

## Sources of the Values of the Noble Qur'an According to Orientalists: Value's Sources of Knowledge as a Model

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### Abstract

Qur'an in mainstream of oriental studies is studied as a historical text created through many cultural sources. This understanding included even Qur'anic values and ethics, and it means that Qur'an is not revealed book. Franz Rosenthal, the German orientalist has given such hypothesis in his study of knowledge in Qur'an. He has supposed that Gnostic doctrines were the cultural source of Knowledge conception in Qur'an. Gnostic doctrines were either but their Christian or Jewish or Mandeian or even Arab Paganism of Pre-Islam era. This paper negates these hypotheses by observing structure of these sources through historical methodology. Obviously, there are either tenuous evidence or nothing about historical existence of these sources in Pre-Islamic Arabia or at least Hijaz area where Islam spread from to all around. As a result, this paper approve that Qur'anic conception of Knowledge does not belong to any external source. Importance of this study is due to lack of studies of Orientalists studies of Qur'anic ethics and values.

**Keywords:** Knowledge, Qur'an, Gnosticism, Rosenthal

### Introduction

The trends of orientalists in the study of the Holy Qur'an varied, as some were convinced that it was a divine revelation and they became Muslim, others acknowledged its consistency with divine religious teachings in general, and others rejected these two options and insisted on claims such as distortion of the Qur'an based on marginal statements that contradict the consensus of Muslims (Dastmard & Bahastmeher, 2019). This trend is due to the development of Quranic Orientalist studies in the nineteenth century within the context of Biblical criticism

sciences, which subjected the sacred books - including the Holy Quran - to study using hermeneutic and semantic methods (Polat, 2019). Thus, these orientalists searched the Holy Qur'an, Jewish, and Christian scriptures (Moghaddam, 2019). Regarding methods, they varied between linguistic methods and used textual analysis, intertextuality, textual overlap, and comparison between the Qur'an and the texts of the surrounding environment, to prove that the Noble Qur'an is quoted from Jewish, Christian, or even Magian sources. In addition, they tried to attribute the Qur'an to the pre-Islamic and Roman traditions by comparing it with those traditions, in an effort to know the sources affecting it (Fadli et al., 2021). This in turn leads to the de-sanctification of the Holy Qur'an, and this vision has left an impact on the orientalists' study of the value dimension in Qur'anic studies, so many orientalists considered that the values of the Qur'an were influenced by the general cultural circumstance prevailing in the Arabian Peninsula (Moghaddam, 2019).

However, Franz Rosenthal was one of the Orientalists who say that there are cultural sources of Quranic values in his analysis of the value of knowledge in Islamic civilization, where he discussed the value, its supposed sources, and its presence in the Holy Quran (Rosenthal, 2019), and this is what the current study will examine and discuss according to historical methodology to determine this hypothesis.

### **Sources of the Value of Knowledge in the Holy Qur'an**

Because of knowledge status in the Arabian Peninsula, Rosenthal attributed knowledge and its place in the Holy Qur'an to Gnostic sources from the Fertile Crescent (Iraq - Levant), referring that the Gnostic texts left their impacts in the Qur'an, but he left the options open between Christian Gnosticism texts, Jewish Gnosticism texts, or Mandaean Gnosticism texts, or even Arab paganism texts, (Rosenthal, 2019). Also, Reeves (2018) mentioned that there are those who referred to Gnosticism as a possible source for the Holy Qur'an itself, and some religious historians have tried to interpret some Qur'anic verses based on Gnostic concepts.

### **The Following Sources which Rosenthal Referred to it the Value of Knowledge in the Holy Qur'an**

Firstly, the Christian Gnostic source: Rosenthal considered that the value and centrality of knowledge entered the Qur'an through Christian Gnosticism through two possible sources:

The first: Writings of Evagrius Pontius through translations and commentaries by Babei The Great, who lived in the seventh century A.D., considering that there might be other Aramaic translations that reached the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace.

The second: The widespread Book of Solomon's Songs among the Syriac Christians in the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. as well, in which the value of knowledge was widely spread.

