

MOTIVES FOR ORIENTALIST STUDIES OF THE QUR'AN: HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK, MOTIVES, AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC STUDIES

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Abstract:

This article examines Orientalism in the study of the Qur'an by exploring its historical framework, underlying motives, and epistemological implications in contemporary Islamic studies. Historically, Western scholarship on the Qur'an emerged from the dynamics of interaction between the Islamic world and the West, which was characterized by theological conflicts, political expansion, and colonialism. In the early phases, Orientalist studies were largely polemic and apologetic, especially in the context of the Crusades and missionary activities. Entering the modern era, this approach underwent a methodological transformation through the use of philology, historical criticism, and textual analysis, as reflected in the works of Theodor Noldeke, Ignaz Goldziher, and Arthur Jeffery. Despite offering significant academic contributions, Orientalist scholarship has not been completely free of ideological bias, as it often rests on epistemological assumptions different from the Islamic intellectual tradition, which regards the Qur'an as a divine revelation. This suggests that the motive behind the Orientalist study of the Qur'an is multidimensional, encompassing religious, intellectual, economic, and political factors. In contemporary developments, the influence of Orientalism presents complex epistemological implications for Islamic studies, especially in the tendency to reduce revelation to purely historical products. Therefore, an integrative approach is needed, one that combines rational and historical methods with the recognition of the transcendental dimension of revelation. This integration is expected to foster a critical, proportionate, and academically strong study of the Qur'an while remaining grounded in Islamic epistemology.

Keywords: *Orientalism, Qur'an Studies, Epistemology, Islamic Studies, Historical Criticism, Revelation.*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji Orientalisme dalam studi Al-Qur'an dengan menelusuri kerangka historisnya, motif-motif yang mendasarinya, serta implikasi epistemologisnya dalam studi Islam kontemporer. Secara historis, kajian Barat mengenai Al-Qur'an muncul dari dinamika interaksi antara dunia Islam dan Barat, yang ditandai oleh konflik teologis, ekspansi politik, dan kolonialisme. Pada fase awalnya, studi Orientalis sebagian besar bersifat polemis dan apologetis, terutama dalam konteks Perang Salib dan kegiatan misionaris. Memasuki era modern, pendekatan ini mengalami transformasi metodologis melalui penggunaan filologi, kritik historis, dan analisis teks, sebagaimana tercermin dalam karya-karya Theodor Noldeke, Ignaz Goldziher, dan Arthur Jeffery. Meskipun memberikan kontribusi akademis yang signifikan, kajian Orientalis tidak sepenuhnya bebas dari bias ideologis, karena sering kali didasarkan pada asumsi epistemologis yang berbeda dari tradisi intelektual Islam, yang

memandang Al-Qur'an sebagai wahyu ilahi. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa motif di balik studi Orientalis tentang Al-Qur'an bersifat multidimensional, mencakup faktor-faktor keagamaan, intelektual, ekonomi, dan politik. Dalam perkembangan kontemporer, pengaruh Orientalisme menghadirkan implikasi epistemologis yang kompleks bagi studi Islam, terutama dalam kecenderungan untuk mereduksi wahyu menjadi produk historis semata. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan pendekatan integratif yang menggabungkan metode rasional dan historis dengan pengakuan terhadap dimensi transendental wahyu. Integrasi semacam itu diharapkan dapat mendorong studi Al-Qur'an yang kritis, seimbang, dan kokoh secara akademis, sekaligus tetap berlandaskan pada epistemologi Islam.

Kata kunci: *Orientalisme, Studi Al-Qur'an, Epistemologi, Studi Islam, Kritik Historis, Wahyu.*

Introduction

The discussion of orientalism in Islamic studies has always been an interesting academic issue to study, especially because of the wide scope of research carried out by orientalists. Various branches in *Islamic Studies*, such as tafsir, hadith, jurisprudence, philosophy, Sufism, and Islamic history, became the object of their attention and research. Through a systematic scientific approach, orientalists have produced a variety of academic works that have quality and significant contributions to the development of Islamic studies. In fact, in certain aspects, the results of the research are considered more in-depth and methodological than some of the works born from Muslims themselves.

From here, the tradition of Western study of the Qur'an developed, which is an academic approach that seeks to understand Islam and the Eastern world through a Western scientific perspective. In its historical trajectory, the orientalism of the Qur'an cannot be separated from the context of the power relations between the West and the Islamic world. In the early phase, the study of the Qur'an in the West was often influenced by missionary interests, colonialism, and theological polemics aimed at maintaining the superiority of Western religion and civilization. The Qur'an is often positioned as a text that needs to be "criticized" to undermine Islamic authority. Entering the modern era, orientalism underwent a shift by adopting scholarly approaches such as philology, linguistics, history, and textual criticism.¹ However, this methodological change does not completely remove ideological bias, as some studies still depart from epistemological assumptions that are different, even contradictory, to the Islamic scientific tradition that views the Qur'an as a divine revelation.

