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Table of Contents

Main Articles:

- Hijrah and Islamic Movement in Social Media: A Social Movement Study of Anti- Dating Movement #IndonesiaTanpaPacaran*
Trie Yunita Sari, Fatimah Husein, Ratna Noviani 1
- Displaying Religious Image on Youtube: Ganjar Pranowo's Political Communication Strategy on Social Media*
Abraham Zakky Zulhazmi 27
- The Criticisms on the Orientalist' Shubba and the Arguments on the Authenticity of the Qur'an*
Abdul Mustaqim 47

Articles:

- Nalar Hermeneutis Ulama Hadis: Larangan Perempuan Berpergian tanpa Mahram dalam Ruang Sejarah Pemahaman*
Miski 71
- Jamaah Ahmadiyah: Ideologi dan Pola Keberagamaan di Tengah Kemajemukan*
Lutfi Rahmatullah, Istianah 97
- المواطنة في التراث السياسي الإسلاميين خلال وثيقة المدينة*
Hayat Abid, Mohamed Ali Bioud 115



The Criticisms on the Orientalist' *Shubha* and the Arguments on the Authenticity of the Qur'an

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Abstract

This article reconsiders the *shubha* (misgrounded conceit) proposed by the orientalists. The first *shubha* is about the revelation of the Qur'an; the second *shubha* is about the differences of qira'at (recitations or readings) claimed by the orientalists as proof that the Quran is not entirely authentic for the existence of false readings. The third *shubha* is about the authorship and the relationship of the Qur'an with previous divine books (Tawrat and Bible) showing that the Qur'an is a plagiarism work of The Prophet Muhammad or the notion of influence or borrowings from Judeo-Christian tradition. Employing the theological-historical approach, this article argues that, firstly, that the Qur'an is a Divine Revelation is evident from the linguistic style in which it very often uses direct speech to Muhammad, such as "Say, (O Muhammad to the mankind)", and from the criticism posed by the Qur'an to Muhammad as the recipient of the revelation. Historically, the process of the writing of the Qur'an has started since the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad and was based on reliable sources, either oral or written, supported by oaths from witnesses from the companions affirming the reliability of the existing records of the Qur'an during that period. Secondly, concerning the variation of the readings, if they are transmitted in *mutawatir*, they are the accepted readings, because theologically the Qur'an was revealed with differences of readings of *sab'at ahruf*, in which there are a lot of *hikma*, and there is no contradiction. Finally, concerning the similarities (either the content or dictions) between the Qur'an and previous divine books, the notion of plagiarism is not relevant; it suggests the consistent and reliable chains of Divine Revelation between the messengers, making they are not in contradiction to the revelation received by the Prophet Muhammad (Q.S. Al-Nisa' [4]: 163-164). From the historical-philological perspective, the similarities of concepts or content between the Qur'an and Bible indicate that the Qur'an is in dialogue with the textual discourses found in its environment. It is reasonable because the Qur'an was not revealed in a vacuum context.

Keywords:

Orientalists, *shubha*, authenticity, criticism, Bible

Introduction

The issue of the authenticity of the Qur'an remains a topic of great interest, either for the insiders (Muslim scholars) or outsiders (the Orientalists). There are a significantly different perspective and attitude between the two camps. Muslims would come with their theological point of view as the true believers who see the Qur'an in its perfection, and hence, out of any sort of criticisms.¹ The orientalists, on the other hand, approaches the Qur'an in their studies from a critical point of view.

The preference of the Orientalists to the critical point of view is not entirely uncommon. Criticism towards the scriptures is indeed one of their intellectual tradition because the Bible itself is historically problematic in its authenticity. The writing of the Bible was conducted as far as eight centuries after the death of Jesus (*ʿĪsa*), based upon oral transmission and transformation. Further, the orientalists bring their tradition of textual criticism that has previously employed in understanding the Bible to the studies of the Qur'an—amid the controversy and disagreement—in a pursue an academically more reliable path.² In fact, the textual criticism was an approach implemented in the early age of Islam by the companions of the Prophet during the process of canonisation and codification of the *mushaf* started from the era of Abū Bakr and ended in the reign of Uthman ibn ʿAffan, a process that resulted in the final text, a closed corpus, that has ever since been widely accepted as a consensus (*ijma*).

1 For Muslim scholars and Muslim in general, the Qur'an is theologically the revelation of Allah that should not be called into doubt, and is historically proven by the convincing data that it is an authentic scripture, because had been transmitted as *mutawatir* through *talaqqi* (direct encounter) and *mushafaha* (direct learning method in which the students observe the mouth of the teacher reciting the Qur'an) from one generation to another, and further supported by the writings (*kitaba*) that was achieved through a precise and accurate method since it was first revealed until it was codified (Syahin 2007).

2 The purpose of the academic study of the Qur'an, according to Manfred S. Kroop, is to demonstrate the extent to which the Qur'an and its history could be known and understood with the means of human's intellect, a relative and temporary knowledge, that requires periodical revision (Kroop 2007: 1-2)

Nevertheless, some of the orientalists are trapped in their ideological biases covered by the academic 'disguise', reflected in the emergence of *shububat* on the study of the Qur'an.³ One of the aims of the Qur'anic studies by the orientalists, one of which is Rudi Bart, is to create *shububat* or dubieties at the heart of Muslims (*idkhal shububat fi qulūb al-mu'minīn*), especially the studies driven by religious motivation (*al-dāfi' al-dīnī*) (Ghazali 2018: 38).

