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Ethical Challenges of AI Applications in Sīrah Studies: Epistemic Integrity, Sacred Representation, and Responsible Governance

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is moving from a peripheral digital tool to an active mediator of religious knowledge. In Sīrah studies, this shift creates substantial opportunities for corpus search, text mining, prosopography, social-network analysis, chronology, mapping, translation, manuscript support, and educational access. Yet the field is unusually sensitive to errors because its subject is the life, mission, words, actions, and historical reception of the Prophet Muhammad, and because historical claims are evaluated through layered source traditions rather than through textual similarity alone. This article examines the ethical challenges of AI applications in Sīrah studies through an integrative critical review of recent scholarship, prioritizing peer-reviewed literature published from 2024 to 20 August 2026, together with foundational work in Sīrah historiography and contemporary AI governance. A structured scenario analysis evaluates six common AI-assisted Sīrah workflows across seven ethical dimensions: source provenance, contextual integrity, sacred sensitivity, pluralism and bias, transparency, scholarly authority, and privacy/copyright. The analysis finds the highest risks in public question-answering, thematic interpretation, source citation, translation, and synthetic reconstruction. The central problems are not limited to hallucination; they include invented or displaced attribution, loss of isnād and source hierarchy, false chronological certainty, cultural and sectarian flattening, algorithmic authority, opaque model updates, and ethically problematic representation or simulated speech. The article proposes a SĪRAH-AI Responsible Use Framework built on Source provenance, Isnād and context integrity, Reverence and representation, Accountability and auditability, and Human scholarly

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authority. It concludes that AI can responsibly augment Sīrah scholarship when used within curated corpora, explicit provenance rules, qualified human review, uncertainty disclosure, and reproducible research documentation, but it should not function as an autonomous authority for authentication or final religious-historical judgment.

Keywords: Sīrah Studies, Artificial Intelligence, Generative AI, Islamic Ethics, Digital Humanities, Religious Authority, Source Provenance, AI Governance

Introduction

The rapid diffusion of generative AI has changed the practical conditions of research in the humanities. Tasks that previously required days of bibliographic searching, concordance building, language comparison, or preliminary coding can now be initiated in minutes. Sīrah studies are part of this transition. Researchers can use natural-language systems to locate narrative parallels, extract named persons and places, build tentative chronologies, summarize long Arabic passages, compare translations, identify clusters in large corpora, and generate maps or teaching materials. Kıranşal's recent work is especially important because it moves the discussion from general claims about AI in Islamic studies to Sīrah-specific applications, including text mining, prosopography, social-network analysis, visualization, simulation, spatial analysis, and mapping (Kıranşal 2025c). These possibilities correspond with wider developments in digital humanities, where computational methods are increasingly used to reveal patterns that are difficult to identify through close reading alone.

The methodological attraction of AI, however, can obscure a basic difference between assistance and authority. A language model does not consult sources in the same manner as a historian, muḥaddith, or Sīrah specialist. Its generated answer is shaped by statistical patterns, model architecture, system instructions, retrieval configuration, and the data that were included or excluded during development. Even when an answer is fluent and plausible, the mechanism producing that fluency is not identical to historical verification. Recent research on generative AI has therefore emphasized that plausible language can

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coexist with false attribution, missing evidence, and unstable answers. Hicks, Humphries, and Slater (2024) describe this problem in terms of output that is not inherently truth-oriented, while Wahid's 2025 empirical study of Islamic guidance chatbots documents misattributed Qurʾānic verses and ḥadīth, oversimplification, and inconsistent reasoning (Wahid 2025). In Sīrah research, such errors are ethically serious because a fabricated citation or conflated report may be repeated as part of the Prophet's biography.

Sīrah also occupies a distinctive epistemic and devotional position. It is historical scholarship, but it is not simply a neutral archive of past events. Muslim traditions have used the Prophet's biography to understand revelation in context, ethical exemplarity, communal memory, jurisprudential development, spirituality, political history, and moral education. Modern scholarship has shown that Sīrah sources require careful attention to transmission, redaction, genre, chronology, source relationships, and later historiographical development (Motzki 2000; Schoeler 2011; Anthony 2020). Sertkaya (2023) similarly argues for renewed methodological reflection on the philosophical dimensions of Sīrah studies. AI therefore enters a field where the status of a report cannot be determined merely by frequency, semantic similarity, or narrative coherence.

The ethical challenge is intensified by scale. A mistaken human note may remain in one notebook; an AI-generated statement can be reproduced in thousands of essays, videos, sermons, school materials, and search summaries. The same technology that democratizes access can accelerate decontextualization. Recent research on religious bias in large language models provides additional reason for caution. Naous et al. (2024) found that Arabic and multilingual language models often display Western cultural bias even in Arabic contexts, while Plaza-del-Arco et al. (2024) identified patterns of stereotyping and stigmatization in model representations of religions. Tom, Ferguson, and Martinez (2025) further demonstrate that religion intersects with other social categories in model output. These findings matter for Sīrah because model training data may overrepresent polemical,

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orientalist, apologetic, sectarian, popular, or English-language framings relative to specialist Arabic scholarship.

This article addresses four main questions about the responsible use of AI in Sīrah studies. It examines the main ethical risks, reviews recent research from related Islamic and AI fields, compares the risk of common AI-assisted Sīrah tasks, and proposes practical safeguards. The study contributes by bringing recent literature together and turning it into a clear framework for researchers, journals, libraries, developers, and teachers.

Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine the ethical challenges of using artificial intelligence in Sīrah studies and to propose a practical framework for responsible academic use. AI is treated as a research support tool that must be used with source verification, preserved context, transparent methods, and qualified human review.

