Arba: Jurnal Studi Keislaman
p-ISSN: 3090-9260 | e-ISSN: 3090-6547
Vol. 2, No. 4, (October 2026), pages: 356-376
https://ejournal.albahriah-institut.org/index.php/arba

OPEN ACCESS

Epistemic Validity of the *Makkiyah-Madaniyah Sūrah* Dating: Reassessing Orientalist Philology through Islamic Historical Traditions

Abdulla Al Rahat*
Islamic University, Kushtia, Bangladesh, 7003
Email: rahatabdullah72428@gmail.com

Syed Maksudur Rahman
Islamic University, Kushtia, Bangladesh, 7003
Email: dmaksud@ahis.iu.ac.bd

Article History	Submitted	Revised	Accepted	Available Online
	2026-06-20	2026-09-26	2026-10-12	2026-10-26

Abstract
The debate regarding the Meccan-Medinan chronology presents an epistemological issue: Western philological reconstruction relies on linguistic, stylistic, thematic, and historical-contextual inferences, whereas the Islamic tradition utilizes reports from the Companions (*ṣaḥāba*) and Successors (*tābiʿīn*), hadith, and *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) through the critical analysis of chains of transmission (*sanad*) and textual content (*matn*). This study evaluates the epistemic validity of both approaches by comparing their types of evidence, verification mechanisms, patterns of correspondence, and sources of divergence in dating the *sūrah*s. The research employs a qualitative study utilizing a critical comparative-historical, philological, and epistemological approach. The corpus includes Western scholarship on Qur'anic chronology alongside literature on *ʿulūm al-Qur'ān* (Qur'anic sciences), hadith, and *asbāb al-nuzūl*; sources are analyzed through thematic selection, source criticism, mapping dating arguments, and triangulation between transmission narratives and textual indicators. The analysis reveals three primary patterns: reports provide explicit evidence regarding the context of revelation via transmission channels, whereas philology primarily yields inferential dating based on the text's internal characteristics; alignment between the two reinforces the chronology when reports possess adequate transmission support and textual indicators demonstrate coherence, while divergences arise chiefly in *sūrah*s or verses characterized by conflicting reports, disputed contextual attributions, or ambiguous stylistic indicators. Criticism of *sanad* and *matn* enables the verification of the information's origins, continuity, and coherence. At the same time, textual analysis tests internal consistency and detects chronological patterns not always revealed in the reports. Consequently, epistemic validity is complementary: reports serve as the primary basis when transmission can be verified, while philology functions as a control mechanism and a means to enrich the evidence—integrating the two yields a more transparent reconstruction of the chronology, without equating the standards of proof for each source type.

Keywords: *Makkiyah-Madaniyah*; Orientalist Philology; Islamic History; Epistemology of the Qur'an; Chronology of Revelation

Corresponding author: rahatabdullah72428@gmail.com*
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Abstrak

Perdebatan mengenai kronologi *Makkiyah-Madaniyah* menghadirkan persoalan epistemologis ketika rekonstruksi filologis Barat bertumpu pada inferensi linguistik, stilistika, tematik, dan konteks historis, sedangkan tradisi Islam menggunakan riwayat sahabat, tābiʿīn, hadis, dan *asbāb al-nuzūl* melalui kritik sanad dan matan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi validitas epistemik kedua pendekatan dengan membandingkan jenis bukti, mekanisme verifikasi, pola korespondensi, serta sumber-sumber divergensi dalam penanggalan surah. Penelitian ini menggunakan studi kualitatif dengan pendekatan komparatif-historis kritis, filologis, dan epistemologis. Korpus mencakup karya kronologi Al-Qur'an dari kesarjanaan Barat serta literatur *ʿulūm al-Qur'ān*, hadis, dan *asbāb al-nuzūl*; sumber-sumber dianalisis melalui seleksi tematik, kritik sumber, pemetaan argumen penanggalan, serta triangulasi antara transmisi riwayat dan indikator tekstual. Hasil analisis menunjukkan tiga pola utama: riwayat memberikan bukti eksplisit mengenai konteks pewahyuan melalui jalur transmisi, sedangkan filologi terutama menghasilkan penanggalan inferensial berdasarkan ciri internal teks; kesesuaian keduanya menguatkan kronologi ketika riwayat memiliki dukungan transmisi yang memadai dan indikator tekstual menunjukkan koherensi, sementara divergensi muncul terutama pada surah atau ayat yang memiliki variasi riwayat, atribusi konteks, atau indikator stilistika yang ambigu. Kritik sanad dan matan memungkinkan pengujian asal-usul, kesinambungan, dan koherensi informasi, sedangkan analisis tekstual berfungsi untuk menguji konsistensi internal serta mendeteksi pola kronologis yang tidak selalu terungkap dalam riwayat. Validitas epistemik karenanya bersifat komplementer: riwayat menjadi basis utama ketika transmisi dapat diverifikasi, sementara filologi berfungsi sebagai kontrol dan pengayaan bukti. Integrasi keduanya menghasilkan rekonstruksi kronologi yang lebih transparan tanpa menyamakan standar pembuktian untuk setiap jenis sumber.

