



## Journal of World Religions and Interfaith

ISSN: 2958-9932 (Print), 2958-9940 (Online)

Vol. 3, Issue 2, Fall (July-December) 2024, PP. 160-178

HEC: <https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/services/faculty/journals/Documents/Merged%20policy%20and%20recognised%20list%202024.pdf>

Journal homepage: <https://journals.iub.edu.pk/index.php/jwrih>

Issue: <https://journals.iub.edu.pk/index.php/jwrih/issue/view/203>

Link: <https://journals.iub.edu.pk/index.php/jwrih/article/view/3242>

DOI: <https://journals.iub.edu.pk/index.php/jwrih/article/view/3242>

Publisher: Department of World Religions and Interfaith Harmony, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan



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**Received on:** 26 July, 2024

**Accepted on:** 10 December, 2024

**Published on:** 13 December, 2024

**Citation:** Lubna Iftikhar, & Dr. Amir Hayat. (2024). Methodological Approaches of Contemporary Seerah Writings in the West: An Analytical Study. *Journal of World Religions and Interfaith Harmony*, 3(2), 160–178. Retrieved from <https://journals.iub.edu.pk/index.php/jwrih/article/view/3242>

**Publisher:** The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan



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## Methodological Approaches of Contemporary Seerah Writings in the West: An Analytical Study

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### Abstract

*Western perspectives, which view and portray Eastern religions and cultures through a biased social framework, often perpetuate stereotypes and misconceptions about the Islamic world. In the contemporary era, Western writers have introduced new perspectives and analytical frameworks to the study of Seerah. Western methodologies have evolved and adapted to the changing dynamics of global interactions and the complexities of cultural exchanges. The study of the Seerah (biography of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) by Western scholars has been a significant area of academic interest. They have approached the Seerah with various methodologies that often reflect their distinct cultural, intellectual, and sometimes ideological perspectives. This article explores the predominant methodologies employed by western writers, such as the historical-critical method, comparative study, and textual criticism. The historical-critical method analyzes the authenticity of Islamic sources, while textual criticism focuses on the evolution and transmission of Seerah texts. The comparison method involves evaluating different sources or perspectives side by side to identify similarities, differences, and underlying patterns; these methodologies lead to skepticism about established Islamic traditions. Critical analysis of these methodologies identifies the biases, evaluates their credibility, and enhances knowledge that provides insights into the complexities of interpreting historical texts.*

**Keywords:** western thought, western methodologies, seerah text, methodologies of western writer, textual study, comparative approach, historical critical methods.

### **Introduction:**

The study of the Seerah, or the biography of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, is at the very heart of Islamic literacy and a resource for guidance and inspiration all over the world. It has been studied and presented in the context of learning Islam, emphasizing spiritual, moral, and social aspects. With the new methodologies in the modern age, the traditional bounds of Seerah's study are very different from those used before, including Western academic contextual methodologies. The methodology that has been adopted by writers of Seerah and based on Western contexts provides the reader with a newer kind of analytical framework as well as perspective on the life and times of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. They also raise important questions about the interpretation and authenticity of traditional sources, challenging scholars to engage critically with both classical and contemporary perspectives.

The historical-critical approach was one such methodology. This method is a scholarly approach that examines ancient documents with respect to their provenance, authenticity, and historical context. In its application to the Seerah, Western writers have focused their studies primarily on Muslim sources, namely the Quran, the Hadith, and biographical accounts subsequently written by historians from the early centuries of Islam, such as Ibn Ishaq and Al-Waqidi. They used this method to assess the historical reliability of these sources. Applying this method has resulted in questioning a number of events or details concerning the Seerah. In certain situations, this has led to doubts about the veracity of various events or details found in the early Islamic texts. This can be achieved by scrutinizing the chains of narration (isnad) of the Hadith, checking the political and social forces that would have shaped the explanations and cross-checking the available ancient Islamic texts with extrinsic documents from contemporary civilizations. The main purpose is to look for probable biases, exaggerations, or later interpolations that could have altered the original accounts of the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), which are done by Western writers.

Textual criticism is an auxiliary method that looks only at the ways in which texts have evolved, been transmitted, and preserved across centuries. In the case of Seerah, textual criticism deals with the study of manuscripts and versions of early texts in tracing their development and evolution over the years. This methodology acknowledges variations in expression, formulation, and content among manuscripts of the same work, and is designed to analyze how scribal errors, intentional revisions, or regional peculiarities have influenced the process of transmission. Scholars trace these alterations retrogressively to reconstruct the potential original text version. They examine numerous manuscripts, identifying inconsistencies and delineating the historical trajectory of how Seerah was

transcribed, edited, and modified throughout successive generations of scholars and scribes.

