Nicolai Sinai (Oriental Institute, University of Oxford)

nicolai.sinai@orinst.ox.ac.uk

When did the consonantal skeleton of the Quran reach closure?[1]

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Part I

I. Introduction

The Islamic tradition credits the promulgation of a uniform consonantal skeleton (*rasm*) of the Quran to the third caliph ʿUthmān (r. 644–656). The best-known account of how this standardization came about is contained in two reports that are cited, *inter alii*, by al-Bukhārī, with *isnād*s passing through Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741–2).[2] According to the first one, during the reign of the first caliph Abū Bakr (632–634) but at the instigation of his eventual successor ʿUmar, Muḥammad's scribe Zayd ibn Thābit was charged with the task of collecting all available Quranic revelations and transcribing them on sheets of paper.[3] The second

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[1] I am extremely grateful to Robert Hoyland, Alan Jones, Christopher Melchert, Behnam Sadeghi and the two anonymous readers for numerous corrections, objections, and suggestions. The reader should note that this article was submitted already in February 2013 and that only minor corrections were made after this date.

[2] Al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. by Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb and Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, 4 vols., Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-salafiyya, AH 1400, vol. 3, 337–8, no. 4986–7 (66:3).

[3] The Islamic tradition is contradictory on the question whether Zayd or somebody else was the first to have collected the Quran (see Alphonse Mingana, "The Transmission of the Kurʾān", *Muslim World* 7 (1917): 223–232, at 224–5).

tradition describes how during a campaign in Armenia, which apparently took place in

30/650–1,[4] the commander Ḥudhayfa ibn al-Yamān became alarmed at differences in reciting

the Quran that he had observed between military contingents from Iraq and Syria. In order to

promote uniformity,[5] ʿUthmān ordered that Zayd's recension – which had ended up in the

possession of ʿUmar's daughter Ḥafṣa – be copied down in proper codices (*maṣāḥif*) and that

these be dispatched to the various regions of the empire. Diverging versions of the text were

to be burnt.

The modern debate as to whether this narrative can be considered historically reliable

was triggered by Paul Casanova and Alphonse Mingana, who, writing in 1911 and 1915–6,

maintained that the codification of the Quran only occurred at the initiative of the caliph

ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān (685–705) and his Iraqi governor al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, possibly on

the basis of "previous traditions".[6] By contrast, Friedrich Schwally, in his influential revision

of Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qorāns* (1919), accepted the ʿUthmānic origin of the standard

rasm,[7] a verdict which became the default view of most subsequent scholarship. It was only in

1977 that a backlash against this sanguine position occurred: in *Hagarism*, Patricia Crone and

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[4] The campaign mentioned in al-Zuhrī's account is probably to be identified with a campaign that al-Ṭabarī
reports for AH 30 in *Annales*, ed. by M. J. de Goeje et al., Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901, series 1, vol. 5, 2856 – thus
Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, revised by Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Otto Pretzl,
3 vols., Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1909–1938 (henceforth: *GdQ*), vol. 2, 49.

[5] According to al-Yaʿqūbī (d. early tenth century), ʿUthmān ordered the people to recite *ʿalā nuskhatin
wāḥidatin* (al-Yaʿqūbī, *Historiae*, ed. by M. Th. Houtsma, vol. 2, Leiden: Brill, 1883, 197).

[6] Mingana, "Transmission of the Kurʾān According to Christian Writers", *Muslim World* 7 (1917): 402–414, at
414, citing Paul Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde: Étude critique sur l'Islam primitif*, Paris: P. Gauthier,
1911, 141–2.

[7] *GdQ*, vol. 2, 1–121.

Michael Cook operate with an eighth-century date for the compilation of the Quran,[8] and John Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies* pushes the closure of the text forward even further, to the end of the eighth century.[9] But since Wansbrough's very late dating has increasingly come to be seen as untenable,[10] scholars inclined to doubt Schwally's conclusions have once more become attracted to the hypothesis of a "mid-Umayyad date" for the arrival of the Quran.[11] As a result, a conjectural dating of the Quran to the time of ʿAbd al-Malik has acquired remarkable popularity in recent years: Chase Robinson,[12] Alfred-Louis de Prémare,[13] David Powers,[14] and Stephen Shoemaker[15] all deem a codification of the Quran under of ʿAbd al-Malik to have been more likely than under ʿUthmān, or at least take the view that the Islamic scripture was open to significant revision up until c. 700 CE.

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[8] Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, 17–18.

[9] John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 49.

[10] E.g. Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998, 35–63 and Patricia Crone, "Two Legal Problems Bearing on the Early History of the Quran", *Jerusalem Studies of Arabic and Islam* 18 (1994): 1–37, here 16–18.

[11] Crone, "Two Legal Problems".

[12] Chase Robinson, ʿ*Abd al-Malik*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2005, 100–104.

[13] Alfred-Louis de Prémare, *Les fondations de l'islam: Entre écriture et histoire*, Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 2002, 278–323; id., *Aux origines du Coran: questions d'hier, approches d'aujourd'hui*, Paris: Téraèdre, 2004; id., "ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān et le Processus de Constitution du Coran", in: *Die dunklen Anfänge: Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam*, ed. by Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin, Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2005, 179–210.

[14] David S. Powers, *Muḥammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.

[15] Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, 136–158.

The time when students of early Islam were confronted with a choice between the customary dating of the Quran to c. 650 or earlier and Wansbrough's very late dating – by now an easily vanquished straw man – is thus past. To be sure, Harald Motzki has made a persuasive case for tracing the traditions about the collection of the Quran under Abū Bakr and its official dissemination under ʿUthmān back to at least al-Zuhrī,[16] thus superseding Mingana's assertion that these reports are not attested before the ninth century. Yet as Shoemaker has correctly emphasized, these results are not irreconcilable with Casanova's and Mingana's hypothesis.[17]

More germane to the issue is the groundbreaking work that Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi have recently done on the famous palimpsest ("Ṣanʿāʾ 1") of which a large part is preserved in the Dār al-Makhṭūṭāt at Ṣanʿāʾ as DAM 01-27.1.[18] Sadeghi and Goudarzi have now edited forty folios of this manuscript's lower writing, which presently constitutes our only material witness to a non-standard recension of the Quran's consonantal skeleton.[19] The text-type attested by the *scriptio inferior* ("C-1") is recognizably a version of the Quran as we have it, yet exhibits frequent divergences from the canonical *rasm* that range from differences in the grammatical person of verbs and suffixes to the omission, addition, and transposition of words and brief phrases. C-1 also arranges the *sūra*s in a different order, although the order

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[16] Harald Motzki, "The Collection of the Quran: A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments", *Der Islam* 78 (2001): 1–34.

[17] Shoemaker, *Death*, 148.

[18] Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Quran of the Prophet", *Arabica* 57 (2010): 343–436, at 344.

[19] Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, "Ṣanʿāʾ 1 and the Origins of the Quran", *Der Islam* 87 (2012): 1–129. Sadeghi has informed me that the Grand Mosque of Ṣanʿāʾ houses forty more folios of the palimpsest.

of verses within a given *sūra* displays almost no deviation from the standard *rasm*.[20] Crucially, there is now considerable scientific evidence that the palimpsest is very early: together with Uwe Bergmann, Sadeghi has subjected a stray folio which appears to have originally belonged to the palimpsest to radiocarbon dating, which has yielded a 95% probability that the parchment was produced (i.e., that the animal was killed) between 578 and 669 CE; the probability of the material being older than 655.5 CE is 91.8% (for 660.5 CE: 95.5%).[21] If one makes the reasonable assumption that the parchment was utilized relatively quickly after the death of the animal, a pre-660 dating of Ṣanʿāʾ 1 would currently seem to be the most defensible assessment, despite the fact that the radiocarbon dating of codices with a known date of completion has been known to produce dates that are too early by several decades.[22] This considerably narrows down the range of viable hypotheses about the Quran's textual history and makes it highly likely that by 660 a considerable portion of the corpus, albeit with numerous discrepancies, had been committed to writing and attained a broadly familiar shape. We may also follow Sadeghi in accepting that the palimpsest does not form a *terminus post quem* for the standard *rasm:* its erasure in order to make room for the standard version

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[20] Ibid., 23.

[21] Sadeghi and Bergmann, "Codex", 348 and 353–4. According to François Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads: A First Overview,* Leiden: Brill, 2014, 13, a carbon dating of two more samples of the Ṣanʿāʾ palimpsest has been commissioned by Christian Robin, yielding the date ranges 543–643 CE and , bizarrely, 433–599 CE. Since Déroche does not supply further details, it seems preferable for the time being to rely on Sadeghi and Bergmann's results, although further testing is probably called for.

[22] The parchment of another early Quranic folio has been dated, on a 95.2% probability, to 609–94; see Yasin Dutton, "An Umayyad Fragment of the Qur'an and its Dating", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9 (2007): 57–87, at 63–4. For a discussion of the limits of carbon dating see Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, 11–14, noting, inter alia, that C14 dating of the famous "Quran of the Nurse", which according to its colophon was completed in 1020, has yielded a date range between 871 and 986 CE, with a probability of 95%. See also the previous note.

of the Quran does not entail that the latter can only have arisen after the palimpsest was produced.[23]

Nevertheless, scholars such as Robinson or Shoemaker would probably still insist on the possibility that the full standard *rasm* of the Quran might only have emerged in the second half of the seventh century, possibly as a result of a state-sponsored revision of pre-existent recensions involving a last bout of editorial activity.[24] Hence, the most serious rival of the traditional dating of the standard *rasm* would at present seem to be the hypothesis that the Quranic text, in spite of having achieved a recognizable form by 660, continued to be reworked and revised until c. 700. For convenience of reference, I shall baptize this scenario the 'emergent canon model'. The issue that is at stake is obviously not a minor one, since during the sixty or seventy years after Muhammad's death a significant reworking of his original preaching might have taken place. The remainder of this article therefore proposes to undertake a systematic assessment of the different kinds of arguments that may be marshalled in support of or against such a view.

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[23] Sadeghi and Bergmann, "Codex", 383–4. Sadeghi's attempt to show that the standard *rasm* preserves an older prototype of the Quran more faithfully than C-1 will be discussed in the second part of this article.

[24] See, for example, Robinson, *ᶜAbd al-Malik*, 104.

II. Evidence in favour of a late seventh-century closure of the Quran

Epigraphic evidence

According to its building notice, the Dome of the Rock was finished in 72 AH = 691/2 CE.[25]

Its arcade exhibits two mosaic inscriptions consisting of a series of Quranic segments

interspersed with several instances of the *basmala*, various forms of the *shahāda*, and

blessings on Muḥammad and Jesus. The Umayyad portions of the copper plaques over the

eastern and northern entrance to the Dome also string together a number of apparently

Quranic phrases.[26] In both cases, the Quranic material diverges in a number of instances from

the standard *rasm*: for example, a phrase from Q 64:1 and two others from Q 57:2 are

conflated into a statement of divine omnipotence that appears twice;[27] and on one of the

copper plaques, Q 7:156, a divine first-person statement, appears in the third person.

(Incidentally, similar observations apply to the use of Quranic material in early Islamic

graffiti.[28]) To Robinson, all of this suggests that "Qur'anic texts must have remained at least

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[25] On the date see Jeremy Johns, "Archaeology and the History of Early Islam: The First Seventy Years",
Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient 46 (2003): 411–36, at 424–6.

[26] The inscriptions are transcribed in Christel Kessler, "'Abd al-Malik's Inscription in the Dome of the Rock: A
Reconsideration", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1970): 2–64; for a translation of the inscriptions and the
plaques see Estelle Whelan, "Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Quran", *Journal of
the American Oriental Society* 118 (1998): 1–14.

[27] The phrase is *lahu l-mulku wa-lahu l-ḥamdu* [from Q 64:1; Q 57:2 begins with the similar phrase *lahu mulku l-
samawāti wa-l-arḍi*] *yuḥyī wa-yumītu* [from Q 57:2] *wa-huwa ʿalā kulli shayʾin qadīrun* [concludes both Q 57:2
and Q 64:1] (Kessler, "'Abd al-Malik's Inscription", 4 and 9).

