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A Critical Study of John Wansbrough's: the Qur'an and Its Relevance for Contemporary Tafsir Studies

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Abstract

Purpose — This article aimed to critically examine John Wansbrough's thought on the Qur'an and to assess its significance within the dynamics of contemporary exegetical studies. The study was motivated by ongoing debates surrounding revisionist approaches in Western Qur'anic scholarship, particularly regarding the use of historical criticism in understanding the origin and formation of the Qur'an. It sought to address the epistemological gap between Wansbrough's historical-critical framework and the normative foundations of Islamic tafsir, while clarifying the extent to which such an approach may be constructively engaged within Qur'anic studies.

Design/methods— The research employed a qualitative design based on library research. Data were collected through an in-depth examination of primary sources, namely John Wansbrough's major works, complemented by secondary sources consisting of peer-reviewed journal articles and writings of contemporary Muslim scholars. The analysis applied content analysis and a critical-hermeneutic reading to explore conceptual assumptions, methodological structures, and interpretive implications of Wansbrough's approach within the broader discourse of Qur'anic exegesis.

Findings— The findings indicated that Wansbrough's historical-critical method made a significant methodological contribution to Western Qur'anic studies, particularly in challenging traditional narratives of textual formation. However, the study also revealed a strong reductionist tendency that marginalized the revelatory dimension of the Qur'an. Consequently, this article argued that historical approaches may be accommodated in tafsir studies only in a limited and critical manner, provided they remain anchored within an Islamic epistemological framework.

Keywords: John Wansbrough, Orientalism, Qur'an, contemporary tafsir, historical criticism.

Ethical Statement: It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were adhered to during the preparation of this work, and all sources used have been properly cited in the bibliography. The article has been reviewed by at least two peer reviewers, a similarity report was obtained using Turnitin, and compliance with research/publication ethics has been confirmed.
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1. Introduction

The study of the Qur'an from an Orientalist standpoint has long been regarded as one of the most contested and evolving discussions within Islamic studies. This discourse extends beyond methodological considerations to encompass deeper epistemological questions concerning the concept of revelation and the legitimacy of sacred authority. One of the most prominent figures in the development of modern critical Qur'anic scholarship is John Wansbrough (1928–2002), a British scholar whose seminal works, *Qur'anic Studies* (1977) and *The Sectarian Milieu* (1978), introduced an analytical framework that substantially reoriented Western approaches to the study of the Qur'an. Wansbrough argued that the Qur'an should not be understood as a text completed in the seventh century CE, but rather as the outcome of a prolonged process of compilation shaped over several centuries amid theological exchanges and polemics among early Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities. Such an interpretation stands in clear opposition to the dominant Islamic understanding of the Qur'an's authenticity and transmission, while simultaneously generating enduring scholarly debate. In the last two decades, Qur'anic studies in the West have been increasingly dominated by philological and historical-critical approaches. Nicolai Sinai asserts that the historical-critical method opens up new possibilities for understanding the process of the Qur'an's formation while placing it within the broader landscape of religious tradition (Sinai, 2017). In line with this, Gabriel Said Reynolds argues that the Qur'an should be read through intertextual dialogue with the Biblical tradition, rather than being understood solely as a stand-alone text (Reynolds, 2018, pp. 13–15). Meanwhile, Angelika Neuwirth developed a historical-literary approach that places the Qur'an as part of the social and religious transformation of Arab society towards monotheism (Neuwirth, 2019). This development marks an important shift in modern Qur'anic studies, from a normative-dogmatic approach to historical, intertextual, and literary analysis.

However, an important research gap can still be identified, especially regarding a thorough and critical engagement with John Wansbrough's ideas in relation to the evolving landscape of contemporary Qur'anic studies. Much of the existing literature tends to mention Wansbrough only in passing as an emblem of "radical skepticism" in

Orientalist scholarship, without exploring in depth his intellectual role in shaping subsequent methodological approaches to the study of the Qur'an (Hafidl, B. Z., & Safei, A., 2025). Consequently, his thought is often reduced to a purely theological opposition, rather than being understood as an academic phenomenon with enduring methodological consequences. This situation highlights the need for a more nuanced and systematic re-evaluation of Wansbrough's ideas in order to examine their relevance and implications, both within Western academia and as a source of critical challenge as well as reflective insight for Muslim scholars.

