

بازخوانی نقادانه نظریه جان ونزبرو درباره خاستگاه و تدوین قرآن در پرتو منشور قرآنی شیعه

محمدعلی رضایی اصفهانی^۱، و عبدالله جبرئیلی جلودار^۲، و جامع آمانو صالح^۳، و عباس کریمی^۴

۱. استاد تمام جامعه المصطفی العالمیه، مجتمع عالی قرآن وحديث، قم، ایران، رایانامه: rezaee.quran@gmail.com
۲. استادیار جامعه المصطفی العالمیه، مجتمع عالی قرآن وحديث، قم، ایران، رایانامه: jebaman2020@gmail.com
۳. استادیار، گروه تفسیر، جامعه المصطفی العالمیه، مجتمع عالی قرآن وحديث، قم، ایران، رایانامه: salehamao@miu.ac.ir
۴. نویسنده مسئول، عضو انجمن قرآن ومستشرقان حوزه علمیه قم، قم، ایران، رایانامه: abas_karim@mail.ac.ir

چکیده

اطلاعات مقاله

هدف: هدف این پژوهش، سنجش معرفت‌شناختی، زبان‌شناختی و متن‌شناختی نظریه تجدیدنظرطلبانه جان ونزبرو درباره خاستگاه، صورت‌بندی متنی و تدوین نهایی قرآن کریم با کاربست چارچوب نظری منشور قرآنی شیعه امامیه و بهره‌گیری از دستاوردهای نوین نسخه‌شناسی کهن سده نخست هجری است.

روش‌شناسی: این مطالعه از روش‌شناسی تحلیلی، انتقادی و تطبیقی سه سطحی بهره می‌برد؛ سطح نخست به ساختارشکنی درون‌متنی و نقد فرمالیستی می‌پردازد، سطح دوم ساختار استنتاجی و کاربست نقد کتاب مقدس در مطالعات قرآنی را ارزیابی می‌کند، و سطح سوم الگوی نظری ونزبرو را با اصول چهارده‌گانه منشور قرآنی شیعه و شواهد کهن مادی مقایسه می‌نماید.

یافته‌ها: یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهد تسری مکانیکی نقد منبع و صورت‌گرایی کتاب مقدس به ساختار بیانی قرآن دچار خلط معرفتی و قیاس مع‌الفارق است. پیش‌فرض تکاملی انگاشتن صورت‌های کوتاه‌تر، نادیده گرفتن انسجام بلاغی و نحوی فرمول‌هایی چون امرهای بیانی و سازه‌های انذاری، نادیده انگاشتن جایگاه تواتر، و تقلیل روایت‌های تاریخی به تاریخ رستگاری، بنیان فرضیه تکوین دیر هنگام در بین‌النهرین را مخدوش می‌سازد. در مقابل، کهن‌ترین اسناد مادی و پدیدارشناسی وحیانی منشور، پایداری ساختار متنی در سده نخست را اثبات می‌کنند.

نتیجه‌گیری: منشور قرآنی شیعه با تفکیک معرفت‌شناختی میان ثبات بنیادین نص و پویایی اجتهادی فهم، مدل چهاربعدی پیوند وحی، تواتر، لایه‌های بطونی و مرجعیت تبیینی اهل بیت را عرضه می‌دارد. این الگو تبیین می‌کند که پویایی تفسیری محصول تکامل فهم است نه تلون و دیرزایی متنی، و بدین‌سان بستری استوار برای گفت‌وگوی دانش‌های اصیل اسلامی با مطالعات تاریخی-انتقادی معاصر فراهم می‌آورد.

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۱. مقدمه و پیشینه انتقادی

مطالعات قرآنی در جهان غرب طی دهه‌های پایانی سده بیستم میلادی با چرخش پارادایمی عمیقی روبه‌رو شد که با انتشار آثار جان ونزبرو با عنوان‌های «مطالعات قرآنی: منابع و روش‌های تفسیر کتاب مقدس» و «محیط فرقه‌ای: محتوا و ترکیب تاریخ نجات اسلامی» شکل گرفت. ونزبرو با گسست از سنت دیرپای فیلولوژی تاریخی که بر زمینه حجازی نزول و اصالت تاریخی کلیات متن در سده نخست هجری پای می‌فشرد، فرضیه‌ای رادیکال و تجدیدنظرطلبانه را صورت‌بندی نمود. وی با وام‌گیری الگوهای نقد منبع، نقد فرم و نقد سنت که در بستر تحلیل عهد عتیق و عهد جدید شکل گرفته بود، مدعی شد قرآن متنی ترکیبی و تدریجی از اقوال و عبارات انبیاپی پراکنده است که در کوران منازعات جدلی میان یهودیان، مسیحیان و گروه‌های آغازین اسلامی در حوزه تمدنی بین‌النهرین گردآوری شده و فرآیند تثبیت نهایی و بسته‌شدن پرونده تدوین رسمی آن تا اواخر سده دوم و اوایل سده سوم هجری به درازا انجامیده است.

ونزبرو تمام سنت تاریخ‌نگاری، حدیثی، سیره‌نویسی و تفاسیر اولیه مسلمانان را نه گزارش‌هایی مستند از رخداد‌های سده نخست، بلکه نوعی «تاریخ رستگاری پس‌نگر» قلمداد کرد که جوامع متأخر اسلامی برای ساخت هویت قدسی و پیوند دادن شریعت نوپای خود به خاستگاهی بیابانی و الگوبرداری‌شده از کهن‌الگوی موسوی بر ساخته‌اند. این دیدگاه، چالش‌هایی عمیق در زمینه تاریخ‌گذاری نص، خاستگاه جغرافیایی و انسجام وحیانی پدید آورد و زمینه پیدایش مکتب تشکیک‌گرایی مفرط را هموار ساخت.

۲. روش‌شناسی و چارچوب نظری تحقیق

روش‌شناسی این پژوهش بر اسلوب تحقیق تحلیلی، انتقادی و تطبیقی استوار است که در سه ساحت پیوسته سازمان یافته است:

نخست، بازخوانی و واسازی درون‌متنی الگوهای ونزبرو از طریق تحلیل خردساختاری و بررسی سبک‌شناختی گزاره‌های وحیانی، ساختارهای امر، و تعبیر پرسشی تکرارشونده صورت می‌پذیرد. دوم، ساختار استنتاجی و منطقی گزاره‌های ونزبرو با سنجش میزان اعتبار تسری روش‌های نقد تاریخی-ادبی توراتی و انجیلی به ساحت نص قرآنی ارزیابی می‌شود و مغالطات روش‌شناختی از قبیل استدلال بر پایه سکوت، دور باطل در اعتبارسنجی منابع کهن، و تعمیم‌های فاقد توجیه منطقی مورد تدقیق قرار می‌گیرد.

سوم، ارزیابی تطبیقی و معرفت‌شناختی میان الگوی ونزبرو و اصول چهارده‌گانه «منشور قرآنی بر اساس آموزه‌های اهل بیت» به همراه انطباق‌سنجی با یافته‌های تجربی و مادی سده نخست، شامل سن‌سنجی رادیوکربن، پالیوگرافی و تحلیل خط‌شناسی نسخه‌های کهن و کتیبه‌های بناهای نخستین اسلامی انجام شده است.