The comparative study methodology is one more crucial methodology that Western writers use in their study of Seerah. This is done by comparing Islamic sources, especially those related to Seerah, with texts from other religious, historical, and cultural perspectives. This will reveal similarities, differences, and possible influences between traditions by placing side-by-side Islamic accounts with non-Islamic sources. Comparative studies often offer a wider scope within which the evolution of Islamic thought can be understood, as well as the elements that make Islam unique among other religious or historical systems. This comparative study approach focuses on one of several common foci; for example, such a study might examine Seerah in light of other religious biographies, like that of Jesus in the Christian Gospels or even the lives of Biblical prophets in Jewish traditions. Western writers frequently make comparisons structured around the prophetic description of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in relation to other analogous figures within the Abrahamic faiths to tease out common themes or narrative structures as guides, leaders, and messengers through whom God conveyed revelation.

Although the fact that approaches like historical-critical, textual criticism, and comparative research provide competent scholarship to the study of the Seerah, these methodologies also present significant challenges, particularly with regard to bias and the skepticism of everything Islamic. The natural skepticism of the historical-critical method questions the reliability of the sources of Islam, thus casting uncertainty over events or stories for which the belief rests in Islam. Textual criticism also challenges the idea of a single, unchanged tradition at times, suggesting that Islamic texts have been thoroughly changed when it looks at the variants in the transmission and development of Seerah texts. The comparative study will, on one level, open up further understanding of the Seerah as opposed to and in relation to other religious and historical contexts, but due to Western perspective, at times, attempt to encapsulate Islam's history within frameworks alien to this history, which at times silence its uniqueness and divine elements. All of these, looking through a non-Islamic lens, often make things more complicated and amorphous about what is known in traditional understanding as the Seerah, which can thus be interpreted and might even conflict with faith-based views within the Muslim world.

**Significance of this topic:**

The importance of assessing the methods employed by Western writers in their study of the Seerah is in the wider dimensions it has regarding how both Islamic history and tradition are perceived and interpreted, as these methodologies,

historical-critical analysis, textual criticism, and comparative study are strong factors composing literacy work regarding the Prophet's life and Islamic thought. Many such approaches examine the credibility and transmission of texts by conducting research on Islamic sources. While examining such Islamic texts, these methods call into question the legitimacy and authority of long-established religious rituals and beliefs. It is critical for academics, both Muslim and non-Muslim, to understand these techniques. Consequently, it encourages critical engagement with western viewpoints and any associated prejudices, as well as the development of a more impartial perspective on Islamic history. In keeping with the previous point, it addresses the breakdown of scholarly cooperation and cross-cultural communication as a means of bridging the knowledge gap between the intellectual traditions of the Islamic and Western worlds. Ultimately, this set of methodologies contributes to greater exploration of how history, faith, and academia intersect in the elaboration of one of the most important figures (**Prophet Muhammad ﷺ**) in Islamic history

#### **Literature review:**

A great deal of effort has been done to evaluate the Western writer's work on Seerah, along with a portion of their modern methodology. In 2022, the article published "The Rationalistic-Critical Approach of Orientalists in Seerah Writings: An Exploratory Study of Modern Trends" by Tehreem Fatima and Aqsa Tasgheer. This insightful study delves into the historical context and modern interpretations of Seerah literature, shedding light on the critical perspectives of Orientalists.<sup>1</sup> Another article is "Orientalist's methodology in the study of Sirah: A Critical Analysis." This insightful analysis by Ghulam Hussain Babar delves into the complexities of Orientalism, highlighting its historical role in shaping perceptions of Islam and the life of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.).<sup>2</sup> The paper "Sira Nabawiyya: Historiography of the Prophet Muhammad by Three Modern Writers" by Muhammad Abror and Awalia Rahma was published recently, in March 2024. In this article, three works adhere to a chronological presentation of the Prophet's life; they differ significantly in their depth of analysis and approach to historical data. Understanding the fundamental strategies used by Western

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<sup>1</sup> Fatima, Tehreem, and Aqsa Tasgheer. "The Rationalistic-Critical Approach of Orientalists in Seerah Writings: An Exploratory Study of Modern Trends." *Al-Wifaq* 5, no. 1 (2022), 85-97. doi:10.55603/alwifaq.v5i1.e7.

<sup>2</sup> Babar, Ghulam Hussain. "Orientalist's methodology in the study of Sirah: A Critical Analysis."

authors is becoming more and more crucial. These approaches are explored and critically analyzed in this piece of writing.<sup>3</sup>

**Objectives:**

The main objective of this paper is to critically analyze the approaches used by contemporary Western Writers to write on the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ Seerah.

- This study aims to assess the interpretation of Seerah by contemporary Western scholars, with a particular focus on historical accuracy and interpretative biases.
- The article will investigate the key methodologies employed by Western Writers in the modern era when writing on the Seerah, highlighting their scholarly rigor and objectivity.
- Additionally, the article seeks to evaluate the overall scholarly quality of Western Writers works by identifying both strengths and weaknesses in their methodological approaches.
- Finally, the study intends to understand the positive contributions and limitations of the methodologies employed by Western Scholars in their examination of the Seerah.

