ATU PRESS

Application Analysis of the Historical-Critical Method of Source Criticism in the Quran, with Emphasis on the Two-Source Hypothesis

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Abstract

The present study aims to examine the foundations and implications of the historical-critical method of source criticism in Qur'anic studies. It employs a descriptive-analytical approach, relying on library-based sources. Source criticism seeks to identify the historical background, possible sources, and stages of the composition of a text. In Qur'anic studies, it endeavors to elucidate the processes through which the various sections of the Qur'an were compiled and arranged into a specific canonical form. This research analyzes three prominent approaches to the application of source criticism to the Qur'an: "Angelika Neuwirth's theory of the secondary insertion of Medinan surahs, Nicolai Sinai's evolutionary model, and Gabriel Reynolds's Two-Source Hypothesis." Reynolds, based on the presence of Meccan-Meccan and Medinan-Medinan doublets in the Qur'an, proposes the existence of a Meccan sub-corpus and a Medinan sub-corpus underlying the Qur'anic text. This study critically evaluates

Reynolds's formulation of the Two-Source Hypothesis concerning the Qur'an, organizing the critique into two major domains: "Methodological criticism and historical criticism, each with several subcategories." The findings of this research indicate that the assumption of two distinct sources for the Qur'an lacks theoretical rigor and sufficient evidence. The results suggest that while source criticism may be useful in analyzing the internal evolution of the Qur'an and the differences between surahs, its invocation of hypothetical lost documents without historical substantiation cannot be accepted within the framework of sound Qur'anic scholarship.

Keywords: Source Criticism, Historical-Critical Method, Two-Source Hypothesis, Meccan Source, Medinan Source, Gabriel Reynolds.

Introduction

Modern Qur'anic studies are an academic endeavor that dates back approximately two centuries (Abbasi, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 46). The historical-critical approach, which has been employed in Orientalist Qur'anic studies since the early nineteenth century, comprises a complex set of methodological stages. Although this approach has long been subjected to critical scrutiny in biblical studies — due to its indifference toward the final form of the text and its tendency toward deconstruction — and has been challenged by various modern methods (Barton, 1998: 9–19), it cannot be entirely dismissed. In fact, historical-critical research on the Quran shares a fundamental objective with historical research on the Bible, namely, the re-interpretation of texts based on the spatial and temporal contexts of their environment (Neuwirth and Sells, 2016: 3).

Western Qur'anic exegesis, in terms of methodology, content, and results, has been profoundly influenced by biblical exegetical practices, given that Orientalists operated under the presupposition that the history of the Bible could be analogously applied to the history of Islam, particularly to the Quran. Qur'anic criticism, therefore, was conducted in a manner closely resembling biblical criticism. Consequently, the foundational principles and main features of biblical studies have been transmitted and extended to Qur'anic studies, a phenomenon that is clearly observable. Neuwirth writes: "We Westerners must apply to the Qur'an the same kind of studies that we conduct on our own sacred scriptures..." (Neuwirth, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 25) and Mohammed Arkoun notes in the entry "Contemporary Critical Practices and the Quran" that "It is important not to lose sight of the fact that contemporary Qur'anic studies lag considerably behind biblical studies to which it must always be compared." (Arkoun, 2001: 414)

Thus far, greater attention has been devoted to critiquing the views of Orientalists, while their methodologies — through which they sometimes arrived at questionable or erroneous conclusions — have received less focus. However, a scholar of Orientalist methodologies seeks primarily to understand the objectives, concerns,

and tendencies of the authors rather than merely validating or rejecting their conclusions; the aim is to explore the underlying assumptions and outcomes associated with different methods of textual analysis (Abbasi, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 46–48).

The background of the present study includes works that have addressed source criticism within broader discussions of critical methods, such as "Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook" by John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, translated into Persian by Azam Pouya and Saeed Shafiei (2021 AD/1400 SH), and "Modern Methods of Interpreting Sacred Texts" by Fatemeh Tawfighi (2022 AD/1401 SH). In addition, Saeed Shafiei's article "The Flow of Qur'anic Historical Studies in the West" briefly addresses the approach of source criticism in the context of the modern skepticism movement.

Nevertheless, this study differs from previous research in two main respects: first, it specifically focuses on the application of source criticism to Qur'anic studies; second, it emphasizes a critical examination of the two-source hypothesis advanced by Gabriel Said Reynolds.

In this research, I will first explicate the method of source criticism and its application to the Quran, and finally present various merits and critiques regarding the use of source criticism in Qur'anic studies.

The discussion begins with an explanation of the concept of "Criticism."

1. Conceptualizing "Criticism"

Biblical exegesis generally proceeds through two stages: "First, the analysis or dissection of texts, and second, their synthesis. Contemporary biblical interpreters strive to pose questions and find suitable answers by employing modern methods and findings, such as lexical studies, textual criticism, and historical analysis." They then combine these answers to produce a coherent and meaningful interpretation of the text (Hayes and Holladay, 2007: 29–30). If we define exegesis as the extraction of meaning from a text (Pakatchi, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 1, 15; Hayes and Holladay, 2007: 5), then

undoubtedly, Western scholars are also engaged in exegesis. However, they typically do not use the term "Exegesis" for their research activities; instead, when addressing new methods of interpreting sacred texts, they prefer the term "Criticism."

