
Effect of Orientalism on Al-Jabri Regarding the Qur'anic Sciences

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Abstract

The debate on the relationship between religion and modernity continues to echo in all the academic and intellectual circles. Nonetheless, the source of modernity, which penetrated Muslim world and is now popularly accepted, is a set of western philosophies and perceptions that arose in an atmosphere completely different from the Islamic one. Like all Muslim modernists, Mohammed 'Abed Al-Jabri believes in the compatibility of Islam with modernity, calling for a reformation and reinterpretation of Islam and its heritage to cope with the updates in the world. Accordingly, effect of Orientalism has been incredibly evident on Al-Jabri's conceptions regarding Islamic philosophy and Qur'anic sciences. The core content of Al Jabri's critical project on the Arab-Muslim heritage is the series of criticizing the Arab mind at epistemological, political and ethical levels.

Keywords:

Modernity, Arab-Muslim Heritage, Orientalism, Islamic Philosophy, Qur'anic sciences, Epistemology.

لا يزال النقاش حول العلاقة بين الدين والحداثة يتردد في جميع الأوساط الأكاديمية والفكرية. إلا أن مصدر الحداثة، التي اخترقت العالم الإسلامي وتلقى حاليًا قبولًا شعبيًا، هو مجموعة من الفلسفات والتصورات الغربية التي نشأت في بيئة تتناقض تمامًا مع البيئة الإسلامية. على غرار جميع الحداثيين المسلمين، يؤمن محمد عابد الجابري بتوافق الإسلام مع الحداثة، داعيًا إلى إصلاح وإعادة تفسير الإسلام وتراثه للتعامل وفق المتغيرات في العالم. ومن ثم، كان تأثير الاستشراق واضحًا تمام الوضوح في مفاهيم الجابري التي تتعلق بالفلسفة الإسلامية والعلوم

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القرآنية. لعل جوهر مشروع الجابري النقدي للتراث العربي الإسلامي يتمثل في سلسلة نقد العقل العربي التي أنتجها على المستويات المعرفية والسياسية والأخلاقية.

الكلمات المفتاحية

الحداثة، التراث العربي الإسلامي، الإستشراق، الفلسفة الإسلامية، العلوم القرآنية، نظرية المعرفة

Introduction

Qur'an is the primary source for Islamic belief and legislation, thus the constitution of Muslims' life both on the individual and social level. Unsurprisingly, most of the works of Orientalism have been revolving around the Glorious Quran. Consequently, modernist works of Islamic thinkers on the Arab-Muslim cultural Heritage, mainly driven from Qur'an, have been greatly affected by the conceptions of Orientalists on the Quranic Studies. Accordingly, issues like questioning the authenticity of the Qur'an, subjecting it to Western critical approaches, calling for a contemporary exegesis of the Qur'an, and rejecting its traditional exegeses dominate the scene.

The effect of Orientalism was more evident in Al-Jabiri's views on the Quran than many other Arab thinkers. His views on the Quranic Sciences are the most shocking due to questioning some decisive issues through an Islamic voice so that only specialists could detect them.¹ However influenced by many Orientalists regarding the Quranic Studies, Al-Jabiri was largely influenced by Goldziher and Noldeke. He, in addition, emulated their attitude of criticizing the Quranic Studies through the skeptical approach to the authenticity and validity of the Qur'an and the alleged origin of some Quranic issues to the old Scriptures.

Investigating the works of Orientalists on the Quranic Studies, their works pivot about a central point, which is casting doubts on the divinity of the Glorious Quran. In the opening of an English translation of the Qur'an published in London in 1736, George Sale, the British Orientalist, wrote: "Muhammad is the author of the Qur'an and its main originator, this is undisputed. Although Muhammad's cooperation with others to write it was achieved, it is necessary to believe that such cooperation is not an easy thing, because his followers never denied it."² The same view was held by many Orientalists to the extent that Ignaz Goldziher, the well-known Hungarian