Kata Kunci: *Makkiyah-Madaniyah*; Filologi Orientalis; Riwayat Islam; Epistemologi Al-Qur'an; Kronologi Pewahyuan

Introduction

The study of *Makkiyah* and *Madaniyah* (Meccan and Medinan) classifications serves as a crucial tool for reconstructing the evolution of Qur'anic discourse throughout the period of revelation. Chronological classification influences how exegetes interpret shifts in theological, ethical, social, and legal orientations, while also helping to situate specific Qur'anic statements within the historical context of their revelation (Stefanidis, 2024). Issues arise, however, because the chronology of *sūrah*s is not always established using the same types of evidence or inferential procedures. The *ʿulūm al-Qur'ān* tradition relies on reports from the Companions (*ṣaḥābah*) and Successors (*tābiʿīn*), *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) data, scholarly transmission, and thematic or linguistic indicators (Qadafy, 2021); conversely, modern studies utilize historical criticism, linguistic analysis, stylistics, compositional structure, and thematic evolution as bases for dating (Dodds, 2023). These methodological divergences raise epistemic questions about the provenance of evidence, mechanisms of justification, the degree of connection between data and revelation events, and the criteria for assessing the strength of chronological inferences.

Discrepancies in dating results illustrate these issues in concrete terms. Certain *sūrah*s—such as al-Raḥmān, al-Insān, al-Zalzalah, and al-Muṭaffifīn—are frequently debated, revealing a lack of alignment between traditional *Makkiyah-Madaniyah* classifications and modern chronological reconstructions. The *ʿulūm al-Qur'ān* tradition itself contains varying accounts of specific *sūrah*s, so that a single *sūrah* might receive multiple chronological attributions in classical literature (Reynolds, 2011). Modern reconstructions, meanwhile, yield different arrangements based on linguistic indicators, the evolution of literary forms, verse length, thematic shifts, and hypothesized compositional layers (Saenong, 2025). This discrepancy reveals an issue more fundamental than a disagreement over classification: each system uses different assumptions to turn evidence into chronological claims. While a linguistic feature may indicate historical development, the link between that feature and the date of revelation still requires inference; similarly, while a historical report may provide chronological information, the strength of the resulting claim depends on transmission quality, redactional variations, narrative context, and cross-source corroboration. Consequently, chronological discrepancies constitute a methodological issue that must be tested against evidence, rather than resolved simply by choosing one classification system over another.

Previous studies have expanded the toolkit for dating the Qur'an, yet each leaves unresolved issues relevant to epistemic evaluation. Kabakcı (2020) constructed a chronological system based on the evolution of language, style, and themes, resulting in an influential periodization—though some dating determinations still rely on historical inferences drawn from the text's internal characteristics. Wang (2021) shifted the focus from the *sūrah* as a fully integral unit to the possibility of gradual composition and assembly, raising questions about the assumptions needed to identify compositional units and their order of formation. Lawson (2021) developed a chronology based on shifts in style, themes, and the evolution of the prophetic mission, yet his approach faces challenges when identical literary characteristics appear across different phases. Goudarzi (2025) subsequently developed a literary-historical approach by situating *sūrah*s within the environment of oral communication and the socio-religious context of Late Antiquity; this approach broadens the understanding of the *sūrah*'s textual function while shifting the focus from linear dating to the processes of communication and the evolution of discourse.

Abdullah (2022) developed analyses of linguistics, stylistics, rhetorical structure, and composition as indicators for periodization, whereas Amir et al. (2023) combined modern sources with Islamic tradition, demonstrating the possibility of a more integrative reading. Meanwhile, Aljawarneh et al. (2025), grounded in *ʿulūm al-Qur'ān*, affirmed the status of *riwāyah* (narrative reports) as a crucial source for the *Makkī-Madanī* classification; however, their analysis stopped

at authenticating the reports without comparatively examining how narrative and textual evidence yield different chronological justifications. Existing literature has produced an increasingly diverse array of dating tools. Still, it has not provided an evaluation framework that systematically reconciles provenance and the critical analysis of narrative transmission with textual coherence, explanatory power, corroboration, and the historical alternatives employed by philological approaches. This gap involves more than just a lack of comparison between classification results; the unresolved issue lies in the standards used to determine why a specific chronological claim warrants a particular level of confidence. This study addresses that gap by comparatively evaluating the sources, justification mechanisms, inference procedures, and limits of certainty inherent in both dating traditions, using cases of *sūrah*s that exhibit chronological divergence as a testing ground.

Stemming from these issues, this study poses four primary questions: how do epistemological assumptions and inference procedures shape *sūrah* dating within the philological-historical approach; how do narrative traditions construct and validate *Makkī-Madanī* claims through transmission, the criticism of chains of authority (*sanad*) and textual content (*matn*), and narrative corroboration; how do these two evidentiary systems generate points of convergence and divergence when applied to cases of *sūrah* chronology; and under what conditions can a dating claim achieve robust epistemic justification? The research aims to reconstruct the epistemological structures of the philological approach and the *riwāyah* tradition; compare their types of evidence and validation mechanisms using explicit criteria; examine their points of convergence and divergence through relevant chronological cases; and formulate an evaluative framework for assessing the strength of *Makkī–Madanī* claims. The study's rationale stems from the methodological premise that the strength of a chronology is not determined solely by an approach's ability to produce a coherent timeline; the validity of a claim also depends on the quality of evidence, the transparency of inferences, cross-source corroboration, and the capacity to account for conflicting data. Consequently, this research seeks to generate a more precise conceptualization of epistemic validity in the study of Qur'anic chronology and to clarify the relationships between transmission evidence, textual evidence, and historical reconstruction.

