Critical Analysis of the Most Important Methods of Orientalists' Revelation Studies

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Abstract
The issue of revelation is one of the important and essential concepts of monotheistic religions that has always been considered and discussed by the thinkers of the Qur'ānic sciences. In recent centuries, with the increase of studies exploring Islam in the West, one of the arenas for the activity of the orientalists has been this hypothesis that some of the contents of the Qur'ān have been borrowed from the earlier religious and literary books. Explicating this issue is essential in order to prove the rightfulness of Islam and the Qur'ānic revelation as well as its superiority over all the other divine religions. Using the descriptive-analytical method and with a critical approach along with gathering and analyzing the organized data, the study at hand examines the most important methods of orientalists' revelation studies, including the historical criticism which has developed in the realm of criticism of the Testaments. It covers a wide range of criticisms such as textual, formal, linguistic, literary, and so on. To the author of the present article, the methods of orientalists' revelation studies are contrary to the Islamic thought, and each of their principles faces critical faults. The most comprehensive and firmest hypothesis that has been proposed so far as to the origin of the Qur'ān is propounded by the Qur'ān itself. It is a hypothesis which is supported by many narrative and intellectual reasons, and is the best account and interpretation for the truth (with all of its features) extant in the Qur'ān. Research's findings show that Western researchers and orientalists have put forward the existing hypotheses about the origins of the Qur'ān by resorting to these principles as well as considering the similarities that exist between the Qur'ān and the former sources like the Torah and the Bible. None of these hypotheses are accepted by Muslims, and their claims contain mythological problems even based on their own foundations.

Keywords: Qur'ānic revelation, methods of orientalists' revelation studies, method of historical criticism, phenomenological method, comparative method.

Introduction

The noble Qur'ān is known as the last produce of divine revelation. As the miracle of mission of the last divine Messenger, Prophet Muḥammad (s), it is a book in Arabic and is the first and the most important reference of Muslims for religious knowledge, principles, and legislations. In Muslims' beliefs, the noble Qur'ān is out of the direct and pure revelation; that is, it is secure from any deviation and interference by non-God, and is revealed to the Prophet of Islam (s) during 23 years and that he pronounced it to the people with no addition or reduction. The Qur'ān is a book that has no mistake and contradiction; it is a text which belongs to all the eras and never becomes obsolete. Although in recent years (under the influence of the new approaches by Western researchers in examining the holy texts) some of

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the Islamic researchers have propounded new viewpoints about revelation and the role of the Prophet in compiling the Qur'ān, God and His revelation are still generally believed by Muslims as the only sources of the noble Qur'ān.

In contrast, to many non-Muslims, the Qur'ān is a book that is like the other written texts by humans which is provided by the Prophet of Islam (s) via using other sources. In examining and sometimes opposing the Qur'ān, they doubt about it to be out of revelation. This way of dealing and opposing has been present as long as the history of the Qur'ān itself. The Qur'ān has pointed out this opposition in many verses, and there are many historical narrations about it in the books of interpretation. The article at hand attempts to examine and explicate the methods of orientalists' revelation studies.

Review of the Literature

Investigations show that in the recent four centuries, many orientalists have discussed the issue of orientalists' revelation studies. Most of them have had a critical attitude as to the sources of the Qur'ān and Islam; in some cases they have tried to prove the unoriginality of the divine verses via the dependence of the Qur'ānic concepts and stories on the former faiths and books. Boldly it can be said the volume of the work done in this arena has been so huge that, in the recent century, researchers of the Qur'ān and Muslim scholars have been made to answer these doubts. According to the investigations done, it can be said that no independent research has so far been done about the orientalists' revelation studies. However, some sporadic and peripheral studies in Arabic and Persian have been carried out regarding the methods of orientalists' revelation studies, which can come of use a bit. In the following, it has been tried to point out the most important studies in this realm (which are in the form of theses and articles):

