

Historical Jesus Quest and its Effects on the Modern *Sirah* Literature

İlhami Oruçoğlu, PhD

Department of History of Islam and Islamic Arts
Faculty of Theology
Uludag University
Bursa-Turkey

Abstract

The main reason behind the change in the modern period sirah literature is the impact of the post-renaissance experiment of the West on the sirah literature, beginning from the mid-19th century. In order to correctly understand the change in the sirah literature, it is necessary to explain the chance which occurred in the West and how this change transformed the understanding of religion and prophecy. In this context, the discussion on the historical Jesus comes to the fore. When examined, it can be seen that there are some resemblances between the arguments and the findings of the historical Jesus quest and the modern period sirah literature.

1. The Change in the Western Perception of Prophecy: The Image of Jesus

In the history of ideas, before the period which is known as the Enlightenment, there was no doubt about the accuracy of the things narrated in the Gospels. The messiah of the Christian belief and the Jesus told in the Biblical texts are the same. Every speech and action attributed to him occurred as described in the Gospels. Stories narrated about the activities of Jesus are not human thoughts, but divine truths. Until the Enlightenment period, judging from the belief in the miracles of the Christian Saints, it was accepted that Jesus Christ could have also performed miracles.

However, when the Enlightenment began, some people started to question the veracity of the stories narrated about the life of Jesus. By the beginning of the period, as a result of the increasing trust towards scientific reasoning and natural law, people, who think that it is needless to believe in a god who supernaturally interferes people's business, emerged. Scholars started to exclude the parts which they thought as unacceptable from the Gospels. Now, the historical Jesus and the Messiah of the Christian belief began to appear as two different persons.

Some of the people, who believe that the Gospels cannot be dependable and they do not present a correct and historical account of Jesus, concluded that Christianity is wrong and they did not described themselves as Christians anymore. Moreover, many scholars who refuse most sections in the Gospels since they did not see them as belongs to historical Jesus, continued to described themselves as Christians. They tried to reconcile the Christian dogma with the historical Jesus. This process led the way to reformulating the Christian belief under the light of a new and critical analysis of the Biblical records. The first issue which scholars felt the need for its exclusion from the Bible (the victim) is the issue of miracles and every supernatural case. As an example, in his article on miracles, Scotch philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) argued that there is no religious base for miracles, since they do not comply with the law of probability.¹ Yet, most teachings of the Church of Jesus were based on miracles. His birth, his healing the sick, his resurrection and ascension are some of them. His prophesy about his own future life necessitates that he had some supernatural abilities.

There are many reactions to the rationalist approach to miracles. One of them belongs to Christian Wolff (1679-1754).

¹ Hume, David, *A Dissertation on Miracles*, Edinburg: Mundell-Doig-Stevenson, 1807.

He states that God acts according to the natural laws, yet whenever he wishes he interrupts the order of the nature and creates miracles.² However, deists hold that God created the world and have never interfered again. In their opinion, the world maintains its existence in the frame of the natural laws. Furthermore, neither God become human in the body of Christ, nor miracles of Jesus and resurrection actually occurred. A deist would accept the unnatural elements in the Gospels as myths and, if he/she believes in Jesus, he/she would only follow his moral teachings.

John Toland (1670-1722) can be accepted as the first author who leveled criticism at Christianity. According to him, the real Christianity is not mysterious at all and the supernatural issues in the Gospels were derived from Paganism. God only revealed the truth and the truth is in compliance with the rational conclusions of reason. Reason is the base for every certainty. There is not any irrational thing in the Gospels and every miracle, which does not have natural explanation, is fictional. Claiming that, by the plots of priests, pagan thoughts were transmitted to Christianity which was in fact rational and the mysteries of pagans as dogmas were put above reason and the five senses, he wanted to save Jesus from the hegemony of the supernatural and dogma.³

In his *The True Gospel of Jesus Christ Asserted*, Thomas Chubb (1679-1747) supported the idea that the Gospel mirrors the later dogmas, not what really happened and that apostles changed the Gospel. Although he does not believe in the deity of Jesus, he believes in divinity of the mission of Messiah and sees himself as Christian.⁴ Peter Annet, known as one of the most aggressive deists of the 18th century (1693-1769), chose the example of the resurrection for its irrational nature among other miracles, and from this aspect, he tried to explain the contradictions between different versions in the Gospels. Like Toland, he thought that, as a support, belief needs only reason and nature, not supernatural intervention. Reckoning that a god who grants his miracles only to some special people is not a morally decent god, he believed that the natural religion of humanity is deism, which is the original religion of reason and nature, as supported and practiced by Socrates.⁵

