

THE SYRO-ARAMAIC MESSIAH: THE HEBRAIC THOUGHT, ARABIC CULTURE A Philological Criticism

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Abstract:

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi wacana mesianisme melalui text Semit bertradisi Arab, dan sekaligus mengkritisi para akademisi literal dan liberal yang tak berterima tentang eksistensi Mesias Ibrani apalagi Mesias Syro-Arami. Di kalangan politisi Muslim, agamawan rumpun Ibrahimi, maupun akademisi kultural Semit, tema sentral mengenai mesianisme masih menjadi tema kontroversial. Pada era milenium ketiga ini, terutama di kalangan 'Masyarakat Berkita' - mengutip istilah Dr. Muhammad Arkoen, pakar sastra Arab Mesir - perdebatan politiko-teologis tema tersebut masih mengacu pada tiga ranah sub-tema kontroversial; (1) politisasi ideologi mesianisme yang dianggap 'a historis' akibat tragedi *politico-social captivity*, (2) misidentifikasi personal Mesias Syro-Arami yang sebenarnya mengakar dan pengembangan dari konsep Mesianisme Ibrani, (3) pembenaran teks sakral Islam terhadap *Yeshô' de-Meshîho* sebagai Mesias Syro-Arami dalam kultur Arab melalui cara kontekstualisasi iman dan tradisi Semit liyan. Tulisan ini mencoba untuk mendekonstruksi 'keberatan rasional akademik sekuler' dan komunitas iman yang mengusung 'Arabisme' terhadap kesejatan Mesias Syro-Arami sebagai manifestasi dan pengejawantahan Mesias Ibrani, terutama dengan menggunakan pendekatan linguistik historis (filologi) dan data historis.

Keywords: *Hebraic Messiah, Syro-Aramaic Messiah, Eastern Syriac, Western Syriac, Semitic, Arabic, Quraishite dialect, 'Ishô, Yeshô', Meshîho, Dagala, theology of the hope, the myth of the hope.*

In the study of Abrahamic religions, especially in Islamology, a study of the Messianic Discourse and the role of the Judahite Messiah, known as *'Ishô de-Meshîho* (the Eastern Syriac) or *Yeshô' de-Meshîho* (the Western Syriac) became interesting topics. Some Moslem scholars in the East as well as in the West, however, have discussed these issues in their various writings, but their researches ironically without referring to the classical data beyond of Islamic literatures to dig up the real understanding through a historical-linguistic study of Semitic culture, like Hebrew literatures and

Syriac/ Aramaic works. Therefore, as a result, without philological understanding, many Moslem theologians developed a wicked hermeneutic approach of both issues among Moslem academicians and fall into a fallacy thinking to interpret the term of *Al-Masîḥ* in Arabic context of the Quran with which the origin of its setting refers to Jesus Christ himself.

Meanwhile, few classical Moslem scholars concerned to discover the origin of the term. A number of those who treated of stray Quranic words of foreign origin is indeed considerable, and there is no need to mention them here by name. Among those who attempted to collect such words in a more or less systematic way, I refer to Jalaluddin al-Suyuti's work, *al-Itqân fi 'Ulûmil Qur'ân*, the best one of Moslem commentators of Quranic critic of Islam who would yield a great harvest of fresh information on the foreign vocabularies in the Quran. The only qualifications needed is that the critic should be armed with a good knowledge of Syriac, Ethiopic, and Hebrew. The writer remark however, that the very restricted knowledge which all the Moslem authors had of other Semitic languages, besides Arabic. And, as an important study, Syriac is much more useful than Ethiopic and Hebrew as the former language that seems have much more pronounced influence on the style of the Quran.

On the other hand, censorship of the unique meaning of *Al-Masîḥ* in the Quran which is related to Hebrew frame of reference has ironically been becoming a new tyranny of the words, mainly through mass media, literatures, journals, or seminars in or beyond the academies. The Messianic idea which refers to a 'theology of the hope' in Judaism, specifically to the coming of Jesus, is totally damage and changed, then regarding it as a 'the myth of the hope.' Moslem scholars who claimed that the Judaic Messianic idea of the past was composed and designed by men of the era of politico-social captivity, and the result of a combination of epileptic and overactive imagination in which the theology of the hope is as a paradigm of thinking. Political depression for Jews, its disappointment, and defeat of fighting for power in the era of broken regimes, in many cases extremely created a new trend through the 'imitation' of Zoroastrian myth hegemony in the land of Babylonian Empire territory.¹ Thus, their knowledge world view by which the Moslem scholars called it as a spirit of post-exilic Jewish messianic ideology. This term, however, is regarded as an imaginative creation by which refers to an 'Expected One' of Hebraic Messiah among the Jews. So far, secular scholars crushed totally the meaning of the Hebraic Messiah too which has a meaning of the 'Savior' as the culprit of semantic fallacy in Judaic theology of the hope, and being this one a target of holy word tyranny in a model of linguistic *per se*.

1 Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Agama Peradaban: Membangun Makna dan Relevansi Doktrin Islam dalam Sejarah*, Jakarta: Paramadina, 2000, 103

1. The Challenge of Hebraic Messianic Ideology

One source of confusion is that the term 'messianic' has much wider range of meaning than 'Messiah.'. The term 'messianic' is usually applied to everything in the Old Testament when it refers the hope of a glorious future. This suggests that the central feature of the coming golden age is the expectation of the Savior and King Messiah. But, that fact is hotly debated, for in the minds of most scholars today, the oldest and most general expectation was for a coming era of happiness. Many scholars concerned to a Messianic idea, only in much later times, according to this academic consensus, was the hope of the Messiah connected with this expectation.

There are many books exploring the Messianic idea in the period of the prophets, like Adam C. Welch's, *'Post-Exilic Judaism'* (Edinburgh, 1935), E. Koenig's work, *'Die Messianischen Weissagungen des Alten Testaments'* (Stuttgart, 1923). There are also monographs which span the period of the Second Temple, like P. Volz's work, *'Die Eschatologie der Jüdischen Gemeinde im Neutestamentlichen Zeitalter'* (Tübingen, 1934), others treat the Talmudic period in relation to more or less important detail of the Messianic idea, like M. Robinshon's work, *'Le Messianisme dans le Talmud et les Midraschim'* (Paris, 1907). But, there is not even one book which encompasses the Messianic hope in all its periods from its beginning, in pre-exilic period of the Jews.