[28] Robert Hoyland, "The Content and Context of Early Arabic Inscriptions", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and
Islam* 21 (1997): 77–101, at 87–8.

partially fluid through the late seventh and early eighth century".[29] Shoemaker follows suit by qualifying the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock as "perhaps the most prominent and inescapable" support for the "relative instability" of the Quran at the time of the building's construction.[30] To be sure, in view of the high probability of a pre-660 date of Ṣanʿāʾ 1 such instability must have had clear limits, but as far as the palimpsest has so far been published it is not, for example, irreconcilable with a hypothetical claim that Q 112 may be a Marwanid addition to the Qurʾān,[31] or that the statement of divine omnipotence on the Dome's arcade may only subsequently have been reworked into the opening verses of *sūra*s 64 and 57.

Still, one must obviously ask whether other interpretations are possible. Strikingly, de Prémare is much less confident than Robinson and Shoemaker of the probative force of the epigraphic data.[32] And indeed there is much to recommend such an assessment: as Estelle Whelan has argued, divergences of the kind described above may be viewed as resulting from an adaptation of Quranic quotations to their epigraphic context, a procedure that is also observable in later inscriptions.[33] For instance, a conversion of Q 7:156 from the first to the third person could have served to bring it into line with the preceding quotation (Q 6:12), also in the third person. Even if Whelan's explanation may not be the only tenable one, it certainly

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[29] Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, 103. Robinson also draws attention to similar divergences in early literary texts, such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's letter to ʿAbd al-Malik (cf. Michael Cook, *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 120–122).

[30] Shoemaker, *Death*, 148.

[31] On the use of Q 112 on Marwanid coinage see Stefan Heidemann, "The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire and its Religion on Coin Imagery", in: *The Qurʾān in Context: Literary and Historical Investigations into the Qurʾānic Milieu*, ed. by Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, Leiden: Brill, 2010, 149–195, at 184–6.

[32] De Prémare, "Processus de Constitution", 183.

[33] Whelan, "Forgotten Witness", 6.

constitutes a perfectly satisfactory way of accounting for the evidence: Shoemaker's curt

dismissal of her article as "special pleading" is therefore worryingly cavalier.[34] In essence,

then, the epigraphic data is indeterminate and compatible both with a traditional view of the

Quran's codification and with the emergent canon model.

Al-Ḥajjāj and the Quran

At least two Umayyad governors of Basra and Kufa appear to have played some role in the

Quran's textual history. Firstly, there is the case of ᶜUbaydallāh ibn Ziyād (killed 67/686).

According to a report that Ibn Abī Dāwūd traces back to his scribe Yazīd al-Fārisī,

ᶜUbaydallāh added *alfay ḥarfin* to the codex, which could either be translated as "two

thousand letters" or, more remarkably, as "two thousand words".[35] Ibn Abī Dāwūd explains

that what ᶜUbaydallāh ibn Ziyād did was to change the orthography of the words *qālū* and

kānū from *q-l-w* and *k-n-w* to *q-ʾ-l-w-ʾ* and *k-ʾ-n-w-ʾ*. It is not *prima facie* obvious, of course,

that this captures the original meaning of the tradition. De Prémare, obviously attracted to a

maximalist construal of *alfay ḥarfin* as "two thousand words", rejects Ibn Abī Dāwūd's

interpretation on the grounds that a plene spelling of *ā* is already found in Muᶜāwiya's

inscription on a dam near al-Ṭāʾif, which to him suggests that by the time of ᶜUbaydallāh ibn

Ziyād this spelling must also have become standard in Quranic manuscripts and therefore did

not need to be promoted anymore.[36] However, this reasoning is refuted by the variation in the

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[34] *Death*, 321, n. 132.

[35] Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, ed. in Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾān: The Old Codices*, Leiden: Brill, 1937, 117 (Arabic text).

[36] *Fondations*, 293–4.

spelling of *ā* in early Quranic manuscripts.[37] On the face of it, then, there is as much reason to view the report as associating ʿUbaydallāh with an increasing switch-over to plene spelling as to consider it to reflect a major overhaul of scripture.[38]

Let us turn to the second case, then: the strong interest that ʿAbd al-Malik's Iraqi governor al-Ḥajjāj reportedly took in the Quranic text.[39] Al-Ḥajjāj is said to have once convoked a group of Quran readers in order to count the text's consonants, words, and verses, and to divide it into sections of equal length.[40] He is also credited with requesting his scribes, or more specifically one Naṣr ibn ʿĀṣim (d. 89/707–8), a student of Abū al-Aswad al-Duʾalī, to introduce diacritical signs into Quranic manuscripts.[41] What may be a secondary synthesis of

[37] See Keith Small, *Textual Criticism and Qurʾān Manuscripts*, Lanham (Maryland): Lexington Books, 2011, 36–44; François Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran dans les débuts de l'islam: Le codex Parisino-petropolitanus*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, 51–75.

[38] See *GdQ*, vol. 3, 256. – For a different interpretation of the tradition, which presupposes the reading *alifay ḥarfin*, "the two *alif*s of a word", see Omar Hamdan, *Studien zur Kanonisierung des Korantextes: Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrīs Beiträge zur Geschichtes des Korans*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006, 135–7. According to Hamdan, what ʿUbaydallāh did was to emend *li-llāhi* in Q 23:87 and 23:89 to *allāhu* by inserting two *alif*s. This interpretation has the merit of allowing one to see how Yazīd al-Fārisī was able to explain ʿUbaydallāh's measure by saying that the latter had been born in the Basran quarter of Kallāʾ: the reading *allāh* instead of *li-llāhi* seems to have been a specifically Basran variant that was reportedly contained in the codex of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (Hamdan, *Studien*, 136) and in the codex that ʿUthmān had dispatched to Basra (Michael Cook, "The Stemma of the Regional Codices of the Koran", *Graeco-Arabica* 9–10 (2004): 89–104, at 94). Hamdan also quotes a tradition transmitted by al-Dānī which states that ʿUbaydallāh "added two *alif*s" to Q 23:87.89.

[39] See Hamdan, *Studien*, summarized in id., "The Second *Maṣāḥif* Project: A Step towards the Canonization of the Qurʾanic Text", in: Neuwirth et al. (eds.), *The Qurʾān in Context*, 795–835.

[40] Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 119–20, and al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, ed. by Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 4 vols., Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1957–8, vol. 1, 249. In many Biblical manuscripts, similar word counts – called the "final Masorah" – appear at the end of individual books (Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd edition, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012, 67).

[41] Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-anbāʾ abnāʾ al-zamān*, ed. by Iḥsān ʿAbbās, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1972 (according to the last volume), 8 vols., vol. 2, 32. Hamdan cites a very similar tradition from Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī

such reports is given by the exegete Ibn ʿAṭiyya (d. 541/1146–7), according to whom al-Ḥajjāj, on the order of ʿAbd al-Malik, instructed al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Yaḥyā ibn Yaʿmar to supply the Quran with diacritical marks and vowel signs, then had the text divided up into *aḥzāb*, and finally initiated the composition of a book on reading variants.[42] In addition, Ibn Abī Dāwūd, on the authority of the Basran ʿAwf ibn Abī Jamīla (d. 147/764–5),[43] transmits a list of eleven passages for which al-Ḥajjāj allegedly "changed" the ʿUthmānic *rasm*, mostly by adding or subtracting single letters.[44]

Non-Islamic sources are more radical and portray al-Ḥajjāj as straightforwardly rewriting the Islamic scripture. The Christian apologist ʿAbd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī (early ninth century) asserts that "there is not a single codex which al-Ḥajjāj did not gather and from which he did not omit many things and to which he did not add many others" (the omitted

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(see the Arabic quotation in *Studien*, 146, n. 84). On Naṣr ibn ʿĀṣim see Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, 11 vols., 1967–2000, vol. 9, 32–3.

[42] Ibn ʿAṭiyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-kitāb al-ʿazīz*, ed. by Aḥmad Ṣādiq al-Mallāḥ, 2 vols., Cairo: al-Majlis al-aʿlā li-l-shuʾūn al-islāmiyya, 1974, vol. 1, 66–7. On Yaḥyā ibn Yaʿmar (also a student of Abū al-Aswad al-Duʾalī) see Sezgin, *Geschichte*, vol. 9, 33–34. – While Hamdan has pioneeringly worked through a massive amount of Arabic sources, he proceeds on the basis of the questionable assumption that all reports relating to al-Ḥajjāj's interest in the Quranic text or to his interaction with Quran scholars are to be interpreted on the model of a unified editorial project involving the appointment of a "project committee", the successive implementation of various "project goals", and finally the publication of the results. This highly orderly framework seems to be inspired by Ibn ʿAṭiyya (on the basis of whom Hamdan, *Studien*, 140–1, dates al-Ḥajjāj's measures to 703–4), but Hamdan does not address the possibility that the latter's tidy narrative could be a retrospective attempt at imposing some kind of overarching order on the material about al-Ḥajjāj. For instance, apart from Ibn ʿAṭiyya, reports describing how al-Ḥajjāj initiated a counting of the text's consonants and its division into sections do not mention the insertion of diacritics, nor that these measures took place at Wāsiṭ.

[43] On him see al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl fī asmāʾ al-rijāl*, ed. by ʿAwwād Maʿrūf, 35 vols., Beirut: Muʾassasat al-risāla, 1983–1992, vol. 22, 437–441.

[44] Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 49–50 and 117–8; Hamdan, *Studien*, 166–170. Two examples are *lam yatasanna* > *lam yatasannah* (both words can be synonyms: Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1863, 1149b) at Q 2:259 and *sharīʿatan* > *shirʿatan* at Q 5:48.

passages allegedly concerned the Umayyads and the ᶜAbbasids). He then had six master copies sent to Egypt, Damascus, Medina, Mecca, Kufa, and Basra, while the "previous codices" were effaced with boiling oil, "thus imitating what ᶜUthmān had done before him".[45] A similar accusation appears in a purported letter by the Byzantine emperor Leo III (717–41) to the caliph ᶜUmar II (717–20) which is cited by the eighth-century Armenian chronicler Łewond: "one knows, among others, of a certain Ḥajjāj, named by you as Governor of Persia, who had men gather up your ancient books, which he replaced by others composed by himself, according to his taste, and which he propagated everywhere in your nation."[46]

Similar steps, albeit not quite as drastic, are also alluded to in Islamic texts. The historians Ibn Shabba (d. 262/875–6) and al-Samhūdī (d. 911/1506) state that al-Ḥajjāj had copies of the Quran sent to the major cities of the empire.[47] Al-Samhūdī, basing himself on Ibn Zabāla (d. after 199/814),[48] additionally informs us that al-Ḥajjāj was the first to distribute *maṣāḥif* not only to the metropolises (*ummahāt al-qurā*), as ᶜUthmān had done before, but also to smaller towns (*qurā*).[49] That al-Ḥajjāj dispatched a Quranic codex as far as Egypt is

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[45] Mingana, "Transmission", 409, and Casanova, *Mohammed*, 119. For the Arabic text see George Tartar, *Dialogue Islamo-Chrétien sous le calife al-Ma'mun* [sic!] *(813–834): Les Épîtres d'al-Hâshimî et d'al-Kindî*, Thèse pour le Doctorat de 3° cycle, Strasbourg 1977, 117–8.

[46] Arthur Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between ᶜUmar II and Leo III", *Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944): 269–332, at 298. See Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 490–501.

[47] Ibn Shabba, *Taʾrīkh al-Madīna al-munawwara*, ed. by Fahīm Muḥammad Shaltūt, 4 vols., Mecca: n. p., 1979, vol 1, 7–8; al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafā bi-akhbār dār al-muṣtafā*, ed. by Qāsim al-Sāmarrāʾī, London: Muʾassasat al-furqān li-l-turāth al-islāmī, 5 vols., vol. 2, 457. See also Hamdan, *Studien*, 171, n. 198 and n. 200.

[48] On Ibn Zabāla's lost *Akhbār al-Madīna* see now Harry Munt, "Writing the History of an Arabian Holy City: Ibn Zabāla and the First Local History of Medina", *Arabica* 59 (2012): 1–34.