The *shububat* come from at least three factors. Firstly, the orientalists do not believe in the Qur'an as a divine revelation of Allah, so that in studying the Qur'an, they rely solely on historical criticism. As the outsiders, they obviously are not interested in theological approach towards the Qur'an. Accordingly, it is unsurprising that emerges from them unusual and shocking statements for Muslim. For example, one view suggests that the Qur'an is not the divine revelation from Allah, but rather the manifestation of the delirium and fantasy of Muhammad, that the Qur'an the result of plagiarism of Muhammad from the Bible. Instead of acknowledging the divine nature of the Qur'an, some orientalists, in fact, assert that the Qur'an is the result of the creative imagination of Muhammad.

Secondly, the West and the East (Islam) experienced crusade in the past (1096-1099), a tragedy that has left ancient 'resentment' and brought about biases in the studies of the Qur'an by western scholars. In short, orientalism is inseparable from the dark history of the crusade. One of orientalist figure whose studies was harshly offensive against Islamic beliefs is Peter the Venerable (Ghazali 2018: 24). Thirdly, the complexity of the history of the Bible brings about problems in its authenticity, mainly

³ *Shububāt* is the plural form of *shubba*, which linguistically means something dark, blurred, and unclear, so it is difficult to be compared to others, its validity is uncertain, and makes people in doubt (Al-Ashfihani, n.d.; Zakariyya 2001). One of the purposes of the orientalists' study on the Qur'an, such as by Rudi Bart, is to create dubiety (*idkhal syububāt fi qulūb al-mu'minīn*), especially the studies that is driven by religious motivation (*al-dāfi' al-dīnī*). (Ghazali 2018: 38)

because the Bible was written as far as eight centuries after Jesus passed away. It is even more problematic that the writing of the Bible relied on oral transmission (Al-A'zami 2005). The Qur'an, on the other hand, was kept through the memory of the companions, and written during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad by the meticulous writers (Al-Dalimi 2006: 78-80).

Nevertheless, it is necessary to underline that some of the orientalist are objective and sympathetic in their studies on the Qur'an, such as Angelika Neuwirth from Germany. In an international conference at State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta in 2015, I asked her a question: "Do you think that the Qur'an is authentic?" She answered, "Yes, I think so; al-Qur'an is the most authentic of religious text."⁴ According to her, there are historical-philological evident in the ancient manuscript of the Qur'an compiled in *Corpus Coranicum* to support this claim, upon which she spent her intellectual activities.

That the orientalist is not always unsympathetic in their studies on the Qur'an is also the view of Sahiron Syamsuddin, who classifies the recent approaches of orientalism on the Qur'an into three categories (Syamsuddin 2013: 98-107). The first category uses the historical-critical approach that emphasises on investigating and clarifying the origins of the text, whether it is authentic or not. The second category is interested in the interpretive approach, that assumes the Qur'an as the final text that needs interpretation (Zayd 2004). Angelika Neuwirth, A.H. Johns, Ian Richard Netton, and Thomas Hoffman, among others, belong to this category. The third category approaches the Qur'an through the descriptive anthropological-sociological perspective that focuses on the issue of reception and responses from society towards the Qur'an, which further known as the study of living Qur'an (Mustaqim 2014: 103-118).

4 Interview with Prof. Dr. Angelika Neuwirth during an International Seminar at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta in 2013.

One of the orientalist that employs living Qur'an is Frederick M. Denny, an Emeritus Professor from the University of Colorado in the U.S. who has a research on the phenomena of the ethic of the recitation of the Qur'an in Egypt (Denny 1990). In this research, he found that Muslims pay great respect to the Qur'an not only because it is the book of guidance, but also because it represents a communicative means by which Muslims spiritually meet God. Also, Anna M. Gade, in her book *The Qur'an: an Introduction*, describes how the Qur'an is read, understood, appreciated, and made guidance by Muslims in the Asia Pacific and Southeast Asia. Neal Robinson also makes living Qur'an as his scholarly interest in his book *Discovering the Qur'an*, specifically when speaks of the living phenomena of the Qur'an amongst Muslims, "the Qur'an as experienced by Muslim" (Robinson 1996: 7-17) as well as Issa J. Boullata who elaborate on the miraculous inimitability of the Qur'an especially from the linguistic perspective in a book that is further translated into Arabic under the title *I'jaz al-Qur'an 'Abra al-Tarikh* (Boullata, n.d.).

This article is a critique of the *shububat* presented by the orientalist around the studies of the Qur'an. It would not deal with all the *shububat*, for the limited time and data that are possible to access. As a consequence, it concerns with three *shububat* only: (1) the dubiety on the nature of the Qur'an as a divine revelation, (2) on the diversity and complexity of *qira'at* that is claimed to be a proof of inauthenticity of the Qur'an—if indeed the Qur'an is authentic, there should be no variation and contradiction of *qira'at*—and (3) on the similarity of the Qur'an to the previous scriptures (the Torah and the Bible) that is assumed to be an indicator of the plagiarism of Muhammad, or at least, that the Judeo-Christian tradition influences the Qur'an.

