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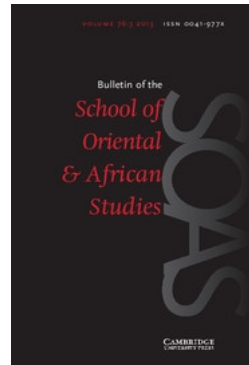
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When did the consonantal skeleton of the Quran reach closure? Part I[1]

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Abstract

The Islamic tradition credits the promulgation of a uniform consonantal skeleton (*rasm*) of the Quran to the third caliph ʿUthmān (r. 644–656). However, in recent years various scholars have espoused a conjectural dating of the Quran's codification to the time of ʿAbd al-Malik, or have at least maintained that the Islamic scripture was open to significant revision up until *c*. 700 CE. This two-part article proposes to undertake a systematic assessment of this hypothesis. The first instalment assesses the evidence adduced in favour of a late seventh-century closure of the Quranic text, including the interest which ʿAbd al-Malik's governor al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf reportedly took in the text. It is argued that neither the epigraphic nor the literary evidence examined is incompatible with the conventional dating of the Quranic text.

Keywords: Quran, *Rasm*, Codification, Transmission, ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān, Al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf

Introduction

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

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

2 Al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb and Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, 4 vols (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-salafiyya, AH 1400), vol. 3, 337–8, no. 4986–7 (66.3).

3 The Islamic tradition is contradictory on the question whether Zayd or somebody else was the first to have collected the Quran (see Alphonse Mingana, "The transmission of the Kurʾān", *Muslim World* 7, 1917, 223–32, at 224–5).

which apparently took place in 30/650–1,[4] the commander Ḥudhayfa ibn al-Yamān became alarmed at differences he had observed between military contingents from Iraq and Syria in reciting the Quran. In order to promote uniformity,[5] ʿUthmān ordered that Zayd's recension – which had ended up in the possession of ʿUmar's daughter Ḥafṣa – be copied down in proper codices (maṣāḥif) and that these be dispatched to the various regions of the empire. Diverging versions of the text were to be burnt.

The modern debate as to whether this narrative can be considered historically reliable was triggered by Paul Casanova and Alphonse Mingana who, writing in 1911 and 1915–16, maintained that the codification of the Quran only occurred at the initiative of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān (685–705) and his Iraqi governor al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, possibly on the basis of "previous traditions".[6] By contrast, Friedrich Schwally, in his influential revision of Nöldeke's Geschichte des Qorāns (1919), accepted the ʿUthmānic origin of the standard rasm,[7] a verdict which became the default view of most subsequent scholarship. It was only in 1977 that a backlash against this sanguine position occurred: in Hagarism, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook operate with an eighth-century date for the compilation of the Quran,[8] and John Wansbrough's Quranic Studies pushes the closure of the text forwards even further, to the end of the eighth century.[9] But since Wansbrough's very late dating has increasingly come to be seen as untenable,[10] scholars inclined to doubt Schwally's conclusions have once more become attracted to the hypothesis of a "mid-Umayyad date" for the arrival of the Quran.[11] As a result, a conjectural dating of the Quran to the time of ʿAbd al-Malik has acquired remarkable popularity in recent years: Chase

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4 The campaign mentioned in al-Zuhrī's account is probably to be identified with a campaign that al-Ṭabarī reports for AH 30 in Annales, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901), series 1, vol. 5, 2856 – thus Theodor Nöldeke, Geschichte des Qorāns, revised by Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Otto Pretzl, 3 vols (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1909–38, henceforth GdQ), vol. 2, 49.

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

6 Mingana, "Transmission of the Kurʾān according to Christian writers", Muslim World 7, 1917, 402–14, at 414, citing Paul Casanova, Mohammed et la fin du monde: Étude critique sur l'Islam primitif (Paris: P. Gauthier, 1911), 141–2.

7 GdQ, vol. 2, 1–121.

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

9 John Wansbrough, Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 49.

10 E.g. Fred Donner, Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998), 35–63 and Patricia Crone, "Two legal problems bearing on the early history of the Qurʾān", Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam 18, 1994, 1–37, here 16–18.

11 Crone, "Two legal problems".

Robinson,[12] Alfred-Louis de Prémare,[13] David Powers[14] and Stephen Shoemaker[15] all deem a codification of the Quran under ʿAbd al-Malik to have been more likely than under ʿUthmān, or at least take the view that the Islamic scripture was open to significant revision up until *c.* 700 CE.

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

More germane to the issue is the groundbreaking work of Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi on the famous palimpsest ("Ṣanʿāʾ 1") of which a large part is preserved in the Dār al-Makhṭūṭāt at Ṣanʿāʾ as DAM 01–27.1.[18] Sadeghi and Goudarzi have now edited forty folios of this manuscript's lower writing, which at present constitutes our only material witness to a non-standard recension of the Quran's consonantal skeleton.[19] The text-type attested by the *scriptio inferior* ("C-1") is recognizably a version of the Quran as we have it, yet exhibits frequent divergences from the canonical *rasm*, ranging from differences in the grammatical person of verbs and suffixes to the omission, addition, and transposition of words and brief phrases. C-1 also arranges the *sūra*s in a different order, although the order of verses within a given *sūra* displays almost no deviation from the standard *rasm*.[20] Crucially, there is now considerable scientific evidence that the palimpsest is very early: together with Uwe Bergmann, Sadeghi has subjected a stray folio which appears to have originally belonged to