Studies on the Qur'an have actually been carried out by many scholars, researchers, and academics since the activation of the discourse on religious moderation in Indonesia. Some

¹ Eira Kishi Febila Saragih, et al., "Kajian Orientalis Terhadap Al-Qur'an: Alih Bahasa Karakteristik Metodologis dan Pengaruhnya dalam Studi Islam," *Jurnal Al-Qolamuna: Jurnal Komunikasi dan Penyiaran Islam*, Vol. 3, No. 1. Januari (2026): 85-97. <https://doi.org/10.71242/5tb1ds30>

academics and researchers who try to study orientalist on the Qur'an include Indri,² Khoeron,³ Muzayyin,⁴ and Fadal.⁵ The article written by this researcher focuses on orientalist studies of the Qur'an from the historical framework, motives, and implications for the study of Islam today.

Method

This research is a library *research* with a qualitative-descriptive method. Through a descriptive qualitative method, this study will explore and decipher research data in a clear, comprehensive, and in-depth manner by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data from various relevant literature. The urgency of this research lies in the need to comprehensively and critically understand how the Qur'an is studied in the tradition of orientalism. This understanding is important so that Muslims and Muslim academics do not act a priori or accept the products of orientalism rawly, but are able to place them proportionately. The main purpose of this study is to analyze in depth how the motives of orientalist studies of the Qur'an are by placing them proportionately on the map of contemporary Islamic studies. This analysis is not intended to reject a priori all products of orientalism, but rather to critically examine the academic contributions that have been produced by orientalists, because behind negative motives, there are certainly positive implications. Various orientalist works, to some extent, have expanded access to the Qur'an among non-Muslims and encouraged the development of Islamic studies as an academic discipline in Western universities.

Discussion

The Historical Framework of Orientalism and Its View of the Qur'an

Orientalism basically refers to a tradition of study that has developed among Western scholars, especially European and American, since the 18th century.⁶ Nevertheless, research on Eastern languages, literatures, and cultures—especially those related to Islam—actually took

² Indri, dkk., "Studi Al-Qur'an dalam Lensa Orientalis: Antara Kritik dan Kontribusi," *Al-Shamela : Journal of Quranic and Hadith Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2025): 113. <https://doi.org/10.61994/alshamela.v3i2.1041>.

³ Moh. Khoeron, "Kajian Orientalis terhadap Teks dan Sejarah Al-Qur'an," *Suhuf*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2010): 235-249.

⁴ M. Muzayyin, "Al-Qur'an Menurut Pandangan Orientalis (Studi Analisis 'Teori Pengaruh' dalam Pemikiran Orientalis)," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Juli (2015): 203-221.

⁵ Kurdi Fadal, "Pandangan Orientalis Terhadap Al-Qur'an," *Religia*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Oktober (2021): 189-206.

⁶ Indri, dkk., "Studi Al-Qur'an dalam Lensa Orientalis: Antara Kritik dan Kontribusi."

place long before that period. In its development, *the term orientalist* is known to have appeared before the term *orientalism*. A. J. Arberry explained that the term *orientalist* has been used since 1638 to refer to members of the Eastern Church (Greek) who pay attention to oriental studies. According to him, orientalist are individuals who have competence in learning Eastern world languages and literature.⁷

Meanwhile, Thomas Wright in his work *Early Christianity in Arabia: A Historical Essay* argues that the conflict between Islam and Christianity has been going on since the expedition of Christian forces under the leadership of Abraham that attacked the Kaaba before the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This kind of view shows the historical background that has shaped the Western perception of Islam. In addition, the series of Crusades that lasted for about two centuries, from 1096 to 1271, further strengthened the atmosphere of opposition between the Islamic world and Western Christianity. In this context, the curiosity of the West towards Islam began to develop more intensively.⁸ Some people even view that orientalism was born from the political and religious dynamics that occurred during the conflict between Muslims and Christians in Palestine, especially during the reigns of Nur ad-Din Zangi and Saladin. The repeated defeats experienced by Christian troops in the war are considered to have given birth to the spirit of competition and the desire to understand the Islamic world more deeply, which later developed into the tradition of orientalist studies.

The term orientalism is rooted in the word *orient* which means "East" and the suffix *-ism* which contains the meaning of certain understandings, streams, or fields of study. Thus, orientalism in general can be interpreted as a scientific tradition that focuses on research on the Eastern world carried out by Western scholars. The scope of "East" in this sense includes the Asian and Middle Eastern regions and various elements of civilization, such as languages, cultures, and religions that develop in these regions, including Islam with its source of teachings, namely the Qur'an.⁹

The Qur'an is not only positioned as a holy book for Muslims, but it is also an object of academic study among Western scholars known as orientalists. In the tradition of orientalism, the Qur'an is used as a research material through various scientific approaches. Broadly

⁷ Hasani Ahmad Said, "Potret Studi Alquran di Mata Orientalis," *Jurnal At-Tibyan*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Juni (2018), 22-40. DOI: 10.32505/tibyan.v3i1.474.

⁸ Hasani Ahmad, dkk., "Orientalisme dan Oksidentalisme: Kajian Keotentikan Al Qur'an," *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadist*, Vol. 5, No.2. Juni (2022): 206-225. <https://ejournal.stiqwalisongo.ac.id>.