One of pioneers in this issue is Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), the USA president. In his work on the life of Jesus, he excluded issues like angels, supernatural visions, the Christmas star and the resurrection out of the religion. Denying the deity of Jesus, he only accepted his moral teachings. To him, Jesus is a great example of morality. As a deist like Toland, Jefferson holds that it is in the capacity of human beings that they constitute a good life with the help of reason.⁶ One of the pioneers in the historical Jesus quest is a scientist and Unitarian Joseph Priestley (1733-1804). He compared Jesus with Socrates. In his mind, both were teachers; however they did not write anything. Both were accused of being disloyalty by their coreligionists and executed. According to the thinkers of the Enlightenment, if wisdom and moral power come from God, the fact that Jesus' wisdom can also be found in Socrates means that God who speaks through Jesus also speaks through Socrates. This means that truth is universal and it is not limited to the God's revelation in the Gospels.⁷

These works by deist thinkers of the Enlightenment had influence on those which came after and determined the agenda of the historical Jesus quest. Gradually growing in the last quarter of the 18th century and finally coming to our century, these works are generally divided into three periods: 1. The Old Quest; started with Reimarus in 1778 and ended with the publication of Albert Schweitzer's masterpiece *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* in 1906. 2. An Interim or No-Quest Period, from 1906 to 1953. 3. New Quest; began with Ernest Kasemann in 1953, and still continues in our times. This new period which started with Kasemann in 1985, after the foundation of the Jesus School by Robert Funk and Roy Hoover in Berkeley/ California, was thereafter called "The Third Quest".⁸

Among these periods, since the second and the third periods are not directly related to the modern *sirah* literature, we only deal with the discussions in the period of the "Old Quest".

² Bennett, Clinton, *In Search of Jesus*, London and New York: Continuum, 2001, p. 91.

³ Gökberk, Macit, *Felsefe Tarihi*, Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1990, pp. 363-364; Bennett, *ibid*, 91-92.

⁴ Bennett, *ibid*, 92.

⁵ Bennett, *ibid*, 92-93.

⁶ Bennett, *ibid*, 93.

⁷ Bennett, *ibid*, 94.

⁸ Aydın, Mahmut, *Tarihsel İsa: İmanın Mesih'inden Tarihin İsa'sına*, Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2002, p. 23.

For researchers, the year 1778 is the beginning of the “Old Quest” in the studies of Jesus Christ. Hermann Samuel Reimarus’ (1694-1768) *Fragments* was posthumously published by the philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781). About the work, Albert Schweitzer comments that: “The essay is not only one of the greatest events in the history of criticism, it is also a masterpiece of world literature” and “seldom has there been a hate so eloquent, a scorn so lofty”.⁹ Known as a supporter of Christianity throughout his life and a disciple of Christian Wolff, Reimarus had revolted against what he saw as absurd and irrational in the Bible.

Reimarus cleaned the Gospels from all supernatural elements. All stories about the birth from the Virgin, miracles, the transfiguration, prophecies of Jesus about the future, the resurrection, the ascension and the similar issues were subjects of this “cleaning”. Furthermore, he denied the related data to the works of Jesus in his life, on the grounds that they were fictionalized by the apostles after Jesus. His most fierce criticism is his claim that Jesus’ pure politic mission was transformed to a spiritual mission. According to him, Jesus’ purpose and aim is not the spiritual salvation or the heavenly kingdom of God, but founding the worldly kingdom and saving the Israelites from slavery. In these efforts, Jesus expected divine intervention and help. However, having failed in his plans, when the Roman soldiers came to arrest him, he felt extremely disappointed. His words on the cross “Father! Why did you leave me?” is an indication of this situation. Moreover, Jesus did not have an intention to found a new religion. He was a Jew. Like he did not do anything to change or abolish the customs, law and religion of Jews, he did not want the Gospel to be spread by missionaries. It is in fact one of the many additions of the Church, in order to legalize Her place.¹⁰