Building on this background, this article seeks to offer a critical analysis of John Wansbrough's perspectives on the Qur'an by situating them within the broader context of Orientalist scholarship and the evolution of modern academic discourse (Alsaied, 2026). The scope of analysis encompasses both Wansbrough's principal writings and recent secondary studies that engage with, respond to, and critique his arguments. Structurally, the article is divided into four main parts: the first outlines the historical development of Qur'anic studies in Western academia; the second elaborates Wansbrough's core theoretical positions as articulated in *Qur'anic Studies* and *The Sectarian Milieu*; the third examines various scholarly responses and critiques of his ideas from diverse perspectives; and the fourth reflects on the contribution and relevance of Wansbrough's thought within the contemporary landscape of Qur'anic studies.

2. Methods

This research adopted a qualitative approach using a library research design (Zed, 2004). The main data sources consisted of John Wansbrough's writings, supported by relevant academic materials such as scholarly articles and other scientific works. The data were analyzed through content analysis to trace and categorize the central arguments, and further interpreted using a critical-hermeneutic approach to evaluate the methodological consequences of these ideas within the domain of Qur'anic exegesis.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Historical and Intellectual Context of Wansbrough's Thought

John Wansbrough (1928–2002) was born in Peoria, Illinois, United States, on 19 February 1928. He is widely recognized as an influential historian and Orientalist in Islamic studies, particularly in the field of Qur'anic scholarship (Calder, 2003). His academic career developed primarily in the United Kingdom from the early 1960s, when he joined the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, as a member of the academic staff. At SOAS, Wansbrough taught early Islamic history and Arabic, and also held several administrative positions. The intellectual environment of SOAS, characterized by strong traditions of philology and Orientalist scholarship, played a decisive role in shaping his academic framework (Zulfa, 2015). Wansbrough's early scholarly interests focused on the history of Mediterranean trade and Jewish–Arab relations. His engagement with Qur'anic studies emerged later, particularly through his examination of medieval documents using literary and historical approaches that treated texts as cultural products. From this perspective, he developed the view that religious texts, including the Qur'an, could be analyzed through philological tools, literary criticism, and historical methods (Calder, 2003).

As an academic, Wansbrough produced several influential works. His two most significant books are *Qur'ānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (1977) and *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (1978) (Wansbrough, 1977; Wansbrough, 1978). In addition, he authored numerous articles on Arabic rhetoric, Qur'anic exegesis, and the relationship between language and religious tradition. These works reflect his deep engagement with the Islamic intellectual heritage, although they were developed from an Orientalist perspective (Zulfa, 2015).

In *Qur'ānic Studies*, Wansbrough advanced the thesis that the narrative of the codification of the ʿUthmānic muṣḥaf, as preserved in Islamic tradition, was a later construction. According to him, the Qur'anic text did not attain its final form during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad but underwent a prolonged process of redaction,

achieving stabilization only several centuries later. Employing a historical-critical approach, he also highlighted thematic and narrative parallels between the Qur'an and Jewish–Christian traditions, leading him to conclude that the Qur'an developed within a context of intense interaction with earlier religious traditions (Wansbrough, 1978; Reynolds, 2010, pp. 13–15). In a more expansive formulation, Wansbrough even suggested that the formation of early Islamic doctrine could not be separated from pre-existing religious patterns (Zaenudin & Tarlam, 2023).

Methodologically, Wansbrough's thought was strongly influenced by the tradition of biblical criticism that developed in the study of the Old and New Testaments. This approach—particularly shaped by Julius Wellhausen's documentary hypothesis—was subsequently applied by Wansbrough to the Qur'an (Wellhausen, 1885). As a result, the Qur'an was treated as a literary-religious document subject to critical philological, literary, and historical analysis, rather than solely as a divinely revealed text fixed from the outset. This methodological stance rendered his ideas highly controversial and prompted widespread rejection among the majority of Muslim scholars (Zaenudin & Tarlam, 2023).

