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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ABRAHAM GEIGER AND AL-AṢFAHĀNĪ ON THE CONCEPT OF RABB

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Abstract

Rabb is one of the central terms in the Qur'an that encompasses complex linguistic, semantic, and theological dimensions. This study aims to analyze and compare the views of Abraham Geiger and Al-Raghib al-Aṣfahānī regarding the concept of Rabb, while also examining the epistemological frameworks underlying their interpretations. This research employs a qualitative method with a comparative-analytical library research approach. The theoretical framework applied in this study is Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics, particularly the concept of *fusion of horizons* in textual interpretation. The primary sources include Al-Aṣfahānī's *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, Abraham Geiger's *Judaism and Islam*, and *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*. The findings reveal that although both scholars depart from relatively similar etymological roots, they arrive at different understandings of the concept of Rabb. Al-Aṣfahānī interprets Rabb within the framework of Islamic theology as a divine concept related to tarbiyah, sustenance, and the absolute sovereignty of God. In contrast, Geiger approaches Rabb through a historical-comparative perspective, viewing it as a term shaped within Jewish rabbinic and broader Semitic traditions. These differences demonstrate that interpretations of the concept of Rabb are strongly influenced by intellectual traditions, historical backgrounds, and the pre-understandings of each interpreter.

Keywords: Rabb, Abraham Geiger, Al-Aṣfahānī, Hermeneutics, Comparative Study

Abstrak

Rabb merupakan salah satu istilah sentral dalam Al-Qur'an yang memiliki dimensi linguistik, semantik, dan teologis yang kompleks. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dan membandingkan pandangan Abraham Geiger dan Al-Raghib al-Aṣfahānī mengenai konsep Rabb, sekaligus mengungkap perbedaan kerangka epistemologis yang melatarbelakangi penafsiran keduanya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kepustakaan yang bersifat komparatif-analitis. Kerangka teoritis yang digunakan adalah hermeneutika Hans-Georg Gadamer, khususnya konsep *fusion of horizons* dalam memahami proses interpretasi teks. Sumber primer penelitian meliputi *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān* karya Al-Aṣfahānī, *Judaism and Islam*, serta *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* karya Abraham Geiger. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun kedua tokoh berangkat dari akar etimologis yang relatif serupa, keduanya menghasilkan pemahaman yang berbeda mengenai konsep Rabb. Al-Aṣfahānī menafsirkan Rabb dalam kerangka teologi Islam sebagai konsep ketuhanan yang berkaitan dengan tarbiyah, pemeliharaan, dan kekuasaan mutlak Allah. Sebaliknya, Geiger memandang Rabb melalui pendekatan historis-komparatif sebagai istilah yang berkembang dalam tradisi rabinik Yahudi dan budaya Semitik. Perbedaan tersebut menunjukkan bahwa interpretasi terhadap konsep Rabb

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sangat dipengaruhi oleh tradisi intelektual, latar historis, dan prapemahaman masing-masing penafsir.

Kata Kunci: Rabb, Abraham Geiger, Al-Aṣfahānī, Hermeneutika, Studi Komparatif

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A. Introduction

The Qur'an serves as the primary guidance for Muslims. Over time, however, the Qur'an has not only functioned as a source of guidance but has also become an object of scholarly inquiry explored by academics across religions and cultural traditions. One of the most widely discussed aspects in Qur'anic studies is its linguistic dimension, which contains rich layers of meaning. Since its emergence, the Qur'an has occupied a central position in various fields of study. With the advancement of knowledge, contemporary approaches to Qur'anic studies have expanded significantly, particularly in modern academic discourse.

One of the central concerns in Qur'anic scholarship is the linguistic aspect, especially the study of key terms that carry profound theological and philosophical meanings. Such terms are often difficult to translate into simple language because they require complex interpretive understanding. Among these significant concepts, the term *Rabb* occupies a particularly prominent place. The word appears repeatedly throughout the Qur'an and serves as a central element within its discourse. For instance, *Rabb* is found in the *basmalah*, in the prayers of the prophets, and in explanations concerning the relationship between God and His creation.

