Collection & Transmission of the Qur'an: A Critical Survey of Western Scholarship

David Addleton
Western Kentucky University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses

Part of the Islamic Studies Commons, and the Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses/2092
Addleton,

David Franklin

1982
COLLECTION AND TRANSMISSION
OF THE QUR'ĀN:
A CRITICAL SURVEY OF WESTERN SCHOLARSHIP

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Philosophy and Religion
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
David Franklin Addleton

November 1982
AUTHORIZATION FOR USE OF THESIS

All copyrights to this thesis, entitled COLLECTION AND TRANSMISSION OF THE QUR'ĀN: A CRITICAL SURVEY OF WESTERN SCHOLARSHIP, are reserved to the author, David Franklin Addleton, except as follows:

1. Permission is hereby granted to the Western Kentucky University Library to make, or allow to be made photocopies, microfilm or other copies of this thesis for appropriate research or scholarly purposes, on the condition that this authorization is kept with the original of the thesis and will control future use of this thesis.

2. Permission is hereby granted to anyone to excerpt brief sections for research or scholarly purposes.

Signed: 
David F. Addleton

Date: 
November 8, 1982
COLLECTION AND TRANSMISSION
OF THE QUR‘ĀN:
A CRITICAL SURVEY OF WESTERN SCHOLARSHIP

Recommended
Nov. 24, 1982

Ronald Nash
Director of Thesis

Approved
1-7-83

Dean of the Graduate College

(Names and dates)

(Names and dates)
A brief review of the history of western interest in the Qur'ān from Keaton's 1143 C.E. translation to the present and a comparison between the western and traditional views on the Qur'ān's textual history serves to place the western theories on the collection and transmission of the Qur'ān in their historical and intellectual context.


The traditional history of the Qur'ānic text serves as the outline for the thesis. Theories suggesting that the Qur'ān could not have been written down during the life of the Prophet are considered against extant physical evidence in inscriptions and papyrii of early Arabic writing. The questions surrounding the "personal" or "metropolitan" collections are treated next, followed by two chapters on 'Uthman's recension and the Hajjaj collection. The two most recent studies, Wansbrough's and Burton's, reach opposing conclusions and their theories are considered against the work which preceded them.

The thesis concludes that the morass of conflicting and differing conclusions regarding the history of the Qur'ānic text may be the result of subjective analysis and selective use of evidence rather than intrinsic mystery of the subject matter.
Three factors led me to select the collection and transmission of the Qur'ān for my thesis topic and also limited its scope.

In the first place, I grew up in the Islamic culture of Pakistan. Thus, it is not surprising that I reached higher education with an interest in and a curiosity about Islamic culture. That interest naturally led me to choose a topic which is of importance to Islamic culture.

The language of most of the primary sources for a study of this topic is Arabic. Because I do not know Arabic, the tools available to me for this study are limited. Consequently, the thesis which I hoped to produce must be similarly limited. Therefore, I have limited my study on the subject to western scholarship—scholarship written in the European languages with which I am more familiar.

The history of western scholarship on the collection and transmission of the Qur'ān is relatively short. It began less than 150 years ago with the publication in 1860 of Theodor Nöldeke's Geschichte des Qorans. Despite the many smaller studies which have appeared in journals and volumes of collected studies since then, only one book-length study of significance has appeared, namely, John Burton's The Collection of the Qur'ān, published in 1977 by the Cambridge University Press. This history suggested to me that the bibliography would be neither so large as to be unmanageable for a project such as this, nor so small that I wouldn't be challenged. While I was correct in my estimation of the size of this bibliography, I have found the search for
it even more challenging. Very few libraries have a complete collection of the works necessary for a student to undertake this study. Circumstances prevented me from traveling to those libraries that have the best collections. However, between the several libraries located in Chicago, a visit to the Library of Congress, and a thoroughly enjoyable adventure in second-hand book stores, I have been able to assemble most of the materials necessary to draw a reasonably complete picture on how western scholars have understood the history of the Qurʾān.

My purpose here will be to survey critically the historical research to-date by discussing each major event in the chronology of the collection and early publication of the Qurʾān. This chronology will serve as the outline for the thesis. The positions taken by each school of western thought on each event will be described and then critiqued with reference to their assumptions, methods, sources and other relevant data.

But I would not have reached this point without the encouragement, assistance and even prodding of several people who deserve my thanks and who have my gratitude.

Dr. Long's interest in me as a student of his is one important reason for ending my procrastination and getting the job done. While I may not always attain them, I have not forgotten the standards he set in his classes. Getting the job done is my way of thanking him in particular and also Dr. Lane, Dr. Nash, and Dr. Veenker for the very stimulating year I spent at Western Kentucky University.

My family has been supportive in many ways. I want to thank my brother Jonathan for the books he picked up for me in his travels to other countries. My father's stimulating conversations constantly
encouraged me. For my mother's long hours of typing this manuscript, I am deeply grateful.

I am especially grateful to my wife, Liv, who gave me help with the French citations and translations and encouraged me through to the end of this project. She insisted that I stop working so that I could complete the task, and patiently lived with the consequences of a lower income.

Finally, to the staff at the Newberry Library who always brought me obscure books very promptly, allowing me to make the most of my brief hours there, I also owe my thanks.

November, 1982

David F. Addleton
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE .................................................. iii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ........................................... 1

Western Interest in the Qur'an: A Brief History
History of the Qur'an According to Orthodox Islam

II. DID MUHAMMAD LEAVE A WRITTEN RECORD? ......... 12

Introductory Remarks
Brief History of Early Arabic Writing
   Mingana's Answer
   Development of the North Arabic Script
   Nabatean Source
   Historical References
Were Parts of the Qur'an Written in Mecca?
   M. Ajmal Khan
   Richard Bell's Internal Evidence
Were Parts of the Qur'an Written in Medina?

III. THE PERSONAL COLLECTIONS. .......................... 34

The Tradition on Abu Bakr's Collection
Criticism of the Story of Abu Bakr's Collection
   Nöldeke
   Mingana
   Caetani
   Bell and Watt
   Jeffery
   Conclusions
Other Personal Collections

IV. 'UTHMAN'S RECISSION. ............................... 52

The Tradition on 'Uthman's Collection
The 'Uthman Recension Story Criticized
   Khan
   Nöldeke
   Jeffery and Watt
   Abott
   Caetani
The Importance of 'Uthman's Collection to Islam
V. CASANOVA AND MINGANA ON THE HAJJAJ COLLECTION. . . . . . . . 63

The Arguments Summarized
The Primitive Writing Argument
The Argument from Christian Silence
Christian-Muslim Debates before al-Kindi
al-Kindi's History of the Collection of the Qur'an
Comparison between al-Kindi's and the Islamic Traditions
The Untrustworthy Tradition Argument
Casanova's Argument
The Collection of Hajjaj

VI. NEW PERSPECTIVES TO OLD PROBLEMS. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 83

Introductory Remarks
John Wansbrough
John Burton

VII. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 96

VIII. WORKS CONSULTED. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 99
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Western Interest in the Qur'ān:
A Brief History

For Europeans who wanted to study the Qur'ān, a copy of the Qur'ān in an accessible language was necessary. The first translation of the Qur'ān into a European language was initiated by the Abbot of Cluny, Peter the Venerable.¹ He provided the funds for Robert Keaton, an English scholar, to translate the Qur'ān into Latin. The task was completed in July of 1143.² Peter the Venerable saw Islam as the last great Christian heresy which had not yet been answered. But his plea for an investigation into the religious tenets and theology of Islam fell on deaf ears. He tried to enlist the aid of Bernard of Clairvaux. He argued that the long term interests of Christianity demanded an investigation.³ Europe, however, was not interested because in addition to the collapse of the

²Ibid., p. 37: see n. 5 where he writes that the first important work on this translation is by M. M.T. d'Alverny, "Deus traductions latines du Coran an Moyen Age," Archives d'histoire doctrinale et litteraire du Moyen Age, 16 (1948: 69-131); also see J. Kritzeck, "Robert of Keaton's Translation of the Qur'ān." Islamic Quarterly, 2 (1955): 309-312.
³R.W. Southern, op. cit., pp. 38-39, cites Peter the Venerable's apology for his interest in Islam: "If this work seems superfluous, I answer that in the Republic of the great King, some things are for defense, others for decoration, and some for both... If the Moslems cannot be converted by it, at least it is right for the learned to support the weaker brethren in the church who are so easily scandalized by small things."
first crusade, European Christianity had at that time too many of its own heresies to deal with at home.

In the years which followed this translation, European interest in Islam centered primarily on the military adventures in the east. The appearance of the Mongols gave birth to a hope that they were Christians and would be useful allies against the Moslems. As Europe became more aware of the world beyond its borders, it became apparent to a few friars that the study of foreign languages would be necessary. In 1250 Robert Bacon became a major proponent of a system of schools throughout Europe which would concentrate on the study of these languages.\(^1\) Meanwhile, the hope for allies in the Mongols quickly died.

In 1312 at the Council of Vienne the Western Church agreed to establish schools in Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon and Salamanca which were to study Arabic, Greek, Hebrew and Syriac.\(^2\) Raymond Lull, who lived between 1235 and 1316, had received credit as the chief proponent for these schools.\(^3\) In the centuries that followed, these schools laid the groundwork for the first systematic and empirical study of Islam in general and the Qur'ân in particular.

The next notable date in European study of the Qur'ân is 1453. John of Segovia had supported the Council of Basel in 1433. When the controversy had run its course, he found himself on the losing side because of his support for the anti-Pope. He retired to a small monastery in Savoy where he devoted the remaining five years of his life

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 72.  \(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)Ibid., pp. 72-73, n. 12, where B. Altane, "Raymundus Lullus und der Sprachenkanon (can. 11) des Konzils von Vienne (1312), "Historisches Jahrbuch, 52 (1933): 190-219, is cited.
to a translation of the Qur'ān. He felt that a new translation was desirable because, in his view, Robert Keeton's translation had utilized words and phrases which, while proper in Christian theology, did not necessarily accurately convey the Islamic concept. Consequently, he argued that an accurate view about Islam could not be formulated. Although his translation has not survived the centuries, the prologue to the work is preserved and published in D. Cabanelas' biography of John of Segovia, Juan de Segovia. 2

John of Segovia corresponded with Nicholas of Cusa in an attempt to interest him in the critical study of the Qur'ān. After John of Segovia's death in 1458, Nicholas of Cusa published Cribratio Alchoran in 1460, the first "systematic literary, historical and philological examination" of the Qur'ān. His basic thesis was that the Qur'ān demonstrated three major strands of thought: one, a basically Nestorian Christianity; two, Jewish anti-Christian sentiments; and three, later Jewish alterations introduced after the death of Muḥammed. 4 Although this analysis can no longer be accepted because of new data and later critical study, it was the first attempt to bring European criticism to bear on the Qur'ān in a systematic and rational manner.

The next four centuries witnessed the growth of Europe into a colonial power. In the wake of colonial armies came missionaries, adventurers, collectors and scholars. They acquired manuscripts which were sent back to the great libraries of Europe. The scholars in Europe sifted through this new material and developed new critical tools for understanding the Qur'ān. Critical editions and translations

---

1 Ibid., p. 86. 2 Ibid., pp. 86-87. 3 Ibid., p. 87, n.37. 4 Ibid., p. 93.
of the Qur'an and the major collections of the traditions appeared, though they no longer meet modern standards of criticism. Perhaps the first such critical edition of the Qur'an was that of Paganini Brixensis, published in 1530, but it was destroyed at the command of the Pope. Other editions include those of Hinckelmann, published in 1694, and Ludovico Marroaccio, published in 1698. Flügel's edition, published in 1834 and reprinted many times since then, is still in use today; but, "if Flügel used some critical principle in constructing his text, no one to this day has been able to discover what it is."[1]

These collections of manuscripts formed the source material for the most influential work on the history of the collection and transmission of the Qur'an, namely, Theodor Nöldeke's Geschichte des Qorâns. Nöldeke originally wrote the book in Latin for the Paris Academy of Inscriptions, but it was first published in German in Gottingen in 1860. The research Nöldeke started was continued by his student, Friedrich Schwally, who edited and published a second edition in 1909 and an expanded, two part volume under the same title in 1919, both at Leipsig. It was published a fourth time under the editorship of Otto Pretzl and Gotthelf Bergsträsser who added a third part in 1938. The most recent printing of the entire work was in 1961 in Darmstadt by Georg Olms Verlag.[2]


[2] The 1938 edition was published at Leipsig. The three parts are entitled: 1) "Uber den Ursprung des Qorâns," 2) "Die Sammlung des Qorâns," 3) "Die Geschichte des Korantexts." A new printing was scheduled for 1980 according to correspondence from Georg Olms Verlag (Hildesheim) but apparently those plans were canceled.
Since the publication of Geschichte des Qorans, numerous shorter studies have appeared in the scholarly journals and as sections or appendices of books. These studies are minor only in reference to their size, for they address individual problems raised by the discovery of new manuscripts or the publication of new theories on the history of the collection and the transmission of the Qur'ān.

As yet, however, no comprehensive critical edition of the Qur'ānic text has appeared. An attempt to bring together photographs of all the extant manuscripts of the Qur'ān with a view to the publication of a critical edition was initiated by Bergsträsser who established an archive of Qur'ānic materials in Munich with the collaboration of Arthur Jeffery.¹ After Bergsträsser's unfortunate accidental death in 1933, Pretzl continued work on the archive.² World War II intervened, putting an abrupt end to these plans. Pretzl was killed on the outskirts of Sebastopol, and the archive was destroyed by the Allied bombing of Munich. As a result, Jeffery wrote,

...the whole of that gigantic task has to be started over again from the beginning. It is thus extremely doubtful if our generation will see the completion of a really critical edition of the text of the Quran.³

Jeffery wrote that sad postscript to Bergsträsser's dream in 1947. About all that remains of this effort is Jeffery's Materials for the


³Jeffery, "Textual History," op. cit., p. 49.
Interest in the history of the text of the Qur'ān continues in the West, although perhaps not at the same level as the interest in the subject between the two great wars of this century. The most recent work of major significance on the subject appeared in 1977. John Burton's *The Collection of the Qur'ān*\(^\text{2}\) is an attempt to analyze the conflicting traditions on the collection of the Qur'ānic text through a study of the theoretical aspect of the Islamic legal sciences.

This thesis will be concerned primarily with western scholarship concerning the collection and transmission of the Qur'ān since the appearance of Nöldeke's book, *Geschichte des Qurāns*, in 1860.

### History of the Qur'ān

**According to Orthodox Islam**

The subheading for this section deserves an important note. It should not be construed to mean that there is only one received Islamic view about the history of the Qur'ānic text. Like all the world's great religions, Islam is divided into groups of people who believe differently about the details of their faith. Consequently, differences of opinion exist among Muslims regarding the details of the history of the Qur'ānic text.

This thesis is concerned with western views regarding the history of the Qur'ān. Nevertheless, it is convenient here to summarize the major events in the chronological development of the Qur'ānic text because that chronology will serve as the outline for this thesis. Thus,  

\(^{1}\)Leiden: E. J. Brill.  

\(^{2}\)Cambridge: University Press.
the word "orthodox" refers herein only to a skeletal chronology which is often repeated in introductions to the Qur'an by Muslim writers. A skeletal chronology, however, would be no more than a table of dates. Since some flesh must be put on the skeleton in order to produce a narrative, the narrative may offend some Muslims as an inaccurate summary of their views. To be fair, therefore, some of the differing Muslim views will be mentioned in the footnotes. The chronological sketch, moreover, will be drawn from a limited number of Muslim writers, as well as several western writers, since this thesis does not purport to be a summary, much less a comprehensive review, of Muslim views on the subject.

With the foregoing caveat in mind, the following is a summary of the orthodox Muslim view concerning the history of the collection and transmission of the Qur'an.

The Angel Gabriel, according to orthodox Islamic teaching, revealed the Qur'an to the Prophet Muḥammad. Gabriel appeared to Muhammad regularly throughout his twenty-year ministry. During these appearances Gabriel recited to Muḥammad the word of Allah for his people. The revelations were naturally fragmentary. Sometimes whole chapters were revealed. Usually the revelations were in response to specific events within the new Islamic community. For example,

---


The prophet received the revelations in fragments. It is but natural that the revealed text should have referred to the problems of the day. It may be that one of his companions dies; the revelation must come to promulgate the law of inheritance; it could not be that the penal law regarding theft, for instance, should have been revealed at that moment. 1

Gabriel and Muḥammad annually collated and checked the material, making certain that it agreed with the pre-existent tablets in Heaven. When Muḥammad brought Allah's word to the people, he had amanuenses write down his dictation. During the last year of his life, the Prophet and the Angel Gabriel collated and checked the material twice. 2 After the collation and checking, Muḥammad would recite the Qur'ān to his secretaries for preservation. Among them was Zaid b. Thābit, a person who figures prominently as a collector of the revelations. 3 Thus, when the Prophet died his legacy to the world was a perfect copy of the Word of Allah which had already been preserved on tablets in Heaven.

