

THE HAGARISM THEORY OF MICHAEL COOK: THE QUR'AN AND HADITH IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM

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Abstract

The Hagarism theory developed by Michael Cook and Patricia Crone claims that Islam is the result of assimilation from Jewish, Christian, and pre-Islamic Arab cultural traditions. The Prophet Muhammad is accused of being the founder of a reform movement inspired by Judaism, which He and His followers were initially seen as part of a broader monotheistic tradition, before eventually forming a separate religious identity calling itself Muslims. This study aims to examine the Hagarism theory from the perspective of religious syncretism to assess the claim that the Qur'an and Hadith are products of the fusion of previous religions. This research employs a critical analysis method by reviewing the primary sources used by Cook and Crone and comparing them with Islamic historiography. The approach applied includes a literature review of orientalist texts and counterarguments from Muslim scholars. The findings indicate that the Hagarism theory has methodological weaknesses, as it relies on non-Muslim sources while disregarding Islamic traditions. The syncretic approach used in this theory also tends to overlook the originality of Islamic teachings. This study emphasizes the importance of a more objective academic approach in orientalist studies of Islam.

Keywords: Hagarism; Michael Cook; al-Qur'an; Hadith

TEORI HAGARISME ALA MICHAEL COOK: AL-QUR'AN DAN HADIS DALAM PERSPEKTIF SINKRETISME AGAMA

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Abstrak

Teori Hagarisme yang dikembangkan oleh Michael Cook dan Patricia Crone mengklaim bahwa Islam merupakan hasil asimilasi dari tradisi budaya Yahudi, Kristen, dan Arab pra-Islam. Nabi Muhammad dituduh sebagai pendiri gerakan reformasi yang terinspirasi oleh Yudaisme, di mana beliau dan para pengikutnya awalnya dipandang sebagai bagian dari tradisi monoteistik yang lebih luas, sebelum akhirnya membentuk identitas keagamaan yang terpisah dengan menyebut diri mereka sebagai Muslim. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji teori Hagarisme dari perspektif sinkretisme agama guna menilai klaim bahwa al-Qur'an dan Hadis merupakan produk dari peleburan agama-agama sebelumnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode analisis kritis dengan menelaah sumber-sumber primer yang digunakan oleh Cook dan Crone serta membandingkannya dengan historiografi Islam. Pendekatan yang digunakan mencakup telaah pustaka terhadap teks-teks orientalis dan tanggapan dari para sarjana Muslim. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa teori Hagarisme memiliki kelemahan metodologis karena bergantung pada sumber-sumber non-Muslim dan mengabaikan tradisi Islam. Pendekatan sinkretis yang digunakan dalam teori ini juga cenderung mengesampingkan orisinalitas ajaran Islam. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya pendekatan akademik yang lebih objektif dalam studi orientalis terhadap Islam.

Kata Kunci: Hagarisme; Michael Cook; al-Qur'an; Hadis.

INTRODUCTION

Studies on the origins of Islam and the historical status of the Qur'an and hadith have long been subjects of intense debate in both Islamic studies and Orientalism. One of the most radical approaches within the Western critical tradition is the Hagarism theory, developed by Michael Cook and Patricia Crone in 1977. In *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, Cook and Crone argue that early Islam emerged through a process of syncretism, a blending of Jewish, Christian, and local Arab traditions. According to their view, the Qur'an and hadith should not be regarded as self-contained or purely authentic sources, but rather as historical constructions deeply shaped by cross-religious and cultural interactions.¹

Academic discourse reveals ongoing debate on this issue. Certain scholars question the usefulness of the term *syncretism*, arguing that the assumption of a "pure religion" or "pure culture" is historically unfounded. Nevertheless, many others maintain that the concept remains valuable because it highlights the cross-cultural and cross-religious dynamics that shape the formation and development of religious traditions. The doctrinal tensions that arise from syncretic encounters often serve as catalysts in defining and consolidating religious identities.² the study of religious history, syncretism is understood as a phenomenon that often arises when a religion develops in an environment rich with other cultural and belief influences. However, understanding of this concept is not uniform. Syncretism is seen by some as a threat to the purity of a religious tradition, while others view it as a natural mechanism in religious evolution. Academic discourse shows that there is debate among scholars. Some consider syncretism to be a problematic concept, because the assumption of a "pure religion" or "pure culture" is considered incorrect and impossible to find in historical reality.

For example, Martin Luther recognized syncretism as a natural process in the evolution of a community's religious and cultural identity, one that is not necessarily negative or deviant. In this sense, the intricate web of cultural interactions, through trade routes, migration, colonialism, and social exchange among communities of

¹ Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World* (Cambridge University press, 1977).

² John Bowker, "The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions," preprint, Oxford University Press, 1997, 931.

differing faiths, has historically contributed to the shaping of religious identities and practices.

However, most scholars support the preservation of the concept of syncretism because it is precisely through the analysis of cross-cultural and cross-religious interactions that we can understand how a religious tradition is formed and developed. The doctrinal disputes arising from the issue of syncretism itself often form the foundation of beliefs in religious traditions. Therefore, studies on the origins, history, and debates surrounding syncretism remain crucial to explaining the dynamics of religion amid cultural interactions. Luther, for example, understood syncretism as a natural process in the development of a community's religious and cultural identity, which is not always viewed negatively or as deviant.³ Intricate cultural interactions through trade routes, colonialism, and social relations between communities with different belief backgrounds often become external factors that help shape the religious identity and practices of a community.⁴

Therefore, the study of syncretism and the debates surrounding it remain essential for understanding the dynamic processes through which religions emerge, adapt, and transform within broader cultural contexts, and in terms of culture and language, syncretism appears in the form of assimilation and Arabization of languages from other tribes and nations.⁵ Syncretism comes from the Greek word *synkretamos*, which means unity. In the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language, this term refers to the fusion of various schools of thought or schools of thought for the sake of balance and harmony. Etymologically, syncretism in English has a similar meaning, with equivalent terms in various languages, including Arabic (*tawfiqiyyah* and *imtizājiyyah*), which emphasize the mixing of different elements.⁶ In social, cultural, and religious studies, syncretism is often associated with the process of assimilation or integration of various belief systems, practices, and values. The choice of the term in Arabic shows

³ Jacob Pandian, "Syncretism in Religion," *Antropos* 101, no. 1 (2006): 229–33.

⁴ Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (SAGE Publications, 1994).

⁵ Mohamad Anang Firdaus Machsun, "Linguistic Complexity in Hadith: An Examination of the Role and Origins of 'Al-Kalimat al-Mubtakirah' in Hadith," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 24, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v24i2.4634>.

⁶ Idris Siregar et al., "Sinkritisme Dalam Studi Agama," *Jurnal Penelitian Multidisiplin Terhadap* 8, no. 6 (2024): 214–21.

that this concept is also relevant in the study of Islam and the Eastern world, which has a long history of cultural encounters and religious traditions.