Each approach is considered a type of "Criticism," a technical term used by scholars to refer to a field of study that has developed clearly defined principles and techniques. The word "Criticism" is derived from the Greek term *krinein*, meaning "To judge" or "To distinguish," and it refers to the process of making discerning judgments. A literary critic studies literary documents and seeks to make intelligent and informed evaluations of them. Ultimately, these judgments may be positive or negative, constructive or non-constructive. Yet "Criticism" in itself is a neutral term and does not inherently imply negative evaluation or fault-finding.

Biblical criticism, as a broad category, encompasses numerous subfields and extensive exegetical activities aimed at making insightful judgments about the Bible. Thus, being "Critical" does not necessarily mean being "Destructive" or "Constructive" (Hayes and Holladay, 2007: 26–27). Similarly, Muslim exegetes also engage in textual and rhetorical analysis to attain accurate and informed assessments of texts.

In Western biblical studies, various types of criticism have developed, including source criticism, historical criticism, textual criticism, grammatical (syntactic) criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism, structural criticism, and canonical criticism (ibid: 33–130).

2. Source Criticism

In this section, the conceptualization of source criticism, its aims, principles and foundations, stages, and its distinction from literary criticism will be examined.

2.1. Conceptualization

The historical-critical approach has been employed in Qur'anic studies by Orientalists since the early nineteenth century, with many scholars

seeking to identify the sources of the Qur'an. In fact, source criticism emerged during the Enlightenment and reached its peak in the nineteenth century (Barton, 1992: 6, 169). As noted in the entry "Form and Structure of the Qur'an" in the Encyclopedia of the Quran, "in historical-critical studies, the search for an "Original Text" has become a common endeavor." (Neuwirth, 2002: 253)

Source criticism is a type of historical criticism that pertains to the history of the composition and writing of a text (Tawfiqi, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 41), and serves as a tool to determine which sources or materials the authors of sacred texts have drawn upon (West, 2022: 2). In other words, its aim is to identify earlier written sources from which the current text has been compiled. Previously known as "Literary Criticism"[1] or "Higher Criticism,"[2] source criticism is a method for studying the Bible that analyzes texts not as the work of a single author, but as compositions assembled from separate original documents. This method has been applied to biblical texts (Barton, 1992: 6, 162). It seeks to identify the historical background and potential sources of a given text or work (Fitzmyer, 1989: 250).

When biblical criticism developed techniques such as form, tradition, and redaction criticism, a type of higher criticism — which we call

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1 The authors of the *Encyclopaedia of the Quran* have utilized literary criticism methods when analyzing the etymology of terms in various entries. In the entry on "Antichrist," under the title "Etymology" (Robinson, 2001: 107), the potential derivation of "Crucifixion" from the Syriac *ṣelībā* (meaning cross) (Robinson, 2001: 487), *ṣalāt* from the Syriac *ṣeloṭā* (Bwering, 2004: 217), "Verse" from the Syriac *ʾāṯā*, the Hebrew *ʾūṯ* (Neuwirth, 2006: 419), and the borrowing of the word *ʾāzar* from a non-Arabic source (Firestone, 2001: 192), as well as *furqān*, a word borrowed from Syriac/Aramaic meaning salvation (Wagtendonk, 2002: 183), are all examples of literary criticism. The derivation of *Messiah* from the Aramaic word and the use of the term *al-Masīḥ* in relation to the Antichrist (*al-Masīḥ al-Dajjāl*, the one-eyed) is also based on its Syriac usage (Rippin, 2001: 103). Additionally, in the entry on "Foreign Vocabulary," Rippin extensively applies literary criticism methods, stating, "...Another factor would be words that were known from other languages and whose meaning as used in the Qurān was such as to suggest a relationship between the qurānic usage and the foreign language..." (Rippin, 2002: 227-228)

2. This term indicates that higher-level questions are being asked—questions regarding the origin of the material, not just the accuracy of its transmission by scribes.

source criticism — came to be generally referred to as "Literary Criticism." This method was termed "Literary" to emphasize that it focused on written documents rather than orally transmitted units or traditions. This usage persisted in German-language scholarship. However, in the English-speaking world, because the term "Literary" in secular literary studies carries a very different meaning — referring to evaluative and interpretive study of literature — the term "Literary Criticism" proved misleading. In Britain and North America, "Literary Criticism" typically refers to the evaluative and interpretive examination of literature rather than to the investigation of the origins or sources of a literary work. Therefore, the term "Source Criticism" is the preferred designation. Nevertheless, it also has its drawbacks: "Source Criticism" may imply that the critic's task is simply to discover sources, whereas, in reality, it is to determine whether a text is composite and derived from multiple sources. Hence, the more neutral term "Literary Criticism" may still be preferable, as it does not prejudge the outcomes of the analysis (Barton, 1992: 6, 169).

2.2. Difference between Source Criticism and Literary Criticism

In fact, source criticism emerged as a follow-up to literary criticism in the West. Literary criticism is concerned with the composition and rhetorical style of a text, and Biblical literary criticism resulted from the eighteenth-century scholars' awareness of the diversity among certain biblical documents. These scholars realized that some collections were formed from smaller earlier works. The attempt to separate these diverse documents led to the emergence of source criticism, and the process of identifying these sources or layers, explaining their content, characteristics, and relating them to each other became known as literary criticism (Hayes and Holladay, 2007: 73).