[49] "Al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf sent codices to the metropolises (*ummahāt al-qurā*), and he sent a big one of these codices to Medina. He was the first who sent codices to the towns (*wa-huwa awwalu man arsala bi-l-maṣāḥifi ilā*

confirmed by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/871), Ibn Duqmāq and al-Maqrīzī.[50] Apparently al-Ḥajjāj's strategy of dissemination also included the novelty of instituting codex-based Quran recitation in mosques.[51] Islamic sources register some repressive measures, too: for example, al-Ḥajjāj reportedly established a small task force charged with inspecting Quranic codices and destroying those which were found to "disagree with the ʿUthmānic codex" (for which their owners received a compensation of sixty dirhams);[52] and al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822–3)

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l-qurā) ...." – De Prémare contends that this statement contradicts the traditional narrative about ʿUthmān dispatching copies of his recension to the provincial capitals, for he summarizes al-Samhūdī's report as describing "le premier envoi d'un *muṣḥaf* officiel dans les capitales, alors que cette primeur est habituellement attribuée à ʿU<u>t</u>mān" ("Processus de Constitution", 200; similarly *Fondations*, 296). Yet what generates the purported contradiction is only the fact that de Prémare here equates *qurā* with "capitales" (the passage is translated correctly, with "capitales" for *ummahāt al-qurā* and "villes" for *qurā*, in "Processus de Constitution", 199, and *Fondations*, 461). However one judges the historicity of ʿUthmān's measures, there is surely no inconsistency between the proposition that ʿUthmān sent Quranic codices to the *amṣār* and the proposition that al-Ḥajjāj was the first to distribute codices to the *qurā*.

[50] Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr wa-akhbāruhā*, ed. by Charles C. Torrey, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922, 117–8, quoted after Mathieu Tillier, review of Déroche, *Transmission*, *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 13 (2011): 109–115; Karl Vollers (ed.), *Description de l'Egypte par Ibn Doukmak*, Cairo: Imprimerie nationale, 1893, vol. 1, 72; Mingana, "Transmission", 231; *GdQ*, vol. 3, 104, n. 1; Hamdan, *Studien*, 172, with n. 201; de Prémare, "Processus de Constitution", 198–9.

[51] Al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ*, vol. 2, 456–7 (cf. Hamdan, *Studien*, 172). This information is quoted on the authority of Mālik, who then expresses his disapproval of the innovation. This in turn is followed by a statement defending the reading from codices in mosques, and another tradition, cited from Ibn Shabba, which claims that the practice of having the Quran read from a codex in the mosque every morning was already established by ʿUthmān. The most straightforward reconstruction of the material would seem to be that al-Ḥajjāj was indeed responsible for instituting the practice; that his innovation then became a point of dispute, generating both supporting and disapproving comments; and that defenders of the practice finally took recourse to circulating a legitimizing tradition invoking an earlier precedent by ʿUthmān.

[52] Hamdan, *Studien*, 170–1. Hamdan places this report under the heading "Spreading the new copies of the Quran produced during the *Maṣāḥif* Project", but this link is not evident from the quotation itself. – Edmund Beck, "Der ʿu<u>t</u>mānische Kodex in der Koranlesung des zweiten Jahrhunderts", *Orientalia nova series* 14 (1945), 355–373 suggests that al-Ḥajjāj only attempted to eliminate codices used for public recitation and teaching.

mentions that the codex of al-Ḥārith ibn Suwayd, which was apparently based on the recension of Ibn Masʿūd, was "buried during the days of al-Ḥajjāj".[53]

Finally, de Prémare has compiled a number of utterances ascribed to ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj that would *prima facie* seem to lend support to the supposition that the two were engaged in significant redactional activity.[54] Among them is a report from al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-ashrāf* in which ʿAbd al-Malik describes the important role of Ramaḍān in his life by saying that it was during this month that he "collected" (alternatively, "memorized") the Quran (*jamaʿtu l-Qurʾāna*).[55] And al-Ḥajjāj, according to a tradition in Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, once charged his audience during a sermon: *allifū l-Qurʾāna kamā allafahu Jibrīl ...*[56] – an injunction which de Prémare takes to mean "Compose the Quran as Gabriel has composed it!" and considers to have been "addressed to the scribes entrusted with the task of *taʾlīf al-Qurʾān*".[57]

What, then, are we to make of all this? Casanova's and Mingana's plea for privileging al-Kindī's account over the Islamic sources was partly based on their conviction that the

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[53] Al-Farrāʾ, *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, vol. 3, ed. by ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Ismāʿīl Shalabī and ʿAlī al-Najdī Nāṣif, Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-miṣriyya al-ʿāmma li-l-kitāb, 1955–1972, 68 (*ad* Q 48:26). I owe this reference to Beck, "Der ʿutmānische Kodex", 355, n. 4.

[54] De Prémare, "Processus de Constitution", 189–206.

[55] Mingana, "Transmission", 230; de Prémare, *Fondations*, 297. De Prémare's interpretation of the utterance is endorsed in Etan Kohlberg and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification: The* Kitāb al-qirāʾāt *of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, 20.

[56] Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, 5 vols., Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1991, vol. 2, 942 (15:50).

[57] De Prémare, "Processus de Constitution", 200–1. De Prémare discusses two further statements ascribed to Abd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj (ibid., 194–197 and 204–5), but his construal of them does not appear even remotely compelling to me.

former predated these latter, an assumption which is now obsolete.[58] Nevertheless, the fact that two Christian texts which are not obviously interdependent as well as various Islamic reports concurrently ascribe to al-Ḥajjāj measures of textual dissemination and suppression strongly indicates that something of the sort really was afoot.[59] It should also be noted that the fact that al-Kindī and Łewond depict al-Ḥajjāj as having revised a scripture that was already in the public domain (rather than as having compiled it in the first place) is perfectly consistent with the emergent canon model as outlined above, according to which the activity of ᶜAbd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj would have constituted the terminus of a process that must have begun earlier. So should the material on al-Ḥajjāj that has just been presented be seen as supporting the emergent canon model?

In working through the evidence, it would be a mistake, I think, to set too much store by the statements ascribed to ᶜAbd al-Malik's and al-Ḥajjāj. For if the former's claim to have undertaken the *jam*ᶜ of the Quran in Ramaḍān referred to codification instead of memorization, the tradition would presumably not document an unguarded biographical reminiscence but is likely to have originated as a proud claim on the caliph's part to deserve credit for having collected the Islamic scripture. This entails that the Quranic text completed under ᶜAbd al-Malik would not have been passed off as an ᶜUthmānic text from the start, but would for a certain period have been openly flaunted as a Marwanid achievement, a stage of which the *jam*ᶜ tradition would constitute the last vestige. Only subsequently would this approach have been replaced by the spread of fictitious narratives about ᶜUthmān's

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[58] See Motzki, "Collection".

[59] Thus Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 501.

promulgation of the Quranic *rasm*. Such a picture, however, invites the query why the only trace of ʿAbd al-Malik's responsibility for the codification of scripture, which would once have been part of official state propaganda, is now contained in one isolated and highly ambiguous report. In the absence of more unequivocal evidence it thus seems entirely possible that ʿAbd al-Malik's statement does simply mean "In Ramaḍān I finished learning the Quran by heart".[60] As for al-Ḥajjāj's command *allifū l-Qurʾāna kamā allafahu Jibrīl*, the innocuousness of the reading "Order the Quran as Gabriel ordered it!" = "Recite the Quran in its canonical order!"[61] must not be mistaken for implausibility: given that the tradition explicitly describes al-Ḥajjāj as "delivering a sermon from the pulpit", de Prémare's suggestion that we are here confronted with an instruction given to an editorial team seems out of place (an early case of crowdsourcing?), while an exhortation about how to recite scripture would clearly be more appropriate.

The remaining material on al-Ḥajjāj, especially reports about the destruction of codices and the dissemination of others, could perhaps be read as oblique reverberations of the distressing memory that the Quranic text had once undergone a significant makeover. It bears pointing out, though, that again there is nothing to preclude a more sedate

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[60] This is how the tradition is understood by al-Thaʿālibī, who substitutes *khatamtu* for *jamaʿtu* (*Laṭāʾif al-maʿārif*, ed. by Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Salīm, Cairo: Dār al-Ṭalāʾiʿ, 1992, 110). Note that *jamaʿa* can undoubtedly have the meaning "to collect in one's heart" = "to learn by heart", as illustrated by al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 3, 348, no. 5036 (66:25), citing Ibn ʿAbbās as saying, *jamaʿtu l-muḥkama fī ʿahdi rasūli llāhi*, and Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyāʾ*, 10 vols., Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī / Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿāda, 1932–8, vol. 1, 285, overlapping with Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, al-Riyāḍ: Maktabat al-maʿārif li-l-nashr wa-l-tawzīʿ, n. d., 239 (5:178).

[61] Unsurprisingly, this is what al-Nawawī assumes the command must mean. He cites a deliberation by al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ as to whether the command refers to the canonical order of the *sūra*s or, which is deemed to be the more obvious meaning, to the order of verses within a given *sūra* (quoted in Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 2, 942, n. 1).

understanding. The report that al-Ḥajjāj ordered the destruction of codices which "disagreed with the ʿUthmānic codex" tallies with information about his and ʿUbaydallāh ibn Ziyād's staunch opposition to the recension of Ibn Masʿūd, which was particularly popular in Kufa.[62] Consequently, al-Ḥajjāj's motive for the suppression of certain Quranic manuscripts may simply have been to buttress the position of one among several other existing recensions of the Quran.[63] As for the codices that al-Ḥajjāj dispatched to various cities and towns, if we take the Islamic sources at face value our best guess would seem to be that these codices constituted a re-edition of the ʿUthmānic text that utilized (some) diacritics[64] and perhaps marked out the Quran's subdivision into sections of equal length. Whether al-Ḥajjāj's text also contained deliberate, albeit minute changes, as reported by Ibn Abī Dāwūd, is less

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[62] Al-Ḥajjāj is said to have threatened to behead anyone reciting Ibn Masʿūd's recension and to "remove it from the codex, if needs be even [by scraping it off] with the rib of a pig" (Ibn ʿAsākir, *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, vol. 4, ed. by ʿAbd al-Qādir Badrān, Damascus: Maṭbaʿat Rawḍat al-Shām, 1332, 69; for further invectives see de Prémare, " Processus de Constitution", 202–3; Sadeghi and Goudarzi, "Ṣanʿāʾ 1", 28–9, n. 62). On ʿUbaydallāh ibn Ziyād's provocative recitation of Q 113 and 114 (missing in Ibn Masʿūd's recension) see Hamdan, *Studien*, 137–8.

[63] Cf. Sadeghi and Bergmann, "Codex", 365, n. 36.

[64] Hamdan (*Studien*, 146–8) accepts that al-Ḥajjāj initiated the use of diacritics in Quran manuscripts (presumably on the basis of Ibn Khallikān and Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī), but rejects Ibn ʿAṭiyya's claim that al-Ḥajjāj also introduced vowel signs. This view is confirmed by the fact that Yaḥyā ibn Yaʿmar and Naṣr ibn ʿĀṣim, the two Basran Quran readers who are portrayed as working for al-Ḥajjāj by Ibn ʿAṭiyya and Ibn Khallikān (see n. 41 and n. 42 above), both figure as "the first person to have dotted codices" in traditions cited by al-Dānī, *al-Muḥkam fī naqṭ al-maṣāḥif*, ed. ʿIzzat Ḥasan, Damascus: Maṭbūʿāt Mudīriyyat Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-Qadīm, 1960, 5–6 (main text). – Three caveats are in order here: (i) Manuscripts and papyri show that it would be anachronistic to conceive of al-Ḥajjāj's codices as *fully* dotted (see Small, *Textual Criticism*, 16–30 and Andreas Kaplony, "What Are Those Few Dots For? Thoughts on the Orthography of the Qurra Papyri (709–710), the Khurasan Parchments (755–777) and the Inscription of the Jerusalem Dome of the Rock (692)", *Arabica* 55 (2008): 91–112). (ii) The extent to which Quranic manuscripts employed diacritical marks continued to vary considerably during the following centuries (cf. Small, *Textual Criticism*, 22–3, on BNF Arabe 333c). (iii) Diacritics as such are older; see Adolf Grohmann, *Arabische Paläographie. II. Teil: Das Schriftwesen. Die Lapidarschrift*, Wien: Hermann Böhlaus Nachf., 1971, 41; ʿAli ibn Ibrahim Ghabban and Robert Hoyland, "The Inscription of Zuhayr, the Oldest Islamic Inscription (24 AH/AD 644–645), the Rise of the Arabic Script and the Nature of the Early Islamic State", *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 19 (2008): 209–236).

certain: in some cases he may only have given preference to an already existing variant, while in other cases the supposedly original reading may in fact be secondary, as Sadeghi has argued.[65] Similar to the destruction of non-ᶜUthmānic codices, the underlying aim of such a re-publication of the ᶜUthmānic text[66] would have consisted in bolstering its status over and against rivalling recensions. This would have made political sense as an assertion of Umayyad control, in particular over unruly Kufa with its strong pro-ᶜAlid faction, where Ibn Masᶜūd's version remained in use. Al-Ḥajjāj's solicitude for the text of the Quran would also have cast him and the caliph as pious guardians of revelation treading in the footsteps of the first member of the Umayyad family to have become caliph. On such a sedate reading, while al-Ḥajjāj could have played a role in the official imposition of the ᶜUthmānic text, he was not necessarily responsible for a significant revision of it. Finally, the testimony of al-Kindī and Łewond could be accounted for as polemical attempts to harness these events, still remembered a century later, in order to cast doubt on the integrity of the Islamic scripture.