12 Chase Robinson, ʿAbd al-Malik (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 100–4.
13 Alfred-Louis de Prémare, *Les fondations de l'islam: Entre écriture et histoire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), 278–323; de Prémare, *Aux origines du Coran: questions d'hier, approches d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Téraèdre, 2004); de Prémare, "ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān et le processus de constitution du Coran", in Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin (eds), *Die dunklen Anfänge: Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam* (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2005), 179–210.
14 David S. Powers, *Muḥammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).
15 Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 136–58.
16 Harald Motzki, "The collection of the Qur'ān: a reconsideration of Western views in light of recent methodological developments", *Der Islam* 78, 2001, 1–34.
17 Shoemaker, *Death*, 148.
18 Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, "The codex of a companion of the Prophet and the Qur'ān of the Prophet", *Arabica* 57, 2010, 343–436, at 344.
19 Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, "Ṣanʿāʾ 1 and the origins of the Qur'ān", *Der Islam* 87, 2012, 1–129. Sadeghi has informed me that the Grand Mosque of Ṣanʿāʾ houses forty more folios of the palimpsest.
20 Ibid., 23.

the palimpsest to radio carbon dating, which has yielded a 95 per cent probability that the parchment was produced (i.e. that the animal was killed) between 578 and 669 CE; the probability of the material being older than 655.5 CE is 91.8 per cent (for 660.5 CE 95.5 per cent).[21] If one makes the reasonable assumption that the parchment was utilized relatively quickly after the death of the animal, a pre-660 dating of Ṣanʿāʾ 1 would currently seem to be the most defensible assessment, despite the fact that the radio carbon dating of codices with a known date of completion has been known to produce dates that are too early by several decades.[22] This considerably narrows the range of viable hypotheses about the Quran's textual history and makes it highly likely that by 660 a considerable portion of the corpus, albeit with numerous discrepancies, had been committed to writing and attained a broadly familiar shape. We may also follow Sadeghi in accepting that the palimpsest does not form a *terminus post quem* for the standard *rasm:* its erasure in order to make room for the standard version of the Quran does not entail that the latter can only have arisen after the palimpsest was produced.[23]

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

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

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

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

24 See, for example, Robinson, ʿAbd al-Malik, 104.

Evidence in favour of a late-seventh-century closure of the Quran
Epigraphic evidence

According to its building notice, the Dome of the Rock was finished in 72 AH = 691/2 CE.[25] Its arcade exhibits two mosaic inscriptions consisting of a series of Quranic segments interspersed with several instances of the *basmala*, various forms of the *shahāda*, and blessings on Muhammad and Jesus. The Umayyad portions of the copper plaques over the eastern and northern entrance to the Dome also string together a number of apparently Quranic phrases.[26] In both cases, the Quranic material diverges in a number of instances from the standard *rasm*: for example, a phrase from Q 64:1 and two others from Q 57:2 are conflated into a statement of divine omnipotence that appears twice;[27] and on one of the copper plaques, Q 7:156, a divine first-person statement appears in the third person. (Incidentally, similar observations apply to the use of Quranic material in early Islamic graffiti.[28]) To Robinson, all of this suggests that "Qur'anic texts must have remained at least partially fluid through the late seventh and early eighth century".[29] Shoemaker follows suit by qualifying the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock as "perhaps the most prominent and inescapable" support for the "relative instability" of the Quran at the time of the building's construction.[30] To be sure, in view of the high probability of a pre-660 date of Ṣanʿāʾ 1 such instability must have had clear limits, but as far as the palimpsest has so far been published it is not, for example, irreconcilable with a hypothetical claim that Q 112 may be a Marwanid addition to the Quran,[31] or that the statement of divine omnipotence on the Dome's arcade may only subsequently have been reworked into the opening verses of *sūra*s 64 and 57.

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25 On the date see Jeremy Johns, "Archaeology and the history of early Islam: the first seventy years", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 46, 2003, 411–36, at 424–6.

26 The inscriptions are transcribed in Christel Kessler, "ʿAbd al-Malik's inscription in the Dome of the Rock: a reconsideration", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1970, 2–64; for a translation of the inscriptions and the plaques see Estelle Whelan, "Forgotten witness: evidence for the early codification of the Qur'ān", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118, 1998, 1–14.

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

28 Robert Hoyland, "The content and context of early Arabic inscriptions", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21, 1997, 77–101, at 87–8.

29 Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, 103. Robinson also draws attention to similar divergences in early literary texts, such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's letter to ʿAbd al-Malik (cf. Michael Cook, *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 120–22).

30 Shoemaker, *Death*, 148.

31 On the use of Q 112 on Marwanid coinage see Stefan Heidemann, "The evolving representation of the early Islamic empire and its religion on coin imagery", in Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx (eds), *The Qurʾān in Context: Literary and Historical Investigations into the Qurʾānic Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 149–95, at 184–6.

Still, one must obviously ask whether other interpretations are possible. Strikingly, de Prémare is much less confident than Robinson and Shoemaker of the probative force of the epigraphic data.[32] And indeed there is much to recommend such an assessment: as Estelle Whelan has argued, divergences of the kind described above may be viewed as resulting from an adaptation of Quranic quotations to their epigraphic context, a procedure that is also observable in later inscriptions.[33] For instance, a conversion of Q 7:156 from the first to the third person could have served to bring it into line with the preceding quotation (Q 6:12), also in the third person. Even if Whelan's explanation may not be the only tenable one, it certainly constitutes a perfectly satisfactory way of accounting for the evidence: Shoemaker's curt dismissal of her article as "special pleading" is therefore worryingly cavalier.[34] In essence, then, the epigraphic data is indeterminate and compatible both with a traditional view of the Quran's codification and with the emergent canon model.