۳. یافته‌های پژوهش و تحلیل تفصیلی

الف) واسازی زبان‌شناختی و نقد صوری فرضیه الحاقات ویراستاری

تحلیل ساختاری موارد مورد استناد ونزبرو، سستی ادعای او را مبنی بر الحاقی بودن سازه‌های بنیادین نص آشکار می‌سازد. ونزبرو صیغه امر «قُلْ» (بگو) را که بیش از سیصد بار در متن به کار رفته، نشانه‌ای از الحاق متأخر ویراستاران برای تبدیل سخنان بشری پیامبر به کلام الهی پنداشته است. با این حال، تحلیل دقیق نحوی و بلاغی نشان می‌دهد که این فعل در بافت‌های گوناگون وظایف متعددی از قبیل مناظرات جدلی، پاسخ‌های تعلیمی، اندازهای اعتقادی و ابطال پرسش‌های مشرکان بر عهده دارد و در ساختار جمله به عنوان عامل نحوی عمل می‌کند؛ به گونه‌ای که حذف آن موجب اخلال قطعی در ارکان صرفی، نحوی و نظام دلالت معنایی آیات می‌گردد. همچنین ونزبرو ترکیب «ما أَذْرَاکَ ما» در سوره قارعه را تفسیر حاشیه‌ای زبانی برای واژه هاویه پنداشته است، در حالی که در بلاغت عربی اصیل، کاربرد امّ به معنای جایگاه و مأوا شناخته‌شده است و تکرار این ترکیب در سراسر قرآن، تمهیدی بلاغی برای جلب توجه مخاطب به حقایق فرابشری و غیبی است، نه حاشیه‌نویسی متأخر کاتبان.

ب) ابطال پیش‌فرض تکاملی در نقد فرم و نوع روایی سوره‌ها

یکی از آسیب‌های بنیادین رویکرد ونزبرو، تحمیل اصل تکاملی نقد فرم بر قصص قرآنی است؛ بر این اساس که صورت‌های موجز و کوتاه، الزاماً مقدم بر صورت‌های مفصل و مبسوط هستند. ونزبرو با تفکیک سرگذشت حضرت شعیب در سوره‌های اعراف، هود و شعراء، آن‌ها را سنن روایی متکثر و متباین منطقه‌ای پنداشته است. در نقد این نگرش روشن می‌گردد که تفاوت بیان یک واقعه در سوره‌های گوناگون، ناشی از هماهنگی ارگانیکی و بلاغی با بافتار، غرض و ساختار کلان هر سوره

است. در سوره‌ای که تمرکز بر پیکار با طغیان اشرافیت است، مواجهه با سران کفر برجسته می‌شود و در سوره‌ای که محوریت بر عدالت اقتصادی است، انذار از کم‌فروشی تفصیل می‌یابد. بنابراین، تنوع بیانی نشان‌دهنده هنر ایجاز و اقتضای حال است، نه گسست متنی و ترکیب منابع موازی.

ج) شواهد خطی و مادی کهن در ابطال تاریخ‌گذاری متأخر

شواهد نسخه‌شناختی و کتیبه‌شناختی معاصر، خط بطلانی بر فرضیه تکوین قرآن در سده سوم کشیده‌اند. تحلیل دست‌نوشته کهن صنعا با وجود لایه زیرین متنی، نشان‌دهنده جریان فعال نگارش و انضباط کتابت در سده نخست است. همچنین برگه‌های کهن قرآنی دانشگاه‌های بیرمنگام و توپینگن که با دقت بالا به نیمه نخست سده اول هجری تعلق دارند، تطابق بنیادین اسکلت همخوانی و صامت‌های نص کهن را با مصحف رسمی اثبات می‌کنند. کتیبه‌های تاریخی بنای قبة الصخره در بیت‌المقدس متعلق به سال هفتاد و دو هجری نیز گواهی روشن بر رواج رسمی، عمومی و تثبیت‌شده متن قرآن در فضای عمومی و حاکمیتی سده نخست است.

د) منظومه معرفتی منشور قرآنی شیعه در برابر رویکرد تقلیل‌گرایانه

منشور قرآنی شیعه با تبیین چهار بعد پیوسته، پاسخی جامع به تشکیک‌های شرق‌شناسانه می‌دهد: نخست، تبیین هستی‌شناسی وحی به عنوان کلام لفظی و معنایی خداوند که فرایند شکل‌گیری جامعه ایمانی را محقق ساخت؛ دوم، تأکید بر مصونیت متن از هرگونه تحریف و دگرگونی از طریق اصل تواتر و همگرایی سنت شفاهی و کتابت مستمر؛ سوم، تدوین نظام فهم لایه‌مند متن بر پایه تمایز ظاهر و باطن، محکم و متشابه؛ و چهارم، استمرار تبیین هدایت‌گرانه از طریق ثقلین و عترت طاهره. این منشور اثبات می‌کند که گسترش دانش‌های تفسیری، نشانه شکوفایی ابزارهای فهم و استنباط بر محور متنی تثبیت‌شده است، نه فرایند برساختن تدریجی نص.

۴. نتیجه‌گیری و افق‌های پژوهش

این پژوهش با کاربرست همزمان ابزارهای نقد فیلولوژیک، منطق صوری، شواهد مادی و اصول معرفت‌شناختی منشور قرآنی شیعه اثبات می‌نماید که فرضیه جان ونزبرو مبنی بر پیدایش دیر هنگام و جغرافیای بین‌النهرینی قرآن، محصول تحمیل پیش‌فرض‌های نامتناسب نقد کتاب مقدس بر

بستری متفاوت و نادیده انگاشتن سازوکارهای ویژه انتقال تواتری است. با این حال، توجه به ساختارهای ادبی و فرم‌های بیانی در آثار ونزیرو می‌تواند به عنوان ابزاری ثانویه در خدمت پژوهش‌های معناشناختی قرار گیرد مشروط بر آنکه از نتایج ناموجه تاریخی تفکیک شود. منشور قرآنی شیعه با ارائه تصویری دقیق از ثبات نص و حیانی در کنار بالندگی و پویایی بی‌پایان لایه‌های معنایی، چارچوبی معتبر و نیرومند برای هم‌سخنی پژوهش‌های اصیل اسلامی با افق‌های نوین شرق‌شناسی دانشگاهی به ارمغان می‌آورد.

A Critical Re-Examination of John Wansbrough's Theory on the Origin and Codification of the Qur'an through the Lens of the Shia Qur'anic Charter

Mohammad Ali Rezaee Esfahani¹ , and Abdullah Jebreili Jelodar² , and Jamiu Amao Saleh³ , and Abbas Karimi⁴ 

1. Full Professor, Higher Education Complex of Quran and Hadith, Al-Mustafa International University, Qom, Iran. Email: rezaee.quran@gmail.com
2. Assistant Professor, Higher Education Complex of Quran and Hadith, Al-Mustafa International University, Qom, Iran. Email: jebبران2020@gmail.com
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Exegesis (Tafsir), Higher Education Complex of Quran and Hadith, Al-Mustafa International University, Qom, Iran. Email: salehamao@miu.ac.ir
4. Corresponding Author, Member of the Association of Quran and Orientalists, Islamic Seminary of Qom, Qom, Iran. Email: abas_karim@mail.ac.ir

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ABSTRACT

This study offers an epistemological, philological, and text-critical assessment of John Wansbrough's revisionist thesis concerning the origins, composition, and canonization of the Qur'an. It evaluates Wansbrough's thesis through the theoretical framework of the Qur'anic Charter from the Perspective of the Shia of the Ahl al-Bayt (2025), alongside contemporary codicological and epigraphic evidence pertaining to the seventh century. In his seminal works, *Quranic Studies* (1977) and *The Sectarian Milieu* (1978), Wansbrough argued that the Qur'an developed as an anthology of circulating "prophetic logia" within a broader interconfessional Jewish-Christian polemical milieu, particularly in Mesopotamia, and that its canonical formation was not completed until approximately the turn of the third Islamic century (c. 800–815 CE). He further characterized early Islamic historiography as a retrospective form of salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*).

