

Interpretation of Hanīf in The Qur'an With a Late Antiquity and Near East Approach

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DOI: 10.29240/alquds.v8i3.9572

Submitted: 2024-01-19 | Revised: 2024-09-14 | Accepted: 2024-11-27

Abstract. The word Hanīf in the Qur'an invites much academic debate regarding the meaning of the word. This word has many interpretations; if it refers to literature originating from recent Islam, it is interpreted as Islam. However, you get many alternative interpretations using interpretation through the Late Antiquity and Near East approaches. This paper aims to interpret the meaning of Hanīf using Late Antiquity and the Near East approach. This research shows that the meaning of Hanīf in the study of Islamic turrets has various meanings; there are at least five meanings in Tafsir At Tabari and Ibn Katsir. Furthermore, in the studies of Western scholars in analyzing the word Hanīf, it is studied based on the development of language in the Near Eastern context, which does not only mean Islam. In the social context, Hanīf means there is a monotheistic group that does not worship idols. Moneteism is defined as a submission to the One God and is not limited to one religion. The meaning of Hanīf here is more pluralistic and is not interpreted exclusively as meaning that Islam is the religion of the Prophet Muhammad. This means there are different interpretations of the word Hanīf using Late Antiquity and Near East approaches.

Keywords: Interpretation, Hanīf, Late Antiquity, Near East

Introduction

The Qur'an is a collection of God's revelations that were revealed to humans to complete the series of revelations that were revealed previously. This is supported by the fact that the Prophet Muhammad SAW. is the last messenger sent to humanity as the last holy book was revealed through the Prophet Muhammad SAW. raises many questions about explaining this text, which was revealed fourteen centuries ago in Arabic. This condition gives rise to lengthy discussions regarding the text and context of the Qur'an. Islamic scholars have many different opinions about how to interpret the Qur'an properly¹.

Ulama or scholars who study to interpret the Qur'an are also called Mufasir. These public commentators generally use two approaches, namely textual and contextual. Commentators who understand the text are called classical commentators. This interpreter understands the text of the Qur'an itself by Arabic grammar, which tends to be careful, even rigid as if the Qur'an was revealed in a vacuum. As a result, the breadth and richness of meaning in the Al-Qur'an need to be comprehensively and in-depth described. Whether we realize it or not, this process makes the Qur'an a symbol and canon, which makes it difficult to accept other meanings apart from the mufasir's textual approach².

¹ Bahruddin, "Epistimologi Teks Dan Konteks Dalam Memahami Al-Qur ' an," *Al-Mutsla: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman Dan Kemasyarakatan* 1, no. 1 (2019).h.1-2.

² M Solahudin, "Pendekatan Tekstual Dan Kontekstual Dalam Penafsiran Alquran," *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 1, no. 2 (2016).h.115-116.

Interpreting the Qur'an is an activity carried out to reveal the values or meanings contained in the Qur'an. Criticism of understanding the Qur'an only through a textual approach is a contextual understanding of the Qur'an. A contextual approach is an approach that attempts to interpret the Qur'an based on considerations of linguistic analysis, historical context, sociology, and anthropology applied to the life of pre-Islamic Arab society at the time the Qur'an was revealed. This contextual approach is related to the hermeneutic approach, which is part of the approach to text interpretation apart from language studies, sociology, history, and philosophy³.

This contextual method in interpreting the Qur'an is a method or approach used to understand the contents of the Qur'an using a historical method or approach. The historical approach in question is an approach to the Qur'an through understanding the historical situation or context before or at the time of the revelation, then deriving moral ideals from it and bringing them into the current context. So, with this contextual approach, the meaning of the Qur'an is not only in the text but is also balanced with a broader meaning⁴. In studying the interpretation of the Qur'an using a contextual approach, western scholars have developed many approaches. One of the Western scholars pioneered a historical-critical approach that focused on studying the Qur'an before the pre-canonization period. The analysis of the Qur'an used by Western scholars using Late Antiquity documents and by looking at the context of the surrounding region, namely the Near East, is seen as a comprehensive approach and cannot be ruled out in looking at the historical originality of the Qur'anic text⁵.

This approach is more developed among Western scholars than Muslim scholars. Muslim scholars are less interested in discussing this approach because it is more speculative and not based on history. The Late Antiquity and Near East context sees the Qur'an as a text after the Bible and also has a relationship with the context of life around Mecca and Medina. What is the relationship between the Qur'an and the traditions of Judaism and Christianity in ancient times as a consideration in interpreting the Qur'an?⁶ Such a comparison allows a deeper understanding of the specifics of the Qur'anic doctrine against its contemporary intellectual background⁷. By using this approach, Western scholars want to see the Qur'an through a broader context in order to interpret the Qur'an comprehensively. If it is not analyzed using a Late Antiquity and Near East approach, this risks separating, even orienting, the text as something foreign and unable to be fully interpreted⁸. One thing that needs attention is the development of classical Arabic, which is closely related to Aramaic and Hebrew. According to Luling, it is important to analyze a word in the Koran based on the history of the development of the language⁹.

³ Solahudin.

⁴ Rudy Irawan, "METODE KONTEKSTUAL PENAFSIRAN AL- QUR ' AN," *Al Dzikra : Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Al-Hadits* 13, no. 2 (2019).h.176.