2 al-Bukhari's canonical collection of traditions preserves the following two stories, The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari, 9 vols. (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1979), 6:485, "Gabriel used to present (recite) the Qur'ān to the Prophet. Fatima said, 'The Prophet told me secretly, "Gabriel used to recite the Qur'ān to me and I to him once a year, but this year he recited the whole Qur'ān with me twice. I don't think but that my death is approaching."'" 6:486, "Narrated Abu Huraira: 'Gabriel used to repeat the recitation of the Qur'ān with the Prophet once a year, but he repeated it twice with him in the year that he died. The Prophet used to stay in L'tikaf for ten days every year (in the month of Ramadan), but in the year of his death he stayed in L'tikaf for twenty days.'"
Abu Bakr, 1 Muhammad's immediate successor as the leader of the small Islamic community, was the first to put the revelation into a convenient codex form of binding. Apparently, the motivation for this collection was the death at a large battle of many of those who had memorized the Qur'ān so that preservation in writing became a necessity. 2 This is why Abu Bakr is credited with compiling the first collection. His codex became the "Textus receptus" of his and his successor Umar's caliphate. It was during Umar's reign that the first signs of disagreement among the Muslims arose regarding the different readings of the text. Umar recognized the need for a single text to unite the Muslims, but the task to promulgate an authorized text fell to his successor, 'Uthman. 3

During 'Uthman's reign, 4 the problem of reciting the Qur'ān differently in different parts of the emerging empire became acute.

1 Abu Bakr was the first Caliph, taking rule upon Muhammad's death in 632 C.E. and ruling until 634 C.E.

2 Muhammed Azizullah, Glimpses of the Holy Quran, (Karachi: The World Federation of Islamic Missions, 1963), p. 2: "...the necessity was felt to compile it in proper book form. The first Caliph Abu Bakr entrusted this task to Zayd bin Thabit who collected it from the writing on palm leaves and stones, parchments and from brains of men." But see Pooya, op.cit., p. 11: "The claim of any school of thought that the text in question was collected and arranged by any one (sic) after the demise of the Prophet is absolutely unfounded."

3 'Umar b. al-Khattab succeeded Abu Bakr in 634 C.E. and reigned until his death in 644. Ahmed, op. cit., p. 15: "Caliph Umar felt the need of sending copies of the authentic text to the provincial centres in order to avoid all deviations; but it was left to his successor, 'Uthman, to bring to a head the task..."

4 'Uthman, b. Affan ruled from 644 C.E. until 656 when Ali succeeded him as Caliph.
Political and theological differences surfaced during this period, and the Qur'an became a tool in these polemics. Reciting the Qur'an differently from one metropolis to the next became a divisive issue in the expanding state.  

1 'Uthman therefore appointed a committee headed by Zaid b. Thābit and charged them to produce a new collection of the Qur'an which remained true to the Quraish dialect which the Prophet himself had spoken.  

2 The committee used Abu Bakr's codex as the basis for their new edition. The new edition was sent from Medina where it had been compiled, to Mecca, Basra, Kufa and Damascus to be installed as the official text. All other differing copies of the Qur'an were burned.  

Thus, according to orthodox Muslim teaching, all copies of the Qur'an today are exact transcriptions into modern script of 'Uthman's collection.  

---

1 Azizullah, op. cit., p. 2: "During the reign of Usman (sic), the third Caliph, it was found that the new converts in the outlying province were committing mistakes in reading the Quran, and hence Hudhayfa requested the Caliph to interfere, lest the Sacred Book of the Muslims should become a subject of dispute like the scriptures of the Jews and Christians." But see Ahmed, op. cit., pp. 15-16: "One of ['Uthman's] lieutenants returned from far off Armenia and reported that he had found conflicting codices (sic) of the Quran, and that there were even quarrels among the different teachers. . . ."


3 Maududi, op. cit., p. 26: "As a precautionary measure, he has had all other copies burnt to ward off any possibility of future confusion and misunderstanding." Also, Ahmed, op. cit., p. 16.

4 Ahmed, op. cit., p. 17: "... copies of the text are found in all parts of the globe; and it is touching to note that there is absolutely no difference between the text employed by one or the other."
Western Qur'ānic scholars dispute much of this history. Many do not believe that any written material was available to anyone when Muhammad died. Some scholars do not believe that Abu Bakr's codex was meant to be an "official" text. Others claim that his "collection" involved much more than the mere collation of leaves into a codex. Some scholars claim that 'Uthman did far more to the text of the Qur'ān than simply assert the primacy of the Quraish dialect. They argue that the differences between the metropolitan codices were much greater than recitational inflections and sounds. A few scholars do not close the story with 'Uthman's collection. They argue that during al-Malik's caliphate¹ a deputy named al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf was responsible for the final official recension of the Qur'ān and that the shape he gave the text involved more radical changes than the mere fixing of diacritical marks. We shall explore these and other opinions in the following pages.

¹Abd al-Malik reigned from 685 C.E. until 705 C.E.
CHAPTER II

DID MUHAMMAD LEAVE A WRITTEN RECORD?

Introductory Remarks

Did Muhammad leave to the world any sort of written record of the revelations which came to him?

The answer to this question depends first upon the existence of the art of writing in Mecca and Medina during Muhammad's lifetime. The answer to this question does not depend upon a finding that Muhammad himself knew the art of writing, for if the Arabs of Mecca or Medina could write, to leave a written record of the revelations he received, Muhammad need only have dictated his revelations to someone who knew how to write. If the answer is affirmative, the next logical step is to determine the nature and character of the record he left behind.

Scholars employing western critical techniques to the materials available have argued both affirmative and negative answers to this question. Those who answer it affirmatively disagree about the nature and character of the record he left.

Although the question about Muhammad's literacy is an interesting question, this thesis will not consider it, for it does not form a link necessary to the argument. On the pro side of the question, see Arvind Sharma, "The Significance of the Alleged Illiteracy of the Prophet," Islam and the Modern Age, 7 (1976): 46-53. On the con side of the question, see Mohiuddin Ahmad, "Was Muhammad Literate?" Islam and the Modern Age, 8 (1977): 1-15. A thoughtful consideration of the question which concludes that Muhammad was literate may be found in Richard Bell, Introduction to the Qur'an, (Edinburg: The University Press, 1953), pp. 17-20, and in W. Montgomery Watt, Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an, Islamic surveys no. 8, (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1970). pp.33-37.
If only an oral tradition remained, the possibility for interpolations and omissions is at its widest extent. If only a fragmentary collection of inscriptions on stones, palm branches and pieces of bone remained after Muhammad's death, the integrity of the text could easily have been compromised. But if Muhammad left a complete and organized written record of the revelations, the possibilities for interpolation and omission would have been remote and the integrity of the Qur'ānic text, except for transcribal errors,¹ almost assured.

The answer to this question, therefore, carries with it important implications for a history of the collection and transmission of the Qur'ān. This section will critically explore the various answers western scholars have given to this question and the implications they have drawn from the answers regarding the nature and character of the record left by Muhammad.

**Brief History of Early Arabic Writing**

**Mingana's Answer**

Alphonse Mingana doubted that any of the revelations attributed to Muhammad were written down while he lived because he doubted that

¹"Arabic is particularly susceptible to transcribal error. "...natural lexicographical difficulties and...textual errors are due to the ignorance or carelessness of the transcriber, to which Arabic, owing to the peculiarities of its script, is even more liable than other manuscript literatures." Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen Gibb, Arabic Literature, an Introduction, (London: Humphrey Milford for Oxford University Press, 1926). p. 10."
the art had reached the Hejaz by the time Muhammad.¹ Since we know so little about the Arabic script at that early date, he argued, we can never know with certainty that the art of writing existed in Mecca or Medina. The traditions on the subject are too late, according to Mingana, to be given much credence.² In any case, he added, it takes years before a man will be acknowledged a Prophet and his teaching regarded as deserving of preservation in writing.³

Contrary to Mingana's assertion, our ignorance of early Arabic is not so great that we cannot make some estimate of the likelihood that the art of writing existed in Mecca and Medina during the life of the Prophet. There is sufficient evidence to suppose that writing was known in Mecca and Medina during the lifetime of the Prophet.

Development of the North Arabic Script

Nabatean Source

The history of writing in general, so far as can be determined, began with the need to keep records of inventory, credit and debt. Historical research has already shown that Arabia was a key link in the

¹ Alphonse Mingana, "Transmission of the Kur'ān According to Christian Writers," The Moslem World, 7 (1917): 412: "... very few oracular sentences, if any were written in the time of the Prophet."

² Alphonse Mingana, "The Transmission of the Koran," The Moslem World, 7 (1917): 224: "The first historical data about the collection of the Kur'ān have come down to us by way of oral Hadith, and not of history... The reader is thus astonished to find that the earliest record about the compilation of the Kur'ān is transmitted by Ibn Sa'd (A.D. 844) and Muslim (A.D. 874)."

trade between the sub-continent and the Mediterranean.¹ Thus, even if we discount the legends which put Muhammad on several caravans,² we must admit that the Arabs needed writing. In fact, inscriptional evidence suggests that the art of writing existed on the Peninsula shortly before Muhammad was born and shortly after he died.

Of the four pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions so far discovered, all show similarities to Nabatean writing. The Arabic in all of them differ only a little from classical Arabic.³

The earliest inscription was found in Namara. It is the tombstone of Imro' Al-Kais. It has been dated to 328 C.E. Although the letters are clearly Nabatean in origin, the inscription shows the distinctive Arabic characteristic of joining the letters.⁴ The monument refers to the "King of all Arabs" in a script which appears to be a rather advanced form of the Nabatean. Apparently the Arabs preferred to express their language in the older Nabatean script rather than that of Palmyre after Rome annexed Edessa in 244. The Arab dynasty in Edessa fled to Hirah where it established the Lakhmid dynasty.

¹See the citation of historian Agatharichides (late second century B.C.E.) in George F. Hourani, "Did Roman Commercial Competition ruin South Arabia?," Journal of the Near Eastern Society 11 (1952):291, n. 3: "For no nation seems to be wealthier than the Sabaeans and Gerrhaeans, who are the agents for everything that falls under the name of transport from Asia to Europe."


³Philip I. Hitti, History of the Arabs from the Earliest Times to the Present, (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1958), p.70: "... but the language of all these inscriptions is North Arabic differing but little from the well-known classical Arabic."

territory apparently extended across the Syrian desert to include Namara on the border of the Roman Empire.¹

The second inscription was found in Zabed and dated 512 C.E.; the third in Harran, dated 568 C.E.² The Zabed inscription is trilingual, being written in Arabic, Greek, and Syriac. The Harran inscription is bilingual, being written in Greek and Arabic.

The fourth inscription, found at Umm al-Jimāl, has not been dated, but there is general agreement that it comes from the sixth century C.E.³

These four inscriptions provide ample proof for the conclusion that the Arabic script evolved from the Nabatean script.⁴

Historical References

Muslim writers claim, with few exceptions, that the art of writing was brought to Mecca and Medina from Hirah.

According to al-Balādhuri, the Arabs of the Lakhmid dynasty derived the Arabic script from Syriac in Hirah. He claimed that

¹Nabia Abbot, The Rise of the North Arabic Script and its Kurānic Development, With a Full Description of the Kurān Manuscripts in the Oriental Institute, The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications Vol. 1, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939), p.4: "It is, therefore, no accident that the first Arabic inscription we have is the Namārah inscription of Imrū' al-Kais, dated 328, referring to the "King of all the Arabs" and written in a script which represents an advanced stage of evolution from the Nabatean."

²el-Hawary, op. cit., p. 323

³Abbot, op. cit., p. 5

⁴Abbot, op. cit., p. 5: "The North Arabic script is the next step from the Nabatean." Hitti, op. cit., p. 70: "This Nabatean cursive script of the North Arabic tongue, the Arabic of the Koran and of the present day." Anwar G. Chejune, The Arabic Language: Its Role in History, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), p. 28: "Actually, Arabic script was derived from the Aramaic via the Nabatean cursive script."
'Abd al-Malik came from there and taught it to several Meccans. Apparently, Ibn Farīs, after reciting the divine source of the script, agrees with al-Balādhuri.¹

Al-Nadīm quoted Ibn 'Abbās with approval:

Ibn 'Abbās said:

The first persons to write Arabic were three men of Bawlān, a tribe inhabiting al-Anbār, who came together and originated letters both separated and joined. They were Murāmir ibn Murwah, Aslam ibn Sidrah, and 'Āmir ibn Hīdra; the first and the third were also called Murrah and Hidlah. Murāmir originated the forms, Aslam the separations and connections, and 'Āmir the diacritical points.

When the people of al-Hirah were asked, "From where did you derive Arabic?" they replied, "From the inhabitants of al-Anbār."²

Ibn Khaldūn also cites this tradition from Ibn 'Abbas.³ Al-Nadīm also included a tradition, from an unnamed source, about how the art of writing reached Mecca:

From another source: "The person who brought writing to the Quraysh at Makkah was Abu Qays ibn 'Abd Manaf ibn Zuhrah." It is also said that it was Harb ibn Ummayyah.⁴

¹Chejne, op. cit., p. 27: "One writer, al-Balādhuri, relates that Arabic script was derived from Syriac writing in the Arab Lakhmīd capital of al-Hirah, from where it was brought to Mecca by Bishr Ibn 'Abd al-Malik, who then taught it to some citizens of Mecca...Ibn Farīs propounds this view as fact."


³Chejne, op. cit., p. 184, n. 4. Ibn Khaldūn mentions a number of traditions, one of which says that the script originated in South Arabia and went to Hirah and the people of Tā'if before the Quraysh learned it.

⁴Dodge, op. cit., 1:9.
Balādhuri gave a list of men who learned how to write which included Umar, Ali, 'Uthman, Tālhah, abu-Sufyan, and Muʿāviyyah.¹

Mingana, however, does not put much credence in these traditions. According to him the men mentioned in them were tribal chieftains who were more prone to action than literary pursuits. Moreover, he argued, they are mentioned only "in the tardy hadith of the ninth century." He concluded, therefore, that few, if any of them, could read or write.²

A careful analysis of historical references not prone to the urges to glorify the men of primitive Islam indicates a more positive conclusion. Abbot cites the critical studies of Noldeke, Rothstein and Horovitz on similar traditions about the art of writing which speak of other men not connected with the early days of Islam.³ The traditions were related by ibn Jutaibah, Tābarī and Abu al-Farāj al-Isbahānī. According to Abbot's review of these traditions, one Ayyūb fled from Yamāmah to Hirah in the mid fifth century C.E. seeking refuge from a blood feud. The king there received him favorably and his son, Zaid, was able to gain influence at the court. Ayyūb's grandson, Hammad, became a secretary to Mudhir III (505-554 C.E.). Hammad insisted that his son, Zaid, be taught the Arabic script first, before Persian, according to this story. Zaid's knowledge of Arabic writing qualified him to become Postmaster for Khursan I (531-579 C.E.) and a popular regent during the reign of Kabūs (569-574 C.E.). Zaid passed his knowledge to

---


³Abbot, op. cit., pp. 5-14, from which of the following narrative is taken.
his son 'Adi ibn Zaid who became known as the most proficient Arabic scribe during the reign of Khusrau I and Khusrau II (590-628). 'Adi's murder by Nu'mān III brought his son Zaid into office as the expert to the Arab kings on Persian affairs. Thus apparently, five generations of scribes in Hirah are known in historical references which do not carry with them the infirmities which caused Mingana to reject the traditions about the writing abilities of Muhammad's companions, namely, the infirmities of a motive for embellishment and reference to men unlikely to be interested in letters.

Khalil Yahya Namani, however, disputed Abbot's conclusion that the Arabic script originated in Hirah on the grounds that Hirah was a Christian Arab center with Syriac as the official script. Abbot responded by pointing out that there were during that period commercial and political conditions that would have led non-Christian Arabs to develop their own script.

The most difficult question in this history of the Arabic script is how the script reached the Hejaz from Hirah. Although the traditions must be handled carefully because their authors show a tendency to produce ancestors worthy of the Prophet, there are clues that yield a positive result.

---

1 Abbot, op. cit., p. 6, n. 36.

2 Ibid.: "It is a well known fact that the Christians of Irāk did not limit themselves to one language and script, but were on the whole polyglot in speech and writing, both in the services of the Persian Empire and in private commercial transactions. But even if we were to limit the Christians to Syriac, there would still remain a large number of non-Christian Arabs... who in the midst of the greater commercial activity of 'Irāk would feel the urge to evolve their own script."
If we disregard the names in the tradition, the stories give specific examples of Arabs communicating in writing with other Arabs. The subject of the letters, moreover, demonstrate the pressures and conditions which produce the necessity for writing.

There is the letter of Abd al-Muttalib sent from Mecca to relatives in Medina asking for help in repossessing family property in Mecca. It is dated by Muir in 520 C.E.\(^1\)

There is reference to a Nabatean market in Medina in which Hashim Mutalib's father traded. Muir dates the visit to the market in 497 C.E.\(^2\)

Kusay, said to be the founder of Mecca, is said to have written to a brother, Rizah, who lived in the southern area of Syria, to come to Mecca in aid of Kusay's attempt to wrest control of Mecca from the Khuza'ah. This letter is dated by Muir in 440 C.E.\(^3\)

During this period from the early 400's to the early 500's, Yemen was in deep decline and subject to the constant harassment of Abyssinia. Meanwhile, the Arab Nabataean and Palmyrene kingdoms bowed to the power of Rome. With the two major powers to the south and to the north in decline, Mecca and Medina began their rise to influence. They took on the trade lost by their neighbors to the north and south. With commerce comes wealth and with wealth, culture. The conditions for the existence of writing existed when Muhammad was born. And if Mecca and Medina did not have the art, it should not be surprising that the leaders of either city would welcome a man of letters such as Bashir or Abu Qais from Hirah to teach them.\(^4\)

\(^1\) Abbot, op. cit., pp. 9-10 \(^2\) Ibid. \(^3\) Ibid. \(^4\) Abbot, op cit., p. 12.
As for the period of Muhammad's career, el-Hawary mentions two references which indicate that writing existed in the Hejaz at that time. In the first instance, there is a letter which the Prophet is said to have sent to al-Mokawkis. The second is a document written on a piece of leather from the boot of the Prophet's scribe, Ali ibn Abi Talib. The Prophet is said to have given it to Tamīn al-Dari. Fadl-Allah el-Omani claimed to have seen it in 745 A.H. and Kalkashandi claimed to have seen it in 821 A.H.¹

The Qur'ān itself contains many references to the paraphernalia associated with writing. Surah 68 is called "The Pen" (al-Qalam) and begins with the words "By the pen and that which they write." The Qur'ān uses terms such as "book" (Kitab), "inscription" (nūskhah; 7:154) and "write" (khatta; 29:48).² Moreover, in 2:282 and following the Qur'ān lays down the rule that debts should be recorded by writing them down. On the basis of this verse, both Bell and Watt concluded that at least in Medina scribes were not difficult to find.³

The reference in 52:3 to parchment (raqq), however, may refer instead to the Jewish law given by Moses. The word qirtas, which is found in the Qur'ān twice (6:7,91) may refer to pages of papyrus. Bell thought that it was derived from the Greek word chartes which means a sheet of papyrus.⁴ What precisely suhuf means, however, is difficult

¹el-Hawary, op. cit., p. 325, n. 1.
²Chejne, op. cit., p. 58.
³Bell, op. cit., p. 15; Watt, Bell's Introduction, op. cit., p. 32.
⁴Bell, op. cit., p. 16.
to determine. It is used in connection with revelation in general (20: 133, 80:13, 98:2) with reference to the revelation given to Abraham and Moses (53:36f, 87:18f) and to denote a record of one's deeds (81:10, 74: 52.). In any case, whether it means a book or separate sheets of paper, the reference to the art of writing is clear.

