

A Critical Analysis of the Contextual Approach to Myth in the Qur'an: Focusing on Angelika Neuwirth's Perspective

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ABSTRACT:

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The concept of myth within the Qur'an has been a subject of extensive scholarly inquiry among Orientalists, offering diverse perspectives and methodologies. Angelika Neuwirth, a prominent Qur'anic scholar, has made significant contributions to this field by examining the Qur'anic historical narratives and proposing a connection between these narratives and the concept of myth. In her view, myths function as narratives that employ archetypes to illuminate and interpret the world. To substantiate her claims, Neuwirth adopts a contextual approach, drawing upon the methodologies of biblical criticism. Emphasizing microstructures and contextual details of Qur'anic verses, this approach aims to uncover the origins of the stories and historical narratives in the Qur'an, attributing them to the social and theological milieu of early Muslims. It posits that these narratives are deeply rooted in the socio-theological milieu of early Muslims. Aligning with this approach, Neuwirth characterizes numerous Qur'anic stories and events as myths that have been shaped by archetypes embedded in the collective unconscious of the Qur'an's audience.

This paper employs a descriptive-analytical methodology, coupled with a comprehensive review of relevant literature, to critically evaluate the methodological underpinnings and presuppositions of the contextual approach to Qur'anic myth. Neuwirth's perspective is examined as a

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representative of this scholarly trend. The findings of this study reveal that, beyond methodological shortcomings, Neuwirth's approach is subject to several criticisms. These include an overemphasis on context as the sole determinant of Qur'anic knowledge, a neglect of the fundamental distinctions between the Qur'an and the Bible concerning the concept of revelation, and an overlooking of the distinct processes of compilation and canonization that shaped these two texts.

KEYWORDS: The Qur'an, Myth, Angelika Neuwirth, Contextual approach, Archetype, Orientalist studies.

1. Introduction

The concept of mythology in the Qur'an has drawn attention from various scholars, especially Orientalists, through different approaches. Some adopt a contextual approach, emphasizing the socio-historical context of the Qur'an's audience, while others use a phenomenological approach aimed at uncovering patterns and symbols within history. The contextual approach entails reading the Qur'an in the light of the social and theological context of its revelation, as well as the perspectives of early Muslims, along with related narratives and texts from sacred scriptures. This approach focuses primarily on the context and conditions surrounding the verses of the Qur'an, positing that a fundamental prerequisite for understanding these verses is to examine their context and environment. In this regard, the late antiquity period is highlighted as a key epistemological concept. While late antiquity refers to a specific period following classical antiquity, from the perspective of these scholars, it represents a shared epistemic space in which the sacred texts of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity were formed. Although the context of revelation holds great significance for Islamic exegetes (*mufasssirrūn*) in understanding the verses, there is a fundamental difference between Muslim studies in this field and those conducted by Orientalists, underscoring the necessity of engaging with these discussions.

Neuwirth is one of the Qur'anic scholars who has approached the study of the Qur'an from a contextual perspective. She defines mythology as a narrative that describes the world and everything in it through archetypes, thus paving the way for guiding its audience. According to such a definition, the concept of mythology encompasses not only

ancient polytheistic stories and narratives but, in a new approach, it also applies to stories with specific interpretive codes. These narratives call upon the audience to engage with the archetypes, applying them to particular characters, thereby facilitating the guidance process. Neuwirth argues that myth and legend, understood as narratives that differ in their interpretative significance, exist across all forms of religious and non-religious literature, including the sacred texts of the two monotheistic traditions prior to Islam, namely Christianity and Judaism. Such distinct stories and narratives embody a dynamic process of mythopoiesis that creates an independent meaning alongside the original meaning and narrative structure, further supporting the purposes of revelation (Neuwirth 2003).

In this article, employing a descriptive-analytical method and utilizing library resources, we aim to provide a critical analysis of the methodological principles and assumptions underlying the contextual approach, particularly assessing Neuwirth's views on mythology in the Qur'an as a representative of this perspective.