The first source was inferred from what he considered a similarity between the two concepts: the knowledge of certainty in the verse: (Nay If only you knew the knowledge of certainty) (102:5), and the phrase "knowledge of the truth" that appeared in the Syriac theological Christian writings of Evagrius Pontius. Also in the Christian Gnostic writings, the concept of knowledge of the truth refers to the solid knowledge of human nature, acquired by asceticism, and some Christian hermits considered it the highest kind of knowledge.

Secondly, the supposed Jewish Gnosticism: Rosenthal believes that Judaism did not give knowledge a high status, but he builds his assumption on the Qumran manuscripts written by the Essenes, which link faith with knowledge. However, Rosenthal admits that the judgment on this hypothesis is suspended by having full knowledge of the beliefs of the Jews in the Arabian Peninsula before Islam.

Thirdly, Mandaean Gnosticism: Rosenthal clarifies the centrality of the concept of knowledge and truth in the Mandaean religion, in addition to the Holy Qur'an's talk about the Sabians, thus he recognizes here the need to discover the Mandaean impact on the Arabian Peninsula (Rosenthal, 2019).

The following is a discussion of these hypotheses, but the definition of the nature of Gnosticism should be introduced before going into details, to clarify the position of knowledge in it, which perhaps urged Rosenthal to think of Gnosticism as a possible source.

### **Discussing the Sources of the Value of Knowledge in the Holy Qur'an According to Rosenthal What is Gnosticism?**

Gnosis is a Greek word meaning knowledge, and it refers to a term for knowledge leading to spiritual salvation, or knowledge that is in itself the salvation of man (Jafari, 2020). Hence, Gnosticism is an ingredient and complex concept that includes a set of ideas and beliefs that recognize knowledge revealed from the highest world, which is considered by the Gnostics one of the finest and most important types of knowledge, and even more accurate than the knowledge acquired by mental methods such as observation, experimentation, and others.

Regarding his view of existence, Gnosticism believes in a higher God, transcendent of the universe, creating mediators that in turn created the entire universe (Reeves, 2018). Gnosticism also believes that the soul is imprisoned in the physical body, and it should be liberated by knowing the truth and piety in this world, as Gnosticism knowledge aims to unite perception with the absolute, transcendental truth, or God. Thus, this matter is considered particularly a conjoint denominator between Gnostic movements and sects throughout the ages (Jafari, 2020), and there are many sects often included under the name of Gnosticism, whether applied its concept or not, such as Manichaeism, while Mandaean seems to be a religion with Gnostic influence, due to being a remnant of the ancient Babylonian religion mixed with the impact of one of the Palestinian Gnostic sects (Reeves, 2018).

Historically, some researchers attribute Gnosticism to the ancient Persian, Babylonian, and Egyptian religions, while some associate it with Hellenism, but it is certain that Gnosticism developed in the School of Alexandria, west of the Jordan River, and extended to include esoteric Judaism (Jafari, 2020). Accordingly, Gnosticism is an ancient, volatile doctrine, capable of merging and influencing different religions, and the reasons for its influence in all these religions remain a matter outside the framework of this paper, but it needs a view from researchers.

### **Discussion of Hypotheses**

Reeves mentioned Gnosticism and its relationship to Islam in principle that Hans Halm rejects connecting between Gnosticism and Islam because he considered Gnosticism to be fundamentally contradictory to Islam, because it contradicts monotheism, especially since

Islam considers any belief in the control of anyone other than Allah Almighty in the universe as unacceptable polytheism.

On the one hand, Reeves refers to Ibn Al-Kalbi's narration about the embracing Gnosticism of some heretic Quraishites "Zanadeqah" and learned it from the Christians of Al-Hira. Further, Reeves tried to suppose that this heresy "Zandaqah" is a Christian Gnostic, but he goes back and decides the ambiguity of the term in itself, in addition to its historical connections to the Abbasid era; which witnessed various forms of pursuit of heretics from the followers of Manichaeism and dualism. Also, the affiliation of the characters described as heretics to the Umayyads in terms of lineage, or their excessive hostility to the Islamic call, may explain the political dimension, and the subsequent impact of the Abbasid era in understanding the nature of the doctrine adopted by those people.