Al-Ḥajjāj and the Quran

At least two Umayyad governors of Basra and Kufa appear to have played some role in the Quran's textual history. First, there is the case of ʿUbaydallāh ibn Ziyād (killed 67/686). According to a report that Ibn Abī Dāwūd traces back to his scribe Yazīd al-Fārisī, ʿUbaydallāh added *alfay ḥarfin* to the codex, which could be translated either as "two thousand letters" or, more remarkably, as "two thousand words".[35] Ibn Abī Dāwūd explains that what ʿUbaydallāh ibn Ziyād did was to change the orthography of the words *qālū* and *kānū* from q-l-w and k-n-w to q-'-l-w-' and k-'-n-w-'. It is not *prima facie* obvious, of course, that this captures the original meaning of the tradition. De Prémare, obviously attracted to a maximalist construal of *alfay ḥarfin* as "two thousand words", rejects Ibn Abī Dāwūd's interpretation on the grounds that a plene spelling of *ā* is already found in Muʿāwiya's inscription on a dam near al-Ṭāʾif, which to him suggests that by the time of ʿUbaydallāh ibn Ziyād this spelling must also have become standard in Quranic manuscripts and therefore no longer needed promoting.[36] However, this reasoning is refuted by the variation in the spelling of *ā* in early Quranic manuscripts.[37] On the face of it, then, there is as much reason to view the report as associating ʿUbaydallāh with an increasing switch-over to plene spelling as to consider it to reflect a major overhaul of scripture.[38]

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32 De Prémare, "Processus de constitution", 183.
33 Whelan, "Forgotten witness", 6.
34 Shoemaker, *Death*, 321, n. 132.
35 Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, ed. in Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾān: The Old Codices* (Leiden: Brill, 1937), 117 (Arabic text).
36 *Fondations*, 293–4.
37 See Keith Small, *Textual Criticism and Qurʾān Manuscripts* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 36–44; François Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran dans les débuts de l'islam: Le codex Parisino-petropolitanus* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 51–75.
38 See *GdQ*, vol. 3, 256. For a different interpretation of the tradition, which presupposes the reading *alfay ḥarfin*, "the two *alif*s of a word", see Omar Hamdan, *Studien zur Kanonisierung des Korantextes: Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrīs Beiträge zur Geschichte des Korans* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 135–7. According to Hamdan, what

Let us turn to the second case: the strong interest reportedly taken by ʿAbd al-Malik's Iraqi governor al-Ḥajjāj in the Quranic text.[39] Al-Ḥajjāj is said to have once convoked a group of Quran readers in order to count the text's consonants, words and verses, and to divide it into sections of equal length.[40] He is also credited with requesting his scribes, or more specifically one Naṣr ibn ʿĀṣim (d. 89/707–8), a student of Abū al-Aswad al-Duʾalī, to introduce diacritical signs into Quranic manuscripts.[41] What may be a secondary synthesis of such reports is given by the exegete Ibn ʿAṭiyya (d. 541/1146–7), according to whom al-Ḥajjāj, on the order of ʿAbd al-Malik, instructed al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Yaḥyā ibn Yaʿmar to supply the Quran with diacritical marks and vowel signs, then had the text divided up into *aḥzāb*, and finally initiated the composition of a book on reading variants.[42] In addition, Ibn Abī Dāwūd, on the

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ʿUbaydallāh did was to emend *li-llāhi* in Q 23:87 and 23:89 to *allāhu* by inserting two *alif*s. This interpretation has the merit of allowing one to see how Yazīd al-Fārisī was able to explain ʿUbaydallāh's measure by saying that the latter had been born in the Basran quarter of Kallāʾ: the reading *allāh* instead of *li-llāhi* seems to have been a specifically Basran variant that was reportedly contained in the codex of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (Hamdan, *Studien*, 136) and in the codex that ʿUthmān had dispatched to Basra (Michael Cook, "The stemma of the regional codices of the Koran", *Graeco-Arabica* 9–10, 2004, 89–104, at 94). Hamdan also quotes a tradition transmitted by al-Dānī which states that ʿUbaydallāh "added two *alif*s" to Q 23:87–89.

39 See Hamdan, *Studien*, summarized in Hamdan, "The second *Maṣāḥif* project: a step towards the canonization of the Qurʾanic text", in Neuwirth et al. (eds), *The Qurʾān in Context*, 795–835.

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

41 Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-anbāʾ abnāʾ al-zamān*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1972 (according to the last volume)), 8 vols, vol. 2, 32. Hamdan cites a very similar tradition from Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī (see the Arabic quotation in *Studien*, 146, n. 84). On Naṣr ibn ʿĀṣim see Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, 11 vols, 1967–2000, vol. 9, 32–3.

42 Ibn ʿAṭiyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-kitāb al-ʿazīz*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣādiq al-Mallāḥ, 2 vols (Cairo: al-Majlis al-aʿlā li-l-shuʾūn al-islāmiyya, 1974), vol. 1, 66–7. On Yaḥyā ibn Yaʿmar (also a student of Abū al-Aswad al-Duʾalī) see Sezgin, *Geschichte*, vol. 9, 33–4. While Hamdan has pioneeringly worked through an enormous number of Arabic sources, he proceeds on the basis of the questionable assumption that all reports relating to al-Ḥajjāj's interest in the Quranic text or to his interaction with Quran scholars are to be interpreted on the model of a unified editorial project involving the appointment of a "project committee", the successive implementation of various "project goals", and finally the publication of the results. This highly orderly framework seems to be inspired by Ibn ʿAṭiyya (on the basis of whom Hamdan, *Studien*, 140–1, dates al-Ḥajjāj's measures to 703–04), but Hamdan does not address the possibility that the latter's tidy narrative could be a retrospective attempt at imposing some kind of overarching order on the material about al-Ḥajjāj. For instance, apart from Ibn ʿAṭiyya, reports describing how al-Ḥajjāj initiated a counting of the text's consonants and its division into sections do not mention the insertion of diacritics, nor that these measures took place at Wāsiṭ.

