



# Orientalists on Authorship of the Qur'an: A Case Study of Professor Claude Gilliot

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**Abstract-** Claude Gilliot is included in the list of those famous French orientalist and scholars who have studied Islamic sciences critically. His major work is on the exegesis and the history of the text of the Qur'an. He has also expressed his views about the life of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in his research work and articles. After briefly mentioning his thoughts, this paper proves that instead of taking an original view on Qur'an and Muhammad, he completely embraced the ideas of other skeptical orientalist. He repeated the same accusations in many of his books, articles and research papers. This article traces some of his errors and misconceptions spread in his writings on sources of Quran and revelations of Muhammad (ﷺ).

**Keywords:** Gilliot, Qur'an, Muhammad, Orientalism, Mushaf

## I. INTRODUCTION

Claude Gilliot was born in France (Guemps) in 1940. He is the child of a farmer family. He studied German, Catholic Theology and Philosophy, Arabic and Sociology respectively. Gilliot has two doctorate degrees. He received his first doctorate titled *La sourate al- Baqara dans le Commentaire de Tabarî* (Surah al-Baqara in Tabari Tafsir) in 1982. He completed his second PhD in *Aspects de l'Imaginaire Islâmîque Commun dans le Commentaire de Tabarî* (Characteristics of the General Islamic Perception in Tabari Commentary) in 1987. He did both of his theses under the supervision of Muhammed Arkoun, on Tabari and at the University of Paris (III).

Gilliot has served as professor of Arabic and Islamic sciences at the University of Aix-en-Provence since 1989 and IREMAM. He is currently working as a retired professor at the University of Aix-Marseille. His areas of expertise and interest are the Arabic language, classical period commentary, the textualization history of the Qur'an, hadith, Sirah of the Prophet and bibliography of Arabic sources. He expressed his biased approach in the following words, "The hypothesis that the Quran could be partly or wholly the fruit or the product of a collective work is seldom clearly expressed".

## II. METHODOLOGY

This paper uses qualitative, descriptive methods and text studies in which library and original text studies are used. This involves the use of primary reference sources namely Quran, Claude's books, theses and articles. Among the secondary materials that are the reference for this paper are books, academic journals and articles related to the topic under discussion. This article suggests that more analysis be made on various books written by Claude Gilliot and other Western scholars.

The present paper is a kind of summary of his several articles and contributions, both published and unpublished, wherein the reader finds more details on sources of Quran.

The writings of western scholars like this need to be refined and scrutinized carefully, in maintaining the sanctity of the Quran and respecting the rights of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ). This article suggests that more analysis be made on various writings of Dr. Claude Gilliot.

### III. DISCUSSION

This is one of the oft-repeated charges of the orientalists that the Prophet composed the Qur'an either with direct help from others, after reading books or after being taught by someone of Jewish or Christian background. He writes about the authorship of the Quran, "Here I will address evidence for collective authorship of the Quran first in Islamic tradition and second in the Quran itself."

Undoubtedly, the greatest miracle of the not learned reading and writing in the presence of anyone Prophet is the bringing of the Holy Qur'an; because he had and this is a wonderful miracle. One of the important points in the area of his prophecy is his "being Ummī". This word, which is mentioned as the attribute of Prophet Muhammad with this term "al-Nabī al-Ummī" in the Qur'an, means "illiterate" that it is widely accepted by all Muslim scholars. But Western scholars of the Islamic religion or the same orientalists have offered different views on the meaning of "Ummī" and the ability of the Prophet. They claim that Muhammad was able to read and write and read the ancient heavenly books. In this regard Claude Gilliot says: "Most of the Western experts do not accept the idea that 'Muhammad was illiterate'." In his opinion Mecca was in regular contact with regions where writing was widely used, such as the town of Al-Hīra, and it is said that the Meccans learned the script from Hīra and Anbar.

He further comments that Muhammad's teachers, some of His companions and Khadjia, his nephew Waraqah ibn Nawfal were able to read and write. He opines that Zayd bin Thabit (665-675) was a student at the Jewish school in Medina." While Gilliot was talking about the manuscripts of the Qur'an, in the context of Muhammad's illiteracy he says: "We neither have the manuscripts of Muhammad (which is now known to be probably literate) nor his scribes."