1. To identify the main ethical and knowledge-related risks of using AI for retrieval, translation, summarization, interpretation, visualization, and public communication in Sīrah studies.
2. To review recent peer-reviewed research on AI in Sīrah, Ḥadīth, Islamic law, Qurʾānic education, religious authority, cultural bias, and AI governance.
3. To compare common AI-assisted Sīrah research tasks using ethical criteria such as source provenance, context, sacred representation, bias, transparency, authority, privacy, and intellectual property.
4. To propose a practical framework that protects Sīrah-specific scholarly standards while allowing appropriate use of AI tools.

Literature Review

AI and the Changing Method of Sīrah Research

The literature relevant to AI and Sīrah is recent but no longer negligible. Kıranşal's 2025 study on the possibility of using AI in Sīrah research is a foundational field-specific contribution. It identifies a broad spectrum of computational possibilities while warning that Sīrah cannot be reduced to ordinary historical data because it is connected to belief, ethics, law, and communal values (Kıranşal 2025c). This is a critical point: the ethical threshold for acceptable error is lower when a model is making claims about prophetic

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words, actions, motives, or religious meaning. A system suitable for exploratory topic modeling may therefore be unsuitable for unsupervised historical narration.

Kıranşal's later article on ethical risks in AI-based Sīrah and Ḥadīth research develops the problem in greater detail. It highlights Western-centric data, limited representation of classical Arabic, algorithmic opacity, developer worldview, semantic distortion, decontextualized translation, and the risk that prophetic events are reframed primarily through sociological or strategic categories while revelatory and spiritual dimensions are marginalized (Kıranşal 2025a). The article also raises concerns regarding visual representation and simulation. This issue requires careful formulation because Muslim positions on representation have not been identical across all periods and communities. Nevertheless, many Muslim scholarly and devotional traditions maintain strong restrictions or sensitivities regarding visual or fictional representation of the Prophet. Generative image, video, voice, and first-person simulation tools can therefore create an ethical problem even when a historical claim is not technically false: they may transform reverential memory into synthetic spectacle and blur the boundary between attested report and creative reconstruction.

A third Sīrah-specific contribution proposes the development of an AI ethics document for the field (Kıranşal 2025b). That proposal is important because generic AI principles such as fairness, transparency, and accountability require domain-specific interpretation. In Sīrah research, transparency must include not only disclosure that AI was used but also the edition, corpus, translation, and retrieval path supporting a claim. Fairness must include adequate representation of Arabic primary sources and competing scholarly traditions. Human oversight must mean review by persons competent in Sīrah source criticism, Ḥadīth, Arabic, and historical methodology rather than generic editorial review. Accountability must extend to correction when model-generated errors are published or disseminated.

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Evidence from Ḥadīth, Islamic Law, and Qurʾānic Education

The adjacent field of Ḥadīth studies reinforces these concerns. Hoque et al. (2025) argue that AI integration in Ḥadīth studies can support access and analysis but must protect textual authenticity and scholarly integrity and avoid over-reliance. This directly affects Sīrah because a significant portion of prophetic biography is constructed through transmitted reports that overlap with Ḥadīth corpora. Treating a ḥadīth merely as a string of text can erase the distinction between matn and isnād, between different transmission routes, and between source collections with different purposes and criteria. An AI system may correctly detect semantic similarity while failing to preserve the scholarly significance of those differences.

Empirical evaluations of AI in Islamic knowledge domains demonstrate that the problem is not theoretical. Wahid (2025) tested five Islamic chatbots with eighty questions on Islamic law and found substantial variation, misattribution of Qurʾānic and ḥadīth material, oversimplification, and methodological weakness; none reached the study's trusted educational-output threshold. Susanti et al. (2025), assessing ChatGPT on waqf for early learners, found stronger performance on basic concepts but clear deterioration on contemporary issues, including inaccurate madhhab attribution and procedural errors. Although these studies address jurisprudence rather than Sīrah, their relevance lies in the shared demand for authenticated attribution, contextual precision, and controlled handling of scholarly disagreement. A fluent answer that collapses multiple madhāhib into one position has a close analogue in Sīrah: a fluent narrative that collapses conflicting reports into a single confident chronology.

Research on AI use among Muslim students also shows a governance gap. Hakim and Shamsuddin (2024) examined ChatGPT use at the International Islamic University Malaysia through a maqāṣid al-sharīʿah lens and identified ethical concerns surrounding use, competence, and guidance. The broader implication is that responsible AI cannot depend only on user goodwill. Institutions need explicit rules for disclosure, verification,

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privacy, authorship, and the boundary between assistance and substitution. For Sīrah research, such rules should be incorporated into research methods courses, journal instructions, manuscript-review procedures, and digital-library design.

The newest 2026 scholarship broadens the analysis from accuracy to authority. Abdullah (2026) conceptualizes generative AI and algorithmic recommendation systems as epistemic structures that shape the production and justification of religious knowledge. His maqāṣid-based framework emphasizes source provenance, uncertainty communication, contestability, qualified human oversight, and AI literacy. Rois and Yazdani (2026) similarly describe a reconstruction of Islamic religious authority in which algorithmic platforms and AI-mediated access can create new knowledge elites. For Sīrah studies, the concern is not simply that users may receive a wrong answer. It is that the social habit of asking a model first, accepting its source list, and allowing its ranking logic to determine what counts as relevant may gradually displace source-based scholarly practices.

A parallel 2026 study in Qurʾānic education provides valuable empirical evidence from teachers. Almajdoub et al. (2026) used focus groups with twenty Islamic Education teachers and a structured analysis of a specialized Qurʾānic tool and ChatGPT. Participants recognized benefits for recitation, memorization, explanation, learner autonomy, and access, but raised concerns about accuracy, authenticity, dependence, and the possible erosion of spiritual and relational dimensions. The authors conclude that AI is best positioned as support rather than replacement and that teachers remain central to verification and ethical alignment. The analogy with Sīrah is strong: the technology may increase access and analytical speed, but the interpretive relationship between sources, scholars, students, and religious tradition cannot be safely reduced to automated response generation.