Orientalist, went so far as to blame the Muslim Ummah for their belief in the divinity and sacredness of the Qur'an. He expressed that there is no book of legislation (tashri') recognized by religious groups—with theological recognition—that it is a text revealed, in which the early days of its transmission came in a chaotic and uncertain form as the Qur'an found.³

Although Quranic Studies were addressed by Al-Jabiri in his critical works on the Arab mind, a special interest was exclusively given to them in his book, "Madkhal Ila Al-Quran Al-Kareem" (An Introduction to The Glorious Quran). Through his book, Al-Jabiri presented many shocking views often at odds with the traditional views on the Quranic Studies. For instance, having introduced some traditional definitions for the Qur'an, he concluded that only a Muslim who believes in the Qur'an as the words of Allah should believe in these definitions.⁴ He added that since these definitions could not be accepted by non-Muslim scholars, this admits review and reconsideration.⁵ The matter extends to criticizing some characteristics of the Qur'an. In addition, Al-Jabiri claimed that some Muslim school of thought regards Tawatur (frequent transmission of the Qur'an) and miraculousness of the Qur'an as subject to consideration.⁶

Al-Jabiri had two motives, both internal and external, behind reviewing the Quranic Studies and introducing his special views. The internal motive is represented in the insufficient responses to the questions posed by Orientalists, though the external motive appears in the intellectual influence of Orientalists.⁷ Expressing his motives, Al-Jabiri asserted on the importance of raising these questions, despite of the fundamental differences between the Qur'an and the Bible, within the Muslim world as already raised within the Western world.⁸ Therefore, similar views were proposed by some Orientalists and Al-Jabiri regarding issues like Qira'at (Methods of Quranic Recitation), compilation of the Qur'an, the Abrogation, illiteracy of the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace from Allah be upon him, arrangement of the Suras, miracles of the Prophet mentioned in the Qur'an, and the resemblance between Qur'an and old Scriptures.

Illiteracy of the Prophet

Some Orientalists cast doubts on the issue of the Illiteracy of the Prophet Muhammad, claiming that it was no sufficiently evidence-based so that Muslim scholars have not unanimously agreed on this issue. Theodor Noldeke, the very well-known German Orientalist, held that "The question whether he could read and write has been much debated among Muslims, unfortunately more with dogmatic arguments and spurious traditions than authentic proofs."⁹ Other Orientalists, however, went further to dismiss the

issue of the Illiteracy of the Prophet outright, claiming that it was the only way to claim divinity and sacredness for the Qur'an. Thomas Patrick Huges claimed in his book "The Dictionary of Islam" that the Prophet Muhammad pretended not to be good at writing and reading so that the Qur'an could be used as a miracle that proves that Muhammad is an Apostle of God."¹⁰

Along the same route, the issue of illiteracy of the Prophet Muhammad attracted considerable attention in Al-Jabiri's critical views on the Quranic Studies. He questioned the issue of illiteracy of the Prophet Muhammad, rather claimed that the Prophet Muhammad was literate. Moreover, Al-Jabiri turned a deaf ear to the classical exegeses of the Qur'an, reinterpreted and redirected some verses of the Qur'an in contrast to their established meanings, and based his claim on some historical narratives in nearly 20 pages.¹¹ Al-Jabiri claimed that the Prophet Muhammad used to travel to Levant for trade and that required that he was literate. He, in addition, claimed that the word "Ummi" illiterate mentioned in the Qur'an, like that in

"الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ النَّبِيَّ الْأُمِّيَّ الَّذِي يَجِدُونَهُ مَكْتُوبًا عِنْدَهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ...."

"They are' the ones who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whose description they find in their Torah and the Gospel"¹² is an Arabized word which traces its origin to the Jewish culture indicating the non-Jewish.

Quran Authenticity Following Its Compilation

Orientalists cast many doubts on the authenticity of the Qur'an due to the alleged changes that penetrated its content especially at the time of its compilation during the reign of Abu Bakr and 'Uthman Ibn 'Afan. These doubts include, but are not limited to, the Methods of Recitation (Qira'at) and the role of Zaid Ibn Haretha. Orientalists questioned why if the Qur'an had been written since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, and why are the materials that have been written not sorted under the care of the Prophet Muhammad?¹³ Although many Orientalists expressed their doubts through similar questions, Noldeke and Goldziher went deep in their criticism.

