

Article history (leave this part):

Submission date: 14.06-2025

Acceptance date: 11.11-2025

Available online: 27.12-2025

Keywords:

Angelika Neuwirth; Qur'anic Studies; Qur'anic Rhetoric; Contextual Criticism; Comparative Tafsir; Late Antiquity

Funding:

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing interest:

The author(s) have declared that no competing interests exist.

Cite as (leave this part):

Hanan Abufares Elkhimry; . (2024). Title. Journal of Science and Knowledge Horizons: 4(1), 283-293. <https://doi.org/10.34118/jskp.v2i02.2727>



The authors (2025). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY NC) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

Journal of Science and Knowledge Horizons
ISSN 2800-1273-EISSN 2830-8379

Angelika Neuwirth and Contemporary Qur'anic Studies: A Critical Analytical Reading of Context, Method, and Impact

Sebai Elboukhari *

Faculty of College of Islamic Sciences and Civilization, Laghouat University
(Algeria)e.sebai@lagh-univ.dz



<https://orcid.org/009-0006-7421-0037>

Abstract:

This study presents a critical analytical reading of the work of German scholar "Angelika Neuwirth" in the field of Qur'anic studies. It examines her methodology, which combines rhetorical analysis of the Qur'anic text with its historical and cultural setting in Late Antiquity. The paper evaluates the coherence of Neuwirth's approach within academic standards, explores its impact on modern Islamic thought and Qur'anic interpretation, and addresses the major critiques leveled against her from both Islamic and Western perspectives. The study argues for the necessity of an integrative hermeneutic that respects the sacred nature of the Qur'an while engaging with rigorous scholarly tools. A comparative analytical table is also provided to synthesize Neuwirth's core ideas and their reception in diverse intellectual contexts.

* Sebai Elboukhari

Section 1:

1. Introduction

Contemporary Qur'anic studies have witnessed an accelerated evolution in recent decades, marked by interdisciplinary engagements involving linguistics, history, anthropology, literary criticism, and comparative religious studies. At the heart of this movement stands the German scholar Angelika Neuwirth, whose work represents one of the most sophisticated efforts to reread the Qur'an beyond the constraints of traditional religious exegesis and Western reductionist Orientalism alike.

Neuwirth's project is rooted in a foundational conviction: that the Qur'an cannot be adequately understood without re-situating it within the Late Antique cultural and religious context—an era rich with Jewish, Christian, and pagan currents in dialogue. Her aim is not to undermine the religious dimension of the Qur'an, but to approach it as both a sacred text and a cultural artifact shaped by its sociopolitical environment.

This approach led her to what she terms the "contextual-historical reading" of the Qur'an—one that combines a literary appreciation of its rhetorical structure with a careful historical analysis of its original audience and discursive strategies. Neuwirth maintains that the Qur'an should not be studied merely as a static divine pronouncement, but rather as a performative and dialogical text, dynamically interacting with its initial socio-cultural environment.

This article presents an expanded and critical reading of Angelika Neuwirth's contributions to Qur'anic studies. It seeks to dissect her theoretical framework, assess the reception of her work within Islamic and Western scholarship, and evaluate its methodological coherence and epistemological impact on contemporary readings of the Qur'an.

"The Qur'an is not to be read as a disconnected, purely literary document. It must be brought back into the cultural environment in which it emerged, so that its rhetorical structure and dialogical strategies may be understood."(Neuwirth, 2010, p. 25).

Section 2 : Background of Qur'anic Studies and Western Criticism

The evolution of Qur'anic studies in Western academia has passed through multiple stages. Early Orientalist scholarship was often characterized by missionary and colonial agendas. However, by the early 20th century, a more critical and scientific attitude had emerged, especially in the works of figures such as Theodor Nöldeke, Régis Blachère, and John Wansbrough. These scholars adopted philological and historical-critical methods to question the traditional Islamic narrative concerning the Qur'an's compilation, authorship, and dating.

