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ORIENTALISM AND QUR'ANIC STUDIES: AN EXAMINATION OF RICHARD BELL'S METHODOLOGY IN RECONSTRUCTING THE HISTORY OF THE QUR'AN

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ABSTRACT

Sejumlah pandangan orientalis terhadap Al-Qur'an dinilai problematis karena cenderung menempatkan Al-Qur'an semata-mata sebagai produk sejarah dan konstruksi budaya Arab pada abad ketujuh. Salah satu tokoh orientalis yang berpengaruh dalam studi Al-Qur'an adalah Richard Bell, yang mengkaji proses pewahyuan, kodifikasi, dan struktur Al-Qur'an melalui pendekatan historis-kritis serta filologis. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pemikiran Richard Bell dalam studi Al-Qur'an, mengidentifikasi landasan metodologis yang digunakannya, serta mengkaji respons sarjana Muslim terhadap pandangan tersebut dalam konteks kajian orientalisme. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kepustakaan (library research). Data diperoleh dari karya-karya Richard Bell, literatur orientalis, serta tulisan para sarjana Muslim yang mengkaji dan mengkritisi pemikirannya. Data dianalisis secara deskriptif-analitis melalui analisis isi (content analysis) dengan pendekatan historis-intelektual. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemikiran Richard Bell dibangun di atas paradigma historis-kritis Barat yang memandang Al-Qur'an sebagai dokumen historis yang mengalami proses perkembangan dan penyusunan secara bertahap. Pendekatan tersebut menghasilkan sejumlah kesimpulan yang berbeda dengan paradigma keilmuan Islam yang meyakini Al-Qur'an sebagai wahyu yang otentik dan terpelihara. Oleh karena itu, kajian terhadap pemikiran Richard Bell perlu ditempatkan secara kritis dan objektif, dengan mempertimbangkan perbedaan epistemologi antara tradisi orientalisme dan tradisi keilmuan Islam, sehingga dapat memperkaya dialog akademik tanpa mengabaikan prinsip-prinsip dasar ajaran Islam.

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Keywords:
Orientalism, Richard Bell, western scholarship, qur'anic studies, historical-critical approach

ABSTRACTS
Orientalism has become one of the major approaches in Western Islamic studies, contributing to scholarly discussions while also generating various critiques of the Qur'an and Hadith. One of the most influential Orientalist scholars in Qur'anic studies is Richard Bell, whose works examine the process of revelation, compilation, and structure of the Qur'an through historical-critical and philological approaches. This study aims to analyze Richard Bell's thought in Qur'anic studies, identify the methodological foundations underlying his approach, and examine Muslim scholars' responses to his perspectives within the broader discourse of Orientalism. This research employs a qualitative method using a library research approach. The data are collected from Richard Bell's works, Orientalist literature, and the writings of Muslim scholars who have analyzed and critiqued his ideas. The data are analyzed descriptively and critically through content analysis within a historical-intellectual framework. The findings reveal that Richard Bell's thought is grounded in the Western historical-critical paradigm, which views the Qur'an as a historical document that underwent a gradual process of development and compilation. This approach leads to conclusions that differ from the Islamic scholarly paradigm, which upholds the Qur'an as an authentic and divinely preserved revelation. Therefore, Richard Bell's thought should be examined critically and objectively by considering the epistemological differences between the Orientalist tradition and the Islamic intellectual tradition. Such an approach may contribute to a more constructive academic dialogue while maintaining the fundamental principles of Islamic scholarship.

A. INTRODUCTION

As the primary source of Islamic teachings, the Qur'an serves as a guide for regulating various aspects of human life and is regarded as the greatest miracle containing guidance for all humanity. Nevertheless, the authenticity of the Qur'an remains a subject of debate among some Western scholars, particularly Orientalists (Putri 2025, 14). Some Orientalist perspectives on the Qur'an are considered problematic because they tend to emphasize the Qur'an as a historical product and a cultural construction of seventh-century Arab society. Such an approach not only diminishes the Qur'an's status as transcendent revelation and the primary source of Islamic teachings, but also overlooks the divine dimension that constitutes the foundation of Islamic theology. From this perspective, the Qur'an is positioned as a historical document entirely shaped by the social, political, and psychological circumstances surrounding the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Consequently, the divine authority, authenticity, and sacredness of the Qur'an have frequently become subjects of criticism and debate within Orientalist scholarship (Kishi et al. 2026, 31).