Method

This research is a qualitative library-based study employing a critical comparative-historical design and epistemic evaluation. It integrates source criticism, philological analysis, and inferential critique to assess the validity of *Makkī–Madanī* dating. The units of analysis comprise claims regarding the dating of verses or *sūrah*s, narratives linking the revelation of verses to specific times and contexts, and philological arguments used to establish relative or absolute chronologies. Primary sources include works on *ʿulūm al-Qur'ān* (Qur'anic sciences), hadith, *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), and *tafsīr* (exegesis) that contain

chronological data, as well as Orientalist philological works that explicitly propose chronological reconstructions; secondary sources include journal articles, monographs, and contemporary academic studies. Sources were selected based on direct relevance, chronological proximity, textual integrity, transmission independence, and evidential capacity, while accounting for inter-source dependencies. Data collection involved searches of catalogs and academic databases using selected keywords, applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, and extracting data into a matrix recording the object, source, evidentiary text, transmission path, type of argumentation, and level of certainty. Analysis involved source criticism, evidence criticism, and inference criticism; each data point was evaluated based on authenticity, independence, coherence, corroboration, historical plausibility, and explanatory adequacy—while avoiding double-counting of evidence and confirmation bias—to consistently determine whether the evidence supported, constrained, or left the chronological claim undetermined.

Results and Discussion

The Epistemological Basis of Orientalist Philology Regarding the Dating of Meccan and Medinan *Sūrahs*

Dating *sūrah*s via a philological-historical approach begins with the epistemic challenge of obtaining temporal information when the date of revelation is not directly observable. This stance positions the text as the primary site for identifying traces of change that can be linked to a chronological sequence. Linguistic features, discourse structures, rhetorical patterns, lexical choices, verse lengths, and thematic configurations serve as initial data, which are then assigned chronological value through inference. Thus, textual data is not synonymous with a temporal claim; the distinction lies in the bridging assumptions that explain why a specific feature is deemed relevant to a particular stage in the revelation's evolution. The Nöldeke model remains highly influential in Qur'anic chronology, as it divides the Meccan period into distinct developmental phases before contrasting them with the Medinan phase (Nöldeke, Schwally, Bergsträßer, & Pretzl, 2013).

The concept of textual autonomy within the historical-critical approach requires a balanced interpretation to avoid the misconception that the text is entirely severed from its historical context. Methodologically, autonomy means prioritizing information from the text's structure and character when formulating chronological hypotheses (Yeager, 2023). Consequently, the relationship between text and history is inferential rather than observational. Dating is not established by a text explicitly stating a date, but by reasoning about shifts in linguistic form and discourse—changes presumed to mirror the evolution of Qur'anic communication. Neuwirth (2019b) expands upon this model by focusing on *sūrah* structure, verbal evolution, rhetorical quality, and the text's relationship with the intellectual milieu of Late Antiquity. This approach shows that the epistemic status of the findings

depends on the selected data, the units of analysis, the underlying historical assumptions, and the procedures linking observations to chronological conclusions.

The relationship between linguistic characteristics and temporality lies at the heart of philological dating mechanisms. A feature acquires chronological significance only when its occurrence reveals a distribution or shift that can be mapped relatively across a set of textual units. Verse length, for instance, serves merely as a descriptive metric until it is compared with terminology, syntactic patterns, literary structures, and thematic developments. Temporal significance emerges from correlating features, rather than from the deterministic operation of any single characteristic. Sinai (2017) incorporates mean verse length alongside terminological, literary, and thematic features to reconstruct the relative chronology—establishing relationships of priority and posteriority—among Qur'anic proclamations. This logic applies to the distinct characteristics that distinguish Qur'an [96]:1–5 from Qur'anic passages with more extended discourse structures. The opening verses of al-ʿAlaq exhibit short units, a driving rhythm, and concise phrasing; these characteristics become chronologically significant when read alongside other rhetorical and thematic patterns associated with the early phase.

Nöldeke's model shows how shifts in textual characteristics translate into a scheme of temporal development. His classification goes beyond assigning *sūrah*s to the Meccan or Medinan categories; instead, it maps the Meccan period's internal evolution through changes in style, rhythm, content, and mode of delivery. Features such as very short verses, intense sound patterns, eschatological imagery, and an emphasis on calls to faith are treated as elements of the configuration pointing to the early phase. In contrast, a shift toward longer, more complex discourse is interpreted as indicating a subsequent stage (Nöldeke et al., 2013). This mechanism yields a relative chronology, establishing relationships of "earlier" versus "later" rather than pinpointing exact dates of revelation. The Qur'anic passage [96]:1–5 illustrates how formal and thematic characteristics combine to suggest an early phase, while the construction of lengthy legal discourse—such as in the Qur'an [2]:183–187—exhibits distinct textual traits typically associated with the Medinan context. The contrast between these two examples does not, however, prove a direct correlation between verse length and date; rather, chronological validity emerges when multiple indicators align consistently and are supported by a plausible historical explanation.

Montgomery Watt and Richard Bell highlight even more profound epistemological implications. Watt and Bell (1995) do not invariably treat a *sūrah* as a homogeneous unit of revelation; instead, they allow for the possibility that it contains shorter segments with distinct histories of formation. Their system rests on two crucial assumptions: that the standard unit of revelation may be a short passage, and that the text underwent revision during its formation. These

assumptions have direct consequences for dating. If a *sūrah* is viewed as being composed of multiple units, the date sought is no longer merely the date of the *sūrah* itself, but rather the temporal position of each section and the compositional relationships between them. *Sūrah* al-Baqarah, for instance, need not be treated as a single chronological block simply because the entire *sūrah* is situated within the Medinan period; the epistemological inquiry shifts toward the possibility of distinct layers of discourse and function.

Neuwirth further develops this by integrating structural, rhetorical, linguistic, and historical-literary analyses. Her approach to the *sūrah* extends beyond individual features—such as verse length or vocabulary—to encompass inter-sectional relationships, the progression of arguments, patterns of repetition, shifts in register, and the rhetorical function of the composition as a whole (Neuwirth, 2019b). The concept of "innertextual chronology" in The Qur'an: Text and Commentary also reflects an effort to establish a temporal sequence based on internal textual relationships and the nature of the proclamation, rather than relying solely on the Mushaf order for analysis (Neuwirth, 2022). Late Antiquity provides an interpretive context that helps clarify vocabulary, discourse, and conceptual structures, rather than substituting for textual data (Sessa, 2022). Neuwirth's position thus illustrates an internal differentiation within Western scholarship: while the use of internal data remains crucial, the methodology for interpreting the interplay among text, history, and chronology has evolved significantly.