"In light of these objectives, the questions emerge are:

1. What are the broader implications of these Western Scholars methodologies for the interpretation of Islamic history and traditions?
2. What are the key assumptions and biases associated with each of these methodologies when applied to the Seerah?
3. What are the strengths and limitations of each methodology in contributing to a nuanced understanding of the Seerah?

**Methodology:**

Using a qualitative, descriptive approach, this essay delves deeply into its subject and attempts to give readers a thorough grasp of it by carefully examining relevant resources. It critically assesses the benefits, drawbacks, and biases of the employed methodologies, focusing especially on how they affect the Seerah's interpretation. An extensive study of Western's writings on the Seerah is part of

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<sup>3</sup>Abror, Muhamad, and Awalia Rahma. "Sira Nabawiyya: Historiography of the Prophet Muhammad by Three Modern Writers." *Buletin Al-Turas* 30, no. 1 (2024), 25-38. doi:10.15408/bat.v30i1.30008.

the analysis, which included books, scholarly articles, conference papers, and research reports. In this article, book reviews are done which are written by Western Writers to uncover underlying perspectives. Furthermore, the study explores how these methodologies align or contrast with traditional Islamic approaches to the Seerah.

### **Historical Critical Method of Writing Seerah by Western writers:**

The historical critical method also commonly known as the Historical criticism or higher criticism is a school of criticism tracing the origins of ancient texts to understand "the world behind the text".<sup>4</sup> This methodology is a scholarly approach that seeks to understand historical events and figures by critically analyzing primary sources, such as texts, artifacts, and other historical evidence. This, in simple words, is a process of investigation into the authenticity, origin, and veracity of these texts for the reconstruction of the original historical narrative. Western writers study prime sources—the Quran, Hadith collections, early biographies on the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ like Ibn Ishaq's "Sirat Rasul Allah," and more historical documents. They analyze the chain of narration, Isnad, and the contents, Matn of Hadiths based on their historical authenticity. More broadly, however, in the grand tapestry of historical narration, Western writers anchor the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the great tapestry of 7th-century Arabia. The more important thematic elements, therefore, include socio-political and economic conditions of the time. They elucidate the tribal structure of Mekkkan society and the relationship between different tribes and highlight the importance of tribal affiliation and conflict. Westerners scolar analyze the language and style of early Islamic texts to understand their origins and meanings. They pay particular attention to the linguistic features of the Qur'an and Hadith. They study how texts may have been edited or altered over time.

### **Strengths of the Historical-Critical Method**

The efficacy of the historical-critical approach lies in its ability to differentiate between factual and fictional accounts by promoting a comprehensive and objective examination of historical evidence. This methodology encourages scholars to critically evaluate the authenticity and reliability of sources, resulting in more accurate representations of historical events. By contextualizing historical figures within their temporal milieu, this approach facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the socio-political and economic conditions of the era. This enables readers to comprehend the challenges faced by the Prophet ﷺ and his followers. Through the promotion of scholarly rigor and critical analysis, this

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<sup>4</sup>Richard N. Soulen and R. K. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Cr//iticism* (James Clarke & Co., 2002), 78

method contributes to Seerah's academic study and enhances its accessibility to a broader audience by challenging preconceptions and drawing evidence-based conclusions.<sup>5</sup>

### **Limitations of the Historical-Critical Method**

It is susceptible to secular biases, which, in turn, lead to interpretations that diminish the religious and spiritual aspects of the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. This approach may undermine the significance of divine revelations and the impact of faith on historical narrative. Excessive skepticism results in the rejection of authentic traditions, potentially compromising Islamic historiography and leading to a fragmented understanding of Seerah. There is a possibility that Western authors may lack sensitivity to the nuances present in Islamic scriptures at cultural and religious levels, potentially resulting in erroneous interpretations and biased conclusions. This methodology, which relies on primary sources, is also inadequate or even contradictory, presenting challenges in constructing a comprehensive narrative.<sup>6</sup>

Western writers adopted a reductionist approach, leading to misconceptions about Islam and the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ by rejecting Muslim sources and interpretations. They argue that these methods are inadequate for accurately evaluating Islamic teachings due to their lack of belief in Islam's core tenets. Their bias and prejudice, along with preconceived notions, distort the understanding of Islamic history. Some western writers conduct research with negative motives, intending to incite doubt among Muslims. According to Maryam Jamilah's work that western writers are not neutral but a deliberate attempt to undermine Islamic culture.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, these writers are placed within the context of European imperialism, asserting that western writers have historically supported Western powers by distorting Islam's image to promote Western cultural dominance.