Employing a three-tiered methodological framework, this study identifies several critical weaknesses in Wansbrough's revisionist paradigm such as: the uncritical transfer of biblical source and form criticism to the Qur'anic corpus; the assumption that shorter or simpler textual forms necessarily predate more developed formulations; the neglect of the syntactic and rhetorical integration of recurrent Qur'anic formulae, including the Qul imperatives and *Mā adrāka mā* construction; and insufficient engagement with early physical evidence. Particular attention is given to the San'a' palimpsest, the Birmingham and Tübingen folios, and the 692 CE Dome of the Rock inscriptions, which collectively support the existence of a substantially stabilized Qur'anic textual form by the mid-seventh century. In contrast to revisionist approaches, the Shia Qur'anic Charter proposes a four-dimensional epistemological model encompassing the divine ontology of revelation (*wahy*), the integrity of Qur'anic transmission through *tawātur* and the doctrine of *ʿadam al-tahrīf*, multilayered semantics expressed through the categories of *zāhir* and *bāṭin*, and authoritative hermeneutical continuity grounded in the Prophetic lineage through Hadith al-Thaqalayn. The study argues that this framework can facilitate dialogue between classical Islamic textual sciences and contemporary historical-critical Qur'anic studies.

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Introduction

Western Qur'anic historiography underwent a significant paradigm shift in the late 1970s with the publication of John Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (1977) and *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (1978). Departing from the historical-philological consensus that had characterized much of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European scholarship—represented by scholars such as Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträsser, Arthur Jeffery, and Régis Blachère—which generally accepted the seventh-century Hijazi setting of the Prophet's mission while debating particular stages of textual formation and redaction, Wansbrough advanced a markedly revisionist paradigm. Drawing on nineteenth- and twentieth-century biblical-critical approaches, particularly Julius Wellhausen's source-critical Documentary Hypothesis and the form-critical models associated with Hermann Gunkel, Martin Dibelius, and Rudolf Bultmann, Wansbrough proposed that the Qur'an constituted an anthological crystallization of diverse "prophetic logia" that emerged within interconfessional Jewish-Christian polemics across the Fertile Crescent. He further maintained that the Qur'anic text attained canonical fixation only around the beginning of the third Islamic century (c. 800–815 CE) (Wansbrough, 1977, pp. 43–52; 1978, pp. 50–58).

Wansbrough treated early Islamic historiographical materials—including prophetic biography (*sīrah-maghāzī*), traditional Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), biographical dictionaries (*rijāl*), and accounts of Qur'anic compilation and codification (*jam' al-Qur'ān*)—as retrospective constructions of salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*). In his view, these narratives were produced by emerging Muslim polities that sought to project an idealized seventh-century Arabian origin onto an imperial community whose canonical scripture, he argued, had actually developed through prolonged sectarian debates in Mesopotamia involving Rabbinic Judaism and Syriac Christianity (Wansbrough, 1978, pp. 1–32). Scholarly responses to this thesis subsequently became divided between revisionist or highly skeptical approaches, associated with figures such as Patricia Crone, Michael

Cook, Gerald Hawting, and the early Andrew Rippin, and historically oriented scholars such as Harald Motzki, Gregor Schoeler, Fred Donner, Angelika Neuwirth, and Nicolai Sinai, who employed methods including isnād-cum-matn analysis, structural and liturgical approaches, and manuscript codicology. Within the Islamic scholarly context, responses have likewise ranged from theological apologetics to empirically oriented critiques that have not always been integrated into a comprehensive epistemological framework.

Against this background, the present study evaluates Wansbrough's methodology, literary analyses, and historical deductions through the theoretical framework of the recently formulated Qur'anic Charter from the Perspective of the Shia of the Ahl al-Bayt, developed under the direction of Mohammad Ali Rezaei Esfahani and reportedly endorsed by the Assembly of Seminary Teachers of Qom and more than sixty academic and research institutions (Rezaei Esfahani & Karimi, 2025). The analysis also engages with relevant methodological contributions in Iranian and international scholarship (Veradi Esfahani, 2022; Nilsaz, 2008, 2010; Sadeghi & Goudarzi, 2012; Déroche, 2014). The existing literature may be broadly organized into four intellectual clusters: (1) Wansbrough's foundational monographs (1977, 1978); (2) Western critical, historical, and codicological responses (Ullendorff, 1977; Serjeant, 1978; Graham, 1980; Motzki, 2001; Neuwirth, 2010; Sinai, 2014; Déroche, 2014; Sadeghi & Goudarzi, 2012); (3) Islamic and Shi'i methodological critiques (Nilsaz, 2008, 2014; Veradi Esfahani, 2022; Karimi-Nia, 2019, 2023; Saki & Shaker, 2018); and (4) the formalized Shi'i Qur'anic Charter (Rezaei Esfahani & Karimi, 2025).

The methodological audit of Wansbrough's work proceeds across three interconnected levels. The first undertakes an intratextual and form-critical analysis of his principal categories, including his schemata of revelation—such as retribution, sign, flight, and covenant—and his classification of formulaic conventions, including apodictic, supplicatory, and narrative forms. The second examines the inferential structure underlying his historical conclusions by tracing the transition from observed textual features to broader historical claims and identifying potential category errors and logical problems

in this reasoning. The third conducts a comparative epistemological assessment of Wansbrough's model in relation to the fourteen-clause matrix of the Shi'a Qur'anic Charter, while also considering relevant seventh-century codicological and epigraphic evidence.

Wansbrough's theoretical model may be reconstructed along four principal dimensions. First, he conceptualizes the Qur'an as an anthology of composite prophetic logia—including oracles, liturgical fragments, homilies, and legal maxims—subsequently unified through editorial processes and glosses. He identifies four principal thematic schemata of revelation rooted in monotheistic theodicy: Retribution (*jazā'*), Sign (*āyah*), Flight (*hijrah*), and Covenant (*mīthāq*). These are situated within broader categories of apodictic formulae (e.g., *qul*, *yā ayyuhā al-ladhīna āmanū*), supplicatory formulae (e.g., *tasmiyah*, *takbīr*), and narrative markers (e.g., *hal atāka*, *wa-idh qāla*) (Wansbrough, 1977, pp. 12–33). Second, he argues that the Qur'an's referential and allusive literary style presupposes an audience already familiar with biblical, midrashic, and Haggadic traditions. On this basis, he locates the emergence of the Qur'anic corpus within a scholastic "sectarian milieu" in Mesopotamia rather than within seventh-century Arabia (Wansbrough, 1978, pp. 1–45). Third, he distinguishes between *Historie* and *Heilsgeschichte*, arguing that early Islamic historical narratives constitute retrospective foundational constructions intended to create an Arabian sacred origin analogous to the biblical figure of Moses. Fourth, he proposes a chronological development of *tafsīr* genres, moving from narrative or Haggadic forms, represented by figures such as Muqātil b. Sulaymān, through legal or halakhic interpretation, textual and grammatical approaches associated with scholars such as al-Farrā' and Abū 'Ubaydah, rhetorical interpretation exemplified by Ibn Qutaybah, and finally symbolic or allegorical approaches. Because more systematic textual and grammatical commentaries emerged around the second Islamic century, Wansbrough inferred that a new varietal Qur'anic canon could not have crystallized substantially earlier (Wansbrough, 1977, pp. 119–148, 202–246).