The making of the Messianic idea which refers to 'the Expected One', 'the Awaited One', or 'the Promised One' is not coming into an imagination after the age of captivity in the land of Babylonian when the Israelite people was annexed, or post-Exilic Babylon Empire, but this idea was already crystallized in the era of Egyptian Exile, namely 'the days of Moses' (*yom Moshe*). Meanwhile, an extended meaning 'the awaited' who will be a savior (redeemer) in each historical setting has a legitimate from its beginning of historical salvation of Jews in Egypt land. If we apply the word *Mashiah* in generic component *an sich* to Joseph, or Moses; these heroic men can not be the Messiahs because of non-ritually anointed ones, except Aaron. But, in the ancient Egyptian culture, Joseph is called in Coptic language as *Yoseph Zaphenath Pa'aneah* (יוסף צפנת פענח) means a savior which refers to the Coptic culture (Genesis 41:45, cf. Psalm 105:15-22).

In the Judaic episteme, the Hebraic Messiah is a phrase which refers to 'the anointed one' from Israel who will come with a Hebraic culture. It is a technical term for the promised Davidic ruler for Hebrews, occurs rarely, if at all, in the entire *Tanakh* (the Masoretic Bible). While the Hebraic Messiah may not appear in the *Tanakh* under the specific title, the choice of this term, during the second Temple period to encapsulate the Biblical messianic hope is, nevertheless, quite appropriate. In Biblical usage, the Hebrew

term *Mashiah* designates 'one anointed' with oil or with Holy Spirit of God. Meanwhile, this term, was translated as Χρίστος (*Christos*) in the Greek version, namely the 'Septuagint' (LXX) as the Hellenic Bible which became the official designation for Jesus in the Greek New Testament as well as in the Eastern Syriac, namely *Peshitta* with the term *Meshiha*.

Meanwhile, in the early Islamic documents, the Quran and the Hadith Literatures proclaimed that the figure of Jesus was as the real *Al-Masîh*, although the understanding of the Arabic term *per se* has multi-interpretations. However, the existence of Jesus who has a connection to the word *Al-Masîh* could not be rejected or marginalized from the Islamic documents literally. Therefore, since the beginning, the clash of definitions on Quranic term of *Al-Masîh* in the paradigm of Arabic context soon became a subject of intense debates among religious academicians, scholars, Sunnite and Shiite clergymen, and Islamic politicians. However, it has become famous but controversial issue from its beginning to the completion of the Hadithic Canons in Islam.

In the problem of interpretation, however, half of Moslems rejected the meaning of *Al-Masîh* as a 'Savior' which refers to 'the Expected One' or 'the Chosen One' according to the Hebraic context, and most of them received its meaning as the 'Savior' or the 'Promised One' in the context of Hebrews. Meanwhile, in a contemporary discussion of interfaith, the intellectual discourse of a comparative study of common Semitic, such as Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic languages in Indonesia, became a trend thinking for formulating a meeting point of Abrahamic faiths among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam which have the same platform in the heavenly original revelation. This discourse, however, is not only to get the real meaning, and true interpretation, especially to focus about a problem of understanding on *Al-Masîh*, an Arabic term, but also to reestablish the genuine message in which the multi-dimensions of the Abrahamic revelations heritage can be understood by modern men and its origin in each cultural context.

Thus, the differences of understanding about *Al-Masîh* term among Moslems, inspire me to have a research on a core problem concerning Hebraic Messiah in Arabic context. So, by this way, the scientific terror and tyranny of the word must be deconstructed to discover the real essence of the Hebraic Messiah by philology/linguistic.

To analyze the Hebraic term *Mashiah* in a frame of linguistic reference, I use the theory of Eugene A. Nida. He said that a word deals with componential analysis which is an important method to be used to describe the internal and external structures of lexical item, and furthermore, the meaning of each word deals with three components; generic component, specific (contractive/distinctive) component, and supplementary (incidental)

component.² In the study of philology, there is an academic statement that each word has a history of its own. It means each word has historical linguistic journey cross-culturally, and cross-theologically. In the Semitic lexicon, the Islamic Arabic word *Al-Masîḥ* has a common origin etymologically. This Semitic word, however, is a part of the grant narrative of Abrahamic text of Islam. To understand about the source language of this Semitic word, *Al-Masîḥ*, as the title of Jesus in the Islamic literary tradition, there are three assumption; (1) the Arabic lexicon, (2) the Arabized Syro-Aramaic lexicon, (3) the Arabized Hebrew lexicon.

2. The Syro-Aramaic Linguistic in Islam

Before the Islamic period, the first independent and clearly defined northern Arab Christian Kingdom known to us is that of the Nabataeans, centered on Petra, Jordan. They were known by their local tribal name *Nabatu*, and they were certainly Arabs who spoke a form of the spoken Arabic language. For their inscriptions, however, they used the Aramaic which had become established as a language of colonial administration under the Assyrians and Persians. The fact that the Nabataeans generally spoke Arabic is reflected in the intrusion of certain distinctively Arabic forms and words into the Aramaic of their inscriptions. When eventually the Arabs in the region began to experiment for the first time with writing Arabic, they used the Nabataean Aramaic script which was familiar to them. The Nabataean Aramaic script was ultimately derived from the earlier Aramaic script in use under the Persian Empire, is well known from the first century AD. It is found in two forms; the cursive script and formal one. Both scripts were used for monumental inscriptions, quite common on tombs at Petra (Jordan), Madâin (Saudi Arabia), Madeba (first century AD.), including the Arabic inscriptions from Zebed (512 AD.), Harrân, south of Damascus (568 AD.), and Umm al-Jimâl (250 AD.). The inscriptions on the tombs, especially 'the Zabad Inscription', according to an archeologist of the West, Dr. Sachau in 1881 AD. found something like 'the Rosetta Stone' as well as the Zabad with three inscriptions, in Aramaic (the left of the Cross symbol), in Greek (the right of the Cross symbol), and in Arabic (below of the Cross symbol).³ Also, 'the Harrân al-Laja Inscription', in the region of Druze, was written in both languages; Greek and Arabic. Then, not only that, the similarities are also reflected in more developed *Naskhî* which so-called the Meccan-Medinan script, used in many fine manuscripts

