

**NICOLAI SINAI'S HISTORICAL-CRITICAL APPROACH TO THE QUR'AN:
A CRITICAL STUDY OF LITERARY COHERENCE, CHRONOLOGY, AND
INTERTEXTUALITY**

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Abstract

This article examines the historical-critical approach developed by Nicolai Sinai in Quranic studies. The main focus includes three methodological dimensions: literary coherence and secondary revision, inner-Qur'anic chronology, and intertextuality. Through a qualitative library research method, this study explores how Sinai's approach offers an empirical and systematic alternative to traditional and earlier Western historical-critical methods that are often accused of undermining Islamic orthodoxy. Sinai's contribution fills a significant gap in contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics by bridging classical Islamic interpretive traditions and modern critical methodologies. His framework offers a more nuanced and respectful engagement with the Qur'anic text, avoiding reductionist tendencies while encouraging deeper philological and literary analysis. The study reveals how Sinai's moderate historical-critical model, grounded in textual data, can enrich

both Western and Islamic scholarship in understanding the historical development, structure, and intertextual dialogue of the Qur'an.

Keywords: *Historical-Criticism, Qur'an, Nicolai Sinai, Hermeneutics, Qur'anic Chronology.*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji pendekatan historis-kritis yang dikembangkan oleh Nicolai Sinai dalam studi Al-Qur'an. Fokus utama meliputi tiga dimensi metodologis: koherensi sastra dan revisi sekunder, kronologi internal Al-Qur'an, dan intertekstualitas. Melalui metode penelitian perpustakaan kualitatif, studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana pendekatan Sinai menawarkan alternatif empiris dan sistematis terhadap metode historis-kritis tradisional dan Barat yang lebih awal, yang sering dituduh merusak ortodoksi Islam. Kontribusi Sinai mengisi celah signifikan dalam hermeneutika Al-Qur'an kontemporer dengan menjembatani tradisi interpretasi Islam klasik dan metodologi kritis modern. Kerangka kerjanya menawarkan keterlibatan yang lebih nuansatif dan menghormati terhadap teks Al-Qur'an, menghindari kecenderungan reduksionis sambil mendorong analisis filologis dan sastra yang lebih mendalam. Studi ini mengungkapkan bagaimana model historis-kritis moderat Sinai, yang didasarkan pada data teks, dapat memperkaya baik studi Barat maupun Islam dalam memahami perkembangan historis, struktur, dan dialog intertekstual Al-Qur'an

Kata Kunci: *Kritik Historis, Al-Qur'an, Nicolai Sinai, Hermeneutika, Kronologi Al-Qur'an.*

Introduction

Qur'anic studies has long engaged both Muslim and Western scholars, with the historical-critical method emerging as a prominent approach adapted from Biblical criticism. Initially developed to address issues of authenticity in Biblical texts, this method was applied to the Qur'an to explore its textual history and interpretive possibilities. Nicolai Sinai, a Western scholar, refines this approach in his book *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction*, emphasizing literary coherence, inner-Qur'anic chronology, and intertextuality to illuminate the Qur'an's structure and context. Although Western scholars initially argued that the Qur'an borrowed from earlier scriptures, contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes the Qur'an, Bible, and other scriptures as unique and independent. There is no Borrowing-lending paradigm between one text and another.¹ Many Muslim scholars contend that applying the historical-critical approach to the Qur'an seeks to challenge Islamic beliefs. But for

¹ Lien Iffah Nafa'atu Fina, "Survei Awal Studi Perbandingan Al-Qur'an dan Bibel dalam Kesarjanaan Barat Sebuah Perjalanan Menuju Intertekstualitas," *SUHUF* 8, no. 1 (30 Juni 2015): 121–40, <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v8i1.17>.

Sinai, this is an inaccurate view, as the historical-critical approach has long been crystallized in modern studies of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. It is thus merely an attempt to innovate the application of biblical studies to Qur'anic studies.²

Among the western scholars who offer a Historical-critical approach to Qur'anic studies is Nicolai Sinai. A western scholar and lecturer at The University of Oxford, United Kingdom. Through his book *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction*, Sinai describes several historical-critical methods or approaches that western scholars often use to interpret Qur'anic verses, which include literary coherence and secondary revision, inner-Qur'anic chronology, and intertextuality.

He reconstructs Nöldeke's thinking by dividing the Qur'anic corpus into early, middle and late Meccan and Medinan texts and constructing an internal chronology of the early Meccan suras. New approaches to Nöldeke's dating were also proposed by Nora Katharina Schmid and Islam Dayeh. Nora Katharina Schmid uses quantitative text analysis to statistically assess Nöldeke's dating method, while Islam Dayeh analyzes seven suras beginning with the letter *hā mīm* to show their chronological interrelationships based on formulaic and thematic similarities.³

So far, research on Nicolai Sinai's thought has not been widely discussed by previous researchers. Like the thoughts of other western scholars, such as Angelika Neurwith, Theodore Nöldeke, and so on. Anis Tilawati in her writing examines Sinai's revision of the Ring Structure theory in the Qur'an popularized by Raymond Farrin and Michel Cuypers.⁴ Nicolai Sinai's Interpretation of *Gharāniq* verse in QS. Al-Najm was reviewed by Hamdi Putra Ahmad⁵ and Nurun Najmatul Ulya.⁶ Both focus on Nicolai Sinai's diachronic approach in interpreting QS. Al-Najm as a whole. From the previous studies above, no author has comprehensively discussed Sinai's Historical-critical method in Qur'anic studies.

By looking at the limited previous studies that discuss Nicolai Sinai's Historical-critical approach comprehensively and systematically, this article tries to explain and explore the motives of his thought, then analyze the methods and operational steps of his approach and show how the response of Muslim scholars to his contribution in the treasures of contemporary interpretation. The primary source of this research is Sinai's

² Nicolai Sinai, "Historical Criticism and Recent Trends in Western Scholarship on the Quran: Some Hermeneutic Reflections," *Majallat Kulliyat al-Shaī'ah wa al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah* 38, no. 1 (Juli 2020): 136–46, <https://doi.org/10.29117/jcsis.2020.0259>.

³ Angelika Neuwith, Nicolai Sinai, dan Michael Marx, ed., *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, Texts and Studies on the Qur'ān, Volume 6 (Leiden Boston: Brill, 2010).

⁴ Anis Tilawati, "Struktur Cincin dalam Al-Qu'an (Perspektif Orientalis - Nicolai Sinai)," *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Tafsir di Nusantara* 4, no. 2 (9 September 2019): 51–77, <https://doi.org/10.32495/nun.v4i2.67>.

⁵ Hamdi Putra Ahmad, "Pendekatan Diakronik Dalam Tafsir: Telaah Atas Penafsiran Nicolai Sinai Terhadap QS. Al-Najm" (Skripsi, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2019), <https://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/eprint/34764/>.

⁶ Nurun Najmatul Ulya, "Kajian terhadap Interpretasi Nicolai Sinai dalam An Interpretation of Surāh al-Najm (Q.53)," *Al-Dzikra: Jurnal Studi Ilmu al-Qur'an dan al-Hadits* 14, no. 2 (25 Desember 2020): 179–204, <https://doi.org/10.24042/al-dzikra.v14i2.6318>.

book entitled *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction*. While the secondary sources used are taken from books or journal articles written by Sinai himself or other authors who discuss Sinai's thoughts.

However, despite the growing attention to historical-critical approaches among Western scholars, there remains a significant gap in contemporary Islamic hermeneutics that bridges this methodology with Islamic interpretive sensibilities. Nicolai Sinai's approach stands as a unique contribution in this regard. Unlike earlier figures such as Abraham Geiger or Theodor Nöldeke, whose methods often leaned toward polemical or reductionist conclusions, Sinai's model embraces the Qur'an as a coherent, autonomous scripture. His emphasis on internal coherence, empirical chronology, and intertextual depth offers a compelling framework that resonates with both critical and devotional readerships. By refining the tools of literary analysis, intratextual reading, and thematic mapping, Sinai provides an interpretive bridge between historical-critical scrutiny and Islamic reverence for the Qur'an. This article aims to explore Sinai's methodological contributions not merely as a Western academic endeavor but as a viable epistemic resource to revitalize contemporary Qur'anic exegesis in both Western and Muslim scholarly domains.

