

## **The Arranging of Verses and Surahs of the Holy Qur'an in the Modernist Reading: Mohamed Arkoun as a Sample – Presentation and Critique**

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### **Abstract:**

*This study addresses a position of the modernist reading in its engagement with the Holy Qur'an and its sciences. It unveils the mechanisms and methodologies it employs to achieve its objectives and purposes. The study is conducted by presenting and discussing one of the most prominent figures of Arab modernist thought – Mohamed Arkoun – regarding his stance on the arrangement of the verses and surahs of the Qur'an, and his connection to the ideas and methods of Orientalists.*

*To accomplish this study, the following methodologies were employed: descriptive and analytical. The study combines the presentation of the suspicions raised by Mohamed Arkoun and the modernist reading, and the critique of his statements through the theoretical and foundational principles of the science of arranging verses and surahs as established by scholars of Qur'anic sciences.*

**Keywords:** *Arrangement of verses and surahs – Mohamed Arkoun – Modernist reading – Orientalism – Historical method – Philological method – Critique.*

## **L'organisation des versets et des sourates du Saint Coran dans la lecture moderniste : Mohamed Arkoun comme exemple – Présentation et critique**

### **Résumé :**

*Cette étude aborde la position de la lecture moderniste dans son approche du Saint Coran et de ses sciences. Elle dévoile les mécanismes et les méthodologies qu'elle utilise pour atteindre ses objectifs et ses buts. L'étude est menée en présentant et en discutant l'une des figures les plus éminentes de la pensée moderniste arabe, Mohamed Arkoun, concernant sa position sur l'agencement des versets et des sourates du Coran, et son lien avec les idées et les méthodes des orientalistes.*

*Pour mener à bien cette étude, les méthodologies suivantes ont été utilisées : descriptive et analytique. L'étude combine la présentation des soupçons soulevés par Mohamed Arkoun et la lecture moderniste, et la critique de ses déclarations à travers les principes théoriques et fondamentaux de la science de l'agencement des versets et des sourates tels qu'établis par les érudits des sciences coraniques.*

**Mots-clés :** *Disposition des versets et des sourates – Mohamed Arkoun – Lecture moderniste – Orientalisme – Méthode historique – Méthode philologique – Critique.*

## Introduction:

Praise be to Allah who revealed the Qur'an to His servant as revelation and clarification, and guided to its arrangement, recording, and compilation. May Allah's blessings and peace be upon Muhammad ibn Abdullah, the Master of the Messengers and the best of His creation, and upon his family and companions.

Writing and research in Qur'anic studies are among the most beneficial fields due to the nobility of their subject – the speech of Allah, the Glorious Qur'an. Among these studies are those defending the Qur'an and refuting doubts raised about it and its sciences, particularly by Orientalists and those influenced by them, as well as by their methodologies, schools, and Western doctrines, including Arab modernists under the title of the contemporary modernist reading of the Qur'an. This study, entitled **“The Arrangement of Verses and Surahs of the Qur'an in the Modernist Reading: Mohamed Arkoun as a Model – Presentation and Critique,”** aims to clarify and expose the doubts raised by modernist readings of the Qur'an regarding the arrangement of verses and surahs.

They call for reordering the Noble Qur'an not according to the agreed-upon Uthmanic codex arrangement, but rather according to the order of revelation or thematic arrangement. Their purpose, they claim, is to attempt to understand the Qur'an logically, easily, and sequentially. They also seek to understand the Prophet's (peace be upon him) biography by tracing and applying philological methods and chronological criteria for events. In this study, I will present one of these modernist models: the studies of Mohamed Arkoun,

his position on the arrangement of verses and surahs, and the method he chose to study this topic.

This study relies on Arkoun's statements, presenting and analyzing them, and linking them to the views of earlier Orientalists, highlighting the importance of the works and opinions of the scholars of the Ummah regarding the arrangement of the Qur'an's verses and surahs. These works displayed remarkable originality in theorizing and grounding this issue, which has been overlooked by modernists including Mohamed Arkoun, resulting in the neglect of Islamic narration and the dominance of Orientalist views.

It is clear to any researcher in the arrangement of the Qur'an's verses and surahs that this science is closely connected with other Qur'anic sciences, such as the science of the Qur'an's compilation. Discussions of the order of the surahs involve the collection by the Prophet (peace be upon him), then by Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), and finally by Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him). From the arrangement of verses and surahs developed the science of the coherence between verses and surahs.

On the other hand, Arkoun's position on the arrangement of verses and surahs cannot be understood except by understanding his project of "Islamic Applications."

This topic is divided into an introduction, four main sections, and a conclusion:

- **Section One:** Mohamed Arkoun's position on the arrangement of Qur'anic verses.
- **Section Two:** Mohamed Arkoun's position on the arrangement of Qur'anic surahs.
- **Section Three:** The impact of the arrangement of verses and surahs in the Uthmanic Mushaf from Arkoun's perspective.