2. Methodology of the Contextual Approach

One of the most significant issues that delineates the divide between theologians and historians is the difference in the methods and approaches employed by these two groups in their treatment of historical narratives and stories. Historians contend that theologians attempt to explain and validate religious concepts and teachings without adhering to the criteria of historical analysis, while historians base their arguments solely on temporal and spatial contexts, which are the primary indicators of history. Myths and historical accounts that appear incompatible with cause-and-effect relationships and are grounded in metaphysical assumptions fall into this category.

Orientalists, often with a historical approach, endeavor to trace the origins of Qur'anic narratives in other sources, sometimes referencing archetypes and at other times examining the context of the Qur'an itself. Consequently, these scholars do not assess whether the Qur'an is realistic; rather, they aim to investigate the historical development of these propositions in terms of the history of beliefs and culture, rather than the history of events. In other words, the study conducted by Western scholars on this category of Qur'anic reports is primarily

historical, focusing on the origins and beginnings of beliefs, or functional, concerning the purposes and functions of these beliefs.

The historical-critical method, which is widely employed in Western Qur'anic studies, verifies only those historical propositions that align with the criteria of modern historical science through meticulous examination of historical sources. In this method, only reports whose authenticity has been substantiated through historical research are accepted, and it does not differentiate between divine texts and other ancient texts, treating sacred texts similarly to secular ancient texts. This implies that the accounts in Holy Scriptures and the Qur'an are subjected to the same scrutiny based on empirical historical analysis (Krentz 1977).

An important challenge faced by the historical-critical method is the skepticism that consistently accompanies it, as historical criticism seeks to articulate the most probable scenario among existing possibilities. Consequently, all assertions made by Western Qur'anic scholars regarding the historical narratives of the Qur'an, when employing this method, are imbued with doubt and uncertainty, leaving them susceptible to being contradicted by alternative interpretations. Thus, their conclusions and perspectives often manifest as claims that can be contested by presenting other possibilities (Aghaei 2012).

Although the researchers who utilize this method acknowledge the doubt inherent in the results obtained, they consider this uncertainty to be normal; the only definitive and certain conclusion is that there is no absolute certainty. According to this perspective, there remains no objective truth in the world, and everything is based on probabilities and the most probable scenarios, calling into question the foundations of science and certainty.

Another method used in the contextual approach by Western scholars is form criticism. This method, which is one of the approaches in biblical criticism, seeks to understand the emergence of the divine text by connecting it with the social and cultural context in which the text was produced. In other words, form criticism examines the relationship between the style and literary structure of the text and its historical and social environment, thereby forming categories within the divine texts (Black & Dockery 1991, 179). It aims to classify units of scripture into literary patterns (such as love poems, parables, sayings, elegies, and legends) and attempts to trace each type to its period of oral transmission (Britannica 2013).

The primary task of form criticism is to recognize and distinguish historical material from non-historical material and to determine the additions made to the sacred texts. Rudolf Bultmann is one of the biblical scholars who uses form criticism to examine New Testament texts. By analyzing the context and social and cultural conditions of the early Christians, he seeks to separate the historical reports of the Bible from non-historical accounts. Researchers employing this method attempt to identify the origins of these narratives by scrutinizing the social context of biblical stories. Form criticism emphasizes the contributions of Jews and Christians in the formation of biblical texts and seeks to uncover the content that entered the scriptures by utilizing findings from source criticism as well as existing oral traditions. Therefore, the difference between source criticism and form criticism lies in the former's focus solely on written sources, whereas form criticism also considers the oral traditions prevalent among Christians and Jews during the compilation of the texts (Marshall 2006, 155-157).

3. Myth in Western Qur'anic Studies

The concept of myth in Western Qur'anic studies has been defined and inspired by the concept of this term in biblical studies. Therefore, most of the features and characteristics attributed to myth in these studies have found their way into Qur'anic studies, and the Western scholars who define this concept in the Qur'an have paid attention to these features. In the Encyclopedia of the Qur'an, Neuwirth defines myths as narratives that serve to explain and describe the experienced world by revealing its archetypes. They are often staged in a cosmic or supernatural framework to manifest binding truths, generate meaning, and provide guidance. In this definition, there are two important components that most definitions of myth emphasize: narrative and explanation. In addition to these two elements, Neuwirth identifies other criteria in the definition of myth. By referring to the archetypes experienced in the world, she attempts to highlight this feature of myth and its relationship with archetypes. Archetypes are considered collective unconscious knowledge that is inherited in the chain of human ancestry and formed by phenomena related to human life since ancient times. These archetypes are regarded by Western Qur'anic scholars as one of the contexts of the Qur'an (Neuwirth 2003).

