

William Muir on Qur'anic Composition: A Critical Evaluation of his Imagination

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Abstract

Authorship is the state or act of being the creator or inventor of a work. In Muslim-Christian relations, one of the most controversial topics was the authorship of the Glorious Qur'an. William Muir a Scottish historian and missionary claimed that the Glorious Qur'an was the result of human authorship rather than a divine revelation. He believed that the Qur'an was primarily written by Prophet Muhammad (saw). His views were in keeping with a broader trend among Western intellectuals at the time, who were skeptical of the vital religious texts of other cultures and religions. Muir applied the historical-critical method in analysing the Glorious Qur'an, examining it within the framework of seventh-century Arabian culture, and seeking to understand its origins and development from a historical perspective rather than a theological one. Although this argument is debatable, it needs specific, convincing, and concrete evidence to support it; Muir does not provide this, relying instead on a few flimsy pieces of evidence. Therefore, the research aims to explore, analyse and evaluate Muir's views on the authorship of the Glorious Qur'an in the light of the Islamic viewpoint and historical reality. This research will be conducted qualitatively, and mostly in a library context. According to the results of the findings, the claim that the Glorious Qur'an was composed by the Prophet (saw) is neither true nor reliable. This is due to the fact that upon closer examination, as Muir suggests that Prophet (saw) composed the Glorious Qur'an by himself in response to the circumstances of his time, lack sufficient evidence, because an individual cannot come up with an exceptional work and attribute it to someone else. Therefore, it is said that the Prophet (saw) could not have produce the great and magnificent book as Glorious Qur'an and attributed it to Allah. Hence, it has been proven that the challenges posed by the Qur'an remain unanswered, which strengthens its status as an authentic work inspired by Allah.

Keywords: William Muir, Imagination, Prophet Muhammad (saw), Qur'anic composition, Prophethood

Introduction

The concept of the authorship of the Glorious Qur'an has a long history. In the medieval period, Christian scholars wrote treatises on the Qur'an to discredit it and disprove its authenticity in the eyes of the general public. As a result, misleading assumptions and false assertions were made in many Christian works. Western Orientalists have studied the Qur'an in the light of their interpretation of the biblical revelation. According to this understanding, the revelation of the Qur'an consists of two elements: a divine element and a human element. This understanding naturally led them to reject the orthodox Muslim understanding that the Qur'an is the literal word of Allah. They claim that the Qur'an contains both divine and human elements. In other words, the Qur'an is not just the word of God, as most Muslims believe, but it is also the word of Muhammad (Aydin, 2002). The influence of these orientalist scholars who tried to prove that the Prophet (saw) was the author of the Holy Qur'an remained strong at the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century and even in due time (Daniel, 1966). One of the most prominent Orientalists who made this effort was William Muir.

William Muir's views on the authorship of the Qur'an are a subject of historical interest, especially in the context of nineteenth-century Western views on Islam. Muir was a Scottish Orientalist known for his work on Islamic history. In his works, especially "The Life of Muhammad from Original Sources" Muir expressed views that were characteristic of his time and reflected a colonial and critical view on Islam. He approached the Qur'an with skepticism and attempted to interpret it from a critical and historical stance, often challenging its divine origins. He also studied the social, political and cultural context of early Islamic society to understand how the Glorious Qur'an was influenced by or interacted with its surroundings. (Guenther, 1997). In addition, it is important to remember that Muir's views were influenced by the colonial mentality and Orientalist views prevalent at the time. This shows that Muir was greatly influenced by a number of famous Orientalists, including Goldziher, Pfander, Springer, Noldeke, and others. Thus, Muir declared his contempt for Islam, and used derogatory language against the Glorious Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad (saw) in a number of his books. (Daniel, 1966).