- **Section Four:** Mohamed Arkoun's method for arranging Qur'anic verses and surahs.

As for my methodology in this research, I present Mohamed Arkoun's views, study and analyze them, discuss them with detailed presentation, and critique the content of his statements. Allah is the one whose help is sought, and on Him we rely.

## **1. Mohamed Arkoun's position on the arrangement of Qur'anic verses**

Arkoun believes that the verses were not arranged according to a chronological standard; for example, Surah Al-Kahf contains verses that do not belong to it.(1) This claim contradicts the consensus of the Ummah. It is obvious that the Mushaf we have – the Uthmanic Mushaf – is not arranged according to the order of revelation. This consensus was settled after the time of Uthman ibn Affan (may Allah be pleased with him). Arkoun's position on the arrangement of verses can only be understood if we understand his conception and stance regarding the Qur'an and revelation. He believes the Qur'an is subject to historical influence. Therefore, he opposes separating the Qur'an from its historical, social, and linguistic context. This, as is known, strips the Qur'an of its sanctity and divinity. With this view, the Qur'an becomes like any other human product.

Mohamed Arkoun says:

"Furthermore, the revealed scripture is accessible to believers only through the written version of the books or sacred scriptures... This is the second aspect of the book, which is subject to all the constraints and limitations of historical and arbitrary characteristics."

(2)

Arkoun believes there is no alternative way to study the Qur'anic text or divine revelation except in connection with its historical context. It holds an equal status with other revealed scriptures that Orientalists have analyzed through historical criticism.(3)

The summary of this argument is that Arkoun transforms the Qur'an from an eternal text, unbound by time and place, suitable and beneficial for every era and location, into a human text subject to the surrounding historical circumstances, thus losing its sanctity.

Arkoun says:

"I never speak about the word of God or the revealed truth... I want to focus first on the linguistic space of the Qur'an." (4)

He tries to understand the Qur'an through language and historical and intellectual clues. By doing so, he does not distinguish between pagan and revealed religions. He studies the Qur'an critically, subjecting it to Western critical methods. He is heavily influenced by Orientalists and their methodologies, praising their efforts, writings, and studies. This admiration is justified since he is a graduate of the school of Orientalism and the Sorbonne. This influence is reflected in his ideas and opinions, especially regarding the Islamic heritage.

Arkoun states:

"The progress in Qur'anic studies was achieved thanks to the scholarly expertise of Orientalism since the nineteenth century." (1)

After this bias and justification, one wishes he had also praised the efforts of Islamic scholars and their contributions in their writings and methodologies in service of Islamic heritage and humanity in general. Instead, Orientalism is praised, and Islamic narratives are neglected or at best tim-

idly mentioned. On the contrary, whenever there was an opportunity to attack Muslim scholars and their methodologies, he took it, sometimes more harshly than the Orientalists themselves. He referred to their efforts as “classical Orthodox theological readings” and elsewhere said:

"Let us be humble at the same time and acknowledge the gains and achievements of Orientalist scholarship. Therefore, I wholeheartedly salute the efforts and achievements of the pioneers of Orientalism." (2)

After this praise, should we expect him to depart from the general framework of Orientalism, Western modernity, and its outcomes? As Arabs say, “Do not expect more than horse manure.” While he sometimes differed with Orientalists, he agreed with them in methods, approaches, and ways of thinking.

Regarding Mohamed Arkoun’s influence by and relationship with Orientalism, I limit myself to one opinion that summarizes this relationship, that of Abdel Razzaq Harnas, who says:

"Among the examples of students of Orientalists who advanced early in the West – France – and publish their works in French is Dr. Mohamed Arkoun. What concerns us here are those parts of his writings related to the divine origin of the Qur’an. Although this writer has rightly become bolder than his teachers in challenging God, His Book, the Sunnah of His Prophet (peace be upon him), and the Sharia of Islam, it is noticeable that in all he has written about the Qur’an, he remained loyal to the Orientalist heritage. We can hardly find any of the Orientalists’ critiques – old or modern – that he has not adopted and defended. His method is always the same: to obscure these critiques by claiming to benefit from

'contemporary epistemological methodologies' in understanding the Qur'an."

But this so-called benefit always leads to affirming and endorsing the various fabrications of the Orientalists. (1) This opinion summarizes Mohamed Arkoun's stance toward Orientalism as well as toward the Islamic narrative.

