
A Critical Analysis of Arthur Jeffery's Methodology and Sources in “The Qur'an as Scripture”

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ABSTRACT

Arthur Jeffery's "The Qur'an as Scripture" is a hall-mark work in Quranic studies that uses a diverse methodological approach to analyze the genesis, formation and context of the Quran. This paper aims at examining Jeffery's work with specific focus on comparative religion, comparative linguistics, realistic approach and textual criticism as methods he used, the innovation of his work as well as the scholarly nature of his work. Through asserting the Quran in the context of religious and linguistic history, Jeffery gives the reader a fresh approach that reorients the understanding of the Quran away from the sole Islamic experience while offering a fuller picture of the Quran's evolution. Drawing from the comparative religion approach, Jeffery's analysis of the Quran shows that the scripture shares a lot of similarities with other religious texts and that all religions are connected in terms of morality and values. His work of language comparison reveals the links between Quranic Arabic and the other Semitic languages to show how they have influenced the Quran. In different aspects, Jeffery's approach is a realistic one, which poses a critical analysis of the Prophet Muhammad in the formation of the Quran, while at the same time honoring the religious tradition but in the same respect questioning its historical accuracy. Jeffery's work has continued to receive criticism from the traditional Islamic scholars though his work has offered the most basic framework, which the current Quranic scholars cannot ignore. His method, assuming the stratified nature of the Quran text, opens new themes for researches and discussions among scholars and opposes them to the further investigation of the processes of the Quran copying and collection. In this analysis, I will demonstrate how Jeffery's work has persisted as relevant after his death and why his methodological findings are useful for the examination of the Quran.

Keywords: Jeffery's Methodology, Sources, Critique, Islamic Perspective, Holy Scripture

Introduction

Arthur Jeffery was an eminent scholar of the Islamic studies with special reference to the Quran and the history of its text. Jeffery was born in 1892 in Australia, he later on became an academic giant at Columbia University where he engaged in the interpretation of the Islamic scripture. One of his most important books is 'The Qur'an as Scripture' published in 1937, in which Bell presented the detailed analysis of the formation, collection and textual reliability of the Quran. Jeffery's work can be deemed as revolutionary for such an attempt, though he employed various methodologies to deal with the Quran both as history and language (Jeffery, 1937). It remains a highly useful source of information for academics exploring the issues of the Quran creation and comprehension.

This article's main objective is to identify the methodologies and sources that Arthur Jeffery used in his Quranic study, which is found in "The Qur'an as Scripture." "Jeffery's work is multi-disciplinary in nature, and it incorporates aspects of comparative religion, comparative linguistics, textual criticism, and historical studies. In this sense, the aim of the article is to analyse how these methodologies have helped to advance the field of Quranic studies, as well as the more general field of religious studies, through a deconstruction of Jeffery's approaches. This paper will also discuss the strengths and weaknesses of Jeffery's approach, thus, painting a more nuanced picture of this scholar's work. The objective is to provide a descriptive analysis that nevertheless recognizes Jeffery's contribution to knowledge while placing his work in context of modern Quranic studies as pioneered by Whaling 1985 as well as Wansbrough 1977.

In "The Qur'an as Scripture", Arthur Jeffery employs a methodological approach that can be described as highly scholarly and which makes a great use of the various methodologies available within the field of religious studies. Its comparative religion approach places the Quran in a religious system comparing it with other religious scriptures like the Bible and the Vedas and analyzing themes and relations (Bell 1926). Jeffery (1937)'s comparative linguistics examines the relations between Quranic Arabic and other Semitic languages to understand the cultural and historical aspects that influenced the Quran. Further, his textual critical analysis of the Quran entails careful study of the Quranic text and the process of its collection and transmission, which is in contradistinction to the historical-critical method's account of the Quran's inviolate preservation (Rippin 2001). Thus, through the use of such approaches, Jeffery's work presents a rich picture of the Quran, which will be of immense benefit to the scholars interested in the history of the text and its language.

Jeffery's Methodology:

Arthur Jeffery's *The Qur'an as Scripture* is a groundbreaking work in which, to investigate the nature of the Quran, the author uses a very complex approach. Therefore, his approach involves comparative religion, comparative linguistics, realistic approach, and Textual analysis to examine the Quran as scriptures. Jeffery believes that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) imbibed theories of scripture and the prophetic office from his environment together with the influence from the People of the Book. The last chapter of Jeffery's book, entitled as "The Textual History of the Qur'ān" describes the history of Quran as text from the time of the Prophet to the twentieth century. Jeffery argues that modern scholarship has similar problems as it does with other scriptures concerning the Quran's text, disputing the official Muslim historiography and offering his readings (Jeffery, 1952).

