

Critique of the Historical-Critical Method in the Study of the Qur'an: An Analytical Reading of the Works of Guillaume Dye and the Contemporary Orientalist School

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Received: 13-03-2026

Accepted: 21-05-2026

Published: 01-06-2026

Abstract:

This study provides a thorough critical analysis of the historical-critical method as applied to the Qur'an. It focuses specifically on the works of the Belgian researcher Guillaume Dye, published in the *Qur'an of Historians*, which is presented as a prime example of contemporary Orientalist trends. The study aims to examine the methodological foundations and preconceived assumptions underlying this approach and evaluate the validity of its main hypotheses regarding the origin and formation of the Qur'anic text.

It concludes that Dye's application of the historical-critical method suffers from structural imbalances stemming from prior philosophical assumptions (e.g. the rejection of divine revelation), the systematic marginalisation of Islamic sources and the imposition of interpretative models derived from textual studies without considering the fundamental differences between the Qur'an and the Bible. Furthermore, the study emphasises that the available material evidence (manuscripts and archaeological inscriptions) corroborates the traditional Islamic narrative concerning the early compilation of the Qur'an and its textual stability. The Qur'an is not subjected to scientific scrutiny that respects its methodological uniqueness, nor are all sources dealt with according to equal critical standards.

Keywords: historical-critical method, Guillaume Dye, contemporary Orientalism, Qur'an of Historians, Islamic sources.

Introduction:

Contemporary Western Qur'anic studies constitute a highly complex intellectual field where various methodologies intersect. These range from linguistic analysis and historical criticism

to comparative religious studies (Dye, 2019, p. 735). Since the 19th century, these studies have undergone radical methodological shifts, moving from traditional Orientalist approaches, which were often characterised by ideological tendencies and religious bias (Said, 1978, pp. 1-28), towards more scientific methods that claim objectivity and academic neutrality under the banner of the 'historical-critical method' (Crone, 1987, pp. 203-230).

Within this context, the work of Belgian scholar Guillaume Dye emerges as a prominent model for a new generation of Western Qur'anic researchers. In his articles published in the encyclopaedia *Le Coran des historiens*, Dye presents a 'historical' reading of the Qur'an that is supposedly free from 'traditional religious narratives', whether Islamic or Christian (Reynolds, 2010, pp. 3-22). In his two primary articles, 'The Quranic Corpus: Context and Composition' (*Le corpus coranique: contexte et composition*) and 'The Quranic Corpus: Questions concerning its Canonisation', Dye puts forward bold hypotheses about the origins and formation of the Holy Quran. He employs a multidisciplinary methodology integrating textual criticism, source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism (Dye, 2019, pp. 847-1001).

However, despite its apparent scientific rigour, this methodology raises profound epistemological and methodological issues upon closer examination. It is based on preconceived ideas about the nature of the Qur'anic text and its history of codification, while systematically ignoring or marginalising traditional Islamic sources.

Furthermore, it relies on interpretive models imported from Biblical Studies without giving sufficient consideration to the specificities of the Qur'anic text and its historical, linguistic and cultural contexts (Shoemaker, 2011, pp. 257-265). Additionally, this approach handles archaeological and manuscript evidence with noticeable selectivity, favouring hypotheses that align with its preconceived theoretical framework even when they conflict with the available material evidence (Déroche, 2014, pp. 7-14).

The significance of a critical study of Dye's work is heightened by the fact that it does not merely represent individual scholarly efforts; rather, it reflects a broader trend in contemporary Western Qur'anic studies. This trend is often referred to as the 'Revisionist School', seeking to rewrite early Islamic history based on methodologies that radically question Islamic sources and propose alternative scenarios regarding the origins of the Qur'an and the development of the early Muslim community (Donner, 2008, pp. 34-38) This school's origins can be traced back to the works of John Wansbrough, Patricia Crone, and Michael Cook in the 1970s and 1980s, although more recent works, including those of Dye, attempt to present themselves in a more moderate and balanced manner (Wansbrough, 2004).

This study aims to provide a comprehensive critical analysis of Guillaume Dye's aforementioned two articles (Crone P. a., 1977).

- **Methodological Examination:** Analyzing the foundational methodologies of Dye's work and uncovering the underlying assumptions and inherent biases within them.
- **Evidence Evaluation:** Conducting a rigorous review of the evidence cited by Dye—whether textual, archaeological, or manuscript-based—and assessing its validity and sufficiency in supporting his conclusions.
- **Comparison with Islamic sources:** Highlighting contradictions between Dye's propositions and accounts established by authoritative traditional Islamic sources, and demonstrating the scholarly value of these sources, which Dye systematically ignores or undermines.

- **Proposing alternatives:** Suggesting alternative methodological approaches that integrate academic rigour with respect for the unique nature of the Qur’anic text and Islamic heritage.
- **Rebutting Assertions:** Refuting Dye’s primary claims concerning external influences on the Qur’an, late canonisation, multiple authorship and other related issues.