An examination of Wansbrough's inferential structure and use of biblical-critical methodologies reveals several significant methodological vulnerabilities. His reasoning proceeds from observed literary features—including stylistic repetition, narrative ellipsis, and formulaic structures—through the application of biblical-critical paradigms to the conclusion that the Qur'anic canon emerged in Mesopotamia around 800–815 CE. However, the direct application of biblical source criticism (*Literarkritik*), particularly criteria associated with Wellhausen's approach—such as parallel accounts, structural seams, duplication, vocabulary shifts, and explicit contradictions—presents substantial methodological difficulties when applied to the Qur'anic corpus (Veradi Esfahani, 2022, pp. 166–175; Collins, 2016). In biblical criticism, explicit and irreconcilable narrative differences, such as those traditionally identified between the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2, have provided grounds for hypothesizing distinct textual sources. By contrast, Wansbrough does not demonstrate comparable formal contradictions within the Qur'an; rather, his analysis relies substantially on stylistic variation and differences in narrative presentation. Moreover, whereas biblical source critics frequently compare parallel textual witnesses or corpora—such as Kings and Chronicles or the Synoptic Gospels—Wansbrough constructs what may be regarded as functional “parallel sources” by isolating variant prophetic narratives distributed across different surahs. In cases such as the account of Shu'ayb, this procedure risks treating variations within a unified discursive and rhetorical corpus as evidence of competing regional or textual recensions.

Similarly, the application of biblical form criticism (*Formgeschichte*), associated with the work of Gunkel (1901), Dibelius (1935), and Bultmann (1976), requires careful reconsideration when transferred to the Qur'anic corpus. Form criticism commonly examines the development and social setting (*Sitz im Leben*) of oral and literary units and, in some applications, assumes a movement from relatively shorter and simpler forms toward more developed formulations. Wansbrough appears to transform this heuristic tendency into a stronger chronological principle by treating brief or relatively simple units as earlier than more elaborate versions.

From the perspective of formal logic, the conversion of a universal affirmative proposition without appropriate restriction of its predicate can result in an invalid conversion, described in classical logical terminology as *conversio per accidens* (Veradi Esfahani, 2022, pp. 173–174; Hillī, 1992, p. 86). An allusive or compressed Qur’anic passage, however, may function as a concise reference to a narrative or discourse already familiar to its audience rather than representing an earlier or more primitive stage of that tradition. Furthermore, interpreting the Qur’an’s self-referential, rhymed-prose (*saj‘*), and liturgically oriented discourse through form-critical models primarily developed for biographical and folkloric materials risks overlooking significant generic and functional differences (Neuwirth, 2014; Graham, 1980).

Finally, Wansbrough’s treatment of early Islamic historiographical sources raises a further epistemological concern. If these sources are initially classified as *Heilsgeschichte* and therefore presumed to be retrospective constructions, their evidentiary value is substantially restricted from the outset; subsequently using their presumed lateness to support a late-canonization thesis risks producing a circular inferential structure. A related difficulty arises from an *argumentum ex silentio* when the absence of securely identified seventh-century Qur’anic codices within the Western manuscript collections available to scholars during the 1970s is treated as evidence for the non-existence of such codices. The subsequent discovery, analysis, and dating of early Qur’anic manuscripts and inscriptions therefore require the historical claims of the revisionist model to be reassessed in light of evidence that was unavailable or insufficiently accessible when Wansbrough formulated his thesis.

Literature Review

A substantial body of scholarship has examined John Wansbrough’s revisionist approach to Qur’anic studies, particularly his views concerning the origins, formation, textual development, and canonization of the Qur’an. Among the earlier contributions, Mallat (1994), in “Readings of the Qur’ān in London and Najaf: John Wansbrough and Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr,” examines the contrasting

intellectual approaches of Wansbrough and Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr and demonstrates the complexity of late twentieth-century debates surrounding the Qur'an and the broader implications of competing approaches to Qur'anic interpretation and historical reconstruction. Calder (1997), in "History and Nostalgia: Reflections on John Wansbrough's the Sectarian Milieu," engages critically with Wansbrough's distinction between history and salvation history while suggesting that the questions raised by his work may be approached through alternative methodological perspectives.

Azmi (1997), in "Crystallization of the Quran: An Analysis of John Wansbrough's Theory," examines Wansbrough's hypothesis concerning the late crystallization of the Qur'anic text and evaluates the principal arguments underlying his reconstruction of Qur'anic textual formation. Stewart (2016), in "Wansbrough, Bultmann, and the Theory of Variant Traditions in the Qur'ān," investigates Wansbrough's application of philological and form-critical methods derived from biblical studies to the Qur'anic corpus. His analysis contributes to the broader debate concerning the reconstruction of Qur'anic chronology and the interpretation of variant traditions. Similarly, Neuwirth's work emphasizes the importance of understanding the Qur'an within its own literary, rhetorical, and historical framework rather than reducing it to an allegorical transformation of pre-existing traditions.

Moqbel (2022), in "Revisiting Wansbrough's Perspective on the Qur'ān's Synoptic Problem," presents a critical assessment of Wansbrough's treatment of variant Qur'anic traditions, engaging particularly with Stewart's critique and employing elements of textual criticism to propose alternative approaches to the interpretation of textual and narrative variation. Sani (2023), in "A Study of John Wansbrough's Thoughts on Qur'anic Studies, Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation," examines Wansbrough's principal arguments and methodological contributions. Sani argues that some of the negative reactions to, and neglect of, Wansbrough's scholarship may be attributable to the breadth of his erudition and the density of his writing style. Nevertheless, these characteristics do not diminish the significance of his methodological proposals for the study of early

Islamic texts. Wansbrough's literary method remains consequential both for what it claims to establish concerning the development of early Islam and for the limitations it places on what can be historically reconstructed from the available sources.

Veradi Esfahani et al. (2023), in "Different Traditions in the Qur'an: Wansbrough's Analysis of the Shu'ayb Story in the Qur'an: A Critical Study," critically examine Wansbrough's treatment of the Shu'ayb narratives. They highlight his argument that the Qur'anic text emerged through the gradual development and combination of relatively short and independent literary units. Their study provides an important basis for reassessing Wansbrough's application of literary and form-critical methodologies to Qur'anic narratives.