The embodiment of God in the body of Christ to meet the prophecies/expectations of Jews, the resurrection of Jesus to make atonement for the sins of human beings are the things which were made up by the Apostles, after the unexpected and unwanted death of Jesus. After dreaming about living a victory together with Jesus after an accomplished revolution and not wanting to their ordinary lives, the Apostles invented the story of the resurrection and the idea that Jesus is the one who saves the souls. Later on, they stole the body of Jesus from his grave. To be more convincing, after waiting for fifty days, they claimed that they saw Jesus and that they ate together. Examining the narrations of the resurrection in detail, Remarius concluded that a witness of such contradicting statements cannot be taken as valuable and legal in any secular court. Thus, he claimed that the Gospels were written by the Apostles, in accordance with the new formulated doctrines and their personal purposes in a later period. Since the performance of miracle is expected from a Messiah, they made up miracles. Since Jesus was expected to bear the attributes of Elijah at least, they added his sending food to the people from heavens and his reviving the dead. In order to present him as a second Moses, they came up with the story of the flight to Egypt and added the killing of new born babies to the story. Yet, the basket in the story of Moses was replaced by reeds.¹¹

Drawing a very contrary image of Jesus to the conventional Christian belief, Reimarus attacked the idea that the Gospels are reliable sources for the life of Jesus. In fact, he is not the first person who invented the idea that the Apostles wrote the Gospels having thinking backwards. Yet, he put this argument at the center of his discussion. Besides, while people before him had believed in the sincerity of the Apostles, he claimed that they were in a deliberate deceiving.

Even if his work is evaluated as a rather polemical work than a scientific source and there is not any clear description of the historical Jesus in his writings, Reimarus’ ideas had impact on today’s Jesus quest and they have still being discussed. He is the one who suggested that the issue of the kingdom of God is at the centre of the teachings of Jesus and this kingdom can only be understood in the context of the Jewish religious atmosphere at the time. From this point of view, he claimed that Jesus’ mission was totally political. In spite of the fact that scholars after him did not accept these conclusions, they were in the position to deal with the problems/questions he had posed.¹²

⁹ Schweitzer, Albert, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001, pp. 15-16.

¹⁰ Bennett, *ibid*, p. 96-97; Aydın, Mahmut, *ibid*, p. 25-26.

¹¹ Bennett, *ibid*, p. 97.

¹² Dawes, Gregory W. (Ed.), *The Historical Jesus Quest*, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press & Deo Publishing, 2000, p. 56; Bennett, *ibid*, p. 98.

These problems/questions centered around three topics. The first is the nature of Jewish people's expectation about Messiah, whether Jews expected a spiritual savior and whether Jesus is a messiah or not. Here, Reimarus brought forth the eschatology. The events Jesus had expected, whether his mission was political or spiritual and how he perceived the kingdom of God; all of these have been subject to discussions so far. While those, who believe that Jesus' real life and the perception of the first Christians about him is the same, expected a timeless and spiritual change; those, who think that both is different, claimed that the change was immediately and materially expected. The second is whether Jesus had intention to found a new religion and his relation to the Jewish society he lived in. Although the general opinion of Christians about Judaism is negative; there is still the fact that Jesus was a Jew. The third is whether the belief of Jesus Christ can be based on historical studies or not.

13

Followers of Kant and Hegel philosophically contributed to the issue. Kantian thinkers, instead of removing the supernatural parts in the Gospel, chose to re-interpret them in a rationalist perspective. Invalidating everything supernatural, they put the moral sides of Jesus to the front. According to them, Jesus, with his moral perfection, is an embodiment of the idea of good and humanity¹⁴

Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761-1851) is one of the most well known Kantian philosophers. In his opinion, the reason for the inclusion of miracles in the Gospel was their acceptance as real facts. Since they did not have more scientific way to tell the events they encountered, for the people of the period, the belief in miracles is a ready explanation for events they could not have understood otherwise. Jews' passion about miracles led to attributing everything to God and ignoring secondary causes. According to this explanation, for every event which looks like miracle, there are natural and rational causes. For instance, Jesus' feeding a crowded group is the consequence of his generosity, not because of the increase of the food. His transforming to the light at the top of the mountain is but his being illuminated by the rising sun.¹⁵

Among Hegelians, the one who comes to the fore is David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874), who benefited from the critical atmosphere provided by Raimarus one century before. He believed in the necessity of a radical break from the supernatural / traditional interpretations of the Gospel which occurred in the 18th century. However, when he denied the reality of the narrations in the Gospel on the one hand, he opposed Reimarus' view that the Apostles deliberately changed the Gospels. According to him, the Gospels are neither historical facts nor hoaxes; they are only "myths" and should be accordingly interpreted. He divides his contemporaries into supernaturalists and naturalists: While supernaturalists believe that the miraculous events in the Gospel literally occurred, naturalists hold that the stories in the Gospel are not historical. Moreover, they are of the opinion that these events happened because of natural causes, yet these natural causes were narrated as miracles by witnesses who did not know the truth behind them. Refusing both views, Strauss supported his own "mythical approach".