3.1. Types of Myths in the Qur'an

Western scholars categorize myths in the Qur'an into two basic types: myths of nature and myths of heroic figures. In introducing the first category, which includes myths that act as supernatural forces in nature, Neuwirth presents a general definition of myth that encompasses pagan stories and demonic supernatural forces, and she seeks to clarify the relationship between the scriptures and this concept. She considers such a definition of myth to be entirely opposed to the divine texts, as these texts emphasize the singular divine force affecting nature and history and reject any form of devilish or non-divine supernatural forces. In other words, according to such mythological interpretations, divine texts have played a demythologizing role. They reject mythological narratives that depict the influence of forces other than God in the creation and order of nature and history (Neuwirth 2003).

Neuwirth argues that the Qur'an rejects the mythological interpretation of the order of nature, which reflects a repetitive pattern in which the seasons follow one another. Instead of this polytheistic explanation, which emphasizes the power of nature and cosmic experience, the Qur'an presents a monotheistic interpretation centered on God's power. Consequently, the festivals established based on the holy text do not merely observe the annual changes of the seasons; rather, they celebrate significant events that have occurred through divine agency in past societies (Neuwirth 2003; Stetkevych 1996).

Neuwirth believes that within the Islamic context, such transformations in causal structures have been executed precisely, leading to the purification of the entire mythological fabric surrounding the cycles of seasons and the festivals and rituals associated with them. She asserts that Islam's approach to rituals and ceremonies has been quite conservative; despite continuing many ancient pre-Islamic practices influenced by the symbolism of seasonal change, the adoption of a new calendar effectively severed these practices from their Arab roots, completely disconnecting them from the cyclical nature of seasons and leaving no mythical subtext for them. Furthermore, new meanings and concepts have been imparted to Islamic rituals through this Islamic calendar, alluding to historical events. These redefined rituals either contribute to a sense of identity within the community or represent practices assigned to previous prophets that have been reinterpreted within Islam. In contrast, Judaism and Christianity have retained the temporal structure of ancient seasonal festivals, embracing and

integrating their primary symbols, which they have reconstructed based on the history of salvation, the central theme of the Bible. Thus, unlike Islam, these two religions maintain a mythical subtext in their seasonal and cyclical celebrations and practices (Neuwirth 2019).

It is evident that the Qur'an does not recognize any non-divine power in the order and cycles of nature, asserting that all power resides solely in the hands of God. Regarding the rituals and occasions that existed in pre-Islamic Arabic culture and continued in Islam, the Qur'an rectifies Arab misconceptions and presents these festivals and rituals through a new divine reinterpretation. It is accurate to say that the Qur'an does not entirely abandon all customs and cultural practices at once, nor does it accept all of them; rather, based on divine knowledge, it selectively retains a limited number. Among these carefully chosen elements, the Qur'an reveals its corrective approach.

The second type of myth, pertaining to heroic figures, involves individuals notable for their strength, courage, intelligence, and other heroic attributes (Gilliot 2003). In a comparative analysis, Neuwirth examines these characters across the divine texts of monotheistic religions, noting that the Old Testament is rich in heroic figures. In contrast, she finds that the Qur'an contains fewer heroic figures and categorizes its characters into two groups: biblical figures and Arabic prophets. Among these groups, Neuwirth highlights only a few notable figures, such as Noah, Abraham, Joseph, and particularly Moses, as heroes. The reason for this selection lies in the way the Qur'an portrays these individuals. Arabic prophets like Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shu'ayb do not act independently and remain primarily focused on fulfilling God's will. Their actions appear static, preventing the audience from perceiving them as key characters or heroes (Neuwirth 2016, 192-193).