⁹ Fadhilah Umami, dkk., "Pengertian, Objek, Ruang Lingkup Orientalisme dan Latar Belakang Munculnya Orientalis," *Fatih: Journal of Contemporary Research*, Vol. 03, No. 01, (2026): h. 28-34 <https://doi.org/10.61253/ysfshn34>

speaking, orientalist studies of the Qur'an can be classified into three main domains, namely: first, research that focuses on the text of the Qur'an; second, the study of the translation of the Qur'an into various languages; and third, the study of the way Muslims understand and interpret the Qur'an. According to Nur Kholis Setiawan, Western research on the history of Qur'anic texts is closely related to the characteristics of the Western academic tradition that emphasizes a philological approach.¹⁰

According to William Muir in his work *The Life of Muhammad*, revelation in Islam is not understood as a phenomenon that originates from God, but is seen as a construction of the Prophet Muhammad's thoughts. On that trip, the Prophet was said to have witnessed the monks and priests who were carrying out worship with full solemnity. According to Muir, the experience made a deep impression on the Prophet and encouraged him to seek and find the correct form of religious teaching.¹¹

European scholars' interest in the Qur'an began to be apparent since Peter the Venerable's visit to Toledo in the mid-12th century. The clergyman from Cluny showed considerable attention to various issues related to Islam. In his quest to understand Islam, he formed a team of scholars and commissioned them to compile scientific works that could serve as the basis for intellectual dialogue with the Islamic world. The result of the project came to be known as *Cluny Corpus*, which is a collection of translations of Arabic texts compiled for the benefit of missionaries and the study of orientalism.

One of the most important results of the project was the translation of the Qur'an into Latin by Robert of Ketton in 1143. The translation is seen as an early milestone in the development of Western studies of the Qur'an. However, William Montgomery Watt considered that the work had not been able to provide a significant improvement in the quality of Islamic studies in the West. Although a number of other works on Islam were born after that, the Western view of Islam at that time was still dominated by hostility. Islam is seen as a threat, although at the same time there is also recognition of some aspects of its teachings. Therefore, the works produced by Western scholars in the early period of orientalism are generally still apologetic, polemic, and even tend to be offensive to Islam.¹²

The development of Qur'anic study among orientalists made significant progress in the 17th century through the work of Ludovico Marracci, an Italian scholar who compiled the text

¹⁰ M. Nur Kholis Setiawan, *Orientalisme Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* (Yogyakarta: Nawasea Press, 2007), 1.

¹¹ Indri, dkk. *Studi Al-Qur'an dalam Lensa Orientalis: Antara Kritik dan Kontribusi*.

of the Qur'an by referring to a number of manuscripts, then supplemented it with Latin translations. This step was seen as a renewal in the tradition of orientalist studies, as previous scholars generally focused only on translation without conducting manuscript-based preparations.¹³ Furthermore, in the 18th century, John Medows Rodwell compiled a translation of the Qur'an based on the chronological order of revelation, starting from surah Al-'Alaq to Al-Mā'idah. This approach shows an orientalist attempt to study the Qur'an through a historical perspective according to the chronology of revelation.

In the following century, the study of the Qur'an among orientalists experienced a fairly rapid development through the contribution of Gustav Flügel. In 1834, he began important research by publishing a critical edition of the Qur'an which went on to undergo various revisions and became a reference for many orientalists afterwards. The West's attention to the study of the Qur'an was also evident from the organization of a monograph writing competition with the theme "historical criticism of the text of the Qur'an" by the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in Paris in 1857. The competition was won by Theodor Nöldeke¹⁴ who was later widely known through his study of the history of the Qur'an. In addition, the study of the interpretation of the Qur'an has also received attention from orientalists. However, works that specifically discuss tafsir are still relatively limited. Most of their research is more directed at tracing the history of the development of Qur'an interpretation among Muslims.

One of the figures who had a great influence in the study of orientalism on the interpretation of the Qur'an was Ignaz Goldziher. In the late 19th century, he conducted critical research on various classical commentaries.¹⁵ His studies later became important references in Western studies of the history and development of Qur'an interpretation. Entering the modern era, the study of the Qur'an among orientalists has developed more rapidly with the emergence of various new approaches to understand the text of the Qur'an in more depth. One of the most dominant approaches is the linguistic approach. In this context, Josef Horowitz through his work *Koransche Untersuchungen* examines the narrative aspects and names contained in the Qur'an. Meanwhile, Arthur Jeffery produced a number of important works, including *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, which focused on the study of foreign vocabulary in the Qur'an. In

¹² Faried F. Saenong, *Kesarjanaan Al-Qur'an di Barat (Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an)*, (Ciputat: Pusat Studi al-Qur'an, 2006), 150.

¹³ Saenong, *Kesarjanaan al-Qur'an di Barat...*, 154.

¹⁴ Saenong, *Kesarjanaan al-Qur'an di Barat...*, 167.

