

The contemporary western academic studies of the Quran and the Muslim stance

*Iffat Batool

Abstract

The history of Western scholarship on the Qur'ān demonstrates that it was directed, by and large, by polemic motifs. The roots of anger and hatred were so entrenched in the literature that it had lasting effects in two folds. On the one side the echoes of the then produced works on the Qur'ān can be heard in the contemporary western works on the Qur'ān. On the other hand, influenced the Muslim thought in a way that mostly they reject the Western academic scholarship setting it in the same old prototype of old polemic tradition and orientalism. The recent Western scholarship on the Qur'ān try to ensure the Muslims that it had liberated itself from the centuries old chains of bias and hatred. A debate can be witnessed among the western and the Muslim scholars on this issue. The western academicians try to inculcate the idea that the rise of objectivity and the scientific methods in the West has affected the discipline Qur'ānic studies. Hence, they claim for a transformation and in the recent western Qur'ānic studies.

Keywords: Qur'ān, West, Orientalism, Objectivity

Introduction:

The study of Islam in the West has a long and deep-rooted history more often directed with polemical motifs.¹ Having felt the pivotal status of the Qur'ān, the western scholars have been engaged in various fields of Qur'ānic studies with different dimensions and approaches. Almost 60,000 books have been written by the western pen covering the topics (Islam and Qur'ān) during 19th to mid of 20th century.² It is quite discernable that the majority ideas presented in this literature do not always conform to the mainstream Muslim scholarship on Islam. Moreover, Muslims often associate it with orientalism that had its own political, religious and colonial objectives. Hence, despite the existence of a vast corpus concerning Islam and more specifically the Qur'ān, the status of the western Qur'ānic scholarship is quite skeptical in the view of majority Muslim scholars. On the contrary, western scholar argue that the past efforts to study the Qur'ān in the West were shaped by the polemics of the times, the recent scholarship is however more objective and scientific.³

In fact, they try to inculcate the idea that the rise of objectivity and the scientific methods in the West has affected the genre of Qur'ānic studies as well and hence, they argue for a transformation in the western Islamic and more precisely Qur'ānic studies. Therefore, the western scholars hold the view that the Muslims should not discard the

*Ph.D Research Scholar, Lecturer, Tafsir Department, International Islamic University, Islamabad.

¹ Bennet, Clinton, "New Directions". In Clinton Bennet, ed. *The Bloomsbury companion to the Islamic studies* (Bloomsbury: New York. 2013), p. 260. And Rippin, Andrew, "Western scholarship and the Qur'ān", in *The Cambridge companion to the Qur'ān*, p.236.

There are countless writers who as well illustrated to this fact such as Norman Denial, Edward Said, Angelika Neuwirth and others.

² Said, Edward, *Orientalism; Western Conceptions of the Orient with New Afterwards* (London: Penguin books, 1995), p.64

³ Voll, John, "Changing Western approaches to Islamic Studies" in Mumtaz Ahmad, Zahid Bukhari and Sulayman Nyang, eds. *Observing the Observer, the State of Islamic Studies in American Universities*. (London: The international institute of Islamic thought, 2012), p.29

contemporary scholarship on the premise of orientalism. In the milieu of this dialogue, the present article shall examine various historical stages of the Qur'ānic studies in the West to analyze the idea of transformation. It also intends to shed light on issue of the reception of western Qur'ānic scholarship by the Muslim world. It will be argued that although the Qur'ānic studies in the West have witnessed some positive changes; there is a reflection of centuries old views in the treatises of recent studies. Hence, this has resulted the pejorative reception of the western scholarship on the Qur'ān in the Muslim world. It is hoped that this work will not only help to better understand the reasons behind the common Muslim perception of western Qur'ānic scholarship but also attempt to offer some solutions to the problem.

While doing so, the following issues will be the focus of this article. To have a sound analysis of the recent condition, the author shall present a short yet inclusive survey of the history of the western studies of the Qur'ān to look into the basic factors that generated concern for this field. As the Qur'ān, being the sacred book of the Muslims, was approached with diverse philosophies and thoughts, the Muslim world also showed various attitudes. The present work shall analyze those attitudes highlighting the factors that caused them. In the end, some of the recommendations will be given.

Foundations for the western study of Islam:

As the western scholarship on Islam is mostly considered a part of Orientalism⁴, it becomes essential to have a glance over the history of Orientalism. The hidden agenda of Orientalism was initiated with political, religious and military purposes as denoted by Edward Said (d.2003) in his well-known book and by many other western scholars in their treatises. Said frequently uses the term "Orientalism" for those studying the East and Islam. He also describes that Orientalism has its own aims and objectives. For this reason, he is criticized by many western writers. On the contrast, several Muslim intellectuals agree with his theses. In a Muslim expression, "it was a project of malice that bred out of frustration and it has been a plan to dislodge the noble scripture from its firmly enriched position in the Muslim world".⁵

Western thinkers and academic institutions confess that there were flaws in the classical Orientalism and hence they try to distance themselves from their predecessors. Consequently, its practice is abandoned by the western intellectuals in twenty-ninth international congress of Orientalists in 1973.⁶ Rather, the terms such as area studies and more recently, religious studies are being used.⁷

Many recent western scholars hold the view that because of the development of scholarly and scientific approach, the chapter of Orientalism is closed now. Furthermore, from the 20th century onward, new methods and styles are being introduced for the study

⁴ The term Orientalism was coined in 1769 and denotes to both the artists who represented the Orient in their paintings and the scholars who specialized in the Eastern cultures, religions and languages.