The inferential structure of philological dating can be articulated through a distinction between textual features, indicators, linking assumptions, and chronological claims. Textual features exist at the level of observation—such as verse length, rhyme schemes, syntactic forms, specific terminology, forms of address, or rhetorical configurations. A feature becomes an indicator when a distribution reveals a specific tendency across groups of texts. Linking assumptions then explain why that tendency is presumed to reflect temporal change. Chronological claims emerge in the final stage, when the researcher establishes a relative sequence based on relationships among elements.

Epistemic limitations arise when a single indicator appears in more than one phase or when a specific feature allows for multiple alternative explanations. Themes such as eschatology, *tawḥīd* (divine oneness), the stories of the prophets, and moral exhortations, for instance, are distributed across various parts of the Qur'an, preventing them from serving as independent determinants of chronology. Verse length presents a similar issue, as variations in length may stem from differing rhetorical functions, argumentative structures, or communicative purposes. Forms of address also do not always carry exclusive temporal significance, since shifts in audience and rhetorical strategy can vary the use of specific formulas. This creates underdetermination, in which a single data configuration can be explained by more than one chronological hypothesis (Johannesson, 2024). Circularity also arises if a

feature is used to establish a specific period. That established period is then used to validate the same feature as an indicator of that period.

Islamic Historical Tradition as a *Makkiyah-Madaniyah* Knowledge Base

Constructing a chronology of revelation in the Islamic tradition relies on transmitted information that links temporal claims to informants historically close to the era of revelation (Öztürk, 2015). Chronological boundaries matter because the *Makkiyah* and *Madaniyah* categories are distinguished primarily by the phases before and after the *Ḥijrah*, rather than solely by the geographical location of revelation (Yahyaoui, 2024). Consequently, determining the status of a *sūrah* or verse requires information that links the text to specific events or periods in the Prophet's life. Narrations serve this function by conveying information from early generations to subsequent ones—whether through hadith, statements by Companions (*ṣaḥābah*), opinions of the Successors (*tābiʿīn*), or reports later compiled in works of exegesis (*tafsīr*) and the sciences of the Qur'an (*ʿulūm al-Qur'ān*). Al-Zarkashī (1997) illustrates the complexity of this corpus by compiling various accounts regarding the classification of *sūrah*s and verses, including the exceptions within them.

The transmitted corpus used to establish the chronology of revelation comprises sources that vary in form and degree of proximity to the events. Statements by Companions regarding the timing of a verse's revelation, *marfūʿ* hadith attributed to the Prophet, *mawqūf* reports traced back to a Companion, and *maqṭūʿ* opinions from the *tābiʿīn* cannot be accorded the same evidentiary weight without further scrutiny. This distinction matters because attribution to an early generation does not, by itself, guarantee traceable transmission (Little, 2022). The exegetical chain of transmission (*isnād*) from Ibn ʿAbbās via ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah offers a clear example. Narrations transmitted through this chain are widely used in exegetical literature—including by al-Ṭabarī and al-Suyūṭī—even though ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah did not receive the exegesis directly from Ibn ʿAbbās. Ibn Ḥajar (1997) and al-Suyūṭī (1994) discussed this issue and offered differing explanations for the possible presence of an intermediary among Ibn ʿAbbās's students.

The report concerning al-Muṭaffifīn illustrates how a transmission account can serve as a temporal anchor, linking a revelation to a historical event that can be situated within the timeline of the Prophet's life. Al-Wāḥidī (2005) transmits the account from Ibn ʿAbbās through the chain of Ismāʿīl ibn al-Ḥasan, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Bishr, ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Wāqid, al-Ḥusayn ibn Wāqid, Yazīd al-Naḥwī, and ʿIkrimah, leading back to Ibn ʿAbbās. The report links the revelation of the opening verses of Sūrah al-Muṭaffifīn to fraudulent weighing and measuring in Medina after the Prophet's arrival; thus, the account carries chronological implications pointing to the post-Hijra period. Its evidential value lies in linking the report to the occasion of revelation with an event that holds a specific temporal position in the Prophet's

history. However, an *isnād* (chain of transmission) does not automatically make the account an authentic *marfūʿ* hadith. The report appears in works on *asbāb al-nuzūl*. Still, it requires evaluating its chain of transmission and comparing with other data.

Epistemic issues become clearer when transmission chains yield inconsistent classifications. Al-Raʿd is a key example, as the literature on *al-makkī* (Meccan) and *al-madanī* (Medinan) classifications includes opinions assigning it to both. Al-Suyūṭī (1994) notes that narrations transmitted via Mujāhid from Ibn ʿAbbās and via ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah indicate the *sūrah* is Meccan, whereas narrations transmitted via al-ʿAwfī from Ibn ʿAbbās, Ibn Jurayj from ʿUthmān ibn ʿAṭā' from Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid from Ibn al-Zubayr, and Qatādah point to a Medinan classification. He later reconciles these differences by stating that al-Raʿd is fundamentally Meccan, except for a few verses revealed in Medina. This situation shows that transmission does not always yield a single, readily accepted chronological conclusion.