2 Eugene A. Nida, *Componential Analysis of Meaning: an Introduction to Semantic Structure*, London: Oxford University Press, 1975, 95

3 J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, London-Beirut: Longman and Librairie du Liban, 1979, 226-227.

of the earliest Quran. This form of Arabic script represent the outcome of a continuous tradition of writing in Nabataeo-Arabic in the Hijâz-Jordan-Syria area. In the East, a slightly different script came to be called *Kûfi*; this may have arisen from an offshoot of the Nabataean Aramaic script/ *Serto* script, the writing style of the Western Syrian Church, and may have been more strongly influenced by other Aramaic model, *Estrangela* script which is derived from the Greek term, στρωγγυλος (*strongulos*); the writing style of the Eastern Syrian Church. It seems that the Nabataean script lies at the origin of the Arabic script, and at the same time, the Nabataean-Aramaic script can be regarded as the 'Christian script' among the Arab-Pagans which then became 'the golden bridge' to the Arabic script, or the Muslim script.

Of course, Nabataeans were certainly Arabs, and they spoke a form of the Arabic language for public purposes, and at the same time, they used the Aramaic language which became a *lingua franca* for diplomacy and trade. In other words, the Nabataeans, most of them spoke the Aramaic fluently side by side with Arabic. Both languages, however, were formally written in Aramaic script which gradually developed and then became a new script, Arabic in two models; *Naskhî* and *Kûfi*. In the light of linguistic or philology, in fact, the Arabic words were generally influenced by Aramaic vocabularies until the establishment of Arabic *an sich* as an independent language. It also indicates that Arabic *per se* before Islam was already used as a complementary language, and in the era of Islam, it became most prestige through the process of *hogere op trackking* in the mind-set of Arab Christians. When the Islamic history appeared as a new religion in Hijaz land, the function of the Arabic language then incarnated to be a *lingua sacra* by which since the beginning it was being a *lingua franca*, the daily spoken language of Arab Christians. Also, at the same time, the writing system and style of both Aramaic/ Syriac scripts, namely *Estrangelo* and *Serto* culturally incarnated into the early Arabic scripts; from the paradigm of *scripta sancta* in the episteme of *Christiana* became the *scripta sacra* in the episteme of *Islamica*. Therefore, in the study of historical linguistic in the Middle East, there was a process of sacredness in two periods; pre-Christian era, and pre-Islamic era. The '*Aromiyo* that means Aramaic before Christian era was considered as '*Armoyo*, which means 'Pagan', the language of non-Christianity; so also the '*Arobiyyah* (cf. Syriac: '*Arobiyyo*) that means Arabic before Islamic era was actually regarded as *Masihyyah* (cf. Syriac: *Mesihyyo*), the language of non-Islam which referred to the *lingua franca* of all Arab Christians among the Syrians. Naturally, in the light of evolution of Islamic revelation, through the process of divine baptism, the Arabic language in the framework of the Quran appeared and shifted the status of *lingua sacra* of Aramaic (the language of Jesus Christ) from its position among the Arabs and Syrians, although many Arabic words *an sich* originally derived from Aramaic.

Here, we then know that the Syro-Aramaic linguistic as the cultural bridge developed in form of the Arabized-Aramaic in pre-Islamic era. And, this hybrid Aramaic, until the making of the Quraishite Arabic, gradually crystallized in form of the Islamized-Arabic in the corpus of the Quran. In other words, the Quraishite dialect of Arabic is the Hybrid Arabic of Syro-Aramaic. In the paradigm of historical linguistic study, it means that in the early Islamic times, the existence of Christianized-Aramaic (*lingua sacra*) among the Arab-Christians has transformed into the Arabized-Aramaic (*lingua franca*) among the Arab-Pagans, then incarnated in form of the Islamized-Arabic (*lingua sacra*) among the Arab-Moslems. It also indicates that in the study of intertextuality of the sacred texts in the expression of the interactive cultural practices between the Aramaic-Christianity and the Arabic-Islam in this case, is a model of mutual interaction of common heritage between the Arab-Moslems and the Aramaic-Christians or Arab-Christians.

3. The Peshitta Heritage in the Quraishite Dialect

The 'Peshitta' is the official Bible of the Aramaic Christian which is the standard Syriac version with a distinctive variation of the Aramaic alphabet (script). The script of the Eastern Syriac is known as *Estrangelo*, and another script of the Western Syriac is known as *Serto*. However, Syriac is still its ecclesiastical language in the East Syriac community as well as in the West. Syriac belongs to the Semitic family of languages, and it is dialect of Aramaic. In the early centuries of Arabic rule, there emerged various vocalization systems to assist the reading and pronunciation of the unvowelled Syriac script. What finally emerged for Syriac, were two different systems. One was used by West Syrians and Maronites (the so-called Jacobite vowel sign), and they were called 'Peshitto' in the Western Syriac dialect. The other was employed by East Syrians (the so-called Nestrian vowel sign).⁴ They were called 'Peshitta' in the Eastern Syriac dialect. It should be explained here that the 'Syriac' is the name that is generally given to the Syriac-speaking Churches among Aramaic Christian communities such as Mar Thoma Church (Syrian Church of Malabar in India), Assyrian Orthodox Church, Syrian Orthodox Church, and other Syrians. They used the standard Syriac version of the Bible which is known as the 'Peshitta' or 'Peshitto', meaning 'simple version' generically.⁵

4 Edip Aydin, *A Bird's Eye View of the Syriac Language and Literature*, vol.5., Courtesy of Gouden Hoorn Publication, 1997, 2

5 F.F. Bruce, *the Book and the Parchment: Some Chapters on the Transmission of the Bible*, London: Pickering and Inglis Ltd, 1953, 183

The Syriac Old Testament is evidently a translation from the Hebrew Bible, and the oral paraphrase of the Hebrew Bible itself in Syriac language was called a 'Targum.' In pre-Islamic times, the existence of the 'Targum' for Jews, however, is an important holy scriptures. There are two authoritative Targums appeared for Jews, based on the official text and interpretation. One of these was a Targum to the Pentateuch, called the Targum of Onkelos, the other was a Targum to the prophets, called the Targum of Jonathan. The Rabbis read these Targums in the synagogues on Sabbaths and festivals continuously. When and by whom these Targums were made, we have no direct information.