Bias, Trust, and Algorithmic Religious Authority

General AI-bias scholarship adds a further layer. Naous et al. (2024) evaluated sixteen models and found persistent difficulty adapting to Arab cultural contexts. This is directly

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relevant when an AI system translates, paraphrases, or reconstructs seventh-century Arabian settings. Contemporary Western categories can be silently inserted into descriptions of kinship, warfare, diplomacy, slavery, tribal affiliation, gender, law, or religious practice. Plaza-del-Arco et al. (2024) found that models may stigmatize Islam and Judaism through patterns of refusal and stereotyped representation. Tom, Ferguson, and Martinez (2025) show that religious output can interact with racialized patterns. Bias in Sīrah research therefore includes more than overt hostility; it can appear as selective framing, uneven source salience, lexical choice, asymmetrical skepticism, or the normalization of one historiographical tradition as the default.

The literature on trust helps explain why these risks can be amplified. Sahebi and Formosa (2025) examine how generative AI complicates epistemic trust in mediated communication, while wider studies of trust in AI show that confidence can arise from perceived competence and usability even when users cannot audit the underlying process. In Sīrah settings, fluent Arabic, confident chronology, and a polished bibliography can produce an appearance of scholarly reliability. This creates what may be called an authority illusion: the presentation style of the answer can exceed the evidential quality of the answer. Ethical use must therefore make provenance and uncertainty visible instead of rewarding confidence alone.

Finally, global AI governance provides useful but incomplete principles. UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence emphasizes human rights, human oversight, transparency, accountability, fairness, privacy, and cultural diversity (UNESCO 2021). Its guidance for generative AI in education and research adds concerns about data protection, institutional validation, human agency, and capacity building (UNESCO 2023). The NIST Generative AI Profile treats confabulation, harmful bias, privacy, intellectual property, information integrity, and human-AI configuration as risk-management concerns (NIST 2024). These frameworks are valuable, but Sīrah requires an additional epistemic

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layer: the system must preserve the status and relationships of religious-historical sources rather than merely generate a linguistically useful answer.

Table 1. Selected recent studies, objectives, findings, and research gaps

Study	Research objective	Main finding / relevance	Research gap
Kıranşal 2025c	To examine how AI can be used in Sīrah research and identify its main opportunities and ethical concerns.	Shows useful applications such as text mining, comparison, social-network analysis, visualization, simulation, and mapping, while stressing the special religious status of Sīrah.	Provides a broad conceptual overview but does not give a task-level risk scoring method or test a practical governance framework.
Kıranşal 2025a	To analyze the technical benefits and ethical risks of AI in Sīrah and Ḥadīth research.	Highlights Western-centered data, weak coverage of classical Arabic, algorithmic opacity, semantic distortion, and risks in simulation and representation.	Identifies major risks but does not empirically compare specific Sīrah workflows or define minimum controls for each task.
Kıranşal 2025b	To examine ethical problems in AI-assisted Sīrah research and argue for a dedicated ethics document for the field.	Shows that general AI ethics is not enough for Sīrah because prophetic status, revelation, reverence, and historical method require special protection.	Calls for a Sīrah-specific ethics framework but does not operationalize it through measurable workflow-based safeguards and audit steps.
Hoque et al. 2025	To examine the challenges of AI integration in Ḥadīth studies and propose guidelines for responsible use.	Emphasizes textual authenticity, scholarly integrity, human oversight, and the danger of over-reliance on automated interpretation.	Focuses on Ḥadīth rather than Sīrah and does not address Sīrah-specific issues such as chronology, narrative variants, visualization, and public biography.
Wahid 2025	To assess the performance of five Islamic chatbots for Islamic legal guidance, including accuracy, reasoning,	Finds misattributed Qurʾānic verses and ḥadīth, inconsistent reasoning, and weak methodological grounding; no chatbot met the trusted-output threshold.	Tests Islamic legal guidance, not Sīrah research, so source hierarchy, biography, chronology, and sacred representation remain untested.

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Study	Research objective	Main finding / relevance	Research gap
	evidence, and hallucination risk.		
Susanti et al. 2025	To evaluate the validity and reliability of ChatGPT in presenting basic Islamic legal knowledge on waqf for early learners.	Performs better on basic concepts than on complex issues and shows errors in madhhab attribution and procedures.	Uses a legal-education setting and a specific model/language context; it does not test Sīrah sources, variant reports, or historical interpretation.
Almajdoub et al. 2026	To explore the educational benefits, practical challenges, and ethical concerns of AI in Qurʾānic education.	Teachers value AI for learning support but stress accuracy, authenticity, human verification, and protection of spiritual and relational dimensions.	Focuses on Qurʾānic education rather than Sīrah historiography and does not provide controls for source chains, competing narratives, or historical reconstruction.
Abdullah 2026	To analyze how generative AI and recommendation systems shape religious knowledge and to propose a maqāṣid-based governance framework.	Emphasizes provenance, uncertainty, contestability, qualified human oversight, and AI literacy.	Provides a broad religious-governance model, mainly for digital religious knowledge, but does not address Sīrah-specific source structures or task-level risks.
Rois & Yazdani 2026	To analyze how AI and digital platforms reconstruct Islamic religious authority and create new digital knowledge elites.	Shows tension between traditional sanad-based authority and algorithmic authority in digital spaces.	Explains changes in authority but does not test source accuracy, provenance, or practical safeguards for AI-assisted Sīrah research.
Naous et al. 2024	To measure cultural bias in Arabic and multilingual language models across Arab and Western cultural contexts.	Finds strong Western cultural bias and weak adaptation to Arab contexts, showing the need for culturally aware datasets and evaluation.	Measures general cultural bias, not religious-historical accuracy or Sīrah-specific concepts, sources, and interpretive traditions.
Plaza-del-Arco et al.	To examine how large language models represent	Finds stereotyping, stigmatization, uneven representation, and bias	Studies broad model bias rather than Sīrah-specific framing, source fidelity,

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Study	Research objective	Main finding / relevance	Research gap
2024; Tom et al. 2025	religion and how religious bias can interact with other social biases.	affecting religious groups, including Islam.	isnād preservation, and ethical representation of prophetic biography.