The term *Rabb* has attracted not only Muslim scholars but also Western orientalists since the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, who sought to investigate its deeper meanings. Orientalist studies did not merely focus on semantic analysis; they also compared the concept with teachings found in other religious traditions. For these scholars, the Qur'an was not solely regarded as a revealed scripture but also as a historical text open to analysis through philological approaches, the history of religions, and textual criticism (Pertiwi et al., 2023).

One of the most influential orientalists in the study of Islam was Abraham Geiger (1810–1874). He was a Jewish activist and reformist widely recognized for his works that explored the relationship between Judaism and Islam (Pemikiran et al., 2024). Geiger was among the first scholars to emphasize the study of cultural assimilation between Judaism, Christianity, and the Qur'an. In essence, many orientalist perspectives on the Qur'an were shaped by particular assumptions, approaches, and intellectual objectives. Their methods of studying Islam often led them to reject aspects considered authoritative within the Islamic tradition. While Islam maintains that its origins trace back to the prophetic traditions of Adam, Idris, and Ibrahim as part of the *samawi* religions, orientalists generally argued that Islam emerged only after Judaism and Christianity.

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In his famous work *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* ("What Did Muhammad Borrow from Judaism?"), Geiger proposed that many Islamic teachings, narratives, and even Qur'anic terms were derived from or duplicated elements of Jewish tradition. According to Geiger, the Prophet Muhammad did not introduce an entirely new religious system but rather adopted elements from Judaism and reformulated them into a different and more refined form within Islam (Mahfudin, 2021).

In another work entitled *Judaism and Islam*, Geiger discussed the term *Rabb* as it appears in the Qur'an. He argued that the meaning of *Rabb* in Islam, along with the related concept of divinity, could not be separated from Jewish influence. In other words, the term *Rabb* in Islam was understood to possess semantic and theological connotations similar to those found in Jewish tradition, thereby generating significant debate. First, considering *Rabb* as a borrowing from Judaism implies that Qur'anic revelation lacks originality. Second, if such a view is accepted uncritically, it may lead to the perception that Islam is merely a derivative religion rather than an independent and authentic revealed faith (Pertiwi et al., 2023).

In contrast, the Islamic intellectual tradition offers a rich and detailed interpretation of the term *Rabb*. Among the most authoritative scholars in this field was Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī (w. 502 H/1108 M). He is widely known as a distinguished exegete, linguist, and moral philosopher (Chandra, 2024). His most celebrated work is *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, a lexicographical commentary that explains Qur'anic vocabulary through linguistic, semantic, and contextual approaches.

Al-Aṣfahānī argued that the term *Rabb* should not merely be understood as "God" or "Lord." Rather, he explained that the original meaning of the term contains the notion of nurturing, educating, and developing something gradually and continuously until it reaches perfection. This interpretation demonstrates the broad semantic scope of *Rabb*. Compared to Geiger's interpretation, the perspective of al-Aṣfahānī differs fundamentally (Fathah, 2021). Al-Aṣfahānī approached *Rabb* through a theological and linguistic framework rooted in Islamic tradition, whereas Geiger interpreted the term through a historical-critical approach that emphasized Jewish influence without incorporating the Islamic perspective. The divergence between these two interpretations opens further opportunities for critical scholarly investigation (Rahmah, 2020).

To analyze the meaning of *Rabb* more comprehensively according to the views of Abraham Geiger and al-Aṣfahānī, a comparative approach between *Judaism and Islam* and *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān* is highly relevant to this study. Al-Aṣfahānī provides a more detailed explanation of the meaning of *Rabb*, which may also serve as a response to Geiger's claim that Islam borrowed its terminology from Judaism. Through this approach, the primary step undertaken in this study is to examine and analyze both works critically. Such a comparative analysis enables a more detailed understanding of how Geiger and al-Aṣfahānī conceptualized *Rabb*, while also demonstrating that Islam did not simply borrow its linguistic framework from Judaism (Noorhayati, 2019).