authority of the Basran ʿAwf ibn Abī Jamīla (d. 147/764–5),[43] transmits a list of eleven passages for which al-Ḥajjāj allegedly "changed" the ʿUthmānic *rasm*, mostly by adding or subtracting single letters.[44]

Non-Islamic sources are more radical and portray al-Ḥajjāj as straightforwardly rewriting the Islamic scripture. The Christian apologist ʿAbd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī (early ninth century) asserts that "there is not a single codex which al-Ḥajjāj did not gather and from which he did not omit many things and to which he did not add many others" (the omitted passages allegedly concerned the Umayyads and the ʿAbbāsids). He then had six master copies sent to Egypt, Damascus, Medina, Mecca, Kufa and Basra, while the "previous codices" were effaced with boiling oil, "thus imitating what ʿUthmān had done before him".[45] A similar accusation appears in a purported letter by the Byzantine emperor Leo III (717–41) to the caliph ʿUmar II (717–20) which is cited by the eighth-century Armenian chronicler Łewond: "one knows, among others, of a certain Ḥajjāj, named by you as Governor of Persia, who had men gather up your ancient books, which he replaced by others composed by himself, according to his taste, and which he propagated everywhere in your nation".[46]

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

43   See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl fī asmāʾ al-rijāl*, ed. ʿAwwād Maʿrūf, 35 vols (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-risāla, 1983–1992), vol. 22, 437–41.

44   Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 49–50 and 117–8; Hamdan, *Studien*, 166–70. Two examples are *lam yatasanna > lam yatasannah* (both words can be synonyms: Edward William Lane, *Arabic–English Lexicon*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1863, 1149b) at Q 2:259 and *sharīʿatan > shirʿatan* at Q 5:48.

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

46   Arthur Jeffery, "Ghevond's text of the correspondence between ʿUmar II and Leo III", *Harvard Theological Review* 37, 1944, 269–332, at 298. See Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), 490–501.

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

48   On Ibn Zabāla's lost *Akhbār al-Madīna* see now Harry Munt, "Writing the history of an Arabian holy city: Ibn Zabāla and the first local history of Medina", *Arabica* 59, 2012, 1–34.

49   "Al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf sent codices to the metropolises (*ummahāt al-qurā*), and he sent a big one of these codices to Medina. He was the first who sent codices to the towns (*wa-huwa awwalu man arsala bi-l-maṣāḥifi ilā l-qurā*) ...". De Prémare contends that this statement contradicts the traditional narrative about ʿUthmān dispatching copies of

confirmed by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/871), Ibn Duqmāq and al-Maqrīzī.[50] Apparently al-Ḥajjāj's strategy of dissemination also included the novelty of instituting codex-based Quran recitation in mosques.[51] Islamic sources register some repressive measures, too: for example, al-Ḥajjāj reportedly established a small task force charged with inspecting Quranic codices and destroying those which were found to "disagree with the ʿUthmānic codex" (for which their owners received compensation of sixty dirhams);[52] and al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822–3) mentions that the codex of al-Ḥārith ibn Suwayd, which was apparently based on the recension of Ibn Masʿūd, was "buried during the days of al-Ḥajjāj".[53]

Finally, de Prémare has compiled a number of utterances ascribed to ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj that would *prima facie* seem to lend support to the supposition that the two were engaged in significant redactional activity.[54] Among them is a report from al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-ashrāf* in which ʿAbd al-Malik describes the important role of Ramaḍān in his life by saying that it was during this month

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his recension to the provincial capitals, for he summarizes al-Samhūdī's report as describing "le premier envoi d'un *muṣḥaf* officiel dans les capitales, alors que cette primeur est habituellement attribuée à ʿUtmān" ("Processus de constitution", 200; similarly *Fondations*, 296). Yet what generates the purported contradiction is only the fact that de Prémare here equates *qurā* with "capitales" (the passage is translated correctly, with "capitales" for *ummahāt al-qurā* and "villes" for *qurā*, in "Processus de constitution", 199, and *Fondations*, 461). However one judges the historicity of ʿUthmān's measures, there is surely no inconsistency between the proposition that ʿUthmān sent Quranic codices to the *amṣār* and the proposition that al-Ḥajjāj was the first to distribute codices to the *qurā*.

50 Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr wa-akhbāruhā*, ed. Charles C. Torrey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), 117–8, quoted after Mathieu Tillier, review of Déroche, *Transmission, Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 13, 2011, 109–15; Karl Vollers (ed.), *Description de l'Egypte par Ibn Doukmak* (Cairo: Imprimerie nationale, 1893), vol. 1, 72; Mingana, "Transmission", 231; *GdQ*, vol. 3, 104, n. 1; Hamdan, *Studien*, 172, with n. 201; de Prémare, "Processus de constitution", 198–9.

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

52 Hamdan, *Studien*, 170–1. Hamdan places this report under the heading "Spreading the new copies of the Quran produced during the *Maṣāḥif* Project", but this link is not evident from the quotation itself. Edmund Beck, "Der ʿutmānische Kodex in der Koranlesung des zweiten Jahrhunderts", *Orientalia nova series* 14, 1945, 355–73, suggests that al-Ḥajjāj only attempted to eliminate codices used for public recitation and teaching.

53 Al-Farrāʾ, *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, vol. 3, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Ismāʿīl Shalabī and ʿAlī al-Najdī Nāṣif (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-miṣriyya al-ʿāmma li-l-kitāb), 1955–72, 68 (*ad* Q 48:26). I owe this reference to Beck, "Der ʿutmānische Kodex", 355, n. 4.