Problem Statement

AI is increasingly used to search, translate, summarize, and explain Islamic texts, but its use in Sīrah studies can create serious academic and ethical problems. AI may produce false citations, remove important context, merge different reports, mistranslate classical Arabic, or present uncertain interpretations as facts. General AI-ethics frameworks discuss issues such as bias, transparency, privacy, and accountability, but they do not fully address Sīrah-specific concerns such as isnād, source hierarchy, variant reports, sacred representation, and scholarly authority. Therefore, a practical Sīrah-specific framework is needed to guide the responsible use of AI while keeping final historical and religious judgment with qualified scholars.

Research Questions

1. What ethical and knowledge-related challenges arise from AI use in Sīrah studies?
2. What does recent Islamic and AI-ethics research show about these challenges?
3. Which AI-assisted Sīrah tasks carry the highest ethical risk?
4. What safeguards can support responsible AI use in Sīrah studies?

Dataset

The analytical dataset consisted of 23 sources included in the final synthesis. The corpus combined recent peer-reviewed journal and conference research with a small number of foundational works on Sīrah historiography and authoritative AI-governance documents. Priority was placed on publications from 2024 to 2026, while earlier works were retained when they supplied essential methodological or ethical context. The literature set included Sīrah-specific AI studies, research on AI in Ḥadīth and Islamic legal guidance, empirical work on Qurʾānic education, scholarship on religious authority and trust, studies of cultural

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and religious bias in large language models, and international governance guidance from UNESCO and NIST.

The dataset was designed as a qualitative evidence corpus rather than a statistical sample of all publications on AI and Islam. Inclusion required direct relevance to at least one of the study's analytical dimensions: source accuracy, attribution, context preservation, cultural or religious bias, explainability, human oversight, intellectual property, privacy, sacred representation, or algorithmic authority. The review was updated through 20 August 2026. Sources were identified through targeted searches using combinations of artificial intelligence, generative AI, large language models, Sīrah, Seerah, prophetic biography, Ḥadīth, Islamic studies, Qurʾānic education, religious authority, Islamic ethics, hallucination, source provenance, bias, and AI governance.

A second component of the dataset was a structured scenario matrix comprising six representative AI-assisted Sīrah workflows: (1) source retrieval and citation; (2) translation of classical Arabic; (3) chronology and narrative summarization; (4) thematic interpretation; (5) visualization or simulation; and (6) educational question-answering and public dissemination. These scenarios were not treated as observations of a single commercial model. Rather, they functioned as standardized units of analysis that allowed documented AI failure modes and ethical concerns to be mapped onto realistic Sīrah research activities.

For each workflow, seven ethical variables were coded: source provenance; context and transmission integrity; sacred representation; cultural and religious bias; transparency and reproducibility; displacement of scholarly authority; and privacy/intellectual-property risk. The dataset therefore joined two levels of evidence: published scholarship describing documented or theorized AI challenges, and a scenario matrix used to compare how those challenges would manifest in Sīrah-specific research practice.

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Methodology

Research Design

This study used an integrative critical-review design combined with structured scenario analysis. The review was updated through 20 August 2026. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2024 onward that addressed one or more of the following: AI in Sīrah or Ḥadīth studies; AI in Qurʾānic or Islamic education; AI-generated Islamic legal or religious guidance; algorithmic religious authority; religious or Arab-cultural bias in large language models; and governance principles relevant to research integrity. Earlier methodological and historiographical works were included where they were necessary to define the evidential character of Sīrah scholarship. International governance documents were included to connect domain-specific concerns with established AI-risk principles.

Search Strategy and Source Selection

Searches used combinations of the terms artificial intelligence, generative AI, large language models, Sīrah, Seerah, prophetic biography, Ḥadīth, Islamic studies, Qurʾānic education, religious authority, Islamic ethics, hallucination, source provenance, cultural bias, Arabic, and AI governance. Sources were prioritized when they supplied empirical evaluation, direct analysis of Islamic knowledge applications, a clearly articulated ethical framework, or specific implications for Sīrah methodology. Opinion pieces without an identifiable scholarly method, commercial promotional material, and unsourced web commentary were not used as evidential foundations for the analysis.

The screening process favored peer-reviewed scholarship with clear relevance to Islamic textual research or AI ethics, while excluding purely technical papers that did not engage with questions of knowledge reliability, interpretation, authority, or religious context. Foundational Sīrah historiography was used to clarify why provenance, variants, transmission structure, chronology, and source hierarchy are methodologically important in the field. International governance documents were used to compare domain-specific

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needs with wider principles of transparency, accountability, human oversight, cultural diversity, and risk management.

Analytical Framework

The literature was coded into seven ethical dimensions. Source provenance concerns whether claims can be traced to identifiable editions, reports, and authorities. Contextual integrity concerns preservation of isnād, matn, chronology, genre, variant reports, and historical setting. Sacred sensitivity concerns reverence, representation, synthetic speech, and the distinction between transmitted report and creative reconstruction. Pluralism and bias concerns cultural, linguistic, sectarian, madhhab, theological, and historiographical asymmetries. Transparency concerns model limitations, retrieval boundaries, versioning, and reproducibility. Scholarly authority concerns the boundary between machine assistance and qualified human judgment. Privacy and copyright concerns confidential research data, unpublished manuscripts, licensed editions, and the terms under which content is uploaded or processed.

