

A Critical look at the Newest Historical Research on Islam and the Earliest Qur'anic Manuscripts

The newest Historical material we now have on the dating of the earliest Qur'anic Manuscripts (Mushafs) is breaking new historical ground. These findings have an impact on not only the authenticity of the earliest Qur'ans, but also on who Muhammad was, as well as the whole scope concerning how Islam emerged. This new material has just come to light in the last two years (2012 - 2014) and is proving to be a real 'game changer' for those of us engaging publicly with Islam, especially within the academic environment, where the significance of these findings will have the greatest impact.

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HISTORICAL CRITIQUE OF EARLY ISLAM AND THE QUR'ANIC MANUSCRIPTS

Introduction: 21st Century Scholar's Criticisms:

“Islam, as we know it, did not exist in the 7th century, but evolved over a period of 200-300 years” (Humphreys 1991:71,83-89)

“The Qur'an probably was not revealed to one man in 22 years, but likely evolved over a period of 50-100 years” (Rippin 1985:155;1990:3,25,60; Lester 99:44-45; Wansbrough 1977:160-163)

Conclusion: The history of Islam, at least from the time of the caliph Abd al-Malik (685-705 AD) and before, is a later fabrication (Cook 1983:65, Robinson 1996:47)

I. HISTORICAL FINDINGS CONCERNING EARLY ISLAM:

- A. 1st Arab inscription referencing Muhammad is in 691 (Volker Popp-Ohlig & Puin 2010:53)
- B. 1st reference to 'Muslims' is in 690s ('Chronicle of John of Niku' – 1602) (Nevo & Koren, 2003:234)
 1. They used: 'Saracen', 'Hagarene', 'Ishmaelite', 'Maghraye', 'Muhajiroun'
- C. 1st reference to 'Islam' is not until 691 (Dome of the Rock) (Volker Popp-Ohlig & Puin 2010:71)
- D. 1st reference to Mecca is not till 741 (Crone 1987:134-136; Hoyland 1997:426; Holland 2012:303)
- E. 1st biography of Muhammad within Islamic sources is not till 833 (by Ibn Hisham)

II. THE SCHOLAR'S CONCERNS: If much of the history of early Islam was written down so late, then:

- A. Why did it take so long to write it all down?
- B. Were these people not literate?
- C. Where did the biographers get their material from?
- D. Can it be trusted?
- E. Should we not instead go to the period these events took place?
- F. Should we not go back to the 7th century, and see what we find?

III. TWO NEW BOOKS and ONE DOCUMENTARY WHICH ARE PAVING THE WAY....

A. *In the Shadow of the Sword* (By Tom Holland)

1. Asks Historical questions, brings many strands together, questions Islamic sources, and points to Qur'anic incongruities ('Islam, The Untold Story' Documentary by Tom Holland (Aug. 28, 2012)

B. *QUR'ANIC GEOGRAPHY* (by Dan Gibson)

1. Asks where did Islam actually begin? Was Mecca the original Holy City? Did the Qibla originally face Mecca?

IV. Problem 1: Geography

- A. In the Qur'an, there are just 65 geographical references. Only 9 places named
 1. 'Ad (23x) (Biblical 'Uz)
 2. Thamud (24x) (Nabateans) -Cut dwellings into mountains
 3. Midian (7x) (Midianites)

- B. They must be important; yet, all 3 civilizations are located in No. Arabia and not near MECCA, but 600 miles further North!

V. Problem 2: Mecca

- A. Mecca is not in a valley, and has none of the references listed in the Qur'an
- B. Mecca is supposedly the center of trade, North to South, East to West, yet, no 7th century Arab Trade Routes go through it!
- C. The Earliest literary reference to Mecca's existence is not till 741 AD!
- D. The earliest maps don't show MECCA until 900 AD!