¹⁵ Adnin Armas, *Pengaruh Kristen-Orientalis terhadap Islam Liberal*, (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2003), 64.

addition, Jeffery and several orientalists of the 20th century also initiated a project to prepare a critical edition of the Qur'an. In the project, they collected various textual variants from a number of sources with the aim of reconstructing the text of the Qur'an based on *Abu Dawud al-Sijistani's Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*, which is seen as containing various accounts of the differences in the recitations in alternative mushaf.

According to Nasaruddin Umar, criticism, research, and even attacks made by some orientalists against the Qur'an cannot be separated from its position as the holy book of Muslims which is the main source of teachings and values of life. The Qur'an is seen as a symbol of the unity of the ummah as well as a fundamental foundation that has been the guideline for the life of Muslims throughout history. Therefore, attempts to question the authenticity and authenticity of the Qur'an are often perceived as a form of threat to the existence and strength and integrity of Islam.¹⁶

Furthermore, he explained that the orientalist study of the Qur'an is at least motivated by two main factors. First, there is disillusionment among some Christians and Jews with their holy books, the authenticity of which has long been disputed. Second, there is a sense of interest as well as jealousy towards the position of the Qur'an and Muslims. A number of Christian scholars recognize that the Gospel texts in circulation today are believed to have undergone various changes as a result of human intervention, making it difficult to distinguish definitively between those parts that are truly revelation and those that are the result of human historical construction.¹⁷

Orientalist Studies on the Qur'an

Orientalism as a scientific tradition that developed among Western scholars with a focus on the study of the Eastern world, encouraged orientalists to study various aspects related to Eastern civilization, especially the study of the Qur'an. The intensity of their attention to the study of the Qur'an is certainly inseparable from a number of motives behind it. Some of the motives that are the driving force behind the emergence of the study of orientalism on the Qur'an include the following.

First, religious motives. The initial motive of orientalist studies of the Qur'an was largely based on theological interests. During the Crusades and the missionary era, the study of the Qur'an aimed to understand the teachings of Islam in order to debate and weaken it. In this

¹⁶ Nasaruddin Umar, *Al-Qur'an di Mata Intelektual*, (Jakarta: PSQ, 2006), 92.

¹⁷ Indri, dkk., 116.

context, the Qur'an is studied as a text that must be criticized to prove the superiority of Christian theology. Narratives emphasizing the "Judeo-Christian influence" in the Qur'an often appear in early orientalist works as part of polemic strategies.

This motif shows that the study of the Qur'an in that period was not entirely scientifically oriented, but rather functioned as an apologetic and missionary tool. The apologetic attitude is seen in the work of William Muir who describes the Prophet Muhammad in the framework of Christian theological polemics.¹⁸ In the 20th century, the approach to textual criticism became more radical through John Wansbrough, who viewed the Qur'an as the result of the editorial process of the early Muslim community.¹⁹ Criticism of the ideological bias of orientalism was later popularized by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, who emphasized the relationship between knowledge and power relations in Western studies of the East.²⁰

Second, scientific motives. The scientific motive in orientalism cannot be separated from the historical fact that in the classical period of Islam, especially between the 8th and 13th centuries, the Islamic world reached the peak of its glory in the fields of science, philosophy, medicine, mathematics, and astronomy, while Western Europe was still in a period that many historians refer to as *the Early Middle Ages*. Intellectual centers such as Bayt al-Hikmah in Baghdad became symbols of scientific progress that integrated Greek, Persian, and Indian heritage into the Islamic intellectual tradition, and then developed them creatively. It was in this context that the works of Muslim scientists such as Ibn Sina in medicine, Al-Khawarizmi in mathematics, and Ibn Rushd in philosophy were translated into Latin and widely studied in Europe.

The West's ambition to translate and master the treasures of Islamic science, especially through the translation center in Toledo in the 12th century, suggests that scientific motives were an important driver in the intellectual interaction between the West and Islam. Through this translation movement, Europe began to reacquaint with Aristotle's works that had previously been lost from the Latin tradition,

¹⁸ William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet and History of Islam to the Era of the Hegira*, vol. 1 (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1858), xlv–lx

¹⁹ John Wansbrough, *Studi Al-Quran: Sumber dan Metode Penafsiran Alkitab* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 1–25

²⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalisme* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 1–28.

but had been preserved and commented on by Muslim scholars.²¹ This process of knowledge transfer gradually contributed to the birth of an intellectual revival in Europe, which later developed into the Renaissance.

In the tradition of orientalism, scientific motives are not only limited to the translation of scientific and philosophical works, but also develop towards research into the main source of Islamic teachings, namely the Qur'an. The orientalist's interest in the Qur'an was ultimately not solely based on the importance of theological polemics, but also on the academic impulse to understand the normative and epistemological foundations that shape the civilization of science in Islam. On that basis, Western scholars began to examine the linguistic aspects, the history of codification, and the social setting of the revelation of the verses of the Qur'an by utilizing the philological approaches and methods of historical criticism that developed in the modern Western academic tradition.²²

However, these scientific motives are often mixed with ideological and colonial interests, so the study of the Qur'an is not completely neutral. As Edward Said argues in *Orientalism*, the production of knowledge about the East, including Islam, is often linked to power relations and the interests of domination.²³ Thus, although academic motives have given birth to a wide range of in-depth philological and historical research on the Qur'an, it still needs to be understood in the context of intellectual history and the political dynamics behind its emergence.