### **Books of Western Methodologies: The Historical-Critical Approach in Seerah Studies**

In the vast body of literature produced by Western scholars, numerous books have adopted the historical-critical approach to examine the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. There are two selected key books that exemplify this methodology, offering

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<sup>5</sup>Khan, Sajid S., and Sajid Hameed. "Orientalism and Muslim Historical Critical Methods." *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 04, no. 01 (2014), 75-81. doi:10.32350/jitc.41.05.

<sup>6</sup>Fatima, Tehreem, and Aqsa Tasgheer. "The Rationalistic-Critical Approach of Orientalists in Seerah Writings: An Exploratory Study of Modern Trends." *Al-Wifaq* 5, no. 1 (2022), 85-97. doi:10.55603/alwifaq.v5i1.e7.

<sup>7</sup>Jameelah, Maryam. *Islam and Orientalism*. Adam Publishers, 2007.



critical insights into how western writers approach Seerah studies, through the lens of historical inquiry.

**Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook**

This book presents a highly revisionist and controversial interpretation of early Islamic history and attempts to reconstruct the origins of Islam by relying on non-Islamic sources contemporary Christian, Jewish, and other non-Muslim sources, rather than traditional Islamic references. The authors argue that Islam began as a politico-religious movement in alliance with Jews, positioning early Muslims (whom they term "Hagarenes") as participants in Jewish messianic expectations. Crone and Cook claim that Islam evolved into a distinct religious tradition only after the initial Arab-Jewish alliance broke down and the Arab conquests expanded. They challenge traditional Islamic historiography, casting doubt on the reliability of Islamic sources like the Hadith and Seerah, and suggest that Islam's formation was closely tied to the empire-building process. Crone and Cook's Hagarism employed a radical application of the historical-critical method. They used non-Islamic sources, such as Christian and Jewish texts, to reconstruct the early history of Islam and challenge traditional Islamic narratives about the Prophet and the rise of Islam. Their work suggested that the early Muslim community was more influenced by Jewish and Christian ideas than is traditionally acknowledged.<sup>8</sup>

Hagarism has been widely criticized by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars for its speculative theories and reliance on non-Islamic sources. The book is generally regarded as skeptical and cautious within the Muslim scholarly community. The Quran plays a central role as a foundational text in shaping the narratives of Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ life. Early Muslim scholars and Western writers interpreted these Quranic references in various ways, reflecting diverse perspectives. In Seerah, Quranic verses are used to connect key events from the Prophet's life to the sacred text, but the way these references are employed varies between different scholars and time periods.<sup>9</sup> Writing the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ requires a careful examination of various sources to ensure accuracy and authenticity. Primary sources, such as the Qur'an, Hadith

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<sup>8</sup> Crone, Patricia, M. A. Cook, and Michael Cook. *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*. Cambridge: CUP Archive, 1977.

<sup>9</sup> Azmi, Ahmad S., Mohd Y. Ismail, Zulhilmi Mohamed Nor, Amiruddin Mohd Sobali, and Amran Abdul Halim. "Qur'ānic References in Sīra Literature: A Prolegomenon to The Orientalist Studies." *Ma'ālim al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunnah* 12, no. 13 (2017), 70-78.  
doi:10.33102/jmq.s.v12i13.8.

collections, and early Islamic biographies, provide foundational narratives of the Prophet's life. Secondary sources, including later historical works, scholarly analyses, and modern interpretations, offer additional context and insight. Non-Islamic sources also provide valuable external perspectives. By critically engaging with these sources, scholars can construct a comprehensive and nuanced biography of Prophet Muhammad that honors his legacy and provides valuable lessons for contemporary readers.

**Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam by Fred M. Donner**

The author takes a historical-critical approach to early Islamic history, including the life of the Prophet. He challenges the idea that Islam was initially a distinct religious movement, arguing instead that it began as a broader monotheistic reform movement that included Christians and Jews. Donner critically examines early sources and questions the traditional Muslim narrative of the early Islamic conquests and the development of Islamic identity. According to Donner, earlier historians who tried to explain the origins of Islam through economic or ethnic motivations faced difficulties and could not offer satisfying explanations for many historical events and archaeological findings. Donner points out that in the first century of Islam, there are no inscriptions, coins, or writings that mention "Islam" as a religion.<sup>10</sup>

The absence of early inscriptions, coins, or writings does not necessarily indicate the absence of a distinct Islamic identity. During the time of the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, writing played an important role in preserving and transmitting knowledge, despite the predominantly oral culture of the Arabian Peninsula. Various scripts, including the Arabic scripts, were used for recording important information. Written materials were employed for recording the Qur'an, diplomatic correspondence, treaties, and personal and legal documents. The use of writing during this period helped ensure the accurate preservation of the Quran and the documentation of significant events and agreements, contributing to the development of the early Islamic state.<sup>11</sup>