More recent studies have continued to reassess Wansbrough's contribution to contemporary Qur'anic scholarship. Hafidl and Safei (2025), in "Wansbrough's Perspective as a Catalytic Challenge in Contemporary Qur'anic Study," examine Wansbrough's understanding of the Qur'an as presented primarily in Quranic Studies and The Sectarian Milieu, highlighting the continuing methodological significance of his arguments for contemporary Qur'anic studies. Mustakim et al. (2025), in "Deconstructing the Historicity of the Qur'an: John Wansbrough's Perspective—A Hermeneutic Study of Islamic Philological Suspicion and Criticism," investigate Wansbrough's radical historical reconstruction of the Qur'an as a product of a prolonged sectarian environment involving Jewish, Christian, and proto-Muslim communities. Anyisa and Safei (2026), in "A Critical Study of John Wansbrough's The Qur'an and Its Relevance for Contemporary Tafsir Studies," critically examine Wansbrough's views on the Qur'an and assess their implications for contemporary Qur'anic exegetical studies. Similarly, Putra and Yulianto (2026), in "A Critical Review of Wansbrough's Qur'anic Theory through Quraish Shihab's Epistemology," critically evaluate the methodological assumptions underlying Wansbrough's theory while reconstructing Quraish Shihab's epistemological approach to Qur'anic authenticity and codification.

Taken together, the existing literature demonstrates that Wansbrough's scholarship has generated sustained debate concerning

the historical origins, textual formation, literary composition, and canonization of the Qur'an. Previous studies have approached his work from diverse perspectives, including historical criticism, philology, form criticism, textual criticism, hermeneutics, and contemporary Qur'anic exegesis. Nevertheless, despite the breadth of this scholarship, the existing literature has not systematically and exclusively examined Wansbrough's theory through the epistemological and methodological framework of the Shi'i Qur'anic Charter. This constitutes an important research gap. The present study seeks to address this gap by critically examining Wansbrough's reconstruction of the origins, textual formation, and canonization of the Qur'an through the lens of the Shi'i Qur'anic Charter, while bringing its methodological claims into dialogue with relevant philological, textual, manuscript, and historical evidence.

Textual Deconstruction, Philological Analysis, and Manuscript Science

A close linguistic, syntactic, and structural analysis of Wansbrough's principal case studies raises substantial difficulties for his claims concerning late redactional interpolation and the geographical displacement of the Qur'anic text. The first case study concerns the imperative *qul* ("Say!"), which occurs 332 times in the Qur'an in its singular imperative form and 348 times when all imperative forms of the root *q-w-l* are considered. Wansbrough argued that *qul* constituted a late editorial device introduced to transform human prophetic utterances into direct divine speech, citing al-Suyūṭī's *al-Itqān* as evidence that early Muslim scholars recognized passages in which the original speaker was an angel or a human being (Wansbrough, 1977, pp. 13–15).

A comprehensive syntactic and rhetorical taxonomy of the Qur'anic corpus, however, reveals at least six principal functions of *qul*: (1) dialogical polemics (*qālū/qul*), as in Q. 2:80, 4:78, and 6:109; (2) interrogative refutations, in which *qul* is followed by *man*, *hal*, or the interrogative *hamzah*, as in Q. 23:84–89, 10:31, and 6:63; (3) didactic responses, particularly in the construction *yas'alūnaka ... qul*, as in Q. 2:219–222 and 17:85; (4) legal and moral exhortations, as in *qul li-l-mu'minīn* (Q. 24:30–31); (5) theological declarations, as in *qul huwa*

Allāh (Q. 112:1) and Q. 6:162; and (6) apodictic conditional constructions, including *qul* in and *qul* law, as in Q. 6:56–58 and 17:100.

Philological analysis further suggests that Wansbrough's interpretation does not adequately account for the relevant principles of classical Arabic rhetoric or the precise arguments of his sources (Veradi Esfahani, 2022, pp. 180–197). Al-Suyūṭī's discussion concerns rhetorical shifts (*iltifāt*) and exceptional passages in which Gabriel speaks or human beings pray, such as Q. 19:64 and Q. 1:5; it does not establish that *qul* represents a scribal or editorial interpolation. From a syntactic perspective, if *qul* were merely an interpolated gloss, its removal would be expected to leave grammatically coherent constructions. In numerous passages, however, *qul* governs subordinate clauses, direct objects, and prepositional phrases whose removal would disrupt the grammatical and semantic structure of the sentence. Examples include Q. 4:63 (*wa-qul lahum fī anfusihim qawlan balīghā*), Q. 8:38 (*qul li-l-ladhīna kafarū in yantahū...*), and Q. 17:23 (*wa-qul lahumā qawlan karīman*). From a rhetorical perspective, *ʿilm al-balāghah* recognizes such constructions as forms of explanatory initiation (*isti'nāf bayānī*) that respond to anticipated questions, objections, or communicative contexts. The recurrent use of *qul* therefore contributes to a dialogical and rhetorically dynamic mode of discourse rather than necessarily indicating a later editorial layer (Qarāmalekī, 2014; Taftāzānī, 2013).

The second case study concerns the *mā adrāka mā* formula in Sūrat al-Qāriʿah (Q. 101). Wansbrough adopted August Fischer's (1902) hypothesis that Q. 101:10–11 (*wa-mā adrāka mā hiyah / nārun ḥāmiyah*) constituted later scribal glosses intended to explain the relatively obscure term *hāwiyah* in Q. 101:9 (*fa-ummuhu hāwiyah*). According to this interpretation, *umm* originally denoted “mother” and was subsequently reinterpreted as a reference to Hell (Wansbrough, 1977, pp. 27–28). However, Torrey (2002) and Veradi Esfahani (2022, pp. 197–200) argue that *fa-ummuhu hāwiyah* can be understood within established classical Arabic usage, in which *umm* may metaphorically denote a person's abode, destination, or place of return—thus conveying the sense that “his abode is the abyss.” This interpretation coheres with the preceding eschatological imagery concerning the

weighing of deeds (*mawāzīn*). Moreover, the final *-iyah* in *mā hiyah* may be understood in relation to the phonological phenomenon known as *hā' al-sakt*, particularly in Qur'anic forms such as *kitābiyah*, *ḥisābiyah*, and *māliyah* (Q. 69:19, 25, 28). The recurrence of the *mā adrāka mā* construction across multiple Qur'anic passages, including Q. 82:17, 83:8, and 97:2, is likewise more readily explained as a recurring rhetorical device for introducing realities beyond ordinary human apprehension than as evidence of isolated late glossation.

Wansbrough's treatment of the Prophet Shu'ayb's mission to Midian across *Sūrat al-A'rāf* (Q. 7:85–93), *Sūrat Hūd* (Q. 11:84–95), and *Sūrat al-Shu'arā'* (Q. 26:176–190) further illustrates the methodological risks of decontextualization (*bāft-zidā'i*) (Stewart, 2016; Veradi Esfahani, 2022, pp. 200–208). Wansbrough mapped these passages onto a nine-part biblical prophetic schema and regarded Q. 26 as the most primitive because of its comparatively compressed presentation, while considering Q. 11 to be later because of its greater narrative elaboration. An alternative reading, however, suggests that the variations are closely related to the macro-thematic and rhetorical architecture of each host *sūrah* (*tanzīm al-sūrah*). In *Sūrat al-A'rāf*, where prophetic confrontation with arrogant political elites (*al-mala'*) constitutes a prominent theme, Shu'ayb's confrontation with the ruling elite receives greater emphasis. In *Sūrat Hūd*, where economic morality, divine justice, and punishment constitute central themes, the narrative gives greater attention to fraudulent weights and measures (*al-mikyāl wa-l-mīzān*). By contrast, *Sūrat al-Shu'arā'* presents a strophic and rhetorically patterned composition in which several prophetic narratives are linked by recurring refrains, including *inna fī dhālika la-āyah*. The Shu'ayb pericope is consequently presented in a more compressed form consistent with the rhetorical and rhythmic structure of the *sūrah*. Such differences can therefore be interpreted as deliberate rhetorical adaptation rather than necessarily as evidence of divergent regional redactions.