For a second time, then, our result is inconclusive: like the epigraphic data, the material on al-Ḥajjāj is compatible with the emergent canon model and with the traditional view that the standard *rasm* of the Quran existed by the mid-seventh century. The latter scenario would allow us to take most of what the Islamic sources say at face value, and it is not

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[65] See Sadeghi and Bergmann, "Codex", 365, n. 36. The skeletal modification that is most likely to stem from a conscious decision to correct the text is the alleged substitution of *li-llāhi* at Q 23:87.89 by *allāh:* since the two verses quote the answer to a preceding question formed with *man*, the variant *allāh* certainly makes for a smoother text. Yet already the ᶜUthmānic codex sent to Basra reportedly had *allāh* instead of *li-llāhi*, and the alteration *li-llāhi* > *allāh* is also ascribed to ᶜUbaydallāh ibn Ziyād (see above, n. 38). Al-Ḥajjāj's text may therefore simply have followed an existing Basran reading.

[66] On the deposition of master copies as a form of publication see Gregor Schoeler, "Writing and Publishing: On the Use and Function of Writing in the First Centuries of Islam", *Arabica* 44 (1997): 423–435.

clear why, in the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary, this should not be our

default position. The former view, of course, is much more attuned to the hermeneutics of

suspicion that has become such an instinctive part of modern scholarly habits of reading.

Nonetheless, it seems questionable to maintain, as a matter of principle, that when

confronted with more than one adequate way of explaining our evidence we ought to choose

the more iconoclastic one.

Even on a minimalist reading, however, it appears that as late as 700 manuscripts

diverging from what was to become the standard *rasm* were still sufficiently prevalent in order

for measures aimed at reinforcing the position of the so-called ᶜUthmānic text to make

sense.[67] The latter's ultimate displacement of all other versions of scripture thus cannot have

come in the immediate wake of the actions of ᶜUthmān, even if these are viewed as historical.

So did the standard *rasm* receive a major push from al-Ḥajjāj instead of ᶜUthmān? The fact

that according to ᶜAwf ibn Abī Jamīla, al-Ḥajjāj's recension of the Quran differed in two

places (23:87.89: *allāhu* instead of *li-llāhi*) from the standard *rasm* would seem to indicate that

the text that we have is not identical with the version endorsed by al-Ḥajjāj.[68] One should also

take note of Ibn ᶜAbd al-Ḥakam's report that al-Ḥajjāj's dispatch of one of his codices to

Egypt was perceived as an affront by the governor ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz ibn Marwān, who then had

his own codex produced; this suggests that al-Ḥajjāj's authority in the matter was regional at

most and that he was not in a position to carry out an empire-wide standardization of

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[67] As late as 323/935, the Quran reader Ibn Shannabūdh was tried for reciting variants deviating from the standard *rasm* (see Christopher Melchert, "Ibn Mujāhid and the Establishment of Seven Qur'anic Readings", *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000): 5–22). Note, however, that al-Ḥajjāj seems to have targetted not just the recitation of non-ᶜUthmānic variants, but proper non-ᶜUthmānic codices.

[68] See above, n. 65. I owe this point to a comment by Behnam Sadeghi.

scripture.[69] Hence, one should probably not underestimate the significant role that an uncoerced attainment of acceptance 'from the bottom up' is likely to have played in ensuring the ultimate ascendancy of the canonical *rasm*, albeit in tandem with al-Ḥajjāj's official measures.

Other Christian sources

Apart from the testimony of ᶜAbd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī, Mingana also surveys other Christian writings on early Islam, such as the *Dialogue between Patriarch John of Antioch (631–48) and a Muslim Emir*[70] or the chronicle of John Bar Penkāyē (probably written 687–8),[71] and concludes that "the Christian historians of the whole of the seventh century had no idea that the 'Hagarian' conquerors had any sacred Book".[72] Such an argument from silence is of course easy to impugn,[73] especially since it is now contradicted by the likelihood of a pre-660 dating of Ṣanᶜāʾ 1. A chronicler like John Bar Penkāyē, for example, concentrates on "recording current events as they impacted on the Christian communities";[74] it is therefore questionable whether we may expect him to discuss the scriptural canon of the Muslims.

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[69] A French translation of the passage is contained in Tillier's review of Déroche (see above, n. 50), which was kindly brought to my attention by Marie Legendre.

[70] On the text and the question of its date see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 459–465.

[71] See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 194–200.

[72] Mingana, "Transmission", 406.

[73] Motzki, "Compilation", 14.

[74] Sydney H. Griffith, "Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bêt Ḥālê and a Muslim Emir", *Hugoye* 3.1 (2000): 29–54, citing 34.

De Prémare, too, accords an important position to Christian sources.[75] Following

Crone and Cook,[76] he draws attention to a Syriac text from the first half of the eighth century,

the *Debate between a Monk of Bêt Ḥālê with an Arab Notable*,[77] which speaks of the Quran

and of Sūrat al-Baqara as two distinct texts: "I think that even in your case, Muḥammad did

not teach all your laws and commandments in the Quran, but you learned some of them from

the Quran; some of them are in Sūrat al-Baqarah, and in *G-y-g-y*, and in *T-w-r-h*."[78] The

statement might be construed as implying that the Quran that was known to the text's author

was not identical with our Quran and perhaps formed a literary precursor of the latter. On the

other hand, in view of the fact that the lower layer of the Ṣanʿāʾ palimpsest does contain

sections from Q 2, the author of the *Debate* may simply have misconstrued the way he heard

Muslims speak about certain revelations being contained "in the Quran", and others "in Sūrat

al-Baqara". Hoyland remarks that "in the Muslim tradition too there are indications that it

[Sūrat al-Baqara] had a certain distinctiveness" and draws attention to the battle cry allegedly

used at Ḥunayn: *yā aṣḥāba sūrati l-baqarah*.[79] To an outsider, such a slogan might well imply

that Sūrat al-Baqara is an independent Muslim scripture.

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[75] De Prémare, "Processus de Constitution", 184–189.

[76] Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 17 with n. 14.

[77] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 465–472.

[78] Quoted (slightly modified) according to Griffith, "Disputing with Islam", 47–8. The end of the sentence is garbled;"G-y-g-y" and "T-w-r-h" may refer to the Gospel (Arabic *injīl*) and the Torah (Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 471–2, and Griffith, "Disputing with Islam", 47).

[79] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 471.

De Prémare attempts to strengthen his case with the chapter about Islam in John of

Damascus' (d. mid-eighth century) *De haeresibus*,[80] which first refers to a Muslim "book"

(*biblos*) and later mentions four "writings" (*graphê*) composed by Muḥammad.[81] Only three

of these "writings" bear titles corresponding to Quranic *sūra*s, while the fourth one, the

"writing of the camel of God" (*hê graphê tês kamêlou theou*), can plausibly be connected to

the Quranic story of the "camel of God" (*nāqat Allāh*, see Q 7:73, 11:64, and 91:13) that was

killed by the Thamūd.[82] De Prémare suspects that this "writing of the camel of God" may

have been a proto-Quranic text of which only fragments made it into the canonical recension

of the Islamic scripture.[83] He also notes that in his discussion of "the writing of the women"

(= Q 4, Sūrat al-Nisāʾ?) John of Damascus refers to Muḥammad's marriage to the wife of

Zayd, which is mentioned not in Q 4 but in Q 33:37, and to the Quranic statement that "your

women are a tilth for you", which occurs in Q 2:223. Hence, according to de Prémare, John of

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[80] The authenticity of the chapter on Islam has been challenged, but see the discussion in Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"*, Leiden: Brill, 1972, 60–66. On the date of John of Damascus's death see ibid., 47–8, and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 482–3.

[81] De Prémare, "Processus de Constitution", 186; Sahas, *John of Damascus*, 89–93.

[82] Sahas, *John of Damascus*, 91.

[83] De Prémare connects his hypothesis to Muqātil ibn Sulayman's commentary on Q 26:155–158, which he understands to preserve "les traces d'un texte antérieur aux différents passages coranique actuels sur la chamelle de Ṯamūd" ("Processus de Constitution", 188). He very much works with a Wansbroughian analysis of the *Tafsīr Muqātil* here, which views the occasionally seamless interposition of brief expansions and additions between scriptural segments as documenting a stage when proto-Quranic material was still closely linked with proto-exegetical material (see Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 119–48). For a different description of the literary makeup of the *Tafsīr Muqātil* see Nicolai Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung: Studien zur frühen Koraninterpretation*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009.

Damascus must be talking about "a text the organisation of which is noticeably different from that of the present *sūra* 4".[84]

However, the *De haresibus* is unlikely to have been written before the 730s, i.e., at least three decades after al-Ḥajjāj had supposedly overseen the final redaction of the Quranic standard *rasm*. To postulate that John of Damascus would in the 730s still have based his presentation of Islam on a by then outdated pre-Marwanid version of the Quran strains credulity. Did the whole enterprise pass him by? Why would he be invoking an older version of the text without polemically capitalising on al-Ḥajjāj's measures in a way similar to al-Kindī?[85] It seems preferable, then, to suppose that the reference to a "writing of the camel of God" simply attests an early Islamic *sūra* name (for either Q 7, Q 11, or Q 91) which subsequently fell out of use. The fact that John of Damascus ascribes passages from other *sūra*s to Q 4 could be a simple mistake caused by that *sūra*'s title ("women") and the consequent misconception that all important Quranic statements about marriage are concentrated therein.

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[84] De Prémare, "Processus de Constitution", 186.

[85] One might rejoin that the ultimate triumph of the Marwanid Quran only came after a protracted struggle spanning several decades (i.e., after the 730s), but this would aggrevate the challenge of explaining why in the end all Muslim groups unanimously adopted it, without leaving behind any literary trace of the entire process (see the second part of this article).

Considerations of historical likelihood

Chase Robinson's cautious espousal of a Marwanid date for the codification of the Quran primarily relies on general considerations of historical likelihood.[86] According to Robinson, the imposition of a standardized text of the Quran is difficult to envision under ʿUthmān, who was "deeply unpopular" in many quarters and ruled "a polity that lacked many rudimentary instruments of coercion and made no systematic attempt to project images of its own transcendent authority – no coins, little public building or inscriptions".[87] By contrast, ʿAbd al-Malik's coinage reform and his construction of the Dome of the Rock bespeak both his interest in deploying a specifically Islamic idiom and his disposal of the means required to carry out such measures, all of which makes his reign a more suitable context for the official promulgation of a uniform text of scripture.

There is no gainsaying the acuteness of these remarks. One way of accommodating them would obviously be to deny that ʿUthmān ever undertook the promulgation of a standard version of scripture. Still, it is not evident that this is the only possible conclusion. As was pointed out above, it appears that al-Ḥajjāj still found it necessary to repress Ibn Masʿūd's text and to promote the ʿUthmānic one. This does indeed create a strong impression that ʿUthmān did not achieve, or did not entirely achieve, the establishment of a uniform version of the Quran, but it hardly implies that he could not have tried. Robinson could therefore well be right to insist that ʿUthmān may not have been in a position to enforce the sole bindingness of one recension of the Quran, while ʿAbd al-Malik, given his imperial self-

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[86] Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, 100–104; cf. Kohlberg and Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification*, 20–23.

[87] Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, 102.

presentation and the more centralized nature of the Marwanid state, would have had both a motive and the means to give the Quranic recension favoured by him a considerable push. However, all of this primarily concerns the aspect of imposition: it has important implications for the question when and how the standard *rasm* of the Quran became the sole authoritative version of scripture, not necessarily for the question when and how this recension reached its final shape.