According to Rick Brown, this syncretism phenomenon occurs in cultures and religions that produce new belief systems. Syncretism is defined as a mixture of worldviews that combine elements from various religions or beliefs. This means that if a community or individual mixes the teachings of their original religion with other beliefs, then it is called syncretism. Brown distinguishes syncretism from contextualization. Syncretism is related to beliefs and perspectives on God, religion, and the world. If someone combines Islamic and Christian beliefs in their beliefs, it is called syncretism. Meanwhile, contextualization is related to the way someone practices their religion in a particular culture without changing the core teachings of that religion. For example, a Christian in a Muslim environment may dress like a Muslim and use Islamic terms, but still adhere to Christian teachings. In conclusion, syncretism is the mixing of different religious teachings in one's beliefs and can form a new belief system, while contextualization is the adjustment of the way of worship to be more in accordance with the local culture without changing the core teachings of the religion. Therefore, the author rejects the idea that syncretism is part of contextualization.⁷

Orientalists often viewed Islam as the product of the influence of earlier religions, especially Judaism and Christianity. The debate thus centers on whether Islam is a product of syncretism and influence by earlier religions (the Orientalist view) or a distinct, original revelation aligned with and confirming the monotheistic tradition symbolized by Judaism and Christianity, as maintained by Muslim scholars. This ongoing scholarly discourse engages with historical, theological, linguistic, and textual analyses of the Quran and the prophetic life.⁸

In summary, Orientalists argue that Islam was influenced by Judaism and Christianity based on textual and thematic overlaps, while the counter-argument stresses Islam's divine originality and its role as the confirmation and culmination of the earlier monotheistic

⁷ Rick Brown, "Contextualization without Syncretism," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 23, no. 3 (2006): 127–33.

⁸ Anshori, "Examining the History of Divine Religion: Theological Relations of Judaism, Christianity and Islam According to William Montgomery Watt," *Journal of Islamic Civilization* 4, no. 2 (2022): 100–112, <https://doi.org/10.33086/jic.v4i2.2687>.

faiths. Revisionist scholarship has highlighted the historical unreliability of classical Islamic literature written in the medieval period, as it is considered to be a misrepresentation of the facts, especially regarding the origins of the Qur'an and the biography of the Prophet Muhammad, which are considered later constructions. John Wansbrough proposed the "sectarian milieu" theory, which states that the Qur'an was born in an environment of theological debate between various religious sects, especially Judaism and Christianity, and not in the Arabian Peninsula, but in Iraq, the intellectual center of the Abbasid Caliphate and home to Jewish communities and rabbinic schools. Meanwhile, Christoph Luxenberg has proposed the controversial theory that the language of the Qur'an was not Arabic, but Syriac, arguing that many words in the Qur'an make more sense when interpreted in the context of Syriac language and culture. In general, revisionist scholarship challenges the traditional narrative of Islam and proposes alternative approaches that see the Qur'an as a product of broader social, political, and theological dynamics, rather than simply a revelation that emerged exclusively in the Arabian Peninsula.⁹

Previous studies have specifically examined Michael Cook's thought and its impact on Islamic historiography and Hadith studies. The debate thus centers on whether Islam is a product of syncretism and influence by earlier religions (the Orientalist view) or a distinct, original revelation aligned with and confirming the monotheistic tradition symbolized by Judaism and Christianity, as maintained by Muslim scholars. This ongoing scholarly discourse engages with historical, theological, linguistic, and textual analyses of the Quran and the prophetic life.¹⁰

In summary, Orientalists argue that Islam was influenced by Judaism and Christianity based on textual and thematic overlaps, while the counter-argument stresses Islam's divine originality and its role as the confirmation and culmination of the earlier monotheistic faiths.¹¹ For example, the article "Neo-Skepticism of Michael Cook and

⁹ Muzayyin, "Kesarjanaan Revisionis Dalam Studi Al-Qur'an," *Esensia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 16, no. 2 (2015): 207–23.

¹⁰ Anshori, "Examining the History of Divine Religion."

¹¹ Busthomi Ibrohim, "A Brief Look Into Orientalists' View on Islam and the Muslim," *Alqalam* 18, no. 90 (2001): 94–109; Klawing Arjuna and Munawir, "History of The Quran In Western Orientalism Paradigm," paper presented at International Conference on Islam, Law, and Society (INCOILS), *Conference Proceedings*, 2022.

Norman Calder towards the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad” by Ali Masrur investigates Cook’s skepticism regarding the authority of hadith and the concept of the common link, as well as how the phenomenon of the spread of *isnad* is seen as a form of competition in *isnād* criticism among the early Islamic schools of thought.¹² Furthermore, the article “The Genealogy of Isnad in the Orientalist Perspective: A Critical Study of Michael Cook’s Thought” by Muhammad Ghifari and Ulfah Zakiyah discusses Cook’s idea that the *isnād* system is not exclusive to the Islamic tradition, but rather bears similarities to the Jewish system in terms of textual transmission.¹³ The article “External Criteria Theory and Its Implications for Hadith Studies: An Examination of Michael Cook’s Thought” by Muhammad Ghifari explains how Cook employed the external criteria theory to test the authenticity of hadith based on historical context and external criticism, rather than merely relying on *isnād* transmission.¹⁴

In addition, international research such as “Methodological Approaches in Qur’anic Studies: A Critique of Michael Cook’s Approach” by Jamil Akhtar provides a comparative analysis of Cook’s methodological approach in Qur’anic studies, highlighting his reliance on non-Muslim sources and his critique of traditional Islamic historiography.¹⁵ These studies indicate that Cook and other Orientalists tend to view Islamic texts both the Qur’an and the hadith through a skeptical and contextual lens, often in contrast to the approaches of traditional Muslim scholars.

In their studies, the assumption emerged that Islam did not develop independently, but rather through a process of assimilation and adaptation of preexisting religious traditions. This view is based on the similarities between Islamic teachings and elements found in earlier religions, such as the concept of monotheism, Sharia law, and several narratives in the Qur’an that are also found in Jewish and Christian scriptures. One of the most controversial theories put

¹² Ali Masrur, “Neo-Skeptisisme Michael Cook Dan Norman Calder Terhadap Hadis Nabi Muhammad,” *Theologia* 28, no. 1 (2017): 1–28.

¹³ Muhammad Ghifari and Ulfah Zakiyah, “Genealogi Sanad Dalam Perspektif Orientalis: Studi Kritik Atas Pemikiran Michael Cook,” *Refleksi* 20, no. 2 (2022): 169–92, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ref.v20i2.19755>.

¹⁴ M Ghifari, “Teori External Criteria Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Studi Hadis; Telaah Atas Pemikiran Michael Cook,” *Tahdis: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Al-Hadis* 14, no. 2 (2023): 161–79.

¹⁵ Jamil Akhtar, “Methodological Approaches in Qur’anic Studies: A Critique of Michael Cook’s Approach,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 104, no. 5 (2023).

forward by Orientalists is the theory of Hagarism, developed by Michael Cook and Patricia Crone.

This theory argues that Islam was originally a religious movement rooted in Jewish and Christian traditions, and that the formation of the Qur'an and the hadith was significantly influenced by the context of religious syncretism at that time. In this context, Hagarism represents one of the most radical approaches in Orientalist studies of early Islamic history, as it methodologically seeks to interpret the origins of Islam through non-Muslim sources and situates them within a framework of cultural religious assimilation.

