



The Historical Distinction between the Qur'an and Hadith: A Critical Examination of John Wansbrough's Revisionist Perspective by Fred M. Donner

Eko Zulfikar¹, Zaki Faddad Syarif Zain², Adrika Fithrotul Aini³ & Azhar Amrullah Hafizh⁴

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang, Indonesia

²Charles Darwin University, Australia

³Universitas Islam Negeri Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung, Indonesia

⁴Universitas Islam Negeri Madura, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: eko-zulfikar@radenfatah.ac.id

Abstract

This article aims to critically examines the distinction between the Qur'an and Hadith in response to John Wansbrough's revisionist-skeptical perspective on the origins of the Qur'an. Wansbrough argued that both corpora emerged from the same "sectarian" milieu and developed within a nearly identical historical timeframe. The present study addresses two primary questions: how Fred M. Donner conceptualizes the distinction between the Qur'an and Hadith, and how his arguments challenge Wansbrough's theoretical framework. Employing a qualitative methodology with a descriptive-analytical approach, this research analyzes the principal works of both scholars to compare their arguments from textual and historical perspectives. The findings indicate that Wansbrough's thesis lacks a robust historical foundation, as six key aspects religious and political authority, portrayals of the Prophet's contemporaries, elements of anachronism, narratives of earlier prophets, depictions of Prophet Muhammad, and descriptions of ritual prayer reveal significant differences between the Qur'an and Hadith. These results support the conclusion that the Qur'an did not originate from the same sectarian environment as the Hadith but emerged in an earlier and distinct historical context. Consequently, the Qur'an is understood to have preceded the Hadith both chronologically and in terms of codification. This article contributes to clarifying the independence and authenticity of the Qur'an as the earliest and primary source of Islamic teaching, while enriching textual-historical scholarship in response to Western revisionist discourse concerning the origins of Islamic scripture.

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan mengkaji secara kritis perbedaan (distingsi) antara al-Qur'an dan hadis sebagai respons terhadap pandangan revisionis-skeptis John Wansbrough mengenai asal-usul al-Qur'an. Wansbrough menilai bahwa kedua korpus tersebut lahir dari lingkungan "sektarian" yang sama dan terbentuk dalam periode historis yang hampir bersamaan. Penelitian ini berupaya menjawab dua pertanyaan utama: bagaimana Fred M. Donner memandang distingsi antara al-Qur'an dan hadis, serta bagaimana sanggahannya terhadap konstruksi pemikiran Wansbrough. Menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan analisis deskriptif-analitis, penelitian ini menelaah karya-karya utama kedua tokoh tersebut untuk membandingkan argumentasi mereka secara tekstual dan historis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pandangan Wansbrough tidak memiliki dasar yang kuat secara historis, sebab enam aspek utama, yakni otoritas agama dan politik, gambaran tentang masyarakat sezaman Nabi, unsur anakronisme, kisah para nabi terdahulu, representasi Nabi Muhammad, dan deskripsi tentang ritual salat menunjukkan perbedaan yang signifikan antara al-Qur'an dan hadis. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa al-Qur'an tidak berasal dari lingkungan sektarian yang sama dengan hadis, melainkan memiliki konteks dan kronologi kemunculan yang lebih awal. Al-Qur'an diyakini muncul lebih dahulu dibandingkan hadis, baik secara kronologis maupun dalam proses kodifikasinya. Artikel ini berkontribusi dalam memperjelas independensi dan keotentikan al-Qur'an sebagai sumber ajaran Islam, sekaligus memperkaya kajian tekstual-historis dalam menghadapi wacana revisionisme Barat terhadap asal-usul dua korpus Islam.

Keywords:

Historical distinction; Qur'an and Hadith; Fred M. Donner; John Wansbrough; Western Revisionism

Kata kunci:

Distingsi historis; Al-Qur'an dan Hadis; Fred M. Donner; John Wansbrough; Revisionisme Barat

Article History:

Received: 20-06-2025 | Revised: 25-06-2025, 09-09-2025 | Accepted: 11-09-2025



Introduction

The origins of Islam are traditionally understood to be closely linked to the character of the early community of believers, as depicted in the Qur'anic text¹. However, several revisionist theories have challenged the conventional chronology of the Qur'anic revelation, contending that the nature of the early Muslim community may be inaccessible through historical reconstruction². Among the foremost revisionist scholars is John Wansbrough, whose work has presented significant challenges to historians of early Islam. Nonetheless, Wansbrough made a notable contribution to Islamic studies by employing historical-critical methodologies previously prevalent in Biblical scholarship, thereby facilitating the interpretation of the Qur'an within the broader context of Ancient Near Eastern religious literature³. Drawing on the diversity of Qur'anic material, Wansbrough proposed that different sections of the Qur'an originated from distinct communities. He further argued that the Qur'an was not revealed exclusively in Arabia but also in regions such as Iraq or Syria, concluding that the text's compilation was a gradual process that did not reach its final form until two or more centuries after its initial revelation.⁴

John Wansbrough's critical approach to the Qur'an reflects a broader orientalist inclination to question its authenticity and process of codification⁵. As a prominent figure within the revisionist school, Wansbrough challenged traditional accounts of the Qur'an's origins, positing that it emerged as a later composition within a sectarian context⁶. He argued that the texts currently recognized as the Qur'an were initially part of a more extensive corpus comprising aphorisms, narratives, and wisdom literature. According to Wansbrough, much of the Qur'anic material did not achieve canonical status but was analogous to Hadith and other narrative traditions that documented the evolving history of early Islam. He maintained that these texts were socially constructed within a "sectarian environment" characterized by religious polemics and political strife. Furthermore, Wansbrough contended that a significant portion of the Qur'an's content was derived from Jewish, and to a lesser extent Christian⁷,

¹ Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1-2.

² Sulaiman Ibrahim, "Sejarah Teks Al-Qur'an: Studi Atas Pemikiran John Wansbrough," *Farabi* 13, no. 2 (2016): 187-207.

³ John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: A Note on Arabic Rethoric Arabic Rethoric and Qur'anic Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 44-48.

⁴ Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1999), 35.

⁵ Skeptics of the Qur'an often question why, if the text had indeed been documented during the Prophet's lifetime, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb expressed concern regarding its potential loss following the deaths of numerous memorizers (ḥuffāz) in the Battle of Yamamah. This concern reportedly prompted him to urge Abū Bakr to initiate the compilation of the muṣṣḥaf. Additionally, they inquire why the existing written fragments of the Qur'an were not maintained under the Prophet's direct supervision and why Zayd ibn Thābit did not fully utilize these written records during the compilation process. Such inquiries underpin Orientalist critiques, which contend that the initial dictation and transcription of the Qur'an were neither valid nor authentic, but rather constituted a reconstructive—and potentially historically fabricated—process. For further reference, see Muhammad Musthafa Al-A'zami, *The History of The Qur'anic Text: From Revelation to Compilation* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, n.d.), 304.