Each dimension was evaluated on a five-point ordinal scale in which 1 represented low ethical concern and 5 represented critical concern. Scores reflected the severity of potential harm, the likelihood that ordinary users would fail to detect the problem, and the difficulty of correcting the output once it entered research, teaching, or public circulation. The scores are interpretive outputs of the literature-guided scenario analysis, not measurements of the performance of a particular proprietary model.

Scenario Analysis and Comparative Scoring

Six representative AI-assisted Sīrah workflows were then analyzed: source retrieval and citation; translation of classical Arabic; chronology and narrative summarization; thematic interpretation; visualization or simulation; and educational question-answering/public dissemination. Each workflow was rated on a five-point ordinal risk scale for each ethical dimension: 1 = low, 2 = limited, 3 = moderate, 4 = high, and 5 = very high. Ratings were assigned through evidence-guided analytic coding: a higher score was used when recent

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studies documented the corresponding failure mode, when the task could transform an uncertain claim into an authoritative output, or when an error would be difficult for a non-specialist to detect. The purpose of the matrix is comparative risk identification, not measurement of a named product's accuracy.

The scenario analysis does not report performance statistics for any commercial model and does not claim that every system will produce the identified failure on every task. It maps documented AI failure modes onto realistic Sīrah research practices and asks what the consequences would be if those failures occurred in this domain. This design is appropriate for an emerging field in which model versions change quickly and product-specific benchmarks can become obsolete, while the underlying ethical problems of provenance, authority, bias, and sacred representation remain stable enough for governance design.

Research Integrity and Ethical Scope

No human participants, private records, or confidential datasets were used. Consequently, the study did not involve intervention with human subjects. The unit of analysis was published scholarship and the ethical structure of common research workflows. Analytical judgments were checked for internal consistency by applying the same seven dimensions across all six workflows and by requiring each high-risk designation to be linked to a concern documented in the reviewed literature.

To strengthen transparency, the study distinguishes between claims directly supported by published empirical work and broader domain-level inferences drawn from the literature. No invented participants, experiments, interviews, or model performance data are presented. The results report the outcomes of the structured analytical procedure applied to the defined corpus and scenario matrix.

Results

The synthesis produced a consistent finding: AI risk in Sīrah studies rises as a task moves from retrieval and organization toward interpretation, attribution, representation, and public authority. The overall issue is therefore not whether AI is used, but where it is placed

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in the research chain and what epistemic weight is assigned to its output. The risk matrix below summarizes the scenario analysis.

Table 2. Literature-guided ethical risk matrix for representative Sīrah AI workflows

Workflow	Prov.	Context	Sacred	Bias	Transp.	Authority	P/IP	Total	Level
Source retrieval & citation	5	4	3	3	5	4	3	27	Very high
Classical Arabic translation	4	5	4	4	4	4	3	28	Very high
Chronology/summarization	4	5	4	4	4	5	2	28	Very high
Thematic interpretation	4	5	5	5	4	5	2	30	Critical
Visualization/simulation	3	4	5	4	4	4	3	27	Very high
Educational Q&A/public use	5	5	5	5	4	5	3	32	Critical

Source Fidelity, Translation, and Chronology

Source retrieval and citation produced a very high risk profile because generative systems can provide real-looking but inaccurate references, merge details from separate works, or cite a correct title for a claim that the source does not support. In ordinary research this is a serious integrity problem; in Sīrah it may become false attribution to early authorities or to the Prophet. Wahid's empirical findings on misattributed Qurʾānic and ḥadīth evidence illustrate the plausibility of this failure mode (Wahid 2025). Accordingly, AI-generated bibliographies should be treated as search leads until every citation has been verified against the original source or a reliable scholarly edition.

Translation of classical Arabic also ranked very high. The ethical problem is not simply lexical error. Sīrah and Ḥadīth texts may contain technical vocabulary, elliptical syntax, tribal names, genealogies, isnād formulae, evaluative terms, and culturally embedded concepts that have no exact modern equivalent. A model can produce elegant target-language prose while removing ambiguity that is present in the source. It can also

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normalize variant names or conflate transmitters. Kıranşal (2025a) specifically warns about decontextualized translation and semantic shifts, while recent Qurʾānic-education literature notes the ongoing difficulty of Arabic NLP in high-precision religious contexts (Almajdoub et al. 2026). Ethical translation therefore requires side-by-side source retention and expert review rather than replacement of the Arabic text with generated prose.

Chronology and narrative summarization ranked very high because Sīrah sources often preserve multiple reports that differ in sequence, date, causation, or detail. Generative systems are optimized to produce coherent narratives; this can convert a contested reconstruction into a seamless account. The harm is epistemic smoothing: disagreement disappears because the model has selected, blended, or harmonized reports without identifying the process. The correct scholarly behavior is often to preserve uncertainty, state that sources differ, and identify the basis for preferring one reconstruction. A system that produces a single timeline without variant-aware citations may therefore be less useful than a slower tool that displays competing reports.

Interpretation, Representation, and Public Authority

Thematic interpretation received the highest research-facing score after public question-answering. The reason is cumulative. Interpretation can involve source selection, translation, historical framing, theological meaning, moral judgment, and comparison with later legal or devotional traditions. Cultural bias documented in Arabic and multilingual models (Naous et al. 2024), religious stereotyping (Plaza-del-Arco et al. 2024), and the broader reconstruction of religious authority (Abdullah 2026; Rois and Yazdani 2026) can all influence such outputs. A model may, for example, overread political strategy while underrepresenting revelation and spiritual intention, or do the reverse in a way that suppresses historical analysis. The ethical goal is not to force one interpretive vocabulary but to make the framing choices visible and to prevent the model from silently converting a contested lens into a neutral fact.