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Although numerous studies have examined the thought of Abraham Geiger and al-Aṣfahānī, most of these investigations discuss them separately, and no study has yet analyzed both figures simultaneously. To date, no research has specifically compared the perspectives of Geiger and al-Aṣfahānī regarding the meaning of *Rabb* through a comparative approach. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that scholarly gap and contribute a deeper understanding of the interpretation of *Rabb*.

Literature Review

Research on the meaning of *Rabb* in the Qur'an demonstrates the dominance of internal semantic approaches within the Islamic exegetical tradition, which may subsequently be examined critically alongside orientalist perspectives such as those of Abraham Geiger. Several contemporary studies emphasize that *Rabb* does not merely signify "God" but encompasses a broad semantic spectrum rooted in the structure of the Arabic language and classical Islamic theology, as elaborated by al-Aṣfahānī.

The study conducted by Nasrurrahman Pohan (2021) argues that the term *Rabb* differs fundamentally from *ilāh*. While *ilāh* refers to an "object of worship," *Rabb* encompasses meanings such as God, owner, king, educator, and one endowed with knowledge. In several Qur'anic verses, *Rabb* functions as the One who governs, sustains, and guides. This finding is consistent with al-Aṣfahānī's interpretation, which derives *Rabb* from the root ر ب ب, meaning *tarbiyah* the gradual process of nurturing and perfecting. The strength of Pohan's study lies in its assertion that *Rabb* cannot be interchangeably equated with *ilāh*, although the research remains limited to internal exegetical analysis and does not incorporate external perspectives (Pohan, 2021).

The research of Abu Bakar Adenan Siregar, which examines the term *Rabb* in Sūrat al-Isrā', adopts a limited yet profound linguistic approach. He interprets *Rabb* as God possessing the attributes of authority, governance, and preservation. However, in derivative forms such as *rabbayā*, the meaning may shift to "to educate" when applied to human beings. More specifically, the study demonstrates that the primary meaning of *Rabb* relates to nurturing and sustaining, which belongs exclusively to Allah, whereas its application to humans remains limited and contextual (Gramatikal, n.d.).

Meanwhile, the undergraduate thesis of Uun Kurniasih (2021), which thematically analyzes the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs' Tafsir, identifies three principal meanings of *Rabb*: God, owner, and educator. This classification essentially remains within the semantic framework established by al-Aṣfahānī, particularly regarding the aspects of ownership and sustenance. Nevertheless, because the study relies solely on one exegetical source, it does not provide a comparison with classical tafsir traditions or broader lexicographical studies (Kurniasih, 2021).

In contrast to the previous three studies, two other works focus on the thought of Abraham Geiger, who argued that religious terminology in the Qur'an emerged through interaction with Jewish tradition. From Geiger's perspective, terms such as *rabbānī* are viewed as linguistic and religious continuations of earlier traditions. Wendi Parwanto (2019) traces Geiger's claim that several Qur'anic terms, including those related to the

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concept of divinity, originated from Jewish tradition. However, the study is largely descriptive of Geiger's arguments and does not critically analyze the internal semantic dimensions of the word *Rabb* in Arabic (Fathah, 2021).

Lola Pertiwi and colleagues (2023) attempted to challenge Geiger's perspective by emphasizing the concept of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*. However, their analysis did not specifically elaborate the semantic meaning of *Rabb* in depth, nor did it directly connect the concept of *Rabb* within the Islamic exegetical tradition as explained by al-Aṣfahānī with Geiger's historical-comparative approach (Pertiwi et al., 2023).

Overall, the existing literature reveals a significant divergence in methodological approaches that has not yet been systematically reconciled. On the one hand, the Islamic exegetical tradition, classically represented by al-Aṣfahānī and continued in contemporary scholarship, interprets *Rabb* as a theological concept rooted in *tarbiyah*, ownership, and comprehensive governance. On the other hand, Geiger situates the term within a framework of Jewish historical influence without examining its internal semantic structure in Arabic.

B. Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach employing a comparative-analytical library research design. The object of analysis involves two intellectual traditions grounded in distinct epistemological foundations, namely the thought represented by Al-Raghib al-Isfahani in *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān* and the nineteenth-century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* tradition represented by Abraham Geiger in *Judaism and Islam* and *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*. Both figures examine the meaning of *rabb* within the Qur'anic framework; however, Abraham Geiger employs a fundamentally different intellectual structure, thereby necessitating a deeper analysis to uncover the underlying factors behind these divergent interpretations.

The primary sources analyzed in this study consist of the aforementioned works, complemented by reputable scholarly articles that comprehensively discuss both figures. This research applies a qualitative approach using the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer as its principal theoretical framework (Weinsheimer & Marshall, 2004). In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer introduces the concept of *fusion of horizons* (*Horizontverschmelzung*), which posits that the process of understanding a text is inevitably shaped by the interpreter's horizon, formed through intellectual tradition, historical context, language, and personal experience (Knotts, 2014). Every interpreter possesses assumptions and conceptual frameworks constructed by scholarly traditions and socio-historical backgrounds, which function as the point of departure in interpreting a text (Fajar Sugianto, 2007).

The data analysis in this study is conducted in three stages. The first stage involves data identification and inventory, namely examining and systematically collecting the principal concepts concerning the meaning of *rabb* from each thinker's primary sources, while simultaneously considering the intellectual background and conceptual context

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underlying their interpretations. The second stage is categorization, which consists of classifying the findings according to the semantic and epistemological dimensions of each perspective. The third stage is interpretative comparison, namely critically and dialogically comparing these two frameworks of understanding in order to produce an argumentative synthesis that transcends a merely descriptive presentation.

C. Results and Discussion

1. The Meaning of *Rabb* from Abraham Geiger's Perspective

Abraham Geiger (1810–1874) was born in Frankfurt am Main into a Jewish family deeply rooted in rabbinic tradition and committed to the mastery of classical religious texts (Fathah, 2021). From an early age, he received intensive education from his father, Rabbi Michael Lazarus Geiger, particularly in Hebrew, Talmudic literature, and methods of interpreting Jewish sacred texts (Lestari, 2015). This intellectual foundation later cultivated his strong interest in philological studies and the historical study of religions more broadly.

In the course of his academic career, Geiger continued his studies at the University of Bonn, where he became engaged with the historical-philological critical tradition that was developing in nineteenth-century Germany (Marsella & Turjiman, 2025). Under the influence of Georg Wilhelm Freytag, he began employing a philological approach to the study of Arabic, Islamic texts, and the interrelations among Semitic traditions (Lestari, 2015).

The academic environment at Bonn played a significant role in shaping Geiger's intellectual outlook. Drawing upon the tradition of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, he regarded religion not merely as a normative doctrine but as a dynamic historical phenomenon that could be examined through scientific, historical, and comparative approaches (Pertiwi et al., 2023). This perspective became particularly evident in his 1833 dissertation, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*, a work that traced elements of Jewish tradition within the Qur'an and early Islamic thought through the use of Semitic philology and the comparative study of religions. The work subsequently became one of the foundational contributions to the development of modern Western Qur'anic studies and established Geiger as a pioneering figure in the formation of Qur'anic scholarship grounded in philology and comparative religion (Muzayyin, 2017). Geiger died in Berlin on 23 October 1874, yet his intellectual legacy continues to exert considerable influence on the traditions of Orientalism, Semitic philology, and the modern study of religions (Lestari, 2015).

Abraham Geiger developed his analysis of the term *rabb* through a historical-philological approach, which constituted the central characteristic of his methodology (Ahmad Said, 2018). According to Geiger, conceptions of divinity should not be understood as immutable metaphysical entities detached from history; rather, they are products of religious language constructions whose meanings evolve alongside the social,

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cultural, and historical dynamics of the communities that employ them (Umi Wasilah, 2021).