What distinguishes Angelika Neuwirth from these predecessors is her refusal to adopt the radical deconstructive tendencies of scholars like Wansbrough. Neuwirth does not consider the Qur'an to be a later construction or artificial literary project. Instead, she argues that it is the product of a complex historical situation, and that it should be studied both internally (as a rhetorical and literary text) and externally (within its cultural and political context).

In her work, the Qur'an is viewed not just as a sacred text, but also as a cultural and literary artifact that reflects the multifaceted nature of the late antique world. As she writes, the Qur'an is "a mirror that reflects the cultural complexities of the Mediterranean world on the eve of Islam." (Neuwirth, A. 2011. p. 11)

This dialogical positioning—between Western academic criticism and the Islamic exegetical tradition—has made Neuwirth a central figure in the contemporary discourse on the Qur'an. Her approach challenges both the external critique of Orientalism and the internal limitations of traditional exegesis, by proposing an integrative framework that respects the text's religious character while applying scientific tools to interpret it.

"The Qur'an cannot be read as a conventional text. It is a performative utterance that arose from a moment of intense cultural contestation and cannot be separated from that without losing its living significance." (Neuwirth, 2014, p. 44)

Section 3: Angelika Neuwirth's Perspectives in the Context of Qur'anic Studies

Angelika Neuwirth has carved out a distinctive scholarly path in the field of Qur'anic studies, combining textual-linguistic precision with historical-cultural depth. Her work aims to move beyond polarizing dichotomies: between traditional Islamic exegesis and radical Orientalist deconstruction. Through several of her major works—particularly *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike* (2014)—she offers a comprehensive approach that sees the Qur'an not as a derivative or isolated text, but as a dialogical and rhetorical product of its time.

3.1. The Historical and Linguistic Context

Neuwirth stresses that any meaningful interpretation of the Qur'an must begin by restoring the text to its historical and social environment—specifically, 7th-century Arabia, at the intersection of Jewish, Christian, and pagan influences. She criticizes fragmentary readings that ignore the dynamic interaction between the Prophet Muhammad and his audience, which she sees as fundamental to understanding the Qur'anic discourse.

"The Qur'an was not composed in a vacuum. It emerged within a vibrant cultural setting marked by intense religious dialogue and ideological conflict." (Neuwirth, 2010, p. 41)

3.2. Focus on the Qur'an's Rhetorical and Literary Structure

A central component of Neuwirth's scholarship is her insistence on the performative and poetic structure of the Qur'an. She argues that many modern translations—both Western and Arabic—fail to capture the Qur'an's rhythmic beauty and persuasive power. She calls for a return to the oral aesthetic of the Qur'an, which she sees as central to its effectiveness as divine speech. "The Qur'an's orality is not a weakness but the source of its emotional and rhetorical strength. It was designed to be heard, not merely read." (Neuwirth, 2014, p. 77)

3.3. Comparative Criticism: Western and Islamic Readings

Neuwirth encourages a comparative interpretive model, wherein both Islamic and Western methodologies are viewed as complementary rather than contradictory. She maintains that Islamic exegesis brings linguistic and theological depth, while Western criticism offers historical and analytical precision. "We must stop viewing the Western approach as hostile, and the Islamic one as static. Both can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the text." (Neuwirth, 2011, p. 17)

3.4. Dialogue Between Muslim and Western Scholars

Neuwirth advocates for collaborative scholarship, where Muslim and non-Muslim researchers engage in joint projects to uncover the Qur'an's literary and historical complexity. One such example is the Corpus Coranicum project in Berlin, which promotes a multi-disciplinary study of the Qur'an's textual development within the broader Near Eastern context. (McAuliffe, J. D. 2006. pp. 43–45).

3.5. Modern Challenges in Qur'anic Interpretation

She also highlights modern interpretive challenges, including translation issues, the gap between the text and contemporary audiences, and the limitations of some reformist approaches. Her call is for an updated methodological toolbox—rooted in both tradition and modern science—that can respect the sanctity of the text while reactivating its multi-dimensional meanings. "The task of Qur'anic studies is not to replicate old interpretations, but to engage the text with fresh tools that honor its originality and pluralism." (Neuwirth, 2010, p. 113)

Section 4: Analytical Methodology and Research Framework

The study of Angelika Neuwirth's contributions to Qur'anic interpretation requires a multi-layered methodological approach, given the interdisciplinary nature of her work. Her analysis draws from literary theory, historical contextualization, religious studies, and semiotics. This section outlines the analytical steps employed in the research and evaluates the internal logic of her framework.