⁵ Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Creating The Qur'an : A Historical-Critical Study, Creating the Qur'an* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022).h.262.

⁶ Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells, "Introduction," in *Qur'anic Studies Today*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells (New York: Routledge, 2016).h.9.

⁷ Nicolai Sinai, "Historical Criticism and Recent Trends in Western Scholarship on the Quran: Some Hermeneutic Reflections," *Journal of College of Sharia & Islamic Studies* 38, no. 1 (2020).h.136.

⁸ Travis Zadeh, "Quranic Studies and the Literary Turn," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135, no. 2 (2015).h.338.

⁹ Harold Motzki, "Alternative Accounts of the Qur'an's Formation," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Quran*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (United States: Cambridge University Press, 2006).h.68-69.

In one example, a word in the Qur'an that has been subject to long debate is the word Hanīf. The term ḥanīf has been an extensive study and has no equal in the academic tradition. This paper discusses the study of the word Hanīf with the offers of Western scholars in interpreting the Qur'an¹⁰. The approach taken in this paper uses a historical-critical approach associated with Late Antiquity and Near East documents.

Discussion

Pendekatan *Late Antiquity* dan *Near East* sebagai Alternatif Baru dalam Penafsiran

Canonization is a traditional report involving the writing and publication of a Koran that is considered complete. A text is collected and formally standardized, giving rise to its inherent ideology. In this way, canonization was the period in which Muslims considered the Qur'an to be a closed and standardized text. Therefore, it cannot be denied that canonization cannot be avoided, but many consequences follow, including removing the Qur'an from its historical context. Apart from that, canonization caused the Qur'an to experience dehistoricization¹¹. Canonization is the ijtihad of the early Muslim generation, which describes a form of textualization of the Qur'an as an Islamic text. In this phase, the Qur'an, which was previously a conversation, was transformed into a text that limited Muslim imagination. In this way, canonization is seen as an authorization in the Islamic religion that seriously impacts religious discourse. If you look at development in the Sunni tradition, the text has a higher authority than reason because its nature is considered non-speculative¹².

Angelika Neuwirth is one of the Western scholars who focuses on criticizing the canonization process of the Qur'an. According to him, canonization causes studies of the interpretation of the Qur'an to be limited to the literature in the text and pay less attention to the historical part of the Qur'an itself. Initially, the Qur'an was a long and typical communication process between the Prophet Muhammad and the Angel Gabriel. For Neuwirth, there needs to be a clear boundary between the Qur'an as a communication text when the Prophet Muhammad was still alive and having undergone a process of codification into a mushaf after the Prophet Muhammad died. Neuwirth thinks that after the codification process became a mushaf, the canonization process of the Qur'an took place, removing the historical story from the Qur'an itself. Furthermore, Neuwirth said that the Qur'an, previously a horizontal communication, became a vertical, linear communication between the reader and Allah after canonization. Neuwirth believes it is necessary to revive the codified Al-Qur'an as it first existed among the Arabs by using a research model based on the structure of the letters of the Al-Qur'an. This method is an ideal way to interpret the Qur'an¹³.

¹⁰ Mustafa Shah, "Vocabulary of the Qur'an: Meaning in Context," in *The Oxford Handbook of QUR'ANIC STUDIES*, ed. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2020).h.338-339.

¹¹ Adrika Fithrotul Aini and Asep Nahrul Musadad, "Konteks Late Antiquity Sebagai Counter Atas Skeptisisme Orisinalitas Al-Quran MIKRO SEBAGAI COUNTER ATAS SKEPTISISME ORISINALITAS TEKS AL-QUR 'AN Refleksi Atas Pemikiran Angelika Neuwirth" 10, no. 1 (2019).h.181-182.

¹² Munirul Ikhwan, "Drama Ilahi: Sebuah Upaya Dalam Membaca Kronologi Wahyu Alquran," *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith* 10, no. 2 (2020).h.211.

¹³ Muhammad Fajri, "PEMIKIRAN AL-QUR'AN ANGELIKA NEUWIRTH DALAM STRUCTURE AND THE EMERGENCY OF COMMUNITY," *Al Wajid* 2, no. 1 (2021).h.307-308.

According to Neuwirth, the Qur'an was transformed into a collection of many texts that needed clear evidence of their relationship after its canonization. With such views, Neuwirth does not oppose the canonization process, but the reading of the canonization texts themselves must be revised¹⁴. The pre-canonization Al Qur'an needs to be addressed in interpretation because it is covered by the post-canonization Al Qur'an. Western scholars offer a new approach to studying the meaning of the Qur'an, namely a historical-critical approach—the historical-critical approach pioneered by Western scholars. Abraham Geiger was the first person to inspire other scholars to use the critical methods of Late Antiquity. Theodore Nöldeke, Sigmund Fraenkel, Charles Cutley Torrey, and John Wansbrough became the generation that continued this critical method. Reading the Qur'an by connecting it with the pre-canonization period occupies a very important position as an effort to reconstruct what happened. The pre-canonization reading was proposed by Neuwirth, who criticized his predecessors who only focused on canonization or post-canonization studies. Reading the pre-canonization Al Qur'an is not a new method of reading and rejects the post-canonization Al Qur'an accepted by Muslims. However, this is a step to obtain a reading that is not distorted and is not removed from its historical context. According to Neuwirth, citing Sinai, it is necessary to read the Qur'an as a fluid text as it was when it was first¹⁵.