Historically, Orientalist scholarship on the Qur'an cannot be separated from the historical relations between the Western and Muslim worlds. In the early stages of its development, Qur'anic studies among Orientalists were heavily influenced by missionary interests, colonialism, and theological polemics aimed at maintaining the religious and civilizational superiority of the West. Within this context, the Qur'an was often positioned as an object of criticism intended to question its authority and authenticity. Along with the development of modern academic traditions, Orientalism underwent methodological transformations by adopting historical, philological, linguistic, and textual-critical approaches to the study of the Qur'an (Mz 2018, 67).

During its early phase, Orientalist studies were predominantly shaped by missionary interests, religious polemics, and colonialism, which resulted in the Qur'an being treated as an object of criticism directed toward Islamic teachings. Entering the twentieth century, Orientalism developed into an academic field that employed philological, historical, textual-critical, and linguistic approaches to investigate the origins, transmission, chronology, and codification of the Qur'an. This methodological shift generated various new perspectives in Qur'anic studies, although many of them were constructed upon a historical-critical paradigm that differs from the epistemological framework of Islamic scholarship (Wansbrough 1977, 25).

Among the Orientalists who have had a significant influence on the development of Qur'anic studies is Richard Bell. Through his works The Qur'an Translated with a Critical Rearrangement of the Surahs and Introduction to the Qur'an, Bell developed a historical-critical approach by examining Muhammad's prophetic experience, the history of the formation of the Qur'anic codex (muṣḥaf), the structure of the Qur'an, and the chronology of revelation. He also proposed hypotheses concerning a process of editorial revision and gradual arrangement of the Qur'anic text based on philological and historical analysis (Al-Azmi 2003, 315). Nevertheless, Richard Bell's methodology remains a subject of debate among Muslim scholars. Most previous studies have tended to focus on critiques of Bell's conclusions regarding the authenticity and history of the Qur'an, while analyses specifically examining his methodological framework, epistemological assumptions, and scholarly implications remain relatively limited. Understanding Bell's methodology is therefore essential for explaining how his arguments were constructed and for evaluating their strengths and limitations from the perspective of ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān.

This study seeks to contribute to the development of Qur'anic studies through a comprehensive analysis of Richard Bell's historical-critical methodology within the tradition of modern Western Orientalism and by examining it from the perspective of the epistemology of ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān. Unlike previous studies, which have generally focused on criticizing Richard Bell's conclusions concerning the origins, chronology, and codification of the Qur'an, this study emphasizes an analysis of the methodological foundations and epistemological assumptions underlying the construction of his thought (Kishi et al. 2026, 87). Accordingly, this study is expected to facilitate a more objective academic dialogue between the Islamic scholarly tradition and Western academic approaches, without disregarding the distinctive epistemological characteristics of each tradition. Furthermore, this study aims to strengthen a critical and proportionate attitude among Muslim scholars in responding to Orientalist scholarship, so that methodologically valuable scholarly contributions can be acknowledged, while assumptions that contradict the fundamental principles of Islamic scholarship can be critically evaluated through rigorous and academic argumentation.

Within the context of contemporary Qur'anic studies, an examination of Richard Bell's thought has become increasingly relevant, as current Qur'anic scholarship is characterized by growing dialogue between the Islamic scholarly tradition and Western academic approaches. This study is expected not only to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of modern Orientalism but also to enrich the field of Qur'anic studies through a critical, objective, and proportionate analysis. Thus, this research seeks to establish a space for scholarly dialogue that remains grounded in the

principles of Islamic epistemology while acknowledging the methodological contributions that have developed within the Western academic tradition.

B. METHOD

Based on the aforementioned issues, this study employs a library research method with a qualitative-descriptive approach (Lexy 2018, 13). The primary data sources consist of Richard Bell's works, particularly Introduction to the Qur'an and The Qur'an Translated with a Critical Rearrangement of the Surahs, while the secondary data are drawn from literature on Orientalism, Qur'anic studies, and Muslim scholars' responses to Richard Bell's thought. The data are analyzed using content analysis combined with a historical-intellectual approach to identify the methodological foundations, epistemological assumptions, and characteristics of Richard Bell's thought in Qur'anic studies. Through this approach, the study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Richard Bell's position within the tradition of Western Orientalism and the relevance of his thought to contemporary Qur'anic studies discourse.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Definition of Orientalism and a Brief History of Its Emergence