A similar problem arises in Wansbrough's treatment of the two paradisiacal sections in *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* (Q. 55:46–77), which he interpreted as duplicate recensions subsequently combined into a single composition. A structural and linguistic analysis, however, suggests a coherent differentiation between two tiers of paradisiacal

description (Veradi Esfahani, 2022, pp. 209–224). The first section (Q. 55:46–61) describes two gardens associated with a higher category of the righteous and characterized by flowing springs (‘aynān tajriyān) and garments of silk (istabraq). The second section (Q. 55:62–77), introduced by wa-min dūnihimā jannatān, presents another pair of gardens with distinct imagery, including gushing springs (‘aynān naddākhātān) and intensely green vegetation (mudhāmmatān). This differentiation can be read as a deliberate theological and rhetorical hierarchy rather than as evidence of textual duplication. Moreover, Wansbrough’s characterization of the dual form jannatān as a “pseudo-dual” requires reconsideration in light of al-Farrā’s grammatical analysis, which understands jannatān as referring to two actual gardens. Within the broader structure of the sūrah, this duality may also be related to the repeated address to the two categories of rational beings, humanity and the jinn (al-thaqalān).

Manuscript and epigraphic evidence provide an additional basis for reassessing Wansbrough’s chronology. Radiocarbon dating, palaeographical analysis, and early monumental inscriptions have contributed substantially to the reconstruction of the Qur’an’s early textual history. The Ṣan‘ā’ palimpsest (DAM 01-27.1), examined by Sadeghi and Goudarzi (2012), contains an erased lower text (scriptio inferior) that represents an early Qur’anic textual witness and is overlain by a standardized upper text (scriptio superior). Radiocarbon evidence places the parchment within the seventh-century period, while the palaeographical and textual analysis provides important evidence for the existence of Qur’anic textual traditions before the late seventh century. The Birmingham Qur’anic folios (Mingana 1572a), whose parchment has been radiocarbon dated to 568–645 CE at a 95.4% confidence level, and the Tübingen fragment (Ma VI 165), dated to 649–675 CE at the same confidence level, likewise provide significant early physical witnesses to the Qur’anic textual tradition. Their textual features broadly correspond to the consonantal framework (rasm) and organizational structure of the received Qur’anic text.

Further evidence is provided by the monumental inscriptions associated with the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, completed in 692

CE under ‘Abd al-Malik. These inscriptions contain substantial Qur’anic material and demonstrate that recognizable Qur’anic formulations were publicly displayed in an imperial monumental context by the late seventh century (Whelan, 1998; Déroche, 2009, 2014; Marx & Jocham, 2019). Although manuscript and epigraphic evidence must be interpreted with appropriate attention to questions of dating, textual variation, and the relationship between individual witnesses and the broader canonical tradition, the cumulative evidence presents a substantial chronological challenge to a model that places the primary crystallization of the Qur’anic canon in the late eighth or early ninth century. Rather than supporting an extended historical vacuum between the Prophet’s lifetime and the emergence of a canonical text, the available physical evidence points toward the existence of a substantially stabilized Qur’anic textual tradition by the seventh century, thereby requiring significant qualification of Wansbrough’s late-canonization hypothesis.

The Shi‘i Qur’anic Charter and Contemporary Scholarly Convergence

To formulate a coherent epistemological alternative to revisionist reductionism, this study draws upon the theoretical framework of the Qur’anic Charter from the Perspective of the Shia of the Ahl al-Bayt (Rezaei Esfahani & Karimi, 2025). The Charter presents an integrated four-dimensional epistemological model that seeks to reconcile the early stabilization of the Qur’anic text with the continuing development of its interpretive and exegetical dimensions through fourteen formal clauses.

The first dimension concerns the ontology of revelation (waḥy). Clauses 1 and 3 define the Qur’an as the literal and semantic Word of God, revealed through Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur’an is consequently regarded as the foundational constitution of Islamic civilization and as an enduring miracle (i‘jāz). It is also understood as a confirmer (muṣaddiq) and authoritative guardian or criterion (muḥaymin) over earlier scriptures. Revelation is therefore conceptualized as intentional divine communication from God to the Prophet, through which the believing community was historically

constituted. This understanding contrasts with Wansbrough's sociological model, according to which the community progressively constructed the scriptural corpus in the process of establishing and negotiating its confessional boundaries (*Gemeindebildung*) (Donner, 1998, 2010).

The second-dimension concerns textual transmission and canonical integrity, particularly the concepts of *tawātur* and the denial of *taḥrīf*. Clauses 2 and 7 affirm that the 114 *sūrahs* of the Qur'an have been transmitted across successive generations through continuous and authoritative mass transmission (*tawātur*), thereby safeguarding the received text against corruption, omission, addition, or alteration (*nafy al-taḥrīf*). Within this framework, the universally received Qur'anic text is understood as the product of a transmission process combining widespread memorization (*ḥifẓ*) with continuous manuscript transcription. The convergence of oral and written modes of transmission is therefore regarded as a principal mechanism underlying the preservation of the Qur'anic text (Schoeler, 2006; Saki & Shaker, 2018).

The third dimension establishes a multilayered hermeneutical framework (*Hermeneutica Sacra*). Clauses 4 and 5 distinguish between the apparent (*ẓāhir*) and inner (*bāṭin*) dimensions of Qur'anic meaning, as well as between clear (*muḥkam*) and ambiguous (*mutashābih*) verses and between abrogating (*nāsikh*) and abrogated (*mansūkh*) rulings. At the same time, the Charter rejects arbitrary or purely subjective interpretation (*tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*). This framework distinguishes textual stability (*thubāt al-naṣṣ*) from interpretive openness (*infītāḥ al-ma'nā*). From this perspective, the historical development of *tafsīr* represents the expanding application of grammatical, legal, theological, rhetorical, and philosophical methodologies to an established textual corpus rather than the retrospective creation or progressive formation of the Qur'anic text itself.

The fourth-dimension concerns authoritative hermeneutical continuity through the relationship between scripture and the Prophetic lineage (*muwālāt al-Qur'ān wa-l-'Itrah*). Clauses 6 and 13 emphasize the inseparable relationship among the Qur'an, the Prophetic Sunnah, and the Infallible Household (*Ahl al-Bayt*),

grounding this relationship in Ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn. Within the Shi'i epistemological framework, the Ahl al-Bayt are regarded as authoritative interpreters and elucidators (al-mubayyinūn) of the Qur'anic text, providing continuity in the transmission and interpretation of Prophetic teachings. This model seeks to preserve the integrity of the original revelation while allowing for the continuing application of Qur'anic principles to changing social and historical circumstances. It thus provides a theological and hermeneutical basis for sustained engagement between textual continuity and interpretive development, while also offering a framework for intra-Islamic dialogue and broader forms of scholarly convergence (al-Ṣadr, 1980; Modarressi, 1993).

Taken together, these four dimensions provide an epistemological framework within which textual stability and interpretive dynamism are not mutually exclusive. The Qur'anic text may be understood as historically stabilized while its meanings continue to be explored through legitimate exegetical methodologies and authoritative interpretive traditions. This distinction is particularly significant for evaluating Wansbrough's thesis: the existence of extensive exegetical development does not, in itself, require the conclusion that the underlying Qur'anic text was progressively constructed or canonized at a much later historical period.