Neuwirth stated that the canonization process was born at the same time as the birth of the community. The most important thing in studying this text is bringing the post-canonization Al Qur'an to life in the spirit of the pre-canonization Al Qur'an. As it exists today, this means that the Qur'an is not seen as something fixed but as a moving and flexible text that reflects dialogue and debate between different roles¹⁶. The appropriate approach to the pre-canonization context is literary and historical¹⁷. A literary approach is carried out by studying the microstructure of letter units in the Qur'an. The text's content, structure, and form clearly record the text's birth and society's birth. This combination of literary and historical approaches is Neuwirth's hope in combining traditional and revisionist perspectives¹⁸.

Neuwirth's criticism of the canonization of the Qur'an makes the study of the pre-canonization of the Qur'an an important concern. This means that the reading of the history of the Qur'an is extended to the Late Antiquity era, which is not only focused on the Islamic era. Developments are seen not only from Greek, Aramaic, or Latin sources and regionally, namely Arabic or Bedouin but also from a wider horizon. This approach frees up the interpreter to look for unfamiliar sources rather than simply concentrating on commonly studied books. The concept of Late Antiquity historiography was first introduced by the work of 20th-century scholars studying the history and culture of the late Roman Empire and early Christianity. Recently, Islamic historians have also used it to discuss the history of the Qur'an. This historiographic concept provides a broader hermeneutical horizon to appreciate the cultural richness of the Arabic-speaking world

¹⁴ Aini and Musadad, "Konteks Late Antiquity Sebagai Counter Atas Skeptisisme Orisinalitas Al-Quran MIKRO SEBAGAI COUNTER ATAS SKEPTISISME ORISINALITAS TEKS AL-QUR ' AN Refleksi Atas Pemikiran Angelika Neuwirth."h.182.

¹⁵ Aini and Musadad.h.182-183.

¹⁶ Lien Iffah Na'atu Fina, "CATATAN KRITIS ANGELIKA NEUWIRTH TERHADAP KESARJANAAN BARAT DAN MUSLIM ATAS ALQURAN: MENUJU TAWARAN PEMBACAAN ALQURAN PRA-KANONISASI," *Num* 2, no. 1 (2016): 57–80.

¹⁷ Angelika Neuwirth, "The 'Discovery of Writing' in the Qur'an: Tracing an Epistemic Revolution in Late Antiquity," *Num* 2, no. 1 (2016): 26–55.

¹⁸ Fina, "CATATAN KRITIS ANGELIKA NEUWIRTH TERHADAP KESARJANAAN BARAT DAN MUSLIM ATAS ALQURAN: MENUJU TAWARAN PEMBACAAN ALQURAN PRA-KANONISASI."

since the first revelation of the Qur'an. Historians broaden the conceptual reach of Late Antiquity by discussing pre-Islamic history, early Islamic developments up to the mid-eighth century, and even beyond¹⁹.

This historiographic concept recognizes the evidence of centuries of Islamic tradition that explores the roots of the Arabic language and religious culture in the Qur'an. With a hermeneutical approach, the Late Antiquity era opened up opportunities for Al Qur'an researchers to explore the early history of Islam, which interacted with other religious cultures that were not just the religion or culture that existed in Mecca or Medina²⁰. The horizon of interpretation in the Late Antiquity period grew wider, encouraging Qur'an scholars to look for connections between the religious discourse of Arabic holy books, religious knowledge, and literature from surrounding communities that did not speak Arabic—starting from the borders of the Roman Empire to Iran and the Persian Empire, which is considered as part of the intellectual and cultural sphere of the Arabic speaking community which is the language of origin of the Qur'an. Taking this into account, this means that the Near East context becomes part of the interpretation of the Qur'an. The interpretation of the Qur'an using the Near East approach is to consider other regions around the Hijaz to understand the Qur'an²¹.

The interpretation of the Qur'an through the historiographic concept of Late Antiquity, discussing background relationships between religions, is the most important object of study. The focus of the study is studying the history of the Qur'an from the perspective of the presence of other religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, indigenous religions, polytheistic religions, or pre-existing monotheistic religions. The development of knowledge in the field of South Arabian epigraphy reveals interactions with the Ethiopian region, the Persian Empire, and the Roman Empire from the third to the seventh century AD. Late Antiquity discusses thousands of inscriptions and graffiti writings in various pre-Islamic languages and scripts from Yemen to the Hijaz and beyond, which contain Arab military and political interactions with the surrounding region. This study shows the political history and Arab tribes at that time, along with the development of religious thought. A study of inscriptions and graffiti shows that Jewish and Christian groups spread among Arab groups until the end of the sixth century AD, even religions that did not speak Arabic. Based on existing evidence, it indicates an indigenous religion that adhered to monotheism or non-denominational monotheism (without sects) among pre-Islamic Arab society, which was most likely influenced by Judaism and Christianity, characterized by respect for patriarchy. In addition, based on works in Greek, Syriac, Roman, Persian, and Ethiopian, it may have influenced Islam in the Late Antiquity period. However, many Arabic writers in the early days of Islam stated that the religious traditions at that time were mostly polytheistic, which developed on the Arabian peninsula before the advent of Islam, as written by Hisham ibn al-Kalbi in the Book of al Asnam²².