On the other hand, the influence of Gnosticism on Islam according to Reeves is clearly evident in the radical Shiite sects "AlGhulah", which he considers undoubtedly Gnostic. As for the influence of Gnosticism on the Qur'an and the Prophet of Islam -Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him- his evidence is considered weak and fragile. (Reeves, 2018). Thus, the relationship with Gnosticism in itself is a very turbulent issue, and there is no valid evidence for it in terms of origin, and now we have to examine the subsequent hypotheses one by one according to its internal structure, and the course of its cultural movement in the seventh century AD, and before.

### **The Hypothesis of Christian Gnosticism as a Source of the Value of Knowledge in the Holy Qur'an**

This hypothesis revolves around two matters: either an assumed translation of the works of Evagrius Pontius, or the use of an assumed translation of the Book of Songs of Solomon, (Rosenthal, 2019). Also, Mar Babei the Great actually translated one of the works of Evagrius Pontius in his book Chapters on Esoteric Knowledge into Language Syriac (Zelski, 2019). However, the spread of this translation, or already translating into Arabic, was connected to the public's needs and interests, and to internal ecclesiastical factors.

Therefore, translations of Pontius' works into Arabic were delayed until the eighth century AD, with the renaissance of Christian literature, which was caused by the large wave of Christians' massive embrace of Islam during the Abbasid revolution against the Umayyads. This literature flourished with the writings of Theodore Abu Qurra, and the translations of the works of Evagrius Pontius in the behavioral and moral aspect began through the works of the monks of the monasteries of Sinai and Palestine, where Evagrius Pontius regained his status after the excommunication that prolonged his work since the sixth century (Patardize,2019). Hence, there were Persian and Sogdian translations of Christian writings in progress at the beginning of the seventh century AD (Platt, 2017). However, Platt and Zelski do not mention Arabic translations of Syriac writings, specifically with regard to the works of Mar Babei the Great. Zelski (2019) explained that Mar Babei the Great was Who initiated the translation of Pontius' works into Syriac. Therefore, these details indicate the absence of interest in science and esoteric knowledge in the pre-Islamic era among the Arabs, the lack of a need among Christian Arabs in Al-Hira for those translations, and the lack of need for translation into Arabic, so these were factors in the delay of those translations, and their popularity among the general public.

Moreover, the internal ecclesiastical factors with which it is difficult to spread the writings of Evagrius Pontius, are due to the fact that the translations and explanations of Babei the Great of Pontius's works were confined within the framework of monasteries, where Babei the Great favored the monks' preoccupation with esoteric meditation, which leads to combating demons that spread doctrinal deviations, confirming that the monks' activities should not go beyond the walls of the monastery, and should not engage in public life in any way whatsoever. This was at a time when doctrinal disputes raged between the Christian sects in the Levant and Iraq, and each sect was interested in strengthening its doctrinal orientation by completing translations and explanations of the writings of the church fathers in accordance with its doctrinal trends, and shortly after his death in 628 A.D., the Sassanid Empire collapsed completely (Zelski, 2019). So, this will make the works of Pontius, and the explanations of Babei the Great confined to the walls of the monasteries, and taking into consideration the political turmoil that destroyed the Sassanid state, and led later to its collapse with the Islamic conquests.

Furthermore, it was difficult to publish the works of Babei the Great in a wide range because of many challenges within the church, so his popularity has faced obstacles continuously. Hence, his impact has remained confined to the area of his upbringing and his early theological studies in northern Iraq, the south of present-day Turkey, and in Al-Mada'in; the capital of the Sassanid Empire, which was the farthest place to him in the south until 612 A.D., where he met Khosrow II to defend the doctrine of his church. Then a quarter of a century later, he was appointed as the inspector of the monasteries. Babei's ideological impact on his contemporaries is greater than his impact through his translation of the works of Pontius (Paltt, 2017).