⁶ Mun'im Sirry, *Kontroversi Islam Awal Antara Mazhab Tradisionalis Dan Revisionis* (Bandung: PT Mizan Pustaka, 2015), 51.

⁷ This perspective corresponds with the views of Theodor Nöldeke, a prominent Orientalist scholar, who contended that the Qur'an contains several historical inaccuracies. Nöldeke attributed these inaccuracies to what he perceived as the Prophet Muhammad's limited knowledge of early Jewish history and maintained that certain sections of the Qur'an were substantially influenced by Jewish traditions. According to Nöldeke, these elements

traditions, thereby rejecting the notion of a finalized Qur'anic redaction prior to the third Islamic century. He also regarded the traditional narrative of the Qur'an's codification under Caliph 'Uthman as a later fictional invention lacking robust historical substantiation.⁸

In practice, relatively few scholars have engaged in a direct and systematic critique of Wansbrough's ideas. Existing studies frequently exhibit certain limitations, resulting in an underdeveloped discourse regarding the distinction between the Qur'an and Hadith. For instance, Azwar Sani concentrated primarily on Wansbrough's historical-philological methodology without addressing the conceptual differences between the Qur'an and Hadith⁹. Michael Graves examined the roles of oral tradition and textual approaches but did not investigate the theological content of the two corpora¹⁰. Mukhlisin Saad, along with Fathurrohman and Marhumah, provided apologetic critiques¹¹ that lacked a comprehensive analysis of the theological and authoritative functions of the Qur'an in relation to the Hadith¹². Similarly, Laila Ngindana Zulfa, while engaging with Wansbrough's sectarian thesis, offered a predominantly descriptive analysis without systematically exploring the functional dimensions of each text.¹³

This article aims to address a notable gap in the scholarship by critically examining the distinction between the Qur'an and Hadith in direct response to Wansbrough's revisionist framework. Challenging Wansbrough's assertion that Hadith and other early Islamic narrative sources constitute "sub-canonical" versions of Qur'anic material, Fred M. Donner offers a robust refutation of this position¹⁴. Donner contends that the Qur'an exhibits unique substantive characteristics that differentiate it from other narrative texts. While the Qur'an and these sources may have developed and solidified within broadly similar historical contexts, they fulfilled distinct functions: the Qur'an was composed to meet theological and liturgical needs, whereas Hadith and historical narratives served interpretive and historiographical purposes¹⁵. Accordingly, this article investigates the fundamental differences between the Qur'an and Hadith as a critique of Wansbrough's thesis, underscoring that these two corpora did not emerge from the same sectarian milieu but rather occupy fundamentally distinct contexts, functions, and roles within the Islamic tradition.

do not constitute divine revelation but rather reflect the social and cultural interactions present in the Prophet's milieu. For further reference, see Theodor Noldeke, *The History of the Qur'ān* (Brill: Hotei Publishing, 2013).

⁸ M. Alfatih Suryadilaga, "Pendekatan Historis John Wansbrough Dalam Studi Al-Qur'an," in *Studi Al-Qur'an Kontemporer*, ed. Abdul Mustaqim and Sahiron Syamsudin (Yogyakarta: PT Tiara Wacana Yogya, 2002), 211.

⁹ Azwar Sani, "A Study of John Wansbrough Thoughts on Qur'anic Studies," *Tanzil: Jurnal Studi Al-Quran* 6, no. 1 (2023): 71–84, <https://doi.org/10.20871/tjsq.v6i1.304>.

¹⁰ Michael Graves, "Form Criticism or a Rolling Corpus: The Methodology of John Wansbrough through the Lens of Biblical Studies," *Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association* 1, no. 1 (2016): 47–92, <https://doi.org/10.5913/jiqsa.1.2017.a005>.

¹¹ Mukhlisin Saad, "Fred Donner, Early Islamic Narratives and The Problem of The Authenticity of The Qur'an," *Al Quds: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis* 8, no. 3 (2024): 86–87, <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v8i3.8852>.

¹² Rizal Fathurrohman and Marhumah Marhumah, "Fred M. Donner's Views on Orientalist Thought about the Distinction between the Qur'an and Hadith," *Mashdar: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 4, no. 2 (2022): 219–30, <https://doi.org/10.15548/mashdar.v4i2.5398>.

¹³ Laila Ngindana Zulfa, "Wansbrough Dan Islamic Studies," *Jurnal PROGRESS: Wahana Kreativitas Dan Intelektualitas* 3, no. 3 (2018): 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.31942/pgrs.v3i3.1688>.

¹⁴ Fred M. Donner, "A Historian's View of the Qur'ān," *Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2024): 1–13.

¹⁵ Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, 39.

The academic impetus for this study arises from the enduring impact of John Wansbrough's revisionist discourse concerning the origins of the Qur'an. Wansbrough not only challenged the traditional chronology of revelation but also relativized the Qur'an's status by situating it alongside Hadith and other early Islamic narratives, which he categorized as "sub-canonical texts." This perspective, which conceptualizes the Qur'an as a later social construction emerging from sectarian dynamics, calls into question its authority and uniqueness as a sacred scripture. The author argues that existing critiques of Wansbrough's thesis remain incomplete: some address his methodological approach, others focus on historical-philological issues, and still others engage with apologetic responses. In response to these gaps, the present article seeks to demonstrate that the Qur'an fundamentally differs from the Hadith in both theological function and liturgical orientation. Specifically, the Qur'an was revealed as divine guidance intended to regulate worship and establish a foundation of faith, whereas the Hadith and other narrative sources developed as interpretive responses to revelation and as historiographical accounts of the Muslim community. By thoroughly elucidating these distinctions, this study aims to advance scholarly understanding of the essential differences between these two corpora and to offer a direct critique of Wansbrough's reductionist portrayal of the Qur'an as merely a sectarian literary product.

To attain a comprehensive understanding, this study utilizes a qualitative methodology grounded in a library research approach. The primary data comprise Fred M. Donner's "Narratives of Islamic Origins" and his related works, while secondary data encompass books, classical texts, journal articles, and other pertinent sources. Data analysis is conducted through a descriptive-analytical technique, which entails describing existing phenomena followed by critical interpretation to derive deeper insights. As a purely library-based study, data collection depends on documentation and employs a critical approach to ensure the accuracy and validity of the information utilized.