A respectful and culturally sensitive approach to the study of early Islamic history requires a deep understanding of Islamic traditions and sources. The traditional Muslim narrative of the early Islamic period is grounded in well-documented historical sources and has been corroborated by archaeological findings and historical records. Traditional Islamic sources have been meticulously preserved and transmitted through rigorous methods of authentication (Isnad) and

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<sup>10</sup> Donner, Fred M. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Azhari, Mohammed K. *Zia-un-Nabi*, (Lahore: Zai ul Quran, 2004), 6:569-574.

verification (Matn).<sup>12</sup> The reliability of these sources has been affirmed by generations of Islamic scholars. The Qur'an and Hadith provide clear evidence of a distinct Islamic identity from the very beginning. The Quran explicitly addresses the followers of Islam as "Muslims" and outlines specific religious practices and beliefs that distinguish Islam from other monotheistic traditions.

### **Textual Criticism Method of Writing Seerah by Western Writers:**

Textual criticism is a method through which it is possible to restore texts as close as possible to their original form. It is a scholarly approach involving a close examination of texts to gain some conclusions as to their authenticity, reliability, and historical context. It reconstructs the original narrative behind texts by correcting errors, interpolations, or inconsistencies in texts.<sup>13</sup> Based on the method of textual criticism, Western writers strive to study the Seerah, the biography of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, by critically analyzing it and doubting the original texts and sources that actually crafted this biography. The basic task involved validating the authenticity and dependability of the texts, along with the historical context, in order to reconstruct a coherent and honest account of the Prophet's life. Western writers are those who, on the basis of primary source materials, such as the Qur'an, Hadith collections, early Islamic biographies and other historical materials, examine the chains of narration that go by the name of the Isnad and determine whether the content, that is, the Matn, is historically reliable or not. They have intentionally misrepresented events and made a deliberate effort to alter the history of Islam with bias and prejudice.

### **Strengths of the Textual Criticism Method**

This critical approach, presented in textual form, maintains the rigorous and impartial investigation of historical sources and works of art, making the distinction between reality and fiction clear. This calls for the highest level of scholarly work to be put into critically determining the reliability and authenticity of the sources, which should result in a reconstruction of history that is better than it has ever been. This will entail examining the texts' historical context, gaining a comprehensive grasp of sociopolitical issues, and considering how these factors have impacted the story at hand. It facilitates understanding the challenges and hardships that the Prophet ﷺ and his companions may have faced. Because it

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<sup>12</sup> "Historiography - Islamic, Sources, Writing." Encyclopedia Britannica. Last modified September 18, 1998. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/historiography/Islamic-historiography> accessed on dated 16-10-2024 , time, 8:00 am.

<sup>13</sup> "Textual Criticism | Definition, Examples, & Facts." Encyclopedia Britannica. Last modified September 18, 1998. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/textual-criticism> , accessed on dated 16-10-2024 time, 10:56 am.

demands a high degree of critical thinking and is intellectually demanding, this enables the researchers to challenge expectations and search for conclusions that are supported by evidence. Because of its existence, the Seerah is more approachable to more people, which benefits scholarly research on the topic in question.<sup>14</sup>

### **Limitations of the Textual Criticism Method**

Textual criticism, as a methodology has its own secular bias, which largely minimizes the spiritual and religious literature about the life of the Prophet ﷺ. It minimizes the significance of faith and divine revelation in relation to history. When skepticism is taken too far, it might lead to the rejection of genuine customs, which reduces the potential richness of Islamic historiography. It might break apart and leave the Seerah unfinished. It is possible that the western culture and religion are too rigid and inflexible to allow them to understand the subtleties of Islamic literature and traditional literary expressions. This may be an attempt to stretch its interpretations and bring forth multiple preconceived conclusions. The textual criticism methodology has always relied on incomplete and dispersed first texts. If there are few or inconsistent sources, it might not have an adequate amount of a narrative.<sup>15</sup>

### **Books of Western Writers Methodologies: the Textual Criticism Approach in Seerah Studies**

From this vast literary production from the Western scholars, a few remarkable works applied the methodology of textual criticism to research into the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. To exemplify how Western writers do research into Seerah studies, this work picks selected texts to portray the research in a way that presents an important critique from the angle of textual criticism.

#### **1-"The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources" by Harald Motzki**

Harald Motzki extensively investigates the Seerah's original sources in order to provide an accurate and coherent account of the Prophet's life. He evaluates the veracity, authenticity, and historical setting of these materials using textual criticism methodology and critically analyzes primary materials, with an emphasis on the writings of Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham, as well as the Qur'an, Hadith

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<sup>14</sup> Motzki, Harald. "The Question of the Authenticity of Muslim Traditions Reconsidered: A Review Article." *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, 2003, 211-257. doi:10.1163/9789047401575\_013.

