

The Evolution of the Orientalist Chronological Theory of the Quran: Methodological Shifts and Epistemological Implications for Contemporary Qur'anic Studies



Yoga Pratama^{1*}, Ilhamni¹, Faizin¹ & Nurul Haliza¹

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Imam Bonjol Padang, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: pyoga4331@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to examine the development of Qur'anic chronology theory as formulated by Orientalist scholars, with particular focus on Gustav Weil, William Muir, Theodor Nöldeke, and Hubert Grimme. Through a detailed analysis of the theoretical and methodological frameworks they established, this research employs a qualitative, library-based methodology, utilizing historical-critical approaches and comparative analysis to trace paradigm shifts in the construction of Qur'anic chronology. The findings reveal that the evolution of Qur'anic chronological theory occurred through several interconnected intellectual phases. Weil initiated the discourse by integrating classical Islamic narratives with Western historical methods within a historical-rational framework; Muir foregrounded biographical and theological dimensions by correlating revelation with the Prophet's life trajectory; Nöldeke introduced a pivotal methodological transformation through his philological and linguistic approach; and Grimme emphasized dogmatic elements and theological development within the Qur'anic corpus. The progression of these theories was shaped by advancements in philology, debates concerning textual authenticity, colonial political contexts, and epistemological exchanges between Western and Muslim scholars. The study's implications demonstrate that the construction of chronology within Orientalist discourse is neither monolithic nor static but rather continuously evolves in response to its intellectual and sociopolitical milieu. This dynamic has also fostered renewed interest in tartib nuzulī methodologies among contemporary Muslim scholars such as Sayyid Qutb, Bint al-Syāṭi', and al-Jābirī, particularly in addressing the imperative for thematic and historical interpretation in Qur'anic studies.

Keywords:

Qur'anic chronology Theory; Orientalism; Tartib nuzuli; Historical criticism

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi evolusi teori kronologi Al-Qur'an yang dikembangkan oleh para orientalis, khususnya Gustav Weil, William Muir, Theodor Nöldeke, dan Hubert Grimme, melalui pembacaan atas kerangka teoretis dan metodologis yang mereka bangun. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis kajian pustaka, penelitian ini menerapkan pendekatan kritik-historis dan analisis komparatif untuk menelusuri perubahan paradigma dalam konstruksi kronologi Al-Qur'an. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perkembangan teori kronologi Al-Qur'an berlangsung melalui beberapa fase intelektual yang saling berkaitan. Weil memulai dengan kerangka historis-rasional yang memadukan narasi Islam klasik dan metode sejarah Barat; Muir menekankan dimensi biografis-teologis melalui keterkaitan pewahyuan dengan perjalanan hidup Nabi; Nöldeke menghadirkan pergeseran metodologis signifikan dengan pendekatan filologis-linguistik; sedangkan Grimme menyoroti aspek dogmatis serta perkembangan teologi dalam korpus Al-Qur'an. Evolusi teori ini dipengaruhi oleh kemajuan ilmu filologi, perdebatan mengenai otentisitas teks, dinamika politik kolonial, serta interaksi epistemologis antara sarjana Barat dan Muslim. Implikasi temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa konstruksi kronologi dalam wacana orientalis tidak bersifat tunggal, melainkan terus mengalami perubahan sesuai konteks intelektual dan sosiopolitik zamannya. Dinamika tersebut turut mendorong munculnya kembali minat terhadap pendekatan tartib nuzulī di kalangan sarjana Muslim kontemporer, seperti Sayyid Qutb, Bint al-Syāṭi', dan al-Jābirī, terutama dalam menjawab kebutuhan penafsiran tematik dan historis dalam studi Al-Qur'an.

Kata kunci:

Teori kronologi Al-Qur'an; Orientalis; Tartib nuzuli; Kritik historis

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Introduction

In the eighteenth century, Western academic discourse underwent a significant transformation in the study of the Quran.¹ During this period, Orientalists such as Gustav Weil applied a historical-critical methodology to determine the chronological order of Quranic verses. This effort to reorganize the sequence of revelation, based on assumptions regarding thematic and linguistic development, ultimately led to the formulation of what is now known as the chronological theory of the Quran. This theory emerged as a critique of the Uthmanic mushaf arrangement, which was viewed as not reflecting the original order of revelation and was often associated with claims of discontinuity within the Quranic text. This perspective directly contradicts a fundamental principle in *ulumul Quran*, which maintains that the order of verses (*tartib al-ayat*) is *tauqifi*—that is, divinely ordained—and has been subject to *ijtihad* and consensus among the Prophet's companions.² Consequently, the development of the chronological theory by Orientalists represents an epistemological shift, as it challenges the authority of transmission and the early Muslim community's consensus, both of which underpin the legitimacy of the mushaf.

The chronological theory of the Quran, as developed by Orientalist scholars, constitutes a systematic effort to understand the structure of the Quran and to clarify its relationship with antecedent religious traditions.³ This formulation also marks a significant paradigm shift within Western Islamic studies, positioning the interpretation of the Quranic revelation within a modern intellectual framework. Analyzing the underlying dynamics involved in the construction of the Quran's chronological theory among Orientalists is crucial for tracing the evolution of Orientalist thought and its role in generating a novel perspective on the Quran as a sacred text. Moreover, such analysis enables critical reflection on the epistemic biases embedded in Orientalist approaches and their potential influence on contemporary Islamic scholarship.

To date, research on the theory of the chronology of the Quran within Orientalist discourse can be categorized into three main areas. The first area encompasses studies that analyze the perspectives of Orientalist scholars regarding the Quran's chronology, as exemplified by the works of Ali Fitriana Rahmat,⁴ Nikmatul Khairiyah,⁵ Maria

¹ Sumna Sadaqat, "Orientalists' View on Quran," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, ahead of print, Elsevier BV, June 17, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2139/SSRN.3868816>.

² Fazlur Rahman, *Islam: Sejarah Pemikiran Dan Peradaban*, Terj. M Irsyad Rafsadie, in Mizan (Bandung, 2017).