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Visualization and simulation produced a very high profile because visual media add persuasive force. A map generated from uncertain coordinates can create false geographic precision; a reconstructed scene can make a weakly attested detail appear historically established; synthetic voice or first-person dialogue can imply words never transmitted in the sources. When the Prophet is visually represented or simulated, additional religious sensitivities arise. Because Muslim communities differ in historical practice and legal-artistic judgment, governance should not rely on a single universal claim about representation. A safer rule is to require explicit community-sensitive restrictions, prohibit unlabeled synthetic prophetic speech, and ensure that generated scenes are marked as reconstructions rather than evidence.

Educational question-answering and public dissemination produced the highest overall risk. Here the user is often unable to verify Arabic sources or distinguish early Sīrah, Ḥadīth, later commentary, modern scholarship, and popular retelling. The model's answer may therefore become the user's primary authority. Empirical studies in Islamic guidance and education show why this matters: users can receive clear but methodologically weak answers, while educators remain necessary for validation (Wahid 2025; Susanti et al. 2025; Almajdoub et al. 2026). Public-facing systems should consequently use stronger safeguards than private research tools, including restricted retrieval corpora, visible citations, uncertainty notices, escalation to qualified scholars, and refusal to invent a source when evidence is unavailable.

Cross-Cutting Challenges

Across all workflows, three cross-cutting challenges emerged. First is reproducibility: the same prompt can yield different answers after model updates, and proprietary systems may not disclose training changes. Second is provenance compression: a model can compress multiple layers of transmission and scholarship into one paragraph, hiding how an answer was assembled. Third is authority transfer: repeated convenience can shift the user's habit from asking which source supports a claim to asking whether the model sounds convincing.

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These challenges explain why disclosure alone is insufficient. A paper that merely states that AI was used has not yet demonstrated that its claims are verifiable.

The comparative scoring also showed a clear gradient of risk. Tasks centered on preliminary organization or search were comparatively more manageable when source-linked retrieval and human checking were available. Risk increased sharply when AI outputs began to select among disputed narratives, infer motives, paraphrase prophetic speech, assign theological meaning, or generate materials for non-specialist audiences. This pattern indicates that the central governance variable is not simply the presence of AI but the degree of authority delegated to it.

Discussion

From Technical Assistance to Epistemic Authority

The results support a distinction between low-authority and high-authority uses of AI. Low-authority uses include OCR cleanup, metadata normalization, preliminary keyword expansion, candidate entity extraction, concordance assistance, clustering for exploratory analysis, or identifying passages for subsequent human review. These uses can save considerable time while leaving the evidential decision with the researcher. High-authority uses include authentication of reports, final chronological adjudication, theological interpretation, attribution of motives, generation of prophetic speech, or public religious guidance. The closer the task comes to declaring what the Prophet said, did, intended, or normatively exemplified, the stronger the requirement for direct source verification and qualified human judgment.

This distinction also clarifies the role of retrieval-augmented generation (RAG). RAG can reduce some hallucination by constraining a system to a curated corpus, but it does not automatically solve interpretation. Retrieval can return an authentic passage while the model still misreads its scope, conflates it with another report, or ignores a contradictory source. A responsible Sīrah RAG system should therefore expose the retrieved passages, edition metadata, source location, and confidence limits; permit the user to compare

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variants; and avoid presenting a synthetic narrative when the underlying evidence is divided. Retrieval is a provenance tool, not a substitute for source criticism.

Preserving Isnād, Variants, and Uncertainty

A second implication concerns the preservation of isnād and source hierarchy in computational form. Digital systems often privilege the matn because semantic search operates on meaningful content rather than transmission structure. Yet isnād data can be central to evaluating relationships among reports. A Sīrah-aware system should store transmitters, work-level provenance, manuscript or edition information, variant readings, and links between parallel reports as structured metadata rather than stripping them during preprocessing. The design principle is simple: data cleaning should not clean away the very features that make the tradition historically assessable.

Third, Sīrah AI requires explicit treatment of disagreement. A model trained to be helpful may resolve ambiguity for the user, but scholarly integrity sometimes requires the opposite: to keep disagreement visible. Outputs should distinguish at least four epistemic categories: directly attested report, later scholarly interpretation, modern historical inference, and machine-generated synthesis. Where reports conflict, the interface should display the alternatives and the source basis for each. This is more faithful to the evidential character of Sīrah than a confidence score alone, because the issue may be genuine source plurality rather than model uncertainty.

Bias, Sacred Representation, and Oversight

Fourth, religious and cultural bias should be audited at the corpus and output levels. Corpus auditing asks which languages, editions, scholarly traditions, and geographic communities are represented. Output auditing asks whether one perspective is described neutrally while another is marked as controversial, irrational, violent, or apologetic; whether Arabic terms are translated asymmetrically; and whether the model applies different standards of skepticism across traditions. The findings of Naous et al. (2024), Plaza-del-Arco et al. (2024), and Tom, Ferguson, and Martinez (2025) show that bias can arise even without

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explicit malicious intent. Sīrah projects should therefore include scholars with linguistic and historiographical diversity in their evaluation process.

Fifth, sacred representation requires governance before generation. The availability of image, voice, and video models makes it technically easy to create historically styled depictions, reconstructed dialogue, or immersive scenes. Ethical review should ask whether the output could be mistaken for evidence, whether it violates the norms of the intended community, whether it fabricates speech, and whether a less representational alternative can achieve the educational objective. Maps, diagrams, timelines, calligraphic design, environmental reconstructions without prophetic depiction, and source-linked infographics may often provide pedagogical value with lower religious and epistemic risk.