⁵ Manzur, Pervaiz, "Method against Truth: Orientalism and the Qur'ānic Studies". *Muslim world book reviews* 7, no. iv (1987), p.35

⁶ Lewis, Bernard, *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.103

⁷ Despite the fact that Western scholars have abandoned the term and changed their strategies and methods, many Muslim scholars still consider Occidental scholarship of the Qur'ān as a new weapon for old war. See for instance: Adbul Halim Uwais, "Al Isteshrāq Fi Ghazwa Jadīda." *Al Dirasat al Islāmīa* 18, no. 6, (1983), p.65

The contemporary western academic studies of the Quran and the Muslim stance of Islam and the old system of understanding Islam has been reshaped now. According to them, Islam was being studied with the perspective of theological scholasticism in medieval ages but from enlightenment period onward, a less religiously committed approach has developed. In addition to this, Muslim scholars also have become the part of western academia and playing a significant role in the development of academic and objective approach towards the study of Islam.⁸ In opposition, the Muslim scholars view it as a new cunning strategy of the West. The new approach is being considered a new weapon for old war.

The history of Orientalism reveals that from the very early times, there was a confrontation between the East and the West and more specifically between Islam and Christianity. Schimmel views regarding this atmosphere of misunderstanding that the Christianity has been dealing with different religions but the most misunderstood and attacked is Islam. She articulates further that from more than a millennium, it has been a threat for Europeans. The Muslims were regarded the arch enemies of Christianity and western civilization.⁹ This relationship of bigotry started with the very first contact of Christianity with Islam. It did not try to find the truth in Islam; instead, it fought with Islam bitterly and bigotedly.¹⁰

It is also very true that the responsibility lies on the shoulders of the intellectuals of Christianity and Judaism as they never succeeded to remove the causes of hatred and hostility. Instead, mostly they have been an important, if not chief, factor to increase that.¹¹ Accordingly, many misconceptions were generated on their behalf. A study of the medieval period shows that Islam was the most misunderstood religion in the West. It was titled as pagan and heretic religion. The prophet was famous as an imposter and false prophet who conquered the world with the power of his magic. He was merciless towards his enemies and had lust for power and women. It was impossible to imagine the person of Muhammad without sword whose only purpose was to either kill his opponents or conquer them. He was also charged with paganism and idolatry. The stories of bull that carried the new law between his horns were famous.¹² His followers were introduced as idolaters in literary works. In the Song of Roland they worshiped three gods, Tervagan, Mahomet and Apollo.¹³ As far as the holy Qur'ān was concerned it was considered as false, absurd and immoral. It was held to be incompatible with reason and other revelations. It was considered strange, unfamiliar and freak thing.¹⁴

The roots of this propagation lie in the hands of clergy men who out of their fear and complex allowed themselves to exceed the moral limits. In this war of confrontation, character assassination of Muhammad and Muslims has become their holy duty. One of the earliest biographers of Muhammad Giubert of Nogent has been reported

⁸ Voll, Changing western approaches, p.28-33

⁹ Schimmel, Annemarie, *Islam an Introduction* (New York Colombia University Press, 2012), p.1

¹⁰ Radhakrishnan, *East and West in Religion* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1958), p.63

¹¹ Tibavi, A.L, "English Speaking Orientalists" *The Muslim World* L111 (1963): 185-204. p.196

¹² Southern, R.W, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (England: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp.29-31

¹³ Ibid, p.32

¹⁴ Daniel, Norman, *Islam and the West (the Making of an Image)* (Oxford: One World, 1997), p.7

to say: "it is safe to speak evil of one whose malignity exceeds whatever ill can be spoken"¹⁵. This shows the negative tendency of the period in dealing with Islam.

A short and quick survey of the western literature of medieval and even modern times shows that literature had also been a contributory element in generating the negative ideas among folks against Islam and Muslims. The early medieval portrayal of Islam and the Prophet is discussed by many intellectuals in recent times even in the West¹⁶. Most of the literature was produced to defend and serve the Christian faith. In the words of Norman Daniel "information was extracted from the sources, whether Christian or Islamic, sometimes for amusement only, but more often to serve the high purpose of the Church".¹⁷

The polemical works of John of Damascus and Petrus Alfonsi and Peter the Venerable (1094-11560) had a deep influence in shaping the medieval concepts of Islam. They focused their attacks on the person of Muhammad and the Qur'ān.¹⁸

The polemic purpose of the writers was to negate the prophet hood of Muhammad and for this they tried their best to show his personality incompatible with revelation. The stories regarding his life were either invented or twisted. The distorted picture of Islam was presented before people to vilify the great religion. In his analysis of the individual authors, Norman sums up that medieval writers used even Islamic sources to deform Muhammad and Islam.¹⁹

The literary works, e.g. The Song of Roland of Tuoldus, The Divine Comedy" of Dante, The Pilgrim's Progress of John Bunyan, Man of Law's Tale of Chaucer, and The Fall of Princes of John Lydgate too presents a ridiculous and scornful picture of Islamic teachings, its founder and followers.²⁰

It is quite understood that it was the result of the rapid expansion that pushed the writers to distort the facts relating Islam. To face Islam's rapid westward expansion they maintained an attitude of hostility and ignorance. They also favored the rise of a complex network of legends and derogatory distortions that de- formed reality and cast the Prophet Muhammad as most powerful enemy of Christianity.²¹

By having a look in the modern literature, one can realize the impact of the then produced literature on later centuries. The echoes of those polemic works can be heard in the works of the writers of the modern times such as Humphrey Prideaux (d.1724), Voltaire.

¹⁵ Southern, p.32

¹⁶ For detail of the works related to the image of Islam in the West see: Masood, Hafiz Abid. "Islam in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature; a Select Bibliography." Islamic Studies 44, no. 4 (Winter 2005).