Result and Discussion

John Wansbrough: A Biography and Critical Examination of His Skepticism toward the Qur'an

John Wansbrough was a Qur'anic scholar originally from London who pursued his higher education at Harvard University, specializing in history¹⁶. His academic career commenced in 1960 with his appointment as a lecturer in History at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. As a Jewish scholar and a distinguished Western Islamologist, Wansbrough was recognized for his systematic methodology in the study of the Qur'an, aiming to achieve a comprehensive understanding of classical Islamic thought¹⁷. His significant contributions to Qur'anic and Islamic historical studies are evident in several influential publications, including "Qur'anic Studies: A Note on Arabic Rhetoric and Qur'anic Exegesis", "Majas al-Qur'an: Periphrastic Exegesis", and "The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Competition in Islamic

¹⁶ Yusuf Rahman, "A Modern Western Approach to the Qur'an: A Study of John Wansbrough's Qur'anic Studies and Its Muslim Replies," *McGill Journal of Middle East Studies* 4 (1996), 138.

¹⁷ Andrew Rippin, "Literary Analysis of Qur'an, Tafsir, and Sira: The Methodologies of John Wansbrough," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Oxford: The University of Arizona Press, 1985), 154.

Salvation History, Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation”¹⁸. Wansbrough died in June 2002 at the age of 74.¹⁹

In his work “*Quranic Studies*”, Wansbrough conducted a literary critique of Islamic sources with the objective of distinguishing theological perspectives from historical analysis in the study of Islam’s origins. A notable example of his literary criticism is found in his interpretation of Qur’an 17:1 (Surat al-Isra’)²⁰. Wansbrough contended that this verse does not pertain to the Prophet Muhammad’s Night Journey (Isra’), but rather to the Exodus of Moses from Egypt to Israel. He argued that the phrase “*asra bi ‘abdihi laylan*” (“took His servant by night”) in this verse, as well as in others with similar wording, refers to Moses’s journey rather than Muhammad’s Isra’. This interpretation, he asserted, is corroborated by the subsequent verse, which describes Moses’s reception of the Torah following his exodus. Furthermore, Wansbrough posited that the phrase “*min al-masjid al-haram ila al-masjid al-aqsa*”, which explicitly identifies Muhammad as the traveler, represents a later textual interpolation that emerged during the Islamic evangelium period and was influenced by Judeo-Christian scriptures. Accordingly, Wansbrough regarded the Qur’anic narrative of the Isra’ as a product of interaction with and adaptation from Judeo-Christian traditions.²¹

Given his profound skepticism regarding the authenticity of the Qur’an, Wansbrough’s examination of its compilation and codification, particularly through the lens of exegetical testimonies concerning the process, is unsurprising²². He contended that the historicity of the Qur’an should not be considered an authoritative source for early Islamic history; rather, it should be understood as a constructed literary artifact. This skepticism was rooted in the paucity of “neutral” material evidence available for the study of early Islam, including archaeological data, numismatic findings, and related documents²³. Furthermore, the scarcity of external sources beyond the Muslim community compounded the methodological difficulties inherent in reconstructing the history of early Islam.²⁴

Wansbrough’s skepticism regarding the Qur’an is founded on two primary considerations. First, he questioned the reliability of both Muslim and Western sources pertaining to early Islamic history, particularly in relation to the revelation and codification of the Qur’an. He contended that there is no extant literal or manuscript evidence to substantiate the historical existence of Qur’anic texts during the classical period. His skepticism was further reinforced by the discovery of divergent accounts among those involved in the compilation of

¹⁸ Suryadilaga, “Pendekatan Historis John Wansbrough Dalam Studi Al-Qur’an”, 212.

¹⁹ Wikipedia, “John Wansbrough,” accessed December 12, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wansbrough.

²⁰ Muhammad Alfatih Suryadilaga, “Kajian Atas Pemikiran John Wansbrough Tentang Al-Qur’an Dan Nabi Muhammad,” *Tsaqafah* 7, no. 1 (2011): 89, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v7i1.109>.

²¹ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: A Note on Arabic Rethoric Arabic Rethoric and Qur’anic Exegesis*, 68.

²² Ulfiana Ulfiana, “Otentisitas Al-Qur’an Perspektif John Wansbrough,” *Ushuluna: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin* 5, no. 2 (2019): 212–31, <http://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/una%0AOTENTISITAS>.

²³ Among these individuals were notable figures including Abraham Geiger, Gustave Weil, William Muir, Theodor Noldeke, Friedrich Schwally, Edward Sell, Hartwig Hirschfeld, David S. Margoliouth, W. St. Clair-Tisdall, Louis Cheikho, Paul Casanova, Julius Wellhausen, Charles Cutley Torrey, Leone Caetani, Joseph Horovits, Richard Bell, Alphonse Mingana, Israel Schapiro, Siegmund Fraenkel, Tor Andrae, Arthur Jeffery, Régis Blachère, W. Montgomery Watt, Kenneth Cragg, S. M. Zwemmer, Andrew Rippin, Luxenberg, Danial A. Madigan, Harald Motzki, dan lain-lain. Lihat, Muhammad Anshori, “Tren-Tren Wacana Studi Al-Qur’an Dalam Pandangan Orientalis Di Barat,” *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Tafsir Di Nusantara* 4, no. 1 (2019): 13–44, <https://doi.org/10.32495/nun.v4i1.35>.

²⁴ Ahmad Fadholi, “Studi Kritis Terhadap Pemikiran John Wonsbrough Tentang Historisitas Al-Qur’an,” *Hermeunetik* 8, no. 2 (2014): 281–304.

the Qur'an during the Prophet's lifetime and the reign of Caliph 'Uthman. Second, he conducted a comparative analysis of the Qur'an's codification process with those of the Bible and Torah, evaluating the Qur'an's originality through the conceptual frameworks established by the Old and New Testaments.²⁵

Wansbrough's skepticism was further heightened by his observation that the earliest surviving Islamic narratives—Arabic texts produced by the Muslim community—primarily date from approximately two centuries after the events they recount²⁶. He posited that the compilation of the Qur'an was a protracted process lasting nearly two centuries, occurring alongside the development of Islam's internal sources, with the objective of documenting the foundations of faith, scriptural validation, and the divine purpose for humanity²⁷. However, this view was challenged by Fred M. Donner, who contended that the Qur'an's compilation did not extend over two centuries but likely took place within approximately thirty years. Donner argued that Wansbrough's hypothesis should be evaluated solely in terms of its interpretive implications and that his skeptical assertions lacked empirical support.²⁸

Fred M. Donner observes that Wansbrough's works are frequently characterized by a complex and loosely organized presentation, which diminishes the clarity of his principal arguments. Due to Wansbrough's failure to articulate his claims within a coherent and systematic framework, formulating a logical and comprehensive rebuttal to his interpretations proves challenging; critiquing one aspect risks destabilizing the entirety of his argument. Nonetheless, Donner proposes an alternative methodology to evaluate Wansbrough's interpretation, which equates the Qur'an with Hadith and other narrative sources. This methodology underpins the author's critique of Wansbrough's skepticism by highlighting the clear distinction between the Qur'an and Hadith as two fundamentally distinct corpora.

