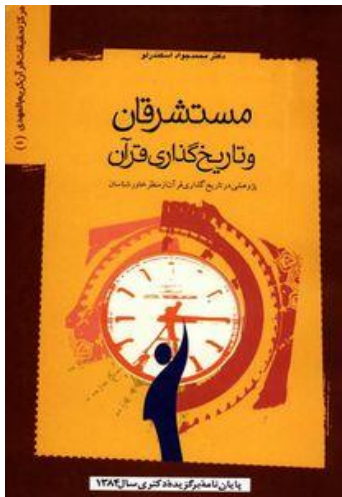




## Book Review



Dr. Muḥammad-Javad Eskandarlū, *Mustashriqān va tāriḵh-gudhārī dar Qur'ān: Pazhūhishī dar tāriḵh-gudhārī-ye Qur'ān az manzar-i khāvar-shināsān* [Orientalists and Chronology in the Quran: A Study on Quranic Chronology from the Perspective of Orientalists], 1st ed., Qum: Pazhūhish-hā-ye Tafsīr va 'Ulūm-i Qur'ān, 1385 Sh/ 2006. 277 pp. [in Persian]



This book was originally written as the PhD thesis by Dr. Muhammad Javad Eskandarlou. The present dissertation critiques and examines the research conducted by Orientalists regarding the chronological order of the revelation of Quranic verses and suras. This topic encompasses discussions such as the benefits of understanding the sequence of revelation of verses and suras, the history of the revelation of suras, tables of the sequence of revelation of suras, comparing the current order with the order of revelation, the first and last verses, the order of revelation of the

Quran in Mecca and Medina, Meccan and Medinan suras, abrogating and abrogated verses in the Quran. However, the author solely focuses on critiquing, examining, and elucidating the perspectives of Orientalists regarding the arrangement of the revelation of suras and their principles and criteria.

The first chapter delves into general concepts such as “Orientalism,” which refers to examining the body of studies conducted by Western scholars regarding the religion and sacred texts of the East, and “Chronology” (*tāriḵh-gudhārī*), which is the knowledge that determines the timing of events or states the dates of historical occurrences. The chronology of the Quran entails identifying the historical order of each unit of Quranic revelation, using various Meccan and Medinan narrations,



events from the life of Prophet Muhammad (s), and occasions of revelation. This research aims to critique non-Muslim Western scholars' views on the chronology of the Quran. Understanding the sequence and dates of the Quran's revelations leads to a deeper interpretation, correcting or validating numerous narrations. The author opines that while Orientalist studies provide a beneficial foundation, they are subject to critique, prompting the need for independent research. Then, he gives a historical background of Orientalist research on the Quran's chronology.

In the second chapter, the author provides a concise historical survey of the methods and books written by Muslim scholars to determine the history of the Quranic verses. Firstly, he refers to the predecessors' works: 1. The references of the Quran, which attempt to find evidence in the Quran concerning the order of revelation of certain verses, such as *al-Maghāzī* written by 'Urwat b. Zubayr (23-94 AH); 2. Narrations of the occasions of revelation (*riwāyāt-i asbāb al-nuzūl*), which appeared in the early centuries of Islam when some Quranic verses were linked with stories, with *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* by Wāhidī Nayshābūrī as an example of this type; 3. Narrations of the Order of Revelation (*riwāyāt-i tartībī-i nuzūl*), with the author mentioning 25 works in this category. Additionally, the author discusses 4. Abrogating and Abrogated narrations (*riwāyāt-i nāsikh wa mansūkh*), stating that while the narrations of the occasions of revelation and the order of revelation provide a more detailed and precise history of the related verses, the narrations of abrogating and abrogated verses do not play a decisive role in this matter. Lastly, he discusses 5. Meccan and Medinan narrations: The classification of the verses and suras of the Quran into Meccan and Medinan categories is based on a narration attributed to Ibn Abbas. It is important to note that the Meccan and Medinan classifications are derived from the occasions of revelation and the order of revelation, and should not be considered independent sources for the Quran's chronology; *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, by 'Abdul Raḥmān Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH) and *Al-Tamhīd fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, by Muḥammad Hādī Ma'rifat are two instances of this type.

Later scholars of the Quran expanded upon the use of narration to establish the Quran's chronology. This approach became foundational for



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figures such as al-Bayḍāwī and al-Suyūṭī. The narration-based chronology attributed to Ibn Abbas gained widespread acceptance and was embraced by Muslims. The standard edition published in Egypt in 1924 identified 86 Meccan suras and 28 Medinan suras, delineating the order of revelation and the Meccan and Medinan status of the verses at the beginning of each sura. However, as the author points out, scholars' efforts have encountered numerous shortcomings, such as failing to reconcile the narrations of the order of revelation with those of the occasions of revelation.

Chapter Three discusses the biographies of certain Orientalists. The author mentions that out of the orientalists who studied the Quran's chronology, only eight of them extensively addressed the determination of the dates of the revelation of the verses and suras of the Quran. 1. Gustav Weil (1808-1889); 2. Theodor Noldeke (1836-1930); 3. John Medows Rodwell (1808–1900); 4. Regis Blachere (1900-1973); 5. William Muir (1819-1905); 6. Hartwig Hirschfeld (1854-1934); 7. Richard Bell (1876-1952); 8. Hubert Grimme (1864-1942).

The fourth chapter examines the chronology (*tārikh-gudhārī*) of the Quran from the perspective of orientalists. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Orientalists have proposed various chronological systems for the suras. Gustav Weil's four-stage classification gained the most acceptance. He based the dating of the suras on historical events known through other sources, the themes of revelation, and the style and context of the structure of revelation. The author criticizes Weil's baseless reliance on the style and appearance of verses and suras to determine their chronological order.