¹⁷ Islam and the west, p.271

¹⁸ Islam through western eyes, pp.66-71

¹⁹ ibid, pp.261-264

²⁰ For critical study of these works, see: Johnson, Galen, *Muhammad and ideology in medieval Christian literature* in Islam and Christian –Muslims relations, Vol 11, No 3, 2003. pp.333-346

²¹ Paret, Rudi, Islam and Christianity, p.91

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The distorted vision of Islam presented by the monks and clergy men in medieval times has become one of the received ideas in Europe later on and still it is difficult for people to get rid of those negative ideas and perceive Islam as a divine religion. In sum, the shadows of medieval writings on modern and postmodern writers were so deep that they could not free themselves from those inherited ideas and have been trying to present the old black in new white and old arguments a new twist. Rudi Paret articulates concerning this situation that for much that happened in the earlier centuries, and what one said and accepted in those times, has its effect somehow even today.²²

Origin of the western Qur'ānic studies:

The Qur'ān has been enjoying the fundamental status of Islamic world. Not only by the Islamic world, but its influential power over the global passage of history has been acknowledged by many western scholars. In the word of Arthur Arberry "Its influence on the course of history has obviously been immense, and will obviously continue to be extremely great".²³ Many among them believe that it is essential to have recourse to the Qur'ān if one desires to understand Islam.²⁴ Having felt the importance of the Qur'ān, the western scholars have been engaged in various fields of the Qur'ānic studies with different dimensions and approaches.

The fact that the Eastern Christianity had been very influential in forming the attitude of the western Christianity regarding the Qur'ān has been recognized by many. Two foremost works that influenced the western Christianity in great deal were the work of Abdul Masih b. Ishaq al-Kindi²⁵ and John of Damascus (d.749)²⁶. Al-Kindi, in his treatise, *Risala*, tried to prove the inauthentic and unoriginal nature of the Qur'ān. He also mentioned the story of the Christian monk Sergius in his work. The second was the work of John of Damascus. His work was as influential as *Risala* of Al-Kindi. His works have been considered as 'stock in trade in the West'.²⁷

The western scholarship on the Qur'ān started with the first translation of the Qur'ān in the 12th century. The Christian theologians began to study Islam in order to refute it. They, in fact, made an effort to make sound assaults on Islam by studying directly fundamental texts of Islam, particularly the Qur'ān. Instead of presenting an imaginary picture of Prophet with a bull, it was determined to overthrow Islam on intellectual and rational bases.²⁸ The motive behind the very first rendering was the defense of the Christian faith on rational basis. The outcome could be the same as in the

²² Ibid, p.91

²³ Arberry, Arthur, *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: George Allen & Unwin, 1995), vol, 1, p.33

²⁴ Endress, Gerhard, *Islam an Historical Introduction*. Trans: Carole Hillenbrand (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p.22

²⁵ Abdal Mahiḥ al-Kindi is pseudo-name of an Iraqi Christian writer of the 10th century. His work has been known as *Risalat al Kindi* (letters of al-Kindi).he wrote these letters to his Muslim friend who invited him to accept Islam. In these letters, he made a detail refutation of Islam and he invited his Muslim friend to convert to Christianity. The Arabic text of these letters had a significant impact on Latin European views of Islam via its translation by Peter, The Venerable.

²⁶ Tolan, "European accounts", pp.233-234

²⁷ Shryock, Andrew, *Islamophobia/Islamophilia*: (Indiana University Press), p.30

²⁸ Tolan, "European accounts", p.232

past but they at least admitted the understanding of the Qur'ān worthwhile. This willingness may be called a step forward for self-defense.

In Medieval times, systematic study of the Qur'ān became necessary for the Christian clerics in order to combat the Islamic threat.²⁹ The first half of the twelfth century was a milestone in the history of the oriental enterprise in the Qur'ānic studies. The step was taken on the initiative of Peter, The Venerable (d. 1156) who, like his predecessor John of Damascus, considered Islam a heresy that should be countered. He tried to justify the translation project to be in the interest of Christendom. He ordered his scholars to translate the early polemical works of John of Damascus and Al-Kindi against Islam that are famous now as Toledan Collection. Along with those works, the Qur'ān was first translated in Latin on his expense by the English scholar, Robert of Ketton (d. 1160), and completed in July 1143.³⁰ Robert also translated some other works of Islamic scholarship related to different sciences.³¹ The polemic zeal is evident from the title of this translation, *Lex Mahumet pseudoProphete* (The Religion of Muhammad, pseudo Prophet).³² Scholars are of the view that this translation provided the basis for other translations until the seventeenth century³³ and had been used as a major source by almost all of the significant European refuters of Islam.³⁴

By browsing the pages of the translation, one finds a plenty of the ridiculous notes. The hostility is clear from the words used in these notes. The favorite noun is *mandex* ("liar"), and adjective *stultissimus* ("extremely stupid").³⁵ The translation has many technical defects and is criticized by many western scholars.³⁶

In any case, it was the inglorious beginning of English renderings of the Holy Book of Islam inspired by hostile intention.³⁷ Many other translations such as Italian (1547), German (1616) and Dutch (1641) were based on it.³⁸

This translation was followed by another complete Latin translation by Mark of Toledo (d. 1216) around the year 1210 under the orders of Archbishop Rodrigo Jimenez de Rada (d. 1247).³⁹ This rendering, too, aimed at denouncing Islamic faith. The project

²⁹ Rehman, Fazlur, "Some Recent Books on the Qur'ān by Western Authors." *The Journal of Religion* 64, no. 1 (Jan, 1984): pp.73-95

³⁰ Southern, Western views, pp.34-5

³¹ Myers, A. Eugene, Arabic Thought and Western Learning in *The Golden Age of Islam* (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing co, 1964), p.81

³² Burman, Thomas, *Reading the Qur'ān in Latin Christendom; 1140- 1560* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press. 2007), p.15

See also: Southern, Islam through Western eyes, p.85

³³ Endress, *Islam*, p.7

³⁴ Bobzin, Hartmut, "A Treasury of Heresies". In Wild, Stefan, ed. *The Qur'ān as Text* (New York: E. J. Brill)

³⁵ Burman, Reading the Qur'ān, 60

³⁶ Arberry, The Koran, p.7

³⁷ *ibid*, p.7

³⁸ Zwemer S. M, "Translations of the Koran." *The Muslim World*, V, (1915): pp.244-61

³⁹ José and Martínez, Andrew Gray, "Translations of the Qur'ān and Other Islamic Texts before Dante": (Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries). *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*. 125 (2007.): p.85