2.3. The Purpose of Source Criticism

The suspicion that a book was not the work of a single author arises from inconsistencies, repetitions, and dualities within the text. The source critic should note every instance where a break, inconsistency,

or discontinuity exists within the text (Barton, 1992: 6, 165). Source criticism seeks to understand the sources of the sacred text and the evolution of its writing, exploring how different pieces of the text came together to form its final structure. When multiple hands in a text make the researcher question whether a single individual wrote it at a single point in time, a plausible guess is that the text consists of fragments from different places and times. In ancient texts, this plurality of authorship is observable, and discovering the sources of these texts is referred to as source criticism. While past commentators and scholars also saw this plurality, they would attempt to harmonize it, minimizing internal contradictions. However, in modern criticism, this plurality is not only acknowledged but also draws scholars' attention to something deeper—information about the history of the text's composition. Source criticism has been particularly important in Biblical studies, especially in regard to the sources of the Torah's Five Books and the synoptic problem of the Gospels.

2.4. Stages of Source Criticism

The stages of source criticism include the separation of the text, the reconstruction of sources, and the dating of sources (Barton, 1992: 6, 165). Gabriel Reynolds has written about this method in his book "The Quran and its Biblical Subtext" and his article "The Quranic Doublets." He argues that the Quran is a sermon derived from the Biblical tradition, alongside other sermons produced in its time. Therefore, the Quran is best read in light of Jewish-Christian sacred texts.

2.5. Principles and Foundations

The principles and foundations of source criticism consist of the following two points:
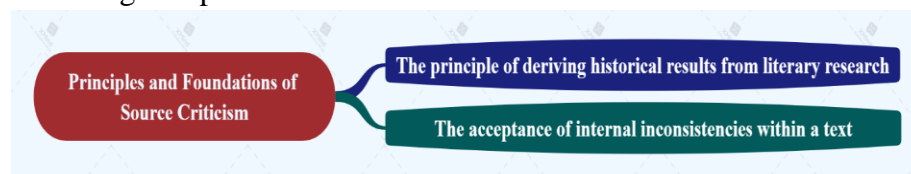
2.5.1. Deriving Historical Results from Literary Research

One of the fundamental principles of source criticism is that literary and linguistic research leads to historical results. That is, historical inquiry relies more on the literary analysis of the text itself than on external sources such as archaeological findings or independent historical records. For example, when performing source criticism on the Pentateuch, scholars separate sections that use the divine name "Elohim" from those that use "Yahweh." (Towfighi, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 57)

2.5.2. Acceptance of Inconsistencies within a Text

A necessary precondition for source criticism is the acceptance of internal inconsistencies within a text without attempting to harmonize conflicting points. The different sources of the Pentateuch reflect internal contradictions just as much as the division of the Qur'anic surahs into Meccan and Medinan categories indicates a certain type of inconsistency. It is also literarily interesting to observe how the final editor harmonized various sources into a coherent final text. In cases where source criticism has produced definitive results, further interpretative steps can be based upon those findings. Even where critical studies have not led to conclusive outcomes, the very assumption of multiple literary and linguistic strands affects the reader's perspective and understanding of the text. Source criticism frees the reader from notions of uniformity and assists in uncovering the internal variations and distinctions—insights that would be difficult to achieve without considering the principles of source criticism (ibid.: 65–66).

3. The Application of Source Criticism to the Qur'an

In this section, the application of source criticism to the Qur'an will be examined through three focal points: "The secondary insertion of Medinan sūrahs according to Neuwirth," "Sinai's evolutionary model," and "Reynolds' two-source hypothesis."

3.1. The Theory of the Secondary Insertion of Medinan Sūrahs according to Neuwirth

Angelika Neuwirth, in her entry "Sura" in the Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān (EQ), argues that the legal content of the Medinan surahs exhibits no structural coherence and is not part of carefully structured literary units; rather, it appears that these materials were inserted later into previously less coherent compositions (Neuwirth, 2006: 175). She states that at a later stage—when it came to be believed that the particular form of revelation communicated to the Muslim community constituted a specific sacred text, or, in other words, when societal matters were incorporated into the broader framework of salvation history—all surahs came to be regarded as manifestations of *al-Kitāb* (ibid: 173).

Neuwirth seeks to outline a general perspective on the formation of the surahs as a literary genre during the pre-canonical phase of the Qur'an. She emphasizes "Intervals and structures of verses as a criterion for approximate dating." (Neuwirth, 2002: 251)

She categorizes the surahs into four developmental periods as literary units, considering the early, middle, and late Meccan surahs to be characterized by a certain thematic cohesion, while viewing the Medinan surahs as lacking systematic composition.

In her analysis of the Medinan surahs, Neuwirth contends that in Medina, the surahs lost their original tripartite compositional structures and display less literary refinement. She identifies Surah *al-Ḥajj*, *al-Nūr*, *al-Aḥzāb*, *Muḥammad*, *al-Fatḥ*, *al-Ḥujurāt*, and the cluster from *al-Ḥadīd* to *al-Taḥrīm* as "Homiletic" or "Sermonic" surahs, arguing that they consist of exhortative speeches directed at the community, frequently introduced by expressions like *Yā Ayyuhā al-Nās* ("O! People") (e.g., al-Ḥajj: 1). Furthermore, she regards Surat *al-Ḥashr*, *al-Ṣaff*, *al-Jumuʿa*, and *al-Taghābun*, which open with *Tasbīḥ* (glorification) formulas, as reminiscent of the Psalms. In comparison to cohesive addresses, Neuwirth describes the group of Medinan surahs and the so-called *long surahs*—such as those from *al-Baqarah* to *Yūnus*—as constituting the most complex sections of the entire Qur'anic corpus (Neuwirth, 2006: 174).