While Arthur Jeffery's study is based upon the comparative religion approach, it allows placing the research within the context of the modern religious studies. Based on historical and phenomenological approach, this approach enables one to grasp the religious phenomena (Whaling, 1999). Historical method encompasses an appraisal of the emergence, leaders, teachings, and practices of religions; phenomenological method comprises the classification of religious activities like rituals, prayers, symbols etc. Jeffery uses these methods in conjunction with one another to locate the Quran within the religious textual tradition and contrast its theological concepts and imagery with those of other sacred texts. Similarly to this, when comparing different cultures and religions, it is possible to discuss how the religious scriptures respond to the society's problems, as the Quran responded to the pre-Islamic Arabian social wrongs (Jeffery, 1952; Whaling, 1985).

The historical context of the Quran, in Jeffery's analysis, entails a closer look at the socio-political circumstances of pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula. This was an era of tribalism, polytheism and other social evils, which the Quran aimed at eradicating by providing solutions for some of the social evils like the status of women, war between tribes and economic differences. For example, regarding female infanticide, the Quran prohibits it and speaks for the rights of daughters (Jeffery, 1952). Jeffery uses cross-cultural analysis whereby he relates Quran with other religious texts like the Bible and the Vedas to show the societal reformation patterns. For example, the Hebrew Bible has laws that assure the rights and protection of the weaker sections of society such as widows and orphans, and the Laws of Manu from Hindu religion enumerates the do's and don'ts of society, concerning the treatment of lower classes of society (Whaling, 1985; Doniger, 1991). Jeffery rightly points out that persons like Muhammad who

said that he received divine revelation to guide people were always found in historical context to seek to bring about change in society and politics on the basis of religion (Jeffery, 1952).

Jeffery's comparative analysis of the Quran with other scriptures like the Bible, Avesta, Vedas, and Taoist canon, is in respect to content, themes, and stories. This approach shows the similarities and differences between the theological ideas, moral values, and prophetic stories. For example, both the Quran as well as the Bible present stories of prophets and moral precepts, yet, they have different theological tones and even story telling approaches. The Quran laid stress on the concept of Tawhid and justice of Allah while the Bible is full of covenant, redemption and salvation (Jeffery, 1952). It is also possible to compare the texts to the Vedas as the sacred Hindu scriptures and the Taoist canon as the fundamental work of the Taoist culture with different outlooks and values based on the Hindu and Taoist philosophical systems which will address the karma and dharma in Hinduism as well as the balance and harmony concepts in Taoism (Doniger, 1991; Cleary, 1991). Thus, in such analyses, Jeffery underscores the variety and similarity of people's spiritual quests across cultures (Jeffery, 1952).

The comparative linguistics approach used by Arthur Jeffery include the consideration of the structure of the Quranic text as compared to other languages, Semitic languages in particular, Hebrew and Aramaic and the classical languages, Greek and Latin. This method helps Jeffery to examine the Quran as a linguistic and stylistic phenomenon, to investigate the sources and the stage of the work's formation within the context of the tradition of religious scriptures. Jeffery looks at individual words and expressions in the Quran and tries to find a match with the words and expressions in other languages to determine possible borrowings. He also looks at historical or cultural antecedents to see how interferences might have happened, for example, through borrowings (Jeffery, 1952). In this respect, Jeffery compares the Quranic text with the other religious scriptures such as the Bible and looks for either similarity or difference with an objective of enhancing the knowledge about the linguistic features of Quran as well as its compatibility with other languages (Cleary, 1991).

The methodologies adopted by Arthur Jeffery in studying the Quran are realistic, objective and critical in an overall reverential manner. Though he dissects some features of Islam and the Quran, his analysis still does not contain any inflammatory comments. He pays respect to Muhammad's genuine attempts to raise the status of his people spiritually and considers him from perspective of the time and place. Some Muslim scholars criticized Jeffery for citing various Orientalist opinions instead of supporting defamatory statements; however, such an approach of his is equally balanced

(Jeffery, 1952). In relation to the Quran Jeffery is critical although accepting that it is an authentic text put together by 'Uthman. His criticisms of canonization and modern scholarship are moderate and empirical, he seems to only want to make his research findings known. This realistic estimation contributes to the better understanding of the Quran and the interpretation of it (Jeffery, 1952).