Comprehensive Assessment of Wansbrough's Revisionism in Light of the Shi'i Qur'anic Charter

A comprehensive assessment of Wansbrough's revisionist thesis in light of the Shi'i Qur'anic Charter reveals substantial divergences between the two frameworks across eight foundational dimensions.

1. **Origin and Nature of the Qur'anic Text:** Wansbrough conceptualizes the Qur'an as a literary anthology that emerged from circulating oral logia and was progressively shaped through a prolonged process of textual formation. By contrast, the Shi'i Qur'anic Charter (Clauses 1 and 3) defines the Qur'an as divine revelation (wahy) possessing distinctive literary, acoustic, semantic, and theological coherence. Within this framework, the unity of the Qur'anic discourse is attributed fundamentally to its revelatory origin rather than to a late editorial process.

2. Chronology of Codification and Canonization: Wansbrough places the definitive canonization of the Qur'an around the beginning of the third Islamic century (c. 800–815 CE). The Charter (Clauses 2 and 7), by contrast, maintains that the Qur'anic text was transmitted and stabilized from the earliest Islamic period through *tawātur*. This position finds significant support in the growing body of manuscript and epigraphic evidence, including radiocarbon and palaeographical analyses of early Qur'anic witnesses.

3. Textual Integrity: Wansbrough's model presupposes a fluid textual tradition that underwent prolonged development and revision. The Charter (Clause 2) affirms the preservation of the Qur'anic text and rejects substantive textual corruption (*nafy al-tahrīf*). Early manuscripts, particularly with regard to the stability of the consonantal skeleton (*rasm*), provide important evidence for assessing the historical plausibility of these competing positions.

4. Sectarian Milieu and Geographical Origin: Wansbrough locates the principal environment of Qur'anic textual formation within a broader Mesopotamian sectarian milieu. The Charter (Clauses 1 and 14), together with relevant historical, manuscript, and epigraphic evidence, supports the traditional localization of the Qur'anic proclamation within the seventh-century Hijazi context. The cumulative evidence therefore creates significant difficulties for relocating the primary formation of the Qur'anic text to eighth-century Mesopotamia.

5. Engagement with Judeo-Christian Traditions: Wansbrough interprets Qur'anic engagement with Jewish and Christian traditions primarily through processes of intertextual borrowing and sectarian polemic. The Charter (Clause 3), however, conceptualizes the Qur'an as *muhaymin* in relation to previous scriptures. From this perspective, Qur'anic engagement with biblical and Late Antique traditions represents an intentional theological and corrective dialogue grounded in the concepts of *taṣdīq* and *haymanah*, rather than merely derivative literary borrowing.

6. The Nature and Chronology of Exegesis: Wansbrough's reconstruction tends to associate the development of exegetical traditions with the progressive formation of the Qur'anic text itself. The Charter (Clauses 4 and 5), by contrast, distinguishes between the stability of the

revealed text and the historical development of its interpretation. The emergence of increasingly sophisticated grammatical, legal, rhetorical, theological, and philosophical approaches to tafsīr can therefore be understood as the maturation of interpretive methodologies applied to an already established textual corpus.

7. The Locus of Hermeneutical Authority: Wansbrough's reconstruction gives considerable weight to the role of later scholarly and scribal communities in the construction of authoritative Islamic traditions, including isnād systems. The Charter (Clauses 6 and 13), by contrast, locates authoritative interpretation within the relationship among the Qur'an, the Prophetic Sunnah, and the Ahl al-Bayt, particularly through the Thaḳalayn paradigm. From the Shi'i perspective, this framework provides continuity between revelation, Prophetic teaching, and authoritative interpretation.

8. The Role of the Faith Community: Wansbrough's model gives priority to the role of the emerging Muslim community in constructing and legitimizing its foundational scripture and confessional identity. The Charter (Clauses 8–12), however, reverses this causal relationship by regarding divine revelation as the primary factor that constituted, organized, and transformed the believing community. The community is therefore understood primarily as the historical recipient and transmitter of revelation rather than as its principal author.

Wansbrough's Enduring Contribution to Qur'anic Studies

Despite the substantial criticisms directed against his historical conclusions, a rigorous scholarly assessment should distinguish between Wansbrough's broader revisionist reconstruction and his more limited contributions to literary and methodological analysis. His work contributed to the study of the Qur'an by emphasizing its sophisticated literary structures, rhetorical patterns, and thematic organization; drawing attention to Late Antique intertextuality; developing functional classifications of early exegetical materials; and encouraging the application of literary theory and structural analysis to early Islamic texts (Rippin, 1985; Berg, 2000; Graves, 2016). In several respects, these methodological interests anticipated or contributed to subsequent

developments in Qur'anic literary studies associated with scholars such as Angelika Neuwirth and Michel Cuypers.

The distinction is therefore important: rejecting Wansbrough's chronology of canonization does not require rejecting every aspect of his literary methodology. His micro-analytical observations can remain heuristically valuable even when the historical conclusions derived from them are reconsidered in light of subsequent evidence.

Convergence with Contemporary Historical-Critical Scholarship

Significantly, several conclusions advanced through the Shi'i Qur'anic Charter converge, at least in certain respects, with findings emerging from contemporary secular and historical-critical Qur'anic scholarship. Neuwirth (2010) and Sinai (2017), for example, emphasize the importance of reading individual sūrahs within their historical, literary, and communicative contexts and recognize substantial evidence for their interaction with a seventh-century audience. Such approaches are compatible with the Charter's emphasis on the Qur'an as an authentic form of prophetic communication, although the underlying epistemological premises remain different.

Similarly, manuscript studies by Déroche (2009, 2014) and Sadeghi and Goudarzi (2012) provide significant evidence for the existence of early Qur'anic textual witnesses and for the relative stability of the rasm during the first Islamic century. This evidence is relevant to the Charter's claims concerning tawātur and textual preservation, although the manuscript evidence itself should not be presented as independently "proving" every theological formulation of nafy al-tahrīf. Rather, it provides historical evidence that must be interpreted within the broader textual history of the Qur'an.

Furthermore, the isnād-cum-matn analyses associated with Motzki (2001) and the studies of oral and written transmission by Schoeler (2006) have challenged overly skeptical assumptions concerning the historical value of early Islamic traditions. Their findings suggest that at least some traditions and legal materials can plausibly be traced to the early Islamic period. Consequently, they complicate Wansbrough's more radical dismissal of early Muslim historical memory.

Methodological Responses to Anticipated Objections

Several potential objections to the present framework require methodological clarification. First, the possibility of theological bias does not necessarily invalidate the comparative use of the Shi'i Qur'anic Charter. The present study does not employ the Charter merely as a dogmatic premise but treats it as an explicit epistemological framework against which Wansbrough's historical and literary assumptions can be evaluated. The analysis therefore combines theological epistemology with philological analysis, formal reasoning, textual criticism, and manuscript evidence.

Second, comparing a 1970s revisionist theory with a 2025 formulation is methodologically defensible because the purpose is not to establish historical contemporaneity but to examine how a contemporary Shi'i epistemological framework responds to one of the most influential revisionist models in modern Qur'anic studies. The Charter consequently functions as a contemporary theoretical lens through which Wansbrough's assumptions can be reassessed.