Problem Statement

One of the most contentious issues in Muslim-Christian relations is the composition of the Glorious Qur'an. Scholars from both Muslim and non-Muslim have written books and articles on this issue, which have been widely published. William Muir's writings are considered among the most controversial treatises of the Glorious Quran. Therefore, Muir's publications are highly respected and widely read in scholarly circles as well as in the Muslim community because of his deep knowledge of Islam. According to Muir, the Qur'an is the core of Muhammad's recorded words in his lifetime, covering his entire career and shedding light on his religious beliefs, public actions, and family life. Therefore, Muir rejects the Islamic interpretation of the Qur'an as the word of Allah. He believes that the arrangement of the Qur'an is incoherent and that it was compiled by the Prophet Muhammad (saw) not God. But in order to know whether his belief contradicts or agrees with the historical facts of the life of the Messenger (saw) we must study Muir's opinions and evidence regarding the composition of the Glorious Qur'an. The questions and the objectives here are to know how Muir presents his views on the Qur'anic composition, and to what extent is his portrayal of the Qur'anic composition contrary to the Islamic teachings and historical reality.

Literature Review

The discuss on the composition of the Glorious Qur'an is believed to be the main focus of interactions between Muslims and Christians. Muslim and Christian scholars have conducted a large number of studies on this subject. Muir is a highly intellectual scholar and interested in Islamic Studies. Despite his writings and in-depth discussions about Islam, his views have not received sufficient attention. It has been shown that most of the authors who evaluated the Christian point of view on the composition of the Glorious Qur'an ignored him. Even the works available about him seem sketchy and descriptive. However, the evaluation of Muir's views on the authorship of the Glorious Qur'an remains incomplete.

In the article by Ghulam Hussain Babar and Muhammad Feroz-ud-Din Shah Khagga "*Attentive Muslim reflections on Orientalists' conception of Sirah*" The authors describe how Muslim historians became interested in Orientalist approaches to the biography of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) after Muir's work in the second half of the nineteenth century. The authors have highlighted Syed Ahmed Khan's views and responses to William Muir's book. However, the authors cite Jabal Muhammad Buaben's work as a critical analysis of the three most influential English writers of the current time, William Muir, David S. Margoliouth, and William Montgomery Watt. However, the authors do not provide a detailed and critical evaluation of their views. Therefore, the discussion appears to be descriptive rather than evaluative. (Ghulam & Feroz-ud-Din, 2013).

Hadeer Abou El Nagah in his article "*Imaging Prophet Mohammed and the Orient Prototype in English Biographies*" outlines the basic beliefs of Orientalists, saying that some claim to be objective, while others do not hide their hostile and biased views. The uniqueness of the article prompted the author to explore the development of the image of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) in biographical writings in English, through the lights of Edward Said's Orientalism, specifically on W. Montgomery Watt's book *Mohammed in Mecca* and Karen Armstrong's *Mohamed a prophet for our time*. However, the author describes the hostile view taken by William Muir against the Prophet Muhammad (saw), but no evaluation of his views in this regard has been found. The article will be useful in presenting Muir's views on the authorship of the Glorious Qur'an and contemporary Christian approaches to Islam. (Hadeer, 2015).

The article "*Orientalism on the revelation of the Prophet: the cases of W. Montgomery Watt, Maxime Rodinson, and Duncan Black MacDonald*" is another important article written by Muhammad Benaboud in the field of Christian-Muslim engagement. Benaboud traces the views of some Orientalists and their positive discussions about the revelation of the Prophet (saw) and describes how Western perceptions of Islam were formed. The author sheds light on issues such as revelation and the Prophet's biography. The author's exploration provides insight into the relationship between two greatest religions of the world, laying a solid foundation for research. (Benaboud, 1986).

In the article written by Jabal Muhammad Buaben "*The Image of the Prophet Muhammad in the West*," addresses the principal focus of Western studies on the life of the Prophet (saw). The author examines the unflattering portrayal of the Prophet (saw) in polemical texts from the medieval period to the twentieth century. He notably mentions David Samuel Margoliouth, William Muir, and William Montgomery Watt while examining a

variety of themes seen in contemporary Christian literature. His writings, meanwhile, seem to be more descriptive than analytical. Thus, we still lack critical evaluation grounded in historical facts and an Islamic perspective. (Buaben,1996).

After conducting a comprehensive examination of the existing literature on William Muir and related topics related to the status of the Qur'anic composition, the researcher noted that the majority of books and articles prioritize the views of other Christian academics over those of Muir. A few of them have mentioned him, but they have not provided a critical evaluation of his imagination in the light of historical facts and Islamic perspective. As a result, a review of the literature reveals that Muir's views on the authorship of the Qur'an have not yet been subjected to a comprehensive and critical review.