4.1. Textual and Contextual Analysis of Qur'anic Passages

The research begins with close readings of selected Qur'anic passages—such as Surahs al-Najm, al-Ḍuḥā, and al-Muzzammil—analyzed through Neuwirth's lens of rhetorical structure, rhythm, and dialogic function. Her approach sees these Surahs as independent literary units, each engaging a real historical audience in the early Muslim community.

"Each Qur'anic surah constitutes a distinct rhetorical unit with its own internal logic aimed at persuading a concrete audience, not an abstract reader." (Neuwirth, 2014, p. 61)

4.2. Comparative Examination of Islamic and Western Methodologies

The research involves a comparative analysis between classical Islamic exegesis—as found in the works of al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, and al-Zamakhsharī—and Western critical scholarship (e.g., Nöldeke, Wansbrough, Blachère). Neuwirth's work is then positioned as a mediating model, seeking to reconcile both interpretive traditions.

This comparison is not intended to create false equivalence but to highlight potential points of convergence and divergence in the interpretive process.

"Comparative interpretation is not about flattening differences, but about exposing the structures that produce them, allowing for a more equitable dialogue." (Rippin, 2001, p. 39)

4.3. Incorporating Dialogical Hermeneutics

Neuwirth champions a dialogical hermeneutic that views the Qur'an as a polyphonic text, open to multiple interpretations across time. She argues that the text's meaning is not static, but evolves in interaction with its interpretive communities.

This resonates with the thought of Mohammed Arkoun, who posited that religious texts are not mere reflections of divine will, but symbolic productions that require multidimensional analysis . (Arkoun, M. 1996. pp. 88–90).

4.4. Structural Mapping of Neuwirth's Interpretive Process

The study constructs a visual model to represent Neuwirth's analytical methodology, emphasizing the layered interaction between textual analysis, historical reconstruction, and intertextual comparison.

Conceptual Flowchart:

flowchart TD

A[Historical Reading] --> B[Surah Structure Analysis]

B --> C[Cultural Context Extraction]

C --> D[Islamic-Western Comparative Interpretation]

D --> E[Emergent Intertextual Meanings]

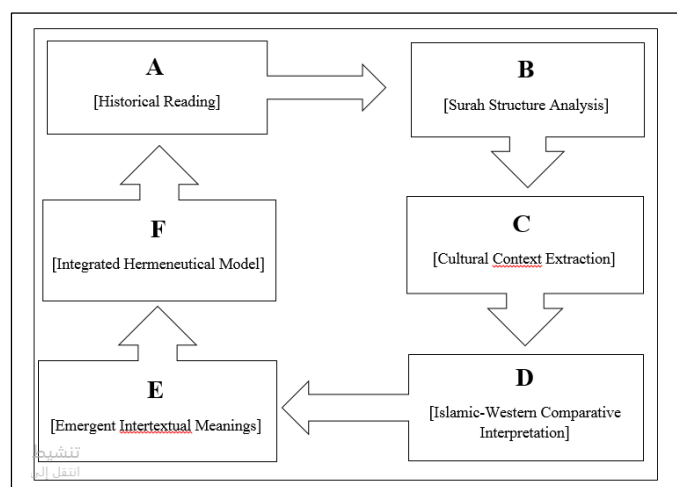
E --> F[Integrated Hermeneutical Model]

Explanation of the Circular Diagram

This circular flowchart represents **Angelika Neuwirth's hermeneutical model** for interpreting the Qur'an. It consists of six interconnected stages that form a continuous interpretive loop, combining historical, literary, and comparative elements:

A Historical Reading

- Recontextualizes the Qur'an within 7th-century Arabia and the broader Late Antique world.
- Aims to uncover the socio-political and religious environment of its initial audience.