The Historicity of the Qur'an: An Attempt to Prove the Authenticity of the Qur'an

To provide a brief overview on the authenticity of the Qur'an, there is a need to provide an account of the history of the Qur'an, so that the claim that the Qur'an is authentic is not only viewed from a theological perspective—as mentioned in Q.S. al-Ḥijr: 9: *Inna naḥnu naẓẓalna al-dhikr wa inna labū laḥafidhūn*—but also has its basis from a historical perspective. It is true that the Qur'anic text experiences development (*taḥawwūr*) due to the transmission and transformation process from the oral to written tradition. Nevertheless, substantively, the Qur'an is authentic as long as there is no philological proof that suggests otherwise. This is the study of the Qur'an as text, namely the Qur'an that has gone through the historical process from the revelation era to become a *muṣḥaf*; the perspective that is different from seeing the Qur'an as discourse (*ḵiṭāb*), borrowing the terminology of Naṣr Ḥamid Abū Zayd. As a text, the Qur'an is a final subject, but as discourse, there is an ample opportunity of discussion.

Scholars suggest that the Qur'an has a compelling history, in which it went through meticulous and scrupulous preservation procedures. Firstly, the preservation of the Qur'an relied upon oral tradition, namely the memory of the companions recognised as being *dabīṭ* (accurate and robust memory) after they had embraced Qur'anic teaching and validation from the Prophet Muhammad (Syahin 2007). For this reason, one of the orientalist, William A. Graham also argues that in order to understand the scripture in Islamic tradition, one should recognise that the Qur'an was initially words that were recited (the Qur'an as spoken word). Considering the tradition of oral text in Islam in understanding the history of the Qur'an would lead to a better comprehension of the scripture in Islam tradition (Graham 1985). Accordingly, one should not assume that the Prophet Muhammad wrote the Qur'an in an attempt to find the *urtext*; certainly would not be possible. That is because the Prophet Muhammad never wrote the Qur'an. After all, it was the spoken word.

Secondly, the Qur'an is kept through the written tradition that is aimed at perpetuating the Qur'an at the form of a *muṣḥaf*, so that the next generations would recognise it in a correct and *mutawatir* way (Syahin 2007). In short, according to the *ulamas*, the history of the Qur'an is clear, so there is no need for a reservation. The Qur'an was historically recorded not only through oral tradition, but also written tradition, since the initial stage of revelation to the compilation phase. This account is available in the writings of al-Zanjani in *Tarikh al-Qur'an*, Abd al-Ṣabūr Shahīn in *Tarikh al-Qur'an: Difa' li Hajamat al-Ishtisbraq*, Mustafa 'Azamī in *The History of the Qur'anic Text: From Revelation to Compilation*. Historically, the *ulamas* divide the history of the Qur'an into two categories:

The Qur'an in the Era of the Prophet

During the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an was protected through two methods: memorisation (*al-ḥifẓ fi al-ṣudūr*) and writing (*al-ḥifẓ fi al-suṭūr*). The companions of the Prophet memorised the Qur'an and wrote it on pieces of the sheet (*ṣubuf*), the well-known ones of which were read before the Prophet Muhammad himself (Al-Zanjani 1935: 17). This account implies that the Prophet Muhammad conducted validation upon the verse written. Additionally, the companions did not write on the sheets other than the Qur'an, because the Prophet explicitly prohibit it as recorded in the famous *ḥadīth*: "*La takṭubū 'annā waman kātaba 'annā ghair al-qur'an fal-yamḥub*" (Muslim, n.d.), which means "do not write anything from me; whoever writes (something) from me other than the Qur'an should erase it."

Besides, the Prophet Muhammad also provided guidelines on the arrangement of the verses and the *sūrah*s—where they should be placed in the *muṣḥaf*—as Uthman ibn 'Affan conveyed: "Several verses of the Qur'an were revealed; when there were verses revealed, the Prophet called the *waby* writers and said: 'put the (writing) of the verse in the *surah*

which mentions this or that verse.” In addition to that, the Prophet also conveyed whether the *basmala* should be written in the *surah* of *Bara’a*, for which reason Uthman eventually did not write it there for the similarity of its context with *surah al-Anfal* (Al-Tirmidzî 1998: 123). These accounts find a supporting justification from Zaid ibn Thabit who conveyed: “We used to arrange the Qur’anic verses that were written on *riqa’* (the surface of animals skin) (Al-Bukhari, n.d.; Syahin 2007).

In short, historically, the writing of all the Qur’anic verses was completed during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad—not on papers though because papers were yet to be invented—on the surface of animal skin (*riqa’*), rocks, woods placed on the back of camels (*aqtab*), the midrib of date palms (*usb*), and the wide skeleton of animals (*al-aktaf*). Nevertheless, the Qur’anic writings during the lifetime of the Prophet were not compiled into single *mushaf*; they were scattered as the possessions of the companions. With the companions, therefore, was the Qur’an that they had with the validation from the Prophet Muhammad, either in the form of memory or the writing.