Research Structure:

The research is organised into six sections. The first section addresses the theoretical and methodological framework. The second section examines Dye’s primary hypotheses. The third section reviews Islamic sources and their role. The fourth section presents archaeological and manuscript evidence. The fifth section analyses methodological problematics. The sixth section proposes an alternative, balanced methodology.

This study does not stem from a position of blind defensiveness or a categorical rejection of Western methodologies. Rather, it originates from a profound belief in the necessity of serious scholarly dialogue and objective methodological critique. It is grounded in the robust academic conviction that the Holy Quran can withstand any impartial scientific scrutiny and that, despite certain problematic details, traditional Islamic sources provide a coherent historical framework supported by increasing material evidence. Furthermore, we argue that rigorous academic critique of Orientalist methodologies is not an intellectual luxury, but a scientific necessity to rectify methodological errors and expose the ideological biases that may be concealed behind the veil of scientific objectivity.

And God is the Granter of success and the Guide to the straight path.

Section One: The Theoretical and Methodological Framework

1.1 The Historical-Critical Method: Roots and Hypotheses

The historical-critical method is one of the most prominent tools used in contemporary Western religious studies. It has its roots in Biblical Studies and has evolved since the 18th century. This method is based on a set of fundamental assumptions:

- a) **The human nature of religious texts:** The method assumes that, regardless of their sanctity to believers, religious texts are ultimately human products subject to specific historical, linguistic and cultural conditions (Barton, 2007, pp. 13-27).
- b) **Historical Development:** It presupposes that religious texts did not emerge instantaneously in their final form, but rather underwent multiple stages of formation, redaction and revision (Steck, 1998, pp. 47-59) .
- c) **External influences:** The method seeks to identify external sources, such as pre-existing texts, oral traditions and cultural influences, that contributed to the shaping of the religious text (Reynolds, 2010, pp. 3-22).
- d) **Critical Vulnerability (Critique-ability):** It posits that all sources, whether sacred or secular, are subject to critical examination and are not infallible (Dye, 2019, pp. 738-741) .

While this method has proven effective in biblical studies, facilitating an understanding of the historical formation of biblical texts and identifying various redactional layers and diverse cultural influences (Barton, 2007, pp. 50-75), attempting to apply it directly to the Holy Quran raises fundamental methodological issues.

1.1.1. Substantial Divergence in the Nature of the Two Texts

The Holy Quran and the Bible differ radically in several key aspects:

- **Temporal unity:** The Qur'an was revealed over a limited period of time (23 years), whereas the Bible was formed over several centuries. (Al-A'zami, 2003, pp. 52-55)
- **Linguistic homogeneity:** the Qur'an is written in a single language (Arabic), whereas the Bible was written in multiple languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek). (Al-A'zami, 2003, pp. 58-60)
- **Oral Preservation:** From its inception, the Qur'an relied on a highly rigorous system of oral transmission (ḥifẓ), a phenomenon unparalleled in the biblical tradition. (Donner F. M., 1998, pp. 35-50)
- **Early Codification:** The Qur'an was documented during the Prophet's lifetime and officially compiled during the caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (644–656 CE), less than a quarter-century after the start of the revelation. (Al-A'zami, 2003, pp. 98-110)
- **Incompatibility of the Historical-Critical Method:** This method was developed specifically to analyse texts with distinct redactional histories (i.e. the Bible). When applied to the Quran, it often leads to the systematic neglect of its unique characteristics, such as concurrent oral transmission (tawātur). (Dye, 2019, p. 760)
- **Conflicting results:** The application of this method has produced contradictory findings among scholars, suggesting inherent weaknesses in its methodological principles. (Motzki, 2006, p. 15) .

1.1.2. Problems with Preconceived Assumptions

When Dye and other Western scholars apply the historical-critical method to the Qur'an, they make several unjustified assumptions, including: (Dye, 2019, pp. 748-753)

Rejection of Divine Revelation: The a priori assumption that the Qur'an is a purely human text, no different from any other religious

scripture, without providing any empirical evidence to support this claim (Shoemaker S. J., 2012, pp. 138-146). This constitutes a philosophical bias that conflicts with the principles of scientific neutrality.

- a) **Scepticism towards Islamic sources:** Rejecting traditional Islamic sources (hadith, sira and tafsir) on the grounds that they are ‘biased’ or ‘late-dated’, while accepting non-Islamic sources that may be even more biased and less familiar with the Islamic context. (Harald, 2001, pp. 1-34)
- b) **Generalisation of the Biblical Model:** Assuming that findings in Biblical Studies necessarily apply to the Quran without accounting for the fundamental differences between the two texts. (Dye, 2019, pp. 750-755)
- c) **Source criticism:** Attempting to reconstruct the history of the Qur’anic text by relying on external (non-Islamic) sources or archaeological and manuscript evidence while applying methodologies such as source criticism and redaction criticism. (Dye, 2019, p. 740)