Suleiman Ali Mourad, a Qur'anic scholar, in his research on Maryam in the Qur'an, employs a contextual approach to investigate the context of the Qur'an and other sources available during that time. After presenting the Qur'anic account of Maryam and the birth of Jesus, he references the account from the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, which was written between the 6th and 8th centuries CE, highlighting the similarities between the two narratives. He posits that the source of both accounts of Maryam is the Greek myth of Leto and the birth of Apollo. Leto, who was desperately trying to hide herself from the angry Hera, sought the remote island of Delos. Aggrieved and distressed, she sat by a palm tree alongside the Inopos River and there delivered Apollo (Britannica 2024). He believes that the story of the palm tree, which

appears in *Sūrah Maryam*, is a reinterpretation of the myth of Leto. It concerns a distressed pregnant woman (Leto/Mary) who seeks a remote place (Delos/a secluded spot) and sits by the trunk of a palm tree beside a river (Inopos/a stream) to give birth to a holy child (Apollo/Jesus) (Mourad 2008, 168-169).

The first critique of this perspective is the same critique raised in the historical-critical method, which concerns the lack of concrete evidence for these possibilities. As stated, this group of Orientalists, relying on a historical framework independent of revelation, seeks only the history and sources of the concepts and narratives found in the Qur'an within other texts. Sometimes, by tracing these sources to Hellenistic myths and legends, they claim that the people of the time of revelation were familiar with such legends, merely presenting conjectures without substantiation. Conversely, other Orientalists, who argue that the story of Mary in the Qur'an is entirely free from mythological influences, underscore the doubts and uncertainties that exist within this approach (Neuwirth 2014; Neuwirth et al. 2010).

3.2. *A Contextual Reading of the Myth*

By emphasizing the microstructures and examining the context of the verses in the Qur'an, scholars employing a contextual approach have sought to understand the origins of the stories and historical reports within the Qur'an, asserting that these reports emerged from the social and theological context of the early Muslims. These scholars categorize many of the stories and historical events mentioned in the Qur'an as myths formed from the archetypes in the collective unconscious of the Qur'an's audience. In this manner, they not only typologize Qur'anic myths but also analyze the Qur'an's engagement with these myths (Neuwirth 2010).

As noted, Western Qur'anic scholars approach the Qur'an from a background in biblical studies. When they discuss context in their Qur'anic analyses, it is often informed by their prior experiences in biblical studies. Consequently, these scholars may overlook the fundamental differences between the two texts, leading to various interpretive errors. It seems that they have confused the concept of revelation in Islam with that in Christianity, resulting in a distinctly Christian approach to the subject. There is a significant difference between Christianity and Islam regarding the concept of revelation. For Muslims, the Qur'an is

entirely dependent on divine revelation; it is God's revelation, a true and complete message with clear, final expressions. In contrast, Christians believe that the most complete revelation is not found in a book but in a person. They contend that Jesus reveals God through his life and actions, expressing His will for humanity. The authors of the New Testament aimed to convey their experiences of Jesus to others, making this human testimony one of the foundations of the Bible. In other words, the New Testament documents the interactions and conversations of Christ as God with his people and society, and this account is validated and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Michel 1997).

In their analysis of the Qur'an, Western Qur'anic scholars often emphasize societal context and its role over divine revelation. They argue that the interactions of the Prophet with society, much like the interactions of Christ with his community, contributed to the formation of the Qur'an. While it is true that society and history are essential for a proper understanding of the Qur'an, and many ambiguities within it cannot be resolved without considering these factors, attributing greater significance to societal context than to the Qur'an itself as a revelation and divine word reflects a deviation stemming from the confusion of Christian and Islamic concepts of revelation (Alizadeh Mousavi 2019, 250-257).

Regarding the myths identified in the Qur'an that some Western scholars have claimed, two possibilities exist. The first possibility, also suggested by some Islamic commentators (*mufasssirūn*) who consider the term of *lisān al-qawm* (the language of the people) (Q. 14:4), emphasizes that this term does not refer to words and language in a literal sense but rather indicates that the Qur'an was revealed according to the level of thought and knowledge of its audience. According to this interpretation, the myths referenced by these Western scholars suggest that the Qur'an employs familiar concepts to convey its message more effectively and understandably to the people of its time, which does not imply an acceptance of those myths.