We may conclude from this data that writing was known among the Arabs of the Hejaz at the time of Muhammad. As Bell noted, a script which is becoming more cursive implies a fairly active use of writing. An active use of writing within the commercial sphere is necessary, moreover, for the literary success of imagery drawn from the art of writing which we find in the Qur'ān.

**Were Parts of the Qur'ān Written in Mecca?**

Having established that the art of writing more likely than not existed in Mecca and Medina during Muhammad's lifetime, we reach the question whether Muhammad left a written record of the revelations which came to him. The chief argument against a written record provided by Muhammad was outlined by Noldeke. If we assume that he collected the revelations before he died, Noldeke argued, we must find it difficult to explain why his followers would have taken the effort to

---

1 Ibid.

2 To complete the line of inscriptions, see el-Hawary, op. cit., on an inscription dated 31 A.H., a mere 21 years after Muhammad's death.

3 Bell, op. cit., p. 15.
collect the Qur'ān after his death. Contrary to this conclusion, there
may be evidence both within and outside the Qur'ān which may lead us to
a different conclusion.

M. Ajmal Khan

M. Ajmal Khan has collected a number of traditions which refers
to writers contemporary with Muhammad. During the Meccan period, how-
ever, he finds no evidence that Muhammad himself wrote or ordered writ-
ten the revelations which came to him during that period while he resided
in Mecca. An argument from silence is a risky argument; but Ajmal
Khan appeals to silence in the tradition accounts of the Hajira. Thus,
although

. . .everything has been recorded in the minutest
details, such as the binding of the food wallet by
Asma. . .by tearing her scarf. . .it is not men-
tioned that anyone carried the manuscript of the
Qur'ān along with him to Medina.

Another tradition treats Umar's conversion to Islam and refers
to his hearing the Qur'ān read to him by his sister and brother-in-law.
Ajmal Khan dismissed this tradition as fabrication for two reasons.
First it contradicts two other traditions which carry more trustworthy
isnads. Second and more importantly, however, it cites the passage from
Surah 20 which begins with "In the name of Allah, Rahman, the Merciful."
Umar's conversion took place in Mecca early in Muhammad's career; this

1 Theodor Noldeke, Geschichte des Qur'āns, (Göttingen, Dieterich-
schen Buchhandlung, 1860), p. 190: "Wenn sie aber den ganzen Qoran
gesammelt hatten, warum durfte es den spater so grosser Mühe, den sel-
ben zusammenzubringen?" English translation: "But if they had collect-
ed the whole Qur'ān together, why then did it require such a great ef-
fort to later do the same thing?"

2 M. Ajmal Khan, "An Inquiry into the Earliest Collection of the

3 Ibid., p. 177. 4 Ibid., pp. 177-178.
introductory formula was not introduced by the Prophet until some time after he had come into contact with Jewish names for God.\textsuperscript{1} The tradition tells us that Umar was beating his sister and brother-in-law for becoming Muslims when his sister, after first requesting that he purify himself, gave him the Qur'ān to read. Umar was struck by God's mercy, in contrast to his own and so immediately converted. Since the Qur'ānic passage in question post-dates Umar's conversion by a number of years, the story must be fabrication. Hence, we cannot accept as trustworthy the story's references to a book, to leaves or to reading. Khan therefore concludes:

\begin{quote}
There were in Mecca few men who could read and write and perhaps no woman. We may conclude that they did not write down the discourses of the Qur'ān in Mecca. It was in Medina that the writing of the Qur'ān was introduced by Muhammad.\textsuperscript{2}
\end{quote}

Richard Bell's Internal Evidence

Richard Bell discovered what he believed was internal evidence that the Qur'ān was written down at a very early stage in Muhammad's career. What sort of evidence did he find? The evidence appeared in the course of a detailed literary analysis of the Qu'rān. Bell noticed that certain passages did not fit with their surroundings in either subject matter or rhyme. For example, Surah 23:12-16 contains a hidden rhyme:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{2}Khan, op. cit., p. 179.
\end{quote}
12. We have created man of an extract / of clay (sulâla / min tin)
13. Then we made him a drop / in a receptacle sure (nutfa / fi qarârin makin)
14. Then we created the drop a clot, ('âlaqa)
Then we created the clot a morsel, (muddha)
Then we created the morsel bones, (izâmâ)
Then we clothed the bones with flesh, (lahma)
Then we produced him a new creature; (akhâra)
Blessed by God the best of creators. (l-khâliqîn)
15. Then after that you are dead, (la-mayyitûn)
16. Then on resurrection-day you are raised again. (tub'athûn)

The Surah rhymes throughout on the sound "-în" or "-ûn". Ayah 14 appears anomalous here because it is so much longer than the other ayahs and because, with one exception, it rhymes on the sound "-a." The sixth and final line of ayah 14 is the one exception. Although this line does rhyme with the rest of the Surah, Bell argued, its meaning or thrust is not required by the other five lines in ayah 14. Moreover, the concluding phrases in ayahs 12 and 13 seem to have been imposed on the Surah because of the rhyme they bring to it. If they are dropped from the passage, we obtain seven short lines which describe the development of a human being from the formation of semen to the development of the fetus and placenta, and from there to birth.²

Another example of this phenomenon may be found in Surah 88, ayahs 17-20:

10. In a garden lofty ('âliya)
11. Wherein they hear no babbling; (lâghîya)
12. Therein is a spring running; (jâriya)
13. Therein are couches upraised (marû'a)

¹Watt, Bell's Introduction, op. cit., pp. 90-91; for Bell's account, see, Bell, op. cit., pp. 82-97.
²Ibid., p. 91; also see Richard Bell, The Qur'ân Translated with a critical re-arrangement of the Surahs, 2 vols., (Edinburgh: T. Clark, 1937), 1:326-327.
14. And goblets set out (mawdū'a)
15. And cushions in rows (masfufa)
16. And carpets spread. (mabthūtha)
17. Will they not look at the camels, how they have been created; (khuligat)
18. At the heaven, how it has been uplifted; (rufi'at)
19. At the mountains, how they have been set up; (nusibat)
20. At the earth, how it has been laid flat? (ṣutihat)
21. So warn. You are only a warner. . . (Mudhakkir)

The ayahs 17-20 are marked off from the rest of the surah, not only because of their rhyme, but because of their quite different content. The question confronting Bell is simply how to explain this phenomenon of hidden rhyme and out-of-context ayahs.

The most obvious hypothesis is that a careless collector placed it there. But why would a collector so carelessly place it out of context when there are other, more appropriate places for it? Bell offered the interesting hypothesis that Muhammad, when he wrote down his revelations, used whatever scraps of material he had available. The hidden rhymes and out-of-context thoughts may have been written on the back of scraps used for the rest of surah. Thus, although Muhammad did not intend ayahs 17-20 to be placed in surah 88, the collector found it written on the back of ayahs 13-16 and therefore carefully included it there.

All of this supposes that Muhammad wrote down the revelations as they came to him. Certain references in the Qur'ān seem to point toward this conclusion. Perhaps the reference in 87.6 to Muhammad's memory might be taken to imply his distrust of his own memory and the

necessity for writing the oracles down. Another ayah implies rather clearly that Muhammad's opponents in Mecca believed that Muhammad had written things down for himself:

And they say: fables of the ancients which he had written down and they are dictated to him morning and evening.²

Bell's hypothesis presents us with several problems and implications. A collector interested only in gathering up the whole of the Qur'ān may not necessarily have been interested in the continuity of its thought; in such a case we might expect rather abrupt changes in subject and rhyme. Later scribes may have tried to smooth out their copy by adding the appropriate rhyme. On the other hand, Muir took the discontinuous thought in the Qur'ān as evidence for the integrity of the collectors:

All the fragments that could be obtained have with artless simplicity, been joined together. The patchwork bears no marks of a designing genius or moulding hand. It testifies to the faith and reverence of the compilers, and proves that they dared no more than simply collect the sacred fragments and place them in juxtaposition.³

Bell must appeal to this kind of haphazard collection if his hypothesis is to convince. Yet to assume that the compilers dared do no more than collect the fragments and lay them end to end will not permit the

---

¹Watt, Bell's Introduction, op. cit., p. 105; "We shall enable thee to recite, and then thou shalt not forget it." is the translation of Maulana Abdul Majid, Holy Quran with English Translation, (Karachi: Taj Company, Ltd., n.d.), p. 598.


addition to ayahs of phrases and words which would produce the "hidden" rhymes. As Watt notes, an explanation which describes the accidental nature of these hidden rhymes and unconnected thoughts in terms of another accident, that is, the writing of these passages on any available scrap of material, is not very compelling. The hypothesis, moreover, places extraordinary importance in written transmission of the Qur'an and does not give due emphasis to oral transmission.

Khan's and Bell's conclusions about writing during the Meccan period are based on rather speculative arguments. Their conclusions, moreover, clash. The Surahs cited in this section have been dated by Bell and Watt within the Meccan period. Khan based his conclusion that the Qur'an was not written down during the Meccan period on the absence of any relevant evidence. An argument from silence, such as Khan's, is very fragile. Perhaps Bell uncovered just the evidence which would shatter the silence to which Khan appealed. On the other hand, Bell's speculative argument may depend upon literary analysis which is arguably inappropriate to the material in question. Watt, in his critique of Bell's hypothesis, noted that while it is not beyond the realm of possibility, his hypothesis is difficult to apply. To argue, however, that the hypothesis must be "applied" misses the point. Bell proposed not a literary method but a historical hypothesis to explain a literary phenomena. However slender this speculative thread of argument may be, Bell does have the support of tradition. It is said,


for example, that Zaid ibn Thabit collected the Qur'an from pieces of papyrus, flat stones, palm leaves, shoulder-blades and ribs of animals, pieces of leather and wooden boards, as well as from the hearts of men.¹

We may conclude that if he did not himself write, Muhammad dictated parts of the Qur'an to people who could write and that he did so at a very early date. Whether or not this writing of the Qur'an began in Mecca or in Medina is a question which cannot be answered with certainty from the meager evidence available. But it seems probable that some parts were written.²

 Were Parts of the Qur'an Written in Medina?  

When we come to the period after the hijirah, the evidence for a written record of the revelations of Muhammad is less ambiguous. al-Nadîm lists seven men who "collected" the Qur'an at the time of the Prophet.³ Khan found no less than twenty-five individuals contemporary with Muhammad who not only could write but are said to have written for the Prophet. Not all of these individuals need be mentioned here, but a few of them deserve special attention, for tradition claims that they both wrote and collected parts of the Qur'an at Muhammad's request.

Ubâi ibn Ka'b Ansari was the first, according to Ibn Sa'd, to write down the Prophet's inspirations after his arrival in Medinah. Muhammad once called him the best Qur'anic reciter. The Prophet also

¹Watt, Bell's Introduction, op. cit., p. 40.

²This is Muir's position. Muir, The Koran, op. cit., p. 38: "...transcripts of the several Suras or fragments, especially of those most frequently in use for meritorious repetition, or for public and private devotion, were even before the Flight in the hands of many persons, and so preserved with religious and even superstitious care."

³Dodge, op. cit., 1:62.
used him to write diplomatic letters.\(^1\)

'Abdullah ibn Sa'd ibn Abi Sarh was the first Quraish to write down the Qur'ān for the Prophet, according to Waqidi. 'Abdullah, the foster brother of 'Uthman, claimed that he himself had been granted revelations from God. His attempt to interpolate them into the Qur'ān, however, was discovered and he was forced to escape to Mecca.\(^2\) Upon the capture of Mecca, he naturally feared for his life because the punishment for inventing revelation and for his apostasy was death. 'Abdullah sought refuge with his foster brother, 'Uthman. Muhammad, after making his distaste for Abdullah's actions frightfully clear, accepted his apology and took his oath of allegiance. 'Abdullah went on to govern Egypt and to conquer parts of Africa.\(^3\)

Zaid ibn Thābit Ansari is perhaps the most famed of the writers who took Muhammad's dictation of the Qur'ān. His fame is due to the work he carried out under Abu Bakr and 'Uthman. These Caliphs ordered him to collect the Qur'ān and this work will form a major part of later sections of this thesis. Zaid used the knowledge of the prisoners taken after the battle of Badr (624 C.E.) to learn reading and writing. On Muhammad's order he learned the religious language of the Jews. The


\(^2\)Khan, op. ci., p. 181; Khan refers the condemnation and/\(\text{found in 6:93 to Abdullah; Bell, The Qur'ān Translated, op. cit., 1:124, refers it to the Jews.}\)

\(^3\)Khan, op. cit., pp. 181-182.
traditions conflict on exactly which language this means, Hebrew or Syriac. Khan appears to prefer the latter. In any case, that literary and linguistic skill should be important so early is significant for the writing down of the Qur'ān. According to the tradition cited by Khan, Zaid had learned most of the Qur'ān by heart before the battle of Tabul (630 C.E.). This is why the Prophet took the banner from 'Amara and gave it to Zaid, saying,

Zaid knows more Qur'ān than you do and the Qur'ān takes precedence.  

Medina was, according to Hitti, a leading agricultural center in the Hejaz and was especially known for its dates which its Jewish inhabitants cultivated. When Muhammad arrived in Medina, he found a town whose Jewish elite had established schools which taught the religious history of the Jews.

During the Medinan period of Muhammad's career, he discovered that the Jews owned a Torah, and the Christians an Injil. This discovery must have focused Muhammad's attention on the necessity of leaving a comparable book for his people. Several modern scholars, however,

1Ibid., pp. 179-180. Scholars of the hadith have often objected to this story on the grounds that it conflicts with ibn Shahab's account of Zaid collecting the Qur'ān during the reign of Abu Bakr. Khan correctly notes that in one case Zaid's knowledge of the Qur'ān is in question, while in the other it is the physical collection of the written Qur'ān, two quite different assertions. In any case, Zaid knew the Qur'ān better than anyone else and this preeminence is reflected in the responsibilities placed upon him by the Caliphs 'Abu Bakr and 'Uthman in editing the text of the Qur'ān.

2Hitti, op. cit., p. 104.


4Watt, Medina, op. cit., pp. 204ff and 315ff, discusses Muhammad's early ignorance of the Jews and Christians and follows his
have taken a different view of this evidence. Mingana and Nöldeke have been mentioned. Hartwig Hirschfeld conceded that fragments of the Qur'an may have been written down, but denied rather categorically that Muhammad intended to write a book.¹

Probably all scholars agree that the interesting, but non-canonical tradition that has survived among the Shia cannot be accepted.² It relates that Muhammad had collected the Qur'an on leaves made of silk and parchment and hid them behind his couch; only on his deathbed did he tell his son-in-law, Ali, about its existence and location and charge him with its publication in codex form. The tradition cannot be accepted because Nöldeke's argument applies to it with exceptional force: Why would Zaid ibn Thābit, Abu Bakr and 'Uthman have gone to so much trouble to collect and publish an authorized version of the Qur'an if it had already been collected and organized by the Prophet himself?

Jeffery has noted that passages of a legalistic character most certainly would have been written down.³ Large segments of the community would have known the liturgical sections and daily prayers by heart. Other passages must have been preserved in individual memories and in collections written down to serve individual needs. Indeed Muslim increasing knowledge of them by tracing his experiences with them throughout his life.


²Arthur Jeffery, Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1937), pp. 5-6; See also Nöldeke, op. cit., pp. 191-192, for his account of this tradition.

³Jeffery, Materials, op. cit., p. 38.
tradition preserved numerous accounts of "collections" of the Qur'an by various individuals. And yet, Muslim tradition also questions the existence of collections of the Qur'an during Muhammad's life:

Narrated Qatada: I asked Anas bin Malik, "Who collected the Qur'an at the time of the Prophet?"
He replied, "Four, all of whom were from the Ansar: Ubai bin Ka'b, Mu'adh bin Jabal, Zaid bin Thabit and Abu Zaid." Question, Why would Zaid have to spend time and energy collecting the Qur'an for Abu Bakr, if he had already collected it during the Prophet's lifetime? 2

The answer lies in the inarticulated assumption that "collection" means a "complete edition." These personal collections could not have been complete, or without important variations or omissions. If they were complete, Noldeke would be right: we could not explain the great efforts of Abu Bakr, Umar and 'Uthman to produce a definitive collection. We may conclude that Mohammad left his community with the Qur'an as his legacy. But he left the Qur'an in a fragmentary state. The fragments were scattered about in private collections of leather, stones, palm-branches and memories. A complete Qur'an was not collected together in one place before Muhammad died. Traditions from several sources agree:

The Prophet of Allah was taken before any collection of the Qur'an had been made. 3

---

1 Mingana, "Transmission," op. cit., 224-225 refers to traditions preserved by ibn Sa'd which lists ten different persons as Companions (Ansar) of the Prophet who collected the Qur'an while the Prophet lived. Paul Casanova, Mohammed et la fin du monde, Étude critique sur l'Islam Primitif, 2 vols., (Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner. 1911-1913), 2:109, lists their names and considers them of questionable authenticity, primarily because of the conflicting traditions about them.