1.1.3. A Methodological Critique of Dye’s Approach

Dye explicitly acknowledges that his methodology is based on the “suspension” of the traditional Islamic interpretive framework. He calls for studying the Quran “from within” (internally), without relying on external Islamic sources (Dye, 2019, pp. 743-748). However, this stance suffers from a fundamental contradiction: it claims to study the Quran objectively and free from “religious biases,” yet it relies on interpretive models imported from external contexts, such as Biblical studies, Syriac literature, and Jewish traditions, and imposes them onto the Quranic text. (Dye, 2019, pp. 743-748)

The assertion that Islamic sources are “biased” while non-Islamic sources are “objective” is itself a biased position lacking

methodological justification. All historical sources carry a degree of bias. Therefore, all sources should be examined using equal critical standards rather than preemptively excluding some merely because they belong to the Islamic tradition. (Patricia, 1980, pp. 3-17)

1.2. The “Nöldekean Paradigm” and Its Limitations

Dye uses the term “Nöldekean paradigm” to refer to the dominant interpretive model in Western Quranic studies since the nineteenth century. This model is associated with the German Orientalist Theodor Nöldeke (1836–1930) and is based on:

- a) **Unity of Authorship:** The claim that the Quran was authored by Muhammad alone.
- b) **Chronological Ordering:** The possibility of arranging Quranic surahs chronologically into Meccan and Medinan periods. (Nöldeke, 1909, pp. 58-234)
- c) **Early Codification:** Early Codification: The idea that the Quran was compiled during the reign of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan. (Nöldeke, 1909, pp. 91-112)
- d) **Textual stability:** The assertion that the Quranic text remained stable and underwent no substantial changes following the Uthmanic compilation. (Nöldeke, 1909, p. 120)

However, Dye argues that this paradigm was “imported” from the traditional Islamic narrative and lacks a solid methodological basis (Dye, 2019, pp. 743-748). Instead, he proposes an alternative model based on multiple authorship.

- a) **Multiple Authorship:** The Quran is a collective product of several authors over multiple decades. (Dye, 2019, pp. 785-826)

- b) **Late Canonization/Codification:** The hypothesis that the Quranic text was only finalized during the Umayyad era (685–750 CE). (Dye, 2019, pp. 828-831)
- c) **External Influences:** The assertion that the Quran was heavily influenced by Jewish and Christian texts. (Dye, 2019, pp. 760-785)
- d) **Redaction and Revision:** The theory that the Quran underwent numerous editing and refinement processes. (Dye, 2019, pp. 806-826)

However, this alternative model has far greater methodological and historical problems than the Nöldekean paradigm, including:

1.2.1. Absence of Physical Evidence:

There is no manuscript or archaeological evidence supporting the hypothesis of late codification or continuous collective redaction extending into the Umayyad period (Déroche, 2014, pp. 35-67). In fact, all early Quranic manuscripts discovered thus far—including the Sana'a palimpsests, the Birmingham manuscripts, and the Codex Parisino-Petropolitanus—are highly concordant with the Uthmanic text. These manuscripts date back to the second half of the seventh century CE. (Sadeghi, 2012, pp. 1-29)

1.2.2. Disregard for Epigraphic Evidence

Early Quranic inscriptions, such as the Jebel Usayd inscription (c. 640 CE) and the Dome of the Rock inscriptions (691–692 CE), contain Quranic verses nearly identical to the current text. This indicates that the Quranic text was stabilized at an early stage (Dutton, 2001, pp. 71-89). However, Dye approaches these inscriptions with noticeable selectivity, focusing on minor variations while disregarding the fundamental textual correspondence. (Dye, 2019, pp. 829-831)

1.2.3 Internal Inconsistency

If the Quran underwent continuous redaction until the Umayyad era ,how can the early consensus among all Islamic sects (Sunni, Shia, and Kharijite) on a single, unified text be explained, despite their profound disagreements on other pivotal matters? (Moezzi, 2011, pp. 25-50)Additionally, how can the rapid and unopposed dissemination of the Uthmanic codices across various provinces be explained? The uninterrupted tradition of oral transmission (tawātur) makes it nearly impossible to introduce substantive changes without detection. (Al-A'zami, 2003, pp. 115-120)

1.3. Key Figures and Applications of the Method

Theodor Nöldeke is considered the pioneer of this method in Quranic studies, as evidenced by his seminal work, *Geschichte des Qorāns* (History of the Quran). Nöldeke applied source criticism to establish the chronology of the surahs based on internal stylistic criteria (Nöldeke, 1909, p. 105.110). In the modern era, Guillaume Dye is a leading figure in this field, notably through his contributions to the encyclopedia *Le Coran des historiens* (Dye, 2019, p. 745). Dye focuses on:

- **External influences:** Seeking Christian and Syriac origins for Quranic narratives and concepts.
- **Late Composition:** He advances the hypothesis that the Quranic text underwent formation and editing processes during the Umayyad period. (Dye, 2019, pp. 760-785)

Section 2: A Critique of Guillaume Dye's Primary Hypotheses

2.1 Critique of the “Syriac-Christian Background” Hypothesis

Dye identifies Syriac-Christian origins of Quranic stories and argues that the Quran emerged in a Syriac-influenced environment ,He bases this argument on lexical similarities.