Etymologically, the term Orientalist derives from the word "Orient," meaning "East." The term originates from the Latin word oriens, meaning "rising," which refers to the direction of the rising sun. Meanwhile, the suffix -ist or -ism indicates a particular doctrine, tendency, or intellectual orientation (Sholihah 2022, 20–21). Terminologically, an Orientalist refers to an individual who specializes in studying various aspects of Eastern societies, including their languages, literature, cultures, histories, religions, and civilizational developments. Orientalist studies encompass a broad range of disciplines related to the social, cultural, political, and religious dimensions of the Eastern world. In the context of Islamic studies, the term Orientalist is generally used to refer to Western scholars who conduct research on Islam from various perspectives. However, such scholarship has not been free from criticism, particularly concerning the possibility of subjectivity, bias, or particular interests influencing the construction of their views of Islam (Muhammad Riza Fahlevi, Abd Rahman Nasution 2026, 801).

In his work Orientalism, Edward Said views Orientalism as an intellectual and social construction developed by the West in representing the East. According to Said, this construction not only portrays the East as exotic, traditional, and backward, but also places it in an inferior position compared with the West, which is perceived as advanced and superior. Furthermore, Said argues that Orientalism is closely connected to relations of power, since knowledge about the East produced by the West can function as an ideological justification for political domination and colonial practices over Eastern societies (Said 1978, 2).

The emergence of Orientalism cannot be separated from the complex historical, political, religious, and intellectual circumstances that developed in the Western world from the Middle Ages to the modern era. Its development was not driven solely by academic interests in understanding the Eastern world, but was also associated with various practical interests, including religious proselytization, political objectives, and colonial expansion (Shafaunnida 2022, 25–35). In Qur'anic studies, Orientalism refers

to a Western intellectual tradition that places Islam and the Qur'an as objects of scholarly investigation through historical, philological, and critical approaches. This tradition developed alongside increasingly intensive interactions between the Islamic and Western worlds, whether through theological debates, intellectual activities, or political and colonial interests. The Qur'an subsequently occupied a central position in Orientalist scholarship because of its status as the primary source of Islamic teachings and as a foundation for the development of Muslim civilization.

With the development of modern Orientalism, the study of the Qur'an gradually shifted from predominantly polemical approaches toward more systematic forms of academic inquiry. Orientalist scholars began employing various methods, including textual criticism, historical analysis of revelation, philological studies, and comparative analyses of the Qur'an in relation to Jewish and Christian religious traditions (Lewis 1993, 5). These approaches were based on the assumption that the Qur'an could be examined as a religious text formed within particular social, cultural, and historical contexts. This assumption constitutes one of the principal points of difference between Orientalist perspectives and the views of Muslim scholars. Some Orientalist scholars approach the Qur'an within a historical framework and regard it as a text closely connected to the social conditions and intellectual development of seventh-century Arab society. This perspective subsequently generated various theories concerning the possible influence of earlier religious traditions, particularly Jewish and Christian traditions, on the Qur'an, while also encouraging investigations into the reconstruction and rearrangement of the chronology of revelation (Bell 1953, 21).

Although the historical-critical approach has contributed to the development of methodologies in Qur'anic studies, it has also attracted criticism, particularly when the Qur'an is understood primarily as a historical product embedded within specific social and cultural contexts. Such a perspective may potentially marginalize the transcendental dimension of revelation, which constitutes a fundamental element of Islamic epistemology. Therefore, the study of Orientalist thought needs to be conducted critically and proportionately by examining the methodological constructions and underlying assumptions that shape their interpretations of the Qur'an(Islamy 2022, 18–30).

Richard Bell's Biograpghy and Intellectual Journey

Richard Bell was one of the Orientalists who lived from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Bell was born in 1876 and died in 1952 in Edinburgh, United Kingdom (Panggabean 1994, 102). He was known as a scholar with expertise in Oriental studies, particularly Arabic linguistics. Bell also served as a lecturer at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. His career in Qur'anic studies developed through the publication of his lectures at the University of Edinburgh, which were later compiled and published in a work entitled The Origins of Islam in Its Christian Environment (1926). Among the Orientalists of his time, Bell was regarded as one of the prominent scholars of Oriental studies, particularly for his precision and careful analysis in developing studies of Islam, especially those related to the Qur'an (Montgomery 1991, 33–34).