Further, for the impact of Solomon's book on the value of knowledge in the Holy Qur'an, the book belongs to Christian-Jewish literature, (Rosenthal, 2019), and in defining Christians-Jews, Del Río Sánchez explains that Jewish Christians are Jewish groups that accepted Christian beliefs in the person of Christ - peace be upon him - in one way or another, it continued to practice Jewish rites.

In addition, a large group of Western academics has turned to the hypothesis that the Holy Qur'an was influenced by Judeo-Christian literature comparing it to that literature in terms of rituals and legislation, and other academics have disputed them, considering them to be mere non-academic conjectures, while some also consider the similarities between the Qur'an and Judeo-Christian literature to be mere causal similarities, but del Río Sánchez makes deeper objections, explaining that this hypothesis is originally weakened by the absence of mechanism for knowing accurately how the Qur'an was influenced by these. Also, the information and documents about Christian-Jewish groups clarify their presence in Jordan and its environs, but there is no indication that these groups reached the Hijaz, and the documentation of these groups is completely absent after the fourth century AD, so how did their ideas reach Hijaz first, or even their ideas continued until seventh century AD? (Del Rio Sanchez, 2021).

Thus, the hypothesis of being influenced by Christian Gnosticism or Jewish Christianity falls due to the absence of evidence of the existence of Christian-Jewish societies in the Arabian Peninsula, and absence of translation of the works of Evagrius Pontius into Arabic before the

middle of the seventh century A.D., whether those explained by Babei the Great, or those that remained in the Syriac monasteries which were translated in the renaissance of Christian literature in the Sinai, and later Palestine, in the middle of the second century A.H. / eighth century A.D.

The hypothesis of the Non-Christian Gnosticism: Judaism, Mandaean, and Paganism: With regard to Gnostic Jewish sources, Rosenthal (2019) ignored the narrations related to Jewish knowledge in Arabia contained in Islamic sources, which could have provided him with possible hypotheses, but the fact is that these narrations also revolved around the axis of prediction of the appearance of a prophet. In the story Ibn Al-Hayyan, the ascetic Jewish rabbi used to pray for rain for the people of Yathrib, as he concluded his life by alerting the Jews to the coming of an end-time prophet.

Furthermore, the trends of the Jews of the Arabian Peninsula are not clear, despite the age of the Jewish community in the Arabian Peninsula, its ethnic diversity among Jewish immigrants from outside the Peninsula and the Judaizer Arabs, the wide spread of Jews between the north and south of the Peninsula, and the availability of evidence from the Holy Qur'an itself that they follow the rabbis, which means that they are Rabbinic Jews, but many researchers do not know about their level of knowledge of the Jewish religion, or their connection to scientific centers in Iraq and the Levant, or even their religious practices, (Firestone, 2016). Thus, it should be noted here that the Holy Qur'an condemns the Jews in many occasions and verses, so how does the Holy Qur'an quotes from Jewish? (Shaygan, 2020). Hence, with the absence of adequate evidence for the Jewish Gnostic hypothesis, it cannot be accepted as a source for the value of knowledge in the Holy Qur'an.

Also, the hypothesis of quoting the value of knowledge from Mandaean-Sabeian Gnostic sources is related to the classification of Mandaean itself as a religion, where some considered it part of the Christian-Jewish communities, and others considered it emanating from it not an actual part of it. So, many issues seem common between the trends of Gnostic Mandaicism and Manichaeism (Reeves, 2018). The hypothesis of Christian-Jewish source is group is previously discussed and proved incorrect. If we accept it is not a Christian-Jewish group. There is a need to determine the field of interaction between Mandaean and the Arabs. Amadinia (2017) believes that Mandaean was not in the Arabian Peninsula, but the main field for transferring the ideas between the Arabs before Islam and the Madaeans was the migrations of the Arabs to Iraq before Islam, the stay of these people under the Sassanid Empire, and the long period of contacting with them (Amadinia, 2017).