<sup>15</sup> Peter gurry. (2019, August 8). Is textual criticism theologically safe? <https://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/2019/08/is-textual-criticism-theologically-safe.html> accessed on dated 12-10-2024,time, 6:50 pm.

collections, and early Islamic biographies. To determine which version of the text is the most accurate, he evaluated various manuscripts of the same work. He investigated the potential for subsequent interpolations or omissions, as well as possible editing or alteration over time. His use of other disciplines deepens our knowledge of Islam's development. His thoughtful and comprehensive approach advanced the field of early Islamic history research.<sup>16</sup>

Motzki's methodologies represent a significant advancement in the study of hadith, as they incorporate a more rigorous and respectful analysis of sources, allowing for a better understanding of the historical context and authenticity of hadiths.<sup>17</sup> He scrutinizes ancient Seerah sources to identify an authentic, imperishable picture of the prophet's life. He uses textual criticism methodology in his examination of the materials: authenticity, validity, and historical context. He critically examined the Quran, compilations of Hadiths, early Islam's biographies, and original sources. He compares various manuscripts of the same text to read and analyze, even more profoundly, which translates the book as more authentic. He also explores such possibilities of addition or erasures that could occur very well during alterations or revisions of time; hence, nothing goes unnoticed. His application in various academic disciplines continues to add mileage to our comprehension of Islam's development. He is trying to move the discipline of early Islamic history studies into a further motion through his systematic and integrative methodology.<sup>18</sup>

## **2-"Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources" by Martin Lings**

This book is a biography of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ based on the earliest sources, to which Ibn Ishaq's "Sirat Rasul Allah" and other early Islamic texts give access. Martin Lings does this, however, in a very narrative way, so a reader will probably enjoy it. This book is one of the best-written and most accessible biographies of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the English language. Lings, formerly a Shakespearean scholar and Sufi, brings a literary sensitivity to his writing that makes it easier to read through the text. His word inventiveness and careful pacing give the reader a feeling of being submerged in the history and spiritual atmosphere of 7th-century Arabia. Martin Lings's "Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources" is an exceptional biography that brings to the reader a

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<sup>16</sup>Motzki, Harald. *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources*. 2000.

<sup>17</sup>Hacer Ayaz. "The difference in historical methodology between Juynboll and Motzik related to Hadith" no. 1 (2015), 41-46.

<sup>18</sup>"Sources of Seerah." *IBN AL HYDERABADEE*. Last modified July 19, 2006.  
<https://ibnalhyderabaddee.wordpress.com/2006/04/15/sources-of-seerah/> accessed on dated 14-10-2024, time, 7:10 pm

very captivating and spiritually nourishing portrait of one of the most influential figures in history. The strength of the book lies in fidelity to the sources, poetic style of narration, and deep reverence for Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. It does not belong to the more argumentative or academic kind of approach towards the life of the Prophet, but it remains a masterpiece of Sirah literature in the English language.<sup>19</sup>

It appeals not only to practicing Muslims who seek a deeper connection with their faith but also to non-Muslims interested in learning about the Prophet in a manner that is both accessible and spiritually uplifting. While Lings' work is rich in spirituality and narrative beauty, it lacks the critical historical analysis that some modern readers might expect. The book is celebrated for its literary quality, historical accuracy, and spiritual depth, making it a significant contribution to the study of the Seerah. His use of different academic fields sheds further light on the understanding of the evolution of Islam. He is attempting to propel the field of early Islamic history studies into greater motion using his methodical and integrative methodologies.

#### **Comparative Study Methodology of Western Writers:**

Comparative is a concept that derives from the verb "to compare" (the etymology is Latin *comparare*, derivation of *par* = equal, with prefix *com-*, it is a systematic comparison). Comparative studies are investigations to analyze and evaluate, with quantitative and qualitative methods, a phenomenon and/or facts among different areas, subjects, and/or objects to detect similarities and/or differences.<sup>20</sup> The comparative study methodology involves analyzing the Seerah by comparing it with the biographies of other religious figures. This approach seeks to highlight similarities and differences, providing a broader religious and historical perspective. Western Writers compare the concept of prophethood and the nature of divine revelation in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. They explore the moral and ethical teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in comparison with those of Jesus and Moses. Western scholars examine the different historical contexts in which these religious figures lived and how these contexts influenced their missions. They compare the religious practices and rituals introduced by each figure. Western historians place the lives of these figures within their respective socio-political environments to understand the challenges they faced. They examine the cultural influences that shaped the teachings and practices of these figures.

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<sup>19</sup> Lings, Martin. *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*. 1991.

<sup>20</sup> "Comparative Studies." SpringerLink

[https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-319-31816-5\\_1197-1](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-319-31816-5_1197-1) . accessed on dated 14-10-2024, time, 3:15pm.