Overall, the scientific motive in orientalism was born out of the admiration and need of the West for the advancement of science and Islamic civilization. From the translation of

Muslim scholarly works to the critical study of the Qur'an, this process shows that the intellectual interaction between Islam and the West is not only a theological conflict, but also a complex dialogue of knowledge, although not always free from particular biases and interests.

Third, economic motives. In line with the development of industrialization in Europe since the 18th century, especially after the Industrial Revolution in Britain, the need for raw materials, cheap labor, and new markets prompted Western countries to systematically expand colonial into Asia and Africa. This economic transformation not only changed the structure of production, but also gave birth to geopolitical ambitions to control strategic areas, including

²¹ Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 278–305

²² Richard W. Bulliet et al., *Bumi dan Rakyatnya: Sejarah Global*, edisi ke-5 (Boston: Wadsworth, 2011), 317–325

²³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalisme* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 12–28.

Muslim-majority areas that at that time were experiencing internal political declines, such as the weakening of the Ottoman Empire and the fragmentation of power in various Islamic regions. It is in this context that the Islamic world is seen as both an opportunity and an object of Western economic and political penetration.

The colonial expansion demanded in-depth knowledge of the society to be controlled. Therefore, the study of religion, demography, social structure, culture, language, and politics of Muslims became an integral part of the colonial strategy. Knowledge of Islam is no longer solely driven by theological or scientific motives, but also by administrative interests and social control. As noted by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, the production of knowledge about the East developed along with the expansion of Western imperialism, so that orientalism functioned not only as an academic discipline, but also as an instrument of power. By understanding the structure of religious beliefs and authority in Muslim societies, colonial governments were able to devise more effective policies to control and stabilize their colonies.

In this context, the orientalist study of the Qur'an acquires a new dimension. The Qur'an is understood as the main source of legal, moral, and political legitimacy in Muslim society, so studying it means understanding the normative foundations that shape the social behavior and political resistance of Muslims. Many colonial administrators and Western scholars studied tafsir, Islamic law (fiqh), and the history of codification of the Qur'an to find out how the text functioned in social life.²⁴ This knowledge is useful for determining the limits of colonial intervention, mapping the potential for religion-based resistance movements, and utilizing local religious elites as power partners.

These studies often use historical-critical and philological approaches to place the Qur'an in a particular historical context, thus allowing for a more "rational" and "historical" reading from a Western perspective. But this approach also has ideological implications, because by interpreting the Qur'an as a product of history, the text's transcendent authority can be reduced within the framework of modern Western scientific analysis.²⁵ Thus, colonial and economic motives also shaped the direction of orientalist study of the Qur'an, making it not only an object of academic study, but also part of the strategy of understanding and managing Muslim society under imperial rule.

²⁴ Bernard S. Cohn, *Kolonialisme dan Bentuk-bentuk Pengetahuannya: Inggris di India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 6–15, 57–75

²⁵ Albert Hourani, *Islam dalam Pemikiran Eropa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 101–120.

Overall, Western industrialization and colonialism created a practical need for knowledge of Islam, and this need reinforced the development of orientalism as a discipline that studies the religion, culture, and sacred texts of Muslims. The study of the Qur'an in this context cannot be separated from the power relations between the colonizers and the colonized, because the sacred text is understood as the key to reading the social, political, and resistance dynamics in Muslim society.

Fourth, political motives. From the 7th and 8th centuries, the expansion of Islam took place very rapidly, encompassing strategic regions from the Arabian Peninsula to Syria, Persia, North Africa, and parts of Southern Europe. In a relatively short time, Islamic political power not only formed a vast state entity, but also built a civilization with a well-established legal, administrative, and intellectual system. As the Ottoman Empire continued its expansion into the heart of Europe and conquered Constantinople in 1453, Islam was increasingly seen by the West as a huge geopolitical and religious power.²⁶ At the same time, Latin Europe was only beginning to emerge from a period of political and intellectual decline following the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, so that the rise and domination of Islam was perceived as a direct threat to political stability and Christian religious doctrine.

This perception of the threat shaped the Western intellectual's attitude toward Islam. Islam is not only seen as a military rival, but also as a theological competitor that claims the continuity and refinement of previous revelation. Since the Qur'an is the main source of legitimacy of Islamic teachings and power, understanding and criticizing the Qur'an is considered a strategic step to respond to these challenges. It was in this context that the early interest of the West in translating and studying the Qur'an emerged, as Robert of Ketton did in the 12th century on the initiative of Peter Venerabilis, not solely for academic purposes, but for the sake of Christian polemics and apologetics.²⁷

Over time, especially as the West entered the era of intellectual revival and then modernity, the study of the Qur'an evolved into a more systematic discipline of philology and historical criticism. However, as Edward Said notes in *Orientalism*, the study of the East, including Islam, has never been completely detached from the West's power relations and construction of superiority.²⁸ Islam, which was previously perceived as a military and theological threat, was then constructed as an object of study that must be understood,

²⁶ Halil İnalcık, *Kekaisaran Ottoman: Zaman Klasik 1300–1600* (London: Weidenfeld dan Nicolson, 1973), 1–15.