VI. Problem 3: The Qibla (Praying towards the Kaa'ba, Sura 2:143 – 145)

- A. The direction of the Qibla is changed (624 AD), but it doesn't say from where.
- B. Archaeology supports this change, but not from Jerusalem to Mecca, as Muslims suggest, But from Petra! And much, much later.
- C. Archaeological Evidence:
 - 1. Wassit mosque, 'Kufa' mosque, in Iraq are pointing directly West
 - 2. Fustat (outside Cairo), is pointing directly East, yet they should all be pointing South! (Creswell 1969:37,137ff,150 & 1989:40; Fehervari 1961:89; Crone-Cook 1977:23,173; al-Baladhuri's Futuh, ed. by de Goeje 1866:276; Crone 1980:1)
- D. Documentary Evidence: Christian writer: Jacob of Edessa (705 AD) refers to the 'Mahgraye,' saying, *"So from all this it is clear that it is not to the south that the Jews and the Mahgraye ere in the regions of Syria pray, but towards Jerusalem or the Ka'ba, the patriarchal places of their races."* (Crone-Cook 1977:24)
- E. Photographical Evidence: DAN GIBSON took photos from space of all of the earliest mosques, noting their original Qiblas (the direction of prayer)
 - 1. Conclusion: ALL the Qiblas were facing towards PETRA until 725 AD, and the Qibla was not finalized towards MECCA until 822 AD - Almost 200 years too late!
- F. Significance of Petra:
 - 1. It's the centre of Trade, has much Vegetation, in a valley, with a parallel valley, with a stream, fields, trees, grass, clay, loam, 'Olive' trees, and near the 'pillar of salt'
 - 2. Petra has all of the items listed in the Qur'an...
 - 3. THUS, could Petra be the place the Qur'an and the traditions are referring to?

VII. WHAT ABOUT THE QUR'AN?

- A. FOUR QUESTIONS TO ASK:
 - 1. Is the Qur'an eternal? (see Sura 85:22, which says so)
 - 2. Was it written down complete by Uthman in 650 AD, and were four copies sent to Medina, Basra, Baghdad and Damascus by him (al Bukhari says so in Vol.6:509-510)?
 - 3. Has the Qur'an changed since 650 AD (i.e. the 1989 Ibn Fahd canon)?
 - 4. Do they have complete Manuscripts from the time of Uthman to prove it was complete, and that it has never changed in 1400 years (i.e. the Topkapi/Sammarkand)?

VIII. WHERE ARE THOSE UTHMANIC COPIES FROM 650 AD?

- A. TOPKAPI MUSHAF (Topkapi Museum, Istanbul, Turkey) (Early – Mid 8th c.)
1. Prof. Dr. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu: (Founding Director General of IRCICA (1980-2004) & Secretary General of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference Research Centre)
 - a. *'We have none of Uthman's Mushafs' (manuscripts)*
 - b. *'Nor do we have any of the copies from those Mushafs'*
 - c. *'These Mushafs date from the later 'Umayyad period'*
 2. Dr. Tayyar Altıkulaç: (Leading scholar in Qur'anic studies, Ex-president of Turkish religious affairs, deputy in the Turkish parliament)
 - a. *'No serious scholarly work has been done on them'*
 - b. *'These Mushafs date from the early – mid 8th cent.'*
 - c. *'They are not Uthmanic, nor copies sent by him'*
 - d. *'The Topkapi has 2,270 consonantal differences'*
 - e. *22% of the Qur'an is missing*

- B. SAMMARQAND MANUSCRIPT (TASHKENT): (EARLY – MID 8TH C.)
1. Dr. Tayyar Altıkulaç: *'It is not Uthmanic, as it dates from mid 8th c.'*; '6 Reasons:
 - a. *Undisciplined spelling*
 - b. *Different writing styles*
 - c. *Scribal mistakes*
 - d. *Copyist mistakes*
 - e. *Written by someone with little experience*
 - f. *With later additions (only goes to Sura 43)*
 2. *66% of the Qur'an is missing*

- C. AL HUSSEINI CAIRO MANUSCRIPT [Located: 'al-Mashhad al-Husayni' – Cairo, Egypt]
1. Dr. Tayyar Altıkulaç:
 - a. *'This is not Uthmanic'*
 - b. *'It is dated from early to mid 8th century'*
 2. Francois Deroche: *'Monumental MS are later...the bigger the later'*