Furthermore, this study holds strategic importance for the development of Qur'anic hermeneutics, particularly in refining methodological tools that are often perceived as dichotomous between traditional Islamic exegesis and modern Western criticism. By highlighting Nicolai Sinai's approach, this research offers a platform for epistemological convergence where both traditions can mutually enrich one another. Sinai's work challenges rigid binaries by providing a historical-critical method that neither dismisses the sacredness of the Qur'an nor imposes orientalist biases. His balanced methodology opens a pathway for more productive and respectful academic dialogue between Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, thus contributing to a pluralistic yet rigorous scholarly landscape in Qur'anic studies.

A Short Biography of Nicolai Sinai and His Thought Motives

The historical-criticism approach that western scholars often use to interpret scripture has been going on for a long time. From the early centuries until the 18th century CE, the Qur'an was studied in a traditionalist manner through the books of *ulūm al-Qur'ān* by scholars. Discussions in this first phase covered topics such as: History of the Qur'an, *Rasm al-Qur'ān*, *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, *Munāsabah al-Qur'ān*, *Qaṣāṣ al-Qur'ān*, and so on. Entering the second phase (18th century AD to 20th century AD), the study of the Qur'an began to shift from the phase of recognition (*idrakī*) to the phase of critical study (*tadrisī-naqdī*).⁷

⁷ Syamsul Wathani, "Perkembangan Pemikiran Kajian Al-Qur'an: Pemetaan Framework Qur'anic Studies Dengan Kerangka History of Ideas," *IRFANI* 2, no. 1 (20 Juli 2023): 39–56, <https://doi.org/10.36667/irfani.v2i1.1869>.

Initially, the critical study of scripture was applied to the Bible to explore the authenticity of the text and its meaning. Bruce M. Metzger explains that there will always be problems faced by Biblical interpreters. This is due to the fact that no original Bibel document has been found to date and the discovery of around 5,000 Bibel manuscripts that differ from each other.⁸

In response to this problem, Western scholars formulated a solution by applying the study of biblical criticism. And one of the methods of Biblical criticism is the Historical-critical method. This method is a scientific method that is built on assumptions with rational explanations. When applied to the Bible, historical-critical contributes to determining the oldest text, its literary characteristics, the conditions that gave rise to it, and its original meaning.⁹

The first western scholar to apply the Historical-critical method to the Qur'an was Abraham Geiger (d.1874), a Rabbi and founder of Liberal Judaism in Germany. He was eager to prove that the Qur'an could not escape its influence on Jewish and Christian traditions. He argued that the Qur'an was not a transcendent scripture, but merely Muhammad's reflection on the traditions and conditions of Arab society at the time or a simplification of the Bibles.¹⁰

Western scholars other than Abraham Geiger who are among the pioneers of this Historical-critical approach are Gustav Weil with his work *Historisch-Kritische Einleitung in der Koran*. He accepted the assumptions of Muslim scholars regarding the dating of the letters in the Qur'an based on the chronology of revelation. Furthermore, Weil also applied three criteria to his Historical-critical study. *First*, references to historical events that can be traced from other sources. *Second*, the nature of revelation as a reflection of changing conditions and Muhammad's role. Third, the appearance or appearance of revelation.¹¹

Nöldeke critically examined the origin of the Qur'an. He concluded that the stories of the prophets, some of the teachings and revelations in the Qur'an were derived from Jewish and Christian traditions, such as the legends (*uṣṭūriyyah*) of Maryam and the birth of Jesus. So, Canon Sell (d.1932), a missionary from India, urged that a study of the historicity of the Qur'an be undertaken.¹²

Nicolai Sinai in his book *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction* attempts to refine Theodore Nöldeke's historical-critical method by dispensing with theological

⁸ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition* (Germany: United Bible Societies, 1994), <https://www.logos.com/product/2190/a-textual-commentary-on-the-greek-new-testament-second-edition>.

⁹ Muzayyin, "Pendekatan Historis-Kritis Dalam Studi Al-Qur'an (Studi Komparatif Terhadap Pemikiran Theodore Nöldeke & Arthur Jeffery)" (masters, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2015), <https://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/eprint/19881/>.

¹⁰ Lenni Lestari, "Abraham Geiger dan Kajian Al-Qur'an Telaah Metodologi atas Buku Judaism and Islam," *SUHUF* 7, no. 1 (8 November 2015): 41–60, <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v7i1.22>.

¹¹ Taufik Adnan Amal, *Rekonstruksi Sejarah al-Quran* (Banten: Pustaka Alvabet, 2013).

¹² Hilmy Pratomo, "Aplikasi Pendekatan Kritis-Historis (Geschichte Des Qorans) Theodor Nöldeke (1837-1930) Dalam Studi Al-Qur'an," *Syariati: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an dan Hukum* 4, no. 01 (1 Mei 2018): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.32699/syariati.v4i01.1159>.

factors in his approach and viewing the Qur'an as an independent scripture that has no affinity with Jewish or Christian scripture. He emphasized the Qur'anic dialogue with local Arab traditions and the wider monotheistic milieu. Among Sinai's Historical-Critical approaches are: Literary coherence and secondary revision, Inner-Qur'anic Chronology, and Intertextuality.

Nicolai Sinai's approach is deeply rooted in the legacy of earlier Western scholarship, particularly the work of Theodor Nöldeke, who pioneered the chronological ordering of the Qur'anic surahs in his seminal work *Geschichte des Qorans* (1860). Nöldeke's framework, based on thematic content, style, and presumed historical context, laid the foundation for subsequent historical-critical studies. However, Sinai does not merely adopt Nöldeke's model; he critically revises it by introducing empirical criteria, such as statistical analysis of verse length and intratextual literary features. In contrast to Nöldeke's largely intuitive chronology, Sinai's approach is data-driven and methodologically rigorous, aiming to reconstruct the Qur'an's literary evolution from within the text itself. This revisionist stance marks Sinai's contribution as a bridge between classical orientalist models and more contemporary, text-sensitive hermeneutics.

Nicolai Sinai and the Historical-Critical Approach to the Qur'an

Typical western scholarship in studying the Qur'an is usually unwilling to accept historical evidence that is not scientific and empirical. Even sources of narration such as *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* in Qur'anic studies and *ʿIlm al-Riwāyah* in hadith studies, they put aside first. Many scholars are constrained by rigid scientific standards. For example, Christoph Luxenberg was challenged by many scholars on his theory that the Qur'an originated from Syriac, not Arabic.¹³

Basically, western scholars' motives for studying the Qur'an are very diverse. There are at least three motives for western scholars to study the Qur'an: 1) apologetic studies, 2) imperialist nuances, 3) academic studies. So, it would be unwise if all western scholars' studies of the Qur'an are generalized and judged negatively.¹⁴ Moving away from orientalist apologetic motives in studying the Qur'an, Sinai tries to develop an objective historical-critical method by emphasizing empirical evidence through literary, statistical approaches such as in Inner-Qur'anic Chronology, and Intertextual between the Qur'an and previous scriptures.

¹³ Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran* (Verlag Hans Schiler, 2007).

¹⁴ Zunaidi Nur, Dona Kahfi Ma Iballa, dan Muhammad Fauzhan Azima, "Komparasi Studi Historis-Kritis Al-Qur'an Orientalis (Studi Pemikiran Abraham Geiger, Theodor Nöldeke dan Angelica Neuwirth)," *Hamalatul Qur'an: Jurnal Ilmu Ilmu Alqur'an* 5, no. 2 (20 Desember 2024): 654–62, <https://doi.org/10.37985/hq.v5i2.317>.

Literary coherence and secondary revision

The mufassirs in interpreting the Qur'an have different ways or approaches, such as the maudhu'i interpretation approach, bayani (literary) interpretation, *tartīb nuzūlī* (chronological), and also surat-based interpretation (the sura as unity) popularized by Muntasir Mir.¹⁵ The study of Qur'anic coherence (*munāsabah al-Qur'ān*) is one of the concepts in *ulūm al-Qur'ān* that focuses on the dependence of meaning behind the interconnection of verses that are coherent between one verse and another with *tartīb muṣḥafī*. The peak of the glory of this *munāsabah* science was in the Middle Ages with Ibrahim Al-Biqā'i (d.1480 AD) as the final developer of the classical *munāsabah* concept.¹⁶

After a long hiatus, Hamimuddin Al-Farahi (d.1930 CE) was born who continued Al-Biqā'i's thesis and introduced his new concept called *Naẓm* (structure) in his book *Niẓām al-Qur'ān wa Ta'wīl al-Furqān bi al-Furqān*.¹⁷ Through his work, he assumed that one surah is a unified whole and has one global mandate. Not unnoticed by western scholars, Sinai contributed to revitalizing the scholarly discourse on Qur'anic coherence (*munāsabah*), which had been relatively dormant in Western studies. He views the Qur'an as a literary work, where understanding a verse can be through literary coherence, such as thematic changes, rhyme, and caesura. Sinai argues that understanding the literary structure of the Qur'an is essential for historical-critical analysis, as it reveals how the suras function as coherent units and how they evolved over time.