- PhD dissertation with the title «Jaryān shināsīyi Qur'ān pazhūhīyi mustashriqān dar īyālāti muttaḥidiyi Āmrikā bā ta'kīd bar sayri taṭawūr, rūykardhā, mabānī wa rawishhā» which was presented in the first term of 2019 in the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth Specialized University. In this dissertation, the most important methods of orientalists' Qur'ān studies are examined and criticized rigorously.
- An article with the title «Barrisī ma'nāyi waḥy az manẓari mustashriqān», written by 'Abd al-Riḍā Baqī, which is published in the journal Qur'ān Pazhūhīyi Khāwarshināsān, No. 17, in the summer of 2011. In this article, the origin, meaning, and foundation of revelation from the view of the orientalists have been examined and criticized severely in order to clarify: what is the orientalists' perception of the Qur'ānic revelation? What is the foundation of this perception? What is the source of that perception and this foundation? And what does this group of orientalists seek by their insistence on this perception and its suggestion to others?

This issue matters a lot because if it is not dealt with properly and its necessity is not mentioned, there is possibility for the dubious and opportunistic persons to deny the revelation and suggest it as the words of the Prophet (s) himself and as a result, refute the Qur'ān to be a miracle. Then, this would be a prelude to deny all the Islamic knowledge, the origin of Islam, and divine revelation. Explication of this issue is necessary so that the rightfulness of Islam and divine revelation and its superiority over all the other divine religions can be proved.

Lexicology (method)

The root of the word «method» is from Greek; it is made of the word meta (after) and the word odos (way). Metaphorically, it means a planned way, a clear fashion, and an organized

trend to carry out the dealings. A scientific method, in a very broad sense, is a way of accepted general process in sciences in its general sense (including the humanities). (Stausberg, 2011: 4)

> In its technical sense, research methods are techniques to gather, analyze, or deliver the data systematically in the scientific studies. Although there is always room for initiatives, these processes or techniques usually follow a plan, routine, or design. (Ibid: 5)
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> If we see methods as the mediums of recognition and collections of rules which enable us to reach a goal, then research methods, in a general sense, would be tools for gathering data as well as perceiving, describing, and judging the theory.
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> The choice of research methods is in some way affected by the perspective of the researcher. Research methods or strategies also lie in broader frameworks of theoretical or philosophical perspectives which are oftentimes called paradigms.
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> Various research paradigms provide different ways to connect the ideas, social experiences, and social realities.

The most important methods of orientalists' revelation studies

method of historical criticism

Methods of historical criticism are of the oldest and mostly used methods, particularly in the studies of religious texts. The roots of historical criticism date back to the Renaissance (centuries of 15 and 16 CE), and has always seen changes, reformations, and improvements. This method grew in the centuries of 17 and 18 CE, and reached its culmination in the centuries of 19 and 20 CE. (Fitzmyer, 1989, vol.5: 247-248; Wagner, 2008: 246-247)

There is discrepancy in the definition and range of this method. Nonetheless, the historical criticism, resulting from the historical criticism of the Testaments in the West, investigates and criticizes a text from five aspects: 1) criticism of text's chain of transmission; 2) literary criticism; 3) criticism of text's content; 4) criticism of text's form; and 5) criticism of text's creator. In other words, the first criticism asks about the text's chain of transmission and its authenticity. The second criticism asks from where the creator of the text has come with it and from where he has related it. The third criticism asks how much the content of the text is true according to the scientific, philosophical, historical, and suchlike data. The fourth criticism asks about the style and mode of the text. In addition, the fifth criticism asks about the author, his condition, and the era of his living (Jalīlī Sanzīqī, 2013: 85-86). The common point of these branches is a general agreement to the effect that texts should be interpreted based on their historical condition, that is, in the light of the literary and cultural traditions and arrangements of their own time. (Collins, 2005: 4)

The branches which are formed out of the historical criticism (particularly in the criticism of the Testaments' texts) and which affect a critic's historical judgment as to a text are:

- Textual criticism, like the method of historical criticism itself, is more based on the classical philology, i.e., historical and comparative linguistics. It deals with the transfer of the Bible's text with its original language, the ancient manuscripts of it, and also translations as well as interpretations which are related to it (which will be discussed in a separate section later in the present article).
- Source criticism seeks to identify and examine the historical background and the probable sources of the text or work. (Wagner, 2008: 250-1)
- Literary criticism, which is a branch of the Bible's historical criticism, deals with the nature, features, and various literary genres of a text. In other words, it analyzes the text

or work according to its general structure or design as well as its literary style and form (Ibid: 250). By this, it tries to collect indications as to the date of gathering, writer, and the application of various genres of the text. A literary identification of the text is a prelude to the interpretation and perception of the text. It helps to clarify issues like the writer, date of writing, and whether some parts of the text have been added. (Sulaymānī, 2000: 103-104)