See also: Burman, Reading the Qur'ān, p.17

The contemporary western academic studies of the Quran and the Muslim stance was under taken in the hope that it would be act as an instrument for the upholding the Christian faith.⁴⁰ It was titled as *Liber Alchorani* (The Book of the Qur'ān). It had a preface in which the author tried to draw a sketch of the biography of the Prophet of Islam and a short account of the expansion of Islam. But he had no kind words to say about Islam in his preface.⁴¹

In the following century, we find another important figure in the Qur'ānic scholarship. Spanish theologian, John of Segovia (d. 1458), translated the Qur'ān in to Latin in the last five years of his life. According to Southern, the translation is lost now.⁴² It is worthy to note that John was also of view that the conversion of Muslims should be based on intellectual basis. Thus, for him the deep and thorough study of the Qur'ān was essential.⁴³

In the first half of the sixteenth century, a number of works were produced on Islam and the Qur'ān. With the invention of printing, Arabic text of the Qur'ān was published in 1537 at Vince. The Latin translation of Robert was also published in 1543 by Zurich scholar Theodor Bibliander (d. 1564), who was the editor of the printed edition of the Qur'ān, along with other works. He was one of the strong proponents of the systematic Qur'ānic studies for refutation. After a long and hard controversy, he was authorized to print the Qur'ān.⁴⁴ Quite identical to his views was Martin Luther (d. 1546) who expressed his opinion regarding the translation of the Qur'ān in the following words:

“It has struck me that one is able to do nothing more grievous to Mohammad or the Turks, nor more to bring them to harm (more than with all weaponry) than to bring their Koran to the Christians in the light of day, that they may see therein, how entirely cursed, abominable, and desperate a book it is, full of lies, fables and all abominations that the Turks conceal and gloss over. They are reluctant to see the Koran translated into other languages, for they probably feel that it would bring about apostasy in all sensible hearts”.⁴⁵

For if indeed we had been able to have the necessary document here, it would finally have come to light, and if such a book should be kept in restraint by you (which God may prevent) we will find it somewhere and still release it . . . if the holy fathers don't get the heretical book to read, how would they take steps against its secret poison.”⁴⁶

First English translation was made by Alexander Ross (d. 1654) in 1649. But this translation was not based directly on Arabic. Instead it was based on French translation of Du Ryer (d. 1660).⁴⁷ Du Ryer is reported to have proficiency in Arabic and

⁴⁰ José and and Andrew, Translations of the Qur'ān, p.87

⁴¹ Burman, Reading the Qur'ān, pp.17-23

⁴² Southern, Western vies of Islam, pp.86-7

⁴³ Burman, Reading the Qur'ān, pp.178-182

⁴⁴ Bell, Introduction to the Qur'ān , p. 173. See also: Clark, Harry, "The Publication of the Koran in Latin a Reformation Dilemma" *The Sixteenth Century Journal*. 15, no. 1 (1984): 3-12. p.3

⁴⁵ Luthera n den Rat zu Basel, October 27, 1542 as quoted by Hagenbach, in “The Publication of the Koran in Latin: A Reformation Dilemma”, p.299

⁴⁶ “The Publication of the Koran in Latin: A Reformation Dilemma”, p.299

⁴⁷ World bibliography of translations, xxiv

Turkish but his translation too abounds in mistakes.⁴⁸ Ross' translation is considered extension of the mistakes to those of Du Ryer.⁴⁹

Ross too, frequently uses the harsh and piercing titles for the Prophet in his rendering. His expressions for the Qur'ān such as "A gallimaufry of errors," "Misshapen issue of Mahomet's brain," or "Corrupted puddle of Mahomet's invention" evidently demonstrate his polemic treatment.⁵⁰

It is worth mentioning that his translation was the first version of the Qur'ān in America, which came out in Massachusetts in 1806 and enjoyed a vast circulation until Sale's translation became the standard text.⁵¹ Later, another English professor of Arabic, Abraham Wheelock (d.1653) created a rendering and refutation of The Qur'ān.⁵² The Italian priest Ludovico Marracci (d. 1700) produced a careful Latin translation of the Qur'ān, along with the Arabic text, under the title 'Refutation of the Qur'ān' in 1698.⁵³ He is reported to have spent forty years of his life on Qur'ānic studies. His purpose was highly polemical as he studied Islam in order to destroy it with its own weapons.⁵⁴

It is quite remarkable that the majority of the early translations were titled as 'Mohamed's Qur'ān', 'The Qur'ān of the Turks', or 'Book of the Turks'. Another noteworthy thing is that most of the translations have a preface or discourse in which the translators tried to occupy the reader's mind and fill him with some presumptions regarding Islam and the Prophet(S). An example can be seen in the translation of John Rodwell (d. 1900) in which he stressed over the origin of Islam and tried his best to prove that it is the mixture of the Christian and Judaic teachings.⁵⁵ Even the western intellectuals acknowledge the existence of anti-Islamic spirit in these works.⁵⁶ It was George Sale who recommended the Christians to avoid the ill words and reproachful language for a deepest impression. In the preface of his translation, he lucidly mentions the flaws of earlier works on the Qur'ān highlighting the polemical tones they possess.⁵⁷

Next to the translation, the western literature falls into three main categories: (1) works that seek to trace the Jewish-Christian influence on the Qur'ān; (2) works that try to rebuild the chronological order of the Qur'ān; (3) works that examine the text or content of the Qur'ān.⁵⁸ The prominent experts of these fields were H. Ewald (d. 1875) Gustav Flugel (d. 1870), Gustav Weil (d. 1889), William Muir (d. 1905), Theodore

⁴⁸ Moher, The Qur'ān, p.327

see also: Sale, The Koran, viii

⁴⁹ Sale, The Koran, viii

⁵⁰ See: Ross, Alexander, "A needful Caveat," appended to the translation of the Alcoran of Mahomet, (1649) cited in Henry Stubb, An account of the rise and progress of Mahometanism, ed. Shairani, H. M. K. Lahore: Orientalia. 1954: p.253