²⁷ R. W. Southern, *Pandangan Barat tentang Islam di Abad Pertengahan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 37–45.

²⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalisme*, 5–12, 59–73.

classified, and explained within the framework of Western epistemology. Thus, the motive of orientalist studies of the Qur'an is rooted in a combination of fear, apologetic needs, and the impulse to intellectually dominate the civilization that once dominated the historical stage.

The historical-critical study of the Qur'an that developed in the 19th and 20th centuries can be understood as a continuation of this dynamic. The attempt to place the Qur'an in historical context, to compare it with the Judeo-Christian tradition, and to analyze its codification process reflects an attempt to explain—and in some cases reduce—the claim to transcendence of Islamic revelation into the category of human history.²⁹ Therefore, the Western perception of Islam as a threat to civilization in the early days also shaped the direction and character of orientalist studies of the Qur'an, making it part of the intellectual response to the rise and domination of Islam in world history.

The study of the Qur'an and the methodology of interpretation as a discipline have continued to develop from the time of revelation to the contemporary era. These developments are not only influenced by the internal dynamics of Muslims, but also by social, cultural, and global changes in human civilization. From *insider* circles, Muslim scholars and scholars formulate various methodological approaches—ranging from *tafsir bi al-ma'tsur*, *tafsir bi al-ra'yi*, to thematic and contextual approaches—in response to the needs of the times. However, the development of Qur'an study is also inseparable from the contribution of *outsiders*, who in academic discourse are often referred to as orientalists.³⁰

The involvement of orientalists in the study of the Qur'an arises in the context of the long history of relations between the West and Islam. As previously described, there are several motives behind the orientalist study of the Qur'an, namely religious, scientific, colonial-political motives, and the perception of Islam as a threat to civilization. In the early phases, when Islam was seen as a theological rival and an expansive political force—especially since the Crusades—the study of the Qur'an was largely colored by apologetic spirit. The goal is not just to understand the text, but also to refute Islamic theological claims and defend Christian doctrine.

Entering the modern era, especially with the colonial expansion and the development of the humanities in Europe, the study of the Qur'an was carried out with a set of philological methodology, historical criticism, and comparative approaches. In the context of colonialism, as analyzed by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, knowledge of the East is often intertwined with

²⁹ Norman Daniel, *Islam dan Barat: Pembuatan Gambar* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960), 83–105

Hasani
Ahmad
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power relations, so the study of Islam and the Qur'an is not completely free from political and ideological interests. Orientalism in this sense became a means of understanding, classifying, and to some extent controlling Muslim society.

Some orientalists do research the Qur'an for political or ideological purposes, or even a combination of both. The approach used sometimes departs from speculative assumptions, limited or biased selection of sources, and an epistemological framework that is not in line with the basic principles of the Islamic faith. As a result, works were born that caused controversy because they were considered to reduce revelation to a mere historical product or place the Qur'an in a fully human literary construction. In many cases, the methodological sophistication and complexity of the analysis used make it difficult for the layman reader to grasp the ideological implications hidden behind it.

However, not all orientalists have polemic or political motives. There are also Western scholars who are driven by pure academic interest to understand the Qur'an objectively and scientifically. They sought to examine the history of codification, language structure, and the social context of verse descent with the standards of scientific methodology applicable in the study of classical texts. In this category, scientific motives are more prominent than ideological motives, so the results of their studies are often used as a reference in global academic discourse on the study of the Qur'an.³¹

Thus, the involvement of orientalists in the study of the Qur'an reflects a diverse spectrum of motives. Some depart from the spirit of religious polemics, some are influenced by colonial and political interests, and some are born from sincere scientific encouragement. This complexity demands a critical and proportionate attitude in assessing orientalist works: not rejecting them a priori, but also not accepting them without careful methodological analysis. The study of the Qur'an as a discipline ultimately develops through interaction, dialogue, and even debate between these various perspectives, thus enriching the treasures of methodology as well as demanding epistemological vigilance from its scholars.

The Epistemological Influence and Implications of Orientalism in Contemporary Islamic Studies

Orientalist studies have had a very significant influence on the map of the development of modern Islamic studies. On the one hand, their thoroughness in the field of philology, manuscript criticism (such as the Corpus Coranicum project), and the archiving of classical

³¹ Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, "Tradisi Orientalisme dan Framework Studi al-Qur'an", *Jurnal: Tsaqafah*,

manuscripts have made valuable technical contributions to the preservation of Islamic intellectual treasures. These methods were then adopted and adapted by contemporary Muslim scholars to strengthen their arguments in the global academic realm.³² Nevertheless, the influence of orientalism also brings serious challenges. A number of speculative conclusions that cast doubt on the authenticity of the Ottoman mushaf or its codification process are often absorbed raw without critical filter by some academics. Al-A'zami warned that the penetration of this thought can erode the authority of the Islamic scientific tradition if it is not balanced with the mastery of the methodology of qualified salaf scholars.³³ In the Indonesian context, the discourse of orientalism entered through higher education and influenced the Islamic study curriculum (such as IAIN/UIN) since the 1970s. This sparked a debate between groups that are pro-Western methodologies and those who want to maintain pure tradition.