Basically, the study of Qur'anic coherence does not belong to the realm of *tauqīfī* (certainty), but rather *ijtihādī*. So that efforts to reform in this field are still wide open. This includes the efforts made by Sinai. Muslim scholars in studying *munasabah* often rely on the narration of *asbāb al-Nuzūl*, in contrast to Sinai who prioritizes critical studies of literature, thematic verses, and overrides *asbāb al-Nuzūl*.

In this first historical-critical method, Sinai shows that Qur'anic suras exhibit a degree of literary coherence and contain traces of secondary revisions, such as insertions or expansions, that reflect the historical development of the text. The method is divided into three main steps, each addressing a different aspect of Qur'anic literary analysis: 1) Qur'anic pharagraphing, 2) Literary Coherence in Qur'anic Surahs, and 3) Tracking literary growth and editorial revision.

First, Qur'anic pharagraphing. In a verse or surah, sometimes several verses are found with the same rhyme as forming a paragraph or theme of discussion. By grouping verses by verses in a surah, it will be easier for a surah to be approached and classified which verses still have coherence and which are just an insertion. In this case, Sinai starts with a careful reading of QS. Maryam. He illustrates that surahs can be segmented into

¹⁵ Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān: a study of Iṣlāḥī's concept of naẓm in Tadabbur-i Qur'ān* (Indianapolis, IN, U.S.A: American Trust Publications, 1986).

¹⁶ Ahmad Solahuddin Dunkring dan Jamaluddin Hadi Kusuma, "Keutuhan Surah dalam Struktur Al-Qur'an: Teori Naẓm dalam Tafsir Niẓām Al-Qur'an wa Ta'wīl al-Furqān bi al-Furqān Karya Al-Farāhī," *SUHUF* 13, no. 1 (22 Juni 2020): 123–56, <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v13i1.510>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

coherent literary units, each reflecting internal thematic or structural consistency. He compares the paragraph divisions proposed by scholars such as Rudi Paret, Muhammad Abdel Haleem, and Angelika Neuwirth, highlighting the variations in their approaches to dividing the surah.¹⁸

The comparative table provided in Figure 1 is not merely a structural mapping; it functions as empirical evidence of Sinai's claim that surahs in the Qur'an exhibit internal literary coherence despite their seemingly non-linear composition. By juxtaposing different scholarly segmentations of Surah Maryam, Sinai demonstrates how diverse literary analyses can still converge on identifying structural unity within the text. This substantiates his broader thesis: that the Qur'an evolved through a coherent editorial process rather than random textual compilation, countering claims from earlier scholars like Watt and Bell who questioned the Qur'an's compositional integrity. Therefore, this table illustrates the *operational validity* of Sinai's literary-coherence method and strengthens the argument that thematic and narrative order can be empirically traced within the text.

Paret	Abdel Haleem	Neurwith	Brief Characterisation
v.1	v.1	v.1	superscript (letter sequence)
	v.2	v.2	formulaic introduction of Zachariah pericope
		v.3	Zachariah's prayer for a son
		v.7	God's response to Zachariah
	v.10		Zachariah asks God for a sign
v.12	v.12	v.12	God's grace upon Zachariah's son John
v.16	v.16	v.16	formulaic introduction of Mary pericope, annunciation of Jesus
		v.22	birth of Jesus
	v.27	v.27	Mary's return to her people
		v.30	speech of the infant Jesus
v.34	v.34b*	v.34	general comments on Jesus: rejection of his divine sonship
		v.37	division of people into factions, eschatological threats
v.41	v.41	v.41	formulaic introduction of Abraham pericope, Abraham's quarrel with his father
		v.47	Abraham renounces his people, God grants Abraham prophetic descendants

¹⁸ Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctv1kz4g1p>.

v.51	v.51	v.51	formulaic introduction of Moses
v.54		v.54	pericope, Moses' prophetic call
v.56		v.56	formulaic introduction of Ishmael
v.58	v.58	v.58	pericope, brief statement
			formulaic introduction of Idrīs
			pericope, brief statement
		v.60	general comments on preceding prophets
			promise of salvation to those who believe
v.64	v.64	v.64	speech by the angels
v.66	v.66	v.66	polemic against doubts concerning the Resurrection, eschatological threats
		v.72	antithetical contrast of the saved and the damned
v.73	v.73	v.73	polemic against those who reject God's signs
v.75		v.75	address of the Messenger (qul command)
v.77			further polemic against those who reject God's signs
v.81	v.81		polemic against false deities
		v.83	eschatological threats (addressed to the Messenger)
v.88	v.88	v.88	polemic against the claim that God has offspring
v.96	v.96	v.96	eschatological promise
v.97 (-v.98)		v.97 (-v.98)	concluding address of the Messenger

Figure 1: Paragraph fragments in surah Maryam according to Paret, Abdel Haleem, and Angelika Neuwirth

As illustrated in the table, Sinai compares the thematic transitions of three figures, namely Paret, Abdel Haleem, and Neurwith. Paret tends to divide the suras based on clear thematic changes, such as the stories of Zacharias, Mary, and other prophets, with a relatively simple approach that focuses on the main narrative. Abdel Haleem, on the other hand, highlights the more subtle transitions between segments, paying attention to thematic connections such as consolations and warnings, as well as the emotional tone of the text. Meanwhile, Neuwirth proposes a more detailed division, emphasizing rhythmic and formulaic elements, such as refrains and structural symmetry, for example the paired arrangements of the prophet stories.

In his analysis, Sinai shows that Surah 19 consists of interconnected narrative segments, such as the story of Zakaria (Q 19:2-15), the birth of Isa through Mary (Q

19:16-33), and the stories of Abraham and other prophets, each of which carries a theological function, such as the affirmation of God's compassion or the prophet's role as a warner. This approach reveals that Surah Maryam is not simply a collection of separate verses, but a text with an organized structure that conveys a unified theological message.

Secondly, Observing the coherence of Literature in Qur'anic Surahs. In 1970, Montgomery Watt asserted that the verses in the Qur'an are haphazardly arranged and there is no continuity between one verse and another. He supported his teacher Richard Bell's opinion that some of the Qur'anic suras were originally short separate verses. Then Muhammad revised and combined them into whole surahs. But both their assumptions were dismissed by western scholars in the 1980s. Sinai and Neurwith argued that many Qur'anic texts essentially have a closer literary unity.¹⁹

Sinai emphasizes that although Qur'anic suras often appear to be less narratively or thematically structured than texts such as Genesis or the *Injīl*, they nevertheless exhibit significant internal interrelationships. He proposes a holistic approach by analyzing the surah as a whole unit, rather than a collection of separate verses. As an example, Sinai refers to QS. Maryam, which has been structurally analyzed by scholars such as Paret, Abdel Haleem, and Neuwirth, to show how thematic divisions and narrative structure reflect intentional coherence.

For example, Sinai analyzes QS. Al-Şāffāt to show how certain verses, such as Q 37:112-113, appear as inserts that expand on the initial narrative of Abraham's sacrifice, perhaps to suit theological or polemical developments in the early Islamic community. The structure of QS. Al-Şāffāt is as follows:

I Introductory oaths and polemic

- 1–5 Oath series: the angels at the Last Judgement, oath statement: God's unity and omnipotence
- 6–10 God's creation of the heavens and the stars; the heavenly assembly's inaccessibility to demons
- 11–18 Polemic against doubts about the Resurrection
- 19–26 The doubters confronted with the Judgement (–)
- 27–32 Conversation among the damned in hell (–)
- 33–39 Threat, flashback: the doubters mock the Messenger (–)
- 40–49 Hospitality in paradise: God's chosen servants (+)
- 50–61 Conversation among the blessed in paradise (+)
- 62–68 Hospitality in hell: the Zaqqūm tree (–)
- 69–70 The doubters accused of following their erring ancestors

Hinge

- 71–74 Previous warners, those who rejected them, and God's chosen servants

¹⁹ Ibid., 86.

ii Narrative cycle

75–82 Noah, refrain

83–98 Abraham and the idols

99–111 Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son, refrain

112–113 Addendum on Abraham and Isaac

114–122 Moses and Aaron, refrain

123–132 Elijah, refrain

133–138 Lot

139–148 Jonah

iii Concluding polemic and address of the Messenger

149–160 Critique of pagan beliefs: daughters of God, female angels, deification of the *jinn*

161–166 Speech of the angels: threat against those worshipping false deities, self-identification

167–173 The doubters' attempts at self-justification, response

174–180 Consolation of the Messenger

181–182 Concluding blessing

From the structural division above, Sinai divides thematically from Q. 37:1-182. The first segmentation is in Verses 1-70 which describe Allah's oath on the angelic ranks and the opening narratives of the letter, both narratives about promises of pleasure (+) and threats (-). Then before moving on to the narrative cycle verse group, there is a hinge in verses 71-74. Verses 75-148 illustrate the segmentation of the narrative cycle of stories from Noah to Jonah, as well as phrases or lines of verse that are repeated regularly (refrain). Such as the verse *wa taraknā 'alayhi fī al-Ākhirīn, wa taraknā 'alayhimā fī al-Ākhirīn*. And the last segmentation in verses 149-182 describes the closing of the polemic and the address of the prophets.