Methodology

The article is conducted using qualitative research method. Creswell defines the qualitative research method as a systematic approach to investigating a particular topic in order to fully understand it (Creswell, 2012). To fully evaluate William Muir's views on the authorship of the Glorious Qur'an, descriptive, historical, analytical, and evaluative methods approaches are used.

The study is categorized into two parts. The first part is a comprehensive study of Muir's imagination on the composition of the Glorious Qur'an, and the second is a critical evaluation of his imagination on the subject based on Islamic viewpoint and historical reality.

Analysis of Muir's Imagination on the Qur'anic composition

As a first stage, Muir began the process of developing his argument by stating that the Prophet (saw) composed the Qur'an himself in response to the situation of his time. Muir argues that the Prophet (saw) composed the Glorious Qur'an on his own due to the impurity of the Quraysh, who were afflicted with ignorance, paganism, and vices, which prompted the Prophet (saw) to seek anguish and meditation in the Cave of Hira. In this situation, he confirmed that the Prophet (saw) began to formulate his ideas and confirmed that they came from God. These ideas include the concept of the monotheistic nature of God, the concept of reward for all deeds and actions, the idea of resurrection, and the concept of heaven and hell, all of which are central themes in the Prophetic message (Muir, 1872).

Muir seems to have come to the conclusion that the Prophet Muhammad (saw) is the author of the Qur'an as a result of his investigation into the sources and origins of the Qur'an, as will be discussed critically. However, Muir tells the story on how the Prophet Muhammad (saw) became the author of the Glorious Qur'an, illustrates that when the Prophet (saw) approached forty years of age, he would often seek comfort in the isolation of a cave at the summit of Hira. He was always contemplating and disturbed by the humiliating condition of his people (Muir, 1897). Moreover, the vague and incomplete shadows of Judaism and Christianity aroused doubts without satisfying them, and he felt confused and doubtful about which religion was the true one. However, instead of making him feel better, being alone increased his anxiety and gave it a more acute form that made his soul restless (Muir, 1897). According to Muir, the Prophet (saw) was waiting for a divine command to relieve him of the hardships of life (Muir, 1923). In this case, as Muir claimed, the Prophet (saw) was sitting or walking between the peaks of Hira, and in this case the figure of (the angel Gabriel) suddenly

appeared before him, expressing his inner turmoil and emotional speech. In one vision, a heavenly visitor, identified as the angel Gabriel, stood clearly and closely before him (Muir, 1923). Therefore, the Prophet (saw) was ordered to spread his message, and then he claimed that the first five verses of Surah al-Alaq were direct divine verses (Muir, 1897).

RECITE in the name of the Lord who created, - Created Man from nought but congealed blood;- RECITE! For thy Lord is beneficent. It is He who hath taught (to write) with the pen;- Hath taught man that which he knoweth not...

Thus, according to Muir, Surah al-Alaq represents the formal beginning of the Prophet's assumption of the divine office of prophethood. He said that the Prophet (saw) himself declared that the five verses of Surat Al-Alaq were the beginning of his heavenly revelation after a period of hesitation and doubt. (Muir, 1897). Finally, Muir argues that the Qur'an can be attributed to Muhammad's mental state and personal convictions, rather than to it being a divine revelation from God. He also stated that the Prophet (saw) absorbed the principles of Judaism and Christianity, and then established a system that gradually unified and revitalized the fragmented Arab population, creating a cohesive political entity that served as the foundation for the emerging religious faith. Muir explains:

Such a process is that of the workman shaping his material. It is not that of the material shaping its own form, much less (as some would hold) moulding the workman himself. It was Mohammad that formed Islam; it was not Islam, or any pre-existing Muslim spirit, that moulded Mohammad (Muir, 1923).

Therefore, this argument highlights Muir's general view on the authorship of the Qur'an. The statement indicates that a large part of the content in the Qur'an can be traced back to previously identified sources. And any content that cannot be attributed to these sources is believed to have originated from the author of the Qur'an (the Prophet).

After providing an overview of Muir's general view of the authorship of the Qur'an, we can say that it was his unfounded assessment that led him to attribute the authorship of the Qur'an to the Prophet (saw). This may explain why he consistently attributed the text to the Prophet (saw) when discussing the Qur'anic composition. Therefore, when examining the Qur'an from this imagination, Muir seems to explicitly deny its divine nature.