Therefore, a systematic and sustained effort is needed to carry out what some Muslim scholars call the Islamization of science or, in a more contextual and moderate formulation, the proportional integration–interconnection of science. This idea was born from the realization that the dominance of Western scientific paradigms, including in the study of Qur'anic orientalism, is not completely neutral, but is rooted in certain epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions. If the paradigm is accepted rawly, then the study of the Qur'an risks being trapped in the reduction of the meaning of revelation to mere historical and cultural products. The Islamization of science, as formulated by figures such as Ismail Raji al-Faruqi and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, is not an attempt to reject modern science, but rather a critical process to refine, reconstruct, and direct science to be in harmony with the Islamic *worldview*. In the context of the study of the Qur'an, the Islamization of knowledge demands the placement of revelation as a legitimate and fundamental source of knowledge, not just an object of academic analysis. Thus, Western methodologies can be utilized as long as they do not contradict the basic principles of Islamic epistemology.³⁴

Meanwhile, the integration–interconnection approach offers a more dialogical framework by reciprocating the classical Islamic scientific tradition and modern sciences. This approach allows Muslim researchers to use Western methodological tools, such as linguistics and history, but still associate them with the science of tafsir, the Qur'anic *ulumul*, and *maqashid al-shari'ah*. The goal is that the study of the Qur'an does not lose its theological and normative dimension. With efforts to strengthen the epistemology of Islamic science through the

³² M. Quraish Shihab, *Mukjizat Al-Qur'an: Ditinjau dari Aspek Kebahasaan, Isyarat Ilmiah, dan Pemberitaan Gaib* (Bandung: Mizan, 1997), 88.

³³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* hlm. 202-205 (sebagai kritik atas landasan epistemologisnya).

³⁴ Umami et al., “Pengertian, Objek, Ruang Lingkup Orientalisme dan Latar Belakang.”

Islamization of science or an integration-interconnection approach, Muslim researchers are expected to no longer be in a passive position as consumers of Western methodology. So far, the dominance of the orientalist paradigm in the study of the Qur'an has often led Muslim scholars to adopt Western methods and frameworks of analysis without an adequate critical attitude. As a result, the study of the Qur'an risks losing its theological footing and being reduced to mere analysis of historical texts. Therefore, Muslim researchers need to build intellectual independence with the ability to carry out epistemological criticism of the basic assumptions that underlie the paradigm of orientalism.³⁵

This epistemological criticism is important because the paradigm of orientalism in general departs from secular rationality and historicism, which tends to get rid of the transcendental dimension of revelation.³⁶ In this framework, the Qur'an is understood primarily as a historical product born from a specific social context, not as the kalam of Allah which has absolute authority and meaning across the ages. Muslim researchers need to assert that rational and historical approaches are indeed important as scientific instruments, but they are not enough to understand the essence of revelation in its entirety. Understanding the Qur'an demands recognition of the divine dimension, the sacredness of the text, and the relationship of revelation to the faith and religious practices of Muslims. By integrating rational, historical, and transcendental approaches in a balanced manner, the study of the Qur'an has a great opportunity to develop scientifically without losing its basic identity as a scientific discipline rooted in revelation. The rational approach allows the Qur'an to be studied with critical, systematic, and argumentative reasoning, so that it can be understood logically and communicatively in the modern academic context.³⁷ Meanwhile, the historical approach plays an important role in tracing the socio-cultural context of the descent of revelation, the dynamics of Arab society, and the process of transmission and understanding of the Qur'an throughout Islamic history. Both of these approaches make significant contributions to enriching scientific analysis and broadening the horizons of interpretation.³⁸

However, the study of the Qur'an cannot be separated from the transcendental approach that recognizes the Qur'an as the kalam of Allah and the highest source of truth in Islam. It is

³⁵ Rachma Zahra Nuraqila dkk., "Analisis Kritis Konsepsi Orientalis Barat tentang Hadis Nabi SAW: Studi Komparatif Pemikiran Ignaz Goldziher dan Joseph Schacht Rachma," *Jurnal Fikrul Islam* 01, no. 01 (2025): 87–96, <https://aksaranusantarafoundation.com/index.php/fikrulislam/article/view/1/10>.

³⁶ Ginan Wibawa and Rizal Muttaqin, "Implikasi Filsafat Kritisisme Immanuel Kant Bagi Pengembangan Studi Hukum Ekonomi Syariah," *Jurnal Ilmiah Humantech* 1, no. 1 (2021): 25–36.

³⁷ Sopwan Mulyawan, "Studi Ilmu Ma' Ani (Stylistic) Terhadap Ayat-Ayat Surat Yasin," *Holistik* 12, no. 2 (2011): 97–113.