In the article *Contextualization without Syncretism*, the concept of syncretism is distinguished from contextualization. Contextualization is defined as the process of adapting the delivery of religious teachings to make them easier to understand in a particular culture, without changing their essence. In contrast, syncretism is considered to have the potential to cause distortion or deviation in religious teachings.¹⁶ This conceptual distinction is important for understanding the position of Hagarism theory, because Cook and Crone explicitly interpret early Islam as the result of syncretism, not merely contextual adaptation.

Although Hagarism has been heavily criticized by Muslim scholars and other Orientalists even Cook himself later softened some of his initial radical claims this theory remains one of the most controversial milestones in modern Islamic historiography.¹⁷ The main criticisms of Hagarism include its bias towards non Muslim sources while rejecting the credibility of Muslim traditions, as well as its speculative tendencies without sufficient archaeological evidence . Nevertheless, Hagarism has opened up new methodological space to rethink early Islamic narratives from an interdisciplinary perspective, while raising fundamental questions about the relationship between Islam and earlier Semitic religions.¹⁸

The urgency of this research lies in the need for a critical reading of Hagarism, particularly in relation to the discourse of religious syncretism. First, this study helps to analyze the extent to which the theory attempts to interpret the Qur'an and hadith as products of religious interaction, rather than merely internal texts. Second, this analysis is important for distinguishing between syncretism and

¹⁶ Brown, "Contextualization without Syncretism."

¹⁷ Michael Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford University Press, 1983).

¹⁸ Cook, *Muhammad*.

contextualization in Islamic studies, thereby clarifying whether early Islam was truly a borrowed religion or a religion born with its own identity. Third, this research is relevant in the contemporary context, when academic dialogue between Orientalism and internal Islamic studies is increasingly necessary to strengthen the methodology of studying the Qur'an and hadith while responding to controversial theories with solid scientific arguments.

This article offers a new perspective in analyzing the Hagarism theory developed by Michael Cook and Patricia Crone, by highlighting it within the framework of religious syncretism. The main novelty lies in the approach that examines the extent to which the claim that the Qur'an and Hadith are the result of a combination of Jewish, Christian, and pre-Islamic Arab cultural traditions can be categorized as a form of syncretism.

In their seminal work *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, Cook and Crone (1977) argue that early Islam emerged not as an independent religious tradition, but as a political and religious movement shaped by interactions with surrounding Jewish and Christian communities, and that Muslim literary sources were composed too late to provide reliable historical information.¹⁹ Their argument builds on the textual skepticism initiated by John Wansbrough (1977), who treated the Qur'an as a product of sectarian debates in the broader Near Eastern religious milieu rather than as a revelation in a purely Hijazi context.²⁰

Unlike previous studies that focused primarily on historical or methodological criticism of the Hagarism theory, such as those advanced by Fred M. Donner (1998)²¹ and Chase F. Robinson (2003)²², this article specifically analyzes the elements of syncretism inherent in the theory. By situating Hagarism within the analytical framework of religious syncretism, this study aims to explore how Cook and Crone's claims correspond to patterns of cultural and religious

¹⁹ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World*. PP: 3-7; 15-20.

²⁰ John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, in *Qur'ānic Studies Today*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Prometheus Books, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315646657>.

²¹ Fred McGraw Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, in *The Darwin Press* (Princeton University Press, 1998). PP: 33-37.

²² Chase F Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). PP: 22-28.

blending documented in Late Antiquity, and whether these claims accurately describe the formation of Islamic scripture and tradition.

To achieve this, the study employs critical analysis of the primary sources used by Cook and Crone, especially non-Muslim historical records as surveyed in Robert G. Hoyland's *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (1997), and compares them with Islamic historiographical narratives found in early Muslim traditions.²³ This dual approach enables a more balanced understanding of how syncretic claims in Hagarism theory align or fail to align with the internal development of Islamic historiography.

In addition, this article also highlights Cook and Crone's methodological weaknesses, especially in relying on non-Muslim sources and ignoring Islamic historiography, and compares the orientalist approach with the perspective of Muslim scholars to present a more balanced analysis. In terms of contribution, this study broadens the understanding of how orientalists viewed Islam in the framework of cultural and religious interaction, and how their approach to the Qur'an and Hadith influenced Islamic studies in academia. Thus, this article not only critiques the theory of Hagarism, but also provides new insights into the position of Islam in orientalist studies and the dynamics of scholarship related to religious syncretism.

²³ Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, in *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (Princeton University Press, 1997), <https://doi.org/10.31826/9781463239602>.

Hagarism Theory in Key Concepts and Ideas

The theory of Hagarism was first introduced by Michael Cook and Patricia Crone in their work in the form of a book entitled *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* in 1977.²⁴ The book discusses the formation of Islamic civilization through a controversial historical approach. The discussion is divided into three main parts: *Whence Islam?*, *Whither Antiquity?*, and *The Collision*, which each explore the origins of Islam, the transformation of ancient civilizations, and the interactions and clashes that occurred in the process of the formation of Islam.

The first part, *Whence Islam?* consists of five sub chapters: *Judeo Hagarism*, *Hagarism without Judaism*, *The Prophet like Moses*, *The Samaritan Calques*, and *Babylonia*. In this section, the author tries to trace the roots of Islam by proposing that the early Islamic movement was heavily influenced by Jewish traditions. The concept of *Judeo Hagarism* emphasizes the close relationship between the early Muslim community and Jewish religious elements, while *Hagarism without Judaism* attempts to show how Islam developed by breaking away from these influences. The use of the term *The Prophet like Moses* indicates a comparison between Muhammad and Moses, reflecting the early Islamic approach to the concept of prophecy. Meanwhile, the discussion of *The Samaritan Calques* and *Babylonia* shows that there were linguistic aspects and Near Eastern cultural influences that helped shape the early identity of Islam.

The second section, *Whither Antiquity?*, consists of two sub chapters: *The Imperial Civilisations* and *The Near Eastern Provinces*. In this section, the author explores how Islamic civilisation emerged amidst the collapse of major civilisations, particularly the Roman and Persian Empires. The author argues that Islam was not simply a continuation of ancient civilisations, but was also a product of the social and political shifts that took place in the Near East. The final section, *The Collision*, contains seven detailed sub chapters: *The Preconditions for the Formation of Islamic Civilisation*, *The Fate of Antiquity I: The Hagarisation of the Fertile Crescent*, *The Fate of Antiquity II: The Cultural Expropriation of the Fertile Crescent*, *The Fate of Antiquity III: The Intransigence of Islamic Civilisation*, *The Fate of Hagarism*, *Sadduce Islam*, and *The Austerity of Islamic History*. This section examines the impact of the interaction between Islam and the

²⁴ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World*.

ancient world, and how Islam adopted and transformed elements of earlier civilisations. The terms Hagarisation of the Fertile Crescent and Cultural Expropriation of the Fertile Crescent indicate that the author sees the early development of Islam as a complex process of acculturation, involving not only cultural adoption but also the seizure of intellectual and social heritage from previous civilizations. As a highly controversial work, Hagarism offers a different perspective from the traditional narrative of Islam regarding its origins. The methodology used, namely an approach based on non Islamic sources such as Byzantine, Jewish, and Armenian records, is one of the main factors that makes this work widely criticized. This approach is contrary to the tradition of Islamic historiography which relies more on internal sources such as hadith and sirah. Even so, this book remains an important study material in academic discourse on Islamic historiography, especially in discussing the role of cultural and political interactions in the formation of early Islamic civilization.