³ Luthfia Shifaul, Amanah Burhani, and Annisa Fitri, "The History of Orientalist Quran Translation," *International Journal of Research* 1, no. 2 (December 2023): 213–23, <https://doi.org/10.55062/IJR.2023.V1I2/371/5>.

⁴ Ali Fitriana Rahmat, "Menimbang Teori Kronologi Al-Qur'an Sir William Muir Dan Hubbert Grimme," *Jurnal Al-Fanar* 3, no. 1 (2020): 57–70, <https://doi.org/10.33511/alfanar.v3n1.57-70>.

⁵ Khairiyah Nikmatul, "Kronologi Al-Qur`An Menurut Theodor Nöldeke Dan Sir William Muir (Studi Analisis The History Of The Qur`An Dan Life Of Mahomet)," No. Januari (Institut Ilmu Al-Qur`An (liq) Jakarta, 2021).

Ulfah,⁶ Saleh et al.,⁷ and Agustina et al.⁸ For example, Agustina et al. observed that, according to William Muir's framework, the Quran's chronology comprises 93 Meccan surahs and 21 Medinan surahs, whereas Grimme's framework identifies 92 Meccan surahs and 22 Medinan surahs. The second area involves investigations into the construction of the Quranic chronological theory by Orientalists, as examined by Shukron et al.,⁹ Asyrifah et al.,¹⁰ and Zunaidi Nur.¹¹ The third area addresses the implications of studying the Quranic chronology theory for the advancement of contemporary Quranic studies in Indonesia, as discussed in the works of Sirajuddin Bariqi,¹² Agustono,¹³ and Afwadzi et al.¹⁴ The existing literature demonstrates a dialectical progression and development of the Quranic chronological theory among Orientalists and its influence on Quranic scholarship. However, the predominant emphasis on individual Orientalist figures has led to an incomplete understanding of the comprehensive evolution of the Quranic chronology theory over time.

This paper seeks to investigate the development of the chronological theory of the Quran within Orientalist scholarship, acknowledging that each scholar proposes a unique theoretical framework and set of arguments concerning the formation of this chronology. The study addresses three principal research questions: first, how has the chronological theory of the Quran evolved within Orientalist discourse? Second, what factors have driven and influenced this evolution? Third, what are the implications of these developments for Quranic studies? This research aims to provide a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the progression of Quranic chronology theory in Orientalist discourse over time.

⁶ Maria Ulfah, "Kronologi Al-Qur'an I (Gustav Weil, Noldeke-Schwally Dan Blachère)," in *Academia.Edu* (Jakarta: Institut Ilmu Al-Qur'an (IIQ), 2019).

⁷ Muhammad Saleh, Hamka Hasan, and Rifqoh Qudsiyah, *Pre-Canonical Reading: An Analysis to the Neuwirth's Chronological Order of Qur'ān*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.7-11-2019.2294545>.

⁸ Dena Agustina, Devya Devya, and Dewi Sinta Setiawati Arafah, "Kronologi Turunnya Al-Qur'an Perspektif Orientalis: Studi Pemikiran Sir William Muir Dan Gustav Weil," *Integritas Terbuka: Peace and Interfaith Studies* 1, no. 1 (November 2022): 35–46, <https://doi.org/10.59029/int.v1i1.2>.

⁹ Ahmad Syukron and Nikmatul Khairiyah, "Chronology of the Qur'an According to Theodor Nöldeke and Sir William Muir (Analysis of the History of the Qur'an and Life of Mahomet)," *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal)* 5, no. 2 (2022).

¹⁰ Asyrifah Luthfiana Azmi, Nurun Nisaa Baihaqi, and Aidah Mega Kumalasari, "Angelika Neuwirth's Genealogy on Tartib Nuzuli as an Interpretation Method of the Qur'an," *Al'Adalah* 25, no. 1 (2022): 49–66, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujs.v18i2.854.1>.

¹¹ Zunaidi Nur, "Kronologi Al-Qur'an Periode Makkah (Analisis Internal Teks Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930) Dalam Penyusunan Kronologi al-Qur'an Periode Makkah)," *ULIL ALBAB: Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin* 1, no. 12 (2022): 4536–45.

¹² Sirajuddin Bariqi, "Pengaruh Theodor Nöldeke Terhadap Studi Sejarah Al-Qur'an Di Indonesia," *Suhuf* 11, no. 2 (2018): 237–56.

¹³ Ihwan Agustono, "Potret Perkembangan Metodologi Kelompok Orientalis Dalam Studi Al-Qur'an," *Studia Quranika: Jurnal Studi Quran* 4 (2020): 159–80.

¹⁴ Benny Afwadzi, Esa Nur Wahyuni, and Sulalah Sulalah, "Qur'anic Curriculum: Development of an Islamic Religious Education Curriculum with Makkiyah-Madaniyah Theory," *An-Nida'* 47, no. 2 (December 2023): 226, <https://doi.org/10.24014/an-nida.v47i2.27610>.

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, specifically utilizing a literature review approach. The qualitative method is appropriate given the study's focus on analyzing orientalist texts and discourses related to the development of Quranic chronology theory. A historical approach is adopted to trace the evolution of this theory within the eighteenth-century context. Primary data consist of the works of prominent Orientalist scholars, including Gustav Weil, William Muir, Theodor Noldeke, and Hubert Grimme, who formulated theories concerning the chronology of the Quran. Secondary data include critical literature on Orientalism, historical texts on Quranic studies in the West, as well as relevant academic articles and journals. The analysis involves deconstructing the development dynamics of chronological theory from a historical perspective, with an emphasis on the argumentation, methodological frameworks, and theological or cultural assumptions underpinning each Orientalist's contributions. Subsequently, points of convergence, divergence, and shifts in argumentation among Orientalists over time are critically examined and compared, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the field's scope and evolution. These procedures form the foundation of the paper's discussion structure.