While making these claims, Gilliot does not give any historical documents other than the possibilities mentioned above. The fact that the writing is widespread in Hira and Anbar, which he mentions here, is in contact with Mecca. The literacy of those whom Muhammad claimed to be his teachers never means that Muhammad was also able to read and write. The Prophet was "Ummī" and did not have a teacher in his neighborhood as claimed. It is historically certain that he met a priest named Bahira in Damascus before his prophethood when he was a child, and Waraqah ibn Nawfal. He never met anyone other than Waraqah ibn Nawfal who could make the claim in question. Later, the incident that tells us this encounter a witnesses reported, there was no learning in either of these two encounters. Therefore, there is not a single historical document that can show that the Prophet (ﷺ) could read and write and learned. In this context, Carlyle (1795-1881) says: "The correct view is that Muhammad was never able to write." Gilliot claimed Prophet Muhammad to be literate as he thought that he was reading the texts before him. In many of his studies on Muhammad and the Qur'an, he claims that the Prophet Muhammad and therefore the Qur'an are nourished by previous texts. Gilliot deals with this topic in many of his studies, in almost the same format. Consequently, he tries to prove that the Prophet (ﷺ) was literate in order to put his claim on a solid foundation in a logical way. One of the arguments he rests on is Addās, Ebu Fukayha Yesār, Jabr, etc., which he calls "the teachers of Muhammad". It is because the slaves living in Mecca were either Jews or Christians, could read and write, and read heavenly books. Another orientalist Samuel Marinus Zwemer (1867 -1952), presented almost the same theory that two Christian sword smiths had taught Muhammad - both by his disbelieving contemporaries.

Ibn Kathir writes in the explanation of the verse of the Holy Quran, "You lived among your people for a long time before you brought this Qur'an. During this time you never read any book or wrote anything. Your people, as well as others all know that you are an unlettered man who does not read or write.'

He further writes in this concern, "This is how the Messenger of Allah will remain until the Day of Resurrection, unable to write even one line or one letter. He used to have scribes who would write down the revelation for him, or would write letters from him to be sent to different places".

He emphasizes a lot on Waraqa ibn nawfal and Khadjia. He claims that it was these two persons in the first place who made Muhammad a prophet. He suggests at this point: "He has assistants who helped Muhammad in his first experience of revelation and created his prophecy. If Hazrat Muhammad had not married Hazrat Khadija, he would probably never have been a prophet. Bel'āmī (d. 363/974), in the summary of the Persian History of Tabari, writes that Khadija read the ancient texts, knew the history of the prophets and the name of Gabriel."

Gilliot refers to the following verse of Holy Qur'an in this regard which says, "We know that they say, a human teaches the Qur'an to him. The language of those they imply is foreign. This Qur'an is a clear Arabic verse". Gilliot says in the analysis of this verse: "Although Muhammad's answer using this verse may seem

satisfying to a Muslim theologian, it does not seem to have a strong influence on Muhammad's contemporaries and those who came after him that he has not been able to dominate them for so long." Indeed, it is hard not to be surprised by Gilliot's interpretation. Although he knows the history of Islam very well, his interpretation is nothing more than a prejudice. Because as it is known in history, that in a very short time, Muhammad dominated his contemporaries and after him under the rule of his caliphs, Islam spread from China to Andalusia. Also, Gilliot contradicts itself here. For, he uses a verse of the Qur'an that he does not believe is true and therefore tries to refute its authenticity as evidence for his claim. In order to prove that the source of the knowledge that came to the Prophet (ﷺ) is human, the Quraysh firstly used religious information like themselves. They had to find someone who was not ignorant about him and was in Mecca - because the life of the Prophet (ﷺ) was always there before their eyes. But a blacksmith's slave; they found someone who lived in Mecca, who could not speak Arabic properly, and who did not have the slightest knowledge of religious knowledge. The interesting thing is that; since the Prophet (ﷺ) learned from this man, why did not they go and learn it themselves?. Thus, they could oppose the Prophet (ﷺ) and easily refute his case. Why did not these slaves (or slaves) claim mastery of the Prophet (ﷺ) or undertake the leadership themselves. Jaber and Vasser were Abyssinian slaves who had accepted Islam; their master, a member of the Bani-J:laeJramy, used to beat them saying, "You are teaching Muhammad!" They would protest, "No, by Allah! He teaches us and guides us!". It seems that Claude favored their master's opinion.

Therefore, Gilliot's use of these claims of the Qurash as evidence shows that he is biased on this issue. It is a common thing that all prophets were exposed to deny by their people, all kinds of deceit, lies and slander and their trials to be refuted. Hazrat Noah, Hazrat Hud, Hazrat Salih, were also denied. The Pharaoh said to Moses as the magician and rejected him. Likewise, according to the Jews, Jesus was not a prophet but a liar. So they attempted to kill him, and they believe they killed him. So what Gilliot has to do here is to see this common history. Claude Gilliot does not focus solely on the "teachings of the prophet" and mentions the slanders of the Meccans to him such as poet, maguns, priests and mad. It is a behavior and evidence that he acts prejudiced about Islam. For, when we look at the history of the prophets, it is seen that the denial of the prophets by their ummah and their killing is one of the most common facts.