2 Al-Bukhari, op. cit., 6:488.

3 Jeffery, "Textual History," op. cit., p. 37. Also see Sale, op. cit., p. 46.
CHAPTER III
THE PERSONAL COLLECTIONS

The state of the Qur'ān at Muhammad's death is a question to which western scholars have given different answers. Chapter II has shown that while some scholars conclude from the evidence that it is doubtful that anything was written down, others conclude from the evidence that it was more likely than not that at least some of the Qur'ān was written during Muhammad's lifetime. The tension between opposing viewpoints about the evidence becomes more acute when we come to the question regarding Abu Bakr's collection of the Qur'ān. The tradition about Abu Bakr's collection of the Qur'ān and the question of variant, personal collections of the Qur'ān is the subject of this chapter.

The Tradition on Abu Bakr's Collection

The tradition on Abu Bakr's collection of the Qur'ān has been recorded by a number of different Muslim writers. The different versions do not vary much in the details of the story. The following is al-Bukhāri's version of the story.¹

Narrated Zaid bin Thābit: Abu Bakr As-Siddiq sent for me when the people of Yamama had been killed. (I went to him) and found 'Umar bin Al-Khattab sitting with him. Abu Bakr then said (to me), "'Umar has come to

¹ Scholars of the history of the text of the Qur'ān almost always refer to the following tradition, and al-Bukhāri's is one of the most popular versions cited. It is from al-Bukhāri, op. cit., 1:476-478. Dr. Mohammad Munsin Khan's notes are within the parentheses throughout this extended quote. When other translations differ significantly or clarify, they are mentioned in the footnotes which follow.
me and said: 'Casualties were heavy among the Qurra of the Qur'an' (i.e. those who knew the Qur'an by heart) on the day of the Battle of Yamama, and I am afraid that more heavy casualties may take place among the Qurra on other battlefields, whereby a large part of the Qur'an may be lost. Therefore I suggest you (Abu Bakr) order the Qur'an to be collected.

I said to 'Umar, "How can you do something which Allah's Apostle did not do?" 'Umar kept on urging me to accept his proposal till Allah opened my chest for it and I began to realize the good in the idea which 'Umar had realized.

Then Abu Bakr said (to me), "You are a wise young man and we do not have any suspicion about you, and you used to write the Divine Inspiration for Allah's Apostle. So you should search for (the fragmentary scripts of) the Qur'an and collect it (in one book)."

By Allah! If they had ordered me to shift one of the mountains, it would not have been heavier for me than this ordering me to collect the Qur'an. Then I said to Abu Bakr, "How will you do something which Allah's Apostle did not do?"

Abu Bakr replied, "By Allah, it is a good project." Abu Bakr kept on urging me to accept his idea until Allah opened my chest for what he had opened the chests of Abu Bakr and 'Umar. So I started looking for the Qur'an and collecting it from (what was written on) palm leaf stalks, thin white stones, and also from the men who knew it by heart, till I found the last verses of Surat At-Tauba (repentance) with Abi Khuzaima.

---

1 The name "Qurra" refers to those who knew and recited the Qur'an and were well versed in its interpretation. Their origins are obscure, but their impact significant. See Watt, Bell's Introduction, op. cit., p. 47.

2 This battle, fought at the beginning of C.E. 633, was fought to crush a rebellion by a collection of clans more than 40,000 in number who had previously supported Muhammad, but now rallied around their own prophet named Muselima. See Sir William Muir, The Caliphate: Its Rise, Decline, and Fall, (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1924), pp. 27-32.

3 Mingana, "Transmission," op. cit., p. 226, translated this as "until God set my breast at ease toward it."

4 Ibid., "...and I sought out the Qur'an collecting it from palm branches, white stones, and breasts of men."
al-Ansari,\textsuperscript{1} and I did not find it with anybody other than him. Then the complete manuscripts (copy) of the Qur'\textsuperscript{ā}n remained with Abu Bakr till he died, then with 'Umar till the end of his life and then with Hafsa, the daughter of 'Umar.

**Criticism of the Story of Abu Bakr's Collection**

Nöldeke

Nöldeke accepted this tradition as largely true and authentic for several reasons. The story has been preserved and passed on to us in several texts, yet it remains essentially the same.\textsuperscript{2} Moreover, one wonders why Abu Bakr would have gone to such trouble to collect the Qur'\textsuperscript{ā}n if it had already been collected by other men at an earlier date.\textsuperscript{3}

Nöldeke's strongest argument in favor of this tradition is his first argument. His second argument, however, begs the question. If Abu Bakr's collection was the first collection of the Qur'\textsuperscript{ā}n, then we would have reason to doubt there existed other, earlier collections. The priority of Abu Bakr's collection is at stake in the argument. Yet

\textsuperscript{1}Montgomery Watt, Muhammad at Mecca, (Oxford; The Clarendon Press, 1953), p. 141, translates Ansar as "Helpers" of Mohammad. This group of people were related to Muhammad through bonds of oath, not blood, on the basis of his religious claims. The Ansari were thus trans-tribal in nature, a new social organization to have a significant impact in Arabia.

\textsuperscript{2}Theodor Nöldeke, op. cit., p. 190, "Über diese erste Sammlung haben wir eine ziemlich lange von Zaid b. Thabit ausgehende Tradition, die sich in vielen Büchern in wenig von einander abweichenden Texten findet." English trans., "On this first collection we have a very long tradition by Zaid b. Thābit which is found in many books but which differs little from one text to another."

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid.; see p. 24, n. 33, supra, for the English trans. of Nöldeke on this argument.
that is an implicit assumption of the argument. His first argument, that the story remains essentially the same throughout its many versions, would be more compelling if it were not for the many conflicting traditions about the collection of the Qur'ān, particularly those about other private collections and about 'Uthman's collections. These other traditions will be considered throughout this and the next Chapter.

Mingana

Mingana had grave doubts about this tradition. In the first place, it was recorded more than 200 years after the events about which it speaks. Moreover, there are so many traditions, both contrary and supportive of this one, that the selection of one tradition over the other as authentic becomes rather arbitrary. For example, ibn Sa'd, whose collection predates al-Bukhari's by a quarter of a century and whose collection was approved by al-Burkhari himself, records ten traditions which, when taken together, yield ten men who are said to have collected the Qur'ān during Muhammad's lifetime. Al-Bukhari lists only four. Elsewhere, ibn Sa'd wrote that the Qur'ān was not collected by anyone until the caliphate of Umar by 'Uthman ibn Affan. In any case, Abu Bakr's task was not to collect the written fragments, for there were

---

2 Ibid., pp. 227-228.
3 See p. 34, n. 61, supra.
4 Mingana, "Transmission," op. cit., p. 225; al-Bukhari, op. cit., p. 488. "Narrated Qatāda; I asked Anas bin Malik, 'Who collected the Qur'ān at the time of the Prophet?' He replied, 'Four, all of whom were from the Ansār: Ubai bin Ka'b, Mū'adh bin Jabal, Zaid bin Thābit and Abū Zaid.'"
few, if any, written records of what the Prophet had claimed to be revelation. His task was to collect the Qur'ān from the memories of men and the ability of those men to memorize the Qur'ān has been somewhat exaggerated. Whose was the definitive collection and whose was not? Mingana concluded with Casanova, the French orientalist:

As far as admitting one sole tradition as real to the detriment of the other, this is what seems to me impossible without falling into arbitrariness.

Against this position, the evidence would indicate the probability of writing parts of the Qur'ān during Muhammad's lifetime. That the traditions contradict one another is clear; but in listing the collectors of the Qur'ān, al-Buhkari agrees with ibn Sa'd, if not about the number of collectors, that the Qur'ān was collected by someone during the lifetime of the Prophet.

Caetani rejected the historicity of this tradition on the grounds of internal, historical inconsistency. The immediate motive for collecting the Qur'ān, according to this tradition, was the death of so many of the Qurra during the battle of Yamama. In the lists of those who fell during the Battle of Yamama, Schwally could find only

---

1Alphonse Mingana, Leaves from Three Ancient Qurans, possibly pre-'Uthmanic, with a list of their Variants, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1914), p. xvii.

2Ibid.

3Mingana, "Transmission," op. cit., p. 228; Paul Casanova, op. cit., 2:105, "Quant à admettre une seule des traditions comme vraie au détriment de l'autre, c'est ce qui me paraît impossible sans tomber dans l'arbitraire."
two people who could have known much of the Qur'an.\textsuperscript{1} In Caetani's mind, the response of Abu Bakr did not match the supposed stimulus. If the text was in such peril by the death of so many Qurra, why would he give the newly prepared copy to a woman for preservation? Caetani rejected this tradition as mere fabrication. Hafsa's copy, he concluded, was invented to justify the corrections ordered by 'Uthman.\textsuperscript{2} Caetani's theory on the 'Uthmanic recension will be dealt with more exhaustively in the next chapter. Schwally's objections to this theory, however, carry more weight than Caetani's because the copy was not, according to al-Bukhari, entrusted immediately to Hafsa.

Bell and Watt

Both Bell and Watt discussed this tradition at some length. Both found four major criticisms which led them to suspect the historical veracity of some of the details of this tradition about Abu Bakr's collection of the Qur'an. These criticisms also led them to question the usual Muslim interpretation of the tradition, namely, that Abu Bakr's was the first "official" recension of the Qur'an.

First, the tradition assumes that no earlier attempts had been made to collect a written Qur'an.\textsuperscript{3} Bell's reasons for believing


\textsuperscript{2}Leone Caetani, "'Uthman and the Recension of the Koran," Moslem World, 5 (1915): 380-381.

\textsuperscript{3}Bell, op. cit., p. 39; Watt, Bell's Introduction, op. cit., pp. 40-42.
at least parts of the Qur'ān were written down at a very early date have been mentioned. Chapter II concluded that it was probable that there were a few attempts to collect or at least write down portions of the Qur'ān during the life of the Prophet. Nöldeke, as has been shown, used the flipside of this argument to support the validity of this tradition. However, if the conclusions of chapter II are acceptable, then Bell's and Watt's conclusions that an early attempt had been made to collect the Qur'ān must also be acceptable. The conflict with the tradition on Abu Bakr's collection that this conclusion raises is more apparent than real. The collections made of the Qur'ān during the lifetime of the Prophet were necessarily incomplete and fragmentary. They were incomplete because as long as the Prophet lived, there was always the possibility of more revelation or of abrogation of earlier revelations. They were fragmentary because they served individual and specific needs. As private collections, they were not meant for the entire community. If Abu Bakr's collection was to be the first complete collection, it would have to gather up all of these fragments. Ajmal Khan agrees with this conclusion:

Certainly, the whole of the Qur'ān was not collected in writing in the lifetime of the Apostle Muhammad, in one place. Zaid ibn

---

2 supra, p. 38.
3 Arthur Jeffery, Islam: Mohammad and his Religion, The Library of Religion, no. 6, (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1958), p. 66, "The Qur'ān is unique among sacred scriptures in teaching a doctrine of abrogation according to which later pronouncement of the Prophet abrogate, i.e., declare null and void, his earlier pronouncements." This doctrine has given rise to the Qur'ānic science known as Nasik wa Mansukh, about which more will be said in the last chapter of this thesis.
Thabit also asserts: "The Apostle of God passed away and the Qur'an was not collected in one place." 1

The conclusion that there was no complete written collection of the Qur'an before Abu Bakr's does not conflict with the conclusion that there were several incomplete and fragmentary collections of parts of the Qur'an before Abu Bakr's collection.

Bell's and Watt's second objection to this tradition concerns the Battle of Yamama and the Qurra who were killed there. Few men in the lists of those who fell there could actually have known the Qur'an. Moreover, if it is true, as the tradition asserts, that the Qur'an was written down on palm branches and stone, then the text would be in less jeopardy than the tradition supposes at the beginning: the death of the Qurra could not endanger the Qur'an which had already been written down. The weight of this objection depends upon the proportion of orally transmitted revelations to revelations preserved in writing. If large portions of the Qur'an had been written down, then the death of the Qurra could not cause significant danger to the transmission of the text of the Qur'an; but if most of it was orally transmitted, then the death of those who knew the Qur'an could put the text in jeopardy. Schwally's objection that few of the men in the lists of those who fell at Yamama knew the Qur'an is the most serious objection to this tradition.

Bell's and Watt's last two objections do not concern the tradition itself, but concern Muslim interpretation of the tradition. This interpretation claims that Abu Bakr's collection was the first "official"

1Khan, op. cit., p. 187.

2Bell, op. cit., p. 39; Watt, Bell's Introduction, op. cit., pp. 40-42.
recension. Watt notes, echoing Caetani's objection, that had it been an official copy, it would not have been entrusted to a woman for safe keeping.\(^1\) The Codex's later history indicates, moreover, that it not only failed to gain universal acceptance, but that it sank almost into oblivion in the hands of Hafsa, the daughter of Umar. It does not reappear again until the time of 'Uthman's collection. In short, an official recension would have been published and protected and would not have received the public disregard accorded to this recension.

Khan provided an explanation for the public disregard which Abu Bakr's collection received. He agreed that,

No copies of the collection were published by authority of the Caliphate.\(^2\)

Therefore, it was not an official recension in the usual sense of the word "official." However,

As it was usual that some sura or other was necessarily to be recited orally in prayers by Muslims, it had become customary since the days of the Apostle to remember (sic) the Qur'ān for this purpose.\(^3\)

Thus, it was Abu Bakr's collection which prevented interpolation by men with political interest during the period when the Qur'ān was recited largely in prayers and was transmitted orally. Abu Bakr's collection received little attention during a period when Muslims valued oral transmission more highly than written. When it came time to prevent political interpolations, however, Abu Bakr's foresight proved invaluable for the preservation of an uncorrupted text of the Qur'ān. This, of course, is

\(^1\) Bell, op. cit., p. 39-40; Watt, Bell's Introduction, op cit., pp. 40-42.

\(^2\) Khan, op. cit., p. 193.

\(^3\) Ibid.
the orthodox reply to those who question the integrity of the Qur'ān through historical objections.

**Jeffery**

Jeffery seems willing to accept that Abu Bakr was one among several men who attempted to collect the Qur'ān after the death of the Prophet. He suggests that Muḥammad may have been preparing to write a book to leave for his people, but that death took him before he completed the project; the materials collected by Muḥammad may have been inherited by Abu Bakr.¹ But Jeffery cannot, like Bell and Watt, accept the proposition that this collection was meant to be an official recension.² That Abu Bakr made a collection of the revelations and that Zaid b. Thabit was responsible for the collection seems to Jeffery to be the most probable explanation for the traditions which suggest that 'Uthman used a collection that originated with Abu Bakr in the version for which 'Uthman is given credit for producing.³ But the collection which Abu Bakr ordered for himself must have been for private use and not an official recension, for it fits into the pattern of other private texts which the tradition mentions.⁴

**Conclusions**

With such widely divergent positions on this one tradition, with the same argument being used both to support and detract from the

tradition, and with no apparent scholarly consensus, how is a student of the Qur'ān's textual history to make up his mind about Abu Bakr's collection? Reactions to this tradition vary from complete trust in its historical detail to the conclusion that the whole story has been fabricated to support a later recension.

The most reasonable account of this tradition will have to admit that traditions do often serve political interests; but it must also recognize that a political polemic which appeals to historical precedent depends as much upon the actual event having occurred as it does upon the interpretation of the event. If a collection had not been made during Abu Bakr's Caliphate, and if that codex had not been produced by Hafsa for use in producing 'Uthman's recension, the story would not have had much persuasive force to the early Muslims it was meant to convince.¹

The position adopted by Jeffery, therefore, seems the most reasonable. Someone must have been responsible for the material produced by Hafsa on 'Uthman's request. It is not unreasonable to suppose that Abu Bakr ordered a collection of the Qur'ān for himself, and if he did, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Zaid ibn Thābit was responsible for its collection. He, after all, was perhaps the most learned of the Qurra, and had been recognized for his learning of the

¹The existence of a collection of the Qur'ān in the possession of Hafsa becomes even more probable when we read in the traditions that Marwan, while governor of Medina, wanted to destroy the leaves owned by Hafsa in order to prevent the unusual readings they preserved from dividing the community. This tradition, cited by Watt, Bell's Introduction, op. cit., p. 43, implies that Hafsa's collection provided a poor basis for 'Uthman's collection; hence, its survival as a tradition is remarkable given the universal acceptance of 'Uthman's recension.
Thus, Abu Bakr's collection was not an "official" recension. It was a private collection, intended for private use, and its subsequent history bears out this conclusion. This conclusion does not conflict with the critical principle that political interest may have colored this tradition during its transmission. The story, having been built around the undisputed fact of an older collection under Abu Bakr's direction, lent further authority to 'Uthman's project.