B Surah Structure Analysis

- Focuses on rhetorical features: coherence, rhythm, parallelism.
- Each surah is treated as a self-contained persuasive unit.

C Extraction of Cultural Contexts

- Connects Qur'anic concepts to parallels in Jewish, Christian, and pagan traditions.
- Highlights intertextuality within the religious discourse of the time.

D Comparison of Islamic and Western Interpretations

- Juxtaposes tafsīr literature with Western critical approaches.
- Seeks both divergence and potential synthesis in readings.

E Emergent Interactive Meanings

- Derives new, context-sensitive interpretations from the dialogical process.
- Views meaning as evolving through engagement, not fixed.

F Integrated Hermeneutical Model

- Culminates in a multi-layered framework that balances sacredness with critical inquiry.
- Encourages interdisciplinary, respectful scholarship.

This model showcases how Neuwirth moves from external historical settings to internal textual cohesion, then outward again to comparative frameworks—creating a feedback loop of interpretation.

Section 5: Comparison Between Western and Islamic Critical Traditions

One of the most critical contributions of Angelika Neuwirth's work lies in her attempt to bridge the epistemological gap between Western academic approaches to the Qur'an and classical Islamic exegesis. Rather than viewing the two as inherently contradictory, Neuwirth posits that each tradition possesses strengths

that, if brought into dialogue, can yield a richer, more balanced understanding of the Qur'anic text.

This section presents a comparative analysis along five analytical axes, culminating in an extended summary table.

5.1. Epistemological Foundations and Interpretive Functions

Islamic exegesis traditionally rests upon the divine origin of the text, focusing on the Qur'an as the uncreated word of God. Interpretive efforts are anchored in prophetic traditions, chains of transmission, and classical linguistic frameworks.

By contrast, Western methods emphasize historical-critical inquiry, relying on external evidence (e.g., manuscript analysis, intertextuality with biblical texts) to assess the origins, development, and reception of the Qur'an. Neuwirth proposes a middle position—what she terms a "historical reading without denying sacredness".

"The historical method does not negate sanctity; rather, it situates it within its cultural matrix, thereby enriching its communicative potential." (Neuwirth, 2011, p. 24)

5.2. Analytical Tools and Modes of Reading

Islamic tradition uses tools such as *tafsīr bi'l-ma'thūr* (exegesis through transmitted reports), *ʿilm al-balāgha* (rhetoric), and *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation). Western scholarship introduces historical linguistics, semiotics, and comparative religious studies.

Neuwirth highlights the complementarity of these tools and encourages developing interpretive models that combine both.

"Neither tradition can claim interpretive sufficiency. Only a layered reading strategy can accommodate the Qur'an's polyphonic texture." (Berg, 2000, p. 71)

5.3. Ontological View of the Text

While Islamic scholars regard the Qur'an as a timeless and universal message, Western critics often treat it as a historically embedded document, shaped by its cultural and polemical context.

Neuwirth challenges both extremes: she affirms the text's historical rootedness while respecting its theological claims. This dual positioning is central to her methodology.

5.4. Contemporary Reception and Function

In Muslim-majority contexts, Qur'anic interpretation often adopts a theological-defensive posture against perceived Western critiques. In contrast, Western academia tends to frame the Qur'an as an object of detached historical inquiry, sometimes dismissing its religious import.

Neuwirth calls for an open dialogical platform where scholars from different traditions can co-construct understanding without falling into polemics or apologetics.