According to Neuwirth, the temporal organization in the Medinan surahs is aligned with the emergence of Islamic rituals, while at the same time, the unfolding of major historical events shapes the self-consciousness of the community. A new feature of the Medinan surahs is the reporting of events in which the community itself is engaged or plays an active role, such as the Battle of *Badr* (Āli ʿImrān: 123), the Battle of *Uḥud* (Āli ʿImrān: 155–174), the expulsion of the *Banū Naḍīr* (al-Ḥashr: 2–5), the conquest of *Khaybar* (al-Fatḥ: 15), the expedition to *Tabūk* (al-Tawba: 29–35), and the Prophet's Farewell Pilgrimage (al-Māʾida: 1–3).

In her methodological approach to the surahs, Neuwirth first examines their literary and thematic coherence and then investigates the textual cross-references between surahs (Neuwirth, 2014: 208–209). She maintains that certain verses related to earlier textual strata are cited or re-read within later Qur'anic contexts, thereby illuminating the Qur'an's self-referential strategies (Neuwirth, 2006: 424).

3.2. Sinai's Evolutionary Model

Sinai investigates the major changes observed between the Medinan and Meccan surahs, interpreting these developments as indicative of a significant evolution in the Quran's message and rhetorical strategies. He analyzes the differences and similarities between the Medinan and non-Medinan surahs, arguing that the Medinan surahs are distinct in both literary style and content, emphasizing particular themes such as legal rulings and social conduct, whereas the Meccan surahs predominantly address general ethical exhortations (Sinai, 2017: 208–209).

According to Sinai, several salient features characterize the Medinan material:

1) Thematic Divergence: The Medinan surahs focus on legislation (*sharīʿa*), social behavior, and polemics against the People of the Book, whereas Meccan surahs primarily offer broad moral admonitions (Sinai, 2017: 208–209).

2) Transformations in the Qurʾanic Message: Sinai highlights a significant shift in the Quran's message from passive expectation in

Mecca to active engagement and warfare in Medina (ibid: 188–190).

3) Elevation of the Prophet's Status: In Medina, the Prophet's role evolves from that of an admonisher to the leader of the emerging community, vested with executive authority and mediating religious and social disputes. Sinai draws a parallel between the Prophet's role and that of Christian bishops, though noting the Prophet's direct mandate from God (ibid: 188–190, 208–209).

4) Formation of a Distinct Religious Identity: Instead of promoting a universal message, the Medinan surahs focus on constructing a distinct Islamic identity separate from Judaism and Christianity, laying the foundations of an Islamic legal order (ibid: 188–190).

5) The Qur'anic Perspective on *Jihā:* Jihad is initially presented as a defensive necessity but eventually evolves into an instrument for establishing monotheism. Thus, in the Medinan surahs, armed struggle becomes a religious obligation, conceived not merely as defensive but as an ideological act aimed at securing the exclusive worship of God, not material gain (ibid: 190–192).

Thus, Sinai argues that the Medinan surahs shift attention beyond purely religious concerns to broader social, legal, and communal leadership functions (Sinai, 2015–2016: 66–70).

Furthermore, Sinai examines the relationship between the Medinan and non-Medinan parts of the Qurʾan, offering several overarching conclusions:

- **Continuity and Discontinuity**

While the Medinan surahs exhibit distinct thematic and stylistic features, they do not represent a complete rupture from the non-Medinan corpus. For instance, the motif of "obedience to the Prophet," highly pronounced in the Medinan material, is also attested in Meccan passages, albeit less prominently.

- **Evolutionary Model**

Sinai proposes an evolutionary model in which the Medinan corpus emerges from the earlier non-Medinan material. He contends that stylistic and linguistic continuities suggest a developmental process linking the two corpora, treating the Medinan surahs as an extension and elaboration of the Meccan compositions (Sinai, 2015–2016: 66–

70; Sinai, 2015–2016: 73–75).

- **Critique of the Two-Source Hypothesis**

Sinai finds the strict "Two-source hypothesis," which posits a sharp division between Meccan and Medinan texts, less convincing. He argues that evidence indicates an awareness of non-Medinan material within Medinan surahs; for example, references to Abraham's intercession for his idolatrous father and the depiction of Gabriel as the conveyor of revelation demonstrate intertextual links.

Sinai suggests that "A core non-Medinan body of material may have been embedded at a second stage, during which Medinan expansions incorporated references to the earlier corpus." He points to examples such as Qurʾan 9:114 — which address Abraham's intercession — to illustrate this secondary interpolation process (Reynolds, 2020: 36).

In sum, Sinai demonstrates the distinctive literary and thematic features of the Meccan and Medinan materials, treating them as coherent yet historically intertwined sections of the Qurʾanic corpus. Reynolds, for his part, asserts that his own research adds further supporting evidence to Sinai's evolutionary model (ibid: 33–35).

3.3. Reynolds' Two-Source Hypothesis

Gabriel Said Reynolds, in his article "The Quranic Doublets: A Preliminary Inquiry" applies a step-by-step approach for identifying and analyzing "Doublets" in the Qur'an. He aims to address several questions, including whether the Qur'an emerged from distinct textual traditions (e.g., Meccan and Medinan sources), whether doublets reveal stages in the Qur'anic editing process and its transition from oral proclamation to written text, how pre-canonical sources might be reconstructed based on patterns of repetition, and what other forms of repetition (such as singular terms or thematic cycles) could clarify the Qur'anic structure beyond doublets.