¹⁹ Sidney H. Griffith, "LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE RELIGIOUS MILIEU OF THE QUR'AN'S ORIGINS," in *THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO THE QUR'AN*, ed. George Archer, Maria M Dakake, and Daniel A Madigan (London: Routledge, 2022).h.3.

²⁰ Griffith.

²¹ Muntasir F. Hamid and John F. Healey, "Late Antique Near Eastern Context : Some Social and Religious Aspects," in *The Oxford Handbook of QUR'ANIC STUDIES*, ed. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2020).h.81–96.

²² Griffith, "LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE RELIGIOUS MILIEU OF THE QUR'AN'S ORIGINS."

Also mentioned in the Qur'an are the native Arab polytheists who are associated with the title al Musyrikun and are accused of associating creatures with the Almighty God. In this section, many local God worshipers from Arabic-speaking communities in Late Antiquity are referred to as al Musyrikun. The Qur'an describes most of the idioms of pre-Islamic Arabic religion with its vocabulary, as the Qur'an contains references to typical Arab rites and cult practices in conveying its distinctive message. In turn, it reflects religious themes and methods, religious expressions which also reflect the interaction of the Qur'an with the knowledge of various traditions that developed in the wider world in Late Antiquity. Recent findings show that the Quran interacted with indigenous polytheistic traditions at the time. Not only is it marked by the increasing presence of Jews and Christians in the Arab environment, but also by religious-political traditions. It was bordering kingdoms, especially the Persian and Roman empires²³.

The most striking discussion of the history of the Qur'an in discussing the perspective of Late Antiquity is the various religious traditions around it. This can be seen from the relevance of Arabic scripture expressions with doctrinal and practical expressions related to the surrounding environment. The language of non-Arab groups is paraphrased, criticized, and corrected by the Qur'an based on the perspective of the Qur'an itself. In particular, there is a variety of rhetorical strategies in the Qur'an and its counter-discourse, which includes the views of opposing parties along with the apologetic and polemical diction it uses in responding to opposing positions, the most prominent of which are Jews and Christians. Much of the knowledge of Jewish and Christian groups comes from texts in non-Arabic languages spoken outside the reach of Arabic culture. Recognition of the subtlety of the Qur'an's polemics and the accuracy of its reflections on the details of one of the controversial topics it touches on often emerges when its responses are read through the lens of its counter-discourse to ideas otherwise found in non-Arabic texts circulating within the frame of reference of Late Antiquity wider. The relationship between the text of the Qur'an and other texts outside the Qur'an is called intertextuality studies. *Intertextuality* is a concept that states that a text is created by combining previous texts that intersect and merge. Furthermore, the text must be seen as something that cannot be separated from the wider social and cultural structure. In this sense, a text is not a single and isolated object but a synthesis of cultural texts. Individual and cultural texts consist of the same textual material and cannot be separated²⁴.

The writer's previous reading inevitably influences a writer's work. As a theoretical framework, intertextuality can make it easier to understand the impact of a particular activity on subsequent similar activities. Intertextuality has been used to analyze interpretations and stories in the Al-Quran²⁵. The study of the intertextuality of the Qur'an is a rereading of previous communications with subsequent communications that need attention. The development of the study of the intertextuality of the Qur'an is seen as a zigzag movement, not a linear movement towards the interpretation of the Qur'an. Reading the Qur'an as an open drama is a much more difficult and laborious procedure than reading it as a specific text because it presupposes the reconstruction of a chronology. Intertextuality studies try to place the Qur'an in the traditions of Late Antiquity. Intertextuality studies assume that the people who received the text of the Qur'an

²³ Griffith.

²⁴ Rahmatullah, "HERMENEUTIKA INTERTEKSTUALITAS MUQATIL BIN SULAYMAN," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* – 20, no. 2 (2019)h.126.

²⁵ Nur Afra Afifah Amani Amatullah, Nur Laili Nabilah Nazahah Najiyah, and Inayah Rohmaniyah, "Intertextuality and Late Antiquity in Michael E. Pregill 's Interpretation of the Worship of the Golden Calf in Surah Thāhā : 81-97," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 24, no. 1 (2023).h.5-6.

at that time had mastered the Bible, Arabic, and Greek rhetoric. With such diverse recipients of revelation, the Qur'an needs to be reexamined within an intertextuality framework involving elements in the traditions of Late Antiquity, namely Judaism, Christianity, the Bible, Arabic, and Greek rhetoric. With an exegetical method based on intertext studies, Neuwirth opened the door to a fresher and more scientific dialogue between Muslims, Jews, and Christians who could understand the situation of the Qur'an at that time²⁶.

The Late Antiquity and Near East approach to reading the Qur'an is a criticism of the canonization process of the Qur'an from Western scholars. This is a new alternative to interpreting the Qur'an, which looks at the context of late antiquity, which is connected to the area around the Hijaz. The interaction of Muslim society with pre-Islamic times, religion, culture, language, regions, and other books cannot be denied that this happened. So, in interpreting the Qur'an, Western scholars proposed a new alternative by considering the Late Antiquity and Near East eras to interpret it more comprehensively.