Goldziher argued that the Qur'an has an uncertain form due to its different Methods of Recitation (Qira'at) caused by the absence of a period in the Qur'an, so that each reader has the authority to determine the reading according to his wishes.¹⁴ This alleged authority Goldziher noticed while investigating the style of the Qur'an. Quoting some examples from the Qur'an to invigorate his claim, Goldziher assumed that the difference in reading is due to either the absence of dots or the absence of diacritical marks or pronunciation.¹⁵ On the other hand, detailed elaboration on the

issue of Qira'at was provided by Noldeke in spite of his claim that this issue was overlooked by Muslims. Moreover, Noldeke denied the interpretation of the Seven Forms of Recitation as different dialects.¹⁶

The "Seven Forms", according to Noldeke, was a solution Prophet Muhammad had recourse to when facing a dispute among his companions. Noldeke unequivocally declared, "On one occasion, when a dispute arose between two of his own followers as to the true reading of a passage which both had received from the Prophet himself, Muhammad is said to have explained that the Qur'an was revealed in seven forms."¹⁷ Invigorating his assumption, he criticized the situation of the Qur'an at the time of the Prophet, being written in scattered pieces, which made it vulnerable and subject to change. Accordingly, Noldeke asserted that "When Muhammad died, the separate pieces of the Qur'an, notwithstanding their theoretical sacredness, existed only in scattered copies; they were consequently in great danger to being partially or entirely destroyed."¹⁸

Furthermore, oral transmission of the Qur'an was harshly criticized by Noldeke, since the net result of this attitude, according to him, was alteration. He added that "Many Muslims knew large portions by heart, but certainly no one knew the whole; and a merely oral propagation would have left the door open to all kinds of deliberate and inadvertent alterations."¹⁹ Being the personal scribe of the Prophet Muhammad and the chief recorder of the Qur'an text, Zaid Ibn Thabet was entrusted with authenticating and collecting both oral and textual Quranic revelation into one single manuscript. In pursuit of seeking any sign which makes a change in the Quranic text, some Orientalists questioned about the role of Zaid in authenticating and collecting the Qur'an.

The procedure of the committee headed by Zaid to authenticate the Qur'an was also criticized by Noldeke. He added that "Zaid read off from the codex which he had previously written, and his associates, simultaneously or successively, wrote one copy each to his dictation."²⁰ Moreover, the role of the committee headed by Zaid was, according to Noldeke, ineffective so that confusion about some parts of the Qur'an still dominated the scene. In addition, Noldeke claimed that Zaid omitted some original parts of the Qur'an. He concluded that "Uthman's Qur'an was not complete. Some passages are evidently fragmentary; and a few detached pieces are still extant which were originally parts of the Qur'an, although they have been omitted by Zaid."²¹

On the other hand, Al-Jabiri concurred with Goldziher and Noldeke in terms of the authenticity of the Qur'an, as he asserted that the Qur'an had

been subject to alteration due to some reasons. Resoundingly, he declared that alteration sneaked into the Qur'an through many ways, and that was admitted by Muslim scholars under some titles like interpretation (Ta'weel), Methods of Recitation (Qira'at), The Seven Forms of Recitation (Al-Ahruf Al-Sabaa'h), and the issue of Basmala (In The name of Allah the Most Gracious the Most Merciful).²²

Reinforcing his assumption, Al-Jabiri interpreted some verses in the Qur'an in a way that goes contrary to the classical interpretations. Commenting on the verse

﴿ مَا نُنسِخُ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِهَا نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِّمَّا أَوْ مِثْلَهَا ۗ أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