To him, the Apostles lived in the age of "religious excitement", not in "the age of reason" as they do. Their words about Jesus are consequences of the religious perceptions which change the realities into narrations; and they are sincere about these words. To change of the religious realities into the form of narration is to create "myth". The modern interpreter must understand this process and distinguish the religious message from the narrative form and from the concepts with which the religious message is conveyed.¹⁶ Removing the mythical elements about Jesus in the Gospel, he did not leave anything but general lines of the life of a fanatical Jewish preacher who thought that he is Messiah. He did not accept that Jesus died to atone for the sins of all human beings, for man does not need a savior. From all these explanations, it cannot be concluded that Jesus did not teach anything. In his opinion, Jesus spread the idea of the unity of all human beings. His ideal of combining the divine and the human together represented the idea of man. Strauss' Hegelian interpretation of Jesus is a good idea which is abstracted from the narrations of the Gospel.¹⁷

¹³ Bennett, *ibid*, pp. 99-100.

¹⁴ Allen, Charlotte, *The Human Christ: The Search for the Historical Jesus*, Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1998, p. 142; Bennett, *ibid*, p. 101.

¹⁵ Bennett, *ibid*, p. 102.

¹⁶ Dawes, Gregory W. (Ed.), *The Historical Jesus Quest*, pp. 87-89.

¹⁷ Bennett, *ibid*, pp. 113-114.

Throughout the Enlightenment period, the historical reliability of the Gospels was questioned and the Gospel of John lost its determining place in the historical Jesus Quest. The question as to which one was the first among three Gospels called Synoptic Gospels and the original source for other Gospels gained importance. In this regard, Karl Lachman (1793-1851) found that the Gospel of Mark was before Matthew and Luke. Afterwards, Christian Weiss (1801-1866) developed this argument with “two documents hypothesis”. According to this hypothesis, when writing their Gospels, Matthew and Luke independently used the Gospel of Mark and a Gospel called Q, an abbreviation of the German word *Quelle* which means “source”. Later, testing the “two document hypothesis”, Heinrich Julius Holtzmann (1832-1910) stated that the Gospel of Mark is the earliest gospel and both Matthew and Luke used the Mark and the Q Gospel as their sources when writing the works.¹⁸

Reimarus and Strauss argued about the opinion that the Gospels truthfully tell the words and the actions of Jesus. According to them, the historical Jesus is different from the one in the Gospels. As a reason for that, Reimarus pointed to the deliberate distortion of the Apostles and Strauss to the process of unconsciously creating the myth. However, both of them hold that the Gospels can be used as historical sources. For them, after the additional and the mythical parts are removed from the original, the real life of Jesus can be constructed from the Gospels. Bringing forward the issue of the reliability of the Gospels as historical sources was the work of William Wrede (1859-1906). In his opinion, the Gospel of Mark cannot be a dependable source for the life of Jesus, no matter it preceded the other Gospels. It was not possible to reach the real picture of Jesus, by taking the general scheme of Mark and filling the spaces with the historical context and the guesses on the psychological development of Jesus and the Apostles. This is because the Gospel of Mark is a statement of belief and it belongs to the Christian dogma. As a writer, Mark did not give any importance to the historical causality and the psychological development. He only presented the opinion of the first Christians on Jesus in separate stories. It is true that in his Gospel, there are some historical records. Yet, they are so intertwined with the dogmatic evaluations that they cannot provide a framework for the historical Jesus.¹⁹

II. Historical-Critical Approach to the Prophet Muhammad

It was inevitable for the growing argumentations of the historical Jesus quest in the West and their consequences to affect the orientalist approaches to the origin of Islam and the life of the Prophet Muhammad. This approach is apparent in most of the works of orientalist writers. For example, the accumulated data which started with the Reimarus' studies on Christianity and historical Jesus quest and was especially formed by the studies of German scientist who were specialists on the Eastern languages, provided the explanations for religions in general, and for the birth and the development of the Semitic religions and the religious mythologies in the Middle East in particular. These explanations have striking resemblances with the theories of Orientalists about the development of Islam and the life of the Prophet.²⁰