Other Personal Collections

Despite the great success of 'Uthman's recension and his attempt to destroy all opposing texts, evidence of texts other than 'Uthman's text have survived the turbulent centuries. These other versions of the Qur'ān were probably, like Abu Bakr's, initially private collections of the Qur'ān intended originally for personal use. With the rise of differing theological and political schools of thought, however, the Qur'ān collections began to be used as a tool in polemics. This section will explore the evidence which remains of these collections and the ways in which western scholars have interpreted this evidence.

Several of the great commentators on the Qur'ān, including at-Tabari and Zamakhashari, sometimes referred in the course of their studies to variant readings of the Qur'ān. Muslim scholars at the beginning of the tenth century made one or two surveys of the early collections, trying to list the variant readings. At least one of these surveys, the Kitāb al-Masahif of ibn Abī-Dawud, who died in 928 C.E., has survived. Jeffery had the good fortune of discovering it and he
Ibn Abi-Dawud's importance lies in the many codices which he mentioned but which are not mentioned elsewhere in Islamic literature. Of the variants he mentions, most can be found from other sources such as the commentators. Combining the codices mentioned by Dawud with those whose existence are mentioned in other sources provides a list of 15 "primary" codices and 13 "secondary" codices. These codices as far as research to date has shown, no longer exist. The many variants associated with them, however, have survived and form the only basis available for a critical text of the Qur'ān. The authenticity of these variants may in some cases be questionable, according to Jeffery, for several reasons. Grammarians and theologians of later years sometimes invented readings in the name of some older authority. In other cases the same variant has been attributed to differing sources. Noncanonical readings never received the same careful transmission as did the canonical recension.

Since we have no direct evidence about the origin of these other collections, any theory about their origins must remain speculative. Watt's theory is as reasonable as any. According to Watt, private collections which initially were maintained for private use would not have gained early acceptance in a milieu which valued oral tradition more highly than the written word. In due course, the authority of the written collections began to grow as the accuracy of oral

1Jeffery, Materials, op. cit.
4Watt, Bell's Introduction, p. 45.
transmission declined. In different urban centers of the new empire, the leaders associated with the Prophet who owned private collections gained authority in Qur'ānic recitation and interpretation. Their collection eventually shared in this authority. Thus, the codex owned by Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, which was called Lubab al-Gulub because of its size, became the Basran exemplar. Ubai b. Ka'b's codex was followed in all of Syria except in Damascus where Miqdad b. Al-Aswad's codex was authoritative. 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd's codex had the support of the Kufan scholars. The followers of Ali, of course, maintained the integrity of Ali's collection. ¹

More than a thousand variants between Mas'ūd's and 'Ubayy's codex and our present text have survived. For example, the lists of the Surahs for the codices differ in several respects and, as Watt notes,² greater differences in the names of the Surahs would exist had later transcribers not replaced the unusual names with the traditional names.³ Al-Nadim has preserved the names and sequences of the Surahs found in a manuscript attributed to 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd and a manuscript attributed to 'Ubayy ibn Ka'b. The Mas'ūd manuscript began with the Surah called "Al-Baqarah" (the Cow).⁴ The 'Ubayy manuscript begins with the Surah called "Fātihat al-Kitāb" (Opening of the Book).⁵ Apparently the first Surah of the Qur'ān we have today was missing from Mas'ūd's

¹Jeffery, Materials, op. cit., pp. 7-8; Watt, Bell's Introduction, op. cit., p. 45.
²Watt, Bell's Introduction, op. cit., p. 45, 53.
³Bell, Introduction, op. cit., 41.
⁴Dodge, op. cit., p.53.
⁵Ibid., p. 58.
collection. Indeed, al-Nadim counted 110 *Surahs* in Mas'ūd's manuscript and 116 *Surahs* in 'Ubayy's manuscript.\(^1\) *Surah* 26 is called "Al-Sāffat" (Those who rank themselves) in Mas'ūd's manuscripts, but it is called "Al-Shu'ārā" (The Poets) in 'Ubayy's collection.\(^2\) The sequence of *Surahs* in both differ significantly between each other and Qur'ān of today.

A number of traditions are preserved which refer to *ayahs* missing from our present text. Those traditions collected by Abū 'Ubaid al-Qāsim b. Sallām are particularly interesting because he collected them at a very early date.\(^3\) Moreover, he became renowned as an authority on the Qur'ān after studying at the feet of scholars in both Kufa and Basra.\(^4\) For example,

Said Abū 'Ubaid:

Isma'īl b. Ibrāhīm related to us from Ayyūb from Nafī' from Ibn 'Umar who said--Let none of you say, "I have learned the whole of the Qur'ān", for how does he know what the whole of it is, when much of it has disappeared? Let him rather say, "I have learned what is extent thereof."\(^5\)

Some of the traditions indicate that 'Uthman changed the text. For example,

Hajjāh related to us from Ibn Juraij who said--Ibn Abī Humaid informed me from Jahra bint Abī Ayyūb b. Yunus saying--I read to my father when he was eighty years of age from 'A'īsha's Codex--"Verily Allah and His angels pray for the Prophet. O ye who believe pray for him and speak peace.

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 58. \(^2\)Ibid., p. 54 on Mas'ūd's and p. 58 on 'Ubayy's.


upon him and upon those who pray in the first ranks". She said, "It is said that 'Uthman altered the Codices." Said he, "Ibn Juraij and Ibn Abi Jamil have related to me from 'Abd ar-Rahmān b. Hurmuz and others the like of this about 'A'sha's Codex."

Unfortunately, all that remains for evidence of these other early collections of the Qur'ān are historical references such as these. Mingana originally thought that he had found manuscript evidence of variants belonging to some of these early codices in a palimpsest purchased in Suez in 1895. In addition, Mingana found an old Syriac translation of the Qur'ān which he felt also gave evidence of variants coming from these other personal codices. Unfortunately, according to Jeffery, they do not have any relation to the variants alleged to have been found in the codices before 'Uthman's recension.

The question about the significance of these variants naturally arises. According to Margoliouth, most of the variants stem from different attempts to decipher a consonantal text, although there are a few variants in which the consonants themselves are questioned. At the other

1 Ibid., p. 64.
2 Mingana, "Leaves from three Ancient Qurans;" op. cit., p.i.
end of the spectrum is Casanova's conclusion:

There were, at the time of the Prophet as after him, a crowd of diverse versions of the [Qur'an]. . . .

Muslim scholars tend to minimize the differences, but they must have been significant during 'Uthman's reign. If they were not significant, how can 'Uthman's extraordinary attempt to impose uniformity on the Qur'anic text by burning all differing Qur'ans or the violent reaction of the Kufan scholars to 'Uthman's new text be explained?

Several recensions of the Qur'an existed and all of them competed for authority in a rivalry which paralleled the political rivalry of the major metropolises and their leading families. The wedding of political and religious forces in Islam brought into sharp religious focus the political conflicts of the period. Thus, according to Caetani,

The number and variety of these new schools of the sacred text and of their dogmas threatened the unity of doctrine, inclination and sentiment which was indispensable for the future success of the Moslem society. In the Koran discrepancies appeared which were bound to be increased in time.

---


2 They also tend to prevent western scholars from access to interesting manuscripts. When Bersträsser was in Cairo photographing manuscripts for his archive, Jeffery drew his attention to one with strange features. When they asked to photograph it, it was "withdrawn from access, as it was not consistent with orthodoxy to allow a Western scholar to have knowledge of such a text." Jeffery, Materials, op. cit., p.10, n. 2.

Between the people and the governor there was thus interposed a class of men who arrogated to themselves a kind of independence from political authority. In short, availing themselves of the doctrine which they claimed to possess in a greater measure than the representatives of the Caliph, they excited the populace against the executive power.¹

This situation of unrest prompted 'Uthman's order for a new collection and editing of a definitive Qur'ānic text and the destruction of differing versions throughout the empire. The western views regarding this recension forms the subject of the next chapter.

¹Caetani, op. cit., p. 388.
CHAPTER IV

'UTHMAN'S RECEPTION

The story of 'Uthman's collection of the Qur'an, like that of Abu Bakr's before 'Uthman, receives different treatment from different western scholars. The reason for the different views about this recension lies not only in the contradictory accounts of the tradition, but in the different methods adopted by the scholars to understand the history of the Qur'an. This chapter, after setting forth two of the traditions about 'Uthman's collection, will discuss the different view of several western scholars concerning this recension and the implications of their conclusions for the history of the text of the Qur'an.

The Tradition on 'Uthman's Collection

Al-Bukhari's version of this tradition is the most often quoted tradition, probably because al-Bukhari, who lived from 810 C.E. to 870 C.E., is known as one of the earliest and the greatest collectors of the traditions. What follows is his version of the story.

Narrated Anas bin Malik: Hudhaifa bin Al-Yamân came to 'Uthman at the time when the

---

1 Dodge, op. cit., 2:974-975.

2 Al-Bukhari, op. cit., 6:478-479. The notes in the parentheses are those of Dr. Mohammad Muhsin Khan, whose translation is cited here.

3 An early convert from the vicinity of Oman who, as a general for Abu Bakr, gained his first fame by retaking Oman after its rebellion upon Muhammad's death. Muir, The Caliphate, op. cit., pp. 34-35.
people of Iraq were waging war to conquer Arminya and Adharbijan.1 Hudhaifa was afraid of their (the people of Shā'īm and Iraq) differences in the recitation of the Qur'ān. So he said to 'Uthmān, "O chief of the Believers! Save this nation before they differ about the Book (Qur'ān) as Jews and the Christians did before." So 'Uthmān sent a message to Hafsa saying, "Send us the manuscripts of the Qur'ān so that we may compile the Qur'ānic materials in perfect copies and return the manuscripts to you." Hafsa sent it to 'Uthmān. 'Uthmān then ordered Zaid bin Thābit, 'Abdullāh bin As-Zubair, Sa'id bin Al'As and 'Abdur-Rahman bin Harith bin Hishām3 to rewrite the manuscripts in perfect copies. 'Uthmān said to the three Quraishi men, "In case you disagree with Zaid bin Thābit on any point in the Qur'ān, then write it in the dialect of the Quraish as the Qur'ān was revealed in their tongue." They did so, and when they had written many copies, 'Uthmān returned the original manuscripts to Hafṣa. 'Uthmān sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Qur'ānic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt.4

Another tradition on the same subject was recorded by Abu Bakr 'Abdullāh ibn abi Da'ūd, a commentator on the Qur'ān and a collector of traditions who died in 757 C.E.5 His version is as follows:

Mus'ab b. Sa'd reports, "'Uthman addressed the people, 'It is now thirteen years since your

1 Southeastern modern Turkey and Northwestern modern Iran.

2 Syria (?)

3 All but Zaid b. Thābit was from the Quraish. Dodge, op. cit., 1:48 n. 6.

4 al-Nadim quotes this tradition, omitting only the names of the places where the dissension took place and replacing them with Iraq. Dodge, op. cit., 1:48-49.

5 Dodge, op. cit., 2:979.
Prophet left you and you are not unanimous on the Qur'ān. You talk about the reading of Ubayy and the reading of 'Abdullāh. Some even say, "By God! my reading is right and yours is wrong." I now summon you all to bring here whatever part of the Book of God you possess. One would come with a parchment or a scrap of leather with a Qur'ān verse on it until there was gathered great store of such. 'Uthman abjured them one by one, 'You heard the Prophet recite this?' They would answer that that was so. After this 'Uthman asked, 'Whose acquaintance with the Book is greatest?' They replied, 'His who wrote it out for the Prophet.' He asked, 'Whose Arabic is best?' They said, 'Sa'id's.' 'Uthman said, 'Let Sa'id dictate and Zaid write.'

These two traditions are representative of the several traditions on the subject. Al-Bukhārī locates the problem of different readings among the troops in Armenia and northwest Iran; ibn abi Da'ūd simply states that a problem of different readings existed and that the differences had led to quarrels among the people. Al-Bukhārī refers to the copy of the Qur'ān held by Hafsa which had been compiled by Abu Bakr. Ibn abi Da'ūd seems to indicate that 'Uthman began his collection from scratch, in a manner similar to what Zaid b. Thābit had done for Abu Bakr. Al-Bukhārī indicates that the only anticipated problem in the new collection of the Qur'ān would be disagreements about which dialect would best express the words of the Prophet. The committee was to follow the Quraish dialect since this was the dialect which the Prophet used. Ibn abi Da'ūd relates that the problem was simply to produce a text which used the "best Arabic."

The 'Uthman Recension Story Criticized

Most western scholars agree that the problem of different readings for the text of the Qur'an was a problem which had spread throughout the empire. It was not, as al-Bukhari's tradition relates, a problem limited to the soldiers fighting in Armenia. This is one of the few instances where there is a consensus among western scholars.

Khan

Ajmal Khan argued that 'Uthman's collection was not only a faithful copy of Abu Bakr's collection, but that it was simply an arrangement for the first time of the individual Surahs.\(^1\) Abu Bakr's collection was, in his view, a loose collection of leaves. For the first time the entire Qur'an was collected together in one place and in a definite order. Khan concluded that the task of 'Uthman's Qur'anic committee was first the standardization of the pronunciation.\(^2\) Khan therefore seems willing to accept al-Bukhari's tradition without serious modification. This is the orthodox Muslim view.

Noldeke

Although Noldeke was willing to accept the proposition that 'Uthman's collection was simply a straight copy of Abu Bakr's earlier collection,\(^3\) he objected to two other details in al-Bukhari's tradition.

---

1Khan, op. cit., p. 202: "Thus, the different suras were arranged according to their length in four groups. This was done by a group of experts by the order of the Cali 'Uthman A.H. 29-30.

2Ibid., p. 204: "'Uthman corrected the different pronunciations and preferred the known readings of the Apostle."

3Theodor Noldeke, Sketches from Eastern History, (London: John Sutherland Black, 1892), p. 51: "It now seems to be highly probable that this second redaction took this simple form: Zaid read off the codex he had previously written and his associates, simultaneously or
According to Nöldeke, the other three members of the committee simply wrote down Zaid's dictation as he read from the copy he had prepared earlier for Abu Bakr. The notion that the new edition was faithful to the Quraish dialect however, cannot be accepted because written Arabic was at that time too primitive to distinguish the subtleties of Arabic dialects. Furthermore, Nöldeke argued, 'Uthman's collection could not have been complete. The Qur'an we have today contains passages which are obviously fragmentary. Traditions can be cited which demonstrate that parts of the original Qur'an were not included in 'Uthman's version.

Jeffery and Watt

The English scholars Jeffery and Watt rejected Nöldeke's view that the 'Uthmanic recension was merely a copy of Abu Bakr's. To be fair to Nöldeke, it should be mentioned that he did not have before him the evidence to which the English orientalists appealed in rejecting his view. This evidence was another tradition, already noted in passing, which implied that Hafsa's copy contained spurious readings. According to this tradition, the Caliph Marwan, during his tenure as successively, wrote one copy each to his dictation."

1 Ibid., p. 52: on the order to follow the Quraish dialect: "... though well attested, this account can scarcely be correct. The extremely primitive writing of those days was quite incapable of rendering such minute differences as can have existed between the pronunciation of Mecca and that of Medina."

2 Ibid. See p. 51 supra for such a tradition.


4 p. 46, n. 32, supra.
governor of Medina, tried to obtain Hafsa's collection in order to destroy it. He wanted to destroy it because it contained spurious readings which, if disseminated, could divide the Islamic community. Given the nearly universal acceptance by Islam of 'Uthman's recension and the traditional claims that it is an exact copy of Abu Bakr's collection, it is unlikely that this story has been fabricated. Indeed, its survival is astonishing, for it implies that 'Uthman's recension was based on a defective collection. As a consequence of this tradition, Watt wrote,

Hafsa's leaves can hardly have been the sole or main basis of the 'Uthmanic text.¹

Abott

Abott adopted a middle position on the issue of the basis for 'Uthman's recension. First, he disputed Noldeke's claim that the Arabic script was too primitive for the task of conveying differences between the dialects of Arabic.² The Arabic script was equal to the task of conveying the Quraish dialect as long as well educated men read the script; only when the common people began reading the text did it become necessary to add diacritical markings to the consonantal text.

Secondly, Zaid and his committee were committed to finding the authentic Qur'ān and conveying it accurately into the Quraish dialect in writing. That this was their purpose rather than a chronological order

¹Watt, Bell's Introduction, p. 43.

²Abott, op. cit., p. 48: "If written Arabic was so primitive and rare in its own homeland at the time of Muḥammad's death, how do we account for its practical use in Egypt only a short dozen years after that even." He then cites a papyrus fragment, dated 21 A.H., found in Egypt.
of the Surahs is seen from their inclusion into the text the mysterious letters which precede twenty-nine Surahs. Regardless of what significance the mysterious letters may have, that the committee sought to preserve them is ample proof that their main object was accuracy. In view of these objectives, it would appear that Abbot would agree that Zaid did not simply copy the private collection of Abu Bakr, but sought the complete, authentic Qur'an wherever it might be found.

Caetani

Although he accepts the probability that private collections of the Qur'an were compiled before 'Uthman's recension, Caetani rejected that portion of the al-Bukhari tradition which referred to a codex compiled by Abu Bakr which Hafsa had in her possession. He rejects the story about Abu Bakr's collection because he believed that the story was fabricated to justify the corrections which 'Uthman introduced to the text.2

Caetani's is a sociological argument drawn from the political situation of the day. Muhammad's religious movement depended upon his personality for its success.3 His revelations made no provision for the eventuality of his death. As a consequence, the mission Muhammad initiated had to undergo a transformation from a personalized movement "into

1Ibid., p. 50.

2Caetani, op. cit., p. 381: "Hafsa's copy seems, in fact to be an invention to justify the corrections of that subsequently compiled under 'Uthman."