The term Hagarism itself refers to Hajar (Hagar in English), the mother of the Prophet Ishmael, who in Islamic tradition is considered the ancestor of the Arab people. The term is widely used by early sources in Syriac,²⁵ Greek,²⁶ Coptic,²⁷ and Armenian²⁸ to describe the early Arab conquerors in Mesopotamia, Syria, and Egypt.²⁹ The Hagarism theory attempts to explain the origins of Islam with a different approach from traditional Muslim historiography. In their study, Cook and Crone propose that Islam was not an independently born religion, but rather the result of a process of assimilation of various previously existing religious and cultural elements, especially from pre Islamic Jewish, Christian, and Arab traditions. They write: "Hagarism is thus classed as a Pentateuchal religion."³⁰ This means that Hagarism is classified as a Pentateuchal religion.

²⁵ Sebastian Brock, *Syriac Views of Emergent Islam*, in *Groningen Oriental Studie*, IV (Peeters Press, 1980).

²⁶ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*. PP: 119-121.

²⁷ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World*. PP: 3-4.

²⁸ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*. PP. 121.

²⁹ Monkbrot, "Hagarenes," in *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia* (29 October, 2024).

³⁰ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World*. PP: 14.

In the author's analysis of Cook and Crone's book on pages 8 9, it is found that they reveal that they use the term Hagarism to describe the early Muslim community which they consider to be part of a religious movement rooted in the descendants of Ishmael and influenced by other monotheistic teachings. They reject the use of early Islamic sources such as sirah and hadith, arguing that these texts were composed long after the historical events occurred and are full of theological bias. Instead, they rely more on non Muslim sources, such as historical records from Byzantine Christians, Jews, and Aramaic sources. In their book, they say that there is no strong reason to assume that the bearers of this early identity called themselves "Muslims". The earliest dated occurrence of this term is on the Dome of the Rock in 691 CE, and outside the Islamic literary tradition, this term does not appear until well into the eighth century. However, the existing sources reveal other, earlier names for this community, which also fit the context of the ideas presented by Sebeos. This term appears in Greek as "Magaritai" in a papyrus from 642 CE, and in Syriac as "Mahgre" or "Mahgraye", which has been used since the 640s CE. The Arabic equivalent is muhajirun.

He states that in the naming of "Mahgraye," there are two main concepts that form the basis. The first is the genealogical aspect. Although somewhat forgotten in the Islamic tradition, one of the early sources in Syriac refers to the "Mahgraye" as the descendants of Abraham from Hagar. This suggests that this community was originally identified through lineage. In addition to this genealogical status, there is also an acquired status, which is fully preserved in the Islamic tradition, namely muhajirun as those who participated in the hijrah or exodus.

In the Islamic tradition, according to Cook, this exodus refers to the migration from Mecca to Medina, which is designated as the beginning of the Arab era in 622 CE. However, there is no early source that proves the historicity of this hijrah. In contrast, the sources reviewed in this chapter provide a more plausible alternative, namely the emigration of the descendants of Ishmael from Arabia to the Promised Land, and there are two arguments in favor of this alternative. In Islamic tradition, the muhajirun during the invasion of Palestine were only the leading group of the religious community that conquered the land.³¹ However, Greek and Syriac sources use the

³¹ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World*. PP: 8-11.

terms "Magaritai" and "Mahgraye" to refer to the entire community, not just a handful of leaders.³² Furthermore, Islamic tradition also records the use of the term hijra in the context of emigration not only within Arabia, but also from Arabia to the conquered land.³³ In fact, there is one tradition that implicitly narrows the purpose of the hijra to Palestine, saying: "There will be hijra after hijra, but the best of people will follow the hijra of Abraham." Based on this, the "Mahgraye" can be understood as the Hagarites who participated in the hijra to the Promised Land. This wordplay reflects the earliest identity of the faith that eventually developed into Islam.³⁴

Cook argues that the term Mahgraye is more appropriate for Muslims based on older non Arabic documents. In a Greek papyrus from 642 CE, the term used is Magaritai, while in a Syriac document from the 640s, the term found is Mahgre or Mahgraye. In addition, a letter written by a Christian figure named Jacob of Edessa before his death in 708 CE also includes the term Mahgraye to refer to Muslims, which in that context means people who believe Jesus is the son of Mary. The same term is also found in a Syriac document recording a debate between a follower of Amir Maslama and the Christian figure, Bet Hale, during the late Umayyad Dynasty, where Mahgraye is still used as a term for Muslims.³⁵

The Core Thoughts of Hagarism Theory

The Hagarism theory developed by Michael Cook and Patricia Crone is based on the assumption that Islam was not an independently born religion, but rather the result of a process of assimilation and syncretism of various previously existing religious traditions. The core of this theory focuses on several main ideas:

First, Islam was influenced by early Jewish and Christian traditions. Cook and Crone argue that early Muslim communities had close ties to Jewish groups in the Arabian peninsula, especially in terms of monotheism and the practice of religious law. They interpret early Islam as a reform movement inspired by Judaism, in which the

³² Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*. PP: 119-125.

³³ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World*. PP: 12.

³⁴ Christopher Melchert et al., *On Schacht's "Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence,"* in *Journal of Law and Religion*, vol. 15, no. 1/2 (Suhail Academy Lahore, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.2307/1051525>.

³⁵ Hasyim Asyari, "Dokumen Non-Arab Tentang Berita Kerasulan Muhammad Dan Awal Islam," *Humaniora* 18, no. 2 (2006): 93-101.

Prophet Muhammad and his followers were initially viewed as part of a broader monotheistic tradition, before eventually forming a separate religious identity.

They state that the Hagarites experienced a crisis of religious identity due to the combination of the concepts of Israel's redemption and the lineage of Ishmael. To overcome this dilemma, they developed a concept of prophecy that was uniquely Ishmaelite, emphasizing their relationship to Abraham and avoiding Christian messianism and the dominance of the teachings of Moses. In the process, Muhammad was initially positioned as a non scriptural warner, but then his role developed into a prophetic figure who was equated with Moses. This doctrinal evolution is also seen in the change in meaning of the term *furqan* from "redemption" to "revelation," reflecting the shift from the exodus narrative to the formation of a new religion. Thus, this theory highlights how early Islam was the result of an Arab community's attempt to construct its religious identity through the reinterpretation of existing traditions.³⁶

Second, the Qur'an and Hadith are considered not authoritative sources in reconstructing early Islamic history. Cook and Crone reject the use of traditional Islamic sources such as the *sirah nabawiyah* and *hadith*, because they are considered to have been compiled long after the time of the Prophet Muhammad and have undergone various revisions and interpolations. Instead, they rely more on non Muslim sources, such as historical records from Byzantine Christian, Jewish, and Armenian sources.

Cook argues that the implication of the term *Ahl al Kitab* indicates that early Muslims only recognized one holy book that was not theirs. Cook sees a continuation of this fundamentalism in two 7th century texts, namely the Letter of 'Abdallah bin Ibadh, which emphasizes an understanding of religion based on the Qur'an without much reference to the *hadith*, and the writings of Hasan al Basri, which show a similar tendency. From this, Cook hypothesizes that the rejection of oral traditions, both in Islam (such as the early *Ibadiyah* and *Mu'tazilah*) and in Judaism (such as the Karaites), may not have originated from Jewish influence on Islam, but instead developed independently in Islam and later influenced several groups within Judaism.³⁷

³⁶ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World*. PP. 16-17.