Arthur Jeffery used the textual critical approach as a method of reconstructing texts of the Quran with the aim of comparing texts of higher quality. He supposes that the collections made by 'Uthman contain only the Madinan text and does not take into consideration other texts Jeffery divides suras by the periods and offers the changes to the order of the suras according to the textual criticism For example, he states that the Surah al-Humazah contains the additions made in a later period to explain the terms which are unfamiliar and the Surah al-Quraish is considered to This approach seeks to reveal the process of textual growth of Quran and thus offers a historical view of the Quran's compilation and transmission (Jeffery, 1952).

Analysis of Jeffery's Sources

Arthur Jeffery's important study 'The Qur'an as Scripture' provides a careful analysis of the Quranic text within its historical and exegetical framework by means of employing a plethora of primary sources. To supplement the analysis, Jeffery incorporates the hadith to explain the experience of the Prophet Muhammad as well as the practices of his companions regarding the Quranic verses. His focus on tafsir literature adds depth to the study because it shows different scholarly interpretations of the scripture, in addition to showing the progressive development of jurists' and theologians' perspectives in Islam (Jeffery, 1952). In addition, Jeffery incorporates sources that explain the socio-political factors of the early Islamic society to which revelations in the Quran belong to, in addition to giving a detailed analysis on how the Quran was understood and practiced during the initial years.

Islamist Sources of the Book "The Qur'an as Scripture"

In "The Qur'an as Scripture," Arthur Jeffery provides a detailed and thorough examination of the vast number of Islamic texts to explain the high regard in which the Quran is held as a holy scripture and how its origins and development should be understood. Jeffery effectively uses Islamic sources as essential tools when studying key components like the collection of the Quran, the process of revelation and the role of the Quran in the society within the Islamic framework. These source, namely Islamic historical works, Hadiths' collections, exegetes, and other Islamic literature remain indispensable in terms of providing the necessary information about the position of the Quran and the range of Islamic teachings. The great use of

these sources show that Jeffery was indeed deeply involved with Islamic stories and material which lays the foundation of his theories and analyses. For instance, Jeffery uses al-Tabari and al-Bukhari to expound the Quran text and the commentary of the Holy Scripture in Islamic history that is (Jeffery, 1952; Rahman, 1984).

As a literary analysis, the first part of the book presents the author Jeffery with a wide range of Islamic materials that he explores, including early literature, scholarship, and the Quran. Having incorporated readings from Mesopotamia, Zoroastrianism and early Christianity, Jeffery's work gives an important background to the development of the Islamic ideas on scripturalism and prophethood. Jeffery also uses the works of Zimmern, Meissner, and Martin and makes the comprehension of the article more enriched by quotations that come from classical scholars, which gives him a better understanding of the background of Islam. In the Quran, Jeffery expounds the analysis of the terms concerning writing and scripture, particularly "sijill" and "sifr" which he incorporates in enhancing his understanding of the Islamic theology. Moreover, it is possible to reveal that Jeffery relies on rabbinic literature to investigate Jewish attitudes toward the pre-essence of Torah and its connection with the prophetic heritage, which, in turn, offers methodologically meaningful analogies. Jeffery also makes comparison with other religious personalities from other religions such as Mani and Elchasai and the position of Islam in the religious structure of the world. Despite his work's critical approach, Jeffery provides a detailed and complex overview of the Quran and its context, thus contributing to the study of Islamic scripture and its role in religious culture (Jeffery, 1952; Bell, 1926).

Oriental Sources of the Book "The Qur'an as Scripture"

Since Jeffery's "The Qur'an as Scripture" is a collection of works from different orientalist sources challenging orientalism, the author interacts with those sources in order to argue, assess, and argue over the authority, accuracy, and legitimacy of their writings regarding the Quran. Among those sources R. Bell's translation of the Quran should be mentioned which describes the Arabic word 'awha' as 'to suggest', pointing to a certain way of reading the Quran. Many muslim scholars have criticized Dr. Richard Bell, a British orientalist who, among other things, translated and made a critical analysis of Qur'an. Sayed Bukhari claims that Bell's works such as 'Introduction to the Qur'an' and 'The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment' published up to 1970 have created controversy among the scholars. It is a matter of debate that Bell interpreted relations between the GOT and Qur'anic text through an assessment of how Gospel impacted certain verses in the Qur'an, and evaluated borrowed stories from the Judeo-

Christian tradition. Skeptic critics think that there may be dangers of misrecognition of the actual meaning of these literary and cultural and theologically relevant stories within the Islamic view point while proposing the interpretations by Bell (Bell, 1953; Muir, 1912).