- a) **Lexical Similarities:** The presence of terms and expressions in the Quran that resemble those in Syriac texts. (Jeffery, 2007, pp. 45-78).
- b) **Shared narratives:** The occurrence of stories common to Christian texts (e.g., the story of Mary and the People of the Cave). (Reynolds, 2010, pp. 125-180)
- c) **Literary style:** Stylistic parallels between certain Quranic surahs and Syriac-Christian literature. (Mingana, 1927, pp. 77-98)

2.1.1. Methodological Rebuttal

- **First :Similarity Does Not Imply Borrowing:** The existence of parallels between the Quran and Christian texts does not necessarily mean that the Quran “borrowed” from them. There are several more logical alternative explanations. (Al-A'zami, 2003, pp. 12-28)
 - a) **Common Source:** Both the Quran and Christian texts draw from a common source—the original divine revelation bestowed upon previous prophets (Al-A'zami, 2003, pp. 15-20).
 - b) **Quranic Correction:** The Quran corrects deviations introduced into prior messages, so similarity in core events is

natural. Yet, the Quran provides the rectified account (Al-A'zami, 2003, pp. 22-25).

- c) **Shared Cultural Context:** Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula were familiar with Jewish and Christian traditions due to trade and cultural contact. This does not imply direct literary borrowing (Donner F. M., 1998, pp. 35-50).
- **Second,** Dye exhibits methodological selectivity, focusing on points of similarity while disregarding fundamental differences. For example:
 - The Story of Mary: While he points out similarities with the Protoevangelium of James, Dye ignores the fundamental theological differences. The Quran categorically denies the divinity of Christ and his crucifixion, which are positions that contradict core Christian dogma (Reynolds, 2010, pp. 147-155)
 - Rhymed prose (saj‘): The presence of saj‘ in the Quran does not necessarily indicate Syriac influence because saj‘ was a well-established literary style in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry (Jahiliyya) (Al-Zarqani, 2003, pp. 67-89).
 - **Third,** there is an absence of evidence for a dense Christian presence in the Hejaz. Dye himself admits the lack of sufficient archaeological evidence for significant Christian communities in Mecca or Medina (Dye, 2019, pp. 770-776). This raises the question: How can one explain a pervasive Christian influence in the absence of an influential Christian presence in the region? (**Hainthaler, 2007, pp. 137-140**)

Dye attempts to resolve this contradiction through several hypotheses:

- a) **Oral Dissemination:** He suggests that Christian ideas spread orally via traders (Dye, 2019, pp. 777-780). However, this is insufficient to explain the profound influence claimed and the

- precise familiarity with complex Christian texts (Al-A'zami, 2003, pp. 45-67).
- b) **Extra-Hejazi Authorship:** He suggests that parts of the Quran may have been written outside the Hejaz, in regions with larger Christian populations. However (Dye, 2019, pp. 780-782).
 - c) , this remains pure speculation, devoid of historical or archaeological support. The mutawātir Islamic narrative and historical facts confirm that the Quran was revealed only in Mecca and Medina (Al-Bukhari, 1997).
 - d) **Multiple Authorship:** Despite a lack of evidence, he proposes that some authors of the Quran were of Christian (Dye, 2019, pp. 785-782) background. Furthermore, the Quranic text exhibits stylistic and theological unity, which contradicts the idea of collective authorship from diverse backgrounds. (Sadeghi B. , 2011, pp. 210-299)

2.1.2. Case Study: The Narrative of Mary in Surah 19 Dye uses the story of Mary in Surah 19 (Maryam) as an example of Christian influence, focusing on the similarities in the accounts of the birth of Jesus (peace be upon him). However, a rigorous analysis of the Quranic text (19:16–33) reveals essential differences. (Qur'an) Mary withdraws to a “place in the East” (v. 16).

- God’s spirit appears to her in the form of a well-proportioned man (verse 17).
- She conceives and gives birth under a palm tree (verse 23).
- Jesus speaks in the cradle in defense of his mother (vv. 30–33).

Dye claims that the “place in the East” refers to the Temple in Jerusalem, reflecting the influence of Jerusalem’s Christian liturgy (Dye, 2019, pp. 762-763). However, this interpretation is problematic in the Quranic context. The text describes Mary’s seclusion from her people, not her entering a temple for worship.