3Ibid., p. 384: "We do not sufficiently bear in mind that the Islam of Mohammed was a creation of an absolutely personal description, concentrated and founded almost entirely upon his own individuality, upon his continual, daily, personal support."
an autonomous, impersonal institution.\textsuperscript{1} The new exegencies created by the occupation of new lands provided conditions for the Qurra to grow from a loose group of people who had learned the Qur'ān at the feet of the Prophet, to a class of people whose prestige, derived from their knowledge of the Qur'ān, could be turned into a political force.\textsuperscript{2} Thus, when the opposing political parties began using the Qur'ān as an authority for their political views, different readings crept into the text. In this situation, it was necessary for the preservation of Islamic unity to compile a single official text of the Qur'ān.\textsuperscript{3}

'Uthman therefore asserted that his recension would henceforth be the only acceptable exemplar of the Qur'ānic text. To minimize dissent which would inevitably arise from this decision, it was necessary to use a committee of men well known for their knowledge of the Qur'ān. 'Uthman therefore selected Zaid b. Thabit to head the committee of recognized scholars. To justify his claim that the new recension was authoritative, 'Uthman found it necessary to produce a copy of the Qur'ān which, by virtue of its age and association with the first two Caliphs, would convince his opponents of both the accuracy and genuineness of his new edition. Thus the story of a collection under Abu Bakr which passed to Umar then Hafsa and from there to 'Uthman. Taken together, this would provide justification for his decision to burn all opposing copies.\textsuperscript{4}

\textbf{The Importance of 'Uthman's Collection to Islam}

'Uthman, when he had finished the project of compiling a new edition of the Qur'ān, ordered copies made of the new edition. These

\textsuperscript{1}Ibid., p. 385.  \textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 386-388.  \textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 389.  \textsuperscript{4}Ibid., pp. 389-390.
copies were sent to every major metropolis in the empire with the order that this new version and no other be used. To enforce the order, all other copies of the Qur'an were to be seized and burned. Apparently this operation was carried out with careful precision, for no copies of text other than those which are traceable to 'Uthman's version have survived.¹

In Kufa, however, this order was not received well. In fact, this decision is probably the major cause of the insurrection which led to 'Uthman's death.² Ibn Mas'ūd was the authority on the Qur'an in Kufa where his words carried much authority. Ibn Mas'ūd was incensed by 'Uthman's order, for it implied that his text was defective. According to Muir, Ibn Mas'ūd

prided himself on his faultless recitation of the oracle, pure as it fell from the Prophet's lips.³

Thus, Ibn Mas'ūd, already politically opposed to 'Uthman, took advantage of the caliph's radical attempt to impose textual and doctrinal unity on the empire. Ibn Mas'ūd originated the cry of 'Uthman's enemies that he had committed sacrilege in ordering copies of Allah's word to be burned.

But the deed had been finished. Even Ali, one of 'Uthman's bitterest enemies, a few years later upon attaining the caliphate, when he

¹Caetani, op. cit., p. 389.

²Margoliouth, op. cit., p. 336: "That this act burning the non-'Uthmanic Qur'ans brought about an insurrection where he ['Uthman] was murdered is the most probable explanation of the first civil war of Islam."

found the Kufans still angry over 'Uthman's impiety, said,

"Silence! . . ."Othman acted with the advice of the leading men among us; and had I been ruler at the time, I should myself have done the same."  

Over the years, Muslim leaders have found it politically expedient to support 'Uthman's recension. By virtue of their authority, 'Uthman's recension has come to occupy an important place in the orthodox Muslim view of the textual history of the Qur'an. But this view that 'Uthman's recension is the complete and perfect copy of the revelations of Allah to Muḥammad did not come to be accepted without the use of force:

The story of a man called b. Shanbudh became famous in Baghdad; he used to read and teach the reading (of the Qur'an) with letters in which he contradicted the mishaf; he read according to 'Abdallah b. Mas'ud and Ubayy b. Ka'b and others; . . . he read and proved them in discussions, until his affair became important and ominous; people did not tolerate him anymore, and the Sultan sent emissaries to seize him, in the year 323; . . . The vizier charged him in his presence with what he had done, and he did not desist from it, but corroborated it; the vizier then tried to make him discredit it, and cease to read with these disgraceful anomalies, which were an addition to the mishaf of 'Uthman, but he refused. . . . (The vizier) then ordered that he should be stripped of his clothes and struck with a staff on his back. He received about ten hard strokes, and could not endure any more; he cried out for mercy, and agreed to yield and repent. He was then released and given his clothes. . . and Sheikh Abu Muhammad Yusuf b. Sairafi told me that he (b. Shanbudh) had recorded many readings.  

Thus, through the authority of major leaders after 'Uthman, and with

---

1Ibid., p. 211.

the use of some force, 'Uthman's version has come to occupy the place of a Textus receptus among Muslims. Western scholars, although they accept the possibility that 'Uthman's recension was the first "official" version of the Qur'ān, generally cannot agree that it represents the complete collection of Muḥammad's oracles, principally because of the historical references to other readings. Another school of western scholarship doubts the 'Uthman recension tradition and would add it to the list of fabricated traditions. Their theories form the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER V

CASANOVA AND MINGANA ON THE HAJJAJ COLLECTION

The Arguments Summarized

The scholars whose works have been considered in chapters II, III and IV have relied exclusively on Muslim sources for their theories. Christian writers who were contemporary with the rise of Islam may be important for what they say and do not say about the history of the Qur'an. Both Alphonse Mingana, an English scholar, and Paul Casanova, a French orientalist, insist that the works of Christian writers be brought into the account of the history of the Qur'an.

Mingana and Casanova represent a school of western scholarship which claims that the Qur'an as we have today was not collected in any official way until the Caliphate of 'Abd-al-Malik who ruled from 685 to 705 C.E.\(^1\) Al-Hajjaj, a lieutenant of 'Abd-al-Malik is given credit by this school with establishing the official text of the Qur'an.

Mingana argues three points to prove his thesis. First, the art of writing Arabic was too primitive during the first century after the Hijirah to support the traditional view that either Abu Bakr or 'Uthman gave us the Qur'an.\(^2\) Second, the silence of the Christian writers regarding any book of the "Hagarians," as the Muslims were called,

\(^1\)Hitti, op. cit., p. 206.

speaks loudly against the view that the Muslims had a Qur'an before the end of the seventh century of the common era.\(^1\) Third, the highly polemical and contradictory nature of the Muslim traditions renders them historically useless and their late date of compilation renders them suspect.\(^2\)

To these three arguments, Casanova added a fourth. His argument is based on a study of early Islamic doctrine, and on a study of the beliefs of the Arabs before Islam. The results of the study led him to believe that the Muslims were not interested in preserving for posterity the oracles of Muhammad until they had given up their belief that the world would end within a generation or two.\(^3\)

This chapter will discuss each of these arguments in turn and the criticism they have received from other scholars. Casanova's argument will receive only passing attention because the conclusions he draws about the Qur'an are based on studies which are beyond the scope of the thesis. However, since the method he adopted is important for later studies of the problem of the Qur'anic textual history, a review of his method will be necessary.

**The Primitive Writing Argument**

Mingana claims that the men listed by the traditions as companions of the Prophet who wrote down and collected his oracles were all

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 406.


\(^3\)Casanova, op. cit., 2:120.
tribal leaders, men of action and not literature.¹ We know so little about Arabic in the earliest stages of its script that we cannot know for certain if the Arabic spoken by Muhammad even had a written form. If the art of writing existed at all, it was maintained by Jewish or Christian scrivens using a script similar to Estrangelo or Hebrew.² The Arabic writing of the eighth century, moreover, was not sufficiently sophisticated to express the detailed phonetic differences among the emerging philological schools.³

Chapter II outlined some of the evidence available which tends to point to an opposite conclusion. A few scholars take issue with this argument based on the evidence of inscriptions and papyrus as well as the historical references to the art of writing.

Reynold Nicholson, for example, disagreed with this assessment of the state of writing on the peninsula. He argued that although the Qurʾān was the first book written in Arabic, the beginnings of Arabic literary composition go back to an earlier century.⁴ Literature, of course may be composed orally and in writing. Elsewhere, Nicholson clearly places the beginning of writing in Arabic during the period when the Qurʾān began its history:

We have seen the oldest existing poems date from the beginning of the fifth century of our era, whereas the art of writing did not

¹ Mingana, "Transmission According to Christian Writers," op.cit., p. 413: "Most of them were more tribal chieftains than men of literature." See also Mingana Leaves, op. cit., p. xxv.


³ Ibid., p. 413.

come into general use among the Arabs until some two hundred years afterwards.  

The work of Abbot in chronicling the development of the north Arabic script has already been discussed. Although the evidence may not provide us with certainty about the state of the art of writing in the Hejaz at the time of Muhammad and the century following him, there seems to be enough evidence to point to a conclusion which would take most of the force away from this argument of Mingana's. Indeed some authors suggest that the role of writing during the early years of Islam has not been sufficiently stressed. The Muslims were the first Arabs to learn the art of writing and it must have given them a tremendous advantage, however primitive it may have been, over the pagan Arabs who could not understand it.

The Argument From Christian Silence

The argument from silence depends for its validity upon an absence of evidence. A scholar who has spent a lifetime studying the traditions of the Muslims may assert with some confidence that he has found no evidence for a particular fact. He may then propound a theory based on the non-occurrence of the fact. A student of his, however, may stumble upon the one reference which breaks the silence and destroys the scholar's theory. This is the chief theoretical objection to the argument from silence.

As circumstantial evidence, the argument can be more persuasive

1 Ibid.

2 Supra, pp. 17, 19-22.

3 Nicholson, op. cit., p. 31; Chejne, op. cit., p. 57.
in a context of polemics where one would expect references to a particular fact and yet finds none. In the years after Muhammad's death when the Muslim Arabs came pouring out of Arabia into the lands occupied by the Christians, circumstances created an opportunity for debate between Muslims and Christians. In the course of these debates, Mingana argued, one would expect to find the Muslims appealing to their Holy Book as an authority in theological arguments. But in the first century after the Hijirah, Mingana could find no appeal by Muslims to a Holy Book of their own.

Christian-Muslim Debates Before al-Kindi

Only 18 years after the Hijirah the Monophysite Patriarch of Antioch, John I, met in Syria with 'Amr b. al-'As. They met to discuss the doctrines and practices which differentiated the Muslims and the Christians. Their discussion ranged from the divinity of Christ, to prophecies about his appearance in the Jewish scriptures, to laws governing inheritance and the authority for these laws in scripture. When the Muslims questioned a Christian interpretation of the Torah, they called in a Jew to translate from the Torah for them. Apparently, the Bishops had been summoned by the Amir for the discussion. Their careful report about the proceedings before the Amir was published among the Mesopotamian Christians with the request that they pray for the illustrious Amir, that God

---

might grant him wisdom and enlighten him in what is the will of the Lord.1

This story is important because, according to Mingana, four important historical implications can be drawn from it. First, at the time of the discussion there apparently was no Arabic translation of the Torah or the Gospel. Second, although the Muslims consistently argued the teachings of Muḥammad about the Torah, about the denial of Jesus' Sonship and divinity, and about the laws of inheritance, they did not--and this is Mingana's third inference -- appeal to a Holy Book of their own. Fourth, a few men in the Muslim ranks, perhaps Jewish or Christian renegades, could read and write.2

In a letter which dates from 647 C.E., some years after 'Uthman became Calif, Isho'yahb III, the Patriarch of Selucia, wrote in one of his famous letters:

In excusing yourselves falsely, you might perhaps say, or the Heretics might make you say, "What has happened was due to the order given by the Arabs;" but this would not be true at all, because the Arab Hagarians [Muslims] do not help those who attribute sufferings and death to God, the Lord of everything.3

Isho'yahb, Mingana argued, would have mentioned the Muslim's Holy Book if he had heard about it.

Mingana noted two other writers from the seventh century who apparently knew nothing about the existence of the Qur'ān. An unknown writer, published by Guidi in 680 C.E. during the reign of Yazīd, the

---

1 Ibid., p. 402.
2 Ibid., p. 404-405.
3 Ibid., p. 405.
son of Mu'āwiah, described the Muslims for his readers as Ishmael's
descendants whose religion was similar to that of Abraham:

As to the K'bah we cannot know what it was, except in supposing that the blessed Abraham
having become very rich in possessions, wanting to avoid the envy of the Canaanites, chose to dwell in the distant and large locali-
ties of the desert; and as he was living under
tents, built that place for the worship of God
and the offering of sacrifices; for this rea-
son, this place received its title of our days,
and the memory of the place was transmitted
from generation to generation with the evolu-
tion of the Arab race. It was not, therefore,
new for the Arabs to worship in that place, but
their worship therein was from the beginning of
their days. . .

Muḥammad, this writer said, was a military general; he does not describe
him as a religious leader. The other Christian writer Mingana mentions
is John Bar Benkayé who wrote the following during the reign of 'Abdul-
Mālik, probably in 690 C.E.:

The Arabs had a certain order from the one who
was their leader, in favor of the Christian
people and the monks; they held also, under his
leadership, the worship of one God, according
to the customs of the Old Covenant; at the out-
set they were so attached to the tradition of
Muḥammad who was their teacher, that they in-
flicted the pain of death upon anyone who seem-
ed to contradict his tradition. . . Among them
were many Christians, some from the Heretics,
and some from us.2

From these writings, and others not quoted, Mingana concluded that the
Christian scholars of the seventh century knew nothing about a Holy
Book that belonged to the Muslims.

1Ibid., pp. 405-406.
2Ibid., p. 406.
According to Mingana, the Qur'ān became a part of Christian polemics only during the end of the first third of the eighth century of the common era. By the end of the eighth century refutations and apologies of the Qur'ān were numerous. Perhaps the most important of the Christian writers during this period is al-Kindi.

al-Kindi's History of the Collection of the Qur'ān

The importance of al-Kindi's version of the history of the Qur'ān lies in the fact that he wrote it only 200 years after the Hijirah. Ibn Sa'd is the only Muslim compiler of traditions before al-Kindi; al-Bukhari was still a child when al-Kindi authored his defence of Christianity. Consequently, despite its length, al-Kindi is worth quoting here in full.

Sergius, a Nestorian monk, was excommunicated for a certain offence; to expiate it he set out on a mission to Arabia; in Maccah he met Muhammad with whom he had intimate converse. At the death of the monk, two Jewish doctors, 'Abdallah and Ka'b, ingratiated themselves with Muhammad and had great influence over him. Upon the Prophet's death, and at the instigation of the Jews, 'Ali refused to swear allegiance to Abu Bakr, but when he despaired of succeeding to the Caliphate, he presented himself before him, forty days (some say six months) after the Prophet's death. As he was swearing allegiance

1 Ibid., p. 407. Casanova, op. cit., 2:119; "Il faut donc, je crois, dans l'histoire critique du C., faire une place de premier ordre au Chrétien Kindite. Ecrivant vers 204 de l'hégire, il est le plus ancien des auteurs connus de nous qui aient relaté les diverses péripéties--de la composition du Coran, Boukhârî étant né en 194. Ce qu'il en dit est de la plus haute importance." Eng. Trans., "It is necessary I believe, in the critical history of the [Qur'ān], to make a first class position for the Christian Kindite. Writing towards 204 of the Hijirah, he is the earliest of the authors known to us who narrated the diverse mishaps of the Qur'ān's composition, Bukhari being born in 194. What he says about is of the utmost importance."
to him, he was asked, "O Father of Hasan, what hath delayed thee so long?" He answered, "I was busy collecting the Book of the Lord, for that the Prophet committed to my care." The men present about Abu Bakr represented that there were scraps and pieces of the Kur'ān with them as well as with 'Ali; and then it was agreed to collect the whole from every quarter together. So they collected various parts from the memory of individuals (as Sūratul-Barā'ah, which they wrote out at the dictation of a certain Arab from the desert), and other portions from different people; besides that which was copied out from tablets of stone, and palm-leaves, and shoulder-bones, and such like. It was not at first collected in a volume, but remained in separate leaves. Then the people fell to variance in their reading; some read according to the version of 'Ali, which they follow to the present day; some read according to the collection of which we have made mention; one party read according to the text of ibn Mas'ūd, and another according to that of Ubayy ibn Ka'b.

When 'Uthmān came to power, and people everywhere differed in their reading, 'Ali sought grounds of accusation against him, compassing his death. One man would read a verse one way, and another man another way; and there was change and interpolation, some copies having more and some less. When this was represented to 'Uthman, and the danger urged of division, strife, and apostacy, he thereupon caused to be collected together all the leaves and scraps that he could, together with the copy that was written out at the first. But they did not interfere with that which was in the hands of 'Ali, or of those who followed his reading. Ubayy was dead by this time; as for ibn Mas'ūd, they demanded his exemplar, but he refused to give it up. Then they commanded Zaid ibn Thābit, and with him 'Abdallāh ibn 'Abbās, to revise and correct the text, eliminating all that was corrupt; they were instructed when they differed on any reading, word, or name, to follow the dialect of the Kuraish.

When the recension was completed, four exemplars were written out in large text; one was sent to Maccab, and another Madinah; the third was dispatched to Syria, and is to this day a Malatya; the fourth was deposited in Kūfā. People say that this last copy is still extant at Kūfā, but this
is not the case, for it was lost in the insurrection of Mukhtār (A.H. 67). The copy at Maccah remained there till the city was stormed by Abu Sarāyah; he did not carry it away; but it is supposed to have been burned in the conflagration. The Madinah exemplar was lost in the reign of terror, that is in the days of Yazid b. Mu'āwiah (A.H. 60-64).

After what we have related above, 'Uthman called all the former leaves and copies, and destroyed them, threatening those who held any portion back; and so only some scattered remains, concealed here and there, survived. Ibn Mas'ūd, however, retained his exemplar in his own hands, and it was inherited by his posterity, as it is this day; and likewise the collection of 'Ali has descended in his family.

