

# Angelika Neuwirth's Pre-canonical Reading: Orality and Scriptuality in Preserving the Spoken Aspects of the Quran

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## Abstract

In the context of Angelika Neuwirth's pre-canonical reading of the Quran approach, which is based on Surah Makkiyah, this article primarily discusses the differences between the concepts of orality and scriptuality of the Quran, as well as examples of how they can be applied to Surah Al-Ikhlās. This research employs qualitative research methodology utilising primary data from several studies and works authored by Angelika Neuwirth. Secondary data for this study were derived from journals and research on the same topics. Research data analysis is done by condensing, presenting, and concluding or validating the data. The study results show that Angelika Neuwirth observed that the Quran's dynamism had been somewhat destroyed by the codification process, turning it into a sort of frozen collection of texts. It appears that God revealed the Quran in a space devoid of any external connection and that it is a "timeless" book and "beyond history." As a result, understanding the period and conditions under which it was first revealed to Muslims is important to restore its historicity, which was shifted due to the canonisation process. A historical-critical approach suits the study to investigate the Quranic context of revelation to return the Quran to its pre-canonical state.

**Keywords:** Quran, Muṣḥaf, Orality, Pre-canonical reading.

## Abstrak

Tulisan ini fokus membahas distingsi antara konsep oralitas dan skriptualitas Al-Qur'an dalam konteks pendekatan *Pre-Canonical Reading of The Quran* berbasis Surah Makkiyah yang ditawarkan oleh Angelika Neuwirth, serta ilustrasi penerapannya terhadap surah Al-Ikhlās. Untuk menelusuri hal tersebut, metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode kualitatif berdasarkan sumber data dari sejumlah penelitian dan karya yang ditulis oleh Angelika Neuwirth sebagai data primer. Sementara data sekundernya yakni buku, jurnal, dan penelitian yang berkaitan dengan tema yang sama. Adapun analisis atas data penelitian dilakukan dengan kegiatan kondensasi, penyajian, serta kesimpulan atau verifikasi data secara bersamaan. Hasilnya, Angelika Neuwirth melihat bahwa gerakan kodifikasi Al-Qur'an dalam taraf tertentu telah menghilangkan kedinamisan Al-Qur'an, sehingga ia hanya menjadi semacam kumpulan teks yang beku. Al-Qur'an seolah-olah adalah kitab yang "*timeless*" dan "*beyond history*" yang diturunkan Tuhan pada sebuah ruang kosong yang hampa, yang tidak memiliki keterkaitan dengan unsur-unsur eksternal sama sekali. Maka, menemukan kembali sisi historisitas al-Qur'an yang menurutnya saat ini telah mulai terlepas dari akarnya akibat proyek kanonisasi, maka Al-Qur'an harus dibawa kembali kepada masa dan situasi di mana ia untuk pertama kalinya diwahyukan kepada umat Muslim. Hal tersebut hanya bisa dilakukan apabila Al-Qur'an dibawa kembali ke era pra-kanonikalnya dengan bantuan pendekatan kritik sejarah.

**Kata Kunci:** Al-Qur'an, Muṣḥaf, Oralitas, Pra-kanonisasi.

## Introduction

The long history of Quranic scholarship in the West, from the 12th century to the contemporary era today, has always been characterised by its dynamics and context. In the contemporary period, at least since the beginning of the 21st century, Quranic scholarship in the West has found a spirit that appears more dialogical and academic rather than sceptical, apologetic, and polemical like in previous periods (Agustono, 2019, p. 168). For example, Jane Dammen McAuliffe and Angelika Neuwirth have criticised various paradigms their predecessors had built. These two contemporary Western scholars, with similar expressions, stated that contemporary Quranic studies are no longer the time to question the originality and historicity of the Quran (McAuliffe, 1996).

Regarding this point, Stefan Wild states, "However, if I am not mistaken, there has been a definite and irrevocable shift of attention in the last decades. The new interest is devoted to the Quran as a textual corpus regardless of its scriptural prehistory." As stated by Abu Zayd, in the study of the Quran, the "textus receptus" point of view has replaced the "genesis of the Quran" paradigm (Zayd, 2004, p. 10). Put another way, a fundamental shift in how Western scholars approach the Quran has resulted from the academic dialogue that has taken place in the modern era (Fina, 2014, p. 271). In the past, Western Scholarship of the Quran focused primarily on determining the text's genetic ancestry and whether it was a genuine revelation from God or merely a document appropriated from Judeo-Christian tradition. During this time, a novel method was devised for deciphering a text product's meaning by examining its predecessor texts (Geiger, 1898).