Grounded in the framework of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Geiger consistently situated religion within the domain of historical-critical inquiry. Consequently, religious understanding was viewed as being shaped through the evolutionary process of tradition and intercultural interaction, rather than merely as a transcendent doctrine existing beyond historical context (Pertiwi et al., 2023).

In his philological study of Judaism and Islam, Geiger examined the term *rabbānī* as it appears in the Qur'an, particularly in QS. Āl ʿImrān 3:73, Al-Mā'idah 5:48, and 5:68. He argued that the term derives from *rabb* combined with the suffix *-ān*, reflecting a linguistic pattern characteristic of the Jewish rabbinic tradition. Within this tradition, the suffix signifies honorific, authoritative, or collective affiliation dimensions. Based on this linguistic analysis, Geiger concluded that the original meaning of *rabb* was closer to "master," "teacher," or "scholarly authority," namely a title within the rabbinic tradition referring to human intellectual and spiritual leaders, rather than a theological term directly denoting God (Hunt, 2017).

In his dissertation entitled *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*, Geiger further argued that the Qur'an contains at least fourteen terms which, in his view, demonstrate connections with the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic literature. He identified the terms *rabb* and *rabbānī* as examples of terminology conceptually adopted from Jewish tradition into Islam (Lestari, 2015).

Nevertheless, Geiger's approach remains the subject of academic criticism. Several contemporary scholars argue that his analysis tends toward oversimplification and is at times trapped in *parallelomania*, namely the tendency to infer relationships of influence too hastily merely on the basis of terminological similarities without sufficient historical and chronological verification. Furthermore, some critiques emphasize the evaluative bias underlying his interpretation of Islam, which was not entirely free from the influence of nineteenth-century Orientalism.

2. The Meaning of *Rabb* in the Perspective of Imam Al-Aṣfahānī

Al-Raghib al-Aṣfahānī, whose full name was Abu al-Qasim al-Husain ibn Muhammad al-Raghib al-Aṣfahānī, was a prominent Muslim scholar who lived during the late 15 and early 15 centuries of the Hijri era (approximately the 17 century M) (Al-Daghistani, 2025). He originated from Isfahan, a Persian region that, at the time, functioned as one of the major intellectual centers of the Islamic world, where diverse disciplines such as Qur'anic exegesis, Arabic linguistics, philosophy, kalam, and jurisprudence flourished (Sweta et al., 2022).

The pluralistic and intellectually dynamic environment of Isfahan significantly shaped Al-Aṣfahānī's integrative and moderate intellectual orientation. His works demonstrate a consistent tendency to synthesize rational inquiry with profound respect

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for the authority of revealed texts, allowing his thought to gain acceptance across various traditions within Islamic intellectual discourse (Huda, 2010).

His seminal work, *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, continues to be regarded as one of the most authoritative references in Qur'anic lexicography and remains widely employed in the fields of tafsir and Qur'anic linguistics. The significance of this work lies not merely in its role as a lexical dictionary of Qur'anic terminology, but also in its method of semantic analysis, which systematically integrates linguistic, semantic, and theological dimensions.

Al-Aṣfahānī did not confine himself to providing literal definitions of Qur'anic vocabulary; rather, he situated each term within the broader conceptual framework of the Qur'an, enabling every expression to be understood through its interrelation with the semantic structure and worldview of the Qur'anic text as a whole (Sweta et al., 2022). This methodological approach elevates *Al-Mufradāt* beyond the function of a conventional dictionary, positioning it instead as a hermeneutical instrument for interpreting Qur'anic terminology.

Al-Aṣfahānī begins his explanation by tracing the root of the word ر ب ب, which fundamentally conveys the meanings of *tarbiyah*, *rabba-hu*, *rabbā-hu*, and *rabbaba-hu*; all of these expressions refer to the processes of nurturing, cultivating, developing, and gradually perfecting something in a continuous manner. Accordingly, verbal forms such as رَبَّهُ، رَبَّاهُ and رَبَّبَهُ all point to a single conceptual core, namely the active involvement of the agent in shaping the object until it reaches the perfection of its innate nature (*fiṭrah*) (Al-Asfahani, 2009).