⁵¹ Kalin, Ibrāhīm, "Roots of misconception by Ibrahim" In E. B. Lombard, Joseph, ed. *Fundamentalism and the Betrayal of Tradition* (Lahore: Suhail academy, 2007), pp.157-8

⁵² Saeed, The Qur'ān, p.103

⁵³ He entirely followed in his edition the Islamic system of numbering of the surahs and Āyāt. <https://exhibitions.cul.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/Qur'ān/Qur'āns/printed>

⁵⁴ Bernard, Islam and the West, p.88

Burman, Reading, p.150

⁵⁵ Rodwell, The Qur'ān, p.9

⁵⁶ A Bausani, "On Some Recent Translations of the Qur'ān". *Nuwmn* 4, no. 1 (1957): pp.75-81

⁵⁷ Sale, The Qur'ān, viii

⁵⁸ Rehman, Major Themes, p.v

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Noldeke, J. Wellhausen (d. 1918) Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921) H. Hirschfield (d. 1934), Fr. Schwally (d. 1919), G. Bergstreser (d. 1933) and Springer. They produced their works regarding the Qur'ān and its sciences. This century also witnessed the Orientalist's study of the chronology of the Qur'ān. The three scholars, who were engaged with this genre, were Aloys Springer, Hirschfield and Noldeke.⁵⁹

H. Ewald was the first to apply the science of textual criticism on The Qur'ānic studies. He also established the school of criticism for Islamic and The Qur'ānic sciences. His eminent students were Theodore Noldeke and J. Wellhausen.⁶⁰

The second edition of Arabic text of Qur'ān was published by Gustav Flügel (d. 1870) in 1834 with a significant translation⁶¹ that was later criticized by Arthur Jeffery (d. 1959) for its unscientific basis.⁶² He also published a concordance of the Qur'ān in 1842.⁶³ Either of his works were later evaluated and critiqued by scholars for his opposition to traditional surah arrangement and verse numbering system in his edition of Arabic text that later had a great impact on his concordance.⁶⁴

In 1844, Gustav Weil, produced his work regarding the arrangements of Qur'ānic chapters. In his work, *Historische-kritische Einleitung in den Koran*, he intended to place the Qur'ān in its historical context.⁶⁵

In 1851 Aloy Sprenger wrote the biography of the Prophet in German under the title, *Das Leben und die Lehr des Mohammad* in three volumes. Some of the pages were devoted to the Qur'ān. He discussed the distinction between Makkan and Madinan sūras and collection of The Qur'ān in those pages.

Muir, who had for long being in India, produced a work relating to the testimony of Qur'ān for the Bible. It is narrated that the work was an outcome of his attending many of the Christian and the Muslim scholar's debates in India. After witnessing the Muslim argumentation regarding the alterations on the Bible, he thought of the idea of creating such a treatise entitled as "The testimony borne by the Coran to the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures". His intention was to create a work with the Qur'ānic references for validity of the Bible.⁶⁶

In the same year, Theodore Noldeke wrote an essay regarding the history of the text of The Qur'ān in a contest and won the prize. Later he published his work in 1960 as *Geschichte des Qorans* (History of the Qur'ān).⁶⁷ His work is considered breakthrough in the western academia leading towards transformation in Qur'ānic studies.

⁵⁹ Rafiabadi, Naseem, *Challenges to Religion and Islam* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2007), p.356

⁶⁰ Khlifā, dirāsatul Qur'ān, 10

⁶¹ Saeed, Qur'ān, 105

⁶² Jeffery, Arthur, *Materials for the history of the text of Qur'ān* (Leiden: E. J. Brill. 1973)

⁶³ Flügel, Gustav, *Concordance of the Koran* (Lahore: Al Birūnī. 1978)

⁶⁴ Alkaf, Abdul Rehman, "A Critical Study of Gustav Flügel's Concordance of the Koran." *Radiance Views Weekly*. no. 1, (2010)

⁶⁵ Rippin, Andrew, "Western scholarship and the Qur'ān", In McAuliffe, Jane Dammen, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

⁶⁶ Powell, A. Avrill, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre- mutiny India* (New York: Routledge Corzon, 2003), p.162

⁶⁷ Bell, Introduction to the Qur'ān, p.174

The history of Qur'ānic Studies, spanning over centuries from medieval times to modern period, had proved itself to be a ground for the upcoming centuries. It was predominated by the polemic fervor of the priests and clergy men. By the passage of time, the bustle was joined by academics with a merger of polemic and intellectual zest.

Qur'ānic scholarship from 19th to 21st century:

As mentioned earlier, that Sale, in his preface advised the intellectuals to adopt a new strategy for study of the Qur'ān. His approach was followed in the upcoming centuries by many scholars. Montgomery Watt too, suggested his fellows to change their styles regarding the Qur'ān. Moreover, he elucidates that western writers have stopped saying that the Qur'ān is Muhammad's own book, not because they have accepted the Muslim point of view, but because of the fact that the Christian-Muslim contacts have been increased and so has trade.⁶⁸ As Watt was very true in his statement, the increasing contacts between Muslims and the West during nineteenth and twentieth centuries led to a grave change in Islamic studies. A transformation in style is implemented by the scholars of twentieth century onward in their works. The seminal change in the tenor is not only the result of the above mentioned factor. There are many scholars who have mainly indulged in this field out of their academic interests.

In the field of Qur'ānic translations too, it is worth mentioning that in recent times there are many scholars who have endeavored to produce translations in real academic meaning.⁶⁹ In addition, one can rarely trace the polemic tone in the introductions and prefaces of recent renderings.