Angelika Neuwirth is a German professor who founded Corpus Coranicum, a digital research project on the Quran, which offers systematic access to early Quranic manuscripts with images and transliterated text. The primary goal of this enormous endeavour was to provide Western society with a more contextualised knowledge of the Quran. Neuwirth conducted numerous investigations and published scholarly essays on the Quranic studies in major international magazines and anthologies, along with the assistance of several other Quranic specialists, including Michael Marx and Nicolai Sinai, in order to strengthen this argument (Neuwirth et al., 2010). Neuwirth is, therefore, among the Western orientalist who best exemplify the approach and focus of current Western Quranic studies.

Neuwirth's theory of the pre-canonisation and post-canonisation of the Quran is the foundation for his conceptualisation. The Quran is divided into two sources: the oral Quran, which was revealed to the Prophet during his lifetime, and the written Quran, which has been preserved in its current form (*muṣḥaf*). While Neuwirth acknowledged the significance of text canonisation, she also pointed out the inevitable consequences of this process in the Quran, such as the blurring of the character that the Quran was gradually revealed (Neuwirth, 2007b, p. 99)<sup>[A1]</sup>.

When the Quran was in its current form (*muṣḥaf*), it was not solely its historical aspect as it was initially among the Arabs, but rather its timeless, everlasting, and beyond history characteristic that distinguished it. The oral component that permeates the whole text of the Quran, as noted by Neuwirth, suggests that the Quran arose from a dramatic communication process, which runs counter to the idea that it is not historical (Neuwirth, 2006, p. 146).

In order to [A2]address this issue, Neuwirth suggests reading the current text (*muṣḥaf uthmānī*) using a pre-canonical interpretation of the Quran. This approach involves reading the Quran while it is still being interpreted; as a result, its development can present scenes from forming a community that genuinely looks alive. Thus, rather than searching for the original text from the Judeo-Christian tradition as was commonly done in earlier eras, Neuwirth's research focuses on determining the true meaning of the Quran and its original form before the bookkeeping era.

### **The Standpoint of Angelika Neuwirth Regarding Quranic Studies in the Islamic and Contemporary Western Worlds [A3]**

To position herself in building a more comprehensive approach to the study of the Quran, Angelika Neuwirth made two fundamental criticisms of the study of the Quran. On the one hand, Neuwirth criticises Muslim scholars studying the Quran who only focus their studies on studying the Quran after the book era, or "post-canonical reading of the Quran." Neuwirth tries to emphasise that because of the canonisation project, the reading of the Quran during the Prophet's time has been buried by the hustle and bustle of studying the Quranic manuscripts. On the other hand, he also criticised Western orientalist's studies of the Quran, and according to him. However, they carried out studies of the Quran during the Prophet's era, or "pre-canonical reading of the Quran," and various conclusions were drawn. Their results are still slanted, pessimistic, and suspicious (Neuwirth, 2006, p. 140).

In response to the first concern, Neuwirth offers a new perspective on reading the Quran, namely reading the pre-canonical era using a more proportional historical-critical approach. Meanwhile, regarding his criticism of the second point, Neuwirth called for a study of the Quran based on intertextuality with a literary approach. Here, we will first discuss the ideas of orality and scripturalism in studying the modern Quran, which Angelika Neuwirth used as the foundation for her thought to more fully comprehend the viewpoint Neuwirth provided above. Stated differently, Neuwirth divides the Quran's components into the Quran and the *muṣḥaf*.

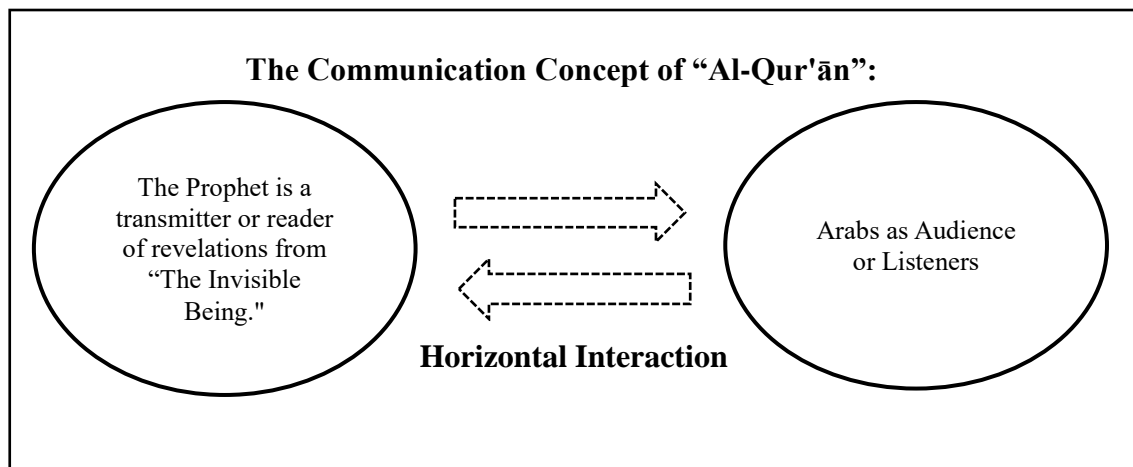
### **The Conceptualisation of Quranic Scripturality and Orality**