Al-Aṣfahānī cites the statement of Ṣafwān ibn Umayya during the Battle of Ḥunayn as an illustration of classical Arabic usage:

لَأَنْ يَرُبَّنِي رَجُلٌ مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِنْ أَنْ يَرُبَّنِي رَجُلٌ مِنْ هَوَازِنَ

"Indeed, for a man from Quraysh to become my *rabb* is preferable to me than for a man from Hawāzin to become my *rabb*."

This statement demonstrates that the meaning of *yurabbunī* is not confined merely to instruction or command; rather, it encompasses a comprehensive process of formation and cultivation that includes one's origin, growth, and the shaping of identity as a whole.

Al-Aṣfahānī further emphasizes that the term الرَّبُّ (*ar-rabb*) in its absolute sense cannot be attributed to any being other than Allah Ta'ālā. This emphasis is not merely linguistic in nature, but is rooted in profound semantic and theological considerations (Al-Asfahani, 2009). According to him, the use of *ar-rabb* implies complete ownership over that which is nurtured, including the origin of existence, the process of development, and the attainment of perfection realities that can only be fully and perfectly realized by Allah alone (Al-Asfahani, 2009).

Al-Aṣfahānī argues that the term *ar-rabb* may only be applied to entities other than Allah when it appears within an *iḍāfah* construction or under semantic restriction, for example:

a. رَبُّ الدَّار (*rabbu ad-dār*) — the owner of a house

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b. رَبُّ الفَرَسِ (*rabbu al-faras*) — the owner of a horse

In these examples, the meaning of *rabb* signifies limited ownership or restricted authority rather than absolute governance. Consequently, the unrestricted use of *ar-rabb* (*bi al-iṭlāq*) is permissible solely for Allah Ta'ālā. This principle forms the basis of Al-Aṣfahānī's interpretation of the Qur'anic verse:

وَلَا يَأْمُرَكُمْ اَنْ تَتَّخِذُوا الْمَلٰٓئِكَةَ وَالنَّبِيّٖنَ اَرْبَابًا

According to Al-Aṣfahānī, the verse does not merely prohibit the worship of angels and prophets; rather, it rejects the belief that they possess functions of *rubūbiyyah*, such as creating, governing the causal order of existence, or determining the destiny of creation. Such a view, in his understanding, constitutes a deviation from the true meaning of *Rabb*, as it transfers absolute authority of governance from Allah to created beings (Al-Asfahani, 2009).

3. Comparative Analysis of the Meaning of *Rabb*

a. Analysis Based on Gadamer's Hermeneutical Framework

According to the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, human understanding is shaped by a consciousness formed through history, tradition, language, and particular lived experiences (Akbar, 2021). Such consciousness is not static; rather, it continuously develops through dialogue with traditions and other systems of thought. Gadamer describes this process as the *fusion of horizons* (*Horizontverschmelzung*), namely the merging of the interpreter's horizon with that of the text or tradition being interpreted.

Al-Aṣfahānī operated within an intellectual framework profoundly influenced by the classical Islamic scholarly tradition. First, he upheld the theological conviction that the Qur'an constitutes an authentic and complete divine revelation. Second, he was shaped by the tradition of *gharīb al-Qur'ān*, which regards every Qur'anic term as possessing profound semantic depth that must be explored through the study of lexical roots, semantic interrelations, and contextual usage within classical Arabic. Third, the intellectual climate of Isfahan facilitated an integration of linguistics, theology, and philosophical inquiry.

In contrast, Abraham Geiger approached the subject from a fundamentally different epistemological perspective. His outlook was strongly influenced by the tradition of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, which treated religious texts as historical products open to examination through philological and historical-critical methods. Furthermore, Geiger's extensive rabbinic background inclined him to interpret religious terminology through the conceptual framework of Jewish tradition. This perspective was further reinforced by the nineteenth-century European academic environment, which emphasized rationalism and historicism in the study of religion.