### **Strengths of the Comparative Study Methodology:**

Comparative research improves decision-making by highlighting best practices and identifying areas for growth. It expands perspectives and promotes cross-cultural understanding by examining diverse cases. However, this type of study suffers from cultural and methodological biases that will cause misunderstandings that are detrimental to the validity of the study. Methodologies for studying evolutionary design are in development to minimize bias and broaden the scope of comparative studies. This kind of approach provides both depth and relevance to comparative research, making it even more robust and dependable.<sup>21</sup>

As a result, the comparative research approach offers a more comprehensive view, enabling readers to distinguish what made the Prophet's life exceptional in contrast to other religious traditions. As a result, it provides additional information about the themes parallels and divergences as they relate to the lives of various religious figures. Thus, this strategy promotes understanding and communication between various religious communities as well as interfaith discourse. It demonstrates shared ideals and foundations for coexistence, deference, and collaboration. Through the application of comparative research methods, the Seerah is placed within a more comprehensive theological and historical framework, leading to an enhanced comprehension of the socio-political and cultural factors that shaped the Prophet's life and mission.

### **Limitations of the Comparative Study Methodology:**

It occasionally becomes clear that certain situations are significantly more well-known to scholars than others. It must be assumed in any case study technique that all comparisons are made on separate grounds since such a disparity in knowledge leads to superficial descriptions of examples that are not well known and also likely to influence conclusions. As the reader will rapidly learn, reality rarely complies with this. In order to make sense of the less familiar cases, researchers are known to rely on some supplemental sources, which are occasionally not thoroughly examined. In situations where there are not enough independent cases, the explanatory narrative may use personal experience to weaken the analysis's strength. Ultimately, the findings' applicability to other comparable situations may be restricted by the particular conditions of individual

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<sup>21</sup> "Cache://www.educationalwave.com/pros-and-cons-of-comparative-research/ - Google Search.". <https://www.educationalwave.com/pros-and-cons-of-comparative-research/> accessed on dated 15-10-2024, time, 9:45am.

cases.<sup>22</sup> The limitations inherent in the comparative study methodology pose significant challenges for Seerah writing. Awareness of these issues is essential for scholars aiming to present a nuanced and accurate portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad's life and Islamic history. Addressing biases, ensuring methodological rigor, and respecting contextual differences are critical for enhancing the quality of Seerah scholarship.

### **Books of Western Writers Methodologies: The Comparative Study Approach in Seerah Studies**

From the extensive and profound literature produced by Western scholars, several notable works have employed a comparative study approach in examining the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Among these selected texts, the two books stand out as significant representations of how Western authors analyze and interpret the Seerah.

#### **1-"Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World"by Jonathan A.C. Brown**

Jonathan A.C. Brown has addressed the more recent discussions and concerns surrounding Hadith studies by elucidating the significance of Hadith in the development of Islamic theology and jurisprudence. Brown also methodically charts the history, dissemination, and exegesis of Hadith from the Middle Ages to the present. By discussing issues like authenticity, interpretation, and the influence of modernity on traditional Islamic studies, he investigates the Hadith's crucial role in the development of Shariah, Aqidah, and Ibadah. This book discusses how modernity has affected traditional Islamic study and how contemporary Muslim scholars have attempted to strike a balance between the old sciences of Hadith and contemporary academic fields. It talks about how modernists tried to reframe or put the Hadith in the context of contemporary problems. In order to determine the consistency and inconsistency of different hadiths and to evaluate their legitimacy, it does comparative analysis. Brown also examines the hadiths in light of other Islamic books, such as the Quran and early Muslim biographies, to ensure that they align with the declared texts and well-established Islamic beliefs.<sup>23</sup>

Jonathan A.C. Brown is a precious jewel in the study literature on Hadith. Brown's very careful consideration of the origins, transmission, and validation of

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<sup>22</sup> Stockholm University, Reza Azarian. "Potentials and Limitations of Comparative Method in Social Science." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 01, no. 04 (April 2011), 113-125.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, Jonathan A. *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*. London: ONE World Publications, 2009



Hadith, as well as his balanced judgement of the role of Hadith in Islamic tradition, make this book a very valuable source for scholars and readers interested in this important field of study in Islamic studies. Some of Brown's arguments are speculative and tend to lack pertinent evidence. Although speculative elements and overemphasis on modern debates are two severely significant shortcomings in this respect, Brown's work stands as a very worthwhile and exciting contribution to the study of Hadith and its relevance to the medieval and modern worlds. While it has speculative elements and an overemphasis on modern debates, Brown's work cannot be overlooked as a valuable and engaging quest in Hadith literature and its importance across the medieval and modern world.