Wansbrough's influence extended beyond his own writings to his students, including Patricia Crone, Michael Cook, and Andrew Rippin. Crone and Cook developed aspects of Wansbrough's ideas in *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (1977), although this work was later heavily criticized for its speculative nature (Crone & Cook, 1977). Andrew Rippin, meanwhile, continued Wansbrough's methodological legacy by advancing Western Qur'anic exegesis through a more systematic and analytically refined approach (Calder, 2003). Developments in Qur'anic manuscript studies, particularly the discovery of early Qur'anic manuscripts in Ṣanʿāʾ, Yemen, in 1972, have often been associated with Wansbrough's approach. These findings were interpreted by some scholars as evidence that the process of textual standardization occurred gradually (Puin, 1996, pp. 107–111). However, other scholars, such as Nicolai Sinai, have argued that early manuscript evidence instead points to a relatively early stabilization of the Qur'anic text (Sinai, 2017, pp. 56–58). Angelika Neuwirth likewise emphasizes the importance of historical context in understanding the Qur'an, while

simultaneously acknowledging the distinctive religious character of the text that cannot be reduced to a mere product of sectarian compilation (LeTourneau, 2016).

In sum, John Wansbrough's thought constitutes a significant component in the development of Western methodologies in Qur'anic studies. Despite the extensive criticism directed at his work, his ideas have contributed to the expansion of academic approaches to Qur'anic scholarship and have stimulated more reflective and methodologically self-aware discussions in contemporary Qur'anic studies.

3.2 Wansbrough's Historical–Philological Approach

John Wansbrough (1928–2002) holds a central position in modern Qur'anic studies through his persistent use of historical and philological methods to investigate the origins of the Qur'anic text. He challenged the conventional view that the Qur'an was completed and definitively codified during the reign of the Caliph ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān in the seventh century CE. Instead, Wansbrough argued that the Qur'an emerged through a lengthy editorial process shaped by the theological and intellectual dynamics of early Semitic societies. From this perspective, the Qur'an is situated within the broader evolution of religious literature rather than understood as a text that appeared in a fixed canonical form from the beginning (Wansbrough, 1978). A key concept in Wansbrough's framework is the notion of the *sectarian milieu*, referring to a religious environment marked by sustained debates among early Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities. Within such a setting, the Qur'an is interpreted as the outcome of dialogue, polemical exchange, and literary development that unfolded during the first two centuries of Islam. Wansbrough famously described the Qur'an as "a document of the sectarian milieu," emphasizing that its formation was inseparable from continuous interaction with earlier Biblical traditions (Wansbrough, 1978, p. 119; Griffith, 2008).

Methodologically, Wansbrough drew heavily on the tradition of biblical criticism long applied to the study of the Bible. This approach does not treat scripture as a timeless and finalized text, but instead examines its origins, modes of transmission, and stages of redaction. When applied to the Qur'an, it led to close analysis of literary structures, stylistic features, thematic repetitions, and intertextual links with other religious texts. On this basis, Wansbrough concluded that the Qur'an developed through prolonged

internal debates within the early Muslim community, which remained closely connected to Jewish and Christian traditions in the broader Middle Eastern context (Wansbrough, 1978).

Within his analytical model, Wansbrough also proposed a typology of Qur'anic interpretation, identifying categories such as haggadic, halakhic, masoretic, rhetorical, and allegorical modes. This classification foregrounded the literary and hermeneutical aspects of the text, rather than the authority of chains of transmission (*isnād*) that dominate classical Islamic exegesis. Consequently, he adopted a skeptical attitude toward early Islamic sources, including hadith and prophetic biography (*sīrah*), which he regarded as later constructions and therefore unreliable for reconstructing the earliest phases of Islamic history (Maqdis & Hakim, 2022; Zaenudin & Tarlam, 2023).

Through this historical–philological framework, Wansbrough opened space for interdisciplinary research, encompassing Qur'anic manuscript studies, Semitic linguistics, and intertextual hermeneutics. At the same time, his approach encouraged more critical engagement with long-standing apologetic assumptions in Qur'anic studies. Although his ideas have generated sustained controversy, they have also played a significant role in shaping new methodological orientations in modern Qur'anic scholarship, particularly within Western academic contexts (Griffith, 2008).

3.3 Literary and Hermeneutical Criticism in Qur'anic Studies

Beyond his historical and philological concerns, John Wansbrough employs literary criticism and hermeneutical analysis as fundamental tools in examining the Qur'anic text. His scholarship places strong emphasis on recurring motifs, narrative discontinuities, and rhetorical patterns, which he interprets as evidence that the Qur'an took shape through sustained engagement with earlier religious traditions in the Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds, particularly those of Judaism and Christianity during Late Antiquity (Machrus, 2016; Muslih et al., 2023). Wansbrough argues that the repetition of prophetic narratives in the Qur'an should not be understood exclusively as a divinely intended pedagogical method, as commonly asserted in classical Islamic exegesis. Instead, he views these repetitions as literary markers of an extended process

of compilation and editorial development (Wansbrough, 1977/2004). From a literary standpoint, variations in phrasing and narrative arrangement are seen as reflections of an evolving religious discourse within the formative period of the Muslim community. Within this hermeneutical framework, polemical verses—such as those addressing Trinitarian theology or the validation of prophetic authority—are interpreted as products of interreligious dialogue shaped by specific historical and social contexts, rather than as ahistorical normative proclamations.