From the perspective of Gadamerian hermeneutics, if a horizon is understood as the totality of an individual's sphere of understanding, then "productive prejudice" represents one of the most decisive forms of pre-understanding in textual interpretation. For Al-Aṣfahānī, the dominant pre-understanding lay in his conviction that every term in

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the Qur'an contains a complete and profound theological meaning that cannot be reduced merely to a linguistic or historical phenomenon. This initial presupposition became the foundation of Al-Aṣfahānī's semantic investigation of the term *rabb*. Within Gadamer's framework, such a pre-understanding is not regarded as a methodological weakness; rather, it constitutes the very precondition that enables understanding to proceed productively.

b. Points of Convergence and Divergence

Although the perspectives and productive pre-understandings of Al-Raghib al-Asfahani and Abraham Geiger differ fundamentally (Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1960), the present study identifies a significant point of convergence between the two scholars in their shared recognition that the root *r-b-b* carries a basic meaning associated with authority, nurturing, and leadership. Al-Aṣfahānī arrives at this understanding through an analysis of the concept of *tarbiyah* within the structure of the Arabic language and the semantic system of the Qur'an, whereas Geiger reaches a similar conclusion through his philological investigation of the terms *rabb*, *rabbi*, and their derivative forms within the Jewish rabbinic tradition.

Despite this convergence, the principal distinction lies in the manner in which each scholar develops the meaning of the term and in the references employed to construct its final interpretation. Al-Aṣfahānī expands the foundational meaning of *rabb* into the framework of Islamic theology, particularly the doctrines of *tawḥīd* and *rubūbiyyah*, thereby establishing the term as a divine designation that reflects God's authority in creating, sustaining, and perfecting all beings. In contrast, Geiger interprets the same concept within a historical-comparative framework of Semitic traditions, regarding *rabb* primarily as a form of religious authority in ancient Semitic societies. This divergence in interpretive orientation is not incidental; rather, it emerges from the differences in epistemological background, intellectual tradition, and pre-understanding that shape the interpretive approaches of each scholar toward the text.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that the concept of *rabb* in the perspectives of Abraham Geiger and Al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī shares a common etymological foundation associated with authority, nurturing, education, and leadership, yet develops into distinct interpretative frameworks due to their differing epistemological orientations. Al-Aṣfahānī interprets *rabb* within the framework of Islamic theology as a divine concept reflecting Allah's attributes as the Sustainer, Educator, Governor, and Absolute Sovereign over all creation. According to him, the semantic root of *rabb* is closely connected to the concept of *tarbiyah*, namely the gradual process of nurturing and perfecting beings until they attain their intended completion. Consequently, the unrestricted use of the term *ar-rabb* can only properly be attributed to Allah.

In contrast, Abraham Geiger approaches the term *rabb* through a historical-philological method rooted in the tradition of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. He regards

Volume 6, Number 1, March 2026, pp: 269-281
E-ISSN: 2797-6440 P-ISSN: 2797-7722
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the term as part of the development of Semitic and Jewish rabbinic traditions, which subsequently established linguistic and conceptual connections with Qur'anic terminology. From Geiger's perspective, *rabb* originally referred more closely to forms of religious authority, such as teacher, master, or spiritual leader within the rabbinic tradition, before later evolving into a theological concept in Islam.

Through the application of Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical framework, particularly the notion of *fusion of horizons*, this study demonstrates that the divergence between the two interpretations is significantly shaped by the respective pre-understandings of each scholar. Al-Aṣfahānī's interpretation is grounded in a theological commitment to the authenticity and sacredness of Qur'anic revelation, whereas Geiger's interpretation is informed by a historical-critical understanding of religion as a product of cultural and historical development. Therefore, this study affirms that the meaning of *rabb* cannot be reduced merely to a linguistic expression, but must also be understood as a concept constructed through intellectual traditions, historical contexts, and the interpretative horizons of its interpreters.

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Volume 6, Number 1, March 2026, pp: 269-281
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