What was the reason the Qur’an was not compiled into single *mushaf*? The Prophet Muhammad did not order the compilation of the Qur’an into a single *mushaf*, because the priority of the companions was to memorise the Qur’an by heart. In addition to that, the process of the revelation was yet to complete, so that there was the possibility of the more verses to come or some verses to be abrogated. At this context, the compilation of the Qur’an into a single *mushaf* would lead to changes. After the Prophet passed away—which means the revelation process had ended—the Qur’an was compiled into a single *mushaf* in the Abū Bakr era (Al-Suyuthi, n.d.; Muhaisin 198: 130).

The account mentioned above displays that the process of the preservation of the Qur’an during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad was highly meticulous, both in terms of recitation or writing; even though

at the same time the Prophet tolerated the recitation of the Qur'an through various readings. Therefore, the claim that the writing of the Qur'an did not exist during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad is baseless. It is true that the Arabs on the transmission of text typically relied on memorisation because they were at that time *ummy* (unable to read). Nevertheless, it does not mean that there was no such thing as the writing tradition of the Qur'an at that earlier period. For the dedication of the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'anic text has been validated (Syahin 2007) as explained by the *ḥadīth* mentioned above.

The Qur'an after the Prophet Muhammad

The preservation of the Qur'an after the Prophet Muhammad passed away, in general, followed the earlier tradition, namely through memorisation and *talaqqi* tradition, which is the learning setting in which a companion learned the Qur'an from other companions who had learned the Qur'an directly from the Prophet. A number of companions—including the writers of the *wahy*—arose as the well-known teacher of the Qur'an, such as Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭab, Uthman ibn 'Affan, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭalīb, Zaid ibn Thabit, Ubay ibn Ka'b, Mu'awiyya ibn Abī Ṣufyan, Khalid ibn Walid, and Abban ibn Sa'id Zaid ibn Qa'is (Muhaisin 1981).

The idea of compiling the Qur'an into single complete *muṣḥaf* arose initially during the era of Abū Bakr after the Yamamah war, in which about seventy memorisers of the Qur'an were killed in a battle against the apostates and those who denied *zakāh*. Anticipating the loss of the Qur'an following the death of memorisers, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭab suggested that the Qur'an required compiling and codifying as single *muṣḥaf*. Abū Bakar was initially hesitant because the Prophet Muhammad never did it; he was worried that he commissioned a *bid'a*. Nevertheless, an intense discussion ended up with 'Umar's success to convince Abū Bakr that the compilation

of the Qur'an into a single *muṣḥaf* is good and would bring *maṣlahah* to the *ummah*.

After the discussion, Abū Bakr called Zaid ibn Thabit to compile the Qur'an individually. The appointment of Zaid ibn Thabit was on some reasons. Not only was he widely acknowledged as a well-known memoriser of the Qur'an—that he had memorised the Qur'an during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad—he himself witnessed the *talaqqi* (learning/validation encounter) between Muhammad and Jibril. He was also known for his intelligence, integrity, truthful, mastery on *qira'a* and Syriac language, and most importantly, his position as a prominent writer of the *wahy* in the era of the Prophet Muhammad who was very cautious and meticulous in his writing activity (Al-A'zami 2005: 84-90).

From the historical-epistemological point of view, the sources of the writing of the *muṣḥaf* in the Abū Bakr period were, firstly, the Qur'an in the memory of the companions. It is necessary to emphasise at this point that the Prophet Muhammad did not write the text by himself; he never wrote the *urtext* of the Qur'an. For that matter, the fundamental basis of the Qur'an is the oral tradition, something that is read and recited before the Prophet Muhammad. On this context, Neal Robinson conveys:

It is God' final word to humankind, vouchsafed to the Prophet Muhammad in pure Arabic. Since the Prophet was illiterate, the revelation was heard, memorised, and recited before they were written down and assembled into a book (Robinson 1996: 9).

The second source was the written records of the Qur'an that were written during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad on the surface of animal skin (*riqa'*), rocks, woods placed on the back of camels (*aqtab*), the midrib of date palms (*'usb*), and the wide skeleton of animals (*al-aktaf*) that had stayed as the possessions of the companions. The third source was two witnesses of the memorisers of the Qur'an. Every time Zaid wanted to copy the verses from the writings of the companions

into the *muṣḥaf*, he would call two witnesses—even though Zaid himself memorised the Qur'an—to confirm and verify whether the writings in question were indeed the Qur'an or whether they had been written during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad. He would only include them into the *muṣḥaf* upon the testimonies of the witnesses. This account proves that the philological process by which Zaid went through in compiling the Qur'an into a single *muṣḥaf* involved highly meticulous and scrupulous procedures. The *muṣḥaf* compiled by Zaid was further called "*muṣḥaf al-imam*". Abū Bakr kept it throughout his administration, and then submitted to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭab and kept at the house of Hafṣah, one of the daughters of 'Umar who married to the Prophet Muhammad (Al-Azami 2003; Muhaisin 1981: 134-142).