Although Christian (2018) observes a similarity between Mandaean and one of the noble verses related to the angels of torment in Hell, he considers this matter unresolved, indicating that a clearer similarity exists between Mandaean and ancient religions in the Levant, Mesopotamia, and Ismailia (Christian, 2016). Further, the certain regarding the impact of Mandaean in Islamic culture is related to esoteric knowledge, and some date it to the first century A.H. and the Gnostic influence generally appears among the Ismaili Shiites (Jafari, 2020). On the contrary, the main Sabeian Mandaean Bible - the Kanzarba or the Great Treasure in Arabic - was finally edited in the seventh century A.D. Also, the Madaeans have always resided near rivers at the level of rituals because they constantly need to practice baptism



that takes place with running water only, and they cannot practice their rituals without the Mandaean clergy (Amirteimour, 2017).

Consequently, it is difficult to imagine Mandaean presence in the Arabian Peninsula in a way that guarantees their transfer of certain information to the Arabs about the value of knowledge. So, their Bible was delayed in its final editing as mentioned before, and their lives and religious rituals are closely connected to the rivers, and to the religious hierarchy in society, which makes it hard to imagine a self-contained society in the Arabian Peninsula. Thus, the hypothesis of Mandaean Gnosticism becomes of no scientific value.

As Rosenthal (2019) refers to the possibility of the existence of pagan Gnosticism, the study of Cole (2021) shows that Arab paganism that contemporary Islam dates back to about the first century A.D. and was influenced by Nabataean paganism in the Jordan region, which in turn had Greek connections. Despite the similarity between the hierarchy of Gods in Arab pagans with Greek and Roman, Cole (2021) does not refer to pagan Gnostic tendencies, or Neoplatonism, such as those found in the School of Alexandria. Also, Reeves (2018) continued to insist on weak evidence of Gnostic influence in Islam and the Qur'an as shown previously, so there is no possibility of the existence of pagan Gnosticism.

Accordingly, if there is an evidence there is no convincing or sufficient evidence with all these considerations related to the Jewish, Mandaean, or pagan Gnostic influence on the Holy Qur'an, and its adoption of the value of knowledge in its central image that left its mark on Islamic civilization. Thus, it remains to add that the most important objection to what Rosenthal (2019) mentioned in his referring to the immortal impact of the Qur'an, which he finds that it is difficult to explain the immortal impact of the Qur'an on all mankind, despite the lack of convincing evidence about the sources of the Qur'an and Islam (Oleh, 2016), therefore the extension of the impact indicates the transcendence of its source, and its transcendence beyond history and its limits.

## **Conclusion**

As part of the orientalist trend that searches for the sources of the Qur'an in all its aspects, even the valuable ones, the Orientalist Franz Rosenthal assumed that the value of knowledge gained its importance from various previous sources, through an accidental not in-depth analysis, established on accidental similarities. Thus, he sufficed with the possibility of Christian Gnosticism as a source of the value of knowledge in the Qur'an by talking about the Book of Solomon's Songs, and the possibility of translating the literature of Evagrius of Pontus and the writings of Babei the Great. Further, he presented possibilities about Jewish or Mandaean Gnosticism, without going into details. Then after examining the possibilities using the historical method, we found that these possibilities are absent due to the weak evidence of the Gnostic influence on Islam originally, in addition to the delay in Arabic translations of Christian writings, especially the Syriac ones, until the middle of the seventh century A.D. and the eighth century A.D. The renaissance of Christian literature in monasteries have taken place since that era. In addition to the limited works of Babei the Great between the walls of the monasteries, and the lack of clarity of his impact due to factors related to his popularity within the church, and the scope of his geographical movements. On the other hand, there is no evidence of the existence of Christian-Jewish societies in the Hijaz or the Arabian Peninsula, in addition to the absence of mention of these sects after the fourth

century A.D. and the absence of evidence of the survival of their ideas until the emergence of Islam in the seventh century A.D. As for Jewish Gnosticism, the weak evidence, the lack of clarity about the attitudes of the Jews in the Arabian Peninsula, and the Qur'an's condemnation of them, preclude the hypothesis of the Jewish source, while it is difficult to imagine the existence of a Mandaean society in the Arabian Peninsula or the transmission of information about that religion to the Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula with its influence limited to the limits of the Sassanid Empire, and the need for the followers of that religion for rivers and priests to perform religious rituals.

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