³⁷ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World*. PP: 38.

Third, the Hijrah and early Islamic expansion are seen as political movements, not purely religious movements. Hagarism theory emphasizes that Islam's success in conquering areas in the Middle East was due to political and military factors rather than purely religious factors. Cook and Crone argue that early Muslim expansion must be understood in the context of geopolitical changes in the region, including interactions with the Eastern Roman Empire and Sasanid Persia.

Cook argues that early Islam developed in the context of Near Eastern cultures that had undergone a long process of assimilation and transformation due to the rule of various empires, such as the Romans, Persians, and Greeks. They highlight that when the Arabs conquered Syria, Egypt, and Iraq in the 7th century, they did not find a homogeneous culture or one that was fully assimilated into the empire, but rather a complex cultural landscape with a new synthesis developing under Christian influence. In this respect, the Hijrah and early Islamic expansion are seen as political movements, not purely religious movements. Hagarism theory emphasizes that Islam's success in conquering areas in the Middle East was due to political and military factors rather than purely religious factors. Cook and Crone argue that early Muslim expansion must be understood in the context of geopolitical changes in the region, involving interactions with the Eastern Roman Empire and Sasanid Persia. Thus, early Islamic development was not only the result of religious revelation and teaching, but also of political dynamics and adaptation to pre existing social and cultural structures.³⁸

Fourth, early Islam is considered to have undergone theological reconstruction after interacting with Persian and Hellenistic cultures. In Cook and Crone's view, the development of Islamic teachings, including theological doctrines and Islamic law, was only truly formed after Muslims interacted with other great civilizations. They argue that the legal system and beliefs in Islam developed through the adoption and adaptation of Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian traditions.

Cook highlights how early Islam developed in the context of political and cultural interactions with the wider world, including Persia. The near extinction of Zoroastrianism is evidence of how the Islamic conquest not only changed the political landscape but also erased or restructured previous religious traditions. Cook sees that

³⁸ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World*. PP: 47.

post conquest Iranian identity could no longer rely on Zoroastrianism, so it was necessary to find a new form of expression within the framework of Islam.³⁹

In line with the Hagarism approach, Cook highlights how Shia became a vessel for Persian identity in Islam. With the concept of the infallible imam that is parallel to the concept of the Persian King, as well as a tendency towards esotericism that allows syncretism with local traditions, Shia provides space for the integration of Persian elements into Islam. The Mukhtar revolt and the Qaramithah's support for a Persian figure who was considered a messianic leader illustrate how Iranian elements attempted to negotiate their place in an Arab dominated Islamic world.

In this context, Cook's ideas in Hagarism emphasize that early Islam was not only an internal development, but also a product of interactions with Jewish, Christian, and Persian communities. Islam was not a monolithic entity from the beginning, but rather underwent changes through the social and political dynamics of the territories it conquered. Thus, the rise of Shiism and the role of Persia in Islam were not simply theological phenomena, but also part of a historical response to Arab dominance in post Conquest Islam.⁴⁰

Although Hagarism's theory provides a new perspective in the study of early Islam, its approach has been sharply criticized, especially for the lack of archaeological and philological evidence to support its claims.⁴¹ Muslim scholars and even some orientalist consider this theory to be too speculative and to ignore the primary sources in the Islamic tradition itself. Nevertheless, Cook and Crone's ideas remain part of the debate in orientalist studies of early Islamic history.

Cook's Methodology in Studying Traditional Islam

Michael Cook, with Patricia Crone, applies methods that differ from traditional approaches in studying early Islamic history. They rely more on non Muslim sources and reject the use of classical Islamic historiography, such as the sirah Nabawiyah, hadith, and tafsir, because they are considered historically unreliable. The methodology

³⁹ Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

⁴⁰ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World*. PP: 110.

⁴¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Vintages books, 1979).

used by Cook in studying traditional Islam can be summarized in the following aspects:

Philological Approach and Source Criticism: Cook uses a philological approach, namely examining historical texts based on linguistic aspects and the chronology of their compilation. In his study, he argues that many Islamic sources that exist today were compiled long after the historical events occurred, so they are at risk of distortion and interpolation. Therefore, he chose to rely more on sources from Jewish, Byzantine Christian, Armenian, and Persian communities from the 7th and 8th centuries, which are considered closer in time to the early period of Islam.

Ignoring Traditional Islamic Historiography: One of the characteristics of Cook's methodology is the rejection of classical Islamic sources. He considered the Nabawiyah sirah and hadith as products of political and theological engineering created to strengthen the legitimacy of the Islamic dynasty's power in the following period. According to him, early Islamic texts were more of a theological construction that developed over time than an accurate historical record.

Focus on Non-Muslim Sources: Cook and Crone attempted to reconstruct the early history of Islam by relying on documents from outside the Islamic tradition. They used historical records from Byzantium, Judaism, and Eastern Christianity that mentioned the existence of early Muslim communities. They assumed that these sources were more neutral and had no interest in shaping the narrative of Islam as Muslim historians did.

The method used by Cook is often categorized as a revisionist approach, namely an attempt to rewrite Islamic history by rejecting the official narrative that has been accepted for centuries. Within this framework, he not only questions the origins of Islam, but also reconstructs how Islam developed as a religion and political force. Although Cook is better known for his historical and philological approach, he also utilizes approaches from anthropology, archaeology, and comparative religious studies. He examines how elements of pre-Islamic religions, such as Judaism and Christianity, contributed to the development of early Islam. This approach aims to show the possibility of syncretism in the formation of Islamic teachings.

Review of the Claim that the Qur'an is a "Mixed Product"

One of the main claims in the Hagarism theory put forward by Michael Cook and Patricia Crone is that the Qur'an is not a stand alone revelation, but rather the result of syncretism from various previous religious traditions, such as Judaism, Christianity, and pre Islamic Arab beliefs. According to this theory, the early Muslim community was part of a religious reform movement influenced by monotheistic teachings that had developed in the Middle East before Islam emerged.⁴²

Cook and Crone argue that many concepts in the Qur'an have similarities with Jewish and Christian teachings, such as monotheism, the stories of the prophets, religious laws, and the concept of eschatology. They interpret these similarities as evidence that the Qur'an is not an original revelation, but rather a compilation of previously existing ideas that were then rearranged within the framework of Islamic theology. However, this claim has drawn much criticism from Muslim scholars and other Western academics.⁴³

There are several main reasons that show the weaknesses of the theory that the Qur'an is a "mixed product":

Similarities Do Not Mean Plagiarism: The similarities between the Qur'an and previous books are not evidence that the Qur'an copied or "mixed" other teachings. From an Islamic perspective, these similarities actually confirm that Islam continues the message of monotheism brought by previous prophets, as emphasized in the Qur'an that it is the final revelation that perfects previous monotheistic teachings (QS. Al Ma'idah: 3).

Significant Conceptual Differences: Despite thematic similarities, many teachings in the Qur'an are fundamentally different from Jewish and Christian teachings. For example, in Islam, the concept of divinity is purely monotheistic without elements of the Trinity (as in Christianity) or ethnocentrism (as in Judaism). In addition, the Qur'an reinterprets many stories of the prophets with a perspective that is different from the Biblical version.