The essence of his position on the arrangement of the Qur'anic verses is the necessity of relying on the historical method. Mohamed Arkoun says:

"To establish an open and applied history of Islamic thought – I mean open to this thought and to all its products, which transcend the boundaries and cognitive barriers imposed by heretical and theological literatures – and equally open to the human and social sciences, their methods and inquiries, as has been practiced in the West for the past thirty years. It is also a practical applied history within the same research movement because it aims to meet the needs and hopes of Islamic thought and to fill its gaps since it was forced to face materialistic and intellectual modernity." (2)

Accordingly, Mohamed Arkoun judges the Qur'anic verses according to the historical circumstances surrounding them, including the issue of the arrangement of the Qur'anic verses. Now I will clarify the arrangement of the Qur'anic verses as established in the books of tafsir and Qur'anic sciences, which have been ignored by the modernist readings, foremost among them Mohamed Arkoun.

There is no dispute among the Muslim community that the arrangement of the verses was by divine instruction (tawqif) from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as he recited it to the companions day and night, and none of them was heard to contradict the order of any verse. The following evidences testify to this:

□ The hadith of Zaid ibn Thabit (may Allah be pleased with him):

"I lost a verse from Surah Al-Ahzab when we were compiling the Mushaf. I used to hear the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) reciting it. So, we searched for it and found it with Khuzaymah ibn Thabit Al-Ansari:

- 'Among the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with Allah' [Al-Ahzab: 23]. We then included it in its surah in the Mushaf." (1)
- This is the story related to the compilation of the Uthmanic Mushaf.
- The hadith of Abdullah ibn Al-Zubair (may Allah be pleased with both of them):
- He said: "I said to Uthman ibn Affan: 'And those of you who die and leave wives behind' [Al-Baqarah: 240]. He said: 'The other verse abrogated it, so I did not write it (or: I left it out).' I said: 'O my uncle's son, did you change anything from its place?' He said: 'No.'" (2)
- The hadith of Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with both of them):

He said: "I asked Uthman ibn Affan: 'What made you put (Al-Anfal), which is one of the Mushaat (repeated), and (Al-Bara'ah), which is one of the Mueen (surahs with a certain meter), together, and not write a line of 'Bismillah Al-Rahman Al-Rahim' between them, but put them together in the seven long surahs? What made you do that?'

Uthman replied: 'The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) used to receive revelations over time, and when a surah was revealed, he would call one of those who wrote for him and say: "Put this surah which mentions such and such." When verses were revealed, he would say: "Put these

verses in the surah which mentions such and such." When a single verse was revealed, he would say: "Put this verse in the surah which mentions such and such." (Al-Anfal) was among the first to be revealed in Medina, and (Al-Bara'ah) is one of the last in the Qur'an. Their stories were similar, but the Messenger of Allah passed away without clarifying that it was part of it, and I thought it was part of it. Therefore, I combined them and did not write a 'Bismillah' line between them."

**"In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate," and placed it in the long surahs.** These three authentic hadiths clearly state that the order of the verses in each surah was by the directive (tawqifi) of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Another evidence is that if the arrangement of the verses had been by the companions' own reasoning (ijtihad), they would have placed the abrogating verse after the abrogated one, as in the case of the verses: 'Those among you who die and leave wives shall wait for four months and ten days' [Al-Baqarah: 234], and 'Those among you who die and leave wives, a bequest for their wives, a provision until one year passes without their being expelled' [Al-Baqarah: 240]. According to the majority, the latter verse abrogates the former, yet it comes after it in the verse order.

Since this arrangement was by the Prophet's directive (tawqifi), the miracle (i'jaz) lies in the coherence between the verses of each surah. It is also a challenge to produce a surah like it, as Allah says: 'And if you are in doubt about what We have sent down upon Our Servant, then produce a surah like it' [Al-Baqarah: 23].

Al-Suyuti (d. 911 AH) said: "...His (the Prophet's) recitation of it in front of the companions shows that the order of its verses was by tawqif, and the companions would not

have arranged it differently from what they heard the Prophet (peace be upon him) recite; this reached the level of mutawatir (mass transmission)." Thus, the issue of the order of the verses within a surah is agreed upon by the scholars of the Ummah.

Badr al-Din al-Zarkashi (d. 794 AH) said: "As for the arrangement of the verses in each surah and the placement of the basmala at its beginning, this arrangement is unquestionably tawqifi and there is no dispute about it, and thus it is not permissible to reverse it."

Scholars have unanimously agreed that the arrangement of the verses is by tawqif, and that ijihad played no role in this order, because Gabriel would bring the verses to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and instruct him on their place in the surah or among the previously revealed verses, so the Prophet (peace be upon him) would command the scribes to write them in their designated place.

Since the order of the verses is by the Prophet's directive, there is no room to discuss the chronological criterion mentioned by Muhammad Arkoun. The time factor is relevant only in the reasons for revelation (asbab al-nuzul), which every tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis) book explains, including whether the verse is Meccan or Medinan. This claim belongs to the Orientalists, and Muhammad Arkoun is merely a transmitter and disciple of theirs, relaying what his teacher Louis Massignon approved.