In this context, Carlyle says: "Our hypothesis that Muhammad was a fraudulent, and that his religion was a pile of fabrications and nonsense, is something that nobody really starts to care about anymore. I believe Muhammad was sincere. Because true sincerity is the first character of all heroes, Muhammad is not a dishonest man. For, while such a man could not even build a house built of mud brick and mud, Muhammad was a person to whom millions of people were firmly attached for twelve centuries. Since his followers are people like us, created by God, how can they follow a dishonest man?"

Watt (1909-2006) also states: "If we want to understand Muhammad even a little and correct the mistakes inherited to us from the past; believing not only in his essential honesty and integrity of his purpose; we must firmly adhere to the belief that he is sincere in all respects until proven otherwise. Muhammad's readiness to endure torture for the sake of his faith, the high moral character of his believers, and the greatness of his ultimate success show that he is truly a righteous and honest person."

Gilliot again says in the context of verse of Qur'an. "This verse does not say that Muhammad never had teachers. Simply what he says; that it (the Qur'an) cannot be obtained from someone who speaks bad Arabic."

Gilliot, while standing in the middle of all Islamic sciences, with an atomic understanding of evaluation, took this verse out of context.

However, the verse just before this verse and the two after it make this interpretation of Gilliot totally meaningless and invalidate, and almost serve as an answer to his interpretation. Therefore, he tries to prove in many different ways that the Qur'an is not based on the facts, on the other hand, he tries to use this verse as evidence for his cause, as if he had no doubt about the authenticity of the Qur'an. This is a contrast that most orientalist fall into. Moreover, this verse clearly and clearly states that the source of the Qur'an is not the alleged person or persons.

Whether various religions, ideas and civilizations have an influence on Islam is a familiar situation in the work of western undersecretaries. They make assumptions in this area and claim external influences on the issues they deal with in Islamic sciences. Consequently they claim Syriac and Hebrew influences on Islam.

In order to refute Muhammad's prophecy he claims that those who raised him were Jews, Christians, those who made use of Syriac translations of the Bible and non-Biblical texts, the "seekers of God" and those who were called "hanif" around him.

He writes in this regard: "This famous legend existed before Islam in one way or another, with some of its foundation stones. Hence, we think that Muhammad also revived him to put him at the service of his own

doctrine. " Gilliot further states: " The hypothesis that the Qur'an is not only the work of a man, but gradually acquired its structure in an environment of spiritual agitators' was reconsidered."

Claude writes in his opinion, the teachings of Muhammad, the 'Hanifs', the 'Seekers of God', the actions of Musaylime and Abu " Amir, should be examined interdependently. .He claims: "Before speaking the Qur'an, Muhammad was probably informed by Jewish and Christian authors, and learned from Syriac translations of the Bible and non-biblical texts. "

Therefore, these claims are not very new among orientalists. Using the same arguments, Goldziher (1850-1921), one of the important leaders of the orientalists, said: "Muhammad, the founder of Islam, does not claim to have brought a new thought. He suggests that he did not make a new contribution in the context of thoughts in the relation of man with the supernatural and transcendent being. " According to Goldziher, Muhammad; Jews, Christians (according to Goldziher, Jewish and Christian scholars are the teachers of the Prophet Muhammad) and his soul remained so much under the influence of these influences that he saw himself as a means of inspiration, apparent visions. they turned into divine revelations. Goldziher again: "Muhammad used most of these materials in a way that was far from being systematic, creating a mixture of Christianity's bid'ahs and fabricated stories with Gnosticism. His receptive mind was influenced by Magi as well as Jews and Christians. It is of the opinion that the removal of Saturday or Sunday from the rest day was due to the influence of the Magi.

As can be easily understood, the similarities of Gilliot's words were put forward by another orientalist about a hundred years ago with more or less the same arguments and again without historical data, on the basis of only assumptions. Watt describes the state of such orientalists as follows: "Most Western writers have been prepared to accept the worst things about Muhammad. Wherever they found an expression that seemed like an objection, they immediately clung to it as if it was real. It is as certain as anything in history that Muhammad carefully distinguished between his own thoughts and those which he believed to have come from a supernatural source. Therefore, he did not in any way constitute an illusion or a Qur'an or a religion from the legends he heard around him, as the orientalists claim.