قَدِيرٌ ۙ

“If We ever abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten, we replace it with a better or similar one. Do you not know that Allah is Most Capable of everything?”²³, Al-Jabiri declared that all Muslims scholars unanimously agreed that there were some parts, even Suras, dropped from the Qur'an, rather some scholars claimed that they were lifted by Allah.²⁴ He always referred to the compilation of the Qur'an at the time of Uthman as the turning point in the authenticity of the Qur'an. Echoing the views of Noldeke, the state of the scattered pieces of the Qur'an prior to its compilation was clear evidence that Qur'an was most likely subject to alteration. Al-Jabiri viewed that the alteration happened while compiling the Qur'an at the time of Uthman or prior to it, since the committee in charge of authenticating and compiling the Qur'an were not infallible.²⁵ Justifying his shocking views, he claimed that the Qur'an itself testifies for the probability of its alteration, deletion or abrogation.²⁶

Chronology of the Qur'an

Orientalists, including Noldeke, Goldziher and Régis Blachère, criticized the traditional arrangement of the Suras in the Qur'an and invented a new approach of arrangement through a study organized the chronology of the Qur'an and a literary criticism method. The literary criticism method used by Noldeke is outlined in determining the characteristics of the surah in each period, though the chronological order is evident through dividing the letters of the Qur'an into four revelation periods, three Meccan periods and one Medina period.²⁷ Gustav Weil (1808-1889) who is considered the pioneer of this study organized the chronology of the Qur'an into four calendar periods, followed by his fellow orientalists such as Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930),

Regis Blachère (1900-1973) , Sir William Muir (1819-1905), and Hubert Grimme (1864-1942).²⁸

The efficiency of the chronological order was always referred to in comparison to the impracticality of the traditional arrangement, especially in the context of the possibility of alteration of the Qur'an. Noldeke emphatically declared that "In the arrangement of the separate sections, a classification according to contents was impractical because of the variety of subjects often dealt with in one sura. A chronological arrangement was out of the question, because the chronology of the older pieces must have been imperfectly known, and because in some cases passages of different dates had been joined together."²⁹ The traditional order was harshly criticized by Noldeke as being arbitrary since only focused on the length of the passages, thus unworkable for conveying the meanings. As a result, he stressed that "The pieces were accordingly arranged in indiscriminate order, the only rule observed being to place the long suras first and the shorter towards the end, and even that was far from strictly adhered to."³⁰

Similarly, Al-Jabiri adopted the methodology of the Orientalists regarding the order of the Qur'an, giving preference to the chronological and thematic approach over the agreed-upon traditional order. Issues like abrogation, Methods of Recitation, and compilation of the Qur'an seem to be an introduction to justify this unfamiliar attitude. With a glimpse into Al-Jabiri's book "Al-Madkhal", especially the tenth chapter, the chronological order of the Qur'an would be obviously evident, in addition to issues concerned with the criteria of the chronological order, highlighting its significance and superiority. Al-Jabiri commenced by questioning about the criteria of arranging the Qur'an and claiming that the traditional order of the Qur'an was dictated by the committee entrusted by Uthman with compiling the Qur'an.³¹ Therefore, he justified his approach by desacralizing the traditional order and proving its human nature.

Echoing the Orientalists, Al-Jabiri based his understanding of the Qur'an on the difference between Makki Suras and Madani Suras and on dividing Makki Suras into periods, as in Noldeke's and Blachère's works.³² Revealing the aim of this approach, Al-Jabiri assumed that he attempted to study the Qur'an corresponding to the biography of the Prophet Muhammad.³³ There is no clearer evidence than Al-Jabiri's book entitled, "Fahm Al-Quran: Al-Tafseer Al-Wadeh Hasb Tarteeb Al-Nuzul" (Understanding The Quran: The Clear Interpretation According To The Chronological Order). Commenting on the traditional order, Al-Jabiri held that some Suras could be excluded from the criterion of length, asserting on the special position of Surat Al-

Fateha.³⁴ It is noteworthy that the same view was held by Noldeke when he declared that “The short opening sura is so placed on account of its superiority to the rest.”³⁵

Abrogation in the Qur’an

Abrogation (Naskh) is one of the main reasons why Orientalists and some modern Islamic thinkers criticized the authenticity of the Qur’an. Abrogation in the Qur’an could be defined as the phenomenon of a later verse changing or altering a ruling established by a verse revealed earlier, either in whole or in part.³⁶ Orientalists refused to consider the issue of abrogation, even though referred to in the Qur’an, since they asserted that there are some contradictions within the content of the Qur’an. Orientalists held the view that the Prophet Muhammad invented the issue of Abrogation to get over these contradictions.³⁷ However, a clear statement about their view on Abrogation was proposed by Noldeke, as he considered abrogation as an invented solution by the Prophet Muhammad to respond to the contradictions within the texts of the Qur’an.