During the twentieth century, the study of Islam in the Western world expanded significantly alongside the establishment of various academic programs focusing on Islamic Studies, history, languages, and Middle Eastern cultures at a number of European and Western universities. This development also contributed to the

increasing translation of the Qur'an into various languages. One of the figures who played a role in Qur'anic translation during this period was Richard Bell. In the development of Western Qur'anic studies, approximately 73 English translations of the Qur'an have been recorded. Entering the twenty-first century, Qur'anic translation continued to expand into various European languages, including Russian, Polish, Hungarian, Swedish, Spanish, Greek, Portuguese, Serbo-Croatian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Czech, Danish, Finnish, Albanian, and Norwegian. In addition to translating the Qur'an according to the traditional order of the muṣḥaf (tartīb muṣḥafī), several Orientalists also adopted an approach based on the chronology of revelation. This approach sought to arrange verses and surahs according to the chronological order in which they were revealed. Such models of translation and arrangement can be found in the works of several Western scholars, including J. M. Rodwell, Hubert Grimme, and Richard Bell (Imam Ahmad Abi Abdillah 2025, 104).

According to Watt (1991), the development of Orientalism during this period reflected a relatively more positive shift in Western perceptions of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. A number of Orientalists began to acknowledge that the Prophet Muhammad was a sincere figure who carried out his activities with integrity and honesty. One scholar who demonstrated such a tendency was Richard Bell, who paid particular attention to the practical and factual aspects of Muhammad's life and activities, both as an individual and as a prophet (Montgomery 1991, 34).

Nevertheless, the development of Orientalist discourse during this period continued to exert considerable influence on Richard Bell's thought. At the same time, although Bell lived until the early 1950s, his thought continued to reflect traces of the colonial paradigm that had developed within the Orientalist tradition. This is consistent with the view of Qomaruddin Hidayat, who argues that Orientalism is difficult to completely dissociate from its ideological character, given that the development of the discipline has historically been closely associated with imperialism and colonialism. Accordingly, Richard Bell's studies of Islam and the Qur'an can be understood within the broader context of Western Orientalism, which underwent significant methodological transformations but had not yet completely detached itself from the legacy of the colonial paradigm (Imam Ahmad Abi Abdillah 2025, 104).

Based on his scholarly works, Richard Bell can be regarded as one of the Orientalists who demonstrated sustained interest and consistency in the study of the Qur'an, particularly from linguistic and literary perspectives. His ideas concerning the Qur'an were expressed not only in book-length publications but also in various articles and scholarly writings addressing its historical, linguistic, and literary dimensions, as well as the development of Muhammad's thought and prophetic consciousness. Some of Richard Bell's works related to Qur'anic studies include: (1) Introduction to the Qur'an; (2) The Qur'an: Translated, with a Critical Re-arrangement of the Surahs; (3) The Origins of Islam in Its Christian Environment;[6] (4) A Duplicate in the Qur'an: The Composition of Surahs; (5) Who Were the Hanifs?; (6) The Men of the A'raf; (7) The Origin of the 'Id al-Adha; (8) Muhammad's Call; (9) Muhammad's Vision; (10) Muhammad and Previous Messengers; (11) Muhammad and Divorce in the Qur'an; (12) Surat al-Hashr: A Study of Its Composition; (13) Muhammad's Pilgrimage Proclamation; (14) The Development of Muhammad's Teaching and Prophetic Consciousness; (15) The Beginnings of Muhammad's Religious Activity; (16) The Sacrifice of Ishmael; (17) The

Style of the Qur'an; and (18) Muhammad's Knowledge of the Old Testament (Montgomery 1998, 159).

Methodological Foundations of Richard Bell's Reconstruction of the Qur'an

1) Philological Approach

The term philology derives from the Greek language and, etymologically, is associated with a love of words or language. Over the course of its development, the term came to refer to the study of texts based on textual research and analysis, particularly in the fields of literature and history. Philology can be understood as a research method that places texts as the primary objects of investigation, whether they take the form of literary works, historical documents, archives, or sacred scriptures. Philological analysis can be conducted through critical readings of texts, comparisons of various manuscripts or textual variants, the application of textual criticism, and investigations into the history and origins of the formation of a particular text.

Philology developed significantly during the Renaissance in Europe. The method subsequently expanded and made substantial contributions to the advancement of various academic disciplines through the nineteenth century, particularly in the fields of literature, history, and linguistics. In the context of Islamic studies, philology subsequently became one of the important methods employed within the Western scholarly tradition in studying Islamic sources. Philology was also among the earliest approaches adopted by Western scholars in their study of the Eastern world. Initially, this approach developed as an effort to understand Eastern cultures and intellectual traditions through the texts they produced and preserved. Consequently, linguistic aspects became a primary concern within the philological approach. This approach subsequently gave rise to various research methods concerned with linguistics, literature, textual history, and the development of a work over time (Imam Ahmad Abi Abdillah 2025, 105).