About A.D.400, Theodore of Mopsuestia could write these: "It has been translated into the tongue of the Syrians by someone or other." It means that the Jews before Islam were familiar to the religious terms in Aramaic/ Syriac, besides the Hebrew. So far, according to John F. Healey (1993), about AD.200, the Bible was translated into the local Aramaic dialect, which known as Syriac, and dissemination of the Syriac Bible and the works of Syriac-speaking and writing theologians led to the use of the Syriac language. Meanwhile, although the Arabs are known present as an identifiable group from early as the Assyrian period, in 9th – 7th BC, they did not become prominent historically until about the time of Christ. In this later period, there was a strong Arab presence in the Hellenized cities of the Middle East such as Edessa and Palmyra, where both Greek & Aramaic scripts were in use. The first independent and clearly defined northern Arab Christian Kingdom, known is that of the Nabataeans, centered on Petra in modern Jordan. The Nabataeans were certainly Arabs, and they spoke a form of the Arabic language. For their inscriptions, however, they use the Aramaic which had established as a language of colonial administration under the Assyrians and Persians. The fact that they normally spoke Arabic is reflected in the intrusion of certain distinctively Arabic forms and words into the Aramaic of their inscriptions.⁶

However, at the same time, the Syriac Christians and the Arabic Christians spoke of Jesus Christ, and of course, they were familiar with 'oral Peshitta', although the 'written Peshitta' was not yet exist, because there was a standard edition of the Syriac New Testament, called 'Peshitta' that has generally been identified with the revision undertaken by Rabulla, who was a Bishop of Edessa from 411 to 435.⁷ It means that Syriac Christians in pre-Islamic times, in the context of history, were familiar to the religious terms in Aramaic, at the same time, the Arabic language became a 'lingua franca' in the Arabian land. But, as a problem, did they transform

6 John F. Healey, *Reading the Past: the Early Alphabet*, London: British Museum Press, 1993, 49-51

7 F.F. Bruce, *Op. Cit.*, 183-184

their religious terms into Arabic? However, in the context of foreign historical references, it proved the phenomena by which the holy stories of the Hebraic prophets, and Messiahship of Jesus were available in the Quran.

During the rule of the third Caliph, Uthman, it was reported that the Quran was being pronounced with different accents, especially by the non-Arab converts to Islam. Othman's action was instantaneous. He recalled all copies of the Quran in circulation, and appointed a committee of four former scribes, including Zaid ibn Thabit, to study the Quran further. The committee authorized one standard copy, which followed the Quraishite dialect which the prophet himself had used. The Quran used today is the very same one as received by the prophet, and authorized by Caliph Uthman and the companions of the prophet in A.D.651.⁸ From the beginning, the Quran was written in this dialect. However, this historical data is related to an Arabic language in the era of the coming of Islam as a 'lingua franca' among the Arabs. Although the Arabic language have many dialects, but the Quran, however, was produced in a dialect of the Arab prophet. In fact, in this dialect of *Quraish*, however, many foreign vocabularies of the Quran can be identified as the influence of Syriac style.⁹

4. The Syro-Aramaic World in Arabic Words

Depending on the use of the term *Mashiah* in all Biblical texts, we can describe that from its beginning, this Masoretic term is 'one word but two type; lexical semantic, and lexical stylistic, (1) *Mashiah* (lexical semantic) in its primary (literal) meaning deals with generic component which means 'the ritually anointed', and complementary component which means 'the chosen'; (2) *Mashiah* (lexical stylistic) in its secondary meaning (literary) deals with specific component with means 'the savior', 'the awaited', 'the expected', 'the promised'; and the complementary component with means 'the chosen.' The meeting point between two meanings of semantic and stylistic of the Hebraic Messianic term, *Mashiah* is in the complementary component 'the chosen.' If someone is appointed by God as 'the ritually Anointed One', automatically he will be 'the Chosen One', and he will be called the Messiah as well as for those who is appointed by God as 'the Awaited One', he will be 'the Chosen One', and he is called 'the Messiah.' Otherwise, for those who is anointed with oil by God through the human mediator, he can not be 'the Awaited One', although he is called 'the Messiah', like the title of Aaron, which means 'the Anointed One.'

8 Badru D. Kateregga and David W. Shenk, *a Moslem and a Christian in Dialogue*, Scottdale: Herald Press, 1977, 59

9 For further reading of this theme, see Arthur Jeffery, *the Foreign Vocabularies of the Quran*, Lahore: Albiruni, 1977

In the context of Quran, the term *Al-Masîḥ* refers to two meanings. The term also refers to both surface and deepest level meanings in the Arab culture, like in Hebrew context. The surface level of it refers to 'the Anointed One', and at the same time, the deepest level of the word refers to the 'the Chosen One' by God's will.