The Historical Distinction between the Qur'an and the Hadith According to Fred M. Donner

I. The Qur'an and Hadith Concerning Religious and Political Authority

One of the most notable features of the Hadith corpus and early Islamic narrative traditions is their pronounced engagement with political issues. Numerous Hadith collections address the circumstances under which Muslims are expected to obey their leaders. For example, the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have emphasized obedience to legitimate authority figures, whether the imam (religious leader), caliph (the Prophet's political successor), or amir (commander or governor). He stated, "True religion (din) is loyalty to God, His Book, and the leaders of the Muslims."²⁹ Another widely cited saying asserts, "Whoever obeys me has obeyed God, and whoever disobeys me has disobeyed God. Whoever obeys my commander has obeyed me, and whoever disobeys my commander has disobeyed me."³⁰

²⁵ Rusmana, *Al-Qur'an Dan Hegemoni Wacana* (Bandung: CV. Pustaka Setia, 2006), 84.

²⁶ John Wansbrough, "Arabic Rhetoric and Qur'anic Exegesis," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 31, no. 3 (1968): 469–85.

²⁷ Carlos A. Segovia, "John Wansbrough and the Problem of Islamic Origins in Recent Scholarship: A Farewell to the Traditional Account," in *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where, and to Whom?*, ed. Carlos A. Segovia and Basil Lourie (United States of America: Gorgias Press, 2012), xix.

²⁸ Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, 39.

²⁹ Ahmad bin Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad Bin Hanbal* (Kairo: Muassasah Qurthubah, n.d.), Juz XV, hadis no. 7941, 99-100.

³⁰ Muhammad bin Ismail bin Ibrahim bin al-Mughirah Al-Bukhari, *Shahih Al-Bukhari* (Kairo: Dar al-Sya'b, 1987), Juz VIII, 104; Abu Dawud Sulaiman Al-Sijistani, *Sunan Abu Dawud* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, n.d.), Juz IV, hadis

Numerous Hadiths elaborate on the obligation to obey rulers, collectively reflecting attempts to address key political questions: Who is entitled to exercise leadership? On what principles should governance be founded? How should believers respond when confronted with a sinful leader or rival claimants to authority? What are the prerogatives of rulers in legal, administrative, and moral domains?³¹ These issues are extensively examined within Hadith literature. In contrast, the Qur'an contains very few verses that explicitly address political or religious leadership³², aside from those directly pertaining to the Prophet Muhammad himself.³³

The Qur'an does not explicitly delineate who should assume political authority among the believers following the Prophet's death, nor does it offer specific guidance regarding the mechanisms for exercising such authority. A frequently referenced verse states: "Obey God, obey the Messenger, and those in authority among you (uli al-amr minkum)" (Q 4:59)³⁴. Nevertheless, politically charged terms such as khalifah in the Qur'an lack the institutional implications that later emerge in the Hadith literature such as khalifah denoting the head of state, a succession of rulers, or the Prophet's political successor. Within the Qur'anic context, the term khalifah embodies meanings that precede these subsequent political interpretations and debates.³⁵

This distinction indicates that the Qur'an and Hadith originated from distinct historical contexts, rather than from a singular "sectarian environment," as posited by Wansbrough. The Qur'an, produced during the Prophet's lifetime, embodies an eschatological perspective that anticipated the imminent end of the world. Consequently, its omission of discussions regarding long-term political succession is comprehensible; if early adherents expected the world's end to occur shortly, concerns about enduring political institutions would have been deemed irrelevant. This argument challenges Wansbrough's hypothesis and highlights the separate and independent origins of the Qur'an and Hadith.

2. The Qur'an and Hadith Concerning the People of the Prophet's Era

The Hadith corpus features numerous prominent contemporaries of the Prophet, including his cousin 'Ali, his uncles Abu Talib and al-'Abbas, the tribal leader Abu Sufyan, among others. According to Donner, these individuals assumed critical roles in subsequent debates concerning political legitimacy within the Muslim community, as they were progenitors of later political claimants. Many Hadiths and early Islamic narratives depict events involving these figures in manners that serve to legitimize the political claims of their descendants during later power struggles.³⁶

In contrast, the Qur'an does not mention these individuals, with the sole exception of a contemporary figure—Abu Lahab. The Qur'an describes Abu Lahab's vehement opposition to the Prophet's message, portraying him as someone who persistently pursued and harmed the Prophet whenever he preached the doctrine of divine unity³⁷. However, unlike the figures referenced in the Hadith literature, Abu Lahab was never cited to substantiate subsequent political claims within the

no. 4658 dan 4659, h. 214-215; Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad Bin Hanbal*, Juz XIV, hadis no. 7643, 76.

³¹ Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, 43.

³² Abu al-Husain Muslim bin al-Hajjaj Al-Naisaburi, *Shahih Muslim* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1999), Juz XII, 239-241; Muhammad bin Isa Abu Isa Al-Tirmidzi, *Sunan Al-Tirmidzi* (Beirut: Dar al-Turats Ihya' al-Arabi, n.d.), Juz IV, hadis no. 2265, 458.

³³ Muhammad Hildan Azizi, "Kesantunan Berbahasa Dakwah Struktural Pada Debat Politik Para Nabi Dalam Al-Qur'an," *Dakwatuna: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi Islam* 9, no. 1 (2023): 42–43.

³⁴ The term khalifah is mentioned only twice in the Qur'an, specifically in reference to Adam (Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 28–30) and David (Q.S. Sād [38]: 26). The political connotation of khalifah in these passages was not apparent to early Muslim scholars; classical exegetical literature generally interpreted the term in a broader sense as "humankind" rather than as denoting a political leader. For further reference, see Abu Ja'far bin Muhammad Ibn Jarir Al-Thabari, *Jami' Al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay Fi Al-Tafsir Al-Qur'an* (Kairo: Dar al-Hijr, 2001), Juz I, 476-480.

³⁵ Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, 44.

³⁶ Donner, 46.