Discontinuities between Qurʾānic legislation and early Islamic law

In the last section of this part I turn to Patricia Crone's case for a "mid-Umayyad" arrival of the Quran as presented in an article from 1994. Crone begins by reviewing a number of Quranic terms and passages with respect to which Islamic exegetes are clearly relying on guesswork rather than on any genuine recollection of the text's original meaning: in other words, the exegetical tradition does not generally seem to reach back to the first addressees of the Quranic recitations. Crone then focuses on similar gaps in the legal sphere, summed up in Joseph Schacht's famous verdict that "apart from the most elementary rules, norms derived from the Koran were introduced into Muhammadan law almost invariably at a secondary stage".[88] To be sure, Harald Motzki has now argued that already the early Meccan scholar ʿAṭāʾ ibn Abī Rabāḥ (d. 114 or 115/732–734) explicitly based some of his legal opinions on Quranic verses.[89] Nevertheless, Schacht's observation that in a number of cases the early

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[88] Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, corrected edition, 1953, 224.

[89] Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*, translated by Marion H. Katz, Leiden: Brill, 2002, 108–117.

Islamic legal tradition departs conspicuously from comparatively unequivocal Quranic stipulations remains valid. Particularly striking examples of such legal discontinuities are the refusal to recognize written documents as legal proof (contradicting Q 2:282) and the stoning penalty for *zinā* (contradicting Q 24:2). Crone herself presents two additional examples: firstly, the expression *kitāb* in Q 24:33, which Islamic exegetes generally understand to refer to a manumission document, whereas the context would clearly seem to require the meaning "marriage contract"; and secondly, a number of early legal traditions which possibly reflect a stage in Islamic legal thinking when the Quranic pronouncements awarding the non-agnatic relatives of a deceased certain fixed shares of the estate were not yet taken into account.

Crone insists that such discontinuities, when viewed through the lens of the conventional scenario of the Quran's codification, produce an intractable quandary. For if one accepts the commonsensical assumption that Muḥammad implemented, or at least made a significant effort to implement, Quranic legislation, then practices which at some point were in conformity with Quranic law (such as the acceptance of written documents as legal proof) must within a rather short period of time have come to be replaced by practices that clearly violated Quranic law (such as the rejection of written documents as legal proof), in spite of the fact that the early Muslims would presumably have known, and been concerned to follow, the Quranic rules. Similarly, the original understanding of certain Qur'anic passages must have been lost and replaced by ingenious speculations. Crone finds such developments baffling and instead proposes a "mid-Umayyad date for the arrival of the canonical

scripture"[90]: "if ... the Quran was codified and canonized after the conquests, it ceases to be problematic that the reception of its legislation belongs to a secondary stage."[91]

Crone's article, then, accumulates circumstantial evidence indicating a surprising absence of the Qur'an from early Islamic intellectual history. It must be noted that the emergent canon model, whatever its merits, does not really provide a satisfactory explanation for this: for if it were true, one might have expected the incipient norms of Islamic law to have found their way into scripture, unless one were to introduce the auxiliary hypothesis that the circles responsible for the early development of the legal tradition were distinct from the circles transmitting proto-Quranic material. Even more compellingly, the carbon dating of the Ṣanʿāʾ palimpsest makes it highly likely that by 660 a broadly familiar version of the Quran had come into existence and was being transmitted at considerable expense. Adding up Crone and the palimpsest, we are thus faced with the question how the Quran could have been both absent and present during the first Islamic century.

What may be a helpful paradigm is provided by the conventional narrative of how the works of Aristotle resurfaced from near-total oblivion when they were reedited by Andronicus of Rhodes in the second half of the first century BCE.[92] Although Crone's article does not address the issue explicitly, it can be construed as advocating precisely such a 'hidden scripture' model, according to which the Quran may well have reached closure as early as 650, but nevertheless remained absent from Islamic history until c. 700, when it was secondarily

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[90] Crone, "Two Legal Problems", 37.

[91] Ibid., 19.

[92] But see the critical assessment in Jonathan Barnes, "Roman Aristotle", in: *Philosophia Togata II*, edited by Jonathan Barnes and Miriam Griffin, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 1–69.

co-opted, without much revision, into an existent religious tradition.[93] To be sure, the Aristotelian paradigm must be considerably toned down to fit the situation of the Quran: at least isolated codices must have circulated, both because of Ṣanʿāʾ 1 and because it seems excessive to dismiss the substantial and highly specific body of information found in Islamic sources about non-ʿUthmānic recensions, or the reports about al-Ḥajjāj's destruction and burial of scriptural manuscripts. It is also probable that not all parts of the corpus would have been equally 'hidden': while early Muslims may have known some Quranic material by heart, they may not generally have had access to complete manuscripts of the text, or systematically studied them, as a result of which certain passages could have inertly sat around in the midst of Quranic codices where nobody but an occasional scribe ever ventured.

Crone herself seems to dismiss the notion that the Quran could have been both present (in the sense of being transmitted in writing and selectively used for recitation) and absent (in the sense that sections of the text were not commonly known) at the same time: how could the early Muslims "have had a scripture containing legislation *without* regarding it as a source of law?", she asks.[94] Yet even today, believers who profess allegiance to a scripture without having more than a superficial understanding of what that text actually says are not an uncommon sight. Sacred writings, even if programmatically acknowledged to be reservoirs of truth and benchmarks of virtuous conduct, are not necessarily processed as bearers of concrete linguistic information. In particular if a sacred text's primary field of use consists in

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[93] This is pointed out by Sadeghi and Goudarzi ("Ṣanʿāʾ 1", 3, n. 3), who remark that Crone argues less for "a late date for the attainment of textual stability" than for "the late canonization of a largely stable text".

[94] Crone, "Two Legal Problems", 14. – The following two paragraphs are based on Nicolai Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 39–58 and 261–7.

ritual and devotional recitation, as seems to have been the case in early Islam,[95] its semantic function can to some extent be suspended.[96] Admittedly, it may be doubted whether this provides a convincing explanation for ignoring the normative import of straightforward injunctions like Q 24:2 ("The woman and man guilty of fornication, flog each of them with a hundred stripes"). But as noted above, most early Muslims' acquaintance with the Quran may well have been limited to "a few favorite passages and prayers, or certain selected verses that were reiterated as proof texts in political and doctrinal disputes",[97] while many sections could have constituted genuine blind spots. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the process by which the early post-prophetic Muslim community (the majority of which had not been members of the Medinan *Urgemeinde*) took cognizance of its scripture should have been extremely gradual, and that it should have taken the form, not of scholarly exegetes systematically working through the text, but of decontextualized Quranic segments and

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[95] As Christopher Melchert aptly puts it, "the Qur'an was not primarily a collection of propositions to be looked up but a liturgy to be recited" ("Ibn Mujāhid and the Establishment of Seven Qur'anic Readings", *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000): 5–22, citing 16). William Graham has found that in prophetic traditions the term *qurʾān* occurs mainly in the context of prayer and other devotional practices ("The Earliest Meaning of 'Quran'", *Die Welt des Islams* 23/24 (1984): 361–77). This is not necessarily to deny that there may have been a limited use of Quranic material in early Islamic theology and law, as reflected, for example, in the so-called Epistle of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī: but the Epistle – the early dating of which is criticized in Suleiman Ali Mourad, *Early Islam Between Myth and History: Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110H/728CE) and the Formation of His Legacy in Classical Islamic Scholarship*, Leiden: Brill, 2006, 161–239 – at most shows that given a controversial theological or legal issue, early Muslims did indeed equip themselves with suitable scriptural ammunition against their opponents, not that they would necessarily have subjected the entire corpus to a sustained analysis.

[96] See William Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 110–5.

[97] Richard W. Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 29. Cf. also the anecdotes indicating very limited scriptural knowledge on the part of some early Muslims gathered in *GdQ*, vol. 2, 7–8.

keywords unpredictably percolating into the collective consciousness, where they inspired, attracted or merged with a host of popular narratives.[98]

Crone is surely right to insist that a proponent of the traditional scenario must assume the Quran's status to have been very different during the lifetime of Muḥammad: given that the latter presumably promulgated the Quranic revelations in order for people to understand and follow them, legally relevant Quranic passages must to some extent have been applied, endowing the Quran with the status of a "source", rather than just that of a "document", to put it in terms coined by John Burton.[99] Consequently, proponents of an early dating of the Quran find themselves committed to an evolutionary trajectory leading from a stage at which the Quran functioned as a normative source (during Muḥammad's lifetime) to a stage at which it did not – or not primarily or invariably – function as such (during the seventh century), to a stage at which it was again taken seriously as a source of behavioural norms, and subjected to systematic exegetical decoding (from the eighth century onwards). Yet such a to and fro, although messy, would not be historically incomprehensible. As a result of the rapid growth of the Islamic community and its geographical expansion over a vast area, the Quranic corpus would have undergone a far-reaching disembedding. Hence, instead of thinking of the post-conquest *umma* as essentially an extension of the prophetic *umma*, we should perhaps envisage them – in spite of certain personal continuities – as two separate

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[98] This description is inspired by John Burton, according to whom Quranic pronouncements entered Islamic legal discourse – i.e., took on the status of a normative source – only after they had already attracted a substantial amount of narrative amplification (for an illustration of this view see his "Law and Exegesis: The Penalty for Adultery in Islam", in: *Approaches to the Qurʾān*, ed. by Gerald R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, London: Routledge, 1993, 269–284).

[99] Crone, "Two Legal Problems", 20. On Burton's distinction between the Quran as a document and as a source see his *The Collection of the Qurʾān*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, 111 and 187.

communities, much in the same way in which urban Hellenistic Christianity was distinct from, rather than a mere extension of, early Palestinian Christianity. Such a shift of perspective calls into question the assumption that those Quranic norms which, on the traditional model, must have been put into practice in the context of the Medinan *Urgemeinde* ought to have remained intact, or that the meaning of specific Quranic expressions ought to have filtered down unscathed from the prophetic to the post-prophetic community. Although the Islamic tradition is generally concerned to depict the early Muslims as meticulously passing on detailed historical and exegetical remembrances of the Prophet's Companions, it seems rather more probable that during the age of the conquests the majority of converts was not sufficiently preoccupied with the interpretation of the Quran in order for the prophetic community's understanding of it to be fully preserved. As a result, later Muslims needed to rediscover and hermeneutically reinvent their scripture.

To conclude this part of the article: all the data examined so far seems compatible with the conventional dating of the Quran's codification in a suitably modified version (circulation of several rivalling recensions even after 650, selective and predominantly liturgical use of the Quran until the end of the seventh century). The emergent canon model certainly remains in the race, although neither the epigraphic nor the literary evidence that has been marshalled by its supporters strictly speaking requires it, and the legal and exegetical discontinuities foregrounded by Crone can only be squared with it if by bringing in the auxiliary assumption that the circles involved in the transmission of proto-Quranic material were separate from the circles at the forefront of early Islamic legal thought and unconcerned to straighten out those bits of the text that had become unintelligible. – In Part II I shall go on to discuss the

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weightiest arguments in support of a mid-seventh century or earlier date for the standard

rasm of the Quran.

III. Evidence in favour of a mid-seventh century closure of the Quran

I now turn to arguments that can be adduced in support of the proposition that the Quran's standard *rasm* reached closure by c. 650. The results of Sadeghi and Bergmann's radiocarbon dating of the Ṣanʿāʾ palimpsest are obviously certainly relevant here, but, as pointed out above, they do not as such preclude the possibility that the full standard *rasm* of the Quran might only have emerged in the second half of the seventh century. Furthermore, the radiocarbon dating of Quranic manuscripts is still in its infancy and has been known to produce anomalies,[100] so additional, albeit less straightforwardly scientific considerations are certainly not superfluous.

Unanimous ascription of the standard rasm *to ʿUthmān*

The emergent canon model entails that traditions about ʿUthmān's promulgation of a standardized consonantal skeleton of the Quran can only have started to circulate after the assumed closure of the standard *rasm*, i.e., after 700.[101] Yet the authoritative consonantal skeleton of the Quran is unanimously traced back to ʿUthmān not only by the Sunnī tradition but also by other Islamic groups, such as the Khārijites and the Shīʿites. Any attempt to reconcile these two things is faced with a double challenge. Firstly, is it historically credible to suppose that a pan-Islamic consensus about the canonical version of the Quranic text could

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[100] See notes 21 and 22 above.