54 De Prémare, "Processus de constitution", 189–206.

that he "collected" (alternatively, "memorized") the Quran (*jamaʿtu l-Qurʾāna*).[55] And al-Ḥajjāj, according to a tradition in Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, once charged his audience during a sermon: *allifū l-Qurʾāna ka-mā allafahu Jibrīl* ...[56] – an injunction which de Prémare takes to mean "Compose the Quran as Gabriel has composed it!" and considers to have been "addressed to the scribes entrusted with the task of *taʾlīf al-Qurʾān*".[57]

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

In working through the evidence, it would be a mistake, I think, to set too much store by the statements ascribed to ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj. For if the former's claim to have undertaken the *jamʿ* of the Quran in Ramaḍān referred to codification instead of memorization, the tradition would presumably not document an unguarded biographical reminiscence but is likely to have originated as a proud claim on the caliph's part to deserve credit for having collected the Islamic scripture. This requires that the Quranic text completed under ʿAbd al-Malik would not have been passed off as an ʿUthmānic text from the start, but would for a certain period have been openly flaunted as a Marwanid achievement, a stage of which the *jamʿ* tradition would constitute the last vestige. Only subsequently would this approach have been replaced by the spread of fictitious narratives about ʿUthmān's promulgation of the Quranic *rasm*. Such a picture, however, invites the query why the only trace of ʿAbd al-Malik's responsibility for the codification of scripture, which would once have been part of official state propaganda, is now contained in one isolated and highly ambiguous report. In the absence of more unequivocal evidence it thus seems entirely possible that ʿAbd al-Malik's statement does

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

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

57   De Prémare, "Processus de constitution", 200–01. De Prémare discusses two further statements ascribed to Abd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj (ibid., 194–7 and 204–05), but his construal does not appear at all compelling to me.

58   See Motzki, "Collection".

59   Thus Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 501.

simply mean "In Ramaḍān I finished learning the Quran by heart".[60] As for al-Ḥajjāj's command *allifū l-Qurʾāna ka-mā allafahu Jibrīl*, the innocuousness of the reading "Order the Quran as Gabriel ordered it!" = "Recite the Quran in its canonical order!"[61] must not be mistaken for implausibility: given that the tradition explicitly describes al-Ḥajjāj as "delivering a sermon from the pulpit", de Prémare's suggestion that we are here confronted with an instruction given to an editorial team seems out of place (an early case of crowdsourcing?), while an exhortation about how to recite scripture would clearly be more appropriate.

The remaining material on al-Ḥajjāj, in particular reports about the destruction of codices and the dissemination of others, could perhaps be read as oblique reverberations of the distressing memory that the Quranic text had once undergone a significant makeover. It bears pointing out, though, that again there is nothing to preclude a more sedate understanding. The report that al-Ḥajjāj ordered the destruction of codices which "disagreed with the ʿUthmānic codex" tallies with information about his and ʿUbaydallāh ibn Ziyād's staunch opposition to the recension of Ibn Masʿūd, which was particularly popular in Kufa.[62] Consequently, al-Ḥajjāj's motive for the suppression of certain Quranic manuscripts may simply have been to buttress the position of one among several other existing recensions of the Quran.[63] As for the codices that al-Ḥajjāj dispatched to various cities and towns, if we take the Islamic sources at face value our best guess would seem to be that these codices constituted a re-edition of the ʿUthmānic text that utilized (some) diacritics[64] and

60 This is how the tradition is understood by al-Thaʿālibī, who substitutes *khatamtu* for *jamaʿtu* (*Laṭāʾif al-maʿārif*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Salīm, Cairo: Dār al-Ṭalāʾiʿ, 1992, 110). Note that *jamaʿa* can undoubtedly have the meaning "to collect in one's heart" = "to learn by heart", as illustrated by al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 3, 348, no. 5036 (66:25), citing Ibn ʿAbbās as saying, *jamaʿtu l-muḥkama fī ʿahdi rasūli llāhi*, and Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyāʾ*, 10 vols (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī / Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿāda, 1932–38), vol. 1, 285, overlapping with Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (al-Riyāḍ: Maktabat al-maʿārif li-l-nashr wa-l-tawzīʿ, n.d.), 239 (5:178).

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

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

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

64 Hamdan (*Studien*, 146–8) accepts that al-Ḥajjāj initiated the use of diacritics in Quran manuscripts (presumably on the basis of Ibn Khallikān and Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī), but rejects Ibn ʿAṭiyya's claim that al-Ḥajjāj also introduced vowel signs. This view is confirmed by the fact that Yaḥyā ibn Yaʿmar and Naṣr ibn ʿĀṣim, the two Basran Quran readers who are portrayed as working for al-Ḥajjāj by Ibn ʿAṭiyya and Ibn Khallikān (see notes 41 and 42 above), both figure as "the first person to have dotted codices" in traditions cited by al-Dānī, *al-Muḥkam fī naqṭ al-maṣāḥif*, ed. ʿIzzat Ḥasan, Damascus: Maṭbūʿāt Mudīriyyat Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-Qadīm, 1960, 5–6 (main text).

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

For a second time, then, our result is inconclusive: like the epigraphic data, the material on al-Ḥajjāj is compatible with the emergent canon model and with the traditional view that the standard *rasm* of the Quran existed by the mid-seventh century. The latter scenario would allow us to take most of what the Islamic sources say at face value, and it is not clear why, in the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary, this should not be our default position. The former view, of course, is much more attuned to the hermeneutics of suspicion that has become such an instinctive part of modern scholarly habits of reading. Nonetheless, it seems questionable to maintain, as a matter of principle, that

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Three caveats are in order here: (i) Manuscripts and papyri show that it would be anachronistic to conceive of al-Ḥajjāj's codices as *fully* dotted (see Small, *Textual Criticism*, 16–30 and Andreas Kaplony, "What are those few dots for? Thoughts on the orthography of the Qurra Papyri (709–710), the Khurasan Parchments (755–777) and the inscription of the Jerusalem Dome of the Rock (692)", *Arabica* 55, 2008, 91–112). (ii) The extent to which Quranic manuscripts employed diacritical marks continued to vary considerably during the following centuries (cf. Small, *Textual Criticism*, 22–3, on BNF Arabe 333c). (iii) Diacritics as such are older; see Adolf Grohmann, *Arabische Paläographie. II. Teil: Das Schriftwesen. Die Lapidarschrift*, Vienna: Hermann Böhlaus Nachf., 1971, 41; ʿAli ibn Ibrahim Ghabban and Robert Hoyland, "The inscription of Zuhayr, the oldest Islamic inscription (24 AH/AD 644–645), the rise of the Arabic script and the nature of the early Islamic state", *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 19, 2008, 209–36).