Criticism of Cook and Crone's Methodology: One of the main weaknesses of the Hagarism theory is its rejection of Islamic primary sources, such as the hadith and tafsir, and its over reliance on non-Muslim sources that often have political and theological biases. Cook

⁴² Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, ed. Michael Marx : Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai (2009).

⁴³ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World*. PP: 110.

and Crone ignore the fact that the Qur'an has a unique linguistic structure, literary style, and composition, which are not found in Jewish and Christian texts.

Lack of Philological Evidence to Support the Hagarism Claim: Archaeological studies and early Qur'anic manuscripts show that the text of the Qur'an has been in a stable form since the 7th century, contrary to Cook and Crone's claim that Islam underwent major changes in its early period. If the Qur'an were truly a compilation of earlier traditions, there should be evidence of a more complex textual evolution, as was the case with the Bible.

Based on this analysis, the claim that the Qur'an is a product of syncretism or "mixture" of earlier religions has no strong methodological basis. Although the Qur'an acknowledges a connection with previous teachings, it still has unique characteristics that affirm the originality of revelation in Islam. Thus, Cook and Crone's approach to the Qur'an in the Hagarism theory is more speculative and not supported by strong evidence.

Nasr Abu Zayd, a liberal academic who claims to be a devout Muslim, extended his linguistic studies to Islamic source texts, including the Quran and hadith. According to him, the Quran is indeed a divine revelation, but at the same time, it is also a cultural product and a historical phenomenon that emerged within a specific social context. This perspective aligns with the historicist approach developed in Western academia, which views sacred texts not only as transcendental documents but also as part of human historical dynamics.

In Abu Zayd's view, the historical nature of the Quran makes it subject to continuous human understanding and interpretation. While the text originates from divine revelation, its interpretation is relative and dependent on its socio historical context. Therefore, any analysis of the Quran and hadith must take into account the social, political, and cultural factors of early Islam. This challenges the traditional understanding that considers the interpretations of classical scholars as final and absolute.

Abu Zayd's approach shares similarities with the ideas proposed by Michael Cook and Patricia Crone in the *Hagarism* theory. In their work, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, Cook and Crone argue that early Islam developed in an environment heavily influenced by Jewish and Christian traditions, leading to a form of religious syncretism. They reject the traditional approach that relies on internal

Islamic sources and instead prioritize evidence from non-Muslim sources, such as Byzantine and Jewish records, to reconstruct the early history of Islam.

When examined within the context of this study, Abu Zayd's approach can be seen as an effort to deconstruct authoritative narratives in Islam, aligning with the *Hagarism* theory's claim that early Islam was not an entirely independent tradition but rather a product of various religious influences in the Near East. Thus, the question of whether the Quran and hadith are mixed products of religious syncretism can be further analyzed using the historical and linguistic methodologies advocated by both Abu Zayd and proponents of the *Hagarism* theory.⁴⁴

The method used by Cook has drawn much criticism, both from Muslim historians and other Western academics.⁴⁵ The main criticisms of Cook's methodology include: 1) Reliance on non Muslim sources when the normative basis he uses often comes from an outside perspective that may be biased against Islam. 2) Ignoring Islamic tradition by not considering Islamic texts as legitimate historical sources can lead to unbalanced conclusions. 3) Speculation without strong evidence biased from several assumptions in the Hagarism theory that are not supported by archaeological evidence and early Islamic manuscripts. Nevertheless, the method applied by Cook still has a major impact on Islamic studies, especially in opening discussions about new approaches to understanding early Islamic history and modern orientalism.⁴⁶

Review of the Claim that Hadith is a Later Interpolation

In the theory of Hagarism, Michael Cook and Patricia Crone claim that hadith is not an authentic source about the life of the Prophet Muhammad, but rather a historical fabrication constructed later by Muslims after the early period of the development of this religion. They argue that hadith developed as part of an effort to legitimize politics and law, not as a valid historical record.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Patrick Sookhdeo, "Issues of Interpreting the Koran and Hadith," *Connections* 5, no. 2 (2006): 57–83.

⁴⁵ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World*.

⁴⁶ Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam*.

⁴⁷ Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

According to Cook and Crone, there are several reasons why hadith is considered an interpolation or later addition because of the long time gap between the Prophet and the recorded hadith corpus. They point out that hadith only began to be systematically codified around the 2nd to 3rd century AH, more than a century after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. This long time gap allows for distortion, fabrication, and falsification of hadith for the sake of certain political and sectarian interests.

However, this assumption overlooks the historical reality of how hadith scholarship developed after the fall of Baghdād, particularly in Egypt during the 8th–9th centuries AH. After the Mongol invasion, Egypt became the new intellectual center of the Muslim world under the Mamlūk dynasty. Far from being politically engineered, the period witnessed the flourishing of a sophisticated and independent tradition of hadith studies. Scholars such as Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, al-ʿIrāqī, al-Suyūṭī, Zakariyā al-Anṣārī, and al-Sakhāwī produced extensive works in various genres, ranging from commentaries, nazam, biographical dictionaries, to *takhrīj*, demonstrating a mature and methodical transmission and analysis of hadith.⁴⁸ This development challenges the notion that hadith emerged merely as a later fabrication, revealing instead a deeply rooted scholarly system that preserved, explained, and authenticated the hadith corpus.⁴⁹

The debate over the authority of hadith did not only occur between classical Muslim scholars and Orientalists but also underwent significant shifts within modernist Muslim thought. Figures such as Aḥmad Amīn and Maḥmūd Abū Rayyah launched sharp criticisms of the validity of hadith, the Prophet's authority, and the revelatory nature of hadith, three central themes in the contemporary discourse on hadith.⁵⁰ Aḥmad Amīn, for example, questioned the classical standards of hadith validation due to the long

⁴⁸ M Inul Rizkiy, "THE DEVELOPMENT OF HADITH STUDIES IN EGYPT AFTER THE FALL OF BAGD Ā D : The Study of the Contributions of Hadith Scholars in Egypt in the 8th- 9th Hijri Century PERKEMBANGAN STUDI HADIS DI MESIR PASCA-KERUNTUHAN BAGD Ā D : Studi Kontribusi Ulama Hadis Di," *Nabawi: Journal of Hadith Studies* 5, no. 2 (2025): 239–70.

⁴⁹ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World*.

⁵⁰ M. Rizki Syahrul Ramadhan and Abdulloh Abdulloh, "DYNAMICS OF THE HUIJAH OF HADITH FROM THE CLASSICAL ERA TO CONTEMPORARY (Study of the Impact of Modernist Muslim Thought)," *Nabawi: Journal of Hadith Studies* 4, no. 2 (2023): 281–304, <https://doi.org/10.55987/njhs.v4i2.114>.

time gap between transmission and codification, as well as the dominance of memorization in its transmission.⁵¹ Meanwhile, Abū Rayyah restricted prophetic authority solely to the religious domain, thus not all hadith were regarded as revelation or as having legal implications.⁵² These criticisms provoked strong responses from scholars such as Muṣṭafā al-Sibā'ī, who reaffirmed the principles of *jarḥ wa ta'dīl* regarding the Companions and other classical arguments.⁵³ This intellectual turbulence shows that modernist skepticism toward hadith did not emerge in a vacuum; rather, it developed through interaction with Orientalist critiques and the need to reinterpret Islamic law in the modern era. This dynamic is highly relevant to the critique of Hagarism theory, which views hadith as a later interpolation, because it reveals that within Islam itself there has emerged a complex discourse of revision and epistemological defense, not merely a passive acceptance of external historical constructions.⁵⁴

Cook and Crone highlight that there are variations and contradictions in the hadith corpus with some narrations that seem to contradict each other. They argue that this shows the reconstruction and fabrication of hadith in the Abbasid era, which was used to strengthen the authority of Islamic law. According to them, all of this happened because of the influence of the social and political context so that hadith easily developed under the influence of the political dynamics of the Caliphate, where various groups used hadith to support their interests. The hadith circulating at that time were believed to be the result of political engineering to justify certain powers, both among Sunnis and Shiites.