1. **Parsimonious Interpretation:** “A place in the East” could simply be a geographical description without specific theological significance. (Al-Zarqani, 2003, pp. 243-250)
2. **Fundamental Divergences:** The Quran does not mention temple details or Jewish rituals. It focuses on the miracle of birth and the cradle speech, elements absent from the Canonical Gospels. (Qattan, 2000, pp. 156-178)
3. **Explicit Theological Negation:** Verses 34–40 of the same sura categorically deny the divinity of Christ, contradicting the theory of “borrowing” from Christian sources. (Reynolds, 2010, pp. 125-135)
4. **Explicit Theological Negation:** Verses 34-40 of the same Surah categorically deny the divinity of Christ, a fact that contradicts the theory of "borrowing" from Christian sources. (The Holy Qur'an)

Methodological Summary

The presence of shared narrative elements between the Holy Quran and Christian texts is more easily explained within the Islamic framework. This framework asserts that the Quran supplements and refines earlier revelations rather than “borrowing” from them (Al-A'zami, 2003, pp. 78-95). While similarities in the general framework of a story are expected given that they address the same historical events, the fundamental differences in details and theology point toward the Quran’s independence and distinct divine origin (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 88)

2.1.3. The Problem of the “Parallel Story”

Dye uses the “parallel story” approach to interpret Quranic narratives, such as the story of Adam and Iblis. He claims that the Quranic narrative is a compilation and modification of earlier Syriac-Christian

stories (Reynolds, 2010, p. 20) However, the existence of parallel stories does not necessarily imply direct literary borrowing rather, it may indicate that these narratives originate from a single divine source but underwent distortion (tahrif) in prior traditions (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 60); Despite contact with surrounding cultures, the Quran provides a distinct and unique treatment of these accounts.

2.1.4. Case Study: The Narrative of Adam and Iblis

The narrative of Adam and Iblis clearly illustrates the fundamental differences between the Quranic and Christian accounts. (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 70);

Feature	Quranic Narrative	Christian (Syriac) Narrative
Origin	Purely Islamic ; emphasizes the Absolute Oneness of God (<i>Tawhīd</i>) and rejects polytheism (<i>Shirk</i>). (Qattan, 2000, p. 55)	Influenced by the doctrine of Incarnation and carries specific Christological and theological connotations. (Al-Zarqani, 2003, pp. 1-55)
Scope of Focus	Multifaceted ; covers diverse aspects (the creation of Adam, the prostration, the expulsion from Paradise) (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 80);	Often restricted to a single dimension (such as the specific act of Iblis's disobedience) (Qattan, 2000, p. 60)
Thematic Unity	All accounts serve a unified objective: affirming human dignity and the perils of arrogance (<i>Kibr</i>) (Al-Zarqani, 2003, pp. 1-60)	May exhibit discrepancies in theological details and doctrinal nuances (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 90)

The variations between Quranic narrations do not constitute contradictions; rather, they provide supplementary details that complement one another. These variations serve as evidence of the Quran's rhetorical inimitability, or *i'jāz* (Qattan, 2000, p. 65)

2.2. Critique of the “Late Composition” Hypothesis

Dye posits that the Quranic text did not stabilize until the Umayyad era (late seventh century CE) after undergoing extensive editing and canonization (Dye, 2019, p. 775)

2.2.1 .Weakness of Historical Evidence

This hypothesis relies on weak and questionable historical accounts, such as the role of Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafi in canonizing the Mushaf. (Motzki, 2006, p. 20). Conversely, it disregards the mutawātir (mass-transmitted) and robust accounts of Uthman ibn Affan’s (RA) early compilation of the Mushaf in the mid-7th century CE (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 100)

2.2.2. Opposing Manuscript Evidence

Early Quranic manuscripts, such as the Birmingham manuscript, date back to the early Islamic period and fundamentally align with the current Uthmanic text (Keith, 2015, p. 30). This effectively refutes the “Late Composition” hypothesis. (Motzki, 2006, p. 25)

Section 3: Islamic Sources and Their Role in Understanding the Quran

3.1 Methodological Value of Traditional Islamic Sources

The systematic marginalization of traditional Islamic sources is one of the most critical flaws in Guillaume Dye’s approach. Dye dismisses these sources (hadith, sira, tafsir, and early Islamic history) as “late,” “biased,” and “unreliable,” preferring non-Islamic sources or

what he terms an “internal reading” of the Quranic text (Dye, 2019, p. 840). This stance is problematic for several reasons.

3.1.1. Methodological Dualism in Criticism: Dye applies rigorous critical standards to Islamic sources while taking a more lenient approach to non-Islamic ones (Motzki, 2006, p. 50). Despite their subjection to the strict critical methodology of Hadith sciences, he rejects Hadiths from Sahih al-Bukhari and Muslim on the pretext of being “late” (9th century CE) (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 170). Conversely, he considers Syriac texts from the sixth or seventh centuries to be “reliable sources” for understanding the Quran without subjecting them to the same level of scrutiny (Motzki, 2006, p. 55).

3.1.2. Historical Value of the Prophetic Biography (Sira): Works such as Ibn Hisham’s Sira provide invaluable historical context regarding the Asbab al-Nuzul (occasions of revelation) (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 180). Though written generations later, many accounts have connected chains of transmission reaching the Sahaba (Qattan, 2000, p. 115).