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

66 On the deposition of master copies as a form of publication see Gregor Schoeler, "Writing and publishing: on the use and function of writing in the first centuries of Islam", *Arabica* 44, 1997, 423–35.

when confronted with more than one adequate way of explaining our evidence we ought to choose the more iconoclastic one.

Even on a minimalist reading, however, it appears that as late as 700 manuscripts diverging from what was to become the standard *rasm* were still sufficiently prevalent in order for measures aimed at reinforcing the position of the so-called ʿUthmānic text to make sense.[67] The latter's ultimate displacement of all other versions of scripture thus cannot have come in the immediate wake of the actions of ʿUthmān, even if these are viewed as historical. So did the standard *rasm* receive a major push from al-Ḥajjāj instead of ʿUthmān? The fact that according to ʿAwf ibn Abī Jamīla, al-Ḥajjāj's recension of the Quran differed in two places (23:87.89: *allāhu* instead of *li-llāhi*) from the standard *rasm* would seem to indicate that the text that we have is not identical with the version endorsed by al-Ḥajjāj.[68] One should also take note of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam's report that al-Ḥajjāj's dispatch of one of his codices to Egypt was perceived as an affront by the governor ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Marwān, who then had his own codex produced; this suggests that al-Ḥajjāj's authority in the matter was regional at most and that he was not in a position to carry out an empire-wide standardization of scripture.[69] Hence, one should probably not underestimate the significant role that an uncoerced attainment of acceptance "from the bottom up" is likely to have played in ensuring the ultimate ascendancy of the canonical *rasm*, albeit in tandem with al-Ḥajjāj's official measures.

Other Christian sources

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

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67 As late as 323/935, the Quran reader Ibn Shannabūdh was tried for reciting variants deviating from the standard *rasm* (see Christopher Melchert, "Ibn Mujāhid and the establishment of seven Qurʾanic readings", *Studia Islamica* 91, 2000, 5–22). Note, however, that al-Ḥajjāj seems to have targeted not just the recitation of non-ʿUthmānic variants, but proper non-ʿUthmānic codices.

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

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

70 On the text and the question of its date see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 459–65.

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

72 Mingana, "Transmission", 406.

73 Motzki, "Compilation", 14.

74 Sydney H. Griffith, "Disputing with Islam in Syriac: the case of the monk of Bêt Ḥālê and a Muslim emir", *Hugoye* 3.1, 2000, 29–54, citing 34.

De Prémare, too, accords an important position to Christian sources.[75] Following Crone and Cook,[76] he draws attention to a Syriac text from the first half of the eighth century, the *Debate between a Monk of Bêt Ḥālê with an Arab Notable*,[77] which speaks of the Quran and of Sūrat al-Baqara as two distinct texts: "I think that even in your case, Muḥammad did not teach all your laws and commandments in the Quran, but you learned some of them from the Quran; some of them are in Sūrat al-Baqarah, and in *G-y-g-y*, and in *T-w-r-h*".[78] The statement might be construed as implying that the Quran that was known to the text's author was not identical with our Quran and perhaps formed a literary precursor of the latter. On the other hand, in view of the fact that the lower layer of the Ṣanʿāʾ palimpsest does contain sections from Q 2, the author of the *Debate* may simply have misconstrued the way he heard Muslims speak about certain revelations being contained "in the Quran", and others "in Sūrat al-Baqara". Hoyland remarks that "in the Muslim tradition too there are indications that it [Sūrat al-Baqara] had a certain distinctiveness" and draws attention to the battle cry allegedly used at Ḥunayn: *yā aṣḥāba sūrati l-baqarah*.[79] To an outsider, such a slogan might well imply that Sūrat al-Baqara is an independent Muslim scripture.

De Prémare attempts to strengthen his case with the chapter about Islam in John of Damascus' (d. mid-eighth century) *De haeresibus*,[80] which first refers to a Muslim "book" (*biblos*) and later mentions four "writings" (*graphê*) composed by Muḥammad.[81] Only three of these "writings" bear titles corresponding to Quranic *sūra*s, while the fourth, the "writing of the camel of God" (*hê graphê tês kamêlou theou*), can plausibly be connected to the Quranic story of the "camel of God" (*nāqat Allāh*, see Q 7:73, 11:64, and 91:13) that was killed by the Thamūd.[82] De Prémare suspects that this "writing of the camel of God" may have been a proto-Quranic text of which only fragments made it into the canonical recension of the Islamic scripture.[83] He also notes that in