Results and Discussion

The Structure of the Chronological Theory of the Quran in Orientalist Discourse: Gustav Weil

Gustav Weil initiated efforts to establish a more historically accurate sequence of the Quranic revelations and is subsequently regarded as a foundational figure in the development of a systematic chronological model of the Quran.¹⁵ In his work, *Historisch-Kritische Einleitung in den Koran*,¹⁶ Weil compiled one of the earliest chronological lists of Quranic revelations by drawing upon the arrangement previously devised by ad-Diyarbakri in *Tarikh al-Khamis fi Ahwal Anfas al-Nafis*. Weil's fundamental premise was that each surah constitutes an independent and original unit of revelation, which can be reconstructed through historical and stylistic indicators. From this premise, he formulated three analytical criteria: historical events external to the Quranic text, the thematic and stylistic characteristics of the revelation, and its literary form.¹⁷ Employing these criteria, Weil developed a chronological periodization model comprising four phases: Early Mecca, Middle Mecca, Late Mecca, and Medina. Each phase is characterized by distinct linguistic features and thematic orientations, such as short verses with a rhetorical style in the early period and extended prose structures addressing socio-political themes during the Medina period.

Weil's periodization model subsequently served as the foundational framework for later chronological reconstructions of Orientalism, notably those advanced by

¹⁵ Gustav Weil, "An Introduction to the Quran. III.," *The Biblical World* 5, no. 5 (October 1895): 343–59.

¹⁶ G Weil, *Historisch-Kritische Einleitung in Den Koran*, *Historisch-Kritische Einleitung in Den Koran*, no. v. 1 (Velhagen & Klasing, 1878).

¹⁷ Taufik Adnan, *Rekonstruksi Sejarah Al-Qur'an* Yogyakarta, 2001, h. 117.

Theodor Noldeke and Friedrich Schwally. Nevertheless, Weil's ostensibly methodical approach is underpinned by epistemological assumptions that diverge fundamentally from the Ulumul Quran framework.¹⁸ Specifically, his perspective, which regards surahs as discrete units of revelation, overlooks the principle of tauqifi within Islamic tradition—the belief that the arrangement of verses and surahs in the mushaf constitutes a divinely ordained order rather than a product of historical development. Consequently, Weil's approach reflects a paradigm shift from a ta'abbudi model, which emphasizes the authority of revelation, to a positivist-historical model that treats revelation as a historical artifact subject to rational reconstruction.

Conversely, Weil's influential historical-critical methodology, shaped by nineteenth-century philological and biblical critical traditions, establishes a hermeneutical distance between the divine dimension and human textuality.¹⁹ This approach tends to prioritize external historical data over the internal coherence of the text, thereby complicating its integration into interpretive frameworks grounded in theological assumptions regarding the unity of revelation's meaning. Within the field of Quranic studies, Weil's method provides valuable contextual insights into the dynamics of revelation; however, it inadequately addresses the theological and semantic profundity preserved through the authority of transmission (isnad) and the process of codification (jam' al-Qur'an). Consequently, while Weil's work represents a significant milestone in the development of Quranic chronology theory among Orientalists, its epistemological underpinnings situate the Quran within a secular historiographical paradigm that conflicts with the sacred ontology of the text as conceived in the Islamic scholarly tradition.

Sir William Muir, The Life of Mahomet and The Quran: Its Composition and Teaching

Sir William Muir holds a distinctive position within orientalist scholarship concerning the chronology of the Quran, as his methodological approach exhibits similarities to that of Gustav Weil, albeit with differing arguments and chronological frameworks. In his seminal works, *The Life of Mahomet and The Quran: Its Composition and Teaching*,²⁰ Muir endeavors to establish the chronological sequence of the Quranic revelations by situating them within the biographical context of the Prophet Muhammad. Contrary to viewing the Quran as a transcendent divine revelation, Muir interprets it as a historical record of the Prophet's religious experiences, which can be reconstructed through historical sources such as hadiths and sirah literature.

Based on this premise, Muir proposed three primary criteria for determining the chronological order of the Quranic revelations: first, examining the historical context of the revelations by consulting hadith literature and the Prophet's biography; second,

¹⁸ Agustina, Devya, and Arafah, "Kronologi Turunnya Al-Qur'an Perspektif Orientalis: Studi Pemikiran Sir William Muir Dan Gustav Weil," 35–46.

¹⁹ Richard E Palmer, "Hermeneutika: Teori Interpretasi Dalam Pemikiran Scheiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Dan Gadamer," *Diterjemahkan Oleh Stephanus Aswar Herwinarko*. Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2022.

²⁰ William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet: From Original Sources* (Smith, Elder, 1894).

analyzing the linguistic style and structural features of the verses; and third, evaluating the content and central themes presented therein. Nevertheless, Muir acknowledged that this proposed arrangement was hypothetical and lacked definitive evidence, as he argued that the Quran does not explicitly distinguish between Meccan and Medinan surahs in its organization. Building upon this framework, Muir categorized the period of revelation into six distinct phases: five occurring in Mecca and one in Medina, providing detailed descriptions of the linguistic characteristics and moral teachings associated with each stage.²¹

Despite its ostensibly scientific methodological framework, Muir's interpretation of the Quran is markedly influenced by theological and ideological biases.²² By treating the Quran exclusively as a historical document, Muir effectively redefined the ontological status of revelation, transforming it from a sacred text into an empirical artifact subject to historical scrutiny. This perspective exemplifies the characteristic 19th-century Protestant epistemological bias, which distinguishes between "wahy" (revelation) in the context of Biblical criticism. In essence, Muir employed a historicist-rationalist paradigm that presupposes the authenticity of a text can only be established through historical evidence rather than through the collective transmission within a community.