5.5. Comparative Summary Table

Analytical Dimension	Traditional Islamic Exegesis	Western Critical Scholarship	Neuwirth's Integrative Perspective
Epistemological Basis	Revelation; divine speech	Historical-documentary	Historical context with respect for sacred status.
Tools of Interpretation	Narrated reports, rhetoric, linguistic analysis	Semiotics, discourse theory, philology	Combined usage across traditions
View of the Text	Eternal, universal message	Product of Late Antiquity	Sacred discourse shaped by cultural context
Goal of Interpretation	Theological guidance, legal and ethical instruction	Literary, historical, and ideological deconstruction	Polyvalent hermeneutic balancing faith and history
Contemporary Application	Defensive reaction to criticism or critique	Academic detachment	Constructive, dialogical scholarship, "Western criticism is not the enemy of Islamic thought. It is an opportunity to deepen our own tradition through responsible engagement." (Neuwirth, 2014, p. 89)

Section 6: Impact of Western Scholarship on Islamic Understandings of the Qur'an

The engagement between Western Qur'anic scholarship and Muslim exegetical traditions has produced a spectrum of reactions—ranging from outright rejection to cautious incorporation and creative reinterpretation. Angelika Neuwirth's work, in particular, has influenced contemporary Islamic thought both directly and indirectly, contributing to an evolving landscape of hermeneutics and religious understanding.

This section examines the primary areas in which her scholarship has affected Islamic discourse and education, while also highlighting key responses and appropriations.

6.1. Re-centering Historical and Cultural Contexts

One of Neuwirth's most significant contributions has been the reintroduction of the historical and cultural context of the Qur'anic revelation into scholarly discourse. Rather than relying solely on Islamic traditions of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, she encourages a broader approach that includes knowledge of late antique religious and intellectual trends.

"Neglecting the cultural context of sacred texts deprives them of their dynamic, communicative function." (Neuwirth, 2010, p. 55)

This contextual emphasis aligns with reformist thinkers such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Mohammed Arkoun, and Amin Maalouf, who also argue that understanding revelation requires historical sensitivity.

6.2. Reviving the Rhetorical and Aesthetic Reading of the Qur'an

Neuwirth emphasizes that the Qur'an's rhetorical power—manifested through rhythm, repetition, parallelism, and orality—is central to its communicative

intent. Her analysis has led to a renewed appreciation of the Qur'an as a performative, rather than purely propositional, text.

This view resonates with early Islamic scholars such as al-Zamakhsharī and modern interpreters like al-Tahir ibn Ashur, who stressed the significance of *balāgha* (eloquence) in Qur'anic meaning-making. Neuwirth goes further by situating such features in a comparative framework with Semitic oral traditions.

6.3. Questioning the Fixed Unity of the Text

While Neuwirth affirms the literary unity of the Qur'an in its present form, she also explores the possibility of gradual textual development, inviting comparison with theories of redaction in biblical studies. She is careful, however, not to reduce the Qur'an to a patchwork document, unlike Wansbrough or Crone.

This position has sparked debate: traditionalists view it as undermining divine authorship, whereas reformists see it as a tool for understanding revelatory progression and structural layers within the text.

6.4. Critique of Qur'anic Translations and Linguistic Mediation

Neuwirth has consistently criticized contemporary translations—both Western and Islamic—for stripping the Qur'an of its original aural, poetic, and performative force. She calls for translation projects that better reflect the layered complexity of the Arabic original, including its rhythms and sound patterns. "Translation must go beyond semantic content and seek to recover the Qur'an's performative resonance, lest it become a sterile linguistic code." (Neuwirth, 2014, p. 119)

In response, initiatives like the *Corpus Coranicum* have begun to explore comparative linguistic approaches that attempt to retain stylistic and contextual nuance.

6.5. Introduction of New Analytical Tools

Neuwirth has been at the forefront of integrating modern hermeneutical tools—including discourse analysis, semiotics, and religious anthropology—into Qur'anic studies. These tools have influenced emerging Muslim scholars who seek to expand the interpretive paradigm without abandoning Islamic epistemology.

Her application of audience theory, for instance, has inspired re-readings of verses that begin with “O mankind” or “O you who believe” as rhetorical performances tailored to diverse social settings.

6.6. Influence on Islamic Pedagogy and Curriculum Reform

While Neuwirth's writings are not widely disseminated in traditional Islamic institutions, they have indirectly influenced curricular reforms in some universities in Tunisia, Morocco, Malaysia, and Indonesia. These include the integration of contextual and rhetorical analysis in courses on tafsīr and uṣūl al-dīn.