This diagrammatic segmentation of Q. 37:1–182 exemplifies how Sinai distinguishes between narrative units, polemical insertions, and liturgical motifs. The careful demarcation into sections such as “Introductory oaths,” “Narrative cycle,” and “Concluding polemic” serves not only to expose editorial layering but also to show textual intentionality in shaping theological arguments. For instance, the placement of the “hinge” (verses 71–74) acts as a literary pivot, transitioning the reader from general eschatological warnings to specific prophetic narratives. Sinai uses this structure to reinforce his assertion that the Qur'an was revised through intentional editorial strategies that reflect evolving community needs and rhetorical functions not simply dictated in a fixed order. Thus, the structural diagram functions as more than a chart; it is a visual argument for the presence of diachronic textual development.

Thirdly, tracking literary growth and editorial revisions. Sinai explains that some suras, especially long suras, show signs of textual growth that occurred through the addition or insertion of new material after the initial text was spoken. There are two kinds of editorial revisions that Sinai refers to in his book, Editorial Conjoining and Editorial Embedding.²⁰

Some scholars, such as Bell, argue that the suras of the Qur'an are composed of pieces of text that originally stood alone, like putting together a building from pre-existing components (Editorial Conjoining). However, not all complex suras are necessarily composed of separate parts. For example, Q. 37 which appears coherent. The claim that this surah is composed of independent texts needs strong evidence, such as tensions or inconsistencies in the text. However, Bell only relies on topic changes or pauses as signs of organization, so this is considered insufficient. In comparison, early Arabic poetry (*qasīdah*) also had distinct sections but was not considered separate before.²¹

Editorial Embedding, on the other hand, is a revision that is more easily seen as the addition of short texts into existing suras. For example in Q. 37:102 and 112-113. In verse 102, it recounts the dialog between Prophet Ibrahim and his son before the sacrifice, confirming that his son agreed and was old enough. This verse is long, different from other verses in the surah, and could be deleted without disrupting the flow of the story. This addition is probably to show that Ibrahim did not force his son, but rather his son took responsibility. While verses 112-113 mention the birth of Prophet Ishaq after the sacrifice, confirming that the child who was almost sacrificed was not Ishaq, but Ishmael. This verse also rejects the view that Abraham's descendants automatically inherit moral goodness. This verse seems like an addendum because of its appendix-like position and its unusual length.

This third methodical step focuses on analyzing thematic, stylistic and structural changes in the surah to trace possible editorial revisions. Here is an example of the macro structure of Q. 2:

I General prologue (vv. 1–39)

I.1 The Believers, the Unbelievers, and those who pretend to be Believers (vv. 1–20)

I.2 Admonishment to believe in God (vv. 21–29)

I.3 The creation of Adam and his temptation by the devil (vv. 30–39)

II Polemic against the Israelites and the People of the Scripture (vv. 40–123)

II.1 Indictment of the Israelites' past acts of disobedience against God (vv. 40–74)

II.2 Further polemic against the Israelites and their present-day descendants, the 'People of the Scripture' (vv. 75–123)

²⁰ Ibid., 92.

²¹ Sinai, *The Qur'an*.

III The Abrahamic sanctuary (vv. 124–152)

III.1 Abraham and the founding of the sanctuary; the religion of Abraham (vv. 124–141)

III.2 Establishment of a distinctively Qur'anic direction of prayer (*qiblah*) towards the sanctuary (vv. 142–152)

IV Legal corpus (vv. 153–283)

IV.1 Introductory exhortation to patience and militancy; miscellaneous pronouncements pertaining, among other things, to dietary matters, manslaughter, bequests, fasting, the pilgrimage, marriage, and divorce (vv. 153–242)

IV.2 Militancy; additional pronouncements to do with charity and money lending (vv. 243–283)

V Epilogue (vv. 284–286)

At first, QS. Al-Baqarah appears to be a collection of separate verses, but scholars such as Amin Ahsan Islahi, Neal Robinson, and Mathias Zahniser have shown that the surah has an organized macro-structure and thematic and literary coherence as shown above. According to Mehdi Bazargan, the initial part (verses 1-20) is the oldest part and may date back to the Meccan period.

The second part, verses 40-123, is thought to be the initial core of the surah and can stand alone as a sura with a typical Medinan structure. The section on Abraham (124-152) seems to have been added later to provide a theological framework linking Muslims to the Abrahamic heritage. The addition of the prologue and the legal section probably occurred in later stages, indicating a complex editorial process.²²

While Sinai's division of surahs like Maryam and Al-Ṣāffāt offers a nuanced understanding of literary structures, his reliance on form-based indicators (rhyme, thematic flow, or refrains) raises questions regarding textual authenticity and authorial intention. There is a risk of over-emphasizing form at the expense of content, leading to conclusions that might not reflect the theological or spiritual priorities embedded within the text. Moreover, although his comparative analysis with scholars like Neuwirth and Abdel Haleem is informative, Sinai's method does not adequately address how literary coherence functions within the exegetical traditions of classical tafsir. Muslim *mufasssirūn* have long engaged in forms of thematic and structural interpretation, albeit with different epistemological assumptions. Sinai's oversight of this lineage may limit the intercivilizational interpretive dialogue that his method implicitly aspires to foster.

Inner Qur'anic Chronology

Sinai's second approach is Chronology in the Qur'an itself. He considers that the approach to chronology in the Qur'an by Muslim scholars such as *asbāb al-Nuzūl*, *Makki-Madani*, and other *'ulūm al-Qur'ān* tools needs to be reconstructed. In this

²² Sinai, *The Qur'an*.

method, he explains how attempts to determine the temporal order (chronology) of Qur'anic revelations are based on internal clues in the text itself, rather than relying solely on Islamic tradition or external sources. He explores both traditional Islamic approaches and Western perspectives on Qur'anic chronology, focusing on two main indicators: verse length and the division between the Meccan and Medinan periods.

They both attempted to build a chronology based on *al-Tartīb al-Nuzūli*, historical and exegetical data, as well as analyzing whether the language style tends to be poetic or prosaic. In contrast to Nöldeke, Sinai used a quantitative approach by taking verse length as the main indicator, measuring mean verse length, standard deviation, and coefficient of variation to identify stylistic changes between the early suras (generally short and poetic) and the later suras (longer and prosaic) (Q 5:113-118).²³

In his application of Inner-Qur'anic chronology, Sinai sets out two methodical steps to analyze Qur'anic Chronology from within.

First, calculating the length of the verse. Sinai's step in measuring verse length as a marker of Qur'anic chronology uses a statistical approach. All the surahs in the Qur'an are calculated on several variables, including: number of verses (according to the Kufa division), average verse length, standard deviation, and coefficient of variation. However, the drawback of this approach is that Sinai calculates the length of verses in the Qur'an based on Hans Zirker's transliteration.²⁴ in Latin script, not through direct Qur'anic *hijaiyyah* letters. Because sometimes one hijaiyyah letter when transitioned into transliteration can become two to more characters.

From figure 2, Sinai calculated the average verse length using the Kufa verse division system, although there are differences of opinion in the Islamic tradition about verse boundaries. Ideally, the data should be recalculated based on a critical evaluation of the various verse divisions. Some suras in Figure 2 are listed twice because they contain verses or groups of verses that may be later inserts. These insertions usually have larger verse lengths, thus affecting the average verse length and standard deviation of the surah. For example, letter number '73*' refers to Surah 73 without the insertion of verse 20.

It shows that Surahs with high average verse lengths tend to have larger standard deviations. To compare, the coefficient of variation (standard deviation divided by average verse length) is used. The coefficient of variation of the Qur'an as a whole is 0.76, and only five suras exceed this value, indicating the verse lengths are more consistent within individual suras than the whole Qur'an. This supports the hypothesis that Qur'anic verse length evolved gradually, as proposed by Weil and Nöldeke.