Assessing chronological narrations requires distinguishing between the existence of information, the traceability of transmission, and the strength of the resulting inference. Examining the *isnād* can reveal the chain's continuity or discontinuity, the narrators' identities, and the quality of transmission across generations (Ridho, Mubarok, & Wahilmi, 2026). Critical analysis of narrators provides information about their narrating capacity (Hartati et al., 2025), while comparing the *matn* can reveal similarities, differences, or editorial developments across chains (Arrahawan, 2020). Such data does not conclude the assessment of the *sanad*, as a report possessing a transmission chain must still be situated within a broader evidentiary context. The *riwāyah* concerning al-Muṭaffifīn, for instance, gains chronological relevance through its link to events in Medina. In contrast, the *riwāyah* regarding al-Raʿd highlights the need to weigh attributions that do not entirely align. The contrast between these two cases shows a hierarchy of evidence in using such reports. Accounts with clearer temporal links and more traceable transmission chains may carry greater weight. In contrast, those involving issues with the *sanad* or conflicting attributions require more circumspect conclusions.

The evidential function of a *riwāyah* also depends on the nature of the information it conveys. *Asbāb al-nuzūl* reports link verses to specific events (Rippin, 1988); *sīrah* provides a sequence of events in the Prophet's life (Sertkaya, 2022); hadith transmits information through diverse modes of transmission (Gül & Divani, 2026); and works of *tafsīr* preserve the views of the Companions (*ṣaḥābah*) and Successors (*tābiʿīn*) through networks of narration (Alias & Yusof, 2024). These source types are not simply additive. A report regarding the cause of revelation becomes chronologically relevant only when the event described has a determinable temporal placement. *Sīrah* accounts situate that event within a historical sequence, while transmission chains provide information about the report's connection to the initial informant. Works of *tafsīr* containing such reports must also be read critically, as the exegete's role as a compiler does not mean endorsing all the material cited.

Al-Ṭabarī (2001) and al-Wāḥidī (2005), for example, compiled reports that differed in character and transmission lineage. Consequently, using their works as sources requires identifying the reports' origins, rather than merely accepting the authority of the books that contain them.

Variations in classification found in the literature highlight the need to distinguish between different degrees of acceptance regarding *ijmāʿ*. A dominant view within *ʿulūm al-Qur'ān* texts does not automatically satisfy the technical definition of *ijmāʿ*. Classifications that eventually become mainstream may emerge through the accumulation of reports, scholarly acceptance, the *tarjīḥ* (weighing) of competing opinions, or a tendency to uphold the most robust classification (Mohamed, 2020). The case of al-Raʿd illustrates the importance of this distinction, as divergent opinions reveal space for evaluation between early authorities and later scholars. Al-Zarkashī (1997) and al-Suyūṭī (1994) discuss the possibility that verses revealed after the Hijrah appear within a *sūrah* generally categorized as *Makkiyyah*; thus, the identity of the *sūrah* as a whole does not necessarily align with the chronology of every individual unit of revelation within it. This structure demonstrates how uncertainty is managed through various approaches: selecting stronger reports, reconciling reports that can be harmonized, distinguishing between levels of chronological units, or maintaining the status of a debate when evidence remains inconclusive.

Methodological Correspondences and Divergences between Orientalist Philology and the Islamic Tradition of Narration

A comparison of the *Makkiyah-Madaniyah* chronology shows several points of correspondence between the Islamic historical tradition and philological reconstruction. In Nöldeke's traditional classification and chronological system, the nine *sūrah*s of interest here are equally placed in the *Makkiyah* or *Madaniyah* categories: al-ʿAlaq, al-Muddaththir, al-Muzzammil, al-Qalam, and al-Fātiḥah belong to the *Makkiyah* group, while al-Baqarah, Āli ʿImrān, al-Nisā', and al-Tawbah belong to the *Madaniyah* group. In Nöldeke's order, al-ʿAlaq, al-Muddaththir, and al-Qalam belong to the early *Makkiyah* phase, and al-Muzzammil is also in that phase; al-Fātiḥah is placed at the end of the early *Makkiyah* phase as the 48th *sūrah* in chronological order. As for al-Baqarah, Āli 'Imrān, al-Nisā', and al-Tawbah are among the twenty-four *sūrah*s which Nöldeke places in the *Madaniyah* period (Nöldeke et al., 2013). In contrast, the Islamic classification tradition developed through transmitted information about the time and place of revelation, while still recognizing historical differences in determining the status of several *sūrah*s or parts of *sūrah*s (Al-Suyūṭī, 1994; Al-Zarkashī, 1997). Watt and Bell (1995) then explicitly differentiated between traditional Islamic views on the dating of revelation and dating theories developed by European scholars.

Table 1.
Comparison of *Makkiyah-Madaniyah* chronology

Sūrah	**Classification of dominant narrative traditions**	**Position in Nöldeke's chronology**	**Form of correspondence**	**Comparative value**
Al-ʿAlaq (96)	*Makkiyah*; associated with the early period of revelation	Early *Makkiyah*	Same	Examining the fundamental differences between historical anchors and textual periodization.
Al-Muddaththir (74)	*Makkiyah*; relates to the initial phase of the mission	Early *Makkiyah*	Same	Indicates a historical agreement without procedural uniformity
Al-Muzzammil (73)	*Makkiyah*; some verses are a subject of debate within the tradition.	Early *Makkiyah*	Same at the *sūrah* level	Examining the issue of *sūrah* units versus verse units
Al-Qalam (68)	*Makkiyah*; There is a discussion regarding exceptions to certain paragraphs	Early *Makkiyah*	Same at the *sūrah* level	Demonstrating that similarities in *sūrah* classification can mask compositional issues
Al-Fātiḥah (1)	Majority view: *Makkiyah*; there is an opinion that it is *Madaniyah*	Early *Makkiyah*	Same as Nöldeke's position, but not absolute in history	Testing the weight of the majority history against alternative histories
Al-Baqarah (2)	*Madaniyah*	*Madaniyah*	Same	Example of strong correspondence at the general classification level
Āli ʿImrān (3)	*Madaniyah*	*Madaniyah*	Same	Indicating agreement with the post-*Ḥijrah* revelation group