Ironically, Prof. Dr. Nurcholish Madjid in his book 'Islam Agama Peradaban: Membangun Makna dan Relevansi Doktrin Islam dalam Sejarah' (2000) snared into the deepest fallacy.¹⁰ He describes the term *Al-Masîḥ* in Arabic word, and the word is a cognate with the Hebrew term, *Mashiah* (מָשִׁיחַ) meaning 'the Messiah' (the Anointed One). Then, the term *Al-Masîḥ* is derived from an Arabic-stem *Mash*, like the Masoretic Hebrew stem, *Masha* (מָשַׁח) meaning 'to anoint.' By using a similar form of *Al-Masîḥ*, as an Arabic term by applying its derivation of the verb *Mash*, he concludes that the word *Al-Masîḥ* is derived from *Mash*, and he translates the meanings of *Al-Masîḥ* and *Mash* in the Quran through an Arabic context, so the translating of *Al-Masîḥ*, according to him, is an ritually 'Anointed One' *an sich* through the meaning of the Arabic word *Mash* which means 'to wipe' by referring to the Quran. In *al-Maidah* 5:6, the text describes, '*yâ ayyuhâ lazhîna âmanû izdâ quntum ila al-shalâti fa-aghsilû wujûhakum wa-aidiyakum ila al-marâfiq wa-amsahû bi-ruûsikum wa-arjulakum ila al-ka'bain*' (O believers when you rise to pray wash your faces and your hands as far as the elbow, and wipe your heads and your feet to the ankle). By quoting this verse, through Arabic word, he also directly has a conclusion that all Moslems who follow Islam as the organized religion, and believe to Muhammad the Prophet, then they rise to pray by wiping their heads, they can be called as *Al-Masîḥ*, (pl. *Al-Masîḥiyyûn*) which means 'the ritually anointed men' (the Messiahs), although they are not the Christians. Prayers for Moslems – according to Nurcholish Madjid's logic is a sign of inauguration of anyone to be *Al-Masîḥ*, so that it is not only for 'Isâ who has a title of *Al-Masîḥ*, but all Moslems who practicing prayers (*shalât*) automatically can be *Al-Masîḥ* because they wipe the heads (*mash al-ra's*). Nurcholish, however, falls into the deepest trapped of fallacies and dangerous identification on that case.

There are three factors of false thinking. First, semantic category. He can not be careful to categorize and classify the terms between the generic meaning and terminological one, so that according to his logical approach, a Moslem consequently can be called as a Christian (organized religion). Meanwhile, for the Arab Christians who communicate Arabic language in the Middle East, they are really familiar with liturgical Arabic language in their own churches, or they use it as a *lingua franca* in economy, politic, social, etc. Many Christian religious literatures are printed into Arabic too,

10 Nurcholish Madjid, *Op. Cit.*, 103-104

including the books of Christian dogma, such as *aqidah al-Masīḥiyyîn fi Al-Masīḥ*, *ta'lif al-Anba Yuanis*, *Usqûf fi al-Qâhirah* (the dogma of Christians on the Christ, written by Anba Johanes, the Bishop in Cairo, 1985), and another *al-Ta'lim al-Masīḥ al-Urtzûdukisî*, *ta'lif Iliyya, fi Beirût* (the teachings of Orthodox Christians, written by Elijah, in Beirut, 1959). The authors use the unique vocabularies in the context of Christianity, such as *al-Masīḥiyyîn*, *Al-Masīḥ*, and *al-Masīḥû*. These terms are not really generic meanings context, although these books were written in Arabic. To understand this Christian Arabic word, Nurcholish Madjid can not apply the generic meaning of those vocabularies textually or out of context of Christian dogma which literally refer to a theological semantic, because the real message is referring to Jesus as their Christ (the Messiah) and the followers of Christ (Christians) who believe in him. So far, according to the Bible discourse, it is not only referring to the meaning of the ritually 'Anointed One' *an sich*, but as 'the Chosen One.'

Second, etymological identification. He can not discover a derivation of the word, and differ between the foreign vocabularies (loan-words) and genuine (native) words in which both languages have different world views in cultural context. He has a false analysis when identifying both Arabic words; *Al-Masīḥ* and *Masḥ* in the same language because of the confusion of phonic interference and lexical interference, double fallacies. Therefore, he can not identify the source language of the word *Al-Masīḥ* in the Quran and the Hadith correctly; (1) the genuine Arabic, (2) the Arabized Syro-Aramaic, or (3) the Arabized Hebrew.

Third, historical criticism. The term *Al-Masīḥ*, in the Quran has a connection with the term '*Îsa*, the proper name of Jesus, because the term of *Al-Masīḥ* is one of titles of him, besides *al-nabî* and *al-rasûl*, which both words were textually used in written text of the Quran. '*Îsâ* and *Al-Masīḥ*, both Quranic Arabic terms as the form of Quraishite dialect, can not be separated, and these terms are always appearing in one theme of the Quranic style. In historical source, Jesus came from the land of the Jews or Hebrews, not Arabs. Then, the proper name of Jesus and his title were derived from Hebraic cultural context, so that the terms *Al-Masīḥ* and '*Îsa*; wherein this religious terms came from the Hebraic history by referring the historical background of the figure. Both terms don not come from Arabic history. It is out of historical context. The false analysis is caused by misidentifying and misunderstanding the source language & target language in Quranic written text, besides the fallacy in classifying the vocabularies in Hebraic or Arabic context.

In the Quranic discourse, a theme of the Syro-Aramaic Messiah always refers to Jesus Christ. His figure appears as '*Îsâ Al-Masīḥ*. As I mentioned before, that the title *Al-Masīḥ* in the Quran is always referred to the proper name of '*Îsâ* in many verses of the text. The name is still a puzzle to

scholarship. Some have suggested that it is really 'Esau (עֵשָׂו), and was learned by Muhammad from Jews who called Jesus out of hatred.¹¹ By some Western scholars, Maracci, Landauer, and Noldeke, it is a form imposed upon Prophet Muhammad by the Jews and used by him in good faith. They called Jesus as 'Esau in hatred and said that the soul of Esau had been transferred within him.¹² But, there is no historical evidence that Jews ever referred to Jesus by this name. This theory perhaps refers to those who rejected Jesus as the quasi Hebraic Messiah (*Meshiah sheqer*), and they never received and believed to him as the true Messiah for Jews according to the prophecy of Moses as a fulfilment of Masoretic Bible and the Talmud.

One of Christian scholars of Indonesia, Harun Hadiwiyono said that the word 'Îsâ in the Quran is originated naturally by metathesis change from Hebrew word *Yesu'* (יֵשׁוּעַ) into Arabic form 'Îsâ (عِيسَى).¹³ Harun's theory, however, is a prejudice to the Arabs, specially to Islam. He described it without supporting the data of archaeology among the Arab Christians themselves wherein they also used the proper name of Jesus in their Syriac dialects, such as *Yeshô'* and *Îsho*. Meanwhile, a theory of Western scholars is also addressed to the Jews without supporting the data of archaeology and philology, their theory is only a prejudice *an sich*. So that, in this context, their both theories have many weak analysis.