[101] See de Prémare, *Aux origines*, 98.

have formed at a time when the Islamic community had already spread across large swathes of territory from Spain to Iran and had split into several mutually hostile groups? It appears unlikely that a caliph like ʿAbd al-Malik could have coerced his various adversaries, some of whom did not hesitate to take up arms, to adopt his version of scripture plus its attribution to ʿUthmān. A defender of the emergent canon model might respond by suggesting that most Muslims were so swiftly won over to the newly arrived Marwanid canon that even dissident groups like the proto-Shīʿites could not escape the pull exerted by the majority text and the legend of origins that went with it. I would concede that such a picture, although perhaps surprising,[102] is not downright impossible, especially if one accepts that the primary medium in which the Quran was present to early Muslims would have been the recitation of brief passages from memory and for ritual purposes, rather than a systematic and frequent consultation of complete manuscripts.

Yet even if the challenge of painting a credible historical picture for the spread of the standard *rasm* is met (and the preceding remarks only intimate a possible starting point), a second query looms: how is it that the literary tradition displays no palpable vestiges of the true origin of the standard *rasm*? If the final redaction of the Quran had only taken place around 700 or later, rather than under ʿUthmān, should we not expect some echo of this to survive at least in Shīʿī or Khārijī sources, which are not beholden to the mainstream Sunnī

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[102] Why didn't the Shīʿites adopt one of the other existing recensions, such as that of Ibn Masʿūd, as their canonical text in order to demarcate themselves from the proto-Sunnī majority? Why didn't they replace the ʿUthmānic legend of origins with one that put ʿAlī centre-stage?

view of early Islamic history?[103] The argument is one from silence, to be sure, and it hinges on

the crucial premiss that the Islamic literary tradition can be trusted to preserve the full range

of people's views at least about major public events that was extant at the beginning of the

eighth century.[104] Is such confidence justified? After all, the fact that the Exodus and the

Israelite conquest of Canaan would have been public events *par excellence* has not prevented

Biblical scholars from raising very weighty doubts that they ever occurred. Given the diversity

of political and doctrinal viewpoints expressed in early Islamic literature, one may reasonably

insist that the Islamic historical tradition is of a different kind than the ancient Israelite one: it

does not necessarily give the impression of having gone through some bottleneck in the first

half of the eighth century that was sufficiently narrow in order to explain the obliteration of

virtually all traces of how the canonical *rasm* of the Quran really originated and spread.

Nevertheless, the assumption that the Islamic literary tradition does record the entire

spectrum of opinions about major public events that was extant in, say, 710, when people

would presumably still have been aware that the so-called ᶜUthmānic text was a recent arrival,

certainly remains debatable.[105] Generally speaking, the higher the salvation-historical

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[103] See Donner, *Narratives*, 26–28, who points out the impossibility of effective empire-wide censorship. Sadeghi emphasizes that the dissemination of a Marwanid text of the Quran would have been a public event that a large amount of contemporaries must have known and talked about (Sadeghi and Bergmann, "Codex", 364–366, on the basis of a remark in Hossein Modarressi, "Early Debates on the Integrity of the Quran: A Brief Survey", *Studia Islamica* 77 (1993): 5–39, at 13–4).

[104] My use of the term "public event" here is inspired by Sadeghi (see previous note).

[105] For example, how far into the early eighth century can we confidently trace back the Shīᶜī assumption that the standard *rasm* was promulgated by ᶜUthmān? It is not obvious that ninth-century authors like al-Sayyārī and others (see Kohlberg and Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification*, 25–6) are simply relating what early eighth-century Shīᶜites believed about the origin of the standard text.

significance of an event, the less impossible it seems that the majority view of that event could have completely drowned out contrary perspectives.

It is therefore worthwhile to present and flesh out a train of thought briefly sketched by Gregor Schoeler which in my view considerably strengthens the unanimity argument.[106] Schoeler observes that ʿUthmān's enforcement of a standardized consonantal skeleton of the Quran comes across as deeply controversial in our sources. For instance, al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī have him defend himself against the charge of having reduced the Quran to a single book (viz., a single recension)[107] or even of having "burnt the book of God" (viz., rival recensions thereof),[108] and Sayf ibn ʿUmar transmits a speech by ʿAlī defending ʿUthmān against the invective "burner of the codices" (ḥarrāq al-maṣāḥif).[109] The Khārijite tradition, too, condemns him for the burning of Quranic codices.[110] Schoeler concedes that statements vindicating ʿUthmān's measures are likely to be apologetic fabrications. But the very fact that

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[106] See Gregor Schoeler, "The Codification of the Qurʾan: A Comment on the Hypotheses of Burton and Wansbrough", in: Neuwirth et al. (eds.), *The Qurʾān in Context*, 779–794, at 787-8; cf. similarly Kohlberg and Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification*, 22, n. 108.

[107] Al-Ṭabarī, *Annales*, series 1, vol. 6, 2952: "The Quran used to consist in different books (*kāna l-Qurʾānu kutuban*), but you have abandoned them all except one." ʿUthmān reacts by pleading that "the Quran is one and comes from One [viz., God]".

[108] Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, vol. 4.1, edited by Iḥsān ʿAbbās, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1979, 552. ʿUthmān vindicates his decision to standardize the Quranic text by recalling how people used to differ in their readings and would say to one another, "My Quran is better than yours!" The burning of the rivalling codices as such is justified by ʿUthmān's wish that "there should only remain what was written under the eyes of the Messenger of God and was firmly established in the leaves that were with ʿĀʾisha".

[109] Sayf ibn ʿUmar, *Kitāb al-ridda wa-l-futūḥ wa-Kitāb al-jamal wa-masīr ʿĀʾisha wa-ʿAlī*, ed. by Qāsim al-Sāmarrāʾī, Leiden: Smitskamp Oriental Antiquarium, 1995, 51–2. ʿAlī's apology emphasizes that ʿUthmān had burnt the codices in the presence of all the other Companions, who had previously endorsed his plan to "gather the people around a single codex".

[110] Patricia Crone and Fritz Zimmermann, *The Epistle of Sālim ibn Dhakwān*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 189–90, n. 7.

people took the trouble to fabricate them would presuppose that the accusation which they are designed to dispel – namely, that ʿUthmān had "burnt the book of God" – was very much in the air. In other words, we have to do with a genuine controversy: it is highly unlikely that the hypothetical originators of the legend describing ʿUthmān's promulgation of a standard text of the Quran would at the same time also have circulated accounts defending ʿUthmān's actions against accusations – and rather harsh ones at that – which had not yet been voiced.[111] But if we have to do with a genuine controversy about ʿUthmān's standardization, the latter has a very good claim to being a historical fact rather than an Umayyad fantasy.

As so often, different stories could be constructed around the literary data. For instance, assuming that the belief in ʿUthmān's promulgation of the canonical *rasm* only emerged in the second half of the seventh century or later, the above traditions might be the fallout of common curiosity: at some point, everybody had come to believe that ʿUthmān had standardized the Quran, and it was also known that he had been unpopular towards the end of his reign (he had been murdered, after all). Against this background, people may have speculated with which particular wrongs his enemies could have reproached him, and may have surmised that having "burnt the book of God" would surely have figured on the list. Umayyad loyalists might then have reacted with traditions designed to clear ʿUthmān of the charge. Or maybe, after the legend of ʿUthmān's standardization had been successfully launched, people increasingly realized that there was something inherently problematic about the burning of rival codices (as these were, after all, copies of the Quran), which then inspired

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[111] A comparable text, the Hellenistic Jewish *Letter of Aristeas*, which describes the legendary genesis of the Greek translation of the Torah, certainly does not waste time on inventing possible objections to the enterprise of rendering the Torah into Greek, only in order to then deliver an emphatic rebuff to such objections.

the addition of an appropriate passage to ʿUthmān's apology. However, in the absence of concrete textual support such storylines seem unnecessarily convoluted. What is by far the easiest explanation is surely to suppose that ʿUthmān did indeed officially endorse a recension of the Quran and destroy competing copies, and that this measure caused him to be vilified in certain quarters as the "burner of the codices".

Nonetheless, there are two things that bear emphasizing. Firstly, the fact that ʿUthmān propagated a standardized version of the Quran does not as such entail that the Quranic standard *rasm* did not undergo any reshaping afterwards. Secondly and more importantly, prudence requires us to suspend judgement on everything that goes beyond the rather limited factual core identified above: whether ʿUthmān's measures were an attempt to suppress quarrels about the correct reading of the Quran, whether it was Ḥudhayfa who brought the matter to his attention, and whether the recension endorsed by him was the faithful transcript of leaves that were in the possession of Ḥafṣa and had been compiled during the reign of Abū Bakr cannot be reliably ascertained. For all we know, the full narrative about the promulgation of the ʿUthmānic text could be teeming with later expansions, accretions, and embellishments. This possibility is augmented by the fact that al-Zuhrī, the common link of the traditions about ʿUthmān's standardization initiative, may legitimately be suspected of having been susceptible to the exigencies of Umayyad "state expediency" (Goldziher).[112]

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[112] See Michael Lecker, "Biographical Notes on Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 41 (1996): 21–63.

Text-critical arguments

As already pointed out in the introduction, Sadeghi has rightly underscored that the fact that

the lower writing of Ṣanʿāʾ 1 was erased in order to make room for the standard version of the

Quran does not entail that the text-type attested by the lower layer (C-1) predates the

standard *rasm*. He then presents evidence suggesting that the common prototype from which

the two recensions are descended is actually preserved more faithfully by the canonical *rasm*

than by C-1. His most impressive argument to this effect consists of a detailed study of the

major non-orthographic *rasm* variants contained in the lower text of nine pages of Ṣanʿāʾ 1.[113]

According to Sadeghi, these are generally more likely to have arisen from the canonical *rasm*,

or from a prototype that corresponded to it more closely than to C-1, than vice versa. This

assessment turns on the assumption that copyists of early Quranic manuscript, who Sadeghi

argues were working from dictation, would have been more likely to drop brief textual

segments than to add them, unless an addition can be accounted for as originating from an

inadvertent assimilation of the verse in question to a similar or neighbouring one.[114] Thus,

when confronted with two variant readings, XY and X, for a given verse, and excluding the

existence of parallel or nearby verses displaying the wording XY, Sadeghi would *ceteris*

paribus deem a development XY>X to be somewhat more likely than one leading from X to

XY (and call XY an "irreducible plus").[115] This assumption is based on the fact that omissions

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[113] Sadeghi and Bergmann, "Codex", 399–405 and appendix 2 (422–433). The four and a half folios analyzed by Sadeghi contain Q 2:191–223, 5:41–54, 15:54–72, 63, 62, 89, and 90:1–6.

[114] Ibid., 387–8.

[115] The qualification "*ceteris paribus*" is meant to convey that Sadeghi would presumably accept a textual evolution leading from X to XY if the latter variant supports a legal or theological claim that is explicitly debated in the literary sources. The above principle contradicts the classic text-critical rule of *brevior lectio potior*, which has however come under criticism in Biblical scholarship as well (see Sadeghi, "Codex", 387, n. 84).

may be attributed to straightforward scribal mistakes, whereas additions not caused by accidental assimilation are more likely to have been deliberate;[116] and while Sadeghi does not rule out that conscious expansions may have occurred, he does posit that simple errors would have been more frequent. Against this background, Sadeghi has found that of the fourteen major pluses displayed by the standard *rasm* in comparison with C-1 at least three are irreducible.[117] By contrast, none of the nine major pluses displayed by C-1 in comparison with the standard *rasm* are irreducible, meaning that if the standard *rasm* is assumed to be primary, the wording of C-1 could have arisen from the standard text by means of widespread accidents of transmission, rather than as a result of less frequent kinds of alterations. This, according to Sadeghi, creates a certain presumption that the wording of the standard *rasm* is older than that of the lower layer of the palimpsest.[118]

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[116] For example, a development from *min ṣiyāmin aw ṣadaqatin aw nusukin* (standard text) to *min ṣiyāmin aw nusukin* (C-1) in Q 2:196 would be explicable as an accidental omission, whereas the reverse development *min ṣiyāmin aw nusukin* > *min ṣiyāmin aw ṣadaqatin aw nusukin* would be best explained as a deliberate expansion of the text designed to sanction almsgiving as a way of compensating for premature shaving during the pilgrimage.