An example pertinent to this discussion is the reference by some Western scholars to the myth of the meteors in their interpretation of verses Q. 55:33-35. These scholars argue that these verses represent an ancient myth from the Arab community in the region where the Qur'an was revealed. According to this myth, jinn would obtain news and information from the occult through eavesdropping and relay it to privileged members of society, such as poets. With the advent of divine revelation, the jinn lost this power and authority (Neuwirth 2010). From

the perspective of these Western scholars, the verse Q. 55:33 refers to this limitation and loss of power:

يَا مَعْشَرَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنسِ إِنِ اسْتَطَعْتُمْ أَنْ تَنْفُذُوا مِنْ أَقْطَارِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ فَانْفُذُوا لَا تَنْفُذُونَ إِلَّا بِسُلْطَانٍ (الرحمن/33)

O company of jinn and humans! If you can pass through the confines of the heavens and the earth, then do pass through. But you will not pass through except by an authority [from Allah] (Q. 55:33).

They believe that the verse Q. 55:35, by stating two issues, re-considers disobeying this order and crossing the borders of the sky without permission:

يُرْسَلُ عَلَيْكُمَا شَوَاظٌ مِنْ نَارٍ وَنُحَاسٌ فَلَا تَنْتَصِرَانِ (الرحمن/35)

There will be unleashed upon you a flash of fire and a smoke; then you will not be able to help one another (Q. 55:35).

In this example, it can be emphasized that although there may have been a myth among the community regarding the revelation of the Qur'an, the Qur'an's view of this myth is correct and highlights the power and sovereignty of God over the earth and the sky, while denying any claims about the power of jinn without God's permission. Therefore, the Qur'an's use of the myth known among the Arabs demonstrates that this book attends to the beliefs and views that existed in the audience, and this is one of the unique features of the Qur'an.

The contrary point of such a view is that the myths and concepts included in the Qur'an serve to align with the culture of the time to the extent that the Qur'an has reflected them despite the knowledge of the invalidity of some views, theories, and traditions accepted at that time. In other words, the Qur'an has reflected these cases, although it acknowledged that these scientific theories and religious and historical beliefs are invalid and that their invalidity will become evident in the future. It can be said that the proponents of this point of view have presented such an interpretation of reflection with the motive of defending the Qur'an; in the seemingly conflicting cases between religion and science, by citing the point of view that the Qur'an itself has stated them while being aware of the invalidity of these cases, these conflicts and problems have been resolved. According to this point of view, the Qur'an, recognizing that some historical narrations are unfounded, has

reported these narrations only in order to engage the people of its era and to take advantage of the stories and narrations (Khorramshahi 1995, 91-97). The critics have considered this point of view as the meaning of engaging with and using the knowledge and false beliefs of the age consciously in the direction of divine goals.

Regarding this view, several criticisms and problems can be proposed, one of which is its incompatibility with the goals of the Qur'an, the most important of which is guidance. A contradiction with the sanctity of the Qur'an is also one of the other criticisms of this interpretation, because in this case, the Qur'an has merely pursued its own goals by using false knowledge, culture, and traditions. This point of view is also in conflict with verses from the Qur'an, as the Qur'an frequently refers to itself with titles such as *qawḥ faṣḥ* (the separator between right and wrong) (Q. 86:13) and asserts that it is not speaking out of whim and desire (Q. 53:3). Inconsistency with the necessity of in-depth study in the Qur'an, depleting the Qur'an of its content and message, and denying the immortality of the Qur'an are among the other criticisms that have been made against this view (Ayazi 2001).