75 De Prémare, "Processus de constitution", 184–9.
76 Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 17 with n. 14.
77 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 465–72.
78 Quoted (slightly modified) according to Griffith, "Disputing with Islam", 47–8. The end of the sentence is garbled; "G-y-g-y" and "T-w-r-h" may refer to the Gospel (Arabic *injīl*) and the Torah (Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 471–2, and Griffith, "Disputing with Islam", 47).
79 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 471.
80 The authenticity of the chapter on Islam has been challenged, but see the discussion in Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The* "*Heresy of the Ishmaelites*" (Leiden: Brill, 1972, 60–66). On the date of John of Damascus's death see ibid., 47–8, and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 482–3.
81 De Prémare, "Processus de constitution", 186; Sahas, *John of Damascus*, 89–93.
82 Sahas, *John of Damascus*, 91.
83 De Prémare connects his hypothesis to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's commentary on Q 26:155–8, which he understands to preserve "les traces d'un texte antérieur aux différents passages coranique actuels sur la chamelle de Ṯamūd" ("Processus de constitution", 188). He very much works with a Wansbroughian analysis of the *Tafsīr Muqātil* here, which views the occasionally seamless interposition of brief expansions and additions between scriptural segments as documenting a stage when proto-Quranic material was still closely linked with proto-exegetical material (see Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 119–48). For a different description of the literary makeup of the *Tafsīr Muqātil* see

his discussion of "the writing of the women" (= Q 4, Sūrat al-Nisā'?) John of Damascus refers to Muḥammad's marriage to the wife of Zayd, which is mentioned not in Q 4 but in Q 33:37, and to the Quranic statement that "your women are a tilth for you", which occurs in Q 2:223. Hence, according to de Prémare, John of Damascus must be talking about "a text the organisation of which is noticeably different from that of the present *sūra* 4".[84]

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

Considerations of historical likelihood

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

There is no gainsaying the acuteness of these remarks. One way of accommodating them would obviously be to deny that ʿUthmān ever undertook the promulgation of a standard version of scripture. Still, it is not evident that this is the only possible conclusion. As was pointed out above, it appears that al-Ḥajjāj still

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Nicolai Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung: Studien zur frühen Koraninterpretation* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009).

84   De Prémare, "Processus de constitution", 186.

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

86   Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, 100–4; cf. Kohlberg and Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification*, 20–23.

87   Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, 102.

found it necessary to repress Ibn Masʿūd's text and to promote the ʿUthmānic one. This does indeed create a strong impression that ʿUthmān did not achieve, or did not entirely achieve, the establishment of a uniform version of the Quran, but it hardly implies that he could not have tried. Robinson could therefore well be right to insist that ʿUthmān may not have been in a position to enforce the sole bindingness of one recension of the Quran, while ʿAbd al-Malik, given his imperial self-presentation and the more centralized nature of the Marwanid state, would have had both a motive and the means to give the Quranic recension favoured by him a considerable push. However, all of this primarily concerns the aspect of imposition: it has important implications for the question of when and how the standard *rasm* of the Quran became the sole authoritative version of scripture, and not necessarily for the question of when and how this recension reached its final form.

Discontinuities between Quranic legislation and early Islamic law

In the last section of this part I turn to Patricia Crone's case for a "mid-Umayyad" arrival of the Quran as presented in an article from 1994. Crone begins by reviewing a number of Quranic terms and passages with respect to which Islamic exegetes are clearly relying on guesswork rather than on any genuine recollection of the text's original meaning: in other words, the exegetical tradition does not generally seem to reach back to the first addressees of the Quranic recitations. Crone then focuses on similar gaps in the legal sphere, summed up in Joseph Schacht's famous verdict that "apart from the most elementary rules, norms derived from the Koran were introduced into Muhammadan law almost invariably at a secondary stage".[88] To be sure, Harald Motzki has now argued that already the early Meccan scholar ʿAṭāʾ ibn Abī Rabāḥ (d. 114 or 115/732–734) explicitly based some of his legal opinions on Quranic verses.[89] Nevertheless, Schacht's observation that in a number of cases the early Islamic legal tradition departs conspicuously from comparatively unequivocal Quranic stipulations remains valid. Particularly striking examples of such legal discontinuities are the refusal to recognize written documents as legal proof (contradicting Q 2:282) and the stoning penalty for *zinā* (contradicting Q 24:2). Crone herself presents two additional examples: first, the expression *kitāb* in Q 24:33, which Islamic exegetes generally understand to refer to a manumission document, whereas the context would clearly seem to require the meaning "marriage contract"; and second, a number of early legal traditions which possibly reflect a stage in Islamic legal thinking when the Quranic pronouncements awarding the non-agnatic relatives of a deceased certain fixed shares of the estate were not yet taken into account.

Crone insists that such discontinuities, when viewed through the lens of the conventional scenario of the Quran's codification, produce an intractable quandary. For if one accepts the commonsense assumption that Muḥammad implemented, or at least made a significant effort to implement, Quranic legislation,

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88   Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, corrected edition, 1953), 224.
89   Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*, translated by Marion H. Katz (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 108–17.

then practices which at some point were in conformity with Quranic law (such as the acceptance of written documents as legal proof) must within a rather short period of time have come to be replaced by practices that clearly violated Quranic law (such as the rejection of written documents as legal proof), in spite of the fact that the early Muslims would presumably have known, and been concerned to follow, the Quranic rules. Similarly, the original understanding of certain Quranic passages must have been lost and replaced by ingenious speculations. Crone finds such developments baffling and instead proposes a "mid-Umayyad date for the arrival of the canonical scripture":[90] "if ... the Quran was codified and canonized after the conquests, it ceases to be problematic that the reception of its legislation belongs to a secondary stage".[91]

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

What may be a helpful paradigm is provided by the conventional narrative of how the works of Aristotle resurfaced from near-total oblivion when they were re-edited by Andronicus of Rhodes in the second half of the first century BCE.[92] Although Crone's article does not address the issue explicitly, it can be construed as advocating precisely such a "hidden scripture" model, according to which the Quran may well have reached closure as early as 650, but nevertheless remained absent from Islamic history until *c*. 700, when it was secondarily co-opted, without much revision, into an existent religious tradition.[93] To be sure, the Aristotelian paradigm must be considerably toned down to fit the situation of the Quran: at least isolated codices must have circulated, both because of Ṣanʿāʾ 1 and because it seems excessive to dismiss the substantial and highly specific body of information found in Islamic sources about non-ʿUthmānic recensions, or the reports about al-Ḥajjāj's destruction and burial of scriptural manuscripts. It is also probable that not all parts of the corpus would have been equally "hidden": while early Muslims may have known some Quranic