³⁷ Akmalia Salsabila and Rizal Samsul Mutaqin, "Mengungkap Pesan Di Balik Kisah Abu Lahab Dalam Al-Qur'an (111): 1-5 (Kajian Semiotika Michael Riffatere)," *Suhuf* 16, no. 2 (2023): 441–61.

Muslim community. The divergence between the Qur'an and Hadith challenges Wansbrough's claim³⁸ that both originated within the same sectarian context and solidified during approximately the same historical period. This distinction is more plausibly accounted for by positing that the Qur'an was compiled and stabilized prior to the emergence of political rivalries, which subsequently involved the descendants of Abu Talib, al-'Abbas, and Abu Sufyan.

3. Anachronisms in the Qur'an and Hadith

The primary distinction between the Qur'an and Hadith lies in their respective approaches to historical references. The Qur'an does not contain any explicitly anachronistic mentions of individuals, groups, or events that occur after the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad. In contrast, Hadith literature frequently includes such anachronisms, portraying the Prophet as foretelling events that transpired long after his death. Notable examples include narrations concerning the emergence of black banners from Khurasan, associated with the Abbasid dynasty; the appearance of a figure named al-Saffah, the first Abbasid caliph, during periods of political unrest; and admonitions regarding a tyrant from the Umayyad lineage who would ascend the Prophet's pulpit.

Another apocalyptic Hadith narrates that the Prophet placed his hand on a companion's head and stated: "O Ibn Hawala, when you observe that the caliphate has been established in the Holy Land (al-ard al-muqaddasa), earthquakes, tribulations, and significant events will ensue, and the Hour will be imminent closer to people than my hand is to your head³⁹." Similarly, predictions concerning the abundance of wealth during Caliph 'Uthman's reign or the conquest of Jerusalem under Caliph 'Umar are found in apocalyptic Hadiths that date no earlier than the mid-first Islamic century.⁴⁰

The Qur'an, in contrast, lacks any references to subsequent events, figures, or issues such as the Abbasids, Umayyads, Zubayrids, 'Alids, disputes concerning taxation or conversion, tribal conflicts, or conquests. This absence suggests that the Qur'an was already a "closed" text by the time of the First Civil War (35–41 AH / 656–661 CE) at the latest. Therefore, Wansbrough's hypothesis—that the Qur'an was compiled significantly later and edited to exclude anachronistic content, thereby constituting a product of the same "sectarian milieu" as the Hadith—cannot be substantiated. The available evidence decisively refutes this claim, instead supporting the conclusion that the Qur'an's formation predates the sectarian developments evident in Hadith literature.

4. The Qur'an and Hadith Concerning the Earlier Prophets

When examining subjects addressed in both the Qur'an and Hadith, it becomes evident that these sources often emphasize different dimensions. For example, numerous pre-Islamic prophets who preceded Muhammad—such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Job, Moses, Jacob, Joseph, David, and Jesus—are mentioned in both the Qur'an and Hadith literature⁴¹. A comparative analysis of the portrayal of these figures in the Qur'an versus Hadith and early Islamic origin narratives reveals a general trend: Hadith and early Islamic accounts typically provide more detailed narratives about these prophets than the Qur'an. However, for certain figures, such as the prophet Ṣāliḥ and his people, the Thamūd, this pattern is reversed; the Qur'an presents considerably more information, whereas Hadith and subsequent Islamic literature contribute relatively little.⁴²

According to Donner, such distinctions are challenging to account for if one accepts Wansbrough's assumption that both the Qur'an and the Hadith emerged from the same "sectarian milieu." Conversely, the traditional perspective regarding the dating and provenance of the Qur'an offers

³⁸ Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, 46.

³⁹ Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad Bin Hanbal*, Juz V, 288.

⁴⁰ Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, 49.

⁴¹ Numerous prophetic narratives are recounted in both the Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet. While the extent of detail and emphasis varies between these sources, they serve to complement one another. This is exemplified by: 'Imaduddin Abu al-Fida' Ibn Katsir, *Qishashul Anbiya'*, ed. Moh Syamsi Hasan (Surabaya: Amelia, 2015).

⁴² Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, 50.

a more coherent explanation. The narratives concerning Šālih and his people, akin to those of Jewish and Christian figures, seem to have circulated within the western Arabian context where Muhammad resided, yet they were not widely recognized in Iraq or Syria—the regions where the “sectarian milieu” responsible for much of the Hadith literature subsequently developed. Consequently, it is plausible that Šālih and the Thamūd are prominently featured in the Qur’an but scarcely mentioned in the Hadith. Furthermore, epigraphic evidence confirms the presence of the Thamūd in northwestern Arabia; however, they no longer constituted a political or theological concern for the early Muslim community. Accordingly, later Islamic traditions largely omitted them in their accounts of religious origins. Thus, they were not integral to the “sectarian milieu” of the first and second Islamic centuries and, as a result, do not appear prominently in Hadith literature.⁴³

5. The Qur’an and Hadith Concerning Muhammad

A significant distinction between the Qur’an and the Hadith lies in their respective portrayals of Muhammad. Wansbrough argued that the Qur’an and other narrative sources represent Muhammad and the earlier prophets in essentially the same manner⁴⁴. However, although both the Qur’an and Hadith acknowledge Muhammad as a prophet, they do so in notably different ways. In the Qur’an, Muhammad and his prophethood often assume a background role, overshadowed by broader theological and moral themes. Fazlur Rahman notes that prophecy in the Qur’an constitutes only one of several major themes, alongside divine omnipotence and mercy, the impending Judgment, moral exhortations, and social and legal injunctions⁴⁵. Thus, the Qur’an depicts Muhammad as an ordinary human whose primary responsibility is to convey the divine message.

In contrast, Muhammad occupies a central position within the Hadith corpus. Each Hadith either records his utterances, recounts his actions as observed by contemporaries, or attributes statements to him. Within Hadith literature, Muhammad is portrayed as an extraordinary figure endowed with miraculous abilities, such as feeding large crowds, healing the sick through his saliva, drawing water from the earth by striking it with his heel, perceiving events behind him, foretelling future occurrences, and possessing esoteric divine knowledge, including the names of individuals he had never encountered⁴⁶. This depiction markedly diverges from the Qur’anic representation of Muhammad as a mortal messenger. Such discrepancies challenge Wansbrough’s assertion that the Qur’an and Hadith emerged from the same sectarian milieu. His thesis—that both corpora present Muhammad in a similar manner—can be contested by the extensive miracle narratives and hagiographic traditions prevalent in Hadith literature and early Islamic historiography.