3.1.3. The Role of Occasions of Revelation (Asbab al-Nuzul): Dye rejects this field as a “late invention.” (Dye, 2019, p. 845). However, this ignores the fact that many verses implicitly refer to specific contexts that cannot be fully understood without these narrations (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 190). For example, the verse: “God has certainly heard the statement of the woman who argued with you concerning her husband” (Al-Mujadilah: 1), which cannot be fully understood without knowing the story of Khawlah bint Tha’labah and zihar, a form of divorce (Al-Zarqani, 2003, pp. 1-115)

3.2. Oral Tradition and Tawātur: Guarantees of Textual Stability

Unlike other religious texts, the distinguishing feature of the Quran is its tradition of mass-transmitted oral preservation (tawatur), which

began during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ and continues to this day (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 195)

3.2.1. The Strength of the Arabic Oral Tradition

Pre-Islamic Arabian society was characterized by a robust oral culture that manifested in several key areas:

- **Preservation of Pre-Islamic Poetry:** Arabs memorized and transmitted thousands of poetic verses with meticulous precision. (Al-Zarqani, 2003, pp. 1-120)
- **Preservation of Genealogies and Historical Lore:** They maintained intricate records of their lineages and tribal histories (Ayyām al-‘Arab). (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 200)

This formidable oral tradition transitioned into the Islamic era. Evidence of this culture is seen in the memorization of the Quran during the Prophet’s lifetime. The Companions memorized the text either in its entirety or in substantial portions. The Quran was transmitted via *tawātur*, meaning it was narrated by a large number of companions to an equally large number of successors, and so on, making collusion in fabrication a logical impossibility. (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 205)

3.2.2. *Tawatur as a Safeguard Against Alteration*

Oral *tawatur* makes it impossible to introduce fundamental changes to the Quranic text without immediate detection. Should any individual—even a caliph—attempt to alter a single verse, they would be challenged by thousands of *huffaz* (memorizers) who know the Quran by heart. This explains why the Quranic text has remained stable for over fourteen centuries and why there is a consensus among Muslims—Sunni, Shia, and others—on the same text, despite their profound disagreements on other matters (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 210).

Section 4: Manuscript and Archaeological Evidence

4.1 Early Quranic Manuscripts

Early Quranic manuscripts are decisive physical evidence in the debate about the history of the Quran's codification and textual stability. Contrary to the claims of Guillaume Dye and other proponents of the revisionist school, these manuscripts strongly support the traditional Islamic narrative of early codification. (Keith, 2015, p. 45)

4.1.1. The Birmingham Manuscript

Discovered at the University of Birmingham in 2015, this manuscript was radiocarbon-dated to the period between 568 and 645 CE with 95.4% probability (Keith, 2015, p. 50). This indicates that the manuscript is contemporaneous with the life of the Prophet ﷺ or the period immediately following it. Its significance lies in the fact that its text is identical to that of the current Quran, thereby refuting the hypothesis of late codification and radical redaction during the Umayyad era (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 220).

4.1.2. The Topkapi Manuscript

Preserved at the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul, this manuscript is traditionally attributed to Uthman ibn Affan (RA). While its precise dating remains a subject of academic discussion, it undoubtedly dates back to the first Hijri century (Déroche, 2014, p. 40.45). It is important because it contains most of the Quranic text and is nearly identical to the modern Mushaf, with only minor orthographic

variations (Keith, 2015, p. 60)

4.1.3. The Sana'a Palimpsest

The Sana'a manuscript (DAM 01-27.1) is considered one of the most controversial manuscripts and is frequently cited by Dye to support the "multiple texts" hypothesis. This manuscript is a palimpsest, meaning an original text was erased and a new text was written over it (Sadeghi B. a., 2012, pp. 35-40) . Dye claims that the original text contains "substantial variations" from the Uthmanic text. (Dye, 2019, pp. 847-918)

The reality of the manuscript: The facts regarding the Sana'a manuscript that Dye and his peers overlook are as follows:

Limited variations: The alleged differences in the scriptio inferior are minor and pertain to the arrangement of short surahs and slight spelling variations that do not alter the core meaning. **Identical Upper Text:** The scriptio superior is identical to the Uthmanic text (Sadeghi B. a., 2012, p. 45.50)

The most plausible explanation is that the original text was a personal mushaf, or unofficial copy. The official standardization process (i.e., canonization), which occurred early on (before the end of the seventh century CE), led to its replacement by the standardized text. This demonstrates the success of the Uthmanic canonization rather than the existence of "competing texts." (Sadeghi B. a., 2012, p. 55)

4.2. Early Quranic Inscriptions

Epigraphic evidence found on rocks and buildings provides additional physical proof of the early stability and fixity of the Quranic text. (Déroche, 2014, p. 50).

4.2.1. Inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock (691–692 CE)

The inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem are the longest known early Quranic inscriptions. The vast majority of the verses are identical to the current text. Minor variations can be interpreted as “free quotations” or adaptations to suit the architectural context (Déroche, 2014, p. 55), similar to homilies or sermons, rather than evidence of a divergent text (Keith, 2015, p. 65). These findings confirm that the Quranic text was stable and standardized by the end of the seventh century CE (Motzki, 2006, p. 75)

4.2.2. Rock Inscriptions in the Desert

Hundreds of rock inscriptions have been discovered in the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant. Most date back to the seventh and eighth centuries CE (Déroche, 2014, p. 65). They demonstrate the rapid dissemination of the Quran and confirm its textual stability in its early stages (Keith, 2015, p. 70). Furthermore, they refute the notion that the Quran was a “hidden text” unknown to the general public (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 230).

