressed this stance without any examination of the Qur’ānic evidences. Exegetes have referred to other verses of the Qur’ān that imply the occurrence of this event. These include Qur’ān 84:84; 6:75; 10:94; 43:44; 2:284-286; 53:13-18, and parts of Qur’ān 93 and 94.

4. Gharānīq myth

Some orientalist believe that gharānīq myth has been added to the Qur’ān 53:19-21 (Holt, 1998: 127; Watt, 1965:76-80). That is, the two sentences “They are beautiful, high-ranking gharānīqs, and their intercession is anticipated” are added to the Qur’ānic verses “Have ye seen Lāt and ‘Uzzā, and another, the third (goddess), Manāt? What! for you the male sex, and for Him, the female?” (Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1995, vol. 3: 386; Huwayzī, 1995, vol. 3: 516).

Analysis and criticism

1. One of the reasons for the rejection of Gharānīq myth is that if these two sentences are added, the set of verses lose their order. One of the features of the Qur’ān is the coherence of the verses of a chapter that form a set; any movement, addition, or reduction disorders the set. How is it possible that the Qur’ān ridicules their gods at the beginning of this chapter and says in a mocking manner, “Did you see those three idols?!” but then changes that ridiculing tone to a great praise and says that they are expected to intercede, and then once again attacks them potently and says that these are just names and God has not given them any power (Rāmyār, 1990: 152).

2. Gharnīq and gharnūq literally means a kind of water bird or a white-skinned and beautiful young person; the word gharānīq has never been used in Arabic language and poems about idols, and none of the two foregoing meanings are congruent with the meaning of idols (Subhānī, 2006, vol. 1: 344).

3. As the name indicates, gharānīq refers to nothing but a myth, and it is narrated only by Ṭabarī (Ṭabarī, 1967, vol. 2: 338).

4. The content of this doubt is manifestly contrary to the infallibility of the Prophet (s) – who, according to the Qur'ān, does not speak based on his whims of soul – and with the style and content of the Qur'ān 53 and the immunity of Qur'ān against distortion (Qur'ān 53:3-4; 41:42).

Conclusion

Orientalists have examined the noble Qur'ān from the various angles and have two different viewpoints about its distortability or non-distortability. Some have relied on some arguments to clearly support the immunity of the Qur'ān against any distortion, while others have relied on sources with faulty chains of transmission and invalid content to suggest the distortion of the Qur'ān. Deletion and reduction, distortion by addition, displacement and misspellings, and doubts in the genuineness of the qur'ānic text are some of the most important claims made by the orientalist believing in the distortion. Reference to definitive narrative and qur'ānic resources and evidences proved that the no distortion has occurred in the qur'ānic text. Thus, the opinions of some orientalist about the occurrence of distortion in the Qur'ān is false. Most orientalist have suggested this claim because of false premises such as taking the Qur'ān as non-revealed, using weak sources of Sunnī authors, believing in the imitation of the Qur'ān from the Bible, believing in the superiority of Christianity over Islam, etc. The origin of most of the suggested theories is the lack of a correct understanding of the relationship between the verses, which leads to the doubt that the qur'ānic verses are disunited and have gone through distortion.

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