6. The Qur’an and Hadith Regarding the Ritual Prayer (Ṣalāt)

Both the Qur’an and the Hadith address the practice of ritual worship, albeit in markedly different manners. A prominent example is the ritual prayer (ṣalāt). The Qur’an often urges believers to “establish the prayer” with sincerity and devotion; however, it provides limited details regarding the specific procedures of the ritual⁴⁷. This suggests that ṣalāt was already a well-established practice among the early recipients of the Qur’anic message, thereby obviating the need for extensive elaboration. Notably, the Qur’an does not delineate the number of daily prayers required.

In contrast, the Hadith literature comprises thousands of reports that provide detailed accounts of various aspects of prayer, including the prescribed number of daily prayers (five) and the specific number of units (rak‘at) for each prayer. Considering the Qur’an’s central role as the foundational legal

⁴³ Donner.

⁴⁴ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: A Note on Arabic Rethoric Arabic Rethoric and Qur’anic Exegesis*, 65.

⁴⁵ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of The Qur’ān* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁴⁶ Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, 51.

⁴⁷ For further reference, see QS. al-Mu‘minun [23]: 1-2, QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 43, QS. al-Isra’ [17]: 78. QS. al-Nisa’ [4]: 103, QS. Hud [11]: 114, dan masih banyak lagi.

text in Islam, its relative absence of detailed instructions regarding prayer suggests that it originates from a distinct intellectual and historical context compared to that which produced the Hadith. If one assumes that the Qur'an reflects the religious practices of the earliest believers in Arabia, the divergence between the Qur'an and Hadith becomes comprehensible: the Hadith serves as *bayān al-tafsīr*, that is, the explanatory elaboration of Qur'anic injunctions that are general or implicit in nature.

Another notable distinction pertains to the communal Friday prayer (*ṣalāt al-jumu'ah*). Within Islamic jurisprudence, the Friday prayer encompasses specific ritual requirements, most notably the inclusion of a sermon (*khuṭbah*), which is extensively detailed in the Hadith literature. In contrast, the Qur'an references the Friday prayer only once (Q 62:9), where the association between "prayer" and "Friday" appears almost incidental, and the *khuṭbah* is entirely absent⁴⁸. This suggests that the Qur'an's succinct and allusive mentions were subsequently supplemented by the precise definitions and ritual regulations articulated in the Hadith. Consequently, if the Qur'an had been fully crystallized solely in the second Islamic century for liturgical purposes—as proposed by Wansbrough—it would be challenging to account for the absence of a detailed description of one of early Islam's central liturgical practices, the Friday congregational prayer, within the Qur'anic text itself.

Table 1:
Historical Distinctions between the Qur'an and Hadith According to Fred M. Donner

No	Aspect of Study	Characteristics of the Qur'an	Characteristics of the Hadith	Historical Significance and Implications for Wansbrough's Critique
1	Religious and Political Authority	The text does not explicitly address political leadership following the Prophet; rather, the term <i>khalīfah</i> is employed in a theological context instead of an institutional one. The emphasis is placed on obedience to God and His Messenger.	The text provides an extensive discussion on leadership and the principles of obedience to imams, caliphs, and amirs. It offers normative guidance concerning governance, legal frameworks, and the foundations of political legitimacy.	The Qur'an is shown to have originated within the Prophet's eschatological context rather than from a subsequent "sectarian milieu" concerned with political succession.
2	Individuals Contemporaneous with the Prophet	The text references only a single contemporary figure, Abu Lahab, as an adversary of the Prophet's message, without acknowledging other family members or prominent Quraysh elites.	The text references numerous contemporaries, including 'Ali, Abu Talib, al-'Abbas, and Abu Sufyan. The narratives concerning these figures frequently function to legitimize the political	The statement suggests that the Qur'an was compiled prior to the emergence of internal political rivalries, thereby highlighting a historical discontinuity between the Qur'an and the Hadith corpus.

⁴⁸ Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, 53.

			claims of subsequent dynasties.
3	Anachronism and Chronology: An Analytical Overview	The text contains no references to individuals, events, or political groups subsequent to the Prophetic era. It was established as a text early in Islamic history.	The text is replete with anachronisms, including prophetic predictions concerning the Abbasid and Umayyad dynasties, forthcoming wars, and apocalyptic conflicts. This study challenges Wansbrough's assertion that the Qur'an was compiled at a later date, demonstrating that the Qur'an predates the Hadith both in terms of textual evidence and chronological order.
4	Narratives Concerning Previous Prophets	The text provides detailed descriptions of numerous prophets, with particular emphasis on Šāliḥ and the Thamūd, thereby reflecting the traditions of western Arabia.	The text elaborates on prominent biblical prophets such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus; however, it offers limited information regarding Šāliḥ and the Thamūd. Regional and cultural variations indicate that the Qur'an originated in the Hijaz region, whereas the Hadith emerged subsequently in the Iraq–Syria area.
5	The Figure of Muhammad	The text depicts Muhammad as an ordinary human messenger, emphasizing the divine message over personal miracles.	The focus is on Muhammad himself, portraying him as a miracle worker endowed with divine knowledge and extraordinary abilities. The Qur'an is theocentric in nature, whereas the Hadith is characterized by hagiographic elements. This distinction challenges Wansbrough's thesis, which posits that both texts share a common narrative or sectarian origin.
6	Ritual Worship (Ṣalāt)	The prayer is commanded without specifying details such as the number of units or repetitions; instead, it emphasizes spiritual obedience and devotion.	The text provides detailed instructions regarding ritual practices, including the five daily prayers, the number of rak'āt for each, and the prescribed manner of their performance. The Hadith's interpretive function (bayān al-tafsīr) is revealed, rather than a simultaneous origin. This challenges Wansbrough's assumption that both emerged from the same liturgical context.

Drawing upon six analytical dimensions, Fred M. Donner argues that the Qur'an and Hadith did not emerge from the same "sectarian milieu," as previously posited by John Wansbrough. Donner contends that the Qur'an is an earlier, theologically autonomous text that predates the Hadith chronologically. This differentiation suggests that the Qur'an originated within the context of revelation and the Prophet's community, which remained focused on an eschatological mission. In contrast, the Hadith developed during the post-Prophetic period as a response to the interpretive and historical demands of the Muslim community. Thus, the Qur'an functions as a normative and liturgical revelation that constitutes the foundation of faith, whereas the Hadith operates as an interpretive and historiographical corpus that elucidates religious practices and experiences. This distinction underscores the fundamentally different historical origins, functions, and intellectual orientations of the two bodies of literature.