3.3.1. Source Criticism in the Study of Gospel Doublets

Doublets are similar or nearly identical expressions that appear twice in different Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), or even within the same

Gospel. For example, the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:3-23, Mark 4:3-20, and Luke 8:5-15 appears with minor narrative differences. According to Reynolds, these slight variations in wording suggest different sources or adaptations for specific audiences.

Studies of the Gospels using "source criticism" have led researchers to the "Two-Source Hypothesis." According to this hypothesis, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke were composed using materials from two older sources: the Gospel of Mark and a separate source called "Q" (from the German "Quelle," meaning "source"). The rationale for this hypothesis lies in the significant number of shared materials (doublets) between Matthew and Luke, compared to Mark, and the scarcity of doublets in Mark itself, indicating its precedence and originality. The synoptic problem examines the relationships between Matthew, Mark, and Luke, positing that Mark, being the oldest Gospel, served as a source for both Matthew and Luke, while Q contains sayings of Jesus used by both. Reynolds believes that repeated phrases in the Gospels are not merely repeated sayings of Jesus in different contexts but rather the result of later editorial processes based on older sources. Essentially, Gospel scholars encountered the same material in both Source A and Source B, and they incorporated it from both sources, giving rise to doublets (Reynolds, 2020:21).

Biblical scholars argue that the doublets in the Gospels reflect the use of multiple sources (e.g., Mark and Q) or editorial activities in which an author reuses material. For example, the Gospel of Luke might include two versions of a saying of Jesus, each adapted for different audiences.

3.3.2. Source Criticism in the Study of Qur'anic Doublets
Reynolds argues that, just as the study of doublets in the Gospels contributes to the reconstruction of early Christian texts and the identification of source relationships, similar methodologies can be applied to Qur'anic doublets to trace their sources and editorial history. Thus, Reynolds' methodology in this article is based on techniques that have been developed over more than two centuries of

research on doublets in the Gospels.

The study of Qur'anic doublets, therefore, aligns with similar studies of biblical texts, particularly the synoptic Gospels. Reynolds suggests that by applying similar methodologies, such as source criticism and editorial analysis, a bridge is created between Qur'anic studies and biblical studies. Doublets, in this context, offer clues about how sacred texts were composed, edited, and transmitted over time, and reveal aspects of the pre-canonical history of the Qur'an, including possible written sources or editorial processes.

Reynolds identified 29 doublets in the Qur'an, each based on at least nine matching words, across the Qur'anic text. After identifying these doublets, he analyzed them structurally and semantically. According to his analysis, most doublets align completely or with only minor differences. He attributes this to the use of pre-Qur'anic written sources that were integrated into the final compilation of the Qur'an.

Reynolds categorized the doublets based on historical period and subject matter into three groups:
1. 13 Meccan-Meccan doublets: These are found in Meccan surahs, which mainly address theological and eschatological issues.
2. 12 Medinan-Medinan doublets: These appear in surahs from the Medinan period, which focus more on laws, social issues, and community formation.
3. 4 Meccan-Medinan doublets: These are rarer and consist of doublets where one part is found in a Meccan surah and the other in a Medinan surah. This type of doublet suggests the overlap or transfer of topics between the two historical periods.

The distribution patterns show that most doublets fall into either the Meccan-Meccan or Medinan-Medinan categories, with only four doublets spanning both periods. Reynolds believes that the Qur'anic doublets mainly consist of Meccan-Meccan or Medinan-Medinan pairs.

3.3.2.1. The Rarity of Meccan-Medinan Doublets in Reynolds' View

Reynolds argues that the rarity of Meccan-Medinan doublets indicates

that these repetitions likely stem from distinct sources or traditions, rather than being composed continuously. It is more probable that the doublets reflect two separate sets of non-canonical Meccan and Medinan materials (ibid: 30).

The Qur'an contains two distinct sub-corpora, one Meccan and one Medinan. The Qur'an gradually expanded over time, adapting to the different contexts of Mecca and Medina, with Medinan texts developing from non-Medinan ones (ibid: 33-35).

Thus, the clustering of Meccan-Meccan and Medinan-Medinan doublets suggests that the Qur'an utilized distinct pre-canonical texts: the Meccan corpus emphasizing theology and eschatology, and the Medinan corpus focusing on laws and community guidance. This study supports the hypothesis that the final form of the Qur'an emerged through editorial activities, merging prior sources and adapting them to new contexts. It indicates that the Qur'an drew from distinct textual traditions compiled during its canonical formation. Therefore, the Qur'anic doublets, due to their thematic similarities between Meccan and Medinan surahs, provide evidence of separate sources that were later integrated.

Reynolds emphasizes that the traditional view of the Qur'anic compilation process summarizes it in two stages: first, the oral proclamation of revelation, and second, the gathering of these oral declarations into a formal written text during the time of *'Uthmān*. However, literary studies by Neuwirth and Sinai on the Qur'anic text suggest that some verses were added to Meccan surahs during the Prophet's (PBUH) time in Medina.

For instance, verse 20 of Surah *al-Muzzammil* and verse 31 of Surah *al-Muddathir* are considered Medinan additions to Meccan surahs. Moreover, they highlight the presence of complex and layered editorial structures in the longer Medinan surahs (i.e., from Surah al-Baqarah to Surah al-Mā'idah). These studies illustrate the significant role of the "Editing" process in the final compilation of the Qur'anic text.