The others, Levy, Nestle hold that the name originated naturally by phonetic change from the Syriac, *Yeshu'* (ܝܫܘܥ) by Christians in Arabia before Muhammad. It is not unusual to find Arabic using an initial 'ain (ع) in words borrowed from Aramaic, and the dropping of final consonant of 'ain is evidenced by the form *Yishô*, and the late Jewish *Yeshô* for *Yeshô'*. The form 'Îsa, however, does not occur earlier than the Quran whereas *Yasu'* appears to have been used in personal names at an early period. Horovitz regarded it as some form of "konsonanten permulation" due maybe, to Muhammad himself, and perhaps influenced by Nestorian pronunciation.¹⁴ Spencer Trimingham also regarded that the proper name of Jesus in Arabic 'Îsa and his epithet *Al-Masih* come from the Nestorian Syriac, namely 'Îsho de-Meshihâ, where both are names of Jesus.¹⁵ The identification of the title of Jesus *de-Meshihâ* in the Eastern Syriac, according to J. Spencer Trimingham is right, like the pronunciation of *Meshihô* in the Western Syriac as well, but he have misidentified on the proper name of Jesus in a Nestorian

11 Arthur Jeffery, *Op. Cit.*, 219.

12 Gibb and Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1961, 173

13 Harun Hadiwijono, *Iman Kristen*, Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1986, 320

14 Arthur Jeffery, *Op. Cit.*, 219-220, cf. Gibb and Kramers, *Op. Cit.*, 173.

15 J. Spencer Trimingham, *Op. Cit.*, 267

dialect, *ʾĪsho*, the true pronunciation of the word as possible is *ʾĪsha* because the Nestorian Syriac (Nestorian dialect), which is also called the Eastern Syriac dialect consists in the pronunciation of original vocal 'a.'

Meanwhile, the written Syriac today is almost the same in morphology as the classical Syriac of the fourth Century. While the language remained the same, there emerged two dialectical pronunciations of Syriac, usually known as the Eastern and the Western. The Eastern Syriac, which is more archaic, is used, by the members of the Church of the East. The Western on the other hand, is mainly used by Syrian Orthodox and the Maronites. A clear difference between the Eastern and the Western consists in the pronunciation of original vocal 'a' wherein the Eastern pronunciation preserves it (e.g. *ʾbayta* means house), while the Western alters it to vocal 'o' (e.g. *ʾbayto* also means house).¹⁶

Then, it is possible, if the proper name of Jesus was pronounced in both dialects; *Yeshô* or *ʾĪsho* in Western Syriac, and *ʾĪshâ* in Eastern Syriac. Moreover, the research of archaeology in the domain of Eastern Syriac community in southern Syria, an archaeologist discovered a name of *ʾĪshâniyah*, means 'the followers' of *ʾĪshâ* in the ruins of monastery at 517.¹⁷

Meanwhile, many Moslem authorities have another analysis. However, they take the word as Arabic, and derived it from *ʾayasa* (عيس) means 'to be a dingy white', whence *ʾayasun* (عيس) means 'a reddish whiteness', or from *ʾaysun*, meaning 'a stallion's urine.' Zamakhsari, however, dismisses these suggestions with some scorn, and there were many how recognized it as a foreign word means *muʾarrib* (arabized).¹⁸ Likewise, Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani said "*tsumma ʾĪsâ bi al-suryaniyyati ʾĪshô wa maʾnahu al-mubarak.*" (then, the term in Arabic was derived from Syriac, *ʾĪshô* means 'the Blessed One').¹⁹ The origin of Arabic term, *ʾĪsâ*, according to him, is derived from Western Syriac word. It is as possible, from Eastern Syriac word, and it was a meaningless, because the term *Īshô*, *Yeshô* or *Yeshu* in Syriac was derived from Hebrew *Yeshûʾa*, means 'God who saves'.

As a comparative study, the Western Syriac community pronounce the proper name of Jesus is *Yeshuʾ Meshilho*, Matthew 1:1 *kthovo di lidutheh de-Yeshuʾ Meshilho breh de-Dawid breh de-Avraham*, means 'the book of generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.'²⁰ Then, if

16 Aydin, *Op. Cit.*, 1

17 Consonant "sh" in the form of "ʾĪshâ" then changed to be a consonant "s" in loanwords of Arabic. Cf. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Quran*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, 16-17

18 al-Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashshaf*. 3rd vol., Lebanon: Dar Kutub ʾilmiyyah, 2004, .40 (cf. Jeffrey, *The Foreign, Op. Cit.*, 219

19 Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani al-Jawi, *Marah Labib Tafsir al-Nawawi*, 1st vol. Surabaya: al-Hidayah, 1987, 104

20 The Aramaic Scriptures Research Society in Israel (ed.), *The New Testament: Peshitta Aramaic Text With a Hebrew Translation*, Jerusalem: Bible Society, 1986, 34

the verse is compared with Hebrew New Testament as follows *Sefer ha-yuhasin shel Yeshû'a ha-Mashiah ben David ben Avraham*.²¹ On the other hand, Eastern Syriac community pronounce the proper name of Jesus in another dialect *Ishâ Meshihâ*; for examples Matthew 1:1 *kthaba di lidhuteh de-Îshâ Meshihâ*, *brekh de-Dawid*, *breh de-Avraham*.²² By using a method of phonic interference correctly, the identification of the origin and justification of etymological analysis in which every word has each history can be discovered one by one according to its cultural context. For the example, I would like to reconstruct the historical journey of the title of Jesus from its beginning to Arabic vocabulary; (Hebrew) *ha-Mashiah* → (the Western Syriac) *de-Meshihô* → (the Eastern Syriac) *de-Meshihû* → (Arabic) *Al-Masîh*. Then, by using a method of lexical interference, the identification of proper name of Jesus in Arabic word is able to be traced from the common Semitic back etymologically as follows; (Masoretic-Hebrew) *Yehoshû'a* → (Mishnaic-Hebrew) *Yeshû'a* → (Western Syriac) → *Yeshu'* ? *Yeshô* → *Yeshô* → *Yishô* → *'Ishô* (the Easter Syriac) → *'Îshû* (Arabic) → *'Îsâ*.