As mentioned, the failure to study the Quran experienced by the modern revisionist generation of orientalists was due to a lack of attention to aspects of orality in the Al-Quran. As a result, their research has a narrow emphasis, concentrating primarily on merely observing the "urtext" of the Quran and other sceptical concerns regarding genetics and the authenticity of the Quranic text. Therefore, in this contemporary period, several Western scholars criticized the negligence of Orientalists in exploring the oral dimensions of the Quran. Consequently, several Western academics have criticized Orientalists for their absence of attention to the oral aspects of the Quran in this modern era. In this instance, Neuwirth stressed that the Quran's orality makes it the most "genuine" text. This model is the essential characteristic of the Quran (Mir, 2006, p. 93).

The first step in effectively capturing this distinctive characteristic of the Quranic orality is to emphasise the unique difference between the concepts of (القرآن) and (الكتاب). Neuwirth underlined that these two phrases nevertheless refer to two completely separate concepts.

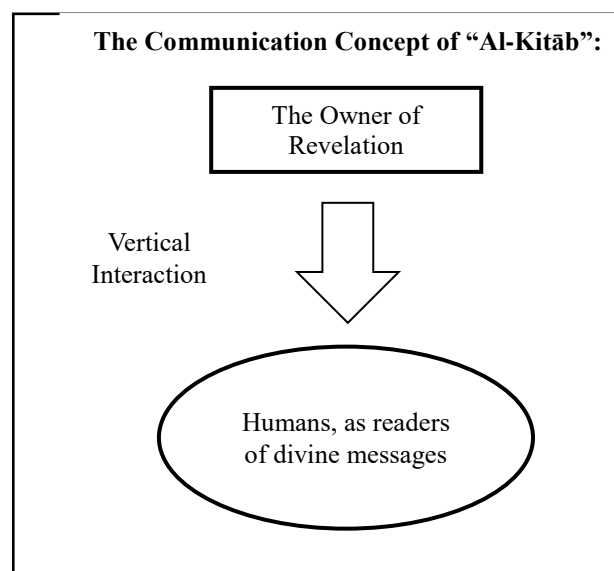
The term (القرآن) refers to a description of an event that is taking place in a community of believers involving many 'drama actors.' In this context, a speaker is conveying divine messages received from an "Invisible Being" who has been assigned to read these divine messages to the entire audience or listeners. Here, the horizontal interaction between the Prophet as the reader of revelation, on the one hand, and the Arab people as the audience, on the other hand, is crucial. This interaction process is very dynamic and fluid and cannot be separated from the socio-historical context surrounding it (Neuwirth, 2007b, p. 102). This description is what Neuwirth later called the "Pre-Canonical Quran" aspect.

If illustrated in a picture (see Picture 1), the pattern of horizontal interaction that occurs will appear more or less as follows:



Picture 1: Horizon interaction of pre-canonical Quran

Meanwhile, in the second concept, namely (الكتاب), this term is more focused on a very hierarchical transcendent impression, which implies a vertical relationship between the invisible substance of the revelation and its readers. Regarding the differences between these two concepts, Nicolai Sinai makes an analogy of the concept of (الكتاب) as a means of storing heavenly pleasures, or "a heavenly medium of storage," while (القرآن) likens it to a means of displaying worldly dynamics, "an earthly medium of display." These two ideas differ in significant ways. The following picture (Picture 2) demonstrates the second idea:



Picture 2: Vertical interaction of the (الكتاب) meaning

In early prophetic teaching, the Quran does not appear to have directly addressed the vertical, hierarchical relationship between the divine element as the owner of revelation and the Prophet as the reader or presenter. The primary focus of the prophethood's early years remained the horizontal communication between the Prophet and his adherents, with the Quran as an essential channel. The distinct connection between these two "terminal revelations" became evident only when the Prophet approached the last years of his preaching livelihood, specifically when the idea (الكتاب) was steadily developing form and achieving its ultimate meaning.

Given the foregoing explanation, it is evident that the meaning of the term (الكتاب) in the Quran is developing. The phrase (الكتاب), which dates back to the early Meccan era, refers exclusively to a few particular narratives in the Quran that are connected to Jewish and Christian traditions. It has not yet been determined that this term corresponds to the real messages of the Quran. For instance, it mentions in Surah al-Isra' (Makkiyah):

وَأَتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَجَعَلْنَاهُ هُدًى لِّبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَلَّا تَتَّخِذُوا مِنْ دُونِي وَكِيلًا ﴿٢﴾

Moreover, We gave Moses the Book (Torah), and We made it a guide for the Children of Israel (with the words), "Do not take a protector other than me" (Al-Quran, 17: 2).