This methodological orientation has elicited a wide range of scholarly responses. Angelika Neuwirth, for example, questions the evidentiary basis of Wansbrough's assertion regarding a prolonged redactional history of the Qur'an, yet she acknowledges the importance of literary analysis for uncovering the internal coherence and compositional logic of the Qur'anic text (as cited in Muslih et al., 2023). Similarly, Gabriel Said Reynolds underscores the need to integrate intertextual approaches with the Muslim exegetical tradition, cautioning that Qur'anic studies risk reproducing orientalist presuppositions if internal Islamic perspectives are systematically marginalized (as cited in Machrus, 2016).

In Indonesian academic discourse, several studies suggest that Wansbrough's literary and hermeneutical methods can be productively employed to illuminate the textual and rhetorical dimensions of the Qur'an without undermining the authority of normative tafsīr. Within this framework, such methods are understood as complementary analytical tools that broaden scholarly engagement with the Qur'anic text rather than as challenges to Islamic theological foundations (Machrus, 2016). Accordingly, Wansbrough's literary-hermeneutical approach retains relevance in contemporary Qur'anic scholarship, provided that it is applied critically, proportionately, and in dialogue with established Islamic intellectual traditions and historical contexts.

It is important to emphasize that adopting Wansbrough's analytical instruments does not require accepting his overall thesis regarding the delayed codification of the Qur'an. A contemporary exegete, for instance, may utilize Wansbrough's literary approach—such as analysis of thematic repetition, narrative structure, and rhetorical patterns—as

a tool to explore the internal coherence of the Qur'an and to understand its moral messages more deeply, without necessarily following his problematic historical conclusions. This approach aligns with what Angelika Neuwirth and Gabriel Said Reynolds have done, integrating literary analysis with manuscript studies and classical tafsir tradition, while firmly rejecting Wansbrough's reductionist framework that negates the revelatory dimension. Thus, a clear separation between *method* and *historical conclusions* becomes the key to a critical appropriation of Wansbrough's intellectual legacy in contemporary Qur'anic studies.

3.4 Western Academic Responses to John Wansbrough's Thought

The publication of *Qur'ānic Studies* and *The Sectarian Milieu* positioned John Wansbrough as a pivotal yet contentious figure within Western Qur'anic scholarship. Many scholars regard his work as instrumental in promoting intertextual readings that situate the Qur'an within a broader constellation of Jewish and Christian textual traditions characteristic of Late Antiquity (Blidstein, 2017). From this vantage point, the Qur'an is approached as a religious text shaped by the intellectual and theological debates of Semitic communities, rather than as a revelation entirely detached from historical processes. The influence of this paradigm is evident in the works of Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, who sought to reinterpret the emergence of Islam through non-Muslim sources and patterns of cross-communal interaction (Muslih et al., 2023).

At the same time, Wansbrough's conclusions have been subject to substantial critique from within Western academia. Angelika Neuwirth challenges his thesis of an extensively delayed codification of the Qur'an, arguing that early manuscript evidence—such as the Ṣan'ā' palimpsests—points instead to a notable degree of textual stability in the early Islamic period (as discussed in Muslih et al., 2023). Nicolai Sinai further criticizes the speculative tendencies of Wansbrough's literary arguments, highlighting their limited grounding in philological and archaeological data. Nonetheless, Gabriel Said Reynolds contends that despite these shortcomings, Wansbrough's work played a crucial role in reorienting Qur'anic studies toward interdisciplinary and intertextual methodologies, even as such approaches must be carefully balanced with manuscript research and the classical tafsīr tradition (as cited in Machrus, 2016).