Noldeke explicitly declared that the Prophet did suppress whole sections or verses, enjoining his followers to efface or forget them, and declaring them to be “abrogated.”³⁸ Moreover, the criticism extended to include the Preserved Tablet (Al-Lawhu ‘l-Mahfuz), since Muslims believe in it as the heavenly preserved record of all that has happened and will happen, contains the predestination. Accordingly, Orientalists assumed that when the text of the whole book is supposed to have been written from all eternity upon a tablet in Heaven, it means that there are contradictions in the text preserved in Heaven.³⁹ Another criticism was made by Orientalists to the Prophet’s ability to memorize the full text of the Qur’an, so that he forgot some parts. Some Orientalists held the view that the Prophet made the concept of “Abrogation” to hide his mistakes in long Suras due to his bad memory.⁴⁰

Al-Jabiri concurred with the Orientalists in terms of rejecting the issue of abrogation, however he went further to introduce new interpretations to abrogation and its types. He rejected the existence of abrogation in the Qur’an, claiming that it should be understood instead as a progressivity of rulings like that from General (‘Aam) to Specific (Khas), Absolute (Mutlaq) to Restricted (Muqaiiad) and other rulings, so that these rulings should consider the state of Muslims to cope with the updates.⁴¹ Commenting on the verse:

" مَا نَنْسَخُ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِهَا نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِنْهَا أَوْ مِثْلَهَا ۗ أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ "

“If We ever abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten, we replace it with a better or similar one. Do you not know that Allah is Most Capable of everything?”⁴², Al-Jabiri introduced a new interpretation to the word (Aya) as a miracle instead of a verse as in the traditional exegeses.

Since this verse is mentioned in the context of talking about the Jews, Al-Jabiri asserted, in pursuit of rejecting the abrogation in the Qur’an, that abrogation should not be interpreted out of this context. Henceforth, he assumed that abrogation in this verse refers to the Torah, so that “We replace it with a better or similar one” should refer to the legislation revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.⁴³ Furthermore, Al-Jabiri supported his claim by his critical views on the types of abrogation in the Qur’an. Some interpreters believe that we have three types of Naskh (abrogation):

1. Naskh al-hukm dun al-tilawa (removing rulings without words),
2. Naskh al-hukm wa al-tilawa (removing both ruling and words), and
3. Naskh al-tilawa dun al-hukm (removing words without rulings).⁴⁴

Commenting on the second type, Naskh al-hukm wa al-tilawa (removing both ruling and words), Al-Jabiri asserted that this would amount to establishing a vacuum in the Qur’an.⁴⁵ However, while referring to the first type, Naskh al-hukm dun al-tilawa (removing rulings without words), he held that this would amount to contradictions in the Qur’an.⁴⁶ Regarding the third type, Naskh al-tilawa dun al-hukm (removing words without rulings), he assumed that this is not from the Qur’an, since the standard content according to him is the Qur’an since it was compiled at the age of Uthman.⁴⁷

The Miracles Mentioned in The Qur’an

Orientalists denied the existence of any material miracle mentioned in the Qur’an like The Night Journey and Ascension to Heaven (Al-sra’ Wal Mi’raj), Inshiqaq Al Qamar (The Moon Split Asunder) and others. On the other side, Al-Jabiri went along with the Orientalists denying all the material Miracles in Islam except for the Qur’an. He pursued their approach of (Ta’weel) re-interpreting the texts, although he drew different conclusions. Their attitudes on the miracle of The Night Journey and Ascension to Heaven could be used as a clarifying example.