## **2. Muhammad Arkoun's Position on the Arrangement of the Qur'anic Surahs**

Arkoun believes that the Qur'an was not arranged according to chronological order. Evidence for this is shown, as indicated in Surah Al-Baqarah, which is the second surah by

the Qur'an's arrangement, not by chronological order. The ninth surah, At-Tawbah, is one of the latest revealed surahs, yet it holds the 115th position in the Qur'an's order. Surah Al-Hujurat is ranked 49th in the Qur'an, while it should be 114th chronologically.

This section will present Arkoun's position on the order of the Qur'anic surahs and the significant scholarly disagreement on this matter. The difference between the modernist (hadathi) reading and the traditional Islamic narrative regarding the order of the surahs is deep due to differing aims and purposes. I will also show the accepted arrangement of the Qur'anic surahs as established in the science of Qur'an and the records of tafsir.

The matter of surah arrangement is a subject of dispute: is it tawqifi (by prophetic directive) or ijtihadi (a result of the companions' effort)? Both views have valid points and some weight.

### **First view: Tawqifi (by prophetic directive)**

Its proponents cite evidence including:

1. Many hadiths mention the consecutive surahs according to the Mushaf's order, with only one hadith indicating otherwise, which does not contradict the idea that the arrangement is tawqifi. Among these hadiths is the one narrated by Muslim from Abu Umamah al-Bahili, where the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Recite the Qur'an, for it will come as an intercessor for its companions on the Day of Judgment. Recite the two bright ones: Al-Baqarah and Aal-Imran, for they will come on the Day of Judgment as if they were two clouds, or two shades, or two flocks of birds disputing on behalf of their companions. Recite Surah Al-

Baqarah, for taking it is a blessing, leaving it is a regret, and the devils cannot approach it."

2. From the companions, Ibn Mas'ud said: "Al-Isra'il, Al-Kahf, Maryam, Taha, and Al-Anbiya are among the 'free ones' (Al-Utaq al-Awwal), and they are among the ancient ones."
3. Abu Dawood Al-Tayalisi and others narrated from Abdullah ibn Aws ibn Hudhayfah that the Qur'an was divided into groups (ajzaa) of three, five, seven, nine, eleven, thirteen, and the final group (Hizb al-Mufassal), as learned from the companions of the Prophet.
4. The division of the Qur'an into long, medium, short, and detailed surahs is transmitted from the companions by the Prophet's teaching, with many reports supporting this division.
5. Rational arguments include:
  - The groups of surahs like the 'Huwwamin' and 'Tawasin' do not follow the order of the 'Mushaat' or surahs starting with 'Alif Lam Mim', which are not successive.
  - The arrangement does not follow the order of revelation, as Meccan surahs do not always precede Medinan ones.

### **Second view: The arrangement of surahs is ijtihadi (companion's effort)**

Evidence includes:

1. The hadith of Uthman ibn Affan, which explicitly states they had no prophetic directive on the arrangement of surahs, and thus he exerted effort re-

garding the arrangement of Surah At-Tawbah and Al-Anfal.

2. The hadith of Aisha, about the Iraqi man who asked her about compiling the Qur'an, indicating that the order was not fixed as it was revealed gradually.
3. It is established that the Prophet recited Surah An-Nisa before Aal-Imran in prayer, indicating that the order was flexible.
4. It is known that the companions' Mushafs differed in their order from Uthman's Mushaf (for example, Ibn Mas'ud's Mushaf's order was different from that of Ali and Abu Bakr ibn Abi Shaybah).

The disagreement between these two views is very strong. Most scholars support the second view, which Zarkashi called the view of the majority of scholars, explaining that the disagreement is mostly verbal, since those who say the arrangement was ijthadi mean the companions arranged it based on their knowledge of the reasons for revelation and the location of verses.

Ibn Atiyyah argued that many surahs' order was known during the Prophet's lifetime, such as the long surahs, 'Huwwamin,' and detailed surahs, but some were not ordered until after the compilation of the Mushaf.

Abu Ja'far ibn Al-Zubayr said: "The narrations testify more than Ibn Atiyyah stated, with only a few exceptions where disagreement might occur."

What appears regarding the Qur'an is that the original principle is transmission in all matters related to the Qur'an—its surah order, verses, names, and virtues. No one has discretion in these matters. Discretion only appeared later in aspects related to its writing, vocalization, decoration, naming surahs, numbering verses, adding pause

marks, and other scholarly innovations, which were accepted.