Academic responses to Wansbrough's thought are divided into two main currents. Among Western scholars, Angelika Neuwirth criticizes Wansbrough's thesis of delayed codification by referring to Ṣan'ā' manuscript evidence, which indicates relative textual stability in the early Islamic period, while Nicolai Sinai highlights the speculative tendencies in Wansbrough's literary arguments that lack sufficient philological grounding. Gabriel Said Reynolds, although acknowledging Wansbrough's contribution in orienting Qur'anic studies toward interdisciplinary approaches, emphasizes the importance of balancing intertextual methods with manuscript research and the classical tafsir tradition. Meanwhile, the majority of Muslim scholars reject Wansbrough's framework as reducing the Qur'an to a mere historical artifact. Fazlur Rahman rejects the assumption of the Qur'an's dependence on Judeo-Christian traditions, arguing that Jewish and Christian communities were not dominant in pre-Islamic Mecca, and offers his theory of *double movement* as an alternative that acknowledges historical contextualization without neglecting the normative authority of revelation. Mohammed Arkoun proposes *applied Islamology* as a middle ground that utilizes Western historical-linguistic tools while rejecting Wansbrough's reductionism, while Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd views the Qur'an as both a divine text and a cultural product (*muntaj thaqāfī*), emphasizing the interaction between text, history, and reader in the interpretive process.

3.5 Muslim Scholarly Responses to John Wansbrough’s Thought

In contrast to certain Western academic receptions, the majority of Muslim scholars approach John Wansbrough’s theory with considerable skepticism, primarily because it is perceived as reducing the Qur’an to a purely historical artifact while neglecting its revelatory dimension. Muslim scholars such as Muslih, Muttaqin, and Sahidin argue that Wansbrough’s portrayal of the Qur’an as a post-prophetic literary construction stands in direct opposition to the Islamic worldview, which affirms the Qur’an as the authentic and divine word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (Muslih et al., 2023). Similarly, Machrus highlights a clear methodological distinction between Wansbrough and Fazlur Rahman: while Rahman maintains the ontological authenticity of revelation,

Wansbrough is seen as treating the Qur'an primarily as a literary product detached from its divine origin (Machrus, 2016).

Fazlur Rahman explicitly rejects the deterministic assumption that Jewish and Christian traditions exerted a formative influence on the Qur'an. He maintains that although Islam is genealogically connected to earlier Abrahamic religions, the historical reality of pre-Islamic Arabia indicates that Jewish and Christian communities were neither dominant nor structurally influential in Mecca (Rahman, 1982). Consequently, Rahman contends that investigations into the historical foundations of Islam should begin with indigenous Arab religious and social traditions rather than presupposing extensive dependence on Judeo-Christian sources. He further criticizes orientalist tendencies, including those exemplified by Wansbrough, that artificially separate the historical and eschatological dimensions of the Qur'an, despite their intrinsic integration within the sacred text (Rahman, 1982).

Although most Muslim scholars reject Wansbrough's historical reductionism, several contemporary thinkers have sought alternative methodological frameworks that remain open to critical analysis without negating the transcendence of the Qur'an. Fazlur Rahman's theory of *double movement*, for instance, combines historical contextualization of revelation with the ethical actualization of Qur'anic principles in modern contexts. This approach underscores the importance of historical inquiry while preserving the Qur'an's normative authority in moral and spiritual domains (Syakir et al., 2022).

Within a similar vein, Mohammed Arkoun proposes *applied Islamology* as a moderate corrective to the extreme historical-critical approaches associated with figures like Wansbrough. Arkoun advocates the use of historical, linguistic, and interdisciplinary tools developed in Western scholarship, yet firmly resists reducing the Qur'an to a mere literary artifact shaped by sectarian polemics (Arkoun, 1994). For Arkoun, the Qur'an retains an irreducible transcendent dimension, even as it remains open to contextual and critical interpretation. Arkoun's critique is directed at two opposing tendencies: reductionist Orientalism that dismisses the sacred nature of revelation, and internal

apologetic approaches that foreclose critical academic inquiry. In this sense, applied Islamology functions as a methodological bridge between modern academic research and the Islamic intellectual tradition, offering a more reflective and context-sensitive framework for contemporary Qur'anic studies.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd further enriches this discourse by conceptualizing the Qur'an as both a divine text and a cultural product (*muntaj thaqāfī*), emphasizing that interpretation inevitably emerges from the interaction between text, history, and reader (Suryani, 2022). A comparison between Wansbrough and Abu Zayd reveals a fundamental paradigmatic divergence: Wansbrough foregrounds radical textual historicity at the expense of revelation, whereas Abu Zayd seeks a balance between acknowledging the Qur'an's divine origin and employing historical-hermeneutical analysis. Consequently, Wansbrough's framework is generally classified as a revisionist paradigm within Western scholarship, while Abu Zayd's approach is regarded as more constructive in mediating between modern methodologies and Islamic epistemology.