Third, the textual variants identified in the lower writing (*scriptio inferior*) of the Ṣan'ā' palimpsest require careful treatment. They should neither be dismissed as insignificant nor automatically interpreted as evidence of an entirely fluid oral tradition. The findings of Sadeghi and Goudarzi (2012) demonstrate meaningful textual variation within an early Qur'anic witness while also indicating substantial structural and textual continuity. The appropriate conclusion is therefore one of early textual plurality within a broader process of stabilization, rather than either absolute textual uniformity from the outset or unrestricted textual fluidity until the ninth century.

Fourth, variations in Qur'anic citation among early exegetes such as Muqātil b. Sulaymān may reflect the characteristics of oral, pedagogical, and homiletic modes of citation rather than necessarily indicating the absence of a fixed written text. Such evidence should therefore be interpreted in conjunction with manuscript, epigraphic, and transmission data rather than in isolation (Versteegh, 1993).

Fifth, the inclusion of the Thaḡalayn paradigm is methodologically legitimate when the objective is to examine the Shi'i conception of the relationship between textual preservation and hermeneutical authority.

Nevertheless, it should be distinguished from manuscript evidence: the Thaḳalayn paradigm constitutes a theological and hermeneutical claim about authoritative interpretation, whereas manuscripts and inscriptions constitute historical-material evidence concerning textual transmission.

Finally, reports within the Islamic literary tradition that appear to refer to missing or additional Qur'anic material require careful differentiation between claims concerning the physical text and claims concerning interpretation, commentary, or meaning. Within Twelver Shi'i scholarship, major authorities such as al-Ṣadūq, al-Murtaḍā, al-Ṭūsī, and al-Ṭabrisī rejected the doctrine of textual corruption of the canonical muṣḥaf. Later Shi'i scholars likewise distinguished between textual taḥrīf and interpretive or semantic alteration (taḥrīf al-ma'nā) (Modarressi, 1993; Rezaei Esfahani & Karimi, 2025). Accordingly, anomalous reports should be assessed individually in terms of provenance, transmission, genre, and interpretive context rather than treated collectively as evidence for textual corruption.

The foregoing analysis indicates that Wansbrough's revisionist reconstruction of Qur'anic origins and canonization encounters substantial methodological and historical difficulties, particularly in its proposed late chronology and its relocation of the principal process of textual formation to an Iraqi sectarian environment. Subsequent manuscript, epigraphic, philological, and historiographical research has significantly complicated the assumptions on which this reconstruction rests. Nevertheless, Wansbrough's contribution to the literary and structural analysis of the Qur'an remains relevant and should be distinguished from the more controversial historical conclusions of his revisionist model.

The Shi'i Qur'anic Charter provides an alternative epistemological framework that integrates the concepts of divine revelation (waḥy), mass transmission (tawātur), textual preservation ('adam al-taḥrīf), multilayered meaning (ẓāhir and bāṭin), and authoritative interpretation through the Thaḳalayn paradigm. Its principal contribution to the present debate lies in distinguishing the historical stability of the Qur'anic text from the continuing development of its interpretation. On this basis, early textual stabilization and subsequent exegetical plurality are not mutually contradictory phenomena. Rather, they can be

understood as complementary dimensions of the Qur'an's historical reception. This framework consequently offers a basis for further dialogue between Shi'i Qur'anic epistemology and contemporary historical-critical scholarship while preserving the possibility of sustained text-critical, philological, and interdisciplinary inquiry.

Conclusion

This study has undertaken a comprehensive epistemological, philological, and text-critical reassessment of John Wansbrough's revisionist thesis concerning the origins, development, and canonization of the Qur'an. By critically examining his foundational works, *Quranic Studies* (1977) and *The Sectarian Milieu* (1978), through the combined perspectives of contemporary manuscript studies and the theoretical framework of the Qur'anic Charter from the Perspective of the Shia of the Ahl al-Bayt (2025), the study has identified substantial methodological, philological, and historical difficulties in Wansbrough's reconstruction.

The analysis of Wansbrough's inferential framework has identified several methodological problems, particularly his treatment of chronological form criticism. The assumption that shorter, more allusive, or more compressed literary units must necessarily represent earlier stages of textual development is not methodologically conclusive. When individual passages are examined within the macro-structural and rhetorical architecture of their respective sūrahs, variations such as the different presentations of the Shu'ayb narrative and the two paradisiacal sections of Sūrat al-Raḥmān can be interpreted as deliberate rhetorical and thematic adaptations rather than necessarily as evidence of divergent regional recensions. Similarly, the syntactic and rhetorical analysis of recurrent Qur'anic formulae, including the imperative qul and the mā adrāka mā construction, indicates that these expressions are structurally and functionally integrated into their respective contexts. Their presence therefore does not, by itself, provide sufficient grounds for identifying them as later redactional interpolations.

The manuscript and epigraphic evidence further complicates Wansbrough's proposed chronology. The Ṣan'ā' palimpsest, the

Birmingham Qur'anic folios, the Tübingen fragment, and the Qur'anic inscriptions associated with the Dome of the Rock collectively provide important evidence for the existence and transmission of Qur'anic textual materials during the first Islamic century. Although individual witnesses exhibit textual and orthographic variation and must be interpreted with appropriate attention to their specific dating and textual characteristics, the cumulative evidence presents a substantial challenge to a model that places the principal stabilization of the Qur'anic text as late as the late eighth or early ninth century. Rather than establishing absolute textual uniformity from the earliest period, this evidence supports the existence of an early and increasingly stabilized textual tradition well before the chronology proposed by Wansbrough.

Against this revisionist reconstruction, the Shi'i Qur'anic Charter provides a four-dimensional epistemological framework that distinguishes textual stability from hermeneutical development. Its framework integrates the divine ontology of revelation (*wahy*), mass transmission (*tawātur*), the doctrine of textual preservation (*'adam al-tahrīf*), multilayered semantics (*ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*), and authoritative interpretation through the Prophetic Household and the *Ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn*. From this perspective, the historical expansion of *tafsīr* literature does not necessarily imply the progressive creation of the Qur'anic text. Rather, it can be understood as the development of increasingly diverse interpretive methodologies applied to an already established textual corpus.

At the same time, a balanced assessment requires acknowledging that Wansbrough's contribution cannot be reduced entirely to his controversial historical conclusions. His emphasis on Qur'anic literary structure, rhetorical patterns, intertextuality, and the relationship between scripture and its Late Antique intellectual environment has retained considerable heuristic value for subsequent scholarship. The present critique therefore distinguishes between the methodological utility of particular literary observations and the historical conclusions drawn from them. Rejecting a late-canonization thesis does not require rejecting the value of literary and intertextual analysis.

Ultimately, the Shi'i Qur'anic Charter offers a framework within which early textual stabilization and continuing hermeneutical development can be understood as complementary rather than contradictory processes. Its integration of classical Islamic textual sciences with contemporary philological, codicological, and historical-critical approaches provides a potentially productive basis for further interdisciplinary research. More broadly, the study demonstrates that the defense of Qur'anic textual integrity need not entail the rejection of literary complexity, historical inquiry, or critical scholarship. Rather, a rigorous engagement with the Qur'an's textual history can accommodate both material evidence and theological epistemology while creating further possibilities for academic dialogue and interconfessional understanding.

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