Sinai attempts to rearrange the chronology of the Qur'an based on the increasing average verse length in each *surah*. The average verse length of the Qur'anic suras ranges from 14.00 for Q. 103 to almost 180.00 for Q. 60. The data shows that there is a standard deviation (deviation) in QS. 73 and QS. 74, both of which are Meccan surahs, but there

²³ Sinai, *The Qur'an*.

²⁴ Sinai, *The Qur'an*.

is one verse from each of these surahs whose verse length deviates from the requirements of Meccan surahs.

Surah no.	Number of verses (according to Kufan division)	Mean verse length (in transcription letters)	Standard deviation (in transcription letters)	Coefficient of variation (standard deviation divided by mean verse length)
full text of the Qur'an	6,236	79.48	60.29	0.76
1	7	27.86	14.58	0.52
2	286	137.19	90.73	0.66
3	200	111.66	58.54	0.52
4	176	137.79	82.66	0.60
5	120	150.06	83.67	0.56
6	165	117.87	55.97	0.47
7	206	104.27	58.93	0.57
8	75	107.63	47.35	0.44
9	129	127.88	49.17	0.38
10	109	104.36	49.13	0.47
11	123	96.18	39.04	0.41
12	111	99.42	47.49	0.48
13	43	126.16	60.95	0.48
14	52	103.29	53.08	0.51
15	99	43.12	16.25	0.38
16	128	93.41	37.73	0.40
17	111	90.15	31.27	0.35
18	110	90.98	49.38	0.54
19	98	62.42	25.99	0.42
20	135	61.04	37.60	0.62
21	112	67.08	23.60	0.35
22	78	102.54	60.84	0.59
23	118	56.86	30.69	0.54
24	64	135.64	95.75	0.71
25	77	75.25	24.81	0.33
26	227	36.71	17.05	0.46
27	93	78.19	33.52	0.43
28	88	101.34	38.38	0.38
29	69	92.36	36.33	0.39
30	60	87.20	40.60	0.47
31	34	97.32	44.69	0.46
32	30	77.33	29.61	0.38

Figure 2: Mean verse length, standard deviation and coefficient of variation of all surahs in the Qur'an

Surah no.	Number of verses (according to Kufan division)	Mean verse length (in transcription letters)	Standard deviation (in transcription letters)	Coefficient of variation (standard deviation divided by mean verse length)
33	73	117.26	75.22	0.64
34	54	99.31	43	0.43
35	45	108.96	52.22	0.48
36	83	55.01	21.32	0.39
37	182	31.20	13.03	0.42
38	88	51.98	29.32	0.56
39	75	98.40	50.52	0.51
40	85	89.20	43.19	0.48
41	54	93.56	42.03	0.45
42	53	99.57	47.97	0.48
43	89	61.78	25.43	0.41
44	59	36.61	13.54	0.37
45	37	84	31.43	0.37
46	35	112.74	52.64	0.47
47	38	96.66	55.57	0.57
48	29	130.97	77.03	0.59
49	18	124.61	51.87	0.42
50	45	50.82	16.71	0.33
51	60	37.77	13.45	0.36
52	49	40.37	20.61	0.51
52* (excl. v. 21)	48	38.35	15.33	0.40
53	62	34.81	32.72	0.94
53* (excl. vv. 23 and 26–32)	54	24.09	5.74	0.24
54	55	41.40	11.88	0.29
55	78	32.97	12.77	0.39
56	96	26.78	9.77	0.36
57	29	129.69	62.21	0.48
58	22	137.59	66.43	0.48
59	24	119.67	54.38	0.45
60	13	179.31	105.29	0.59
61	14	100.14	52.51	0.52
62	11	100.18	33.13	0.33
63	11	110.18	31.07	0.28

Figure 2: Mean verse length, standard deviation and coefficient of variation of all surahs in the Qur'an

Surah no.	Number of verses (according to Kufan division)	Mean verse length (in transcription letters)	Standard deviation (in transcription letters)	Coefficient of variation (standard deviation divided by mean verse length)
64	18	89.28	31.85	0.36
65	12	157.83	67.61	0.43
66	12	138.33	58.01	0.42
67	30	67.47	18.09	0.27
68	52	37.04	18.20	0.49
69	52	32.87	17.03	0.52
69* (excl. v. 7)	51	31.41	13.64	0.43
70	44	32.64	14.98	0.46
71	28	51.39	26.53	0.52
72	28	61.29	15.11	0.25
73	20	63.90	100.23	1.57
73* (excl. v. 20)	19	41.11	13.48	0.33
74	56	28.18	46.42	1.65
74* (excl. vv. 31 and 56)	54	21.28	7.16	0.34
75	40	26.80	7.84	0.29
76	31	52.65	13.83	0.26
77	50	25.48	7.27	0.29
78	40	28.60	17.83	0.62
78* (excl. vv. 37–40)	36	23.36	6.26	0.27
79	46	25.22	8.98	0.36
80	42	21.43	6	0.28
81	29	22.45	5.42	0.24
81* (excl. v. 29)	28	21.68	3.64	0.17
82	19	25.84	9.61	0.37
83	36	30.11	9.90	0.33
84	25	27.24	10.73	0.39
84* (excl. v. 25)	24	26	9.02	0.35
85	22	29.73	22.68	0.76
85* (excl. vv. 7–11)	17	19	3.66	0.19
86	17	21.53	6.44	0.30
87	19	23.37	5.54	0.24
87* (excl. v. 7)	18	22.17	2.22	0.10
88	26	22.58	5.20	0.23

Figure 2: Mean verse length, standard deviation and coefficient of variation of all surahs in the Qur'an

Surah no.	Number of verses (according to Kufan division)	Mean verse length (in transcription letters)	Standard deviation (in transcription letters)	Coefficient of variation (standard deviation divided by mean verse length)
89	30	29.10	15.95	0.55
89* (excl. vv. 15–16, 23–24, and 27–30)	22	24.36	7.60	0.31
90	20	25.35	10.88	0.43
90* (excl. vv. 17–20)	16	22.19	5.14	0.23
91	15	24.13	12.55	0.52
92	21	22.90	5.23	0.23
93	11	23.73	6.81	0.29
94	8	19.88	1.05	0.05
95	8	27.88	13.82	0.50
95* (excl. v. 6)	7	23.43	7.76	0.33
96	19	22.95	5.92	0.26
97	5	34.20	12.06	0.35
97* (excl. v. 4)	4	28.25	2.17	0.08
98	8	74.38	33.77	0.45
99	8	31	8.53	0.28
100	11	23.27	7.12	0.31
101	11	20.27	7.62	0.38
102	8	23.63	6.71	0.28
103	3	32	26.09	0.82
103* (excl. v. 3)	2	14	7	0.50
104	9	24.11	4.04	0.17
105	5	30	5.25	0.18
106	4	27.50	10.14	0.37
107	7	23.57	4.92	0.21
108	3	22.67	0.94	0.04
109	6	23	2.83	0.12
110	3	39	10.71	0.27
111	5	24.40	2.42	0.10
112	4	18.25	5.02	0.27
113	5	23.40	4.63	0.20
114	6	18	6.30	0.35

Figure 2: Mean verse length, standard deviation and coefficient of variation of all surahs in the Qur'an

After elaborating Mean verse length, standard deviation and coefficient of variation of all surah in the table, Sinai visualizes the form of a Qur'anic chronology by using chart from the shortest verse to the longest verse.