Another of their arguments is the minimal use of hadith in early Islamic sources so that normative Islamic texts in the early period, including the Qur'an and some of the earliest historical documents, rarely cite hadith as the main source of law and theology. This shows that hadith was not yet an important part of Islam in the early period, but only gained a central role later.

⁵¹ Aḥmad Amīn, *Fajr Al-Islām* (Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1969). PP: 210-215.

⁵² Maḥmūd Abū Rayyah, *Adwā' 'alā al-Sunnah al-Muḥammadiyyah* (Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.). PP: 11-17.

⁵³ Muṣṭafā Al-Sibā'ī, *Al-Sunnah Wa Makānātuha Fī al-Tashrī' al-Islāmī* (Dār al-Salām, 2014). PP: 243-251.

⁵⁴ Ramadhan and Abdulloh, "DYNAMICS OF THE HUIJAH OF HADITH FROM THE CLASSICAL ERA TO CONTEMPORARY (Study of the Impact of Modernist Muslim Thought)."

Although this theory has attracted attention, many Muslim academics and even some other orientalists consider Cook and Crone's approach to hadith to have serious weaknesses, namely:

Isnād System as a Mechanism for Verifying Hadith

Scientific studies of hadith show that the Islamic tradition has a strict *isnād* (chain of transmission) system to ensure the validity of a hadith. Hadith scholars developed a complex methodology to classify *ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḥasan*, and *ḍaʿīf* hadith, and to identify reliable and questionable narrators. through *ʿilm al rijāl* (biographical evaluation) and *ʿilm al jarḥ wa al taʿdīl* (criticism and accreditation of narrators).⁵⁵ For example, the famous hadith about “Actions are judged by intentions” (إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ) was transmitted through a well known *isnād* beginning with ʿUmar ibn al Khaṭṭāb, narrated by ʿAlqamah ibn Waqqāṣ, then by Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al Taymī, then by Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd al-Anṣārī, and subsequently dispersed widely through multiple students in different regions such as Medina, Basra, and Kufa.⁵⁶ This *isnād* is considered *muttafaqun ʿalayh* (agreed upon) and is notable for its common link at Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd, which demonstrates both the geographical spread and the early fixation of the text. The hadith was already transmitted and authenticated during the lifetimes of the *tābiʿīn* and their students, long before the codification of hadith in the third century H.

In contrast, Hagarism theory which developed by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook argues that much of early Islamic historiography, including hadith, consists of later interpolations that emerged through a process of religious assimilation with Jewish and Christian traditions.⁵⁷ This approach tends to disregard the internal mechanisms of hadith transmission and instead relies on non Muslim sources to reconstruct early Islamic history.

However, this theory faces significant methodological weaknesses when examined against the *isnād* system: (1) Historical Continuity: Multiple independent *isnāds* across regions and generations demonstrate the early circulation of hadith, contradicting

⁵⁵ Harald Motzki, “The Musannaf of ʿAbd Al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī as a Source of Authentic Ḥadīth of the First Century A.H.,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 50, no. 1 (1991): 1–21.

⁵⁶ Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oneworld Publications, 2014).

⁵⁷ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World*. PP: 3-10.

the assumption of later fabrication.⁵⁸ (2) Multiplicity of Transmission Paths: The existence of numerous corroborating chains (*tawātur ma'nawī* and *tawātur lafẓī*) undermines the claim that hadith originated from a single interpolating source.⁵⁹ (3) Documentation from the Companions: Historical records show that many Companions kept written collections (*ṣaḥīfah*) of hadith, such as the *Ṣaḥīfah of Hammām ibn Munabbih*, which modern manuscript studies have dated to the late first century H.⁶⁰

Moreover, contemporary research in hadith studies demonstrates that the spread of *isnād* reflects critical competition and cross verification among early Muslim scholars, rather than mere later inventions.⁶¹ The *ʿilm al ʿilal* (science of hidden defects) further ensured that hadith were scrutinized not only by text but also by their transmission networks. As a result, the Hagarism model fails to account for the internal epistemological rigor of the hadith tradition, which functioned as a self-regulating verification mechanism from the earliest period.

The wide distribution of hadith in various Islamic regions and the consistency of the hadith content across generations reinforce the conclusion that these hadith were neither inserted nor altered at later times. The process of collecting hadith during the Companions' era and the recognition of their authenticity by the early Muslim community indicate that there was no room for massive interpolation that could compromise hadith authenticity.

Support from Manuscript and Archaeological Research

A number of studies of early Islamic manuscripts have demonstrated that hadith were already circulating in written form during the first Islamic century, long before their formal codification in the second century AH, thereby refuting the claim that hadith were

⁵⁸ Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*, ed. Uwe Vagelpohl (Routledge, 2006).

⁵⁹ Harald Motzki, "Dating Muslim Traditions: A Survey," *Arabica* 52, no. 2 (2005): 204–53, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1570058053640349>.

⁶⁰ Mohammad Mustafa A'zami, *Studies in Early Hadith Literature: With a Critical Edition of Some Early Texts*, in *Energy Policy*, no. July (American Trust Publications, 1978).

⁶¹ Masrur, "Neo-Skeptisisme Michael Cook Dan Norman Calder Terhadap Hadis Nabi Muhammad."

merely late interpolations.⁶² The *Ṣaḥīfah of Hammām ibn Munabbih*, a disciple of Abū Hurayrah, is one of the most striking examples. This manuscript, containing 138 hadith, has been preserved in the *Musnad* of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and other sources, and modern manuscript analysis indicates that it was written in the late first century AH.⁶³ According to M. M. Azami, the language and transmission structure of this *ṣaḥīfah* prove that written documentation of hadith existed within one generation after the Prophet, which strongly undermines theories suggesting a late compilation.⁶⁴

Furthermore, references to hadith in non Muslim texts from the early eighth century CE, such as Christian and Syriac chronicles, also indicate that hadith were already part of Islamic religious discourse long before the major canonical collections emerged.⁶⁵ These external attestations provide a historical cross check against claims like those of Cook and Crone, who argued that hadith literature was a later theological construct.