3.3.2.2. The Connection between Doublets and the Evolutionary Model of Sinai

Reynolds writes that Sinai's perspective aligns with the results provided by the doublets, suggesting that a part of the Qur'anic textual corpus, prior to its official codification, likely existed in two independent sources: the Meccan source and the Medinan source. The extremely low frequency of Meccan-Medinan doublets indicates the independence of these two textual sub-corpora from each other.

3.3.2.3. Evidence against a Unified Oral Tradition

According to Reynolds, doublets are not simply repetitions that have occurred randomly or intentionally in different contexts (or are re-revealed). Rather, they are the result of the Qur'anic text's editorial process. Due to their remarkable length, which exceeds the typical framework of oral speech patterns, doublets clearly indicate that they were derived from a written source—one that is not directly available to us. In other words, these doublets are akin to texts that scholars have proposed to reconstruct the early history of Gospel writings, such as "Q" (Quelle) and the hypothetical Proto-Matthew (ibid: 30).

The lack of frequent Meccan-Medinan doublets suggests that the Qur'an was not entirely reconstructed within a single, continuous oral tradition. Instead, it likely reflects the editing of previous written sources. This pattern challenges the idea of a purely oral process and supports the hypothesis of pre-canonical written sources. Qur'anic doublets propose distinct pre-canonical sources that were probably written down and later integrated into the official text. The explanation of doublets, especially exact matches, is difficult within a purely oral-only model. Rather, they suggest reliance on written materials that were reused during the process of compilation. In fact, Reynolds uses the doublet phrases as evidence to formulate or expand a theory about the process of the Qur'an's formation, editing, and final stabilization. He believes these phrases are the result of editorial work applied to the text after the Prophet's (PBUH) death and before the final consensus on the official Qur'anic version (ibid: 14).

3.3.2.4. The Three-Stage Process of Qur'anic Codification

The Qur'anic doublets and their distribution reveal the process of the writing and compilation of the Qur'an, which was based on written texts and the editing of unofficial sources, ultimately leading to the creation of the official and standardized version of the Qur'an, likely during the reign of *'Uthmān*. The central proposition of this analysis is that the Qur'an had a written source. Reynolds adds that if this suggestion is correct, a new stage should be added to the stages of Qur'anic codification (ibid: 30-32). He believes that the evidence from the doublets, especially their distribution in the Meccan-Meccan and Medinan-Medinan groups, points to a three-stage process in the production and official codification of the Qur'an:

A) The stage of oral (or possibly written) declaration or codification of verses by the Prophet;

B) The stage of the formation of two independent textual sub-corpora (unofficial): one Meccan and the other Medinan;

C) The stage of editing the Meccan and Medinan textual sources (and other available sources) for the compilation of the official and standardized Qur'an, with additions and deletions.

3.3.2.5. Editorial and Corrective Processes

The doublets indicate that verses, rather than surahs, were the primary units of composition in the early stages of the Qur'an. Repetitive verses reflect intentional revisions and editorial decisions that shaped the final text. The presence of doublets aligns with the concept of editorial work that combines, adapts, or repeats previous content to create the final text. The editorial process may have involved merging Meccan and Medinan materials and adjusting verses for new contexts without significant changes in content.

Reynolds suggests that other materials might have been added to the Qur'an during stage C. He believes that doublets are instances where a verse from a completed surah was substituted into the next surah. His findings are as follows:

1. The large number of doublets, as well as their word-for-word nature, guides us towards a writing process;

2. Given the scarcity of mixed Meccan and Medinan doublets, there must have been two independent Meccan and Medinan sources (ibid: 32).

In his view, some doublets may reflect the oral roots of the Qur'anic tradition, where repetition served mnemonic or rhetorical purposes, while others represent deliberate editorial choices, such as emphasizing key themes for legal or theological emphasis. Reynolds stresses that each doublet should be carefully examined to determine whether it is a version of the original source or the result of the editorial process. According to him, doublets found in unofficial texts (stage B) should be considered editorial doublets unless evidence to the contrary is presented. This distinction could set the history of the Qur'an's formation apart from that of the Gospels, where most doublets in Matthew and Luke are classified by scholars as derived from the original source.

Drawing from experiences in New Testament studies, he explains that in the case of the Qur'an, the Meccan and Medinan sources were never directly combined but underwent transformation during the editing process. Thus, the proposed three-stage model involves not just the joining or even the insertion of Meccan and Medinan texts in stage B but also the editing and reworking of these texts in stage C. He writes: "A careful study of these changes, at least for those doublets that show differences, can assist us in discerning which version reflects the older or more original form." (ibid: 32-33)

4. Critique of the Application of "Source Criticism" in the Quran

"Source criticism" is, in fact, the starting point for many other methodologies and approaches and it helps scholars in the West to place the original text and its subsequent revisions within specific historical contexts, thereby gaining insight into its meaning within those contexts. Many theologians utilize the findings of "Source criticism" to demonstrate the context in which a sacred text conveys its message and how it evolved. Therefore, while "Source criticism" can be useful in understanding the internal development of the Quran, such as the differences between Meccan and Medinan surahs, it

becomes problematic when it postulates hypothetical primary sources for the Quran without sufficient evidence. In Quranic studies, such assumptions should be avoided. Furthermore, the applicability of "Source criticism" in the context of Hadith studies warrants further investigation (Tawfiqi, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 64-65).