- Next is the form criticism. In the view of those who use this method, each text, particularly the literary texts, is comprised of story, admonition, fable, prayer, supplication, and so on. At first, via a literary criticism, parts of a text are determined. Then, using a historical criticism, the foundation upon which a part, e.g., a story, is made and the course it has taken to reach its final form is examined. All of this process is called form criticism, which is a combination of literary and historical criticisms. (Ibid: 104)

Perhaps, the most important difference between the literary criticism and form criticism is that in the literary criticism, the researcher pays attention to the interior content of the work, in addition to its exterior form and structure. The works of John Wansbrough, particularly the book "Qur'ānic Studies," is one of the instances that uses this combination of the two methods, which will be distinctly discussed in the section of the method of literary criticism.

- Next is redaction criticism. This method of criticism as for the religious texts is based on two primary principles: first, the authors of religious texts have redacted what they have seen and heard based on their own certain beliefs. Second, these texts are a representation of the certain ambiance that was present in the Islamic society at the time of their development. Findings of the redaction criticism are effective in determining the authenticity of the texts, setting dates for their appearance and development, and also one's historical judgment of the mentioned texts. (Karīmīnīyā, 2008: 178)

In sum, it can be said that in historical criticism, what are examined are the era of the author and the time of writing the text; historical and social contexts of its appearance; backgrounds and roots regarding the author's thoughts or school of thought; the probable sources of the text; and so on. Moreover, the content of the text is investigated in the framework of history, society, and the policy which was dominant over the time and place of text's development. Finally, the text is analyzed with an evolutionary perspective, that is, gradual editing and development of the text in the base of the history. In this method, text is considered a produce which is completely historical, whose content can be analyzed by examining its temporal and spatial contexts. ('Imādī Ḥā'irī, 2014: 11-14)

From the aforesaid branches, two cases, i.e., the method of textual criticism and the method of literary criticism, are explicated here owing to the orientalists' more attention to them and their application in the Qur'ānic studies.

1. Method of textual criticism

Method of textual criticism, which deals with the transfer of the Bible's text with its original language, the ancient manuscripts of it, and also translations as well as interpretations which are related to it (Hawting, 2006, vol.5: 555-557), is one of the most common methods in historical criticism, particularly for the holy texts. Historically, this criticism, which is part of the Bible's criticism, is to identify the extant manuscripts of a text as well as its various translations and interpretations. Furthermore, it has to identify, at least, the main text or the more authentic text via comparing the extant texts with each other and examining them with using new methods. Although the origin of historical criticism of the Bible belongs to the past centuries, the textual criticism is considered a new scientific method. (Sulaymānī, 2000: 102)

A kind of confusion can be seen among the Western thinkers when it comes to the relation between the historical criticism and textual criticism. On one hand, the textual criticism is considered a subset of the historical criticism. On the other hand, it seems that some others have considered the criticism of the text more important, and consider the other methods such as historical criticism as well as the phenomenological criticism as the subsets of the analysis of text's content ('Imādī Ḥā'irī, 2014: 11-14). Or, they consider this method a combination of some other methods and because of this some have named the general form of this method the "method of logical eclecticism" (Small, 2011: 5). Also to define textual criticism, some have said: a science and art which, based on the common sense and the application of logic, seeks to identify the most valid form of the wording of a text. (Wegner, 2008: 24)

However, to James Bellamy, the simplest definition for the textual criticism is that it is to correct the mistakes of the text. (Bellamy, 2006, vol. 5: 237)

In any way, tracking and examining the history of a text's transition and identifying the deviations and corrections incurred upon it (via comparing its various manuscripts), in order to bring back the original text, can lead to the production of a critical version of the aforesaid text. Then, a text would be offered to the reader which is expurgated from all the deviations and nonconformities made by the transcribers as well as the later additions. (Stausberg, 2011: 349)