Critique of John Wansbrough's Revisionism: Reflections on Fred M. Donner's Ideas

John Wansbrough's critical study of the Qur'an—especially his hypothesis that the Qur'an and Hadith originated from the same "sectarian milieu"—reflects a complex intellectual evolution marked by continuity, change, and diversity. This evolution spans two main dimensions: methodology and thematic focus. Methodologically, revisionist-skeptical scholars extensively employed historical and literary approaches. Thematically, their research encompasses various aspects of Qur'anic scholarship, including textual analysis, contextual study, interpretation, and exegesis.⁴⁹

Fazlur Rahman categorizes revisionist-skeptical literature on the Qur'an into three groups: works exploring possible Jewish and Christian influences; studies reconstructing the chronological order of revelation; and thematic analyses of the Qur'an's content, either comprehensive or focused. Rahman notes that the first two categories dominate revisionist research, often overemphasizing the Qur'an's dependence on Judeo-Christian traditions and compromising objectivity. Shortened: Fazlur Rahman divides revisionist-skeptical Qur'an studies into three types: exploring Jewish-Christian influences, reconstructing revelation chronology, and thematic analyses. He argues the first two dominate, overemphasizing Judeo-Christian dependence and reducing objectivity.⁵⁰

Fred M. Donner critiques revisionist theories questioning the Qur'an's authenticity, identifying four main views: the non-existence of Prophet theory, denying Muhammad's historicity; the late crystallization theory, suggesting the Qur'an evolved gradually; the sectarian milieu theory, viewing the Qur'an as a product of a complex sectarian community; and the extra-Arabian origins theory, claiming the Qur'an originated outside Arabia. Donner argues these theories are inadequate because they wholly reject Islamic historical sources like Hadith and *sirah*.⁵¹ While these ideas align with Wansbrough's view that the Qur'an and Islamic narratives emerged from a sectarian context, Donner doubts this approach can yield an accurate understanding of early Islamic history.

Through a critical engagement with Qur'anic studies, Donner systematically refutes Wansbrough's claim in "Narratives of Islamic Origins" that most of the Qur'an originated outside Arabia, in Iraq and Syria.⁵² Wansbrough views the Hijaz as a mythical birthplace of Islam and argues that the Qur'an and Hadith emerged from a polemical sectarian environment marked by doctrinal disputes

⁴⁹ Yusuf Rahman, "Tren Kajian Al-Qur'an Di Dunia Barat," *Jurnal Studia Insania* 1, no. 1 (2013): 1, <https://doi.org/10.18592/jsi.v1i1.1076>; Yusuf Rahman, "Survei Bibliografis Kajian Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir Di Barat: Kajian Publikasi Buku Dalam Bahasa Inggris Sejak Tahun 2000an," *Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 4, no. 1 (2015): 103–27, <https://doi.org/10.15408/quhas.v4i1.2285>.

⁵⁰ Rahman, *Major Themes of The Qur'an*, v.

⁵¹ Fred M. Donner, "The Historian, the Believer, and the Qur'an," in *New Perspective on the Qur'an: The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2011), 25–30.

⁵² Wansbrough, "Arabic Rhetoric and Qur'anic Exegesis."

among competing communities. Donner challenges this assertion:

“If the Qur’anic text originated in the same sectarian context as the Hadith and early Islamic narratives—making these narratives ‘sub-canonical’ versions of the Qur’an—then a critical question arises: why does the Qur’an differ so markedly in content from these sources?”⁵³

Donner refutes Wansbrough by identifying six key differences between the Qur’an and Hadith: (1) religious and political authority; (2) contemporaneous figures; (3) anachronisms; (4) accounts of earlier prophets; (5) portrayals of Muhammad; and (6) descriptions of ritual prayer (ṣalāt). His analysis challenges Wansbrough’s thesis from textual and historical angles, providing valuable insights for revisionist-skeptical scholars questioning the Qur’an’s authenticity.

Wansbrough’s extensive but empirically weak critique of the Qur’an created methodological challenges that impeded reconstructing its authentic history. Donner rejects Wansbrough’s hypotheses, arguing that the Qur’an and Hadith did not arise from a single sectarian environment. Instead, the Qur’an emerged earlier, while the Hadith developed later to address the Muslim community’s interpretive and legal needs⁵⁴. Using rigorous philological and historical methods, Donner demonstrates that the Qur’an and Hadith were shaped by different functions, periods, and socio-religious contexts: the Qur’an as a normative revelation reflecting the Prophet’s mission, and the Hadith as a post-revelatory effort to build communal identity, law, and tradition.

Donner’s critique challenges Wansbrough’s methodology and offers a significant epistemological insight into contemporary Islamic studies⁵⁵. He contends that the Qur’an is not a later creation of the Muslim community or a gradual doctrinal development, as revisionist skeptics claim. Rather, the Qur’an is an early, independent text that establishes Islam’s foundational worldview and serves as a primary source later interpreted and expanded through the Hadith.⁵⁶

This analysis calls for a renewed examination of the textual authority and chronological relationship between the Qur’an and Hadith. Such reevaluation enables reinterpretation of shari‘ah codification, religious authority construction, and intellectual dynamics during Islam’s formative period. The traditional, uncritical framework must be replaced by a comprehensive, textually grounded approach that incorporates historical, philological, and source-critical perspectives. Revisionist views like Wansbrough’s should be addressed methodologically, demonstrating the Qur’an as an autonomous and earlier source of Islamic teaching. While normatively significant, the Hadith reflects the community’s historical response to evolving needs post-revelation; thus, both corpora should be understood as distinct yet complementary within the broader Islamic intellectual tradition.

Table 2.

A Comparative Analysis of Fred M. Donner’s Critique of John Wansbrough’s Revisionist Approach

No	Aspect of Study	John Wansbrough (Revisionist-Skeptical)	Fred M. Donner (Critic of Revisionism)	Academic Implications
I	Fundamental Assumptions	The Qur’an and Hadith are considered to have	This claim is rejected, with the argument that	This work challenges the notion of

⁵³ Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, 39.

⁵⁴ Ahmad Labib Majdi and Iq Arifin Mansurnoor, “Fred McGraw Donner Tentang Al-Qur’an: Pemikiran Dan Catatan Kritis Terhadap Kesarjanaan Non-Muslim,” *Journal of Qur’an and Hadith Studies* 10, no. 2 (2021): 155–78.

⁵⁵ Saniatul Hidayah & Zulfadli, Pemikiran Tafsir Al-Qur’an Kontemporer: Studi Komparatif Metode Tafsir Amīn Al-Khulī dan Nashr Hamīd Abū Zayd, Al-Qudwah; Jurnal Studi Qur’an dan Hadis 2, no 1 (2024): 99-115

⁵⁶ Fred M. Donner, “The Qur’an in Recent Scholarship: Challenges and Desiderata,” in *The Qur’an in Its Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2007), 29–49.