Moreover, Jeffery also cites Goldziher's essay *Ueber die Vorgeschichte der Higa-Poesie in Abzahlungen zur arabischen Philologie* by 1896. Thus, this essay provides historical information about the early Arabic poetry before Islam and determines the role of the poems in the formation of the Quranic environment. From the insights provided by Goldziher, Jeffery derives his opinion to explicate the Qur'an within the followers of Arabic literature. Also, Jeffery uses William Muir's *A Life of Mohammed*, published in 1912, to which he turns to for historical background and events related to the revelation of the Quran. Nevertheless, Jeffery also elaborates his controversies on the historical and theological contexts of Muir's history in the orientalist prejudice and restriction. Interestingly, incorporating orientalist sources such as D. H. Müller work on the original form of prophetic literature, Jeffery effectively questions some of the sources' reliability and authenticity in the way that a professional scholarly research would. Though, contentious and critiqued, Jeffery's interaction with these sources points to a novice yet culturally and academically pertinent inquiry into the text of Quran and its history and religiosity (Muir, 1912; Goldziher, 1896).

Critique of Jeffery's Methodology

In the methodology used in 'The Qur'an as Scripture', Arthur Jeffery uses systematically organized and documented approach based on early Islamic literature, historical records, and scriptures of other religions to study the Quran. Drawing upon primary source materials in hadith and tafsir, he creates the basis of how the Quran was interpreted and implemented during the times of early Islam. As a result, this approach fits Quranic verses within the social-historical context and provides important information about the process of Islamic thought's and Islamic practice's development (Jeffery, 1952). However, when it comes to the analysis of the findings, there are certain disparities, as Jeffery's work is based on textual and historical analysis and thus may not meet certain challenges connected with the study of the Quran.

Nevertheless, what can be seen as Jeffery's main weakness is that her methodology might elevate the multifaceted aspects of the meanings and roles of the Quran in people's lives, experiences, and contexts. The concentration on early Islamic sources might lead the reader to Jeffery's work to miss out on the diverse palettes of interpretation that other cultures, geographic locales, and time periods have potentiating. Other methods

which could be helpful and are more accessible than the methods chosen are: following modern ethnographic researches or using a wider range of Islamic theological currents to understand how the Quran is interpreted and used in different Muslim communities now. In this connection, a social-scientific approach that draws upon sociology, anthropology, and textual criticism may be used in conjunction with the theology to add to the analysis of the Quran more cultural, social, and even aesthetic values.

Moreover, Jeffery's work bears significant biases that come from the paradigms of scholarship at the time he operated as well as his own culture. Due to the fact that Jeffery was a scholar in the middle of the twentieth century, he may have written the paper with modalities of western academic setting and with orientalist lenses which were predominant at the time he wrote the paper. This may be evidenced in the choice and evaluation of sources, in interpretation, as well as in the choice of standards to rate the credibility of the sources he uses (Jeffery, 1952). These biases may distort the view of the Islamic theology and history that he will present and exclude or misrepresent the materials and ideas that do not correspond to certain standards and expectations of the Western academia. Furthermore, Jeffery's background as a Christian theologian and orientalist scholar could bias his perceptions of certain Quranic verses and Islamic usages in offering some theological or comparative outlooks over the others.

Nonetheless, Arthur Jeffery's approach in "The Qur'an as Scripture" provides useful information concerning the early Quranic exegeses and settings although it is not without shortcomings. His approach might need more integration of multicultural perspectives and modern approaches for convening the complexity of Quranic science. Familiarity with epistemological assumptions that are present in any scholarly paradigm and in the authors' backgrounds, is important for methodologically sound appraisal of Jeffery's work as well as for development of more sophisticated and sensitive approach to the modern Quranic scholarship.

Critique of the Sources and References of the Book "The Qur'an as Scripture"

In his work "The Qur'an as Scripture", Arthur Jeffery uses many sources belonging to the orientalist tradition to distort Qur'anic text. This implies that the following groups of arguments review if Jeffery's claims on Quran nature, origin, compilation, and interpretations are as valid as they are made out to be;

Richard Bell

Richard Bell, a British orientalist, also provides critical analysis on the translation of Qur'an. These works are well-known but still rather provocative consisting "Introduction to the Qur'an", (Bell, 1953), and "The

Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment” (Bell, 1926). Specifically, Bell’s approach to identifying aspects of Islamic themes has attracted controversy; the impact of the Christian theology into the Quran. Hence, the viewpoints presented by Bell might give an impression of a simplified understanding of specific aspects of the Islamic contexts, and there is a need for developing more refined typological analyses of these aspects within the framework of the vocabulary of the Islamic theology (al-Khidar, 2004; Ali, 1996).