Then followed the business of Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, who gathered together every single copy he could lay hold of, and caused to be omitted from the text a great many passages. Among these, they say, were verses revealed concerning the House of Umayyah with names of certain persons, and concerning the House of 'Abbās also with names. Six copies of the text thus revised were distributed to Egypt, Syria, Madinah, Maccah, Kūfah, and Basrah. After that he called in and destroyed all the preceding copies, even as 'Uthmān had done before him. The enmity subsisting between 'Ali and Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān is well known; now each of these entered in the text whatever favoured his own claims, and left out what was otherwise. How, then, can we distinguish between the genuine and the counterfeit? And what about the losses caused by Ḥajjāj? The kind of faith that this tyrant held in other matters is well-known; how can we make an arbiter as to the Book of God a man who never ceased to play into the hands of the Umayyads whenever he found the opportunity? . . .

All that I have said is drawn from your own authorities, and no single argument has been advanced but what is based on evidence accepted by yourselves; in proof thereof, we have the Kur'ān itself, which is a confused heap, with neither system nor order.¹

¹This is Mingana's translation of al-Kindi's history of Qur'ān, "Transmission According to Christian Writers," op. cit., pp. 407-409. Casanova, op. cit., 2:110-118, traces the textual history of this account by al-Kindi to twelfth century C.E. Arabic manuscripts in
This apology for Christianity by al-Kindi raised serious historical questions about the text of the Qurʾān. What Mingana finds interesting is the silence of Muslim writers in response to it. The nearest thing to a response, according to Mingana, is at-Tabari's Kitabud-Dinawd-Daulah (Book of Religion and Empire). It was written in 855 C.E. for the Caliph Mutawakkil as an official Apology of Islam.\(^1\) When he comes to the question about the transmission of the Qurʾān, at-Tabari fails to respond to al-Kindi's historical charges:

Such is the asceticism of several kings, princes, and men of piety in the Muslim community, who, among the kings of the earth and the nations of the prophets, have no one comparable and similar to them since the creation of the world. Falsehood and lies are not attributed to men of this kind...\(^2\)

Spain through references to it by Abbot of Cluny, Peter the Venerable. (For Peter the Venerable's interest in the Qurʾān, see p. 1, supr.) William Muir published a translation of Al-Kindi's Apology in 1881 under the title Indian Female Evangelist and dated its composition to A.H. 215. Casanova disagrees with this date for two reasons. First, al-Kindi says elsewhere in the text that a little over 200 years elapsed since the Hijirah when he began to write. Second, the text contains a reference to Babek Khorrami. The crimes Babek committed reached the ears of al-Mamun, at whose court al-Kindi wrote the apology, shortly after they were committed in 204 A.H., according to Mas'oudi, whom Casanova cites on page 2:112. As for the authenticity of this letter of al-Kindi, Casanova writes: "L'authenticité de la lettre d'al Kindi est hors de doute; elle contient des détails qu'un faussaire eût difficilement inventés et qui sont confirmés par d'autres indices." Eng. trans.: "The authenticity of al-Kindi's letter is beyond doubt; it contains details that a forger would have invented with difficulty and which are confirmed by other indications;" 2:113.

\(^1\) 855 C.E. is approximately 241 A.H.

\(^2\) At-Tabari, The Book of Religion and Empire, (Lahore: Law Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 73. Appears to be a copy of the translation published by Mingana, but the quote from this book is his "Transmission According to Christian Writers," op. cit., p. 410, could not be found. Mingana quotes Tabari as follows: "If such people may be accused of forgery and falsehood, the disciples of the Christ might also be accused of the same."
Al-Kindī's account differs from al-Bukhārī's account in several respects.

The motive for collecting the Qur'ān at the time of Abu Bakr was not the death of many of the Qurra in the Battle of Yamama. A friendly view of al-Kindī's tradition might say the reason for the first collection was the fragmentary state of the Qur'ān. But it appears from al-Kindī's narrative that the companions of the Prophet, unwilling to let Ali gain an immediate advantage, set about to collect their own version of the Qur'ān. Al-Kindī agrees that the first collection was not a codex but a collection of leaves.

Al-Kindī's history agrees with the assessment of many modern scholars that between Abu Bakr's Caliphate and 'Uthman's Caliphate the several different personal collections attracted circles of followers. These differing versions of the Qur'ān led to strife within the empire and prompted 'Uthman's radical cure. The disagreements between the competing versions appear to more than phonetic detail. The charges, according to al-Kindī, included interpolation, change and omission, accusations which if well founded carried a penalty of death.

Zaid b. Thābit does not appear in al-Kindī's story about Abu Bakr's collection. He was, however, put in charge of editing 'Uthman's collection. He and Abdallah ibn 'Abbas, not a committee of four, were to follow the dialect of the Quraish. 'Uthman, despite his threats, was unable to obtain the differing copies of ibn Mas'ūd and Ali. Hafsa's name does not appear at all in al-Kindī's version of the history of the Qur'ān. "Then followed the business of Hajjaj b. Yusuf," an entirely new element in the history of the Qur'ān which will be discussed shortly.
Casanova laid the elements of three oldest traditions side by side to see what would be revealed about the development of the traditional history of the Qur'ān:¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ibn Sa'd</th>
<th>al-Kindi</th>
<th>al-Bukhari</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Collectors of the Qur'ān in Muhammad's time</td>
<td>1. Sergius</td>
<td>1. Collectors of the Qur'ān in Muhammad's time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 'Uthman (under Umar's reign)</td>
<td>2. 'Abdallah &amp; Ka'b</td>
<td>2. Abu Bakr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Ali</td>
<td>3. 'Uthman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Quraishi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. 'Uthman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Hajjaj</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ibn S'ad's tradition is earliest, al-Kindi's next, and al-Bukhāri's the latest. It would appear, according to Casanova, that this chronological development of the traditions shows al-Bukhāri's tradition to be partly fabricated inasmuch as it tightly links 'Uthman's recension to that of Abu Bakr's. The fabrication, moreover, appears to be in response to al-Kindi's version, since al-Bukhāri's is later in time.

Casanova concludes his argument by asking about the bones and palm branches. If they existed, the fear of Abu Bakr that the Qur'ān would disappear with the death of the Qurra would be unfounded. If they did not exist, then the references to the Qur'ān as a book (Kitāb) were later additions to the traditional accounts of the history of the Qur'ān. 'Uthman's edition failed to get the support of the entire empire. Consequently, we are left with the conclusion that the Qur'ān received its first official collection at the hands of Hajjaj.

¹ Casanova, op. cit., 2:122, n. 1.

² Casanova, op. cit., 2:141-142; he gives another argument at 2:123; "Ce qu'il y a de certain, c'est que c'est par ordre d'al Hadjdjadj que le C. recut sa forme definitive et aucun des exemplaires connus ne resmonte au dela de cette epoque. L'ecriture des plus anciens est contemporaine de 'Abd el Malik, sous qui vivait al Hadjdjadj." Eng. trans., "What is certain is that it is by Hajjaj's order that the [Qur'ān]
Mingana concludes his argument with the claim that the silence of Christian writers combined with their view of Islam as primarily a political movement establishes the theory that the lieutenant of Abd-al Malik, Hajjaj, felt the need to imitate "The People of the Book" and create for Islam the first official recension of the revelations of Muḥammad.  

The Untrustworthy Tradition Argument

Mingana and Casanova wish to dispense with most of the Islamic traditions on the history of the Qur'ān on the grounds that they were fabrications. We can conclude that they were fabricated because they were written down at a very late date and because they are obviously polemical in nature. The skepticism of this view originated with Ignaz Goldziher whose research into the development of the Hadith clearly demonstrated that many traditions were fabricated to meet political and religious requirements.

Apart from the tendentious traditions intended to serve as authority for the doctrines of a political or religious party, another use of the hadith for party purposes must be mentioned: the interpolation of tendentious words into hadiths which in their original form were unsuitable for the purposes party politics. The newly invented part was to pass unchallenged under the flag of the well-authenticated part.  

received its definite form and none of the known volumes goes back farther than that epoch. The writing of the most ancient [copies] is contemporaneous to Abd-al-Malik, under whom al-Hajjaj lived."


Muslims themselves admitted at an early date that traditions must be accepted with a jaundiced eye. And in time, a method for critically determining a better tradition from one likely to have been invented developed. This was the study of the isnad of the tradition, the line of informants which linked the contents of the story with the Prophet or one of his companions.

The critical assumption operating here asserts that historical data used in polemics is untrustworthy for it has been modified to suit a polemical purpose. Modern criticism uses this assumption everywhere, in Jewish, Christian and Islamic studies, usually under the name "form" or "redaction" criticism.

The names of form and redaction criticism suggest a preoccupation with literary problems. Form criticism takes its name from the classification of literary units according to their "forms." "Redaction" refers to the selecting, editing and arranging literary units according to a purpose. These are genuinely literary questions which are used in the service of two disciplines whose ultimate objectives are historical. The critical question comes to mind: "How does literary evidence support historical conclusions?" In understanding Islamic history we are concerned with the literary form "hadith" or "tradition." The literary form "hadith" is very apt to undergo alteration because of its use in polemics.

The type of polemics employed here by the early Muslims may be called "primitivism" because their argument takes the form of an appeal

\[1\] Ibid., p. 126.

\[2\] Ibid., p. 134-138.
to an earlier time or precedent. This kind of argument carries considerable risk, particularly if an eyewitness is available who can come forward and verify or reject the story. It was the theoretical possibility for this risk which led later Muslims to develop their studies of the isnads of the traditions. If the man in the isnad is said to have heard a certain story from another man who had died before the first man was born, the history of the transmission of the tradition is as doubtful as its contents.

Ultimately, this skepticism of the hadith which leads some scholars to throw the entire heap of traditions about the history of the Qur'an into the pile of fabricated traditions is circular. In order to establish the existence of the polemics which will cast doubt upon the traditions, the critic must rely to some extent upon the traditions which identify that polemic. It seems just as arbitrary to reject one or another tradition about the collection of the Qur'an\(^1\) as it does to reject the content of a tradition because it was used in polemics and then to present the tradition as evidence that the polemic occurred.

An appeal to the past cannot use fabricated events in a situation where the essential facts are well known. It can, however, selectively choose facts and present them in a manner most flattering to the thesis in question.

\(^1\)Mingana, "Transmission, "op. cit., p. 228 quotes Casanova, op. cit., 2:105 as follows; "Quant a admettre une seule des traditions comme vraie au détriment de l'autre, c'est ce qui me paraît impossible sans tomber dans l'arbitraire." Eng. trans., "As far as admitting one sole tradition as real to the detriment of the other, that is what seems to me impossible without falling into arbitrariness."
Casanova's Argument

Casanova's position on the other personal collections follows from this thesis that the early Muslims were initially concerned with the imminent end of the world and not with collecting the Qur'an. As a consequence, he dates the final establishment of the text of the Qur'an later even than 'Uthman's in the reign of Abd-al-Malik which extended from 685 to 705 C.E.

If someone thinks it is incredible that they had dreamt, so late, of the recension of the sacred book, I will respond, in effect, that it is incredible that the Muslims worried about something other than the imminence of the end of the world.¹

According to Casanova, the early Muslims could not see any purpose in writing anything down, for the world was about to end. Only when the majority of Muslims had given up the notion that the world would end within one or two generations did they begin putting the Qur'an and the hadith into writing.² As a consequence, he consigns the traditions on Abu Bakr's and 'Uthman's collections to the list of fabricated traditions.³

¹ Casanova, op. cit., 2:120. To enter a discussion on this thesis about the early Muslims would divert attention from the main topic of this thesis, the collection of the Qur'an. It is sufficient to mention here Bell's criticism of Casanova's thesis: "The main objection...is that it is not founded on a study of the Qur'an so much as upon an investigation of some of the byways of early Islam...But when Casanova deals with the Qur'an itself, his statements often display incorrect exegesis and a total lack of appreciation for the historical development of Muhammad's teaching." Bell, Introduction, op. cit., p. 47; Watt, Bell's Introduction, op. cit., pp. 53-54.

² Casanova, op. cit., 2:121.

³ Ibid., p. 106.
When the Muslims began realizing that the world was not about to end, it became necessary to preserve the revelations of Muhammad for posterity. Several people began collecting the Qur'an according to the oral traditions of the different schools of the Qurra. The text in its first and final official form was established by Hajjaj under the Caliph Abd-al-Malik. We have confirmation of this claim in the fact that the most ancient of the Qur'anic writings extant dates to Abd-al-Malik's reign.1

What Casanova had done was to place the collection and formation of the Qur'an against a backdrop of early Muslim theology. Instead of attempting to reconcile differing traditions or to determine which traditions is nearer the truth than the other, Casanova with this argument draws out implications for the Qur'an's textual history from a theory about the beliefs of early Muslims. He has adopted a different method from the scholars who went before him, a method which at least in its theoretical aspects has been adopted by more recent scholars, who will be discussed in the next chapter.

Without entering a discussion about his thesis that the early Muslims were more interested in the impending end of the world than in collecting a book of Muhammad's oracles, the method he adopted deserves at least theoretical comment. The premise for his argument about the Qur'an is the early belief of the Muslims. The implications he draws from the premise will stand or fall depending upon the truth of the premise. Mingana, although he cites the conclusions of Casanova with favor because they agree with his conclusions about the Qur'an,

1Ibid., p. 123; supra, p. 78, n. 24.
believed that the Christians contemporary with the rise of Islam saw the Muslims more as a political force than a new religion. ¹

The Collection of Hajjaj

Khan does not even mention the collection of the Qur'ān under the direction of Hajjah. He explicitly states that the Qur'ān was collected three times; first, in the presence of the Prophet by several of his companions; second, by order of Abu Bakr; third, the arrangement of the Surahs by 'Uthman. ²

Watt apparently gave Hajjaj credit for the introduction of dia-critical marks and vowel points, but not for an entirely new recension. In this Bell apparently agrees. ³

Jeffery, on the other hand, agreed with Mingana that Hajjah was responsible for more than the mere introduction of phonetic markings. To support his position he not only mentioned the apology of al-Kindi, but also the Kitab al-Masahif of ibn Abi Dawud. ⁴ Al-Kindi's claim that Hajjaj had made extensive alterations in the text and that everyone knew about these changes becomes more credible when we read ibn Abi Dawud's list of Hajjaj's changes. The nature of Hajjaj's text is im-

⁴ Jeffery, "Textual History," op. cit., p. 45.


² Khan, op. cit., p. 187.

³ Watt, Bell's Introduction, op. cit., p. 48; Bell, Introduction, op. cit., p. 43.

⁴ Jeffery, Materials, op. cit., p. 49.
received text of today is based not on 'Uthman's text but on Hajjaj's. If we can accept al-Kindi's narrative, Hajjaj followed 'Uthman's example and recalled the defective texts for destruction. His was published throughout the land as the official text. Although fewer traditions survive which give us details about this recension than any other, a few have been collected by Mingana. In one, the Governor of Egypt expressed anger over Hajjaj's action.¹ In another, the Caliph 'Abd-al-Malik, under whose orders the new recension was made, once said:

I fear death in the month of Ramadan—in it I was born, and in it I was weaned, in it I have collected the Qur'an, and in it I was elected Caliph.²

Al-Kindi's story, however, being found in an apology for Christianity, can hardly be less polemical in nature than the other traditions. On the other hand, owing to the traditional belief and doctrinal necessity that 'Uthman's was the final and definitive collection, it is no wonder that so few traditions about this later version survive.

²Ibid., p. 231.
CHAPTER VI

NEW PERSPECTIVES TO AN OLD PROBLEM

Introductory Remarks

In the development of western scholarship on the history of the Qur'ān, a definite trend emerges.

Nöldeke opened modern discussion of the problem with his Geschichte des Qorans in 1860. His conclusions about the textual history of the Qur'ān depended in a large measure upon a method which sought to bring harmony to the conflicting traditions. His was by no means a naïve approach, for he also took into account linguistic data and he brought to bear a critical eye which recognized the function traditions played in the polemics of the day. Nevertheless, he apparently was unwilling to throw all the traditions concerning the history of the Qur'ānic text onto the heap of fabricated traditions and as a consequence he drew a charge from Casanova that he was arbitrary in his selection of traditions.¹

The English scholars, Bell, Jeffery and Watt, drew upon Nöldeke's work for their own conclusions. Their method did not differ much from Nöldeke's. They collected the relevant traditions, placed them side by side for comparison, and brought to bear the critical principle that some of the traditions could not be trusted because their content and sometimes survival often depended upon their utility in debates. When

¹ pp. 38, 57, supra.
their conclusions differed from Nöldeke's conclusions, the difference was due, not to the adoptions of different methods, but to the addition of new data. The English scholars had the advantage over Nöldeke in that they had more material to work with.¹

With Caetani, Mingana and Casanova appeared a more comprehensive method of study. Caetani looked for historical data about the politics of the era and placed his conclusion against the backdrop of a political milieu.² Mingana sought evidence from Christian writers; finding none, he adopted the position that the Qur'ān did not receive its canonization until very late.³ Casanova went further afield for his evidence. He looked into the historical evidence for the beliefs of the early Muslims and from there drew his conclusions about the textual history of the Qur'ān.⁴

Casanova's method deserves special attention for, at least in its theoretical aspects, it appears to be the method adopted by two recent studies regarding the history of the Qur'ānic text. The theory of Casanova's method is to first draw a picture of the religious situation of early Muslims. On the assumption that a literary event such as the Qur'ān does not occur in a vacuum but requires for its existence a motivation which arises out of a situation in life, Casanova concluded that the conditions for the canonical text of the Qur'ān could not have

¹ pp. 26, 41, 45, 58, supra.
² pp. 41, 60, supra.
³ pp. 14, 39, 67-78, supra.
⁴ p. 81, supra.
occurred until very late under the reign of Abd-al-Malik.