³⁸ Aqdi Asnawi, "Manāhij Naqd Al-Kitāb Al-Muqaddas Fī Ad-Dirāsāt Al-Qur'āniyyah," *Kalimah: Jurnal*

this transcendental dimension that distinguishes the study of the Qur'an from the study of ordinary texts. Without acknowledging this aspect, the study of the Qur'an risks getting caught up in reductionism and losing its normative and spiritual meaning. Therefore, the integration of these three approaches is the key to keeping the study of the Qur'an intact, balanced, and rooted in the values of faith. This integrative approach also opens up a space for productive dialogue with global academic traditions. By using a universally understandable scientific language and methodology, Muslim scholars are able to actively participate in international discourse without having to sacrifice the principles of Islamic epistemology. This kind of dialogue not only enriches the study of the Qur'an, but also introduces the Islamic perspective as a legitimate and relevant epistemological alternative. In the end, this integrative position is expected to give birth to a methodologically rich and epistemologically robust study of the Qur'an.³⁹

This kind of study not only contributes to the development of science in the academic realm alone, but also has a very real relevance for the development of Islamic civilization in the global era. In the context of an increasingly open and interconnected world, Muslims are faced with the rapid exchange of ideas, values, and scientific paradigms. Therefore, the study of the Qur'an that is critical, reflective, and dialogical is a strategic need so that Islam is able to present as a constructive intellectual and moral force in world civilization. The scholarly contribution of the study is seen in its ability to enrich the treasures of Islamic scholarship with new approaches that remain rooted in revelation. The integration of scientific rationality and spiritual depth allows for the birth of Islamic thought that is not trapped in rigid conservatism or liberalism that loses its value orientation.⁴⁰

On this basis, the Qur'an is not only understood as a normative text, but also as a source of inspiration for the development of science, social ethics, and human life. Furthermore, the relevance of this study for the development of Islamic civilization lies in its ability to respond to the challenges of the times, such as globalization, cultural pluralism, moral crises, and the development of modern science. Intellectual openness encourages Muslims to dialogue with various traditions of world thought without feeling inferior, while spiritual depth keeps such dialogue from eroding Islamic identity and values. Sensitivity to social and humanitarian realities also makes the teachings of the Qur'an contextual and solutive. Thus, a comprehensive and globally minded study of the Qur'an has the potential to be an important foundation for the

³⁹ Azyumardi Azra, *Pergolakan Politik Islam: Dari Fundamentalism ke Modernisme* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1996), 74.

⁴⁰ Muhammad Fahrurrozi, "Urgensi Penguatan Keterampilan Berfikir Kritis," *Jurnal Penelitian*

Keislaman, no. 1 (2021), <https://jonedu.org/index.php/joe/article/view/5393>.

birth of an Islamic civilization that is knowledgeable, moral, and competitive, as well as able to make a positive contribution to human civilization as a whole.⁴¹

Conclusion

Based on the previous description, it can be concluded that the orientalist study of Islam and the Qur'an is a historical phenomenon born from the complex interaction between the West and the Islamic world. Since the early conflicts—such as the political expansion of Islam and the rise of tensions during the Crusades—Islam has been viewed by some in the West as a religious and geopolitical threat. This perception then influenced the initial pattern of study of the Qur'an which tended to be polemic and apologetic. The translation of the Qur'an into Latin by Robert of Ketton on the initiative of Peter the Venerable became one of the early milestones of Western study of the Qur'an which was full of theological importance.

Along with the times, orientalism has undergone a methodological transformation. In the 19th and 20th centuries, philological approaches, historical criticism, and textual analysis became the main instruments in the study of the Qur'an, as seen in the work of Theodor Nöldeke, Ignaz Goldziher, and Arthur Jeffery. At this stage, orientalist studies were no longer solely driven by religious motives, but also by scientific, political, and economic motives, especially in the context of colonialism and Western domination of the Islamic world. The critique of power relations in the production of knowledge about the East is systematically put forward by Edward Said through *Orientalism*, who asserts that orientalism is not entirely epistemologically neutral.

However, not all orientalist works are ideological or politically motivated. Some of them contributed significantly to the development of textual studies, manuscript criticism, and scientific research methodologies that later enriched the study of the Qur'an among contemporary Muslim scholars. Therefore, the orientalist study of the Qur'an must be understood proportionately as a multidimensional phenomenon that contains a spectrum of motives: religious, scientific, economic, and political.

In the contemporary context, the influence of orientalism presents serious epistemological implications for Islamic studies. The rational and historical approaches developed in the Western tradition can make valuable methodological contributions, but they also have the potential to give birth to reductionism if the transcendental dimension of revelation is ignored. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate rational, historical, and

⁴¹ Hani Zahrani dan Rubini, "Pendekatan Hermeneutika dalam Studi Islam," *SALIHA: Jurnal Pendidikan*

& Agama Islam 6, no. 2 (2023): 171–96, <https://doi.org/10.54396/saliha.v6i2.662>.

transcendental approaches so that the study of the Qur'an remains academically solid and rooted in Islamic epistemology.

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