### **3. The Impact of the Arrangement of Verses and Surahs in the Uthmanic Mushaf from Muhammad Arkoun's Perspective**

Arkun believes that the arrangement of the verses and chapters was not based on a rational or formal criterion. He says: "The Qur'an consists of scattered, fragmented texts disconnected from their original context, even if they are gathered within the covers of the mushaf or the official closed text." He also states elsewhere: "We are finally certain, with regard to ourselves as contemporaries, that the purely linguistic connection that links the official closed text (or the final completed text) with the Qur'anic discourse – understood as a collection of chapters that were uttered and accepted under specific initial conditions – has been lost forever and cannot be recovered. This loss of connection began with the death of the first generation of Companions who personally witnessed the emergence of the Qur'anic phenomenon."

This conclusion reached by Muhammad Arkun is based on a premise he assumes to be correct when he says: "I insist here on the oral character of the Qur'an initially because it was not written until later."

This stance on the arrangement of the verses and chapters of the Holy Qur'an, as well as other Qur'anic sciences, summarizes Muhammad Arkun's position on the Word of God Almighty in our hands, preserved in hearts and recorded in mushafs. He calls it: "the second Qur'an."

The terms "the official closed text," "the Qur'anic event," and each of these terms carry their own connotations and

effects, linking to a fundamental pillar of his project which he called applied Islamics: "historicization" or "historicism" – linking the revelation to social, political, cultural conditions, the desert environment, and others – to emphasize the humanity of this "cultural product," lifting its sanctity and treating it like other literary and human texts.

Consider his words as he describes the Noble Mushaf: "This physical volume that I touch and hold with my hand, transfer from place to place, read and interpret after performing ablution and purification; this is the book that was completed through the transition from an oral culture to a written culture."

What Arkun declares here, distinguishing between the recited Qur'an and the written Qur'an – or as he calls it, the "oral discourse" and the "official closed text" – echoes Plato's thought, who distinguished between speech and writing, and also echoes Spinoza's thought who differentiated between the written and printed revelation. Ferdinand de Saussure also devoted a chapter to this distinction. Originally, this differentiation was a method of other philosophers, and Arkun repeated and confirmed this method.

He also states explicitly: "The transition from the stage of oral discourse to the stage of the official closed written text was not achieved except after many deletions, selections, and linguistic manipulations that always occur in such cases. Not all oral discourse is recorded; rather, some things are lost along the way. This is because the compilation took place under intense political struggle over power and legitimacy."

Researchers must carefully study Muhammad Arkun's methodology in his writings, interviews, recordings, and his overall stance on Islamic heritage in order to understand these details.

If we understand his stance on the Qur'an and his vision of it through the "modern reading of the Qur'an," we can grasp his aim in rearranging the mushaf according to chronological order of revelation, which does not differ from what Orientalists before him have established. Hashim Saleh, translator of Arkun's works, says in the introduction to the translation of Arkun's book "Issues in Critique of Religious Reason": "What Arkun does to Islamic heritage closely resembles what European scholars and thinkers have done regarding Christianity." It is not hidden to researchers that these Western projections on Qur'anic verses have methodological and scientific defects, which will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

Based on these premises regarding Arkun's stance on the non-chronological order of verses and chapters, he concludes that there are hardly any cohesive textual units in the Qur'an except rarely. Rather, the formation mostly happened in three ways:

1. A kind of overlapping between verses somewhat related or unrelated in their chronology.
2. Concerning the circumstances of the discourse when it was first uttered.
3. Concerning the content or its expressive formulation.

One who studies Muhammad Arkun's statements will find many contradictions, confusion, and lack of clarity on many issues included in his books and articles. This inconsistency results from his distancing from the Islamic narrative and not consulting original sources. For example, regarding the arrangement of verses and chapters, there is no reference to Islamic sources and references, which are rich in this field. Much of his interaction with Islamic heritage and transmission was mediated by Orientalists, not directly. This

clearly shows weakness, lack of editing and verification in clear matters known to anyone who reads the Qur'an.

When browsing the Noble Mushaf, one finds for each chapter its number, whether it is Meccan or Medinan. Anyone familiar with exegesis books finds references to reasons for revelation and the order of verses and chapters. The second cause of contradiction is "lack of mastery of Arabic." Arkun did not exert effort or time to master the Arabic language, its secrets, and the evidence of its miraculousness. How then could he understand the Word of God, which reached the highest levels of eloquence and is the most articulate language? Most of his writings were in French and translated into Arabic, as if his audience were not Arabic readers but Western elites — which is very strange.

He denies the existence of cohesive textual units in the Qur'an except rarely. If this were true, those opposed to the Islamic call among the polytheists of Quraysh would have been the first to respond. If they found an entry or a door to attack from this doubt, they would have done so, and they were masters of rhetoric, poetry, and eloquence. Their ultimate attack on the Prophet was that he was a sorcerer, poet, or madman, out of their inability, as the Qur'an challenged them to produce anything like it — it is the miraculous Word of God Almighty.