Al-Nisā' (4)	*Madaniyah*	*Madaniyah*	Same	Demonstrating correspondence with the *Madaniyah* phase
Al-Tawbah (9)	*Madaniyah*	*Madaniyah*	Same	Demonstrating agreement without making the methods identical

Table 1 illustrates why the term "correspondence" should be used with caution. For those nine *sūrah*s, the main point of agreement is the macro-level classification. For instance, al-ʿAlaq is placed based on historical accounts linking it to the initial revelatory experience. In contrast, Nöldeke's chronology assigns it to the early Meccan phase using a periodization system derived from the text's developmental characteristics. Nöldeke also groups al-Muddaththir, al-Muzzammil, and al-Qalam in the early period; however, the Islamic tradition does not invariably treat all verses within a single *sūrah* as a chronologically homogeneous unit. This principle matters because the *ʿulūm al-Qur'ān* tradition acknowledges the possibility of Meccan verses appearing within a predominantly Medinan *sūrah*, or vice versa (M. Alashqar, 2024). Watt and Bell (1995) even distinguish between "traditional Islamic views of dating" and "European theories of dating," examining the sequence of ideas as an indicator of chronology.

The case of al-Raʿd reveals a more telling divergence, as the Islamic tradition itself contains conflicting attributions regarding its Meccan or Medinan status. Some accounts—notably those of Mujāhid (from Ibn ʿAbbās) and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah (from Ibn ʿAbbās)—classify it as Meccan, whereas other accounts—such as those transmitted via al-ʿAwfī (from Ibn ʿAbbās), Ibn Jurayj (from ʿUthmān ibn ʿAṭā' from Ibn ʿAbbās), Mujāhid (from Ibn al-Zubayr), and Qatādah—point to a Medinan classification (Al-Suyūṭī, 1994). Nöldeke (2013) subsequently places al-Raʿd within the third Meccan period—the late Meccan phase—in the chronological order of revelation he established. This discrepancy cannot be adequately explained simply by saying that philology yields different conclusions than the *riwāyah*; the case of al-Raʿd shows that both narrative traditions and modern chronological reconstructions rely on evidentiary tools and methodological assumptions that require scrutiny.

Al-Muṭaffifīn presents a different set of issues. Traditions of *tafsīr* and *ʿulūm al-Qur'ān* record divergent opinions regarding the status of this *sūrah*: al-Qurṭubī (1999) notes that it is considered Meccan according to Ibn Masʿūd, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, and Muqātil, yet Medinan according to al-Ḥasan and ʿIkrimah; he also documents views suggesting the *sūrah* is Medinan—save for its final eight verses—or that it was revealed somewhere between Mecca and Medina. Al-Suyūṭī (1994) likewise notes these differences, linking them to reports from Ibn ʿAbbās concerning the practices of the people of Medina regarding weights and measures. Nöldeke (2013) assigns al-

Muṭaffifīn to the first Meccan period, a classification based on chronological considerations, the *sūrah*'s character, and its formal evolution. This comparison reveals a sharper methodological divergence than in al-ʿAlaq. The epistemological issue lies in the unit of analysis selected: should the entire *sūrah* be viewed as the product of a single phase, or does its composition allow for distinct temporal layers? Thus, al-Muṭaffifīn illustrates how classification discrepancies can arise from differing models of the object itself, rather than merely from divergent interpretations of the same evidence.

Al-Raḥmān presents a more complex case regarding classification. Al-Suyūṭī (1994) notes that most scholars consider al-Raḥmān Meccan, deeming this view stronger based on narrations—transmitted by al-Tirmidhī and al-Ḥākim via Jābir—about the recitation of this *sūrah* to the jinn in a context set in Mecca. Nöldeke (2013) also places al-Raḥmān among the early Meccan *sūrah*s, based on a chronological periodization constructed from the *sūrah*'s textual characteristics. Thus, the narrative tradition and Nöldeke's chronology yield the same conclusion; however, this similarity is better understood as convergence of conclusions rather than cross-validation. Cross-validation requires relatively independent evidence that separately supports the same hypothesis; when two conclusions are reached through different inferential rules, similar results indicate convergence, but their status as independent confirmation requires further methodological substantiation (Blowes, 2026).

Al-Ḥajj and al-Insān illustrate the importance of distinguishing between *sūrah* classification and the dating of compositional units. In Nöldeke's chronology (2013), al-Ḥajj is placed in the Medinan period, while al-Insān is assigned to the second Meccan period; yet, both are *sūrah*s whose Meccan-Medinan status is disputed within certain *ʿulūm al-Qur'ān* classification traditions. These discrepancies show that the Meccan or Medinan category at the *sūrah* level cannot always be treated as a uniform date for every verse or section within it. Watt and Bell (1995) explain that Muslim scholars have long recognized that certain sections of a *sūrah* can be classified differently from others; meanwhile, modern scholarship on dating can use traditional information about specific events while also considering the progression of ideas and textual characteristics. Watt and Bell (1995) also emphasize that sections linked to specific historical events rest on a firmer dating foundation, whereas chronology based on the sequence of ideas is more interpretive.