Muir's assertion that the arrangement of the chapters of the Quran is "merely speculative" fundamentally contradicts the core principles of 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, specifically the concepts of *tawātur* and *ḥifẓ*. *Tawātur* guarantees that the transmission of the Quranic text occurs through a collective and uninterrupted chain, rendering distortion impossible, while *ḥifẓ* affirms the dual preservation of the text's integrity – both divine and human. To disregard these principles is to reject the epistemic foundations that have underpinned the Quran's authority and authenticity within the Muslim tradition for centuries. Critiques of Muir's claims are not solely theological but also epistemological, as they engage with differing methodologies for establishing the truth and authenticity of texts across distinct scholarly traditions. Although Muir's periodization contributed significantly to the development of Quranic chronology within Orientalist discourse, his approach revealed underlying ideological biases that neglected the role of revelation as a transcendent phenomenon and undermined the authoritative function essential to preserving and interpreting the sacred text. Consequently, his methodology is incompatible with the discipline of Islamic exegesis, as it rests on epistemological assumptions that deny both the divine nature and the continuous transmission of the Quran.

²¹ William Muir, *The Corān: Its Composition and Teaching, and the Testimony It Bears to the Holy Scriptures* (Society for promoting Christian knowledge, 1896).

²² Ali Fitriana Rahmat, "Menimbang Teori Kronologi Al-Qur'an Sir William Muir Dan Hubbert Grimme."

Theodor Nöldeke; *Geschichte des Korans*

Theodor Noldeke developed a chronology of the Quran in his work *Geschichte des Qorans*,²³ which was subsequently subject to minor modifications by Schwally. This endeavor is grounded in the historical premise that the Quran should be understood as a text that evolved gradually within a specific historical context, rather than exclusively as a transcendent revelation. Employing a philological-historical methodology, Noldeke integrated modern literary criticism with historical analysis to propose a periodization of the Quranic revelation comprising three Makkan phases followed by one Medinan phase. This periodization was based on two principal criteria: first, historical factors related to the context of revelation, linguistic style, and thematic content; and second, the systematization of earlier tafsir traditions, primarily derived from Muslim scholars such as Abu Qasim al-Naisaburi and the prophetic historical narratives of Ibn Ishaq.²⁴

Nevertheless, Noldeke's approach entails significant epistemological consequences. By treating the Quran exclusively as a philological and historical artifact, Noldeke implicitly challenges the revelatory dimension of the Quran (wahy). This perspective repositions the Quran from its status as the transcendent and absolute word of God to that of a literary document subject to human historical and linguistic scrutiny. Within the framework of Islamic hermeneutical epistemology, this stance is problematic, as it undermines the foundational principles of tawatur and hifz, which constitute the essential mechanisms for the transmission and authentication of the Quran in the Islamic tradition.

In comparison, Noldeke's methodology for interpreting the Quran markedly diverges from the epistemological framework upheld by classical Muslim scholars, which regards revelation as a transcendent truth validated by the authority of tawātur and divine preservation (hifz).²⁵ While Noldeke approached the Quranic text with the historical presupposition that it could be reconstructed through philological techniques akin to those applied to human literary works, Muslim exegetes such as al-Zarkasyi, al-Suyuthi, and al-Baqillani maintained that the arrangement and periodization of revelation possess a ta'abbudi dimension that transcends human historical logic. Consequently, Noldeke's endeavor to the Quran may be interpreted as an effort to secularize the revealed text, entailing an epistemological shift from the revelatory paradigm (wahy) to the human paradigm (insani), wherein the source of authoritative knowledge transitions from divine origin to human rationality.²⁶

²³Theodor Nöldeke, "Geschichte Des Qorans," Gottingen: Verlag Der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1860, 68–78.

²⁴Syukron and Khairiyah, "Chronology of the Qur'an According to Theodor Nöldeke and Sir William Muir (Analysis of the History of the Qur'an and Life of Mahomet)."

²⁵Iqra Naheed, "The Quranic Sources According to Theodor Nöldeke and Their Refutation; A Specialized Study," *Islamic Studies Research Journal Abhāth* 9, no. 36 (January 2025), <https://doi.org/10.54692/abh.2024.09362150>.

²⁶Anwar Mujahidin, "Epistemologi Islam: Kedudukan Wahyu Sebagai Sumber Ilmu," *Ullumuna* 17, no. 1 (November 2017): 41–64, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v17i1.171>.

Nöldeke's scholarship represents a pivotal advancement in the modern Western study of the Quran.²⁷ He successfully developed a systematic periodization framework consisting of four principal phases that delineate the progression of the Prophet's preaching from its inception through the post-migration period in Medina. The initial three phases correspond to the Meccan period, distinguished by thematic and stylistic elements that emphasize faith, eschatology, and the oneness of God. The final phase reflects the Prophet's evolving role as a community leader and lawgiver in Medina. While this framework significantly contributes to the historical contextualization of the revelation's development, Nöldeke's approach remains situated outside the humanistic-historical paradigm that is independent of the epistemology of Islamic faith. Furthermore, it continues to be subject to critique regarding the ideological biases embedded within the Orientalist discourse on Quranic studies.

Hubbert Grimme: Mohammed; An Introduction to the Koranic System of Quranic Theology

Hubbert Grimme developed a chronology of the Quran based on its content and the evolution of Islamic doctrinal characteristics, although his dating system remains closely aligned with those of earlier scholars. In his work, **Mohammed: Introduction to the Koran System of Quranic Theology**,²⁸ Grimme delineates the period of revelation into four stages: two distinct phases in Mecca, including their transitional periods, and one phase in Medina. The primary criterion he employed was the emphasis on the content of the teachings and the progression of Islamic dogma corresponding to the stages of the Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) preaching. This methodology aimed to correlate the dynamics of historical events with the theological developments documented in each surah, regardless of whether it was revealed in Mecca or Medina.

According to Grimme, the first Meccan period encompasses teachings centered on monotheism and the oneness of God, the affirmation of the Day of Resurrection and divine retribution, and the role of the Prophet as a messenger. This phase is characterized by short, poetically styled chapters, including Surahs 111, 107, 106, 105, 104, 103, 102, 101, 100, and 99. The second Meccan period addresses themes such as human proximity to the worldly realm, the rejection of the unseen, and warnings directed at polytheists, exemplified by Surahs 56, 55, 54, 53, 52, and 51. The third period, often referred to as the second Meccan phase, emphasizes God's mercy, the validation of the Quran's truth, and narratives of previous prophets, as seen in Surahs 46, 72, 45, 44, 41, 40, 39, and 38. In contrast, the Medinan period reflects a transformation in the Prophet's role from a spiritual messenger to a socio-political leader responsible for

²⁷ Morteza Karimi-Nia, "The Historiography of the Qur'an in the Muslim World: The Influence of Theodor Nöldeke," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 15, no. 1 (February 2013): 46–68, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2013.0077>.