3.6 The Relevance of Wansbrough's Thought for Modern Qur'anic Studies

John Wansbrough's intellectual legacy remains significant in contemporary Qur'anic studies, particularly with regard to methodological innovation and the expansion of academic horizons. Despite widespread criticism of his conclusions concerning the codification and formation of the Qur'an, his historical-philological and literary approaches have encouraged scholars to move beyond purely theological or descriptive models toward more critical and interdisciplinary analyses. By situating the Qur'an within the context of Late Antiquity, Wansbrough introduced an intertextual reading strategy that examines the Qur'an's relationship with Jewish and Christian traditions, without necessitating full acceptance of his reductionist claims.

The principal contribution of Wansbrough thus lies not in his historical conclusions, but in the methodological tools he introduced—tools that foster dialogue between Islamic studies and the modern humanities, including philology, religious history, and literary criticism. His emphasis on literary structures, thematic repetition, and rhetorical strategies has also prompted greater scholarly attention to the Qur'an's internal coherence as a text. These insights were subsequently developed in more balanced

forms by scholars such as Angelika Neuwirth and Gabriel Said Reynolds, who integrate literary and historical analysis with early manuscript studies and sustained engagement with classical Muslim exegesis.

In this respect, Wansbrough's work functions as an epistemological catalyst rather than a definitive model. His critiques have stimulated empirical verification through manuscript research, including studies of the ṣana codices, which have contributed to a more nuanced understanding of textual transmission and early Qur'anic stability. Within the contemporary Muslim world, Wansbrough's relevance is most evident as an intellectual challenge that compels Muslim scholars to strengthen their methodological foundations in defending the Qur'an's authenticity. Critical engagements by figures such as Fazlur Rahman, M. M. al-Aʿẓamī, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd demonstrate that sustained dialogue with Wansbrough's approach can generate alternative, more constructive methodological frameworks (Mustakim, et.al., 2025).

Elaboration on what is meant by acceptance in a "limited and critical manner" can be manifested in contemporary tafsir practice through several examples. First, a mufasir may utilize Wansbrough's intertextual analysis to trace thematic connections between the Qur'an and earlier traditions, while still framing such findings as illustrations of the continuity of divine messages—not as evidence of textual dependence. Second, Wansbrough's literary approach to Qur'anic structure and rhetoric can be employed to uncover the internal coherence of Meccan and Medinan surahs, without necessarily accepting the thesis that such patterns reflect an extended redactional process. Most importantly, any use of historical-critical instruments must always be grounded in the conviction that the Qur'an is the word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, so that historical analysis serves as an aid to understanding context—not as an epistemological framework that replaces revelatory authority. With these boundaries, historical approaches can enrich the treasury of tafsir without threatening its theological foundations.

In Indonesia, scholars such as those writing in Syamsuddin Arif emphasize that Wansbrough's literary methods may serve as analytical instruments within academic research without displacing normative Islamic tafsīr. Accordingly, Wansbrough's enduring value lies not in definitive answers but in his capacity to stimulate critical

reflection, methodological pluralism, and more contextually informed Qur'anic interpretation.

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that John Wansbrough's historical-critical approach occupies a paradoxical position in contemporary Qur'anic studies. On one hand, his methodological innovations—particularly the application of literary criticism, intertextual reading, and philological analysis to the Qur'anic text—have enriched academic discourse by challenging static assumptions and encouraging interdisciplinary engagement with the humanities. His emphasis on the sectarian milieu and the Qur'an's interaction with earlier religious traditions has prompted scholars to move beyond purely theological or descriptive models toward more historically and literarily informed analyses. This contribution, while controversial, has undeniably expanded the horizons of Qur'anic scholarship and stimulated productive debate across diverse academic traditions.

4. Concluding Remarks

The findings indicate that while Wansbrough's historical-critical method made a significant methodological contribution to Western Qur'anic studies—particularly in challenging traditional narratives of textual formation and opening new avenues for intertextual and literary analysis—it also exhibits a strong reductionist tendency that marginalizes the revelatory dimension of the Qur'an. Consequently, this article argues that historical approaches may be accommodated in tafsir studies only in a limited and critical manner, provided they remain anchored within an Islamic epistemological framework, as demonstrated by constructive engagements from contemporary Muslim thinkers.

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