4.3. Absence of Evidence for Alteration (Tahrif)

If the Holy Qur'an had undergone radical editing in the Umayyad era, as Day claims, we would expect to find diverse manuscripts showing significant differences (Keith, 2015, p. 75). We would also expect to find reliable historical accounts of opposition to this editing or differences between Qur'ans in different regions (Al-Zarqani, 2003, pp. 1-135). However, none of this is the case. There is not a single piece of evidence for the alleged distortion.

The Material Reality:

The physical evidence of both long-held and recently discovered manuscripts proves beyond a doubt that:

- **Fundamental Correspondence:** All early manuscripts show a fundamental alignment with the Uthmanic text. (Keith, 2015, p. 80)
- **Absence of Opposition:** No credible narrations exist regarding opposition to the Uthmanic compilation (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 250).
- **Uniformity of Text:** The text remains consistent throughout the Islamic world (Al-Zarqani, 2003, pp. 1-140).

Section 5: A Comprehensive Methodological Critique of Guillaume Dye's Approach

5.1 The Problems of "Redaction Criticism"

Guillaume Dye relies heavily on "redaction criticism," a methodology imported from biblical studies (Dye, 2019, p. 850). This approach presupposes that sacred texts underwent multiple stages of editing by various redactors (Dye, 2019, p. 855) . Applying this framework to the Quran presents several methodological challenges:

5.1.1. Incompatibility of the Method with the Quranic Context

This methodology was originally developed to analyze scriptures composed over several centuries in multiple languages and diverse cultural contexts, lacking a continuous, mass-transmitted oral tradition. The Quranic text differs fundamentally in all these respects, making the application of "redaction criticism" fundamentally flawed (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 270).

5.1.2. Overinterpretation of repetitions: Dye interprets every repetition or parallel text as “evidence” of multiple editorial layers (Dye, 2019, p. 860). However, repetition is a well-known rhetorical device in Arabic utilized for emphasis and pedagogical purposes. Repetition with varying focus enriches meaning rather than indicating compositional instability (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 280).

5.1.3. Example: Surah Al-Rahman (55): Dye claims that verses 8–9 are “interpolated” because they mention the “balance” in the context of creation. He argues that this pertains to a commercial context. (Dye, 2019, p. 865) However, the word “balance” in verse 7 can signify cosmic equilibrium and justice rather than a commercial scale (Qattan, 2000, p. 155). Verses 8–9 complete the meaning: “That you may not transgress within the balance (Al-Zarqani, 2003, pp. 1-155). Establish weight in justice, and do not make the balance deficient.” Concluding that a “later editor misunderstood the original meaning” is a highly contrived interpretation; a simpler and more logical explanation is that the text is consistent and possesses clear thematic unity (Harald, 2001, p. 90)

5.2. The problem of the ‘literary standard’ in Dye’s critique

Dye judges the ‘quality’ of the Qur’anic text according to Western literary standards, viewing certain transitions as ‘sudden’ or ‘illogical’, and thus as evidence of redaction. (Dye, 2019, p. 870) The fallacy here lies in applying literary criteria from a different cultural milieu. (Reynolds, 2010, p. 80) Arabic literature has its own distinct rules for instance, *iltifāt* (the sudden transition in pronouns from third to second person or from singular to plural) is a sophisticated rhetorical style in Arabic (Al-Zarqani, 2003, pp. 1-160) However, Dye perceives it as ‘disorder’ indicating redaction (Dye, 2019, p. 875).

5.3. Bias in the Selection of Examples

Dye's methodology is characterised by a selective approach that compromises scientific objectivity. Examples of this bias include:

- **Focus on the Sana'a Manuscript:** He focuses his argument on the Sana'a palimpsest, exaggerating the variations found in the scriptio inferior (Sadeghi B. a., 2012, p. 60).
- **Ignoring correspondence:** He disregards hundreds of other manuscripts that perfectly match the Uthmanic text (Keith, 2015, p. 85).
- **Amplifying al-Hajjaj narrations:** Amplifying al-Hajjaj narrations: He highlights weak accounts regarding the role of Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 300).
- **Dismissing Uthmanic accounts:** He disregards the robust narrations concerning the compilation by Uthman ibn Affan (RA) (Al-Zarqani, 2003, pp. 1-165) .

This methodological selectivity does not serve impartial scholarship, but rather a predetermined hypothesis (Motzki, 2006, p. 100).