Noldeke believes that it is easier to determine the chronology of the Medinan suras compared to the Meccan suras due to the availability of more accurate information. He suggests reordering some suras and verses, and many other scholars have adopted his approach. When accurate chronology is unavailable, Noldeke proposes analyzing the psychological development of the Prophet through the Quran itself. However, the author argues that this approach is incorrect, as revelation is not influenced by the prophet's personality. Many of Noldeke's statements are conjectural and lack a scientific basis. The author critiques some of Noldeke's conjectures, such as the belief that *Surat al-'Alaq* was not the first sura revealed to the Prophet.



The author addresses doubts raised by Rodwell, specifically his claim that the Prophet Muhammad manipulated Quranic revelations. Rodwell accuses the Prophet of mixing earlier revelations with later ones to diminish their intensity but provides no evidence. He also alleges that verses in *Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt* were moved during the Quran's compilation, but this is easily disproven by examining the sura's content.

Blachere, like Noldeke, has identified specific characteristics for each of the stages of Meccan and Medinan revelations and introduced them as criteria for distinguishing the suras of each class from those of others. Blachere's error, according to the author, lies in not providing historical or scientific justification for the organization and rearrangement of the suras. Blachere's personal taste and inclinations led to incorrect conclusions, including the claim that the number of suras in the Quran has been increased to 116 due to his classification, dividing *Suras al-'Alaq* and *al-Muddathir* into separate texts. Blachere rejects the traditional biography of the Prophet Muhammad and other conventional methods used to classify the suras of the Quran. Instead, he proposes considering the Quran itself as the basis for classification. However, the author believes that the chronological order of the verses and suras should rely on transmitted evidence and not on subjective methods employed by Orientalists. Blachere suggests using the style and language of the verses, the themes of the verses, and credible narrations as criteria for determining the chronological order, although he is criticized for not consistently adhering to these criteria.

One common mistake among the four mentioned orientalists, according to the author, is the belief that Meccan revelation differs from Medinan revelation in style. The belief is that the style of Meccan suras is characterized by intensity, severity, threats, and intimidation, while Medinan suras possess qualities such as flexibility, forgiveness, and kindness.

In the second part of the fourth chapter, the author examines four other orientalists who presented a different classification: Muir and Hirschfeld proposed a six-stage classification system, dividing the suras of the Quran into six categories (five categories of Meccan suras and one category of



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Medinan suras). Meanwhile, Grim has outlined and explained a three-stage system of suras, categorizing two stages as Meccan and one stage as Medinan. In contrast, Richard Bell has not presented any historical system for the suras; instead, he identifies the entirety of the Quran as having three stages: the stage of verses, the stage of the Quran, and the stage of the book.

Hubert Grimme respected tradition and arranged the Quranic suras based on Islamic narrations and chains of transmission. He aimed to reclassify the suras without disrupting their connections to narrations. He placed the suras into three categories: two Meccan categories and one Medinan category. He paid considerable attention to the style of the Quran in his arrangement, using the style of expressions, tone, and rhythm of words as criteria for classifying the verses and suras. As a result, his arrangement seems to reflect more of an exercise in personal taste.

Then, the author refers to some of Bell's views as mentioned in his book *Introduction to the Quran* and critiques them. One of his wrong views is that contrary to the view that the primary unit of revelation has always been in the form of a complete sura, he believed that the verses of revelation existed in much smaller units, often consisting of just one, two, or three verses. However, he provided no evidence for such a significant claim, whereas the revelation of complete suras of the Quran in an instantaneous manner is a matter of consensus.

In Muir's discourse, a sense of instability and contradiction is observed; he denies the Quranic nature of the first-stage suras yet considers other suras to possess a Quranic structure and divine message. However, acknowledging the revelatory nature of the other suras implies recognizing the Prophet Muhammad (s) as the Messenger of God.

Hartwig Hirschfeld categorized most suras of the Quran based on their themes and contents rather than event chronology and historical dating. He classified the Quranic revelations into affirmative suras, oratory and sermonistic suras, narrative suras, descriptive suras, and legislative and regulatory suras. However, his classification is rebuked due to the diverse themes and subjects of the Quranic suras. The assumption that each sura must necessarily contain verses with a unified theme is incorrect, as the Quran's verses are more directed towards the audience and the contextual



circumstances surrounding them. Therefore, situational coherence should be sought more than contextual coherence.

In Chapter Five, the author summarizes the viewpoints of eight orientalists on the chronology of the Quran and criticizes their views. He presents general criticisms of the orientalists' views, such as the claim of displacement in the verses of the Quran, the introduction of the Prophet Muhammad (s) as the author of the Quran, and differences in style between the Meccan and Medinan revelations. The orientalists generally do not give value to narrations, and when they do, they rely on weak narrations. Additionally, they compare the Quran to the Torah, the Gospel, and other heavenly books and claim that many verses of the Quran derive their content from the Torah and the Gospel without substantiating their claims with evidence. None of the classification systems for the suras in the context of Quranic chronology has been able to reach definitive, complete, or comprehensive results. This is because they either completely ignore the basis of the narrations and focus on the style, form, and apparent characteristics of the verses or they rely on weak narrations. In many cases, they attribute the rearrangement of verses from their original positions and their placement in other contexts to the Prophet and the compilers of the Quran, sometimes even claiming the distortion of the Quran. As a result, much of their research yields mere subjective impressions and approximations. The author suggests that, given the historical nature of this research, the most appropriate method of investigation is to refer to credible historical documents, authentic and sound narrations, and to carefully examine the contents of the verses and surahs.

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