Furthermore, during the administration of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭab, the project of the preservation of the Qur'an focused on the introduction of the holy book through the delegation of Qur'anic teachers throughout the regions under the territory of Islamic sovereignty. At least, he delegated ten Qur'anic teachers to Baṣra and delegated Ibn Mas'ūd to Kūfa. Upon receiving a report from Yazid ibn Abī Ṣufyan, the ruler of Syria concerning the necessity of the Qur'anic learning, 'Umar responded positively by delegating three prominent companions, namely Mu'adh, 'Ubada, and Abū Darda'. 'Umar also delegated Yazīd ibn 'Abdillah ibn Qusair to teach the Qur'an to the Bedouins (Muhaisin 1981).

Subsequently, during the period of 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, the process of the preservation of the Qur'an took the most significant step through canonisation. The idea of canonisation was prompted by an incident between Muslim armies from Sham and Iraq during an expansion of Azerbaijan and Armenia, in which they argued and even accused each other of infidel over the different readings of the Qur'an (Aughal 2007). In fact, such difference did exist during the lifetime of the Prophet, only it did not lead to argumentation amongst the companions, because the regions

ruled by Islam during the life of the Prophet was way smaller than that of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭab and ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan. If a dispute occurred over the issue of different readings of the Qur’an, the companions would go to the Prophet directly to ask for clarification, such as the one between ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭab and Hisham ibn Ḥakim and ‘Ubay ibn Ka’b and another companion (Al-Sindi 2001).

The dispute and accusation of infidelity led to anxiety, specifically for Ḥudhaifa ibn al-Yaman. He reported the issue to ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan that the dispute grew bigger and would potentially harm the unity of Muslims, as had happened to between the Jews, for the reason of which he proposed the idea of unifying the *mutawatir* readings that could be accommodated in one single *muṣḥaf*. ‘Uthman responded to the report by assembling a team tasked for codifying the *muṣḥaf*. He appointed Zaid ibn Thabit, ‘Abdu-llah ibn Zubair, Sa’īd ibn ‘Aṣ, ‘Abd al-Raḥman ibn Ḥarith ibn Hisham, and other companions such as Kathīr ibn Aflaḥ, Anas ibn Malik, ‘Abdu-llah ibn ‘Abbas, Malik ibn Abī ‘Amir, ‘Abdu-llah ibn ‘Umar, and ‘Abdu-llah ibn ‘Amr ibn ‘Ash (Al-Azami 2003).

‘Uthman had a direct hand in the codification procedures. First of all, he compiled an autonomous *muṣḥaf* by himself. In a speech, he expressed that “Whoever has the writings of the Qur’anic verses that were written before the Prophet Muhammad should hand them to me (‘Uthman)!” People handed their writings, and ‘Uthman asked them whether they learned about those verses as recited by the Prophet Muhammad. Their answers were taken with oaths. Afterwards, the writings were compiled and assigned the name of the initial owner, and further handed over to Zaid ibn Thabit, the chief of the committee of the canonisation (Al-Azami 2003).

Secondly, ‘Uthman took the sheets containing the Qur’an that belonged to ‘Aisha as a comparative measure to the autonomous *muṣḥaf* of ‘Uthman. As a result, the comparison found a number of minor

mistakes in the autonomous *muṣḥaf* and was further corrected. Thirdly, Uthman also took the *muṣḥaf* that was compiled during the Abū Bakr era and kept by Ḥafṣa, again, as a comparative measure to the autonomous *muṣḥaf*. The comparison between the autonomous *muṣḥaf* and the *muṣḥaf al-Imam* revealed the loss of a minor segment of the verse, “*min al-mu'minān rijalun ...* (Q.S. al-Aḥzab: 23). After the revision, the *muṣḥaf* of Ḥafṣa was taken back to her.

Furthermore, the team was asked to copy the autonomous *muṣḥaf* commissioned by 'Uthman. There were four copies at that time, which were later sent to Kuffa, Baṣra, Syria, and Madīna. Another record indicates the existence of the other three copies that were sent to Mecca, Yaman, and Bahrain. Therefore, there were a total of seven *muṣḥaf*, whereas the autonomous *muṣḥaf* was then kept by 'Uthman. In short, the process of textual and philological criticisms conducted during the canonisation was very scrupulous. Consequently, there was no inconsistency between the *muṣḥaf al-imam* that was compiled under the administration of Abū Bakr and the autonomous *muṣḥaf* of 'Uthman ibn 'Affan. The methodology used in the compilation of the text of the Qur'an under both rulers were meticulous and accurate (Al-Azami 2003).

The Shubuhāt on the Divine Nature of the Qur'an

The concept of the revelation⁵ of the Qur'an in Islam is very theological; therefore, it relies on the belief of a person on the Qur'an. For unbelievers, no matter how convincing the argument provided, they would stay on their ground. In Islam, the belief in the divine nature of the Qur'an is strongly related to the prophecy (*al-nubuwwa*). A person who claims to be a prophet should prove himself that he receive the revelation from God. That is what happened to the Prophet Muhammad, as written

5 The word *wahy* linguistically means *al-isyrārah*, *al-risālah*, *al-ilhām*, *al-kalam al-khāfiy*, (Al-Afriqi, n.d.: 379). It is commonly defined as a piece of vague and fast information from Allah to a prophet as proof of the validity of his prophecy.

in Q.S. al-Anbiya': 108, Q.S. al-Ahzab: 2, Q.S. Fuṣilat: 6, and Q.S. al-Aḥqaf: 9. As a result, theologically Muslims believe that the Qur'an is not the work of Muhammad, but the revelation from Allah, and the Prophet merely delivered it to his people.