Al-Zalzalah illustrates the issue of evidence-based conflict resolution. Exegetical sources record two primary positions: Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (2006), al-Baghawī (1999), and Ibn Kathīr (2004) are among the proponents of the *Makkiyah* classification, while al-Zajjāj (1998), al-Wāḥidī (2005), and al-Zamakhsharī (1987) favor the *Madaniyah* classification. Nöldeke (2013) places al-Zalzalah within the early *Makkiyah* group. This comparison demonstrates that a philological result aligning with one branch of the tradition does not, in itself, prove that philology has

confirmed the historical report (*riwāyah*). Rather, a specific model of inference yields a conclusion that coincides with one of the traditional positions. Methodologically, the more pertinent question is why a particular tradition accepts one type of evidence as more decisive than another. The answer cannot be found through the *Makkiyah-Madaniyah* labels alone; it must be sought by examining the authority structure of the reports, potential conflicts in transmission, the weight of internal indicators, and the rules applied to resolve such discrepancies.

A comparison of these cases reveals four concretely observable mechanisms of divergence. First, the hierarchy of evidence differs: the *riwāyah* tradition prioritizes lines of transmission and authoritative attribution, whereas philology situates internal textual evidence within a chronological reconstruction. Second, the unit of analysis differs: the *ʿulūm al-Qur'ān* tradition distinguishes between the status of the *sūrah* and the *āyat*, whereas Orientalist chronology often arranges *sūras* according to a broader developmental sequence. Third, the rules for resolving conflicts differ: contradictory *riwāya*s require assessing transmission and attribution, whereas philological reconstruction requires comparing textual characteristics and their relative positions within a chronological model. Fourth, assumptions about the relationship between text and history differ. Watt and Bell (1995) illustrate this complexity through their discussion of the text's history, the formation of the Qur'an, written-document theories, and chronology, showing that the philological approach should not be reduced to mere reading.

The Epistemic Validity of Dating Meccan and Medinan *Sūrah*s from the Perspective of the Islamic Narrative Tradition

Epistemic validity in dating *Makkiyah* and *Madaniyah* revelations refers to the degree to which a chronological claim is justified by seven parameters: provenance, traceability, authentication, corroboration, non-circularity, explanatory adequacy, and uncertainty control. Provenance assesses the origin and the source's proximity to the subject of the claim; traceability evaluates the ability to trace the transmission path or the formation of the argument; authentication examines the credibility of the transmitter and the nature of the evidence; corroboration seeks relatively independent support; non-circularity checks whether the classification being proven was already used as a premise; explanatory adequacy evaluates the model's ability to explain the entire dataset without ad hoc assumptions; and uncertainty control requires that every inference state the limits of its certainty.

Provenance and traceability offer an advantage when a report has an identifiable transmission path, clear attribution, and a plausible chronological link to Islam's early generations. This advantage is evident in *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports or *sūrah* classifications attributed to the Companions (*ṣaḥābah*) and Successors (*tābiʿīn*), as the object of evaluation is not merely the text's characteristics but the testimony regarding its transmission. The report of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah from Ibn ʿAbbās, for instance, is frequently cited in exegesis, yet the transmission link to Ibn

ʿAbbās does not involve a direct meeting; consequently, its informational value cannot be equated with reports possessing more complete and unbroken chains of transmission (*isnād*) (Al-Suyūṭī, 1994; Al-ʿAsqalānī, 1997). Al-Wāḥidī (2005) also demonstrates that *asbāb al-nuzūl* material exists as a collection of reports with varying levels of documentation. These findings shift the *isnād* from a guarantee of truth to one component of justification. High provenance strengthens the information's origin, while high traceability facilitates auditing the transmission. Neither approach fully resolves the issue of a report's historical authenticity.

Authentication requires more than verifying the existence of a *sanad*. While critical assessment of narrators, the status of the *sanad*, the analysis of transmission paths, and scrutiny of the *matn* can enhance a report's reliability, these results must still be distinguished from verification of the chronological event itself. The classification of Sūrah al-Raʿd illustrates this challenge, as exegetical traditions contain reports pointing to both Meccan and Medinan origins. Such conflicts cannot be resolved by selecting the seemingly strongest *sanad*; evaluators must compare the quality of the respective transmission paths, the status of attribution, the possibility of editorial harmonization, and the content's consistency with other evidence. The repetition of a narration in the works of al-Ṭabari, al-Wāḥidī, al-Suyūṭī, and later scholars does not constitute independent corroboration if all these authors rely on the same initial transmission path. Two relatively distinct transmission paths or a report supported by independent textual evidence provide a stronger foundation. Thus, authentication establishes a source's reliability, while corroboration determines whether external evidence reinforces that reliability.

Avoiding circularity is a crucial test for dating methods that rely on a text's internal characteristics. Circular reasoning arises when a *sūrah* is assigned to a specific period based on a particular premise, and the characteristics identified after that classification are then used to validate the initial classification. A methodological issue arises in periodization schemes that base the sequence on stylistic evolution, only to use that resulting sequence to interpret—or confirm—that very evolution. This criticism does not apply uniformly to all Western scholars, as Nöldeke, Watt, Bell, Neuwirth, and Sinai each employ distinct methodological tools. Nöldeke (2013) constructs his periodization based on the character of the text's development; Watt and Bell (1995) focus on units of revelation and potential reordering; Neuwirth (2019b) emphasizes *sūrah* structure and rhetorical context; and Sinai (2017) combines internal analysis with textual history and external sources. This diversity demonstrates that Orientalism is not a monolithic epistemic category.

Corroboration requires a symmetrical evaluation of both the narrative tradition and philology. Narrative traditions should not be dismissed simply because they originate from Islamic sources, nor should philological findings be rejected merely because they are inferential. In the case of Sūrah al-Raḥmān, for instance,

reports classifying it as *Makkiyah* must be weighed against internal indicators and other evidence, rather than tallied simply by how many texts cite them. A similar approach applies to al-Muṭaffifīn and al-Zalzalah. If transmission-based reports suggest one classification while rhetorical structure, vocabulary, or stylistic patterns point to a different chronological placement, this discrepancy warrants further examination. Corroboration is most valuable when the supporting evidence comes from a line of inquiry that does not depend entirely on the primary evidence. Early manuscripts, paleography, epigraphy, the history of the Arabic language, radiocarbon dating, and the context of Late Antiquity can provide additional evidence for the text's history, even though each addresses different questions. Radiocarbon dates for manuscript materials, for instance, are not synonymous with the date of revelation; their evidentiary value lies in establishing the chronological limits of the text's material history.