Sixth, the literature on algorithmic authority suggests that human oversight must be substantive rather than ceremonial. A scholar who merely approves a polished AI draft without checking sources has not functioned as a meaningful human-in-the-loop. Oversight should be tied to specific checkpoints: corpus approval, prompt design where consequential, verification of Arabic quotations, review of every prophetic attribution, inspection of disputed chronology, bias review, and final sign-off for public dissemination. Abdullah's (2026) emphasis on provenance, uncertainty, contestability, and qualified oversight provides a useful governance architecture, while Almajdoub et al. (2026) supply empirical support for retaining educator authority in religious learning.

Finally, responsible use includes research integrity and intellectual property. Researchers may be tempted to upload copyrighted Arabic editions, unpublished translations, archival photographs, student work, or confidential peer-review material into cloud AI systems. The ethical status of such uploads depends on licensing, institutional policy, vendor terms, and data retention. NIST (2024) and UNESCO (2023) both treat privacy and information governance as central to generative-AI risk. Sīrah projects should maintain a data inventory, identify what may leave institutional infrastructure, and prefer locally controlled or contractually protected systems when working with restricted material.

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A Responsible-Use Framework for Sīrah-AI Research

On the basis of the review and scenario analysis, this article proposes the SĪRAH-AI Responsible Use Framework. The acronym identifies five non-negotiable principles for AI-assisted research: Source provenance; Isnād and context integrity; Reverence and representation; Accountability and auditability; and Human scholarly authority. The framework does not reject AI. It defines the conditions under which technical assistance can remain subordinate to scholarly evidence and ethical responsibility.

Table 3. SĪRAH-AI principles and minimum controls

Principle	Meaning	Minimum controls
S — Source provenance	Every consequential claim is traceable to a real source and edition.	Verified citations; source-linked retrieval; no unverified generated references.
I — Isnād and context integrity	Transmission structure, variants, chronology, and Arabic context are preserved.	Keep isnād/matn metadata; display conflicting reports; source-linked translations.
R — Reverence and representation	Sacred status and audience norms govern synthetic media and narration.	No unlabeled prophetic speech; ethical review of depictions; mark reconstructions clearly.
A — Accountability and auditability	AI use can be inspected, reproduced where feasible, and corrected.	Disclose model/date/task; record corpus and verification steps; correction pathway.
H — Human scholarly authority	Qualified scholars retain final judgment for high-stakes claims.	Human sign-off on attribution, authentication, disputed chronology, interpretation, public Q&A.

Source provenance requires every consequential claim to be traceable. A model should never be treated as the source of a historical proposition. Researchers should record the primary or secondary source, edition, volume/page or stable identifier, language, and where relevant the exact retrieved passage. AI-generated citations must be checked manually or through trusted bibliographic databases. If a system cannot establish provenance, the answer should be marked unverified rather than completed through probabilistic invention.

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Isnād and context integrity requires preservation of transmission and narrative structure. The system should retain isnād information when it is relevant, distinguish matn from metadata, preserve variant reports, identify chronological uncertainty, and avoid merging narrations simply because they are semantically similar. Translation outputs should remain linked to the Arabic source. When the system summarizes multiple reports, it should state which reports were combined and where disagreement remains.

Reverence and representation requires attention to the sacred status of the subject and to the norms of intended audiences. Unlabeled synthetic speech attributed to the Prophet should be prohibited. Visual or voice simulation should undergo explicit ethical review and should not be used merely because it is technically possible. Educational reconstructions should clearly separate evidence from imagination and use alternative visual forms when direct representation is likely to cause religious offense or epistemic confusion.

Accountability and auditability requires documentation sufficient for another researcher to understand the AI-assisted process. At minimum, publications should disclose the tool or model family when known, date of use, task performed, whether external retrieval was enabled, corpus boundaries, major prompts or prompt logic where material to reproducibility, verification steps, and the human role in final judgment. Version changes should be recognized as a reproducibility limitation. Institutions should also provide a correction pathway for AI-related errors in published digital resources.

Human scholarly authority means that AI remains advisory in high-stakes interpretive tasks. Qualified scholars should approve source hierarchies, resolve disputed reports, evaluate theological and historiographical framing, and review public-facing answers. AI may surface possibilities that a scholar then tests; it should not independently decide authenticity or generate normative conclusions from Sīrah evidence. The principle protects both academic method and the social ecology of religious learning by preventing convenience from being mistaken for competence.

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Implications for Researchers, Journals, Developers, and Educators

For researchers, the practical recommendation is to build AI into a verification-centered workflow. A productive sequence is: formulate the historical question; define an approved corpus; use AI for retrieval or exploratory organization; inspect the retrieved Arabic and metadata; compare variants and relevant scholarship; draft the interpretation under human responsibility; then use AI, if desired, for language editing that does not alter claims. The dangerous sequence is the reverse: ask a general chatbot for an answer, accept its chronology and citations, and then search selectively for material that appears to support it.

For journals, AI policy in Sīrah and Islamic studies should go beyond generic disclosure statements. Submission guidelines can require authors to verify all AI-assisted quotations and references, describe the role of AI in the methods section, preserve source passages for audit when appropriate, and affirm that no AI system was treated as an author or final authority. Peer reviewers should be encouraged to inspect suspiciously polished source lists and to request primary-source verification for contested claims. Journals can also specify that fabricated references constitute a research-integrity breach regardless of whether they were generated intentionally or by an AI tool.

For digital libraries and developers, the most valuable investment is not a more persuasive chatbot but a more inspectable research environment. Sīrah tools should expose source metadata, support Arabic-script search and morphological variation, link parallel narrations, allow filters by collection and period, preserve uncertainty, and provide exportable citation trails. A system that answers fewer questions but makes its evidence visible may be ethically superior to one that answers everything fluently.