Two studies appeared in 1977 which adopt a similar method. John Burton's, The Collection of the Qur'ān, attempts to establish first the notion that the Qur'ān was the source for early Muslim law. A review of the theoretical aspects of the Islamic legal sciences led him to the conclusion that the Qur'ān as we have it today was established as canonical probably very near the Prophet's death. ¹ John Wansbrough's Qur'ānic Studies, also published in 1977, adopted a theoretically similar method, but placed the canonization of the Qur'ān very late in early Islam. Wansbrough's is a wide ranging study of early Islamic literature through which he traces the development of a canon of scripture. ²

Both Burton and Wansbrough, like Casanova, established a thesis first about the situation in the life of the early Muslims. Having established their theory of the Sitz in Leben they then draw conclusions from that theory about the text of the Qur'ān. While the theoretical structure of the method is similar, the conclusions differ significantly. Wansbrough argued for a date of canonization even later than Casanova, while Burton concluded that the Qur'ānic text was established upon the Prophet's death. The conclusions of all three scholars differ because, as will be shown for the cases of Burton and Wansbrough in this chapter, their assessment of the life situation differs remarkably.

¹ Burton, op. cit., pp. 239-240.

John Wansbrough

Wansbrough's work is probably the most extensive application of the principles of form and redaction criticism to the early Islamic literature. His work has been described by one critic as "seminal" and has been compared by another critic to the work of Schacht on the development of the Islamic law and to the work of Goldziher on the traditions. Wansbrough made a wide ranging review of the commentaries on the Qur'an from their earliest examples to the work of Tabari and beyond, studying them in manuscript form.

According to Wansbrough, the development of the commentaries went through three stages of development.

In the first stage, which he calls "haggadic," the commentaries were written primarily for the edification and pious entertainment of the Islamic communities. Consequently, they display a narrative style with almost no technical terminology. As an example of this he cites the story of Ja'far b. Abi Tālib who went to Ethiopia to bring back the members of Muḥammad's young movement who had fled there to escape persecution. Ja'far explained their situation as follows:

1. We were a people, a folk in ignorance.
2. Worshipping idols.
3. And eating carrion.
4. Frequenting prostitutes.
5. And severing ties of kinship.
6. Violating the rules of security.
7. The powerful among us oppressing the weak.

---


2 Issa J. Boullata, review of Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation, by John Wansbrough, in Muslim World 67 (1977): 306.
Thus we were until:

1. God sent to us a messenger chosen from our midst, whose background, honesty, faithfulness, and ..we knew,

2. Who called us to God, to associate no one with Him, to worship Him, to rid ourselves of the stones and images which we and our fathers had been worshipping. He commanded us to worship God alone and to associate nothing to Him.

3. (And he commanded us) to abstain from that which is forbidden and from blood.

4. And he forbade us prostitutes.

5. (And he commanded us) to observe the ties of kinship.

6. And to abide by the rules of security.

7. (And he forbade us) to devour the property of orphans.

8. And he commanded us to speak honestly and to act in good faith; and (to abstain from) false speech and the slander of honorable women.

9. And he commanded us to fulfil the duties of prayer, almsgiving, and fasting.¹

This, explained Wansbrough, is "not unlike prescriptions of essentials for the new faith published from time to time by the Christian apostles."²

What makes this catechism interesting, said Wansbrough, is its relationship with the received text of the Qur'ān. We are led to suppose either that the contents of the catechism were revealed before the immigration to Ethiopia, or that the catechism embodies the prophetic words which were later confirmed by incorporation into the text of the Qur'ān.³ The use here of counterpoint suggests a composition designed to assist memory in oral transmission. And since it is improbable that the references to the Qur'ān here were revealed before the escape to Ethiopia, Wansbrough concludes that the words of the Prophet were


²Ibid., p. 39; Acts 15:20, 28-29.

³Ibid., pp. 41-42.
transmitted for some time before they were collected into the canon.

The "halakhic" commentaries are characteristic of the next stage of commentary development. These commentaries show a preoccupation with judicial questions. The language became more complex and the reasoning more sophisticated. For the first time there appears the attempt to place the prophetic sayings into a chronological order. ¹ About the same time, commentaries with philological emphasis appeared. These commentaries exhibit what Wansbrough called "Masoretic Exegesis." These commentaries exhibit three elements which characterize their approach: lexical explanation, grammatical analysis and an apparatus of variant readings. ² Wansbrough appealed to the work of Schact to support his assertion that the appeal to scripture for authority in legal matters did not occur until the appearance of the "halakhic" commentaries, ³ sometime in the third century after the hijirah. The "masoretic" exegetes were responsible for the development of a "theological" grammar which was an attempt to bring order to the literary chaos of the Qur'ān. ⁴

Apart from his survey of the early Islamic literature, Wansbrough adduced from the Qur'ān itself evidence that it went through a long period of oral transmission before parts of it began to be written down. One of the most interesting features from a literary perspective of the

¹Ibid., 158-159; Boullata, op. cit., p. 307.
³Ibid., p. 44.
⁴Ibid., p. 207: "...the variant traditions exhibit at least the components of a process by which scripture was produced from revelation."
of the Qurʾān is the many examples of stories which are repeated in different parts of the Qurʾān. Wansbrough cites two examples of these,¹ places them side by side for comparison and draws historical conclusions from the comparison. The first inference is the fact that each version of the same story tends to show a progression of exegetical additions to the story.² The second inference is that the Qurʾān was formed by placing side by side separate collections of the sayings of the Prophet:

The failure to eliminate repetition in the canon might be attributed to the status which these logia had already achieved in the several(?) communities within which they originated and by whose members they were transmitted.³

The first inference is evidence of a period of oral transmission of the Qurʾān. The second inference permits the conclusion that the text of the Qurʾān achieved canonical status as the result of compromise between competing schools of thought. As a consequence of these literary studies, Wansbrough considers the traditions preserved by the Muslims on the history of the Qurʾānic text to be stories developed to describe the origin of their scriptures. First, he groups the traditions into one of three themes. The traditions tend to indicate either that the Qurʾān was handed down to us from a collection by the Prophet himself or by one of his close companions, or that the Qurʾān as we have it today is the result of the work of a committee under Uthman. The third theme in the

¹Ibid., p. 21, cites the Qurʾān 7:85-93, 11:84-95, and 26:176-190 as one example and 55:62-77 and 46-61 as the second example.

²Ibid., p. 27; on Qurʾān 55:62-77 and 46-61 Wansbrough writes: "...version A represents an elaboration of version B, both by rhetorical device and exegetical gloss."

³Ibid., p. 50, his exclamation.
traditions is to harmonize the stories grouped in one or the other of themes just mentioned. The first type of story, which traces the origin of the Qur'ān to the Prophet or his companions, is an attempt to produce the most reliable history for the text as possible, much along the same lines the Rabbinic stories on how Moses received the Torah.\(^1\) The second theme in the traditions is a construction which reminds us of the Rabbinic academy at Jamnia which provided the written form of Jewish traditions.\(^2\)

Wansbrough therefore concludes:

The fact of canonicity may be seen as a kind of watershed in the transmission history of the Qur'ānic revelation. Development beyond that point, which I should hesitate to set before the end of the second/eighth century, is to be elicited from a study of exegesis and commentary. Description of the course of events up to that date is, I have more than once suggested, frustrated by the form in which pertinent witness has been preserved. Any attempt at reconstruction is thus hazardous, being limited to tenuous conclusions from literary analogies.\(^3\)

John Burton

Burton, like Wansbrough his teacher,\(^4\) adopted a method which looks first to the cultural background before attempting to consider the traditions relating to the history of the Qur'ānic text. Where Wansbrough looked first to the development of Islamic literature in general, Burton considers first the legal sciences before attempting an analysis of the traditions. Specifically, Burton is interested in the role of the Qur'ān as a source for law.\(^5\)

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 45. \(^2\)Ibid., p. 46. \(^3\)Ibid., p. 49.
\(^4\)Burton, op. cit., p. vii.
\(^5\)Ibid., pp. 6, 12.
Burton began his argument with the distinction between the words "Qur'ān" and "mushaf" a distinction used by the Muslims in determining the source for their law. The Qur'ān refers to an idea, not an object: by "Qur'ān" is meant the entirety of the revelations granted to the Prophet.1 "Mushaf" on the other hand, refers to the physical object, the book which is often in nontechnical discussion called the Qur'ān. According to Burton, the Muslims using this distinction were "virtually unanimous in the opinion that our present texts are incomplete."2

Burton then turns his attention to the legal sciences of naskh. There were three modes of naskh, corresponding to the three logically possible means by which either the wording of a proscription on the ruling itself could be abrogated. Each mode functioned in the resolution of conflicting theological conclusions. The first mode of naskh occurred when there was a suppression of both the wording and the ruling.3 The second mode consisted in those instances where a ruling might be suppressed but not the wording.4 In the third mode the ruling remained, but the wording was suppressed.5

The first mode of naskh is important because through it the early Muslim schoolmen were able to neutralize the conflict between the references in the Qur'ān (17:86, 87:6-7, 2:106) to the Prophet's forgetting the Qur'ān and the theological axiom that God's Word was too important to be lost by the forgetfulness of his Prophet. If both the wording and the ruling are suppressed because God chose to cause his Prophet to

---

2 Ibid.
3 Burton, Collection, op. cit., p. 46. 4 Ibid., p. 49. 5 Ibid., Chapter 4, pp. 68-113.
forget the proscription, the emphasis is put on the Will of God and not on the weakness of the Prophet.¹

The second mode of naskh, which holds that the ruling of an earlier statement can be replaced by a subsequent statement, with the wording remaining in the mushaf, corresponds to what has popularly been called the doctrine of abrogation. The early schools were able to agree that the Qur'an could abrogate the Qur'an and that the Sunna, the traditions on the Prophet's actions, could abrogate the Sunna. But between the Qur'an and the Sunna, which took precedence?² One school argued that the Qur'an, being of divine origin, could not be abrogated by the Sunna which is of human origin. Another school argued that the wording of the Qur'an might not be affected, but the ruling embodied by those words could be suppressed.³ The former school won the debate.

Finally, there is the third mode of naskh, where the wording might be suppressed, but the ruling remained valid Islamic law. An example of this is the famous "stoning verse." The penalty for adultery according to the Qur'an as we have it today, is a flogging of one hundred strokes.⁴ But the Sunna holds that the penalty is stoning, for this was Muhammad's practice. Applying the third mode of naskh we find that the wording of the verse has been suppressed from our mushaf, but the ruling has remained. The continued existence of the ruling abrogates the flogging penalty in the Qur'an. Thus, we have an example of an omission from the mushaf which remained in the Qur'an.⁵ The third mode of naskh was not universally recognized among the early schoolmen.

The group which rejected it were worried that its adoption would put an end to the creative role of the Sunna in formulating the law.\(^1\)

Having reviewed the development of the legal sciences within early Islam, Burton turned his attention to the traditions about the collection and transmission of the Qur'anic text. The concern about the Qur'ān as a source of law eventually required the early school men to take a clear look at the document itself; when they did they found that the texts did not always support the ruling currently practiced.\(^2\)

For theoretical reasons, the Sunna could not abrogate the Qur'ān. Therefore,

\[\ldots\text{assisted by the general lack of information on the history of the earliest period, [the schoolmen] persuaded themselves that the lacunae in their Qur'ān texts could be accounted for rationally only on the assumption that the Prophet had not collected and checked the revelation.}\] \(^3\)

As a consequence, the early Muslim schoolmen were motivated by two factors to exclude Muhammad from the history of the collection of the text.\(^4\)

In view of the theory of naskh, there was a need to continue referring to the Qur'ān, as opposed to the mushaf, when the current rulings could not find support in the text. Second, there remained the need to justify differing regional attitudes by reference to Qur'ān variants.

Thus, if the Prophet had collected the Qur'ān, there would not be omitted any verse still valid. The traditions developed that companions of the Prophet collected the Qur'ān.\(^5\) It appears that all the traditions agree: Muhammad did not collect the Qur'ān before he died.\(^6\)

\[\ldots\text{the Muslims simply could not afford to find themselves in possession of a Qur'ān document that had been edited, checked and promulgated by its Prophet-recipient. That was because they}\]

\(^1\) Burton, *Collection*, op. cit., pp. 103-104.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 161. \(^3\) Ibid., p. 162. \(^4\) Ibid., p. 163. \(^5\) Ibid. \(^6\) Ibid., p. 160.
argued that certain elements of Islamic Law derived from revealed and still surviving Qur'an revelations, were nowhere referred to in the mushaf.

This motive induced the Muslims to exclude their Prophet from the history of the collection of their Qur'an texts. It was a compelling motive. It was their only motive.¹

The early Muslim scholars, in developing the theory of naskh, relied upon two Qur'anic verses. In combining Qur'an 2:106 with 16:101, they had the following proposition:

When We substitute one āya for another, We shall bring one better than it or one like it.

The theory of naskh therefore rested solely upon the term "Ayah" which was interpreted to mean a verse in the Qur'an. But, according to Burton, the better meaning is ritual or practice:

What seems more likely, in view of the contexts in which each of these key verses occurs, is that, in each instance, the notoriously difficult term āya refers to an individual ritual or legal regulation established and hallowed in one religious tradition, the Jewish, and now modified in a later tradition, the Islamic.²

The theory of naskh, moreover, was responsible for the development of variant readings of the Qur'an, omitted from the mushaf, to support local legal practice. This motive is particularly clear in the case of the tradition on Uthman's collections, according to Burton. But if the stories on the other codices are fabrications to support variant readings which the science of naskh postulated, the story of the 'Uthmanic recension must also fall as a fabrication. Since "So far as they have

¹Ibid., p. 232.
²Ibid., p. 237.
been examined to date, all Qur'ān [manuscripts] exhibit throughout the 'Uthmanic text.' Burton was led to the conclusion that a single text has always united the Muslims:

We have isolated and neutralized the only motive for excluding Muhammad from the editing and promulgating of the Qur'ān texts. In those processes, Muhammad at last must now be once more re-instated. What we have today in our hands is the muṣḥaf of Muhammad.¹

¹Ibid., p. 239.

²Ibid., pp. 239-240.
CHAPTER VII

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

This survey of more than one century of inquiry into the riddle of the collection and transmission of the Qur'ān has revealed a variety of methods and a variety of conclusions. Disagreement between the orientalists goes so far as to question the profitability of exploring one or another area of Islamic literature. Mingana, for example, doubted that a serious scholar would profit from a study of the science of naskh. ¹ Sixty three years later Burton was compelled to seek an answer to the riddle of the Qur'ān's genesis within the subtleties of the naskh sciences.

The attempt by Casanova, Wanbrough, Burton and Caetani to look beyond the traditions to their development against a cultural background were alike inasmuch as they took into account the dynamic situation in which oral traditions are preserved and passed down to posterity. They differed in their conclusions, not because of the theoretical basis for their method, but because they each chose a small segment out of the cultural background upon which to focus. Casanova was interested in the early beliefs of the Muslims about the end of the world. Wansbrough was interested in the historical development of the commentaries. Burton was interested in the political situation faced by the early Caliphs.

¹ Mingana, Leaves., op. cit., p. xvi: "those abrogated passages of the Quran are distinguished by many of the rigid commentators into three kinds...These subtleties of the theological schools do not afford a profitable subject of study for the serious critic."
The English scholars, Bell, Watt and Jeffery followed the lead of Nöldeke. They looked to the traditions of Islam and tried to make some sense to the confusing and often conflicting historical data they contained. They were willing to recognize that many of them were colored by the polemics from which they were born, but unwilling to throw out on that basis all the historical data they contained. Mingana sought additional evidence from the contemporary Christian writers and for the early centuries found none; but when he found evidence in a later Christian writer, while rejecting the Islamic traditions for their polemical bias, ignored the polemics of al-Kindi.

The riddle of the Qur'an's collection and transmission, despite a century of intensive effort, has not yet been solved. If there is a lesson in this history of scholarly inquiry it must be that a single method will not solve the riddle, that neither thorough skepticism of the materials available, nor the naïve acceptance of their content will solve the riddle, and that selectivity, whether it be in the evidence chosen to support a thesis or the segment of the culture against which materials will be placed, will not solve the riddle. If the riddle is to be solved at all it will require a wide range of inquiry into the many facets of the culture of the early Muslims, their dealings with the cultures with whom they came into contact, and an open mind to the materials available.

These conclusions are so fundamental that it might be said they are mere truisms, too banal to warrant comment. The response to such a criticism is the history of a century of inquiry into the collection and transmission of the Qur'an. Ignoring the fundamentals has led to a number of conclusions which are as conflicting and confused as the
materials upon which they are based. Perhaps, as one student has concluded, the riddle is insoluble:

The story of the gathering of the Qur'ān that lies behind the orthodox tradition is beyond our reach. The Qur'ān is too multifaceted and early Muslims too various in their needs and emphases within the umma for any single approach to solve solvable problems, let alone insoluble ones.

But the mountain of Muslim tradition, because it is there, will always be explored by infatigable students. The history of the inquiry into the history of the Qur'ānic text should be a warning to prospective students of the hadith: Even easy riddles can't be solved if the fundamentals are forgotten.

1Johns, op. cit., p. 272.
WORKS CONSULTED


Altane, B. "Raymundus Lullus und der Sprachen Kanon (can. 11) des Konzils von Vienne (1312)." *Historisches Jahrbuch* 52 (1933):190-219.