In Europe where the Prophet was seen along with slanders, myths and prejudices until 16th century, a romantic curiosity towards Islam arose in the 17th and 18th centuries. Depending on the Islamic sources, they tried to abolish this image, which was left by these wrong and deliberate descriptions.²¹ At the top of the developments which caused this situation comes the fact that the Western scholars reached the Islamic sources, if indirectly, with the translation of some of the Arabic sources into Western languages. The romantic approach to Islam and the Prophet in the post-renaissance Europe ceased to exist, after the economical and the political superiority of the Ottoman State was broken by powerful countries of Europe. Napoleon's Egypt Campaign in 1789 is an important turning point. In 1800s, the interaction between the West and the East increased and for that reason, more sources on the history of Islam reached Europe.²² Western writers who were in a position to be satisfied with the works of Abu al-Fida, a writer in the very late period, then had the chance to reach earlier sources of the history of Islam.²³

¹⁸ Aydın, *ibid*, p. 36.

¹⁹ Dawes, *ibid*, p. 112-114.

²⁰ Ibn Warraq, “Studies on Muhammad and the Rise of Islam: A Critical Survey” in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. Ibn Warraq, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000, p. 75.

²¹ Fück, J. W., “Islam as an Historical Problem in European Historiography Since 1800”, in *Historians of the Middle East*, edited by Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt, London: Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 303.

²² Fück, *ibid*, p. 304.

²³ Margoliouth, David Samuel, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam*, New York and London: G.P. Putnam, the Knickerbocker Press, 1905, p. III.

It was also a period for the Orientalist studies to reach a philological ground, setting itself free from the theological connections. Besides, it was the time for the historical critical studies in Europe to start. Accordingly, before a fact is evaluated as a part of the historical process, there is a need to do a critical examination of the sources in order to understand whether this fact is valuable. Orientalists had a strong ground in this issue.²⁴ As mentioned before, as a consequence of the ongoing discussions on Christianity and the life of Jesus during the 18th century, the knowledge about reaching the historical Jesus and the methods began to be applied to Islam and the Prophet.²⁵ The first stage of this process is to reach the first sources, leaving the later ones, and the second stage is not to accept these sources as they are, and to analyze them in a critical way.

Gustav Weil (1808-89) is one of the first authors who write depending on the early sources. In his *Mohammed der Prophet* which was written in 1843, he depended on İbn Hişam (d.213-218/828-833). Moreover, he was the first person who applied “the historical-critical method”* to the life of the Prophet.²⁶ Just after him, William Muir (1819-1905) wrote the most comprehensive biography, relying on Ibn Hisham, Vâkıdî, Ibn Sa’d and Taberî. He had prejudices against Christianity²⁷ and tried to falsify the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad.²⁸ Yet, he provided a critical approach to the sources that are seen very complicated. Regarding most details in the sources as absolute myths, Muir is very skeptical about the value of the Hadith. Sharing the same view with Weil, he argues that the oral transmission of the prophetic traditions in a time which Muslims were divided lead to fabrication and distortion. He also argues that a tradition could be easily made up when needed, in order to support a religious or political group. As a proof, he points to that only an amount of 4000 out of 600.000 hadith are sound in the Bukhari. He claims that even half of these sound hadiths cannot be accepted by Europeans.²⁹ Regarding this issue, another method used by Muir is that among historical narrations, those which are contrary to the Prophet and Islam must be accepted as truth. Otherwise, they could not have found a way into the Islamic sources. However, those narrations which support Islam must be met with suspicion.³⁰ Almost all of the orientalist in 19th century used this method.³¹

Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921) is undoubtedly among the pioneer authors in the issue of the criticism of the sources. According to him, even a meticulous study for selecting the hadiths is not sufficient because most of them were fabricated during the 2th and 3th century AH.³² This means that the *isnad* which protects the hadith is also fabricated. Contrary to this thesis, in order to shield from his suspicions, the conventionalist historians divided between the hadith and historical narration.

²⁴ Fück, *ibid*, p. 304; Ibn al-Rawandi, “Origins of Islam: A Critical Look at the Sources”, in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. Ibn Warrak, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000, p. 92; Peters, F. E., “The Quest of the Historical Muhammad”, in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. Ibn Warrak, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000, pp. 444-446.