As the age of prophetic preaching progressed, this term (الكتاب) then increasingly developed towards its independence. During the late Mecca era and continued with the Medina era, this term began to refer to the pure and comprehensive messages of the Quran. However, in this context what is meant is still the pre-codification of the Quran. This growth in meaning continued until finally, the term (الكتاب) found its standard meaning, namely a collection of Al-Quran revelations that were recorded after the Mushaf compilation movement, around 25 years after the death of the Prophet. In Surah al-Baqarah (early Madaniyah), it is stated:

الَمْ (1) ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٢﴾

Alif – lām – mīm. This book (Al-Quran) does not have the slightest doubt about it; guidance for those who are pious (Al-Quran, 2: 1-2).

When the impression of a vertical relationship between the Substance Owner of Revelation as the sender of the message and humanity as the recipient of this message dominates—as a result of the crystallisation of the concept (الكتاب)—then the result, according to Neuwirth, is the blurring of the Prophet's existence in the terminals of the journey of revelation. There is a kind of impression that it is as if the communication process (الكتاب) only occurs vertically between God and humanity. Apart from that, this impression also has implications for the cessation of the dynamism of the Koran corpus so that it becomes a kind of frozen collection of texts. The Quran seems to be a "

timeless "book" and "beyond history" revealed by God in a space without connection with external elements. These socio-historical factors during the 23 years of the prophethood have contributed to the birth of Islam and the Quran (Neuwirth, 2013, p. 197).

Thus, to revive the Quran, which retains its pre-canonical 'taste' and spirit, it is necessary to straighten out the perception of all readers of the Al-Quran that it is a mistake if the Al-Quran is rigidly interpreted as "a book to study" or "a book to read." It is necessary to start thinking of the Quran as "a text to be read" or "a text to recite." This is because verbatim and orality are fundamentally emphasised in both the Quranic transmission process and the social environment in which it occurs (Mir, 2006).

This is further supported by the Quranic rhythm, which emphasises and reaffirms on numerous occasions that the speech in the Quran is fundamentally intended to be heard. Therefore, the auditory aspect of the Quran holds the majority of its significance. In terms of the semantic information it conveys, as much as there is. Moreover, if the Quran's true meaning is indeed "a text to recite," then the Quran's actualisation as an oral tradition in practice must have proof derived from the composition of the text itself (Neuwirth, 2007b, p. 103).

Neuwirth raises two further significant but related notions, namely the concept of the Quran and *muṣḥaf* and his way of preserving the verbal aspects of the Quran using a surah-based approach. These concepts are still tied to the orality and scripturality of the Quran.

### **Two Faces of the Quran: Al-Quran vs. *Muṣḥaf***

If there are two distinct concepts of revelation in the discourse on studying the Quran, namely (القرآن) and (الكتاب), then both of these realities in the Islamic world can be said to be represented by the two faces of the Quran, namely the Quran and *Muṣḥaf*. In actuality, these two phrases are frequently understood to be identical. Angelika Neuwirth herself likes to refer to the post-codification corpus of the Quran in our possession today as *mushaf*. The Quran and the *Muṣḥaf*, or the two faces of the Quran, differ fundamentally from one another, according to Neuwirth.

*Mushaf* can be understood as a codified book or manuscript, while the Quran describes the Quranic communication process that occurred in the era of revelation. The shift that occurred from what was originally an original concept of the Quran, which grew and developed in the prophetic era, to the concept of *mushaf*, which was born from the codification of the Quran after the death of the Prophet, resulted in a shift in the impression of the Quran. From what was originally seen as the Al-Quran as a historical oral text, it became a book with strong "timeless" and "beyond history" symbols. With these symbols, the historical elements of the Quran become increasingly obscure.

One proof of this is that there are still a few studies regarding the chronological arrangement of the Quran following the order of its revelation (*nuzuli*) in the Islamic scholarly tradition. This is made worse by the increasing number of mythical elements surrounding the Quran verses and its surah units. The study of the chronology itself in Islamic scholarship is still restricted to classifying the Quranic surahs into two categories: Makkiyah and Madaniyah. According to Muslim scholars, the Prophet's hadith and the words of earlier Quranic scholars serve as the primary foundation for the historical chronology of specific chapters and passages of the Quran (Watt, 1995).