Section 6: The Methodological Alternative and Conclusion

6.1 Towards a Balanced Research Methodology

A rigorous academic critique of Guillaume Dye's approach does not imply a categorical rejection of Western methodologies. Rather, it calls for the development of a balanced research framework that combines the rigour of historical criticism with a deep respect for the distinctive nature of the Qur'anic text (Motzki, 2006, p. 105). Consequently, we advocate a methodology based on the following principles:

- **Respecting the specificity of the Quranic text:** Faith in the sanctity of the text does not preclude serious scientific inquiry (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 310). Researchers should avoid the a priori assumption that the Qur'an is a purely human construct, identical in nature to any other historical text.
- **Appreciating Islamic sources:** This involves drawing upon the immense wealth of Islamic tradition, including tafsir (exegesis), hadith, sira (biography) and linguistics, as an essential interpretative and historical framework (Qattan, 2000, p. 165).
- **Prudent engagement with modern methodologies:** This involves applying contemporary research tools such as codicology (manuscript studies), archaeology and computational linguistics in a way that aligns with the Quranic text's inherent nature. (Keith, 2015, p. 90)
- **Balanced criticism:** Implementing uniform critical standards across all sources, whether Islamic or non-Islamic, to ensure objectivity and academic integrity . (Motzki, 2006, p. 110)

6.2. Criteria for Source Evaluation

Criterion	Description	Significance
Primacy of Early Sources	The chronological proximity of a source to the events increases its evidentiary value (Al-A'zami, 2003, p. 320).	Facilitates the construction of a reliable historical timeline.
Recurrence (Tawātur)	Mass-transmitted information (narrated by a vast number of reporters) is superior to isolated reports (<i>Āḥād</i>) (Al-Zarqani, 2003, pp. 1-170).	Serves as a safeguard against alteration and individual error.
Alignment with	Narratives that correspond with	Bridges the gap

Criterion	Description	Significance
Physical Evidence	extant manuscripts and archaeological findings are prioritized over those that contradict them (Déroche, 2014, p. 70).	between historical narrative and empirical data.
Internal Consistency	Sources that exhibit internal coherence are deemed more reliable than those characterized by internal contradictions . (Sadeghi B. a., 2012, p. 65)	Identifies and exposes potential redactions or fabrications.

6.3. Research proposals

- **Comprehensive study of early manuscripts:** Rather than focusing selectively on the Sana'a palimpsest, a holistic examination of all surviving early manuscripts is required to demonstrate fundamental textual correspondences across the entire corpus. (Keith, 2015, p. 65)
- **Exhaustive Computational Linguistic Analysis:** A comprehensive computational linguistic analysis of the Qur'an is essential to substantiate its stylistic unity, moving beyond reliance on superficial textual variances. (Sadeghi B. a., 2012, p. 70)
- **Systematic comparison with contemporaneous texts:** A systematic comparison is needed between the Qur'anic text and its contemporaneous Arabic linguistic environment, including pre-Islamic poetry and epigraphic inscriptions, to better understand its true linguistic and cultural context. (Reynolds, 2010, p. 90)
- **Future research should adopt an integrative approach** that synthesises manuscript data, epigraphy and traditional historical sources within a unified interpretive framework. (Motzki, 2006, p. 115)

Conclusion :

The findings of this research, which are based on a thorough methodological analysis of Guillaume Dye's work, show that the contemporary Orientalist approach he belongs to has profound structural imbalances. These issues arise not merely from a lack of data, but from a priori assumptions that govern the research trajectory from its inception. Most notably, the Quran is treated as a presumed human construct, and the possibility of Divine Revelation is systematically excluded without scientific or historical justification. This directly influences the nature of the questions posed and the results obtained.

This study has shown that these methodological issues cannot withstand critical analysis when considered alongside the available physical evidence. Early Qur'anic manuscripts and inscriptions do not attest to radical textual transformations; rather, they confirm the fixity of the Qur'anic text at an early historical stage, contradicting hypotheses of 'gradual formation' or 'late redaction'. This is further reinforced by the clear alignment between these physical artefacts and the traditional Islamic narrative. Despite some scholarly debate over details, this narrative provides a coherent historical framework for the reception, transmission and compilation of the Quran.

In this context, it becomes clear that a serious scientific critique of Orientalist methodologies is not an adversarial approach to academic enquiry, but rather a legitimate and necessary practice that ensures methodological integrity. Rather than marginalising specific sources under the pretext of bias while uncritically accepting others, objectivity is achieved by adopting unified critical standards applied to all evidence and reports, regardless of their cultural or religious affiliation.

Furthermore, this research highlights that traditional Islamic sources are an indispensable epistemic asset in the study of Qur'anic history. Characterised by a continuous system of transmission and rigorous scholarly traditions of scrutiny, these sources should be treated as valuable historical data, not dismissed as faith-based accounts. This underscores the urgent need to develop a balanced methodology in Quranic studies that respects the specificity of the Quranic text, while benefiting from modern analytical tools and avoiding the uncritical transplantation of research models from vastly different textual and historical contexts.

Ultimately, the Qur'an, as the preserved Word of God, is not threatened by any impartial scientific examination. On the contrary, in-depth, impartial study only further reveals the facets of its preservation and inimitability throughout history. Thus, the rigorous methodological critique of contemporary Orientalist approaches does not seek to provide an apologetic defence, but rather aims to consolidate objective scholarship and contribute to making the field of Quranic Studies more balanced and precise, and capable of engaging in serious academic dialogue within the global scientific arena.

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