²⁵ Ibn Warrak, *ibid*, pp. 75-77; Rodinson, Maxime, “A Critical Survey of Modern Studies on Muhammad”, in *Studies on Islam*, ed. Merlin L. Swartz, New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, , 1981, p. 24.

* It is the method which criticizes the religious sources, judging from the assumption that the sources reflect the tendencies of their authors, since they are written by human beings. The method was rooted in the renaissance period, especially improved by writers like Grotius, Simon and Spinoza in the 17-18th centuries, and shaped by the historical thought of Ranke in the 19th century. The basic assumption of this method is that the sources do not tell “what really happened in the history”, but what the author thinks about the events. Accordingly, only a little information in the sources represents the true facts. This idea put the authors into accusation, since, according to this method, the authors either deliberately or naively do not tell the truth.

²⁶ Jeffrey, Arthur, “The Quest of the Historical Muhammad”, in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. Ibn Warrak, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000, p. 344; Bennett, *ibid*, pp. 101-102; Ibn Warrak, *ibid*, p. 44.

²⁷ Margoliouth, *ibid*, p. IV; Bennett, *ibid*, p. 111.

²⁸ Buaben, Jabal Muhammad, *Image of the Prophet Muhammad in the West: A Study of Muir, Margoliouth and Watt*, Leichester: The Islamic Foundation, 1996, p. 25.

²⁹ Bennett, *ibid*, p. 115; Ibn Warrak, *ibid*, pp. 44-45.

³⁰ Muir, Sir William, *The Life of Mahomet I-IV*, London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1861, I, LXXXI.

³¹ Buaben, *ibid*, p. 24; Bennett, *ibid*, pp. 115-116.

³² Goldziher, Ignaz, *Muslim Studies I-II*, Chicago-New York: Aldine-Atherton Inc., 1971, II, 18-19; Hourani, Albert, *Batı Düşüncesinde İslâm*, Istanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 1996, pp. 64-65; Schacht, Joseph, “A Reevaluation of Islamic Traditions”, in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. Ibn Warrak, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000, pp. 358-359; Rubin, Uri, *The Eye of the Beholder*, Princeton-New Jersey: The Darwin Press, 1995, p. 1.

However, the hadith and historical narration very much resemble each other and, in case the *isnads* of the hadith are regarded as fabricated, it also means that the *isnads* used in the historical events are also fabricated.³³

After Goldziher, the discussion was taken further with orientalist like Nöldeke, Caetani, Lammens and Schacht. They held that there is not any reliable source except the Quran. According to Henri Lammens (1862-1937), all *sirah* literature is but a hypothetical and subjective interpretation of some information in the Quran.³⁴ Due to this fact, the entire *sirah* material about the Quranic data is fabrication, which were made up afterwards. Joseph Schacht (1902-1969) casted doubts on the *sirah* literature through the traditions of the Islamic law (*fiqh*) He claimed that most narrations about the Madina period were fabricated in following centuries and they did not have any historical value.³⁵

Western scientists who study on the Islamic history are divided into two main categories as regards the reliability of the historical sources. The first group adopts a pessimistic view about sources. According to them, the works mentioned above were written quite after the death of the Prophet, at the times in which Muslims were divided into many religious and political parties. Hence, instead of telling about the life of the Prophet, they show the tendencies and the prejudices of the following generations and they are completely fictional. For that reason, they cannot be accepted as sound sources. Goldziher, Lammens, and our contemporaries Patricia Crone and Michael Cook can be counted as the representatives of this group. The second group also holds that the sources have many weaknesses; however they do not refuse them completely. They hold that the bulk of these sources draw a general frame about the life of the Prophet, and judging from the sound information extracted from them, His life can be re-constructed to a certain degree. Andrew Rippin, W. Montgomery Watt and Martin Forward can be included in this group.³⁶

Even if they are divided into two groups, Western researches of Islam are staying on a shared level; and it is that the sources of the history of Islam are not reliable. The consensus between Muslims and non-Muslims on the reliability of the sources before the 19th century had already vanished.³⁷ After Reimarus' ground-breaking study on the historical Jesus, particularly thanks to the works by German scientists, there have been considerable ground covered in the formation of the religions and religious mythologies. It can be seen that there is a striking resemblance between the conclusions of this study and the findings of the scientists who are interested in the history of Islam. Reimarus' historical and literal criticism and David Strauss' thesis that the early sources are full of myths due to their writing times at least one generation later, brought destruction the Christian sources and caused the Gospels to lose their reliabilities. Similarly, in consequence of the application of the same perspective to Islam, some people started to see the sources of the history of Islam as unreliable.³⁸