Nevertheless, some of the orientalist appreciate the phenomena of the revelation not like how Muslims understand and believe it. Not only does it relate to theological belief, for the orientalist, to acknowledge the concept of illuminative knowledge as the revelation from God is considered not to make sense, not to mention impossible. Accordingly, if one claim to receive knowledge from the Highest Essence (God) outside of himself, he would be considered deluded or disturbed by jinn. That was the accusation delivered towards the Prophet Muhammad by his adversaries (Q.S. al-Ṣaffat: 36, Q.S. al-Dukhan: 14, Q.S. al-Dhariyat: 39, 52).

The accusation threw by some of the orientalist at the Prophet Muhammad is similar. The Qur'an that was received by Prophet Muhammad was not the divine revelation, but the manifestation of delusional epilepsy (*nubuwat min al-ṣar'*) (Dermengham 1930: 135). This assumption is the result of their reading upon the records that the Prophet at the time of receiving the revelation was unconscious, sweating, and suddenly he expressed words (Katsir, n.d.). This phenomena, according to some of the orientalist, resemble the situation of a person suffering from epilepsy. In fact, that is not the case. A person with epilepsy would typically be confused, absentminded, dazed, a blank stare, in a trance-like situation, unable to control himself, screaming, out of breath, and not able to remember what just happened to him. A people with epilepsy would typically be a person with mental disease, depression, and sometimes suicidal.⁶

⁶ See some articles on epilepsy disease, *alodokter.com*, accessed on 6 July 2016.

Those symptoms did not happen to the Prophet Muhammad. After the revelation came, he was completely capable of remembering and reciting the verses he had just received from Jibril to his companions. He indeed sweated during the time he was receiving the revelation—called in Arabic as *al-ruḥaḍa'*: *al-'araq alladhī sala 'inda nuḥūl al-waḥy* (Al-Bukhari, n.d.)—but he was able to move his tongue reciting the verses to imitate Jibril, such as the case for Q.S. al-Qiyama: 16-17 (Al-Bukhari, n.d.). In addition to that, the verses he was receiving is beautiful and astonishing from the perspective of linguistic aesthetic, and the content and teaching it has is enchanting, not like the words coming out from a person with epilepsy.

In addition to that, there are internal proofs of the divine status of the Qur'an instead of the work of Muhammad. *Firstly*, from the form of the rhetorical point of view, the expressions in the Qur'an include another party other than Muhammad that give him orders. For example, there are the expressions of *qul* (say) addressed to Muhammad, *ya ayyuḥa al-rasūl* (O the messenger) in Q.S. al-Ma'ida: 61 and 67), *ya ayyuḥa al-nabī* (O the Prophet) in Q.S. al-Anfal: 64, 65, 70, 73; Q.S. al-Aḥzab: 1, 28, 45, 50, 59; Q.S. al-Mumtaḥana: 12; Q.S. al-Taḥrīm: 1 and 9; Q.S. al-Ṭalaq: 1. *Secondly*, from the perspective of the content, several verses criticise Prophet Muhammad when he is considered misguided, known as *ayat al-'itaḥ*. The verses in this category are Q.S. 'Abasa: 1-4 when the Prophet being surly encountering 'Abdu-llah ibn Ummi Maktūm, Q.S. al-Taḥrīm: 1, when he initiated to forbid something for himself to please his wives, and Q.S. al-Anfal: 67, when he decided to take ransom from the prisoners of Badr. If the Qur'an were the work of Muhammad, he would not have explicated his oversights.

The baseless description upon the divine status of the Qur'an is also subject to criticism from some orientalists, such as Sir William Muir in his book, *The Life of Mohamammad*. He argues that the view assuming the

revelation received by Muhammad indicates that the Prophet Muhammad suffered from epilepsy is wrong and unsupported by scientific facts. That is because after receiving the *wahy*, the Prophet Muhammad remembered and was capable of reading what he had just received to his companions. In contrast, someone with epilepsy would not have been able to do so because he suffered from the malfunction of a particular nerve in the brain. It is necessary to emphasise that there are a number ways the Prophet Muhammad received the revelation, not only that he was unconscious; he received many verses with a complete consciousness (Muir 1923).

The thesis of the orientalist that are sceptical towards the divine status of the Qur'an is not much different from the view of Montgomery Watt as written in his book *Islamic Revelation in Modern World* (Watt 1970), even though he is not entirely explicit. He writes that Muhammad was an honest person and would not have deceived his people. However, Muhammad, Watt goes on, was mistaken in what he assumed as the revelation. This misconception occurred when he experienced an unusual situation in Ḥīra', which he could not comprehend. He then asked Waraqa ibn Naufal, and he explained that what Muhammad had experienced was the divine encounter, just like what had occurred to previous prophets. To this answer, Muhammad believed, and then called what he got as the revelation (Southem 1986).