Contemporary Western scholarship considers that the writing of the Quran—which in Muslim belief is a very appropriate step in efforts to uniformize and safeguard

the purity and authenticity of the holy book—has some real implications for the identity of the Quran itself. This impact can be seen from several points of view, namely: First, the first manuscript of the Quran that first existed was a manuscript that was still at the level of "scriptio defectiva" (an imperfect manuscript). The basic form of this early manuscript is easily known from studies of the first Quran and fragments or early manuscripts in major libraries. In some of the earliest examples, only consonants were written, and even these letters could not be distinguished from each other because similar forms of writing could sometimes indicate two identical consonants. Thus, it can be said that "scriptio defectiva" is nothing more than a tool to preserve aspects of orality and memorization of the Quran for those concerned. Readers of these early texts are thought to be independent and almost certainly already have a certain level of familiarity with the texts; this is proof of the survival of the oral tradition of the Quran in the prophetic era (Watt, 1995, p. 71).

However, with the codification project that began in the era of Caliph Uthman, various gradual experimental changes continued to be made to the attributes surrounding the writing of the Quran, such as vowel sound marks, various dot shapes, and various distinctions for long and short vowels, markers to indicate repetition of consonants, and so on (Abdurrahman, 2020). According to Neuwirth, these various improvements resulted in the *mushaf* becoming stiff, crystalised, and isolated from the socio-historical background as well as the elements of its total orality. This refinement has also closed this corpus because it is considered final and established (Neuwirth, 2007b, p. 99).

Second, the Quran has been divorced from its original socio-historical setting due to its codification. The Quran has become dehistoricised due to canonization. The Al-Quran's "timeless," "eternal," and "beyond history" qualities stand out when converted into the *mushaf* form that it is today. Neuwirth claims this character contradicts the Quran's identity, which contains much oral complexity. Third, the fact that the Quran was gradually revealed has been masked by its canonization. The buried study of the chronology of the Quran among Muslim scholars demonstrates this. In addition, each surah acquires its individual qualities and variability when its units are arranged in a uniform 'row' in the *mushaf*. As an issue of fact, every surah in the Quran possesses an original narrative style, language, and historical background. Because of this, the surah unit's significance in the study of the Quran is diminishing, particularly in the minds of Muslims today (Neuwirth, 2007b, p. 100).

As an illustration, in order to illustrate the difference between the concept of the Quran as a form of description of a dynamic and live communication process in the prophetic era and the concept of the Quran as a standard and final canonical text, Neuwirth likens it to a drama. In drama performances, there are at least two dominant factors, namely external and internal factors. In this case, external factors of drama mean the arrangement of scenarios or story scripts that have been written standardly. The internal factors of drama are the scenes that appear in the drama, which are presented by all the elements involved, starting from the actors, director, supporting actors, and several others. This drama performance is an implementation or live depiction of everything that has been recorded in the scenario. This internal factor can be used as a kind of metaphor to explain how the process of reading the pre-canonical Quran can be applied (Neuwirth, 2010, p. 144).

### **Surah-Based Research of the Quran: Attempting the Quranic Verbal Aspects**

According to Angelika Neuwirth, the Quran's beauty lies in the text and the place and function the book has held among a community of believers. Because the community was intimately involved in the revelation of the Quran, it is necessary to thoroughly analyse the circumstances surrounding its initial revelation to determine the characteristics and nature of this holy book. Since these scholars are still not serious about reading the pre-canonization of the Quran—that is, the Quran that existed before it was recorded—the tradition of studying the Quran—from an external linguistic and grammatical perspective—will never be able to yield results. Later on, this idea served as the foundation for Angelika Neuwirth's analysis of the Quran. In contrast to Western orientalist scholars who typically search for the original parent (urtext), pre-canonical readings of the Quran are significant because they attempt to uncover the original meaning of the text as well as what transpired (or "what exactly happened") within the text by tracing its historical context (Neuwirth, 2007a, p. 123).

This assumption shows that the Quran's historicity—which Neuwirth asserts is already starting to be eroded due to the canonization process—needs to be restored to the conditions and era in which it was initially revealed to Muslims. This is only possible if a historical-critical approach is used to restore the Quran to its pre-canonical age. The term "pre-canonical reading of the Quran" refers to reading the text while it was still in the early stages of development or reading that, for the first time, vividly and reflects the events leading up to the establishment of a community under the firm protection of the Quran. This historical approach is essential because currently there is an impression of the de-historicisation of the Quran. The concept of the "unhistorical nature of the Quran" works antithetical to the oral tradition that flows throughout the text, demonstrating that the Quran originated from a theatrical transmission process (Neuwirth, 2006, p. 146).

Neuwirth added that the text of the Quran, which in this context is represented by surah units, is a text whose content, style, language, structure, and rhetoric develop to adapt to the surrounding situation. When everything changes, the Quran flexibly adapts to convey its message effectively. Developing the internal structure and content of these surah units can, therefore, be a way to assemble the pre-canonization Al-Quran because there is information about where, when, how, and who was involved in the communication process.