Interpreting the Meaning of Hanif in the Qur'an

The word Hanīf in the text of the Qur'an has debates regarding its meaning. The Qur'an has two forms of syntax, namely *mufrad* and *Jama*. These twelve times appear with details of ten words in *mufrad* form and twice in *Jama* form, as well as nine verses relating to the Prophet Abraham. The following are the details²⁷.

No	The Name of the Surah	Verse	Forms	Connection to Ibrahim
1.	<i>Al Baqarah</i>	135	<i>Mufrad</i>	Yes
2.	<i>Ali Imran</i>	67	<i>Mufrad</i>	Yes
3.	<i>Ali Imran</i>	95	<i>Mufrad</i>	Yes
4.	<i>An Nisa</i>	125	<i>Mufrad</i>	Yes
5.	<i>Al An'am</i>	79	<i>Mufrad</i>	Yes
6.	<i>Al An'am</i>	161	<i>Mufrad</i>	Yes
7.	<i>Yunus</i>	105	<i>Mufrad</i>	No
8.	<i>An Nabl</i>	120	<i>Mufrad</i>	Yes
9.	<i>An Nabl</i>	123	<i>Mufrad</i>	Yes
10.	<i>Ar Rum</i>	30	<i>Mufrad</i>	No
11.	<i>Al Hajj</i>	31	<i>Jama'</i>	Yes
12.	<i>Al Bayyinah</i>	5	<i>Jama'</i>	No

In general, the meaning of Hanīf in the twelve verses in the Qur'an above is closely related to Ibrahim and is opposed to shirk or polytheism. Scholars see the term as referring to pre-Jewish and pre-Christian Islam and Ibrahim monotheism²⁸. The formulaic nature of *Hanif's* statements shows that the word, whether *mufrad* or *jama'*, always appears in the accusative position, which

²⁶ Fina, "CATATAN KRITIS ANGELIKA NEUWIRTH TERHADAP KESARJANAAN BARAT DAN MUSLIM ATAS ALQURAN: MENUJU TAWARAN PEMBACAAN ALQURAN PRA-KANONISASI."

²⁷ Francois de Blois, "Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and Hanīf (Ἐθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65, no. 1 (2002).h.16-17.

²⁸ Devin J. Stewart, "Notes on Medieval and Modern Emendations of the Qur'ān," in *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2008).h.238-240.

cannot be determined how to read it, namely *hanifan* or *hunafaa*. There is no indication, at least in the Qur'an, that there ever was a group of people, a religion, called *hunafaa*. It can be known that Ibrahim, another person, or several people, was or did something in the state of *Hanif*'s²⁹. Al-Qur'an exegetes in the classical period considered the word *Hanif*'s to be part of the *yarbu Al Qur'an*, namely expressions whose exact meaning was unknown and whose interpretation was considered a subject of legitimate scientific dispute.

In *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wil āy al-Qur'ān*, *al-Ṭabarī* comments on the meaning of Hanif based on Surah Al Baqarah verse 135. According to him, the interpreters provide five explanations about the word Hanif, which are extrapolated from the context in which the word appears in the Qur'an. First, that hanif means hajj or pilgrim or, more precisely, a person who performs the hajj in Mecca. Second, hanif means obedient. Third, Abraham's religion is called *al-hanifiyyah* because he was the first imam to prescribe circumcision for the congregation, which seems to imply that these experts think that hanif means circumcision. Fourth, *Hanif* is a person whose religion is devoted only to his god. Fifth, *al hanifiyyah* means *al Islam*, where Ibrahim is called *Hanif* Muslim. *al-Ṭabarī* said that *Hanif* means straight, based on Surah Al An'am verse 161³⁰.

In *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, *Ibn Kathīr* comments on surah Al Baqarah verse 135, which relates to *Hanif*. *Hanif* means the upright religion of the Prophet Ibrahim, not Judaism or Christianity. According to *Muhammad ibn Ka'b Al-Quraẓi* and *Ais ibn Jariyah Hanifah*, it means straight, while according to *Kbasif*, it comes from *Mujahid*, the meaning is sincere. *Ali ibn Abu Talbah* narrated from *Ibn Abbas* that *Hanifan* means a person who makes a pilgrimage. Next, *Hasan, Ad-Dabbak, Atiyyah*, and *As-Saddi*. *Abul Aliyah* said that *al-hanif* means the person who faces the Baitullah in his prayers, and he believed that making the pilgrimage to the Baitullah was only obligatory if the person concerned could make the journey to it. According to *Mujahid and Ar-Rabi' ibn Anas*, *Hanifan* means a person followed by his guidance. *Abu Qilabah* stated that *al-hanif* means someone who believes in all the messengers, from the first to the last. *Qatadah* said, that *al-hanifiyyah* is a testimony which states that there is no god but Allah. Included in this teaching is that it is haram to marry mothers, daughters, maternal or paternal aunts, and all other things that Allah SWT forbids, including *al-Hanif*'s religious teachings, namely circumcision³¹.