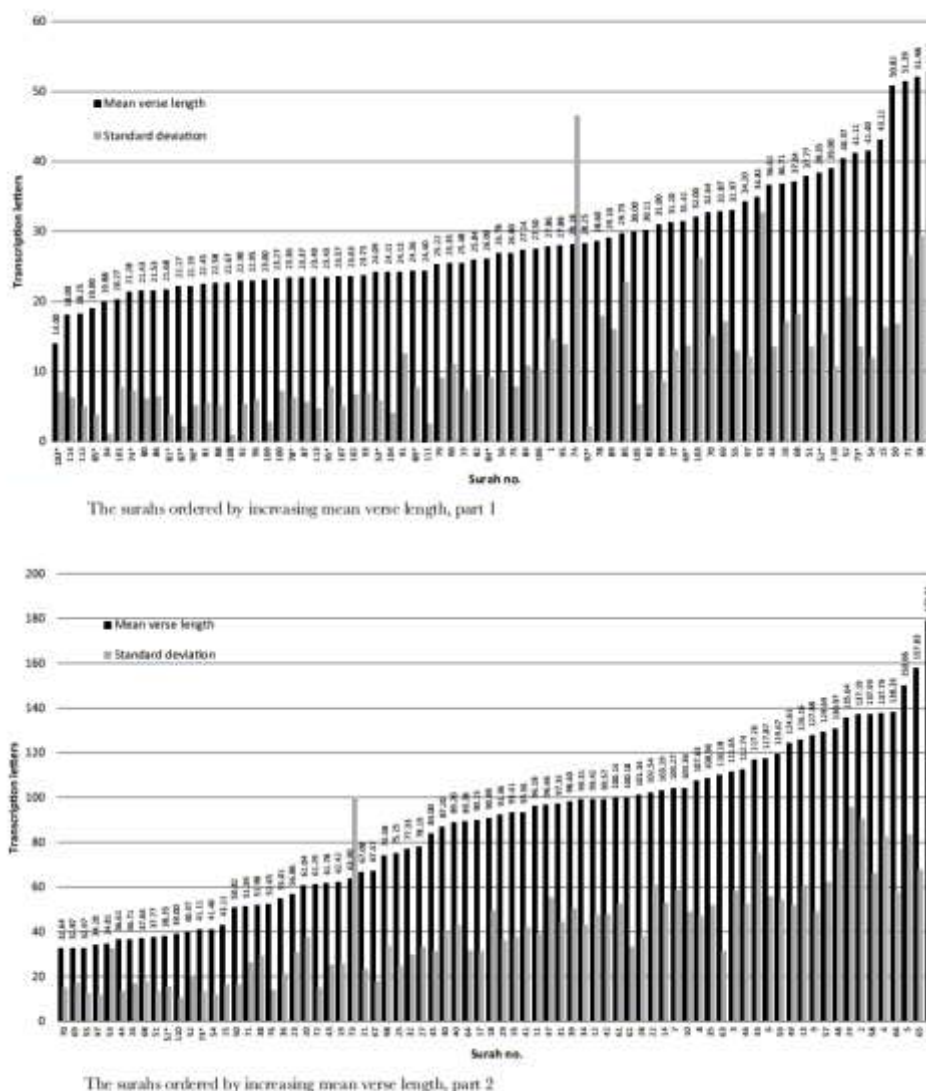


Figure 3: Average (mean) verse length

Figure 3 provides a robust and detailed analysis of the evolution of Qur'anic style, integrating both quantitative (verse length statistics and lexical profiles) and qualitative (stylistic and thematic elements) approaches. The main strengths of this analysis are the use of empirical data, such as the correlation between verse length and various textual features, as well as the support of Sadeghi's study which does not rely on the assumption of surah unity. This approach reinforces the hypothesis of gradual development in an objective and measurable way, while also aligning with the traditional Islamic narrative of Qur'anic revelation.

However, its weakness lies in its reliance on the assumption that correlation always indicates chronological progression, whereas variations in verse length can be influenced by other factors such as context or literary purpose. Furthermore, while recognizing that ranking by verse length does not necessarily reflect chronology, clear guidance on when verse length differences are chronologically significant is lacking. Overall, this analysis is valuable for understanding the textual dynamics of the Qur'an, but requires further research to clarify the relationship between statistical data and historical chronology.

Secondly, paying attention to the Meccan-Medinan division. The separation between the Meccan and Medinan suras is based on the Islamic tradition of linking revelation to the two main phases of Prophet Muhammad's life: the Meccan period (before the migration in 622 CE) and the Medinan period (after the migration). The Mecca phase is characterized by an emphasis on preaching monotheism and eschatology, while the Medina phase focuses more on community building, law, and relations with other groups such as Jews and Christians.

The Medinan verses can be recognized by their specific setting, namely the community of the Apostle and his followers who have migrated from the sanctuary (*al-masjid al-haram*) to Medina, and are in open conflict with the polytheists of Mecca. The suras reflecting these conditions tend to be characterized by long verses, formulaic structures, and direct references to Jews and Christians in the context of theological polemics. In addition, these suras contain practical instructions related to family, inheritance, worship and criminal law, and include new terms such as "hypocrite" and "disease of the heart".

However, the boundary between Meccan and Medinan verses is not always firm. Some suras such as QS. 6, 7 and 16 have a mixture of both, while suras such as QS. 22 clearly show a rearrangement or insertion of verses from different periods. This suggests that the Qur'anic redaction process involved incorporating and adapting to the developing context of the Muslim community.

Sinai's statistical approach to Qur'anic chronology provides a novel empirical dimension by measuring verse lengths and lexical profiles. However, this methodology is not without critique. By prioritizing formalist measurements, such as mean verse length and standard deviation, Sinai risks reducing the Qur'an's complex revelatory context to quantifiable data. The reliance on Latin transliteration, rather than the original Arabic script, introduces another level of abstraction that may distort phonetic, rhythmic, and syntactic patterns crucial for Arabic stylistics. Additionally, the method tends to overlook traditional Islamic frameworks of chronology rooted in *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, *Makkī-Madani* classification, and *riwāyah*-based sequencing. While Sinai's approach enhances objectivity, it may simultaneously disconnect from the lived and transmitted experience of the Qur'an in the Islamic intellectual heritage.

Figures 2 and 3 are crucial to understanding Sinai's application of quantitative methodology in constructing an inner-Quranic chronology. By calculating mean verse

lengths and plotting their statistical variations, Sinai attempts to map the developmental trajectory of Qur'anic style from early poetic surahs to later legalistic ones. This data visually reinforces his argument that the Qur'an's literary form changed over time correlating with shifts in prophetic mission and socio-political context. Particularly, surahs like Al-'Aṣr with short, punchy verses are placed chronologically earlier than Al-Mumtaḥanah, which has longer, more didactic passages. While this may not conclusively determine revelation order, it strengthens the plausibility of a gradual stylistic and thematic evolution, aligning with both Islamic tradition and modern critical theory.

Intertextualiy

Intertextuality is a concept that reveals that a text is created by combining previous texts that intersect and blend with each other. In addition, a text should be seen as inseparable from wider cultural and social constructions.²⁵ The term intertextuality basically refers to two understandings. First, Intertextuality in the sense of the relationship or connection between one text and another text and still within the scope of the Qur'an itself. This equivalent is also known as *Al-Qur'ān yufassiru baḍuhū ba'ḍan*. Secondly, Intertextual in the sense of the relationship between one text and other texts outside the Qur'an. And it is this term that Nicolai Sinai refers to as one of his Historical-critical approaches.²⁶

In this chapter on Intertextuality, Sinai explores how the Qur'an interacts with narratives, concepts and texts from previous religious traditions, particularly Jewish and Christian traditions, and how the Qur'an adapts and transforms these elements to convey its own theological message. Sinai classifies critical methodical steps in this intertextual study.

First, the Transmission of Biblical Knowledge into the Qur'anic Milieu. In the Qur'an, there are verses that explicitly mention the previous books such as the Torah, Gospel, and Zabur.²⁷ For Sinai, this indicates at least an interaction between the Qur'anic audience at the time and the Hebrew biblical tradition. He argues that the Qur'an did not simply receive influences from Biblical narratives, but actively adapted and transformed them to support its theological message, especially the affirmation of monotheism and Muhammad's prophethood.

Sinai highlights that Biblical knowledge likely reached the pre-Islamic Arab environment through oral transmission, such as contact with Jewish and Christian communities or oral traditions circulating among Arabs. Sinai rejects reductionist views

²⁵Nur Afra Afifah Amani Amatullah, Nur Laili Nabilah Nazahah Najiyah, dan Inayah Rohmaniyah, "Intertextuality and Late Antiquity in Michael E. Pregill's Interpretation of the Worship of the Golden Calf in Surah Thāhā: 83-97," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 24, no. 1 (31 Januari 2023): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v24i1.4093>.

²⁶Fina, "Survei Awal Studi Perbandingan Al-Qur'an dan Bibel dalam Kesarjanaan Barat Sebuah Perjalanan Menuju Intertekstualitas."

²⁷See QS. 3:3-4, 4:163, dan 5:44,46

that regard the Qur'an as a compilation of earlier texts, and emphasizes that the Qur'an reworks these narratives in innovative ways, creating an authentic theological identity.²⁸

Second, Convergence and Divergence of Jewish and Christian traditions in the Qur'an. As a heavenly holy book, the Qur'an and the previous books have some similarities in concept and redaction. So that in intertextual studies it is necessary to unite (convergence) or separate (divergence) the concepts of the two scriptures to be studied.

For example, the Basmalah '*Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*' is similar in structure to the Christian Trinity formula 'In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28:19). However, the Basmalah still emphasizes the oneness of God by mentioning two attributes of God, not three persons as in the Trinity. This similarity emphasizes the major theological differences between Islam and Christianity.