Explanatory adequacy shifts the focus from which method is "correct" to which model best explains the totality of the data. Al-Muṭaffifīn serves as a useful test case because its classification intersects with indicators regarding content, discourse structure, and dating traditions. Al-Zalzalah likewise shows the need to distinguish between macro-classification and relative position within the sequence of revelations. A model that categorizes a *sūrah* as Meccan or Medinan must be tested against divergent data, not merely against supporting indicators. An explanation gains strength when the model can account for conflicting reports, variations in textual units, and differing indicators without requiring additional assumptions for every anomaly. Sadeghi (2011) employs a stylometric approach—examining average verse length and the frequency of specific morphemes as stylistic markers—to confirm the grouping of Qur'anic texts into seven chronological phases. Meanwhile, Neuwirth (2019a) uses *sūrah* structure, textual and rhetorical characteristics, and linguistic features as criteria to explain the Qur'an's chronological development. Such evidence possesses a heuristic value distinct from that of traditional reports. Its epistemic value increases when statistical or structural findings are replicable and not derived from the very chronological categories they seek to substantiate.

Controlling for uncertainty is a prerequisite to ensuring that dating results do not exceed the limits of the available evidence. Historical inquiry grapples with uncertainties such as the *marfūʿ*, *mawqūf*, or *maqṭūʿ* status of reports, variations in *isnād*, differences in wording, conflicting accounts, and the temporal gap between the events themselves and the process of codification. Philology faces uncertainties regarding corpus representativeness, the boundaries of units of analysis, inter-indicator dependencies, the selection of statistical models, and the possibility of textual alteration. Déroche (2016) demonstrates the importance of codicology and paleography for the history of Qur'anic manuscript transmission, while Shoemaker (2022) integrates linguistic history, radiocarbon dating, oral transmission, and the

social context of Late Antiquity. Stylometric research by Mahmoudi and Abbasalizadeh (2019) further expands quantitative testing of the Qur'anic chronology through statistical and computational analysis. Each technique generates a distinct type of uncertainty; therefore, conclusions must be expressed in degrees of support rather than absolute certainty.

The distinction between macro-classification and detailed chronology determines the final weight assigned to each type of evidence. Classifications such as *Makkī* or *Madanī* are categorical claims that do not necessarily require the same precision as establishing the sequence of *sūrah*s or dating individual verse units. Historical reports may carry significant weight when the attribution to a Companion is clear, the transmission chain is auditable, the accounts do not conflict seriously, and there is relatively independent internal or external corroboration. Such conditions are particularly suitable for macro-level claims. Claims about detailed chronology require evidence sensitive to relative sequencing, allowing structural, stylistic, linguistic, and textual indicators to play a larger role. Al-ʿAlaq, al-Muddaththir, al-Raḥmān, al-Ḥajj, and al-Insān demonstrate that a hierarchy of evidence cannot be applied mechanically to all types of claims. When historical accounts are weak, fragmented, contradictory, or unavailable, philology can carry greater relative weight if multiple independent indicators converge. Conversely, when transmission evidence is strong and internal evidence yields only a very loose probability, the historical account takes priority.

Conclusion

An epistemic comparison reveals that the Meccan-Medinan chronology rests on varying levels of justification depending on the type of evidence employed: narrative traditions provide chronological data through traceable transmission—subjected to scrutiny regarding chains of transmission (*sanad*) and textual content (*matn*)—whereas Orientalist philology yields inferential reconstructions based on linguistic, stylistic, thematic, and historical indicators. Key findings indicate that narrative traditions offer an epistemic advantage for establishing chronology when transmission quality, content coherence, and chronological relevance can be verified; philological evidence remains valuable for confirmation, correction, or enrichment, provided controls against interpretive subjectivity temper its application. This framework grounds chronological validity not in the identity of the source tradition, but in the robustness of verification procedures and each source's evidential capacity. Methodologically, this implies that the dating of *sūrah*s requires a transparent hierarchy of evidence alongside the triangulation of narratives, texts, and historical contexts. This study is limited to epistemological analysis and does not yet examine all disputed *sūrah*s, internal narrative variations, or concrete conflicts between textual evidence and transmission data. Future research should examine specific case-study *sūrah*s, expand the narrative-philological corpus, and formulate

procedures for resolving evidential conflicts through measured interdisciplinary analysis.

Acknowledgments

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Author Contribution Statement

AR contributed to conceptualization, methodology development, data collection and analysis, manuscript drafting, and revision and finalization. SMR contributed to developing the conceptual framework, literature review, interpretation of research findings, substantive editing, and critical review of the manuscript. Both authors approved the final version of the manuscript and are responsible for the integrity and accuracy of the publication's content.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that this manuscript was prepared without any conflicts of interest—whether financial or non-financial—that could influence the objectivity, integrity, conduct of the research, interpretation of results, or presentation of findings. The entire research and writing process was conducted independently, free from any party that could introduce bias into the manuscript.

AI Usage Statement

The author declares that artificial intelligence (AI) was used solely to refine language, correct grammar, and format the manuscript. The author generated all research results, findings, concepts, ideas, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions without using AI to produce the scientific content. The author bears full responsibility for the manuscript's accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content and ensures that AI did not replace academic judgment, the research process, or the author's scientific responsibility.

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