Support from manuscript and archaeological research also strengthens this argument. Discoveries of early codices and manuscript fragments from sites such as Ṣan‘ā’, the Great Mosque of Damascus, and libraries in North Africa, show that records of hadith existed in the early centuries after the hijrah, often in the form of individual *ṣuḥuf* or students’ notebooks (*majāmī*), well before the formal compilation of *Ṣaḥīḥ al Bukhārī* or *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*.⁶⁶

Classical hadith scholars themselves testified to the early use of writing. Imām al Shāfi‘ī (d. 204 H), in his *al Risālah*, stated:

“The Companions and their followers memorized the hadith of the Messenger of Allah, and they wrote them down in order to preserve them, and transmitted them as they heard.”⁶⁷

Similarly, Ibn Ḥajar al ‘Asqalānī affirmed in *Nuzhat al Naẓar* that writing was already practiced among Companions, and that written

⁶² Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri II: Qur’anic Commentary and Tradition*, in *University of Chicago Press* (University of Chicago Press, 1967).

⁶³ Motzki, “The Musannaf of ‘Abd Al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī as a Source of Authentic Ḥadīth of the First Century A.H.”, pp: 3-15.

⁶⁴ A’zami, *Studies in Early Hadith Literature: With a Critical Edition of Some Early Texts*. PP: 36-44.

⁶⁵ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*. PP. 119-125.

⁶⁶ Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*. PP: 64-78.

⁶⁷ Muḥammad ibn Idrīs Al-Shāfi‘ī, *Al-Risālah*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr (Dār al-Turāth, 1940). PP: 399-400.

and oral transmission complemented each other, ensuring accuracy and early preservation.⁶⁸ Contemporary scholars such as Harald Motzki and Gregor Schoeler have further supported these classical attestations through rigorous *isnād* cum *matn* analysis and manuscript research, concluding that many hadith in later collections can be traced back to the first century of Islam.⁶⁹

Taken together, the combination of internal Muslim testimonies, manuscript evidence, and external non Muslim references offers a strong empirical foundation to reject the Hagarism claim that hadith were merely later interpolations influenced by Judeo Christian traditions. Instead, the evidence points to an early and robust culture of documentation among the Muslim community that preserved hadith with both oral and written mechanisms.

Some of the hadith manuscripts that have been found even show variations that are consistent with the widely accepted hadith, indicating that the process of collecting and disseminating hadith had already taken place earlier, long before the distortion or compilation of large collections was carried out. In addition, archaeological evidence such as inscriptions or artifacts containing hadith quotes also indicate that the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW were accepted and practiced by the Muslim community in the early days of Islam. This study provides concrete evidence that the hadith were recorded in a form similar to the texts we know today, eliminating the claim that the hadith were the result of interpolations that emerged later.

Continuity with Early Islamic Practices

Many aspects of Islamic law, worship, and the social life of Muslims are based on hadith, and their traces can be clearly traced back to the early Islamic period. If hadith were purely the result of later political engineering, as proposed by Hagarism and similar revisionist theories, it would be difficult to explain how early Islamic religious practices developed with such striking uniformity across different regions of the Muslim world in such a short period.

From the very beginning, the hadith were not merely textual records but were embodied in communal practice (*‘amal*). The Companions not only memorized and transmitted the Prophet’s

⁶⁸ Ibn Hajar Al-‘Asqalānī, *Nuzhat Al-Nazar Fī Tawdīh Nukhbat al-Fikar* (Dār al-Bashā’ir al-Islāmiyyah, 1998). PP: 45-47.

⁶⁹ Motzki, “Dating Muslim Traditions: A Survey.”, pp: 204-253.

sayings but also directly practiced and institutionalized them in daily life, especially in matters of ritual worship (*‘ibādāt*), law (*aḥkām*), and social norms. This living continuity is evident in the uniformity of practices such as the call to prayer (*azān*), the number of daily prayers, the form of zakat and fasting, and the rites of pilgrimage, all of which are derived from hadith and were practiced consistently in Medina, Mecca, Iraq, Egypt, and Syria as early as the first Islamic century.⁷⁰

Imām Mālik (d. 179 H) emphasized the normative weight of early communal practice (*‘amal ahl al Madīnah*) as evidence of the authenticity of hadith:

“The practice followed by the people of Medina is for us stronger than isolated reports (*khabar al wāḥid*), because they inherited it from the Companions and the Prophet himself.”⁷¹

Similarly, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456 H) argued that the widespread and uniform transmission of worship practices across the Muslim lands could not have been the product of fabrication:

“If these acts were fabricated after the Prophet, they would not have been spread in such a unanimous way, nor would the whole ummah have agreed upon them.”⁷²

Modern manuscript and *isnād* studies reinforce this observation. Harald Motzki’s analysis of *Muṣannaf ‘Abd al Razzāq* demonstrates that the legal and ritual practices recorded in early hadith collections correspond closely to what is known from the first and early second Islamic centuries, indicating a living continuity rather than retrospective invention.⁷³ Similarly, Gregor Schoeler highlights that the early institutionalization of hadith in legal and ritual contexts made massive post facto interpolations highly improbable.⁷⁴

In this light, continuity with early Islamic practices stands as a major weakness in the Hagarism hypothesis, which portrays hadith as products of later theological and political evolution. The historical

⁷⁰ Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri II: Qur’anic Commentary and Tradition*. PP: 3-15; Motzki, “The Musannaf of ‘Abd Al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī as a Source of Authentic Ḥadīth of the First Century A.H.”, pp: 1-21.

⁷¹ Mālik ibn Anas, *Al-Muwatṭa’*, ed. Muḥammad Fu’ād ‘Abd Al-Bāqī (Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d.). 1: 74.

⁷² Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Iḥkām Fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām*, ed. Aḥmad Shākīr (Maṭba‘ah al-Sa‘ādah, 1960). 1:97.

⁷³ Motzki, “The Musannaf of ‘Abd Al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī as a Source of Authentic Ḥadīth of the First Century A.H.”

⁷⁴ Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*. PP: 89-105.

reality of uniform practices across distant regions and generations shows that hadith were already embedded within the Muslim community's religious and legal framework from the earliest period of Islam.

CONCLUSION

The Hagarism theory by Michael Cook and Patricia Crone relies heavily on non-Muslim sources and largely ignores Islamic traditions like the Qur'an and hadith. This approach has major methodological weaknesses, causing inaccuracies in understanding Islamic teachings. The theory emphasizes religious syncretism, suggesting that early Islam was heavily influenced by Judaism and Christianity, which risks oversimplifying Islam's unique theological system. The main critique is that excluding authentic Islamic sources leads to misinterpretations of Islamic history and religion. Therefore, a more objective academic approach should integrate internal Islamic texts with external evidence to achieve a balanced, accurate view of early Islam and its development.

The main challenge in critiquing and developing research on the Hagarism theory is how to overcome the bias that exists in orientalist studies that tend to ignore or underestimate internal Islamic sources. More objective research requires a deep mastery of authoritative and authentic Islamic texts, which are often neglected in studies that prioritize non-Muslim sources. In addition, there are methodological challenges in integrating various conflicting historical perspectives, both from within the Islamic tradition itself and from outside, without falling into simplification or reductionism.

In addition, research on religious syncretism in early Islam also faces challenges in determining the extent to which elements of other cultures or religions actually influenced the formation of Islamic teachings. Issues about the interaction between Islam and earlier traditions (such as Judaism and Christianity) are often complex and nuanced, requiring a more holistic and contextual approach to understand the true dynamics. Finally, another challenge is how to bridge the differences in perspective between Western scholars and Islamic thinkers, given the differences in epistemology and intellectual traditions that exist.

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