3.3. *The Traditional Discourse of the Contextual Approach*

Western Qur'anic scholars in the modern era, especially since the second half of the 20th century, have often adopted an academic and methodological approach to Qur'anic studies. They have approached the study of this topic in the Qur'an by defining the characteristics of mythology, discovering archetypes and primordial examples, or by examining the functions of mythology. However, the orientalist scholars who have studied the Qur'an within the traditional discourse have investigated the similarities between the Qur'an and the written and oral sources at the time of the Qur'an, claiming that the Qur'an was borrowed from these sources.¹ They have primarily sought to identify similarities between Qur'anic teachings and the claimed sources of that time, without considering that these sources could include the Abrahamic texts or other oral and written traditions. Consequently, they have focused less on the semantics of mythology and regarded

1. It should be noted that there have been many works and research critiquing the idea of the adaptation of the Qur'an from other written and oral sources. In addition to Muslim scholars, many Western scholars have also criticized this notion, to the point that there are fewer scholars who maintain belief in adaptation using its traditional approach.

mythology in a manner similar to other sources available during the time of revelation, paying little attention to the characteristics attributed to mythology in the modern era. This group of scholars has primarily examined the fabric of the Qur'an through a philological approach. For instance, Tisdall, in his analysis of the story of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* in the Qur'an, explores the etymology of these terms. He points to the names of two ancient Armenian deities who were worshiped by the Armenians before their conversion to Christianity in the 3rd and 4th centuries CE, considering *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* to be adaptations of the names of these gods. By providing numerous examples in his book, Tisdall refers to all the verses and historical narratives of the Qur'an as "Muhammadan legends," indicating his belief that the Qur'an was authored by Prophet Muhammad and adapted from various sources. According to him, the Qur'an serves merely as a retelling and myth-making of the Prophet from other existing narratives and stories during the time of its revelation (Tisdall 1905).

3.4. *Context, Canonization, and Mythology*

Some Western scholars contend that the Muslim perception of the Qur'an, following its canonization, transcends its historical context and details. Neuwirth argues that the Qur'an has evolved from being a historical document into a timeless text as a result of the canonization process, which has created numerous complications. She explains that with its final official canonization, the Qur'an lost its historical context, and instead of reflecting its gradual emergence as depicted in the text, it became characterized by the timeless and eternal nature of its message. This shift has made the understanding of the Qur'an increasingly reliant on the *sīrah*, a body of knowledge that, while transmitted and codified separately, has been integrated into the Qur'an by its early readers and listeners. Neuwirth suggests that prophetic tradition, in developing a meta-historical narrative, assumed the role that the history within the Qur'an should have held, despite the limited chronological evidence available. This includes the history of a liturgical and social communication process that took on a distinctly textual form in the Qur'an, reflected in the structure of its *surahs*. She emphasizes the need for further literary analysis of the Qur'an's microstructure to uncover the still-traceable aspects of that history, which remains an urgent area of study (Neuwirth 2002).

Neuwirth also highlights the implications of the canonization process on the decontextualization of texts from their historical backgrounds, facilitating their integration with myths and serving as evidence for societal myths (Neuwirth 2010). Based on Assmann's theory, when a message is preserved to endure beyond the context in which the original group was engaged, it typically undergoes significant structural changes. The message acquires a new form through processes of scripturalization and institutionalization. In the case of the Qur'an, a canon from below initially emerges prior to any canon from above, which appears only through the final redaction deemed necessary to combat pressures that could lead to fragmentation and provincialization. As a result, the grassroots canon evolves into an authoritative one, a development that mirrors what occurred in early Christianity when the official Church established an alliance with political authority (Neuwirth 2002).

According to Neuwirth, the Qur'an prior to canonization, which she describes as a book from below, differs significantly from the Qur'an post-canonization, which she characterizes as a book from above. In critiquing this perspective, it is important to note that Western scholars have often suggested that the canonization process created a new context for the post-canonical Qur'an, thereby paving the way for the incorporation of myths into the text. Although Neuwirth acknowledges certain fundamental differences between the Qur'an and the Bible regarding the number of biblical copies and their interpretations and translations, she has not sufficiently addressed the significant and fundamental differences between the two texts in the canonization process. In the case of the Qur'an, the Prophet of Islam actively encouraged the writing, recitation, and memorization of the text, ensuring that the general public was familiar with it, thereby minimizing the possibility of tampering or concealment from both the public and the Prophet himself. In contrast, the Bible was authored by various individuals over many centuries, with no precise information available regarding the authorship or the transmission of texts to subsequent generations. It appears that Neuwirth has overlooked this critical distinction between the Qur'an and the Bible, mistakenly equating the canonization process of the Qur'an with that of the Bible, which lacked direct supervision by the prophets and the community. Consequently, this misapprehension has led to the potential for the introduction of myths and alterations within the text.