²⁸ Hubert Grimme, *Einleitung in Den Koran. System Der Koranischen Theologie*, vol. 7 (Munster: Aschendorff, 1892).

organizing society and Islamic law. The style of the Medinan verses is notably longer and more prosaic compared to the Meccan revelations.

The approach developed by Grimme diverged from those of Weil and Noldeke. Whereas Weil emphasized historicity and Noldeke concentrated on philological criticism, Grimme prioritized the systematics of theology and Islamic dogma. However, this approach raises important epistemological concerns. By focusing exclusively on the content of the teachings and dogmatic logic, Grimme neglected fundamental principles underlying the transmission of the Quran, such as the reasons for revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and the chain of narration (*sanad*), which constitute the basis for the validity of revelation within the Islamic tradition. Consequently, Grimme's methodology reduced the Quran to a historically developed system of theological teachings, rather than recognizing it as a divine revelation delivered in a *tauqifi* manner and preserved through the mechanisms of *tawātur* and *ḥifẓ*. From the perspective of the epistemology of Islamic exegesis, therefore, Grimme's theory exhibits significant methodological limitations, as it fails to account for the revelatory dimension and the spiritual and prophetic context of the Quran's revelation.

Table. 1.1 Comparison Map of the Chronological Arrangement of the Quran in Orientalist Discourse

No	Character	Periodization	Chronological Order	Date
1.	Gustav Weil	Makkah 1	96, 74, 106, 111, 53, 81, 68, 87, 92, 89, 93, 94, 103, 100, 108, 102, 107, 109, 105, 113, 114, 112, 80, 97, 91, 85, 90, 95, 101, 75, 104, 77, 86, 70, 78, 79, 82, 84, 56, 88, 52, 69, 83, 99	From the beginning of revelation to the migration to Abyssinia in 615 AD
		Makkah 2	1, 51, 36, 50, 54, 44, 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 26, 67, 37, 38, 43, 71, 55, 15, 76, 18	Return from Taif 620 AD
		Makkah 3	7, 72, 35, 27, 28, 17, 10, 11, 12, 6, 31, 34, 39, 40, 32, 42, 45, 46, 18, 16, 14, 41, 30, 29, 13, 64	Preparation for the Hijrah of 622 AD
		Madinah	2, 98, 62, 65, 22, 4, 8, 47, 57, 3, 59, 24, 63, 33, 48, 110, 61, 60, 58, 49, 66, 9, 5	The Prophet in Medina
2.	Noldeke-schawally	Makkah 1	96, 74, 111, 106, 108, 104, 107, 102, 105, 92, 90, 94, 93, 97, 86, 91, 80, 68, 87, 95, 103, 85, 73, 101, 99, 82, 81, 53, 84, 100, 79, 77, 78, 88, 89, 75, 83, 69, 51, 52, 56, 70, 55, 112, 109, 113, 114, 1	From the beginning of revelation to the migration to Abyssinia in 615 AD
		Makkah 2	54, 37, 71, 76, 44, 50, 20, 26,	Return from

3.	William Muir		15, 19, 38, 36, 43, 72, 67, 23, 21, 25, 17, 27, 18.	Taif 620 AD
		Makkah 3	32, 41, 45, 16, 30, 11, 14, 12, 40, 28, 39, 29, 31, 42, 10, 34, 35, 7, 46, 6, 13	Expansion of the Dawah and Preparations for Medina
		Madinah	2, 98, 64, 62, 8, 47, 3, 61, 57, 4, 65, 59, 33, 63, 24, 58, 22, 48, 66, 60, 110, 49, 9, 5.	The Prophet in Medina
		Makkah 1	103, 100, 99, 91, 106, 1, 101, 95, 102, 104, 82, 92, 105, 89, 90, 93, 94, 108.	Before Prophethood
		Makkah 2	96, 112, 74, 111	Opening Prophetic Message
		Makkah 3	87, 97, 88, 80, 81, 84, 86, 110, 85, 83, 78, 77, 76, 75, 70, 109, 107, 55, 56.	The beginning of the journey of Dawah and migration to Abyssinia
		Makkah 4	67, 53, 32, 39, 73, 79, 54, 34, 31, 69, 68, 41, 71, 52, 50, 45, 44, 37, 30, 26, 15, 51	Occurring between 7 AH and 2 AH (including the Prophet's time in Ta'if until his return to Mecca)
		Madinah	2, 47, 57, 8, 58, 65, 98, 62, 59, 24, 63, 48, 61, 4, 3, 5, 33, 60, 66, 49, 9	The Prophet in Medina
		Makkah 1	111, 107, 106, 105, 104, 103 (except for verse 3 later), 102, 101, 100, 99, 108, 96, 95, 94, 93, 92, 91, 90, 89, 88, 87 (verse 7 is Madaniyah), 86, 85 (verses 8-11 later), 84 (verse 25 later), 83, 82, 81 (verse 29 later), 80, 79, 78 (verses 37-38 later), 77, 76 (verses 30-31 later), 75, 74 (verse 55 later), 7 (verse 20 in Madinah), 70, 69, 68, 114, 113.	During the period of migration to Abyssinia and return from Taif
		Pertengahan Makkah 1 dan 2	56, 55, 54, 53 (verses 21-23 and 27-22 later), 52, 51, 50, 15, 22 (verses 25-42 and 76-78 in Medina), 14 (verses 38-42 in Medina)	Journey to Medina
		Makkah 2	46, 72, 45, 44, 41, 97, 40, 39, 38, 37, 36, 35, 34, 32, 31, 67, 30, 29 (verses 1-2, 45-46, and 69 are Medinan), 28, 27, 26, 71, 25,	Journey to Medina