Then Muhammad Arkun says: "Yes, this does not negate the possibility of finding a central idea even in a long chapter like Al-Baqarah." Despite admitting the lack of textual sequence in the Qur'an, he describes this sequencing as astonishing to the mind but hiding a deep semiotic order. This reveals his confusion and lack of deep, clear study of exegesis books. Had he done so, he would not have reached these conclusions, which are, at best, weak and contradictory.

For example, Arkun praises the exegesis of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 606 AH), titled "Al-Tafsir al-Kabir (Mafatih al-Ghayb)," saying: "It awaits to be scientifically exploited," and also: "It is distinguished by fertility." However, he overlooks that al-Razi's tafsir is one of the most detailed works that focused on the science of coherence (al-munasaba), examining the relation between verses and chapters. How then can he say there are no cohesive textual units? Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911 AH) and Burhan al-Din al-Biqā'i (d. 885 AH) also excelled in this field in works such as "Nazm al-Durar fi Tanasub al-Ayat wa al-Suwar."

Whoever contemplates the Qur'an finds harmony among its verses and chapters. Despite differences in length, short chapters usually have a unified theme, and their names indicate their topic, as in the chapters of Juz' Amma. Long chapters may have one topic presented in various contexts or multiple topics.

Some contemporary scholars have studied this under the term "thematic unity" or, following earlier scholars, "the purpose of the chapter." Investigating thematic unity or chapter purposes is a fascinating subject if those involved avoid artificiality in examining coherence.

One cannot understand thematic unity or uncover chapter purposes without considering the following elements:

- The name of the chapter
- The chapter's topics
- The general interpretation of the chapter

This indicates how deeply related the arrangement of verses and chapters is to other Qur'anic sciences.

What is the consequence of not knowing the chronological order of verses and chapters? The modern reading of the Qur'an, especially by Muhammad Arkun, leads to harms

such as losing track of the development of the meaning of words in the Qur'an, exemplified by concepts like "disbelievers" and "believers."

These harms imagined by Arkun stem from his belief in the Qur'an and his division between oral and written as previously mentioned. What he asserts here leads to removing the barrier of sanctity and the belief that the Qur'an came with fixed and eternal rulings. To remove this barrier, the modern reading resorts to what is called "historicization," linking the Qur'anic verses to their environmental circumstances, times, and varying contexts.

We can summarize the methodology of the historical reading of Qur'anic verses by connecting them to temporal and spatial frameworks as follows:

1. Employing reasons for revelation, abrogation (naskh), clear (muhkam) and ambiguous (mutashabih) verses, Meccan and Medinan classifications to establish the legitimacy of historicism and to surpass limits and controls respected by interpreters and jurists.
2. It is impossible to derive legislative rulings from verses according to their view because rulings may vary between general and specific, abrogating and abrogated.
3. Modernists believe that verses of rulings represent only a limited portion of the total verses, affected by the special conditions and stops where they were revealed.
4. Modernists believe Qur'anic verses do not carry fixed or absolute meanings; they impose relativity on rulings verses.
5. The doctrines in these verses depend on the level of knowledge at the time of revelation.

Muhammad Arkoun links the arrangement of the Quranic verses and chapters to the compilation carried out by Uthman ibn Affan (may God be pleased with him) and the circumstances surrounding it. He believes that in this compilation, the copies of the companions of the Prophet, which they had written by their own hands, were lost. This led to the loss of an important aspect that affected the recording of the Quran. He exemplifies this by the Mushaf (written copy) of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (may God be pleased with him). Based on this, a "chaos" arose in the arrangement, and "randomness" in the selection of the positions of chapters and verses. Arkoun says: "We know that the system of ordering chapters and verses in the Mushaf does not follow any real chronological order, nor any rational or logical criterion. For our modern minds, accustomed to a certain methodology of composition, construction, and presentation based on logical argumentation, the text of the Mushaf and its method of arrangement surprise us with their chaos." He strives to rearrange the verses and chapters of the Quran and thus describes it as "chaotic." He calls for a historical study to know the correct chronological order of verses and chapters.

He sees that a historical reading of the Quran, including arranging verses and chapters in chronological order, helps in understanding the real circumstances faced by the Prophet's contemporaries. Therefore, he praised the efforts of orientalisks in reordering the Quranic chapters chronologically, saying: "... after the formation of the official closed text with its arbitrary arrangement of chapters and verses." Arkoun calls for a new reading of the Quran and a new ordering of its chapters based on a chronological reading of the Quran, arranging verses and chapters in chronological order, stat-

ing: "This critical edition specifically includes a chronological classification of chapters and verses in order to discover the earliest linguistic events of the oral text."

You may consider the harshness of this description: "chaos," repeated in more than one place.