The development of source criticism became more systematic during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries CE. This development was closely associated with various issues that emerged in Biblical studies, including differences in meaning, narrative repetitions, changes in linguistic style, and variations in vocabulary within the texts. These findings encouraged scholars to examine texts more critically by tracing their sources, layers, and processes of formation (Natsir, 1994). In Qur'anic studies, philological and textual-critical approaches were employed not only by Richard Bell but also by a number of other Orientalist scholars, including John Wansbrough, Theodor Nöldeke, Régis Blachère, Gustav Weil, and Friedrich Schwally. These scholars employed historical, linguistic, and philological approaches to examine the development of Qur'anic literature, the processes underlying its formation, and questions concerning the chronology of the revelation of Qur'anic surahs (Imam Ahmad Abi Abdillah 2025, 106).

2) Historicist Approach

In the development of Orientalist studies, historicism became one of the relatively dominant characteristics. This approach views religion, including

Islam, as a social and cultural phenomenon that develops historically and is influenced by the surrounding social context. From this perspective, Orientalist scholars tend to position religion as an object of scientific and historical inquiry, meaning that the theological truth claims of a particular religion are not the primary focus of their research (Muslih 2003, 85). In Qur'anic studies, the historicist approach seeks to understand the emergence and development of the Qur'an by relating it to the historical circumstances surrounding the life of the Prophet Muhammad. From this perspective, Muhammad's claim to prophethood has been understood by some Western scholars as being connected to prophetic traditions found in earlier scriptures, particularly the Torah and the Gospel. Likewise, Qur'anic revelation is viewed as inseparable from the social, cultural, and religious environment in which the Prophet Muhammad lived, as well as from pre-existing religious traditions.

One scholar who applied this perspective was Richard Bell. He sought to trace possible influences of Christian traditions on the Qur'an. According to Bell, this relationship initially emerged in the form of religious polemics and subsequently developed through connections with a particular Christian group or sect in Syria that held certain views concerning the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Bell 1925, 73). In general, the historicist approach began to exert a strong influence on the study of religion among Western scholars from the mid-nineteenth century onward. According to Hasan Hanafi, the development of Orientalism during this period cannot be separated from the emergence of various intellectual paradigms and trends of nineteenth-century thought, including positivism, historicism, scientism, racialism, and nationalism. These paradigms contributed to shaping the ways in which Western scholars studied the religions and cultures of the Eastern world.

3) The Historico Phenomenological Approach

The historico-phenomenological approach is a combination of the historical and phenomenological approaches to understanding religion and religious texts. This approach was employed, among others, by W. Montgomery Watt, who is often regarded as a relatively objective, open-minded, and sympathetic scholar of Islamology. Through this approach, Watt, like Richard Bell, sought to understand the Qur'an by taking into account both its historical dimensions and the religious experiences underlying its emergence. Both scholars viewed the Qur'an as being connected to more than one source or background of religious tradition. On the one hand, Watt acknowledged the Qur'an as the word of God; on the other hand, he understood the process of revelation through the personal experience of the Prophet Muhammad. In explaining this phenomenon, Watt also attempted to compare the revelatory experience of the Prophet Muhammad with the concept of revelation in the Christian tradition (Imam Ahmad Abi Abdillah 2025, 108). Nevertheless, the empirical phenomenology that developed in its early stages had characteristics distinct from those of classical phenomenology of religion, which developed during the first half of the twentieth century. One of the scholars widely recognized in the development of classical phenomenology of religion was Gerardus van der Leeuw (Permata 2000, 303).

In the development of scholarly inquiry, a scholar cannot, in principle, completely detach himself from the influence of ideas and research that have emerged previously. This is also evident in Richard Bell's study of the Qur'an. His thought was significantly influenced by the research of earlier scholars, including Abraham Geiger, Theodor Nöldeke, Gustav Weil, Friedrich Schwally, Régis Blachère, and Hartwig Hirschfeld, particularly with regard to the chronology and dating of the Qur'anic surahs. Bell subsequently sought to develop these studies in greater depth by employing various existing methods and theories. Through this approach, he attempted to identify the structure, development, and messages contained in the Qur'an. One of the consequences of this approach was Bell's interpretation of the concepts of naskh and mansūkh, which he developed on the basis of his own intellectual framework and methodological assumptions. In conducting his research, Bell did not entirely disregard sources from the Islamic scholarly tradition. For instance, he engaged with the works of Muslim scholars such as al-Suyūṭī, particularly through his al-Itqān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān (Imam Ahmad Abi Abdillah 2025, 108).