Based on these two interpretations, the word *Hanif* has several meanings that depend on the context of the conversation. In *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wil āy al-Qur'ān* there are six meanings and *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, *Ibn Kathīr* there are eight meanings. From these two interpretations, if the word *Hanif* is related to Ibrahim, it can be interpreted that Ibrahim religion is straight. The interesting thing about *Hanif* is that the religion referred to is the straight religion held by the Prophet Ibrahim. Of course, this discussion requires investigating the religion referred to in the Qur'an. In post-Quranic Arabic, Hanif is commonly used as a synonym for Muslim or believer; Muslim communities are called *al-hanifah* and *al-hanifiyyah*. Of course, it is not impossible to understand the word in this way in the context of the Koran; Ibrahim and all other prophets taught the same true religion as the Prophet Muhammad SAW. So Prophet Ibrahim, like Prophet

²⁹ de Blois, "Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and Ḥanīf (Ἐθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam."h.16-17.

³⁰ Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wil Āy Al-Qur'ān*, Juz II (Mekkah: Dār al-Tarbiyah wa-al-Turāth, 2010).h.35-43.

³¹ Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azīm*, Juz I (al-Riyāḍ: Dār Ṭaybah lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 1999).h.448-449.

Muhammad SAW., was a Muslim and a follower of the Prophet Muhammad SAW., just as the Prophet Ibrahim was a *Hanif*³².

Western scholars argue that when reading the Qur'an, it is necessary to look at its pre-canonization, associated with the Late Antiquity period and the Near East context. This is a new offer offered by Western scholars in interpreting the Qur'an. From the perspective of Western scholars, exegetes are fixated on the post-canonization text of the Qur'an. Western scholars criticize the textual approach and offer an alternative with a contextual approach that expands the perspective of Late Antiquity and the Near East. Late Antiquity is related to time, and the Near East is related to place. Interpreting it in the context of Late Antiquity and the Near East means that the perspective in understanding the Qur'an is even broader. The Qur'an is not only understood when it was revealed and post-canonization but is also related to Mecca and Medina. Late Antiquity and Near East view the Qur'an as a series of processes influenced by Antiquity and the region around Mecca and Medina³³.

Böwering said there was a need for a revision of the text of the Qur'an, which was read from pre-Islamic times to reinterpretation after the Prophet Muhammad SAW. According to Luling, interpretive reconstruction must consider dogmatic, historical, and tribal motifs. In the context of *Hanif*, interpretation requires a sociohistorical reading of the word. At that time, the Arab tribe in Mecca tried to fight against the Hellenistic trinity of Christianity, which had spread in central Arabia in Mecca. They want to be free from the Christian religion that has dominated and been entrenched for two centuries, making the holy place of Mecca its church. Among the Ebionites, non-trinitarian Christianity, represented by the pre-Islamic god-seekers or *Hanifs* mentioned in Muslim tradition, is allied to trinitarian Christianity and its various sectarian currents. The *Hanifs* were attracted to Muhammad's leadership because he rejected the divinity of Christ and their adherence to an angelic Christology that interpreted Christ as both an angel and a creature. Meanwhile, the pagan Arab tribes considered Muhammad's call to return to the religion of Ibrahim, Ishmael, and the tribes as a national agenda. However, Muhammad was considered to have betrayed the Hanīf Ebionite group when he used his warlike jihadist methods to advance the national agenda of the Arab tribes³⁴. Historically, the word *Hanif* in this story describes a community that rejects idol worship among Arab tribes.

The word Hanīf, apart from being in the Qur'an, is also found in poetry literature at the time of Muhammad which was written by three people, namely *Hudhail*, a tribe who settled between Mecca and Medina, *Sakbr al-Ghairy*, an idol worshiper, and *Abū Dhu'aib*, a Muslim who was born in 622 AD. Islamic tradition knows several religious thinkers before Muhammad who are referred to as Hanīf, namely follows *Warakah bin Naufal*, *'Ubaidillāh bin Jahsh*, *'Uthman bin al-Huwairith*, *Zaid bin Amr bin Nufail*, *Urbab bin al-Bara*, *'Umayyah bin. Abi-s-Salt*, *Kuss bin Sa'idab*, *Abu Kais Sirmah bin Abi Anas*, *Khalid bin Sinan bin Ghaith*, *Abū Kais Saifi ibn al-Aslat*. This description shows that apart from

³² de Blois, "Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and Ḥanīf (Ἐθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam."h.18.

³³ Hamid and Healey, "Late Antique Near Eastern Context : Some Social and Religious Aspects."

³⁴ Gerhard Böwering, "Recent Research on the Construction of the Qur'ān," in *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2007).h.76-77.

being used in the Qur'an, *Hanif* has also been used in other literature and that there have been people who have been *Hanif* since pre-Islamic times³⁵.

Furthermore, Lyall believes that the origin of the term *Hanif*, as far as his research is concerned, comes from the Hijaz and the western part of the Arabian Peninsula. The doctrine of the *Hanif* religion is different from Christianity, but some people of the *Hanif* religion are also followers of Christianity, but it is different from Islam. The characteristic features of the *Hanif* religion are the rejection of idol worship, taboos on certain foods, worship of the God of Abraham, and ascetic practices³⁶. Lyall concluded that the origins of the word *Hanif* cannot be explained well, like other words in the Qur'an and ancient poetry. The meaning of Hanif is a term that means religion, although according to him, there is nothing certain about the source of the word. The acceptable hypothesis is Sprenger's opinion, which comes from Magoliouth's article and the Hebrew word *Hanef*, which means heretical godless, or hypocritical. Many similar cases have the same root but have different meanings in Hebrew and Arabic³⁷.