While criticizing the miracle of The Night Journey and Ascension to Heaven, Orientalists tended to relate this incident to some following historical events in the Muslim world, especially those related to Al-Masjid Al-Aqṣā in Jerusalem. Henceforth, there were attempts by Orientalists to

reject the importance of Islamic Jerusalem in Islam by denying the existence of Al-Masjid al-Aqṣā in Islamic Jerusalem. These attempts were based on either their inability to understand some Quranic terms or challenging the existence of Al-Masjid al-Aqṣā.⁴⁸ Commenting on the verse:

"سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي أَسْرَىٰ بِعَبْدِهِ ۗ لَيْلًا مِّنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَا الَّذِي بَرَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ ۗ لِنُرِيَهُ ۗ
مِنَ آيَاتِنَا ۗ إِنَّهُ ۗ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ"

"Glory be to the One Who took His servant 'Muḥammad' by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque whose surroundings We have blessed, so that We may show him some of Our signs. Indeed, He alone is the All-Hearing, All-seeing"⁴⁹, the Orientalist Sam Shamoun argued that it is confusing to relate this verse to the mosque in Islamic Jerusalem.⁵⁰

Furthermore, Orientalists asserted that the reference to Al-Masjid Al-Aqṣā was added only centuries after the death of the Prophet, while others translated the word "Al-Aqṣā" as the farthest instead of the name of the mosque in Jerusalem. Shlomo Dov Goitein, the German-Jewish Orientalist, claimed that identifying Jerusalem as the site of the Nocturnal Journey was not mentioned in the early decades of Islam, even when the glorification of Jerusalem was a primary objective of the Umayyad dynasty.⁵¹ Other Orientalists criticized the status of Al-Masjid Al-Aqṣā in the early Islamic history, especially at the Prophetic era, as it had no influential role either to the spiritual or mundane aspects.

Daniel Pipes, the American historian, asserted that by arguing, "Where does Jerusalem fit in Islam and Muslim history? It is not a place to which they pray, not once mentioned by name in prayers, and it is connected to no mundane events in Muhammad's life. The city never served as capital of a sovereign Muslim state, and it never became a cultural or scholarly centre. Little of political import by Muslims was initiated there."⁵² As a result of their misunderstanding of Quranic terms like "Al-Aqṣā" being translated as the farthest, Orientalists attempted to suggest places inside Arabia instead of Al-Masjid Al-Aqṣā in Jerusalem. For Lactantius, the Christian apologist, held that it was apparently identified with places inside Arabia: either Madinah, or a town called Ji'ranah, about ten miles from Makkah, which Muḥammad visited in 630 CE. Palestine had not yet been conquered by the Muslims and contained not a single mosque.⁵³

Along the same route, Al-Jabiri insisted on denying all the material miracles in Islam, considering Qur'an as the only miracle that supports the Prophethood of Muhammad, may the blessings and peace from Allah be

upon him. The approach of rationality Al-Jabiri built his conceptions on has been predominantly evident in all his views, even about the Qur'an, since he considered it as a miracle only on the basis of its rationality. Al-Jabiri unequivocally declared that the Qur'an is the only evidence for the Prophethood of Muhammad, not the material miracles, and that the Quranic premises are appropriate to the rationality, unlike the style of Torah and Injeel which is based on irrational supernatural issues like the parting of the red sea, bringing the dead back to life, and a rod turned into a serpent.⁵⁴

Since the only accepted criterion for Al-Jabiri is rationality, and the Qur'an already mentions the material miracles referred to in Torah and Injeel, he had to reject those miracles in the Qur'an through his alleged rational interpretation. With regard to the miracle of The Night Journey and Ascension to Heaven, Al-Jabiri asserted that it happened to the Prophet as a dream while sleeping only with his soul not his body, which is not an irrational or supernatural issue.⁵⁵ Many questions were raised as to why Al-Jabiri insisted on rejecting the miracles and the unseen. The answer could be provided by some Muslim scholars who assumed that Al-Jabiri intended to exaggerate the influence of the mind over the revelation for the sake of adapting religion to the Western civilization, which is entirely based on rationality, thus conflicts with the unseen and divine aspects of Islam.⁵⁶