Furthermore, Bell's position as a scholar living within the modern intellectual context also influenced the character of his research. The development of modern scholarship during this period was marked by a strong emphasis on epistemological and methodological dimensions. These dimensions were employed to examine various objects of study, including the Qur'an, the Bible, classical texts, historical sources, and ancient artifacts. Thus, Bell's study of the Qur'an can be understood as part of the modern academic tradition that sought to interpret texts through the historical, philological, and methodological tools that had developed in his intellectual milieu.

4) Objective Hermeneutic Approach

The objective hermeneutic approach to literary texts essentially employs two forms of criticism, namely external criticism (naqd al-khārijī) and internal criticism (naqd al-dākhilī). External criticism focuses on tracing sources and examining various factors beyond the text that underlie the emergence of a particular work. Such analysis may encompass social, geographical, religious-cultural, and political conditions that shaped the context in which the text emerged. Meanwhile, internal criticism is directed toward elements contained within the text, including wording, structure, diction, symbols, signs, and meaning. These elements are analyzed linguistically in order to gain an understanding of the meanings constructed by the text (Rusmana 2006, 128–29). In the context of Dadan Rusmana's thought, the discussion of approaches to and criticism of texts is closely related to the methodology of Qur'anic studies and Western Islamology.

The objective hermeneutic approach is closely related to structuralism, particularly linguistic structuralism, which developed extensively during the 1960s and 1970s in various European and American countries. The primary focus of this approach lies in the internal structure of a text, including its linguistic and literary structures. Accordingly, a text is understood as an integrated whole possessing a system and structure that can be analyzed objectively. From the perspective of linguistic structuralism, sacred scriptures can likewise be

examined as texts possessing structures and systems of signs. The meaning of a text is not determined solely by external factors but can also be traced through the relationships among the elements contained within the text. One application of a structural-linguistic approach to religious texts is through semiology or semiotics, namely the study of systems of signs and the relationships among signs in the construction of meaning.

The development of research on religious texts was also influenced by the discovery of various ancient manuscripts. One important discovery was the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered after World War II in the region surrounding the Dead Sea. These manuscripts provided additional data for research into the history of religious communities and the development of ancient religious texts. The existence of such manuscripts subsequently became an important source for the development of textual criticism and historical studies of religious traditions (Rusmana 2006, 317–19). In Qur'anic studies, the objective-structural approach was also employed by Richard Bell, particularly in his efforts to reconstruct the chronology of revelation units. Bell did not simply accept the arrangement of the Qur'an as presented in the muṣḥaf but attempted to identify the earliest units of revelation and investigate the possibility of alterations or rearrangements during the formation of the Qur'anic text. Based on this assumption, Bell developed the view that certain portions of the Qur'an underwent revision and rearrangement, which he associated with the process of the development of revelation.

Reconstruktion of the Chronology of Revelation According to Richard Bell

Richard Bell's study of the chronology of the Qur'an constitutes an important component of the historical-critical approach that developed within Western Qur'anic studies. Bell sought to understand the Qur'an by placing its verses and surahs within the historical context of their revelation. His views on this issue can be found in his works The Qur'an Translated with a Critical Rearrangement of the Surahs and Introduction to the Qur'an. In The Qur'an Translated with a Critical Rearrangement of the Surahs, Bell did not merely translate the Qur'an but also undertook a critical rearrangement of its various sections based on his estimation of their chronological order of revelation. This procedure was based on the assumption that the arrangement of the surahs in the muṣḥaf accepted by Muslims does not fully reflect the historical sequence in which the revelations were delivered. Bell therefore attempted to separate certain passages from particular surahs and reposition them according to their estimated chronological order of revelation (Audina and Biari 2026, 1701).