	20, 23, 43, 21, 19, 1, 42, 18, 17, 16 (verses 111-125 and 128 are Medinan), 13, 12, 11, 10, 7 (verses 156-158 are Medinan), 6, 98, 112, 109.	
Madinah	2 (verses 192-196 later), 62, 5 (verses 15-88 and 108-120), 47, 8, 24, 59, 3, 29 (only verses 1-2, 45-46, and 69), 4, 57, 64, 61, 60, 58, 65, 33, 63, 49, 110, 48, 5 (only verses 1-14), 66, 9 (only verses 1-24), 9 (verses 25-124 at Tabuk. While verses 125-129 were revealed earlier)	The Prophet in Medina

From this dynamic, it can be inferred that the construction of the chronological theory of the Quran is transitioning from a predominantly diachronic focus to a more synchronic-thematic orientation. Early Orientalists such as Weil, Muir, and Noldeke conceptualized revelation as a linear historical process, presuming that the sequence of the texts mirrored the gradual evolution of prophetic experience and the socio-political context of early Islam. While this diachronic perspective is systematic, it tends to reduce the Quran to a mere historical artifact, thereby overlooking its internal coherence as a revelatory text. In contrast, later scholars like Grimme and Riddell adopted a more hermeneutic approach, seeking to integrate chronological developments with the Quran's recurring theological and moral themes.

The methodological shift in developing a chronological theory of the Quran carries profound epistemological implications. The diachronic model posits that the validity of a theory is contingent upon historical verification, whereas the synchronic-thematic approach aims to restore the Quran's conceptual unity through thematic reconstruction. Despite their differing emphases, both approaches are constrained by a shared positivist assumption: that the meaning of revelation can be fully elucidated through human rationality, independent of divine intentionality. Furthermore, the variation in the sequencing of surahs among Orientalist scholars highlights the tension between the historical-critical paradigm and the theological integrity of the Quran. Consequently, while the synchronic-hermeneutic approach represents a progression in interpretive sophistication, it nonetheless inherits the epistemological limitations of its predecessors, as it fails to reconcile historical reconstruction with the coherence of revelation as asserted by the Quran itself.

The Evolution of the Chronological Theory Regarding the Composition of the Quran Among Orientalists

The dynamics involved in constructing a chronological theory of the Quran among Orientalists have introduced a novel discourse within contemporary Orientalist

scholarship.²⁹ Entering the twentieth century, the focus of Quranic chronological studies shifted toward thematic analysis as a means of application and continuity. Consistent with Riddell's emphasis on the significance of reading the Quran in chronological order, this approach has contributed substantially to the advancement of thematic interpretation and the broader process of understanding the Quran, thereby mitigating potential misinterpretations.³⁰ At least three principal themes frequently serve as foundational points and chronological guides within the Quran: the authority of the Messenger as a prophet, the concepts of resurrection and retribution, and the categorization of believers and non-believers. These themes, initially proposed by Riddell, have been incorporated into the chronological frameworks developed by the four scholars previously mentioned, who situate these discussions within the Meccan period, albeit with variations in dating. This development marked the emergence of a new generation of Orientalists dedicated to thematic studies employing a chronological reading model of the Quran.

This example illustrates the progression of chronological theory construction toward thematic interpretation studies. Among the seven surahs categorized by Riddell, at least three—Q.S. 53:1-12, Q.S. 21:41, and Q.S. 6:35—serve as foundational texts for comparative analysis among four orientalist scholars in their chronological examinations of the Quran. Weil situates Q.S. an-Najm [53:1-12] within the early Meccan period, which marks the inception of the Prophet Muhammad's da'wah. Weil provides only a translation of the Quranic revelation conveyed by Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad, without further elaboration. In contrast, Noldeke interprets this surah as addressing the Quraysh disbelievers' rejection and skepticism regarding the Quran's truth as preached by the Prophet Muhammad.³¹ Indeed, the Quraysh persecuted the Prophet and his followers, compelling the early Muslim community to evacuate and migrate to Abyssinia.

According to Weil, the second period of the prophetic mission elucidates the experiences of previous prophets, serving as exemplars to fortify the resolve of the Messenger of Allah. In the tenth year of his prophethood, alongside escalating persecution, the Prophet Muhammad endured the loss of two of his most cherished individuals. The death of Abu Talib profoundly affected the Prophet's mission, prompting him to seek refuge in Taif; however, he was subsequently expelled by his own relatives. During this time, several verses were revealed, including Q.S. al-Anbiya' [21:41], which recount how earlier prophets also encountered significant rejection and ridicule from their communities. This verse was intended to console the Prophet in his

²⁹ Hubert Grimme, *Einleitung in Den Koran. System Der Koranischen Theologie*, vol. 7 (Munster: Aschendorff, 1892).

³⁰ Azyumardi Azra, "Review: Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses Peter Riddell," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14, no. 1 (2003): 103–6, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/14.1.103>.

³¹ Travis Zadeh, "Quranic Studies and the Literary Turn," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135, no. 2 (October 2015): 329–42, <https://doi.org/10.7817/jameroriesoci.135.2.329>.

sorrow. In the third Meccan period, the pressure exerted on the Prophet and his followers intensified, compelling them to initiate preparations for migration to Medina. Notably, Q.S. al-An'am [6:35] was revealed in a more emphatic narrative style, issuing a command to demonstrate the truth to those who persistently refused to believe. The Quran's arrangement, as analyzed by Weil and Noldeke, alongside the evolution in its linguistic style, reflects the increasing authority of the Prophet Muhammad as a messenger during the late Meccan period.