In Syriac *hanpā* means non-Christian pagan or pagan. Although *hanif* and *hanpā* have the same root, they are different forms. In Babylonian and Palestinian Jewish Aramaic, the root *h-n-p* means to deceive or flatter. The word Hanif in Mandaic is called *h'nypy'*, which means false gods, then *h'nypwt'*, which means worship of false gods, and *hwnpn'*, which means hypocrite. The word Hanif, which has the same root, has different meanings in Christian and Islamic literature. In Christian Arabic, *Hanif-Hanafi-Sabi* means Pagan, and *Al Hanafiyyah* means Paganism. In Islamic Arabic, *Hanif* is the nickname of the Prophet Ibrahim, and people who adhere to his religion are called Muslims. Furthermore, *Al Hanafiyyah – Al Hanifah* means Ibrahim Religion, meaning Islam. It should be emphasized that the word heathen in the New Testament does not always have a negative connotation. Paul declared himself the apostle to the Gentiles. According to his teachings, Jesus promised salvation to Jews and Gentiles. To partake of this promise, the Gentiles did not need to become Jews; they were not subject to the law of Moses, for Christ had "made us free"³⁸. Interpreting *Hanif* as an infidel shows that the faith of Prophet Abraham before the existence of Judaism could be accepted as truth³⁹.

In his Thesis, Osmat argues, in line with the opinion above, that *Hanif* first appeared in Ancient Aramaic and Biblical Hebrew, meaning pollution or wickedness. In Syriac, *Hanif* mentions the characteristics of Paganism. The rise of orthodox Christianity and Judaism changed its meaning to Paganism or heresy. In the second half of the 6th century, the word *hnp* was adopted by heterodox monotheists in Arabia, thus becoming a new word in Arabic. It has a new meaning for the new alternative religious groups that emerged within a few decades and became the forerunners of Islam. Finally, Osmat quotes Frank Griffel's opinion that the meaning of Hanif is a theological concept, which means original character or original monotheism; these two meanings are the main understanding of Hanif, which is based on Surah Ar Rum verse 30⁴⁰.

³⁵ Charles J. Lyall, "The Words 'Ḥanīf' and 'Muslim,'" *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1903.h.772-773.

³⁶ Lyall.h.773.

³⁷ Lyall.h.781.

³⁸ de Blois, "Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and Ḥanīf (Ἐθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam."h.19-20.

³⁹ de Blois.h.24.

⁴⁰ Ghasan Osmat, "FROM 'PAGANISM' TO 'MONOTHEISM': A Theory on the Semantic Reversal of the Semitic Root HNP" (McGill University, 2018).h.90-91.

De Blois provides a critical view of *Hanif's* meaning polemic with a question. For de Blois, it is not a question: "Who is the community known as Hanif?" but the important question is, "What does the term hanif mean? Moreover, why is it applied to Ibrahim?" De Blois rejects Beeston's hypothesis that links the *hanif* of the Qur'an with non-Christian and non-Jewish monotheism in several inscriptions in South Arabia, especially inscriptions that mention the god *Rahmānān*. There is no real reason to think that this was the case, i.e., there is no intrinsic connection between the term *hanif* and the content of these inscriptions, nor is there anything to suggest that the monotheists were *Hanif*. De Blois tends to interpret the word *Hanif* as infidel and accuses the word Hanif of being misinterpreted by many Muslim writers⁴¹.

In contrast to de Blois, Munim Sirry tends to agree with Hamilton Gibb, who said that by looking at several verses of the Qur'an, pre-Islamic monotheism is most openly recognized, and its character is presented most clearly and completely. There is no reason to ignore the possibility that the natural Arab monotheists were called *hanafa* before the advent of Islam. Thus, at the time of the Prophet, the word *Hanif* had a monotheistic meaning in one of its various meanings. Based on Muslim sources, some scholars have developed historical reconstructions of the *hanifiyya* as the origins of Muhammad's prophetic mission⁴². The Prophet Muhammad himself before Islam was a *Hanif* because the Prophet Muhammad used to meditate in the *Hirā'* cave to contemplate God's creation and never bowed down to idols⁴³.

Furthermore, Munim Sirry argues that the word *Hanif* has been used in the Qur'an to describe society or ideals. There are four meanings of this word, namely, first, adherents of any religion that is pure and real; second, natural religion itself, not part of the scriptural tradition; third, the description of the Ibrahim religion as the true religion; fourth, people who are neither Jews nor Christians. The use of the word *Hanif* has different meanings, which shows that there is no definite and clear conception regarding its meaning. Munim Sirry said that Qur'anic exegetes in the classical period considered *hanif* to be part of a set of expressions whose precise meaning was unknown and whose interpretation was considered a subject of legitimate scientific dispute. Munim Sirry appreciates the open-mindedness of classical tafsir scholars who are more open in interpreting the word *Hanif*. However, in post-*Ṭabarī* tafsir, the word *Hanif* acquires a more fixed meaning, namely adherents of a straight and true religion who are equal to Muslims⁴⁴.