This reconstruction was based on the assumption that revelation units did not always take the form of complete surahs but rather consisted of shorter passages or units of revelation that subsequently developed and were compiled into surahs. In this regard, Bell adopted an idea previously developed by Hartwig Hirschfeld concerning the existence of short units during the early stages of revelation. According to Bell, these units subsequently underwent processes of collection and arrangement, eventually forming the compositions of the surahs as they are known in the muṣḥaf. One consequence of this assumption is that Bell did not always regard Qur'anic surahs as unified compositions originating from a single period of revelation. Instead, a single surah could contain several layers or sections originating from different periods. Bell therefore sought to identify passages that, in his view, exhibited different characteristics

in terms of language, themes, style, and their relationship to particular historical circumstances. Based on this analysis, he then determined the possible relative sequence of these units of revelation (Imam Ahmad Abi Abdillah 2025, 115).

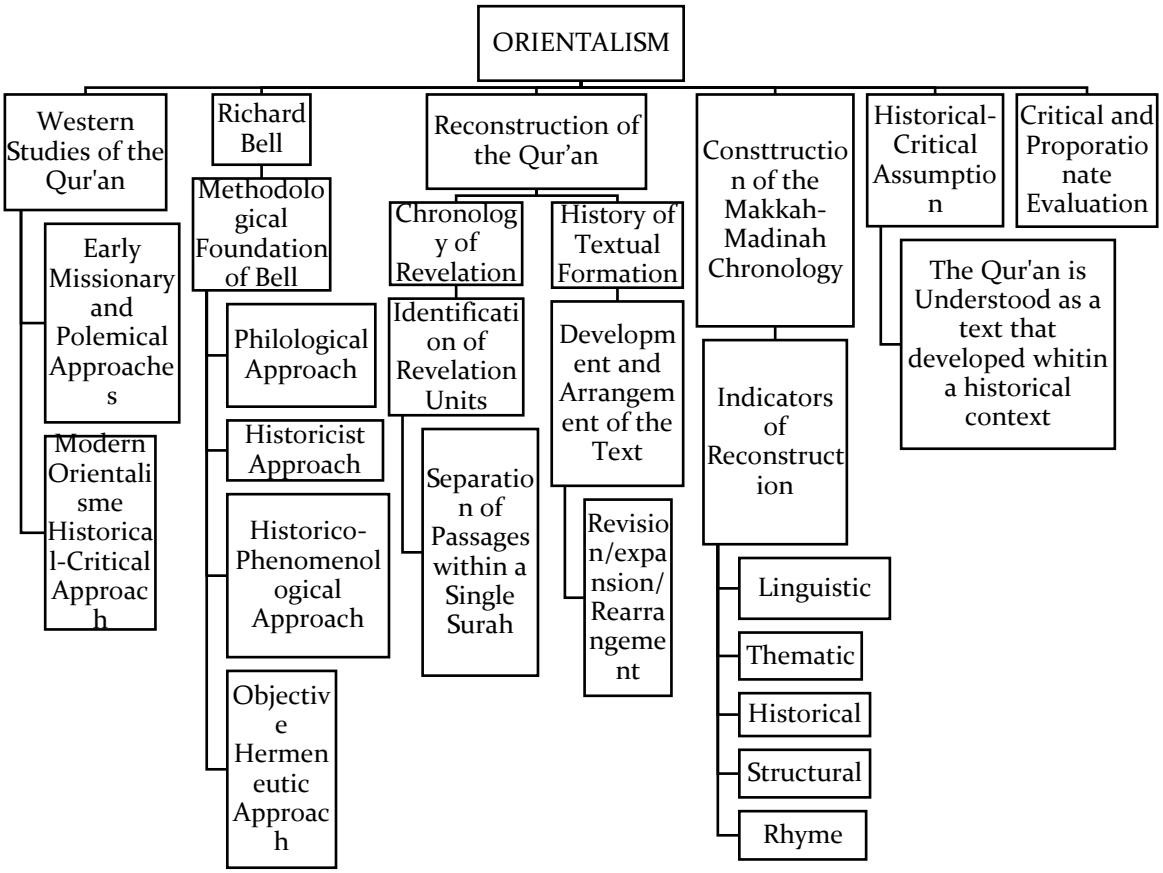
One important characteristic of Bell's method is his attention to changes in wording and the development of textual forms. He argued that, during the process of Qur'anic compilation, certain passages underwent expansion, adaptation, or revision. Such changes were associated, among other things, with the development of the message, changes in the circumstances of the audience, and adjustments in rhyme and linguistic style. Within Bell's framework, these changes enabled researchers to distinguish between passages considered earlier and those believed to have emerged at a later stage. Thus, linguistic and stylistic characteristics became important instruments in determining chronology. Bell also connected the question of chronology with the history of the formation of the Qur'anic text (Amal 2001, 114). In Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an, discussions of textual history, the characteristics of the Qur'an's external form, the shaping of the Qur'an, and chronology are presented as interconnected aspects. The structure of his discussion indicates that, for Bell, chronology could not be separated from questions concerning how revelation developed, was collected, and eventually formed the composition of the Qur'an (Bell 1953, 86).