Although it is true that some people in the Arabian Peninsula have belief in "one God", their belief in "one God" is the Prophet. There is no reason to believe that Muhammad is the same as belief in "one God". There is no historical evidence that this "monotheism" is linked to a social reform movement. However, from the beginning, Hazrat Muhammad's belief in "one God" has been linked in parallel with a sense of humanism and a sense of social and economic justice. Consequently, the reason why the Meccans did not attach themselves to those who believed in "one God" before Islam was due to any sociological or economic reforms and hence this it may have resulted from the fact that the understanding is not reflected in the social life in any way.

According to Gilliot, "The superiority of Muhammad's message over others stems from his manifestation of his message with an understanding beyond local and tribal understanding, and his resorting to violence, in contrast to Abu 'Amir. However, the claim that Abu' Amir did not resort to violence is historically a false claim. When Hazarat Muhammad came to Medina, Abu 'Amir provoked the polytheists for the battles of Badr,Uhud and Hendek. When the Taif people became Muslim, Abu' Amir went to Damascus and became a Christian. Abu 'Amir sought help from the Greek ruler Kayser in order to wage a war against the hypocrites who built the Masjid-i Dirar and the Muslims. Therefore, Abu' Amir resorted to violence in all aspects but was not successful.

In the end in one of his article he writes his findings, "we find in this research motivation for a critical reading of the Muslim sources which reflects a "lectionary" in constant evolution, perhaps until the Umayyad period: informers of Muhammad, the reception by Muhammad and his collaborators, abrogation, the "forgetting" of verses, or even suras, missing (or victim to forgetting) verses or suras, collections more or less complete, interpolations, partial correction of faults (lahn, pl. luhun) contained in the text (and which perdure in the present day vulgate), various linguistic emendations, and so on. A prophet is not created in a single day, and a holy book no less!"

Watt's statement: "No one of the great historical figures in the West has been valued as little as Muhammad" is very meaningful. It was Reinhart Dozy (1820-1883), Aloys Sprenger (1813-1893), W. Muir (1819-1905), Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921), Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930), Leone Caetani (1869-1935). It is because they misrepresent Muhammad in the West and thus prevent him from being recognized as true.

In making these claims it should be pointed out that the writer concerned has overlooked certain important facts. Ibn-Taymiyah statement refutes all the allegations presented by Claude Gilliot. He writes that the Prophet was illiterate and the sublime style of the Qur'an remained the same throughout the entire period of its revelation. No mortal author could maintain such perfection of style, persistently, for so long. Not a Surah, not a verse, not even a word was revised, as is recorded in history. He further says

that the Arabs of those generations were accurate in memorizing of their history. Not one Arab historian was quoted to have mentioned that Muhammad ever sat down to learn from anyone; nor that he used regularly to counsel with friends except after he became a Prophet. Finally, Muhammad, before reaching the age of forty, never preached, nor could he utter a passage of the Qur'an which is clearly distinct even from his own speeches and sayings.

#### IV. FINDINGS

Gilliot relied on the theses put forward by the skeptical orientalists before him in his imagination; it did not bring a different perspective. As he did in almost all of his works, he summarized the theses of his predecessors on this subject and adopted the ones that came to his job based on their thesis. This is also one of the most characteristic features of the orientalists. Edward W. Said (1935-2003) summarizes these features of the orientalists as: "Every Orientalist takes some of his previous studies as preliminary and he relies on the information he got here in his studies".

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3. The new name of this university is: University of Aix-Marseille. University of Aix-Marseille, University of Provence Aix-Marseille I, The Mediterranean University and Paul cezanneIt is a university that came into being with the merger of the University.
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11. Anbar also known by its original ancient name, Peroz-Shapur, was an ancient and medieval town in central Iraq
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29. *ash-Shu'ara'* 26:105, 116.
30. *ash-Shu'ara'* 26:123, 136-139.
31. *ash-Shu'ara'* **26 : 141,153-154.**
32. *ash-Shu'ara'* 26:29, 34.
33. Matthew, 13: 57-58; Mark, 6: 3-5.
34. *al-Anbiya'* 21; 5; *at-Tur* 52 : 30-31.
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37. Matthew, 23:37; Luke, 11: 47-51.
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41. An-Nahl, 16:103. (O Muhammad!) Say to them: "Gabriel has sent down the Quran as truth from his Lord, to give perseverance to those who believe, to be a guidance and good news to Muslims)
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