Furthermore, to prove that the Prophet Muhammad had once studied to the Jewish-Christian monks—so that the divine nature of the Qur'an is questionable—some of the orientalist propose some arguments. *Firstly*, the Prophet Muhammad had once asked the monks Bahiro and Nasturo for help in writing some of the Qur'anic verses. *Secondly*, the claim of the illiteracy (*ummiy*) of the Prophet Muhammad is also put into question, such as by Regis Blechere. The Prophet Muhammad was not *ummiy* (in the meaning that he was unable to read and write), because he was accustomed to trading since his childhood. As a trader, he would have known writing

and calculating, so that he was illiterate would have been unlikely. At the same time, there was a good chance that he had encountered the previous holy books. If the Prophet Muhammad was indeed illiterate, why was the first Qur'anic verse the instruction to read (*iqra'*: read). This line of argument indicates that the Qur'an is not the revelation from Allah to Muhammad, but rather the work of Muhammad.

The answer to this *shububat* is that the illiteracy of the Prophet Muhammad is not the only argument that proves the divine status of the Qur'an. The Qur'an itself explicitly mentions that it is the revelation that Muhammad received and not the result of him studying earlier Holy Scriptures (Q.S. al-Ankabūt: 48). As mentioned, there is some internal evidence that the Qur'an is not the work of Muhammad. There is indeed an opinion from some *ulamas* suggesting that perhaps the Prophet Muhammad was not illiterate the whole his life. There is a report saying that he involved in writing activity during the Hudaybiya charter in 6 H/627 AD. At that time, the Prophet called his writer and dictated to write the *basmala*, but Suhail, one of the delegations from Mecca stopped him and said: "Write Muhammad as you used to write it with the expression *bismika-llahumma* (Syahin 2007).

As for the first revealed verse, *iqra'* (read), it is necessary to underline that the meaning of *iqra'* is not solely to read in the sense of reading a written object. It could also mean to observe, to investigate, and to compile. Accordingly, the instruction of *iqra'* did not mean to read a written object, but an order to observe or to read an object that is needed to be read and researched.

The Shubuhāt on the Difference Readings

One of the dubieties proposed by Ignaz Goldziher, an orientalist, is that the Qur'an constitutes from a messy difference of readings. In the Qur'an, there are variations of readings that lead to incoherence (*idṭirāb*),

so that the validity of the Qur'anic text is questionable for the existence of a part that is contradictory to other parts. According to him, there is no Holy Scripture—that is believed to be divinely revealed—that is more disorganised than the text of the Qur'an present. He said:

Fala yūjad kitab tashri'yyūn i'tarafat bihi ta'ifa dīniya i'tirafan 'aqdiyyan 'ala annahu naṣṣ munazzal aw muhan bihi yaqdimu naṣṣ ūbu fī aqdamī 'uṣuri tadawulibi mithla hadbihi al-ṣūrah min al-idṭirab wa 'adam al-thabat kama najid fī naṣṣ al-Qur'an (Goldziher 1955).

The reason for this problem, according to Goldziher, is that the original writing of the Qur'an did not recognise diacritics and vocalisation, making people read the Qur'an as they wished. For this reason, Goldziher goes on, what is said *al-ikhtilaf al-qira'ah* is actually *al-idṭirab al-qira'a* (incoherence of readings). The example provided by Goldziher is Q.S. al-Rūm: 2, *غُلِبَتِ الرُّومُ*, officially read in the passive voice, which means the Romans would soon be defeated by the Persians. Nevertheless, if the very same verse is read in the active voice, *ghalabat al-rūm*, it means the Romans defeated the Persians (Goldziher 1955).

There are some answers to this *shububat*. First, Goldziher's view about *ikhtilaf al-qira'ah* in the Qur'an as *idṭirab al-Qira'a* (incoherence and contradictive readings) is incorrect. The nature of *ikhtilaf al-Qira'a*, according to the *ulamas*, is the variation (*tanawwu'*) instead of contradiction (*tadaḍ*). The variation of the readings in the Qur'an, as long as referring to the *mutawatir* reports, is justified by the Prophet Muhammad. In fact, there is no indication of contradiction whatsoever in the variation of the readings transmitted by the *mutawatirah* reports. This variation opens up the extensive possibilities of the reading methods of the Qur'an as well as interpretive significance coming from each reading. Second, the example provided by Goldziher about the reading of *ghalabat al-rūm* in the active voice in Q.S. al-Rūm:2 is not a *mutawatirah* reading, and hence, is objected because it does not fulfil criteria of the acceptable readings.

Third, Goldziher develops his thesis from a baseless assumption considering that the difference of *qira'at* was the result of the absence of vocalisation and diacritics in the Uthmanic *muṣḥaf*. *Qira'at* is based on oral tradition transmitted in *mutawatir*, and hence its validity is perceived to be justified. The difference in *qira'a* has existed since the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad. That is why the *ulamas* have a maxim saying that *al-aṣl fī al-qira'at al-riwaya* (the principle of readings is *riwaya*).

For this reason, to connect the different readings with the writing in Uthmanic *muṣḥaf* that did not have vocalisation and diacritics goes against the historical fact. Should the assumption of Goldziher is accepted, a part of the Qur'an is not the revelation, but rather the creation of the companions following their own wishes. That is theologically irrelevant. On the other hand, the claim of Goldziher is objected based on the internal data from the Qur'an. For example, in the writing of (الم ذلك الكتاب لا ريب فيه) at the beginning of Q.S. al-Baqara: 1-2, with a probabilities theory, the expression could be read *Alam dhalika al-kitab la raiba fih* (Have you not considered that the book has no doubt). However, because such reading has no support from *riwayah mutawatirah*, and even *ghair mutawatirah*, one cannot read the verse that way. The official reading is *alif lam mim dhalika al-kitab la rayb fih*.