Quranic scholarship, however, has closed the discussion over the distinction between the pre-canonical era of the Quran—in this case, the speech received by the Prophet and his companions—and the post-canonical era, which, according to Neuwirth, was only perfected several decades after the Prophet's death. As a first step for scholars, the Quran's unique claim that it is one of the three heavenly holy books (kutub samawī) that originated in late antiquity deserves much more study and investigation by contemporary observers of the Quran (Neuwirth, 2006).

Makkiyah surahs provide Neuwirth with a foundation for her literary study. She selected the foundation of a surah because, in Neuwirth's opinion, it is both an essential unit that is editorially assured as a literary text and a unit that preserves the communication process at its inception. The surah was a text unit that was read aloud to an audience at the time of the Prophet's birth and became the community's liturgical text. The main idea behind Angelika Neuwirth's interpretation of the surah is that this part of the liturgy and the cultic nature inherent in the text of the Quran (Fina, 2014, p. 277).



Neuwirth conducted a microstructural analysis of the suras of the Quran as a technical form of the pre-canonical Quran reading method she initiated to revive the surah units in the post-canonization of the Quran (*mushaf*), which had appeared frozen so that their pre-canonization character could reappear (Neuwirth, 2007b, p. 101). Microstructural analysis based on surahs examines how surahs were put together as speech units during the Prophet's lifetime. The surah is examined to determine the speech's cohesiveness and to determine where it lies in the Prophet's teaching journey. Neuwirth's underlying assumption in this study is that the growth of the Quran text is very closely tied to the process of forming the early Muslim community. Microstructural analysis to revive these surah units is carried out in two integrated step processes (Neuwirth, 2007b, p. 102).

The first step is to examine a surah in the Quran as a "pericope" unit on the one hand and as a liturgical text on the other hand. The position of a Quranic surah as a "pericope" unit means one that forms and describes a coherent religious thought. In this case, the surah is seen in its capacity as a unit of speech that discusses the focus of a specific message and produces a particular impression on the listener. (Fina, 2014, p. 277) Meanwhile, the position of the Quran as a liturgical text is to examine the surah as a speech that has the capacity to shake the listeners' awareness, memory, and knowledge of the "text nucleus," namely the texts that came first, as well as the reality that exists outside the text (Neuwirth, 2000, p. 147).

Meanwhile, the second step in the microstructural analysis process is to bring back the historicity of the Quran, which is based on the history of the Prophet. In this way, *sirah* data, whether about the Prophet or others surrounding the revelation of the Quran, can find significance. Without this data, surah analysis only stops at dead structure analysis. On the other hand, with this data, the surah unit can be revived and occupy its proper position in the process of revelation and the birth of the Prophet's community (Fina, 2014, p. 280).

According to Neuwirth, at least three crucial components should be the primary focus of attention when reading the structure of this surah in order to provide an understanding that is thorough, dynamic, and genuine. These elements are: The eschatological first. This type of information relates to significant afterlife events that the Prophet has revealed will take place. One of the most notable features of the Quran is this part, which is conspicuously lacking from works authored by Arab poets before the Islamic era (Neuwirth, 2010).

Secondly, indications or proofs of God's presence were found all over His creation. The Quran says that only the pensive can recognize these signals. In addition, these indications can also be found in historical accounts that have been documented in the Quran. The narrative's moral is that disobedient people will always suffer from regret, disgrace, and devastation. The narrative of earlier people's stories, tied to the background of earlier works, comes in third. The fourth component is the discussion or conflict aspect. Rebuttals and arguments between faith and unbelief, knowledge and ignorance, and so forth can be used in this debate (Neuwirth, 2007b).

### **Angelika Neuwirth's Pre-Canonical Reading of Surah Al-Ikhlāṣ: An Illustration**

At last, we will demonstrate here the application of the notion of "pre-canonical reading of the Quran" based on Makkiyah suras, which Angelika Neuwirth introduced. As the subject of the analytical work in the present instance, a sample in the form of the

surah Al-Ikhlās [A4] (purifying the Oneness of God) will be utilized. The entire surah says:

﴿1﴾ قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ  
 ﴿2﴾ اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ  
 ﴿3﴾ لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ  
 ﴿4﴾ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

Say (Muhammad), "He is Allah Almighty."

Allah is the place to ask for everything.

(Allah) neither begets nor is he begotten.

Furthermore, there is nothing equal to Him (Al-Quran 112: 1-4).