Next to the restoration of the original text, exploring and explicating the historical development of the text can be cited as the second goal of textual criticism. (Small, 2011: 161)

2. Method of textual criticism and the Qur'ān

Among those Western researchers who have studied the Qur'ān, Richard Bell is one of those using this method in the Qur'ānic studies (Sa'īd, 2019: 153-154). However, the most explicit and newest work, perhaps, is the book "Textual criticism and Qur'ān manuscripts" by Keith Small, the British researcher, which is in need of a serious and precise investigation by Muslim thinkers. This is because contrary to the opinion of some Muslim researchers, traces of a polemical and cruciferous attitude can be seen in the opinions of Small. (Small, 2011: 12)

Also among the American researchers, James Bellamy can be pointed out. He does not have an independent book as for this realm, but, from 1973 to 2002 (using the method of text analysis), has pointed out some of these so called "textual changes of the Qur'ān" in some articles and has suggested some corrections (Karīmīnīyā, 2008: 361). His most important article as for this arena is "textual criticism of the Qur'ān" which is published in the Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān, by MacAuliffe as the editor-in-chief. (Bellamy, 2006, vol. 5: 237-252)

Bellamy says that the thinkers of ancient literature have divided the process of textual criticism into three stages: 1) attaining a text at first and setting it as the base; 2) assessing that text in order to clarify whether it is the best extant manuscript of that work or not and, if yes, to identify its mistakes; and 3) correcting its mistakes. If the work is done well, the result should be a rectified version which is closer to the original work of the author. (Ibid: 237)

He says: since the standard, Egyptian manuscript of the Qur'ān (1924 CE) is edited very well and also that the other extant manuscripts of the Qur'ān are flawed in their primary editing, then there is no need to procure such a manuscript of the Qur'ānic text, and we set that very manuscript as the base. (Ibid)

About the accuracy and acceptability of the third stage (that is, correcting the mistakes which exist in the text) of the Qur'ān's text, Bellamy sees some conditions necessary: 1) semantically, the proposed correction should convey the meaning of the text in a better way; 2) the corrected item should agree with the style of the Qur'ān; 3) it should also be justifiable regarding the orthography and epigraphy; and 4) it should be able to show how the mistake in the text was done in the first place.

The most important item from the above is the benchmark of semantics. (Ibid: 239)

Criticism and investigation

a. According to the orientalists, the method of textual criticism has not provided trustable, practical results yet. Even the texts of the New Testament, which are recorded way better than the other ancient texts (with over 4000 manuscripts) and have been examined via textual criticism more than any other text from the later ancient era, cannot be surely restored. (Stausberg, 2011: 349)

b. One of the main conditions to carry out the textual criticism is the critic's familiarity with the original language of the very text. This familiarity should be to the extent that the critic could have a proper interpretation regarding the philology as well as a logical and useful perception of the text and its contents regarding the linguistics. In this type of the scientific studies, one cannot refer to the translations of a certain text – despite their being useful and facilitative – as the evidence. (Ibid: 351)

Now the question arises how many non-Muslims who actively study the Qur'ān from this perspective have such a condition.

Also in the textual criticism, the viewpoints differ wherein sometimes a certain viewpoint is criticized and condemned by the others. For instance, about the doings of some persons like Barth, Blachere, and Bell in the realm of textual criticism, James Bellamy says: their way was to assess the internal relations between the chapters and also their possible disconnections as well as to discover the possible additions to the main text. Their main presupposition was also based on the change of the original order of the Qur'ān's words, phrases, and verses. (Bellamy, 2006, vol. 5: 240)

To criticize them, he then says: these persons face difficulty to attain the fourth accepted condition as for the correction of the text (that is, explication of the origin of the mistake or deviation) (ibid). On one hand, they cannot claim it was the work of the Prophet (s) himself because this means that the meaningfulness of the verses of the Qur'ān was of no importance to the Prophet (s), a claim which is not acceptable. On the other hand, the concurrent presence of both oral relating and written relating of the Qur'ān is a barrier to the occurrence of such extensive changes and displacements. Moreover, that these changes occurred after the Prophet (s) is a claim which faces difficulty owing to this barrier. (Ibid: 240-241)