The "Two-Source Hypothesis" faces several issues, which can be addressed under two main headings: methodological and historical critiques.
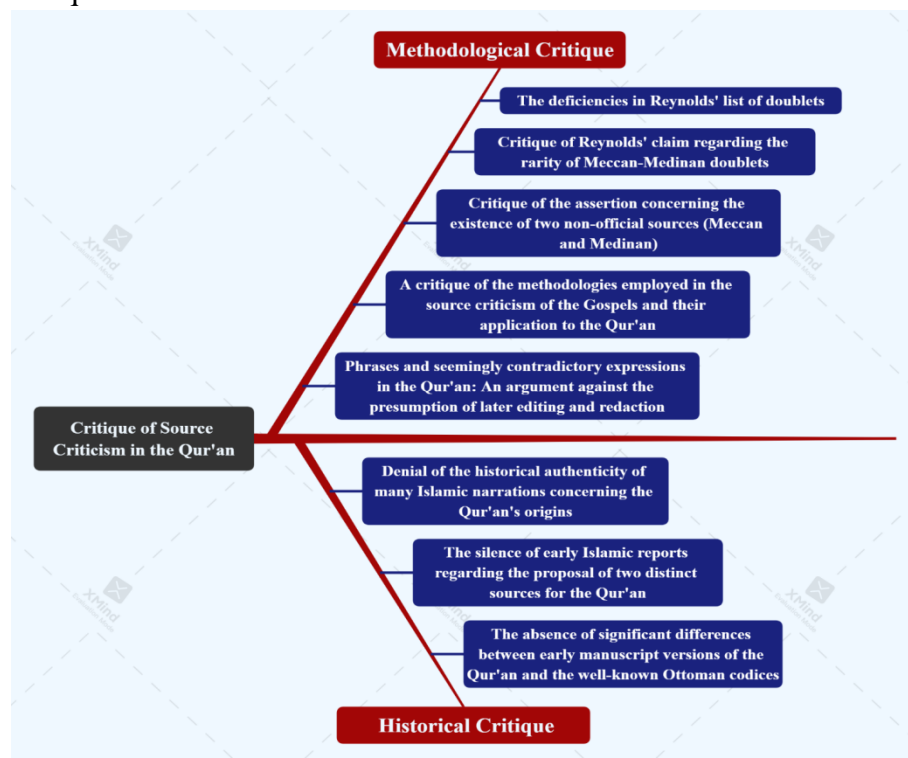
4.1. Methodological Critique
4.1.1.   Deficiencies in Reynolds' List of Doublets
The number of Qur'anic doublets, according to Reynolds' criteria, exceeds 29 instances. Reynolds' argument heavily relies on the notably low number of Meccan-Medinan doublets, only three out of 29 (approximately 10%), to support his thesis. However, five additional examples of Meccan-Medinan doublets, which Reynolds overlooks in his analysis (such as al-Baqarah: 170 and Luqmān: 21;

al-Baqarah: 36 and al-Aʿrāf: 24; Āli ʿImrān: 44 and Yūsuf: 102; Luqmān: 30 and al-Ḥajj: 62; as well as the triplet Yūsuf: 109, Muhammad: 10, and al-Ghāfir: 82), can significantly challenge the statistical basis of his argument (Noubari and MirMoradi, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 132-133). Including these examples could offer a substantially different perspective on the formation process of the Qur'an.

4.1.2. Critique of Reynolds' Explanation for the Rarity of Meccan-Medinan Doublets

In his analysis of Qur'anic doublets, Reynolds asserts that the predominance of Meccan-Meccan and Medinan-Medinan pairings indicates the presence of distinct Meccan and Medinan textual sub-corpora during the Qur'an's compilation process. However, even if we accept his numerical findings, an equally plausible alternative explanation must be considered, rendering Reynolds' claim an arbitrary preference without sufficient justification. Given the Qur'an's structure — characterized by audience-oriented content and a gradual thematic arrangement responding to the social and spiritual needs of early Muslims — the conditions following the Hijrah naturally led to significant thematic and structural differences between Medinan and Meccan surahs. Consequently, thematic repetition would more likely occur within the same socio-religious context, primarily during the Meccan period, where audience expectations and thematic concerns were more homogeneous. Thus, the relative rarity of Meccan-Medinan doublets does not necessarily imply the independent existence of two distinct textual sub-corpora but rather reflects the temporal, thematic, and social differences between the Meccan and Medinan phases. Therefore, Reynolds' theoretical basis in this regard requires reconsideration, with greater attention to the cultural and interpretive contexts of Qur'anic revelation.

4.1.3. Critique of the Claim Regarding the Existence of Two Non-Official Meccan and Medinan Sources

One of the central points in Reynolds' analysis is the hypothesis that

two independent non-official sources underlie the Meccan and Medinan passages of the Qur'an. He posits that the Qur'anic doublets reflect these two textual sub-corpora, which allegedly existed prior to the official compilation of the Qur'an. However, this claim faces several fundamental questions:

What precisely were these non-official sources, and where were they preserved? Reynolds, drawing upon the length of certain doublets, concludes that these materials could not have been transmitted purely through oral memory, arguing that lengthy passages would have inevitably been forgotten without written documentation, and therefore must have been preserved in written form before their incorporation into the Qur'an. Nevertheless, this argument is grounded in a human-centered presupposition regarding the limitations of memory, and it is open to critique from a Qur'anic perspective. According to the explicit statement in Surah al-A'lā (87:6), God reassures the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) by saying, "We shall make you recite, so you will not forget."

Based on this assertion, the presumption that the existence of written records was necessary to prevent forgetfulness becomes highly questionable from a Qur'anic standpoint. Consequently, it cannot serve as a robust foundation for asserting the existence of non-official written sources.