**The conditions in which the Meccans lived at the time surah Al-Ikhlās was revealed:** Surah al-Ikhlās is one of the Makkiyah surahs from the early era, where when it was revealed, the entire community of believers following the Prophet was still a very oppressed minority group. They are still not free from all kinds of threats, intimidation, and pressure from the majority group—especially from the elite—who adhere to a pagan religion that worships many gods, various kinds of heavenly bodies, and also idols. Al-Lāt, al-'Uzza, and al-Manāt were the main idols, which they believed to be the three daughters of God who were very sacred to the people of Mecca then. Apart from worshiping gods, there are still some Arab people who adhere to monotheism, namely the Judeo-Christian tradition (Hitti, 2002, p. 124).

These various models of polytheism and animism are the mainstream religions of pre-Islamic Arab society. From a socio-historical perspective, although the various religions and beliefs that existed in Mecca at that time—including Islam—both referred to their God as "Allāh" or "al-Ilāh," the Quran emphasises four characteristics. One of the ways of divinity in Surah al-Ikhlās is an actual response to social facts that show that the traditions of polytheism and animism were widespread at that time, as well as being a refutation of the doctrine that God has children. On the other hand, it turns out that the Prophet's preaching movement was not yet established, which influenced the structure and linguistic patterns contained in the revelations conveyed by the Prophet at that time. Most early Meccan surahs still clearly reflect the acoustic patterns and linguistic rhetorical forms typical of poetry by pre-Islamic Arab poets (Neuwirth, 2010, p. 150).

The above-mentioned situation demonstrates that the Quran, known as the "Pre-Canonical Quran," had a highly dynamic and responsive nature and was not created in a vacuum during its revelation period. In addition, he needs to engage in various ways with the customs, literature, and faiths formerly practiced in his community.

The early suras of Mecca's teaching are known for having a few distinct features regarding their revelation structure. One is the text unit's form, characterized by its extreme shortness (surah al-Ikhlās is only four verses long). In addition, each verse in the surah al-Ikhlās closes or finishes with the same ending rhythm (all verses in the surah end in *-ad.*), and each verse is brief and compact (the surah al-Ikhlās only consists of 4 to 6 syllables per verse). Shamans and diviners frequently employed this type of

intricate structural model in their rituals (poems), strikingly similar to the literary styles of pre-Islamic Arab poets (Neuwirth, 2007b, p. 103).

This rhyming prose is a literary work illustration that places great importance on the harmony of language sounds, both from sound equivalence, contrast, and similarity, which is also seen as the earliest stage of the development of poetic form. The similarity between the early Meccan era suras and the poetry traditions of the pre-Islamic Meccan poets once again shows a relationship or influence between the Arabic literary tradition and the revelations of the early prophetic period at that time. In Neuwirth's perspective, this kind of influence is part of the intertextual communication of the Quran.

Regarding the theme of revelation, every surah from the early Meccan period covers various topics, and occasionally, a surah unit would have many theme combinations. The surah covers many topics, including polemics and arguments, divinity, criticism, counsel and warnings, and information about prophetic escalation. The issues surrounding divinity appear to be strongly reflected in Surah al-Ikhlāṣ. The concept of eschatology is a novel and distinct idea found in the Quran that was not previously encountered in pre-Islamic Arabic literary history. Regarding the setting, scenarios for early Makkiyah surahs usually take place in public places in Mecca, most likely around the Kaaba. This is because the Kaaba has a very noble and important position for the pagan residents of Mecca in their worship activities (Neuwirth, 2000, p. 110).

This condition is proven by the many idols and 'gods' belonging to the pre-Islamic Meccan people, who placed their idols around the Kaaba to carry out various rituals and offer various sacrifices. In the following years, the Kaaba was used as one of the most important places in Muslim worship, including a direction for prayer and a place to carry out tawaf worship. It seems complicated to dispute the fact that some religious rituals that were once commonly performed by pre-Islamic Arab societies have been adopted by Muslims.

**An illustration of the intertext's pre-canonical interpretation, verse by verse:** [A5] First Verse, according to Angelika Neuwirth, the text of Surah al-Ikhlāṣ is not as simple as it seems. In the first verse, Say (Muhammad), "He is the One and Only Allah" (Qul huwa Allāhu Aḥad). From the perspective of intertextuality studies, it is challenging to deny that this verse reflects one of the central teachings contained in the Jewish text, which reads, "Hear, O children of Israel, the Lord our God is One" (Shema' yisrā' ēl adōnay ēlōhēnū adōnay eḥad). Apart from the two being identical in terms of content, what is also very interesting is the fact that it shows that there is one genuine part of the Jewish text that is recorded in the Quran, namely the vocabulary "aḥad" or "eḥad" (Neuwirth, 2010, p. 151).