Muir's Evidence and Assertion

Identifying the sources of the Qur'an, as put forward by Muir, such as: Jeedo-Christian traditions and the personal thoughts of Muhammad, can be considered as convincing evidence indicating that Muhammad is the author of the Qur'an. Therefore, having established that Muhammad is the author of the Qur'an, we can conclude that its composition was not inspired by God. If it was not created by God, then his claim that it was from God must be false. On this basis, Muhammad was a liar, and his Qur'an must be rejected.

Refutation on Muir's imagination on the composition of the Glorious Qur'an

To properly reveal the flaws and falsehoods of this assertion, efforts must be taken to explain the logic behind the divine origin of the Glorious Qur'an. Therefore, the subsequent conversation will contain both rational and Islamic perspectives. First, if Muir's argument

about the authorship of the Qur'an is critically examined from a rational point of view, we can conclude that it is illogical and unsupported by evidence. We can reasonably say that no author would think of giving the honor of his excellent work that he worked day and night to accomplish to someone else, especially if his society values people who are so creative and productive. Israr Ahmad says: "If the Prophet Muhammad (saw) was responsible for developing the book, why did he not attribute it to his name? (Israr, 2000). This is because if a person creates a great work, such as the Glorious Qur'an brought by the Prophet (saw) he would prefer to attribute it to himself rather than to anyone else.

At this very point, Abdullah Draz presented a more rational argument that there is no reason in claiming that Muhammad (saw) is the author of the Glorious Qur'an. The author assumed that there is a well-established understanding that some writers engage in plagiarism, falsely attributing the work of others to themselves. They also steal from others to improve their work. Historically, no author has attributed his exceptional work to another individual (Draz, 2001). However, if it is true that no one can attribute his merit and excellent work to anyone other than himself, then how can it be logical that Prophet (saw) was the one who composed the Glorious Qur'an, which is the most wonderful work ever found in human history, and then attributed it to God and not to himself? Drez came to a conclusion by saying:

No rational person who makes a claim to leadership and supports his claim with miraculous events would attribute his finer goods to someone else, disowning them totally and completely. In fact, the opposite is true; his position would be enhanced if he were to claim such goods to himself. Moreover, he would meet no objection to his claim from any person on earth (Draz, 2001).

If the Prophet Muhammad (saw) was the author of the Glorious Qur'an, he would have attributed it to himself in order to receive the honor that was previously given to the people of the Arabian Peninsula who were famous for their persuasive and inspiring sayings. Hence, the conclusive evidence that the Prophet (saw) always attributed the Qur'an to God and not to himself is conclusive evidence that he was not its author.

In addition, some of the verses in the Glorious Qur'an confirm that the Prophet (saw) is not the creator of its content, but rather attribute its authorship to God. In several occasions, Allah the Almighty says:

Verily! We have sent it (this Qur'an) down in the night of al-Qadr (Decree)" (Qur'an, 97: 1). "And truly, this (Qur'an) is a revelation from the Lord of the Alamin (mankind, jinns and all that exists). Which the trustworthy Ruh (Gabriel) has brought down. Upon your heart (O Muhammad (saw)) that you may be (one) of the warners" (Qur'an, 26: 192-94). "(Qur'an) is a Revelation from the Lord of the worlds" (Qur'an, 56: 80). "Do they then not consider the Qur'an carefully? Had it been from other than Allah they would certainly have found therein much contradictions" (Qur'an, 4: 82). "Say (O Muhammad (saw)) If Allah had so willed, I would not have recited it (the Qur'an) to you, nor would He have made it known to you. Verily, I stayed amongst you a whole lifetime before it (the Qur'an). Have you then no sense? (Qur'an, 10: 16). "And when Our clear verses are recited unto them, those who hope not for their meeting with Us say: Bring us a Qur'an other

than this or change it. Say (O Muhammad (saw.)) it is not for my own accord to change it; I only follow what is revealed unto me..." (Qur'an, 10: 15). "Neither did you (O Muhammad (saw)) read any book before it (this Qur'an), nor did you write any book (whatsoever) with your right hand. In that case, indeed, the talkers of vanities would have doubted" (Qur'an, 29: 48). "...And We have sent down unto you (O Muhammad saw)) the reminder and the advice (the Qur'an), that you may explain clearly to men what is sent down to them and that they may give thought" (Qur'an, 16: 44).