Ignaz Goldziher

Ignaz Goldziher is another critical source when it comes to understanding the background of Quranic Arabic with reference to pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. In doing that, Jeffery is following the path initially transcended by Goldziher who aimed at establishing connections between the rhetoric of the Quran and the pre-Islamic poetry (Goldziher, 1896). However, Muhammad Mustafa al-Azami is seen to fault Goldziher on this account for the excessive stress on outside influences and insufficient recognition of the autochthone written culture of pre-Islamic Arabia. In coming to the rescue, Al-Azami pleads for increased insight in analyses of Arabic poetry, both internal and environmental (al-Azami, 1977).

William Muir

The historical background of Quran can be found in William Muir’s “Life of Mohammed” though the author has significant prejudices (Muir, 1912). In his book ‘The Life of Muhammad,’ Syed Ahmed Khan explicates that, Muir has depended on unsubtle sources and selected hostile sources to write the biography of the Islamic prophet; further, it is also discovered that the writers are from western world hence, have concealed prejudice to Islam and the Islamic prophet (peace and blessings upon him). Responding to the particularities of the East India Company, alike Parsons, and Khan does not hesitate to point out that the proper version of the Islam history can be reconstructed only on the basis of accurate Islamic sources (Khan, 1870).

D. H. Müller

The work of D. H. Müller on the prophetic literature provides useful suggestions, however, it is carried out criticized for paying attention to the text solely and not paying much attention to context (Müller, 1896). Muhammad Rashid Rida also acknowledges the work done by Müller but explains that due to omission of Hadiths and certain prejudices of western scholars several misinterpretations have occurred. Al-Rida insists on the importance of including Islamic sciences and background for such research (Rida, 1935).

K. Ahrens

Analyzing Muhammad's role in Islam is K. Ahrens' "Muhammad als Religionsstifter;" however, the work might contain biases (Ahrens, 1931). According to Muhammad Abu Zahra, Ahrens' view of revelation in Islam has significant problems and is informed by colonial expectations. The Islamic scholars such as Abu Zahra urge the practitioners to adopt Islamic sources in defining the Prophet's function and the Islamic tenets appropriately.

Anonymous and Unverified Sources

Some aspects may lead to skepticism, such as the sources Jeffery quoted, which include anonymous and unverified documents like "Ebionitische Elemente im Islam." Cohesion to such traits as unexplained background and identity undermines the credibility of his points (Jeffery, 1952). Opponents basically make the use of transparent and verifiable source as instruments of scholarship as a major concern (al-Khidar, 2004; Ali, 1996).

Thus, despite the variety of influential orientalist scholarship employed in Jeffery, Wings, and Dennis, Van der Steen's analysis of the sources reveals several controversies concerning their genuine credibility and bias in interpretation. Therefore, one should immerse himself with other Islamic scholars, especially the competent ones for a quality study on the Quran and the tradition of Islam in general.

Conclusion

It is perhaps noteworthy to mention that Arthur Jeffery in his "The Qur'an as Scripture" tends to broaden the discussion with different and various orientalist approaches towards the Quran. Describing the methodology he employs as 'Quranic studies' Jeffery aims to enhance the discussion about the Quran by using elements of Western scholarship. However, he relies on unidentified and unverified sources of information which is contrary to the scholarly research. Thus, the presence of references, for example, "Ebionitische Elemente im Islam," is also unclear, whether they are facts or ideas of the author without the verification or authentication. Failing to provide clear and accessible information on the background and authority of these sources, readers are unable to determine the credibility of the writings and the scholarly basis of Jeffery's claims. This lack of accountability undermines the scholarship of his work and undermines the work's reliability for the field of Quranic studies.

To maintain academic integrity and be entirely accurate in his work, Jeffery must step up on the credibility of the sources he is using and on his references. It is only relevant to critically analyze the reliability, and authenticity of all sources to avoid the dissemination of fake news or

hearsay. It is imperative that Jeffery's research should be impartial with clear descriptions of the sources that were used to assemble the research citations and the steps taken to establish that they sources are credible. Jeffery's scholarly practices can benefit the study of Quran by increasing the transparency and accountability of his work, thus enriching the body of knowledge on the subject. Also, participating in the dialogue with Muslim scholars and learning from other, more traditional Islamic sources can provide him with useful additional perspectives to reflect on and supplement his interpretation with more culturally sensitive understanding regarding the role of the Quran in the Muslim culture. Having been trained to uphold the values of scholarly academicism as well as interdisciplinary, Jeffery should strive to bring higher standards and efficiency of argumentation in his contributions to the analysis of the Quran and theoretical reception which would contribute to the intensification of academic discussions and production.

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