Muir positioned Q.S. an-Najm [53:1-12] (the fourth Meccan surah) subsequent to the initial migration to Abyssinia, and placed Q.S. al-An'am [6:35] prior to Q.S. al-Anbiya' [21:41], despite both originating from the same chronological phase. This arrangement notably diverges from the sequences proposed by Weil and Nöldeke, thereby impacting the interpretation of the Prophet Muhammad's missionary activities. In the initial correspondence, signaling the Prophet's return from Abyssinia to Mecca to resume public preaching, opposition from the leaders of the disbelieving Quraysh intensified, to the extent that any means to provoke the Quraysh tribe and its environs were deemed permissible. The fifth period did not differ substantially from preceding phases and is characterized as the year of the Prophet's sorrow, marked by the deaths of Khadijah and Abu Talib. The loss of Abu Talib was particularly profound, given his role in raising the Prophet from childhood and safeguarding the mission. This period was exploited by the Quraysh leaders to intensify their suppression of the Prophet Muhammad's call. However, Muir did not provide an explanation regarding the categorization of the letters within this phase.³²

The placement of the Grimme calendar closely resembles that of its predecessor. Grimme frequently references Noldeke's chronological list in various sections. For instance, Q.S. an-Najm [53:1-12] is situated within the transitional period between the first and second Meccan phases, marking the Prophet's migration to Abyssinia. Additionally, Q.S. al-Anbiya' [21:41] and Q.S. al-An'am [6:35] are positioned at the conclusion of the second Meccan period. According to Grimme, the resistance exhibited by the Quraysh leaders stemmed from their attachment to worldly possessions, denial of the unseen, and disregard for human values. From this analysis, it can be inferred that the thematic dynamics and developments correspond with the Quran's chronological framework, although this approach primarily addresses the diachronic aspects of the text. It was only during the Orientalist phase that a model of Quranic hermeneutics was formulated, encompassing both diachronic and synchronic dimensions.

³² Eltigani Abdelgadir Hamid Rahma, "The Problem of the Meccan Verses In the Research of Certain Orientalists," 38 *مجلة كلية الشريعة و الدراسات الإسلامية*, no. 1 (July 2020): 48-71, <https://doi.org/10.29117/jcsis.2020.0255>.

Factors Influencing the Development of the Chronological Theory of the Quran within Orientalist Discourse

The development of the theory of Quranic chronology within Orientalist discourse is intricately linked to the evolution of textual studies in the Western academic tradition. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, philological studies advanced rapidly, emphasizing texts as literary artifacts that embody the cultural and historical contexts of their periods.³³ Philology extended beyond linguistic analysis to situate texts within both their internal structures and external environments. Initially, this methodology served as a tool for historical-critical examination of the Bible, a corpus characterized by diverse authorship, textual variants, linguistic styles, and narrative forms. The primary objectives of this approach were to trace the origins of the text, elucidate its authentic meaning, and reconstruct its historical development. Subsequently, Orientalist scholars adopted this framework in their study of the Quran to facilitate its historical reconstruction.³⁴

The subsequent factor concerns the debate surrounding the authenticity and codification of the Quranic verses. According to Riddell, the primary source for compiling the chronology must incorporate both intra-Quranic and extra-Quranic evidence. Weil, however, was regarded as lacking objectivity, as his perspective remained influenced by the biases of earlier Orientalist scholarship, which questioned the authenticity of verses such as Q.S. Ali Imran 3:35, Q.S. al-Anbiya' 21:35, Q.S. al-Ankabut 29:57, and Q.S. al-Zumar 39:30. Weil posited that these verses were later additions by Abu Bakr during the Quran's codification process, supporting his claim with various narrations concerning the death of the Prophet Muhammad. In contrast, during Muir's era, there was a paradigm shift away from debating the Quran's authenticity; nevertheless, Muir acknowledged the significant subjectivity inherent in the compilation process. For Muir, the Quran lacks a definitive framework for delineating its historical periods.

In the development of the chronology of the Quran, the prevailing political and ideological contexts significantly influenced Orientalists in formulating their periodizations. For instance, Noldeke criticized Muir's subjective methodology by prioritizing philological and grammatical analyses of the Quranic text, thereby establishing philology and stylistics as the principal tools for reconstructing the Quran's chronology.³⁵ Although this approach is regarded as more systematic and scientific, it has faced criticism, particularly concerning the chronological placement of certain surahs, such as al-Fatihah, for which no definitive consensus exists. In the mid-twentieth century, Grimme sought to enhance this framework by emphasizing

³³ Muhammad Amin, "Perkembangan Kajian Teoritis Tafsir Di Barat Dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Sarjana Muslim," *Al Burhan: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Dan Pengembangan Budaya Al-Qur'an* 19, no. 2 (2019): h. 154.

³⁴ Palmer, "Hermeneutika: Teori Interpretasi Dalam Pemikiran Scheiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Dan Gadamer."

³⁵ Theodor Nöldeke, *The History of the Qur'ān*, vol. 8 (Leiden- Boston: Brill, 2013).

doctrinal elements; however, his approach was limited by an insufficient consideration of linguistic criteria and the context of revelation.

Moreover, this entire approach is not devoid of the ideological bias inherent in Orientalism, which implicitly reflects colonial political ambitions aimed at framing the Quran as a historical text subject to deconstruction through Western rational categories. Such bias directly influences the outcomes of periodization, wherein the development of Islam is interpreted solely as the social and intellectual evolution of the Prophet Muhammad, rather than as a process of transcendent revelation. Critiques from contemporary Muslim scholars, including M. Mustafa al-A'zami, 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi, and Muḥammad 'Abid al-Jabiri, highlight that the historical-critical assumptions employed by Orientalists have neglected key Islamic epistemological principles such as sanad, sabab al-nuzul, and the authority of oral transmission. Consequently, philological, methodological, and political factors have collectively shaped the development of Quranic chronology theories within Orientalist scholarship.