Meanwhile, the phenomena of phonetic correspondence of the other proper names between Hebrew and Arabic loanwords are not a problem, like *Yishmael*, *Yisrael*, *Yitshaq* in Hebrew become different pronounces in Arabic; *Isma'il*, *Israil*, *Ishaq*. Likewise, vowel 'o' in Western Syriac becomes vowel 'a' in Arabic, like *kthobo* and *Îshô* become *kitaba* and *'Îsâ*, and at the same time, consonants 'sh' or 's' is exchangeable among those languages. This analysis depends on the study of philological criticism and it has to be supported by a study of historical criticism.

Concerning about my research, it is amazing, why are there three Quraishite vocabularies in the Quran and the Hadith; *'Îsâ*, *Al-Masîh*, dan *Al-Dajjâl*? Are these words *dreieinigkeit* which embracing into the religious vocabularies of Arab culture, especially into a world view of the Islam as a manifestation of Quraishite dialect? Are these words the genuine Arabic or Arabized Syro-Aramaic through the Aramized Masoretic Hebrew? Which languages and dialects are supported in the Syriac of the past which injected into Arabic vocabularies? Many Semitic linguists classified them into; Classical Syriac, Swadaya (the Eastern Neo-Aramaic dialect of the Assyrians and Chaldeans), Turoyo (the Central Neo-Aramaic dialect of the Syriac Orthodox of Tur Abdin), Garshuni (Arabic written in Syriac), Christian Palestinian Aramaic (also called Palestinian Syriac), and its scripts divided into Estrangelo (West Syriac), and Serto (East Syriac). A study of Aramaic, as a golden bridge among Islam, Christianity and Judaism, of

21 The Bible Society in Israel (ed.), *Sefer Berith ha-Hadashah: Targum Hadatsh*, Jerusalem: United Bible Societies, 1976, 1

22 *Ktaba Qadisha*, Et hataq be-Madinta de'Orash de-Amra: be-Sita Msihta Ef'at, 1982, .5

course, is an important study to discover everything, mainly to reconstruct the Quranic text messages.

In a contemporary research, many specialist of the Aramaic language have analyzed closely this topic, and they had come to distinguish various Aramaic dialects in the contemporary Palestine of Jesus as testified to by inscriptions thus discovered, based on this data, they are able to distinguish seven dialects that were shared by seven different locations in this small region such as Aramaic of Judea/ Hebrew dialect, Aramaic of Southern Judea, Aramaic of Samaria, Aramaic of Galilee, Aramaic from beyond Jordan, Aramaic from Damascus, and Aramaic spoken in the River Basin of Syria.²³

Concerning about the term *al-Dajjâl* in Islamic literature, it is really important to explore the influence of Syriac style in a deepest analysis. Besides the term *Al-Masîḥ*, in which the Quranic text proves it, a lot of hadithic texts of Prophet Muhammad also affirmed the using of the word deals with or combines with another loanword by which the some scholars identified it as a Syriac word, like *Al-Masîḥ al-Dajjâl*. This phrase refers to an Antichrist in the world-view of Syro-Aramaic Christian theology. The term *al-Dajjâl* means *al-kadhḥâb* in Arabic, and the word is not found in the Quran. It is probably an Aramaic/ Syriac loanword. In Syriac Peshitta, it is found as an epithet of the Antichrist. On the other hand, the existence in Arabic of the verb *dajjala* with the meaning 'to deceive', given in the lexicons without further references.²⁴

About a theology of *al-Dajjâl* (الدجال), there is a famous hadith, *la yadhulu al-Madinah ru'ba al-Masîḥ al-Dajjal, laha yaumaidzin sab'atu abwabin, ala kulli babin malakani.*" It means 'the city of Madinah can't be entered by *Al-Masîḥ al-Dajjal*, because of that time, Madinah city has seven doors, and each door is protected by two angles.' This hadith, however, was recommended by many authoritative Moslem scholars as a valid hadith, like Imam Bukhari (4/76), Imam Ahmad (5/43,47), Imam Hakim (4/542) and Imam Malik (3/88). Another hadith describes *yaqtulu Ibn Maryam al-Dajjala bi-babi Lud*. It means that Jesus Christ, son of Mary, is going to kill *al-Dajjal* at the door of Lud. This hadith was also selected by many Moslem scholars as a valid hadith, like Imam Tirmidzi (2245), Imam Ibnu Hibban (1901), Imam al-Thayalisi (2/219), Imam Abd al-Razzak (20835), Imam Ahmad (3/420), and Imam al-Dany (143/1-2).²⁵ Here, I attempt to research in the context of philological phenomena in Arabic language diachronically that the

23 Paul Younan, "Aramaic Dialects", an article of Peshitta.org, June 6th 2001

24 Gibb and Kramers, *OP. Cit*, 67

25 Muhammad Nashiruddin al-Bany, *Nabi Isa as. Versus Dajjal*. Trans. Abdul Kadir Ahmad & Syahrullah Iskandar, Jakarta: Pustaka Azzam, 2002, 103,133

loanword *al-Dajjal*, is also derived from Syriac, because many linguists have no evidence to identify the form of word of *al-Dajjal* by which has no *stem* in all based-words of Arabic language. Whereas, in Arabic vocabularies, however, the native word are usually characterized by a system of root. Most roots of three (sometimes two) consonants with vowels being inserted to indicated various inflectional and derivational categories. For example, the root K-T-B (denoting the concept of writing) has many words from which a variety of words can be formed, including *kitab* 'book', *katibun* 'writer', *kataba* 'he had written', and *yaktuba* 'he will write'. Then, if we can look for the proofs of many textual documents in pre-Islamic time, mainly in the Eastern and the Western Syriac communities, however, they have been familiar with the term *Daggala* in their religious scripts. It means that the hadithic Arabic term *al-Dajjal* is Arabized Syro-Aramaic, and consonant 'g' in Syro-Aramaic is pronounced 'j' in Arabic.