Munim Sirry seems inclined to interpret the word *Hanif* as a monotheistic religion. In another writing, Munim Sirry quotes Surah Ali Imran verse 85 and Surah Al Baqarah verse 62, which gives the impression that these two verses are contradictory. Munim Sirry said Islam in Surah Al Baqarah is not interpreted exclusively as an institutionalized religion but as an inclusive religion, the religion of the Prophets. If Ali Imran verse 85 is understood as an exclusive verse, it does not mean that it cancels Surah Al Baqarah verse 62 because, according to him, the meaning of Islam contains the meaning of submission to God, belief in the afterlife, and the implementation of good deeds. Although it is acknowledged that there are several differences in the Shari'a of the prophets, the

⁴¹ de Blois, "Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and Ḥanīf (Ἐθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam."h.52.

⁴² Munim Sirry, "The Early Development of the Quranic Hanif," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 56, no. 2 (2011).h.365.

⁴³ Hamid and Healey, "Late Antique Near Eastern Context : Some Social and Religious Aspects."h.92.

⁴⁴ Sirry, "The Early Development of the Quranic Hanif."h.366.

essence is one, namely submission and obedience to Allah as conveyed by all the prophets. God has implanted a form in humanity in its original state or nature of pure faith. Munim Sirry also quoted *al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī* in interpreting Al Baqarah verse 62, namely, at the gate of happiness, name, title, and group are no longer important whether they are called Jews, Christians, or Sabeans, the most important thing is to believe in God, the Last Day and do Good⁴⁵.

By interpreting *Hanif* as monotheism, the conflict is polytheism, not other religious groups, namely Jews or Christians. This means that our attitude is to uphold the oneness of God rather than having many Gods⁴⁶. Thus, every tendency towards monotheism is formed as a natural religion. If someone is Muslim, Jewish, or Christian, in essence, it is Islam that still maintains monotheism⁴⁷. The word Islam is defined as surrender or submission to God, but mainstream Muslims in modern times emphasize Islam as a formal and distinct religious system because they follow the normative traditions of Muhammad. In short, Islam must follow the pillars of Islam and faith. Here lies the difference in understanding the words *Hanif* and Islam⁴⁸.

Conclusion

The study of the word *Hanif* in the Qur'an has had many long debates, and no extensive academic debate compares to it. The Qur'an has a close relationship with the traditions of Judaism and Christianity and the region around the Hijaz. This relationship will enrich the Qur'an interpretation, called the Late Antiquity and Near East approach. In the study of classical Islamic interpretation, *Hanif* has five meanings: the person who performs the Hajj in Mecca; obeys; circumcision; a religion that worships the One God; and Islam. Western scholars have tried to study the origins of the word *Hanif*, which is found in other languages before Islamic Arabic. In Syriac, *hanpā* means non-Christian pagan or pagan, then in Babylonian and Palestinian Jewish Aramaic, the root word *h-n-p* means to deceive or flatter. Furthermore, in Hebrew, the word *Hanef* means heretical, godless, or hypocritical. The word *Hanif* in Mandaic is called *h'nypy'*, which means false gods, then *h'nypwt'*, which means worship of false gods, and *hwnpn'*, which means hypocrite. In Christian Arabic, *Hanif-Hanafi-Sabi* means Pagan, and *Al Hanafiyyah* means Paganism. In Islamic Arabic, *Hanif* is the nickname of the Prophet Ibrahim, and people who adhere to his religion are called Muslims.

There are debates over conflicting meanings in Western scholarly studies of the word *Hanif*. One of the opinions was put forward by de Blois, who rejected that the meaning of *Hanif* was associated with non-Christian and non-Jewish monotheistic groups. De Blois tended to interpret *Hanif* as infidel and said that Muslim writers had misinterpreted it. Munim Sirry quoted Hamilton Gibb's opinion as a position to reject De Blois' opinion. Munim Sirry interprets *Hanif* as monotheism, which means worshipping the one and only God. The reason refers to history, which shows that there were non-Jewish and non-Christian monotheistic people in pre-Islamic times.

⁴⁵ al-'Allamah al-Sayyid Muhammad Husayn al- Ṭabaṭabā'ī, *Al-Miṣṣān : An Exegesis of the Qur'an*, ed. 'Allamah Sayyid Sa'īd Akhtar Rizvi, Volume 1 (Sydney: Tawheed Institute, 2020).h.225.

⁴⁶ Massimo Campanini, "GOD, HUMANITY, PROPHECY," in *THE QUR'AN THE BASICS*, ed. Oliver Leaman (New York: Routledge, 2007).h.59.

⁴⁷ Massimo Campanini, "Islam and The Qur'an," in *THE QUR'AN THE BASICS*, ed. Oliver Leaman (New York: Routledge, 2007).h.6.

⁴⁸ Muhamad Ali, "Religious Pluralism and Freedom in Islam," in *Freedom of Religion and Religious Pluralism*, ed. Md Jahid Hossain Bhuiyan and Carla M. Zoethout (Leiden: Brill, 2023).h.37.

With the meaning of *Hanif* as monotheism, the attitude of submission to God Almighty is the true meaning of *Hanif* without considering one's religion.

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