In the situation that the Gospel does not bear any value as a source, it was up to the modern Western scientists which narrations about Jesus are correct. When examining the history of religion, the scientists looked through the worldview they were in. Their scientific atmosphere was shaped by concepts like deism, natural religion, the enlightenment, rationalism, positivism, secularism etc. With such environment, when they examine the facts related to religion and historical events about religion, they aim at how religion should be, not what it really is. Hence, there has been a definition of religion in the mind of the modern European scientist and in every case he/she looks at, he/she criticizes any items that do not conform with this definition. In this context, when examining the lives of the Prophets, all metaphysical elements that do not comply with the modern scientific viewpoint and that cannot be explained in the physical and the human level like supernatural cases and miraculous events were regarded as fabricated.

³³ Bennett, *ibid*, p. 37; Ibn Warraq, *ibid*, pp. 46, 77.

³⁴ Lammens, Henri, "The Koran and Tradition – How the Life of Muhammad was Composed", in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. Ibn Warrak, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000, pp. 169-170; Lammens, Henri, "Fatima and the Daughters of Muhammad", in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. Ibn Warrak, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000, pp. 218-219.

³⁵ Rodinson, *ibid*, p. 42; Lewis, Bernard and P.M. Holt, "Introduction", in *Historians of the Middle East*, edited by Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt, London: Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 5.

³⁶ Ibn al-Rawandi, "Origins of Islam: A Critical Look at the Sources", in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. Ibn Warraq, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000, p. 107; Bennett, *ibid*, pp. 37-40.

³⁷ Forward, Martin, *Muhammad: A Short Biography*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1997, p. 3.

³⁸ Ibn Warraq, *ibid*, pp. 75-77.

The lives of the prophets were only examined for their historical roles, which were played in the history of human beings. The fact that human beings are the addressees of the divine revelation, which is the real purpose of the existence of religions and their relation to God, were left aside.

In the 19th century, Muslim world encountered this kind of scientific understanding of the West, during its decline in political, economical and military levels. The studies done in this period were produced in the face of the consequences of the Western worldview. Even if there are few works which ignore the Western methods of research, some works are done under the influence of the orientalist. This is so, in spite of the fact that some of these works were written as criticisms of the above-mentioned Western sources.

Conclusion

Similar arguments to those which held by some researchers regarding Jesus from the viewpoint of the modern mind, its worldview and its perception of religion and prophecy were also supported in Islamic world. There can be many reasons for that. The hegemony of the modern idea all over the world especially Muslims, the effect of the modern scientific mentality and the direct influence of the works by the Western scientists can be regarded among these reasons. However this study only aims at demonstrating the resemblances depending on several examples, not focusing on these reasons.

The first and the most important of these resemblances is the question on the reliability of the traditional sources, or even their being regarded as totally unreliable sources. This issue can be seen not only in the works of Orientalists, but also the works of Muslim scholars.³⁹ Another issue is that the Prophet was only a human being and did not have any miracles except the Quran. Hence, supernatural elements in the classical source were either denied⁴⁰, or a rational explanation was provided.⁴¹

Consequently, the idea that the Prophet who lived in the history and the Prophet as represented in the sources are not the same, caused confusion in people's minds in modern times. The quest for discovering the true/historical portray of the Prophet among the scattered data in the sources or re-constructing them became a reality in the modern period.

³⁹ Şehbenderzade Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi, *İslâm Tarihi I-II*, Istanbul: Anka Yayınları, 2005, p. 28; Celal Nuri, *Hatemü'l-Enbiya*, Istanbul: Yeni Osmanlı Matbaası, 1332 A.H., pp. 17-30; Syed Ahmad Khan, *A Series of Essays on the Life of Mohamad and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto*, Lahore: Sh. Mubarak Ali Oriental Publishers and Booksellers, 1979, pp. XII-XV.

⁴⁰ Syed Emir Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1978, pp. 32-33; Heykel, Muhammed Hüseyin, *Hayâtu Muhammad*, Maktaba al-Usra, pp. 58-59.

⁴¹ Hamidullah, Muhammed, *İslâm Peygamberi*, I-II, trans. Salih Tuğ, Istanbul: İrfan Yayımcılık, 1990, I, 120-128.