However, all the previous verses confirm that the Holy Qur'an was authored by none other than seen, and that Muhammad's primary mission was only to receive it and deliver it to the people to whom it was sent. To prove that it was made by a heavenly creature, the author challenges the world of jinn and humans to create something similar if they believe it was written by someone. "Say (O Muhammad (saw)) if the mankind and the jinns were to come together so as to produce the like of the Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they helped one another". (Qur'an, 17: 88). When they did not accept this challenge, the author presented a more explicit challenge, which was simply to create ten surahs similar to those in the Glorious Qur'an. He says: "Or they say he (Prophet Mu'ammad (saw)) forged it (the Qur'an) (and attributed it to Allah). Say (unto them) bring you (just) ten forged chapters similar to it, and call whomsoever you can, other than Allah (to help you), if you speak the truth!" (Qur'an, 11: 13). And when they didn't respond, the author gave them an easy challenge: bring in one chapter. He says: "And if you (Pagan Arabs, Christians and Jews) are in doubt about that which We have sent down (the Qur'an) to Our servant (Prophet)), then produce a (single) chapter similar to that of it (the Qur'an) and call your witness (helpers and supporters) other than Allah, if you are truthful. But if you do it not, then you can never do it. Therefore, fear the fire (Hell) whose fuel is men and stones, prepared for the disbelievers". (Qur'an, 2:23).

These challenges continue to the present day. Whoever believes that he is able to compose a system that comparable to that of the Glorious Qur'an, whether it is ten surahs or even one surah, let him try to do so. However, if he lacks the ability to address these challenges effectively, it should be ashamed of his audacity to claim that they were authored by someone other than Allah. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Prophet Muhammad (saw) was not the only person with an exceptional memory or the ability to effortlessly pick up the information. He was not the only person who possessed such qualities as a remarkable ability to express ideas, a certain level of imaginative enthusiasm, and a degree of lyrical grandeur. Where is the world of humans and jinn? Why did they not send down the revelation that the Prophet Muhammad (saw) brought? If the Glorious Qur'an had been written by the Prophet (saw) himself, then other humans and jinn would have been able to write something equal to what the Prophet (saw) wrote, and perhaps even surpass it. The inability of anyone to make a verse equivalent to the Glorious Qur'an, and the lack of evidence to support this claim, indicates that God, and not a human or jinn, is the true author of the Glorious Qur'an.

Finally, since the challenges posed by the Qur'an have never been answered, the book has been able to successfully establish itself as an authentic divine masterpiece. For anyone to deny that the Qur'an is inspired by God, they must first demonstrate that it is reasonable to attribute good authorship to someone else, and then answer the challenges posed by the Qur'an itself; failure to do so will ensure that their argument will always be meaningless. On this basis, can we conclude that Muir's imagination that the Qur'an was authored by the Prophet (saw) is unreasonable and unjustified?

Conclusion

The above discussion clearly expresses Muir's imagination on the authorship of the Glorious Qur'an. As mentioned earlier, Muir claimed that the Prophet (saw) must be the author of the Glorious Qur'an because its source is not revelation. This statement indicates that if God is not the author of the Qur'an, the Prophet (saw) is lying when he claims that the Glorious Qur'an is a divine revelation. Therefore, the evaluation concluded that the individual could not produce exceptional work and attribute it to someone else. Thus, it was said that the Prophet Muhammad (saw) could not have brought the great book, as the Glorious Qur'an, and attributed it to God. Hence, it has been proven that the challenges by the Glorious Qur'an remain unanswered, which reinforces its status as an authentic and divinely inspired work.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors expressly declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that might have interfered with their work on this study.

Author's Contribution

After completing an extensive textual and literary analysis on the subject in question, the researchers assert that there has been no comprehensive analysis and evaluation of Muir's views on the composition of the Glorious Qur'an, especially when viewed from an Islamic perspective and in light of the larger picture of historical reality. The objectives of the research are to fill the knowledge gap and to enhance Christian views on the authorship of the Glorious Qur'an.

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