Many of the claims by those who hold textual deviation and mistake in the Qur'ān are examined and answered by the Muslim thinkers. Corrected items by Bellamy are of this type, for example, the word «ḥaṣab» in the verse 21:98 which Bellamy thinks the original word is «ḥaṭab». (Ibid: 241)

This claim of Bellamy is contrary to the ancient interpretative and lexical sources of Arabic where the word «ḥaṣab» means stone (which is thrown) and fuel (in its general sense) – fuel or anything which is thrown into fire to make it more flaring. (Farzāni, 2012: 99-112)

The other item is the word «sijell» in the verse 21:104 for which Bellamy suggests the word "musajjal" (Ibid: 242). This claim of his as for the correction of this word has been refuted via investigation. (Faqhīzādi, 2014: 115-128)

Furthermore, the other item is the word «al-raqīm» in the verse 18:9 which is corrected by Bellamy as «al-raqūd» (Bellamy, 2006, vol. 5: 251). This claim is also not accepted and is criticized. (Iskandarlū, 2012: 97-126)

Orientalists refer to all the sources of Muslims including the sources of interpretation, hadith, history, literature, theology, and etc., and do not consider a certain classification regarding their authenticity. (Noldeke, 2004: 249)

As to the research resources, the first principle for the orientalists is to refer to the old

sources, a principle which is proper and notable in the scientific research. However, this simply is not enough. For instance, in the interpretive texts, the interpretation of «*Jāmiʿal-Bayān*» by Ṭabarī is not at the same level with the interpretation of «*Al-Qurʾān al-Karīm*» by Ibn Kathīr Damishqī, because Ṭabarī's interpretation is teemed with weak narrations and Isrāʾīlīyyāt (Maʿrifat, 2010: 2), whereas Isrāʾīlīyyāt are conspicuously removed from the interpretation of *Al-Qurʾān al-Karīm* by Ibn Kathīr Damishqī, and the author of this work, at least, has pointed to the weakness of the interpretative narrations as well as the criticism of Isrāʾīlīyyāt. Accordingly, the same difference exists between *Tārīkh Ṭabarī* and *Tārīkh Ibn Kathīr*. As to this, to the scholars of hadith, hadith chain of transmitters cannot be considered – regarding their authenticity – at the same level with the *Two Ṣaḥīḥs*. Muslims take these differences into account in their research, but the orientalists employ the Islamic sources and their texts equally.

The other point in using the sources is that – regarding the abundance of Sunni sources in the world compared to the sources of the other Islamic denominations and sect – orientalists mostly study Islam and judge it with the perspective of Sunni sources.

This is whereas, first, there are a lot of weak and unacceptable materials – even in the view of the Sunni dignitaries – in these books. Second, in these books, there are a great many materials that although they are acceptable to the Sunni scholars, there are narrations and views opposite to those materials in the other Islamic denominations including Shīʿa.

Some of the orientalists – including Caetani and Schacht – hold that Muslims have not tried to criticize the text and have focused on the criticism of the chain of transmission. Moreover, chains of transmissions were formed in the late first Hegira century and the beginning of the second Hegira century. Owing to this, the orientalists are suspicious of the narrations related in the books of hadith. The result of this doubt is that, first, they do not refer to the narrations whose contents are opposite to their presuppositions or criticize them and cast doubt upon them. Second, they refer to the weak and ambiguous narrations easily – even if they unsettle the beliefs of Muslims, or are in flagrant contradiction with the Qurʾān, decisive narrations, and rules of intellect.

Of the obvious cases of this issue are the orientalists' reference to the narrations which indicate the beginning of revelation in Sunni sources; narrations are cited about the myth of the Satanic Verses; and also the narrations which are about the obliviousness of the Messenger of God (s). (Maʿārif, 2016: 55-56)

The other setback in the orientalists' research is their improper perceptions of some verses and narrations. This is because the orientalists do not deeply know Arabic literature, the jargon of verses and narrations, the various angles of Islam's history, and the dimensions of Muslims' religious culture, on one hand, and they do not refer to all the texts and indications of a certain issue, on the other hand. Most of the orientalists, including Noldeke and Sprenger, hold that the Prophet knew how to read and write. (Rāmyār, 2009: 506-507)