#### **4. Muhammad Arkoun's Method for Arranging Quranic Verses and Chapters**

Muhammad Arkoun believes that the method that can be relied upon to understand the chronological order is the philological reading and chronological studies, as they are capable of conceiving a solution for the chronological sequence of chapters and verses, as well as the arrangement and organization of the totality of the phrases and texts of the revelation.

To apply this reading or methodology, Muhammad Arkoun refers to the critical examination of the history of the Quranic text as represented in the orientalist project, foremost among them the German orientalist Noldeke (d. 1930) in his "History of the Quran," first published in 1860, followed by Schwally, Bergsträsser, Brätzl, and then the attempt of Régis Blachère. Arkoun views these attempts as incomplete and capable of being surpassed, yet despite his attempts at renewal and criticism of orientalists' works, he did not surpass Noldeke's work, which served as the lens through which he viewed the Quran.

Regarding chronological studies, Arkoun presents examples of orientalists who examined the order of Quranic chapters, including the English orientalist Robinson, German orientalists Noldeke and Schwally, and the orientalist Bell. As for the importance of chronological sequence for Arkoun: he sees that working with the chronological order of Quranic verses allows us to historically understand, with precision,

the repeated debates with many opponents and the social and political positions of the social groups active on the scene.

Arkoun believes that if this chronological sequence were applied, it would result in "a less simplistic and more historical theology." However, he notes that Muslims oppose the possibility of adopting and applying chronological sequencing to the Quran.

What is evident from Arkoun's statements is his deep alienation to all Western intellectual productions, especially orientalist works. His approach to the Quran follows the orientalist method and introduces the idea of differentiating between the oral and written Quran, siding with the oral, seeing writing as the cause for freezing the oral Quran. This is not his own innovation but borrowed from the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, employing statements from philosophers ranging from Plato to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and others.

Rejecting any of the critical methodologies Arkoun used in critiquing Islamic heritage—philological, linguistic, anthropological, historical, and others—would inevitably lead to failure, disorder, and distance from methodological and scientific rigor. Thus, the epistemological and methodological defects of the modernist reading can be summarized as its attempts to impose Western methodologies on the Quranic verses, as noted by Taha Abdurrahman in his critique of the modernist method:

- Those who do not transition from Islamic tradition and narrative and fail to master its tools and methods will inevitably lose the ability to critique.
- The proponents of this reading insisted on ignoring Muslim sources and references, accusing their oppo-

nents of traditionalism and rigidity, which led them to fatal scientific errors showing ignorance of the Arabic language and Islamic criticism methods such as hadith and usul scholars.

- The modernist reading is characterized by exaggerating the results obtained, as seen in the issue of ordering Quranic verses and chapters. Examining these results alongside abundant Western sources shows they fall into one of three possibilities: either repetition of orientalist conclusions, repetition of Islamic scholars' conclusions, or mixed merchandise not reaching the conclusions of either.

The modernist reading also involves:

- Reversing the order of facts and accepted truths related to the Quran by spreading reports and opinions mentioned by early commentators as if they were aberrant ideas and false doubts that should be discarded. The modernist reading, led by Arkoun, turns these into essential facts and builds on them judgments full of corruption because what is built on falsehood is false. This confirms the "selective" approach that orientalism and the modernist Arabic reading followed.
- Mechanically applying skepticism at all levels of the Quran, from the revelation to all related sciences, claiming doubt is the path to discovery. This skepticism applied to the Quranic text and its sanctity has led their studies and analyses to confusion, ambiguity of judgments, and contradictory results.

Therefore, the methodology proposed by Muhammad Arkoun is a clear imitation of what Western culture and modernity produced. The claim that Arkoun applied methodologies and theories never before applied to the Quran is

invalid because what he did was nothing but mechanical imposition, which is neither innovation nor renewal.

Consequently, the results Arkoun reached by applying the philological method and the chronological standard in arranging Quranic verses and chapters lacked objectivity and logical conditions that every scientific research must include. This is because the method is borrowed from Western epistemological fields different from the field it was imposed on without reviewing its procedural characteristics and without considering the logical specificities of this field. Also, this method and others severed the connection with the Islamic narrative, resulting in a distorted perception, disconnected from its roots, and far from the depth of Islamic civilization and its culture centered on revelation and its sciences.

Hashim Saleh, commenting on Arkoun's choice of this method based on the historical ordering of chapters, states: "The German philological school (i.e., the school of Noldeke and his students) revealed that the order of chapters in the Quran does not observe chronological sequence... This school tried through precise philological analysis to arrange the Quran in a historically correct order as much as documents and data allow." Arkoun gave an example showing the order he adopted for the Quranic chapters, relying on philologists and ignoring the efforts of ancient and modern scholars of tafsir and Quran who studied this matter carefully. He says, explaining the difference between the order of Surat Al-Hujurat in the Mushaf and the order chosen by philologists: "It appears that Al-Hujurat, which is arranged as number 49 in the Quran, actually represents order number 114. This was revealed by modern philological historians

who arranged the chapters and verses of the Quran in a real chronological order."