Resemblance Between the Qur'an and The Old Scriptures

One of the most widespread allegations among the Orientalists is that the Qur'an is not original as to its content, since it borrowed its themes from the old Scriptures; namely Torah and Injeel. The motive behind this allegation is to criticize the authenticity of the Qur'an and prove its human nature, thus the net result of this attitude is that the Qur'an is clearly apocryphal and a mixture of foreign sources. Invigorating their assumption, the Orientalists focused mainly on the resemblance of some aspects between the Qur'an and the old Scriptures. Notably, this is an old allegation used first by polytheists against the Qur'an during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace from Allah be upon him. Allah says in the Qur'an:

”وَقَالُوا أَسْطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ اكْتَتَبَهَا فَهِيَ تُمْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِ بُحْرَةً وَأَصِيلًا”

And they say, “These revelations are only ancient fables which he has had written down, and they are rehearsed to him morning and evening”,⁵⁷

Goldziher held the view that the Qur'an seeks to absorb the teachings of the previous divinely-revealed books. He based his assumption on two premises; namely the outward relationships in trade between Muhammad before being appointed as a Prophet and the resemblance between the five

pillars of Islam and similar basic elements in Judaism and Christianity.⁵⁸ Goldziher, in addition, gave examples to the rituals of prayer which have similarities with eastern Christian traditions such as prostration, kneeling and ablution. In addition to fasting and its resemblance with fasting in Judaism on the tenth day of the first month.⁵⁹ Moreover, the theologian Hendrik Kraemer proposed the same view as he assumed that some of the contents of the Qur'an are obtained from the Old Testament.⁶⁰

In the introduction of an English translation of the Qur'an, George Sale asserted that the Prophet Muhammad cooperated with others to write the Qur'an and that his followers never denied it.⁶¹ However, Noldeke concentrated more on the histories in the Qur'an and where exactly similarities could be found in the old Scriptures. He added that "These histories are chiefly about Scripture characters, especially those of the Old Testament. But the deviations from the Biblical narratives are very marked. Many of the alterations are found in the legendary anecdotes of the Jewish Aggada and the New Testament Apocrypha."⁶² Furthermore, Noldeke asserted that the Prophet Muhammad was the originator of the Qur'an, and these similarities were found due to the direct relationships between him and Jews and Christians. He clearly expressed that "Even in the rare passages where we can trace direct resemblances to the text of the Old Testament, there is nothing more than might readily have been picked up in a conversation with any Jew or Christian."⁶³

The resemblance between the Qur'an and the other divinely-revealed books; Torah and Injeel, had a privileged position in the thought of Al-Jabiri. He reflected on the histories in the Qur'an and concluded that the only original contribution of the Qur'an regarding these histories is its own special presentation. Al-Jabiri asserted that the Quranic originality and creativity appear only in its style while presenting the histories previously mentioned in the old Scriptures, therefore this contribution could be achieved simply through presenting the histories of Torah with a similar Quranic style.⁶⁴ He asserted on the role of the Qur'an in confirming the histories in Torah and Injeel. Correspondingly, Al-Jabiri said that all the histories recounted by the Qur'an regarding the Prophets sent to people of Israel largely correspond with the histories in Torah and Injeel, since the Qur'an was revealed as a confirmation to what was revealed in Torah and Injeel.⁶⁵

Indeed, Qur'an was not only revealed as a confirmation to the previous Scriptures, it has been a supreme authority over them. Allah says:

"وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيِّمًا عَلَيْهِ..."

“We have revealed to you ‘O Prophet’ this Book with the truth, as a confirmation of previous Scriptures and a supreme authority on them...”⁶⁶ In addition, the Qur’an abundantly asserted on the alteration of the pervious Scriptures. In the context of talking about the people of Israel, Allah says in the Qur’an:

"يُحَرِّفُونَ الْكَلِمَ عَن مَّوَاضِعِهَا ۖ وَنَسُوا حَظًّا مِمَّا ذُكِّرُوا بِهِ..."