4.1.4. Critique of the Application of Gospel Source Criticism Methods to the Qur'an

It appears that Reynolds' research operates heavily under the influence of methodologies developed for Gospel studies. However, historical evidence and the existing chains of oral transmission (*Ijāzāt al-Qirāʾah*) clearly demonstrate that the Qur'an was established from the outset on the basis of oral transmission. The Qur'an is a spoken message, preserved letter by letter and generation by generation through the collective memory of the early Muslim community. The transmission chains, beginning with the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), confirm the authenticity and continuity of this oral tradition. In contrast, Biblical texts, such as the Gospels, were often compiled from

earlier written sources, and textual criticism and manuscript studies play a central role in their scholarly analysis. However, such an approach proves inadequate when applied to the Qur'an. The Qur'an was orally transmitted from the beginning, and its early written manuscripts were produced based on these oral recitations. Even today, the Qur'an's authenticity is primarily grounded in the oral chains of transmission, with written codices being secondary to this oral foundation. Therefore, investigating the origins and compilation of the Qur'an using the methods of Biblical textual criticism is methodologically inappropriate, since the Qur'an is not a written text dependent on earlier manuscripts but rather a text shaped by a living oral tradition (Akhavan Sarraf, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 179). As *Wadād Qāḍī* and *Mustanṣir Mir* argue, the fundamental differences between the Qur'an and the Bible necessitate the application of distinct, text-specific critical methods (Kadi and Mir, 2003: 213).

4.1.5. Problematic and Apparently Contradictory Phrases in the Qur'an: An Argument Against Any Subsequent Revision and Editing

According to John Burton, the Qur'an contains certain problematic, seemingly contradictory, and difficult-to-understand phrases, which in themselves serve as evidence against any kind of subsequent revision or editing. Such revisions could have easily resolved these issues (Schöller, 2004: 202).

4.2. Historical Critique
4.2.1. Denial of the Historical Nature of Many Narratives About Islamic Origins

Reynolds' reconstruction requires the additional claim that all Islamic narratives regarding the history of the early centuries of Islam are distorted. Both Burton and Wansbrough also denied the historical nature of many narratives about Islamic origins (Schöller, 2004: 202). However, there is undeniable evidence that ancient Islamic sources and texts have deep historical roots (Rezai Haftador et al., 2022 AD/1401 SH: 214). Twentieth-century research has shown that all

areas of Islamic tradition and knowledge are deeply interconnected, and it became evident that separating certain parts as valuable or historically authentic from others is, if not impossible, at least extremely difficult (Schöller, 2004: 198). Therefore, Islamic narratives are much older and closer to actual historical events (Motzki, 2001: 31), and due to the lack of reliable data, none of these hypotheses can be considered conclusive.

4.2.2. Complete Silence of Islamic Narratives Regarding Two Proposed Sources for the Qur'an

The hypothesis of the existence of two main and independent Meccan and Medinan sub-corpora within the Qur'an is unprecedented among the factions. Despite the competition and disputes within the early Islamic community, all Islamic sects agree on the fundamental features of Islamic history. A widespread conspiracy or collusion among the exegetes and Muslims is highly unlikely (Donner, 1998: 26-27, 282).

4.2.3. No Difference Between Early Qur'anic Manuscripts of the First Two Centuries and the So-Called Uthmanic Qur'ans

The results produced by the method of source criticism have been challenged by opponents who have raised various critiques, just as opponents of the skeptical approach have cited inscriptions, codices, newly discovered papyri and coins, and the analysis of documentary evidence in their criticisms. Schoeler maintains that the external evidence is sufficient to at least confirm certain details of the Islamic historical tradition (Schoeler, 2011: 13–15). Marco Schöler acknowledges the following: "Considering the evidence from Qur'anic manuscripts of the first two centuries of Islam, it is difficult to accept that the history of the early centuries of Islam could have taken shape while its sacred text (the Qur'an) was still in a gradual process of formation. Qur'anic manuscripts from the first and second centuries show little difference from the so-called Uthmanic Qur'ans, and the historical evidence regarding the emergence of the Qur'an is not entirely incompatible with what Islamic sources report." Schöler

writes: "...Most Islamic scholars quickly concluded that none of these hypotheses would ultimately hold." (Schöller, 2004: 200)

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the foundations, approaches, and outcomes of the historical-critical method of "Source criticism" in Qur'anic studies. In this regard, three prominent approaches in this field were analyzed: "The theory of "Secondary inclusion of Medinan surahs" from the perspective of Neuwirth, the "Evolutionary model" of Sinai, and Reynolds' "Two-source hypothesis." The results of this study revealed that the source criticism method, like other historical methods, can be useful in understanding the context of revelation of the verses and distinguishing the content of Meccan and Medinan surahs, shedding light on part of the internal development process of the Qur'anic text. However, in cases where this method, based on limited data or undocumented evidence, emphasizes the existence of hypothetical written sources for the Qur'an, it lacks sufficient credibility and is not acceptable within the framework of Qur'anic studies. The hypothesis of two unofficial sources, Meccan and Medinan, as proposed by Reynolds, lacks a solid argument due to methodological shortcomings and the weakness of historical evidence. The evidence presented by proponents of this view is insufficient to prove it. Therefore, it is not possible to reconstruct the stages of the final stabilization and compilation of the Qur'an based on this hypothesis. Meanwhile, the effectiveness and credibility of this method in the field of Hadith studies require independent and more precise investigations.

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