"Engagement with Western Qur'anic criticism is not submission to it, but an exercise in intellectual responsibility and critical self-renewal." (McAuliffe, 2006, p. 56)

Section 7: Critical Review of Neuwirth's Methodology and Writings

While Angelika Neuwirth has made undeniably influential contributions to modern Qur'anic studies, her approach has not gone unchallenged. Scholars—both from within the Muslim world and from her own Western academic circles—have voiced significant critiques of her methodology, assumptions, and practical conclusions.

This section presents a structured critique of Neuwirth's work through three primary analytical lenses: rhetorical-literary analysis, comparative methodology, and hermeneutical coherence.

7.1. Rhetorical and Literary Analysis of the Qur'an

Neuwirth's emphasis on the Qur'an's poetic and performative structure is among her most original contributions. She sees rhetorical features—such as parallelism, repetition, rhythmic progression, and auditory impact—as central to the persuasive power of the Qur'anic message. "Qur'anic eloquence is not merely semantic; it manifests through sound patterns, cadences, and structural intensity." (Neuwirth, 2010, p. 85)

This view aligns with Mustansir Mir's early works on Qur'anic coherence (*naẓm*), which argue for an inherent compositional unity in each Surah.

Strengths:

Reclaims the Qur'an's aesthetic and oral dimensions.

Promotes a performative reading rather than a static legalistic one.

Builds a bridge with comparative Semitic oral literature.

Weaknesses:

Demands specialized literary training not accessible to most scholars.

Risks marginalizing theological or juridical dimensions of the text.

7.2. Comparative Methodology: Islamic and Western Traditions

Neuwirth advocates for a comparative paradigm that draws from both Islamic exegetical traditions and Western academic frameworks. She encourages reading the Qur'an alongside the Hebrew Bible and New Testament—not to subordinate it, but to contextualize its symbolic grammar.

"The most valuable insight from Islamic *tafsīr* is its linguistic precision and attentiveness to textual layers. Western criticism adds analytical clarity and historical framing." (Neuwirth, 2011, p. 31)

This method mirrors the work of scholars like Gabriel Said Reynolds, though her approach is more rhetorically driven.

Strengths:

Offers a balanced, dialogical model of engagement.

Legitimizes Islamic tradition within academic discourse.

Enhances intertextual literacy across Abrahamic scriptures.

Limitations:

Selective engagement with tafsīr (relying mainly on classical sources).

Absence of a unified theory guiding comparative judgments.

Occasional tendency to generalize or oversimplify Islamic interpretive diversity.

7.3. Hermeneutical Dialogue and Application

Neuwirth frequently calls for interpretive dialogue between Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. However, some critics argue that this dialogue remains largely theoretical in her work, with limited incorporation of living Islamic theological voices or popular reception of the Qur'an.

Moreover, her framework has been critiqued for lacking a fully articulated hermeneutical ethics—i.e., how to responsibly engage sacred texts within communities of faith. "Declaring dialogue is not enough. One must meaningfully integrate religious interpretive frameworks, not just critique them." (Berg, 2000, p. 91)

Section 8: Scholarly Criticism of Neuwirth's Work — Muslim and Western Perspectives

Despite the academic depth and innovation in Angelika Neuwirth's work, it has been the subject of extensive critique from both Muslim scholars and Western academics. These criticisms span theological, methodological, and epistemological concerns, and they reflect the complex reception of her ideas in various intellectual and cultural settings.

This section presents a systematic account of the major objections to her project, categorized by source and content.

8. 1. Traditional Muslim Criticism: Concerns Over Doctrinal Integrity

From traditionalist Islamic scholars, the main critique revolves around Neuwirth's reconceptualization of the Qur'an as a product of Late Antiquity, which they see as fundamentally incompatible with the Muslim belief in the Qur'an as eternal, divine revelation.

"What Neuwirth offers is not Qur'anic science ('Ulūm al-Qur'ān), but a secular reading that strips the text of its metaphysical grounding." (Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī, Al-Jazeera Interview, 2003)

This objection focuses on her historical contextualization, which they interpret as a denial of the Qur'an's transcendence and timelessness. They argue that her model reduces the divine to the human by treating the Qur'an as a cultural document rather than sacred speech.