“...they distorted the words of the Scripture and neglected a portion of what they had been commanded to uphold...”⁶⁷ Then comes the role of the Prophet Muhammad towards the previous Scriptures. Allah declares:

"يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولُنَا يُبَيِّنُ لَكُمْ كَثِيرًا مِّمَّا كُنْتُمْ تُخْفُونَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَعْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ ۖ قَدْ

جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُّبِينٌ"

"O People of the Book! Now Our Messenger has come to you, revealing much of what you have hidden of the Scriptures and disregarding much. There certainly has come to you from Allah a light and a clear Book" ⁶⁸ Consequently, Al-Jabiri interpreted the Qur’an being “a supreme authority on previous Scriptures” as it an authority to amend their distorted contents especially in terms of the pure Monotheism and the prophecies of the advent of the Prophet Muhammad, thus amending the distortions in the previous Scriptures is restricted only to doctrinal issues, and has nothing to do with the histories and other issues.⁶⁹

Conclusion

Al-Jabir’s views on the Qur’anic sciences are the most shocking due to questioning some decisive issues through an Islamic voice so that only specialists could detect them. He reproduces many of the views proposed by the Orientalists regarding the authenticity of the Qur’an in his book “Madkhal Ila Al-Quran Al-Kareem”. He concurs with Orientalists in denying the abrogation, the material miracles, and the Illiteracy of the Prophet Muhammad. In addition, he disputes the authenticity of the Qur’an due to abrogation, the compilation of the Qur’an, methods of Recitation (Qira’at) and the seven forms of the Qur’an. It is noteworthy that most of his views are borrowed from Noldeke and Goldziher, although he proposes different premises while reinterpreting some Qur’anic verses.

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- ⁵ Ibid, 12.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Okhraz, Ta'athur Al-Mufakereen Al-'Arab, 251.
- ⁸ Al-Jabiri, Madkhal Ila Al-Quran Al-Kareem, 16.
- ⁹ Nöldeke, Theodor. "The Qur'an," Sketches from Eastern History. Trans. J.S. Black. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892.
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- ¹² "Quran.com", The Clear Quran, Translated by Mustafa Khattab, 7:157
- ¹³ NazarFadli, Muhammad Faisal, Triansyah Fisa, "Orientalists And Their Study Of The Qur'an", Jurnal Ilmiah Teunuleh ,The International Journal of Social Sciences. Vol 1, Issue 2, Dec 2020. E-ISSN: 2746-4393, 90-91.
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- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Nöldeke, "The Qur'an," Sketches from Eastern History.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Al-Jabiri. Madkhal Ila Al-Quran Al-Karem, 222.
- ²³ "Quran.com", 2: 106.
- ²⁴ Al-Jabiri. Madkhal Ila Al-Quran Al-Kareem, 223.
- ²⁵ Ibid, 232.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Ahmad Syukron, Nikmatul Khairiyah, "Chronology of the Qur'an According to Theodor Nöldeke and Sir William Muir (Analysis of the History of the Qur'an and Life of

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- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Al-Jabiri, Madkhal Ila Al-Quran Al-Kareem, 215.
- ³² Okhraz, Ta'athur Al-Mufakereen Al-'Arab, 261.
- ³³ Al-Jabiri, Madkhal Ila Al-Quran Al-Kareem, 245.
- ³⁴ Ibid, 234.
- ³⁵ Nöldeke, "The Qur'an," Sketches from Eastern History.
- ³⁶ Justin Parrott, "Abrogated Rulings in the Qur'an: Discerning their Divine Wisdom", (November 15, 2018), Edited: October 24, 2022, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/abrogated-rulings-in-the-quran-discerning-their-divine-wisdom>
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- ⁶³ Ibid.
- ⁶⁴ Al-Jabiri, Madkhal Ila Al-Quran Al-Kareem, 392.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid, 239.
- ⁶⁶ "Quran.com", 5: 48.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid, Quran.com, 5:13.
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