Implications of the Development of the Chronological Theory of the Qur'an in Qur'anic Studies

The arrangement of the Quran according to its periods of revelation has been a subject of scholarly discussion since the time of Suyuthi and Zarkasyi; however, it did not receive sustained or detailed attention in subsequent periods. This is evident in several classical works addressing the reasons for revelation (asbāb al-nuzūl), including Abdurahman's *"Al-Qasas wa al-Asalib Allati Nazala min Ajlihi Qur'an"*, Al-Wahidi's *"Asbāb al-Nuzūl"*, al-Dīn al-Syafī's *"Madad al-Rahman fi Asbāb Nuzūl al-Qur'ān"*, Suyuthi's *"Lubāb al-Mukūl fi Asbāb al-Nuzūl"*, Ikrima's *"Nuzūl al-Qur'ān"*, and Hasan al-Bashri's *"Nuzūl al-Qur'ān"*.³⁶ In the context of classical and medieval Quranic exegesis, interpretative works compiled based on the Uthmani mushaf generally did not engage in diachronic historical analysis; rather, they predominantly presented narrations without critical historical examination. Examples include *"Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān"*, *"Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm"*, which extensively compiles narrations, and *"Tafsīr al-Kashshāf"*, which emphasizes linguistic analysis. It was only in the modern era that the concept of the Nuzuli Quran reemerged, as reflected in works such as Sayyid Qutb's *"Mushāhid al-Qiyāmah fi al-Qur'ān"*, Bintu Shātiq's *"Al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī fi al-Qur'ān"*, al-Jabiri's *"Fahmul Qur'ān"*, Izzat Darwazah's *"Al-Tafsīr al-Ḥadīth"*, among others.³⁷

This development is closely connected to the orientalist discourse concerning the chronology of the Quran, which has exerted a considerable influence on contemporary Muslim scholarship. One manifestation of this influence is the adoption of historical

³⁶ Mu'ammār Zain Qadāfy, *Buku Pintar Sababun Nuzul: Dari Mikro Hingga Makro: Sebuah Kajian Epistemologis* (IN AzNa Books, 2015).

³⁷ Aksin Wijaya, *Sejarah Kenabian: Dalam Perspektif Tafsir Nuzuli Muhammad* Izzat Darwazah (Ircisdo, 2022).

criticism methods by Muslim scholars in their study of the Quran's history. Notable examples include Zanjani's reconstruction of the Quran's history in his work *"Tarikh Al-Qur'an"*,³⁸ Taufik Adnan Amal's *"Rekonstruksi Sejarah Al-Qur'an"*, among other contributions. This discourse has led to the emergence of a new typology in interpretative methods, referred to as nuzuli interpretation. The nuzuli interpretative model operates bidirectionally, moving from the Quran to reality and from reality to the Quran. As al-Jabiri has observed, nuzuli interpretation, when combined with a historical approach, represents a renewal of exegesis that had previously concentrated predominantly on linguistic analysis without sufficiently engaging in historical contextualization. The historical criticism methodology introduced by Orientalists has thus prompted Muslim scholars to reexamine the significance of reading the Quran in a chronological framework.

The evolutionary implications of the Quranic chronology theory within Orientalist discourse on Quranic studies can be delineated as follows. Primarily, there has been a paradigm shift from a normative framework to a historical-critical approach. This shift fundamentally contrasts with the Muslim conception of *tartib nuzuli*, which is grounded in the principle of *wahyani* (prophetic and divine transmission) and the continuity of the interpretative chain. Nonetheless, the Orientalist critique and reconstruction of the Quran's chronology have indirectly stimulated a renewed interest among contemporary Muslim scholars in exegetical readings based on the order of revelation. This trend is exemplified in the works of Fazlur Rahman, Muhammad Arkoun, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, whose methodologies integrate Western historical consciousness with a commitment to Islamic epistemology that continues to uphold the authority of revelation.

Secondly, the development of the chronology theory of the Quran demonstrates a refinement and differentiation of fundamental assumptions that challenge traditional concepts of revelation, prophethood, and textual authenticity. Several Muslim methodologists, including Toshihiko Izutsu and Mustafa Syalabi, have endeavored to reconcile philological rationality with the principle of sacredness in the interpretation of sacred texts. This approach suggests that a historically chronological framework can function as a hermeneutical tool without undermining the text's divine dimension. Thirdly, the advancement of the Quranic chronology theory facilitates cross-traditional academic dialogue, as evidenced in Islamic studies forums in both the West and the Middle East. Scholars from Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds actively engage in debates concerning the validity of philological methods, textual criticism, and their applicability to contemporary tafsir studies. For instance, the discourse between Angelika Neuwirth and Seyyed Hossein Nasr exemplifies how historical and theological methodologies can mutually inform and correct one another without compromising their respective epistemological foundations.

³⁸ Riddell, "Reading the Qur'ān Chronologically: An Aid to Discourse Coherence and Thematic Development."

Conclusion

The development of the chronology of the Quran within Orientalist discourse reflects a complex and multifaceted progression, both methodologically and epistemologically. Based on the research findings, this chronological theory can be delineated into four principal phases. First, Weil introduced a rational-historical framework by integrating traditional Islamic sources with European historical methodologies, thereby marking a shift from theological narratives to a more systematic historical interpretation. Second, Muir advanced a biographical approach that emphasized the relationship between the chronology of revelation and the life of the Prophet Muhammad, while concurrently reinforcing theological biases by situating the revelation within the political context of early Islam. Third, Noldeke established a philological framework that prioritized linguistic and stylistic analysis as the primary basis for reconstruction, representing a significant milestone in the transformation of chronological theory into a modern scientific discipline. Fourth, Grimme expanded the analytical scope to encompass the doctrinal dimension, underscoring the evolution of theological ideas within the Quranic corpus.

The development of this theory has been shaped by multiple factors, including advancements in philological and linguistic methodologies, debates regarding the authenticity and periodization of texts, colonial political and ideological contexts that prompted discourse on the origins of Islam, and epistemological interactions between Western and Muslim scholars. Significantly, the latter factor illustrates that the construction of the Quran's chronology does not occur within an isolated epistemic framework but is intricately connected to the evolution of historical-critical methodologies in the West and reform initiatives within the Islamic tafsir tradition. Moreover, the theoretical implications are evident in the efforts of contemporary Muslim scholars to integrate Orientalist historical-critical approaches with classical Quranic sciences, thereby producing innovative interpretative frameworks for the Quran, as exemplified in the works of Sayyid Qutb, Bint al-Syathi', and al-Jabiri.

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