In his book *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction*, Sinai provides the following comparison of textual similarities between the Qur'an and the Bibel.

Qur'anic Verse	Closely overlapping Biblical or post-Biblical passage
<p>Q 1: 6: <u>'Guide us on the straight path.'</u></p> <p>Q 2: 255: 'God – there is no god but Him, the Living (<i>al-hayy</i>), the Enduring (<i>al-qayyūm</i>). Neither slumber (<i>sinah</i>) nor sleep (<i>nawm</i>) seizes Him. To Him belongs what is in the heavens and what is on earth. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth, and He is not weighed down by guarding them. He is the Exalted and Mighty.'</p>	<p>Psalms 27: 11: 'Teach me Your way, O Lord, and <u>lead me on a straight path</u>, because of my enemies.'</p> <p>Daniel 6: 26/27: '... For <u>He is the living and eternally enduring God</u></p> <p>Psalms 121: 4: 'Behold, He who keeps Israel <u>shall neither slumber nor sleep</u>.'</p> <p>1 Chronicles 29: 11: 'Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; <u>for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours ...</u>'</p> <p>Isaiah 66: 1: 'Thus says the Lord: <u>the heaven is My throne</u>, and the earth is My footstool ...'</p>

Figure 4: Similar quotations in the Qur'an and Bibel

The data presented in Figure 4 is not intended to argue for textual borrowing or theological dependency but rather to highlight how the Qur'an enters into intertextual dialogue with pre-existing scriptural traditions. The semantic and thematic resonance between verses such as Q 2:255 and Psalms 121:4 suggests a shared concern with divine transcendence, omnipotence, and protection. However, Sinai emphasizes that these similarities are not "quotations" in the strict sense, but deliberate adaptations aimed at

²⁸ Sinai, *The Qur'an*.

recontextualizing theological motifs within a new, monotheistic discourse that is both independent and corrective.

Importantly, these textual echoes serve a rhetorical function in the Qur'an: to validate Muhammad's prophethood by demonstrating familiarity with sacred language, while simultaneously offering reinterpretation and reformulation. For instance, while Psalm 27:11 seeks guidance due to "enemies," Q 1:6 universalizes the plea for guidance toward the "straight path," signifying a broader, metaphysical framework. This distinction is critical. It shows how intertextuality in the Qur'an is not passive replication but an act of textual sovereignty where older motifs are re-scripted to support a distinct theological and eschatological vision.

Furthermore, the Qur'anic transformation of these motifs supports Sinai's thesis that the Qur'an engages in creative intertextuality, which not only reflects the cultural-religious milieu of Late Antiquity but also constructs a unique scriptural identity. This approach aligns with the broader goals of the historical-critical method: not merely tracing influences but understanding how and why those influences are reframed. Through this lens, Sinai challenges reductionist readings that label the Qur'an as derivative and instead situates it as a dynamic participant in the late antique scriptural landscape.

Sinai argues that the redactional similarities between Qur'anic and Biblical texts are not 'quotations' in the strict sense. Rather, they tend to be paraphrases, allusions and echoes. An example of the application of Intertextual reading is the story of God's dispute with the angels. Some Qur'anic narratives about the dialog between Allah and the angels regarding the creation of Adam, as found in several Qur'anic verses, such as Q 2:30-33, Q 7:11-18, Q 15:26-43, Q 17:61-65, Q 18:50, Q 20:116, and Q 38:71-85. The story of Adam's creation is quite familiar to Christians.

In the Qur'an, for example, Adam was initially created in a state of ignorance about all the names of animate and inanimate objects around him. Until God told Adam the names as in QS. In contrast to the Biblical narrative which says that Adam gave all the names of the objects around him according to Adam's will and creativity, as in Genesis 2:19 "The Lord God formed out of the ground every wild animal and every bird of the sky, and brought each to the man to see what he would call it. And whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name."²⁹

Later in the Qur'anic narrative, when Allah announced His plan to create Adam as the "*khalifah*" (representative) on earth, the angels expressed their objections, questioning why Allah would create a being who would cause destruction and bloodshed (Q 2:30). Allah responded by asserting His higher knowledge, then ordered the angels to bow down to Adam, who all obeyed except Satan. Sinai highlights that this story has parallels in Jewish tradition, particularly in texts such as the Life of Adam and Eve (*Vita Adae et Evae*) and some Rabbinic midrash (interpretations of books by ancient

²⁹ *The Holy Bible: Christian Standard Bible (CSB)* (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Bible Publ, 2017), 2.

prophets), where angels also question the creation of human beings or show jealousy towards Adam.

However, the Qur'an distinguishes itself by the way these narratives are treated. In Jewish tradition, angelic objections often reflect jealousy or a comparison of status between humans and angels. In contrast, in the Qur'an, the angels' objections are more intellectual and moral, focusing on the potential damage that humans will cause. God responds by demonstrating the superiority of Adam's knowledge (exemplified through Adam's ability to name things, Q 2:31-33), which the angels lack, thus confirming divine wisdom in the creation of humans. Iblis, in the Qur'anic narrative, refuses to prostrate himself out of pride (considering himself better for being created from fire, not clay like Adam), leading to his expulsion from the divine presence.

Sinai emphasizes that this intertextual approach reveals how the Qur'an not only borrows from Jewish and Christian traditions but also reworks those elements to assert its theological views on God's sovereignty, humanity's role as caliph, and the origin of evil (through Satan's rejection). The narrative also demonstrates the Qur'an's dialog with its audience, who were likely already familiar with these earlier traditions, so that the Qur'an positions itself as a continuation and refinement of earlier revelations.

In addition to the intertextuality reading, Sinai also explains the Intratextuality Reading in the Qur'an. As explained, Intratextuality is an approach that examines the internal relationships between parts of one text, in this case the Qur'an. Unlike intertextuality, which focuses on the Qur'an's relationship with external texts such as Jewish and Christian traditions, intratextuality focuses on the Qur'an's internal coherence and dynamics. In its application, Sinai uses the creation narrative of Adam and the defiance of Iblis.

The narrative of Adam and Iblis in QS. Şad (38):71-76 can be seen as a development of the previous narrative in QS. Al-Ĥijr (15):26-28, with the addition of details that enrich the theological meaning, such as Iblis' refusal to prostrate which is attributed to his arrogance.

QS. Al-Raḥmān (55): 14-15	QS. Al-Ĥijr (15):26-28, 33	QS. Şad (38): 71, 76
14. He <u>created man (al-Insān) from clay (salsal)</u> like a potter,	26. We have <u>created man from clay (salsāl)</u> , from a moulded mud;	71. And [recall] when your Lords said to the angels: 'I <u>am creating a human (basharan) from clay (tīn).</u> '
15. and He <u>created the jinn from a mixture of fire.</u>	27. We <u>created the jinn before from the fire</u> of the scorching wind.	76. He [Iblīs] said: 'I am better than him: You <u>created me from fire and created him from clay (tīn).</u> '
	28. And [recall] when yours Lord said to the angels: 'I <u>am creating a human</u>	

	<p><u>(basharan)</u> from clay <u>(salsāl)</u>, from a moulded mud.'</p> <p>33. He [<i>Iblīs</i>] said: 'I am not one to prostrate myself to a human whom You have created from clay (<i>salsāl</i>), from a moulded mud.'</p>	
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Figure 5: Comparison of internal Qur'anic texts

The table above illustrates how the Qur'anic verse 'dialogues' with itself. Sinai assumes that we cannot be absolutely sure whether the first people to receive the Qur'an would have immediately associated the designation of God as "the Living and Everlasting" (in QS. 2:255, 3:2, and 20:11) with the verse in the Book of Daniel "For he is the living God, and he endures forever" (in 6:26/27). However, we can be fairly certain that the followers of Prophet Muhammad would understand that QS. 15:26-28 refers back to QS. 55:14-15. This is because the verses of QS. 15:26-27 are actually a slightly altered repetition of two verses in Sura 55, which were revealed earlier, and are still considered to be valid words of God despite having been delivered earlier.³⁰

The result of Sinai's analysis of the above Intratextual is that Iblis in the Qur'anic perspective is not like in the Judeo-Christian scriptures which consider the devil to be an angel who fell into sin, but rather belongs to the class of beings similar to demons (demon beings). Sinai's intratextual analysis of the Qur'anic narrative on Iblis reveals a fundamental theological departure from the Judeo Christian portrayal of Satan. While Christian tradition often depicts Satan as a fallen angel who rebelled against God, the Qur'an explicitly classifies Iblis as a being from the jinn (Q 18:50), not from the angelic realm. This distinction is significant, as it preserves the Qur'anic conception of angels as infallible beings who never disobey divine commands (Q 66:6), and situates the origin of moral rebellion outside the realm of divine purity.