In this regard, mention should be made of the contribution of '*The Muslim World*' in the field of The Qur'ānic studies. It was launched, as cited earlier, in 1911 by Samuel Zwemer (d. 1952). The journal, originated with missionary zeal, includes thousands of articles related to the Qur'ān and its sciences. Generally, what one sees is that the contributors of this journal also hold the traditional Christian stance regarding the Qur'ān, its history and collection. But, at present, it has developed a welcoming stance for the Muslim contributors although with critical approach towards the western image of Islam.⁷⁰

Besides, the 21st century witnessed a breaking down of traditional divide between the West and Islam. Scholars have started collaborating each other in their researches and findings. One can witness an excess of joint publications, encyclopedias, journals and companions related to the holy the Qur'ān. The movement, which started in 12th century to refute the book of 'infidels', has adopted diversities of styles now. The western scholarship has approached the variation of ways over the twentieth century. Many scholars have explored the general areas related to the Qur'ān without questioning the Muslim accounts of its origin.

Somehow, intellectuals believe that at the dawn of 21st century, the Qur'ānic studies is entering a new era as the old norms of the western scholarship are being changed now and challenged in the context of intellectual globalization. Furthermore, involvement of the Muslim scholars in academic activities can be a dynamic factor for

⁶⁸ Bell, Introduction, p.v

⁶⁹ Asad, Muhammad, *The Message of Qur'ān* (Dārul Anduls: Gibraltar. 1980), p.3

⁷⁰ For further detail: Abdul Karīm, Abdullah and Aābi, Mustafa, "Egocentric or Scientific: The Christian Perspective of the Qur'ān." *Journal of Qur'ānic Research and Studies*. 1, no. 1 (2006): pp.1-16

The contemporary western academic studies of the Quran and the Muslim stance transformation.⁷¹ Even though, we observe, from time to time, the reflection of ancient and ingrained notions in recent works regarding Islam in general and Qur'ānic studies in specific. Many intellectuals could not liberate, despite the assertions of objectivity, themselves from the preconceived notions of classical period. Hence, one cannot declare an entire change in the western academia. What can be affirmed is that some scholars, if not all, have endeavored to step ahead in the fulfillment of impartiality and objectivity in the genre of Qur'ānic studies.

It is quite worth mentioning that out of the vast corpus of Orientalists' scholarship, the work related to the contents of the Qur'ān is very few.⁷² The reason, according to the scholars, is their indulgence in the chronology and history of the text of the Qur'ān itself. He further says that the interest of the western savants in the sources and history of the Qur'ān only caused a kind of stagnation in their works.⁷³ History of the Qur'ān has gained their interest to extent that no other subject has gained.⁷⁴ It is also perceptible that from this plethora of works in past on the Qur'ān, many few have attempted to evaluate the functional power of the Qur'ān through a systematic study of the themes and the contents of the Qur'ān. The grave change that the Qur'ān brought in the individual and collective lives has been the least point in the discussions of the western works. At present, some scholars have drawn attention to researcher working on themes of the Qur'ān that resulted the emergence of many voluminous works.⁷⁵

Reception of the western scholarship in Muslim world:

As mentioned before that the recent western scholarship of the Qur'an has been considered by majority of the Muslims as part of Orientalism which itself has a pejorative meaning. Consequently, it could not gain appreciation and veneration among Muslim societies. It has been rejected vigorously by majority of Muslim scholars even though, with the acknowledgment of the constructive contribution of the western scholarship to the Qur'anic sciences' legacy. In Muslim world, the upsurge of strong critiques can be observed very clearly. Muslim scholars, in the previous two centuries, have tried to produce a vast body of literature to defend or clarify the position of Islamic accounts.

In the line of the countries confronted the West concerning the specific issue of defense of Islamic accounts, the Sub- continent particularly India, stands at the fore front. The academic efforts to meet the challenge of the then called Orientalism; Indian Muslim thinkers produced a bulk of works with a multitude of offensive and defensive approaches.⁷⁶ Among them, some noted scholars are Rehmatullah Kairanvi (d. 1891), Shibli Naumani (d. 1914), Amir Ali (d. 1928) and Sulaiman Nadvi (d. 1953). Mostly, their works relate to the Sira and the refutation of the orientalist in this regard. The works of Manazir Ahsan Gilani (b. 1892), Abdul Majid Darya Abadi (d. 1977) and Muhammad Hamidulla (d. 2002) revolve around the subject of Qur'ānic studies.

⁷¹ Voll, "Changing Western approaches, p.29

⁷² Manzur, "Method against Truth",

⁷³ Khalifa, *The Sublime Qur'ān*, p.58

⁷⁴ Shaib, Khidhar, Nubuwatu Muhammad Fil Fikrīl Isteshrāqī Al Muā'sir (Riyadh: Maktaba tul Abika, 2002), p. 280

⁷⁵ Andrew Rippin, "Qur'ānic Studies". In Clinton, Bennett, ed. *The Bloomsbury*, p.68-9

⁷⁶ Nadvi, Abu ul Hasan Ali, *Islamic Studies, Orientalism and Muslim scholars*. Tran: M. Ahmad (Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1983), p.18

In the Arab world we see a vast range of books and doctoral theses covering the topic of Orientalism and evaluating critically the works and findings of those works. It is a fact that many of the Muslim works consist of the pejorative and harsh phrasings pertaining the issue of the western scholarship of Islam.⁷⁷ In Iran, the recent scholarship has focused the academic works of western thinkers and started examining their theories and concepts on micro level.