Meanwhile, in the textual discourse of Syriac Peshitta proves that the origin of proper name of Jesus, and his title are not derived from Arab words and its cultural background. For example, in the Gospel of Matthew 24:23-25, the Western Syriac Bible, called *Peshitto* describes *ha-ydein in enas nmar lekon: ha harka hu Meshiha au harka. La-tha ymenun. Nqumun geir Mshihe Daggala wa Nebiyye de-kadavuta we-nitlun atwata rau-rvata aik de-nat-'on in mishkta af laqvayya. Ha qadmet emret lekon.* (Then in any man shall say unto you: look here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false *Christss* and false Prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before).²⁶ In this Western *Peshitto* text, the existence of term *Daggala* is a proof that the historical journey of the word *al-Dajjal* in Arabic, then adopted by many hadith, is naturally derived from the Syriac word.

In the Greek Bible, the *Antichrist* is textally called *Psoidochristoi* (*Ψευδόχριστοι*), constructed from both words, *psoido* (false) + *christoi* (anointed one), as well as in the Syriac Bible, the *Antichrist* is called *Meshiha dagala*, constructed from both words, *meshiha* (anointed one) + *dagala* (false). Meanwhile, in the Greek Bible, the *false prophet* is also called *Psoidoprophetai* (*Ψευδόπρφήται*), constructed from both words, *psoido* (false) + *prophetai* (messenger), as well as in the Syriac Bible, the *false prophet* is called *Nebiyye kadavuta*, constructed from both words, *nebiyye* (messenger) + *kadavuta* (false). Jesus Christ said τότε εάν τις υμιν ειπη, Ιδου ωδε ο Χριστος, η, Ωδε μη πιστευσητε. Εγερθησονται γαρ Ψευδόχριστοι και Ψευδόπρφήται. The Latin Bible also describes, *tunc si quis vobis dixerit: Ecce hic est Christus aut illic, nolite credere. Surgent enim Pseudochristi et Pseudoprophetae dabunt*

26 The Aramaic Scriptures Research Society, *Op. Cit.*, 34.

signa magna et prodigia ita ut in errorem inducantur si fieri protest, etiam electi").²⁷ Meanwhile, in the Arabic Bible, the Antichrist is called *Al-Masih al-Dajjal* (المسيح الدجال) as well as the false prophet is called *al-Nabi al-Dajjal* (النبي الدجال). In the Arabic version, Jesus said *fa-in qala lakum ahadun 'indaiddzin: Ha inna al-Masih huna au hunaka fala tushaddiqu. Fa-saufa yabruzu aktsaru imna Masih ad-Dajjal wa al-Nabi ad-Dajjal, wa-yuqaddimuna ayatin 'adhimah wa-a'ajiba liyudhillu hatta al-muhtarina, lawistatha'u. Ha-ana qad ahbartukum bi-al-amri qabla hudutsihi*.²⁸

The word *Al-Masih al-Dajjal* in Arab Christians world view, however, refers to the false Christ in the original aim of Syriac Bible as well as in the Greek Bible, and no doubt that *Al-Masih al-Dajjal*, according to the Arabic Bible, or *Meshiha Dagala* in the Syriac Bible, has the same reference with Islamic tradition by which Moslem scholars called hadithic term, where used the word *Al-Masih al-Dajjal* in Islamic context. Therefore, the discourse of *Al-Masih al-Dajjal* in both Arab Christians and Arab Moslems has a 'meeting point' as the discovery of genuine heritage of Syriac style. Obviously, the word *dajjâl* in the Hadith, is etymologically the Arabized Syro-Aramaic which then becomes Islamized-Arabic word. As I said before, the word semantically means *kadhkhâb* (lie) in the Arabic, as well as in the Syriac, *kadavuta* (lie). Here, the use of both Arabic words, *dajjâl* and *kadhkhâb* in the Arabic Bible is exchangeable, such as *Masih al-dajjâl* (the false Messiah) and *Nabi al-dajjâl* (the false Prophet). However, in the context of negativa, the Arabic New Testament names, *Masih* and *Nabî* are always followed by the name, *al-dajjâl*. Meanwhile, the Syriac name, *Nebiyye*, is always followed by the name, *kadavuta*. Thus, the Syriac New Testament name, *kadavuta* and the name of Arabic New Testament or the name of Hadith of Islam, *dajjâl* can therefore hardly be the same. Since *dajjâl* is frequently used in Arabic as an adjective, meaning 'lie', it probably had this meaning when used as a 'title', and hence is quite correctly translated 'the Lier' (*al-dajjâl*/ *Al-Dajjâl*).

5. Conclusion

Based on this Syriac Christians document, the using of some Arabized Syro-Aramaic words, *Meshiha*, *Yesho'*, *'Îsho'* or *'Îshâ*, and *Dagala* can not be rejected as the Syriac style which embraced into the Islamic literature in the early Islamic times. Meanwhile, those words are a part of religious terms

27 Augustinus Merk, S.J.(ed.), *Novum Testamentum: Graece et Latine*, Romae: Sumptibus Pontifici Biblici, 1951, 85.

28 International Bible Society, *Kitab al-Hayah, New International Version*, Araby-Injlizy, London: Jami'ah al-Khuquq Makhfudhah, 1995, 79

in the Aramaic Christian language, especially in Syriac dialect. Therefore, we have to place the words in the context of cultural background and history.

Linguistically, in the Arabic phonetic, the Syro-Aramaic consonants 'y' (*yud*) and 'g' (*gomal*) are pronounced 'i' (*'ain*) and 'j' (*jim*) in the Arabic. And, the Syro-Aramaic term '*Dagala*', has changed into an Arabic-form '*Dajjal*' by which a consonant 'g' in Syriac word through phonetic correspondence actually changed being consonant 'j' in Arabic word. Moreover, the terms *Al-Masīh* & *al-Dajjal* in the Arabic words are more importation which embraced into Arabic vocabularies through phonic interference and lexical interference. Indeed, this linguistic phenomena, however, is able to describe a model of interfaith among Arab Christians, Syriac Christians, and Arab Moslems in the early Islamic times, and how to discover a Syro-Aramaic theology of Christ in the Quran itself.

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