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90 Crone, "Two legal problems", 37.
91 Ibid., 19.
92 But see the critical assessment in Jonathan Barnes, "Roman Aristotle", in *Philosophia Togata II*, ed. Jonathan Barnes and Miriam Griffin, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 1–69.
93 This is pointed out by Sadeghi and Goudarzi ("Ṣanʿāʾ 1", 3, n. 3), who remark that Crone argues less for "a late date for the attainment of textual stability" than for "the late canonization of a largely stable text".

material by heart, they may not generally have had access to complete manu-
scripts of the text, or systematically studied them, as a result of which certain
passages could have inertly sat around in the midst of Quranic codices where
nobody but an occasional scribe ever ventured.

Crone herself seems to dismiss the notion that the Quran could have been
both present (in the sense of being transmitted in writing and selectively used
for recitation) and absent (in the sense that sections of the text were not com-
monly known) at the same time: how could the early Muslims "have had a scrip-
ture containing legislation *without* regarding it as a source of law?", she asks.[94]
Yet even today, believers who profess allegiance to a scripture without having
more than a superficial understanding of what that text actually says are not
an uncommon sight. Sacred writings, even if programmatically acknowledged
to be reservoirs of truth and benchmarks of virtuous conduct, are not necessarily
processed as bearers of concrete linguistic information. In particular if a sacred
text's primary field of use is in ritual and devotional recitation, as seems to have
been the case in early Islam,[95] its semantic function can to some extent be sus-
pended.[96] Admittedly, it may be doubted whether this provides a convincing
explanation for ignoring the normative import of straightforward injunctions
like Q 24:2 ("The woman and man guilty of fornication, flog each of them
with a hundred stripes"). But as noted above, most early Muslims' acquaintance
with the Quran may well have been limited to "a few favorite passages and
prayers, or certain selected verses that were reiterated as proof texts in political
and doctrinal disputes",[97] while many sections could have constituted genuine
blind spots. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the process by which the
early post-prophetic Muslim community (the majority of which had not been
members of the Medinan *Urgemeinde*) took cognizance of its scripture should
have been extremely gradual, and that it should have taken the form, not of
scholarly exegetes systematically working through the text, but of decontextua-
lized Quranic segments and keywords unpredictably percolating into the

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

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

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

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

collective consciousness, where they inspired, attracted or merged with a host of popular narratives.[98]

Crone is surely right to insist that a proponent of the traditional scenario must assume the Quran's status to have been very different during the lifetime of Muḥammad: given that the latter presumably promulgated the Quranic revelations in order for people to understand and follow them, legally relevant Quranic passages must to some extent have been applied, endowing the Quran with the status of a "source", rather than just that of a "document", to put it in terms coined by John Burton.[99] Consequently, proponents of an early dating of the Quran find themselves committed to an evolutionary trajectory leading from a stage at which the Quran functioned as a normative source (during Muḥammad's lifetime) to a stage at which it did not – or not primarily or invariably – function as such (during the seventh century), to a stage at which it was again taken seriously as a source of behavioural norms, and subjected to systematic exegetical decoding (from the eighth century onwards). Yet such a to and fro, although messy, would not be historically incomprehensible. As a result of the rapid growth of the Islamic community and its geographical expansion over a vast area, the Quranic corpus would have undergone a far-reaching disembedding. Hence, instead of thinking of the post-conquest *umma* as essentially an extension of the prophetic *umma*, we should perhaps envisage them – in spite of certain personal continuities – as two separate communities, in much the same way as urban Hellenistic Christianity was distinct from, rather than a mere extension of, early Palestinian Christianity. Such a shift of perspective calls into question the assumption that those Quranic norms which, on the traditional model, must have been put into practice in the context of the Medinan *Urgemeinde* ought to have remained intact, or that the meaning of specific Quranic expressions ought to have filtered down unscathed from the prophetic to the post-prophetic community. Although the Islamic tradition is generally concerned to depict the early Muslims as meticulously passing on detailed historical and exegetical remembrances of the Prophet's companions, it seems rather more probable that during the age of the conquests the majority of converts were not sufficiently preoccupied with the interpretation of the Quran in order for the prophetic community's understanding of it to be fully preserved. As a result, later Muslims needed to rediscover and hermeneutically reinvent their scripture.

To conclude this part of the article: all the data examined so far seem compatible with the conventional dating of the Quran's codification in a suitably modified version (circulation of several rival recensions even after 650, selective and predominantly liturgical use of the Quran until the end of the seventh

98 This description is inspired by John Burton, according to whom Quranic pronouncements entered Islamic legal discourse – i.e. took on the status of a normative source – only after they had already attracted a substantial amount of narrative amplification (for an illustration of this view see his "Law and exegesis: the penalty for adultery in Islam", in Gerald R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (eds), *Approaches to the Qur'ān* (London: Routledge, 1993), 269–84).

99 Crone, "Two legal problems", 20. On Burton's distinction between the Quran as a document and as a source see his *The Collection of the Qur'ān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 111 and 187.

century). The emergent canon model certainly remains in the race, although nei-ther the epigraphic nor the literary evidence marshalled by its supporters strictly speaking requires it, and the legal and exegetical discontinuities foregrounded by Crone can only be squared with it, by bringing in the auxiliary assumption that the circles involved in the transmission of proto-Quranic material were separate from the circles at the forefront of early Islamic legal thought and unconcerned to straighten out those bits of the text that had become unintelligible. In Part II I shall go on to discuss the weightiest arguments in support of a mid-seventh century or earlier date for the standard *rasm* of the Quran.