In determining this chronology, Bell considered several internal indicators within the text. First, he examined linguistic and stylistic features. Changes in linguistic characteristics and verse structures were regarded as potential indicators of the development of particular Qur'anic passages. Second, he considered thematic aspects. Changes in themes—for example, from an emphasis on eschatology and monotheism toward social, legal, and communal concerns—could be used to estimate developments in the periods of revelation. Third, he considered historical aspects. References to particular events or social conditions were used to connect a particular passage with a specific phase in the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Fourth, he examined structural features and rhyme. Differences in the form and patterns of verse endings also constituted one of Bell's considerations in distinguishing different textual layers(Bell 1937, 7–8). Through this method, Bell attempted to distinguish the development of revelation during the Meccan and Medinan periods. Passages regarded as earlier were generally associated with short forms and strong emphases on eschatology, monotheism, and moral admonition. Meanwhile, passages considered later were associated with the development of the Muslim community in Medina, including matters of law, social relations, warfare, and relations with other religious groups. However, this division was not necessarily applied to entire surahs, since Bell allowed for the possibility that passages from different periods could coexist within a single surah.

Another aspect that influenced Bell's reconstruction was his view of the religious environment surrounding the Prophet Muhammad. Bell argued that the development of the Qur'an should be understood within the context of Muhammad's interactions with religious communities in Arabia and its surrounding regions. He paid particular attention to Jewish and Christian elements, which he considered to be related to certain Qur'anic ideas and narratives. Within his historical-critical framework, similarities with Jewish and Christian traditions were employed as one of the considerations for understanding the background and development of Qur'anic material. From the perspective of Islamic studies, however, the Qur'an presents itself as revelation that

both confirms and corrects aspects of earlier teachings and traditions. Therefore, Bell's assumption concerning Jewish and Christian influence should be understood as part of his historical-critical framework and distinguished from conclusions accepted within the Islamic scholarly tradition.

Figure 1. Discusion fokus



D. CONCLUSION

Richard Bell represents a historical-critical strand of Orientalism in Qur'anic studies that seeks to reconstruct the history of revelation through textual, philological, and historical analysis. Bell not only established a chronology of revelation but also questioned the relationship between the chronological sequence of revelation and the structure of the muṣḥaf as received within the Islamic tradition. His reconstruction was based on the assumption that the units of revelation initially consisted of short passages that were subsequently collected and underwent processes of arrangement into surahs. To determine the layers and chronology of these passages, Bell employed linguistic and literary stylistic indicators, rhyme, themes, historical contexts, and presumed editorial changes and revisions. Consequently, a single surah could be understood as containing

passages originating from different periods of revelation. Bell's critical rearrangement was thus a methodological consequence of his attempt to distinguish the arrangement of the muṣḥaf from a chronological reconstruction that he considered closer to the historical development of the text. This approach demonstrates that, for Bell, the history of the Qur'an was concerned not merely with when revelation occurred, but also with how individual units of revelation developed, were arranged, and ultimately formed the textual composition known as the Qur'an.

Bell's reconstruction cannot be separated from the historical-critical epistemological paradigm, which differs fundamentally from the epistemological framework of Qur'anic scholarship within the Islamic tradition. His assumptions concerning the development, revision, and textual formation of the Qur'an, as well as his explanations regarding the possible influence of Jewish and Christian traditions, indicate that Bell primarily situated the Qur'an within a framework of textual history. By contrast, the tradition of ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān regards the Qur'an as the revelation of God, characterized by continuity of transmission and the preservation of its authenticity. This difference demonstrates that the fundamental issue is not merely a disagreement over the dating of revelation, but rather a difference in the starting points used to determine the validity of knowledge concerning the Qur'an. Therefore, Bell's thought is more appropriately positioned as a methodological construction that requires critical evaluation rather than being accepted or rejected solely on the basis of its association with either Western or Islamic scholarship. Through such a comparative and critical approach, the study of Richard Bell not only facilitates a critique of Orientalism but also opens up possibilities for developing a more dialogical, methodological, and epistemological approach to Qur'anic studies without disregarding the principles of the Qur'an's authenticity and preservation within the Islamic tradition.

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