Additionally, like many other Western and Muslim scholars, Neuwirth attributes the compilation of the Qur'an to the period of

‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, overlooking the collection and compilation efforts that took place during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad. She notes that, according to the prevailing Islamic tradition, the authoritative final version of the Qur’an is credited to the redaction performed by a committee convened by the third caliph, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān. While this codex established a fixed sequence for the *surahs* that had not previously existed, it also integrated passages that had been transmitted separately into entirely new contexts. Neuwirth acknowledges, however, that the committee remained committed to the textual material whose authenticity was supported by reliable oral and written traditions, considering the complete body of Qur’anic revelations available at that time (Neuwirth 2002).

Therefore, there are two principal criticisms of Neuwirth’s perspective. The first criticism contends that Neuwirth equates the canonization of the Qur’an with the process of canonization that occurred for the Bible, thereby attributing to the Qur’an the same issues that canonization has purportedly created for the Bible, including the amalgamation of biblical texts with myths. The multiplicity of authors and the composition of biblical texts over many centuries, along with the lack of a clear record of their transmission to subsequent generations, represent a significant divergence between the Qur’an and the Bible, rendering the canonization processes of the two texts fundamentally different (Alizadeh Mousavi 2019). The second criticism of Neuwirth’s analysis of the Qur’an’s canonization pertains to her emphasis on the compilation of the Qur’an during the period of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, coupled with her insufficient attention to its compilation during the lifetime of the Prophet. However, historical evidence suggests otherwise, as numerous reports indicate that the Qur’an was indeed written and compiled during the Prophet of Islam’s lifetime (al-Zarkashī 1989; Khoei 2012; Ramyar 2014).

4. Conclusion

The contextual approach is a key methodology utilized by Western scholars in the study of the Qur’an, focusing on its historical and cultural context. The exploration of myth within the Qur’an is a significant topic that scholars have investigated from various perspectives. By relying on historical frameworks independent of revelation, these scholars seek alternative historical and non-revealed sources for Qur’anic

propositions, thereby prioritizing a contextual understanding of the text. One of the most important methods underpinning the research of this group, particularly Neuwirth, is the historical-critical approach. This method verifies only those historical propositions that align with the criteria of modern historiography through meticulous examination of historical sources. However, the doubts, uncertainties, and instability of results associated with this method present numerous challenges and criticisms. In this context, myth encompasses narratives that elucidate and describe the experienced world through archetypal lenses. By emphasizing micro-structures and investigating the context of the verses of the Qur'an, the contextual approach aims to understand the origins of the stories and historical statements within the Qur'an, positing that these statements emerged from the social and theological contexts of the early Muslim community. Scholars in this field categorize many stories and events mentioned in the Qur'an as myths, arguing that they were shaped by archetypes in the collective unconscious of the Qur'an's audience. In this manner, they articulate the characteristics of Qur'anic myths and examine the Qur'an's engagement with them.

However, by comparing the Qur'an with the Bible and neglecting the fundamental differences between these two texts—whether in terms of compilation and canonization or in the interpretation of revelation and context—these scholars assert that the Qur'an was influenced by the socio-historical context of the revelation era. They argue that many propositions and teachings of the Qur'an were derived from both written and oral traditions prevalent at the time. The multiplicity of authors and the composition of biblical texts over many centuries, coupled with the absence of a clear record regarding their transmission to subsequent generations, represent significant distinctions between the Qur'an and the Bible. Consequently, the processes of canonization for the two texts are fundamentally different, as the canonization of the Qur'an involved a distinct and more centralized approach compared to that of the Bible.

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