The ongoing antagonism towards the western scholarship has some very logical grounds. Muslims are of the view that western schema of the Qur'ānic studies is based on stereotypes⁷⁸ and by using that frail basis, Islam has always been misinterpreted.⁷⁹ The academic interest were considered by Muslims as a prelude to practical application for the purpose of power over Orient.⁸⁰ Ultimately, among the consequences is denunciation of the western Qur'ānic scholarship by the Muslims.⁸¹

Jeffery Lang, in his analysis of the western scholarship, says that the Muslims consider the Orientalists as enemies of Islam as a result of the policies adopted by the western scholars. He, nevertheless, admires the efforts of recent scholarship for their endeavors for objectivity and justice.⁸²

The fact that the early western studies have always distorted the image of Islam is observed by many non-Muslim scholars too. It is evaluated by scholars that for many centuries the common image of Islam in the West was based entirely on the distorted reports of fanatical Christians. What was good in Muhammad was entirely ignored and what was not good, in their eyes, was exaggerated.⁸³

Another reason behind Muslim reaction is the disparaging attitude of the western authorities towards Muslim scholarship. Abdul Rauf articulates in this regard that they often try to belittle the status of long tradition of Muslim scholarship by applying the terms 'objective', 'scientific' and 'scholarly' to their works only. Moreover, they approach the Muslim works with a skeptical eye and criticism.⁸⁴

Even the unbiased non-Muslim scholars express the identical views regarding the undeserved treatment of Islam and its Holy Book by the western intelligentsia. An expert of the field of Islamic studies, famous for her objectivity and sympathetic tone, Schimmel articulates her views regarding this atmosphere of misunderstanding by saying that the West has been dealing many religions but the most misunderstood and attacked one is Islam.⁸⁵ A premier modern-day specialist of the field shares her findings and says

⁷⁷ One can easily find the expressions like Makar (deception), Iftera (falsehood or slander), and dhahadh (falsification) in the titles of the Arabic books.

⁷⁸ Namla, Ali bin Ibrāhīm, *Ishāmatul Musteshreqin Fi Nathr Et Turāth Al 'Arabīā* (Riyadh: Maktabatul Malik Fahad al Wataniyya, 1996), p.15

⁷⁹ See for example: Ibrahim, Ishāmāt, p.15. See also: Adnan, Wazzan. *Alisteshraq waal musteshreqūn*, Introduction.

⁸⁰ Zein, Christianity, Islam and Orientalism, p.165

⁸¹ Saeed, Qur'ān, p.98

⁸² Lang, Jeffery, *Struggling for Surrender* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2000), p.94

⁸³ Sale, The Koran, p.vii

⁸⁴ Abdul-Rauf, Muhammad, "Outsider's interpretation of Islam: A Muslim's point of view". In Martin, Richard C., ed. *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Oxford: One World. 2006), p.185

⁸⁵ Schimmel, Islam, p.1

The contemporary western academic studies of the Quran and the Muslim stance that “Qur’ān has been, for centuries, subjected to the Christian bias”.⁸⁶ Carl Ernest, another contemporary significant scholar conveys his findings and says that the English-Language scholarship has been and, miserably still, follows the norms of Oriental scholarship or works for polemical theological agenda.⁸⁷

While discussing the negative reception, it should not be neglected that many Muslim scholars have recognized the services of occidental academia regarding Islam. Mentioning the works of objective scholars, Hasan Ali Nadvi states that they have rendered many services to Islam and several among them have studied Islam for the satisfaction of their academic interests. They have contributed to further studies and researches and for this several Arab scholars too have highlighted the same point.⁸⁸ Certainly, many of them have enriched the library on Islam to great extent and many fair-minded scholars have made efforts to highlight the contribution of Islamic civilization to the journey of knowledge, the fact admitted by even those Muslim scholars who protest against the western academic assaults.⁸⁹ In this regard, the Muslims do not doubt that there have always been, in all ages, a small number of reliable non-Muslim western scholars whose sincerity, sympathy and goodwill are beyond doubt”.⁹⁰

It is worth noting that the recent western scholarship, as well, is well aware of this reality. Many scholars have denoted to the increase of Muslim sensitivity to Islamic studies in the West.⁹¹ Rippin also illustrates toward that fact and attempts to defend the western scholarship against the charges laid on them by Muslim academics.⁹²

He very skillfully notices the hostile responses to the western Qur’ānic scholarship and describes the causes saying that the general reception of the western scholarship of the Qur’ān is based on some negative events in the past. Simultaneously, he mentions that the Muslim world has accepted the scholarship of Toshihiko Izutsu without evaluation and no one questioned the authenticity of his works.⁹³

The underlying reason is the history of Orientalism and its biased studies. Centuries old literature had played an important role in shaping the common depiction of Islam in the West. Not only religious but their literary works have been presenting Islam as false religion and Prophet Muhammad as a combatant and warrior.

It is true that the centuries old reservations will take some time to move off. The polemical works of John of Damascus, Petrus Alfonsi (d. 1110) and Peter the Venerable had a deep influence in shaping the medieval concepts of Islam.⁹⁴ Even the literary works

⁸⁶ Neuwrith, Angelika, "Orientalism in Oriental Studies? Qur’ānic Studies as a Case in Point." *Journal of Qur’ānic Studies*. 9, no. 2 (2007): 115-27, p.120

⁸⁷ Reading strategies, p.2

⁸⁸ Nadvi, Islamic Studies, p.5

⁸⁹ Abdul-Rauf, Outsider, p.185

⁹⁰ Akhter, Shabir, *The Qur’ān and the secular mind; a philosophy of Islam* (Oxon: Taylor and Francis group. 2008), p.5

⁹¹ Adam, Charles, *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard Martin (One World: 2001), Forward

⁹² Rippin, Andrew. "The Reception, pp.1-8

⁹³ Rippin, Reception, p. 1, 7

⁹⁴ Lyons, Islam through Western eyes, pp.66-71

e.g. The Song of Roland of Tuoldus, The Divine Comedy” of Dante, The Pilgrim’s Progress of John Bunyan, Man of Law’s Tale of Chaucer, and The Fall of Princes of John Lydgate too presented a ridiculous and scornful picture of Islamic teachings, its founder and followers.⁹⁵

A brief study of the works written by European scholars with reference to the misrepresentation of Islam can make a reader well aware of the fact that, from medieval times onward, the emotions of resentment are ingrained in the western minds.⁹⁶ As a result of biased works, resistance and rejection to the western Qur’ānic scholarship can be discerned clearly. Manzur’s article is a sound illustration of Muslim suspicion in European studies of the Qur’ān.