According to Sinai, this difference is not incidental but reflects a deliberate intertextual correction within the Qur'an, which engages with earlier scriptural traditions not by replicating them but by reconfiguring their theological implications. The Qur'an thus asserts a distinct cosmology in which evil is a product of a separate volitional entity, not a corruption of the divine order. For Sinai, this case study exemplifies the broader function of intertextuality in the Qur'an: not as evidence of textual borrowing, but as an act of scriptural sovereignty reframing inherited motifs to articulate a new theological vision.

³⁰ Sinai, *The Qur'an*.

This is consistent with the fact that the Qur'an does not seem to regard angels, unlike humans and jinn, as beings capable of disobeying God's commands. Thus, through this intratextual approach, it is possible to discover another way in which the Qur'anic Adam-Iblis stories differ from earlier Judeo-Christian literature, by looking at later Qur'anic statements that build on and refer back to earlier statements.

Sinai's intertextual reading, particularly his mapping of overlaps between the Qur'an and Biblical texts, contributes significantly to comparative scriptural studies. Yet, his framing often assumes that such parallels necessarily imply textual borrowing or theological continuity. This assumption requires greater scrutiny, especially considering the Qur'an's self-conscious assertion of its independence and its corrective stance toward earlier scriptures. Moreover, Sinai's treatment of intertextuality lacks sufficient engagement with the Islamic science of *tasyābuh* and *mu'jizāt*, which could offer an alternative epistemology for understanding scriptural intersections not merely as literary echoes, but as divine affirmations or polemical responses. Without this, Sinai's intertextual analysis risks being interpreted as part of the orientalist paradigm that views the Qur'an as derivative rather than dialogical and autonomous.

Gabriel Said Reynolds has shown how Qur'anic narratives interact with Christian apocrypha, thereby reinforcing Sinai's intertextuality thesis within a broader Late Antique religious milieu³¹. Nicolai Sinai's empirical approach to the Qur'an reveals that its literary form is shaped not merely by divine dictation but also by internal editorial strategies, establishing a textual autonomy built upon intertextual dialogue with earlier scriptural traditions³². In the Indonesian context, thematic intertextuality has emerged as a salient method that demonstrates both structural unity and exegetical depth in *tafsīr* studies³³. Complementing this development, recent scholarship highlights a methodological shift toward critical-philological approaches, especially in how classical narratives are reinterpreted through contextual hermeneutics.³⁴

Comparative Reflections on Sinai's Methodology: Between Neuwirth and Fazlur Rahman

To further appreciate Nicolai Sinai's contribution, it is necessary to compare his methodology with other major figures in Qur'anic studies particularly Angelika

³¹ G S Reynolds, *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context* (api.taylorfrancis.com, 2008), <https://api.taylorfrancis.com/content/books/mono/download?identifierName=doi&identifierValue=10.4324/9780203939604&type=googlepdf>.

³² Nicolai Sinai, "Historical Criticism and Recent Trends in Western Scholarship on the Quran: Some Hermeneutic Reflections," *Majallat Kuliyat al-Shaī'ah wa al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah* 38, no. 1 (July 2020): 136–46, <https://doi.org/10.29117/jcsis.2020.0259>.

³³ Nur Afra Afifah Amani Amatullah, Nur Laili Nabilah Nazahah Najiyah, and Inayah Rohmaniyah, "Intertextuality and Late Antiquity in Michael E. Pregill's Interpretation of the Worship of the Golden Calf in Surah Thāhā: 83-97," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 24, no. 1 (January 31, 2023): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v24i1.4093>.

³⁴ Lien Iffah Nafa'atu Fina, "Survei Awal Studi Perbandingan Al-Qura'n Dan Bibel Dalam Kesarjanaan Barat Sebuah Perjalanan Menuju Intertekstualitas," *SUHUF* 8, no. 1 (January 1, 1970): 121–40, <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v8i1.17>.

Neuwirth and Fazlur Rahman whose frameworks also attempt to reconstruct Qur'anic meaning through historical, literary, and contextual analysis.

Sinai vs Angelika Neuwirth: Diachronic Theology vs Structural Emphasis

Angelika Neuwirth's approach emphasizes the diachronic development of the Qur'anic text. She regards the Qur'an as a "late antique text" that evolved in dialogue with the religious and social discourses of its time. Neuwirth integrates philological, socio-political, and theological aspects, especially by reconstructing the *Sitz im Leben* of each sura. She often employs form criticism, examining surahs as liturgical and communal texts that reflect the transformation of early Muslim society.

In contrast, Sinai while sharing a historical-critical orientation focuses more on text-internal structures, particularly the literary architecture and editorial growth of individual surahs. His methodology is more empirical and literary-philological than Neuwirth's more historical-sociological lens. Where Neuwirth emphasizes the community's reception of revelation, Sinai prioritizes textual indicators verse length, rhyme, thematic clusters as the primary source of historical reconstruction.

Moreover, Neuwirth is more willing to accept the religio-cultural pluralism of Late Antiquity as a positive influence on the Qur'an, while Sinai is more cautious, aiming to maintain the textual autonomy of the Qur'an. His rejection of the "borrowing model" places him in a more text-sympathetic position, albeit within a Western critical framework.

Sinai vs Fazlur Rahman: Critical Philology vs Ethical Hermeneutics

Fazlur Rahman, as a Muslim scholar, was not primarily concerned with historical-linguistic dissection, but with ethical coherence and moral renewal of the Qur'anic message. His concept of *double movement* from the Qur'anic text to the socio-historical context, and back to present application sought to reconstruct Islamic law and thought through a holistic, ethical reading of the Qur'an. He emphasized *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* (purposive principles) over literalism and was wary of atomistic interpretations.

Sinai, on the other hand, is not engaged in normative reconstruction. His goal is not to revive Islamic ethics, but to establish a scientific model for understanding the Qur'an's literary evolution. This makes Sinai's approach more descriptive than prescriptive, and less concerned with normative implications. Where Rahman reads the Qur'an as a guide for socio-moral reform, Sinai reads it as a textual-historical document in need of stratification, segmentation, and editorial analysis.

Another key difference lies in their epistemological commitments: Rahman integrates Islamic theological presuppositions into his method, whereas Sinai deliberately brackets theological claims in favor of methodological neutrality a hallmark of Western critical scholarship.³⁵

³⁵ F. Rahman, "Hermeneutics and the Qur'ān: Bridging Traditional and Critical Approaches," *Islamic Studies* 58, no. 2 (2019): 189–210.

Conclusion

Nicolai Sinai's historical-critical approach represents a significant advancement in contemporary Qur'anic studies. By integrating literary coherence, inner-Qur'anic chronology, and intertextuality, Sinai offers a methodological framework that is both empirically grounded and theologically sensitive. Unlike earlier Western scholars such as Nöldeke or Geiger, whose approaches often positioned the Qur'an as derivative, Sinai emphasizes its internal structure, historical development, and rhetorical distinctiveness. His contribution refines the historical-critical paradigm by respecting the Qur'an's autonomy while employing rigorous textual analysis. The study has shown how Sinai identifies editorial growth within the Qur'an, reconstructs chronology using statistical models, and highlights intertextual links with Biblical traditions without reducing the Qur'an to borrowed narratives. This not only bridges a gap in modern tafsīr discourse but also challenges binary assumptions between faith-based and academic scholarship. Beyond theoretical contribution, Sinai's approach has practical implications for Qur'anic interpretation today. In an era of rising literalism and ideological misuse of scripture, his method encourages a thematic and developmental reading of the Qur'an revealing how its ethical and legal messages evolved in response to changing historical contexts. Such an approach can counter extremist readings that isolate verses from their broader discourse. Moreover, Sinai's intertextual analysis opens pathways for interfaith engagement by acknowledging shared scriptural motifs while preserving theological distinctions. This is especially relevant in multicultural societies, where religious understanding and cooperation are essential. For Islamic education, Sinai's model provides a foundation for reformulating tafsīr pedagogy, enabling students to engage critically with the text through empirical tools without sacrificing reverence. His framework encourages scholars to reexamine inherited interpretive traditions, not to reject them, but to enrich them with new insights drawn from literary and contextual reading. In sum, Sinai's historical-critical method offers not only academic refinement but also a constructive response to contemporary challenges. It provides a bridge between traditional tafsīr and modern hermeneutics, opening the way for a more dialogical, context-aware, and socially relevant engagement with the Qur'anic text in the 21st century.

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