The same also true for Q.S. al-Fīl: 1 that writes (الم تر كيف فعل ربك بأصحاب الفيل). In case the verse does not have vocalisation and diacritics, and that it is read with a probability, it could go *alif lam mim tara kayfa fa'ala rabbuka bi aṣḥab al-fīl*. Nevertheless, no such *riwaya* are suggesting this kind of reading. For this reason, the claim of Goldziher that the difference in reading in the Qur'an displays the incoherence of the scripture is not true. Also, the assumption that the difference in reading is the result of the absence of vocalisation and diacritics in the Uthmanic *muṣḥaf* is not true. Historical facts prove that the Qur'an as an oral tradition has been read in many ways and was justified by the Prophet Muhammad.

The Shubuhats of the Plagiarism from the Bible

One other dubiety from some orientalist about the Qur'an is that the stories conveyed in the Qur'an are similar to the Bible. This implies that the Qur'an is plagiarism. From the philological point of view, this claim seems feasible, because chronologically, the Qur'an came after the Bible. Therefore, any scripture coming later than the other and is similar to its predecessor is entitled to be claimed as plagiarism. This claim perhaps has a hidden agenda, that the Qur'an that was received by the Prophet Muhammad is not the revelation from Allah, but rather the result of Muhammad plagiarising the Torah and the Bible.

In *What did Muhammad Borrow from Judaism*, Abraham Geiger suggests that there are some sentences that Muhammad borrowed from the Jewish tradition. The word of *tabut* (Q.S. al-Baqara: 248), for example, is not originally from the Arabic language, but Hebrew. That is also the case for *jannatu 'adn* that is mentioned in eleven places across the Qur'an; the word is unknown in Arabic vocabularies. This particular word is also mentioned in many places across the Bible. However, instead of referring to heaven, it refers to a particular park in a particular region that is resided by the first parents (Adam and Eve). The same also true for *jahannam*, *abbar*, *rubban*, etc (Geiger 1998). According to Anis Shorrosh, a Palestinian priest, there are as many as seventy per cents of the Qur'anic verses that resembles earlier scriptures.⁷ This accusation is questionable because it lacks convincing evidence.

There is a reservation for this dubiety: does any similarity between the Qur'an with the previous scriptures imply that the Qur'an had copied from them? I would argue that it is not the case; the similarities between the Qur'an and the previous scriptures do not mean that the Qur'an had copied materials from its predecessors. The similarity between vocabularies

⁷ Anis Shorrosh is a Christian priest from Palestine, who is very harsh in his polemics against Islam (Shorros 1988).

is a common linguistic phenomenon in general. A particular language would typically interplay and interchanges words with other languages. This, in fact, indicates that the Qur'an responds to the previous scriptures.

In addition to that, which Bible is claimed to be similar to the Qur'an? One should take into consideration that the Bible at that time was not the original one that used Hebrew, but rather the one that transformed and had been translated from times to times from one language to the others. The question is, which one the Qur'an could have copied? Therefore, the existence of similarities in some aspects between the scriptures implies to the dialogue of discourses, besides that the Qur'an revised the mistakes contained in the previous scriptures, which was the result of corruption. At the same time, the similarity in the stories mentioned in the Qur'an shows the chains of revelation from Allah manifested in those scriptures.

The internal data from the Qur'an indicates that the similarity, either in the vocabularies or the substance of the book, implies to the chains of revelation, that the revelation received by the previous prophets would not have been contradictive to that of the Prophet Muhammad (Q.S. al-Nisa'[4]: 163-164). In addition to that, from the philological point of view, the existence of the similarities either in the vocabularies or the substance between the Qur'an and the Bible indicates that the Qur'an was in dialogue with the textual discourse in its environment. Accordingly, it is just a casual phenomenon because the Qur'an was not revealed in a vacuum context and tradition. This account is in line with the view of Angelika Neuwirth that she has from the historical-literary method that the Qur'an as text in Late Antiquity had a relation with other texts found in the seventh century. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the Qur'an is a mimesis text (Neuwirth 2010). She proves this view when she compares Q.S. al-Raḥman with Psalm (Zabūr) 136; there are indeed similarities between both, but either from linguistics and thematic point of views, there is a significant shift, for example, in theological tendency from historical discourse (in Zabūr) to eschatological discourse (in al-Raḥman) (Syamsuddin 2013).

In addition to that, the similarity shows the unity of teachings between the Prophet Muhammad and the previous prophets. The claim of Muhammad to be a prophet could, in fact, be supported by, among others, the fact that the Qur'an has been mentioned in the earlier scriptures, despite with the different rhetorical style (*uslub*). The stories mentioned in the Qur'an follow religious and proselytisation purposes. That is because the Qur'an is not a history book that should follow the academic convention of history when narrating a particular story. *Wa Allahu alam bi al-shawab.*

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