As far as the works of Izutsu’s are concerned, the reason for welcoming Muslim stance lies, as many Muslims scholars view, in his unbiased approach for Islam and its Holy Book. Moreover, he didn’t write from the western perspective and manage to distance himself from the effects of tradition of Orientalism that has been dominating the western Islamic studies since long.⁹⁷

It is noteworthy that the followers of the three sacred religions i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have many common things to share but this common legacy was not able to prevent the negative feelings among them. The responsibility lies on the shoulders of the learned ones among the adherents of Christianity and Judaism as they never succeeded to remove the causes of hatred and hostility. Instead, mostly they have been the factor to increase that.⁹⁸

The new approach of study and objectivity is being admired and criticized simultaneously by Muslim scholarship and intellectuals. There are scholars who show a welcoming stance for new efforts. They see their attempts a step ahead towards new dispassionate approach.⁹⁹ Still, there are many who perceive this method a new weapon that has been adopted with the mentality of offence as the best defense. They opine that still the western work is a propaganda more than learning and that the occidental scholarship has only restructured the wordings for old ideas and their new activities too are the part of the long series of hostility and resentment towards Islam and the Qur’ān.¹⁰⁰ The fact is that, although, there are still many drawbacks and pitfalls in the works of the western academia, their struggles, for dispassionate study of Islam should be welcomed.

⁹⁵For critical study of these works, see: Johnson Galen, “Muhammad and ideology in Medieval Christian literature”. *Islam and Christen Muslims relations* 11, no, 3 (2003), pp.333-346
See also: Jamal, Image of the Prophet, Introduction.

⁹⁶ Masood, Hafiz Abid, “Islam in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature; A select bibliography”. *Islamic Studies*. 4, no, 44 (winter, 2005).

⁹⁷ Albayrak, Ismail, “The Reception of Toshihiko Izutsu’s Qur’ānic Studies in the Muslim World: With Special Reference to Turkish Qur’ānic Scholarship”. *Journal of Qur’ānic Studies* 14, no, 1. (2012.): pp.73-116. 80

⁹⁸Tibavi, English Speaking Orientalists, p.196

⁹⁹ Hussain, Sana Ullah, Qur’ān E Hakīm or Musteshreqīn (Islamabad: Allama Iqbal Open University, 2010), p.201

¹⁰⁰ Salim, Ismail, “Al Musteshreqūn wa Al -Qur’ān.” *Dawatul Haqq* 104 (1990): pp.15-17

See also: Doi, Abdur Rehman, *The Sciences of the Qur’ān* (South Africa: Dar al-Salam Islamic Research Centre), p. 295-6, and Wasti, The Qur’ān, p.242

The contemporary western academic studies of the Quran and the Muslim stance

There are works that truly can be called as gems and contribute considerably to scholarly study of The Qur'ān. Besides, there are several among them, who are trying to develop the trend to understand Islam from its own sources and are calling their fellows to study the Qur'ān by themselves and comprehend it in order to have peaceful relations with Muslims and to get rid of old biased stereotypes of Islam.¹⁰¹

Furthermore, the genesis of Islamophobia in the West is old traditions of hostility towards Islam and Muslims that have shaped the European mentality as a whole. Hence, a great awareness of those factors is essential to any intellectual schema that struggles to overcome Islamophobia.¹⁰²

H. R. Reland, a professor of Theology, has warmly recommended the application of justice in historical research towards Islam and its sources. In his Latin sketch of Islam, he vigorously endorsed the need of justice in the study of Islam and demanded his fellows to allow this religion to speak for itself. In his words “no religion is more calumniated than Islam”.¹⁰³ In sum, the words of a western scholar “the purpose of scholarship is to strive for truth for its own sake”¹⁰⁴ can be the best guidelines for scholars. In fact, wherever and whenever individuals fulfill the conditions of justice, fairness and impartiality, there is no way to discard their scholarship.

Conclusion:

The history of the western Qur'ānic scholarship of medieval times, influenced by the highly polemical works of Eastern scholars, demonstrates that the Qur'ān was the victim of distortion and misinterpretation. The extremely distorted images of Islam by the Christian missionary resulted in an antagonism that affected the entire history of the relationship of the East and the West.

Mainly, the western Qur'ānic scholarship started with the emergence of the first rendering of Qur'ān followed by a long series of translations. Indeed, the translators of the Qur'ān, from Medieval to modern times, can be declared among the most accountable authorities in the process of deformation as most of them have presented a pejorative conception of Islam in their preliminary discourses and prefaces.

With the emergence of academic approaches in the modern times, the intensity of bitterness and hostility in the writing style of the western scholars reduced to greater extent. At the dawn of 21st century, a transformation in the western academia emerged in the form of the Muslim contribution in various projects.

It is a fact that majority of the Muslims do not regard the western studies as objective and academic due to the reason of the past treatment of the Qur'ān. However, there are few scholars, Muslims and non-Muslims, who are optimistic in this regard. They are of the view that with the involvement of Muslims in the western academia and

¹⁰¹ See for instance the preface of ‘The Essential Qur'ān’ as the author advises his contemporaries to adopt just approaches in the study of Islam. p.viii

¹⁰² Andrew Shryock, *Islamophobia/Islamophilia*: (Indiana University Press)

¹⁰³ Hurgonje, Snouck, *Mohammedanism: Lectures on Its Origin, Its Religious and Political Growth and Its Present State* (New York: G.P. Putnam's sons, 1937)
<http://answering-Islam.org/Books/Hurgonje/hurgonje1.htm>, pp.2-3

¹⁰⁴ Rodinson, Maxime, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988), p.40

the increase in the collaborative activities, it is expected that the western scholars will liberate themselves from the old prejudices for a better comprehension of the Qur'ān leading in future to optimistic and constructive results. The endeavors of the western scholars to get rid of the centuries old rivalry and anger can affect the overall attitudes of the policy makers, think tanks and image producers. In this regard, efforts to produce joint works with the involvement of the major Muslim scholars can do a lot.