In addition to discussing that the word «ummī» (unlettered) is derived from the word umma (nation), paying attention to the transformation of its meaning in Islam, and criticizing the opinion of some orientalists like «Frants Buhl», Paret, the German Orientalist, writes: some have argued that attribution of the word «ummī» to Muḥammad (s) was because of his inability to read and write, but actually this word is not related to this view. This is because the verse 2:78, which is referred as the evidence for this meaning, in fact, has not criticized the Jew's ummī ones because of their inability of reading and writing, but rather it censures them because they are unaware of the heavenly book's content. (Rāmyār, 2009: 645)

With such a perception of the concept of «ummī», it can be concluded that Paret does not care about the studies done by the philologists, interpretation, history, and even the verse

29:48. Emphasizing his hypothesis, he describes the Messenger of God (s) as someone who knew how to read and write. (Ṭabrisī, 1994, vol. 4: 749)

Method of phenomenology

To Huserel, phenomenology is describing, discovering, and analyzing the phenomena. In fact, phenomenology is the subjective description as well as the description and interpretation of subjective content and issue, whether that issue has a real existence and is in agreement with the outside world or does not exist in the outside world and does not agree with it. (Būdlā'ī, 2017: 15)

To apply phenomenology in texts, it can be said that the phenomenological analysis tries to analyze the text via a careful investigation of text's features, beyond a historical explication. ('Imādī Ḥā'irī, 2014: 11-14)

Criticism and examination

Despite its strong points, method of phenomenology also faces some challenges:
   a. The most important challenge is related to the first and most important principle of phenomenology, i.e., epoche or suspension of assumptions and judgments. This is because there is controversy as to the time and stage where epoche should be done. Who should participate in the process of epoche or suspension of judgment? To answer this, it is the researcher, the subject, or both, describing the experience of the phenomenon. (Būdlā'ī, 2017: 79)
   b. The other problem is the ambiguity of the concept of phenomenology, particularly the phenomenology of religion. This ambiguity is due to various attributions as well as various, subjective uses of phenomenology. This problem has caused some to regard phenomenology more of an approach than a method. (Farāmarz Qarāmalikī, 2014: 320-327)
   c. The other setback of the phenomenology is its incompetence and failure as to solving the extracted view (Ibid: 329); phenomenology was mostly formed to address this setback, but in some way sank in it. (Ibid: 386-387)

Comparative method

In the comparative method, there are two fundamental points which represent the essence and aim of this method. First, the goal of comparative study is to know two or some phenomena or viewpoints. Second, the second goal is to understand and explicate the stances of difference and then to compare them. Owing to this, it should be said that comparative study is nothing but explanation and explication of opposing stances and of the real agreement between the compared issues so as to know them. (Ibid: 294)

Therefore, by the comparative method, the researcher looks for a sound and deep understanding of an issue via comparing two or some phenomena, views, or performances. In investigating the schools of thought and religions, this method has various applications, including the comparison of a religion's rulings and teachings with those of other religions, the comparison of religions' ideologies, the comparison of the knowledge and themes propounded in religions, and so on. (Nawbarī, 2011: 22-23)

Among the works of the orientalists, books like «*Muqāyisi'ī mīyāni Towrāt, Injīl, Qur'ān, wa 'ilm*» by the French Maurice Bucaille (Bucaille, 1987: 44) – so as to prove the compatibility of the Qur'ān with the science and its ensuing superiority over the Testaments – or the book «*Al-Qur'ān wal-Kitāb*» by Yūsuf Durra Ḥaddād – so as to prove that the Qur'ān has borrowed from the Bible – are some instances of using this method. (Nawbarī, 2011: 24)

Among the American Qur'ān researchers, the works of Gabriel Saʿīd Reynolds can be pointed out. He holds that the status of the Qur'ān should be explicated in the light of the Qur'ān's interaction with the traditions of the Testaments. In his works, via using a comparative method and comparing the Qur'ānic teachings and the traditions of the Testaments, he seeks to establish a kind of interaction between them.

From the works of Reynolds, as to this, two works can be mentioned.