[117] See Sadeghi and Bergmann, "Codex", 401. The three variants in question are as follows (words in the standard text that are absent from C-1 are underlined): Q 2:196, second variant (*min ṣiyāmin aw ṣadaqatin aw nusukin*); 2:217, first variant (*qul qitālun fīhi kabīrun wa-ṣaddun ᶜan sabīli llāhi wa-kufrun bihi wa-l-masjidi l-ḥarāmi wa-ikhrāju ahlihi minhu akbaru ᶜinda llāhi*); 2:222 (standard text: *fa-ᶜtazilū l-nisāʾa fī l-maḥīḍi wa-lā taqrabūhunna*, C-1: *fa-lā taqrabū l-nisāʾa fī maḥīḍihinna*). Two more pertinent variants occur at 5:42 (*fa-in jāʾūka fa-ḥkum baynahum*) and 63:1, but Sadeghi concedes that these two should perhaps be disregarded.

[118] Sadeghi also provides a stemmatic analysis of the standard *rasm*, C-1, and the *rasm* variants ascribed to Ibn Masᶜūd. His point of departure consists in the observation that in cases of disagreement, the standard text tends to be in the majority, either siding with C-1 against Ibn Masᶜūd, or with Ibn Masᶜūd against C-1 (Sadeghi and Bergmann, "Codex", 394; Sadeghi notes that the same observation would apply had he utilized the *rasm* variants ascribed to Ubayy instead of Ibn Masᶜūd, see ibid., 399, n. 109). Proceeding on this basis, Sadeghi ends up favouring either (i) a stemma in which all three recensions are direct descendants from a common prototype, with the standard text as the most reliable transcript of this common source; or (ii) a stemma in which the standard *rasm* is a hybrid text following the majority readings of a number of pre-existing Companion codices.

Sadeghi's study, a full appraisal of which is beyond the scope of this article, certainly marks a major advance: for the first time, sophisticated methods of textual criticism have been applied to the Quran, thus opening up promising avenues for future research, irrespective of whether an analysis of the remainder of the palimpsest's lower writing will bear out the trend detected by Sadeghi.[119] His tentative conclusion that the wording of the standard *rasm* seems to be older than that of C-1 also coheres well with the conclusion of the preceding section. Nevertheless, a few issues that deserve further discussion may be flagged up. Above all, it would be important to state how much more probable an evolution XY>X has to be than the reverse one in order to make us confident that the fact that manuscript A exhibits a given surplus of 'irreducible pluses' over manuscript B really indicates that A is older. One must also note, as Sadeghi and Goudarzi do, that different parts of a manuscript could belong to different textual families whose value would have to be assessed separately[120] (a Biblical case in point being the Codex Alexandrinus). Finally, even if a default presumption in favour of the standard *rasm* being better than that of the lower layer of Ṣanʿāʾ 1 were established, this obviously does not exclude (and is not taken to exclude by Sadeghi) that particular passages could have undergone subsequent revision and expansion, although this possibility is likely to shrink further – or be confirmed – as the remainder of Ṣanʿāʾ 1's lower writing is published.

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[119] The need for further study is emphasized in Sadeghi and Bergmann, "Codex", 347 and 404.

[120] See Sadeghi and Goudarzi, "Ṣanʿāʾ 1", at 22. Note that the three major omissions of C-1 which most obviously constitute 'irreducible pluses' of the standard *rasm* occur in relatively close proximity (2:196.217.222).

Internal features of the Qurʾān (i): lack of fit with post-650 Islamic history

While the preceding sections have focused on extra-Quranic literary sources and on

manuscript evidence, the strength of the emergent canon model can also be probed by

examining internal characteristics of the standard *rasm* itself. Such an inquiry proceeds

counterfactually, i.e., it involves the thought experiment of trying to hypothesize what kind of

document we might have expected the presumed editors of the Quran to have produced if

they had been active until around 700, and then checking the result against the kind of text we

are in fact confronted with.

Perhaps the most popular argument of this kind is Fred Donner's observation that in

the Quran "we find not a single reference to events, personalities, groups or issues that clearly

belong to periods after the time of Muḥammad – ͨAbbāsids, Umayyads, Zubayrids, ͨAlids, the

dispute over free will, the dispute over tax revenues and conversion, tribal rivalries, conquests

etc."[121] Shoemaker has attempted to parry this line of reasoning by contending that the

Quran's lack of allusions to later Islamic history "may simply reflect the fact that the Quran is

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[121] Donner, *Narratives*, 49. – Shoemaker briefly discusses Q 30:2–4, which according to a minority reading
predicts the Islamic victory over the Byzantines ("The Romans have vanquished / in the near part of the Land,
but after their vanquishing, they shall be vanquished / in a few years"), which would make it an anachronism.
However, the majority reading ("The Romans have been vanquished ... they shall vanquish") is surely
preferable: it is easier to imagine that some Muslims were tempted to turn a verse that had originally alluded to
the Byzantine-Sassanid war ending in 628 into a miraculous prediction of the Islamic victory over the Byzantines
than to see why a triumphant prediction of the Islamic conquests, which later Muslims clearly perceived as
confirming Muḥammad's claim to prophethood, should have been transformed, by the majority of Quranic
readers, into a reference to an obscure pre-Islamic war. Bell's objection against the majority reading that it is "
difficult to explain Muhammed's favourable interest in the political fortunes of the Byzantine Empire" (quoted
in Shoemaker, *Death*, 154) misses part of the passage's point, namely, that "the decision is with God, in the past
and in the future" (thus Q 30:4). The "political fortunes of the Byzantine Empire" are thus adduced as an
illustration for God's universal control of history.

generally not a predictive text".[122] As a result, the early Muslims who potentially continued to shape the Quranic corpus after Muḥammad's death may not have been tempted to insert into it vaticinations of later events, and the absence of such foretellings does not prove that no posthumous editing occurred. Indeed, given the general scarcity of names and dates in the Quran, it is far from obvious that we would be entitled to expect an explicit mention of, say, the counter-caliph ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr. On the other hand, the question at stake is not so much whether the Quran contains or does not contain anachronisms in the strict sense but whether we can detect in it concerns that are best understood as those of editors active in the second half of the seventh century rather than those of the Meccan and Medinan *Urgemeinde*. If the Quranic *rasm* did not reach closure until c. 700, it does seem odd that it should nowhere engage with the major developments that defined Islamic history between 630 and 700, in particular the unprecedented speed with which an alliance of 'barbarian' tribes from the fringes of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires established themselves as the masters of an immense territory, and the bitter disputes and civil wars that soon wreaked havoc on the unity of the conquerors.

Shoemaker also demurs that following Donner's logic, "one could similarly make the argument that the Christian Gospel according to John, which does not assign any predictions to Jesus beyond his own lifespan (or a few days thereafter), must accurately reflect his life and teaching and date to sometime before 60 CE",[123] whereas the majority of scholars would of course date the text three or four decades later. Yet even the Gospel of John occasionally

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[122] Shoemaker, *Death*, 153.

[123] Shoemaker, *Death*, 153.

gives away the time of its composition. For example, the story of Jesus' healing of a man who had been blind from birth concludes with the statement that "the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue" (John 9:22). As Bart Ehrman comments, "we know that there was no official policy against accepting Jesus (or anyone else) as messiah during his lifetime. On the other hand, some Jewish synagogues evidently did begin to exclude members who believed in Jesus' messiaship toward the end of the first century. So the story ... reflects the experience of the later community that stood behind the Fourth Gospel."[124] Hence, the argument that if the Quran had been an open text until the second half of the seventh century then, like other ancient writings, it somehow ought to reflect the historical context from which it supposedly emerged (albeit not necessarily by virtue of explicit name-dropping) still stands. As long as scholars have not managed to demonstrate that certain Quranic passages – and preferably, passages with a distinct stylistic and terminological profile! – are only intelligible, or best intelligible, when placed in a post-conquest context, a dating of the standard *rasm* to before 650 therefore seems heuristically preferable.

If one shifts the burden of proof, however, it is not evident that the Quran's lack of palpable fit with post-prophetic Islamic history, while excluding a major later reshaping of the text, also rules out minor additions and modifications: there is nothing 'out of period' about

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[124] Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 5th ed., New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 193–4. See also John 16:2, where Jesus anachronistically predicts that "they shall put you out of the synagogues". Although the Gospel of John does not refer to the destruction of the Temple as unequivocally as, for example, Matthew 24:1–2, many scholars consider John 11:48 to allude to the event (Robert Kysar, "John, the Gospel of", *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. by David N. Freedman, 6 vols., New York: Doubleday, 1992).

the story of Jesus and the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53–8:11), often considered to be a later addition to the Gospel of John due to its absence in early New Testament manuscripts. Of course the argument from unanimity discussed in the previous section raises grave questions as to how any changes that are assumed to have been made to the Quranic *rasm* as late as ʿAbd al-Malik could have been consensually adopted by dissident groups such as the proto-Shīʿites. However, in order to further strengthen the position that the standard *rasm* of the Quran had largely stabilized by the middle of the seventh century the next two sections will examine two further internal characteristics of the Quranic corpus. (It must be emphasized that the conclusion of early stabilization does not pertain to orthographic matters, such as the spelling of long *ā*, which continued to evolve for much longer.[125])

Internal features of the Qurʾān (ii): absence of narrative framing

The Quranic texts clearly presuppose an individual messenger figure,[126] yet are notoriously unforthcoming with specific details about him. This is why Islamic exegesis has found the technique of biographical contextualization to be such an indispensable hermeneutic tool: isolated Quranic segments are clarified by inserting them into a narrative – often one that seems to have been tailor-made for its exegetical function – describing a particular situation

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[125] See n. 37 above.

[126] While the Quranic 'Thou' might occasionally be understood as addressing a generic believer like the Biblical commandment "Thou shalt not kill!" (Andrew Rippin, "Muḥammad in the Quran: Reading Scripture in the 21st Century", in: *The Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of the Sources*, edited by Harald Motzki, Leiden: Brill, 2000, 298–309), such a construal is hardly tenable for the entire corpus.

from the life of Muḥammad.[127] Nonetheless, in spite of their supreme interpretive utility, no such contextualizing narratives have seeped into the actual text of the Quran,[128] again suggesting an early date of closure.

It is true that Shoemaker would date the emergence of narratives about Muḥammad that incorporate Quranic quotations to after 700.[129] In my view, however, it has by now become reasonably certain that already towards the end of the seventh century narratives about Muḥammad containing Quranic elements were in circulation. An episode that has been particularly thoroughly scrutinized is the story about Muḥammad's first revelation on Mount Ḥirāʾ, significant bits of which, including a Quranic quotation, Andreas Görke and Gregor Schoeler have been able to trace back to the Medinese traditionist ʿUrwa ibn al-Zubayr (d. 93/711–12 or 94/712–13).[130] Another biographical episode integrating Quranic quotations is

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[127] See Andrew Rippin, "The Function of *asbāb al-nuzūl* in Quranic exegesis", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51 (1988): 1–20.

[128] See Daniel Madigan, "Reflections on Some Current Directions in Qurʾanic Studies", *Muslim World* 85 (1995): 345–362, at 353–4.

[129] Stephen J. Shoemaker, "In Search of ʿUrwa's *Sīra:* Some Methodological Issues in the Quest for 'Authenticity' in the Life of Muḥammad", *Der Islam* 85 (2011): 257–344, at 310–312.