For educators, AI literacy should include religious-source literacy. Students need to learn that a generated explanation is not self-authenticating, that a quotation can be invented, and that different source classes have different evidential weight. Assignments can require students to verify one AI-generated Sīrah answer against early sources and modern

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scholarship, identify where the model simplified disagreement, and document the verification process. Such exercises transform AI from an invisible shortcut into an object of critical method.

For institutions, governance should be proportional to risk. Exploratory text analysis on public-domain corpora may require light controls, while public-facing chatbots, synthetic media, or systems that make religious-historical judgments require formal review. High-risk projects should include expertise in Sīrah/Ḥadīth, Arabic, digital humanities, AI ethics, and information governance. Community consultation is especially appropriate for representation choices that may be technically legal but religiously sensitive.

Table 4. Publication-ready checklist for AI-assisted Sīrah research

Checkpoint	Question
Corpus	Are primary and secondary sources clearly defined, licensed, and appropriate to the question?
Attribution	Has every Qurʾānic, Ḥadīth, and Sīrah quotation or paraphrase been checked against the cited source?
Variants	Are conflicting reports preserved rather than silently harmonized?
Arabic	Are consequential translations reviewed against the original Arabic and technical terminology?
Bias	Have cultural, sectarian, linguistic, and historiographical asymmetries been considered?
Representation	Are synthetic images, voices, scenes, and first-person narration ethically reviewed and clearly labeled?
Reproducibility	Are tool/model, date, corpus boundaries, and verification steps recorded?
Privacy/IP	Were restricted manuscripts, unpublished data, or copyrighted editions protected under institutional policy?
Human review	Did a qualified scholar retain final responsibility for high-stakes historical and religious claims?

Taken together, these findings suggest that responsible AI use in Sīrah studies should be verification-centered rather than generation-centered. The most defensible workflow begins with a clearly defined corpus, uses AI for limited and auditable research assistance, returns every consequential claim to the original source, preserves disagreement and

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uncertainty, and assigns final interpretive responsibility to qualified human scholars. This model does not reject innovation; it places innovation within the evidentiary and ethical structure of the discipline.

Conclusion

AI can make Sīrah research faster, broader, and more computationally ambitious, but its ethical acceptability depends on whether efficiency remains accountable to evidence. The central danger is not only hallucination. It is the conversion of probabilistic output into religious-historical authority: an uncertain model synthesis can become a confident citation, a blended chronology can become a textbook fact, a culturally biased framing can become an apparently neutral interpretation, and a synthetic reconstruction can become indistinguishable from transmitted memory.

The most recent scholarship through August 2026 supports a human-centered approach. Sīrah-specific studies identify challenges of opacity, Western-centric data, decontextualization, simulation, and semantic distortion; empirical work in Islamic guidance and legal education documents misattribution and methodological weakness; research on Qurʾānic education emphasizes the continuing role of qualified teachers; and studies of religious authority show that algorithms increasingly shape what users recognize as knowledge. These findings converge on the need for provenance, uncertainty disclosure, contestability, human oversight, and culturally informed evaluation.

The SĪRAH-AI framework translates those principles into five research commitments: verify the source, preserve isnād and context, respect the sacred character of representation, make the AI process auditable, and retain qualified human authority. Under these conditions, AI can serve as a powerful instrument for retrieval, organization, comparison, and exploratory digital humanities. Without them, the same technology can accelerate historical error and weaken the very source discipline on which responsible Sīrah scholarship depends. Future research should therefore prioritize benchmark corpora with

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verified Arabic sources, multilingual bias audits, reproducibility protocols, and empirical testing of Sīrah-specific RAG systems under scholar supervision.

Future Work

The rapidly changing character of generative AI makes continued empirical testing essential. New models, retrieval-augmented systems, Arabic-language models, and domain-specific Islamic research tools may reduce some current failure modes while introducing new ones. Future studies should therefore move beyond general demonstrations and develop reproducible benchmarks that directly reflect the evidentiary practices of Sīrah scholarship.

Future empirical work should build benchmark datasets from verified Arabic Sīrah and Ḥadīth sources, pre-register task definitions, and compare general-purpose models with RAG systems that use curated corpora. Particularly useful studies would test citation accuracy, preservation of variant reports, Arabic-to-English semantic fidelity, chronological uncertainty, and bias across theological and historiographical framings. Researchers should archive prompts and outputs where licensing allows and repeat evaluations after model updates. A further priority is participatory governance: Sīrah scholars, Arabic linguists, historians, educators, digital-humanities specialists, and diverse Muslim communities should help define acceptable representation and risk thresholds rather than leaving these decisions solely to commercial developers.

A particularly important direction is the construction of benchmark datasets in which each Sīrah question is linked to verified Arabic source passages, edition metadata, transmission information where relevant, accepted scholarly classifications, and documented areas of disagreement. Such datasets could support controlled comparisons between general-purpose large language models, retrieval-augmented systems, and specialized Sīrah tools. Researchers should report not only answer accuracy but also citation validity, preservation of variants, uncertainty calibration, translation fidelity, and the ability to distinguish strong evidence from weak or disputed reports.

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Future work should also include multilingual and cross-tradition auditing. Models should be tested in Arabic as well as major languages used by Muslim communities, and evaluations should examine whether the system privileges particular modern ideological, regional, or sectarian framings. Participatory governance studies involving Sīrah scholars, muḥaddithūn, historians, educators, developers, librarians, and students could help establish acceptable boundaries for synthetic media, public-facing chatbots, and automated educational content.

Longitudinal research is also needed on epistemic trust. It is not enough to know whether an AI system can answer a single Sīrah question correctly. Scholars should investigate how repeated use changes students' habits of verification, their understanding of source hierarchy, their willingness to consult qualified teachers, and their ability to distinguish generated explanation from authoritative evidence. Finally, journals and research institutions should test disclosure standards for AI-assisted scholarship and develop correction mechanisms for AI-generated attribution errors that enter published or educational materials.

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