8.2. Progressive Muslim Criticism: Selective Context and Neglect of Internal Dynamism

Some Muslim reformists and intellectuals, while appreciative of Neuwirth's contextual method, criticize her for being overly focused on the Jewish and Christian milieu, at the expense of the Qur'an's indigenous Arab roots and internal coherence. "What we need is not to link the Qur'an to the Bible, but to re-link it to contemporary Muslim thought and society." (Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Leiden University Lecture, 1999)

They also argue that Neuwirth underplays the moral and ethical dynamism of the text, focusing instead on literary form and external parallels.

8.3. Western Academic Criticism: Methodological and Historical Concerns

From within the Western academic tradition, notable scholars such as Fred Donner, Michael Cook, and Andrew Rippin have raised critical concerns about Neuwirth's framework:

Overemphasis on literary unity: While Neuwirth defends the Qur'an's internal coherence, critics suggest she downplays textual diversity and contradictions that are central to other Western reconstructions of the Qur'an's formation.

Lack of attention to oral transmission: Scholars argue that her focus on written texts and manuscripts ignores the central role of oral recitation in the Qur'an's compilation and dissemination.

Inflated influence of Jewish and Christian sources: Critics like Gabriel Said Reynolds caution against overstating biblical parallels, suggesting that the Qur'an reinterprets rather than merely borrows biblical material.

"Qur’anic engagement with previous scriptures is not derivative—it is polemical and innovative, producing a distinct theological voice."(Reynolds, 2008, p. 65)

8.4. Methodological Contradictions and Hermeneutical Gaps

Despite calling for a dialogical approach, Neuwirth is accused of failing to meaningfully incorporate Muslim theological frameworks in her own analysis. Her work, while generous in tone, often remains anchored in European academic norms, with little reflexive critique of their limits.

"Proposing dialogue is one thing; practicing hermeneutical humility in engaging faith-based perspectives is quite another."(Berg, 2000, p. 91)

Furthermore, her assumption of a coherent "Late Antique milieu" has been challenged by historians who emphasize the fragmented, pluralistic nature of the period, suggesting that her cultural reconstructions risk homogenizing complexity.

Section 9: Summary Table of Neuwirth’s Ideas and Impact

After an extensive review of Angelika Neuwirth’s scholarship—its methodological foundations, thematic contributions, and reception—this section presents a comparative analytical table summarizing her major ideas, their alignment with Islamic and Western perspectives, and their broader impact on Qur’anic studies.

This synthesis allows for a concise yet critical appraisal of her conceptual framework, analytical strategies, and reception across intellectual traditions.

Comparative Analytical Table:

Analytical Dimension	Neuwirth’s Position	Traditional Islamic Response	Progressive Islamic Perspective	Western Academic Evaluation
Nature of the Qur’an	A monotheistic cultural text rooted in Late Antiquity	Rejection: Qur’an is divine revelation, not historical	Partial acceptance with caveats on over-historicization	Mixed: valuable but sometimes over-contextualized

Methodological Approach Rhetorical-literary, contextual-historical, intertextual
 Criticized for secularizing the text Seen as opening space for hermeneutical
 renewal Applauded for rigor, but lacks documentation of orality Sources of
 Interpretation Late Antique literature, biblical texts, selected tafsīr Seen as
 marginalizing prophetic traditions and hadith Encouraged but with calls for more
 inclusion of tafsīr Questioned for selective use of Islamic sources.

Role of Historical Context Essential for textual understanding Viewed as
 secondary or supplemental Essential for reformist hermeneutics Central to most
 academic reconstructions.

Qur'anic Rhetoric Performative, poetic, orally persuasive Accepted if not
 separated from theological intent Promoted in modern stylistic tafsīr approaches
 Considered a key breakthrough in Qur'anic analysis Impact on Interpretation
 Indirect influence through reformist thinkers and academic curricula Criticized as
 foreign or subversive Inspired new approaches in pedagogy and public discourse
 Seen as foundational in modern Western Qur'anic studies.