[130] See Gregor Schoeler, *The Biography of Muḥammad: Nature and Authenticity*, trans. by Uwe Vagelpohl, ed. by James E. Montgomery, Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, 38–79; Andreas Görke and Gregor Schoeler, *Die ältesten Berichte über das Leben Muḥammads: Das Korpus ʿUrwa ibn az-Zubair*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 2008, 22–37. For a response to Shoemaker's criticism see Andreas Görke, Harald Motzki, and Gregor Schoeler, "First-century Sources for the Life of Muḥammad? A Debate", *Der Islam* 89 (2012): 2–59. Görke and Schoeler, in their study of the *sīra* traditions ascribed to ʿUrwa, contend that the ʿUrwan origin of the report about Muḥammad's first revelation transmitted on the authority of al-Zuhrī < ʿUrwa < ʿĀʾisha (consisting, *inter alia*, of Muḥammad's encounter with Gabriel, the revelation of Q 96:1–5, and the accreditation of Muḥammad's prophetic status by Waraqa ibn Nawfal), is at least partly confirmed by three brief reports transmitted on the authority of Hishām ibn ʿUrwa < ʿUrwa. These latter parallel some of the motifs of al-Zuhrī's report and even employ some of the same keywords and phrases, although their diction frequently diverges. Arguably, then, the traditions ascribed to Hishām constitute precisely the "evidence of independent transmission from ʿUrwa that bypassed al-Zuhrī" which Shoemaker demands ("In Search", 306). As Görke and Schoeler emphasize, the

the well-known story of the ꜤĀꜣisha scandal, which Görke and Schoeler likewise ascribe to ꜤUrwa.[131]

The situation, then, is as follows: the early Islamic reception of the Quran displays a trend towards the biographical narrativization of Quranic material; and by 700, suitable narrative material about Muḥammad containing scriptural quotations had come into existence, while Muḥammad had also become an important political symbol (in 685–6, an Iranian governor of ꜤAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr minted the first existing coins mentioning Muḥammad,[132] and from 691–2 on ꜤAbd al-Malik's coinage as well as the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock invoke Muḥammad as a foundational religious figure[133]). How, then, to explain the fact that the Islamic tradition so scrupulously managed to keep apart the utterances of its prophet and the exegetical narratives with which these utterances were so much more readily understandable? As comparative evidence from the Hebrew Bible demonstrates, collections of prophetic *logia* seem to display a natural tendency to attract legends about the life and times of the respective prophet.[134] It is therefore indicative of an early stabilization of the Quran that such legendary accretions apparently could not be incorporated into the Islamic scripture anymore and needed to be outsourced to a separate

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Hishām ibn ꜤUrwa fragments must have belonged to a larger whole and presuppose other elements of the long al-Zuhrī account. Note that the third one of the Hishām reports concludes with a reference to the revelation of Q 93.

[131] Görke and Schoeler, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 145–62. Shoemaker has no major reservations here and accepts that ꜤUrwa's version included a reference to the revelation of Q 24:11 ("In Search", 321–6).

[132] Heidemann, "Coin Imagery", 167.

[133] Ibid., 170–4.

[134] See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, revised edition, Louisville (Kentucky): Westminster John Knox Press, 100, on the narratives in Isaiah 36–39.

body of literature. For example, neither the Quran nor the material in the early chapters of the book of Isaiah suggest that the prophet in question was a miracle worker; in the case of Isaiah, however, it is Isaiah 38 that turns him into one, whereas in the case of Muḥammad this happens in the *ḥadīth*.[135]

From all of this one takes away the consistent impression that the text of the Islamic scripture must have set rather early. One might object that the Quran's hypothetical Marwanid redactors could have shied away from incorporating full-blown biographical narratives because they did not wish to alter the general character of the text as a collection of prophetic utterances. But the Quran lacks even the most editorially minimalist techniques of biographical contextualization, such as the insertion of superscriptions tying specific scriptural passages to certain events in Muḥammad's life (see Isaiah 1:1, Jeremiah 1:1–3, and the various Psalmic superscriptions associating the following text with the life of David).[136] The fact that the Quranic corpus as we have it is remarkably uncontaminated not only by fully-fledged *sīra* narratives but also by such minor redactional accretions is most easily accounted for by a mid-seventh century date for the standard *rasm*'s closure.

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[135] The divergence in the understanding of Muḥammad that obtains between the Quran and the *ḥadīth* is pointed out in Donner, *Narratives*, 50–52.

[136] The case of the Psalmic superscriptions is briefly taken up in Gabriel S. Reynolds, "Le problème de la chronologie du Coran", *Arabica* 58 (2011): 477–502, at 500–1, but only in order to emphasize that since most critical Biblical scholars would be unwilling to view these Psalmic headlines as reflections of historical facts, we ought to be equally suspicious of the link that the Islamic tradition establishes between the Quran and the life of Muḥammad. Reynolds thus fails to ask what we can learn from the fact that in the case of the psalms such biographical references were incorporated into the scriptural text itself, whereas in the case of the Quran they were relegated to exegetical secondary literature.

Internal features of the Qurʾān (iii): lack of linguistic normalization

A third characteristic of the Quran that implies fairly rapid stabilization consists in its various "rough edges".[137] These include, for example, archaic grammatical features that were not brought in line with later usage, such as employment of *an* in the sense of "lest" (e.g., Q 4:176, 16:15).[138] Arguably the most striking example is provided by a handful of passages that violate basic rules of case agreement in classical Arabic (Q 2:177, 4:162, 5:69 and 20:63).[139] These verses appear to have given umbrage already to early Muslims: it is reported that ʿUthmān himself, when presented with the copies of the Quran that he had ordered to be produced, found incorrect expressions in them, but gave the command not to change them "because the Arabs will change them with their tongues" (thus advocating a solution along the lines of the masoretic Qre-Ktiv distinction[140]); and Muḥammad's wife ʿĀʾisha is said to have commented

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[137] The expression is taken from Cook, *Koran*, 134–5.

[138] See William Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, third edition, revised by W. Robertson Smith and M. J. de Goeje, 2 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896, vol. 2, 27.

[139] See John Burton, "Linguistic Errors in the Quran", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33/2 (1988): 181–196. The Ḥafṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim reading of Q 20:63 (*in hādhāni la-sāḥirāni ...*) is of course not, strictly speaking, incorrect, for *in al-mukhaffafa* does not require the accusative (see Wright, *Grammar*, vol. 2, 81D). On the other hand, it is noteworthy that a majority of the canonical readers seems to have read *inna hādhāni*, at the price of linguistic correctness (Aḥmad Mukhtār ʿUmar and ʿAbd al-ʿĀl Sālim Makram, *Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt al-qurʾāniyya*, 2nd ed., 8 vols., Kuwait: Dhāt al-Salāsil, 1988, vol. 4, 89–90). There must consequently have been a strong oral tradition in favour of *inna* instead of *in al-mukhaffafa;* and it seems probable that this was the original wording, as it is surely the *lectio difficilior*. Abū ʿAmr and others read *inna hādhayn la-sāḥirān*, probably by tacitly going against the *rasm*. What is significant in the present context is that this oral tradition in favour of *inna* did not result in an emendation of the *rasm*.

[140] See Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2006, 65–6. For a number of examples in which early Quran readers adopted this procedure see Beck, "Der ʿuṯmānische Kodex", and id., "Die Kodizesvarianten der Amṣār", *Orientalia nova series* 16 (1947): 353–376, at 357–8.

that such verses are "the work of the scribes; they wrote it out wrongly".[141] Bergsträsser is

surely right that traditions which enjoin Muslims to improve on the Quranic text as they recite

it, or openly recognize that God's word is contaminated by typos, are likely to be early[142] and

may well date to before 700, thus indicating that people did not have to await the advent of

Sībawayh to notice the above problems, yet neither al-Ḥajjāj nor anyone else ever seems to

have tried to correct the *rasm* of these verses.

A similar case is Q 3:96, according to which "the first house [of worship] that was

founded for humankind is that in *bakka*". Islamic exegetes generally propose that the

expression *bakka* is a variant for *makka*, i.e., Mecca, yet are forced to construct rather

intricate derivations of the expression *bakka* in order to make the point. What would have

been by far the simplest way of remedying the problem, and presumably one on which all

major Islamic confessions should have been able to agree – namely, to change a *bāʾ* into a

mīm – was apparently not practicable anymore by the time people started paying serious

attention to the verse.[143] In the Hebrew Bible, too, anomalous or obscure expressions and

place names have frequently been retained, but there they have often given rise to

interpretive glosses inserted into the text,[144] which are conspicuously absent from the

Quran.[145]

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[141] *GdQ*, vol. 3, 1–6.

[142] Ibid., 4.

[143] Crone, "Two Legal Problems", 20, makes a similar observation with respect to some of the notoriously opaque terms that can be found in the Quran, which were likewise not changed into more intelligible ones.

[144] Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, 44–65.

[145] August Fischer has argued that Q 101:10–11 constitute a later gloss ("Eine Qorān-Interpolation", *Orientalistische Studien Theodor Nöldeke zum siebzigsten Geburstag gewidmet*, ed. by Carl Bezold, Gießen:

The textual shock freezing indicated by examples such as the above is most easily explained as the early Islamic community's reaction to the death of the charismatic messenger who had been the sole person endowed with the authority to publish and modify divine revelations. In any case, it stands to reason that if al-Ḥajjāj or anybody else had revised the Quranic text around 700, even on a very minor scale, passages such as the above should have been the first to be emended, which would merely have required exchanging single letters and might therefore have occurred almost instinctively.

Conclusions

One must admit that the argument at the end of the preceding section is not unassailable. Firstly, can we be sure that there might not have been more passages of the sort presented above that *were* corrected (such as Q 48:24, where we get *makka* instead of *bakka*)? Secondly, even if it is conceded that most of the Quranic corpus must have been extant before al-Ḥajjāj and that the latter did not correct existing portions of the text, does this rule out the insertion of new material? In other words, can we rule out that the Quran might have constituted a literary corpus which was textually stable yet could still be added to? Such objections obviously raise a burden-of-proof dilemma: should we require proponents of the conventional view that the standard *rasm* of the Quran had become fixed by 650 to produce conclusive proof of the absence of later additions, or should we instead require scholars insisting on the possibility of later additions to prove that such additions do in fact exist? I would submit that

Alfred Töpelmann, 1906, 2 vols., vol. 1, 33–55), but see my comments at
http://www.corpuscoranicum.de/kommentar/index/sure/101/vers/1, in the section "Literarkritik")

the latter position is more reasonable: if the only swans we have ever encountered are white ones, it is the proponent of the existence of black swans whom we may legitimately expect to argue his case. Similarly, as long as no Quranic passages with a distinct stylistic and terminological profile have been compellingly placed in a late seventh-century context, the traditional dating of the standard *rasm* (excepting certain orthographical features) to 650 or earlier ought to be our default view.[146]

Assuming a mid-seventh century dating of the standard *rasm*, can we go back any further? Even if one were to fully underwrite the hypothesis that the standard text of the Quran more faithfully than C-1 preserves the common textual prototype of the two, and to ascribe, on a probability of 3:1, a *terminus ante quem* of 646 to Ṣanᶜāʾ 1,[147] this prototype may only have reached closure in the late 630s. Thus, it seems wise to concede that during the first decade or so after Muḥammad's traditional year of death, the latter's literary legacy may not yet have been fully fixed.[148]

There are nevertheless good reasons to believe that the arrangement of verses in most *sūra*s does go back to the lifetime of Muḥammad. Sadeghi and Goudarzi have underscored the general convergence between the variants exhibited by the lower writing of the Ṣanᶜāʾ palimpsest and what the *qirāʾāt* literature tells us about the spectrum of variance

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[146] As I have underscored above, the conventional scenario, if it is to be squared with some of the data surveyed in this article, will need to be amended in two respects: firstly, ᶜUthmān's measures, whatever they were, do not seem to have immediately displaced rivalling recensions; secondly, during much of the seventh century the Quran may have been used primarily for ritual and devotional recitation, not as a normative source, with parts of the corpus being perhaps rarely recited and transmitted only in writing.

[147] Sadeghi and Bergmann, "Codex", 353.

[148] Against ibid., 406–10.

characterizing the earliest stages of the Quran's transmission.[149] On the basis of the literary sources alone, we may also accept that different recensions disagreed about the inclusion of a handful of short *sūra*s (Q 1, 113, 114, as well as Sūrat al-Khalᶜ and Sūrat al-Ḥafd).[150] But neither C-1 nor the literary sources reveal any genuine disagreement about the contents of each *sūra*,[151] thus lending credence to the view that at least the majority of them were extant by Muḥammad's death. It bears repeating that this does not rule out that existing texts could to some degree have been expanded, reshaped, and updated during the first post-prophetic decade. Ultimately, it is above all the rigorous literary analysis of each individual *sūra* that can determine whether there are reasons for suspecting that it may have undergone early post-prophetic alteration or expansion.

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[149] Sadeghi and Goudarzi, "Ṣanᶜāʾ 1", 19.

[150] See Jeffery, *Materials*, 21–23 and 180–1; *GdQ*, vol. 2, 33–8 and 40–42.

[151] See Sadeghi and Goudarzi, "Ṣanᶜāʾ 1", 23.