## **2-"Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time" by Karen Armstrong**

The author, being a renowned comparative religionist, has given the reader here a balanced and very accessible account of the prophet that highlights his social reform, peacemaker, and spiritual leader. It explores the mission of the prophet and its relevance to contemporary issues. It compares the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ with that of other religious figures, like Jesus and Moses in order to distinguish between similar and dissimilar incidents. Armstrong discusses the concept of prophetic vision and nature of divine revelation in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. She further points out the similarities in their missions as a prophet, like Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Jesus, and Moses who were called by God to be His messengers, but He was giving them guidance in their own communities. Armstrong further went ahead to compare the religious practices and rituals that Prophet Muhammad introduced and shared with others. She pointed out the uniqueness of Islamic practices, especially five daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca.<sup>24</sup>

In this regard, Armstrong has tried to represent Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in a very balanced and nuanced account. He gives weight to his attributes as a social reformer, peacemaker, and above all, spiritual leadership in an admirable manner. This method of hers surely enhances the understanding of the Prophet's mission in the present scenario. The kind of narrative used in the book makes events about the prophet's life relive so easily. Armstrong's comparative analysis opens a broader perspective for readers by helping them understand what is unique within the Prophet's life compared to other religious traditions. This provides a clearer picture of the general themes and differences in the life stories of many religious figures. Some of Armstrong's arguments, particularly those pertaining to the openness of the early movement, are speculative and rest on too little

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<sup>24</sup> Armstrong, Karen. *Muhammad Prophet for our time*. Mizan Pustaka, 2013.

evidence. Armstrong's approach to the subject may be culturally insensitive and unacquainted with Islamic traditions and sources. While the book is generally well received, some Muslims may feel that certain aspects of the Prophet's life or Islamic teachings could have been explored in greater depth. The writer promotes the culture of religious secularism in a soft tone. However, this is often seen as a limitation of the book's scope rather than a significant flaw.

**Conclusion:**

Three approaches, namely historical-critical, textual criticism, and comparative study, each contribute something unique to the study of Seerah. These methods make it possible to conduct a thorough, methodical examination that can be understood by a wide range of academics. However, the religious and spiritual aspects that are essential to Seerah and Islamic historiography may be diminished by their secular prejudices and cultural insensitivity. As a result, although these approaches enhance comprehension, their drawbacks call for a fair strategy that honors Islamic historiographical traditions. Taken together, these methodologies provide a comprehensive understanding of the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

By adopting the historical-critical method, western scholars have consequently been able to establish scientific and academic explanations of Prophet Muhammad's life amidst 7th-century Arabian sociopolitical and historical settings. Because Western scholars have mostly operated in the reductionist methodology, where evidence often involves very strict materialistic terms as interpreted mainly by the usage of non-Islamic sources of information, a lot of criticism has been undergone against this group. It is essential for Western scholars to strike a balance between their interaction with both Islamic and non-Islamic sources, putting the research within the acknowledgment of the importance of Islamic historical traditions in constructing a more accurate understanding of the Seerah. This methodological approach has strengths and weaknesses. Its strength is the provision of an academic approach to authenticity and historical context related to the original sources: the Qur'an, Hadith, and early biography, reconstructing history in a more authenticated form. This approach requires intellectual intensity, promotes critical thinking, and enhances the validity of the historical reconstruction. Limitations include a secular bias and insensitivity to the religious and spiritual dimensions intrinsic in Islamic traditions. Western scholars, due to their inherent secular bias, often tend to minimize the spiritual and religious aspects of the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

The methodology of textual criticism applied by Western scholars to Seerah shows both strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, it is indeed strengthening Seerah by being more relevant to a broader audience through an emphasis on

scholarly rigor and research, referencing historical context, and providing evidence-based conclusions. On the other hand, it often lacks sensitivity toward the spiritual and religious dimensions that are integral components of Islamic historiography. This secular approach would make scholars have to ignore the main traditions or distort the Islamic sources in ways that are at variance with the general scholarship. Moreover, reliance on fragmented or incomplete primary texts may result in an incomplete narrative, thus highlighting the intellectual principles and limitations of this methodology that would enable a comprehensive appreciation of the richness and complexity of the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

The study method that the writers of the West adopted was the comparison of the life and message of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ with that of Jesus or Moses and more widely with other religious personalities. It is only by setting Seerah in its historical and sociopolitical framework and contrasting it with others that scholars have been able to obtain a deeper appreciation of the importance of the Islamic teachings. Such a methodology will enhance strength as it encourages interfaith dialogue and widening perspective through common values, which supposedly are embedded within the religious figures to support coexistence and respect. However, the approach is cumbersome when cultural bias is comprised and analysis is distorted. This approach can While this method has its weak point, the comparative method ensures that much broader religious and historical contexts are provided for the study of the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

In final analysis, historical-critical analysis, textual criticism, and comparative study enrich the academic study of Seerah by offering rigor and diverse perspectives. However, their secular biases often overlook the essential spiritual dimensions of Islamic historical analysis. A balanced approach that respects Islamic traditions alongside critical methodologies is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.