Relationship with the Bible Structural and thematic continuity with previous
 scriptures Rejected: Qur'an as corrector, not continuer Accepted with emphasis
 on Qur'anic originality Welcomed, with warnings against textual equivalence

Mode of Engagement Academic, dialogical, interdisciplinary Viewed as lacking
 spiritual reverence Acknowledged but seen as distanced from lived Islam
 Applauded for bridging scholarly divides.

Key Takeaways:

Neuwirth's approach redefines the Qur'an as both sacred text and literary
 document, opening interpretive space beyond traditional exegesis.

Her work has provoked strong reactions—ranging from doctrinal opposition to
 cautious appreciation and scholarly debate.

She has revived rhetorical and contextual appreciation of the Qur'an but has yet
 to provide an integrative model that is fully welcomed across epistemological
 camps.

The future of her influence lies in whether her interdisciplinary tools can be harmonized with Islamic frameworks without negating spiritual foundations.

"Comparative Qur'anic studies should not be a zero-sum game between secular reason and sacred tradition, but a shared pursuit of layered truth." (Cook, 2000, p. 97)

Section 10: Conclusion and Full Bibliography

10.1. Conclusion

Angelika Neuwirth's contributions have undeniably reshaped the terrain of modern Qur'anic studies. Her work departs from both **classical Orientalism**, which often approached the Qur'an with skepticism or reductionism, and **traditional Islamic exegesis**, which can resist historical and comparative methodologies. Instead, she proposes a **middle ground**: a **literary and historical reading of the Qur'an** that neither dismisses its sacred status nor isolates it from its Late Antique environment.

Neuwirth views the Qur'an as a **performative, dialogical, and rhetorically rich text**, addressed to a real historical audience. She seeks to reintroduce **context**, **orality**, and **literary form** as integral to understanding the Qur'an's message and function. Her method has opened new paths for **interdisciplinary collaboration**, especially through initiatives like the *Corpus Coranicum*, and has left a tangible mark on reformist Islamic thinkers and critical pedagogy in Muslim contexts.

However, her approach is not without its **shortcomings**:

- It tends to **overemphasize** external cultural and biblical parallels.
- It often **neglects the diversity and depth** of traditional Islamic hermeneutics.
- It **underrepresents the oral, performative reception** of the Qur'an in early Islamic society.
- It sometimes fails to fully engage with the **spiritual and devotional dimensions** of the text.

As such, future Qur'anic studies will benefit from an **integrative approach**—one that preserves the **sacredness of the text** while engaging **scientific and**

comparative tools with critical awareness. Neuwirth's work may not offer the final model, but it provides a vital framework for ongoing debate, methodological innovation, and cross-cultural scholarly dialogue.

References

- Arkoun, Mohammed. (1996). *Islamic Thought: Critique and Ijtihad*. Beirut: Markaz al-Inma' al-Qawmi.
- Abu Zayd, Nasr Hamid. (1999). *Discourse and Interpretation*. Beirut: Arab Cultural Center.
- Al-Sharfi, Abdelmajid. (2002). *Islam and Modernity*. Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a.
- Al-Qaradawi, Yusuf. (2003). *Interview, Al Jazeera Channel*.
- Berg, H. (2000). *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period*. Routledge.
- Cook, M. (2000). *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*. Cambridge University Press.
- Donner, F. (2010). *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Harvard University Press.
- McAuliffe, J. D. (2006). *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mir, M. (1986). *Coherence in the Qur'an*. American Trust Publications.
- Neuwirth, A. (2010). *Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text*. Oxford University Press.
- Neuwirth, A. (2011). "Qur'anic Studies and Historical-Critical Method." In *Approaches to the Qur'an in Contemporary Indonesia*. Oxford University Press.
- Neuwirth, A. (2014). *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein europäischer Zugang*. Verlag der Weltreligionen, Berlin.
- Reynolds, G. S. (2008). *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*. Routledge.
- Rippin, A. (2001). *The Qur'an and Its Interpretative Tradition*. Variorum.