	Regarding the Origins of the Qur'an	originated from the same sectarian milieu, both emerging within a context of polemical interactions among early Islamic communities.	the Qur'an originated earlier and within a distinct revelatory context compared to the Hadith.	sectarian homogeneity and affirms the historical uniqueness of the Qur'an.
2	Methodological Approach	This approach employs an extreme historical-critical and philological methodology, entirely dismissing classical Islamic sources such as Hadith and Sirah.	This study employs a more balanced philological and historical methodology, while continuing to utilize Islamic sources as primary analytical materials.	This demonstrates that critique can be performed without disregarding the value of traditional sources.
3	Focus of the Study	This study aims to demonstrate that Islamic texts are the result of social reconstruction processes occurring after the Prophet's era.	This study aims to demonstrate the independence of the Qur'an as a normative text that predates the Hadith.	This shifts the discourse away from skepticism regarding text-based historical reconstruction.
4	Literary Categories According to Fazlur Rahman	Revisionist literature can be categorized into three distinct areas: (a) Jewish-Christian influences, (b) the reconstruction of the chronology of revelation, and (c) thematic analysis.	Donner contends that these interpretations are excessively shaped by external presuppositions and neglect to account for the Qur'an's internal context.	This work critiques the predominance of Western paradigms that tend to overlook the theological and historical dimensions of Islam.
5	Four Principal Theories of Revisionism	The first two factors dominate and diminish objectivity: (1) the theory of the Prophet's non-existence, (2) late crystallization, (3) a sectarian milieu, and (4) extra-Arabian origins.	This study rejects all four theories, as none provide a credible explanation for the historical origins of the Qur'an.	This text underscores the necessity for a novel methodological framework that preserves the integrity of Islamic history rather than negating it.
6	A Critical Examination of the Geographical Hypothesis	It is asserted that the Qur'an was compiled in Iraq or Syria rather than in the Hijaz, with the Hijaz being regarded merely as a	The claim is rejected with the question: if these texts indeed originated from the same milieu, why does the Qur'an differ so markedly from the Hadith and early Islamic narratives?	This analysis exposes the logical inconsistencies within Wansbrough's hypothesis and substantiates the Qur'an's origins in

		mythical birthplace of Islam.		the early Arabian context.
7	Six Principal Distinctions Between the Qur'an and the Hadith	This overlooks the distinctions in both content and function between the two.	Six distinguishing aspects are identified: religious-political authority, contemporaneity with the Prophet, anachronisms, narratives of earlier prophets, the portrayal of Muhammad, and prayer practices.	The Qur'an and Hadith originate from distinct historical and functional contexts
8	Perspective on Chronology and Codification	It is argued that the codification of the Qur'an occurred approximately two centuries after the time of the Prophet.	It is asserted that the codification process required a significantly shorter duration, approximately 30 years.	This work addresses and rectifies the chronological inaccuracies present in Western revisionist interpretations of the history of Islamic texts.
9	Function and Role of the Text	The Qur'an is regarded as a product of communal evolution rather than an initial divine revelation.	The Qur'an is understood as a normative revelatory text, whereas the Hadith is regarded as an interpretive, post-revelatory response.	This establishes a hierarchical relationship whereby the Qur'an serves as the theological foundation, and the Hadith functions as its historical elaboration.
10	Epistemological Contributions	This engenders skepticism regarding the authenticity of Islamic texts and intensifies philological doubt.	This work provides methodological and epistemological critiques that reestablish the Qur'an within its appropriate historical and theological contexts.	This work offers a novel approach to contemporary Islamic studies through rigorous textual and historical analysis.
11	Relevance to Contemporary Academic Discourse	This situation engenders a crisis of confidence in traditional Islamic narratives.	This approach promotes reinterpretation by integrating perspectives from multiple disciplines, including philology, anthropology, linguistics, and intellectual history.	This approach paves the way for a new scientific paradigm in Qur'anic and Hadith studies that is both more balanced and comprehensive.

Fred M. Donner's approach contrasts with John Wansbrough's by not only rejecting the revisionist hypothesis but also introducing a more historical, empirical, and text-based framework. While Wansbrough embodies methodological skepticism—dismissing traditional Islamic sources like Hadith and *sīrah*—Donner advocates an epistemological reconstruction that balances historical criticism with respect for Islamic intellectual tradition. Using rigorous philological and historical methods, Donner argues that the Qur'an occupies an earlier, autonomous chronological position as a normative revelation forming Islam's theological foundation. In contrast, Hadith reflects a historical response to interpretive

and legal needs in the post-Prophetic community. By identifying six key distinctions between the Qur'an and Hadith, Donner shows they arose from fundamentally different historical contexts and functions.

This comparison confirms that Donner's critique has significant epistemological implications for contemporary Islamic studies. He restores the Qur'an's authenticity as an independent revelatory text and situates the Hadith within the historical processes shaping Muslim religious identity, law, and practice. Donner's approach fosters a balanced methodology that integrates rational critique with theological insight, countering the reductionism of Western Orientalist scholarship. By combining textual, historical, and philological analysis, he offers a more inclusive academic paradigm that promotes multidisciplinary research to better understand the interplay of text, context, and historical development in Islam.

Conclusion

This research concludes that the Qur'an and Hadith are distinct Islamic texts differing in origin, function, and historical context. Although both emerged in early Arab-Islamic society, their transmission, codification, and theological development diverged significantly. John Wansbrough's critique, which treats them as products of a single "sectarian milieu," lacks solid historical and methodological support. Through detailed philological and historical analysis, Fred M. Donner shows the Qur'an appeared earlier with a normative role, while the Hadith developed later as an interpretive response to the Muslim community's social and theological needs. Donner highlights six key aspects—religious and political authority, references to the Prophet's contemporaries, anachronisms, narratives of earlier prophets, Muhammad's portrayal, and ritual prayer descriptions—that demonstrate the Qur'an and Hadith stem from distinct textual traditions with different chronological and functional trajectories.

This study confirms that debates on the authority and chronology of the Qur'an and Hadith extend beyond philology to the epistemological foundations of Islamic law and thought. While Wansbrough's revisionist approach challenges the classical view, its methodological flaws allow for more objective, historically grounded reinterpretations. Through detailed textual and historical analysis, the study reaffirms the Qur'an's independence and authenticity as Islam's primary source, positioning the Hadith as a subsequent intellectual development. Future research should use multidisciplinary methods—combining linguistics, religious anthropology, and manuscript philology—to better understand the transmission, codification, and theological and social implications of the Qur'an–Hadith distinction in contemporary Islamic discourse.

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