Instead of using the considerably more common term "waḥīd," in this instance, the Quran prefers to use "aḥad," which does not conform to the standards of the Arabic language. As mentioned in both religious texts, the Arab community at the time would have had no trouble understanding the shifts from one tradition to another in terms of linguistic terms, themes, and rhythm because they were already very familiar with literary and religious terms. In other words, the reader's mind will be semiotically drawn to other texts that offer important direction and significance for him at this point of textual strangeness in Surah al-Ikhlāṣ. Michael Riffaterre [A6] called this type of occurrence a "dual sign."

This kind of trans-lingual quotation phenomenon in the Quran is, of course, not without reason. For Neuwirth, this is a negotiation strategy in prophetic preaching,

namely giving a familiar impression to followers of the Jewish religion on the one hand but still not eliminating the universal character of the Koran on the other hand. With this strategy, both Jews and non-Jews could easily accept the Prophet's preaching. So, the urgency of the words "aḥad" is a 'trans-tradition' vocabulary that bridges the community of followers of the Prophet with the community of followers of the Jewish religion (Neuwirth, 2010).

Third Verse: The third verse, which reads, "God neither begets nor is begotten (lam yalid wa lam yūlad), is intended to reverse the concept of divinity held by the Nicene tradition, which very firmly emphasises the concept of Jesus' sonship, that Jesus exists because he was born (by God) and not by creation (*gennêthenta, ou poiêthenta*). The Quranic proclamation represents a rejection of theology that emerged from disproving theological notions found in earlier indigenous sacred texts. The following verse from Surah al-Ikhlās reiterates this theological idea of rejecting the Quran (Neuwirth, 2010).

Fourth Verse: The last verse of Surah al-Ikhlās, which reads, "And there is nothing equal to Him (wa lam yakun lahūkufuwan aḥad)," aims to explain the position of the Quran regarding the concept of equality between divine substance and creatures His creation. This assertion reverses the concept of *homoousios* (union between God and creatures) in the Nicene tradition. It is not enough just to reject the concept of divinity in the Nicene religion; this verse also emphasises the prohibition against having thoughts that state that there are servants who have a degree of equality with God (*homoious to patri*), let alone believing that they are His children. According to Neuwirth, although at first glance this verse essentially denies the divine teachings found in the Nicene tradition, at the same time, the Quran has copied Syriac intertext theory, namely in adopting the rhetorical strategies of that tradition. Angelika Neuwirth terms this phenomenon as "intensification" (Neuwirth, 2010).

When examining the text of al-Ikhlās from a rhetorical perspective, Neuwirth observes that it still distinctly uses the same phrasing as other early Christian writings. In the context of the surah's third and fourth verses—indeed, the final two verses do not aim to argue against Christian doctrine—instead, more broadly, the surah fulfils its function as a component of a brand new, essential literature that teaches universal monotheism. It is important to consider Surah al-Ikhlās as a composition that opposes the two influential texts that preceded it—the Jewish and Christian scriptures. For this reason, stories about the Quran still mention these two earlier scriptures in passing (Neuwirth, 2010)<sup>[A7]</sup>.

## Conclusion<sup>[A8]</sup>

The main objective of contemporary Western scholarship is to provide an innovative, intertextually-based method for studying the Quran. This intertextuality-based study is expected to be more successful in preserving the Quranic identity and addressing the Quran as genuine. Neuwirth requires that Quranic scholars first wholeheartedly accept that the Quran is an original, singular, and final religious document that continues to need interpretation. This will prevent the study of the Quranic intertextuality from coming to the same depressing and contentious conclusions as Geiger's and the other revisionists' periods. If this is accomplished, the viewpoint

from which the Quran is viewed will no longer be historical-critical, focusing on "what is behind the text" and following the "urtext" of the Quran. Instead, it will already be at the level of interpretive studies, wherein "what is before/in front of the text" is examined, and the Quran is studied as a literary text.

Likewise, according to Neuwirth's argument, reading the Quran contextually—that is, reading that depicts, for the first time, the scenes of a community emerging under the tight protection of the Quran—while it is still growing is crucial. She recognised that the rush of standardised post-canonisation Quran studies had eclipsed efforts to read the Quran during the Prophet's lifetime because of the Quran canonisation endeavour. She believes that the Quran was derived as a text from other sources. Therefore, studying the Quran requires more than paying attention to what is being read; to see the themes that appear within the text, people also need to glance at additional sources that might be related to it. This type of situation can be more precisely defined as a dynamic and well-balanced form of communication than plagiarism or imitation. The significance of the intertextuality approach will come into play at this point. It entails analysing the surahs of the Quran and comparing them to texts that are thought to have been around it during its revelation, which he claimed fell into the Late Antiquity period. These texts include Christian Aramaic, Jewish Hebrew holy books, Greek rhetoric, and Arabic poetry. As seen by her published works, Neuwirth already fulfils the category of a true contextualist who employs a historical-literary approach.

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