Note how Arkoun describes this chronological order as "real," while this approach is relative and subject to debate and dispute. How could a reasonable person abandon the Islamic narrative, which is a consensus after Uthman ibn Affan (may God be pleased with him), where the work was stabilized based on the Uthmanic Mushaf arrangement, and turn to an order full of criticism and refutation? Perhaps Arkoun's strong inclination toward secularism and scientific approaches made him treat these as absolute truths and central principles in all his positions on Islamic heritage issues.

The example he gave regarding Surat Al-Hujurat, placing it as number 114 in chronological order, means it is the last chapter revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him), unless Arkoun considers the number of chapters 115 or more since he mentioned Surat At-Tawbah as one of the last chapters revealed, which might occupy number 115.

Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911 AH) said: "The chapters are one hundred and fourteen by the consensus of those deemed reliable. It is said thirteen, considering the merging of Al-Anfal and Bara'ah as one chapter."

From a scientific and methodological perspective, the arrangement of Quranic chapters according to their revelation order is not without problems, and it is impossible to determine the exact correct order for all chapters, contrary to Arkoun's claim. Moreover, no arrangement escapes scientific and objective criticism or is supported by strong and reliable chains of narration. Those who look into al-Suyuti's encyclopedic work on Quranic sciences "Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Quran" find various orders attributed to Jabir ibn Zaid, Al-Husayn, Ikrimah, Ibn Abbas, and a fourth order without a known source.

Therefore, the researcher wonders where Arkoun got this from. Looking at tafsir books that arranged the Quran according to revelation order, there have been ten attempts, the most famous by Muhammad 'Izzat Darwaza, who relied on the order in the Mushaf of calligrapher Qadrougli, printed under the supervision of a special committee of scholars, placing Surat Al-Hujurat at number 106. Thus, there remained differences in ordering concerning precedence and delay, and whether the chapter is Meccan or Medinan. How then could Arkoun judge his chronological order method as "correct" and "real"?

Regarding Arkoun's surprise at the opposition of Muslims to rearranging the Mushaf according to chronological order, the answer is brief: Muslims have known the greatness of God's Book in its words, meanings, and arrangement. Despite the legitimate scholarly disagreement over whether the order of chapters is divinely mandated or subject to interpretation, both sides agree that the secrets and wisdom in the Quran's arrangement indicate that it is the word of the Lord of the Worlds.

Al-Jahiz (d. 255 AH), the orator of the Mu'tazilites, whom the modernist reading praised for their creativity and intellect, said: "God named His Book a name different from what the Arabs call their speech, in terms of structure and detail. He named its whole 'Quran,' as they named a 'diwan'; some parts are called 'surah,' some 'ayah,' like a line, and its end is a separator like a rhyme."

Abu Bakr al-Anbari (d. 328 AH) said: "Whoever acts to abandon consensus and arranges the chapters according to their locations in Mecca and Medina does not know where Al-Fatiha falls due to disagreement over its place of revelation and is forced to delay the verse at the beginning of 235

(of Al-Baqarah) to the beginning of 240. Whoever corrupts the arrangement of the Quran has disbelieved in it, and the words of the Prophet (peace be upon him) concerning the quarter revealed are true."

Therefore, the claim to reorder the Quran according to chronological order and describing the Uthmanic Mushaf's arrangement as "chaos" is nonsense aimed at undermining the sanctity of God's words. The greatness of the Quran remains in its collection and arrangement, verse by verse, chapter by chapter, a profound greatness and wisdom because it is from the Wise, the Acquainted.

### **Conclusion:**

By following the verses and statements of Muhammad Arkoun regarding the arrangement of the verses and chapters of the Qur'an, we arrive at the following conclusions: The researcher concluded that Arkoun built his view of the Qur'an and the arrangement of its chapters and verses on three foundations:

The first foundation: the distinction between the oral text and the written text.

The second foundation: the historicity of the Qur'anic text.

The third foundation: the chaotic arrangement of verses and chapters.

Muhammad Arkoun relied in his stance on the arrangement of verses and chapters on the historicity of revelation.

He employed the philological method and the chronological criterion in arranging the verses and chapters, in his project aimed at rearranging and reading the Qur'an in a new way.

The study concluded that Muhammad Arkoun was influ-

enced by and praised the orientalist's regarding the issue of the Qur'an's arrangement, while completely neglecting Islamic sources and references.

The study affirmed the fixed (divinely mandated) nature of the arrangement of the Qur'anic verses, the existing disagreement regarding the arrangement of its chapters, and that the fruit of this disagreement differs entirely from the goals and objectives of modernist readings.

- And our last prayer is that all praise is due to Allah, Lord of the Worlds -

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