One is «*Qur'ān wa zīr matni Ahdaynīyi ān*» (Reynolds, 2010: 4), which is published by Routledge in 2010. There he argues: whereas both the Islamic tradition and tradition of critical knowledge have a tendency to separate the Qur'ān from the Bible, the Qur'ān itself expects its addresses to be familiar with the language of the Testaments, and these holy books be regarded next to each other (Ibid: 2). In this work, Reynolds examines thirteen Qur'ānic themes in the light of the Qur'ānic jargon in relation to the traditions of the Testaments.

His second work is «*Qur'ān wa Kitābi Muqaddas: matn wa tafsīr*», which was published by Yale University Press in 2018. In this work, in addition to mentioning the English translation of the Qur'ān completely (translated by ʿAlī Qulī Qarā'ī), Reynolds compares and contrasts many chapters and verses within the context of the Testaments. He emphasizes that almost one fourth of the verses of the Qur'ān refer to the Bible, its characters, and Jewish and Christian stories, and that this relation of the Qur'ān with the Bible should be taken into account as an important source in order to comprehend the text of the Qur'ān.

To him, the holy books and also the traditions of Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) should be looked at in relation and interaction with each other, and we should not simply think of a Jewish-Christian tradition. Rather, we are faced with a Jewish-Christian-Islamic tradition.

Criticism and examination

Comparative method is also a research tool. Like the other methods, it has strong points and certain setbacks.

a. One of the most important setbacks of this method is its sheer comparison of phenomena's outer level with the structure of the phenomena. It does not pass this level and as a result, it does not reach the inside and the reality of phenomena. The result of this entanglement is nothing but making the research fruitless, mixing the viewpoints, and mingling various foundations with each other. (Farāmarz Qarāmalikī, 2014: 299-300)

b. The other problem that most of the methods, including this method, face is the researcher's fixation on the research hypothesis (Ibid: 302) and his dogma for his doctrinal assumptions. This can be the main cause of many differences of views and contradictory results in comparative studies.

c. Perhaps the entanglement in the very aforesaid problems have caused some of the entry writers of Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān – at the time of comparing the Qur'ān and the Testaments – to conclude that the Qur'ān and the Testaments are at the same level (disregarding the fact that the Qur'ān is safe from distortion and that the texts of the Testaments are twisted), or, worse, that the Qur'ān is affected by the Jewish and Christian texts (Maʿārif, 2016: 55-58). This is whereas the Qur'ān, while endorsing the Torah and the Bible, sees itself the protector of the heavenly books.

Conclusion

Scientific, useful discussions have not been done yet as to the methods used by the non-Muslims who study the Qur'ān. However, what is presented here are some of their mostly-

used and prevalent methods. The most important methods are: a) the method of historical criticism in its general sense, which is mostly developed and perfected in the realm of the Bible's criticism. Then, it has found its way to the realm of Islamic and Qur'ānic studies; b) the method of phenomenology; and c) the comparative method.

The most comprehensive and firmest hypothesis which has been so far propounded as to the origin of the Qur'ān is put forward by the Qur'ān itself. It is a hypothesis which is backed up by many narrative and intellectual reasons, and is the best account and interpretation for the exiting truth of the Qur'ān with its all coordination and features. Drawing on the present research, the most important setbacks and criticisms of the above methods are:

1. Admitted by the orientalists, the method of historical criticism has not so far led to practical, trustable results regarding the religious texts. Namely, this idea in practice can only be somehow practical. Even the texts of the new Testament cannot be restored with complete certainty, the texts which are recorded and ascribed way better (with more than 4000 manuscripts) than the other ancient texts and have been studied via textual research more than any other texts belonging to the later ancient era.

2. To criticize the method of phenomenology, it can be said the most important challenge and problem is related to the first and most important principle of phenomenology, that is, suspension of assumptions and judgments or epoche. This is because there is controversy as to the time and stage where epoche should be done. Who should participate in the process of epoche? To answer this, it is the researcher, the subject, or both, describing the experience of the phenomenon.

3. One of the most important setbacks of this method is its sheer comparison of phenomena's outer level with the structure of the phenomena. It does not pass this level and as a result, it does not reach the inside and the reality of phenomena. The result of this entanglement is nothing but making the research fruitless, mixing the viewpoints, and mingling various foundations with each other.

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