- D. PARIS PETROPOLITANUS – (Early 8th c.)
1. Francois Deroche (Deroche 2009:172-177):
 - a. *Corrections to the text*
 - b. *Disagrees with the Caireen Mushaf in 93 places*
 - c. *"Five different copyists"*
 - d. *"Later modified with erasures and additions"*
 - e. *74% of the Qur'an is missing*

- E. MA'IL MANUSCRIPT (2165 MS, British Library) (Late 8th Century [790 AD])
1. *Written in an early Hijazi Script, Dated to the late 8th c.*

2. Only goes up to Sura 43, thus it is not complete
3. 25% of the Qur'an is missing

F. SANA'A MANUSCRIPT (Located in Sana'a, Yemen; Late 7th – Early 8th Century)

1. Dr. Gerd Puin (1981-Present):
 - a. "Oldest parchments & papers of any Qur'anic Manuscript."
 - b. Yet, more than half of the text is ambiguous letters which need diacritical marks for understanding.
 - c. Adding vowels helped correct mistakes.
 - d. It includes orthographical changes found in geographical tradition schools.
 - e. Many deviations are not mentioned in later literature.
2. SANA'A PALIMPSESTS: Using Ultra-Violet light, we find a 'Qur'anic' script written and washed below that of the existing script ('Script Defecto'). This is the first evidence we have of an evolution in the Qur'anic text in one manuscript.

IX. QUR'ANIC CONCLUSIONS

- A. Western Scholars (Deroche, Böwering, Conrad, Peters, Stein, Shoemaker, etc...) conclude that the earliest Mushaf's begin to appear in the 8th c.
- B. Muslim Scholars (Prof. Dr. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu & Dr. Tayyar Altıkulaç) conclude that the earliest Mushaf's begin to appear in the 8th c.
- C. 'Islamic Awareness' (IA) concludes there are no Uthmanic Mushafs, and that all the early Mushafs date from the 8th c., or later
- D. Therefore....I conclude:
 1. Since there are NO COMPLETE MANUSCRIPTS
 - a. The Qur'an is NOT ETERNAL! (despite Sura 85:22)
 - b. It was NOT COMPLETE in 650 AD (despite al Bukhari Vol. 6:509-510)
 - c. The Qur'an HAS CHANGED since 650 AD (despite the 1984 Ibn Fahd canon)
 - d. Thus, Muhammad had little to do with the Qur'an!
 2. SO, WHO THEN CREATED THE QUR'AN?!!

X. Summation:

- A. New Books are being published which question the Classical Account of Islam's beginnings
 1. Why are there no Muslim sources for 200 Years?
 2. Why do the claims they make not fit the historical record?

3. Why are the geographical references so few & confusing?
4. Why do they all seem to be 600 miles further north?
5. Why are there so many references to Vegetation which wouldn't exist in Mecca?
6. Why is Mecca not mentioned until 741 AD, nor included in maps until 900 AD?
7. Why is Mecca not on the trade route?
8. Why do all the Qiblas face Petra for the first 100 years, then are confused the next 100, and aren't standardized to Mecca until 822 AD, 200 years too late!??

B. Much of what we know about early Islam is thus in doubt.

C. Much of the Qur'an is also in doubt

1. None of the earliest Mushafs are from Uthman
2. They don't begin to appear much later, after 'Abd al-Malick...8th c.,
3. Thus, suggesting...Muhammad had nothing to do with the Qur'an!

CONCLUSION: With this new evidence, we must confront Islam's foundations, and begin to publicly challenge the historical authenticity of not only Muhammad and the whole emergence of Islam, but of the Qur'an as well. We already allow people to demand the same of our Bible. So, let's bring both books into the 'Public Sphere', and ask each to take the same historical test. We know that since the 19th century similar historical questions have already been asked of the Bible, and they have all been ANSWERED!

We now need to do the same to Islam, and bring our Muslim friends 'home'